

BIG VALLEY & KELSEY BENCH

On the elevated ridges and flanks of the Mayacamas Mountains to the west and the Vaca Range to the east, Lake County's 8,380 acres of vineyards ring one of the oldest geological lakes in North America. Under cobalt blue skies that boast the purest air in California, one hundred and forty growers cultivate vines in an astounding array of soils, from rocky volcanic highlands to mountain valleys lined with gravelly river courses.

Lake County's intensity of place — climate, soils, and sunlight — produces grapes and wine of compelling quality and character.



OVERVIEW

Runoff over millennia have eroded the Mayacamas' young volcanic foothills of Kelsey Bench into the ancient clays and deposits of Big Valley on the shores of Clear Lake, North America's oldest lake, estimated to be two and a half million years old. Big Valley's mix of gravel, clay and loam, bright sunlight from the 1,400 feet elevation, and cool nights produces remarkable Sauvignon Blancs, establishing Lake County as one of the premier California regions for the varietal. Volcanic Kelsey Bench and the gravel seams in Big Valley produce intense and balanced Zinfandels and Cabernet Francs. Big Valley growers were among the first visionaries to discover the region's winegrape potential and began planting vineyards in the 1960s, the first in Lake County since Prohibition.

TOPOGRAPHY

Bordered by Clear Lake on the north, the Mayacamas on the west and south, and Mt. Konocti on the east.

Big Valley

Big Valley is a structural basin that is part of the larger Clear Lake basin.

Kelsey Bench

Originally a pyroclastic lava flow, the bench is a transition between the volcanic mountains and the alluvial flood plain. It has a largely northeastern exposure.

ELEVATION

Vineyard elevations range from 1,330 to 1,440 feet in Big Valley while Kelsey Bench vineyards are planted up to 1,600 feet. Higher elevations and Lake County's pure air allow for greater levels of UV light, as much as 10% more than neighboring sea level valleys. This UV intensity triggers thicker skins, greater tannins, and intense wines with high phenolic content.

SOILS

Kelsey Bench forms an arc of rich, red volcanic soils. The evolving watershed has eroded into the fertile blocks of clay and loam soils of Big Valley resulting in swaths of gravel deposits and well-drained soils.

ACREAGE

3,288 acres

CLIMATE

Warm days are moderated by the thermal mass of Clear Lake. Afternoon breezes carry down from the ridges of the Mayacamas and initiate afternoon cooling that often results in 50° diurnal cycles, key to retaining acidity in mature wine grapes. Cold winters and dry summers allow for low rates of pesticide and other applications.

VARIETALS

Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Viogner, Riesling, Cabernet Franc, Zinfandel and Merlot.