

IDLEWILD

Top 25 Wineries

The best wineries to visit in the Bay Area

- San Francisco Chronicle 2025

“A rapidly proliferating group of devotee winemakers and growers have been grafting, planting and producing a wide variety of Italian grape varieties throughout the state of California, and the results of their efforts are now far too good to ignore.” - Alder Yarrow

Year Founded: 2012

Region: Mendocino County, California

Founder/Winemaker: Sam Bilbro

Known For: Drawing inspiration from his family's history—his father Chris founded Marietta Cellars—Sam set out to craft wines that marry the elegance of Italy's Piedmont region with the vibrancy of northern California.

-Organic-

“I grew up hanging out in a winery converted from an old cow barn, walking vineyards, and tasting blends with my dad. Later, while in the restaurant industry, I was exposed to wines from across the globe and was especially struck by the wines of Italy's Piedmont. Learning natural systems and the world of wine in general was my route to making wine and starting Idlewild. I was also fortunate to have many friends and family to learn from along the way. As Idlewild has grown, I have had the great fortune of building a team who I feel so lucky to work alongside. When your coworkers feel like your family, something is working right.” -Sam Bilbro, Founder, Managing Partner and Winemaker



Idlewild has a relatively concise aim within a broad context: to produce wines of exceptional balance and beauty. It is a journey to pursue Italy's Piedmont in the elevated hills of Mendocino County, and to find the sides of these varieties that are intriguing, delicious, and haunting. Each wine is unique and treated as such, though the common thread is balancing depth and seriousness with vibrancy and joy. Emphasis is on the vineyard followed by minimalist winemaking techniques. While not dogmatic in practice, an honest and sustainable approach is fundamental in making wines of purity. Idlewild has a few homes but Fox Hill makes up the core of the Flora & Fauna blends.

Fox Hill Vineyard is located southeast of Ukiah on Mendocino's Talmage Bench, the soils are well drained with high concentrations of gravel, quartz, and sandstone. What makes this site so special is the fact that Lowell Stone decided to buck every trend and simply plant what he was interested in planting. Many trips to Italy turned to inspiration and the wild spectrum of varieties began to take root.



Flora & Fauna White Wine 2024

Winemaking starts in the vineyard, and my preference is to work with sites that require minimal to no work. In other words, the basics done right and well timed are all a great site needs. When that is the case, the winemaking becomes a simple game of guiding the fruit to be what it already is. I time picking for this blend to when the core of the wine's pieces overlay into a balance of bright acidity with emerging tones of aromatic depth. From there, the grapes were whole cluster pressed, fermented via native yeasts, left on all the lees and solids, aged in neutral oak, and underwent native secondary fermentation. Complexity and texture are gained from allowing secondary fermentation and aging on lees in neutral oak for four months, while the structure and acidity from picking plenty early allow for great vibrancy and energy through the wine.

A balance of florals (orange blossoms), minerals (wet stones), citrus (lemon peel), and orchard fruit (pear). Just when the wine starts to feel intense in its phenolics and aromatics, the palate turns to this near rain water like lightness with a crisp and clean finish.

92 Points - '23 Vinous - *"Aromatic and light on its feet, with lovely inner perfume and nuance. Terrific. Orchard fruit, white flowers, mint, spice and light tropical overtones add vibrancy. The Muscat is quite expressive here."*



Flora & Fauna Rosé Wine 2024

To say the least, it is an unconventional idea for Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, Barbera, and Grignolino to be co-fermented for a rosé. It should be noted that these grapes ripen at very different times. But in this case, they were all picked together at the moment when their different qualities and stages of ripeness came together and were complimentary. In the winery, the grapes were whole cluster pressed, fermented via native yeast, left on all the lees and solids, aged in neutral oak and stainless steel, and underwent native secondary fermentation. Complexity and texture are gained from allowing secondary fermentation and aging on lees for four months, while the structure and acidity from picking plenty early allow for great vibrancy and energy through the wine.

Shows all the bright and fresh sides of rosé we love with a pronounced structure to pair with food. There is a play between savory versus fresh and subtlety versus power that make this wine very intriguing. The aromas are wound up around orange peel, grapefruit, alpine herbs, peach, wildflowers, and sea spray. The four varieties can all be seen in the structure: Nebbiolo and Grignolino lend the crunchy minerality, Dolcetto lends a delicate softness, and Barbera lends bright acidity.

92 Points - '23 Vinous - *"Delightful. Cranberry, alpine flowers, mint, rose petal and white pepper give the Rosé quite a bit of brightness to complement its md-weight personality. Even in this cold, late-ripening year, the Rosé has very good depth."*



Flora & Fauna Red Wine 2023

All of these varieties have structure and at the same time a joyous side. The focus in fermentation was to build enough structure for a very versatile food wine but also to emphasize the exuberant and delicious elements of each grape. To do this, the wines were left largely whole cluster and all fermentations started with carbonic maceration. That being said, none of them were pushed to be fully carbonic wines. Instead, the initial lift in aromatics and push on frothy fresh fruits was achieved, and then I fully treaded the wines to allow fermentation to switch to a more standard flow. This gave a backbone and savory qualities to act as bass notes to the carbonic high tones. All of the wines were pressed a touch early to ensure that the tannic structure was appropriate for a shorter time in barrel, just four months in neutral oak.

92 Points - '22 Vinous - *"Supremely delicious. A burst of sweet red cherry fruit, spice, orange peel, lavender and rose petal makes a strong opening statement. This fresh, inviting red blend is an absolute delight."*



Nebbiolo 2019

Lost Hills Ranch sits on a lonely ridge in the Yorkville Highlands. Located near the southwest corner of Mendocino County, the climate is marked by a clash of maritime and continental influence. At 1500 feet of elevation, the vineyard often looks down on the fog hugging the valley below, or transversely, the cooling winds run along the ridge as the heat sinks on warmer days. The soils are comprised of deep fractured sandstone with veins of schist. The vine roots work hard to push deep into the rock, and in turn, a powerful core can be found in the fruit grown here. I always look towards traditional methods from Piemonte while focusing on the fact that I am in Northern California. The Nebbiolo very much comes from this place of balancing tradition reimagined in new soil. The grapes were left 100% whole cluster and foot trodden. The wine was fermented via native yeast in Slovenien oak vats and then topped and sealed up for an extended maceration of nearly ninety total days on skins (and stems). This is old fashioned, but it yielded amazing depth and spectrum in a decidedly ethereal feeling wine. A year in Slovenien oak vats, then a year in large format Slovenien oak Botti, and finally a year in bottle is the timeline of it's elevage.

The nose is a study in contrasts: cherry, roses, orange peel, and violets are balanced by tar, earth, and sandalwood like spice. The long elevage in large format Slovenien oak lends a retention of freshness while also filling out the structure. The mouthfeel is delicate with modest mid palate richness, and then it gently rolls into firm tannin and a long finish. While a joy to drink now, this wine has many years in its future.



Arneis 2022

Lost Hills Ranch sits on a lonely ridge in the Yorkville Highlands. Located near the southwest corner of Mendocino County, the climate is marked by a clash of maritime and continental influence. At 1500 feet of elevation, the vineyard often looks down on the fog hugging the valley below, or transversely, the cooling winds run along the ridge as the heat sinks on warmer days. The soils are comprised of deep fractured sandstone with veins of schist. The vine roots work hard to push deep into the rock, and in turn, a powerful core can be found in the fruit grown here. Arneis ripens quickly. Its acidity can fall away overnight on the vine, but one of the pleasures of Arneis is the floral notes that can be lost if picked too early. So, harvesting at just the right moment is harder and more crucial with Arneis than with other varieties as that perfect window is small and fleeting. With that in mind, I always agonize over the timing of Arneis and then feel rewarded by good choices. Once in the cellar, there is little to do. The wine is fermented via native yeast in stainless steel after a whole cluster pressing. Secondary fermentation and aging for four months in neutral oak on lees adds texture and complexity that are counterbalanced by being sure to pick while the acidity is still racy and pure.

Jasmine tea, pear, fennel, and lemon balm are all aromatic highlights. The palate has a powerful phenolic core yet also a lightness like fresh rain. The finish is bright with acidity and a pleasant hint of almond bitterness.