

Hahn Family Wines: Santa Lucia Highlands' Sweet Spot Part 2

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Winemaker Greg Freeman plays the bagpipes in Hahn's wine cellar, coaxing the maximum expression from the wines!

Patricia Decker

And while good wine is made in the vineyard, **Winemaker Greg Freeman**, who coaxes the best from each year's harvest, sometimes by playing the bagpipes in the cellar, notes that "Fortunately the weather in Monterey County is pretty much perfect all the time. The quality is consistent". Except, of course, for the current year 2015, which may be a standout, extremely high quality in the face of drought reduced yields. He says, "This year, its unbelievable. We have so much color, that our Pinots are actually darker than our Cabernets this year...smaller grapes, less water in the grapes, more skins, and the magic stuff is in the skins, so there's more of that. More color, more concentration, more aromas..." Coming off of three good years of yields, the 2015 wines' concentration of flavors should be one for the books.

Hahn harvests the fruit at peak ripeness, because of the consistent weather and long hang time. **Director of Winemaking Paul Clifton** collaborates with Freeman on the details. With a gentle touch, the fruit is pressed and cold soaked, allowing time for extended maceration to extract the

“magic stuff” from the skins; color, aromas, and flavors. Temperature-controlled fermentation, and French oak barrel aging, some new and many neutral, add to the depth of the wines, and **Chardonnay** is stirred on its lees, bringing complexity and texture to the vibrant fruit.

And while the recent focus is on **Pinot Noir**, **Chardonnay** is also a star of the region. The **Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnays** are vibrant, floral, and channel more tropical fruit notes. Racy acidity, structure and balance make these Chardonnays more Burgundian in style. Hahn offers three different label Chardonnays, all silky and supple, round and creamy, yet varying in flavor profiles and intensity. The mid-priced **Hahn SLH Chardonnay** is delightful, silky and rich, with peach, pear, green apple, and lime notes, whereas the **Lucienne Chardonnay Lone Oak Vineyard** resonates banana and mango alongside Meyer lemon flavors, with a mineral backbone.



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The **Lucienne** collection of Lone Oak, Doctor’s, Smith, and Hook single vineyard Pinot Noirs are limited, with less than 3000 cases produced, and retail for \$50. These wines are increasingly recognized as some of the finest in California, rated 91-93 points by **Wine Spectator**.

The **Hahn SLH** label consists of several wines, their estate Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, and a GSM blend round out the brand. Different from a single vineyard expression, or the lower tier wines from throughout Monterey County, these wines are blended from the best barrels of all Hahn’s estate vineyards. Silky, velvety Pinot Noir and delicate, full-bodied Chardonnay define the Hahn Estate, retailing between \$25-35 a bottle.

Hahn also offers different varietal wines through the basic **Hahn** label with the rooster on it. The fruit for these bottles come from the **Arroyo Seco AVA** of Monterey County, and Paso Robles, warmer areas that can ripen Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah. These are easy drinking, value wines that are very affordable, at \$14. In addition, there is a **Smith & Hook** label, a trio of Cabernets sourced from Paso Robles and the Central Coast.

Hahn’s limited production wines are sold through the **website** or are available at the **estate tasting room**. There is an incentive to join their wine club. The **Highlands Wine Club** offers 4, 6, and 12 bottle quarterly shipments of either red or mix for a 20% discount. Some of the tiers even offer an **ATV tour** of the property, a fun and exciting way to see what makes Hahn and the Santa Lucia Highlands so special.

On my recent trip to the property, **Executive Chef Dyon Foster** and his team prepared a three course luncheon for visiting wine writers, demonstrating the **food friendly** aspect of Hahn’s wines. The Hahn SLH Chardonnay accompanied wild caught Sablefish over risotto with a Beurre Noisette sauce, it was nirvana! The Hahn SLH Pinot Noir was poured alongside the Pork Medallions with

Cranberry and Corn Polenta, a delicious pairing! The sum was definitely greater than the parts, the wines enhanced the food, and the food brought out the best of the wine.

What Hahn and other **Santa Lucia Highlands** producers have achieved in a generation of winemaking is remarkable. These producers fast-tracked the quality of these wines, and much is still to be discovered. Today's elegant and reasonably priced wines are testimony to the promise and potential of the region. **Hahn Family Wines** are constantly evolving, reaching for perfection in the glass.



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