



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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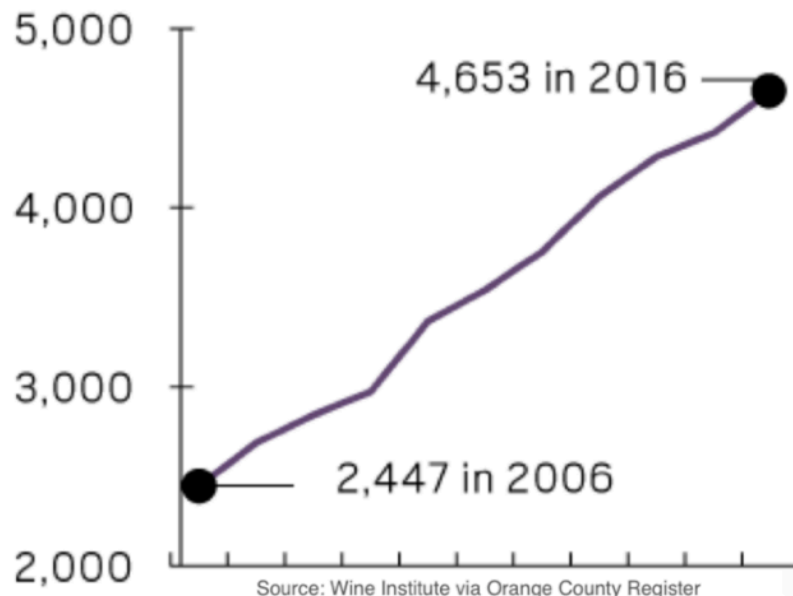
*Pinot Noir has more to say than other wines*

## Recently Tasted California Pinot Noirs are Dazzling

*"Some people were put on earth to make life better. These people are called winemakers."*

Along with the remarkable surge in number of California wineries over the past ten years, has come an equally extraordinary increase in the consistent high quality of California Pinot Noir. It no longer is known as the "heartbreak grape," but rather the "joyful grape." Pinot Noir is the wine winemakers want to make because Pinot Noir has more to say than other wines.

Number of California Wineries Soars 190% in 10 years



My enthusiastic ramblings on Pinot Noir for almost sixteen years has led many others to discover the joyful grape. One of my readers noted, "As far as what I am drinking, it's Pinot Noir you bastard, and it's your damn fault. Now I empty my bank account at wineries nobody has ever heard of, on wines nobody has ever drank except you, you pr\*\*k. You ruined me.....and I love it."

It is hard not to pimp Pinot Noir when you have the opportunity to sample the stunning wines such as those reviewed in the following pages. Over the Holidays, give thanks to the dedicated winegrowers and winemakers who make all this joy possible.

# A Dozen California Wineries Offer Holiday Cheer

## Black Kite Cellars, Santa Rosa, CA

The Pinot Noirs reviewed here showcase the individual Pinot Noir blocks that comprise the Birdsall family's 12-acre Kite's Rest Vineyard in Anderson Valley. The Kite's Rest bottling is composed of grapes from all blocks in the vineyard and receives less oak treatment. The Black Kite Cellars Pinot Noirs are typically generously extracted featuring darker, riper and sappy fruits well supported by generous new oak and buffered by gracious acidity. The 2015 wines reviewed here are still young wines with the block-specific wines showing enthusiastic oak that will integrate over time. These wines are quite similar at present, but will develop more block-specific nuances over time. In addition to these Black Kite estate wines, the winery also produces small bottlings of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from special vineyard sites in both the Santa Lucia Highlands and Sonoma Coast. The winemaker is Jeff Gaffner. Black Kite wines are available through the winery at [www.blackkitecellars.com](http://www.blackkitecellars.com), and through distribution to select wine retailers and restaurants nationally.

**2015 Black Kite Cellars Redwoods' Edge Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.63, 194 cases, \$60. Clones 114 and 115. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 66% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Engaging aromas of cherry, allspice, bark and cigar box. Soft and plush in the mouth in a light to mid weight style, offering heady flavors of boysenberry, black raspberry and black cherry with a hint of anise. Well-crafted, with balanced tannins and a richly-fruited finish of some note. The lightest and most approachable wine in the 2015 lineup. 93.*



**2015 Black Kite Cellars Stony Terrace Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.64, 195 cases, \$60. Pommard clone. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 66% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy nose initially, opening up slowly to offer aromas of blackberry jam and a waft of oak. Mid weight plus in style, with a generous layer of blueberry, blackberry and pomegranate fruit flavors accented with oak vanillin. Sleek and quite appealing in texture, with impressive length and finishing power. This wine has the most aggressive tannins at present, arriving with a rush on the somewhat astringent finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was more aromatic and the tannins less noticeable. Best to decant if you must drink now. 92.*

**2015 Black Kite Cellars River Turn Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.69, 198 cases \$60. Pommard clone. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 66% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose is quite primary initially, opening slowly to reveal aromas of dark berries, spice and plenty of toasty, sweet oak. More expressive and quite charming on the palate, with a broad-shouldered array of black fruits balanced with integrated tannins, juicy acidity and a deft compliment of oak. Very impressive length and intensity on the vivacious finish. This wine will benefit from a year or two in the cellar. 93.*

**2015 Black Kite Cellars Kite's Rest Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.61, 1,362 cases, \$50. Dijon 114, 115 and Pommard. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of purple grape, pomegranate and nutty oak. Oak-kissed purple and black fruits arrive on the palate with a rush, showing good mid palate presence and finishing persistence. Somewhat burly, unresolved tannins show up on the finish. More appealing when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 92.*

**2015 Black Kite Cellars Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.60, 91 cases, \$50. Pisoni clone. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blackberry, black raspberry, fertile earth and toasty oak open the way for a mid weight styled wine that is richly appointed with flavors of black cherry, blueberry and pomegranate infused with notes of dark chocolate and toast. Lush in the mouth, with agreeable tannins, and a bombastic cherry finish. This wine needs a little more time to integrate the new oak but it is a hedonistic charmer in the Pisoni mold. 93.*

**2015 Black Kite Cellars Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.64, 221 cases, \$60. Dijon 777 clone. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Demure aromas of crushed dark red berries and gravelly soil lead to a mid weight plus styled wine of great character with imposing mid palate flavors of black cherry, ollaliberry and spice that hold tight through a juicy finish. Soft and soothing in the mouth, with a supportive structure and bright acidity. Deft oak integration as well.* **93.**

## Carmel Road Winery, Soledad, CA

Winemaker Kris Kato has ushered the Pinot Noir wines of Carmel Road from an excellent supermarket staple to a premium label with expanded premium bottlings. Sourced from SIP-certified vineyards, Kato has the gift of working with some of the best Pinot Noir fruit in the Arroyo Seco region.

The Arroyo Seco region of Monterey County does not receive the recognition among pinotphiles that it deserves. The Arroyo Seco AVA was established in 1983, ten years before the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA that is located to the north. Historically, it was a region known for large production value priced wines, but more recently is recognized for more artisan wines and premium vineyard-designated bottlings. The Arroyo Seco is unique in that it did not suffer the ravages of California's drought because the regions aquifers remained generous. It is a growing region with persistent winds that typically lead to high acid levels and lower sugar levels.

The value priced Carmel Road Monterey Pinot Noir is a representation of Monterey as a whole and the Panorama Pinot Noir is made from the top 20 barrels of the high density estate Panorama Vineyard located in the foothills of the Santa Lucia Highlands. Drew's Blend is a collaboration between Drew Barrymore and winemaker Kris Kato, and is intended to be a forward drinking table wine "made to share with friends and family." The North Crest, South Crest and First Row Pinot Noirs are all sourced from Panorama Vineyard. These small-lot, serious wines are meant to express the microclimates and geographic diversity of the site. All wines were grown, produced and bottled by Carmel Road Winery except Drew's Blend that was vinted and bottled by Carmel Road Winery. Visit [www.carmelroad.com](http://www.carmelroad.com) for more information.



**2015 Carmel Road Monterey Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., TA 0.57, \$25, screw cap. Aged 9 months in barrel, 16% new French oak. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. The nose opens nicely over time in the glass, offering fresh aromas of dark red cherry, spice and dusty oak. Light weighted and easy going, with bright flavors of cherry, strawberry and mocha. Lacy in texture with silky tannins and a cherry-fueled finish. A simple but redeeming wine.* **88.**



**2014 Carmel Road Drew's Blend Monterey Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$28. Sourced from Panorama, Rincon and Mission Peak vineyards. Clones 2A, Pommard, 115, 23, 667 and 777. Aged 8 months in barrel, 11% new French oak. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Slight reduction upon opening, transitioning to aromas of cherry and fertile earth. Light to mid weight in style, with a tasty core of red cherry and red berry fruits with a touch of spice. Good brightness and vibrancy, with silky tannins and a modest but satisfying finish. Not too serious, but that's the point.* **88.**



**2015 Carmel Road Panorama Vineyard Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.54, \$35. Clones 23, 667 and 777. Aged 13 months in French oak barrels, 24% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose is infused with welcoming aromas of black cherry, blackberry, earthy flora and a bit of oak. The black cherry core is quite tasty on the palate, enhanced with an earthy tone. Impressive harmony, with juicy acidity, modest tannins, and a light touch of oak. The satiny mouthfeel is quite seductive.* **92.**



**2015 Carmel Road Panorama Vineyard North Crest Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.73, TA 0.55, \$55. Sourced from the north facing slope of the largest knoll within the vineyard that is exposed to gusty winds. Clones 23, 667 and 777. Aged 13 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The scent of black cherry and bramble leads to a welcome depth of black cherry fruit accented with warm spices, earth tones, and just a thread of oak. Sleek in texture with a substantial tannic backbone.* **91.**

**2015 Carmel Road Panorama Vineyard South Crest Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.67, TA 0.55, \$55. Sourced from vines located on the south facing slope of the largest knoll in the vineyard protected from afternoon marine breezes. Clones 667 and 777. Aged 13 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of ripe dark berries, prune, marzipan and fertile earth. Full-bodied, with a virile core of dark red and black cherry fruit flavors that veer to the very ripe side. Nicely balanced with immersed tannins and some finishing generosity. Re-tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, when the wine continued to show a compote character.* **88.**



**2015 Carmel Road Panorama Vineyard First Row Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.53, \$55. Sourced from the vineyard floor. The first row of vines acts like a protective barrier from winds for the other rows. Clones 667 and 777. Aged 13 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Lovely perfume of fresh dark berries and baking spices. Silky and elegant on the palate in a middleweight style, this enticing wine shows a pure expression of black cherry fruit with a compliment of spice. Seamless, with tannins in check. Still very enticing when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **93.**

## Furthermore Wines, San Francisco, CA

Partners Chad Richards and Bob Zeches offer limited release bottlings from prime North Coast and Central Coast vineyards. They began modestly in 2006 at Crushpad and now produce about 2,000 cases of Pinot Noir annually. I have been fortunate to review the wines since the 2008 vintage. In January 2016, Furthermore acquired Graton Ridge Cellars in the Russian River Valley where they now have an estate vineyard and tasting room and at the same time added Erica Stancliff as head winemaker. Stancliff also crafts wines for her own Trombetta Family Wines label. With Chad, I have an ongoing, good-natured criticism of the daffy labels that have the winery name at the bottom of the label and the vineyard source in small, very difficult to read writing below the winery name. Curious labels, good wines! Visit [www.furthermorewines.com](http://www.furthermorewines.com).

**2015 Furthermore Graton Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 348 cases, \$55. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Intoxicating aroma of spiced Bing cherry with a bit of oak. Light in weight, with a core of robust cherry and raspberry fruit flavors accented with a smoky, herbal tone. Rather simple, but easy to like, with integrated tannins and a modest finish.* **89.**

**2015 Furthermore Gioia Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 177 cases, \$50. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose leads off with aromas of black cherry, purple grape and blackberry. Discreetly concentrated flavors echo the aromas with a compliment of spice and toasty oak. The fruit veers to the very ripe side but doesn't cross the line. Plenty of mouth filling goodness and length, with a silky texture and some finishing persistence. More giving when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **91.**

**2015 Furthermore Gloria Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 177 cases, \$50. *Light garnet color in the glass. This wine shows a muscular punch of oak along with savory notes of fertile earth and herb garden. The mid weight red cherry core is relegated to the background. Silky in the mouth, with gentle tannins and a juicy, quenching finish. The finish is dominated by oak-driven toast and marzipan. The wine was unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **88.**

**2015 Furthermore Eden Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 116 cases, \$55. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Sullen red and blue fruits are pushed to the background with aromas of earthy flora and smoky oak. The mid weight essence of black cherry fruit is underpinned with smoky, herbal flavors. A very*

savory styled wine with silky, nebulous tannins and plenty of oak overlay showing up as burnt tobacco on the finish. 87.

**2015 Furthermore Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 285 cases, \$55. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Attenuated aromas of cherry, cranberry and wild strawberry touched by nutty oak. Light to mid weight engaging flavors of red cherry and red berry with plenty of spice in a seamless and forward drinking style, with some finishing length. A very typical wine from this pedigreed vineyard. 91.*



**2015 Furthermore Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 202 cases, \$45. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry reduction, dried herbs including sage give way to a tasty mid weight plus core of black raspberry and purple grape flavors. Sleek in the mouth with filigree tannins and a modest finish. Much more expressive when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle showing both fruit and savory notes competing for attention. 90.*

## **Kutch Wines, Sonoma, CA**

Jamie Kutch is an enthusiastic proponent of whole cluster (whole bunch) fermentation that gives his wines an extra dimension compared to many other California Pinot Noirs that are 100% de-stemmed. Whole cluster fermentation refers to the fermentation of intact clusters of grapes as they are picked from the vine with no intervention of machines leaving all berries and stems intact. The Burgundians have practiced whole cluster fermentation for centuries, as historically they had no de-stemmers.

The New World has largely moved away from whole cluster fermentation or limit it to 10%-30% of the clusters. Many winemakers use intuition in deciding whether stems from a certain vineyard will contribute positively or negatively. Stems have a high tannin content and can give wines added tannins and a green aroma. (Countering this is the fact that the seeds remain encapsulated in the grape keeping seed tannins to a minimum.) Adding stems to a wine increases the pH and decreases the TA and this may necessitate acidifying the wine depending on the vintage and ripeness at picking.

On the other hand, whole cluster fermentations tends to be longer, with more carbonic maceration (fermentation within the grape), and lower fermentation temperatures. When successful, the results of whole cluster fermentation can be sensational. Winemaker Jeff Fink (Tantara, Aether) says, "The aromatics can be thrilling and literally spine tingling. There can be a purity, depth and freshness to the bouquet that almost defies description. Stem inclusion brings depth, texture, fragrance, age ability and that mysterious element of intrigue that all great Pinot Noir should have and aspire to."

An interesting study was conducted at Rex Hill Wines and reported at the first annual Innovation + Quality Conference held in Napa Valley in March 2016. Four different treatments were devised to evaluate the impact of stems in various capacities on a final wine while all other winemaking protocols were standardized. The four treatments were: (1) Fully de-stemmed, (2) Fully de-stemmed with 100% of stems added back to the fermenter, (3) 100% whole cluster, and (4) 100% whole cluster with a 100% stem addition (200% stems). The study found that tannin levels increased in wines as more stems were added. The 100% stem-added-back tannin levels (2) were higher than those in the 100% without de-stemming treatment (3). Adding stems back led to more tannin in the catechin family (the type of harsher tannin often associated with commercial seed) - the type of tannin usually winemakers are trying to avoid. Through tasting, there was a clear difference as stem percentage increased. The biggest difference in the two 100% stem lots (one de-stemmed and added back and the other whole cluster) was in the aromas. More stems in the tank caused potassium to go up and the pH to increase. All alcohols were remarkably similar, There were more polymeric anthocyanins with stems confirming the belief that stems help fix color for a longer period.

Jamie told me that winemakers have a tendency to say each vintage, "These are the best wines I have every made." He does, however, sincerely believe these are the best Pinot Noir he has produced to date. "They are cool, fresh and pure, and I strongly believe they will age incredibly well (maybe 30 years) on their own balance."

2016 was the first vintage that the Sonoma Coast bottling was a 100% declassified single vineyard Pinot Noir from the winery's four sourced vineyards (Falstaff, McDougall, Bohan and Signal Ridge). Fruit from Sonoma Stage and Campbell Ranch vineyards that typically went into the Sonoma Coast bottling were dropped. This practice of declassifying improved the quality of the Sonoma Coast bottling and also increased the quality of the single vineyard wines since barrels were culled out that were not the best from the site and rather than going into the single vineyard, they were blended into the appellation wine.

The wines were fermented 100% whole cluster and not acidified because of high natural acidity. Native yeast primary fermentation and native malolactic fermentation were employed. The wines were bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Jamie recommends that the wines be decanted if opened soon.

Jamie was fortunate to escape from the October fires. He told me the fire came within one-half mile on one side and one and one-half mile on the other side of the winery in Sonoma.

Kutch wines are sold to a dedicated mailing list at [www.kutchwines.com](http://www.kutchwines.com). There is both a spring and fall release.



**2016 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.1% alc., \$39. Release January 9, 2018. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Soaring aromas of black raspberry, spice, burnt tobacco and tutti-fruitti. Sleek and eager to please in a forward drinking mid weight style, featuring flavors of black cherry and black raspberry with a tasty spice riff and a carbonic maceration note. Well-structured, with a compliment of oak, taking on more pride with time in the glass. Perfectly fine when tasted up to four days from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating good age ability. Drink this wine now and over an extended time of cellaring. 92.*

**2016 Kutch Signal Ridge Vineyard Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir.** 12.0% alc., \$49. Release August 14, 2018. Second vintage from this vineyard. The vineyard is often referred to as an "Island in the Sky" because it is the highest vineyard in all of Sonoma and Mendocino County at 2,800 feet elevation. Located just north of the Sonoma Coast AVA. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Intriguing aromas of exotic floral bouquet, crushed red grapes, spice, and potpourri. Mid weight flavors of blackberry, purple grape, plum and black raspberry entice as does the accents of burnt spice, tobacco a edible flower. Plenty of whole cluster goodness in this wine with integrated tannins, welcome vibrancy and a juicy finish. An adventurous wine that was much better at the two day and four day interval after opening. 93.*



**2016 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 11.3% alc., \$49. Release January 9, 2018. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. A pheromonic nose offering a deep well of fresh cherry, strawberry, and raspberry fruits along with exotic spices including mulling spice. A wine of ethereal refinement, with searching and perfumes flavors of red cherry and berry, spice, tobacco and bacon fat. Very silky mouthfeel with a buried but supportive structure and a refreshing finish that drives another sip. Only Pinot Noir could offer a wine of such delicacy and sensuality while knocking your socks off with flavor. This is a wine to share with your partner for it could easily lead to romance. 97.*



**2016 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.0% alc., \$59. Release January 9, 2018. Vineyard is located 8.2 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Soils are marine quartz sandstone and Goldridge. Vine age is 13+ years. Clones are dijon "828," 115 and 777 on 101 x 14 rootstock. A very cold site. Planted in 2001 by owners Ron and Judy Lougheed. Very intense and small clusters with berries the size of peas. Yields often less than 1 ton per acre. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Intoxicating nose of pie cherry, pipe smoke and exotic spice. Mouth filling goodness in a mid weight style offering flavors of cherry, raspberry, burnt tobacco and spice. Plenty of tannic backbone for support working in harmony with welcome acidity. The polished mouthfeel is striking as is the extraordinarily long finish. Still exceptional when tasted four days after a bottle was opened and re-corked. This wine shows the most whole cluster character of the wines in the 2016 lineup. 95.*



**2016 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.0% alc., \$59. Release August 14, 2018. Vineyard is situated 3.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean at 935-1,030 feet elevation. Soils are Graywacke and sandstone. Clones 114 and 115 on 44-53 rootstock planted in 1998. Located 1.7 miles north of Hirsch Vineyards. Vineyard managed by Ulises Valdez. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass.*

*Other worldly aromas of crushed black cherry, pine, spice and burnt tobacco. Amazing attack and expansive mouth filling presence of black cherry fruit. A fruit grenade combined with an ephemeral demeanor. This beauty offers exceptional length, vibrant underlying acidity and uncommon finishing intensity. A complete wine that has everything you could ask for in Pinot Noir. Still great when tasted four days after opening the bottle. Ridiculously good. 98.*



## La Follette Wines, Sebastopol, CA

Greg La Follette is one of California's most veteran and respected winemakers who has excelled with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in his career. He offers both superb value priced appellation wines and exceptional premium single vineyard wines (what he refers to as "an ongoing dialogue with singular vineyards") The current associate winemaker, Simone Sequeira, learned under the tutelage of Greg and is now guided by Ehren Jordan, the winemaking consultant. It is always a pleasure to sample his latest offerings. See also the Chardonnays reviewed in this issue. For more information and to purchase, visit [www.lafollettewines.com](http://www.lafollettewines.com).



**2015 La Follette North Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$24, screw cap. The primary source for this wine is the Straquandano Vineyard, planted in the 1970s. Picked in three passes to capture the essence of the old vines. Bottled unfixed and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Cozy aromas of earthiness, blackberry, wood spice and smoke. Mid weight flavors of black raspberry, boysenberry and blackberry in a forward drinking style with good mid palate richness, fine-grain tannins, bright acidity and a satisfying finish. A terrific value priced wine. 89.*

**2015 La Follette Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.58, 340 cases, \$42. This vineyard is located at the base of the eastern foothills of the Sonoma Coast AVA, directly adjacent to Gap's Crown Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap. Dijon 777 and Swan clones. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 38% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Welcome aromas of black cherry, cardamom spice, vanilla, herbs and fertile earth. Impressive attack, length and finish in a silky, refined, mid weight style that is beautifully balanced. Flavors of purple berries and plum linger on the quenching finish. 92.*

## la pitchoune Winery, Santa Rosa, CA

Tracy Nielsen, the co-founder and assistant winemaker, works with master winemaker Andrew Berge to produce small lots of appellation and vineyard-designated Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The name of the winery is inspired by a small family property in the South of France, la Pitchoune, which means "the little one. The name speaks to small production, small lots and the idea that small size is the winery's greatest asset.

Tasting is available by appointment at the winery for barrel tasting and sampling of older vintages, or an exclusive tasting at the home of the owners of La Pitchoune Winery in the Russian River Valley. Visit [www.lapitchounewinery.com](http://www.lapitchounewinery.com). Be sure and check out the phenomenal la pitchoune Pratt Vineyard Chardonnay also reviewed in this issue.

**2014 la pitchoune English Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., pH 3.63, TA 0.58, 98 cases, \$58. Second vintage from this vineyard. Dijon clones 115 and 667 and a Vosne-Romanee selection. Harvest Brix 23.7° and 23.2°. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, raspberry and fertile earth are replicated in the mid weight flavors that also add notes of black tea, dried herbs and a smoky oak. Good richness of flavor and fullness on the palate with a frame of suede tannins. The refined texture pleases as does the generous finish. 91.*

**2014 la pitchoune Holder Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., pH 3.58, TA 0.58, 98 cases, \$68. Second vintage from this family operated, 1.25-acre vineyard. Dijon 115 and 667. Harvest Brix 23.4° and 24.4°. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose arrives slowly over time in the glass, opening to aromas of dark fruits, briar and earth. The mid weight plus flavors of black raspberry, cassis, blackberry and black tea are virile and alive. Very silky, polished and refined with recessed tannins and an impressive finish. This wine has the balance to age beautifully. Still impressive when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

## **Pisoni Vineyards, Santa Lucia Highlands (vinified in Santa Rosa), CA**

The Santa Lucia Highlands began commercial grape growing in the early 1970s and was designated an AVA in 1991. Today, there are 50 vineyards and over 6,200 acres under vine. Half of this acreage is devoted to Pinot Noir and most of the rest to Chardonnay. The AVA is long and narrow in a north-south orientation, overlooking the Salinas Valley and Highway 101, about 15 miles east of the Pacific Ocean. Vineyards are planted on the west side of Foothill Rd and range in elevation from 300 to 1,400 feet. The growing season in the Santa Lucia Highlands is long with plentiful daytime sun and cooling breezes from Monterey Bay to moderate the heat. With 2896 degree days, the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA is a Region I in terms of coolness.

There are many notable vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands but the Pisoni Vineyard is the most renown. First planted to 5 acres of Pinot Noir in 1982, Pisoni Vineyard now consists of 45 acres made up of multiple blocks with different aspects and altitudes. It is the highest vineyard in the AVA at 1,300 feet and the second-furthest south. The soil is decomposed granite with little topsoil, but well draining. The vineyard is planted to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah (Cabernet Sauvignon was planted but grafted over to Chardonnay).

The 2015 vintage produced very limited quantities of estate Pinot Noir (normally annual production is 500-800 cases).. The Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir is the Pisoni family's proudest achievement and is considered the benchmark wine of the Santa Lucia Highlands. It is released each September, a full two years after harvest. The wine spends the first year aging in barrel, and the second in bottle.

The Estate Pinot Noir is built for aging and the winery recommends that the wine be cellared for later consumption. If opened sooner, the wine benefits from 30 to 60 minutes of decanting. Decanting after cellaring will also remove any sediment that has accumulated over time.

The Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir comes in a very classy package including a black cardboard case, black styrofoam insert and a paper wrap for each bottle.. No expense is spared in the presentation of this exceptional wine. Pisoni vineyards wines are only available through a mailing list at [www.pisonivineyards.com](http://www.pisonivineyards.com). The Pisoni family also produces wines under the Lucia, Lucy and Luli labels.







**2015 Pisoni Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$85. Produced from tiny yields in this vintage. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of earth, iron, toast and dark fruits predict a serious wine. Full-bodied flavors of boysenberry, blackberry and cassis saturate the palate with goodness. Structured tannins are suave and supportive rather than intrusive. The balance is spot on. The finish is incredibly long, seemingly lasting for a minute or more. I rarely encounter a domestic Pinot Noir with this length of finish. The wine is still relatively young and is more giving when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Easily a 20-year wine.* **96.**

## **Rhys Vineyards, Los Gatos, CA**

2014 was the third year of California's drought and brought a consistently warm growing season and early harvest. The steady, accumulated warmth occurred with few prolonged heat spikes. Given the lack of water, the vines carried a moderately sized crop, smaller than either 2012 or 2013, with thick skins, loose clusters and many hens and chicks. This combination resulted in wines with deep concentration and excellent structure.

I have tasted many Rhys Vineyards releases since the 2006 vintage including the Alesia label of the early years. My general impression is that the wines have incrementally improved as the vines have aged and the winemaking team has learned the nuances of the multiple vineyard sites.

Rhys wines are considered by many critics to be in the upper echelon of California producers and this critic agrees. The wines are highly sought after and sold by allocation through a mailing list. Visit the extremely detailed and informative website at [www.rhysvineyards.com](http://www.rhysvineyards.com).

It is important to point out that these Pinot Noir are not particularly enchanting upon opening due to their daunting tannin structure and initial reductive aromas. Winemaker Jeff Brinkman told me that the 2014 wines have significantly more structure than the 2012, 2013 and 2015 vintages and probably the most since 2008. The 2015 vintage wines, in contrast, are quite concentrated but don't have the immediate structure of the 2014s and will probably drink earlier than the 2014 vintage wines. The 2014 Pinot Noir wines need air time to soften the tannins, develop aromatic and flavor charm, and nuance. If you must drink them now, pull the corks and leave the wines in a decanter for 6 to 8 hours. The best option is to drink the 2012, 2013 and even 2015 wines while the 2014 wines evolve in the cellar.

Jeff told me that they have backed off significantly on whole cluster fermentation over the past five years, especially with Alpine and Horseshoe vineyards. Horseshoe is now essentially all de-stemmed and Alpine is only about one third stem inclusion. They have found that the wines in some years simply take too long to integrate the stems and they have committed to a program of stem inclusion only when they think it will be additive, not as a philosophic choice for all wines. As they have become more familiar with the personalities of all the sub-blocks across the estate vineyards, they have found it is easier to isolate which blocks will generally be successful with stems and which will not. Jeff thinks that the 2014 Pinot Noir wines are a good example of a vintage that would have been untouchable for quite some time if they had used all stems in all the wines.

**2014 Rhys Vineyards Home Vineyard San Mateo County Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., \$79. 1.32 acres, mixed field blend clones. 450-500 feet elevation with a southwest facing exposure. 100% whole cluster, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The most open nose in the lineup, offering a seductive perfume of red berry, dark rose petal, spice and turned earth. Mid weight dark red fruits are featured, framed by raw, expressive tannins. Over time in the glass, well-spiced cherry fruit emerges lifted by juicy acidity. Oak plays a subtle dance in the background. The finish is both savory and fruity along with a little bit of astringency.* **93.**

**2014 Rhys Vineyards Family Farm Vineyard San Mateo County Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$59. 6.16 acres of Rhys selection, Swan, 115 and Pommard. Located at 400 feet elevation with a northeast facing exposure. 25% whole cluster, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose gains traction over time in the glass, offering hi-tone aromas of cherry, spice, floral notes and vanilla. The mid weight flavors of plum, boysenberry and ripe strawberry arrive on the attack with notice. Soft, even mellow in texture over time, with a pleasing grip of acidity on the bright finish. Much more enjoyable when tasted from an opened bottle six hours later.* **93.**



**2014 Rhys Vineyards Skyline Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir.** 13.3% alc., \$99. 2.12 acres planted to Rhys selection and Swan situated at 2280 to 2315 feet elevation with a southwest and southeast facing exposure. 100% whole cluster, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Many aromas show up over time on the nose including black cherry, exotic spice, burnt tobacco and rose petal. On the palate, the sappy purple fruits show uncommon concentration, but are in tune with the broad, energetic tannins and juicy acidity. The result is a beautifully balanced wine. Very exotic, with many varieties of spice showing up over time. There is textural interest from whole cluster inclusion as well.* **94.**

**2014 Rhys Vineyards Horseshoe Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 12.7% alc., \$79. 10.85 acres planted to Rhys selection and two heritage clones at 1450-1610 feet elevation with an east, south and west facing exposure. 10% whole cluster, aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. This wine starts out quite savory with aromas of fertile earth, tobacco leaf and oak. The ebullient blackberry, pomegranate and black cherry fruits have a smoky, tobacco underpinning. The finish is remarkable for its succulence and longevity. Much more enjoyable when tasted six hours later from a previously opened bottle when the savory elements found more balance with the fruit tones. The additional new oak is evident in this wine's early stage.* **93.**

Soon after the 2014 harvest, it was evident that some barrels in the cellar were of exceptional quality and there was adequate production to make Hillside bottlings. Extremely limited bottlings were made from the Alpine and Horseshoe vineyards. These will be the last Hillside offerings for at least two years as production levels were too low. The winery comments: "The Rhys Hillside Pinot Noir capture the pinnacle expression of our iconic Alpine and Horseshoe vineyards. Our experience over the last decade taught us that a few blocks within these sites consistently produce even higher quality wines than their neighbors." Production of these wines was so limited in 2014 that not every member of the mailing list was able to obtain them. I snagged a bottle of the Alpine Hillside and want to share my tasting experience with you.





**2014 Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard Hillside Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$149. 2.25 acres, selection massale, 1600 feet elevation, 6" to 18" of topsoil over soft shale. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Initially, the aromas are brooding with only a hint of black cherry, burnt tobacco and oak. Substantial tannins underlie the prodigious core of sweet black cherry fruit that is augmented with notes of exotic spice, Charcuterie and black raspberry. There is enough lively acidity to invigorate the wine. When tasted the following day and three days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, this savory wine was more aromatic with some mellowing of tannin, but still not entirely friendly (although the fruit remained seductive as did the persistent finish). This wine will require considerable patience (? ten years) in the cellar for full enjoyment. I could be underestimating the final score of this wine but it is challenging to fully evaluate its potential now. 93-94.*

## Sanglier Cellars, Santa Rosa, CA

Glenn Alexander has put his degree in viticulture to good use along with his practical winemaking experience that began at Preston Winery in Dry Creek Valley. He started his own farm management company in 2003 and named it after the Greek god of the grape harvest and wine, Bacchus. Today, he farms vineyards for respected wineries such as Paul Hobbs, Kosta Browne, Pahlmeyer, Eric Kent and Chalk Hill, and manages 800 acres of premium vineyards in Sonoma County. Glenn launched Sanglier Cellars in 2006 along with his spouse Melissa and two children, Dustin and Chelsea. The name, Sanglier, is French for wild boar. His wine program now includes Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, a Rhone blend, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

A tasting room is located in downtown Healdsburg and is open Thursday through Monday or by appointment. Visit the website at [www.sangliercellars.com](http://www.sangliercellars.com).

**2015 Sanglier Old Camp Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.66, 159 cases, \$60. Release spring 2018. Vineyard planted to Pommard and 667 clones in 2006. by Glenn Alexander. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 50% new and 50% 1 to 3-year-old. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Shy, but very pleasant scents of black cherry, crushed purple grapes, spice and earth. Beautifully crafted in a mid weight style with vibrant flavors of black cherry and black raspberry framed by sleek, ripe tannins. A slight floral note chimes in. A notable finish features dark grape aromatics that finish generous and long. Even better when tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*



**2015 Sanglier River Tusque Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.56, 124 cases, \$36. The name of this wine is French Provencal for "The Old Lands." Aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 10% new and 90% 1 to 3-year-old. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose is wild and exotic, with aromas of purple berries and complimentary oak notes. Generously endowed in a mid weight plus style, with intense and succulent flavors of boysenberry, pomegranate and blackberry augmented with loads of spice. The wine's haunting flavors are framed by supporting tannins and an unusually lengthy finish. This wine just has plenty of Pinot speak. 94.*

## Soliste, Santa Rosa, CA

Soliste has been on the quest to be part of the conversation with the great Burgundies that the proprietors admire. These two 2013 wines demand comparison with Burgundy and owners Claude Koeberle and Dan Plumley believe these are the most extraordinary Pinot Noir that they have released.

Soliste focuses on each specific clone of Pinot Noir that is best in harmony with each vineyard site resulting in Soliste's Single Vineyard, Single Clone and Single Cooperage wines known as Monoclone®. The Soliste style is both elegant yet intensely flavored, both powerful and refined.

The wines are sold through an allocated mailing list at [www.soliste.com](http://www.soliste.com).



**2013 Soliste Sonatera Vineyard T Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 123 cases, \$85. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose is focused on aromas of spiced black cherries, plum, vanilla and sous-bois. Very elegantly composed, with dark cherry and plum fruits engaging from entry to exit. Glorious flavors with whole cluster nuances, impeccable balance, and a cherry-fueled finish that never gives up. This wine has a spring in its step and is even more enticing when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine will slay any appetite for Burgundian Pinot Noir. 95.*



**2013 Soliste Forêt Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc. 123 cases, \$85 (magnums \$300). Sourced from a vineyard secluded by redwoods near Occidental, just 6 miles from the Pacific Ocean on the western coastal range. 50% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 22% new. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, sous-bois, red berries and nutty oak. Hair-raising attack of black cherry fruit causes the drinker to sit up and take notice. Very polished and elegant, with waves of cherry and spice flavor with the slightest burnt tobacco note. Gossamer tannins with a silky soft mouthfeel and a succulent, cherry-fueled finish.*

*The wine has the balance to age magnificently. 94.*

## **Velvet Bee Wine, Sta. Rita Hills, CA**

Phillip Kaplan has followed the path of a number of lawyers who have entered the wine business. He and his spouse bought a house in Los Olivos in 2009. While practicing law in Costa Mesa, California, Phillip was looking to get into the wine business as something more than a collector and drinker. At the time of the home purchase, he was primarily a French Bordeaux drinker.

Phillip's friends and former law partners, Steve and Cathy Pepe, and Cathy's son, Wes Hagen, had already established Clos Pepe as a premier label in the Sta. Rita Hills. Clos Pepe wines opened Phillip's eyes to the possibilities of Pinot Noir from the Central Coast. He started drinking more French Burgundies when he could afford them. Although he was curious about winemaking at this stage, he was still not committed.

The Los Olivos house came with a small backyard vineyard of 200+ Zinfandel vines. Phillip and his spouse took a number of courses at University of California at Davis about wine growing and bought some equipment for small scale winemaking. They spent the next two years finding how difficult it was for a novice to grow and produce drinkable wine. During that period, he was befriended by several local winemakers who he pestered to assist him on his own backyard winemaking project. Joe Davis of Arcadian Winery was one of that group. He suggested that if Phillip was really interested in making commercial quality wine, he should come make wine with him at the Arcadian wine facility on Santa Rosa Road in the Sta. Rita Hills.

Phillip started at Arcadian in 2011 crafting Zinfandel from his own vineyard. In 2012, Joe told Phillip about an opportunity to buy good Pinot Noir grapes at harvest. Phillip was in New York, downing a gin and tonic at his hotel after a deposition. Joe caught Phillip at a weak moment and Phillip has been in the wine business ever since.

Phillip's choice of vineyards - Bentrock, La Encantada, Rita's Crown, Radian and Rancho La Viña - reflect his good fortune in working with the several winemakers who make wine at Arcadian and had connections with these vineyard sources.

Phillip aims to make wines that he describes as "off-the-beaten-path" for California. That means for the whites, Chardonnay should resemble a French Chablis, and for reds, Pinot Noir with a full palette of flavor beyond the classic strawberry, cherry and raspberry fruits that ripe California Pinot Noir grapes from good vineyards provide. He says, "I am looking for some funk, some dirt, some underbrush and good acids to go with the fruit, and to make that all integrate in the finish. I choose vineyards that produce those traits."

Phillips passion is wine, although he continues to practice law to make ends meet. He has lived and worked in Orange County for the past 30 years.

Phillip now produces about 400 cases annually of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. The first commercial vintage was 2012, bottled in 2015. The wines reviewed here are from the second bottling. Visit the website at [www.velvetbeewine.com](http://www.velvetbeewine.com).



**2013 Velvet Bee Bentrack Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.94% alc., 196 cases, pH 3.59, TA 0.542, \$38.

Released November 1, 2017. Clones 667 and "828." Harvest Brix 25.1°. Aged 24 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very shy aromas initially of dark fruits and nutty oak. Mid weight flavors of dark red and black fruits with a touch of spice. Quite*

*forward, with soft tannins, bright acidity and complimentary oak in the background. Much better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with more aromatic and fruit expression and finishing generosity. 89.*



**2013 Velvet Bee La Encantada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.31% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.557, 125 cases, \$38. Released November 1, 2017. Clones 777 and 115 (50% each). Harvest Brix 21.9°. *Moderate ruby red color in the glass. Very little to report aromatically even when checked from an opened bottle on the next day. Light in weight, even shallow, with flavors of red cherry and cranberry. Very elegantly composed with gentle tannins and supportive oak in the background. The fruit seems under ripe and there is not enough savory character to lift interest. 86*

**2014 Velvet Bee Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.53% alc., pH 3.53-3.78, 194 cases, \$38. Released November 1, 2017. Sourced from Bentrack Vineyard (667, 25%), La Encantada Vineyard (777 and 115, 31% and Rancho La Viña (115, 31%). Harvest Brix 23.0°-24.3°. *Moderate ruby red color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of dark berries and nutty oak. Light to mid weight in style, with engaging flavors of red and black berries. Nicely balanced with a supportive oak thread and some envious cherry fruit on the modestly long finish. 88.*

## More Excellent Wines

**2016 Chalk Hill Mt. Eden Clone Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., pH 3.80, TA 0.60, 280 cases, \$60. Proprietor is William P. Foley II. Grown, produced and bottled by Chalk Hill Estate Winery, Healdsburg. The Chalk Hill Estate located in the northeastern hills of the Russian River Valley is a bit warm for growing Pinot Noir, but the winery's Trenton Road Vineyard, located a few miles west is better situated. The vineyard's 45 acres are planted to Mt. Eden and Pommard clones and Swan selections of Pinot Noir. Average harvest Brix 24.7°. Aged 10 months with monthly lees stirring for 4 months in French oak barrels, 67% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of dark berry fruits, toast and cigar box lead to a mid weight plus array of very ripe blackberry and black currant flavors accented with notes of smoke and toast. The high alcohol propels the wine's lush, velvety structure. The firm tannin structure supports the richly fruited core. The wine lacks some vibrancy and the finish is very modest. The impression is a wine from a warm site with some resemblance to a Syrah. 87.*

**2015 Gary Farrell Fort Ross Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.73, 341 cases, \$70. Released October 2017. Produced and bottled by Gary Farrell, Healdsburg. Inaugural release from this vineyard located on a cool, coastal ridge at 1,200 to 1,700 feet elevation. Clone 777 and a Calera selection. The 777 grapes were gently de-stemmed while the Calera grapes were delivered to tank with 36% whole clusters. 4 to 7-day cold soak, 10 days of post fermentation extended maceration, and aged 16 months on the primary lees in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is driven by savory notes of dried herbs, timber and clove with shy aromas of cherry. A round mouthful of black cherry fruit is buffered by earth and herbal flavors with some noticeable citric acidity in the background providing juiciness. The tannins have not mollified as yet and show up on the lengthy finish. Interest in this wine will depend on one's attraction to the savory side of Pinot Noir. 89.*

**2015 Pfendler Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 250 cases, \$45. Estate grown. Bottled by Pfendler Vineyards, Santa Rosa. Winemaker Greg Bjornstad. Clones are Swan, Calera and Pommard. Harvest

Brix 23.4°. Extremely small yields in this vintage. 7 to 10-day cold soak, inoculated for primary fermentation. Basket pressed with primary finishing in barrel within two weeks. All native secondary fermentation with some lees stirring. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black raspberry, blackberry, turned earth and vanilla creme lead to a mid weight plus styled wine with a core of earthy dark berry fruits and a bit of savory tobacco/leafy accent in the background. Beautifully balanced with a modest but pleasing finish. Unchanged when sampled the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **90.**



**2015 Roth Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 4,310 cases, pH 3.88, TA 0.564, \$28. Aged on the lees for 11 months in French and American oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose opens slowly in the glass to reveal aromas of black cherry, oak spice and toasted almond. Forward drinking mid weight flavors of purple and black fruits and a touch of spice framed by gentle tannins. Oak plies the background, the mouthfeel is genteel and the finish modest. Nothing stands out, but there is little to complain about especially at this price.* **89.**

**2015 Sarah's Vineyard Estate Santa Clara Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 385 cases, \$45. Produced and bottled by Sarah's Vineyard, Gilroy. Clones 667, 777, 115 and a "DRC" selection from Sarah's Vineyard. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Engaging aromas of red cherry, raspberry, baking spice and sandalwood. Sleek and polished in the mouth with a very enjoyable core of fresh Bing cherry and red berry fruits in a middleweight style. Lazy tannins, deft oak management and some length on the finish add to the appeal. A lot of Bing cherry singing in this wine.* **93.**

**2015 Tongue Dancer Pinot de Ville Putnam Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.59, 125 cases, \$65. Released September 6, 2017. Winemaker James MacPhail, produced and bottled by Liquid Vinyl Ltd., Healdsburg. Vineyard is located just 6 miles from the ocean in the town of Annapolis. Clones 115 and 777. Harvest Brix 25.0°. 100% gently de-stemmed and not crushed. 5-day cold soak in 1-ton open-top fermenters. Daily punch downs by hand. Barrel fermented in French oak barrels with batonnage once every other week until primary fermentation finished. Aged 17 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 25% new. Light filtration, no fining at bottling. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Shy, but welcoming aromas of black cherry and earthy flora. Good depth of black cherry and raspberry fruit with notable attack and length. Well-spiced, with a thread of toasty oak in a supportive role and the slightest confected tone. The tannins are quite silky making for easy drinking now yet the balance predicts age ability.* **93.**



**2016 Valerie's Vineyard One Acre Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 100 cases, \$40. Three families hand farm this 1-acre vineyard along with vineyard practices guided by Phil Coturri. Produced and bottled by Benziger Family Winery, Glen Ellen (winemaker Jeff McBride). 14th vintage. Aged 12 months in 100% new French oak barrels.

*Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Intoxicating aromas of fresh berries, fertile earth and compost. Gorgeous in every way, featuring a vivid mid weight core of dark red cherry and berry flavors framed by engaging tannins and supported by juicy acidity. The unbelievably intense and persistent finish is a message from heaven. I have tasted almost every vintage of Valerie's and the wines are consistently fine, but this one is the best ever.* **95.**



# Recently Tasted Oregon Pinot Noir Delights

## Beckham Estate Vineyard, Tualatin, OR

Beckham Estate Vineyard is located on the flank of Parrett Mountain in the Chehalem Mountains at 412-568 feet elevation. The vineyard is organic and dry farmed, with extremely rocky, volcanic soils. Andrew and Annedria Beckham acquired this property in 2004 with the intent of building a pottery studio, but an estate vineyard soon followed and the first wine was made in 2009 by Andrew. The 6.5-acre vineyard is planted to Pommard, Wädenswil and Dijon 115 and 777 clones of Pinot Noir derived from cuttings from a nearby vineyard. A tasting room was completed in 2012. Visit [www.beckhamestatevineyard.com](http://www.beckhamestatevineyard.com). Annual production of Beckham Estate Vineyard and A.D. Beckham wines is 2,700 cases.



**2015 Beckham Estate Vineyard Estate Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., \$30. A blend from the entire estate vineyard including Pommard, Wädenswil, 115 and 777 clones. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose opens slowly in the glass to reveal aromas of blackberry, turned earth and oak vanillin. Fruit-driven by a mid weight core of black fruits accented with dark chocolate, spice and toast flavors. Very approachable, with suede tannins, balancing acidity and some finishing generosity. 89.*

**2015 Beckham Estate Vineyard Dow's Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., 100 cases, \$50. Released October 2017. The name of this wine honors Andrew's son, father, grandfather who carry the name Dow. Pommard and 777 clones. 30% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Demure aromas of blackberry, cassis and smoke. Masculine in a mid weight plus style, with rich, full flavors of black raspberry and blackberry with a touch of smoke and tobacco. Silky in texture, with a noticeably intense and prolonged finish. More giving when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 90.*

**2015 Beckham Estate Vineyard Sophia's Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., 100 cases, \$40. Released April 2017. This wine is named for the Beckham's eldest daughter Sophia. Dijon 115 (own-rooted). Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 10% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. A charming wine with enticing scents of black cherry, woodland, spice and piney oak. Lifted and vivacious, with a tasty core of dark red cherry and berry fruits framed by smart tannins. Impressive harmony, with a driving, extended finish. 91.*



The A.D. Beckham project offers wines vinified and aged in 100 to 220-gallon terra cotta amphorae. As a ceramics teacher, Andrew found the confluence of his life's passions: clay and wine. He has worked to develop clay amphorae that are viable and food safe, using clay from the Delta in Sacramento. Through trial and error, he found the most appropriate firing temperature for making unlined amphorae. The project is ongoing, but Andrew has found that the extraction coming from amphorae at the end of primary fermentation is brighter and higher toned with more energy and tension. Ferments are not as hot and are slower. During aging in amphorae, wine is exposed to twice the oxygen as in an oak barrel and the wines tend to mature at a much faster rate than would be seen with wines aged in oak barrels. The clay vessel also acts as a fining chamber so the wines finish with clarity. The finished wines have a unique texture that Andrew describes as earthen or similar to brick dust. The amphorae wines are handcrafted in Andrew's studio located on the estate vineyard.

**2015 A.D. Beckham Creta Chehalem Mountains Amphora Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 100 cases, \$55. "Creta" is Latin for clay and this wine was fermented and aged in terra cotta. Clones are Pommard, Wädenswil, 115 and 777. 30% whole cluster fermentation. Native yeast fermentation. Bottled unfixed and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Primary aromas of black cherry, earth and white chocolate with a dank note in the background. More appealing on the palate, with mid weight flavors of dark red cherry, cranberry and spice. Lively and bright, with a purity of fruit expression unencumbered with oak. The texture is like fine emery. Similar to a Pinot Noir vinified in neutral oak, but with more richness of fruit flavor and structure. 90.*

**2015 A.D. Beckham Lignum Chehalem Mountains Amphora Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$45. This wine was fermented in handmade terra cotta vessels and 50% aged in 12-year-old French oak barrels and 50% aged in amphorae. Bottled unfiltered. *Dark garnet color in the glass. A totally different wine than the "Creta." The fruit profile seems riper, showing aromas of fruitcake, prune and marzipan. Full-bodied, with plenty of purple and black fruit sap with a pleasing spice accent. Well-structured, with a soothing texture and a enviable finish. I was attracted to the spice, balance and texture of this wine. 91.*



## Evening Land Vineyards, Salem, OR

Beginning with the 2014 vintage, Evening Land became the name of the winery producing exclusively Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from the 62-acre Seven Springs Vineyard located in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. The 2014 vintage was the 30th anniversary vintage from Seven Springs Vineyard and marks the first vintage Rajat Parr and Sashi Moorman became sole stewards of the vineyard. A new label for the brand also appeared in 2014.

Three of the 2015 vintage estate wines are reviewed here. For 2015, there are seven bottlings including three Pinot Noirs, three Chardonnays and a Gamay Noir (current release is from the 2016 vintage). According to the winery, "The 2015 vintage sees all the traits of classic Oregon Pinot Noir turned up a notch. The color is brighter, the palate is weightier, the fruit purity more pronounced on both the nose and palate, and the wines in their youth are - dare we say it - a touch showy and opulent." Because of the showiness, the use of new oak was dialed back slightly. For the Chardonnays, "We brought the elegant influence of the larger Austrian puncheons to both the Summum and La Source cuvées in 2015." The Anden Pinot Noir is only available in a Reserve Case due to very small production. The wines are sold through a mailing list at [www.eveninglandvineyards.com](http://www.eveninglandvineyards.com).



**2016 Evening Land Seven Springs Eola-Amity Hills Gamay Noir** 12.5% alc. \$35., From a 3-acre block of estate Gamay Noir planting that is among some of the oldest Gamay vines in North America. Vinified in the traditional Beaujolaise approach in the cellar. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Pleasant aromas of cherry liquor, strawberry malt, and a leafy/vegetal note. Mid weight flavors of red cherry, cranberry are shot through with a herbaceous tone. Refreshingly crisp, with balanced tannins and a juicy, red cherry-themed finish. 88.*





**2015 Evening Land Seven Springs La Source Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$75, Dijon clones planted in shallow and rocky soils at the very top of the vineyard. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of black cherry, spice, burnt tobacco, mocha and toast maintain over time in the glass. Delicious and seductive, with mid weight flavors of black cherry and black raspberry highlighted by baking spice and sandalwood goodness and underlain with complimentary oak. Rather elegant, with inviting Pinot delicacy, offering more flavor and complexity than the color would dictate. The finish has unusually gratifying length. A memorable wine from an iconic vineyard.* **95.**

## Soléna Estate, Yamhill, Oregon

After successful careers in the Oregon wine industry, husband and wife team of Laurent Montalieu and Danielle Andrew Montalieu acquired an 80-acre estate to commemorate their marriage in 2000. In May 2002, they launched Soléna by bottling their first vintage of Domaine Danielle Laurent Pinot Noir and, shortly thereafter, opening a tasting room in Carlton. Soléna is the combination of the French and Spanish words soleil and luna, celebrating the sun and the moon, and the name that Laurent and Danielle gave their daughter. Soléna Estate began as a way to explore winemaking with several varieties grown in neighboring appellations while the family's young Domaine Danielle Laurent vineyard in the Yamhill-Carlton AVA matured. In May 2007, Danielle and Laurent added the spectacular Hyland Vineyard in the McMinnville AVA to their estate vineyard holdings. Today, Laurent and Danielle produce Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris from their estate vineyards and other exceptional vineyards in the Willamette Valley. Visit [www.solenaestate.com](http://www.solenaestate.com).

**2015 Soléna Grand Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.65, 5,000 cases, \$30. Harvest Brix 24.5°. Aged 8 months in French oak barrels. *Light ruby red color in the glass. The nose is both savory and fruity with aromas of black cherry, underbrush, dried herbs and toasty oak. Light to mid weight in style featuring a cherry core with an oak frame. Simple and forward drinking, with decent mid palate presence, juicy acidity, and some cherry-driven finish. An unpretentious, everyday wine.* **88.**

**2015 Soléna Guadalupe Vineyard Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., pH 3.62, \$50. Pommard, Wädenswil, and Dijon clones planted in Willakenzie soil. Harvest Brix 22.0-23.0°. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of dark red cherry and berry, potpourri and herbal oak. Darker fruit flavors in the mouth featuring black cherry and blackberry with accents of clove and earth. Substantial tannic backbone yet silky in texture with uplifting acidity.* **90.**

**2015 Soléna Zena Crown Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.75, 150 cases, \$50. Volcanic Nokia soils. Harvest Brix 26.0°. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose gains traction over time in the glass, revealing black cherry, plum, baking spice, earthy flora and mulch aromas. Middleweight in style, with engaging flavors of well-ripened black cherry, boysenberry, and blackberry fruits, as well as game and Charcuterie. Firm, but integrated tannins and a pleasing thread of oak.* **92.**

**2015 Soléna Hyland Vineyard McMinnville Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.65, 340 cases, \$55. Coury, Wädenswil and Pommard clones. Vineyard originally planted in 1971. Harvest Brix 23.9°-24.8°. Aged 8 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Lovely aromas of cherry, Herbs de Provence and sweet oak. A cheerful mid weight wine in the mouth that is vibrant and juicy with buried tannins. Flavors of dark cherry and dark red berry along with spice and earth are highly satisfying as is the finish of notable length.* **93.**



**2015 Soléna Prince Hill Vineyard Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.50, 150 cases, \$50. Harvest Brix 23.0°-24.3°. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels. Vineyard planted by Dick Earth in 1983. 22 acres of Pinot Noir in Jory soil. *Moderate light garnet color in the glass. A very showy wine from the get-go, with charming aromas of fresh red cherry, strawberry, spice, and sandalwood. Silky smooth in the mouth with seductive mid weight flavors of black cherry black raspberry and spice. Very giving now with modest tannins and unrelenting juiciness as well as a very lengthy finish. This wine reflects its Dundee Hills terroir.* **94.**



**2015 Soléna Domaine Danielle Laurent Yamhill-Carlton**

**Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.62, 490 cases, \$55. Clones 114, 115, 667, 777, "828," Pommard and Swan. 80-acre, densely planted in Willakenzie soil. Harvest Brix 24.2°-24.9°. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. A sophisticated, haunting wine with the right combination of spiced, dark red and purple fruits and savory earthen notes in a mid weight style. The tannins and acidity are in step creating a wine of impressive harmony that still needs time to fully express itself. The most backward wine in the 2015 lineup, yet the one that is the most complex and potentially the best. Wines from this vineyard have improved as the vineyard has matured.* **94.**



Related value priced labels from Real Nice Winemakers in Dundee: [www.realnicewinemakers.com](http://www.realnicewinemakers.com).



**2016 Shallow Seas Oregon Rosé** 13.5% alc., pH 3.14, RS 2g/L, \$18, screw cap. Produced and bottled by Real Nice Winemakers, Dundee, OR. Pinot Noir and Riesling sourced from Domaine Loubejac Vineyard. Harvest Brix 22.4°-24.1°. *Moderate pinkish orange color in the glass. Nicely appointed aromas of blood orange, strawberry, apricot and nectarine. The flavors echo the aromas in a bone dry style with a good grip of finishing acidity. Fresh and pleasing, holding up nicely over time in the glass. A good wine to chill out with.* **89.**

**2015 Black Magnolia Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.60, \$22. Sourced from Hyland Olsen and Domaine Loubejac vineyards. *Light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, vanilla and pain grille lead to a light to mid weight style wine that is heavily oaked. The core of black cherry fruit is rather shallow and oak flavors of char and vanilla predominate. A bit disjointed, with some aggressive oak tannins.* **85.**

## Privé Vineyard & Winery, Newberg, OR

Longstanding readers know that I have written extensively about the wines from this 2-acre site in the Chehalem Mountains. The wines have become so popular and produced in such small quantities, that owners Tina and Mark Hammond can only accept appointments for tasting from club members beginning in January 2018. It is no secret that the Hammonds want to retire and their winery property is available for sale. The estate Pinot Noirs are 100% Pommard clone from vines first established in 1980 in Jory soil. All three wines were exceptional even three days after opening indicating they will age and there is no hurry to drink them. Visit [www.privevineyard.com](http://www.privevineyard.com).

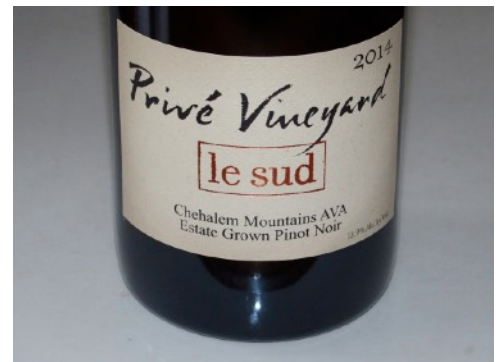
**2016 Privé le nord Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$59. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose is highly rewarding, featuring hi-tone aromas of fruit jam, spice box, rose petal and toast. Expansive flavors of black cherry, raspberry and Coca-cola with just a touch of toasty oak. A gorgeous wine with impeccable balance and long, black cherry-infused finish. Still exceptional when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle predicting age ability.* **93.**



**2016 Privé le sud Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir**

13.9% alc., \$69. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Heady aromas of dark cherry and berry and sous bois. Mid weight plus in style, with more sappy and deeper flavor than le nord. Flavors of blackberry, black cherry, and pomegranate fruits are highlighted with tastes of tobacco and spice.*

*Texturally seductive, with enmeshed tannins and a very generous black-fruited finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle the intensity and length of the finish grabbed my attention.* **94.**





**2016 Privé Joie de Vivrie Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir.** 13.8% alc., \$99. 115 of 192 bottles signed by winemaker. Etched, heavy bottle. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Brooding aromas of dark berries, fertile earth and oak. Velvety in the mouth in a mid weight plus style with initially reserved flavors of blackberry and cassis. Heavenly texture and balance with an outlandish finish that persists in the mouth for over a minute. Even better and more giving when tasted two and three days from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Don't even think about drinking this wine for three to five years. A tour de force that unfortunately few will get to drink. 96.*

## Walter Scott Wines, Salem, OR

This winery has burst on the Oregon wine scene in recent years, although the owners, Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon, have been members of the Oregon wine industry for twenty years. Walter Scott Wines was launched in 2008 and was a featured winery at the 2016 International Pinot Noir Celebration. The winery now produces 3,000 cases annually of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc from exceptional vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. Look for more about this stellar producer in the next issue of the *PinotFile*. Visit [www.walterscottwines.com](http://www.walterscottwines.com).

The same care and attention to detail goes into the Walter Scott Willamette Valley appellation wines as for the single vineyard selections. La Combe Verte translates to "The Green Fault" or "The Green Valley." The phrase is a tribute to both the Willamette Valley and the team at Patricia Green Cellars, without whose support Walter Scott could never have been started. Essentially, it is Patricia Green's "fault" that Ken and Erica were able to start their project. See also the review of La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Chardonnay. The two wines reviewed below are the first of the 2016 wines to be released. Visit [www.walterscottwine.com](http://www.walterscottwine.com).



**2016 Walter Scott La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 1,350 cases, \$28. Released September 2017. Primarily sourced from Eola-Amity Hills sources (Hope Well, Justice and Sojourner vineyards) with barrels of Vojtilla and Freedom Hill vineyards added. 15% whole cluster, ambient yeast fermentation, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderate dark garnet color in the glass. The nose offers its pleasures over time in the glass, showing aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, and spice. More expressive on the palate, with a real mouthful of luscious purple and black fruits dressed in matched tannins. The seductively silky texture is embraceable. Well-crafted, with some finishing intensity. 91.*

**2016 Walter Scott Cuvée Ruth Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 350 cases, \$40. Released September 2017. This wine is dedicated to the memory of Ruth and Irv Kantor, the winery's partner's parents showing a tribute to partners Sue and Andy who helped Ken and Erica realize their dreams. A combination of select barrels from exceptional vineyards including Seven Springs, Sojourner and Temperance Hill. Grapes from Lewman Vineyard, a site adjacent to the winery, were also blended in. A blend of Pommard, Wädenswil and Dijon clones. Fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfixed and unfiltered. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of red and purple berries with a whiff of spice. Mid weight plus in style, offering vivid flavors of boysenberry and pomegranate that flood the mouth with goodness. Silky and sleek in the mouth with cashmere tannins and laudatory oak input, finishing with class. This wine wows the palate with virility. 93.*

# Recently Tasted Glorious Chardonnays



**2015 Evening Land La Source Seven Springs Estate Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay** 13.0% alc., \$75. This wine is a good example of the excitement around Oregon Chardonnay these days. Large once-used puncheons were employed in this vintage that yielded limited quantities.

*Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Flat-out enchanting aromas of green apple, iron, and considerable stony minerality. Crisp flavors of green apple, apple butter, citrus and honey combine to elate the palate. The wine is clean, almost crunchy and quenching like a cold, cut apple. The fruit is enlivened by bright but complimentary acidity that lifts the mouthwatering, lengthy finish. There is plenty of "minerality" to excite even the most finicky Chardonnay connoisseur. 95.*



**2015 Gary Farrell Durell Vineyard Sonoma Valley Chardonnay** 12.7% alc., pH 3.33, TA 0.71, 245 cases, \$65. Released October 2017. Old Went selection planted in rocky, volcanic soils. Harvest Brix 21.5°. Whole cluster pressed and transferred to 35% new French oak barrels and 500-L puncheons for native fermentation and 8 months of barrel aging. Racked once off the primary lees just before bottling. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Leading off an impressive offering are aromas of lemon zest, cut apple white nectarine, warm biscuit and slate. Richly flavored and somewhat weighty in the mouth, with flavors of lemon, grapefruit, banana and honey. Crisp in character, with taut acidity on the finish that leaves a fresh citrus impression. 93.*



**2015 La Follette North Coast Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., \$24, screw cap. A combination of barrel and tank fermentation and aging on the lees. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon, buttery brioche and poached pear leap from the glass upon opening. Bright citrus flavors with hints of honey, pear, persimmon and blonde caramel offer a highly flavorful experience. Commendable balance with a good cut of acidity on the finish. 90.*



**2015 La Follette Sangiacomo Vineyards** 14.5% alc, \$38. Clusters picked earliest date ever (September 14) and pressed straight to barrel without cold settling, with the lees in contact with the wine throughout the aging process. *Light golden yellow color with a tinge of green in the glass. Hi-tone lemon creme aroma with some reductive slate addition. Pretentious charge of lemon-infused pleasure on entry with a bit of pineapple accent. The fruit really saturates the palate. Slight viscosity with a lemon drop, uplifting finish. This is a wine for fans of boisterous Chardonnay yet there is enough restraint to remind one of a great Meursault. 95.*



**2014 la pitchoune Pratt Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., 50 cases, \$58. *Moderate golden yellow with the slightest green caste and the slightest haze in the glass. Strong and persistent aromas of lemon-lime, orchard fruits, buttery brioche and wet stone. Luscious flavors of lemon, pineapple, apple, pear and spice merge in a wondrous melange of pleasure. The wine also sports*

*welcome viscosity, impeccable balance, submissive oak, and a flat-out great finish infused with layers of fruit goodness. This wine is all about California sunshine and the Pratt Vineyard that is fast becoming one of California's treasured Chardonnay sites. Lovers of lean, hi-acid, mineral-driven Chardonnay should stay away (leaving more for me). I just had to buy this wine for my cellar. 97.*



**2015 Pfendler Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.3% alc., 250 cases, \$38. Estate grown. Clones 4 and Hyde-Wente. Whole cluster bladder press, inoculated for primary, aggressive lees stirring at the beginning, lightening up and finishing off in January when native secondary finished. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon, cut apple, spice and caramel. Richly fruited, yet bright in demeanor, with flavors of grilled lemon, grapefruit, baked apple and peach. Sound acidity brings the finish up to a quenching climax. 92.*

**2015 Rhys Bearwallow Vineyard Anderson Valley Chardonnay** 12.5% alc., \$50 (500 ml). *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A taut, acid-driven wine, leading off with aromas of apple, slate, lemon creme and a hint of spice. Flavors of lemon, grapefruit and kiwi are lifted by vivacious acidity, leading to a bright finish that offers both refreshing lift and satisfying fruit richness.* **92.**

**2014 Rhys Horseshoe Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay** 13.6% alc., \$50 (500 ml). 3.5 acres planted to Wente, Hyde and Mt. Eden clones. 1,450 to 1,500 feet elevation. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Envious aromas of grilled lemon, honey, buttery brioche, nut oil and caramelized custard. Rich flavors of lemon, pear, golden baked apple, honey, caramelized nuts and buttered toast. A decadent and ripely fruited offering with a very lengthy finish replete with lemony goodness. A completely different wine than the 2015 version that is much less ripe and more acid driven. I prefer this one where the acidity is fully integrated.* **93.**

**2015 Rhys Horseshoe Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay** 12.9% alc., \$50 (500 ml). *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Soaring aromas of lemon curd, pineapple, marzipan, vanilla creme and steely resolve. Very bright acidity cuts through the lemon-lime, grapefruit, pear and white nectarine flavors like an arrow. The wine finishes with tart, even somewhat puckering acidity as well as a slight herbal note. For acid lovers only.* **90.**

**2015 Rhys Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay** 13.0% alc., \$79. *Moderately dark golden yellow color in the glass. Slight reduction upon opening with added aromas of citrus fruits, lychee and savory earth. A searching, somewhat austere wine that demands the drinker's attention. Mid weight flavors of lemon-lime, pear and white peach are well-balanced by bracing acidity. Clean and spirited, with a cleansing texture. This wine shows the most "minerality" of the three Rhys Chardonnays tasted here.* **93.**



**2016 Screen Door Cellars Asern Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., \$25. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. The aromatic profile is somewhat unusual yet attractive, featuring prominent floral scents of white blossoms including jasmine along with honeydew melon, pineapple and French toast. Discreet fullness and weight, with flavors of lemon, tropical fruits and Christmas spices with a hint of caramel. Clean and crisp with a quenching, barely sweetened finish. Not what one usually expects from Chardonnay, but nevertheless quite enjoyable in a free-spirited style.* **90.**

**2015 Soléna Domaine Danielle Laurent Vineyard Willamette Valley Chardonnay** 13.1% alc., pH 3.30, RS, 190 cases, \$55. Released September 2017. Harvest Brix 20.0°. Fermented and aged 18 months in French oak barrels. Dijon clones. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of Granny Smith apple, honey, and marzipan. Well-balanced and gracious in a refreshingly styled wine featuring flavors of salted apple, honeycomb, pear and orchard fruits. Slightly creamy in the mouth, with an uplifting, dry finish.* **92.**



**2016 Walter Scott La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Chardonnay** 13.0% alc., 340 cases, \$28 (sold out). Released September 2017. Sourced from Clos des Oiseaux, Freedom Hill, Sojourner, X Novo, Vojtilla and Witness Tree vineyards. Lightly fined and filtered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon oil, grilled peach, grapefruit and slate. Attacking flavors of green apple, lemon-lime, grapefruit and nectarine in a bright, lifted styled wine with a slightly creamy mouthfeel and a citric finish that never gives up. A superb Willamette Valley cuvée.* **93.**

**2015 Tongue Dancer Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay.** 14.5% alc., pH 3.49, TA 0.58, RS <1 g/L, \$50. Wax top. Inaugural release September 6, 2017. Old Went clone. Harvest Brix 23.2°. Whole cluster pressed to barrel. Native yeast fermentation lees stirring once weekly through primary fermentation only. Barrel fermented and aged 15 months sur lie in French oak barrels, 25% new. Bottled unfixed and unfiltered. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon, chalk, slate and coffee along with subtle burnt match reduction. Richly flavored with lemon, golden apple, honeyed pear and blonde caramel. Lush and creamy mouthfeel with a modest mantle of oak. The heady flavors continue through the finish highlighting salted apple.* **93.**



**2013 Velvet Bee Rita's Crown and Radian Vineyards Star. Rita Hills Chardonnay** 13.94% alc., 201 cases, \$28. Released November 1, 2015. 64% Rita's Crown Vineyard (Dijon 76) and 36% Radian Vineyard (Dijon 95). Rita's Crown: stainless steel ferment, no malolactic fermentation. Radian: French oak barrel fermented, 20% new, 100% malolactic fermentation. Harvest Brix 22.6° (Rita's Crown) and 25.0° (Radian). *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of citrus, clay, white flower blossom, stony resolve and a hint of nuttiness. Some richness on the palate with refreshing core of citrus, yellow apple, lychee, and caramel flavors with background notes of nuts and salinity. Clean and balanced with a satiny texture. 90.*



**2014 Velvet Bee Rita's Crown Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay** 14.45% alc., 84 cases, \$28. Released November 1, 2017. Dijon clone 76. Harvest Brix 22.4°. Barrel fermented, malolactic fermentation. *Moderately light golden yellow color and apparently unfiltered. Aromas of apple, citrus, slate and salty air emerge on the nose with resolve. Modest creaminess in the mouth, with flavors of lemon, topical fruits (passion fruit) and caramel. Quite sophisticated in a poised, fresh and seamless style. The mouthfeel is particularly appealing. 92.*

An outlier:



**2016 Soléna Willamette Valley Pinot Gris** 13.1% alc., pH 3.24, TA 0.54, RS 1.7 g/L, 1,900 cases, \$20, screw cap. Harvest Brix average 23.2°. Very light gold color with a pinkish tinge and slight carbonation upon pouring. *Highly engaging aromas of pear, golden delicious apple, kiwi and spice. Clean, juicy and dry, with uplifting flavors of apple, honey and Asian pear. The pillowy texture is quite charming. A very impressive offering and one of the best Pinot Gris wines I have had in recent memory. 91.*

# Pinot Briefs

**Mark Bixler, Founder of Kistler Vineyards Dies** Bixler partnered with Steve Kistler to found Kistler Vineyards in 1978. He played an instrumental role in the success of the winery, serving as business manager, directing sales and marketing and acting as the winery's enologist.

**Deleting Sulfites from Wine** There has been increased interest in developing ways to remove sulfite preservatives from wine for people who have an intolerance to sulfites. Symptoms of chest tightness, hives, stomach cramps, diarrhea and breathing problems have been reported according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The specific mechanisms causing sulfite intolerance are unclear, but in some individuals, the sensitivity to sulfites appears to be an allergic response. People with asthma are at an increased risk of having asthma symptoms following exposure to sulfites. Research at the University of Kansas School of Engineering has led to the design and marketing of a low-cost, easy-to-use device that would filter up to 99 percent of sulfites from wine when it is poured from the bottle. The device is applied to the top of the bottle, and like an aerator, as a glass of wine is poured, the device removes sulfites. Many current products on the market for removing sulfites have shortcomings due to cost and failure to remove all sulfites. The device developed at Kansas University, which is projected to cost only 99 cents, from is not yet commercially available.

**January Wine Events** January 12-21, British Columbia, Canada, Okanagan Winter Wine Festival, [www.thewinefestivals.com](http://www.thewinefestivals.com); January 13-14, Sonoma Winter Wineland, [www.wineroad.com](http://www.wineroad.com); and January 19-28, Mendocino County Crab, Wine & Beer Festival, [www.visitmendocino.com](http://www.visitmendocino.com).

**Residents of Sardinia, Italy, Attribute Longevity to Wine** A report in *USA Today* (November 15, 2017) on the people of Sardinia, who are the oldest people in the world, attribute their longevity to a daily intake of red wine. The residents of this island in the Mediterranean also are physical active, eat healthy, and have a small, isolated gene pool. One of the residents interviewed said, "Go live your life, work hard and be active - and a little wine. It's one of the secrets, but just a little. Don't abuse it."

**Weight Watchers Debuts Lower Calorie Wine** A line of white diet wines have been developed called Cense that have 85 calories a glass compared to 120 calories for standard white wines. A Rosé is also planned. A Weight Watches approval is on the back label and can be removed if the consumer does not want others to know they are dieting. The wines are priced at \$13-\$15 and are made by Truett-Hurst Winery in Healdsburg. My comment would be that 35 calories makes little difference when one consumes a glass of wine and seems silly to drink a wine with compromised taste just to save 35 calories.

**Brooks Winery Celebrates 20 Years in 2018** The cornerstone of the winery's celebration in 2018 is to return the gratitude of those in the wine community that made this celebration possible. Each winemaker who collaborated to allow the winery to carry on upon the passing of Jimi Brooks in 2004 will be celebrated for one month in 2018. Brooks will feature one of these 12 wineries each month throughout the year, with one of their white and red wines included in the flights poured in the Brooks tasting room. Each winemaker will also spend a Saturday at Brooks during the month they are featured, pouring their wines and sharing stories. Each of the 12 winemakers will be interviewed for the Linfield College Oregon Wine History Archies and will be featured in a follow-up film to the American Wine Story, directed by David Baker. One of the winemakers, Patricia Green, recently passed away but the winery will be represented. Brooks will also produce the Red Letter Pinot Noir, a limited-release wine last made for the 10th anniversary and will include grapes from three vineyards Jimi farmed: Brooks Estate, Momtazi Vineyard and WillaKenzie. Visit [www.brookswine.com](http://www.brookswine.com), for a schedule of participating winemakers.

**MIXT Studio Reusable Wine Bags** These festive wine bags feature ethnic-inspired prints and a metallic gold interior. They are adorned with a tassel and a unique "traveling tag," so that each bottle bag shares the story of where it has been as it gets gifted forward. The tag features five write-in slots, meaning each new recipient can see the bag's journey as it gets reused. The eco-friendly, heavy-duty Tyvek® bags are recyclable and water resistant. The bags, a thoughtful holiday hostess gift, can now be found in over 300 stores nationwide and online at [www.mixstudio.com](http://www.mixstudio.com).