

Welcome to My World

You just spent a great day wine tasting in Lodi and can't wait to come back and do it again. You want to learn all about the wines and maybe even live that fun wine country life yourself. Then those practical questions come up: Which wineries do I go to next? Which wines should I try? How do I tell the difference between all those wines and pronounce their weird names? What's up with all those descriptions about ripe plum, green apple, and cardamom? What is cardamom? Where is my mid-palate? What kind of food do I make for a wine country dinner? Can I even make that fancy food? Relax. You're holding the guide that will help you take your Lodi wine country experience to a whole new level. I'll tell you all about Lodi wines and how to appreciate them, how to decide what food goes with each wine, and exactly how to make the food. No previous experience required. As a bonus, I'll tell you some stories about our community, our culture, and our people through our wine and food.

I wrote this book mostly to introduce you to our amazing wines and give you the knowledge you need to fully appreciate them. The first three chapters are about Lodi and how we make great wine. I'm not trying to turn you into grape grower, winemaker, or sommelier. I just want to give you enough knowledge to appreciate the uniqueness of Lodi as a wine region, the tremendous effort that goes into growing grapes and making wine, and the many things that winemakers do to give each wine its own distinct aroma and flavor. Pairing the meals made from the recipes in this book with the recommended wines will take you from simply drinking wine to enjoying the amazing sensory experiences that are possible when you get the right combination of wine and food. I hope my cooking tips and advice will make your time in the kitchen easier, more productive, and more fun. Every recipe has a "California ingredient"—something that is either unique to our state or that our state is known for. I included these to help you better appreciate how lucky we are to live in such a bountiful part of the world.

Another reason I wrote this book is that, as far as our wines have come, to be honest, Lodi is not yet a foodie town. Like any town our size, we have several decent restaurants but none that food lovers would leave their own towns to travel here for. Aside from dining at the rather pricey Towne House Restaurant or our local gem, Zin Bistro, you will only find the great Lodi wine and food experiences at peoples' homes or at private winery events catered by professional chefs like Lisa Freeman, Warren Ito, and Paul Ratto or accomplished home cooks like Liz Bokisch, Steve Fetzer, Rodney Schatz, and Bob Smith. With a lineup like that, I hope this book is just the first of many from the burgeoning Lodi culinary scene.

I'm not exaggerating when I say that we often sit around, wine glasses in hand, talking about how blessed we are to live here in Lodi. We're at that sweet spot right now, where we have everything we need to attract the best and brightest in the wine industry and create exceptional wine country experiences, but not quite enough to be completely overrun by wine tourism. Now is the best time ever to get stuck in Lodi and enjoy our wine and food.

Why Lodi?

Lodi is one of the most exciting wine regions today, being named Wine Enthusiast's "2015 Wine Region of the Year." This honor recognizes not only excellence in wine quality, but also innovation and excitement coupled with the courage to take risks and the skill to succeed. Lodi is one of only eighteen recipients since the title was established in 2000. Previous recipients include Ribera del Duero (Portugal), Colchagua Valley (Chile), Mendoza (Argentina), Rioja (Spain), and the Rhône Valley (France). Lodi is rapidly becoming a leading wine tourism destination, with over two million visitors per year. Located seventy miles East of San Francisco and thirty-five miles south of the capital city of Sacramento, Lodi offers a low-stress, affordable alternative to the ever-increasing traffic, prices, and restrictions in the Napa Valley and Sonoma Coast. Why is that? What makes a place a great wine region?

Terroir

"Terroir" (pronounced tare-WAH) is a French term that refers to the complete natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including things like soil, topography, and climate. Lodi is located in California's Central Valley, which is very hot and dry during the summer. The sun heats the ground, which heats the air just above the ground and makes it rise. This uplift or "convection" creates a vacuum that is filled by cooler coastal air flowing slowly over the coastal mountain ranges. However, cold San Francisco Bay air flows quickly through a single opening between two coastal mountain ranges where the San Joaquin Delta rivers flow out to the Bay. These late afternoon and early evening "Delta breezes" flow right into Lodi, bringing cool air in the summer and warm, moist air in the winter (fog). A normal summer day in Lodi is 95 degrees around 3:00 pm, 70 degrees by 8:00 pm, and 60 degrees by 4:00 am. If you go more than 30 miles north or 30 miles south of Lodi, a lot of grape varieties will not grow well without excessive irrigation and special (expensive) farming methods.

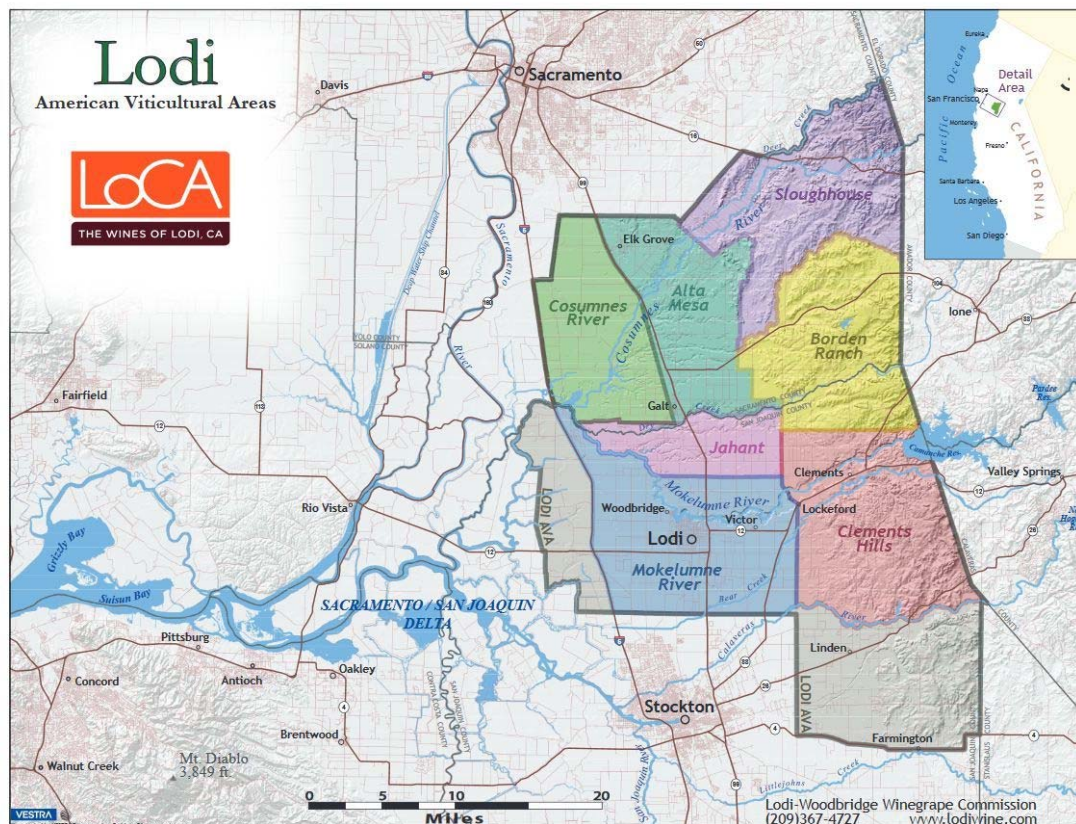


Over millennia, snowmelt and rivers have eroded the Sierra Nevada mountains, bringing billions of tons of minerals downhill and depositing them around what is now Lodi. The result is rich soils that can be six feet deep or more. Grape vine roots love to spread out and will easily take full advantage of Lodi's deep sandy loam soil. Grape vines with extensive root systems tend to age gracefully, which has allowed many multi-generation farming families to grow vines that live and produce grapes for more than 100 years.



(Map courtesy of Shannon1)

American Viticultural Areas (AVA's) are wine grape growing regions distinguishable by geographic features that are defined by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB). Most AVA's are not only defined by but are also *limited* by geographic features like mountains. The Lodi AVA, being in the middle of an extremely large valley, is only limited by where the grapes will grow. Our AVA is the largest in California with over 100,000 acres in wine grape production. Though Lodi produces more Cabernet sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, and Sauvignon blanc than any other California AVA, it is ideally suited to Zinfandel, which was the most produced grape in California in 2013. In 2002, Lodi wineries received federal approval for seven sub-regions that they can use on their labels to designate specific grape growing areas within the Lodi AVA.



(Map courtesy of the Lodi Winegrape Commission)

Passion

Passion is an essential ingredient in wine. It's just as important as the land and climate. There's no shortage of passion here in Lodi. In fact, I don't believe you will find a larger and more passionate group of wine industry people anywhere. From the most experienced, prolific award-winning winemaker to the newest member of the rapidly growing Lodi Amateur Vintner's Association (LAVA), their passion is almost uncontrollable. In Lodi, we don't just make wine, we *believe in* our wines. The best part for you is that winemakers and owners like nothing better than to see the expression on your face when you taste their product. Sure, most of the popular, busy tasting rooms are staffed with young associates new to the wine business, but unlike Napa and Sonoma, in Lodi, you will have a better than even chance of being served by the owner, someone from the owner's family, or even the winemaker. If you want to meet the winemaker, most wineries have wine club events where all the winery employees attend. You can also simply ask to meet the winemaker, and the staff will likely get you an appointment to tour the winery when they are not in the middle of a big operation. In fact, Harney Lane Winery recently won the USA Today award for the nation's best winery tour.

The phrase that sums up the Lodi wine tasting experience came from my wine aficionado friend who owns exotic cars and spends a lot of time (and money) driving them around tasting and buying the best California wines. While standing in Harmony Wyneland's tasting room listening to winery owner Bob Hartzell play his massive 2/11 Robert Morgan pipe organ, sipping award-winning Alicante bouschet poured by winemaker Shaun MacKay, my friend turned to me with a big smile and yelled:

"You can't get this in the Napa Valley!"

Don't forget the grape growing part, which is just as important as the winemaking. It's an absolute universal truth in winemaking that you can make bad wine from great grapes, but you can't make great wine from bad grapes. Farmers have been growing grapes in Lodi for 140 years. Lodi is filled with fourth and fifth generation winegrape farmers. They are everywhere. I'm a fourth generation winegrape farmer myself--a relative newcomer. In Lodi, you are judged by what you produce and what you contribute, not who you are or who you know. Our farmers mostly know each other, many grew up together, and some are related to each other. They are always willing to cooperate, share, and help out.

Lodi winegrape farmers feel connected to their land. They led the national effort to establish sustainable grape farming. *Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing* is California's original sustainable viticulture program. This program literally began from the ground up, with grape growers deciding that sustainability was important for the future of the Lodi wine region but more importantly for future generations of family farmers. The two main components of "Lodi Rules" are sustainable practices and a pesticide risk model. You will see the round, green "Lodi Rules Sustainable Winegrowing" logo on many vineyard signs and even on some wine bottles.

It is often said that to make a small fortune in the wine business you must start with a large one. In any wine region, there are people who arrive with large fortunes and create lavish properties that dazzle the imagination. Sometimes, their wines are pretty decent. Lodi has a few of those. However, the two most common stories you hear in Lodi are 1) a couple who gave up high paying careers somewhere else and spent their life savings to move to Lodi, live their dream, and create great wines; and 2) long-time farming families who borrowed a million dollars to start a winery to guarantee a market for their grapes and to entice their children to stay in an otherwise difficult and frustrating business. We have a few mega industrial wineries in town (with no shortage of passion among their employees), but for the vast majority of our boutique, small, and medium-sized wineries, the "business" is intensely personal.

Infrastructure

Lodi today is a juxtaposition of old wineries that produce massive volumes of low-priced wines and more than a hundred new wineries that produce high-quality, small lot wines. Once thought of by wine competition judges as a region they could not give a major award to, Lodi wines routinely win gold, double gold, and best of class awards in the higher price categories at prestigious national and international competitions. Twenty-five years ago, a bottle of Lodi wine selling for more than \$10 was a rarity. Today, people gladly pay \$30 to \$60, with most of those wines selling out every year. The combination of large-scale production, industrial operations, and a median home price about one-third of that in the Napa Valley ensures a large, affordable, and relatively permanent local labor force. The proliferation of small wineries that focus on quality hone the skills of this labor force. This proliferation has created a cottage industry where small wineries can easily obtain labels, laboratory services, climate-controlled case and barrel storage, wine shipping, winery equipment rentals, and mobile bottling. All this will ensure that the Lodi winegrape work force will continue to be innovators, risk takers, and highly skilled for decades to come.

Fun

Be honest. Do you really go wine tasting to expand your knowledge or critique the latest releases from wineries? Sometimes. But mostly you are there to have fun. Sure, if you stop by a popular Lodi tasting room on the Saturday afternoon of a holiday weekend, you will probably have to wait a few minutes to get a place at the counter. A few Lodi wineries now require reservations if you plan to bring, say, twenty people in a Trailways bus. But most of the time you can walk right in and get the full experience without the crowds, parking hassles, closed gates, appointments, or *traffic* of other more famous wine regions. Most wineries that are only open on weekends will take private weekday tasting appointments if you call ahead. In Lodi, you can pretty much focus on the wine tasting experience and not get overwhelmed by the logistics of getting yourself and your friends to the tasting room counter. So many Lodi tasting rooms now have picturesque settings that they use for weddings and private parties that you can easily find the perfect backdrop for your ultimate wine tasting experience or wine country event. Combine all that with exceptional wines that can surprise even the most seasoned wine aficionados and you get, well, fun.