

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir: Highlighting Its Virtues



Discovering the pioneers of wine regions and how they set the stage for today's wine experience is part of what intrigues us to visit a winery. Gary Farrell's legacy lives on as winemaker Theresa Heredia strikes her own balance with the Gary Farrell Pinot Noir. This article will focus on eight Pinot Noir offerings at **Gary Farrell Vineyards and Winery**, including seven single-vineyard Pinot Noirs.

Gary Farrell's connection with many of the winegrowers in the [Russian River Valley](#) dates back to the 1970s. He created his first wine under the Gary Farrell label in 1982. His intent to create small-lot Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Russian River Valley. Although he sold the winery in 2004, many of those relationships with growers remained. Today the winery is owned by Bill Price, the managing partner of Kistler Vineyard and owner of Three Sticks, Lutum, and the famed Durell and Gap's Crown vineyards. The winery continues to follow in Gary's footsteps through the production of small-lot vineyard-designate expressive Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Winemaker Theresa Heredia

Step forward to 2012, when winemaker Theresa Heredia came on board. Her pedigree included specializing in cool-climate, small-lot, single-vineyard wines, which ideally suited the philosophy at Gary Farrell Winery. As a winemaker, her goal continues to respect what Gary built by maintaining his methods of winemaking but adding some new current day techniques that enhance the quality of the wine. Like Gary, her goal is to work with the best fruit to express the place, creating wines with lower alcohol. Most wines contain some whole cluster inclusion to enhance the specificity of the terroir.

Theresa has a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. During graduate school in chemistry at UC Davis, she discovered enology and wine. She was hooked and switched from cancer research to wine. Her work at Joseph Phelps's Freestone wine on the Sonoma Coast brought her into the limelight. She spent ten years working for Joseph Phelps before joining the Gary Farrell team.



Theresa Heredia. Photo Courtesy Will Bucquoy

Gary Farrell Wines

The portfolio of wines Gary Farrell produces is 12 – 14 different Pinot Noirs, 8 Chardonnays, 1 Rosé, Zinfandel, and Sauvignon Blanc. Many of the vineyards Gary Farrell sources grapes from have relationships that go back to the 19080s. Some of the older vineyard relationships include Rochioli, Allen, Bacigalupi, and Hallberg that supply older heritage clones, while enhancing the Pinot Noir with French Dijon clones that bring out the rich fruit qualities and the bright acidity. Other vineyards adding additional character to the wines include Durell, Gap's Crown, Olivet Lane, Ritchie, Fort Ross, Terra de Promissio, Sanford & Benedict, and Bien Nacido.

Russian River Valley

The characteristics of this appellation are the climate with its cool breezes and fog from the nearby Pacific Ocean. The fog blankets the area most mornings and evenings, creating a diurnal shift in temperature, especially in the summer months.

Because the region is known for its long ripening season, this allows the grapes to maintain higher levels of acidity. The range of soils from volcanic, sandstone, and alluvial soils are very favorable for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir because it provides the essential water drainage as well as retains sufficient moisture and nutrients to nourish the vines during the appellation's long growing season.

Our tasting consisted of seven single- Vineyard wines, but to round out my article, I also included Gary Farrell's flagship Pinot Noir, The Russian River Selection. The focus of the single-vineyards showcases Theresa's goals of achieving bright, vibrant aromas, intense yet supple flavors, and the winery's signature balance and purity of varietal expression. One thing I noticed in reviewing these wines is the different cooperages and toasting of the barrels used for each vineyard designate. All the single-vineyard Pinot Noirs represented the 2016 vintage and 2017 for the Russian River Selection.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Russian River Selection

This wine blends 22 vineyards, thereby expressing the depth of the Russian River Valley. Each component ages for 8 – 9 months in barrel before they taste for the blend. The wine ultimately ages for

15 months in lightly toasted barrels. The result is a compilation of the Russian River Valley that is very balanced and together.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley

The winery sources fruit from other regions besides Sonoma County. For 20 years, they have sourced grapes from Bien Nacido and, in this case, the legendary Q Block. The area is known for its foggy, cooler climate with less sun exposure. The wine has 20% whole cluster inclusion and ages 15 months in 40% new oak. This wine displayed a sharper yet bigger and bolder quality to the wine compared to some of the others we tasted. With aromas of earth and spice, the wine exhibits fresh fruit, especially cranberry, raspberry, and strawberry.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Fort Ross – Seaview

This wine consists of two clones, Calera and 777. In this wine, they utilized more whole cluster grapes in the tank, while aging 15 months in 40% new oak. I found a softer Pinot Noir with a savory profile with more acidity. Tangy flavors of raspberry and cranberry with hints of spice on the finish.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Hallberg Vineyard – Dijon Clones, Russian River Valley

Located in the Green Valley sub-appellation, Gary Farrell has sourced grapes from this vineyard since the 1990s. Utilizing clones 777 and 667, Theresa finds that those grapes coming from the west side of the property give the wine structure, spice, and earthiness. The 777 clone from the east side offers dense, dark fruit flavors and floral aromatics, which combined enhance the wine. The grapes from this wine age for only ten months in 40% new oak. This Pinot Noir is bigger and earthier in its expression with darker fruit and more tannins. Hints of white pepper and black tea, baking spice accent the flavors of cranberries and raspberries.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Hallberg Vineyard, Russian River Valley

The combinations of clones 667, 777, and 828 create a softer wine. The 828 clones make the most significant difference from the Dijon clone wine in this vineyard. I found a very balanced wine, a favorite of the wines sampled during this tasting.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Martaella Vineyard, Russian River Valley

In the location of the Martaella Vineyards, the composition of the terroir causes the vines to struggle more. From the group of wines sampled, this vineyard was planted in 2005, making it the youngest vineyard of the group. The clones for this Pinot consisted of Calera Swan and 37. The Martaella exhibited higher acidity, more structure, and intensity in the fruit. Flavors of plum dominated the wine followed by hints of savory characters.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Gap's Crown, Sonoma Coast

Gap's Crown is one of the younger vineyards that Gary Farrell utilizes to source grapes. This Pinot Noir blends clones 667 with 828 to create a brighter wine with earthy aromas and flavors of cherry and cranberry.

Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Toboni, Russian River Valley

This wine, like the Dijon clones, only ages for ten months. The wine comes across as richer with more structure than some of the others we sampled; thus, the flavors were more characteristic of darker, more brooding fruit.

In concluding, all the Gary Farrell Pinot Noir samples fit into Theresa's philosophy of engaging us in the expression of each vineyard of the Pinot Noir grape.

Note: Common to the wine industry, this writer received hosted wine samples. While it has not influenced this review, the writer believes in full disclosure.