



Green Valley AVA

Highlights of the most distinctive appellation in Sonoma County

<http://www.greenvalley-russianriver.com/>

Green Valley is one of the smallest appellations in Sonoma County. It lies in the western part of the Russian River Valley, bounded by the towns of Sebastopol, Forestville and Occidental. It is shown in all of the Russian River maps as a distinct part of the region and is very tightly delineated in terms of climate and soil. In fact, it is the most consistent in terms of soil, climate and flavor of *any* north coast appellations. As winemaker Dan Goldfield, partner in Dutton-Goldfield, puts it: "This is one of the few appellations that is actually geographically distinct and climatologically unique." Tracy Dutton explains Green Valley as a 'niche' *terrior*.

The official name of the region today is "Sonoma County-Green Valley". This is a federally recognized AVA in its own right. In April 2005, a group Green Valley wineries and grape growers formally petitioned the TTB for an appellation name change to Green Valley of the Russian River Valley. The eight key producers who spearheaded the petition are: Dutton Estate, Dutton-Goldfield, goldridgepinot, Hartford Court, Iron Horse, Marimar Estate, Orogeny and Tandem. Other wineries with Green Valley bottlings include Dutch Bill Creek, Freeman Vineyard & Winery, Lynmar, Martinelli, Paul Hobbs, Patz & Hall, Walker Station, and Fred Scherrer.

Fog is the main defining feature. GIS-GPS computerized mapping of fog patterns show that the most significant fog influx originates at the Petaluma Wind Gap as opposed to the Russian River and that, as a result of its proximity to the Petaluma Gap, Green Valley typically experiences cooler morning temperatures for a longer period than the northern parts of the Russian River. It is the first point of incursion and the last place where the fog burns off, making it the coolest, foggiest part of the Russian River.

The predominant soil type is Gold Ridge soil – covering about 60% of the area. It is a particularly valuable soil type because of its excellent drainage. It is a very fine, beige, sandy clay loam – the remains of an ancient inland sea that slowly emptied into the Pacific five million years ago. One of its key characteristics is that it naturally stresses the vines; another is that it is uniquely balanced in its mineral content, which directly contributes to wine quality.

The third determining aspect of the area is described by diurnal temperature profiles – the difference between the highs at the peak heat of the day and the lows during the coolest pre-dawn

hours. Green Valley is distinguished by relatively narrow temperature swings, which speaks to the cooler daytime readings and is particularly favorable to Pinot Noir.

The combination of the soil and the fog yield a remarkably consistent taste profile – especially in the Chardonnays. And, though there is more variability in Pinot Noir generally, these too share distinct common characteristics.

Comparative tastings conducted by Master Sommelier Bob Bath show a definite thread of continuity in Green Valley Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. Asked to provide a one- or two-word description of the Green Valley flavor profile, the tasters offered the following:

Chardonnay: A hint of green-gold in the glass, floral (honeysuckle, white flower, very subtle and nice), fresh, clean, crisp, tangy, tart, integrated, restrained, complex flavors of green apple, citrus (grapefruit, lemon, lemon zest, lime zest, lemon curd, tangerine), spice (cinnamon, nutmeg), core of minerality, crystalline focus, “Burgundian” mouth presence, long finish, great food wines, possibly more age-worthy than other AVA wines. “Green Valley Chardonnays have an incredible combination of ripeness and acidity that most new world wine regions can only dream about,” according to Bob Bath.

Pinot Noir: Bright, forward fruit, clarity of fruit (cherry and cranberry), zesty, spicy, sweet spice character (allspice, cinnamon, clove), distinguishing underlying earthiness (red clay), no vegetal flavors, tea and floral notes, good acids, soft tannins, subtle oak, supple, complex, nuanced, long palate evolution. Bob Bath describes Green Valley Pinots as having “classic dark cherry, ripe plum and rich earth coupled with a beautiful structure that gives them a definite sense of class.”

There is a strong feeling for the history (grape growing in Green Valley dates back to the 1830’s), the charm and beauty of the area, and the family-oriented nature of the wineries and growers here, exemplified by the Duttons. “Having grown grapes in Green Valley since 1964, we’re very happy that people are learning more about the area that’s such an essential part of my family’s life,” says Steve Dutton.

While some key wineries call Green Valley their home, the area is defined more by its vineyards and includes such gems as Dutton’s Jewell Vineyard, Iron Horse’s Thomas Road, Dutton-Rued Vineyard, Martinelli’s Bondi Home Ranch, Tandem’s Keefer Ranch, Dutton-Sanchietti, Hartford Court’s Arrendell Vineyard, and Marimar Torres’ Don Miguel Vineyard.

A strong source of pride for the Sterling-Tancer family is the number of Iron Horse “firsts” connected with the region - first to produce single-vineyard Green Valley bottlings, first to champion the region, first to use the Green Valley appellation on labels. Laurence Sterling drafted and filed the petition for the AVA name change in April 2005.