

# The Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowing Appellation

*“A mountain vineyard is the most beautiful sight on earth!” - Martin Ray*

*Breathtaking vistas. Ocean and valley views. Lush forests. Majestic first-growth redwoods. Misty fog. Ocean breezes. Surf and sand. And mountain vineyards. This is the Santa Cruz Mountains. This mountain terroir is where we grow the grapes that produce our acclaimed wines.*

## **The Santa Cruz Mountain Appellation**

The Santa Cruz Mountains Viticultural Appellation was federally recognized in 1981, among the first to be defined by mountain topography, following the fog line along the coast to encompass our highest vineyards on the ridgetops at 2600'+ elevation. The appellation encompasses the Santa Cruz Mountain range, from Half Moon Bay in the north to Mount Madonna in the south, and is defined primarily by elevation – down to 800 feet in the east (the valley side) and 400 feet in the west (the coastal side). Our vineyards and wineries and the wines they produce reflect this mountain terrain, and their proximity to the ocean and resulting maritime climate.

The appellation is characterized by intimate, artisan wineries tucked in among the trees along beautiful mountain roads, or perched atop the ridges with sweeping views into the valleys or along the coast. Visitors can meet with and talk with the winemakers and enjoy exploring the mountain and coastal ambience and little towns.



The Santa Cruz Mountains has played a pivotal role in the history of winemaking in California, with roots going back over 100 years. Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the appellation has undergone significant rebirth and growth, with wineries now numbering over 70. And, changes in viticultural and winemaking practices (new trellising and improved canopy management, new clones, sustainable agricultural practices) are producing vibrant, complex, luscious wines of world-class quality throughout the appellation – this of course in addition to the famous wines for which the appellation has already been known. Santa Cruz Mountains wines possess a complex character backed with rich fruit flavors, depth and balance. These memorable qualities reflect our unique mountain terroir. And, delicious to drink now, they also age extremely well.

### ***The Wines.***

Santa Cruz Mountains wines are as diverse as the variety of microclimates and individuals that produce them. Our wines reflect our special mountain terroir and, notwithstanding the different varietals, share the following acclaimed characteristics:

- Complex flavors and deep intensity backed with rich fruit
- Balanced acidity
- A long finish on the palate

The result is wine that pairs particularly well with complementary foods, and age worthy wine that matures and improves in the bottle. Try pairing your Santa Cruz Mountain wine with complementary food for an enhanced wine experience!

Variety traits generally include:

- Pinot Noirs and Cabernet Sauvignons that are complex, elegant and age worthy
- Chardonnays that are crisp and clean, and not over-oaked, with refreshing mineral flavors

Wine lovers tired of over-oaked or overly sweet wines made of grapes harvested at increasingly high Brix appreciate Santa Cruz Mountains wines for their balanced flavors, complexity, food-friendly acidity and age-worthiness.

### ***The Vineyards***

Santa Cruz Mountain vineyards, whether looking west into the Pacific Ocean or Monterey Bay, or east into the Santa Clara (Silicon) Valley, or tucked into the hillsides, benefit from their proximity to the ocean. This marine influence gives us not only fabulous views, but also moderates the climate and sends coastal fog across the mountains with its cooling temperatures. Santa Cruz Mountains vineyards are almost unique among California vineyards in being so close to the ocean and the benefits it brings to producing quality winegrapes – while also benefiting from the mountain elevation. Visitors can come and taste our wines, then enjoy a sunset walk on the beach!

The Santa Cruz Mountains appellation is characterized by many small, family-owned vineyards. Because of the generally small acreage they can be tended with great care. Most growers and vineyard workers personally know each vine in the vineyard! There is little mechanized farming, other than small tractors and ATVs for routine maintenance; harvesting is all done by hand, which protects the grapes from bruising and the plants from damage. This personal attention to the vines follows through in personal attention to winemaking, all of which creates better quality wines.

There are over 200 vineyards\* in the appellation, ranging from very small plantings under one acre to the largest at 64 acres. Only about 40 of these are larger than 10 acres, and 14 larger than 20. The largest vineyards are Jimsomare on Montebello Ridge in Cupertino (64 acres); Ridge Vineyards in Cupertino (55.9 acres); and Mt. Eden Vineyards in Saratoga (43 acres).

Total acreage within the AVA boundaries is 322,000; and total acreage\* planted to vineyards is about 1300 acres. About one quarter of that is planted in Pinot Noir (229 acres); one quarter in Cabernet (249 acres); a little more than one quarter in Chardonnay (298 acres); and the rest in other varieties, most notably Merlot (at 94 acres) and Zinfandel (40 acres). Also represented are: Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Chenin Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon.

*\*Figures based on latest vineyard inventory conducted in 2003, with additional acreage known to have been planted since.*

### ***Grapes Into Wine: From the Vineyard to the Bottle***

The Santa Cruz Mountains terroir comprises numerous factors, probably the greatest of which is the influence of our maritime, Mediterranean climate on fruit flavors and the resulting wine:

- cool nights, warm but not too hot days as a result of the coastal fog create intense, concentrated flavors in the fruit;
- the long growing season and slow ripening that results in complex, nuanced flavors and a long finish on the palate.

Soils are varied throughout the appellation, and include decomposed rock, clay, loam and limestone. The abundant mineral content of the soil often releases a fresh, mineral character to the wines.

The appellation is characterized by several microclimates:

**The coastal vineyards.** These vineyards are typically at the lower elevations (about 400 to 800 feet) along the coast. Here the fog burns off late in the morning, followed by hot afternoons and evenings, and cool nighttimes. This dramatic daily temperature variation during fruit development creates intense, concentrated flavors; and slows ripening, creating complex, nuanced flavors. The grapes and the wines that result are complex, with balanced acidity. They stand well on their own, but the balanced acidity also makes them particularly food-friendly. This balanced ripeness and acidity also gives our wines excellent aging potential.



*Windy Oaks Vineyard*

**The high mountain/summit vineyards.** These vineyards at the higher elevations are usually above the fog during the growing season, but also benefit from the fog's cool proximity. They also experience dramatic temperature variations, from cold nights and cool mornings to hot afternoons that cool down again in the evenings. The ridges are bathed by gentle warm coastal breezes during the afternoons. These soft breezes massage the vines without overstressing them. (Highly stressed vines will close down the leaf stomata, thus inhibiting vine respiration and photosynthesis - sugar production - and produce tough fruit and skins, resulting in harsh tannins.) Santa Cruz Mountains breezes honor the integrity of the fruit, allowing for softer skins and softer tannins that release more easily in the wine.



*Savannah-Chanelle Vineyards*

**The valley slopes.** Sandwiched between the ocean to the west and San Francisco Bay to the east, these vineyards on the eastern side of the mountains along the peninsula also enjoy a long, cool growing season from their proximity to these bodies of water. Temperatures are generally moderate, with low daytime highs and few heat spikes, and fog is generally rare (although these vineyards enjoy its influence), so growing days are long and even. Sun exposure is primarily eastward or southern, which promotes slow, measured ripening, and the vineyards are generally more protected than on the western summit overlooking the coast. This variation on our climate, as well as the mountain soils produce grapes with intense, vibrant, lasting flavors.



***For More Information:***

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## ***A Very Brief History of the Santa Cruz Mountain Appellation***

For centuries massive tracts of virgin Coast Redwoods covered the Santa Cruz Mountains, covering substantial lime deposits. Early loggers harvested 18,000,000 board feet of virgin redwood. Cleared spaces allowed homesteaders to plant fruit, vegetables, and vineyards. Early viticulturists included Lyman J. Burrell near the summit (Burrell School); the Jarvis brothers near Scotts Valley (Santa Cruz Mountain Winery, Annamaria's Vineyard); the Burns family in Ben Lomond (Beauregard); Dr. Robert Tripp in Woodside, where he established a market (Robert's Market) in the town of Woodside in 1854 that still stands today. By 1875, existing records noted that Santa Cruz had 262,275 vines (about 300 acres) and was making 70,000 gallons of wine a year.

On the east side of the mountains, Emmet H. Rixford planted a small vineyard on the top of a small ridge (*cuesta* in Spanish) above Woodside. Rixford evokes the type of winemaker that you're most likely to find in the mountains today -- people dedicated to preserving the quality of small vineyards in their wine. Rixford's book, *The Wine Press and the Cellar*, published in 1887, was a staple for new winemakers well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Further south, another group of winemakers began their ascent up Monte Bello Ridge. Vincent and Secundo Picchetti (Picchetti Winery) purchased land towards the bottom of the mountain in the early 1870s. Further up the mountain, Pierre Klein purchased 160 acres in 1888 (now owned by Ridge Winery). Klein was regarded as one of the primary winemakers of his day, winning a gold medal at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Osea Perrone, a dapper San Francisco physician, created his summer retreat, vineyard and winery at the top of Monte Bello Ridge in 1886 (Ridge Winery).

Paul Masson was probably the most notable character to establish a vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains in the early 1890s. Born in Burgundy, he purchased 40 acres in the mountains above Saratoga (Mountain Winery) in 1896. For the next 40 years, he produced champagne. The other significant winery

established in the 1880s was the Novitiate in Los Gatos (Testarossa).

Prohibition was the looming cloud that finished off most of the premium winemaking in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Paul Masson continued on with his "medicinal" champagne and the Novitiate still made altar wine, but any other winemaking efforts went underground. The first winery to emerge from Prohibition was run by the Bargetto family. John and Phillip Bargetto opened their place in Soquel in 1933.

The person who had, and continues to have, the greatest hold on the style and imaginations of Santa Cruz Mountains winemakers was Martin Ray. Throughout his education and employment as a stockbroker, journalist and real estate broker, Ray's dream was to own his own vineyard in the mountains. He originally purchased Masson's property in Saratoga, but subsequently sold it to Seagrams and purchased land further up the mountain. One of the most significant changes that Ray brought to the wine business was his focus on varietal grapes. Martin Ray fought his entire life to increase the percentage of the varietal wine in a bottle named with that variety. By all accounts, a visit to Ray's home was both fascinating and unpredictable. On at least one occasion he sent someone packing back down the mountain in the middle of dinner.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a resurgence of winemaking in the Santa Cruz Mountains. In the early 1970s, a small group of Santa Cruz Mountain winery owners prepared an application to the government for a Santa Cruz Mountains American Viticultural Area (AVA). The AVA, established in 1981, was one of the first AVAs determined by altitude.

The number of wineries has grown exponentially throughout the last 25 years, continuing to produce wine befitting a region with a long and distinguished history.

*Adapted from Mountain Vines, Mountain Wines: Exploring the wineries of the Santa Cruz Mountains by Casey Young (with permission) © Casey Young*