

Dispatch: SLO Wine Country

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San Luis Obispo, or SLO (pronounced "slow") as its known in these parts, is rarely thought of when one imagines California wine country. But as popular (and therefore overrun) as places like Napa and Sonoma are, lesser traveled regions tend to offer more chill, bucolic environments to enjoy when you're not not spitting in tasting rooms. SLO County is one such place, but with the huge added bonus of one of the coolest little cities in the US.

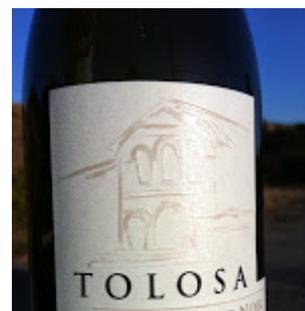


A short drive from the beach, and home to CalPoly State University (and one of the best farmer's markets in the country), the city of SLO is to California what Boulder is to, well, the rest of the world. Part hip, part hippie, part retiree destination, and part shopping heaven, the diversity of demographics and recreational options are endless here. Nestled amidst the gorgeous southern foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains, the beauty and friendliness of this small city makes the area a destination unto itself. That it's surrounded by some seriously under-appreciated winegrowing makes this a place I will return to before long. But what is perhaps a more appropriately flattering statement is that this seems like a great place to raise a family. There aren't too many places in California an outsider will say that about.

But back to wine...[SLO wine country](#) is home to two AVAs, Arroyo Grande Valley and Edna Valley, which, again, probably don't have the same ring as more publicized points north, but this is an area whose wines you should be on the lookout for. Thanks to its proximity to the coast, favorable maritime influences have a prominent effect on the vineyards. This means warm (but not crazy hot) days and cool nights - ideal growing conditions for Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah. (Just half an hour north is Paso Robles, desperately hot by comparison.) So, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the majority of what's grown here is Pinot and Chard. In fact, the Paragon Vineyard, source of the dependable and value-priced [Edna Valley Vineyard](#) bottlings, sits right smack in the middle of this region.

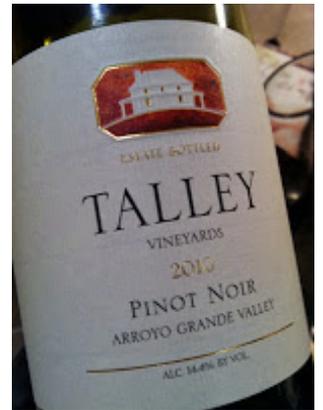
Both Edna Valley and AG have their share of well-known (and broadly distributed) labels - [Laetitia](#), [Chamisal](#), and [Talley](#) to name a few. But it was the unexpected discoveries that made staying in this area a real treat. Some noteworthy wines follow...

[Tolosa](#), a solar-powered winery in Edna Valley, has an estate Pinot Noir that is both varietally correct and compelling for its subtle tarry funk factor. Organically farmed, the estate Pinot is easy to appreciate as a "correct" wine, but it's fun to drink a wine that's also interesting. The Tolosa scores on both fronts. At around \$30 a bottle, it's fairly priced and in the mid-tier of what Pinots are priced at in this region.



Kynsi was another terrific discovery - and a worthwhile tasting room visit. Hands-on, hard-working, (and a little ornery in his mid-harvest, sleep-deprived state), owner/winemaker Don Othman turns out a dozen or so bottlings, the most compelling of which is what he was drinking when we met: the **Stone Corral Vineyard Pinot Noir**. Exotic spice and expressive Pinot fruit without over extraction. Lovely, beautiful even. Illustrative of the potential in the Edna Valley. Finishes a mile long next Tuesday with languid, lingering aromatics beckoning for another sip, taste, gulp. At \$45, its pricey, to be sure, but holds its weight among even more expensive bottlings from regions like Russian River Valley and Carneros.

Though we didn't have the chance to drop in on **Talley** in Arroyo Grande, their base level Pinot Noir is a textbook example of what makes the next echelon of Central Coast Pinots so damned irresistible. Exotically perfumed in a subtle musty and mysterious way, textured with the suppleness of equatorial sea water, and in possession of fruit expansive enough to easily disguise the 14.5% ABV. Gains in intensity and depth as it unfolds over many hours. \$36 is a fair price for this caliber of wine.



Though Pinot is easy to gravitate towards in this region (as the last three recommendations demonstrate), SLO wine country is not a one-trick pony by any measure. No tasting room proves this more than the old Independence Schoolhouse where the **Niven Family Wine Estate** brands are poured. Six brands are served under this one roof - all of which are made by winemaker Christian Roguenant - a surprise given how stylistically different each is. Two eye-popping examples of this contrast are the Syrah and the Grüner Veltliner. Perhaps the most easily approachable red wine consumed on this trip, the **Baileyana's Firepeak Syrah (\$20)** is an incredible value, as is **Zocker's Grüner Veltliner (\$15)**. (I didn't know there was any Grüner in California, either.) Crisp and clean, this amazingly true-to-form version of Grüner is as refreshing as it is delicious.

Though these are just a handful of the many enjoyable wines to be found from SLO wine country, they are representative of the potential of the area...but just one of many reasons to consider it for your next wine-themed vacation.