

Russian River Valley Neighborhoods

**Master Class with Evan Goldstein MS
City Winery, New York – November 2016**

This event was a launch by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers of a new way of looking at the varying districts or “neighborhoods” within their Valley; in other words, an attempt to identify unique subzones or terroir. It does make you smile, thinking back to all the scorn heaped on the French by California winemakers in times past whenever terroir was mentioned! More seriously, as I have written in various articles, terroir is in truth a universal concept to describe the particular environmental conditions in any country or region which shape the character of wine. This seminar was certainly carefully conceived and very well organized. There were three wines from each of five historically recognized neighborhoods (to use the language of the handout), and one winemaker spoke about each locale and the wines from that subzone. A myriad of descriptors were proposed to define the “typical” profile of wines from each neighborhood. These need to be narrowed down to a cogent list of distinctive and compelling markers to make the case more convincingly. The history of classic Old World regions suggests that the Russian River Valley may still be too young to delineate precise terroir characteristics. What can be said is that this was an excellent range of wines, proving what we already knew: the Russian River Valley is indeed a natural for Pinot Noir.

Sebastopol Hills

Presented by Greg LaFollette

Balletto Vineyards Pinot Noir Sexton Hill Vineyard 2014 *(+)**

Pale plus dark ruby with purple rim. The attractive nose displays fine nuances of red berries and is restrained and delicate. In its taste, the wine is direct and largely non-expressive, medium weight, wrapped up by elevated acidity. Closed for now, needs 6 to 12 months to open.

Jim Ball Vineyards Pinot Noir Mes Filles Vineyard 2013 *(*)**

Pale plus dark ruby with a purple rim. Fragrant to the nose, with delicately accented red berries and complementary oak. This Pinot is polished and medium-bodied in its taste, exhibiting perfumed fruit notes. On the palate, the oak is more prominent. Persistent flavors, pointed acidity and soft tannins in the finish.

DeLoach Vineyards Pinot Noir Maboroshi Vineyard 2013 **(+)**

Pale plus dark ruby with purple rim. The aroma is forthcoming and expresses red fruits and berries, nuanced and scented. The attack is muted. The wine is medium weight plus and emerges gradually, leaving a long signature of fruit and skillfully integrated oak. Has reserve and finesse.

Green Valley

Presented by Guy Davis

Freeman Winery Pinot Noir Gloria Estate 2013 *(*)**

Pale plus dark red with purple rim. The aroma is warm and expressive, marked by ripe red cherry, red raspberry and cranberry. At first restrained on the palate, this medium-bodied Pinot shows faintly sweet maturity and youthful, masked fruit. Balanced, with embedded acidity and tannins.

DRNK Wines Pinot Noir Hallberg Vineyard 2013 *(*)**

Pale plus dark red with purple rim. Warm, ripe nose delivering a medley of red cherry, cranberry and blueberry. Closed on the attack. Fleshy and generous. Youthful and undeveloped. Defining acidity and moderate tannin. Will develop over the near term. The 40% new oak does not interfere.

Davis Family Vineyards Pinot Noir Dutton Ranch 2013 ****

Moderately dense very dark red. Aromatically, the Davis Pinot conveys pronounced ripeness and is ample and warm, with dark cherry, cranberry and toasted oak. Immediately rich in the mouth, with notable fruit maturity. The wine possesses generosity and warmth in the finish, balanced by defining acidity and integrated tannins at the very end.

Laguna Ridge

Presented by Rod Berglund

Martinelli Winery Pinot Noir Zio Tony Ranch-Grace Nicole 2013 **+**

Pale dark ruby red with clear purple rim. Open, lifted aroma boasting a lovely, nuanced red berry perfume and a note of smoky oak. At first restrained, the wine builds across the palate. Medium-bodied, suave. Multifaceted aromatics which last through a long finish. Has length and style with a precise structure of acidity and fine-grained tannin.

Lynmar Estate Pinot Noir Quail Hill Vineyard 2013 *(*)**

Moderately dense dark red with clear purple-tinted rim. The nose shows evident ripeness, with cranberry and other dark fruits. Has dimension and youthful complexity. The taste is ripe, youthful and still reserved. Medium weight plus, with a sweet undertone. Ripe, well-integrated structure with hidden acidity and tannin surfacing at the end together with a lasting fruitiness.

Joseph Swan Vineyards Pinot Noir Trenton Estate Vineyard 2013

*****(*+)**

Pale plus dark red with clear purple rim. Forthcoming nose, moderately generous and warm. Ripe red fruit and a note of cherry jam complemented by well-judged oak. In the mouth, this Pinot shows its innate maturity, with a sweet undertone, though it is muted in expression. Medium weight plus. Oak spices become more evident, and the wine leaves a lasting sweet ripeness and a measure of tannic grip.

Santa Rosa Plain

Presented by Mike Sullivan

Arista Winery Pinot Noir Mononi Vineyard 2013 **+**

Pale dark red brick with clear purple rim. Very mature, scented aroma of cranberry and red cherry with a touch of alcohol. The wine is again ripe and generous in its taste, with an underlying sweetness of fruit along with smoky oak. Nearly full-bodied, the Arista Pinot possesses ripe acidity and tannin. The aftertaste is marked by a red fruit scent and an oaky overlay.

Pelligrini Wine Company Pinot Noir Olivet Lane Vineyard 2013 *(*)**

Pale dark brick red with a clear purple rim. Warm, engaging, spicy and perfumed nose showing red fruits and berries. The palate as well is especially fragrant and high-toned. The aromatics persist through the finish, and the wine is framed by pronounced acidity and moderate tannin. Youthful, will likely improve in the near term.

Benovia Winery Pinot Noir Maratella Vineyard 2013 **(*)**

Moderately dense very dark red with clear purple-tinted rim. Warm, generous aroma with a pure, multidimensional fruit perfume of black raspberry, cherry and other fruits. Closed on attack, the wine slowly reveals itself and is ample and mouth-coating. Balanced by ripe acidity and fine tannins. The beautiful perfume is repeated in the long finish. Youthful, seductive and elegant – a complete wine. In Burgundian terms, a Vosne-Romanée in a ripe year (that's a real compliment!).

Middle Reach

Presented by Theresa Heredia

Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery Pinot Noir Rochioli-Allen Vineyards 2013 *(*?)**

Pale brick red with thin, clear purple rim. Aromatically, the Farrell Pinot initially shows little, then with more airing it divulges a gently floral aroma with subtle red raspberry and cherry. In the mouth, it is also reticent at first, medium weight, and is rather angular, with elevated acidity and dry tannin. There is more intensity of flavor in the final taste, suggesting this 2013 needs more time. Again, another Burgundy appellation comes to mind, this time an Aloxe-Corton premier cru.

C Donatiello Winery Pinot Noir Bucher Vineyard 2013 ***

Pale dark brick red with clear rim. The Donatiello Pinot has a distinctive aromatic profile characterized by red fruit, spice, oak and a medicinal note. The palate is somewhat hollow and leaves spicy and tertiary highlights in the aftertaste. Apparently, this was given a 10-day cold soak and 30% whole clusters were utilized.

Williams Selyem Pinot Noir Rochioli River Block 2013 *****

Moderately dense dark red with purple rim. The impressive nose has notable depth and is warm and generous, delivering ripe dark red fruit (especially cranberry) and oak accents. The taste profile is similarly ripe and ample yet also well-balanced. Full-bodied, with mouth-filling dark fruit. There is a ripe, integrated structure apparent in the finish. Long, perfumed, fruit-dominated finale. Sensual and stylish. The 60% new oak does not seem excessive for the luxuriant fruit. Makes a real statement.