

PinotFile[©]

Head for the Sta. Rita Hills

Santa Rita Hills is a fairly new part of the Santa Barbara County wine region located west of the 101 Freeway between Buellton and Lompoc. It is actually a western



subdivision of the much larger Santa Ynez Valley appellation. Vina Santa Rita, a 123-year old winery in Santiago, Chile, filed suit in 2001 to stop the California vintners from using the Santa Rita Hills name, which is its trade name. After lengthy negotiations, a legal contract was hammered out that permits California to use an abbreviated name for the AVA, St. Rita Hills. If the ATF approves the name change for the appellation, that's what will appear on wine labels. Some vintners, however, find the new name too restrictive and won't use the new AVA name. So some wines from the Santa Rita Hills will not be labeled as such.

The Sta. Rita Hills AVA is one of the few spots along the California coast where the mountains run east-west instead of north-south. This produces a gap that allows cooling ocean winds to flow inland. When it is hot in Santa Ynez, it is 10 degrees cooler 10 miles west in the Santa Rita Hills. This makes it among the coolest AVAs in California. Calcareous soils (limestone, chalk, and clay) combine with the climate to make this area ideal for growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The Pinots are deeply colored, intense, and luscious. 10 years ago there were only 3 vineyards in the area: Sanford & Benedict, Lafond, and Babcock. Now many well-to-do wine enthusiasts have found this the place for Pinot Noir and have installed new Dijon clones and new rootstocks. Look for Pinot Noirs from Melville, Sea Smoke, Flying Goat, Bonaccorsi, Fiddlehead, Loring Wine Co, Longoria, Brewer-Clifton, Foley, Gainey, Hitching Post, and Fess Parker.

Vineyards in the Sta. Rita Hills AVA include Lafond, Sanford & Benedict, La Rinconada (Sanford), Fess Parker Vineyard, Foley Vineyard, Melville Vineyard, Clos Pepe Vineyards, Olivestone Vineyards, Rozak Vineyard, Babcock Vineyard, Burning Creek Vineyard, Fiddlestix Vineyard, Casa Caesara, Huber Vineyard, Blind Faith Vineyard, Mount Carmel, Sweeney Canyon, Wine at Work Vineyard, Cargasacci Vineyard, Gainey vineyard, and Lavie Vineyard.

**If You Drink
No Noir, You
Pinot Noir**

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Only four wineries in the Santa Rita Hills are currently open for tours or tasting: Babcock, Lafond, Melville, and Sanford. You can cover the entire region in a weekend (west on Santa Rosa Road and back on Highway 246, or loop vice versa). Then head for the tasting rooms in Los Olivos, where the smaller – production labels from Santa Rita Hills are available.

Inside this issue:

Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Tasting	2
Bonaccorsi	2
Flying Goat Cellar	2
New Wine Books	3
Miner Pinot Scores Big	3
Sea Smoke Cellars	4
Paradoxe Blanc	4

Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir Tasting

The Le Grand Crew gathered on October 12 to taste a number of Pinot Noirs from the Sta. Rita Hills AVA. Overall the quality was high and scores were consistent among the 12 in attendance. The results:

- 1 Brewer-Clifton Melville Vineyard Pinot Noir 2001 (92+) \$45
- 2 Sanford La Rinconada Pinot Noir 2000 (91+) \$45
- 3 Fiddlehead Lollapalooza Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir 2000 (89+) \$43
- 4 Siduri Clos Pepe Vineyard Pinot Noir 2001 (89) \$40
- 5 Sea Smoke "Botella" Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 2001 (89) \$46
- 6 Babcock Grand Cuvee Pinot Noir 2001 (89) \$24
- 7 Hitching Post Clos pepe Vineyard Pinot Noir 2000 (88+) \$25
- 8 Rusack Reserve Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 2001 (87) \$25
- 9 Melville Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 2001 (87) \$19



Unfortunately the Brewer-Clifton offerings are mailing list only and highly allocated. All of the other wines are readily available.

Bonaccorsi Wine Company



Winemaker-owner Michael Bonaccorsi, a sommelier at Spago's in Beverly Hills, holds the Master Sommelier title. Motivated by his love for Burgundy, he started his label in 1999, focusing on vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs. His first releases have received plaudits from Robert Parker and Stephen Tanzer. Larry Stone, Master Sommelier at Rubicon Restaurant in San Francisco said: "I always thought a sommelier-winemaker with a great store of tasting experience would have an advantage over a purely technical enologist. Bonaccorsi is proof of this, and he surely must be proud of his work."

Current releases:

- 1 **Bonaccorsi Red Monkey Santa Barbara Pinot Noir 2002** 190 cases \$22 Mostly from Sanford & Benedict Vineyard with a little Fiddlestix Vineyard blended in. Rich and mouthfilling, full of black plums and cherries.
- 2 **Bonaccorsi Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 2002** 260 cases \$34 Mostly Le Bon Climat Vineyard. A big, deeply colored wine, like strawberries dipped in melted chocolate.
- 3 **Bonaccorsi Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 2002** 430 cases \$34 A blend of several vineyards. Dark and rich, highly structured, masculine and intense.

Sold primarily through mailing list: www.bonawine.net, 1-310-994-3207

Flying Goat Cellars

Owners Norm and Pat Yost were at their accountant's office and he advised them to start a business. So in the early part of 2000 they launched Flying Goat Cellars and crushed their first fruit from the 2000 harvest. The label features a unique flying goat (Never).

Current release:

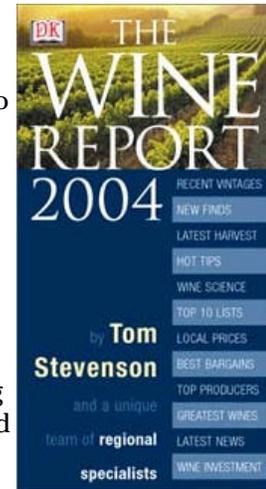
Flying Goat Cellars Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 2001 \$32
Flavors of cola, vanilla, earth; slightly rustic with a clear finish.

PO Box 1604, Santa Ynez 1-805-688-1814, www.flyinggoatcellars.com.



Plethora of Wine Books Released

- 1 **The Wine Report 2004** Tom Stevenson \$15 This manual contains the opinions of 38 regional wine specialists including Clive Coates and Dan Berger on hot news in the wine world, vintage reports, and top 10 lists in succinct chapters.
- 2 **Oregon Viticulture** Ed Edward Hellman \$45 A reference, textbook, and guide to the art and science of winemaking.
- 3 **Daniel John's Top 200 Wines, an Expert's Guide to Maximum Enjoyment for Your Dollar** \$16 Author is the sommelier at Montrachet Restaurant in NY. Lists favorite value wines with food pairings.
- 4 **Wines of Baja California** Ralph Amey \$20 The first book on the history and current status of the burgeoning wine industry in the Guadalupe Valley of Baja.
- 5 **The Science of Healthy Drinking** Gene Ford \$30 A "how to" book of achieving good health with daily wine consumption. Over 900 citations from peer-reviewed medical and science references.
- 6 **Icon: Art of the Label** Jeffrey Caldewey and Chuck House \$85 The first in-depth study of the best wine packaging and how it is developed. 120 award winning labels in color.
- 7 **Renaissance Guide to Wine and Food Pairing** Anthony Didio and Amy Zavatto \$28.50 In-depth interviews, advice, and comments from celebrity chefs, winemakers, and sommeliers demystifies the subject of wine and food pairing.
- 8 **Ancient Wine: the Search for the Origins of Viticulture** Patrick E McGovern \$30 One of the world's leading experts on ancient wine takes readers on a fascinating journey to find the origins of viticulture. The quest leads to the beginnings of civilization itself. Wine was probably made during the Stone Age's Paleolithic Period, when prehistoric man roamed the earth forging for food. The first fermented grape juice was likely discovered by cave men or women who had gathered wild grapes, eaten their fill, and left the remaining ones, which spontaneously fermented. That primal wine was crushed by the weight of the fruit itself, a technique called carbonic maceration that is still used for making Beaujolais Nouveau and other nouveau-styled wines. McGovern calls that first physical evidence of deliberate winemaking that he discovered "Chateau Hajji Firuz," for the location in the northern Zagros Mountains of Iran where he found the clay jar containing some wine residue in 1996.



Pinot Noirs of Note

Miner Family Vineyards Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir 2001 \$50 1063 cases. In a blind tasting of 50 American Pinot Noirs from \$20 to \$50 reported in the *Wall Street Journal* September 26, 2003, the Miner bottling was rated number one. "Massive, cherry/berry nose. Classy and tight, with Bing cherries and blackberries. Serious wine. Layered with tobacco and cedar, vanilla and spices. It's like a meal. I wish I could wear this behind my ears, Dottie noted. A rich, mouth-coating splendor." Call winery.

Sebastiani Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2001 \$22 In the October 2003 issue of *Connoisseur's Guide* this wine received 2 puffs and a score of 92. "A downright opulent look at the varietal...rich display of cherries, chocolate, and very sweet oak...rich and racy on the palate...unparalleled out-and-out priceworthiness." Limited distribution

Paul Hobbs is the new winemaking consultant for Lynmar Winery, a boutique Pinot Noir and Chardonnay producer in the Russian River Valley. Hobbs is well-known for the wine under his own label, Paul Hobbs Winery.

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PrinceofPinot.com

Although wine advertising cannot make reference to wine's medicinal or caloric values, the remarkable low rate of heart disease in the French despite their rich diet (the so-called French Paradox) makes strong support for wine's health and medicinal value. Red wine has been the hero to date, but researchers at the Universite de Montpellier in France have created an experimental Chardonnay as beneficial as Pinot Noir. More than 4,000 cases were made using red-wine production techniques: the grapes were fermented with their skins and seeds at relatively high temperatures, which quadrupled the wine's antioxidants and made it taste more like a red than like a white. Named Paradoxe Blanc, it was released as a 1999 vintage and the producer, Domaine Viginie plans to market it in the United States.

Sea Smoke Cellars

Bob Davids, proprietor of Sea Smoke Cellars, has an interesting background. He became a well-respected automotive designer at General Motors. Later on he was a partner in a casino in Reno, Nevada and led Radica Games, known for developing "Bass Fishin" handheld game. While in Hong Kong, he attended a wine tasting which changed his life. He started studying and collecting fine wines from France. In 1996, he met Bill Wathen of Foxen Winery, who helped him start looking for a site for a winery. He eventually settled on a piece of land with the perfect microclimate, soils and exposure on the Santa Ynez River and planted a 100-acre vineyard to grow world-class Pinot Noir. He retired as CEO of Radica in 1999 to focus exclusively on Sea Smoke Cellars.



The winemaker is Kris Curran, formerly of Cambria Winery and Koehler Winery and Vineyards. She works directly with the vineyard crew who manage the estate vineyard, believing that the vineyard is the wine.

Current releases: **Sea Smoke Botella Pinot Noir 2001, Sea Smoke Southling Pinot Noir 2001, and Sea Smoke Ten Pinot Noir 2002** (ten clones blended to create a complex showcase wine). The wines are very limited (less than 300 cases each) and expensive (over \$40). However, the wines show great purity of flavors and vibrant fruit. Both Botella and Southling scored 90-94 by WS. www.seasmokecellars.com and HiTime.