



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## On the Pinot Trail: Hartford Family Winery

Veteran winemaker Jeff Stewart was a young winemaker assistant to Merry Edwards in 1989 when the Hartford Family Winery in Forestville was known as Laurier Winery. He left that position for winemaking stints at De Loach, Mark West, Knude, La Crema and Buena Vista Carneros, before coming full circle and in 2011 returning to the winery that Jackson Family bought out of bankruptcy in 1992. Don Hartford and spouse Jenny, Jess Jackson's daughter, are now the sole owners of Hartford Family Winery and Jeff Stewart is the Winemaker and General Manager.

Jeff's over 25 years of winemaking experience really shows through in the superb wines he is now crafting at Hartford Family Winery. My most recent visit in March allowed me to taste through all 12 of the currently released Pinot Noir-based wines. The scores do not mean a whole lot because Jeff just doesn't make a bad wine, meaning individual preferences determine which wines you or I might prefer. The excellent assortment of North Coast vineyards offer something to please every palate. I chose to concentrate my tasting at the winery on Pinot Noir, but the Chardonnays are equally impressive.



All Pinot Noirs are vinified with native yeasts, aged in about one-third new oak, and most are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.

With the 2016 vintage, Hartford Family Winery will be releasing 16 different Pinot Noirs, most all vineyard-designates, with the Russian River Valley appellation bottling aimed primarily at restaurants. The wines are available for tasting at two venues: the original tasting room open daily in Forestville at the winery at 8075

Martinelli Road, and in downtown Healdsburg at 331 Healdsburg Avenue, also open daily. The wines are offered through a wine club and the website at [www.hartfordwines.com](http://www.hartfordwines.com).

**2014 Hartford Court Pinot Noir Rosé** pH 3.25, 240 cases, \$28. Released March 15, 2015. Harvested from Fog Dance Vineyard as a rosé, tank fermented, finished in neutral oak. *Light pink color in the glass. Aromas of strawberry, cherry and rose petal echoed on the palate with an added hint of spice. Fresh and vibrant, with good acidity, finishing dry.* **88.**

**2013 Hartford Court Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** \$38. Released January 2015. A blend of grapes from single vineyard properties and three grower vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Aged 10 months in 100% French oak barrels, 32% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Cherry is the featured fruit in this light to mid weight wine, with added notes of cranberry, cola and oak seasoning. Forward and easy to drink with a good cut of acid on the bright finish.* **87-88.**

**2012 Hartford Court Seascape Vineyard Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.59, 327 cases, \$70. Released January 2015. A 6-acre vineyard on a ridge top west of the town of Occidental, bordering the well-known Coastlands Vineyard. A very cold site, with grapes picked often in November. Primarily Dijon 777, 114 and 115. Average yields 1 ton-per-acre. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak barrels, 28% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Very savory on the nose with scents of conifer, sous-bois, black cherry and a hint of oak. Striking attack of vivid cherry fruit with many added nuances including spices particularly clove, earth and conifer. The tannins are very silky, and the wine finishes with good brightness.* **92.**

**2012 Hartford Court Marin County Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.55, 373 cases, \$70. Released January 2015. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 32% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of forest and spice lead to a lighter weight wine featuring purple berry flavors with a hint of citrus in the background. Fresh, with supple tannins, and a high-strung finish.* **90.**

**2012 Hartford Court Sevens Bench Vineyard Estate Carneros Pinot Noir** 15.0% alc., pH 3.77, TA 0.57, 163 cases, \$65. Release September 2015. The name Sevens Bench comes from the two clones planted on the winery's block: 37 (Mt Eden) and Dijon 777. First release from this vineyard since 2009. Some whole cluster. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 25% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely aromas of peppery cherry, dark rose and earthy loam. The mid weight black cherry core is framed by firm tannins and accented with a compliment of oak. Earthy and savory, with soft acidity, and a remarkably intense and long finish. Will benefit from more time in bottle.* **91-92.**

**2012 Hartford Court Fog Dance Estate Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., pH 3.76, TA 0.54, 315 cases, \$65. Released January 2015. Grapes are from an organically farmed, estate vineyard planted in 1996 to Dijon 667, 777 and 115. The bottling is named for the dance performed by the Pacific fog which drifts through the vineyard and back again to the sea each day. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 38% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Medium reddish purple hue in the glass. Very slight reduction. Riper fruit aromas featuring spiced plum, boysenberry and black cherry. Welcome charge of black cherry and purple berry fruits on entry with an underlying riff of baking spices and citrus. Nicely integrated acidity, but the slightly grainy tannins need more time to moderate.* **90.**

**2012 Hartford Court Velvet Sisters Estate Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., pH 3.72, TA 0.56, 397 cases, \$65. Released January 2015. The "Velvet Sisters" are local historical figures who in Boontling lore became known for wearing plush velvet dresses. The grapes are sourced from blocks within Falk Vineyard planted to Dijon 115, 667 and 777, and Pommard selections. Native and cultured yeasts. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 32% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very enticing aromas of alpine strawberry, cherry, wood spice and sous-bois. Highly satisfying, "pretty" core of cherry fruit with a flowery underpinning. The oak is well-integrated, the fine-grain tannins provide support, and the wine finishes with a burst of juicy, black cherry fruit which hangs on for dear life.* **92-93.**

**2012 Hartford Court Land's Edge Vineyards Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.71, TA 0.55, 2,295 cases, \$50. 2013 vintage released January 2015. Sourced from vineyards (75% Far Coast Vineyard and 25% Seascape Vineyard) located in the far western edge of the Sonoma Coast that are driven by maritime influence. Clones 667, 777, 115, Pommard and Swan. Aged 10 months in 100% French oak barrels, 28% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. An intensely flavored mid weight plus macho wine*

featuring aromas and flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, mocha, and savory herbs. Polished tannins make for very forward drink ability. A “ribeye wine.” 92-93.

**2012 Hartford Court Jennifer’s Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.57, 341 cases, \$70. Released January 2015. Named in honor of coproprietor Jennifer Hartford. Sourced from a vineyard in a windy and very cool site in the Sebastopol Hills planted primarily to clone 23 that is known for very small berries, low yields and a high skin-to-pulp ratio. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak barrels, 46% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Dark reddish purple hue in the glass. Highly expressive nose that leads with aromas of dark berries, tea and anise. Highly structured and robust, with flavors of blackberry, ollaliberry and English tea. Concentrated, but elevated with juicy acidity, and offering a suave finish of noticeable intensity.* 93.

**2012 Hartford Court MacLean’s Block Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.59, TA 0.54, 337 cases, \$65. Released January 2015. Named after Don and Jennifer Hartford’s son, MacLean. The 20-acre vineyard is nestled near redwood groves near the town of Occidental. Organically and biodynamically farmed Dijon 667 and 777 clones planted in Goldridge sandy loam soil. Aged 16 months in 100% French oak barrels, 44% new. *A very curious and interesting wine. Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of pine and forest floor lead to a delicious mid weight core of black cherry and black raspberry fruits accented with notes of conifer, spice and mocha. The tannins are very fine, and there is a lively grip of acid on the finish. As Jeff points out, in this wine you get a real sense of the forest that surrounds this vineyard.* 92.

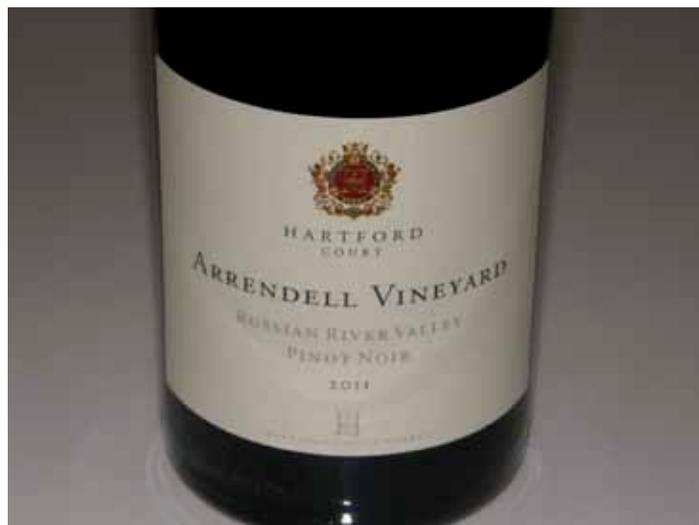


**2012 Hartford Court Hailey’s Block Estate Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.55, \$65. Released January 2015. Sourced from a block within Arrendell Vineyard that is named after Don and Jennifer Hartford’s daughter, Hailey. The block was planted in 1996 to Dijon 114 and 777 when Hailey was six years old. The site is probably the coldest spot in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 44% new.

*Moderate dark reddish purple color in the glass. Intoxicating aromas of ripe strawberries, black cherries and black raspberries with hints of spice and violet. Mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and cassis with a well-proportioned backbone of acid and tannin. A highly enjoyable wine of great character.* 94.

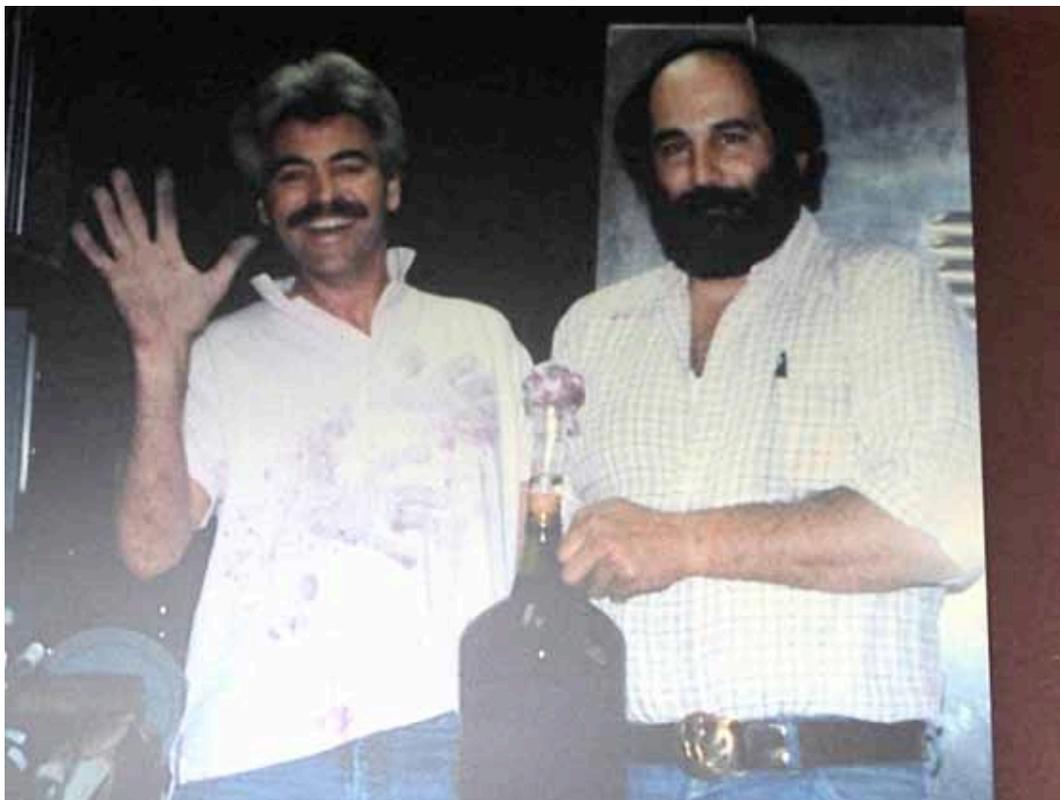


**2012 Hartford Court Arrendell Vineyard Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.59, 298 cases, \$90. Released January 2015. This low-lying vineyard sits in a very cold meso-climate that allows full expression of the terroir. The old vines were planted in 1975 and struggle to ripen a 1 ton-per-acre fruit load of heirloom selections. Aged 14 months in 100% new French oak barrels, 45% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. A wonderful array of fresh scents greet the drinker including black cherry, kirsch, cassis, sous-bois and violets. Sappy and robust, with intense layers of flavor that unfold on the palate in stages to reveal notes of boysenberry, cassis, plum reduction sauce, and earthy herbs. Very smoothly textured with balanced tannins and a lingering finish. A special wine of uncommon personality and breeding.* 95.



# On the Pinot Trail: Papapietro Perry

Ben Papapietro and Bruce Perry met 40 years ago while working together at the San Francisco Newspaper agency. Besides being both native San Franciscans, they shared a love for food and wine, and had a particular interest in Pinot Noir. They began making wine in Ben's garage and their friends loved their early efforts. After meeting coworker Burt Williams of Williams Selyem fame, they were inspired to move from garagistas to professional winemakers. Below is a picture of Ben (right) and Bruce in their early winemaking days:



Burt Williams invited the pair to visit him at Williams Selyem Winery where they learned about making Pinot Noir from the "master." Before long, they began crafting their own Pinot Noir, and over time added Zinfandel and Chardonnay to their lineup. Ben even picked up the habit from Burt of wearing Hawaiian shirts everywhere.

When Ben and Bruce retired from their day jobs, they started a winery in Healdsburg in 1998. Soon Renae Perry was handling the operations and Yolanda Papapietro dealt with distributor relations. Currently, the winery produces 6,000 to 8,000 cases annually.

A tasting room is open daily at 4791 Dry Creek Road, just north of the town of Healdsburg. Visit the website at [www.papapietro-perry.com](http://www.papapietro-perry.com).

I stopped by the tasting room in March 2015, and tasted through the 2012 lineup of Papapietro Perry Pinot Noirs. The 2012 vintage wines have only been released since early 2015 and all are available except the Mukaida Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir which is sold only to wine club members and is sold out (I did not taste this wine). If you liked the Williams Selyem Pinot Noirs crafted by Burt Williams, then you will like the Papapietro Perry Pinot Noirs which are nearly the same in style.

**2014 Papapietro Perry Russian River Valley Rosé of Pinot Noir** 200 cases, \$32. Juice from incline sorting tray. Several Russian River Valley vineyards. Barrel fermented. *Light salmon red color in the glass. A crisp wine with plentiful aromas and flavors of ripe strawberries and cherries, finishing with a brisk, refreshing cut of acidity.* 88.

**2014 Papapietro Perry Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 1,370 cases, \$51. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 1/3 new and 2/3 once and twice used barrels. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass.*

*The nose leads with oak-kissed cherry aromas. Soft and smooth, even slightly creamy on the palate with forward flavors of cherry and raspberry accented with notes of vanilla and baking spice. Very supple tannins and balanced acidity make for armchair drinking. 89.*

**2012 Papapietro Perry Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 700 cases, \$51. *Light cherry color in the glass. Expressive nose offering scents of cherry pie glaze, spice and forest floor. A little more concentration and tannic backbone than the Russian River Valley bottling, with a burst of blue and red berry flavors on entry, persisting through a satisfying finish. 90.*

**2012 Papapietro Perry Nunes Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 773 cases, \$56. This vineyard is located at a relatively warm site just off the 101 Freeway east of the Santa Rosa airport. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Effusive aromas of fresh cherry, raspberry and spice. The cherry flavor really pops on the palate with endearing spice notes. Tastes of blueberry and raspberry add interest. Very suave in the mouth, with fine grain tannins, and a huge, fruit-driven finish. 92.*

**2012 Papapietro Perry Peters Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 1,070 cases, \$56. This vineyard is located south of Sebastopol. *Moderate light cherry red color in the glass. A very savory nose featuring aromas of forest floor, conifer and herbs with a hint of strawberries and spice. More fruity on the palate, with mid weight, attacking flavors of cherry and red berries with a subtle savory thread in the background. The wine has great purity of cherry flavor that really clings to the palate. Easy to like, with suave tannins and good finishing length. 92.*



**2012 Papapietro Perry Leras Family Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 1,245 cases, \$56. Vineyard is located on River Road behind Martinelli's tasting room. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. This wine shows an inviting interplay between cherry and berry fruits and oak. Discreetly concentrated, with a good attack, chewy tannins, and a welcome touch of oak spice on the finish. 90.* (Nick Leras photo below)



**2012 Papapietro Perry Charles Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 995 cases, \$56. *Light cherry red hue in the glass. Very fragrant cherry and kirsch aromas on the nose. Beautifully composed, with layers of cherry flavor that coat the palate and pick up intensity on the gorgeous, long-lived finish. 92.*

**2012 Papapietro Perry Campbell Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.9% alc., 825 cases, \$56. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of cherry tart and sandalwood. Acid-driven, and a bit austere, with flavors of tart cherry and citrus. Refreshingly crisp, but modest in attack and finish. 88.*

**2012 Papapietro Perry 777 Clones Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 625 cases, \$72. Ben calls this his "Vegas wine," because of the triple 7 designation. Sourced from five Russian River Valley vineyards. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. A very harmonious wine with aromas and flavors of cherry, cranberry, raspberry and sandalwood. Well-crafted, with juicy acidity, balanced supple tannins, and generous length on the lingering finish. 91.*

**2012 Papapietro Perry Pommard Clones Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 625 cases, \$72. 100% Pommard clone from several Russian River Valley vineyards. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Perfectly seasoned with spice and oak, this charming wine is a delight. Mid weight flavors of Bing cherry and cola fill the mouth with goodness, holding court through an expansive finish. Impressive composure draws you back for another sip. 93.*



# On the Pinot Trail: Kutch Wines

I visited Jamie Kutch in March 2015 at his relatively new digs in Sonoma to talk about Pinot Noir, see his new winery setup, and check out his newly born son. I recently wrote extensively about Kutch Wines and reviewed the 2013 vintage wines in the *PinotFile*: [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1274/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1274/), so no need to go over the winery's background again. We tasted some older vintages as well as two wines out of barrel. Refer to my previous tasting notes on the 2009-2013 wines to see how they are progressing based on this tasting.

Jamie feels that the 2013 and 2014 vintage wines made in his new winery have more expressive fruit due to his complete control of all of his own equipment. The first wines were barrel samples.

**2014 Kutch Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay** A blend of fruit from Trout Gulch and Zanate vineyards. *A barrel-fermented beauty with bright, fresh aromas and flavors of citrus and apple. Good cut and vibrancy. Very promising.*

**2014 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Most know that Kutch is a proponent of whole cluster fermentation. *This was an eye-popping demonstration of the difference between 100% de-stemmed and 100% whole cluster Pinot Noir. The wine from the de-stemmed barrel was simple and not distinctive. The wine from the whole cluster barrel offered more aromatic and textural interest, and was more complex and nuanced. The difference was dramatic.*

The following finished wines were tasted from bottle. The tasting notes are not detailed since this was a friendly, informal tasting and chat.

**2009 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Sourced from Sonoma Stage, Nobles and La Jons vineyards. Several suitcase clones. 75% whole cluster. 50% new oak. *Very ripe, fruit-driven, rather ordinary with modest tannins. Good.*

**2009 Kutch Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 100% whole cluster. 100% neutral oak. *Some green herbal notes on the nose but not on the palate which featured flavorful black cherry fruit backed by firm, but not intrusive tannins. Good.*

**2009 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 50% whole cluster. 50% new oak. *The best of the three 2009s. Nicely flavored ripe, spicy cherries with a slightly gritty tannic backbone. Has opened up nicely since I last tasted it in 2011 with softening of tannins. Very good.*

**2011 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** A blend of fruit from Campbell Ranch Vineyard in Annapolis (sandy, Goldridge soil) and Sonoma Stage Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap (heavy clay). 25% whole cluster. *A showy wine drinking perfectly now with a lovely marriage of black cherry, spice and savory notes. Very soft tannins. Excellent.*

The point about the soils is that Jamie has learned to match oak regimen with soils. Sandy, Goldridge soils produce more feminine wines that shouldn't be exposed to too much new oak. On the other hand, clay or rocky soils produce more intense fruit that matches better with higher amounts of new oak.

**2011 Kutch Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 12.9% alc.. 50% whole cluster. Dijon 115, 667, and Pommard and Martini clones. *A very savory nose leads to a feminine wine with soft tannins, good acidity and flavors of edible flower, cherry and spice. The finish is suave and lengthy. Excellent.*

**2011 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.7% alc.. 50% whole cluster. 50% new oak. This vineyard is located at a very cold site and is the last picked. Goldridge soils. *More concentrated and sappy, featuring flavors of blackberry, black raspberry and cassis. Velvety smooth in the mouth with modest tannins. Excellent.*

**2012 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.9% alc.. 100% whole cluster. *Concentrated, robust core of darker fruits with an earthy, spicy, floral and mineral-driven underpinning. Complex and intriguing. Still sporting noticeable tannins, but the wine has interesting textural qualities. Still young. Excellent.*

The 2013 Kutch Pinot Noirs are all 100% whole cluster fermented and are stunning wines that offer the best features of whole cluster vinification without the greenness or heavy tannic load that can ruin the party.

**2013 Kutch Sans Soufre Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Produced without sulfur. 100% whole cluster. Aged in neutral barrels. Harvest Brix 19.5°, pH 2.95. *A pleasant, lighter weight wine with fresh scents of cherry and rose petal. Vibrant flavors of cherry and raspberry in a Beaujolais style with lively acidity. Very good.*

**2013 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.3% alc.. Campbell Ranch, Sonoma Stage and Le Jons vineyards. 30% new oak. *Very charming and forward drinking now featuring darker berry fruits with notes of spice and rose petal. Impeccable balance. Very good.*

**2013 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.3% alc.. 30% new oak. *A feminine wine with exquisite balance featuring a plethora of red fruits and hi-tone accents of spice and rose petal. Very suave and seductive, with refined tannins and uplifting acidity. Very good.*

**2013 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.3% alc.. 30% new oak. Grapes sourced from own-rooted, dry-farmed, head-trained vines planted in the Graveyard Block. The sprawling vines produce grapes of variable ripeness. *The nose is both fruity and savory. Richly fruited on the palate with darker cherries and raspberries. Still sporting firm, gritty tannins. The finish on this wine is remarkably intense and long. Excellent.*

**2013 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 12.2% alc.. 50% new oak. *Noticeably darker in color with a dreamy concentration of black cherry, boysenberry and blackberry fruits. This wine makes you sit up and take notice. The young tannins are firm but balanced. Excellent.*



# On the Pinot Trail: FEL Wines

At the last World of Pinot Noir I met with Ryan Hodgins, the very personable winemaker at FEL Wines in Anderson Valley. His current Pinot Noir releases are outstanding, so I wanted to know the story behind the wines.

In 2009, Cliff Lede, proprietor of Lede Family Wines in Napa Valley, expanded into Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris with the acquisition of Breggo Cellars in Anderson Valley. In 2014, as tribute to his mother, Florence Elsie Lede, Lede renamed the brand FEL Wines. She was known for her home winemaking hobby and sparked Lede's curiosity in wine when he was young.

In 2011, Lede bought the Savoy Vineyard in Anderson Valley, known as one of the premier Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards in the North Coast region of California. The vineyard was planted by Richard Savoy in 1991, and encompasses 44 acres of diverse sub-blocks planted to a wide array of Dijon and heritage Pinot Noir and Chardonnay clones and selections. Fruit from Savoy Vineyard is also sold to Auteur, Failla, Littorai, Peay and Radio-Coteau among others.

Winemaker Ryan Hodgins buys fruit from other vineyards in the Anderson Valley and Sonoma Coast for the FEL portfolio's of single-vineyard bottlings. The full array of wines includes: Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley Chardonnay, Anderson Valley Pinot Gris, Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir, Savoy Vineyard Chardonnay, Ferrington Vineyard Pinot Noir, Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noir, Donnelly Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir, and in select vintages, Savoy Spiritus Pinot Noir.

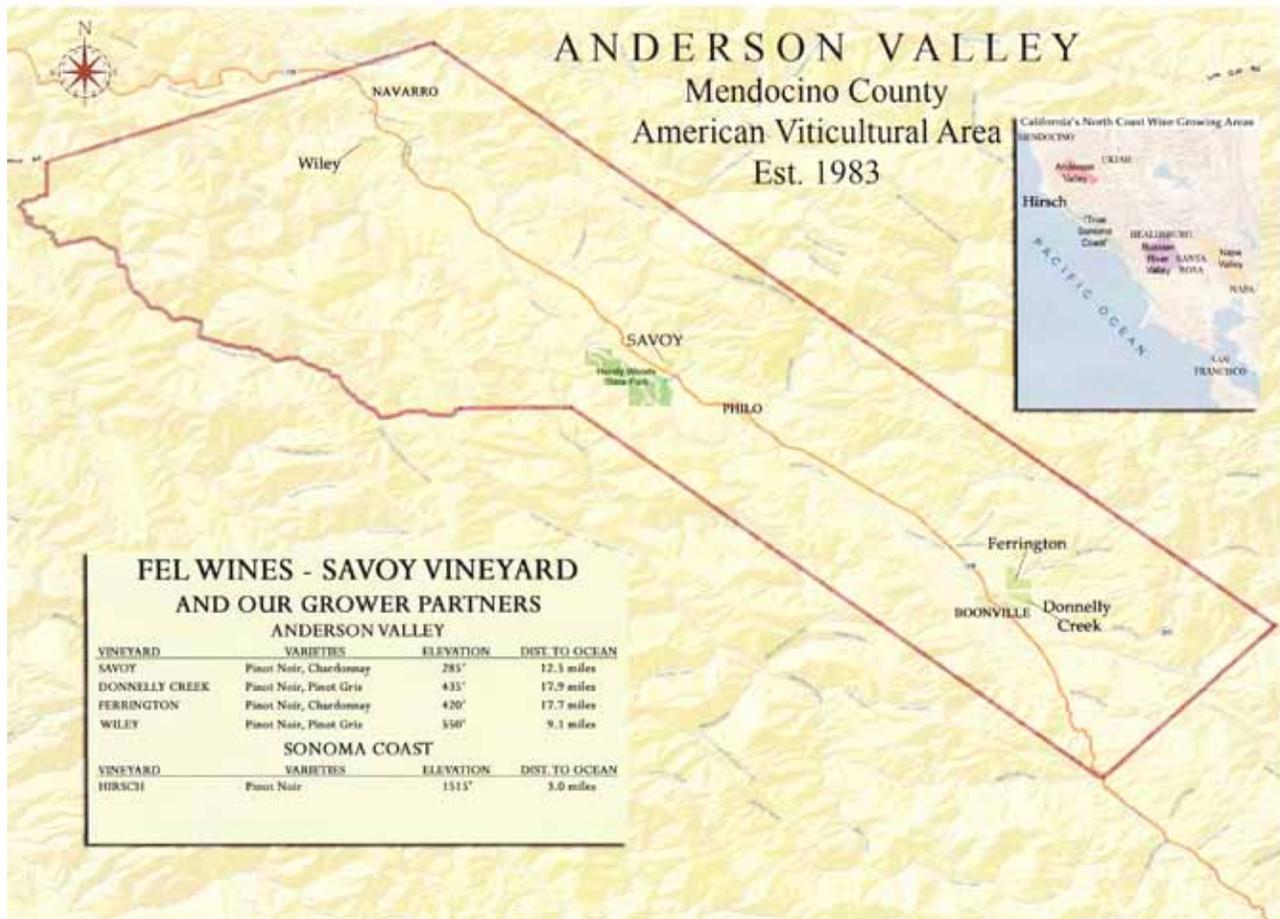
Raised in Portland, Oregon, Ryan attended Oberlin College in Ohio, where he majored in biology and developed an interest in plant biology and winegrowing. He considered several careers after college, but wine seemed most interesting and he soon attended University of California at Davis where he graduated with a Master's Degree in Viticulture & Enology. He met his wife at Davis, who is also a viticulturist. His first hands-on experience in vineyard and winery work was during a harvest internship while at Davis under mentor Brice Bagnall, the winemaker at Witness Tree Vineyard in Salem, Oregon. Upon graduation in 2004, Ryan worked at Acacia Winery in Napa Carneros, leaving to accompany the winemaker at Acacia, Michael Terrien, who left Acacia to become the winemaker at Hanzell Vineyards.

While working as an assistant winemaker at Hanzell Vineyards, Ryan became the founding consulting winemaker for Breggo Cellars in the Anderson Valley in 2005. When Cliff Lede acquired Breggo Cellars (now FEL) in 2009, he asked that Ryan become the full-time winemaker. When Lede bought Savoy Vineyard in 2011, it became the winery's first estate vineyard. Ryan was very familiar with the vineyard, having made wines for Breggo from Savoy Vineyard, and it was only natural that he became the vineyard manager and grower relations manager for Savoy Vineyard along with his role as winemaker at FEL.

Ryan's Pinot Noir vinification is straightforward. Grapes are largely de-stemmed with some limited amounts of whole cluster based on intuition (in 2014 he did include 20% to 30% whole clusters in the bottom of the tanks primarily in the AV blend and Savoy Vineyard wines). He prefers not to make wines that make people think of whole cluster first when they smell the wines. Generally he employs 5 to 7 days or longer of extended maceration with the amount of tannin driving the length of time decision. The wines are aged 15 months in barrel without racking.

FEL's Anderson Valley grower partners include Donnelly Creek, Ferrington and Wiley vineyards. Beginning in 2012, Ryan began sourcing wine from outside Anderson Valley, and was able to obtain some much-prized grapes from Hirsch Vineyard. Today, Ryan crafts 5 Pinot Noirs, 2 Chardonnays and a Pinot Gris: a total of 7,000 cases annually. The wines are sold online at [www.felwines.com](http://www.felwines.com), through wine clubs, and a mailing list. The generous 2012 vintage provided plenty of wine to go around.

Read more about Ryan in the last page of this issue in the "Up Close and Personal" feature.



**2013 FEL Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., 2,347 cases, \$38. Released May 1, 2015. A blend of several clones and selections including Dijon, Pommard, Mt. Eden and Martini from Donnelly Creek, Savoy, Wiley and Ferrington vineyards. Harvest average Brix 24.7°. 5 to 7 day cold soak, 9-day uninoculated primary fermentation, and 3 to 7 day extended maceration. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 38% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Hi-tone scents of black cherry, red currant and spice lead to a mid weight plus charge of black cherry, black raspberry fruits accented with a pleasing spice note. The wine has balanced tannins, integrated acidity, and some length. This is a terrific AVA blend that is primed for current drinking. 91.*



**2013 FEL Anderson Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 1,201 cases, \$28. Released October 1, 2014. A blend of multiple clones sourced from Ferrington and Savoy vineyards. Harvest Brix averaged 23.0°. Whole cluster pressed to tank, fermented in neutral French oak barrels with limited malolactic fermentation. Aged sur lie 9 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately light straw yellow color and clear in the glass. Aromas of citrus, tropical fruits and apple hold up nicely over time in the glass. Richly fruited, yet crisp and vibrant, with a vigorous mid palate attack of citrus. Very satisfying, with subtle notes of pear and roasted nuts, finish with a bright charge of lemon-lime spirit. 90.*



**2014 FEL Anderson Valley Pinot Gris** 14.2% alc., 1,437 cases, RS 0.35%, \$25. Released May 1, 2015. A blend of fruit from Wiley Vineyard, Filigreen Vineyard and Donnelly Creek Vineyard. Harvest Brix 23.6°. Whole cluster pressed, fermented in a 900 gallon French oak oval, small neutral French oak barrels and stainless steel tanks. *Light golden yellow with a faint pink caste in the glass. Don't underestimate Pinot Gris - there is plenty to like in this wine. Aromas of nectarine, peach, melon, pine, herbs and floral bouquet. Bright, crisp, clean and refreshing with flavors of apple, stone fruits, melon, lychee and herbs. The flavors really cling to the palate. A very complex wine that changes over time in the glass, and will perform beautifully at the dinner table. 92.*

**2012 FEL Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., 138 cases, \$48. Released December 2014. A blend of clones including Wente and Martini selections. Harvest Brix 23.6°. Whole cluster pressed to tank, barrel fermented in 50% new French oak, aged sur lie for 15 months. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of fig, lychee, citrus, flower basket and buttery brioche. Some California fruit exuberance, with flavors of pear, lemon, white peach, and a deft touch of oak. Smooth and slightly viscous on the palate, with tight acidity lifting the finish.* **90.**



**2012 FEL Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**

14.2% alc., 645 cases, \$65. Released December 1, 2014. A blend of clones including Dijon and Pommard, as well as Martini and Calera selections. Harvest Brix average 24.6°.

*Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of fresh black cherry, rose petal and spice, with some cedary oak chiming in over time. Layer upon layer of gorgeous black cherry, kirsch and black raspberry goodness envelope the palate. A sexy, suave wine that is plush and velvety in the mouth, yet there is enough acidity to keep the experience fresh and vibrant. Nothing is out of place in this magnificent wine that finishes with a flourish of perfectly ripened black stone fruits. I ran out of superlatives with this one, but WOW sums it up. Still terrific the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating good age ability.* **95.**



**2012 FEL Hirsch Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 382 cases, \$65. Released February 1, 2015. A blend of Dijon 777 and Pommard clones. Harvest Brix average 24.3°. 7-day cold soak, 6-day extended maceration. Aged 14 months in 100% French oak barrels, 62% new. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The complex nose offers an array of scents including dark red berries and cherries, balsam, spice, meadow and a hint of vanilla. The bright black cherry and raspberry fruits offer good lift and energy. Discreetly concentrated, the wine sports balanced tannins and deft integration of oak. Much better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, with more expressive fruit aromas and flavors and more length on the finish. Like the Savoy bottling, this wine should easily age for 10 years.* **93.**

# A Delightful Pinot Aura Pervades the Pinot Noirs of LaRue

You won't find scores for LaRue Pinot Noir in the *Wine Spectator* or *Wine Advocate* because owner and winemaker Katy Wilson doesn't submit her wines for review. I have raved about the wines since my first article on LaRue appeared in 2012 in the *PinotFile*. You could say I helped to discover the wines, but like other great cult Pinot Noirs, they would have been found out in time anyway.

Katy gained her Pinot Noir winemaking acumen with stints at Testarossa, Joseph Phelps, Craggy Range, and Flowers Winery where she was the assistant winemaker to Ross Cobb. If you have enjoyed COBB Pinot Noirs, you will like LaRue Pinot Noirs, as they share some common vineyard sources and have a very similar style.



I find LaRue Pinot Noir closely reflects Katy's personality. She is somewhat shy and modest, playful with a beaming smile, and energetic but not flamboyant. Her wines have a certain transcendent aura that reminds you why you fell in love with Pinot Noir in the first place. La Rue Pinot Noirs are wines that could make you want to abandon your family, leave your job, and forfeit your hard-won position in the community for just one more bottle.

Katy produces about 500 cases of Pinot Noir annually, both Sonoma Coast and Sonoma Coast vineyard designated wines. Despite the demand, she refuses to make more, preferring to do all the winery work by herself. She is also a consulting winemaker for Anaba Wines since late 2014, and Claypool Cellars since 2011.

The first wine reviewed here, the 2012 La Rue Rice-Spivak Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir needs special mention. This is one of California's most special vineyards because it is capable of expressing a consistent uniqueness with each vintage. Some might deem this a reflection of terroir. I first met Pinot Noir from this vineyard several years ago made by Ross Cobb under his COBB Wines label and it has always caught my eye. The wines always have stunning aromatics featuring sous-bois, rose petal and spice, a plethora of juicy red fruits, and a certain elegant quality that in a review of the 2006 COBB Rice-Spivak Vineyard Pinot Noir, I said, "It really shows off the frilly, sexy side of Pinot Noir." Katy told me that this 6-acre vineyard south of Sebastopol always produces a wine that seems like it is made with whole cluster even when it is not. The

vineyard is owned by Russell Rice and Helene Spivak MD who planted it to Dijon clones and Swan selection in Goldridge soil that also has some volcanic ash which is unusual for this area.



**2012 LaRue Rice-Spivak Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot**

**Noir** 12.6% alc., 125 cases, \$70. Clones are 115, 667 and Swan. Less than 5% whole cluster. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very exotic aromatic profile brimming with alluring scents of black cherry, spice, rose petal and a hint of sweet oak. The nose reminds of one that reflects whole cluster fermentation. This is a special wine of charm and character, offering juicy cherry fruit that dances across the palate. Accents of spice and flower bouquet add interest. The experience is bright and energetic with great harmony and elegance. The wine offers a refreshing cut of acidity on the long finish that flaunts seductively spiced cherry and red berry fruits. Very difficult to keep from drinking the whole bottle. 97.*



**2012 LaRue Coastlands Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 50 cases, \$75. First planted in 1989 by the Cobb family, the vines are among the oldest on the Sonoma Coast. Clones are Pommard, Martini and Wädenswil. 15% whole cluster. Aged 17 months in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. The nose is somewhat subdued but very pleasing, offering aromas of darker red fruits, balsam, vanilla and sous-bois. Very intense and saturating on the palate with an explosion of fresh cherry and raspberry fruits that are flat out delicious. A little more structured, sappy and masculine with a touch more oak overlay than the Rice-Spivak bottling. The finish is remarkable for its persistence, generosity and juicy acidity. This wine was even better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, displaying the fat, silken richness that only Pinot Noir can achieve. 96.*

La Rue wines are sold online at [www.laruewines.com](http://www.laruewines.com). I suggest you join the mailing list because as the word continues to get out, these wines will be increasingly difficult to acquire.



## Winemaker Up Close & Personal: Ryan Hodgins of FEL Wines

**What Pinot Noir made by someone else are you am drinking now?** Auteur, Littorai and Radio-Coteau Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir.

**What was your wine epiphany?** 1995 or 1996 (not sure) Kathryn Kennedy Santa Cruz Mountains Cabernet Sauvignon (drank while attending UC Davis).

**My talent that few people know about:** Fast pitch softball coaching (daughters).

**The thing I do religiously in the winery:** I do not taste too much, preferring to taste about once a month (avoids chasing my tail).

**The wine region other than my own where I would like to make Pinot Noir:** West Sonoma Coast

**How do you relax?** Spending time with my three daughters, vegetable gardening.

**If money were no object, you would:** Travel.

**If I wasn't a winemaker, I would be:** A woodworker crafting furniture.