

¡Salud! 2013 Russian River Valley Immersion Trip Recap

The ¡Salud! Oregon Wine Auction represents a collaboration between Oregon wineries and healthcare professionals to provide access to health care for Oregon's seasonal vineyard and winery workers and their families. ¡Salud! is named for the traditional Spanish, toast, "To your health!" As I am retired physician, this charity is close to my heart.



The charity's major fundraiser is the two-day ¡Salud! Oregon Wine Auction held in the Willamette Valley and Portland, Oregon, in early November each year. For several years, I have donated a Russian River Valley Immersion Trip for two couples, hosting the auction winners for four days of private, focused winery tours and tastings, meals, and lodging. The 2012 auction winners pictured below from left to right were Christina Isaacson, M.D., Morgan Belford, Paul Sehdev, M.D., and Ann Smith Sehdev, M.D. They found *joie de vivre* for four days in the Russian River Valley December 4-7, 2013, thanks to the generosity of the wineries I called on to host them.



The wineries involved included Arista Vineyards, Benovia Winery, Freeman Vineyard & Winery, Kosta-Browne, Lynmar Estate, and Twomey Cellars. All these wineries are very successful, and easily sell out of their wines annually to eager wine enthusiasts, but they generously gave of their time and resources to support ¡Salud!. The charity does not benefit them directly, but the wineries participate as a goodwill nod to others in the wine industry as well as supporting the charity's goals.

Arista Winery, Healdsburg

Founded in 2002 by the McWilliams Family, the estate is located on 36 acres along Westside Road adjacent Williams Selyem Winery in the Middle Reach sub-region of the Russian River Valley. Mark McWilliams, who manages the day-to-day operations of the winery and assists with winemaking duties, spent an afternoon with our group. The winery's four estate vineyards cover 12 acres and are planted to heritage and Dijon clones of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The winery acquired the Martinelli Road Vineyard in Forestville in 2012, planted to 5 acres of 130-year-old Zinfandel and 12 acres of 20+-year-old plantings of Pinot Noir and 30+-year-old plantings of Wente Chardonnay (renamed Banfield Estate, see photo below). The estate vineyards are managed by Ulises Valdez. Grapes are also sourced from premium grower partners including Bacigalupi, Toboni, Mononi, Ferrington and Ritchie. The consulting winemaker from 2004 to 2012 was Leslie Sisneros and she established the house style which is one of full-flavored, discreetly concentrated, balanced, and age worthy wines. In January 1, 2013, Matt Courtney joined the winery as the full-time winemaker after spending the previous eight years at Marcassin Winery following his graduation from University of California at Davis. Matt will continue the Arista style going forward. The emphasis is on vineyard-designated Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and Zinfandel. Arista wines are sold exclusively through the tasting room and mailing list. Visit the user-friendly website at www.aristawinery.com.



Mark led our group on a tour of the winery's serene Japanese garden and the estate Pinot Noir vineyards including Harper's Rest, Two Birds, and Seven Stories. We then settled in at the

winery's comfortable pavilion for an extensive tasting and plenty of banter. The wines were all enjoyable and beautifully crafted.



[2011 Arista El Diablo Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay](#)

14.3% alc., pH 3.33, TA 0.68, 119 cases. Released spring 2013. Vineyard planted by Ulises Valdez in 2008 on a ridge off Eastside Road. Old Wente selection grafted onto rootstock 420a, 4' x 6' spacing. Native fermentation, 100% MLF, aged 15 months in 30% new French oak barrels. • Light, crisp and clean with aromas and flavors of green apple, citrus, and roasted nuts. Perfect aperitif or accompaniment to shellfish. *Score: 87*

[2011 Arista Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay](#)

14.3% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.57, 213 cases. Released fall 2013. Aged in 20% 1-year, 60% 2-year and 20% 3-year French oak barrels. One of the Russian River Valley's iconic vineyards owned and farmed by Kent Ritchie. Located at the intersection of Eastside Road and Trenton Road, the vineyard is exposed to the cooling effect of coastal fog yet receives ample sunlight. Planted primarily to Old Wente selection in 1971-1972. • The same planted selections as the El Diablo, but the wine is noticeably fatter and richer. Vibrant scents of fresh lemon, baked apple, peach and burnt caramel. Slightly creamy, with flavors of lemon, baked apple, peach and spice. Fruit-driven, but still offering wet stone minerality in the background, most evident on the finish. *Score: 90*

[2012 Arista Toboni Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir](#)

14.7% alc., pH 3.67, TA 0.52, 168 cases. Released spring 2013. Vineyard located off Olivet Lane in the heart of the Russian River Valley across the street from Mononi Vineyard. 15 acres planted to 115, 667, 777 and Pommard. Owned and farmed by Mary and Joe Toboni. Aged in 35% new, 40% 1-year and 25% 2-year French oak barrels. • Aromas of red cherries, blueberries and complimentary oak. Mid weight red and blue fruit flavors with balanced tannins. *Score: 89*

2012 Arista Mononi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.7% alc., pH 3.73, TA 0.56, 187 cases. Released winter 2013. Vineyard is located at intersection of Olivet Lane and River Road. Planted in 2003 to Dijon clones 113 and 115. A monopole for Arista. Aged in 40% new, 45% 1-year and 15% 2-3 year French oak barrels. • Aromas of Bing cherry and spice leap from the glass. Flavors of dark cherry, black raspberry, and oakdriven smoke and vanilla. Very forward and silky on the palate with soft tannins. Highly enjoyable. *Score: 91*

2012 Arista U.V. Lucky Well Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

13.5% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.60, 98 cases. Released spring 2013. Vineyard located on the western edge of the Sebastopol hills outside the towns of Graton and Sebastopol. Although a very cool and foggy site, it sits on a knoll that rises above the fog line so the vineyard is exposed to more sunlight. Sourced from a 4-acre section planted in 2008 to Pommard clone and Swan and Calera selections. Planted and farmed by Ulises Valdez. Second vintage. • Highly aromatic with effusive aromas of black cherry pie, fresh raspberries, earthy flora and spice. Earthy and beefy on the palate with plenty of appealing dark red cherry and berry fruits. A relatively big wine with staunch tannins that match well with the luscious fruit. The bright underlying acidity brings the wine to life. Terrific. *Score: 93*

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2011 Arista Harper's Rest Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., pH 3.76, TA 0.57, 170 cases. Released fall 2013. Aged in 30% new, 50% 1-year and 20% 2-year French oak barrels. Vineyard is named to honor Ruben Harper, a pioneer farmer who settled in the mid-1800s on the property that is now the Arista Estate. Ruben is buried under a California bay laurel tree in the middle of the 2-acre vineyard. Ruben's headstone and original rock wall surrounding his grave site still stand (see photo below). River bed soils, lowyielding Pommard clone. • Light reddish-purple color in the glass. Lovely aromas of cherries, rose petals, peat and spice. Relatively delicate and light in weight, but the core of spiced cherry and raspberry fruits is quite flavorful. *Score: 89*



2011 Arista Two Birds Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.58, 195 cases. Released fall 2013. Aged in 25% new, 50% 1-year and 25% 2-year French oak barrels. Vineyard named after proprietors Al and Janis McWilliams who call each other "bird" and live adjacent these vines. Planted in 2007, the 3-acre vineyard contains Pommard clone, Swan and Calera selections. Soils are a well-drained mixture of loam and clay formed from weathered sandstone. Each year select barrels are chosen for the final Two Birds Vineyard bottling. • More structured and intensely flavored than the Harper's Rest and not as forward. The big-boy fruit veers to the dark red and purple side (black cherry, black raspberry, plum) and is accented by a meaty and bay leaf note. The intense finish is especially noteworthy, lasting what seems like a minute. I would have liked to spend a few hours with this wine to experience it as it unfolded. *Score: 94*



Benovia Winery, Santa Rosa

Benovia Winery donated their vineyard hideaway cottage as lodging for the ¡Salud! auction winners. The cottage is located adjacent the 41-acre estate Martaella Vineyard and surrounded by other vineyards. The view from the cottage's front porch in the morning is striking, with vineyards in the foreground, the typical fog in the distance, and the hot air balloons hovering over the horizon.



Benovia Winery's winemaker, Michael Sullivan (pictured below) crafts outstanding Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel from both estate vineyards and premium fruit sources. The estate vineyards include Martaella Vineyard, located in the Laguna de Santa Rosa region of the Russian River Valley AVA adjacent the winery; Cohn Vineyard located in the western reaches of the Russian River Valley, just outside the AVA; and Falstaff Road Vineyard located in the Sonoma Coast near the town of Freestone. Annual production is about 5,000 cases. The wines are sold primarily through a mailing list and at the tasting room in the hospitality center on the estate (by appointment). Visit www.benoviawinery.com.



Our group was guided through a tasting of Benovia wines by the Director of Hospitality, Roger Carrillo, who entertained us with an informative tasting sprinkled with the history of the Russian River Valley. The following wines from the 2011 vintage were tasted and have been reviewed previously in the *PinotFile* (www.princeofpinot.com/winery/276/). The 2011 La Pommeraie Russian River Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were drinking especially well at this time.



[2011 Benovia La Pommeraie Russian River Valley Chardonnay](#)

14.5% alc., 275 cases, \$48. The name of the vineyard is French for “apple orchard,” and this wine definitely has an apple flavored theme. Dijon clones 548 and 95 from Zio Tony Vineyard. • Aromas of lemon, pear and nutty oak. Well-endowed with flavors of lemon curd, apple, pineapple backed by lively acidity, and a hint of toasty, caramelized oak on the finish. *Score: 90*

[2011 Benovia Russian River Valley Pinot Noir](#)

14.1% alc., 1,600 cases, \$38. 60% Martaella Vineyard blended with grapes from Martinelli, Lingenfelder, Dutton and Petersen vineyards. Multiple heirloom and Dijon clones. Aged 16 months in 40% new French oak barrels. • Delicate but pleasing aromas of red cherry, baking spice and rose petal lead to lighter weight flavors of cherry, spice, cola and tarry oak. *Score: 86*

[2011 Benovia Bella Una Russian River Valley Pinot Noir](#)

14.5% alc., 250 cases, \$56. 100% estate fruit (heirloom clones from Martaella Vineyard), 30% whole cluster. • Deep aromas of Bing cherries, raspberries, spice and subtle oak. Luscious core of black cherry and black raspberry fruit supported by staunch tannins, finishing with a bit of oak. Needs time to soften the tannins and fully integrate the oak. *Score: 89*

[2011 Benovia Cohn Vineyard Sonoma County Pinot Noir](#)

14.2% alc., 50 cases, \$65. This vineyard was planted in 1970 to a massale selection of Pinot Noir clones, most likely Martini 13 and Pommard. • Fresh scent of cherry pie glaze, plum sauce and forest. Mid weight flavors of ripe cherries, red plum, savory herbs, and earth. On the leaner side in this vintage, with firm tannins, bright acidity, a juicy finish, and good integration of oak. *Score: 89*

[2011 Benovia La Pommeraie Russian River Valley Pinot Noir](#)

14.5% alc., 400 cases, \$56. Sourced from Martinelli's Zio Tony Vineyard. Dijon clones 777 and "828". • The aromatics are stunning, with bright scents of black cherry, black raspberry and blueberry. Richly flavored with plenty of lip-smacking sap, but very approachable due to supple tannins and refreshing acidity. A special wine to be enjoyed now or can easily age 5 to 7 years. *Score: 92*

Freeman Winery and Vineyard, Sebastopol

Ken and Akiko Freeman started their winery in 2001 and since then have developed a style of Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir that appeals to those who savor cool-climate wines with lovely, ripe fruit flavors. The veteran winemaker for many years, Ed Kurtzman, has passed the winemaking duties on to Akiko, and has assumed a consulting posture. The 7-acre Freeman Estate Vineyard (Gloria Vineyard) adjacent the winery will produce a vineyard-designated Pinot Noir for the first time from the 2012 vintage, adding to their portfolio of wines produced from sourced grapes. The winery is built into a hillside cave where Ken and Akiko also hold tastings by appointment. Total production is fewer than 5,000 cases which is sold through a mailing list. The winery offers a Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley appellation Pinot Noir, a Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, and the Akiko's Cuvée, which is a barrel selection. An excellent Rosé of Pinot Noir and the Rya-fu Russian River Valley Chardonnay complete the lineup. The wines are distributed to selected retailers and restaurants throughout the United States, and several hundred cases are sent to Japan (Akiko's birthplace) each year. Visit www.freemanwinery.com for more information.

The 2011 Freeman wines were reviewed this past year in the *PinotFile* (www.princeofpinot.com/winery/501/). After a tasting of the 2011 wines in the winery cave, our group was invited into the Freemans' home on the property for a lunch. We got a sneak peak at the 2012 Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir which was very special.



Kosta Browne Winery, Sebastopol

Our group visited the new 40,000-square-foot modern winery that is part of the Barlow complex in downtown Sebastopol. Kosta Browne now produces well over 14,000 cases of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay annually, sourced from premium vineyards in the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Santa Lucia Highlands. The wines are highly allocated and sold exclusively through a mailing list, with a large waiting list eagerly clamoring for an allocation. In 2013, Kosta Browne acquired a block in the Keefer Ranch, and secured a long-term lease of 37 acres of the Gap's Crown Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast. Both vineyard acquisitions expand the winery's evolving estate wine program. Kosta Browne generously contributes a magnum each year to the Russian River Valley Immersion Trip auction package (Kosta Browne large formats are only for charity and are never sold). The new winery does not have a tasting room open to the public because Kosta Browne simply doesn't have enough unsold wine to pour the public on a daily basis. For further information, or to join the waiting list, visit www.kostabrowne.com.

We tasted a couple 2012 Pinot Noirs out of barrel. The Keefer Ranch and Pisoni were impressive even at this young age. A few 2011 Pinot Noirs were sampled as well. The 2011 Pinot Noirs and Chardonnay were reviewed 6 months ago in the *PinotFile* (www.princeofpinot.com/winery/4/).

Lynmar Estate, Sebastopol

Winemaker Shane Finley, who joined Lynmar Winery in 2012 as winemaker after several years as an assistant to Michael Browne at Kosta Browne, was under the weather, so the owner of Lynmar, Lynn Fritz, joined our group in a barrel tasting and special luncheon in the winery's hospitality center. I did an extensive tasting of 2012 wines out of barrel with Shane several months ago (www.princeofpinot.com/article/1382/).

Fritz acquired the property in 1980 and named it Quail Hill Ranch. It was a retreat from his busy life as CEO of Fritz Companies, a global logistics organization. Lynmar began a small winemaking activity in the early 1990s, producing small amounts of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The wines

were well-received, and the reputation of the estate's wines have continued to rise through the years. Today, Lynmar is an 100-acre property with frontage on the Laguna de Santa Rosa. There are about 70 acres of estate vineyards including Quail Hill and Susanna's, another family owned vineyard located west of Quail Hill Ranch. Together, the vineyards have 15 clones of Pinot Noir, four clones of Chardonnay and a block of Syrah. The original Quail Hill Estate Vineyard was planted in 1971 so it contains some of the oldest Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines in the Russian River Valley. The property is strikingly beautiful with a modern, classy visitor's center and a large organic vegetable and herb garden that is breathtaking. The photos below show the visitor's center, Quail Hill vineyard with the winery and caves in the distance, and the garden.





The beauty of the Lynmar Estate is matched by the superb wines. The winery offers 7 Chardonnays, 14 Pinot Noirs, a Syrah and a Rosé of Pinot Noir. The tasting room is open daily and a full-time chef provides wine and food pairings. The wines are sold primarily through the tasting room, a wine club and a mailing list. For more information, visit www.lynmarestate.com.

Two memories still stand out from our visit and lunch. A barrel sample of the 2012 old vine Swan selection Pinot Noir from the Quail Hill vineyard was off the charts good. The pairing at lunch of popcorn scented with truffle oil and the 2011 Lynmar Susanne's Vineyard Chardonnay was a match that was utterly exhilarating. The happy crew is pictured below including Lynn Fritz, seated at the head of the table.

Twomey Cellars, Healdsburg

Our gracious host for a winery tour, barrel tasting, bottle tasting and luncheon was veteran winemaker Daniel Baron, the Director of Winemaking for Silver Oak and Twomey Cellars. He is an animated, captivating personality who has over thirty vintages under his belt. Early in his winemaking career, he worked at the legendary Chateau Petrus and later Dominus Estate in Napa.



He then crafted award-winning wines with Justin Meyer of Silver Oak Cellars until Justin's retirement in 2001, when he continued as winemaker at Silver Oak under the leadership of the Duncan family. Daniel was instrumental in the creation of Twomey Cellars in 1999, also a Duncan family winery.

Twomey Cellars in Healdsburg is in transition as winemaker Ben Cane has departed and a new winemaker will soon be on board. I have been a big fan of Twomey Pinot Noir the past few years as it is styled to emphasize food friendliness. The winery produces appellation Pinot Noirs from Anderson Valley, Sonoma Coast, Russian River Valley and a vineyard-designated Pinot Noir from Bien Nacido Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley. An excellent Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc rounds out the lineup. The winery's stylish tasting room has a very informed and friendly staff with views that span the Russian River in a way that is more spectacular than any other winery on Westside Road. The tasting room is open daily. For more information, visit www.twomeycellars.com.

Our lunch was prepared by Twomey's personal chef, Dominic Orsini, and was a highlight of our group's journey through the Russian River Valley. I have reviewed the 2011 Twomey Pinot Noirs at www.princeofpinot.com/winery/69/. A copy of the menu is below.

TWOMEY

December 6, 2013

Braised Abalone

Bacon Brodo, Leeks, Fennel & Kale Pesto

Twomey, Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley 2011



Chestnut Agnolotti

Heirloom Pumpkin, House-Cured Capicola & Crispy Sage

Twomey, Pinot Noir, Russian River 2011



Pasture-Raised Game Hens

*Roasted Persimmons, Foraged Mushrooms
& Parsnip Puree*

Twomey, Bien Nacido 2011



Artisan Cheeses

Twomey, Merlot, Napa Valley 2009



Petite Sweets

Coffee & Tea

Chef Dominic Orsini

Check out the amazing Christmas tree composed of bottle drying racks and over 300 empty bottles of Twomey wine



<http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1465/>