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THE

P R E S S

The 52 California wineries you need to visit in 2020

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John Storey / Special to The Chronicle

From Santa Barbara to the Sierras, Humboldt to Temecula, California has wineries – and tasting rooms – at seemingly every turn. Now more than ever, you can count on finding solid, well-made wine at almost all of them. But with wine prices and tasting fees creeping ever higher, it can be hard to know which ones are actually worth the money.

What's more, it can be hard to know what you're getting yourself into: Is this an appointment-only palace with exhaustive, guided tastings (and an expectation that you'll buy a few cases at the end)? Is this an overcrowded tasting bar where you'll have to jostle your way to the front of the hordes every time you want another sip?

It's a lot to consider before you set out for a drive to wine country. That's where we come in at The Press and The San Francisco Chronicle. Together, our team of wine experts has visited hundreds of wineries and evaluated the tasting experiences – not only the quality of the wine (though that's key, of course), but also the vibe of the tasting itself and the value for the money.

The 52 wineries on this list represent the best of a dynamic landscape. Now in its third year, this list is more expansive than ever before, thanks to the hard work of our team: During the past 12 months, on The Press, we explored [Santa Barbara County](#), [Paso Robles](#), [Lodi](#) and [Amador County](#), which added to our database of tasting room reviews from [Napa Valley](#), [Sonoma County](#), [Mendocino County](#), the [Santa Cruz Mountains](#), [Monterey County](#) and the [East Bay](#). From all of those regions, we've culled a collection of wineries that achieve some mysterious nexus of quality, value and fun. Whether you're a geeky wine collector or you're just planning your friend's bachelorette party, we believe there's truly something for everyone here.

The Press' team of wine experts is led by me, Esther Mobley, and includes Mike Dunne, Virginie Boone, Matt Kettmann, Chris Macias, Sara Schneider, Tim Teichgraeber and Bryce Wiatrak. All of our work contributed to this feature.

— *Esther Mobley, Chronicle wine critic*

Freeman

Ken and Akiko Freeman are serious about wine. Since planting their vineyard in 2001, they have been single-mindedly dedicated to improving their farming and producing high-quality Pinot Noir wines that reflect their places of origin. Those places are the western edges of the Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast AVAs, where cooler temperatures can produce Pinot Noirs that lean toward European styles. Akiko Freeman makes the wines with the help of consulting winemaker Ed Kurtzman, also of August Briggs. Visits to the estate in Sebastopol, by appointment only, feel personal and include a tour of the Gloria Vineyard and the wine caves, plus a guided tasting. All that for \$30 – with such a thoughtful experience and such well-made wines, it's hard to imagine a better deal in Sonoma County today.