



Santa Barbara County Wine History

Santa Barbara County has a history of winemaking and wine grape growing stretching back more than 200 years, before California was a state. From the Mission Era of early California to the beginning of the modern era of wine production that started in the '60s, Santa Barbara County has emerged as a world class wine region combining traditional, time-honored techniques, with the latest cutting-edge innovations. Richly endowed with natural and human talent, the region has made its mark in the wine community.

The Beginning (1780-1960)

Father Junipero Serra brought grapevine cuttings from Mexico in 1782 to be planted in the fertile bottoms of Sycamore Creek (in what is now known as the Milpas district of Santa Barbara). The largest mission vineyard, about 25 acres, was located in the San Jose Creek area, and an adobe winery, built nearby in 1804, is now Goleta's oldest landmark. Producing sacramental wine from the Mission grape variety, Santa Barbara was second in wine production to all California missions. But wine wasn't all for religious purposes. The Spanish rancheros were also planting grapes and producing wine, mainly brandy for their enjoyment. By the late 1800s there were 45 vineyards with a total of 260 acres and 17 winemakers in the county with the Mission grape still predominant. A grapevine planted in 1842 on a farm in Carpinteria grew to monstrous proportions. In fifty years, it had a trunk measuring nine feet around, an arbor covering two acres and an annual yield of ten tons of grapes.

As immigrants came to our country, so did their love of wine. In 1884, Justinian Caire imported grape slips from his native France and planted a 150-acre vineyard on Santa Cruz Island, just off the coast of Santa Barbara, to European vinifera varieties that included Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Zinfandel. His prize-winning wines were shipped to San Francisco for bottling. With the enactment of Prohibition, his last vintage was in 1918. The entire wine industry was disseminated statewide.

When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the now legal wine industry once again began to flourish. It was one of the few industries to expand in the fourth year of the Great Depression. Northern California was the first to benefit, but shortly thereafter that interest traveled to Santa Barbara County. A nudge from respected authority came from UC Davis viticulture professors Maynard Amerine and Albert Winkler who deemed Santa Barbara County as one of the state's potential growing regions for fine wine. The wine revolution was sparked.



The Wine Revolution (1961-1990s)

Early studies found that Santa Barbara County was cooler than most wine regions of Northern California and that it had an excellent balance of geology, climate, soil and water, giving it great potential as a viticultural area. The first modern vineyards were planted in Cabernet Sauvignon, Sylvaner, Riesling, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc on their own rootstock in the Tepusquet area of the Santa Maria Valley in the early 1960s by Uriel Nielsen and Bill De Mattei. Brother Timothy of Christian Brothers in Napa Valley had encouraged their venture from the start, and when the grapes were ready for harvest in 1968, he offered them a five year contract paying \$325 per ton. Rancho Sisquoc, also in the Santa Maria Valley, and the Bettencourts of Santa Ynez were the next to take the plunge. News of grape growing success spread quickly. Shortly thereafter, vineyards were planted in several parts of the Santa Maria and Santa Ynez Valleys. Winegrowers who pioneered the region include *Louis Lucas, Bob Woods, Dale Hampton, Jeff Newton and, Robert Miller.*

Initially, most of the fruit produced was sent out of the county to be made into wine. Though Santa Barbara Winery is the first commercial winery in the County since Prohibition, Firestone was the first estate winery here to make wine using local grapes with the first vintage being 1975. Zaca Mesa, Sanford & Benedict, Rancho Sisquoc and Santa Ynez Winery soon followed. Among the first generation of winemakers were *Ken Brown, Fred Brander, Jim Clendenen, Richard Sanford, Bob Lindquist, Lane Tanner, Alison Green, Tony Austin, Bryan Babcock, Stephan Bedford, John Kerr, Bill Mosby, Bruno D'Alfonso, Rick Longoria, Mike Brown, Bruce McGuire, and Chris Whitcraft.* In the early 1980s, 13 wineries existed and by the end of the decade there were 29 with over 9,600 acres of wine grapes in the county and 30 percent of the yield being made into wine locally. This was a time of elemental experimentation in the field; identifying what grape varieties did best in different areas, and what farming techniques were most appropriate. The Santa Maria Valley and Santa Ynez Valley as federally approved appellations were established, further pinpointing the differences within growing regions. By the '90s, it was all a matter of fine tuning—vineyards and winemaking.



SBCVA History

The introduction of a few large corporate wineries from the north purchasing land and establishing wineries in Santa Barbara County, called for the local wine industry to take on a more serious tone. Once casual, small, family-owned ventures making up the overwhelming majority of wineries in the County, now had formal business plans, winery/grower relationships were stabilized. The result? Better wine.

Going Forward

Now that we've entered the 2000s, Santa Barbara County continues to evolve. Family owned and operated wineries still predominate, but a new generation of winemakers is joining veterans at the helm. The ever-growing roster of wineries now includes *Palmina*, *Flying Goat*, *J. Wilkes*, *Taz*, *Carina*, *Melville*, *Sea Smoke* and *Carhartt*, just to name a few. **Sta. Hills** recently became an AVA, emphasizing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Italian and Spanish varietals are making headway. Formerly untapped, the eastern edge of the Santa Ynez Valley referred to as "Happy Canyon" is developing a region dedicated to Bordeaux varieties that one day will certainly have its own appellation. This is not a group resting on their laurels.

Since the modern era of winemaking began in the '60s, a fresh, open minded approach to produce ultra-premium wine has led to the success of this area. Today there are more than 100 wineries and over 20,000 acres of grapes planted to almost 70 varieties (although 75% of the planting is to Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah) making wine grapes the number two agricultural product in the county (next to strawberries with broccoli number 3.) The wine industry has grown from virtually nothing in 1970 to a \$900 million business in less than 35 years.

What sets Santa Barbara County apart as a wine region, besides being a great place to grow grapes, is the maverick, spirited attitude towards winemaking and winegrowing that is not set in convention yet knows the value of it. Quality is paramount as is innovation. The wines of this region have earned great respect among knowledgeable wine drinkers world wide and have won an impressive array of medals in regional, national and international competitions.