

Gary Farrell: Producer Profile

The Gary Farrell winery maintains outstanding relationships with growers, which helps in producing single vineyard Pinot Noirs that are consistent, balanced and elegant. Stacy Slinkard learns more and tastes seven of the 2016 wines...

Stacy Slinkard
August 25, 2020



Before the Russian River Valley was officially recognized as one of Sonoma County's distinguished AVAs, Gary Farrell was pioneering Pinot Noir in partnership with some of the region's most esteemed growers – Rochioli, Hallberg, Allen and others. It is these long-term, vineyard relationships that have built the sturdy foundation for Gary Farrell's celebrated portfolio that offers 12-14 single-vineyard Pinot Noirs from the Russian River Valley and surrounding sites every vintage.

The Gary Farrell winery and tasting room enjoys epic views from a hilltop in the heart of Healdsburg, and while the winery itself does not own their own vineyards, the extensive grower relationships remain mission critical to

producing the consistent, balanced, elegant wines that consumers have come to expect and adore. Maintaining outstanding relationships with growers is a top priority for the Gary Farrell team, and as proof of loyal partnership the name of each grower appears front and center on all single-vineyard labels in complete collaboration with the winery name – a testimony to the teamwork, dedication and shared contributions of both players.

Steering the winemaking team, Theresa Heredia joined Gary Farrell as head winemaker in 2012, and has since been championing Farrell's initial vision of experimenting and showcasing specific vineyard site expression and winemaking techniques that give voice to Pinot Noir's diverse terroir-driven character. While admitting that there is certainly no formula, Heredia seeks to creatively adapt her winemaking tool kit to each vineyard and grower. Her goal? 'To capture the essence of place,' says Heredia, who leans heavily into her extensive experience working with cool climate grapes and small-lot, single-vineyard wines.

'Working with fruit from the different sites keeps things exciting from a winemaking perspective because not only are the flavors different, but also the grape chemistry,' explains Heredia, 'this makes each vineyard and block or clone a unique challenge from one vintage to the next.'

Adding that each site calls for the implementation of different winemaking techniques, Heredia shares, 'Cooler sites dictate higher percentages of whole cluster fermentation because the fruit and stems ripen more in sync. However, in warmer vineyards, the fruit tends to ripen ahead of the stems, so I am more cautious with stem inclusion.'

In addition to a dozen single-vineyard Pinot Noirs and eight site-specific Chardonnays, Gary Farrell also crafts small quantities of Sauvignon Blanc from the 162-acre Rochioli Vineyard and the 24-acre, family-owned Patient Terrier Vineyard, along with a cool-climate, members-only Russian River Valley rosé of whole cluster Pinot Noir.

Heredia relies on the region's acclaimed microclimates that manifest themselves uniquely in specific vineyard capacities. Sourcing fruit from close to 40 distinct vineyards, these specific sites range from cool climate often with heavy maritime influences to warmer ridgeline spots and extended growing-seasons thanks to microclimates exhibiting Mediterranean-like terroir.

For example, the Petaluma Gap, one of the newest American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), is southwest Sonoma County's gateway to the coast where consistent early morning coastal fog and an almost daily afternoon wind tunnel have their way with the vineyards. Gary Farrell sources Pinot Noir fruit from the cool and windy Gap's Crown Vineyard where mixed soils, varied elevations and steep, well drained slopes create stress on the vine to yield berries with thicker skins, higher tannins and naturally elevated acidity levels. These richly layered, concentrated wines deliver an enticing mix of vibrant red and black fruit aromas in a well-structured, velvety-textured package.

Or take the Fort Ross Vineyard, whose high elevation rests 'well above the fog layer,' and lies less than a mile from the Pacific Ocean, produces Pinot Noir that is more subtle on the fruit factor and shines with savory, earth and herb-driven character.

On the flipside, the lower elevations of the Santa Rosa Plain are home to the Martaella Vineyard, one of the coolest vineyards in the Russian River Valley thanks in part to lingering morning fog. This site produces Pinot Noir showcasing juicy, fresh, fruit-forward profiles where an engaging floral layer meets snazzy spice nuance and notable structure leaning into lively acidity and refined tannins. The Martaella Vineyard is planted to nine distinct Pinot Noir clones and heirloom varieties over the course of 42-acres offering remarkable vineyard variation and diversification from clay-based soils.

By combining myriad vineyard sites with countless clones ranging from the Dijon clones: 777, 115, and 667 along with the aromatic heritage varieties such as Pommard and Calera, and even a mysterious suitcase clone sourced from what is rumored to be a famed Burgundy vineyard, the opportunity for Gary Farrell's single-vineyard Pinot Noir expression becomes exponential.

'We are driven by a winemaking philosophy that is all about capturing as much site specificity as possible in the bottle,' says Heredia. It is precisely this philosophy that drives meticulous vineyard selection, exceptional grower partnerships, and ultimately delivers the impressive fruit quality that has built Gary Farrell's reputation for world-class Pinot Noir.

Tasting Gary Farrell 2016 Pinot Noirs



Gary Farrell, Bien Nacido Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016

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Brimming with black tea and ripe red berry, expect a swirl of warm spice and wild herb to debut among a chorus of lively acidity and engaging minerality. Intense and extroverted, this brilliant bottle mak...

Points 95



Gary Farrell, Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016

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Crafted from some of Hallberg Vineyard's best blocks with a keen focus on clones 667, 777, 828, Pommard and an enigmatic 'suitcase' clone, the 2016 Hallberg showcases exceptional depth with ripe red fruit charact...

Points 94



Gary Farrell, Fort Ross Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016

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As one of 'the closest vineyards in California to the Pacific Ocean,' according to winemaker Theresa Heredia, Fort Ross is situated on a cool, coastal ridge riding about 1,500 feet above sea level and 'well abo...

Points 94



Gary Farrell, Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016

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Tucked into the wind and fog-laden Petaluma Gap, this 138-acre cool-climate hillside vineyard digs deep into rocky well-drained soils. Fresh and bright, flavours of red cherry, black currants and tangy cranberry...

Points 94



Gary Farrell, Toboni Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016

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Well situated on the eastern end of the Russian River Valley, Toboni vineyard's foggy mornings, sunny afternoons, and Pinot-perfect clay loam soils give rise to the dark fruit flavors of blackberry compote,...

Points 93



Gary Farrell, Martaella Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016

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Brawny, juicy and brimming with black fruit, this bottle shows intensity and concentration, thanks in large part to the diurnal temperature changes that retain acidity levels while promoting rich fruit character...

Points 93