

Tasting Monterey

A WINE ENTHUSIAST'S MONTHLY JOURNEY THROUGH MONTEREY'S WINE COUNTRY

STORE HOURS



A Taste of Monterey
Cannery Row
Sun-Thu 11am-6pm
Fri-Sat 11am-8pm*

Food service begins at
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*No new member tastings
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Although Monterey County's Santa Lucia Highlands is a hot appellation on a global scale these days, it was another growing area of our County that actually first captured the world's attention. It was also a wine produced from this AVA that was the first to be considered superior to French wines in a now famous blind tasting in the 1970s. This particular California Chardonnay was not from Napa Valley, as most people would assume. It was from Monterey County, and it was from Chalone.

As you probably already know, Chalone is one of our County's appellations, but it's one that doesn't seem to receive as much attention as it should. There are a few reasons contributing to this unfortunate reality. With only about 300 planted acres of vines, it's a fairly small growing area. Additionally, after the unfortunate closure of Chalone Vineyard's tasting room some years ago, the AVA lost its only tasting room. And there aren't many possibilities for another tasting room to open to begin with, as there are only a small number of growers or wineries in the appellation, and a good amount of the grapes grown in Chalone end up being made into wine by out-of-County wineries.

Furthermore, this is not the easiest area to reach. It is located high in the Gabilan Mountains east of Soledad, 1,500 to 1,800 feet above the Salinas Valley, at the base of Pinnacles National Park. Anyone who's driven to the Pinnacles may have had a similar first impressions, as most, when suddenly seeing grape vines stretching alongside the winding road leading to the park. The impression is most likely something along the lines of: people actually grow grape vines up here?

For those who have not been on Route 146, the reason one would question the choice to plant grape vines here is that after ascending from the fertile valley, the landscape dramatically changes into high desert conditions. Ironically though, it's actually precisely because of these conditions that such premiere and sought-after fruit is produced by these vines. This is a truly unique soil environment where decomposed granite, volcanic soils, and limestone are all co-located. This combination gives wines from Chalone distinct mineral qualities that some describe as flinty.

Despite the challenging terrain and conditions (it gets scorching hot in summer), the first commercial vineyards in Monterey County were planted there in 1919. In fact, the oldest producing vines in the County are located there. In the 1950's, wine grape production in Chalone began to blossom, with the original owner selling fruit to larger wineries, such as Wente. In the 1960s, Sonoma County wine pioneer Rodney Strong was even involved with Chalone.

But it wasn't until a banker looking for a life-change decided to become a winery owner in 1965 that Chalone really started coming into its own. That former banker was Richard Graff, and he changed Chalone forever. The culmination of this vision was on full display when a Chalone Chardonnay was selected over Chardonnays from Burgundy in the event known as the 1976 Judgment of Paris. It may have been a Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa County that won biggest that day, but it was a Chardonnay from Monterey County right alongside it to share in the newly-discovered American winemaking glory. From that time on, Chalone has been considered a premiere wine growing area.



Continued Inside

MONTHLY WINE SELECTIONS

CRAFTWORK - 2013 Zinfandel



Following a picture-perfect 2012 growing season, the 2013 vintage was another beaut. Spring came early and lasted long. In the summer, cool nights led into overcast mornings that were followed by breezy, warm afternoons. These temperate conditions and ideal temperatures made the 2013 growing season an excellent one for even ripening and good flavor development. The Zinfandel grapes were sourced from their estate San Lucas and Hames Valley vineyards. Hames is located at the southern edge of Monterey County and has a climate characterized by a high day-to-night temperature differential, with a variation of up to 50° quite common. The majority of this blend came from San Lucas, about 20 miles north of Hames Valley, which is characterized by its beautiful rolling topography, sunshine-filled days, and cool nights.

Aromas of plum and black currant mingle with ripe, juicy flavors of black cherry and strawberry jam. Well integrated tannins unfold into a rich layered finish. The firm tannins make it a terrific pairing with tri-tip steak, sausage, and juicy burgers.

100% Zinfandel

13.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2021

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

FIELDFARE - 2014 Rosé



Harvested from vineyards in the San Antonio Valley and Arroyo Seco that are planted in granitic soils, the Rosé has hints of honeysuckle, apple blossom and strawberries on the nose. Ruby red grapefruit and cranberry on the palate, it finishes with light garrigue.

60% Zinfandel, 40% Grenache

95 Cases Produced

13.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2017

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

FIELDFARE - 2013 Pinot Noir (Club Red)



Harvested from La Belle Rosé vineyard at the mouth of Chualar Canyon and planted in soils of iron oxide, granite and Chualar loam, the Pinor Noir show dark cherry, pine and juniper on the nose. Plum, blackberry, and cracked pepper emerge on the palate, with savory intense tannins.

100% Pinot Noir

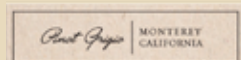
250 Cases Produced

13.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2018

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

CRAFTWORK - 2013 Pinot Grigio (Club Blanc)



Not to be outdone by the 2012 growing season, the 2013 vintage was another stunner. Spring came early and lasted long. In the summer, cool nights led into overcast mornings that were followed by breezy, warm afternoons. These temperate conditions and ideal temperatures made the 2013 growing season an excellent one for even ripening and good flavor development. To grow a high quality, flavorful Pinot Grigio, a cool climate area is a necessity to allow for slow ripening and maintain the grape's fruit character and natural acidity. Craftwork grows Pinot Grigio on their cool climate estate vineyard located just outside of the town of Greenfield. With morning fogs that often linger until mid-day, the intricate fruit flavors have time to develop while preserving crucial acidity. A combination of right location and traditional winemaking allows for crafting a bright, lively style that is brimming with fruit.

Aromas of stone fruit and citrus are followed by a lively blend of pear and tropical fruit. The palate shows a crisp acidity with a fruit forward finish, making this a versatile wine that pairs particularly well with light fish dishes, grilled chicken, prosciutto and melon, or all on its own.

100% Pinot Grigio

14.8% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2017

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

Cover Article Continued



But some of the banker in him must have stuck around, as the winery then known as Chalone Vineyard became the first in the U.S. wine industry to go to an IPO in 1984. However, despite what were most likely his great intentions, the opening up of the winery's ownership also most likely led to a demise in its quality. In 2004, the once small, independent winery which was a figurehead for an entire AVA, was bought out by a corporate giant.

That giant liquor company, Diageo, once again instigated a major change for the Chalone Vineyard winery which may have resulted in repercussions which, albeit wrongly, may have led to a slight degradation of the overall AVA. Diageo would eventually change the face of the Chalone Vineyard winery by expanding away from only estate-grown fruit and small production, as had been the Chalone tradition for decades, to large-scale production and sourcing from outside the AVA.

However, perhaps there is a change in the air once again. Chalone Vineyard winery is currently for sale...so who knows what comes next for this storied winery and the greater Chalone AVA. All of us engaged in Monterey County's wine industry have our fingers crossed that someone will step in and turn things around to get Chalone Vineyard back to its former glory.

There are other growers and small wineries in the Chalone AVA who have endured and continue growing and producing excellent grapes and wines from Chalone. Antle and Michaud Vineyards wineries produce excellent wines with every new vintage, such as Antle's Mourvedre included as one of our March Club selections. Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays are still grown there, as they have been for almost a hundred years. The are other varietals grown in the Chalone AVA have a reputation for being outstanding as well. Chenin Blanc, Pinot Blanc, Syrah, Marsanne....if you see any of these varietals with the Chalone AVA on their label, you will not be disappointed.

Bryce Ternet - is a contributing editor and is the author of: "The Stevenson Plan, A Novel of the Monterey Peninsula."

RECIPE

Classic Crab Cakes

Ingredients

2/3 cup	panko (Japanese breadcrumbs), divided
1 tablespoon	minced fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 tablespoons	finely chopped green onions
2 tablespoons	canola mayonnaise
1 teaspoon	lemon juice
1 teaspoon	Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon	Old Bay seasoning
1/2 teaspoon	Worcestershire sauce
1/8 teaspoon	kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon	ground red pepper
1 large	egg, lightly beaten
8 ounces	lump crabmeat, shell pieces removed
1 tablespoon	olive oil
1	lemon, quartered

Directions

1. Combine 1/3 cup panko and next 10 ingredients (through egg) in a large bowl, stirring well. Add crab; stir gently just until combined. Place remaining 1/3 cup panko in a shallow dish. Using wet hands, shape crab mixture into 4 equal balls. Coat balls in panko. Gently flatten balls to form 4 (4-inch) patties.

2. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add oil to pan; swirl to coat. Add patties; cook 3 minutes on each side or until golden. Serve with lemon wedges.

Serves 6



VISITING Varietals



ROSÉ

Pronunciation: Rose-ay

Rosé has exploded on the US market over the past few years, especially during the warm months of the year. In France, it now eclipses the sale of white wine, and rumor has it, Sting slugs bottles of the stuff during his live performances. It also happens to be the perfect wine for sipping in the park or at a backyard barbecue. Suffice it to say, rosé has become incredibly popular, but most of us don't know how rosé is made or where some of the most consistent rosés comes from.

Unlike white grapes that become white wine, and red grapes that become red wine, pink grapes don't exist in nature; so, how do winemakers create a style of wine that always has such a beautiful pink color?

The answer here is skin contact. As we have discussed in other wine 101 posts, when all grapes, no matter their color, are juiced, the juice that runs out of the fruit is clear. Wines receive their color not from the juice but from the juice's contact with the skin of the grapes. As the skins and the juice soak together, the color from the skin bleeds into the juice, giving the wine its yellow or red color. This process is known as maceration.

Winemakers create a rosé wine by juicing red grapes and then allowing the juice to soak with the skins for a very short period, usually only two to three days. As soon as the juice begins to take on the beautiful pink color the winemaker desires, the skins are removed and the juice is allowed to ferment, creating delicious rosé.

The wine region known for creating the most consistent rosés, no matter the price point, is Provence. The Provence wine region of France creates rosé more than any other style of wine, and they've become incredibly good at it. Due to the size of the region, quality rosés exist at all price points. So, if you're looking for a rosé and happen to be in a store or at a restaurant, a safe bet is asking for a rosé from Provence. Or, why not try from Monterey County?

CHEESE

Varietals



CHÈVRE

Pronunciation: she-vruh

Chevre is French for Goat's cheese i.e. cheeses made out of goat's milk. They are popular among elderly and children who are more likely to show low tolerance to cow's milk. Also, goat cheeses are lower in fat, and higher in vitamin A and potassium. They serve as a perfect substitute for many dieters. A majority of goat cheeses come from France, the most famous among them being Bucheron, Chabis and Crottin de Chavignol.

Goat cheeses have a unique, tart, earthy flavour that sets them apart from cow cheeses. This distinctive tang and aroma grows robust and bold as it ages. Milk production of goats, unlike of cow's, is seasonal from mid-March through October. Only a few cheeses are aged beyond four months, and they cannot be frozen without loss of quality. Considering the availability of limited milk production, experiments are on to make cheeses from frozen goat milk curd.

The flavor and aroma of goat cheese relies upon its moisture, density, aging and flavoring. It can feature a soft, semisoft, firm, or hard texture that indicates its moisture content. They come in many sizes and shapes, such as round patties, log-shapes, drum-shapes, pyramids, round loaves, long loaves etc. Chevres are excellent dessert cheeses, but are also often served as snacks or with dinner drinks.

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