

# San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

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## THE WINE PAGE

### Tasting Shows if Terroir Counts

**G**eography is a hot issue in winemaking. Winemakers who are concerned about the loss of regional identity are turning back to the land. They are committed to single-vineyard wines that express the distinct personality of the vineyard. It's what the French call *terroir*.

Single-vineyard wines are not a new concept. But a growing number of California winemakers are

#### WINE POTPOURRI

Gerald D. Boyd

recognizing that certain pieces of land have distinct characteristics that can be coaxed from the grapes.

Nickel & Nickel, a small-lot, single vineyard winery developed by Far Niente partners Gil Nickel, Dirk Hampson and Larry Maguire, has released a string of 100 percent varietal wines from single vineyards they believe express individual characteristics. The first releases from the 1997 vintage include a Merlot from Jameson Canyon, a Cabernet Sauvignon from Coombsville, three more Cabernets from vineyards in Oakville and the only non-Napa wine, a Zinfandel from Sonoma's Russian River Valley.

I recently tasted all of these wines and can say that, without exception, they are all excellent, with individual personalities. But as good as these wines are, I'm not sure that each wine's individuality isn't as much an expression of winemaking as it is of vineyard character. Moreover, will even the most demanding wine fan appreciate the geographic subtleties of these wines as much as the grower and winemaker do?

Let's take a closer look at each wine.



KAY WADE / THE CHRONICLE

#### GRAPES OF CABERNET:

Does "terroir" affect how a varietal will taste?