

Santé

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World-Class Wines Of Gary Farrell Winery

A virtual tour and tasting of single vineyard wines.

My virtual plane recently flew me to the picturesque wine-growing region of the Russian River Valley in Sonoma County, CA.

The Russian River Valley was granted AVA status (American Viticultural Area) in 1983 and is considered a premier region for cultivating cool- climate grapes. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel are the most planted vines here. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Sauvignon Blanc follow. Within the valley, many established vineyards produce distinctively different wines from each other.

Gary Farrell Winery is located in the heart of the Russian River Valley. It was while working with Russian River Valley vintners in the mid-1970s that winemaker Gary Farrell developed a reputation for producing elegant Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines. In 1982 and under his own label, Gary produced his first Pinot Noir from grapes grown in the iconic Rochioli Vineyard and the adjacent Allen Vineyard. Gary and his winery became renowned for producing small-lot Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays in the Russian River Valley. He identified and secured grapes from only the best sites in this AVA. Gary built the winery in 2000, with a focus on his obsession for cleanliness, attention to detail, natural process flow, small tank fermentation, and top-flight French oak cooperage.



Gary sold the winery in 2004, but to this day his legacy continues with collaborative partnerships with top growers and dedication to making wines that capture the essence and unique character of each distinctive vineyard.

In 2012, winemaker Theresa Heredia joined Gary Farrell Winery. Her specialty is small-lot, single vineyard wines. Theresa said, *“Coming to Gary Farrell was ideal for me with 36 different vineyards to work with. My primary goal is respect for the fruit and the vineyards.”* She further stated, *“I strongly believe in the Russian River Valley’s capacity to consistently produce world-class wines. The key is cool breezes and fog from the nearby Pacific Ocean blanket.”*



The Russian River Valley boasts a long, consistent growing season, allowing for a slow ripening process and good levels of acidity. In addition to the fog and cool breezes that relieve the summer heat, the 35-40 degree drop in temperature at night also contributes to the long growing season. Volcanic, sandstone and alluvial soils add to the aromas, vibrancy, intense flavor, and balance of the wines.



With wine samples poured, Theresa walked us through a tasting of three Chardonnays and four Pinot Noirs representing seven different single vineyards.

It was a stellar lineup of the 2017 vintage. Every wine shows the uniqueness and expression of their respective vineyards. Theresa said, *“Vintage and site designation is the most important in making quality wine. We use gentle pressing and the use of light to medium toasted French oak barrels for all of our wines, allowing the fruit to shine through.”* Theresa uses gentle, whole-cluster pressing, which produces a much finer and less bitter wine.

Chardonnays



Olivet Lane Vineyard Chardonnay

This vineyard is exposed to regular fog, and is moderated by cool breezes, crisp nights, and well-drained loam, clay soils that create a perfect environment for this well-balanced Chardonnay with rich acidity and minerality. Fermentation and aging took place in 35% new French oak for nine months on its primary lees. Lovely aromas of pear, lemon, melon, and honeysuckle spill onto the palate. Vibrant acidity, hints of baking spice, lemon curd, and toasty notes add to the dimension of this wine, with honeysuckle lingering on the finish.

Alcohol: 13.8%

SRP: \$45

Ritchie Vineyard Chardonnay

The legendary Ritchie Vineyard sits on a northwest-facing hillside in the heart of the Russian River Valley and is regarded as one of the best Chardonnay sites in all of California. The soil profile is comprised of *Goldridge series sandy loam and volcanic ash deposits, which contributes to the wine's intensity and expressive characteristics. Fermentation and aging took place in 35% new French oak for nine months on its primary lees.

** "The predominant soil type of the AVA is called Goldridge—a fine sandy loam covering about 60% of the area. The soil has a dark, yellowish, fine, sandy loam surface over a subsoil of golden yellow, sandy loam and fractured sandstone. It is derived from the remains of an ancient inland sea that slowly emptied into the Pacific three to five million years ago. It is particularly valuable for high-quality wine grape production because of its excellent drainage and low soil fertility. These characteristics allow it to be initially managed from a "low vigor" situation that may be readily customized with more water and/or nutrition, which directly contributes to wine quality". Source: Paul Anamosa, Ph.D., Soil Science & Viticulture*

This is a vibrant and refreshing wine with aromas of citrus, tropical notes, and floral. The palate offers fruit-driven flavors of white stone fruit, lemon, pink grapefruit, nutty notes, and bright acidity. It has so much depth and character.

Alcohol: 14.3%

SRP: \$60

Rochioli Vineyard Chardonnay

The Rochioli Vineyard is a historic site that grows both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Fertile, gravelly soils and warmer daytime temperatures in this vineyard

contribute to the wine's flavor and complexity. Fermentation and aging took place in 35% new French oak for nine months on its primary lees. Compared to the other Chardonnays that I tasted, this one has more citrus, fewer tropical notes, and more minerality. The palate is treated to juicy white stone fruit, lemon, white flowers, and toasted nuts. Crisp acidity and hints of baking spice add dimension to this beautifully textured wine.

Alcohol: 13.5%

SRP: \$65

Pinot Noirs



Bacigalupi Vineyard Pinot Noir

In 1964, the Bacigalupi family was among the first to plant Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the area. In fact, their Chardonnay grapes became famous when they were used to make Chateau Montelena's 1973 winning entry in the Paris Wine Tasting of 1976. The soil in this vineyard is gravelly sandy loam. Its unique climate features cool mornings and warm afternoons. This wine was aged for 15 months in 40% new French oak. Inviting aromas of cherry, red berries, and spice are mouth-watering. Ripe, juicy fruit greets the palate with dark cherry, raspberry, herbal notes, and a touch of tobacco. Beautifully balanced, soft, and quite engaging.

Alcohol: 14.1%

SRP: \$65

Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir

This vineyard is located in the Green Valley sub-appellation. The marine influence brings invigorating daytime breezes, followed by cool evening temperatures. The blend for this Pinot is a composition of many of the best blocks here, which produces fruit with deep, dark color and great structure. This wine was aged for 15 months in 40% new French oak. It has intoxicating aromas of floral, dark cherry, blackberry, and ripe strawberries. The palate is layered with earthy notes, dark cherry, spice, raspberry, and a hint of vanilla. This is a fresh and intense wine with soft tannins and a long finish.

Alcohol: 13.8%

SRP: \$55

McDonald Mountain Vineyard Pinot Noir

This vineyard is close to the border that divides the Russian River Valley from the Petaluma Gap. This is where the fog first arrives inland from the Pacific Ocean in

the morning and where it burns off last in the afternoon. The vines are planted in one to four feet of Goldridge sandy loam underlain with clay. The climate and soil produce small, but flavor-packed clusters and berries that have lots of natural acidity. This wine was aged for 15 months in 40% new French oak. Seductive aromas and flavors abound in this complex yet light wine. Pomegranate, cranberry, strawberry, and earth fuse with hints of anise, pepper, cherry, and baking spice. Fruit and acidity meld together in this elegant and expressive wine.

Alcohol: 13.3%

SRP: \$70

Martaella Vineyard Pinot Noir

This vineyard is located in an area called Laguna de Santa Rosa, which is in the heart of the Russian River Valley. The climate is influenced by the fog that rolls in from the Pacific Ocean. It can cool the region down by as much as 40 degrees. High vine density planting exists here, much like that of Burgundy and the result is smaller berries and smaller clusters, which produce overall concentration and balance. This wine was aged for 15 months in 40% new French oak. Wonderful aromas of cherry, dark raspberry, blueberry, floral and herbal notes segue onto the palate. The wine is a dance of savory and sweet with firm tannins and good acidity. This is a beautifully structured Pinot Noir with deep fruit concentration. Theresa recommends decanting this wine.

Alcohol: 13.2%

SRP: \$65

If you love Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, then you must indulge yourself in these wines. The grapes may be sourced from different vineyards, but the wines all share one thing in common, the purity of the fruit and simple elegance.