

ENJOY HOLIDAY COCKTAILS

Local spirits are the star ingredients p.62

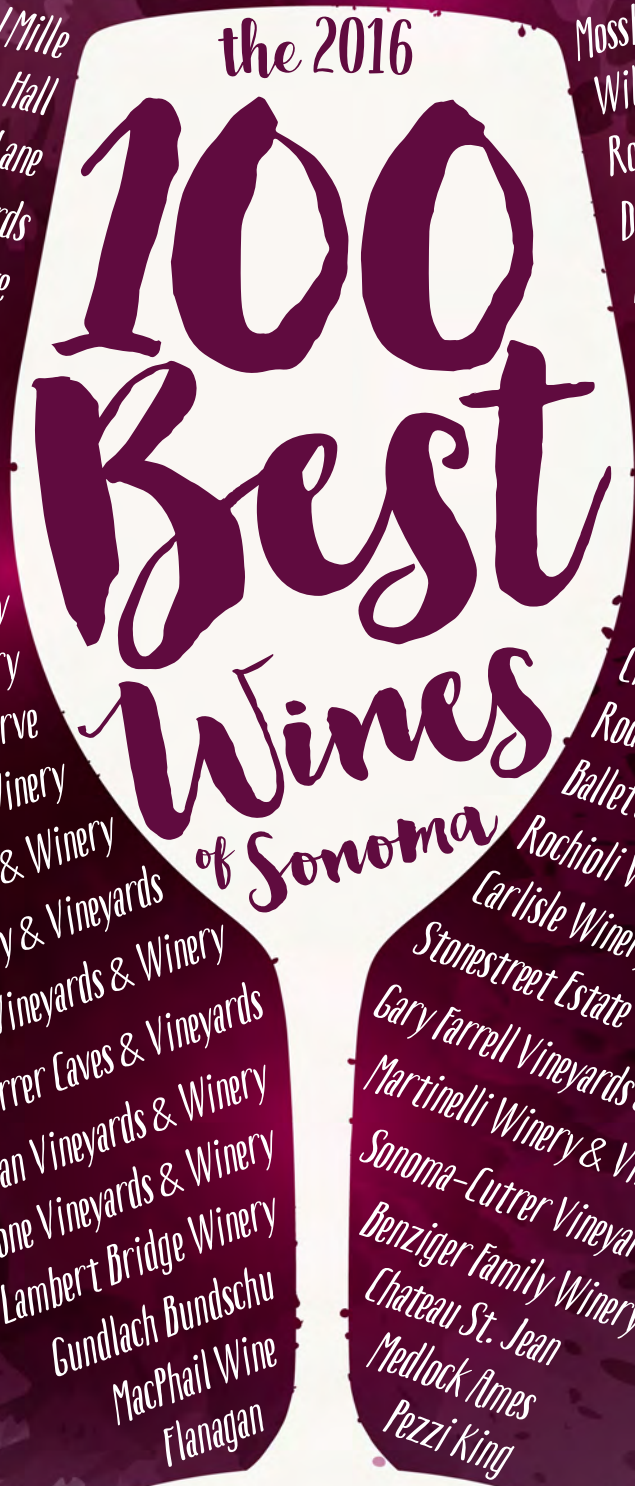
Albion Open: Anglers, kayaks and a feast p.110

Our liquid gold **Olive Oil** p.54



SONOMA

The Heart of Wine Country



the 2016

100 Best Wines of Sonoma

Benovia Winery
Ordaz Family Wines
Joseph Swan Vineyards
Lasseter Family Winery
Laurel Glen Vineyard
Kenwood Vineyards
Hart's Desire Wines
Trentadue Winery
Meadowcroft Wines
Rancho Zabaco
Kokomo Winery
deLorimier Winery
St. Francis Winery
Lynmar Estate
Forefathers
1 Mile
Patz & Hall
Limerick Lane
Ridge Vineyards
The Donum Estate
Inman Family Wines
Landmark Vineyards
J Vineyards & Winery
Dry Creek Vineyard
Dutton-Goldfield Winery
Kendall-Jackson Winery
Francis Coppola Reserve
Papapietro Perry Winery
Flowers Vineyards & Winery
MacKostie Winery & Vineyards
J. Rickards Vineyards & Winery
Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards
Jordan Vineyards & Winery
Trione Vineyards & Winery
Lambert Bridge Winery
Gundlach Bundschu
MacPhail Wine
Flanagan

Mossback
Wilson Winery
Roth Estate
DeLoach Vineyards
Iron Horse Vineyards
Ramey Wine Cellars
Three Sticks Wines
Occidental Road Cellars
Imagery Estate Winery
Hartford Family Winery
Charles Heintz Vineyards
Rodney Strong Vineyards
Balletto Vineyards & Winery
Rochioli Vineyards & Winery
Carlisle Winery & Vineyards
Stonestreet Estate Vineyards
Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery
Martinelli Winery & Vineyards
Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyards
Benziger Family Winery
Chateau St. Jean
Medlock Ames
Pezzi King
Dehlinger Vineyards
Merry Edwards Winery
Quivira Vineyards
Black Kite Cellars
Bacigalupi Vineyards
Archimedes
Sojourn Cellars
Arnot-Roberts
Erin E Wines
Sidebar Cellars
Estate 1856 Wines
Pedroncelli Winery
Westwood Estate
Siduri Wines

12
Difficult Wines
to Acquire

8
Winemakers
to Watch

NOV/DEC 2016 \$4.95



Our experts present this guide to wines
made from grapes grown in Sonoma County.

Top
1000
Wines of Sonoma

BY LINDA MURPHY
WITH VIRGINIE BOONE
AND JULIE FADDA POWERS



Our yearly roundup of Sonoma's finest has a decidedly Burgundian slant, with 39 of the Top 100 made from Chardonnay or Pinot Noir grapes.

It's no wonder: The two varieties made famous in France's Burgundy region thrive here, too, in growing areas such as Carneros, Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast. Cooling marine breezes and fog from the Pacific Ocean and San Pablo Bay create an ideal environment for growing Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, producing wines with plenty of ripe fruit aromas and flavors, and bright, mouthwatering acidity that makes them particularly refreshing and food-friendly. Even rival Napa Valley has figured out that Sonoma is the place for these grapes, with dozens of wineries there purchasing fruit, and in some cases vineyards, here, making Sonoma "cool" in a whole other way.

Yet the Top 100 also shows off Sonoma's winemaking and viticultural diversity. Sparkling wines, Sauvignon Blanc, rosé, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Rhone-style reds and whites, and of course, old-vine Zinfandel, all are strongly represented on the list.

A word must be said about retail pricing and availability. Sonoma has become such a winemaking powerhouse that its best bottles are relatively expensive — particularly Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon. Demand, production volume and buzz largely drive wineries' pricing decisions: The more difficult a wine is to find, and the more high scores important critics award it, the more aficionados want to have it — and will pay whatever it takes. As well, prices paid for grapes by those without their own vineyards continue to soar, mirroring Napa. Winemakers must pay the going rates, and price their wines accordingly.

Still, there are many less-expensive wines in the Top 100, and a handful of outright bargains, most from long-established wineries with wide distribution. Dry Creek Vineyard, Kenwood Vineyards, Pedroncelli Winery and Rodney Strong Vineyards are among those offering terrific bang for the buck.

Methodology

Sonoma wine critics Virginie Boone and Linda Murphy selected the Top 100 Wines from their extensive tastings and winery visits throughout 2016, and considered 95-point-and-higher scorers at The Press Democrat 2016 North Coast Wine Challenge (which Boone and Murphy helped judge).

Boone is a frequent contributor to Sonoma magazine, and the Sonoma and Napa critic for Wine Enthusiast magazine. She is a former Press Democrat wine writer, and contributes

the LikeWine feature for Sonoma magazine. Murphy, Sonoma magazine's managing editor, was the founding editor of the San Francisco Chronicle's wine section, contributes to Decanter magazine and Food & Wine magazine's annual wine guide, and is a wine consultant for Air New Zealand.

Only wines produced from Sonoma County grapes, by wineries located in the county, were eligible for the Top 100. Diversity in price, varietal and geography

were important factors in determining the list. Sonoma magazine could have easily come up with a Top 300, so high is the quality of the local vino.

All Top 100 Wines were released in 2016, although some may no longer be in the marketplace. If you have difficulty finding a wine, contact the winery's tasting room for availability. Also consider purchasing a newer vintage of the wine, as the 2013, 2014 and 2015 harvests were spectacular throughout Sonoma.

Note:

Initials after each wine description are for reviewers Virginie Boone (VB) and Linda Murphy (LM).

Wines produced in Sonoma County, from Sonoma County grapes, are legally required to include "Sonoma County" on their labels. For brevity, "Sonoma County" has been omitted from the wine names.



Rosé

› BALLETO VINEYARDS

**2014 Russian River Valley
Rosé of Pinot Noir**
\$19

Fresh strawberry and red-plum aromas and flavors dominate this exuberantly fruity wine, which gets a tangy kick from tangerine and grapefruit. It finishes soft and juicy, making it a fine lunch and pre-dinner sipper. *[LM]*

› LASSETER FAMILY WINERY

2015 Enjoué Sonoma Valley
\$28

This rosé is packed with lively Bing cherry and raspberry personality. A blend of Syrah, Grenache and Mourvedre, it has deep coral color, enough richness to stand up to pork and lighter beef dishes, and finishes long and mouthwatering, with a kick of baking spice. *[LM]*

› KOKOMO WINERY

**2015 Pauline's Vineyard
Dry Creek Valley Grenache Rosé**
\$24

A Best of Class winner in previous NCWC tastings, it remains a winner, although the acclaim has made it a bit more difficult to find. Vivacious red cherry, watermelon and raspberry flavors ride a wave of brisk acidity, with ruby grapefruit and lime on the long finish. *[LM]*

› LYNMAR ESTATE

**2015 Estate Russian River Valley
Rosé of Pinot Noir**
\$25

The color of a fresh-cut watermelon, it delivers mouth-watering watermelon, strawberry, pineapple and tangerine flavors in a slightly richer style than most, yet not at all heavy. Great with salmon. *[LM]*

› SIDEBAR CELLARS

2015 Russian River Valley Rosé
\$21

A project of Ramey Wine Cellars, Sidebar is an affordable option for tasting David Ramey's winemaking talents. This rosé is 100 percent Syrah, from old vines growing in the Russian River Valley. Crisp and refreshing, it sports juicy strawberry and berry flavors accented by a thread of citrus. *[LM]*

Julia Iantosca

Lasseter Family Winery

Sonoma Valley

JULIA IANTOSCA, WINEMAKER at Lasseter Family Winery in Glen Ellen, originally wanted to become a veterinarian. She moved from Ventura County to Northern California to attend college, eventually transferring from San Jose State University's microbiology department to UC Davis' fermentation science program. A wine appreciation class sealed that deal.

Iantosca now has more than 30 years of winemaking experience. But it was at Lambert Bridge Winery, where she worked with Merry Edwards, that Iantosca's love for blended wines truly bloomed. At Lasseter, her focus is on Bordeaux- and Rhone-style blends, and two of them — 2015 Enjoué rosé and 2013 Chemin de Fer red Rhone blend — made our Top 100.

"What I like about blends is you start with

a concept," Iantosca said. "You choose the right grapes and barrels, and put the puzzle together to build a balanced, whole entity. It's fun because you're not constrained by what a particular wine 'should' be."

Iantosca has been with Lasseter from the ground up, helping design the winery and replanting some of John and Nancy Lasseter's vineyards.

"This year, we're getting our first crop from what we planted in 2013," Iantosca said. "It's exciting to see the wines in the tanks. You have to be patient in this business, it takes a lot of time for things to happen. The first crop is a teaser, then it takes years to see how the wine turns out. But that's also what makes it pleasurable. Each vintage is different and I learn new things all the time."

– Julie Fadda Powers



Other Red Varietals

ESTATE 1856 WINES

**2013 Tzabaco Rancho Vineyards
Dry Creek Valley Malbec**
\$36

Brian and Janice Schmidt (she's the winemaker) won gold and achieved 95 points at the NCWC with this brawny, dense wine with blackberry, blueberry and mulberry flavors accented by chocolate, vanilla and baking spice. The tannins are quite firm, suggesting a year or more of bottle age will reward the patient. *(LM)*

I MILLE

**2012 Knights Valley
Cabernet Franc**
\$42

Another Francis Ford Coppola/Corey Beck wine, I Mille earned 95 points from NCWC judges. It's a melange of red cherry, black raspberry, tobacco leaf, dried herbs and clove character, quite ripe, and with toasty, vanillin oak coming through on the finish. *(LM)*

KENDALL-JACKSON WINERY

**2013 Grand Reserve
Sonoma County Merlot**
\$26

Spicy oak frames the plush, juicy red plum and black fruit; the supple, mouth-coating tannins are balanced by palate-whisking acidity. It delivers more than its relatively modest price would suggest. *(LM)*

KENWOOD VINEYARDS

**2013 Jack London Vineyard
Sonoma Mountain Merlot**
\$28

Five percent Cabernet Sauvignon boosts the structure of this wine, which brims with blueberry, cherry and red-plum flavors. Nicely oaked, it has vanilla, cola, spice and toast nuances, plus an intriguing mintiness. The tannins are soft, the finish firm and long. *(LM)*

LAMBERT BRIDGE WINERY

2012 Sonoma County Merlot
\$60

Silky and supple, it delivers a mouthful of red and black cherry fruit, accented by spice, cola, tobacco leaf and a very subtle chocolate note on the finish. Sumptuous and satisfying. *(LM)*

PEDRONCELLI WINERY

**2014 Alto Vineyards
Dry Creek Valley Sangiovese**
\$17

This medium-bodied, easy-drinking red is a great weeknight quaffer, with bright cherry, plum, spice and dried-herb aromas and flavors. Its rounded tannins and crisp acidity make it suitable for pizza, meat-sauced pasta and dishes with tomatoes. *(LM)*

ST. FRANCIS WINERY

2013 Sonoma Valley Merlot
\$45

Small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec lend complexity and structure to this medium-bodied Merlot. Plump and plummy, it offers hints of dark chocolate, vanilla, cedar and spice, with rounded tannins and a juicy finish. *(LM)*

Rhone-Style Reds

DEHLINGER VINEYARDS

**2013 Goldridge Russian River
Valley Syrah**
\$45

From one of the few producers to have estate-grown Syrah in the Russian River Valley, this wine is made from vines planted in Goldridge soils and exhibits robust, tangy red fruit and notes of leather, pepper and wild game. Owner/founder Tom Dehlinger's daughter, Eva, is now the winemaker. *(VB)*

DUTTON-GOLDFIELD WINERY

**2013 Cherry Ridge Vineyard
Green Valley of Russian River
Valley Syrah**
\$50

This wine can get lost in the accolades for the winery's superlative Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, but not here. Boldly flavored in blackberry and blueberry fruit, it's laced with white pepper and subtle bacon fat character, with smooth tannins and nervy acidity. *(LM)*

FLANAGAN

2013 Bennett Valley Syrah
\$50

Smoky and meaty in both aroma and palate, it has deep, ripe plum, wild berry and dark-cherry fruit, a generous shake of black pepper, and iron-like minerality. Smooth tannins and a lush mouthfeel make it drop-dead-delicious. *(LM)*

J. RICKARDS VINEYARDS & WINERY

**2013 Brown Barn Vineyard
Alexander Valley Petite Sirah**
\$32

Grower Jim Rickards and winemaker Blaine Brazil teamed for this textbook Sonoma Petite Sirah – and there is nothing small about it. Big, bold flavors of blackberry, blueberry and dark plum gain even more weight from toasty oak and hints of molasses and mocha. It's a mouthful. *(LM)*

LASSETER FAMILY WINERY

**2013 Chemin de Fer Sonoma
Valley Grenache-Syrah-
Mourvedre**
\$56

A longtime proponent of Rhone blends, Lasseter combines 60 percent Grenache, 23 percent Mourvedre and 17 percent Syrah to full-bodied, ripely robust effect, all from estate-grown fruit. Smoky, charred oak and spicy acidity wrap around lush blackberry, cherry and tar character, with plenty of grip on the finish. *(VB)*

QUIVIRA VINEYARDS

**2014 Wine Creek Ranch Dry
Creek Valley Grenache**
\$32

Packed with juicy goodness (viva-cious red cherry, red raspberry and strawberry pie) and silky, Pinot Noir-like in texture, it pairs nicely with salmon, duck breast, roast chicken and even mild curry. *(LM)*

RAMEY WINE CELLARS

**2013 Rodgers Creek Vineyard
Sonoma Coast Syrah**
\$65

Waves of black pepper, graphite, leather and smoke unfold on the nose and palate, supporting the rich but not-too-ripe blackberry and dark plum fruit. Oak sits in the background, and vibrant acidity seals the deeply delicious deal. *(LM)*