

# NATURAL CHEESE FROM AMERICA



According to legend, cheese was "discovered" 4,000 years ago when an Arabian merchant journeyed across the desert, carrying a supply of milk in a pouch. The lining of the pouch, made of calf's stomach combined with the heat of the sun, caused the milk to separate into curd and whey. That night he drank the whey and ate the cheese, and thus, so the story goes, our beloved cheese was born.

You don't have to become a "cheese snob" to enjoy some of the finest cheese in the world, because they're made in the United States, and available at your local supermarket in Singapore. From Cheddar to Brie to Havarti, nearly every variety of cheese imaginable is now produced in the United States.



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# SIDEWAYS

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF  
ELECTION AND ABOUT SCHMIDT



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# THE FUSS OVER PINOT NOIR

LIM HWEE PENG shares the peculiarity of a unique red wine that fascinates fans of SIDEWAYS.

It is believed that a winemaker who can produce a great Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon is only a good winemaker; a great winemaker is one who can craft a Pinot Noir that will wow the *vinophiles*.



The origin of Pinot Noir, a fussy and unpredictable grape, is in Burgundy, France. It is the quintessential red grape that was used to make some of the greatest Burgundy rouge, such as Domaine Romanee Conti, a rare wine treasured by many wine lovers and collectors.

The 'suffering' that many winemakers identified with Pinot Noir is due to the make-up of the grape. It has a thin-skin, thus making it much easy to rot if not well attended. It also requires a cool climate to retain the all important freshness, and at the same time receive sufficient warmth for ripening; hence, in an extreme or unpredictable climate, Pinot Noir grape produces an acidic wine that will brace one's palate with only citrus acidity and no pleasure.

However, if the grapes were picked too late during harvest, the wine will lack structure and taste saggy on the palate. Therefore, winemakers would need to pay loads of attention, as well as provide tender loving care to the growing and harvesting of Pinot Noir.

With all this extra attention and care, it is no surprise then, that most of the renowned Pinot Noir cost an arm and a leg to enjoy.

Aside from the great Burgundy rouge that are being priced dearly, some of the existing wine regions are also known to produce such gems, but at a reasonable cost, such as Central Otago (New Zealand), Russian River, Santa Ynez, Santa Barbara, Napa Valley (California), Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula, Adelaide (South Australia), and Pemberton (Western Australia).

There are also some wild cards that could spring surprises as far as my experience with Pinot Noir is concern; one memorable wine that remained etched in my memory was a powerful and intense Argentina Pinot Noir from Rio Negro, a region that is located southern-most of Argentina; an area that is not known for crafting such lovely wine.

So if one's budget is limited but would still love to sample this fastidious wine, choose from the many alternatives that were mentioned.

Pinot Noir, if well made, is cheerful, floral and easy on the palate, and many love to share this wine on an important date, little wonder it is also known as a romantic wine. Then there are also wine lovers who have unfortunate encounter in the companion of Pinot Noir, and the wine is also interestingly perceived as a 'heartbreaker' wine.

Whether Pinot Noir will aid one in his passion pursuit or otherwise, it remains one of the contentious grape and wine that many will fuss about.



# THE CALIFORNIA HERITAGE

“To take wine into our mouth is to savor a droplet of the river of human history”. LIM HWEE PENG shares the same sentiment and sheds light on the past and present of California wines.



I was once told that to fully appreciate a glass of wine, one must find the opportunity to immerse in a vine growing environment; smell the soil and air, fondle the tiny grapes, and admire the vast beauty of the vineyard and winery.

Despite years of visiting wineries in various continents, from a personal and professional capacity, my honest conclusion to that statement is that it forms only part of a total picture. Climate, soil, wonderful vineyards, superb grapes and impressive state-of-the-art winemaking equipment are all vital. The people element is also an equally key contributing factor; add in the critical prologue in the birth of a wine appellation, only then can any serious wine lover genuinely value that bottle of fine wine.

One such wine-growing region that I have paid regular pilgrimage to is the sunny state of California, home to one of the world's renowned wine producing areas, Napa Valley, where, understandably, California wines' legacy was established. A notable trait in the early years of California wine growth was the diverse personalities that have created significant impact in the wine scene, which subsequently catapulted California wine to a higher standing in the wine world.

## THE PIONEERING OF CALIFORNIA WINE INDUSTRY

Even though early European migrants were credited for devoting their resources and effort in cultivating vines and developing the west coast wine industry, the significant foundation of California wine was, in fact, of a sacred origin. *The Franciscan missionaries* were the first to plant vines in California for sacramental purposes; and as those catholic devotees gradually established other missionaries, vineyards were also being created in tandem with their holy work. Until the turn of the 20th century, the evolution of the wine industry took on a much quicker pace with contributions from several individual and establishments.

The formation of a research centre, later known as *UC Davis*, is solely responsible for researching and initiating new viticulture and vinification methodology in California, and was a critical element in the quantum leap of California wine quality.

Among the many migrants that have contributed to the wine community, one aspiring young Italian created a legacy. *Robert Mondavi's* destiny was one that liberated and lifted California wines to an unprecedented level. With his passion for excellence in almost everything he does, 'Bob' Mondavi was the one who paved the way for California vintners to produce world class fine wines. Mondavi not only led in the revolution of California winemaking, he has also unwittingly nurtured many top winemakers of the early years, and those 'disciples' went on to make their own wine and were duly recognized in the subsequent landmark '76 Paris tasting.

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Another pioneer that has left an immeasurable impact on the California wine industry was Russian winemaker *André Tchelistcheff*, a chief winemaker at Beaulieu Vineyard. Tchelistcheff, together with *Louis Martini Sr*, was then considered the two brightest winemakers in California; even the driven Mondavi saw the brilliance in Tchelistcheff and from time to time tapped the Russian's expertise to improve his wines!



**CHALLENGES AND MILESTONE** Naturally, the development of the wine trade in California was met with daunting challenges. The seemingly insurmountable ordeals that the pioneers have overcome are lessons that will always be remembered by the latter day's vintners. Opportunities explored during those trying time were equally cherished by many today, and in many ways influenced the direction and approach of California wine industry.

**THE PROHIBITION ERA** was a period that populated many Al Capone movies with underground bars serving alcoholic drinks. In 1919, regulation was imposed to ban production and sales of alcoholic beverages in the entire nation. The introduction of this regulation almost choked the budding wine industry. However, some creative wineries managed to wriggle out of the predicament by crafting wines for sacramental purposes. The ban was subsequently lifted in 1933, when the entire America wine trade was faced with the ardent task of rebuilding the entire industry. While those wineries that resourcefully escaped the blemish of the regulation stood to gain from the fruits of those well tendered old vines.



**THE 1970'S** saw the renaissance of California wines in a major way, owed to the kind act of a British bloke, who provided a vital platform for the world to sit up and take note of California wines. It was May 24th 1976, at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris, where Mr Steven Spurrier, then a British wine critic and a wine trade professional, personally gathered some of the finest California wines to challenge the finest wine producers from Bordeaux and Burgundy. California wines consequently won first place in both the red and white wine categories (Stags Leap Cabernet Sauvignon and Chateau Montelena Chardonnay respectively). The astounding victory in that comparative tasting was immense in scale for the California wine industry. Overnight, many vintners, wine critics, and wine lovers have to realign their benchmark for quality fine wines.

**CURRENT RAGE** Even though California has established itself as a world-class wine producing region, it is also being viewed as one of the top research centres in the winemaking world. Various notable developments currently in California will certainly have an impact on the future growth of California wines.

**CULT WINES**, a celebrated term that refers to wines of intense fruit concentration, massive in structure, using mainly Cabernet Sauvignon grape and available only in minute quantity; another general characteristic of such wines is their princely pricing as the market demand regularly outstrip supply. The more renowned examples of California cult wines include Screaming Eagle and Harlan Estate. With many other winemakers showing similar ambition, California looks set to increasingly fabricate new non-mainstream wines, and giving the phrase "small is beautiful" a whole different connotation.

**JOINT VENTURE WINES**, a new catch-phrase among many California wineries, has resulted in the production of more quality wines beyond the sunshine state. Vintners look beyond the state to create their dream wines, resulting in the birth of joint venture winery. One such project is Opus One, probably the originator of such undertaking in California wine industry. Opus One is a joint effort between Robert Mondavi and Baron Philippe Rothschild of the Chateau Mouton fame in Bordeaux, France. The synergies between those two passionate vintners created an unprecedented wine that maximizes the existing resources and leverages on the strength of both wineries. The final product is a new world wine with old world nuances that is marketed with passion.



**ZAP** is an acronym for a non-profit organization that thrives on the love of Zinfandel among both the wine industry and consumers. Zin is a versatile red grape that is synonymous with California wines, and has been garnering deserved limelight since the 90s. It's a grape varietal that can be made into various wine styles ranging from rose or blush wine; light to heavy-bodied red wine as well as fortified wines, pleasing connoisseurs with various preferences. The rise and fall of Zinfandel has made this grape so endearing to the Americans, and captivated its fans with its full fruit flavour and heady impression. Zinfandel Advocates and Producers (ZAP) was founded in 1991 by wine lovers and winemakers that were enthralled by its

nuances. It has now grown to become a non-profit educational organization dedicated to advancing the public's knowledge and appreciation for Zinfandel.

However, Zinfandel is not the only celebrated grapes in California. In recent years, there was another movement that aims to popularize Rhone style wines. It is a group of wine lovers and winemakers that were obviously big Rhone wine fan, who were determined to see the popularity of wines fashioned from Rhone varietals.

**THE RHONE RANGERS**, whom they are affectionately called, gather annually to celebrate the birth and promote the goodness of Rhone style wines. In California, however, wineries craft wines from Rhone varietals such as Syrah and Viognier, similar to Northern Rhone blend, but a slight deviation from the famous Chateauneuf-du-pape wine, which has a blend of 13 red and white Rhone grape varietals.

Where California was once a mediocre wine production region, it has now evolved to be an acclaimed wine appellation and continues to fascinate wine lovers all over the world with their magical wines.



The success of *SIDEWAYS* and celebration of wine culture in the movie is certainly a sign of the coming of age for California wines and its industry.

