



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir lends itself to a cornucopia of descriptives*

## Recent Oregon Pinot Noir Tastings Confirm Consistent Excellence

As the last of the 2012 vintage Pinot Noirs are reviewed and attention turns to the 2013 vintage and even a few early releases from the 2014 vintage, the words “ultra premium” ring true from a range of producers. The wines are of such extraordinary excellence, that drawing distinct differences in quality between them in boils down to a bee’s nudget.

### Boedecker Cellars

This is a unique husband and wife owned and operated artisan producer of Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay, founded in 2003, and based in urban Portland, Oregon. Both partners are Pacific Northwest natives and winemakers. Stewart Boedecker also is the enologist and vineyard lead, having begun his wine education at Cornell University, enriched his experience working in Northern California, and now has nearly two decades of experience crafting wines in Oregon’s Willamette Valley. Athena Pappas serves as cellar master and general manager along with her winemaking duties. The Pinot Noirs are crafted using traditional techniques involving small fermenters, indigenous yeasts, and extended barrel aging. The Winemakers Selection Pinot Noirs represent distinct blends that reflect each of their palates and are appropriately named Stewart and Athena. Boedecker Cellars was one of the featured wineries at the 2015 International Pinot Noir Celebration. A winery and tasting room is located at 2621 NW 30th Ave. in Portland and is open weekends. Visit [www.boedeckerwines.com](http://www.boedeckerwines.com).





**2013 Boedecker Cellars Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$20, screwcap. Native fermentation, hand punch downs, aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 6 months on the lees with stirring. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Lovely aromas of red cherry, spice, dried herbs, earthy flora and redwood log. Light in weight but flavorful, with tastes of red cherries and berries and blueberry that are earth-kissed. Very elegant, with a deft touch of oak in the background and gossamer tannins. The wine does not have a bevy of nuance, but is very like able. A perfect everyday table wine crafted in a classic Oregon style. 90.*

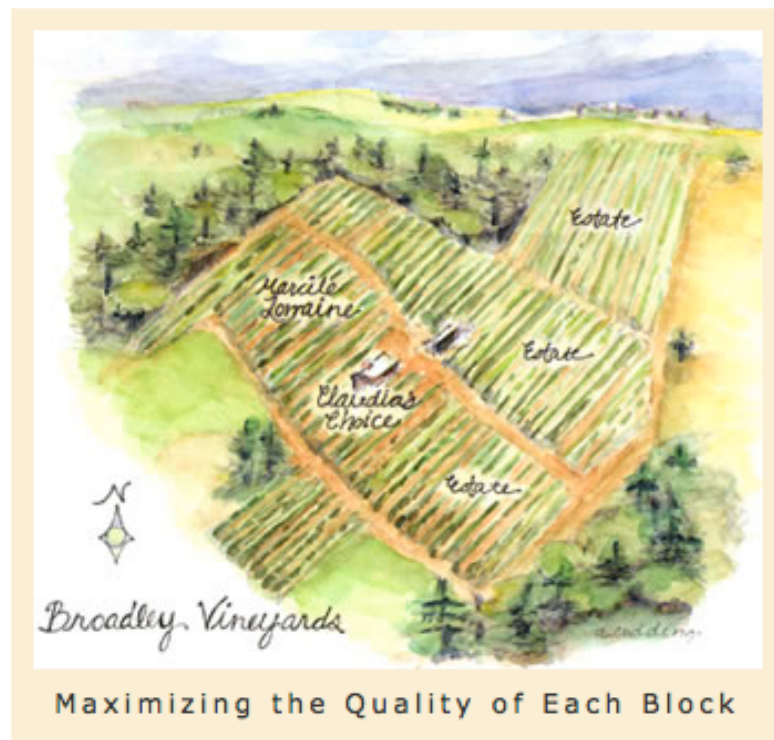


**2013 Boedecker Cellars Stewart Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., 900 cases, \$36, screwcap. Release March 2016. A blend from Carlton Hill, Cherry Grove, Finigan Hill, Hirschy, Shea and Stoller vineyards. Winemaker Stewart Boedecker's favorite barrel selections. 25% whole cluster, native yeast fermentation, 18 months in French oak barrels with lees stirring (first 9 months in a mix of new, once and twice-filled and neutral barrels, last 9 months in neutral barrels). Bottle aged 4 to 6 months before release. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Inviting aromas of cherry, rose petal and woodland lead to a mid weight styled wine with impressive mid palate presence and finish. The core of cherry and ripe strawberry fruit flavors is accented with notes of interesting spices including cinnamon. The tannins are suave, the acidity is bright, and the overall impression is one of complete harmony. A masterful cuvée. 93.*

## Broadley Vineyards

This stellar winery has been featured in the *PinotFile* on a number of occasions. Family owned, Broadley Vineyards was established over 30 years in the hills west of the town of Monroe, Oregon, in the southern Willamette Valley. Craig and Claudia Broadley launched the winery in 1982, released their first wines in 1986, and had developed a reputation for outstanding estate Pinot Noir by 1994. Winemaker Morgan Broadley crafts the estate wines from 30 acres in the warmest and driest part of the Willamette Valley that include a diverse selection of Dijon clones as well as Pommard and Wädenswil. The wines uniquely feature partial whole cluster fermentation, significant fermentation in wood containers, and always are unfinned and unfiltered. The winery's tasting room is well worth a detour from the more highly publicized northern Willamette Valley wineries, and is open by appointment. Visit [www.broadleyvineyards.com](http://www.broadleyvineyards.com).

The 2014 vintage at Broadley Vineyards was warm and dry, the hottest on record, what the winery called "the perfect harvest."





**2014 Broadley Vineyards Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., 3,000 cases, \$20. A blend of fruit from several highly regarded vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, wild yeast fermentation, aged 9-10 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose leads with a mixture of dark berry and woodland aromas. Upon entry, there is literally an explosion of fruit goodness, including flavors of black cherry, blueberry and pomegranate. Despite the charge of sappy fruit, the wine retains good balance with supporting tannins, fresh acidity and a touch of oak. The fruit-driven finish is unusually long for an appellation blend. I liked this wine more over time in the glass. A welcome value. 90.*



**2014 Broadley Vineyards Rocky Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$30. This vineyard is located in the Eola-Amity Hills, owned by John and Kathy Zelko, and managed by Leigh Bartholomew. 30% whole cluster. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very shy aromas of dark fruits and seasoned oak lead to a silky platform of very tasty cherry and red berry fruits with a compliment of spice. Elegantly styled, with comforting balance and welcoming persistence of a red berry medley on the finish. 90.*

**2014 Broadley Vineyards Shea Vineyard Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 250 cases, \$50. Clones 777 and Wädenswil. 40% whole cluster, wild yeast fermentation in 3-ton open-top Taransaud wood fermenter for 14 to 21 days, aged 12 months in 30% new and 70% neutral Francois Frères French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Haunting aromas of black fruits, forest floor and violets. Mid weight flavors of dark red and black fruits with muscular tannins. The wine lacks subtlety upon opening, but the charming fruit emerges over time in the glass. Nicely crafted, with deft integration of oak, this wine needs a few years in the cellar. 92.*



**2014 Broadley Vineyards Estate Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 800 cases, \$30. A blend of Pommard, Dijon 115, 667, and 777, and Wädenswil clones from various blocks including the oldest planted in 1981. 90% de-stemmed, wild yeast fermentation in open-top fermenters, aged 12 months in Francois Frères French oak barrels, 15% new and balance 1 to 2-year-old. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Hi-tone aromas of blueberry, black raspberry, spice and iron set the stage for the delicious core of well-spiced cherry and raspberry fruit flavors. Structured, but balanced, with a satiny texture and a finish that clings to the palate for what seems like a minute. The most gracious wine tasted here from Broadley blessed with a grand cru finish. Spot on. 94.*

## Domaine Serene

A French-inspired Willamette Valley winery dating to 1989 when Ken and Grace Evenstad, both Burgundy enthusiasts, invested in a 42-acre hilltop estate in the Dundee Hills of Oregon where Oregon Pinot Noir originated. They named the winery after their daughter, Serene. Their initial modest winery was located in shared space in Ken Wright's winery in Carlton and Ken Wright made their first wines dating to 1990. They later built one of the most modern and technologically advanced wineries in North America, completed in 2001. With additional property acquisitions, six estate vineyards were planted over time to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay on the surrounding hillsides, creating a spectacular estate of 180+ acres of vineyards on 462 acres. The vineyards are dry-farmed and sustainably managed under the direction of viticulturist Joel Myers. The current head of the winemaking team (pictured below along with the Evenstads) is Erik Kramer, formerly of Adelsheim Vineyard.

Several Pinot Noirs are produced, including the Willamette Valley blends from three Willamette Valley AVAs, Evenstad Reserve and Yamhill Cuvée, vineyard-designates, and ultra premium cuvées. The Dundee Hills Chardonnays (reviewed later in this issue) consist of both blends and single vineyard bottlings. A unique white Pinot Noir (Coeur Blanc) and Rosé ("r" - a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay), a proprietary red blend (Grand Cheval) and a single Syrah (Rockblock SoNo) are also offered. The accolades for the wines of Domaine Serene are unprecedented among Oregon producers.

In April 2015, the Evenstads bought Château de la Créée, a Burgundy wine estate in the Côte d'Or. They will be making their own wines from famous vineyards including ones in Chassagne-Montrachet, Puligny-Montrachet and Volnay.



The winery's Tasting Room is open daily with tours of the 5-level winery building available by appointment. Three types of tastings are offered (\$20 to \$60) with details available on the winery's website at [www.domaineserene.com](http://www.domaineserene.com). A new wine tasting experience will open in 2017 in the Domaine Serene Clubhouse. (pictured below). Several wine club memberships extend exclusive offerings and experiences.



**2012 Domaine Serene Yamhill Cuvée Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.6%, 7,739 cases, \$45. A blend of grapes from the Dundee Hills, Eola-Amity Hills and Yamhill-Carlton AVAs, all part of Yamhill County. Aged 13 months in French oak barrels, 47% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A fresh, forward wine that is eager to please with aromas and flavors of cherry, red berry, spice and a modest grip of oak. Lighter in weight, with lacy tannins, the wine is nicely balanced and offers a burst of cherry on the finish. The least extracted offering in the 2012 lineup, but a solid everyday drinking wine that will please at the table. 89.*

**2012 Domaine Serene Evenstad Reserve Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 7,982 cases, \$70. The winery's flagship bottling that represents a consistent blend from premier vineyards in the Dundee Hills and Eola-Amity Hills. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 65% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The spirited berry fruits are overlaid with significant oak top notes of coffee and char more noticeable on the nose than on the palate. That said, the oak is not drying. The majestic assorted red and black berry fruit flavors are offered in a mid weight plus style embellished with pleasing spice notes and framed by*

integrated tannins. Easy to like, with plenty of swagger, boasting a satiny mouthfeel and some finishing exuberance. This wine will appeal to those who enjoy a prominent, but not overbearing oak influence. **91.**

**2012 Domaine Serene Côte Sud Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 384 cases, \$90. Estate grown, produced and bottled. One of seven Evenstad Estate vineyards. 24 acres (19 acres of Pinot Noir), dry-farmed, south-facing, 600-680 feet elevation, closely planted in Jory soil. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of boysenberry, blackberry, cardamom spice, and char. The mid weight core of black fruits is complimented by notes of anise, black tea, tobacco and herbs. The fruit has impressive beauty of flavor, although the oak overlay is a bit aggressive for me. The wine finishes with plenty of resonant fruit fragrance.* **91.**



**2012 Domaine Serene Fleur de Lis Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 132 cases, \$85 (member exclusive). Estate grown, produced and bottled. One of seven dry-farmed estate vineyards located on a hilltop at 720 to 740 feet elevation. Closely planted Dijon clones in Jory soil. An important component of the Evenstad Reserve bottling. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 66% new. *Moderately dark reddish*

*purple color in the glass. Vigorous aromas of cherry reduction sauce, strawberry, earthy flora and oak spice lead off. Very elegant in the mouth, with ebullient flavors of dark red and blue berries accented by a deft touch of sweet oak. Impressive acid-driven juiciness, cashmere tannins and good finishing length. Somewhat delicate yet powerfully flavored, this wine is full of sunlight, and exudes harmony and class. Still exceptional the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, taking on a darker fruit profile and maintaining its regal aura.* **94.**



**Domaine Serene Winery Hill Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 314 cases, \$90 (member exclusive). Estate grown, produced and bottled. Sourced from a 20-acre, dry-farmed, south and west facing vineyard closely planted to several clones in Jory soil at 800 to 900 feet elevation. Planted in 2000 while the winery was under construction. 100% Dijon clones planted at the highest elevation on the Estate. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 57% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Initial conservative aromas of darker cherry, woodland and musk blossom over time in the glass adding inviting scents of baking spices, potpourri and dark berries. Very enchanting on the palate, with a mid weight core of black cherry, black raspberry and blackberry fruit flavors dressed in subtle oak seasoning. Silky in the mouth, with matched intricate tannins, and juicy acidity that infuses the finish with lip-smacking brightness. Still very appealing the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **92.**

**2012 Domaine Serene Jerusalem Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 434 cases, \$90. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 47% new. Estate grown, produced and bottled. Vineyard is located in Yamhill County's Eola-Amity Hills. Assorted clones of Pinot Noir are closely planted in sedimentary soil in an east-facing site located at 200 to 300 feet elevation. *Demure aromas of berry jam, exotic tea and sandalwood need time in the glass to emerge. Darker fruits are featured in a middleweight style including blackberry and black raspberry flavors highlighted by a tug of char-driven oak. This wine has noticeably more tannic grip but it is not overwrought. The finish is particularly memorable in this wine for its extended length and opulence. When tasted the following day from a previously opened bottle, the nose was still shy, but the fruit core was even more giving. A good cellar candidate.* **92.**

**2012 Domaine Serene Two Barns Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 422 cases, \$90. Estate grown, produced and bottled. Sourced from a 35-acre vineyard located on the west side of Dundee Hills. Dry-farmed, west and south-facing, closely planted in sedimentary soils of Willakenzie series. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose presents an inviting marriage of baked cherry and seasoned oak aromas. Impressive depth of fruit, showing flavors of dark red cherries and berries with a touch of spice and oak. Intense attack, attention-getting mid palate presence, and a generous finish that exudes luscious cherry fruit. A dreamy wine with cohesive tannins and acidity and exemplary Dundee Hills character.* **93.**



**2012 Domaine Serene Mark Bradford Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 344 cases, \$125. Named after Ken and Grace Evenstad's son and was the first Pinot Noir vineyard planted at Domaine Serene. Estate grown, produced and bottled. Vineyard is one of seven estate vineyards. Dry-farmed, west-facing hillside site at 650 to 750 feet elevation

closely planted to several clones of Pinot Noir in Jory soil. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 74% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A slowly evolving, but exceptional nose, offering aromas of cherry tart, raspberry jam, earth and tobacco. The mid weight plus core of black cherry and black raspberry fruits attack with a fury and sustain a presence that really alerts the senses. A somewhat muscular and aggressively styled wine that nonetheless reflects its Pinot Noir genetics and remains silky in its demeanor. The plucky tannins are well balanced as is the smart new oak and the deliciously spicy and berry-fueled finish leaves a memorable impression. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was notable for its seamless character. 94.*

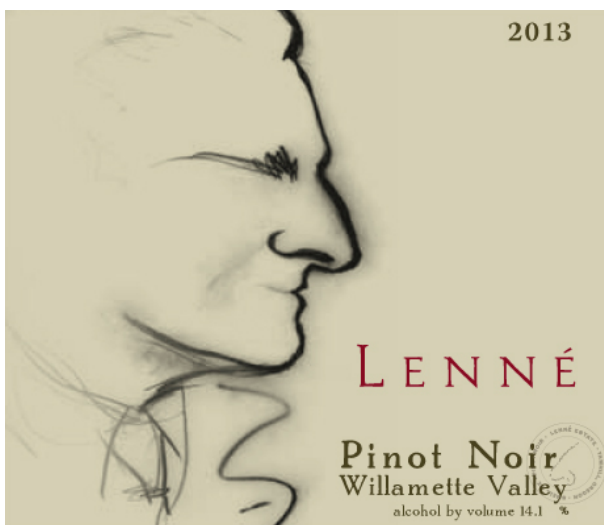


**2012 Domaine Serene Grace Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 340 cases, \$175. Estate grown, produced and bottled. One of seven vineyards of the Evenstad Estate. Dry-farmed, east-facing, situated at 540-640 feet elevation, with Jory soils. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose extends a number of nuances, including aromas of an array of black and purple stone and berry fruits, spice, bacon and even a floral note. Clearly a classy wine on entry, offering well ripened heady black fruits that are deep on the mid palate, and underpinned by fine-grain tannins, juicy acidity, and compliments of oak-driven toast and black tea flavors. Packed with flavor, but*

*light as a ballerina on its feet, this beauty has a very comforting texture. A very long and expansive finish completes the enjoyment of this majestic wine. 94.*

## Lenné Estate

A very reliable producer of superb Yamhill-Carlton estate Pinot Noir had success with the challenging 2013 vintage. Owner and winemaker Steve Lutz (along with David O'Reilly of Owen Roe), told me he picked before the major rain in September. The wines were difficult to evaluate in barrel, even the first six months after he bottled them, but are opening up and showing better and better as time goes by. He likens the 2013 vintage to the 2007 vintage as to weather and the way the wines tasted upon release, improving over time. He said, "I love the 2013 wines for what they will become more than for what they are." Lenné Estate Pinot Noir is produced from a 20.9-acre hillside vineyard. The tasting room on Laughlin Road is open weekends or by appointment. Visit [www.lenneestate.com](http://www.lenneestate.com).



**2013 Lenné Estate Le Nez Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.54, RS <0.05, \$30. A blend of five clones in the estate vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Like a cabin in the forest, this nose is quite woody, with aromas of bark, smoke, spice and black cherry. A bit lean, but offering some gratifying flavors of griotte cherry,*

*raspberry and spice. Forward, early drinking with modest tannins and some cherry-fueled finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the fruit flavors had picked up a little intensity, but a green thread lurked in the background. 88.*

**2013 Lennè Estate Estate Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.56, RS <0.05, \$45. A selection of the best barrels from the estate vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A shy nose offers primarily earthy and mulch aromas with some dark fruits emerging with swirling. Much more impressive on the palate with a mid weight plus charge of luscious black cherry and black raspberry fruits, nicely spiced and oak-tinged. Impressive fullness in the mid palate with good generosity on the finish. Seemingly reluctant, the wine opened up the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, showing more aromatic brilliance, and more transparent fruit and spice on the palate. 91-92.*

**2013 Lennè Estate Karen's Pommard Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.76, TA 0.57, RS <0.05, \$55. Single clone Pommard from estate vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Deep perfume of crushed black cherries with an echo of sandalwood on the nose. The strong attack of mid weight dark cherry, cola and spice flavors grab on to and persist on the palate, carrying over to a glorious finish that treats the drinker with an interplay of cherry and spice goodness. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the nose was exuberant, and the flavor profile still charming, with a savory herbal note in the background. 91-92.*

**2013 Lennè Estate Eleanor's 114 Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.52, RS <0.02, \$55. Single clone Dijon 114 from estate vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is quite floral, with added aromas of cherry and nutty oak. Like cherry pie day at cooking school, the red cherry and baking spice flavors predominate. The tannins are soft and well managed, and the tight, lip-smacking finish featuring cinnamon spice and cherry is tantalizing. The wine needs a little time to shed some oak overlay, but otherwise is a real charmer. 92-93.*

**2013 Lennè Estate Jill's 115 Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.52, \$55. Single clone Dijon 115 from estate vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Extravagant aromas of cherry and earthy flora lead to a middleweight styled wine featuring juicy flavors of black cherry, blueberry and pomegranate. Lively and bright, with fine grain tannins and an uplifting finish replete with cherry liquor goodness. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine's elegance was on full display and the wholesome marriage of fruit and savory notes was uplifting. 92-93.*

**2013 Lennè Estate Kill Hill Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.56, RS <0.05, \$55. Sourced from the most challenging part of the vineyard and composed of clones 667 and 114. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose was lacking in fruit, offering a display of floral, vegetal and rusty iron aromas. A very earthy and mineral-infused wine with a riper fruit profile of purple and black berries and even raisins. Nicely balanced with a silky mouthfeel, but the ripeness didn't appeal. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine had a vegetal undertone. 88-89.*

My advice would be to cellar these wines for a few years (except the Le Nez) and they might surprise further. Otherwise, decant them. They are quite different from the powerfully fruited 2012 vintage wines but may have more appeal for those preferring more elegant, crunchy fruited, vibrant and savory Pinot Noir.

# Recent California Pinot Noir Tastings are Inspirational

To inspire can mean to cause someone to have a feeling or emotion and California Pinot Noir is currently offers an exalting experience. I use a mnemonic to assess quality of Pinot Noir - "BLING" - and California Pinot Noir currently has an abundance of bling. B = balance (integration of alcohol, acid, tannins, fruit and oak), L = length of finish, I = intricacy (nuance and complexity), N = nose, and G = God blessed, as in, "God this is good."

## Bohème, Occidental

Kurt Beitler, an Oregon native, directs the farming and winemaking of Bohème Wines, rooted in the town of Occidental in West Sonoma Coast. The winery's namesake Bohemian Highway winds through Sonoma's coast of redwoods. Kurt leases three vineyards that are among the nearest to the Pacific Ocean in all of North America: Stuller, Taylor Ridge and English Hill.



Kurt's grandfather is Charlie Wagner, who founded Caymus Vineyards in 1972, and his uncle is Chuck Wagner. Kurt was invited to work at the family's Caymus Winery in Napa Valley during the summers and was encouraged to enter the wine business. Kurt's first vineyard management job in 2000 followed college and was at the Belle Glos Taylor Lane Vineyard in Occidental owned by his uncle, Chuck Wagner. It was while working here that he had an epiphany about the sensational wines from that region that led to the founding of Bohème. The small production Pinot Noirs are sold through a mailing list and on the website. The winery's Cellar Door Tasting Room is located in Occidental and is open Friday through Sunday or by appointment. Chardonnay and Syrah from the Occidental region are also offered (reviews of Chardonnay are also in this issue). The website is [www.bohemewine.com](http://www.bohemewine.com).

There is plenty of nuance in the Bohème Pinot Noirs which separates them from the ordinary. The extended time in barrel blesses the wines with more maturity.





**2012 Bohème Stuller Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 472 cases, \$53. This 6-acre vineyard dates to 1998 and is located amidst the redwoods at 1,200 feet elevation, with views of the Pacific Ocean 6.4 miles away. Clone 115 is planted in clay loam and 667 in gravelly hilltop soils. Yield 1.8 tons per acre. Aged 20 months in once to four times used French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nuanced aromatic profile satisfies, with scents of black cherry, sarsaparilla, pine needle and sandy loam. Pleasingly silky and slightly viscous on the palate which features mid weight dark red and black cherry, black raspberry and cola flavors with an earthy undertone. Opens nicely in the glass over time, displaying commendable harmony and some finishing length marked by uplifting acidity.* **92.**

**2012 Bohème English Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 766 cases, \$49. This 8.5-acre vineyard is located at the southwestern edge of the Sebastopol Hills overlooking the Russian River Valley and Marin Coast. Yields 2.81 tons per acre. A barrel selection from clones 115, 667, Vosne-Romanee, BRC and Calera harvested and fermented separately. Aged 21 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely aromas of black cherry, raspberry, woodland and cherry leather. The wine's flavors echo the nose with a perfectly ripened fruit profile. There is a slight smoky note in the background conferred on the wine by oak. The wine offers boundless elegance and a gratifying finish.* **91.**

**2012 Bohème Taylor Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 305 cases, \$55. This vineyard is located on a bluff 4.8 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean at 915 feet elevation. Swan selection is planted in sandy loam Goldridge soils. Yields 2.15 tons per acre. Aged 20 months in once to three times used French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple hue in the glass. The highly expressive nose offers a perfume of red cherry, cake spice, rose petal and sandalwood. Plenty of luscious cherry goodness engages the mid palate in a polished, elegantly style wine with refined tannins and integrated acidity. A compliment of baking spices is enmeshed. This is a very classy wine with pinpoint balance and a vivacious charge of cherry hanging on at the finish.* **93.**



## The Donum Estate, Carneros

The Donum Estate, originally founded in Carneros, is now spread over three California appellations. The Donum Ranch (Donum means “gift of the land”). is a 147-acre property planted to 70 acres of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Carneros, (including the 20-acre Ferguson Block Vineyard located less than a mile away from Donum Ranch and also in Carneros), the 16-acre Winside Vineyard located in the Russian River Valley, and further north is the 11-acre Angel Camp Vineyard in Anderson Valley. Donum farms all three vineyards, providing three different estate grown interpretations of California Pinot Noir. A variety of Pinot Noir clones are planted on the various sites including the “Donum selection,” Calera, Chalone, Hanzell, Martini and Swan selections, and Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777.



President Anne Moller-Racke is a pioneer winegrower in the Carneros region who was instrumental in developing the Buena Vista Carneros Estate, and helped establish the Carneros AVA and Carneros Wine Alliance. In 2001, she launched The Donum Estate project, now owned by Winside, Inc.. The winemaker, Dan Fishman, has been a part of the winemaking team since 2007, becoming head winemaker in 2012. Kenneth Juhasz is the consulting winemaker. Tasting of the single vineyard estate wines is by appointment only by calling 707-939-2290. The Stemmler label wines are also part of The Donum Estate wine production. Visit [www.thedonumestate.com](http://www.thedonumestate.com).

The relatively warm 2013 vintage followed three cooler growing seasons. Bud break occurred very early due to a warm spring. Cooler weather at the right times in early and late September prevented an escalation of sugar levels. The year was very dry, requiring irrigation in the growing season. Harvest began at the Winside Vineyard on September 2, and ended in Carneros on October 8.

The resultant wines are rich, bold expressions of Pinot Noir, but the 2013 vintage wines offer less extraction but comparable ripeness and more charm than their hedonistic 2012 counterparts. Although the wines are raised in a generous percentage of new oak, there is only a light imprint of oak in the wines. Only free-run juice is used in the Donum wines.

**2013 Donum Single Vineyard Estate Grown Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.78, TA 0.59, 650 cases, \$72. Sourced from the best blocks of the estate 70-acre vineyard and includes a selection of the most appealing barrels within each lot. 95% Donum selection and 5% Calera selection. Aged on fine lees 14 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Savory and fruity notes compliment the aromatics, including scents of black cherry, cardamom spice, toast, earthy flora and bramble. A mid weight styled wine with succulent black berry and black plum fruit flavors built around a core of typical Carneros earthiness, with suave tannins and easy approachability, and good finishing persistence.* **91.**



**2013 Donum East Slope Single Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.65, 157 cases, \$90. Sourced from an east-sloping vineyard block of the Donum Ranch planted to a Calera selection. East Slope is a cool site, prone to uneven set with a mix of large and small berries. 5-day cold soak, slow natural fermentation, brief extended maceration, aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The most expressive nose in the 2013 Donum lineup, with welcoming aromas of Bing cherry, cake spices and sandalwood. This wine oozes charm and freshness, featuring mid weight flavors of cherry, dark red berry and plum. Cohesive tannins and acidity make for seductive drinking. The finish has remarkable staying power as well as a dancing suavity. This wine is a perfect prelude to seduction.* **95.**



**2013 Donum West Slope Single Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.62, 269 cases, \$90. Sourced from the middle portion of west-sloping vineyard block, a 5.5-acre site at the Donum Ranch. The Donum Roederer selection (the "Donum selection") is the mainstay of the Donum Carneros Pinot Noir and certain vines developed further depth and complexity, so a stand-alone West Slope bottling was started in 2007. 100% Donum selection. 100% de-stemmed, 8-day cold soak, 4 weeks in tank, aged on the lees 15 months in French oak barrels, 63% new. *Medium reddish purple hue in the glass. A very engaging wine, offering hi-tone aromas of darker berries and cherries and a sprightly note of potpourri. The luscious core of dark red and black berry fruits is long and expansive, and accented by hints of cola, sweet oak, and earthiness. Impeccable balance, with a silky countenance and a classy finish of notable aromatic persistence.* **94.**

**2013 Donum Single Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.74, TA 0.58, 890 cases, \$72. Anne Moller-Racke planned and planted the Winside Vineyard, formerly the Nugent Vineyard in the mid 1990s, and has farmed the property ever since. Dijon clones 667 and 115 were planted here initially with Pommard added in 2009. All three clones were included in this wine beginning in 2012. A barrel selection that was first offered in 2005. 100% de-stemmed, 6 to 10-day cold soak, slow fermentation with punch downs, and aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 70% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The aromas of cherry liquor and oak draw you into this middleweight styled wine offering crunchy black cherry and dark strawberry fruit flavors. Aggressive on the attack, with a polished mid palate demeanor, and a modest finish. Welcome harmony and easy drink ability.* **90.**

**2013 Donum Single Vineyard Russian River Valley Reserve Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.59, 293 cases, \$90. First introduced in 2009, this wine has consisted of only Dijon clone 667, but in 2013, the Pommard eclipsed the Dijon 667 block and Pommard makes up the majority of the blend. Typically, this is the winery's richest blend. Long cold soak, extended maceration after primary fermentation, aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 70% new, and the best barrels selected. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of crushed dark cherries emerge with swirling. This wine has more swagger than finesse, yet is still agile, offering an intensely flavored cherry core accented with cola, spice and oak notes. The finish leaves a slight sense of warmth behind, but is clearly more generous and persistent than the regular Russian River Valley bottling. Cellaring is advised for this wine as it is still closed and brooding at this stage.* **91.**

**2013 Donum Single Vineyard Ten Oaks Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 12.9% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.60, 158 cases, \$72. Sourced from the Pommard block at Winside Vineyard, named after the ten majestic oak trees that border it on two sides. 15% whole cluster, 7-day cold soak, spontaneous fermentation, pump overs used but punch downs avoided to prevent over-extraction. The wine was aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Haunting aromas of Bing cherry, spice, rose petal and wine cave. Intense attack of crunchy cherry fruit with added complimentary flavors of spice and cherry cola. A*

*teasing wine that draws you in with its appealing crispness. Still highly aromatic the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

**2013 Donum Single Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.58, 423 cases, \$72. Sourced from the Angel Camp Vineyard located in the deep end of the Anderson Valley north of Philo. Seven clones of Pinot Noir in volcanic, sandy soil at 500 feet elevation. A barrel-selected blend from all the vineyard blocks. 6-day cold soak, extended maceration of 20 to 26 days. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A forward drinking wine, offering aromas and flavors of black cherry, blackberry jam, vanilla and toast. Plenty of luscious fruit goodness with matched tannins, complimentary oak and a charge of fruit on the finish. Ripe flavors but not too ripe. 91.*

**2013 Donum Single Vineyard Angel Camp Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.57, 135 cases, \$90. Sourced from an 11-acre property planted to Wädenswil, David Bruce, Martini and Swan selections as well as Dijon clones 115, 667, and “828.” The largest component was the co-fermentation of Dijon 115 and 777. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 87% new. A favorite six barrel blend. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Brooding aromas of ultra ripe black fruits lead to a full-bodied and intensely sappy wine featuring black cherry and black currant flavors framed by matching tannins. The fruit load has embraced the high percentage of new oak which is well integrated. Unusually dense for a Pinot Noir and the boldest wine in the 2013 Donum lineup. 90.*

## Fogline Vineyards, Fulton

A boutique winery with a production facility and tasting room in Fulton, Sonoma County, and an estate Fogline Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain directly above Gap’s Crown Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap region of the Sonoma Coast AVA. The Fogline Vineyard is planted to Pinot Noir clones 115, Pommard, Swan and Mt. Eden and Chardonnay clones 76 and Old Wente. In 2014 Sauvignon Blanc was established. The first harvest was in 2011. The winery was founded in 2009 by Brent Bessire and Evan Pontoriero. Zinfandel, Syrah, and a Rosé of Pinot Noir are offered as well as two Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs. The wines are sold on the website and at the tasting room. Visit [www.foglinevineyards.com](http://www.foglinevineyards.com). Evan Pontoriero is one of the four featured winemakers on the Petaluma Gap Wineries River Cruise, “Cruising the Rhone River,” March 23-30, 2017. See [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1785/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1785/) for details.



**2013 Fogline Hillside Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.62, 95 cases, \$55. Released October 2015. Fogline Estate Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap. Clones 115, Pommard, Swan and Mt. Eden. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Uplifting aromas of Bing cherry, dark red raspberry, baking spice and mulch. Thoroughly satisfying, with vivacious flavors of cherry, raspberry, spice, cola and dried herbs. Balanced t n' a with a pleasing cherry and cranberry appointed finish. Still very solid the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle meaning the wine has somewhere to go in the cellar. 91.*



**2013 Fogline Fogline Neighbors Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.65, 72 cases, \$65. Released October 2015. A blend of three vineyards on the western face of Sonoma Mountain: Sun Chase (1200 feet elevation), Janian (900 feet elevation) and Fogline (850 feet elevation). Clones 667, 777, 115, 114, Pommard, Mt. Eden and Swan. 30% whole cluster fermentation. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose evolves slowly over time in the glass, eventually giving hi-tone aromas of black cherry, black raspberry and seasoned oak. Dark fruited on the palate with inviting intensity that carries over on the fruit-dominated finish. The slightly sinewy tannins are folded in, and the barrel management is ideal. Still inviting the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Can be enjoyed now, but has the balance to last. 91.*

## Joseph Jewell, Forestville

Micah Joseph Wirth and Adrian Jewell Manspeaker launched their winery in 2007 with 300 cases of Pinot Noir and have gradually expanded their production to the current offering of 2,500 cases annually. Micah was raised in Alexander Valley and learned winemaking from his winemaker father Christopher Wirth at ElvenGlade and Raptor Ridge in Oregon. He was also mentored by Gary Farrell and Susan Reed at Gary Farrell Winery where he became cellar master. Adrian studied winemaking and viticulture at University of California Davis extension program and developed his winemaking skills at C. Donatiello Winery and Peay Vineyards. Pinot Noir is sourced from several Russian River Valley and Humboldt County vineyards. Chardonnay and Zinfandel are also offered. A tasting room was opened in Forestville in 2015. The wines are sold at the tasting room and through a mailing list at [www.josephjewell.com](http://www.josephjewell.com).



The wines reviewed here were all better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating that if enjoyed now, decanting would be recommended. Better yet, cellar the wines for another 6 to 12 months.



**2013 Jewell Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.11% alc., pH 3.63, TA 0.59, 1,150 cases, \$34. A blend of several vineyards: Hallberg, Floodgate, Appian Way, Bucher and Nurmi. 100% de-stemmed, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Nice perfume of Bing cherry, cherry pie spice, purple grape and a hint of oak. A solid offering of mid weight black cherry, blueberry and spice flavors with a top note of toast, earth, tar and black tea. Modest tannins, with some finishing intensity and a slight sense of alcoholic warmth on the finish.* **89.**



**2013 Joseph Jewell Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.27% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.56, 200 cases, \$48. Release April 1, 2016. This original apple growing property, named after the former owners, Don and Marcia Hallberg, was sold to Emeritus Vineyards in 1999. Goldridge soils. Yields 2.40 tons per acre. 100% de-stemmed, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 22% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The scent of black raspberry, blackberry, spice and woodland is inviting. Up front black raspberry and blackberry fruits blanket the mid palate, carrying over on the lifted, juicy and very long sweet-fruited finish. A compliment of oak plays in the background in this harmonious offering. Considerably more enjoyable the next day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**

**2013 Joseph Jewell Floodgate Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.22% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.61, 200 cases, \$44. Release April 1, 2016. This vineyard is located in the Middle Reach of the Russian River Valley. Clones 777. Yields 2.13 tons per acre. 100% de-stemmed, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 22% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. The nose is primary, even when checked the following day, with only earthy, oak-driven aromas. Much better and giving on the palate, with a mid weight core of sweet, sappy blackberry, black raspberry, and blueberry-pomegranate fruits supported by a touch of oak. The polished, velvety mouthfeel is alluring.* **90.**

**2013 Joseph Jewell Appian Way Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.22% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.61, 92 cases, \$46. Release April 1, 2016. Vineyard is located just outside the town of Forestville. Farmed as an organic apple orchard until 2001, the 2-acre vineyard is now planted to Pinot Noir clones 115, 777 and Pommard in Goldridge soil. Yields 3.40 tons per acre. Unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is steeped in purple berry, hazelnut and vanilla aromas. Soft on entry and exit, with mid weight plus flavors of spiced plum, ollaliberry and blueberry-pomegranate. Super ripe in profile with even a hint of prune peeking out. Nicely composed with a deft touch of oak, merged tannins, and a satiny texture. A slight sense of warmth shows up on the finish. Unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **89.**

**2013 Joseph Jewell Elk Prairie Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir** 12.91% alc., 50 cases, \$39. This vineyard is located at 1200 feet elevation on Fruitland Ridge. *Light strawberry red in color, Highly aromatic, with a perfume of strawberry shortcake, red cherry and sandalwood. Lighter in weight, featuring flavors of red cherry, red berry, strawberry, blueberry and spice. The tannins are hidden, and the finish is mildly tart. Considerably more enjoyable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, showing soaring aromatics and highly expressive fruit with plenty of charm.* **91.**



**2013 Joseph Jewell Alderpoint Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.56, 100 cases, \$34. Martini clone. Yield 2.01 tons per acre. 100% de-stemmed. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. Unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Both fruity and savory aromas announce the wine, including scents of cherry, raspberry, spice, underbrush, oak and herbs. A polished wine on the palate, with mid weight flavors of cherry, raspberry and boysenberry, framed by matching tannins and a subtle top note of oak. The finish is modest but satisfying.* **90.**

## Littorai, Sebastopol

Winemaker Ted Lemon crafts appellation-driven and vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs from northern Sonoma Coast vineyards in the Sonoma Coast and Anderson Valley appellations. He closely directs the farming practices of his sourced vines emphasizing organic and biodynamic viticulture. The name, Littorai, is derived

from a plural noun formed from the Latin word *litor-*, which means “the coasts.” His Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays are produced to reflect a sense of place, and are highly lauded and extremely age worthy. Ted’s 30-acre estate property in Sebastopol is a recommended visit for wine enthusiasts because it is a unique example of a biodynamic farm. A hay-bale walled gravity-flow winery was opened on the property in 2009 where tastings are held. The winery is surprisingly simple and functional, with no signage, for Lemon says, “This is not an indulgence.” An estate vineyard, The Pivot, is adjacent the winery. Visitors are welcome to taste and tour the estate by appointment. The wines are highly allocated through a mailing list, with limited restaurant distribution. Visit [www.littorai.com](http://www.littorai.com).

Some of the 2013 vintage wines are reviewed here. The spring offering of the 2014 vintage wines has just concluded. The 2013 vintage saw significant rainfall in December and early January followed by a frosty period in later January. Following a multi year drought and a very dry spring, early season irrigation was applied, something very rare at Littorai. The year offered one of the longest and slowest veraisons Ted had ever seen. Harvest was conducted between September 4 and 18.

Pinot Noir vinification is as follows. Grapes are harvested at night and fermenters naturally rise in temperature, starting native yeast fermentation. During fermentation, a combination of punch down and pump over techniques are used. Both stainless steel and wood fermenters are used. The wines are generally pressed at dryness. A proportion of whole clusters are included in the tanks, with the percentage depending on a number of criteria including vintage and vineyard conditions, but rarely surpassing 30% in any given fermenter or bottling. The Pinot Noirs are rarely racked and remain on the lees until bottling. The vineyard designated wines are aged in about 25% new French oak barrels where they remain for approximately 14 to 17 months. The press lots are declassified (a rare practice among Pinot Noir producers) into the Sonoma Coast or Les Larmes Anderson Valley blends or sold off in bulk. The appellation Pinot Noirs are exposed to less new oak, are aged about 11 months, and are intended for earlier consumption.

Ted notes, “The 2013 vintage wines do not lack structure, but the aromas are fresher and more vegetal than 2012. The fruits are on the less ripe spectrum. They are more aromatically complex and generally more suited for nearer term drinking than the 2012 vintage Pinot Noirs. 2013 is much closer to 2010 in style, with great aromatics. We suggest you be patient with them because there is more muscle and grip than the charming 2010 vintage wines.”

My overall impression following a tasting of the wines reviewed here is that the wines are classically styled and balanced to age, and most likely will pick up some weight and be better in 3 to 7 years (typical for Littorai Pinot Noir). They are not heavily extracted or manipulated, the wines have suave tannins, and are very food friendly. The Platt Vineyard and B.A. Thieriot Vineyard are clearly standouts.



**2013 Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., 709 cases, \$70. Vines dating to 1995. Farmed using organic and biodynamic principles. Clones 114, 777, Pommard and Swan. Yields 2.74 tons per acre. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of cherry, sous-bois and shaved oak. Toothsome flavors of black cherry and cinnamon spice are accented with toasty oak. Rather delicate and elegantly styled, with structured tannins and a silky mouthfeel. Easy to drink now, with an appealing grip on the finish, but the wine is slightly sullen and withdrawn. Largely unchanged the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, although the tannins seemed more prominent. Give this wine some cellar time. 90.*



**2013 Littorai B.A. Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 186 cases, \$80. The vineyard is located southwest of the town of Occidental, overlooking Bodega at an elevation of 900 feet. Goldridge over sandstone soils. Littorai has a long term lease on this site so that it is farmed as if it was an estate vineyard. Farmed for over a decade using biodynamic methods. Yields 1.99 tons per acre. Vines planted in 1991 and 1994. Clones are Swan, Pommard, 114, 777, Calera and a proprietary clone. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. This has been my favorite Littorai bottling since I first discovered it 15 years ago. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Alluring, even intoxicating aromas of fresh cherry, raspberry, blackberry, sous-bois and spice. Gracious and sexy, with finesse rather than swagger, offering a mid weight core of nicely ripened black cherry and black raspberry fruits framed by a hint of tannic sinew, integrated juicy acidity and a deft touch of oak. A note of exotic spice sneaks in at the finish. A very seductive wine. Turn down the lights when you pull the cork on this beauty. 94.*



**2013 Littorai Platt Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., 613 cases, \$70. Littorai section of vineyard planted in 2004 and are highest elevation blocks on the property at 750 feet. The vines are planted to a rootstock and clones specifically chosen by Littorai. Platt is only 6 miles from the coast and overlooks the town of Bodega. Goldridge sand loam over marine origin sandstone soils. Organically farmed. Clones "828," 115, 777, proprietary, and Calera. Yields 4.67 tons per acre. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate cherry red color in the glass. A wonderland of aromas greet the drinker with notes of black cherry, blackberry, woodland and seasoned oak. Impressive attack of heady dark cherry and dark red berry fruits transition to a plush mid palate embossed with a woody, savory note, finishing with uncommon length and charm. A wine of special breeding with cohesive tannins and acidity. Even better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine has somewhere to go. 94.*

**2013 Littorai Roman Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., 234 cases, \$75. Roman is a hilltop vineyard situated at 1150 feet elevation northwest of the town of Philo. Soils are Boont loam over sandstone. Farmed using organic materials and biodynamic methods. Vines planted in 1999. Yields 2.48 tons per acre. Clones 114, 667 and a proprietary clone. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Stunted aromas of red cherry, leather chaps, spice and woodland. Light to mid weight in style, with flavors of cherry, cranberry and strawberry and a slight herbal riff. Restrained, even too calm, but nicely balanced, with a slightly tart finish. This wine has the most under ripe fruit of the wines tasted here. Unchanged the following day when re-tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 89.*

**2013 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 12.7% alc., 565 cases, \$70. This vineyard is located on the cooler end of the valley but is protected on two sides so it is warmer than most of its neighbors. Farmed using organic materials. Pinole and Boont loams over Franciscan shale soils. Vines planted in 1991, 1992 and 1993. Yields 3.16 tons per acre. Clones 114, 115, 667, 777, Calera and Pommard. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of compost, mushroom, cherry and blueberry lead to a smooth and suave palate of red cherry, red berry and blueberry flavors. Very satisfying, even uplifting, with pinpoint balance and a finish awash in vibrant fruit. The tannins are unusually tame in this vintage. 91.*

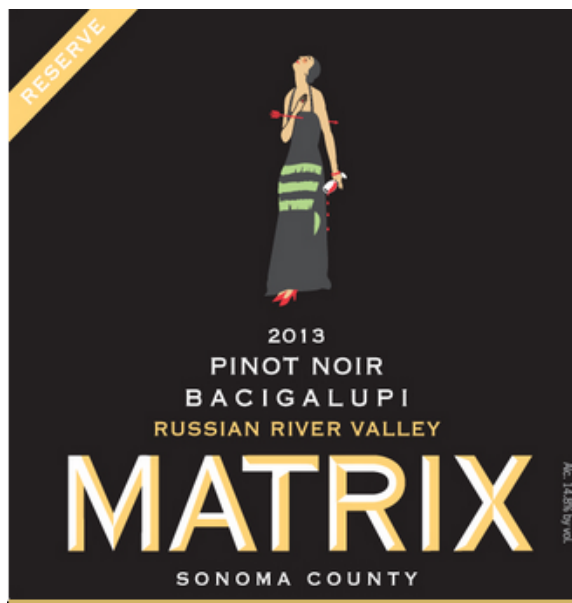
**2013 Littorai One Acre Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 143 cases, \$80. Littorai's original vineyard-designated Pinot Noir. A hilltop vineyard situated at 1600 feet elevation in the mountains northeast of Boonville. The vineyard succumbed to phylloxera several years ago and was replanted in 2005 when the rootstock, row orientation and clones were changed. Soils are Bearwallow loam over marine origin sandstone. Yields 2.87 tons per acre. Clones are 114, 777, "828," and Swan. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 25% new.



*Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. The nose has already developed complexity, offering scents of black plum, black raspberry, pungent earth, compost, char, and floral intricacy. This wine has considerable mid palate presence and finishing power, yet is light on its feet. The richest and ripest wine of those tasted, with mid weight plus flavors of black raspberry, purple grape and blackberry and a light imprint of oak. A charismatic wine that will be a joy to follow over time. 92.*

## Matrix Winery, Healdsburg

Proprietors Ken and Diane Wilson founded Matrix Winery in 1986. Located on Westside Road, Russian River Valley's Rodeo Drive of Pinot Noir, the winery produces multiple varietals from the winery's 400 acres of estate vineyards as well as other premium vineyards. The Wilsons also own seven other wineries including Wilson Winery, Mazzocco Sonoma, deLorimier Winery, Jaxon Keys Winery, Soda Rock Winery, Pezzi King Vineyards and St. Anne's Crossing all located in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. The winemaker is Diane Wilson, who has won many medals in wine competitions including Sweepstakes at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair and San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. The Matrix tasting room is at 3291 Westside Road and is open daily. Visit [www.matrixwinery.com](http://www.matrixwinery.com).



**2013 Matrix Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.1% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.60, 923 cases, \$38. Sourced from Matrix Estate, Monroe Vineyards and Boschetti Vineyards. Native yeast fermentation, aged in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very fragrant initially, with aromas of well-ripened Bing cherry and baking spice, giving way over time in the glass to oak-driven scents of smoke, cigar and woodland. Ultra ripe flavors on the palate of black cherry, boysenberry, cola and dark chocolate. Noticeably oak-infused and a bit drying with a slight sense of warmth on the sappy finish. 87.*

**2013 Matrix Winery Russian River Valley Reserve Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.60, 199 cases, \$65. A best barrel selection of wines from Nunes, R. Buoncristiani and Bacigalupi vineyards. Native yeast fermentation, aged 18 months in French oak barrels and bottled unfined. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, kirsch, vanilla and spice lead to a delicious core of fresh cherry fruit accented with baking spices. Nicely balanced with plenty of heady cherry saturating the palate and lasting through an extended finish. Much more charm and nimble character than the regular Russian River Valley bottling. 90.*

**2013 Matrix Winery Matrix Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.1% alc., pH 3.76, TA 0.62, 248 cases, \$56. Clones 667, 777 and "828." Native yeast fermentation, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, and bottled unfined. Clones 667, 777 and "828." A best barrel selection of wines from Nunes, R. Buoncristiani and Bacigalupi vineyards. Native yeast fermentation, aged 18 months in French oak barrels and bottled unfined. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Initial aromas of black cherry, blueberry and blackberry-pomegranate give way to more oak overlay with time in the glass. Very luscious and super-ripe fruited with top*

notes of cola, dark chocolate, espresso and tobacco engaging the deep black cherry core. The wine is plush on the palate with submerged tannins, displaying a sense of lip warmth on the finish. **88.**

**2013 Matrix Winery R. Buoncristiani Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.60, 199 cases, \$52. Vines date to 2002. Clones 115 and 777. Native yeast fermentation, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, and bottled unfined. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The engaging nose leads off with aromas of Bing cherry and Asian 5-spice. A comforting wine on the palate with a silky texture and well-spiced flavors of dark cherry and blueberry-pomegranate. Nicely composed, with integrated tannins and an ebullient finish.* **92**

**2013 Matrix Winery R. Buoncristiani Russian River Valley Reserve Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.60, 99 cases, \$68. Vines date to 2002. A selection of the finest barrels from this vineyard. Native yeast fermentation, aged in French oak barrels, and bottled unfined. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Very ripe fruited profile with aromas of blueberry and blackberry, and mid weight, ultra ripe flavors of blackest cherry, blackberry and blueberry-pomegranate. A bit earthy with a mushroom note. The wine picks up interest with more nuance over time in the glass, finishing with a juicy and oak-kissed, cherry-driven finish.* **91.**

**2013 Matrix Winery Bacigalupi Russian River Valley Reserve Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.58, 124 cases, \$68. Vines date to 1995 and 2003. Pommard and Wente clones. Native yeast fermentation, aged in French oak barrels. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, leather, sandalwood and raisin lead to a mid weighted wine with a core of dark red cherry and berry fruits and a top note of smoky oak. Modest tannins, juicy acidity and redeeming elegance with some power on the slightly warm finish.* **89.**

## Pali Wine Co., Lompoc

The Pali Wine Co. Pinot Noir cuvées are set for release this spring. These are well-priced, consistently reliable wines crafted by winemaker Aaron Walker with input from consulting winemaker Kenneth Juhasz. Aaron developed his winemaking skills working for respected Central Coast producers including Arcadian, Kunin Wines, Stephen Ross Wine Cellars and Hitching Post. While developing his winemaking acumen, he worked as a server at the Hitching Post in Buellton where you may have had occasion to meet him. The wines reviewed here are blended to maintain consistency from year to year, and are available at the winery's two tasting rooms in Lompoc and Santa Barbara, and online through the website at [www.paliwineco.com](http://www.paliwineco.com).

**2013 Pali "Riviera" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 4,479 cases, \$22, screwcap. Sourced from Collins Ranch, Arrowhead and Champlain Creek vineyards. Aged 18 months in barrel, 30% new French oak. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. The nose is quite earthy, offering clay-kissed aromas of blackberry jam and mushroom. On the palate, there is an assemblage of chunky dark fruits and added accents of black tea and anise. Very ripe fruited and robust, with structured tannins, modest vibrancy and a dry finish. Nothing speaks of Sonoma Coast character in this fruit-driven wine.* **87.**



**2013 Pali "Bluffs" Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 454 cases, \$23.50. Aged 10 months in barrel, 30% new French oak. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of blackest cherry, blackberry, spice and violets. Expansive and juicy on the palate, with ripely flavored black cherry, black raspberry and blackberry fruits. The sappy fruit attracts attention, and persists through a generous finish that leaves a hint of warmth in its wake.* **89.**

**2013 Pali "Huntington" Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 3,140 cases, \$23.50. A blend of grapes from vineyards in Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Ynez Valley and Los Alamos. Aged 12 months in barrel, 30% new French oak. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry reduction sauce, peat and oak lead to a mid weight styled wine offering black cherry and black raspberry flavors with noticeable oak seasoning. Easy to drink, with silky tannins and integrated acidity.* **88.**

## Screen Door Cellars, St. Helena

A tiny family project of winemakers Bobby and Shannon Donnell producing small lots of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir since the 2012 vintage. I found the first two releases from Leras Family Vineyard to be striking examples of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and highly recommended the wines. The wines are produced in

St. Helena in the Napa Valley, but the couple live in Shannon's hometown of Sebastopol. The wines are available on the winery's website at [www.screendoorcellars.com](http://www.screendoorcellars.com).

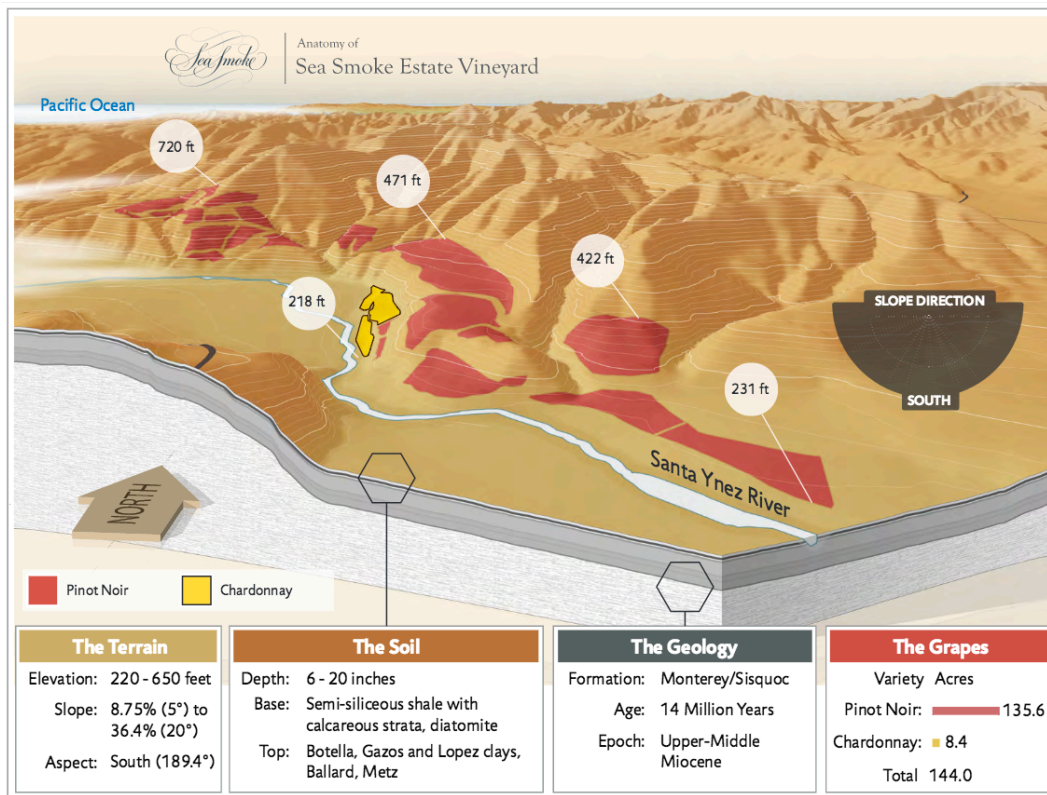


**2014 Screen Door Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 240 cases, \$50. A blend of two vineyards, primarily Pommard clone. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very ripe fruited, featuring aromas of black cherry, blackberry and black grapes. Plenty of crunchy, sweet black fruits are nicely spiced and framed by matching tannins. Nicely crafted, with well-integrated oak and some finishing generosity. This wine pushes the ripeness envelope, but keeps its Pinot Noir character in perspective. 90.*

**2014 Screen Door Cellars Leras Family Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 25 cases, \$65. Primarily Pommard clone. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely aromas of Bing cherry, spice and rose petal. Soft and polished on the palate, with middleweight flavors of well-spiced red and black cherry fruits. The suave tannins make for easy drinking and the cherry-driven finish is remarkably long. The wine was even better when drunk from a previously opened and re-corked bottle showing more fruit intensity and glorious spice. 93.*

## Sea Smoke, Lompoc

Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard has been considered one of California's most exceptional vineyards. The Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard was planted in 1999 on a south-facing hillside in the Sta. Rita Hills AVA. Ten Pinot Noir clones coexist including 777, 667, Wädenswil, 115, 113, "828," 459, 09, 16 and Pommard 05. Natural vigor reduction derives from the shallow clay soils on the hillsides and carefully selected rootstocks. Each evening a layer of marine fog ("sea smoke") funnels up the Santa Ynez River canyon, cooling the vines and extending the growing season. The entire vineyard has been farmed biodynamically since 2013. Meticulous farming techniques include managed deficit irrigation, suckering and shoot thinning, cluster thinning post fruit set, green drop and wing removal on remaining clusters. Winemaker Don Schroeder has been with Sea Smoke since 2003. Estate wines include Botella, Southing and Ten Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Sea Spray sparkling wine. The wines are sold exclusively through a mailing list at [www.seasmoke.com](http://www.seasmoke.com).



**2013 Sea Smoke Southing Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.63, \$60. Southing represents the diversity of the entire Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard. 100% gently de-stemmed, cold soaked for 1 to 4 days, cultured yeast fermentation, punch downs, and a total maceration time of 14 to 18 days. Free-run juice was sent to tank and pressed, with both free-run and press wines racked to barrels. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 55% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Plenty of oak-driven spice and vanilla compliment the fruit aromas of blackberry and floral notes of rose and violet. Discreetly concentrated, with flavors of purple and black fruits, graced with spice, dark chocolate and floral accents. Soothing tannins are nicely balanced by juicy acidity and there is some length on the fruit-driven finish. 91.*



**2012 Sea Smoke L.D. Sea Spray Blanc De Noirs Sparkling Wine** 11.9% alc., pH 3.15, TA 0.90, \$80. 100% Pinot Noir vinified by *methodé champenoise*. 9 months in Barrel and 24 months *en tirage*. A long, cool fermentation was completed in stainless steel tanks followed by once-used and neutral French oak barrels. After 9 months of aging on the lees, the wine was bottle aged an additional 24 months *en tirage* before disgorging.

The wine was finished with no dosage. *Lovely delicate pinkish orange color in the glass. The nose is searching and complex, offering scents of yeasty lees, salty ocean, peach pit, walnut oil, and subtle cherry and raspberry fruits. Tremendous vibrancy in the mouth with a lively bead, offering flavors of peach, orange water, dried cherry, cranberry and brioche. Thoroughly dry, with noticeable persistence of flavors on the soprano finish that delivers a tight grip of acidity. This wine calls out for foie gras. 94.*




# Recently Tasted California & Oregon Chardonnay To Swoon Over

Chardonnay continues to be America's most popular wine. It is easy to find respectable value priced Chardonnay most everywhere wine is sold, but the premium Chardonnays reviewed here are clearly several notches above and well worth the extra tab, even if it means emptying your wallet.

**2014 Black Kite Cellars Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay** 14.3% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.60, 212 cases, \$48. Wente clone. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Rather subdued but pleasant aromas of lemon-lime, chalk dust and crushed rock. Not as boisterous as the Gap's Crown and more imbued with salty green apple notes to accompany the flavors of lemon, white peach and caramel. Very smooth on the palate and slightly creamy on the finish.* **92.**

**2014 Black Kite Cellars Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.62, 264 cases, \$48. Wente clone. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Clean aromas of lemon oil, citrus blossom, vanilla and marzipan. An abundance of citrus spearheads the flavor profile, complimented by notes of pain grille, caramel, butter brickle and pear. Pinpoint balance with a juicy finish that offers a hint of salinity.* **93.**

 **Black Kite Cellars Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.62, 201 cases, \$48. Dijon 76, 95 and 96. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Highly aromatic with a perfume that sustains over a lengthy time in the glass, featuring lemon cake, pear, nutty pastry creme and clarified butter. This wine comes at you with a flavor stick, exploding on the palate with flavors of lemon, pineapple, peach, pear and a hint of spice and vanilla. Impressive harmony, with a slightly viscous demeanor, and a really long, lip-smacking finish.* **94.**



The Domaine Serene Chardonnays are very fresh and pristine and not encumbered with oak characters. They are impeccably balanced with pure fruit flavors and lively acidity. Domaine Serene is one of Oregon's Chardonnay pioneers, crafting the wine long before it has reached its current resurgence and popularity among Oregon producers.

**2013 Domaine Serene Evenstad Reserve Dundee Hills Oregon Chardonnay** 13.3% alc., 1,504 cases, \$55. Dijon clones sourced from vineyards in the Dundee Hills. This wine is blended for consistency from vintage to vintage. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Engaging perfume of fresh apple, peach, spice, lees and nutty oak. Very polished and slightly creamy on the palate, with vibrant flavors of lemon, apricot and apple that persist through a finish awash in citrus goodness. A very giving wine with plenty of fruit.* **90.**

**2013 Domaine Serene Clos du Soleil Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Chardonnay** 13.3% alc., 127 cases, \$75. Estate grown, produced and bottled. This vineyard is one of seven estate vineyards. It consists of 4 acres that are dry-farmed and is close planted to Dijon clones in Jory soil at 650-700 feet elevation. Fermented and aged on the lees in French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. The aromas of apple, baking spice, lemon curd and nut spread draw you into the glass. Fresh and possessing noticeable bounce, with a delicious blend of apple, pear and citrus flavors underpinned with steeliness and salinity. Beautifully balanced, clean and bright, with a refreshingly juicy finish. I like this wine for its freshness. It seems to call out, "Drink me!"* **93.**

**2013 Domaine Serene Etoile Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Chardonnay** 13.1% alc., 124 cases, \$75. Estate grown, produced and bottled. This wine is from a 3-acre, west-facing, hilltop vineyard site at 750-800 feet elevation planted to Dijon clones in Jory soils. Fermented and aged on the lees in French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. The aromas arrive gradually over time, offering a fruit mix of citrus, apple and peach, with a compliment of oak. Generous presence on the palate with vivid flavors of lemon, pineapple and apple fruits that arrive in waves. Beautifully composed with steely acidity, a top note of nutty oak, and a lip-smacking finish. A unique wine in that it has almost an ephemeral texture borrowed from Pinot Noir.* **93.**



**2013 Domaine Serene Côte Sud Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Chardonnay** 13.3% alc., 155 cases, \$75. Estate grown, produced and bottled. This vineyard is a top the Dundee Hills and is one of seven estate vineyards. Nearly 6 acres, the vineyard is dry-farmed, south-facing, and situated at 600 to 680 feet elevation. The Dijon clones are closely planted in Jory soils. Fermented and aged on the lees in French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. The nose is dreamy, offering scents of lemon creme, Asian pear and wet crushed rocks. Silky smooth on the palate and citrus driven, with the slightest oak in the background. Good crispness with a fresh personality, this wine becomes more enchanting over time in the glass and develops almost a velvety mouthfeel.* **92.**

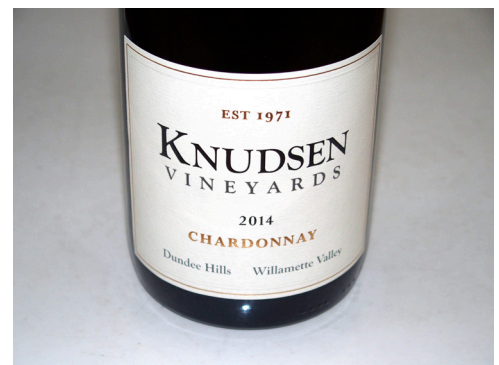
**2013 Domaine Serene Clos de Lune Vineyard Dundee Hills Oregon Chardonnay** 13.1% alc., 120 cases, \$70. Estate grown, produced and bottled. From a 6-acre, dry-farmed, south and west-facing vineyard situated at 800 to 900 feet elevation and closely planted to Dijon clones in Jory soils. Fermented and aged on the lees in French oak barrels. *Moderately light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Pristine aromas of fresh citrus and sweet nutty oak lead to a discreetly rich palate of citrus, apple, peach, pineapple and vanilla flavors. A crisp wine, with welcome fruit intensity on a finish sporting a robust cut of acidity.* **92.**



**2012 Domaine Serene Récolte Grand Cru Dundee Hills Oregon Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 144 cases, \$125. Estate grown, produced and bottled. Récolte is the French word for "harvest." A tribute to white Burgundy and is the pinnacle of the Domaine Serene Chardonnay program. Dry-farmed Dijon clones grown at high elevation in Jory soils. Barrel fermented and aged on lees in French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. This wine is clearly different from the other Domaine Serene Chardonnays because of its complexity and serious intentions. Multiple aromas emerge from the alluring nose, including citrus, nectarine, cantaloupe, marzipan, garrigue, flint and lemon-infused oak. Richly flavored on the palate, with notes of lemon pie filling, pineapple, grapefruit, lees, toasty marshmallow, and more. Impeccable mouthfeel with pinpoint balance between focused fruit and steely resolve. A special wine that reveals itself slowly over time in the glass, and a keeper that will cellar beautifully long term.* **95.**



**2014 Knudsen Vineyards Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., pH 3.27, TA 0.63, 275 cases, \$45, screwcap. This vineyard is home to the oldest plantings of Dijon Chardonnay clones in Oregon dating back to 1990. That year, Allen Holstein, the vineyard manager, established over 8 acres of Dijon clones 76 and 96 in Jory soil in the Dundee Hills. This wine is a blend of Dijon clones 76 and 95 planted in 1995. Aged 6 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Inviting aromas of white peach, lemon oil, shaved oak and floral goodness lead to a discreetly concentrated and thoroughly satisfying citrus-driven wine offering considerable complexity. Additional fruit flavors of pear and apple mix amicably with subtle oak driven notes of vanilla and spice. The lemon-infused finish is driven by a bright cut of acidity as the wine literally slides off the back of the palate. One of Oregon's finest Chardonnays.* **94.**



**2014 Fogline Vineyards Zephyr's Block Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.23, TA 0.66, 145 cases, \$38. Sourced from the estate vineyard located at an 850 foot elevation at the fogline in the Petaluma Gap region. Old Wente and Dijon 76 clones. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. The nose offers aromas of apple, pear, caramel and scrub brush. Nicely composed, with juicy flavors of apple, lemon wafer, pear, peach, mango and butterscotch budini. Slightly creamy on the palate with some length and an inviting cut on the finish. 90.*



**2013 Stony Hill Napa Valley Chardonnay** 13.0% alc., pH 3.30, TA 0.69, RS 0.25, 1,852 cases, \$45. This wine comes from one of Napa Valley's most iconic wineries that has farmed Chardonnay since 1947. It is grown, produced and bottled 600 feet above the floor of the Napa Valley. Vines are 22 to 31 years old. Aged 10 months in neutral French oak barrels. A non-oaky, non-malolactic style Chardonnay. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Plenty to like in this complex wine including clean aromas of green apple, lemon, peach, yellow cake, nuts, poppyseed and crushed chalk, and vivid fruit flavors of lemon, pineapple, and peach framed by refreshing acidity. Silky smooth on the palate with impeccable balance, featuring a grip of "stony" acidity on the uplifting finish. This is Chardonnay in its purest form, not gussied up with oak. 94.*



## Stony Hill Vineyard

Stony Hill Vineyard is located in the Spring Mountain District of Napa Valley. It is a property of extraordinary history and character. Fred and Eleanor McCrea first planted vines here in 1947, and the McCrea family continues to manage the property to this day. The vines have been dry-farmed for the past 65 years, causing the roots to reach deep into the limestone rock within the vineyard's volcanic mountain soils. The high elevation, fog and morning sunlight create a cool climate environment ideal for Chardonnay with bright acidity. Winemaker Mike Chelini continues his conservative winemaking practices that he began when he took on the role in 1973. The map below outlines the dates that the vines were planted.

I first met with Stony Hill Chardonnay back in the early 1980s while dining at the Imperial Dynasty in Hanford, California. The Imperial Dynasty had a Wine Spectator Grand Award Wine List compiled by chef Richard Wing, and was one of the first restaurant accounts for Stony Hill Vineyard.





# Popular Meiom Pinot Noir Spawns Imitators

The popular Meiom label was sold in 2015 to Constellation Brands for a staggering \$315 million, bringing attention to a stylistic Pinot Noir that consumers embraced. Founded in 2007 by Napa Valley winemaker Joe Wagner, the son of Chuck Wagner of Caymus fame, the Meiom brand has gained unprecedented popularity in a relatively short time, becoming the top restaurant Pinot Noir by the glass and one of the two most popular restaurant Pinot Noirs (along with Emeritus) in a matter of seven years according to the 26th Annual *Wine & Spirits* Restaurant Poll published in 2015. In 2014, the brand received the prestigious Market Watch Leaders Choice Award for "Wine Brand of the Year," and in 2015, Meiom was on pace to sell more than 700,000 cases.

Meiom means "coast" in the language of the coastal dwelling native Wappo and Yuki tribes. After Wagner's success with the Belle Glos Pinot Noir brand, Meiom was launched with a Pinot Noir produced from grapes sourced in California's Sonoma, Monterey and Santa Barbara counties carrying a California appellation. Retailing for an average of around \$21, the sleek bottles of Pinot Noir have a glossy screwcap closure, the WAK closure from Guala used since 2009.

Packaging and distribution is a big part of the success of Meiom Pinot Noir. The close relationship of Caymus with Southern Wine & Spirits, combined with the price point is a large part of the brand's success.

Wagner spun off the Meiom brand from Belle Glos in 2013 when he founded Copper Cane Wines & Provisions, based in St. Helena, California. He expanded the lineup of wine offerings to include a California Chardonnay, Alouette (a California Pinot Noir sold exclusively by Total Wine & More), Elouan (an Oregon Pinot Noir) and most recently, a Nouveau Pinot Noir. The sale of the Meiom brand will allow Wagner to buy vineyards and develop other wine brands under the Copper Cane Wines & Provisions banner.

Meiom Pinot Noir has a very distinctive aroma and flavor profile consisting of very ripe blackberry and black currant fruit, a prominent oak overlay expressed as dark chocolate, cola, espresso and vanilla, a touch of violet and other floral notes, and slight sweetness due to residual sugar. The wine's texture is fleshy and velvety. Having tasted Meiom Pinot Noir through several vintages, I can easily pick it out of a lineup of Pinot Noirs. It is a wine that would make In Pursuit of Balance devotees frown, and yet clearly many consumers prefer a rich, ripe, well oaked and slightly sweet or off dry Pinot Noir like Meiom. Even the wine press has embraced Meiom Pinot Noir, with *Wine Spectator* awarding the 2011 and 2013 vintages 92 points, and positioning it as #20 of the top 2015 Top 100 wines.

I became curious how Meiom Pinot Noir was concocted when recently I discovered two other California Pinot Noirs that were exact knockoffs of the Meiom style: Diora and Mark West Black.

The winery's website notes that the 2014 wine is a blend of 25% Santa Barbara County, 27% Sonoma County and 48% Monterey County Pinot Noir grapes. Previous vintages have included a small percentage of white grapes (? Riesling, Muscat) and maybe Grenache. The tech sheet for the 2014 vintage is vague about vinification other than that the lots from each of the three regions are kept separate in the winery, both punch downs and pump overs are used, and the wine is aged in 100% French oak, 60% new. Alcohol is 13.7%, pH 3.85, TA 0.55 and residual sugar 6 g/L.

Responding to an article about Meiom at [winespectator.com](http://winespectator.com) written by Matt Kramer in July 2015, winemaker Jonathan Pey analyzed the 2013 Meiom through ETS Labs in St. Helena. The wine had the following numbers: 13.59% alc., pH 3.81, TA 0.59, and residual sugar 6.9 g/L. Pey noted, "So are we Pinot Noir 'traditionalists' making wine for ourselves - to make us feel good about being traditional, 'pure,' and all that? Are we too caught up with stem inclusion, natural yeasts and the like? Or should we make Pinot Noir that, clearly, consumers want?"

There are several unique features of Meiom Pinot Noir that sets it apart from traditional California Pinot Noir bottlings. The first is the residual sugar (RS) of 6-6.9 g/L. RS is usually expressed as grams of sugar per liter of wine, that is, g/l or g/L or as percentage of weight to volume. For example, a wine with an RS of 2g/L would contain 0.2% sugar. Most dry wines, including nearly all currently produced domestic Pinot Noirs have between 0.1 to 0.3 percent RS since certain types of unfermentable sugars remain after fermentation (a wine is considered "dry" if RS is less than 0.5 to 1.0 g/L). This level of RS is undetectable to the human palate. RS can

be manipulated by stopping fermentation before completion, or adding unfermented, sweet grape must (in California it is illegal to add table sugar, but permissible in Oregon). An RS of at least 6 g/L as found in Meiomi Pinot Noir would be slightly perceptible to human taste. However, the awareness of sweetness in this wine is enhanced by the relatively low acidity (high pH) and the alcohol level. This is why Pinot Noirs with higher alcohol levels, say 14.8%, and low acidity have a perceived sweetness, even though the RS is negligible.

The second feature is generous oak seasoning which is not entirely unique among domestic Pinot Noirs. There is a loud vanilla note combined with coffee tones that I liken to a vanilla latte. 60% new French oak accounts for this character.

The third feature is very soft tannins creating a velvety mouthfeel that is also in part due to low acidity.

So, how is the wine produced? I asked several winemakers their opinion and the consensus was as follows. Keep in mind, this is all speculation, but large volume production of Pinot Noir often involves at least some of these winemaking manipulations.

1 The grapes are probably picked extremely ripe, probably at or above 29° Brix, when the pH is low and the bitter tannins have softened.

2 Enological tannin is likely added to stabilize color and improve mouthfeel (see [www.scottlab.com](http://www.scottlab.com)).

3 Enzymes may be added to improve color extraction.

4 Some concentration method such as flash détente may be employed. Flashing (heating grapes to a high temperature), on average, produces about 30% greater color and structure and frees the wine of any vegetal character (see [www.winesecrets.com](http://www.winesecrets.com)).

2 The wine is probably de-alcoholized to under 14% to save Federal taxes.

3 Residual sugar is increased by adding grape concentrate.

4 Acidity is added before bottling

5 It is doubtful that the wine is aged in 100% French oak barrels, 60% of which are new. The tech sheet simply says, "100% French oak." At a retail price of around \$21, it is most certain that oak adjuncts of some kind are used, as the expense of new French oak barrels would seem to preclude their use for the entire production.

What is really surprising is how Meiomi is able to source enough Pinot Noir to produce 700,000 cases (the estimated production for 2015). At a conservative 2 tons per acre, an acre of vineyard produces 120 cases. To produce 700,000 case of Pinot Noir, one would need about 5,833 acres of vineyards! Even at 4 tons per acre, one would need to source 2,916 acres of vineyards.

Following are reviews of the 2013 Meiomi Pinot Noir, and the two Pinot Noirs I tasted recently that are stylistic copies offered by other wineries most certainly looking to cash in on Meiomi's popularity.

**2013 Meiomi California Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.81, TA 0.59, RS 6.9 g/L, \$21, screwcap. *Dark reddish color in the glass. The aromas of charcoal, tobacco, blackest fruits and spice are not particularly appealing. Sappy and sweet on the palate with very ripe flavors of purple and black fruits, a floral note, and oak-driven spice, vanilla and coffee highlights. Smoothly textured with modest tannins in a richly styled wine that lacks vibrancy.* 87.





**2014 Diora Le Petite Grace Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.61, RS unknown, 5,038 cases, \$30. Inaugural bottling. One of the Delicato Family Vineyards stable of brands. Elaborate packaging with a large golden wax dip on the top and neck with pull tab (string "lappet") that is very difficult to open, and a necklace with the winery's crest draped over the neck. The wax treatment is a copy of that used for the Belle Glos Pinot Noir wines. Sourced from San Bernabe Vineyard at the southern end of the Santa Lucia Mountain range and crafted by winemaker James Ewart. 96% Pinot Noir, 2% Grenache, 2% Syrah. 30% whole cluster. 5-day cold soak in stainless steel fermenters, proprietary yeast fermentation. Aged 10 months in 90% French oak, 8% neutral American oak and 2% Hungarian oak. A select portion of the wine was aged in Francois Frères barrels with toasted heads to amplify the oak influence. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of very ripe blackberry and boysenberry with notes of spice, vanilla, violets, baking cocoa and char-infused oak. The wine pushes the ripeness envelope, with slightly sweet flavors of purple and black berry fruits, dark chocolate and spice. Slightly creamy in the mouth, with balanced tannins and some finishing persistence. Not my favored style, but will find an audience in the consumer marketplace. 89.*



**2014 Mark West MW Black Monterey County Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., RS unknown, \$13.99. Black label and black bottle coordinate with this intensely colored and full-bodied version of Mark West Pinot Noir. Winemaker Jason Becker uses the French Saignée method to remove the lighter colored wine early in the process to increase the skin-to-wine ratio and increase the body of the wine. Aged 8 months in French and Hungarian oak. Other details are not available. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of vanilla, dark chocolate and oak lead to a richly endowed, full-bodied wine featuring flavors of blackberry, black currant, cola, mocha and vanilla. Plenty of oak overlay, inviting smoothness, and a bold, fruit-driven finish. 88.*



The Ménéage à Trois California Pinot Noir is included here as well because it has an RS of 6g/L, but I found its aromatic and flavor profile to be quite different from Meiomi Pinot Noir.

**2013 Ménéage à Trois California Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.56, RS 6g/L, \$14 (usually discounted). 40% Central Coast, 35% Clarksburg, 25% North Coast. Winemaking details not known, but the wine is said to be, "Enhanced with French and American oak." *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Pleasant aromas of cherry and oak lead to a middleweight styled wine with flavors of cherry, strawberry and cranberry. Rather elegant and fruit forward, with gentle tannins, a compliment of oak, and a very slight sweetness to the fruit. Overall, an innocuous wine that offers plenty of Pinot character at a very reasonable price. 88.*



# Ritual: Quality Wines from the Casablanca Valley of Chile

Winemaker and viticulturist Rodrigo Soto of Huneus Vintners was in Southern California recently to preview his 2014 portfolio of Ritual Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines. I had a conversation with him about the wines and tasted the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir releases.

I first met Rodrigo a few years back when he was crafting wine at Sonoma's Benziger Winery. The wines that caught my interest specifically were the certified organic and biodynamic Signaterra Vineyard and de Coelo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs originating from the Benziger de Coelo Estate. He had joined Benziger in 2006 after working at Chile's Matetic Vineyards in San Antonio for a six year tenure where his wines won international acclaim.



After his success at Benziger Winery, Rodrigo returned to his native Chile in 2012, and now crafts the portfolio of Huneus Vintners Chilean wines including Ritual, Primus, Veramonte and Neyen along with a team of viticulturists and winemakers including renowned terroir specialist, Pedro Parra. Rodrigo is a protege of Alvaro Espinoza, who pioneered many organic and biodynamic practices globally. Currently, Rodrigo is converting all the large-scale vineyard holdings of Huneus in the Apalta and Casablanca Valleys to organic farming with the goal of featuring terroir in the company's wines.

Rodrigo has a special passion for Pinot Noir and his exhaustive research and extensive experience in Chilean vineyards have revealed Pinot Noir's promising potential in Chile. He finds solace in the Casablanca Valley, located on the northwestern side of Chile's coastal range. The region's proximity to the Pacific Ocean, early morning fog and gentle maritime breezes, the Mediterranean climate, and the decomposed granite soils have proven ideal for growing Pinot Noir, but it has taken a different mindset of serious commitment to maximize grape quality and institute less intrusive winemaking that has led to gains in quality of Chilean Pinot Noir.

Rodrigo works with 90 acres of older plantings of Pinot Noir that date their origins to 1994 and early 2000. The original plantings of UCD clones 9 and 16 were brought to Chile by Huneus and these vines have thrived, showing self-regulation, little dehydration (the region is arid with little rainfall), and have remained virus-free. The subsequent plantings and the 60 acres of newest Pinot Noir plantings have included Dijon clones 115,

667, 777 and “828,” which are subject to more dehydration but offer more transcendent and pure Pinot Noir character.

Chilean Chardonnay has historically been too simple and light, and Rodrigo is working to change that image. This is a work in progress, as he attempts to bring out the best from specific sites. He is employing more 400 liter oak barrels, mostly neutral, to lessen the impact of oak on the wines, and using partial malolactic fermentation to retain freshness in the wines.

Ritual wines are reasonably priced, represent good value, and are widely distributed in the USA. On the Pacific Coast, look for the wines in supermarkets, Costco, Bev Mo!, and Total Wine & More. Visit [www.ritualwines.com](http://www.ritualwines.com).

The 2015 vintage in Chile was marked by beneficial rainfall at the beginning, and ideal weather that allowed slow ripening of the grapes.

**2015 Ritual Casablanca Valley Chile Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$19.99, screwcap. A selection of vineyard lots and barrels from the coolest sections of the Casablanca Valley Estate property. Grapes hand-harvested in cool morning, double-sorted. A portion of the grapes undergo whole cluster fermentation. Fermented with wild yeast. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose offers a marriage of black cherry fruit and oak-driven aromas of espresso and tobacco. Light to mid weight in style, featuring dark stone and purple berry fruit flavors with an undercurrent of oak. Refined and somewhat elegant, with balanced dry tannins, a silky texture and a finish replete with black cherry fruit. A forward drinking wine with admirable finesse.* **88.**



**2014 Ritual Monster Casablanca Valley Chile Pinot Noir** Unlabeled sample. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose only hints at dark fruit, offering primarily aromas of earthy flora and coffee-toned oak. Intensely flavored and quite sappy, featuring flavors of blackberry and black currant augmented with complimentary oak seasoning. Slightly velvety on the palate with a boisterous, black fruited finish.* **89.**

**2015 Ritual Casablanca Valley Chile Chardonnay** 14.0% alc., \$19.99, screwcap. Grapes hand-harvested at night, whole cluster pressed. A portion of fruit undergoes whole cluster fermentation in concrete eggs, and the rest ferments in oak barrels. Aged in 20% 400 liter barrels, 20% concrete eggs, and 60% neutral oak barrels with regular lees stirring. *Delicate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. The scents of lemon-lime, pear and oak lead to a light and easy-going wine infused with lemon, apple, pear and green herb flavors. Clean and brisk, with a citrus-infused finish.* **88.**

# Pinot Briefs

**USPS Announces Pinot Noir Stamp** The United States Postal Service released a 5 cent business stamp on February 19, 2016, that depicts a cluster of Pinot Noir grapes based on original pen and ink and watercolor by Art Director Derry Noyes. Unfortunately, you cannot mail a letter with the stamp and it is currently only available in rolls of 10,000 for \$500. I suspect this may be the first of a series of stamps depicting wine grapes. As an added note, the decision of the USPS to allow shipping of alcohol is still under review. Visit [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com).



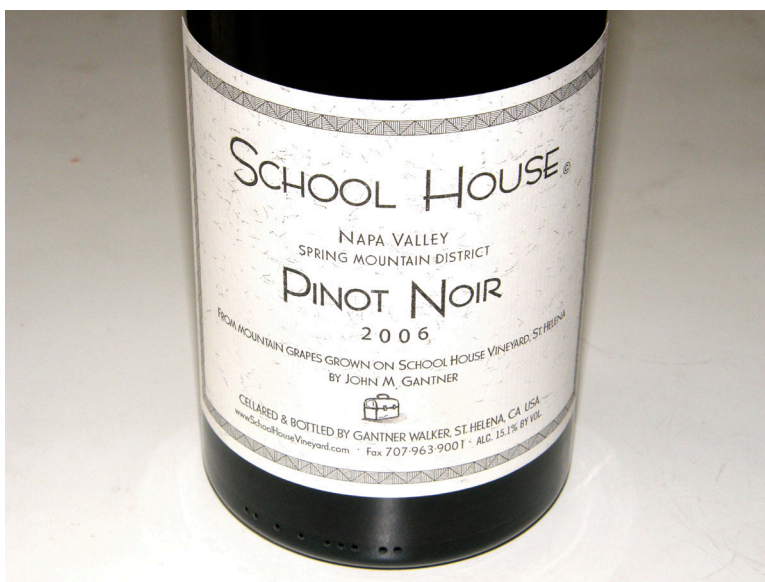
**Family Winemakers Tasting** Family Winemakers of California will host its sixth tasting of family produced California wines on March 20, 2016, at Wyland Center at the Del Mar Fairgrounds in San Diego. This is a one day event and the opportunity to taste over 500 wines offered by over 125 wineries from 60 of California's appellations. Consumer tickets are available for \$75 at [www.16SDconsumer.eventbrite.com](http://www.16SDconsumer.eventbrite.com).

**Dacor Winestation** Dacor now sells the first automated, temperature-controlled, four-bottle wine dispensing and preservation system for the home that is appropriate for the kitchen, den or wine cellar. The unit, named Discovery™ WineStation, maintains the freshness of your favorite wine for up to 60 days without the loss of flavor or natural aroma. Visit [www.dacor.com/Our-Products/Refrigeration/Discovery-WineStation.aspx](http://www.dacor.com/Our-Products/Refrigeration/Discovery-WineStation.aspx).



**Direct Air Service Launched** Direct nonstop flights on Horizon Air (Alaska Airlines) will start March 16, 2016, between Orange County and Santa Rosa. This is a godsend for those in Southern California who like to visit the wineries of Russian River Valley.

**School House Releases 2012 Pinot Noir** School House Vineyard is a fascinating cult producer of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah Blend and Zinfandel Blend that is rich in Napa Valley history. The vineyard is located high up Spring Mountain at the intersection of Spring Mountain Road and Langtry Road at 1,500 feet elevation. The vineyard takes its name from the one-room school house once located here during to 1889, but destroyed by fire in the mid 1980s. In 1940, John Gantner's father bought the 160-acre property which had 35 acres of non-irrigated vines. There were a few operating vineyards in the area at the time, but during Prohibition many families moved away and abandoned their vineyards and fruit orchards. Today, the second generation of John Gantner and Nancy Walker do all the vineyard operations where they make their home. Each of the School House wines are vinified in the caves at neighboring Pride Mountain Vineyards. The first vintage of School House Pinot Noir was 1957, made from grapes that had been planted in 1953. The original Pinot Noir budwood was brought from Domaine de la Romanee-Conti by John Daniel of the Inglenook Estate and he gave the cuttings from his plantings to John Gantner's father. The **2012 School House Napa Valley Pinot Noir**, 19 barrels, is available for \$85, by phoning 707-963-9001 or emailing Nancy at [Nancy@SchoolHouseVineyard.com](mailto:Nancy@SchoolHouseVineyard.com). Visitors are welcomed by the gracious proprietors by appointment and I would urge you to take in the history and magnificent wines from this historic estate. I wrote an extensive article on School House Vineyard after I visited in 2012: [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1202/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1202/).



**2016 Outstanding in the Field Tour Dates Announced** Tickets go on sale Sunday, March 20 for the national tour with dinners beginning in California. Visit [www.outstandinginthefield.com](http://www.outstandinginthefield.com) for the schedule.

**Soliste Release First Pinot Noir from 2013 Vintage** Claude Koeberle and Donald Plumley announce that they have released the EXTRAVAGANT Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. Like all Soliste Pinot Noirs, the partners are obsessive and only select the very best grapes through multiple passes at harvest and use whole cluster fermentation (in this wine, 50%). The wine was aged for 16 months in a single 225-liter French oak barrel selected from Tonnellerie Rousseau. The EXTRAVAGANT is the one barrel, 23 cases, that stood out among all the best. In Burgundy, a winemaker may reserve a special barrel for friends and family. They call this barrel Soliste. Very limited allocation at \$100. Visit [www.soliste.com](http://www.soliste.com) to join the allocation list.

**Another Grapevine Virus to Worry About** [www.winesandvines.com](http://www.winesandvines.com) reported that the grapevine Pinot Gris virus (GPGV) has recently been discovered in several Napa Valley vineyards after having been previously found in many vineyards internationally. The virus has been discovered not only in Pinot Gris, but also Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. A member of the *Trichovirus* genus, GPGV is believed to be spread by a mite. The effects of the virus on grapevines and wine quality is poorly characterized at present. FPS has begun testing all imported and local selections for this virus. It has not been found at the Classic Foundation Vineyard.