



California Dreamin '

Off the beaten track

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I am from California. Specifically, regions of Napa and Sonoma. It had been three or four times I went there since the 1990s first observation quickly like that, without even peruse my notebook of notes: Napa still impressive, prestigious, but oh the region directly to the west has the gift to sound sensitive strings ...

Landscapes (often hilly), the atmosphere (more friendly, less formal) and of course the wines (more nervous, more hop-lavie), all made of the latter place, Sonoma, a destination of choice - that we do go there or that we should be content to wander the aisles of the SAQ.

The *Golden State*, also known as the most populous state that Canada is not limited of course not to the two regions, on the wine map. But they remain the best known. Especially Napa.

Napa is the star is four percent of the state's production volume, but something like 25 per cent in value. The fault, so to speak, these Cabernet-cults that have put the region in the sky - and primarily Chateau Montelena, awarded during the famous Judgment of Paris in 1976. Napa is of course as Robert Mondavi, Opus One Harlan Estate, Groth, Dominus and all the rest.

The reverse of this renowned for the consumer means is that the prices are to match. The best wines of the Napa cost the skin of the buttocks. If you can afford them, or if carbide contemplation labels, one need not look far: the quality is high does, and wine, I noticed during my stay, less woody less burly and less excessive than in the past. (Unless it is the other red of the world, including those of Bordeaux, who took so safe (read: alcohol) for fifteen years that the wicked *Cabs* California, by comparison, are no longer elephant in the china shop.)

Meanwhile, in Sonoma ...

Sonoma, she warms to a different timber. Literally as well as figuratively. Its wines, overall, often cooler helping climate, are more nervous, more sour - and thus more in keeping with the taste of many Quebecers, known to have a French palate, formatted to accommodate the liveliness and even the bitterness. (Though sweet Californian bugs as *Ménage à Trois* or *Apothic Red* cartonnet our market, plunging connoisseurs here in the greatest perplexity ...)

The landscape is different, too, we said at the outset - although in fairness the neighboring Napa is not limited to the valley floor, the famous *Valley Floor*. As proof, the mountainous and impressive Atlas Peak area, which is especially established Antinori Tuscan house with its winery *Antica*.

Sonoma is essentially the vast regional appellation Sonoma County, which includes sub-regions such as *Sonoma Coast*, *Dry Creek Valley*, *Russian River Valley*, *Alexander Valley* and also *Rockpile*, while to the north, we discover the end of our stay with the excellent wines of Mauritsen, both full-bodied and refreshing, but that did not error still made their way to Quebec.

However, everything that comes from Sonoma is not to buy eyes closed, far from it. The most common downside, and this also applies to many of the wines of Napa we could taste it is a sometimes indiscriminate use of wood, leading to notes of caramel, *butterscotch* eg Chardonnay, and vanilla aromas lined tannins rather asséchants in red.

But again, compared to what I could personally taste on site during previous trips, the California offers approximates growing requirements of our Quebec palace, you want to drink more than a glass the freshness is often at the appointment.

Now there is of course the issue of the exchange rate and prices possibly known to climb ...

But that is another story.

Drip

Life after "Fing Merlot" the protagonist of *Sideways* : If Miles, the character in question, was quite right at the time to decry this variety, there are more and more excellent Merlots and namely in California Napa, not caricatures.

The special case of Carneros : This region has one foot in Napa and one in Sonoma. It produces particularly good sparkling and good Pinot Noir.

The egg-shaped tubs and cold maceration : unnecessary, according to Daniel Baron, winemaker at Silver Oaks in Napa, having long been with Dominus. On this last operation, the winemaker claims essentially that everything was good to extract the grape is all the way to the stage of fermentation itself, so hot.

There are no really bad vintages in California, as there may be, for example, in France. The climate is not only relatively warm, it is also rather constant. Example: from May to October, year after year, it hardly falls a drop of rain. Who says better ?

Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot remain the most planted in California. But still there are more than 100 grape varieties grown. There among other here and there beautiful Syrah and good Viogniers, not to be despised.

Surreal experience at Raymond Vineyards - This area of Napa Valley, owned by the French house Boisset is biodynamic, while cellars and facilities, oddly decorated on the theme of the party, evoked last week the license or lust. Rogues models, suggestive videos, atmosphere brothel: were it not for the two sisters who accompanied me and have been Bees mouths too, I might have thought that this was once my prude side and *low profile* that was playing a trick on me ...

Drink, innkeeper!

Some good California wines, first, to stay in tune.

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Innisfree Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2012 - The exception that proves the rule, red Napa sells "only" \$ 42 ... A lovely on the palate and a wooded supported, but without this creates imbalance nor does dry wine. Ready to drink, but still retain without problem three or four years.

Morning Fog Chardonnay 2014 Wente - Typical Californian chardonnay, vanilla and fruity in the nose and mouth. Freshness is there, however, it is not heavy, just typical New World whatsoever.

Le Cigar Volant Bonny Doon 2010 - The complexity of the aromatic plane, and I hardly stirred glass. Cherry, pepper, something that reminds pastry, melted and character point.



Besson Grenache Vieilles Vignes Birichino 2013 - A good California grenache, quite full-bodied, generous, with good fruit and a mass of indisputable freshness. Very successful ! And at good prices.

Raymond Napa Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford 2011 - Not cheap (\$ 87, exclusive SAQ Signature), but very serious, both tasty and nervous, strong and toned. The wood is delivered to time, and chocolate, but the concentration is there, that counterbalances this component. A beautiful Californian cabernet.