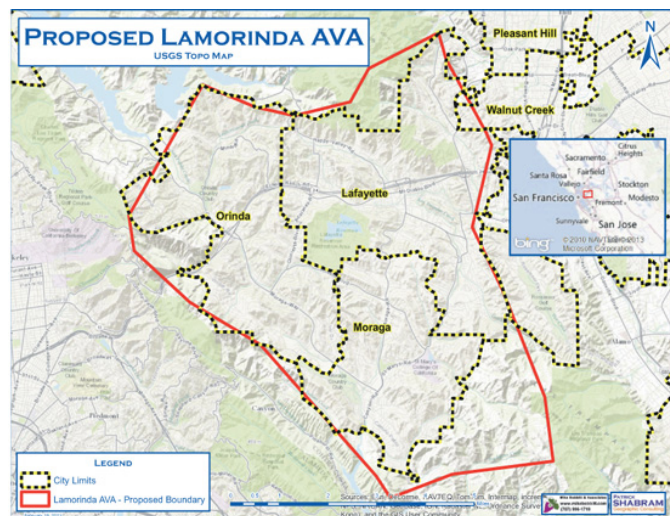


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## Lamorinda Gets Closer to Official Wine Region Designation

By Sophie Braccini



Map provided

L. Shabram, a geographer who drafted the petition to the US Department of Treasury Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB).

What was discovered is that Lamorinda grapes grow on uplifted sedimentary rock that is a younger, less resistant sedimentary rock than neighboring rock. It was also found out that soils are higher in clay content (which will not surprise anybody), and that combined with the gentle sloping of the terrain permits good drainage.

Lamorinda also has a unique climate, protected from coastal cooling influences, an area of transition from cooler, marine-influenced climates to warmer inland climates, with multiple microclimate pockets due to the topography. The last unique characteristic is the suburban setting. The AVA covers 29,369 acres and includes approximately 121 acres of planted vines and planned plantings across approximately 42 vineyards. Those are a large number of small vineyards, mixed in low density housing areas, where all the work is done by hand.

"We had no idea about the geology of the area, they (Oskin and Verosub) identified that fact fairly quickly on geological maps, and confirmed with field work and testing, and the area coincides with the boundary of Lamorinda," said AVA Committee leader Dave Rey, who served as the liaison to the UC Davis experts and professionals who worked on the application. "The grapes grown here are different. The combination of the terrain, the warm days and cooler nights makes it perfect for growing grapes. We need that designation to represent what's unique about our growing circumstance."

LWGA also researched the history of wine making in Lamorinda and discovered that growing grapes in Lamorinda goes way back. The 1860 census showed that local growers John Grinnell, Daniel Hunsaker, Isaac Hunsaker, and William B. Rodgers collectively produced 623 gallons of wine in the Lafayette/Alamo area (Alamo is not part of the proposed AVA). Then in 1907, Serafino Rossi started growing wine grapes commercially at a site currently occupied by Reliez Valley Vineyards in Lafayette. In Moraga the Trelut brothers who settled there in 1880 planted vines, and in Orinda by 1897, Theodore Wagner was commercially growing grapes.

"We were amazed to find out how unique we are," commented LWGA President Susan Captain, "and very excited because this appellation will bring value to Lamorinda. It puts a stamp on how distinct we are."

As the process went on, some property owners - some part of LWGA - found out they could not be part of the AVA without compromising the scientific criteria. Some parts of Orinda close to the Caldecott Tunnel and some areas of Lafayette close to Walnut Creek had to be excluded; Canyon altogether could not be added. On the other hand, one Indian Valley property in Moraga, which had not been included at first, was added after the consultant researched the property.

The Lamorinda application has been formally accepted by the TTB, which means the TTB agrees that a new AVA is likely warranted. "We are now entering a process that could take two years," warned Captain. First the TTB creates what is called a "proposed rule making" in support of the AVA, which could take a year. Then a comment period will be opened to the public, and the TTB will prepare a "final rule" that will be published in the Federal Register as a treasury decision.

Although some new information could still cause the TTB to change its mind, LWGA says that is extremely rare. "We are confident that our application will be accepted; it is just a matter of time," said Rey. "In the meantime, we at LWGA will focus on the quality of our wines, a work of love that combines science and art."

At its regular Libation Party at the Moraga Barn June 19, the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association celebrated the acceptance of its application for Lamorinda to become an official grape growing region. Once the decision is ratified and published, which can take up to two years, local growers will be able to include the official appellation "Lamorinda Wine" on their bottle labels.

Working with experts as the group developed their application, they discovered that Lamorinda is even more unique than they thought. Not only is it a historical wine-growing region with a unique climate, but the geology in Lamorinda is unlike that of its neighbors. Unfortunately, meeting certain criteria of Lamorinda's unique geology meant that some properties had to be left out of the American Viticultural Area.

In order to apply to get an appellation with some chance of success, many criteria had to be scientifically demonstrated. LWGA hired two geologists, Dr. Michael Oskin and Dr. Kenneth L. Verosub (a specialist of the relationship between soils and wine), from the University of California, Davis to study the local geology and soil, as well as Patrick

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