

Hidden Upriver

Off the beaten track but

By Jan Vick & Susan Whitesell

Established as an American Viticultural Area, or appellation, in 1985, the Clarksburg AVA located in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, boasts a cool maritime climate and fertile, low-draining soils that enable the little wine region to produce 45,000 tons of grapes each year. The area has been statistically identified as comparable to the best wine grape regions in California (Napa, Sonoma, Paso Robles) in terms of degree days and day to evening temperatures. The AVA touches three counties – Sacramento, Solano and Yolo and includes over 64,000 acres. Cool evenings and warm days with limited summer fog enable the AVA to grow a diverse portfolio of premium grapes and wine. The area is known for a range of both red and white grapes that produce excellent stand-alone wines, but also excel as blending varietals.

Here are a few wineries in the Clarksburg area that you may never have heard of in one of California's most overlooked wine regions.

The tasting recommendations for Miners Leap and Julieta wineries are from San Francisco Chronicle writer Stacy Briscoe, reprinted from her March 16, 2017 online article, *Clarksburg AVA the little wine-growing region that could*. Read the full article at <http://www.sfchronicle.com/travel/article/Clarksburg-AVA-the-little-wine-growing-region-11007591.php>

Miners Leap

Miners Leap winery at 54250 South River Road on the Sacramento River, couldn't be more scenic. The grounds feature a century-old rustic barn and beautifully landscaped grounds, with a wonderful view of the surrounding vineyards and the distant coast range.

Miners Leap is a boutique winery, producing over 13 varietal wines in small lots, rarely over 100 cases each.

The century-old barn that sits on the property houses the indoor-outdoor tasting room. It's eclectically decorated with art from Cabo San Lucas and "Hotel California" memorabilia. The outdoor tasting room can be a bit chilly, especially in winter. Grab one of the many wool blankets that are set out for just such an occasion.

A recent addition is the event space just a few yards from the tasting room that accommodates up to 500 guests. And don't forget to pack a picnic. The site has many inviting tables to use at your leisure. Miners Leap is family and dog friendly. The outdoor setting is the perfect place for both two and four legged friends to spend a day.

Wine to try: 2014 Pinot Noir. Miner will be proud to tell you that Clarksburg is a successful producer of Pinot Noir. The constant delta breeze keeps these thin-skinned grapes cool even in the summer sun. Those most familiar with Napa and Sonoma's take on the varietal shouldn't miss out on Clarksburg's expression.

5420 South River Road, Clarksburg; (916) 882-1000. www.minersleap.com. Tasting room hours: Friday Noon – 7:00 pm Saturday and Sunday Noon – 6:00 pm. Fee: \$5.



Miners Leap front gate

Julieta Winery

This little hidden jewel is a little off the beaten path at 51221 Clarksburg Road, off South River Road, the main road that leads tourists in and out of Clarksburg.

Julie and Craig Russell are new kids on the Clarksburg block, having officially opened their winery just over three years ago.



Miners Leap outside tasting area

Wineries well worth the effort!

Photos by Jan Vick

Craig's mother, Beverly, encouraged the couple to transform a formerly unplanted 12-acre lot with an old barn used for storage, into a winery.

Walls of the quaint tasting room are decorated with works by local artists. The Russells are often behind the bar, greeting regulars by name. Comfortable lounge chairs and sofas invite you to linger with your wine. Outside, a new outdoor tasting area beckons. The winery has beautiful landscaping and several indoor and outdoor patios to enjoy a nice Delta breeze. Visitors can enjoy the bocce ball court, putting green and picnic area. The tasting room often features live music on Fridays and Saturdays.

Wine to try: 2015 Chenin Blanc. Visiting Clarksburg means visiting one of the few California regions where Chenin Blanc still thrives. Julietta Winery's interpretation is a perfect balance of crisp acidity, subtle fruit aromas of apples and pears, and an almost creamy mouthfeel that gives the wine an enjoyable weight and body.

51221 Clarksburg Road, Clarksburg; (916) 744-9090. www.juliettawinery.com. Tasting room hours: 11:00 am – 6:00 pm Friday – Sunday. Fee: Flight of 5 wines \$10, tasting fee waived with purchase of bottle.



Julietta tasting room outside

Skylar Stanley. The barrel room is behind the main tasting room and is set with tables for events and tastings. The winery is surrounded by extensive lawns and a large patio, welcoming events and parties.

Wine to try: 2014 Fiano. The Fiano, in particular, is a less well known wine as the grapes came originally from Southern Italy and are not

growing grapes for 45 years, and bought the vineyard around the winery in 1996. Their first commercial wine, Sutter Island Red, was bottled in 2007. In 2012 they began to produce varietal wines, with the grapes crushed in Lodi as they developed the new winery and tasting room.

Wines are produced now at the beautiful new facility in Walnut Grove. All wines are estate grapes, and include 13 varietals or blends.

The tasting room has a two story rock wall with the space lined with paintings by the late Marty Stanley, a well known artist, and photographs by his son,



Julietta tasting room inside

often grown in this area. It has a smooth, luxurious, rich earthy flavor with hints of butterscotch and date.

12484 Highway 160, Walnut Grove; (916) 775-2111. www.grandislandvineyards.com. Tasting room hours: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm Friday – Monday. Fee: Wine tasting is complementary.

Grand Island Vineyards

Another recent addition to the Clarksburg AVA is Grand Island Vineyards located on Grand Island at the junction of Steamboat Slough and the Sacramento River. The Salman family has been



Grand Island tasting room outside