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Not All Russian River Valley Wines Are The Same

The Russian River Valley has a history of making some of the most seductive pinot noirs and chardonnays in California. Grapes ripen slowly and evenly here because morning and evening fogs cool the grapes and lengthen the season. The climate is ideal for these grape varieties.



There has been a recent focus on what winemakers call the six “neighborhoods” of the Russian River Valley: Middle Reach, Green Valley, Santa Rosa Plains, Laguna Ridge and Sebastopol Hills and Eastern Hills. The goal of the campaign is to get consumers to understand that not all Russian River Valley wines are the same, but instead unique wines that vary according to the range of soils. For Theresa Heredia, winemaker at Gary Farrell since 2012, there couldn’t be a better playground for a pinot noir devotee. Farrell makes single-vineyard pinot noirs and chardonnays from some of the most prestigious growers – Rochioli, Bacigalupi, and Hallberg to name a few. A recent virtual tasting with her showed the differences a few miles can make.



Theresa Heredia (Courtesy: Will Bucquoy)

“My number one goal is to respect these amazing vineyards,” she said. “There are so many great ones with histories. Respecting the fruit is respectful of the wine in the end.”

Heredia favors whole-cluster pressing, which produces more delicate, less bitter wines.

It was hard to choose which of her single-vineyard pinot noirs we liked the best. The Bacigalupi Vineyard pinot from the Middle Reach was delicious for its ripe, juicy character; the McDonald Mountain Vineyard pinot noir in Sebastopol Hills – the coolest neighborhood where vines struggle in the high winds and cold — had great structure and concentration.

Heredia also makes some incredible single-vineyard chardonnays. These wines are only available on its website but Gary Farrell Russian River Valley’s blended pinot noir and chardonnay are widely available.

Here are several pinot noirs from the Russian River Valley that we recently tasted and liked:



- **Gary Farrell Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir 2017** (\$55). Opulent black cherry and ripe blackberry flavors with hints of olive and tobacco.
- **Gary Farrell McDonald Mountain Vineyard Pinot Noir 2017** (\$70). Fresh strawberry and cranberry aromas with lovely red fruit flavor and hints of licorice and cloves. Elegant and balanced.
- **Gary Farrell Russian River Selection Pinot Noir 2017** (\$45). One of the best pinot noir producers in the Russian River Valley, Farrell makes a consistently good and elegant pinot noir. Big red berry and floral aromas are followed by raspberry and cola flavors with a hint of forest floor and clove.