

best kept secret of the *West Coast*

You won't find Howell Mountain wines everywhere. But when you do, grab some of California's consistently finest Cabs and Zins.

There's a fascinating texture to the Howell Mountain experience, both in tasting the wines of the region and in experiencing the place. "Above the fog" is what they call it. While that explains the climatic conditions that make the grapes so special, it doesn't really convey a sense of the place, its history, or its products.

In tasting the wine, consistent quality is the hallmark. There is an elegance, a maturity of technique, and an exquisite balance to the mountain's signature offerings of Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel across the board. Consistently highly rated, these wines are not found on supermarket shelves. Most growers nurture small acreage and parcel out their limited production to loyal followers. None are open every day to the public; some are open by appointment, and others are virtually impossible to access without a personal entrée.

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The marine fog layer extends up from the San Francisco Bay and crawls up the mountain to the 1400 ft. level, leaving the top of the mountain in the sunlight to ripen the grapes and create warm days and cool nights so loved by the vines. And it is the nutrient-poor soil with its high content of minerals that cause the vines to struggle and produce intense berries and amazing flavors in the wine. It's because Howell Mountain was the first appellation to be recognized within Napa Valley that the winemakers there have refined their technique over the years.

But there's something else . . . there's a texture to the place, to the wine, and to the people. You just have to experience it yourself, I guess, to know what I mean.

For full information on the Howell Mountain appellation in Napa Valley, go to HowellMountain.org or call 707.252.6229. Airport: Angwin-Parrett Field Airport (203). Call ahead for tasting appointments, and be sure to view the 10 min. video on the home page.