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The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

"If You Drink No Noir You Pinot Noir!"



Benovia Winery 2015 Pinot Noir: Wow!

"Winemaking is about the journey and not the destination."
Winemaker Michael Sullivan

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Co-owner and winemaker Michael Sullivan has been refining the Benovia style of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay since the winery's founding in 2005. Benovia began modestly in 2005 with the purchase of a small existing winery and a producing vineyard with 13.5 acres of Pinot Noir. In 2008, Benovia acquired an adjacent 40-acre horse ranch, expanding the total property acreage to 58. The Martaella Vineyard was planted with a very high vine density of between 2200 to 2722 vines per acre. The winery also owns two other estate vineyards: Cohn Vineyard located just outside the Russian River Valley AVA and Tilton Hill Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast AVA.

Today, Benovia produces 10,000 cases of primarily estate grown Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Zinfandel with an inaugural sparkling wine from the 2012 vintage to be released soon. Grapes are harvested from 71 acres of estate vineyards along with grapes sourced from grower partners such as the Martinelli family. Sullivan works out of a brand new winery specifically tailored to Pinot Noir production (pictured below), while the older winery is used for Chardonnay production.



I have followed the winery's evolution since the first releases in 2006, and have seen firsthand the remarkable progress that has ensued with the quality of the wines. The superb Pinot Noirs of the 2015 vintage bear this out. Due to rain during flowering, yields were markedly reduced in 2015, in some cases from a usual 2.5 tons per acre to a little over 0.1 ton per acre. Michael noted, "We got hammered," with overall yields down 30% to 40% from average. That said, as you can see from my reviews, the wines are magnificent featuring good acidity, lower alcohols, massive extraction and bold but balanced tannins.

The wines reviewed here were bottled in March 2017. The Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is released now, with the other wines to follow in the fall. The vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs are only now becoming accessible.

Pinot Noir vinification is careful and attentive. Careful sorting is followed by de-stemming and a 5 to 8-day cold soak. Indigenous yeast complete fermentation followed by an inoculated, very slow malolactic fermentation with lees stirring until the process is completed. The wines spend 14 to 16 months aging in French oak barrels.

Join the mailing list to get first shot at the 2015 Benovia Pinot Noirs. Quantities are limited. Visit www.benoviawinery.com. Tasting is available at the winery's Ranch House hospitality center by appointment. Join in at one of the events at the winery and get to know the very personable Michael Sullivan (pictured).



2015 Benovia Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.1% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.62, 2,600 cases, \$38. Released April 2016. Sourced from Martaella, Cohn, Tilton Hill and Zio Tony Vineyards. A blend of many clones including Calera, Swan, Mt. Eden, Pommard, Chalone and Cijon 777 and 943. Rigorously hand sorted, 100% destemmed, 8-day cold soak and fermented with indigenous yeast in open-top containers for more than two weeks. Aged in French oak barrels, 37% new. · Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Those nose opens in stages over time in the glass to a wondrous perfume of dark cherry and berry and spice. Quite dark fruited on the palate in a mid weight plus style of great concentration accented with a note of Asian 5-spice. Impressive fruit staying power through the mid palate and finish. Modest, velvety tannins, with a very giving finish. A superb appellation wine reflective of the vintage. Score: 92

2015 Benovia Cohn Vineyard Sonoma County Pinot Noir

14.1% alc., unreleased. An historic 18-acre vineyard first planted in 1970, making it one of the oldest vineyards in the Russian River area. The vineyard is part of a 55-acre ranch purchased in 2003 by Benovia owners Joe Anderson and his spouse, Mary Dewane. This site has also produced celebrated single vineyard wines for Williams Selyem and Kosta Browne. This bottling comes from 9 acres of a massale selection (likely Martini and Pommard clones) of Pinot Noir. · *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy aromas of grape must and crushed berries. Mid weight flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, earth and smoke framed by silky tannins. Well-structured but not imposing. This is often my favorite wine in the Benovia lineup but this wine is not particularly expressive at this stage, even when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. I will re-visit this wine in a couple of months. Score: 90-91*



2015 Benovia Martaella Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., unreleased. This vineyard surrounds the winery in Santa Rosa in an area known as the Laguna de Santa Rosa. The 58- acre property has 42 acres of Pinot Noir (nine clones) and Chardonnay (four clones) planted in Goldridge soils. · *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. More forward drinking, with lifted aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, cola, spice and wilted rose. Delicious core of black fruits framed by discreet tannins. Very polished and fresh in character, with an extremely long and fruited finish. More modest in concentration than the La Pommerae and Tilton Hill, but seduces with its vibrancy and openness. Score: 94*



2015 Benovia Tilton Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.2% alc., unreleased. The coldest Benovia estate vineyard, located a few miles from the Pacific Ocean near the town of Freestone. 11.7 acres were planted to Pinot Noir in 2009. Low vigor rootstock 420A and heirloom and Dijon selections of Pinot Noir. First vintage was 2012. · *Deep, dark garnet color in the glass. The nose opens beautifully over time in the glass, revealing hi-tone aromas of black raspberry, spice box, underbrush and warm brioche. Lush and concentrated, with vigorous fruit flavors of blackberry, black raspberry and allaliberry. Impeccably balanced with supportive tannins and acidity, and a deft touch oak. The finish is quite special in its own right, although falling slightly short of the stunning La Pommerae. Still a Lolita, and will benefit from more time in bottle. Score: 94*



2015 Benovia La Pommerae Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

Sourced from a vineyard farmed by George Martinelli located on Frei Road. The vineyard was once an apple orchard, leading to the name "La Pommerae," French for "apple orchard." The vineyard is planted to a very high density of 1 meter x 2 meters or 2420 vines per acre. Dijon 777 and "828." · *Deep, dark garnet color in the glass. Deep, dark garnet color in the glass. A highly nuanced perfume offers aromas of boysenberry, blackberry, dark rose petal, cardamom spice and underbrush. The gorgeous and core of sappy purple and black fruits is backed by toned and firm fruit tannins. Big as is typical for this vineyard, but focused and adroit, with a dreamy velvety texture and a very long and silky finish offering an added pleasing floral note. A perfect example of the proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove. An extraordinary wine that I had to re-taste from a second bottle to be sure. Score: 98*



Previous article:
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