

Red, White and Wind

THE BEST OF PETALUMA GAP by Meg Houston Maker

From a crest of the Blue Wing Vineyard, I can just make out the muted profile of San Francisco, 20 miles southwest across the Bay. It's late morning and skies are clear, but as the day warms a breeze will kick up, pulling a veil of marine air down a narrow opening in the Coastal Range to blanket the Petaluma Gap, tucking it in for the night.

From April through October, this wind is a constant vector, the fog an omnipresence. The combination begets slow ripening to produce concentrated, complex fruit that retains its zesty acidity. These cool Pacific breezes imbue Gap wines with character.

"It's about the wind," says Rickey Trombetta Stancliff, CEO of Trombetta Family Wines and President of the Petaluma Gap Winegrowers Alliance. "Yes, it's part of the Sonoma Coast, but everything's affected by the wind." The Gap's distinctiveness has led to a bid for AVA status; approval is expected soon.

Unsurprisingly, cool-tempered grapes do best here. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay dominate, plus a little Syrah. The Pinots skew floral, with limpid garnet fruits and savory bass notes, while the Chardonnays feel pure and crystalline. The Syrah—if you can find it—trends feral and meaty.

Ask a dozen growers to characterize Gap wines, and you're likely to hear "Burgundian" thirteen times. But California is not France, so you can taste the sunshine, too. Cool-climate sunshine, that is. "We're bottling the wind," Stancliff says. "That's what's in the bottle."

Rodney Strong 2014 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$25) Lustrous and beautifully structured, with a traces of bay leaf, apple skin and salt.



Sojourn Cellars 2014 Pinot Noir, Sangiacomo Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$59) A dark-steeped Pinot with earth, herbs and red and black cherries, but it's lifted by elegant acidity.



Agnitio 2013 Chardonnay, Sun Chase Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$40) Fragrant of sweet yellow apple and quince paste, with a parting shot of laurel and brine.



Trombetta Family Wines 2014 Pinot Noir, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$65) Exotic, spiced, and jazzy, suggesting hibiscus, rose hips, red licorice and tart raspberries.

Trombetta Family Wines 2015 Chardonnay, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$60) Sleek and scintillant, suggesting salty melon, Meyer lemon and cultured cream.



Guarachi Wine Partners 2014 Pinot Noir, Sun Chase Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$75) An elegantly balanced mélange of sweet berries, sundried tomatoes and potpourri.



Pellet Estate 2014 Unoaked Chardonnay, Sun Chase Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$36) Ripe and gingery, an orchard of yellow tree fruits rendered to their concentrated, silken essence.



Arnot-Roberts 2014 Syrah, Clary Ranch Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$50) Red hibiscus and pomegranate drift above with smoked blue fruits below, with a cooling black-walnut finish.

Pfendler Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast (\$45) Wild strawberries and pink petals adorn a lean, crystalline wine, berry-fruited but with a savory finish.



Pax Mahle 2013 Syrah, Griffin's Lair Vineyard, Sonoma Coast (\$65) Growling and black-fruited, suggesting meat, anise, iron, blood and violets. ■■



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