



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir has  
more to say  
than other wines*

## Vertical Tasting of Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir



Several years ago, there was a unattributed quote on the back label of a bottle of Tantara Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir: "On some other planet encircling one of 200 billion stars in the Milky Way there may be intelligent life that has not heard of Pisoni Vineyard, but not on this planet." There cannot be any pinotphiles who have not heard of and sampled a Pinot Noir made from Pisoni Vineyard grapes.

In 1982, Gary Pisoni, who had come from generations of farmers who tended row crops long before he was born, realized that the Santa Lucia Highlands was a perfect setting for growing Pinot Noir and planted six acres of Pinot Noir and other assorted varieties on his father's 280-acre ranch. He was not the first to plant wine grapes in the Santa Lucia Highlands, but he was to bring the region notoriety unmatched by any of his winegrowing colleagues before or since.

Gary was a true visionary, planting Pinot Noir in a cool climate region that wine experts in the early 1980s considered only appropriate for grape varieties such as Riesling, Gamay Noir and Pinot Blanc. He had developed an interest in French wines in college and read any books he could find about Burgundy and Pinot Noir. After receiving his degree, he immediately headed for Europe, experiencing his wine epiphany over a Burgundy from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Legend has it that he surreptitiously brought back cuttings from that esteemed estate, rumored to be La Tache, and established what would become known as the "Pisoni clone" or more correctly, the "Pisoni selection," in the decomposed granite and sandy loam soil on the ranch that his parents, Jane and Eddie Pisoni, had purchased in 1979. The exact source of the Pinot Noir scion material remains subject to speculation.

The release of the 2012 Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir coincided with the thirty year anniversary of the original plantings, and the offering of that wine contained the following depiction by Susan Pisoni Tavernetti:

*"With his heart set on growing the heartbreak grape, Gary planted finicky Pinot Noir in the virgin ground among a small assortment of varieties. The rest of the story is the stuff of legend. Daily treks with a water truck from the Salinas Valley floor to irrigate the tender vines. Eight years of water witches and the drilling of five dry wells. On the sixth attempt, the drill bit penetrated seven feet of soil before grinding through 490 feet of solid granite to the elusive water source. Soon Pisoni Vineyards was designated on the labels of artisan California winemakers, touted as one*

*of America's '10 Great Vineyards,' and crowned the 'the grand cru site of the Santa Lucia Highlands' by Robert Parker."*

The original plantings were situated at an elevation of 1,300 feet above the Salinas Valley (one of the highest-elevation vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands) at the southern end of what is now the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. Once a water source was located, an additional 40 acres of Pinot Noir were planted in several blocks ranging in size from .5 to 16.8 acres with different trellising and vine spacing, using both own-rooted and grafted vines. Eventually 30 individual different blocks were established among 36 acres, each with distinct soil compositions and microclimates, but all benefitting from the fog and afternoon breezes that flow in from nearby Monterey Bay contributing to the area's cool mornings and nights. The vineyard is 100% sustainably farmed.



When Gary stepped into winegrowing in 1982, growers in Monterey County often reached for high tonnage and sold their wine in bulk to other counties. Gary chose the tack that predecessors at Chalone, Calera and Sanford had shown to be promising, that is, an emphasis on meticulous farming, focusing on quality rather than quantity. Gary's son, Mark, was to become the manager of Pisoni Vineyard. With a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of California at Davis and a Master's Degree in Farm Business Management from Cornell University, he was able to bring out the best in the site and foster the development of premium fruit that is among the most highly prized in California.

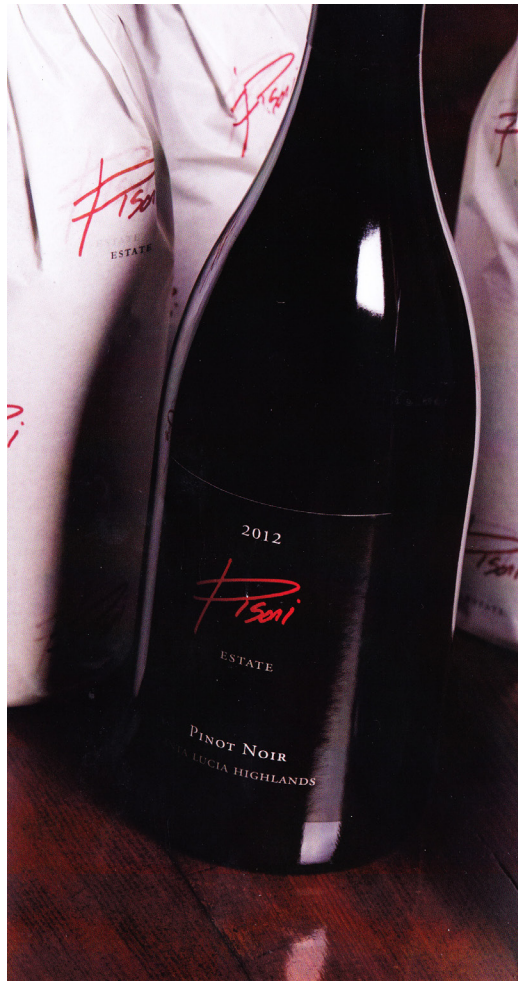
Gary's other son, Jeff, a winemaker who is a graduate of the Enology program at California State University Fresno partnered with Mark to create the Pisoni Estate label. The first Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir debuted in 1998. Early vintages were crafted at off site wineries by Marc Aubert and Vanessa Wong. Jeff became the winemaker for the Pisoni label in 2002 and the wines have been produced at a winery in Santa Rosa. The photo below shows (L to R), Jeff, Gary and Mark.





Jeff is also the winemaker for the family's second label, Lucia, meaning "light," that debuted in 2000. Some of the grapes for the Lucia wines are sourced from the Pisoni Vineyard, Gary's Vineyard and Soberanes Vineyard. The Santa Lucia Highlands bottling is made up of grapes from younger Pisoni Vineyard vines and blocks situated in valleys or lower lying areas along with some fruit from Garys' and Soberanes Vineyard. Pisoni fruit usually makes up about 50% of that blend. The valley blocks have more approachable tannins that is normally a great fit for the Santa Lucia Highlands appellation bottling.

The Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir is known to Pinot geeks as "Pisoni-Pisoni" to differentiate it from Pisoni Vineyard designated bottlings from other California Pinot Noir producers. The grapes for the Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir bottling are all "Pisoni clone," and are usually sourced from Big Block, Elias Block, and Lino Block. These blocks are primarily on ridges of the ranch, with vines planted in rockier, leaner soils that yield more structure and acid in the resulting wine.



I asked Jeff to outline the winemaking regimen for Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir.

*“We always use some whole cluster in varying percentages, usually around 20% to 40% with the amount depending on the vintage. Total time in tank is usually 15 to 18 days (slow fermentation is encouraged). We find that aromatics are most vibrant if the wine is not left on the skins too long after being dry so there is no extended maceration post fermentation. Fermentations are carried out with native yeast and native ML. DNA testing is done on the ferments to observe the diversity of yeast strains working in the fermentation. We recently moved to a new winemaking facility, and when testing, we were pleased to find several dominant strains that did not match any of the known strains in the ETS database, making our native strain feel ‘very native,’ and not from a localized domesticated strain. The wine is aged 10 or 11 months in French oak barrels, using three coopers that we work with very closely in developing stave seasoning and toasting regime. Finally, the wine is aged for 12 months in bottle prior to release.”*

Winemaking for the Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir has evolved in small ways over the years. Jeff summarized some of the changes.

*“Part of our philosophy is to always push ourselves for improvement. Most years we bottle several cases of trials and experiments that are in consideration for long term tasting evaluation. Wood tanks were incorporated as part of the fermentation regime a few years ago. A small amount of reduction is encouraged during aging, not enough to be a stylistic change, but to give the wine a greater aging trajectory. Malolactic fermentation is now allowed to go through at colder temperatures so it progresses more slowly. Medium toast has replaced a large portion of heavy toast in our barrels. Heavy toast is still important and works well with the uniquely high tannins that we have in the Pisoni Vineyard, but it is no longer a majority.”*



On the farming side, Mark has instituted a number of changes as well and the brothers are able to bounce ideas and make steady suggestions for improvements. Both Mark and Gary are vineyard managers.

*"We re-select our 'clone' for newer blocks, alter irrigation, canopy management and vine spacing and change how we work the soil of the vineyard floor. We are currently developing an insectary with native plants to increase the number of beneficial insects on our range. We take sustainability very seriously and this benefits grape quality both directly and indirectly. We have always been one of the earlier ones to harvest at the ranch. This is still the case, but we now also pick over a wider range of days and maturity levels, depending on the block. We do this to really fine-tune vineyard sections within a given block based on soil type and it also gives a bit more diversity in blending."*

I have been allocated Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir for a number of years and decided to taste an 11-year vertical from 2004 to 2014. These wines have all been perfectly stored at 55°F since release in my own wine locker. The wines were tasted upon opening, 6-8 hours later, and the following day from previously opened and re-corked bottles because sampling the wine the following day tells you plenty about age ability of the wine. Tasting a vertical is very instructive for it allows one an opportunity to: (1) Observe the aging curve of the wines, (2) Appreciate vintage differences, (3) Understand a stylistic continuum, and (4) Realize subtle changes in the wines due to farming and vinification methods. Each review is accompanied by brief comments by Jeff about the vintage, admittedly quite general, but may provide some insight. I added reviews of a few aged Pisoni Vineyard designated Pinot Noirs from other producers as well.



The mailing list to obtain Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir is filled and there is a wait list of several years. The winery is not open for tasting, but visits to the vineyard can be arranged by appointment. If not on the mailing list, look to auctions or the secondary market for the wine. Annual production ranges from 500 to 800 cases and the wine is currently priced at \$80.

While not the Pisoni Estate bottling, there are a number of select California wineries offering Pisoni Vineyard designated Pinot Noir and these wines are more readily available. These are remarkable wines in and of

themselves, and my experience over the years of tasting multiple bottlings is that these wines rarely disappoint and almost always score in the 93-95 point range. These producers include Bernardus (last vintage 2016), Capiaux, Kosta Browne, Miura, Patz & Hall, Paul Lato, Peter Michael (not vineyard designated but labeled “Le Moulin Rouge”), ROAR, and Testarossa. The reliable Lucia wines are widely distributed or obtainable through an open mailing list. A very limited amount of Pisoni Estate Chardonnay is also produced. For more information about Pisoni Vineyard, visit [www.pisonivineyards.com](http://www.pisonivineyards.com).

I can offer some general impressions from my tasting. The Pisoni Estate Pinot Noirs are powerful, potent and tannic wines, offering soaring aromatics that elevate over time in the glass and bottle. The tannins tend to be more noticeable in years with lower pH. The fruit core is uncommonly concentrated and ripe and is able to balance the tannic load in most vintages. The grapes for this bottling are farmed for good acidity, meaning these wines have excellent food compatibility, and in fact, these wines need to be drunk with and compliment substantial food. Over the vintages tasted, there was a tendency to have less oak overlay, presumably due to the decreased use of heavily toasted barrels, and the tannins seemed to be more refined and less aggressive. There was considerable vintage variation in the wines, a credit to the winemaker in expressing the terroir without sacrificing the expression of the vagaries of each vintage. Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir is a true California treasure that is a singular wine unlike any other Pinot Noir currently produced in the state.

As far as age ability of Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir, this depends on the person doing the estimating. Jeff recommends that the wines be drunk between 10 and 20 years after the vintage, although he points out that this will depend on personal preferences. He suggests that if someone buys several bottles, open one early around five years and spread them out from there to following the aging curve. I found that all wines from 2004 to 2013 could be enjoyed now, with the 2004 and 2005 vintages expiring. The 2013 and 2014 vintages require at least another two years for adequate approachability. My estimated drinking window for all the wines is included with the reviews.

The Pisoni family recommends serving Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir within a range of 55°-60° F. They also encourage decanting for 30 to 60 minutes. I did not encounter any sediment in the wines but this would be another advantage of decanting.

**2004 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc.. *“A warm vintage but many blocks were harvested before the heat waves. The wine had great acid levels and concentration.”* Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Upon opening, the wine offered a profusion of delightful aromas including blackberry, cassis, spice, vanilla and violet. However, the following day, the aromatic profile became much less charming, dominated by aromas of prune and very ripe fruit. On the palate, the mid plus core of black raspberry and blackberry fruit was concentrated and lush with a matching firm structure that was not imposing. The fruit was very ripe (*surmaturité*) and somewhat sweet and complimented by subtle spice and oak notes. The fruit seemed a bit tired when tasted the following day and the finish was slightly bitter. Drink up. **89**.

**2005 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc.. *“A cold year with a late harvest. Average crop levels and very slow development, but harmonious wines.”* Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant scent of black fruits, potpourri and vanilla. Rugged and unyielding on the mid plus weighted palate, becoming somewhat more giving and softer over time in the glass, yet still displaying noticeable tannin. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, oak dominated the fruit on the nose and palate. Much more enjoyable upon opening than when tasted the following day. Drink up. **88**.

**2006 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc.. *“A cool year with very high yields. A lot of fruit was removed to reduce the vines’ tendency for high yields. Tannins were firm and hard and the wines took considerable time to fill out after bottling.”* Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Upon opening, the aromas of black cherry, plum pudding and spice were quite appealing. The mid weight plus core of black cherry and blackberry fruit flavors were charming yet confronted by substantial tannins. Not overly sweet, with some length on the astringent finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the fruit had faded on the nose, the tannins had moderated some but still overwhelmed the fruit. Drink now to 2020, but will always be a tannic wine. **89**.

**2007 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc.. *“Cool season and average yields. A harmonious vintage.”* Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Brooding, but pleasant aromas of slightly roasted blackberry fruit along with notes of oak vanillin, and tar. Full-bodied, with an attacking and expanding core of very ripe, even prune-flavored fruit on the palate. Noticeable oak contribution, with a slight sense of heat on the



modest finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was unchanged, offering roasted fruit flavors including prune backed by modest tannins. Drink now to 2020. **87.**

**2008 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc.. “A very wet spring led to poor set and reduced yields along with considerable millerandage. The wine had more fine and supple tannins (less seed occurrences of millerandage). The season turned warm in August leading to an earlier harvest.” Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opened nicely over time in the glass, revealing aromas of black cherry, black tea and herbs. Full-bodied, with a very ripe core of plump blackberry and cassis flavors framed by substantial tannins. Earthy, primal, smoky, and herbal with a touch of iron and oak in the background. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine had mellowed, offering more expressive black cherry fruit aromas and a soothing texture. Drink now to 2024. **90.**

**2009 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc.. “A cool year with an exceptionally long growing season leading to very dense wine. Tannins were the highest among the 2004 to 2014 vintages.” Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black raspberry, blackberry jam and earthy flora lead to a dramatic onslaught of black cherry and blackberry fruit flavor. Very sleek on the palate, with corralled tannins, a touch of spice, and a juicy, fruit-driven finish of impressive length. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the fruit had faded a bit on the nose, replaced by aromas of nutty oak and earthy flora. The fruit load sustained on the palate with balanced tannins. Drink now to 2024. **92.**

**2010 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc.. “The first half of the growing season was cold and late. There was concern about reaching enough degree days for ripening, but hot weather appeared in July and August bringing harvest in early.” Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The aromas appeared slowly over time in the glass with swirling, offering notes of dark cherry liquor, nutty oak, spice and mocha (primarily oak-driven aromas). More integrated on the mid weight palate, with flavors of muddled black cherry and brown spices. Silky, with very modest tannins and some finishing power. The lightest in weight of the wines tasted in this vertical. Easy to drink now, but with too much oak overlay for full enjoyment. Drink now to 2020. **89.**

**2011 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc.. “Similar start to the growing season as in 2010. The second half of the growing season brought moisture and an even later harvest. A very challenging vintage that required extremely slo and patient vineyard work. Many passes were required through the vineyard with small scissors clipping out botrytis on a berry-by-berry basis. The preceding winter was also very wet which necessitated extensive canopy work.” Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Highly aromatic, with appealing scents of spiced plum, black raspberry and hazelnut. Very easy going with impeccable balance, offering mid weight flavors of blueberry and black raspberry, robed in relatively tame tannins and supported by complimentary oak in the background. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the aromatic explosion persisted and the wine offered remarkable pleasure. Drink now to 2022. **93.**



**2012 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc.. “A very moderate growing season with few weather challenges.” Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The aromas arrive slowly over time in the glass, revealing an array of black fruit goodness. Full-bodied, with a perfectly ripened core of blackberry, boysenberry, black tea and oak spice flavors in dancing in harmony. Tannins are evident but not intrusive, the texture is seamless, and the fruit-filled finish is remarkably long and intense. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine had maintained its excellence indicating a long life ahead. Drink now to 2026. **95.**

**2013 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc.. “The influence of warm winters and drought began to show. Ideal spring weather led to good fruit set. High potential yields required additional fruit thinning. The vines were more stressed, producing dense, but mature tannins.” Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Shy initially, but extremely inviting over time in the glass. Aromas of black grapes, blackberries and spice with cigar oak in the background. Intense on the attack, expansive in the mouth, with a luscious expression of blackberry and cassis flavors. Concentrated and bold, yet offering admirable balance of acidity and tannin. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the tannins were more imposing indicating the wine needs more time in the cellar to integrate the tannins and allow the fruit to fully rouse itself. Drink 2018-2026. **93.**



**2014 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 780 cases, \$80. Released September 2016. 24% whole cluster. Aged 11 months in selective French oak barrels, 61% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *“Early bud break from warmer winter. Fruit dropping required due to high potential yields. Harvest was early, but total days of fruit development was still long, with the growing season more ‘shifted’ from the early bud break as opposed to the season being ‘cut short’ by warm weather late in the season.”* Moderate dark reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely aromas of black raspberry juice, Bing cherry, vanillin and pain grille. The mid weight core of gorgeous black cherry and black raspberry fruits arrive with notice, expanding in the mouth and finishing with remarkable length. The wine seems crisper and less concentrated in this vintage, to the better, with a compliment of toasty oak in the background. The tannic structure holds the fruit in check, and the texture is appealingly silky. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was still captivating and quite approachable. A reference wine for Pisoni Vineyard. Drink 2018-2028. **95.**

**2007 ROAR Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc.. Dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is quite pungent with aromas of Band-Aid and sweaty horse (Brett). Dense and boldly concentrated, with a core of purple and black fruits that veer to the very ripe side framed by muscular tannins. A bit flat on the palate, with a compliment of nutty oak and some length on the sweet-fruited finish. Drink up. **N/R.**

**2009 Paul Lato “Lancelot” Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc.. Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Brooding aromas of blackberry syrup, dark chocolate and porto. Dense and rugged on the palate, with a mid weight plus essence of ultra-ripe dark fruits. The tannins are aggressive, making the wine unpleasant to drink on its own and needing a big steak to mollify. Drink up. **84.**

**2012 Siduri Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., screwcap. Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Little aromatic discovery, offering muted aromas of dark fruits and bark. Big, bold and masculine, with an array of sweet black fruits tempered by muscular tannins. Silky in the mouth, with a generous, fruit-driven finish of notable length. Drink now to 2020. **88.**



**2012 Kosta Browne Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc.. Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Engaging nose that draws you in with aromas of black cherry, raspberry and spice. Beautifully composed, with middleweight flavors of black cherry and black raspberry balanced by tame tannins. Nicely spiced with giving oak in the background, and seamlessly composed. A terrific wine that can be thoroughly enjoyed now but will age magnificently. Drink now to 2026. **94.**



# Pinot Noir Trends & Topics Looking Back at 2016

Looking back at 2016, I observed a number of trends and noteworthy topics reflecting the evolving domestic Pinot Noir world.

- (1) There has been a noticeable reduction in the number of previously popular Pinot Noir centric celebrations. Pinot Days has had events in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago but is now reduced to a single event in San Francisco. Pinot Paradise in the Santa Cruz Mountains was an annual affair with as many as 900 people attending, but is no longer held. West Sonoma County Vintners' West of West Festival had their last event in San Francisco in May 2016. In Pursuit of Balance held their last event in 2016 and disbanded. Pinot Family Reunion in Santa Rosa was last celebrated in 2014. Pasadena Grand PinotFest has not had an announced event since 2014. Affairs of the Vine annual Pinot Shootout was last held in 2015. The future of the Marin County Wine Celebration (formerly the Marin County Pinot Noir Celebration) is in jeopardy in 2017. Many of the Pinot Noir events that have soldiered on have gotten more expensive to attend and mainly attract the well-healed, baby-boomer consumer. The events have had to budget significantly less for media and press attendance resulting in feeble publicity. Winemakers have found that the large walk-around tasting events result in little post-event sales and have looked elsewhere to invest their marketing dollars. Wine critics do not find these venues to be ideal for serious wine evaluation.

## 2017 Domestic Pinot Noir Festivals

**World of Pinot Noir** Bacara Resort & Spa, Santa Barbara, CA, March 3-4, [www.wopn.com](http://www.wopn.com)

**Pigs & Pinot** Healdsburg, CA, March 17-18, [www.pigsandpinot.com](http://www.pigsandpinot.com)

**Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival** Anderson Valley, CA, May 19-21, [www.avwines.com](http://www.avwines.com)

**Santa Lucia Highlands (SLH) Gala** Mer Soleil Winery, CA, May 20, [www.santaluciahighlands.com](http://www.santaluciahighlands.com)

**Paso Pinot & Paella Festival** Templeton, CA, June 4, [www.pinbotandpaella.com](http://www.pinbotandpaella.com)

**Marin County Wine Celebration** June

**Pinot, Pigs & Poetry** Omaha, NB, June 1, [www.pinotandpigs.org](http://www.pinotandpigs.org)

**International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC)** McMinnville, OR, July 28-30, [www.ipnc.org](http://www.ipnc.org)

**Wine & Fire** Sta. Rita Hills, CA, August date to be announced, [www.staritahills.com](http://www.staritahills.com)

**Winesong!** Mendocino, CA, September 8-9, [www.winesong.org](http://www.winesong.org)

**Pinot on River** Healdsburg, CA, October date to be announced, [www.pinotfestival.com](http://www.pinotfestival.com)

**Big Sur Food & Wine Festival** Big Sur, CA, November 2-4, [www.bigsurfoodandwine.org](http://www.bigsurfoodandwine.org)

**PinotFest** Farallon Restaurant, San Francisco, CA, mid-November date to be announced, [www.farallonrestaurant.com](http://www.farallonrestaurant.com)

**Salud! Oregon Wine Auction**, Willamette Valley and Portland, OR, November date to be announced, [www.saludauction.com](http://www.saludauction.com)

- (2) Overuse of the term “Burgundian style” in winery promotional material, winery websites and back labels. This naive term is laughable because it is nebulous and has no definite meaning. It is used to imply a wine of better quality, since many consumers consider Burgundy to be the reference wine for Pinot Noir.
- (3) Pinot Noir rosé and rosé wines in general have enjoyed a surprising rise in popularity of late, but have you ever had a rosé wine that you swooned over or elicited emotion like regular Pinot Noir? Many domestic

wineries produce a few hundred cases each year to satisfy the rosé seekers, but at its average price of around \$18, rosé is a money losing proposition for wineries and very few produce it with serious intent.

- (4) I have been frustrated by writing about incredibly great Pinot Noir wines that most people can't afford and will never experience. Prices for high-end domestic Pinot Noir have been escalating since the 2009 recession recovery. I think many wine drinkers never sample an exceptional Pinot Noir and wonder what the big deal is about Pinot Noir. **The average price of the 2016 California Pinot Noir All-Americans was \$70.** Nine of the All-Americans were priced \$100 or more (about 12% of the wines).
- (5) Wines continue to be rushed to market by many wineries and reviews of these wines may occur shortly after bottling before the wines have recovered from bottle shock. Ideally, bottled wines should be reviewed initially at least 6 months after bottling.
- (6) The American palate has little experience with aged Pinot Noir. Most wine purchased is consumed shortly thereafter. There are practically no restaurants that offer any significant number of aged domestic Pinot Noirs on their wine lists. Wineries rarely hold back a library of wines for later release since it makes little business sense.
- (7) A number of wineries that previously had tasting rooms open daily are now catering to consumers through an appointment only model. Examples are Lynmar, Arista and Gary Farrell in the Russian River Valley. This weeds out the social drinkers who purchase little wine and allows the winery to focus their attention on serious wine drinkers who relish the personal attention and purchase more wine.
- (8) Inbox overload. Everyone receives too many emails, much of it unwanted or unsolicited. Wineries try to engage customers through frequent email information and offers but this tactic is ineffective because people are deluged with email advertising. In time they often unsubscribe.
- (9) Proliferation of second labels and retailer-specific labels continues. There are so many new Pinot Noir labels, I cannot keep up. Many premium Pinot Noir producers bottle inexpensive versions of their wine under a second label. Large wine retailers like Total Wine & More, BevMo! and Trader Joe's have multiple discounted and exclusive Pinot Noir bottlings that are unremarkable. There is no way to trace where these wines were actually produced or who the winemaker was.
- (10) There is a continued heightened superiority of Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir over other wine regions of California. **40% of my 2016 California All-Americans had a Sonoma Coast AVA designation.**
- (11) Curse of the wax closure continues. Wax closures are eye candy, but they are a pain in the ass when opening a bottle of Pinot Noir. Fragments of wax invariably find their way into the wine. Don't even think about bringing a wax-closed bottle to a restaurant. Let's outlaw them!
- (12) Cork taint continues in a small percentage of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay I opened this past year. I would say it is less than 3% although there are some bottles that I suspect are corked but cannot be sure since the taint is subtle and undetectable by my senses. Wineries that use screwcap closures continue to do so but I see almost no new winery conversions to this type of closure.
- (13) Sustainability is important but poorly understood by the consumer. It is defined as growing and winemaking practices that are sensitive to the environment, responsive to the needs and interests of society-at-large, and are economically feasible to implement and maintain. The Sonoma Winegrowers website states, "Sustainability is complex, but the results are simple - the land stays preserved in agriculture, people are trained, save and treated with respect and the business endures." Several regional sustainable farming certification programs for wine grapes have been established. Sonoma County has committed to becoming the first 100% sustainable wine region in the nation by 2019. However, many wineries claim sustainable practices are used to grow grapes and in the winery yet they have no basis of verification unless they belong to one of these certification programs. In addition, there is no clarity in the definition and scope for the sustainability concept and the certification programs are not necessarily comparable. Organizations in California include Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW), Sustainability in Practice (SIP), Salmon-Safe and Napa Green, and in Oregon, Low Input Viticulture and Enology (LIVE), Oregon Tilth, and Salmon-Safe. Look for the logos of these programs on the back labels of wine bottles as proof of certification.





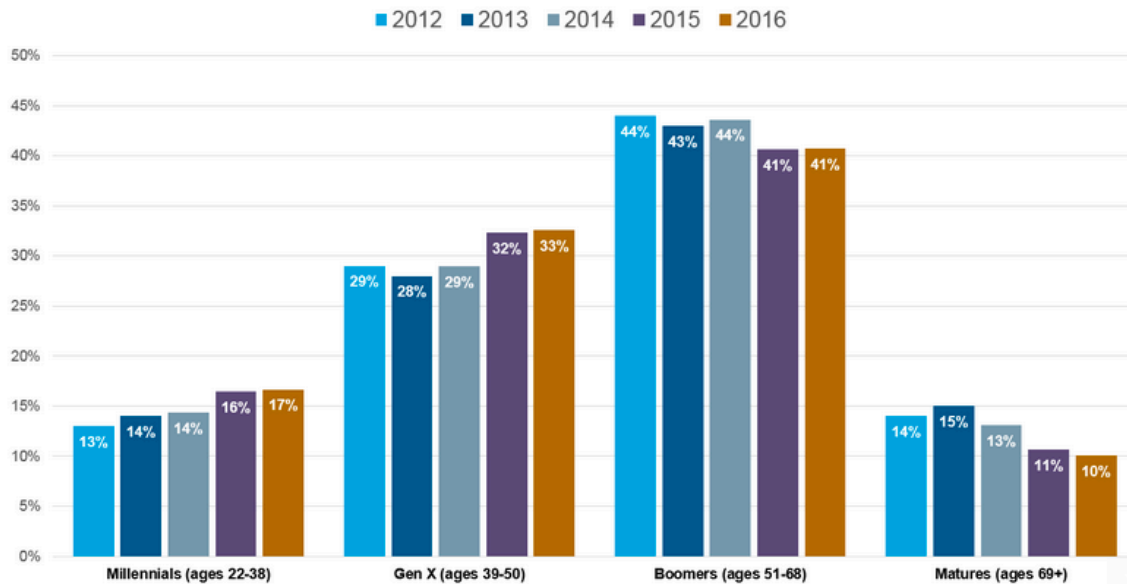
(14) I had the idea that it would be interesting to compare scores of Pinot Noir wines I reviewed in 2016 to reviews found in *The Wine Advocate*, *Wine Spectator*, *Wine Enthusiast* and *Wine & Spirits*. It turned out that I could find very few of the same wines reviewed by all five of these sources. Also, the project seemed to involve a complicated comparison since some of the other review sources do not have one individual doing all the Pinot Noir reviews. For example, domestic Oregon Pinot Noir is reviewed by Neal Martin, Central California Pinot Noir by Jeb Dunnick and Northern California Pinot Noir by Robert Parker in *The Wine Advocate*. Parker's tastings are usually in peer-group, single-blind conditions with some exceptions. *Wine & Spirits* has a screening panel consisting of retailers, sommeliers, winemakers and other wine professionals who send qualifying wines that are then blind tasted, rated and described by one critic (who is not named). For *Wine Spectator* reviews, James Laube is the California Pinot Noir critic and Harvey Steiman is the Oregon Pinot Noir critic. The wines are tasted blind with the taster's initials at the end of the tasting note (reviews without initials at the end of the tasting note were reviewed by two or more tasters). *Wine Enthusiast* employs Matt Kettmann, Virginie Boone, and Jim Gordon for California and Paul Gregutt for Oregon (the reviewer's initials are included in the review), although none of these reviewers concentrate solely on Pinot Noir. Wines are tasted in peer-group flights blind. Another major wine review website is *Antonio Galloni Vinous* that acquired *Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar (IWC)* in November 2014. Antonio Galloni covers Napa Valley, Sonoma, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz Mountains, and Josh Reynolds covers Oregon and the Santa Lucia Highlands. *Vinous* and *IWC* reviews are available on CellarTracker. None of these critics solely cover Pinot Noir. The method of tasting is not described on the *Vinous* website. Allen Meadows of *Allen Meadows' Burghound.com* is the sole reviewer for California and Oregon Pinot Noir. I am not sure if tasting of domestic Pinot Noir is blind.

(15) Whole cluster fermentation is a gamble, but when it pays off, the resultant Pinot Noir wines have more interesting nuances, more seductive aromatics, more textural interest and probably more age ability. As Laetitia winemaker Eric Hickey notes, "The hallmark of whole cluster wines is a signature burnt tobacco note entwined with fruit aromas and flavors. There is an extra layer of structure to whole cluster Pinot Noir. Whole cluster fermentation usually appeals to those who prefer a Pinot Noir with more structure and less pure red fruit on the nose." Many winemakers in recent years have moved away from fruity Pinot Noir by fermenting at least some percentage of whole clusters to impart complexity, tannic grip and savory elements on the palate. Personally, many of the greatest domestic Pinot Noirs I have encountered have had some whole cluster inclusion.

(16) Baby boomers still buy most of the wine in the U.S. according to SVB 2017 State of the Industry Report.

# Boomers still rule the wine market

## Cohort Share of Total Wine Sales by Year

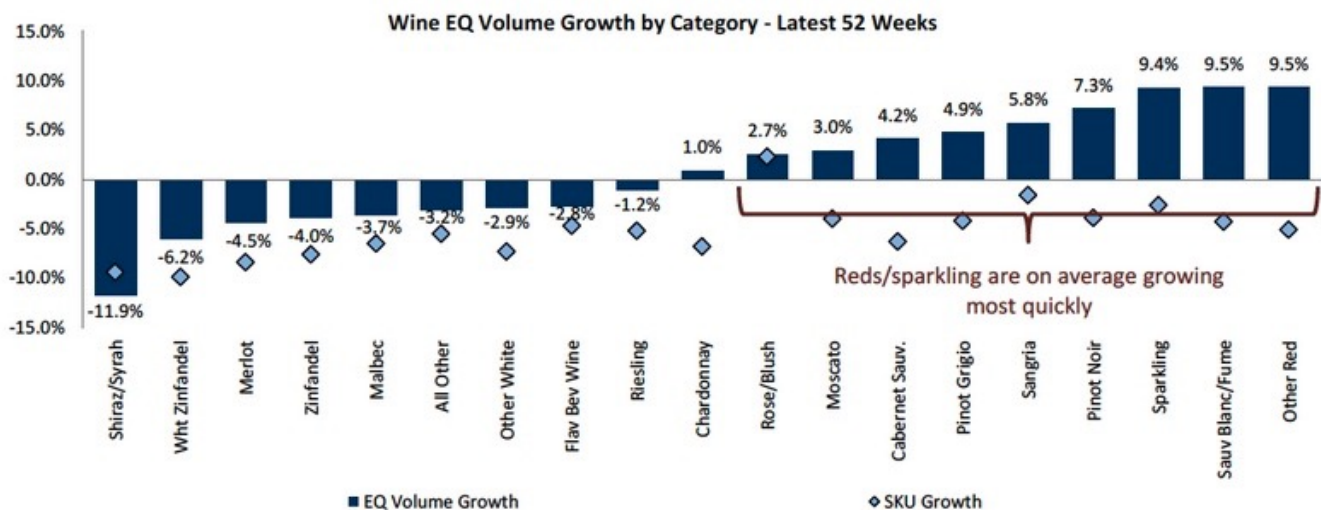


Right-click chart to view a larger image.

Source: SVB 2017 State of the Industry Report

(17) Red and sparkling wines showed most volume growth in sales over the past year with Pinot Noir the fourth highest growth.

## Red & sparkling wines dominated 2016 volume growth (but Sangria came on strong!)



Source: Nielsen, RBC Capital Markets – "Beverages, HPC & Tobacco – The Playbook for 2017"



(18) The decline of wine writing as a viable occupation continues. Jamie Goode published a post on his blog in December titled, "The ill-health of wine writing." He pointed out that there are very few wine writers who make a living solely on writing. He noted, "The big problem is the continued flight of advertising money away from professionally generated content (newspapers, magazines) onto platforms where the content is user generated (Facebook, Twitter, etc). There's no money left to pay writers." Jeremy Parzen, Adjunct Professor for Master in Food Culture & Communications at University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy expanded the discussion in January 2017. He points out, "Even at the peak of interest in wine writing in the late 1990s and 2000s (up until the financial crisis of 2007-2008), there were very few people who made a real wage through writing about wine.....Aside from a handful of full-time wine writers who still have positions with high-profile mastheads, I know very few people who make a living exclusively by creating editorial content about wine."

# Recently Tasted Pinot Noir & Chardonnay

## Alma Rosa Winery & Vineyards, Buellton, CA

It is important to pay homage to the pioneers of California Pinot Noir. Richard Sanford was the first to see the potential of the Santa Rosa Hills region for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and went on to establish a highly respected winery, Sanford Winery, in 1981. He established the Sanford & Benedict Vineyard and many consider the Sanford Sanford & Benedict Pinot Noir to be one of the seminal wines in California wine history. In 1983 he planted E Jabali Vineyard, the La Rinconada Vineyard in 1995 and in 2000, the La Encantada Vineyard. Beginning in 2002, a number of unfortunate events played out and Richard lost his namesake winery to his business partners, but retained ownership of the El Jabali Vineyard, assumed a lease on the La Encantada Vineyard, and began a new venture, Alma Rosa Vineyards & Winery, releasing his first wines in 2004. In 2015, Nick de Luca joined Alma Rosa as winemaker and works alongside Richard who is the director of winemaking. Richard and his spouse, Thekla, have shown an untiring devotion to charitable work and commitment to conservation, sustainability and altruistic endeavors. Richard was the first person from California's Central Coast to be inducted into the Vintners Hall of Fame. Visit the website at [www.almarosawinery.com](http://www.almarosawinery.com).



**2014 Alma Rosa La Encantada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.62, 596 6 bottle packs, \$55, screwcap. 100% clone 777. Harvest Brix 23.8°. Aged in about 25% new French oak barrels. Bottled fined but unfiltered. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Very enticing aromas of red cherry, raspberry and baking spices. Light to mid weight in style with juicy flavors of red stone and berry fruits accented with a pleasant earthy tone. The fruit has a slight confected character. Forward drinking, with admirable finesse, balanced tannins, a deft touch of oak, and a modest, but pleasing finish. 91.*

**2014 Alma Rosa El Jabali Vineyard Mt. Eden Clone Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.56, 1,324 6 bottle packs, \$55, screwcap. Harvest Brix 24.1°. 10% whole cluster, 3-day cold soak, aged 16 in 20% new French oak barrels and 2 months in tank. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, pungent herbs and mulch draw you in to the glass. Noticeable attack and finish and more savory character in this wine. Flavors of black cherry, blueberry, herbs, spice and dried rose. Still showing vigorous tannins even the next day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. A gutty and gruff but complex wine that will reward cellaring to ameliorate the tannins. 89-90.*





**2014 Alma Rosa Barrel Select Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$60, screwcap. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Demure aromas of black cherry, sous-bois and pungent herbs. The wine needs time to arouse itself, offering a core of well-spiced cherry fruit that is juicy and ripe. Somewhat elegant, with modest tannins, and complimentary oak treatment. Much better the following day, with brighter cherry fruit and spice expression, yet the aromatics still lag. Cellar this one for at least 2-3 years. 89-90.*

## Brooks Note, Novato, CA



**2014 Brooks Note Marin County Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.68, 250 cases, \$36. A blend from Chileno Valley Vineyard (46%) and Azaya Ranch Vineyard (54%). Clones are Wädenswil 2A, Dijon 115 and 667 (Azaya Ranch) and Pommard and "828" (Chileno Valley). About 10% whole cluster. 3-day cold soak, native yeast inaugurated fermentation, aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 27% new, 27% once-filled and 46% neutral. Bottled March 2016. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. I had to dig deep to pull out the shy aromas of earth-embossed cherry, plum, boysenberry, fall forest floor, and floral bouquet. Light to mid weight in style, with flavors of plum, red and purple berry and pomegranate. Sleek in the mouth, with supportive tannins, and good lift and juiciness. Forward drinking and pleasing. A very attractive value. 90*

**2014 Brooks Note Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.70, 140 cases, \$44. Rochioli and Wädenswil clones from the lower eastern blocks and RC clone from the western blocks. 10% whole cluster. 3-day cold soak, native yeast start to fermentation, clones kept separate and blended before bottling. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled March 2016. *Light reddish purple color in the glass. Both savory and fruity aromas show up with a hint of sandalwood. Elegant and bright on the palate, bursting with flavors of dark red cherry and berry. The fruit really locks onto the palate and holds on through a very generous finish. Light in color and body, yet delivers a wallop of flavor, and has just enough fine-grain tannins to deliver a compliment of textural interest. 92.*

## Calera Wine, Hollister, CA

In the rush to find the latest producer, we forget about the icons who continue to produce Pinot Noir of remarkable and consistent quality in California. As the Calera winery's website notes, "Now more than 35 years later and in spite of prevailing opinion that Pinot Noir grapes could not be successfully grown in the U.S., Calera is a symbol of perseverance and grace, and remains a true pioneer in California Pinot Noir." The vineyards are planted at an average elevation of 2,200 feet making them among the highest and coolest vineyard sites in California. All Pinot Noirs are Calera selection, a reportedly suitcase selection of unverifiable origin. All vineyards are organically farmed and certified by CCOF. Visit [www.calerawine.com](http://www.calerawine.com).



# CALERA

**2013 Calera Ryan Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.63, 898 cases, \$N/A. From a 13.1-acre vineyard that was planted in 1998 and 2001 in limestone soils. Yields .97 tons per acre. Native fermentation. Aged 19 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Very earthy aromas of clay combined with black fruits and spice. Bold in size, with an array of succulent purple fruits including grapes and boysenberries. Long and hedonistic in sap, with daunting tannins and a big, fruit-filled finish. Tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with the same results, and I believe this wine needs at least two more years in bottle to be friendly. 90.*

**2013 Calera de Villiers Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.63, 1,018 cases, \$N/A. 15.6-acre vineyard planted in 1997 in limestone soils. Yields 1.07 tons per acre. Native fermentation, aged 19 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry reduction sauce and blackberry jam lead to a mid weight plus style wine with a luscious core of purple fruits. The fruit is extraordinarily bombastic but monotone at present. There are substantial tannins that need time to integrate. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine had more oak and less fruit on the nose, but the lush mouthfeel was appealing. This wine is disjointed now and one can only speculate about its future.* **90.**

**2013 Calera Reed Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.64, 336 cases, \$70. Sourced from the 4.4-acre Reed Vineyard that was planted in 1975. Yields were 1.14 tons per acre. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of cherry, strawberry, blueberry and dark raspberry blend harmoniously with nutty oak in this mid weight wine with more approachability. Impressive attack and persistent finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the blueberry, cherry, spice and nutty oak flavors were captivating. Easily recognizable as coming from Reed Vineyard.* **92.**

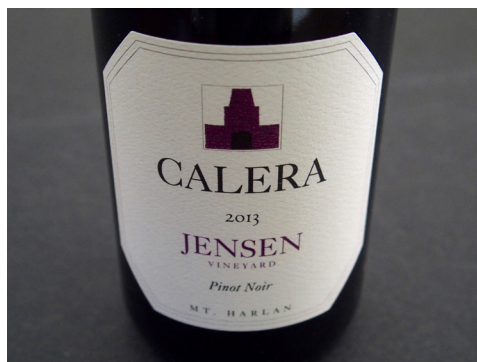


**2013 Calera Selleck Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., pH 3.39, TA 0.68, 327 cases, \$N/A. From the 4.8-acre Selleck Vineyard that was planted in 1975. Yields .93 tons per acre. Native fermentation, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Enthralling aromas of cherry, rose petal, white pepper and scrub brush. Intriguing and complex, with flavors of well-spiced black cherry and black raspberry fruits along with significant oak compliment. Plush on the palate with a very long finish. The tannins are firm but not foreboding, the bright acidity keeps the fruit fresh, and the alcohol is well integrated. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, there was less oak overlay apparent and the finish was other worldly.* **94.**

**2013 Calera Mills Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.65, 789 cases, \$62. From the 14.4-acre Mills Vineyard planted in 1984 in limestone soils. Own rooted Calera selection. Crop yield 0.81 tons per acre. Native yeast fermentation, aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A very compatible blend of fruit and savory aromas with black cherry standing out. Amazing charge of black cherry fruit on the palate, yet discrete in weight, with balanced tannins and a raspberry coulis infused finish of notable length. Approachable now, but will surely last for years.* **93.**



**2013 Calera Jensen Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.64, 1,088 cases, \$88. From the 13.8-acre Jensen Vineyard that was planted in 1975. Yields 1.12 tons per acre. Native fermentation, aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, rose petal, smoke and toasty oak rise from the glass. Relatively light in color, but substantial in flavor, featuring mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and blackberry. The gorgeous fruit seems to last and last and thoroughly illuminates the senses. There are still firm tannins that need time to soften but the wine is hard to refuse at this early age. The sensual mouthfeel adds even more appeal, and like all great wines, the finish is grand.* **94.**



**2014 Calera Mt. Harlan Chardonnay** 14.4% alc., 386 cases, \$N/A. From Calera's 10.4-acre Chardonnay Vineyards. Vines planted in 1984 and 1998. Calera selection. Yield was 0.54 tons per acre. Barrel fermented with native yeasts, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged 13 months in stainless steel and French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Aromas of lemon, apple, seasoned oak, buttery pear, and brioche. Fresh and mildly flinty, with a clean, brisk envelope of citrus, pear and apple flavors. Sleek and balanced, with a refreshing, chalky finish. The wine picks up more body and charm over time in the glass.* **92.**

**Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards, Malibu, CA (wines vinified in Santa Maria)**





**2014 Dolin Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** 13.8% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.62, 232 cases, \$39. Whole cluster pressed and fermented in 33% new and 66% used French oak barrels. 100% malolactic fermentation over 5 months, then left on the lees and stirred twice a month during 15 months of barrel aging. Bottled unfiltered and filtered. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Lovely perfume of lemon, pineapple, nutty apple and vanilla creme. The flavors of crisp citrus and pear along with saline notes drive this nicely balanced wine that displays good vibrancy and flavor presence. Recommended and a good value. 92.*

**2014 Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards Malibu-Newton Canyon Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.71, TA 0.57, 187 cases, \$39. Grapes were grown in the hills of Malibu at elevations of 1400 to 1800 feet above sea level. Whole cluster pressed, fermented in 33% new and 66% used French oak barrels. 100% malolactic fermentation over 5 months, then left on the lees and stirred twice a month during 15 months of barrel aging. Bottled unfiltered and filtered. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Demure aromas of lemon oil, applesauce, pear and oak are pleasing. A restrained, somewhat austere style, that is sleek and bright, featuring shy flavors of citrus and pear. The wine lacks a bit of acidic verve. 89.*

## Domaine Divio, Dundee, OR

This is a relatively new winery that opened in 2016, owned by winemaker Bruno Corneaux, the Director of Viticulture and Winemaking at Northwest Wine Company (Soléna Estate and Hyland Estates), and business partner André Weil. The estate vineyard, Clos Gallia, was planted in 2014 and is in development. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have been produced initially from sourced fruit. A tasting room is located in Newberg. Visit [www.domainedivio.com](http://www.domainedivio.com).

**2012 Domaine Divio Eola-Amity Hills Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., pH 3.62, 150 cases, \$48. Released October 21, 2015. Clone 777, harvest Brix 24°. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Toasty oak dominates the perfume, with added aromas of spice cake and black cherry. Plenty of sappy purple and black fruits to satisfy with an appealing earthy bent. Plenty of oak at play with a healthy tannic structure. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was pleasant but not provocative, with oak playing a major role in its character. 87.*

**2014 Domaine Divio Willamette Valley Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.55, 250 cases, \$28. Released May 2016. Harvest Brix 24°. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is quite woody, with aromas of soft cherry married to dominant nutty oak. Better on the palate, yet somewhat shallow and woody with light to mid weight flavors of cherry and raspberry. Silky in texture, with modest tannins and a little burst of cherry on the finish. 86.*

**2014 Domaine Divio Ribbon Ridge Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.65, 75 cases, \$48. Released May 16, 2016. Sourced from Ribbon Springs Vineyard. Harvest Brix 23.5°. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Bright aromas of black cherry, almond and oak lead to a mid weight core of appealing dark cherry, strawberry and black raspberry fruit flavors. The wine displays tight acidity in harmony with good structure, an accent of oak vanillin, and a modest but satisfying finish. 89.*

**2014 Domaine Divio Chehalem Mountains Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., pH 3.62, 125 cases, \$55. Released November 16, 2016. Clone 667. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of red cherry, spice, wood and sherry lead off. Upon entry there is an intense attack of cherry and raspberry fruit flavors that persist with good length on the finish. Satiny in texture, fresh and vibrant, with notable but not imposing tannins and a compliment of oak in the background. A thread of savory herb flavor adds interest. 89.*

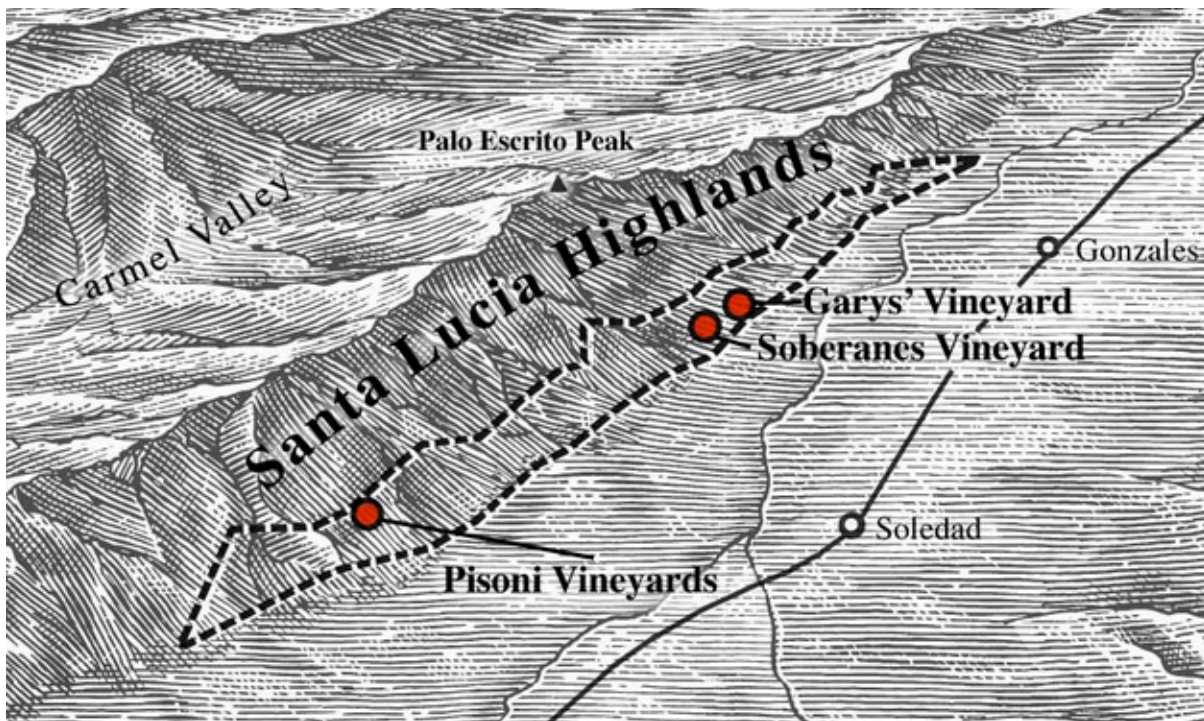
**2015 Domaine Divio Willamette Valley Oregon Chardonnay** 13.0% alc., pH 3.29, 150 cases, \$50. Released November 16, 2016. Harvest Brix 22.7°. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. Full malolactic fermentation. *Light platinum yellow color and clear in the glass. Aromas of cut apple, Asian pear and cake spice lead off. Pleasant, bright and clean, driven by apple and pear flavors with a little citrus and minor nutty oak component. Soft in the mouth with spirited acidity. An interesting wine because of its emphasis on orchard fruit rather than citrus fruit and its demure, slightly austere character with a mineral bent driven by acidity. 90.*

## Lucia Vineyards, Santa Rosa, CA

These two wines represent future releases of Lucia Santa Lucia Highlands appellation cuvée wines grown and produced by the Pisoni family. The Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines contain fruit from Pisoni, Garys' and Soberanes vineyards. Release is planned for mid February 2017. Lucia wines are sold primarily through a mailing list at [www.lucivineyards.com](http://www.lucivineyards.com).

**2015 Lucia Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 375 ml format tasted, around \$45. A blend of grapes from Pisoni, Garys' and Soberanes vineyards. Native yeast fermentation and aging 10 months in French oak barrels, about 50% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very inviting aromas of cherry, red berry, exotic spice and warm brioche. Succulent flavors of red and purple berries with a welcome touch of oak in the background. Elegant in demeanor, yet highly flavorful, with good drive in the mouth, juicy acidity and a finish that lingers appealingly. An impressive appellation wine that is very easy to like at this young age.* **90.**

**2015 Lucia Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., 375 ml format tasted, around \$45. A blend of grapes from Pisoni and Soberanes vineyards. A combination of eight low-yielding Chardonnay clones, mostly Old Wente selections. Native yeast fermentation, some modest whole cluster, and aged in carefully selected French oak barrels. Aged 10 months in about one-third new French oak. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Leading off are aromas of yellow applesauce, pear, lemon oil and buttered toast. Highly engaging, with delicious flavors of apple, pear, pineapple and lemon and a soft touch of oak. Bursting with flavor, yet crisp and lively.* **90.**



## Mignanelli Winery, Sonoma, CA

You won't find better quality Pinot Noir at these prices in California. See also recent reviews of this producer's KW Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir and Highlands Ranch Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir. Visit [www.mignanelliwinery.com](http://www.mignanelliwinery.com).

**2014 Mignanelli Savaria Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., \$39. Vineyard planted in 2000 in sandy, calcareous soils. Clones 115, 667 and "828." 50% whole cluster. Aged in neutral French oak barrels. Bottled unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is complex and appealing, with aromas of cherry, rose petal, spice and bell pepper. Light to mid weight styled, with flavors of cherry, raspberry and red grape as well as a vegetal and burnt tobacco note. Fresh, with good vibrancy, slick in texture, with integrated tannins and a raspberry-infused finish. I like this wine, but the whole cluster inclusion character is a tad overbearing and the burnt tobacco note is too prominent. A wine for whole cluster aficionados.* **89.**





**2014 Mignanelli Nelson Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., \$36. Vineyard planted in 1999 at 1700 feet elevation in sandstone rock and marine sedimentary soils. Clones 115 and "828." Native fermentation, 75% whole cluster, aged in French oak barrels, 20% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose enralls with aromas of black cherry, dark berry and spice. Noticeable attack and mid palate presence of mid weight plus boysenberry and plum fruits that saturate the taste senses. The density of fruit is evident and the high percentage of whole cluster really compliments this wine creating textural fullness and interest as well as subtle floral and spice notes. The tannins are quite modest and the wine has open arms even at this young age. 92.*

## Migration, Duckhorn Wine Co., Hopland, CA

Migration offers both appellation and vineyard-designated Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from cool climate coastal growing regions in California. The appellation wines are in wide retail distribution and represent excellent value, while the vineyard-designated wines are sold through the website and the winery's wine club at [www.migrationwines.com](http://www.migrationwines.com).

**2014 Migration Bien Nacido Vineyards Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 310 cases, \$68. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of cherry, strawberry and spice. Light to mid weight in style, with layers of dark red cherry, strawberry and raspberry fruits accented with notes of tea and toasty oak. Delicious, with juicy acidity and taut tannins, finishing with nuances of pine needle and Middle Eastern spices. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the aromatics still soared and the finish was remarkable. 93.*



**2014 Migration Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 316 cases, \$68. Released September 2015. Sourced from three Dutton Ranch properties, all in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. A block and barrel selection of favorite Dutton lots and represents only about 7% of the total fruit obtained from Dutton Ranch. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Complex nose offering aromas of Bing cherry, strawberry, underbrush and a touch of oak. Silky in the mouth, strutting a middleweight core of cherry cola, dark raspberry, black plum and baking spice flavors framed by integrated tannins. Plenty of Russian River Valley luscious fruit in this polished wine. Unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 91.*

**2014 Migration Running Creek Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 206 cases, \$68. Inaugural release. A Migration estate vineyard located on River Road, consisting of 70 acres and six clones of Pinot Noir. A block and barrel selection including only about 4% of the vineyard's grape output. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of Bing cherry, spice and animale. Mid weight flavors of black cherry, blackberry and cola with a compliment of oak backing. Noticeable attack with good mid palate presence and persistence. Forward drinking with a very credible finish, although the wine leans a bit on oak. Unchanged the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 91.*

**2014 Migration Drum Canyon Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 213 cases, \$68. Vineyard planted in 2003 by the Dierberg family and is located on the eastern edge of the Sta. Rita Hills. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Savory notes of leaf, oak and earth combine with aromas of cherry and clove on the nose. Light to mid weight flavors of black cherry and blackberry have an earthy tone and are framed by dry, but not bitter tannins. Even better the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, showing more spice and exuberant fruit on the nose, and a more fruit-charged finish. 92.*

## Patz & Hall, Sonoma, CA



Although Patz & Hall has been sold, master winemaker James Hall continues on at the winery. The combination of focus on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, consummate winemaking skill and exceptional vineyard selection has long defined Patz & Hall and its wines.

**2014 Patz & Hall Burnside Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 315 cases, \$75. Released October 2016. This vineyard was planted by the Martinelli family and Patz & Hall has been making a single-vineyard Pinot Noir from Burnside Vineyard since 2002. Clones 115 and 777. Wild and cultured yeast fermentation, aged in 50% new French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of dark berry mash, spice and toast lead to a mid weight styled wine with flavors of oak-infused blackberry and black grape with a touch of spice. A bit rugged and barrel-laden upon opening with some astringency. Much better six hours later and also the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, showing less tannin and oak overlay and more charm.* **91.**

**2014 Patz & Hall Chenoweth Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 1,284 cases, \$60. Released October 2016. In 2000, famed viticulturist Charlie Chenoweth worked with James Hall to plant his family's homestead estate in the cool Green Valley sub-AVA of the Russian River Valley exclusively for Patz & Hall (Chenoweth and a select few other wineries make wine from this vineyard as well). The 7-acre vineyard has an assortment of Dijon clones planted in Goldridge sandy loam soils. The vineyard is a warm site in a cool region. Wild and cultured yeast fermentation, aged in 70% new French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of compost, spice, dark chocolate and shy fruit arrive slowly in the glass over several hours. Mid weight flavors of black cherry and black raspberry with noticeable oak overlay. Very pretty fruit that has great intensity and length, becoming more appealing over several hours in the glass. This is a wine to decant if you open now, or better yet, be patient and cellar it for a few years.* **92.**

**2015 Patz & Hall Zio Tony Ranch Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 496 cases, \$65. Released October 2016. This is a well-known vineyard planted by the Martinelli family. Patz & Hall has produced a Chardonnay from this vineyard since 2003. 100% Dijon 76 clone. Whole cluster pressed, indigenous yeast fermentation, aged on lees with weekly stirring in 50% new French oak barrels. 100% malolactic fermentation in barrel. Bottled without filtration. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Aromas and flavors of lemon, pineapple, yellow apple, melon and toasty oak combine in a full body styled wine that has a comforting mouthfeel and admirable balance, finishing with a bit of tannin.* **90.**

**2015 Patz & Hall Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., \$40. Released September 2016. A blend of grapes from multiple established vineyards including Dutton, Durell and Gap's Crown, and young vineyards like Mark Sanchietti's Pleasant Hill Vineyard that was planted for Patz & Hall. Whole cluster pressed, indigenous yeast fermentations, aged on lees with weekly stirring in 32% new French oak barrels. 100% malolactic fermentation in barrel. *Light golden yellow color and clear in the glass. This is a very crisp, uplifting and agreeable wine offering fresh aromas and flavors of cut apple and pear, along with gracious integration of oak. Spirited and easy to drink, with a clean, thirst-quenching finish.* **90.**

## **TREOS Wines, Monmouth, OR**

Partner, winemaker and winegrower Dave Jepson produces Pinot Noir in two styles (in his words): Elegant Reserve that is "robust but complex and layered," and Founder's Choice that is "a bigger, bolder style." The wines are crafted from an estate vineyard in the southern Willamette Valley first planted in 2007. The 2013 vintage was set at a crop load of just 10 bunches per vine or about 0.75 tons per acre and the grapes were harvested at full maturity before rains set in. As a result, the 2013 Pinot Noirs are unlike many 2013 Oregon Pinot Noirs in that they are full bodied, rich and without rainy weather taint. The 2012 wines were last reviewed 2 years ago, and reviewed again recently, but the previous reviews were not read prior to tasting the 2012 wines again.

**2012 TREOS Estate Elegant Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 15.0% alc., 170 cases, 500 ml., \$48. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of a dark fruit medley lead to a mid weight styled wine with ripe but not particularly sweet black fruit flavors. Fruit driven with little nuance, but delivers a hedonistic fruit experience. Silky in the mid palate, with mild astringency on the fruit-intense finish.* **89.** (Consistent with review of August 2014 with same score)

**2012 TREOS Estate Founder's Choice Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 15.5% alc., 195 cases, 500 ml., \$48. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Sweet black fruit aromas with hints of port and cognac and slight volatile acidity. Sweet, ultra ripe fruit flavors with soft tannins and integrated alcohol. Drinks more like a dessert wine with the sweetness coming from fruit and alcohol, not sugar. Well-done in the intended style but not my style. 86.* (This wine is less appealing to me now than when reviewed in August 2014 when it was scored 88 and probably is not a long-lived wine)



**2013 TREOS Estate Elegant Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 200 cases, \$35. Released November 2016. Five Dijon clone mix. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Charming perfume of fresh cherry fruit and cedary oak. Impressive attack and length with a silky as well as juicy character that is very easy to like. The mid weight core of boysenberry fruit is complimented by a deft touch of oak and the tannins are finely tuned. Clearly the best wine to date from this producer and a good value. 91.*

**2013 TREOS Estate Founder's Choice Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., 125 cases, \$35. Released November 2016. 2 Dijon clones. The biggest, boldest, most "bad-ass" expression of Pinot Noir that Dave can achieve. Targeted at consumers who like the body and texture of Rhone reds and Brunellos, while maintaining the black cherry, dark plum flavor profile of Pinot Noir. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The sweetly aromatic nose offers scents of dried cherry, plum, herbal tea and oak. Mid weight flavors of dark cherry, black raspberry and savory herbs satisfy. Modest tannins and oak support the fruit load that displays good intensity on the dry, but not bitter finish. Not as "bad-ass" as the 2012 version and more appealing to me. 88.*

## More Wines

**2014 Carlson John Sebastiano Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$45. Winemaker is Chuck Carlson, vinified in Los Olivos. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. The nose is largely oak-driven (sandalwood and smoky), with added cherry fruit and baking spice aromas. The palate is oak-charged, but there is charming cherry fruit that is complimented by spice. The acidity and tannins are in harmony and there is some generosity to the finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, there was considerable oak-driven notes of toast and cigar and the wine had lost appeal for me. 86.*



**2014 Cattleya Pratt Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 100 cases, \$70. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. A delightful wine that is very polished and hi-collar. Aromas of citrus, pear and spice carry over on the palate that adds integrated toasted oak flourishes and an acid-driven minerality that further elevates the wine. This wine has nothing out of place, is very easy to drink, and urges you to search for nuance. 94.*



**2014 Peirson Meyer Charles Heintz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 200 cases, \$55. Indigenous yeast fermentation and barrel aged for 14 months on the lees in about 40% new French oak. Old Wente clone in Goldridge soil. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Appealing aromas of fresh cut apple, citrus, white peach, rain-dampened grass and nutty oak. Wonderful parade of citrus, apple, pear and tropical fruit flavors that have uncommon length and persistence. Slightly viscous in the mouth, thoroughly seamless, with a high-flying finish that tempts the drinker to return to the glass. Special in every way. 95.*



**2014 Purple Heart Wine Freedom Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 500 cases, \$38. Pommard and Wädenswil clones. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Uplifting aromas of blackberry, black currant and oak driven notes of hay, popcorn and toast. Highly enjoyable on the palate, with a mid weight plus core of purple and black berry fruits complimented by spice. Inviting roundness and harmony with deft oak management and welcome overall balance. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine still displayed a tasty marriage of dark fruit and oak. The wine is true to Freedom Hill terroir and shows off the vineyard well. The dense, dark fruit stands up well to oak. A good value.* **90.**

## Bargain Wines

Note: I need to dip into inexpensive, “value-priced” Pinot Noir occasionally to re-set my palate since I taste so many high quality, ultra premium Pinot Noirs.

**2014 Austerity Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$15.70. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. I struggled to find much nose in this wine at all even over time in the glass, that offered only subtle whiffs of purple berry, smoky oak and ash. Much better on the palate, with a mid weight charge of black cherry and raspberry fruit flavors, combined with noticeable smoky oak in the background, displaying modest tannins, and donating some intensity on the fruit-driven and mildly astringent finish.* **84.**

**2015 Castle Rock Kristy Vineyard Reserve Monterey Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$16.95. Cellared and bottled by Castle Rock, Geyserville. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. An oak-dominated nose reminds me most of the scent of cigar. Light to mid weight black cherry, cola and spice flavors. Innocuous, with silky tannins, noticeable oak overlay and a modest cherry fueled finish. The oak treatment tends to smother the fruit. and the wine fades in appeal over time in the glass.* **82.**

**2012 Chalone Vineyards Estate Grown Heritage Vines Chalone Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 2,836 cases, \$26. Vineyard is at 1800 feet elevation near the Pinnacles National Park. Reddish soil underlain with limestone. Aged in French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Very ripe fruited, featuring dried plum and black cherry essence accented with vanilla, floral and apple core notes on the nose. Welcome mid palate intensity and plushness, featuring highly ripened dark stone and berry fruits with a floral and oaky thread in the background. Sappy, with balanced tannins and some finish. I expected more from heritage vines.* **85.**



# Tasting Wine Before Its Time: Experiencing Wayfarer Vineyard Pinot Noir

One of the vagaries of tasting and rating Pinot Noir is that the wines are often presented for review shortly before or after release, and often have not recovered from the shock of bottling or had enough time in bottle to develop their full charm. Predicting how Pinot Noir will evolve is a skill that comes with experience, but is tenuous at best and fraught with uncertainty.

I had the unique opportunity to taste the 2014 vintage Wayfarer Pinot Noirs on two occasions seven months apart that shows how wines can benefit considerably from more time in bottle. This repeated tasting was particularly informative because the Wayfarer Pinot Noirs are vinified in a reductive manner that along with their oak interplay and firm tannic backbone require significant time in bottle.

The wines were originally bottled in December 2015 after 13 months in barrel. I first tasted the wines with winemaker Bibiana Gonzalez Rave and owner Cleo Pahlmeyer in May 2016 at Wayfarer Vineyard. My second tasting was done at home in my usual fashion in December 2016, seven months later. The Wayfarer Estate bottling was released in the fall of 2016, but the other wines will be released in 2017 (exact release dates determined by the winemaker). On the first occasion, the wines were opened at least six hours prior to tasting and some needed decanting even then. On the second tasting, the wines were sampled after opening and in a few instances, re-tasted a day or two later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.

Here are the tasting notes on the two occasions to compare.

**2014 Wayfarer Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 1,020 cases. Free run juice only. A quality barrel selection. • The nose releases its charms slowly in the glass, evolving into a very engaging mix of cherry and spice aromas. The silky mouthfeel is immediately satisfying in this mid weight plus wine offering intense flavors of blackberry and cassis. Juicy acidity lends vibrancy and tempered tannins make for more approachability. The most open and giving of the wines tasted. May 2016. **91-93**.

**2014 Wayfarer Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc.. Estate grown. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Demure, but pleasing aromas of black cherry, blackberry and woodland spice. Silky in the mouth with striking flavors of black cherry and blackberry framed by firm but not imposing tannins. Very good juiciness on the finish. The least extracted wine in the lineup and the most approachable.* December 2016. **91**.

**2014 Wayfarer Paige's Ridge Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 43 cases. Dijon clone 667. Fermented in a wood tank and aged in two new barrels. • The nose opens slowly in the glass to reveal enticing aromas of black cherry, boysenberry, woodlands and spice. A gorgeous mid weight plus core of dark fruit greets the palate. A bit rustic and earthy, with a hint of thiols and firmly defined tannins. After the wine was decanted and re-tasted, more fruit expression was evident. May 2016. **90-92**.



**2014 Wayfarer Paige's Ridge Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc.. Clone 667, estate grown. Named after Jason Pahlmeyer's wife Paige. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black fruits, damp earth and underbrush lead to a mid weight plus offering that is flat-out delicious. Layers of invigorating black cherry and blackberry fruit are tempered by honed tannins combined with enough acidity to elevate the prodigious sap. A deft touch of oak seasoning adds interest. A harmonious wine with a generous finish that is beautifully crafted in a bold California style. Yes, it is excessive, but so what.* December 2016. **94**.

**2014 Wayfarer Mother Rock Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 335 cases. Clones are Mt Eden and Dijon 777. • Very sexy perfume of dark red berries and cherries with a lovely spice and floral accent. The deep red fruits really demand attention in this well structured mid weight plus styled wine that

offers considerable textural interest. Balance is spot on, the finish is noticeably generous, and the wine has a very streamlined demeanor. May 2016. **92-94**.

**2014 Wayfarer Mother Rock Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc.. A blend of clones 37 and 777. Named for the vineyard's sandstone substrate that fractures into sandy loam. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Deep aromas of black fruit compote. This wine is still monolithic and unyielding, opening some in the glass to reveal mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, blueberry-pomegranate and spice framed by muscular tannins. Much more aromatic and friendly when tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine definitely needs decanting or a few more years in the cellar.* December 2016. **93**.

**2014 Wayfarer Golden Mean Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 515 cases. Pommard and Swan clones. • The nose is currently more oak infused with aromas of spice and vanillin. More fruity on the palate with muscular tannins, and sweet oak dancing in the background. A very sappy, dark fruited mid palate carries over on the intense finish. *May 2016. 91-93*.



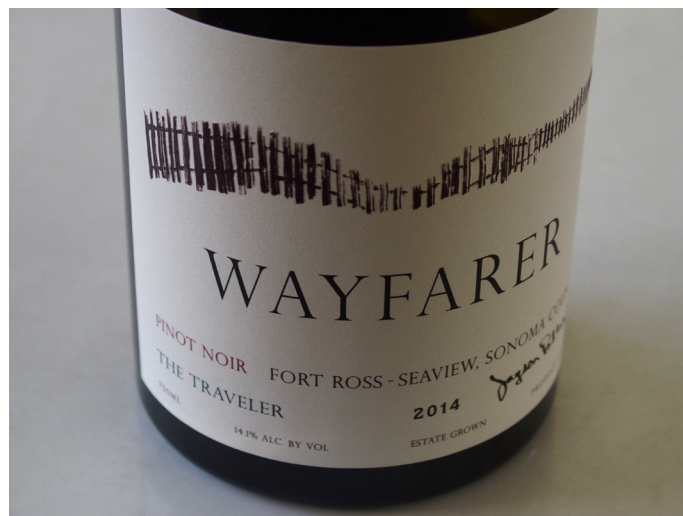
**2014 Wayfarer Golden Mean Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc.. Pommard and Swan clones, estate grown. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. I was enthralled with the nose on this wine, offering hi-tone aromas of earthy black fruits, sous-bois and mocha that were persistent. Both mature purple and black berry fruits form the essence of this mid weight plus wine that is impeccably balanced with a soothing velvety texture and a polished demeanor. The wine speaks to you with open arms: "Take me."* December 2016. **94**.

**2014 Wayfarer The Traveler Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 195 cases. A suitcase selection. 0% whole cluster. • The most closed wine. Much more expressive after the wine was decanted. The nose is rather primary, offering scents of rose petal, spice, woodland path and oak dust. A charge of glorious blackberry, blueberry and pomegranate flavors are framed by mature tannins. Very sleek and soft in the mouth, with good natural acidity and a very lengthy finish. May 2016. **92-94**.



**2014 Wayfarer The Traveler Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc.. A single suitcase selection. Estate grown. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Soaring aromas of blackberry and cassis. Considerably more open than last tasting in May 2016, offering a gorgeous core of discreetly concentrated, well-spiced black cherry and blackberry fruits that are broad in the mouth and display freshness, vibrancy and juiciness. This beauty is very harmonious and giving, finishing with unbelievable length and generosity, and deserves an ovation.* December 2016. **95**.

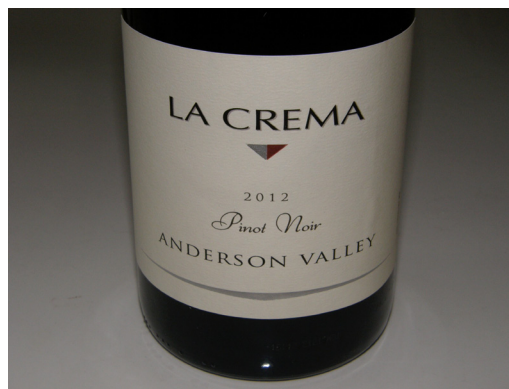
Wayfarer wines are allocated through a mailing list at [www.wayfarervineyard.com](http://www.wayfarervineyard.com).



# Pinot Briefs

**“Does Color Matter in Pinot Noir”** A post at [www.palatexposure.com](http://www.palatexposure.com) by veteran winemaker Greg La Follette is a humorous read for pinotphiles, but Greg never really answers the blog entry’s premise: “Does color count in a Pinot Noir?” The post should have been titled, “Merlot is more dependable than Pinot Noir.”

**New Winemaker at La Crema** After fifteen years as head winemaker for La Crema, Elizabeth Grant-Douglas has stepped down and Craig McAllister has become the new head winemaker. McAllister first joined La Crema as the harvest enologist in 2007, and has been a steward of La Crema’s Monterey and Sonoma Coast programs as associate winemaker. Elizabeth, who has been the head winemaker at La Crema for fifteen years, remains the winemaker for Maggy Hawk Pinot Noir from the Anderson Valley. Elizabeth leaves a legacy of a label that offers the consumer a variety of high quality wines at an affordable prices produced in large-enough quantities that make them widely obtainable in retail wine markets. La Crema is one of California’s iconic labels, first founded in 1979 as a family owned and operated winery focused exclusively on cool climate coastal appellations. The label is known for its appellation wines, but plans to expand into some single vineyard offerings. The name, La Crema Viñera, means “Best of the Vine.” The website is [www.LaCrema.com](http://www.LaCrema.com).



## **Farmhouse Inn in Russian River Valley Icons of Russian River Valley Packages**

Locals and visitors are invited to experience Russian River Valley’s premier Pinot Noir producers along with a weekend in wine country. Partnering with the Farmhouse Inn are winemakers from Williams Selyem, Kistler, Kosta Browne, Merry Edwards and Littorai. Each winery will host a dinner on a Friday night where they will share some of their favorite vintages from their cellars. Each winery’s wines are paired with Executive Chef Steve Litke’s Michelin menu. Saturday afternoon the dinner attendees will head out to the wineries for a special experience. Reservations for the weekends and room specials are at [www.farmhouseinn.com](http://www.farmhouseinn.com).

**Petaluma Gap Soon be a recognized AVA** An article appeared recently in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Windswept Petaluma Gap’s growers reach for wine imprimatur” (December 31, 2016). The Petaluma Gap region is currently part of the vast Sonoma Coast AVA, but is soon to become California’s newest AVA. A public comment period ended December 27, 2016, with no opposition. The Petaluma Gap AVA would extend from the coast at the northern tip of Tomales Bay to Sonoma Mountain and would be the seventeenth sub-AVA within Sonoma County and the only California AVA defined by its wind patterns. The Petaluma Gap is an opening in the coastal mountains and the Petaluma area is defined as a “wind gap,” with winds entering the region from the Pacific Ocean and traveling eastward, a rarity for California. The region has long been known for producing exceptional Pinot Noir grapes, but the grapes were go unrecognized by inclusion in Sonoma Coast bottlings. The challenge for the new AVA is that Sonoma Coast is an established and prestigious AVA title conferred on some of California’s most outstanding Pinot Noir bottlings. Soon the consumer must be sophisticated enough to recognize the Petaluma Gap designation as the equal of the Sonoma Coast designation. The Sonoma Coast AVA is undergoing further division with petitions in the works for Freestone-Occidental, West Sonoma Coast and Sebastopol AVAs. Fort Ross-Seaview AVA has already been approved. Read the full article at <http://www.sfchronicle.com/wine/article/Windswept-Petaluma-Gap-s-growers-reach-for-wine-10828639.php>.





**Historic Vineyard Society (HVS)** This organization is an attempt to preserve old historic vineyards that are 50 years or older in California. Many of the vineyards are much older than that, even dating to the 1880s. The oldest continuously producing Pinot Noir vineyard in California is at Hanzell Vineyards (dating to 1953). For information, to register a vineyard or make a donation, visit [www.historicvineyardsociety.org](http://www.historicvineyardsociety.org).

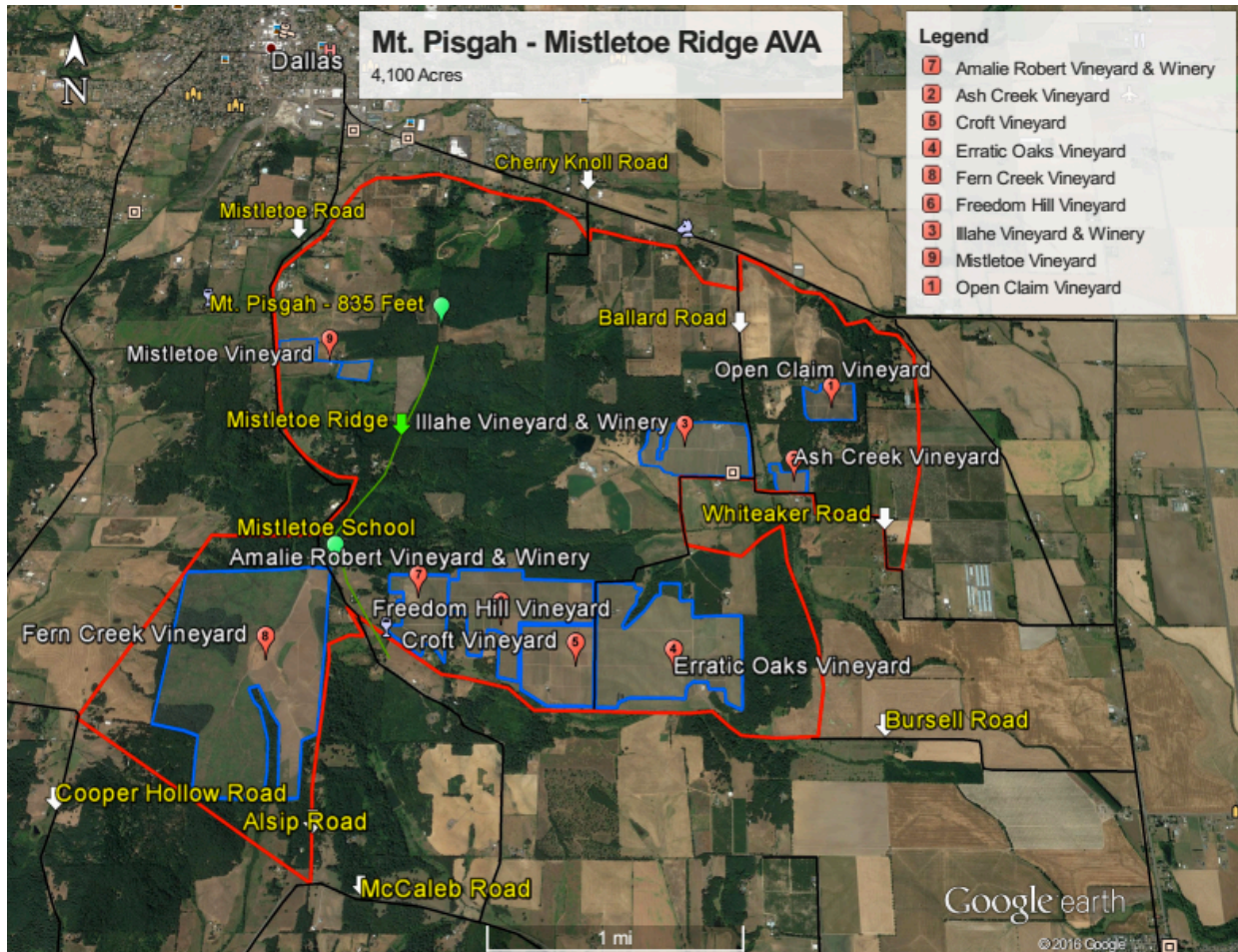
**Does Organic Wine Taste Better?** An article was recently published in the *Journal of Wine Economics*, titled, "Does Organic Wine Taste Better? An Analysis of Experts' Ratings." Data from three leading wine-rating publications (*The Wine Advocate*, *Wine Enthusiast* and *Wine Spectator*) were used to assess quality of 74,148 wines produced in California between 1998 and 2009. The results indicated that ecocertification was associated with a statistically significant increase in wine quality rating. Being ecocertified increases the scaled score of the wine by 4.1 points on average. It is important to point out, as do the authors of this study, that wine operations might use similar practices as ecocertified operations (and many do), but choose not to obtain ecocertification. If so, the estimates would understate the impact of such practices.

**Tasting, Spitting and Alcohol Absorption** I have written about this topic and questioned the danger to wine critics who repeatedly taste a large number of wines at one sitting. In 2012, an article appeared in the journal *Wine Studies* (an Open Access, peer-reviewed scientific journal) that addressed the absorption of alcohol while spitting: "The Bac(chus) experiment: blood alcohol concentrations after wine tasting." Blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) were measured in ten volunteers after a wine tasting event with and without the swallowing of 15 ml (about a half ounce) of each wine ( a total of about 5 ounces or 1 glass of wine). When ten wines were tasted within one hour without swallowing, buccal mucosa absorption was low, with BAC's averaging 0.0026 percent, far below the legal driving limit. However, when 15 ml of each was swallowed, the BAC's, half of the ten test subjects measured a BAC of 0.05 percent, above the legal driving limit in some countries. It would be of interest to redo such an experiment with tasters sampling many more wines at one sitting.

**Aging Leads to Fading of Smell More than Taste** An article in *Decanter China* by Elin McCoy looked at the science behind changes in smell and taste with aging. Research has found that the ability to smell fades much more than the ability to taste as we age. The degree of decline in the sense of smell varies widely and the loss of specific aroma sensitivities also is fickle. Wine critics may compensate for a decreased ability to smell nuances with taste memories and experience, and some wine professionals retain their smell and taste faculties well into a late age.

**New Willamette Valley sub-AVA Proposed** Ernie Pink, proprietor and winemaker of Amalie Robert Estate, along with his neighbors, is submitting a petition to establish a new sub-AVA in the Willamette Valley. The area is located in the mid-point of the Willamette Valley, longitudinally speaking, about 60 miles south of Portland, 15 miles west of Salem and nestled into the foothills on the western side of the Willamette Valley. The area surrounds the 835 foot summit of Mt. Pisgah in Polk County, near Dallas, Oregon. The proposed AVA would be the southernmost AVA located with the Willamette Valley AVA and does not affect the

recent expansion of the Willamette Valley AVA. The tiny sub-AVA consists of about 4,100 acres comprised of the following producing vineyards and wineries: Amalie Robert Estate, Freedom Hill Vineyard, Croft Vineyards, Erratic Oaks Vineyard, Illahe Vineyards & Winery, Open Claim Vineyards, and Mistletoe Vineyard. The proposed name of the sub-AVA is Mt. Pisgah-Mistletoe Ridge. Approval of new AVAs typical takes four years.



The idea of another nearby sub-AVA in the Monmouth, Oregon, area, “Monmouth Independence,” has been bantered about and is early in the process. This AVA would include the Maple Grove Vineyard owned by Jackson Family Wines and Domaine Loubejac under the Northwest Wine Company ownership.

# Prince of Pinot: A Real Person

As I enter the 15th year of publication of the *PinotFile* using the moniker, "Prince of Pinot," I realize that many readers have no idea who I am and what my background is. I think it is only fair to expose myself.

I grew up in a humble but loving household in Lakewood, California, the son of a father who was an aircraft tool and die maker (an a world class swimmer and diver as a young man) and a mother who was a teller at a savings and loan (and taught me fortitude). Our 2 bedroom, 1 bath home was bought for about \$10,000 new in the early 1950s in a tract that would set a standard for future neighborhoods in the U.S.. I grew up with a brother who was seven years younger and would become a pharmacist in adult life. The topic that arose at many evening meals was that I should become a doctor and work for myself. My parents enjoyed cocktails socially and my father drank beer at home, but like many of my parents' generation, wine was an after thought.

I ventured away from home to attend Stanford University in 1961, majoring in Biology as a course tract to get into medical school. Athletically inclined, I played freshman football as a walk-on, but quickly realized my talents were better served in academics. I was quite a book worm in the four years of undergraduate study and left Stanford as a graduate "with distinction." A family doctor friend living near Stanford who was heavily invested in Burgundy first exposed me to fine wine. I was shocked when I saw his residential wine cellar for the first time.

It wasn't until after four years of medical school at UCLA, a year of internship, three years of ophthalmology residency at Jules Stein Eye Institute at UCLA, and two years active duty as a major in the Air Force, that I started my private practice in Orange County, California, and soon had enough expendable income to explore the pleasurable world of wine. I dove into wine with serious intent, sampling varietals of every type, developing a cellar of sizable proportions, but always returning to Pinot Noir. Many friends called me a "prince" for introducing them to Pinot Noir and this was to be the forerunner of my moniker. I married 37 years ago, raised two sons, and retired from medicine in late 2001.

My mother always told me I would either be a doctor or a writer and I showed her - I became both. Upon retiring, with no special intent to launch a second career, I began a single page email that I sent out weekly to friends on Sunday night, titled "*The PinotFile*," a play on the word pinotophile, detailing recent Pinot Noir wines I had experienced, making recommendations, and writing in general to show my passion for Pinot Noir. The early missive soon became a four page online newsletter, one of the first devoted solely to Pinot Noir. I began to read everything I could possibly find on Pinot Noir, attended every one of the domestic Pinot Noir celebrations and tastings held annually, traveled to the Holy Land (Burgundy), and began visiting Pinot Noir producers regularly. Today, the *PinotFile* is published online about every 2 weeks, receiving about 50,000 page views monthly from readers everywhere in the internet sphere.

Beyond the gratification that comes from recognition of my writing, and the opportunity to taste the greatest domestic Pinot Noirs in current production, my satisfaction has come from the many friendships I have established among winery owners and winemakers that are a very special breed of people. Unlike many wine critics, I do not try to distance myself from the fulfilling interpersonal bonds that can develop in this business.

My wife says I spend too much time on the computer and I do. Each issue of the *PinotFile* requires at least 40 hours to complete, involving careful tasting of Pinot Noir, and researching and writing about the wines and Pinot Noir in general. I am, however, undeterred, because I am intent about offering a special service to pinotphiles and thoroughly enjoy the process. I often jokingly ask people, "What is the difference between a doctor and a wine writer?" The answer is, "A doctor makes a lot more money, but a wine writer gets to drink on the job!"

In my free time I love to play tennis and pickle ball, read more books on wine, dine out as often as I can enjoying wines from my own cellar, play my large collection of rock-n-roll and doo-wop vinyl LPs, collect way too many recipes but never find time to cook with them, spend every Saturday during college football season on the couch, and exercise regularly with my wife Patti who is my social wing person as she is much more outgoing than I am. I have arrived healthy in my early 70s, in large part to her companionship as well.

I do not have time to respond to comments on my website and thus have not incorporated that option for readers, but I am always excited to hear from readers through my email address at [prince@princeofpinot.com](mailto:prince@princeofpinot.com). As far as a photo of myself, you need only look at my logo on my website homepage that was taken from a profile shot several years ago, and I never age because of the life-sustaining properties of Pinot Noir.