



As Seen In...

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...A TASTE OF HISTORY

...The story begins in the 1880s when the California wine industry was getting started, with the majority of its energy in Sonoma County. It started in the town of Sonoma, winding north into Sonoma Valley, where a famous property called Dunfillan stood, and on up the road more than 50 miles to Healdsburg and further to Asti.

At Asti, the Italian Swiss Colony was founded in 1881 as a sort of utopian community by Andrea Sbarboro to provide work for the young Italian men who had fled poverty in Italy for work in the San Francisco fishing fleet, only to find no jobs available.

The huge Italian influence on the wines of Sonoma County (Foppiano, Pedroncelli, Martini, Rochioli, Sebastiani, Simi and more) leaned heavily on red wines that were essentially local blends. Many of these red blends were called Burgundy or claret, and these were hearty, often heady red wines with alcohol levels pushing 13 percent (which was very high for the period).

They were often sold, at the winery and in San Francisco shops, to consumers who would bring in their own gallon or half-gallon jugs to be filled from the cask.

Such wines were popular with northern Californians because of their rustic nature and their house styles. **Foppiano's Burgundy was based on petite sirah because that was the dominant grape of the Healdsburg house, located near the Russian River - Alexander Valley border.** Sebastiani had more zinfandel in its Sonoma property, so that was the largest grape in its Burgundy. Simi Burgundy had a healthy dose of carignane.

And almost all such wines had a bit of the black-skinned, red-juiced alicante bouschet.

The growers of the time, before Prohibition, also sold grapes to wineries, and prices for them varied based on a number of factors.

Such intermixed vineyards mostly were planted with numerous varieties, and when wineries sought to buy fruit, they asked for, in the parlance of the day, "mixed blacks."

That is, the black fruit was of different varieties from vineyard to vineyard, and **a plot that had more zinfandel was no more prized than one that had more petite sirah.**