

The Gazette

Pulitzer Prize Winner / Est. 1872

Wine Guy: Shining a deserved light on quality wines in California's Santa Cruz Mountains

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Circulation: 156,500

WEDNESDAY, JULY 5, 2023 | THE GAZETTE | F3

World-class wines in Santa Cruz Mountains

Among consumers, the Santa Cruz Mountains American Viticultural Area (AVA) is one of the lesser-known wine regions of California. I'm trying to change that. In addition to breathtaking ocean

and mountain vistas, the world-class wines are becoming a major draw.

The AVA was established in 1981 using the "European model" of climatological and geophysical aspects instead of political boundaries. From just south of San Francisco, it stretches down the peninsula almost to Monterey Bay with the Pacific Ocean to the west and the San Francisco Bay and Santa Clara Valley to the east. Even with significant growth since the 1960s that has accelerated in the 21st century, the region is mostly characterized by smaller, family-owned vineyards and wineries.

Wine grape production is divided roughly evenly among cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, pinot noir and "other varieties." Here's a closer look at the first two:

Cabernet sauvignon

- 2019 Ridge Monte Bello Vineyard (\$245) 13.7% — Wine growing along and up Monte Bello Ridge began in the 1870s. Since 1962, Ridge has championed what it describes as a "pre-industrial approach" to single-vineyard wine making. Monte Bello Cabernets from Ridge are iconic, long considered a "grand cru" of California wine. Notably they present an elegant European style as much as a full-fruited American style.

This one has layers of complexity, vanilla, minerals, cocoa, currant; balanced, yet revealing the structure to en-

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able evolution, possibly for decades.

- 2018 Mount Eden Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains (\$110) 14% — Small historic wine estate founded in 1945 by Martin Ray; located on a mountain peak, it is

one of the original "boutique" California wineries; earth, herb, graphite accent plum and blue fruits, dryly tannic, tightly wound structure yet supple texture, will develop even more complexity with lengthy cellaring.

- 2019 Vöcal Vineyards "Bates Ranch" (\$95) 13.9% — Focused on single vineyard wines, Vöcal produced this from an allocation of hillside vines of the original dry-farmed, own-rooted 1969 planting; quite rich, a bit of spice with ripe, fresh red berries touched with herbal notes.

Chardonnay

- 2019 Thomas Fogarty Winery Langley Hill Vineyard (\$68) 13.5% — Established in 1976, employs organic, sustainable, and biodynamic practices; delightful brisk citrus and nectarine with hints of stone and juicy palate.

- 2021 Sandar & Hem Wines Mountain Winery Vineyard (\$52) — Barely 5 years old but the dedication to capturing the essence of the terroirs of the AVA, this one from a Paul Masson-planted vineyard; tightly impactful citrus balanced with round nut and spicy lemongrass.

- 2021 Beaugard Vineyards Ben Lomond Mountain "Bald Mountain" (\$65) — Originally planted around 1880, the Beaugard family has farmed this property since 1945; intense and brash with zesty citrus and chalky notes.

View the full article here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15mrZfQYPCpL731U5pHPFJZt3R6YGPfYE/view>