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The Internet's Premier Wine Gift Shop

The Grapevine Newsletter



American Viticultural Areas (AVA)

What are they and why should I care?

You might have run across one or several of them but not known about it. You may have been familiar with one for years, but not known it was one of them. You may have driven through a few in your lifetime without knowing you did. When a US winery wants to tell you the geographic pedigree of its wine, it uses a tag on its label called an *Appellation of Origin*. This tag must meet federal and state legal requirements regulated by the ATF. While a geographical term may have been in use for a very long period of time, ATF requires by regulation that both substantive and procedural requirements must be met before it will "recognize" and "define" a viticultural area.

Many people believe that the term *appellation of origin* is synonymous with *viticultural area*, but that's not the case. Viticultural areas are to appellations like grapes are to fruit. Viticultural areas are one kind of *appellation*. Not all *appellations* are viticultural areas. An *appellation of origin* can be the name of a country, the name of a state or states, the name of a county or counties within a state. Viticultural areas are a hybrid appellation.

ATF prohibits the use of an American Viticultural Area on a wine label unless 85% of the wine is derived from fruits grown within the confines of the viticultural area boundaries. There is a hidden economy to a successful AVA, one that is recognized by consumers as a good grape growing area. For some consumers, the appellation of origin is one more indication of value and is an important pricing factor. Also, unless a winery is located in, and gets all of its grapes to produce a particular wine from, a common viticultural area from vineyards that it owns or controls, the winery cannot designate the wine as "Estate Bottled" wine.

This Month's Featured Appellation - **El Dorado AVA**

California's wine grape cultivation began in El Dorado County even before the Gold Rush of 1849. Topography, soils and altitudes in the area create varied microclimates consistent with the best known grape growing regions of the world. The premium grapes grown in these settings are ideally suited for diversification of wine product lines with the most popular wines produced in the region being Zinfandel, Syrah, Petit Sirah, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

At the ascent of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in California, El Dorado family wineries are winning over wine lovers and competition judges with an extraordinary diversity of global grape varieties from just one AVA (American Viticultural Area). How can this be? Normally, an AVA is recognized by the U.S. Government for its common growing conditions, not its diversity. In El Dorado, the vintner's strength is the land's diverse terroir: hundreds of tiny microclimates make it possible to make world-class wines in conditions similar to each winegrape's European homeland.

"One of the things that makes El Dorado unique is that its hillsides provide a broad range of temperatures, exposures and soils, which provide ideal locations for grapes of Bordeaux, Rhone, Italian, Spanish, even Burgundian origin. The list of varieties grown is well over forty, and includes virtually all the grapes from which fine wines can be made," explains John Smith of Oakstone Winery, who credits the high elevation for producing wines of deep flavor and color.

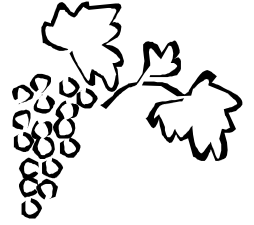
Paul Bush, second generation El Dorado grape grower and winemaker at Madroña Vineyards, calls this the "El Dorado English Muffin Geographic Phenomenon." The topography of El Dorado's mountain terrain gives us hundreds of nooks and crannies, so the region as a whole produces a dazzling variety of wines. We choose carefully when matching the varietal to the spot where we are planting. As winemakers, we're going for more site-specific character and flavor," says Bush.



This Month's **Featured Wineries**

Because California is widely regarded as the finest viticultural region in America and one of the best wine producing regions in the world, the vast majority of our **Wine of the Month Club** featured wines are from California's finest boutique wineries.

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Mount Aukum Winery

Mount Aukum Winery is located in California's El Dorado County - a region long famous for Zinfandel and more recently gaining a name for the cultivation of Rhone and Italian varietals. It sits at an elevation of 2615 feet, where the air is clear, it is above the Central Valley's winter fog blanket, and the mighty Sierra Nevada's majestic snowy peaks are just an arm's length away.

Vines cling to the hillsides here between outcroppings of crumbling granite in a perfect world for wine grapes - a little red dirt here, a rocky drainage there - what the experts call "Holland Series", thirty-six inches deep. Days are sunny and nights are crisp on Mount Aukum- the same old story every winery wants to tell, but up here the long underwear proves it's not just a marketing ploy.

The five acre estate vineyard rests at the top of Mount Aukum. This superb location is distinguished by its comfortable elevation, excellent sun exposure, and granitic, rocky loam soil. The elevated, sunny location and rocky soil make Mount Aukum's vineyards the ideal microclimate for producing Syrah, Petite Sirah, and Zinfandel, which comprise the majority of their fine vines.

Within the rugged sub-appellation of Fair Play ("Wines with Altitude"), Mount Aukum uses its own hillside vineyards as well as sourcing fruit from the same growers who nurtured the explosion of premium wines in the Sierra foothills. Great wines begin in the vineyard, and Mount Aukum Winery uses grapes from only the highest quality growers throughout the state of California. They carefully select vineyards with an excellent reputation for the highest quality fruit and sound vineyard practices to create wines of exceptional quality.

Mount Aukum is owned and operated by four partners - three cousins, one married, all originally from Texas - in an arrangement that proves that passion trumps paychecks every time. All four have a fiery devotion to their mountain, their vineyards and to the rare fine mysteries of making superlative wine.

Madroña Vineyards

Madroña Vineyards takes its name from a majestic old madrone tree which still stands in the middle of the vineyard. The warm days and cool nights of the historic El Dorado grape-growing region have proven to produce fruit with excellent balance and intense varietal character. At an elevation of 3,000 feet, Madrone Vineyards can truly claim the distinction of offering mountain-grown wines.

Early in the 1970's, Dick Bush was convinced that the combination of climate, soil and topography found in the foothills of El Dorado County held great promise for producing outstanding wine. In 1973, Dick and his wife Leslie, along with their children, parents and friends, planted 35 acres of vines as the first step toward demonstrating this fact. More than two decades of experimentation and production, coupled with personal family attention to every part of the winemaking process, has helped fulfill the promise of this re-emerging region. The initial excitement Dick and Leslie felt for the potential of El Dorado County is now passed on to the next generation. With the latter's planting of new vineyards and varieties and their leadership at the winery, the tradition and commitment continue.

The Madroña Vineyards estate wines come from some of the highest elevation vineyards in El Dorado, with awesome views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Paul Bush manages the vineyards himself, adding to the family's knowledge of grape varieties, clones within a variety, and microclimates. "Intensive hands-on vineyard practices make wines that are frankly exceeding what we thought possible at these high elevations" says Paul. "And we're going to keep on improving over the next 30 years.

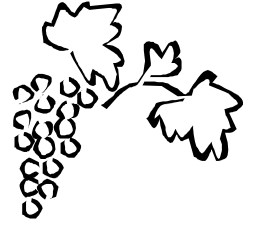
Over twenty years old, the 35-acre estate vineyards are now in their prime. Originally planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, and Johannisberg Riesling, the family has since added Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Petite Sirah and Gewürtztraminer. An old-world philosophy prevails at Madroña with nearly all aspects of vineyard production still done by hand. This intensive handwork coupled with an integrated-pest-management system fosters low-impact agriculture while producing wine grapes of the highest quality.



This Month's **Classic Wine Club** Selections

Every month our **Classic Wine Club** members receive one or two bottles of our featured wines. The wines you get depend on the membership you are enrolled in. If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the fun. Happy wine tasting!

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Madroña Vineyards 2003 Mélange de Trois

Only 539 cases produced

The Mélange de Trois ("Blend of Three") is an example of the perfect harmony of the three major white Rhône varieties, Marsanne, Roussanne, and Viognier. Marsanne, the heavyweight of the team, provides the rich, full-bodied voluptuous curves on the palate with hints of honeydew melon. The nose of tropical fruit comes entirely from the Roussanne and Viognier, each delivering its own personality to the blend. The percentages between the varieties may change each vintage as they achieve the ideal balance for the distinctive wine these mountain vineyards produce. From the first sniff, it is easy to tell that this wine is something special. The nose is loaded with sweet cream, honey and apricot characters framed by ripe cantaloupe and subtle tangerine fruit. The palate is rich, but not overbearing, with notes of honeydew, candied pear and elegant caramel. Bursts of cream, roasted hazelnuts and vanilla spice linger intensely on the finish, inviting the taste buds to enjoy the wine just a little longer.

The 2003 Mélange de Trois is a beautiful wine made not for sipping, but instead for food. Chilled slightly, it pairs well with pork, fish and chicken dishes where the richness warrants a wine of this caliber. And don't be afraid to lay a bottle down for awhile. It is known to age well!

- Double Gold Medal Winner / Best White Wine - Amador County Fair
- Silver Medal - Indiana International Wine Competition
- Silver Medal - California State Fair
- Silver Medal - El Dorado County Fair
- Bronze Medal - Orange County Fair

Mount Aukum Winery 2003 Syrah, El Dorado

Only 460 cases produced

This mountain grown Syrah was harvested September 26th from a ridge-top vineyard over two thousand feet above sea level in El Dorado County's famous red soil. The vineyard source is the Bush Family Vineyard, owners of Madroña Vineyards, thus the link between this month's featured wine selections. Co-fermented with 3% Viognier, small lot fermentations create a complex wine of intense varietal character. The nose opens with a delicate aroma of rose blossom and finishes with a clean touch of mineral and prolonged vanilla. 100% barrel aging for 18 months in French oak adds notes of cedar and toast to this plush spicy Syrah.

- Silver Medal - California State Fair
- Silver Medal - El Dorado County Fair

Wine Gift Baskets

Our wonderful collection of Wine Gift Baskets, Corporate Gift Baskets and Gourmet Food Gift Baskets are perfect for any occasion. **Customizable** - You can choose to include only reds, only whites, or a combination of red and white wines. You can even substitute bottles of our fine Private Label Wine with any wine gift basket we offer. We are definitely the most unique and complete Wine Gift Shop online!



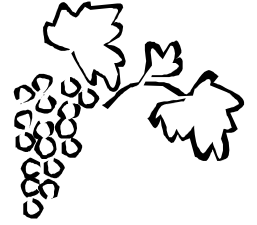
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This Month's **Epic Reds Wine Club** Selections

This is our top-shelf wine club and is limited to only 750 members. Every month our **Epic Reds Wine Club** members receive two bottles of California's finest red wines. If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the fun. Happy wine tasting!

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Mount Aukum Winery 2003 Syrah, Fair Play

Only 350 cases produced

Decomposed granite soils dominate the Fair Play AVA along with a microclimate naturally tempered by an elevation above 2500 ft. The combination of soil and climate produce a velvety Syrah with dense tannins. On the palate this Syrah opens with ripe blackberry and bramble fruit flavors, layered with clove and black pepper. Dried violets and roses with cranberry caramel toast define the bouquet.

- Double Gold Medal - Calaveras County Fair
- Gold Medal - San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition
- Gold Medal - West Coast Wine Competition
- Silver Medal - Grand Harvest
- Bronze Medal - Pacific Rim International Wine Competition

Mount Aukum Winery 2003 Petite Sirah, Fair Play

Only 220 cases produced

Produced with grapes from the Fair Play AVA, boasting the highest average elevation of any appellation in California, this wine is the epitome of taste using select mountain-grown fruit. Fair Play has developed a reputation for high quality wine grapes that yield deeply flavorful, intense wines, and this superb wine is no exception. The Petite Sirah grape is perfectly suited for the local terroir and produces a wine with excellent balance and structure; eloquent and powerful. Ripe blackberries and violets with a hint of magnolia lead to dense tannins and a subtle smoky finish.

- Silver Medal - Calaveras County Fair
- Silver Medal - San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition
- Silver Medal - West Coast Wine Competition
- Silver Medal - Grand Harvest
- Silver Medal - Pacific Rim International Wine Competition

*Mount Aukum Winery
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Mount Aukum, California*

Personalized Label Wines

We have a great selection of wine label templates available on our website that you can use to create your very own Private Label Wine. Our private label wines come in four wonderful red and white varieties and you can mix and match them as you please. You can even choose to substitute private label wines in any of our wine gift baskets! **Private Label Wines are perfect for Birthdays, Holidays, Thank You Gifts, Congratulations, House Warming, Corporate Gifts and Promotional Items.**



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