



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir is as  
inviting as  
silk sheets*

## Gold Medal California Pinot Noir

With a nod to the spirit of the ongoing Rio Olympics, here are Gold Medal worthy California Pinot Noir wines featured in this issue along with many other medal contenders. As you can see, almost every wine is from the 2014 vintage. MY ADVICE IS TO BUY EVERY 2014 VINTAGE PINOT NOIR FROM CALIFORNIA AND OREGON YOU CAN POSSIBLY AFFORD. Vintages like 2014 come along rarely.

**2014 Balletto Winery Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Balletto 18 Barrel Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 94**

**2014 Bernardus Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Bernardus Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Couloir John Sebastiano Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 94.**

**2014 Couloir Monument Tree Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 94.**

**2013 Domaine Anderson Pinoli Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Fulcrum Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 94**

**2013 Ken Brown Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 93**

**2012 Ken Brown Radian Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 94**

**2014 MacPhail Lakeview Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 MacPhail Mardikian Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Manzoni Home Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Paul Lato "Duende" Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 93**

**2014 Paul Lato "Lancelot" Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 94**

**2014 Small Vines MK Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 94**

**2014 Small Vines TBH Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 96**

# Couloir 2014 Pinot Noir Wines Impress

I have been following winemaker Jon Grant's career at Couloir Wines for several years now, and the 2014 vintage Pinot Noirs are the best he has ever produced. That is saying something, since his wines have always been stellar.

When Jon moved from the ski mountains of Utah to Napa Valley in 1997, he traded the skier's lifestyle for wine country living. The transition was smooth because he brought with him the sensibilities of outdoor living. He possessed an innate passion for transforming grapes from the vineyard to the table combined with his backcountry experience.



Jon crafted his first vintage of Couloir Wines in 2007, releasing two Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs. Today, he offers four wines from proven cool climate vineyards of coastal California, including the North Coast's Anderson Valley, Sonoma Coast and Marin County, and the Central Coast's Sta. Rita Hills. He works with preeminent vineyard managers in each area and chooses specific rows with special blocks for his wines.

In 2013, Jon opened the Couloir Wines Tasting Room in a historic building in downtown Tiburon, just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. Here he offers Couloir wines and the wines of his companion label, Straight Line Wine. Both new releases and library wines are offered at this venue which functions as both a wine bar and wine shop. Limited production magnums are available as well as a variety of wine clubs with preferred pricing and benefits. The Couloir Wines website at [www.couloirwines.com](http://www.couloirwines.com) is filled with information about the sourced vineyards and winemaking.

Like most dedicated Pinot Noir winemakers, Jon uses Pinot Noir as a conduit for the voice of the vineyard. He wants to be able to taste the common thread exhibited by a vineyard's character combined with the mark of the vintage. Jon accomplishes his goal by using whole clusters, spontaneous primary and ML fermentations, and aging on the lees in once used and neutral French oak barrels.

According to Jon, "The 2014 growing season, while early, produced a well ripened crop that was in balance. I think the 2014 wines offer the depth and dark fruit of the 2012 vintage in conjunction with the verve and freshness of the 2013 wines. It is a stellar combination and can be seen across appellations. The wines have both wonderful immediacy and the potential for longevity."

The following wines are scheduled for release this fall and winter.



**2014 Couloir Wines Monument Tree Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., 198 cases, \$48. Previously reviewed and included in Volume 10, Issue 24 of the *PinotFile*. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. This wine really impresses with aromas of muddled black cherry and raspberry, along with spice and wooded forest infusions. The aromas achieve more penetration with time in the glass. Mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, blackberry and spice satisfy with added accents of dark caramel and char from oak. Intriguing and beautifully balanced, with a seductive velvety texture that makes you want to pour this syrupy Pinot on your waffle. 94.*

**2014 Couloir Wines Campbell Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 146 cases, \$58. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Highly enjoyable in every way, with enchanting aromas of blackberry liquor, plum, soy sauce and subtle oak. Mid weight flavors of ripe black cherry and purple berries are accented with a hint of toasty oak and Asian spices. Suave in the mouth with soft tannins, leading to a bright, gifted finish that leaves a little alcoholic heat in its wake. 92.*

**2014 Couloir Wines Chileno Valley Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 197 cases, \$44. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Like a walk in a forest after a rain, featuring aromas of cedar, pine and sandalwood along with crushed wild berries off the vine. Delightfully composed, with middleweight flavors of boysenberry and dark raspberry along with a touch of smoke. Very fine-grain tannins create a sensual texture and the wine finishes with a dazzling array of berry flavors. 92.*



**2014 Couloir Wines John Sebastiano Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., 196 cases, \$52. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of blackberry jam, soy, potpourri and earthy flora. The wine explodes with glorious fruit on entry, saturating the mid palate with delicious flavors of black raspberry, plum and spice, finishing with both length and intensity. Impeccably balanced with vibrant acidity and integrated tannins, this beauty offers a sublime experience for hedonists. 94.*



# Small Vines Wines Excels with High-Density Plantings

Paul and Kathryn Sloan founded a winegrowing company in the Russian River Valley called Small Vines Viticulture in 1998. The firm's trademarked tagline became, "The smaller the vine, the better the wine," based on the Sloans' belief that high density planted vineyards similar to those in Burgundy can play an important role in determining grape quality.

The traditional 8 feet by 12 feet (454 vines per acre) planting in California was the rule until the 1980s, after which closer rows of 6 feet wide by vines 4 feet apart (1,816 vines per acre) became common. The vine density in California was traditionally chosen to accommodate the tractors and implements available at the time. Wider vine spacing was less risky and allowed tailoring of the vine budding to soil vigor. Crop thinning was then necessary to reduce yields and concentrate flavors. As more compact farm equipment became available and hand farming was in vogue, row and vine spacing became narrower.

Tight inter row and between row vine spacing appears to have clear advantages with Pinot Noir. Typically with high density planting, rows are 4 feet wide and vines are 2.5 feet to 4 feet apart (2722-3630 vines per acre). The resultant smaller vines yield less fruit without crop thinning than a standard vine, and the spacing leads to better shading. At the same time, the amount of vines per acre is significantly increased insuring that the vineyard has economic viability. In addition, it does not appear that high density planted vines compete with each other in many soils with studies indicating that root density continues to increase in step with vine density.

Tight vine spacing does come at a cost, because it requires more vines to be planted, more labor, more attention, more irrigation lines, and specialized tractor and other farm equipment. Here is a photo of the Small Vines' imported Caval tractor used for high density plantings.



Small Vines Viticulture specializes in the planning, instillation and precision viticulture of close spaced vineyards in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast appellations. A second business model was launched with the 2005 vintage when the Sloans offered Pinot Noir under the Small Vines Wines label. They now produce both Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from either estate owned or estate leased and farmed vineyards exclusively (all organically farmed). Paul handles the winemaking in consultation with veteran winemaker Byron Kosuge.

With the release of the 2014 vintage of Small Vines Wines, the Sloans are on a roll. Paul recently recorded a show on Grape Radio and the winery was a featured participant at the 2016 International Pinot Noir Celebration. In 2016, they are breaking ground on their own winemaking facility on a historic property they bought in Sebastopol.



The single-vineyard Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines reviewed here are new releases that were recently offered to a mailing list. For more information or to access the wines, visit [www.smallvines.com](http://www.smallvines.com). To arrange a tasting, contact Kathryn Sloan at [Kathryn@smallvines.com](mailto:Kathryn@smallvines.com). There is some availability of the wines at high-end retail stores and restaurants throughout the United States.

**2014 Small Vines Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.56, RS 0.7 g/L, 675 cases, \$55. Released February 2016. TBH, Fassler, Baranoff, and MIK vineyards. Calera, Pomard, Swan, 943, "828," 459, 114, 115, 667 and 777 planted in red sandy clay loam and Goldridge sandy loam soils, 2722-3630 vines per acre. Harvest Brix 21.8°-23.0°. Yields 1.5-2.2 lbs per vine. 35% whole cluster. 3 to 5-day cold soak, native primary and malolactic fermentations, aged 12 months on fine lees in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Engaging scents of black cherry, exotic spice, rose petal and sweet smoke. Discreetly concentrated flavors of well-spiced black cherry and black raspberry fruits framed by modest tannins and a pleasingly heady finish. Highly approachable at this young age. 91.*

**2014 Small Vines Estate Cuvée Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.55, RS 0.5 g/L, 360 cases, \$65. A proprietor's blend of favorite barrels from Baranoff, Fassler, Old Mill, MK and TBH vineyards. Organically farmed by Small Vines Viticulture. 2722-3630 vines per acre planted in red sandy clay loam and Goldridge sandy loam. Yields 1.0-2.0 lbs per vine. Dijon 113, 114, 115, 667, 777 and 943. Harvest Brix

22.9°-24.8°. 50% whole cluster. 3 to 5-day cold soak, on skins 14-21 days, native primary fermentation and malolactic fermentation. 100% free run aged 15 months on fine lees in French oak barrels, 37.5% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Clean aromas of forest air, black cherry and hay bale. On the palate, the wine aims to please with forward leaning flavors of black cherry, plum and pomegranate accented with sweet oak. The whole cluster inclusion compliments the experience. The tannins are balanced and the easy-going, sleek finish satisfies. This is an entirely different experience than the Sonoma Coast bottling because of clonal differences. 91.*



**2014 Small Vines MK Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.54, RS 0.4 g/L, 171 cases, \$82. Released August 2016. Vineyard planted by Small Vines Viticulture in 1999 on an east facing ridge above Occidental. Organically farmed using biodynamic practices. 4 feet x 4 feet vine spacing (2722 vines per acre). Yields 2.5 lbs per vine. Dijon 114, 115, 667 and 777. Harvest Brix 22.7°-23.1° Brix. 50% whole cluster. 5-day cold soak, native primary and malolactic fermentations, pre and post fermentation maceration, aged 15 months on fine lees in French oak barrels, 43% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A wine of immense charm with aromas of black cherry, spice, loam, and savory herbs and an explosion of plum, black raspberry, iron and spice flavors on the prodigious attack. Exemplary harmony with matched tannins and a glorious finish. Still impressive the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine has something extra special. 94.*



**2014 Small Vines TBH Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.57, RS 0.4 g/L, 309 cases, \$82. Released August 2016. Vineyard planted in 2009 on a cool and windy ridge top in Sebastopol. Organically farmed, Goldridge sandy loam soils. 4 feet x 3 feet vine spacing (3630 vines per acre). Yields 1.5 lbs per vine. Calera, Pommard, Swan and 943. Harvest Brix 22.3°-24.4°. 3 to 5-day cold soak, native primary and malolactic fermentations, on skins 14-18 days, pre and post fermentation maceration, aged 15 months on fine lees in French oak barrels, 23% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose offers a lovely blend of black cherry fruit and a savory note of herbs. The black cherry and blueberry-pomegranate flavors really wake up the mouth. Moderately bold, with firm tannins, complimentary oak, with spice and dried herbs in the background. A marvelous wine that perfectly balances fruit and savoriness. Even more dazzling the following day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 96.*



**2014 Small Vines Baranoff Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.74, TA 0.56, RS 0.3 g/L, 360 cases, \$82. Released August 2016. Vineyard is located above Laguna de Santa Rosa in Sebastopol and was planted in 2001. 4 feet x 4 feet and 4 feet by 1 meter vine spacing. Yields 1.8 lbs per vine. Calera, 777, Swan and 459. Harvest Brix 22.1°-23.5°. 75% whole cluster. 5-day cold soak, native primary and malolactic fermentations. 100% free run. Aged 15 months on fine lees in French oak barrels, 43% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Shy aromas of dark red berries, spice and potpourri with a subtle green note. Mid weight flavors of dark red, blue and black berries are accented with a bit of tobacco and herbal tastes. Somewhat rugged and attacking tannins persist through the finish and superimpose their will on the fruit. The high percentage of whole cluster inclusion makes its presence felt in this wine, but further aging in bottle should ameliorate some of that character. Unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 90-91.*

**2014 Small Vines Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.9% alc., pH 3.17, TA 0.72, RS 1.8 g/L, 574 cases, \$55. 100% TBH Vineyard located in Sebastopol. Planted in 2009, organically farmed, 3630 vines per acre. Yields 1.5 lbs per vine. Hyde Wente and Kistler Mt Eden Wente selections. Harvest Brix 21.8°-23.6°. Whole cluster pressed gently, barrel fermented with native primary and malolactic fermentations, minimal lees stirring. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels (12% new) and stainless steel (16%). Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate golden straw color in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of freshly peeled apple, white peach, toasty brioche and a hint of butter. Nicely composed with integrated acidity, a slightly creamy texture, flavors of apple, nectarine, white peach and a hint of butterscotch, finishing with a note to citrus on a refreshing finish. 90.*

**2014 Small Vines TBH Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.7% alc., pH 3.13, TA 0.77, RS 1.4 g/L, 347 cases, \$72. Released August 2016. Sourced from The Barlow Homestead (TBH) vineyard located on a cool and windy ridge top in Sebastopol. Hyde Wente and Kistler Mt Eden Wente selections planted in Goldridge sandy loam in 2009, 4' x 3' (3630 vines per acre). Harvest Brix 21.8°-23.6°. Whole cluster pressed slowly and gently, barrel fermented with native yeast and native malolactic fermentation, aged 10 months on fine lees with minimal stirring. 100% French oak barrels, 7% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light golden straw color in the glass. Aromas of apple, mango, vanilla creme and butter lead to a delicious core of fresh peach, apple, honey and lemony citrus flavors. Noticeably more vibrancy and "minerality" than the Sonoma Coast bottling with more attack and finishing length.* **92.**

# Recently Tasted Notable California Pinot Noirs North Coast

**Balletto Vineyards & Winery** John Balletto is a prominent grower in the Russian River Valley whose wines are all crafted from sustainably farmed estate vineyards. Today, Balletto Vineyards consists of 650 acres of wine grapes in the Russian River Valley including 280 acres in western Sebastopol. Most of the grapes are sold, with only ten percent of the best grapes retained for Balletto wines that were first released in 2001. The talented winemaker is Anthony Beckman who became the winemaker at Balletto in 2009. Since then, the wines have gained in quality and are among the premier offerings from the Russian River Valley. All wines are fermented with feral yeast in small six-ton open top vats, finished in French oak barrels with new oak used sparingly.

**2014 Balletto Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.57, 8,260 cases, \$29. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of Bing cherry, pie spice and tobacco lead to a light, cherry-driven wine that is suave and easy going on the palate. Flavors of spice, dried herbs and cherry cola add interest as does a deft touch of oak. The wine finishes with a flourish of cherry and strawberry highlights. 88.*

**2014 Balletto Cedar Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.58, 620 cases, \$42. Vineyard is located in the Sebastopol Hills at 950 feet elevation and is planted primarily to California heritage clones of Pinot Noir. Aged in French oak barrels, 26% new. *Moderate light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of oak-infused cherry and herbs. Light to mid weight flavors of red cherry, red berry, blueberry and root vegetables with an imposing oak thread. Tannins and acidity are in balance and the wine is forward drinking, but doesn't excite. 88.*

**2014 Balletto BCD Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.59, 560 cases, \$42. Aged in French oak barrels, 42% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. This wine smells of crushed blueberries and the blackest cherries with a subtle touch of oak. The spiced black cherry fruit enters with purpose and explodes on the mid palate, leading to an intense, marvelous finish. Soothing and refined with nuances of cola, herbs and sweet oak adding interest. Balance is spot on in this highly enjoyable juice. 92.*

**2014 Balletto Sexton Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.59, 680 cases, \$42. A cold and steep hillside vineyard located southwest of Sebastopol. Aged in French oak barrels, 32% new. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Light to mid weight in character, but very flavorful, with a noble attack of cherry and raspberry fruit flavors accented with dried herbs and oak spice and displaying a slight confected tone. Juicy and invigorating, with soft tannins and an extended finish. 91.*

**2014 Balletto Burnside Road Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 630 cases, \$44. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Black cherry and raspberry fruits are featured in the middleweight styled wine that adds a touch of nutty oak and earthy flora tone. There is noticeable length on the highly enjoyable finish that offers thirst quenching vibrancy. 92.*

**2014 Balletto Winery Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.57, 593 cases, \$44. A favorite 4-acre block located west of the winery in Santa Rosa. Aged in French oak barrels, 32% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. This is a toned and trim wine that offers aromas of Bing cherry and red berry on the vine leading to an intense attack of mid weight plus melange of dark red and purple berry flavors enhanced with an overlay of spice. Impeccably balanced and juicy with a seductively soft mouthfeel and an intensely fruity finish. 93.*

**2014 Balletto Emerson Block Burnside Road Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 165 cases, \$42. This 1-acre parcel is owned by the Emerson family and is surrounded by Burnside Road Vineyard. *Light cherry red color in the glass. The perfume of fresh crushed cherries, cranberries and oak spice set the stage for the light to mid weight, elegantly presented flavors of red and blue berries and cherries with a welcome touch of spice. A satiny mouthfeel entices, the tannins are suave, and the oak is woven deftly in this feminine styled, but highly flavorful, wine. 92.*





**2014 Balletto 18 Barrel Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 450 cases, \$44. Composed of grapes from estate vineyards in the hills southwest of Sebastopol. *Dazzling aromas of wild berry jam and dark muddled cherries. Superb presentation of a mixture of dark red cherry and berry fruits that enter with aplomb, expand in the mouth and finish with memorable length. Silken in texture, with a splendid acid underbody, offering elegance with power. A subtle sense of earthiness, terra cotta and mushroom add a savory note that tantalizes.* **94.**



**Bucher Vineyard** John Bucher founded Bucher Vineyard in 1997. After graduating from University of California at Davis, he returned to Healdsburg to manage the family dairy farm and soon diversified into wine grapes. Additional plantings followed in 1998, 1999, 2006, 2008 and 2009. Today, Bucher Vineyard consists of 36 acres of Pinot Noir grapes and 2 acres of Chardonnay, all sustainably farmed. The Bucher Vineyard is very close to the Russian River and overlooks the Russian River Valley. The Bucher label was started in 2011. Fruit is sold to renowned Pinot Noir producers including Williams Selyem, Siduri, Papapietro Perry, Ramey Wine Cellars and C. Donatiello. The winemaker for Bucher wines is Adam Lee (Siduri).

**2014 Bucher Bucher Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.54, 545 cases, \$40. Released March 15, 2016. Composed of all seven Pinot Noir blocks in the vineyard with the backbone being Swan selection. Clones are Swan, Mt Eden, Pommard, Jackson 16, and Dijon 667. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. A cherry dominated wine with added fruit notes of black raspberry and blackberry in a mid weight plus style that is nicely composed. There is an undertone of organic manure and ashen oak that is somewhat typical of this vineyard reflective of its history as a cow pasture in the past.* **91.**

**2014 Bucher Three Sixty Bucher Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.74, TA 0.55, 143 cases, \$60. A distinctive blend of the vineyard providing a 360 degree view of the fruit. Jackson clone, Pommard clone, and Dijon 667 clone. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, spice and mulch open the way for flavors of dark Bing cherry, spice and cola robed in silky tannins. Good vibrancy, with a little more mid palate intent and finishing power than the RRV bottling. Less manure note also. Very RRV in character.* **92.**

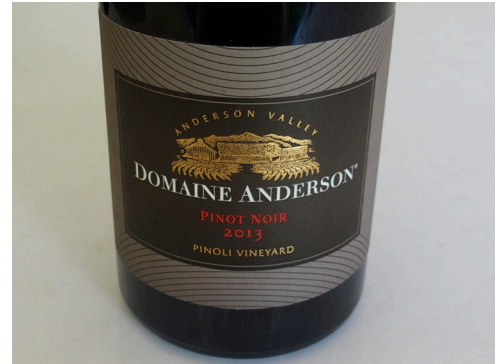
**2014 Bucher Pommard Clone Bucher Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.60, 142 cases, \$50. Released March 15, 2016. *Inaugural bottling. Harvest Brix 24.2° average. Aged 10 months in 50% new French oak barrels. Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A handsome wine with revelatory aromas of Bing cherry, strawberry and subtle toasty oak. Darker fruit flavors accented with clove spice lead the way on the mid weight palate, backed by filigree tannins. Nicely composed, with good finesse, and a pleasing finish.* **92.**

**Domaine Anderson** One of the newer additions to the superb array of Anderson Valley estates, Domaine Anderson farms 50 acres of vineyards planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The estate is the most recent addition of the Louis Roederer family. Vineyards are certified organic and biodynamic. The winemaker, Darrin Low, majored in enology and viticulture at University of California at Santa Cruz, and studied abroad at L'Institut de'OEnologie in Bordeaux, France. His previous winemaking experience flourished in the Willamette Valley and at J. Grgich Hills and Flowers in California. Domaine Anderson also offers an Estate Pinot Noir and three Chardonnays (Estate, Dach Vineyard and Walraven Vineyard).

**2013 Domaine Anderson Dach Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.59, \$65. Estate bottled. Biodynamically farmed vineyard located a half mile east of the town of Philo at an altitude of 300 feet. Vineyard is planted to a mix of heritage clones. A barrel selection of best lots. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is oak driven, offering aromas of espresso, anise and toast as well as pine sap and underbrush. A savory offering in a light to mid weight style, with fruit flavors of black cherry and black raspberry*

augmented by a pungent pine needle note. Unusual flavor profile and challenging to describe, but reminds of a Pinot Noir grown in a tree forest. I like this wine for its non-fruit qualities. Still a bit tight with unyielding tannins and will benefit from more bottle age. **91.**

**2013 Domaine Anderson Pinoli Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.55, \$65. Estate bottled. First offering from this certified biodynamic vineyard located northwest of Philo in the “deep end” of the Anderson Valley. Clones 667 and 777. A barrel selection from several fermentation lots. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. A very elegant offering that presents all the best features of Pinot Noir. Earth-dusted black cherry, herb bunch and toasty oak lead off. Suave and charming in the mouth, with a ravishing core of black cherry fruit seasoned with a delicate touch of oak and savory dried herbs. Nicely balanced, finishing with composure and freshness.* **93.**



**Fulcrum Wines** One of the joys of what I do is to see the progress of winemakers like David Rossi who began modestly at Crushpad in San Francisco and now crafts impeccably balanced Pinot Noirs that seem to improve with every vintage. A new tasting room has opened on the Sonoma Plaza in the town of Sonoma, joining other prominent Pinot Noir producers including Auteur, Walt, Three Sticks and Sojourn. The tasting room is open daily but check the website for seasonal changes in hours. The Fulcrum 2014 vintage Pinot Noirs are superb representations of terroir. See also Brousseau Vineyard under the Central Coast listing of Pinot Noirs.



**2014 On Point Christinna's Cuvée North Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 217 cases, \$36. A blend of 23% Landy Vineyard, 33% Donnelly Creek Vineyard and 44% Gap's Crown Vineyard grapes. Aged 15 months in French oak, 19% new. *Moderately light reddish purple hue in the glass. A delightful blended wine offering aromas of cherry, spice, herb field and cigar box leading to a mid weight core of Bing cherry and spice flavors backed by silky tannins. A very cozy and easy to*

*like wine that finishes with a charge of black cherry and raisin notes. Still styling the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**



**2014 Fulcrum Landy Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 91 cases, \$58. Calera clone. Aged 15 months in French oak, 33% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Bright scent of fresh cherries and sandalwood. Shining Bing cherry core with added flavors of cola and baking spice framed by silky tannins and lively acidity. Oak chimes in with a bass note. Flirty in personality and quintessential Russian River Valley in character. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine had taken on woody, darker fruited and riper profile.* **92.**



**2014 Fulcrum Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 237 cases, \$62. Clones 667 and “828.” Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 42% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is initially brooding, but fans out over time to reveal enticing aromas of darker berry jam, spice and earth. A remarkable attack of mid weight plus black cherry, blackberry and spice flavors are flat out delicious. This*

*wine is impeccably balanced with impressive mid palate presence and follow through into a long, masculine finish. A 60 minute wine: the bottle is sure to be gone in 60 minutes.* **94.**



**2014 Joseph Phelps Freestone Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 11,600 cases, \$55. Release in fall 2016. Estate grown. 51% Quarter Moon Vineyard and 49% Pastorale Vineyard. Aged 13 months

in French oak barrels, 35% new and 65% used oak puncheons and barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Delightful aromas of black cherry, blackberry, exotic spices and underbrush. Mid weight flavors of purple berries, plum, blood orange, spice and herbs combine for an enjoyable experience that is both fruity and savory. Nicely balanced with juicy acidity. 92.*

**2014 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.54, \$25. 100% de-stemmed, 70% whole berries in tank, 3-day cold soak, free run juice aged 8 months in 100% French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas and flavors put cherry front and center in this light to mid weight styled wine with added accents of baking spices, cola, charred oak and vitamin. The tannins are soft in this very approachable wine, but the oak plays too big a role in overshadowing the rather delicate fruit core. I am a big fan of La Crema wines as they represent very good value, but this is not one of my favorites. 87.*

**MacPhail** James MacPhail has left his namesake winery. The 2014 vintage wines reviewed here are the last vintage that James had under full control. He went out with a bang, for these are some of the best wines he has ever crafted at MacPhail.

**2014 MacPhail Lakeview Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.62, 211 cases, \$49. Clones 114 and 115. Harvest Brix 24.2°. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, inoculated yeast primary and native malolactic fermentations, batonnage weekly for 3 months, and aged 11 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 25% new. Bottled unfiltered and lightly filtered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. A complex nose offers aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, spices including oregano and vanilla, and pipe smoke. Mid weight plus flavors echo the nose fruits with a gentle nod of oak. The dreamy texture satisfies and the spiced blueberry finish elevates the experience. 93.*

**2014 MacPhail Wightman House Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 119 cases, \$55. Martini clone. Harvest Brix 24.0°. 100% de-stemmed. 5-day cold soak, inoculated primary and native malolactic fermentations, batonnage weekly for 3 months, aged 11 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 61% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is primary, with mainly oak scents. Much more expressive on the palate in a full bodied style replete with luscious flavors of dark red and black berries. A husky, rugged and rustic wine that sports opulent tannins but still has a pervasive charm and can be enjoyed for its individuality. 91.*

**2014 MacPhail Mardikian Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.54, 341 cases, \$85. Clones 114, 115, 667, 777, 2a, Pommard, Martini and Swan. Harvest Brix 22.7°-25.0°. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, inoculated primary and native malolactic fermentations. Aged 16 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 35% new. Bottled unfiltered and lightly filtered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Heavenly scents of raspberry, black cherry and dried herbs lead off. Sleek, refined and polished in the mouth, with both weight of flavor and weightlessness. Savory spices and herbs compliment the red cherry and berry essence. Not the biggest hunk, but very seductive. 93.*



**2014 MacPhail Vagon Rouge Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.59, 248 cases, \$65. A special barrel blend. Sourced from Lakeview, Dutton Ranch-Thomas Road, Susanna's and Mardikian Estate vineyards. Clones 115, 667, 2a, Martini, Swan and qhv Swan. Harvest Brix 22.7°-25.5°. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, native yeast primary and malolactic fermentations. Aged 17 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Beautifully balanced and easy to enjoy, with aromas and flavors of blueberry, boysenberry and blackberry seasoned with a deft touch of oak, finishing with good depth and vigor. Silky in the mouth, with welcome poise. 92.*



**2014 Migration Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 19,675 cases, \$38. Released March 2016. Aged 10 months in 100% French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of dark red and black berry fruits, spice and shaved oak lead to a mid weight plus styled wine with exemplary balance and pleasing flavors of Bing cherries, cola and brown spice, finishing with a modest but very pleasing finish of pretentious fruit. An impressive offering considering the large production and one that is widely available in markets countrywide. 90.*

**2013 Schermeister Rodgers Creek Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 150 cases, \$49. Pommard and Dijon 777 clones. Native fermentation, extended maceration with 35 days on skins, aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 50% new and 50% once used. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Piquant oak infuses the nose and palate in this mid weight wine featuring flavors of black cherry, pomegranate and blackberry. Forward drinking, with a sexy texture and good follow through on the finish. The fruit definitely pushes the ripeness envelope and the oak overlay pushes for dominance. 88.*

**WesMar Winery** Very good, well-crafted wines but they do not “pop” in this vintage, lacking some of the aromatic fireworks that WesMar is known for and failing to emphatically reflect terroir.

**2013 WesMar Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$39. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Pleasant aromas of cherry, oak spice and old book. Light to mid weight flavors of red berry and cherry in a simple, straightforward style of wine with the right overlay of oak and a very modest finish. A solid everyday table wine. 87.*

**2013 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$40. *Medium reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of muddled dark cherries lead to a middleweight core of black cherry and blackberry fruit flavors with a touch of cola. Satiny smooth in texture and easy to like, with a simple but pleasing finish. 88.*

**2013 WesMar Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$39. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Very shy aromas of red cherry, strawberry and cedary oak. Light to mid weight flavors of red cherry and cranberry are framed by chalky tannins, an earthy mantle, and a thread of oak. 88.*

**2013 WesMar Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$40. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of wild berries, floral array, pungent herbs and oak lead off. More appealing on the palate with mid weight flavors of blueberry-pomegranate and spice in a soothing style with satisfying harmony and a modest finish. 89.*

**2013 WesMar Salzgeber Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$45. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Ripe, darker stone and berry fruit aromas lead off. This wine will appeal to those who prefer very ripe fruited Pinot Noir. Flavors of blackberry and cassis are framed by firm, but supportive tannins. Soft in the mouth with a black fruit driven finish that leaves a hint of alcoholic warmth in its wake. 89.*

**2013 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$42. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of Bing cherry and the vineyard’s signature baking spice. Simple and modest in sap, with a mid weight core of black cherry fruit and commendable oak seasoning in the background. The tannins are restrained and the acidity is juicy in this well balanced offering. 90.*

**2013 WesMar Balletto Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$42. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. A cherry bombast featuring aromas and flavors of fresh cherries. Silky in the mouth and rewarding, but not challenging, in a light to mid weight style that hints of alcoholic warmth on the finish. 89.*

# Central Coast

**2014 Bernardus Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 381 cases, \$55. Release September 1, 2016. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Fruit-driven aromas of red and black cherry are blended with oak-driven scents of toast and cigar smoke. The black cherry fruit is dusted with flavors of toasty oak, black tea and dark chocolate. Earthbound, with filigree tannins and a modest finish. 89.*

**2014 Bernardus Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 412 cases, \$55. Release September 1, 2016. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Oak leads off prominently on the nose, fading with time in the glass to reveal an hi-tone array of darker berry aromas. The sumptuous black cherry and blackberry fruits alert the palate as does the oak overlay in the background. More tannic bones and more intensity of finish in this wine compared to the Soberanes Vineyard bottling. 90.*

**2014 Bernardus Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 413 cases, \$65. Release September 1, 2016. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Fabulous aromas of cherry, raspberry and sandalwood picking up intensity over time in the glass. Very silky and deeply flavored with tastes of dark red cherries and berries highlighted with oak seasoning. Appealingly elegant in style, with welcome harmony, and a soft, lavish finish. 92.*

**2014 Bernardus Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., 185 cases, \$65. Release September 1, 2016. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose dazzles with penetrating aromas of fresh blueberries, pomegranate, spice and tobacco. Noticeably more sappy than the Rosella's in a mid weight plus style with gorgeous dark fruit that envelopes the mid palate and finishes with uncommon intensity and length. The oak is well integrated as well. 93.*



**2014 Bernardus Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 446 cases, \$70. Release September 1, 2016. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Shy fruit aromas of darker red and purple berries and fresh, vivid and luscious black cherry and black raspberry flavors combine for a sublime drinking experience. Nicely balanced with a powerful, lengthy finish. Pisoni Vineyards always delivers. 93.*

**2014 Fulcrum Brousseau Vineyard Chalone Appellation Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 143 cases, \$58. Clones 113, 114 and 115. Aged 15 months in French oak, 35% new. *Dark reddish purple hue in the glass. Earthbound aromas of boysenberry and blackberry with a hint of oil slick. Smooth on the palate, but husky in character, with mid weight plus flavors of purple and black berries. This vineyard tends to produce a highly structured wine, and the tannins are evident but supportive without being intrusive in this wine. The finish is replete with gorgeous purple fruit that seems to persist for over half a minute. 92.*

**Ken Brown Wines** Ken is one of California's iconic winemakers, now celebrating his 40th harvest. Meet him and taste his outstanding wines at this year's Santa Barbara Vintners Celebration of Harvest Weekend October 7-10.



**2012 Ken Brown Radian Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.61, 203 cases, \$70. This vineyard is located at the extreme western end of the Sta. Rita Hills AVA and is one of the coldest vineyards on the West Coast. Soils are rocky clay loam with generous amounts of diatomaceous earth. 70% clone 667 and 30% clone 115. 100% de-stemmed, cold soak, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 38% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The proximity to the ocean is reflected in this wine with its aroma of sea breeze accompanying scents of black raspberry, blackberry and graphite. A complex and unique wine, with mid weight plus flavors of purple and black fruits, anise, cardamom, and cassis. Rich and sappy, but refined, with impeccable balance, and an extremely persistent finish that dazzles with charming purple fruited aromatic goodness.* **94.**



**2013 Ken Brown La Encantada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.59, TA 0.54, 287 cases, \$60. 69% Swan selection and 31% Dijon 115 clone. 100% de-stemmed, cold soak, aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry syrup and red berry preserves are lavish. Satiny and quite elegant in the mouth, with tame tannins, integrated acidity, a deft touch of oak, and a vibrant array of dark red fruits that linger modestly on the finish. One of the more distinguished wines I have had from this vineyard.* **92.**

**2013 Ken Brown Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.53, 208 cases, \$65. Pommard clone planted in low vigor, sandy loam rich in calcareous shale. 100% de-stemmed, cold soak, aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 32% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely perfume of fresh cherries, red berries, spice and shaved oak. Deft balance between fruit richness, tannins and acidity, displaying impressive fruit purity through flavors of cherry, cranberry, raspberry and spice. A gorgeous wine that is both elegant and ephemeral.* **93.**

**2014 Ken Brown Duncan's Cuvée Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.54, 277 cases, \$40. 7% Rio Vista, 14% Radian and 9% LaFond vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, cold soak, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 28% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Love the nose on this beauty with its bright aromas of cherry, strawberry, mushroom, and sous-bois. A forward drinking mid weight wine propelled by a luscious red fruit core underlain with the right touch of oak spice. Harmonious, with a sleek demeanor and a quenching, pleasing finish.* **92.**



**2015 Manzoni Pedregal Vineyard San Benito County Rosé of Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 127 cases, \$23, screwcap. Release summer 2016. Grower Ray Francioni and winemaker David Coventry. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Splendid aromas of red berries, watermelon, blood orange and dried herbs. A richer style of rosé that drinks almost like a regular still Pinot Noir, yet never wavers from its rosé genetics. The flavors of red berries, Damsel plum, red cherry and watermelon are pleasingly assembled and polished in the mouth.* **91.**



**2014 Manzoni Home Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 1,385 cases, \$35. Release summer 2016. Grower Mark Manzoni and winemaker David Coventry. Clones 777, 115 and a La Tache suitcase selection. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry syrup, spice cabinet and sweet oak draw your nose into the glass. Forward drinking, with flavors of black cherry, cola, spice and an oak overlay that is noticeable but comforting. The wine finishes with an intensely fruity and juicy ending that lingers. An exceptional value.* **93.**



**2014 Nielson by Byron Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., pH 3.58, TA 0.55, \$45, screwcap. Swan and Calera clones. 33% whole cluster fermented. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate*

reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of Hoison sauce, clove and blackberry jam lead off. A forward drinking wine that offers flavors of nutty oak-kissed black cherry and blueberry-pomegranate. The tannins are in check and the wine holds its alcohol well. I wanted more from the nose, but the wine is very giving on the palate and the whole cluster addition rounds out nicely the texture. **90**.

**2014 Paul Lato “Suerte” Solomon Hills Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$80. Unfiltered. Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. The nose is quite woody, with added aromas of black cherry, oak spice and charcoal. The seductive black cherry and black raspberry core is complimented by spice, vanilla and smoky oak notes. Elegant in style, with refined tannins, but lacks finishing length. Very solid, but not up to previous Solomon Hills bottlings that were extraordinary. Could have been an off bottle. **89**.

**2014 Paul Lato “Duende” Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$65. Unfiltered. Light cherry red color in the glass. Shy scent of cherry, cranberry, baking spices and cardamom. Lighter in weight, but highly flavorful, offering a jubilee of cherry goodness. Elegant and silky in the mouth, with very favorable attack and finish. This wine is why I call Paul Lato, “Paul Elelato,” because his wines are often elegance personified. **93**.



**2014 Paul Lato “Lancelot” Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$85. Unfiltered. Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Deeply scented nose of cherry, herbs and steak sauce. Rather tame for a Pisoni wine, even an anathema, but reflects the Paul Lato style. A mid weight earthbound cherry core shows off the ripest of the fruit tasted in the three wines reviewed here. As typical for Pisoni Vineyard, the wine has a strong physique, but yet is highly approachable in this case. Pisoni Vineyard is truly one of a handful of Grand Cru California vineyards and representative wines always reflect its excellence and terroir in one way or another. **94**.



**2014 Presqu’ile Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 12.9% alc., \$42. 90% Presqu’ile Vineyard, 10% Bien Nacido Vineyard. Clones 777, 667, 115, Pommard and Mt Eden. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. 47% whole cluster. Grapes harvested at a relatively low Brix, minimal new oak aging. SIP certified. Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opens grudgingly in the glass offering aromas of smoky oak, hazelnuts, pungent herbs with no fruit. Better in the mouth, with mid weight flavors of black cherry and black raspberry that have good phenolic ripeness and are backed by a healthy tannic backbone. Very modest on the finish, and a bit too oak-infused and herbaceous for my taste. **87**.

**2014 Presqu’ile Steiner Creek Vineyard San Luis Obispo Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.74, \$48. Vineyard is located 3 miles north of Cambria on the Phelan Ranch. 11 acres of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay planted by Greg Phelan in 2008. Pinot Noir clones 667, 777, 115 and Pommard. Cobbled riverbed soils and proximity to the Pacific Ocean lead to low yields naturally. 50% whole cluster. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of blackberry jam, black cherries, dried herbs and spice. The blackberry, blueberry and pomegranate fruit flavors really pop in the mouth, holding court through a generous mid palate and finishing with panache and length. An herbal and vegetal thread in the background is from whole cluster inclusion and detracts rather than elevates the wine currently. **90**.

**2013 Reata Three County California Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$15. 53% Monterey County, 31% Sonoma County and 16% San Benito County blend. Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of blackberry jam, spice, tar and barrel lead to a well endowed, rib-sticking core of blackberry, cassis, and anise flavors shadowed by slightly coarse and firm tannins. Soft in the mouth, this wine displays fully ripened fruit, an overlay of charred oak, and a dry and slightly astringent finish. **86**.

**2014 Samuel Louis Smith Radian Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 12.8% alc., 73 cases, \$42. Vineyard is located at the far western edge of the Sta. Rita Hills AVA. Steep, with wind swept slopes and sedimentary

soils. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Earthbound aromas of cherry and cranberry fruits lead to a lighter styled, somewhat austere wine featuring flavors of cherry, cranberry and blueberry. Infused with typical Sta. Rita Hills acidity, this wine has engaging traits, but it may be too somber for some California palates. More expressive the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 90.*



**2014 Weatherborne Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.65, 450 cases, \$35, screwcap. Released April 2016.

Winemaker Chris Carter is a one-man operation producing one wine. Composed of grapes from John Sebastiano (72%) and Kessler-Haak (18%) vineyards. Harvest Brix 23.9°. 38% whole cluster, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of*

*black cherry, purple grape and sandalwood are followed in the mouth by a juicy, mid weight core of cherry delight that attacks with intention and brings the mid palate to life. Smooth and comforting, with commendable oak management and a delightful, spice-laden finish. 91.*





# Recently Tasted Notable California Chardonnays



**2015 Balletto Teresa's Unoaked Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.7% alc., pH 3.31, TA 0.70, 2,910 cases, \$20. Robert Young clone. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. An excellent example of this Chardonnay genre exhibiting aromas of ripe green apple, guava and pineapple, with flavors of Meyer lemon, apricot, apple and pear. Slightly creamy, with bright acidity, and a tight, soprano finish.* **91.**

**2014 Balletto Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.3% alc., \$28. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. A solid barrel fermented wine showing barrel influence through aromas and flavors of warm croissant, toast, caramel and honey accentuating the fruit notes of baked apple, lemon creme accented by a touch of butter. An easy drinking table wine that finishes with juicy goodness.* **88.**

**2014 Balletto Cedar Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.9% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.56, 485 cases, \$38. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. The mantle of oak in this wine is subtle and complimentary. Aromas of lemon, yellow peach and salt air lead to a moderately rich core of baked apple, lemon pie and ripe nectarine flavors. The satiny texture and long lemony finish appeals.* **91.**



**2014 Balletto Sexton Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.8% alc., 480 cases, \$38. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. This wine has more vibrant bravado compared to the more creamy Cedar Ridge bottling and speaks more of a "stony minerality." Citrus-driven, with a hint of lightly buttered brioche, this silky wine finishes with a steely resolve that is thirst quenching.* **93.**



**2014 Bernardus Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay** 14.7% alc., 280 cases, \$40. Released April 1, 2016. *Moderate golden straw color in the glass. The nose offers appealing aromas of salted apple, lemon, grapefruit and wet path. Sleek and refined on the palate, with grilled lemon, apple and slight caramel flavors, finishing with an infusion of acidity that elevates the experience.* **92.**

**2014 Bernardus Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., 509 cases, \$40. Released April 1, 2016. *Moderate golden straw color in the glass. A savory nose leads with aromas of lemon zest, crabapple, dried herbs and dried flowers. Creamy citrus, white peach, buttery toffee and caramel flavors satisfy. An oak-infused but not oak dominant style with good richness.* **90.**

**2014 Bernardus Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay** 14.7% alc., 392 cases, \$40. Released April 1, 2016. *Moderate golden straw color in the glass. Very clean and fresh scent of yellow orchard fruits and freshly peeled apple. Slightly viscous on the palate, with vibrant flavors of yellow peach, nectarine, lemon and pineapple. The finish is seductively silky and refreshing.* **93.**



**2015 Bucher Unoaked Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.4% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.70, 154 cases, \$30. Released April 1, 2016. Wente clone 4 and Robert Young clone 17. Harvest Brix 22.3° average. Aged 5 months in 100% stainless steel. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. The scent of tropical fruits, lemon oil and butterscotch lead off. Highly flavorful, with layers of lemon, pineapple, crisp apple, and honeydew melon goodness in a superbly balanced wine that is slightly creamy in the mouth and finishes with some purpose. I am not usually a big fan of unoaked Chardonnay, but I found this wine to be extremely inviting.* **93.**



**2014 Bucher Rio Oro Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.4% alc., pH 3.6, TA 0.60. \$40. Released October 16, 2015. The Bucher family has farmed in the Middle Reach of the Russian River Valley for over 50 years. Wente clone 4 and Robert Young clone 17. Harvest Brix 22.6° average. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Lavish aromas of lemony custard, Golden Delicious apple, wildflower honey and brioche. Sleek, bright and crisp on the palate with sumptuous flavors of lemon, grapefruit and apple with a compliment of oak infused blond caramel and honeyed nuts. Beautifully crafted, with sound acidity and noticeable finishing length. 94.*



**2014 J. Lohr October Night Arroyo Seco Monterey Chardonnay** 14.22% alc., pH 3.47, TA 0.66, RS .34 g/100 ml, 1,500 cases, \$25. 100% estate grapes, 100% barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, and aged on the lees for 10 months in Francois Frères French oak barrels, 50% new. Largely Dijon 809 (Musqué) clone, with lesser amounts of Dijon 95 and 96 and a small amount of Hyde Wente selection. Harvest Brix 26.4°. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of citrus oil, white flower and butter dissipate a bit over time in the glass. Richly flavored, featuring lemon, Golden Delicious apple, and pear with slight accents of oak-driven vanilla, honey and hazelnut. Slightly creamy in the mouth with an uplifting lemony finish. A nicely crafted, bolder California style of Chardonnay representing excellent value. 89.*

**2014 Joseph Phelps Freestone Vineyards Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 4,600 cases, \$55. Released May 2016. Estate grown. Aged 13 months in 35% new and 65% used French oak puncheons and barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Very complex nose offering aromas of lemon, grapefruit, nectarine, buttery brioche, butterscotch and petrichor. Driven by brisk acidity in the mouth with flavors of lemon, yellow grapefruit and toast this wine finishes in a thirst quenching, soprano fashion. Acid lovers will celebrate this style. 90.*

**2013 La Rochelle Recherché Reserve Ferrington Vineyard Anderson Valley Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., \$65. Robert Young clone. Winemaker Tom Stutz has almost four decades of experience crafting Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A nicely composed wine with appealing scents of lemon, Asian pear, pineapple, honey and a little nutty oak. Discreetly concentrated and ripe in character, with flavors of lemon curd, baked yellow apple, toffee, butterscotch and creme caramel. A good snap of acidity creates vibrancy in the wine. 90.*



**2014 MacPhail Pratt Vineyard Vine Hill Road Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.3% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.62, RS .09 g/100 ml., 251 cases, \$45. Mt Eden, Robert Young and Dijon 96 clones. Barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, and aged 17 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 27% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Bright aromas of peeled apple, peach and acid-driven steeliness. Fully ripened flavors of peach, pear and apple are brought to a vibrant high with a lively acid backbone. Very clean and balanced, with a cleansing finish. So easy to drink, you could easily polish off a bottle before you realize it. 94.*

**2014 MacPhail Vagon Blanc Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.3% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.53, RS .11 g/100ml, 120 cases, 65\$. Sourced from Pratt Vineyard Vine Hill Road and Gap's Crown Vineyard (50% each). Mt Eden, Robert Young, and Dijon 76 and 96 clones. Barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, batonnage once weekly through primary fermentation. Aged 17 months on lees in French oak barrels, 15% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Lovely aromas of golden apple, pear and buttery brioche. Ripely flavored notes of yellow stone fruits, yellow apple, pear, lemon and honey are enticing as is the slightly viscous, seductive texture and the clean and focused finish. The fruit is the star in this wine that deftly integrates a restrained use of oak. 93.*



**Migration** All vineyard-designate Chardonnays are vinified identically, including 75% malolactic fermentation, and aging 10 months in 35% new oak and 10% stainless steel. The intent is to reveal the unique terroir of each vineyard site. Tasted side-by-side, I can confirm the goal.

**2014 Migration Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., 7,860 cases, \$32. Released March 2016. Sourced from Jewell, Searby, Bellflower and Orsi Eastside vineyards. 75% malolactic fermentation, 10% aged in stainless steel. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Reserved aromas of lemon oil and white peach lead to unassuming flavors of lemon, pear and nectarine fruits framed by bracing acidity that shows up on the cleansing finish.* **87.**

**2014 Migration Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., 162 cases, \$55. Released March 2016. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The nose is more expressive than the palate, offering bright aromas of lemon peel, spice, vanilla creme and caramel. Somewhat reserved and even austere in the mouth, with flavors of lemon and brioche. The mouthwatering acidity really sticks out.* **89.**

**2014 Migration Searby Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 162 cases, \$55. Released March 2016. Vineyard dates to 1972. Dry farmed, low yields, old vine Rued clone. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Nicely presented aromas of yellow apple, canned peach, white flower bouquet and brown butter. Slightly creamy on the lifted palate, with flavors of lemon wafer, apple and melon. Nicely composed, with vibrant acidity and an uplifting finish.* **90.**

**2014 Migration Charles Heintz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 235 cases, \$55. Released March 2016. Clone 4 planted in 1982. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A restrained, but pleasing style with aromas of lemon, pastry creme and chalk dust. Nicely balanced, with juicy citrus and green apple flavors. Highly satisfying but I would have liked a tad more depth and dimension.* **91.**

**2014 Migration Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 165 cases, \$55. Released March 2016. Sourced from blocks that include the original 1973 plantings and 1991 plantings in limestone-rich soils. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Plenty of interest to offer on the nose, with aromas of citrus, tropical fruits, white peach, banana and crème brûlée. Citrus-based flavors have a steely resolve in this edgy and highly enjoyable offering that speaks more of grapes and stony minerality than oak. Clearly the best of the 2014 Migration Chardonnays.* **92.**



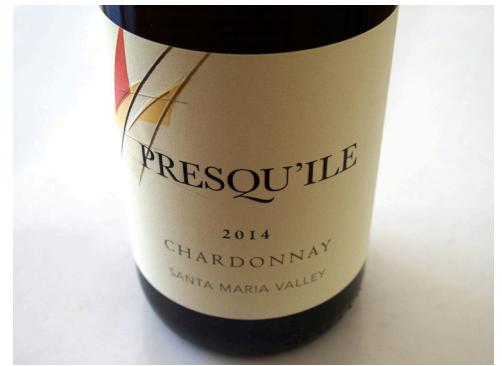
**2014 Oceans Churning Sangiacomo El Novillero Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., 93 cases, \$50. Heritage Wente clone 4. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Enticing aromas of baked apple pie, baking spice and brioche. A riper and well oaked style with flavors of yellow apple, grilled peach, honey and caramel. The wine's fruit has a slightly maderized character and is more stone fruit driven than citrus and mineral based. Not classic, but enjoyable in its style.* **90.**

**2014 Oceans Churning Sangiacomo Green Acres Hills Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., 120 cases, \$50. Old Wente clone. *Moderately deep golden yellow color in the glass. Inviting aromas of lemon, buttery brioche, vanillin and floral bouquet. Nicely balanced and clean and bright in the mouth, with appealing flavors of citrus, baked pear, vanilla creme and butterscotch.* **93.**





**2014 Presqu'ile Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** 13.9% alc., pH 3.30-3.52, TA 0.68-0.82, \$35. An array of Dijon clones grown in outstanding vineyards such as Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills. Feral yeast primary fermentation and feral malolactic conversion. Aged 12 months on the lees in neutral French oak, 6 months in stainless steel. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The nose comes at you with hi-tone aromas of dried apricot, ocean breeze salinity and a complimentary butter note. Slightly viscous in the mouth, with flavors of green apple, citrus and white peach. A restrained style without oak intrusion, finishing with steely resolve. 93.*



# On the Pinot Trail

## Soliste

In May this year, I visited the Soliste winery in Santa Rosa during their Open House and tasted several wines with Don Plumley who founded Soliste along with Claude Koeberle. Don was proudly pouring many of the current releases as well as some library wines. Soliste wines are available by allocation through a mailing list and can also be enjoyed at many prominent restaurant partners throughout the United States. Beginning with the 2009 vintage, Soliste wines returned to the roots of Burgundy and the craftsmanship of the Cistercian monks of Vougeot to focus on single clones from single vineyards and wines matured in single cooperage. The winery's limited production MonoClone® Pinot Noirs reflect a commitment to harness the purity and complexity of one clone from one vineyard. Visit [www.soliste.com](http://www.soliste.com).

**2014 Soliste Lune et Soleil Lake County Sauvignon Blanc** 12.4% alc., 836 cases, \$25. Whole cluster pressed, aged 4.5 months in 600L French oak barriques. *Pale golden straw color in the glass. A very generous wine replete with aromas and flavors of fresh citrus, melon, stone fruits and tropical fruits, finishing with a vibrant note of grapefruit and lime.* **89.**

**2012 Soliste Lune et Soleil Lake County Sauvignon Blanc** 12.9% alc., 212 cases, \$55. Whole cluster pressed, aged in a cigar-shaped barrique, in homage to the late Didier Dagueneau. The wine comes from a single organic vineyard. The grapes are de-stemmed, allowed 36 hours of skin contact and pressed to barrel where it is fermented and aged for 16 months. There is no malolactic fermentation to preserve acidity, vibrancy and length. *Pale golden yellow color in the glass. Clearly a special wine from the get-go. Aromas of salty sea breeze, lime and tropical fruits give it a fascinating start. Bright on the palate, with flavors of lime peel, gooseberry, apple and saline-infusion. The stunning finish has uncommon persistence for this varietal. Like no other.* **93.**

**2012 Soliste L'Age D'Or Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.1% alc., 298 cases, \$50. The model for this wine is the Meursault 1er Cru Blagny from Francois and Antoine Jobard. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The nose leads with scents of lemon oil, green apple, pear and white flower bouquet. Slightly creamy on the palate, with flavors of salted apple, brioche, lemon curd and baked apple. Impressive finesse yet satisfying drive. A Somm's wine.* **90.**

**2015 Soliste Soleil Rouge Sonoma Coast Rosé de Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., 148 cases, \$22. A serious offering in the Provence style. Primarily sourced from La Cruz Vineyard. 43% 12 hour skin contact, 85% whole cluster pressed, aged 4.5 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate salmon color in the glass. Inviting aromas of strawberry, cherry, dried rose petal and herbs. Crisp and vibrant on the palate, with plenty of strawberry, blood orange and tangerine flavors that linger on the clean finish.* **90.** Note: I also tasted the 2014 vintage of this wine demonstrating that serious rosé can improve with some bottle age contrary to what many wine drinkers believe. The 2014 Rosé de Pinot Noir was even better, less fruit driven, but more complexity and tertiary character. Buy a few bottles of the 2015 Rosé and keep some in your cellar for a year or two to see what I mean. Best when chilled.

**2011 Soliste Sonatera Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 123 cases, \$85. Single vineyard and single clone = MonoClone®. 30% whole cluster, aged 16 months in 30% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely perfume of wild cherry, Oriental spices and rose petal. Elegantly composed, yet highly flavorful, with a barrage of well-spiced dark cherry and pomegranate fruits.* **92.**

**2012 Soliste L'Espérance Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 241 cases, \$85. Clone 115. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Streaming aromas of darker stone fruits, spice and graphite. Quite charming, with an ephemeral quality, yet demands attention for its display of intensely flavored black cherry and black raspberry fruits, energized by racy acidity. A more generous offering that is reflective of the vintage.* **93.**

**2012 Soliste Forêt Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 241 cases, \$85. Clone 23 (Mariafeld) from Guidicci Vineyard. 50% whole cluster. Aged 16 months in French oak, 0% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Engaging, exotic, even intoxicating fragrance of black cherry, spiced plum, rose petal, and forest floor. The nose defies adequate description. Both weight and weightlessness, with soft tannins and impeccable*

balance, featuring flavors of Bing cherry pie, baking spices, cardamom, and earthy herbs. The finish offers racy energy and fruit flavors that return in waves. The whole cluster inclusion heightens the texture. This wine is Pinot Noir heaven. Even better than when originally reviewed six months ago. **95.**

**2011 Soliste Forêt Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** This was a special treat offered in magnum format. The nose was filled with aromas of whole cluster spice, potpourri, rose petal and pine sap. On the palate, the wine had taken on tertiary characters including mushroom, leather and earth bound flora. The dreamy texture was captivating. Nothing more exhilarating than a great wine aged in magnum. **96.**

Look for these upcoming releases of Soliste Pinot Noir. I tasted them briefly over lunch on another date with Claude who told me that Soliste will be focusing solely on Pinot Noir in the future.

**2013 Soliste L'Esperance Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Dijon clone 115. 123 cases. No whole cluster. 20% new oak. *The most Chambolle-like. Red cherry, raspberry fruits, plenty of spice, chalky tannins, very elegant.*

**2013 Soliste Renaissance Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Dijon clone 777. 147 cases. 50% whole cluster. 25% new oak. Quite elegant for a 777 wine. *Darker in color, darker fruits, and a particularly complex nose offering aromas of black cherry, peppery herbs and rose petal. Also from Sonatera Vineyard like L'Esperance, but completely different with every aspect magnified, showing the distinct clonal differences.*

**2013 Soliste Les Griottes Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Dijon clone "828." 73 cases. 20% whole cluster. 0% new oak. *Reminiscent of La Tache, with exotically spiced wild cherry flavor imbued with a redwood forest air.*

**2013 Soliste Nouveau Monde Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Pommard clone. 149 cases. 0% whole cluster. 20% new oak.

**2013 Soliste Forêt Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Clone 23 (Mariafeld). 123 cases. 50% whole cluster. 22% new oak.

**2013 Soliste L'Ambroisie Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Dijon clone "828." 49 cases. 20% whole cluster. 0% new oak. Claude's tasting note: *"Once you have tasted L'Ambroisie, I assure you, words cannot adequately describe how you will feel. I will retreat with a bottle and my glass, as a hermit without any distraction to experience it in deep Zen and simple bliss. This exceptional vintage captures all the alchemy that becomes great Pinot Noir, the intoxicating nose, powerful yet refined with layers of spice, sous-bois, truffles and wild cherry, amazing length and complex finish (if there is one). Magical!"*

**2013 Soliste Solitaire Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Clone 23. 65 cases. 100% whole cluster. 33% new oak for 12 months, and extended aging in a single 600L neutral oak barrel for a total of 28 months.



# Wayfarer

I visited Wayfarer Vineyard for the second time with winemaker Bibiana Gonzelz Rave in May 2016. We left Sebastopol and drove the winding roads for 45 minutes through the tall coastal redwoods out to the remote Fort Ross-Seaview AVA located in the far west Sonoma Coast. You cannot really appreciate the challenges of farming wine grapes in this rugged landscape far removed from the comforts of the Russian River Valley until you make the drive.

Bibiana is now also the winemaker for Pahlmeyer wines so she must travel to both Wayfarer and the Napa Valley from Santa Rosa where the Wayfarer wines are crafted on a regular basis. She not only makes the wines for both labels, but also directs the winegrowing. She also has her own label, Cattleya Wines. Born in Colombia and trained in France, she is one of California's most recognized winemakers and a member of the extended Pisoni family (her husband is Pisoni winemaker Jeff Pisoni).



Bibiana and I were met at Wayfarer by Cleo Pahlmeyer who directs the Wayfarer project. Extensive coverage of Wayfarer was published previously in the *PinotFile* ([www.princeofpinot.com/article/1583/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1583/)).

The 2014 vintage Wayfarer wines reviewed here have not been released and the release dates will be determined solely by the winemaker. The 2014 Wayfarer Vineyard Chardonnay and Wayfarer Vineyard Pinot Noir will tentatively be released in the fall and the other wines will follow in 2017. The wines are crafted in such a fashion to require additional bottle aging before release. They unfold slowly in the glass, finding more traction, integration and nuance over time, improving when tasted from opened bottles one or more days later. The reductive winemaking, the oak interplay and tannic backbone dictate that these wines become cellar candidates.

The reviews here are brief snippets and I will give thorough reviews of all the wines in the fall. That said, these wines will be highly rated and should be in every serious pinotophile's cellar. The Wayfarer wines are allocated and sold through a mailing list at [www.wayfarervineyard.com](http://www.wayfarervineyard.com).

The wines, the third vintage for the Wayfarer label, were bottled in December 2015 after spending 13 months in barrel. The wines tasted were opened about 6 hours before and the cork replaced. Several were decanted during the tasting.

**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 on this date in May 2016. 91-93.*

**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. 90-92.*

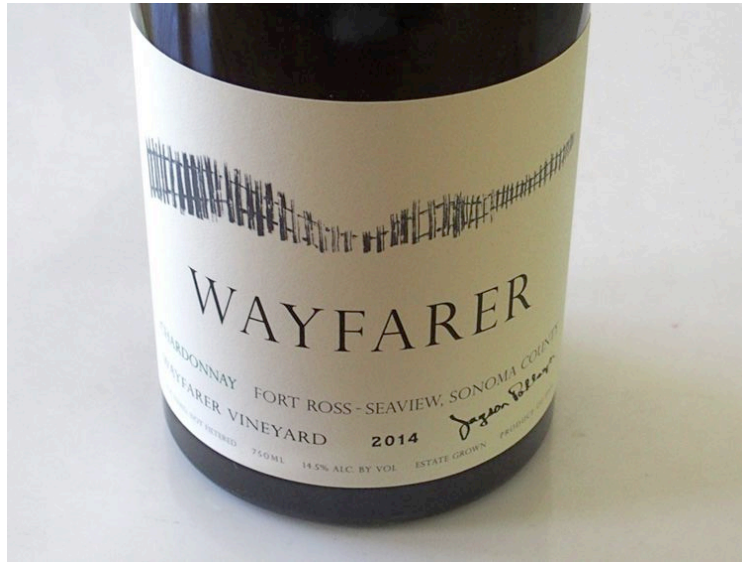
**2014 Wayfarer Mother Rock Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 335 cases. Clones are Mt Eden and Dijon 777. *Very sexy perfume of dark red berries and cherries with a lovely spice and floral accent. The deep red fruits really demand attention in this well structured mid weight plus styled wine that offers considerable textural interest. Balance is spot on, the finish is noticeably generous, and the wine has a very streamlined demeanor. 92-94.*

**2014 Wayfarer Golden Mean 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. 91-93.*

**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. 92-94.*

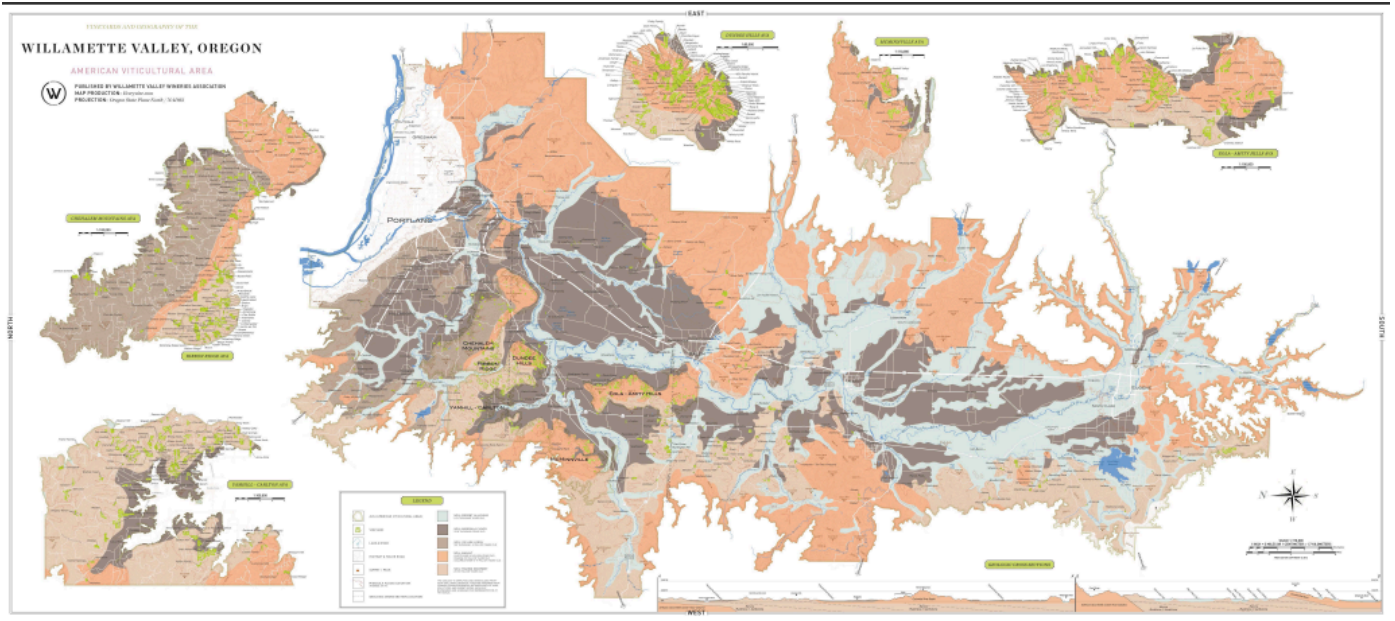
**2014 Wayfarer Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., 815 cases. 6 blocks planted on 6 acres to 4 clones. Barrel fermented and aged in 65% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Slight reduction flinty note that is appealing. Engaging aromas of lemon oil, baked apple, honey, lees and subtle butter note. Very slightly creamy on the palate with delicious flavors of lemon, pear and white peach, accented with a fleur-de-sel-infused acidity. 93-95.*





# Pinot Briefs

**Willamette Valley Map** The Willamette Valley Wineries Association has just released a limited run Willamette Valley map that is available for sale. The 72" x 32" poster-sized map denotes over 700 vineyards within the region along with varied soil types, geography and the region's geologic complexity. The cost including shipping is \$112 and may be purchased at [www.willamettewines.com](http://www.willamettewines.com).



**Kosta Browne Winery Acquires Cerise, Knez and Demuth Vineyards.** Kosta Browne has expanded its estate portfolio with the purchase of vineyards owned by Peter and Heidi Knez. Cerise, Knez and Demuth vineyards are located on hillsides on slopes above Boonville. The vineyards include 60 acres of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.



**Sea Smoke Acquires Rita's Crown Vineyard** The 201-acre Rita's Crown Vineyard located adjacent Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard, has been acquired by Sea Smoke from Santa Colina Vineyard, LLC. The vineyard consists of 61 acres of high-density plantings of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay planted in 2007. Grapes from Rita's Crown Vineyard will not be used in the wines of Sea Smoke. Plans call for Atlas Vineyard Management to farm Rita's Crown organically. Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard is farmed organically and biodynamically.

**Sonoma Wine Country Weekend** Fifteen notable sommelier stars are part of the experience this year for Sonoma Wine Country Weekend. Sponsored by Rodney Strong Vineyards, they will serve as guest wine guides at key events throughout the three-day, charitable event set for Labor Day weekend (September 2-4, 2016). The sommelier stars hail from across the United States and Canada. Tickets are now available for the 2016 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend. For information and tickets, visit [www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com](http://www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com).

**MAVA 6th Annual Harvest Festival** A tasting of wines from fifteen Mexican-American vintners will be held Saturday, August 20, 2016, at Robledo Family Winery at 21977 Bonness Road in Sonoma. This is one of the very few times of the year you can taste Mexican-American vintner wines in one place. There will also be food pairings, live music, and a silent auction filled with limited production wines and offering winery experiences. Profits will benefit the Mexican-American Vintners Association (MAVA) scholarship fund. Tickets are available for \$100 until August 16, \$125 thereafter at [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com).

**Smoke Taint a Concern in Carmel Valley** The recent Soberanes Fire has sent smoke to many parts of the Central Coast and growers are concerned in Carmel Valley. The fire has not caused any sign of smoke taint yet in the Santa Lucia Highlands.

**CIRQ Videos** CIRQ Pinot Noir by Michael Browne has just released its 2013 Treehouse and Bootlegger's Hill Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs. Visit [www.cirq.com](http://www.cirq.com) to view the extraordinary videos ("moving pictures") of the estate vineyards, winegrowing, winemaking and the Russian River Valley.



**11th Annual International Terroir Congress** This event was recently held at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon. The five-day conference gathered attendees from wine regions all over the world. As reported by Ryan Stevens at [www.oregonwinepress.com](http://www.oregonwinepress.com), a compelling presentation was offered by Portland State geologist Dr. Scott Burns. He said, There are seven main factors affecting the taste of a wine. They are the different types of grapes, the geology and resulting soils, the climate, the soil hydrology, the physiography of the site, the winemaker and the vineyard management techniques. The first five of these factors comprise what the French call terroir or 'taste of place.' Terroir differs from wine region to wine region around the world."

**Results of 2016 San Francisco International Wine Competition** On June 9-12, 2016, the 36th annual edition of the nation's most prestigious international wine competition included the blind tasting of 4,618 wines. The Best in Show Red and Best Pinot Noir was the **2014 Cru Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**

**(\$25)** sourced from Sierra Madre and Garey vineyards. The Best in Show Sparkling and Best Blanc De Noir was the **NV Gloria Ferrer Winery Carneros Blanc de Noirs**. Among Pinot Noirs, there were 19 Double Gold winners, including wines from Anaba, Furthermore, and Westwood Estate that have been reviewed in the *PinotFile*. For a full listing of all winners, visit [www.sfwinecomp.com](http://www.sfwinecomp.com).

**Decanter Platinum Best in Show Pinot Noir** The **2012 Domaine Serene Winery Hill Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** beat out six Grand Cru and 26 Premier Cru Burgundies to win the Platinum Best in Show for Pinot Noir costing more than about \$20 at *Decanter's* 2016 World Wine Awards where judging is carried out by many Masters of Wine and Master Sommeliers. The wine, like a number of Domaine Serene's vineyard designated Pinot Noirs, is sold almost exclusively to wine club members and visitors to the tasting room. Domaine Serene took home more medals than any American winery at this competition. Also, Domaine Serene will be the featured Pinot Noir at the Riedel exhibition intended to show the quality of the Riedel Pinot Noir wine glass at the 2016 *Decanter* Fine Wine Encounter in November 2016.

**Unique Wine Cellars** Infographic about building a wine cellar using precast containers. Visit [www.versatiletanks.com.au/build-wine-cellar/](http://www.versatiletanks.com.au/build-wine-cellar/).

**New Coravin™ Aimed at Millennials** A cheaper Coravin unit that allows pouring of a glass of wine without removing the cork has been released to the market. Newly designed and lighter in weight, it is made to appeal to wine drinkers in the 20 to 30 year old age group.