

HISTORY

One of the oldest wine regions in California, Livermore Valley is recognized for introducing grape varietals from France, Germany, Italy and Spain that have shaped the wine industry throughout the state.

Vineyard growth began in the region in 1882 when Charles Wetmore, Secretary of the California Viticultural Commission, opened his Cresta Blanca Winery in Livermore. He recognized the valley's terroir as strikingly similar to the premier vineyards of the Bordeaux region. In 1889, Wetmore's Livermore Valley dry white wine won the Grand Prix at the International Paris Exposition, becoming the first California wine to win a competition in France.



Charles Wetmore won Grand Prix at the International Exposition in Paris in 1889.

Two other viticulture pioneers, Carl H. Wentz and James Concannon, also purchased prime acreage in Livermore Valley. Wentz Vineyards and Concannon Vineyard were established in 1883 and both have become trailblazers in the California wine industry.

Wentz Vineyards is recognized as the pioneer of California Chardonnay. With fruit from the 1936 vintage, Wentz released the nation's first bottling with the varietal name Chardonnay printed on the label. Currently, Chardonnay is the number one white wine grape in California with over 100,000 acres planted—the majority is either Wentz Clone 4 or another of the Wentz Chardonnay Clones.

Concannon Vineyard is recognized as the pioneer of California Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah. In 1961, Concannon introduced America's first varietally labeled Petite Sirah. Concannon Cabernet Clones 7, 8 and 11 helped California Cabernet achieve international recognition and are the most widely planted Cabernet clones in the state - 80 percent of the 80,000 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon in California can be traced to a Concannon clone.

In recent years, there have been important changes in the Livermore Valley that have added a new dimension to the history of the region.

- A modern read of the topography and microclimate has inspired growers to look beyond traditional sites on the valley floor and begin planting the rolling hills that ring the valley.
- New irrigation and monitoring technology has made it possible to nurture vines in hillside locations that were previously difficult to cultivate.
- Growers and winemakers are working with new grape varieties such as Tempranillo from Spain, Barbera from Italy and Touriga from Portugal.

Attracted to the rich winemaking tradition, unique geography, soils and climate, new winemakers and vineyardists are working alongside fifth generation winegrowers to create a Livermore Valley wine renaissance. The region is now home to more than 50 wineries, varying from limited release, 500-case boutiques to 400,000-case industry leaders. The future of Livermore Valley is bright—as promising as it was when the first growers settled the region in the early days of California's winemaking history.



C.H. Wentz and family in 1883



Concannon bottling line in 1936.