



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

Volume 11, Issue 20 March 19, 2018

A sip of Pinot is worth a 1,000 words

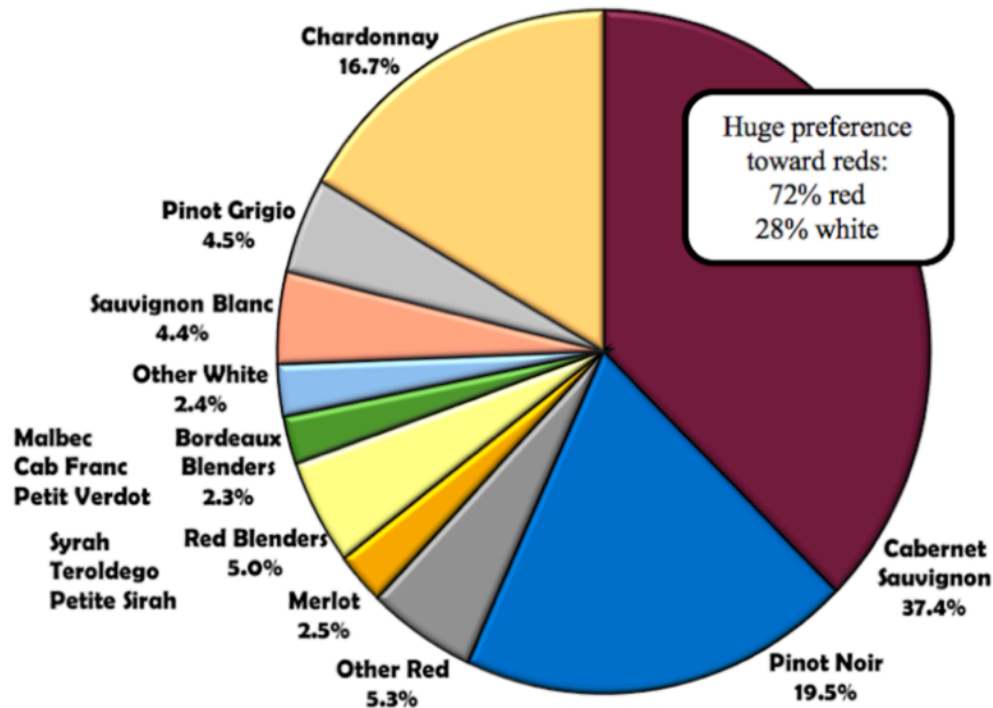
California Pinot Noir: The Good, Bad and Downright Ugly

The Good News

California Grape Crush Reports indicate that California crushed 253,995 tons of Pinot Noir in 2016, compared to 32,295 tons of Pinot Noir crushed in 1990. The variety has steadily increased in popularity, even before 'Sideways' provided a boost in 2004. As of 2016, there were a total of 44,578 acres of Pinot Noir planted in California according to the California Agricultural Statistics Service.'

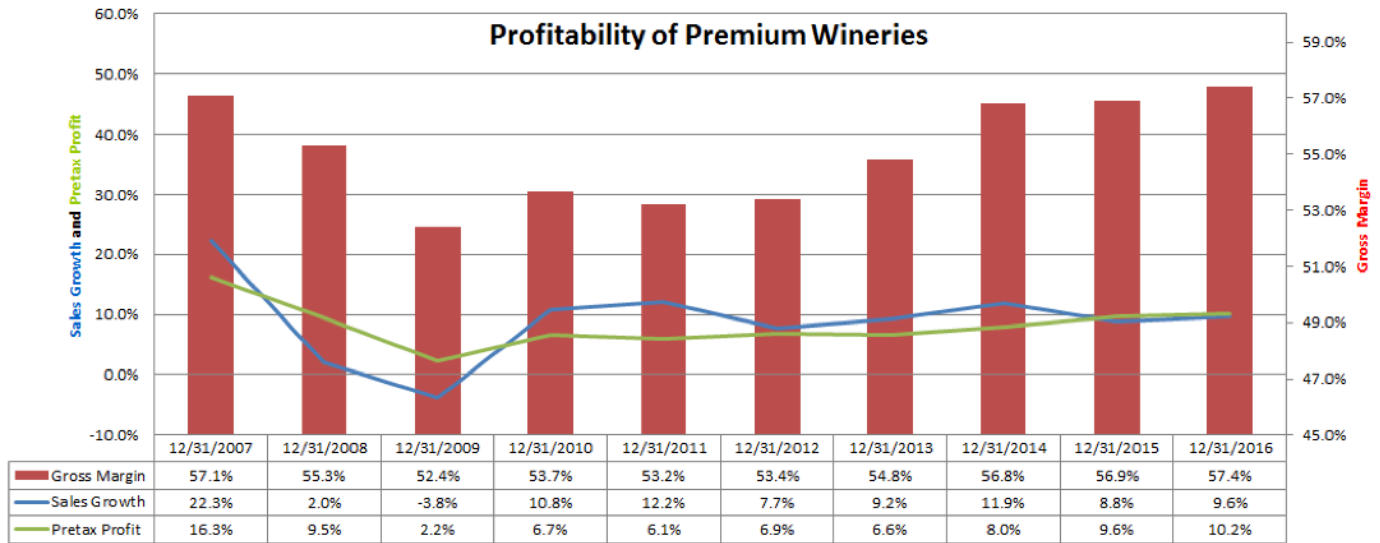
Pinot Noir vines sold by nurseries in California in 2017 were second only to Cabernet Sauvignon indicating planting and re-planting of Pinot Noir continues at a significant pace. Pinot Noir has shown a 65% increase in plantings in California over the ten years from 2006 to 2015.

19,000,000 Winegrape Vines Were Sold by CA Nurseries in 2017



Source: Allied Grape Growers presentation at 2018 Unified Symposium

With the premiumization wine in general including Pinot Noir has come a gradually increasing profitability of premium wineries since the fall-off from 2008 to 2012 back to 2007 levels although sales growth and profit has still not reached 2007 levels:



Source: SVB on Wine : <http://svbwine.blogspot.com/2017/09/how-much-did-wineries-really-make-in.html>

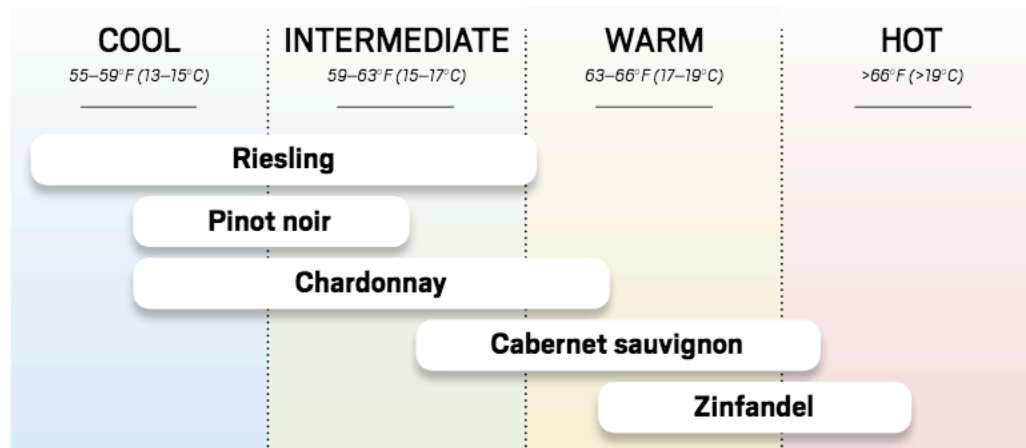
Michael Jappy wrote at www.vintagecellars.com.au about “The Rise and Rise of Pinot Noir” this in 2017. He said, “Pinot has taken the wine world by storm of late and continues paradoxically to entice, to captivate and to confuse many wine consumers. Good Pinot is haunting....enchanted....ethereal....sensual....and caresses the palate. Good Pinot makes you stop in your tracks.” The good news is that the allure of Pinot Noir will always be strong enough to attract those who appreciate fine wine.

The Bad News

Climate change and with it warm temperatures is a growing concern among Pinot Noir winegrowers. Average Pinot Noir is particularly heat sensitive and thrives only within a specific and narrow temperature range. Elin McCoy penned an article in 2014, “Too Hot for Pinot Noir,” in Bloomberg Markets, https://elinmccoy.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/11_a_environment_drinks_rfp.pdf. The following chart shows the growing-season average temperature tolerances provided by climate scientist Gregory V. Jones:

IN THE ZONE

Each variety of grape thrives in a specific temperature range, and pinot noir’s niche is narrow.



Growing-season average temperature tolerances. Source: Gregory V. Jones

Winemaker Wes Hagen, formerly of Clos Pepe in the Sta. Rita Hills and now at J. Wilkes in the Santa Maria Valley wrote a piece on the winery blog on how Pinot Noir fares following a late-season heat spike in 2017: <http://jwilkes.com/how-does-a-late-season-heat-spike-and-an-unexpected-rainstorm-impact-the-2017-vintage/>. He points out that Pinot Noir is particularly heat-sensitive in the weeks leading up to harvest. Sugar levels can spike dramatically within a day or two when temperatures exceed 90 degrees due to dehydration. Warm nights can also rob Pinot Noir of acidity so acidulation may be necessary to replace the acid lost to the night's warmth. Irrigation is necessary to try to mitigate the impact of heat on the vines.

Warmth during the harvest season can result in over-ripeness, necessitating alcohol reduction or the addition of water to fermenters to reduce the alcohol level in the finished wine.

Another bit of bad news is the escalating cost of Pinot Noir grapes. The average price per ton for Pinot Noir in Sonoma County was \$3,680 in 2016 according to Glenn McCourty, a winegrowing advisor. Currently, winemaker Adam Lee told me that average price of desirable Pinot Noir grapes is \$4,000 a ton in Sonoma County. But, there were significantly more sales of Pinot Noir grapes in Sonoma County over \$7,000 a ton than below \$3,000 a ton. Winemakers are getting squeezed by growers forcing them to raise their wine prices.

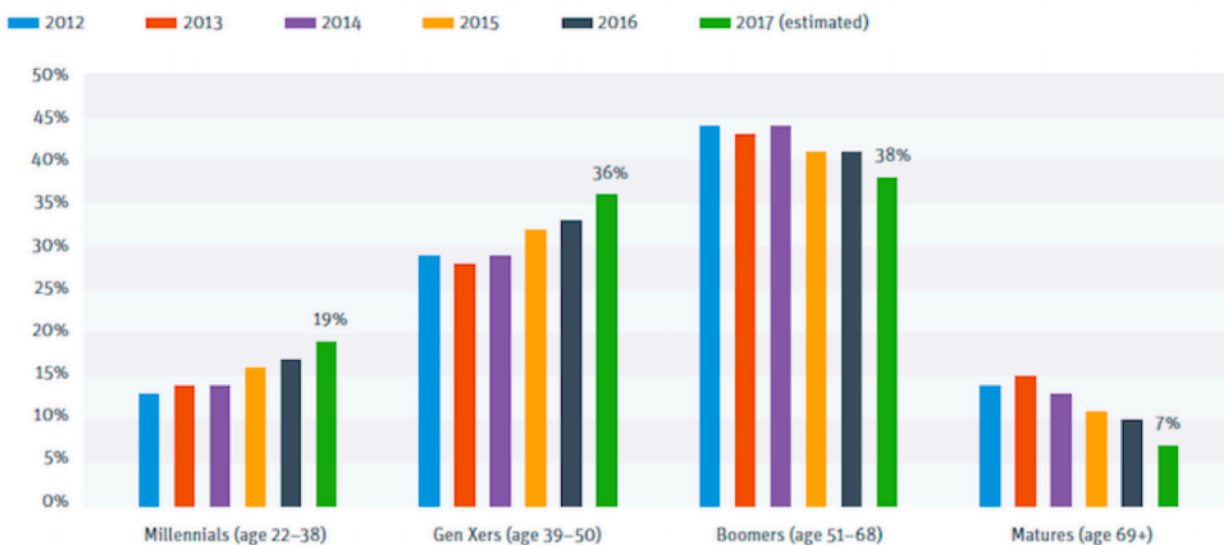
This escalation in pricing has led a number of my readers to respond such as in an email I received recently: "My concern is that the price of good Pinot Noir is skyrocketing so high that it will soon be impossible to find reasonably priced daily drinkers, especially Pinot Noir that we love with dinner." The average price of the 2016 California Pinot Noir All-Americans in the PinotFile was \$70 with 12% of the All-Americans priced at \$100 or more. The consumer is hoping that Pinot Noir pricing is close to peaking.

Even established wineries are having more difficulty selling premium Pinot Noir. The problem has been compounded by the disappearance of small distributors and the shrinkage in number of distributors and many wineries have turned to selling direct to consumers but not always with great results.

Direct-to-Consumer Survey by Silicon Valley Bank for 2016 shows that millennials are not buying wine at the rate of Boomers or Gen X. This may not be as bad as it seems for millennials have often not reached the age where they have significant spendable income to purchase fine wine.

Reality Check: Millennials are no where near Boomers or GenX for share of wine purchased

Figure 16: Cohort share of wine purchased



Source: SVB 2016 Direct-to-Consumer Survey

Source: Silicon Valley Bank 2018 Wine Industry Report

The Ugly News

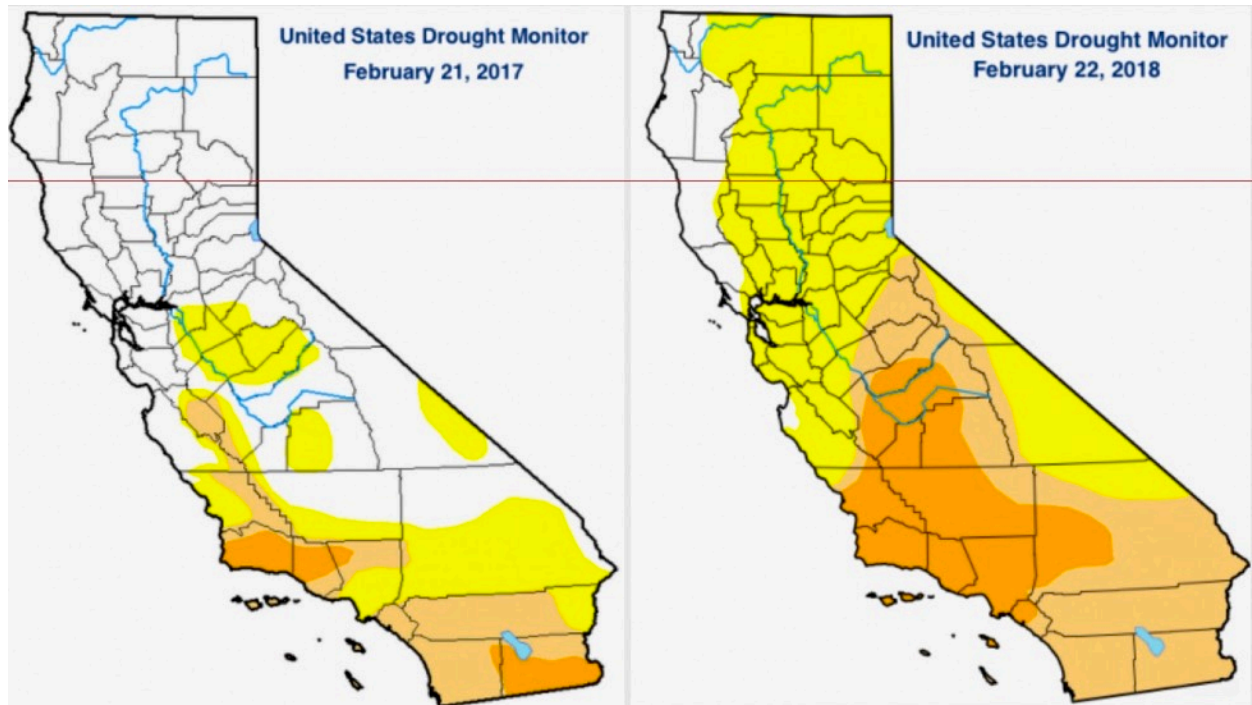
According to Turrentine Brokerage, a consultancy bulk wine and grape brokering company that assists grower and winery clients with supply challenges, the 2012 Crush Report indicated that the Central Valley of California produced 12,730 tons of Pinot Noir from 24 bearing acres in 2012 or 530 tons per acre! Reporting of acreage numbers is voluntary, however, so the most reasonable estimate is that mature Pinot Noir vineyards in the Central Valley averaged ten tons per acre in 2012. Contrast this with many Pinot Noir vineyards in the coastal areas of California that produce between 2.5 and 6 tons per acre or even less.

Winemaker Wes Hagen put it bluntly, “They do grow Pinot Noir in hot California regions for cheap, awful plonk that can be accurately described by its varietal’s name.” With the high demand for Pinot Noir grapes from coastal California that are in limited supply, producers may have to turn to using Pinot Noir grapes from the Central Valley that are of lower quality but inexpensive. Glenn McCourty has cautioned that this potential trend may have a damaging long-term effect on the image and popularity of California Pinot Noir.

There is a flood of second label, negotiant, and bulk-produced Pinot Noir wines in the marketplace that are unremarkable. As Australian writer Michael Jappy said, “Bad Pinot Noir is more common than the winter cold.” These wines can lead the consumer to ask, “What’s the big deal about Pinot Noir?” (Later in this issue there is my review of some “supermarket” Pinot Noir wines currently offered and the findings support the widespread production of Pinot Noir plonk.)

Because of the 75% rule, not all “value” Pinot Noir is made with 100% Pinot Noir grapes. The popular Meiomi brand California Pinot Noir production is about 1 million cases annually. It is impossible to source that much California Pinot Noir with the current planted acreage - just saying.

I could go on - there are issues with the drought, immigrant labor, intrusion of marijuana growers, and vine pests such as Red Blotch Grapevine Virus - but those subjects will be approached in future issues.



California Pinot Noir Worth Toasting

I have reiterated to readers a number of times how my wine drinking lifetime of close to fifty years coincided with the dramatic rise in excellence of California Pinot Noir. That said, the joyous ride is not over. There continues to be an embarrassment of riches and today's overall consistent quality of California Pinot Noir has never been more extraordinary. The bar has moved to such lofty heights that large numbers of premium California Pinot Noir now receive scores of 90 or above.

As winemakers continue to strive for perfection in Pinot Noir, consumers can rejoice. It's time to toast our blessings!

Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards, Malibu, CA

Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards, established in 2005, has emerged as one of the leading producers in the Malibu Coast, a region that attained AVA status in 2014. Proprietor Elliott Dolin grew up Northern New Jersey and became an accomplished musician, working with Donna Fargo Ray Price and Brenda Lee as well as playing on recording sessions alongside Nashville's top session players. He began to invest in real estate, moved to California and transitioned into a career in commercial real estate investment. After meeting his spouse, Lynn, in the early 1990s, he developed a passion for wine and became active in restoring vintage cars.

In 2006, while restoring his recently purchased Malibu home, he saw the opportunity to grow Chardonnay and three years later, Dolin Estate Chardonnay was born.

After the first three vintages of Chardonnay, the winery expanded production to include Pinot Noir from notable Santa Maria Valley vineyards. Winemaker Kirby Anderson joined the winery in 2010 and helped expand production into Central Coast Pinot Noir in 2012. A graduate of University of California at Davis, Anderson honed his winemaking skills working at Buena Vista Winery, Bernardus Winery and La Crema. In 1997, he became the winemaker for Gainey Vineyard in Santa Ynez, CA, leaving in 2008 to become a winemaking consultant.

Dolin wines are available on the winery website and through a mailing list at www.dolinestate.com. The winery's Chardonnays are reviewed later in this issue.

2013 Dolin Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.63, 340 cases, \$32. Sourced from Bien Nacido Vineyard. Dijon 667. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, fermentation in 1.3-ton open-top tanks, and aged 23 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Noticeable oak toast and spice frames the aromas of black raspberry and plum. Mid weight plus in concentration, featuring black stone and berry fruits engaged by gentle tannins. Plush and satiny in texture, with integrated alcohol and a modest finish. Oak plays too prominent a role in this wine and this may worsen as the wine ages so I recommend consuming it now. 87.*

2013 Dolin Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.61, 128 cases, \$45. Dijon 667. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, fermentation in 1.3-ton open-top tanks, and aged 21 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Very nice perfume of purple and black fruits with a complimentary floral note. A charming wine with a tasty mid weight core of black cherry, black raspberry, black grape and spice flavors sporting a silky texture, modest tannins and a gracious finish. The breeding of the grapes comes through in this wine. 92.*

2013 Dolin John Sebastiano Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 340 cases, \$45. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very ripe fruited, with aromas and flavors of dark berry jam, cassis and raisin. Mid weight plus in style offering a silky mouth feel and ingratiating tannins but not much finish. The fruit has a roasted quality and there is an additional tutti-fruity note. 87.*

Dutton-Goldfield, Sebastopol, CA

This distinguished winery began in a vineyard in 1998, when longtime colleagues and friends Steve Dutton and Dan Goldfield recognized a shared vision to craft wines that expressed the personalities of their vineyards. Dan has become something of a winemaker emeritus based on his many years of crafting wines from cool-climate vineyards in Sonoma County.



The annual production is focused on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with 75% of the grapes coming from Steve Dutton's over eighty Dutton Ranch vineyards, primarily in the Green Valley sub-appellation of the Russian River Valley.

A tasting room is open daily on Gravenstein North in Sebastopol. The wines are largely sold to a dedicated mailing list of wine enthusiasts. Visit www.dutton-goldfield.com.

2016 Dutton-Goldfield Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.58, \$44. Sourced from eight Dutton Ranch vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, 14 to 20 days on skins, and aged in French oak barrels, 40% new, for 10 months. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. This wine is aged in significant new oak and will need more time for the oak to integrate. At this stage, the nose offers aromas of dark cherry, spice, underbrush and woodshed. The mid weight flavors of black cherry, purple and black berries appeal but the wine is tight. Nicely balanced with caressing tannins and a short finish. Considerably better when re-tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with more aromatic goodness and more finish. There is no hurry to drink this wine now. 89.*

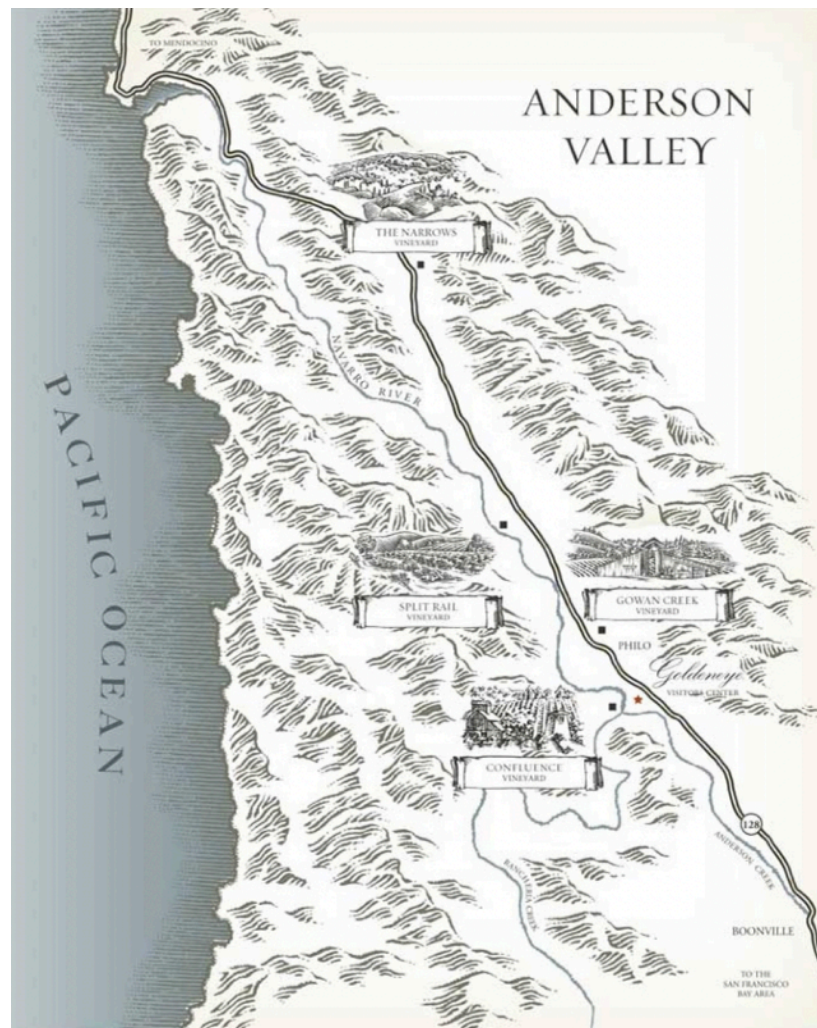
2015 Dutton-Goldfield Emerald Ridge Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.64, 602 cases, \$62. Clones are Pommard, 2A, and "828." 100% de-stemmed, open-top fermentation after a 5-day cold soak, each clone treated separately and later blended. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The wine was considerably more giving when tasted the following day after opening and my review will reflect that. Aromas of purple berries, spice, pine and savory herbs engage the drinker. Crafted in a mid weight plus style, with explosive flavors of black raspberry and blackberry that find every corner of the mouth. Impeccably balanced, with agreeable tannins, gracious acidity and a noticeably long finish replete with fresh fruit. Decant if you must drink now. 93.*

2015 Dutton-Goldfield Fox Den Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., pH 3.44, TA 0.68, 490 cases, \$62. The 8-acre vineyard sits just above the town of Occidental. Goldridge sandy loam soil. Planted in 2002 to 667, 777 and 115 at the home of Ed and Sue Smith. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, open-top fermentation, clonal blocks managed individually and aged 16 months in French oak

barrels, 55% new. Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Enticing aromas of ripe cranberry black raspberry rose petal, ground cocoa and vanilla. A luscious array of purple and black berry fruits greet the palate carrying over through an intensely fruity finish. Nicely composed, with a satiny texture and well-integrated tannins. The wine was considerably more appealing when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle showing more fruit and spice in the nose, a seductively soft mouth feel and a seamless character. Decant if you must drink now. **92.**

Goldeneye Winery, Philo, CA

Goldeneye was founded in 1996 by Dan and Margaret Duckhorn who believed the Anderson Valley had the potential to be one of the finest regions in the world for growing Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir is now sourced from four estate vineyards within the Anderson Valley: Gowan Creek in the heart of the Anderson Valley on the valley floor, Confluence located on both hillside and valley floor sections, Split Rail located riverside on the valley floor, and The Narrows located in the very cool, northern “deep end” of the valley surrounded by redwood forests. The entire Pinot Noir program encompasses 200 vine acres and more than 24 distinctive clones.



Single-vineyard bottlings are offered from each of the estate vineyards. When blended together in the Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, the representation of the region as a whole is brought to light. The Ten Degrees bottling is a reserve selection.

The current winemaker is Michael Accurso, who joined the winery in 2012 and worked alongside previous winemaker Michael Fay. He also managed vineyards for a number of wineries including Copain and Littorai while a vineyard manager for Ardzrooni Vineyard Management.

The picturesque Goldeneye tasting room is located in Philo overlooking the Confluence Vineyard. Visitors are welcome daily. Visit www.goldeneyewinery.com. The wines reviewed here were cellared and bottled by Goldeneye in Hopland, CA.

2015 Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 12,723 cases, \$58. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Flattering aromas of black raspberry, plum, earthy flora, dried herbs and a dash of oak. A giving, congenial wine with mid-weight flavors of black raspberry, black cherry and ripe strawberry. Silky and embraceable, as well as balanced, with a decent but not extraordinary finish. 90.*

2015 Goldeneye Gowan Creek Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$84. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 65% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry fruit and oak-driven vanilla, cigar and warm spices. Modest in weight with an explosive attack of black cherry fruit that veers to the ripe side. The fruit sap is wrapped in luxurious toasty oak in the typical Goldeneye style. Discreet tannins allow for drinking now. 91.*

2015 Goldeneye Confluence Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$84. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 60% new. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Alluring aromas of black cherry, rose petal perfume, and oak spice and vanilla. Sleek in the mouth with good vibrancy and freshness, offering a core of black cherry fruit that shows great purity and charm. The tannins are well matched to the sap, oak plies the background, and the finish is endowed with aromatic cherry goodness. 92.*

2015 Goldeneye The Narrows Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 437 cases, \$84. Located at the northernmost tip of the Anderson Valley in the “deep end.” Mature vines planted ten miles inland from the Mendocino Coast so there is a strong maritime influence including summer fog and cooler daytime temperatures. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Inviting scents of cherry, fruit bin, pasture and a hint of oak. Uplifting and gratifying, with good dark red fruit and spice exuberance and a sidecar of floral goodness. Refined and silky in the mouth with enough tannin to bolster the sap. Although accessible upon opening, this wine was considerably better when tasted several hours after opening. 93.*

2015 Goldeneye Split Rail Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 342 cases, \$84. 16 blocks and 9 clones in this vineyard located in the heart of the Anderson Valley. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Reserved, but gracious aromas of mixed berries, piney oak and a subtle floral note. Darker fruits are featured on the mid weight palate. Straight forward, fruity and pleasant with harmonious tannins, but not complex at this stage. Still reserved when tasted from an open bottle several hours later. Should be cellared for a year or two. 91.*

La Crema Winery, Santa Rosa, CA

La Crema, dating to 1979, is one of the most dependable brands in the Pinot Noir marketplace. The original name of the winery, La Crema Vinera or “Best of the Vine,” set the standard for the winery. A member of the Jackson Family Wines portfolio, this winery focuses solely on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from cool-climate appellations in California and Oregon.

La Crema wines are widely distributed in the retail marketplace. For years, there was a tasting room in Healdsburg. Now consumers can also visit the La Crema Estate at Saralee’s Vineyard in the Russian River Valley to sample La Crema wines. Visit www.lacrema.com for details.

2015 La Crema Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.76, TA 0.60, 11,850 cases, \$40, Sourced from 14 grower and estate vineyards spread across the Russian River Valley. Clones 777, Flowers, Pommard, 2A, 667, “828,” and 23. 100% de-stemmed, 3 to 5-day cold soak, fermented in open-top tanks, and aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 31% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Engaging scents of Bing cherry, baking spices and nut oil. Succulent and sweet dark cherry flavor with accents of spice, toast and anise. Easy to like in a middleweight style with complimentary tannins and an alluring cherry cola finish. Impressive quality at this scale of production. 89.*

2015 La Crema Panorama Vineyard Arroyo Seco Monterey County Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.74, TA 0.59, 761 cases, \$40. Sourced from selected blocks within the estate Panorama Vineyard. 100% de-stemmed, 3 to 5-day cold soak, fermented in open-top tanks, and aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 28% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose is earthbound with added fruit aromas of black cherry and*

ripe berries and a subtle infusion of Asian spice. An engaging wine with open arms, offering tasty black cherry, boysenberry and plum fruit flavors infused with the right amount of oak spice. Gracious and harmonious, with a noticeably extended finish. 90.

Maggy Hawk, Windsor, CA

This winery, part of the Jackson Family Wines portfolio, is unique in that only single clone Pinot Noir wines are offered from the Maggy Hawk Estate Vineyard. Each wine in the series is named for a horse born to Maggy Hawk, a winning thoroughbred. Readers know that I have a special fondness for the Maggy Hawk Pinot Noirs.

The vineyard is situated in Philo, in the “deep end” of the Anderson Valley among redwoods and is one of the last vineyards before one reaches the Pacific Ocean. It is a complex patchwork of different facings, slopes and clones. The soil is decomposed sandstone, known for exceptional drainage and low nutrients. In most vintages, yields are very low, no more than two tons per acre.

The winemaker is Elizabeth Douglas who joined La Crema in 2001, became the Director of Winemaker in 2010, and WindRacer more recently. The photo below shows her pouring at the Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival. I have toured the vineyard with Elizabeth and found she possesses a close bond with this special property. Elizabeth is a Canadian native who became one of the first to graduate from the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture program at Brock University in the Niagara Region of Ontario, Canada.



Maggy Hawk wines are available on an allocation basis to mailing list members. Visit www.maggyhawk.com. Taste the wines at the annual Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival.

2015 Maggy Hawk Stormin' Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 223 cases, \$66. Clone 667. This wine, from a 3.47-acre block, is typically intense and structured. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. A classic Pinot nose of spiced cherry and earthy flora. A big gulp of dark fruit goodness that is bold yet refined with gracious tannins and giving acidity. Satiny in the mouth, with noticeable oak backing, and a long finish. The majestic fruit is unusually concentrated for Pinot Noir. More desirable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle when the oak showed better integration. Decant or hold awhile in the cellar. 93.*



2015 Maggy Hawk Hawkster Anderson Valley Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., 495 cases, \$66. Clone Wädenswil 2A. A 6.18-acre block. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels.

Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Reserved, but pleasing aromas of forest and blackberry fruit. Both earthy and fruity, exhibiting a mid weight core of fresh black cherry and black raspberry sap clothed in gracious toasty oak. Soft and silken in the mouth with a notable juiciness and a big,

even giant, persistent finish. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, that glorious finish continued to grab my attention. 94.



2015 Maggy Hawk Graceful Lady Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 327 cases, \$66. Clone 777. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Energetic aromas of black cherry, cardamom spice and complimentary oak. Discreetly concentrated in a charming and poised style, with flavors of black cherry, black tea and spice. Highly accessible, with welcome elegance, a silky mouth feel and seamless integration of t n' a. "Graceful Lady" is an apropos name for this wine. Still highly aromatic and charming when sampled the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*



2015 Maggy Hawk Jolie Anderson Valley Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., 641 cases, \$66. Clone 115. A southeast facing 10.03-acre block that consistently produces the most nuanced and pretty Pinot Noir from the vineyard and always my favorite wine in the lineup. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels.

Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Lovely perfume of black cherry, clove, and Wassail spices, becoming more explosive over time in the glass. The mid weight black cherry essence is pure and vivid in the mouth, carrying over through an exceptionally long finish. Even better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine has

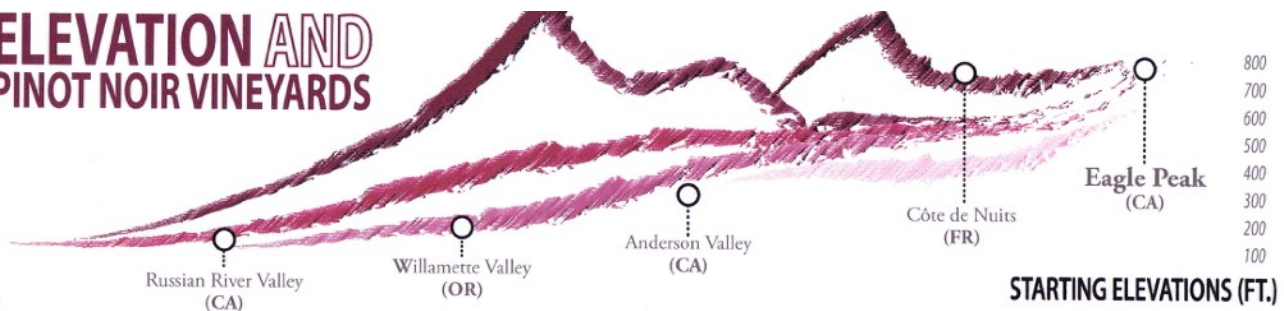
an aura that captivates me year in and year out. 94.

Masút Vineyard & Winery, Redwood Valley, CA

Third generation vintners Ben and Jake Fetzer began planting the first vineyards at Masút in 1997 and by the early 2000s, many wineries were beginning to see the potential of the site untapped for growing Pinot Noir. They spearheaded a petition for a new AVA called Eagle Peak Mendocino County (approved in 2014, Masút is the sole winery in the AVA), and converted a barn on their property to a wine making facility, becoming a bonded winery in 2009. They released their first vintage in 2011, dedicating it to their father, Robert Fetzer, who tragically passed in a rafting accident in 2006.

Masút is a Native American word meaning, "dark, rich earth."

ELEVATION AND PINOT NOIR VINEYARDS



The 1,200-acre Masút property features rugged, sloped terrain and fast-draining soils. Elevations rise from 800 feet to almost 2000 feet. 40 acres are planted to Pinot Noir, including Dijon clones 113, 115, 777, and Mariafeld, Mt. Eden, Swan and Masút clones, and Chardonnay including Wente and Dijon 96 clones.

I have followed the Fetzer brother's wines since the initial release and although the wines have always been very good, I have seen improvement due to maturity of vines and increasing winemaking acumen. The 2016 Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir is the culmination of years of hard work and is truly a magnificent wine that deserves a toast.

Masút wines are sold through the winery's online store at www.masut.com. Private tours and tasting are available by appointment.



2016 Masút Estate Vineyard Eagle Peak Mendocino County Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.58, TA 0.60, 3,100 cases, \$40. Clones are 115 (50%), 777, 113, Mt. Eden and Masút. 100% de-stemmed, 4 to 6-day cold soak, 10-day ferment, aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 32% new. *Gorgeous moderately dark garnet color in the glass.*

Irresistible aromas of boysenberry, blueberry-pomegranate, black grape juice, spice and forestry. A stunning wine in the mouth with a terrific attack, length and finish. The mid weight flavors of juicy purple and black berries seem to melt in the mouth. The sap is framed by a deft touch of oak and the velvety mouth feel is a turn on. This wine is great from the time you pull the cork and still great when tasted later in the day. This is the most exceptional wine from this producer I have tasted to date. I felt in the past that the Masút wines often leaned too much on oak, but this wine has none of that. You can feel the Fetzer boys' passion in this Pinot. 96.



Ram's Gate Winery, Sonoma, CA

Veteran winemaker Jeff Gaffney directs the wine program at this modern and progressive winery that is an inspiring showpiece in Sonoma Carneros. The winery works with marquee vineyards of Sonoma County and Carneros as well as the 28-acre estate vineyard planted to seven grape varieties.

The 2015 wines were released a bit later than in previous vintages to allow the wines to age longer in oak and bottle. This extended aging before release has led to wines that are ready to drink now and the entire Pinot Noir lineup is exceptional with the most outstanding offerings from this winery to date. Most wines exhibit exquisite balance, elegance, and juiciness and what I call "hug ability."

The 2015 Chardonnays are also noteworthy and are reviewed later in this issue. With fewer bottles available from the light crop in 2015, these wines will sell out quickly.

Appointments for tasting that includes food pairings are recommended and are held in several venues at the winery. The wines are sold at the winery and through a mailing list. Visit www.ramsgatewinery.com.

2015 Ram's Gate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.5, TA 0.59, 670 cases, \$46. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Many aromatic nuances show up on the nose including boysenberry, black raspberry, grilled beef, underbrush and earthiness. Rather rich and jammy with a core of brooding black fruits, dark chocolate and black tea flavors framed by genteel tannins. Sleek in the mouth, with a modest finish. 89.*

2015 Ram's Gate Estate Carneros Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.59, 188 cases, \$78. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose shows off aromas of cherry, raspberry, toast and coffee. Oak-kissed cherry and red berry fruit form the vibrant and juicy core of this wine. Forward drinking, with silken tannins and a cherry-driven finish. Oak intercedes a little too much in what otherwise is a very charming wine. 92.*

2015 Ram's Gate Roberts Road Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.58, 178 cases, \$72. Located in the Petaluma Gap AVA, this vineyard dates to 1999 and is farmed by the Sangiacomo family. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Seductive aromas of cherry, strawberry and warm spices are engaging. The flavors echo the aromas in a mid weighted wine with impressive length in the mouth, leaving behind a long, juicy, cherry-fueled finish. The mouth feel is soft and relaxing. The load of fruit sap is kept in check by adroit acidity so that the wine is balletic and fresh in character. 93.*

2015 Ram's Gate Gap's Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., pH 3.30, TA 0.58, 333 cases, \$72. A new addition to the Rams Gate portfolio. This vineyard is located in the Petaluma Gap AVA and consists of 138 acres ranging in elevation from 300 to 840 feet above sea level. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Reserved aromas of black cherry, blackberry, plum and old cellar entice. Plump and luxurious, yet suave and caressing in the mouth, with a boat load of dark fruit. The sap is balanced with a backbone of fine-grain tannins and gracious acidity as well as supportive oak. I can't emphasize enough the intensity of fruit flavor and must score the wine high simply on fruit audacity. Like Olympic figure skater Nathan Chen this wine pushes the envelope.* **93.**

2015 Ram's Gate El Diablo Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.59, 325 cases, \$76. This property is maintained by Ulises Valdez. Vines here were planted in 2006 on steep slopes in gravelly, rocky clay over sandy loam soils. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, red berry, spice and a dash of toast lead to a middleweight styled wine with a serious attack of well-spiced red and purple fruits backed by a firm tannic grip. Nicely composed with good harmony, offering an amazingly persistent finish with fruit holding on for dear life.* **93.**



2015 Ram's Gate Silver Eagle Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.30, TA 0.61, 132 cases, \$76. This property is managed by Ulises Valdez. Located in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley region, the vines were planted in 2007 near the town of Occidental just 6 miles from the coast. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass.*

Appealing perfume of cherry, allspice, and earthy flora. A complete wine with luscious black cherry and black raspberry fruit flavors that strike an impression. The fruit is infused with exotic spices that hold interest. Bold on the attack, lengthy in the mouth, and finishing with purpose and generosity. **94.**



2015 Ram's Gate Bush Crispo Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.58, 497 cases, \$76. Vines are rooted in stony loam soil on an elevated bench with optimal drainage. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of cherry, baking spice and prune. Light to mid weight flavors of black cherry and purple berry that veer to very ripe territory. Nicely balanced, with an elegant demeanor, a soft texture, a compliment of nutty oak and a lingering finish.* **92.**

Sante Arcangeli Family Wines, Corralitos, CA

This family winery is an accomplished producer of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, primarily produced from vineyards in the Corralitos region of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Pronounced "SAHNtay Are CAN Juh Lee," the winery is named after a real person, winemaker John Benedetti's great grandfather. He built an historic business in the small farming town of Pescadero on the coast of California. Sante Arcangeli's grandson, Norm Benedetti and his spouse Shirley, guided the business to become known as Arcangeli Grocery Company, a world-famous bakery and gourmet market. It is now owned by Sante's great grandchildren, John's brothers Mike and Don.

The winery was named after John's great grandfather as a means of honoring all those in his family who came before him. John taught himself to brew beer in his late teens and segued into wine in his mid-30s with the guidance of winemaker Ryan Beauregard, the Brassfield family, and winemaker James MacPhail.

The winery's quaint tasting room in Pescadero is open Friday-Sunday. See Prince in photo - he gets around. Visit www.santewinery.com to purchase wines, or visit the Arcangeli Grocery Company in Pescadero for a unique experience.

2016 Sante Arcangeli Split Rail Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.63 175 cases, \$49. Vineyard is located in Corralitos five miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. 20 to 30-year-old dry-farmed vines planted in gray sandstone and clay soils at 1700 feet elevation. Harvest Brix 23.0°-24.5°. Martini, Mt. Eden, Swan, 2A, 32, Pommard 4 and David Bruce selection. 95% de-stemmed., native and inoculated yeast fermentation, aged 10 months on lees in French oak barrels, 28% new. Bottled unfiltered and

unfiltered. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Aromas of cherry anointed with oak-driven toast and burnt tobacco. Light in weight in a fresh and juicy style featuring red cherry and strawberry fruit flavors overlain with a pushy tobacco note. The silky personality appeals as does the slightly tart and quenching finish, but there is just too much oak at the forefront at this stage. More time in bottle may ameliorate some of the aggressive oak but this wine was unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **88.**



2016 Sante Arcangeli Integrato Barrel Selection Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 350 cases, \$39. Sourced from Lester Family, McConnell, Saveria and Herr vineyards. A barrel selection from single-vineyard lots. Clones 2A, Swan, "828," 667, 115 and Mt. Eden. Harvest Brix 23.0°-25.0°. 95% de-stemmed. 10% *saignee*. Native and inoculated yeast fermentation. Aged 10 months on lees in French oak barrels, 33% new. Filtered at bottling. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Leading off are aromas of black cherry, toast and pipe smoke. The barrel management is more commendable in this mid weight wine featuring a core of vivacious black cherry and black raspberry fruits. The attack has purpose, the tannins are harmonious, the appealing texture is sleek, and the finish is highly notable for its intensity.* **90.**

Sea Smoke Estate Vineyards, Lompoc, CA

Sea Smoke wines are produced from the winery's organic and biodynamic certified Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard that contains ten clones of Pinot Noir. Winemaker Don Schroeder has been at Sea Smoke since 2003.

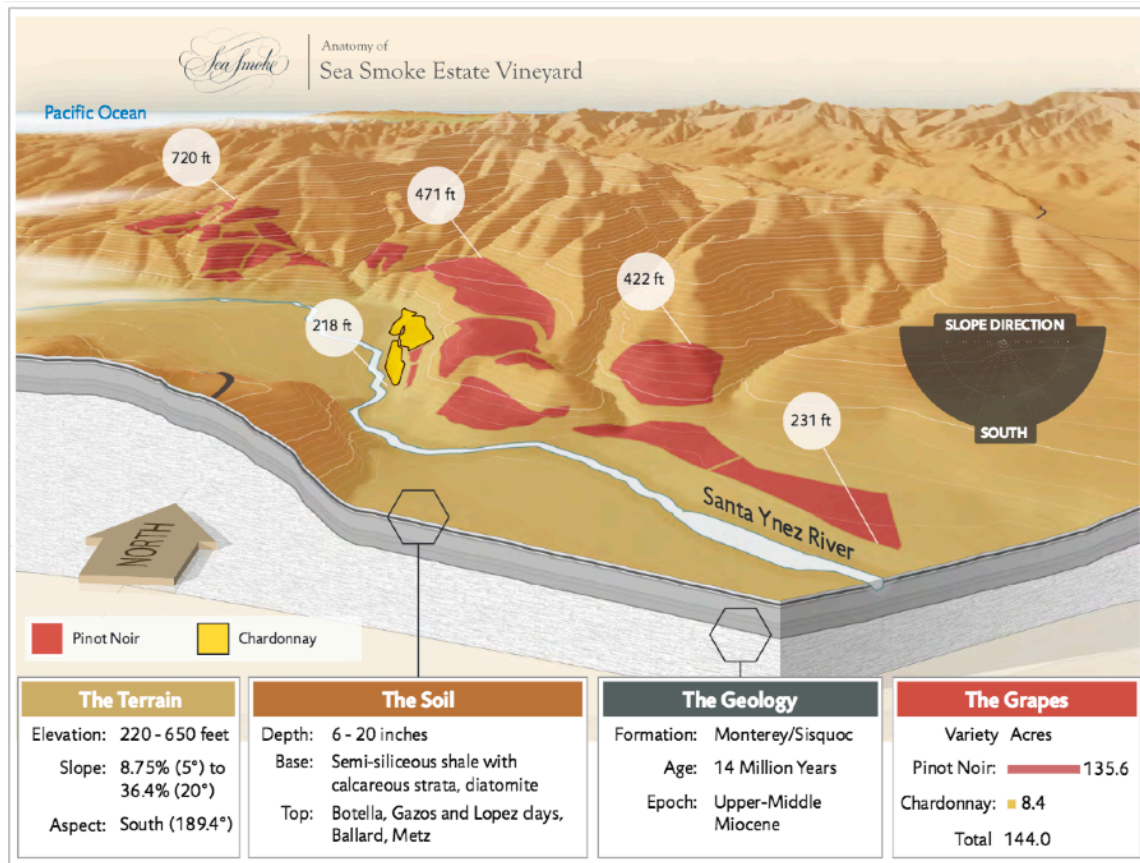
In 2015, yields were very low (about 1.5 tons-per-acre), but the small size of the clusters and grapes led to exceptional concentration.

The winemaking goal with the Southing bottling is to create a marriage of complexity and elegance. Grapes are 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, then inoculated with cultured yeasts. Manual punch downs with a total maceration time of 14 to 18 days. Free-run and gently pressed wines were racked to barrels and aged 16 months.

The Sea Smoke wines are sold exclusively to a mailing list at www.seasmoke.com. The 2015 Sea Smoke Chardonnay is reviewed later in this issue.

2015 Sea Smoke Southing Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.63, \$64. Southing refers to the south-facing hillside bluffs on the estate vineyard. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 45% new. Bottled

unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, purple berry, underbrush and tar engage the nose. Comforting and satiny in the mouth, in an elegant but flavorful, even powerful, mid weight style, offering flavors of black cherry and boysenberry accompanied by earthbound notes. The tannins are well-behaved making for easy drinking now.* **92.**



Senders Wines, Davis, CA

Craig Senders, M.D., is an ear, nose and throat surgeon and director of the Cleft Lip and Cranial Facial Team at the University of California at Davis, who has provided free cleft lip and palate repair in developing nations for more than three decades. Along with his spouse, Karen, he founded Senders Wines to further international surgical outreach programs. Dr. Senders harnesses his artisan winemaking skills, crafting wine and donating all of his winery's profits to support surgical outreach efforts.

Senders offers Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Carneros Pinot Noir and Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc. Current production is about 500 cases annually. The wines are crafted at a custom crush facility in Napa, with one lot produced at home for a very personal experience. Visit the website for more information and to purchase wine: www.senderswines.com.

2011 Senders Las Brisas Carneros Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 125 cases, \$55. Sourced from Mahoney Los Brisas Vineyard. 40% 667, 40% Swan and 20% 777. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Light ruby red color in the glass. The nose is nuanced with aromas of red cherry, cranberry, baking spice, old leather and smoky oak. Light to mid weight in style, with a shallow attack and finish, featuring red fruits, melted tannins vibrant acidity and a modest overlay of oak that peeks out at the end. A wine for older Pinot Noir enthusiasts.* **88.**

2013 Senders Carneros Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 105 cases, \$45. 50% clone 667 and 50% Swan selection. *Light ruby red color in the glass. The nose resembles an aged Pinot Noir with aromas of dried cherry, straw, dried herbs, spice, weathered wood and barn. Light weighted, elegant and soft in the mouth, with flavors of cherry, cranberry, spice, cola, tea and herbs. Nicely composed, with genteel tannins, crisp acidity and a slightly tart, cherry-driven finish.* **90.**

2014 Senders Mahoney Ranch Las Brisas Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 50 cases, \$45. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Lovely aromas of cherry, spice and rose petal with the slightest hint of volatile acidity. Light in weight and delicately styled with flavors of red cherry and spice and the slightest tomato note. Easygoing with modest tannins and a caressing finish. 88.*



WesMar, Sebastopol, CA

Kirk **Wesley** Hubbard and Denise **Mary** Selyem learned the wine business while working at Williams Selyem years ago and established a garagiste winery modeled after that iconic winery. Working out of a small warehouse facility in Sebastopol, the pair handle all the duties of a winery themselves, including personal time with those who choose to visit by appointment.

I first became interested in WesMar wines with their second release in 2001 that consisted of four Pinot Noirs and a Chardonnay. I believe I have tasted every wine they have made since. The couple knows the drill. Obtain the best grapes possible from growers who are committed to producing quality fruit. Employ many Old World methods such as hand sorting of grapes, open-top fermentations in stainless steel (former milk container) fermenters once used at Williams Selyem, partial whole cluster, hand punch downs, no post-fermentation maceration, removal of wine from fermenters using only gravity and siphoning, and removal of grape skins by hand to be pressed. Once in French oak barrels, the wines are allowed to settle and clear naturally, removing the need for fining or filtering. The wines are aged one year prior to bottling in 50% new and 50% 1-year-old barrels. The only additions are yeast, malolactic bacteria, tartaric acid to adjust pH and sulfur for preservation. It is winemaking pure and simple.

Search the PinotFile for extensive coverage of this winery through the years. Visit www.wesmarwinery.com for more information. WesMar is one of the few wineries that offer magnums of each bottling every vintage. The wines are sold primarily to mailing list members.

The WesMar wines reviewed here are among the best they have produced in recent memory. The wines compose the annual spring release. The winery also produced a Russian River Valley AVA blend in 2015 (sold

The WesMar wines reviewed here are among the best they have produced in recent memory. The wines compose the annual spring release. The winery also produced a Russian River Valley AVA blend in 2015 (sold out).

2015 WesMar Salzgeber Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$48. Clone 115. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, dark rose petal and exotic spices find traction over time in the glass. Mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and baking spices captivate. Suave in texture, with handsome tannins and good finishing generosity. Highly enjoyable even when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

2015 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$45. Martini clone. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Uplifting aromas of Bing cherry, spice, sarsaparilla, tobacco, rose petal and the slightest bruised apple (VA) that blows off in the glass. Mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, strawberry and raspberry with a dash of spice and supportive oak. Commendable balance with finishing length to spare. Quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. 92.*



2015 Wes Mar Balletto Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$45. Pommard clone. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Very complex and sensual nose offering scents of exotic spices including allspice, savory herbs, new leather, dark rose petal and boysenberry jam.*

Mouthwatering mid weight plus flavors of blueberry and boysenberry fruits blessed with enhancing spices, showing exceptional length in the mouth and finish. The wine floods the mouth with saturating fruit yet retains a vibrant demeanor due to balancing tannins and acidity. Even better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle offering glorious spice on the nose, a satin texture in the mouth and the biggest and longest finish of any of the wines in the 2015 WesMar lineup. Like Shaun White at the Winter Olympics, a stunning finish. 95.



2015 WesMar Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$55. Field blend of Pommard, Mt. Eden and Swan. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Brooding and rustic aromas of black fruits, wet mulch and barn initially. Not particularly charming, even grumpy when first opened, with a mid weight plus core of purple and black berry fruits framed by firm but not aggressive tannins. This wine typically needs time in bottle and was more giving when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, when it showed more aromatic promise, a satiny texture and an agreeable savory aspect. May deserve a higher score in three to five years if you are patient. 91.*

More Wines

2015 Chateau St. Jean Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$70. Sourced from Hallberg Vineyard. Clones 777, 115 and "828." 3-day cold soak, aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 70% new and aged an additional six months before release. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Muted aromas of black fruits, anise, dark toast and cigar. Ripe, bold and rich, with mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, blackberry, cassis, root beer and spice with an earthy undertone. Oak is well-integrated and the tannic backbone matches up well to the sappy fruit. Nicely balanced and well crafted in this ripe-fruited, hedonistic style, but not my cup of tea.*



2015 Chateau St. Jean Le Seul Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$75. Sourced from Gap's Crown and Sun Chase vineyards, both located in the Petaluma Gap AVA. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Lovely aromas of black cherry, blueberry-pomegranate, cardamom spice and fertile earth. Highly engaging on the palate, with a mid weight core of primarily black cherry goodness. A subtle spice, floral and*

vanilla accent add interest. Impeccable balance with well-matched tannins and easy approachability. Even better when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 94.



2014 Chateau St. Jean Reserve Sonoma County Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$70. Heavy bottled, embossed and signed by the winemaker. A selection of the most intensely flavored barrels. 100% Clone 777. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 39% new, and an additional 7 months in bottle before release. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. The toasty oak on the nose obscures the fruit aromas. Approachable flavors of oak-infused majestic dark fruits including black cherry with added notes of anise and black tea. Very seductive, silken mouth feel with tame tannins and a modest but pleasing finish. There is a paucity of nuance and sophistication and a bit more barrel treatment than I prefer.* **92.**

2016 Decoy Sonoma County Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$25. Aged 8 months in French oak barrels, 30% new and 60% neutral. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of red cherry, cranberry relish, rose petal and sandalwood. Light in weight, even delicate, with gentle tannins and a red-fruited theme enlivened with crisp acidity. The wine doesn't lean too heavily on oak like many inexpensive Pinot Noirs but the fruit is very shallow.* **87.**

2016 Samuel Louis Smith Albatross Ridge Vineyard Monterey Pinot Noir 12.8% alc., pH 3.56, 109 cases, \$44. Samuel Louis Smith is a micro négociant based in Salinas, CA. Sam is currently the winemaker at Morgan Winery in Salinas, producing 200-400 cases annually of Pinot Noir, and Syrah under his eponymous label, Samuel Louis Wines. The Albatross Ridge Vineyard is perched at 1,250 feet northwest of Carmel Valley. Yields are less than 2 tons per acre. 25% whole cluster fermentation, native primary and secondary fermentation, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 36% new. Bottled unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, raspberry, toast, smoke and ash lead off. Discreetly concentrated flavors of cherry and raspberry fruits with a noticeable guaiacol (smoke) note. The wine has nice harmony and fruit purity with suave tannins and up front drink ability. The smoke taint may or may not be averse to the drinker depending on their sensitivity to it. In any case, the wine should be consumed now as over time the as the fruit fades, the smoke taint will become more obvious.* NOTE: In 2016, this vineyard was exposed to the Soberanes fire. Sam told me that he tracked the wine carefully through its *elevage* and there was a negligible level of smoke taint in the wine and his impression upon tasting was consistent with that level. He considers the amount of smoke taint to be part of the terroir of the vintage and is not enough to discard or even RO filter the wine. **88.**

2015 Manross Hawk's View Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.71, 50 cases, \$58. NOTE that this is a wine made from Oregon grapes by a California vintner, Heather Manross. 50% Pommard and 50% Wadenswil clones. 20 to 26-year-old vines planted in Laurelwood soil. 30% whole cluster fermented. Aged 24 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of black cherry, mocha, clove and underbrush. A light to mid weight elegant style with tasteful spiced cherry flavor framed by complimentary oak and modest tannins. A savory herbal riff plies the background. This vibrant wine finishes with a searching, quenching ending. Heather has a touch with Pinot Noir.* **91.**

2015 Square Peg Square Peg Estate Vineyard Dry Farmed Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.57, 200 cases, \$55. Vineyard is located in Green Valley, Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley overlapping appellations. Harvest Brix 24.2°. 3-day cold soak after de-stemming, extended maceration, aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 30% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Fresh aromas of black cherry, black raspberry and warm spices soar over time in the glass. A remarkably intense attack of spiced Bing cherry fruit greets the palate and energizes the frontal lobes. Expansive in the mouth, with a juiciness propelled by vibrant acidity, and a lingering finish. This wine combines bombastic Russian River Valley fruit with vivacious acidity in a joyous union.* **93.**



What Collectable California Pinot Noir Wines are Being Bought to Sell?

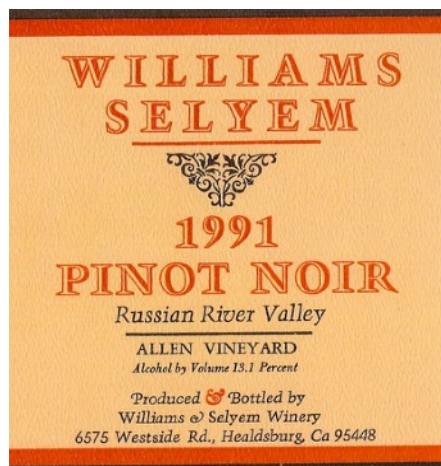
California Pinot Noir collectibles are sold through allocated mailing lists, are difficult to acquire, absurdly priced on the secondary market, and more often sold on the secondary or auction market than consumed. That said, many of these wines remain the standard against which other California Pinot Noirs are measured.

The concept of domestic “cult” wines emerged in the 1980s with a number of collectible Napa Valley Cabernets, and were jokingly defined as a wine you can’t buy. Wine industry analyst Eileen Fredrikson said there was one quality cult wines usually had in common: “Exclusivity, either real or imagined.” The criteria for inclusion in the cult club were allocation, limited production, unobtainable if not on the mailing list except on the secondary market or auction sites at inflated prices, high scores, perception of high quality, reputable winemaker.

As wines become collectible they are often bought as an investment and rarely drank. Many buyers keep a few bottles and sell the rest to cover their purchase and remain on the mailing list. The problem is that it is often deep-pocketed collectors and restaurateurs who bid on the wines on the secondary market, further driving up prices until they soar beyond rationality.

The original California cult Pinot Noir was Williams Selyem. Ed Selyem originated the idea of a mailing list and consumers had to be on the mailing list to obtain Williams Selyem wines. Virtually none was available outside of a few select restaurants. If you showed up at the winery garage, you might be lucky to be offered a logo tee shirt, but never any wine. I was one of those on the mailing list early on, but I drank the wines and never sold any.

Williams Selyem Pinot Noir became so popular that a waiting list was developed for those begging to get on the mailing list. Eventually, 85% of the Williams Selyem wine was sold directly to individuals on the carefully guarded mailing list. Over the years there were hoards of wine enthusiasts trying to get on the mailing list and managing it became a daunting task. Two of the winery’s seven full-time employees in the mid 1990s were designated as “keepers of the list,” and devoted some of their work day to managing it.



The fact is that although wineries who achieve cult status are flattered by all of the notoriety, they would prefer to see the wine drunk by those who cherish it rather than sold by those who invest in it. Sophie Kevany said appropriately, “The problem with escalating wine prices for desirables is that when it comes time to sell, the price will exceed the value perceived by those who would actually drink the wine.”

K & L Wine Merchants in Northern California is a large retailer in business for over 30 years offering significant amounts of wine including domestic Pinot Noir through sales and auctions. They notify their customers when wines in the category that they are interested in are available. For two months at the end of last year, I tabulated all the collectible California Pinot Noir wines being offered by K & L either through direct sale or auction. Presumably, these wines were acquired by K & L from consumers who were urged to sell the wines by

K & L promotion on their website. I was curious to know which California Pinot Noirs were being sold (and not drunk) most often on the secondary market. Kosta Browne Pinot Noir was by far the most commonly offered wine for sale with 134 bottles for sale or auction over the 2 month span. The Pinot Noir wines are listed in descending frequency.

Kosta Browne (134)
Rhys Vineyards (67)
Williams Selyem (56)
Rivers-Marie (39)
Sea Smoke (34)
Aubert (28)
Peter Michael (24)
Rochioli (24)
Sojourn (16)
Kistler (15)
Hanzell (12)
Anthill Farms (11)
Paul Lato (11)
Littorai (10)
Marcassin (10)
DuMOL (8)
ROAR (8)
Less than 5: Calera, Kutch, Brewer-Clifton, Occidental

Vinfolio is another company that buys and sells wine on the secondary market. Of the California Pinot Noirs they recently offered, most of the wines were from Kosta Browne and Rhys Vineyards, with a few from Aubert, Kistler, Occidental, Peter Michael and Williams Selyem.

Perusing the Grocery Aisle for Drinkable Pinot Noir

Periodically, I look at the state of the value-priced domestic Pinot Noirs on the shelves at local supermarkets. It is standard practice today for these stores to offer a 30% discount on a six bottle mix or match purchases.

The selection of Pinot Noir wines lining the shelves at chain supermarkets is practically identical since shelf space is controlled through distribution dominance by the largest wine companies or “big-volume brands” such as E. & J. Gallo Winery, The Wine Group, and Constellation Brands who produce wine under multiple labels. These three producers account for more than 60% of all wine shipped in California. Jackson Family Wine Estates has a lesser, but still prominent presence with their Byron, Cambria, Carmel Road, Kendall-Jackson and La Crema brands of Pinot Noir. There are usually only a few Pinot Noir wines offered from boutique domestic producers and then only the winery’s entry level wines.

In addition, there are many labels that give only the vaguest idea of who produced the wine. When the back label says, “Produced and bottled by,” by law, 75% or more of the wine in the bottle must be made (fermented) by the producer listed on the label at the stated address. But as the case in many of these inexpensive wines, the back label may say, “Vinted and bottled by,” in which case the winery on the label may have had very little to do with making the wine at the stated address, or “Cellared by,” in which case the wine was only aged or cellared by the depicted winery before bottling. In essence, in many cases, the consumer is prevented from knowing what region(s) the grapes came from or who made the wine, and are only given the name of the “phantom winery” that may have sourced bulk or declassified wine from any number of producers and slapped a label on it. The consumer also has no way of knowing whether the “Pinot Noir” is made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes. The result can often be a disappointing reflection of what Pinot Noir can be.

Winemaker Ted Lemon of Littorai once commented in his newsletter that after tasting a number of inexpensive American Pinot Noirs, “They were large in scale and alcohol, with rough tannins and dark, extracted flavors...the aromas dominated by various shades of oak...essentially they tasted as if they were the winemaker’s rejects from reserve barrels driven by the media’s insatiable appetite for Pinot on steroids.” There are also a number of inexpensive Pinot Noir wines that are very shallow and boring often made up with oak to cover deficiencies. The old saw holds true: you get what you pay for in Pinot Noir.

Here are a few wines I plucked off the supermarket second and third shelves (the most expensive Pinot Noirs are on the top shelf). The prices are full retail prices so figure a 30% discount when buying six wines mix or match. The Oregon Pinot Noir wines seem to perform better than California wines at these under \$20 price points.

California

2016 Austerity Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$15.70. Vinted and bottled by Austerity, Parlier, CA. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Very perfumed, offering a prominent floral scent alongside a red berry mix. Light to mid weight core of blackberry fruit back by insular toast and vanilla from oak. Silky in texture and simple in character with a very modest finish. It is hard to find much Pinot character under the oak.* **85.**

2015 Blank Canvas California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$12.84. Vinted and bottled by American Vines Cellars, Napa, CA. Kris and Cora Riggs owners. Orange County Fair medal winner. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, raspberry, spice and redwood. Light to mid weight red-fruited flavor spectrum of strawberry, raspberry and cherry. Slightly confected with minimal oak presence. Rather shallow and easy going with modest tannins.* **87.**



2015 District 7 Estate Grown Monterey Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$14.27, screwcap. Estate grown, produced and bottled by Scheid Family Wines, Greenfield, CA. Label refers to Monterey County which is District 7 among the 17 California grape crush districts. The Scheid family has been sustainably farming land in California for nearly 50 years. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. There is a whack of oak on the nose that dominates the cherry aroma. Elegantly styled, but lacking depth and length, with plenty of toasty oak obscuring Pinot's delicate character.* **85.**

2016 Line 39 California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$9.99. Vinted and bottled by Line 39, Parlier, CA. Designed as a top value in *Wine Enthusiast* magazine. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Nothing but toast, char and grill on the nose. Somewhat better on the palate, with mid weight flavors of red cherry and raspberry infused with oak. Submissive tannins and true to Pinot Noir in character, but little satisfaction. The wine had completely faded and was vegetal when tasted the following day from an opened bottle.* **83.**

2014 Wente Vineyards Riva Ranch Vineyard Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$27.13. Produced and bottled by Wente Vineyards, Livermore, CA. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The aromas and flavors feature very ripe berry and blackest cherry fruits with noticeable accents of oak spice and toast. Beefy and somewhat bold in the mouth with supporting tannins, finishing with some intensity and the echo of oak.* **86.**

Oregon

2016 Averaen Oregon Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.60, \$15.99, screw cap. Classy label and bottle. Jory and sedimentary soils. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of cherry and oak. Light in weight, offering flavors of cherry, cranberry and green tea with a bit of wood in the background. Matched tannins, good vibrancy and finishing cut.* **88.**

2016 Planet Oregon Oregon Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., \$17.99, screw cap. Cellared and bottled by Soter Vineyards, Dundee, OR. Produced from certified sustainably grown grapes. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of red cherry and berry, underbrush and earthy flora. Light to mid weight in style with a decent charge of cherry fruit. Hints of herbs and oak in the background with buried tannins and a juicy persistence on the finish.* **87.**



2014 The Pressing Plant Kick Out the Jams Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., 815 cases, \$17.49, screw cap. Vintner Sheri Hood is a New Yorker who managed rock bands for record companies before moving to Portland to make wines inspired by the music she loves. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Very nicely perfumed with spiced cherry and a hint of oak. The mid weight cherry core is inviting and supported by accommodating tannins. Nicely balanced, with a deft touch of oak and a gregarious cherry finish. This wine should find wide appeal at this price.* **90.**



Previously reviewed Oregon Pinot Noir in this category:

2016 Cloudline Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$14.99. Reviewed in the previous issue. Bottled by Cloudline Cellars, Dundee, OR (a Drouhin family label). Excellent Pinot character at this price point. **89.**

2016 Underwood Oregon Pinot Noir \$13.99. Reviewed in the previous issue. Vinted and bottled by Union Wine Co. McMinnville, OR. An easy sipper with balanced oak. **87.**

Recently Tasted California Chardonnay

"The success of California Chardonnay runs so deep that the wine is often taken for granted."

James Laube

There are many variations of California Chardonnay, largely in the hands of the winemaker, including stainless steel fermented, barrel fermented and concrete egg fermented, natural yeast fermented, proprietary yeast fermented, aging on the lees with or without stirring, use of traditional 60 gallon Burgundy oak barrels or larger 84 gallon puncheons and so on. There are styles to suit everyone's preferences. That said, the two most popular styles are the ripe, buttery, tropical-fruited wines with moderate acidity, and the more hi-strung, lean and acid-driven wines.



It is easy to find very good California Chardonnay, but more challenging to find it in the style that you prefer. I hope that the descriptions of the following Chardonnays tasted recently can lead you one that brings you pleasure.

2015 Anaba Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.5% alc., pH 3.46, TA 0.61, 728 cases, \$36. Sourced from J McK Estate Vineyard, Denmark Vineyard and Dutton Ranch vineyards. Harvest Brix 23.8°. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented, 80% malolactic fermentation, and aged 17 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon oil, lime, grapefruit and pear lead off. Clean, crisp and refreshing featuring flavors of citrus, golden apple and pear with hints of caramel, honey, vanilla and salinity. The finish has enough acidic verve but is shallow and falls off quickly.* **88.**

2015 Anaba Dutton Ranch Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 13.9% alc., pH 3.36, TA 0.71, 255 cases, \$42. Wente clone. Harvest Brix 23.3°. Sourced from Dutton Mills Station and Shop Block vineyards in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented, 50% malolactic fermentation, and aged 17 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of lemon curd, green apple, and sawdust. Reserved flavors of lemon, grapefruit and kiwi are uplifted by energetic acidity. More sophisticated than ostentatious, with a steely cut on the finish. An adroit food wine.* **90.**

2015 Anaba J McK Estate Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay 14.1% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.54, 174 cases, \$42. Wente clone. Harvest Brix 24.0°. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented, 85% malolactic fermentation, and aged 17 months on the lees in French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with scents of lemon creme, banana, baking spices and pie crust. Delicately flavored but very satisfying, offering tastes of citrus, caramelized apple, honey and toasty oak. The acidity is more restrained in this wine and it will appeal to those who prefer fruit and oak at the forefront.* **92.**



2015 Chateau St. Jean Single Vineyard Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.2% alc., \$35. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. The aromatic profile appeals, offering scents of lemon, pineapple, butter, flint and toasty oak. Richly styled with lemon, yellow peach and pineapple flavors as well as spice. There is enough acidity to balance the robust fruit sap and the fruit-driven finish shows length. This is a wine for fans who like a Chardonnay awash in fruit along with boisterous oak engagement.* **92.**



2015 Chateau St. Jean Single Vineyard Cold Creek Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.5% alc., \$35. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Fresh aromas of lemon, melon and a steely, metallic tone. Bright flavors of lemon-lime and pear matched with a brisk acid spice and minimal oak input. More discreetly fruity and austere in demeanor.* **90.**

2015 Chateau St. Jean Single Vineyard Robert Young Vineyard Alexander Valley Chardonnay 14.5% alc., \$N/A. Vineyard is planted to the Robert Young clone, a selection derived from original plantings of the Wente clone and certified in 1989. Barrel fermented and aged on the lees 15 months in French oak barrels, then given extended bottle age before release. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Sexy nose of lemon oil, pineapple and pear perfume. Discreetly rich in character, with tantalizing flavors of lemon, baked pear, spice and toast. A thread of oak holds court through the finish that shows a bit of alcoholic heat.* **92.**



2016 Chateau St. Jean Single Vineyard Belle Terre Vineyard Alexander Valley Chardonnay 14.4% alc., \$N/A. The winery has made wine from this vineyard since the 1970s. *Moderate light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of lemon, pear and riverbed. Really nice harmony in a flavorful style with dancing acidity. Citrus, honey and nutmeg are the main tastes with oak way in the background. Very inviting, with a brightness and purity that elevates this wine that also sports a quenching and haunting finish.* **94.**



2015 Chateau St. Jean Le Seul Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.6% alc., \$75. Gap's Crown and Sun Chase vineyards. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Soaring aromas of lemon curd, brown butter, ripe pear, toast and roasted nuts. Amazing attack of lemon, pear, white peach, pineapple, spice and creme brûlée flavors that are bolstered by complimentary oak. There is a hint of fleur de sel. The slightest tannin peaks out and the energetic acidity energizes the fruit. A serious effort that has the pedal to the metal with the alcohol adding fortitude to the wine. Even better when sampled the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **94.**



2015 Chateau St. Jean Reserve Sonoma County Chardonnay 14.4% alc., \$N/A. Winemaker Margo Van Staaveren's signature is on the heavy, embossed bottle. 54% Robert Young, 26% Cold Creek, 12% Durell and 8% Belle Terre vineyards. Each lot fermented separately. Aged on the lees for 18 months in French oak barrels. A barrel selection for the final blend. *Moderate golden yellow. A classy wine by all definition that is highly nuanced and intriguing. Aromas and flavors of lemon oil, lemon meringue, spice, ripe pear and banana with a dash of oak. Enough fruit to satisfy, but gracious acid (read "minerality-driven") is the soul of this wine. The lemon creme finish has uncommon staying power. Still terrific when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. The winemaker's best effort and it shows.* **96.**





2014 Dolin Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay 13.8% alc., pH 3.48, TA 0.62, 232 cases, \$39. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented with 100% malolactic fermentation. Aged 15 months on the lees with twice monthly stirring in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Engaging aromas of grilled lemon, pineapple, spice, vanilla and flint lead to a flavor palate of lemon, pineapple, yellow apple and spice. Creamy in the mouth, with good fortitude, righteous acidity and a gratifying lemon-infused finish. Enjoy this classy wine on its own or with shellfish. 93.*



2014 Dolin Rincon Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Chardonnay 13.9% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.62, 140 cases, \$39. Vineyard established in 1982 in Salinas clay loam soil. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented and underwent 100% malolactic fermentation. Aged 15 months on the lees with twice monthly stirring in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark golden yellow color in the glass. The fruit-forward nose features aromas of lemon, pineapple, mango and caramelized apple. Richly-fruited with a boisterous charge of ripe citrus and apple flavors on a viscous frame. A thread of toast and roasted nuts plies the background. Quite enjoyable, although I wished for more acidic verve. 90.*



2015 Dolin Malibu Newton Canyon Chardonnay 14.3% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.57, 220 cases, \$39. Vineyard situated at 1,400 feet elevation above the fog line. Planted in 1993. Whole cluster pressed, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. Left on the lees and stirred twice monthly while in barrel. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately golden yellow color in the glass. The saline-infused nose shows appealing restraint with added aromas of citrus, green apple and candy corn. Bright and crisp, with a lemon-lime core, accommodating oak, and some finishing citrus bounty. 90.*



2016 J. Lohr October Night Arroyo Seco Monterey Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.66, RS 0.36 g/100ml, 1,456 cases, \$25. The uniqueness of this wine is derived from the "Musque clone" or Dijon 809 (60%) that produces a noticeable floral component. Harvest Brix 24.8°, harvested on a single October night. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented an average of 13 days, full malolactic fermentation, aging on the lees with weekly stirring for 10 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Plenty of white blossom floral perfume along with citrus fruits and piney oak on the nose. Ripe-fruited profile with flavors of lemon and pineapple backed by oak notes of toast and blonde caramel. The floral perfume also engages the palate. An unconventional wine that will appeal to those receptive to individuality. 89.*



2016 J. Lohr Arroyo Vista Arroyo Seco Monterey Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.70, RS .45 g/100ml, 7,325 cases, \$25. Primarily Dijon clone 76. Whole cluster pressed, proprietary yeast fermentation, inoculated full malolactic fermentation, aging in French oak barrels with weekly stirring, 49% new. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Inviting aromas of lemon curd, golden apple, white peach, spice and nutty oak. Slightly creamy on the palate, with engaging flavors of lemon, grapefruit, poached golden apple and caramelized oak. Seductive mouthfeel and impressive balance with a good cut of acidity on the uplifting finish. 90.*

2015 Ladera Pillow Road Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.0% alc., 525 cases, \$50. Ladera is known for making mountain-grown Napa Valley wines but in 2006 they acquired a vineyard just 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean with vines planted in Goldridge sandy loam soils. An adjacent parcel was acquired and planted in 2008 to 7 acres of Pinot Noir and 2 acres of Chardonnay (Wente and Mt. Eden 809). Formerly the wines were bottled under the Pillow Road Vineyard name but beginning in 2015, a switch to Ladera was chosen. Gentle whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented followed by partial malolactic fermentation. Aged on the lees in 60% new French oak barrels for 15 months. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Love able aromas of lemon curd, honeycomb, butterscotch and toasty brioche. Discretely rich in the mouth featuring an array of flavors including lemon, lime, green apple, pineapple and a dash of complimentary oak. Slightly viscous and highly satisfying in a fruit-laden style that has enough acid backbone to be refreshing. Full of California sunshine and well done in this style. 93.*

2015 Ram's Gate Estate Carneros Chardonnay 14.4% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.60, 415 cases, \$76. 4.2-acre hillside vineyard exposed to cooling winds from San Pablo Bay and marked diurnal variation throughout growing season. Named the Estate Faultline Vineyard, it is tended by vineyard manager Ned Hill. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Complex nose sporting aromas of lemon curd, pineapple, honeycomb, guava and char. Lusciously appointed with ostentatious pineapple flavor. Soft and creamy in the mouth with enough supportive acidity to lift up. Very California in tropical fruit character but very Hawaii in its pineapple theme. 92.*



2015 Ram's Gate Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.30, TA 0.61, 643 cases, \$74. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Wowzer! Stately aromas of lemon-lime, flint, spice and marzipan, opening over time in a seductive progression. Captivating vibrancy with impeccable barrel integration and overall harmony. Bracing flavors of lemon-lime and golden apple play off subtle accents of butter and vanilla. Slightly creamy in texture, with a sustaining finish of uncommon length. Easy to find superlatives for this beauty. 95.*

2015 Ram's Gate El Diablo Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay pH 3.24, TA 0.58, 325 cases, \$68. Vineyard planted in 2006 by Ulises Valdez who manages the site. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. The nose is blessed with hi-tone aromas of apple, ripe pear, lemongrass and buttered toast. Highly flavorful in a rich style, with flavors of lemon, pineapple and ripe apple that grab onto the palate and persist through the finish. Toasty, charred oak plies the background. Good vibrancy and lift on the finish. 93.*

2015 Rhys Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay 13.0% alc., \$79. Fall 2017 offering. 1.75-acre vineyard situated at 1230 to 1400 feet elevation and planted to Hyde, Wente and dijon clones. Soil is 12"-24" of topsoil over chalky, soft shale. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Leading off are aromas of lemon oil, poached golden apple, and marzipan. Appealing richness of flavor in an acid-driven style featuring flavors of citrus and green apple. Vibrant, with a acid-fueled minerality that carries through the soprano finish that offers good length. A little too citric and high-strung for my personal taste but an excellent wine. 92.*



2015 Sea Smoke Sea Smoke Estate Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay 15.0% alc., pH 3.37, TA 0.60, \$60. Released October 2017. As vines have matured, the winemaker has chosen to use less new oak and lighter toast levels in this wine. Also, more 600-liter demi-muids are being used. Whole cluster pressed, fermented in stainless steel after inoculation, then racked to barrels and inoculated for malolactic fermentation. Aged in French oak barrels on the lees with periodic stirring for 16 months, 26% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. The nose is steely and edgy with added fruit flavors of frozen lemon, cut Honeycrisp apple and pineapple. Richly endowed with vivid citrus flavors accented with tastes of apple and subtle blonde caramel. Beautifully crafted with redeeming acidity and a finish awash in citrus goodness. Like an Olympic Winter Games snowboarder: full of content and still lands on its feet. 94.*



2015 Stony Hill Vineyard Spring Mountain District Napa Valley Chardonnay 13.0% alc., \$48. I cut my Chardonnay teeth many years ago on Stony Hill and still cherish the wine today. This family-owned winery dates back over 65 years and their Chardonnay remains one of the most age worthy wines produced in the USA. The old vines are dry farmed. No malolactic fermentation, aged in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Intoxicating perfume of lemon, pineapple and other tropical fruits and a hint of welcome oak. Very polished and seamless on the palate with a discrete amount of citrus, pear, applesauce, apricot spice, vanilla and almond paste flavors embellished with a desirable mineralogy note. The finish is slightly tart and citrus driven, cleansing the palate and urging a second sip. A California treasure that is unique in its own way and fits like a glove. 94.*



2015 WesMar Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.9% alc., pH 3.36, \$39. Wente clone. Barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermentation, aged in French oak barrels, 25% 1-year-old and 75% neutral. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Aromas of cut apple, lemon zest, pineapple, pear and a kiss of oak. The flavors echo the aromas in a rich and ripe, Russian River Valley sun-infused-fruit style. Slightly creamy in texture with the slightest tannin and some finishing length. The oak and alcohol are well integrated. My only nit would be that the wine seems to lack a bit of desirable acid verve even at this pH. 90.*

California Pinot Briefs

Valette Restaurant Introduces 2016 Pinot Noir The first Valette private label wine, the Valette 2016 Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir is a collaboration between Chef Dustin Valette and Sonoma County winemaker Bob Cabral, formerly of Williams Selyem and now Three Sticks Wines. Dustin made wine at home for many years and Bob has attended courses at the CIA in St. Helen, so the two wanted to craft a wine together that reflects the unique qualities of Pinot Noir from Sonoma County when paired with local Sonoma County-grown goods. The wine is now available in the restaurant in Healdsburg.



Valette and Benovia Hosting Luncheon To celebrate 45 years of the Cohn Vineyard, Valette Restaurant, in partnership with Benovia Winery owners Joe Anderson, Mary Dewane and Mike Sullivan hosted a special luncheon on Sunday March 11. Honored guests were iconic winemakers Burt Williams (Williams Selyem), Michael Browne and current Williams Selyem winemaker Jeff Mangahas. The 3-course luncheon featured six vintages of Cohn Vineyard Pinot Noir and three vintages of Cohn Vineyard Zinfandel. Dessert and cheese followed at the Cohn Estate Vineyard along with a tour (see full report with photos in next issue)

Fourth Silicon Valley Wine Auction The Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers Association Education Foundation (SCMWEF) presents the fourth annual Silicon Valley Wine Auction Weekend held in Saratoga, CA, May 19-20, 2018. Proceeds benefit several educational programs. On Saturday May 19, the Wine Auction Dinner, an evening of wine and giving, will be held at Eden Estates, the private home of John Couch, the Vice President of Education at Apple. On Sunday May 20, 45 Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers will pour at the Taste of the Mountains Grand Tasting at Montalvo Arts Center. Notable auction items include a private Space X Rocket Factory Tour, a VIP destination trip to the Mexican Riviera, and Winemaker Dinners with Big Basin Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards and Ridge Vineyards. Tickets for the Wine Auction Dinner are \$10,000 per table, and \$95-\$145 per person for the Taste of the Mountains Grand Wine Tasting, with early bird reduced pricing for the Tasting until April 1. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.siliconvalleywineauction.org.

Outstanding In The Field All of the 2018 Summer/Fall events, including farmer and chef participants are now on the website at www.outstandinginthefield.com. The California Spring/Summer tour includes a West Sonoma Winemakers dinner Saturday May 12, 2018 (\$245), featuring Red Car, Failla, and Littorai wineries and chef Shane McAnella of Chalkboard and The Brass Rabbit in Healdsburg. The setting is a forested ridge in Occidental. Dinners are also planned for Adelaida Vineyards & Winery in Paso Robles, Albatross Ridge in Carmel Valley, Flowers Vineyard & Winery at Timber Cove (Sonoma County) and McEvoy Ranch in Petaluma. Tickets go on sale March 20 at 9:00 A.M. and sell out fast.

Alaska Airlines Adds 18 Cities to Wine Flies Free Program The airline's mileage-plan perk began in 2007 at Santa Rosa's Sonoma County Airport and now includes airports such as San Diego, Seattle, San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland. The baggage-check fee for a case of wine is waived at airports in 29 West Coast cities. The offer is good for one case on domestic flights only and must be checked in at the airport check-in counter. You must enroll in the airline's mileage plan. More details at www.alaskaair.com.