



# Bouquets on the Bay

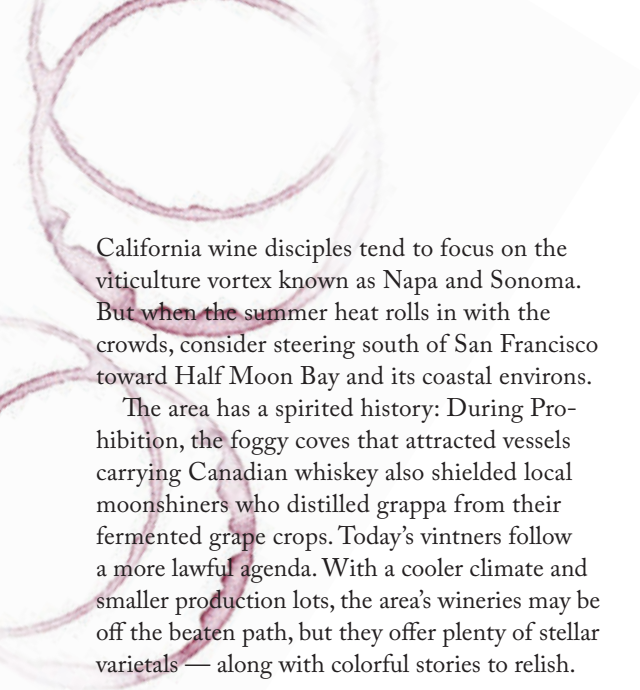
WHERE THE MELLOWER WINE ENTHUSIAST WANDERS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIN KUNKEL    WRITTEN BY CAROLYN JUNG









California wine disciples tend to focus on the viticulture vortex known as Napa and Sonoma. But when the summer heat rolls in with the crowds, consider steering south of San Francisco toward Half Moon Bay and its coastal environs.

The area has a spirited history: During Prohibition, the foggy coves that attracted vessels carrying Canadian whiskey also shielded local moonshiners who distilled grappa from their fermented grape crops. Today's vintners follow a more lawful agenda. With a cooler climate and smaller production lots, the area's wineries may be off the beaten path, but they offer plenty of stellar varietals — along with colorful stories to relish.

### Eccentric Excellence

The first stop is Bonny Doon Vineyard, about 10 miles north of Santa Cruz on Highway 1. Step inside the oceanfront tasting room across from wind-swept dunes and you may worry you've already imbibed too much: You're greeted by a replica of the iconic "American Gothic" couple — disguised as aliens. (They're soon to be joined by an art piece by metal sculptor Michael Leeds: a spaceship that will be installed to look as though it crashed into the building.)

This tasting room, dubbed "The Temple of Doon," is the vision of the eccentric and trailblazing winemaker Randall Grahm. A Vintners Hall of Fame inductee, Grahm takes winemaking seriously. But everything else? Not so much.

Who else would name his flagship wine Le Cigare Volant (The Flying Cigar) — an homage to the celebrated Rhône village of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, which passed a law forbidding flying saucers from landing in its vineyards? (Look closely at the label on Grahm's red varietal blend to spot an unidentified flying cigar hovering above a chateau.) While the rest of California lived and died by chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon, Grahm championed esoteric Rhône varietals such as syrah and grenache, becoming one of the original and most influential "Rhône Rangers" in the United States.

Grahm is always tinkering. Among his newest creations are hard ciders — made in the European style — that are crisp, dry and bottle fermented. Querry is an elegant blend of apple, pear and quince, while the Winter Nelis Sparkling Perry is redolent of its namesake spicy heirloom pear. Don't miss the silky-bodied Le Cigare Volant Reserve vintages, either, each of which uniquely finishes aging in glass.

"I want the tasting experience to be fun," Grahm says. "But at the same time, I want to







Clockwise from far left: Harvest time at Bonny Doon Vineyard in Davenport. Randall Graham, Bonny Doon's trailblazing winemaker, holds court in the tasting room. Look carefully to find a flying cigar on bottles of Bonny Doon's Le Cigare Volant. A cluster of the winery's massive storage barrels.



convey that we're making wines of some distinction and real personality."

### Into the Hills

Now that you've embraced the local spirit of irreverent excellence, drive into the mountains toward Thomas Fogarty Winery & Vineyards, possibly the only winery in the world displaying a photo of an embolectomy catheter. It's an homage to founder Dr. Thomas Fogarty, inventor of the balloon catheter. Now 80 years old, Fogarty no longer performs cardiovascular surgeries at Stanford University Medical Center, but he can be found visiting his eponymous winery, which is managed by his son Tommy.

The elder Fogarty began making his own wine on a lark in the 1970s, after helping a Stanford colleague. The experience spurred him to buy acreage in the Santa Cruz Mountains, where winemaker Michael Martella, who has been with the winery since its founding, coaxes pinot noir and chardonnay vines from rocky, 2,000-foot-high terrain and turns the yield into extraordinary Old World-style wines of complex elegance.

"The joke in Napa is that you hire a winemaker there to make a cab not taste like a cab," says Pristine Echevarria, corporate sommelier for the winery. "Here, we do the opposite."

The tasting room sits above the production area, so time your visit right at harvest and you can breathe in that unmistakable sweet fragrance of just-pressed grapes.

The winery's panoramic view of the Bay Area is one of the drawing cards for foreign travelers. Used to the ultrajammy wines produced in the Napa Valley, Europeans, especially, are pleasantly surprised by Fogarty's Burgundian-style pinot noirs. They're even more astonished by the chardonnays, far removed from Napa's once-notorious butter bombs, with plenty of minerality and a welcome austerity.

### Superstar Territory

Twenty minutes along winding mountain roads brings you to one of the most celebrated vineyards in the state — even the world. Ridge Vineyards rose to fame in 1976 at the Judgment of Paris wine competition. In a blind tasting, French judges stunned even themselves when they chose two unheralded California wines over France's greatest reds and whites. Ridge Vineyards' Monte Bello placed fifth in that event. Thirty years later, with the same red vintages again tasted blind, the 1971 Ridge Monte Bello took first place, trouncing the competition.



*Coaxed from rocky terrain, Thomas Fogarty pinot noirs taste Burgundian and chardonnays have a welcome austerity.*