

# The Five California Vineyards You Need to Know

Anyone looking for wines that are consistently strong should seek out bottles with labels bearing these names, says Lettie Teague



By  
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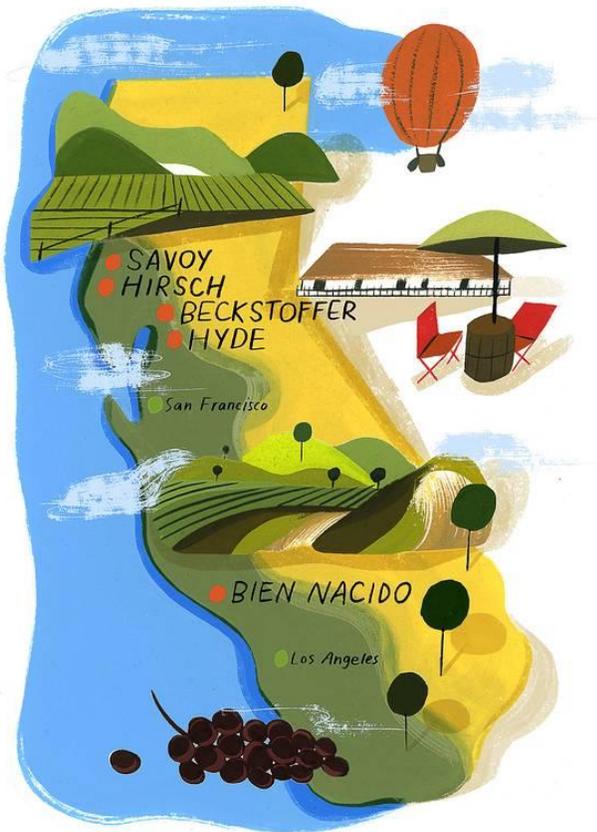


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**THERE ARE MANY** great vineyards in California, but very few people will see their names on a label. That's because they often belong to a single producer turning out wines in tiny amounts. A handful of vineyards, however, supply multiple producers who create wines that are more readily attainable—though no less profound.

The following five vineyards range from small to large but have two things in common: They've produced notable wines for decades, and top winemakers in California vie for the opportunity to buy their grapes. Anyone looking for wines of reliably high quality should seek out labels bearing these names.

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## Savoy Vineyard | [Anderson Valley](#)

ENLARGE

2012 Failla Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir *PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*



The Savoy Vineyard in Mendocino County's Anderson Valley isn't easy to find on a map or in person. I had to flag down a local to escort me there. Planted by Richard Savoy in 1992, Savoy is a Pinot-dominant 43-acre vineyard, with a small amount (5 acres) of Chardonnay planted as well. Tucked against a hill, the vineyard was a great place of experimentation for Mr. Savoy, who was "constantly tinkering with different clones," said Ryan Hodgins, winemaker at FEL, the Anderson Valley winery formerly known as Breggo.

Napa vintner Cliff Lede bought Savoy Vineyard in 2011 and Breggo in 2009. Savoy may be a small vineyard, but it is well represented in the world by acclaimed producers such as Peay, Radio-Coteau, Littorai, Auteur, Barnett, Failla and of course, FEL.

Every winemaker has a different style of Savoy Pinot Noir, Mr. Hodgins noted. FEL's, for example, was distinctly savory, while the Radio-Coteau was bigger and more concentrated. Ehren Jordan of Failla liked Savoy because the vineyard climate was "just cool enough but not radically cool, where you are on a tightrope 100 feet up," wondering if the fruit will get ripe. He also liked the "tension and acidity" found in Savoy wines, qualities his **2012 Failla Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$65) definitely had, along with a vibrant acidity and lots of dense fruit.

Winemakers like to say great wine is made in the vineyard. I'm not sure how much they believe this and how much it's just a catchy sound bite. One thing I know to be true: A great vineyard is where a great wine must start.

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