

More labels acknowledge vineyards

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Winemakers, who don't always grow the grapes they crush, often acknowledge the farmers they buy from and admire by putting the name of their vineyard on bottles of wine made from their fruit.

That's one reason wines with vineyard names are on the rise.

Another is the increasing maturity of the California wine trade. Over the years, some vineyards have shown that they produce remarkably choice fruit, vintage after vintage. These grapes, in turn, produce remarkably expressive wines. Thus, the name of the vineyard on the label is meant to be an indication of consistency and quality.

Besides Walker Vineyard, here are 10 other California vineyards to watch for on bottles of wine.

Backus Vineyard

Officials of Joseph Phelps Vineyards in the Napa Valley have been making a concentrated and complex cabernet sauvignon from the small Marion Backus vineyard in Oakville since 1977, and became so smitten by the fruit that they bought the parcel in 1996.

Bien Nacido Vineyards

A prime vineyard need not be tiny, as shown by Bien Nacido Vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley of Santa Barbara County. It spreads over 800 acres, producing mostly chardonnay and pinot noir for such highly regarded wineries as Sine Qua Non, Au Bon Climat, Hitching Post, Gary Farrell, David Bruce, Longoria, Jaffurs, Qupe and Steele.

Garys' Vineyard

Though planted only in 1997, the 50-acre Garys' Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey County quickly has established itself as a primo source of pinot noir and syrah, with such artisan wineries as Kosta Browne, Siduri, Miura and Morgan taking advantage of the grapes. The vineyard is named for growers Gary Franscioni and Gary Pisoni.

Martha's Vineyard

Perhaps the most celebrated and recognizable vineyard in Napa Valley, the plot now known as Martha's Vineyard was planted in 1959 by Bernard and Belle Rhodes. In 1963, they sold the parcel to Tom and Martha May, hence the name, which since the 1966 vintage has provided the grapes for the most iconic wine in the state -- Heitz Cellar's Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon.

Mohr-Fry Ranches

A series of ranches in Lodi, Mohr-Fry raises all sorts of crops, from cherries to dried Indian corn, but it's the operation's zinfandel, one plot of which dates to 1901, that accounts for its growing prominence on wine labels. Look for the name on wines from such producers as Gustavo Thrace, Chouinard and St. Amant.

Monte Bello

Grapes have been grown in Monte Bello in the Santa Cruz Mountains above Cupertino since 1886, though they've had to weather Prohibition and occasional neglect over the past 110 years. Since 1962, the vineyard has yielded the fruit that goes into the Ridge Vineyards Monte Bello Cabernet Sauvignon, the 1971 version of which won the recent 30th anniversary re-enactment of the 1976 Judgment of Paris tasting that did much to establish California's credentials on the world wine stage.

Olivet Lane Vineyard

For people taken with pinot noir, the name "Olivet Lane" on a label stands for wines of vitality and charm. The Pellegrini family planted the first vines in 1975, and today they occupy 60 acres of choice land in the Russian River Valley, 20 acres devoted to pinot noir, the rest to chardonnay. In the past, the wineries Williams Selyem and Gary Farrell bought the pinot noir, but today the Pellegrinis are using much of the fruit for their own releases under the label of Pellegrini Family Vineyards. Merry Edwards Wines also continues to make an Olivet Lane pinot noir.

Original Grandpère Vineyard

Believed to be the oldest documented zinfandel vineyard in California, dating from 1869, the Original Grandpère Vineyard is a 10-acre plot in the Shenandoah Valley of Amador County. Currently, the winery Vino Noceto uses the designation, though some other wineries, including C.G. Di Arie Vineyard & Winery and Macchia Wines, also buy grapes from the vineyard.

Sangiaco Vineyard

In the Carneros district in the southern reaches of Sonoma County, chilly and foggy Sangiacomo Vineyard has become one of the more celebrated vineyards in the state for chardonnay and pinot noir, supplying fruit to numerous wineries that proudly stamp the name of the vineyard on their label.

To Kalon

Planted smack dab in the middle of the Napa Valley in 1869, the 359-acre To Kalon Vineyard provides fruit for some of the more esteemed cabernet sauvignons in the nation, most notably the releases of Robert Mondavi Winery. Today, the vineyard is divided into three parcels -- 250 owned by Robert Mondavi Winery, 20 owned by UC Davis and 89 owned by grower Andy Beckstoffer, who just last week donated a conservation easement on his portion to the Land Trust of Napa County to help preserve the vineyard in perpetuity.

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