



capstone  
CALIFORNIA

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# An Exploration of California Chardonnay

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PRESENTING TO:

January 21, 2025

CONTACT:

Peter Granoff MS

# SOME QUICK THANK YOU'S

Evan Goldstein

The Wine Institute & Capstone California

Schug Winery for hosting

Jancisrobinson.com, Elaine Chukan Brown ++

# ROAD MAP FOR THIS AM

2 hours total

90 min - History of Chardonnay in CA from several perspectives, and -

Tasting 10 selections from around the state

Then 30 min for discussion & questions



Map of California

# 154 AVA's in CA



# Total Chardonnay exposure this week - 1

## ALREADY TASTED:

2002 Hanzell, Sonoma Valley

2013 Bacigalupi RRV

2005 Wente Nth Degree, Livermore Valley

2023 Wente Morning Fog, Central Coast

2019 Stony Hill, Napa Valley

2021 Frog's Leap Shale & Stone, Napa Valley

# Total Chardonnay exposure this week - 2

2022 Peay Maritima, Sonoma Coast

2022 Ernest Joyce Sonoma Coast

2021 Sense Thieriot, Sonoma Coast

2021 Red Car Fort Ross-Seaview

2022 Littorai Mays Canyon, Sonoma Coast

2023 Hirsch ,West Sonoma Coast

2021 Chanin Bien Nacido, Santa Maria Valley

2021 La Crema Sarelee's RRV

2021 Maggy Hawk Skycrest, Anderson Valley

2021 Argot Le Rayon Vert, Sonoma Mountain

2018 Stonestreet Upper Barn, Alexander Valley

# HISTORY OF CHARDONNAY IN CA

Acreage then and acreage now

When, where, how did plantings occur?

Evolution of clones

Emergence of Chardonnay as a varietal wine

Changes in winemaking, winegrowing



# Acreeage Then & Now

1960, barely 300 acres of Chardonnay in CA

Today, over 100,000, best selling wine in the US, most widely planted wine grape in CA

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN??

# When, Where & How?

Earliest arrivals difficult to pin down – naming issues, mis-identification

1882 - Charles Wetmore plants Chardonnay imported from Meursault at La Cresta Vineyard in Livermore, provides cuttings for propagation

1896 – Paul Masson brings Pinot Noir, Chardonnay cuttings from Burgundy, plants in Livermore, Santa Cruz Mountains

1908 - Wente family plants cuttings from Wetmore selection, adds imported vines from Univ Montpellier in 1912 – ORIGINS OF WENTE CLONES

## When, Where & How? (2)

Prohibition – survival tactics – most white varieties nearly disappear

1930 – grape harvest report 600,000 acres, only 7,000 white. Chardonnay not even mentioned

1936 – Martin Ray buys Paul Masson – starts varietal labeling the wines

1939 – Frank Schoonmaker offers varietal Chardonnay from California

WW2 constricted access in US to imported wines – boost to CA

1943 – Martin Ray takes cuttings from Paul Masson to plant on Mt Eden at 2000 ft – ORIGIN OF MT EDEN CLONE

## When, Where & How? (3)

Late 1940's into 1950's – both Wente family & UC Davis work to refine Chardonnay selections

1946 – Fred & Eleanor McCrea plant cuttings from Wente on Spring Mountain – 1<sup>st</sup> new Napa Winery post-Prohibition, all white varieties

1953 – Hanzell plants Stony Hill cuttings above Sonoma, 650-900 ft.

Early 1960's – UC Davis and FPS efforts to deal with widespread virus issues with "thermotherapy"

1967 – Dry table wine sales surpass dessert wine styles in US

1970's and beyond - Explosive growth follows as quality and yields improve

# When, Where & How? (4)

The seminal pivot?

1976 Paris Tasting

# Evolution of Clones & Myriad Challenges

Just since the 1950's

Combination of oral, written & sometimes conflicting histories

Numerous changes in numbering and naming sequences over time

Numerous trials to separate genuine variations from virus-driven

Early lack of scientific consensus on "thermotherapy"

Casual usage - Old Wente versus Wente, imprecise records, multiple paths

# Emergence of Chardonnay as Varietal Wine

California's contribution?

Varietal labeling started in the US in the late 1930's, by late '70's was dominant

Spread from CA to rest of US, Australia, South Africa, and other New World regions

Now so widely used that even the French (purists shudder) have partially embraced it

# Changes in Winemaking, Winegrowing

Popularity of Chardonnay can't be separated -

Stony Hill approach blocked ML, no new oak, SO<sub>2</sub> to block oxidation, fermentation in old wood, no battonage, sterile filtration. Understated when young – basic white wine approach (not a critique)

1950's Hanzell winemaker Brad Webb 1<sup>st</sup> in US to complete a controlled ML conversion, initially with Pinot, eventually Chardonnay

Hanzell introduces temp-controlled SS fermentation tanks, employs barrique aging



# Changes in Winemaking, Winegrowing (2)

1966 – Mondavi launched, embraces Hanzell's innovations on a larger commercial scale – proliferation of techniques throughout CA

1976 – total acreage still only 11,500

Paris tasting triggers 1980's influx of money, interest in education, serious research – winemakers like Dave Ramey, the Focus on Chardonnay group with technical tastings and collaborative studies on global scale

Industry experimentation increases – whole cluster pressing, elimination of skin contact, deliberate oxidation, barrel fermentation, ambient yeast fermentation, spontaneous ML -

1990's and early 2000's – bigger is better (??)

# Changes in Winemaking, Winegrowing (3)

2000's - The pendulum swings –

Bigger is better yields “ABC”, but the backlash did not differentiate

2011 – Pursuit of Balance launched – both criticized and lauded

International collaborations deepen focus on European finesse coupled with the inherent richness of CA fruit – Hyde / de Villaine for example

Increasing move to cooler growing areas, closer vine spacing, fresher, less heavily oaked white wines in general, picking earlier, some moderation of alcohol levels . . .

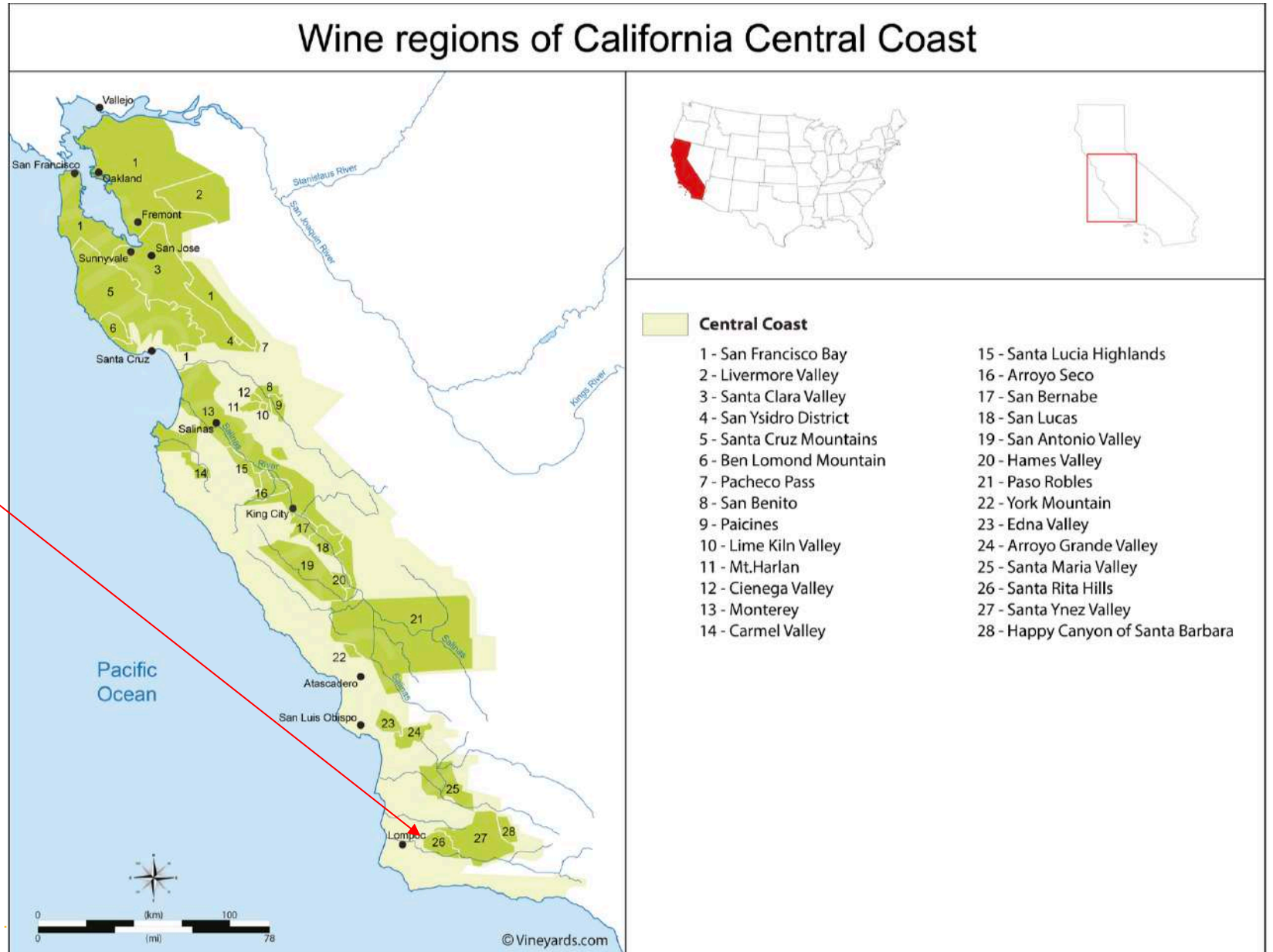
Today the stylistic spectrum is broad, and that is (mostly) worth celebrating

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Wine 1 – Alma Rosa  
“Inoks”

Sta. (Santa) Rita Hills  
AVA runs West  
From Buellton to Lompoc

Sub AVA of Santa Ynez  
Valley AVA



# Wine 1: Alma Rosa "INOKS" Chardonnay 2022

Sta Rita Hills AVA, Santa Barbara County

Winery & El Jabali (wild boar) Estate vineyard founded by Richard Sanford

55% Wente, 45% Clone 548 – a trademarked French clone approved by FPS

"Inoks" – trademark issues with "INOX" – all Stainless Steel

\$38 s/r Winemaker - Samra Morris, native of Bosnia



## View N across Sta Rita Hills AVA

Vines planted between 200 and 1700 feet

Santa Rosa Hills to the S side of AVA, Purisima Hills to the N

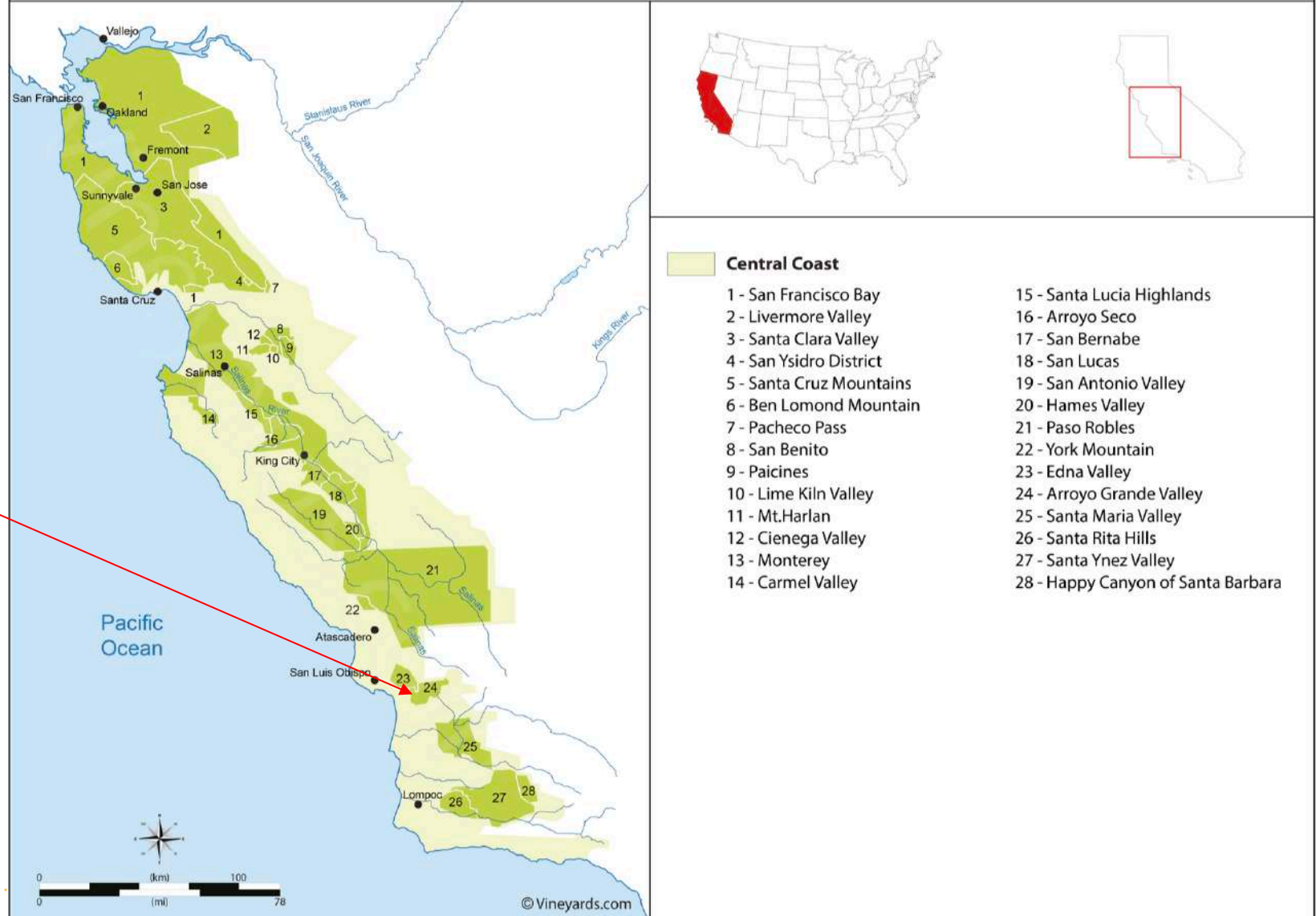


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Wine 2 – Talley  
Rosemary's Vineyard

Arroyo Grande Valley  
AVA is just SE of Edna  
Valley in San Luis  
Obispo County

## Wine regions of California Central Coast



# Wine 2: Talley Rosemary's Vineyard Chardonnay 2014

Arroyo Grande Valley AVA, San Luis Obispo County

Elizabeth the 4<sup>th</sup> generation to farm Arroyo Grande Valley –  
vegetables on valley floor, vineyards on hillsides

Barrel-ferment, ambient yeast, 15 months sur lie in French oak,  
16% new, bottled unfiltered. Rosemary's is coldest vineyard at  
Talley, chalky, shale soils

876 six-packs produced. \$75 s/r Alcohol: %

Winemaker – Eric Johnson



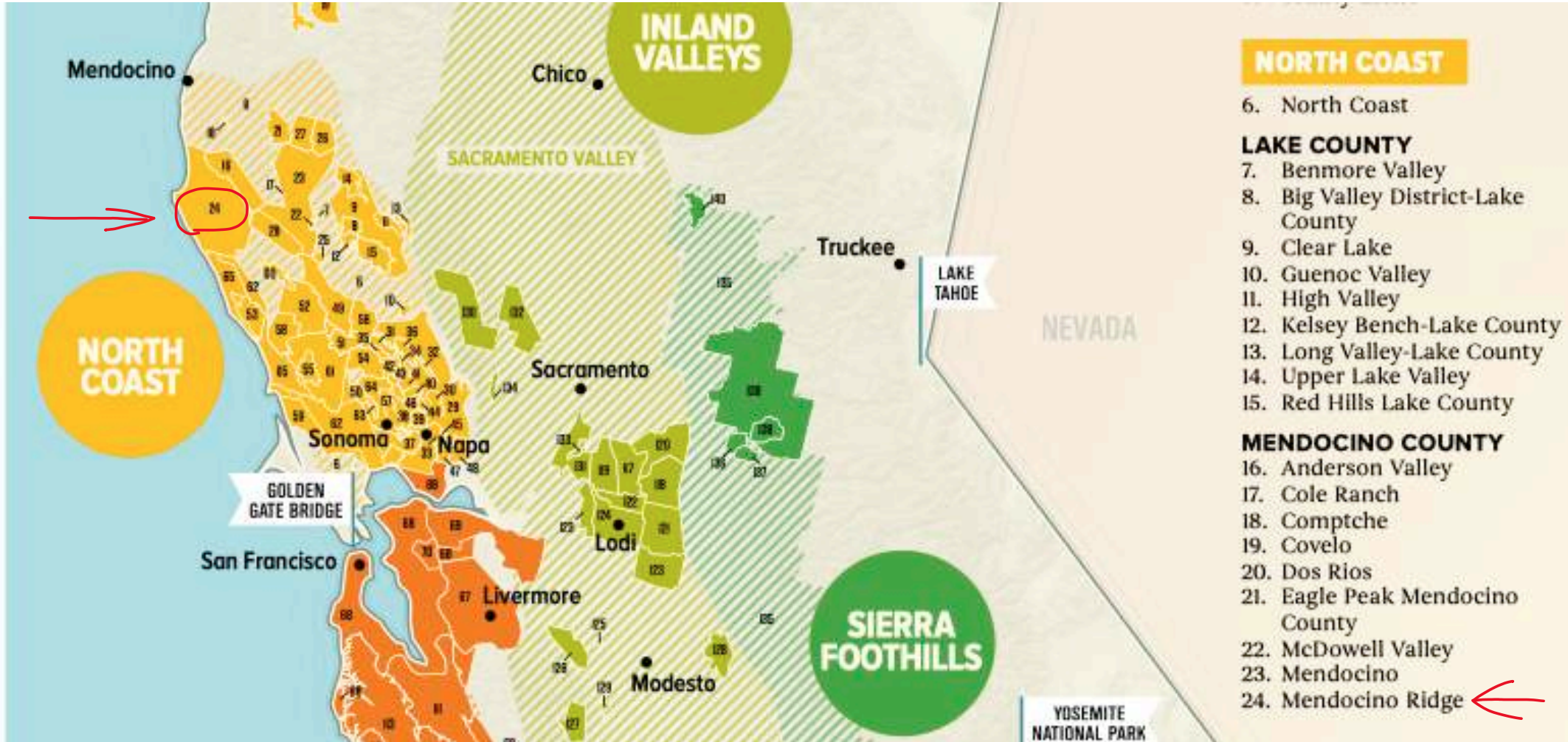






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# Wine 3 - Brick & Mortar Chardonnay



# Wine 3: Brick & Mortar Manchester Ridge Vineyard Chardonnay 2021

Mendocino Ridge AVA, Mendocino

Whole cluster pressed, native yeast, transferred to French oak puncheons, 60% new. No ML or battonage.

12 months in puncheon, light fining & filtration at bottling. 12-18 months in bottle before release.

2,000 ft elevation, 4 miles from Pacific, above fog line all year

70 cases produced

\$85 s/r Alcohol: 12.5%

Matt & Alexis Iaconis

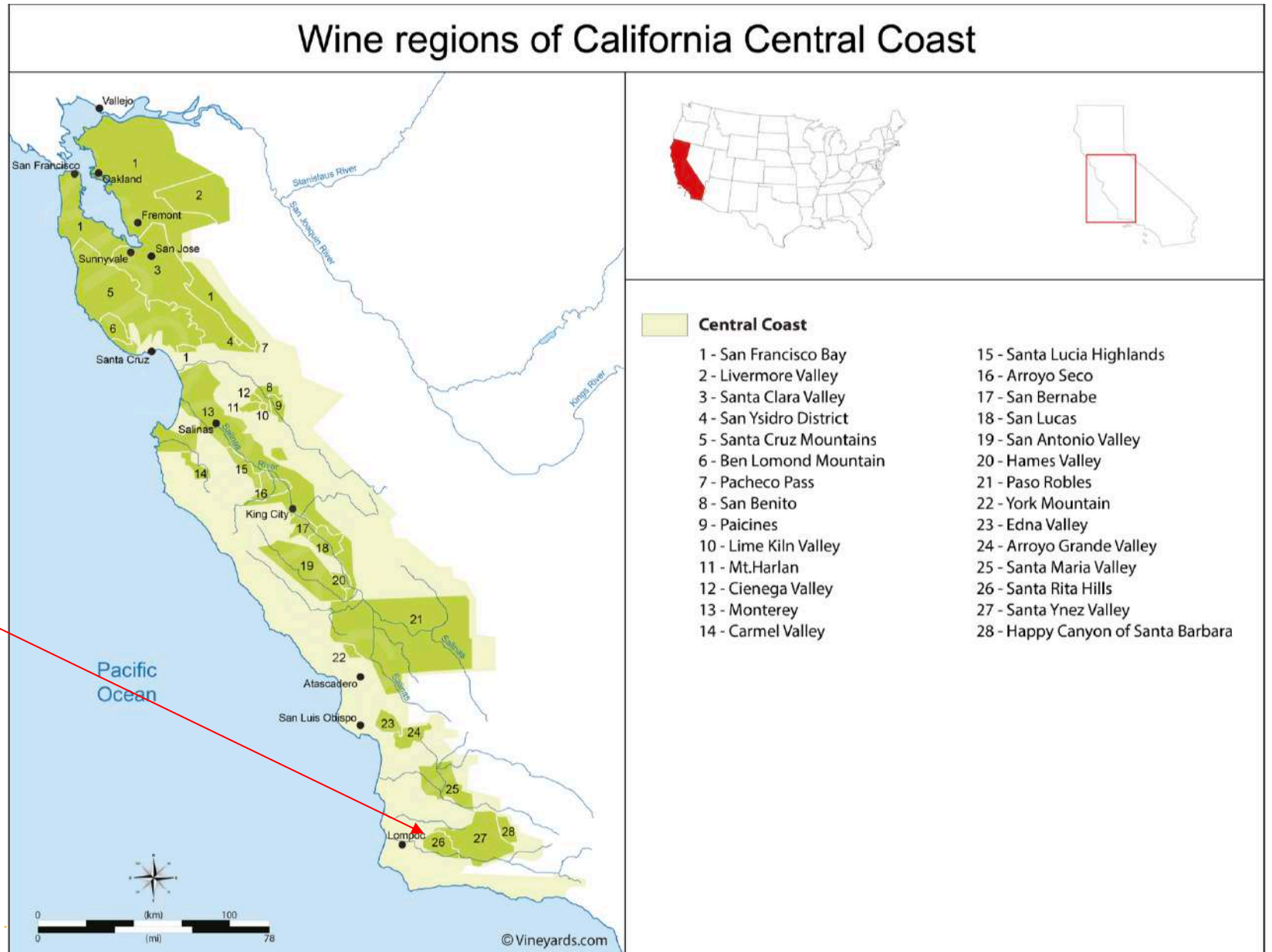


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Wine 4 – Sanford’s  
Sanford & Benedict  
Vineyard

Sta. (Santa) Rita Hills  
AVA runs West  
From Buellton to  
Lompoc



# Wine 4: Sanford Wine Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Chardonnay 2021

Sta Rita Hills AVA, Santa Barbara County

1971 - planted by Richard Sanford & botanist Michael Benedict.  
1st in what would become AVA, 1<sup>st</sup> Pinot in Santa Barbara County

100% ML, 18 months French barrique, 20% new

\$60 s/r, approximately 360 cases produced

Alcohol: 12.5%

Winemaker – Trey Fletcher (since 2019)



## Winter Light

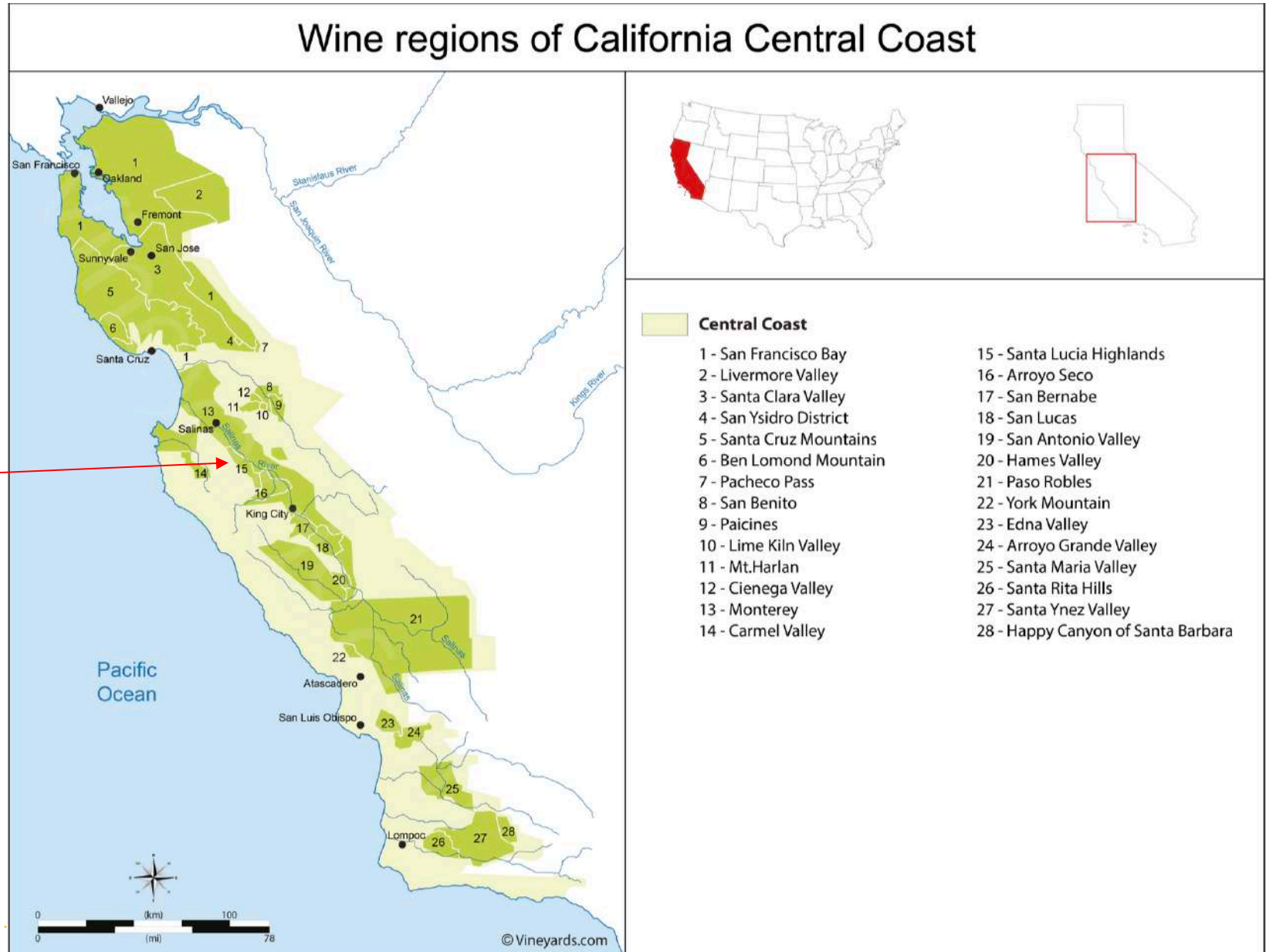
Sanford & Benedict  
Vineyard in the  
Sta. Rita Hills AVA



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# Wine 5 – Wrath Fermata

Santa Lucia Highlands AVA is between the Salinas Valley floor and the Santa Lucia Range to the west





# Wine 5: Wrath "Fermata" Chardonnay 2022

Monterey County, just outside of SLH boundary

Fermata – Italian for "halted" because ML is blocked beyond 50%

Estate San Saba Vineyard, 63% Wente clone, 37% Mt Eden

10 months in French barrriques, 10% new

186 cases made, \$35 s/r

Alcohol: 14.2%



# Late winter in the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA



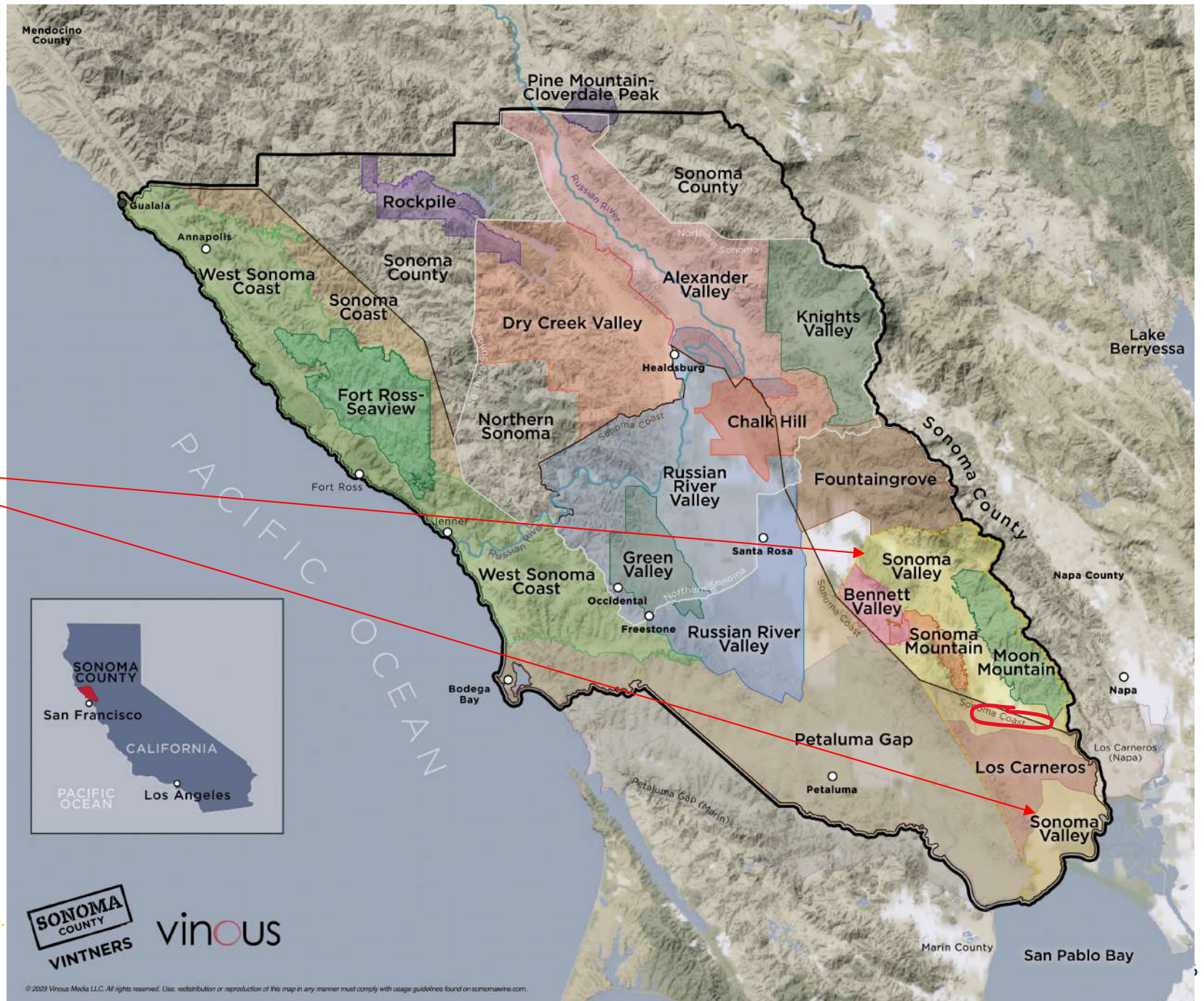
Spring view of SLH  
Note alluvial fans,  
fog bank



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Wine 6 – Gary Farrell  
Durrell Vineyard

Sonoma Valley is in  
the SE corner of  
Sonoma County



# Wine 6: Gary Farrell Chardonnay, Durell Vineyard 2019

Sonoma Valley

Planted in 1979, Old Wente clone, SW foothills of AVA north of San Pablo Bay, east of Petaluma Gap, ideal for cool-climate Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Rocky, volcanic soils. Ample rains winter & spring required crop thinning. Whole cluster pressed, chilled & settled, Montrachet yeast. Transferred to 35% new French barrique & puncheon (FF & Damy). 8 months aging, barrel selection for final blend. 346 cases.

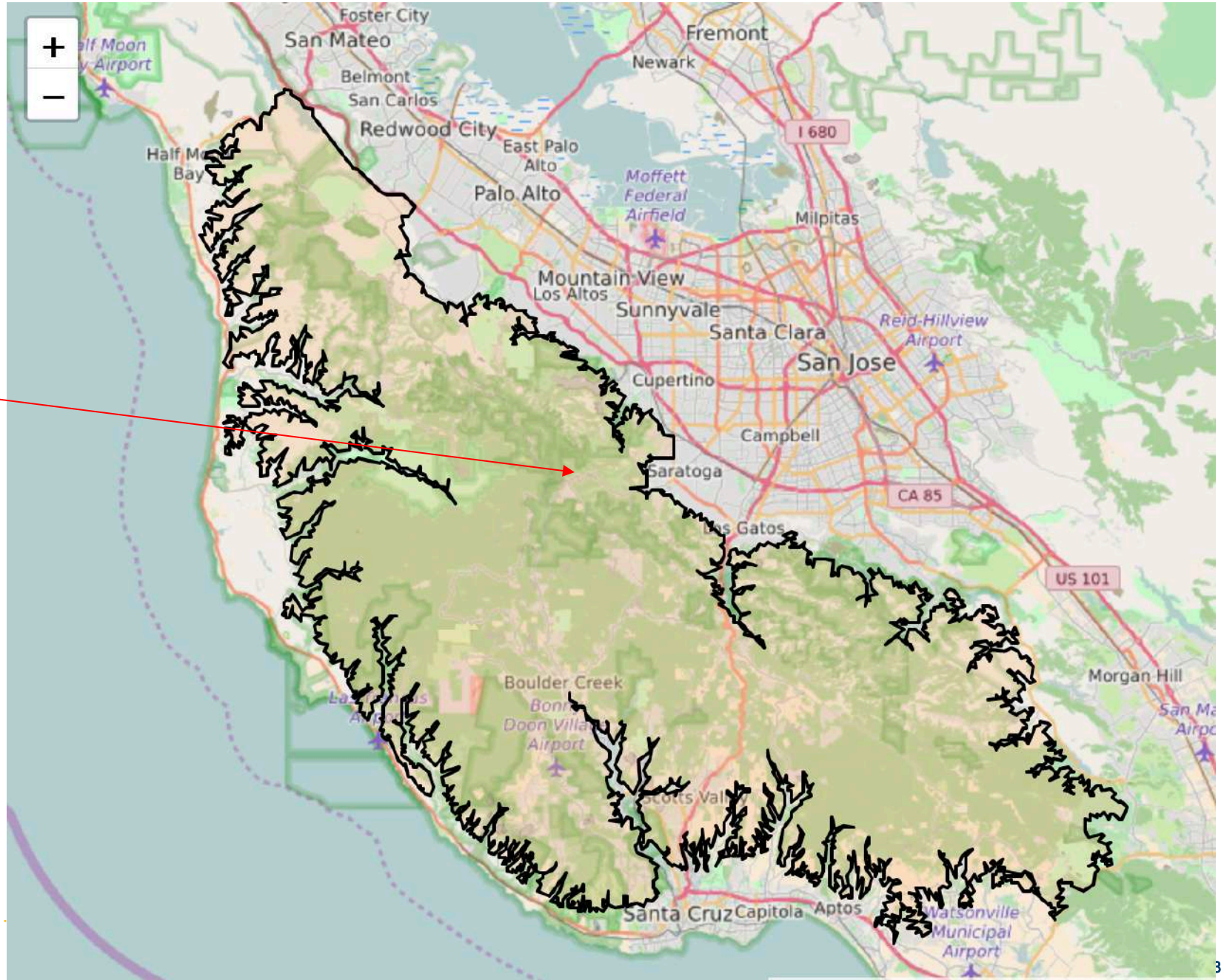
\$65 s/r Alcohol: 13.5%



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Wine 7 - Mount Eden Vineyards is in the hills west of Saratoga

Santa Cruz Mountains AVA



# Wine 7: Mount Eden Estate Chardonnay 2021

Santa Cruz Mountains AVA

Martin Ray planted original blocks in late 1940's. One of oldest Chardonnay vineyards in CA, 1,200-2,000 cases annually

Barrel fermented in new & 1 year French oak, full ML in barrel, 10 months on lees, lightly filtered before bottling.

2 years in cellar before release. Stellar track record for aging.

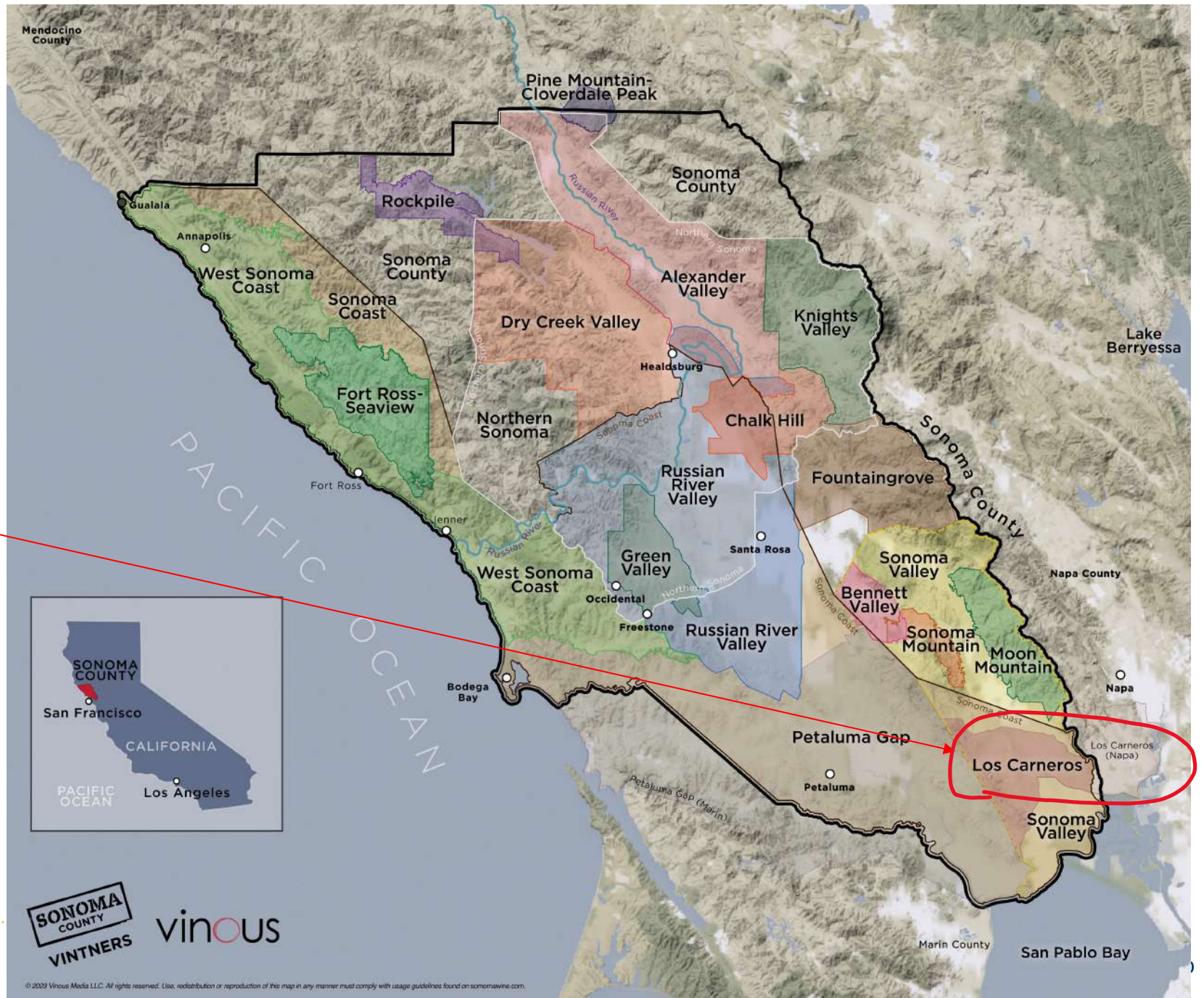
Alcohol: 14.0%



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Wine 8 – Schug Estate

Los Carneros AVA is partly in Sonoma County and partly in Napa County





# Wine 8: Schug Estate Chardonnay 2021

Carneros AVA, Sonoma County

Ridge at western edge of AVA. Rocky soils and gusty afternoon winds off San Pablo Bay

94% Wente clone (1990), 6% "Musqué" clone 17 (2013), vinified and aged separately

100% barrel-ferment, 8 months on the lees in 30% new French oak, 70% 1-3 years old, 25% ML

\$54 s/r, 210 cases, Alcohol: 14.0%. Winemaker - Johannes Scheid



Carneros Vineyard in  
February . . .

Sure, it is always warm  
and sunny in California

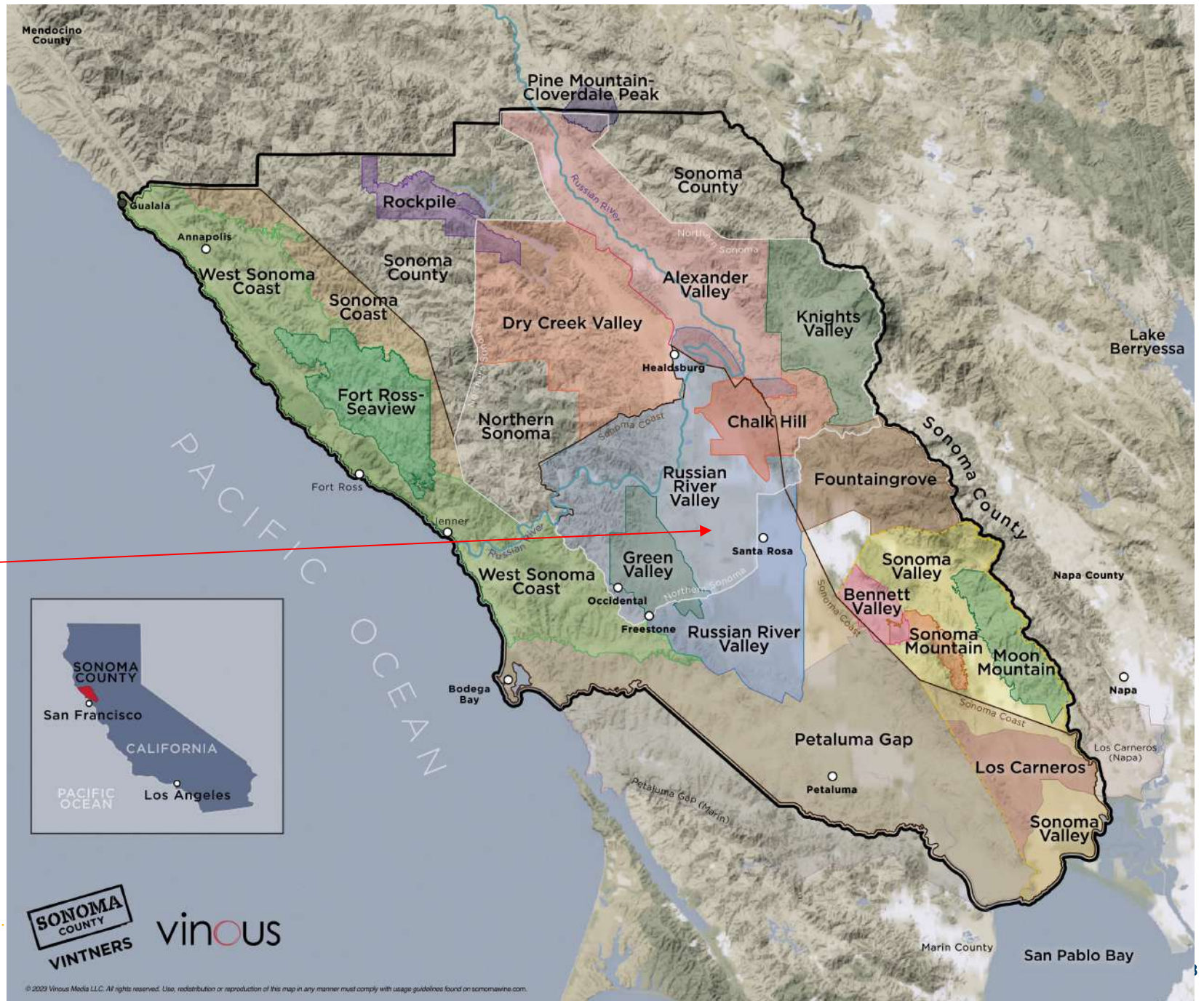


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Wine 9 – Ramey  
Woolsey Road  
Vineyard, Russian River  
Valley

Woolsey Rd Vineyard is  
just to the NE of  
Santa Rosa



# Wine 9: Ramey Chardonnay, Woolsey Road Vineyard 2021

Russian River Valley, Sonoma

Vineyard owned/farmed by 4<sup>th</sup> gen Martinelli family, planted to Old Wente clone from Hyde Vineyard. Clay loam over clay.

Whole cluster press, native yeast, 100% ML in barrel, lees aging with battonage

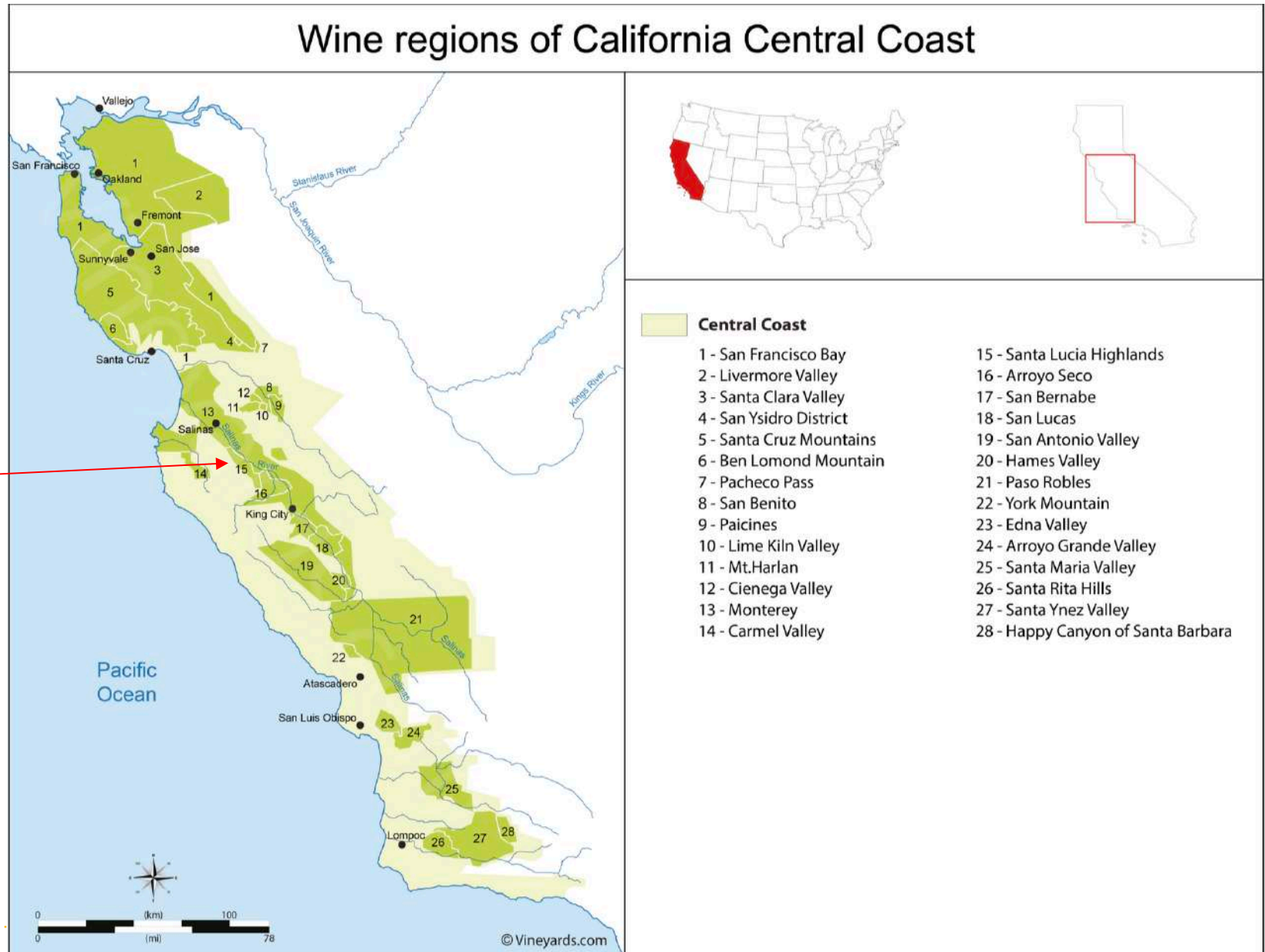
20 months in Taransaud Beaune barrique, 20% new, bottled unfiltered.

\$85 s/r Alcohol: 14.5%



Wine 10 – Roar  
Soberanes Vineyard

Santa Lucia Highlands  
AVA is between the  
Salinas Valley floor  
and the Santa Lucia  
Range to the west



# Wine 10: Roar Soberanes Vineyard Chardonnay 2022

Santa Lucia Highlands AVA, Monterey County

75% barrel-ferment, 16 months in Damy French barrique, 33% new

Sandy loam soils w/granite deposits, True North row layout. Hyde and Wente clones, farmed by Gary Francioni & Mark Pisoni, 7 acres Chardonnay, 27 Pinot Noir, 3 Syrah

Planted in 2008, 134 cases produced

\$60 s/r Alcohol: 14.6%



Late afternoon looking  
East from Santa Lucia  
Highlands AVA . . .



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Early March,  
Santa Lucia  
Highlands AVA . . .

View east across  
Salinas Valley







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