



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

Volume 10, Issue 7 April 6, 2015

*The proof of
Pinot is in the
drinking*

2015 World of Pinot Noir: Adventure Along the Pinot Trail

This year's Fifteenth Anniversary World of Pinot Noir (WOPN) was held March 6-7 at the Bacara Resort & Spa in Goleta, California. Fifteen hundred Pinot geeks reveled in the sunny and glorious weather and the Pinot Noir smorgasbord of unlimited options. With 225 wineries participating, each of which was pouring multiple offerings, one had to be in peak shape for this bacchanalia. On Friday, if you participated in the seminar, "Latitudes & Longitudes," chaired by Janus Robinson, the luncheon that followed, the Pinot Noir Focus Tasting in the afternoon, and any of four dinners offered in the evening, you could have tasted an outrageous number of Pinots. If you were in superb condition, you could have done it all over on Saturday by attending the Burgundy Seminar and its luncheon, the Pinot Noir Grand Tasting, and one of the three special dinners presented that evening.

The WOPN was truly the "World" of Pinot Noir with wineries from Australia, Austria, British Columbia, Chile, France, Italy, South Africa, and New Zealand participating. Stateside, all major Pinot Noir growing regions of California were represented, and wineries from Oregon's Willamette Valley, the New York Finger Lakes, and the Leelanau Peninsula of Michigan were present.



I came away with a few general impressions:

- 1) More wineries are bottling Pinot Noir using some proportion of whole cluster fermentation. There are several reasons for this, including more favorable and extended ferments, appealingly complex spice and rose petal aromatics, and favorable textural changes (stem tannins are silky and smooth).
- 2) There is no “Holy Grail” region for Pinot Noir in California. Multiple quality growing areas have been identified, but the vines are still relatively young in most areas. I tasted superb wines from all major California appellations.
- 3) At the walk-around Pinot Noir Focus Tastings, the most rewarding tasting tables were those staffed by the winery’s winemaker or owner, who not only were informative but put a face to a wine. The character of the person who made the wine is highly relevant to how that wine tastes. Below are Tom and Susan Higgins of Hearts and Hands Wine Company who travel to the event each year from the Finger Lakes region of New York.



- 4) The large Pinot Noir Focus Tastings are not an ideal setting for evaluate wines critically. That said, Pinot Noir is a lot like love: you know it when the right one comes along.
- 5) Attendees at the large Pinot Noir Focus Tastings often gravitate to the “name” producers, and ignore the small, boutique wineries that are relatively unknown. This is unfortunate, for they miss out on some of the most appealing wines. Every year I find undiscovered wineries that intrigue or impress. This year it was Center of Effort Wines, Cotiere Winery, DELLA Wines and Stephen Goff Wines.
- 6) Attendees of the large Focus Tastings would be better served if they had a plan when they enter. For example, limit yourself to Pinot Noir from a certain region or appellation in California, or just taste Pinot Noir from Oregon, or just taste Pinot Noir from a certain vintage. This way, one can leave with some comparable, useful information.
- 7) I find it thrilling to bump into readers of the *PinotFile* that I have never met and receive their impressions of the newsletter (and hopefully accolades).
- 8) Attendees should learn to spit. It is simple to learn (try practicing with water) and there is no reason to be self-conscious about doing it because no one is interested in watching you spit anyway.
- 9) Practically every 2012 vintage wine I tasted from Anderson Valley was exceptional, even extraordinary. Stock up while the wines are still available.
- 10) The offerings from Big Basin Vineyards, Maggy Hawk and Phelps Creek Vineyards really stood out from the pack.

Tastes of World of Pinot Noir

I tasted Pinot Noir both at the Friday and Saturday Pinot Noir Focus Tastings and in the Press and Media Room where some wineries provided wines to be sampled in a quiet, undisturbed setting. Either way, my notes are based on brief impressions, not extensive tasting as done in the usual manner for my newsletter. There were so many wineries, I could only taste a small portion of the wines offered, but you can tell some of my favorite producers by the wineries that I made a point of seeking out. Quite a few of the wineries at the event previously submitted wines to me for review, and since I have already published the reviews for the wines they were pouring, these were not included here. Pay attention more to producers than individual wines. I have given the recommended wines a scoring range: 88-89, 90-91, 92-94, 94+. Wines that scored lower than 88 are not included so there may seem to be a cornucopia of inflated scores.

Alma Rosa Winery & Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills

2012 Alma Rosa Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.97% alc., 918 cases, \$35, screwcap. The best value priced Pinot Noir offering I tasted at this year's WOPN. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of Damsel plum, raspberry and spice with medium weight flavors of sappy black cherry and raspberry fruits with a note of grilled mushrooms, framed by modest tannins. Very easy approachability. 90-91.*

Arcadian, Sta. Rita Hills

2000 Arcadian Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir This is not a misprint! *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. A fine aged wine with aromas of black cherry liquor, tobacco, dried herbs and dark chocolate. Secondary characters of leather and herbs accent the sweet, dried cherry core. Juicy acidity, melded tannins and some finishing drive. 92-94.* (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2008 Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir are still for sale on the winery's website - \$75-\$100)

BARDEN (Margerum Wine Co.), Santa Barbara

BARDEN Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., \$85. Zotovich Family, La Encantada and John Sebastiano vineyards. 30% whole cluster, ambient yeast fermentation, aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Plenty of oak overlay in this wine which has an appealing core of bright cherry fruit. Vivid and vibrant with zippy acidity. 88-89.*

Baxter Winery, Anderson Valley

2012 Baxter Oppenlander Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir \$60. 100% whole cluster. Aged in 100% neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Enticing whole cluster accents of spice and rose petal goodness on the nose and palate. Bold flavors of earth-kissed darker fruits unencumbered by oak with a freshness and vivaciousness that appeals. Somewhat brooding and in need of decanting. 92-94.*

2012 Baxter Valenti Vineyard Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir \$48. Vineyard is high upon Greenwood Ridge above the fog line and bathed in sunshine while moderation from the nearby ocean keeps grape maturation slow and steady. 30% whole cluster. *Moderately light red cherry color in the glass. Aromas of cherries, strawberries, spice and herbal tea. Flavors of black stone fruits and pomegranate with a riff of savory herbal notes in the background. The fine-grain, lithe tannins and juicy acidity make for easy drinking. 92-94.*

Beauregard Vineyards, Santa Cruz Mountains

2012 Coast Grade Vineyard '828' Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 120 cases, \$60. Vineyard is located in Bonny Doon (Ben Lomond subregion) and is owned and farmed by Jim Beauregard. This 17-acre vineyard was planted in 2008 at 1,238' to 1,350' elevation and is heavily influenced by nearby Monterey Bay. 50% whole cluster. Aged in 50% new American oak. It's rare if ever you meet a Pinot Noir aged in a significant amount of American Oak, much less one made with a single '828' clone. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. A pleasant surprise with aromas and flavors of fresh blackberry, cassis and pomegranate. Discreetly concentrated with a likable touch of whole cluster spice complimenting the fruit. A saline-driven minerality plays in the background. 92-94.*

Big Basin Vineyards, Santa Cruz Mountains

As noted in the introduction, more Pinot Noir wineries are fermenting with whole cluster in amounts ranging from 30% to 100%. Winemaker Bradley Brown has been so satisfied with whole cluster ferments that he plans to go to 100% whole cluster inclusion in all his 2014 vintage Pinot Noirs. All four of the wines he offered for tasting were gorgeous and nuanced.

2013 Big Basin Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 325 cases, \$36. A stunning modestly priced offering sourced from the winery's single vineyard sources in Corralitos and Bonny Doon (Lester Family and Coast Grade) 50% whole cluster, indigenous yeast fermentation, aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *The whole cluster goodness makes an impression on the nose with plenty of rose petal and spice aromas enhancing the red berry fruit. The tannins are firm but tucked in, and the finish is reasonably long and satisfying. An everyday wine for the table. 90-91.*

2012 Big Basin Vineyards Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 220 cases, \$44. 42% whole cluster, indigenous fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Aromatically inviting with scents of rose petal, exotic spices, anise and dark raspberries. Generous on the attack and finish, with fresh flavors of dark cherry and berry that expand in the mouth. Very suave in the mouth with beautifully integrated tannins. 92-94.*

2012 Big Basin Vineyards Alfaro Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., 145 cases, \$48. 43% whole cluster, indigenous yeast fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *A savory wine of great interest with plenty of spice and floral nuances supplementing the core of red and black berry and cherry fruits. Impressive phenolic ripeness at this alcohol level with enough sappy fruit to satisfy any Pinot drinker. The stem tannins are firm and slightly astringent and need time to integrate. 92-94.*

2012 Big Basin Vineyards Crestview Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 240 cases, \$44. 20% whole cluster, indigenous yeast, aged 15 months in French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Tighter and more tannic than the other wines tasted on this day, but still offering impressive flavor and nuance. The aromas are quite floral with hints of cherry and herbs. Modest in weight, but flavorful, with notes of spiced cherry, anise and pain grille, building in intensity to a lavish and long-lived finish. 92-94.*

Brewer-Clifton Wines, Sta. Rita Hills

2012 Brewer-Clifton 3-D Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$80. *Moderately light cherry color in the glass. Wonderful aromas of whole cluster spice, pine and dried rose petal. The mid weight cherry and strawberry core is bright and tasty, and framed by firm but supportive tannins. A mix of red and blue berries and spice drives the pleasing, dry finish. 92-94.*

2012 Brewer-Clifton Hapgood Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.0% alc., \$84. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of whole cluster driven spice and rose petal with a hint of redwood. Middleweight attack of ripe black cherry fruit with a subtle earthy, oaky bent and a hint of chocolate, finishing with expansive fruit flavors. Everything is in balance. 90-91.*

2012 Brewer-Clifton 459 Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$90. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The scent of rose, spice, raspberry and cherry is appealing but the wine is a bit linear and disjointed on the palate. The mid weight black cherry, blackberry and dark chocolate brooding flavors are framed by leathery tannins and there is a sense of alcohol warmth on the finish. 88-89.*

2012 Brewer-Clifton Machado Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 675 cases, \$74. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Highly nuanced nose with scents of dark strawberry, plum, black raspberry, spice and rose petal. Darker fruits are featured on the palate which features some allspice and stem. The suave tannins are well integrated and the wine finishes with admirable fruit drive, although a hint of alcoholic warmth peaks out. 90-91.*

Brooks, Willamette Valley, Oregon

2012 Brooks Janus Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$38. The winery's flagship wine that is the richest and most intense blend offered. *In a vintage like 2012, this wine really shines. Abundant waves of dark cherry fruit attack the mid palate, holding court through a long and expansive finish. Beautifully balanced, with juicy, refreshing acidity and modest tannins. 90-91.*

2011 Brooks Temperance Hill Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.2% alc., 200 cases, \$48. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Reflecting the very cool 2011 vintage, this is a very elegant and demure offering of red fruits, spice and herbs. Bright, with lithe tannins and sparkling acidity. This wine will appeal to connoisseurs more than hedonists. 88-89.*

Burn Cottage, Central Otago, New Zealand

2013 Burn Cottage Central Otago Pinot Noir Ted Lemon was pouring this wine at WOPN and he told me he has been involved as a consultant with this project for 12 years. The interesting images on the label are from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's biodynamic allegory "The Green Snake & the Beautiful Lily." *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Pretty showy, with hi-tone aromas of cherries jubilee, black raspberry and spice. The medium weight dark fruit core is sappy and plush, yet vibrant and elevating. 92-94.* The 2010 vintage was also offered for tasting and was lighter in weight and more savory, although still very satisfying.



Carr Vineyards & Winery, Santa Barbara

2013 Carr The Yard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir. 14%, 195 cases, \$50 (2013). An interesting vertical of the 2007 (first Carr release), 2008 and 2013 vintages was offered from this unique vineyard that was originally planted in 1988 but abandoned. The 18-acre site was rescued and rehabilitated by Ryan Carr. *Deep reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of earth-kissed black cherry. Sumptuous flavors of black cherry and blackberry with a beefy streak underneath. Well-crafted with supportive tannins and a silky, fruit-laden finish. 90-91.*

2013 Carr Single Clone 114 Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir Only two barrels produced of this unusual wine. Single clone 114 Pinot Noirs are rare. *An impressive wine notable for the harmony between fruit, tannin, acidity and oak. It tasted of freshly picked Pinot Noir grapes. 90-91.*

Center of Effort, Arroyo Grande Valley

2012 Center of Effort Rossa Corsa Edna Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc.. Winemaker Mike Sinor is a consultant for this label. 100% whole cluster, native yeast fermentation, clones 2A and Mariafeld 23. Aged 19 months in once-filled French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is somewhat brooding but welcoming with deep aromas of dark fruits, sous-bois and spice. Very luscious and satiny on the palate with a mid weight core of luscious blackberry, cassis and black plum flavors. Burly, but with good harmony in a hedonistic California style. 92-94.*

Charles Heintz Vineyards, Sonoma Coast

2014 Charles Heintz Vineyards Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir \$19. I think winemaker Hugh Chappelle has a gift for producing Pinot Noir Rosé as I find his offerings at Heintz and previously at Lynmar to be California's best examples. The wine sells out quickly. *Modest pink in color in the glass. Aromas of fresh wild strawberries, blood oranges and peaches echoed on the palate that is vivid, bracing and thirst-quenching. Maybe the most versatile wine on the planet. 90-91.*



CIRQ Estate, Russian River Valley

See review of the 2012 Treehouse Vineyard Pinot Noir in this issue.

Cotiere, San Luis Obispo (formerly Luminesce)

2013 Cotiere Laetitia Vineyard Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir 13.8% alc.. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. A cherry-driven wine with a savory streak in the background due to whole cluster inclusion. The fruit is framed by balanced tannins and driven by lively acidity, finishing with thirst-quenching tart cherry goodness. Very smooth in the mouth. 90-91.*

2013 Cotiere Riverbench Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc.. *Light red cherry color in the glass. Demure, but pleasing aromas of cherry, sandalwood and toast. Light to mid weight flavors of fresh cherry pie glaze and savory herbs. Supple tannins make for easy enjoyability. 88-89.*

2013 Cotiere Presqu'île Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc.. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Fresh cherry aromas and flavors abound in this wine with a good mid palate attack, soft tannins, and a juicy, persistent finish. A savory herbal thread from whole cluster inclusion brings up the background. 90-91.*

CrossBarn Winery, Russian River Valley

2013 Crossbarn Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$35, screwcap. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. An intensely dark fruited wine with contributions of spice, bramble, and oak. Full-bodied, with firm tannins and a sweet, sappy finish. 88-89.*

2013 Crossbarn Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$35, screwcap. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is more savory than fruity with appealing scents of cherry, spice, forest floor and fern leaf. More elegant and transparent and less boisterous than the Sonoma Coast bottling, yet delivers plenty of vivid black cherry flavor accented by smoky oak. Soft and sleek in the mouth, and still a bit reserved, but has a promising future. 90-91.*

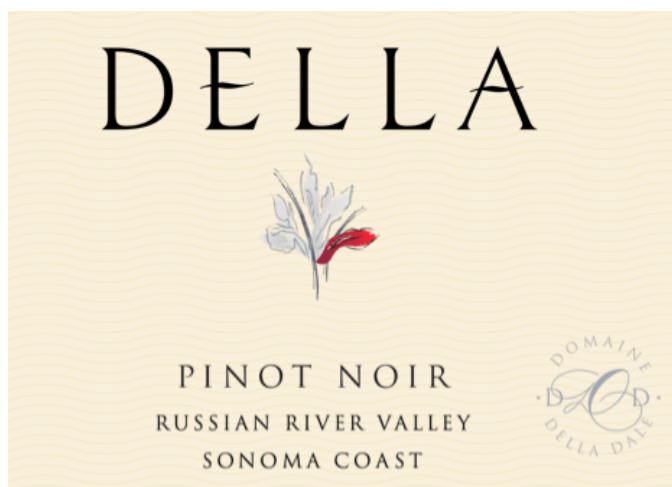
DELLA Wines, Russian River Valley

David Hejl spent over 3 years at Kosta Browne Winery as the CEO and GM before founding his own DELLA label in 2010 with co-founders Lee and Ernie LeRoy. DELLA honors Della Winifred Dale, David's mother.

2013 DELLA Russian River Valley Pinot Noir *A very solid offering reflecting the Russian River Valley propensity for luscious Bing cherry fruit, cola and spice character. Well-crafted, with good lift and finishing drive. 90-91.*

2013 DELLA Terra De Promissio Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir *A vineyard in the Petaluma Gap sourced by Kosta Browne for several years. More earthy, feral and floral than the RRV offering, with substantial tannins making it less accessible at this early juncture. 90-91.*

2013 DELLA Keefer Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir *A real standout and not surprising as this vineyard is the source of so many grand Pinot Noirs that it is deserving of grand cru status. This wine is very polished and appealing with mid weight flavors of iced cherries, spice and sandalwood. Still a bit tightly wound, but promises a great future. 92-94.*



EnRoute Winery, Napa Valley

2013 EnRoute Les Pommiers Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$70. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noir featuring aromas and flavors of Bing cherries. Fairly bold, with integrated tea-like tannins, generous but not intrusive oak seasoning, and a juicy finish replete with sweet black cherry and dark berry fruits. 92-94.*

FAILLA Wines, Napa Valley

2013 Failla Occidental Ridge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc.. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The dreamy aromas of cherry pie and brown baking spices are intoxicating. Impressive harmony and flavor, featuring mid weight black cherry and black raspberry fruits with good tension and slightly steely acidity. Impressive finishing drive and length. I really liked this wine for its bright demeanor. 92-94.*

FEL Wines, Anderson Valley

2012 FEL Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 2,923 cases, \$38. 2012 was a remarkable vintage for Pinot Noir in the Anderson Valley and this wine reflects it beautifully. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 44% of which were new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Plenty to like about this*

wine which offers luscious cherry and pomegranate flavors enhanced with notes of herbs and anise. Bright and juicy, and very welcoming, with an elegant demeanor. **90-91**.

2012 FEL Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 645 cases, \$65. Inaugural release. 7-day cold soak and 7-day extended post-fermentation maceration. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 56% of which were new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Bold aromas of black cherry, toast and spice echoed on the discreetly concentrated palate that sports firm, ripe tannins. The wine really grabs your attention now, but will develop further over time.* **92-94**.

Hilliard Bruce, Sta. Rita Hills

2012 Hilliard Bruce Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay 600 cases, \$45. Clones 76 and 96. Barrel fermented (30% new French oak), full malolactic fermentation. *Light golden straw color in the glass. My favorite Chardonnay tasted at WOPN. Invigorating aromas of lemon-lime, apple and subtle nutty oak lead to a highly flavorful core of white stone fruits, lemon oil and caramel flavors. Slightly creamy, with a lasting finish fueled by mineral-driven acidity.* **92-94**.

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery, Arroyo Grande Valley

2013 Laetitia Whole Cluster Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$42. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Intoxicating aromas of cherries, red rose petal, and exotic spices. Mid weight plus core of well-spiced black cherry and black raspberry fruits with a little note of Dr. Pepper and edible flower. Velvety smooth with reigned-in tannins and a satisfying finish. Extraordinary!* **94+**.

Left Coast Cellars, Southern Willamette Valley

2014 Left Coast Cellars Willamette Valley White Pinot Noir \$20. A brand new release for this hugely popular white wine. Stock up for summer. Vinified in stainless steel from free run juice of Pommard and Wädenswil Pinot Noir grapes. *Refreshing aromas of white stone fruits, honeyed pears and floral bouquet lead to bright, crisp and refreshing flavors that echo the nose.* **90-91**.

2014 Left Coast Cellars Willamette Valley Rosé of Pinot Noir \$18. A saignée of Pinot Noir, aged in neutral French oak barrels and stainless steel. *Moderate pink color in the glass. Fresh strawberry, cranberry and cherry flavors, fueled by bracing acidity, and finishing dry and tight.* **88-89**.

2012 Left Coast Cellars Suzanne's Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 850 btls, \$45. Aged 22 months in French oak barrels, 75% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose offers a pleasing combination of cherry, strawberry, herbs, and wood spice aromas. Very soft and supple in the mouth with a delicious mid weight core of black cherry and black raspberry fruits supported by a lively acid spine. The large amount of new oak is beautifully integrated. Very refreshing and uplifting.* **92-94**.

Maggy Hawk, Anderson Valley

2012 Maggy Hawk Jolie Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 312 cases. Clone 115. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A harmonious, highly enjoyable wine that offers scents of black cherry and sous-bois and a deeply flavored cherry core. The tannins are suave, the mouthfeel is satiny, and the finish returns for many encores over a minute.* **94+**.

2012 Maggy Hawk Hawkster Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Clone 2A. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of red berries and herbs. Delicious array of dark fruits dance on the palate including black cherry and black raspberry with a hint of pain grille. Modest tannins make for easy drinking now.* **92-94**.

2012 Maggy Hawk Afleet Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Pommard clone. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The boldest and most tannic wine in the 2012 Maggy Hawk lineup. Very ripe flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and sassafras with a modest toasty oak seasoning.* **90-91**.

2012 Maggy Hawk Unforgettable Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Clone 667. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is a walk in the forest with aromas of sous bois, wild berries and mushrooms. Delicious flavors of dark stone and berry fruits with a note of iron and spice. Finishes juicy with explosive drive.* **92-94**.

2009

MAGGY HAWK

Jolie

Anderson Valley

Pinot Noir



237 cases produced

Merry Edwards Winery, Russian River Valley

2012 Merry Edwards Meredith Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$57. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Toasty black cherry aromas and rich black cherry, plum and pomegranate flavors. Very fruity with balanced tannins and fruit-driven finish. A luscious, rich California style. 90-91.*

2012 Merry Edwards Coopersmith Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$57. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Ripely fruited, with scents of dark berries, Bing cherries and sandalwood. Full-bodied flavors of black cherry with hints of anise and tea, finishing with some generosity and a touch of warmth. 90-91.*

Navarro Vineyards, Anderson Valley

2012 Navarro Vineyards Deep End Blend Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$49. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, alpine strawberry, spice cabinet and red rose petal leap from the glass, holding court over an extended time in the glass. Very showy and glorious mid weight plus core of black cherry, black raspberry and spice flavors. Impeccable harmony, with an extended, expansive finish that puts a smile on your face. Extraordinary! 94+.*

Panthea, Anderson Valley

2010 Panthea Londer Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 200 cases, \$38. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Well-balanced, with aromas and flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and sandalwood. Modest in weight with mild tannins and a short but pleasing finish. 88-89.*

Papapietro Perry Winery, Russian River Valley

2012 Papapietro Perry Peter's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$56. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, strawberry and spice lead to a generous attack of cherry fruit that coats the mouth and hangs on through a big finish. 90-91.*

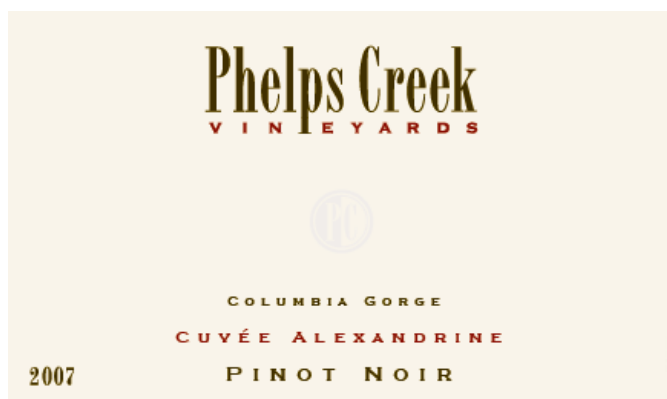
Phelps Creek Vineyards, Columbia Gorge, Oregon

2012 Phelps Creek "Corduoy" Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir Blanc \$59. You might balk at the price of this wine but it is a wine with serious intentions that is one of the most stunning examples of this little-produced style of Pinot Noir. *Strawberry, white peach, pear and spice aromas and flavors are vibrant and clean. Moderately rich with good structure and finishing goodness. 92-94.*

2007 Phelps Creek Cuvee Alexandrine Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir French vigneron Alexandrine Roy leaves her estate in Gevrey-Chambertin to craft this special wine made from hand-selected rows, using native

yeast and foot punch downs. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Delicate and demure, but enough fresh fruit flavor to hold your interest, and nicely reflecting this very cool vintage. 90-91.*

2012 Phelps Creek Cuvee Alexandrine Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir \$49. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Sexy and alluring in the glass, with a panoply of spicy cherry fruit, crafted with admirable tannin support and juicy acidity. This is one of those Pinot Noirs that grabs your attention and your heart. 94+.*



Reuling Vineyard, Sonoma Coast

2012 Reuling Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$70. *Medium reddish purple color in the glass. Impressive harmony in this mid weight plus wine with gorgeous black cherry and pomegranate fruits backed by fine-grain tannins. Velvety in the mouth, with a really expansive finish that delivers a lasting impression. 92-94.*

RN Estate Vineyard & Winery, Paso Robles

2012 RN Estate Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 195 cases, \$55. 113, 115 and 667. 35% whole cluster. Aged 11 months in French oak, 100% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Extravagant aromas of cherry, strawberry, red rose petal and sandalwood. Uplifting and vibrant with bright red fruit flavors enhanced by exotic spices from whole cluster inclusion. The tannins are well managed and the refreshing finish has good length. Still young but hard to resist now. 92-94.*

Saxon-Brown Wines, Sonoma

2012 Saxon-Brown Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc.. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of dark red berries and a touch of bramble. Mid weight plus deeply flavored berry and cherry fruits with a savory oak note in the background. Velvety in the mouth with some finishing drive. 90-91.*

Schug Carneros Estate Winery, Carneros

2012 Schug Schug Estate Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$30. *Moderately light cherry color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of oak-dusted cherry and strawberry with a savory streak in the background. Juicy, refreshing finish. 88-89.*

Seagrape Wine Company, Santa Ynez Valley

2012 Seagrape Rancho La Vina Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$40. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of crushed wild berries, spice and loam. Very appealing flavors of red berries, cherries and savory herbs with a spicy note showing up on the generous finish. The tannins are tucked in, and the wine delivers an easy-going, velvety and elegant drinking experience. 92-94.*

2012 Seagrape "Jump Up" Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$36. Clones 667 and 777 from two vineyards. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Nice finesse and balance in a red fruit driven wine with pleasing spice and supple tannins. 90-91.*



Seagrape

2012

Duende la Vina Vineyard
STA. RITA HILLS
PINOT NOIR

Senses Wines, Sonoma Coast

2013 Senses Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir Sourced from the same vineyards as the 2012 previously reviewed in this newsletter but 2013 was a slightly warmer year. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Strikingly soft in the mouth and very easy to like, with flavors of Bing cherries, raspberries and spice. Very forward and embracing. 90-91.*

2013 Senses Hillcrest Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir Vineyard is just outside town of Occidental adjacent Charles Heintz Vineyard. Home to the original Chardonnay plantings in the Sonoma Coast, it has been replanted to Pinot Noir in 2005 to Calera, Swan, "828," and 115. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. This wine was love at first sip, with a discreetly concentrated array of fresh fruit flavors accented with spice and oak seasoning. Silky in the mouth with suave tannins and a driving, uplifting finish flush with fruit. 92-94.*

Sinor-LaVallee, Arroyo Grande

2013 Sinor-LaVallee San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir \$30, screwcap. Beginning with this vintage, all Sinor-LaVallee wines are from the winery's estate vineyard in Avila Beach planted to 8 clones of Pinot Noir and other varieties. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. A pleasing medley of red and black fruits blended with modest but supportive tannins, and backed by vibrant acidity, making for easy and early drinking. 88-89.*

Sokol-Blosser, Willamette Valley

2012 Sokol Blosser Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$38. Extended maceration and 16 months of barrel aging. *Medium reddish purple color in the glass. Bright cherry aromas with generous oak overlay. Generous and forward, with a charge of ripe cherry fruit on the mid palate, holding on through a fruit-driven finish. Better oak integration on the palate. 88-89.*

Stephen Goff Wines, Portland, Oregon

2012 Stephen Goff Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 147 cases, \$42. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely aromas of cherry, raspberry and sous-bois. Intense attack of fruit with layers of very ripe black cherry and black raspberry flavors that really attract your attention. A healthy tannic backbone provides support for the fruit load. Prodigious fruit for Oregon, and more like California Pinot Noir in character and origin. 90-91.*

Ten Acre Winery, Russian River Valley

2012 Ten Acre Jenkin's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc.. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Effusive aromas of black raspberry and spice. Mid weight flavors of black raspberry*

and blackberry fruits with some earthiness and oak seasoning. Structured, with slightly grippy tannins on the persistent finish. 90-91.

2012 Ten Acre Ramona's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc.. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Deep perfume of black cherry, spice and sous-bois. Rich and luscious on the palate with a charge of robust, sweet black cherry and blackberry fruit. The tannins are tucked in, and the mouthfeel is soft and caressing. A hedonistic style of Pinot Noir. 88-89.*

Trombetta Family Wines, Russian River Valley

2012 Trombetta Family Wines Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 500 cases, \$45. Sourced from Petersen Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap region. Clones 115 and 667 planted in 1996. Harvest Brix 26.5°. Native yeast fermentation and native MLF, extended cold soak and maceration, aged 9 months in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Admirable transparency in the mid weight wine with fresh, up front red fruits underpinned by silky tannins. There are appealing notes of spice and, herbs and oak vanillin. 90-91.*

2012 Trombetta Family Wines Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 872 cases, \$65. Clones 777, '828," and Swan selection. Yield 2.3 tons per acre. Harvest Brix 27.8°-29.8°. Native yeast fermentation and native MLF, extended cold soak and maceration, aged 9 months in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Very ripe fruited with aromas and flavors of sweet black cherry, black raspberry and pomegranate framed by imposing, sinewy tannins. Highly extracted and sappy with a compliment of oak and fruit-dominated length. 88-89.*

On the Pinot Trail: Santa Lucia Highlands Tasting in Orange County

It has become popular over the past few years for California pinotcentric appellations to travel to major cities in California and elsewhere in the United States to show off their wines. Members of the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans paid a visit in February 2015 to the California cities of Costa Mesa and San Diego for Trade Tastings. Formed in 2005, the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans is an association of vineyards and wineries that grow grapes in the Santa Lucia Highlands or use the appellation's fruit to craft their wines. There are currently 49 grower vineyards, 20 grower member labels, and 24 associate member labels.

The Santa Lucia Highlands consists of a series of vineyards planted on the terraces of the Santa Lucia Mountain range that overlooks the Salinas River Valley. The fog and ocean breezes from nearby Monterey Bay funnel southeast to create a cool, Region I climate. Long, gentle ripening is the rule, with the vines' elevated sites bathing in the morning sunshine before the afternoon maritime winds slow down photosynthesis. The region is known for early bud break, lack of fall rains, an exceptionally long growing season, and prolonged harvests, allowing grapes to develop full phenolic ripeness.



The first commercial plantings arrived in 1971 and the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA was established in 1991. There are about 6,150 acres of vines in the Santa Lucia Highlands, planted primarily to Pinot Noir (3,095 acres) and Chardonnay (2,060 acres). Conscientious viticultural standards are the rule, whether sustainable, organic or biodynamic. Visit the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans website at www.santaluciahighlands.com where there is a detailed map of vineyard locations within the AVA.

Here is a list of wines that impressed me. I had previously tasted wines from a number of producers present (Bernardus, Hahn Family Wines, Loring Wine Co., McIntyre, Pisoni,) and their wines are not included here.

2013 August West Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay \$38 *Bright citrus and pear on the nose and palate with crisp acidity and a finishing lift.*

2013 August West Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$45 *Typical feminine character featuring an array of ripe red fruits and suede tannins.*

2013 Black Kite Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay \$45 *Released on day of tasting. See review in this issue.*

2013 Black Kite Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$55 *Invigorating aromas of fresh black cherries and berries with a stunning spice accent. Very welcoming on the palate with a silky mouthfeel.*

2012 Joyce Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$35 10% whole cluster, aged 13 months in 25% new French oak. Mid weight dark red fruits with a note of spice on the nose and palate. Like this.

2011 La Rochelle Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$48 Plenty of meaty, spiced dark red fruits with good drive on the finish.

MV La Rochelle Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$42 A savory offering with a noticeably persistent finish.

2012 Miner Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$75 Plenty of character and nuance in this superb offering with a bit of whole cluster savoriness.

2012 Miner Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$60 A terrific, more feminine wine, with plenty of spiced red fruit goodness and admirable balance.

2010 Miura Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$65 Full-flavored, mid weight dark red fruits with suave tannins and nice balance.

2011 Miura Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$66 Released a few months ago. Striking aromatic presence, impressive finesse and balance. The top wine of the tasting.

2013 Morgan Twelve Clones Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$34 65% Estate fruit. A blend of several vineyards. Both fruity and savory, featuring an array of berry and spice flavors, and a finish with good drive and length.

2013 Morgan Double L Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$58 Estate fruit, certified organic, 750 cases. A superb offering featuring layers of purple fruits framed by balanced, fine grain tannins and a luscious finish.

2013 Lucia Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$60 A complete wine with luscious, sweet fruit, folded-in tannins, and a generous finish.

2012 Puma Road Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$32 Plenty of sweet fruit and baking spices with balanced tannins and easy drink ability. Good value.

2012 Puma Road Apex Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$35 Highest vineyard in SLH. Very forward, dark red cherry core with pleasing spice accent. Great value.

2013 ROAR Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$52 Full-bodied, structured tannins, richly fruited with oak in background. Very young.

2013 ROAR Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$55 Feminine, solid, with great balance and refreshing acidity on finish.

2013 Saxon Brown Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$58 Feminine wine featuring red fruits, spice and fine grain tannins.

Father John Pinot Noir Flusters Burgundians

Father John is a boutique Pinot Noir producer from the Russian River Valley offering a single wine from Oehlman Vineyard on Vine Hill Road just outside Graton. Proprietor and winemaker Nick Maloney is currently living in Burgundy and finishing his studies at the Lycée Viticole in Beaune, as well as working with Domaine Rollin in Pernand Vergelesses. A white Burgundy will be released in early 2016 under the Father John label. The 2012 Father John Pinot Noir is currently the only American Pinot Noir to be found in multiple restaurants in Burgundy!

Nick strives to feature acidity and delicacy, not power or ripeness. Recently, Nick poured his 2012 Father John Russian River Valley Pinot Noir at a blind tasting among vigneron from Pernand Vergelesses including Domaine Rapet, Delarche, Marey, Denis, Francoise Jeanniard, Pavelot and Rollin. As everyone tried the Farmer John Pinot Noir, no one could decide if it was old or new world. The crowd was puzzled, but approved of the wine as no one spoke about its defaults. Mr. Rapet then spoke about it and said that it was a good wine with absolutely no default, and the crowd seemed to agree with his statement.

When Nick's boss, Remi Rollin, told everyone that it was a California Pinot Noir, everything changed! Many vigneron started to grumble. They declared that the wine had multiple defaults including lack of acidity, over ripeness, jammy fruit, and unbalance. Nick said, "I explained a bit about the wine and the small production, but everyone was now a bit ticked off and didn't like the wine anymore."

Nick told me that the blind tasting proved the power of a product being rejected because of provenance or competition, not on actual quality. Nick noted, "Burgundy winemakers believe that they are the only ones who can really make fantastic Pinot Noir." Ultimately, it proved to be a humorous event where opinions shifted dramatically regarding wine quality when the provenance of the wine was unveiled.

Discover for yourself the quality of this Pinot Noir which I found superb. The wine is sold exclusively to acclaimed restaurants and through a mailing list. Visit www.fatherjohnwinery.com.

2012 Father John Oehlman Vineyard Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$55. Partially de-stemmed. Aged 11 months sur lees in French oak barrels. Fined but not filtered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Effusive and persistent aromas of cherry, cranberry, raspberry and spice. Silky and satisfying on the palate with mid weight flavors of cherry, cranberry and pomegranate underlain with a subtle savory herb, oak and citrus note in the background. Admirable freshness, with juicy acidity, suave tannins, and a long cherry-driven finish. A more demure interpretation of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir which oozes pinotosity. 92.*



Recent Sips of Pinot Noir & A Few Whites

Black Kite Cellars produces less than 2,500 cases annually of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Anderson Valley (estate vineyard), Santa Lucia Highlands and Sonoma Coast. The wines are available through the winery mailing list and website at www.blackkitecellars.com, as well as select wine retailers and restaurants.



2013 Black Kite Angel Hawk Anderson Valley Pinot Noir

14.9% alc., 190 cases, pH 3.56, TA 0.58, \$85. Clones 114, 115 and Pommard. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass.*

Gorgeous label. The aromas leap from the glass, penetrating the olfactory senses with black cherry, blackberry, peat, citrus, cardamom and redwood timber scents. Luscious, but angelic on the palate, with mid weight plus flavors of black cherry and black

raspberry fruits. A very sexy wine with a velvety mouthfeel, silky tannins, complimentary oak, and enough acid to energize the luscious fruit load. Even better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, offering an incredible attack and finish and a just plain delicious drinking experience. A serious wine with intentions. 94.

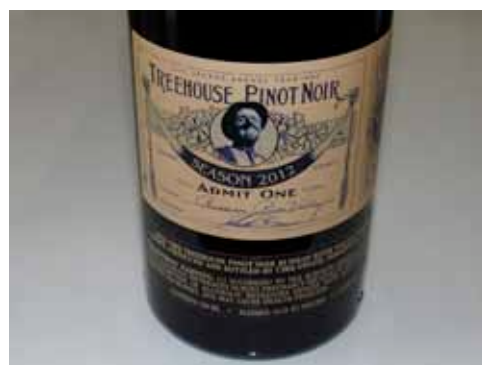


2013 Black Kite Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay 14.1% alc., pH 3.35, TA 0.74, 195 cases, \$45. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. A delightful, oak-infused, bold, full malolactic style of Chardonnay that offers an array of aromas including yellow apple, pear, lemon oil, spice, and toasty oak, and heady flavors of lemon, pineapple, apple, and toasted brioche. Slightly creamy, with discreet richness, finishing dry with oak-kissed, lemon drop goodness. 92.*

2013 Black Kite Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.1% alc., pH 3.39, TA 0.64, 236 cases, \$45. *Very light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Compared to the Soberanes Chardonnay, this wine is more mineral-driven with scents of salt air, green apple, and lemon meringue pie, reaching more intensity over time in the glass. Refined, crisp and refreshing, with plenty of apple, lemon and tangerine fruit flavors to satisfy. Very polished with admirable oak seasoning showing up as a touch of caramel. An excellent food wine that can also satisfy on its own. 93.*

2012 CIRQ Treehouse Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.54, TA 0.60, 1,397 cases, \$100.

Winemaker and proprietor Michael Browne's great grandfather, Reuban Warren Simonds, graces this label. He helped put on many circus shows across the U.S. during the 1930s and 1940s. Clones 23, Swan, 37, Pommard and Calera. Yield 2.2 tons per acre. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely, effusive aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, vanilla and spice. The wine offers a pleasant marriage of fruit oak and an enticing texture. Very soft and approachable, with mid weight layered flavors of black cherry, raspberry, Damsel plum, and boysenberry fruits. Excellent harmony with a lasting, berry-driven finish with a kiss of oak. 93.*



Clos De La Tech offered 5 wines in their fall release. Besides the wines reviewed here, there was a Domaine Lois Louise Twisty Ridge and a Santa Cruz Mountain Estates (previously named Domaine Lois Louise). I have written in the past about this very impressive estate and winery. Owners and spouses Rodgers and Valeta Massey, are self-taught winemakers who founded Clos De La Tech in 1994. The wines are produced with no expense spared in a Burgundian style and have been received well by the wine press. A number of consumers who have a California palate, on the other hand, have not been as receptive or enthusiastic about the wines. Each bottle has a Cypress Semiconductor memory chip affixed to the neck of the bottle. Visit

www.closdelatech.com.



2010 Clos De La Tech Domaine Lois Louise Cote Sud Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 190 cases, \$62. Sourced from the Cote Sud block at Domaine Luis Louise Vineyard. The site is fully exposed and buffeted by strong maritime winds off the Pacific Ocean 8 miles to the West. Whole cluster fermentation, native yeast, foot crushed, unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Savory aromas of earth, tobacco leaf, bramble, and wine cave with a hint of black cherry. Full-bodied flavors of black raspberry, blackberry and black current with a touch of spice. Very ripe, but gorgeous fruit that is dense and somewhat brooding at this stage, backed by firm, well-proportioned tannins. The wine finishes with plenty of fruit goodness and slight astringency. Like Burgundy wines after it is fashioned, this wine should benefit from more time in the cellar.* **90-92.**

2010 Clos De La Tech Domaine Valeta Sunny Slope Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 190 cases, \$62. Vineyard site is cold and windy situated at 2,350 feet above Silicon Valley. 30 acres with 3 acres planted to vines. Whole cluster fermentation, native yeast, foot crushed, unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Somewhat vegetal on the nose reflecting the 100% whole cluster, with added notes of toasty oak and mulch. Mid weight dark red cherry and strawberry fruits with a touch of spice and sandalwood. More approachable than the Cote Sud with less fruit intensity and sap, more vibrant acidity, and showing somewhat aggressive tannins and generous sweet oak in the background. Again, this wine will benefit from further bottle aging.* **89-91.**



2010 Clos De La Tech Domaine Du Docteur Rodgers San Francisco Bay Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 102 cases, \$102. Sourced from a 1-acre hilltop vineyard in the town of Woodside at the base of the Santa Cruz Mountains. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very savory nose with aromas of bramble, conifer herbal oak, spearmint, and vanilla. Oak and tannins dominate this wine at present, which offers mid weight flavors of blackberry, black cherry and pomegranate fruits. The intense, long finish is the most striking feature of this wine. The wine will hopefully outgrow the green thread in the background resulting from the 100% whole cluster inclusion. When tasted the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the tannins had ameliorated, but the oak still overwhelmed the fruit. Check back in five years.* **88-90.**

Cutruzzola Vineyards (Koo-troot-ZOL-a) is located in a coastal valley stretching east from the town of Cambria on steep, predominantly south-facing broken hills. The vineyard consists of five acres of Pinot Noir (clones are Pommard 5, 667, "828," 115 and 23), and two acres of Riesling (clones 2 and 10), planted mostly on lime-bearing soils. The remaining portion of the 47-acre property has been left in its natural state. The vines are now between 9- and 14-years-old.

2013 Cutruzzola Gloria San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.59, 441 cases, \$40. 10% whole cluster, inoculated fermentation with Assmannhausen and RC212 yeasts. Aged 10 months in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Welcoming nose alive with scents of boysenberry, raspberry and a hint of herbs. Light to mid weight flavors of cherry, raspberry and boysenberry with a touch of spice and oak seasoning. Very pleasant on the palate, with a suede texture, good acid tension, finishing dry with a slight grip of tannin. Even better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**



2012 Cutruzzola Riven Rock Vineyard San Luis Obispo County Riesling 12.5% alc., pH 3.05, TA 0.62, 440 cases, \$22. A long, cool fermentation was stopped at 2.3% residual sugar to balance the pH. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Drinks like a dry wine with aromas and flavors of lemon-lime (7-Up), blood orange, vanillin, petrol and rum cake. Moderately viscous with good supporting acidity. A California-styled Riesling.* **89.**



2013 Farmstead Long Meadow Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$29. Grapes were sourced from vineyards in Freestone. Primary fermentation in stainless steel followed by malolactic fermentation in neutral oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting perfume of crushed berries, cherries, brown spices, herbs and sandalwood. Soft in the mouth, with a pleasing attack of cherry and raspberry fruits accented with notes of cola, sarsaparilla, and savory herbs. Commendable finesse and harmony, and easy to cozy up to.* **89.**

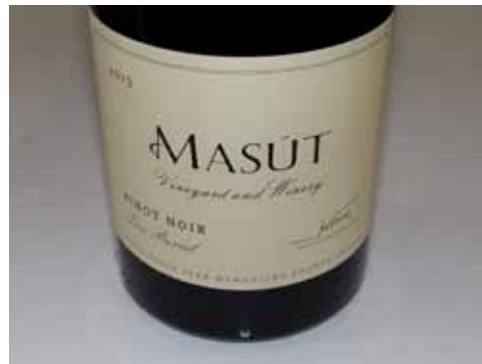
2013 Joseph Phelps Freestone Vineyards Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.4% alc., 5,750 cases, \$55. Estate grown from Freestone Vineyards. 100% malolactic fermentation. Aged 13 months in 100% French oak barrels and puncheons, 35% new and 65% 2-to-3-year-old. Unfiltered. *Light golden yellow color and slightly cloudy in the glass. Appealing aromas of lemon, petrichor, apple and a hint of buttery oak. Crisp flavors of green apple, lemon curd and complimentary oak seasoning framed by thirst-quenching acidity, finishing slightly tart and thoroughly dry with a lemon drop note.* **91.**

2012 Husch Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$18. Small lot fermentation. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry pie glaze, dried herbs and tobacco lead to mid weight flavors of black cherry and boysenberry with modest oak seasoning. Soft tannins, and a juicy, tart cherry finish with decent cut.* **87.**

Masút Vineyard and Winery is located in the newly approved Eagle Peak, Mendocino County AVA in Northern California (see Pinot Briefs in this issue for further details). Masút Vineyard and Winery is part of the legacy of the Fetzer Family, one of the original founding families of the modern Mendocino County wine industry. Owners Jacob and Ben Fetzer are the third generation of Fetzer winemakers, the sons of Bobby and Sheila Fetzer, and grandsons of Barney and Kathleen Fetzer, the founders of Fetzer Vineyards in 1968. After Fetzer Vineyards was sold in 1992, Bobby Fetzer acquired a 1,500-acre ranch adjacent the family's home ranch that the Native Americans referred to as Masút, which means "dark, rich earth." Bobby, along with his young sons began planting vineyards there in 1997, creating the basis for the AVA. After Bobby passed away in 2006, Ben and Jake decided to build upon their family legacy and create Masút Vineyard and Winery, releasing their first Pinot Noir from the 2009 vintage in 2011. Visit www.masut.com.

2013 Masút Vineyards & Winery Estate Vineyard Eagle Peak Mendocino County Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 1,500 cases, \$40. Higher alcohol do to a heat spike in September. 94% clone 115 and 6% clone 23. Whole berry de-stemmed into open-top fermenters for a 16 to 20-day fermentation. Aged 15 months sur lie in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely perfume of black cherries and cedary oak. Intense attack of mid weight black raspberry, ollaliberry and blackest cherry fruits back by a subtle tug of oak. Incredibly gorgeous fruit back by firm tannins that are tucked in. Soft and smooth in the mouth, finishing with impressive drive and length.* **92.**

2013 Masút Vineyards & Winery Two Barrel Eagle Peak Mendocino County Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 50 cases, \$60. Favorite two barrels of the vintage. 100% clone 115. Whole berry de-stemmed into open-top fermenters for a 20-day fermentation. Aged 15 months in 100% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Hi-tone aromas of fruit basket, spice and bramble. On entry, the charge of blackest cherry, blackberry, and black raspberry is delicious. Bombastic, but still nimble and balanced with well-integrated fruit tannins, and a huge finish that takes intensity up a notch. More brooding than the Estate bottling at this stage, but exhibiting more potential.* **93.**



2013 Owen Roe The Kilmore Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$37. Clones are Pommard, Wädenswil and Dijon. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The scents of black cherry, spice box, cardamom and wine cave are alluring. Very attractive flavors of red and black cherries and a hint of strawberries. Juicy, with balanced and supple tannins and a cherry force that lingers on the finish. A superb forward-drinking wine that always delivers in every vintage.* **91.**



Pali Wine Co. released three of their 2014 cuvée wines this spring. Founded in 2005 in Lompoc, Pali Wine Co. produces both premium single-vineyard Pinot Noirs and value-priced appellation blends named for different neighborhoods in the Pacific Palisades area of Los Angeles where the founding investors live and work. Visit www.paliwineco.com.

2013 Pali Wine Co. Summit Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.3% alc., 2,460 cases, \$29, screwcap. Bent Rock, Radian, Rancho La Vina and Huber vineyards. Small lot fermentations. Aged 12 months in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, spice, potpourri, smoke and toast. Tasty mid weight flavors of spiced black cherry with noticeable oak overlay. Intensely fruity, but still nimble and easy to drink.* **88.**



2013 Pali Wine Co. Huntington Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 3,861 cases, \$22.50, screwcap. Sourced from Lucas & Lewellyn, Bent Rock, Radian and Pence Ranch vineyards. Aged 12 months in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. A cherry-driven wine with added notes of raspberry and cola in a middleweight style with well-integrated tannins. The*

fruit is luscious and very satisfying, finishing with some intensity. Oak shows up in the background over time in the glass. **89.**



2013 Pali Wine Co. Bluffs Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 1,977 cases, \$22.50, screwcap. Sourced from Windsor Oaks and Rockin' B vineyards. Small lot fermentation. Aged 10 months in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new. *Medium reddish purple hue in the glass. Brooding aromas of Bing cherry and dark red rose petal. The generous core of crushed cherry flavor is complimented by hints of Coca-Cola and spice. Somewhat jammy, with muscular fine-grain tannins that overwhelm the fruit.* **87.**

Ponzi Vineyards is celebrating its 45th anniversary. Sisters Luisa and Maria Ponzi have been at the helm for more than two decades. The two wines reviewed here are latest releases that are available in the national market. Visit www.ponziwines.com.



2014 Ponzi Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir Rosé

13.2% alc., pH 3.25, RS 0.34, 1,500 cases, \$20, screwcap. A blend of fruit from Merten and Dion vineyards, and saignée from Ponzi's finest Pinot Noir lots. 100% de-stemmed, stainless steel tank fermentation, malolactic fermentation inhibited. *Moderately deep pink salmon color in the glass.*

Perfume of fresh strawberries, crushed cranberries and rose petal lead to pleasing flavors of strawberry, cherry and white stone fruits. The experience is like biting into a fresh, ripe strawberry. Clean and vivid, with balanced acidity and a dry finish. 89.



2014 Ponzi Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Gris 13.2% alc., pH 4.2, RS 0.57, 17,000 cases, \$17, screwcap. Ponzi was one of the pioneers of this varietal, with first plantings in 1978. The wine is produced from certified sustainable Ponzi Aurora, Avellana and Estate Vineyards, as well as multiple other vineyards. Fermented in stainless steel tanks, malolactic fermentation prohibited. *Very light platinum gold and clear in the glass. Invigorating aromas of fresh apple, lychee, pear, marzipan and wet chalkboard. Clean, crisp and refreshing, with flavors of lemon oil, mango, pear and apple, finishing with a bright cut of acidity. A versatile wine that will enliven a variety of foods or satisfy on its own. 89.*

2012 Premonition Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 123 cases, \$29. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of timber, floral garden and vanilla cream lead to a modest core of sweet dark cherry liquor and blackberry jam flavors. Hints of green tea and cola are in the background. Very forward, with easy tannins, and a dry, cherry-driven finish which has some alcoholic warmth. 85.*

The Withers Winery was founded by Andrew Tow, a Westchester, New York-based business executive, who started out making a few barrels of wine for friends and family in conjunction with winemakers David Low and Tyson Freeman at Anthill Farms Winery in Healdsburg. The response was so positive that a label was born in 2013. The name, "The Withers," refers to the tallest point of the body in many species, and for horses, the place from which height is measured. The winery was thus named in the spirit of striving for heights in wine production and as a tribute to Mr. Burgess, the Irish Connemara pony who has been a member of Tow's extended family for almost 15 years. The winemaker is David Low, who has served in various winemaking capacities at Williams Selyem Winery, Papapietro Perry Winery and Anthill Farms Winery. Visit www.thewitherswinery.com.

2013 The Withers English Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

13.1% alc., 145 cases, \$46. This vineyard in Occidental was planted in 2005. Clones include Vosne Romanee, 115 and 667. Fermented with 35% whole cluster and ambient yeasts at cool temperatures after a cold soak. Aged in about 15% new French oak barrels. Racked once before bottling, unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate cherry red color in the glass. Lovely perfume of whole cluster-inspired spice, bark and rose petal enhancing the fresh cherry fruit. Mid weight flavors of spiced cherry and sandalwood, with modest backing tannins and a juicy finish. Admirable smoothness on the palate and very harmonious. 91.*



2013 The Withers Charles Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir

13.7% alc., 300 cases, \$44. Clones include Pommard, 115 and 667. Fermented with 35% whole cluster and ambient yeasts at cool temperature after a cold soak. About 15% new French oak barrels. Racked once before bottling, unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. This wine was rather brooding and bland with aggressive tannins upon opening, improving some in the glass, but really achieved*

expression two days after opened when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Fresh aromas of blackberry, black cherry and spice were followed on the palate with a ripe array of red cherry and berry flavors accented with spice and herbs, and framed by supportive fruit tannins. A remarkable transformation that proves again that Pinot Noir is an elusive challenge to evaluate. Decant this wine if you must pull the cork now. 91,

2013 The Withers Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 13.3% alc., \$42. This vineyard was planted in 1991 and 1996 on land that was previously an apple orchard. It is located southwest of Sebastopol. Clones are Pommard, 115 and 777. Fermented with 35% whole cluster and ambient yeasts at cool temperatures after a cold soak. Aged in 20% new French oak barrels. Racked once before bottling, unfinned and unfiltered. *Moderate cherry red hue in the glass. Aromas of red cherry, cranberry and earth are echoed on the palate with an additional hint of cola and citrus. The tannins are well-matched and the finish is thirst-quenching. When tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the nose had become more earthy and herbal and the wine was soft and pleasant in the mouth with a cherry theme. A solid, but not exceptional wine. 88.*

2013 Underwood Oregon Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$10. From Union Wine Co.. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of red cherry and potpourri hold up over time in the glass. Light to mid weight flavors of cherry, black raspberry, black tea and red licorice. An easy drinker with soft tannins that displays more than an ideal amount of oak overlay. Hard to complain at this price. 86.*

Pinot Briefs

J Vineyards & Winery Sold to E.&J. Gallo Gallo acquired the iconic sparkling and still wine producer, J Vineyards & Winery and label, along with 300 acres of vineyards in the Sonoma and Russian River Valley for an undisclosed amount in March 2015.

Sta. Rita Hills Winegrowers Alliance Southern California Road Trip The annual Sta. Rita Hills Winegrowers Alliance will make their annual Road Trip to the Wine House in Los Angeles. Trade tasting is from 1:30-4:00 and consumer tasting is 7:00-8:45 (\$49 per person). 25 wineries are participating. Tickets are available to the general public at www.WineHouse.com.

New Wine Region Fine Art Maps A new series of 13 wine region maps have been released. Each print contains a subtle map showing all the streets and the primary AVA with each sub-AVA highlighted and labeled. The prints (\$49) are printed on high-quality, heavy paper stock that has a subtle metallic shimmer giving them a unique visual effect. They are also available framed with or without a mat and as a gallery-wrapped canvas. Use coupon code BC1 on checkout for \$5 off on your purchase at the website at www.cityprintsmapart.com/wine-regions/.



Science Confirms Microbiological Component of Terroir The Lead South Australia, at www.theleadsouthaustralia.com.au, a news service providing stories about innovation in South Australia, recently reported that studies published in *mBio* on the online open-access *Journal of the American Society of Microbiology*, found that the soil in vineyards acts as a reservoir for most of the bacteria that are colonizing the plants' structures. Researchers discovered that where you grow a grapevine is the most important characteristic shaping which bacteria will colonize the plant. The terroir of wine could have more to do with the soil microbes (microbiome) found around a grapevine's roots than the soil's physical characteristics. There is not clear evidence that bacteria are specifically contributing to terroir, but further research will be done with the goal of figuring out how bacteria are affecting the chemistry of the plant.

Knudsen Releases First Chardonnay in Over 40 Years Knudsen Vineyards is releasing a 2013 Chardonnay, currently available only to mailing list members. The Chardonnay is produced from vines planted in 1993 to Dijon clone 76. The family is releasing this wine to honor Cal and Julia Lee Knudsen, founders of Knudsen Vineyards. Visit www.princeofpinot.com/article1586/ to learn more about Knudsen Vineyards that released the inaugural Pinot Noir with the 2012 vintage.

Matthew McConaughey to Star in Billionaire's Vinegar According to thedrinksbusiness.com (March 29, 2015), a new movie based on Benjamin Wallace's best-selling book, *The Billionaire's Vinegar*, will star Oscar-winner Matthew McConaughey. Will Smith will produce the film.

Pinot Noir Prices and Yields for North Coast AVA Gabriel Froymovich of Vineyard Financial Associates recently reported on the prices and yields for Pinot Noir for the North Coast, 2013-2014 (per ton). The 2013 price was \$2,845.68 compared to \$2,913.31 for 2014, an increase of 2.38%. Yields were 78,633 in

2013 compared to 70,530 in 2014, a decrease of 10.31%. The North Coast AVA includes Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma, Marin, Napa and Solano Counties.

Oregon Wineries Lead Nation in Sales in 2014 According to the 2015 Wine Sales Report by Ship Compliant, Oregon had the fastest growth in direct to consumer (DTC) sales to customers in 2014, over double the next leading region. The figures reflect an increasing demand for Pinot Noir across the country. The volume of direct shipments of cases of wine increased 46% in 2014, compared to regions in California and the rest of the U.S. that were below 16% increases in volume. The average cost of a bottle of Oregon wine was \$39.72, a 4.2% increase over 2013. Since most Oregon wineries are small (5,000 cases or less produced per year), they concentrate on DTC sales through wine clubs and other marketing. The strong growth of the Oregon wine industry has attracted new investment from the U.S. (Jackson Family Wines, Foley Family Wines, Wagner Family of Wines) and global interests such as Louis Jadot.

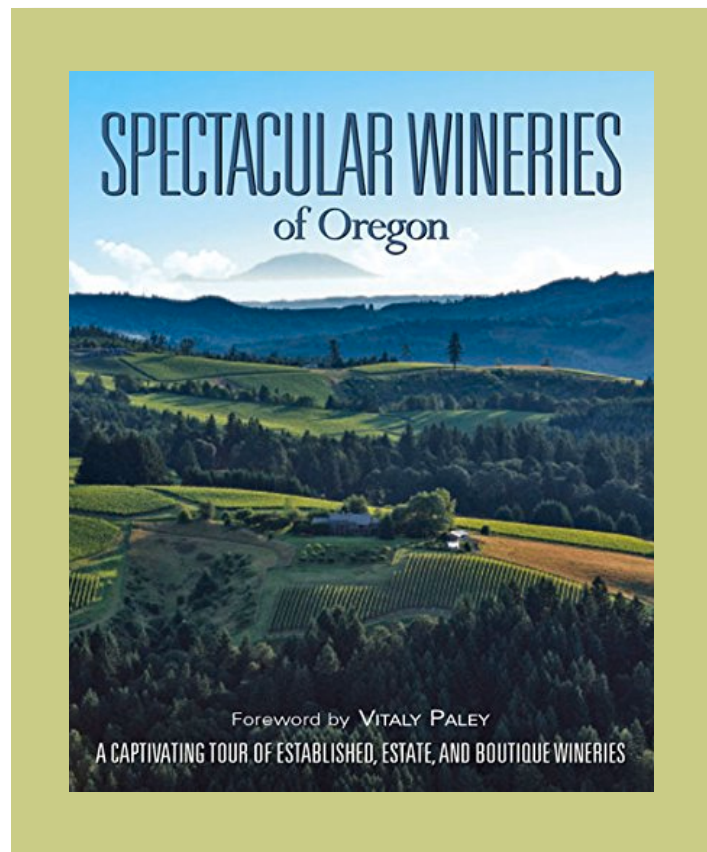
Eagle Peak, Mendocino County AVA Receives Approval The TTB approved the AVA “Eagle Peak Mendocino County” in October 2014. Named after the most prominent nearby peak in the coastal mountain range, the Eagle Peak, Mendocino County AVA encompasses a unique growing region in Northern California. Situated 125 miles north of San Francisco, and 10 miles north and slightly west of the nearest city, Ukiah, the new AVA contains nearly 21,000 acres of mountainous terrain. Currently there are five growers in the new AVA: Golden Vineyards, Linholme Vineyards, Masút Vineyard & Winery, Sea Biscuit South Vineyards, and Turan Vineyards. A total of 115 acres are under vine. The vineyards are all on high coastal range slopes, mostly facing east and south, above the Redwood and Potter Valleys, the two nearby, well-established AVAs. Masút is the only operating winery within the new AVA. The region has been noted for winegrowing since the early 1900s, following the influx of Italian and Swiss immigrants into the area. The AVA is significantly affected by marine air that courses through the gaps in the coastal mountain range. Marine fog is common in the mornings and nights within the AVA. This factor cools the vines to a different degree than the neighboring valleys and the air drainage assists in reducing the threat of frost-induced vine damage. The region’s soils are well-draining coarse gravel, clay and loam mixes.



2014 a “Goldilocks” Vintage in Oregon Winemaker Luisa Ponzi said that the 2014 vintage in Oregon was “not too hot, not too cold, and not too much rain.” The vintage was, however, the warmest season on record in the Willamette Valley. This was not due to high maximum temperatures, but rather higher than normal minimum temperatures. A warm spring and a little rain led to an early bud break and the season maintained warm temperatures throughout. Nighttime temperatures were well above normal accelerating ripening despite large crop loads and harvest began the very beginning of September. The dry weather inhibited disease pressure leading to a bountiful, clean and quite ripe vintage

Wine Enthusiast May Film Issue The May issue of Wine Enthusiast, on stands April 8, features a photo of actress Kate Hudson on the cover. Hudson, co-owner of Hudson Bellamy Wines reveals her favorite wines and her approach to wine making. Other celebrities involved in wine are featured in the new film issue including Kurt Russell, Max Thieroit, Drew Barrymore, Jason Wise, Kyle McLaughlin, and Gia Coppola. The Kate Hudson interview is available at www.winemag.com/Web-2015/Kate-Hudson-On-Wine-and-Show-Business/.





Spectacular Wineries of Oregon Urges a Visit

I couldn't wait to get my hands on this new book that features the photography of Portlander, Andrea Johnson. I have known Andrea for years, and have found her wine-related photography to be inspiring.

This large, hard-bound book of 270 glossy pages includes hundreds of dazzling photographs, including many spectacular aerial shots, that bring Oregon's pastoral terroir vividly to life. Covering 70 of Oregon's most notable wineries, the photographs are accompanied by a detailed history of each winery, a portrait of the colorful owners and winemakers, and a listing of featured wines with food pairings.

After opening the book and perusing a few pages, I was so inspired that I wanted to cancel my plans for the week, grab a flight to Portland, and explore the wineries in the book that I have not visited. I dare you to resist the urge to visit after perusing this collection of photographs. The availability of tastings and visiting hours for each winery is detailed in case you are tempted.

A map showing the location of the included wineries would have been welcome. Some of my favorite wineries were not included, but with Oregon's more than 450 wineries spread over 17 appellations, it is impossible to include them all in one volume.

The publisher, Panache Books, also offers companion volumes in its Spectacular Wineries Series that cover the wine regions of California's Central Coast, Napa Valley, and Sonoma Coast, as well as New York, Ontario, Sonoma Coast, Texas and Washington.

This book retails for \$49.99, but is discounted at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and other sources. Get a copy and bring it to the International Pinot Noir Celebration this July in McMinnville, Oregon, where Andrea and the vintners featured in this book will be happy to autograph your copy.