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james laube's wine flights

New Pinots from a Gal Named Walt

Kathryn "Walt" Hall and others are adding to the explosion of single-vineyard California Pinot Noirs

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Wine labels may fade, but they rarely disappear. Most find new owners or reinvent themselves, to wit: Sonoma's Roessler is gone; enter Walt. Walt is Kathryn Hall's new lineup of Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. It's a reincarnation of sorts of the former Roessler operation. She and her husband, Craig, bought Roessler in 2010. Walt is Hall's maiden name, as well as a childhood nickname.



James Laube

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Walt is the Halls' ambitious entry into the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay sweepstakes. Under the winemaking direction of Steve Leveque, who also makes the Kathryn Hall Napa Valley wines, Walt offers 10 new Pinot Noirs and two Chardonnays, all from 2010. Most of them are made in the 200- to 300-case range, and all but one are from California.

Among the Pinots are bottlings from Clos Pepe and Rita's Crown in Sta. Rita Hills (\$60 each, 330 cases and 68 cases made, respectively), La Brisa Sonoma County (\$40, 1,829 cases) and The Corners and Hein Family from Anderson Valley (also \$60 each, 198 and 270 cases, respectively). The two Chardonnays include a Russian River Braughton Vineyard (\$50) and Sonoma County La Brisa bottling (\$35, 1,000 cases). A Pinot from Shea Vineyard in Oregon's Willamette Valley (209 cases) is also part of the mix.

Another California label changing its stripes is De Loach. De Loach hasn't been owned by a De Loach for some time. Yet the brand continues to make gains under the Jean-Charles Boisset regime. Boisset bought the brand in 2003, and the focus is on Pinot Noir, with 12 different bottlings. The wines to look for carry the vineyard designate notation and sell for \$45. Also of note is the 2010 JCB (for Jean-Charles Boisset) No. 7 Pinot from Sonoma Coast (\$50).

Winemaker Brian Maloney credits experience working with the vineyards, upgrades in winemaking equipment and two excellent vintages for the upswing in quality. "We had a couple of nice years to work with in 2009 and 2010," he said. "Now the vision [for the wines] can go with the [upgraded winery]."

There is also a renewed interest in single-vineyard Zinfandels at De Loach, which have shown improvement.

Flowers, a Sonoma Coast pioneer, is undergoing a repositioning with an energetic new winemaking team. Jason Jardine heads up the vineyard and winery for [Huneus Family Vineyards](#), which purchased controlling interest in 2009. Jardine came to Flowers after working at Rhys.

Beginning with the 2010 vintage, Flowers will now emphasize its estate vineyards, featuring the names Camp

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Meeting Ridge and Sea Ridge prominently on the front label of the Chardonnay (\$58) and two Pinot Noirs (about \$68). Flowers is in smaller print.

Jardine said he intends to make special wines from select portions of the vineyard, with up to six different bottlings possible in a given year.

The Flowers name will still be prominently displayed on most of Flowers' 25,000 cases of non-estate vineyard wines (\$49 each for the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir), which are made from purchased grapes grown in Sonoma Coast. Jardine selects grapes from more than a dozen different sites for the Pinot.

He has also created a wine called Perennial, a puzzle of sorts, a blend of Pinot Noir (50 percent), Syrah (42 percent), Pinot Meunier (6 percent) and Chardonnay (2 percent), carrying a California appellation and retailing for \$38.

"We will continue to look for small mom-and-pop vineyards (for Pinot and Chardonnay), so we can control the farming," said Jardine. "We're farming every 2-acre plot like it's the only wine we make."

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