

## **Wine tasting in Napa and Sonoma**

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The wine tasting in Napa and Sonoma was conducted by Nurit and Asher Tishler during July 2016. We tasted the current releases and some older vintages of 14 high quality wineries in Napa and 4 in Sonoma.

High quality mature wines from Napa and Sonoma are usually unavailable for purchase in the wineries and should be purchased in specialized wine stores or in other professional outlets (local importers, internet stores, auctions, etc.), since most of their production is pre-sold (sometimes several years) in advance. Wines from the latest 1-3 vintages are sometimes available in some, but not all, wineries.

There are numerous hotels, B&Bs, quality restaurants and wine stores in Napa Valley and Sonoma. Booking a hotel or B&B well in advance is highly recommended, particularly in Saint Helena (at about the center of Napa Valley), Calistoga, Yountville, and Santa Rosa (Sonoma). These towns are surrounded by some of the region's most famous wineries and offer many interesting attractions.

Our trip was planned several months in advance, and included only high quality wineries. Thus, no wonder that we ranked many of the wines that we tasted as 'very good' or even 'excellent'. Almost all of these high quality wines will age and continue to develop, most of them for 5-20 years.

Finally, there are numerous sources of information on Napa's and Sonoma's wines, wineries, history, climate and geography. Wikipedia and the references therein is a good place to start.

## **Wineries in Napa**

### **Ovid**

W1.4 (an experiment. The first white wine by Ovid), 2014. \$85. 14.3% alcohol. About one third Sauvignon Blanc, one third Viognier, one third Roussanne. Nice body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Some very soft tannins. Fresh. Young. Light. Great floral aroma. Drink now up to 5-6 years. Very good wine.

R8.3 (an experiment), 2012. \$165, 14.7% alcohol. 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. On the light side (not heavy). Some floral aroma. Soft noticeable tannins. Drink in 3-5 years up to 15 years. Very good to excellent wine.

Hexameter, 2013. \$285. 14.8% alcohol. 64% Cabernet Franc, 22% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Merlot. Full body. Powerful. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Noticeable soft tannins. Drink in 3-4 years up to 15 years. Excellent wine.

A small, high quality, interesting winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces very high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Brand**

Brio, 2013. \$125. 15.4% alcohol. 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Cabernet Franc, 6% Petit Verdot. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Fresh. Some floral aroma. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink now up to 15 years. Very good wine.

Brand, 2013. \$225. 15.2% alcohol. 92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc. Full body. Powerful. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Fresh. Some floral aroma. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink in 3-5 years up to 15 years. Excellent wine.

High quality and interesting winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces very high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Nine Suns**

Nine Suns, 2012. \$250. 14.5% alcohol. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% merlot, 11% Malbec, 4% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot. Full body (not powerful). Balanced. Complex. Very elegant. Very soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Somewhat feminine. Drink now up to 15 years. Such a high quality wine is a great achievement for a first release of the winery. Very good to excellent wine.

A new, small (for the time being), high quality, and interesting winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces very high quality wine. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Opus One**

Opus One, 2012. \$265. 14.5% alcohol. 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot, 6% petite Verdot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 2% Malbec. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Floral aroma. Some desired bitterness at the end. Soft tannins. Very good wine. (A great improvement over the 2011).

A mid-size winery. Nice tasting room. Nice hospitality. Produces very good wines. This year's Opus One is a great improvement over the 2011 Opus one. Visiting the winery (only with appointment) is recommended.

### **Pride Mountain**

Chardonnay, 2014. \$50. 14.3% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Light wine. Round. Good to very good wine.

Syrah, 2014. \$60. 14.8% alcohol. 95% Syrah, 5% Viognier. Full Body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Very good wine.

Merlot, 2013. \$60. 14.6% alcohol. 92% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full Body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Soft tannins. Drink in 2-3 years up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$70. 14.6% alcohol. 87% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Petit Verdot, 5% Merlot. Full Body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Drink in 2-3 up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Cabernet Sauvignon, 2015 (from a barrel). \$70. 14.5% alcohol. Full Body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Better than the 2013. Drink in 2-3 up to 10 years. Very good (and will improve) wine.

Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$140. 14.8% alcohol. 99% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Petit Verdot. Full Body. Fairly powerful. Balanced. Complex. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 up to 15 years. Very good to excellent wine.

Reserve Claret, 2013. \$140. 14.8% alcohol. 62% Merlot, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1% Petit Verdot. Full Body. Balanced. Complex. Noticeable soft tannins. Closed. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 15 years. Very good wine.

A mid-size winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Spottswode**

Sauvignon Blanc, 2015. \$38. 14.1% alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. Close to full body. Balanced. Complex. Light. Elegant. Drink now up to 8 years. Good to very good wine.

Lydenhurst Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$80. 13.9% alcohol. 92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Malbec, 2% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Full body (not powerful). Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Spottswode Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$185. 13.9% alcohol. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot. Full body (fairly powerful). Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 15-20 years. Very good to excellent wine.

An interesting and high quality winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides close to the center of the valley and produces high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

## **Futo**

OV/SL 2013. \$150. 14.7% alcohol. 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 6% Petit Verdot. Full Body. Balanced. Complex. Very elegant. Soft tannins. Some floral aroma. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 15-20 years. Very good to excellent wine.

he-li-an-thus, 2013. (Produced at Futo). \$95. 14.4% alcohol. Full and powerful Body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 3-4 years up to 15 years. Very good wine.

Futo Oakville, 2014 (will be released in 2017). \$325 (estimate). 14.7% alcohol. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot. Full Body. Powerful. Balanced. Complex. Very elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Some floral aroma. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 3-4 years up to 20 years. Excellent wine.

A small, high quality and interesting winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces very high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

## **HDV**

De La Guerra Viognier, 2014. \$45. 13.6% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Fairly complex. Round. On the light side. Drink now up to 5 years. Good to very good wine.

De La Guerra Chardonnay, 2014. \$45. 13.5% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Some floral aroma. Round. On the light side. Drink now up to 5-6 years. Very good wine.

HDV Chardonnay, 2013. \$65. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Sharp. Nice and long finish. Some floral aroma. Round. Drink now up to 7-8 years. Very good wine.

Californio Syrah, 2012. \$75. 14.5% alcohol. 100% Syrah. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Very elegant. Soft tannins. Somewhat feminine. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink in 1-2 years up to 10 years. One of the best Syrah in Napa. Very good to excellent wine.

Belle Cousine, 2012. \$75. 14.1% alcohol. 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Soft tannins. Some bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 10 years. Very good wine.

A small to mid-size winery. Great hospitality. The winery produces high quality wines. Visiting the winery (only by appointment) is highly recommended.

## **Fairchild**

Cabernet Sigaro, 2013. \$200. 14.3% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Fairly powerful. Balanced. Complex. Very elegant. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 15 years. Excellent wine.

Cabernet Sigaro, 2010. \$225. 14.2% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Fairly powerful. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Stone No. 2, 2013. \$325. 14.2% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Powerful. Fairly heavy. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 15 years. Very good to excellent wine.

A small, high quality and interesting winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces very high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

## **Pott**

La Carte et Le Territoire, 2012. \$125. 14.8% alcohol. 30% Cabernet Franc, 70% merlot. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Fresh. On the light side. Floral aroma. Some very soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Le Nouveau Western, 2013. \$125. 14.9% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Somewhat powerful. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Fresh. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Kaliholmanok, 2013. \$125. 14.8% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Dry. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Acteon, 2011. \$125. 14.3% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Dry. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. A little too acidic. Drink now up to 10 years. Good to very good wine.

The Arsenal, 2012. \$150. 14.9% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Dry. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink now up to 10+ years. Very good to excellent wine.

HER Majesty Secret Service, 2012. \$125. 14.9% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Dry. Soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Drink now up to 10+ years. Very good to excellent wine.

A small, high quality, interesting and unusual winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful and unusual building and produces high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Lail**

Blueprint Sauvignon Blanc, 2014. \$40. 14.5% alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. Close to full body. Balanced. Somewhat complex. Somewhat elegant. Fresh. Light. Young. Very pleasant. Drink now up to 5 years. Very good wine.

Blueprint Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$80. 15.3% alcohol. 95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Somewhat elegant. Very fruity. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Georgia Sauvignon Blanc, 2013. \$135. 14.4% alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. Full (big) body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Very fresh. Young. Drink now up to 8-10 years. Very good to excellent wine.

J. Daniel Cuvee, 2013. \$250. 15.9% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full (big) body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Soft tannins. Will improve. Drink in 3-4 up to 15 years. Excellent wine.

A small, high quality, interesting winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Realm**

IBID, 2015. \$60. 14.1% alcohol. 100% Sauvignon Blanc. Close to full body. Balanced. Fairly complex. Light. Young. Fresh. Floral aroma. Very pleasant. Drink now up to 5-6 years. Very good wine.

The Bard, 2014. \$100. 14.6% alcohol. 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, some Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Closed. Very soft tannins. Floral aroma. Very promising wine. Drink in 3-4 years up to 15 years. Very good wine.

Houyi, 2014. \$175. 14.6% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Powerful. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Floral aroma. Very promising wine. Drink in 3-4 years up to 15 years. Very good to excellent wine.

Beckstoffer To Kalon, 2009. \$200. 14.9% alcohol. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Full body. Powerful. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Drink in 3-4 years up to 15 years. Very good to excellent wine.

Cabernet Franc, 2015. (From a barrel). About 14.5% alcohol. 100% Cabernet franc. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Very elegant. Gentle. Young. Fresh. Very promising wine. Soft tannins. Drink in 3-4 years up to 10 years. Very good wine.

A small to medium, high quality and interesting winery. Just moved to a new location. Great hospitality. The winery resides in the center of Napa Valley. It produces very high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Oddette**

PlumpJack Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Oakville, 2013. \$120. 14.9% alcohol. Full body. Fairly powerful. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Floral aroma. Drink in 2-3 up to 15 years. Very good wine.

Odette Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap, 2013. \$126. Full body. Fairly powerful. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 up to 15 years. Very good wine.

Cade Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain, 2013. \$98. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desirable bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 up to 15 years. Very good wine.

A high quality, interesting winery. The tasting room, at the Stag's Leap region of the Valley, represents three quality wineries: PlumpJack, Cade and Odette. These wineries produce several wines of varying qualities. Their higher quality wines are very good. Visiting this tasting room (and each winery) (only with appointment) is highly recommended.



## **Caymus**

Mersoleil Unoaked Chardonnay, 2014. \$32. 14.7% alcohol. Less than full body. Balanced. Somewhat complex. Simple. Light. Good wine.

Napa Valley Zinfandel, 2013. \$38. 14.6% alcohol. Somewhat full body. Balanced. Somewhat complex. Some sweetness. Simple. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 5 years. Good wine.

Caymus Suisun Grand Durif, 2014. \$50. 14.9% alcohol. (New release; Petit Syrah). Full body. Balanced. Fairly complex. Simple. Not elegant. Noticeable tannins. Drink in 3-4 years up to 10 years. Good to very good wine.

Emmolo Merlot, 2013. \$60. 15.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Closed. Fruity. Soft tannins. Elegant. Round. Better than the 2012. Will develop. Drink in 2-3 years up to 8 years. Very good wine.

Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, 2014. \$72. 14.8% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Fruity. Closed. Soft tannins. Somewhat fruity at the end. Some bitterness at the end. Drink in 2-3 years up to 10 years. Very Good wine.

Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$160. 15.2% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Somewhat powerful. Elegant. Closed. Fruity. Noticeable soft tannins. Some desired bitterness at the end. Will develop. Drink in 2-3 years up to 15 years. Very Good to excellent wine.

A mid-size winery. Very nice tasting facilities. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a nice area and produces quality wines. Visiting the winery is highly recommended.

## **Wineries in Sonoma**

### **Littorai**

Haven Vineyard Chenin Blanc, 2014. \$70. 12.4% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Fairly complex. Elegant. On the light side. Sharp. Nice minerality. Drink now up to 5 years. Very good wine.

Charles Heintz Chardonnay, 2014. \$80. 13.2% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. A little buttery. Drink now up to 6-7 years. Very good wine.

Platt Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2013. \$75. 13.4% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Nice aftertaste. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 8 years. Very good wine.

Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2013. \$75. 12.8% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Nice aftertaste. Soft tannins. Very good (+) wine.

Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2013. \$75. 12.7% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Nice aftertaste. Very soft tannins. Very good wine.

Roman Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2013. \$80. 12.8% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Nice aftertaste. Noticeable soft tannins. Very good wine.

A small winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces quality wines. This year's tasting was much more satisfying than the one in 2014. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Kistler**

Les Noisetiers Chardonnay, 2014. \$70. 14.1% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Complex. On the light side. Fairly elegant. Drink now up to 4-5 years. Good to very good wine.

Trenton Roadhouse Chardonnay, 2013. \$80. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. On the light side. Elegant. Very soft tannins. Drink now up to 6-7 years. Very good wine.

McCrea Vineyard Chardonnay, 2013. \$80. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. On the light side. Drink now up to 6-7 years. Very good wine.

Stone flat Vineyard Chardonnay, 2013. \$80. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. On the light side. Long aftertaste. Drink now up to 6-7 years. Very good wine.

Durell Vineyard Chardonnay, 2013. \$80. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Sharp. Not buttery. Very soft tannins. Long aftertaste. Drink now up to 6-7 years. Very good (+) wine.

Hyde Vineyard Chardonnay, 2013. \$80. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. A little buttery. Good to very good wine.

Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 2013. \$70. 14.1% alcohol. Full (and somewhat heavy) body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Long aftertaste. Floral aroma. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Kistler Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2013. \$90. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Dry. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good wine.

Cuvee Natalie Pinot Noir, 2012. \$100. 14.1% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Feminine. Long aftertaste. Floral aroma. Very soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Very good (+) wine.

A mid-size winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful mountain area and produces high quality wines. Visiting this winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

### **Dehlinger**

Estate Chardonnay, 2013. \$40. 14.5% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. A little buttery. Fairly heavy. Fairly elegant. Nice minerality. Drink now up to 6-7 years. Very good wine.

Goldridge Pinot Noir, 2014. \$52. 14.9% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Drink now or (better) in 2-10 years. Very good wine.

Altamont Pinot Noir, 2013. \$60. 14.9% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Sharp. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Will improve. Very good wine.

Goldridge Syrah, 2012. \$48. 14.9% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Noticeable soft tannins. Not aggressive. A little high on acidity. Drink now up to 10 years. Good to very good wine.

Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, 2013. \$55. 15.2% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Soft tannins. Drink now up to 10 years. Good wine.

A small winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful area and produces some quality wines. Visiting the winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.

## **Williams Selyem**

Vista Verde Vineyard Chenin Blanc, 2014. \$35. 13.6% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Fairly complex. Fresh. Elegant. Somewhat too acidic. Simple. Drink now up to 4-5 years. Good to very good wine.

Drake Estate Chardonnay, 2013. \$70. 14.1% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Complex. Elegant. Fresh. Light. Not buttery. Somewhat too acidic. Drink now up to 5-7 years. Very good wine.

Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 2013. \$60. 13.9% alcohol. Close to full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. On the light side. Very soft tannins. Drink in 1-3 years up to 8-10 years. Very good wine.

Ferrington Pinot Noir, 2012. \$75. 13.9% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Fruity. Some sweetness at the end. Soft tannins. Drink in 1-2 years up to 8-10 years. Very good wine.

Westside Road Neighbors Pinot Noir, 2013. \$79. 13.7% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fruity. Drink in 1-2 years up to 8-10 years. Very good wine.

Block 10 Mass Selection Estate Russian River Pinot Noir, 2013. \$85. 13.8% alcohol. Full body. Balanced. Complex. Fairly elegant. Not buttery. Soft tannins. Drink in 1-2 years up to 8-10 years. Very good wine.

Drake Estate Blanc de Noirs, sparkling Pinot Noir, 2010. (Brut). \$75. 12.5% alcohol. Light body. Balanced. Fairly complex. Very dry. Drink now up to 3-5 years. Good to very good wine.

A mid-size winery. Great hospitality. The winery resides in a beautiful area and produces quality wines. Visiting the winery (only with appointment) is highly recommended.