



# The International Wine Review

## October 2011

### Report # 29: The Wines of Monterey County

## Introduction



Monterey County is one of California's largest premium wine grape producing regions—only Sonoma and Napa are larger

in terms of vineyard acreage. While Monterey does not yet have the name recognition of its northern competitors, that is changing quickly. We tasted over 250 wines in Monterey and at our offices in preparing this report and found a large number of world class, elegant wines that reflect the diverse terroir of the county. In terms of plantings, Monterey is still Chardonnay country, but Pinot Noir has a very firm foothold, and other varieties like Syrah are also staking a claim to the region's future. In this report we study the microclimates, grapes, vineyards and wineries of Monterey and look at how they and the exciting winemakers of the county are raising the bar on quality.

Monterey has come very far, very fast as a wine growing region. A half century ago it had hardly any vineyards. Thirty years ago it mainly produced grapes and wine under contract to California's large, commercial wineries. Today Monterey is recognized for producing premium and super-premium wines, at wineries located throughout California.

There are nine distinct and separate AVAs and 45 thousand acres of vineyards within Monterey's almost four thousand square miles of territory. Each year they produce about 200 thousand tons of wine grapes, 40 percent more than Napa County. In other words, Monterey is a huge, diverse winegrowing area. That size and diversity makes it difficult to describe it in simple terms.

What the different AVAs—from Chalone in the north to Hames Valley in the south and Carmel Valley in the west—share in common is low rainfall, large diurnal temperature variations, and a strong ocean influence, albeit one that weakens as one moves south in the Salinas Valley. A two mile deep submarine canyon (the Monterey Canyon) lies just off the coast of Monterey, and its cold water moderates temperatures and contributes fog and strong, cool winds that rush through the 80 mile long Salinas Valley. The location of each AVA relative to the Salinas River and



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the Monterey Bay determines its daytime temperature, strength of winds, and exposure to fog and sun.

In what follows, we explore the vineyards and wines of Monterey. We began this journey two years ago with an in-depth look at the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. In this report we continue the journey through the other varied parts of Monterey. At the end of this exploration we conclude that Monterey has all the ingredients for future success. We expect that in two decades its name will roll of the tongues of wine aficionados like Napa and Sonoma do today. It's this future and the dedicated growers and winemakers of the region that make Monterey such an exciting wine region today.

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