

Be the First to Discover Petaluma Gap, Sonoma's Next AVA

Ian White

When wine country's newest region becomes official, the crowds will follow. Here's where to go before the tourist crush. Still a whisper among wine lovers, Petaluma Gap is named for a 15-mile-wide break in the coastal mountain range. Wind and fog are pulled through the vines on their way from Bodega Bay to San Francisco Bay, creating a climate that's cooler than nearby Russian River Valley and Sonoma Valley. The chilling effect of the fog translates to a longer growing season, which in turn produces delicate, fruit-driven wines with typically lower alcohol and sugar. This spring the Petaluma Gap Winery Alliance completed the first of five steps to become its own American Viticultural Area, or AVA, an arduous process that can take months or even years. And when Petaluma Gap goes legit—it shouldn't have a problem clearing all the hurdles—tourists will surely follow.



Pfendler Vineyards

Winery: Pfendler Vineyards

Wine to try: rosé of pinot noir, \$18

What makes this place special? Some might call me crazy for picking the rosé over Pfendler's celebrated chardonnay or pinot noir, but it's almost summer and I couldn't resist. The rosé is packed with red berries, sweet melon, and citrus, but yoFu can also find stone fruit and other hints of summer in this salmon-colored wine. Wines of this quality and scarcity are often overpriced, so it's a bit of a surprise that they are all under \$50, and well worth the splurge if you don't often break the \$25 barrier.

What else? The winery lacks a tasting room, and the staff is minimal, so it's a challenge to visit. But Kimberly Pfendler has offered to host vineyard tours for those that mention this story. Who's an insider now?