

WEST SONOMA
COAST VINTNERS
ARE A BAND APART

California's Côte d'Or

by Anthony Dias Blue

WEST SONOMA COAST VINTNERS, FOUNDED IN 2010, is an association of growers and wineries dedicated to preserving and protecting the history, landscape and culture of the West Sonoma Coast (as distinct from the broader—some say too broad—Sonoma Coast AVA) and to promoting this region's wines to the media, trade and the public. The group originally consisted of six founders but quickly grew and now numbers more than 40 member growers and wineries.

One of the original founders, Carroll Kemp of Red Car Wine, notes that the group is doing the preliminary research necessary before filing a petition for a new AVA that would nestle inside the existing Sonoma Coast AVA. "We're not doing this for marketing purposes," Kemp emphasizes, adding, "We want to make sure everything is in place before we begin the AVA process."

The vintners have identified four main factors that contribute to West Sonoma Coast terroir: a maritime climate that combines relatively cool daytime temperatures with warm night temperatures; a stable, cool ocean temperature that prevents extreme weather spikes and troughs; fog and wind that moderate temperature and balance humidity; and precipitation that is ample but rare during growing season. These factors are particularly conducive to Pinot Noir; cooler daytime temperatures slow sugar accumulation and extend growing seasons, which in turn increase flavor ripening (phenolic development); warmer nighttime temperatures balance sugar and flavor ripeness with acidity.

Situated at a latitude of 38 degrees, the northern vineyards of the West Sonoma Coast tend to be on band of coastal ridges less than five miles from the Pacific Ocean, while the region's southern vineyards extend further inland (up to eight miles from the Pacific) and sit on lower elevations. The region includes the distinctive growing areas of Fort Ross-Seaview, Occidental, Freestone, Annapolis, Green Valley and Sebastopol Hills—West Sonoma Coast *communes*, if you will.

"We will always be Pinot Noir- and Chardonnay-dominant," says Kemp, "because that's what the region demands." Pockets of other varieties, however, are promising, including exceptional Syrah, as my notes show.

TASTING NOTES

I recently tasted through wines—mostly Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, but with a ringer Syrah—from several of the West Sonoma Coast Vintners member wineries. All prices are suggested retail.

Charles Heintz 2012 Pinot Noir, Charles Heintz Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$48)

Lively cherry fruit with earth and savory qualities; fresh, elegant and vibrant; long and lifted. **91**

Charles Heintz 2012 Syrah, Charles Heintz Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$46)

Dark and rich with lovely boysenberry and blackberry fruit; tangy and elegant with great structure and finesse; notes of spice, pepper and tobacco; complex and stunning—a signal that this region may not be only about Pinot Noir. **94**

Emeritus Vineyards 2012 William Wesley Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$68)

Lush and rich but elegant and juicy with spice, tangy cherry and savory notes; silky and balanced, long and bright. **92**

Emeritus Vineyards 2011 William Wesley Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$68) Soft and smooth with earth, spice and tangy raspberry; lush and juicy with polished style; good acid structure and a rich, balanced finish. **90**



Failla 2012 Pinot Noir, Occidental Ridge Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$60) Smooth and lush with soft, ripe cherry and earth tones; ripe and juicy with lovely texture and balance; long and elegant. **92**

Flowers 2012 Estate Chardonnay, Camp Meeting Ridge Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$80) Golden color; elegant and bright with leesy notes and silky texture; ripe fruit and lush, mineral style. **92**

Freeman Winery 2012 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$45) Silky and smooth with fresh black cherry and spice; savory and lush with notes of earth and toasty oak. **92**



Gros Ventre Cellars 2012 Pinot Noir, Campbell Ranch, Sonoma Coast (\$44) Ripe and bright with spice and soft cherry fruit; juicy and mellow with elegance and balance; smooth and fresh with depth and bright style. **91**

Gros Ventre Cellars 2012 First Born Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$58) Earthy, mushrooms and dense with ripe plum and cherry fruit; smooth and juicy with good acid structure; long and complex. **91**

Joseph Phelps 2012 Chardonnay, Freestone Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$55) Elegance and ripe flavors galore; toasted and lush with juicy fruit, lovely balance and a vibrant finish. **93**

Joseph Phelps 2012 Pinot Noir, Freestone Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$55) Dark, rich and dense with toasty oak and ripe black cherry; smooth, lush and juicy; balanced and long. **92**



MacPhail 2012 Pinot Noir, Mardikian Estate, Sonoma Coast (\$85) Silky and smooth with bright savory style; candied cherries and spice with toasty oak and deep flavors of oak and dried berries. **90**

Marimar Estate 2012 Mas Cavalls Pinot Noir, Doña Margarita Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$44) Ripe black-cherry nose; juicy and fresh with bright acidity and lovely balance; elegant. **91**

Martinelli 2011 Sea Ridge Meadow Pinot Noir, Three Sisters Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$63) Light, fresh and lively with spice and tangy acidity; candied strawberry and savory notes; crisp and balanced, long and juicy. **91**

Paul Hobbs 2013 CrossBarn Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$25) Smooth and juicy with ripe fruit, tangy acidity and nice vanilla notes; fresh, balanced and long. **89**

Ramey Wine Cellars 2012 Chardonnay, Platt Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$60) Bright and structured with racy acidity, minerals and lovely elegant fruit flavors; silky and Burgundian; long, pure and balanced. **92**



Red Car Wine 2012 Pinot Noir, Hagan Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$68) Smooth and savory with mature cherry and spice; dense, complex and earthy with long, deep flavors. **90**

Red Car Wine 2011 Estate Syrah, Fort Ross-Sea View (\$50) Smooth and bright with juicy black raspberry and plum; fresh and spicy with lovely mouth feel and a long, balanced finish. **92**

Senses 2012 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$40) Silky and bright with earth, spice and tangy cherry cola; juicy, savory and balanced, long and racy. **91**

Small Vines 2013 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$53) Bright and smooth with tangy acidity and creamy texture; ripe and juicy with toast and good depth. **91**

Sojourn Wine Cellars 2012 Pinot Noir, Silver Eagle Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$59) Dense with ripe cherry and long, savory flavors; complex and balanced, polished and rich. **91**

Sojourn Wine Cellars 2012 Pinot Noir, Ridgetop Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$59) Smooth and spicy with bright cherry and tangy savory notes; fresh, racy and juicy. **90**

Trombetta Family Wines 2012 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$45) Lush and dense with rich plum, cherry and spice; firmly structured and generous; long and elegant. **92**

Trombetta Family Wines 2011 Pinot Noir, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$58) Elegant and juicy with lovely bright cherry and berry fruit; vibrant and silky with depth, style and grace; generous, precise and long. **93**



Wayfarer 2013 Pinot Noir, Wayfarer Vineyard, Fort Ross-Sea View (\$90) Lush cherry nose; deep and rich with ripe cherry and plum; savory and elegant with intensity and finesse; gorgeous and voluptuous with lovely sweet oak and remarkable subtlety. **95** SJ

For more of Anthony Dias Blue's notes on Sonoma Coast wines, see sommjournal.com.