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## History of Napa Wineries

By Benjamin Bicais

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Napa Wineries and Vineyards enjoy a long viticultural history that dates back to 1836. In this year, George Yount settled on the 12,000 acre Caymus Rancho near the modern day town of Yountville. General Vallejo granted Yount the land as part of Mexico's secularization of Spain's former holdings. Three years later, Yount planted the first grapes in the Napa Valley.

Colonel Joseph Ballinger Chiles was another earlier settler whom was granted land from General Vallejo in modern day Chiles Valley. In 1861, Charles Krug established the first St. Helena Winery. This was followed by the founding of Inglenook in 1879 by Captain Gustave Niebaum in Rutherford. These were booming years for Napa Valley Wineries. However, the coming decades would see two devastating setbacks.

The first occurred during the 1880s and 1890s when Phylloxera ravaged vineyards throughout the Napa Valley. Phylloxera originated in Europe, and attacks the roots of vitis vinifera vines.

The pest was eventually combatted when it was discovered that vitis vinifera cuttings could be grafted onto Phylloxera resistant rootstocks. Unfortunately, an immense amount of damage had already been done to many of the best Napa Valley vineyards.

The second debilitating setback occurred in 1919, when Prohibition became the law of the land in the United States. Most Napa Valley Wineries did not survive these two massive setbacks. A few weathered Phylloxera and then dealt with Prohibition through two major loopholes.

Sacramental wine was not banned under Prohibition, and some Napa Valley Wineries were able to stay afloat by producing wine for the Church. Located in the BV Winery weathered Prohibition using this tactic.

Male heads of household were also allowed to make fifty gallons of wine per year for private use under the Volstead Act. Some wineries and vineyard owners began selling grapes for home wine-making.

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However, the vast majority of wineries went out of business, and many former vineyards were converted to other crops. Tragically, the exceptional terroir enjoyed by Napa Valley Wineries was not widely utilized during these years.

In the years immediately following the repeal of Prohibition, very little quality wine was produced in the Napa Valley. Although some Rutherford Wineries, most notably Inglenook, continued to make great wines, the vast majority of California wine was either very alcoholic, or undistinguished and cheap.

Thankfully, the embers of excellence were not entirely extinguished. During this era, Andre Tchelistcheff made massive breakthroughs in the science of quality wines at BV Winery.

Originally from Russia, Tchelistcheff realized that unsanitary practices were adversely affecting wine production. He was extremely influential, and did much to increase interest in high quality wine from Napa Valley Wineries.

Tchelistcheff's innovations helped to bring on a renaissance in high-quality wine making in the Napa Valley. In 1961, Joseph Heitz opened the first Post-Prohibition Napa Valley Winery.

Five years later, Robert Mondavi split from his family at Charles Krug and started his own winery in Oakville. Many other Napa Valley Wineries were established in the following years with the philosophy of making high-quality wines.

The area increasingly became a tourist destination, and people from all over the world became interested in visiting the rising star of the California Wine Industry.

Ben Bicais lives in the Napa Valley and is the webmaster of <http://www.california-wine-tours-and-accessories.com>

### **Carneros Wineries And Wines**

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#### **Carneros Wineries And Wines by Benjamin Bicais**

Although Carneros Wineries are located in both southern Napa and Sonoma Counties, the region has always had its own unique identity. Being a huge Pinot Noir fan, I really enjoy exploring new, interesting wines from this region.

Carneros is an example of an AVA that has a more uniform terroir than most. Whereas the borders of some AVAs have been extended beyond their natural climactic boundaries because of politics and influence, Carneros resisted this all too common tendency.

History

## History of Napa Wineries

During the Spanish era of California, the region was a natural place for settlement in the North Bay due to its proximity to San Francisco, and accessibility by water routes. When General Vallejo secularized the Spanish Missions in 1834, he divided the region amongst several of his cronies. The area was initially developed to produce subsistence crops and livestock.

The first vineyards were planted in the 1830s, and Carneros Wineries flourished for many decades until phylloxera devastated the region's grapes along with most vineyards throughout California.

Prohibition appeared to be the last nail in the coffin for Carneros Wineries. After this unfortunate law's repeal, Andre Tchelistcheff and Louis M. Martini took an interest in the region's unique climate. Investment in Carneros Wineries was slow until the 1970s when it began to surge with the rest of the Napa Valley.

### Terroir

Regular fog derived from the San Pablo Bay and Napa River has a cooling effect on the region. Wind is a constant factor, and it blows relatively unobstructed throughout most of the AVA.

Additionally, rainfall is relatively scarce, causing most Carneros Wineries and growers to irrigate their crops. The lack of abundant fresh water as well as the encroachment of sea water into some parts of the ground inhibit rampant vineyard expansion.

As one moves north from the San Pablo Bay, rolling hills begin to replace the extremely flat terrain in the south. There are a few hills that rise to 1000 feet, but they do little to shield the wind and fog. Because of Carneros' consistent climate, certain varietals grow in a very methodical manner.

A multitude of fossilized sea life exists in the soil, and is reminiscent of when the San Pablo Bay covered much of the region. The soil has relatively low fertility, giving grape vines only enough nourishment to focus on scarce, concentrated fruit. The soils of Carneros are generally made of relatively compact clay and are quite shallow.

### Varietals, Wines, and Wineries

Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are quite compatible with the terroir of Carneros, and the AVA produces some great examples of these two varietals. About 80% of the grapes produced here are either Pinot Noir or Chardonnay. Carneros Wineries also produce some excellent sparkling wines. Some parts of the region have also had a degree of success producing Merlot and Syrah in the northern, slightly warmer parts of the AVA.

Benjamin Bicais is the webmaster of <http://www.california-wine-tours-and-accessories>. This site contains original articles about California Wine Regions, and general wine knowledge.



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