

# One Vine Day

THE BIRTHPLACE OF CALIFORNIA'S TWO MOST FAMOUS VARIETIES IS A WELL-GUARDED SECRET FOR WINE LOVERS.

BY KELLY MAGYARICS



Phil Long,  
owner of  
Longevity  
Wines

Rodrigue  
Molyneux  
vineyard



The Livermore Valley put itself on the map in the late 1800s when winemaker James Concannon replaced phylloxera-ravaged vineyards with a vine from Bordeaux; a few decades later, UC Davis enology student Ernest Wente grafted a French chardonnay cutting with one from his family's vineyard.

Today, over 80% of California's cabernet sauvignon and 75% of its chardonnay are descendants of these mother vines. Despite these remarkable achievements, Livermore has remained more widely known as the home of the world's fastest rodeo and a top-secret government lab than for wine. But that's changing. In the past few decades, the region has grown from 11 to 50 producers, with trailblazers and more recent upstarts countering the long-held belief that it's too hot for lighter reds and aromatic whites and coexisting with a collaborative, convivial spirit. Here are some of the region's standout vineyards.

## RODRIGUE MOLYNEUX WINERY

**Insider Pick:** *Barbera*  
Consulting winemaker Meredith Sarboraria's measured, thoughtful approach and quest for balance results in some of the region's most restrained, elegant wines. "I'm equalizing

the dials rather than turning them up," she says. Her penchant for understated reds and crisp whites is apparent in her judicious use of subtle French and Hungarian oak to round out textbook Livermore fruit, and meticulous blending trials optimize the final expressions. Guests will love the floral-tinged pinot blanc, herbaceous cabernet franc and concentrated yet fresh nebbiolo, but Sarboraria's baby is barbera. "I call it the Red Queen—that acid brightens the cranberry, red rose, pomegranate, red licorice and red cherry until it's electric." 3053 Marina Ave., Livermore, [rmwinery.com](http://rmwinery.com)

## LONGEVITY WINES

**Insider Pick:** *"Pink" Pinot Grigio*  
The origin story of Livermore's

first urban winery goes back two decades when Phil and Debra Long became garage winemakers. Now, guests flock to the boho-chic barn to taste bottles adorned with a heart-shaped logo—Phil's homage to his wife, who died from cancer a few years ago. (You may also recognize the label from its more than 50 network TV appearances.) In 2020, Long was named president of the Association of African American Vintners and remains devoted to lifting Black-owned wine brands while elevating his own. "We try every harvest to improve on the previous one in some shape or form." The Italian Ramato production style marks the brand's signature pinto grigio, with 24 hours of skin contact lending a copper hue and notes of citrus and

pineapple. 2271 South Vasco Road, [longevitywines.com](http://longevitywines.com)

## WOOD FAMILY VINEYARDS

**Insider Pick:** *The Captain BDX Red Blend*

After being forced by the airline to take a leave of absence during her pregnancy, commercial airline pilot Rhonda Wood passed the time by home brewing, then making wine with her husband, Michael. After their hustle took flight, Rhonda clipped her wings to become a full-time winemaker, producing expressions like a chardonnay—with hints of toasted sesame seeds and Asian pear—and an albarino bursting with minerality and apricot. The aptly named Captain is a Bordeaux blend with aromas of cassis and red currants, and grippy tannins. Rhonda

CONTINUED...

...CONTINUED sees similarities between flying and winemaking. “Both require a methodical approach and the same logistics: weather, wind, timing and equipment,” she says. But whether in the air or the vineyard, I’m with nature.” 2407 Research Drive, Livermore, woodfamilyvineyards.com

**FENESTRA WINERY**

**Insider Pick: Infrared**  
One of the OG—and the region’s first boutique wineries—Fenestra was established in 1976 by Lanny and Fran Replogle to reach beyond expected California varieties to explore Iberian ones like albarino and tempranillo. Ongoing research to improve quality and identify top varieties motivates Lanny, a former winemaker. Outdoor picnicking is an excellent introduction to their sauvignon blanc’s purity of fruit, and Infrared is a concentrated Southern Rhône-style GSM with cherry and cedar tones. What’s next? “Coming this fall, Azulene is a new red blend named after the organic compound I’ve researched for my thesis and continued at San Jose State University,” says Lanny. 83 Vallecitos Road, Livermore, fenestrawinery.com



Rhonda Wood and son Harrison at Wood Family Vineyards

**CONCANNON VINEYARD**

**Insider Pick: Heritage Petite Sirah**  
Visitors headed to the winery’s 1883 restored brick building

**WENTE VINEYARDS**

**Insider Pick: Eric’s Unoaked Chardonnay**  
Wente offers several experiences to delve into the heritage of this storied chardonnay producer. Tastings on the patio nestled into the valley’s rolling hills pair with regionally inspired cuisine, and outdoorsy types can embark on a sunset hike and picnic at nearby sister winery Murrieta’s Well. The depth and breadth of Wente’s wine program draw on 25 planted varieties, with classic expressions like Meritage joining unexpected ones like sparkling grenache. This steely, Chablis-like bottling—one of



Concannon created the first American single-varietal offering from petite sirah.

Wente boasts 25 planted varieties, from Meritage to sparkling grenache.



and tasting room can glimpse the gnarly old mother vine—arguably one of the world’s most famous viticultural relics—still producing a wildly concentrated cab. In 1961, Concannon created the first American single-varietal offering from petite sirah, an intense, inky, structured wine with coffee aromas and brambly fruit. Harrison Miller, the brand’s marketing specialist, sees potential for other grapes like cabernet franc in Livermore. “The unique combination of a stunning Mediterranean climate, east-west orientation, coastal fog and marine breezes creates ideal conditions for cultivating a diverse range of fully-ripened, well-balanced fruit,” he says. 4590 Tesla Road, Livermore, concannonvineyard.com ■

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