



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## First Peek at 2020 and 2021 Pinots

Unusual weather conditions in Oregon over the Labor Day weekend in 2020 led to multiple wildfires that caused smoke-filled air quality over the entire Northwest region. Some pockets in the Willamette Valley were spared but in general, the threat and presence of smoke taint caused many wineries not to bottle the 2020 vintage of Pinot Noir.

The 2021 vintage was complicated by drought conditions (one of the driest growing seasons on record) and below-average winter precipitation. In late June a heat dome developed over the Pacific Northwest but the growth stage of vines at this time was such that there was no serious damage to the developing grapes. The remainder of the 2021 growing season was warmer than average and ended up the second warmest on record. Overall, vintners were pleased with the quality of the vintage that had decent but not particularly large yields.

The worst fire season on record in California in 2020 led to burned vineyards and smoke-tainted wines but some regions of California wine country were unaffected. Yields were down about 14 percent overall due to low rainfall and many wineries chose not to bottle 2020 Pinot Noir wines because of smoke taint. Those sites where harvest was completed before the fires had a successful vintage.

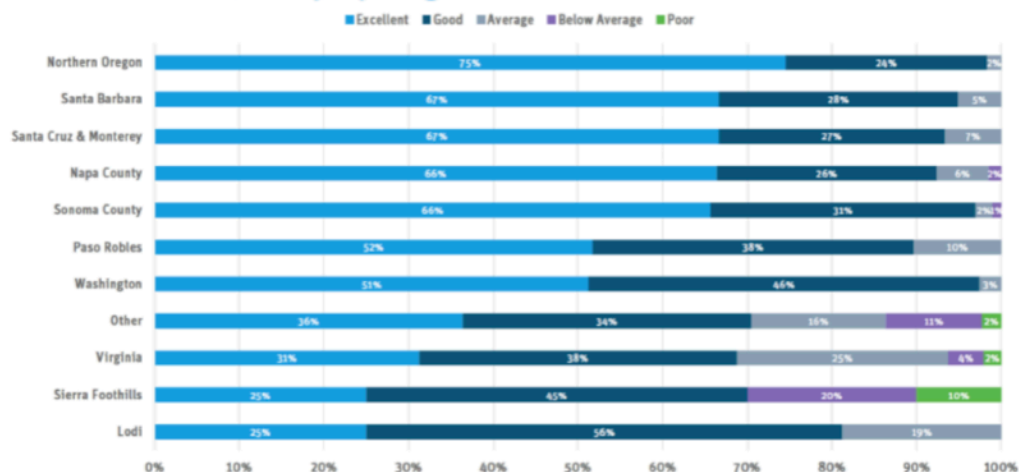
The 2021 vintage was marked by a moderate and consistent growing season in California. The ongoing drought presented challenges and led to reduced yields, but many winemakers reported outstanding quality and superb concentration in the fruit.

### Wine Grape Harvest Quality By Region – SVB Survey

October 5, 2022 | Filed under [Daily Data](#) | Posted by [Lewis Perdue](#)

**Wineries: If you want this kind of data for this year, then participate NOW!**

#### 2021 Harvest Quality by Region



Source: SVB State of the Wine Industry Survey

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Source & Survey Sign-Up: [Silicon Valley Bank](#)

**Less than a week left.**

# TESTAROSSA Winery

This winery has more ultra-premium Pinot Noir vineyard sources than any other winery in California. Hand this plethora of blue-ribbon grapes to a peerless winegrower and winemaker and the result is one of the Golden State's preeminent wineries.

Testarossa Winery was launched in 1993 in Los Gatos by Rob and Diana Jensen after careers in technology. Winemaking has been led by Bill Brosseau since 2000. Bill works with over 20 vineyard partners in the Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County, Sta. Rita Hills, Arroyo Grande Valley, Chalone, and Russian River Valley appellations.

A number of superb 2020 and 2021 vintage Testarossa Pinot Noir wines are reviewed here. To purchase, visit the winery's website at [www.testarossa.com](http://www.testarossa.com).

**2020 Testarossa Cuvée Los Gatos Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.67, RS .07%, 2,932 cases, screw cap, \$32. Released May 2022. The entry level offering. Grapes are sourced from Monterey County AVA sustainable vineyards. Aged 16 months in stainless steel and 11% new French oak barrels. *Light garnet color in the glass., A fruity nose featuring aromas of red cherry, strawberry and complimentary oak. Light and gentle in the mouth with a core of oak-kissed cherry fruit framed by gossamer tannins. Good freshness with a bright, slightly tart cherry drop finish.* **88**

**2020 Testarossa La Rinconada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.27, TA 0.644, RS 07%, 380 cases, \$74. Released May 2022. 23-year-old vines, Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing (CCSW). 67% Pommard 4 clone, 33% Mount Eden clone. Grapes were 100% de-stemmed and fermented in stainless steel. Aged 19 months in French oak barrels, 57% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very alluring perfume of warm cherry pie with spicy a la mode. The essence of red and dark red cherry and raspberry is long in the mouth and infused with tasty spice. Refined in character with bright acidity, agreeable tannins, and a compliment of oak. This wine is simply outstanding.* **94**

**2020 Testarossa Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.38, TA 0.656, RS .05%, 648 cases, \$74. Released April 2022. 12-year-old vines. CCSW vineyard. 100% de-stemmed, fermented in stainless steel. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 56% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. The woody nose is replete with aromas of potting soil, woodpile, peat and blackberry fruit. Mid-weight plus in style, with a rich core of pomegranate, purple and black berry fruits framed by gracious tannins for easy approachability. Impeccable harmony with a velvety texture and welcome persistence on the gloriously-fruited finish. Still gorgeous when tasted two days later from a previously opened bottle.* **95**

**2020 Testarossa Rincon Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.59, TA 0.592, RS .03%, 432 cases, \$74. Released August 2022. 35-year-old vines grown in a SIP Certified vineyard. Clones 2A, 667 and 115. 100% de-stemmed, fermented in stainless steel. Aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. A vigorous nose arrives over time in the glass revealing striking aromas of blackberry, spice, and forest. A spirited wine with exuberant flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, blackberry, black licorice and spice. Flat-out delicious with a measured use of oak, a well-proportioned tannic backbone, and a follow-through of uncommon tenaciousness.* **94**

**2020 Testarossa Rosemary's Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.533, RS .06%, 384 cases, \$74. Released June 2022. 100% 667 clone. 33-year-old vines in a SIP Certified vineyard. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 56% new. 100% clone 667. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Vivid aromas of well-spiced cherry and easy oak. Well-crafted and charming in a mid-weight style, with a caressing mouthfeel and generous flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, cocoa, and toasty oak. The tannins are refined making for good approachability. Very slick mouthfeel. Not a blockbuster but a seductive wine. I rarely encounter a 100% 667 clone wine that is this complete.* **95**

**2020 Testarossa Niclaire California Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.644, RS .08%, 615 cases, \$100. Released June 2022. The winemaker's choice of the best barrels in the cellar. Sourced from multiple vineyards including Sanford & Benedict (35%), La Rinconada (15%), Rincon (15%). Rosemary's (8%), Brousseau (4%), and new oak barrel. A sexy wine that is Rancho La Vina (4%). 100% de-stemmed, fermented in stainless steel. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 65% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Haunting aromas of black cherry, raspberry, sous bois and new oak. Discreet intensity of flavor in a mid-weight style, offering flavors of dark red cherry, red raspberry, strawberry, and spice. Flawless, with a very sleek mouthfeel and spot-on integration of tannins and acidity. Very well-mannered now and easy to like, but has the balance to rest in the cellar for even more enjoyment in years to come. This is the winemaker's best effort and it shows.* **96**



**2021 Testarossa Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.645, RS .04%, 3,700 cases, \$55. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 39% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of oak-kissed cherry, baking spices and rose petal. Straight-forward and easy drinking with a core of wood-fired cherry and berry framed by soft, silky tannins and bright acidity. Oak plies the background in a complimentary manner. The finish is short but accommodating.* **89**

**2021 Testarossa Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.19, TA 0.792, RS .05%, 288 cases, \$57. Release February 2023. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of dark cherry, pomegranate, vanilla and a hint of toast. A flood of delicious dark stone and purple berry fruits greet the palate and really pops. The bright acidity reflects its SRH origins. The intense fruitiness carries through an impressive finish. Oak plays a very subordinate role in this wine.* **92**

**2021 Testarossa Rancho La Viña Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.25, TA 0.787, RS .07%), 192 cases, \$76. 15-year-old vines. 100% clone 115. Grapes were 100% de-stemmed and fermented in stainless steel. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 53% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Exuberant aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, cola, and oak-driven spice and smoke. On the palate, the flavors echo the aromas. This broad-shouldered wine acquires interest over time in the glass as it sheds some of its sumptuous oak. The finish is modestly long with a sweet and sour stamp.* **90**

**2021 Testarossa Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.25, TA 0.792, RS .05%, 528 cases, \$76. Release August 2023. *Similar to the 2020 vintage of this wine but more backward and needs some time in the cellar. Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of darkest cherry, spice box and barnyard are appealing but slow to come to the fore. Mid-weight plus flavors of boysenberry, blackberry and pomegranate have discreetly concentrated richness that carry over to a very long and sleek finish.* **93**

**2021 Testarossa Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 240 cases, \$76. Release February 2022. 25-year-old vines. 100% de-stemmed and fermented in stainless steel. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The woody nose offers fruit aromas of blackberry and blueberry. A mid-weight styled wine with a darker fruit profile than is usually present in Pinot Noir from Rosella's vineyard (typical red fruit predominates). There is a discrete richness of purple berry flavor backed by suede tannins. The wine is quite tasty and although it lacks mid-palate generosity, the wine finishes on a high note with good length.* **91**

**2021 Testarossa Tondré Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.18, TA 0.81, RS .07, 504 cases, \$76. Release December 2022. 12-year-old vines in a SIP Certified vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 70% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackberry, baking spice and toasty oak lead to a mid-weight plus styled wine with a bounty of blueberry and blackberry fruit. A masculine wine, with heavyweight fruit that coats the tongue. Succulent rather than complex and not for those seeking Pinot delicacy.* **90**

# Salty Goats Wine Company

*"You can find us where the vines meet the ocean"*

Two young winemakers, while making high-end Cabernet Sauvignon at two different iconic wineries in Napa for seven harvests, dreamed of crafting Pinot Noir. Intrigued by coastal Pinot Noir, they discovered a vineyard in the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA of the West Sonoma Coast.

The wines are the result of meticulous farming, partial whole cluster fermentation, and gentle extraction. A goal is to create site-driven wines that are age-worthy.

The brand name, Salty Goats, comes from the word "Salty" reflecting the coastal influence on the vineyard source and the wines and "Goats" which have a long history on the Sonoma Coast. The full story of the winery's namesake can be read on the website at [www.saltygoatswine.com](http://www.saltygoatswine.com).



The wines reviewed here are sold exclusively through a mailing list.

**2021 Salty Goats Coastline Project West Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 265 cases, \$60. A blend of a Fort Ross-Seaview vineyard and Annapolis vineyard. The Fort Ross-Seaview vineyard was planted in 2002 3.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean at an elevation of 1000 feet. Selections planted are Calera and Schoolhouse. The Annapolis vineyard was planted in 2005 and sites at an elevation of 1,200-1,600 feet 5 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. Soil is Goldridge sandy loam. Clones are 115 and faux 828. Native yeast fermentation in stainless steel, 14 days on the skins, 25% whole cluster. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of purple and black berry compost along with a crisp ocean breeze perfume. Mid-weight plus in style, with discretely rich flavors of blueberry and boysenberry, and a slightly confected raspberry note. Fresh, with balancing tannins, and a deft hint of oak, some savory earthiness, and finishing with good fruit richness along with the slightest astringency.* **91**

**2021 Salty Goats Fort Ross-Seaview West Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., 150 cases, \$75. The Fort Ross-Seaview vineyard was planted in 2002 and organically farmed by Greg Adams and his team. The site is located at 900 feet elevation and surrounded by a redwood forest protecting the vineyard from coastal winds. Soil is hard sandstone and quartz. Selections are Calera and Schoolhouse. Native yeast fermentation in stainless steel, 14 days on the skins and 35% whole cluster. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Reserved aromas of black raspberry, boysenberry, earthy flora, and a hint of toasty oak. Similar to the Coastline Project but with more charm, a longer finish, and more appealing acidity on the finish that gives the wine lift and energy. The wine is packed with spiced dark cherry and raspberry flavors and there is an interesting saltiness. This wine is still very young and will need a few years in the cellar to fully reach full acclaim.* **93**

# Three Sticks Wines

This small winery produces exceptional wines from estate vineyards owned by Bill Price including Durell, Gap's Crown, Walala and William James. The winery's hospitality home is the Vallejo-Casteñada Adobe located in the town of Sonoma. The Adobe was originally built in 1842 by Salvador Vallejo, and has been restored as a Sonoma landmark.

Winemaker Ryan Prichard joined Three Sticks in 2015 alongside former Williams Selyem winemaker consultant Bob Cabral. He crafts both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Three Sticks' estate vineyard sites.

Most of the wines are sold through a mailing list at [www.threestickswines.com](http://www.threestickswines.com).



**2020 Three Sticks Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.64, 490 cases, \$75. Released August 2022. Clones 115, 667, 943, and Swan and Calera selections. 10% whole cluster. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 55% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Invigorating aromas of dark pie cherries, garrigue, and complimentary oak. The palate echoes the nose with added flavors of black grapes and brown spices. No rough edges with refreshing acidity leading to a satisfying finish that lingers appealingly.* **92**

**2020 Three Sticks William James Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.65, 424 cases, \$75. Released August 2022. Clones Swan, Calera and 943. 20% whole cluster. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 52% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Bright aromas of darker cherry, graham, toast, and dried thyme. A well-spiced love letter with a long kiss of cherry on the mid-weight palate. Good acidity, calm tannins, with a lengthy finish. Plenty of oak sheen in this wine will determine your pleasure depending on your preferences.* **91**

**2020 Three Sticks Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.66, 872 cases, \$75. Rochioli and Swan selection, and 115, faux 828, 667 and 777 clones. 20% whole cluster. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 56% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The aromas of darker cherry and berry and earthy flora arrive over time in the glass. The gorgeous core of deeply-flavored dark cherry and berry fruit with a slightly confected tone. Richly fruited, reflecting the typical Gap's sine quo non, yet with refined backing tannins. Not as big as some vintages of Gap's Crown Pinot Noir but a solid wine in its own right.* **93**

**2020 Three Sticks Walala Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.49, TA 0.66, 432 cases, \$75. Always a stunning wine from a vineyard perched high in the northwestern Sonoma Coast, six miles from the rugged Pacific Ocean coastline. The most isolated of the Three Sticks Estate vineyards. Released August 2022. Clones 115 and 113. 20% whole cluster. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 52% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The welcoming aromas of black cherry, cocoa and sous-bois lead to a mid-weight melange of black cherry and boysenberry fruits that are flamboyant. A glamorous wine with inviting finesse and cool-climate refinement. Better and better when sampled over the following two days from a previously opened bottle. This vineyard is always delivers outstanding wines.* **95**

# Kutch Wines

I have ridden along with Jamie Kutch on his road to success since his first vintage in 2005. More recently, I have found his Pinot Noirs not only unique (he uses a high percentage of whole cluster) but exceptional in quality across his entire range of offerings.

Kutch Pinot Noirs are all sourced from impeccable Sonoma Coast and Santa Cruz Mountains vineyards. Over the past year, Jamie has worked to develop his first estate vineyard on the Sonoma Coast (read the whole story at [www.kutchwines.com](http://www.kutchwines.com) in the 2022 Spring Release Newsletter).

Jamie produced no wine from the challenging 2020 vintage. Smoke from North Coast wildfires led to the loss of all grape sources except McDougall Vineyard which was picked early before plumes of smoke tainted the grapes.

The lineup of 2021 Kutch Pinot Noirs is reviewed here. Jamie told me, "All of our vineyards were harvested with exceptional fruit quality. Small clusters and small berries led to intensity that was framed with exceptionally fresh and bright acidity. The wines are expected to age well." I found the aromatics of each wine arresting. The wines are definitely terroir-driven and not just about fruitiness. The whole cluster inclusion is complimentary and not as prominent a feature compared to some past vintages that had 100% whole cluster fermentation. All in all, this is a very impressive lineup and sensibly priced considering qualitatively comparable Pinot Noirs are currently often priced in the \$85 to \$100+ range.

Kutch wines are sold through a mailing list.

**2021 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 625 cases, \$42. Release January 10, 2023. Composed of select barrels from each of Kutch's vineyard sources. 50% whole cluster and indigenous yeast fermentation. Aged in used French oak barrels and bottled unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very nice, fresh perfume of bright Bing cherry, floral goodness and earth. Mid-weight red and black cherry fruits are supported by bright acidity, a tag of oak and mild tannins. Silky in the mouth and satisfying. This wine has many of the same traits as the Kutch single vineyard wines in this vintage.* **91**

**2021 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 550 cases, \$69. Release January 10, 2023. Sandy loam marine soils (Goldridge). Vineyard planted in 1999. 50% whole cluster and indigenous yeast fermentation. Aged in used French oak barrels. Bottled unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Vibrant aromas of dark cherry and raspberry with a earthy tone and a hint of iodine. Sleek in the mouth with mid-weight flavors of cherry, raspberry and a subtle herbal, woody tone. There is noticeably bright acidity with a slinky texture and a decent but not exceptionally long finish.* **92**

**2021 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 175 cases, \$54. Release January 10, 2023. This historic vineyard was planted in 1972 at 1,400 feet elevation 3.05 miles from the Pacific coastline. Goldridge soils. 50% whole cluster and indigenous yeast fermentation. Aged in used French oak barrels and bottled unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Lovely aromas of black cherry, dark berries, forest and rose petal. This wine has a unique forest theme underpinning the mid-weight blackberry and pomegranate fruit flavors making it very interesting beyond simple fruitiness. A moderately firm tannic backbone predicts age-ability.* **94**

**2021 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 500 cases, \$69. Release July 11, 2023. This vineyard is perched high above the fog line at 1010 feet and 3.5 miles from the Pacific coastline and receives more warmth than any of the vineyards Kutch works with. 50% whole cluster and indigenous yeast fermentation. Aged in used French oak barrels and bottled unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Soaring aromas of purple berry, dark rose petal, wood pile, and sous bois. Very charming at a young age with middleweight flavors of purple and black berries and dark chocolate endowed with appealing spice. Redeeming balance is evident but the wine's nose is its most striking feature. The quenching, very long finish leads to an urge for another sip. Pinot Noir from this vineyard is stellar year in and year out.* **94**

**2021 Kutch Bohan Graveyard Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 100 cases, \$54. Release July 11, 2023. A 1-acre block of Bohan Vineyard marked by a tombstone dating to 1875. Located 1,500 feet elevation 3.05 miles inland from the Pacific coastline. The vines are own-rooted, head-trained, and raised without irrigation. The soil in this block is distinctly rocky in a base of sandstone. 100% de-stemmed and fermented with indigenous yeast. Aged in used French oak barrels and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Dark garnet color in the glass. A mysterious nose offering aromas of wine cave, animale, chalk, and a dark berry medley. The richly appointed dark fruit core is well-spiced and accented with a hint of herbs. Somewhat primal and intriguing with a healthy tannic backbone and quenching acidity on the finish. This wine totally captured my interest when sampled the following day from a previously opened bottle.* **95**



**2021 Kutch Mindego Ridge Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 500 cases, \$69. Release July 11, 2023. A high elevation (925 feet), 10-acre vineyard located 8 miles from the Pacific Ocean owned and farmed by David and Stacy Gollnick. Vineyard planted in 2009. 50% whole cluster and indigenous yeast fermentation. Aged in used French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Plenty of aromatic goodness on the nose with scents of blueberry, dark cherry, cola, and savory herbs. An explosion of dark stone and berry fruit greets the mid-palate, expanding and then saturating a fortuitous finish featuring memorable, spicy fruit. This wine is clearly the best Pinot Noir I have had from this vineyard. A treasure chest of Pinot goodness.* **95**

# Modus Operandi Cellars

Jason Moore, owner and winemaker of Modus Wines, told me that when he moved to California from Dallas, Texas he hated Pinot and would not drink it if you paid him. As his palate has evolved, he has fallen head over heels in love with Pinot and it's just about all he drinks now (welcome to the flock). Jason still loves his Cabernets, Syrahs, and red blends, also crafts Napa Cabernet, and that may account in part for the choice to harvest well-ripened fruit and produce the resulting bold style of the finished wines. The distraction of higher alcohol Pinot Noir wines is that they lack the gorgeous Pinot Noir perfume.

The wines are sold by allocation at [www.moduswines.com](http://www.moduswines.com).

**2020 Modus Operandi Cellars Silver Eagle Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.25% alc., 50 cases, \$85. Current release. This 30-acre vineyard is located north of Occidental in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley AVA. Vosne-Romanée selection. Harvest Brix 25.5°. 100% de-stemmed and fermented in open-top tanks. Aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Cooked fruit aromas of blueberry-pomegranate with some oak vanillin and a slight note of volatile acidity. Full-bodied with layers of dark purple and black fruit flavors with an underlying earthy tone. Silky in the mouth with modest tannins. This wine is ripe-fruit driven with little nuance.* **87**

**2021 Modus Operandi Cellars Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.0% alc., 100 cases, \$75. Releasing January 2023. Vineyard has been planted and managed for the past 30 years by John Bacigalupi and his family. Harvest Brix 25.0°. 50% clone 777 and 50% clone 667. 100% de-stemmed and fermented in open-top tanks. Aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Muted aromas of blackberry jam, pine sap, herb garden and toasty oak. Full-bodied and richly endowed with very ripe purple and black berry fruit flavors framed by silky tannins. Goes down easy, with the hefty alcohol well-hidden, and finishes with admirable length.* **90**

**2021 Modus Operandi Cellars Gap's Crown Vineyard Petaluma Gap/Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 15.0% alc., 150 cases, \$85. Releasing January 2023. 60% clone 777 and 40% clone faux 828. Harvest Brix 25.7°. 100% de-stemmed and fermented in open-top tanks. Aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Muted aromas of well-ripened black cherry, dark rose petal, sous bois and dusty oak. Mid-weight plus in style with a core of boysenberry and black cherry fruit flavors that awaken the senses. The striking finish offers both intensity of fruit flavor and length. The pedigree of this vineyard shows through. The high alcohol peeks out as the wine warms in the glass.* **91**



**2021 Modus Operandi Cellars UV-Laguna Vineyard Russian River Valley/Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 15.0% alc., 100 cases, \$85. Releasing January 2023. This vineyard was planted by Ulises Valdez Sr. in 2011. The soil is a unique mix of sand and dense clay known as "Sebastopol Clay." The Pinot Noir benefits from the moisture trapped in the clay by allowing the grapes to achieve ripeness without excessive water stress during the warm summer months. 50% clone 777 and 50% clone 667. Harvest Brix 26.7°. 100% de-stemmed and fermented in open-top tanks. Aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black raspberry, dark rose petal and wood shop. A middleweight-crafted wine with a core of cherry cola and baking spice flavors. There is a redder tone to the fruit than other wines in the 2021 lineup. The alcohol is well-hidden and the tannins are silky.* **92**



# Woodenhead Vintners

Woodenhead Vintners remains the last vestige of the original Williams Selyem Winery., WesMar, and Burt Williams' Morning Dew Ranch have ceased to make wine. The owner and winemaker of Woodenhead Vintners, Nikolai Stez, worked 17 harvests at Williams Selyem as an assistant winemaker for Burt Williams. With the sale of Williams Selyem Winery in 1997, Nikolai started his own Woodenhead label.

Nikolai continues the Williams Selyem tradition of sourcing grapes from only top quality vineyards and his vinification regimen duplicates that performed at Williams Selyem during the winery's pre-sale glory years.

I have tasted along with Nikolai on a number of occasions and can highly recommend his Pinot Noir lineup. He is the longtime principal vintner sourcing Pinot Noir from the renowned Ritchie Vineyard in the Russian River Valley.

The Woodenhead wines are sold through a mailing list and the website at [www.woodenheadwine.com](http://www.woodenheadwine.com). An inviting tasting room is located in a converted home at 5700 River Road in Santa Rosa (reservations not required but recommended). Older vintages are available for sale on the website, several of which I have previously reviewed at [www.princeofpinot.com/winery/428/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/winery/428/).

**2016 Woodenhead Ritchie Vineyard "Cinder Cone" Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., \$N/A. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. A complex nose offers aromas of black cherry, cocoa, Herbs de Provence, worn leather and toasty oak. On the palate, the wine is taking on an aged, tertiary character. Cherry-driven, with notes of cola and smoke backed by bright acidity. The fruit intensity is modest allowing both tannin and acidity to stick out a small amount.* **90**

**2017 Woodenhead Ritchie Vineyard "Cinder Cone" Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.646, 116 cases, \$70. Cinder Block contains both Martini 58 and Pommard 5 clones. There is a total of 910 vines planted in 1972., making it one of the oldest plantings of Pinot Noir in the North Coast. The unique soil consists of two feet of Goldridge loam on top of volcanic cinder cone material. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of black cherry, potpourri, red licorice and a hint of oak. Mid-weight in style, with the striking essence of black cherry and black raspberry fruit that saturates the mid-palate and carries through a remarkably lengthy finish. A thread of oak and earthiness adds interest. Outstanding balance.* **94**

**2017 Woodenhead Buena Terra Vineyard E Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.653, 154 cases, \$70. Gold Medal at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair and California State Fair in 2022. Vines planted in 1994. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noir nose offering enticing aromas of Bing cherry, BBQ spice rub, cola, and earthy flora. Bright black cherry, spice, cola, and matcha tea flavors are shadowed with toasty oak. This beauty is expansive through the mid-palate and finish and an inviting cut of acidity brightens the finish.* **94**



**2019 Woodenhead Ritchie Vineyard Martini Clone Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.67, 158 cases, \$56. The vines are 47 years old and Woodenhead has been purchasing Pinot Noir from Kent Ritchie since 2010. There are several Pinot Noir blocks in the Ritchie Vineyard: the Cinder Cone is Martini and Pommard clones, another block is exclusively Swan clone and adjacent is a block solely planted to Martini clone. Most recently, Nikolai has sourced the Martini clone block for its superiority. Often the grapes are blended into the winery's Russian River Valley bottling or the popular Wet Kiss Pinot Noir but in 2019 the grapes were exceptional. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very engaging aromas of purple and black berry fruits with a floral accent. Discretely rich in a mid-weight style, with earth-*

*kissed blackberry and black currant fruit flavors. The tannins are well-proportioned and there is admirable length on the dry finish. This wine reflects the typical character of the Martini clone. 93*

**2020 Woodenhead Starbridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.66, 161 cases, \$66. Since 2010, Summa Vineyard, located on the extreme West Sonoma Coast, and a source for Williams Selyem Pinot Noir in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was sold to Thomas Rivers Brown and the grapes are used for Brown's Rivers-Marie label. Scott and Joan Zeller, who own a property adjacent to the original plantings at Summa Vineyard, planted the 2-acre Starbridge Vineyard in 2000 using vine grafts for the original vines at adjacent Summa Vineyard. The clones are unknown and Zeller refers to them as the "Summa clones." In 2020, the Starbridge Vineyard grapes did not suffer smoke taint from the wildfires. Bottled unfinned and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Reserved but appealing aromas of purple grape, incense, forest path, and muddy earth. The dark red cherry fruit core is framed by savory notes of herbs and tobacco. Silky in texture, with very gracious tannins, redeeming acidity, and a persistent finish. 92*

# Broadley Vineyards Celebrates 35 Vintages

The 2021 growing season was characterized by an unusually warm spring, the driest April on record, several days of over 100°F during the summer. Since the Broadley Estate Vineyard is dry-farmed, the vines struggled somewhat. Clusters were small leading to small yields. The result was lush fruit, medium acid and medium to low alcohols.

The Pinot Noirs crafted by owner and winemaker Morgan Broadley have been consistently top-notch. I have had the pleasure of reviewing multiple vintages since 2005. The three wines reviewed here are available on the winery's website at [www.broadleyvineyards.com](http://www.broadleyvineyards.com), with special reduced pricing during November.

**2021 Broadley Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., \$23. Released July 2022. A blend of grapes from the Broadley Estate Vineyard, and Malliris, Button Field, Sunny Mountain, and Walnut Ridge vineyards. Aged 9 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, raspberry, rose petals and wood spice lead to a lighter-styled wine with flavors that echo the aromas. There is a slight confected tone of red licorice. Silky in the mouth with refreshing acidity and just a hint of oak backing. A solid daily drinker at the right price.* **89**

**2021 Broadley Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., \$29.75 (November only). Current release. This wine is composed of a variety of blocks containing older and newer vines. 15% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The earth-bound nose also offers scents of black cherry fruit and red rose petals. There is a plethora of luscious red and black fruits framed by a herbal tone. There are some untamed tannins. The finish is noticeably longer than the WV bottling.* **90**

**2021 Broadley Marcile Lorraine Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., \$46.75 (November only). Current release. This wine is produced each year from the same distinctive block of old vine Pinot Noir (Pommard and Dijon clones). 30% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. This mid-weight plus styled wine is clearly a step up in quality. Inviting aromas of blackberry, baking spices, and dark red rose petals. Impressive fullness and length on the mid-palate that features black raspberry and blackberry fruit flavors. The wine's balance is impeccable and the length of finish is impressive.* **93**



# Bluebird Hill Cellars

Neil and Sue Shay moved to the Willamette Valley in 2010 and found a 6-acre homestead located in the southwestern coastal foothills in Alpine, west of Monroe, Oregon (southern Willamette Valley). There was a 3-acre Christmas tree farm on the property originally and it took the Shays three years to fully clear the land in preparation for planting a vineyard. The site is ideal for winegrowing because its warm hilltop site enjoys gentle summer breezes with southeastern and western-oriented slopes capture the sun's energy. 3 acres are under vine including Dijon, Pommard, and Wädenswil clones planted at high density.

Bluebird Hill Cellars Pinot Noir is handcrafted in small lots and represent very good value. Grapes are harvested at modest Brix levels and the resulting wines are red and blue fruit driven with good acidity and a compliment of oak in the background.

The current release 2019 Pinot Noir wines are available for sale on the website at [www.bluebirdcellars.wine](http://www.bluebirdcellars.wine).

**2019 Bluebird Hill Cellars Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.78, RS 0, 200 cases, \$35. Harvest Brix 22°. Clones 115 and Pommard (37.5%), 777 (20%), and 667 (5%). Aged in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose leads with appealing aromas of well-spiced cherry, blueberry and leather. Light to mid-weight in style, driven by red cherry and red berry flavors with a shadow of oak. An easy, forward drinking wine with a short finish.* **89**

**2019 Bluebird Hill Cellars Mom's Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., pH 3.53, RS 0, 200 cases, \$54. Harvest Brix 22.1°. 50% Pommard and 25% each 667 and 777. Aged in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Oak-kissed cherry and blueberry aromas lead off. Cherry-driven in a mid-weight style with a thread of oak. Forward-drinking, with modest tannins, and a decent finish. A satisfying wine but not epic.* **91**

**2019 Bluebird Hill Cellars South Block Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.68, RS 0, 100 cases, \$54. Harvest Brix 22.0°. 50% 667, 25% each 115 and 777. Aged in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, dried herbs and graham lead to a middleweight styled wine featuring red and blue berry fruit flavors with a touch of spice. Very welcoming with a silky mouthfeel and a noticeably long finish. The pick of the 2019 vintage litter.* **92**



**2019 Bluebird Hill Cellars Zenith Vineyard Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., pH 3.61, RS 0, 100 cases, \$54. Harvest Brix 22.2°. 50% Pommard and 50% 777. Aged in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of red cherry, woodpile, and oak spice. A delicate wine with a lighter-weighted gist of cherry fruit. Nicely balanced, with gentle tannins and a modest finish.* **90**

# Wine Briefs

**Russian River Valley Neighborhoods Study Conclusions** Growers and wineries undertook an experiment beginning in 2015 to prove that Pinot Noir grown in different sub-regions within the Russian River Valley AVA presented itself differently. Called the Neighborhoods Initiative, it led to six specific delineations within the Russian River Valley known simply as The Neighborhoods. Pinot Noirs from 18 wineries from several vintages were analyzed to devise a series of characteristics for their wine that could be measured in a laboratory. When the analysis was concluded in 2019, it was confirmed that each neighborhood offered a fingerprint of its own. There were consistently specific sensory characteristics that derive from Pinot Noir grapes grown in the neighborhoods. The neighborhoods:

**Middle Reach** One of the warmer neighborhoods. The heart of it is Westside Road, home to Bacigalupi, Bucher, Rochioli, Allen Vineyard, Williams-Selyem, Arista, DuMOL's Flax Estate, Ramey's Westside Farms, MacRostie, MacMurray Ranch and Gary Farrell. The wines are typically defined by texture and length as well as ripeness, intensity and lush character. The tannins can be structured yet supple.

**Laguna Ridge** This neighborhood lies south of the Middle Reach near Forestville. It is home to Merry Edwards, Dehlinger, Lynmar and Joseph Swan. The Pinot Noirs are characterized by sensuous and moderate acidity, with red and dark fruit flavors and a touch of baking spice, with ample tannin.

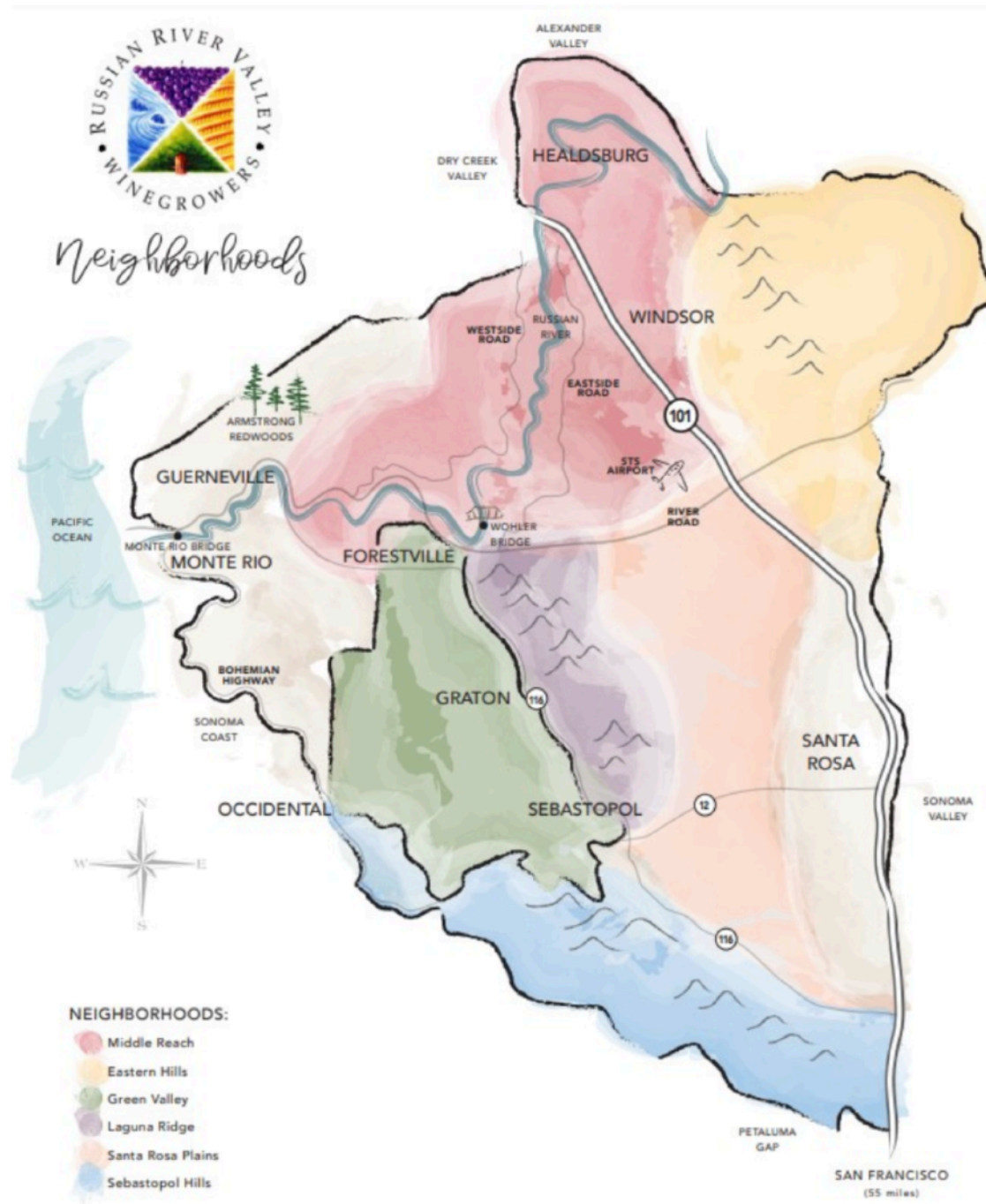
**Santa Rosa Plain** A large stretch of flatlands on the east side of the Laguna de Santa Rosa encompassing Olivet Road. It includes a deep concentration of vineyards and wineries including Benovia, Inman, Pellegrini and De Loach.

**Eastern Hills** The northernmost neighborhood east of Windsor, a warmish area only minimally touched by Russian River fog. The Pinot Noirs can be quite ripe and lush.

**Green Valley** The only neighborhood that is its own AVA, centered around the towns of Graton and Occidental. Redwood and fir trees surround many of the vineyards. The Dutton family, Iron Horse, Hartford Court, Marimar Estate and DuMOL have considerable plantings here. Because of the cooling winds and moderate elevations, many of the Pinot Noirs have a crispy red fruit character, more rhubarb and pomegranate than dark cherry, with beautiful aromatics and texture.

**Sebastopol Hills** Predominantly west and southwest of Sebastopol, this neighborhood is about as cool as it gets with in the Russian River Valley. Vineyards include Balletto's Burnside Road, Sexton Hill and Cider Ridge, as well as Pratt Sexton Road. The cool climate provides crisp red fruit characters with elements of dried herb and black tea. Cold, windswept and unsheltered, it has less risk of frost than other neighborhoods, providing plenty of hang time.

The Russian River Valley Winegrowers Neighborhoods map:



**Wine Ratings Continue to be Controversial** I read with interest a post in the Northwest Wine Report - [www.northwestwinereport.com](http://www.northwestwinereport.com) - by Sean P. Sullivan (a former contributing editor to *Wine Enthusiast* magazine) titled "Who cares about wine ratings?" Looking back to the origins of the *PinotFile* in the early 2000s, I resisted awarding scores to reviewed wines, preferring instead to give a concise and appropriate description ending with words like "good," "very good," "outstanding," and "extraordinary." Readers demanded scores, so I relented and began using the 100-point scoring system in 2008. Sullivan points out, "You are unlikely to find a critic who does not have at least some misgivings about rating wine." You can include me in those with misgivings. Sullivan also notes that wine rating is still more art than science. I find scoring entirely subjective and vulnerable to many variables particularly with Pinot Noir. That said, through the years I have accumulated enough experience tasting thousands of domestic Pinot Noirs to consider my scores reliable at least to those whose palates are aligned. Young consumers are not particularly interested in scores and they may be the force that causes the extinction of wine scoring.

**Increased Risk for All-Cause Dementia in Abstainers** A recent paper in the journal *Addiction* reported the relationship between alcohol use and dementia in adults aged more than 60 years after reviewing data from 15 international studies. Some population-based studies in the medical literature have shown that light-to-moderate alcohol use can reduce dementia risk as compared to those who have abstained from alcohol. Still other studies revealed no increased risk of dementia in abstainers. This recent study suggests that abstaining from alcohol may increase the risk for all-cause dementia and that light-to-moderate alcohol consumption is associated with reduced risk of dementia among Europeans (but not Asians) compared to occasional drinkers. The study did not look at the type of alcoholic drink in each cohort.

**Binge Drinking Could Increase Risk of COVID-19** A study published recently in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* looked at seven groups of women in their 20s and found the women were more likely to end up with COVID-19 if they consumed four or more drinks of alcohol per sitting. One explanatory factor is not practicing preventive behaviors such as social distancing when intoxicated.

**Some Australians Welcome New Flat-Pack Wine Bottles** Traditional wine bottles are heavy, fragile and waste a lot of space. Flat wine bottles arrived in Australia in the summer of 2022 to provide a solution. The bottles are made from 100% recycled PET plastic that is 83% lighter than traditional glass wine bottles. The slim, flat profile allows twice as many bottles to fit into a standard case. There has been some buzz since the release of these flat bottles but it is not clear that they are suitable for ultra-premium, cellar-worthy wines. The bottles are most appropriate for early drinking wines and are not meant for cellaring wine.



**Smoke Taint and How to Manage It** Tom Collins of the Washington State University's Wine Science Center has studied for years how smoke exposure affects grapes and reported his findings in the journal *Nature*. Researchers at UC Davis and Oregon State University are also studying smoke taint of wine grapes. The class of compounds causing smokey aromas and flavors has been identified but the next challenge is determining how to remove them from wine or finding things that can be done in the vineyard to prevent smoke compounds from entering grapes. Stay tuned.

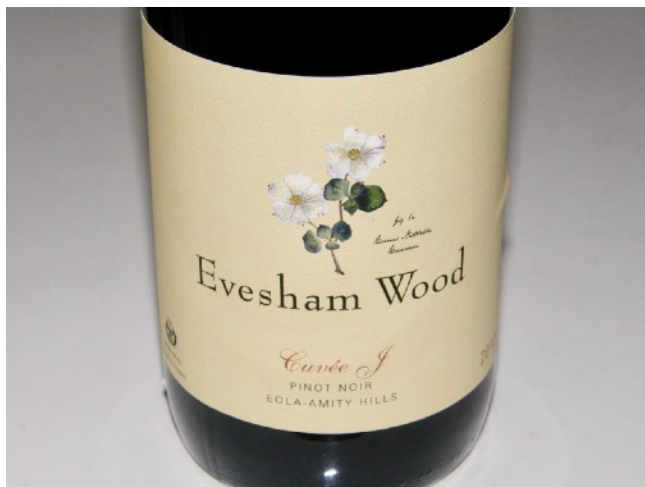
**Alcohol Consumption and Weight Gain** Current scientific research has consistently shown that light-to-moderate alcohol consumption does not increase body weight and that increased body weight is only a result of excessive alcohol intake or binge drinking. A single-serving size of 6 ounces of wine has 111-275 calories depending on the type of wine and its ABV. A standard 12 ounce serving of beer has 150 calories as does a 12 ounce service of Coke. Many scientific studies show that liquid calories from alcohol are metabolized differently and not bioavailable. Drinkers process complex carbohydrates more efficiently and store less fat. The takeaway message is that you can enjoy wine in moderation without worrying about gaining weight as long as you maintain a proper diet and perform regular exercise.

**Lynmar Estate Adds Hessel Station Vineyard to Portfolio of RRV Estates** Located in South Sebastopol in the coolest and most southern tip of the Russian River Valley, Hessel Station Vineyard joins Lynmar Estate's three other estate sites, which include Susanna's Vineyard, Adam's Vineyard in

Forestville, and the winery's original Quail Hill Vineyard, located adjacent to Laguna de Santa Rosa in the heart of the Russian River Valley. The four vineyards encompass 85 acres of vines. Lynmar purchased the Hessel Station site in 2018 which at the time it was but an unfarmed open field which had sat fallow for decades. The site is sustainably farmed by a permanent vineyard team. For more information, visit [www.lynmarestate.com](http://www.lynmarestate.com).

**Looking for an Unparalleled Value in Pinot Noir?** The **2021 Cristom Mt. Jefferson Cuvée** Pinot Noir is crafted predominantly from Cristom's estate single vineyards including Eileen, Jessie, Louise, Marjorie, and Paul Gerrie, along with some fruit from partner vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills. After 30 years of dedication to whole cluster fermentation and native yeast fermentations, the "Mt. Jeff" is the embodiment of Cristom's winemaking style and is the winery's flagship Pinot Noir. This wine has 46% whole cluster fermentation. Simply outstanding and an unparalleled value in Pinot Noir (\$40), this wine sells out year after year. I believe this is Cristom's largest production wine so it is widely available. Check our wine retailer or visit [www.cristomvineyards.com](http://www.cristomvineyards.com).

**Nearly an Epiphany** I have had the opportunity to drink Pinot Noir from every notable producer in California and Oregon but once in awhile there is a Pinot Noir that comes along that is truly stunning. I retrieved a magnum of **2012 Evesham Wood Cuvée J Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** from my wine locker recently and brought it home. There is no question in my mind that Pinot Noir tastes better from magnums particularly aged Pinot Noir. The Cuvée J bottling is the winery's top wine created for cellaring and sourced exclusively from organic grapes grown at the estate Le Puits Sec Vineyard. I have reviewed examples of this wine since the 2006 vintage and have found this bottling always to be my favorite in the impressive Evesham Wood lineup. When I reviewed the 2012 vintage of this wine in December 2014 (13.0% alc., \$42), I noted, "A classy wine with a good tannic backbone for aging and a lengthy finish that soars with a purple berry scent. The wine has shoulders but is still refined." I awarded it a score of 93. The magnum of this wine I recently drank over 3 days with my wife Patti was incredible. There were masses of perfume and the perfect balance between dark berry fruit and spice. The finish went on and on and on. I kept looking at my glass and shaking my head. The meretricious mistress had been tamed!!



**Sta. Rita Hills Wine Alliance Saunters & Sips** Sta. Rita Hills wineries show their current and new release wines along with Spanish music and tasty snacks from Buena Onda at El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historic Park on Saturday, April 29, 2023. Participating wineries include Alma Rosa, Fiddlehead Cellars, Foxen Winery, Kessler-Haak Vineyard & Winery, Longoria Wines, Ojai Vineyards, Pali Wine Company, Sanford Winery, Seagrape Wine Co, and The Hilt. Purchase tickers now for Early Bird pricing (discount ends December 15, 2022). Tickets are \$99 per person now and \$129 after December 15. Purchase tickets at [www.staritahills.com](http://www.staritahills.com).

**Santa Cruz Mountains Event** The Taste of the Mountains Menlo Park Wine Walk will be held Saturday, December 3 in downtown Menlo Park. Wines from local boutique wineries of the Santa Cruz Mountains will be poured from tasting locations up and down Santa Cruz Avenue. Advanced ticket price is \$50. The Aptos Wine Wander will be held Saturday, December 10 in Aptos Village. Taste local Santa Cruz Mountain wineries while strolling through Aptos Village businesses. Advanced ticket price is \$40. For more information and tickets, visit [www.winesofthesantacruzmountains.com](http://www.winesofthesantacruzmountains.com).



**IPNC Announces VIP Experience** When you travel to IPNC with an entourage it is always a challenge to sit together at the Grand Dinner and Salmon Bake. Now a VIP Experience is offered that allows attendees to purchase 10 full weekend tickets as a bundle and receive a complimentary reserved 10-person table at the Grand Dinner and Salmon Bake. This is the only way to reserve a private table. The 2023 Elevated VIPNC Experience for 10 is \$16,950.00 (a single registration for the Full Weekend package is \$1,695.00). The 2023 IPNC, now in its 35th year, will be July 28-30 at Linfield University in McMinnville, Oregon. For more information, visit [www.ipnc.org](http://www.ipnc.org).

**Insider Information on Trader Joe's Pinot Noir** Trader Joe's is currently airing Podcast #57 "Trader Joe's Wine Wonderings." I found out after listening to this podcast that the Lot designation indicates what winery produce that Lot# Pinot Noir. The word "Lot" is deceiving since it refers to the producing winery and not the particular batch or lot of Pinot Noir. Lot #109 is a Platinum Reserve Pinot Noir and my scores have been 2015 87, 2016 90 and 2019 89, so this lot is worth purchasing when it is available. Currently, Trader Joe's is offering a Lot #23 Grand Reserve Carneros Pinot Noir from Carneros Cellars in Napa (14.5% alc., \$12.99). I have reviewed Trader Joe's Lot #23 Pinot Noir 4 times in the past and scored them low: 2013 86, 2015 86, 2016 87, and 2019 87. This would indicate that Lot #23 is probably not a good value and I did not buy this current release to review.

**Bacchus Landing** Taste wines from eight boutique wineries at one location in the heart of Healdsburg. The relatively new three-acre property offers five tasting rooms, wood-fired pizza at The Market, picnic tables, lawn games and an event center. There is a wide range of grape varietals offered including Pinot Noir from Convene by Dan Kosta, Dot Wine, Montagne-Russe, and Smith Story Wine Cellars. Check it out at 14210 Bacchus Landing Way.

**Hanzell Vineyards Holiday Offerings 2020 Hanzell Farm Pinot Noirs** are two bottlings handled identically right down to the harvest and bottling dates, with one fermented fully de-stemmed and one fermented 100% whole cluster. This is a good chance to compare the two fermentations. You may want to also consider **Hanzell Sonoma Valley Pinot Noir** which is an estate blend sourced from 12 acres of the Ambassador's 1953, de Brye and Sessions vineyard blocks with an average vine age of nearly 30 years. [www.hanzell.com](http://www.hanzell.com).



**Looking for a Limited Production "Cultish" Pinot Noir?** This holiday season you may be searching for a special California Pinot Noir that is only sold through allocation (ie expensive). Visit [www.goldengatecellars.com](http://www.goldengatecellars.com) for the good stuff. Sure, you pay a little more than winery release price, but wines from Cattleya, Cirq and CHEV,, Paul Lato, and Occidental, to name a few, make very impressive gifts. For what it's worth: Golden Gate Wine Cellars held a bland tasting recently with a lineup that included (vintages not stated but I assume recent releases; scores are from the wine press) Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch (96), Addax Silver Eagle (95), Brewer Clifton Hapgood (95), Dragonette Fiddlestix (95), Hyde de Villaine Ygnacia (94), Rochioli Big Hill (97), Beaux Freres The Upper Terrace (97), Littorai Hirsch (96), and Ancien Jouissance (94). The wines were tasted with a group of 12 people. The Ancien Pinot Noir received 6 first, 2 second and 2

third place votes ahead of Littorai's 3 firsts, 4 seconds and 3 third place votes and Beaux Freres' 2 first, 2 second and 3 third place votes. The Ancien Jouissance Vineyard Pinot Noir is from a 2-acre vineyard in the Russian River Valley planted to Dijon 115 in Goldridge sandy loam soil and is offered at \$59.99.

**Inflation and a Missed Windfall** A 3-liter bottle of 1971 Romanée-Conti La Tâche sold this month at auction for \$81,250. In the early 1990s, I bought a 6-liter bottle (methuselah) of 1983 La Tâche at auction (back when wine auctions were in their infancy) for \$900. Unfortunately, the wine was drunk soon after at my wine club's Christmas dinner. 1983 wasn't as good a vintage as 1971 but the name La Tâche currently brings big money at auction and that rare 6-liter bottle would certainly have brought me a significant profit. Bummer.

