



Fountaingrove: An Epic & Scandalous History

Fountaingrove District is named after a historic vineyard and winery in the region, Fountaingrove Winery, which was founded in 1882 by an enigmatic spiritualist and his small utopian society that same year just outside of Santa Rosa. Thomas Lake Harris built his paradise on a 600 acre patch of land he called the “Eden of the West” and it featured impressive buildings, gardens, a winery and extensive vineyard growing enough to cover around 1,800 acres in its pinnacle.

Harris could be called many things including dubious cult leader, brilliant businessman, prolific poet, perhaps even a visionary and also a con man, but he was “Father Faithful” to his loyal spiritualist followers, The Brotherhood of the New Life. While Thomas Lake Harris founded this wine legacy, insisting he was immortal and demanding the title of King, it’s his devoted follower, Kanaye Nagasawa who would be lauded internationally as “The Wine King of California.”



Thomas Lake Harris



Kanaye Nagasawa

The winery was one of California’s premiere producers both before and after Prohibition thanks to viticulturist and winemaker, Japanese-born Kanaye Nagasawa, nicknamed “Baron Nagasawa” by Californians. In fact, in its heyday the winery produced over 200,000 gallons of wine that were shipped all over the world, most notably Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Riesling. At that time, there were other vineyards and wineries of note, like Bastoni Vineyard (the source for our Karma Zin), which was originally planted in 1905 by the current owner’s grandparents. Indeed, in 1893 there were 23 wineries in the district producing thousands of gallons every year, contributing to California’s long history in the wine industry. Most of the wineries disappeared during prohibition, never to be seen again except for small vestiges of old vines and artifacts that pop up now and again in the region, discovered by hikers or farmers. Fountaingrove Winery was the longest standing, and city officials were loath to demolish it, but the buildings were so dilapidated that it was unsafe. The property had been abandoned since the 1940’s shortly after Nagasawa’s death, and slowly disappeared over the years, building by building, until this year when the winery was finally demolished. All that remains of this scandalous tale, is an architectural oddity called

The Round Barn, which still stands visible from Highway 101 in Santa Rosa. Though the old winery is gone, the spirit remains with the growers and wineries that now represent the Fountaingrove District.

The new District has a seductive history in its namesake, Fountaingrove, but it also has some serious quality in the wines it produces. Carol loves the region so much she makes two single vineyard Zinfandels from the new AVA. The 2012 Karma Zin comes from Bastoni Vineyard which snuggles up to the foot of the mountain at 145 feet elevation. They grow Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Alicante Bouschet which combine to make the full bodied and delicious Karma. Her newest addition to her Zin line up is the Peaceland Vineyard Zinfandel. It is from higher up the Mayacamas range at 1,200 feet, with shallow and rocky soils that layer in complex and dense flavors that will make your toes curl.

Fountaingrove District Today

Fountaingrove District is a very official sounding title for an AVA named after a now demolished winery that was founded by a cult in the late 19th century. It has maintained deep roots in the wine industry over the last century with family vineyards dotting the landscape, but recognition as an American Viticultural Area (AVA) will give it some public acknowledgement as a great wine producing region. With a nod to its roots, Sonoma County's newest AVA is looking forward with a focus on small family vineyards that produce quality with their own unique character. What is that unique character that makes this region distinct from its Chalk Hill, Russian River Valley and Sonoma Valley neighbors? It is those classic tenets of terroir: topography, soil, and climate. When you add on over a century of wine production you have an epic story of a new California appellation.

Dramatic Topography

Still not on any AVA map that has been published yet, Fountaingrove District became an official AVA on March 20th, 2015, making it the 17th AVA for Sonoma County. If you try to Google a current map of Sonoma's wine country, it fills in the big gaping hole of wine regions just east of Santa Rosa. Fountaingrove District's range covers 38,000 acres with only 600 acres currently planted to grapevines, and it lies between the borders of Napa Valley's Spring Mountain & Diamond Mountain in the east, Russian River Valley in the west, Chalk Hill & Knight's Valley to the north and Sonoma Valley to the south. Most noteworthy of the topography is vineyard elevations that range between 400 and 2,000 feet, with most of the vineyards are on what are considered foothills at the Western Slope of the Mayacamas Range and a few vineyards have more mountainous landscapes at upper elevations. It is quite a dramatic distance from the bottom of the mountain to the top – but the vineyards of Fountaingrove District share more than their location.

Moderate Climate

At the founding of the AVA, there were 35 vineyards that focus on Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Zinfandel, Syrah, Alicante Bouschet, Petite Sirah, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Viognier. Moderate temperatures help to define the climate, as it is shielded from most of the cooling influence of the fog and marine airflow for which the North Coast AVA is known, but isn't quite as hot as the regions to the east and south because of a lone gap in the mountain range that allows just enough of the cool marine air and a morning fog into the valley.

Tuff Soil

The soil of Fountaingrove District is composed of a well-draining mix of "Sonoma volcanics"; in some vineyards it is a blend of volcanic with Franciscan bedrock. The iron rich soil of pumiceous tuff and basalt lava are owed to the eruption of Mount St. Helena 3 million years ago. The same eruption formed the Petrified Forest and Old Faithful Geyser, both located along the edge of the region's borders. The mixed soil is perfect for growing high quality grapes that create complex and interesting wines.

Fountaingrove District growers sought TTB approval and it went through very quickly with no dissent from any individual grower or winery in their region. The concept of a small family vineyard still flourishes; cooperation and working towards a common goal have made them highly successful in creating their new AVA. It seems that the rooted ideals of a utopian society must be in the soil and air in Fountaingrove District, because that quality of communion is one that makes them stand out from other California's AVAs.



Carol Shelton

2012

KarmaZin™

Bastoni Vineyard, Sonoma County

The name KarmaZin™ was bestowed in gratitude for the many gifts of good Karma received in life, whatever the source. When positive energy is put forth in hard work mixed with integrity, the giver is rewarded with success, the fulfillment of a dream.

Winemaker's Tasting Notes:	Very complexly layered spice and black fruits, lively! Dark chocolate, Creamy oak, a bit of vanilla cola, brown spices-nutmeg/cinnamon. Rich in mouth, good structure for aging, a bit chewy in its youth.
Harvest Date:	October 11, 2012
Average Brix at Harvest:	27.2°Brix (soaked)
Fermentation Characteristics:	All fermented in 0.8-ton T-bins (4 different yeasts); Punched down by hand two times/day; Total of 16 days on skins, including 4 days cold soak pre-fermentation
Cellar Storage/Aging:	20 months in oak barrels-- 40% new & 1-yr-old French 10% new American 50% older French and American
Alcohol:	14.25%
Total Acidity:	0.62 gm/100ml
pH:	3.63 pH
Varietal Composition :	80% Zinfandel blended with 14% Alicante Bouschet, 6% Petite Sirah
Appellation :	100% Bastoni Vineyard, Fountaingrove District
Case production:	341 cases
Bottling Date:	August 2, 2014
Release Date:	January 1, 2015





Bastoni Vineyard

Name of Vineyard	Bastoni Vineyards
Name of Grower	Russ & Martha Messana
Vineyard Description	Originally planted by Martha's grandparents, Pasquale & Maria Bastoni in 1906, she and her husband, Russ Messana now cultivate 35 acres of vines. Currently planted with Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, and Alicante Bouschet, the Messana's maintain a family tradition of farming and community in the Fountaingrove
Elevation	145 feet
Soil type	Spreckles loam – common in Sonoma County
Appellation	Fountaingrove District
Varietals	Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet
Year Planted	1906-replanted in 2005
Organic/Sustainable	Sustainably farmed, but not certified
Clones	DuPratt
Rootstock	St. George
Vine training	Trellis – vertical shoot positioning
Pruning System	2-bud spurs
Irrigation Type	Drip irrigation
Average Crop Yield	2-3 T/acre