

All Stars of Pinot Noir Rock the 2016 World of Pinot Part 1

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Merry Edwards Winery of Sonoma poured a beautiful Meredith's Estate Pinot.
Patricia Decker

Enthusiasm ran high as wine flowed at the **2016 World of Pinot**, a two day Pinot Noir-centric event, that attracted hundreds of Pinot lovers and winemakers from around the world. Held at **Bacara Resort & Spa** in Santa Barbara, the Friday and Saturday afternoon “Pinot Noir By The Sea” grand tastings were simply the best, where Pinot’s legendary California pioneers, rock star winemakers, and up and comers in the industry poured samples side by side to a crush of serious Pinotphiles! This was no average tasting event, serious wine collectors were on the hunt for old favorites and new sensations, while for many, it was a chance to really understand what **Pinot Noir** can be, from sparkling wines to still reds, from Old World to New World. The winemakers added to the buzz, taking breaks to excitedly check out what other producers were pouring. With so many wineries in attendance, it was impossible to check out everyone, but if you asked fellow tasters what they found on this pre-Easter wine hunt, valuable tips were swapped about the not-to-be-missed wines of the moment. Tasting over 100 wines during the event, here are my highlights, and wines that deserve to be sought out!

California producers were the largest contingent, spanning the state from Santa Barbara to Sonoma. California is blessed with several pockets of Pinot-growing regions, and these differences were celebrated with single vineyard expressions from the different AVAs, even from different blocks within the vineyards themselves.



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- **Black Kite Cellars** of Anderson Valley is a perfect example, owners Rebecca and Tom Birdsall poured five distinct site-specific Pinot Noir wines from their estate Kite's Rest Vineyard, which displayed the nuances from the top of the hill to the turn of the river at it's base, all elegant and aromatic.
- Their winemaker, Jeff Gaffner, poured Pinot from his own label, **Saxon Brown** of Sonoma Valley, showing the same deft touch, elegant, aromatic, and structured wines from single vineyards in Anderson Valley, Sonoma Coast, and Santa Lucia Highlands.
- **Ram's Gate Winery** of Sonoma County, is another of Jeff Gaffner's winemaking projects, he must be one of the busiest men in Sonoma! Small lots of vineyard-designate Pinots, sourced from some of the most valued grape growers in the area, make for deep-flavored and layered wines.
- **Byron Wines**, one of Santa Barbara's pioneers in Pinot, has returned to their roots, producing single vineyard Pinots from the Sta. Rita Hills and Santa Maria Valley AVAs, starting with the 2014 vintage, with winemaker Jonathan Nagy at the helm. Nagy aims to capture the essence of Santa Barbara County, blending different clones from barrel-fermented lots to create a distinct expression of these iconic vineyards.
- Greg Brewer of Lompoc-based **Brewer-Clifton** attracted a lot of attention from fellow winemakers, he poured two spectacular Sta. Rita Hills single vineyard wines, the 2013 bottlings of 3D and Machado vineyard.
- The flamboyant Lane Tanner of Santa Maria Valley's **Lumen Wines** proved her feminine-styled Pinot had the stuff to age gracefully. She poured a 1990 Sierra Madre Vineyard Pinot, made under her Lane Tanner label, alongside a 2013

version under the Lumen brand, same vineyard, same winemaking methods, a gorgeous wine that retained its structure and subtle character.

- Gary Francioni of Santa Lucia Highlands' **ROAR Wines** was a rock star, people flocked three deep to his table, professing love and admiration for his supple and balanced Pinots.
- The highly regarded **Patz & Hall** of Sonoma poured four single vineyards Pinots, from the Russian River Valley, Carneros, and Sonoma Coast, all rich and intense wines that rocked the table.
- **Siduri Wines** of Sonoma offered a glimpse into their extensive Pinot portfolio, which produces single vineyard wines from 20 different vineyards in California and Oregon. Unfiltered, dense expressions of Pinot from a vertical tasting of their Russian River Valley Ewald vineyard 2012-2014 showcased vintage and vineyard, with the 2012 harvest providing the “Goldilocks” moment, just right!
- Sonoma's **Westwood Estate Winery** earned some industry buzz with their Annadel Gap Vineyard estate wines. Cool climate, biodynamic practices, and an emphasis on clones had people lined up to taste six distinct Pinots, their 2014 Estate Reserve was excellent.
- The legendary Pinot pioneer of the Sta. Rita Hills, Richard Sanford, poured his **Alma Rosa** wines, making the case for screw cap closures replacing traditional corks. I had the opportunity to taste some of his library wines, back to the 2005 Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc, holy smokes, they aged so beautifully, a smoky minerality permeated the glass! The vertical tasting of 2006-08 Alma Rosa La Encantada Vineyard Pinot Noir was fascinating, a study of vintage differences, the 2007 was simply spectacular!

Continued in **Part 2**

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