

Finer American Pinot Noirs than Ever Before

OUR EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM THE 2014 WORLD OF PINOT NOIR

story and photos by Randy Caparoso

There were significantly more—and finer—world-class West Coast–grown Pinot Noirs at 2014’s World of Pinot Noir, held at Bacara Resort in Santa Barbara March 28–29. The world of Pinot, in other words, is spinning faster and faster. Two observations:

- The idea of “typically over-oaked” American Pinot Noir is officially a thing of the past. In premium price ranges, it is extremely rare to find one in which oak qualities dominate fruit profile.
- There is still talk of the “high-alcohol problem” in American Pinot Noirs; but in the vast majority of 200-plus wines tasted at World of Pinot Noir (mostly 2011s and 2012s), an overweening sense of alcohol or ripeness just wasn’t there.



Author Randy Caparoso with Jasmine Hirsch of Hirschman Vineyards, one of the founders and leaders of the recent In Pursuit of Balance (IPOB) movement.

Yes, there were 14%–15% alcohol wines. But a stated 14.4% alcohol on the 2011 Merry Edwards Meredith Estate from Russian River Valley did not keep it from attaining absolute perfection of layering and balance; and an opulence of spiced strawberry made it all the more ravishing. A 2011 Brewer-Clifton Machado from Sta. Rita Hills claimed 14.5%; but from the first whiff, it was nothing but “wow”—delirious waves of sensuous, concentrated black, blue and red fruits, savory and even keeled on the palate.

When composing my final list of “favorites,” I found myself drawn to lean, subtle, sinewy styles; particularly the minerally Brittans from McMinnville, an acid-driven Baxter from Mendocino Ridge and feathery, feminine bottlings by Wayfarer in Fort Ross, Luminesce in Santa Maria Valley, and Alma Rosa in Sta. Rita Hills. Still, most of my favorites were wines combining high-flying intensity with length and grace. If this be the American style, so be it! My top 25, in order of preference are in the sidebar.

Baxter 2011, Valenti Vineyard, Mendocino Ridge
Brittan 2011, Gestalt Block, McMinnville
Cargasacchi 2011, Santa Rita Hills
Luminesce 2011, Presq’ille Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley
Wayfarer 2012, The Traveller, Fort Ross
Merry Edwards 2011, Meredith Estate, Russian River Valley
Brewer-Clifton 2011, Machado, Sta. Rita Hills
Anaba 2011, Soberanes Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands
Melville 2012, Estate, Sta. Rita Hills
Gypsy Canyon 2011, Sta. Rita Hills
Hitching Post 2012, Cargasacchi Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills
Failla 2012, Keefer Ranch, Russian River Valley
Alma Rosa 2012, La Encantada Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills
Penner-Ash 2011, Dussin Vineyard Estate, Yamhill-Carlton
Thomas Fogarty 2011, Rapley Trail, Santa Cruz Mountains
Lucia 2012, Soberanes Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands
Talley 2011, Rosemary’s Vineyard, Arroyo Grande Valley
Pfendler 2012, Sonoma Coast
Pali 2011, Fiddlestix Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills
Kosta-Browne 2012, Gary’s Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands
Keller 2011, La Cruz Vineyard, Sonoma Coast
MacPhail Family 2012, Wildcat Vineyard, Sonoma Coast
Freeman 2012, Keefer Ranch, Sonoma Coast
Brittan 2011, Basalt Block, McMinnville
Merry Edwards 2011, Coopersmith, Russian River Valley



The Baxter 2011 Valenti Vineyard Pinot Noir was Randy Caparoso’s top pick from this year’s World of Pinot Noir. ■■