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## Report # 109: The Vines and Wines of the Russian River Valley



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## **Introduction**

The Russian River Valley is the heart of the Sonoma County winegrowing region. It has some of California's oldest Zinfandel vineyards and is home to numerous grape varieties. Today, however, it's best known for producing elegant Chardonnay and fine-tuned Pinot Noir. It's not the first place in California where these varieties were planted, but the vines and wines of the Russian River Valley are what caught the consumer's attention and gave rise to their popularity today.

When the Russian River Valley was granted AVA status in 1983, the region's growers already understood that their terroir is highly variable. The AVA extends from near the cold Pacific to the considerably warmer foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains. Indeed, at the time of its creation, the southernmost part of the Russian River Valley was granted its own, separate AVA status as the Green Valley of the Russian River Valley, and the northeastern most part was granted a separate status as the Chalk Hill AVA. As more vineyards were planted, the differences in terroir and wines within the AVA became increasingly obvious in structured tastings carried out by members of the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association (RRVWA) beginning in the 1990s. These differences were later confirmed by Roger Boulton and other scientists at UC Davis. This led to the movement to more formally identify six different growing areas, or neighborhoods, within the AVA. These are, for now, loosely defined, but already one neighborhood, the Sebastopol Hills, has filed to create its own sub-AVA within the Russian River Valley. This report looks in detail at the diverse neighborhoods of the Russian River Valley.

We have made several visits to Sonoma County and the Russian River Valley over the past two decades to meet with growers and winemakers and to taste wines from more than 20 vintages. We've also written and published numerous articles and reports on the region, including our comprehensive report a decade ago on *The Wines of Sonoma County* [Report #44] and our 2021 report *California Chardonnay: Terroir and Winemaking in Sonoma* [Report #87]. These earlier reports provide useful background information for the current report, which is focused on the growing neighborhoods of the Russian River Valley.

Since our earlier reports have gone into some depth on the climate and soils within the region, this report puts more focus on the producers. We begin with a brief history of the families, growers and winemakers, who have contributed to region's reputation for producing wines of exceptional character and quality. And we pay special attention to generational change as 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> generations of families begin to assume winemaking and management responsibilities.

We briefly discuss the quality of recent vintages. We are fortunate that many of the wines we tasted are from the 2023 vintage, the best of the century. Other vintages have been more

challenging, but our tastings reveal that winemakers have been making wines of high quality even in difficult vintages. We also write about the marketing challenges facing Russian River Valley winegrowers. This is a region of mostly family wineries with production levels too small to warrant nationwide distribution. In addition, the hilly, small vineyards they farm often have low yields and require hand cultivation, which raises the prices of their products. Their small size requires cooperative marketing efforts, like the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association [RRVW].

Since many of the region's wineries are small and not well known outside Northern California, our profiles of the wineries and discussion of their wines is more detailed than usual in our reports. The final section on winery profiles and tasting notes, which is the core of this report, confirms that Russian River Valley wines are among the very finest in Sonoma County and California. We highly recommend them to our readers.



**Acknowledgements.** This report could not have been carried out without the support of the RRVW and its members, many of whom personally showed us their wines, both in California and in Washington, DC. We've tasted with several of the winemakers over the years, which allowed us to explore in depth winemaking practices and vintage variations. We owe an especially large debt of gratitude to Mike Sullivan, current RRVW President, and Jesslyn Jackson, RRVW Executive Director. The list of others to whom we owe deepfelt thanks includes James MacPhail of Tongue Dancer, David Ramey, Fred Scherrer, Andy Smith of DuMOL, Brent McKoy and Theresa Heredia of Gary Farrell, Joy Sterling of Iron Horse, Marimar Torres

of Marimar Estate, Tom Rochioli, James and Kerry MacPhail of Tongue Dancer, and Jeff Mangahas of Williams Selyem. Cover photo credit: @wildlysimpleproductions

## History and Generational Change

Italian immigrants played a major role in Sonoma and the Russian River Valley's early development as a wine region. Giovanni Foppiano began making wine in 1896, and his son began bottling wine under the family name in 1937. In the 1890s, Giuseppe and Luisa Martinelli, recent immigrants from Tuscany, planted a small area of Zinfandel and Muscat of Alexandria vines that later became known as the Jackass Hill Vineyard. Other century old Zinfandel or Zinfandel field blend vineyards include Highwire Vineyard and the Fanucchi family's Fanucchi-Wood Road Vineyard in the Santa Rosa Plain. The Martini & Prati winery, which made jug and sacramental wine, was established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century [it's now home to the Martin Ray winery]. Also, in the late 1800s, the Korbel brothers, emigres from Czecholavakia, established the Korbel Winery on the Russian River and produced *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine. While these three wineries and several old vine Zinfandel vineyards survived Prohibition, most did not. Pre-Prohibition Sonoma County had 256 wineries;

only 50 would survive by producing sacramental wine. Russian River's modern wine industry did not appear until well after WWII.

In what follows, we summarize the principal vineyard and winery events in the second half of the last century, a time when the Russian River Valley began its rise to national prominence.

**1950s-1960s:** Joe Rochioli Sr purchases Fenton Acres on the Russian River and plant vines in the 1950s; in 1959 he and his son Joe Jr plant Sauvignon Blanc vines that still bear fruit. In 1968, Joe Rochioli Jr plants Pinot Noir. In 1964, Charles and Helen Bacigalupi plant Chardonnay and Pinot Noir at their Healdsburg property that they purchased in 1956, the first to plant these varietals in the Russian River Valley. [Although, the Cohn Vineyard adjacent to the Russian River Valley boundary was planted to Pinot Noir in the 1950s.] In 1967, Joe Swan purchases an old vineyard near Forestville and replants it to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon. He makes his first Pinot Noir in 1973 with the assistance of legendary Andre Tchelistcheff. The quality of his Pinot Noir fruit and the subsequent planting of cuttings from it elsewhere leads to it being identified as a unique clone, the Swan Clone. Foppiano sells its first Petite Sirah wine, its marquee wine, in 1967.



*Helen Bacigalupi Driving Tractor in the 1950s*  
(credit Bacigalupi)

**Bacigalupi** Charles and Helen Bacigalupi purchased this 121-acre site in 1956 located in the Middle Reach neighborhood off Westside Rd and in 1964 began planting Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (they're credited for being the first to plant these varietals in the Russian River Valley). They sold their grapes, including to Mike Grgich of Chateau Montelena who proceeded to make the 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay (40% from Bacigalupi) that won the Judgement of Paris. Today, Bacigalupi has 125 acres of grapes now managed by John Bacigalupi, son of Charles and Helen. The vineyard has three main parcels with

different soils. The vineyard began producing wine under its own name in 2011 with winemaker Ashley Herzberg. Bacigalupi sold grapes to Flanagan, Gary Farrell, MacRostie, and Tongue Dancer. The Bacigalupi Chardonnays are medium weight, subtle and refined rather than in your face; they show their terroir in their dusty, lemon verbena and citrus-inflected aromas and flavors.

**1970s:** Rochioli sells grapes to Gallo for its Hearty Burgundy and later to Korbell for its sparkling wine. In 1973, Davis Bynum buys Joe Rochioli's Pinot Noir and bottles it as a single vineyard Pinot Noir, perhaps the first from the Russian River Valley. In 1973, Brice Cutrer Jones plants his first vineyards with a focus on Chardonnay. About the same time, Fred Fruth, owner of Chalk Hill Estate, plants Chardonnay and hires David Ramey to make the wine. Self-rooted Martini Pinot Noir is planted at Block 4 of the Mark West vineyard (now Starscape) in 1972. Also, in 1972 Kent Ritchie plants his vineyard in Laguna Ridge [see box]. Joe Swan makes his first Pinot Noir in 1973 with the assistance of legendary Andre Tchelistcheff. The quality of his Pinot Noir fruit and the subsequent planting of cuttings from it elsewhere leads to it being identified as a unique selection, the Swan Clone. Tom Dehlinger sets out his own vineyard this same year, and in 1975 plants Swan, Pommard, and Martini clones. The Bazzano Family plants

its Lorenzo Vineyard to Old Wente Chardonnay in 1974. Also in the early 1970s, Warren Dutton begins converting his apple orchards to vineyards in the Green Valley, eventually becoming one of the largest vineyards in Sonoma County. Pellegrini plants its Olivet Lane vineyard to Wente selection Chardonnay in 1975. Audrey and Barry Sterling establish the Iron Horse sparkling wine house in Green Valley in 1976. Also, in 1976, Steve Spurrier organizes the Judgement of Paris, and a 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay made from Bacigalupi grapes wins, beating out wines from top producers in Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet, and Batard-Montrachet.



*(credit Ramey Wine)*

**Kent Ritchie Vineyard (Middle Reach)** Located just off River Rd at the intersection of Eastside Rd and Trenton Rd, about 2 mi northeast of Forestville, this vineyard was planted by Kent Ritchie in 1972 and is still farmed by him today. The location is unique because it sits on a bench at the confluence of the Russian River, the Santa Rosa Plain, and the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Each of these unique geological characteristics influences the “terroir” of the Ritchie Vineyard, but the dedication, skill and continuity of Kent Ritchie’s farming this site for almost 50 years is equally important. The Ritchie Vineyard features Goldridge-based soil with volcanic ash

and river pebbles. The vineyard is planted to Old Wente Chardonnay on AXR-1 rootstock and is widely spaced, as was the fashion in the early ‘70s. These old, gnarly trunked vines produce small clusters with distinct “hen and chick” berry sizes. Ritchie Chardonnays are renowned for their combination of refinement and depth of flavor. DeLoach, DuMOL, Flanagan, Gary Farrell, MacRostie, Patz & Hall, and Ramey have all produced wines from the Ritchie Vineyard.

**1980s:** In 1982 Charles Heintz plants 25 acres of Clone 4 Chardonnay on his 900’ high vineyard near Occidental. In the same year, Gary Farrell launches his own label with a Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir. And then Ed Selyem and Burt Williams converted their winemaking hobby into a commercial winery in 1981 and made their first vineyard designated Pinot Noir (from the Rochioli Vineyard) in 1985. This wine won the top wine award at the California State Fair and made both Williams-Selyem and Rochioli famous. These producers—Bynum, Farrell, Williams-Selyem and, later, Rochioli—introduce Sonoma single vineyard Pinot Noir to America. Iron Horse sparkling wine is served at the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Geneva in 1985. Marimar Torres plants the 60-acre Don Miguel vineyard in Green Valley and later introduces the Albariño, Godello and Tempranillo grape varieties to the Russian River Valley. Steve MacRostie founds his eponymous winery in 1987.

**1990s:** David Ramey establishes his own winery in 1996 and starts making single vineyard Chardonnays. DuMOL opens the same year as a negociant winery but a few years later under Andy Smith’s management begins its estate vineyard program. Brice Cutrer Jones sells Sonoma-Cutrer and establishes Emeritus Vineyards, including the Pinot Noir vineyard Hallberg Ranch. Steve Kanzler buys an old apple orchard in the Sebastapol Hills and plants a vineyard in 1996,

one of the first in the Sebastopol Hills. Merry Edwards and Ben Papapietro and Ranae Perry establish their eponymous wineries in 1997 and 1998.

## Generational Change



Left to right, Nicole Bacigalupi, Ryan and Rachel Rochioli, Alexia Pellegrini (credit drwinkler)

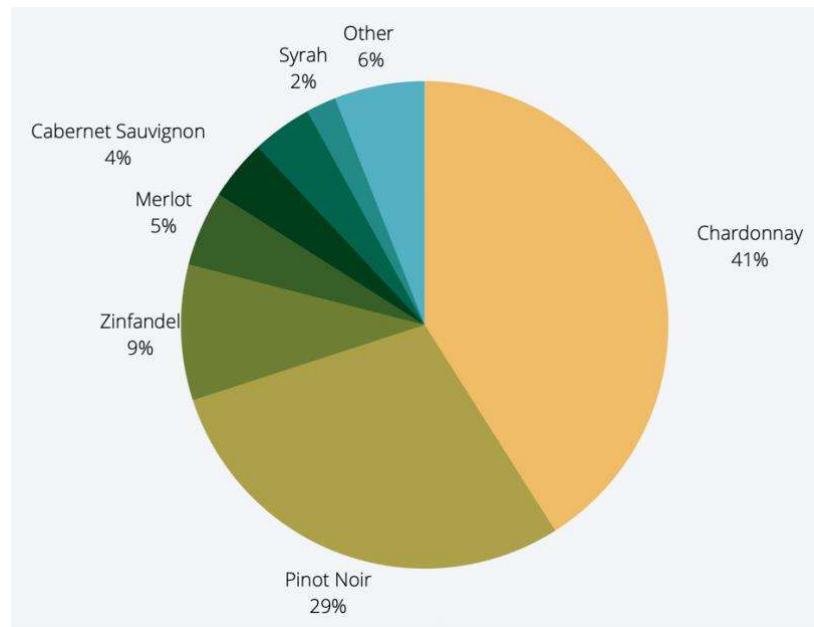
Russian River Valley wineries are similar to those of Europe in terms of their size and ownership with many owned and managed by families over multiple generations. Several vintners have assumed leadership positions from their parents, and some are the third or fourth generation of the family to do so. Nicole Bacigalupi and her twin sister Katie are the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation at Bacigalupi Vineyards. Juliana Martinelli is the 4<sup>th</sup> generation working at the Martinelli Winery; Ryan and Rachel Rochioli are the 4<sup>th</sup> generation to work at the Rochioli Vineyard and Winery; and Alexia Pellegrini is the 4<sup>th</sup> generation to manage the Pellegrini-Olivet Lane winery and vineyard operations.

Several others are the second generation of their families to assume management or winemaking positions in their wineries. Alex Kanzler has taken over the winemaking and management responsibilities from his father at Kanzler Family Vineyards, while Cristina Torres has assumed administrative responsibilities at her mother's Marimar Estate, Riggs Lokka has taken over his father's previous position as vineyard manager at Emeritus Vineyards, and Joy Sterling manages the Iron Horse winery her parents established.



Left to right, Alex Kanzler, Cristina Torres, and Riggs Lokka (credit drwinkler)

## Vines and Vintages



(credit RRVW)

Chardonnay and Pinot Noir account for over two-thirds of all plantings in the Russian River Valley. As noted earlier, this is a dramatic change from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1960 so little Chardonnay was planted in California that it didn't even register in the state's annual vineyard survey. That changed dramatically in three decades. By 1990 Sonoma County alone had almost 12 thousand acres of Chardonnay vines. Pinot Noir experienced a growth pattern similar to that of Chardonnay. As plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grew, other varieties, especially Zinfandel, declined.

Our discussions below of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel are kept brief. Readers wanting much more detail on these varieties as grown in Sonoma County should consult our earlier reports: #44 *The Wines of Sonoma County*; #87 *California Chardonnay: Terroir & Winemaking in Sonoma*; and #61 *California Zinfandel: A New Look*.

### Chardonnay

A Chardonnay “boom” occurred after a Chardonnay made mostly from Russian River Valley grapes grown by the Bacigalupi family won the 1976 Judgement of Paris. Since the Wente vineyard in Livermore was one of the few sources of Chardonnay budwood [see box], the Wente clone (especially, its heat-treated version, FPS-04) and its derivatives (including the Mt Eden clone that Merry Edwards brought from the Santa Cruz Mountains to her vineyards in the Russian River Valley) became ubiquitous in Sonoma County. Today, over 40% of the grapes grown in the Russian River Valley are Chardonnay.

**The Wente Clone.** In 1882, Charles Wetmore, head of the State Viticultural Commission, imported budwood from Meursault and planted it at his winery in the Livermore Valley. Wetmore was interested in propagating new grape varieties in California and made cuttings available to other vintners, including the Wente family, also in Livermore. Carl Wente imported Chardonnay budwood from the University of Montpellier in 1912 and planted it along with the Wetmore cuttings. Over the next four decades, the Wente family selected and planted the best vines resulting in what would eventually be called the Wente selection.

## **Sauvignon Blanc**

The international popularity of this variety has led to increased plantings in Sonoma County and the Russian River Valley. Joe Rochioli Jr was one of the first to plant Sauvignon Blanc in the Russian River Valley in 1959; those vines are still producing today. While several clones are planted, the most common are the Wente heritage clone FPS 1, followed by the Musqué clone FPS 27. Winemakers frequently blend grapes of different clones and from different regions together to contribute to complexity.

## **Pinot Noir**

Pinot Noir is a challenging grape to cultivate successfully. It needs perfect growing conditions to ripen and reveal its considerable flavor and delicacy. The Russian River Valley provides the perfect terroir for growing Pinot Noir from the windy, foggy coastal areas of Green Valley and Sebastopol Hills to the somewhat warmer Middle Reach and Santa Rosa Plains neighborhoods where the now historic vineyards of Bacigalupi, Pelligrini-Olivet Lane, and Rochioli were planted over a half century ago. Grapes from these and other vineyards established the region's reputation for making rich, elegant, balanced Pinot Noir. At the opposite, southwest end of the Russian River, Warren Dutton showed that Pinot Noir grown near the Pacific produces distinctive, cool climate wines.

## **Zinfandel**

Zinfandel was one of the first varieties planted in Sonoma County in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and today the Zinfandel and mixed blacks vineyards are among the oldest and most special of the Russian River Valley. These old, gnarly vines are often located on steep slopes with meager soils, like the 60° slopes of Martinelli's Jackass Hill in Green Valley. In addition to Jackass Hill, the centenary vineyards of the Russian River Valley include: Martinelli's Lolita Ranch, and DeLoach's Fanucchi-Wood Road on Olivet bench. Of course, Sonoma County has more old vine Zinfandel vineyards located outside the Russian River Valley AVA.

## **Syrah**

This is not a widely planted variety in the Russian River Valley, but the wines made from this cool climate region are elegant and relatively complex with dark fruit flavors, peppery nuances, violets and good levels of natural acidity. David Ramey's Cole Creek Syrah is typical of the Northern Rhone character of much Russian River Valley Syrah.

## **Other Varieties**

Other varieties have also been introduced over time. Marimar Estate has demonstrated that Spanish varieties like Albariño, Godello and Tempranillo do well when planted appropriately. Joseph Swan grows and produces wines from Southern Rhone varieties like Viognier, Roussanne, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc, and Gewürztraminer.

Unusual varieties also exist in some of the old vineyards of the Russian River Valley. In the early 1920s, Italian immigrant Luca Mancini planted a 16-acre vineyard in the Santa Rosa Plain to mostly Zinfandel and Carignan. However, he also included smaller amounts of Abouriou, Blauer Portugeiser and Elbling. And current owner Max Reichwage has grafted other varieties like Mondeuse, Plavac Mali and Clairette Blanche.

Other growers are experimenting with varieties that are even more rare in California. Owner David Drummond and winemaker Sam Bilbro have planted several Italian and French varieties at the Las Cimas Vineyard located in the hills on the western edge of the Middle Reach neighborhood of the Russian River Valley. Las Cimas sits at 800' elevation with unusual (for the Russian River Valley) sandstone schist, chlorite and quartz soils. In 2020, they began regrafting an existing 50 acres of vines to 40 different varieties including Ribolla Gialla, Dolcetto, Refosco, Schioppettino, Nebbiolo, and many more. Another experimental effort is underway at David Ramey's Westside Ranch where UC Davis' newly created hybrid variety Caminante Blanc is now planted near the river.

## **Recent Russian River Valley Vintages**

2024 A very good vintage that started with good winter rains and a cool spring followed by a hot summer that resulted in an early start to harvest about mid-August and then proceeded quickly. Overall, a very good, new-normal year.

2023 A superb vintage for both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. A cool spring delayed flowering, and a moderate growing season allowed the fruit to mature slowly, resulting in one of the latest harvests in recent memory. Rain events during harvest caused some concern but no adverse effect on quality. Jeff Mangahas says it was a refreshing return to normal.

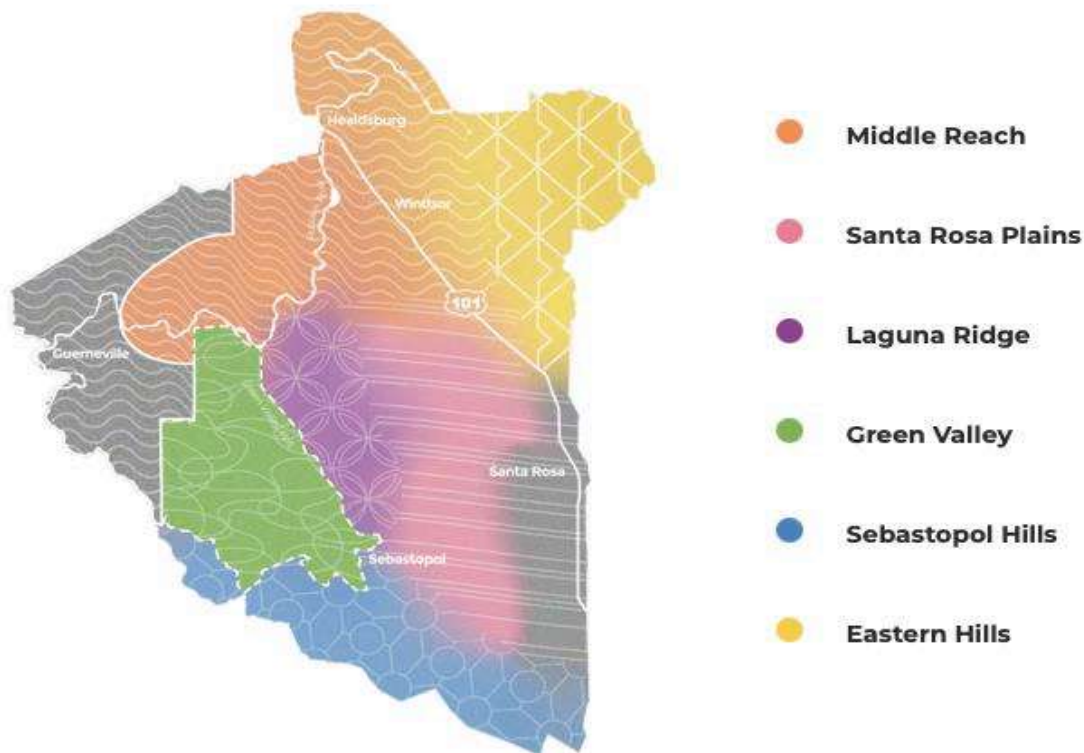
2022 This was the third year of drought, so rainfall was short of average. A warm season in general, so a lot of grapes were picked prior to the September when a Labor Day heat dome that began Sept 6 produced several days over 100°F. White wines from fruit harvested in August are fresh. Producers that pick early, like Gary Farrell, began harvesting in August before the heat spike. David Ramey reports that after the heat spike ripening and harvest slowed to a crawl; it was another five weeks before they were picked.

2021 Windy weather during blooming resulted in lower-than-normal yields. The season had stable temperatures but dry weather resulting in small berries and early picking.

2020 Wildfires during harvest resulted in smoke taint, so many if not most producers decided to not make wine from grapes harvested during or after the fires. About a third of the crop was lost. Weather was moderate prior to the fires, so grapes picked early were of very good quality.

2019 A vintage to remember with stable, moderate weather that allowed vintners to harvest when fruit was phenologically ripe.

## The Neighborhoods of the Russian River Valley



When the Russian River Valley AVA was first approved in 1983 it comprised 96,400 acres. After expansions in 2005 and 2011 it now contains 126,600 acres with 16 thousand acres of vines and over 200 wineries and vineyards. Located near the Pacific Ocean with significant marine influence, especially in the western and southern parts of the AVA, it's also quite varied in terms of climate and soils. Higher elevation vineyards can be close to the ocean and still be quite warm, while low lying vineyards can be quite distant from the ocean yet be very cool if they're exposed to marine winds and fog. The soils also vary, from the famous Goldridge sandy loam of the western part of the AVA to the alluvial and basaltic soils of the eastern and northern parts.

Winemakers and growers of the Valley have long recognized its varying terroir and have historically given names to its distinct subregions. These subregions consist of the following: Green Valley, Sebastopol Hills, Laguna Ridge, Middle Reach, Santa Rosa Plains, and the Eastern Hills. Recognizing the differences in terroir, the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association has carried out tastings over the years to determine how Pinot Noir wines vary by subregion. Recently, researchers at UC Davis did more systematic research and found that Pinot Noir wines do in fact regionally vary in terms of their "footprint".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Courtney Tanabe, et.al. (2020), "The Use of Macro, Micro, and Trace Elemental Profiles to Differentiate Commercial Single Vineyard Pinot Noir Wines at a Sub-Regional Level," *Molecules*.

## Green Valley of Russian River Valley



*(credit @wildlysimpleproductions)*

Green Valley became an AVA in 1983, the same time as the larger Russian River Valley AVA, of which it is a part. It's located in the southwest corner of the Russian River Valley, 10 miles from the Pacific and just east of Occidental, west of Sebastopol, and southwest of Forestville. It's located west of the Laguna Ridge neighborhood of the Russian River Valley and, also, west of the Gravenstein Highway. It's diverse in terms of elevation with many vineyards low lying and open to the winds and fog from the Pacific. Green Valley is where the fog first comes in and the last where it burns off. It is slightly cooler (especially at the southern end of the AVA) than most other parts of the Russian River Valley and has low diurnal temperature variations, typically from the low 50s to the mid-80s during the peak growing season. The soils are predominantly Goldridge sandy loam over fractured marine sandstone with good drainage and low fertility. The soils and climate make it ideal terroir for growing high quality Chardonnay grapes.

There are over 100 growers in Green Valley farming 3,600 acres of grapes; the largest by far is the Dutton Ranch. Warren Dutton bought his first 35 acres of land west of Graton in 1965 and began growing apples and pears; he switched to grapes in the late 1970s. Just 35 years later he owned or managed over one thousand acres of vines in western Sonoma County. Some parts of the vineyard are dry farmed, resulting in small, intensely concentrated berries. Another grower pioneer in the Green Valley is Charles Heintz [see box] who planted his vineyard on a ridge not far from Occidental in 1982.

**Heintz Vineyard (Green Valley of Russian River Valley)** Located just east of the town of Occidental surrounded by old Redwoods and 7 miles and two ridges in from the Bodega Bay coastline, the Heintz family has owned this 100-acre site (55 acres of vines) in Green Valley's "banana belt" since 1912. Coastal fog moves directly through the vineyard during the growing season, and the vineyard faces some disease pressure as a result. Botrytised bunches may have to be selectively cut before the harvest. Producers who have used fruit from this vineyard

include Amici, Banshee, DeLoach, DuMOL, Freeman, Heintz, La Rue, Littorai, MacRostie, and Williams Selyem.

## **Sebastapol Hills**



*(credit @wildlysimpleproductions)*

This former home of Gravenstein apple orchards was added to the Russian River Valley AVA in 2005. It has 52 vineyards and about 900 acres of vines. Located both near the Pacific and the Petaluma Gap, it is the most southerly and coolest part of the Russian River Valley. It lies to the south/southwest of Sebastopol below Hwy 12 and borders the Petaluma Gap AVA to the south. Its terrain is mostly rolling hills with elevations from 118-646', and the soils are predominantly the Goldridge type. With plentiful rain (43 inches average annually) and soils that retain moisture, it's a good location for dry farming. Several prominent wineries, among them, Hartford Court, Paul Hobbs, Kanzler, Littorai, Martinelli, and Merry Edwards, have estate vineyards here. At 77 acres Balletto's Burnside Vineyard is one of the largest.

## **Laguna Ridge**



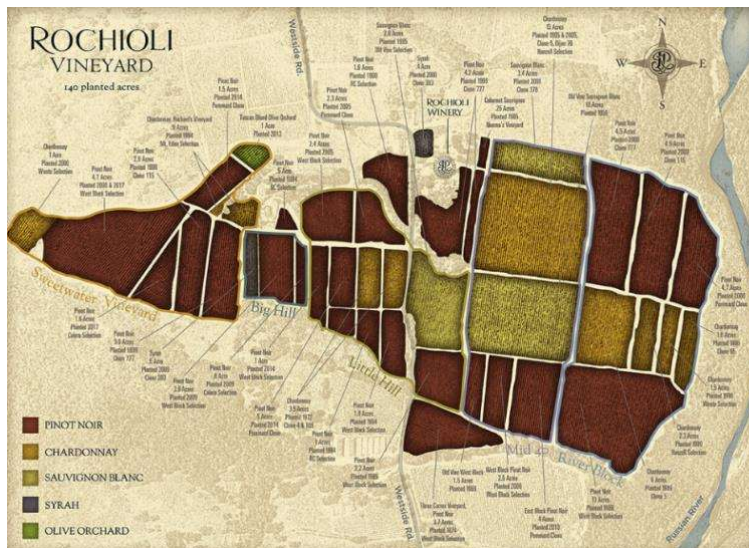
*(credit @wildlysimpleproductions)*

Laguna Ridge is the center of the Russian River Valley, to the west of the Santa Rosa Plains and the Laguna de Santa Rosa and to the east of Green Valley and covering a north-south ellipse around Graton and Forestville. The “Ridge” is a set of north-south running rolling hills with mostly Goldridge loam soils to the west and Altamont and Franciscan soils with a high percentage of sandstone and shale to the east. Bud break is earlier and hang times are longer than vineyards located further north. Although east of Green Valley, the area still receives a lot of fog, and diurnal temperature differences are large (about 40° during the growing season).

The best-known grower vineyards in Laguna Ridge include Lorenzo, Reuling, Ritchie, Wohler, and Martinelli’s Zio Tony. Planted in 1972, Kent Ritchie’s vineyard [see box] is one of the oldest. There are, in addition, many excellent winery estate vineyards in this area, including those of DuMOL, Kistler, Lynmar, and Scherrer. The wines from this neighborhood are, of course, not uniform, but they do reveal richer, riper flavors than Green Valley to the west or the Sebastopol Hills to the south. In general, the wines made by skilled winemakers show superb balance and refined mouth feel.

## Middle Reach

Middle Reach lies mostly west of Highway 101 at the northern end of the Russian River Valley with vineyards located on the benches both on the eastern and western sides of the river between Forestville and Healdsburg. This is a warmer part of the valley as the flow of fog is slower, although it eventually finds its way north to cool down vineyards in the evening. Temperatures climb as one goes up the hills on either side of the river. As a result, bud break and harvests tend to be earlier here than most other parts of the valley. The soils here are varied, a Franciscan mélange of sandstone but also floodplain deposits and deep gravel terraces. Further from the river, one finds more Josephine loam in iron-rich soils. Middle Reach is the principal growing area of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir; it is sometimes called Pinot Noir’s *Miracle Mile*.



**Rochioli Vineyard** Located just 10 minutes south of Healdsburg on Westside Road, the Rochioli Vineyard has been in the family for three generations. Its reputation was originally tied to Pinot Noir, which was planted in 1968, but Chardonnay was planted shortly thereafter in 1972 and today some of Sonoma’s best wines are made from both varieties. The vineyard is 140 acres running from the Russian River up to and across Westside Road. It consists of several parcels with somewhat different soils and clones.

It sits over deep gravel deposits and a large aquifer, so it’s both very well-draining and dry farmed. Among the wineries sourcing from Rochioli are Ramey, Gary Farrell, Alysiian, and Longboard.

Middle Reach is home to some of the oldest as well as newest vineyards of the Russian River Valley. The old ones include Bacigalupi, first planted in 1964, and Rochioli Sauvignon Blanc, planted in 1959. Newer vineyards include David Ramey's Westside Farms and El Diablo and Flora Marie, planted away from the river in 2008-14 at higher elevations by famed viticulturist Ulises Valdez. Being further from the river, these are some of the first harvested vineyards in the Russian River Valley.

## Santa Rosa Plains

This is the largest of the neighborhoods and lies just to the west of Santa Rosa and east of the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Low lying (120-200') and less hilly than other areas, the vineyards tend to be larger and more uniform. The soils are quite varied, a mix of basaltic, shale, sandstone and clay, and many places have a hardpan 2-5' below the surface. The fog burns off relatively early, and daytime temperatures are a bit higher in this area, creating large diurnal temperature changes. The southern end of the Plains receives fog and can be very cool, but the climate warms towards the north, creating the conditions for growing the Zinfandel the neighborhood is known for. The best-known Chardonnay producers in this area are the Pellegrini Winery and its Olivet Lane Vineyard planted to Old Wente in 1975; the Sonoma-Cutrer Winery and its Les Pierres and Cutrer vineyards planted beginning in 1973; and the La Crema Winery and its Saralee's Vineyard planted by Jim and Saralee Kunde in 1989. In addition, Ehren Jordan (Failla) owns an adjoining vineyard on Olivet Lane, and Jim Pratt planted his eponymous vineyard to Dijon clones in 1988. Benovia's 42-acre Martaella Vineyard was planted by winemaker Mike Sullivan to 4 clones of Chardonnay and 9 clones and vineyard selections of Pinot Noir in the early 2000s.



*(credit Merry Edwards)*

**Pellegrini Olivet Lane Vineyard** Located just east of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, the 70 acre Olivet Lane parcel was purchased in 1972 by Vincent and Aida Pellegrini and planted in 1975, half to the Wente selection of Chardonnay and half to the Martini selection of Pinot Noir using 8x12 spacing and AxR1 rootstock. At 150' elevation, the low-lying Olivet Lane experiences heavy fog and large diurnal temperature variations from long cool nights and hot summer days. Pellegrini sold its first Chardonnay labeled Olivet Lane in the late 1970s. Merry Edwards Winery makes Chardonnay, Pinot

Noir and sparkling wine from Olivet Lane grapes. Other wineries purchasing Olivet Lane fruit include Williams Selyem and Gary Farrell.

## Eastern Hills & Chalk Hill



*(credit @wildlysimpleproductions)*

Located east of Hwy 101 and following the western edge of the Mayacamas, this is the northeastern corner of the Russian River Valley. It's the warmest region with the least fog influence and west facing vineyards exposed to the afternoon sun. The soils are diverse, a mix of sedimentary and volcanic. The Chalk Hill AVA, which was created in 1983 along with the Russian River Valley and Green Valley, is named after its volcanic soil of chalky white ash.

Given the warmth of this region, it's best known for its red grape varieties grown on the western slopes of the Mayacamas. However, it's also one of the areas where Chardonnay was first planted in Sonoma County by Rodney Strong in 1965. The Chalk Hill Winery, founded in 1972 and now part of Foley Family Wines, has collaborated with UC Davis in clonal research. As might be expected from Chalk Hill's warm climate, the wines are riper in flavor than other parts of the Russian River Valley and complemented by toasty oak, but they're also nicely balanced. Notre Vue's Balverne Estate is another notable vineyard in this area.

## Russian River Valley: Winery Profiles, Tasting Notes, and Ratings

In this section, we provide profiles of many of the principal wine producers of the Russian River Valley and reviews of their wines. Don Winkler and Mike Potashnik spent several days in late 2025 visiting wineries, meeting winemakers, and tasting their wines. Subsequently, several producers sent additional wines to our Washington DC offices for tasting.

We use a 100-point scale in assigning numerical scores to the wines. Suggested retail prices are given when provided by the producer.



*Nicole Bacigalupi (credit drwinkler)*

**Bacigalupi Vineyards** Charles and Helen Bacigalupi were the first to plant Burgundian varietals in the Russian River Valley, and their fruit was the largest component in the Chateau Montelena Chardonnay that won the 1976 Judgement of Paris. Today, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes from this historic vineyard are highly sought after by California's top winemakers, and the Bacigalupi family also makes their own wines from the estate vineyard, only sold online.

In 1956, Charles and Helen Bacigalupi purchased this 121-acre site with 20 acres of grapes located in the Russian River Valley's Middle Reach neighborhood off Westside Rd near Healdsburg; in 1964 they began planting Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (they're credited for being the first to plant these varietals in the Russian River Valley). They sold their grapes to luminaries such as Mike

Grgich of Chateau Montelena, who proceeded to make the 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay that won the Judgement of Paris.

Today, Bacigalupi has 125 acres of grapes now managed by John Bacigalupi, son of Charles and Helen. The vineyard has three main parcels with different soils; it produces about 350 tons of grapes, about 40 of which are used for the winery's own production, which began in 2011 with winemaker Ashley Herzberg. Annual production is about 3 thousand cases, all of which are sold direct to consumer. We tasted Bacigalupi's current releases with Nicole Bacigalupi, granddaughter of the founders; she and her twin sister Katie are the general managers of the winery. Several prominent vintners source fruit from Bacigalupi today including Flanagan, Gary Farrell, MacRostie, and Tongue Dancer. Chardonnays made from Bacigalupi fruit are medium weight, subtle and refined; they show their terroir in their dusty, lemon verbena and citrus-inflected aromas and flavors.

**Bacigalupi 2023 Chardonnay Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$65) 93** Medium yellow straw color. Fruit rich nose revealing tropical notes. Lovely, concentrated mango and stone fruit flavors with a creamy texture and sensuous mouthfeel on a balanced palate with just a hint of toasty oak. Sourced from three blocks of Wente clone Chardonnay within the estate including the Paris block with vines that date back to the 1960s. Whole cluster pressed and fermented using ambient yeast and matured in about 40% new French oak for 11 months. Bottled unfiltered. 13.7% alc. **Bacigalupi 2023 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$79) 93** The medium ruby Pinot Noir, sourced from estate fruit, reveals dried and fresh red cherry scents followed by savory, forest floor notes. The mouthfeel is wonderfully silky with excellent balance. Made from Wente,

Pommard, and Dijon 828 clones and matured 11 months in 40% new French oak. 13.5% alc.

**Bacigalupi 2022 Petite Sirah Russian River Valley (\$58) 92** Opaque in color with a bouquet of black fruit along with violets and a hint of licorice. The wine is almost black with note of blackberry, licorice, and black plum. Finishes with firm but round tannins. Matured 21 months in 25% new French oak. 13.8% alc. **Bacigalupi 2023**

**Renouveau Paris Tasting Chardonnay Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) 94** Medium yellow gold revealing a toasty, mango and peach bouquet.

Smooth and sensual in the mouth showing a very appealing silky creaminess. Richly flavored of stone fruit complemented by toasty notes and exhilarating acidity. Finishes very long and succulent. Made from the historic Paris Tasting Block, which made up 40% of the winning wine from the 1976 Judgement of Paris. Pressed to half new 500L puncheons where it ages for 12 months before being racked to neutral oak. Available only to club members. 14.4% alc.

**Bacigalupi 2021 Brillante Blanc de Noir Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$80) 92** Pale bronze-gold. The nose reveals lively, fresh orchard fruit with yeasty notes. Lovely, delicate mousse and creamy mouth feel balanced by bright acidity. Crisp, mineral like finish with lingering sweet fruit notes. A blend of 50% Wente Chardonnay and 50% Wente Pinot Noir aged 3 years on the lees in bottle. Dosage (honey) 3 g/L, pH 3.18, 12.5% alc.



**BENOVIA  
WINERY**

**Benovia Winery** In 2003, Mary Dewane and Joe Anderson purchased the 50-year-old, 18-acre Cohn Vineyard and in 2005 purchased the former Hartman Lane Vineyards and Winery that had been built by Cecil DeLoach, later purchasing and planting the adjacent 42 acre Martaella Vineyard. They then partnered with winemaker Mike Sullivan to establish Benovia Winery, which has won plaudits from the wine press for its Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines. We recently tasted the wines at the winery, located in the middle of the Martaella

Vineyard, with Associate Winemaker Adolfo Hernandez. In addition to the Cohn and Martaella Vineyards, Benovia also owns the 10-acre Tilton Hill Vineyard in Freestone in the Sebastopol Hills. They also source fruit from the Martinelli Family. Total production is about 10 thousand cases, most of which is sold direct to consumer.

Winemaker Mike Sullivan grew up tending his family's vines on Sonoma Mountain, and at age 18 began working in Dick Arrowood's cellar at Chateau St. Jean. He studied winemaking at Fresno State and gained winemaking experience at Landmark Vineyards (under legendary Helen Turley) and at Chappellet



*Mike Sullivan (credit Benovia)*

prior to assuming the role of lead winemaker at Hartford Family Winery.

Benovia's Chardonnays are all whole bunch pressed and fermented using native yeast in barriques and matured 18 months in about 40% new French oak. The wines go through full malo but are not inoculated, and the lees are not stirred. The Pinot Noirs are harvested at night, given a 5-day cold soak and fermented in room before being fermented about 15% whole cluster with native yeasts in small, open top tanks. We tasted the wines at the winery, located in the middle of the Martaella Vineyard, with Associate Winemaker Adolfo Hernandez.

**Benovia 2023 Sauvignon Blanc Martaella Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$42) 92** Green-tinted straw color. Fresh and crisp revealing citrus fruit and key lime pie notes. Round, full and pure on the palate. A blend of 93% Sauvignon Blanc and 7% Semillon sourced from the estate vineyard in the Santa Rosa Plains neighborhood and matured about 6 months in used oak.

**Benovia 2022 Chardonnay Martaella Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$65) 93** Sourced from Old Wente, Hyde and Montrachet suitcase selections, the 2022 Chardonnay opens with notes of lemon custard, yellow apple and a hint of chamomile. It's round in the mouth with a creamy texture and good balancing acidity. Excellent concentration, beautifully integrated oak, and lingering richness on the finish. Sourced from the estate vineyard in the Santa Rosa Plains and matured in 36% new French oak.

**Benovia 2022 Chardonnay La Pommeraie Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$65) 94** Sourced from the Martinelli's La Pommeraie Vineyard on Frye Road near Graton in the Middle Reach neighborhood. Bright, fresh aromas of ripe citrus and orchard fruit with a hint of baking spice jump out of the nose. A warm spice note runs throughout the wine along with notable acidity. Overall elegance with a long, fine finish. Aged 16 months in 36% new French oak. 14.5% alc.



*Adolfo Hernandez* (credit: Benovia)

**Benovia 2022 Chardonnay Tilton Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast (\$65) 95** Picked at the end of September from a late ripening, high altitude site above the fog line planted to Old Wente and Mt Eden clones near Freestone, this is a delicate, elegant Chardonnay with a precise, lemony nose and rich extract on the palate. A gorgeous wine with bright acidity that enhances the fruit flavors. Matured in 26% new French oak.

**Benovia 2022 Chardonnay Three Sisters Vineyard Fort Ross Seaview (\$65) 93** This is an impeccably balanced wine that opens with a perfumed, floral-herbal nose. Delicate and suave on the palate with understated fruit, a hint of salinity and a mineral note that's especially prominent on the refined finish. Aged in 40% new French oak. 14.1% alc.

**Benovia 2022 Pinot Noir Martaella Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$75) 93**

The Martaella Vineyard has six blocks, each a different clone fermented separately. The 2022 vintage was harvested before the Labor Day heat spike. Black cherry and baking spice appear on the nose followed by a medium weight palate of cherry, boysenberry and pomegranate with savory notes. Good flavor density with soft round tannins.

**Benovia 2022 Pinot Noir La Pommeraie Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$75) 94** Located on the edge of Green Valley, La Pommeraie is densely plated with strong coastal influences. Intense black cherries, berries and plum show on the nose. The attack is firm with excellent freshness and concentration of fruit with a savory note. Soft, polished tannins on the finish. Dijon clones (777, 828) harvested before the heat spike. 14.5% alc.

**Benovia 2022 Pinot Noir Cohn Vineyard Sonoma County (\$100) 95** Located near Westside Road just outside the boundaries of the Russian River Valley, this is a 50-

year-old, 800' high, organically farmed cobblestone vineyard. The wine is complex, beginning with a savory, red fruited nose and followed by a chewy, broad, full-flavored savory palate. Superb focus and refinement. 14.1% alc. **Benovia 2022 Pinot Noir Tilton Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast (\$75) 94** Tilton Hill produces tiny berries with a high skin to juice ratio. Harvested after the heat spike, it offers darker flavors with a hint of chocolate. Excellent concentration and pliable tannins. 14.2% alc. **Benovia 2022 Pinot Noir Bella Una Russian River Valley (\$90) 94** A winemaker's blend of the best barrels, the Bella Una has a complex floral-fruit bouquet and offers excellent balance, freshness and intensity of flavor on the palate. A pretty wine with a silky mouthfeel. **Benovia 2022 Zinfandel Cohn Vineyard Sonoma County (\$50) 94** Dark ruby. Opens with a red and dark red berry nose complemented by floral accents of roses and violets. Silky on the attack with a juicy palate of fresh red berries. Mouthfilling and lovely with a long, focused finish.



*Winemaker David Milner (credit drwinkler)*

**Donelan Family Wines** Winemaker David Milner caught the wine “bug” while attending Sonoma State University. He took winemaking classes and learned more while working at Eisele and Groth in the Napa Valley before returning to Sonoma where he worked at Benovia before joining Donelan in 2017 and being named Director of Winemaking and Viticulture in 2019. At Donelan, he works with Cellar Master and San Luis Obispo grad Maya Joye and several members of the Donelan family. About 85% of Donelan wines are sold DTC (direct to consumer). We tasted verticals of three Donelan wines with David. His fine-tuned winemaking produces consistently excellent wines despite vintage variation. We do not allocate points to the wines as the focus of the

tasting was on terroir and vintage variation. However, these are all beautiful, finely crafted wines deserving scores in the mid-90s.

**Donelan Genevieve's Block Chardonnay Devoto Vineyard Sonoma Coast** This is a small, organically cultivated, 2.3-acre vineyard on Goldridge Rd next to Littorai planted 35 years ago to just 0.9 acre of Clone 4 Chardonnay. This foggy, cool climate site is west facing with late bud break and late veraison and subject to powdery mildew and botrytis. The wine is fermented and aged in oak (about one-third new) with full malo; it's relatively high in acidity. We tasted three vintages with David. The 2023 vintage is our favorite: it's classically styled, balanced and concentrated, and exceptionally good from a season with an exceptionally long hang time (214 days from budbreak to harvest); 14.1% alc. While the 2023 vintage was picked on Nov 14, the 2022 vintage was picked almost two months earlier, on Sept 17. The wine is richly flavored and balanced but with a bit more alcohol (14.4%). The 2021 vintage was also picked the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September. It reveals firm acidity and a tad higher alcohol (14.6%).

**Donelan Cuvée Pierrine Chardonnay Allen Ranch Russian River Valley (Middle Reach)** Sourced from one of the Russian River Valley's marquee vineyards farmed by the Rochioli family since its first planting in the early 1970s. A warmer site than Genevieve, Donelan usually does two picks of this vineyard. Given about 18 months of sur-lee aging in 35% new French oak. The 2023 vintage was harvested on Sept 6 and 15. It's a gorgeous wine, phenolically ripe with superb balancing acidity, integrated and creamy. 14.3% alc. The 2022 vintage suffered from a

May hailstorm that resulted in just 2.5 tons of fruit from 4 acres of vines. Harvested Sept 1-2, just before a heat spike. Superb, full and creamy. 14.2% alc. The 2021 vintage was picked Sept 2 and 6. It's also superbly balanced and fresh with 14.3% alc.

**Donelan Annabelle's Block Pinot Noir Klopp Ranch Russian River Valley (Laguna Ridge)**

This is a single vineyard off Laguna Rd that includes Swan material from 1988 that gives dark, brambly, somewhat tannic fruit. We've tasted other wines from this vineyard but not from these vintages. The 2023 vintage is exceptional, elegant and pure, superbly balanced with a high toned sweetness. 14.2% alc. The 2022 bottling is beautifully balanced, a bit lighter than the 2023, with good acidity and balance. 13.9% alc. The 2021 vintage is our favorite, intensely aromatic and concentrated. From a low yielding year with small clusters. 14.6% alc.



*Andy Smith (credit DuMOL)*

**DuMOL** was opened in 1996 by partners Michael Verlander and Kerry Murphy. The winery produces wine from its own estate vineyards in the Green Valley section of the Russian River Valley plus other premium vineyards in Sonoma. Scotsman Andy Smith has been the viticulturist and winemaker since 2001 and became a partner in 2005. Andy holds a degree in enology and viticulture from Lincoln University in New Zealand and served as assistant winemaker for Paul Hobbs before joining DuMOL. The winery started planting estate vineyards in 2004-5, and today 70% of grapes are from the estate. About 80% of Pinot Noir comes from the estate and 50% of Chardonnay. They have their own vineyard crew of 18 people farming 90 acres; Andy says the stability of the crew contributes to fruit quality.

DuMOL produces 22 wines; about half of total production is sold DTC and half via distribution. They export around the world with Japan their largest export market. We tasted wines from the 2023 vintage with Andy at their estate vineyard near Sebastopol. The 2023 vintage is, of course, one of the best in memory and the wines will age well; Andy also opened several 2015 vintage wines from another classic vintage to illustrate how well the 2023s should age.

**DuMOL 2023 Wester Reach Chardonnay Russian River Valley (\$65) 93** This is DuMOL's appellation wine sourced from five different vineyards located in four different neighborhoods of the appellation. Waxy yellow fruit shows on the nose. Beautifully balanced palate with nice firmness and a long, rich finish. Barrel fermented and matured 11 months in light toasted barrels followed by 3-6 months on the lees in stainless steel. Malo is inoculated. 4600 cases produced. pH 3.3, 14.1% alc. **DuMOL 2023 Chardonnay Highland Divide Russian River Valley (Green Valley) 94** Sourced from two Dutton Ranch sites in Green Valley, this wine illustrates the Green Valley style. While there are notes of apple and citrus, this Chardonnay is more savory, revealing lemon grass and botanicals. There's nice firmness to the palate and bright acidity. Fermented in 25% new 320L cigar barrels designed by Dagenau that give more surface contact with the lees, ideal for high acid wines. pH 3.2 **DuMOL 2023 Chloe Chardonnay Russian River Valley 96**

Sourced half from the Flora Marie Vineyard located in the warmer eastern hills of the Russian River and the other half from the Bressay Estate in the Green Valley. This is DuMOL's richest and most opulent Chardonnay with lush orchard and stone fruit and somewhat lower acidity. Aged 11 months in 26% new French oak followed by 6 months in stainless steel.

**DuMOL 2023 Wester Reach Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$65) 94** Like the Chardonnay, the appellation Pinot Noir comes from four of the Russian River Valley neighborhoods. Ruby red in color and revealing fresh red berry fruit. Significant purity on a refined mouthfeel. Made with 15% whole cluster and aged 11 months in 30% new French oak. Long, focused finish with a lingering sense of freshness. **DuMOL 2023 Highland Divide Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$70) 95** Sourced from adjacent state parcels planted high density at 9 thousand vines/hectare, almost the same as in Burgundy, that results in more shade on the bunches and soil and a wine that is more structured and savory with higher acidity. The 2023 vintage reveals savory dark red fruit and spice and a refined mouthfeel. Aged 15 months in 30% new French oak. **DuMOL 2023 Ryan Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$85) 96** This is a blend of two Dutton Ranch vineyards made since 2002 including Dutton-Widdoes planted to the Martini clone in 1984. It's classic Green Valley with dark berries and cherries and an earthy rusticity (from the Martini clone). Full and succulent in the mouth with excellent density and a bit lower acidity than wines from coastal vineyards. 15% whole cluster and aged 15 months in 34% new French oak. **DuMOL 2023 Finn Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$125) 98** This is DuMOL's 24<sup>th</sup> vintage of Finn, a blend of the Bressay Estate and Occidental Road vineyards, the latter being older Calera vines planted in 1990 that contribute a dark-fruited, spicy note. Minerals, flowers and berries show on the nose. The palate is silky and beautifully refined. Matured 15 months in 40% new French oak. It's one of the top-rated Pinot Noirs in this report. **DuMOL 2023 Pinot Noir Flax Estate Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$100) 95** Located on Westside Road near Rochioli Allen, up off the river with eroded red volcanic soils with a high iron content. Planted in 1996 using Pommard budwood from Rochioli. Broad on the palate and firmly tannic, showing a gamey Pommard wildness. There's a red mineral component on the finish. Sold all DTC.

**DuMol 2023 Eddie's Patch Syrah Russian River Valley 95** Eddie's Patch is predominantly from a single vineyard planted in 1996 to older clones of Syrah on a steep, south facing hillside on Limerick Lane southeast of Healdsburg. Semi-opaque in color, it shows a blackberry and rosemary scented nose. Very flavorful fruit including blueberry, blackberry and herbal accents on a silky palate. About 1/3 whole cluster and aged 15 months in 25% new French oak.



*Riggs Lokka (credit drwinkler)*

**Emeritus Vineyards** Established in 1999 by Brice Cutrer Jones, who also founded Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyards, Emeritus is known for its Hallberg Ranch property on Hwy 116 planted by Kirk Lokka who later planted Pinot Hills in the Sebastopol Hills. The two estate vineyards, which total 140 acres, include 110 acres of Pinot Noir; the vineyards are dry farmed since 2011 and pesticide free (beginning 2025). Most of the fruit is sold. Over time, the winery has begun picking earlier, using less new oak, lighter bottles, and more recycled glass. Sonoma County native Keith Hammond first joined Emeritus in 2007 and became winemaker in 2023. Kirk Lokka's son Riggs joined Emeritus full time in 2020 and became vineyard manager in 2023. Both Keith and Riggs studied at Santa Rosa Junior College.

Mari Jones, daughter of Brice Cutrer Jones, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation President of Emeritus. Production is 7-8 thousand cases, half sold DTC and half in distribution. While most the production is red wine, Emeritus also makes a Pinot Noir Blanc and a sparkling wine (with Gloria Ferrer).

**Emeritus 2023 Hallberg Blanc Pinot Noir Blanc Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$45) 91**

The bouquet reveals white pear with a hint of citrus. Crisp and clean on the attack with mineral notes on a nicely balanced palate. No skin contact; fermented with indigenous yeasts in concrete tank and neutral barrels and aged 11 months in 10% new French oak barrels with lees stirring. Full malo. First made in 2017. pH 3.2, 12.9% alc.

**Emeritus 2021 Pinot Noir Hallberg Ranch Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$50) 93**

Medium ruby red. This is the first picked of the Emeritus Pinot Noirs. It's a blend of 13 different clones, each harvested and fermented separately and blended just before bottling. Fresh and pure, this is a beautifully balanced Pinot Noir with exuberant acidity. Widely distributed. Aged 10 months in 34% new French oak. 13.7% alc.

**Emeritus 2021 Wesley's Reserve Pinot Noir Hallberg Ranch Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$80) 95**

A gorgeous Pinot Noir that opens with a savory bouquet of herbs, earth and red fruit. In the mouth, there's superb depth of flavor and an impressively silky texture. A Pinot with power that would benefit from some cellar aging. Wesley's Reserve is sourced from just one block of Hallberg Ranch planted to clones 667 and 115. Matured 11 months in 38% new French oak. 13.8% alc.



*Keith Hammond (credit drwinkler)*



**Foppiano Vineyards** Founded in 1896 by Giovanni Foppiano, this was Sonoma County's oldest family-owned winery until the winery and vineyards were purchased by the Courtney Benham family (owners of Martin Ray) in 2024. Foppiano began bottling wine under its own name in 1937 and was an industry leader. In 1941 Louis J. Foppiano founded the Wine Institute of California. In 1967 Foppiano sold its

first Petite Sirah wine, which became one of its flagship bottlings. The 1983 vintage was the first to include Russian River on the label. Another significant event occurred in 1926 when Prohibition revenue agents forced Foppiano to discard 140 thousand gallons of wine into the Russian River, turning the river red. We tasted three Foppiano wines that are widely distributed. They are all well-made and well-priced.

**Foppiano 2023 Estate Chardonnay Russian River Valley (\$32) 91** An excellent entry level Chardonnay. Aromas and flavors of light white peach and pear. Nicely balanced palate with a clean finish.

**Foppiano 2023 Estate Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$40) 92** Opens with a ripe fruited nose of dark cherries and plums. An easy drinking Pinot Noir, soft and round. Finishes dry.

**Foppiano 2021 Petite Sirah Russian River Valley 91** Semi-opaque red. This is a

medium weight Petite Sirah, lighter in body than one would expect, but flavorful nonetheless. The nose reveals savory dark fruit, while the palate is soft on entry with dark red fruit and firm dry tannins. 14.7% alc.



*Winemaker Brent McKoy (credit Gary Farrell)*

**Gary Farrell Winery** Gary Farrell started his eponymous label in 1982 with Pinot Noir grapes from the Rochioli vineyard and became one of the winemaking pioneers of the Russian River Valley. He and his winery played an important role in establishing this as California's premier region for growing and making Pinot Noir. Today, the winery that carries his name continues to source fruit from Rochioli and other iconic Russian River Valley vineyards [Hallberg Vineyard is shown here.] Indeed, it is the 40+ year continuity of this winemaker-grower relationship that is one of the strengths of the winery. That and the winemaking, which continues the fresh style initiated by Gary Farrell. Grapes are picked a bit earlier than elsewhere, gently pressed using a basket press, and aged in lightly toasted barrels with

thin staves that allow more oxygen exchange. Bill Price of Kistler Vineyards and Three Sticks leads the investor group that owns the winery. Theresa Heredia was the winemaker at Gary Farrell for the past decade and made the wines reviewed in this article. In 2023, Brent McKoy was named winemaker. We tasted wines at the winery with Brent and sommelier Gabe Brezic and also at our Washington DC offices. Annual production is 25 thousand cases, about 10 thousand of which are distributed.

**Gary Farrell 2022 Chardonnay Russian River Selection Russian River Valley (\$40) 92**

Light yellow. This blend of some of the most noted vineyards of the Russian River Valley offers an excellent Chardonnay at a reasonable price. It's a good example of the Gary Farrell style that puts the focus on freshness and vibrancy. There's an overall richness of flavor with lemony acidity, orchard and citrus fruit and good extract on the finish. Sourced from several vineyards including Rochioli, Allen and Olivet Lane and fermented and aged 10 months in 30% new French oak.

**Gary Farrell 2021 Chardonnay Olivet Lane Russian River Valley (\$50) 93**

Lively bouquet of orchard fruit with a toasty oak accent. Bright on the attack with tangy acidity and density of citrus and tart apple flavors. Chablis like in its minerality and purity. Sourced from Pellegrini's Olivet Lane Vineyard on the Santa Rosa Plain planted in 1975 to Wente selection. Fermented with Montrachet yeast and aged 10 months in 35% new French oak. pH 3.23, 13.2% alc.

**Gary Farrell 2021 Chardonnay Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$75) 94**

Pale yellow straw. Nuanced aromas of Bosc pear, lemon oil, and a hint of ginger. Excellent volume on a well-structured palate with firm edged flavors. Beautiful purity, juicy acidity and excellent delineation; quite firm and refined with a fresh minerality. Lovely rich, dry finish. Sourced from Ritchie vineyard and fermented and aged 10 months in 35% new, 65% neutral French oak barrels. pH 3.20, 14% alc.

**Gary Farrell 2021 Chardonnay Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$75) 95**

A stunning wine! Sumptuous nose of waxy Meyer lemon and cling peach with floral notes. Elegant mouth feel with excellent depth and volume, exhilarating acidity and an energetic,

rich finish. Sourced mostly from the historic Rochioli Vineyard's River Block planted in 1989, whole cluster pressed, fermented with Montrachet yeast, and aged 10 months in 35% new French oak barrels and puncheons. pH 3.21, 13.7% alc.

**Gary Farrell 2023 Rosé of Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$45) 93** This is one of the most delightful rosés we've had in a long time. It opens with a nuanced floral perfume of rose petals and subtle red cherry. Very fresh on the palate with bright, penetrating cherry/berry fruit that persists on a very long finish. Beautifully balanced and very dry (but with sweet fruit). All UCD Clone 37 sourced from the Wat Vineyard near Sebastopol in the very cool Green Valley of the Russian River Valley. 13.8% alc. Only available to club members, so it's a good reason to join.



*Sommelier Gabe Brezic (credit Gary Farrell)*

**Gary Farrell 2021 Pinot Noir Russian River Selection Russian River Valley (\$50) 93** Medium ruby red. Sourced from iconic vineyards located in the diverse neighborhoods of the AVA, this wine is a beautiful representation of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Riper red berries and dark cherry show on the bouquet along with light earthy note. The medium weight palate is well-balanced with good acidity, an overall sense of juicy, fresh fruit, and a clean, dry finish. Sourced from vineyards located in diverse parts of the Russian River. Matured 13 months in 40% new French oak. pH 3.37, 13.9% alc.

**Gary Farrell 2021 Pinot Noir Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley)(\$60) 94**

Sourced from the diverse clones of the 100-acre Hallberg Vineyard in the cool, foggy Green Valley, the

part of the Russian River Valley closest to the Pacific with a strong marine influence, this Pinot Noir has striking purity of flavor. The bouquet reveals dark cherry with floral and earth notes, and the palate adds rich red and black berries to the mix. It's an elegant wine, medium weight with excellent balance and a silky mouth feel. Partially destemmed and fermented in small open top tanks followed by 15 months in 40% new French oak. pH 3.35, 13.8% alc.

**Gary Farrell 2020 Pinot Noir Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$90) 95** Sourced from the historic Rochioli Vineyard's Rochioli River Block, this is an exceptional wine made even more special by the challenges of the vintage. Intensely perfumed, it shows deep fruit aromas with savory notes. Lovely, refined and silky mouth feel and overall weight with complex, layered flavors of fruit, cassis and bergamot and a superb rich finish with excellent persistence. Fermented 15% whole cluster, in open top stainless steel and aged 15 months in 45% new French oak. pH 3.30, 13.8% alc.

**Gary Farrell 2020 Pinot Noir Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta Rita Hills (\$75) 93** This is a lovely, floral-accented, red fruited wine from Santa Barbara's most historic Pinot Noir vineyard. It reveals excellent purity of flavor and invigorating acidity with an appealing silkiness in the mouth. Hand sorted, fermented in small open top tanks with 20% whole cluster, and aged 15 months on the lees in 40% new French oak. pH 3.32, 14.3% alc.



HARTFORD  
FAMILY WINERY®

The **Hartford Family Winery** focuses on single vineyard bottlings of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel, most from organically and biodynamically farmed vineyards located in the Russian River Valley. It was founded by Don and Jennifer Hartford in Forestville in 1994. Today, Hailey Hartford Murray, daughter of Don and Jennifer and granddaughter of Jackson Family Wines founder Jess Jackson, is President of Hartford Family Winery. Jeff Stewart is General Manager, and Tiaan Lordan is Winemaker. We tasted the Hartford wines with Tiaan Lordan, a native of South Africa and graduate of Stellenbosch University and Elsenburg Agricultural College.

He interned at Hartford Family Wines under winemaker Jeff Mangahas and worked his way up to the Winemaker position in 2018. Naturally, given his background, he has added Chenin Blanc to Hartford's range of wines.

*Hartford Court's Chardonnays are all fermented in barrel using ambient yeast and go through full malo. In addition to the single vineyard wines reviewed here, Hartford makes an entry level (\$32) Chardonnay that is a blend of vineyards located in several of the Russian River Valley neighborhoods. Aged 9 months in 24% new French oak, it offers excellent value in a Russian River Chardonnay.*

**Hartford Court 2023 Chardonnay Three Jacks Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$70) 94**

The Three Jacks Vineyard Chardonnay opens with lively scents of lemon drop and mineral-accented pear. It's refined and suave with optimally ripened fruit and a hint of creamy oak. From a small vineyard in the heart of Green Valley farmed by the Dutton family. Aged 15 months in 28% new French oak. pH 3.26, 14.1% alc.

**Hartford Court 2023**

**Chardonnay Fog Dance Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$70) 95** The Fog Dance Chardonnay is delicate with a firm backbone, juicy acidity and very appealing green apple and citrus fruit. The bouquet reveals fresh fruit and hints of honeyed oak and a light reductive note. Impressive depth and persistence. From Jackson Family's Fog Dance Vineyard located across the valley from Iron Horse and planted in 1998 to Dijon 96 and ENTAV 809 on fine, sandy Goldridge soils. Aged in 12% new French oak for 14 months. 14.6% alc.

**Hartford Court 2023 Chardonnay Jennifer's Vineyard (Sebastopol Hills) (\$75) 95** The perfumed Jennifer's Vineyard Chardonnay opens with a sumptuous nose of lemon and crushed pineapple. The palate offers excellent richness and depth with sizzling acidity. Sourced from a vineyard planted in 2005 to old Wente selection Chardonnay on the edge of the Petaluma Gap with a cold, windy climate. Aged 13 months in 25% new French oak. pH 3.19, 14.1% alc.

*Hartford's Pinot Noirs are harvested at night, given a 5-day cold soak, and fermented in 2-5 ton stainless steel fermenters using ambient yeast. Fully destemmed, in general. The single vineyard program focuses on cooler growing neighborhoods of the Russian River Valley. In addition to the single vineyard Pinot Noirs reviewed below, Hartford makes an excellent, entry level Russian River Valley vineyard blend aged 9 months in 27% new French oak.*

**Hartford Court 2023 Pinot Noir Jennifer's Vineyard Russian River Valley (Sebastopol Hills) 96**

The Jennifer's Pinot Noir has a vibrant, complex bouquet that evokes raspberry, dark cherry and a hint of tea and dried rose. Supremely silky in the mouth with striking purity and precision and a long after taste inflected with savory notes. Jennifer Vineyard's Pinot Noir blocks are planted to Dijon 777 and the Swan and Pommard selections. Matured 13 months in 23% new French oak. pH 3.44, 14.1% alc.

**Hartford Court 2023 Pinot Noir Hailey's Block Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$85) 95**

Hailey's Block Pinot Noir offers a floral, perfumed nose of rose petals, Green Valley spice and red berries. Delicate in character with a layered, silky palate of red fruits and polished, soft tannins. Hailey's Block is located within the Arrendell Vineyard, a cold, low lying vineyard; it was planted in 1996 to Dijon 114 and 777. Aged 15 months in 21% new French oak. pH 3.55, 14.6% alc.

**Hartford Court 2023 MacLean's Block Pinot Noir Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$78) 95**

Organically farmed with very poor soils, MacLean's Block gives a very light crop with small clusters and berries resulting in a high skin to juice ratio. It presents refined and pure solid red fruit on a rich, velvety palate with crunchy tannins. Very ageable. Sourced from an estate vineyard planted to Dijon 667 and 777 on a northeast facing slope amidst redwoods and oaks on the edge of Green Valley in the Freestone-Occidental area. About 8% whole cluster; aged 14 months in 11% new French oak. pH 3.49, 14.8% alc.

**Hartford Court 2023 Pinot Noir Arendell Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$110) 96**

This wine comes from one of the coldest spots in Green Valley. It has one of the latest bud breaks and latest pickings. Dark cherry and plum with earth notes on the nose. Big and full flavored on a semi-viscous, suave and layered palate showing dark fruit with savory notes. A powerful wine that also shows finesse. Super long finish. Sourced from the old vine Arendell Vineyard planted (probably to the Martini clone) 8x12 next to Atascadero Creek off Occidental Rd planted in 1975. Yields below one ton/acre. Aged 14 months in 12% new French oak. pH 3.26, 14.2% alc.

*Hartford Family Winery makes six single vineyard Russian River Valley old vine Zinfandels in addition to a blend of the six vineyards, all over 100 years old except for Jolene's Vineyard, which was planted in 1998. All the Zinfandels are hand-picked at night, destemmed, sorted, given a 5-day cold soak and fermented with native yeast in 2-5 ton fermenters, then matured in Bordeaux shape 225L barrels.*

**Hartford 2023 Zinfandel Jolene's Vineyard Russian River Valley (Santa Rosa Plain) (\$65) 95**

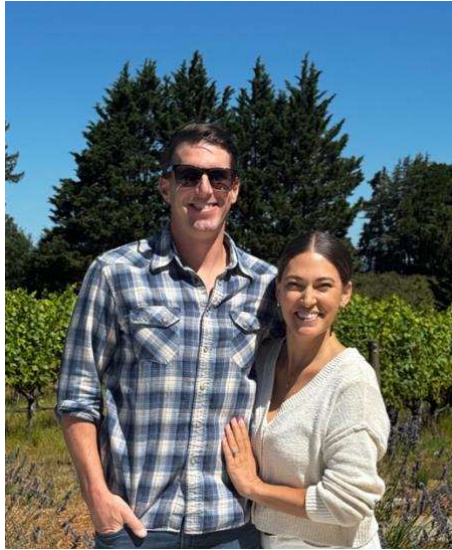
This concentrated, dark-fruited wine made from almost 100-year-old vines offers ripe blackberry, black currant, and *sottobosco* aromas and flavors. The fruit is rich and sweet, and the mouth feel is viscous, yet bright acidity gives the wine a lively freshness that belies its high alcohol. From a 21-acre vineyard on Olivet Road managed by grower Joanne Maffei; her grandparents, Umberto and Maria Maffei, planted this vineyard in 1928. Matured 9 months in 48% new French oak. pH 3.32, 16.1% alc.

**Hartford 2023 Zinfandel Highwire Vineyard Russian River Valley (Santa Rosa Plain) 96**

Black fruit is complemented by black raspberry and boysenberry along with a distinctive dash of white pepper in this big, rich wine. Beautifully balanced with firm acidity, finishing with lingering rich extract and firm, well-knit tannins. A field blend of 95% Zinfandel and 5% other varieties, including Petite Sirah, sourced from the 100+ year old Highwire Vineyard, purchased by Hartford Family Winery from Lloyd and Dee Chelli in 2018. The name refers to the vineyard's trellising: a high wire trellis is strung between head-trained vines resulting in half the parcel being head trained and half trellised. Aged 9 months in 44% new French oak. pH 3.29, 15.9% alc.

**Hartford 2023 Zinfandel Fanucchi-Wood**

**Road Vineyard Russian River Valley (Santa Rosa Plain) (\$65) 94** The Fanucchi-Wood Road Zinfandel expresses dark berries, cherries and licorice with notes of chocolate shavings and espresso. Silky on the attack with firm, dry tannins on the back palate. Concentrated and full-bodied in the mouth. From an organically farmed, unirrigated, head trained, 7-acre vineyard of Zinfandel and Tousseau Gris planted in 1890; located off Wood Road and managed by the Fanucchi family for over 40 years. The vineyard's sandy loam soils produce tiny berries with concentrated flavors. Aged 9 months in 54% new French oak. pH 3.37, 15.5% alc.



*Alex and Breana (credit drwinkler)*

**Kanzler Family Vineyards** The Steve Kanzler family bought an old apple orchard 8 miles from the Pacific Ocean in the Sebastapol Hills in 1994 and planted their first vineyard in 1996 with the assistance of vineyard manager Eric Neal. They sold grapes to some of Sonoma's leading wine producers. When the Wine Spectator gave 98 points to the Kosta Browne Kanzler Vineyard Pinot Noir, the wine world took notice. Among those making a Kanzler vineyard designate Pinot Noir were A.P. Vin, Arista, Flowers, Gary Farrell, Kosta Browne, Landmark, Lynmar, Rhys, Rivers-Marie, and Senses. Steve began making Pinot Noir under his own label in 2004. After gaining winemaking experience in Oregon, New Zealand, and Sonoma, Steve's son Alex became manager and winemaker in 2011. He has converted the vineyards to mostly organic practices and with his wife Breana built a new, state of the art tasting room at the family homestead. Alex is also leading the effort to give the

Sebastapol Hills AVA status. Annual production: about 3 thousand cases.

**Kanzler 2023 Chardonnay Walker Station Russian River Valley (\$74) 93** Medium yellow straw. Very fresh bouquet with notes of peach skin and vanilla bean. Great acidity and excellent balance on an invigorating palate with white tropical fruit notes. Sourced from 1 acre of the Montrachet selection grown in the Walker Station Vineyard in Green Valley. Native ferment and matured 14 months in 50% new French puncheons. pH 3.2.



**Kanzler 2021 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$64)**

**93** This is the only Kanzler wine in distribution; all other wines are sold DTC. The wine is showy and juicy with dark fruit aromas and a cola note. Beautiful up-front fruit with lovely concentration. Sourced from four vineyards in the Sebastapol Hills. Sees 14% new French oak. **Kanzler 2022 One Fifteen Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$90) 94** This clonal designate Pinot Noir reveals dark red cherry

fruit with floral and herbal hints. It has an especially silky mouth feel and a remarkably pure, long finish. Sourced from the Kanzler Estate, Mes Filles and O'Conner vineyards and aged in 17% new French oak. **Kanzler 2023 Mes Filles Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$90) 95** Opens with an enticing perfume of red fruit accompanied by savory notes. Suave and rich on the palate with a very long, fine finish. Sourced from one of the highest points (550') in the Sebastapol Hills. Age in 35% new French oak. **Kanzler 2022 Kanzler Estate Reserve Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$96) 94** Medium dark red. The Estate Reserve Pinot Noir shows rich Russian River Valley fruit. Begins with a bouquet of cherry, dark rose petals and Chinese 5 spice. Big and chewy on the palate and packed with flavor. Finishes long with rich extract and firm tannins. Sees 45% new French oak.



*Joy Sterling (credit drwinkler)*

**Iron Horse** Located 13 miles from the Pacific, this 300-acre estate (164 acres in vine today) was founded by Audrey and Barry Sterling in Green Valley in 1976. They were pioneers of the Green Valley and played a key role in establishing it as an AVA within the Russian River Valley. Today, their daughter, Joy Sterling, who grew up in Paris, attended Yale, and was bureau chief at ABC News, is CEO of the winery. In addition to making some of America's most popular sparkling wines, Iron Horse is famous for being served at the 1985 summit meeting between President Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva. Iron Horse has now been served at seven consecutive presidential administrations. David Munksgard has been winemaker and chef de caves since 1996. All the Iron Horse sparkling wines are made from estate fruit grown in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley.



*Iron Horse Vineyard as Seen from the Winery (credit drwinkler)*

**Iron Horse 2021 Classic Vintage Brut Russian River Valley (\$58) 92** This is Iron Horse's flagship wine. It's clean, nicely balanced and has lovely fruit and brioche aromas and flavors. A blend of 77% Chardonnay and 23% Pinot Noir with 3 years of lees aging. **Iron Horse 2019 Ocean Reserve Blanc de Blancs Russian River Valley (\$62) 92** After spending 5 years on the lees, the Ocean Reserve has a notable leesy quality to it. Bright and sparkling on the attack, this is a nicely balanced Green Valley sparkler revealing firm minerality and a hint of lemon zest. Dosage 6.9 g/L. Disgorged April 2025. All profits go to the Ocean Conservancy. **Iron Horse 2021 Summer's Cuvée Blanc de Blancs Russian River Valley (\$75) 92** Opens with toasty lees and stone fruit notes on the nose. Bright and dry on the attack with a fine, very firm effervescence. Finishes with lingering chalkiness. 6.9 g/L dosage. Limited production of this sparkler and only available online or at the cellar door. **Iron Horse 2021 Brut X Green Valley of Russian River Valley (\$62) 91** This Brut Nature (no sugar added) offers light orchard fruit aromas and flavors on a beautifully pure nose. It's round and dry and mineral like on a bone-dry palate. A blend of 77% Chardonnay and 23% Pinot Noir. **Iron Horse 2021 Russian River Cuvée Russian River Valley (\$58) 92** The Russian River Cuvée is made of the same base wine as the Brut X but with a dosage of 8.3 g/L. Round and full, it reveals orchard fruit, croissant, blanched almond and toasty leesy notes. Very nicely balanced. Made to commemorate the 1985 Reagan Gorbachev meeting. A beautiful, very drinkable food sparkler that was served at the White House for many years. **Iron Horse 2021 Year of the Snake Russian River Valley (\$75) 93** This blanc de blancs is one of Iron Horse's most flavorful sparklers. It reveals a fruity, lees-inflected nose and is round and full on the palate. 100% Chardonnay. 5.4 g/L RS. 13.5% alc. **Iron Horse 2016 Stargazing Cuvée Russian River Valley (\$195/magnum) 93** Joy served this aged sparkler from magnum over lunch at the winery. It's rich, mouth filling and perfectly balanced with prominent leesy notes complementing white peach, lemony citrus and apple. It shows how well sparkling wine pairs with food and, also, the benefits of aging sparkling wine, especially in magnums. A 50/50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.



**Joseph Jewell Wines** Natives of Humboldt County, winemaker Adrian Jewell Manspeaker and his wife Lily source grapes from both Humboldt and Sonoma Counties. Adrian is the winemaker with training from UC Davis and the C. Donatiello Winery and Peay Vineyards. He began making wine in 2006. The Jewell tasting room is in Forestville. Photo credit: Jewell Wines

**Joseph Jewell 2023 Chardonnay Russian River Valley (\$35) 91** Medium yellow straw. This is a good entry level Chardonnay with an easy drinking style. Full in the mouth with light, honeyed orchard fruit complemented by a lemon zest note.

Good length on the finish. **Jewell 2023 Chardonnay Starscape Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$50) 92** Yellow gold straw color. Opens with rich, ripe apple and pear flavors accompanied by hints of peach and toast. Softly textured on entry with rich up front fruit. Located at the south end of Middle Reach, the 74-acre Starscape Vineyard was previously called Floodgate Vineyard; it is planted to 5 clones of Chardonnay. **Jewell 2023 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$40) 91** This Russian River Valley blend reveals mouthfilling dark cherry fruit complemented by earthy notes. Good interplay between fruit and acidity; finishes with firm tannins. Good value. 14% alc. **Jewell 2022 Pinot Noir Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$65) 92** Medium dark red. Opens with a red fruited nose. Bright flavors erupt on

a soft, round palate. Excellent freshness and silky texture to the palate with savory undertones. The dry farmed Hallberg Vineyard is farmed by Riggs Lokka. 13.5% alc. **Joseph Jewell 2022 Pinot Noir Rubies Russian River Valley (\$75) 94+** This perfumed Pinot Noir blend is sourced from four vineyards. It's full in the mouth, revealing an impressive concentration of dark cherries and raspberries. Vibrant, balanced and relatively low in alcohol. Aged 18 months in French oak. 13.6% alc. **Jewell 2021 Pinot Noir Martini Clone-Old Girls Russian River Valley (Laguna Ridge) (\$75) 95** Medium ruby red. A delicious Pinot Noir showing red berries with herbal accents on the nose. Light silky, vibrant palate with excellent purity of red berries and cherries. Flavorful and delicious. Made from self-rooted Martini Clone planted in 1972 in the Starscape Vineyard, one of the oldest plantings in the Russian River Valley. Yields are very low, less than 1 ton/acre. 15% whole cluster, native ferment, aged sur lie for 16 months and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.



*Winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen  
(credit drwinkler)*

**MacRostie** Sacramento native Steve MacRostie founded his eponymous winery in 1987. He caught the wine bug while traveling in Italy and subsequently enrolled at UC Davis along with David Ramey, Merry Edwards, and other members of the first generation of skilled Russian River Valley winemakers. He built the brand with wholesale distribution, but today 70 percent of sales are direct to consumer. MacRostie sold the winery to an Australian firm in 2011, staying on as consulting winemaker. After stints at Kendall-Jackson and Sonoma-Cutrer, Wisconsin native Heidi Bridenhagen joined MacRostie as winemaker at the same time (2011). Today, Heidi is the Director of Winemaking for Distinguished Vineyards' winery portfolio including Markham in the Napa Valley and Argyle in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

MacRostie Winery and Vineyards sources fruit from more than 30 Chardonnay and 15 Pinot Noir Vineyards in addition to its estate vineyards. While most of its grapes are sourced from the Russian River Valley, MacRostie also owns the Nightwing Vineyard and Wildcat Mountain Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap AVA.

**MacRostie 2023 Chardonnay Russian River Valley (\$40) 92** MacRostie's Russian River Chardonnay blend sourced from several vineyards, mostly in Green Valley, is superb for the price. It's clean and precise with aromas and flavors of citrus and stone fruit with hints of toasty, vanilla oak. You're likely to find this served by the glass at restaurants; if so, have a glass! Matured in 18% new French oak. 13.7% alc. **MacRostie 2022 Chardonnay Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$54) 94** Sourced from one of California's most famous, historic vineyards (its grapes were in the Chateau Montelena Chardonnay that won the famous 1976 Paris tasting). Opens with a perfumed, white flowers and tropical fruit nose. Excellent, fresh acidity and rich, toasty, ripe fruited flavors on a full, balanced palate and very long finish. Outstanding! Aged 18 months in neutral oak. 14.9% alc. [Note: We later tasted the 2023 vintage of the Bacigalupi Chardonnay; it is an outstanding wine that we rate even higher, 95 points.] **MacRostie 2023 Chardonnay Olivet Lane (Santa Rosa Plain) (\$58) 94** Light yellow gold in color, this is an old vines Chardonnay from a vineyard planted to the Old Wente clone by the Pellegrini family in 1975. Opens with a mineral like nose revealing yellow fruit. Firmly structured with stone fruit, jasmine, and hints of green tropical fruit. Aged 10 months in used oak. 13.8% alc. **MacRostie 2024 Pinot Noir Rosé (\$30) 92** A bright and effusive rosé that

begins with a fresh red berry nose and proceeds to a perfumed and balanced palate of strawberry, raspberry and a hint of wild cherry. Finishes on the crisp side. 52% direct press and 48% saignée, fermented and aged in stainless steel. 13.9% alc. **MacRostie 2022 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$50) 92** As with the Chardonnay, this Russian River Valley blend is mainly distributed to restaurants for their wine by the glass programs. Effusive nose of dark cherry and toasted spice. Broad on the palate with concentrated, sweet dark red cherry and berry flavors and savory notes. Made in small fermenters with fruit from all the neighborhoods of Russian River Valley after 14 days on the skin. Aged about 10 months in 31% new French oak. 13.6% alc. **MacRostie Pinot Noir Thales Vineyard (Middle Reach) (\$68) 94** Spicy, herbal, dark red fruited nose. Broad and full flavored on the palate with a light, delicate character. An earthy notes shows on the finish. Made with some whole cluster from a 14 acre property purchased in 2013. Matured 10 months in 32% new French oak; 13.6% alc.



*Marimar & Cristina Torres (credit drwinkler)*

**Marimar Estate** Marimar Torres is a member of one of Spain's most famous winemaking families, the Torres of Catalunya. After helping market Torres wines in America, she decided to make her own wine in California and in 1986 planted the 60 acre Don Miguel vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Her winery, Marimar Estate, has been one of the Russian River Valley's success stories, and in 2002 she went beyond the Russian River to the West Sonoma Coast AVA to plant 20 acres of vines at the Doña Margarita Vineyard. In recent years, she has introduced Spanish varieties—Albariño, Godello and Tempranillo---to the Russian River Valley, and she continues to experiment with lesser known Spanish varieties, including Mencia.

Today, Marimar's daughter Cristina has assumed the role of General Manager and taken over the day-to-day management of the winery. Both mother and daughter have similar educational backgrounds. Marimar studied economics at the University of Barcelona, while Cristina studied economics at Princeton. Marimar is a graduate of the Stanford Executive Program, while Cristina earned an MBA from Wharton.

Taylor Bianco, who previously made wine in the Willamette Valley and New Zealand, makes the wine today with long-time consulting winemaker Bill Dyer. We tasted the Marimar Estate portfolio at the winery with Taylor, Marimar and Cristina in late 2025. Marimar also treated us to a Spanish lunch made with recipes from her two cookbooks, *The Spanish Table*, published in 1986, and *The Catalan Country Kitchen*, published in 1992.

**Marimar Estate 2024 Acero Chardonnay Don Miguel Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$42) 93** This is one of the best unwooded Chardonnays we've had from California. Chablis like in its crispness and minerality, the Acero (steel, in Spanish) Chardonnay is clean and mineral-like on the palate with note of tropical fruit and waxy yellow apple. From vines planted in 1986; fermented in stainless steel and concrete egg with battonage. 13.5% alc.

**Marimar Estate 2023 La Masía Chardonnay Don Miguel Vineyard Russian River Valley Green Valley) (\$54) 93** Medium yellow gold. This Chardonnay sourced from the estate offers a sumptuous nose of mineral-accented pear, lemon oil, and yellow apple complemented by light notes of hazelnut and citrus zest. The palate is suave and creamy with just the right amount of juicy, Green Valley acidity. Finishes crisply with good length. Whole cluster pressed and barrel fermented using ambient yeast with full malo matured in 30% new French oak for 9 months. 13.5% alc. **Marimar Estate 2024 Godello Don Miguel Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green**

**Valley) (\$46) 93** Medium yellow straw. This wine is an excellent example of Godello, a variety native to Spain's Galicia region. It's round and full on the palate with moderate acidity and integrated aromas and flavors of cling peach, yellow apple, acacia and beeswax. Godello is one of our favorite Spanish white varieties, and this one in addition to being delicious shows excellent typicity. Sourced from the estate vineyard, whole cluster pressed and fermented in 55% stainless steel and 45% concrete egg vessels. **Marimar Estate 2021**

**Tempranillo Don Miguel Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$64) 92** Semi-opaque. The Tempranillo is classic Ribera del Duero in style with vibrant, spice tinged aromas and flavors of juicy black cherry and cassis. The firmly structured palate reveals good depth and energy with appealingly sweet dark fruit and firm tannins. An excellent version of New World Tempranillo. Sourced from two blocks of head trained vines planted on the estate, destemmed and fermented with ambient yeast in stainless steel tanks, then aged 10 months in 33% new French oak. 14.2% alc. **Marimar Estate 2021**

**Cristina Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$88) 94**

Medium ruby red. An impeccably balanced, full bodied Pinot Noir showing rich dark cherry with violet notes. Excellent concentration with a persistent finish. A barrel selection of Pinot Noir fermented using native yeast and matured 18 months in 45% new French oak. 13.6% alc.

**Marimar Estate 2021 La Masía Don Miguel Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) \$64 93** Medium ruby red. Reveals bright red cherry fruit with savory notes and superb balance. Fine grained tannins. Marimar Estate has 30 acres of Pinot Noir planted in its Don Miguel Vineyard; several clones (Pommard, Swan, Dijon 667 and Dijon 115 are in the 2021 bottling). The grapes were destemmed and fermented in stainless steel with native yeast followed by aging 10 months in 30% new French oak.



**Martin Ray Vineyards & Winery** The former Martini and Prati property in the Laguna Ridge neighborhood of the Russian River Valley was purchased by Courtney Benham in 2003 and renamed Martin Ray; Benham had previously purchased the Martin Ray brand in the Santa Cruz Mountains in 1990. The Martin Ray property and its 12 acres of estate vineyards in Sonoma dates back to 1881 and is one of the oldest continually operating wineries in Sonoma County.

**Martin Ray 2023 Sauvignon Blanc Russian River Valley 89** Light straw color. Shows some lime citrus and green bean notes on the nose followed by a lightly flavored palate. An easy drinking wine. **Martin Ray 2023 Chardonnay Concrete Russian River Valley 92** Medium yellow gold. A full, rich unoaked Chardonnay with deep fruit aromas of tropical fruit and a honeycomb accent. Nicely concentrated with good acid balance. **Martin Ray 2020 Brut Rosé Russian River Valley 90** Medium salmon bronze with a rose petal and cherry bouquet. A straightforward sparkling wine with some sweet strawberry fruit notes. Serve well chilled as a summer patio aperitif. 12.5% alc. **Martin Ray 2022 Pinot Noir Hallberg Ranch Russian River Valley (Green Valley) 93** Medium ruby red in color reveal a bouquet of red cherry, dark berries and a hint of sandalwood. Smoothly textured, fresh and well balanced finish with a light herbal note.



**MERRY EDWARDS**

**Merry Edwards Winery and Vineyards** Although Merry Edwards created her first wine label while an undergraduate at Berkeley in 1970, it wasn't until 1997 that she launched Merry Edwards Winery and Vineyards, after receiving her master's degree in enology at UC Davis and gaining winemaking experience at Mount Eden, Matanzas Creek and elsewhere. She sold her winery and 80 acres of estate vineyards to Maison Louis Roederer in 2019. Sonoma County native Heidi von der Mehden joined Merry Edwards has been the lead winemaker since 2018. After a two-year, Peace Corps stint in Tanzania Heidi returned to Sonoma and made wine at Kenwood Vineyards, Mauritsen Winery and Richard Arrowood before joining Merry Edwards in 2015. The Pinot Noirs are big, juicy, dark fruited wines with

superb extract, gorgeous balance and round tannins that make them accessible early on.

**Merry Edwards 2023 Sauvignon Blanc Russian River Valley (\$48) 94** Medium yellow straw. The bouquet reveals citrus and kiwi fruit with savory notes. Full in the mouth with good flavor density and a focused, mineral like finish. Sauvignon Musqué from a 2-acre plot on the Meredith Estate. 30% fermented and aged in amphora, the rest in neutral oak and 9% new oak. pH 3.13, 14% alc. **Merry Edwards 2023 Chardonnay Olivet Lane Russian River Valley (Santa Rosa Plain) (\$70) 94** Medium yellow gold showing herb-accented lemon and acacia on the nose. Full, rich palate is superbly balanced with incisive lemon-apple flavors. Well-integrated oak gives it a lovely backbone and superb length. Planted in 1973 by the Pelligrini family, hand-picked, whole cluster pressed and barrel fermented, aged 8 months on the lees in 41% new French oak. pH 3.31, 13.8% alc. **Merry Edwards 2023 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$65) 93** A dark red fruited Pinot Noir revealing up-front red cherries and berries with earth notes. Medium-long, dry finish. Hand-picked, hand sorted, destemmed with a 5-day cold soak; aged 9 months in 37% new French oak. pH 3.54, 14.5% alc. **Merry Edwards 2022 Pinot Noir Meredith Estate Russian River Valley (Sebastopol Hills) (\$100) 96** Semi opaque dark red color. On the nose, earthy notes complement rich plum and dark berry fruit. Polished, lively, mouth filling and high toned with juicy, bright acidity and lovely, deep flavors accompanied by dusty earth notes. Superb balance and a long, precise finish. This 26-acre site was planted in 1998; now organically farmed. 100% destemmed, cold soaked, matured 10 months in 56% new French oak. pH 3.63, 14.5% alc.

**Merry Edwards 2023 Pinot Noir Georganne Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$72) 95**

Dark ruby. Opens with an earthy, herbal nose. There's incredible freshness to the mouth filling palate. Lively and bright with dark cherry and plum fruit, finishing with round tannins and abundant sweet fruit. Sourced from the 7.25 acre Georganne and Bob Proctor vineyard located on Westside Rd near the northern border of the AVA and planted to the Mt Eden (UCD37) clone and farmed by Merry Edwards. Destemmed, cold soaked 6 days and aged 9 months in 25% new French oak. pH 3.57, 14.5% alc. **Merry Edwards 2023 Pinot Noir Olivet Lane Russian River Valley (Santa Rosa Plain) (\$77) 95** Medium dark red. Alluring bouquet of dark red cherry with toasty notes, mirrored on the palate with herbal accents. A refined Olive Lane Pinot Noir that's full in the mouth, broad and silky with an astoundingly long finish. 16% whole cluster, cold soaked, aged 8 months in 69% new French oak. pH 3.59, 14.5% alc. **Merry Edwards 2022 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$60) 94** Medium ruby red. Opens with notes of ripe dark cherry, plum and underbrush. Soft on the palate with excellent balance and dense, layered flavors. Refined in character. A beautiful wine. Destemmed fruit given a 5 day cold soak; aged 9 months in 46% new French oak barrels. pH 3.64, 14.5% alc.



**Morét-Brealynn** We've been tasting Morét's wines since her maiden vintage. We had the opportunity to sit down with her in Santa Rosa and taste through her new releases from the classic 2024 vintage. In 2024, a wet winter was followed by a "normal" growing season with no major weather shocks. As a result, the harvested grapes were phenolically ripe with good acidity and freshness, making for excellent wines like those reviewed below.

**Morét-Brealynn 2024 Rosé of Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$30) 92**

Vibrant reddish pink in color, this Rosé of Pinot Noir offers freshness and plenty of pomegranate-raspberry-cherry flavor on a very dry, bright acid palate that finishes clean and mineral like. A blend of Pinot Noir juice sourced from premier Santa Lucia Highlands vineyards and given varying amounts of skin contact time, then fermented in neutral oak and stainless-steel vessels. Alc 13.1% [tasted and reviewed previously]

**Morét-Brealynn 2024 Stray Dogs Pinot Noir Sonoma County (\$39) 91**

A blend of three Sonoma County vineyards, the Stray Dogs Pinot Noir offers wonderful freshness and early drinking. Nicely concentrated and balanced, there's effusive red fruit aromas, round tannins and a persistent finish. Matured 10 months in 20% new French oak and bottled in July. 14.5% alc. **Morét-Brealynn 2024 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$52) 92**

Medium dark ruby red. A vineyard blend mostly from Sexton Vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Lovely fresh red fruit on the nose with the addition of spicy, savory notes on the palate. A juicy wine, wonderfully fresh with good concentration. 14.1% alc. **Morét-Brealynn 2024**

**Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$52) 93**

Medium carmen red. A very attractive, fruit forward Russian River Valley Pinot Noir revealing a perfume of cherry, rose petals and raspberries that carry over to the palate. Good volume in the mouth with bright acidity and a flavorful finish.

Mostly sourced from the Lakeview Vineyard. 14.4% alc. **Morét-Brealynn 2024 Pinot Noir**

**Sexton Vineyard Sonoma Coast/Russian River Valley (\$72) 94**

The Sexton Vineyard Pinot Noir opens with deep fruit aromas of dark cherry, violets, and exotic spice. Abundant quantities

of opulent flavors show on a supple palate with well-knit tannins putting in an appearance at the end. The steeply sloped Sexton Vineyard is located in Russian River Valley's Sebastopol neighborhood with a northern exposure and ocean winds from the Petaluma Gap. Matured in 66 percent new French oak for 10 months. 14.1% alc. **Morét-Brealynn 2023 Pinot Noir Lakeview Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$72) 94** Medium dark ruby in color, the Lakeview Vineyard has loads of personality. Opens with a penetrating nose redolent of dark cherry accented by a hint of toasty oak. Exuberant on a silky palate with copious, nicely delineated flavors and medium firm tannins. Finishes long and pure. About 25% whole cluster. 14.4% alc.



*Dave Low, Ben Papapietro & Tyson Freeman (credit Papapietro Perry)*

**Papapietro Perry Winery Ben** Papapietro was working as a journalist in the 1960s when he met a fellow-journalist and lover of fine wines, Burt Williams. They made garage wine together, and after Burt founded Williams Selyem, Ben worked harvests there. Ben began making his own garage wine and was joined by another journalist, Bruce Perry, and in 1998 they started their own winery, Papapietro Perry. Today the winery produces small lots of single vineyard and clonal designate wines from top vineyards in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties.

Unfortunately, Bruce Perry died in early 2022, and assistant winemaker Dave Low was asked to take on lead winemaking responsibilities, while Tyson Freeman became assistant winemaker. The rest of the Papapietro Perry team remains the same: Yolanda Papapietro, Ranae Perry, and, of course, Ben Papapietro. Most of the eight thousand case production is sold direct to consumer; the tasting room is on Dry Creek Road outside Healdsburg.

**Papapietro Perry 2020 Pinot Noir Leras Family Vineyards Russian River Valley (\$66)**

**93** This clonal blend offers ripe and dark cherry fruit, a soft and round palate and a long finish with savory notes. It exhibits very good balance and an overall sense of elegance. A beautiful wine. A blend of Pommard, Beringer Heritage, 115, 667, and 777 clones separately fermented and aged 11 months in 50% new French oak. 3.67 pH, 14.1% alc.

**Papapietro Perry 2020 Pinot Noir Nunes Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$66) 92**

Medium ruby red. The Nunes Vineyard Pinot Noir begins with a spicy, dark cherry nose with just a hint of smoke. It offers lovely freshness in the mouth with bright acidity enlivening luscious red fruit. Silky, refined, and very well made. A blend of 115, 667 and 777 clones aged 11 months in 50% new French oak. pH 3.59, 14.1% alc. **Papapietro Perry**

**2020 Pinot Noir Peters Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$66) 94** Medium ruby red.

Although not the most expensive, this is perhaps our favorite Papapietro Pinot Noir for drinking now. The nose shows cherry fruit married to spicy, toasty oak. Superbly balanced with vivid acidity and sweet red fruit complemented by savory tea-like notes. Overall

elegance and a long finish wraps this one up. A blend of Pommard, 115 and 777 clones from a site west of Sebastopol; matured 11 months in 50% new French oak. pH 3.59, 14.4% alc. **Papapietro Perry 2020 Pinot Noir Pommard Clones Russian River Valley (\$82) 93** Medium ruby red. More savory than the other Pinots in this tasting with dark spices and toasty oak overlaying fresh and dried cherries. It's dry on the palate with well-integrated tannins and could benefit from more time in bottle. Wonderful mouthfeel and an expressive palate. Sourced from several vineyards and aged 11 months in 70% new French oak. pH 3.68, 13.7% alc. **Papapietro Perry 2020 Pinot Noir 777 Clones Russian River Valley (\$82) 93** Medium dark ruby. The 777 Clones has a multifaceted bouquet of dark spices, earth, and biltong/jerky on the nose. The flavors are also dark with notes of loam, balsamic, black plum and toasted oak. Firm backbone with good depth and length. A lovely, age worthy Pinot. Matured 11 months in 70% new François Freres French oak. pH 3.67, 13.4% alc.



*Alexia Pellegrini (credit drwinkler)*

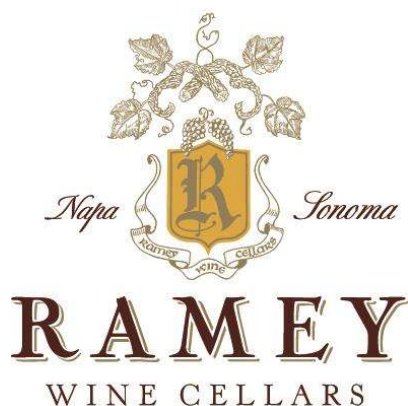
**Pellegrini-Olivet Lane** The Pellegrini family has been growing grapes and making wine in California since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nello Pellegrini immigrated from Italy in 1915, and by 1925 the family was making wine in San Francisco from Sonoma County grapes. In 1972 Vincent and Aida Pellegrini purchased an orchard on West Olivet Road in the Santa Rosa Plains and planted Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vines in 1975, one of the Pinot Noir pioneers of the Russian River Valley. Alexia Pellegrini is the 4<sup>th</sup> generation vintner currently heading the winery and vineyard operations. Grapes from the 60 acre vineyard are sold to other Russian River Valley wineries and also go into production of Pellegrini Olivet Lane wines. Annual production is about 5 thousand cases, about half sold DTC and half goes into distribution.

**Pellegrini-Olivet Lane 2020 Brut Sauvage Olivet Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley (Santa Rosa Plain) (\$70) 92**

First produced in 2018, this 50/50 blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay is made in house. With just 1.5 g/L dosage, it's very dry with a nice mousse, good balance and creamy texture. Aged two years in bottle on the lees. Only about 200 cases made and only available at the winery.

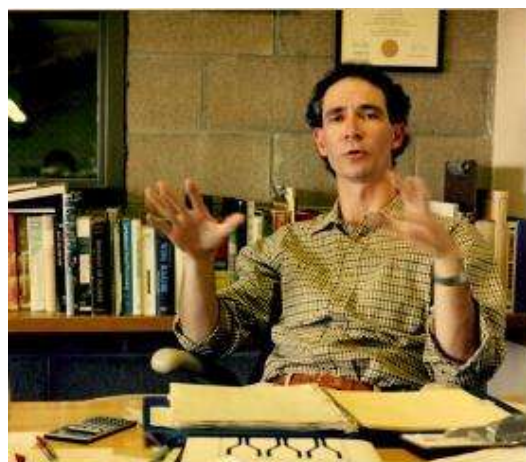
**Pellegrini-Olivet Lane 2024 Sparkling Red Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$55) 91** Made Charmat style with a crown cap, this is a dry, fizzy, fruit driven red sparkling wine. The nose is fresh and Beaujolais like, reflecting the use of carbonic maceration, and the palate is dry and fizzy. A fun wine to have with pizza.

**Pellegrini-Olivet Lane 2023 White Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 92** Made with estate fruit, this no skin contact Pinot Noir sees some aging in neutral oak. It's round and full with good acidity, nice balance and a touch of red cherry flavor. 13.8% alc. **Pellegrini-Olivet Lane 2022 Pinot Noir Old Vine Reserve Russian River Valley 92** A barrel selection of 50-year-old vines grown on the estate. Medium light red in color with a bouquet that reveals dried cherry and a hint of forest floor. Medium weight with a silky texture and a savory character of cherry skin and earthy mushroom. Round, fine tannins. Matured 18 months in 30% new French oak.



**Ramey Wine Cellars** David Ramey has one of California's most impressive winemaker résumés and is a member of the small tribe of scholar-winemakers who systematically research and experiment how to make better wine. We've had several meetings in the Russian River Valley with David Ramey over the years, most recently over a leisurely dinner in Healdsburg accompanied by Cameron Frey, who has worked with David making wine since 2002. Both at the dinner and later in our offices we tasted the current releases of Ramey Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. See our reviews below.

David majored in English Literature at UC Santa Cruz but had an epiphany on the road to Hermosillo (Mexico) and decided to become a winemaker. He graduated from UC Davis in 1979 with many of California's future winemaking stars, after which he worked with Christian Moueix at Petrus and Zelma Long at Simi before taking winemaking jobs at Matanzas Creek and Chalk Hill in Sonoma and Dominus in Napa. In 1996 he founded Ramey Wine Cellars and never looked back.



David Ramey at Matanzas Creek, 1988  
(credit JButler)

While making wine, he also did research and published on skin contact, fermentation yeasts, whole cluster pressing and other topics. His writing and his advocacy for following Burgundian winemaking techniques, including participating in several California-Burgundy Chardonnay Summits (see box), significantly influenced Chardonnay winemaking in California<sup>1</sup>. Ramey's research about yeast, for example, revealed how significant its effect on wine character was; cultured yeasts got the job done, to be sure, but often provoked overtly fruity esters obscuring more subtle, distinctive wine features from a given site.

While still active at the winery, David has passed the torch to the next generation of Rameys. Both his daughter Claire and son Alan have worked at Ramey Winery for several years, Claire specializing in viticulture and Alan in winemaking, and in 2021 they officially became the co-presidents of the business.

### **Ramey 2021 Chardonnay Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$85) 95**

An elegant, full-flavored Chardonnay from one of the Russian River Valley's historic vineyards. Superb freshness and impeccable balance. Sourced from the Mid-40 (Clone 5 and 76 planted in the mid-90s) and River (Clone 5 planted in 1989) blocks of the Rochioli Vineyard. Whole cluster pressed, fermented with native yeast, and given full malo in barrel. Matured 20 months in 20% new French oak. Tasted with David Ramey at Baci Restaurant in Healdsburg. **Ramey 2014 Chardonnay Woolsey Road Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) 96** Medium

<sup>1</sup> D. Ramey et.al. (1986) Effects of Skin Contact Temperature on Chardonnay Must and Wine Composition, *Am J Enol Vitic.*



*Cameron Frey (credit drwinkler)*

yellow gold. The 2014 vintage of the Woolsey Chardonnay was especially dense and rich, promising a long life. Now, ten years later, it's still as fresh and elegant as ever. Broad and layered with optimally ripe fruit framed by sound acidity and revealing rich extract and mineral like notes on a lingering finish. Aged 19 months in 26% new French oak. 14.5% alc. **Ramey 2022 Chardonnay Westside Farms Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$85) 94** Medium yellow straw. A toasty, richly fruited nose leads to a clean, pure and mouthfilling feeling in the mouth. Excellent balance and a gorgeous creamy texture with hints of minerals, lemony acidity and a long finish. Westside Farms is Ramey's estate vineyard located on Westside Road and planted to a Spring Mountain selection in 1989. Harvested Aug 19 before the Labor Day heat spike. Whole cluster pressed and fermented in barrel using native yeast and full native malo. Aged 20 months in 20% new French oak. 13.5% alc. **Ramey 2022 Chardonnay**

**Woolsey Road Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$85) 95** Like the 2014 Woolsey Road Chardonnay, the 2022 vintage has the phenolic richness to benefit from aging in cellars. Medium yellow straw in color with a scintillating, layered bouquet and a brightly flavored palate with a focused, very long and pure finish. Light toasty notes complement rich citrus and stone fruit. The Woolsey Road Vineyard is owned by the Martinelli family and was planted with Old Wente cuttings (Hyde selection via Platt Vineyard) to Ramey's specifications in 2007. Whole cluster pressed and fermented with native yeast and given full native malo in barrel. Matured 20 months in 20% new French oak. **Ramey 2022 Estate Pinot Noir Westside Farms Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$85) 93** Medium ruby red, revealing spicy warm toasty oak and cherry fruit on the nose. The medium weight palate offers up front juicy fruit complemented by sweet oak and finishing long with lingering cherry and vanilla flavors This is David Ramey's first estate vineyard Pinot Noir. A blend of 52% Pommard, 31% Clone 777 and 17% Clone 115, tank fermented with 25% whole cluster and native malo in barrel; matured 18 months in 45% new French oak. 13.5% alc. .



*Ryan & Rachel Rochioli (credit drwinkler)*

**Rochioli** We recently met with the 4<sup>th</sup> generation (see photo) of the Rochioli family to produce some of California's top wines, especially Pinot Noir. However, the Rochioli story begins in 1911 when Joe Rochioli Sr. emigrated as a child to the US and ended up working on a farm in the Russian River Valley. He later married, had a child (Joe Jr) and moved to a nearby property called Fenton Acres, which he purchased in the 1950s and planted, in part, to wine grapes, mostly French Colombard and Gamay Beaujolais. In 1959, Joe Sr and Joe Jr planted Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc on their property. The Sauvignon Blanc (not the Cabernet) is still producing fruit, and the Rochiolis still make a very good wine from it.

In 1968, Joe Jr began planting Pinot Noir, one of the first to do so in the Russian River Valley. He initially sold it to Gallo for their Hearty Burgundy, but in 1973 he began selling Pinot Noir grapes to Davis Bynum. The 1973 Davis Bynum Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir was the first Russian River Valley vineyard-designated Pinot Noir. Gary Farrell, the winemaker at Davis Bynum, later started his own label in 1982 sourcing Pinot Noir from Rochioli. In 1985 Joe Jr's son Tom Rochioli made the estate's first Pinot Noir wine under the Rochioli label. However, he still sold most of his fruit, and in that same year Burt Williams of Selyem Williams made a Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that won the Sweepstakes Award at the California State Fair. That award put Pinot Noir, Selyem Williams and Rochioli Vineyards on the map.

Tom visited the Domaine Romanée-Conti in 1990 and saw how the different climats at DRC produced very different wines. He also noted the difference in wines from different parcels in the Rochioli Vineyard even though viticultural and winemaking practices were identical. So, in 1992 he began producing vineyard block designates, a practice that continues today. In tasting the 2023 single parcel Pinot Noir releases, we, too, are struck by the differences between parcels despite similar winemaking practices.



*Joe Rochioli, Jr* (credit Rochioli)

Today, Tom still makes the now world-famous Rochioli wines, which we tasted with him at the winery while preparing our report a decade ago on *The Wines of Sonoma County*. His children, the 4<sup>th</sup> generation (see photo), are very much involved, too. A graduate of UC Davis, Ryan Rochioli is assistant winemaker, and his sister Rachel is General Manager. Today, about half the grapes grown at the 140-acre vineyard are sold, and the other half go into Rochioli wines. Total production is about 10 thousand cases, 75% of which is sold direct to consumer, and 25% (the estate blends) is sold through distribution. Terlato is their national distributor.

**Rochioli 2024 Sauvignon Blanc Russian River Valley (\$40) 92** Mostly sourced from the oldest (1959) vineyard parcel on the estate (planted by Joe Rochioli Jr) and one of the oldest Sauvignon Blanc plantings in Sonoma County. Lovely citrus nose with light grassy accents that carry over to the palate. The old vines produce small, concentrated berries and low yields of about 2 tons/acre. Stainless steel fermented and aged. 14.5% alc. **Rochioli 2023 Chardonnay Estate Russian River Valley (\$64) 93** This blend of parcels within the larger Rochioli vineyard opens with a waxy nose of cling peach, pears and chamomile. Full in the mouth with juicy acidity, ripe fruit flavors and a hint of vanilla. Long, mouthwatering finish. Mostly from the highest point of the River Block Vineyard, barrel fermented and aged sur lie 9 months in 25% new French oak. **Rochioli 2023 Pinot Noir Estate Russian River Valley (\$72) 93** Medium ruby red in color with beautiful purity of aroma and flavor. Cranberry, dried cherry and hints of clementine and tobacco all served up on a silky-textured palate with outstanding balance and freshness. Like the Chardonnay, a blend of vineyard parcels, each hand sorted and fermented separately in open top fermenters, pressed to barrel for 15 months aging in 25% new French oak.

## SINGLE VINEYARD PARCELS

**Rochioli 2023 Chardonnay Rachel Vineyard Russian River Valley (\$84) 95** A spectacular Russian River Valley Chardonnay, mostly the Mt Eden clone. Leesy lemon and with a hint of hazelnut on the nose. There's a nice firm backbone with refreshing acidity on the palate and a long, rich finish. **Rochioli 2023 Pinot Noir River Block Russian River Valley (\$90) 95** The River Block Pinot Noir is impressive from its effusive, perfumed bouquet to its concentrated, silky palate. The fruit character is noteworthy and spiced up by a hint of cracked black pepper. Elegant and precise. 14.5% alc. **Rochioli 2023 Pinot Noir Little Hill Russian River Valley (\$90) 96** The Little Hill Pinot Noir opens on a high-toned floral note. It's a serious, dark fruited Pinot, firmly structured with dry tannins that beg for a bit more aging. But it's delicious now and will only improve over time. **Rochioli 2023 Pinot Noir Sweetwater Russian River Valley (\$90) 95** The Sweetwater Pinot Noir is an enticing blend of dark fruit, fragrant flowers, and Sonoma herbs, all wrapped up in a dense, mouth filling delivery. The palate is silky, savory and full with a dry, lingering finish. Another wine that would benefit from more time in cellar.



*Fred Scherrer (credit drwinkler)*

**Scherrer** Founded by UC Davis grad (class of '89) Fred Scherrer in 1991 while he was still the winemaker at Dehlinger. In 1998 Fred left Dehlinger to devote himself full time to making his own wine. Born in the Alexander Valley, he makes Chardonnay from his father's old vineyard (including 110 year old Zinfandel) there on the eastern bench. His winery is in the Vine Hill area of Russian River Valley where he also makes a Chardonnay from the nearby Helfer Vineyard. These are handcrafted wines that spend a long time (unstirred) on the lees in barrel (30-34 months for Pinot Noir without racking) resulting in elegant,

silky and sometimes earthy wines that usually show best after some time in bottle. Annual production about 4 thousand cases.

**Scherrer 2018 Chardonnay Helfer Vineyard Russian River Valley (Laguna Ridge) (\$52) 93** Yellow gold. Complex bouquet of orchard fruit, citrus and fine French oak. Excellent concentration of flavor with good acidity and a persistent finish. Mostly the Hyde selection (obtained via Kistler) sourced from the Helfer Vineyard planted in 1993 in the Vine Hill area, slowly pressed and fermented in barrel with ambient yeast then aged up to two years in about 40-50% new French oak with a long spontaneous malo conversion and almost no stirring of the lees. 14.5% alc. **Scherrer 2024 Dry Rosé Sonoma County 92** The appellation says Sonoma County, but almost all the fruit comes from the Russian River Valley. Fresh red berry nose, bright on the palate with lively, fresh flavors. A blend of 50% Grenache, 25% Zinfandel and 25% Syrah. 13.5% alc. **Scherrer 2015 Pinot Noir Gunsalus Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$54) 93** The 10 acre Gunsalus Vineyard is planted to four different clones, but Fred works only with 777 in this fresh, lively wine. Packed with bright, dark red fruit and vibrant acidity. Aged 34 months in barrel without racking. 14.5% alc. **Scherrer**

**2015 Pinot Noir Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$82) 94** Showing a dark cherry nose and a note of cola on the palate, this is a full-bodied, spicy, bright and lively Pinot Noir with round tannins. Very low pH, about 3.1. **Scherrer 2015 Pinot Noir High Slopes Russian River Valley (Sebastopol Hills) (\$75) 93** This wine is sourced from the hilltop of the McDonald Mountain vineyard owned by Emeritus. The clone is 667. Sensuous, silky texture with savory, dried fig notes. Delicious fruit; a beautifully integrated wine. **Scherrer 2018 Syrah Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$44) 94** Sourced from Martinelli's Lolita and Calypso vineyards. Savory and delicious with a fresh blackberry nose and a black fruited, mineral laden palate. Aged 4 years in larger format barrels.



**Three Sticks Wines** Founded in 2002 by Bill Price III, Three Sticks is part of Price Family Vineyards & Estates. The Three Sticks estate vineyards are some of Sonoma's most prestigious, including Alana Vineyard and William James Vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Ryan Prichard is the Director of Winemaking and has been winemaker at Three Sticks since 2017. He previously worked at Williams Selyem as did Bob Cabral, the winemaker who preceded him. We tasted the wines with assistant winemaker Jeremy Sedaka.

**Three Sticks 2023 Chardonnay Alana Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$80) 95** Alana is a monopole vineyard with 1.5 acres of Wente clone Chardonnay planted in Goldridge sandy loam soils at the far west end of Green Valley surrounded by Redwoods. Opens with scents of lemon and Asian pear with a hint of cling peach. Full and round in the mouth with excellent acid balance and an elegant mouth feel. Harvested Oct. 19; barrel fermented and aged 14 months in 20% new French oak with full malo. pH 3.34, 13.7% alc. **Three Sticks 2023 Chardonnay Gaps Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast (Petaluma Gap) (\$70) 94** Citrus and green apple skins show on the nose. Broad on entry and rich in flavor with good backbone and rich lingering extract. This vintage is particularly mineral like, vibrant and energetic. Made of clones 76, 124 and 95 sourced from Gap's Crown, fermented and aged 11 months in 19% new French oak. pH 3.20, alc 13.7% alc.

**Three Sticks 2022 Pinot Noir William James Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$85) 93** William James is a 6.5 acre monopole vineyard planted to Swan, 943 and Calera clones. Medium ruby red in color, it offers a bouquet of cherry and raspberry fruit with all spice and herbal notes. The red-fruited palate is energetic with a very long, flavorful finish. Fermented 17% whole cluster in open top fermenters and matured 15 months in 44% new French oak. pH 3.43, 14.2% alc. **Three Sticks 2022 Pinot Noir Alana Vineyard Russian River Valley (Green Valley) (\$85) 93** A little darker in color than the William James, the Alana Vineyard Pinot Noir offers an herbal, red-fruited nose. On the palate it's firmly textured and lively with good concentration and dark red fruit flavors. Harvested September 4 and fermented 23% whole cluster and aged 15 months in 44% new French oak. pH 3.40, 14% alc. **Three Sticks 2022 Pinot Noir Gaps Crown Vineyard Sonoma Coast (Petaluma Gap) (\$75) 96** Dark red with a dark cherry nose. The cool climate and battering winds of this Heritage vineyard lend earthy dark fruit and a firm structure to the wine. The silky palate reveals black and blue fruit and a firm round

tannins. Fermented 16% whole cluster and aged 15 months in 45% new French oak. pH 3.37, 13.8% alc.



*James and Kerry MacPhail (credit Tongue Dancer)*

**Tongue Dancer Wines** James and Kerry MacPhail established Tongue Dancer Wines in Healdsburg in 2012 with a focus on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. They source grapes from premier vineyards located throughout Sonoma County, from the West Sonoma Coast to Dry Creek Valley and Chalk Hill (see Sonoma County appellation map below). This wide variety of growing conditions from Pacific marine to warmer inland climates along with differences in soils, clones and viticulture gives James the opportunity to craft balanced, terroir expressive wines, both blends and single vineyard bottlings. In doing so, he carefully selects barrels for aging that preserves the delicate character of Pinot Noir. We've regularly

reviewed James MacPhail's wines beginning with the establishment of his winery MacPhail Family Wines in 2001. [He later sold that label but repurchased it last year.] In this article, we review the current releases of Tongue Dancer wines.

**Tongue Dancer 2023 Chardonnay Pratt Vineyard/Irwin Lane Russian River Valley (\$49)**

**94** Medium yellow straw. Yellow apples, beeswax and vanilla flowers show on the nose. Round and suave on entry with superb balance--firm backbone, rich flavors and excellent acidic cut. Long rich finish. Certified organic grapes hand-picked on Sept 23, whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented with Burgundy yeast and aged 11 months sur lie in 25% new French oak. pH 3.47, 13.7% alc. Excellent value! **Tongue Dancer 2023 Magnolia Montrachet Chardonnay Dry**

**Creek Valley 93** This is the freshest and most Chablis-like Chardonnay we've had from the Tolmasoff Vineyard. Light yellow straw in color, the nose evokes white flowers, Bosc pear, and Casaba melon. The mouth feel is suave and round, but there's also firm acidity and a mineral-like, rich finish. Handpicked and hand sorted in the field early on Sept 21, a full month later than the 2022 vintage. Whole cluster pressed, fermented and aged 10 months on the lees in concrete with full malo. pH 3.38, 13.8% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2022 Chardonnay Bacigalupi Vineyard**

**Frost Ranch Russian River Valley 94** This elegant and flavorful Chardonnay is in keeping with the tradition of James MacPhail's wines from this historic vineyard. Richly flavored and perfectly balanced with juicy acidity and revealing layers of honeyed lemon, toasted almond, ripe pineapple and crisp orchard fruit. Almost impossible to resist drinking this gorgeous wine. Made from Bacigalupi's Old Wente clones, hand-picked and hand sorted in the field, whole cluster pressed to barrel where it was fermented with full malo; aged 14 months sur lie in 20% new French oak. pH 3.4, 14.6% ac. **Tongue Dancer 2021 Chardonnay Pratt Vineyard-Irwin**

**Lane Russian River Valley 94** Medium yellow straw. Multifaceted nose of honeysuckle, chamomile, and lemon curd. Full and very flavorful on a superbly balanced, deep palate with a rich, lingering finish. Beautiful ying-yang between fresh acidity and rich fruit. Hand-picked early in the morning of Sept 2, whole cluster pressed and barrel fermented using a Burgundy yeast with 75% malo and aged 11 months sur lie in 25% new French oak. 3.29 pH, 14.1% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2021 The Sly One Chardonnay Dry Creek Valley 92** Medium yellow straw. Fresh nose of honeycomb and ripe orchard fruit. Fresh on the attack with upfront lemony acidity.

Round and nicely weighted palate, mouth filling with solid acidity balancing ripe fruit. Long and uplifting on the finish. Sourced from the gravel and sandy loam Tolmasoff Vineyard located just south of Healdsburg. Hand-picked and hand sorted in the field on Aug 30. Whole cluster pressed and 1/3 fermented in neutral oak and 2/3 in concrete; 100% malo and aged 11 months sur lie. pH 3.34, 14.1% alc.

**Tongue Dancer 2024 Rosé de Ville Russian River Valley 93** Light copper salmon. Hints of cherry, red berries and fresh garden herbs on the nose. Full on the palate with a firm texture and savory character. Good balance and a long, rich finish. Sourced from Vineyard Eleven and Vine Hill Vineyards and made the saignée method from the first 8 hours of skin contact; fermented and aged in stainless steel. pH 3.32, 14.1% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2024 Rosé of Pinot Noir South Sonoma Coast (\$25) 92** Medium copper salmon color. Semi-flamboyant aromas of red berry, dried cherry and blood orange. Full in the mouth with good concentration on a flavorful, dry palate. Bright acidity enlivens this rosé. What more could you ask for in a dry rosé? Made saignée method from several Sonoma Coast vineyards. pH 3.28, 13.9% alc.

**Tongue Dancer 2023 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$55) 92** Pretty medium ruby color. Riper cherry fruit on nose along with pomegranate. Soft on entry, sensuous, silky and broad on the palate. A blend of Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley Vineyards, the grapes were gently destemmed, not crushed, fermented in small stainless-steel tanks, and aged 14 months sur lie in 20% new French oak. pH 3.65, 14.5% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2022 Pinot Noir Sonoma County 92** Medium ruby red. Expressive bouquet revealing earthy, ripe scents of dark red cherry. Fruit driven with good ripeness and a silky mouth feel, finishing long and rich. A blend of grapes from the Notre Vue Vineyard in the Eastern Hills and the Putnam Vineyard in Annapolis. Aged 11 months in 20% new French oak. pH 3.63, 14.3% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2022 Pinot Noir Pinot de Ville Russian River Valley (\$69) 94/3** Deep fruit aromas with a sense of purity. Full and silky in the mouth with ripe, opulent fruit married to crisp acidity. Striking purity and focus. Sourced from the highest section [1000'] of the Putnam Vineyard and the Notre Vue Vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Aged 17 months in 20% new French oak. pH 3.65, 14.5% alc.

### *Single Vineyard Pinot Noirs*

**Tongue Dancer 2023 Foxtrot Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$49) 93** Medium dark ruby. This is classical Russian River Pinot Noir with its ripeness, weight and densely packed flavor. Broad and full on the palate with rich, dark red cherry/berry fruit complemented by earthy, dried mushroom terroir notes. Clones 115 and Pommard 4 sourced from the 700-acre Notre Vue Vineyard in the Eastern Hills. Aged 11 months in 20% new French oak. pH 3.61, 14.2% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2023 Pinot Noir Vineyard Eleven Russian River Valley 95** Simply spectacular purity and brilliance. The ruby color is alluringly bright and transparent. There's optimal balance, a lush velvet-like texture, and earth-tinged pomegranate and red berry aromas and flavors. Russian River Pinot at its best. Vineyard Eleven is a 21-acre ranch of loam and clay soils in the Middle Reach that was replanted by the Bedrogian family to the Vosne-Romanée clone in 2018. Aged 11 months in 33% new French oak. pH 3.64, 14.5% alc. **Tongue Dancer 2022 Pinot Noir Putnam Vineyard West Sonoma Coast (\$75) 94** Medium dark ruby. Expressive nose of dark cherry accented by earthy, forest floor notes. Silky texture but with a crisp quality on the palate. Gorgeous, ripe, tart dark red cherry and pomegranate fruit. Perhaps

it's the vintage, but this wine tastes more like Russian River Valley than West Sonoma Coast to us. Aged 18 months in 18% new French oak. pH 3.58, 14.5% alc.



*Jeff Mangahas (credit drwinkler)*

**Williams Selyem** Burt Williams and Ed Selyem are to Pinot Noir as Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak are to Apple. Both partnerships began in suburban garages, Williams Selyem in Santa Rosa and Apple Computer in Los Altos. Both began in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Williams Selyem releasing their first handcrafted Pinot Noir in 1981, and Jobs and Wozniak making their first Apple 1 computers in 1976. Both were innovative and highly successful. We recently visited the Williams Selyem winery in the Russian River Valley to taste the current releases with winemaker Jeff Mangahas. Our reviews are given below but, first, more on the genesis of this iconic winery and its founders.

Burt Williams was born in San Francisco but grew up in the Russian River Valley and lived most his life in the small town of Forestville. Not able to afford attending college, he apprenticed as a printer, and that was his occupation until the winery could pay his bills. Ed Selyem was a wine buyer, working at Speer's Market in Forestville. Burt and Ed liked wine but couldn't afford French imports, so they decided to make their own. They

started making Zinfandel in their garage in 1979 and in 1981 began producing wine commercially.

These were not your run of the mill home winemakers. Burt had an unusual, natural talent for making wine, and he and Ed developed their own yeast strain, modified stainless steel dairy tanks into open top fermenters (still used today), and did all the manual labor required to make wine. Most importantly, they selected the best sources of Pinot Noir grapes in the Russian River Valley, vineyards like Rochioli, Allen Ranch, Olivet Lane, and Martinelli. While Burt took the winemaking lead, Ed managed the business and marketing end of the business and pioneered today's direct to consumer movement by developing a highly successful membership club.

The tipping point for Williams Selyem was in 1987 when their 1985 Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley was named the best of 2136 wines from 316 wineries competing at the California State Fair. Suddenly, everyone wanted Williams Selyem Pinot Noir, and the waiting list to become a

member grew exponentially.



A decade later, in 1997, Burt and Ed sold the winery to a New York politician named John Dyson, who was himself trained as a viticulturist and served as the state's Agricultural Commissioner. Dyson hired Fresno State grad Bob Cabral as winemaker, and with financial resources now secured, they began planting estate vineyards and built a new winery and tasting room on Westside Road outside Healdsburg. In 2014 Cabral left to become winemaker at Three Sticks winery, and Jeff Mangahas, previously at Hartford Court, became the lead winemaker at Williams Selyem. The business matured and became ever more successful, and in 2020 Burgundy's Faiveley family invested in the winery and took full ownership in 2024.

While the ownership of Williams Selyem has changed, the winemaking has remained much the same. The grapes are gently pressed; modified dairy tanks are still used for Pinot Noir fermentation using native yeast; and the Pinot Noirs are still matured exclusively in François Frère barrels. What has changed is the source of grapes. The original Williams Selyem winery owned no vineyards; today, they own 140 acres of estate vineyards.

**Williams Selyem 2023 Chardonnay Allen Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach**

**(\$68) 94** Refined aromas and flavors of pear, apple and minerals with a hint of honeyed oak on the finish. Beautifully textured with a firm, mineral backbone and creamy mouth feel and bright acidity. Finishes bone dry with lingering rich extract. Sourced from the 25+ year old vines of the Allen Vineyard that surrounds the winemaking facility and fermented using native yeast.

Matured 16 months in 27% new French oak. pH 3.20, 14.1% alc. **Williams Selyem 2023**

**Chardonnay Estate Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$70) 94** Medium yellow straw. Sumptuous, floral-like bouquet of pear, jasmine, and melon. Viscous, almost oily, mouth feel, creamy with lively acidity popping in late. Chalky mineral finish with rich extract. There's a lingering sensation of crushed rock. Sourced from the 14-year-old vines of the Estate Vineyard adjacent to the Russian River planted to 20 different Chardonnay selections, including the Rued Musque clone, fermented using native yeast, and aged 16 months in 30% new French oak. pH 3.48, 14% alc. **Williams Selyem 2023 Pinot Noir Westside Road Neighbors Russian River**

**Valley (Middle Reach) (\$90) 93** Opens with spice, smoke and dark red huckleberry and cherry aromas. Concentrated flavors of cherry, herbs, and minerals. Refined, polished tannins and a very long finish. A blend of younger vines from several Westside Road vineyards, fermented

25% whole cluster, and matured 15 months in 60% new French oak. pH 3.53. 14% alc. **Williams Selyem 2023 Pinot Noir Rochioli Riverblock Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach)**

**(\$110) 95** Given its riverside location, the Riverblock Pinot Noir reveals a gamey, sous bois

nose. It's a large wine showing dark red fruit and savory herbs, a hint of cola, and wood spices, a total sense of place. Very rich, long finish with broad shouldered tannins. Grapes for this wine come from a block right on the riverbank where wild fennel and other herbs grow, contributing to the complexity of the wine. Matured 16 months in 68% new French oak. pH 3.49, 13.8% alc.

**Williams Selyem 2023 Pinot Noir Lewis MacGregor Estate Vineyard Russian River Valley (Middle Reach) (\$125) 96** The MacGregor Vineyard Pinot Noir is a high acid site, so Jeff uses

a bit more whole cluster in the fermentation. The bouquet reveals plum, cherry and a hint of sous bois. Tiny berries contribute to a dense, concentrated and viscous palate. Aged 16 months in

62% new French oak. **Williams Selyem 2023 Zinfandel Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River**

**Valley (Middle Reach) (\$72) 95** Almost opaque, revealing blueberry, huckleberry and violet notes, this is a dense, concentrated wine with lots of tension on a linear, straight palate. Juicy and vibrant, it has good acidity and freshness. There's an overall sense of elegance and finesse. From 100-year-old head trained vines; aged 13 months in 24% new French oak. pH 3.43, 14.9% alc.