



WHY NAPA VALLEY?

## Uniquely Napa Valley

FIVE GEOGRAPHIC DISTINCTIONS THAT MAKE THE REGION SO SPECIAL

BY PETER GOLDMAN

Napa Valley is not a single entity, but rather an extremely diverse geographic and climatic palette for winemakers. It's no wonder there are 17 distinct nested American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) in Napa, each bringing a rich range of wines and styles.

Here are five geographic distinctions that make Napa Valley a special place, worth returning to visit after visit, bottle after bottle.

**1 SCALE AND SCOPE:** Napa Valley is 30 miles long and five miles wide, with 45,000 acres under vine. By comparison, that is just 20% the size of Bordeaux. Napa County produces 4% of California's grape harvest and just 0.4% of world production.

**2 CLIMATE VARIATION:** Napa Valley's southern tip, closest to the San Pablo Bay, is quite cool with typical summer highs reaching 80 degrees. Further north, in St. Helena and Calistoga, summer highs can reach 95 degrees or higher. These climatic differences impact countless winegrowing decisions and result in an array of wine varieties and styles.

**3 UNIQUELY NAPA:** During the growing season, the cooling fogs from the Pacific Ocean blanket portions of the valley floor and foothills, while the mountain vineyards may be exposed to radiant morning sun, but at a lower overall temperature because of altitude. This weather phenomenon is known as *diurnal shift* and helps to achieve ripeness and balance in grapes, resulting in the characteristic structure of Napa Valley wines.

**4 GEOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE:** In addition to the valley floor, there are distinctly defined foothills and mountain ranges. The Vaca Mountains on the east and Mayacamas Range on the west border Napa Valley with only five miles between at the widest point. These ranges rise

to 2,600+ feet, with vineyards and wineries dotted all along the foothills and mountains.

**5 DIVERSE TERROIR:** These broadly distinct geographic areas: valley floor, foothills and mountain ranges are richly diverse in soil types, flora composition, sun exposure and altitude, making every vineyard block distinct from the next. When you consider the shifts in temperature and rainfall from vintage to vintage, each bottle tells a unique story (see page 16).

### EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF

Enjoy a mountain-grown Cabernet Sauvignon (see page 22) alongside one from the valley floor, and note the differences in aromas, flavors and styles with these recommendations from Peter.

#### From the mountains:

- Keenan Winery Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain
- Robert Craig Winery Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain

#### From the valley floor:

- Larkmead Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, Calistoga
- Dominus Estate Napanook Cabernet Sauvignon, Yountville

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