

2009 Pinot Noir

Russian River Valley



100% Pinot Noir

The Appellation: Pinot Noir grapes have thin skins. Thick-skinned grapes, like Cabernet, like lots of hot sun in the summer. Thin-skinned grapes like it cooler. The Russian River Valley, about an hour and a half north of the Golden Gate Bridge, is the perfect spot for these delicate grapes. Here the cold water of the Pacific interacting with the warm California interior creates more foggy summer days than almost anywhere in the world. The fog is Mother Nature's air conditioner. The mountains in California are in rows parallel to the coast except where they are intersected by rivers; the Russian River is the greatest of these, bringing the coolness of the fog well inland. The summer sun pushes the fog back beyond the beaches on most summer days, giving the vines a chance to soak up just the right amount of sunbeams to ripen the grapes to perfection.

The 2009 Vintage was a superlative one for Pinot Noir and all varietals in the north coast. The winter was dry; spring was warm and wet, producing a large crop set. We dropped fruit twice to reduce vine stress from too much fruit. Summer weather was moderate with few spikes. Harvest was long and steady, an easy year to make good wine. This vintage gave us a slightly bigger wine than our previous favorite, the '06.

The winemaking: Six separate clones were hand picked at dawn from a single vineyard for this wine. We sorted the bunches, removed the berries from the stems, and sorted the berries by hand. They went into the fermenters whole, not crushed. Pure strain yeast, introduced after the fermentation starts on native yeast, migrates through the grape stem hole to ferment from the inside out, trapping delicate compounds that produce the best aromatics and flavors. It's a technique that John Farrington, Michael Browne and Robert Rex pioneered for Pinot that is now practiced worldwide. The entire Pinot protocol is designed to be gentle, which retains and enhances the feminine style of the best Pinots.

Élevage Only French oak barrels are used for our Pinot; 40% new. Over the years we have honed the selection to just a few coopers, as each barrel is as much a product of who made it, as it is from which forest the wood came. The must is pressed before the end of primary fermentation so the last of it is completed in the barrel, lending additional nuances to the wine. The lees are stirred every month for about 6 months to add mouth feel and creaminess. The barrels were racked only once. Barrel aging is typically 18 months, a bit more if our tasting suggests it.

Tasting notes: John Farrington mused, "Think a brunette in high heels, a twinkle in her eye, on her way to the bedroom and you have this Pinot." Balance is everything to us and you find this mantra in this wine. It is delicate, yet full flavored, with a gentle touch of spice in the middle. The oak melds perfectly into the full mid-palate and the finish is long. Pinot pairs with a wider variety of foods than any other wine and our 2009 will age beautifully.

Picked: Sept. 1 to 10, 2009. Brix 23.8 to 25.0, T.A. 5.8 to 7.5g/L

Clones: 115, 24A, 777, 459, 114, 828

Barrel aged: 20 barrels - 10 months, 100% French oak, 35% new

At bottling: Alc. 14.5%, pH 3.80, T.A. 6.0g/L, R.S. 0.03%

Unfined. Cross flow filtered before bottling, sterile bottled, Velcorin free.

SO₂ at bottling 18 ppm, at release less than 10 ppm.

Bottled 500 cases, April 2011. Released December 2011.

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Taste the Passion

