



RODRIGO SOTO OF FAR MOUNTAIN WINES OVERSEES HARVEST IN THE FAINT LIGHT OF EARLY MORNING. COURTESY OF MIKE BATTERY

TRAVEL FEATURES

## Dreamy Cabernets Are Hiding in the Clouds of Moon Mountain

BY TOM R. CAPO | 6 MIN READ



High in the hills above [Sonoma Valley](#), where the peaks of the [Mayacamas](#) range form the boundary between [Napa](#) and Sonoma counties, grow some of [California](#)'s best [Cabernets](#). In the [Moon Mountain AVA](#), iron-rich soils, [old vines](#), and upwards of 2,200 feet of elevation combine to create a framework for [age-worthy](#) wines that possess a true sense of place. Up here, old-school Sonoma winemaking and energetic new projects are sharing the hillsides and a vision for the future of California Cabernet.

Although the Moon Mountain AVA has been recognized only since 2013, the region's oldest vines date back to the 1850s, when early farmers like James Hamilton (Montecillo Vineyard) and Thomas Nau (Nuns Canyon Ranch) cleared trees from elevated slopes to plant a range of popular varieties. Subsequent replantings have sharpened the focus, and now Cabernet reigns supreme. This isn't surprising, given that the opposite slope of this hillside is the [Mount Veeder AVA](#) in Napa Valley. But the wines of Moon Mountain are distinct, bearing the clear imprint of [volcanic soils](#) and a persistent [acidity](#) that seems to resonate throughout the appellation. Wines here are powerful but seldom bombastic. Energetic, but never chaotic. It's the mark of a truly great wine region beginning to find its footing.

Rodrigo Soto, co-owner of [Far Mountain Wines](#) and a member of the [Moon Mountain District Winegrowers Association](#), was drawn to the magic of the area before it became a recognized appellation. "There's something energetic about being out there," he says "[Moon Mountain] has a special connection. It feels private, feels remote, feels wild."

Like-minded producers here are embracing and refining [organic](#) and [regenerative](#) techniques, [dry-farming](#), and [biodynamics](#) in pursuit of ever more exceptional wines from these slopes. [Gallo](#)'s Monte Rosso Vineyard converted to organic farming over the past few years and was [certified](#) in July 2025. Brenae Royal, who began the process, believes that it just makes sense to farm this way on Moon Mountain. "Everybody has this same idea of wanting to increase the soil activity and use a lot of regenerative practices," she says.



Up Nuns Canyon Road, at some of the oldest vineyards in the AVA, Montecillo Vineyard is farming organically and preparing for certification, while [Hamel Family Wines'](#) Nuns Canyon Vineyard is biodynamic as well as dry farmed. [Stone Edge Farm's](#) Silver Cloud Estate Vineyard is farmed organically by Phil Coturri. The list goes on, and while there's a variety of practices on the hill, the shared philosophy is as clear as the view from the top of the ridge: Let the land speak and let the vines do the work.

The roads up Moon Mountain aren't necessarily easy to navigate, but the wines, the people, and the views are all worth the trip. Here are a few estates to check out if you're craving some Cabernet or just a bit of mountain air.



HILLSIDE ROWS PRODUCE DISTINCTIVE CABERNET AT KAMEN VINEYARDS. COURTESY OF KAMEN ESTATE WINES

## Classic Moon Mountain Wineries

### Stone Edge Farm

Chalone Wine Group co-founder Mac McQuown purchased Silver Cloud in 2012, just before Moon Mountain became an appellation. Only about 10% of the estate is planted to vines, but Alejandro Zimman's style in the cellar yields complex and [elegant](#) wines that will thrill [Bordeaux](#) fans, and the views aren't too shabby either. [Stone Edge Farm](#) also operates [Enclos](#), a two-Michelin-starred restaurant in downtown Sonoma that's worth a splurge.

### Kamen Estate Wines

Robert [Kamen](#), the screenwriter who penned the Karate Kid movies, was an early pioneer of Moon Mountain winemaking. His excellent, classically styled Cabernets and other wines are available at his tasting room in downtown Sonoma or at the absolutely stunning vineyard. It's worth the drive up the hill.

### Stewart Cellars

Blair Guthrie recently purchased the historic Montecillo Vineyard, which makes a lovely counterpoint to [Stewart Cellars'](#) otherwise Napa-focused portfolio. Montecillo's historic vines produce elegant Cabernets with energetic acidity that balances their considerable [tannin](#). You'll need to pop over to Napa to taste with Stewart Cellars, as the tasting room is in [Yountville](#). This lineup is a great way to contemplate the differences between the eastern and western slopes of the Mayacamas.