



PinotFile

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*If you drink no
Noir, you Pinot
Noir*

California Spring Releases of Pinot Noir to Covet

Asuncion Ridge Vineyards, Paso Robles, CA

The winery's 7-acre estate vineyard is located at the southern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands mountain range, at 2,000 feet elevation, a few miles from Paso Robles. Proprietors Philip Krumal and Michael Dilsaver work with winemaker Marc Goldberg and with the inspiration of Yvonne Rich. Visit www.asuncionridge.com.

2014 Asuncion Ridge Vineyards San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 146 cases, \$45. Grown, produced and bottled by Asuncion Ridge Vineyards, Paso Robles, CA.. Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777, and Pommard 4 and 5, and HRM (Hoffman Mountain Ranch). *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Ripe fruit aromas of dusty black cherry and blackberry embellished with toasty oak. Soft, smooth and lush on the palate, featuring a middleweight core of spiced black fruits lifted by well-behaved acidity and supported by structured tannins. The finish is generous, although some oak char and tannin infuse the finish.* **88.**

2014 Asuncion Ridge Vineyards Barrel Select San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 81 cases, \$65. Grown, produced and bottled by Asuncion Ridge Vineyards, Paso Robles, CA.. 50% free run juice from Estate Vineyard. Clones 115, 667, 777, Pommard 4 and 5, and HRM blended together. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Shy, but pleasing perfume of blackberry with added notes of piney oak, earth and vanilla. Rather bombastic and broad in the mouth with good attack, length and finishing persistence. Very like able, with balanced tannins and good juiciness. Even better when sampled the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**



Beresini Vineyards, Napa, CA

Beresini Vineyards (Black Dog Ranch) is a small family-owned producer of Pinot Noir in Napa Carneros. About 200 cases are produced each vintage. Both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are grown on the property. The property is named after a Black Labrador, Vito Beresini, whose predecessors Chester and Luca watched over the vineyard before Vito.

Steve Beresini began his wine career managing vineyards in Napa County, later starting at Phelps in 1977 as a cellar worker, leaving in 1981 to become assistant winemaker at Niebaum Coppola. In 1983, he became the head winemaker at Niebaum Coppola under the tutelage of Andre Tchelistcheff. He departed Coppola in 1991 to work as cellar master at Grgich Hills for 10 years, and from 2001 through 2005 worked at Garvey Vineyard Management handling vineyard operations.

In 1988, Steve planted four acres of Chardonnay and two acres of Pinot Noir on his property in Carneros. In 2010, he leased an adjoining Pinot Noir vineyard that he also manages. The grapes were sold for the first 16 years to MacRostie Winery with some Chardonnay going to Staglin Family Vineyards. The Chardonnay grapes were sold to TOR from 2010 to 2015 and currently to Kenward Family Wines. A little over one acre of the Pinot

Noir grapes were sold to Stomping Girl Winery through 2014. As of 2015, the three acres of Pinot Noir grapes now planted are used exclusively for the Beresini Pinot Noir.

The Beresini Pinot Noir is distributed to several fine restaurants in Napa, Sacramento and Walnut Creek and sold on the website at www.beresinivineyards.com.

2013 Beresini Black Dog Ranch Carneros Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.559, 194 cases, \$45. Grown, produced and bottled by Beresini Vineyards, Napa, Ca.. 81% Swan selection (27-year-old vines) and 19% Calera selection (14-year-old vines). Harvest Brix 25.2°. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of well-ripened fruit include blackberry liquor, blackest cherry and Hoison sauce. Tiptoes to the edge of ripeness without crossing the line, offering luscious flavors of black cherry, blackberry and spice with attendant toasty oak in the background. There is a proper balance of acidity and tannin to accommodate the fruit load. The mouthfeel is smooth and the well-fruited finish satisfies. 91.*

Dierberg , Santa Ynez, CA

The Dierberg family has owned the historically significant Hermannhof Vineyards in Missouri since 1974. After a decade searching for the perfect spot to establish a wine estate that could grow classic varieties, they chose Santa Barbaras Happy Canyon region in 1996. Under the Dierberg label, they also grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Santa Maria Valley and Sta. Rita Hills AVAs.

The Dierbergs acquired their first cool climate vineyard in 1996, located at the western edge of the Santa Maria Valley AVA just 13 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Dierberg Vineyard is a 160-acre property planted to 12 heritage clones of Pinot Noir and Wente selections of Chardonnay. In 2003, the Drum Canyon Vineyard in the Sta. Rita Hills was planted to 70 acres of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes.

The wines from the Dierberg properties have never been highly touted until winemaker Tyler Thomas joined Dierberg in 2013. Tyler has a master's degree in Viticulture and Enology from University of California at Davis, and previously worked at North Coast wineries Donelan Family Wines and Hyde de Villaine. His affinity for the Central Coast began long before joining Dierberg and Star Lane Vineyards. His first full-time harvest internship was at Fiddlehead Cellars in Lompoc in 2003, but his choice to return came only after several meetings with the Dierberg family.

I recently met with Tyler over dinner and tasted some of his current releases. It was an opportunity to learn of his philosophy. Tyler told me, "I believe the world's great wines have three things in common: they are connected to a specific estate, they have a long term consistency, and they transcend their generation. I see this potential at Dierberg Vineyards." T

Tyler has access to two precision-farmed vineyards, access to top viticulture talent, and the use of a 26,000-square-foot winery. He muses, "Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are two varieties that can express themselves across two different climate sites in Santa Barbara County. We are striving to do every thing we can to make each wine more and more special."

Tyler is a firm believer in making vineyard-focused wines, with minimal signs of winemaking technique. He has a strong anti-house style approach, choosing to pursue wines with a sense of freshness rather than targeting an ideal fruit, alcohol or acid profile.

Once Tyler was on board, I immediately noticed a trend away from density and rusticity to an increase in balance, vibrancy and enjoyability of the Dierberg Vineyard Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. Honestly, these wines are now stunning. Dierberg Vineyard produces a Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah from the Dierberg Vineyard as well as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Drum Canyon Vineyard. The wines are distributed nationally in 40+ states and are available from the tasting room in the Sta. Rita Hills. The Three Saints value label is being discontinued. Visit www.dierbergvineyard.com.

The 2014 Pinot Noirs are refined and flavorful with perfumed aromatics and supple textures. Stem inclusion was increased in 2014 to add textural refinement and improve age ability. The following wines were tasted with Tyler and then re-tasted the following day.

2014 Dierberg Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$44. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Lovely nose, offering aromas of black cherry, spice, mushroom, fertile earth and subtle oak. Very charming, with mid weight flavors of blueberry and black cherry that assume intensity over time in the glass. Supportive tannins with toasty oak in the background.* **92.**

2014 Dierberg Drum Canyon Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$52. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Effusive aromas of black cherry and spice. Broad in the mouth with mid weight plus assortment of dark red and black stone fruit and berry flavors. Well-structured, with a good acid spine, admirable vibrancy, welcome integration of oak, and a lingering black cherry finish.* **93.**



2014 Dierberg Drum Canyon Vineyard Ty Sta. Rita Hills

Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 62 cases, \$95. This wine is made from a special block of clone 667 which showed more fullness and complexity in the barrel. This block is located in rockier soils and a perfect slope. Named after Jim and Mary Dierberg's grandson, this wine is the pinnacle of the Drum Canyon Vineyard.

Fermented with some stem inclusion. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. An array of dark fruit aromas are complimented with notes of warm spices and a bit of oak-driven notes of anise and tobacco. Embraceable core of dark cherry fruit with floral and brioche accents. Soft in the mouth, with a very long black cherry imbued finish. A big but not cumbersome wine that will need more cellaring for full oak integration.* **94.**



Clos De La Tech, La Honda, CA

This winery is a very ambitious project established in 1994 by TJ Rodgers, founder and retired CEO of Cypress Semiconductor, and his spouse, Valeta. The vineyards are exposed to extreme growing conditions and high-altitude terrain. The significant highlights of Clos de la Tech are meticulous vine-by-vine farming, high-density planting (4,150 vines per acre), low yields, and innovative viticulture equipment (the vineyards are so steep they have to be farmed with a specially-designed tractor moved by cables. Vinification is done in an underground, gravity-flow winery, employing whole cluster fermentations with native yeast, extended cold soaks, foot crushing, malolactic fermentation on the lees, gravity transfer, and no filtration of the wines. Barrel aging is carried out in caves tunneled deep into a ridge. The five wines produced are aged in Francois Frères barrels with a significant percentage of new oak.

The Pinot Noirs come from three estate vineyards: Domaine du Docteur Rodgers, Domaine Valeta and Domaine Lois Louise. 2012 was the first vintage produced entirely at the new, underground winery. The wines have received considerable praise and high praise from the wine press, and the winery is one of the featured ones at this year's International Pinot Noir Celebration. Uniquely, each bottle other than the Santa Cruz Mountains Estates blend features a chip on the neck of the bottle. The chip is code named Juno, designed by Cypress Conductor's design center in Japan.

These wines will appeal to a segment of pinotphiles who understand the style. The wines certainly will be liked by those who relish seductively ripe, lush fruit and substantial structure. I found them a challenge to taste due to the tannins. The wines have a gorgeous fruit core, but lack charm and elegance. They can be likened to a slightly tough steak - flavorful but tough to chew. Normally a high percentage of whole cluster adds aromatic and textural interest to the wines, but I did not find those characteristics in these Pinot Noirs. The high levels of tannins are still present nearly five years after harvest, suggesting the wines may never be in balance. I tasted the wines a day after opening and four days after opening and found no significant change in perceived tannins.

The wines are sold through a mailing list at www.closdelatech.com.

2012 Clos De La Tech Santa Cruz Mountains Estates Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.565, 1,483 cases, \$45. Sourced from the three estate vineyards, primarily the steep, south-facing hillsides. Extended cold soak, whole cluster fermentation with native yeast, foot crushing, malolactic fermentation on lees, and gravity transfer. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 80% new, and bottled unfiltered. *Dark garnet color in the glass. The aromas are primarily oak fueled including cocoa, toast and vanilla, and showing no change when the wine was tasted the following day. There is a mid weight plus core of sappy, very ripe dark fruits including olalliberry and blackberry flavors backed by significant tannins that return with noticeable intent on the finish. The wine is polished and luscious in the mouth, with some carryover of fruit delight on the finish. There is a significant oak imprint that is unyielding four days after opening.* **89.**

2012 Clos De La Tech Domaine Valeta “Sunny Slope” Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.55, 128 cases, \$62. 3.5 acres planted on a 30 acre mountaintop site at 2,350 feet elevation in 1999. A challenging site exposed to wind, cold and occasional snow. Soils are fractured weathered sandstone and sandy loam. Clones are Dijon 113, 114, 115 and 777. Extended cold soak, whole cluster fermentation with native yeast, malolactic fermentation on lees, and gravity transfer. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 90% new, and bottled unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Pleasing aromas of dark berries and cherries lead to a mid weight plus core of blackberry and cassis flavors. Less sappy than some of the other wines in this lineup, yet the fruit really ignites the palate. The tannins are foreboding and I wonder whether they will ever resolve (unchanged from an opened bottle after 4 days).* **90.**

2012 Domaine De La Tech Domaine Lois Louise “Twisty Ridge” Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.596, 166 cases, \$62. This very steep 35-acre vineyard sits above the fog line and is buffeted by strong maritime winds. The “Twisty Ridge” block runs along the upper ridge line at 1,700 feet and features a thin layer of topsoil over fractured rock. Dijon clones. Extended cold soak, whole cluster fermentation with native yeast, malolactic fermentation on lees and gravity transfer. The wine was aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 75% new, and bottled unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very shy aromas of black cherry, fertile earth and nutty oak. A gorgeous core of perfectly ripened boysenberry and blackberry fruits is framed by muscular tannins that are both fruit and oak in origin. Hard to ignore the enticing and boisterous fruit, but the wine lacks vibrancy.* **89.**

2012 Domaine De La Tech Domaine Lois Louise “Cote Sud” Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.571, 191 cases, \$82. The “Cote Sud” block clings to the south-facing slope on the Lois Louise Vineyard. Buffeted by strong winds from the Pacific Ocean 8 miles to the West., it features a thin layer of topsoil over fractured rock. Dijon clones. Extended cold soak, whole cluster fermentation with native yeast, foot crushing, malolactic fermentation on lees and gravity transfer. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 100% new, and bottled unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. An abundance of blackberry jam and spice aromas greet the drinker along with a bite of oak. There is an imposing attack of very ripe black fruits that have length as they expand in the mouth. The texture is quite velvety, yet the tannins are burly and astringent and imposing on the finish. The wine brings more appeal over time in the glass and shows more finishing fruit persistence the following day from an opened bottle.* **91.**

2012 Clos De La Tech Domaine du Docteur Rodgers, Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.50, 85 cases, \$102. From a 1-acre vineyard in the town of Woodside, a cool, somewhat protected site. Extended cold soak, whole cluster fermentation with native yeast, foot crushing, malolactic fermentation on lees, and gravity transfer. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 67% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. This wine has the most charm in the lineup with a mid weighted, satiny core of dark red and purple berries complimenting the nose of cherry and sous bois. A slight green herbal note from the whole cluster is evident. There are modest tannins and extraction and the wine finishes with purpose and juiciness.* **92.**



Domaine Della, Santa Rosa, CA


The wines are produced and bottled by Domaine Della Dale, Santa Rosa, CA.. The website is www.domainedella.com.

Winemaker David W. Hejl joined his sister and brother-in-law, Lee and Ernie LeRoy to found this winery in 2010. The name, Domaine Della, honors their mother, Della Winifred Dale. Hejl spent time at Kosta Browne Winery and you see that influence in the style of the wines.

2015 Domaine Della Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.0% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.64, 150 cases, \$60. Sourced from three vineyards. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 45% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. An array of black fruit aromas ply the nose with added notes of rose and oak. A big boy wine not for the timid with an onslaught of sweet black stone and berry fruits embellished with oak-driven notes of dark chocolate and toast. The tannins and acidity keep the fruit in check, and the high alcohol is not evident when the wine is cool, but the heavy fruit load obscures Russian River Valley typicality and is excessive for my taste. A good transition wine for previous Cabernet drinkers. 89.*

2015 Domaine Della Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., pH 3.49, TA 0.62, 125 cases. \$60. Sourced from four vineyards. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 45% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. An array of aromas appear over time in the glass, including boysenberry, blackberry and brewed tea. Mid weight plus in style, with commendable vibrancy and lift and silky in the mouth. Flavors of black cherry and black raspberry dominate, with a deft touch of oak in the background, refined tannins and a decent finish. 91.*

2015 Domaine Della Keefer Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.0% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.62, 150 cases, \$70. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 45% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The black cherry and spice aromas reach for the sky over time in the glass. The silky mouthfeel seduces as does the luscious mid weight essence of black cherry fruit. Very charming, with subtle oak highlights, gentle tannins and a juicy, well-fruited finish. 93.*

 **2015 Domaine Della Terra De Promissio Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc, pH 3.46, TA 0.62, 125 cases, \$70. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 55% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Captivating aromas leap from the glass including black cherry, black raspberry, caramel and wine cave. An enchanting array of black fruits greets the palate with resolve, dances lightly on the mid palate, and slides smoothly off the finish. A signature Pinot that is very seductive in all ways including the silk and satin texture. Amazingly giving at this young age. 94.*



Fogline Vineyards, Fulton, CA

All wines reviewed here were produced and bottled by Fogline Vineyards, Fulton, CA..

2016 Fogline Vineyards Swan Block Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 23 cases, \$N/A. *Moderately deep pinkish orange color in the glass. A clean, crisp and somewhat rich offering with aromas of watermelon, blood orange, Rainier cherry and biscuit, and flavors of strawberry, orange peel, red cherry and dried herbs. This wine has enough body to match with substantial foods. 89.*

2014 Fogline Vineyards Starscape Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.65, 195 cases, \$45. Release spring 2018. Vineyard is located in the Middle Reach sub region of the Russian River Valley. Formerly Floodgate Vineyard. Clones 667, 115, 777 and Pommard. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry partner with spice and toasty oak. Nice flow in the mouth with polished tannins, showing good vibrancy and vivid flavors of black cherry and black raspberry, underlain with a compliment of oak. 89.*

2014 Fogline Vineyards Hillside Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 195 cases, pH 3.63, TA 0.603, \$45. Release December 17, 2017. Estate Hillside Vineyard. Swan, Mt. Eden, Pommard and 115 clones. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose reluctantly offers hints of black cherry, underbrush and vanilla. Rather closed, with a mid weight focus on blackest cherry flavor. Well-ripened fruit profile, with expressive tannins and a slightly astringent finish. A slight bit more expressive when tasted the following day from a*

previously opened and re-corked bottle but the tannins still stick out. This could benefit from cellaring for a few years and my score may prove to be conservative. **89.**

2014 Fogline Vineyards Fogline Neighbors Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.62, 245 cases, \$65. Release September 17, 2017. Sourced from Hillside Estate Vineyard and neighboring Sun Chase and Janian vineyards. Clones 667, 777, 114, 115, Swan, Mt. Eden and Pommard. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of underbrush, fertile earth and blackberry lead to a nuanced palate of flavors including black fruits, spice, oak, black tea, flower and dark chocolate. Velvety in the mouth, with harmonious tannins and a modest finish. Unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. **89.***

2014 Fogline Vineyards Bacchus Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc, pH 3.57, TA 0.64, \$75, white wax capsule, embossed bottle. Released. 50% whole cluster clone 114 from Janian Vineyard and 50% stemmed Hillside Block (Estate) Swan, Mt. Eden, Pommard and 115 clones. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very ripe dark fruit aromas arrive over time in the glass. The good news is that the satiny texture is very seductive. The regrettable news is that the fruit has a roasted character and there is some alcoholic warmth detectable. When tasted the following day, the wine still showed extremely ripened, cooked fruit flavors. It doesn't seem this wine has anywhere to go. **88.***

Hirsch Vineyards, Cazadero, CA

All wines reviewed here were grown, produced and bottled by Hirsch Vineyards, Cazadero, CA.. The wines show the imprint of noted winemaker Ross Cobb. Several of these wines need time to rouse themselves.

2014 Hirsch Vineyards San Andreas Fault Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.7% alc., \$60. The San Andreas Fault lies 2.5 miles from Hirsch Vineyards and defines the soils, topography and climate of the site. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Aromas of blueberries, under brush and oak spice lead off. Light in weight, with delicate and forward flavors of red cherry, cranberry, raspberry, red licorice and dried herbs. Nicely balanced, with modest tannins and a red-fruited finish. A very elegant offering. A little more expressive when tasted the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. **89.***

2014 Hirsch Vineyards Raschen Ridge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.6% alc., 312 cases, \$85. Henry Raschen (1854-1937) was a painter of the American West and lived on a ranch that is now Hirsch Vineyards. From the highest elevation of the vineyards with merging heat and coolness, uplifting and erosion. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Inviting aromas of dark pie cherries, underbrush and fertile earth. Plenty of attack and intensity to satisfy, with flavors of blueberry, black cherry and Damsel plum. More savory and earthy than fruity with temperate tannins and a finish of exceptional length. The long finish really stood out when the wine was tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. **92.***

2014 Hirsch Vineyards West Ridge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.7% alc., 360 cases, \$85. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Initial aromas of mulch and terra cotta lead to aromas of cherry, black raspberry and spice. Discreetly concentrated, earth-kissed flavors of blueberry and cherry with an expansive mouthfeel. There is a note of iron and green pepper as well. Inviting harmony, with firm but integrated tannins, a silky texture, and a modestly generous finish. **90.***

2014 Hirsch Vineyards East Ridge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.5% alc., 528 cases, \$85. A selection of the very best barrels from the three oldest blocks on the ridge. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Upon opening the nose is quite primary. The following day the nose remained shy but better, offering aromas of purple berries and a hint of oak. A more masculine wine, with a firm tannic backbone, and mid weight flavors of purple and black fruits. Quite sappy and intense and long in the mouth, but still withdrawn. Much more expressive when tasted the following day showing an intense attack and mid palate presence. A little green, unripe character shows in the background. **91.***

2014 Hirsch Vineyards Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., 768 cases, \$85. A selection of the best barrels from the oldest and finest vineyard blocks at Hirsch Vineyards. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose entices with aromas of cherry and spice. Provocative flavors of cherry, purple berry and spice that are rich and expansive on the palate, finishing with purpose and persistence. This wine is more welcoming than others, yet has firm fruit tannins that need more time in bottle to assimilate. The very long finish was striking when the wine was tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. **92.***

2014 Hirsch Vineyards Block 8 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 360 cases, \$85. Sourced from a western ridge with a singular personality. The site contains more iron oxide soil unique within Hirsch Vineyards. David Hirsch calls it his Grand Cru block. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The fruit in this wine is riper and this wine shows the most grace and charm. Aromas of muddled black cherry, Dr. Pepper and mocha. Mid weight, earthy flavors of purple berries are framed by defined tannins for the long term. Smooth and gracious on the palate, with impeccable balance and a thread of "minerality" that adds appeal.* **93.**



Kanzler Family Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA

Kanzler Family Vineyards was established in 1996 in the Sebastopol Hills sub region of the Russian River Valley at the site of a former apple orchard. The first harvest from the 14.5-acre vineyard was 2000 and early on grapes were sold to Landmark Vineyards, Flowers Vineyards 7 Winery, Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery, Kosta Browne, Rhys Vineyards and CL Wines. Currently, they hold back more of the grapes for their own label, but still sell to Kosta Browne, Lynmar and Rivers-Marie.

The Kanzler family leases the Walker Station Vineyard, 3.2 acres of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay located in a cool area southwest of Forestville.

Alex Kanzler was 10-years-old when the vineyard was first planted. He followed a winemaking career after college in New Zealand, Oregon and back to Sonoma County. He assisted with winemaking at Kanzler beginning in 2011, and became the head winemaker in 2014.

A Rose and Chardonnay were introduced with the 2016 and 2015 vintages respectively. Current production is 3,500 to 5,000 cases.

All wines reviewed here were produced and bottled by Kanzler Family Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA.. Kanzler Vineyards was recently featured in the *PinotFile*: www.princeofpinot.com/article/1954/. The wines are sold primarily through a mailing list.



2016 Kanzler Vineyards Russian River Valley Rosé of Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., pH 3.16, 167 cases, \$N/A. Released April 1, 2017. 72% Kanzler Estate, 20% Walker Station, 4% Umino and 4% Mes Filles. Aged 3 months in neutral French oak barrels and gently filtered prior to bottling. Crafted using the saignée method where juice is bled from a fermentation tank and fermented apart as a Rosé. *Pretty in pink color in the glass. Soaring aromas of red strawberry, blood orange and peach that hold up over time in the glass. Welcoming in the mouth with fresh, crisp flavors of blood orange, Rainier cherry, apricot and white nectarine. Impeccable balance, finishing dry with some persistence.* **93.**

2015 Kanzler Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.55, 481 cases, \$56. Released April 1, 2017. Sourced from grapes grown west of Sebastopol: 60% Kanzler Estate, 20% Mes Filles, 20% Umino, 5% Walker Station. Early pick date in this vintage so less whole cluster inclusion (only 5%). 3 to 5-day cold soak, native and inoculated yeast fermentations. Basket pressed. Aged 14 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 50% new, and finished 1 month in stainless steel. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackest cherry, black raspberry and clay loam lead off. An attacking charge of purple and black fruits aim to please and the flavors last and last. The mouthfeel is velveteen, the tannins blend in inconspicuously, and only the slightest hint of vanilla suggests an oak presence. Can be drunk now or aged for several years.* **91.**

2015 Kanzler Estate Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$78. Release September 1, 2017. Grapes exclusively from Kanzler Vineyard in the Sebastopol Hills of Russian River Valley. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is really engaging, with bright aromas of blackberry, blueberry-pomegranate, spice and underbrush. Excellent grip and intensity in a mid weight plus, ripely fruited style. More sap, more flavor delivery, but also more apparent alcohol compared to the RRV bottling. Satiny in the mouth with ingrained tannins, satisfying acidity and a notable finish. Undoubtedly, this wine will benefit from more time in the cellar.* **93.**



2015 Kanzler Walker Station Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$N/A. Release September 1, 2017. This 3-acre vineyard is planted in Goldridge soil in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of black fruits and earthy flora. A huge wine with an explosion of boysenberry and black raspberry sappy fruit that floods the palate. The tannins are majestic as well but the wine has some tension to counteract the prodigious tannins. Oak is integrated. Both tannins and a little alcoholic warmth stick out on the finish. A bit over-the-top for my taste.* **89.**

Lucienne, Soledad, CA

Lucienne is a winery within a winery - an estate producer of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay within Hahn Estates. Owned by Nicholas Lucien Hahn, this winery is based in a separate facility. The name is from Nicholas Hahn's middle name Lucien, but in the feminine form to honor the mountain range where the winery's vineyards are planted. Santa Lucia was a saint who wore a crown of candles on her head and that crown is depicted on the Lucienne label.

Paul Clifton, who gained his cool climate winemaking stripes at Bernardus Winery and Byington Winery, began at Hahn Estates in 2003 and soon became the Director of Winemaking.



Paul told me the following about the 2015 vintage. "The first three months of 2015 were a mirror of 2014 but towards the end of April below average temperatures remained over the Santa Lucia Highlands region into June. Gusty jet streams caused upwelling of very cold water in Monterey Bay. The wind and cold water impacted the Salinas Valley day and nighttime temperatures. As most vineyards were in bloom during that period, the cooler temperatures caused a lengthy set period. Needless to say, conditions were not ideal. We estimated that Pinot Noir yields were down 25%-30% compared to our 5-year average. The clusters were small with very small berries - just what growers cry about and winemakers rave about."

He continued, "We also experienced Pinot leaf curl and stuck caps, two conditions I have rarely seen. With Pinot leaf curl the growing shoot tips and juvenile leaves were frosted and dried up. These changes were

probably weather related. Thankfully, it was isolated to only certain clones on the estate properties and not every vine had it. Stuck caps refer to the cap on the pistil not completely falling off. This doesn't allow the anthers to release and fertilize the berry. The unfertilized berry develops no seed and the berry either falls off (shatter) or remains on as a very small 'shot' berry. The cause is due to moisture that moved through the vineyard at this stage of development. The result is a lighter crop due to shatter."


Harvest in the Santa Lucia Highlands was the earliest the winery had experienced and one of the lightest crops as well. Harvest started in mid-August and finished at the end of September for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Pinot Noir yields were 1.4 tons per acre and Chardonnay yields 2.9 tons per acre. Harvest was finished before it normally starts. Paul remarked, "The accountants and growers are cringing at the light crop, but the winemakers and consumers will love it."

The 2015 Lucienne Pinot Noirs show impressive balance, polished textures and the right amount of oak to temper the eager fruit. The wines are still young and with superb balance should develop further over time in bottle (all the wines tasted better hours after opening and the following day). These are the best group of Pinot Noirs I have tasted from Lucienne to date. Visit www.luciennevineyards.com. One Hahn Family Wines Pinot Noir bottling is included here as well. All wines are produced and bottled by Hahn Estates or Lucienne Vineyards, Soledad, CA. from certified sustainable vineyards.

2014 Hahn SLH Gabrielle Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$sold out. A barrel selection of the best of the vintage from estate vineyards. The name is a tribute to second generation Philip Hahn's mother, Gaby, who along with father Nicholas founded Hahn Estate. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, raspberry a hint of toasty oak are followed in the mouth with a mid weight core of flavorful Bing cherry fruit. Nicely balanced and forward drinking, with easygoing tannins and a compliment of toasty oak in the background. 89.*

2015 Lucienne Doctor's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.57, 1,530 cases, \$50. This vineyard is located near the center of the Santa Lucia Highlands 520 feet above sea level. Harvest Brix 24°-26°. Clones 667, 777, 115, 113, Pommard and Jardini. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 40% new, 60% neutral. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of black grape, black cherry, pipe smoke and wood. Luscious and bold on the palate yet not jammy. Flavors of black fruits, black tea and toast. Polished, with a satiny mouthfeel and nicely integrated tannins. This wine shows the most concentration and oak overlay of the four 2015 Lucienne Pinot Noirs. The wine needs a little more time to rouse itself. 91.*

2015 Lucienne Hook Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.54, 135 cases, \$50. The farthest south of Hahns four SLH vineyards, this vineyard is least affected by the cooling influence of winds from Monterey Bay. Harvest Brix 25°. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of red and black fruit compote and graham. Mid weight flavors of cherry and spice have exceptional lift and length. Very polished, with integrated oak highlights. The wine sported more aromatic interest and flavor expression when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

 **2015 Lucienne Smith Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.57, 2,230 cases, \$50. This vineyard sits at the highest elevation of Hahn's vineyards. Harvest Brix 24°-26°. Calera and Jardini clones. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 40% new, 60% neutral. *Invigorating aromas of cherries and spice. This wine has a noticeable juiciness and spring in its step. Fresh, clean flavor of dark red, spiced cherry in a middleweight style with a luxurious, comforting texture like a Nike Dry Fit shirt. Complimentary notes of mocha and vanilla join the tasty fruit flavors. The finish is extended and generous, and the final impression is one of thankful harmony. 94.*





2015 Lucienne Lone Oak Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.67, TA 0.55, 644 cases, \$50. This wine is from a 20-acre vineyard located at the northern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands. It experiences the strongest maritime influence of all of Hahn's vineyards and the coolest growing season. Harvest Brix 24°-25.5°. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Enticing aromas of cherry, red berry, spice and toast. The delicious dark cherry core really alerts the taste buds. Very polished, even slinky, with a subtle swirl of toasty oak and brown spices. The gossamer tannins make for seductive drinking and the persistent finish is the most striking of the four 2015 Lucienne Pinot Noirs. This wine is quintessential Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir.* **95.**

Reichwage Winery, Sebastopol, CA

The Twin Hills Ranch in Sebastopol was established in 1942-1947 by Darrel Hurst who planted mostly Gravenstein apples. The name, "Twin Hills," refers to the two main ridges that run through the Sebastopol Hills sub region, Pleasant Hill and Spring Hill (aka Sexton Hill). During WW II, Twin Hill Ranch supplied dried apples to the troops. In 1998, Darrel Hurst passed away and his son, Ben Hurst, inherited the Twin Hills property. The following year, the first vineyard parcels at Twin Hills were planted to clone 777 and Swan selection Pinot Noir, and the grapes were sold to W.H. Smith Winery of Napa and Chasseur Wines of Sebastopol. In 2005, the expansion of the Russian River Valley AVA south incorporated the Twin Hills Vineyard and the surrounding Sebastopol Hills area into the AVA.

In 2006, the Twin Hills property was divided in half with the southern portion sold to David Bruce Winery in Los Gatos. An additional 4 acres of clone '828" were planted by Arturo Robledo. Ben Hurst sold the Twin Hills property to the Palk family of Sebastopol in 2010. In 2014, the Reichwage family acquired the Twin Hills property from the Palks. At the time of purchase, the property had dilapidated buildings and serious amounts of junk scattered about. Beneath the clutter, Max saw a hilltop property with ideal soils for grape growing and untapped potential.

Max has farmed the orchards and vineyards with organic materials only. The 8 acres of apple orchards were USDA certified organic in 2016 and the vineyards will likely be certified soon as well.

The property is now 20 acres, with 5 acres of established, dry-farmed Pinot Noir plantings and 4 acres of newer 2015 plantings including four clones of heirloom Pinot Noir and a .25 acre of Gamay Noir.

The vines are planted in Goldridge sandy loam at an elevation of 350-400 feet. Only 9 miles from the Pacific Ocean, the chilly microclimate is influenced by maritime cold air and fog.

Max Reichwage established the Reichwage Winery in 2014. The three wines reviewed here are Reichwage Winery's inaugural releases from the Twin Hills Vineyard. Visit www.reichwage.com to purchase wine.



2016 Reichwage Winery Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$24. After foot stomping, the grapes were whole cluster pressed. The juice was fermented with native yeasts in used French oak barrels and allowed to age on the lees for 6 months. *Light apricot color in the glass. Absolutely wonderful nose offering aromas of nectarine, strawberry, Rainier cherry and melon. Very accommodating, with fresh flavors of white nectarine, apricot, apple and cantaloupe. A bit of tannin adds texture and the lip-smacking finish shows good tenacity.* **91.**

2015 Reichwage Winery Twin Hills Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., \$48. Produced and bottled by Reichwage Winery, Sebastopol, CA.. Grapes were fermented with native yeasts, 15% whole cluster, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 12% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is primary even when sampled from a previously opened bottle the following day. Much more expressive on the palate yet still reserved, with a mid weight plus core of sweet cherry and blackberry fruits that are somewhat sappy. Earthy and savory, with substantial tannins, a spring in its step, and a generous, intensely-fruity finish. This wine needs more time in the bottle to rouse itself.* **90-91.**



Sonoma-Loeb, Sonoma, CA

Chappellet acquired Sonoma-Loeb in 2011, but Chappellet winemaker Phillip Corallo-Titus had made the Sonoma-Loeb wines since 1990. Chappellet's renowned vineyard manager, Dave Pirio, was added to the Sonoma-Loeb team. Phillip and Dave have worked together for more than a quarter of a century. Together, they added new vineyards and vineyard blocks to the winegrowing program and switched many of Sonoma-Loeb's contracts to acreage contracts allowing more control. This allowed the addition of new small-lot wines to the Sonoma-Loeb portfolio.

Phillip made subtle winemaking changes as well, including picking a little earlier to preserve more natural acidity and achieving slightly lower alcohol levels in the wines. He reduced oxidative techniques such as lees stirring and prolonged malolactic fermentation. A new barrel chai was finished in 2013, and barrel fermentations now take place at very low temperatures. Philip says, "We reevaluated everything to see if we could make the wines even more vibrant and delicious and applying the same dedicated focus on quality that had always defined Chappellet.

I believe the Chardonnays have been taken to another level (see the reviews later in this issue). The two Pinot Noir examples reviewed here show very ripe fruit picked at high Brix, with dense fruit extraction, and Visit the winery website at www.sonoma-loeb.com.

2015 Sonoma-Loeb Bateman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 169 cases, \$60. Vineyard is located in Graton in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley AVA. It was planted in 1999 to Dijon 777 and 115 clones in Goldridge soil. Harvest Brix 26,8°. Winemaker is Phillip Corallo-Titus, the winemaker for Sonoma-Loeb and Chappellet since 1990. *Very dark, inky purple color in the glass. The nose lacks aromatic inspiration, offering only a hint of cassis along with oak-driven aromas of dark chocolate and toast. A huge fruit load greets the palate, with a mixed bag of purple and black fruits. Tannins and acidity are in harmony, but the wine lacks nuance and interest. Unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Hard to know this is Pinot. May be a good transition wine for ex-Cab drinkers. 88.*

2015 Sonoma-Loeb Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 1,430 cases, pH 3.75, TA 0.61, 1,430 cases, \$40. Dijon clones 667, 777 and 115. Harvest Brix 25.2°. Wild and inoculated yeast fermentation, cap managed with punch downs and pump overs, and aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Hard to find descriptors for the nose as there is little find other than a whiff of oak, even when checked the following day from a previously opened bottle. The wine offers a load of purple and black fruits with a green thread in the background. Difficult to be highly complimentary other than the tannins are supportive. The wine lacks a Pinot message. 87.*

Three Sticks, Sonoma, CA

These 2015 vintage Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays represent winemaker Bob Cabral's first releases (Cabral had a 17-year tenure as winemaker for Williams Selyem before joining Three Sticks). Additional fall releases from estate vineyards include a Gap's Crown Vineyard Chardonnay (\$55), a Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$70), a Walala Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$70) and the first of the winery's Cuvée series - the 2015 Cuvée Eva Marie Pinot Noir from One Sky Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain (\$90). The wines are allocated to a mailing list.

The winery has partnered with El Dorado Kitchen and introduced new food and wine pairing experiences at Three Sticks at The Adobe in downtown Sonoma. A private luncheon (\$200 per guest) and small bites pairing experience (\$85 per guest) are offered Monday through Saturday for groups of two to eight by reservation. Traditional wine tasting is also offered throughout the week by appointment, starting at \$35 per person. Three Sticks at The Adobe is one of Sonoma's oldest and longest occupied residences and remains one of the last standing buildings from California's Mexican Period. Its transformation into the Three Sticks tasting room was directed by noted San Francisco designer Ken Fulk. Visit www.threestickswines.com.

2015 Three Sticks The James Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.49, TA 0.61, 732 cases, \$65. Released February 7, 2017. Grapes sourced from Rita's Crown, La Rinconada and Sanford & Benedict vineyards. Martini, 777, "828," and Mt. Eden clones. 25% whole cluster fermentation in open-top fermenters. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 55% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Bright aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, fertile earth and spice. Satisfying mid weight flavors of blueberry and pomegranate with*

a touch of spice and toasted oak. An earthy undertone pervades the background. The mouthfeel is silky and the wine finishes on a spirited cherry note with just a hint of dry oak tannins. 90.

2015 Three Sticks Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.58, 283 cases, \$65. Released February 7, 2017. Grapes sourced from vineyards north of Sebastopol. Clones 777 and "828." 22% whole cluster fermentation in open-top fermenters. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of Bing cherry, fruit bin and seasoned oak. The core of purple and black berries and black cherry is modest on the attack but satisfying. The wine is giving all it has but is not assertive. There is noticeable oak overlay that occupies the somewhat lengthy finish. 89.*

2015 Three Sticks PFV Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.60, 658 cases, \$65. Released February 7, 2017. 29% whole cluster fermentation in open-top fermenters. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. Swan, 115, 667, 777 and "828" clones. Sourced from vineyards owned and farmed by Three Sticks' owner Bill Price and his farming company Price Family Vineyards. Gap's Crown, Walala, Dupont and Durell vineyards make up this blend. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackest cherry, underbrush and new oak lead. Well structured, yet offering a gracious character, with mid weight flavors of black raspberry and purple grape. Nicely composed, with an oak thread in the background and some length and grip on the finish. 91.*

More Pinot Noir

2014 Anaba Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.62, 395 cases, \$52. Produced and bottled by Anaba Wines, Sonoma, CA.. Pisoni selection. Harvest Brix 24.3°. De-stemmed, 4 to 5-day cold soak, fermented in stainless steel, gentle pump over and punch downs during fermentation. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of mushrooms on the grill, earthy flora and cherry-nut cake lead off. Very elegant and cordial, with silky tannins backing a mid weight core of fresh cherry fruit. Very polished and charming, with a good spring in its step. There is an oak sidecar of note that is not intrusive, and the black cherry finish is notable. 92.*

2014 Fallon Place Herbitage Vineyard Los Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.718, 60 cases, \$36. Winemaker and proprietor Cory Michal. Grapes are a single clone sustainably grown from a single vineyard in the northern Carneros AVA. Aged 18 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Aromas of black cherry, dark strawberry, earthy flora and subtle oak. Very delicate, easygoing and elegant in style, even a bit shallow on the mid palate and finish. Juicy, with flavors of red cherry, spice and dried herbs. A solid quaff that lacks initiative. 88.*

2015 Frank Family Vineyards Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.56, \$. Produced and bottled by Frank Family Vineyards, Calistoga, CA.. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 33% new and 67% once and twice-filled. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Soaring aromas of black strawberry, black cherry, blackberry and toasty oak. Luscious in the mouth, with the mid weight plus essence of black cherry and blackberry fruits. Enters better than it finishes but still satisfies. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the oak overlay characters of dark chocolate, coffee and spice were more evident. 89.*

2015 Frank Family Vineyards Lewis Vineyard Reserve Napa Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.59, 1,000 cases, \$. Produced and bottled by Frank Family Vineyards, Calistoga, CA.. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 50% new and 50% once-filled. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of dark fruits and sweet oak lead off. Full-bodied and Syrah-like in concentration, with a no holds barred charge of purple and black fruits that thoroughly saturate the palate. The tannins are well matched and the finish is fruit-filled yet modest. The flavor profile is similar to the regular Carneros bottling, but ramped up fruit sap and oak. When sampled the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, oak notes of dark chocolate and coffee were prevalent. A wine for Pinot hedonists with a thing for oak. 90.*

2015 Fulcrum Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$N/A. Produced and bottled by Fulcrum Wines, Napa, CA. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Infatuating aromas of cherry, spice and earth tones. Delicious flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and candy apple. Modest tannins with a silky mouthfeel and the slightest oak enhancement. A very pleasant wine that is forward and giving, and an ideal everyday wine. The tenth vintage from Fulcrum and the wines keep reaching for greatness. 92.*

2014 Kitá Hilliard Bruce Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 12.8% alc., pH 3.80, TA 0.567, 217 cases, \$55. Produced and bottled by Chumash Cellars, Lompoc, CA.. Harvest Brix 23.0°. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 20% new, 80% neutral. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, cranberry and marzipan lead to a light weight styled wine with flavors of cherry gum drop, red berries and savory herbs. The fruit tastes riper than the harvest Brix would indicate. Silky in the mouth, with a pleasing cherry themed finish.* **89.**

2015 Lombardi Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.59, 200 cases. \$46. Grapes sourced from Petaluma Gap vineyards (Griffin's Lair, Sun Chase and Terra de Promissio). Calera selection, clones are Pommard, 667 and 777. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 18% new. Winemaker is Cabell Coursey. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is foresty upon opening (earth, wood and mulch aromas), with very pleasant aromas of black cherry fruit and spice arriving over time in the glass. Silky smooth in the mouth, with a sumptuous core of tasty blueberry and blackberry fruits that linger with intent on the finish. Discreetly concentrated, with suave tannins and balanced acidity. Considerably more appealing when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **90.**

2014 MacRostie Wildcat Mountain Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 1,100 cases, \$56, screwcap. Produced and bottled by MacRostie Winery & Vineyards, Sonoma, CA.. Vineyard is owned by Steve MacRostie and his partners Nancy and Tony Lilly. The vines are planted in sparse volcanic soils and must withstand the maritime breezes off the Pacific Ocean. Vines planted in 1998 and 2000. Dijon and Pommard clones. The grapes were gently de-stemmed into open-top fermenters, 3-day cold soak, inoculated yeast fermentation, cap management with a combination of pump overs and punch downs. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Cozy aromas of cherry, spice and worn leather. Elegant in the mouth in a middleweight style, offering an array of juicy, dark red fruit flavors accented with toasty, smoky oak. Silky and easy to cozy up to, with a finish that lingers appealingly.* **92.**

2015 Migration Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 12,840 cases, \$40. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new, 60% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of darker red and black fruits with a hint of tobacco oak. Sappy and somewhat dense core of very ripe fruit including blackest cherry and black raspberry flavors framed by firm tannins. The wine's best feature is the silky texture. A bit moody and reclusive, even when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **89.**

2015 Presqu'ile Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.56, \$42. Produced and bottled by Presqu'ile Winery, Santa Maria, CA.. Sourced from both the Western and Northeastern areas of the Santa Maria Valley (50% Bien Nacido, 30% Presqu'ile and 20% Solomon Hills vineyards). Clones are Mt. Eden, 777, Pommard, 667 and 115. 32% whole cluster fermented. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Inviting aromas of black cherry, tar, tobacco, dried rose petal and toasty oak. An explosion of delicious purple grape, boysenberry and tobacco flavor greets the palate and carries through to a lingering finish. Silky in the mouth with accommodating balance. Very nice whole cluster compliment in this wine.* **91.**



2015 Sarah's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 160 cases, \$38. Sourced from White Sage Ranch and Tondre Grapefield. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of cherry and sandalwood in a light to mid weight styled wine that is juicy and vibrant. Hints of savory herbs and tobacco oak ply the background. Elegant tannins make for early and easy drink ability.* **90.**



2015 Sarah's Vineyard Santa Clara Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 557 cases, \$25. Produced and bottled by Sarah's Vineyard, Gilroy, CA.. Estate grown on Dwarf Oak Vineyard. Clones 667, 777, 115 and "DRC." 100% de-stemmed and whole berry native and inoculated yeast fermented in small lots, punched down by hand, and aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. A lighter weight offering, with pleasing aromas of cherry, raspberry, sandalwood and forest path, and flavors of confected cherry drop, raspberry and brown spice. Clean and harmonious, with gentle tannins, gossamer oak, and some finish. Easy*



to like and a very good value. 89.



2015 Sean Thackrey Andromeda Devil's Gulch Ranch Marin County Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 329 cases, \$60. Produced and bottled by Sean Thackrey, Bolinas, CA. Grower Mark Pasternak only sells Pinot Noir grapes to Sean Thackrey and Dan Goldfield for vineyard-designated bottlings. Devil's Gulch Vineyard is located above Nicasio and is one of the cooler and windier Pinot Noir growing sites in California. Yields are small due to wind that interferes with pollination, often less than 1 ton per acre. Thackrey aims for a wine "that is uniquely expressive and one that is wilder and more mysterious and not meant to be light and simple." Aged 13 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. A very interesting nose with uncommon aromas of peppermint basil, herb-coated black cherries, peppered beef and earthy flora. Rather bold in a mid weight plus style, with generous flavors of black cherry, blackberry and brewed tea. Plush in feel, with commendable balance and with a density that does not sacrifice charm. A truly unique wine from a challenging site crafted by a contemplative winemaker.* 94.



2015 Trader Joe's Lot #79, Platinum Reserve Carneros Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 1,450 cases, \$14.99. Vinted and bottled by Carneros Cellars, Napa, CA. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Upon opening, the nose is effusive with blueberry pie aroma but develops more oak notes of anise and tobacco over time in the glass. Soft and satiny in the mouth, with a decent attack of blueberry-pomegranate fruit flavor underlain with an earthy, mushroom riff typical of Carneros Pinot. A pleasant but not special wine, with adequate backing tannins and a modest finish.* 87.

Even More Pinot Noir

Nga Waka, Martinborough, New Zealand

Established at Martinborough in 1988 by founder and winemaker, Roger Parkinson (pictured below), Nga Waka is a family owned winegrower producing small amounts of Martinborough wine from estate grown grapes. The name is from Nga Waka A Kupe (The Canoes of Kupe). There are three hills that lie side by side like upturned canoes form the backdrop for the town of Martinborough. Legend has it that the hills were formed by the three canoes of the Polynesian explorer Kupe that were carried inland by an earthquake and came to rest in the valley behind Martinborough.

The Three Canoes and Three Paddles wines have recently become available in the United States through Canoe Wine Imports, Sebastopol, CA, and are worth seeking out. Visit www.ngawaka.co.nz.





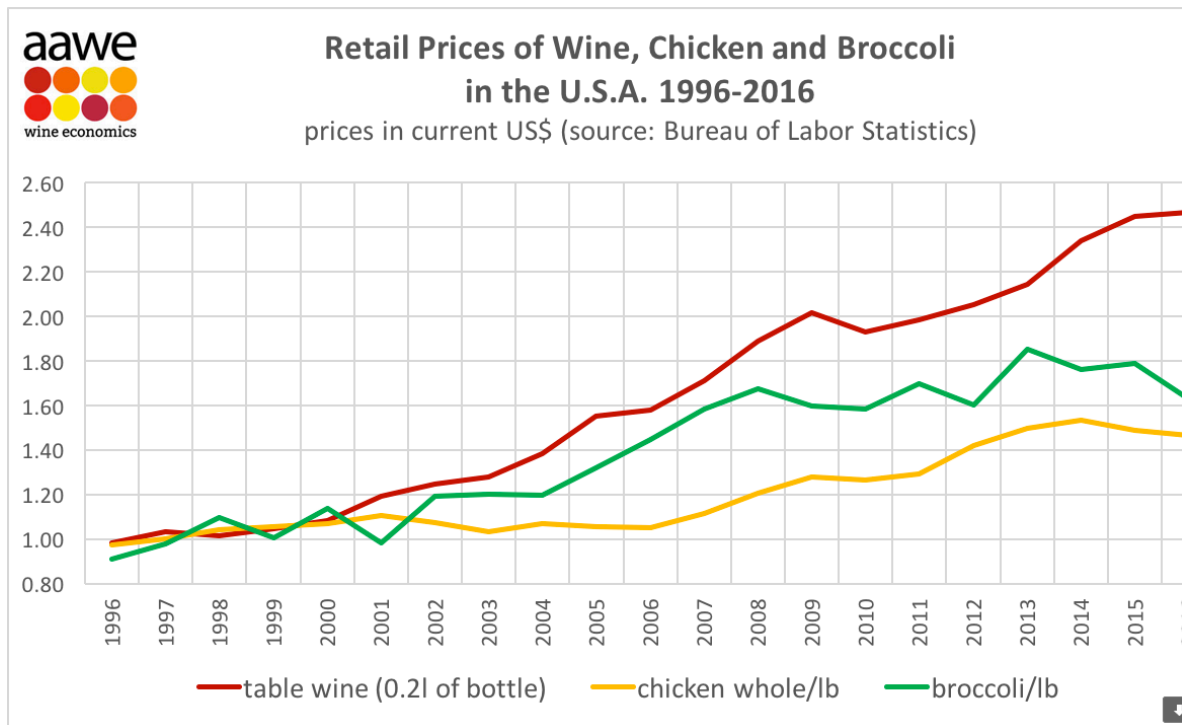
2015 Nga Waka Three Paddles Martinborough New Zealand Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.55, RS < 1 g/L, \$20, screwcap. Harvest Brix 23°-25°. 10% whole cluster. Total maceration 24 days. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 19% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Fruit aromas of black cherry and pomegranate are accompanied by savory notes of undergrowth and tobacco leaf. An easy drinking middleweight wine with good attack and finish, offering flavors of black cherry and blackberry. Charming, with silky tannins and noticeable toasty oak overlay.* **89.**

2015 Nga Waka Three Canoes Lease Block Martinborough New Zealand Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.60, RS < 1 g/L, \$40. Harvest Brix 25.2°. 10% whole cluster, total maceration 24 days. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 28% new. Vineyard planted in 1999 and this wine was sourced from a 1.8-acre block of Pinot Noir. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The aromas of black raspberry, blackberry, fertile earth and clay arrive over time in the glass and become quite enticing. Mid weight plus core of blackberry fruit is accented with notes of spice and ash. Well-structured in the typical Martinborough manner, with a generous finish that urges another sip. The wine picks up interest over time in the glass, and is an age worthy, exceptional offering.* **93.**



Transparent Pricing of Pinot Noir

California wine prices continue to rise along with the increasing overall quality. High double digit and even triple digit prices for domestic Pinot Noir are no longer a rarity.



A winery in Oregon, **Alit**, exposes the cost to make a bottle of Pinot Noir. Proprietor Mark Tarlov is selling his wines direct to consumer at a relatively lower price, offering a transparent look at what exactly a bottle of good Pinot Noir costs to produce. **Alit Pinot Noir** price is not based on scores or scarcity, but is sold at what the winery costs to make the wine, plus a small profit for the winery. The winery claims its wine would cost 3X as much if priced and sold in the traditional way. The 2015 alit Pinot Noir is sold only online in 3-packs with 3-day air shipping anywhere in the U.S. included at www.alit.wine. A Rosé and Brut Champagne are also offered.



For the 2015 alit Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, grapes were sourced from dry-farmed vines grown in volcanic soils. The wine was fermented with wild yeasts with 100% whole cluster, with no additives and aged 12 months in French oak barrels. The vintage is not displayed on the wine's labels.

The breakdown of production costs per bottle: (1) all-natural farming and fruit - \$5.66, (2) Alit's winegrowing and winemaking team of five - \$2.14, (3) winery and equipment - \$3.31, (4) French oak barrels - \$1.11, and (5) recyclable packaging - \$2.88. Total cost - \$15.10. Gross profit (45%) - \$12.35. Final cost \$27.45 plus S&H.

The packaging is very impressive with three bottles wrapped in paper in their own embossed box. Each bottle is rather heavy and closed with wax. I don't have technical information.



2015 Alit Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., \$27.45. Inaugural release from an organically farmed vineyard planted in volcanic soil. Wild yeast and whole cluster fermentation. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Leading off are aromas of red cherry and dried herbs. Black cherry and raspberry flavors are embellished with flower and herbal notes. Lightly fruited and forward drinking, with fine-grain tannins that create textural interest but stick out a bit at this young age. More enjoyable when tasted the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 90.*

A few other value priced Oregon Pinot Noirs from Ransom Wines & Spirits are reviewed here. Ransom has been producing small lots of Oregon wines since the 1999 vintage. Vintner Tad Seestedt is the one-man operation behind the label. The name, Ransom, was chosen to reflect the debt incurred to start the business. The wines are in retail distribution.

2015 Jigsaw Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., pH 3.80, TA 0.50, 4,149 cases, \$19.99, screwcap. Produced and bottled by Ransom Wine Company, Sheridan, OR.. Grapes sourced from seven vineyards, primarily in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. Harvest Brix 23.2°. Grapes 100% de-stemmed, into 1.5-ton open-top and large close-top fermenters. Average cold soak 4 days, inoculated and wild yeast fermentation for seven days with hand punchdowns. Aged 11 months, filtered and bottled. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very little aromatic interest, with only subtle notes of fertile earth, candy corn, vanilla and floridity. Slightly confected mid weight black cherry and cranberry flavors framed by noticeable tannins, finishing somewhat astringent. 86.*



2014 Machine Breaker We The People Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., pH 3.35, TA 0.65, 1,829 cases, \$29.99, screwcap. Produced and bottled by Machine Breaker, Sheridan, OR., a side project of Tad Seestedt, the mastermind of Ransom Wines and Spirits. Sourced from ungrafted vines on their own roots that were dry farmed. Six different vineyard sources, multiple clones. 100% de-stemmed into 1.5-ton fermenters. 2 to 4-day cold soak, inoculated and wild yeast fermentation, hand punchdowns, aged 11 to 18 months in 2-year-old French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, raspberry, underbrush and nutty oak lead off. Light to mid weight in style, with a flavorful fruit core of cherry and raspberry with a thread of dry herbs in the background. Nicely balanced, with modest tannins and a short finish. 89.*

2013 Ransom Selection Eola-Amity Hills Oregon Pinot Noir 12.6% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.62, 1,200 cases, \$27.99. Produced and bottled by Ransom Wine Company, Sheridan, OR.. Low yields, own-rooted and non-irrigated mature vines, all free run juice. Sourced from four vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills. Harvest Brix 22.4°. 100% de-stemmed, 4-day cold soak, inoculated and wild yeast fermentation for average of 7 days with hand punchdowns. Aged 12 to 16 months in two-year-old French oak barrels. Bottled unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose offers primarily stemmy, woody, and vegetal aromas with only a hint of cherry fruit. Light to mid weight flavors of red and purple berries with what can be described only as a grape popsicle taste. Also earthy and woody. The tannins are tame, the texture is appealing silky and there is some persistence on the finish. I just could not embrace the flavor of this wine. 87.*

One more wine to consider and recommended.



2016 Broadley Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$20. Sourced from several vineyards along with added estate fruit and vinified as a forward drinking, value priced wine. I tasted this wine with winemaker Morgan Broadley while visiting the Willamette Valley in late July 2017. 100% de-stemmed fruit. Wild yeast fermentation and aged 10 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Giving aromas of dark cherry and rose petal. Light to mid weight cherry and red berry fruit core with seamless oak backup, easy going tannins, and a juicy finish. Lively, fresh and open. Ideal for summer drinking. 89.*




Sips of Recently Tasted Domestic Chardonnay

2016 Decoy Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.5% alc., 61,000 cases, \$20, screwcap. Cellared and Bottled by Decoy, Hopland, CA.. Part of the Duckhorn Wine Co. portfolio. A blend of fruit from warmer Sonoma County appellations with fruit from cooler areas. Vinified in 10% French oak, 90% stainless steel. *Light golden yellow color with a slight spritz in the glass. Pleasant aromas of lemon-lime, applesauce and vanilla creme. Vibrant on the palate, with flavors of lemon, pear, butterscotch and caramel, as well as a subtle petrol note in the background. Nicely balanced with just a whiff of oak. An unpretentious daily drinker. 88.*

2015 Domaine Della Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.27, TA 0.62, 125 cases, \$60. Produced & bottled by Domaine Della Dale, Santa Rosa, CA.. Sourced from three vineyards including Ritchie Vineyard. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon rind, slate and caramel. A slightly reductive (matchstick) style, with appealing richness of lemon curd and pineapple flavors. Slightly viscous, endowed with bright with a sumptuous citrus-driven finish. 88.*

2015 Duckhorn Napa Valley Chardonnay 14.1% alc., 13,500 cases, \$35. Cellared and bottled by Duckhorn Vineyards, Hopland, CA.. Vinified by Renée Ary, only the fourth winemaker in the four-decade history of Duckhorn Vineyards. 90% French oak barrel fermentation with lees stirring for 10 months and 10% in stainless steel. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Clean aromas of pear, cut apple, tropical fruits and spice that fade some over time in the glass. The flavors echo the aromas in a fruit-driven style with some richness. There is a hint of salinity and the wine ends on a lemon-lime note. Somewhat shallow and less appealing over time in the glass. It seemed to me there may be some RS in this wine. 87.*

2015 Fallon Place La Cruz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.9% alc, pH 3.29, TA 0.69, 51 cases, \$38. Produced and bottled by Fallon Place Wines, San Francisco, Ca.. Aged 12 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Bright golden yellow color in the glass. Bright aromas of lemon, yellow apple, creme brulee and warm brioche lead to a nicely appointed core of lemon, pineapple, pear, and caramel apple flavors. The texture is slightly creamy and there is a briny hint of the sea. A richer, riper style that seems oak appointed even though only neutral oak was used. 89.* (A second bottle tasted had aromas of cooked tropical fruits and off notes. The wine was a bit flat on the palate and probably was corked although not evident to me aromatically)

 **2015 Frank Family Vineyards Carneros Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., pH 3.47, TA 0.64, \$35. The foundation for this wine is the Frank Family's Lewis Vineyard located in Napa Carneros near the shores of San Pablo Bay. 68 acres planted to Chardonnay and 10 acres planted to Pinot Noir. Other sources include Beckstoffer Vineyards and Hudson Vineyards in Napa Carneros, and Sangiacomo Vineyards in Sonoma Carneros. Barrel fermented and aged on the lees with hand stirring in French oak barrels, 34% new, 33% once-filled and 33% twice-filled. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Leading off are aromas of buttery brioche, lemon curd, poached pear, banana and burnt caramel. A rich and well-ripened style, yet easy going, with flavors of pear, yellow nectarine and cantaloupe embellished with meticulous integration of oak on the palate. Silky in the mouth with a modest, but juicy finish. 90.*

2015 Frank Family Vineyards Lewis Vineyard Reserve Carneros Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.32, TA 0.64, 1,000 cases, \$65. The Lewis Vineyard was bought by Rich Frank in 2000 and named for Paul Frank's son, Lewis. 58 acres are planted to Chardonnay in shallow and dense clay loam soils. Dijon clones. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 100% new. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. A more mineral driven nose and palate compared to the regular Carneros bottling. Aromas of lemon-lime, pear and apple are replicated in the flavors with added notes of green apple and a hint of smoky oak on the palate. Very polished and classy, with a glorious finish filled with robust apple goodness. 93.*

2015 Hirsch Vineyards Estate Ft Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 12.5% alc., 245 cases, \$60. Grown, produced and bottled by Hirsch Vineyards, Cazadero, CA.. Low yields in 2015 produced only 1.3 tons per acre. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Very shy aromas of lemon oil, pineapple and ripe apple lead to a moderately rich palate of lemon, pear and green apple flavors, infused with a steely bite of acidity. A bit too austere and hi-strung for my taste and a deviation from the style of this Chardonnay in the past. 89.*

2015 Kanzler Family Vineyards Walker Station Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.2% alc., pH 3.30, 98 cases, \$Sold out. Produced and bottled by Kanzler Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA.. Inaugural vintage for this new vineyard-designated wine. 3-acre vineyard located in Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Aged over 14 months in French oak barrels, 40% new, and finished 2 months in stainless steel. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Reserved aromas of lemon, lime and ocean breeze. Very pleasant in a mineral-inflected style with austere flavors of lemon, peach and yellow apple. Nicely balanced and easygoing, with complimentary oak, and a quenching finish.* **90.**



2015 Kitá Hilliard Bruce Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay 12.8% alc., pH 3.15, TA 0.0.645, 165 cases, \$30. Release fall 2017. Produced and bottled by Chumash Cellars, Lompoc, CA.. Dijon clones 76 and 96. Harvest Brix 22.0°. Lees stirring with no malolactic fermentation. Aged 6 months in French oak barrels, 14% new, 86% neutral. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of pear, green apple, lime zest and nuts lead to a reserved style most noted for its acid-driven minerality. Flavors of citrus and green apple carry through to a finish offering a tight cut of acidity. A bare fruit style that will appeal to aficionados of non-MLF and minimally oaked Chardonnay.* **89.**

2015 Lombardi Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.3% alc., pH 3.29, TA 0.68, 200 cases, \$42. Bottled by Lombardi Wines, Santa Rosa, CA.. Sourced from 3 Starrs Vineyard. Wente clone. Fermented and aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 18% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Slowly evolving aromas of lemon, petrichor and buttered waffle appear over time in the glass. More expressive on the palate, with flavors of lemon, poached pear and apple paired with a pleasing texture. An unpretentious, every day style.* **88.**

2015 Lucienne Lone Oak Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.61, 155 cases, \$40. Release May 2017. Grown, produced and bottled by Lucienne Vineyards, Soledad, Ca.. Harvest Brix 24.8°. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 50% new, 50% neutral. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Reserved aromas of lemon, pineapple and toasty brioche. Flavors of poached pear, cooked apple, yellow raisin and caramel offered in a rich and ripe style. Slightly viscous in the mouth, with an oak-infused finish.* **89.**

2015 Lucienne Smith Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.56, 170 6-pack cases, \$40. Harvest Brix 24.5°. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 50% new and 50% neutral. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The aromas of lemon curd, pear, white peach, buttery brioche and righteous oak maintain over time in the glass. Plush and velvety on the palate, with full weighted flavors of citrus, pineapple, cooked apple, white stone fruits and poached pear. Ripe fruited and almost syrupy in density, with embossed notes of caramelized oak. Well done in this flamboyant, Caliesque style.* **91.**

2015 MacRostie Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.2% alc., 954 cases, \$34, screwcap. Grapes sourced from Kent Ritchie, Martinelli, Mirabelle, Charles Heintz, Mill Station and Braughton vineyards. Gently whole cluster pressed, fermented and aged on the lees with occasional stirring for 9 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Enticing aromas of lemon-lime, pink grapefruit and ripe pear. Straightforward, but offering crisp citrus and white stone fruit flavors that are energized by good acidity. The wine finishes with a mineral oil taste.* **88.**

Migration, Santa Rosa, CA.

Migration, part of the Duckhorn family, was founded in 2001. It's roots are in the 90-acre Running Creek Estate Vineyard in the Russian River Valley, but Migration also sources premium grapes from top vineyards in other cool climate appellations including Dierberg and Bien Nacido in the Santa Maria Valley and Charles Heintz Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast.

Winemaker Dana Epperson tries to bring out the distinctiveness of each vineyard-designated Chardonnay. Dana's emphasis on terroir relates to her deep viticultural roots, including past positions guiding grower relations for both Jamieson Ranch and Artesa Vineyards. While at Artesa, she worked alongside former Duckhorn Vineyards winemaker Mark Beringer and in a way, studied the Duckhorn style before she joined the Duckhorn Wine Company team.

Along with the emphasis on singular personalities of her wines, Dana uses a light hand with new oak with moderate toast levels to make wines that are balanced with only oak subtlety framing the flavors. If oak or buttery notes scare you away from California Chardonnay, you will find these wines appealing.


All Migration Chardonnays are cellared and bottled by Migration in Hopland, CA..

Migration Chardonnay (and Pinot Noir) wines are sold on the website at www.MigrationWine.com.

2015 Migration Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.2% alc., \$32. 75% malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% new and 60% neutral along with 20% stainless steel. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Nicely appointed aromas of lemon pie, yellow stone fruits and caramel. Somewhat light and austere and straightforward, with flavors of lemon-lime dominating. Flavor notes of straw and green herb are found. The wine is softly textured and bolstered by a good acid spine. 88.*

2015 Migration Running Creek Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay 13.5% alc., \$55. 75% malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% new and 60% neutral along with 10% stainless steel. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Highly aromatic, with hi-tone scents of pear, white stone fruits, white flowers and lemon blossom. Bright and satisfying in the mouth with vivid flavors of lemon custard, pear, white nectarine and lime. Sleek and balanced, with only a whisper of oak, and a cleansing finish. 92.*

2015 Migration Charles Heintz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.5% alc., \$55. 75% malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in 90% French oak barrels, 30% new and 60% neutral along with 10% stainless steel. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Shy aromas of lemon oil, mango, banana and rain water. Full-charged on the palate, with a vigorous show of grilled lemon, yellow peach, pineapple and creme caramel flavors. A denser, riper offering that has appeal but lacks vibrancy. 90.*

 **2015 Migration Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., \$55. 75% malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in 90% French oak barrels, 30% new and 60% neutral, along with 10% stainless steel. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Fresh, clean aromas of ocean air, lemon, and vanilla creme. Very friendly, with noticeable vibrancy and finish, offering a bracing acidity that lifts and energizes the palate, leading the drinker to want more. The flavors of lemon-lime and white stone fruits are sustained and satisfying through a palate-cleansing finish. 94.*



2015 Migration Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay 14.1% alc., \$55. 75% malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in 90% French oak barrels, 30% new and 60% neutral, along with 10% stainless steel. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. More reductive on the nose, with aromas of flint, oil slick, lemon oil and white peach, becoming more appealing with swirling over time. Citrus-driven in a rather austere style, featuring earthy lemon-lime flavors set off by notes of white stone fruits and nutty oak. The slightly creamy texture has appeal as does its mature quality. 92.*

2015 Presqu'ile Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay 13.5% alc., pH 3.35, TA 0.68, \$35. Produced and bottled by Presqu'ile Winery, Santa Maria, CA.. 100% estate grapes. Clones 124, 76, 4 (Wente), 131, 95 and 96. Native yeast fermentation, native malolactic conversion and aging on the lees. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 15% new and 85% neutral, and 6 months in stainless steel. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Shy but intriguing, with steely, stony aromas accompanying apple notes. A somewhat understated, citrus-driven style with bracing acidity leading to a soprano finish. Slightly creamy in the mouth with a hint of lemony sea salt. No oak character at all. 88.*



2015 Sonoma-Loeb Sangiacomo Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay 14.1% alc., pH 3.39, TA 0.62, \$27. The relationship with the Sangiacomo family dates to 1990 and today sources have been expanded to include several of Sangiacomo's best blocks. Harvest Brix 23.7°. Fermented and aged on its lees for 8 months in French oak barrels, with full malolactic fermentation. *Light golden color in the glass. Complex nose offering aromas of citrus peel, apple, butter and lees. Somewhat steely on the palate, with refreshing flavors of grilled lemon, melon and pear. Very slight reductive note of flint is evident. Nicely composed with a good cut on the finish. 91.*



2015 Sonoma-Loeb Envoy Carneros Chardonnay 14.1% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.54, \$38. A limited production wine made from Wente, Hyde and Robert Young selections of Chardonnay from Sangiacomo Vineyard. Barrel fermented and aged 8 months on its lees in French oak barrels. The wine underwent partial malolactic fermentation. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Very fragrant with aromas of lemon custard, yellow apple, tropical fruits, and vanilla. Citrus-driven flavors of lemon and pineapple reflect plenty of California sunshine kissed goodness. Silky in the mouth, with enviable balance and some finishing intensity. 92.*



2015 Sonoma-Loeb El Novillero Carneros Chardonnay 14.1% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.56, \$42. El Novillero is a special cool, windswept section at Sangiacomo Vineyard with unusual for Carneros gravelly, rocky bench land soils. Robert Young clone planted in 1993. Harvest Brix 23.1°. Barrel fermented and aged on its lees for 10 months in French oak barrels, 50% new, with 100% malolactic fermentation. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Lovely aromas of lemon, banana and other tropical fruits, creme brulee, and subtle toasty oak. Somewhat lush, seamless and seductive due its clean and fresh character, offering flavors of lemon, Golden Delicious apple, and golden pear. There is deft oak management and a long lemon-infused finish. A connoisseur's Chardonnay. 94.*



2015 Three Sticks Origin Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.4% alc., pH 3.58, TA 0.62, 398 cases, \$50. Released February 7, 2017. Old Wente 5 block and V9 Hyde block. Fermented in concrete eggs with inhibited malolactic fermentation. Aged 11 months in stainless steel. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon curd, pineapple, green apple, vanilla, straw and wet clay are quite endearing. Exceptional spirit and brightness, with flavors of lemon, white peach, pineapple and apple unplugged from oak. The slightest tannins are evident in this edgy and mildly steely wine that has some finish persistence. 93.*



2015 Three Sticks One Sky Sonoma Mountain Chardonnay 14.2% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.63, 241 cases, \$50. Released February 7, 2017. Old Wente selection grown at 900 to 1,100 feet elevation in red iron volcanic soil over calcareous strata. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 60% new with 100% malolactic fermentation. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Compared to Origin, this wine is softer and more mellow.*

Aromas of lemon oil, toasty brioche and creme brulee transition to a rounded core of baked lemon, pie crust and blond caramel in the mouth. Slightly viscous with generous fullness and a righteous finish. The acidity is fully integrated such that the wine is soft like worn Ugh boots. Oak checks in but enhances rather than leads. 94.



Dutton-Goldfield Wines are Consistently Top Shelf

Valerie Wathen of Dutton-Goldfield Winery recently hosted me for a vineyards tour with Steve Dutton and a tasting of some current Pinot Noirs. We spent some time at both Emerald Ridge Vineyard and Jentoft Vineyard, both in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley AVA. Emerald Ridge was planted in 2001 to multiple suitable clones and Jentoft to the Calera clone in 2000. As the vineyards have matured, the wines produced from these sites have shown special qualities. Emerald Ridge became a vineyard-designate in 2009 and Jentoft, a component of the special Deviate Sonoma Coast bottling, is now being considered for vineyard-designation.

Dutton-Goldfield represents a unique collaboration between fifth-generation farmer, Steve Dutton, and veteran winemaker Dan Goldfield. The two longtime friends and colleagues began their winery with a handshake in a vineyard on 1998. Steve Dutton's father, Warren Dutton, grew Pinot Noir and Chardonnay beginning in the mid-1960s in the cooler, western part of Sonoma County. Today, along with his brother, Steve manages over 80 separate vineyards comprising more than 1,100 acres. Dan Goldfield graduated from University of California at Davis with an M.S. in Enology in 1986. He went on to earn his winemaking stripes at Robert Mondavi Winery, Schramsberg, eventually finding a passion for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and became the winemaker at La Crema Winery and then Hartford Court, which was created under his direction.

Most of Dutton-Goldfield's vineyards are located in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley as can be seen in the map below. This area is located in the southwestern portion of the Russian River Valley and is one of the coolest AVAs in Sonoma County. Here, the predominant Goldridge fine sandy loam soils provide excellent drainage and balanced nutrients, and the vines benefit from the cool air and fog from the ocean through the Petaluma Wind Gap.



Dutton-Goldfield has a winning formula: carefully selected vineyards most of which are expertly managed by one of the proprietors and meticulous winemaking by the other proprietor who is a veteran of his craft. Visit www.duttongoldfield.com.

2014 Dutton-Goldfield Redwood Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.61, 278 cases, \$62. Inaugural bottling from William Wesley Vineyard located in the Annapolis area of the Sonoma Coast. Only 5 miles from the coast but at an elevation above the fog line allowing for enough gentle warming throughout the day for adequate grape maturation. Gravelly soil, close-spaced vines lead to low yields, thick-skinned fruit, small berries and concentrated fruit. De-stemmed, layered into open-top fermenters where a 5-day cold soak ensued. The wine was raked in March and barreled an additional 5 months before bottling. Total aging in French oak barrels was 15 months in 55% new barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Pleasing perfume of black cherry, dark red berries and baking spices. An impeccably balanced wine with delightful flavors of black raspberry and blueberry-pomegranate underlain with a riff of nutty oak and savory spice. Rather elegant, but with firm fruit tannins providing support. The finish is remarkable for its intensity and persistence.* **91.**

2015 Dutton-Goldfield Angel Camp Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.67, 240 cases, \$58. This 10-acre vineyard is owned by Dan Goldfield's good friend, Brian Zalaznick, who planted this vineyard in memory of his brother and family. It is located west of Philo on a scenic knoll overlooking the valley. An assortment of Dijon and heritage clones are planted - Pommard, '828,' and 667 are in this wine. De-stemmed, 5-day cold soak in small open-top fermenters, clones co-fermented. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. I loved the aromas of cherry and warm spices. The mid weight flavors of blueberry, pomegranate, cherry and spice are enticing. The tannins are very fine grained and gentle, a woody oak note plies the background, and the wine ends with a slightly tart, well-spiced red fruit array.* **91-92**

2015 Dutton-Goldfield Azaya Ranch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.59, TA .63, 184 cases, \$62. Vineyard planted by Mark Pasternak for the McEvoy family in Hicks Valley. 18-acres are planted to clones 667, '828,' 115, 777 and 2A. This wine contains '828,' 667 and 115. De-stemmed, 7-day cold soak in open-top fermenters, no sulfur dioxide at crusher to preserve delicacy. Initially aged in 45% new French oak, then blended in early spring. Total aging 15 months. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, graham and vanilla set the stage. Impressive cherry sap lifted by bright acidity and framed by tightly wound tannins. Impressive attack, mid palate presence and finishing power with length.* **92-93.**



2014 Dutton Goldfield Emerald Ridge Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., pH 3.67, TA 0.60, 646 cases, \$62. Vineyard planted in 2001 by Steve Dutton in Goldridge sandy loam soil to several Pinot Noir clonal blocks. This offering contains Pommard, 2A, 667 and '828.' De-stemmed, 5-day cold soak in open-top fermenters, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. A complex wine with an array of aromas including wild dark berries, cardamom spice, forest and floral bouquet. Mid weight styled juicy flavors of blueberry, dark raspberry and plum. Supportive oak with soft tannins and a quenching finish. This wine will benefit from more time in bottle.* **93-94.**



2015 Dutton-Goldfield Emerald Ridge Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (Tech data not yet available) *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of wild strawberries and cherries soar from the glass. Mid to full bodied explosion of fruit flavors that attack with length and purpose, finishing with a grand generosity.* **93-94.**



2015 Dutton-Goldfield Deviate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., Ph 3.49, TA 0.68, 406 cases, \$72. A followup of the first deviation from single-vineyard bottlings in 2013. This wine is a blend of two far flung Sonoma Coast vineyards: Jentoft Vineyard in Green Valley (Calera clone) and Putnam Vineyard near Annapolis. De-stemmed, 5-day cold soak in small open-top fermenters, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 55% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Earth, floral and foliage aromas compete with an array of dark berry scents that is intoxicating. Very smooth and sexy on the palate with vibrant blackberry flavor framed by ripe fruit tannins. Remarkable follow through on the intense finish that seems to last a minute. Still very young, but blessed with unbridled potential. You can plan a special dinner around this wine.* **95-96.**



2015 Dutton-Goldfield Devil's Gulch Vineyard Marin County Chardonnay 13.5% alc., 80 cases, \$N/A. This wine is to be offered to wine club members first in the fall 2017, but check with the winery for availability. A very limited bottling from vines planted in 1980. Aged on the lees in stainless steel. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. A very special, beautifully composed Chardonnay that is crisp, bright and juicy, even when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle that sat out on my desk. More pleasing pear and other orchard fruit flavors than citrus backed by an invigorating cut of acidity. 97.*



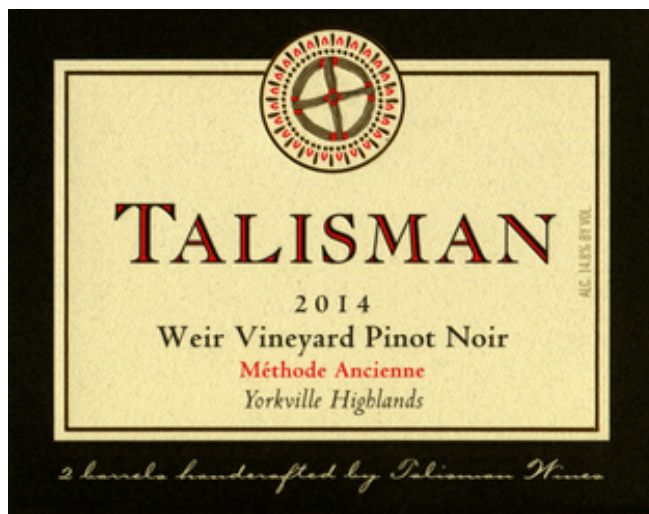
Talisman Wines: An In-Depth Tasting of 2014 Vintage & Older Vintage Pinot Noir

One of the great pleasures of exploring the the Pinot Trail is sitting down with a winemaker over an extended time at the winery, tasting and re-tasting his or her wines, and really delving into what the winemaker is trying to achieve. Sessions like this bring to mind this quote from Tim Atkin MW. "I believe that the place where a wine was made, not to mention the character, ambition and talent of the person who made it, is highly relevant to how that wine tastes. I want to know about these things, just as I want to know about vintage conditions, personal eccentricities and a winemaker's take on the world. All these things make wine different: all these things made wine special."

Winemaker Scott Rich and I have a friendship that goes back over ten years. His father was a physician and this has meant a commonality that we have embraced. I have always been intrigued with his Pinot Noirs since my first extensive encounter with them in 2006 when I experienced wines dating back to 1997. Since then, we have touched bases at many Pinot Noir events, but until recently I had never sat down for an afternoon with him at his winery and really got to know him and his wines.

Scott learned his craft as a research enologist for both RH Phillips and Robert Mondavi Winery and later under Tony Soter at Etude in Carneros. He made the wines and oversaw the construction of a winery at Moraga Vineyards in Bel Air in Southern California. As with many winemakers, his desire for self expression led him to start his small label with his spouse, Marta Rich, in 1992. Scott currently makes his wines in a tiny warehouse facility on Eighth Street in Sonoma with an office and war room above where we met to taste.

Talisman is a word for a charm and the Talisman logo on the label is a stylized medicine wheel, a representation of the paho, a Native American charm that has been imbued with the power to protect one from harm. The paho has the circle of the life and the four directions that show one's place in the universe. The rays around the edge represent the sun that gives energy for life on earth (and allows wine grapes to ripen). The name and logo was given to Scott by his Native American mother and is a tribute to her.



Scott's vineyard sources are truly unique for he is a lover of distinctive, challenging terroir. He says, "I like to express terroir - that is the beauty of Pinot Noir - and that comes through in the more extreme vineyards." Current production of vineyard-designated Pinot Noir is about 5,000 cases annually. Vineyards range throughout Sonoma County as well as Yorkville Highlands, and Napa Valley.

The tasting took place on May 18, 2017. The 2014 Pinot Noir wines had been bottled at the end of June and July 2016. The wines are still quite young and some are not released as yet for Scott strives to make wines that have age ability and need time in bottle for full expression. As Scott notes, "I make my wines to age, even if no one gives them a chance." In 2014, the stems were ripe, and although he always uses about 25% whole cluster in his ferments, four of the 2014 wines were made with 100% whole cluster and designated "méthode ancienne."

I had the opportunity to take the opened wines home with me and re-taste the 2014 vintage Pinot Noirs in my usual fashion four days after opening. My reviews reflect both impressions upon opening the bottles and re-tasting four days later.

2014 Talisman Gunsalus Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 392 cases, \$54. Vineyard farmed by retired research scientists Glen and Pamela Gunsalus. Vineyard was planted in 2001 in the Goldridge soils of the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Clones 114, 115, 667 and 777. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 44% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, savory herbs and spice. Deep cherry flavor with a savory herbs note in the background. Middleweight styled, with modest tannins, a bit of spice accent, welcome touch of oak, a soft texture and some finish. The slightest hint of alcoholic warmth is evident.* **90-91.**

2014 Talisman Gunsalus Vineyard Dijon Clone 114 - Méthode Ancienne Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 46 cases, \$75. Dijon clone 114, 100% whole cluster fermented. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass (slightly darker than the regular Gunsalus bottling). Inviting blend of dark muddled cherry fruit and savory notes of stem and mulch. Definitely different than the regular Gunsalus bottling, with a little deeper black cherry flavor, more mid palate presence, more lifted fruit, a little more structured backbone and more finish.* **91-92.**

2014 Talisman Red Dog Vineyard Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 366 cases. This vineyard is located above Bennett Valley on the northwestern side of Sonoma Mountain. A low yielding site exposed to the full brunt of cold air flowing off the Pacific Ocean. 800 feet elevation, planted in 2000 in loamy clay. Clones 115, 777 and Pommard 5. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Teasing aromas of black cherry and blueberry fruit with integrated oak, timber and spice notes. The lovely core of dark fruits including very ripe cherry and raspberry are accented with hints of clove and other warm spices that alert the senses. The suede tannins and plenty of finishing power leave an impression.* **92-93.**



2014 Talisman Red Dog Vineyard Honey's Cuvée Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 46 cases. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. Clones 115 and 777, 100% whole cluster fermented - méthode ancienne. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. More primary than the regular Red Dog bottling, but with deeper flavored darker fruits, a silky mouthfeel, and a delightful dark berry infused finish. A bit more rustic and savory at this stage, and more tannin, but with a generous finish. The wine needs considerable foreplay as reflected in the vivid fruit flavors assuming considerably more intensity over time in the glass. Best to cellar a few years.* **93-94.**

2014 Talisman Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 241 cases, \$65. This vineyard has the coldest nighttime temperature of all vineyards Talisman works with. Gravelly, well-drained loamy clay soils. 1,000 foot elevation. Clones 2A, Pommard, Romanée-Conti and Rochioli selections. Aged 21 months in French Oak barrels, 60% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Engaging aromas of black cherry and blueberry lead to a mid weight styled wine with a core of sweet and juicy dark red and blue fruits accompanied by a thread of herbal oak. Quite suave in the mouth with a glorious finish.* **92-93.**



2014 Talisman Weir Vineyard Méthode Ancienne Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 47 cases, \$85. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Sensual aromas of lurking dark red fruits. The bright and seductive dark red cherry core is underlain with a firm but not intrusive tannic backbone. The whole cluster seems to fill out this wine with goodness. There are accents of exotic spices, pine sap and burnt tobacco contributed by the whole cluster. The finish seems to go on and on. Hard to resist now, but this beauty will benefit from more time in the cellar as it is built for aging.* **93-94.**

2014 Talisman Adastra Vineyard Los Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 291 cases. This vineyard is organically farmed and certified CCOF by owner Chris Thorpe and son-in-law Edwin Richards. Talisman is the only winery to source fruit from this vineyard. Planted in clay loam soils in 1994 to 113, 115, 777, Pommard, 2A, and two unnamed suitcase selections. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 67% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Scents of spiced dark berry, fertile earth, rose petal and pine lead off. A husky, full-bodied style with concentrated flavors of earthy blackberry, yet not jammy with added notes of dark chocolate and floral goodness. Bold, yet juicy with an intensely black raspberry fruited finish.* **92-93.**

2014 Talisman Adastra Vineyard Méthode Ancienne Los Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 46 cases. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very ripely fruited impression on the nose and palate. Mid weight plus in style, with bright dark fruit flavors engaged with an exotic spice and floral note. Noticeable tannins, inviting oak integration, and an amazing finish that lingers with black cherry and black raspberry goodness. 92-93.*

2014 Talisman Jamison Valley Vineyard Destein Estate Bennett Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 59 cases, \$55. This vineyard receives the brunt of cool air thru the Petaluma Gap. Planted in 1996 at an elevation of 565-625 feet in gravelly, volcanic mudflow. Clone 777. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Embracing aromas of red cherry, dark cranberry, spice and floral bouquet. Plush on the palate, yet lifted with juicy acidity. Forward flavors of cherry and red berry with a spice back note and a refreshing finish. Still lovely when tasted four days after opening. 92-93.*

2014 Talisman Sadie's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 342 cases, \$45. Vineyard is located along Bodega Highway west of Sebastopol. Planted in 2009 in Goldridge sand loam soil. Pommard and Dijon 115. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, sage, warm spices and sous-bois. Mid weight flavors of red cherry and berry with a vegetal thread in the background. Bright acidity and balanced tannins with some persistence on the dried cherry fused finish. 90-91.*

2014 Talisman Wildcat Mountain Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 140 cases. Vineyard is located on the southern flank of Sonoma Mountain on the western edge of Sonoma Valley. Soils are volcanic - red, pebbly clay loam. Planted in 1998 at 750 feet elevation to clones 115, 777 and Pommard. Very cool site, exposed to foggy cold airflow from San Pablo Bay and the Petaluma Gap. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose is rather primary initially with delicate aromas of cherry, picking up intensity over time in the glass. The cherry essence is integrated with feral, game and floral notes making for an interesting drink. A little more tannin is evident in this wine. There is deft oak management and the finish has good persistence. 92-93.*

2014 Talisman Huckleberry's Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 140 cases. A 1-acre vineyard farmed by Bill and Lauren Hipp. Planted in 2004 at an elevation of 70 feet in Goldridge sandy loam soil. Clones 115, 667, 777 and '828.' Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose is engaging and special with aromas of cherry, exotic spices and underbrush. Light to mid weight in style, with well spiced cherry and blueberry flavors that are framed by quenching acidity. Well structured for aging. 92-93.*

2014 Talisman Rancho Estrella Vineyard Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc, 46 cases. Known as Star Ranch, this vineyard is located in a farming community in an obscure valley in Napa County. Planted in 2006 at 600 feet elevation in weathered thylite soils. Clones are Pommard and Dijon '828.' Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy, but pleasing aromas of redder fruits, earthy flora and green leaf. Light to mid weight in style, with flavors that echo the aromas. Dry, but not bitter tannins are quite noticeable. 89-90.*



2014 Talisman Starscape Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 338 cases. Vineyard is located in the Middle Reach sub region of the Russian River Valley. Clones 777 and '828.' Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 57% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Enticing scents of cherry, green tea, and floral blossoms. Noteworthy attack of mid weight black raspberry and black cherry flavors that really cling to the palate through the finish. Gentle tannins make for easy drinking. The most fruit forward wine in the lineup with the most striking finish replete with vivid fruit that hangs on for what seems like a minute. 93-94.*

Random choice of older wines.

2011 Talisman Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of cherry, cranberry, and dried herbs in an elegantly styled and polished wine with a juicy, cherry-fueled finish. Drink now to 2022. 91.*

2008 Talisman Huckleberry's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Exuberant aromas of blackberry, cola, rhubarb, prune, marzipan and spice. Flavors of black cherry and marzipan with melted tannins and a moderate finish. Drink up. 89.*

2008 Talisman Aداstra Vineyard Los Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Soaring aromas of dark raspberry, black cherry, warm spices and marzipan. Flavors of black raspberry, tar and tobacco backed by residual tannins. Holding nicely and can be drunk now to 2022. 92.*

2007 Talisman Red Dog Vineyard Dijon Clones Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Very vivid aromas of cherry, spice rhubarb and brioche. The core of oak-kissed cherry flavors is accented with baking spices. The tannins are refined and the finish is juicy. Holding nicely. Drink now to 2022. 91.*

2007 Talisman Red Dog Vineyard Pommard Clone Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Moderate garnet color in the glass. Fresh aromas of Bing cherry, spice and woodshed. Vivid black cherry fruit is embellished with oak flavors of toast and tobacco. This wine leans too much on oak that will never integrate. Drink up. 89.*

2005 Talisman Hawk Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. This wine has developed tertiary characters. Aromas of leather, potpourri, burnt tobacco and timber lead to faded fruit flavors with a bit of oak and olive flavor. The tannins are still notable but the wine is enjoyable. Drink up. 92.*

2003 Talisman Wildcat Mountain Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aged aromas of old leather and wood pile with dried fruit. More evident dried fruit on the palate with notes of brown spice and fruit leather. Still hanging in there but showing its age. Drink up. 90.*

1996 Talisman Los Carneros Pinot Noir *Grapes sourced primarily from Truchard Vineyard. Slight orange tinge in the glass. Aromas of orange peel, crusty bread and pickling spices. Still some black cherry fruit but it is dried out and fades rather quickly in the glass. The tannins have disappeared. Drink up.*

1995 Talisman Los Carneros Pinot Noir *Grapes sourced from Madonna Vineyard and Mueller-Mckenzie Vineyard. Yellow-brown cast in the glass. Aromas of marzipan and eucalyptus. Faded fruit trying to give its best, with a spice and leather accent, finishing with some grip. Drink up.*

Talisman wines are sold online at www.talismanwine.com. The Talisman tasting room is located at 13651 Arnold Drive in Glen Ellen where a personal comparative Pinot Noir tasting experience is offered.

Pinot Briefs

Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Paradise Revived in New Format The Santa Cruz Winegrowers Association (SCMWA) will hold the 13th Annual Pinot Paradise on Saturday, September 23, 2017, with a Pinot Harvest Dinner, and continues the weekend of October 13-15, 2017, with a Reserve Tasting, Pinot Picnic, Technical Pinot Noir Session and Pathway to Pinot Paradise Wine Trail. The event is now devoted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grown in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Pinot Harvest Dinner under the Stars will be held at Lester Family Vineyards, the Reserve Wine Tasting and Dinner at Hollins House Pasatiempo, the Pinot Picnic in the Park at Quail Hollow Ranch Park, a Technical Pinot Noir Session at Scotts Valley Hilton, and a Pathway to Pinot Paradise at the wineries in and around the Santa Cruz Mountains. Pre-event pricing for tickets is now in effect. For more information and to buy tickets, visit www.scmwa.com.

Oregon Wine Experience® Miracle Auction and Salmon Bake This gala event of the Oregon Wine Experience® will be August 26, 2017 from 4:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at the historic Brigham Knoll Campus in Jacksonville, Oregon. The Coquille Indian tribe will cook salmon over an alder and cedar wood fire and this will be accompanied by an extravagant outdoor buffet created by notable local chefs. The wine served throughout the dinner and Miracle Auction will be the Gold and Best of Show award winning wines from the Oregon Wine Competition®. The Miracle Auction sends 100 percent of the proceeds to Asante Children's Miracle Network. Over 100 wineries from across the state of Oregon participate in the week long Oregon Wine Experience®.



2017 WineSong The 33rd Annual WineSong event will be held on September 8 & 9, on the Mendocino Coast of Northern California. The Little River Inn will host A Pinot Noir Celebration on Friday, September 8, featuring wines from Anderson Valley and other renowned Pinot Noir producing regions. The WineSong Charity Auction & Tasting on Saturday, September 9, is held at the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens with all proceeds going to the Mendocino Coast Hospital Foundation. Tickets may be purchased at www.winesong.org.

Sonoma County Tourism Booming Last year new records for hotel occupancy and average daily room rates were set at \$166 from January to December 2016. Total travel-related spending in the county rose to \$1.9 billion, an increase of 5.7 percent over 2015, and the industry supports more than 20,000 jobs according to the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau.

Kosta Browne at 20 Years A recent article at www.forbes.com caught my eye titled, "Kosta Browne 20 Years Later." After very humble beginnings, the winery now produces at least 14 different wines with a total production of about 25,000 cases a year. In 2016, Nico Cueva became the head winemaker, taking over for Michael Browne. The winery has such exclusivity now that its winery in The Barlow in Sebastopol is not open to the public, although special guests can often land a tour. I have written extensively about Kosta Browne in the *PinotFile*, and my reviews go back to the 2005 vintage. I first got to know Michael when he was crafting Kosta Browne wines in the caves at Freeman Winery many years ago. Michael now has his own label, CIRQ, and just released Pinot Noirs under that label from Bootlegger Vineyard and Treehouse Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast. The Kosta Browne wines are only available through a mailing list at www.kostabrowne.com, as are the CIRQ wines at www.cirq.com.

David Adelsheim Sells Eponymous Winery David Adelsheim is one of Oregon's wine business icons, having run Adelsheim Vineyard for nearly fifty years. He has sold his ownership to Jack and Lynn Loacker, who have co-owned the winery since 1994, but will remain in an advisory role. Winemaker Dave Paige will be retained and will focus solely on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The winery has grown from an initial 19 acres to six estate vineyards in the Chehalem Mountains and annual production of about 43,000 cases per year. I am sure that David will continue to be an important supportive voice for the Oregon wine industry. Visit www.adelsheimvineyard.com.

Willamette Valley Pinot Noir as a Cultural Good Neal D. Hulkower used my tasting scores and prices to see if Willamette Valley Pinot Noir reflected its value as a cultural good. Hulkower determined that Willamette Value Pinot Noir satisfies Professor David Throsby's six cultural value characteristics. He concluded that Willamette Valley Pinot Noir is recognized by consumers as embodying some of the attributes of a cultural good for which they are willing to pay a premium. Read the full report in the latest *Oregon Wine Press* at www.oregonwinepress.com/wv-pn-as-a-cultural-good.

For What Its Worth Golden Gate Wine Cellars in San Francisco conducted a blind tasting of 2014 California Pinot Noirs, all rated 94-96 by Robert Parker, except Alma Fria that was unrated (I reviewed it in December 2016 and scored the wine 92). The tasting group consisted of 13 unnamed wine professionals. The lineup included Argot (RP 96), North by Alban (RP 96), The Hilt Vanguard (RP 94), Rhys Horseshoe (RP 95), Brewer-Clifton Hapgood (RP 96), Lucia Garys' Vineyard (RP 95), J. Rochioli Three Corner (RP 95), Paul Lato Seabiscuit (RP 95), and Alma Fria Holtermann (Unrated by RP). The clear winner was Alma Fria (\$64.99) with 7 first, 2 second and 2 third place votes. Paul Lato was second and Argot was third. Visit www.goldengatewinecellars.com.

California Highway 1 Discovery Route This route offers a fantastic wine experience and vacation any time of the year. California Highway 1 Discovery Route along coastal San Luis Obispo County features the Avila Wine Trail, the Pacific Coast Wine Trail, and many other winery experiences in Edna Valley, Arroyo Grande Valley, Avila Beach and San Simeon. Download the SLO Wine Map at www.winecoastcountry.com and visit www.Highway1DiscoveryRoute.com.

California Wine Production has Plateaued

Our Production Potential

Crop Year	Winegrape Tons Crushed or Estimated	AGG Estimated Bearing Winegrape Acres	Estimated Average Winegrape Yield
2012	4,018,237	525,000	7.65
2013	4,244,891	540,000	7.86
2014	3,894,397	550,000	7.08
2015	3,704,571	560,000	6.62
2016	3,907,860	573,000	6.82
2017*	4,204,800	584,000	7.20
2018*	4,226,400	587,000	7.20
2019*	4,204,800	584,000	7.20

***2017-2019 include attrition estimates**

Source: Allied Grape Growers, 2017 Annual Meeting Presentation

Interested in Canned Wine? Tangent now offers the first 100% estate-grown and SIP-certified 2016 Sauvignon Blanc and a 2016 Rosé made with multiple varieties including a splash of Pinot Noir. The wines are available in stores nationally for \$7.99. Visit www.tangentwines.com.

Folate Intake and Breast Cancer Risk The Alcohol Research Forum presented a critique of research to be published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* in 2017, titled "Alcohol consumption and

breast cancer risk by family history of breast cancer and folate intake in younger women.” Forum members considered this a very well-done analysis from the Nurses’ Health Study II, that followed young women for two decades. The main results of this study were that without a positive family history of breast cancer, there was no significant increase in cancer risk for any level of alcohol intake. With a positive family history, however, there was a tendency for higher risk with increasing alcohol intake; this increase was not statistically significant for those with high folate. **Forum members concluded that the results from the present study should greatly relieve anxiety about breast cancer for women without a positive family history of breast cancer who choose to consume light-to-moderate amounts of alcohol. For women with a first-degree relative with breast cancer, the data indicate that if they maintain a high level of folate intake, it may attenuate an increase in risk associated with alcohol intake.**

Live Longer by Moderate Drinking A recent study published in the July issue of *Health Affairs* indicated that moderate drinking (14 drinks a week for men and fewer than seven drinks per week for women) in combination with a healthy weight and avoidance of smoking cigarettes may add as much as seven years to one’s life. This long term survey of the health habits of Americans 50 years of age and older was studied. Obese smokers who drank heavily or not at all were the highest-risk group. The caveat is that this was a self-reported study that leaves open the possibility of inaccurate reporting, but there are many similar research studies in the literature to support the study’s findings.

Light Drinking Wine May Prevent Dementia The International Scientific Forum on Alcohol Research (ISFAR) recently published a critique of a meta-analysis of recent research on drinking alcohol and the risk of developing dementia. The meta-analysis found that light to moderate alcohol consumption (one drink a day or less) leads to a lower risk of dementia than total abstinence. The risk for dementia was higher for those who drank more than three to four drinks per day. There are many theories to account for the beneficial effect of alcohol on developing dementia but it seems clear that people who drink wine lower their risk of developing dementia. ISFAR members admit we just don’t know why this is true.

Health Revelations These comments have nothing to do with wine but bear highlighting. With all the emphasis on lowering cholesterol, there is no consensus based on all current scientific studies that lowering cholesterol through diet prevents heart disease. We have believed that lowering cholesterol would benefit health. However, although most of the diet trials have lowered cholesterol, this did not reduce mortality from heart attacks. The Minnesota Coronary Experiment actually found that the more men were able to lower their cholesterol, the more likely they were to die from a heart attack. This is not to say that you should ignore a significantly high cholesterol or LDL since that will most certainly require a combination of diet and drug (statin) therapy particularly if there are other risk factors. Also of note regarding diet is that based on papers of upwards of 500,000 people, no consensus association has been found between the consumption of saturated fats and coronary heart disease. Since 1970, Americans have been replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats, yet cardiovascular disease remains a leading cause of death among men and women. Don’t be afraid to eat avocado, eggs, cheese and nuts in moderation unless you are on a strict dietary regimen! Read more at www.medscape.com/viewarticle/882564.



Readers over the age of 35 (men) and 40 (women) should consider having a Coronary Heart Scan by Electronic Beam Tomography (EBT), especially if they have any risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, history of tobacco use, family history of heart disease, are overweight, or have significant stress. This test (photo of scanner above) can detect your risk for heart disease at an early stage. It is the only scanner FDA approved for coronary artery scanning and is the only scanner capable of capturing motionless images of the heart (the heart beats 60 times per minute, 3,600 beats an hour, 80,000 beats in 24 hours, and 2.5 billion times in 80 years). It is known as the “gold standard” for heart scanning. The test detects calcified plaque in the coronary arteries (a sign of atherosclerosis) and the resulting calcium score can be used by your physician for determining your risk for a heart disease event in the subsequent ten years, and for advising you about preventative measures. The EBT is inexpensive - \$125 - can be ordered by your physician, and is performed at imaging centers. It takes less than 15 minutes, needs no injection, and requires no significant undressing. It does involve some radiation exposure. Remember, that about 25% of people who have a heart attack have no predisposing factors and no symptoms. (Disclosure - I have no financial interest in EBT)

EBT Heart Scan: Early Detection of Coronary Plaque

Typical Progression of Coronary Artery Atherosclerosis (Hardening of the Arteries)

Early detection with EBT

Late detection with stress testing

CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE FACTS:

- 68% of Heart Attacks occur in vessels that are less than 50% blocked and are therefore **NOT** detectable by stress testing.
- 56% of patients who have normal thallium stress tests results can still have significant coronary artery disease.
- Two-thirds of heart attacks occur in patients who have normal cholesterol.
- The EBT Heart Scan can correctly identify and monitor those who should initiate drug therapies.

Commentary: Defining Great Wine

I read with great interest the provocative article by Remington Norman in Issue 56, 2017, of *The World of Fine Wine*, titled, "What Defines Grand Vin?" More specifically, I was interested in his comments that spew venom on many Old and New World wines that aspire to be great wines.

Norman doesn't appear to think that New World wines are deserving of the accolade "grand vin." He points out that most vineyards contain young vines (less than 20-25 years old) and as a result produce wines "dominated by varietal character rather than any other second-order qualities including site character." New World producers have an eagerness for professed site-specific wines "when there is little evidence of real qualitative difference." I agree that this is true for the majority of domestic Pinot Noirs, although I have had enough examples of certain vineyards to be able to pick up site-specific qualities in the absence of senescent vines.

Norman is also under the impression that red wines are widely burdened by the "unholy trinity: overripeness, over oaking and over extraction." He admits this "regressive religion" has infected both New and Old World wines. His subsequent comments are well founded: "Excessive ripeness delivers alcohol, extract and fruit character but at the expense of freshness, balance and texture. It also blurs site and varietal character. Wood can add welcome elements of sweetness or spiciness but needs careful attention if these are not to be overdone. Oak tannins are more durable than fruit tannins and thus affect how and how well a wine ages. Over extraction is often pursued in the wrong-headed belief that it is a substitute for natural concentration....and reinforces the idea that 'more' is 'better.' Great wines are generally understated rather than loud, restrained rather than strident."

He goes on to say, "High alcohol, 'gobs of fruit,' 'lashings of new oak,' and massive density may lead to show success, but they make for wines that are hard to drink with pleasure - the kinds of wines that consume the consumer before the consumer has had the chance to consume them." Norman lays blame in part on wine critics, "There remain influential commentators who still consider size as an indicator if not the prime determinant of quality."

I too am in the camp of those who prefer Pinot Noir to be fresh, sensual and elegant rather than extracted, tannic and over oaked. That said, there are winemakers who specifically prefer the well-endowed style of Pinot Noir for a number of reasons and consider their wines successes if they match the stylistic goals they set out to achieve. Norman notes, "Although style may not be in step with classicism and grand wines....the question of the relationship between style and quality remains contentious."

There are wines reviewed in the *PinotFile* that do offer dense extraction, ultra ripeness and high alcohol, and significant oak overlay. Oak should never stand out, even in a young wine. I am concerned that some of these heavily oaked wines will reach maturity with unyielding tannins. Some of these wines also reflect Norman's quip, "These are wines from everywhere yet wines from nowhere". I have checked, and many of these wines have received scores in the 90s in the popular trade publications indicating they are considered extraordinary or even 'great,' despite the fact that the wines have a lip burn at finish due to high alcohol, and/or a fruit compote character that seems out of place in Pinot Noir. Every Pinot Noir seems to get a score in the 90s these days with score inflation both a reality and a notoriety opioid for reviewers.

Norman admits that grand vin is beyond precise verbal definition, but lists a number of building blocks: (1) Balance, (2) Elegance/finesse/delicacy/subtlety/refinement, (3) Class/style/sophistication, (4) Concentration - depth of fruit not over extraction, (5) Complexity, (6) Length - length, particularly in mid palate, is a signal indicator of a great wine, (7) Persistence - desirable flavors or traits last on the finish, (8) Texture, (9) Freshness, (10) Power - a core of natural energy upon which high alcohol and over extraction have no bearing, (11) Weight - seamless integration of a wine's elements across palate gives impression of weightlessness, (12) Understatement, and (13) Age ability - truly great wines develop nuance over time rather than just enduring.

Perhaps we shouldn't waste time trying to conclude which wines are "great," or which style is the most preferable, and decide which wines gives us the most pleasure. Norman is spot on correct when he states, "What is beyond argument is that grand vin is not defined by style." Wines that may be stylistically considered unworthy of "grand vin" designation by some authoritarians may yet have features that offer *joie de vivre* and greatness in the eye of the beholder. On the other hand, a wine can be great even if the drinker doesn't like it.