



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## Benovia Celebrates Tenth Anniversary with Exceptional Offerings



I have followed the emergence of Benovia Winery in Santa Rosa since its origins and I have tasted every wine from this winery over the past eight years beginning with the first commercially released wines from the 2005 vintage. Winemaker and viticulturist extraordinaire, Michael Sullivan, had to make do initially with an aged winery and equipment and primarily purchased grapes. The limited amount of estate vineyard sources needed considerable revitalization. Undaunted, he continued to adapt and reshape his winemaking and viticultural goals. Today, Benovia Winery has a modern new winemaking facility dedicated to Pinot Noir and is transitioning to all estate grown wines. The Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from the 2012 vintage were stunning examples of persistence and dedication, and the equally stellar 2013 wines celebrate the winery's tenth anniversary and remarkable advances achieved over a relatively short span of time.

The idea for Benovia Winery was first launched in 2002 when Joe Anderson and his spouse Mary Dewane, former CEO's in the healthcare industry, bought the Cohn Vineyard located in the far western reaches of the Russian River Valley. The property included a home which allowed Joe and Mary, who lived in Arizona, to spend time in Sonoma County and pursue their winery aspirations.

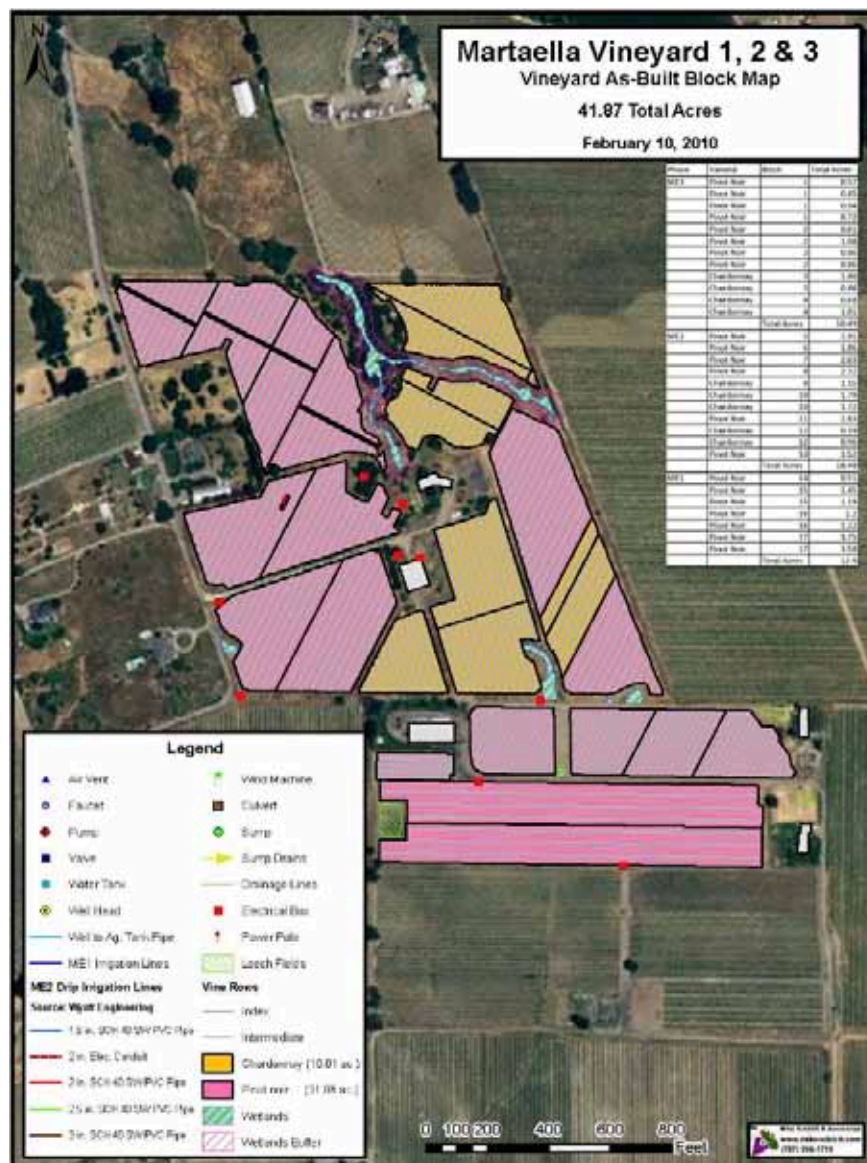
In 2005, they bought an 18-acre ranch located in the Laguna de Santa Rosa subregion of the Russian River Valley from Cecil DeLoach. The modest Hartman Road Vineyards and Winery property (where Merry Edwards made wine at one time under the Merry Vintners label) included a dated winery and 13.5 acres of Pinot Noir.

The name, Benovia, was chosen as a merger of the first names of Mary Dewane's father, Ben, with Joe Anderson's father, Novian. The property's vineyard was named Martaella for the mothers, Martha (Joe's), and Eleanor (Mary's).

Winemaker Michael Sullivan, who had made many brilliant Pinot Noirs at Hartford Family Winery, joined as a partner to lead the winemaking, vineyard development and management of the winery. At the beginning Michael stated his goals: "I joined Benovia to make wines that transcend varietal correctness. I want to create bottlings that meld the grape, climate and topography into something unique and special." Humbled by the challenge, Michael noted, "What I love about winemaking is that perfection is unattainable."

The owners committed significant financial resources to achieve their goal of making extraordinary wines. The old vine Pinot Noir and Zinfandel vineyard known as the Cohn Vineyard (18 planted acres located just outside the Russian River Valley AVA so designated Sonoma County AVA), soon underwent revitalization including a commitment to organic farming. Originally planted in 1970, the Cohn fruit had been sourced by Kosta Browne and Williams Selyem for exceptional Pinot Noir bottlings. The dry-farmed Pinot Noir at Cohn Vineyard is planted to a massale selection, most likely Martini and Pommard clones. For extensive reading on this vineyard visit [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1689/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1689/).

A 40-acre horse ranch parcel adjacent the winery belonging to the Erbs family was acquired increasing the Benovia Winery property to 58 acres. The original 13.5 acre estate vineyard adjacent the winery was expanded to 41.87 acres after the Erbs property acquisition and was named Martaella Vineyard. The new plantings included 9 clones and heirloom selections of Pinot Noir, and 4 clones of Chardonnay including a suitcase selection from Montrachet Vineyard in Burgundy, established in a very high density configuration of between 2200 and 2722 vines per acre. A map of Martaella Vineyard and its three parcels is below.



A 16-acre site near Freestone known as Tilton Hill Vineyard, was acquired, and 12 acres of Pinot Noir vines developed. Tilton Hill is the coldest estate vineyard located just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. Vines were planted here at very high density in 2009 using Dijon selections of Pinot Noir on a very low vigor 420A rootstock. Benovia Winery now has 71 acres of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Zinfandel vines in three distinctive locations across the Russian River Valley AVA, the Sonoma Coast AVA, and the Sonoma County AVA. The three estate vineyards can be located on the map below.



An old ranch house on the property was converted into a tasting room, a horse barn became the new red wine winery (photo below), and the original winery was transitioned to white wine production (photo above with balloons overhead).



I recently tasted through the lineup of Benovia Winery wines from the 2013 vintage. The Pinot Noirs were particularly charming in this vintage, offering a more forward elegance than the boisterous 2012 Pinot Noirs. They are all superbly balanced. The 2013 vintage was not too hot and not too cold with an abundance of sunshine and temperatures that rarely spiked above 90° F. Ripening was uniform and almost perfect weather at harvest produced grapes with ideal ripeness and balance. All Benovia Pinot Noirs are also available in magnum format.

Pinot Noir winemaking is as follows. The grapes are gently de-stemmed after hand sorting. A small amount of whole cluster was included in the ferments in the following 2013 Pinot Noirs: La Pommeraie 12%, Martaella 22%, and Tilton Hill 5%. After a cold soak of 5 to 8 days, indigenous yeast completes primary fermentation. The must is moved to French oak barrels and inoculated for malolactic fermentation with weekly lees stirring. The wines are typically aged 14 to 16 months in roughly one-third new French oak barrels.



**2014 Benovia Russian River Valley Rosé of Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.34, TA 0.71, 230 cases, \$24 (sold out). Released April 2015. Martaella and Zio Tony vineyards. Whole cluster pressed and blended with a small amount of saignée, barrel fermented in neutral barrels. “Weeping tears of Pinot Noir.” *Moderate pinkish red color in the glass. Lovely aromas of strawberry, cherry, blood orange, peach and bay leaf. The flavors echo the nose in a fresh, bright, and silky style of rosé with quenching acidity. A perfect aperitif or food wine. 89.*



**2013 Benovia Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.60, 2,200 cases, \$36. Released April 2015. Heirloom clones and Dijon “828” and 943 from Martaella, Cohn, Martinelli and Tilton Hill vineyards. Aged in 37% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of Bing cherry, blueberry, spice and smoky oak. Darker fruited on the palate, with flavors of black cherry, boysenberry, and plum, with a subtle oak overlay. Silky tannins and impressive balance make for forward drinking. Not typical flavor profile for a Russian River Valley AVA bottling because of contribution of vineyards outside the Russian River Valley. 89.*

**2013 Benovia Martaella Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.60, 446 cases, \$56. Released September 2015. Heirloom clones only. Aged in 34% new French oak barrels. *Moderate*

reddish purple color in the glass. Clean, pleasing berry fruits that are shy upon pouring. The nose was considerably more expressive the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. A welcome charge of mid weight blue, purple and black berries are framed by silky tannins. Ephemeral in nature and very giving on the palate with satisfying balance. **92.**

**2013 Benovia Tilton Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.61, 492 cases, \$56. Released September 2015. Aged in 38% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Very fragrant perfume of blackberry, sage, and sous-bois. Elegantly styled, with soft tannins caressing a mid weight core of blue and black berry fruits. Slightly feral with an iron thread running through. Plenty of length on the finish. Even better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle when the wine was more aromatic and flavorful. This is a wine that has somewhere to go over the coming years.* **93.**

**2013 Benovia Cohn Vineyard Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.78, TA 0.56, 350 cases, \$70. Released September 2015. Aged in 40% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Intriguing aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, white pepper and a hint of oak. Refined and elegant on the palate, with layered flavors of black cherry and dark red berries and the slightest oak compliment. A haunting wine that finishes with plenty of spice and quenching acidity. This wine is more about nuance than power.* **92.**



**2013 Benovia La Pommeraie Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.57, 300 cases, \$56. Released September 2015. George Martinelli Frei Road Vineyard farmed by the Martinelli Family. Name of wine pays homage to the history of the site which was once an apple orchard. Dijon clones 777 and "828." 10-day cold soak, indigenous yeast fermentation lasted for almost 3 weeks. Aged 16 months in 33% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. This is a real crowd pleaser with intoxicating aromas of dark berry jam, toasty oak and rose petal. The mid weight plus core of showy and gorgeous purple and black fruits literally explode on the palate. The ripe tannins are well matched and there is enough juicy acidity to keep the wine vibrant. A bombastic but gentle wine that displays the hallmark of a great Pinot Noir. This wine will part your hair!.* **94.**



**2012 Benovia La Pommeraie Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., pH 3.38, TA 0.71, 380 cases, \$48. Released September 2015. Vines planted at very high density of 2420 vines per acre to Dijon clone 548 and 95. Located at edge of Green Valley AVA. Whole cluster pressed, indigenous yeast fermentation, weekly lees stirring. Aged 16 months in 30% new French oak barrels. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Lovely aromas of citrus blossom and lemon peel lead to a crisp attack of fresh pear and lemon flavors. Creamy in the mouth, yet offering a crispness of flavor and a mouthwatering finish.* **92.**

**2013 Benovia Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.35, TA 0.69, 1,580 cases, \$36. Released April 2015. Primarily from Martaella Estate Vineyard with some contribution from Zio Tony Ranch. Whole cluster pressed and fermented with indigenous yeast. Aged in 30% new French oak barrels. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Similar to the La Pommeraie offering but offering tighter acidity and less fruit generosity. The aromas and flavors feature Granny Smith apple and lemon with a complimentary note of nutty oak.* **89.**



**2013 Benovia Fort Ross-Sea View Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.58, 340 cases, \$48. Released April 2015. Charles Vineyard located on third coastal ridge from the ocean. Dijon clones 76, 95 and 96. Whole cluster pressed and fermented with indigenous yeast. Aged in 24% new French oak barrels. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Intense and penetrating aromas of lemon curd, pear, nutty oak and saline minerality. Exceptional presence in the mouth with bright flavors of lemon, white peach and vanilla creme. Crisp and lively with a finish that perks up the senses. This special wine has noteworthy elegance and balance.* **94.**

**2013 Benovia Sonoma County Zinfandel** 15.2% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.61, 322 cases, \$38. Released September 2015. De-stemmed, fermented in open-top fermenters, aged in thin-staved, 30% new Bordeaux barrels on fine lees without racking. I tasted plenty of Zinfandel in my early wine enthusiast years and this wine stands up to many of the best. *Moderately dark purple color in the glass. The nose leads with a mash of fresh*

*berries and cedary spice. Luscious dark fruits engulf the palate, but hold a discreet presence. Beautifully balanced, with a sustained finish that sports a modest wave of dry tannins. A Burgundian-fashioned Zin. 90.*

Seated, detailed tastings are available by appointment only daily from 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (a charge of \$20 per person is waived with the purchase of one or more bottles of Benovia wine). Phone 707-921-1040 or visit the website at [www.benoviawinery.com](http://www.benoviawinery.com). The entry to the tasting room and hospitality center is pictured below.



# Recently Tasted California Pinot Noir: The Bar Keeps Moving Higher

I am fortunate in that my wine drinking lifetime has coincided with the modern rise of Pinot Noir excellence in California. When I first developed a serious interest in Pinot Noir in the late 1970s, there were very few notable Pinot Noir producers. I had to become a Chalone stockholder to get my hands on the Reserve Pinot Noirs of Chalone, the gold standard for Pinot Noir at the time. If only Dick Graff were alive today (he passed away in 1998) to experience the current state of Pinot Noir renaissance.

Currently, there is an embarrassment of riches and the quality of California Pinot Noir is at an all time high. The bar has moved to such lofty heights that a disproportionately large number of premium Pinot Noirs now consistently receive scores of 90 or above. As I tasted the wines reviewed here, I had to shake my head in amazement at the skilled hands of winegrowers and winemakers who today continue to strive for perfection in Pinot Noir. Fortunately, perfection will never be achieved, but there are many wines that are damn close.

## Bailiwick Wines

Brothers Paul and Bryan Vais made wine in various garages for 25 years before launching their commercial venture with the 2009 vintage. They chose to focus on specially chosen vineyards across multiple appellations of California and employ artisan winemaking methods on a limited production basis. I was enthralled with their inaugural wines, and have followed their releases since. The wines are available through the winery's website store at [www.bailiwickwines.com](http://www.bailiwickwines.com). All the wines tasted here would benefit from decanting if enjoyed now.

**2013 Bailiwick Borderline Marin County Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.54, 300 cases, \$36. Sourced from Kendric and Chileno Valley vineyards. Clones 667 and 777. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 25% new. 23% of Kendric Vineyard fruit fermented whole cluster. 4 to 6-day cold soak, proprietary yeasts, several day post fermentation maceration. A blend of the best barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose leads with a mix of cherry, Xmas spice and tobacco. Soft, even slightly creamy in the mouth, with a modestly concentrated array of oak-kissed cherry, red berry, cola and spice flavors. The fruit is framed by suave tannins and the persistent aromatic cherry finish brings a smile. This wine is very solid, but not to my favored taste since there is too much tobacco-charged oak overlay even when tasted the following day.* **88.**

**2013 Bailiwick Michaud Vineyard Monterey County Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.61, 49 cases, \$44. This vineyard sits at 1600 feet elevation at the front door of Pinnacles National Monument. Soils contain significant amounts of decomposed granite and limestone. Michael Michaud, the former winemaker at Chalone in its hay day, has farmed this vineyard since the early 1990s. Clones 115, 667, 777 and Swan. The berries and clusters were particularly small and the grapes more thick-skinned in 2013 due to sparse rainfall, with very low yields. 100% de-stemmed, followed by a 4-day cold soak after which fermentation was initiated with natural yeasts. The fermentation was augmented with an additional yeast strain. The wine was macerated on the skins for several weeks after fermentation. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate cherry red color in the glass. Pleasing aromas of black cherry, earthy flora and mixed berry jam lead to mid weight flavors of blackberry and black raspberry with a welcome notes of spice, dark chocolate, Kahlua and oak creeping in. Firm tannins, yet very polished, with the fruit playing a starring role on the vigorous finish. This vineyard can produce wines with daunting tannins, but they were corralled in this special wine.* **90.**

**2013 Bailiwick Foray Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.58, 148 cases, \$44. Swan and Pommard clones. Vineyard source is Juui Vineyard located in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Goldridge sandy loam soil. Pommard and Swan clones. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, proprietary yeast fermentation, 2 week post-fermentation maceration. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 33% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Rather shy nose offering demure aromas of ripe cherry and cardamom spice with a hint of aged oak. An easy to like wine with a juicy deeply flavored cherry core accented with hints of cola and clove spice. The tannins are balanced, the mouthfeel is plush and saucy and the finish is filled with bombastic cherry goodness. Pommard and Swan makes for a very compatible marriage. Considerably more enjoyable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**



**2013 Bailiwick Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.56, 470 cases, \$36. A blend of grapes from Chileno, Kendric, Juui and Silver Pines vineyards. Clones are 115, 667, 777, Swan and Pommard. Portions of the Kendric and Silver Pines grapes went in as whole clusters. 4-day cold soak, two lots were inoculated with two yeast strains and one lot continued on ambient yeasts. A several week post-fermentation maceration was followed by aging for 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 37% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, sea breeze, spice and seasoned oak. A silky core of cherry fruit is quite inviting on the mid palate. This wine is blessed with modest tannins and a pleasing elegance, finishing with a candied cherry theme and a slight tug of oak. More aromatic and expressive the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 90.*

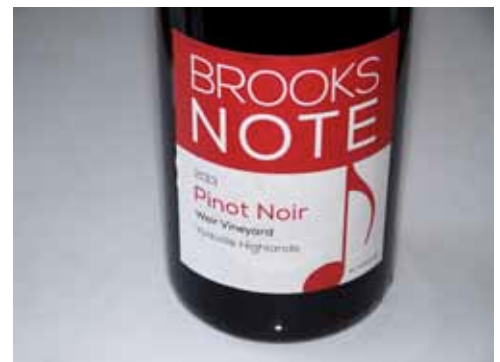


**2013 Bailiwick Silver Pines Vineyard Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.78, TA 0.56, 100 cases, \$44. This vineyard is located at 900 feet elevation overlooking nearby Bennett Valley on the northwestern flank of Sonoma Mountain. This wine is crafted from clone 115 planted in 2000 in volcanic soils that limit yields. 30% whole cluster. 4-day cold soak, a different yeast added to each fermenter, and macerated on the skins for several weeks post-fermentation. A selection of barrels was aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 34% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The most expressive nose in this lineup upon opening, offering hi-tone scents of cherry, strawberry, rose petal and sous-bois. Seductive harmony on the palate, offering mid weight flavors of earthy red fruits embellished with a measured touch of oak. Very elegant and silky, with a modest red fruited finish. 90.*

## Brooks Note

This newer winery founded by winemaker Garry Brooks is based in Forestville and focuses on Pinot Noir. With a degree in viticulture and enology from UC Davis in hand after leaving the technology world, he gained experience at Acacia in 2007 where he crafted his first Pinot Noir, later working at Kosta Browne and Dutton-Goldfield. The Brooks Note label was launched in 2011. This is a serious up and coming winery that should be on your radar. Visit the website and join the mailing list to purchase wine: [www.brooks-note-winery.myshopify.com](http://www.brooks-note-winery.myshopify.com).

**2013 Brooks Note Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.67, TA 0.71, 140 cases, \$44. Rochioli selection and Wädenswil grapes were sourced from the lower, eastern blocks planted in 1992 and the RC clone from the western blocks planted in 2000. 10% whole cluster. 3-day cold soak, native yeast fermentation finished in 2 weeks. Wines from the three different selections and clones were vinified separately and combined just before bottling. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak barrels, 33% new. *Light reddish purple color in the glass. I was really drawn into the glass by the aromas of Maraschino cherry, peach skin and redwood forest. The profound attack of ripe red cherry and raspberry fruits alerts the palate and persists on the finish for more than 30 seconds. The raspberry fruit really sticks out and there is an interesting edible flower petal component to the flavor profile. The tannins are very supple and comforting. This charming and elegant offering is highly enjoyable now, but has the balance to prevail through several years. 93.*



## FEL Wines

This winery was profiled in detail previously in the *PinotFile*: [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1669/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1669/). Suffice it to say, that winemaker Ryan Hodgins is rather unassuming but exceptionally talented and I have become a big fan of FEL wines. The vineyard sources are superb, including Savoy, Donnelly Creek, Ferrington and Wiley in



the Anderson Valley and Hirsch in the Sonoma Coast. The wines, which sell out every year, are available online at [www.felwines.com](http://www.felwines.com) and through the winery's wine clubs and mailing list. Large formats are available.

**FEL Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 605 cases, \$70. A blend of clones including several Dijon and Pommard clones along with Martini and Calera selections. Harvest Brix averaged 24.2°. 7-day cold soak, a 9-day uninoculated primary fermentation and a 7 to 14-day extended maceration. The was aged 15 months in 100% French oak barrels, 59% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of black cherry and black raspberry fruit with savory notes of herbs and tea leaf. More expressive on the palate with a charge of well-spiced dark red and black fruits that alert the senses and expand to a mouth coating presence. The intense fruit soaks up the high percentage of new oak nicely. Still young and tight, needing time to ameliorate the tannins, but the future looks bright.*

**91-92.**



**FEL Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 138 cases, \$48. This wine is made from a blend of Wente, Prosser and Dijon clones from the winery's estate vineyard near Philo. Averaged harvest Brix 24.1°. Whole cluster pressed to tank and barrel fermented in 50% new French oak barrels. Aged 15 months sur lie. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. The fresh aromas of citrus, blood orange and a hint of oak leap from the glass. A slight note of reduction resolves quickly. Very lovely and refined with an excellent spark of somewhat steely acidity, featuring flavors of lemon, apple and spice. Crisp and bright, with the fruit speaking far more than oak.* **92.**

## Hirsch Vineyards

Not much needs to be said about this iconic West Sonoma Coast vineyard and winery. Vineyard manager Everado Robledo has lived on the site since 1988 and planted and cultivated all 90,000 vines on the 72 acres of Hirsch Vineyard. Noted winemaker Ross Cobb crafts the wines. Biodynamic viticulture is currently practiced. The wines are sold online through the website and a mailing list at [www.hirschvineyards.com](http://www.hirschvineyards.com). The 2013 East Ridge and West Ridge Pinot Noirs are already sold out. All of these 2013 Pinot Noirs will benefit from decanting if opened now and will be better served by cellaring for a few years.

**2013 Hirsch Vineyards San Andreas Fault Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., \$60. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Upon pouring, aromas of oak-driven espresso and campfire overwhelm the black cherry fruit. A little tight on the palate, offering a discreetly concentrated, juicy black cherry core with noticeable intensity and finishing power. Very suave and silky. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the aromatics were more fruity and the wine was more flavorful with less evident oak overlay.* **89-90.**

**2013 Hirsch Vineyards Reserve Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 570 cases, \$85. This wine is made from the best barrels from ten of the oldest and finest blocks in the Hirsch Vineyard. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very shy nose, offering demure aromas of cherry, spice and espresso. Impressive attack, mouth presence and finish with substantial tannins to match. Delicious blueberry, black cherry and black raspberry fruit flavors with modest oak seasoning in the background. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the nose was slightly more inviting, and the palate was more giving and pleasing.* **92-93.**

**2013 Hirsch Vineyards East Ridge Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 470 cases, \$85. This wine is a selection of the best barrels from the three oldest blocks on the ridge. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is noticeably unique with a stony minerality evident accenting the fresh cherry fruit aromas. On entry, the plum, cherry and berry assemblage explodes in the mouth and refuses to leave on the endless finish which offers a wave of fruit and tannin. Oak is beautifully integrated. A masculine expression of the vineyard but not in an extreme sense. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the attack of succulent fruit is still engaging and the tannic backbone is still slightly daunting. Cellar this baby.* **92-93.**

**2013 Hirsch Vineyards West Ridge Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., 320 cases, \$85. A selection of the oldest and most exceptional sections on the cool western ridge of Hirsch Vineyard. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A bit tight on the nose, showing shy aromas of dark cherry and espresso. More appealing in the mouth with redder-toned fruit, lacy tannins, and juicy acidity. Very smooth and graceful in a feminine style, with oak intruding a bit on the fruit expression at this young age. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine still offered noticeable oak overlay on the nose and palate bringing the delicate fruit core into subjugation.* **90-91.**



**2013 Hirsch Vineyards Block 8 Sonoma Coast Estate Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., 290 cases, \$85. Located on the West Ridge of the vineyard, this section has iron oxide-laden soils that are unique within the vineyard. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Demure aromas of red cherries and red berries and spice lead to a delicious core of fresh, well-spiced cherry and strawberry fruits that are framed by sublime tannins. A touch of earthiness and oak seasoning adds interest. A complete wine that emotes due to its texture, flavor and roundness. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, this wine continued to stand out, reminding me of a great Chambertain. The vintner made a prudent decision to bottle this wine separately.* **94-95.**



**2013 Hirsch Vineyards Estate Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 720 cases, \$60. This wine is produced from 3.9 acres of Chardonnay vines planted at Hirsch Vineyard. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. The wine aims to please upon opening, offering hi-tone scents of lemon curd, grilled pineapple and poached pear. The fruit really speaks in this harmonious wine, with delicious flavors of lemon, pear and apple accented with a saline note. Slightly creamy on the palate, with juicy acidity and beautiful integration of oak. Very gracious and classy.* **93.**

## Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

I believe winemaker Dave Hickey is crafting some of the greatest Central Coast Pinot Noirs. I say this, because I don't he has received the notoriety he deserves. The winery's estate Pinot Noir is consistently fine, but the Reserve, Whole Cluster and single vineyard Pinot Noirs are striking wines that belong in every pinotophile's cellar. The wines are available on the winery's website at [www.laetiawine.com](http://www.laetiawine.com) or at the tasting room in Arroyo Grande which is open daily.



**2013 Laetitia Single Vineyard La Colline Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.61, 205 cases, \$60. Sourced from original plantings located in low yielding blocks in the heart of the Laetitia Estate Vineyard. Only produced in exceptional vintages. Harvested in late August at 24.9° Brix. Martini clone 13.4-day cold soak, whole berry fermented in small open top fermenters with the addition of RC 212 yeast. After 6 days of fermentation, the wine was gently pressed and racked into 100% French oak barrels, 30% new, where it was aged for 12 months. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Highly aromatic, drawing the nose to wondrous aromas of strawberry, cherry, spice and a hint of smoky oak. Very charming, with a mid weight core of delicious red fruits framed by suave tannins. Impressive elegance and class, with the ripe red fruits holding court through a finishes that lingers for what seems like a minute.* **94.**



**2013 Laetitia Single Vineyard La Coupelle Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.59, 209 cases, \$60. Harvest Brix 27.6°. 80% Dijon 667 and 20% Dijon 459. 5-day cold soak, whole berry fermented in small open top fermenters. Aged 12 months in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The aromas of plum, blackberry, spice and vanilla leap from the glass initially. Soft in the mouth with a touch of smoky oak and dark chocolate accenting the mid weight plus core of*

ripe dark fruits. The tannins are harmonious, and the finish is generously endowed with fruit. Still young, and a bit monotone, but very promising. **92.**



**2013 Laetitia Single Vineyard Les Galets Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.78, TA 0.563, 209 cases, \$60. Composed of grapes from low yielding blocks. The name means "stones" in French. Only produced in the most promising vintages. Multiple picks from late September to early October. Harvest Brix 25.5°. Dijon clone 115. 4-day cold soak, whole berry fermented in small open top fermenters with an addition of

RC212 yeast. After 6 days of fermentation, the must was gently pressed and racked to 100% French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Enticing aromas of boysenberry, blackberry, rose petal and vanilla soar from the glass. Brightly fruited with layers of dark fruits and exotic spices. Highly distinctive, with a firm, but complimentary tannic backbone, a hint of oak seasoning, juicy acidity and a silky mouthfeel. An exceptional wine of unusual breeding that will bring you to your knees. **95.***



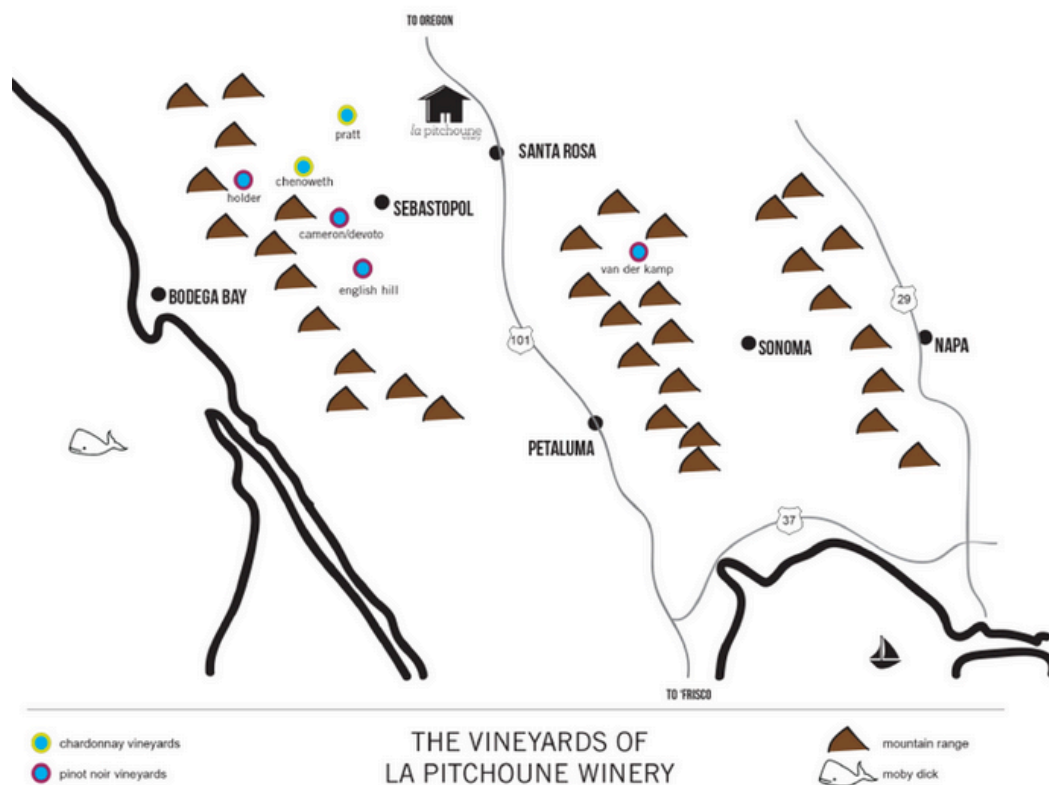
## La Pitchoune Winery

Tracy Nielsen and Peter Joachim Nielsen were inspired by a small family property in the south of France named "la pitchoune," or "the little one." The name speaks to small production, small lots and the idea that the winery's small size is its greatest asset. Tracy was a Registered Nurse who accepted a job managing sales for a medical equipment company and moved to California. Not long after, the idea of La Pitchoune was born, and she became the assistant winemaker. Peter is a successful entrepreneur.

The winemaker is Andrew Berge, a UC Davis graduate, who also crafts wines for SPELL Estate.

Vineyard sources include Chenoweth Vineyards, Devoto Vineyard, English Hill Vineyard, Holder Vineyard, Van der Kamp Vineyard and Pratt Vineyards, all in Sonoma County.

Visit the website for more information at [www.lapitchounewinery.com](http://www.lapitchounewinery.com).



**2012 La Pitchoune Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 279 cases, \$56. *Moderately light reddish purple hue in the glass. Nicely ripened black cherry fruit is featured in this mid weight wine which is dominated on the nose and palate with heavy-handed smoky, tarry oak. The tannins are nicely balanced, and the juicy finish appeals although lacks a bit of intensity. 88.*

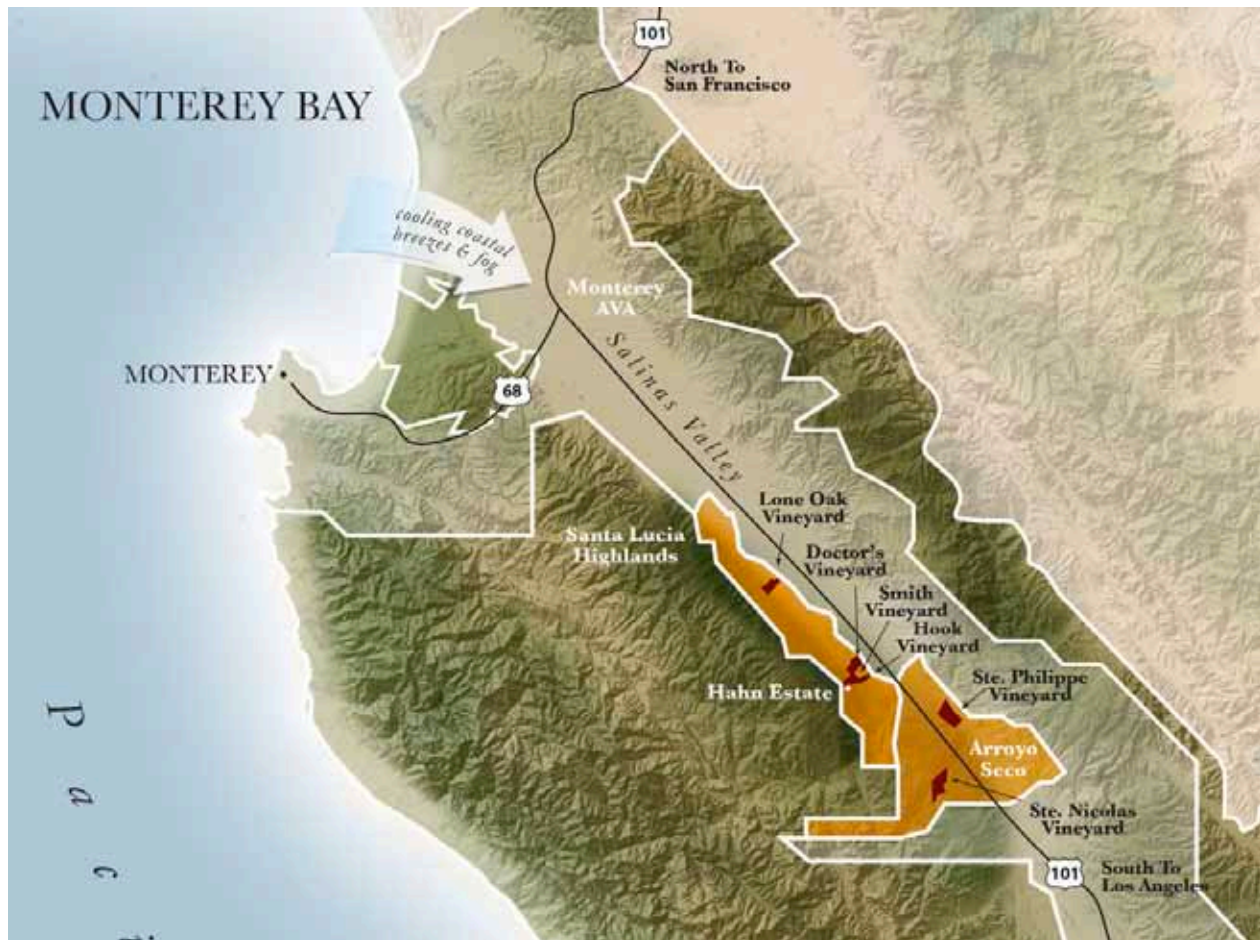
**2013 La Pitchoune English Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.57, 99 cases, \$58. Released November 2015. Harvest Brix 24°-25°. Dijon 115, 667 and a Vosne Romanee selection. Aged 11 months in 100% French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very appealing scent of black cherry and sous-bois. The light to mid weight flavors of black cherry and blackberry are vibrant and classy and embellished with the right touch of oak and spice. Impressive harmony with noticeable length on the aromatic finish. 92.*



**2013 La Pitchoune Holder Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.63, TA 0.57, 120 cases, \$68. Released November 2015. Harvest Brix 22.7° and 24°. Dijon 115 and 667. Aged 11 months in 100% French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. An enchanting wine with soaring aromas of fresh Bing cherries, forest floor, brioche and a kiss of oak. Striking entry and mid palate presence of Bing cherry and blueberry fruits framed by refined tannins and integrated acidity. The finish is remarkably long, lasting well over 30 seconds. 92.*

## Lucienne

This is a winery within a winery launched in the 2005 vintage under the Hahn Estates umbrella of wines. Owned by Nicholas Lucien Hahn, the winery is a separate facility devoted to three single vineyard, estate, premium Pinot Noir. Winemaker Paul Clifton joined Hahn Estates in 2003, worked his way up to become head winemaker, and has brought the winery's Pinot Noir program into prominence. The wines are available through the winery's website at [www.luciennevineyards.com](http://www.luciennevineyards.com). The Hahn Estate's tasting room is nestled in the heart of the Smith Vineyard in Soledad. A map showing the location of Hahn Estate's estate vineyards is below.



**2013 Lucienne Doctor's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.73, TA 0.57, 602 cases, \$50. This vineyard is near the center of the Santa Lucia Highlands, 520 feet above sea level. Afternoon sun exposure leads to riper and more robust flavors than are found in vineyards farther north. Harvest Brix 25.5°-27°. Clones are 667, 777, 115, 113, Pommard and Jardini. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 40% new. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. This wine is infused with blackest cherry and blackberry aromas and flavors accented with oak-driven highlights of tar, anise and black tea. Nicely balanced, with modest tannins and a vigorous finish with good length. 91.*

**2013 Lucienne Smith Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.60, 1,224 cases, \$50. This vineyard sits at the highest elevation of Hahn's vineyards. Harvest Brix 25.5°-27°. Clones are Calera and Jardini. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose offers bright aromas of darker cherries and berries with the right touch of oak. Beautiful dark fruits including black cherry and blackberry engulf the palate with richness. Saucy, fat, ripe and lush, with a balanced fine-grain tannin backbone. A riff of spice, anise and vanilla add interest. Ideal harmony. 92.*



**2013 Lucienne Lone Oak Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.83, TA 0.56, 598 cases, \$50. This 20-acre vineyard is located at the northern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands, and experiences the strongest maritime influence of all of Hahn's vineyards and the coolest growing season. Harvest Brix 25.5°-27°. Pommard clone. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose evolves in the glass over time to offer inviting aromas of black cherry, sous-bois and toasty oak. Very suave on the palate with a mid weight core of well ripened darker stone and berry fruits framed by creamy tannins. This wine shows the most oak imprint of the three 2013 Lucienne Pinot Noirs, with anise and smoke augmenting the fruit. 90.*

## Maggy Hawk

Regular readers of the *PinotFile* will know that I have a soft spot for the Pinot Noirs from Maggy Hawk Vineyard in the Anderson Valley, particularly the Jolie bottling. The Hawkster bottling was only recently released, and this wine, along with the 2012 Maggy Hawk Jolie are the two top Pinot Noirs I have drank this year. Hawkster is a winning, record-holding thoroughbred sired by Maggy Hawk. Hawkster is only produced in the best vintages from clone 2A and is considered the "crown jewel" of the Maggy Hawk collection. Get some while they still might be available through the allocated mailing list at [www.maggyhawk.com](http://www.maggyhawk.com).





### **2012 Maggy Hawk Hawkster Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**

14.5% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.54, 268 cases. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak barrels, 63% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of wild berries, mushroom and earthy humus draw you into the glass. A striking array of rich black cherry fruit saturates the palate with joy, fanning out on the finish in glorious fashion. Robust, yet refined, with the balance to last and improve over further time in the bottle. This is a complete wine with every component singing in unanimity. A wine that brings emotion.*

97.



## **Mignanelli Winery**

This winery was founded in 2011 by winemaker Byron Mignanelli. His sole focus is creating site-driven coastal California Pinot Noir. The winery started in a garage and has now moved into a professional facility where modern equipment is available.

The wines undergo native fermentation with 40% or more whole cluster. There are minimal additions if any (only Santa Lucia Highlands wines received acid additions in 2013). The wines are aged on fine lees and racked before bottling.

The wines are very modestly priced considering the quality. The wines are sold through a mailing list. Visit [www.mignanelliwinery.com](http://www.mignanelliwinery.com).



### **2013 Mignanelli Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.61, 140 cases, \$36.

The grapes were sourced from the dry farmed Nelson Family Vineyard, occupying 9 acres at 1700 feet elevation. Sparse topsoil with marine sediment below. Harvest Brix 21.1° (clone 115) and 22.3° (clone "828"). The two clones were fermented and aged separately, and combined after 11 months in barrel. 75% whole cluster. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opens slowly to reveal very appealing aromas of dark red cherry and raspberry with notes of exotic spice and wilted rose petal. Lighter in weight, but flavorful, featuring a core of red cherry,*

*Damsel plum, raspberry and cranberry fruits accented nicely with whole cluster spice. This rather delicate wine has balanced tannins and bright acidity with oak playing a seasoning role in the background. The finish is a bit short, but otherwise the wine is solid and will particularly attract whole cluster fans.* 89.

### **2013 Mignanelli Romas Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.61, 75 cases, \$42.

This small family owned and dry farmed vineyard was planted exclusively to Pinot Noir in 1992. Located on a ridge 1800 feet above the town of Boonville, it is exposed to cold Pacific Ocean breezes. The site struggled to ripen in 2013. Pommard clone. 25% whole cluster fermentation. Aged in French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. There is a nice compliment of whole cluster goodness in this mid weight wine featuring aromas of charred plum, black cherry and exotic spice, and flavors of black raspberry, blueberry, spice and a thread of oak. Texturally appealing with fine grain tannins and a bit of citrus blessed acidity in the background.* 91.



### **2013 Mignanelli KW Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.59,

135 cases, \$32. This 6-acre vineyard is the home ranch of Kirk Williams, a Santa Lucia Highlands farmer who owns or manages 150 acres of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah. The vineyard sits between Rosella's and Garys' vineyard but lower in elevation and in closer proximity to the old Salinas River. The gravelly loam soils consist of decomposed granite and significant amounts of quartz. Harvest Brix 23.3°. 50% whole cluster. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is filled with delightful cherry and spice perfume. Well-composed, with the mid*

*weight essence of black cherry and blackberry fruits working in harmony with a light touch of oak. Whole cluster adds a spice and floral accent that I find very appealing. The wine is well structured with ripe fruit tannins and finishes with a generous fruit presence.* 91.

**2013 Magnanelli Highlands Ranch Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.57, 145 cases, \$26. This 18-acre vineyard is planted to a variety of Pinot Noir clones. Gravelly sandy loam soils. Harvest Brix 23.8°. Clones 115, 777 and Pommard. 40% whole cluster. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Very pleasant scent of cherry pie glaze, baking spices and dark red rose petal. Plush and velvety on the palate, with a generous charge of well ripened black cherry and black raspberry fruits with a wink of dark chocolate accent. Whole cluster plays only a subtle role in this wine which has beautifully integrated tannins and acidity. The seductive mouthfeel and seamless character speaks loudly of Pinot Noir. 92.*



## Ron Rubin Family of Wines

There is 40 years of interesting history behind the Ron Rubin label. Rubin studied viticulture and enology at UC Davis in 1971, and then dedicated his life to the wholesale beverage business, all the time dreaming of producing exceptional wines that offer great value. In 1968, Rubin worked for his family's Central Wholesale Liquor Co., in Mount Vernon, Illinois. He stayed with his family's company for the next 22 years. In 1994, Rubin read the book, *The Republic of Tea*, and offered to buy the Novato, California business. Rubin sold his family's liquor distributorship in Illinois and began a speciality tea revolution. He introduced nearly 200 different teas and offered tea-inspired unsweetened varietal glass bottled teas for fine restaurants. In 2015, Ron Rubin retired from the company's leadership role and his son, Todd, stepped into the position as president of The Republic of Tea.

In 2011, Ron bought River Road Family Vineyards and Winery in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley AVA which included a 10-acre estate vineyard. Since retiring from The Republic of Tea, he is devoting his energies to developing The Rubin Family of Wines. He is actively involved in many Sonoma County philanthropic programs.



**2013 Ron Rubin Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.57, \$25, screwcap. Sourced from multiple vineyards in addition to estate fruit. Clones 115, 667, 777, 887, 113 and Pommard. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, aged 8 months in 15% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with scents of cherry, spice and nutty oak. The bright core of fresh Bing cherry and cranberry fruits is appealing as is the crisp finish. Accents of cola and oak play in the background, with oak showing more overlay than I prefer. A touch shallow on the mid palate attack, but otherwise a solid wine. 89.*

## Senses

Three childhood friends reunited after many years to produce small lots of Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from vineyards near their hometown of Occidental. The winery is named Senses, the logo is SENS3S. Vineyard sources are superb. The 2013 vintage marks the third for these young, talented winemakers who rely on noted winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown as a consultant. These two wines were previously reviewed after tasting at World of Pinot Noir in March 2015, so they now have another 6 months of bottle age. The wines are sold through a mailing list at their black and white website: [www.senseswines.com](http://www.senseswines.com).

**2013 Sense Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.63, \$40 (sold out). Released spring 2015. Sourced from Hillcrest Estate Vineyard (less than 2 acres) and Tanuda Ridge Vineyard (less than 3 acres) which are close together. Aged 10 months in 100% French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. An array of aromas present, including red cherry, cranberry, earthy flora and toasty oak. Very suave and silky on the palate, with a middleweight charge of well-spiced cherry and black raspberry fruits with a compliment of dried herbs and anise-laced oak in the background. Well composed with balanced tannins and easy drink ability. 90.*

### **2013 Senses Hillcrest Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**

14.2% alc., pH 3.82, TA 0.62, \$55 (sold out). Released spring 2015. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 35% new. Vineyard is owned by one of the Senses winemakers. It sits on top of a hill and is rooted in shallow, rocky soil, a mere 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Similar to the Sonoma Coast bottling but more expression and sappy goodness. The nose leads with aromas of black cherry, black raspberry and spice, all of which show up on the palate in a mid weight style with impressive polish and vibrancy. There is a slight earthbound quality that I find appealing. The tannins are soft and integrated, and the oak sings backup. Thoroughly like able, with an aromatic finish that hangs on with tenacity.* **93.**



## **Soliste Cellars**

The wine reviewed here, the Soliste 2012 Forêt Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, and the Soliste 2011 Sonatera Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir represent the 10th anniversary releases for this winery. The force behind Soliste, noted chef and now winemaker Claude Koeberle, has always been fascinated with the great red Burgundies and their singular aromatics and complexities that are born in unique vineyards but a few kilometers apart. This led him, along with partner Don Plumley, to undertake the challenge and risk to focus on each specific clone of Pinot Noir that is best in harmony with each vineyard site - the Soliste Single Vineyard, Single Clone, and Single Cooperage wines known as MonoClone®.

Forêt comes from a secluded vineyard near Occidental. Located in the middle of a redwood forest, the vineyard is just six miles from the Pacific Ocean and is perhaps the most visually stunning vineyard that Soliste is entrusted with.

Soliste wines are sold exclusively through an allocated mailing list at [www.soliste.com](http://www.soliste.com).



**2012 Soliste Forêt Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir.** 14.0% alc., 241 cases, \$85. Clone 23 (Mariafeld) from Guidicci Vineyard in Occidental. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opens slowly to reveal glorious aromas of black cherry, black plum, sous-bois and spice. Quite bold for a Soliste Pinot Noir in this vintage, but still offering the Soliste style of elegance and intensity. Well-spiced black cherry, blackberry and black*

*plum fruits flood the palate with goodness and hold on through a velvety, vibrant finish. Oak lends a gentle touch and the tannins are infused with maturity. Even better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, this virile wine will age beautifully.* **94.**



## **Talisman**

Winemaker Scott Rich looks for unique, extreme vineyards that can display character and terroir. He has been crafting Pinot Noir under the Talisman label for more than 20 years. His experience shows in wines that are consistently top notch and age well. A quaint tasting room in a 100-year-old building is open daily in Glen Ellen. Visit [www.talismanwine.com](http://www.talismanwine.com).

**2013 Talisman Gunsalus Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., 267 cases, \$50. Release October 1, 2015. Vineyard planted in 2001 in Goldridge sandy loam soil. Clones 114, 115 and 777. Aged 20 months in 100% French oak barrels, 64% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. This wine reminds one of cherry pie day at baking school with aromas and flavors of Bing cherries, baking spices and a touch of sandalwood. The fine-grain tannins are well balanced, the fruit is forward and juicy, and the wine finishes with a surge of cherry goodness.* **90.**



**2013 Talisman Rancho Estrella Vineyard Napa Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.58, 72 cases, \$48. Release August 8, 2015. The vineyard, planted in 2006, is located at 600 feet elevation at the southern end of the Napa Valley. Pommard and Dijon clones 115 and "828." 25% whole cluster in the bottom of the fermenters. Native yeast primary fermentation and native bacteria malolactic fermentation. Extended maceration followed by racking into new (33%) and once-used French oak barrels and aged for 21 months. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Saucy aromas of black cherry and peppery spices lead to a delectable core of earthy black cherry and black raspberry fruits accented by a spicy tang and framed by supportive fine-grain tannins. The fruit really sings in this wine which finishes with uncommon persistence and a hint of alcoholic warmth.* **92.**



**Talisman Red Dog Vineyard Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir**

14.4% alc., 218 cases, \$52. Released October 1, 2015.

Vineyard is located high above Bennett Valley on the northwestern side of Sonoma Mountain. Clones 115, 777 and Pommard 5 were planted in 2000 in loamy clay soil. Aged 20 months in 100% French oak barrels, 46% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A stunning wine from the get-go, offering soaring aromas of dark berries, earthy flora, spice and rose petal. May notes say, "WOW," about the entry and follow through, featuring juicy dark red and purple berries, spice, slight floral input, and engaging oak presence. Impeccably balanced. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was still great indicating a long life ahead.* **94.**



**2013 Talisman Aadastra Vineyard Los Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 416 cases, \$56. Release October 1, 2015. This organically farmed and certified vineyard is a shy-bearing site planted in clay loam soil in 1994. Clones are 113, 115, 777, Swan, Pommard, Wädenswil and two unnamed suitcase selections. Aged 20 months in 100% French oak barrels, 59% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Highly perfumed with aromas of black cherry, spice, cola and dark chocolate. A rich dark cherry core of fruit is clothed in modest tannins and complimented by a gentle oak touch. A wine of impressive integrity and balance that is somewhat Russian River Valley in character in this vintage. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine still had generous power and length.* **93.**

## Waxwing Wine Cellars

Winemaker Scott Sisemore told me that as he tasted and rated his barrels, he had 6 of the original 8 in the 2014 vintage that really stood out. He decided to declassify the 2 under performing barrels and blend them with Syrah. He called it the Bohemian Blend because one of the two North American Waxwing bird species are known as Bohemian Waxwings. It is also an unconventional blend. The Lester Family Vineyard bottling, now in its third year, has been a standout. This small producer is located in Belmont, south of San Francisco. The website is [www.waxwingwines.com](http://www.waxwingwines.com).

**2014 Waxwing "Bohemian Blend" California Red Table Wine** 13.9% alc., 98 cases, \$28. Released October 2015. 50% Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir from the Lester Family Vineyard and 50% Bennett Valley Syrah from Three Creeks Vineyard in Sonoma County. 100% of the fruit was crushed by foot whole cluster and fermented with indigenous yeast in open-top fermenters. Aged 11 months in once-used French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Engaging aromas of blackberry, black cherry, tobacco and oak spice. This mid weight plus wine is enjoyable and silky in the mouth, but it drinks more like a Syrah and the Pinot Noir fruit is swallowed up by the Syrah fruit and tannins. The core flavors are black cherry, blackberry, spice and vanilla, maintaining some intensity on the finish that displays a noticeable rush of tannins. A marvelous foil for a steak.* **88.**

**2014 Waxwing Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 138 cases, \$45. Released October 2015. Vines planted in 1998 on a sandy loam hillside bordered by redwoods. Nearly dry farmed. Two-thirds clone 115 and one-third 667. Harvest Brix 24°. Crushed by foot whole cluster and fermented in open-top fermenters with indigenous yeast. Aged 11 months in once-used French oak barrels and bottled with a light filtration. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Lovely aromas of red cherry, baking spice, rose petal and sandalwood lead to an elegantly composed and delicious wine offering vivid red cherry and raspberry flavors and an appealing whole cluster spiciness. The dreamy texture adds to the pleasure as does the lip-smacking, cherry fueled finish. A seamless wine that offers loads of Pinot character. Still terrific the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **93.**



## Wonderment Wines

Owner and winemaker Stephanie Cook pursued careers as a fashion model and caterer before pursuing her dream of becoming a winemaker. In 2011, she crafted her first Pinot Noir and Zinfandel wines and subsequently honed her skills at Spottswoode, Anomaly Vineyards and Spy Valley Wines in Marlborough, New Zealand. Her back label says, "Happiness is not a matter of intensity, but of balance." Both wines reviewed here are true to their origins and terroir-driven. Tasting is by appointment. Visit [www.wondermentwines.com](http://www.wondermentwines.com).

**2013 Wonderment Dutton-Campbell Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 261 cases, \$40. Released October 15, 2015. *Light cherry red color in the glass. The nose really resonates over time in the glass with hi-tone aromas of cherry and spice. Lighter weighted and quite elegant, with a charming core of lacy cherry fruit and a touch of oak spice. Very supple tannins make for forward drinking. A wine that aims to please, becoming more aromatic and flavorful over time in the glass.* **90.**

**2013 Wonderment Dr. Stan's Vineyard Carneros Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 94 cases, \$50. Released October 15, 2015. 100% Dijon clone 115. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. This offering is more earthy, with aromas of cherry, cranberry and mulch, and mid weight flavors of darker cherries and berries complimented with notes of spice, earth and mushroom. The attack is substantial and carries over to a generous finish. A superb wine of impeccable balance that reflects Carneros terroir.* **92.**



## More Wines

**2013 Deux Punx Elk Prarie Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., \$36. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Enchanting aromas of cherry, herbs and resin. Red fruits are featured with the cherry taking on a Starburst flavor. The fruit is backed by hi-pitched acidity and accented with a riff of dried herb flavors in the background.* **88.**



**2013 La Crema Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.56, 17,916 cases, \$30. 3-day cold soak, open-tank fermentations with hand punch downs three times a day. Aged 9 months in 100% French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. An integrated marriage of cherry and oak aromas arrive on the nose. Impressive entry and mid palate attack of fresh, spiced red cherry and red raspberry fruits with complimentary oak in the background. Soft tannins, balanced acidity, and a pleasing, intensely fruit citrus-fueled finish complete the picture.* **89.**



**2013 Mayhall Tibbs Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$9.99-\$10.99. A Trader Vic's value-priced wine. The winery (name withheld but vinified in Buellton) had to move inventory and this translated into a great price. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. This wine is true to its varietal character with plenty of lip-smacking sweet darker cherry and berry fruits in a ripe, full-bodied and smoothly textured style that is forward drinking. You won't find a better California Pinot Noir for this price in the marketplace. Even the label looks like there is a \$40 wine inside. 88.*



**2011 R Sisters Vineyard Napa Carneros Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$22. A relative gave me this bottle to taste. Produced and bottled by Jeff Runquist of JR Wines. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose offers cooked fruit, BBQ grill and smoky oak aromas. Better on the palate with commendable balance, but the well-ripened fruit has a prune and root beer theme. Because of the relatively low ABV, I wouldn't expect over ripe fruit so this probably is a prematurely oxidized bottle. N/R.*

# Recently Tasted Oregon Pinot Noir

After the fruit-forward, extracted and bold 2012 Pinot Noirs, the 2013 wines are a return to the classic Willamette Valley style of lower alcohol, bright acidity, elegance and nuance. Some may find some of the wines a bit demure, even austere at present, but they should put on weight with more bottle age. I am afraid that a number of the 2013 Pinot Noirs from the Willamette Valley won't impress the California palate.

## Analemma Wines

Analemma Wines, founded in 2010 by winemakers Steven Thompson and Kris Fade, is one of the few Columbia Gorge wineries growing and producing wines exclusively from within this region. The winery's beginnings trace back to an opportunity to farm the historic Atavus Vineyard (previously Dragonfly Vineyard) on the Washington side of the Columbia River. This experimental site was a vision of Washington State University's Dr. Walter Clore. Planted in 1968 under the guidance of Walter J. Clore, it present conditions ideal for Pinot Noir and Gewürztraminer. Organically and biodynamically farmed at 1,700 feet elevation, this vineyard is positioned on a southern slope with a sweeping view of the Columbia River and Mt. Hood.

The name, Analemma, comes from the sun's path as seen in the sky at the same time each month. Similar to the symbol of infinity, the owners of the winery draw inspiration from this image of "boundlessness."

Analemma Wines farms two distinct alpine environments. The Oak Ridge Vineyard sits at 1,400 feet in the foothills of Mount Adams where Pommard and Dijon 115 are self-rooted and dry farmed in volcanic, ashy loam soils. Six and a half miles south, the Atavus Vineyard contains nearly 50-year-old, self-rooted Mariafeld vines.

A sparkling wine, Blanc de Noir, is also produced from the Atavus Vineyard. The 2010 Analemma Atavus Vineyard Blanc de Noir sparkling wine was a featured wine at the 2015 International Pinot Noir Celebration.

**2013 Analemma Oak Ridge Vineyard Columbia Gorge Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., 230 cases, \$32. Pommard and 115 clones from a certified organic vineyard. Majority whole cluster. Aged on lees for 16 months in neutral barrels and concrete. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Intensely fruity nose featuring cherry and raspberry. A bit feral in character, with a mid weight core of dark berry fruit, accented with a note of tar and a kiss of stems. Noticeably fervent entry and attack with a focused finish replete with fruit and tannin. 89.*



**2013 Analemma Atavus Vineyard Columbia Gorge Oregon Pinot Noir** 12.3% alc., 70 cases, \$N/A (release spring 2016). 47-year-old Swiss Mariafeld clone of Pinot Noir. 100% whole cluster. Aged on lees for 14 months in neutral barrels. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Inviting aromas of wild berries, spice and floral bouquet, fading a bit over time in the glass. Light to mid weight flavors of black cherry, plum and raspberry with thick wood and stem flavors, offering a slightly shallow mid palate attack. Brightened by citrusy acidity that leads to a juicy finish and underlain with a firm tannic backbone, this wine is unusual in character and should appeal to those looking for something intriguingly different in a whole cluster style. 88.*

## Ghost Hill Cellars

The family owners of this property have farmed 234 acres on Savannah Ridge in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA since 1906. In 1999, 15 acres of Pinot Noir was planted and the first wine under the Ghost Hill Cellars label was released from the 2006 vintage. Half of the estate grapes are sold to local wineries and half is used in the Ghost Hill Cellars wines. The winemaker for several years, Rebecca Pittock-Shouldis, has been replaced in 2015 by Eric Hamacher, one of Oregon's most respected winemakers. The tasting room is open weekends. Visit [www.ghosthillcellars.com](http://www.ghosthillcellars.com).

**2013 Ghost Hill Cellars Bayliss-Bower Vineyard Savannah Ridge Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.77, 390 cases, \$42. 45% Pommard, 20% 777, 20% 114 and 15% Wädenswil. Aged in 10% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, dried herbs and red hard candy. Light to mid weight array of spiced black cherry and berry fruits with an herbal vein in the background. The tannins are balanced and there is some finishing intensity.* **89.**

**2013 Ghost Hill Cellars Prospector's Reserve Savannah Ridge Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.74, 148 cases, \$55. A special selection of barrels intended to create a more masculine and intense reflection of the site and vintage. A blend of the four main clones from the oldest part of the Bayliss-Bower Vineyard: Wädenswil, Pommard, 777 and 114. Aged in 17% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Exemplary purity of black cherry fruit on the nose that really soars. A little more sap and backbone than the regular bottling featuring mid weight flavors of Bing cherry, red raspberry, cola, and baking spice. Very juicy acidity with noticeable finishing power and length. Impeccably balanced for age ability.* **92.**



## Keeler Estate Vineyard & Winery

Keeler Estate Vineyard & Winery began as an overgrown 200-acre farm east of the town of Amity, Oregon, acquired by Craig and Gabriele Keeler in 1989. Vineyards were planted methodically and farmed biodynamically. Today, the vineyard is Demeter® Biodynamic certified. The planted 30 acres include Dijon clones 667, 777, 115 and 943, Pommard 4 and 5, and Wädenswil. The winemaker is Darcy Pendergrass. Visit [www.keelerestatevineyard.com](http://www.keelerestatevineyard.com).

**2013 Keeler Estate Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.59, 191 cases, \$38. Released September 2015. Harvest Brix 21.7°-22.2°. Pommard, 115 and Wädenswil. 100% de-stemmed. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 28% new. Unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Delightful aromatic array including plum, black cherry, dried herbs, spice, rose petal and cedary oak. A discreetly concentrated styled wine in this vintage, with mid weight plus flavors of black cherry and black raspberry, embellished with savory dried herbs and a woody note. Nicely composed with corralled tannins and some finishing length.* **90.**



**2014 Keeler Estate Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.60, RS < .2g/L, 156 cases, \$28. Released June 2015. Whole cluster pressed, aged 8 months on lees in 65% once-filled French oak barrels and 35% stainless steel. Tartaric acid addition. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of crisp apple, pear, pastry cream and brioche. Very satisfying, with bright acidity and a pleasing apple-driven finish.* **90.**

## Van Duzer

With Burgundy native winemaker Florent-Pierre "Flo" Merlier now well established at this winery in Dallas, Oregon, the wines have reached new heights and the winery now belongs in the upper echelon of Willamette Valley wineries. The estate vineyards total 82 acres including multiple clones of Pinot Noir. A majority of the wines are estate grown, but some singular bottlings are from grapes sourced from other regions in the Willamette Valley. The winery's Pinot Noir Rosé and Pinot Gris are among Oregon's finest. The tasting room is a little out of the way and not along the main Willamette Valley winery trail, but well worth an extra effort to visit. The website is [www.vanduzer.com](http://www.vanduzer.com).



**2013 Van Duzer Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 6,100 cases, \$32, screwcap. Release December 2015. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Good character and flavor featuring red cherry, spice, tobacco and dried herb flavors. Light and easy, with suede tannins and a silky mouthfeel. Solid. 89.*

**2013 Van Duzer Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 223 cases, \$40. Release October 2015. *Moderate light reddish purple color in the glass. Gorgeous perfume of fresh dark cherry and musk. Light to mid weight cherry goodness with a saucy spice accent. Very easy to like, with a silky texture, modest tannins, welcome fruit purity and good persistence on the cherry-driven finish. 90.*

**2013 Van Duzer Westside Blocks Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 272 cases, \$55. Release 2016. A barrel selection. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Invigorating aromas of cherry, raspberry and the right hint of oak. The delicious cherry core is wrapped in gentle tannins and vibrant acidity. A rich middle palate and virile finish give this wine a special breeding. 91.*



## Winderlea Vineyard & Winery

Winderlea has a storied history in the Dundee Hills. It was formerly known as the Dundee Hills Vineyard when it was first planted in 1974 and was later rechristened Goldschmidt Vineyard after the former Oregon governor who bought the property in 1998. In 2006, Bill Sweat and Donna Morris, who had been highly successful in the financial services industry, left the East Coast for Oregon and the following year bought the Goldschmidt Vineyard, renaming it Winderlea Vineyard. The name is derived from a Vermont property the couple owned and is a German word loosely translated as “valley protected from the wind. The couple brought on veteran winemaker, Robert Brittan to direct the Pinot Noir program.

A tasting room, positioned to take advantage of the panoramic views of the Dundee Hills offers a relaxing venue for wine appreciation and has become an iconic landmark of the Dundee Hills. The inaugural releases of Winderlea Pinot Noir were from the 2006 vintage. Visit the website at [www.winderlea.com](http://www.winderlea.com).



**2013 Winderlea Juliard Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 99 cases, \$48. This south sloping parcel is located on Worden Hill Road, one-quarter of a mile from Winderlea. It was planted in the 1980s and 1990s. Own-rooted, old vine Pommard clone. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A perfume of ripe strawberry, cherry and spice leads to a light to mid weight essence of black cherry and raspberry fruits. Straightforward and simple, with soft tannins and a suave texture. Easy to like, but seems a bit under ripe.* **88.**

**2013 Winderlea Weber Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.60, 230 cases, \$48 (sold out). Weber Vineyard was formerly named Ana Vineyard and with the first release under the new name, the longtime growers Arthur and Vivian Weber are celebrated. This vineyard has some of the oldest own-rooted Pinot Noir in Oregon, dating to the 1970s. Pommard primarily with some Dijon 777. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 8% new. *Light cherry red color in the glass. The nose really impresses out of the gate with soaring aromas of red cherry and spice. Delicious attack of deep cherry flavor with added notes of spice and cola. Well-matched tannins and a slightly gravelly texture add to the appeal. A complete, vibrant wine that really wakes up the senses.* **93.**



**2013 Winderlea Murto Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 12.5%, pH 3.20, TA 0.68, 118 cases, \$48. This vineyard is a neighbor of Winderlea located just west, owned and farmed by Mike and Robin Murto. Planted in 1978 at 400' to 700' elevation on a south-facing slope. Pommard and Wädenswil clones. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 38% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose leads with bright aromas of black cherry, red berry spread, and white pepper. Flavored with black cherry and plum fruits, this polished, fruit-driven and high-strung wine is easy to like now. The soprano finish has good depth of fruit flavor.* **89.**

**2013 Winderlea Maresh Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 12.5% alc., 116 cases, \$48. Maresh Vineyard, located west of Winderlea Vineyard, was planted in 1970 and is the fifth oldest vineyard in the Willamette Valley. Dijon 115. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 38% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Shy, but lovely aromas of cherry syrup, dried herbs and spice cabinet. Rather elegant, even delicate, offering a boastful and succulent core of red cherry fruit that has class and breeding. Immediately embracing, with suave tannins and bright acidity.* **91.**

**2013 Winderlea Crawford Beck Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., 155 cases, \$48 (sold out). Released October 18, 2014. 15 acres planted in Jory soils by scientists David and Jeanne Beck, transplants from New Jersey. Dijon 115, Clone 60, Swan and Pommard. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 18% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of cherry, red berries, soy and woodlands. Forward drinking with a middleweight charge of fresh cherry, red berry, savory herb and toasty oak flavors. A bit earthy, with firm but balanced tannins and a juicy finish.* **89.**

**2013 Winderlea Meredith Mitchell Vineyard McMinnville Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$N/A. This vineyard was planted in 1988 by owners Susan Meredith and spouse Frank Mitchell. The own-rooted vines are planted in rocky basalt sedimentary soils. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of dark cherries, humus and earth highlight the nose. On entry, the black cherry, black raspberry and blackberry fruits are embellished with notes of earth and mushrooms. The wine is noticeably high pitched with well-matched tannins and a black raspberry, razor sharp finish.* **89.**

**2013 Winderlea Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 556 cases, \$60. Pommard and Wädenswil clones from Block 21 on the West Hill part of Shea Vineyard. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of cherry, strawberry and cranberry fruits. Relatively light and elegant, with an array of red fruits and earthy goodness, and blessed with matching tannins. Rather linear on the mid palate, but has a very satisfying and persistent finish which is the wine's best feature.* **90.**

**2013 Winderlea Dundee Hills Vineyards Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., 817 cases, \$38. Released October 18, 2014. Maresh, Murto and Weber vineyards. Dijon 115, Pommard and Dijon 777 clones. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. The*

*signature cherry aromas and flavors of the Dundee Hills are highlighted with added notes of red raspberry, cranberry, and iron. Good mid palate presence with inviting balance and vibrancy and no intrusive oak. 89.*

**2013 Winderlea Winderlea Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., \$60. This is the winery's flagship wine culled from all 13 vineyard blocks. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of sous-bois, mushroom and red and purple fruits led to a well-structured wine with decent drive and finish. The red stone and berry fruits on the palate had appeal although I sensed that the fruit was slightly under ripe. The modest fine grain tannins and bright acidity lent a vibrancy to the earthy wine. Tasted twice with the same results. 89.*

**2013 Winderlea Imprint Winderlea Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 176 cases, \$42. Released September 2015. Coury and Pommard clones. This is the only wine produced onsite at the Winderlea Estate Vineyard. It is crafted by owner Bill Sweat using 100% whole cluster fermentation, pigeage and natural yeasts. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 39% once-used. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Distinctive whole cluster highlights on the nose, featuring aromas of cherry, spice, cedar and rose petal. The light to mid weighted core of red fruits also shows hints of sandalwood and flower, leading to a juicy, red fruited finish that has a spice flourish. A feminine wine with supple tannins that are more gentle than one would expect from 100% whole cluster. I believe this wine shows more the effect of whole cluster fermentation than the vineyard character that is better exemplified in the Winderlea Vineyard bottling. Still, this is a unique, fun wine. 89.*

**2013 Winderlea Legacy Winderlea Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 12.5% alc., \$75. This wine is meant to highlight the most favorable characteristics of the 35-year-old 16-acre Winderlea Estate Vineyard. The grapes are drawn from vines planted between 1974 and 1976 (Pommard, Dijon 115, Coury and Wädenswil clones). *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Deep aromas of red cherry, spice, sandalwood and cowhide draw you into the glass. This is a silky, relatively delicate wine that offers a charming and flavorful array of red fruits that are subtly spiced and backed by gossamer tannins. A lacy wine that personifies the feminine side of Pinot Noir. 91.*



**2013 Winderlea Willamette Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 525 cases, \$38. Released October 18, 2014. Sourced from Carabella (45%), Hyland (13.5%) and Thistle (18%) vineyards. Dijon 76 and 95, CA 108 and 4. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 17% new. *Light yellow color in the glass. Steely aromas of pear, yellow apple, buttery brioche and lees. Crisp and vibrant on the palate, with lovely flavors of peach, apple and a hint of vanilla creme. Nicely balanced, with a lip-smacking finish. I liked it better over time in the glass. 90.*



# Update on Russian River Valley Neighborhoods Initiative

I know many of my readers are fans of Joseph Swan vineyards wines and probably saw this piece written by winemaker Rod Berglund in the latest newsletter, but I am passing on an abbreviated and annotated version for those who did not see the newsletter.

“When the Russian River Valley AVA was established in 1983, the amount of planted Pinot Noir acreage was very small. Zinfandel and French Colombard accounted for more acres. The notion that wines made from grapes grown in the Russian River Valley expressed different nuances depending upon where they were grown was not yet realized. As vineyard acreage increased, descriptions of sub-regions began to be used. The Middle Reach was the area along the Russian River south of Healdsburg. Green Valley became its own AVA. The Santa Rosa Plain and Laguna Ridge areas became common geographic descriptors.”

“A little over 10 years ago, a group of winemakers began to realize that if the Russian River Valley had one signature grape, it was probably Pinot Noir. The group began to assemble on a regular basis to taste Pinot Noir blind from the Russian River Valley along with ringers. Pinot Noir was chosen not only because it was widely planted, but it was more likely to be able to study a large number of wines from sites that were fermented separately. Pinot Noir is also a grape that is ‘transparent,’ meaning the effects of site can be tasted in the wine. A more literal definition is that the site can be tasted through the wine.”

The goal was to see if the Pinot Noirs from Russian River Valley grapes had a relatively consistent aroma profile that differentiated them from other Pinot Noir growing regions. The tastings were done using criteria that was consistent with what research panels would do. The group learned several things.”

“(1)The average age of the vines was fairly low so it was difficult to determine if the results reflected vine age or were truly characteristic of site. (2) Only finished wines were tasted to look beyond winemaking to see the naked fruit underneath. (3) Winemakers that worked in a particular area of the Russian River Valley were often able to identify where particular wines came from. (4) There seemed to be a common thread between the wines that spoke to the Russian River Valley appellation as a whole but there were differences between them as well.”

“The Russian River Valley Winegrowers have now launched a research project. This last winter a large number of newly released Pinot Noirs were tasted blind by a large and very serious group of winemakers. Each wine was evaluated for certain sensory characteristics that were derived from the grapes rather than the winemaking. The tastings will be ongoing.”

## **Russian River Valley Neighborhoods: Current Beliefs**

“Sonoma County has more soil types than all of France. There is also widely differing climatic conditions based on, among other things, proximity to the ocean, elevation and the side of a range of hills where the vineyard is located. Despite this, at least five distinct “neighborhoods” have been identified within the Russian River Valley appellation. They are: the Santa Rosa Plain, Sebastopol Hills, Green Valley, Laguna Ridge and The Middle Reach.” The map below also shows Freestone and Windsor Hills which have been proposed subregions of the Russian River Valley appellation in the past.



### **Santa Rosa Plain**

“When driving north from Petaluma on Hwy 101, you climb a hill before descending into what has historically been known as the Santa Rosa Plain. The hill separates the Russian River Valley AVA from the proposed Petaluma Gap AVA. As you drop down into the area from Sonoma Mountain to the East and the first ridge of hills to the West (Laguna Ridge), there is a broad flood plain. Over the last several million years, material from the volcanics to the East, Franciscan shale and sandstone in the Northwest, and decomposed sandstone on the West have eroded and filled the valley floor with a host of soil types. In the middle was once the Laguna de Santa Rosa, a series of freshwater lakes that drained the valley from Cotati north to the Russian River. Because the area is lower lying than the surrounding areas, the temperatures in the spring tend to be lower at night than the surrounding areas as cold air sinks. Bud break tends to be a little later and frost danger greater. Vine vigor, due to the richer soils and water availability tends to be higher. Pinot Noir from here is often described as pretty with vibrant red fruit.”

### **Sebastopol Hills**

“This area was added to the Russian River Valley AVA a few years ago. Until recently, it was almost exclusively the domain of the apple. With the downturn of the apple industry due to competition from places where land is cheap and labor is not an issue, some of the old orchards have been converted to vineyards. The effect of the wind funneled through the Petaluma wind gap can be fairly persistent. Fog, breezes and cool temperatures result in later harvests. Pinot Noir from this region is usually red fruited with an edge, higher in acid, a bit leaner and very age worthy.”

### **Green Valley**

“This AVA was approved the same year as the Russian River Valley (1983). Officially it is known as the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. The hallmark of Green Valley is its fog which often persists after other areas are

bathed in sunshine. There are, however, some disparity in the growing conditions within the Green Valley AVA. Winemaker Dan Goldfield talks about two separate growing regions in one - the hilltops and the valley floor. Green Valley is close enough to the ocean to be one of the last areas to lose the fog but it will clear much earlier the higher the elevation you are. The soils here, like the Sebastopol Hills, tend to be Goldridge, a fine grain sandy loam derived from the exposed volcanic ash sandstone that was once at the bottom of a shallow sea. Pinot Noir from here tends to be high in acid, if not as high as Sebastopol Hills. Bright, firm red fruits, often including cranberry and rhubarb, are often found. The wines are more linear than all but the Sebastopol Hills and are particularly food friendly.”

### **Laguna Ridge**

“Situated between the Santa Rosa Plain to the East and Green Valley of Russian River Valley to the West, this ridge is a north to south line of hills. The soils are almost all Goldridge or variations of it. The weather is greatly influenced by the drainage of air from the western hills to the valley floor. This drainage results in milder weather in the spring allowing the soils to warm earlier resulting in earlier bud break than much of the surrounding areas. Frost is less of a problem due to the air drainage. With an earlier bud break, hang time is often extended. This softens the acidity and results in rounder, softer tannins. The fruit profile in Pinot Noir ranges from deep red to sometimes darker fruit, often with a hint of black tea and sometimes oriental spice.”

### **Middle Reach**

“This region of the Russian River Valley was the first to gain widespread fame due to the early plantings by the Rochiolis, Bacigalupis and others. This is the warmest of the neighborhoods, yet is still considered a cool area. The Pinot Noir here is most often the first to be harvested in the Russian River Valley. This area stretches from below Healdsburg, flanking the Russian River on both sides. Just how far in each direction is open to interpretation as is the southern boundary. Some would say it stops where the river makes its turn and heads toward the ocean, while others would have it continuing along Westside Road until it reaches River Road, a few miles east of Guerneville. The soil types are quite varied and often change within vineyards. Pinot Noir from here tends to be described more by texture than aromatics. Aromas tend to be red cherry dominated. The acidity tends to be lower and the tannins quite pronounced, but they tend to have the lushest mouthfeel of any of the neighborhoods.”

“There is some general agreement about Rod’s descriptions of the five neighborhoods. However, winemaking plays a big role in the final wine presentation. Even from the same vineyard, different winemakers are likely to make different wines. In spite of this, we feel the general personalities of each of the neighborhoods will emerge. So, the next time you are tasting wine in the Russian River Valley, ask if they know which neighborhood the wine is from. Hopefully, you will join us on the voyage of discovery. Not to discover ‘the best,’ but simply to be intrigued about all the diversity this special place has to offer.”

To receive the Joseph Swan Vineyards newsletter, or to see the latest offerings, visit the winery’s website at [www.swanwinery.com](http://www.swanwinery.com).

# Pinot Briefs

**BARVIVO Corkscrew** Two brothers from Denmark launched their brand, BARVIVO, a few months ago. One of their products is a Classic Handmade Wine Opener. This is a masculine waiter's style corkscrew made from heavy-duty 420 stainless steel with a classy rosewood handle and a double hinged fulcrum. I personally tried out the wine opener and can highly recommend. Right now it is available at a steal: \$12.94 on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) (list price \$24.95). A perfect holiday gift for wine enthusiasts. Includes a lifetime warranty. Disclaimer: I have no financial interest in this product.



**News from Santa Lucia Highlands** *Wine Spectator* has again ranked the SLH as California's most consistently excellent appellation for Pinot Noir. For seven vintages in a row, SLH has scored a vintage rating of at least 90 points. Every two years, the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans have a trade and press tasting at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Forty SLH brands will be pouring on Tuesday, February 23, 2016, at Fort Mason's newly remodeled Gallery 308. Also, a trade tasting will be held on March 21, 2016, in Carmel.

**2016 International Chardonnay Symposium** The 2016 event will be held Thursday through Saturday on May 12-14, 2016 at Greengate Ranch & Vineyard in San Luis Obispo. The line up includes a grand tasting, educational seminars and panel sessions, winemaker dinners. Many Central Coast wineries will also offer special promotions and events to complete the experience. Early bird tickets available until January 30, 2016: VIP \$75, General Admission \$50 at [www.TheChardonnaySymposium.com](http://www.TheChardonnaySymposium.com). The International Chardonnay Symposium is sponsored by *The Tasting Panel Magazine*, *The SOMM Journal*, Pismo Beach Conference & Visitors Bureau, Avila Beach Tourism Alliance and the California Highway 1 Discovery Route.

**Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association Announces 2016 Festivals** The 11th Annual International Alsace Varietals Festival will be held on February 19-20, 2016, and the 19th Annual Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival will be May 20-22, 2016. Other events include the Anderson Valley Barrel Tasting Weekend July 23-24, 2016, and the Winesong! Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Celebration September 9-10, 2016. The Alsace Festival technical session on Saturday morning will include a talk by John Winthrop Haeger whose book, *Riesling Rediscovered*, will be released March 2016. Additional information about all these events can be found at the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association website at [www.avwines.com](http://www.avwines.com). Remember, lodging in the Anderson Valley is limited so make your arrangements early.

**Big Table Farm Wines Now in Magnum Format** For fans of Big Table Farm wines, magnums are now available on the website at [www.bigtablefarm.com](http://www.bigtablefarm.com). Honestly, wine tastes better from magnums, and their celebratory nature creates excitement at any meal over the holidays.