Lake County refines its Reds

By Tim Teichgraeber

After two decades of heavy investment and pioneering work by an infusion of ambitious winegrowers, Lake County — once a hotbed for lemons for gateway blush wines — is knocking loud, inside-over-with-more-thoughtfully-sited vineyards and state-of-the-art winemaking facilities. Meanwhile, the region's cool nights and prolonged growing season yield exquisite fruit for premium reds. Here's how it was also known for cheesy Cabernet Sauvignon and other reds. Now emphasis is changing on the high-altitude Bench Mark Ridge and Red Hills AVAs. Red Hills Appellation, most of the vineyards now hand-farming, wines, especially Cabernet Sauvignon.

Geographically, Lake County abuts the Mayacamas Mountains to the west, Napa County to the south and Mendocino County to the north. Its vineyards are scattered around the shores of Clear Lake, which is the largest natural freshwater lake entirely within California. Lake County's 8,600 vineyard acres are planted in a rough quadrangle, with the lake at its center. Most of the vineyards are on the lake's west side, between Clear Lake and the Mayacamas Mountains, and on the east side, between the lake and the Mayacamas Mountains, and on the east side, between the lake and the Mayacamas Mountains, and on the east side, between the