



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

Volume 11, Issue 15 December 18, 2017

*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## 2017 Pinot Noir All-Americans

*"The only way to really get a sense of where a wine stands is to score it. Scores are another way for me to learn your palate and judge what your comments mean compared to my palate."*

*A PinotFile reader*

In the final issue of the *PinotFile* each year, I name my All-Americans, my favorite domestic Pinot Noirs reviewed this past year. In 2017, nearly 850 domestic Pinot Noir were reviewed, with 15% of the wines receiving a score of 94 or above. These extraordinary wines have what wine writer Hugh Johnson calls "numinous," that is defined by *Webster* as "the higher emotions or the aesthetic sense." In other words, truly extraordinary, spellbinding wines that elicit emotion. 79 wines were scored 94, 29 wines 95, 13 wines 96, 8 wines 97 and 3 wines 98. The prices of Pinot Noir scoring 90 or above ranged from \$18 to \$125 with an average of \$55.

I score all the wines using the 100-point scoring system with guidelines as follows: 94-99 Extraordinary, 90-93 Outstanding, 86-89, Very Good, and 82-85 Good. Wines scoring less than 82 do not merit publication in the *PinotFile* and there are very few of these in the current marketplace.

In choosing the All-American Pinot Noirs, I follow several dictums and these have been outlined in the past: [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1754](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1754). In essence, the All-Americans are the highest scoring wines. This year I have included multiple wines from the same producer if qualified. The 2017 All-Americans were judged independent of price, case production, vintage or wine region of origin. Most of the wines tasted in 2017 were from the 2014, 2015 and 2016 vintages. It is somewhat unfair to compare wines from disparate vintages, but the evaluation of each wine is taken on its own merit in the context of the vintage.

Only finished bottled wines that are formerly reviewed in controlled, and therefore comparable circumstances are candidates for All-American consideration. Almost all wines are culled from unsolicited winery submissions while a few wines that are rarely sent for review came from personal purchases.

Pinot Noir awarded the Value icon offer an exceptional price to quality ratio and generally this is a wine priced at or below \$39 that is also scored in the upper Very Good or above category (89 or above). The prices of Pinot Noir scoring 89 or below reviewed in 2017 ranged from \$12 to \$85 with an average of \$39.50.

The Chardonnay All-Americans are chosen using the same process as for Pinot Noir.

To search for the complete review of each All-American wine, visit the Home Page at [www.princeofpinot.com](http://www.princeofpinot.com). Click on Winery Directory, then the producing winery, and then read the review among the listings for that winery.

The most important take-away from these All-American awards is expressed in the words that Jamie Goode so eloquently offered in his book, *I Taste Red*, a recommended discourse that explores how we taste wine. "The notion of rating or judging wine reflects the fact that we come to wine from our own perspective. A rating cannot be a global, universal score that is a property of that wine. If you decide to follow a critic, you need to choose one whose own narrative of wine is largely overlapping with years: you need to adjust for differences and calibrate yourself to the critic."

# 2017 California Pinot Noir All-Americans

## First Team Wines

2015 Benovia La Pommeraie Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **98** ....highly nuanced perfume....focused and adroit with a dreamy velvety texture....proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove.

2016 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **98** ....other worldly aromas.... a fruit grenade.... uncommon finishing intensity.... a complete wine....ridiculously good.

2015 Paul Lato "Atticus" John Sebastian Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir **98**  
....aromas are knee-weakening seductive....an ephemeral wine with amazing harmony and silkiness....almost indescribable.

2014 Big Basin Vineyards Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir **97**  
....a glorious wine....vibrant and refreshing....soothes the palate....bombastic cherry finish....really emotes.

2015 Ferrari-Carano Sky High Ranch Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir **97** ....sexy nose full of pheromones....knee-bending....really emotes....grand finish that lasts until next sip.

2016 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **97** ....deep well of fruits and exotic spices....ethereal refinement....such delicacy and sensuality while knocking my socks off with flavor....romantic.

2014 Maggy Hawk Jolie Maggy Hawk Estate Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir **97**  
....ridiculously alluring....flat-out delicious....celebratory black cherry delight.

2015 Paul Lato "Seabiscuit" Zotovich Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir **97** ....Vivid and vibrant....overall harmony....well-spiced blackberry goodness.

2015 Paul Lato "Lancelot" Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **97**  
....soars over time....earth-toned blackberry flavors....uncommon length....superb rendition of vineyard's terroir.

2015 Cattleya Cuvée Number One Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **96** ....decadent, powerful wine yet demure....showy character....spirited acidity....uncommon finishing generosity.

2014 Drew Family Cellars Morning Dew Ranch Anderson Valley Pinot Noir **96**  
....exudes pure class....gorgeous nose....velvety and lush....memorable finish....impeccable balance.

## Second Team Wines

2014 Dutton-Goldfield Deviate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **96** ....earth, floral and foliage aromas....very smooth and sexy on palate....remarkable follow through on an intense finish that seems to last a minute.

2014 Goldeneye Confluence Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir **96** succulent mid weight core of red berry and cherry....special in every way....commendable harmony....extraordinary finish that seemed to last indefinitely.

2015 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **96** ....teasing flavors with uncommon goodness....circus of fruit....infusion of whole cluster character into the fruit profile....orgasmic.

2014 Maggy Hawk "Stormin" Maggy Hawk Estate Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir **96** ....vivacious aromas, descriptors don't do justice....gorgeous and delicious....spot-on balance.....extraordinary finish.

2015 Paul Lato "The Contender" Drum Canyon Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir **96** ....energetic core of gorgeous boysenberry and blackberry fruit....lush in the mouth....impeccable balance....long, fulfilling finish.

2015 Pisoni Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **96** ....a serious wine....structured tannins are suave and supportive....balance spot on....rarely encounter a domestic Pinot Noir with this length of finish.

2015 Chasseur Soft Asylum Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **95** ....lovely aromas, ephemeral flavors....satin in texture....nothing out of place....a ticket to heaven.

2014 COBB Emmaline Ann Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....sensational aromas, ....delicious cherry fruit....seamless and polished....tugs at your heart strings.

2015 Domaine De La Côte Memories Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir **95** ....nose is alive....intense attack....bright acidity,....exquisitely balanced....extremely long and gregarious finish....just perfect.

2015 Eric Kent Sasha Marie Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....toned and trim....both weight and weightlessness....noticeably juicy, joyously long finish....immense charm and poise.

2015 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....terroir-driven....rustic and earthy....lovely spice....sinewy tannins....silky texture is dreamy....stunning even four days later.

2015 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....mouth filling goodness....polished mouthfeel striking....extraordinarily long finish....plenty of whole cluster character.

2014 LaRue Emmaline Ann Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....fruit-driven aromas, impressive fortitude on palate....very soothing with gentle tannins....power in a velvet glove character.

2015 Lucienne Lone Oak Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **95** ....enticing aromas....alerts the taste buds...very polished, even slinky....gossamer tannins....quintessential Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir.

2015 Morgan Double L Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **95** ....very special nose that attracts....high-collared....flat-out terrific....gifted with plenty of extract yet discreet in generosity....tenacious finish.

2014 Pisoni Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **95** ....core of fruit arrives with notice....tannins hold fruit in check....appealingly silky texture....captivating and approachable....a reference wine for Pisoni Vineyard.

2015 RAEN Royal St. Robert Cuvee Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....complex nose, splendid attack....fresh and crunchy style....delights with a hearty and sustained finish....appealing elegance.

2013 Soliste Sonatera Vineyard T Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....elegantly composed....glorious flavors....whole cluster nuances....cherry-fueled finish that never gives up....wine has a spring in its step.

2016 Valerie's Vineyard One Acre Carneros Pinot Noir **95** ....intoxicating aromas....gorgeous in every way....unbelievably intense and persistent finish....a message from heaven.

2014 Wayfarer The Traveler Wayfarer Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **95** ....soaring aromas....discreetly concentrated....freshness, vibrancy and juiciness....harmonious and giving....deserves an ovation.



**McDougall Ranch, Sonoma Coast**

# 2017 Oregon Pinot Noir All-Americans

## First Team Wines

2014 Walter Scott Freedom Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **97** ....reserved but alluring nose....unctuous on the palate....perfectly ripened fruit flavors....infatuating....will stay the long course.

2014 Walter Scott Temperance Hill Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **97** ....at loss of words to describe joyful nose....reflects Temperance Hill terroir....vigorous flavors....perfect harmony....captivating.

2015 Evening Land Seven Springs Estate La Source Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **96** ....welcoming aromas....delicious and seductive....rather elegant....inviting Pinot delicacy....a memorable wine.

2016 Knudsen Vineyards Estate Reserve Dundee Hills Pinot Noir **96** ....riveting aromas and flavors....charming dose of spice....sophisticated....seamless texture....grand finish....collectible.

2014 Phelps Creek Cuvée Alexandrine Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir **96** ....remarkably complex nose....very sophisticated....built to age....enjoy for its complexity and longevity....needs more time in cellar.

2016 Privé Joie de Vivrie Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir **96** ....brooding aromas....heavenly texture and balance....outlandish finish....a tour de force

2012 Privé le sud Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir **96** ....appealing scents....delicious bombastic wine....richness of flavor and energetic verve....luscious and satiny....dreamy.

2015 Brick House Evelyn's Ribbon Ridge Pinot Noir **95** ....clearly a special wine, seductive aromas....impression of boldness and ripeness....sturdy backbone of tannins matches sappy fruit....finish lingers indefinitely.

2015 De Ponte Cellars Baldwin Family Reserve Dundee Hills Pinot Noir **95** ....luxurious deep black cherry perfume....deliciously ripe fruits....dreamy....long finish is almost too good to be true.

2014 Trisaetum Family Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **95** ....heady scents....cashmere texture....mouth coating sap....finish grand cru in spirit....connoisseur's wine.

2014 Trisaetum Estate Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **95** ....grand nose....gloriously fresh aromas....a flavor explosion greets palate....suede tannins....remarkably long finish.

## Second Team Wines

2015 Broadley Vineyards Jessica Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **95** ....silky in mouth....vivacious core of dark fruits really grab your attention....boldly structured....finishes with intensity and purpose....marvelous.

2014 Brooks Rastaban Brooks Estate Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **95** ....intoxicating nose....very classy....impeccably balanced....pleasing earthiness....impressive polish and verve.

2014 Gran Moraine Estate Reserve Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **95** ....aromas rise up over time....onslaught of flavors....big by Oregon standards....great depth of fruit....soothing texture....a good friend now but will benefit from cellaring.

2015 Evening Land Seven Springs Estate Anden Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **95** ....very fulfilling in mouth....whole cluster fermented demeanor....intriguing savory underpinning....juicy finish.

2015 Walter Scott Seven Springs Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **95** ....open and giving.... soaring aromas....superb harmony....regal spiced fruit....quenching finish and invigorating acidity

2015 Brick House Cuvée de Tonnelier Ribbon Ridge Pinot Noir **94** ....clean and fresh aromas....beautifully elegant....masterfully crafted....everything is in sync....glorious finish.

2014 Brooks Crannell Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **94** ....engaging aromas....delicious cherry pie core....suave tannins....cherry-driven finish lasts a minute.

**\*\*2015 Compton Family Wines Alpine Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 94** Also a best value \$38. ....exceptional aromatic seduction, a gift from heaven....outstanding harmony....darker, riper fruit package....Pinot royalty.

2015 de Lancellotti Lachini Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir **94** ....a comforting wine....vivid flavors....impressive mid palate intensity....satiny in texture....right touch of oak.

2015 de Lancellotti Onelia Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **94** ....array of aromas....remarkable attack....seamless....silky and sexy....charitable red fruited goodness on finish.

2015 DePonte Cellars Estate Dundee Hills Pinot Noir **94** ....dreamy nose....delicious....elegant and silky....memorable finish....a step up in class.

2015 Siduri Hawk's View Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **94** ....a real charmer....juicy, forward and elegant....balletic character....thoroughly delightful.

2014 Kramer Vineyards Heritage Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **94** ....nose builds in charity over time in glass....gentle in the mouth....bright acidity....superb balance....compelling package.

2014 Lenné cinq élus Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **94** engaging aromas....delicious core of fruits....envelopes the taste buds....very long finish....truly age worthy.

2015 Lingua Franca Ryan's Plow Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **94** ....seductive aromas....elegantly composed....vibrant flavors....suave tannins....noticeable mid palate intensity....remarkable finish.

2015 Lingua Franca Tongue n' Cheek Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **94** ....penetrating aromas....vivid essence of fresh dark red cherries....earthbound....expansive in the mouth....tenacious finish.

2015 Nicolas-Jay Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **94** ....a very interesting wine evolves over time....highly pleasing aromas....soft in the mouth....sleek, rewarding finish....more cordial with decanting.

**\*\*2014 Phelps Creek Vineyards “Beehive” Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 94** Also a best value \$38. ....intriguing aromas....flat-out delicious and very showy....skillful oak management....incredibly glorious cherry finish.

2015 Soléna Domaine Danielle Laurent Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **94** ....sophisticated, haunting wine....right combination of fruits and savory earthen notes....impressive harmony.

2015 Soléna Prince Hill Vineyard Dundee Hills Pinot Noir **94** ....a very showy wine....charming aromas....silky smooth....very giving now....unrelenting juiciness....very lengthy finish.

2013 Tendril C Note Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **94** ....array of pleasurable aromas....feminine perfume....waves of fruit....textural charm....extra long finish....a special wine.

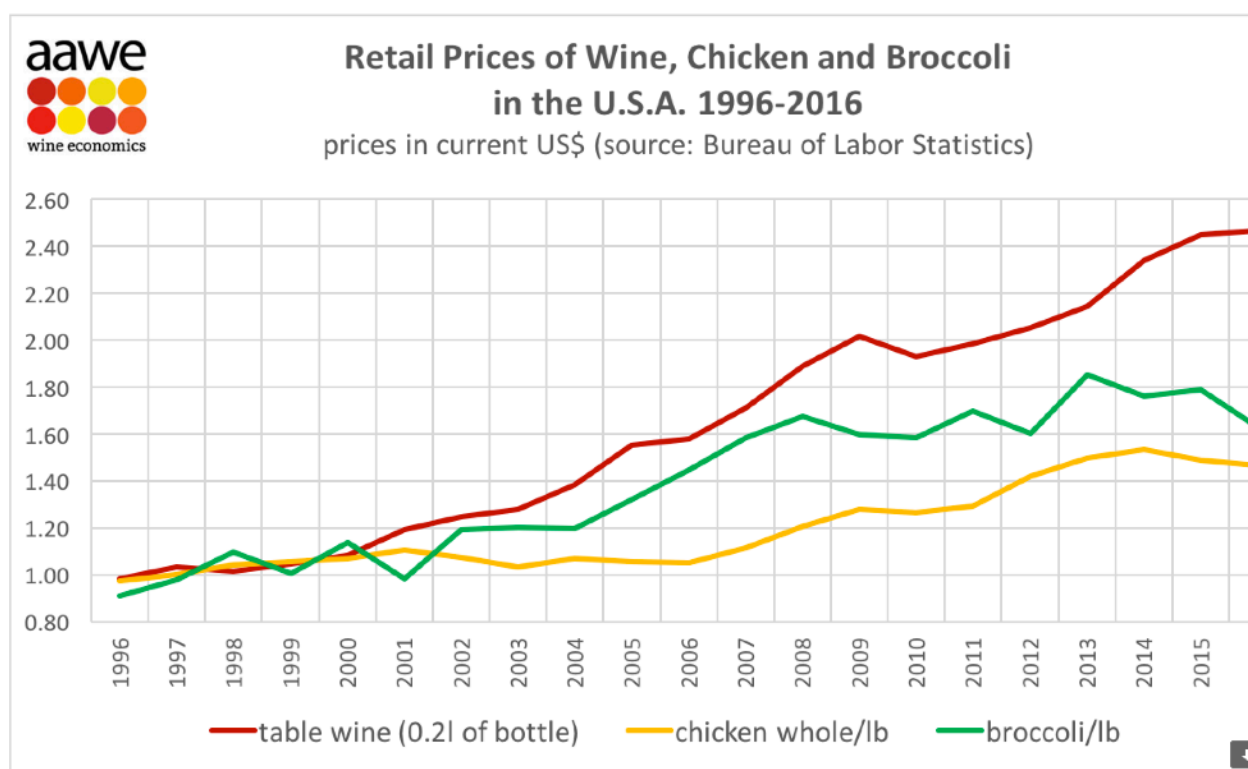


**Temperance Hill Vineyard, Eola-Amity Hills**

# 2017 California Value Priced Pinot Noir All-Americans

There is a huge market for reasonably priced Pinot Noir that is of very good quality. The reality is that it is expensive to farm and produce quality Pinot Noir, making value priced domestic Pinot Noir limited in availability.

As you can see from the table below, the retail prices of table wine have escalated significantly over the past decade.



Most of the wines submitted for review to the *PinotFile* are in the premium or ultra premium category and cost more than \$40. As a result, I don't have the opportunity to review large numbers of value priced Pinot Noir. Nevertheless, here are some recommended wines I found in 2017. I consider the value priced icon for wines that score at least 88 and are priced less than \$40. A few wines were awarded both the Pinot Geek and Pinot Value icons making them particularly desirable. There was only one of these California wines reviewed in 2017 and is indicated by a preceding double asterisk. I have not included Pinot Noir Rosé wines as they almost always represent good value.

## First Team Wines

**\*\*2015 Sanglier River Tusque Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 94 \$36**

**2014 O'Connor Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 93 \$35**

**2014 Press Cellars Helluva Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 93 \$30**



2014 Windy Oaks Estate Schultze Family vineyard Estate Cuvée Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir **93 \$39**

2016 Balletto Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **92 \$18**

2015 Carmel Road Panorama Vineyard Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir **92 \$35**

2016 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **92 \$39**

2014 Mignanelli Nelson Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir **92 \$36**

2015 Roessler Wine Cellars Black Pine Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir **92 \$30**

2015 Sandler Wine Co. Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir **92 \$36**

2015 Sandler Wine Co. Boer Vineyard Chalone Pinot Noir **92 \$36**

2014 Sarah's Vineyard Santa Clara Valley Pinot Noir **92 \$25**



## **Second Team Wines**

2015 August West Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **91 \$34**

2014 Davis Bynum Jane's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **91 \$35**

2014 Sanglier River Tusque Sonoma County Pinot Noir **91. \$36**

2016 Alma de Cattleya Sonoma County Pinot Noir **90 \$28**

2015 August West Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **90 \$34**

2015 Balletto Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir **90 \$29**

2015 Birichino Saint Georges Central Coast Pinot Noir **90 \$24**

2014 Brooks Note Marin County Pinot Noir **90 \$36**

2014 J. Lohr Highlands Bench Santa Lucia Highlands Monterey Pinot Noir **90 \$35**

2015 J Vineyards & Winery Monterey County, Sonoma County & Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir **90 \$24**

2015 Morgan Twelve Clones Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **90 \$35**

2014 Pence Ranch Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir **90 \$27**

2015 Sarah's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir **90 \$38**

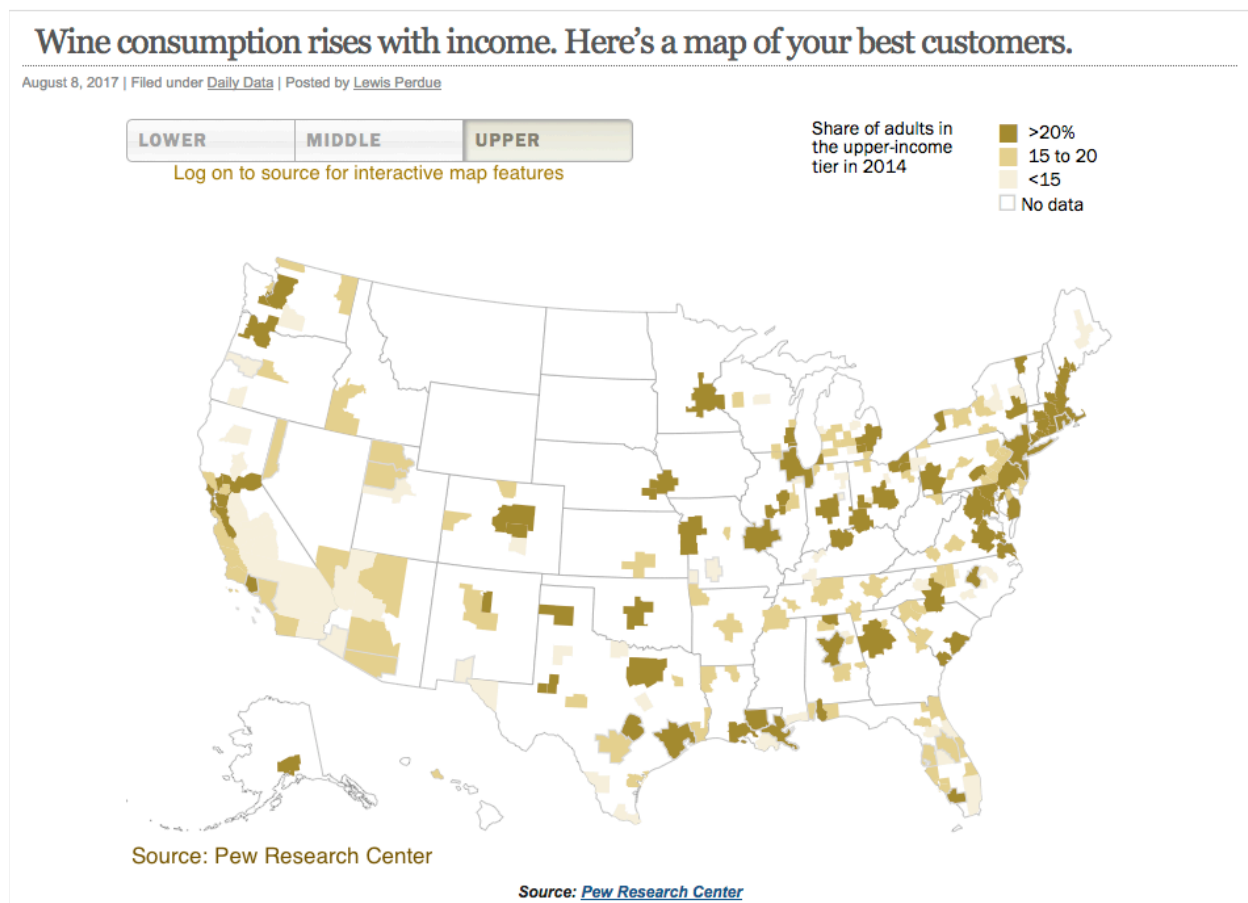
2013 Seal Beach Winery Taylor Noelle Clone 459 Pence Ranch Vineyard Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir **90 \$32**

2014 Seal Beach Winery Reserve Star. Rita Hills Pinot Noir **90. \$35**

# 2017 Oregon Value Priced Pinot Noir All-Americans

Most of the wines submitted for review to the *PinotFile* are in the premium or ultra premium category and cost more than \$40. As a result, I don't have the opportunity to review large numbers of value priced Pinot Noir. Nevertheless, here are some recommended wines I found in 2017. I consider the value priced icon for wines that score at least 88 and are priced less than \$40. A few wines were awarded both the Pinot Geek and Pinot Value icons making them particularly desirable. There were two of these wines reviewed in 2017 and they are indicated by a preceding double asterisk. I have not included Pinot Noir Rosé wines as they almost always represent good value.

Referencing the map below, it is evident that the best wine consuming customers are those with higher incomes. For Oregon, that is the northern Willamette Valley.



## First Team Wines

\*\*2014 Compton Family Cellars Alpine Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **94 \$38**

\*\*2014 Phelps Creek Vineyards "Beehive" Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir **94 \$38**

2015 DANCIN Écarté Oregon Pinot Noir **93 \$37**

2014 Domino IV Rain on Leaves Stermer Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **93 \$35**

2015 Brigadoon Lyle Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **92 \$23**

2015 Broadley Vineyards Zenith Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **92 \$30**

2014 Kramer Vineyards Estate Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **92 \$28**

2014 Lenné Estate Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **91 \$38**

2015 Rain Dance Vineyards Estate Nicholas Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir  
**91 \$30**

2014 Résonance Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **91 \$35**

2016 Walter Scott La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **91 \$28**

### **Second Team Wines**

2014 Broadley Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **90 \$20**

2015 Alit Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **90 \$27.45**

2014 Coeur de Terre Heritage Reserve Estate McMinnville Pinot Noir **90 \$36**

2015 DANCIN Pas de Trois Oregon Pinot Noir **90 \$37**

2015 DION Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir **90 \$25**

2014 iOTA Not One iOTA Pelos Sandberg Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir **90 \$28**

2014 Maison Roy & Fils Petite Incline Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **90 \$35**

2014 Purple Heart Freedom Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **90 \$38**

2015 Siduri Yamhill-Carlton Pinot Noir **90 \$36**

2015 Trisaetum Willamette Valley Pinot Noir **90 \$36**

2014 Winter's Hill Estate Dundee Hills Pinot Noir **90 \$39**

# 2017 California Chardonnay All-Americans

Top notch barrel fermented California Chardonnay is somewhat expensive. The All-Americans ranged in price from \$38 to \$70 with an average of \$53.

In the past couple of years, I have been impressed by the Chardonnays from Pratt Vineyard (photo below). This 15.65-acre vineyard is located in Sebastopol on Sexton Road, south of the town of Graton and west of the town of Sebastopol. Jim Pratt, of Cornerstone Certified Vineyards, a winegrower for over 30 years, began developing this Sebastopol Hills vineyard in 1998. Soils are Goldridge sandy loam. Both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are planted, with at least some of the Chardonnay as Old Went clone.

In addition to Chardonnays from Pratt Vineyard, there are several other vineyard-designated Chardonnays from the North Coast that are a guarantee of high quality: Bacigalupi, Charles Heintz, Durell, Hanzell, Ritchie, Rochioli, Savoy, and Zio Tony.



2015 Dutton-Goldfield Devil's Gulch Vineyard Marin County Chardonnay **97**

2014 la pitchoune Pratt Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay **97**

**\*\*2015 La Follette Sangiacomo Vineyards Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 95 \$38**

2015 La Rue Charles Heintz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay **95**

2014 Peirson Meyer Charles Heintz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay **95**

2015 Scherrer Helfer Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay **95**

2015 Ancient Oak Cellars Single Vineyard Series Nurmi Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay **94**

2014 Balletto Cider Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay **94**

2015 Cattleya Pratt Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay **94**

2014 Gregory James Hawk Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay **94**

2015 Migration Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay **94**

2015 Sonoma-Loeb El Novillero Carneros Chardonnay **94**

2015 Three Sticks One Sky Sonoma Mountain Chardonnay **94**

2015 Zina Hyde Cunningham Adeline's Vineyard Anderson Valley Chardonnay **94**

# 2017 Oregon Chardonnay All-Americans

Oregon Chardonnay has gained considerable prominence recently. If you are new to Oregon Chardonnay, it is an ideal time to get on board. The prices of the 2017 Oregon Chardonnay All-Americans ranged from \$30 to \$100 with an average of \$52, comparable to California Chardonnay counterparts.

2014 Gran Moraine Yamhill-Carlton Chardonnay **98**

2015 Knudsen Vineyards Dundee Hills Chardonnay **96**

2015 Walter Scott X Novo Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay **96**

2015 Evening Land La Source Seven Springs Estate Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay **95**

\*\*2016 Rain Dance Estate Nicholas Vineyard Chehalem Mtns Chardonnay **95 \$30**

2015 Walter Scott Cuvée Anne Willamette Valley Chardonnay **95**

2014 Evening Land Seven Springs Estate La Source Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay **94**

2014 Evening Land Seven Springs Estate Summum Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay **94**

2014 Knudsen Vineyards Dundee Hills Chardonnay **94**

2015 Walter Scott Freedom Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Chardonnay **94**



**Knudsen Vineyard, Dundee Hills**

# 2017 Wineries of the Year: Kutch Wines, Benovia Winery, Walter Scott Wines

Traditionally, I have chosen a single winery each year as the “Winery of the Year.” This year, I could not single out one winery, and have chosen two wineries from California and one from Oregon as “Wineries of the Year.”

**Benovia Winery** and **Kutch Wines** are this year’s California “Wineries of the Year.” The two wineries present quite a contrast. Benovia has a more glamorous winemaking facility and hospitality center in Santa Rosa, while Kutch is housed in a more modest warehouse setting in Sonoma. Benovia’s winemaker, Michael Sullivan, is a veteran in the Russian River Valley, while Jamie Kutch is a relative newcomer in comparison. Benovia produces Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from estate vineyards almost exclusively, while Kutch’s wines come only from sourced grapes. Benovia’s Pinot Noirs are made using a typical Russian River Valley approach using largely de-stemmed grapes and aging in about one-third new oak barrels. Stylistically, the wines show luscious fruit flavors beautifully balanced with structured tannins and modest acidity. Kutch vineyard sites are much cooler in general and the grapes are picked earlier. The wines are fermented 100% whole cluster, and aged in very modest new oak. Stylistically the resultant wines are lower in alcohol and higher in acidity with an emphasis on delicacy and balance. Kutch Chardonnay is more lean and acid-driven, while Benovia’s Chardonnays are more richly fruited with more barrel input. The two styles of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are far apart, but both are equally alluring.

**Walter Scott Wines** is the 2017 Oregon “Winery of the Year.” Located in the Eola-Amity Hills region of the Willamette Valley, owners Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon specialize in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vinified with grapes sourced from multiple premium vineyards primarily located in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA. After only nine vintages, Walter Scott has risen to the top tier of Oregon wineries, primarily due to the couple’s talents and the special vineyard sources that give their wines their dazzling character.

## Benovia Winery

**Proprietors:** Joe Anderson, Mary Dewane, Michael Sullivan

**Winemaker:** Michael Sullivan

**Address:** 3339 Hartman Rd, Santa Rosa, CA , 707-921-1040

**Website:** [www.benoviawinery.com](http://www.benoviawinery.com)

**Tasting:** Guests are welcome by appointment only daily (\$30 per person waived with purchase of two or more bottles per guest)

**Wine Purchases:** Wines are sold through a mailing list, the winery’s website and the tasting room. \$40-\$75.

**Wines:** Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Sonoma County Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, Russian River Valley Blanc De Blancs, Sonoma County Zinfandel and Sonoma Mountain Grenache. Annual production about 5,000 cases.





This winery dates to 2003 when Joe Anderson and spouse Mary Dewane bought a 55-acre ranch west of Healdsburg just outside the Russian River Valley AVA that included old vine Pinot Noir and Zinfandel planted on the property's Cohn Vineyard. The property also included a home that allowed Joe and Mary, who lived in Arizona, to spend time in Sonoma County and pursue their winery aspirations.

In 2005, the couple purchased the Hartman Road Vineyards and Winery from Cecil DeLoach. The 18-acre ranch, located in the Laguna de Santa Rosa subregion of the Russian River Valley, had 13.5 acres of Pinot Noir and a dated winery. Eventually, a 40-acre horse ranch parcel adjacent the winery property was acquired increasing the property to 58 acres. The original 13.4-acre estate vineyard was expanded to almost 42 acres and renamed Martaella Vineyard. This vineyard includes nine clones and heirloom selections of Pinot Noir and four clones of Chardonnay, all planted in a high density configuration of between 2000 and 2722 vines per acre.

A 16-acre site near Freestone named Tilton Hill Vineyard, has been planted with 12 acres of Pinot Noir. Again, this is a high density planting established in 2009 with Dijon selections of Pinot Noir.

Today, Benovia Winery has 71 acres of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Zinfandel vines in three distinctive locations across the Russian River Valley AVA, the Sonoma Coast AVA and the Sonoma County AVA.

The name, Benovia, is a merger of the first names of Mary Dewane's father, Ben, and Joe Anderson's father, Novian. The property's estate Martaella Vineyard was named for the mothers, Martha (Joe's) and Eleanor (Mary's).

Winemaker Michael Sullivan joined Benovia at its launch as a partner to lead winemaking, vineyard development and management of the winery. Michael had previously produced brilliant wines at Hartford Family Winery. Early on, Michael had to make due with an aged winery and equipment using primarily purchased grapes. (Michael and Prince at winery below)



Today, Benovia Winery has a modern new winemaking facility dedicated to Pinot Noir and has transitioned to predominantly estate grown wines. I have been lucky to sample the Benovia wines over the past twelve years and have seen first-hand the progressive rise in quality and consistency. (Winery pictured below)



Scores for Benovia Pinot Noir over the past four vintages (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015):

Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 89, 89, 89, 92

La Pommeriae Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (Zio Tony Vineyard) 92, 94, 92, 98

Martaella Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 93, 92, 93, 94

Cohn Vineyard Sonoma County Pinot Noir 95, 94, 91, 92

Tilton Hill Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 91, 93, 90, 94

Scores for Benovia Chardonnay:

Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 93 (2012), 93 (2013), 94 (2014)

La Pommeriae Russian River Valley Chardonnay 92 (2012), 93 (2015)

# Kutch Wines

**Proprietors:** Jamie and Kristen Kutch

**Winemaker:** Jamie Kutch

**Address:** 21660 8th Street East, Sonoma

**Website:** [www.kutchwines.com](http://www.kutchwines.com).

**Tasting:** Available to mailing list customers who have made a previous purchase from the mailing list. Email [tastings@kutchwines.com](mailto:tastings@kutchwines.com) well in advance. Weekdays only. A limited number of appointments are available for those who don't have a previous purchase (\$30 per person).

**Wine purchases:** Offered twice a year to mailing list members only by allocation. Prices range from \$39-\$62.

**Wines:** Offered twice a year to mailing list members only. Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, and Signal Ridge Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir. Very limited amount of Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay has been produced. Annual production 2,500 cases.



I have profiled Jamie extensively over the past twelve years since I first met him. Jamie's interest in Pinot Noir developed while he was working as a stock trader at Merrill Lynch in New York. He has admitted that part of his interest was fueled by reading the *PinotFile*. Upon the urgings of other young winemakers in California, including Andrew Vingiello (A.P.Vin), Brian Loring (Loring Wine Company) and Michael Browne (Kosta Browne), Jamie quit his job, talked his wife-to-be, Kristen, to move west with him, and began learning winemaking under the tutelage of Michael Browne. I first met Jamie when he was working for Michael while Michael was making wine at Freeman Winery in Sebastopol in the early 2000s.

Jamie did not follow the path of Kosta Browne Pinot Noir stylistically after his first two vintages. He developed his own style through tasting many older vintages of top-shelf California Pinot Noir looking to discover their desirable wine traits such as balance and age ability. Travels to Burgundy allowed him to learn more about stem inclusion and time spent with accomplished California winemakers and growers fueled his passion. His talent as a thinker and innovator led him to push the envelope successfully. He has become respected by wine cognoscenti for the individuality of his wines and his accomplishments in a relatively short period of time.

Jamie's first commercial vintage was 2005, the same as for Benovia Winery. Since then, he has become a strong proponent of whole cluster fermentation. Inclusion of whole clusters in fermentation adds an extra dimension to the structure, texture, sensuality, and aromatic and flavor profile of Pinot Noir. That said, there are a number of potential pitfalls to this technique such as green aromas and flavors, so appropriate vineyard sites must be chosen carefully vintage vagaries taken into account, and vinification protocols adapted accordingly. Jamie began extensive whole cluster trials in 2009 and was cautious at first, but he found that it was the wines he produced with 100% whole cluster fermentation that he liked the best. By 2012, he was all in so to speak, vinifying all of his wines with 100% stem inclusion.



In the winery, after the grapes are carefully sorted, Jamie puts the whole clusters in open-top fermenters, initiates fermentation with wild yeasts, punches down with his feet, then basket presses the must into French oak barrels where natural malolactic fermentation ensues. The wines are aged on the lees for about 10 months, and left alone until bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.

Scores for Kutch Pinot Noir over the past five vintages 2012-2016:

Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 90 (2012), 90 (2013), 89 (2014), 89 (2015), 92 (2016)  
Falstaff Vineyard Pinot Noir 93 (2012), 94 (2013), 93 (2014), 92 (2015), 95 (2016)  
Bohan Vineyard Pinot Noir. 93 (2013), 92 (2014), 95 (2015), 97 (2016)  
McDougall Ranch Pinot Noir 96 (2013), 95 (2014), 96 (2015), 98 (2016)  
Signal Ridge Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir 94 (2014), 94 (2015), 93 (2016)

## Walter Scott Wines

**Proprietors:** Ken Pahlow, Erica Landon, Sue & Andy Steinman

**Winemaker:** Ken Pahlow

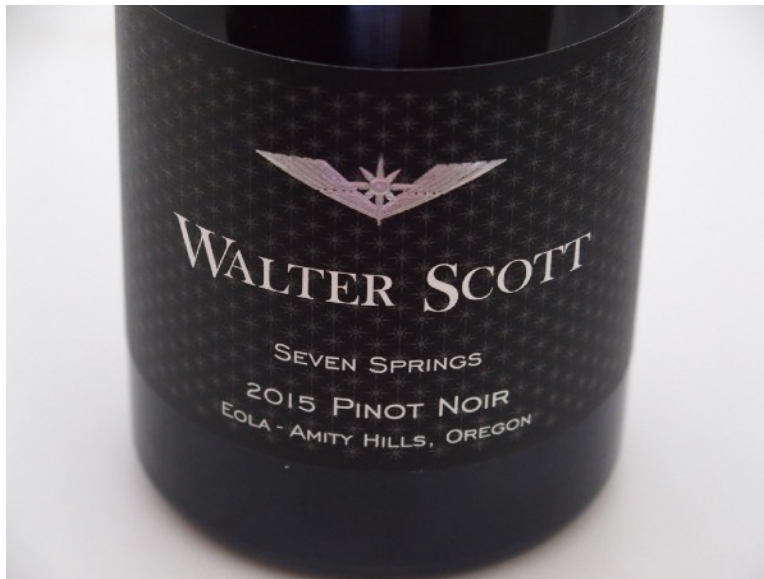
**Address:** 6130 Bethel Heights Road NW, Salem, OR. 971-209-7786

**Website:** [www.walterscottwines.com](http://www.walterscottwines.com)

**Tasting:** Cellar tasting by appointment only hosted personally by Ken or Erica. Schedule: [info@walterscottwines.com](mailto:info@walterscottwines.com). Closed until Spring Release in early March.

**Wine purchase:** The wines are sold primarily through a mailing list. A limited selection of wines are available on the website. Price range \$28-\$85.

**Wines (2015):** La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, Cuvée Ruth Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir, Sojourner Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir, Freedom Hill Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, Temperance Hill Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir, Clos Des Oiseaux Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir, Dubai Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir, Seven Springs Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir, Los Muertos Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir. La Combe Verte Chardonnay, Cuvée Anne Willamette Valley Chardonnay, Freedom Hill Vineyard Chardonnay, X Novo Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay. Annual production 4,500 cases (2015). In 2016, Chardonnay from Bunker Hill Vineyard will be added.



I had my first up close meeting with Ken Pahlow and Erica Landon this past July before the International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC) when I tasted through all of their 2016 Pinot Noir and Chardonnays resting in barrels. The winemaking facility is very modest but that is of little importance when the wines are dazzling. I believe Ken and Erica should adopt the tagline, “We have the grapes!” since all of their wines are sourced from very special Willamette Valley vineyards. The couple have been involved in the Oregon wine business for more than twenty years and the contacts and friendships established over this time have enabled them to source fruit from a very impressive lineup of prestigious vineyards. All great wine starts with great grapes.

Ken’s past winemaking experience includes stints at St. Innocent Winery (14 years), Patricia Green Cellars (where he first began producing the Walter Scott wines) and Evening Land Vineyards where he worked alongside Burgundian winemaker Dominique Lafon. Erica is a sommelier who has taught for the Wine & Spirits Education Trust and International Sommelier Guild, and managed wine programs at prestigious restaurants including Timberline Lodge, Ponzi Family’s Dundee Bistro, Ten 01, and a number of Bruce Carey restaurants in Portland. In 2014, both Ken and Erica left their additional jobs to focus entirely on Walter Scott.



Andy and Sue Steinman have provided legal counsel (she is an attorney focused on wineries) and Andy business experience, as well as financial backing for Walter Scott since 2012. Many of you know the Steinmans who attend the IPNC faithfully every year. The IPNC was where I first met them many years ago, and they have kindly shared special Pinot Noir wines from their extensive cellar at the Salmon Bake ever since.

The name, Walter Scott, honors Walter, Ken's grandfather who was a flight engineer for TWA, and Ken's nephew, Scott, whose time was short but impressed with his fearlessness.

Walter Scott was launched in 2008 with the modest production of 25 cases of Pinot Noir and 135 cases of a non-vintage white grape blend. The first commercial vintage followed in 2009, a total of 650 cases of La Combe Verte Pinot Noir that was a tribute to the team at Patricia Green Cellars where the wine was produced by Ken. In 2012, a winery space in the Eola-Amity Hills located adjacent to Justice Vineyard was leased to Ken and Erica by the Casteel family of Bethel Heights Vineyards. The same year, fruit was offered from the renowned Freedom Hill and Temperance Hill vineyards. In 2013, X Novo and Sojourner vineyards were added and in the following year, Seven Springs Vineyard became a fruit source. Critical acclaim about Walter Scott wines quickly rolled in from many prominent wine publications.

Sometimes, a winery's esteem is reflected in the quality of the appellation wines, not just the vineyard-designated wines. At Walter Scott, the same care and attention to detail goes into the Walter Scott Willamette Valley appellation wines as for the single vineyard selections. The winery's La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Pinot Noir and Chardonnay represent outstanding quality at reasonable prices and these wines typically sell out a few days after release.

Scores of Walter Scott Pinot Noirs from the 2015 and 2016 vintages:

La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 91 (2016)  
Cuvée Ruth Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir 93 (2016)  
Seven Springs Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir 95 (2015)  
Clos des Oiseaux Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir 93 (2015)  
Dubai Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir 94 (2015)  
Freedom Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 97 (2015)  
Temperance Hill Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir 97 (2015)  
Sojourner Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir 92 (2015)

Scores of Walter Scott Chardonnays from the 2014, 2015 and 2016 vintages:

La Combe Verte Willamette Valley Chardonnay 93 (2016)  
Cuvée Anne Willamette Valley Chardonnay 95 (2014), 95 (2015)  
X Novo Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Chardonnay 94 (2014), 96 (2015)  
Freedom Hill Vineyard Willamette Valley Chardonnay 93 (2014) 94 (2015)



# Quotable Wine Quotes of 2017

## Regarding Pinot Noir

***If an alien asked me: "What can Americans achieve? I'd sit him down with a glass of Eyrie Pinot and a copy of As I Lay Dying....John Atkinson, MW***

***When you find a Pinot Noir that hits all of the grape's hallmarks - fine-grained tannins, frisky acidity, red-berry fruit and truffle-y, stony earth - it just might make you an addict. Consider yourself warned....Wines & Spirits***

***Pinot Noir is the botanical equivalent of a radio transmitter. The vine, through its grapes and its wine, is able to transmit what happened subsoil, down to the last rainfall, the last heat spike, in each vintage, making it one of the most expressive red-wine grapes in the world....Sarah Looper, Wine & Spirits***

***I feel like Pinot Noir as a variety is approaching a zone that had previously only been occupied by Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay regarding general consumer acceptance, wine list placements and cultural presence.....Jeff Pisoni, Pisoni Vineyards***

***Pinot Noir can be a wine that's difficult to read, but it can also be extremely sexy. There are very few varieties that can be both intellectual and pleasurable at the same time, the flexibility of the grape is fascinating....Josh Reynolds, Vinous***

***Pinot Noir is endlessly interesting. There aren't many grapes that are endlessly interesting....Josh Wesson, Supreme Provisions***

***Today it seems that delicious handcrafted Pinot Noir at a decent price is pure fantasy - some might even call it "unicorn" wine....Katie Kelly Bell, [forbes.com](http://forbes.com)***

***It's no secret in this industry that Pinot Noir is a twisted grape....taming the notoriously tricky Pinot grape requires skill, patience, and a little bit of fatalism....Julia Burke***

## Regarding oak

***Fortunately oenophiles don't have to deconstruct the wines they drink to know if they're too oaky. Even in a young wine, the oak should never stand out too much. A well-made wine is always balanced, whether fermented and aged in oak or not....Lettie Teague, WSJ***

***Oak is only good for making tables and chairs. If you taste oak, it's the winemaker's fault. Even if the wine has been aged in barrel, you should only be able to taste the fruit....Marco Caschera, Vincent Girardin in Meursault***

***Wines that rely for their presence on heavy oaking often reach maturity with high levels of irremediable hard tannin with all the grace of a lump hammer like the Cheshire Cat, just the grin is left, and a desiccated and crabby one at that....Remington Norman, The World of Fine Wine***

## Regarding Winemaking

***The special winemaker finds something of himself in every wine and something of every wine in himself....Irving Penn (original quote adapted to wine)***

***In general, I would posit it is harder to make good inexpensive wine than a good expensive one. That seems perhaps to be a trivial observation, but too many wines are made by those who craft their wines to impress - and to justify a high price tag....David Graves, co-founder Saintsbury Winery***

***Fining and filtering a wine is like torturing someone then asking if they are happy....***Mounio Saouma, Lucien Le Moine

***Progress has been notably hampered by the widely media-lauded unholy trinity of red wine production: overripeness, over oaking and over extraction....***Remington Norman, *The World of Fine Wine*

## **Regarding Wine in General**

***The Somms are a strange people, only recently discovered by Westerners. Little is known about where they originated....***Ron Washam, HoseMaster of Wine

***Most wine is fairly priced. Wine sales operate on a fundamental supply-and-demand model that is hard to refute; the market sets the price. That doesn't mean that there aren't multitudes of high-priced or overrated wines out there. The market is awash with them, yet they help determine a wine's real value....***James Laube, *Wine Spectator*

***Wine prices reflect what the market will bear. Of that I have no doubt. But will the eager enthusiasts not blessed with megabucks now be shut out from ever tasting the great wines. If we are not already at that sad pass, we may well be very soon....***Charles Oiken

***Where is the quality cheap wine going to come from to save the wine business again if the worst happens? There won't be any, thanks to an industry dominated by scores, overpriced wine that doesn't deliver value, and winespeak....***Wine Curmudgeon

***There's no doubt that the French coming here (Oregon) is an exclamation mark that what we're doing here in the New World is awesome. Everyone's welcome. I love the French, the Australians, the Californians....it's all good in the hood....***Alex Sokol Blosser, *Sokol Blosser Winery*

***The relationship between style and quality remains contentious....***Remington Norman, *The World of Fine Wine*

***Unicorn wines is a term used by Somms for ultra rare, extremely limited, and there highly prized bottles that inspire gangs of envy among wine geeks. They confer status not by virtue of their cost....but of special expertise it takes to acquire them....***Zachery Sussman, *The Journal of Fine Wine*

***A balanced wine is one where all of its components - acidity, alcohol, dry extract, fruits, tannins - are in harmonious relationship with one another. Nothing sticks out....***Benjamin Lewin MW, *The World of Fine Wine*

***Wine isn't something you need to learn in classes or by chasing a pin or a diploma. Wine is something that becomes part of your life in gradual, almost invisible, steps. And when it enters your life in that way, it's all the more meaningful....***Jon Bonné

***Wine is unique in that it needs words to bring it to life....***Andrea Frost, *The World of Fine Wine*

***Minerality is used as an ill-defined and over used term, often as a marketing tool....it might be largely 'a redox phenomenon,' a mystical name for sulfur....***Pescale Denevlin, *The World of Fine Wine*



# Pinot Briefs

**Davis Bynum Passes Away at Age 92** Davis Bynum was a Russian River Valley pioneer who established the first winery on Westside Road and was the first to produce a single-vineyard Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley: the 1973 Davis Bynum Winery Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Bynum wanted to duplicate the French appellation system and bring attention to the source of grapes in his wines. Gary Farrell, a friend of Bynum's son, Hampton, made his first Pinot Noir for Davis Bynum as an assistant to Davis in 1978. He stayed on as winemaker for 20+ years and continued to consult when he started his own eponymous winery on Westside Road. Throughout his winemaking career, Bynum always sought to emphasize varietal character and food friendliness in his wines, undoubtedly influenced by his father who was a wine writer and wine judge, and Davis' involvement in the food and wine scene in the San Francisco Bay Area before founding Davis Bynum Winery. Davis Bynum Winery was sold to Thomas George Estates in 2007 and the Davis Bynum label was acquired by Tom Klein and the Klein family of Rodney Strong Wine Estates. To read more about Davis Bynum visit [www.princeofpinot.com/article/551/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/551/).



**Rhys Vineyards' Kevin Harvey Turns to Italian-inspired Wines** Esther Mobley reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (December 8, 2017) that Kevin Harvey, proprietor of Rhys Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, plans to launch a Cal-Ital project in Sonoma named "Aeris." Harvey has planted the Centennial Mountain Vineyard on a remote coastal ridge top west of Lake Sonoma. He intends to focus on Nebbiolo as well as a number of less well known Italian grapes such as Carricante, Nerello Mascalese, and Nerello Capuccio. Harvey also is a partner in a Carricante vineyard in Sicily and plans to make a Carricante wine under the Aeris label to be released in 2018 (2014 Aeris Etna Bianco Superiore).

**Total Wine & More Expansion in San Francisco Bay Area** Total Wine has opened a superstore in San Jose, a Mountain View Store and plans to add more stores in San Jose and Pleasanton. Total Wine stocks a wide variety of exclusive proprietary Pinot Noir labels that are reasonably priced but have little production information available. Vintages are not listed online. California labels include Soldiers of Fortune, Magna Terra, No Curfew, We Are Sonoma, Love Noir, Smoke Tree, Misbehaved, Fat Monk, and Velvet Crush. Oregon labels include Corvallis Cellars, Rascal, Domaine Loubejac, and Oregon Territory.

**Increased Fertility in Women Who Drink Red Wine in Moderation Regularly** Recent research by a team at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, indicated that women between the ages of 18 and 44 who drank red wine regularly compared to women who consumed little or no red wine had better ovarian reserve. A similar benefit was not seen for white wine. The results suggested that red wine, with a high amount of resveratrol, protects cells from biological stress and boosts fertility. It should be emphasized that women should drink red wine in moderation (one standard drink a day) and women wishing to conceive should be careful to imbibe.

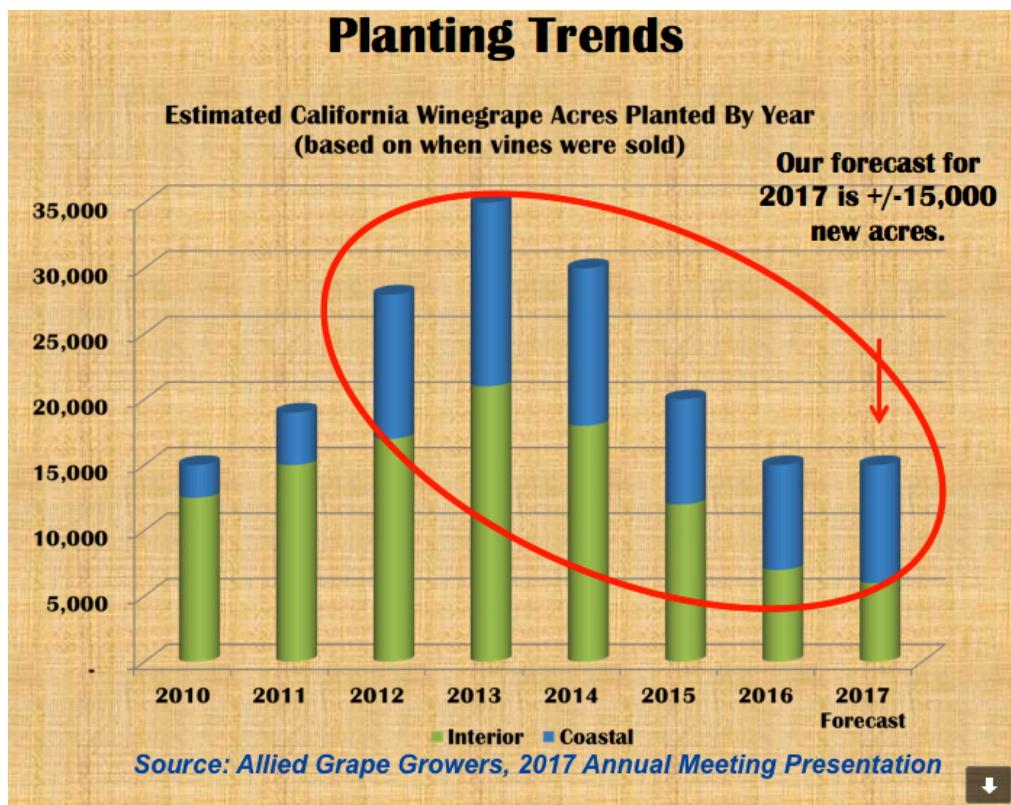
**New Chemical Test for Wildfire Tainted Wine Grapes** As reported in [thedrinksbusiness.com](http://thedrinksbusiness.com) (October 25, 2017), researchers at the University of British Columbia have created a chemical test that

accurately measures the levels of damaging aromatic chemical compounds (volatile phenols) that grapes absorb when they are exposed to smoke. This test would allow growers to receive instant information as to whether grapes are fit to use in wine. The grapes do not need to be fermented first. The test would also have applicability in smoked oak barrel aging when volatile phenols from the barrels enter wine, allowing winemakers to control the amount of smoky aroma and flavor.

**2017 California Harvest Report** A remarkable summer heat wave producing record high temperatures (triple digits) over Labor Day weekend and October's wildfires in the north of California near the end of harvest are the most notable features of the 2017 vintage. The problem with the heat spike was that the vines shut down at a very pivotal stage of development to try to stay alive and "raisining" of berries often results. In some cases, the grapes were mature before the heat spike and in other cases moved ripening along quickly. The heat led to a rush to harvest certain varieties to keep the grapes from getting too sweet. Most Pinot Noir was harvested before the wildfires. The North Coast and Monterey reported generally high quality across all varieties although yields will be impacted. Yields of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay were down as much as 50% below average in Santa Barbara County with clusters smaller than usual. Santa Cruz Mountains experienced as much as 100 inches of rain on the ocean side requiring leaf pulling and thinning due to vigorous growth. A shortage of vineyard labor at harvest was widespread in California.

**2017 Oregon Harvest Report** Everything came up roses for Oregon in 2017. Several weeks of high temperatures earlier in the growing season in the Willamette Valley had little impact and September and October were relatively dry. Harvest was huge and required intensive vineyard work to limit vigor. Growers finished harvest at the end of October (the norm for Oregon except for the past three years that were at least a month early) and reported a robust crop that is estimated to be up by 10 to 15 percent. The Cascade wildfires had little impact. Mold and birds were of little consequence. The available labor pool at harvest continues to be a major challenge.

## Planting Trends in California



**Article on Conducting Wine Tastings with Wine Critics** I contributed to an article written by Carl Giavanti Consulting titled, "How to Taste With Professional Reviewers and Critics." My comments were based on visiting multiple wineries over the past 15 years. Visit [www.carlgiavanticonsulting.com/2017/12/06/how-to-taste-with-professional-reviewers-and-critics/](http://www.carlgiavanticonsulting.com/2017/12/06/how-to-taste-with-professional-reviewers-and-critics/).

**Santa Rosa's Bottle Barn** An article appeared online (<https://daily.seventy.com/inside-bottle-barn-an-iconic-santa-rosa-wine-retailer/>) about this wine retailer. I have been a regular visitor to this warehouse wine retailer for years. Hidden in an obscure location in an industrial area of Santa Rosa, the store is bare bones, with wines stacked in racks, organized by varietal with a few seemingly haphazard descriptive and rating shelf tags taped to the racks. One can spend an hour or more grazing through the extensive selection of North Coast Pinot Noir that includes many little known, boutique producers. The wines are priced reasonably at an average of 20 percent over wholesale prices, and occasionally special deals offer a more significant discount. There is no customer service to speak of, but the low prices make up for this shortcoming. Bottle Barn has no online presence but this is being considered. The store also has a terrific selection of beer.

**Petaluma Gap Gains Official AVA Recognition** Rickey Trombetta Stancliff, CEO of Trombetta Family Wines and current president of the Petaluma Gap Winegrowers Alliance, reported that the Petaluma Gap officially becomes an American Viticultural Area (AVA) on Friday, December 8, 2017. This approval means that wines from this AVA may have "Petaluma Gap" on their labels. These new labels should appear on wines from the 2014 vintage. Producers of Pinot Noir from this region welcome this change as it allows wines from the Petaluma Gap AVA to distinguish themselves from the massive Sonoma Coast AVA.



**Need a laugh?** Visit the Amalie Robert Estate FLOG communication @ [www.amalierobert.blogspot.com](http://www.amalierobert.blogspot.com). The 2017 Climate Update had me laughing out loud. "The Master Farmer (MF) exam is scheduled to begin in October....every year about this time, winegrowers in Oregon's Willamette Valley take this exam. Unlike other wine accreditations, the MF must achieve a passing grade each year. It's really quite a Cluster Pluck when you get right down to it. A MF must deliver healthy, mature wine berries that have stunning aromas and flavors regardless of degree day accumulations and rainfall, and be pristine exemplars of the variety with balanced acids and sugars.....more (BTW, winemaker Ernie Pink manages to pass the MF exam yearly with flying colors)

**Shortage of Manpower Serious Threat to Winegrowers** Rod Berglund, proprietor and winemaker at Joseph Swan Vineyards in the Russian River Valley, who worked his 28th harvest this year, described his challenges this past harvest. "Our best-laid plans to pick when flavors and balance were attained ran head on to something. There simply was not enough labor. Too many vineyards, too few people, too many competing needs for the pickers. Vineyard managers had scheduled picks and scrambled when half their people showed up. In some cases, whole crews would leave when someone else would offer them a better opportunity. For some winegrowers, there has been a return to the old days - when harvest arrived, schools would close and whole families would bring in the harvest." The shortage of field workers in both California and Oregon has become a serious challenge since most Pinot Noir vineyards are not amendable to mechanical harvesting.



## The True Meaning of Pinot Noir

I was shopping at a local mall recently and walked by Santa Claus. When I was a kid, I was scared to death of Santa and never would go up and sit on his lap, much to my mother's chagrin. As I grew older, I always felt I missed something in life. I thought it was time to meet the jolly old fellow and I got in line. Soon enough, I was sitting on his lap and beaming to the crowd in front of me. I then asked him, "What is the true meaning of Pinot Noir?" This is what he told me.

The specific origins of the name are unclear, but it is known that Pinot Noir appeared in the Côte d'Or prior to the 14th century, and possibly as early as the 5th century B.C.. The grape was initially called *noiren* long before the word *pinot* appeared. *Pinot* first surfaced in the last part of the 14th century in papers of the Dukes of Burgundy: a document of Philip the Bold showed an order for a shipment to Flanders of "vermillion *pinot* wine" in 1375. *Pinot* was initially often spelled *pynos* or *pineau*. No other grape variety has a name that has been in use for more than six centuries.

At the end of the last century, *pinot* was made the official name to avoid the Burgundian peasant pronunciation of *pineau* as "peen-yo" or "peen-yew." The grape has had multiple names in the Côte d'Or through the years including *franc norien*, *franc pineau*, *plant a bon vin*, *plant fin*, *plant noble*, *franc bourguignon*, *frank pinot*, *petit pinot*, and *morellon*. Today, the word *pineau* designates the Chenin Blanc grape of the Loire Valley.

Pinot Noir is thought to be named *pinot* because its grape cluster resembles a pine cone in shape. In reality, this feature is not readily observable as a distinguishing characteristic. The word *noir* comes from the fact that the grape's skin is a dark blue that is so darkly colored it is called *noir*, the French word for black. In actuality, the skin of Pinot Noir contains considerably less pigment than other varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah.

If after reading this article, you wish to obtain Continuing Education credits in Pinot Noir, please write Santa Claus at the North Pole.