



A Taste Of Some Pinot Noir's From "Cold" Anderson Valley



Village of Chateauneuf-du-Pape (Credit: Aa77zz via Wikipedia)

It is remarkable that some of the best wines are grown in the most inhospitable regions. Champagne is the coldest wine growing region in Europe yet yields one of the most exquisite wines in the world. Vineyards in Chateauneuf du Pape are covered in potato-size rocks called galets that destroy tractors yet absorb the heat and retain the water to nurture the vines. On the Mosel River in Germany, vineyards are planted on 65-degree slopes, yet pickers face death harvesting the grapes that go into some of the most aromatic wines.

California's Anderson Valley, a remote and relatively small appellation in Mendocino County, has its challenges too. Located about 100 miles north of downtown San Francisco, Anderson Valley extends 15 miles from Boonville to Navarro. Only a mile wide, it is flanked by resin-scented redwood forests that serve as a weather buffer to the valley below. Cold ocean currents funnel breezes inland from the coast where the valley's Navarro River begins just 10 miles away. Fog floods the vineyards until late morning and challenges grape growers to protect moist grapes from mold. That's hardly the temperate climate you find in Napa or Sonoma counties, yet it is these difficult conditions that make the wines from Anderson Valley unique.

Extreme diurnal temperature swings — 85 degrees during the day to 39 degrees at night — can give a winemaker heartburn during the growing season. But the night's coolness keeps the soil from overheating during the day.

In a virtual tasting program, Elaine Chukan Brown, a contributing writer to JanicsRobinson.com and the *Oxford Companion to Wine*, said cooler soils “shorten the ripening arc” and make for wines with a lot of layers. She said pinot noirs from Anderson Valley have good acidity and more floral aromas.

 Champagne’s house of Louis Roederer was among the first to identify the terroir and climate as ideal for sparkling wine. Roederer Estate, established in Anderson Valley in 1982, drew the attention of other wine producers who planted vines for pinot noir in the north end and zinfandel, merlot and syrah in the warmer south end.

We sampled a number of impressive Anderson Valley pinot noirs that gave us more respect for this northern region. The wines had a restrained delicacy closer to the Burgundian model we like. They contrast with the alcoholic fruit bombs we often find in pinot noirs from Napa and Sonoma counties.

In general, the pinot noirs have moderate alcohol levels – largely a result of the grape’s struggle to fully ripen. They have an earthy character, a distinctive mineral thread and fresh acidity. Many are light in color and leaner in style.



Maggy Hawk Vineyard Credit: Sarah Wuethrich

Sarah Wuethrich, winemaker at Maggy Hawk, likes to use whole-cluster pressing to express her pinot noirs in The Deep End of northern Anderson Valley. She works alongside legendary pinot noir winemaker Tony Rynders.

“It (whole cluster) provides texture, rustic tannins, juicy in mid-palate but creates a framework on the outside that is lovely,” she said.

Ryan Zepaltas, who gave up a passion for skateboarding to make wine, likes the location of his Copain vineyards. He said the mild weather of the middle Anderson Valley has the “best of both worlds” of northern and southern regions.



Long Meadow Ranch Credit: Long Meadow Ranch

Stephane Viver, a native of Burgundy, likes the diverse terrain of his Long Meadow vineyards. Planted in 1996, the vineyard for his flagship pinot noir ranges in soil composition as it slopes toward the river at a 25-35 percent angle.

“Pinot noir grown 75 yards apart are so different,” he said. “Our goal is to show a wine that is a reflection of the vineyard.”

Few producers actually have wine-making facilities in Anderson Valley – they ship the grapes to wineries in Napa or Sonoma counties. That doesn’t seem like producers are ready to commit to Anderson Valley. It doesn’t have the lure of tourist-bound Napa and Sonoma counties. And, it is sort of an outpost for

winemakers.

Said Wuethrich of Maggy Hawk, “Not many want to live in a rural area like Anderson Valley. Therefore, your options for full-time production candidates are very limited.”

Maggy Hawk and Copain Wines aren’t made in Anderson Valley, but Wuethrich said their parent company, Jackson Family Wines, bought a facility in Philo last year. It should be ready for production in the next few years.

Here are several pinot noirs from the Anderson Valley:



*Copain Wines
Edmeades
Vineyard Pinot
Noir 2017*

Maggy Hawk Afleet Pinot Noir 2017 (\$65). The most complex and boldest of the pinot noirs, the Afleet has a reserve quality. Rich, layered and tannic, it shows off floral aromas and an earthy combination of red and black fruit.

- **Long Meadow Ranch Tanbark Mill Vineyard Pinot Noir 2017** (\$80). The big tannins in this colossal pinot noir portends a long future. Dense black cherry flavors with the earthy notes that are typical of the valley. Most notable in this wine was the mineral notes and lingering finish.
- **Copain Wines Edmeades Vineyard Pinot Noir 2017** (\$65). Lighter in color, this medium-bodied and elegant wine has a burgundian feel. Low in alcohol at 13.1 percent, it has raspberry aromas with cherry flavors.



*Copain Wines
Estate P2 Wine
2019*

Copain Wines Estate P2 Wine 2019 (\$35). Zepaltas combines co-fermented pinot noir and pinot gris – the two Ps – to create a unique wine that for us was like a cross between rosé and Beaujolais. Bold and fruit, it has a candy-like appeal and juicy strawberry flavors. Zepaltis calls it a “super fun wine to chill.”

- **Maggy Hawk Edmeades Vineyard White Pinot Noir 2018** (\$50). White pinot noir is becoming more popular in California. Whole clusters of grapes are immediately pressed after harvest, so the wine has no time for color. Viscous with white peach and sweet apple flavors with hints of white raisins and honey.

Wine picks

- **La Vielle Ferme Rosé 2019** (\$9). You can't beat the price for this rosé from southern Rhone Valley. Grenache, syrah and cinsault grapes lead to a fruity, dry palate with cherry, strawberry and citrus flavors.



*Chateau Lauriga Rosé
2019*

Chateau Lauriga Rosé 2019 (\$20). This syrah-grenache blend from the Roussillon region of southern France exudes red berry and citrus flavors

- **Cote Mas Rosé Aurore 2019** (\$13). Another southern France blend of syrah, grenache and cinsault, this delicious and crisp rosé is more complex than most. Candied cherry notes.
- **Laetitia Arroyo Grande Valley Estate Pinot Noir 2018** (\$27). A decent price for a pinot noir, this one has easy, ripe black cherry flavors and good acidity.
- **Ram's Gate Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 2017** (\$46). We liked the balanced in this luxurious chardonnay. Crisp acidity but creamy mouthfeel with tropical fruit and citrus notes.

Tom Marquardt and Patrick Darr, [MoreAboutWine](#), posted on [SouthFloridaReporter.com](#), July 27, 2020

Tom Marquardt and Patrick Darr have been writing a weekly wine column for more than 30 years. Additional Wine reviews on [MoreAboutWine](#)

All photos are randomly selected and do not indicate any preferred wine. Listed prices are subject to change

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