

# WINE News

Sonoma: Land, Legacy...  
& Lots of Wine



## JULY 15, 2013 FEATURES

- 1 Tasting the 2010, 2011 & 2012 Sonoma Vintages
- 2,3 Arnot-Roberts & Scribe: A New Spin on “New World”
- 4 Biodynamic Benziger!

## Sonoma: 2010, 2011, & 2012 Vintages

By Trey Beffa

In May, I had the opportunity to travel with a few K&L staff members to Sonoma to visit producers and taste over the course of three days.

Truth be told, I have not spent very much time in Sonoma compared to Napa and Bordeaux over the years—Sonoma sure is a change of pace! Unlike Napa, you can't just drive up Highway 29 or the Silverado Trail and hit winery after winery. The wineries here are hidden up and down the valleys. I believe this makes the visits a bit more intimate and laid-back, but it also means that you have to do your homework. If you plan to visit Sonoma, I recommend making appointments in advance.

For our trip we focused on current releases, which meant many 2010s, 2011s, and a few 2012s. Both cool, difficult vintages throughout all of California, we were all surprised by how well many of the '10s and '11s showed. The whites and the reds impressed us with great acidity, fresh-

ness and backbone. Perfect examples of this are the vibrant, yet complex **2010 Walter Hansel “Cuvée Alyce” Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$38.99) 94 RP, 90 ST** and the bright, mineral-driven **2010 Walter Hansel “South Slope Vineyard” Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$38.99) 94 RP, 92 ST**, in addition to the highlights and staff favorites mentioned in this newsletter. We get plenty of hot, dry years in California, so it is nice to have some cooler years to keep things fresh—no pun intended.

Fans of vibrant and crisp wines will find a lot to love from Sonoma now from 2010 and 2011. Quantities are back up in 2012, which is good news for everyone as this may help reduce price increases. We tasted 2012s out of barrel and a few from bottle, and it is shaping up to be another excellent vintage, but more “classic” California in style.

## Elegance and Restraint at Ramey

Ten or fifteen years ago, a trip to Sonoma would have meant many full bodied, rich, heavily oaked wines.

That is not the case now. Across the board, there is a real interest in creating fresher, less oaky white and red wines with lower alcohol levels. We tasted many stunning Chardonnays, but among my personal favorites were those from David Ramey. These are seriously structured wines that I



believe will show best with an additional 2-3 years of bottle age.

**2010 Ramey Sonoma Coast Chardonnay (\$29.99) 92 RP, 91 ST** A leaner, more “Chablis-like” style, for fans of a crisper style Chardonnay. It is very fresh and bright with an ABV of 13.5%. This will round out and soften with a few years in a cellar.

**2010 Ramey Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$32.99) 92 RP, 91 ST** Wine Advocate writes: “A rich, enveloping wine, the 2010 Chardonnay Russian River Valley caresses the

palate with layers of bright, focused fruit. This is an especially saline, intense vintage of the Russian River bottling...the Ramey Chardonnays have a Chassagne-like richness that is quite appealing, yet they remain laid-back in style by California standards.”

Ramey's reds also showed considerable restraint and complexity—not your typical “big” California reds by any stretch. A perfect example is the **2011 Ramey Claret (\$34.99) 90 ST, 89-91 RP**. Bordeaux-inspired with a California twist, this shows lots of spice, sweet herbs and earth, and complements a variety of foods.

## Brave New World: Arnot-Roberts

By Mari Keilman

Recently named “Winemakers of the Year in 2012” by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and a James Beard semifinalist, Arnot-Roberts is redefining what it means to be a “New World” wine. Keeping their growth slow and methodical, lifelong friends Duncan Meyers and Nathan Roberts follow a very simple philosophy: to make wines that reflect the styles of wines they like to drink. And a quick survey of the shelf of empty wine bottles in their open-air warehouse winemaking facility in Healdsburg reveals that these Napa natives prefer wines from the “Old World” regions of France—Burgundy, the Northern Rhone, Arbois, and Champagne, to name a few. So, it makes sense that while the other winemakers fight to secure the warmest hillside vineyards that guarantee full ripening for the highest sugar levels in their grapes, Arnot-Roberts seeks out cold, exposed sites that barely achieve phenolic ripeness in a good year.

In working with fruit from vineyards such as Clary Ranch near Tomales Bay, Watson Ranch off the San Pablo Bay and Griffin’s Lair in Petaluma, the pair can rely on Mother Nature for the raw materials that enable them to produce wine in the structured, restrained style that characterizes the wines they enjoy. Their success in making wines their way, without having to answer to any impatient and demanding investors, has inspired a movement of similarly inspired small-scale, site-driven winemaking in Sonoma.

**2011 Arnot-Roberts “Watson Ranch” Napa Valley Chardonnay (\$31.99)** From the southern-most vineyard in Napa, the “Watson Ranch” Chardonnay has a beautiful expressions of ripe lemon and zesty orange with bracing acidity reminiscent of a high quality Chablis. It really stands out from other California Chards due to its bright chalky and salty mineral aromas and flavors.

**2010 Arnot-Roberts “Fellom Ranch Vineyard” Santa Cruz Mountains Cabernet Sauvignon (\$79.99)** I was recovering from an awful



Duncan Roberts (left) pours for K&L’s Joel Nicholas and Mari Keilman.

head-cold when I had the pleasure of tasting with this fabulous wine-making duo, but as stuffed up as I was, I could still smell the amazing aromas of this Cabernet emanate from the glass—sweet savory herbs matched by ripe candied cherries, tobacco and delicate purple flowers. From a site adjacent to Ridge’s famous Monte Bello vineyard, this wine is so beautifully Old World in elegance and finesse that even the most hardened New World naysayer will fall head over heels for it.

**2011 Arnot-Roberts “Griffin’s Lair” Sonoma Coast Syrah (\$49.99)** The Griffin’s Lair Vineyard is extremely unique in that a completely unobstructed airflow from the Bay passes through it. This cold airflow produces small clusters of tiny berries that increase the skin to pulp ratio in the grapes. The collaboration between the cooler climate and increased skin ratio results in a Syrah of intense concentration, minerality and structure. The Griffin’s Lair Syrah is ridiculously savory and rich on the palate with notes of spice and meatiness, yet surprisingly floral and herbaceous on the finish. “Old World” winemakers beware!

## Sonoma All Summer Long: Staff Recommendations

Here is a short list of staff highlights from our Sonoma trip below, and we’ve got hundreds more recommendations to share! Inquire at your local store or browse our vast selection online at [KLWines.com](http://KLWines.com)!



**2012 Origine Russian River Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$13.99)** This Russian River SB is refreshing, bright and crisp with fresh notes of ripe citrus, yet surprisingly rich on the palate. It is the perfect white for refreshment on hot summer days. Stock up now! —Mari Keilman, K&L

**2012 Joseph Swan “Saralee’s Vineyard” Russian River Valley Gewürztraminer (\$19.99)** Dry, fresh and invigorating! Serve with fresh salads, fish, or poultry. —Chiara Shannon, K&L

**2012 Bench Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$15.99)** Balancing classic and tropical fruit aromas and flavors, minimal use of neutral French oak gives this just enough richness to make it a summer deck day favorite. —Mari Keilman, K&L

**2011 Sojourn Cellars “Sangiaco Vineyard” Sonoma Coast Chardonnay (\$44.99) 90 ST**  
Owner Craig Haserot focuses on mouthfeel for his Chardonnays; this one went through full malo but saw only about 30% new oak. It is loaded with dense, rich fruit—baked pear, figs and green apple—and is fleshy and creamy in the mouth. The finish is still bright and fresh, thanks to terrific acid structure. —Trey Beffa, K&L

**2009 Ramey “Hyde Vineyard” Carneros Chardonnay (\$49.99) 93 ST, 92 RP, 90 WS** Rich, lush and spicy in the mouth, with hints of cinnamon, baked apples and a citrus, the 2009 Hyde is complex and lush without being heavy. It’s drinking excellently right now and can be enjoyed over the next 5 years. —Trey Beffa, K&L

**2012 Bench Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$19.99)** With its sweet tannins and bright raspberry-laden palate, the 2012 Bench Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is a clear and vibrant rendition of Sonoma Valley fruit. To complete the package, this party-perfect Pinot finishes with a touch of smokey earth and bright red fruit-driven acidity. —Mari Keilman, K&L

Key: \* Direct Buy RP Robert Parker WS Wine Spectator ST International Wine Cellar CG Connoisseurs’ Guide



*Scribe has plans to restore this lovely 100 year old Mission style hacienda, former home of the Dresel family who originally settled this site in 1858.*

## A New Chapter at Scribe

By Matt Callahan

Andrew and Adam Mariani of Scribe Winery are penning a new chapter in the history of their 45 acre Sonoma estate. Located in a curious triangulation of Sonoma AVAs primarily in the Sonoma Valley, Scribe winery borders the Sonoma Coast to the west, Carneros to the south-west and Napa County to the north-east. As the name implies, the Mariani brothers see themselves as figurative scribes—transmitting the legacy of the estate and lending only a guiding hand to the land in the process of winemaking.

The story of the estate is layered in history, not unlike an illuminated manuscript. Four German families established a winery on the site in 1858. Sylvaner and Riesling, among the first established in California, were planted soon after and proved ideal for the cool site. With the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment and the enforcement of

Prohibition the property changed hands, ultimately transforming into a turkey farm. When Scribe Winery bought the estate it had fallen into complete disrepair. A long and careful rehabilitation of the estate began in 2007 and continues with careful consideration of the impact that farming and construction has on the land. These details result in wines that truly represent the unique story of the land that Scribe Winery is continuing to write and rewrite.

The **2012 Scribe Sonoma County Sylvaner (\$37.99)** recalls the original German varietals planted on the site in the mid-19th century. It is a beautifully aromatic example of dry Sylvaner with a citrus and white pepper nose. On the palate there is plenty of lemon and lime notes, zippy acid and a more full expression than its sometimes more austere German counterparts.

Scribe's **2012 Sonoma County Riesling (\$37.99)** evokes, again, the Scribe's Teutonic heritage. Farmed on a super-steep hillside vineyard, this bone-dry Riesling shows hallmark varietal characteristics: petrol and peaches on the nose, high acid and beautiful fruit on the palate, and persistent mineral drive on the finish. I was especially impressed by a consistent floral component that was hard to pin down.

The **2012 "The Hunter" Carneros Pinot Noir (\$39.99)** constitutes a break from the Germanic style and instead evokes a decidedly Franco-Californian style. Eucalyptus and red cherry lead the nose, with more pronounced cherry on the palate that is joined by a hint of orange and some spice. Partial concrete egg aging means bright, fresh, fruit-driven wines, with little to no vanilla or hazelnut characteristics.

The **2012 Skin Ferment Carneros Chardonnay 500ml (\$36.99)** was, perhaps, the most intriguing of the bunch. Made, technically, in an orange wine style, this experimental white is a must for any serious wine geek. It sees extended skin contact time and is fermented and aged in concrete eggs. There is a purposefully oxidative, nutty aroma on the nose, with plenty of apple skin and fresh fruit on the palate. Unlike many overdone orange wines, this is understated and delicious. It's my choice for a summer picnic—cured meats, olives, and cheese.

## FIND HUNDREDS MORE RECOMMENDATIONS ON OUR STAFF REVIEW PAGE!

**2010 Joseph Swan "Saralee's Vineyard" Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$34.99)** Classic Russian River bright fruit character, density, and spice. Food-friendly and guaranteed to please. —Chiara Shannon, K&L

**2011 Sojourn Cellars Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$38.99) 93 PR** The 2011 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is a fresh, delicate and lively wine that will pair well with food. It's not overdone and shows the softer side of Pinot. —Trey Beffa, K&L

**2011 Sojourn "Gap's Crown Vineyard" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$53.99) 90 ST, 90 CG** Oceanic breezes keep vines cool and preserve natural acidity here, yielding a structured, fragrant, and elegant Pinot. —Chiara Shannon, K&L

**2011 Sojourn Cellars "Rodgers Creek Vineyard" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$47.99) 91 ST** Classic forest floor, mint and spice linger behind a wall of upfront, ripe red fruits. A solid core of fruit carries this wine through on the finish. —Trey Beffa, K&L

**2010 Wind Gap Sonoma Coast Syrah (\$34.99) 93 ST** Winemaker Pax Mahle whole-cluster pressed, foot-crushed, and used a combination of stainless steel and gentle oak aging to coax a stunning expression of spicy, meaty, cool-climate Syrah with serious depth. —Chiara Shannon, K&L

**2011 Bedrock Wine Company "Kick Ranch" Sonoma County Syrah (\$31.99) 92 RP, 92 ST** Inky dark, with a complex array of black fruit, mineral, flowering herb, and savory, meaty aromas and flavors, this is real-deal old vine Sonoma Syrah that gives its Northern Rhone counterparts a run for the money! —Chiara Shannon, K&L

**2007 Joseph Swan "Stellwagon" Sonoma Valley Zinfandel (\$26.99)** Exploding with blackberry, raspberry and red currants, this Zin dances across the palate without hinting of over-ripeness. Great summer BBQ wine! —Trey Beffa, K&L

**2011 Bench Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.99)** Framed by supple tannins, this sleek, trim and accessible Cab is a good value for the money. —Mahon McGrath, K&L

**2009 Jordan Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$49.99)** Ripe upfront red cherry fruit and a round, soft, almost creamy mouthfeel are followed by hints of vanilla, mint and mocha. Can be enjoyed young; drink now and over the next ten years. —Trey Beffa, K&L



# DuMol Does Burgundy

By Joel Nicholas

An unassuming warehouse just off the 101 freeway in Windsor, California houses one of the finest domestic producers of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay currently on the market. DuMol winery was founded in 1996 by business partners Michael Verlander and Kerry Murphy. The wines are all named for various members of the two men's families—mostly grand kids if I remember correctly. We met Scottish-born winemaker Andy Smith on the first day of our trip for a tour of the winemaking facilities and to taste through several wines plus some 2012 barrel samples. Andy was a gracious host, filling us in on each step of his process and detailing the unique characteristics of each of DuMol's vineyard sources. Eventually the conversation drifted toward single malt—turns out Andy is a huge fan of some of K&L's exclusive single cask selections (shameless plug!). From start to finish, the lineup of wines we tasted was incredibly impressive. The Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah (they also make small quantities of Viognier) all showed remarkable finesse and purity of fruit. These are long and dense wines, with freshness and plenty of acidity that will reward long-term aging. DuMol is one of the top domestic producers working with Burgundian varietals; it was a tremendous pleasure to meet with Andy and taste their wines. The wines can be hard to find at times but it's well worth the effort to have a few bottles in your cellar. Now in stock:

**2010 DuMol Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$54.99) 91 RP, 91 WS, 90 CG** Drinking beautifully now, this shows perfect balance with a lovely, bright acidity all the way through.

**2010 DuMol "Chloe" Russian River Valley Chardonnay (\$63.99) (1.5L \$149) 94 ST, 92 RP** Broad and focused with richness and length.

**2010 DuMol Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$67.99)** Warm and earthy, with dark red fruits, tobacco leaf and cocoa.

**2010 DuMol Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$94.99) 94 RP, 94 ST** Always a standout, this is made from young vines, but extremely high quality.

**2010 DuMol "Eoin" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$84.99) 94 ST, 93 RP** The most impressive wine we tasted, with herbal notes and a long, powerful finish.

**2010 DuMol Russian River Valley Syrah (\$54.99) 93 RP, 92 WS, 91 CG** A surprise winner! Tons of Northern Rhone-ish smoked meat character to go along with dense, pure blackberry and purple plum fruit.



*Benziger was awarded 2012 Winery of the Year by Wine & Spirits Magazine!*

## Personal Sommelier Corner: Biodynamic Values from Benziger

By Chiara Shannon

Occupying an ancient volcanic caldera (bowl-shaped canyon) with the perfect exposure, aspect, and situation for grape-growing, the Benziger family has pioneered organic and Biodynamic viticulture in California since long before it was trendy; every wine they produce is certified sustainable, organic or Biodynamic. Their estate wines are 100% Demeter Certified Biodynamic and they work with certified organic growers for their appellation wines. Wine production at this level is highly labor intensive, which increases production costs and drives up prices. Not so at Benziger—they care deeply about keeping their wines affordable for all to enjoy. If you haven't discovered these incredible values in local, sustainable, certified organic Sonoma County wines, now is the time!

**2011 Benziger Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc (\$9.99) 2012 Best Buy from Wine Enthusiast!** Crisp, clean, and refreshing with subtle floral and hay notes, Benziger's Sauvignon Blanc steals the show for \$10.

**2011 Benziger Sonoma County Chardonnay (\$11.99)** Aromas of fresh citrus and stone fruit greet the nose, with nutty undertones. The palate is creamy and round, with bright acidity.

**2009 Benziger Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14.99)** Flavorful and complex with a lush texture, this versatile Cab is a crowd-pleasing style that will complement many foods, including the pizzas served at neighboring Glen Ellen Star restaurant, whose produce is delivered fresh from Benziger's farm up the road.

**2009 Benziger Estate "Tribute" Sonoma County Red Blend (\$69.99)** A profound expression of the soul of the Benziger Estate, this has the complexity and structure of Bordeaux but the ripeness and body of Sonoma—the best of both worlds! Great now but built to age.

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