



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Pinot Noir is the most sensual of all grapes

Goldeneye

Goldeneye Winery dates to 1996 when Duckhorn Wine Company owners Dan and Margaret Duckhorn bought the former Obester Winery in the hamlet of Philo along Highway 128 in the Anderson Valley, and the following year planted the 57-acre Confluence Vineyard to Pinot Noir. With the subsequent acquisition of additional Anderson Valley vineyard properties, Goldeneye now farms four estate vineyards encompassing over 200 acres, second in Anderson Valley acreage only to the vast vineyard holdings of Roederer Estate.

Dan and Margaret Duckhorn had established a reputation for outstanding Bordeaux-varietal wines (particularly Merlot) from Napa Valley, but through the years developed a passion for Pinot Noir. They envisioned a winery devoted to Pinot Noir and found a suitable location in the Anderson Valley. The vineyards were to become among the first in California to receive sustainable certification and a Pinot-focused winery that was built became one of only three wineries in California to earn the LEED Gold environmental certification.

The name, Goldeneye, derives from a yellow-eyed waterfowl that occasionally calls Anderson Valley home since it lies on the bird's migratory route.

The initial winemaker, Zach Rasmuson, established the winery's reputation. Michael Fay took over the helm in 2012 and further refined the bold Goldeneye style by adding some native ferments, employing less saignée to accentuate the mouthfeel of the wines, and dialing back the percentage of new oak slightly. Michael left Goldeneye in 2016 for a winemaking post in the Central Coast, and was replaced by Michael Accurso who had worked alongside Michael as assistant winemaker since 2014. Accurso has continued to fine tune the winery's style, tending to pick at lower Brix and further dialing back the amount of new French oak used during aging.

Winemaking at Goldeneye requires an astute organizational focus since nearly 250 individual lots of Pinot Noir are fermented each vintage. The Estate program consists of more than 24 clones of Pinot Noir planted to more than 96 individual vineyard blocks with 49 unique combinations of clones and rootstock material.

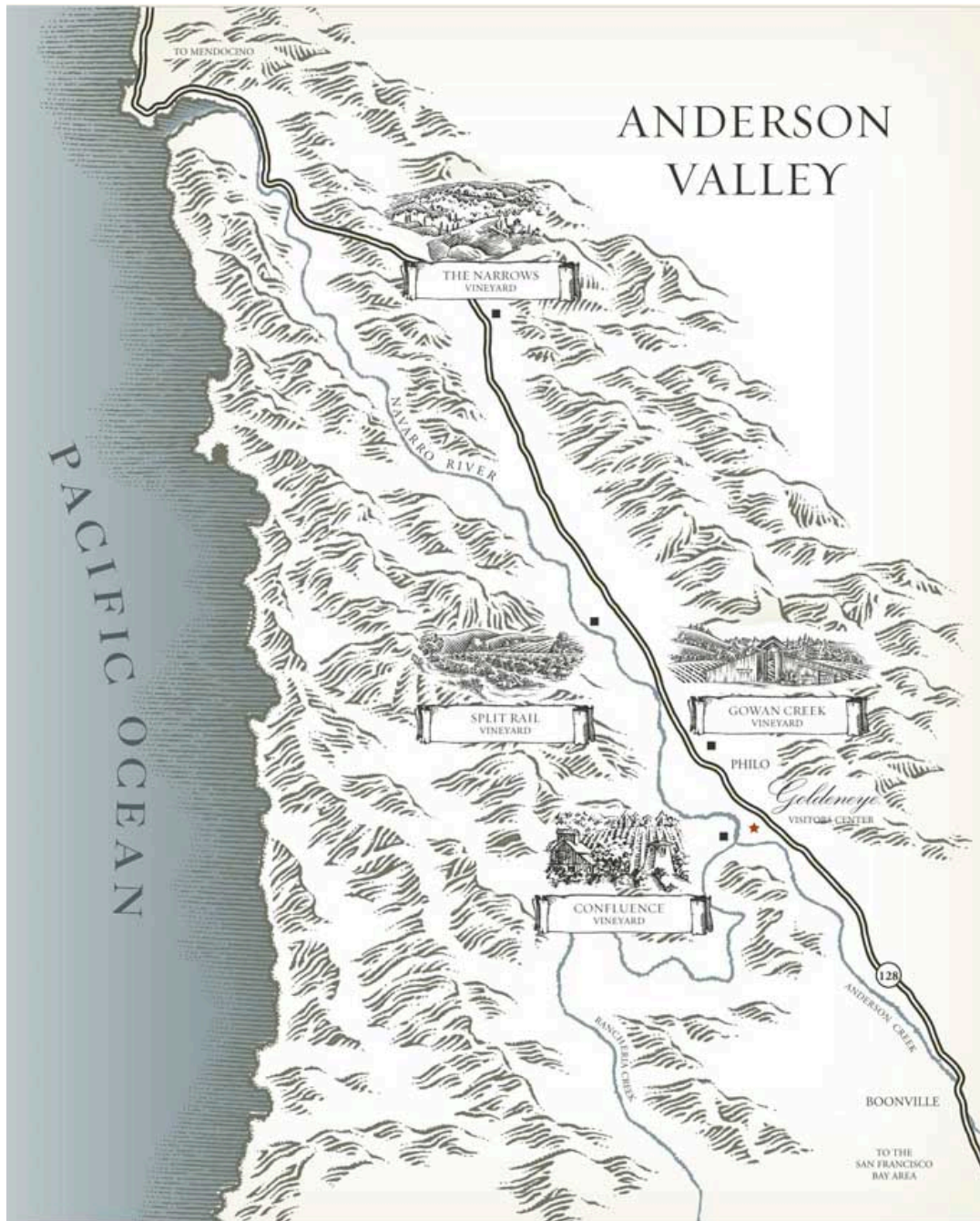
Here is a map and summary of the four estate vineyards:

The Narrows Vineyard (formerly Floodgate Vineyard and renamed after acquired by Goldeneye) This historic mountain vineyard is situated on a narrow ridge top at the northernmost end ("Deep End") of the Anderson Valley. It is 10 miles inland from the Mendocino Coast and therefore is exposed to a strong marine influence producing summer fog and cool daytime temperatures. A challenging site to farm, due to its coolness and threat of frost. Yields are low

Split Rail Vineyard This vineyard is located on the bank of the Navarro River between Gowan Creek and The Narrows vineyards and possesses considerable diversity.

Gowan Creek Vineyard This vineyard is two miles north of Confluence Vineyard and is also the site of the Goldeneye winery. This site combines elements of the valley's warmer regions and its cooler, northern climate. Planted to eight different clones of Pinot Noir tailored to a specific site and soil type.

Confluence Vineyard Established in 1996, this vineyard is located in the heart of the Anderson Valley adjacent the headwaters of the Navarro River. There are a range of soils and exposures.



The Goldeneye Pinot Noirs remain rich, lush, often savory and unique among the cadre of other Anderson Valley producers, attracting the respect of pinotphiles and collectors and bringing the Anderson Valley considerable recognition. The wines are relatively low in acidity that makes for a lush palate. The 2014 Goldeneye releases reviewed here were vinified by both Michaels working in tandem. All the wines were vinified with 100% estate fruit. I found the wines impressive for their rich fruit flavors and harmony. Expensive, yes, but well worth every penny. Great Pinot Noir never comes cheap.

2014 Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.89, TA 0.51, 15,850 cases, \$56. Harvest Brix 24.5°. 45% of blend from Gowanus Creek Vineyard. Amazing quality considering the large production. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Nicely appointed aromas of black cherry, spice, and toasty oak. Black cherry and black raspberry flavors arrive in force with accents of anise and black tea. Forward drinking, with a healthy tannic backbone, a polished mouthfeel and some finishing generosity. A little more oak on hand than was evident with the single vineyard bottlings, but thoroughly enjoyable. 90.*

2014 Goldeneye The Narrows Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.91, TA 0.49, 390 cases, \$84. This wine typically has a wild, rustic character. Harvest Brix 24.5°. Aged 16 months in French oak

barrels, 59% new, 41% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. I was infatuated with the nose that offered aromas of fresh cherry and cranberry fruit, rose petal, baking spice and vanilla. Generous flavors of cherry and raspberry arrived on the palate with a rush, expanding in the mouth, and finishing with purpose. This wine packs a lot of juicy fruit flavor in harmony with structured tannins and courtly oak support. 92.*

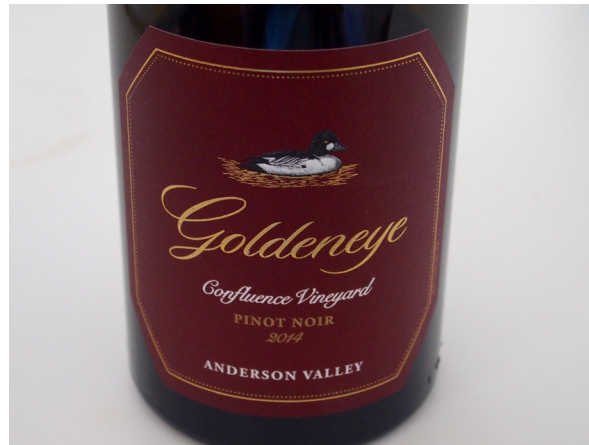
2014 Goldeneye Split Rail Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.82, TA 0.50, 350 cases, \$84. Harvest Brix 24.5°. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 60% new and 40% neutral. Made from clones "828" and 777. Typically structured and savory. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Complex nose offering aromas of dark red berries, mushroom, mocha, and toast. Delicious attack of vivid dark red and black berry fruits along with hints of black tea, rose and spice. The oak barrel treatment is expressed as toast and bbq, and the tannins, most prominent among all the single vineyard offerings lead to a modest astringent message on the finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the tannins had softened indicating further time in the cellar will be beneficial. Cellaring will not only ameliorate the tannins but also further integrate the oak. 92.*



2014 Goldeneye Gowan Creek Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.55, 1,130 cases, \$84. Harvest Brix 25°. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 60% new, 40% neutral. This vineyard typically provides rich, lush fruit and a velvety texture. 60% clone "828," provided voluptuous dark fruit flavors while clone 667 was added to balance the acidity and structure. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Enticing aromas of black fruits, sweet pipe smoke, oak spice, nuts and earth. Robust mid weight plus flavors of blackberry and boysenberry are deftly balanced by firm tannins. Rounded and polished with a luscious palate that is both creamy and replete with heaps of berry goodness. Impeccably balanced, this wine finishes long and sturdy. Flat-out delicious. 94.*



2014 Goldeneye Confluence Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., pH 3.87, TA 0.49, 540 cases, \$84. Grapes picked at a lower Brix and earlier than Gowan Creek, attempting to accentuate the brightness and red fruit character typical of this vineyard. Harvest Brix 24.5°. Aged 16 months in medium toast French oak barrels, 57% new, 43% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. This wine offers a redder fruit profile with scents of cherry and strawberry on the nose. Less sappy, less tannic and more vibrant than the other 2014 Goldeneye Pinot Noirs, but still blessed with a succulent mid weight core of red berry and cherry fruits complimented with a riff of sandalwood-linked oak. Special in every way, with commendable harmony and length of finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, I was still seduced, and particularly impressed by the extraordinary finish that seemed to last indefinitely. 96.*



2014 Goldeneye Ten Degrees Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.51, 1,175 cases, \$120. This wine is made from the finest barrels of wine, the top 5% of estate Pinot Noir, blended for both power and elegance. Four estate vineyards. Aged 16 months in 100% new medium toast French oak barrels. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. This wine is quite reserved upon opening and only brought it when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Deep fruit aromas of ripe strawberry, blackberry and blueberry-pomegranate fruits paired with a compliment of toasty brioche. Polished, sophisticated and seductive on the palate with an array of opulent purple fruits backed by silky tannins. The fruit load is expansive in the mouth, and propels the long, long, long finish to a glorious climax. I have tasted several vintages of this special wine, and this one falls in line as far as taste, but it offers a little more vibrancy and juiciness than in the past. Best to cellar this wine for a couple of years, but if you must open it sooner, by all means decant. 94.*

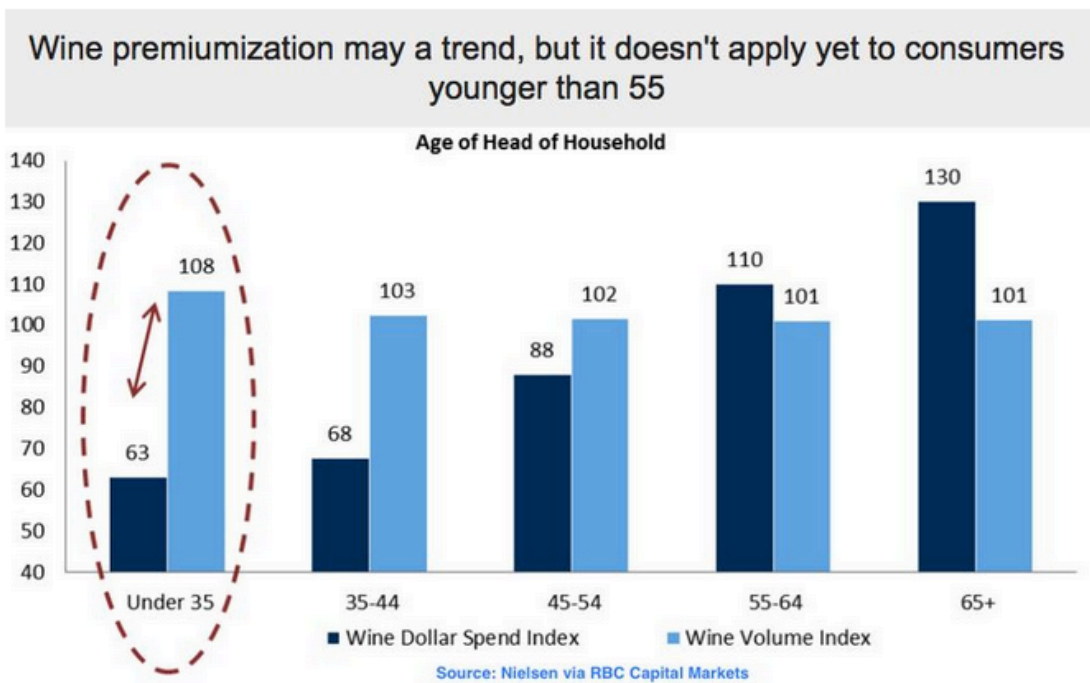
Sips of Recently Tasted California Pinot Noir

With the gradual premiumization and increasing popularity of domestic Pinot Noir has come a gradual escalation in price. I looked back at the average price (rounded off) of all domestic Pinot Noirs I reviewed by year from 2007-2016. Each year there are about 1,000 published reviews of domestic Pinot Noir in the *PinotFile*.

2007	\$41.00
2008	\$39.00
2009	\$44.00
2010	\$48.00
2011	\$48.00
2012	\$46.00
2013	\$47.00
2014	\$50.00
2015	\$51.00
2016	\$52.00

The Nielsen statistics (representing about 75% of off-premises sales) for 52 weeks ending 11/05/16 of wine sales at all US outlets combined plus liquor and convenience stores showed a 9.2% increase in sales versus a year prior for Pinot Noir, exceeding all other varietals except Sauvignon Blanc (12.2%) and Rosé (55.4%). The average price for a 750 ml bottle of Pinot Noir was \$10.20, exceeded among all varietals only by Zinfandel (\$10.57) and Rosé (\$13.27). However, the average price change compared to the prior year, was greatest for Pinot Noir among all varietals (\$0.24) except Zinfandel (\$0.39).

For the time being, premiumization is driving the overall profit pool for domestic Pinot Noir producers. And while wine premiumization may be a trend, it doesn't apply yet to consumers younger than 55 who are drinking plenty of wine but not buying premium priced bottles. Will the younger consumers succumb to the allures of premium Pinot Noir as they age?



Most of the wines reviewed here are priced a little below or above the 2016 average price of \$52.

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines, Paso Robles and San Jose, CA

Jerry Lohr first planted his estate grapevines in the Arroyo Seco AVA of Monterey County in 1972. Forty-five years later, J. Lohr's Monterey estate program encompasses more than 1,300 planted acres in the Arroyo Seco and Santa Lucia Highlands, with an emphasis on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The Pinot Noirs are crafted by long time red wine winemaker Steve Peck. Visit www.jlohr.com.



2014 J. Lohr Fog's Reach Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.55, RS 0.09 g/100ml, 490 cases, \$35. Dijon 115, 667 and 777 and Pommard. 100% de-stemmed, fermented in six and twelve ton open-top fermenters with manual punch downs, 6-days on skins, aged 8 months in French oak barrels, 60% new (medium plus to heavy toast). *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, ripe strawberry and toasty oak build in a crescendo over time in the glass. A mid weight plus attack of black fruits greets the palate, filling the mouth with a lush, plush and slightly creamy experience. A grounded wine with some earthiness that is complimentary. The silky tannins are well proportioned as is the acidity so the wine holds its balance even at this higher alcohol level. The modest finish leaves an impression of oak-kissed fruit. 89.*



2014 J. Lohr Highlands Bench Santa Lucia Highlands Monterey Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., pH 3.71, TA 0.58, RS 0.1 g/100ml, 82 cases, \$35. Warm vintage and early harvest. sourced from Escolle Road Vineyard located just west of the town of Gonzales. Primarily clone 115. Harvest Brix 24.5°. 100% de-stemmed, 20% saignée, 3-day cold soak, fermented in 10-ton open top tanks with punch downs twice daily, aged in unique water bent French barrels from Marcel Cadet, 60% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Initially reluctant, the nose opens over time to offer scents of purple berries, spice and vanilla. Full and luscious on the palate with a charge of sweet, ripe black cherry and black raspberry fruit flavors. Nothing out of place, with a creamy mouthfeel, the right touch of oak and enough finish to thoroughly satisfy. 90.*



Lula Cellars, Philo, CA

Lula Cellars is a small production, ultra-premium label located in the "Deep End" of Mendocino County's Anderson Valley. Winemaker Jeff Hansen is a thirty-year veteran of the wine industry and crafts Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Gewürztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc and Rosato wines made solely from grapes grown in vineyards in Mendocino County. The winery, named after Jeff's maternal grandmother Lula, was launched in 2010. Visit www.lulacellars.com.

2014 Lula Mendocino Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.62, 276 cases, \$45. A blend of grapes from Peterson and Costa vineyards. 33% Pommard, 30% 115, 20% 667 and 15% 777. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, and an additional 6 months after blending. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is driven by oak aromas of toast, marzipan and vanilla with black fruits in the background. Silky in the mouth, with very ripe flavors of blackberry, prune and black grape underlain with nutty oak. The wine has good acidity, but the tannins are gummy. The excessive ripeness of the fruit and overbearing oak impair the experience. 86.*

2014 Lula Docker Hill Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.55, 157 cases, \$50. First vintage from this vineyard. planted in 2010 in the coastal mountain town of Comptche, 8 miles southeast of the village of Mendocino. 5 acres at 900 feet elevation. Clones are Pommard, 777, "828," 115 and Swan, each harvested and fermented separately. Aged 12 months before blending, then spent another 6 months in barrel before bottling. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose was slow to come around after opening, but became more expressive when sampled the following day from a previously opened bottle. Dark cherry and berry fruit aromas are echoed on the mid weight palate with added contributions of pine and caramel. Inviting natural acidity with silky tannins and a modest but enjoyable finish. 89.*

2014 Lula Costa Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.64, 362 cases, \$45. Third release from this vineyard. 5 acres planted in 1998 in the coastal mountain town of Comptche, 700 feet

above sea level. A blend of 65% Pommard and 35% Dijon 115 clones. Each was harvested, fermented and barrel aged separately, then blended after 12 months in barrel and aged a further 6 months before bottling. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackest cherry, forest floor and nutty oak lead off. Mid weight in style, with a core of black raspberry and blackberry fruits with an earthy bent. There is a modest riff of oak, the tannins are noticeable and the wine finishes with the slightest sense of alcoholic warmth.* **88.**

2014 Lula Peterson Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.67, 400 cases, \$45 (wine club exclusive). Vineyard planted in 1999 and located in the coastal mountain town of Comptche at 700 feet elevation. A blend of Pommard and Dijon 115, 667 and 777 clones, each harvested and fermented separately before blending after 12 months in barrel, and then aged an additional 6 months in barrel before bottling. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is reticent, even when checked the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Much more giving on the palate in a densely fruited and bold style that offers plenty of charm. Delicious flavors of black cherry and black raspberry with compliments of spice, vanilla and earth. Envious balance with integrated tannins and plenty of finishing power. This wine needs decanting if opened now but will most certainly benefit from a few more years in bottle.* **90.**

Tessier Winery, Healdsburg, CA

Kristie Tacey crafts a variety of wines out of a custom crush facility (Moshin Vineyards). Her 2014 Saveria Vineyard Pinot Noir was featured as one of the Year's Best U.S. Pinot Noirs in the April 2017 issue of *Wines & Spirits* (score of 96). Visit www.tessierwinery.com.

2015 Tessier Winery Morelli Lane Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 197 cases, \$45. 15% whole cluster. Clones 113 and Pommard. Native primary and secondary fermentations. Aged in 37.5% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Noticeably more giving when tasted one day after opening, showing hi-tone aromas of purple berries, purple grape mash, and earth notes. A succulent charge of black berry and black raspberry fruit flavors draw attention. Plenty of extraction to please, with added accents of black tea and nutty oak. Nicely balanced, with plenty of finishing energy.* **91.**

2015 Tessier Winery Saveria Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 94 cases, \$45. 30% whole cluster. Clones 667 and 115. Native primary and secondary fermentations. Aged in 25% new French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Highly fragrant, offering soaring aromas of cherry, raspberry, spice and rose petal. The deep black cherry core is blessed with freshness in this spirited offering that has a dreamy texture that speaks loudly of pinotosity. Fresh acidity, a deft touch of oak and a bit of savory herbs complete the experience. Still solid when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **92.**



Valerie's Vineyard, Carneros, CA

The 2015 release is the 13th vintage of Valerie's Vineyard Pinot Noir. This one-acre site, farmed by three families according to practices guided by viticulturist Phil Coturri, is now reaching maturity and showing the nuances that come with old vines. The 2015 vintage crop was smaller than in previous years. Winemaker Jeff McBride crafted the wine at Benziger Family Winery in Glen Ellen. The wine was aged 18 months in 30% new French oak barrels. The wine is distributed to fine restaurants in Sonoma Valley and is sold at Hi-Time Cellars in Costa Mesa, CA. Visit www.valeriesvineyard.com. I have reviewed 10 vintages (2006-2015) and pulled out a few older vintages to accompany this review of the 2015 release. The 2007 through 2010 wines were vinified at B.R. Cohn Winery in Glen Ellen and have a consistency of style: ripe and luscious fruit, minimal oak infusion, firm tannic backbone and good balance. The 2015 vintage shows a shift in style with plenty of rich fruit but more vibrancy. As you can see, the price has remained the same through the years.

2015 Valerie's Vineyard "One-Acre" Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 60 cases, \$40. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Plenty of aromatic volume, featuring scents of cherry, raspberry, sage and rose petal. The nose reminds of some intraberry (carbonic) fermentation. Ripe and discreetly sappy flavors of cherry, cranberry and strawberry offer good vibrancy. The gossamer tannins make for seductive drinking, the black cherry infused finish delights, and the overall harmony results in a charming, even aristocratic impression. 92.*



2007 Valerie's Vineyard "One-Acre" Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 88 cases, \$40. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Considerable tertiary character in this wine with bouquet of dried black cherry, strawberry, red and black current, turned earth and earthy flora. Very ripe fruited and mid weight in style, with flavors of black cherry and prune framed by silky tannins, admirable oak assimilation, and a juicy, cherry-fueled finish of some length. Drink now to 2020. 89.*

2008 Valerie's Vineyard "One-Acre" Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$40. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Some aromatic breadth with scents of black cherry syrup, toasty oak and earthy flora. Rich and sappy, with dense flavors of dark cherry and berry accented with a hint of prune and marzipan. Still quite structured and fresh, with a polished mouthfeel. Drink now to 2025. 90.*

2009 Valerie's Vineyard "One-Acre" Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 75 cases, \$40. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. A slight oxidized note is present on the nose that offers fruit aromas of black cherry and black raspberry. Sleek and seamless on the palate with intense, even teeth-staining, flavors of blackberry, black plum, raspberry and black tea. There is enough balancing tannin to support the fruit load. A pristine bottle would undoubtedly score higher. Drink now to 2025. 88.*

2010 Valerie's Vineyard "One-Acre" Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 58 cases, \$40. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackberry jam, dark chocolate covered raisin, black raspberry and vanilla are replicated on the palate. The gorgeous fruit really impresses and is supported by well-integrated tannins. The milky texture appeals as does the fruit-filled finish. There is an underlying earthiness so prevalent in Carneros Pinot Noir. Drink now to 2025. 90.*

Waxwing Wine Cellars, Belmont, CA

Scott Sisemore experienced extremely light yields in 2015, and ended up with only four barrels of Pinot Noir. The Ascona Vineyard is new for him, located above Los Gatos at 2,000 feet elevation in a beautiful spot surrounded by tall evergreen trees. The wines are distributed in the San Francisco Bay area and can be obtained on the website at www.waxwingwines.com.

2015 Waxwing Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 50 cases, \$55. Released March 2017. Fourth vintage working with this vineyard. Vines planted in 1998 and managed sustainably by Prudy Foxx. Dijon clones 667 and 115. 50% of fruit was crushed by foot whole cluster and fermented with Assmanhausen yeast. 5-day cold soak, punched down two to three times per day and aged 15 months in once-used French oak barrels. Bottled after a light filtration. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Quite savory on the nose with whole cluster aromas of stem merging with aromas of black cherry and blueberry. Light to mid weight in style, with flavors of strawberry, dark red cherry, boysenberry and root beer infused with noticeable oak highlights. Easygoing, with minimal tannins and silky in texture, but the wine lacks spirit and seems almost grumpy like it is in a dumb phase. Just doesn't have the charm and character of other Lester Family Pinots from this and other producers. Tasted twice with similar results. Will need to be re-assessed in the future. N/R.*

2015 Waxwing Ascona Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 54 cases, \$48. Released March 2017. Martini, Pommard, 115 and Mt. Eden clones. 100% of grapes crushed by foot whole cluster and fermented with Assmanhausen yeast. 5-day cold soak, punch downs two to three times per day and aged 15 months in once-used French oak barrels. Bottled after a light filtration. *Moderate purple color in the glass.*

Cherry, spice and earthy flora infuse the nose with goodness, especially over time in the glass. Modest in attack and finish, featuring a mid weight essence of clove-infused cherry fruits framed by bright acidity and toothsome, mildly astringent tannins that surge on the finish. This wine needs more time in bottle that hopefully will soften the tannins. Otherwise it has some nice attributes. Tasted twice. **89.**

Windy Oaks Estate, Corralitos, CA

Winemakers Jim and Judy Schultze have been crafting exceptional Pinot Noir and Chardonnay since 1999. I have written extensively about their talents and the wines that are among the finest offered from the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation. Pinot Noir is vinified by gravity only with no pumps during crush, press and bottling. About half of the fermentation bins are done with indigenous yeast. All Pinot Noirs are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. In recent years, the winery has expanded its offerings to include Albarino, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Viognier, Syrah, Mourvedre, Grenache and a red Rhone blend. Visit www.windyoaksestate.com.



2014 Windy Oaks Estate Schultze Family Vineyard Estate Cuvée Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 296 cases, \$39. A blend of 5 clones. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 35% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Soaring aromas of dark berry and cherry, rose and spice and a subtle touch of oak. The party continues on the mid weight palate that offers a wholesome attack of black cherry fruit accented with baking spices. Very fine grain tannins, juicy acidity and welcome intensity and length on the finish. A forward drinking offering that builds in appeal over time in the glass.* **93.**

2014 Windy Oaks Estate Schultze Family Vineyard Limited Release 100% Wild Yeast Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 72 cases, \$58 (wine club and tasting room only). Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Plenty of appealing aromas of red cherry and berry, spice, underbrush and white pepper that are more showy when the wine was tasted the following day. The black cherry core of fruit has noticeable presence on the mid weight palate, working in harmony with compatible tannins. The mouthfeel is seductively silky, there is a tasty spice and floral thread, and some finishing persistence. Oak is definitely involved, but less so when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**

2014 Windy Oaks Estate Schultze Family Vineyard Limited Release Wood Tank Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 106 cases, \$58. Fermented up to eight weeks in one-ton, French oak, open-top fermentation tanks. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 45% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. I couldn't stop sticking my nose in the glass as the aromas of cherry, spice cabinet and marzipan were mesmerizing. Light to mid weight in style, with a redder fruited core that is embellished with wood-driven spice and nuttiness. Noticeable but not intrusive tannins and a lip-smacking finish complete the experience. There is more barrel presence in this wine but it enhances rather than detracts.* **92.**



2013 Windy Oaks Estate Schultze Family Vineyard Proprietor's Reserve Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 554 cases, \$65 (wine club members and tasting room only). The winery's signature wine, primarily made from the 1.5-acre Bay Block planting of the original 3-acre vineyard. Aged 24 months in French oak barrels, 65% new. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Demure aroma of cherry pie filling with a hint of oak and barnyard. Lighter weighted, delicate flavors of cherry and cranberry accented with spicy oak amid a frame of gossamer tannins. Very easy going and elegant, bordering on austere. This bottle did not capture my fancy as much as a bottle sampled a year ago.* **88.**

Young Hagen Wines, Angwin, CA

2013 Young Hagen Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.68, 77 cases, \$50. Released February 2017. A single vineyard wine from a vineyard located at the western edge of Green Valley (name not

disclosed). Calera, Pommard, 115 and Elite clones. 10% whole cluster fermented separately. Aged 15 months on the lees in once-used French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Although there is no new oak barrels used in the aging of this wine, it shows a whack of oak on the nose and palate. Aromas of wood smoke and oak char lead off and persist over time. More fruit expression on the mid weight palate, with lush flavors of black raspberry, blackberry, spice and leaf. The tannins and acidity are in balance and there is some length to the sweet-fruited finish. Toasty oak plies the background and is still evident in the wine when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 87.*

2014 Young Hagen Riddle Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., pH 3.82, TA 0.57, 149 cases, \$50. Released February 2017. Clones 115 and Pommard. 10% whole cluster included in de-stemmed fermentation. Aged 11 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 20% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Dark purple color in the glass. Very similar in style and character as the 2013 Sonoma Coast bottling, but with more compatible oak management. Aromas of blueberry-pomegranate, rose petal, white pepper and vanilla lead to a mid weight plus core of sweet purple and black berry fruits framed by gentle tannins. The wine enters better than it finishes, with a welcome attack of well-ripened fruit, but finishes only modestly. 89.*

More Pinot Noir

2015 Böen Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$26, screwcap. Produced and bottled by Böen Wines in St. Helena, part of winemaker Joseph J. Wagner's Copper Cane Wines & Provisions. *Dark purple color in the glass. The nose is primarily imbued with aromas of oak-driven toast and vanilla. Lush and velvety on the palate, with a mid weight core of sweet, vanilla-scented boysenberry and blackberry fruit flavors reminiscent of blackberry swirl ice cream. This wine is done in the "Meiomi" style for which Wagner became well known and will find an audience, but not among true Pinot connoisseurs. 85.*

2015 Cline Family Cellars Estate Grown Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., pH 3.72, RS 0.30%, TA 0.60, \$16.99. Sourced from the estate Lazy C Vineyard located in the Petaluma Gap and Lazy P and M Ranches located a few miles further north. Harvest Brix 23.8°. 100% de-stemmed, cultured yeast fermentation, cap pumped over three times a day, and the wine aged for 10 months in 40% new French oak barrels and some contribution of small amount of American and Eastern European oak. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackberry jam, vanilla, tar and smoke lead off. A gutsy wine with the mid weight plus essence of ripe black fruits underlain with flavors of creosote and tar, finishing with rich fruit and some astringency. There is too much of a role for oak in this wine to suit my taste. 85.*

2015 Clos du Val Gran Val Vineyard Estate Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.55, 800 cases, \$60. Sourced from the winery's Gran Val Vineyard in Carneros that the winery has farmed since 1973. The vineyard adjoins Brown Ranch and Hyde Vineyard and features 41 acres and 10 clones of Pinot Noir with vine age between 12 to 18 years. This wine is from a prized block planted to Dijon 667 and Pommard. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 58% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very complex nose offering an array of aromas that dance in and out including blackberry, black grape, oak spice, mushroom and maple. The attack of blue and purple berry fruits is rich yet noticeably vibrant. The succulent fruit core is accented with notes of black tea and vanilla along with the typical Carneros earthiness, bay leaf and mushroom tone. The tannins are nicely proportioned, there is adroit oak management, and the wine finishes in pleasant fashion. 91.*



2015 Decoy Sonoma County Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 64,300 cases, \$25, screwcap. Aged 8 months in French oak barrels, 30% new and 70% neutral. Decoy winemaker Tyson Wolf learned to make wine alongside his father and grew up in the Napa Valley just two miles from Duckhorn Vineyards. *An impressive offering considering the large production. The nose aims to please with inviting aromas of cherry, spice and brioche, becoming more exuberant over time. Soft in the mouth, with a polished demeanor, offering flavors of cherry and raspberry and a subtle touch of oak in the background. The finish is notable for its quenching, cherry-infused goodness. Widely available in the marketplace and easy to recommend as a daily table wine. 89.*



2015 Dutton-Goldfield Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.65, \$44. A blend of several Green Valley vineyards with additions of Russian River sites. Yields down nearly 50% in contributing vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, punch down up to 3 times a day, 14 to 20 days on skins. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. There is a plethora of vivid purple and black berry aromas and tastes in this discreetly concentrated wine complimented with a bit of savory herbs and sweet oak. Showing off inviting harmony and easy drink ability, this wine has enough richness of fruit and tannic structure to thoroughly satisfy. An ideal introduction to the Dutton-Goldfield Pinot Noir style.* **90.**

2014 Gregory James Hawk Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., pH 3.54, TA 0.58, 275 cases, \$58. Released October 2016. Vineyard on a ridge top above the town of Freestone. 6 acres planted to Pinot Noir in 1985. Pommard 4 and Dijon 115. Harvest Brix 22.8°. 100% de-stemmed, 8-day cold soak, two clones co-fermented with native yeast and very gentle cap management. 3-day extended maceration, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 35% new and 65% neutral. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Upon opening this wine appeared dull and unyielding. However, it became amazingly alive when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. The nose blossomed to reveal a lovely perfume of cherry, red berry, spice and sandalwood. Modest in weight, but packed with cherry and berry goodness offered in an elegant framework of gentle tannins, and finishing with both purpose and spirited acidity. There is a subtle riff of smoky oak in the background.* **91.**

2014 Mindego Ridge Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., pH 3.32, TA 0.73, 805 cases, \$48. Estate grown. Second vintage from a family owned and farmed 10-acre vineyard planted to 8.7 acres of Pinot Noir and 1.3 acres of Chardonnay at 700 to 950 feet elevation adjacent redwoods. Clones 114, 115, 667, 777, "828," and 943. Harvest Brix 23.3°. 20% whole cluster, native fermentation, daily punch downs. After 2 weeks on skins, the wine is gently basket pressed to French oak barrels, 25% new and 75% neutral. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark purple color in the glass. Shy aromas initially of blackberry jam, cigar box, vanilla and spice, arriving with more exuberance when sampled from a previously opened bottle the following day. Impressive harmony in a middleweight styled wine with vivacious flavors of blueberry and blackberry brought to life with spry acidity, and an appealingly sensuous mouthfeel. There is a pervasive earthiness that gives the wine character as does the oak that plies the background in a good way.* **91.**

2014 Sea Smoke Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard Ten Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.49, TA 0.59, \$82. Released October 2016. Crafted from the organically farmed and biodynamic certified Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard by winemaker Don Schroeder who has been at Sea Smoke since 2003. A blend of 10 clones. 100% de-stemmed, 1 to 4-day cold soak, inoculated with cultured yeasts, manual punch downs one to three times a day, total maceration time of 16 to 28 days. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 70% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Plenty of spicy boysenberry fruit aromas are joined with subtle notes of toast and vanilla. Very welcoming in the mouth, with a suave mouthfeel, bright acidity and gentle tannins. The taste of fresh purple berry fruits have expansive energy in the mouth and on the lengthy and uplifting finish. The barrel treatment is adroitly managed. An aristocratic wine that has the balance to carry on for many years.* **93.**



Sips of Recently Tasted California Chardonnay


Chardonnay most likely resulted from an amorous fling in the distant past between Gouvais Blanc and Pinot Noir. I like the result of this Pinot Noir infidelity and when I am not drinking Pinot Noir, I can usually be found with a glass of Chardonnay in hand. I am not the only one, for Chardonnay continues to be America's most popular wine. At last year's Wine Industry Financial Symposium, the Gomberg Fredrickson Annual Review of California Varietal Table Wine Volume in 2015 was 214 million cases of which 26% was Chardonnay.

There is a flood of domestic Chardonnay in the marketplace, the vast majority of which is ordinary or worse. Most of it shows the hand of the winemaker more than the pedigree of the fruit or the terroir and as a result, many wine consumers write Chardonnay off as a quaff of little nobility. The truth is, that you can find complex domestic Chardonnay to rival anything made in the world, but like its parent, Pinot Noir, it often doesn't come cheap. There are value priced Chardonnays of note to be sure, and you will find several in this review priced in the \$40 and less ballpark, but the top dogs are from elite vineyards, are expensive to craft and the prices reflect this. High dollar Chardonnay can be an anathema to many but the lofty quality of many such wines justify the tab.

Next issue will feature the impressive latest Chardonnays from Oregon.

2015 Cline Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.0% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.59, RS 0.52 g/100ml, \$14.99, screwcap. Harvest Brix 24.1°. Grapes were gently de-stemmed and carefully pressed. Fermented in stainless steel after two days of cooling and settling. No malolactic fermentation. The lees were stirred for several months before racking to French oak barrels, 40% new, for 6 months. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Delicate aromas of slate and apple. Easy going in a very delicate style that is clean and crisp, featuring flavors of lemon, pineapple, apple and petrol and a hint of sweet oak. Satisfactory rather than special. 85. Tasted twice with a second bottle showing marked reductive notes of flint, burnt rubber and gun barrel that did not subside even when tasted the following day from a previously opened bottle.*

Clos du Val is a pioneering Napa Valley winery established in the Stags Leap District in 1972. Over the past several years, the winery has gone through a period of unprecedented change. President and CEO Steve Tamburelli and Director of Operations Jon-Mark Chappellet (both formerly of Chappellet Winery) and Winemaker Ted Henry have led the revitalization. In the 2014 vintage, Clos du Val began exclusively making wines from its own 350 acres of estate vineyards in the Stags Leap District, Carneros and Yountville appellations. To make this decision a reality, the winery cut production in half, lowered yields and focused on vine balance, harvested fruit riper, renovated the winery adding a small-tank fermentation room, invested in a new barrel program, switched to guaranteed TCA-free corks for all wines and built a stunning new visitor center. The renewed dedication is evident in the quality of the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay reviewed in this issue.

 **2015 Clos du Val Estate Grown Carneros Napa Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.69, \$32. 100% estate Chardonnay from vines that range in age from 11 to 29 years. Barrel fermented, 20% malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 28% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A richly styled offering, with aromas of lemon, grilled pineapple, peach, herbs and oak vanillin. Soft and creamy in the mouth, with flavors of Fuji apple, lychee, pineapple, spice and white corn, supported by admirable balancing acidity. Even more enjoyable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 92.*





2015 Decoy Sonoma County Chardonnay 13.5% alc., 63,700 cases, \$20, screwcap. 20% aged in French oak barrels and 80% in stainless steel. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Gregarious aromas of lemon, grapefruit, spice and a hint of butter. Bright and clean in the mouth with a silky demeanor and enjoyable flavors of white peach, lemon, lychee and creme caramel. Unpretentious but highly satisfying. A great value. 90.*

2015 Dutton-Goldfield Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Chardonnay 13.5% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.66, \$38. A blend of grapes from seven vineyards most of which are old clone vineyards located in the heart of Green Valley. Barrel fermented using a combination of indigenous and inoculated yeast strains. Full malolactic fermentation, with lees stirring twice monthly through the winter. Total aging 10 months, 40% new French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A rich and heady Chardonnay with aromas of lemon oil, poached pear, butter, oak and iron. Highly flavorful, with tastes of apple, pear, lemon, creme caramel and toast. An outspoken offering that is very creamy in the mouth and generously oaked. 90.*

2015 Fulcrum Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.2% alc., 175 cases, \$48. Inaugural Chardonnay from this producer. Dijon clone 95. Barrel fermented and aged 11 months in 42% French oak barrels. Unfined and lightly filtered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. The nose is mildly reductive with the distinct aroma of flint along with scents of apple, banana and vanilla creme. Somewhat richly endowed with flavors of peach, salted apple, pineapple and brioche with a subtle green note. Satiny in texture, with seamless integration of acid and some length to the pleasantly fruited finish. 88.*



2015 Gregory James Patient Terrier Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.5% alc., pH 3.28, TA 0.73, 320 cases, \$38. Released October 2016. Spring Mountain, Robert Young and Old Wente clones. Harvest Brix 22.5°. Whole cluster pressed, inoculated with a White Burgundy yeast, fermented and aged in neutral French oak barrels. No lees stirring, full malolactic fermentation. Bottled immediately after secondary fermentation to retain a fresh and vibrant character. Winemaker Greg James was strongly influenced to produce this style of Chardonnay by his love of wines of Chablis, France. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Although I try to avoid the term, "minerality" came to mind right away when I tasted this wine. Clean and brisk, with aromas and flavors of citrus, melon, pear and floral bouquet uplifted by a prevalent energetic, steely acidity. There is the slightest hint of butter from malolactic fermentation and even less infusion of almond oil presumably from oak. 93.*



2015 Gregory James Hawk Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.6% alc., pH 3.23, TA 0.69, 220 cases, \$52. Released October 2016. Winemaker Gregory James has worked with Hawk Hill Vineyard for over 13 years. 7 acres of Chardonnay planted primarily to Clone 5 (Wente) in 1985 on a ridge top high above the town of Freestone. Harvest Brix 22.0°. Whole cluster pressed, inoculated with a select White Burgundy yeast strain, infrequent lees stirring during primary fermentation. 3 week primary fermentation, malolactic fermentation over 5 months. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 22% new and 78% neutral. The wine remained on its lees during malolactic fermentation without stirring, and eventually racked off the lees to allow for natural clarification of the wine two months before bottling. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Terrific aromatics, offering scents of honey, apple, spice, and a hint of butter and oak. Very classy with brisk acidity, offering juicy flavors of lemon and apple with a bit of nut oil. The lip-smacking and lifted finish goes on and on and leaves an memorable impression. 94.*



2015 J. Lohr October Night Arroyo Seco Monterey Chardonnay 14.9% alc., pH 3.39, TA 0.73, RS 0.30 g/100ml, 1,918 cases, \$25. Backbone is Dijon 809 (Musqué clone) harvested at 24.8° Brix. Whole cluster pressed, inoculated primary and secondary fermentations. Aged in French oak barrels, 50% new, for 10 months with weekly stirring of the lees. Tight grain Francois Frères barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A very unusual Chardonnay reflecting the clone and I found it intriguing. The floral aspect of the Musqué clone definitely comes through in this wine, reminding somewhat of the aromatic profile of Malvasia Blanca. Besides the floral bouquet on the nose, aromas of spice, butterscotch and orange peel are attractive. The wine offers richness on the palate as*

well as clean, bright flavors of applesauce, citrus and spices including cinnamon. The oak is beautifully integrated and the overall balance excels. Give this one extra points for uniqueness. **92.**



2015 J. Lohr Arroyo Vista Arroyo Seco Monterey Chardonnay 14.9% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.71, RS 0.30 g/100 ml, 5,133 cases, \$25. Majority of blend is Dijon clone 76. Harvest Brix 25.7° average. Inoculated primary and secondary fermentations. Weekly lees stirring during malolactic fermentation and ten months past. Aged in French oak barrels on the lees for 14 months, 51% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Welcoming aromas of ripe apple, peach, lemon-lime and whipped cream. Slightly richer with riper flavors than the October Night bottling, offering flavors of apple, white peach, nectarine and brioche along with a hint of sweetness and a tiny bit of spritz.*

*Impressive barrel management and overall exemplary balance. **91.***



2015 La Rue Charles Heintz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.1% alc., 22 cases, \$60. (allocated to mailing list customers). Aged 17 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Heady aromas of orchard fruits, butterscotch, and floral goodness that reminds of a walk in an orchard in blossom. The wine really perks up the senses with flavors of lemon, peach, pear and subtle vanilla. A floral note chimes in as well. Very comforting, with a velvety mouthfeel and a quenching finish. I can just taste the Wente clone in this classy wine that embraces with perfect harmony. Still terrific when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Heintz=Hightz. **95.***



Mindego Ridge is a relatively new winery based on a vineyard site in the Santa Cruz Mountains, about 8 miles from the Pacific Ocean and 1 mile from Rhys Vineyards' Alpine Vineyard. This is a very small husband and wife project, with 8.7 acres of Pinot Noir and 1.3 acres of Chardonnay planted in 2009 amongst the redwoods. The couple devote themselves to caring for the vines. Noted winemaker, Ehren Jordan (Failla), is the winemaker

2014 Mindego Ridge Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay 13.7% alc., pH 3.37, TA 0.79, 343 cases, \$48. Dijon 17, 76 and 96. Harvest Brix 22.7°. Whole cluster pressed directly to French oak barrels, 15% new and 75% neutral along with 10% into stainless steel. Fermented with indigenous yeast followed by native malolactic fermentation. Aged 11 months on the lees. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Lovely aromas of slate, lemon curd, apple core and buttery brioche lead to a polished palate featuring flavors of citrus, baked apple, and pear lifted with pinpoint acidity. Slightly creamy in texture with a juicy finish. **92.***



2014 Sea Smoke Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.54, TA 0.50, \$60. Released October 2016. Whole cluster pressed before gently pumped into stainless steel tank and cold settled. Racked to French oak barrels, 55% new, and a stainless steel fermenter, then inoculated for primary fermentation. Subsequently, the wine was inoculated for malolactic fermentation and lees were periodically stirred. Aged for 16 months before bottling. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Enticing aromas of lemon wafer, yellow apple, spice, white chocolate and crushed sea shells. Polished in the mouth with a sophisticated bearing, offering tastes of lemon creme, apple and vanillin and a pervasive thread of minerality in the background. Well-integrated acidity with adroit oak management. **93.***

2013 Stomping Girl Wines Hyde Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay

14.3% alc., pH 3.24, TA 0.63, 350 cases, \$44. Released spring 2016. Wente Hyde field selection and Robert Young clone. Harvest Brix 23.7°. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented, aged on the lees with regular stirring, 100% malolactic fermentation. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light platinum yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lees, apple, lemon creme, jasmine and brioche. Discreetly concentrated, with inviting flavors of yellow stone fruits, lemon, grapefruit, spice and subtle toast. Ideal balance with a slightly creamy mouthfeel, and a vibrant finish with good cut. The pedigree of the fruit shows through in this classy wine. 93.*



2013 Two Sisters Courtney's Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay 14.3% alc., \$30. Sourced from a 123-acre vineyard located at 515 to 860 feet elevation. Clones 76 and 96 planted in limestone sand clay. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Expressive aromas of lemon oil, white peach, butter and brioche satisfy. A rich, well-oaked style featuring ripe stone and tropical fruit flavors along with oak embellishments of toffee and caramel. The wine finishes with a good grip and grilled lemon and sandy beach aromatic themes. 89.*

2014 Varner Spring Ridge Vineyard Amphitheater Block Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay 14.1% alc., \$45. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. The Santa Cruz Mountains seems to be the chosen region for Chardonnay and this wine shows why. A complex nose offers aromas of lemon curd, honey, yellow applesauce, spice and steel. Vivacious on the palate with vivid flavors of peach, melon, banana, pineapple, honey, graham and vanilla cream. The wine seduces rather than attacks the senses with some austerity that is part of its charm. The clean finish shows persistent aromatic goodness as well. Still fine the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

2014 WindRacer Anderson Valley Chardonnay 13.5% alc., \$40. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of lemon, spiced apple, nut oil, buttery brioche as well as notes of salinity and steeliness. Slightly viscous on the palate, with flavors of apple, lemon zest, custard and buttered toast. Nicely balanced, with an uplifting backbone of citrus-infused acidity, finishing with a bit of length. Still fine the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 91.*

2014 WindRacer Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.5% alc., \$40. Clones 4 and 76 from Kelli Ann Vineyard. A mix of older and new blocks that replaced previously planted Pinot Noir. Gentle whole cluster pressed and fermented and aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Subtle aromas of yellow apple, pear and melon are infused with the scent of beach sand. Somewhat reserved with more apple than citrus flavor and a touch of spice. The fruit is well-ripened but not tropical in character. Plush in the mouth with a thread of well-paced oak in the background, finishing on a lemon-lime note. A hint of alcoholic warmth peaks out as the wine warms in the glass. 89.*



Spring has Sprung: Break out the Rosé

Spring is the time of the year when many Pinot Noir producers offer a limited amount of Rosé crafted from last year's harvest. Sure, Rosé gets a bad rap and is poo-pooed by wine cognoscenti. But when the weather turns warm, a chilled glass of Pinot Noir Rosé can refresh the palate on its own or provide a perfect accompaniment to a versatile range of food options. Perhaps you grew up with slightly sweet Mateus and Lancers Rosé wines like I did and frequently enjoyed them. White Zinfandel later appeared on the wine scene and catered to the American soda pop palate, but was never for me. Today, serious, bone-dry versions of Rosé have become increasingly popular and a favorite of mine. The fresh fruit aromas and minimal tannins make for perfect quaffing or drinking with summer fare like hamburgers, grilled chicken and seafood, or a BLT sandwich.

I find it challenging to critically review a Pinot Noir Rosé wine, because it is an unpretentious wine to enjoy, not a wine to be critiqued. Admittedly, there are serious versions, crafted with the same intent as regular Pinot Noir, and their superiority can be recognized, but most do not require contemplation. Despite the increasing popularity of Pinot Noir Rosé, the wines are produced in small lots because quality Pinot Noir grapes are expensive to farm and buy. The wines demand prices in the range of \$18 to \$30, much less than half the price of premium Pinot Noir and this value pricing, along with the appeal, make the wines disappear rapidly from the marketplace in the year following harvest. When you taste Rosé, you taste the sun.

Here are four excellent examples. Scores are for the Rosé category and represent the score of the wine in relation to other Pinot Noir Rosés, not premium still Pinot Noir.



2016 Etude Grace Benoist Ranch Carneros Pinot Noir Rosé 13.5% alc., pH 3.16, TA 0.78, 630 cases, \$28. Released April 2017. Estate grown. Crafted from grapes specifically grown and vinified to showcase the attributes of a Rosé. Martini, Pommard and Dijon 115 clones. Whole cluster pressed while fruit was still cool with minimal skin contact. The juice was transferred to older French oak barrels and fermented cool, aged on the lees for four months, with no malolactic fermentation. *Moderate pink color in the glass. A blend of fruity and savory aromas including cranberry, red cherry, strawberry, and herbs. A soulful, satisfying wine with embracable flavors of red cherry, strawberry and rose water backed by snappy acidity, finishing with a grip of citrus on the finish that offers some length. Similar in style to a Provence Rosé.* **92.**



2016 Gary Farrell Russian River Valley Selection Rosé of Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., pH 3.16, TA 0.78, 393 cases, \$32. Release May 2017. Sourced from Dutton Ranch Wat and Dutton Ranch Galante vineyards located in the cool Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Clones 37 (Mt. Eden) from Wat and Dijon 115 from Galante. Harvest Brix 21.0° specially for this bottling. Whole cluster pressed as a white wine using a gentle Champagne press program. Fermented in stainless steel tank. After a few days in tank, 40% of the juice was transferred to 3-year-old French oak barrels where it fermented to near dryness. The two components were later combined in a stainless steel tank where the blend remained on its primary lees for about two months. *Light salmon pink color in the glass. Lovely perfume of blood orange, strawberry and floral notes. Clean and bright, in a light styled wine, with tastes of nectarine, raspberry and blood orange. Finishes up tempo with refreshing acidity.* **90.**



2016 TongueDancer Putnam Vineyard Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.19, TA 0.82, 95 cases, \$25. Released March 8, 2017. A saignée of Pinot Noir from the Putnam Vineyard in Annapolis. 2-day skin contact, fermented in stainless steel with M2 yeast. 100% malolactic fermentation. *Moderate copper hue in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of strawberry, watermelon and yellow rose. The flavors echo the aromas along with tastes of blood orange, persimmon and herbs. Clean and upbeat, with some persistence on the citrus peel infused finish. The alcohol in this wine, above the level of many Rosés, gives the wine more body and a hint of perceived sweetness.* **91.**



2016 Waxwing Blair Vineyard Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir Rosé 12.7% alc., 42 cases, \$23. Released March 2017. Pommard 4 clone. Whole cluster pressed, fermented in stainless steel, aged in barrels with weekly lees stirring. *Delicate apricot color in the glass. The nose is alive and sustained in the glass, offering aromas of apricot, strawberry, cherry, blood orange and a floral note. Delicious flavors of cherry, strawberry, white peach and apricot have good weight and are bright and lifted. The wine is perfectly balanced with fresh natural acidity, finishing with a blood orange tang. The best domestic rosé that I have experienced in quite awhile.* **93.**

Pinot Briefs

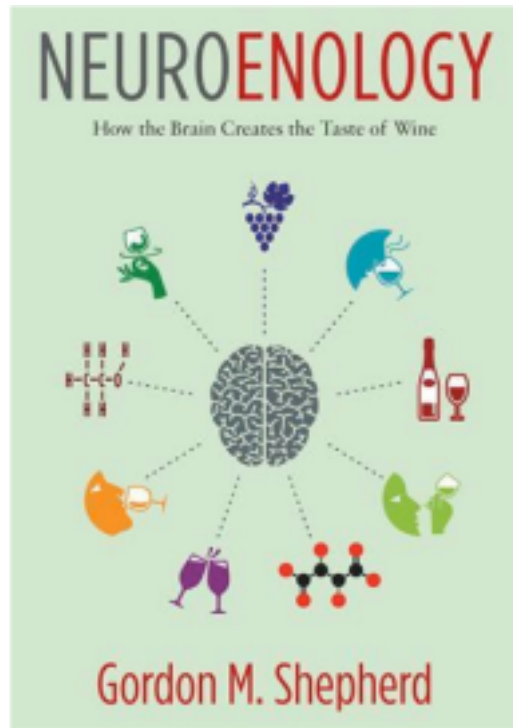
California North Coast 2016 Vintage Nearly 491,000 tons were crushed in Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino and Lake counties in 2016, up 21.9 percent from 2015, but down nearly 4 percent from the five-year average according to the *North Bay Business Journal* analysis. It was the fourth-largest wine grape harvest for the region in more than a decade, behind 2012-2014. Demand for grapes has outstripped the harvest of the past two years so grape prices are high. The average price for all wine grape varieties in Sonoma county increased by 6.2 percent last year to a new high of \$2,561 a ton, 10 percent higher than the county's five-year average. Pinot Noir tonnage increased by one-third in 2016 compared to 2015 and tied with the 58,000 tons of 2006 as the fourth-largest crop for the variety in the North Coast. Sonoma Pinot Noir pricing rose to 3.4 percent to \$3,657 a ton, up 10.8 percent from the five-year average. Tonnage for Pinot Noir in Sonoma County increased 31.5 percent from 2015 to 40,400 but was almost 11 percent below average. Mendocino had the largest crop of Pinot Noir at 9,420 tons since 2006.



Oregon 2016 Vintage This was an uneventful vintage for Oregon vintners. Flowering arrived early due to a warm spring so that the growing season was as long or longer than usual. The Oregon Wine Board reported that 2016 was the earliest vintage on record and delivered outstanding fruit quality with close to normal yields. Summer had fewer heat spikes than in the 2014 or 2015 vintages that led to smaller berry size and higher concentration of flavors. Most vineyards in the Willamette Valley started to harvest by early September and almost all wine was in barrel by the first week of October. There were few signs of disease, pest or bird effects. Tom Gerrie, owner and winegrower at Cristom Vineyards, said, "If 2014 and 2015 made very good wines, the 2016 vintage may be headed toward greatness. We began harvesting Pinot Noir on September 3 from our estate and continued steadily through September 15. The 2014 and 2015 vintages make the 2016 vintage harvest seem small by comparison but our yields were closer to our historical average of two tons per acre." James Frey, the winemaker and owner of Trisaetum Winery, noted, "The cornerstone of the vintage seems to be balance - with fruit, acidity and tannin in fine equilibrium. It's hard not to like what 2016 gave us."

Wine Freedom in America It is a reality that only 14 states and the District of Columbia allow consumers to receive shipments of wine from out-of-state wine stores, internet retailers, wine-of-the-month clubs and wine auction houses. The consequence of this restriction of interstate trade is that wine consumers in 36 states are barred from receiving any direct wine shipments of imported wines since in the US only wine retailers sell imported wines. Only a very small percentage of all wines available in the US are available in any given state. The organization, www.WineFreedom.org, provides consumers with information on which states are considering legislation to change this discriminatory policy and tools for supporting consumer efforts to bring wine freedom to their state. Bills are currently in legislation in Texas and New York to allow direct shipment of wine from out-of-state retailers. Suits have been filed in Michigan, Illinois and Missouri concerning their discriminatory treatment of out-of-state retailers.

Neuroenology: How the Brain Creates the Taste of Wine This book by Yale neuroscientist Gordon Sheperd, is based on the theory that savoring the flavor of wine activates more grey matter than solving a complex math problem. Shepard thinks that the flavor of wine “engages more of our brain than any other human behavior.” The act of sipping wine leads to a complex interplay of air and liquid controlled by coordinated movements of the tongue, jaw, diaphragm and throat. In the mouth, molecules in wine stimulate thousands of taste and odor receptors, sending a flavor signal to the brain that triggers massive cognitive computation involving pattern recognition, memory, value judgment, emotion and pleasure. Wine is tasted in the brain, not the mouth.



Lompoc Wine History Kate Griffith of Flying Goat Cellars has written an article, “Lompoc Wine History: From Mission Grape to Spectator’s Top Eight,” in *Edible Santa Barbara*, Spring 2017 issue. This is an abbreviated version of a longer story forthcoming elsewhere. The Santa Barbara Vintners Spring Weekend Grand Tasting will be Saturday, April 22, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at River View Park in Buellton. Information and tickets at www.sbvintnersweekend.com. Flying Goat Cellars will have an Open House on Sunday, April 23, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Flying Goat Tasting Room, 1520 E. Chestnut Court in Lompoc.

Laughlin Loop This seven-mile route of eight Yamhill-Carlton wineries will be the site of “Discover Laughlin Loop,” April 22-23. Drive yourself or take the shuttle and taste exceptional wines from the region. Participating wineries include Beacon Hill, Fairsing Vineyard, Gran Moraine, Lenne Estate, Roots Wine Company, Saffron Fields Vineyard, Solena Estate and WillaKenzie Estate. Portland’s most talked-about food carts will be present as well. \$75 per person includes wine tasting, shuttle service, \$10 food cart voucher and a 6-bottle tote bag. Each bottle of wine purchased at a winery will enter you for a chance to win a Laughlin Loop Wine Collection. Purchase tickets at www.eventbrite.com.



Taste the Place On Saturday, April 29, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 35 of the Yamhill-Carlton AVA's best wineries will host a tasting. The event will be held at Anne Amie Vineyards in Carlton. Tickets are \$40 and include tasting from all participating wineries and six local restaurants. Tickets on sale at www.yamhillcarlton.org.

Taste Dundee The 3rd Annual Taste Dundee will be held Saturday May 6 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Billick Park in Dundee, Oregon. 25 Dundee wineries will be pouring along with local eats and music. Visit www.tastedundeeoregon.com for information and tickets.

Vinnibag Inflatable Travel Bag This travel aid allows you to safely carry liquids, fine collectible items and fragile valuables including wine. The reusable Vinnibag can be put in carry-on's or checked luggage and is TSA friendly. It will withstand air travel and high altitudes. It is easy to use: stick items in the bag, inflate with a few breaths of air, snap the bag closed, pack it in a travel bag and deflate when get home. Travelers can likely fit up to three inflated Vinnibags in their suitcase. Vinnibag retails for \$28 each and is sold at Bed, Bath & Beyond, Brookstone and Amazon. For more information, visit www.vinnibag.com.

Explore California's Wine Regions on the Rise The Wine Institute's Road Trip Series highlights different wine regions each month. For March, the series offered tips for traveling to California's off-the-beaten-path regions including Humboldt County, Marin County and Santa Clara Valley. Visit www.discovercaliforniawines.com for information on California's 138 American Viticultural Areas and 4,600 wineries.



Wines & Vines Oak Conference The 2017 *Wines & Vines* Oak Conference will include a session on barrel aging Pinot Noir. The session panel will include winemakers Bob Cabral, Ken Bernards, Luisa Ponzi and Scott Shapely who will offer insights into how winemakers match oak to their Pinot Noirs as well as provide detailed glimpses into the production of Pinot Noir from nearly all of the major wine regions in the western US and Willamette Valley of Oregon. Registration includes all the general sessions plus one of three technical tastings. The conference takes place April 26 at the Event Center at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa, California. For information and to register, visit www.wvoak.com.

Designating Pinot Noir Color

For years I have used a number of terms to designate Pinot Noir color. You will notice in this issue, the use of three terms: garnet, ruby and purple. These are the three approved synonyms for the color red in red wines so I decided to adopt these synonyms and continue to use modifiers such as light, moderate, and dark.



Ruby Red



Garnet



Purple