

**S**eptember is California Wine Month, and while there is a lot to celebrate about all California wines, there is something extra special about the Santa Clara Valley wine region. Here are ten reasons to celebrate the vino made right here in our own fertile valley.

# 10 Reasons to love our wine region

Written By  
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# Wine



## 1. History

The Santa Clara Valley is the oldest winemaking region in California with the first varietals brought here from Italy in 1798, according to Wineries of Santa Clara Valley President Karen Seeker. As new wine regions pop up all over the country in response to increased demands for the sacred fermented juice, Santa Clara is like the wine industry's wise grandmother, confident in her rich history and experience.

## Fresh Ideas 2.

The region may be old, but there is always fresh creativity shaking things up. Whether it's the Stomping Ground, a collective tasting room in a former industrial building behind Target in Gilroy, or Blended, a forward-thinking trio of winemakers sharing a space in the former Thomas Cruz vineyard off New Avenue in Gilroy, the area is constantly exploring new concepts to stay ahead of the times. "If you haven't been out in a while, you might want to do that. We keep getting feedback that our wines keep getting better and better," Seeker said.

## 3. Something for Everyone

There are 27 winery members in the Wineries of Santa Clara Valley directory, from Saratoga to Gilroy, and no two are making the same vino. Because of the various micro-climates in this diverse region, wine drinkers can enjoy anything from a Chardonnay—grown in the cool coastal breeze of the Chittenden Pass on the east side of Gilroy, to the rare dark reds of the dryer climate in western Morgan Hill. Of course, it wouldn't be California without a classic peppery Zinfandel—and here there's plenty.

## Award Winning Wines 4.

According to Gilroy Welcome Center Director Jane Howard, Santa Clara Valley wines took home seventy awards at the 2017 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition—the largest competition of solely American wines in the world. Kirigin Cellars on Watsonville Road and Martin Ranch on Redwood Retreat Road even took home Best of Class awards. But their winnings never get to their heads. "Every year, wineries in our area bring home baskets of gold medals from well respected statewide competitions and high scores from major wine publications, but remain humble, low key and friendly," said Tim Slater, owner of Sarah's Vineyard on Hecker Pass Highway.

## 5. Entertainment Fun

"We may not have big ornate buildings but we have that personal touch. Our wineries are making good wine—but more importantly, they are having fun. And I think that makes us so unique." Summer is alive with activity at the wineries. There's music and dancing, harvest dinners, wine tasting, and fun. They also host weddings and nonprofit fundraisers throughout the year.

## 6. Relaxed Vibe

The Santa Clara Valley Wine region might be the most family friendly out there, which speaks to the area's relaxed vibe. Stop at Cafe 152, Nob Hill, or Lawson's Bakery and grab picnic items, pile in the car and enjoy a casual meal in a natural setting with a bottle of wine, suggested Howard. "This is down-home winemaking—almost every vineyard has a resident dog," she said, laughing. Friendly dogs, bocce ball, cozy nooks, vintage tasting rooms, live music are all found amongst the wineries here.



The new Tankhouse at Fernwood Cellars

## 7. Economic Boost

In 2014, Supervisor Mike Wasserman introduced the Santa Clara Valley Wine Trail, an official country designation of area wineries with road signs for travellers to follow. "We've heard anecdotally from a lot of wineries that they've seen a big jump in foot traffic since the Wine Trail was implemented," said Elizabeth Sanford, a policy analyst from Wasserman's office. From the County's perspective, the wine industry creates a "full package" for tourism, bringing up revenue for area restaurants and shopping. "Anytime we can support local agritourism, that's a good thing," Sanford said.

## 8. Stories Behind the Winemakers

The wines here are as diverse as the people making them. "When you visit our wineries, you're meeting the owner, the winemaker, and you're hearing the stories behind the wine," Seeker said. "We do this because we love it and we want to share it with you. "Some are third-generation winemakers, while others are plumbers and tech executives by day, she said. There's a fascinating story behind how each of them ended up in the wine industry, and they are ready to share it with their customers over a glass of Sangiovese. "Not all of us are making big money from this," Seeker said. "We are here because we love making wine."

## 9. Budget Friendly

The wines may be artisan and made in small batches, but the vast majority are affordable enough to drink every evening. Most bottles are in the \$15-\$50 range, with further discounts for members. And for those needing a beautiful country setting for their next event, the wineries offer many spaces with competitive pricing—especially compared to venues in Silicon Valley, Howard said.

## An Escape 10.

A trip to the wineries in Santa Clara Valley is a tour of the area's most beautiful countryside. While sipping Syrah, the backdrop could be anything from towering redwoods, to the Santa Cruz Mountains, to rolling hills and pastoral farmland. Plan a hike in Mount Madonna County Park or Uvas Canyon and relax the legs at the end of the day at a tasting room or two. The demands at home or work can wait. "We live in a mad paced region, where people are going 24/7. Our tasting rooms are an escape from that," Seeker said.