



Best Pinot Noir

LYNMAR ESTATE

By Alexandra Russell

Arriving at Lynmar Estate, mid-morning on the first day of spring, the fog is still heavy on the ground and we can smell the ocean. “We’re 16 miles from the coast as the crow flies,” explains Lisa Gower, Lynmar’s hospitality supervisor, before adding, “and all this late-clearing fog is great for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes.”

Just as the sun breaks through, we embark with a small group of wine club members (they’re called “Advocates”) on an estate tour encompassing Quail Hill vineyard (one of the oldest planted vineyards in Russian River Valley), the recently expanded winery facility (with 9,000 square feet of caves), and an extensive gourmet garden (the organic produce is used by winery chef Sarah Simile to create delectable pairings and also donated to local food banks and charities). As we progress, it becomes clear that Lynmar founder Lynn Fritz is dedicated to not only crafting the best wines possible, but to sound environmental stewardship and paying back some of his own good fortune to improve what’s around him for the enjoyment of all.

In the 1990s, Fritz turned a small domestic documentation company into a global powerhouse. At the same time he was building that company, Fritz was stepping into the wine industry with a 1994 vintage Quail Hill Chardonnay (released in 1996). When the documentation company was purchased by UPS in 2001, Fritz’s fate as a gentleman farmer was sealed. Four years ago, he broke ground on a new visitors’ center, winery and caves; the construction is part of a larger investment that will eventually include replanting the entire Quail Hill vineyard and purchasing additional acreage.

Depending on the vintage, Lynmar produces five to seven Pinot Noirs annually; the most consistently popular are the Quail Hill Estate Pinot Noir and Five Sisters, which is named in honor of the five Fritz daughters and blended from the finest estate and sourced fruit (Lynmar has longstanding contracts with a short list of growers located throughout West Sonoma County). According to Gower, Five Sisters is only made in years when the fruit quality is exceptional; the next release will be a 2007.



Russian River Valley’s cool climate is ideal for Pinot Noir grapes.

Director of Winemaking Hugh Chappelle, who came to Lynmar in 2004 from Flowers Vineyard and Winery, says Pinot Noir “should, first and foremost, taste like Pinot and not Syrah or Zinfandel. Second, an excellent Pinot Noir always has a sense of place and speaks to its origins, be it Russian River Valley, Oregon or Burgundy.

“Lynmar wines fit that profile, because we make a conscious effort to express both our vineyards and the Russian River Valley as a whole. Our wines are intentionally made in a style that downplays ripeness, extraction and heavy-handed winemaking. The results are Pinot Noirs that are *clearly* Pinot Noirs. We haven’t changed our style since these wines were first produced more than 15 years ago. Our traditional focus has always been on balance, elegance and age-worthy structure.”

Pinot Noir accounts for 70 percent of Lynmar’s production, with the remainder taken up by Chardonnays (and a very small production of Syrah). “It’s such a demanding variety, both in the vineyard and in the winery,” says Chappelle of the Pinot. “It really stretches me as a winemaker.” Which is why he’s so excited to have been singled out by *NorthBay biz* readers.

“It’s an honor to be selected by the local community as Best Pinot Noir,” he says, “especially considering all the great wines being made by our friends and colleagues across the entire North Bay and North Coast.” ■

www.lynmarwinery.com



Winemaker Hugh Chappelle