A Very Brief History of the Santa Cruz Mountain Appellation

For centuries massive tracts of virgin Coast Redwoods covered the Santa Cruz Mountains, covering substantial lime deposits. Early loggers harvested 18,000,000 board feet of virgin redwood. Cleared spaces allowed home-steaders to plant fruit, vegetables, and vineyards. Early viticulturists included Lyman J. Burrell near the summit (Burrell School); the Jarvis brothers near Scotts Valley (Santa Cruz Mountain Winery, Annamaria's Vineyard); the Burns family in Ben Lomond (Beauregard); Dr. Robert Tripp in Woodside, where he established a market (Robert's Market) in the town of Woodside in 1854 that still stands today. By 1875, existing records noted that Santa Cruz had 262,275 vines (about 300 acres) and was making 70,000 gallons of wine a year.

On the east side of the mountains, Emmet H. Rixford planted a small vineyard on the top of a small ridge (*cuesta* in Spanish) above Woodside. Rixford evokes the type of winemaker that you're most likely to find in the mountains today -- people dedicated to preserving the quality of small vineyards in their wine. Rixford's book, *The Wine Press and the Cellar*, published in 1887, was a staple for new winemakers well into the 20th century.

Further south, another group of winemakers began their ascent up Monte Bello Ridge. Vincent and Secundo Picchetti (Picchetti Winery) purchased land towards the bottom of the mountain in the early 1870s. Further up the mountain, Pierre Klein purchased 160 acres in 1888 (now owned by Ridge Winery). Klein was regarded as one of the primary winemakers of his day, winning a gold medal at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Osea Perrone, a dapper San Francisco physician, created his summer retreat, vineyard and winery at the top of Monte Bello Ridge in 1886 (Ridge Winery).

Paul Masson was probably the most notable character to establish a vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains in the early 1890s. Born in Burgundy, he purchased 40 acres in the mountains above Saratoga (Mountain Winery) in 1896. For the next 40 years, he produced champagne. The other significant winery established in the 1880s was the Novitiate in Los Gatos (Testarossa).

Prohibition was the looming cloud that finished off most of the premium winemaking in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Paul Masson continued on with his "medicinal" champagne and the Novitiate still made altar wine, but any other winemaking efforts went underground. The first winery to emerge from Prohibition was run by the Bargetto family. John and Phillip Bargetto opened their place in Soquel in 1933.

The person who had, and continues to have, the greatest hold on the style and imaginations of Santa Cruz Mountains winemakers was Martin Ray. Throughout his education and employment as a stockbroker, journalist and real estate broker, Ray's dream was to own his own vineyard in the mountains. He originally purchased Masson's property in Saratoga, but subsequently sold it to Seagrams and purchased land further up the mountain. One of the most significant changes that Ray brought to the wine business was his focus on varietal grapes. Martin Ray fought his entire life to increase the percentage of the varietal wine in a bottle named with that variety. By all accounts, a visit to Ray's home was both fascinating and unpredictable. On at least one occasion he sent someone packing back down the mountain in the middle of dinner.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a resurgence of winemaking in the Santa Cruz Mountains. In the early 1970s, a small group of Santa Cruz Mountain winery owners prepared an application to the government for a Santa Cruz Mountains American Viticultural Area (AVA). The AVA, established in 1981, was one of the first AVAs determined by altitude.

The number of wineries has grown exponentially throughout the last 25 years, continuing to produce wine befitting a region with a long and distinguished history.

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