

JEB DUNNUCK

Your Completely Independent Guide to Fine Wines

Wine Rating System

100 - 96	As good as It gets. These wines reach the peak of my personal scale of quality.
95 – 90	Outstanding. These wines are outstanding for their type and are worth the extra effort to seek out.
89 – 87	Very Good to Good. These offer real character and can be age worthy. The majority of my cellar and what I drink on a daily basis falls into this category.
86 – 80	Good to Decent. While still good, these wines lack character or fail to show a significant number of positive traits.
79 – 50	Quaffable to Undrinkable. Wines rated less than 80 points are not recommended. They will range from passable to flawed and undrinkable.

I score wines on the above scale and the bottle price, winery/wine reputation, and vintage have no bearing on the score. While a well-written note should not need a score, its inclusion allows a clear, easy to understand delineation of preferences. This allows a more concise note that can focus on the positive aspects of each wine as opposed to always having to explain why a wine rated 88 points isn't as good as one rated outstanding with 95 points. A precise score also forces the reviewer to make a hard decision... and I will agonize over small differences in score. Having said that, and while I believe a reviewer should be as precise as possible (i.e. the old saying "aim small, miss small") readers should interpret broadly and take any rating system with a grain of salt. The only difference between a wine I rate 89 points and one I rate 90 points (or one rated 100 points and one rated 97 points for that matter) is that I liked one a little more than the other. That's all a score tells you and a score represents the reviewer's opinion.

While I use score ranges in the case of barrel samples, I will also use a range if I am unsure of a wine or if the tasting conditions do not allow enough time or focus on the wine. Wines are scored on their overall quality. The note should indicate my best guess at when the wine will be at maturity; however, drinking young, structured wines can provide just as much pleasure as drinking fully mature, completely integrated bottles. If you prefer the latter and don't like young, tannic wines or wines with primary fruit, don't open a newly released Châteauneuf-du-Pape and expect the same level of enjoyment that I get from it. While scores give you a clear idea of what I think of the

wine, please realize that there are times when a less complex, easier drinking wine is actually the best wine for a given situation. I cringe every time I hear someone state that their cellar consists of only 90+ point wines (I'll ignore the source of the point rating) because I truly believe that person is missing out on a huge swath of interesting wines that deliver immense pleasure. Soft and easy are not always bad things and there are times when it doesn't get better than taking big gulps of a fresh, newly released Côtes-du-Rhône with a roast chicken or quaffing a delicious Rosé after work or with dinner. The style of the wine (described by the note), is every bit as important as the score. To me, any wine rated 85 points or higher is a wine I like, believe can be enjoyed, and has noteworthy qualities. In the case of barrel tastings, I use a range for the score. While I think it is possible to evaluate barrel samples (especially final blends), these notes should always be taken with a grain of salt. Scoring is a subjective portion of wine evaluation and as such, is simply my personal preference for a wine at a given point in time. Nothing more, nothing less. Any score or note in isolation is close to worthless and it is only after reading multiple notes and tasting multiple bottles that a reader can start to understand where the note taker is coming from.

At the end of the day, the only opinion that matters is yours and my goal is to help you find a wine, either via a note or score (or both), that you will enjoy.

California, Santa Cruz Mountains: The High Quality, yet Tiny Production 2015s

August 24, 2017 - Jeb Dunnuck

This report looks mostly at the 2015s from the Santa Cruz Mountains, yet includes wines from Monterey County to the south, as well as wines from Sonoma County to the north.

Looking at the 2015 vintage for the Santa Cruz Mountains, this is a *terrific vintage with regards to quality*, yet a *disaster with regards to quantity*. As I said in the Santa Barbara County report, if you want these top 2015 releases, this isn't the vintage to twiddle your thumbs on.

Like the rest of California, 2015 started off early with above average springtime temperatures. This pulled flowering from its normal time in June into May. Unfortunately, this coincided with an unusually cold, windy and even wet May, causing widespread shatter and fruit set issues that decimated yields.

Numerous estates lost upwards of 70% of their normal crop, and many were forced to forgo producing special cuvees (there's no Skyline Pinot Noir, nor Hillside releases from Rhys) or combine their normal single vineyard releases into

a new appellation cuvee just to have enough grapes to fill a fermenter.

Nevertheless, the grapes that were there were high-quality, with generally small berry sizes and thick skins due to the drought. Despite numerous winemakers talking about uneven berry sizes within a single cluster (aka hens and chicks), the tiny yields and warm, even weather through harvest meant growers could get consistent, even ripeness.

The resulting wines are beautifully concentrated, structured and tannic, yet have a tense of elegance and purity. The top wines will need bottle age to show their full potential. The only problem, there's not enough of them!

Readers can find additional California coverage published at JebDunnuck.com at the below links:

- [Santa Barbara County: The Classic 2014s and Variable 2015s](#)
- [Latest Releases from Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo County](#)

BEAUREGARD	2015	CHARDONNAY BEAUREGARD RANCH	BEN LOMOND MTN	\$55	WHITE	86
BEAUREGARD	2015	CHARDONNAY BALD MOUNTAIN	BEN LOMOND MTN	\$50	WHITE	85
BEAUREGARD	2014	PINOT NOIR BEAUREGARD RANCH	BEN LOMOND MTN	\$60	RED	88
BEAUREGARD	2014	PINOT NOIR COAST GRADE VINEYARD	BEN LOMOND MTN	\$60	RED	90
BEAUREGARD	2013	SYRAH ZAYANTE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$35	RED	87
BEAUREGARD	2013	MERLOT ZAYANTE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$35	RED	88
BEAUREGARD	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON BEAUREGARD	BEN LOMOND MTN	\$100	RED	90+

I always enjoy these wines from Ryan Beauregard. They can be a touch rustic, yet have charm and age well. Starting out, the **2015 Chardonnay Beauregard Ranch** from Beauregard is a tad rough around the edges, yet is enjoyable and offers plenty of tart apple, citrus and brioche/toasty notes. Harvested at the end of August and aged all in neutral barrels, drink it over the coming couple of years. Also aged 11 months in neutral barrels, the **2015 Chardonnay Bald Mountain Estate Grown** offers cleaner white fruits, yet is also tart and slightly angular, and just not that much fun to drink.

The **2014 Pinot Noir Beauregard Ranch** spent 10 months in 20% new French oak. It has a ruby, slightly evolved color to go with a pretty bouquet of dried cherries, cranberries, forest floor and autumn leaves. It has racy acidity, good fruit, and a clean finish. It should keep for a decade. Seeing more new oak, the **2014 Pinot Noir Coast Grade Vineyard** is a spicy, red currant and cranberry scented effort that offers lots of spice and forest floor nuances, bright acidity, solid balance, and a great finish. It has a touch more depth than the Beauregard Ranch Estate release, yet should have a similar evolution.

The **2013 Syrah Zayante Vineyard** is an interesting, black and blue scented effort that has lots of pepper, green herbs and spice aromas and flavors. It's ripe, mouthfilling and textured, with good acidity and a rustic, chewy style. It's certainly an enjoyable, character filled red that will drink nicely for 4-6 years.

Leading off the two Bordeaux blends, the **2013 Merlot Zayante Vineyard** is a lively, juicy Merlot (it's 100% Merlot aged 30 months in 40% new American oak) that offers lots

of plum and blackberry fruit, medium-bodied richness, plenty of vanilla oak and racy acidity. Drink it anytime over the coming decade. Lastly, notes of tobacco leaf, cassis, violets and spiced plum all emerge from the **2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Beauregard Ranch Estate Grown**, and it's concentrated, nicely textured, and has bright acidity. It needs forgotten for 5-6 years and will have three decades of overall longevity. This cuvee is 100% varietal and saw 30 months in 40% new French oak. Website: www.beauregardvineyards.com

BIG BASIN	2015	CHARDONNAY COASTVIEW VINEYARD	MONTEREY COUNTY	\$48	WHITE	91
BIG BASIN	2015	ROUSSANNE HOMESTEAD BLOCK	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$48	WHITE	89
BIG BASIN	2015	PINOT NOIR ALFARO FAMILIY VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$55	RED	92+
BIG BASIN	2015	PINOT NOIR LESTER FAMILY VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$55	RED	94
BIG BASIN	2015	PINOT NOIR COASTVIEW	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	92+
BIG BASIN	2015	HOMESTEAD	CALIFORNIA	\$36	RED	90+
BIG BASIN	2014	SYRAH COASTVIEW VINEYARD	MONTEREY COUNTY	\$48	RED	91+
BIG BASIN	2014	SYRAHCOASTVIEW VINEYARD TERRACES	MONTEREY COUNTY	\$55	RED	93
BIG BASIN	2014	GABILAN MOUNTAINS GSM	MONTEREY COUNTY	\$44	RED	88
BIG BASIN	2014	RATTLESNAKE ROCK SYRAH	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$55	RED	93
BIG BASIN	2014	ODEON	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$60	RED	91
BIG BASIN	2013	SYRAH FRENCHIES RANCH	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$75	RED	92

Bradley Brown's Big Basin Vineyards is certainly one of the top estates in the Santa Cruz Mountains. In addition to his sites in the Santa Cruz Mountains, he also pulls from numerous cool-climate sites in Monterey County as well. These latest Pinot Noir see plenty of stems and mostly neutral barrel, and are going to benefit from short term cellaring.

Leading off with two whites and coming from a higher elevation site (2,300 feet above sea level) in the Gabilan Mountains, east of Monterey, the **2015 Chardonnay Coastview Vineyard** (100% Chardonnay aged 12 months in 25% new barrels) is rock-solid and offers notes of white peach, citrus peel, matchstick and green herbs. With medium-bodied richness, good acidity, plenty of depth and a clean finish, it will improve with a year or two and keep for a decade or more. The **2015 Roussanne Homestead Block** was brought up mostly in 600-liter Amphora, with the balance in barrel. It offers lots of lees character in its buttered lemon and orange blossom aromas and flavors. Exotic, well-made, and with good acidity, drink it over the coming 3-4 years. I'm sure it will have an interesting evolution beyond that as well.

I loved the **2015 Pinot Noir Alfaro Family Vineyard** from Big Basin and this beauty was fermented with 100% whole

JebDunnuck.com clusters and spent 15 months in 25% new French oak. It's a dark fruited, smoky, earthy Pinot Noir that offer lots of blackcurrant, black raspberry, smoked herbs and earth in a medium-bodied, rich, structured, slightly chunky style. I love its fruit, but it needs short term cellaring. The **2015 Pinot Noir Lester Family Vineyard** saw a touch of destemming (there's 70% stems) and was brought up in 25% new French oak. Its medium ruby color is followed by terrific notes of red currants, raspberries, spice and underbrush aromas and flavors. Lightly textured, elegant, and silky, with impressive balance, it's a touch mid-weight, yet has impressive length on the finish. This is a beautiful Pinot Noir I suspect will evolve nicely. Another terrific 2015, the **2015 Pinot Noir Coastview's** deep ruby/purple tinged color is followed by classic notes of black cherries, dried herbs, earth and spice-cabinet. With medium-bodied richness, bright acidity, present, chewy tannin, and plenty of length, give it a few years to come together and enjoy bottles through 2030.

Moving to the Rhône blend releases and made from 43% Mourvèdre, 16% Syrah, 14% Grenache, 14% Carignan, and the balance Cabernet Sauvignon, mostly from the Gabilan Mountains, the **2015 Homestead** offers a peppery, savory, spicy, meaty style as well as medium to full-bodied, richness, solid complexity and a clean finish. It's shut down

slightly since I tasted this last year, so give bottles another year or three.

The **2014 Syrah Coastview Vineyard** (96% Syrah and 4% Viognier, not destemmed and aged in one-third new barrels) is a more classic, cool-climate beauty that offers textbook notes of black raspberries, white pepper and hints of bacon fat. It's medium-bodied, elegant and seamless on the palate, with enough chalky tannin on the finish to warrant short term cellaring. The deep purple colored **2014 Syrah Coastview Vineyard Terraces** is a blend of 96% Syrah and 4% Viognier that saw plenty of whole cluster and aging in 40% new 300-Liter barrels. Blackberries, raspberries, spice, scorched earth and hints of licorice all emerge from this youthful, concentrated, impeccably balanced beauty that has great acidity and a clean finish. It's a beautiful Syrah that will be at its best from 2020-2030.

A blend of 49% Grenache, 32% Mourvèdre, and 19% Syrah, the **2014 Gabilan Mountains GSM** (88% whole cluster and 21 months in 16% new French oak) offers notes of kirsch, blackcurrants, toasted spice and dried earth in a firm, structured, savory style. There's a dry edge here, and while it will benefit from a year in bottle, I wouldn't push the aging

KATHRYN KENNEDY	NV	SPARKLING WINE BRUT	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$45	SPARKLING	90
KATHRYN KENNEDY	2014	SERIOUS MERLOT	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$45	RED	89

I tasted two wines from winemaker Marty Mathis. The **NV Sparkling Wine BRUT** (65% Chardonnay and 35% Pinot Noir, mostly from the 2013 vintage and with zero dosage) spent 13 years on lees in bottle. It sports a medium-gold color as well as an incredibly fine mousse and texture. Orange blossom, apple peel, spice and hints of toast all emerge from this classy sparkler, and it's firm and bone dry on the palate, with a clean finish.

RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	CHARDONNAY ESTATE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$55	WHITE	93
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2014	CHARDONNAY MONTE BELLO	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$75	WHITE	93+
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	ZINFANDEL PAGANI RANCH	SONOMA COUNTY	\$40	RED	93
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	ZINFANDEL EAST BENCH	DRY CREEK VALLEY	\$32	RED	89
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	PETITE SIRAH LYTTON ESTATE	DRY CREEK VALLEY	\$37	RED	92+
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	LYTTON SPRINGS	DRY CREEK VALLEY	\$40	RED	92
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	ZINFANDEL PASO ROBLES	PASO ROBLES	\$35	RED	90
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	ZINFANDEL PONZO	RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY	\$35	RED	90
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2015	GEYSERVILLE	ALEXANDER VALLEY	\$40	RED	92
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2014	CABERNET SAUVIGNON ESTATE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$60	RED	92
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2014	MERLOT ESTATE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$55	RED	91
RIDGE VINEYARDS	2014	MONTE BELLO	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$200	RED	96

curve too much either. Coming from Bradley's estate vineyard just outside his winery, the **2014 Rattlesnake Rock Syrah** is a beautifully complete, balanced Syrah that has ample black and blue fruits, freshly cracked pepper, and leafy herb aromatics, medium to full-bodied richness, good acidity and moderate tannin on the finish. Give bottles 2-3 years and drink over the following decade. This cuvee was mostly destemmed (there's 9% whole clusters) and spent 21 months in 300-liter French oak, 24% being new.

From sites in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, the **2014 Odeon** checks in as 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 47% Syrah, and 3% Viognier aged 21 months in 17% new French oak. It sports a vibrant purple color to go with spice-laced notes of blueberry pie, dried flowers and licorice. Ripe, rounded and supple, with a mouthfilling, chewy style, it's a pleasure bent red to enjoy over the coming decade. Incorporating a splash of Viognier, the **2013 Syrah Frenchies Ranch** offers an exotic bouquet of blackberries, blueberries, mint, peach pit and sappy herbs. Rich, concentrated and structured, with lots of fruit, it has a great texture and a good finish. It needs short term cellaring to gain some integration and elegance, but is solid stuff. Website: www.bigbasinvineyards.com

The only red wine I could taste from this estate, the **2014 Serious Merlot** (which consists of 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in 100% new French oak for 9 months before being bottled) offers a deep purple color as well as perfumed notes of plums, spiced blackberries, vanilla and minty/leafy herbs. Medium-bodied, supple and polished, with lively acidity and a good finish, it will drink well for a decade or more. Website: www.kathrynkennedywinery.com

Ridge continues to produce a stacked lineup from their estate vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, as well as numerous sites in Sonoma County. These reviews focus mostly on their 2015s, which was the earliest harvest on record for Ridge. Nevertheless, the wines show terrific purity and elegance, and it's a rock-solid vintage for the estate. The Bordeaux blends are from the 2014 vintage, which was another hot, dry year. These are big, ripe, sexy releases that have the fruit and depth to drink nicely today, yet are going to age beautifully.

Starting with the two Chardonnays, Ridge's **2015 Chardonnay Estate** is slightly deeper in color than the Monte Bello release and offers a White Burgundy-like bouquet of stone fruits, toasted spice, crushed rock and addition toasty nuances. It's rich, textured, has bright acidity, and needs 2-3 years of cellaring. There's 1,700 cases of this beauty and it's much more approachable today than the Monte Bello cuvee. The **2014 Chardonnay Monte Bello** sports a medium to lighter gold color as well as lots of matchstick and reductive aromatics, bright acidity and excellent concentration. Reserved and slightly hard to judge given its reductive character, I still love its balance and length. However, it needs a solid 4-5+ years of cellaring.

Moving to the reds, the **2015 Zinfandel Pagani Ranch** (83% Zinfandel, 10% Alicante Bouschet, and 7% Petite Sirah) is a downright slutty wine that's just loaded with sweet fruit and texture. Spiced plums, licorice, baking spices and brambly notes emerge from this ripe, full-bodied, plush Zinfandel that's already impossible to resist. It's not for those craving austerity or tart flavors. Possessing classic Zinfandel notes of black and blue fruits, dried cedar, spice and dried herbs, the **2015 Zinfandel East Bench** comes from a site in the Dry Creek Valley and is 100% Zinfandel. Medium to full-bodied, savory and nicely textured on the palate, it has a dry edge to its tannin that's cause for concern, but still has plenty to love. I'd drink it over the coming 4-6 years.

The **2015 Petite Sirah Lytton Estate** offers an inky color (it's Petite Sirah) as well as backward, intense notes of liquid violets, blackberry, blueberries, graphite and ample minerality. It's a big, inky, concentrated and firm Petite Sirah that needs forgotten for 5-6 years, and will age effortlessly over the following decade. There's roughly 2,000 cases produced and it's well worth buying.

A wine that always delivers (and ages beautifully), the **2015 Lytton Springs** checks in as a blend of 74% Zinfandel, 16% Petite Sirah, 8% Carignan, and 2% Mourvèdre, all from the

Dry Creek Valley in Sonoma. It offers tons of black raspberries, blueberries, brambly spice, leather and dried herb aromatics, full-bodied richness, no hard edges and a gorgeous, mouth filling texture. It's not the most concentrated vintage of this cuvee, yet it excels on its finesse, approachability and sheer charm. Drink it anytime over the coming decade.

The **2015 Zinfandel Paso Robles** (100% Zinfandel) is a downright sexy, exuberant, extrovert that boasts tons of black raspberry and blueberry fruits, incense, spice-box and potpourri aromas and flavors. Soft, voluptuous and seamless on the palate, with tons of sweet fruit and a forward, medium-bodied style, drink it anytime over the coming 4-6 years. From a site in the Russian River Valley, the **2015 Zinfandel Ponzio** is a blend of 97% Zinfandel and 3% Petite Sirah brought up in barrel. Its mostly purple color is followed by notions of spice plums, blueberries, licorice and incense. Medium to full-bodied, supple, sweetly fruited and charming, it's another elegant Zinfandel to drink over the coming 4-6 years.

Another wine from this estate that has a terrific track record for aging beautifully, the **2015 Geyserville** checks in as a blend of 70% Zinfandel, 15% Carignan, 12% Petite Sirah, and the balance Alicante Bouschet. It offers elegant, lively notes of spice plums, leather, white pepper and brambly herbs in a medium-bodied, silky, charming, and undeniably elegant style. It stays fresh and lively on the palate, and like most of these 2015 Zinfandel releases, is already a joy to drink. There's 9,000 cases.

Moving to the Bordeaux blends, the **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** from Ridge is an inky colored, ripe, downright sexy Cabernet that gives up ample notes of blueberries, cassis, vanilla bean, and licorice. A blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot, 5% Cabernet Franc, this full-bodied 2014 has a big mid-palate, good freshness and lots of chalky tannin on the finish. It has plenty of baby fat currently, but should round into form with 3-4 years of bottles age. Also inky colored, the **2014 Merlot Estate** (100% Merlot) offers lots of ripe black cherry, white chocolate, espresso roast, and licorice in a supple, seamless style. It's much more approachable than the Estate Cabernet and is ideal for drinking anytime over the coming decade. There's 1,700 cases. The **2014 Monte Bello** checks in as a blend of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, and the balance Petit Verdot brought up in the standard mostly new American oak barrels. Its inky purple color is followed by a sensational perfume of crème

de cassis, vanilla bean, espresso roast and violets. Much more polished and elegant than the estate Cabernet, yet with no shortage of concentration, it's a ripe, sexy, seamless

Monte Bello that's going to be approachable in its youth, yet evolve for two decades or more. Website: www.ridgewine.com

MINDEGO RIDGE	2015	CHARDONNAY	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$48	WHITE	92
MINDEGO RIDGE	2015	PINOT NOIR	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$48	RED	93

Farmed by owner Dave Gollnick, Mindego Ridge covers 10 acres on the western edge of the Santa Cruz Mountains, not far from the Pacific Ocean. The wines are made by Ehren Jordan and are mostly destemmed (although this has started to change) and aged largely in neutral barrels. These are beautiful wines, yet the quantities are miniscule.

The **2015 Chardonnay** comes all from the estate vineyard and spent 11 months, on lees, in 15% new French oak. It's seriously impressive, with classic stone fruits, white flowers, and mineral notes showing in its impeccably balanced,

nice textured style. It has good acidity and is already a joy to drink, but it will keep for at least 7-8 years. The estate's **2015 Pinot Noir** is also a beautiful, fruit-driven effort that shines for its texture and balance. Wild strawberries, cassis, licorice and spice aromas and flavors all emerge from this richly textured, round, supple beauty that's going to put a smile on your face over the coming 7-10 years. This cuvee was made with 50% stems, aged 11 months in 25% new French oak (the balance in neutral oak) and was bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Website: www.MindegoRidge.com

MOUNT EDEN	2015	CHARDONNAY EDNA VALLEY	EDNA VALLEY	\$23	WHITE	90
MOUNT EDEN	2014	CHARDONNAY ESTATE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$64	WHITE	94
MOUNT EDEN	2013	CHARDONNAY RESERVE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$75	WHITE	95
MOUNT EDEN	2014	PINOT NOIR	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$62	RED	95
MOUNT EDEN	2013	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$70	RED	93

Winemaker Jeffrey Patterson makes a classic, old-school, age-worthy style of wine from his vineyard located on the east side of the Santa Cruz Mountains. These wines see longer time in barrel than most, hence these are mostly 2014s and 2013s. This is unquestionably one of the benchmark estates for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in California.

Coming from the cooler, pacific influenced AVA of the Edna Valley, the **2015 Chardonnay Edna Valley** is more fruit forward than the Santa Cruz Mountain releases and offers lots of pineapple and tropical aromatics. It's beautifully balanced, has good acidity and a clean texture. While it was brought up in a mix of new to 5-year-old American oak barrels, you couldn't tell that from tasting it. There's over 5,500 cases and it's a terrific value, as well as a smoking good Chardonnay make by a great winemaker.

The **2014 Chardonnay Estate** comes from 43% of the average yields (it was a tiny crop due to the drought) and was barrel fermented in 70% new French oak and aged 10 months on lees before bottling. It's another youthful, slightly reserved Chardonnay that's going to benefit from cellaring. Brioche, buttered citrus, almond paste and honeysuckle all give way to a beautifully balanced, layered,

rich effort that has vibrant acidity as well. There's 1,495 cases. The **2013 Chardonnay Reserve** is a selection of the top 11 barrels made from the estate Chardonnay after spending 10 months in barrel. It then spent another 12 months, on lees, in stainless steel, and there's a tiny 262 cases produced. It sports a vibrant gold color as well a rich bouquet of golden fruits, citrus, toasted bread, flowers and honeysuckle. It's beautifully concentrated, has plenty of texture, good acidity and a clean finish. I love its balance and purity, and it's going benefit from short term cellaring and keep for two decades. Want to show your Burgundy loving friends how good California Chardonnay is? Let them try this wine.

Seeing one-third whole clusters and 12 months in barrel, the **2014 Pinot Noir Estate** has a subtle, nuanced style as well as terrific notes of dried strawberries, red currants, spice-box and forest floor. It's elegant, seamless and silky on the palate, with fine tannin and impeccable balance. Give it a few years to develop more complexity (although I'd happily drink it today) and it's going to keep for 10-15+ years.

The **2013 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate** checks in as a blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot and the rest Cabernet Franc that spent 32 months in 60% new French oak. Its inky

purple/violet color is followed by a terrific perfumed of crème de cassis, spring flowers, licorice and hints of vanilla spice. Medium to full-bodied, silky and elegant on the

palate, with chalky tannin, nicely integrated acidity and a great finish, it needs 4-5 years of bottle age and will keep for two decades or more. Website: www.mounteden.com

RHYS	2015	CHARDONNAY ALPINE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$69	WHITE	97
RHYS	2015	CHARDONNAY HORSESHOE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$69	WHITE	95
RHYS	2015	CHARDONNAY ANDERSON VALLEY	ANDERSON VALLEY	\$39	WHITE	93
RHYS	2015	CHARDONNAY BEARWALLOW VINEYARD	ANDERSON VALLEY	\$69	WHITE	94
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR SAN MATEO COUNTY	SAN MATEO COUNTY	NA	RED	90
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR HOME VINEYARD	SAN MATEO COUNTY	NA	RED	92
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR FAMILY FARM VINEYARD	SAN MATEO COUNTY	NA	RED	95
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR HORSESHOE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$69	RED	92+
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR ALPINE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$69	RED	97
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR ANDERSON VALLEY	ANDERSON VALLEY	\$69	RED	93
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR BEARWALLOW VINEYARD	ANDERSON VALLEY	\$69	RED	93
RHYS	2015	PINOT NOIR PORCUPINE HILL	ANDERSON VALLEY	\$69	RED	96
RHYS	2015	SYRAH HORSESHOE VINEYARD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	92

This was a terrific lineup of 2015s from the team at Rhys. Across the board, these are tight and structured, with terrific concentration. Give them a few years of bottle age. Unfortunately, due to the devastating yields, there's no Skyline Vineyard or Hillside releases in 2015s. In addition, they have a new estate vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains (bringing their total to seven estate vineyards) that will be coming on line over the next couple of years. Named Mount Pajaro Vineyard, the site was planted in 2010 and covers 18 acres in the southern part of the Santa Cruz Mountains, planted all with high density, 3.5 feet row spacing. Harvey commented that they've learned a lot over the past decade planting their other estate properties and they're excited about the quality of this site.

One of my favorite Chardonnays from this team is always the Alpine Vineyard and it's a classic, pure expression of Chardonnay that ages beautifully. The **2015 Chardonnay Alpine Vineyard** is certainly one of the great examples of this terroir and it shows terrific concentration and viscosity, while staying elegant, pure and perfectly balanced. White peach, citrus oil, tangerine and white flower characteristics give way to a medium to full-bodied, tight, backward Chardonnay that has racy acidity, more than enough fruit, and a great finish. Give bottles 2-4 years and enjoy over the following decade or more. The **2015 Chardonnay Horseshoe Vineyard** is also world class. Slightly more aromatic and exuberant than the Alpine Vineyard, yet with slightly less density on the palate, it gives up a masculine, mineral-laced style in its orchard fruits, fennel, wet stone, campsite and citrus aromas and flavors. With medium to

full-bodied richness, bright acidity and a clean, classic and structured finish, it should be better in another year and keep through 2027.

Looking at the releases from Mendocino County, the **2015 Chardonnay Anderson Valley** offers a riper, slightly tropical style in its aromatics and possesses lots of caramelized pineapples, orange blossom, and honeysuckle nuances, with some toasty, nutty notes developing with time in the glass. With terrific mid-palate depth and fat on the palate, as well as bright acidity and a great finish, it's what I call a Smoking Value! It's already impossible to resist, with a rounded feel, yet I suspect it will keep for a decade. The single vineyard release from Anderson Valley is the **2015 Chardonnay Bearwallow Vineyard** and it offers more citrus oil, white flowers and lemon characteristics compared to the Anderson Valley release. With building richness, a sensational texture, integrated, yet bright acidity, and a great finish, it's just another killer Chardonnay from this estate that's well worth your time and money. Like the Anderson Valley release, it's far from unapproachable today, yet it will keep for a decade or more.

Moving to the reds and the most charming and forward of the lineup, the **2015 Pinot Noir San Mateo County** release is a character-filled effort loaded with notions of strawberries, pit fruits, singed herbs, leather and wild flowers. It has a slightly exotic quality, medium-bodied richness, light tannin and a beautiful finish. It's well worth your time and money, and will drink nicely over the coming 4-5 years. The **2015 Pinot Noir Home Vineyard** comes from a site in San Mateo County and it's a pretty, forward,

charming Pinot Noir made with 100% whole clusters and neutral oak. It offers textbook notes of mulled red fruits, underbrush, dried flowers and dried earth, with lots of savoriness and minerality (I'm sure from the stems) coming through with time in the glass. It's polished and nicely textured on the palate, with good density and savory tannin that could use a touch more ripeness. It will benefit from short term cellaring and keep through 2027. My favorite vintage of this cuvee to date, the **2015 Pinot Noir Family Farm Vineyard** is just smoking good. Possessing awesome complexity and depth in its framboise, cassis, spice, forest floor and leafy, green herb aromatics, it hits the palate with an understated, yet building style that carries beautiful richness, sweet, polished tannin and surprising length. While the overall impression here is one of upfront charm and fruit, it's going to keep nicely in the cellar given its balance, depth and length. Count me as fan.

Leading off the two Santa Cruz Mountain Pinot Noirs, the **2015 Pinot Noir Horseshoe Vineyard** is tight and closed, with a mineral, savory quality to its red currants, spice and dried herbs aromas and flavors. Medium-bodied, concentrated and with a solid core of sweet fruit, it needs a year of bottle age and will keep for a decade. A significant step up over the Horseshoe Vineyard (time will help clear this up, though), the **2015 Pinot Noir Alpine Vineyard** is straight up sensational! Its medium ruby color is followed by a deep, slightly reticent bouquet of cherry pits, black raspberries, dried violets, forest floor and spice. Incredibly nuanced, seamless, silky and refined on the palate, with terrific tension, purity, and concentration, it's one of the *do-not-miss* wines of the 2015 vintage!

Leading off the wines from Mendocino, the straight **2015 Pinot Noir Anderson Valley** is terrific. Black raspberries, singed herbs, earth and sappy flower notes all emerge from

this supple, textured 2015 that's already a joy to drink. It's certainly one of the more approachable in the lineup, yet like all the wines from this estate, it's going to keep nicely for a decade due to its balance and classic style. There are two wines from the Bearwallow Vineyard in Anderson Valley, which is in the northern part of California, in Mendocino County, roughly 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The larger production **2015 Pinot Noir Bearwallow Vineyard** offers a classic bouquet of ripe red fruits and dried cherries, loads of spice and earth, medium-bodied richness, and a terrific savoriness that keeps you coming back to the glass. It's another wine from this estate that blossoms with time in the glass, is impeccably balanced and will impress for 10-15 years. From the same vineyard as the Bearwallow cuvee, the **2015 Pinot Noir Porcupine Hill** comes from newer, high density plantings checking in at a seriously packed 17,000 vines per hectare. It's one of most seamless, sexy, yet still balanced and classic wines I've tasted from Kevin and his team. Black raspberries, framboise, rose garden, violets and loads of spice all flow to an incredibly textured, seamless, perfectly ripe Pinot Noir that has silky tannin and a great finish. The tannin quality is what really separates this cuvee from the straight vineyard release, and it's a more polished, elegant wine that's going to age beautifully. Drink it anytime over the coming 15+ years.

While this site is mostly known for Pinot Noir, it makes a seriously good Syrah. The **2015 Syrah Horseshoe Vineyard** is a youthful, backward, even unevolved, effort that reveals a deep purple color as well as notes of cassis, black raspberries, bay leaf, violets and a hint of mint. It reveals plenty of pepper and classic cool-climate Syrah characteristics with time in the glass, is medium to full-bodied, has terrific purity, and a great finish. Forget bottles for 2-3 years and enjoy over the following decade. Website: www.rhysvineyards.com

DOMAINE EDEN	2014	CHARDONNAY	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$30	WHITE	92
DOMAINE EDEN	2014	PINOT NOIR	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$35	RED	91
DOMAINE EDEN	2014	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$40	RED	90

While considered the second wine of Mount Eden, Domaine Eden is actually its own estate located just to the south of Mount Eden. Made by Jeffrey Patterson, the wines are a mix of declassified Mount Eden fruit as well as estate fruit, and are made similarly to the more expensive Mount Eden releases. They represent terrific values, and if you want to understand Santa Cruz Mountains, and the style of Mount Eden, this is a great place to start.

Showing a deep gold color, the **2014 Chardonnay** (57% declassified Mount Eden Fruit, aged 10 months in 35% new barrels) offers lots of orchard fruits and buttered citrus, terrific minerality and reductive notes, medium-bodied richness and a silky texture. It has bright acidity, and while it doesn't quite have the balance and finesse of the Mount Eden Chardonnay releases, it is a terrific Chardonnay.

The **2014 Pinot Noir** is the value priced, entry level wine from winemaker Jeffrey Patterson and it's more than worth your time and effort. Framboise, ripe black cherries, spice and forest floor notes flow to a medium-bodied, rich, beautifully textured Pinot Noir that's loaded with charm. This cuvee spent 12 months in 10% new French oak and there 1,680 cases produced.

The **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon** is 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Merlot and aged 22 months in 20% new French and American oak. It offers a pretty bouquet of lavender, leafy herbs, tobacco leaf and cassis fruit in a medium-bodied, supple, nicely textured style. It doesn't have the purity or elegance of the Estate release, yet has lots of character. Website: www.domaineden.com

THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	CHARDONNAY ESTATE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$38	WHITE	93
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	CHARDONNAY DAMIANA VYD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$62	WHITE	92
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	CHARDONNAY LANGLEY HILL VYD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$62	WHITE	95
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	CHARDONNAY PORTOLA SPRINGS	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$62	WHITE	94
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	PINOT NOIR	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$38	RED	93
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	PINOT NOIR ESTATE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	94
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	PINOT NOIR WILL'S CABIN VYD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$66	RED	90
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	PINOT NOIR RAPLEY TRAIL VYD	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$78	RED	92
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	PINOT NOIR MINDEGO RIDGE	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	\$60	RED	95
THOMAS FOGARTY	2015	PINOT NOIR LA VIDA BELLA	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	94

One of the rising stars of the Santa Cruz Mountains is Thomas Fogarty Winery, which is owned and run by the Fogarty Family, with the wines made by the young, talented Nathan Kandler. The estate consists of numerous, tiny vineyards spread mostly around the estate, and they normally release numerous single vineyard Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. As with the other Santa Cruz Mountain estates, dismal weather in May caused horrible fruit set problems, and yields were decimated (so much so they had to combine numerous normally single vineyard parcels just to fill a fermenter). There's very little of these to go around, but they're smoking good wines and well worth the extra effort to track down.

A blend of all four estate vineyards, the **2015 Chardonnay Estate** is a beautiful, classic Chardonnay that's a smoking value in California Chardonnay. White peach, salty minerality, white flowers and hints of vanilla all flow from this gorgeous, supple, seamless beauty. It has terrific flavor intensity and a great finish. A wine that came in with the highest alcohol of the Chardonnays, yet also the highest acidity, the **2015 Chardonnay Damiana Vineyard** is a big, richly textured beauty that has lots of buttered lemon, orange blossom, brioche and baking spice. It's has a rich, honeyed, style that will shine on the dinner table. There's 150 cases (6 barrels) of the **2015 Chardonnay Langley Hill Vineyard**, and it comes from a larger, diverse site in the Santa Cruz Mountains that can have upwards of a month's difference between harvest dates from the top to the bottom of the vineyard. It's a beautifully clean, classic

Chardonnay that offers lots of buttered lemon, salted orchard fruits, pineapple, and brioche aromatics. Made in a rich, seamless, gorgeously balanced style, it's one of the finest yet from winemaker Nathan Kandler. From a steep, volcanic and basalt site that suffered due to the drought, the **2015 Chardonnay Portola Springs Vineyard** was brought up all in used barrels. It offers a rich, textured, medium to full-bodied style as well as lots of buttered lemon, white flowers, honeysuckle and toasted bread aromas and flavors. It's a rich, salty, lengthy beauty that has bright acidity and a great finish. Like all these 2015s, I suspect it's going to age for a decade or more.

Leading off the Pinot Noirs, there's 150 cases of the appellation **2015 Pinot Noir Santa Cruz Mountains** and it comes mostly from purchased fruit as they didn't have enough fruit due to the dismal yields. Seeing 20-30% whole cluster, it offers lots of black cherry and currant fruit, with plenty of stem and peppery nuances, medium-bodied richness, good density and a clean finish. It shows more raspberry and violet notes with time in the glass, and is a classy red that will evolve nicely.

A wine they don't make very often (and it was created because the single vineyards didn't producer enough fruit to fill a fermenter) the **2015 Pinot Noir Estate** is a blend of Rapley, Razorback and Windy Hill vineyards. It offers a clean, pretty and pure style, with beautifully integrated acidity and ample notions of fresh strawberries, spring flowers, earth and savory spices. It's elegant, seamless, and

silky on the palate, with fine tannin, and it going to drink nicely for a decade.

Coming from the broken sandstone soils of the estate Gist Ranch - and from the highest elevation site they farm (2,400 feet) - the **2015 Pinot Noir Will's Cabin Vineyard** is a soft, plump Pinot Noir that offers lots of cranberry, cherry and violet aromas and flavors, medium-bodied richness, and an endearing, soft style. Drink it over the coming 5-6 years. The tiny production **2015 Pinot Noir Rapley Trail Vineyard** offers a terrific bouquet of dried cherries, dusty earth, and spice-box, with medium-bodied richness, a light graceful texture and nicely integrated acidity. From a site that's the first to be harvested, it has a beautiful savoriness, notable minerality, fine tannin and a good finish. It will keep for a decade or more. While they barely got any fruit from this site in 2015 due to the dismal yields, the **2015 Mindego**

Ridge Pinot Noir is nevertheless a total stunner. Black raspberries, forest floor, violets, and spice all emerge from this gorgeously complete, balanced, structured Pinot Noir that does everything right. With ripe tannin, integrated acidity and a big finish, give bottles short term cellaring and enjoy over the following decade.

Lastly, the **2015 Pinot Noir La Vida Bella** is a new single vineyard bottling from Thomas Fogarty that comes from a site just beside the Alvaro Vineyard, in the southern part of the Santa Cruz Mountains. While they don't own this vineyard, they purchase all the fruit. It offers lots of darker fruits (black raspberries, red currants) and well as leafy herbs, forest floor and hints of mushroom. Rich, forward, and approachable, yet with solid complexity and good density, drink it over the coming 7-8 years. Website: www.fogartywinery.com

LEXINGTON WINE CO	2014	CABERNET FRANC	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	91
LEXINGTON WINE CO	2014	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	92
LEXINGTON WINE CO	2014	LEXINGTON MERLOT	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	90
LEXINGTON WINE CO	2014	LEXINGTON APEX	SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	NA	RED	95

The Lexington Wine Co. is the Bordeaux label for Thomas Fogarty. These wines come from the Gist Ranch Vineyard, which is located just off Skyline road, in the more southern portion of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The quality here is more than noteworthy and these beauties shine for their balance, purity and length.

There's just 6 barrels (150 cases) of the **2014 Cabernet Franc**. It offers a beautiful bouquet of spring flowers and liquid violets, with lots of black and blue fruits, graphite and licorice aromas and flavors. Pure, elegant and seamless, with solid concentration, bright acidity and ample tannin, it needs 3-4 years of cellaring and will age beautifully. Blended with 8% Merlot and 3% Cabernet Franc, the **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon** offers terrific notes of cassis, crushed violets, hints of tobacco and graphite, medium to full-bodied richness, polished tannin and a good finish. It's a pretty, elegant, yet nicely textured beauty that excels on its purity and balance. While it's terrific today, in a youthful sort of way, it should be at its best from 2020-2030.

There's only 100 cases of the **2014 Merlot** (most of the Merlot blocks go into the Cabernet Sauvignon release) and it comes from cooler, sandstone soils, which I suspect contributes to its redder fruit profile and more elegant style. Picking up hints of cassis, violets and spice with time in the glass, it has medium-bodied richness, a pretty, fresh mouthfeel and excellent length. Drink it over the coming 7-8 years. The flagship Cabernet Sauvignon dominated (there's a splash of Cabernet Franc) **2014 Apex** is straight up gorgeous on all accounts! Classic notes of blackcurrants, licorice, toasted spice, tobacco and graphite all emerge from this deeply colored, medium to full-bodied, layered, even sexy Cabernet, and it's undoubtedly the greatest vintage of this cuvee to date. I put this wine just behind the Ridge Mont Bello Cuvee (it's made in a more fresh, elegant style, however) for the top Bordeaux blend of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Website: www.lexingtonwineco.com

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