



Basic Juice Article
Undiscovered California

by: *Beau Jarvis*

Name the last bottle of wine you shared with a friend. Chances are it was from California. More specifically, said bottle was likely from Napa Valley. Of course there is nothing wrong with enjoying Napa wine. However there is much more to California wine than ‘the valley.’ Believe it or not there are many great non-Napa wines just waiting to be discovered. Let’s hop on Highway 101 sprouting north out of LA’s concrete tangle.

Our first stop is about 100 miles outside Los Angeles. We’ve arrived in Santa Barbara County, the so-called *American Riviera*. Warm temperatures and ocean breezes greet visitors and caress vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley, Santa Ynez Valley and Santa Rita hills. Aside from the trusty grape varieties grown here in abundance such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, there is a deliciously interesting genetic mutant of a grape enjoying this idyll. It’s called *Pinot Blanc* and it is the albino variant of the better-known grape variety, Pinot Grigio (AKA Pinot Gris, which, incidentally is the ‘gray’ variant of Pinot Noir). Pinot Blanc makes for a heady white wine; offering up green apple, pineapple, peach and pear scents. Pinot Blanc is full in the mouth with notable zing. This is a great wine for stir-fried veggies hot off the wok. Try *Steele Pinot Blanc* (2002) for about sixteen dollars and pat yourself on the back for venturing outside of Napa.

Highway 1 is a joy to drive. In fact, from Santa Barbara County let’s motor north past Carmel and Monterey, skip San Francisco and put it in park near the small hamlet of Mendocino. Mendocino is sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and Coastal Mountain Range. The weather is notably cooler. Exotic grapes dwell here with names like *Gewürztraminer* and *Viognier*. Care to place your nose in a glass of Viognier? This white wine is one pungent little cuss. Viognier tickles the nose with scents of honey, orange blossom and apricot. Take a sip. There is nothing delicate about this wine. It’s deceptively full-bodied and has a ‘slippery’ mouth-feel. Spend fourteen dollars and spend the evening sniffing a glass of Mendocino’s *Jepson Viognier* (2002).

Seeing the Coastal Mountain Range makes me yearn for a bit of inland adventure. We’ll hang a left at route 20 and drive east towards Lake County; home to Clear Lake, the largest natural lake in California. This lake dominates the landscape. It is surrounded by dormant volcanoes, rolling hills and boulders. Grapes growing in Lake County’s vineyards are treated to bright sunny days and cool, chilly nights. *Syrah*, a grape variety from the south of France, seems to have found a second home here. The aroma of Lake County Syrah is intensely fruity with a right good bit of pepper and pipe tobacco. It’s easy to drink and packs enough of a tannic punch to make one crave pepperoni pizza or a double cheeseburger. Call the pizza man and open up an eleven dollar bottle of *Shooting Star Lake County Syrah* (2001).

According to my roadmap, we're just 80 miles from Napa. As wine lovers, it would be downright blasphemous to completely ignore the valley. We can simply take Highway 29 and zoom on down south to the eastern side of Napa Valley. Take a look out the left side of the car at Atlas Peak – one of the highest mountains in the valley. There is a winery here by the same name that specializes in *Sangiovese*. This is the same grape that is used in Italian Chianti. The Atlas Peak version (*Atlas Peak Sangiovese, 2000, \$12*) is full of ripe cherry and strawberry scents. This is the perfect wine to sip, as shadows grow long in the valley. It would really pair well with roast duck over a bed of soft polenta. Does anyone know if *The French Laundry* delivers? Cheers.

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