

The Big

FIVE

THE RUSSIAN RIVER
VALLEY WINEGROWERS
ASSOCIATION
DELINEATES FIVE
DISTINCTIVE
“NEIGHBORHOODS”
WITHIN THE AVA

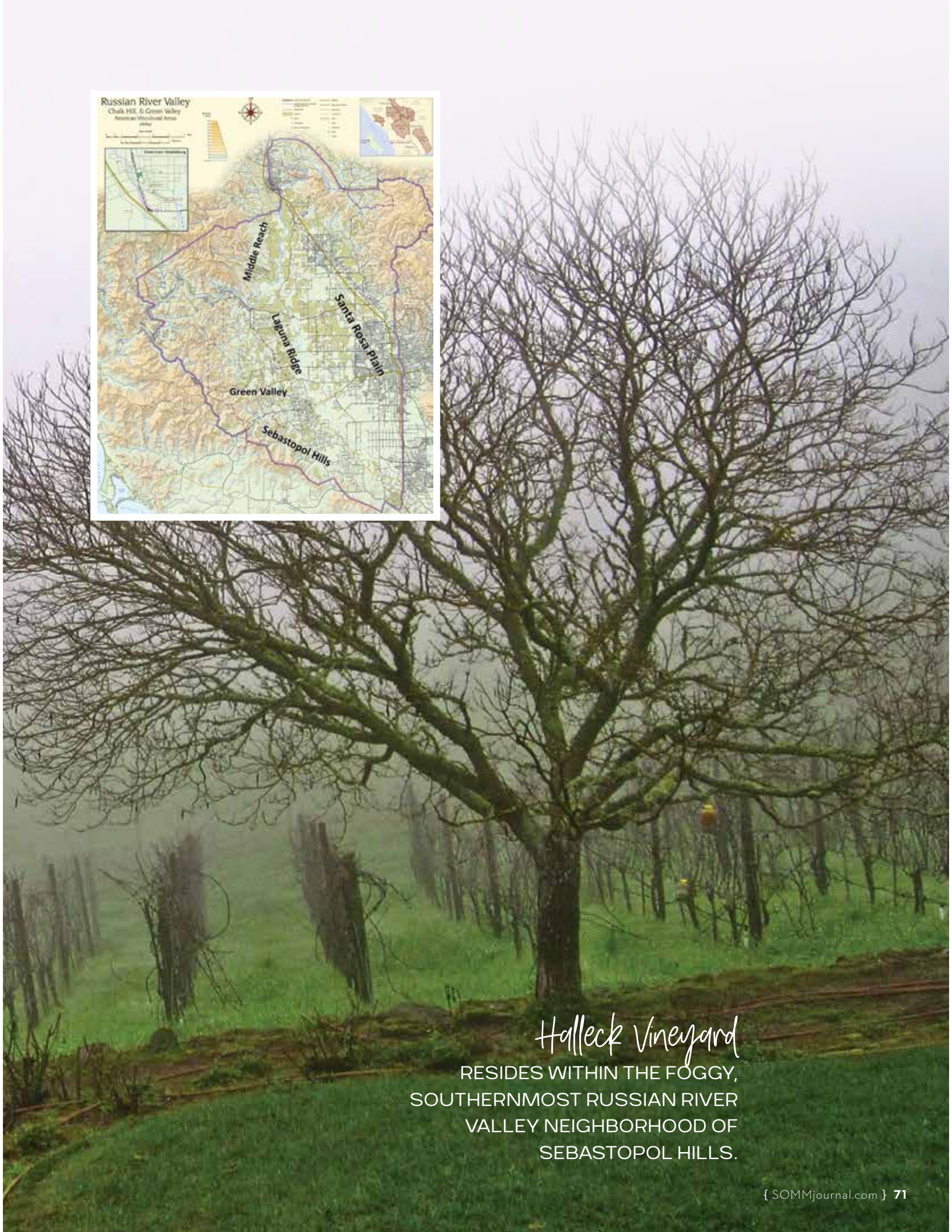
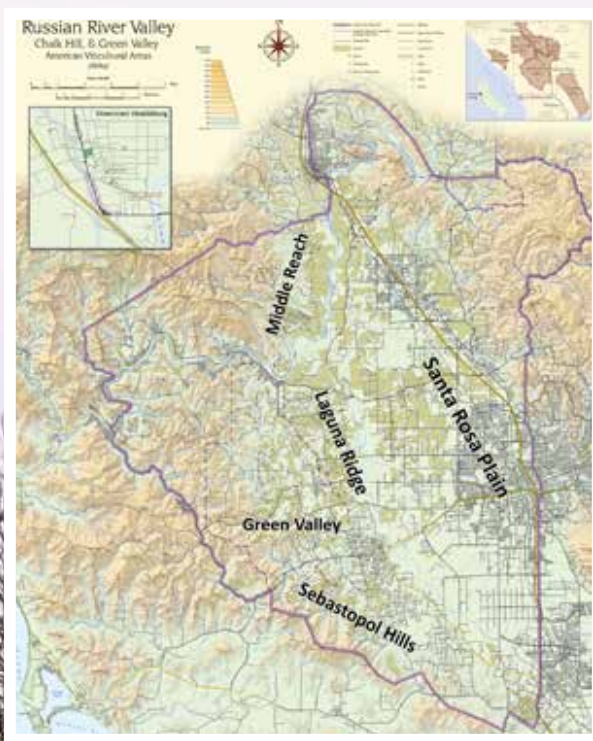
story and photos by
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*R*urgundy is not simple to understand, yet it behooves the wine professional to know the differences between a Musigny and a Mercurey or Meursault vs. Mâconnais—both in terms of terroir and sensory ramifications.

Why should regions like California’s Russian River Valley be any different? In recent years, it’s become increasingly clear to growers and winemakers in the 160,000-acre Russian River Valley AVA that there are significant climatic and topographical differences in the appellation’s sub-areas, which they are now calling “neighborhoods.”

This necessity of this shift—stemming from a research-driven initiative started by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers organization in 2013—lies in the fact that each of these sub-areas manifests distinct sensory qualities in their Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. Hence, the creation of the five Russian River Valley Neighborhoods: Middle Reach, Laguna Ridge, Santa Rosa Plain, Sebastopol Hills, and Green Valley.

Here’s the skinny on these neighborhoods, in order from north to south:



Halleck Vineyard

RESIDES WITHIN THE FOGGY,
SOUTHERNMOST RUSSIAN RIVER
VALLEY NEIGHBORHOOD OF
SEBASTOPOL HILLS.

Winemaker Theresa Heredia of Gary Farrell Winery in Rochioli Vineyard, which is located in the Middle Reach neighborhood.



MIDDLE REACH: Both the northernmost and warmest of the five Russian Valley neighborhoods, its immediate proximity to the Russian River results in denser fog banks and seasonal diurnal swings of over 40 degrees. Some of the appellation's oldest and most iconic Pinot Noir vineyards—such as Allen, Flax, Rochioli, and Joseph Swan's Great Oak—are known for lush, cherry/red fruit-driven qualities and rounded structures, notwithstanding firm tannin and moderate acidity. The neighborhood's Chardonnays, meanwhile, pick up tropical fruit notes while retaining taut, lemony acidity. Yet winemakers like Gary Farrell's Theresa Heredia remind us that "Middle Reach is not all the same ... the cobbly, riverbed soil of Rochioli gives beautifully-pure Pinot Noir; whereas the finer, silty Yolo series soil in Allen across the road produces earthier, more savory, and often exotically-spiced Pinot Noirs."

SANTA ROSA PLAIN: The flatter area east and south of the Middle Reach is not quite as warm as its northern neighbor, but the area is among the warmest in the broader appellation (cold pockets in flatter areas, however, are particularly susceptible to frost). Soils vary but are predomi-

nantly in the clay-based Huichica series, in contrast with the Goldridge sandy loam associated with most of the Russian River Valley. Pinot Noirs are brightly red-fruited, suggesting cherry, raspberry, and strawberry, along with ample acidity. Vineyards that produce wines highly representative of these characteristics are Pellegrini Olivet Lane, Benovia Winery Martaella, and Leras.

Santa Rosa Plain Chardonnays are citrusy and often steely with minerality, epitomized by Benovia's La Pommeraie, Russian River Vineyards' Tina's, and La Crema's Saralee's. You'll also still find Russian River Valley Zinfandel planted by Italians (notably, the Mancini, Pelletti, Barbieri, Gambogi, and Saitone families) as long ago as the 1890s in the Santa Rosa Plain.

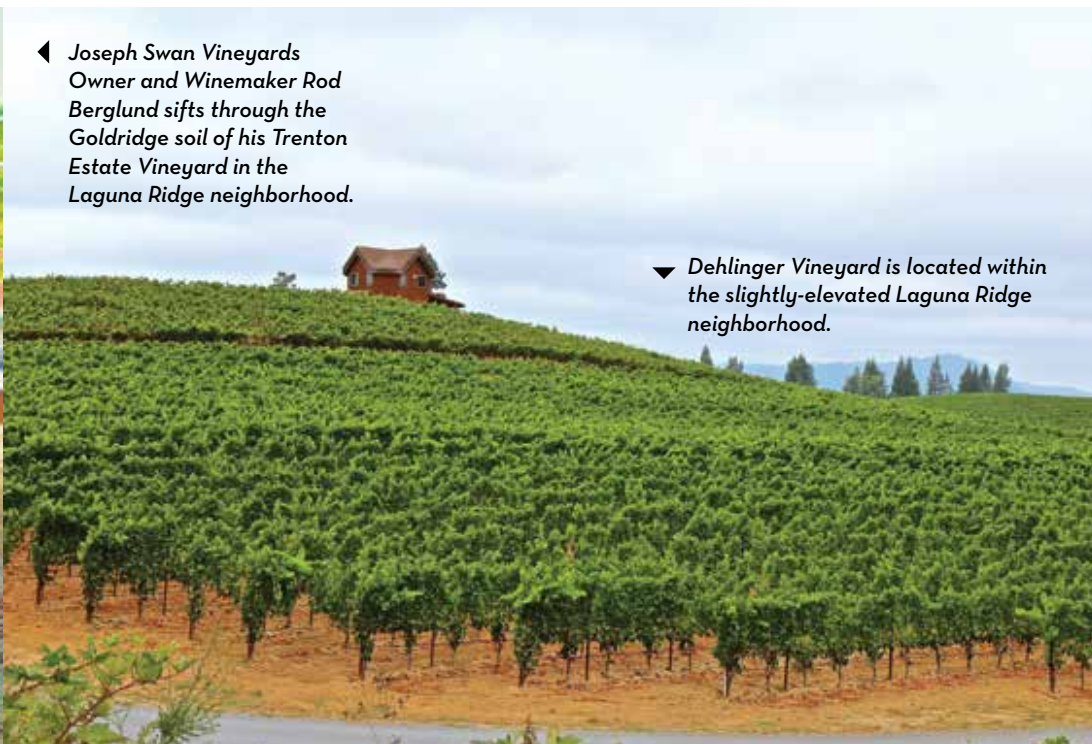
LAGUNA RIDGE: As the name implies, this is a slightly-elevated line of Goldridge sandy loam-crustured hills running in a north-south direction between Green Valley to the west and Santa Rosa Plain to the east. Laguna Ridge's climate is cooler than the Middle Reach and most of Santa Rosa Plain, but not as cold as Sebastopol Hills further south. Fog cover gives diurnal swings of 40 degrees during much of the growing season, resulting in wines defined by vibrant acidity. Pinot Noirs are richly structured with brambly, brushy spices (as with Dehlinger, Joseph Swan's Trenton Estate, and Merry Edwards' Klopp Ranch); Chardonnays (notably, Kistler Vineyards' Vine Hill as well as those from Ritchie and Zio Tony vineyards) are often minerally, yet opulent and full-scaled.

Mike Sullivan is the Winemaker for Benovia Winery, located within the Santa Rosa Plain neighborhood.





◀ **Joseph Swan Vineyards**
Owner and Winemaker Rod Berglund sifts through the Goldridge soil of his Trenton Estate Vineyard in the Laguna Ridge neighborhood.



▼ **Dehlinger Vineyard** is located within the slightly-elevated Laguna Ridge neighborhood.

GREEN VALLEY: Among the coolest and foggiest neighborhoods, Green Valley is also dominated by Goldridge sandy loam. Although elevations and exposures in this hilly AVA vary considerably—higher elevation slopes can be blazing in hot vintages—Green Valley Pinot Noirs veer toward darker red fruits (black cherry, blueberry, and cranberry), forest floor nuances, and sumptuous textures. Chardonnays are acid-driven, deep, and sometimes long-lived. Dutton Ranch cultivates numer-

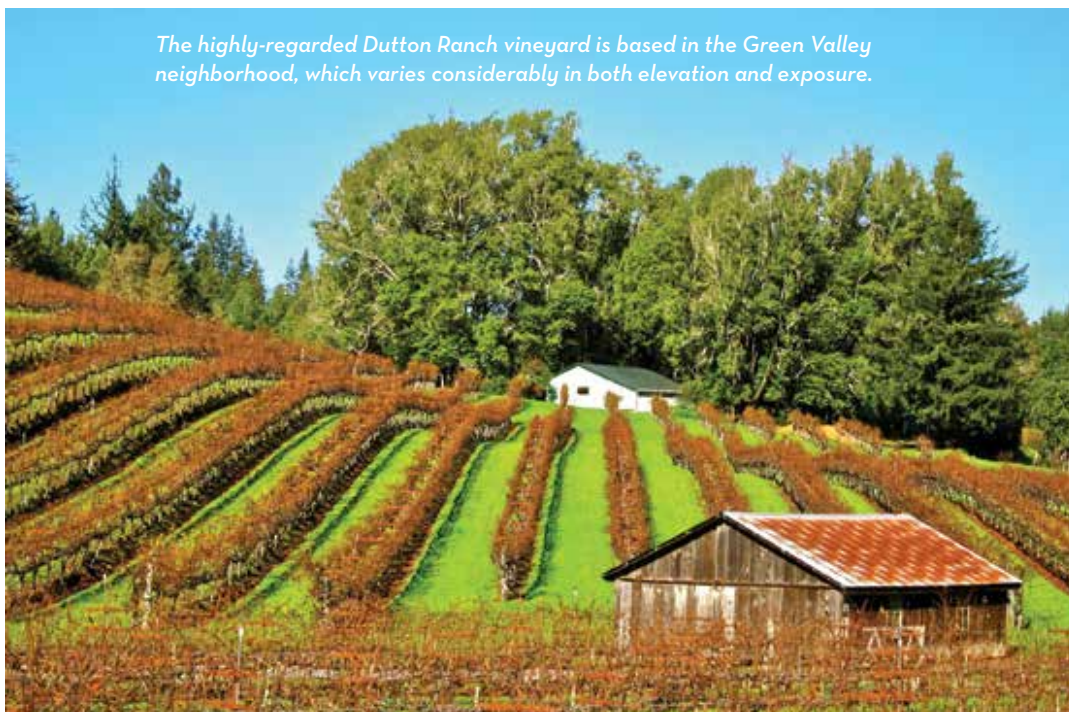
ous blocks in this neighborhood, which is also associated with vineyards such as Martinelli Winery's Jackass Hill, Keefer Ranch, Heintz, Hawk Hill, Hallberg, Iron Horse, and Marimar's Don Miguel.

SEBASTOPOL HILLS: Located at Russian River Valley's southernmost point, Sebastopol Hills' close proximity to Bodega Bay and the Petaluma Gap makes it the coldest, foggiest, and windiest



Balletto Vineyards Winemaker Anthony Beckman in Sebastopol Hills.

The highly-regarded Dutton Ranch vineyard is based in the Green Valley neighborhood, which varies considerably in both elevation and exposure.



of the five neighborhoods. Chardonnays can exhibit elevated acidity, lemon/citrus intensity, and sensations of mineral and silk, while Pinot Noirs are deep in black cherry and sometimes blueberry—or even with a pomegranate-like zip. Lean, acid-driven profiles are often savory with non-fruit qualities, but they can also retain a billowing, penetratingly-intense core of fruit. Prime examples of this iconic style of Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs are Balletto Vineyards' Burnside and Sexton Hill bottlings; Merry Edwards Winery's Meredith; Kosta-Browne's Kanzler; Littorai's The Pivot; and Klopp's Thorn Ridge, as well as the Pinot Noirs of Pratt, Maboroshi, DuNah, Umino, Halleck, and Suacci. **\$**

For more information, please visit the Russian River Valley Winegrowers website at rrvw.org.