

California 's Wine Country: Great Wines & Great Small Towns!

One of California's many great areas is its world famous wine country, which has been vying with France for the last two decades to see which produces the world's best wines. Encompassing four counties (Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake) on the coastal side of Central California, the wine country is a paradise for wine connoisseurs...and Small Town collectors!

The heart of this wine country is the Napa Valley. Although Yount and Bale were the first to raise grapes in there, it seems doubtful either had the inclination to cultivate fine wines. That distinction goes to several German immigrants who arrived in the 1870s. First was Jacob Schram (who barbered by day and planted vines by moonlight), Charles Krug (known as the father of Napa viticulture), Jacob Beringer (Krug's winemaker until he built his own winery) and Gottlieb Groezinger (his winery stands as Yountville's Vintage 1873).

The 1870s marked tremendous growth in the Napa Valley wine industry. Local viticulture clubs began organizing in 1875, with Charles Krug chosen president of the largest. (A note that will come in handy: Generally speaking, we use "viticulture" when talking specifically about the science and practice of growing grapes, and "viniculture" to discuss the process of making wines.) About the same time, the Beringer brothers established their winery, complete with a cellar dug into a hillside by Chinese laborers and reinforced with stone — an architectural as well as a masonry feat. Adding to the growth of the industry was an outbreak of phylloxera in French vineyards — a fatal plant disease that attacks the plant's roots. Napa wineries continued to expand.

Unfortunately, this led to overproduction. In the late 1880s growers were all feeling the pinch, and Charles Krug's vineyards and cellar went into receivership. More bad times loomed in the form of a general nationwide depression in 1890. But the blow that brought valley growers to their knees was the discovery that the dreaded, grapevine-ravaging phylloxera — for which there was no cure — had infected the vineyards of the entire area. By the turn of the century, almost every vineyard had been ruined.

Plantings of hardier varieties brought fresh hope. Viticulture looked to be getting back on track. But those bright hopes were dashed by a new cataclysm. It was called Prohibition. For the grape-growing Italians, who considered wine the elixir of life, the law was inexplicable madness. One Italian in Pope Valley continued selling his wine because he believed wine to be "a natural way of life." He was arrested, naturally.

Fourteen years — from 1920 to 1933 — it lasted. Some vintners survived Prohibition by making sacramental or pharmaceutical wines. But for others it would take years to build back the business. Still, one thing was clear: There would be no returning to wheat or cattle raising. Napa County was on its way to becoming America's premier wine region.

By 1966 wine was becoming fashionable, not only in California, but also across the nation. Between 1966 and 1972 wine consumption doubled. Visitors started pouring into the area to look, sample and buy. By the mid-70s, there were again more than 50 wineries in operation in Napa Valley, and a new promotional technique had been developed — winetastings. In order to let the public see how great the product was, vintners opened their doors and uncorked their bottles for sampling. Many opened their cellars for touring. Add to it all an outstanding showing by Napa County wines in a 1976 blind taste test with some of the most prestigious wineries in France, and the worldwide wine community was beginning to take notice.

Today, California's wine country is recognized by all as, at the least, one of the premier wine-producing regions of the world, and it's a favorite with tourists who come anywhere near the San Francisco area. It's also a favorite with Small Town collectors. Look at the list below. I'll wager you've never heard of the great majority of these California towns...but they're there...right in the wine country. What a great way to spend a beautiful California weekend...perusing the towns of this incredible region...looking for covers...and, of course, touring the wineries (better have a backup driver though!). If you already have a Small Town collection, check and see how many wine country towns you actually have. Chances are that you don't have them all!

California Wine Country Towns

Special thanks to <http://www.insiders.com/winecountry/main-areaoverview.htm> for wine country history.

Albion	Cobb	Guerneville	Lower Lake	Oakville	Sebastopol
Angwin	Cotati	Healdsburg	Lucerne	Occidental	Sonoma
Bodega	Duncan Mills	Hopland	Mendocino	Petaluma	St. Helena
Boonville	Forestville	Jenner	Middletown	Philo	Ukiah
Calistoga	Ft. Bragg	Kelseyville	Monte Rio	Point Arena	Upper Lake
Cazadero	Geyserville	Kenwood	Napa	Rohnert Park	Willats
Clear Lake	Glen Ellen	Lakeport	Navarro	Rutherford	Yorkville
Cloverdale	Gualala	Little River	Nice	Santa Rosa	Yountville
					Windsor

