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Showcase

Cheers California

Wine Month toasts the Golden State's 3,000+ wineries.
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Give opera a chance, you might just enjoy it. Page 18 Journalist recounts the day he talked to Bill Cosby. Page 22 Visit the stunning beaches of San Clemente. Page 26

Drink to the Golden State

By BRITTANY MCSHEA
Valley Press Staff Writer

Things just got a whole lot easier for the Golden State.

Governor Jerry Brown has proclaimed September as California Wine Month and all you have to do to celebrate is swirl, sip, swish and repeat.

This is the tenth consecutive year that California's governor has made the proclamation, inviting locals and tourists alike to indulge in the unique offerings from each of the state's six wine regions here to offer and feel the road. All that's left is to eat, drink and be merry!

FAR NORTH CALIFORNIA

Tucked far away near California's northern border are the wineries of Humboldt and Siskiyou counties. While the area is still growing, Humboldt county now sees some 150 acres of vineyards planted around the region

Regions include:
Siskiyou County
Humboldt County
Trinity County

What locals are drinking:
Grapes grown in Humboldt include Cabernet Franc, White Riesling, Zinfandel and Syrah among others.

NORTH COAST

It's not called Wine Country for nothing. Home to some of the largest wineries in the state, the North Coast is home to more than half of the Golden State's wineries.

Regions include:
Lake Country
Los Carneros
Mendocino County
Napa Valley
Sonoma County

What locals are drinking:
Cabernet Sauvignon reigns supreme in Napa Valley and Chardonnay is the cleanest white counterpart. In Sonoma county, however, the rules are reversed with Chardonnay in front.

How to celebrate:
Sonoma Valley Cittiâ — 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday, Sept. 26-Sunday, Sept. 28. Festival gives guests a behind-the-scenes look at harvest season for wineries. Activities include grape sampling and wine tasting. Cost: $35. Wineries throughout Sonoma county; www.sonomamountainvalley.com/products.

CENTRAL COAST

Spanning some 200 miles, the Central Coast covers San Francisco down to Santa Barbara and everything in between. Such a range of climates ensures grapes are diverse, robust and delicious.

Regions include:
Livermore Valley
Monterey County
Paso Robles
San Benito County
San Francisco Bay
San Luis Obispo County
Santa Barbara County
Santa Clara County
Santa Cruz Mountains

What locals are drinking:
In the San Francisco Bay, Monterey and Santa Barbara counties Chardonnay is the most prominent variety planted. The regions also produces Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir.

How to celebrate:
Gourmet Grazing on the Green — Noon-4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 27. The 11th annual event features food from dozens of local restaurants and wines from neighboring wineries as well as live entertainment. Cost: $55. Ayres Village Park, 100 Ayres Creek Road, Ayres; www.events.acvbg.org

SIERRA FOOTHILLS

Tucked away amid the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, wineries in this region trace their roots back to the days of the California Gold Rush when settlers came to the state seeking their own fortune.

Regions include:
Amador County
Calaveras County
El Dorado County
Nevada County
Placer County

What locals are drinking:
The high altitude of the area gives rise to full red wines made from Zinfandel and Syrah grapes.

How to celebrate:
Amphitheater Concerts featuring Gregg Rolie Band — 8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 27. Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame inductee Gregg Rolie, the original lead singer of Santana, will be performing a special concert under the stars. Cost: $55. Kelley Winery Amphitheater, 11555 Shenandoah Road, Plymouth; www.kelleywinery.com.

INLAND VALLEYS

With its sandy climate and ample sunshine, the land stretching across the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys is some of the most fertile in the entire state. In addition to producing roughly 75 percent of all California wine grapes, the region is also responsible for a quarter of the nation's total agricultural yield.

Regions include:
Lodi and the Delta
Madera County
Sacramento Valley
San Joaquin Valley

What locals are drinking:
French Colombard is the leading variety of grape planted in the San Joaquin Valley, followed by Chardonnay.

How to celebrate:
SIP SAVOR LODI — Friday-Sunday, Sept. 26-27. Three-day festival includes culinary delights from restaurants in Lodi wines, cellar tours of various wineries throughout the area and a Grand Tasting of local food and wine. Time, location and ticket costs vary by event. Lodi Winegrape Commission; www.lodiwine.com.

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CALIFORNIA'S WINEGROWING REGIONS

A taste of desert grapes

By BRITTANY MCSHEA
Valley Press Staff Writer

Where on the planet the finest bottle of wine, one doesn't have to venture all the way out to Napa, Paso Robles or Temecula. With its ample sunshine and cool evenings, the Antelope Valley has become home to a handful of wine community all its own.

Dotting the landscape from Santa Clarita and Rosamond up to Lancaster and Tehachapi, family run wineries offer the relaxation of a weekend getaway without all of the hassle of commuting.

Here are some of your best bets when it comes to quenching your thirst — whether it be for Cabernet, Merlot or Zinfandel — locally:

AGUA DULCE WINERY
10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily
9840 Santa Clarita Highway, Santa Clarita
(661) 268-7402
www.aguadulcewinery.com

What to Sample:
2008 Agua Dulce Winery Cabernet Sauvignon — This wine has been aged in an oak barrel for roughly 18-12 months, leading an unmistakable presence of oak to the otherwise fruity blend.

ANTELOPE VALLEY WINERY
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday
42041 20th St West, Lancaster
(661) 945-1253
www.avwinery.com

What to Sample:
2007 Tempranillo Full-bodied and dry, this red wine has black currant grapes which gives it a smoky, spicy flavor. Antelope Valley Winery's 2007 blend received a Double Gold medal from the American Wine Society in 2011.

DORNER FAMILY VINEYARD
15070 W Rosamond Blvd, Rosamond
(661) 256-3405
www.dornerfamilyvineyard.com

WHAT TO SAMPLE:
While the tasting room and winery at Dorner Family Vineyard is still under construction, wine aficionados may start dreaming about crisp Rieslings and tangy Zinfandels now — the vineyard is currently comprised of 500 of the grapevines.

HIGH DESERT CELLARS/ CHAVEZ VINEYARDS
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday-Sunday
3040 46th St West, Suite A, Rosamond
(661) 256-6200
www.highdesertcellars.com

What to Sample:
2010 Syrah; Gold Medal winner at the 2014 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, wine has a lush flavoring of blackberry, plums and raisins that leaves a smoky finish.

REYES WINERY
11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays
15300 Sierra Highway, Agua Dulce
(661) 268-1966
reyeswinery.com

What to Sample:
2011 Merlot; Medium-bodied wine has molasses, mocha and plum flavors that leave a slight oak taste on the palate.

SOUZA FAMILY VINEYARD
11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday-Sunday
29877 Conway Valley Road, Tehachapi
(661) 822-9232
www.souzafamilyvineyard.com

What to Sample:
"High Mountain Zin" – Proviteo Zinfadel Rich, full-bodied wine has flavors of spice, licorice and fruits. The 2009 vintage was a Double Gold Medal winner at last year's San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition.

TRIASSIC LEGACY WINERY
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday-Sunday
29877 Conway Valley Road, Tehachapi
(661) 822-0344
www.triassiclegacy.com

WHAT TO SAMPLE:
Sparkling Legacy; Sparkling white wine is created when natural carbonation is trapped in the bottle. Triassic Private Cuvee Champagne. Wine's almond flavor is accentuated by hints of pear, green apple and toasted vanilla.

lancasterchamber.com

Wine like a pro

By BRITTANY MCSHEA
Valley Press Staff Writer

If you don't have to have "Sideways" playing on a loop in your head to realize that the world of wine tasting can be a particularly confusing place.

There is always a lot of talk about the different grapes and bodies. You can't possibly read a label without the words "balance," "palate" and "finish" jumping out at you and for some reason, a lot of wines seem to have an oakiness to them.

It should be very overwhelming and it may cause some to throw up their hands and reach for an understanding bottle of Two Buck Chuck on the lower end, per 1000s a little bit of clarification and a few basic definitions, you'll be well on your way to winning over dinner party guests and impressing even your snobbiest friends.

Before we begin, we've probably all seen those wacky contraptions that sit on top of wine glasses and allow you to pour the wine through and into the glass. While at first they seem like just another toy that will soon be collecting dust, they actually serve to mix oxygen into the wine, or aerate it. This is important as it allows the flavors of the wine to be released and, as a result, the overall flavor of the wine is certainly not a good thing as it can make the wine taste flat.

Acidity: You are sipping wine and while its smooth at first, you feel a bite of flavor that makes you pucker. That is what acidity, an important factor when choosing wines to pair with food. Often, the ginger — or more acidic — the wine, the better it pairs with food.

Balance: This is how every component of the wine — the alcohol, the tannins and the combination of acid, alcohol, tannins and the wine's body — one element overpowering the others.

Body: The body of the wine is often determined by the type of grape used, its age and the alcohol content of the drink. Something that is stronger is considered heavy-bodied, while something easier to drink and light is full-bodied.

Finish: Ever take a sip of wine and be treated to the most delightful aftertaste? That is the wine's finish. It describes how long flavors remain after the wine has been swallowed or spit out. Lasting well generally, the longer the taste lingers, the better the wine.

Flavor: One must clarify that if a wine is said to have a "good nose," it is not necessary to taste like an ash tray. Flavors, taste and essence are all words we, mere humans, use to best describe elements of what we are tasting or smelling.

Legs/Tears: Whether it be the fact that we enjoy the winery's tasting room, we have all likely seen a wine drinker swirl their cup before sipping. But why? They are looking for the wine's legs, the residue of wine that drip down the side of the glass after it is swirled. Thicker, fast-moving legs suggest the wine has less alcohol or residual sugar.

Oaky: Wines that are aged in oak barrels will have a hint of vanilla to their flavors. Some wineries forgo buying new barrels for a time so that the flavor tastes and wines are able to develop on their own.

Tannins: Mentioned when discussing wine, tannins are the astringent, bitter and dry flavors of grapes. When a red wine leaves your mouth feeling dry, fuzzy or velvety, the tannins are responsible. Wines high in tannins are often called firm, while wines low in tannins are described as soft.

Naturally, we could go on and on about wine, but in most cases and appellation labels, but your Grandmother might want.

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