Over the last half century, Napa Valley has fought to be recognized as one of the best places in the world to grow vines and make wine — and it’s safe to say it’s succeeded.

The valley attracts nearly 4 million visitors a year, according to Visit Napa Valley, who come to taste its famous Cabernet Sauvignon, dine at Michelin-starred restaurants and take in the beautiful scenery. Wines from Napa’s top estates command as much praise —
and as much money — as any in the world: Many of its bottles are so collectible, and represent such strong investments, that they’re traded at auctions.

By now, Napa Valley is more than merely a place. It’s one of the great American brands, as synonymous with fine wine as Silicon Valley is with tech, Wall Street with money or Hollywood with films.

But Napa is in a moment of flux. Serial wildfires have threatened it in recent years. Climate change and warming temperatures have called into question whether its main cash crop, Cabernet Sauvignon, will remain viable into the next generation. Debates over how Napa’s land should be used have deeply divided residents. Corporations are quickly buying up some of the valley’s most beloved wineries from the families that founded them.

These are the issues that we cover daily in The Chronicle’s Food + Wine Department. But we wanted to step back and consider this turning point from new perspectives. That’s how this collection of stories was born.

We’ll continue to report on Napa Valley, watching it evolve as as an industry, as a brand, as a place. For now, we hope you’ll guzzle down these stories as salient examples of this pivotal moment.

---

**Revisiting Napa’s ‘Disneyland’ wineries**

*We all know the valley’s tourist traps*
Some of the most popular tasting rooms in Napa Valley are also the most controversial among locals. We visited these love-them-or-hate-them wineries and render verdicts: Are they actually fun?

Go to Story

Is Napa Valley Cabernet all starting to taste the same?
There is such a thing as too much perfection

I take a hard look at the luxury product that keeps Napa Valley running, Cabernet Sauvignon, and argue that the economics governing winemaking in Napa have encouraged homogeneity.
The most historic wineries are staging a comeback

Why multimillion-dollar rebrands are suddenly the norm

Wineries like Clos du Val, Heitz, Robert Mondavi and Charles Krug have all endeavored major renovations recently (and, in many cases, upped their prices accordingly). Wine reporter Jess Lander explores this sweeping trend.

Meet the power players

The names you need to know
A new set of influential entrepreneurs has emerged in Napa Valley. Here’s why these empire builders are worth watching in the years to come.

The labor shortage in Napa’s vineyards

The children of farmworkers don’t want to be farmworkers
Jess Lander reports on a generational shift among the families that power Napa Valley's vineyards, and how employers are scrambling to attract labor.

Esther Mobley is The San Francisco Chronicle's senior wine critic. Email: emobley@sfchronicle.com Twitter: @Esther_mobley

Sign up for Chronicle Food newsletter
The latest news from The Chronicle's Food and Wine team.
Senior wine critic Esther Mobley joined The Chronicle in 2015 to cover California wine, beer and spirits. Previously she was an assistant editor at Wine Spectator magazine in New York, and has worked harvests at wineries in Napa Valley and Argentina.