

Wine(s) of the Week: The "terroir" speaks volumes for the wine

- Gary Farrell 2017 Russian River Selection Pinot Noir-\$45 - Gary Farrell 2016 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir Russian River Valley-\$55

The French are famous for creating words that do more than simply describe an object, an emotion or a place. They use words that embody a concept. Such a word is one commonly used in the wine industry, terroir. It means more than simply the ground that the wine grapes are grown in or the weather conditions under which they are developed. Rather, terroir refers to the time, the place and, yes, the season, the culture and, perhaps, even the mood of the person making the wine. It is a word that is all encompassing, as is the experience of drinking wine.



It's with this idea in mind, that I began my conversation with Gary Farrell Vineyards' tastes salon manager and estate sommelier Kevin Patterson, regarding the estate's latest releases, 2017 Russian River Selection Pinot Noir, which retails for \$45 and 2017 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, which is \$55. While made at the same winery and from the same grape, the two wines are quite distinct from one another and imbued with their own characteristics. They are perfect examples that illustrate the meaning of the term I used earlier...terroir.

"Every bottle of wine is a story of time and place," said Kevin Patterson. "The story of our 2017 vintage is that it arrived in a very hot year, thus we had a very early harvest. Our winemaker, Theresa Heredia picked all of our grapes over Labor Day Weekend. The temperatures were in excess of 133 degrees, but we were able to get 95% of our fruit at the brix (level of sweetness) that we were looking for.

"What we do for all of our wines is simple. We treat all of our wines as if they were intended to be single vineyard wines, whether or not it is bottled as such. In the winemaking process, we ask ourselves, "Is this wine that we're tasting from the barrel going to be part of an orchestra, or is it a soloist?"

Pointing specifically to the Gary Farrell 2017 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$45), as an example, Patterson elaborated, "This is definitely an orchestra. There's something in this wine for

everyone. It is certainly one of our most popular because of it. If you're a person who likes wine with more fruit characteristics, there's an aspect of fruit in this wine for you. If you prefer something that's savory, with an earthy spice to it, this wine has some of that too. It's a wine that's typical of the Russian River Valley. It's something that you can simply sit with, relax and enjoy. One of the things I like to have with this wine is a Mushroom Pizza. It brings out the earthiness of the wine and there's just enough of that smoky spice to bring out the flavors in both.

Patterson said that when he's in the tasting room, he tries to direct his guests toward food pairings that emphasize the wine. "When you're pairing wine with food, you want to combine it with dishes that enhance the wine, not dominate it. You want the wine to be noticed first."

In that regard, Gary Farrell wines tend to be lower in alcohol than most reds (11-14.5%), and to have a more restrained acidity. "One of the things that defines Gary Farrell wines is that they have more natural acidity. The acidity begins to soften as the wines open up in the glass."

Gary Farrell Russian River Selection Pinot Noir starts out with pronounced fruit notes of red cherries and raspberries, so typical for pinots from the area. "The fruit gives way to more savory characteristics, like tealeaf, and holiday spices like clove and cinnamon. There's even some star anise and a little black pepper. This wine really takes you on a journey through the meal, because it starts to open up, you get more of those savory notes." Looking forward to the fall season and the holidays ahead, Patterson offered; "Roast Duck would be delicious with this wine, for sure!"

Gary Farrell 2016 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55) is sui generis (a thing apart or in a class of its own). Although it is made from Russian River Valley Pinot Noir grapes, its characteristics are specific to the vineyard in which they are grown.

"You see that often in wine," Patterson elaborated. A wine can be made from the same grape, even from neighboring vineyards, and they will be almost completely different." Such is the case of the Hallberg Pinot Noir. Kirk Lokka, an industry veteran with a reputation for meticulous acumen, manages the vineyard. Named for its previous owners, Hallberg Vineyard is nestled in the Green Valley sub-appellation, known for its refreshing daytime breezes. A strong marine influence brings the cool early morning fog that allows the fruit greater 'hang time,' giving the deep, dark fruit flavors, silky tannins and an earthiness that you can almost feel.

"Kirk is first and foremost an amazing farmer who knows this vineyard well. The vineyard is 'dry farmed,' which means there is no irrigation. Kirk hasn't irrigated those vines since 2007. So the vines have that classic struggle that we in the winemaking business all look for. The vineyard has rich, sandy loam soil, and the roots have to really dig down past 15 feet to the water table to find nourishment. That brings about more complexity and greater flavor concentration.

"Concentration is really the story at Hallberg. More savory qualities and darker fruits; like black cherry, plum, come through. There's also a hint of dark tealeaf and dried flowers. On the back end, there's almost a kind of minty freshness, a menthol quality, if you will, that is very refreshing. All those subtleties come through when the wine spends time in the glass or in the decanter. In fact, this wine rewards you with time."

Patterson says his experiences with wine have taught him to broaden his perspective of the industry. " I have had influencers and teachers over the years who have set me on a completely different path, such that I am always a student who has learned to look at wine in a totally different way. Wine is not unlike art, or a landscape or a painting. It has depth, dimension and color. Wine is a way of experiencing flavor and life in a totally unique way. No two wines are exactly alike and no two vineyards will give you the exact same kind of wine. That's why wine is never boring. There's always something new."

Gary Farrell Winery has introduced a series of virtual tasting experiences allowing wine lovers to enjoy wine at home with guidance from the winery's estate sommeliers. Three different online tasting options bring the Gary Farrell Tasting Salon experience to customers who can't visit in person.

To learn more about Gary Farrell wines and their unique portfolio, visit garyfarrellwinery.com.