



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

Volume 11, Issue 16 January 8, 2018

*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## A Bounty of Ravishing California Pinot Noir Greet the New Year

Time to stock up your wine cellar with some of these new releases and Live Mas! The quality of California Pinot Noir has reached such unprecedented high levels in recent vintages that my job may soon become superfluous. I feel so blessed to have the opportunity to review the marvelous results here of so many talented winemakers.

### **Aether Wine Company, Orcutt**

Proprietor and winemaker Jeff Fink, formerly the winemaker at Tantara and Pence Ranch, launched this new project with the 2013 vintage. The name, Aether, is derived from the Greeks who saw the aether as the link between the early realm and the heavens, the so-called fifth element.

The wines reviewed here are from the 2014 vintage. Jeff told me they were in primarily neutral oak for almost two years as they took time to come around. Some whole cluster inclusion was used. The wines all showed much better when re-tasted the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle reflecting the reductive style of winemaking.

The wines are offered through a mailing list and on the website at [www.aetherwines.com](http://www.aetherwines.com).





**2014 Aether Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.54, \$36. A blend from Pence Ranch, Dierberg, Drum Canyon, Hilliard Bruce, and Sanford & Benedict vineyards. Harvest Brix 22.8°-24.4°. 80% indigenous and 20% RC-212 fermentation. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas arrive slowly in the glass, offering notes of cherry, spice and burnt tobacco. Elegant and cashmere in the mouth in a light to mid weight style, featuring enticing flavors of dark red fruits, spice and toast and a subtle earthbound thread. Nicely balanced, with buried tannins and a modest but pleasing finish. Much more enjoyable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. A solid everyday drinker. 91.*

**2014 Aether Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.45, \$50. Vineyard first planted in 1971 by Richard Sanford and Michael Benedict. Clone 115. Harvest Brix 24.0°. 100% indigenous fermentation. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Black cherry fruit and seasoned oak interplay on the nose. A charge of dark red and black fruits seduce with juicy intent, backed by a firm tannic structure. Smooth in the mouth, with impressive length on the finish that has good cut. Much better when tasted the day after from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Immense charm. 93.*

**2014 Aether Drum Canyon Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.41, \$50. Vineyard established in 2003 by the Dierberg family. 56-acres planted almost entirely to Pinot Noir. Calera clone. Harvest Brix 23.7°. 100% indigenous fermentation. Aged 27 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. An earthbound nose with added aromas of dark red and black fruits. Rather monolithic upon opening, showing more nuance and interest when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Mid weight flavors of well-ripened black fruits, spice and tobacco and welcome intensity on the ending. 92.*

**2014 Aether Quinta Del Mar Vineyard San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.45, \$50. A uniquely situated 20-acre Pinot Noir vineyard on the western flank of the Nipomo foothills near the town of Nipomo. Clones 115 and 777 planted in 2006. Harvest Brix 23.8°. 50% whole cluster and 100% indigenous fermentation. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, spice, vanilla and earthy flora are inviting. Mid weight flavors of blackberry, black raspberry and cassis with initially noticeable oak-driven flavors of cola, vanilla and toast. Considerably more enjoyable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, with better oak integration and soaring flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and spice. 93.*



**2014 Aether Matrix Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$65. Harvest Brix 24.1°. Calera and 115 clones. 25% whole cluster, indigenous yeast, aged 27 months in neutral French oak barrels. The name implies a mosaic of flavors and aromas ever changing and moving through time. In the case of this wine, Matrix is a fusion of the energy and flavors of two vineyards with divergent yet simpatico character - Quinta del Mar and Drum Canyon.

*Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy, but very pleasant aromas of black cherry and black raspberry fruits. Vivid array of dark red to purple orchard and berry fruits presented in a seductive, mid weight style with valued length. Seamless with a polished texture and ethereal refinement. Notable but not intrusive oak in the background. Finishes bright and quenching with a burst of cherry goodness. The most transcendent of the 2014 Aether Pinots. 94.*



## Brooks Note Winery, Novato

In 2004, Garret (Garry) Brooks left the world of technology in the San Francisco Bay area to pursue winemaking. After graduating from University of California at Davis, he made his first Pinot Noir at Acacia in 2007 and later moved on to Kosta Browne, working alongside Michael Browne and Shane Finley for two years. He then joined Dutton-Goldfield as an assistant winemaker working under Dan Goldfield. Dan introduced Garry to the unique geography, microclimates and vineyards of Marin County

Gary and his spouse Joanne (her maiden name was Note) launched their commercial label in 2011, using fruit from Marin County and Weir Vineyard in the Yorkville Highlands.

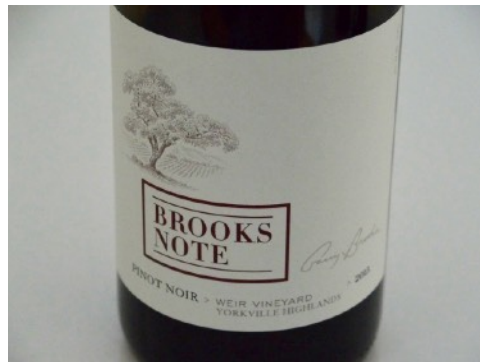
Brooks Note shares a tasting room with Trek Winery in Novato. Check the website for hours and directions: [www.brooks-note-winery.myshopify.com](http://www.brooks-note-winery.myshopify.com). Wine prices are reasonable.

**2015 Brooks Note Marin County Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.68, 175 cases, \$36. A blend of grapes from Kendric, Grossi Ranch and Chilean Valley vineyards. All three vineyards are on the Marin side of the Petaluma Gap, although Grossi is just outside the southern border of the new AVA. Cold wind and fog lead to thick-skinned grapes resulting in more structure and color in the wines. Cold nights and warm days provide good acidity. A cold snap on Easter weekend caused frost damage throughout North Coast wine country and decreased yields markedly. 10% whole cluster, open-top fermentation, 3-day cold soak, native yeast, aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 27% new, 27% once-filled and 46% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of blueberry, boysenberry, floral bouquet and feminine scent. Mid weight flavors of purple and blackberries smoothly integrated with gentle tannins. Deft oak input, with bright acidity and an uplifting finish. More sappy and heady when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **93.**



**2015 Brooks Note Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.72, 230 cases, \$44. Rochioli and Wädenswil 2A clones from the lower, eastern blocks, and Romanée-Conti clone from the western blocks. 10% whole cluster, open-top fermentation, 3-day cold soak, native yeast, aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Terrific*

*aromas of black cherry and baking spices leap from the glass. Just what you desire from Pinot. Light to mid weight gloriously fresh flavors of strawberry, cherry, spice and tobacco framed by toned tannins. Lovely balance and a very long, quenching finish. Still pumping out a deep well of fruit pleasure when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. The vintner really hit the mark in this vintage!* **95**



## Castalia Wines, Geyserville

Terry Bering has been the cellar master at J. Rochioli Vineyards since 1990. He launched his own label in 1992 with the production of a single Pinot Noir based on Rochioli Vineyard grapes. The name, Castalia, refers to Apollo's favorite spring on Mount Parnassus in ancient Greece that bestowed drinkers of the spring gifts of poetry and inspiration.

I have been a fan of Castalia Pinot Noir for many years and have reviewed every vintage since 2000. If you are not on the Rochioli mailing list, this is one wine from Rochioli Vineyard that you can buy. It is also the only bottling other than one from Gary Farrell that is permitted to put Rochioli Vineyard on the front label. The wine is sold in 6 and 12 bottle lots only. Visit [www.castaliawines.com](http://www.castaliawines.com).



**2015 Castalia Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 323 cases, \$60. Sourced from Rochioli ranch vineyards. Clones originated from the West Block along with Dijon 777, 115 and 667. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Highly aromatic, offering soaring scents of Bing cherry compote, allspice and nutmeg with a compliment of*

*oak. Loved the nose. Intense attack of oak-kissed Bing cherry fruit in a mid weight style. A seductively creamy texture holds court in the mouth, the tannins are in sync, and the finish is generous with cherry goodness. The wine was considerably more appealing when tasted later in the day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with much better oak integration. A year or two of cellar time is advisable. A Rochioli vineyard wine that you can actually buy!* **94.**



## Cellars 33, San Francisco

An urban winery in San Francisco founded by Baltimore transplants, John and Katie Fones, in 2010. John developed his winemaking skills working at Freeman Winery. Visit [www.cellars33.com](http://www.cellars33.com).

**2015 Cellars 33 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.635, RX 0 g/L, 175 cases, \$30. A blend from two diverse vineyard sites including one in the hills, west of Westside Road and Hummingbird Hill Vineyard located in the Petaluma Gap. Harvest Brix 23.5°. Aged 10 months in neutral French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of blueberry, briar, rye crisp and nutty oak lead to a light to mid weight styled wine featuring flavors of blueberry and purple grape with subtle oak in the background and a citric thread also plying the background. Soft tannins and a plush mouth feel offered promise but the wine finished with a sweet and sour tone.* **87.**

**2015 Cellars 33 Hummingbird Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.604, RS 0 g/L, 150 cases, \$48. Pommard and Rochioli clones. Harvest Brix 23.9°. 100% de-stemmed, 50% native and 50% inoculated primary fermentation with native malolactic fermentation. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose is primary upon opening but pleasant, offering aromas of black cherry and rye toast. Discreetly dense and sappy, featuring luscious black cherry and black raspberry fruit flavors in tune with oak support. Nicely balanced, with admirable finishing persistence.* **90.**

**2015 Cellars 33 Katie's Cuvée Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.487, RS 0 g/L, 72 cases, \$48. This wine focuses more on grace than power. Harvest Brix 23.4°. Aged 10 months in once used French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with savory, floral and oak notes complimenting the crushed black cherry fruit theme. Mid weight flavors of black cherry, black currant and toasty oak are well in tune with the tannic backbone. The velvety mouthfeel attracts pleasure.* **89.**

## **Donelan Family Wines, Santa Rosa**

This family owned and operated winery was founded in 2009 by Joe Donelan along with his sons Tripp and Cushing. He has used his long-term relationships with small growers to access unique parcels of vineyards in Sonoma's Knights Valley, Green Valley and Russian River Valley. Joe says, "It is like real estate: if you have a great location, then you should be in good shape. I believe that the best wines are not made, they are discovered. Site really trumps all variables." The winery's focus is Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Rhone varieties.

The wines are named after his loved ones including his mother, wife, children and grandchildren. 80% of production is sold to mailing list customers. Tripp Donelan oversees winery sales and Cushing Donelan manages marketing and hospitality.

The tasting room offers guests the opportunity to interact with a family member or winemaker Joe Nielsen. The "Donelan Portfolio Tour & Tasting" (\$35) lasts 60 minutes and includes a private tour of the production facility, a flight of four current releases of cool climate and Rhone varietal wines. The "Road Less Traveled Tour & Tasting" (\$60) lasts 75 minutes and includes a comprehensive tasting of five of Donelan's highly-allocated Rhone wines. Tasting experiences are offered daily by appointment only. Visit the website at [www.donelanwines.com](http://www.donelanwines.com) for further details.

**2013 Donelan Two Brothers Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 1,630 cases, \$55. Heavy wax capsule. Sourced from multiple sites in Sonoma County. Whole cluster inclusion (% not specified). *Light ruby red color in the glass. Whole cluster driven nose with aromas of cherry, savory herbs, and burnt tobacco. Mid weight flavors of cherry, red berry and warm brown spices with a hint of tobacco and woody intent. Silky in the mouth, with suede tannins and a moderately intense finish. The wine shows the slightest amount of oxidation.* **89.**

**2014 Donelan Tripp's Block Perl Vineyard Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 290 cases, \$78. Heavy wax capsule. Vineyard is located at 2,000 feet elevation above the fog line. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Enticing aromas of boysenberry, blackberry jam and fertile earth. Exhilarating attack of black cherry and strawberry fruit flavors with a hint of spice and caramel. Impeccable balance, with gentle tannins and a silky texture. A very engaging and accommodating wine finishing with uncommon length.* **92.**



**2015 Donelan Cushing's Block Barbed Oak Vineyard Bennett Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 222 cases, \$78.

Heritage clones. Vineyard is exposed to prolonged foggy mornings that temper and extend the growing season.

*Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, sweet pipe smoke, clove, burnt tobacco and cardamom spice. The luscious black cherry and black raspberry fruits*

*make an immediate impression upon entry. The wine really brings the senses to alert. Ideal balance, buried tannins, the slightest oak input, and a very long, fruited finish make for a very special wine that can be thoroughly enjoyed now. I liked this a lot! 94.*



**Ellen Redding, Wines That Deliver, Napa**

I was browsing the Pinot Noir aisle at Hi-Time Wine Cellars in Costa Mesa, California, recently when the Ellen Redding label caught my eye. Apparently winemaker Patrick McNeil works with small, family owned vineyards in Marin County and Napa Valley to make wines that are described as “fruit-forward, site-specific, and off the beaten path. His tagline is “Wines that Deliver.”

In the early 1970s, Patrick’s father moved the family to an old ghost winery in the Napa Valley and set out to revive this historic winery estate and unknowingly participate in the renaissance of the Napa Valley wine industry as we know it today.

It turned out that I bought a bottle of the 2015 Ellen Redding Marin County Pinot Noir and found it to be mesmerizing. The wine is a loving ode to Patrick’s grandparents. Joseph Dennis McNeil courted Ellen Josephine Redding via the U.S. Postal Service from 1925 to 1928 and more than 50 different envelopes exist. Each new vintage and colorful envelope tells their story. The envelope depicted on the label of this bottling celebrates the summer months, 90 years ago in 1927, when several letters found their way to Patrick’s vacationing grandmother in Santa Cruz, California.



For more information, visit [www.winesthatdeliver.com](http://www.winesthatdeliver.com). Inquire to purchase at [patrick@winesthatdeliver.com](mailto:patrick@winesthatdeliver.com).



**2015 Ellen Redding Marin County Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 120 cases, \$36. Sourced from Chilean

Valley Vineyard, located in the Petaluma Gap AVA. Dijon clones 667, 777 and 115. 33% whole cluster, 7-day cold soak, native primary and secondary ferments, aged in two once-used and three neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very expressive aromas of blackberry, black raspberry, warm spice, vanilla and brioche. Delicious mid weight plus for of sweet black fruits rounded out with tastes of spice, cola, dark chocolate, black tea and toast. Velvety in the mouth with a hedonistic slant but enough tannins and oak to corral the rich fruit core. This wine*

*grew in appeal when tasted later in the day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle and I could not stop*

drinking it. My notes say, "great." You won't find a better California Pinot Noir in the marketplace at this price. **95.**

## Karah Estate Vineyards & Winery, Cotati

This estate is located on 144 acres above Highway 101. Founded by Mohamed "Michael" Sarah, a native of Libya, in 1995, the site was originally named Windy Hill Estate Vineyards. In 2008, the name was changed to Karah Estate Vineyards along with a renewed commitment to producing the highest quality, affordable Pinot Noir.

The Karah Estate Vineyard is planted on steep hillsides in the new Petaluma Gap AVA. The site is exposed to moist marine air and winds and the resulting effect is low yields and a long growing season. Six separate vineyards were planted to Pinot Noir between 1995 and 2002.

Wines are fermented in small, open-top fermenters using a combination of native and proprietary yeasts.

The winery's tasting room, located in the production barn, is open Friday-Sunday. The wines are relatively inexpensive considering the quality. Visit [www.karahestatevineyard.com](http://www.karahestatevineyard.com).

**2015 Karah Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.61, RS 1.2 g/L, \$30. Aged in French oak barrels, 35% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very charming aromas of dark cherry, blackberry, black tea and nutty oak. Nicely composed, with vivid flavors of cherry pie and baking spices with a layer of oak. Impressive vibrancy and brightness in a nimble, mid weight style that can be enjoyed now for its silkiness and welcoming demeanor. My only nit would be that oak currently plays to big a role.* **90.**

**2015 Karah Estate Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.57, RS 1.1 g/L, \$N/A. Aged in French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Ripe fruit aromas of cassis, blackberry jam and black grape juice. The dark fruit definitely veers to the ripe side but is seductively rich, and the integrated alcohol lends a satiny mouthfeel to the experience. A hedonistic mid weight plus offering with much better oak integration than the regular Estate bottling. The wine is still a bit reserved and will find its full footing with more time in bottle. This ripe-fruited, sappy wine is well-crafted in this style and will find appeal.* **92.**



## Littorai, Sebastopol

This winery needs no introduction with nearly fifty features or mentions in the *PinotFile* over the years. I have reviewed multiple wines going back to the 1990s. Many wines have made my annual All-Americans list. Proprietor Ted Lemon is one of the most respected winemakers in California and his wines are consistently lauded by the Pinot Noir cognoscenti.

All vineyard sources are farmed sustainably by organic and in several cases biodynamic methods but not certified.

Littorai wines are sold through an allocated mailing list with limited fine restaurant distribution. Tasting is available at the Littorai estate by appointment. Visit [www.littorai.com](http://www.littorai.com).



**2015 Littorai Wendling Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., \$75. A newer source for Littorai. 23 acres located in Philo, in the deep end of the Anderson Valley, planted by Paul Ardzooni (Ardzooni Family Wines) and two winemaking colleagues in 2009 (I believe Ted Lemon is a partner). The vineyard is planted entirely to multiple clones of Pinot Noir and is organically farmed. The site is the most northwestern vineyard in the Anderson Valley AVA giving it close proximity to the Pacific Ocean. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose offers intriguing whole cluster nuances of exotic spices, pipe bowl, rose petal and earthy flora. Impressive attack of black cherry, plum and spice flavors with a savory undertone. Expansive in the mouth, with a very long, succulent and juicy finish. Beautifully composed with a firm structure taming the fruit.* **94.**



Wendling Vineyard, Anderson Valley



**2015 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot**

**Noir** 13.7% alc., \$75. This wine is from an iconic California vineyard planted in the early 1990s just north of the town of Philo. This is the only valley floor vineyard that Littorai works with anywhere. Located at the cooler end of the Anderson Valley, but protected on two sides so the site is warmer than one might expect. Several blocks that Littorai sources from

are dry farmed. Littorai is the largest purchaser of Savoy Vineyard grapes since 1995. The vineyard is farmed organically. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The aromatic goodness explodes over time in the glass, offering hi-tone black cherry and spice cabinet aromas.*

*Intense and sappy, with mid weight flavors of black cherry, blueberry, pomegranate, raspberry and spice, with a nuanced earthy underpinning. A sophisticated wine that satisfies from attack to finish, offering impeccable balance. This wine has that ephemeral Pinot quality that is the Holy Grail of vintners. 97.*



**2015 Littorai The Pivot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., \$85. This is the Littorai Estate Vineyard located at the winery site. 3 acres located on a ridge top between Sebastopol and Freestone, just seven miles from the coast. Five different clones of Pinot Noir are planted (not specifically disclosed). Biodynamically farmed. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The nose only reluctantly offers black cherry, pomegranate, spice and underbrush aromas even two days later. Much more embracing on the palate, with mid weight flavors of purple grape, boysenberry, warm spices and a touch of oak. Rich entry, rich middle and rich finish. Seems a bit grouchy at this stage but hints at better days ahead. 92.*



**2015 Littorai The Haven Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., \$90. Another estate site lying northwest of the town of Occidental on a 1,200 foot ridge. Approximately 40 different rootstock and clonal combinations planted in 2001 within a 4-acre vineyard. Biodynamically farmed. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Upon opening, the nose is primarily barrel driven. When tasted the following day, the nose was exotically spiced, with plenty of blackest cherry fruit aroma and a hint of tobacco. A mid weight plus treasure with unctuous black raspberry and blackberry fruit, warm spices, and earthy, savory character. Flat out delicious with enviable harmony and an extraordinarily intense and persistent finish. 95.*



## Mignanelli Winery, Sonoma

Winemaker Byron Mignanelli founded this winery in 2011, focusing on coastal Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Some grape sources include old vine, original plantings in California and Oregon. Typically, the wines undergo 40% or more whole cluster and native fermentation, and are aged on the lees with racking only just before bottling.

The wines are relatively inexpensive considering the high quality and are sold on the website at [www.mignanelliwinery.com](http://www.mignanelliwinery.com).

**2015 Mignanelli Central Coast Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., \$30. Dijon, Pommard and Martini clones planted in 1980, 1999 and 2004. Native fermentation, aged in French oak barrels, 20% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Leading off are aromas of red cherry, cranberry, raspberry, rose petal and a hint of oak. Lighter in weight with a core of black cherry fruit picking up some intensity over time in the glass, but leaning a bit on oak. The juicy finish takes on some tannic muscle.* **88.**



**2015 Mignanelli Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., \$36. Clones 115, "828," Mt Eden and Martini planted in 1980 and 1999. Native fermentation, aged in French oak barrels, 20% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose opens slowly in the glass to reveal aromas of dark red cherry, spice, violets, herbs and warm brioche. Mid weight flavors of cherry and raspberry are framed by prominent tannins that stick out on the finish, yet the tannins are in tune with generous fruit persistence.* **89.**





## Sojourn Cellars, Sonoma

The 2018 Spring Release wines were sampled with winemaker Erich Bradley and again in my usual fashion at home. The 2016 wines were bottled in August and are scheduled for a January release (Gap's Crown Chardonnay is a fall release). The Chardonnays are reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Erich told me that the 2016 vintage was close to a "dream" vintage. Yields were very decent and slightly higher than in 2015 as the vines were more in balance. Moderate temperatures during the summer allowed for proper flavor development and harvest allowed for leisurely picks. The result was wines with concentrated flavors and freshness derived from good acidities.

The wines are sold through a mailing list at [www.sojourncellars.com](http://www.sojourncellars.com). Personal and intimate tasting is available by appointment at the Sojourn Tasting Salon in downtown Sonoma. Winemaker Erich Bradley is assisted by associate winemaker Randy Bennett and proprietor Craig Haserot. The location of the winery's vineyard sources are seen on this map:



## SOJOURN CELLARS



**2016 Sojourn Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.60, 2,900 cases, \$39. A blend of eight vineyards in the Sonoma Coast ranging from Occidental to the Petaluma Gap. Clones 115, "828," 667, Pommard and Wädenswil 2A. 100% de-stemmed, open-top fermentation, native yeast, aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very giving aromas of Bing cherry, blueberry, spice and cigar box. Good weight and juiciness in a forward style featuring a luscious for of black cherry and spice flavors. Nicely composed with integrated moderately toasty oak and a solid finish. A deft AVA offering. 90.*

**2016 Sojourn Rodgers Creek Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.59, 800 cases, \$48. This vineyard is located high on a ridge in the heart of the Petaluma Gap. The foundation of this wine is two blocks of Pommard clone with clone 777 adding a layer of bright fruit. 15% whole cluster. Open-top fermentation, native yeast, aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately*

*light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, blueberry, spice, underbrush and subtle smoke draw the drinker in. Light to mid weight flavors of oak-kissed black cherry and black raspberry are expansive in the mouth. Slightest feral and gamy character. Creamy and suave in the mouth with an extended finish. Even better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

**2016 Sojourn Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.67, TA 0.61, 1,250 cases, \$59. Sourced from a vineyard on Roberts Road located at the western base of Sonoma Mountain. Clones 115, 777 and Swan. 100% de-stemmed, open-top fermentation, native yeast, aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Bright aromas of cherry, raspberry, woodland spice and sawdust. Bombastic cherry and raspberry flavors with polished tannins and supportive oak. Commendable harmony with a memorable dark red raspberry fueled finish. 93.*



**2016 Sojourn Walala Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.57, 475 cases, \$69. This vineyard sits at 1,200 feet above sea level, just inland from the Pacific Ocean near the coastal town of Annapolis. Clones 113, 115 and "828." 5% whole cluster. Open-top fermentation, native yeast, aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. A nose of complexity, showing aromas of black cherry, wild dark berry, spice, undergrowth, floral bouquet and a hint of sweet oak. A wine of great fortitude the palate, with waves of boysenberry, blackberry and pomegranate fruits that hang on through an extended luscious finish. The satiny texture is quite appealing as is the wine's seamless composure. This vineyard really impresses when the vintage allows. 94.*

**2016 Sojourn Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.61, 1,350 cases, \$69. This vineyard is located on Roberts Road just above the Sangiacomo Vineyard. Clones "828," 115 and 667. 10% whole cluster. Open-top fermentation, native yeast, aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, blackberry jam, briar and woodland spice. The biggest, baddest wine in the lineup, with a sappy core of well-ripened purple and black fruits that saturate the palate with goodness. Slightly fatiguing to drink, but a hedonist's delight with well-matched tannins, integrated acidity, complimentary oak tones of toast and vanilla, and a long, meaty finish. 93.*



## Three Sticks Wines, Sonoma

Noted former Williams Selyem winemaker Bob Cabral released his first Estate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from Three Sticks with the 2015 vintage. The 2015 vintage was extremely small yet quality was extraordinary and Bob really nailed it with this vintage.

2015 was the fourth drought year in a row. Untimely winds and cold during spring bloom reduced flowering and resultant yields by 25%. Harvest was earlier than ever, with grapes brought in by August.

I thought the entire lineup were among the top wines I had tasted in 2017 but the tasting was too late to include them in my 2017 All-Americans. The wines were released to mailing list customers August 15, 2017. You should make it your New Year's resolution to snag some of these wines for your cellar. Chardonnay reviews are in this issue also.

Visit [www.threestickswines.com](http://www.threestickswines.com). Tasting is available by appointment in the historic Adobe in downtown Sonoma.

**2015 Three Sticks Durell Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.49, TA 0.60, 178 cases, \$70. Clones 667, 115 and 777. 25% whole cluster, open-top fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of brioche bramble and nutty oak lead to a mid weight styled wine with tantalizing black cherry, black raspberry, pomegranate and warm spice flavors that satisfy. Velvety and seductive in the mouth, with streamlined tannins and a virile finish of good length. The barrel management is spot on. The nose was much more expressive when the wine was sampled later in the day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*



**2015 Three Sticks Gap's Crown Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.60, 220 cases, \$70. Vineyard is located on the western slope of Sonoma Mountain in the recently approved Petaluma Gap AVA. The area enjoys the cooling effects of both wind and fog plus a sweeping western exposure. Swan, "828," 115 and Rochioli selection of Pommard. 20% whole cluster. Open-top fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 55% new.

*Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Lovely mix of aromas including boysenberry jam, underbrush, tobacco and biscuit. Delicious mix of purple and black fruits in a middleweight style that offers exquisite balance. The sexy, satiny texture makes the eyes light up as does the extremely long finish that never seems to quit. An extraordinary wine. 97.*



**2015 Three Sticks Walala Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.59, 218 cases, \$70.

Inaugural release. This 17-acre vineyard is perched on a ridge at 1,200 feet elevation just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean near the town of Gualala and in the middle of 19,000 acres of pristine forestland. This heavily maritime-influenced vineyard is on the extreme edge of

Pinot Noir viticulture. Soil is Goldridge sandy loam along with gravelly Hugo loam. 25% whole cluster, open-top fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 55% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Sensational aromas of blackberry, cassis and warm Holiday spices that are deep and persistent. Mid weight plus flavors of slightly sweet purple and black berries are bold and generous accented with the right amount of spice. Bombastically flavored with majestic fruit, yet elegantly composed with impressive balance and a silky mouth feel. This on-the-edge vineyard continues to astonish with its fruit concentration. 95.*



**2015 Three Sticks Cuvée Eva Marie Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.62, 112 cases, \$90. Inaugural release. One Sky Vineyard is located high atop Sonoma Mountain and is a new jewel in the crown for Three Sticks. At 1,400 feet elevation, growing grapes here can be a challenge. A mix of heritage and Dijon clones planted strategically in Goulding cobble clay loam that provides excellent drainage. 25% whole cluster, open-top fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 57% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Captivating aromas of blackberry, sage, earth and mulch. The wine captures the heart with a dreamy texture that is pure silk. Vibrant flavors of purple and black fruits with the right touch of spice and oak compliment. The wine wows the senses with appeal, finishing long and charitable. My notes say, "Wow!" 95.*

*Vibrant flavors of purple and black fruits with the right touch of spice and oak compliment. The wine wows the senses with appeal, finishing long and charitable. My notes say, "Wow!" 95.*

## More Wines

**2014 Anaba Westlands Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., pH 3.59, TA 0.56, 264 cases, \$54. The name of this wine is a nod to the West Sonoma Coast. O'Connor, Barlow Lane Private and Mariani vineyards. Pommard, Swan and 115 clones. Harvest Brix 23.5°. 100% de-stemmed. 5-day cold soak, gentle pump overs and punch downs. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Winemakers Ross Cobb and Katy LaRue. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of red cherry and berry, burnt tobacco and fertile earth. Light to mid weight and bright and juicy in style, with a core of fresh cherry and raspberry fruit weathered to a bit of tobacco flavor. Very delicate with dapper tannins and an uplifting finish. 90.*

**2015 La Crema Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.57, 30,086 cases, \$30. Sourced from eight vineyards including the estate Gran Moraine Vineyard and Estate Zena Crown Vineyard. 100% de-stemmed, 3-day cold soak, open-top fermentation, free-run juice sent to French oak barrels, 24% new, where the wine was aged 9 months. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Quite woody on the nose with aromas of vanilla, toast and oak spice dominating the boysenberry fruit. Mid weight plus in heft, with ripe fruit flavors of black cherry, boysenberry and blackberry overlain with considerable oak input (black tea, coffee). 87.*

**2015 RAEN Royal St Robert Cuvée Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 800 cases, \$60. Vinified by Carlo and Dante Monday of Society of Research in Agriculture & Enology Naturally. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose hints at whole cluster with aromas of mulch, spice and rose augmenting the fruit aromas of red berries. Quite tasteful in a mid weight style, with flavors of blackest cherry, black raspberry, boysenberry, spice and earthiness. Well-integrated tannins and acidity make for current drinking. The wine's intense and very long finish is most impressive. 92.*

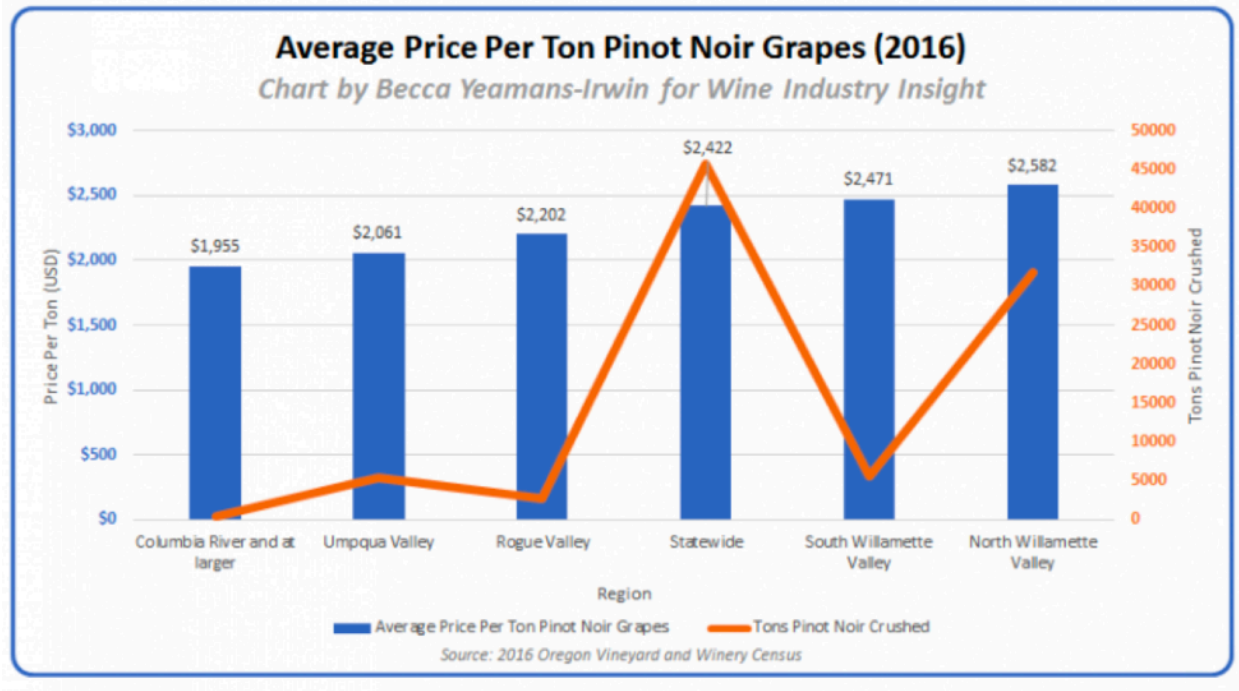
**2016 Trader Joe's Grand Reserve Lot 23 Carneros Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$12.99. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of coddled black cherry, spice, cola and fertile earth with oak showing up in the glass over time. Silky in the mouth, with mid weight flavors of black cherry, raspberry, purple plum, mushroom and earth. Elegantly composed, with gossamer tannins, finishing with welcome cherry succulence and a bit of tobacco oak. A very good value. 87.*

**2016 Trader Joe's Grand Reserve Lot 89 Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$12.99. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose opens slowly to reveal aromas of purple and black berries, marzipan, wood spice and dark chocolate. Sleek and easy to drink, with a mid weight core of dark berry fruits backed by toasty oak. Rather elegant, with soft tannins, building in intensity over time in the glass. 87.*

# Virtuous Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

The North and South Willamette Valley continue to lead in tons of Pinot Noir crushed in 2016 with the North Willamette Valley demanding the highest average price for ton of Pinot Noir grapes.

## North & South Willamette Valley Pinot Priced Above Oregon Average



## Guillén Family Wines, Dayton

Guillén Family Wines is a remarkable success story for a Mexican family that immigrated to Oregon. Jesús Guillén, Sr., arrived in Oregon in 2000 from Chihuahua, Mexico, encouraged by another Mexican immigrant working as a winegrower. He became the vineyard manager at White Rose Estate in the Dundee Hills. His son, also named Jesús, graduated from the University of Chihuahua in 2001 with a degree in computer systems engineering. A year later, he traveled to Oregon to visit his father, fell in love with the Willamette Valley, and stayed to learn English at a local community college. His mother, brother and sister also immigrated to Oregon.

Jesús, Jr., soon acclimated to the Oregon lifestyle and became intrigued by Oregon Pinot Noir. He read extensively about viticulture and winemaking, as he developed a keen palate for the local wines. He became a vineyard worker for Patricia Green Winery in 2002 and worked alongside his father at Laurel Ridge Winery where Jesús, Sr., was helping Greg Sanders, the new proprietor and winemaker at White Rose Estate, make his wines. Upon completion of the winery at White Rose Estate, Jesús, Jr., began working in the White Rose cellar and learned many winemaking skills from Mark Vlossak of St. Innocent Winery, who was the consulting winemaker. He also received some mentoring from Gary Andrew. Because Jesús, Jr., showed such talent, he was promoted to winemaker at White Rose Estate in 2008, working closely with Greg Sanders.

Jesús, Jr., launched his own small label, Guillén Family Wines, in 2009 with the 2007 vintage, sourcing fruit from Vista Hills Vineyard (near White Rose Estate in the Dundee Hills). The Guillén Pinot Noir wines are vilified in a similar fashion to those of White Rose Estate, using 100% whole cluster (since 2010), native yeast fermentations, and aging sur lie in either neutral (Damian bottling) or 100% new (Adrian bottling) French oak barrels. The Guillén Family Pinot Noir wines tend to be more extracted than the White Rose Estate Pinot Noir wines so they have their own character.

Over time, Jesús, Jr., has expanded his vineyard sources and total production to include both cuvées named after his sons (Esteban, Damien and Adrian) and vineyard-designates. One of the newer fruit sources is the Domingo Vineyard, named after his grandfather that Jesus, Sr., planted at the foot of the Dundee Hills.

The Damian bottling is based on harmony and complexity. The Adrián is designed more for the long term, and even though it has a high level of harmony when bottled, it requires some time to show its full potential.

Guillén Family Wines are poured for tasting at Vintner's Cellar PDX in Portland on weekends. The wines are sold primarily through a mailing list, wine club and fine wine retailers in the Portland, Oregon area. Futures pricing is available. Visit [www.guillénfamily.com](http://www.guillénfamily.com). Future plans call for the winery to move into its own production facility with a place for regular tasting.

The 2014 wines reviewed here were previously reviewed with Jesús in December 2015. There is low inventory of the 2014 Adrián and Damian, all others sold out. The 2015 vintage wines were bottled with Diam corks and will begin release this month.



**2014 Guillén Esteban Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 154 cases, \$25. 56% Domingo, 42% Vista Hills and 2% Meredith Mitchell vineyards. A selection of the most approachable barrels in the cellar. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Basket pressed and aged on the lees for 11 months in 100% neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Really nice perfume of cherry, rose petal, and sweet pipe smoke. Light to mid weight flavors of black cherry, raspberry, tobacco and rose water, Noticeable but complimentary whole cluster input. Easy to like, with polished, fine-grain tannins and a bright finish.* **90.**



**2014 Guillén Damian Winemaker's Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 140 cases, \$40. A meticulous selection of the best barrels in the cellar that offer harmony, complexity and mouth feel. 40% Vista Hills (667), 20% Meredith Mitchell (Pommard) and 40% Saikkonen (Pommard) vineyards. No cold soak. 100% whole cluster, native yeast fermentation. Basket pressed, aged on the lees 11 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. Filtered at

bottling. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. enticing aromas of black cherry, pine sap and spice lead to a middleweight, cherry-driven wine that is succulent yet refined. Elegantly composed, with filigree tannins, an adroit finish and impressive harmony. The winemaker went for harmony rather than boldness and it shows.* **94.**



**2014 Guillén Adrián Reserve Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., 125 cases, \$60. 100% Pommard clone from Vista Hills (40%), Saikkonen (20%) and Meredith Mitchell (40%) vineyards. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Basket pressed and aged on the lees for 11 months in 100% light toast new French oak barrels. Filtered at bottling. Jesús's attempt to mimic DRC. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose is replete with dark red cherry and berry aromas. Highly structured in a mid weight plus style with a strong physique. Gutsy flavors of dark red and black berries, black tea, tobacco and spice. Aggressive on the attack, finishing with a lengthy sweet cherry kiss.* **93.**

**2014 Guillén Meredith Mitchell Single Vineyard McMinnville Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., \$45. Self-rooted Pommard clone planted in 1996. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation, Aged 11 months on the lees in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The aromas arrive grudgingly over time in the glass showing a mix of earthy and dark fruit tones. Mid weight plus in style, with concentrated flavors of blueberry, pomegranate and black raspberry framed by rather brutish tannins. Fruit-driven, with an intensely sappy finish.* **89.**

**2014 Guillén Vista Hills Single Vineyard Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., \$45. Pommard clone planted in 2006. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged on the lees for 11 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Whole cluster infused nose offering scents of dried rose petal, pipe smoke, burnt tobacco and cherry. Silky in the mouth with good energy in a mid weight styled wine offering a tobacco-laced cherry core, balanced tannins and some finishing depth.* **91.**

**2014 Guillén Saikkonen Single Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$45. Pommard clone planted in 2003. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged on the lees for 11 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy but pleasant aromas of wet woodland, fertile earth, mulch and dark cherry. Light to mid weight essence of ripe, dark red fruits that enter with more power than they exit. Muscular tannins dominate making for a dry finish. Not enough joy me my taste. 87*



gratifying. 89.

**2015 Guillén Esteban Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 495 cases, \$25. A four vineyard blend (Vista Hills, Meredith Mitchell, La Dolce Vita and Domingo) 52% Pommard, 18% 667 and 30% 115. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged 11 months on lees in French oak barrels, 5% new. A selection of the most approachable barrels in the cellar. *Light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, burnt tobacco, rose petal and grains arrive immediately upon opening. Like able, with a straightforward core of light to mid weight cherry fruit accented with subtle spice and cola notes. Lacy tannins and welcome acidity with a modest finish. Instantly*



healthy tannic backbone that is supportive and not intrusive. The wine finishes with a gentle grip of acidity and toothsome fruit. 94.

**2015 Guillén Damian Winemaker's Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 73 cases, \$40. A meticulous selection of the best barrels in the cellar based on harmony, complexity and mouth feel. A three vineyard blend (33% Vista Hills, 33% Flânerie, and 33% Meredith Mitchell). 66.6% Pommard, 33.3% Dijon 667. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged on the lees for 12 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Really nice perfume of wild boysenberry, wilted rose, exotic spice and tobacco. Very streamlined in style with impressive balance and elegance. Vivid mid weight flavors of purple and black berries with a*

**2015 Guillén Adrián Reserve Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 72 cases, \$60. A three vineyard blend (33% Vista Hills, 33% Flânerie, and 33% Meredith Mitchell). Pommard clone. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged 12 months on the lees in 100% new French oak barrels. Filtered at bottling. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Nice perfume of boysenberry, wood spice, and wassail spice. A little less extraction than the 2014 version, but just as satisfying, with a tasty core of spiced black cherry fruit. Sleek in the mouth, with congenial tannins that elevate the fruit. The wine ends on a high note with fresh dark cherry good will. Needs more cellar time for full expression. 93.*

## Tyee Wine Cellars, Corvallis

This winery and vineyard is located on the Buchanan Family Century Farm founded over 120 years ago in the southern Willamette Valley. Five family generations have grown crops here in a sustainable manner. The oldest vines date to 1974, with subsequent plantings throughout the 1980s. The old, self-rooted vines make up more than half of the estate vineyard. In 2000, Dijon clones 115 and 777 and Pommard were planted on phylloxera-resistant rootstock.

The current winemaker and general manager is Merrilee Buchanan Benson who grew up at the Wine Cellars and has worked intimately with her family in the winery and vineyard her entire life. She took over as winemaker with the 2006 vintage, coinciding with the production of Estate wines made from grapes grown exclusively in the family's Estate Vineyard adjacent the winery.

Tyee is an early Northwest word meaning "chief" or "best" and symbolizes the winery's commitment to producing excellent estate wines to compliment the local cuisine.

The wines are of exceptional quality and offered at extremely reasonable prices. To purchase, visit [www.tyeevine.com](http://www.tyeevine.com).



**2015 Tyee Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 600 cases, \$28. Released November 2017. A blend of all grapes grown in the Estate Vineyard with vines from 15 to 41 years old. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Highly nuanced nose, featuring aromas of cherry, strawberry, rose petal, dried herbs and sandalwood. Lighter weighted but quite flavorful, with tastes of cherry, red berry, spice and cola. Refined and sleek, with fine-grained tannins, deft oak input and a juicy finish. 90.*



**2015 Tye Estate Barrel Select Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 200 cases, \$35. Released May 2017. A winemaker's barrel selection. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. More brooding, with slowly emerging aromas of darker red cherries and berries, earthy flora and rose petal.*

*More sap, more tannic backbone, more finish and more age worthy than the regular Estate bottling. Black cherry fruit driven with compliments of spice, savory herbs and seasoned. Needs more time to reach full potential. 92.*



## Winter's Hill Estate, Dayton

Winter's Hill sits in the Golden Reach of the Dundee Hills, bordered to the East by Domaine Serene, to the south by Stoller Vineyards and to the North by Vista Hill Vineyards. South-facing, at an elevation of 525-730 feet, the site has Jory soils. The original plantings of own-rooted Pinot Noir date to 1990. Newer plantings of Pinot Noir in 1997 have brought the total to 21 acres. Clones are Pommard, Wädenswil, and Dijon 114 and 115. All Pinot Noir wines are sourced from the Estate Vineyard that is LIVE Certified Sustainable and SalmonSafe since 1999.

Delphine Gladhart joined the Gladhart family winery in 2004 and has been the winemaker ever since. I have been privileged to taste the winery's Pinot Noir wines dating back to 2004. The labels have been updated for the 2015 vintage reviewed below. Visit [www.wintershillwine.com](http://www.wintershillwine.com) to check for visiting room hours and tasting options.



**2015 Winter's Hill Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.75% alc., 485 cases, \$39. The winery's flagship bottling. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. The nose expands over time in the glass to reveal hi-tone aromas of cherry, red berry and fertile earth. Light to mid weight in style, featuring red cherry and berry flavors woven through with a savory thread. Fresh and expressive, and forward drinking with a gentle but adequate tannic backbone. A reliable daily drinker. 90.*

Since 2006, the winery has selected two individual barrels from different blocks and bottled them separately to show the differences among the distinct blocks in the vineyard. For the 2015 vintage, four barrels from four separate blocks were produced.

**2015 Winter's Hill Block 8 Single Block Series Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., 98 cases, \$49. Block 8 is a warm and steep block planted to Wädenswil clone. Only second time winery has bottled 100% Wädenswil wine. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose starts out quite savory with aromas of bramble and dried herbs, transforming over time in the glass to a predominance of black cherry, wild strawberry, spice and cola aromas. Light to mid weight flavors of spiced red cherry and strawberry with an earthy thread and the right touch of oak. Nice harmony, with a deep cherry finish. This wine grows on you over time. 91.*

**2015 Winter's Hill Block 9 Pommard Single Block Series Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.8% all, 98 cases, \$49. From a warm, southwestern-facing block. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Charming atoms of Bing cherry, warm spices and herbal oak. Engaging attack of deep cherry flavor accented with a hint of savory herbs and floral goodness. Silky in the mouth, with plenty of sap to satisfy, backed by polished tannins. The finish is grand. 92.*



**2015 Winter's Hill Block 10 Single Block Series Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 98 cases, \$49. Block 10 is the highest elevation block planted to Pinot Noir and receives the most direct sunlight. 100% de-stemmed. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Heady aromas of marionberry, purple grape and baking spices. Aims to please in the mouth, with an attack of vivid black cherry and spice flavors that demands attention. Remarkable intensity, yet cohesive tannins and acidity make for seamless drinking. The wine's remarkable ending offers uncommon vibrancy. 94.*





**2015 Winter's Hill Block 10 Single Block Series Whole Cluster Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 98 cases, \$49. 100% whole cluster fermented. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Dramatic aromatics that excite including scents of black cherry, black raspberry, rose petal and exotic spices. My notes say, "Oh-man!" Equally seductive on the palate, with mid weight unctuous flavors of black cherry and black raspberry immersed in exotic spices.*

*Noticeably different texturally from the 100% de-stemmed version of this wine with meaty, fine-grain tannins that seem to caress and elevate the fruit. A very long, flavorful and juicy finish completes the picture. A connoisseur's wine. 95.*



**2015 Winter's Hill Reserve Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 250 cases, \$65. A selection of the finest blocks in the Estate Vineyard. After 12 months of aging, 12 barrels were chose that best represented the 2015 vintage. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Deep aromas of dark red cherry and berry with a bit of savory herbs. An elegant, mid weighted style, offering the essence of well-ripened cherries and berries. Nicely composed, with gentle tannins and a finish that impresses with its length. Both weight and weightlessness in this wine that is still somewhat reserved and not as expressive as it probably will be. 93.*

## More Wine

**2015 Nicolas-Jay Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., pH 3.63, TA 0.56, 2,400 cases, \$65. Released April 2017. Fruit sourced from almost every AVA in the Willamette Valley. All vineyards are biodynamic, organic and LIVE certified. Winemakers are Jean-Nicolas Méo and Tracy Kendall. Harvest Brix 22.6°. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. A wine of both fruit and savory character offering aromas and flavors of black cherry, dark red berry, spice and savory herbs. An easy going, mid weight style, that is somewhat expansive in the mouth, finishing modestly. The tannins are relegated to the background making for a gentle mouth feel. 90.*

# Chardonnay: No Wonder that it is the Most Popular White Varietal

Californians owe their Chardonnay to Ernest Wente, who took cuttings from the University of Montpellier viticultural nursery in the south of France over 100 years ago and planted them at Wente Vineyards in Livermore. Today, over 80 percent of Chardonnay produced in California comes from some version of the Wente clone.

UC Davis FPS clone 4 is referred to as “Wente” or “heat treated Wente. Non-certified budwood is referred to as “Old Wente.”

There are few plantings of Wente clone in the Northern Willamette Valley as they were displaced with the introduction of the Dijon clones of Chardonnay, mainly 96 and 95, both traced to Meursault, France, and 76, traced to the Stone et Loire region of France. Oregonians prefer Dijon clones of Chardonnay because they give better yields there than the Wente clone, and they ripen earlier. There remains Oregon winemakers such as Jay Christopher and Josh Bergstrom who profess a love for Wente selections.



**2014 Aether Sierra Madre Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** 13.2% alc., pH 3.26, \$36. Clone 17 from Robert Young Vineyard in Alexander Valley. Often called the Robert Young clone but is a selection of budwood brought from the Wente Vineyard in Livermore in the 1960s. It first appeared on the FPS registered list in 1987 after heat treatment.. Harvest Brix 21.8°. An heirloom vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley first established in 1971. A very cool and windy site due to proximity to ocean. Barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged 27 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon, pineapple, yellow cake and brioche hold court over time in the glass. Energetic and crisp in the mouth, with great purity of flavor and restrained richness. Flavors of lemon, pineapple, Golden Delicious apple and tropical notes combine in harmony, finishing with lemony goodness. The wine shows very little barrel imposition and the slightest tannins enrich the body. 94.*



**2015 Aubert Sugar Shack Napa Chardonnay** 15.0% alc., \$140 (secondary market). Mark Aubert's only vineyard in Napa. Barrel fermented and aged in 100% new French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color with the slightest haze in the glass. A bold, ripe fruited wine with a gorgeous blend of lemon, pineapple citrus and tropical fruit flavors, yet there is the proper amount of acid-driven vibrancy to hold the power in check. There is no hint of alcohol, and just the slightest hint of caramelized oak. The resultant harmony and slight viscous mouth feel allows the wine to go down so easily that one is prone to consume too much. If you aren't lucky enough to be on the mailing list, splurge on a bottle in the secondary market to see why so many wine critics are "ga-ga" over Aubert Chardonnays.* **97.**



**2016 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.9% alc., \$38. Best White Wine Sweepstakes Award at the 2017 Sonoma County Harvest Fair. Sourced from the Estate Soul Patch Vineyard. Farming is organic and biodynamic. Whole cluster pressed. 70% of grapes go to French oak barrels to undergo full malolactic fermentation. 30% is placed into

stainless steel barrels. Aged one year and just before bottling the oak and stainless steel barrels are blended. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Lovely aromas of fresh-cut apple, lemon and pineapple. Sleek, crisp and satisfying, with flavors of lemon, pineapple, yellow apple and nutty oak that wow. Bright, clean acidity keeps the fruit in balance. The wine walks the line between fruit exuberance and vibrancy and can easily steal your heart.* **94.**



**2014 Donelan Nancie Sonoma County Chardonnay** 14.0% alc., 1,947 cases, \$48. A blend of four vineyards located in Sonoma Mountain, Russian River Valley and Green Valley. Fermented and aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. A rich, ripe offering featuring aromas of stony lemon, white orchard fruits and honeyed oak. Well-endowed with citrus and kiwi fruit flavors along with notes of caramel, toast, and baking spice. Slightly viscous in texture, with a richly-appointed, highly fruited and slightly oak-infused finish.* **92.**



**2015 Smith-Madrone Napa Valley Chardonnay** 14.4% alc., pH 3.29, TA 0.803, 512 cases, \$34. Vineyard founded in 1971 at the top of Spring Mountain at 1,800 feet elevation. Winery is run by Charles, Sam and Stuart Smith. Steep, dry farmed vineyard with red and rocky volcanic soil. Estate grown and bottled. For 47 years, Smith-Madrone wines have been sourced from the

same vineyards, pruned, cultivated and harvested in the same manner. 100% barrel fermented, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 80% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon oil, slate, toast, stony earth and matchstick. Intense citrus core with a bright and crisp demeanor. Flavors of lemon, pineapple, caramel and a hint of graphite. A refreshing drink with an amazing finish spearheaded by highly aromatic citrus that seems to build in intensity over time at the end. I rarely encounter a finish of this grandeur in Chardonnay.* **94.**



**2016 Sojourn Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.62, 800 cases, \$38. Old Went clone from Sangiacomo Vella and Green Acres ranches, clone 95 from Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard, Old Went clone from Durell Vineyard, and clone 95 from Gap's Crown Vineyard. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented, native yeast, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged 10 months on lees with regular stirring during the first three months of fermentation and aging in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfinned. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Heady aromas of fresh-cut apple, pear, nectarine and citrus blossom. Offers both richness and eloquence, featuring flavors of lemon, pineapple, honey and crème brûlée. Slightly creamy, with integrated acidity and some finishing length.* **91.**

**2016 Sojourn Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.1% alc., pH 3.44, TA 0.69, 400 cases, \$45. Clone 95 from Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard, planted in 1998, and Old Wente clone from Sangiacomo Vella Ranch and Green Acres. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented, native yeast, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Eye-opening aromas of apple, lemon, sea shell and cold steel. Discrete richness with a gracious attitude, featuring fresh apple and citrus flavors lifted by spirited acidity and complimented by a deft touch of oak. This sleek wine has a delightful spring in its step.* **93.**



**2016 Sojourn Reuling Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.56, 150 cases, \$69. Vineyard planted in 2000 under direction of Mark Aubert and Peter Michael Winery. 12.2 acres of Pinot Noir and 2.2 acres of Chardonnay. The Chardonnay originated from the famed Montrachet Vineyard in Burgundy. Sandy Goldridge soils. Whole cluster pressed, native yeast, barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged in French oak barrels, 50% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Rather austere nose initially, opening in the glass over time to offer aromas of lemon rind, fresh peach and. Rich and creamy on the palate with delicious flavors of golden apple, lemon, pear, honey and nut oil. This wine is eager to send a message of pleasure and easily seduces the senses. Dreamy balance makes for effortless drinking. The quenching finish is lively and spirited. Even better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with more nuances emerging.* **95**



**2015 Three Sticks Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.63, 398 cases, \$55. Released August 15, 2017. Old Wente and 76 clones. The Old Wente grapes come from one of the oldest, coldest and windiest sections of Durell Vineyard. Clone 76 comes from the rocky flatland on the northeastern side of the vineyard. 100% malolactic conversion. Barrel fermented and aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Breezy aromas of nut oil, lemon, grapefruit, pineapple and apple. Ripe flavors of pineapple and tropical fruits with a touch of caramel and pistachio. A hedonistic style, yet possessing lifted acidity that leads to a bright, spicy conclusion.* **95.**



**2015 Three Sticks Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 14.4% alc., pH 3.38, TA 0.61, 145 cases, \$55. Released August 17, 2017. Dijon clones 76 and 124. Barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Terrific perfume of lemon peel, cut green apple, ocean air, flint and the slightest barrel note. A spirited wine with serious extract of lemon, pineapple and green apple in step with bracing acidity resulting in welcome congeniality. The vivid fruit flavors are accented with subtle tastes of caramel and vanilla creme. This wine offers both redeeming features of great Chardonnay: a mineral-inflected, acid-driven character and a deep well of fruit.* **96.**



**2015 Tye Wine Cellars Estate Willamette Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 300 cases, \$20. Released June 2017. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of white peach, pear, lemon curd, fresh straw and a faint hint of band-aid. Full richness in the mouth with flavors of lemon, pear, pineapple and nut oil. Nicely integrated acidity with a bright stream of citrus on the finish.* **89.**

# Pinot Briefs

**Pigs & Pinot** Charlie Palmer's 13th annual Pigs & Pinot Weekend will be Friday, March 16, and Saturday, March 17, 2018. Held at the Hotel Healdsburg, over 60 wineries and 20 chefs will showcase their talents. Chefs include Trevor Bird (FABLE Kitchen), Susan Feninger (Border Grill, Blue Window), Rick Moonen (RM Seafood, Rx Boiler Room), and Bryan Voltaggio (VOLT, Lunchbox, Family Meal, RANGE and AGGIO). All net proceeds benefit Share Our Strength, as well as a specific focus on North Bay and wine country fire relief funds. Alaska Airlines VISA Signature cardholder pre-sale will be Wednesday, January 10, 2018, at 10:00 AM PST. General Sale will be Thursday, January 11, 2018, at 11:00 AM PST. Weekend hotel packages and individual event tickets sell out almost immediately every year. Visit [www.pigsandpinot.com](http://www.pigsandpinot.com) for further information.



**Jason Kesner Takes Over Winemaking at Kistler Vineyards** Steve Kistler and Managing Partner, Bill Price, of Kistler Vineyards jointly announced that Steve is stepping down as CEO and Director of Winemaking in December 2017, after 39 years of managing the iconic winery he founded in 1978. Steve will focus on winemaking at his family's Occidental brand, crafting Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir with his daughters, Catherine and Elizabeth. Jason Kesner has been an apprentice to Steve Kistler over the past nine years. Kistler produces single vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir that are available exclusively to mailing list members, with a small amount sold to high quality restaurants and retail stores in select markets throughout the country. To learn more, visit [www.kistlervineyards.com](http://www.kistlervineyards.com). Mark Bixler, the co-founder of Kistler Vineyards, died in 2017.



**UC Davis Creates Wine Price Database** A new crowdsourcing database of historic wine prices is now available from UC Davis. The central focus of the database are more than 200 digitized catalogs of famed New York-based distributor Sherry-Lehmann, the most comprehensive online database of its kind. Price the Vintage is the second phase of another wine-related, digital crowdsourcing project led by the Library. Label This catalogue thousands of wine labels from the collection of the late Maynard Amerine, a world-renowned

viticulture and enology professor at UC Davis. The UC Davis library holds over 30,000 wine books and special collections of rare manuscripts, maps and imprints on wine dating back as far as 1450. Visit [www.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ucdavis.edu).

## Wine & Health News in 2017

\*A study published in the journal *Nature* found in mice that the byproduct of alcohol metabolism, acetaldehyde, can break and damage DNA within blood stem cells, permanently altering the DNA sequences within these cells. When healthy stem cells develop faulty DNA, it is known that they can give rise to cancerous cells. It is believed that some cancers develop due to DNA damage in stem cells. The body normally counteracts the effect of acetaldehyde by enzymatic breakdown with aldehyde dehydrogenases. The body's defense also includes DNA repair systems and can fix and reverse different types of DNA damage.

\*In November, 2017, the Cancer Prevention Committee of the American Society of Clinical Oncology recommended minimizing drinking alcohol, claiming it is a "modifiable risk factor for cancer." This report was then sensationalized by the press, with the *Wall Street Journal* claiming in a headline, "Just One Drink Can Harm." The international Scientific Forum on Alcohol Research responded, "An individual will need to weigh the modest risks of light to moderate alcohol use on breast cancer development against the beneficial effects on cardiovascular disease to make the best personal choice regarding alcohol consumption. The smart choice for women may be to have a glass of wine with dinner and not stress over it. The American Cancer Society recommends limiting alcohol consumption to one drink per day for women or two drinks per day for men.

\*Research published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* in 2017 looked at alcohol consumption and breast cancer risk by family history of breast cancer and folate intake in younger women. The results indicated that for women with a first-degree relative with breast cancer, the data indicated that if they maintain a high level of folate intake, it may attenuate an increase in risk of breast cancer associated with alcohol intake.

\*Alcohol may be associated with skin cancer although studies to date have had varying results. One meta-analysis found the risk of basal cell carcinoma increased by 7% and squamous cell carcinoma increased by 11% for every increase in intake of a standard beer or small glass of wine. Another study found a 20% increase in melanoma in drinkers compared to abstainers with increased risk in heavy drinkers. Although it is known that acetaldehyde can cause DNA damage in skin cells, is not clear whether alcohol is the cause of skin cancer or a bystander (with ultraviolet light the primary cause). Red wine may actually protect against skin cancer because the consumption of foods and wine rich in polyphenol antioxidants may confer protection against ultraviolet damage to the skin. One German study looked at the topical application of red wine and found minimal benefit (you have to drink it).

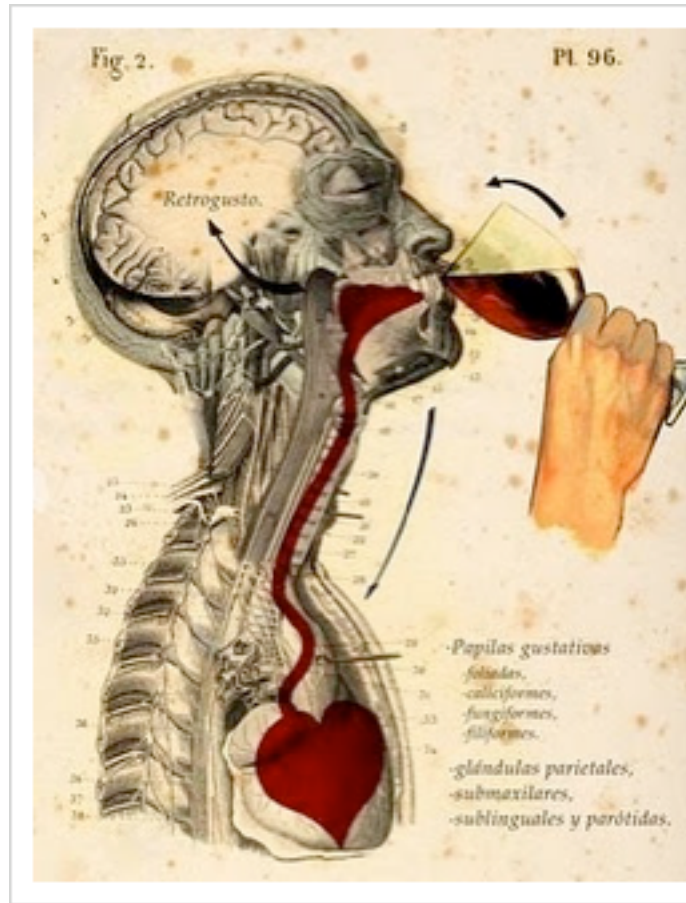
\*An important study published in the *Journal of American College of Cardiology* found that compared with lifetime abstainers, those who were light or moderate alcohol consumers were at a reduced risk of all-cause and cardiovascular-specific mortality in U.S. adults. The authors of the study showed a clear J-shaped curve for the relationship of alcohol to mortality, with lower total, cardiovascular, and even cancer mortality rates for light and moderate drinkers who do not binge drink. Another study published in *Health Affairs*, found that moderate drinking (14 drinks a week for men and fewer than seven drinks per week for women) in combination with a healthy weight and avoidance of smoking cigarettes may add as much as seven years to one's life.

\*Research in 2017 indicated that people who drink wine in moderation lower their risk of developing dementia but it is unknown why this is true. It is speculated that resveratrol provides neuro-protective qualities in individuals at risk for dementia. One study found that compared with non-drinkers, people with early stages of mental decline due to age who consumed 1.5 glass of wine a day showed more activity in the regions of the brain that control memory.

\*A study published in the *European Journal of Epidemiology* confirmed the recommendation of abstinence during pregnancy as the safest option. However, an occasional drink or very light alcohol during pregnancy, especially after the first trimester, should not be over-dramatized and one needs just common sense. A Chinese meta-analysis on the current research on the aging brain and alcohol found that wine had a protective effect against dementia when consumed in moderation while beer drinkers were found to have an increased risk over non-drinkers.

The words of Curtis Ellison, M.D., Professor of Medicine & Public Health at the Boston University School of Medicine continue to ring true: "For middle-aged and older people essentially all well-done studies continue to support beneficial health effects of wine when consumed in a sensible fashion: small amounts consumed every

support beneficial health effects of wine when consumed in a sensible fashion: small amounts consumed every day, especially with meals.

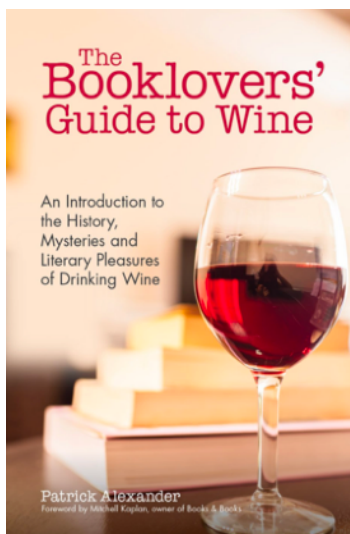


**Santa Cruz Mountains Debuts Wine Trail Signage** Those of you who have traveled the winding, highly forested roads in the Santa Cruz Mountains where GPS is of little assistance, will be happy to hear this news. The Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers Association (SCMWA) and the City of Saratoga announced the installation of new wine trail signage in and around the City of Saratoga. These signs are the first phase of a planned Santa Cruz Mountains Regional Wine Trail network to help visitors more easily locate wineries throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains American Viticulture Area. Future phases of the Santa Cruz Mountains Regional Wine Trail network are planned for the Summit Road area, Sea to Summit wineries, Pacific Coastal, Surf city and Corralitos Wine Trails. The wine trail signage will be integrated into future mobile tools at [www.SCMWA.com](http://www.SCMWA.com). There are currently more than 70 member wineries in the SCMWA.

**Santa Cruz Mountains AVA Winter/Spring Events 2018** On Saturday, January 20, the Santa Cruz Mountains January Passport Celebration Day will be held. Participating wineries will welcome passport aficionados into more than 50 tasting rooms, each offering a unique Passport Celebration Day winery experience. The Passport Celebration Days (held four times a year) are a unique opportunity to taste wines at wineries that are usually not open to the public. Passports are valid for 1 year, all year round during winery hours of operations, and can be purchased for \$65 each at [www.scmwa.com/event/january-2018-passport/](http://www.scmwa.com/event/january-2018-passport/). A second Passport Celebration Day returns on Saturday, April 21, 2018. The Silicon Valley Wine Auction and Taste of the Mountains Grand Tasting will be held Sunday, May 20, 2018. Visit [www.siliconvalleywineauction.org](http://www.siliconvalleywineauction.org) for details.

# Wine Books for the New Year

## **The Booklovers' Guide to Wine: An Introduction to the History, Mysteries & Literary Pleasures of Drinking Wine**

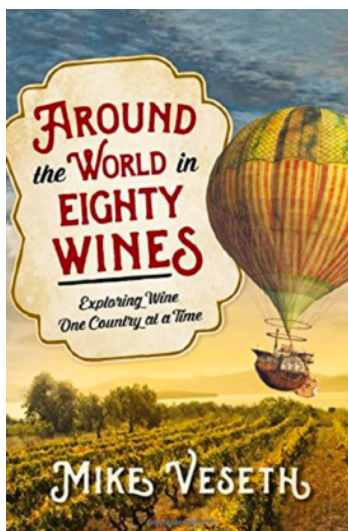


This basic introduction to wine was inspired by a 6-week course given by the author at Books & Books, a noted bookstore in Coral Gables, Florida. I emphasize the word “Basic,” since this book is essentially an introduction to wine. Topics include tasting wine, making wine, history of wine, description of varietals with literary pairings, and food pairing are covered succinctly. There are better books available on all these topics, but this guide offers accurate, brief synopses.

The book is replete with quotes and facts, accompanied by a few tables. Many common wine terms are defined. Some statistics are outdated as is common with books: the number of Oregon wineries is stated as 544 and there are now over 700 wineries in Oregon.

Published in 2017, cloth bound, 377 pages, \$19.95. Score: 87.

## **Around the World in Eighty Wines: Exploring Wine One Country at a Time**





Accomplished wine writer, Mike Veseth, uses Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* as his inspiration for this historical travelogue. Veseth is an authority on global wine markets and publishes *The Wine Economist*, a highly-rated wine blog at [www.WineEconomist.com](http://www.WineEconomist.com).

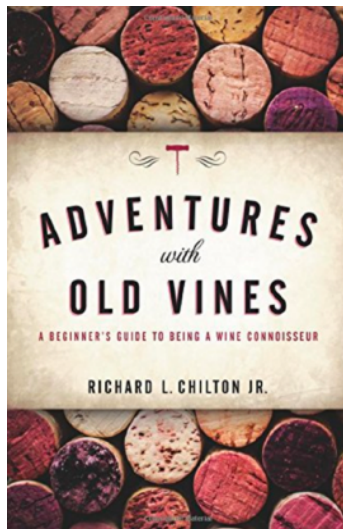
The book is written in an academic style in the context of the history of many major wine regions of the world. Both major wine countries like France, Italy, Spain and North America are on the itinerary as well as countries less well known for wine such as Lebanon, Thailand, India and China.

The featured wines are chosen to be representative of each country with additional suggestions offered in the last chapter that assesses the journey, "Victory or Defeat?"

Veseth is an extremely good writer with a wealth of wine knowledge. Still, this book is in introduction to the world's wine regions and readers will need to look elsewhere for in-depth coverage. That said, even the most accomplished connoisseur will enjoy the trip.

Published in 2017, cloth bound, 193 pages, \$24.95. Score: **90**.

## **Adventures with Old Vines: A Beginner's Guide to Being a Wine Connoisseur**



Richard Chilton, Jr., is a vineyard owner in the Napa Valley and a partner in Hourglass Wine Co.. This book represents a compilation of the wine experience he has accumulated over the past forty years.

There are introductory chapters on buying wine, storing and collecting wine, tasting wine, wine fraud, deciphering a wine list and how wine is made, but his book is primarily a reference book with the body devoted to "Benchmark Wines." Many classic wines include a detailed three-to-four page description of the producer and the producer's key wines and best vintages. The emphasis is on Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, and Napa Cabernet Sauvignon. This part of the book would prove to be a valuable reference for those wanting to purchase older wines from some of the world's most notable producers.

Published in 2017, cloth bound, 269 pages, \$24.95. Score: **91**.

A few more books: *The New Wine Rules: A Genuinely Helpful Guide to Everything You Need to Know*, by Jon Bonné. *9000 Years of Wine: A World History*, by Rod Phillips. *The Wine Lover's Daughter: A Memoir*, by Anne Fadiman. *Wine Revolution: The World's Best Organic, Biodynamic and Natural Wines*, by Jane Anson. *The Dirty Guide to Wine: Following Flavor from Ground to Glass*, by Alice Feiring.

The best book I read this year: *In Vino Duplicitas: The Rise and Fall of a Wine Forger Extraordinaire*, by Peter Hellman. Score: **99**.