

THE TASTING PANEL

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SAN FRAN INSIDER

“Great things are done when men and mountains meet; this is not done by jostling in the street.”
—William Blake



Winemaker Laura Barrett has been dialing in the wine styles from the ten-year old vineyards at Casey Flat Ranch. Her sold out 2012 Sauvignon Blanc won rave reviews.



Mountain AVA pioneer Barry Hoffner is an advocate for the close-knit community of winegrowers in the Pine Mountain–Cloverdale AVA.



Casey Flat Ranch vintner Alison Morey Garrett with Thea Dwell, who blogs at Luscious Lushes.

Mountain AVA Pioneers

INSIDER TRAVELS NORTH TO VISIT TWO HIGH-ELEVATION APPELLATIONS

story and photos by Deborah Parker Wong

As a deluge of new AVAs in Paso Robles, 11 to be exact, make their debut this month (see page 87 –Ed.), we’re catching up with research that took place earlier this year in two mountain AVAs: Pine Mountain–Cloverdale Peak and Capay Valley. Day trips to each provided a firsthand look at the vineyards and chance to taste with the growers and winemakers who are putting their hearts and a lot of sole (as in shoe leather) in to the wines they’re producing.

After a morning ATV ramble over Silverwood Ranch with grower Barry Hoffner and fellow advocate John Compisi to view Sonoma’s Pine Mountain–Cloverdale Peak AVA, it’s apparent why producers like Kendall-Jackson are establishing a footprint here. Overlooking Alexander Valley from 3,000 feet, the AVA which was approved in 2011 straddles Sonoma and Mendocino counties for wine grapes since the 1850s. Alluvial fans and shallow volcanic soils are ideal for Cabernet Sauvignon; Hoffner planted to 80 percent of the variety. Merlot site over to Malbec with some Syrah.

Benziger, Francis Ford Coppola, and others have been sourcing fruit from here for their luxury labels, including Imagery and consulting winemakers like Capture. According to Hoffner, the 2012–2013 vintage will carry the Pine Mountain–Cloverdale Peak designation which will bring the total number of AVAs in the region to seven. Coppola’s consumer awareness of the AVA’s quality is a key factor.

In addition to the round tannins and expressive black fruit that are typical flavor markers for the mountain’s Bordeaux

varieties, we also found plenty of patchouli spice in the Pine Mountain Vineyard. Hoffner says he’s never tasted that day.

Approved in 2011, the AVA, located in the Sacramento, is the only high-elevation AVA in the valley floor. Casey Flat Ranch, a 110,000-acre family farm spanning 110,000 acres of the valley floor, is the only high-elevation producer, demonstrating that the untapped region has merit. “The Ranch was originally a cattle ranch, and the vineyard sites at Casey Flat Ranch

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CASEY FLAT RANCH

- DISTINCTIVELY AUTHENTIC -

The low-vigor, hillside vineyard sites at **Casey Flat Ranch** winery, the AVA's only high-elevation producer, demonstrate that the untapped region has merit.

half of one percent of the family ranch that’s under vine, “It’s where Bordeaux meets Rhône and the cattle still roam.” ■■