

March 14, 2016

# WINE News

*Sonoma County road trip!*



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## Flying High on Sonoma County Wines

By Bryan Brick

For this year's first official K&L Domestic Field Trip, we decided to go to Sonoma County. Between the recent streak of phenomenal vintages, the great number of high-quality producers and our staff's excitement about the wines coming from the region, we figured it would be the perfect place to start scouting wines in 2016. We had the distinct pleasure of beginning the trip with a spectacular helicopter ride, taking in rare views of Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino counties and the rugged terrain that helps make up distinctive terroirs within each. Over three days we visited 14 wineries, encompassing even more brands, and we were shocked that we encountered no stinkers. In fact, I don't know if we had any bad wines during the entire trip. We may have found some things that we weren't keen on selling, but that had nothing to do with their quality. The staff that attended the trip, Mellyn Craig, Dave Genevro, John Majeski, Daniel Maas and myself, were in lockstep in concluding that we are actually under-utilizing these wines and need to get them out in front of people more often.

Case in point: **2013 Lynmar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$39.99)**. This has long been a staple at K&L, but it is rare for us to actively sell it. More often, it is a wine that just sort of disappears off the shelves. No longer will that be the case. This is delicious, pure and hallmark Russian River Valley Pinot Noir in all its bright and fruity glory. Full of tangy aromatics of raspberry coulis, blood orange flesh, cranberry and white sage, this nails all the notes one would want from the region. Lush and



juicy on the palate with no excess or unneeded ripeness, this is almost crystalline in its set of fruity flavors and back-end savor. While not inexpensive, it is a tremendous bargain for the varietal, region and quality, and has a lot to offer any Pinot fan regardless of personal preferences in style.

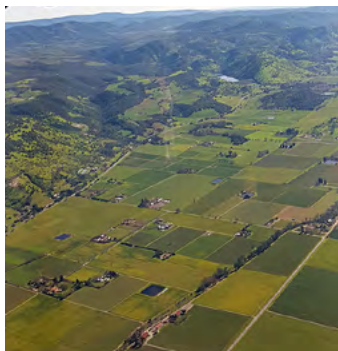
Another great find is the current lineup at Hartford Court. This was the one appointment we were a bit apprehensive about. That changed instantly when we had a fun and informative meeting with the winemaker, Jeff Stewart. We were pleasantly surprised with just how good these wines are. Long gone are the big, oak-driven wines that this winery was known to produce. Now the wines are site-driven and distinctive, and we had more than a few hits on our respective lists from HC. One of the wines that stood out was the entry-tier Chardonnay. The **2014 Hartford Court Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$24.99)** is full of floral edges, with magnolia and honeysuckle on the nose, bolstered by touches of polenta and apple flesh. A stony intensity drives the palate, bolstered by rich, plump flavors of Asian pear, orange oil and grilled peaches. A tasty value, to be sure.



One of the small producers we've made a point of going to the last few years is Nalle. Long known for their balanced Zinfandels from true old vine vineyards, they have been knocking it out of the park lately. Andrew Nalle, the second generation winemaker at Nalle, is about as non-assuming as they come and is completely locked in with his family's

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vineyard while working tirelessly to make the winery and the wines as good as any in Dry Creek Valley. Case in point is Nalle's Estate Reserve Zin. The **2013 Henderlong Nalle "Henderlong Ranch" Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel (\$44.99)** is one of the best Zinfandels, if not one of the best wines, we tasted on the trip. Powerful but weightless, rich yet full of lifting acidity, this Zin is a pure tightrope act. With two percent Carignane added, this Zinfandel, from 100-plus-year-old vines planted around the winery, is deeply briary on the nose with refined spice notes of whole black peppercorns, cardamom and oolong tea, and is fruited like a wild berry cobbler. On the palate, it is dark and brooding at its core and energetic at its edges, with a tension between its bass-toned blue fruits and its high-toned red fruits—all with a silky

smooth feel, no residual sugar and little oak getting in the way. This is just great raw material from these tremendous vines shepherded into a bottle with no excess or pretense. Exactly the way we like it!

These are just a few of the great wines I tasted on this trip. Mellyn, Dave, John and Dan all have written here about some winners, too. Unfortunately, we have a limited space in this newsletter in which we can discuss these and all the other great wines we tasted in the three days we were in Sonoma. We do have a more unlimited space in our **On The Trail Blog** in which we've posted more in-depth looks at some of the wines and producers we met on the trip, along with some stunning photos (the best that five camera phones could offer), so please check us out there as well if the wines you read about here have piqued your interest.



*Mick Unti discusses his Dry Creek Valley wines.*

## Unti We Meet Again...

*By John Majeski*

**First off, I'd like to take a moment to thank none other than Leonardo da Vinci for inventing, or at least making a rough sketch of, the first helicopter.** Our little sojourn in Sonoma County literally got off to a flying start when we climbed into a shiny blue copter and whizzed over the steep and rambling terrain to get a stunning bird's-eye view of this vast wine region, from the glistening coast to Knights Valley and beyond. I never really came down to earth after that ride, but was able to find my feet again at Unti Vineyards, where we were greeted by the gregarious and affable Mick Unti, who poured both his wines and heart out over many amazing bottles we tasted.

Founded in 1997 by Mick and his father George, the winery achieved early success with their Dry Creek Valley Zinfandels. But they felt that the climate and terroir of the valley also held great potential for

Italian and Rhône varieties. After all, many of the original growers in Sonoma County were Italian immigrants who planted a patchwork of vines destined for field blends that were served on the family table.

The **2013 Unti Dry Creek Valley Barbera (\$29.99)** was harvested following one of the driest growing seasons in memory. A very deep, intense wine with higher acidity that recalls the more serious wines of Piedmont, this is brilliantly defined by vibrant cherry and floral aromatics, with pitched flavors of Morello cherries, currants and plums. A delicious pairing with messy cioppino or mushroomy pizza, this high-flying wine sings all the right notes.

The **2013 Unti Dry Creek Valley Grenache (\$34.99)**, made from selectively reduced yields of 80% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre and 10% Syrah, shows the generous ripeness of the harvest. Vinification involved whole cluster fermentation to add richer flavors and structure to the final blend. Aged in barrels that underwent frequent lees stirring to enhance texture, this exuberant Grenache soars with aromas and flavors of red and black plums, violets, licorice and cherries, framed by soulful tannins and bright acidity. Grilled lamb skewers would marry magically with this red beauty.

And of course, the **2013 Unti Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel (\$27.99)**. Made from a field blend of 82% Zinfandel (from a thick-skinned Primitivo clone), 9% Petite Sirah and 9% Barbera, this is a much more structured, balanced wine, and certainly one of the benchmark Zinfandels from the region. According to Mick Unti, the addition of Barbera ups the acidity in the final wine. With its dark, spicy fruit and classic Dry Creek Valley flavors, this wine will match well with a slow-braised barbecued brisket.

## Banshee Wines: Awesome Reds and Undiscovered Whites

By Dave Genevro

For some time now, I have known about the magic happening at **Banshee Wines in Healdsburg**. So when I learned that it was a stop on our trip to Sonoma County this year, I was genuinely excited.

The Banshee Wines tasting room occupies a storefront in downtown Healdsburg, just steps away from the lovely park in the town square. The space is not traditionally laid out, which what I loved so much about it: instead of having one big tasting bar, it's furnished with a leather sofa, comfy chairs, a gorgeous wooden table and stools. Even the display of bottles for sale on the wall was unique.

I have been a huge fan of the single vineyard and Sonoma County AVA Pinot Noirs coming from the Banshee winemaking team, and I was waiting anxiously to try the upcoming Chardonnay bottling from them. I was delighted when we tried the newest Chardonnay, the **2014 Banshee Sonoma Coast Chardonnay (\$19.99)**. I really enjoy the stylistic approach these guys take with this wine: while it is creamy, with a gorgeous and generous richness on the palate, citrus fruit and stony minerality lend it brightness and texture.

One of my favorite single vineyard wines of the Russian River Valley, the **2013 Banshee "Tina Marie Vineyard" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$54.99)**, was showing great when we got the chance to taste it. Cherries, cranberries and a very well-balanced structure leads on

the palate, with back-end flavors of Assam tea, dirt, an impression of orange and citrus rind or zest, and other savory characters.

Those such as myself who might be budget-minded these days now have another fantastic option for when we just need something delicious to drink for under \$15. That option is the wine under Banshee's second label, Rickshaw. The **2014 Rickshaw California Chardonnay (\$14.99)** is a citrusy, fun, crowd-pleasing Chardonnay

that packs a great amount of fruit, acid structure and finish for the money. This is a perfect everyday sipper and an effective entertaining wine that will hold up to foods of all sorts. If you love drinking expressive, rich, well-balanced Chardonnay for more than fair prices, Rickshaw is a great find.



*Banshees Steve Graf and Noah Dorrance.*



*At long last, taking in a view of Dry Creek Valley at Papapietro Perry.*

## Papapietro Perry Perfection

By Daniel Maas

**November 23, 2000: Thanksgiving weekend in Massachusetts.** The fireplace roars, and I'm sitting at the dinner table when cousin Michael rejoins the festivities, fresh from a quick jaunt down to his basement wine collection. In his hand is a bottle of Pinot Noir that would thrust me headlong into a love affair with California wines. The bottle? The first vintage of what would become a most respected wine of the Russian River Valley: Papapietro Perry.

In 1998, longtime friends Bruce Perry and Ben Papapietro released their first vintage. Now, 18 years later, one thing has remained constant: the focus and care with which these two Northern California natives make each of their wines. Recently, I was able to visit these heroes of mine and taste through some of their current releases.

Beginning with their **2013 Papapietro Perry Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$49.99)**, we are treated to a fantastic summary of everything that is wonderful about wines produced in this region. Mostly sourced from the Campbell Ranch vineyard, this is an elegant expression of the varietal, with bright strawberry, lingering spice, and vibrant acidity that balances wonderfully with the soft tannic structure.

A darker and somewhat more brooding wine, the **2012 Papapietro Perry "Charles Vineyard" Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$54.99)** instantly catches your eye with its ruby color before invigorating your nose with introductory notes of sweet raspberry and bramble. As it coats your mouth with its silky texture, you'll find yourself lost in a world of plush fruit, vibrant minerality, and a hint of cedar.

Our final selection, and perhaps their most well-known bottling, is the **2013 Papapietro Perry "Peter's Vineyard" Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$54.99)**. This selection, which serves as the basis for most of the winery's blends, is perhaps one of my favorite wines in the world. Deep garnet in color, here is a party of cherry, cherry, and even more cherry intermingling with cola, black pepper, lavender and toasty vanilla richness. The finish lasts forever!

Back in the year 2000, Thanksgiving dinner came to an end. Football games began. And it shouldn't be a surprise that my mind was not on the game, but elsewhere: far off in the hills of Sonoma, feeling the breeze of the near Pacific as my skin warmed in the sun. And forever, my mind is down in the basement, ever searching for the wonder that is Papapietro Perry.





## New Wines from an Old Friend: Joseph Swan Vineyards

By Mellyn Craig

*“There are few more civilized pleasures in life than good company, good food, and good wine.” —Joe Swan*

I grew up in Sonoma County and visiting Joseph Swan Vineyards has long been at the top of my “wine bucket list.” Their legendary status has been known most of my life and I have loved their wines for many years. I even had the pleasure of tasting their Pinot Noir from my “vintage year,” 1977, with Clyde a few years ago. It still tasted amazing!

Joe Swan began making wine at his estate in the Russian River Valley in 1968, specializing in Chardonnay, Zinfandel, and Pinot Noir. Joe believed that growing small crops led to age-worthy wines, and that by keeping the winery small he would be able to oversee every aspect. Some have referred to him as “The Godfather of Pinot Noir in California.” He helped to put the Russian River Valley on the map.

Rod Berglund became a winemaker in 1979 and married Joe Swan’s daughter, Lynn, in 1986. Rod helped Joe Swan in the 1987 vintage, which ended up being Joe’s last vintage, as he became ill in 1988 and passed away a year later. Rod and Lynn have continued to make the same high quality, small production wines that are made to age beautifully. All of the wines we tasted lived up to their high standards. Here are two of these delicious wines we currently have for sale.



*With Rod Berglund in the cellar tasting room at Joseph Swan.*

The grapes used in the **2013 Joseph Swan “Kent the Younger” Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$34.99)** are from younger vines in the Ritchie Vineyard, which creates a slightly more modern style wine but also some lively acidity. This Chardonnay was fermented in used oak, allowing the elegant pear, citrus and white flower characteristics to shine. I really love the spicy ginger notes that excite the taste buds. The palate on this Chardonnay has a rich, leesy character, but is balanced with zesty acidity. Delectable now, it will also be a great wine with a little age.

If you crave the Zinfandels of the past with a little more balance and less alcohol, the **2012 Joseph Swan “Bastoni Vineyard” Russian River Valley Zinfandel (\$29.99)** is made for you! Joseph Swan has only been making a few vintages of Zin from this vineyard, but they know how to showcase the grapes well. This wine has sweet blue fruits with fresh acidity to keep the fruits balanced without being jammy. There is a wonderful savory note to this wine as well as baking spices like nutmeg and white pepper. This is a complex Zinfandel that will complement food well!

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