

Wines vie for Pinot Cup

By [PEG MELNIK](#)

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Thursday, March 21, 2013 at 3:00 a.m.

In a world where gourmet candy bars boast they're bacon-flavored, it's not a stretch to say people are passionate about pork. And there are plenty of wine-lovers who insist pork is at its best with a glass of pinot noir.

The eighth annual Pigs & Pinot event this Friday and Saturday at Hotel Healdsburg celebrates the delectable synergy between the two with a string of events. But for those with a keen eye on competitive pinot and yes, suspense, the most exciting event will be Friday night when the Pinot Cup winner and runner-up are revealed. While the metal, winged pig trophy is whimsical, it still stands for quality in pinot circles.

Brian Maloney of Santa Rosa's DeLoach Vineyards accepted the Pinot Cup last year for his winery and said, "I was thrilled and shocked when (chef) Charlie Palmer and (vintner) Daryl Groom called DeLoach out as the winner. . . . It was an honor to be brought up in front of my peers . . ."

The winery won the Pinot Cup with its DeLoach, 2009 Marin County Pinot Noir, which retails for \$35. Maloney, head winemaker, said he keeps the trophy at DeLoach, a touchstone for quality.

Before the announcement this year, guests will graze and sip, sampling an array of 60 pinots from around the world paired with pork dishes like homemade sausages, charcuterie and grilled pork.

Maloney said pig and pinot both have "flavors that have some excitement. Pinot noir and pork have a similar mouth feel. They are both luscious and spread across your palate."

Maloney said the pigs and pinot noir are celebrated because they represent a commingling of food, wine and tradition.

"It's a coming together of farmers, chefs and winemakers to celebrate heritage and tradition," he said. "Like winemaking, it all comes down to where the food was raised and how it was raised by the farmer and how the chef prepares the food."

Lee Martinelli Jr., of Windsor's Martinelli Winery, said, "Pigs and pinot are a great match . . . because the two pair very well together and they are both local foods.



PD FILE

The 2012 winner of the Pinot Cup, DeLoach Vineyards.



People from all over want to come here to Wine Country to get a taste of our local lifestyle."

As for a great pig/pinot match, balance is crucial, he said.

"A great pork pairing can be achieved when the spice or marinade in the pork does not overpower the wine, but complements it," he said. "Pinot noir can be a very delicate wine, so I like to put a little bit of salt, pepper, sage, thyme, and just a small amount of red pepper, for a little heat, on a wild pork loin or chop."

Dan Kosta of Sebastopol's Kosta Browne Winery said diversity is what makes for a great pork pairing.

"The best thing about pork is the myriad of ways it can be prepared," Kosta said. "From fatty pork belly to lean and sweet loin, it's one of the most diverse animals out there. And considering that pinot noir is equally diverse, it's a perfect match."

Kosta will be a featured speaker over the weekend and he said he plans to entertain people with plenty of pinot stories.

At the Saturday night gala, he'll be pouring his 2009 Koplén Vineyard, Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and his 2009 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, the wine that was selected as Wine Spectator's Wine of the Year in 2011.

The secret to making rock-star pinot noir?

". . . Staying true to the vision and one's own passion is paramount," Kosta said. "There are many different styles of pinot and that diversity is to be celebrated. However, when a wine has no soul, it doesn't stand a chance."

Staff writer Peg Melnik can be reached at 521-5310 or peg.melnik@pressdemocrat.com.

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