



## A SENSE OF PLACE WITH GARY FARRELL PINOT NOIRS

Pinot Noir is a sexy and seductive grape that expresses where it is grown. Gary Farrell Winery is known as a top Pinot Noir producer. During a recent virtual tasting with Gary Farrell winemaker Theresa Heredia, we tasted through Pinot Noirs from different areas of the Russian River Valley, as well as the Sonoma Coast, Fort Ross-Seaview and Santa Maria Valley. It was fun to taste the nuance difference from wine to wine as I wrote about in the [Napa Valley Register](#) and share here.

Pinot Noir is a finicky grape that demands particular conditions to thrive. It matters where it is planted, and the soil and climate are of the utmost importance. And, in the end, these subtle differences in the terroir will be reflected in the wine. One winery that focuses on the nuances of Pinot Noir from one vineyard to another is Gary Farrell Winery.

“At Gary Farrell, we work with 36 different vineyards,” said winemaker Theresa Heredia. “What’s been really eye-opening for me is working not only with different growers and their farming techniques, but the different fruit qualities from those different sites and the different climates from the different grapegrowing techniques those farmers use.”

Founded by Gary Farrell, the winery has long specialized in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Continuing Gary Farrell’s legacy, Gary Farrell Winery is today owned by Bill Price, the managing partner of Kistler Vineyard and owner of Three Sticks, Lutum and the Durell and Gap’s Crown vineyards, and a group of investors including Pete Scott, the former CFO of Beringer Wine Estates and Walt Klentz former president and CEO of Beringer Wine Estates.

Heredia joined Gary Farrell Winery in 2012. After receiving a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry from Cal Poly, Heredia began working on her Ph.D. in chemistry at UC Davis. She was doing cancer therapeutics research and worked with 11 other teachers as a teaching assistant in a 400-person general chemistry class. Each teacher was from a different discipline and one was from microbiology and viticulture, which intrigued her. She found a natural progression from cancer therapeutics to wine as the research methods were rather similar.

She left her Ph.D. program to work as the enologist at Saintsbury in Napa in 2001. In 2002, she joined Joseph Phelps Vineyards where she worked at Freestone Vineyards, making every vintage of Freestone wines starting with the first one in 2002.

During her 10 years focusing on cold-climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Heredia developed the style of the brand and received critical acclaim for her winemaking. In 2006, Heredia worked one harvest at Domaine de Montille in Volnay, France where she studied the Burgundian style of winemaking. This experience inspired her to make site-specific wines.

Heredia brought this perspective to Gary Farrell Winery when she became the winemaker in 2012. At Gary Farrell, Heredia makes 12 to 14 Pinot Noirs, as well as many as seven Chardonnays and small amounts of Sauvignon Blanc and Zinfandel.

She focuses her winemaking specifically to the quality of the fruit. “My approach to winemaking is very much about taking advantage of specific vineyard and fruit qualities,” says Heredia. “I like to tailor the winemaking techniques specifically to each block of fruit that we receive separately.”

Gary Farrell Winery sources fruit from all over California. Gary Farrell wines embody elegance, balance and bright natural acidity. But Heredia lets each vineyard express Pinot Noir differently, which I was able to note while tasting through seven different single vineyard designates from Gary Farrell, all from the 2016 vintage.

The 2016 vintage was a pretty easy vintage with no drastic weather conditions. Heredia called it a “soft ride” as the weather was moderate, there were no major heat spikes, and there was no fear of rain. Extraction was easy and she did not have to be overly careful. In general, Heredia said it was pretty consistent from Sonoma to the Central Coast and the nuances of each vineyard were able to express themselves. Heredia captured the essence of place in these wines.



— **Santa Maria Valley, Central Coast**

**Gary Farrell 2016 Bien Nacido Vineyard Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$70)**

Gary Farrell has been sourcing grapes from the Bien Nacido Vineyard in the Central Coast since

the 1990s. The Central Coast offers a beautiful counterpoint to Sonoma as it is a completely different fruit profile. The Gary Farrell Bien 2016 Nacido Pinot Noir has the classic Santa Maria Valley nose. Heredia chose to do 20 percent whole cluster in order to not mask the spice characteristics typical to the region. The wine has pretty aromatics of red fruits and spice. It has a weighty delicacy, good acidity, and a silky finish on the palate.

#### — Fort Ross-Seaview, Sonoma

##### **Gary Farrell 2016 Fort Ross Vineyard Pinot Noir, Fort Ross-Seaview (\$75)**

Fort Ross Vineyard is located in the far west part of the Sonoma coast and may be the closest vineyard to the Pacific Ocean. The vineyard sits at a high elevation of 1,400-1,450 feet above sea level, compared to the cool climate Freestone Vineyard Heredia once worked with that sits at only 1,200 feet. While Freestone was entrenched in the fog, Fort Ross sits above the fog line and is exposed to the sun resulting in richer wines. The Gary Farrell 2016 Fort Ross Vineyard Pinot Noir has dark red and blue fruit notes. It is concentrated with structure. There is a savory quality to the wine, which has silky, sandy tannins and a mineral-driven mouthwatering finish.

#### — Sonoma Coast

##### **Gary Farrell 2016 Gaps Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$80)**

Gap's Crown Vineyard, owned by Bill Price, is located in the cool, windy Petaluma Gap in southwest Sonoma County. The climate is influenced by the effects of coastal fog and it is extremely windy. The Gary Farrell 2016 Gaps Crown Vineyard has fresh notes of tart cherry, cranberry, pomegranate, dried flowers, cola and earth. The wine is delicate on the mid-palate with natural acidity and soft tannins.

#### — Russian River Valley

The Russian River Valley is one of California's coolest and foggiest AVAs with cool growing seasons and long ripening periods. It's an ideal place for Pinot Noir. Heredia sources from the different neighborhoods of the Russian River Valley.

Santa Rosa Plains are the closest to Santa Rosa on the east side. The area is flat and it is warm during the day and cool at night. The soils consist of shale, sandstone and clay resulting in Pinot Noir with opulent fruit and vibrant acidity. The Toboni Vineyard and Martaella Vineyard are both located in the Santa Rosa Plains.

##### **Gary Farrell 2016 Toboni Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55)**

The wine has opulent fruit aromas of cherry and plum, floral aromas of rose petals and violets, and spice. It is an intense wine with firm tannins, lovely structure and finishes with cherry and vanilla notes.

**Gary Farrell 2016 Martaella Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$65)**

Located in heart of Santa Rosa, the wine has notes of dark red and black fruit and dried flowers. The wine is at first fresh with mineral and tart fruit flavors that open to a wine with savory and textural notes.

Green Valley is south of Forestville and north of Sebastopol and closest to the Pacific Ocean. The strong marine influence and the fine sandy loam soils produce deep colored Pinot Noirs which have high acids, ripe tannins and a luxurious mouthfeel. The Hallberg Vineyard is a 100-acre vineyard within the Green Valley AVA.

**Gary Farrell 2016 Hallberg Vineyard Dijon Clones Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$60)**

This wine is made from exclusively Dijon clones of Pinot Noir, selected from three different blocks flanking the east and west sides of the Hallberg ranch. The wine has a dark fruit profile with licorice and herbal notes. It is bright and juicy on the palate with sandy tannins and fresh acidity.

**Gary Farrell 2016 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$55)**

A blend of all blocks from the Hallberg Vineyard, this wine is the most rustic and deep with aromas of dark cherry, currants, violets, cola and black tea. The concentrated fruit on the palate and grippy tannins make for a balanced, yet powerful, wine.

Over eight years at Gary Farrell, Heredia has become knowledgeable about each of these sites. She has learned how to treat each one, knowing what portion of whole cluster to do on each wine and how much extraction each vineyard needs.

While there is a common theme of elegance and balance among each of these wines, each of these Pinot Noirs expresses the place it is from and is beautiful in its own unique way. The Toboni Pinot Noir is the most crowd pleasing. The Bien Nacido Pinot Noir has the prettiest nose. The Gap's Crown Pinot Noir has the most body. The Fort Ross Pinot Noir has the most salinity. And that is what is so special about Pinot Noir.