Introduction

Sonoma County is one of California’s leading wine regions. It is also a spectacular place to grow and make wine. It boasts a beautiful coastline, majestic mountain ranges, towering redwood trees and beautiful inland valleys with rolling hills. Few places can rival it for its geographic diversity and amazing variety of high quality premium wines.

Sonoma County’s wine industry is flourishing. In 2013 it boasted a record number of plantings (64 thousand acres, of which 60 thousand are bearing) and over 700 bonded wineries. The grapes it produces annually are valued at half a billion dollars, but the total economic impact of the wine industry is estimated at $13.4 billion, including wine-related tourism and the $3 billion in wages paid to workers1. Wine’s impact on Sonoma’s economy has almost doubled in the past eight years while vineyard acreage has increased only slightly, reflecting the improvements in wine quality and price and, equally important, enhanced consumer perceptions of Sonoma wine. This is thanks in part to the marketing efforts of the Sonoma County Vintners and Winegrowers.

Although Sonoma County2 lay in Napa Valley’s shadow for many years, it is today increasingly recognized as California’s preeminent county for wine production. It is twice the size of Napa and a significantly more diverse wine-producing region. While Napa is best known for its highly polished Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County stands out for its rich variety of Chardonnays, elegant Pinot Noirs, and complex, old vine Zinfandels. Its Cabernets and Bordeaux blends grown on volcanic soils are also winning growing acclaim.

The large number of AVAs in Sonoma County makes it especially challenging for the consumer and even the wine professional to understand. This report attempts to: explain Sonoma wine and its diversity of terroir; identify the wine pioneers in its history, its outstanding vineyards, and its world-class winemakers; and, of course, evaluate its wines. We identify the top producers of each of the principal

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1 Data come from a 2014 study done by the Stonebridge Group for The Sonoma County Winegrowers and Vintners.
2 In the interest of brevity, this report uses Sonoma and Sonoma County interchangeably, recognizing there are also a Sonoma City and Sonoma Valley.
Acknowledgements. We are indebted to many organizations and individuals for their collaboration and support. First and foremost we would like to thank the Sonoma County Vintners [SCV] and the Sonoma County Winegrowers [SCW] without whom we could never have undertaken this project. We especially wish to thank Sara Cummings, SCV’s former Director of Communications, for her help in organizing and arranging every aspect of our work and travel to Sonoma in June-July 2014. We also wish to thank Honore Comfort, Executive Director of the SCV and Karissa Kruse, President, and Sean Carroll, Marketing Manager, SCW for their advice and support. We are also most grateful to winemaker, David Ramey and Joel Butler MW for commenting on early drafts of this report. Their comments and suggestions were invaluable. Thanks, also, to Clay and Cameron Mauritson, Barry Hoffer, and Marcella Thompson for their help in obtaining wine samples from Rockpile, Pine Mountain, and Dry Creek Valley producers. Last, but by no means least, we wish to thank the many wineries and winemakers who extended hospitality to us during our visit and, in particular: Corey Beck, Ross Cobb, Michael Eddy, Kenny Kahn, Ana Keller, Regina Martinelli, Clay and Cameron Mauritson, Anne Moller-Rake, John Olney, David Ramey, Justin and Karin Warnelius-Miller, Jackson Family Wines, E&J Gallo Wines, and Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery.

Mike Potashnik and Don Winkler

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### Top Rated Producers

#### Chardonnay
- Arrowood
- Auteur
- Chateau St. Jean
- David Ramey
- Dutton Goldfield
- Evening Land
- Failla
- Ferrari Carano
- Garden Creek
- Gary Farrell
- Hanzell
- Hartford
- Joseph Phelps (Freestone)
- Keller Estate
- Kosta Browne
- Kistler
- La Follette
- Littorai
- MacRostie
- Marcassin
- Pahlmeyer
- Sojourn
- Soliste
- Stonestreet

#### Pinot Noir
- Anaba
- Anthill Farms
- Banshee
- Claypool Cellars
- Cobb Wines
- Dehlinger
- Dutton Goldfield
- Failla
- Flowers
- Gary Farrell
- Hartford
- Hirsch
- Joseph Phelps (Freestone)
- Keller Estate
- Kistler
- Kosta Browne
- La Follette
- La Rue
- Littorai
- Lynmar
- MacPhail
- MacMurray Ranch
- Mac Rostie
- Pahlmeyer
- Peter Michael
- Schug
- Siduri/Novy
- Sojourn
- Soliste
- Williams-Selyem
- Windgap

#### Cabernet Sauvignon/Blends
- Alexander Valley (Cyrus)
- Anakota
- Blue Rock
- Capture
- Chalk Hill
- Clos du Bois (Proprietary)
- Ferrari-Carano
- Francis Coppola
- Goldschmidt
- Hartford
- Hawkes
- Kendall-Jackson
- Kamen
- Kunde
- Lancaster
- Landmark
- Laurel Glen
- Louis Martini
- Matanzas Creek
- Rodney Strong
- Sebastiani
- Skipstone
- Stone Edge
- Trentadue (La Storia)
- Verité

#### Zinfandel
- Bedrock
- Bella
- Carlisle
- Dry Creek
- Dutcher Crossing
- Gary Farrell
- Hartford Family
- Kokomo
- Louis Martini
- Mounts
- Novy
- Quivira
- Ravenswood
- Robert Biali
- Rockpile
- Seghesio
- Ulises Valdez

#### Sauvignon Blanc
- Banshee
- Chalk Hill
- Kamen
- Kunde
- Lancaster Estate
- Matanzas Creek
- Stonestreet
Highlights of Sonoma’s Wine History

Sonoma County’s wine industry has a rich history, beginning with the planting of vines in 1812 by Russian fur traders at Fort Ross, followed in 1823 by Fr. Jose Altimira of Barcelona who established the Mission San Francisco Solano, located just off the Sonoma town square. Shortly after California’s Gold Rush of 1849, the planting of vines began in earnest, and by the late 19th century Sonoma had extensive vineyards. The arrival of phylloxera and, subsequently, prohibition seriously impeded further progress, and it wasn’t until the 1970s that new wine pioneers began experimenting, planting and investing that paved the way to the very high quality, diverse wines that Sonoma produces today. We explore these events in more depth below.

The Early Days

Although Franciscan friars planted vines along the California coast as early as the 17th century, it was the mid-19th century before Sonoma’s wines received recognition. A story in the Daily Alta in December 1858 noted: “The wine of Sonoma is different from that of the Southern portion of the State being lighter and more like French wines.” Whether this was accurate or not, there were many pioneers, European immigrants and Yankees who brought winemaking know-how to Sonoma County and established vineyards and wineries that continue in operation today in all corners of the county.

In the mid-19th century, the Gold Rush and the rapidly growing population of San Francisco created the demand for wine that stimulated Sonoma’s incipient wine industry. The most noteworthy of the early pioneers was the swashbuckling Agoston Harazthy of Hungary. In 1856 he purchased the 560-acre Buena Vista Ranch in Sonoma Valley and produced wine for sale in San Francisco. He is also credited with importing European grapes to supplant the Mission grape, experimenting with gravity flow winemaking, using redwood barrels to age wines and aging wines for wine that stimulated Sonoma’s incipient wine industry.

In the Dry Creek Valley, French immigrant Georges Bloch was among the first settlers in the 1870s to establish a commercial vineyard and winery. By the 1880s there were 54 vineyards in the valley with a total of 883 acres of vines, at least half planted to Zinfandel. In the Russian River Valley another young Tuscan couple, Giuseppe and Luisa Martinelli, working side by side on a sixty-degree slope with horse and plow, planted a small area of Zinfandel and Muscat of Alexandria vines that later became known as the Jackass Hill Vineyard. To this day, the Martinelli family has played a major role in the growth and development of the wine industry in Russian River Valley.

In the mid-1870s, the world phylloxera epidemic invaded Sonoma’s vineyards, appearing first in the Dressel-Gundlach Vineyard a few miles south of the town of Sonoma. It slowly spread north through the Sonoma Valley (where it did the greatest damage) and by 1890 had reached the Upper Russian River Valley. All told, phylloxera reduced Sonoma’s vineyards from 23 thousand in the early 1890s to just 6 thousand a few years later. In the post phylloxera period the wine industry in Sonoma continued to grow and attract new investors, and by 1920 there were 256 wineries in operation and more than 22 thousand acres of vines.

Prohibition and its Aftermath

The Volstead National Prohibition Act of 1919 made illegal the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors, until its repeal in 1933. Many of the vineyards survived by selling grapes to home winemakers, but the number of wineries

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3 Sherry Monahan, California Vines, Wines & Pioneers, American Palate, 2013
4 For his contributions to the wine industry, Harazthy was officially recognized by the state of California in 1946 as the “Father of California Viticulture” although many of his contributions have proven to be more the stuff of legend. In 1866 stockholders at Buena Vista accused Harazthy of extravagance and irresponsibility and forced him to resign. He later left for Nicaragua where he managed a sugar plantation and while there met his death by an alligator.
5 This finding was based on a survey of 822 vineyards in the county. The Vineyards in Sonoma County: The Report of I. DeTurk, Commissioner for the Sonoma District, to the Board of State Viticultural Commissioners, Sacramento 1893.
shrank to 70, and the wineries that did survive were decrepit. Machinery had been dispersed or was obsolete, and vats and casks had rotted or been broken.

Prohibition contributed to a long-term decline in Sonoma’s wine industry. Over the next several decades the wine industry mostly produced poor quality fortified and generic wines sold in bulk. Although profitable, they gave Sonoma wine a bad name, postponing the emergence of premium quality table wines until well after World War II. As a result, vineyard acreage began to shrink, and by 1960 Sonoma had just half the number of vines (11 thousand acres) it had during Prohibition.

Prohibition also marked a turning point in winemaking, according to veteran winemaker Paul Draper of Ridge Vineyards. With the virtual destruction of the industry, winemaking traditions and knowledge also disappeared. As a consequence, the industry had to reinvent itself. Aspiring winemakers had to learn in universities rather than absorb the wisdom of tradition, and winemaking became more industrial rather than agricultural. According to Draper, “What was lost was the connection with the earth, with what was distinctive and interesting.” Moreover, the 21st Amendment, the Repeal Amendment, upheld the power of individual states to impose a myriad of inconsistent regulations on the movement of wine in the United States that plague the wine industry to this day.

Investment and innovation in Sonoma’s wine industry was scarce in the ensuing decades. Most wine was sold in bulk, the most important buyer being E&J Gallo, which in 1935 purchased land for a winery in Dry Creek. A significant exception was James D. Zellerbach’s new vineyard and winery in the Mayacamas, established in the mid-1950s. With Brad Webb leading winemaking, Hanzell introduced barrel-aged Chardonnay to Sonoma as well as controlled malolactic fermentations and temperature-controlled, stainless steel fermentation tanks. Hanzell became Sonoma’s first cult wine and blazed a path that many vintners would follow in the following decades.

1970 to the Present

In the 1970s Sonoma wine reached the takeoff stage. Total vineyard acreage doubled between 1970 and 1980. By 1990 there were 33 thousand acres of vines, and by 2000 there were 56 thousand. New investment poured in, and new, talented winemakers appeared on the scene. Quality improved as well. A growing number of producers began making the premium and ultra-premium varietal wines that would put Sonoma on the map as one of California’s top wine regions for Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Chardonnay.

While the movement towards quality was led by new, mostly small investors and winemakers, it was given a significant boost from large-scale investments by E&J Gallo, Jess Jackson, and others. The Gallos purchased the Frei Ranch in Dry Creek in 1977 and the MacMurray Ranch in the Russian River Valley in the late 1990s. In addition they have extensive holdings in the Alexander Valley and elsewhere and a high capacity winery (24 presses, 50 thousand barrels) built at Frei Ranch in the early 1990s. After building the winery, they released their line of premium wines with a North Coast appellation in 1993. The Gallo focus on quality in Sonoma, now led by Gina and Matt Gallo, is perhaps best revealed in its acquisition of the historic Monte Rosso Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain in 2002. Today Gallo has over 3200 acres of vineyards in Sonoma.

The Chardonnay Boom

Chardonnay was not a popular grape in Sonoma County or in California prior to 1970. Thus, James D. Zellerbach’s effort to produce quality Chardonnay in the Mayacamas is especially noteworthy. Zellerbach, who implemented the Marshall Plan in Europe after WWII and served as Ambassador to Italy, set out to make wines as good as those he knew in Europe. He planted six acres of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines in 1953 and established Hanzell Vineyard in 1957.

Despite Hanzell’s success with the critics there were still only 303 acres of Chardonnay in the county by 1970. Things changed when a California Chardonnay won the 1976 Judgement of Paris organized by Steven Spurrier. Consumers suddenly started asking for Chardonnay, and Sonoma’s plan-
ings increased dramatically. As a percent of total vineyard acres in Sonoma, Chardonnay increased from 1 percent in 1970 to 16 percent in 1980. Then Kendall Jackson introduced its fabulously popular Reserve Chardonnay in 1982, further stimulating demand. Growers continued to plant Chardonnay, and by 1990 it represented one-third of all plantings in the county. Chardonnay was half of all new plantings in Sonoma in this two decade period.

Several Sonoma vineyards made their fame and fortune on Chardonnay. Sonoma-Cutrer focused on Chardonnay when Brice Cutrer Jones planted his first vineyards in 1973 and continued that focus when he started making wines in its new winery in 1981. Today Sonoma-Cutrer is one of Sonoma’s largest vineyard owners, built on Chardonnay. About the same time, Fred Furth began planting Chardonnay at his Chalk Hill vineyards. When he later established his winery he had the good judgement to hire David Ramey as winemaker, who gave Chalk Hill its rich, opulent style. Chateau St. Jean was also founded in 1973 with Richard Arrowood as winemaker and a focus on vineyard-designated Chardonnay. Arrowood would finally establish his own eponymous winery in 1986. Later in the 1970s, Steve Kistler established his vineyard and winery and began producing rich and elegant Chardonnays from the Sonoma Coast, Sonoma Mountain, and Carneros.

The decade of the 1990s saw continued growth in Chardonnay plantings, but by 2000 the Chardonnay boom had largely run its course, and plantings stabilized. New winemakers started pursuing the white Burgundy grail. Ted Lemon arrived on the scene with his Littorai Chardonnays in 1993, after making wine at Domaine Roulot in Meursault and Chateau Woltner in Napa. Steve Kistler started making his own Chardonnay in 1979, after making Chardonnay at Ridge. After making wine at Chalk Hill and, earlier, Matanzas Creek, David Ramey established his own winery in 1996, started making single vineyard Chardonnays from diverse Sonoma vineyards, and established his reputation as one of California’s best Chardonnay producers.

The Pioneers of Pinot Noir

The Russian River Valley was the locus of experimentation with Pinot Noir beginning in the 1970s. Joe Rochioli Jr had the foresight and good fortune to plant some of the valley’s first Pinot Noir in an excellent vineyard site in 1968. This vineyard served as the launching site for Sonoma Pinot Noir. Joe first sold the grapes to Gallo for its Hearty Burgundy and later to Korbel for its sparkling wine. However, in 1973, Davis Bynum bought Joe’s Pinot Noir and bottled it as a single vineyard Pinot Noir, perhaps the first from the Russian River Valley. Then, Gary Farrell, who started out as assistant winemaker to Davis Bynum, launched his own label in 1982 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—introduced Sonoma single vineyard Pinot Noir to America.

However, these weren’t the only pioneers of Pinot Noir in Sonoma. In 1967 Joe Swan bought an old vineyard near Forestville and replanted it to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon. He made 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 led to it being identified as a unique clone, the Swan Clone. Swan made frequent visits to Burgundy to improve his winemaking and experimented with whole cluster fermentation, manual punch downs and the use of new French oak to the Russian River. He contributed greatly to raising the quality bar of Pinot Noir in Sonoma.

Tom Dehlinger was another early Pinot Noir pioneer. After making wine at Hanzell and Dry Creek, he set out in 1973 to establish his own vineyard and winery. He planted his first vines in 1975 using Swan, Pommard, and Martini clones. While Dehlinger’s first wines were made from purchased fruit, he began using estate fruit in 1977, and that’s been his focus ever since.

The Movement to the Coast

After many years producing Pinot Noir in Russian River Valley, Sonoma County vintners developed a keen interest in producing wines closer to the Pacific coast. The aim was to craft wines with greater natural acidity, freshness and elegance. As early as the 1970s, adventurous wineries and growers began growing grapes on the coast, the farthest western edge of the Sonoma Coast, a remote and hauntingly lonely area. Mike Bohan and David Hirsch were the early pioneers. Mike Bohan planted Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and Riesling as early as 1973. David Hirsch bought an 1100 acre parcel in 1978 in Cazadero and in 1980 planted Pinot Noir and Riesling (grafted over to Pinot Noir in 1988). The success of these West Sonoma Coast pioneers is revealed by who bought their grapes—Ted Lemon (Littorai), Burt Williams (Williams Selyem), Steve Kistler (Kistler), and many others.

Subsequent decades saw several other premium producers develop vineyards along the coast. They included Walt and Joan Flowers, Nick and Andy Pfeay, Ross Cobb, Ehren Jordan and An-Marie Failla, Peter Michael, and Lester and Linda Schwartz (Fort Ross Vineyard).

Rediscovering Zinfandel

While Zinfandel originated in Croatia and subsequently made its way to Italy (where it’s called Primitivo) no one is sure what route it took to get to Sonoma. It was sold as cuttings by a Long Island nursery as early as 1830 and grown in New England hothouses in the mid-19th century.
There is an apocryphal story concerning Col. Hazarathy bringing it from Hungary that no one believes any longer.

While the real pioneers of Zinfandel are the families that did the original plantings many decades ago, the modern day pioneers are the growers and producers that appreciated the unique character of old vine Zinfandel. For many years Zinfandel was California’s workhorse grape—an anonymous blending grape used to add body to lighter wines. Zinfandel was not taken seriously until the 1970s.

Ridge Vineyards was one of the first to take Zinfandel seriously, producing single vineyard wine from the Geyersville Vineyard in 1966 and the Lytton Springs Vineyard in 1972. In 1968, following the advice of André Tchelistcheff, Joseph Swan made Zinfandel from the old vines on his vineyard near Forestville. Joel Peterson learned winemaking under Swan, and then in 1976 he made 500 cases of Zinfandel in a corner of Swan’s winery and won critical acclaim for the first Ravenswood wines. He soon became Sonoma’s largest producer of premium, single vineyard Zinfandel. Kent Rosenblum followed suit in 1978, making distinctive Sonoma Zinfandels at his Alameda winery and earning the nickname “King of Zin”.

The latest generation of winemakers to explore the potential of old vines include Mike Officer and Morgan Twain-Peterson. Mike started his Carlisle winery in 1998 and today makes several single vineyard Zinfandels from old vineyards located throughout Sonoma and beyond. Morgan established his new, Bedrock Winery in 2007 and today makes several single vineyard Zinfandels, including from the Bedrock Vineyard in the Sonoma Valley [see box on Bedrock later in this report].

Clay Mauritson of Mauritson Wines and several other growers and winemakers have pioneered the development of the high altitude Rockpile growing area above Lake Sonoma where vines planted in the late 1990s are now bearing fruit and producing elegant wines from newer Zinfandel vines.

Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux Blends

One of the most significant developments during the 1980s and 1990s was the movement to produce Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux blends from new micro-climates and high elevation vineyards. Patrick Campell at Laurel Glen Vineyards was among the first, producing stellar Cabernet Sauvignon from a vineyard at 1000’ on Sonoma Mountain. Around the same time, veteran winemaker Richard Arrowood began producing classy Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon from different AVAs as well as from the revered Monte Rosso Vineyard. Tom Klein at Rodney Strong with help from Rick Sayre and later David Ramey started making single vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon from outstanding vineyard sites such as Alexander’s Crown Vineyard, while Ferrari Carano was sourcing reds from Look Out Mountain in Alexander Valley’s cooler area. And, in 1983 Peter Michael in Knights Valley began producing some of Sonoma County’s finest and most polished limited production Bordeaux varietals and blends. In the Sonoma Valley, Robert Mark Kamen began producing outstanding mountain grown Cabernet Sauvignon, especially the Kashmir Cuvée, from Sonoma Mountain.

Joel Peterson, Joe Swan, and Andre Tchelistcheff

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Vintner Jess Jackson also played a prominent role in developing high elevation vineyards for producing Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and other Bordeaux varieties. He believed that “growing grapes on the side of mountains builds character.” He developed vineyards on mountain tops, ridges, hillsides and raised benchland soils in Alexander Valley, Knights Valley and other AVAs and produced exciting wines such as those of Highland Estates, Stonestreet, Verité and Anakota. In the 1990s Jess Jackson recruited Bordelais vigneron Pierre Sellian to take the lead to make the ultra-premium micro cru known as Verité sourced from the Jackson Family’s Alexander Mountain Estate and other vineyard parcels in Knights Valley and Bennett Valley. In 2001 Pierre also began producing Cabernet Sauvignon under the Anakota label from two estates below Mount St. Helena. Today these wines are among the finest Cabernet Sauvignons and Bordeaux blends being produced in California.
Geography, Climate, and Soils

Sonoma County is 1,786 square miles, more than double the size of neighboring Napa County. Much of the county remains in a natural state with about half in forest, including ancient stands of virgin redwoods. Only 9 percent of the land is urban, and just 6 percent is used for vineyards, which account for 71 percent of the total value of agricultural production in Sonoma. The county is geographically highly diverse with numerous micro-climates suitable for wine grape production. The diversity within Sonoma has led to the creation of 16 different AVAs, which we examine in depth in subsequent sections; a map of all the AVAs can be found in Annex 1. In what follows, we explore the interplay of geography, climate and soils that explain Sonoma’s reputation as a premier wine producing region.

Geography

Sonoma County is bordered by Marin County to the south, Napa and Lake counties to the east, Mendocino county to the north, and 60 miles of Pacific coastline to the west. Most travelers first experience Sonoma by driving north from San Francisco on Highway 101, crossing the county line just south of Petaluma, passing through a cool, windy area called the Petaluma Gap, and then continuing on 101 traveling northwest to Santa Rosa, Healdsburg, and, finally, through the Alexander Valley to Cloverdale before crossing the border into Mendocino. Highway 101 roughly divides Sonoma into its east and west sides. To the east lays Sonoma Mountain, then Sonoma Valley, and, finally, the Mayacamas.

The Mayacamas Mountain Range rises along the east side of Sonoma County acting as a natural divide between the Sonoma and Napa Valleys. It features biologically diverse habitats and is home to deer, black bears, bobcats, wild boar and coyotes. Its ravines and valleys drain to the Russian River. The Mayacamas forms about 8 miles from the San Pablo Bay and travels more than 50 miles north. In the North, the Mayacamas tower over Alexander Valley and offer high elevations, volcanically derived soils and cool breezes for mountain winegrowing.

The wine tourist who wants to travel to the western side of Sonoma County has several options. The most likely one would be to take the Highway 116 exit off the 101 and then pass through Sebastopol and Graton before reaching the Russian River and following it through the Coastal Range to the coast at Jenner. At that point the tourist might take a right turn and travel north up Highway 1 along the coast, perhaps visiting some of the high altitude vineyards that look out over the ocean.

Besides the Pacific Coast and the Mayacamas, the Russian River is Sonoma’s most distinctive geographic feature. It is 110 miles long, beginning in Mendocino County and crossing into Sonoma County just north of Cloverdale. From there it runs south along the 101, descends into Alexander Valley, and meets up with its largest tributary—Dry Creek—just south of Healdsburg. It then makes a 90° turn to the west and passes through the Russian River Valley, spilling into the Pacific near Jenner. The river, its tributaries and reservoirs are an important source of water for the vineyards and urban residents of Sonoma.

Climate

In making this trip through Sonoma, the wine tourist would observe that temperatures rise as one travels north from Petaluma to Cloverdale, and they decrease as one travels westward towards the coast. These temperatures reflect the overwhelming influence of the cool Pacific (52° in August) in defining Sonoma’s terroir. As we’ve seen in other coastal winegrowing regions, each summer day as the interior valleys warm up, a thermal updraft is created that sucks in the cool Pacific air. It first arrives as brisk, cool breezes and, later, by an evening fog that by midnight extends across the entire county, blocked by the Mayacamas from spilling over into Napa.

The fog intrusion varies depending on proximity to the ocean, altitude, and the presence of mountains that block its flow. In general, vineyards close to the ocean experience more hours of fog, cooler temperatures, and higher humidity than vineyards further from the ocean. However, there are two exceptions to this generalization. First, high altitude vineyards above 1000’, including those very close to the coast like the 1500’ Hirsch Vineyard, lie above the

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8 The Russian River takes its name from the Russian-American Company, which explored the river in the early 19th century and established the Fort Ross colony 10 miles northwest of its mouth. The Russians established three ranches near Fort Ross, one of which — the Kostromitinov Ranch — was along the Russian River near the mouth of Willow Creek.
fog line. Second, vineyards located in the Petaluma Gap experience heavy fog even though they may be many miles from the ocean.

The Petaluma Gap gains its name from the fact that the Coastal Range largely dies out around Bodega Bay, giving the fog and cool ocean breezes an unimpeded route inland, ending at the mouth of the Petaluma River in San Pablo Bay. The fog and cool air flows inland in the late afternoon, hits Sonoma Mountain, and then turns north towards Santa Rosa and Sebastopol and south and east towards Sonoma Valley.

The flow of cool marine air and fog by and large explains Sonoma’s three climate zones shown on the map: Marine (blue), Coastal Cool (green), and Coastal Warm (red). These zones are further explained below.

Coastal marine: The marine zone is under direct ocean influence and is the coolest of the three climatic zones. It lies west of the first mountain ridges of the coast below 1,000 ft. and extends inland through river canyons and the Petaluma gap to Sonoma Mountain and Petaluma. It also extends a few miles up the Russian River almost as far as Occidental and Freestone. The Coastal Marine zone overlaps much of the Sonoma Coast AVA but excludes high altitude vineyards that lie above the fog belt. The growing areas in the zone average 2,185 degree days, but range from less than 1,800 to 2,800 depending on the year. This zone also has less than 800 hours between 70 and 90°F during the growing season. This zone is well suited for growing Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and even Syrah, although growing conditions are challenging for all varieties.

Coastal cool: The coastal cool zone runs along the coastal mountain ridge tops in the north above 800 to 1,000 ft. In the central and eastern part of the county, it includes the areas east of the Sebastopol hills, areas bounded on the north by the Russian River, and the northern and southern portions of Sonoma Valley. Thus, it comprises a significant portion of the Russian River Valley AVA, including all of the Green Valley AVA.

Cold foggy air hits the Sonoma Mountain and covers portions of the Sonoma Valley AVA, including Bennett Valley and Sonoma Mountain, and is then diverted south towards the Carneros AVA. This climatic zone averages 2,582 degree days per year, but can range from 1,900 to 3,600 depending on the year. It has 800 to 1,100 hours between 70 and 90°F per year. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir do well here in the cooler micro-climates as does Zinfandel and Merlot with some Cabernet Sauvignon.

Coastal Warm: The coastal warm inland areas are the driest and hottest in the county, protected from the early fog bank by elevation, mountain ranges, and distance. While the marine influence fades, it has a moderating influence, keeping average lows above freezing. It comprises the protected areas (the “banana belt”) of the Sonoma Valley AVA, the Alexander Valley AVA, and the Dry Creek AVA. There are many vineyards here where orchards once flourished. It averages 2,920 degree days per year but ranges from 2,100 to 4,200 depending on the year. This zone has over 1,100 hours between 70 and 90°F and very little fog during the growing season. The warmer zones are most suited for Chardonnay, Bordeaux and Rhone varietals.

Rainfall and Water Supply

Historically, Sonoma has received adequate rainfall, in part attributable to the fact its coastline lies 35 miles west of San Francisco. Rain typically falls October to May with December the wettest month. Rainfall varies greatly by location within Sonoma as well as by season. The average total rainfall varies from 32 inches in Santa Rosa to 36 in Healdsburg, 41 in Sebastopol and 55 in Jenner on the Pacific coast. While there has always been significant variation in precipitation, rainfall has been unusually low recently. In 2013 Sonoma had the least rain of the past 120 years, less even than the drought years of 1932 and 1976. Santa Rosa received 9 inches of rain in 2013, less than one-third its normal, and rainfall through the first half of 2014 was also below normal.

Uncertain rainfall, the threat of frost, and prolonged heat spells mean that most growers irrigate their vineyards, especially recently planted vines. The sources of irrigation water are rivers and groundwater. Drought affects all three sources. The Russian River is fed by reservoir releases from Lake Pillsbury (Potters Valley), Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma. Urban water use and the need to maintain streamflow levels to protect threatened Chinook salmon and steelhead trout constrain the amount of water available for vineyard irrigation. When water levels are at risk, the State Water Resources Control Board can curtail water rights, first, of newer (junior) water rights holders.

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As of September 2014 Lake Mendocino was down to 28% of capacity, and Lake Sonoma was at 62% of capacity.
and, second, of senior water rights holders, as it did with the droughts of 1976-7 and 1987-8. In June of this year the Board told junior water rights holders on the upper Russian River to stop diverting Russian River water. Since an estimated 60 percent of growers do not have holding ponds, their only option may be to use tank trucks to bring in water for irrigation.

Groundwater is the principal water source for vineyards distant from the Russian River like those in Sonoma Valley. Increases in the number of wells and increased pumping has led to declining groundwater levels in localized areas and is not sustainable in the long term. Solutions will require increased water recycling, reduced water use for non-essential purposes, and new technology that makes more efficient use of water. Increasing prices is also an important policy tool for rationing water and stimulating conservation. The water conservation measures encouraged by Sonoma’s sustainable winegrowing initiative will be critical in the long run to the health of Sonoma’s vineyards.

Altitude

The climate of Sonoma’s vineyards varies greatly depending on their altitude. Vineyards below the fog belt experience cooler temperatures, higher humidity, and fewer hours of sunlight than those above the fog belt. Mountain vineyards, like those of the Coastal Range, Sonoma Mountain, Moon Mountain, Mount St. Helena, and Pine Mountain, have even more extreme climates with low diurnal temperature variation, very long, sunny growing seasons, strong winds, and higher precipitation. The vineyards of Pine Mountain, for example, average 45-50” of precipitation annually, considerably more than the vineyards that lie below it. Pine Mountain vineyards also have diurnal temperature variations of only 14°, in comparison to 35° for vineyards on the valley floor.

Soils

Sonoma County has a complex geology resulting from eons of volcanic, tectonic, erosion and sedimentation processes. The collision of the Pacific and North American Plates, delineated by the San Andreas Fault on the western edge of the county has lifted the seafloor and created the coastal range, while volcanic activity has built the Sonoma Mountain and Mayacamas ranges to the east. Since the last significant volcanic activity ended about 3 million years ago, erosion and sedimentation have created Sonoma’s dizzyingly diverse soils.

Uplifted ancient seaboards in the western portion of the county have layers of clay, sand and maritime mix. Of special note is the Green Valley’s Wilson Grove Formation of shallow marine sandstone that has broken down to form Goldridge soils of degraded sandstone interspersed with pumice and volcanic ash. This fine sandy loam has excellent drainage and low fertility. Somewhat similar soils can also be found along the coast, such as at Peay Vineyards near Annapolis.

Volcanic soils predominate in the eastern side of Sonoma. The slopes of Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas are made of degraded volcanic rocks. Outcroppings of basalt are common at high altitudes, such as Kamen’s vineyard in the Southern Mayacamas. Over time these rocks have eroded, forming alluvial fans on the valley floors like that found at Robert Young Vineyards in the Alexander Valley. Other soils have been formed from volcanic ash, like the ash gray soils of the Chalk Hill AVA on the west-facing slopes of the Mayacamas.

As with other regions of the world, the mountain tops and slopes have the thinnest, least fertile soils, while valleys like the Alexander and Dry Creek valleys have deep, fertile, mostly alluvial soils. In Dry Creek the bottomland is rich in clay and loam, while the benchlands are volcanic-based and less fertile.
Vineyards, Vines and Vintages

Sonoma is California’s largest producer of premium wines. Its 64,073 acres of vines compares to Monterey’s 46,373 and Napa’s 45,990.12 Among all counties, it is the largest producer of Pinot Noir and the second largest producer of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Zinfandel.

While Sonoma is home to some of California’s largest producers and growers—Gallo, Constellation, Francis Ford Coppola, Jackson Estate, it is still a county of small growers. Of its 1800 vineyards, 80 percent are family owned and smaller than 100 acres in size. About 40 percent of its vineyards are under 20 acres in size.

It’s often said that it’s the vineyard that makes the wine. In Sonoma’s case, there are numerous vineyards that have acquired fame, partly for historical reasons but mostly for their special terroir and the high quality grapes they produce. These special and historic vineyards are identified later in this report, in the discussion of Sonoma’s AVAs and their wines.

Red Grapes

While more Chardonnay is planted than any other variety in Sonoma, red grapes are 2/3 of total acres planted, and the percent of vineyard acres planted to red grapes has slowly increased since 1980. As shown in the graph, the most important red varieties are Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, followed by Merlot and Zinfandel.

Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir grows well in Sonoma. It is one-third of all red varieties planted, and plantings have increased 340 percent since 1990. In 2013 it surpassed Cabernet Sauvignon as the #1 grape variety with 13,487 acres.13 Pinot Noir grows best in the cooler AVAs close to the Pacific Coast such as Sonoma Coast, Fort Ross Seaview, Green Valley and other areas that have significant coastal influence like the Russian River Valley, the Petaluma Gap, and Carneros. Pinot Noir is a challenging grape to cultivate successfully due to its frailty. It needs perfect growing conditions to ripen and reveal its considerable flavor and delicacy. The traditional style of Pinot Noir mainly cultivated in Russian River Valley, Green Valley and Los Carneros displays ripe dark cherry fruit aromas and flavors with moderate acidity and concentration. A new style of Pinot Noir produced from grapes cultivated under highly challenging growing conditions in the west Sonoma coast is a recent development. These wines reveal brighter red fruit flavors, higher acidity and overall freshness. As growers continue to experiment and learn, the future for the Pinot Noir grape in Sonoma looks very bright indeed.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet Sauvignon has a long and successful history in Sonoma County. There are currently almost 13 thousand acres planted throughout the county under a wide variety of growing conditions. A large quantity of Cabernet Sauvignon is grown on the warm, fertile valley floors and benchlands of Alexander Valley, Knights Valley, Dry Creek Valley and Sonoma Valley. In these climates, Cabernet Sauvignon grows easily and quickly, producing full-bodied and flavorful wines of average to good quality. Sonoma County’s finest Cabernet Sauvignon is grown on the slopes of the Mayacamas in Alexander and Knights valleys as well as in Pine Mountain and Cloverdale Peak, Sonoma Mountain, and Moon Mountain. In these high elevation vineyards, growing conditions are difficult, yields are low and grapes acquire concentrated fruit flavors. Sonoma’s super premium single varietal Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet blends are sourced from these sites. Sonoma County’s Cabernets are often more rustic, herbal and red-fruited than those of Napa Valley, but can also be more complex.

Merlot

Merlot has been through a boom and bust cycle with plantings increasing 15 fold between 1980 and 2000 and then decreasing by 40 percent between 2000 and the present, perhaps partly the result of the 2004 movie Sideways, which disparaged Merlot wine. Currently, there are 4,647 acres of Merlot planted, 4th largest among red varieties. Merlot grows well in Alexander Valley, especially on Alexander Mountain, in Knights Valley, Chalk Hill, Carneros and Bennett Valley. In warm growing areas like Alexander Valley, Merlot produces wines rich in dark spicy red plum

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12 San Joaquin is the largest county with 72,974 acres of vines, but its grapes largely go into inexpensive wines.

13 Many variables influence Pinot Noir. At Hirsch Vineyards near the Pacific numerous clones (Mt. Eden, Pommard, Swan, Calera, 114, 777) grow on 5 different rootstocks on 4 microclimates and 6 different soil series.
aroma with ripe flavors on a supple, lush palate. Merlot is also planted in cooler areas like Bennett Valley where it receives the winds and fog of the Petaluma Gap or the high altitude (1400') rocky volcanic vineyards of Alexander Mountain. Merlot grown under these conditions ripens slowly and produces elegant and refined wines with lighter red fruit and mineral notes. Vérité’s La Muse, which is perhaps Sonoma’s best known single varietal Merlot, is mostly sourced from the Jackson Park vineyard in Bennett Valley.

**Syrah**

There are fewer than 1800 acres of Syrah planted in Sonoma, but the plantings are distributed throughout the county and do well in a range of sites, both warm and cool climate. Some of the finest Syrah is being cultivated at Sonoma Coast vineyards in the Petaluma Gap and in Bennett Valley. The wines made from these cool climate grapes are elegant and relatively complex with dark fruit flavors, peppery nuances, violets and good levels of natural acidity. Some of the warmer climate Syrah from Dry Creek Valley and elsewhere are more fruit forward and full-bodied with lush textures and ripe flavors. The continuing and mystifying consumer ambivalence towards Syrah means it is unlikely to become a major Sonoma grape in the near future.

**Zinfandel**

Although recent ampelographic evidence indicates Zinfandel originated in Croatia, it can legitimately be called Sonoma’s grape today. It was one of the first varieties planted in the county in the 19th century, and today the Zinfandel and mixed blacks vineyards are among Sonoma’s oldest and most special. These old, gnarly vines are often located on steep slopes with meager soils, like the 60° slopes of Martinelli’s Jackass Hill. They’re head-trained, dry-farmed, arthritic looking vines with low yields of 1-2 tons/acre. For many years Zinfandel was the most widely planted red grape in Sonoma. In 1970 it represented 40 percent of all red vine plantings; today it’s just 13 percent. A few growers, like Morgan Twain-Peterson, are planting new Zinfandel vineyards like the old ones, head-trained and dry-farmed.

While Zinfandel is mostly found in the benchlands of Dry Creek Valley and Alexander Valley, the hills of the Russian River Valley, and the warm “banana belt” of the Sonoma Valley, the most promising area for new plantings may be the recently approved Rockpile AVA located high above Lake Sonoma. Zinfandel varies greatly by site, with the warm Dry Creek Valley recognized for its distinct red fruit character, while the cooler Russian River Valley gives darker, spicier fruit.

**Old Vines**

A number of Sonoma’s prized vineyards are populated by old vines, typically Zinfandel and an assortment of mixed blacks like Petite Sirah, Mourvedre, Carignan, and as many as 30 other varieties, some quite obscure. Originally planted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often by Italian immigrants, many of these old vines were ripped out and replaced by more productive varieties planted using modern trellising. Others were the victims of the phylloxera epidemic that hit Sonoma in the 1880s and had to be replanted. However, some of the best old vine vineyards survived [see box]. Originally dry-farmed and planted with very wide 10x10 spacing, some have been interplanted to reduce spacing with the addition of drip irrigation.

**Bedrock Vineyard**

Bedrock Vineyard is located in the Sonoma Valley banana belt where the temperatures are warm and there’s less fog and wind intrusion. Bedrock is today famous for its 35 acres of 125 year-old vines (mostly Zinfandel but, also, mixed-blacks and 30 other obscure varieties) and the magnificent wines produced from them by Sonoma’s outstanding wineries, including Bedrock Wine Co., Ravenswood, Carlisle, Dashe, and Windgap. However, it’s also famous for the historic personalities tied to it. Original part of the Mexican land grant owned by General Vallejo, Comandante of Alta California, it was purchased by General Hooker in 1856 with the financial backing of William Tecumseh Sherman, who later led the infamous March to the Sea during the Civil War. Hooker planted the first *vitis vinifera* vines at Bedrock. After phylloxera destroyed the vineyard, George Hearst, father of the publisher William Randolph Hearst, purchased the vineyard and began replanting in 1884. Eventually, the vineyard ended up in the hands of the Domenici family, who farmed it for 100 years before selling it to Joel Peterson in 2005.

**White Grapes**

14 Mike Officer, Morgan Twain-Peterson and others have been important actors in the formation of the Historic Vineyard Society, which documents the history of California’s old vineyards. Historicvineyardsociety.org
Chardonnay

As shown in the graph, white grapes are essentially Chardonnay in Sonoma. Chardonnay is ubiquitous, grown in every AVA, from the cool rolling hills of Carneros and the Petaluma Gap to the warmer climes of Alexander Valley and Sonoma Valley. What most regions have in common is the particular Chardonnay clone, Wente. The Wente clone is the result of Ernest Wente’s massale selection of the best vines from his Livermore vineyard over a 40 year period. His vines in turn came from Meursault cuttings imported in the late 19th century and Montpelier cuttings brought in somewhat later. When the “boom” occurred after California Chardonnay won the 1976 Judgement of Paris, the Wente vineyard was one of the few sources of budwood. The Wente clone found today in Sonoma is of two types, the old Wente clone that was subject to millerandage and the heat-treated Wente clone (FPS 04). Over time, several other clones have been derived from the Wente clone, especially, in Sonoma, the Robert Young clone (FPS 17), and the musqué style Rued clone. Several other Wente-derived, Chardonnay clones have been developed in Sonoma County. The Hyde Vineyard is reputed to have produced an especially good clone in terms of fruit quality.

Sauvignon Blanc

Sauvignon Blanc is just 4 percent of all Sonoma County plantings, but it’s grown in most regions of the county. The grape does well in deep, fertile soils that create excess vigor in many varieties, so it’s commonly planted on the valley floors of Dry Creek, Alexander Valley, Knight’s Valley, and Russian River Valley. In 1959, Joe Rochioli Jr. was one of the first to plant Sauvignon Blanc in the Russian River Valley; 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. Growers have learned to tame the herbaceous tendencies of Sauvignon Blanc by growing in warmer areas and deleafing to expose grape clusters to filtered sunlight. The highest quality grapes come from vineyards with moderate yields, about 6 tons/acre. The success producers are having with Sauvignon Blanc suggests a bright future in Sonoma.

Old Vine Whites. In addition to old vine, mixed blacks, there are rare old vine white varieties that have been resuscitated. Mike Officer of Carlisle makes a barrel fermented old vine white blend called The Derivative, a blend of Semillon from Monte Rosso planted in 1886, Muscadelle from the Pagani Ranch planted in 1920, and Palomino from the Saitone Ranch in Russian River Valley planted in 1895. Morgan Twain-Peterson uses the same Monte Rosso Semillon fruit to make his Cuvée Karatas Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc blend. Both Mike and Morgan also make a white field blend from dry farmed vines planted in 1954 at the Compagni Portis Vineyard. There are also some old Semillon vines planted in 1905 at Jeff Gaffner’s Casa Santinamaria Vineyard, located near Compagni Portis; Jeff has made a Semillon and a Semillon-Zinfandel field blend from the vineyard for his winery, Saxon Brown.

Sustainability

In early 2014 the Sonoma County Winegrowers in partnership with the Sonoma County Vintners announced that Sonoma County is committed to becoming the nation’s first 100 percent sustainable wine region through a three-phased program to be completed within the next five years. Although many of the region’s growers and winemakers have been practicing sustainable farming techniques and winemaking practices for decades, this initiative demonstrates their seriousness and commitment to ensuring all vineyards and wineries across Sonoma County will soon be sustainable. Since making this bold commitment, they have received support to reach their goal from Sonoma State University, the Sonoma County Economic Development Board’s Green Certification program, and others. The program has been strongly endorsed by small and large producers alike, including the Francis Ford Coppola and Jackson Family Wines wineries. Francis Ford Coppola works with its contract growers to help them gain certification.

The certification process entails a complex set of 200 assessments and measurements that look at every element of the vineyard and winery. The first phase focuses on helping growers assess their vineyard practices through trainings and educational sessions focused on land use, canopy management, energy efficiency, water quality assessments, carbon emissions, and healthcare and training for employees. The goal is to assess 15 thousand vineyard acres per year for the next four years. The second phase involves the Sonoma County Winegrowers working with vineyard owners to achieve certification with the goal of 100 percent sustainability for the Sonoma County wine industry by 2019.

Since many vineyards are small and farmed under contract, vineyard management companies may themselves become certified, based on inspection of the vineyards they manage. Redwood Empire Vineyard Management is the first management company to be so certified.
Sustainable farming practices are different from and more comprehensive than organic and biodynamic practices, but most organic growers and organic management companies like Phil Coturri’s Enterprise Vineyards should have little difficulty becoming certified sustainable should they wish to do so.

There are several different sustainability initiatives already in existence in the state, including SIP (Sustainability in Practice) and the Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing, so the Sonoma certification process will be flexible and build on those initiatives. That said, the single most important program in California is the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA) and its Code of Sustainability. This code was introduced in 2003 through the efforts of the Wine Institute and the California Association of Winegrape Growers. It’s expected that most Sonoma growers will use the CSWA certification process as Napa does with its Napa Green initiative.

While certification may have some value in selling Sonoma grapes and wines, its main value is the certification process itself, which helps educate the grower as to how viticultural practices affect the larger environment and how they can be improved to the betterment of the environment and grape quality and often at lower cost in the long run. An important part of the process is measuring and benchmarking each producer’s water use, greenhouse gases, nitrogen and energy use with the technical assistance of the CSWA.

The 2019 goal set out by the Sonoma County Winegrowers is a very ambitious one. According to the CSWA, only 12 percent of vineyard acreage and 2 percent of the wineries in the state were certified using CSWA standards by May of this year. However, Sonoma County is ahead of the curve with about 15 thousand acres of Sonoma vines already certified sustainable, including those belonging to large producers like Gallo, Jackson, Francis Ford Coppola, Ravenswood, and Rodney Strong. It’s estimated that about 35 thousand acres of vines have already gone through the first phase of sustainability self-assessments.

In general, the estate vineyards of producing wineries account for about one-third of total vineyard acreage in Sonoma. Another one-third of plantings is farmed by vineyard management companies. The final one-third of acres is farmed by numerous small growers. The combination of large numbers and limited capitalization make this latter group the most difficult to convert to sustainable operations. Vineyards and wineries that are certified organic or biodynamic are likely to find it easy to also gain certification as sustainable, but less than two percent of Sonoma vineyards are organic.

**Self-Assessment of Sustainability in Nitrogen Management.** Excessive and inappropriate use of nitrogen fertilizer unnecessarily uses scarce resources (33,500 cubic feet of natural gas is required to produce one ton of anhydrous ammonia that is used to make nitrogen fertilizers) and can produce runoff that adversely affects groundwater quality in addition to numerous other problems. The CSWA self-assessment of nitrogen management scores sustainability on a scale from 1 (least sustainable) to 4 (most sustainable). The least sustainable practice applies nitrogen every year. If nitrogen is applied at the appropriate time and only after plant analysis, a score of 2 is assigned. A score of 3 is assigned if the grower also carefully selects and applies the appropriate form of nitrogen. The workbook also includes an evaluation of a variety of manure and compost options for adding nitrogen.

Finally, nitrogen management is most sustainable (i.e., a score of 4) if inter-row cover crops are planted and managed to provide long-term nitrogen needs. For farmers wishing to move towards sustainability, the workbook provides a variety of both tilled and no-till options for planting and managing cover crops. In times of drought the cover crop may be mowed and tilled into the soil to conserve moisture*.

*Glenn McGourty discusses a wide variety of cover crop options in his article “Cover Cropping Systems for Organically Farmed Vineyards,” Practical Winery & Vineyard Magazine (Sept. 2004).

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16 SIP was established by the Central Coast viticultural team (CCVT), which was established by Santa Lucia Highlands grower and vintner Rich Smith and others in 1994.

17 The California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Workbook can be downloaded at sustainablewinegrowing.org.

18 According to the 2013 Sonoma County Crop Report about 1,000 acres of vineyards are sustainable.
Vintages

Sonoma County experiences considerable vintage variation due to changes in temperature and rainfall. There is also considerable variability within the county, due to geographic location and climate differences. Over the past five years, most vintners had excellent vintages in 2013 and 2012. On the other hand, 2011 and 2010 were challenging and produced low yields and uneven quality. The 2009 vintage was also cool and wet.

In Sonoma as elsewhere in the world, experienced and diligent vintners are usually able to meet the challenges presented by unfavorable weather events. Our summaries of recent vintages and our assessment of the wines produced from those vintages are presented below.

2013 This was an exceptional vintage in terms of both quality and quantity of grapes. The long growing season and moderate temperatures allowed grapes to ripen slowly and produce clean grapes with balanced acidity, tannins, and sugar levels. Crop size was high, as in 2012. Our limited tastings of the 2013 vintage confirm that it is exceptional.

2012 This vintage had a long growing season with no heat waves or heavy rain. Flowering and fruit set were normal, and full flavor maturity occurred at relatively low sugar levels while still retaining vibrant acidity. Crop yields were generally much higher than the two previous years.

2011 A difficult growing season with cool weather and heavy rain during harvest diluted the fruit and introduced mildew and botrytis in some vineyards. As a result, the crop was small and grape quality was highly variable. Wines also vary in terms of ripeness, flavor and concentration. Based on our tastings, the 2011 vintage is a mixed bag. Some wines are stellar, especially from grapes picked early, but there are also some dilute, high acid wines.

2010 One of the most difficult vintages in recent memory. The growing season was long and cold with late harvest and low yields. In May many vineyards were inundated with rain and suffered a stunted crop and uneven ripening. Harvest rains added to the challenges. Growers who dropped fruit and picked before the October rains fared surprisingly well. Red wines were especially variable.

2009 This vintage started off cool and dry with rains in May and cool weather during the summer. Mid-October rains were a complicating factor. Early ripening grapes like Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Noir had an excellent year acquiring good acidity as a result of the cool weather. Big reds tended to suffer from uneven ripening throughout the county.

The AVAs of Sonoma County

In the next two sections of this report we give a detailed description of each of Sonoma's American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), their principal producers, and their wines. The aim is to help consumers and wine professionals to become better acquainted with the amazing diversity of Sonoma's wine growing areas and the exciting wines they produce.

Sonoma County wines are produced in fifteen different AVAs. This is by far the largest number of any California county and is indicative of Sonoma's amazingly diverse wine growing conditions1. Sonoma's AVAs range in size from the Northern Sonoma AVA that covers 348 thousand acres and includes all of Sonoma County north of Santa Rosa to the Moon Mountain AVA of just 17 thousand acres. The largest AVAs overlap some of the smaller ones; the Northern Sonoma AVA, for example, overlaps eight others. Some of Sonoma's AVAs, mainly the smaller ones, have unique terroir and produce wines with distinct characteristics. The larger AVAs—e.g., Northern Sonoma or Sonoma Coast—are more diverse in terroir; as a result their wines are less unique and recognizable. A complete map of Sonoma County and its AVAs is in Annex 1.

The diversity and overlapping character and the sheer number of Sonoma's AVAs makes it difficult for the consumer to fully understand and appreciate the unique characteristics of each, and how they relate to each other. Sonoma County’s new (2011) conjunctive labeling law strengthens the argument for these proposals as wine labels saying “Sonoma Coast Sonoma County” in addition to the name of the appellation. At the very least, it helps build Sonoma as a brand name and ensures that consumers understand that each appellation falls within the county.

As noted in the next section, there are proposals for developing still more AVAs for Sonoma. The particular problem these proposals address is the huge size of the Sonoma Coast AVA and the large diversity of terroir within it. A first proposal would create a West Sonoma Coast AVA that would be limited to vineyards subject to strong marine influence. A second proposal would create a Petaluma Gap AVA that would cover the territory influenced by the cool Pacific breezes that flow east to Petaluma. Ironically, the conjunctive labeling law strengthens the argument for these proposals as wine labels saying “Sonoma Coast Sonoma County” sound redundant.

1 The geographic features of AVAs and their boundaries are defined by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) of the US Treasury. The TTB defines AVAs at the request of wineries and other petitioners. Unlike in Europe’s appellations of origin, an American AVA only specifies the geographic location of a wine and does not regulate yields, eligible varieties, aging requirements or other determinants of a unique growing area. However, an AVA designation requires that 85% of the grapes used to make a wine must have been grown in the specific geographic area.
Coastal Climates

Climatic conditions vary considerably throughout Sonoma County and its AVAs, determining which varieties flourish and the quality of wines produced. As noted earlier, UC Davis research has identified Sonoma’s three major climate zones: marine, coastal cool, and coastal warm. We use these climate zones to organize the following discussion of Sonoma’s AVAs, recognizing there is great diversity of microclimates, and soils, within each AVA.

The first group of AVAs presented below is those with the strongest marine influence in the form of cool breezes and heavy fog. These AVAs are mostly close to the Pacific or San Pablo Bay or have physical features—the Petaluma Gap, the Russian River—that allow the marine influence to penetrate inland. These coastal cool climate AVAs correspond to the marine and coastal cool climate zones discussed earlier. They are also located in the western and southern portions of the county. While their soils vary, they are predominantly uplifted marine sediment and alluvial in nature.

The second group of AVAs is those with the weakest marine influence. As a result, they have somewhat warmer temperatures, although they are not as warm as the Napa Valley, which lies further to the east. These AVAs usually have mountains or hills that hinder the intrusion of coastal breezes, although some experience evening fog. These are the coastal warm AVAs, which are located in the eastern and northern portions of the county. These AVAs tend to have soils that are volcanic and alluvial in origin. Zinfandel and Bordeaux varieties do well in most of them, and Pinot Noir is not widely grown. Some of them also have mountain vineyards of volcanic soils that are less warm but still lack the fog and marine influence of the cool AVAs.

The Wines of Sonoma

In addition to describing the climate, soils, and grapes of Sonoma’s AVAs in the following sections of this report, we also provide profiles of many of Sonoma’s premiere wineries and reviews of many of the 700 wines we tasted. All members of the Sonoma County Vintners were invited to submit samples. All wines were tasted at our offices and during our visit to Sonoma County in July 2014. We assign scores to all wines using the 100 point system. Due to the large number of wines we tasted for this report, not all reviews are published in this document. However, reviews of all the wines we tasted are available in the tasting notes and rating archive on our website at www.iwinereview.com.

The very coolest parts of Sonoma County are strongly influenced by marine winds and fog. These areas correspond to the following AVAs: Sonoma Coast, Fort Ross Seaview, Russian River, Green Valley, and Los Carneros. In the table below, we list the most noteworthy grapes grown in each AVA. The best wines are made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the cool climate AVAs, although Syrah and Zinfandel also make a showing in warmer areas. Each AVA is discussed in turn below.

Coastal Cool Climate AVAs and Their Wines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVA (date established)</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Soils</th>
<th>Noteworthy Grapes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma Coast (1969)</td>
<td>517,000 acres; overlaps most of Russian River Valley and Carneros AVAs</td>
<td>Uplifted marine, marine sandstone, alluvial river deposits</td>
<td>Chardonnay, Pinot Noir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Ross Seaview (2012)</td>
<td>27,500 acres; lies entirely within the Sonoma Coast AVA. 503 acres of planted vines</td>
<td>Uplifted marine</td>
<td>Pinot Noir, Chardonnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian River Valley (1938)</td>
<td>169,029 acres; overlaps Green Valley and Chalk Hill with about 200 growers</td>
<td>Varied soils—uplifted marine and alluvial river deposits</td>
<td>Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Zinfandel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Valley (1963)</td>
<td>19,300 acres; lies entirely within the Russian River Valley AVA with 130 vineyards and 1962 acres of vines</td>
<td>Mostly Goldridge soils from marine sandstone but, also, uplifted marine and alluvial deposits</td>
<td>Pinot Noir, Chardonnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Carneros (1983)</td>
<td>36,900 acres divided between Sonoma and Napa; the Sonoma portion lies within the Sonoma Valley AVA</td>
<td>Thin, clay soils on rolling foothills of the Mayacamas</td>
<td>Chardonnay, Pinot Noir</td>
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The Sonoma Coast is the “hottest” new region for wine growing in Sonoma County and is also its coolest. The vineyards here are exposed to varying degrees of coastal influences, (cold, wind, and fog) and situated at relatively high elevations. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah do best in these growing areas with many wines exhibiting clean flavors, with high acidity, low alcohol, and overall elegance and refinement.

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2 The International Wine Review rates wines using the 100 point system. We D.O. not write up wines that receive a rating below 85 points. The ratings are:

- 95 and above: A wine of distinction
- 91-94: A wine of outstanding or superior quality
- 89-90: A wine of very good to excellent quality
- 87-88: A wine of good quality
- 85-86: A wine of fair or acceptable quality
- 84 and below: Not recommended

3 Data on vineyard acres are from the Sonoma County Winegrowers publications. However, it should be noted that due to the overlapping boundaries of the AVAs, there is sometimes inconsistency in the numbers reported by different sources.
The Sonoma Coast is the largest AVA in Sonoma County. Its boundaries run along the Pacific Coast from the Mendocino County line in the north down to San Pablo Bay and Marin County in the south. It overlaps five other Sonoma County AVAs including the Sonoma part of Carneros, part of Sonoma Valley, the western part of Chalk Hill, all of green Valley and a considerable portion of the Russian River Valley. The soils are mainly derived from shallow sea sandstone, ocean mixture and river gravels.

With daytime highs typically in the low 70s and nighttime temperatures that fall to the 40s during the growing season, the Sonoma Coast is among the coolest in the state, barely allowing grapes to ripen. Located close to the Pacific, the most northwesterly portion known as the West Sonoma Coast is significantly colder. The southerly portion that is strongly influenced by the Petaluma Gap is also cold and foggy. The huge size and heterogeneity of the Sonoma Coast AVA has led to proposals to carve out smaller, more well-defined AVAs for the West Sonoma Coast and Petaluma Gap.

The West Sonoma Coast subdivision extends roughly from Jenner in the South to Annapolis in the North and from the coast to 5 to 12 miles inland including the first ridges of the Coastal Range of mountains. It encompasses six sub-regions: Annapolis and Fort–Ross Seaview, located along the coast, and Freestone, Occidental, Green Valley and Sebastopol Hills, which are further from the coast where the southern coastal ridges flatten out.

The West Sonoma Coast is a complex region with many challenges for growing grapes. It is buffeted by high winds and fog, lots of rain, and extremely cold temperatures. Most vineyards are dry-farmed, tightly-spaced and farmed organically or biodynamically, although not necessarily certified. All harvesting is done by hand and vineyards generally follow sustainable agricultural practices. Most of the vines are planted with a variety of Dijon and Heritage clones for producing complex wines. Due to the cool climate, yields in most vineyards are around two tons per acre but can be much less, depending upon the vintage.

The areas of Fort Ross, Occidental, Freestone, and Annapolis in the West Sonoma Coast are significantly cooler than most Pinot Noir growing areas in the world. A typical harvest sees a majority of the region’s grapes harvested in mid-October to November — quite a contrast to warmer regions, where harvest usually begins in August. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah are the principal varieties produced in the region and do extremely well.

Petaluma Gap

Like the West Sonoma Coast, the Petaluma Gap is another distinctive region within the Sonoma Coast. While it is not yet an officially recognized AVA, the Petaluma Gap Winegrowers Alliance, led by current president Ann Keller, has proposed AVA status to the BATF. The proposed AVA would run from the coast to Sonoma Mountain. Containing about 4 thousand acres of vines farmed by about 80 growers, it would overlap the southern portion of the Sonoma Coast AVA and the southern part of the Russian River Valley and the western portion of Carneros.

As discussed earlier, the Petaluma Gap funnels cool breezes and fog east from the Pacific Ocean through the town of Petaluma and south to San Pablo Bay. It is roughly 22 to 31 miles in width with walls rising roughly 2-3 thousand feet from the valley floor. Compared to the Russian River Valley and Carneros, the fog arrives earlier in the afternoon and persists longer the next morning. Rainfall is moderate (20-24 inches) so that irrigation is required for at least part of the growing season. Like other cool growing areas, the “wind tunnel” and the fog in the Gap result in lower yields and late ripening grapes with good levels of acidity. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and cool climate Syrah do especially well in the proposed AVA.

The Fort Ross Seaview AVA

The Fort Ross Seaview AVA is located on the steep coastal ridges above the Pacific and has a cool maritime climate, rugged topography and marine soils, all of which contribute to wines of unique character. Most of the vineyards in the Fort Ross Seaview AVA are at 920-1800' altitude, placing them above the fog line but close to the Pacific. This creates a climate with more sunshine and warmer temperatures than the surrounding, lower-lying areas. However, the steep terrain and gullies make it difficult to farm most vineyards, and yields are generally low. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are the most common varieties grown in the AVA followed by Syrah and smaller amounts of Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and Rhone varieties.

A remote area mostly used for sheep-herding, the Fort Ross Seaview region has attracted adventurous vignerons for decades. Mike Bohan and David Hirsch were among the early pioneers. Mike Bohan, from a local sheep-herding family, initially planted 1 acre of Zinfandel in 1972 and followed that up with Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Riesling. David Hirsch bought a 1100 acre parcel at 1400' in 1978 in Cazadero and planted his first 2 acres to Pinot Noir in 1980. Lee Martinelli convinced his father-in-law, sheepherder George Charles, to plant the Charles Vineyard to Chardonnay in 1980. And Helen Turley purchased land on the same ridge as the Hirsch Vineyard in 1985 for her Marcassin Vineyard. Today there are numerous other growers (e.g., Peter Michael, Pahlmeyer, Failla) but very few wineries, Hirsch, Flowers, and Fort Ross being the exception. Further north, in Annapolis, Andy Peay established his vineyard and winery (outside Fort Ross Seaview but inside the West Sonoma Coast) in 1996.

Pinot Noir

Sonoma County’s winemakers produce two main styles of Pinot Noir: traditional and new. The traditional Pinot Noirs are represented by the wines of Rochioli, William-Selyem, and Gary Farrell, which are sourced from well-established Pinot Noir vineyards in Russian River Valley, Green Valley and elsewhere that were mainly planted in the mid-1970s and 1980s. The wines are generally ripe in character with definable dark cherry, plum and pomegranate, and some even exhibit cola flavors with hints of smoke and brambles. They are generally more earth than mineral-like and also have good acidity but are not as high in acidity as the wines made in the new areas. They also tend to have a higher concentration of flavors and higher alcohol levels. Winemaking following the traditional approach involves sourcing grapes from different clonal material with preference for the use of heritage clones. The vineyards are managed sustainably, well established and mainly planted in Goldridge soils. Spacing is of moderate density, below 2000 vines per acre, and yields are moderate to low, depending upon the grower and vintner.

The new Pinot Noirs represented by winemakers such as Ted Lemon of Littorai, Ehren Jordan of Failla and Ross Cobb of Hirsch and Cobb Vineyards involve sourcing grapes closer to the Pacific Coast, some in quite rocky and difficult terrain, and mostly located at high altitudes where growing conditions are very challenging. The newer areas include sections of the Sonoma Coast, Fort Ross-Seaview, Petaluma Gap and the West Sonoma Coast. These wines are noteworthy for their bright red and black cherry and red and black raspberry flavors, vibrant acidity, freshness, sinewy tannins, mineral character, and relatively low alcohol. They are generally light-bodied but with good flavor concentration. These attributes are the result of the cold air breezes from the Pacific Ocean and the complex soils found along the coastal ridges. The grapes ripen slowly and are harvested late. Many of the vineyard sources for these wines are organic or biodynamic and have a wide variety of clonal material, especially Dijon clones such as 114, 115 and 777, massale selections and some heritage clones. The vineyards are often divided into blocks with identifiable clonal material for blending purposes. Spacing of vines can be very dense, as high as 4000 vines/acre. Many of the best vineyards have southern and western exposure and are situated above the fog line. The winemakers following this approach are part of a new generation transforming Pinot Noir winemaking in Sonoma County.
Russian River Valley AVA

The Russian River Valley is best known for producing some of Sonoma County’s finest Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Kistler, Littorai, Rochioli, Williams Selyem, Gary Farrell, Lynmar, and many other top producers of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are located here.

The Russian River Valley was established as an AVA in 1983 (enlarged in 1985 and 2011). The valley is known for its cool climate resulting from Pacific breezes and cooling fog flowing through the Petaluma Gap and the Russian River channel through the coastal hills.

Moving to the north in Russian River the hills increase in height and density so the vineyards enjoy fewer coastal breezes and are deprived of the morning fog that refreshes the vineyards further south. The warmer climate here means that Zinfandel vines grow alongside the Pinot and Chardonnay, particularly on warmer, sunnier, west-facing sites. The AVA is at its warmest in its northeastern corner, around the town of Windsor. Here, Pinot Noir is replaced almost entirely by Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Chardonnay is just as common, and it is clearly different (richer and more tropical) from that made in the AVA’s cooler southwestern corner.

There are an amazing variety of soil types in the valley. The finest Russian River Valley vineyard sites are planted on Goldridge soils, which consist of deep, moderately well drained soils formed in weathered sandstone. There are also alluvial soils here, mostly close to the river itself. The Russian River, which heads west through the coastal foothills, has deposited large amounts of alluvial materials that are now river bench lands. Each of these different soils has its influence on the wines produced.

The valley is ideally suited for Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel, although other varieties are also planted here, especially Syrah and Rhone varieties. Chardonnay is the most widely grown variety in valley, cultivated on about two-thirds of the vineyard acreage. The Valley is also home to a number of Sonoma’s best known old, historic vineyards of Zinfandel and mixed blacks.

Green Valley AVA

The Green Valley is located in the southwestern corner of the Russian River Valley 10 miles from the Pacific coast and just east of Occidental. Low lying and open to the winds and fog from the Petaluma Gap, it is a slightly cooler climate than the rest of the Russian River with low diurnal swings. Indeed, agricultural extension experts used to warn against planting grapes in the area. Fortunately, the Dutton family ignored the advice and began planting vineyards in the 1970s.

Green Valley has predominantly Goldridge sandy loam soils over fractured marine sandstone with good drainage and low fertility and are well suited for Green Valley’s principal varieties, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which are used for both still and sparkling wines. The combination of cool temperatures, an extended growing season, and great soils produces grapes with excellent aromatic complexity and balance.

Green Valley has over 100 growers and 8 key wineries. In addition to the Dutton Ranch, prominent Green Valley growers include the Hallberg Vineyard and Keefer Ranch. The key wineries include DeLoach, Dutton Estate, Dutton-Goldfield, Emeritus, Hartford, Iron Horse, Marimar Estate and Orogeny. Those wineries outside Green Valley that source grapes from Green Valley vineyards include inter alia Auteur, A.P. Vin, DeLoach, DuMol, Failla, Freeman, Kosta Browne, Lynmar, MacPhail, Martinelli, Merry Edwards, Patz and Hall, Paul Hobbs, Siduri, and Zepaltas.

The formal name of the AVA is Green Valley of the Russian River to distinguish it from the Solano County Green Valley AVA; this name was legally adopted in 2007.
Los Carneros AVA

Carneros is another, relatively cool growing area, although not as cool as Russian River and the Sonoma Coast. The Carneros AVA is partly in Sonoma County and partly in Napa County. The Sonoma portion lies entirely within both the Sonoma Valley AVA and the Sonoma Coast AVA. Fog reaches Carneros later than winegrowing areas to its west, but the cooling effect of the Petaluma Gap winds contributes to its moderate temperatures. Its shallow soils are heavy in clay and low in fertility, and vineyard elevations run from 400' to the Mayacamas foothills. The growing season is long, and yields are relatively low for most growers.

Carneros was among the very first regions in California to produce high quality, cool climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, thanks in part to Andre Tchelistcheff and Louis Martini, who began clonal experimentation of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the 1940s. However, the region didn’t receive widespread recognition until the early 1980s when wineries such as Carneros Creek, Acacia and Saintsbury on the Napa Valley side demonstrated that Carneros could produce light and elegant Pinot Noirs with earthy complexity.

A serious outbreak of phylloxera in the late 20th century combined with the excitement around newer Pinot growing regions in Sonoma created challenges for Carneros. But replantings on phylloxera resistant rootstock that include Dijon clones like 115, 667, and 777 as well as heritage clones like Martini and Swan have resulted in wines with high consumer appeal. A new marketing effort by the Carneros Wine Alliance promises to draw renewed attention to Carneros wines.

Most of the wines produced in Carneros today are cool climate in character with about half the production in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, although Merlot, Syrah and other varieties are also grown. Carneros Chardonnays are generally fruit forward with high acidity and freshness, employing stainless steel and neutral French oak for fermentation and aging. The Pinot Noirs are often light and elegant, although some, especially those from Dijon clones, are darker and earthier like those of the Russian River Valley. Among the leading producers on the Sonoma side of Carneros are Schug, Carneros Estate, Donum Estate, MacRostie Winery, Keller Estate, Patz and Hall, and Gloria Ferrer.

Chardonnay

Chardonnay in Sonoma covers a style spectrum running from Chablis-like steely, high acid, unoaked wines to Côte de Beaune-like lush, creamy palates showing ripe tropical fruit, roasted hazelnuts, and toasted oak. While the rich, ripe creamy style was dominant during the Chardonnay boom years of the 1980s and 1990s, most producers today have moved towards a more balanced style. The highly sought after Kistler Chardonnays perhaps show this transition best. Kistler pioneered the use of French oak barriques for fermenting Chardonnay, and until recently his wines were recognized for their voluptuous texture and ripe flavors. However, beginning with the 2006 vintage, grapes were picked earlier and less lavishly oaked, resulting in wines of greater finesse and structure.

Unoaked Chardonnays appear to have run their course in Sonoma, although Marimar Torres still makes her fresh, dry Acero. The rich, voluptuous style is a bit more common and can be found mostly in wines sourced from warmer sites in the Sonoma, Alexander, and Russian River valleys. Ripe grapes from these areas seem to marry well to toasted oak, giving notes of butterscotch and caramel, hazelnut and toast. Wines in this style can be found at Arrowood, Chateau St. Jean, Landmark, MacRostie and Stuhlmuller. However, these and most other producers often make Chardonnays in more than one style. Producers like Kistler, Ted Lemon (Littorai), and David Ramey make several single vineyard Chardonnays. Today, the dominant style of premium Sonoma Chardonnay has good, mostly natural acidity resulting from cooler vineyard sites and earlier picking, is whole cluster pressed, fermented in oak—usually less than half new—with full malo and little or no stirring of the lees, and given about 10 months maturation in barrel. The resulting wines are refreshing and well-balanced with flavors that run the gamut from orchard and melon to Meyer lemon and yellow stone fruit.
Coastal Cool Climate AVAs: Selected Producers and their Wines

Anaba Wines. Anaba was founded by French wine enthusiast John Sweazey in 2003. It is based in western Carneros where it produces top-notch Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah. Grapes are sourced from Anaba’s estate vineyards and vineyards in Russian River and the Sonoma Coast. The general manager and director of winemaking and vineyard operations is Jennifer Marion, a graduate of UC Davis and former assistant winemaker at Macrostie Winery. Anaba obtains part of its energy requirements from a wind-powered turbine, an example for others to follow.

Anaba 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($28) 90 This Chardonnay is very bright with a fragrant nose of fresh lemon and green apple. It is nicely balanced with brisk acidity, ripe citrus flavors, and mineral notes on the finish. Anaba 2012 Chardonnay Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($36) 91 The Chardonnay Dutton Ranch displays subdued aromas of wet stones, melon and pear, and light citrus notes with a hint of fresh thyme. It is round and soft on the palate, slightly creamy with excellent natural acidity, restrained flavors, hints of citrus and a medium long finish.

Anaba 2012 Pinot Noir Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($46) 92 The 2012 Pinot Noir Dutton Ranch offers a complex nose of dark cherry, earth, forest floor and musk. Pure Russian River Valley Pinot Noir in style, it is rich in red fruit flavor with a lush mouth feel and a touch of earth. A lovely wine. Anaba 2012 Pinot Noir Las Brisas Vineyard Carneros ($38) 90 This Pinot Noir displays fresh red and dark cherry aromas and is soft on the attack with good acidity, earth notes and good depth of red fruit. A flavorful and easy drinking youthful wine.

Anaba 2012 Pinot Noir Roberts Road Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($46) 91 The 2012 Pinot Noir Roberts Road Vineyard displays a medium ruby color and aromas of dark cherry and hints of oak. It is nicely concentrated on the palate with a soft texture, ripe dark fruit flavors, round firm tannins, and a long crisp finish. A delicious wine, albeit a bit heavy on the oak. A wonderful Sangiacomo vineyard originally planted in the 1960s with vines sourced by Joseph Swan brought to the US from Burgundy.

Other Wines Reviewed: Anaba 2012 Pinot Noir Roberts Road Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($46) 91

Banshee Three friends from the Midwest and the East Coast founded Banshee wines in 2009. The winery does not own any of its own vineyards but sources grapes from vineyards in Sonoma County and elsewhere. The winery’s main focus is Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The wines are made by winemaker and co-founder Noah Dorrance with the assistance of consulting winemakers Ross Cobb and Katy Wilson. Among the noteworthy wines are the Pinot Noir Tina Marie Vineyard, Pinot Noir Sullivan Vineyard, and Chardonnay Blakeman Vineyard. Keep an eye on this fast rising winery.

Banshee 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($20) 89 Light yellow straw. Reveals stone fruit with leesy notes. Full on the palate with good flavor depth. Made from early harvested, own-rooted Wente clone grapes and aged in neutral oak.

Banshee 2012 Chardonnay Blakeman Vineyard Anderson Valley ($35) 92 Medium yellow straw. A gorgeous wine with notes of fresh, yellow stone fruit, vanilla bean, and lightly toasted nuts. Big and soft on the attack, creamy mouth feel but with bright acidity, too. From a high altitude vineyard, fermented 2/3 in stainless steel, 1/3
in French oak. **Banshee 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma County ($25) 90** This is an easy drinking and highly affordable Pinot Noir. It offers fresh aromas and flavors of raspberry and pomegranate. It is full in the mouth with good intensity of flavor, excellent balance and a satisfying finish. Great value. **Banshee 2012 Pinot Noir Marine Layer Sonoma Coast ($50) 92** The Pinot Noir Marine Layer is a big step up in quality. Sourced from the Sonoma Coast, It displays perfumed aromas of dark red berry fruit and rose pedals and is feminine and saline in character. Aged 15 months in oak, 10% new, it shows good acidity and freshness, intensity of flavor and a long lasting finish. **Banshee 2012 Pinot Noir Tina Marie Sonoma Coast ($60) 91** This is a delicate Pinot Noir, light in color with sweet red berry fruit aromas. It is elegant on the palate with concentrated cherry and cranberry flavors and a touch of minerals. Fermented with 5% whole clusters, it reveals a good level of natural acidity and overall freshness. Enjoy over the next 5 to 10 years and perhaps longer.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Banshee 2012 Pinot Noir Sullivan Vineyard Sonoma Mountain ($60) 92 Banshee 2013 Rosé of Pinot Noir Sonoma County ($18) 89 Banshee 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma ($18) 89

**Claypool Cellars 2013 Pachyderm Pinot Rose Russian River Valley ($28) 91** This is a lovely Pinot Noir rosé. Pink orange, 100% whole cluster, with very fresh and delicious fruit of red apple and cherry. It exhibits freshness on the attack with brisk acidity finish and a mineral-like finish. **Claypool Cellars 2012 Pinot Noir Rice Spivak Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($48) 91** Delicious and easy drinking dark flavored Pinot Noir, no whole cluster; rich and concentrated flavors, elegant and refined good acidity, but balanced. Somewhat rustic and meaty. Blend of three vineyards including Moore vineyard, Hurst Vineyard and Rice-Spivak. **Claypool Cellars 2012 Pachyderm Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($40) 91** The 2012 Pachyderm Pinot Noir displays a medium dark ruby color and aromas of dark red cherry with meaty/forest floor notes. These are followed by ripe, plum and cherry flavors, high acidity and good depth. Sourced from the Hurst Vineyard which is located straight west of Sebastopol.

**Cobb Wines Winemaker Ross Cobb** Ross Cobb founded Cobb Wines with his father in 2001. The winery champions cool-climate Pinot Noir sourced from vineyards along the Sonoma Coast, including his family’s Coastlands Vineyard. Ross has had rich experience as an enologist and viticulturist in Sonoma working at Williams Selyem and Flowers wineries. He also currently makes the wines at Hirsch Vineyard and consults for Banshee Wines. Ross’ wines are exemplary Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, rich in flavor, elegant and refined. Ross is a likeable young winemaker who is crafting impressive wines.

**Cobb Wines 2009 Coastlands Vineyard Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($80) 94** The Cobb Wines Pinot Noir Coastlands Vineyard is a spectacular wine! Sourced from Cobb’s own estate vineyard, it exhibits a remarkable perfumed and fresh character that can only come from a high altitude vineyard on the far Sonoma Coast like the Coastlands. The wine offers delicate red berry fruit on the palate with great refinement and elegance. Although it is light-bodied, it exhibits unusual richness of flavor, polished tannins and a lengthy delicate finish. A masterpiece of wine making. **Cobb Wines 2011 Pinot Noir Coastlands Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($70) 94** The 2011 Pinot Noir Coastlands offers floral aromas of spicy red cherry. It has a lovely palate of pure fruit flavors with light toast. Aged 30 months in 25% new French oak, it is beautifully structured with round firm tannins and a long finish. Very elegant and refined and among the best Pinot Noirs being made on the Sonoma Coast. **Cobb Wines 2011 Pinot Noir Emmerline Ann Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($70) 91** A three acre vineyard shared with La Rue above Freestone which produces 1/2 ton per acre. Aged 30 months in barrel with lovely red berry fruit. Very pure with excellent acidity and nice structure and very dense on the palate. **Cobb Wines 2009 Pinot Noir Joy Road Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($80) 93** The 2009 Pinot Noir Joy Road Vineyard is another very fine wine from this producer. It offers lovely dark red cherry aromas and a hint of minerals on the nose. On the palate it reveals rich red berry fruit flavors and a soft and elegant mouth feel. Beautifully focused and perfectly balanced, the wine provides ethereal drinking pleasure.

**David Noyes 2011 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($26) 89** David Noyes’ 2011 Pinot Noir displays lovely aromas of fresh ripe cherries followed by nicely concentrated pure dark red fruit flavors on a medium-bodied palate. The wine is perfectly balanced and pleasant to drink.
Dehlinger Winery  Tom Dehlinger is a monumental figure in the Russian River Valley. For more than 40 years he and wife Carole have built one of the finest estate vineyards in all of Sonoma County. Their 45-acre vineyard in the heart of Russian River Valley receives extraordinary attention and care. Tom planted the first generation of vines in 1975 and oversaw 15 years of subsequent plantings that today include Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Our tastings with Tom focused on his four 2012 Pinot Noirs which have not yet been released. Two of the wines are Goldridge Pinot Noir bottlings that offer bright red fruit; the others are the Altamont Pinot Noirs from hilltop sections of the vineyards that showcase darker fruit flavors.

Dehlinger 2012 Pinot Noir Goldridge Old Vines Russian River Valley 92 The recently bottled Pinot Noir Goldridge Old Vines is sourced from blocks planted in 1975. The wine displays a dark red color and aromas of dark cherry and raspberry. It is also quite floral in character with kirsch-like notes of dark cherry, spice and earth. The finish is a bit dry and shy.  

Dehlinger 2012 Pinot Noir Goldridge Russian River Valley 92 This bottling from a somewhat lower elevation on the estate, exhibits a medium red ruby color and aromas of fresh cherry. It is a gorgeous wine, very fresh and elegant with, good acidity and purity of flavor and excellent length.  

Dehlinger 2012 Pinot Noir Altamont Russian River Valley 94 This wine comes from the hilltop sections of the vineyard where Altamont soil predominates. This wine displays very spicy, high toned dark cherry aromas and is quite dry and savory with earthy notes and excellent depth, fermented with some whole clusters.  

Dehlinger 2012 Pinot Noir High Plains Russian River Valley 93 This bottling is sourced from one special estate hillside. It displays very fine perfume, lots of red cherry aromas and flavors and has a very fine silky palate. It also has excellent depth and complexity Fermented with a small amount of whole clusters for complexity and structure.

Donum Estate  Donum Estate comprises three vineyards: [1] the Donum Home Ranch, a 147-acre property of which 70 acres are in vines, located on gently rolling hills that rise up from San Pablo Bay in Carneros, [2] the 16-acre Winside Vineyard in Russian River, and [3] an 11-acre vineyard in Anderson Valley, Mendocino. The Donum Estate is owned by Winside, Inc a partnership of five Danish investors. Its vineyards are managed by Anne Moller-Racke, President and Winegrower, and formerly vineyard manager at the Buena Vista Carneros Estate. Donum produces Burgundian-style Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs of outstanding quality.

Donum 2012 Chardonnay Carneros ($50) 92 The estate grown Chardonnay Carneros is sourced from a selection of Old Wente clones. Barrel fermented, it offers fragrant aromas of apples, yellow fruit, light toast and minerals on the nose. On the palate there are more intense fruit flavors along with excellent acidity and balance and a bright lively finish.  

Donum 2011 Pinot Noir Estate Grown Russian River Valley ($70) 91 The Pinot Noir Estate Grown Russian River Valley exhibits lovely aromas of pure red berries with a hint of earthiness. It has a soft texture, delicious dark fruit flavors, firm tannins and a long finish. A delicious wine that can be enjoyed now and over the next 4-5 years.  

Donum 2011 Pinot Noir Estate Grown Los Carneros ($75) 91 The dark ruby Pinot Noir Estate Grown Carneros exhibits pure red cherry and raspberry fruit aromas and flavors with excellent acidity and overall freshness from free run juice. The wine is drinkable now and over the next 3-4 years.  

Donum 2011 Pinot Noir Reserve Russian River ($90) 94 The Russian River Reserve Pinot Noir displays a dark ruby color and pretty aromas of brambly ripe dark cherry fruit. Produced from a selection of parcels and barrels, it offers savory red fruit flavors, good weight and excellent balance. A gorgeous wine that can be enjoyed over the next decade.

Dutton Goldfield This highly successful winery is the product of a partnership between the talented Steve Dutton and Dan Goldfield that was launched with a handshake in 1998. Located in Russian River Valley, Dutton Goldfield sources grapes from 80 separate vineyards comprising more than 1000 acres throughout western Sonoma County.  

Dutton Goldfield produces outstanding vineyard-designated Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs mainly from the Russian River and Green valleys. The bottlings from Dutton Ranch are among their best. Steve spends most of his time in the vineyard, and Dan spends his time in the cellar.
Dutton Goldfield 2012 Chardonnay Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($38) 91 The Chardonnay Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley displays a light yellow gold color and aromas of citrus, ripe orchard fruit and hints of oak. It is elegant and refined on the palate with a soft texture, excellent balance, good acidity and outstanding freshness. A very attractive wine that will reward cellaring for the next three to five years. Delicious. **Dutton Goldfield 2012 Chardonnay Dutton Ranch Green Valley ($38) 92** The Chardonnay Dutton Ranch Green Valley displays a lovely star bright platinum gold color and flavors of pear, guava and toasted oak. Aged 10 months in French oak, 40% new, it is big and full on the palate with a rich elegant mouth feel and a persistent finish. **Dutton Goldfield 2012 Chardonnay Rued Vineyard Green Valley ($50) 93** Planted in 1969 by Dutton for Rued and dry farmed on St George rootstock. It has a beautifully perfumed nose with rich, well integrated oak, a touch of ginger and a lovely flavor profile showing vanilla integrated with melon and orchard fruit. It has a clean, bright brisk finish. **Dutton Goldfield 2012 Chardonnay Walker Hill Green Valley ($50) 92** The Walker Hill vineyard was planted in the 1980s using the old Wente selection. It’s a tad shy compared to the extraverted Rued Vineyard Chardonnay but is aromatically complex showing citrus flowers, light lemon curd, white pepper and a touch of coconut. Flavors tend towards tropical fruit, hazelnut and vanilla bean with good acidity and rich extract on the finish. Delicious. **Dutton Goldfield 2012 Pinot Blanc Shop Block Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($25) 89** Nice floral and melon aromas show on opening this wine. While it goes through only partial malo, it has a nice creamy texture with ripe pear and a dash of white pepper. Very pleasant drinking.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Dutton Goldfield 2012 Pinot Noir Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($40) 91+ Dutton Goldfield 2012 Pinot Noir Dutton Ranch-Freestone Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley ($72) 92 Dutton Goldfield 2012 Pinot Noir Emerald Ridge Green Valley of Russian River ($58) 92 Dutton Goldfield 2012 Zinfandel Morelli Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley ($45) 90+

**Evening Land** This international wine company has been producing terroir-driven wines since it was established in 2005. It began operations with the purchase of the 3.5 acre Occidental Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast where it produces Pinot Noir. These Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, all sourced from the Sonoma Coast, are of outstanding quality.

**Evening Land 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma County ($35) 92** The Chardonnay Sonoma County displays attractive and effusive floral and yellow fruit aromas. It is mouth filling and refined and packed with lemon and orchard fruit flavors. It has a bright finish and excellent rich extract. **Evening Land 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($40) 91** The Evening Land 2012 Chardonnay offers ripe aromas of melon and orchard fruit. It is packed with mouth filling flavor, especially on the back end. It has good acidity and freshness, but is most noteworthy for its pure intensity of flavor and long finish with a touch of minerality. **Evening Land 2012 Chardonnay Sun Chase Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($40) 93** The Chardonnay Sun Chase Vineyard displays a hint of honeysuckle and ripe lemon on the nose. It is big, full and creamy on the palate with exceptional mouth filling flavor, balance and refinement. A beautiful wine with a rich finish. **Evening Land 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($40) 91** The Evening Land 2012 Pinot Noir boasts a pure red fruited nose with a hint of lavender. It is sweet on the attack with candied red cherry fruit, and good purity. It also offers good rich extract on the finish.

**Failla** (FAY-lya) is a small family winery owned and operated by the husband and wife team of Ehren Jordan and Anne-Marie Failla. Founded in 1988, Failla produces outstanding hand-crafted Syrah, Chardonnay, Viognier and Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir represents some 70% of Failla’s total production and consists of several vineyard designated bottlings from the Sonoma Coast and Russian River as well as estate bottlings from the Failla vineyard in Fort Ross Seaview. Ehren and Anne-Marie have their own winery and charming tasting lodge (pictured here) on the Silverado Trail in Napa Valley. Ehren is a talented winemaker (and pilot), and his passion for producing top quality and distinctive wines shines through in these wines.

**Failla 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($35) 91+** This is a stony, Chablis like Chardonnay revealing rich orchard fruit, a spritzy attack, and nuanced flavors accented by minerals. Beautifully made. **Failla 2012 Chardonnay Estate Fort Ross Seaview ($60) 92+** The Estate Chardonnay from Fort Ross Seaview shows a sumptuous perfume of lavender and a melange of ripe fruit. It’s full and fresh and very flavorful with rich, sweet fruit on a creamy palate. Has a fresh, lingering finish, too. **Failla 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($40) 91** The Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast offers light earthy raspberry fruit on the nose with considerable freshness, acidity and a note of minerality. On the palate it shows good intensity of red berry fruit flavors with dried herbal notes, excellent balance, and a long finish. **Failla 2012 Pinot Noir Estate Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview ($35) 91** Failla’s Estate Vineyard exhibits ripe dark berry fruit and is elegant on the palate. Blended with Calera and Swan clonal material, it has good flavor concentration with an element of sauvage, a round mouth feel, and soft round tannins on the finish. Enjoy over the next 10+ years. **Failla 2012 Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($70) 93** The Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard boasts aromas of ripe dark cherry kirsch, earth and mushrooms on the nose. On the palate it shows considerable density of red fruit flavors and is quite savory. It is full in the mouth and has a firm and persistent finish. Reminiscent of a Nuits St. George 1er Cru. Enjoy over the next 10+ years.
Other Wines Reviewed: Failla 2012 Pinot Noir Occidental Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($60) 92  Failla 2012 Pinot Noir Vivien Sonoma Coast ($80) 92+  Failla 2012 Syrah Estate Vineyard Fort Ross Seaview ($60) 92

Flowers Vineyard & Winery Flowers produces premium cool climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from two estate vineyards on the northern Sonoma Coast: Camp Meeting Ridge Vineyard and Sea View Ridge Vineyard. It also purchases fruit from other Sonoma Coast vineyards in the coolest region of the Sonoma Coast AVA farmed to its specifications. The winery was established in 1989 with 321 acres purchased by Walt and Joan Flowers. The Chardonnay showed very well and as noted, was Chablis-like and citrusy in character; the Pinot Noir tasted rather young and unevolved but showed great potential. Flowers is definitely one of the leaders of the West Sonoma Coast producers.

Flowers 2011 Chardonnay Camp Meeting Ridge Estate Sonoma Coast ($65) 91+ This Chardonnay is Chablis-like on the nose offering aromas of citrus and a hint of minerals. On the palate it reveals a creamy mouth feel, with delicate orchard fruit flavors and crisp acidity on the finish. Aged 12 months in French oak, 45% new and 3 months in stainless steel. Quite lovely with cold lightly smoked salmon and capers. Flowers 2012 Pinot Noir Seaview Ridge Sonoma Coast ($70) 90 Light weight and delicate at this stage of development. Reticent on the nose but showing lovely red berries and spice on the palate with good acidity, depth of flavor and freshness. Fermented with 10% whole clusters and aged 15 months in French oak, 30% new. Give this wine two to three years more in the bottle to evolve and flesh out.

Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery 2010 Pinot Noir Fort Ross Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview ($52) 90 This Pinot Noir exhibits a dark ruby color and has a lush palate of dark cheery fruit, spice and notes of forest floor. It is beautifully balanced with crisp acidity, supple tannins, and a persistent soft finish.

Gary Farrell Winery is one of California’s pre-eminent producers of distinctive vineyard designated Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Beginning in the 1980s Gary Farrell began identifying vineyards to produce distinctive single vineyard Pinot Noirs. In 1982 he sourced grapes from what would become the famous vineyards of Rochioli and Allen as well as other top quality vineyards. Gary Farrell sold the winery in 2004, but the winery continues to enjoy long term relationships with other growers such as the Bacigalupi family, Westside Farms, Hallberg, Martinelli and many others in the Russian River Valley. Outside the Russian River, it has developed relationships with Durell Vineyards in the Sonoma Valley, Bien Nacido Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley, and others including growers of old vine Zinfandel. Winemaking is in the capable hands of the talented Theresa Heredia who joined Gary Farrell in 2012.

Gary Farrell 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Selection ($35) 90+ This is a selected blend of fruit from eight different Russian River vineyards, all whole cluster pressed, 100 percent barrel fermented and aged for about 7 months in 30%-40% new French oak 500L puncheons and regular barrels. While it goes through 100% malolactic, it shows excellent bright acidity along with citrus, orchard fruit and beautifully integrated oak. It’s the kind of Chardonnay that complements food. Gary Farrell 2012 Chardonnay Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley ($50) 92 This single vineyard Chardonnay from the superb Rochioli Vineyard has outstanding balance and refinement. It offers a hazelnut tinged flinty perfume and dense, firm-edged flavors of creamy lemon tart with stone-like minerality and vibrant natural acidity. The Gary Farrell winery has sourced Chardonnay from Rochioli for 30 years now. Although the original vines were planted in the 1960s, they were replanted in the 1980s; this wine comes mostly from the River Block parcel, which is planted to Clone 5. Fermented in barrel and aged about 8 months in French puncheons, about 40% new. Gary Farrell 2012 Chardonnay Durell Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($55) 92 The Durell Vineyard Chardonnay has a light elegant style offering citrus, pear and gun flint on the nose. It is elegant on the palate with bright, dense orchard fruit flavors with a hint of oak. It has high acidity and freshness with perfect balance. The Durell Vineyard, located in Sonoma Valley is a relatively new fruit source for Gary Farrell. The sparse soils and cool breeze that comes off the San Pablo Bay allow for slow ripening and concentrated flavors. The Chardonnay is the old Wente clone, which has tiny clusters and very small, densely flavored berries. Gary Farrell 2012 Pinot Noir Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley ($70) 94 The 2012 Pinot Noir Rochioli Vineyard is pure, elegant and refined. Dark ruby in color, it offers aromas of pure sweet dark...
plum fruit from the Pommard clone with toasted notes. On the palate it is polished and beautifully balanced with firm round tannins and a persistent finish. It is exemplary Russian River Pinot Noir from exceptional vineyard blocks.

Other Wines Reviewed: 2012 Gary Farrell Zinfandel Maffei Vineyard Russian River Valley ($45) 92  Gary Farrell 2012 Pinot Noir Russian River Selection Russian River Valley ($45) 91

Hanzell Vineyards  Located on the steep hillside of the Mayacamas Range overlooking the town of Sonoma, Hanzell Vineyards was founded in 1957 by Ambassador J.D. Zellerbach whose ambition was to produce Pinot Noir and Chardonnay equal to the finest in the world. Hanzell Vineyards has had only a handful of winemakers over the past 55+ years; the late Bob Session served as winemaker for 28 years; the new winemaker is Michael McNeil. Hanzell wines are known for their flavor, power and elegance. Only the Chardonnays were tasted for this report.

Hanzell 2012 Chardonnay Hanzell Vineyards Sonoma County ($70) 91+ The 2012 Chardonnay displays complex aromas of light citrus and pear with buttery lemon notes. It is soft and round on the palate with citrus-like flavors on the palate and hints of toast. It is a delicious wine with good natural acidity and freshness and a persistent finish.  

Hanzell 2013 Chardonnay Sebella Sonoma County? ($37) 90 The 2013 Chardonnay Sebella offers lovely aromas of white flowers, lemon zest, and orchard fruit. It is rich and full on the palate with excellent natural acidity. Fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak, it retains freshness and has a persistent finish with hints of minerals.

Hartford Family Winery 2012 Chardonnay Four Hearts Vineyards Russian River Valley ($45) 92 A rich, ripe wine showing wet stones, toasted hazelnut, rich vanilla, and concentrate of orchard fruit. Sees 10 months in oak, 39% new. Superb now but will flesh out further with more time. 14.5 alc.  Hartford Family Winery 2011 Chardonnay Seacape Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($65) 92 This wine shows amazing purity, bright acidity, and stone like minerality. It’s quite assertively oaked with 14 months in 50% new French oak, and the citrus and apple fruit are a bit reserved, but this is a wine that should age well and flesh out with time.  

Hartford Family Winery 2011 Chardonnay Stone Cote Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($60) 92 Very pretty with tropical melon, Meyer lemon, and gun flint on the nose, mirrored on the palate with the addition of lemon curd and coconut notes. A lavishly oaked wine that sees 14 months in 50% new French oak. Ripe, rich and balanced.  

Hartford Family Winery 2013 Rose of Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 91 Light in color, this superlively fresh and vibrant rosé shows fragrant red cherry with good intensity of flavor and wet mineral notes. Very fresh with a zesty finish.  

Hartford 2010 Pinot Noir Far Coast Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($70) 93 The 2010 Pinot Noir Far Coast Vineyard displays a dark ruby color and a magnificent nose of pure dark cherry and pomegranate fruit. It is densely flavored on the palate with ripe red berry fruit and a velvet texture. It is beautiful balanced with firm tannins on a persistent finish.


Hirsch Vineyards  This 1,000-acre property is the site of one of the most highly regarded vineyards on the West Sonoma Coast. It was purchased in 1978 by David Hirsch, a true pioneer, who converted a remote, rugged and abandoned sheep ranch into vineyard parcels, and over the years sold the grapes to the top producers of Pinot Noir in Sonoma County. In 2002 Hirsch began to make his own wine in a small winery built onsite. Winemaker Vanessa Wong made the wines for the first two vintages; today they are made by Ross Cobb. The wines from Hirsch are elegant and refined and among the best produced on the West Sonoma Coast. Sadly, David Hirsch was recently involved in a terrible accident while working on his property and is sidelined temporarily. His daughter Jasmine is currently at the helm and is an energetic advocate of the wines of the West Sonoma Coast.

Hirsch 2012 Chardonnay Estate Sonoma Coast ($55) 92 A beautifully balanced and refined wine. Produced in small quantities from 3.9 acres of vines, the 2012 vintage is
already sold out. It shows lovely Meyer lemon citrus, a hint of ripe mango, juicy acidity and good fruit density. But it’s the refinement that makes this wine really special. **Hirsch 2012 Pinot Noir The Bohan Dillon Sonoma Coast ($38) 92** Sourced from 12 year-old estate vines and a variety of Dijon clones, and a portion from nearby vineyards, this young Pinot Noir is very pretty with a clean fresh berry character with notes of violets, an elegant mouth feel and good tannic grip. A delicious wine that will be read to drink from 2014 to 2020. **Hirsch 2011 Pinot Noir Reserve Estate Sonoma Coast ($60) 93** The Pinot Noir Reserve is sourced from the best 25-year old blocks of the Hirsch vineyard. Aged for 20 months in 35% new oak, it reveals ripe dark cherry kirsch flavor with hints of underbrush. It is soft and round on the attack with good concentration, polished tannins and has a long finish. A beautiful wine. **Hirsch 2011 Pinot Noir San Andreas Fault Sonoma Coast ($60) 94** The 2011 Pinot Noir San Andres Fault reveals lovely dark and perfumed red berry fruit aromas. Aged 18 months in 35% new oak, it is quite elegant and fruit forward on the palate and reveals good purity and depth of red berry and plum flavors. Only 13.4 alc. **Hirsch 2010 Pinot Noir San Andres Fault Sonoma Coast ($60) 93** The 2010 Pinot Noir San Andres is less ripe and more earthy than the 2011 vintage. It exhibits good intensity of fruit flavors along with forest floor and mushroom nuances. The flavors are also lighter and more delicate as is the color of the wine.

**J Vineyards and Winery**

Established in 1986 by Judy Jordan, this winery produces exceptionally good sparkling and still wines sourced from a wide variety of Russian River Valley estate vineyards. The wines are nicely crafted by winemaker Melissa Stackhouse. J follows rigorous vineyard management practices and is certified sustainable by the California Winegrowers Alliance. **J Vineyards and Winery NV Cuvée 20 Brut Sonoma County ($42) 89** The Cuvée 20 reveals a fresh, yeasty nose with a hint of pear and apple. It’s crisp and fresh with a flavorful, balanced palate and lingering leesy notes. A blend of 54% Chardonnay, 44% Pinot Noir and 2% Pinot Meunier aged two years on the lees. **J Vineyards and Winery NV J Bin 1008 Sonoma County ($42) 92** This is J’s tête de cuvée; it is a vineyard selection of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir that spends 5 years on the lees. It’s rich and complexly flavored on a round, full palate with notes of nuts and honey. A delicious food wine. **J Vineyards and Winery NV Brut Rosé Russian River Valley ($38) 91** This is one of California’s best sparkling rosés. Made of 2/3 Pinot Noir and 1/3 Chardonnay fruit from the Russian River Valley, it spends a minimum of 2 years on the lees before disgorgement. It’s very dry with delicate red berry fruit accented by notes of yeast and toast. Very well made!

**Joseph Phelps** Beginning in 1999 Joseph Phelps and several partners planted 100 acres of vineyards in Sonoma County’s Freestone area to produce Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Freestone is located on the western edge of Russian River Valley some 5-8 miles from the Pacific Coast. A state-of-the-art winery was completed in time for the 2007 harvest. The project had to overcome many challenges from gophers to weather conditions but has been operational and producing some excellent wines under Damian Parker, Director of Winemaking. We have reviewed these wines over the years, and we’ve been impressed with the steady improvements in quality.

**Joseph Phelps 2012 Chardonnay Freestone Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($55) 91** The 2012 Chardonnay Freestone Vineyard is rich and creamy with notable minerality. It is also mouth filling and nicely balanced with good acidity. Not a flamboyant wine but a delicious one. **Joseph Phelps 2012 Chardonnay Pastorale Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($55) 90** Full-bodied and flavorful with notes of orchard fruit, lemon curd and lanolin, this Chardonnay is very creamy in the mouth with rich flavors, and very Beaune-like in character. Delicious to drink now, but would benefit from an addition year or two in bottle and will give lots of pleasure to 2018-2020. **Joseph Phelps 2012 Pinot Noir Freestone Vineyards Sonoma Coast ($55) 90** The 2012 Pinot Noir Freestone Vineyards exhibits red berry and earthy aromas followed by notes of ripe plum and a hint of herbs. The wine is leaner and higher in acidity than the 2011, which surprised us although the tannins and the finish are somewhat soft. **Joseph Phelps 2011 Pinot Noir Freestone Vineyards Sonoma Coast ($55) 90** The 2011 Pinot Noir Freestone Vineyards exhibits dark red berry fruit followed by hints of cola, earth and blackberry. It is nicely balanced with good acidity and freshness on the palate and soft ripe tannins on the finish. This 2011 strikes us as a bit better than the 2012, but perhaps time will tell. Enjoy this one over the next five to seven years.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Joseph Phelps 2012 Pinot Noir Quarter Moon Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 92 Joseph Phelps 2011 Pinot Noir Quarter Moon Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 92 Joseph Phelps 2011 Pinot Noir, Pastorale Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 90 Joseph Phelps 2012 Pinot Noir, Pastorale Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 90 Joseph Phelps 2011 Pinot Noir, Pastorale Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 90
Keller Estate 2012 Chardonnay Ore De Plata Sonoma Coast ($33) 89 The 2012 Chardonnay Ore De Plata displays fresh lemon aromas with hints of herbs on the nose. Fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak, it is fruity, tangy and flavorful on the palate with good acidity and a light crisp finish. **Keller Estate 2011 Chardonnay La Cruz Vineyard ($38) 88+** This is a flavorful barrel-fermented Chardonnay offering aromas of melon, hazelnut and toast. It is easy drinking a persistent oak finish. **Keller Estate 2007 Chardonnay Precioso ($75) 93** The 2007 Precioso Chardonnay is a topnotch wine sourced from the Keller Estate’s La Cruz Vineyard. While seven years old, it is still rich and flavorful with a nose of ripe yellow fruit, toasted oak and a hint of nuts. It has rich fruit flavors on a layered palate with an oxidative note and a persistent finish. The wine has been aging nicely and should continue to drink well for the next three years and perhaps longer. **Keller Estate 2012 Pinot Gris La Cruz Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($30) 88** This is a flavorful wine with notes of tropical fruit, lemon oil, minerals, and fennel. It is high in acidity and has a pleasant mouth feel and finish.


Kistler Vineyards. Kistler is one of California’s iconic producers of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and enjoys an enviable following among a small group of consumers lucky enough to obtain annual allocations of its wines. Founded in 1978 by Steve Kistler and Mark Bixler, Kistler Vineyards sources its grapes from some of the finest vineyards in Napa and Sonoma Counties and crafts its wines at a winery located on its Vine Hill Vineyard in Russian River Valley. The Chardonnays are whole-cluster pressed, barrel fermented with 100% MLF, and rich and buttery. The Pinot Noirs are bright, flavorful and elegant, especially the Occidental Station-Cuvée Catherine.

**Kistler 2011 Chardonnay Cuvée Cathleen Sonoma Mountain ($150) 96** Medium dark yellow gold. This is a superb, liqueur like Chardonnay showing floral notes of honey-suckle and hints of toasted hazelnut on the nose and rich, ripe fruit on a creamy and indescribably delicious palate. Refreshing and uplifting despite the richness. **Kistler 2012 Chardonnay Cuvée Cathleen Sonoma ($75) 95** Medium yellow gold. Lively and full, the Cuvée Cathleen reveals intriguing notes of mandarin, almond, and wet stones. It’s superbly balanced and lively, but at this stage not as full as the 2011. Made from one block of the Kistler estate vineyard with broken shale and red volcanic ash soils.

Joseph Swan Vineyards

Joseph Swan established his winery in Russian River Valley in the late 1960s. He was working as an airline pilot at the time and bought a run-down Zinfandel vineyard. With advice from his friend, the legendary Andre Tchelistcheff, Swan planted Pinot Noir (and Chardonnay) and produced his first vintage of these wines in 1973. One of the early pioneers of Pinot Noir in Sonoma County and following annual trips to Burgundy, he introduced new and improved winemaking techniques for Pinot Noir such as whole cluster fermentation, manual punch downs and the use of new French oak barrels. Rod Berglund and Lynn Swan Berglund follow in Joe Swan’s footsteps. Rod, Joe’s son-in-law, took over winemaking in 1988 from Joe when he became ill; Joe passed away in January 1989.

Joseph Swan 2012 Chardonnay Kent the Younger Russian River Valley ($38) 90 A rich, toasty Chardonnay revealing ripe fruit, fresh acidity, and prominent toasted oak marry to orchard fruit. Sourced from 14 year old vines on the Ritchie Vineyard and aged in 20% new French oak. **Joseph Swan 2010 Pinot Noir Trenton View Vineyard Russian River Valley 90+** The Pinot Noir Trenton View Vineyard displays a medium-red color and aromas of dried cherry and pomegranate with hints of herbs. It has a soft attack but is quite tart on the plate with high acidity and a...
planted in 1989. **Kistler 2012 Chardonnay McCrea Vineyard Sonoma Mountain ($75) 93** The gold-flecked McCrea Chardonnay is a lovely wine, stony with dense tropical fruit, round and soft. Made from 44 year old vines of the McCrea Vineyard, located on the eastern flank of Sonoma Mountain. **Kistler 2012 Chardonnay Trenton Roadhouse Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 94** Bright medium yellow with green flecks. A rich, almost blowzy wine, with tropical fruit, flint and smoke notes. It’s densely flavored, lush and rich, with superb balance and superb persistence with rich extract. **Kistler 2011 Pinot Noir Occidental Station Cuvée Catherine Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir ($185) 95** This is a stunning new wine project by Steve Kistler which for now is based in Kistler Vineyards but eventually will be produced from newly planted vineyards and at a separate winery at Bodega. This cuvée, previously sold under the Kistler label, exhibits a deep ruby color and is smooth and rich on the palate with flavors of black cherry and a lavish mouth feel. It is very ripe with highly concentrated dark fruit flavors, medium acidity and nicely polished tannins. A big and beautiful wine not unlike some Russian River bottlings in style.

**La Follette 2011 Chardonnay Lorenzo Vineyard Russian River Valley ($38) 91+** A distinctive, classy Chardonnay that’s firmly structured, showing prominent chalky mineral notes. It reveals lime zest, melon, smoky oak, and crushed stone. Spends 11 months in 40% new oak. Very good value. **La Follette 2011 Chardonnay Manchester Ridge Mendocino Ridge ($48) 92** A very distinctive wine made from the Dijon 809 Musque and Wente and 76 clones grown on the 2200’ Manchester Ridge. Fermented whole cluster, with some skin contact and in 18% new oak. The wine is pungent and herbal with honeyed apple and melon notes. **La Follette 2012 Chardonnay Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($38) 92** Made from the Wente clone grown on alluvial soils in the cool, Petaluma Gap. A very late ripening Sangiacomo Vineyard, at the hints of pomegranate. It is full-flavored with a broad palate, bright, pure and fresh and a dense ripe finish. Stylish and attractive. **Kosta Browne 2012 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands ($100) 91** This Pinot Noir is sourced from five different vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands. It displays dark red cherry aromas and is densely flavored with pure, almost candied red fruit. It has fine tannins, and an effusive focused finish. Enjoy it over the next 5 to 7 years. **Kosta Browne 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($100) 92+** This magnificent Pinot Noir is a blend of grapes from four vineyards including those in the Petaluma Gap such as Gap’s Crown and Griffins Lair. It offers spicy and savory red cherry fruit and is bright and delicious on the palate with firm tannins and a very long finish. **Kosta Browne 2012 Pinot Noir Gap’s Crown Sonoma Coast ($125) 92** This Pinot Noir is sourced by Kosta Browne from the Gap’s Crown Vineyard in the Petaluma Wind Gap. This cool growing area produces perfumed, high toned dark cherry fruit with earth and spice notes. The Pinot Noir clones include 667, 777, 828, Swann among others. This beautiful wine is refined and elegant with firm polished tannins and a long finish. Will be released in October 2014.

**La Follette 2012 Chardonnay Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($38) 91+** A distinctive, classy Chardonnay that’s firmly structured, showing prominent chalky mineral notes. It reveals lime zest, melon, smoky oak, and crushed stone. Spends 11 months in 40% new oak. Very good value. **La Follette 2011 Chardonnay Lorenzo Vineyard Russian River Valley ($38) 91+** A distinctive, classy Chardonnay that’s firmly structured, showing prominent chalky mineral notes. It reveals lime zest, melon, smoky oak, and crushed stone. Spends 11 months in 40% new oak. Very good value. **La Follette 2011 Chardonnay Manchester Ridge Mendocino Ridge ($48) 92** A very distinctive wine made from the Dijon 809 Musque and Wente and 76 clones grown on the 2200’ Manchester Ridge. Fermented whole cluster, with some skin contact and in 18% new oak. The wine is pungent and herbal with honeyed apple and melon notes. **La Follette 2012 Chardonnay Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($38) 92** Made from the Wente clone grown on alluvial soils in the cool, Petaluma Gap. A very late ripening Sangiacomo Vineyard, at the
base of Sonoma Mountain across from Gaps Crown. The wine is made all whole cluster press with no skin contact, unfined and unfiltered, and matures 11 months in 1/3 new barrels. The wine is full and rich with an herbal, musky edge and a creamy, lush palate. **La Follette 2011 Pinot Noir Du Nah Vineyard Russian River Valley** ($59) 90 The Pinot Noir Du Nah Vineyard displays a medium dark ruby red color and aromas of dark red berries, loam and cola. It is ripe and full in the mouth with a rich velvet texture, firm round tannins and a long finish. The 10-acre DuNah Vineyard is situated in the Sebastopol Hills above the fog line. **La Follette 2012 Pinot Noir Cuvée Barlow Russian River Valley** ($136) 92+ The 2012 Cuvée Barlow is a blend of 45% Van der Kamp, 45% DuNah and 10% Manchester Ridge. It is a lovely wine, pure, ripe and harmonic, and full of dark plum fruit and extract. It is elegant on the palate and has polished tannins. It drinks well now and should be enjoyed over the next to 8 to 10 years, and perhaps more.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** La Follette 2011 Pinot Noir Sangiacomo Sonoma Mountain ($40) 93 La Follette 2011 Pinot Noir Van der Kamp Vineyard Sonoma Mountain ($42) 91

La Rue Wines This tiny wine venture is owned by Katy Wilson, a young and talented winemaker who learned her craft at Joseph Phelps, Flowers, and Kamen in addition to a stint at Craggy Range in New Zealand. With LaRue Wines, Katy’s aim is to produce high quality Pinot Noir from top vineyards on the Sonoma Coast. Based on our tasting of two of Katy’s new releases, we think LaRue Wines is already well on its way to becoming one of the finest producers of Pinot Noir on the Sonoma Coast.

**La Rue 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast** ($60) 92 This Pinot Noir has both purity and intensity of ripe cherry flavors presented in an elegant format. Aged in French oak, 1/3 new, it is rich on the attack, exhibits a velvet texture and is perfectly balanced with excellent acidity and a long finish. A joy to taste. **La Rue 2012 Emmacline Ann Vineyard Sonoma Coast** ($70) 93 The vineyard-designated Emmacline Ann Vineyard is a somewhat bolder cuvée, dark ruby in color and offering ripe dark cherry fruit with baking spice. Aged 16 months in 50% new oak, it is rich in flavor although still young and in need of fleshing out to achieve its maximum potential.

**Littorai** This family winery, owned and operated by Ted and Heidi Lemon, is among the top producers of terroir-driven Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Sonoma County. The winemaking here follows Burgundian methods that Ted Lemon learned in Burgundy from producers such as Aubert de Villaine and Jean Marie Roumier. Littorai’s vineyard sources include a 30-acre estate (eight acres planted with grapes) in Western Sonoma farmed biodynamically since the late 1990s and other outstanding vineyards in the Sonoma Coast, Russian River and Anderson Valley. Ted Lemon’s 2012 Pinot Noirs and Chardonnay are stunning; they are elegant and balanced and have great finesse, although they will need time to flesh out to reveal all of their richness and complexity.

**Littorai 2012 Chardonnay B.A. Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma ($70) 94** B.A. Thierrot is a biodynamic certified vineyard but with significant ocean influence. This yellow gold wine reveals richness and complexity. It’s beautifully focused and refined, showing notes of Wealthy apple, orange zest, and wet river stones. Finishes with superb length.

**Littorai 2012 Chardonnay Charles Heintz Sonoma ($70) 93** Medium yellow straw. This is a big, dense wine offering rich, baked apple, toasted hazelnut, and candied Meyer lemon but, also, with steely notes and excellent balancing acidity. The organically farmed Heintz Vineyard is at 800’ near Occidental in the fog belt. **Littorai 2012 Chardonnay May’s Canyon Sonoma ($75) 93** A supremely pure, elegant Chardonnay with floral, fennel, and flint on the nose and a superbly fresh, pristine palate. Oak is present but understated. The wine needs a bit more time in bottle to show its best. The certified biodynamic May’s Canyon Vineyard is located right outside Guerneville; it was replanted in 1999. **Littorai 2012 Chardonnay Tributary Vineyard Sonoma ($75) 94** The biodynamically farmed Tributary Vineyard provides the fruit for this firmly structured, saline-edged, complex and beguiling Chardonnay that reveals notes of citrus and pineapple and crushed rock. The wine has mid-fermentation racking, but the lees are left undisturbed. Unfiltered. **Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir B.A. Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma ($75) 93+** A wine of great beauty, complexity and power. Black cherry and plum fruit on the nose with hints of spice. Mouth filling with good density of flavor on the palate. Big and fleshy with great acidity, tannic grip and a long finish.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir Haven Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($80) 93 Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($70) 94 The Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir Mays Canyon Sonoma Coast ($70) 93 Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir One Acre Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 94 Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir Pivot Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($70) 93 Littorai 2012 Pinot Noir Platt Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($75) 92
Lynmar Estate in Russian River Valley (also known as Quail Hill) was originally purchased in 1980 by businessman Lynn Fritz. The 42-acre property was later developed into a vineyard with the planting of vines obtained from Joe Swan. In the early 1990s the grapes were sold to winemakers Tony Soter and Merry Edwards. Later, Lynmar began producing its own wines with the help of winemaker Hugh Chappelle and consulting winemaker Paul Hobbs, sourcing grapes from its own estate and contracting neighboring vineyards. Lynmar Estate is widely recognized for the high quality of its wines, and our recent tastings with Lynmar’s current winemaker Shane Finley confirmed that they are indeed making some magnificent wines.

**Lynmar 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley** ($30) 90

Yellow straw. This is a seamlessly integrated Chardonnay, made mostly from the Rued clone, revealing rich lemon curd aromas and a creamy yet bright, rich tasting palate of crème brulée and key lime pie. Delicious.

**Lynmar 2012 Chardonnay Quail Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley** ($42) 91

This is another mostly Rued clone Chardonnay. It’s rich and complex, revealing flowers of peach and honeysuckle and orange mandarin on the nose and additional notes of hazelnut and chalky minerals on the palate. The grapes are destemmed and soaked in dry ice over night before pressing. Sees 45% new oak.

**Lynmar 2012 Chardonnay Susanna’s Vineyard Russian River Valley** ($70) 92+

The Susanna’s Vineyard Chardonnay is 100% Wente clone grown in Gold Ridge powdery soils. It reveals ripe fresh peach on the nose and is big and lush on the attack. It’s very flavorful, mouth filling and seamless with perfectly integrated oak and bright, uplifting acidity. Lynmar 2012 Pinot Noir Quail Hill Vineyard Summit Russian River Valley ($70) 92

The 2012 Pinot Noir Quail Hill Vineyard Summit is a pretty wine sourced from a single block of Calera clones. It displays complex red berry fruit and earthy aromas with hints of spice and herbs. It has a complex, brambly and savory palate of dark red berry fruit with good density of flavor. Fermented with 15% whole cluster.

Other Wines Reviewed: Lynmar 2012 Pinot Noir Terra de Promissio Russian River Valley ($70) 92 Lynmar 2012 Quail’s Hill Vineyard Lynn’s Blend Pinot Noir Russian River Valley ($70) 93

**MacMurray Ranch**

This beautiful property was originally owned by actor Fred MacMurray who purchased it from the Porter family in 1941. Today, this ranch, located in the Russian River Valley, has been restored and looks pretty much as it did years ago. [See photo of Russian River from the MacMurray Vineyard.] However, this 1500-acre property is now home to a first-class 450-acre vineyard of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, owned by E.& J Gallo. Chris Munsell serves as winemaker and crafts some lovely wines that we had the pleasure to taste in situ.

**MacMurray Ranch 2013 Pinot Gris Russian River Valley** ($20) 90

Sourced from both the estate vineyard and the marine-influenced, cool climate Two Rock vineyard in the Petaluma Gap, this wine is floral and effusively perfumed and flavored of rich tasting melon and pear. Delicious and excellent value.

**MacMurray Ranch 2012 Chardonnay Estate Russian River Valley** ($20) 89

Yellow gold. This well-priced, easy drinking Chardonnay shows light honey-suckle and baked apple on the nose. It’s fresh and creamy in the mouth with subdued fruit and a light buttery note. Very good.

**MacMurray Ranch 2012 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley** 88

Dark fruited in the glass, this wine offers aromas of black raspberry, plum and a touch of rose petal. It is mouth filling with considerable ripeness and density of flavor and hints of earth. Easy drinking.

**MacMurray Ranch 2012 Pinot Noir Reserve Russian River Valley** ($42) 91

This lovely wine offers flavors of cherry kirsch, spice and lavender. Aged 9 months in new and used oak, it is elegant on the palate with good density of flavor and excellent structure. The grapes were sourced from the Laguna Ranch, MacMurray Ranch and the Del Rion Ranch.

**MacMurray Ranch 2012 Pinot Noir Winemaker’s Block Selection Russian River Valley** ($60) 92

The fruit for this Pinot Noir came from three top blocks on the Laguna Ranch and Del Rio Vineyard planted mainly with Swan and Pommard clones. A very ripe and luscious wine, benefiting from a long growing season. The flavors are ripe cherry, boysenberry and spice, pure, perfectly balanced, and generous with a silky elegant texture and a lingering finish.
MacPhail Family Wines 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($40) 91
The 2012 Sonoma Coast offers fragrant aromas of orchard fruit, minerals and herbs. It shows good density of flavor on the palate and is quite focused. Fruit forward and unoaked, it is aged in stainless steel with regular battonage and has a full rich mouth feel and a long finish.

MacPhail Family Wines 2012 Chardonnay Gaps Crown Sonoma Coast ($45) 91
The 2012 Chardonnay Gaps Crown displays an attractive yellow gold color and aromas of ripe pineapple with notes of dulce de leche on the nose. Aged 11 months in French oak, 30% new, it is big, round and ripe and mouth filling with 14.5% alc. Gobs of tropical fruit are well integrated with oak notes, and the wine finishes clean with good extract. A lovely traditional-style Chardonnay.

MacPhail Family Wines 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($40) 91
The 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast is a flavorful wine revealing aromas of ripe dark cherry and toast. Aged 11 months sur lie in 100% French oak, 40% new, it is ripe and full in the mouth with good extract and flavor and rich tasting finish.

MacPhail Family Wines 2011 Pinot Noir Sundwag Ridge Vineyard Green Valley ($49) 90
The 2011 Pinot Noir Sundwag Ridge Vineyard displays red cherry aromas and flavors on the palate with traces of light herbs and toasty oak. Aged 11 months in oak, 41% new, it shows good flavor with moderate intensity.

MacPhail Family Wines 2012 Pinot Noir Vagon Rouge Russian River Valley ($65) 93
The 2012 Pinot Noir Vagon Rouge offers pretty plum fruit with a hint of vanilla and toast. Aged 11 months in French oak, 50% new, it has a silky texture with good concentration of red berry fruit on the palate, soft round tannins, and a long finish. The Pinot Noir fruit is from Calera, Pommard and Swann clones and is primary and fresh.

Other Wines Reviewed: MacPhail Family Wines 2012 Pinot Noir Vagon Rouge Russian River Valley ($65) 93
MacPhail Family Wines 2012 Pinot Noir Wildcat Sonoma Coast ($49) 91
MacPhail Family Wines 2013 Rosé of Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($22) 89

MacRostie Winery 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($25) 92+
A lovely aromatic wine with rich fruit aromas and flavors and hints of minerals. Excellent concentration and richness on the palate. Burgundian in character. Excellent balance and acidity too. A work of art and superb value.

MacRostie Winery 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($32) 91+
Medium yellow straw in the glass, this Chardonnay reveals aromas of ripe mango with hints of butterscotch on the nose. Rich on the palate, it boasts integrated flavors of bright fruit, mineral notes and toasted oak. It is beautifully balanced and elegant, finishing on a slightly sweet vanilla note.

MacRostie Winery 2012 Pinot Noir Goldrock Ridge Sonoma Coast ($54) 91
A True Sonoma Coast wine from Goldrock Ridge Vineyard situated a few miles from the Pacific Ocean near Annapolis. It offers pure dark cherry and cranberry fruit with a toasted, spicy quality on the nose. It has a soft attack with a silky texture, fine natural acidity, nicely concentrated fruit, and lingering oak on the finish.

Marcassin is the personal label of Helen Turley, one of California’s finest and most influential winemakers. Turley and her partner, husband John Wetlaufer, a viticulturist, produce 2,500 to 3,000 cases of Marcassin Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and sell most of it via a mailing list. Turley sources the grapes for Marcassin from a 20-acre estate vineyard on the Sonoma Coast and produces the wine at Martinelli Winery in Russian River Valley where she served as consulting winemaker from 1993 to 2010. Helen Turley doesn’t miss a beat making top quality Chardonnays.

Marcassin 2009 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($125) 94
Medium dark yellow gold in color, the 2009 Chardonnay is very rich and fragrant with integrated toasted oak and rich lemon curd, tropical fruit and herbs. There is a smoky overlay on the palate, quite distinct, with good integration of cured lemon and fruit. Excellent length on the finish.
Marimar Estate 2011 Chardonnay Don Miguel Vineyard Acero Russian River Valley ($29) 88. This Chardonnay displays fresh and ripe orchard fruit on the nose and citrus-like flavors on the palate with a hint of herbs and a note of sweetness. It has high acidity and finishes dry.

Marimar Estate 2010 Chardonnay Don Miguel Vineyard La Masía Russian River Valley ($35) 90. Showing rich toasted oak married to tropical Chardonnay fruit, the La Masía is lively with bright acidity and good length. Very flavorful and a tad smoky, it would be a great wine to pair with roasted chicken. Made from organically grown grapes.

Marimar Estate 2009 Pinot Noir La Cristina Russian River Valley ($57) 92. The Pinot Noir Cristina is made from a special selection of grapes blended from the Don Miguel Vineyard. Fermented in small stainless steel tanks, the wine was aged for 11 months in 60% new French oak barrels unfined and unfiltered. Dark ruby in color, the wine offers pure red plum fruit on the nose and on the palate with hints of forest floor. It has a silky texture with ripe and concentrated fruit and is beautifully focused and elegant on the finish.

Other Wines Reviewed: Marimar Estate 2010 Pinot Noir La Masía Russian River Valley ($44) 90. Marimar Estate 2009 Pinot Noir Mas Cavalls Sonoma Coast ($44) 91.

One of Sonoma’s finest Chardonnays and offered at a hefty price.

Marimar Winery. The Marimar Estate is owned and operated by Marimar Torres, daughter of the world renowned winemaker Miguel Torres of Torres Wines in Barcelona. Marimar launched her winery in Sonoma County in 1986; today it consists of 81 acres of which 30 are planted with Chardonnay and 30 with Pinot Noir. The estate also includes a 180-acre property located between Freestone and Occidental with 20 acres planted to Pinot Noir. Both the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vineyard designated wines produced by this estate are consistently impressive.

Martinelli Winery. The Martinellis have been growing grapes (and apples) in Russian River since the 1880s when Giuseppe and Luisa Martinelli settled in Sonoma and planted the Jackass Hill Vineyard. Their vineyards consist of 158 acres of vines, primarily planted with Chardonnay and smaller amounts of Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and other varieties. Although they produce their own wine, some 90% of Martinelli grapes are sold to other Sonoma County wineries. The Martinelli wines reviewed here are high quality made with natural yeast, and are unfined and unfiltered. The estate is managed by Lee Sr. and his sons and daughters.

Martinelli 2009 Chardonnay Bella Vigna Sonoma County ($42) 90+. This delicate Chardonnay is a blend of selected single vineyard estate grapes with the majority of the grapes coming from the Lolita Ranch and Charles Ranch Vineyards. 100% barrel fermented, it offers aromas and flavors of melon, pear and citrus with a hint of toast and spice. It is light-bodied and fresh-tasting with good acidity and a long and persistent finish. Martinelli 2009 Chardonnay Lolita Ranch Russian River Valley ($60) 92. This wine comes from the steeply sloped (35°) Lolita Ranch Vineyard located in the warmer part of Green Valley. It reveals beautiful waxy yellow fruit, peach, and a hint of mandarin with a bit of nutmeg spice. It’s full on the palate, has good acidity and is still very fresh even though 5 years old. Martinelli 2010 Chardonnay Three Sisters Vineyard Fort Ross Seaview ($63) 93. This is a precisely textured, racy Chardonnay with a spicy, flint like bouquet. It’s finely honed, lean and focused, with prominent minerality and rich lemon flavors. Comes from the Martinellis’ former sheep ranch near the coast that was planted to Chardonnay in the late 1990s. An adjoining parcel was sold to Marcassin.

Martinelli 2012 Pinot Noir Bella Vigna Russian River Valley ($40) 92. This Pinot Noir offers ripe and savory dark cherry fruit with hints of earth. Aged 12 months in 70% new French oak, it has excellent acidity, firm tannins, and a tight muted finish. A delicious wine that should benefit from cellaring and last for 10 to 15 years. If you can’t resist, be sure to decant this sleeping beauty. Martinelli 2012 Pinot Noir Zio Tony Ranch Russian River Valley ($60) 89+. A fruit rich wine of dark raspberry, cherry, licorice and a hint of cola. Nicely balanced with good acidity and freshness on the palate and persistence on the finish.

Martinelli 2011 Zinfandel Vellutini Ranch Russian River Valley ($52) 93

Novy Family Wines. Owned by Adam and Dianna (Novy) Kee of Siduri Wines and other members of the Novy family since its founding in 1998. Dianna and Adam make the wines, specializing in single vineyard Syrah as well as Zinfandel and other wines from exceptional vineyard sites.

Novy 2013 Viognier Sunny View Vineyard Russian River Valley ($29) 90 This easy drinking Viognier offers a very fresh effusive perfume of white peach and honeysuckle. It's soft and lush with good acidity and bright, vivacious fruit.

Novy 2012 Zinfandel Russian River Valley ($20) 89 A blend of vineyards, including old vine vineyards, this is an easy drinking, delicious wine of excellent value. It shows black cherry and pepper spice on the nose, followed by a thick, sweet attack and a dark-fruited, unctuous palate. It finishes with firm, balancing tannins.

Pahlmeyer 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($75) 90+ The 2012 Pinot Noir displays a dark ruby hue and fresh on the finish. Made of Wente clones and matured in 60% new French oak, it is ripe and mouth filling with good flavor concentration, yet still young and evolving. Impressive wine making.

Pahlmeyer 2012 Pinot Noir Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview ($90) 90 The 2012 Pinot Noir Wayfarer Vineyard is dark in color and quite evolved with 8% whole cluster fermentation. It is ripe and concentrated with hints of earth and minerals, although it has less overall elegance and refinement than the Pahlmeyer Sonoma Coast. The Wayfarer Vineyard is located 6.7 miles from the Pacific Ocean on rugged terrain.

Papapietro Perry 2010 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley ($52) 89 The 2010 Pinot Noir displays a dark ruby hue and aromas and flavors of dark cherry, briard and earth. Aged for 10-12 months in French barriques, it is nicely balanced with concentrated flavors, good grip and a long finish.

Patz & Hall This winery founded in 1988 is the product of a successful partnership of Donald Patz, James Hall, Anne Moses and Heather Patz. Over the past 25 years Patz & Hall has produced small lot and single vineyard wines focusing on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, sourcing grapes from the finest vineyards within Russian River Valley, the Sonoma Coast and elsewhere in California. The winery has had an outstanding track record producing some of the finest Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs in Sonoma County as revealed in our tasting of the 2012 vintage at their lovely new facility outside the center of the town of Sonoma.


Patz & Hall 2012 Chardonnay Durell Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($55) 91 Yellow gold. This barrel fermented Chardonnay is a bit reserved aromatically with notes of flint and lemon citrus. However, it opens up on the soft, creamy palate, revealing Meyer lemon, hazelnut, and stony minerals. Made from a 30 year old vineyard opposite the winery and matured in 50% new French oak.

Patz & Hall 2012 Chardonnay Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($42) 91 This is an austere, low-keyed Chardonnay with toned down oak and a focused, stony character. It shows orchard fruit with crisp acidity and the structure to age. We tasted a 2003 vintage of the same wine, and it had evolved beautifully with a soft, lush palate of dried peach with a caramel note and lingering secondary nuances.

Patz & Hall 2011 Chardonnay Hudson Vineyard Corneros ($55) 92 This is a soft textured wine with excellent intensity of flavor. It's full and rich with a creamy, concentrated attack of ripe stone fruit and mango with hints of smoke and caramel. Leaves a sweet impression on the finish. Made of Wente clones and matured in 60% new French oak.

Pahlmeyer 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($75) 90+ The Pahlmeyer 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast displays dark red plum aromas and ripe and spicy red berry and cola fruit flavors on the palate. It has high acidity and is crisp and fresh on the finish. Sourced from the Pahlmeyer Wayfarer Estate Vineyard in Fort Ross Seaview and the Hallberg Vineyard in Russian River Valley.

Pahlmeyer 2012
Vineyard Carneros ($58) 93+ Classic California Chardonnay from the cool Carneros. Has a sumptuous nose of peach flowers and orange zest, followed by a fat, juicy, densely flavored palate. Finishes brightly, dry and chalky. Made from Wente and Hyde-Wente clones and aged in 50% new French oak.


Paul Hobbs Wines 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($47) 91 This vineyard blend of Russian River Chardonnay reveals light smoke and waxy yellow fruit on the nose. It has a creamy palate with excellent balancing acidity, good flavor intensity and integrated oak. Gorgeous drinkable, it has a creamy palate with excellent flavor density, bright acidity, round tannins, and a long finish. Not yet released at the time of review.

Other Wines Reviewed: Patz & Hall 2012 Chardonnay CrossBarn Sonoma Coast ($25) 89 Patz & Hall Pinot Noir 2012 CrossBarn Sonoma Coast ($35) 89

Paul Hobbs Winery Paul Hobbs’s winemaking is legendary. As the owner and winemaker of Paul Hobbs Winery he has been able to identify exceptional vineyards in both Napa Valley and Sonoma County to produce some of California’s finest wines. The winery focuses on crafting small production, vineyard designated wines from distinct growing sites. Paul Hobbs is known for the meticulous care and expertise he brings to the vineyard and minimally-invasive winemaking techniques that produce terroir-based wines of up front fruit, refinement and finesse. Shown here, his Sebastopol winery, built in 2003. Our reviews focus on the winery’s outstanding Sonoma portfolio of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and its excellent entry level CrossBarn wines. Megan Bacchitich, Director of Winemaking, who grew up in Sonoma County, works alongside Paul Hobbs.

Paul Hobbs Wines 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($55) 91 This Russian River Valley Pinot Noir displays lovely fresh dark red fruit with excellent acidity and structure. Aged 11 months in 47% new French oak with weekly battonage, it is elegant and refined on the palate with good volume and acidity and a persistent finish. Paul Hobbs Wines 2012 Pinot Noir Katherine Lindsay Estate Russian River Valley ($85) 93 Planted in the year 2000, the Lindsay Estate is located at the winery and consists of half Calera and half Swan clones. The wine produced from this estate vineyard exhibits beautiful dark plum fruit aromas with hints of smoke. Aged 11 months in 46% new French oak with weekly battonage, it has a creamy palate with excellent flavor density, bright acidity, round tannins, and a long finish. Not yet released at the time of review.

Other Wines Reviewed: Patz & Hall 2012 Chardonnay CrossBarn Sonoma Coast ($25) 89 Patz & Hall Pinot Noir 2012 CrossBarn Sonoma Coast ($35) 89

Paul Hobbs Wines 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($55) 93+ The vineyard for this wine is located about half way between Graton and Forestville in the Russian River. The wine is medium yellow gold with a floral nose accented by crushed minerals and a touch of smoky flint. It reveals honeysuckle, Meyer lemon and intense minerality. Focused and beautiful. Aged 12 months in 56% new French oak with biweekly battonage. Paul Hobbs Wines 2012 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley ($55) 91 This Russian River Valley Pinot Noir displays lovely fresh dark red fruit with excellent acidity and structure. Aged 11 months in 47% new French oak with weekly battonage, it is elegant and refined on the palate with good volume and acidity and a persistent finish.

Peay Vineyards Peay Vineyards is among the new producers on the West Sonoma Coast making extraordinary wines under challenging conditions. The operation is jointly managed by brothers Nick and Andy Peay and Nick’s wife Vanessa Wong, who serves as winemaker. Their 48-acre vineyard, established in 1996, sits on an isolated mountain ridge along the Northern Sonoma Coast (near the town of Annapolis) within the reaches of the coastal fog some five miles from the Pacific. Peay Vineyards makes wines of high quality and originality, expressive of the Northern Sonoma Coast terroir. Over the years we’ve been tasting these wines, we’ve been impressed with the steady improvement in quality and finesse.

Peay Vineyards 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($40) 88 This Chardonnay offers bright orchard fruit and citrus aromas and flavors with a creamy mouth feel and very high acidity. It is fresh tasting but light on fruit flavor. Peay Vineyards 2012 Chardonnay Estate Sonoma Coast ($50) 92 The Chardonnay Estate is a big step up in quality. It has an attractive pale yellow color and displays orchard, apple and pear flavors with a smoky, creamy and leesy mouth feel. It is rich and flavorful on the palate and is beautifully balanced with crisp acidity and a touch of minerals on the finish. All in all it is a very fine Chardonnay.

Peay Vineyards 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($42) 89 The Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast is a young fresh and flavorful wine offering flavors of wild red berries. It displays crisp acidity and an elegant mouth feel. Drinking well now, it will continue to provide drinking pleasure over the next five to seven years. Peay Vineyards 2012 Pinot Noir Ama Estate Sonoma Coast ($55) 91 The Pinot Noir Ama Estate...
Cuvée displays ripe dark red fruit flavors and has a rich creamy mouth feel with good acidity, freshness and balance. It is somewhat earthy in character with big dark fruit flavors, soft round tannins and a long finish. Peay Vineyards 2012 Pinot Noir Pomarium Sonoma Coast ($56) 93
The 2012 Pinot Noir Pomarium is a gorgeous wine. It offers ripe red berry fruit and rose petal aromas and is elegant and silky on the palate with rich flavors of ripe cherry and raspberry and round tannins. Still young and fresh, the wine will no doubt improve in the bottle within a year or two and provide drinking pleasure for at least a decade.

Other Wines Reviewed: Peay Vineyards 2012 Pinot Noir Scallop Shelf Sonoma Coast ($56) 93 Peay Vineyards 2012 Syrah La Bruma Sonoma Coast ($50) 91 Peay Vineyards 2011 Syrah Les Titans Sonoma Coast ($50) 90

Radio Coteau 2012 Pinot Noir Alberigi Russian River Valley ($60) 92+
The 2012 Alberigi Pinot Noir offers attractive red raspberry and cranberry flavors. Fermented with 20% whole clusters and aged in 30% new French oak, it shows good concentration on the palate with some underbrush, earth notes and brisk acidity. The grapes are sourced from a 100-year old family owned vineyard of 2.5 acres planted with Dijon clone 777, 115 and 114. Radio Coteau 2012 Pinot Noir La Neblina Sonoma Coast ($50) 91+ The 2012 Pinot Noir La Neblina is a lovely wine of red pomegranate and cherry. Mainly sourced from the nearby Hallberg Ranch, it is fermented with 15% whole clusters and aged for 15 months in oak, 30% new. It has a silky palate, beautiful texture and good concentration through to the finish. Radio Coteau 2012 Zinfandel Lemorrel Sonoma Coast ($60) 93
This old vine, cool climate Zinfandel shows a heady exotic perfume, layered flavors, and a refined mouth feel. It reveals brambly red fruit with licorice and loam earth on a firmly structured, refined palate. Made of fruit from 75 year old estate vines. Radio Coteau 2012 Syrah Las Colinas Sonoma Coast ($45) 90
This is a flavorful and easy drinking Syrah with lovely plum, pepper and spice. Aged in puncheons, it sees no new oak and has a silky mouth feel with bright acidity on the finish. Enjoy this wine now and for the next 4-5 years.

Ramey Wine Cellars 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($40) 91+
Sourced mostly from cool vineyard sites, 70% from the Martinelli Charles Ranch Vineyard, with a variety of clones. The wine reveals stone fruit and gunflint, but it's the freshness, the focus, and balance that are most remarkable. Ready to drink now. Sees 12 months in 16% new oak. Ramey Wine Cellars 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($40) 91
This Chardonnay vineyard blend is made from several Russian River Valley vineyards, mostly in the warmest part of the valley, including Dutton, Martinelli, Rochioli, and Ritchie. Being from warmer sites, the wine is a bit flesher and riper than the Sonoma blend, and it's equally as good. It shows notes of tropical fruit with hints of smoky oak and butterscotch. It's soft, full and ready to drink. Ramey Wine Cellars 2011 Chardonnay Hudson Vineyard Napa Carneros ($60) 92
The Hudson Vineyard is also located on the wind-swept, Carneros with light clay loam soils. The wine shows smoky, rich hazelnut and vanilla on the nose. These are mirrored flavorwise with the addition of toasted nuts. It has a creamy texture and a long, rich, lush finish. Delicious. Ramey Wine Cellars 2011 Chardonnay Hyde Vineyard Napa Carneros ($60) 92
The Hyde Vineyard has heavy loam soils over hardpan clay on the rolling slopes of Carneros and is planted to Wente selections. The wine shows fragrant, yellow flowers and notes of stone fruit and Meyer lemon. It’s broad and soft on the palate with superb flavor depth, finishing with the perception of sweet, ripe fruit. Ramey Wine Cellars 2011 Chardonnay Platt Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($50) 93
The Platt Vineyard has Goldridge loam soils on a very cool, fog-bound site, just 4 miles from the ocean overlooking Bodega Village. Yields are absurdly low, about 1 ton/acre. This Chardonnay is Ramey’s most Burgundian with a gorgeous fine texture, evoking oyster shells and crushed minerals and lime citrus. It finishes on a pronounced chalky note.

Other Wines Reviewed: Ramey Wine Cellars 2011 Chardonnay Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley ($60) 93 Ramey Wine Cellars 2012 Chardonnay Woolsey Road Vineyard Russian River Valley ($60) 93

Radio Coteau 2012 Pinot Noir Alberigi Russian River Valley ($60) 92+
His winemaking is heavily influenced by Burgundian winemaking techniques: the use of native yeasts, whole cluster fermentation, light pressing with a basket press, aging in French oak, and no fining or filtering. All this takes great patience, and as Eric Sussman says, “Sometimes the hardest thing to do is nothing at all.” Eric’s wines are first-class.
Other Wines Reviewed: Red Car 2013 Rosé of Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($25) 89 Red Car 2010 Syrah Sonoma Coast ($35) 90. Red Car 2011 Syrah Estate Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview ($50) 91 Red Car 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($40) 90 Red Car 2012 Chardonnay Estate Vineyard Fort Ross Seaview ($58) 91

Red Car Wine This small West Sonoma Coast winery specializes in cool climate Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah. It produces small lots of estate and vineyard designated wines following minimalist intervention techniques. Red Car was founded in 2000 by winemaker Caroll Kep and partners; its estate vineyard is located in the Fort Ross Seaview AVA. From our first tasting of these wines, we were impressed with their overall refinement and quality.

Red Car 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($35) 91 This vivacious blend of Russian River and Sonoma Coast vineyards offers fragrant scents and flavors of gun flint, hazelnut and orchard fruit. It's balanced, focused, and fresh with excellent persistence. Sees 10% new French oak for 12 months and goes through full malo. Red Car 2012 Chardonnay Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley ($58) 93 A delicately balanced, suave and lively wine, this Russian River Chardonnay reveals honeysuckle flowers and fresh, pure stone fruit on a beautifully delineated palate. Sees 14 months in oak, just 13% new. Red Car 2009 22 Syrah Bennett Valley ($55) 91 The 22 Syrah is sourced from the Vivio Vineyard in Bennett Valley. These bench land vines of volcanic soils are cooled by the sea fog and winds of the Petaluma Gap. Fermented with native yeast, the wine reveals lovely flavors of black cherry and plum and a hint of toast. Aged 18 months in French oak, 30% new, it has firm tannins with excellent acidity and balance and can be enjoyed over the 3-5 years. Red Car 2012 Pinot Noir Estate Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview ($58) 92 This Pinot Noir is sourced from Red Car's Estate Vineyard which sits at 1,000 feet in the chilly Fort Ross-Seaview AVA along the Sonoma Coast. The wine is fresh and lively with red berry fruit and spices and a hint of toasted oak. It has good density of dark red fruit flavors, polished tannins and crisp acidity on the finish. Red Car 2012 Pinot Noir Platt Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($58) 92 The 2012 Pinot Noir Platt Vineyard is sourced from a densely planted 5 acre site overlooking the town of Bodega on the Pacific Ocean. The wine exhibits a perfumed nose, bright rich tasting berry fruit with light toast, and high acidity on the finish. Drink it over the next 5 years.

Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma Coast ($20) 90 A flavorful, rich Sauvignon Blanc done in a ripe, tropical style, this wine reveals mandarin, guava and citrus fruit. It has a nice leesy character that adds complexity and roundness. Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2012 Chardonnary Carneros ($30) 90 This is an appealing, energetic wine revealing melon, pear and juicy tropical fruit and integrated light honeyed oak. Very well made with a good, rich finish. Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2012 Pinot Noir Carneros ($30) 90 The 2012 Pinot Noir Carneros displays light cherry Kirsch aromas and spicy red berry fruit on the palate. It is elegant with good flavor concentration, medium acidity and overall freshness. It should provide good drinking pleasure now until 2018-2019. Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2010 Pinot Noir Heritage Reserve Carneros ($40) 91 The 2010 Pinot Noir Heritage Reserve displays lovely dark fruit with a floral and pomegranate nose with earth notes. A bigger and more complex wine than the 2012, it is nicely concentrated with excellent balance and good extract on the finish. Drink now and enjoy until 2018-2020. Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Heritage Reserve Sonoma Valley ($50) 88 The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon has a lovely nose of black currant fruit with red berry highlights and is soft on the attack with a silky texture. It is ripe and flavorful on the palate without a lot of richness or nuance, but quite drinkable. Drink now until 2018-2019.

Schug The Schug Carneros Estate Winery is a family operation of Walter and Gertrud Schug, originally from Germany. Prior to establishing the family winery in the early 1980s, Walter worked for E&J Gallo and Joseph Phelps. During his tenure at Phelps, Walter made Insignia and the single vineyard Eisele and Backus wines. In 1989 the Schugs purchased about 50 acres of land in Carneros and planted the vineyards that became the cornerstone of their estate, producing Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Schug wines are well made and cool climate in character, sourced from the Sonoma Coast and Carneros. The Sauvignon Blanc is one of the finest tasted for this report, and the Pinot and Chardonnay are excellent with noteworthy elegance and refinement. After many years as winemaker, Walter has passed the baton to Michael Cox, although he remains as Winemaker Emeritus.

Schug Carneros Estate Winery 2010 Pinot Noir Heritage Reserve Carneros ($40) 91 The 2010 Pinot Noir Heritage Reserve displays lovely dark fruit with a floral and pomegranate nose with earth notes. A bigger and more complex wine than the 2012, it is nicely concentrated with excellent balance and good extract on the finish. Drink now and enjoy until 2018-2020.

Cellars 2012 Syrah Sonoma Coast ($40) 94 Ramey Wine Cellars 2010 Syrah Rodgers Creek Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($60) 95
Shane Wine Cellars

Shane Finley is an affable and talented young winemaker. He is one of a new generation of winemakers in Sonoma County who are making a name for themselves in the industry. Two years ago he became the winemaker at Lynmar Estate, one of the Russian River Valley’s finest wineries. In his “spare time,” Shane produces tiny quantities of excellent Pinot Noir, Syrah and other Rhone varieties from several fine vineyards within and outside Sonoma County. The Sonoma County wines reviewed here were tasted with Shane earlier in the year.

Shane 2011 Pinot Noir La Reine Sonoma Coast ($42) 90
The Pinot Noir La Reine is delicious Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir sourced from vineyards exposed to the cool and windy growing conditions of the Petaluma Gap. Dark ruby in color, it offers aromas of red plum with hints of toast and underbrush, spice and tea. Aged in 25% new French oak for 14 months, it has lovely ripe berry fruit, good acidity and a lively finish. Shane 2013 Rosé Ma Fille Sonoma County ($17) 89 The Rosé Ma Fille is a blend of 90% Syrah and 10% Pinot Noir. An attractive pink salmon color, it is a vibrant and fresh tasting wine with good red fruit flavor, excellent acidity and a crisp finish. Shane 2011 Syrah the Unknown Sonoma County ($34) 90 Syrah the Unknown is a ripe and richly flavored wine, round and full in the mouth. A blend of 85% Syrah and 15% Grenache Noir, it is sourced from a vineyard in the Rockpile appellation, known for producing big and flavorful wines. This blend offers black and blueberry fruit flavors, with good density on the mid palate, firm tannins, and a lingering finish.

Siduri Wines

Adam Lee of Siduri produces a staggering variety of high quality single vineyard Pinot Noirs from some 20 vineyards in California and Oregon. Originally from Texas, Adam and wife Dianna moved to Sonoma County in 1993 and soon after, with little formal training, began producing wine. Within Sonoma County today they produce single vineyard Pinot Noir from much admired vineyards in Russian River Valley and the West Sonoma Coast. Adam also makes Syrah and other varieties under the Novy label. Ryan Zepaltas serves as Assistant Winemaker.

Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley ($30) 90 The 2012 Pinot Noir exhibits brambly dark cherry aromas. It is bright on the attack with bold dark cherry and plum fruit flavors and lovely earth notes. The wine is a blend of wines that didn’t make it into premium single vineyard cuvées. Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($30) 91

The Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast is light bodied and generous with dark red fruit and light cola notes. It is soft on the attack and more feminine and refined than the Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Ewald Vineyard Russian River Valley 92 This Pinot is sourced from a three-acre vineyard planted with Dijon clones 115 and 777. It offers dark cherry aromas with cola notes. It is lush yet light and elegantly flavored on the palate with dark cherry fruit. A polished wine with beautiful balance and ripe tannins on the finish. Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard Fort Ross Seaview ($55) 91 The Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard is a finely focused, beautifully balanced wine offering aromas of black cherry with lovely purity on the attack and the palate with hints of vanilla. It is a lovely wine that Adam Lee has been crafting since 1995. Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Pratt Vineyard Sonoma Coast 91+ The 2012 Pratt Vineyard Pinot Noir offers dark red cherry aromas on the nose and is soft and easy drinking on the palate. Fruit forward and rich in texture, it is a beautiful wine based entirely on Dijon clone 777 grown in the Pratt Vineyard located between Occidental and Sebastopol. Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Keefer Ranch Green Valley of Russian River Valley 91+ The Pinot Noir Keefer Ranch is a lush and bold flavored wine similar to the Pinot Noir Pratt Vineyard. Located in the Western part of Russian River Valley in a relatively warm microclimate, the grapes display ripe dark cherry fruit aromas with a cola note on the nose and dense black cherry fruit on the palate.

Other Wines Reviewed:

Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Lingenfelder Vineyard Russian River Valley 92 Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Parson’s Vineyard Russian River Valley 91 Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Sonatera Vineyard Sonoma Coast 92 Siduri 2012 Pinot Noir Van der Kamp Vineyard Sonoma Mountain 93

Soliste

Soliste is the project of Claude Koeberle, a former three-star Michelin chef turned winemaker. Claude was born and raised in Burgundy and spent his early years in France where he learned his winemaking from the famed winemaker Henri Jayer. Since 1979, Claude has been on this side of the Atlantic engaging in food and wine projects. Claude launched Soliste in 2005 with the aim of producing Burgundian-style wines. He sources his grapes from different vineyards, mainly on the Sonoma Coast, and makes the wines at a crush facility in Santa Rosa. The wines are made by the talented winemaker Ryan Zepaltas of Zepaltas Wines and Siduri Wines. The Soliste wines are flavorful and vibrant, combining California fruit with the sensitivity and finesse of Burgundian winemaking.

Soliste 2011 Chardonnay “L’Age d’Or” Russian River Valley ($40) 93 This Chardonnay boasts a rich and flavorful
palate of yellow fruit and lightly toasted oak, Mersault-like in style, it is rich on the palate with dense fruit flavors, high acidity and loads of minerals. A leaner-styled California Chardonnay with loads of richness and beautifully focused. **Soliste 2013 Rose of Pinot Noir “Soleil Rouge” Sonoma Coast ($20) 90** The “Soleil Rouge” rose displays a pale pink hue and aromas of bright red berries. Soft on the attack, it is full and lush on the palate with excellent acidity and freshness and a crisp finish. A lively and delicious wine. **Soliste 2012 Pinot Noir “L’Esperance” Sonoma Coast ($58) 93** The Pinot Noir “L’Esperance” displays lovely perfumed aromas, dark rose petal and hints of raspberry pomegranate. Crafted from 100% clone 115, it is pure, silky and elegant with excellent density of fruit and flavors not unlike an excellent Chambolle-Musigny. A very attractive Pinot Noir that will grab your attention. **Soliste 2012 Pinot Noir “Narcisse” Sonoma Coast ($30) 90+** This Pinot Noir shows a pure bright medium red hue followed by a spicy effusive fresh red cherry nose. It has lovely depth of fruit without a lot of complexity, good length with some tartness, and firm tannins on the finish.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Soliste 2009 Pinot Noir Sonatera Vineyard T Block Sonoma Coast ($47) 92 Soliste 2009 Out of the Shadows Bennett Valley ($46) 93 Soliste 2011 Sauvignon Blanc St Andelain Lake County ($40) 91

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Ulises Valdez/Valdez Family Winery. This winery is the result of a bold journey to Sonoma County by Ulises Valdez, originally of Michoacán, Mexico. His journey began in 1985 when at 16 years old he travelled to Rockpile to earn money to help his family. With the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 he was able to obtain legal residency in the US, after which he launched a highly successful vineyard management company with many high profile clients. Having a desire to produce his own wine, he released his first vintage in 2004 and opened his own winery in 2010. The wines reviewed here are of excellent quality and show the great potential of this wine-making enterprise.

**Ulises Valdez 2009 Pinot Noir Lancel Creek Vineyard Russian River Valley ($60) 90** This Pinot Noir exhibits a dark ruby color and offers aromas and flavors of pure dark cherry and plum with a hint of toasted oak. It is refined and silky smooth on the palate and has a lingering finish. Made with the assistance of consulting winemaker, Marc Aubert.

**Ulises Valdez 2011 Sauvignon Blanc Russian River Valley ($23) 89** The 2011 Sauvignon Blanc is a well-made wine that is crisp and dry on the palate and has concentrated flavors of melon and citrus. It should pair well with chicken and fish, but will probably overwhelm oysters and other seafood.

**Ulises Valdez 2009 Zinfandel Botticelli Vineyard Rockpile ($41) 91** The Zinfandel Rockpile Bot-

ticelli Vineyard is a big cut above the Lancel Creek Zinfandel. It is rich and bull-bodied revealing great depth of dark red fruit flavor and hints of toasted oak. It reveals intensity and richness of flavor without being overly extracted. The tannins are firm but round and the finish is persistent.

**Ulises Valdez 2008 Zinfandel Lancel Creek Vineyard Russian River Valley ($40) 89** The 2008 Zinfandel Lancel Creek Vineyard offers red and black fruit flavors with hints of smoke. It soft on the attack and nicely balanced but reveals big firm unresolved tannins on the finish.

**Watkins Family 2012 Pinot Noir Crinella Vineyard Russian River Valley ($40) 90** This Pinot Noir offers fragrant aromas of bright red cherry fruit. Refined and elegant on the palate it offers concentrated red fruit, soft round tannins and a long finish. It is nicely balanced and easy drinking. Produced by a small family-owned Sonoma County winery.

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**Williams Selyem** The Williams Selyem Winery dates back to 1970 when friends Ed Selyem and Burt Williams began making wine on the weekends in a garage in Forestville in the Russian River Valley. By the mid-1980s their winery was in full swing, and they released their first vineyard designated wine sourced from the Rochioli Vineyard. In the ensuing years, success came quickly to the winery, which developed a world wide reputation for its Pinot Noir. In 1998 Burt and Ed sold the winery to John Dyson who retained the winery’s name and hired winemaker Bob Cabral.

**Williams Selyem 2011 Pinot Noir Rochioli Riverblock Vineyard Russian River Valley ($79) 92** The Williams Selyem 2011 Pinot Noir Rochioli Riverblock Vineyard displays a dark ruby color and aromas of ripe dark red berry fruit flavors with earthy-mushroom nuances. Aged in French oak, 73% new, for one year. It is a beautifully balanced and intensely flavored wine with soft lush tannins and a rich persistent finish. The Rochioli grapes have been an integral part of Williams Selyem wine making since the early 1980s. **Williams Selyem 2012 Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($78) 92** The 2012 Pinot Noir Hirsch Vineyard offers fragrant red cherry and raspberry aromas. It has savory red berry fruit flavor on the palate and an elegant and refined mouth feel with good density and ripeness. A complete wine with good acidity and freshness, firm tannins and a long finish. After a couple of years in the bottle it will offer enjoyable drinking for 8 to 10 years and perhaps more. **Williams Selyem 2012 Pinot Noir Terra de Promissio Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($55) 91** The Pinot Noir Terra de Promissio Vineyard displays an attractive spicy floral nose of dark red cherries. It is full and savory on the palate with good red fruit ripeness with a hint of herbs, excellent balance, firm round tannins and a long finish.

**Williams Selyem 2012 Pinot Noir Westside Road Neighbors Russian River Valley ($69) 91** The Pinot Noir Westside
Road Neighbors displays a dark red fruit nose with light cola. It is delicious and elegant on the palate with bright acidity and good intensity of flavor on the finish. It is a refined and beautifully balanced Pinot Noir that should drink well for up to a decade.

**Windgap** This winery is a new venture for winemaker Pax Mahle who is best known for making powerful Syrah-based wines under the Pax label. In contrast, Windgap focuses on producing fresh and elegant wines from cool climate, low-yielding vineyard sites. Pax’s wines are authentic and terroir-based as we learned in our tasting with him and assistant winemaker, Scott Schultz. Scott’s Jolie-Laide wines are also reviewed in the report.

**Wind Gap 2013 Trousseau Fanucchi-Wood Vineyard Russian River Valley ($25) 88** This is a fresh, crisp summer white made using concrete fermenters, whole cluster pressed with some skin contact from a 32 year old vineyard right behind Martinelli’s. It shows white flowers and honey on the nose with soft palate of fresh orchard fruit. Sold in kegs for restaurant use.

**Wind Gap 2010 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Sonoma County ($36) 92** This is a lovely, very rich and expressive Chardonnay with effusive ripe tropical fruit and honeysuckle aromas and a soft, buttery palate of butterscotch, roast pineapple, toasted oak and minerals. Delicious.

**Wind Gap 2013 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Sonoma County ($40) 90** A very bright, fresh, aromatic Pinot Noir of tart pie cherries and hints of rhubarb, sourced from four vineyards in the southern Petaluma Gap. Shows good intensity of dark red fruit on the palate from Swann, Calera, 667, 828, 115 clones and gentle whole cluster crushing.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Wind Gap 2012 Pinot Noir Sun Chase Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($60) 92  Wind Gap 2011 Syrah Sonoma Coast ($40) 90

Windgap

Zeppalatas 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($24) 88 Made from mostly young vines, this wine sees 15% new oak for 14 months. It reveals light lemon citrus aromas and a lightly flavored, saline-edged lemon fruited palate and a fine finish. **Zeppalatas 2012 Chardonnay Babushka Russian River Valley ($36) 90** A barrel selection sourced from the Keefer Ranch, this Chardonnay reveals citrus flowers on the nose. It’s a delicate but flavorful wine revealing creamy lemon curd flavors. Fairly tight now, it should open up nicely with another year or two in bottle. **Zeppalatas 2012 Chardonnay Charles Heintz Vineyard Russian River Valley ($45) 91** This vibrant, lemon-infused Chardonnay comes from Clone 4 vines at the Heintz Vineyard, planted in 1982. The fruit is destemmed and soaked on the skins before pressing. The wine is perfumed with good viscosity, showing Meyer lemon and crushed minerals and perfectly integrated oak. Delicious.

**Zeppalatas 2012 Chardonnay Russian River Valley ($31) 89** This is a bright flavorful wine sourced from young vines of five different vineyards. It offers light red currant and cherry flavors with earthy notes. Fermented with 1/3 stems and aged with 1/3 in new oak it shows good intensity, of flavor with a saline note and a firm finish.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Zeppalatas 2012 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley ($31) 89  Zeppalatas 2012 Pinot Noir Devoto Vineyards Sonoma Coast ($42) 90+

**Zeppalatas** Winemaker Bryan Zeppalatas grew up as a beer drinker in Wisconsin but moved to Russian River Valley in 1998 after finishing college and got into winemaking. Soon after, Bryan met up with Adam and Diana Lee of Siduri who recruited him as an assistant to make their new Novy label Pinot Noir and Syrah. Bryan continues working as Assistant Winemaker at Siduri but also has developed his own label of hand-crafted premium Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines. These wines are reviewed here and are showing well.
Coastal Warm Climate AVAs and Their Wines

The warmest parts of Sonoma County are not especially warm relative to other wine growing regions in California, but they do experience weaker marine influence than the coastal cool AVAs. These AVAs usually have mountains or hills that hinder the intrusion of coastal breezes, although most (excluding the mountain AVAs) experience evening fog. Zinfandel and Bordeaux varieties do especially well in these coastal warm AVAs, although we found excellent wines made from Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay in some AVAs, too. Pinot Noir is not widely grown. Each AVA is discussed in turn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVA (date established)</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Soils</th>
<th>Noteworthy Grapes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma Valley (1981)</td>
<td>115,322 acres. Overlaps Sonoma Mountain, Bennett Valley, Moon Mountain, and part of Carneros. 40 vineyards and 11 wineries.</td>
<td>Diversity of soils, mostly of volcanic origin, including fertile loam on the valley floor and thin soils with basalt outcroppings on the mountains.</td>
<td>Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, Merlot, Syrah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moon Mountain (2013)</td>
<td>17,663 acres with over 1500 vineyard acres and 40 growers; lies entirely within the Sonoma Valley AVA</td>
<td>Iron rich basalt and basaltic ash with thin clay loam topsoil.</td>
<td>Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Merlot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma Mountain (1985)</td>
<td>800 vineyard acres and 25 growers; lies entirely within the Sonoma Valley AVA</td>
<td>Volcanic ash and boulders and marine deposits.</td>
<td>Cabernet Sauvignon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett Valley (2003)</td>
<td>One of Sonoma’s smallest AVAs (8140 acres), it lies within the Sonoma Valley AVA. It has 36 vineyards averaging 20 acres each.</td>
<td>Mountain bench lands of shallow soils of volcanic ash.</td>
<td>Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, Chardonnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalk Hill AVA (1983)</td>
<td>1635 vineyard acres; lies mostly within the Russian River Valley AVA</td>
<td>Chalky white, volcanic ash soils with sand and silt loam.</td>
<td>Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Bordeaux Varieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knights Valley AVA (1983)</td>
<td>37 thousand acres with 1721 vineyard acres; 30+ vineyards, 2 wineries.</td>
<td>Alluvial on the valley floor with volcanic soils on the slopes of Mount St. Helena, and uplifted marine soils to the north.</td>
<td>Cabernet Sauvignon &amp; Bordeaux Varieties, Chardonnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Valley AVA (1984)</td>
<td>76,900 acres with 12,513 vineyard acres; 103 growers, 42 wineries</td>
<td>Alluvial, clay soils on the valley floor and volcanic soils and rocks on the bench lands and hillsides.</td>
<td>Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Zinfandel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Mountain Cloverdale (2011)</td>
<td>4,750 acres with 380 vineyard acres. The Sonoma portion lies almost entirely within the Alexander Valley AVA.</td>
<td>Volcanic with gravelly loam.</td>
<td>Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Creek Valley (1983)</td>
<td>5235 vineyard acres and 70 mostly family-owned wineries</td>
<td>Sandy loam on the valley floor; ferrous red clay on the bench lands.</td>
<td>Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockpile (2002)</td>
<td>15 thousand acres, 121 acres planted, 11 growers. The south-east portion overlaps Dry Creek Valley AVA.</td>
<td>Shallow (&lt;24&quot;) loam to clay loam over serpentine rock.</td>
<td>Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Cabernet Sauvignon</td>
</tr>
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Overlapping and directly north of Carneros lies one of Sonoma’s largest and most important wine growing regions, the Sonoma Valley AVA, which stretches 17 miles from San Pablo Bay in the south almost to Santa Rosa city in the north. It offers a wide variety of growing conditions including steep mountains, rolling benchlands, and fertile plains on the valley floor. The Sonoma Valley AVA hosts five distinct wine growing regions: Carneros, Bennett Valley, Moon Mountain, Sonoma Mountain and the valley floor itself. Los Carneros is a cool growing area and was discussed earlier; the others are described here.

The relatively narrow valley floor, which the Sonoma Creek runs through, is squeezed between two mountain ranges—the Mayacamas to the east and Sonoma Mountain to the west. Thus, the valley is relatively sheltered from the fog and winds of the cold Pacific and receives less rainfall than points to the west. However, it does receive cool air coming from the south and from the Santa Rosa plain to the north. The soils here are fertile and alluvial but basaltic in origin. As one moves away from the valley floor the soils become less fertile and better draining.

Highway 12 runs along the valley floor, passing through Sonoma, Glen Ellen and Kenwood before reaching Santa Rosa to the north, and several of Sonoma Valley’s premier wineries are located just off the highway. The city of Sonoma is the site of some of the county’s first vineyards, planted in 1823 by Fr. Jose Altimira of Barcelona, who established the Mission San Francisco Solano, located just off the town square. Also in Sonoma is the county’s first commercial winery, the Buena Vista Winery established by Count Agoston Haraszthy in 1857. Historic vineyards dot the Sonoma Valley landscape, with 24 identified by the Historic Vineyard Society.

The southern part of the valley is best suited for growing cool climate grapes like Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer. The vineyards of Sonoma-Cutrer’s famed Les Pierres Vineyard are located here as is the Durell Vineyard, a source of fruit for both Kistler and Kendall Jackson.
The Chardonnays from the southern valley are taut and less fleshy than those from the warmer north.

A number of Sonoma’s premier wineries are located on the valley floor or nearby bench lands, including, in addition to Buena Vista, Ravenswood, Arrowood, Benziger, and Chateau St. Jean.

**Moon Mountain District AVA**

The Moon Mountain District AVA is situated east of Glen Ellen along the western slope of the Mayacamas from 400 to 2200’ in altitude with rocky slopes, deep hollows, and several types of rocks from different volcanic flows. The climate is usually arid and dry, although it is exposed to crosswinds from the Pacific Ocean to the west. When it is chilly on the valley floor it is significantly warmer on Moon Mountain. Microclimates abound among the meadows, canyons and ridges of the district.

Moon Mountain is made up entirely of hillside vineyards, some incredibly remote. Growing conditions are perfect for Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties, although we tasted delicious Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah from Kamen’s vineyards on the top of the mountain. One of California’s most historic vineyards, the Monte Rosso Vineyard, originally planted in the late 1800s, is part of the AVA. Another is Ripris Vineyards, which is nearly 300 acres of low yielding parcels high above the fog line, some rising to nearly 2000 feet in elevation. In contrast to the valley floor, the grapes here are typically smaller and thick-skinned with intense color and flavor. Other vineyards and their grape buyers include Frederick’s Vineyard (Turley) and Compagni-Portis Vineyard (Bedrock, Carlisle).

A fire in August 1996 destroyed many vineyards in the district but gave growers the opportunity to replant their vineyards and to introduce new farming practices. Viticulturist Phil Coturri was instrumental in the replanting and introduction of organic farming, which has taken root in the area. Notable producers from Moon Mountain, in addition to Repris and Kamen, are Gallo’s Louis Martini (which owns Monte Rosso), Spann, Bedrock, and Stone Edge.

**Sonoma Mountain AVA**

Four million years ago the east side of the volcano now called Sonoma Mountain erupted, leaving today’s soil surface of volcanic ash, marine deposits, and basaltic rocks. Today, this ancient volcano rises up to 2463’ with high, east-facing vineyards looking out over the valley. The east side of the mountain, where most the vineyards are located, is protected, warm and relatively dry, ideal conditions for its premier grape, Cabernet Sauvignon. In contrast, on the west-facing side of the mountain, the Petaluma Gap winds slam into the mountain before being deflected north to the Bennett Valley and south to Carneros. However, vineyards located high above the fog line enjoy both sunny weather and low temperatures, perfect for Pinot Noir.

Some of the outstanding vineyards in the AVA are Mccrea (where Kistler sources Chardonnay), Richard Dinner (a source of Chardonnay for Paul Hobbs), Van der Kemp (near the top of the mountain, where Siduri sources Pinot Noir), Pickberry (where Ravenswood sources fruit for its single vineyard wine by the same name and Zepaltas winery sources Cabernet Franc), and Jack London (still owned by the famous writer’s family). Rodgers Creek Vineyard is located on the west facing side of the mountain; David Ramey’s Syrah from Rodgers Creek shows the unique cool terroir in its savory aromas and flavors of smoked meats and white pepper with a Pinot Noir like texture.

Laurel Glen is one of the few wineries located in the AVA, and Patrick Campbell of Laurel Glen played a lead role in petitioning for AVA status. Glen Ellen’s Sonoma Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon has typical attributes for these mountain vineyards with it floral notes and high-toned, tight character. Sonoma Mountain’s Cabernet Sauvignon stands in contrast to Cabernet from Moon Mountain in the Mayacamas where the wine is more massive and tannic.
**Bennett Valley AVA**

One of Sonoma’s smallest AVA’s, Bennett Valley is also one its most unique. It has greater marine influence and a cooler climate than the other coastal warm AVAs, but its soils are volcanic in origin, and it’s known for its Bordeaux varieties, not Pinot Noir. It’s very narrow and nestled in among three mountains—Sonoma to the south, Taylor to the west and Bennett to the east—with rolling bench land of 450-1100’ altitude. While it can be hot during the day, the region experiences sharp diurnal temperature variations, as much as 40-50° as a result of cool winds and fog of the Petaluma Gap being sucked into the valley through a gap in the mountains. Founded in 1977, Matanzas Creek was one of the pioneers of the region and is the best-known winery with estate vineyards. The single largest grower is Kendall-Jackson, which became even larger when Jess Jackson purchased Matanzas Creek in 2000. Verite’s Pierre Seillan planted Jackson Park Vineyard for Kendall-Jackson in the late 1990s. Today that vineyard provides the Merlot that goes into Verite’s La Muse, one of Sonoma’s most highly rated and most expensive wines.

**Sauvignon Blanc**  Sonoma’s Sauvignon Blancs range in style from lightly herbaceous to round, ripe citrus to moderately oaked. The lightly herbaceous style shows grass, green tea, and capiscum notes, although they never dominate the wine, which often has a passion fruit or lime citrus base. Wines made from grapes grown in cooler sites, like Carneros and the Sonoma Coast, have a more herbal character than those from warmer sites. Most the Sauvignon Blancs we tasted were in the round, ripe citrus style. These wines display a range of aromas and flavors ranging from pink grapefruit to lychee and guava. Grapes for these wines are often grown in warmer sites, like Dry Creek (Quivira), Alexander Valley (Lancaster), Chalk Hill, and Bennett Valley (Matanzas Creek). A number of producers make wooded Sauvignon Blanc, and several are very successful, including ones from Chalk Hill and Lancaster. Kamen’s Moon Mountain Sauvignon Blanc is unique—made from very low yielding, mountain top vineyards and fermented in concrete eggs. It’s unusually dense and rich for Sauvignon Blanc, yet it’s fresh and crisp.

**Chalk Hill AVA**

While Chalk Hill is coterminous with the northeast portion of the Russian River Valley AVA, it has more in common with the dry, mountain vineyards of the Mayacamas than it does with the cool, foggy river bottoms and hills of the Russian River. The vineyards of Chalk Hill sit mostly on the western bench land slopes of the Mayacamas up to 1300’, above the fog line. Warm summer temperatures are not much affected by Pacific breezes and fog, although it’s a bit cooler than adjacent Knight’s Valley and Alexander Valley. The soil types are also unlike Russian River, being Sonoma Volcanics and not Uplifted Marine Sediments. The volcanic ash soils come from repeated eruptions of Mount St. Helena.

The best-known winery of Chalk Hill is Chalk Hill Estate, purchased by the Foley Wine Group in 2010, with 300 acres under vine. Rodney Strong also has vineyards in Chalk Hill. Chalk Hill makes especially flavorful, tangy Sauvignon Blanc and substantial Chardonnay from a variety of clones. Jolie-Laide and Wind Gap both make Pinot Gris wines from Chalk Hill fruit.

**Knights Valley AVA**

Knights Valley lies adjacent to and northwest of Chalk Hill, east of Alexander Valley and continues to the Napa
County boundary. The slopes of the Mayacamas’ Mount St. Helena come straight down to the valley floor. It’s Sonoma’s warmest region with no direct marine influence. Knights Valley is famed for its mountain vineyards that offer ideal growing conditions for Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and other Bordeaux varieties.

While grapes were grown in Knights Valley in the early 20th century, phylloxera and Prohibition killed them off. Beringer began planting grapes in the valley in the 1960s and now has almost 600 acres of vines. Kendall Jackson also has extensive plantings in the valley for its Highland Estates line. Another Jackson Estates project, Vérité, sources fruit from high elevation, small Knights Valley vineyards. Vérité makes two single vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons from the Knights Valley vineyards Helena Dakota and Helena Montana. Both wines are made from low-yielding vines in different high elevation microclimates.

Knight Valley’s reputation for world-class wines is mostly due to Englishman Peter Michael’s 1982 purchase of 630 acres of volcanic ridges on the western face of Mount St. Helena. The vineyards he planted there, especially Les Pavots, have won international acclaim for their rich, bold wine flavors.

### Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux Blends

Sonoma County’s Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux style premium wines are produced in two main styles depending upon the growing area: valley floor and benchlands or high elevation vineyards. Those produced on the valley floors and bench lands are stylistically ripe-tasting, dark fruited and mouth filling wines like those produced by wineries such as Arrowood, Rodney Strong, and Trentadue. Depending upon the vintage, they can be high in alcohol with firm tannins and in need of at least a year or more of bottle aging upon release and can last from 5 to 10 years and even longer. Some wines reveal underbrush and herbal notes and red berry accents, as well as smoke and toasted oak. Those few vineyards in the southern area of Alexander Valley, like Lancaster Estate, that are exposed to coastal fog and cooler temperatures, produce somewhat more elegant and polished wines. The wines produced on high elevation vineyards in the Mayacamas and Sonoma Mountain are generally powerful wines with flavors of blackberry, black current, currant and often with hints of red plum and well-defined mineral aspects. The very finest of these wines such as Vérité, Stonestreet, Skipstone, Stone Edge Farm, Kamen and Laurel Glen are elegant, polished and refined, with excellent structure, natural acidity, and fine round tannins. Aging is also in French oak, both new and used, but well balanced. These wines are similar in character to many Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and red blends. They are also quite age worthy with a 15 to 20 year life span.

### Alexander Valley AVA

Nestled between the Mayacamas on the east and the Coastal Range on the west, the 22 mile long Alexander Valley varies in width from 2.7 miles with the Russian River running down its center. It’s a highly diversified AVA, ranging from 900-2400’ in elevation with varied terroir. The northern end of the valley is about 10° warmer than the southern end, which is cooled by the evening fog that creeps up the valley from the Russian River.

Alexander Valley has a wide variety of soils. Decomposed, rocky red volcanic rocks, marine uplift and gravelly loam soils are found on the hillsides and bench lands. The valley floor has rich clay alluvial soils, especially near the Russian River.

While best known for its Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, Alexander Valley is also a source for Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, and other varieties. The best Cabernet Sauvignon is grown on the bench lands and foothills and is different stylistically from Napa Valley Cabernet. Vine vigor is a problem for reds grown on the valley floor, resulting in herbal bell pepper notes in Cabernet, but growers are addressing this problem by using different clones, rootstocks, and trellising. The white wines from the valley floor are usually ripe and tropical in style.

Alexander Valley has a number of large, commercial vineyards planted mostly on the valley floor. Beringer, Clos du Bois and Gallo all have extensive holdings. Many of these grapes find their way into wines carrying a Sonoma County or North Coast appellation. There are also many smaller, family vineyards and wineries on the valley floor and bench lands, including Garden Creek, Blue Rock, and Stuhlmeyer. The finest vineyards of the valley are located on the slopes of the Mayacamas. The large Alexander Mountain Estate (Gauer Ranch), owned by Jackson Family Estates, rises to 1800’ with rocky slopes and cool mountain air and provides fruit for several ultra-premium wines, including Vérité and Stonestreet.
Pine Mountain - Cloverdale Peak AVA

Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak sits at the northern end of Sonoma County. Like Carneros at the southern end, Pine Mountain covers two counties, in this case, Sonoma and Mendocino. Pine Mountain-Cloverdale is located at the top of Pine Mountain on the northern flank of the Mayacamas. At 1600-3000', this is one of the highest grape growing areas of California. Like other high altitude parts of eastern Sonoma County, it has shallow, rocky volcanic soils with ancient alluvial fans. The high altitude vineyards sit like an island above the fog with 3-4 more hours of sunlight and significantly cooler temperatures (12° cooler, on average) than the valley floor but with smaller diurnal temperature variations. This is also one of the wettest AVAs in California, with annual average precipitation of 45-50".

The vineyards of Pine Mountain have a long growing season that exposes them to the risks of autumn rainfall and early frost. They also experience high winds. As with other mountain vineyards, there are numerous microclimates. The mountainous terrain constrains vineyard size to about 20 acres or less.

Most of the small, independent growers sell fruit (mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, which accounts for 79% of all plantings) to Sonoma's high end wineries. Silverwood Ranch supplies fruit to Miro Tcholakov for a single vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon and to Francis Ford Coppola for its Archimedes and Director’s Cut wines. Benziger leases the 30 acre Upper Ridge Vineyard for its Imagery Estate wines. The 2400' high Pine Mountain Vineyards both sells fruit and makes its own wine (Ampere). Respite makes Cabernet Sauvignon wines from its 2600' high Reichel Vineyard. In addition, Kendall-Jackson just planted a new, 90 acre vineyard, the largest yet on Pine Mountain. Unfortunately, the ultra-premium producer Capture Wines, owner of Tin Cross Vineyards, failed financially earlier this year.

Dry Creek Valley AVA

Located west of Alexander Valley and north of the Russian River Valley, Dry Creek Valley runs from Healdsburg to Lake Sonoma where it meets up with and partly overlaps the Rockpile AVA. It’s 16 miles long and 2 miles wide with vineyards located on the valley floor, benchlands and hills. It’s named for Dry Creek, which runs through the valley, meeting up with the Russian River just south of Healdsburg. While only 20 miles from the Pacific, Dry Creek is sheltered from coastal breezes and has less fog intrusion than the Russian River Valley to the south. As a result, it has some of Sonoma County’s warmest daytime temperatures.

Dry Creek’s valley floor reveals mostly alluvial deposits of gravel and sandy loam, while the bench lands are often rocky with red clay loam, highly ferrous soils of mostly volcanic origin. Valley floor soils are deep, well drained and fertile with the propensity to produce high yields, while the bench land and hillside soils are also well-drained but less fertile.

Dry Creek vineyards and wineries tend to be small and family owned. Several vineyards have been continuously farmed by the same families over several decades, including A. Rafanelli (since 1900), Nalle/Henderlong (1927), Pedroncelli (1927), Puccioni (1904), Tzabaco Rancho Vineyards (1856), Rued Wines (1882), and Seghesio (1895). By the 1880s there were 54 vineyards with a total of 883 acres of vines, at least half planted to Zinfandel.

Like elsewhere, the combination of phylloxera and Prohibition took its toll, but plantings resumed in the mid-20th century, and by 1972 Dry Creek Valley had 1500 acres of vines; forty years later it had over 5 thousand. Zinfandel represents a significant part of total plantings in the Dry Creek AVA; about half of Sonoma County’s Zinfandel vineyard acreage is in Dry Creek.

Traditionally, Dry Creek farms were long and narrow with frontage on the river providing irrigation water; hops and

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6 Seghesio was purchased by the Crimson Wine Group in 2011.
wheat planted on the valley floor; and vineyards planted on the bench lands. Today’s old vine Zinfandel vineyards are all located on the bench lands. Only in more recent years has the valley floor been planted to vines, especially Sauvignon Blanc and other white varieties. Dry Creek has numerous, special plots of head-trained, dry-farmed, old field blends.

In addition to the old, family wineries mentioned above, Dry Creek has numerous other well-known growers and producers, including Ferrari Carano, Dutcher Crossing, Frei Brothers, Geyser Peak, Lambert Bridge, Mauritson, Michel-Schlumberger, Quivira, and Ridge Lytton Springs.

Rockpile AVA

The Rockpile AVA consists of Coastal Range hills (800-2100’) that rise above Dry Creek Valley and Lake Sonoma, which was created in 1982 with the construction of Warm Springs Dam, created to control the frequent flooding of the valley floor by Dry Creek.

Originally considered part of Dry Creek Valley, Rockpile is one of the most dramatic AVAs in Sonoma County. It is characterized by steep rocky terrain, strong coastal 10-15 mph wind gusts, and highly diverse soils, with exposure and terrain that are partly the result of its location right on the Healdsburg-Rogers Creek earthquake fault. Its high altitude and the inversion layer caused by Lake Sonoma puts it above the fog line, giving it extra hours of sunlight as well as temperatures 10-15° cooler than the valley below. Temperature swings are also moderate compared to lower altitude vineyards. Annual rainfall ranges from 50-73 inches.

Originally sheep ranch territory, the modern period of Rockpile began in the early 1990s with the establishment of the 2000’ high Rockpile Vineyard by Rod and Cathy Park. They were followed by Gary Branham (Branham Rockpile Vineyard) and several others, including the Mauritson family, which has 34 acres planted in eight different blocks. The Mauritsons also farm other vineyards in the AVA, and in total manage over half the plantings of the AVA.

The wild topography and thin soils, high altitudes and diverse exposures (predominantly southwest and northeast) of the vineyards provide excellent growing conditions for several varieties, especially Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Syrah and Bordeaux varieties. The vines are stressed by the poor soils and gusting winds, leading to low yields and intense fruit.

Zinfandel and Petite Sirah are the dominant varieties in the Rockpile AVA. The Zinfandels are renown for their elegant, intense red-fruited character and high acidity. Zinfandel, especially, benefits from the moderate temperatures and extended hang time, which contribute to uniform ripening and avoid the raisining that can occur in high heat.

While there are no wineries in Rockpile, several wineries source fruit from the AVA, including Mauritson and Branham, which make their own estate wines. Wineries purchasing fruit from Rockpile include Bella Vineyards, Bruliam Wines, Robert Biale Vineyards, Carole Shelton, and Seghesio.

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7 See Gerald Asher’s artful essay on Dry Creek Valley in A Vineyard in My Glass (University of California Press, 2011).
8 The number of fine growers and wineries is too numerous to mention; a full listing and interactive map can be found at drycreekvalley.org.
Coastal Warm Climate AVAs: Selected Producers and their Wines

Alexander Valley Winery has been producing high quality wines since the mid-1970s from the 600-acre Wetzel estate vineyard purchased by growers Maggie and Harry Wetzel in 1962. Bordered by the Russian River and the Mayacamas Mountains, the property was the homestead of the valley’s namesake Cyrus Alexander. Cyrus, a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend, is their benchmark Bordeaux and is a super wine; Sin Zin is their most popular wine. Their regular Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah also showed well in our tasting.

Alexander Valley Vineyards 2012 Estate Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($18) 90 This is a well-balanced, fruit rich Chardonnay that’s also excellent value. It shows restrained aromas of orchard fruit and flint and has a spritzhy attack with a nicely balanced fruit and mineral palate. Matured in 70% stainless, 30% French oak. Alexander Valley Vineyards 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley ($22) 89 The 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon displays ripe aromas of black currant fruit, cassis, and graphite. On the palate it offers ripe and juicy blackberry fruit with good flavor intensity, soft round tannins and a pleasant finish. Excellent value. Alexander Valley Vineyards 2012 Syrah Alexander Valley ($20) 88 The 2012 Syrah displays a dark ruby color and aromas of sweet and spicy black fruit. On the palate it has earthy black fruit and herbs, firm dry tannins, and a firm finish. Alexander Valley Vineyards 2012 Sin Zin Alexander Valley ($20) 87+ The Sin Zin is an easy drinking wine with red berry fruit flavors and dried herbs. It is soft on the palate with red fruit up front, light tannins and a crisp finish. Its no sin to drink this Zin. Alexander Valley Vineyards 2010 Cyrus Alexander Valley ($65) 92 The 2010 Cyrus is this estate’s top-of-the-line premium Bordeaux blend of 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Merlot, 18% Cabernet Franc and small amounts of Petit Verdot and Malbec. It displays rich aromas of blackberry and cassis on the nose, followed by ripe lush black fruit on the palate. It has a soft texture, full mouth feel and polished tannins. A delicious wine honoring Alexander Valley pioneer Cyrus Alexander. Anticipated drinking: now until 2022-2024.


Anakota These Cabernet Sauvignons are crafted by Bordelais winemaker Pierre Seillan from two estates in Knight’s Valley that belong to Jackson Family Wines. One estate is the Helena Dakota Vineyard of 12.4 acres that sits below Mount St. Helena at an elevation of 750 ft. The other is the 60-acre Helena Montana Vineyard located at 950 feet above sea level. Both estates benefit from cool mountain breezes that slow down the ripening of the grapes and result in full-bodied wines of elegance and finesse. Anakota’s inaugural vintage was in 2001. These are outstanding Cabernets and show the enormous potential of high elevation vineyards in Knights Valley.

Anakota 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Dakota Vineyard Knights Valley ($75) 92 The 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Dakota Vineyard offers ripe blackberry fruit on the nose with black pepper, violets and a hint of minerals. Aged 15 months in new French oak, it is rich and concentrated on the palate with black and red fruit flavors, soft and round tannins and a persistent finish. The Helena Dakota Vineyard consists of 12.4 acres of silt-loam soil located at 750 feet in the foothills of Mount St. Helena.

Anakota 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Montana Vineyard Knights Valley ($75) 93 The 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Helena Montana Vineyard has an opaque ruby color and appears somewhat more red-fruited, perfumed and elegant than the Helena Dakota Vineyard. Both are nonetheless quite similar in character offering rich ripe flavors with hints of smoke, minerals and spice, firm round tannins, and a long persistent finish.

Arrowood Vineyards and Winery Richard and partner Alis Arrowood founded this winery in 1985. During this period, Richard was winemaker at Chateau St. Jean where he had established an outstanding reputation producing some of California’s first single vineyard wines. Today, Arrowood is owned by the Jackson Family, and the wines are made by Heidi von der Mehden, who became winemaker in 2010. Richard Arrowood devotes himself full-time to making wines for his estate winery Ampola Creek. Arrowood Winery is one of Sonoma Valley’s finest red wine producers. Its Cabernet Sauvignon Monte Rosso and Syrah Saralee Vineyard are standouts.

Arrowood 2011 Chardonnay Alary Ranch Russian River Valley ($35) 91+ From the certified organic, Russian River benchland Alary Ranch vineyard, planted to an assortment of Dijon and Rued clones. The wine is rich, showing leesy mango and tropical fruit with a light hazelnut accent. It’s creamy in texture and well-balanced. All barrel fermented, full mellow, and aged sur lie for 9 months. Arrowood 2011 Chardonnay Réserve Spéciale Sonoma Coast ($45) 92 This is a barrel selection from three different vineyards in the Russian River Valley and Carneros. The wine is big and soft, but it’s also bright and elegant. It’s rich and layered.
and very full in the mouth. Delicious! **Arrowood 2012 Viognier Saralee’s Vineyard Russian River Valley ($30)** 91 One of the best Viogniers we’ve had from Sonoma, it has a bright, floral honeysuckle and stone fruit nose that’s mirrored flavorwise. It has excellent freshness and acidity. Fermented and aged in neutral barrels with no lees stirring.

**Arrowood 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County ($35)** 88+ This Cabernet Sauvignon is a blend of 96% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot. It offers fresh red cherries with herbs and hints of spicy concentrated fruit. It is soft and round on the palate with hints of cedar, ripe tannins and an earthy dark finish.

**Arrowood 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Monte Rosso Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($80)** 92 The 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon Monte Rosso is a highly aromatic wine with aromas and flavors of blackberry, chocolate, hints of toast and leather. Aged 24 months in 43% new French and American oak, it is an earthy wine with big firm tannins and a long finish.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Arrowood 2011 Syrah Saralee’s Vineyard Russian River Valley ($35) 91 Arrowood 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Smothers Remick Ridge Vineyards Sonoma Valley ($70) 91

**Bedrock Wine Company 2012 Dolinsek Ranch Heritage Wine Russian River Valley ($38)** 92 A blend of old mixed blacks planted in 1910, this wine reveals a pure dark red cherry, rose petals, and red raspberry jam bouquet. Red fruit, plum, and earthy notes continue on the palate, too. It’s firmly structured with rich, thick extract on the finish. Absolutely delicious.

**Bedrock Wine Company 2012 Lorenzo’s Heirloom Wine Dry Creek Valley ($50)** 93 This Zinfandel-based field blend comes from dry-farmed, 100+ year old Dry Creek bench land vines. The wine shows Dry Creek’s refined red fruit on a soft, lush attack with bright acidity and freshness. It’s full in the mouth with notes of garrigue and underbrush, finishing with firm, dry tannins.

**Bedrock Wine Company 2012 Old Vine Zinfandel Sonoma Valley ($33)** 91 Made from Sonoma Valley old vineyards planted between 1888 and 1940 with about 40% of the fruit from the Bedrock vineyard and about 19% of the fruit mixed blocks. The wine shows spicy dark red fruit, boysenberry, and cracked pepper. It’s very fresh and bright with excellent acidity, polished tannins, and a velvet smooth mouth feel. Very good value.

**Bedrock Wine Company 2012 Pagani Ranch Heritage Wine Sonoma Valley ($45)** 93 A Zinfandel-based blend sourced from the old vines (planted in 1880) of the Pagani Ranch at the foot of Sonoma Mountain, the cool evenings give this wine a Russian River accent. The wine is highly perfumed with effusive dark fruit. It has a soft, velvet smooth attack and is pure and densely flavored, finishing quite dry.

**Other Wines Reviewed:** Bedrock Wine Company 2012 Syrah Griffin’s Lair Sonoma Coast ($45) 92 Bedrock Wine Company 2011 Zinfandel Monte Rosso Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($45) 93

**Bella 2011 Barrel 32 Sonoma ($55)** 93 This wine is the best 9 barrels of Zinfandel from the Dry Creek and Alexander Valley, including the Maple Vineyard in Dry Creek and the Todd’s Creek Vineyard in Alexander Valley. Aged 18 months in 20% new French oak, the wine is exceptionally good and limited in supply. It reveals spicy, pure dark red fruit with savory notes on a big, lush and very rich, round palate. Very, very good.

**Bella 2011 Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($25)** 90 This blend of several Dry Creek vineyards is a good benchmark for the red fruited Zinfandel from this appellation. It reveals red cherry and rose petal with earth and herbal notes. It’s delicious and easy drinking with a pure red maraschino cherry note on a nicely balanced palate. 14.7% alc.

**Bella 2011 Zinfandel Lilly Hill Estate Dry Creek Valley ($45)** 92 The 85 year old estate vineyard Lilly Hill produces this rich and intensely flavored wine. It shows pure black cherry and black raspberry fruit on a soft, lush and mouth filling palate. Quite spicy aromatically, it’s very smooth on the palate, finishing rich and long.

**Bella 2012 Zinfandel Rocky Ridge Vineyard Rockpile ($45)** 92 This bold, earthy Zinfandel comes from the 1800’ high ridge top of Rockpile where the soil is very thin, and the yields are very low. It shows spicy dark cherry, blackberry, slate and even meaty notes on a lush, round, savory, and complex palate. Finishes with velvet tannins and persistent savory notes.
Benziger Family Winery 2012 Sauvignon Blanc North Coast ($15) 87 This Sauvignon Blanc is done in the ripe, California style with light honeyed citrus notes. It’s pleasant, easy drinking with flavors of ripe grapefruit and lemon notes that persist on the finish. Benziger Family Winery 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma County ($29) 88 This Chardonnay is a good every day wine offering aromas of orchard fruit and lemon citrus. It has a creamy mouth feel with good acidity, and freshness on the finish. Benziger Family Winery 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($29) 88 The 2012 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is a blend of several vineyards on the Sonoma Coast exhibiting different climates and soil types. It has a dark garnet color and aromas of black cherry. It has good concentration of red berry fruit on the palate with a soft texture and a big dry finish. Benziger Family Winery 2011 Merlot Sonoma County ($19) 88 The 2011 Merlot displays notes of plum and cola and hints of savory herbs. It is earthy and soft on the attack and is easy drinking with firm round tannins and a persistent satisfying finish. Benziger Family Winery 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County ($17) 87 The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon offers spicy black currant fruit with hints of black olive. It is quite herbaceous at this stage of development with hints of coffee and spice. The tannins are firm and the finish rather short. Benziger 2012 de Coelo Quintus Sonoma Coast ($75) 91+ The de Coelo Quintus is a 100% Pinot Noir sourced from the Benziger 25-acre hilltop estate vineyard on the Sonoma Coast. It is one of two cuvées produced from the property, the other being Terra Neuma. The Quintus displays a medium dark ruby color and has pure and concentrated red kirsch flavors with a hint of earth. It is soft and round on the palate, beautifully balanced and has a lovely texture with a refined mouth feel and a persistent finish. A gorgeous wine that is drinking well now and will be even better in a couple of years.

**Other Wines Reviewed:**
- Benziger Family Winery 2011 Signaterra, Bella Luna Russian River Valley ($49) 89 Benziger Family Winery 2011 Tribute Sonoma Valley ($80) 89 Beringer 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Knights Valley ($30) 90 The 2011 Beringer Cabernet Sauvignon Knights Valley offers loads of black currant and cassis fruit. It is very soft, smooth and elegant on the palate with good flavor, round tannins, and a persistent finish. Excellent value too.
- Blue Rock Vineyard Kenny Kahn, the owner of this small artisanal winery, is a passionate vigneron. He is one of the producers in Alexander Valley who are deeply committed to producing authentic, high quality estate wines. Blue Rock currently has 46 acres of vineyards planted with five Bordeaux varietals and three acres of hillside Syrah. Blue Rock’s vineyards are densely planted with low yielding vines and are managed following sustainable agricultural practices. We tasted Kenny’s wines earlier this year and again at the winery during our Sonoma visit.

**Benziger** This family winery was founded in 1980 by Mike Benziger when he purchased an 85-acre estate on the Sonoma Mountain above the village of Glen Ellen. Located in the Sonoma Mountain AVA, the estate vineyards were planted between 1981 and 1989 in an unusual terraced volcanic bowl of diverse soils and are farmed sustainably, organically or biodynamically. Benziger produces basic level single varietals and various premium level estate-bottled wines from different AVAs; both are reviewed here. The premium level wines are beautifully made, but those of the 2011 vintage were not up to standards due to the cold weather and rain. In contrast, the 2012 Coelo Quintus Pinot Noir from the Benziger Sonoma Coast estate showed beautifully. Several wines produced by Joe Benziger under the Imagery label in the Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak AVA are reviewed elsewhere.

**Blue Rock 2011 Baby Blue Bordeaux blend Alexander Valley ($25) 89** Made from younger vines, the 2011 Baby Blue is a blend of 61% Cabernet Sauvignon and small amounts of other Bordeaux varietals and 5% Syrah. It is made primarily from young vines of the estate and is meant to be drunk early. It is ruby purple in color and offers aromas and flavors blueberry, violets, chocolate and loam. It is soft on the attack with good acidity, followed by firm tannins and a long finish. A delicious wine that probably would be best drunk with food. Blue Rock 2010 Best Barrels Merlot Alexander Valley ($60) 91 The 2010 Best Barrels Merlot is sourced from a special two-acre parcel. It displays a dark ruby opaque core and aromas of blueberry, plum, sweet charred oak, chocolate and earth on the nose. Aged in 100% new French oak, it is soft and lush on the palate with smoky red and blue fruit flavors, soft round tannins, and a long finish. Blue Rock 2010 Best Barrels Malbec Alexander Valley ($60) 92 The 2010 Best Barrels Malbec displays an opaque ruby color and aromas of blackberry, charred oak, violets and earth. Aged in 100% new French oak, it reveals highly concentrated fruit and charred smoky oak notes, soft firm tannins, and a persistent finish. This is a superb wine reminiscent of some of the finest Argentine Malbecs from the Valle de Uco. Blue Rock 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley ($45) 91 This 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon boasts ripe and earthy black currant fruit with notes of lead pencil sandalwood, and dried black cherries. It is elegant and refined with good concentration, firm dry tannins and a long finish. It is still rather closed in on itself and would benefit from a couple of years of further aging. If you can’t resist drinking it now, be sure to decant it for at least a couple of hours.

**Black Stallion 2011 Zinfandel Rockpile ($40) 91** This Napa winery traveled to Rockpile to find the special dark red
cherry fruit that shows in this wine. It’s soft and lush with big up-front fruit, very good palate density, and a long finish. The purity of the wine is impressive.

Branham Wines 2011 Zinfandel Rockpile ($30) 92 This Rockpile Zin is elegant, beautifully balanced and a joy to drink. It reveals spicy black cherry fruit with an herbal edge on a refined and delicious, layered palate of impressive depth. Beautifully made.

Bruliam Wines 2011 Zinfandel Rocky Ridge Vineyard Rockpile ($42) 88 An earthy wine with a dried fruit character. It’s soft and light on the attack and shows dense, very ripe fruit flavors with some tannic grip. It’s pleasant drinking but lacks the fresh, fruit forward character of many Rockpile Zins.

Capture Wines These topnotch wines were produced by winemaker Denis Malbec from the 35-acre Capture Estate Vineyard that rises nearly 2500 feet above the Alexander Valley floor in Sonoma County. Since the release of these wines, Capture Wines closed its doors and its assets are being sold to new investors, who were not known at the time of publication.

Capture Wines 2010 Harmonie Red Wine Pine Mountain Cloverdale Par ($120) 94 The 2010 Harmonie is a delicious Bordeaux blend, exemplary of the kind of big elegant reds which can be produced at high elevation vineyards in Sonoma County. It is lush and ripe in style, yet elegant. It boasts fresh and dense blackberry and cassis flavors with hints of oak and earth. Aged in French barriques, 80% new, it is a beautifully polished wine with big tannic grip and a persistent finish. Elegant and in need of further bottle aging. Capture Wines 2010 Alliance Pine Mountain Cloverdale Park ($90) 91 The 2010 Alliance is not as evolved as the Harmonie and is much lighter in style. It offers lovely black fruit aromas and concentrated black fruit flavors but not as dense as Harmonie. It has firm tannins and a long finish. Enjoy from 2013 to 2023.

Carol Shelton Wines This eponymous winery, was founded by Carol Shelton and her husband in 2000 and has since become widely recognized for its good quality and moderately priced Zinfandels. The winery also produces very good Petite Sirah, Carignane and Pinot Noir. The Carol Shelton Zins and other wines are sourced from a wide variety of vineyards in Rockpile and neighboring appellations. The old vine Carignane reviewed here is one of our favorites.

Carol Shelton 2011 Karma Zinfandel Bastoni Vineyard Sonoma County ($30) 89 The Karma Zin is a bit rustic with earthy, underbrush dominating dark plum fruit. It’s rich and flavorful with good concentration and ripe fruit. Carol Shelton 2012 Old Vine Carignane Alexander Valley ($28) 90+ The Old Vine Carignane is sourced from 60+ year, sustainably dry-farmed old vines from the Oat Valley Vineyard in Alexander Valley. It is a delicious wine with a soft lush attack on the palate and excellent dark plum and spice flavors with good structure for aging. Aged 15 months in American oak. Carol Shelton 2012 Pinot Noir Larson Vineyard Carneros ($30) 89+ The Pinot Noir Larson Vineyard displays a light ruby color and pleasant aromas of red cherry fruit. The wine is flavorful and elegant on the plate with good concentration and has a slight red berry underbrush note on the finish. Carol Shelton 2011 Petite Sirah Reserve Rockpile Vineyard Rockpile ($40) 89 This Petite Sirah is sourced from one of the first vineyards to be planted in the Rockpile AVA back in 1988. It is soft and lush on the attack with a spicy dark plum character. Aged 20 months in American and French oak, 30% new, it is ripe and moderately concentrated with red berry fruit flavors, sweet oak, firm tannins and an elegant finish. Carol Shelton 2011 Rocky Reserve Zinfandel Florence Vineyard Rockpile ($35) 88 The Rocky Reserve offers lots of spice, earth and dark plum fruit on a moderately concentrated palate. It offers purity, freshness and prickly acidity, finishing dry. Made from 1400’ high vineyard parcels.

Chalk Hill Vineyards. Founded in 1972 by Fred Furth, this 1236-acre estate is currently owned by William P. (Bill Foley) of Foley Family Wines. The estate includes 277 acres of vineyards with a range of microclimates, soils and exposures and a wide variety of clones, especially Dijon clones of Chardonnay. Lisa Bishop Forbes is Chalk Hill Estate’s Director of Winemaking; she previously worked at Phelps, Dry Creek and David Ramey wineries. The winery produces a wide variety of delicious wines, including first-rate Sauvignon Blancs, Chardonnays, and a Proprietary Estate Red.

Chalk Hill Estate 2012 Estate Sauvignon Blanc Chalk Hill AVA ($33) 90 The Estate Sauvignon Blanc is a mix of clones. It presents melon and passion fruit aromas and flavors of ripe citrus, Crenshaw melon, and a hint of green bean. It’s clean, flavorful, and finishes with crisp mineral notes. Chalk Hill Estate 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Clone 378 Chalk Hill ($40) 90+ This partially barrel fermented, single clone Sauvignon Blanc reveals sweet tropical fruit with leesy notes and a hint of vanilla bean. It’s rich, creamy and very long lasting but also has surprisingly high alcohol (14.7%). The oak fermented portion (55%) sees 10 months in barrel. 85% Sauvignon Blanc, 11% Sauvignon Gris and 4% Sauvignon Musque. Chalk Hill Estate 2011 Sauvignon Blanc Musque Clone Chalk Hill ($40) 91 The single clone, single vineyard Sauvignon Blanc comes from Chalk Hill’s coolest estate parcel. That combined with the coolness of the vintage has resulted in a wine absent the usual Muscat notes. It’s nonetheless very pleasant with light
grass and passion fruit aromas, vibrant fresh fruit flavors, and a bright, persistent finish. Fermented 10 months in French oak, 12% new. Chalk Hill Estate 2012 North Slope Pinot Gris Chalk Hill ($30) 88+ Medium yellow straw. Barrel fermented in neutral oak, this Pinot Gris made from two Alsatian clones offers up chalky mineral and dusty hay scents. It’s soft on the attack with a subdued fruit character and low acidity. Chalk Hill Estate 2012 Estate Chardonnay Chalk Hill ($45) 92 Complex bouquet with integrated ripe orchard fruit and light toasted oak scents. Lovely mouth feel, lush without being over the top, the wine is creamy with well integrated oak and fruit, finishing on a very pleasant, subtle toasted oak note. Fermented with native yeast, 100% malo, 11 months in 40% new French oak. Very good.

Other Wines Reviewed: Chalk Hill Estate 2010 Estate Red Chalk Hill ($70) 93

Chateau St. Jean Located at the foot of Sugarloaf Ridge in the Sonoma Valley near Kenwood, Chateau St. Jean produces excellent reserve and vineyard designated Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs and a flagship red-blend called Cinq Cepages. A pioneer in vineyard designation, Chateau St. Jean sources grapes from its estate vineyards and outstanding vineyards farmed under contract in Alexander Valley, Sonoma Valley, Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast. Winemaking is directed by veteran winemaker Margo Van Staaveran, who has been with Chateau St. Jean over 30 years.

Chateau St. Jean 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($20) 90 Spectacular value! This vineyard blend expresses orchard fruit but also has some more tropical notes. It has a nice, round mouth feel but is also crisp on the edge. Surprisingly refined, given the price. This Chardonnay is mostly (80%) fermented in stainless steel, but nicely integrated vanilla and oak still come through. Chateau St. Jean 2010 Chardonnay Reserve Sonoma County ($25) 92 A blend of top Sonoma vineyards, this wine is in the blockbuster style with an extravagant citrus and melon perfume and lovely flavors of ripe rich yellow fruit with hints of citrus and rich toasted oak. Super dense and flavorful but with bright acidity, too. Chateau St. Jean 2011 Chardonnay Robert Young Vineyard Alexander Valley ($25) 90 Medium yellow straw. A very attractive and approachable Chardonnay showing nectarine and Meyer lemon, the latter from the Robert Young clone. It has an expansive but suave texture in the tradition of the ripe, California style. Goes through full malo. Delicious. Chateau St. Jean 2012 La Petite Etolie Fume Blanc Russian River Valley ($22) 91 A very well done Fume Blanc from winemaker Margo van Staaveren. Many aroma threads and flavors are interwoven into a complex and interesting wine, including green tea, lemon zest, green grass, flinty minerals, and well-integrated oak. 100% whole cluster press, mostly barrel fermented, sur lie but not stirred. One of Sonoma’s best oaked Sauvignon Blancs.

Chateau St. Jean 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($21) 89 The Chateau St. Jean 2012 Pinot Noir offers aromas of fresh red berries with a hint of tea. It is soft and round on the palate with good intensity of flavor, excellent balance, and polished tannins on the finish. Easy to drink and enjoy this great value Pinot Noir.

Other Wines Reviewed: Chateau St. Jean 2011 Pinot Noir Russian River Valley ($65) 91 Chateau St. Jean 2011 Cinq Cepages Sonoma County ($75) 92

Clos du Bois Located at the foot of Sugarloaf Ridge in the Sonoma Valley near Kenwood, Chateau St. Jean produces excellent reserve and vineyard designated Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs and a flagship red-blend called Cinq Cepages. A pioneer in vineyard designation, Chateau St. Jean sources grapes from its estate vineyards and outstanding vineyards farmed under contract in Alexander Valley, Sonoma Valley, Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast. Winemaking is directed by veteran winemaker Margo Van Staaveran, who has been with Chateau St. Jean over 30 years.

Clos du Bois 2010 Briarcrest Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley ($60) 92 The 2010 Briarcrest Cabernet Sauvignon is a well-crafted wine exhibiting aromas of ripe black cherry fruit with a hint of toast on the nose. Aged 25 months in new French oak, it is medium-bodied and elegant on the palate with good density of flavor, silky tannins and a long finish. This wine takes on depth after it is open a while so consider decanting to enable it to breath and displays its qualities. Clos du Bois 2010 Marlstone Alexander Valley ($60) 91 The 2010 Marlstone is a delicious Cabernet-based proprietary red blend. It offers ripe black currant and cassis fruit with a hint of red berries on the nose. It is full-bodied on the palate revealing dense pure black fruit flavors, a soft texture, firm tannins and a persistent finish.
Dashe Cellars. Michael and Anne Dashe co-founded Dashe Cellars in 1996 in Dry Creek Valley. Dashe focuses on crafting single-vineyard wines sourced from exceptional vineyards in Sonoma County. It specializes in Zinfandel but also produces Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, and other varieties. Michael and Anne follow traditional and natural winemaking techniques including small-lot fermentation, the use of indigenous yeasts and little or no fining or filtration. Dashe produces exceptional Zinfandel wines like those reviewed here.

Dashe 2011 Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($26) 88
Made from five small, family-owned Dry Creek vineyards, this wine offers spicy, ripe red and black berries, finishing quite dry. An easy going, easy drinking wine that offers near term pleasure. Not nearly as good as the 2010 vintage, which showed deeper, earthier fruit. Dashe 2009 Zinfandel Louvau Vineyard Old Vines Dry Creek Valley ($35) 89
This Zinfandel reveals dark berry fruit and is brambly in character offering big earthy flavors of blackberry and plum. It has good structure and firm round tannins with a pleasant finish. Give it an hour to open up and you will be rewarded. Dashe 2009 Zinfandel Florence Vineyard Dry Creek Valley ($35) 89
The 2009 Zinfandel Louvau Vineyard Old Vines Dry Creek Valley is a juicy and flavorful wine offering flavors of pure black raspberry fruit and toasted oak. It is very ripe, dense and peppery with soft round tannins and a good structure on the finish. The grapes are sourced from low-yielding old vines so that only small quantities are made of this wine annually.

Dry Creek Vineyard
This family-owned winery, founded by David Stare, has been growing grapes and making wine in Dry Creek Valley since 1972. It currently produces Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Zinfandel and Bordeaux varieties, all of excellent quality. David Stare was a true pioneer of Sauvignon Blanc in Dry Creek Valley ignoring the advice of experts who advised against planting the variety. Happily for wine enthusiasts, he’s had good success with it.

Dry Creek Vineyard 2013 Dry Chenin Blanc Clarksburg ($12) 88+
It’s not that easy to find a good California Chenin Blanc, so it’s a pleasant surprise to find this nicely balanced, easy drinking one. It is clean and perfumed, showing fresh peach and garden herbs and is round and full on the palate with stone fruit and juicy tropical fruit.

Has just a hint of residual sugar. Dry Creek Vineyard 2013 Fume Blanc Dry Creek Valley ($14) 89
This is quite a substantial wine with robust flavors of ripe citrus, lemon zest, and a hint of bitter grapefruit pith. Brisk acidity, good fruit intensity and subtle oak all combine to yield a very enjoyable wine. Dry Creek Vineyard 2012 Heritage Vines Zinfandel Sonoma County ($20) 89
This wine is made from younger (20 years) vines, 85% Zinfandel and 15% Petite Sirah. It’s easy and very pleasant drinking with notes of freshly cracked pepper, dark red fruit. There’s good acidity and a vibrant, youthful personality. Dry Creek Vineyard 2012 Old Vine Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($30) 92
This complex, intensely aromatic and deeply flavored wine is made from very low-yielding, 90+ year old vines. Some vines date from the late 19th century. It shows a perfume of black raspberry and cherry and delicious, lush fruit with an earthy richness on the palate, finishing long with round tannins.

Other Wines Reviewed:

Dry Creek Vineyard 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Creek Valley (90+)
Dry Creek Vineyard 2011 The Mariner Dry Creek Valley ($40) 90

Dutcher Crossing
Debra Mathy, originally from Wisconsin, is the owner. Kerry Damskey, a graduate of UC Davis and Stanford, is winemaker. While the winery produces several varieties and its signature is mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, our focus is on its Zinfandel, especially those sourced from Tom and Tina Maple’s bench land vineyard on the east side of Dry Creek; their grapes have the intense and pure red fruit character for which Dry Creek is famous. The Dutcher Crossing Zinfandel wines are made in a pure fruit forward, easy drinking style that lends itself to early consumption, which is what most consumers want.

Dutcher Crossing Vineyards 2012 Zinfandel Bernier Sibary Vineyard Dry Creek Valley ($43) 90
Medium dark red. This Zinfandel reveals lovely purity of up front, Dry Creek red fruit. No noticeable wood despite spending 14 months in 30% new oak. This is a refined and pure wine of moderate depth that’s best for early drinking.

A blend of 75% Zinfandel, 10% Petite Sirah, 10% Carignan, and 5% Mourvedre. Dutcher Crossing Vineyards 2012 Zinfandel Maple Vineyard Dry Creek Valley ($42) 91
Made from dry-farmed, head-trained vines planted in 1940, this is another refined, delicious wine that shows beautiful up-front aromas and flavors that fade a bit on the mid-palate. It offers black raspberry, raspberry liqueur, and a hint of vanilla from 9 months in 35% new French oak. A blend of 92% Zinfandel and 8% Petite Sirah. 15.3% alc. Dutcher Crossing Vineyards 2012 Zinfandel Maple Vineyard Bill’s Block Dry Creek Valley ($51) 91
Bill’s Block is 60 to 80 year old vines of Zinfandel (85%), Petite Sirah (7%), Carignan (4%), and Mataro (4%). It’s dark ruby red...
with lively notes of red raspberry, red berry liqueur, and a hint of peppery tobacco leaf. The wine has good density and elegance, showing pure red fruit extract on the finish. 15.1% alc.

Ferrari Carano A highly successful family-owned and operated winery, Ferrari Carano was started in 1981 by Don and Rhonda Carano. Their winery is based in Dry Creek Valley, but its operations extend to estate vineyards in several Sonoma County AVAs. It produces its white wines at the Estate Winery in Dry Creek Valley and its reds at its Mountain Winery in Alexander Valley. It has a large and diverse portfolio that includes excellent single vineyard premium Chardonnays, Cabernet Sauvignons (in the PreVail series), and blends like Trésor, all reasonably priced.

Ferrari-Carano 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Alexander Valley ($52) 91 The Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve is sourced from Ferrari-Carano’s dry farmed, low-vigor LookOut Mountain/West Face Vineyard situated at 800-1200 ft elevation. It is bright and flavorful with rich black fruit and cassis and new oak. It is nicely balanced with polished tannins and has a long finish. Ferrari-Carano 2007 Prevail Back Forty Alexander Valley ($85) 94 The Prevail Back Forty is a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon sourced from low-yielding vines in rocky soils of Alexander Valley. It offers rich aromas of blackberry and cassis fruit with earth and mineral notes. It has an elegant mouth feel with rich, dense and complex flavors. Aged 22 months in barrel and three years in bottle before release. This wine still needs an additional 3-4 years in the bottle to evolve but will age well for 10-15 years minimum. Ferrari-Carano 2009 Prevail West Face Alexander Valley ($55) 94 This is a superb blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon and 37% Syrah sourced from Ferrari-Carano’s LookOut Mountain in the cooler, southern part of the Alexander Valley. It boasts bold blackberry and black cherry fruit, licorice and leather on the nose. On the palate it is elegant and silky with dense fruit flavors but has firm tannins that will need another 3-5 years to fully integrate. Matured 22 months in French barrels (55% new) and 14 months in bottle prior to release in February 2014. Ferrari-Carano 2012 Tresor Sonoma County ($52) 93 The 2012 Tresor is a blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon and small amounts of Malbec, Merlot and other Bordeaux varieties. It offers pure, dense blackberry and cassis fruit on the nose with herbal notes and hints of leather, and tobacco. It is rich and lush on the palate showing great intensity and purity of flavor with lovely spice, firm round tannins and a long finish.

Francis Ford Coppola This large winery, owned by the famed movie director Francis Ford Coppola, produces fairly priced, good quality wines. The wines are categorized under three different collections. The Director’s Collection, a series of wines to “showcase Sonoma County” as a premier wine growing region, the Diamond Collection which offers “wines of character and complexity” at affordable prices, and the Votre Santé which is a tribute to Francis’ paternal grandmother. The wines are made under the direction of the talented winemaker Corey Beck, who is making European-styled wines that are fruit forward and elegant with good flavor concentration, low alcohol levels and overall balance. The wines reviewed here are their tasty Pinot Noirs and Bordeaux blends, including their new flagship Bordeaux blend Archimedes.

Francis Coppola 2012 Pinot Noir Director’s Cut Russian River Valley ($27) 89 The Director’s Cut displays fragrant red berry and plum fruit with light toast on the nose followed by ripe fruit flavors on the palate. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, it has a round mouth feel with soft firm tannins and a satisfying finish. Francis Coppola 2012 Pinot Noir Reserve Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($38) 91+ The Pinot Noir Reserve Dutton Ranch displays very fragrant aromas of red berry fruit, earth and toasted oak. It has a ripe mouth feel and a complex palate with good minerality, acidity and a long finish. Excellent. Francis Coppola 2011 Archimedes Alexander Valley ($60) 91+ The Archimedes is Francis Coppola’s new and delicious flagship Bordeaux blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc crafted by the talented winemaker, Corey Beck. The wine is soft and polished with ripe black cherry and plum fruit aromas and flavors and a hint of sandalwood. Aged 24 months in French oak, it is medium-bodied with excellent balance and flavor concentration. While not a blockbuster, it is a refined and elegant blend. The wine is designated Alexander Valley although the grapes were also sourced from the Silverwood Ranch, a high altitude vineyard in the Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak AVA.

Other Wines Reviewed: Ferrari-Carano 2013 Fumé Blanc Sonoma ($14) 89 Ferrari-Carano 2012 Chardonnay Dominique Russian River Valley ($38) 92 Ferrari-Carano 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma ($23) 90 Ferrari-Carano 2011 Chardonnay Fiorella Russian River Valley ($30) 91+ Ferrari-Carano 2011 Chardonnay Tre Terre Russian River Valley ($33) 90 Ferrari-Carano 2011 Chardonnay Emelia’s Cuvée Russian River Valley ($30) 92

Ferrari-Carano 2011 Chardonnay Tre Terre Russian River Valley ($27) 89 The Director’s Cut displays fragrant red berry and plum fruit with light toast on the nose followed by ripe fruit flavors on the palate. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, it has a round mouth feel with soft firm tannins and a satisfying finish. Francis Coppola 2012 Pinot Noir Reserve Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley ($38) 91+ The Pinot Noir Reserve Dutton Ranch displays very fragrant aromas of red berry fruit, earth and toasted oak. It has a ripe mouth feel and a complex palate with good minerality, acidity and a long finish. Excellent. Francis Coppola 2011 Archimedes Alexander Valley ($60) 91+ The Archimedes is Francis Coppola’s new and delicious flagship Bordeaux blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc crafted by the talented winemaker, Corey Beck. The wine is soft and polished with ripe black cherry and plum fruit aromas and flavors and a hint of sandalwood. Aged 24 months in French oak, it is medium-bodied with excellent balance and flavor concentration. While not a blockbuster, it is a refined and elegant blend. The wine is designated Alexander Valley although the grapes were also sourced from the Silverwood Ranch, a high altitude vineyard in the Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak AVA.

Other Wines Reviewed: Francis Coppola 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Director’s Cut Alexander Valley ($22) 89+ Francis Coppola 2012 Claret Black Label ($21) 91
Frei Brothers 2012 Chardonnay Reserve Russian River Valley ($20) 91 The 2012 Chardonnay Reserve displays a lovely bright yellow straw gold color and aromas of fruit, smoke, and hints of vanilla, nutmeg and butter. On the palate it reveals nicely integrated ripe fruit flavors and oak along with a soft texture, excellent balance and a long persistent finish. Frei Brothers 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Alexander Valley ($27) 89 The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon offers dark, earthy aromas with hints of dark berry fruit, tobacco, chocolate and minerals. It is rich and concentrated on the palate with a soft texture and a persistent finish. It should drink well over the next 5 years.

Frei Brothers 2012 Merlot Dry Creek Valley ($20) 90 This is a delicious wine that gets better and better in the glass. It offers aromas of black cherry and plum and rich layered flavors of ripe fruit. It has excellent structure, good firm tannins and a long finish. Frei Brothers 2012 Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($20) 88 The 2012 Zinfandel shows spicy, ripe, sweet fruit aromas with an herbal edge and flavors of the ripe red berry and plum fruit characteristic of Dry Creek. It has round firm tannins and a rather dry finish.

Garden Creek Vineyards Garden Creek Vineyards is one of the better small artisanal vineyards and wineries in Alexander Valley. It is owned and operated by the Miller family—Jim Miller, son Justin and wife Karin. They began producing wine in 2001 and currently craft about 700 cases of excellent quality Chardonnay and a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend. The Millers are deeply committed to organic and sustainable practices in the vineyard and winery and are exemplary small Sonoma County producers.

Garden Creek 2009 Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($45) 91+ Made with whole clusters with 72 hours on the skins, this is a rich, creamy, ebullient wine showing ripe peach and honeysuckle. It’s an unctuous, hedonistic wine that is absolutely delicious. Highly allocated.

Garden Creek 2011 Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($45) 91 A delicious, barrel-fermented Chardonnay using the Wente clone that spends 10 months on the fine lees with frequent stirring. The cool weather of the vintage gives the wine a special fresh, brightness, but it still expresses spicy peach and honeysuckle. Beautifully balanced. Only available to club members and at the cellar door.

Tessereaux Alexander Valley ($70) 89 The 2007 Tessereaux is a blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot and other Bordeaux varieties. Aged 24 months in French oak, 60% new, it offers rich dark cherry and cassis aromas with notes of cacao and toasted oak. On the palate it provides flavorful dark berry fruit with spicy and herbal notes, firm round tannins and has a very dry finish. Karen and Justin keep the wine in bottle for four years before release so the wine is ready to drink upon release.

Geyser Peak One of Sonoma’s oldest wineries, Geyser Peak was founded in Alexander Valley in 1880 and has been producing good quality wines at affordable prices. Its grapes are sourced from Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley and Sonoma Valley. Ondine Chattan has served as winemaker for close to 20 years. The winery was acquired by Accolade Wines of North America in 2012.

Geyser Peak 2011 Cabernet Walking Tree Alexander Valley ($28) 88 The Cabernet Walking Tree is a pleasant wine offering aromas of black currant and black cherry aromas with hints of wood spice. It reveals dark earthy flavors with notes of underbrush and round firm tannins.

Geyser Peak 2012 Chardonnay Water Bend Sonoma Valley ($22) 89 The Water Bend Chardonnay reveals nice ripe
Red Blend Tectonic Alexander Valley ($28) 90 The Red Blend Tectonic is a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend with a small amount of Petit Verdot. It offers fragrant blackcurrant and plum fruit on the nose with traces of herbs and toast. On the palate it reveals good ripeness, a soft texture and round tannins. It is highly approachable and pleasant drinking now and for the next 5+ years. **Geyser Peak 2009 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley** ($40) 87 The 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve offers aromas of blackberry with a hint of black cherry, red licorice and toast. It is very dry on the mid-palate with light fruit flavors and hard tannins on the back end. **Geyser Peak 2012 Sauvignon Blanc River Ranches Russian River Valley** ($22) 88 The Sauvignon Blanc shows green herbs on the nose that are also picked up on the palate. Richly flavored with good balance, but a bit overly herbaceous.

**Goldschmidt Vineyard**

Goldschmidt Vineyard was established in 1998 by Nick and Yolyn Goldschmidt. Nick Goldschmidt is originally from New Zealand and settled in Healdsburg in 1990 where he served as winemaker at Simi Winery, Allied Domeq Wines USA, and Beam Estate. Nick has served as consulting winemaker to Blue Rock in Alexander Valley and to wineries in Argentina and Chile. Goldschmidt Vineyard’s portfolio consists of excellent single vineyard, handcrafted, small production artisanal wines from the Alexander and Napa Valleys. The Sonoma Valley wines are reviewed here.

**Goldschmidt Vineyard 2012 Chelsea Goldschmidt Alexander Valley** ($17) 88 This is a fruit forward Merlot that offers dark red berries, spice and toasted oak. It is soft on the palate and easy drinking with round tannins and a pleasant and persistent finish. A delicious wine that is enjoyable to drink. **Goldschmidt Vineyard 2010 Forefathers Cabernet Sauvignon Lone Tree Vineyards Alexander Valley** ($50) 90+ Nick Goldschmidt’s 2010 Forefathers offers rich black currant fruit with notes of spicy herbs and a hint of pine. It is elegant and refined on the palate although not as lush and ripe tasting as the Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard It has firm round tannins at this stage of its development and should provide pleasant drinking over the next 10 years, at least. **Goldschmidt Vineyard 2011 Katherine Goldschmidt Cabernet Sauvignon Crazy Creek Alexander Valley** ($20) 91 The 2011 Katherine Goldschmidt Cabernet Sauvignon Crazy Creek is a delicious wine sourced from 20-year old vines of the Crazy Creek Vineyard in Alexander Valley. It offers red and black fruit aromas and concentrated rich dark fruit flavors with perfectly integrated oak. It is medium weight with soft and silky tannins, excellent balance and a long lingering finish. A great value. **Goldschmidt Vineyard 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Single Vineyard Selection Alexander Valley** ($50) 93 Opaque ruby in color, this bottling is perhaps the best of the fine wines tasted in this series. It offers ripe lush cassis flavors and rich toasted oak It is soft on the palate with good concentration of flavor, a velvet texture, and firm round silky tannins on the finish. A gorgeous wine that could easily be mistaken for a high priced Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon in a blind tasting.

**Gundlach Bundschu**

Gundlach Bundschu Winery 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma Coast ($27) 90 A very pleasant Chardonnay with a perfumed bouquet and a straightforward, flavorful palate showing orchard fruit, melon and toasted oak. A very good, traditionally-styled California Chardonnay. **Gundlach Bundschu Winery 2012 Gewürztraminer Sonoma Coast** ($23) 89 The 2012 Gewürztraminer is sourced from the Budschu family’s vineyard in the Mayacamas Mountains about eight miles north of the San Pablo Bay. Light and refreshing, the wine offers fragrant floral aromas and crisp dry passion and tropical fruit on the palate. **Gundlach Bundschu 2011 Merlot Sonoma County** ($30) 90 The 2011 Gundlach Bundschu Merlot is a delicious wine endowed with ripe, lush and flavorful black cherries and plum fruit. It has a velvet texture, remarkable depth and soft round tannins A delicious and approachable wine from an ideal growing area for Merlot. **Gundlach Bundschu 2011 Mountain Cuvée Sonoma County** ($20) 89 The 2011 Mountain Cuvée is an easy-drinking blend of 45% Merlot, 36% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Zinfandel and other Bordeaux varieties. It offers perfumed blackberry fruit with hints of toasted oak and vanilla. Aged 14 months in predominantly French oak, it is soft and round on the palate with round tannins and a persistent finish. Enjoy this wine over the next five years.
**Hawkes** Stephen and Paula Hawkes have been farming grapes in the southern Alexander Valley since the early 1970s. With the help of their son Jake, they currently produce Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and small amounts of Chardonnay from their Home Ranch Vineyard and several other vineyards in the cooler parts of Alexander Valley. Hawkes only began making wines in 2002 and recruited Herman Froeb, an old family friend to make them. The wines are very well made, especially the single vineyard Cabs.

**Hawkes 2013 Home Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($30) 90** A lovely, suave wine revealing perfumed sweet orchard fruit on the nose and additional notes of lychee and melon flavors. Perfumed in character with a round mouth feel and fresh acidity. Sees 5 months of neutral oak. **Hawkes 2010 Merlot Alexander Valley ($35) 90** The 2010 Merlot is medium ruby in color and offers spicy dark plum and black cherry fruit. Aged 18 months in 25% new French oak, it is soft on the attack with a velvet texture, good intensity of flavor and firm tannins on the finish. It is drinking nicely now and should improve with age. The grapes were sourced from Hawkes’ Red Winery Road Vineyard. **Hawkes 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley ($50) 91** The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon is dark ruby and boasts spicy dark plum and blackberry fruit with hints of expresso. Aged 18 months in 25% new French oak, it full in the mouth with rich deep flavors and firm tannins. It is sourced partly from the Red Winery Road Vineyard and the rest from Pyramid and Stone vineyards. It should drink well over the next 5 to 7 years. **Hawkes 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Stone Ranch Vineyard Alexander Valley ($65) 92** This Cabernet Sauvignon is the most charming of the reds. It is highly perfumed and has lovely black raspberry and cassis fruit on the nose. Aged 24 months in 30% new French oak, it is soft and lush on the attack with a velvet smooth texture on the palate, a nice juicy note of red fruit, and chalky tannins.

**Imagery Winery** This project was launched by winemaker Joe Benziger of the Benziger Family Winery in Sonoma Mountain. Joe’s goal is to experiment with new varieties and little known grapes and to have fun in the process. The colorful and creative wine labels on each bottle of Imagery are drawn by local artist Bob Nugent, who does a fine job. The wines are of good quality.

**Imagery 2012 Malbec Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Park ($42) 90+** This Malbec displays a lovely purple color and fragrant aromas of red plum that are mirrored on the palate. While not complex, it offers pure ripe red berry fruit flavors, round firm tannins, and a pleasant finish. It will benefit from a year in the bottle and drink well for up to 5 years. **Imagery 2012 Tempranillo Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Park ($39) 89** The Tempranillo is another lovely wine with pure fruit aromas and flavors. It is delicious and easy-drinking but a little less interesting than the Malbec. It has a soft texture but youthful firm tannins that need time to evolve. Drink in 2015-2016 and enjoy for up to 5 years. **Imagery 2012 Lagrein Upper Ridge Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Park ($45) 87** The Lagrein displays dark ripe plum and red cherry fruit aromas and flavors. It is easy drinking with good acidity, dry firm tannins, and a dry finish. A work in progress on this interesting grape of northern Italy. **Imagery 2012 WOW Out Upper Ridge Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Park ($45) 87** This blend of 68% Sauvignon Blanc, 19% Muscat Canelli and 13% Viognier has a dominant Muscat character with a hint of pungent Sauvignon Blanc on the nose. It is bright and fresh on the palate with prominent tropical fruit notes and finishes with good acidity and bright Muscat flavor. An interesting but confusing blend.

**Kivelstadt Cellars** Launched in 2007, Kivelstadt Cellars is a family winery specializing in premium Rhone-style wines. Owner and winemaker Jordan Kivelstadt previously made wine in Australia, Argentina and elsewhere in California. Kivelstadt’s vineyards total 18 acres spread across the Sonoma Valley, Bennett Valley and Sonoma Mountain appellations. The wines tasted for this report were excellent, especially the Estate Syrah. We also liked the mineral-laden Lake County rosé not included here. Also, the labels are distinct and attractive.

**Kivelstadt Cellars 2012 Father’s Watch Red Blend Sonoma County ($25) 89** Father’s Watch is a red Rhone-style blend of 60% Syrah, 20% Mourvedre, 10% Carignane and 10% Grenache. It displays spicy black cherry flavors with high acidity and overall freshness on the palate. It is medium weight with good balance and has a dry persistent finish. **Kivelstadt Cellars 2010 The Inheritance Estate Syrah Sonoma Valley ($45) 92** This 100% organically grown Syrah offers aromas of blackberry fruit, roasted meat and hints of pepper, It has a smooth mouth feel, good fruit concentration on the palate, round firm tannins and a persistent finish. Fermented 30% whole cluster with native yeast, it is aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 30% new.

**Jolie-Laide Wines.** These wines are produced by Scott Schultz. Originally from Chicago, where he worked in the restaurant trade, Scott joined Pax Mahle in 2010 to help manage the cellar. He now has his own project called Jolie-Laide, which debuted with the 2010 vintage. The wines are quite good, but Scott only produces 500 cases presently. We especially liked the Grenache-Syrah blend from Rossi Ranch Vineyard.
Jolie Laide 2013 Pinot Gris Windsor Oaks Vineyard Chalk Hill ($26) 89 This entrancing Pinot Gris with notes of apricot and red berry on the nose and light flavors on the palate. Jolie Laide 2013 Trousseau Gris Fanucchi-Wood Road Vineyard Chalk Hill ($26) 90 This pale orange wine is cold soaked on the skins for one night but not fermented on the skins. Made in stainless steel and one neutral barrel with no malo. Sourced from the same vineyard as the Wind Gap. Jolie Laide Grenache Syrah Rossi Ranch Vineyard Sonoma County ($37) 91 This Grenache Syrah blend is foot-trodden and co-fermented whole cluster with a small amount of Viognier. It is medium-dark ruby in color and offers very fresh aromas of ripe strawberry. It is mouth filling with pure ripe fruit flavors and has firm tannins on the palate with a slightly astringent finish. Quite intriguing.

Kamen 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Moon Mountain ($45) 90 This 85/15 blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Sauvignon Musque is a deeply colored, stony wine showing good acidity and freshness with lovely, rich ripe citrus aromas and flavors. Made from very low-yielding, 2 tons/acre grapes that are whole cluster pressed and fermented in concrete eggs. A unique and delicious Sauvignon Blanc.

Kunde 2013 Magnolia Lane Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma Valley ($75) 90 One of the finer Sauvignon Blancs tasted for this report. A floral, herbal nose with a hint of melon. Full-bodied with good flavor density, nice complexity of tropical fruit and ripe apple flavors. Finishes with good extract and length.

Jolie Laide 2013 Trousseau Gris Fanucchi-Wood Road Vineyard Chalk Hill ($26) 90 This pale orange wine is cold soaked on the skins for one night but not fermented on the skins. Made in stainless steel and one neutral barrel with no malo. Sourced from the same vineyard as the Wind Gap. Jolie Laide Grenache Syrah Rossi Ranch Vineyard Sonoma County ($37) 91 This Grenache Syrah blend is foot-trodden and co-fermented whole cluster with a small amount of Viognier. It is medium-dark ruby in color and offers very fresh aromas of ripe strawberry. It is mouth filling with pure ripe fruit flavors and has firm tannins on the palate with a slightly astringent finish. Quite intriguing.

Kamen Robert Mark Kamen is producing some of Sonoma County’s finest mountain grown Cabernet Sauvignon from his rugged 280 acre Kamen Estate situated in the Sonoma Mountains. While at first Kamen sold its fruit to other growers, after a devastating fire in 1996 and a replanting of half of his vineyard with different clones and rootstocks, Mark released his first of many outstanding Kamen Estate Cabernet Sauvignons. The Kashmir Cuvee, Kamen’s extraordinary small production of the best barrels of Cabernet Sauvignon followed, as did Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc. We had the pleasure of tasting the wines with the Kamen team in their magnificent mountain vineyard.

Jackson Estate 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Hawkeye Mt Alexander Valley ($55) 91 The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Hawkeye Mountain reveals red and black fruit and cedar aromas quite typical of Alexander Valley. Aged 23 months in 93% French oak (41% new), the wine is big, lush and concentrated with dark blackberry fruit flavors on the palate and a soft silky texture. It is intensely flavored on the palate with a lush texture, notoriety, and polished tannins on the finish. A superb wine. Drink it now to 2019.

Kunde The Kunde Family Estate was first planted in Sonoma Valley in 1904 by Louis Kunde with imported cuttings from Chateaux Margaux and Lafite Rothschild. It was for many years a major source of grapes for Sebastiani Vineyards and other wineries. Today the estate consists of 1,850 acres of which 750 are planted to vineyards growing 20 varieties of grapes for estate wines. The winemaker is Zach Long. Two examples of Kunde’s excellent winemaking are reviewed here.

Kunde 2011 Syrah Sonoma Valley ($75) 90 The 2011 Syrah is a fruit forward wine sourced from three distinct vineyard blocks grown at different elevations and fermented with Viognier skins and whole clusters. Aged 16 months in 50% new French oak, it reveals perfumed aromas of dark plum and blue fruit, smoke, citrus, and black pepper. On the palate, it displays pure and concentrated fruit flavors with notes of spice, firm round tannins, and a long finish. A wine that is intensely flavored and will drink well from 2014 to 2024 and beyond.

Kunde 2011 Red Dirt Red Sonoma Valley ($35) 91 The 2011 Red Dirt Red is a delicious and innovative blend of Sangiovese, Barbera, Syrah and Petite Sirah. The grapes are sourced from Red Loam II, a rare soil found in Sonoma Valley. It displays rich aromas of black and red fruit, spice and smoke. On the palate it boasts dense and vibrant fruit flavors with a note of chocolate, a soft silky texture, round tannins and a persistent finish.
Lancaster Estate Located in the eastern hills at the southern end of Alexander Valley, Lancaster Estate produces outstanding limited release Bordeaux style wines from its 53-acre estate. The estate is farmed in small vineyard blocks conforming to different micro-climates and soil types. Yields are kept low through deficit irrigation, shoot thinning and cluster thinning. The Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines are intensely flavored and distinctive in character.

Lancaster Estate 2013 Samantha’s Sauvignon Blanc Alexander Valley ($30) 91 This 60% stainless, 40% barrel fermented Sauvignon Blanc has both Clone 1 and the Musqué Clone grown near the river in Alexander Valley. The wine reveals a lovely perfume of white pepper, melon and ripe pear. It’s fresh, bright and very expressive with good flavor density and chalky notes on a persistent finish. Excellent winemaking. Lancaster Estate 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate Alexander Valley ($65) 93 This is a rich and flavorful wine of ripe black currant, cassis, and violets. It is fruit-forward, silky and elegant on the palate, although it finishes with big tannic grip. Youthful and bursting with fruit, this wine will be best between 2015 and 20125. Lancaster Estate 2010 Nicole’s Proprietary Red Alexander Valley ($115) 91 The 2010 Nicole’s Proprietary Blend is a big wine offering aromas of dried black currant, tobacco and herbs. A blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and small amounts of Malbec, Merlot and Petit Verdot, it was still rather backward and unevolved when we tasted it. Medium-weight on the palate, it has good density of fruit and excellent complexity but will need more time to show their best.

Landmark Founded in 1974, Landmark Vineyards is an attractive estate located in the Sonoma Valley at the base of Sugarloaf Moutain. Its original investors include Damaris Deere Ford, descendant of John Deere. Its wines have been crafted by the talented winemaker Greg Stach (shown here with a vintage John Deere tractor) since the early 1990s with the help of consulting enologist Helen Turley. In addition to the 11-acre Landmark Estate, planted to Rhone varieties, Landmark sources grapes from vineyards in different regions and microclimates. The Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs are excellent.

Landmark 2012 Chardonnay Lorenzo Vineyard Russian River Valley ($55) 93 Lorenzo is Landmark’s iconic Chardonnay. Made from 40-year-old vines, partly self-rooted, and done in the lush, beautiful California style. It shows rich peach, and minerals with superb focus and depth. Landmark 2012 Chardonnay Rodgers Creek Vineyard Sonoma Coast ($45) 93 Medium yellow gold. A superb, richly styled Chardonnay that reveals a perfumed bouquet of light resin, toasted hazelnut, and honeysuckle spice that are also picked up on the creamy, richly flavored palate. Has a fair amount of the Musque clone (UCD 809) as well as the Wente. Superb! Landmark 2012 Pinot Noir Grand Detour Sonoma Coast ($35) 90 This Pinot Noir is dark fruit-ripened and spicy with fragrant aromas of blackberry, plum and roast meat. Aged 10 months in French oak, it is lush and ripe on the palate with a soft texture, bright acidity, and a long finish. Landmark 2012 Pinot Noir Overlook Sonoma Coast ($25) 88 An easy drinking rustic Pinot sourced from San Luis Obispo, Sonoma and Monterey Counties showing dark plum and black cherry fruit, high acidity, and a persistent finish. Laurel Glen Vineyard Laurel Glen Vineyard is one of Sonoma County’s top producers of Cabernet Sauvignon. The winery was founded in the late 1970s by Patrick Campbell, a fastidious grower and winemaker who crafted the wines at this 16-acre estate on Sonoma Mountain until 2010 when Patrick sold the winery to Bettina Sichel, its current owner. The combination of high altitude, eastern exposure, even temperatures, and low yields translates into Cabernet Sauvignon grapes that mature at lower brix with lower alcohol and higher natural acidity. It is good to see that Bettina Sichel has maintained the high quality of Laurel Glen’s flagship Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2007 we conducted a comprehensive vertical tasting of Laurel Glen dating back to the early 1980s and were impressed with the progress made over the years in crafting top quality Cabernet Sauvignon.

Laurel Glen Vineyards 2012 Counterpoint Sonoma Mountain ($35) 89 The Laurel Glen 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Counterpoint offers aromas of spicy black and red fruit with hints of black pepper. It reveals concentrated dark plum fruit flavors with a firm structure, round tannins, and excellent acidity. A vibrant wine that will pair well with food. Laurel Glen Vineyards 2010 Laurel Glen Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Mountain ($60) 92+ The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon offers a lush dark earthy nose with rich aromas and flavors of blackberry fruit, forest floor and mushrooms. It is soft and round on the palate with hints of slate, minerals and loam. Sourced from 10-45 year old vines, it displays a velvety texture, excellent structure and a long finish. A wonderful mountain wine.
Louis Martini  This historic property is currently owned by the Gallo family, who purchased it from the Louis Martini Family in 2002. The winery makes excellent full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon in Napa Valley and Sonoma County. The Sonoma County wines are sourced from the Alexander Valley and the Monte Rosso Vineyard in the Moon Mountain District. The quality of the wines is very high.

Louis M Martini 2011 Gnarly Vine Zinfandel Monte Rosso Vineyard Moon Mountain ($50) 91 Gnarly Vine is a big, expressive wine with dense black fruit and notes of cured meat and dark chocolate. It is rich and firm with gritty tannins. Not for the weak of heart. Matured 16 months in 75% French and 25% American oak, all new. Louis M Martini 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley ($34) 91 Winemaker, Michael Martini has crafted a delicious wine of ripe plum and blackberry aromas with undertones of anise and leather. On the palate it reveals rich and lush wine of ripe plum and blackberry aromas with undertones of anise and leather. It has a velvety texture, silky tannins and a long finish. Louis M Martini 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County ($18) 89 This Cabernet Sauvignon offers ripe black currant fruit with notes of black pepper. It is soft on the palate with concentrated black fruit flavors, soft round tannins and a long finish with hints of vanilla and light herbs. Louis M Martini 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Monte Rosso Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($85) 93 This is an extraordinary wine from one of Sonoma’s iconic vineyards. It displays an opaque ruby color and aromas of earth, minerals and black currants. It is bold on the palate with dense black fruit and cherry pomegranate flavors, round yet firm tannins and a long persistent finish. It is a wine that will age gracefully for 15 to 20 years.

Matanzas Creek Winery was established in 1977 by Sandra and Bill MacIver in Bennett Valley. Following attempts at growing different varieties, they settled on Chardonnay, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc and had very good success with those wines over the years. In 2000 the MacIvers sold the winery to Jackson Family Wines, which has retained much of the original concept while making significant improvements. The winery is still estate-based and remains rooted in Bennett Valley. All the vineyards for Matanzas Creek are now sustainably grown, and the winery sources fruit from exceptional vineyards across Sonoma County. Marcia Monahan, originally from Chile, was appointed winemaker and has developed new and exciting vineyard-designated programs in Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot and extended the top-of-the-line Journey program.

Matanzas Creek 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Bennett Valley ($32) 91 A fresh and lively, 100% Sauvignon Blanc from the Bennett Valley. Citrus flowers and lemon oil show on the nose. The wine exhibits richness and fullness in the mouth with notes of guava, citrus and minerals. Fermented and matured in a combination of stainless steel, oak barrels, and large foudres. Matanzas Creek 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma County ($21) 89 This is a fresh, youthfull wine revealing grapefruit with grassy notes. It’s balanced and has good concentration and a persistent finish. A blend of 94% Sauvignon Blanc and 6% Semillon. The Sauvignon Blanc includes the FPS 1 (53%), Musqáu (25%), 387, 530, and 317 clones. Matanzas Creek 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Helena Bench Knights Valley ($40) 91 Quite stony in character, this focused Sauvignon Blanc comes from the Helena Bench Vineyard located at the foot of St. Helena Mountain. It expresses dense flavors of lime, minerals, and fresh green beans from the garden, with a rich, persistent finish. Matanzas Creek 2012 Journey Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma County ($50) 93 Journey is winemaker Marcia Monahan’s selection of the very best vineyard parcels. This 90/10 blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon shows a honeyed, floral nose with a light acacia accent. It has a delicious, balanced profile with good flavor complexity and depth of melon, tangerine citrus, and guava and a creamy, focused mouth feel. It includes several clones, including, of course, FPS 1 and Musqué, and is aged in a variety of vessels–stainless steel, neutral oak, puncheons and foudres. Matanzas Creek 2011 Merlot Sonoma County ($26) 87+ The Merlot Sonoma County displays light aromas and flavors of spicy plum fruit, clearly a casualty of the cold and rainy 2011 vintage. The majority of the grapes were picked before the rains but lack the concentration and flavor typical of this wine. Matanzas Creek 2011 Merlot Alexander Valley ($45) 90 A delicious wine with lots of spicy ripe plum flavors. Earthy, rich and moderately complex with elegant mouth feel, firm tannins and a persistent finish. A more successful effort than the Merlot Sonoma County.

Mauritson One of the wine growing pioneers of Dry Creek Valley, the Mauritson family first planted its vines in 1884. Most of its large estate and vineyards were flooded when the US Army Corps of Engineers constructed the dam that created Lake Sonoma, leaving the family with just 700 ridge top acres that now comprise a significant portion of the Rockpile AVA. Mauritson has 270 acres of Sonoma County Vineyards, but its special single vineyard wines come exclusively from its sustainably farmed, high altitude Rockpile vineyards, especially its Zinfandel. Clay Mauritson makes the wines. The wines have excellent acidity and structure, which contributes to their long life in the cellar. The Zinfandel tend to flesh out and acquire greater depth and complexity with a little bottle age.
Mauritson Winery 2011 Rockpile Cabernet Sauvignon Rockpile Ridge Vineyard Rockpile ($47) 90 This is a lovely, medium weight Cabernet Sauvignon showing ripe, dark fruit with herbal and cedar spice notes. It’s soft and lush on the palate with black currant and blackberry flavors. Easy and delicious drinking. **Mauritson Winery 2011 Rockpile Petit Sirah Madrone Spring Vineyard Rockpile ($37) 89** This is an elegant, cool climate, 100% Petite Sirah. It offers spicy, sweet ripe dark red fruit with dark chocolate notes on a polished palate. It has big tannins at this early stage of its evolution. Sees 18 months in oak, half French, half American. **Mauritson Winery 2012 Rockpile Zinfandel Cemetery Vineyard Rockpile ($41) 92** One of our favorite Rockpile Zins. This one shows an effusive bouquet of baking spice, ripe dark red fruit, and a hint of forest floor. There’s excellent depth and richness of high-toned flavors on a savory, elegant and pure palate. Finishes with silky tannins. From the shale and serpentine soils of the Cemetery Vineyard. **Mauritson Winery 2012 Rockpile Zinfandel Jack’s Cabin Vineyard Rockpile ($75) 90+** The Jack’s Cabin Zinfandel is the most red-fruit scored of the Rockpile Zins. It shows clean red berry and cherry with savory spice and graphite notes. Roundly textured, it’s delicious and easy drinking with good acidity and ripe tannins. As with the other Rockpile wines, this one will age well. The 2006 vintage we tasted was still fresh and youthful. **Mauritson Winery 2012 Rockpile Zinfandel Pritchett Peaks Vineyard Rockpile ($47) 91** The Pritchett Peaks Zinfandel has a bouquet of dark cherry with rose petal and loam notes. It’s a big, rich wine of beautiful purity, showing delicious red fruit on a velvet-toned, well-structured palate. Gorgeous. **Mauritson Winery 2012 Rockpile Zinfandel Ridge Vineyard Rockpile ($39) 91** The Rockpile Ridge Zinfandel shows cool climate character with clean, pure fruit, bright acidity and an elegant, fresh character. Dark red cherry and a touch of chaparral show on the nose, while the palate is lean and elegant with refined flavors. This wine ages well, fleshing out and developing additional complexity over time. The 2005 Rockpile Ridge we tasted was especially impressive. **Mauritson Winery 2013 Rosé Rockpile ($19) 89** Pale salmon in color, this is a well made, fresh and crisp rosé revealing light red berries and a note of orange zest with mineral notes on a bright, crisp palate. Made from a blend of whole cluster pressed Malbec and saignée Cabernet Franc. It’s partly aged in used French oak.

Miro Cellars 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Silverwood Vineyard Pine Mountain Cloverdale Peak ($30) 91 This is a fresh and lively fruit forward Cabernet sourced from Silverwood Vineyard at the top of Cloverdale’s Pine Mountain. It boasts red and blackberry fruit aromas with a touch of spice and smoke. It has good intensity of fruit on the palate with excellent acidity and soft round tannins on the finish. Enjoy through 2024. **Miro Cellars 2012 Cuvée Sasha North Coast ($18) 90+** Cuvée Sasha is a blend of 68% Grenache, 20% Mourvedre, and 12% Syrah. It is a delicious bistro-like wine with fresh red berry fruit and lively acidity. Aged 11 months in European oak, 18% new, it is nicely balanced with good acidity, round tannins and a savory finish. Enjoy over the next 3 to 5 years.

Mounts Family Winery The Mounts family has been growing grapes for over 60 years at their Dry Creek vineyard. The family winery was established in 2005 by David and Lana Mounts but is already making a name for itself as one of Dry Creek Valley’s top artisanal producers. David has a degree in viticulture from Fresno State and previous experience with Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyards. He currently crafts the wines and is a very talented winemaker. In addition to the outstanding Zinfandel reviewed here, he produces Petite Sirah and several Rhone varietals.

Miro Tcholaskov, born and raised in Bulgaria, has been in the US since 1990, much of it spent working in the cellars of Sonoma County wineries. He began as an intern with Dry Creek Vineyard, and after nine years he advanced from Cellar Master to Assistant Winemaker. In 1998 he became winemaker at Trentadue Winery and in 2001 he launched his eponymous winery. His Petite Sirah and other wines have garnered praise in the past from the International Wine Review and other critics. Miro’s wines are fruit forward, bold and flavorful.
Mounts 2011 Old Vines Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($30) 92+. The Mounts Old Vines Zinfandel shows unusual density and power for the vintage. It reveals a nose of earthy, underbrush notes and a lush attack leading to a deeply flavored, unctuous palate. Well-balanced with firm round tannins and a long, rich finish. A terrific wine.

Nalle 2012 Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($40) 90 This Zinfandel from one of Dry Creek Valley’s finest artisanal producers offers sweet, ripe raspberry and red cherry fruit. It’s a wine of some elegance with good acidity and depth of flavor and firm round tannins. A blend of 82% Zinfandel, 9% Petite Sirah, and 9% Carignan.

Pedroncelli This family-owned and operated winery in Dry Creek Valley produces easy-to-drink and affordable wines. Established in 1907 by brothers John and Jim Pedroncelli, the winery owns 110 acres of vineyards and purchases other grapes to produce a wide range of good quality and uncomplicated wines. Pedroncelli is known for its Zinfandel, which is also our favorite.

Pedroncelli 2012 Chardonnay Signature Selection Dry Creek Valley ($14) 88+. An excellent value Chardonnay with a clean nose showing toast and orange citrus, a light but balanced palate showing citrus fruit and good acidity. Good, easy drinking.

Pedroncelli 2011 Zinfandel Mother Clone Dry Creek Valley ($17) 89 The Zinfandel Mother Clone is sourced from head trained vines of the Pedroncelli’s original estate vineyard first planted in 1904 and a massale selection of vines from the original estate. The cool vintage contributed to a light-bodied, dark fruited wine with toast and peppery notes. It is fresh and fruit forward with excellent acidity and an easy drinking finish.

Pedroncelli 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Three Vineyards Dry Creek Valley ($18) 90 The Cabernet Sauvignon is a blend of 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc and 3% Petit Verdot. It offers aromas of black currants with hints of light herbs and earth. It has a soft texture, firm round tannins and a pleasant finish. Drink over the next five years.

Pedroncelli 2011 Three Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Creek Valley ($18) 88. The Three Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon offers blackberry and plum-like aromas and flavors with hint of baking spices. It has good ripe flavors with moderate, round tannins and a persistent finish. A good pizza wine.

Quivira Vineyards and Winery is a small family-owned operation founded in 1981 in Dry Creek Valley. Its current owners Pete and Terri Knight purchased the property in 2006 with the aim of producing world-class wine. They introduced significant improvements in vineyard management and winemaking and acquired new vineyards. Since 2005 Quivira has been a Demeter-certified biodynamic and organic winery. All wines are estate bottled; winemaking is under the direction of Hugh Chapelle. Quivira wines are of excellent quality and include an outstanding rose and noteworthy old vine Zins and Syrah.

Quivira 2013 Rosé Dry Creek Valley ($22) 91 This is Grenache-based with some Mourvedre and Syrah. Medium salmon in color, it displays a lovely strawberry and orange zest nose. It is soft and fruity on the palate with good intensity of spicy red berry fruit, excellent acidity and a crisp finish. Clearly among the very best roses of the 2012 vintage in Sonoma.

Quivira 2012 Flight Zinfandel Anderson Ranch Vineyard Dry Creek Valley ($45) 90 A very attractive, delicious, very soft and easy drinking Zinfandel. It has a fine liqueur-like perfume and a lush rich flavor profile. The Anderson Ranch Vineyard is certified and biodynamic.

Quivira 2011 Quest Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($34) 89 A blend of Zinfandel from three different estate vineyards that includes a bit of Petite Sirah. Shows spice and pepper with dark red fruit and black raspberry notes. Very fresh and expressive with lush up-front fruit. Not a lot of structure, so drink early.

Quivira 2012 Zinfandel Katz Vineyard Dry Creek Valley ($45) 91 The Katz Zinfandel is also made in a fruit forward, soft and feminine style. It’s fresh, spicy and attractively perfumed with good persistence. Made from pre-prohibition vines. A beautiful wine!

Quivira 2011 Syrah Dry Creek Valley ($30) 90 The 2011 Syrah offers fresh dark red fruit and black olive aromas. It is fruit forward and perfumed, and soft on the attack with good acidity and firm tannins on the finish.

Rancho Zabaco 2012 Sonoma Heritage Vines Zinfandel Sonoma County ($15) 89+. This Zinfandel from E&J Gallo displays peppery dark red fruit with an alcohol level of 15.3. It is rich and ripe tasting with dense and concentrated dark berry fruit flavors, firm ripe tannins and a persistent finish. It is also a noteworthy bargain Zinfandel for the price.
Ravenswood. Joel Peterson started his wine career as a Zinfandel garagiste, making just a few hundred cases a year when his newly founded Ravenswood winery opened for business in 1976. He quickly became famous for his Zinfandel, especially the single vineyard series made from low yielding old vines. When Joel Peterson sold Ravenswood to giant Constellation Brands in 2001, some critics expressed trepidation. But Joel continues to make the wine from the same low yielding, old vineyards and using the same time-tested techniques—native yeasts, open top fermenters, extended time on the skins, and aging in French oak barriques. Ravenswood's single vineyard wines are their best, and that's mostly what we tasted for this report. These Sonoma vineyards are mostly old vine Zinfandel field blends that reveal their terroir.

**Ravenswood 2012 Barbera Bedrock Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($37) 89** This is a big, dark fruited Barbera. While quite ripe, it has refreshing acidity and a nice, long earthy finish. **Ravenswood 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon Bedrock Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($50) 91** Opaque ruby. This Cabernet is spicy, dark and brooding with sweet black fruit complemented by notes of smoke, tar, and black olive. It’s big, lush and very full bodied with extremely dense fruit flavors. A blend of 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, and 6% Merlot from the Bedrock Vineyard, located in Sonoma’s banana belt. **Ravenswood 2012 Chauvet Sonoma Valley ($35) 90** This Zinfandel-based field blend includes a good portion of Alicante Bouschet. It offers spicy black raspberry and black currant on a soft and elegantly textured palate. It shows remarkable purity and rich extract on the finish. From vines planted in the early 1900s on the ranch formerly owned by the 19th century French immigrant Joshua Chauvet. Good value.

**Ravenswood 2011 Icon Native Sonoma Mixed Blocks Sonoma ($75) 90** Opaque ruby. This blend of Carignan, Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Alicante Bouschet offers lovely mineral and blackberry notes on the nose. It’s big and soft on the attack showing dark fruit and a velvet texture. Exceptionally rich for the vintage. **Ravenswood 2012 Old Hill Zinfandel Sonoma Valley ($60) 93** The 12 acres of old vines that provide the fruit for this wine are among the very oldest of Sonoma, having been planted in 1885. It has 30 different varieties, including a significant (9%) amount of Grenache. It shows a light herbal/resin note on the nose, a soft attack, and perfumed red fruit on the palate. It’s rich and intense with a full body and a firm structure that promises long life.

Other Wines Reviewed: Ravenswood 2012 Zinfandel Barrica Vineyard Sonoma Valley ($37) 91

**Ravenswood 2012 Zinfandel Belloni Vineyard Russian River Valley ($37) 92** Ravenswood 2012 Zinfandel Big River Vineyard Alexander Valley ($41) 92. Ravenswood 2012 Zinfandel Teldeschi Vineyard Dry Creek Valley ($37) 91

RIDGE VINEYARDS

Ridge Vineyards was founded in the early 1960s by a group of Stanford Research Institute researchers with no prior experience in winemaking. Winemaker Paul Draper was hired in 1969. Draper and Ridge’s reputation was sealed when their Monte Bello Cabernet Sauvignon was highly rated in the 1976 Judgment of Paris. Ridge has been present in Sonoma since 1966 when it produced its first Geyersville Zinfandel. In 1991 Ridge purchased the Lytton Springs Vineyard in Dry Creek (shown here). Winemaking remains under the direction of Paul Draper and Eric Baugher. The winery is best known for its old vine Zinfandel-based field blends. The wines are unique and terroir-driven, often with earthy, dark fruit and firm tannic structures that require time for optimal drinking. The 2011 vintage wines we tasted at the winery north of Healdsburg reflect the coolness of the vintage, although most grapes were harvested prior to the mid-October rains.

**Ridge Vineyards 2011 Pagani Ranch Zinfandel Sonoma Valley ($38) 89** An earthy, savory Zinfandel showcasing boysenberry, black olive, and herbs with good acidity, chalky tannins, and moderate flavor intensity. A blend of 78% Zinfandel, 18% Alicante Bouschet, and 3% Petite Sirah from the 100 year old vines of the Pagani Ranch located on the east-facing side of Sonoma Valley and matured 14 months in all used American oak. Lacks the depth and charm of warmer vintages. **Ridge Vineyards 2012 Proprietary Red Geyersville Sonoma County ($9) 93** Dark ruby, showing a smoky, black raspberry liqueur scent accented by minerals. The wine is big and full with a velvet smooth texture, showing flavors of boysenberry, lavender, and garrigue. A field blend of 71% Zinfandel, 19% Carignan, 7% Petite Sirah, 2% Mourvedre, and 1% Alicante Bouschet matured 13 months in American oak, 24% new. While the label says Sonoma County, the fruit comes from Alexander Valley. **Ridge Vineyards 2011 Proprietary Red Lytton Springs Dry Creek Valley ($38) 90** The Lytton Springs shows spicy dark red fruit with an herbal/chapparal note on the nose. These are complemented by notes of blueberry, cassis, and black olives on the palate. Firmly tannic, the wine is a blend of 82% Zinfandel, 16% Petite Sirah, and 2% Carignan. **Ridge Vineyards 2011 Zinfandel Ponzo Vineyard Russian River Valley ($30) 90** This 97% Zinfandel is rich...
and complex, showing aromas of red plum and berry, cooking spices and dried herbs. It’s big, lush and very soft and fruit forward, finishing long and firmly tannic. Made from a 60+ year old parcel of the Ponzo Vineyard, located on slopes overlooking the river at the northernmost edge of the appellation and matured 12 months in American oak, 20% new.

Roth Estate 2011 Heritage Red Wine Sonoma County ($30) 91 The 2011 Heritage Red is a bold blend of 36% Zinfandel, 25% Malbec, 16% Merlot, 15% Petite Sirah and small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. It offers attractive aromas of blackberry with hints of toast and vanilla. It is beautifully concentrated with a soft texture, smooth round tannins and good depth of black cherry fruit flavors. This is a young complex wine that needs time to open in the glass. Roth Estate 2011 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($28) 90+ The 2011 Roth Estate Pinot Noir offers aromas of black raspberry, black cherry and pomegranate. It shows good intensity of red fruit flavor, toasted oak and spice on the palate with excellent balance, round tannins and a long finish.

Other Wines Reviewed: Roth Estate 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Alexander Valley ($15) 88 Roth Estate 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley ($28) 88

Rued Winery 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Dry Creek Valley ($16) 90 Very attractive, Loire like Sauvignon Blanc with a dry, stony character and subdued fruit. The wine is full and dense with prominent chalky minerals and ripe citrus and melon accents.

Rodney Strong Vineyards. This large family owned winery was originally established some 50 years ago by the celebrated dancer Rod Strong. It was later purchased in 1979 by the Klein Family, 4th generation California farmers who converted it into a modern winery. The winery is managed by proprietor Tom Klein and crafts world class wines from 14 vineyard holdings totaling some 1,000 acres spread throughout Sonoma County. A 200-acre vineyard in Rockpile is also in the works. Rodney Strong produces close to one million cases of Sonoma County wine annually, including outstanding single vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons and blends from estate vineyards in Alexander Valley. The winemaking team is directed by veteran Rick Sayre. Greg Morthole crafts the estate and single vineyard wines with assistance from consulting winemaker David Ramey.

Rodney Strong Vineyards 2012 Chardonnay Chalk Hill ($22) 88 The Chardonnay Chalk Hill is from an estate vineyard in Chalk Hill AVA planted by Rodney Strong back in 1965. The wine expresses aromas of bright orchard fruit and citrus with hints of minerals and toast. Fermented in French oak with 100% MF, it has ripe fruit flavors on the palate with light creamy mouth feel and a crisp finish. Enjoy over the next two-three years. Rodney Strong Vineyards 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Charlotte’s Home Northern Sonoma ($17) 88+ This is a warm climate Sauvignon
Blanc with 70% of the grapes sourced from Alexander Valley and 30% from Russian River and Dry Creek Valleys. It displays honey-like flavors with hints of lemon grass and herbs. It has good texture on the palate and a round mouth feel. **Rodney Strong Vineyards 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Alexander Valley ($45) 91+** The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve is a rich full-bodied wine offering aromas and flavors of black currants, licorice and toasted oak. It is bold flavored and ripe on the palate with excellent texture, firm tannins and a long persistent finish. A gorgeous wine and one of our favorites from this portfolio. **Rodney Strong Vineyards 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander’s Crown Alexander Valley ($75) 92** The 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander’s Crown is one of this estate’s finest red wines sourced from one of the best Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards in Alexander Valley. Bordeaux-like in character, it reveals rich and ripe black currant, and dried red fruit, flavors with hints of loam and oak. Aged 21 months in French oak, 42% new, it is beautifully balanced with excellent acidity and elegant power.

**Other Wines Reviewed:**
- **Rodney Strong Vineyards 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Brother’s Ridge Vineyard Alexander Valley ($75) 94**
- **Rodney Strong Vineyards 2011 Symmetry Alexander Valley ($60) 90+**

**Sebastiani** This historic winery established in 1904 by Samuele Sebastiani was the only one in Sonoma County to continue operations through Prohibition making a small amount of sacramental and medicinal wines. The winery was managed and expanded subsequently by later generations until it was purchased in 2008 by wine entrepreneur Bill Foley. While the winery traditionally produced average quality, value wines, under Bill Foley it is aiming to increase quality with a new emphasis on single-vineyard and sub-appellation wines. The Sebastiani 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Cherryblock and the 2012 Gravel Bed Red are two exceptional wines reviewed here from the fast improving Sebastiani portfolio.

**Sebastiani 2012 Chardonnay Sonoma County ($19) 89+** This is superb value in Sonoma Chardonnay with a flinty, smoky nose, good depth of orchard fruit and integrated oak and a flavorful, very long finish. Tastes like a wine easily double its price.

**Sebastiani 2012 Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast ($19) 88+** The 2012 Sebastiani Pinot Noir displays a reticent nose of dark cherries and spice. On the palate it offers bright red fruit flavors, notes of sandalwood and forest floor. It has nicely layered flavors, firm tannins and an easy drinking finish.

**Sebastiani 2012 Gravel Bed Red Sonoma County ($35) 94** The 2012 Gravel Bed Red is a delicious wine rich in black cherry fruit and notes of minerals and spice. Sourced from a small parcel in Northern Alexander Valley, it reveals dense fruit on the palate and a silky texture with medium weight and perfect balance. The tannins are round and soft, and the finish is long and pleasant. The beauty of this wine is that it gets better and better in the glass.

**Sebastiani 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Cherryblock Sonoma Valley ($90) 95** This is a beautiful opulent wine. It offers an opaque ruby color and ripe aromas of black cherry fruit and hints of toast. It is densely flavored on the palate and has a velvety texture. The tannins are soft and resolved and the wine has a long and persistent finish. It is a very evolved wine that can enjoyed now and over the next decade. Magnificent.

**Other Wines Reviewed:**
- **Sebastiani 2011 Merlot Sonoma County ($18) 88**
- **Sebastiani 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma County ($19) 88+**

**Seghesio Family Vineyards.** In 1895 Edoardo Seghesio planted his first vineyard in the Alexander Valley, and by the mid 1970s the Seghesio winery processed more than one-quarter of all Sonoma Valley grapes. In 1983 the family first bottled its wine under the Seghesio label. Today the 4th generation of the Seghesio family is represented by Ted Seghesio, who has been the winemaker for over 30 years. In 2011, the Seghesio family sold its winery and 300 acres of vineyards to the Napa-based Crimson Wine Group, but Ted and other family members have remained with the new organization. Seghesio is best known for its Zinfandels, which are among the best produced in Sonoma County. The Home Ranch Zinfandel, Seghesio’s flagship made from an 1895 vineyard, shows the very high level of quality that can be produced from Sonoma’s old Zinfandel vineyards.

**Seghesio 2012 Zinfandel Rockpile ($38) 90+** This 100% Zin from the high altitude Rockpile AVA offers a pure, simple focus of light red raspberry and cherry fruit with a loam and mineral edge. It has a silky smooth attack and good flavor depth. **Seghesio 2012 Zinfandel Sonoma County ($24) 89** This is Seghesio’s volume leader, and it’s both very approachable and well-priced. It’s a generous wine, rich and ripe tasting, with good acidity, sweet cherry and plum fruit, and moderate tannins. Aged 10 months in mostly American oak.

**Seghesio 2012 Zinfandel Home Ranch Vineyard Alexander Valley ($58) 93** The Home Ranch Zin is Seghesio’s flagship wine from the vineyard originally planted in 1895. It’s ripe and dense with black raspberry and boysenberry fruit and complementary notes of loam and chocolate. It has a soft, velvety texture and offers both elegance and richness. Matured in 2/3 American and 1/3 French oak, about one-third new.

**Seghesio 2011 Zinfandel Pagani Ranch Sonoma Valley ($48) 92** A blend of 85% Zinfandel and 15% Alicante Bouschet from head pruned vines planted in 1880. A bold, dense, lush and complex wine offering notes of black forest cake, cracked pepper and earthy spice. Superb, especially considering the vintage.

**Seghesio 2004 Zinfandel San Lorenzo Vineyard Alexander Valley ($60) 92** A field blend of Zinfandel and Petite Sirah
from Seghesio’s oldest vineyard. It’s a rich, unctuous wine showing dark fruit, baking spice, balsamic, and forest floor on an elegantly textured palate. Still youthful and firmly tannic.

Also tasted: Seghesio 2011 Cortina Zinfandel Dry Creek Valley ($38) 89  Seghesio 2011 Old Vine Zinfandel Sonoma County ($38) 91  Seghesio 2012 Vermentino Russian River Valley ($22) 88

This 200-acre Alexander Valley Estate is tucked between two hillsides in the mountains above Alexander Valley. The Skipstone Vineyard consists of 30 organically farmed acres in a bowl shape surrounded by steep mountain slopes. The site is divided into 42 microblocks that are farmed with precision at the single vine level. The vineyard is mainly planted with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec and small amounts of Viognier and Riesling. The three wines reviewed here crafted by winemaker Philippe Melka are all outstanding cuvées and exemplary of the tremendous potential of high elevation viticulture and winemaking in Alexander Valley.

Skipstone 2012 Viognier Alexander Valley ($48) 91 Made from organically farmed grapes as are all the Skipstone wines, this is a classy Viognier that reveals white stone fruit. It’s a perfumed, feminine wine that’s fresh and very flavorful. Whole cluster pressed, goes though full malo, and 40% of the wine sees some oak aging. Skipstone 2011 Red Wine Faultline Vineyard Alexander Valley ($115) 93 A gorgeous opaque ruby blend that highlights Cabernet Franc and reveals a distinctly delicious herbal character. Aged 19-21 months in 75% new French oak, it is delicate on the palate, beautifully balanced with soft round tannins, a rich texture and a long finish. Skipstone 2011 Red Wine Oliver’s Blend Alexander Valley ($115) 92 An elegant blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot with intense flavors of black currants cassis, red berries and smoke. Rich and softly textured on the palate, it has firm round tannins and a long persistent finish.

Spann Vineyards Spann Vineyards is owned and operated by Peter and Betsy Spann. Their vineyards are located in the Mayacamas Mountains on a steeply terraced mountainside. They dry farm their vineyards and strive for low yields, in some cases as little as one ton per acre. They also purchase fruit from Sonoma and elsewhere. Stylistically, Spann wines are fruit forward and easy drinking. Made for short to medium term drinking, they are generally ripe, mouth filling and flavorful. The difficult 2011 vintage was not kind to Spann Vineyards.

Spann Vineyards 2012 Yin-Yang Sonoma County ($20) 87+ The Yin-Yang is a 50-50 blend of Chardonnay and Viognier. It exhibits light aromas and flavors of pear with a hint of stone fruit and fennel. It has a creamy palate with delicate fruit flavors and a pleasant finish. Spann Vineyards 2012 Cinsault Sonoma Valley ($25) 88 This is one of the very few, and may be the only, single varietal wine made of Cinsault in Sonoma. It offers lovely aromas and flavors of dried plums, cloves and herbs. It is somewhat reticent in the nose but reveals fresh flavors on the palate with a silky texture and a pleasant finish. Spann Vineyards 2011 Malbec Sonoma County ($38) 86 The 2011 Malbec reveals dilute light red berry fruit aromas and flavors typifying many of the wines in the vintage. It also has dry tannins on the palate and insufficient fruit density to complement the wine’s 14.5 alc. Spann Vineyards 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Cross Creek Vineyard Moon Mountain District ($50) 86 The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Cross Creek Vineyard appears to have been impacted by the cool weather and rains of the vintage, which produced many dilute and astringent wines including those in the Moon Mountain District. Spann Vineyards 2011 OMG Sonoma Valley ($30) 90+ The OMG is a blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon and 33% Merlot. It is a big lush wine with beautifully integrated dark fruit flavors and toasted oak. It is soft and silky on the palate with concentrated dark fruit flavors, a touch of earthiness and polished tannins on the long finish.

Stone Edge Farm This small artisanal winery is a collaborative venture of Mac McQuown, co-founder of Carmenet Winery, winemaker Jeff Baker, formerly with Mayacamas Vineyards, and Sonoma’s preeminent organic viticulturist Phil Coturri. It consists of 16 acres with some 4+ acres in vines and the rest in olive groves, fruit trees, ornamental plants, chickens and beehives.

Stone Edge Farm produces small quantities of outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and Bordeaux blends that we tasted with Jeff Baker.
Stone Edge Farm 2012 Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma Valley ($30) 92 Made of Moon Mountain fruit, partly purchased from Kamen’s 1800’ vineyard, this wine is part egg fermented and part barrel fermented. It has a lovely rich minerality and full mouth feel with gooseberry flavors and excellent balancing acidity. A first rate first release!

Stone Edge Farm 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley ($90) 95+ This is a lush and expansive wine rich in black fruit, licorice and graphite flavors. It is beautifully balanced and reveals a lovely texture with great ripeness and density. It also has firm round tannins, which should enable it to last for 15 to 20 years minimum. A gorgeous wine!

Stone Edge Farm 2010 Surround Bordeaux Blend Sonoma Valley ($50) 92 Opaque ruby in color, the 2010 Surround is a blend of 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot and 1% Malbec. Sourced from the Moon Mountain District, and aged 22 months in French oak, it offers attractive red and black ripe spicy fruit aromas and flavors, a soft texture and good tannic grip on the finish.

Stone Edge Farm 2004 Surround Bordeaux Blend Sonoma Valley ($70) 93 The 2004 Surround was the winery’s first release. A blend of 58% Cabernet Sauvignon and 42% Merlot, it is half sourced from the Stone Edge Vineyard and half from Moon Mountain. It is a magnificent wine, rich and dense with lovely aromas and flavors of dark cherry, blackberry, cassis, and chocolate. Although 10 years old, it has maintained its flavor, structure, and tannins.

Stonestreet wines are produced from the 5100 acre, high elevation Alexander Mountain Estate located in the Mayacamas Mountains overlooking Alexander Valley. Originally belonging to the Zellerbach winery, it was acquired by Jess Jackson in 1989 and renamed in honor of his late father, Jess Stonestreet Jackson. The estate offers small and distinctive single lots of delicious whites and powerful reds hand crafted with great attention to detail by winemaker Graham Weerts. Stonestreet wines are superb, yet are not all that well known in the wine world. The 2010s are tasting beautifully but will need time to show their full potential.

Stonestreet 2011 Aurora Point Sauvignon Blanc Alexander Valley ($40) 92 A delicious, very expressive Sauvignon Blanc made in large foudres, about half fermented on the skins. There’s an exotic bouquet of ruby grapefruit lifted by a light note of passion fruit. It’s an opulent wine of astounding purity showing richness from the skins and lees stirring and finishing with good minerality. From a 900’ high vineyard.

Stonestreet 2010 Bear Point Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($55) 92 Beautifully aromatic of citrus blossoms with an underlying note of lightly toasted oak. Great delineation and focus on the palate, perhaps the most Burgundian of the Stonestreet Chardonnays. Winemaker Graham Weerts follows a similar technique with all his Chardonnays, doing whole cluster press, indigenous yeasts, full malo, and half neutral, half new oak barrels. It reveals rich tropical fruit with nice touches of toasty oak.

Stonestreet 2011 Broken Road Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($40) 91 The Broken Road has an effusive bouquet of wet stones and white flowers and citrus, while the palate is round and shows more orchard and stone fruit and nicely integrated oak. Delicious but doesn’t have the intensity of some of the other Stonestreet Chardonnays, perhaps due to the difficult vintage. This vintage is 1100’ high.

Stonestreet 2012 Red Point Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($55) 93 A superbly balanced and refined wine showing a high-toned perfume of flint and pear and expressive fruit flavors with integrated oak. It’s mouth filling with lime-like acidity. With the vineyard at 850-1000’, it’s below the fog belt.

Stonestreet 2011 Terrace Ridge Semillon Sauvignon Blanc Alexander Valley ($35) 92 This 62/38 blend of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc is another gorgeous wine from Stonestreet, also made in large foudres like the Sauvignon Blanc. It reveals grapefruit, lychee, and a hint of spicy green olive on a lush, creamy palate. Very interesting, and excellent.


Stuhlmuller Vineyards

This 150-acre family estate is located on hillside bench lands in the southwestern corner of Alexander Valley near Dry Creek and the Russian River valleys. It originally sold grapes to top wineries in the area, but in the mid-1990s Fritz Stuhlmuller, fresh from the business school at the University of Southern California, decided to make his own wine and built a winery on the property in 2000. The wines are made by Danish winemaker Leo Hansen and are of excellent quality. The winery specializes in producing small quantities of premium Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel with the Chardonnay being the standout.

Stuhlmuller Vineyards 2012 Estate Chardonnay Alexander Valley ($24) 90 Winemaker Leo Hansen has made a well-balanced, fresh and delicious Chardonnay from the estate’s predominantly Wente clone vineyard located at the extreme south end of Alexander Valley, near Chalk Hill. It’s barrel fermented and aged in 70% new French oak and shows bright melon, citrus and stone fruit complexity with a vanilla note and excellent acidity.

Stuhlmuller Vineyards 2011 Estate Chardonnay Reserve Alexander Valley ($40) 91 A rich, full and very flavorful wine, especially for the vintage. It reveals honeysuckle, ripe fruit, toasted oak
and notes of smoke and caramel. Nicely integrated on a vivid palate. **Stuhlmuller Vineyards 2011 Estate Zinfandel Alexander Valley** ($28) 89 Bright dark red, very fresh and peppery, dark cherry nose. Big and bold, this wine reveals red and black fruit, ripe and rich, with somewhat gritty tannins. This co-fermented Zinfandel and Petite Sirah comes from the very southern edge of Alexander Valley and is aged 14 months in French and American oak, 20% new. **Stuhlmuller Vineyards 2012 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley** ($38) 89 The Estate Cabernet Sauvignon displays an inky nose with aromas of blackberry, leather and oak. It is full-bodied with ripe dark plum flavors and has firm and astringent tannins on the finish. Aged for 20 months in French oak, 52% new. Blended from 12 individual fermentations. **Stuhlmuller Vineyards 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Block 11 North Alexander Valley** ($75) 91 The opaque purple Cabernet Sauvignon Block 11 boasts aromas of blackberry, roasted meat and black olive. It is full-bodied on the palate with concentrated cassis and black cherry fruit flavors with hints of herbs and firm round tannins. Aged 19 months in 65% new oak.

**Trentadue**

This Italian family winery was established in Geyserville in the early 1960s by Leo and Evelyne Trentadue, who have grown grapes in Alexander Valley since the mid-1950s. They own 200 acres, much of it planted with Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Carignane and Italian varieties. The Trentadues have been a major source of grapes for Ridge Vineyard since 1967. Miro Tcholakov has served as winemaker since 1999. The La Storia Reserve Wines reviewed here are the top tier of wines produced by Trentadue and include Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and a Cuvée 32.

**Trentadue 2012 La Storia Merlot Alexander Valley** ($35) 90+ The La Storia Merlot offers dark red spicy fruit with a reticent nose. Aged 16 months in 38% new French oak, it displays a soft texture with good intensity of flavor and high acidity on the palate. **Trentadue 2012 La Storia Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley** ($35) 93 The La Storia Cabernet Sauvignon exhibits rich dark fruit aromas and flavors of black currant and cassis. It is soft, round and lush on the palate with good balance and persistence. Aged 13 months in 25% new French and European oak, it has soft round tannins and overall elegance. **Trentadue 2012 La Storia Cuveé 32 Red Wine Alexander Valley** ($35) 90 The La Storia Cuveé 32 Red Wine is an easy-drinking blend of 54% Sangiovese, 29% Merlot 8% Malbec, 5% Cabernet Franc and 4% Montepulciano. It is ripe and well endowed with cherry fruit aromas and flavors. It is lush and elegant on the palate with good acidity, round tannins and a long finish. **Trentadue 2012 La Storia Petite Sirah Alexander Valley** ($35) 91 The Petite Sirah is well endowed with blackberry fruit, spice and earth. Partially co-fermented with Zinfandel and aged 11 months in French, American and European oak, it is beautifully balanced and refined with a velvet texture, soft round tannins and a firm finish. Very attractive and should be enjoyed over the next 3 to 5 years. **Trentadue 2012 La Storia Zinfandel Alexander Valley** ($35) 91 The La Storia Zinfandel offers fragrant aromas of red and black fruit with a touch of cinnamon spice. Aged 11 months in 25% new oak, it is complex and elegant exhibiting high acidity and freshness on the palate with nicely integrated flavors and dark red cherry notes. A delicious wine.

**Trione**

The Trione family has been growing grapes in Sonoma County for more than three generations. Brothers Mark and Vic Trione own and cultivate close to 700 vineyard acres in Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Alexander Valley. In 2005 they built a winery on their Home Ranch in Alexander Valley and appointed Scot Covington winemaker. They produce Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. The premium wines reviewed here are of excellent quality.

**Trione 2012 Sauvignon Blanc River Road Ranch Russian River Valley** ($23) 89 This is an extraverted Sauvignon Blanc not afraid to show its pungent side. Ripe passion fruit shows on the nose, but the palate evokes asparagus and green herbs. Well done for the style. **Trione 2010 Pinot Noir River Road Ranch Russian River Valley** ($37) 90 The 2010 Trione Pinot Noir offers fragrant aromas of black cherry and loam. It is soft and velvet smooth on the palate with good intensity of ripe fruit flavors and freshness. Perfectly balanced with firm round tannins, the wine drinks beautifully now and will no doubt fill out and improve in the coming years. Well done. **Trione 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon Block Twenty one Alexander Valley** ($67) 89 The 2009 Trione Cabernet Sauvignon Block Twenty one displays a dark ruby color and aromas of earthy dark berry fruit. It is lush on the attack with a velvet texture and concentrated spicy dark fruit flavors. The tannins still have considerable grip and the finish is somewhat dry and tart. The wine may improve with additional time in the bottle.
Verité The Verité wines are among the very finest Bordeaux varieties crafted in Sonoma County. The wines are crafted by veteran winemaker Pierre Seillan of France. Pierre was recruited by Jess Jackson in the mid-1990s to make world class wine in Sonoma, and Pierre has done just that. The wines known as Verité consist of three cuvées: La Muse, crafted mainly from Merlot, La Joie, a Cabernet Sauvignon, and Le Désir, a Cabernet Franc. The grapes are sourced from high quality estate vineyards in Alexander Valley, Knights Valley, Bennett Valley and Chalk Hill. Verité is a world class winery and as our tasting revealed, Pierre Seillan produces extraordinary and age-worthy wines that are true works of art.

Verité 2010 La Jolie Sonoma County ($450) 97 The La Jolie is Pierre’s Medoc-style wine made of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot and 5% Cabernet Franc. It is a monumental wine, despite the difficult vintage, richly flavored with black currant fruit, cassis and licorice. The Cabernet Sauvignon comes from the Alexander Mountain Estate and Knights Valley and has rich and savory flavors, firm round tannins and a persistent long finish. Keep it in the cellar for two to three years and drink it over several decades. Verité 2010 La Muse Sonoma County ($450) 96 The La Muse is a Pomerol-like blend of 85% Merlot, 13% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Cabernet Sauvignon. The Merlot is sourced from Bennett Valley, where Jess Jackson planted an estate 15 years ago. The wine is dense and pure with high acidity and firm ripe polished tannins, excellent structure and a long finish.

Verité 2010 Le Desire Sonoma County ($450) 94 The Le Desire is a blend of 50% Cabernet Franc, 40% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. It is soft, light and elegant offering aromas and flavors of black cherry with a hint of loam. It has a ripe silky texture with firm tannins and a full-bodied structure. Verité 2002 La Muse Sonoma County ($450) 98 The 2002 La Muse displays a vibrant dark ruby color and has a special fragrance of plum and black cherry fruit. It has a soft and lush texture with a slightly meaty character and hints of leather, and brown spice. The wine still has lots of tannins for aging at least another decade.

Verité 2001 Le Desire Sonoma County ($500) 99 The 2001 Le Desire is simply a gorgeous wine. A blend of 48% Merlot and 42% Cabernet Franc it reveals more secondary notes of meat, wood and leather rather than fruit. It also is rich and intensely flavored with perfect acidity and freshness. Very refined and silky texture. Satiny.

Verité 1998 Verité Sonoma County ($500) 96 The 1998 Verité Sonoma County consists of 90% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Showing a little age on the rim, it is a gorgeous wine that is ready to drink and enjoy. It has spectacular silky mouth feel with great depth and complexity of red fruit flavors. The wine still retains elegance and rich flavors almost like a gran reserve from Rioja.
Future Challenges and Opportunities

Sonoma County is an exciting and highly diverse wine region. As illustrated in this report, there are many talented growers and winemakers producing an amazing variety of high quality premium wines. Sonoma is also a dynamic wine region undergoing considerable change with tremendous challenges and prospects facing the industry. They require action by industry leaders and the rapidly expanding community of growers and winemakers. Some of the most important ones are the following:

1. The industry faces considerable uncertainty due to the serious water shortages affecting California. This situation calls for thoughtful concerted actions by growers and winemakers to manage water more efficiently by increasing water recycling, reducing water use for non-essential purposes and using new technology for more efficient use of water. The water conservation measures encouraged by Sonoma’s sustainable winegrowing initiative will be critical in the long run to the health of Sonoma’s vineyards.

2. Sonoma County has set itself an ambitious goal to become 100% sustainable by 2019. This is a highly ambitious goal, but an important one for the future of the industry. Certification may help sell grapes, but its main value is the certification process itself. While about half of all Sonoma vineyards have already undertaken some form of self assessment, in the months and years ahead, growers and winemakers will need to complete the CSWA certification process. This will be especially challenging for the small, independent grower, although the Sonoma County Winegrowers have employed Robert LaVine, an expert in sustainable vineyard management, to provide training and technical assistance to growers and other wine industry stakeholders.

3. Diversity is one of the strengths of Sonoma County. That diversity is most clearly manifest in the large number of AVAs. AVAs have value to consumers only to the extent the wines reflect unique features of the terroir. The huge Sonoma Coast AVA overlaps other AVAs, especially Russian River, to such an extent that consumers may be puzzled as to what is a Sonoma Coast wine. The proposals to differentiate the wines of the Far Sonoma Coast and Petaluma Gap from the Sonoma Coast AVA are well justified and merit support.

4. Sonoma County’s new Conjunctive Labeling Law requiring the inclusion of “Sonoma County” on the label of all Sonoma county wines is a major step in helping to define Sonoma County as a recognizable wine region.

5. Land use conflicts between environmental groups and wine growers, like the CalPERS Preservation Ranch proposal and Artesa Vineyard projects, scuttled due to environmental lawsuits, put at risk further vineyard expansion, especially in some of the most promising cool climate sites along the coast. While CSWA certification helps address environmental concerns, Sonoma County needs to continue to refine its land use plans and procedures that balances continued vineyard growth with environmental protection.

6. The economics of growing grapes is rapidly changing in Sonoma and threatens Sonoma’s tradition of small, independent growers. Vineyard prices now average $125 thousand per acre, making it difficult for new growers to enter the market. At the same time, the growing labor shortage will inevitably lead to greater mechanization (currently 35-40% of grapes are machine harvested). Policy options for retaining small growers should be on the SCW agenda.

7. The Sonoma County Vintners and the Sonoma County Winegrowers need to continue to educate American consumers and the trade about Sonoma and the high quality of its premium wines. The annual tastings held in major markets is a good way of doing this as are the annual trade seminars like Sonoma in the City. This report and other in-depth educational materials will also help gain well-deserved recognition for Sonoma County and its wines.
Sonoma County offers a rich variety of interwoven, well-balanced soils, elevations and microclimates for growing grapes. There are 259 soil types mapped within the county that are divided into five major blocks or rock systems that account for the resulting soils. The accompanying map provides information on the location of each system and the corresponding AVAs.

The five major rock systems of Sonoma are:

1. Salinia [S] granite that lies close to the ocean west of the San Andreas Fault;
2. Franciscan Complex [F] of uplifted marine sediment that lies east of the San Andreas Fault;
4. Sonoma Volcanics [SV] of volcanic rocks to the east of the county; and
5. alluvial River [R] deposits that can be found in all the major river valleys and in Knight’s Valley.

For more on Sonoma County soils, see W.H. Wright, “Geology, Soils and Wine Quality in Sonoma County,” Sonoma State University.
The Salinian Block (S) lies west of the main trace of the San Andreas Fault system and is largely made up ancient granites with overlying sand and gravel. This block is too close to the cold waters of the Pacific for growing grapes.

To the east, there are sloping terraces perched above the coast composed of sand and gravel that originated on old beaches beneath the waves offshore. These formations have been uplifted to more than 1,000 feet above sea level and their sandy soils are suitable for growing grapes and cold-weather varieties like Pinot Noir and Chardonnays with excellent results (i.e., the far west Sonoma Coast). East of the San Andreas Fault, the Franciscan Complex (F) presents a mélange of heterogeneous rocks red-green in color consisting of serpentinite schists, basalt, sandstone and shales. These rocks are found along the Pacific coast and high ridges between Bodega Bay and Mendocino County. They are also located above the Russian River, southern Dry Creek, and run north to Knights Valley and Alexander Valley. The Franciscan Complex is mostly of oceanic origin consisting of sea-floor marine sediments and a variety of randomly distributed rocks. The soils of these areas are sandy and red pebbly clay most notably on the west side of the upper Dry Creek Valley where excellent red wines are produced.

The Wilson Grove Formation (W) consists of the gentle slopes and rolling hills near Sebastopol in the Russian River Valley. It is composed of fine-grained, shallow marine quartz sandstone and Gold Ridge soils that are now being recognized as prime land and climate for growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. In some areas there are also layers of volcanic ash and pumice interspersed with the sandstone. These sandy soils also occur in the northwestern part of the Sonoma County coast, which is prime land for Pinot Noir.

Sonoma Volcanics (SV) is a formation resulting from volcanic eruptions some 3 to 6 million years ago from Mount St. Helena south to the San Francisco Bay. The slopes of Sonoma Mountain, the west side of the ridge that extends north of Sonoma to Mark West Creek, Mount St. Helena, and the east ridge of the Napa Valley, are all eroded Sonoma volcanic rocks. The formation serves as the parent material for many of the soils in both the Napa and Sonoma regions. Soils of the Sonoma Volcanics is highly variable in type, thickness and extent.

Finally, River [R] gravels, terraces and older alluvium and the Glen Ellen Formation are older river deposits that include sand mixed with pebble and cobble layers capping ridges near the town of Glen Ellen and in Knights Valley. The older alluvium deposits like the Glen Ellen soils offer especially good soils for vineyards. These older alluvium soils are found along the Russian River in Russian River Valley and in Carneros. Soils developed along the flood plains of creeks and rivers tend to be sandy, but locally may have a percentage of clay.
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