



In each issue, the editorial team at *The SOMM Journal* will deliberate through wine submissions and release final judgment on select wines that garnered scores of at least 90 points. The "jury" will also feature an esteemed guest sommelier.

The (New) World of Pinot Noir

AS A MEDIA SPONSOR for the World of Pinot Noir held March 2-3 in Santa Barbara, California, *The SOMM Journal* was summoned to taste more than 100 examples of this beloved variety. Very few entries from outside of the U.S. were received, with most selections hailing from California and Washington State.

Twelve outstanding producers were chosen and celebrated during the event at the Ritz Carlton Bacara Resort. They were so good, in fact, that our Publisher/Editorial Director Meridith May has chosen to also highlight these exceptional bottlings in this edition of *The SOMM Jury*. She called upon a handful of guest somms "journors" to help taste through the litany of labels. Here are our results!

A view of Sleepy Hollow Vineyard on the Talbott Estate in the Santa Lucia Highlands.

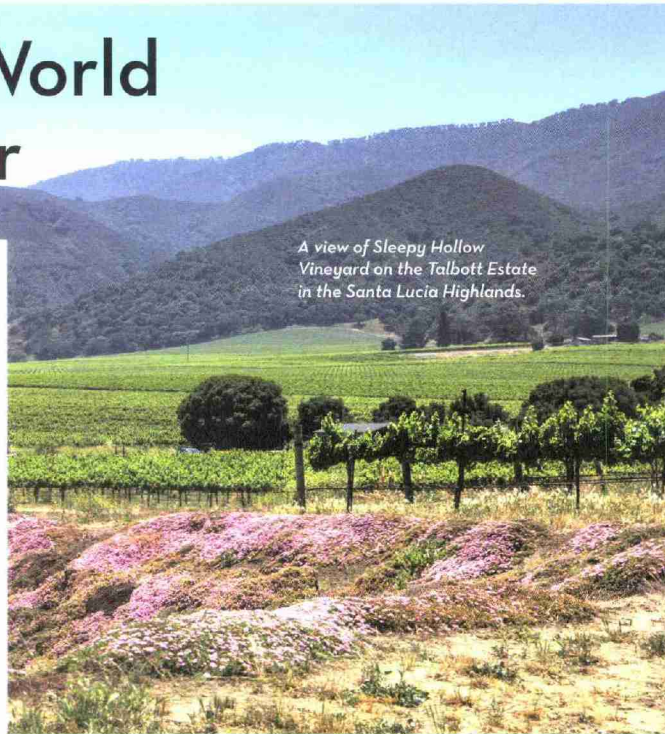


PHOTO COURTESY OF TALBOTT VINEYARDS

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHEN ROSS WINE CELLARS

Stephen Ross 2015 Stone Corral Vineyard Pinot Noir, Edna Valley (\$56)
 Intensely-bright raspberry, deep, ripe cherry, and dried rose funnels enter a vein of salinity. Stone Corral Vineyard, the flagship site of Stephen Ross, is located in the Edna Valley—one of the coolest winegrowing regions in California. This is 20% whole cluster aged 15 months in 50% new French oak.

*Stephen Ross Founder/Winemaker
 Stephen Dooley.*

Black Kite 2015 Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir, Petaluma Gap, Sonoma Coast (\$60)
 Hi-toned and ripe dark red fruits, seashells, fresh purple flowers, and sweet, spicy cinnamon. It's richer in texture, yet the acid is powerful enough to counter the dense red fruit and well-integrated oak. Gap's Crown is proof that Black Kite can make incredible Pinot Noir not only from its estate in Anderson Valley but from other sites as well, particularly in the Sonoma Coast.

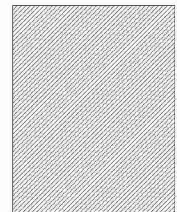
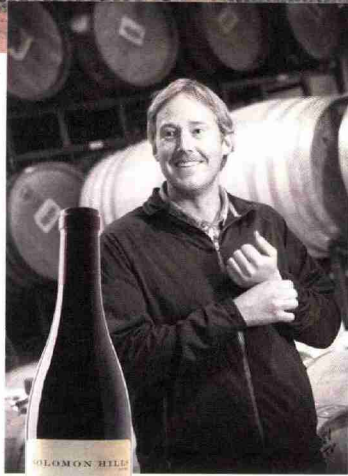




PHOTO COURTESY OF SOLOMON HILLS VINEYARDS



**Solomon Hills Winemaker
Trey Fletcher.**



Solomon Hills Estate 2014 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$60) A mouth-filling texture with nutmeg, spiced cinnamon, and red floral tones. Tea and scrumptious red fruit make this wine approachable and inviting. The vineyard is on Garey series soil—a marine-based wine-deposited loamy sand that was at one time a sea bed—while the estate is ten miles from the Pacific Ocean.

J. Lohr Estates 2016 Falcon's Perch Pinot Noir, Monterey County (\$17)

Grapes from cool-climate vineyards in Arroyo Seco and Santa Lucia Highlands perform fantastically in this high-flying Pinot. Pommard and Dijon clones make up the backbone of this wine, which is named for the bird that makes its home in the lone pine tree among the vines. Beyond the nose of red tea and oregano, blueberry develops discretely on the palate alongside ripe red cherries, sage, powdered "talc" tannins, and a lean acidity. What a great value!



Chateau St. Jean Winemaker Margo Van Staaveren.

Chateau St. Jean 2015 Le Seul Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$75) Legendary winemaker Margo Van Staaveren created Le Seul, which translates to "one and only," to showcase the greatness of Sonoma County as a Pinot Noir-growing region. The Sonoma Coast is the influencer here in this third vintage of the wine, with grapes hailing from the Gap's Crown and Sun Chase vineyards; both are located in the Petaluma Gap and are blessed by ocean breezes and natural fog pockets. Dijon Clone 777 was used exclusively for this wine, and dark cherry, summer-sweet strawberry, and baking spices are present in the lush texture alongside savory notes of tobacco and licorice.

DeLoach 2015 Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$70)

This 17-acre estate/garden is one of 64 wineries in the U.S. that are Demeter USA Biodynamic certified. The 2015 vintage was the earliest harvest recorded for the winery, leading to developed fruit and rich, ripe flavors. A delicious combo of earth and magnolia blossom perfumes the air with this feminine and elegant wine, which exhibits a creamy raspberry mid-palate, luscious plum notes, tea tannins, and an iconic Russian River Valley persona.



Brian Maloney is the Winemaker for Russian River Valley-based DeLoach Vineyards.

Mail Road 2013 Mt. Carmel Vineyard Pinot Noir, Blocks 3 and 5, Sta. Rita Hills (\$100) Floral and incredibly earthy with ripe pomegranate and blueberry, this is glossy and somehow dusty all at once. The Mt. Carmel vineyard consists of just six blocks covering a total of 22.5 acres, which are organic and, to a slightly lesser degree, dry-farmed. Fruit from this parcel of land in the Sta. Rita Hills tends to show on the leaner side (as does this wine). At Mail Road, this translates as delicate and pretty red and blue fruits.



Flying Goat Cellars 2013 Rio Vista Vineyard Dijon Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills (\$46) Rio Vista Vineyard comprises three different blocks and three different clones, but it's the Dijon blend that makes up this wine. Soils of rocks and chert are found on the steep, eastern side of the vineyard. The wine, which goes through 18 months of barrel aging, has depth, power, and intensity in both mouthfeel and flavor. Winemaker Norm Yost must put some secret ingredients in this wine, because this was one of the more unique profiles we tasted. Maple and oak seemed to meld, with black fruit weaving in and out of mushroom, black pepper, and sweet tobacco.

Masút Vineyard and Winery 2016 Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir, Eagle Peak, Mendocino County (\$40) The word *masút* is a Native American word meaning "dark, rich earth." Founders (and brothers) Ben and Jake Fetzer launched the winery with intent to produce estate fruit in Mendocino County; together, they established the mountainous Eagle Peak appellation in Mendocino, where they are the sole winery. The wine is earthy and creamy, with flavors of cinnamon cherry pie and a finish of vanilla spice.



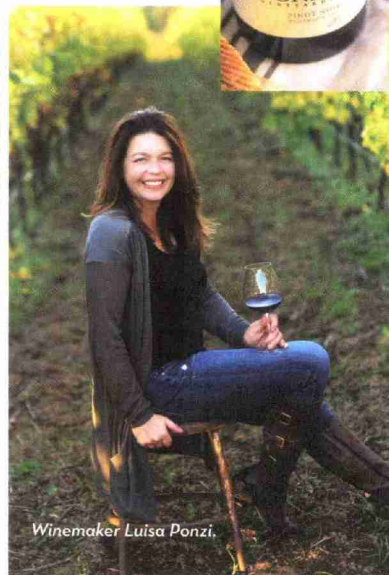
PHOTO COURTESY OF MASÚT VINEYARD

Talbott Vineyards 2015 Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) One of the most well-known vineyards in California, this expansive bench site is 13 miles from Monterey Bay. Well-drained and sparse soils bring out the concentrated flavors in the wine, with earth and spice leading the way to a palate of cinnamon, spiced cedar, and cherry juiciness. Haunting notes of forest floor and a garden of dried roses are present, and a billowy mouthfeel and lean acidity makes it ethereal.



Talbott Vineyards Winemaker David Coventry.

Ponzi Vineyards 2015 Classico Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$43) While this is around \$10 less than most well-made Pinot Noir, the Classico shows well above its station. Both red fruits and blue fruits jump out the gate, kicking up dried sage and rosemary on the stretch. There's also slight hints of cherry cola and carob happening midway that are offset by juicy acidity at the end. Aged in 35% new French oak for 11 months, then bottled unfined/unfiltered and rested five months in bottle.



Winemaker Luisa Ponzi.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PONZI VINEYARDS



St. Francis Winery & Vineyards Winemaker Katie Madigan.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. FRANCIS WINERY & VINEYARDS

St. Francis Winery & Vineyards 2015 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$45) Just 4% Syrah from the certified sustainable Wild Oak Estate Vineyard (which is the location of the winery itself in Sonoma County) adds a zest to the wine. Each vineyard lot of Pinot Noir undergoes a slow, 14-day ferment, with extended maceration up to 30 additional days. This is fleshy, fruity, and savory with notes of black pepper and cranberry. Tea tannins and bright acidity are part of the balanced mouthfeel. SI

