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The International Wine Review

SONOMA COAST VINEYARDS (SCV)

New Releases 2010

We are always keen to taste the new releases of Sonoma Coast Vineyards (SCV) as it is one of the top producers of handcrafted wines on the Sonoma Coast. Founded in 2002 by John and Barbara Drady and currently owned by Windsor Vineyards, Sonoma Coast produces small quantities of very fine Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. Sonoma Coast does not own any of its own vineyards but works closely with a special group of growers. Winemaking at Sonoma Coast Vineyards is in the hands of Anthony Austin, one of California's most talented winemakers.

SCV sources its fruit from vineyards located in the area known as the true Sonoma Coast. This growing area is characterized by warm days and cool nights, shallow sand and clay soils, a long growing season, and very low yields. The growing conditions are challenging: cool spring temperatures, with periodic frosts and rain, heavy fog, and late harvests—at least a month or more later than most of California. On the other hand, marginal growing conditions can translate to superb wines, provided there are warm temperatures before harvest to allow for adequate ripening and phenolic maturity. The

2007, 2008, and 2009 vintages reviewed here were very good, which is revealed in the quality of the wines.



Winemaking at SCV is meticulous and Burgundian in approach. Harvests are carried out in the early morning so that the fruit remains cool. The Chardonnay grapes are gently pressed, and then the juice is chilled and inoculated with Montrachet yeast and placed in barrels (50-60% new) for primary fermentation, malo, and aging. After fermentation the wines are kept on the lees for 10 months or so with regular stirring before bottling. The Pinot Noir grapes are hand sorted, destemmed and transferred into one ton fermenters, with 20%-30% left whole cluster. An extended cold soak and hand punch downs are used to achieve a balanced extraction without harsh tannins. Primary and secondary fermentation occur by lots in barrels for 18 months with racking after 10 months; the wines are blended, fined with egg whites and lightly filtered before bottling.

SCV wines are distributed nationally by Wilson Daniels (St. Helena, CA) and by Nice Legs (Sterling, VA) in the Washington, DC, area.

Tasting Notes

2009 LAGUNA VISTA SAUVIGNON BLANC SONOMA COAST (\$18) 89

The 2009 Laguna Vista Sauvignon Blanc offers fragrant light citrus aromas with toast on the nose. This is followed by a creamy attack on the palate with pear and red apple fruit flavors and more toast. The wine has good balance and bright acidity on the finish. The wine is vinified in stainless-steel tanks with 50% transferred to re-toasted French oak barrels for six months and is then reassembled.

2008 CHARDONNAY ANTONIO MOUNTAIN VINEYARD SONOMA COAST (\$45) 92

Yellow gold in hue, the 2008 SCV Chardonnay Antonio Mountain Vineyard is the best Chardonnay we have tasted from this winery in recent years. The wine is ripe and aromatic with clean melon and tropical fruit aromas on the nose. Having spent ten months sur lie in 60% new French barriques, it reveals a rich and creamy mouth feel with ripe pear and citrus. It also shows good overall structure and balance with good acidity and elegance on the finish.

2008 CHARDONNAY GOLD RIDGE HILLS SONOMA COAST (\$30) 89+

Light yellow gold, the Chardonnay Gold Ridge Hills exhibits rich aromas and flavors of ripe tropical fruit and brioche. While vinified much the same as the Antonio Mountain Vineyard Chardonnay, stylistically it is a tad lighter in volume and intensity of fruit flavor. It has a pleasant creamy texture, excellent balance and crisp green apple-like acidity on the finish.

2008 PINOT NOIR SONOMA COAST FREESTONE HILLS SONOMA COAST (\$40) 91

We prefer the 2008 Freestone Hills to the 2007 vintage. Medium dark ruby in color, it offers attractive aromatic aromas of pure dark red berry fruit and toasted oak notes. It is elegant and beautifully balanced on the palate with fresh pure red fruit flavors, polished tannins, good acidity and an incredibly long and flavorful finish. The grapes were sourced from three vineyards: Petersen Vineyard, Bella Sonoma Vineyard, and Balistreri Family Vineyard. Aged for 18 months in barrel.

2007 PINOT NOIR BALISTRERI FAMILY VINEYARD SONOMA COAST (\$75) 93

SCV produces its finest Pinot Noir from The Balistreri Family Vineyard. Dark ruby in color, this Pinot Noir exhibits earthy aromas with raspberry and red plum fruit and notes of vanilla, toasted oak and underbrush. It is nicely balanced and elegant on the palate with a soft texture and long lasting finish. A terrific Pinot Noir for drinking now or holding for a couple of years for maximum pleasure. Spends an initial 10 months in 70% new barrels and is blended and aged for an additional 8 months before bottling.

2007 SYRAH OCCIDENTAL ROAD VINEYARD SONOMA COAST (\$35) 91

The 2007 Syrah Occidental offers fragrant blue and black fruit aromas on the nose followed by a soft attack and an elegant mouth feel with good volume. This is a terrific wine that is sweet and beautifully balanced with silky tannins and a long finish. The wine is fermented and aged in separate lots using 60% new oak for a total of 18 months.

Previous wine review articles of SCV wines including tasting notes and ratings are available on www.I-WineReview.com. Subscribers can use the 'Search' function to obtain all ratings and reviews.

— *Mike Potashnik & Don Winkler*
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