



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir

## Onward Wines: Pinot Noir & Pet-Nat Too

Many have a vision of wine writers tasting wines at glorious estates in the Napa Valley sitting at a table draped with a starched, white table cloth, in perfectly landscaped surroundings. The writer is almost certainly seduced by the experience and the glowing wine reviews that follow reflect it.

Now the reality. I am in the backyard at a winemaker's home in Napa on a sunny afternoon sitting at a well-used picnic table. In the background are a roaming, barking dog, a strutting chicken, and four young children laughing and energetically playing together. I am tasting wine while a soccer ball whizzes by and a 3-year old comes to the table to ask her winemaker mother to help her go to the bathroom, her face smeared with ice cream that also drips down her arm. All formality was thrown aside, and as I chatted with Faith Armstrong-Foster and sampled her creative wines, I realized that this was a welcome antidote to hi-collared wine tasting.

Faith's endearing story was told previously in the *PinotFile* after I first met her two years ago: [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1337/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1337/). She attended the University of California at Davis on a full Regents scholarship and graduated in 2006 with highest honors. Her subsequent marriage to Sean Foster, the Senior Winemaker at Merryvale Vineyards, derailed her winemaking plans initially and she settled into family life in Napa. In 2009, she finally launched her own label, Onward Wines, when she had the opportunity to source Pinot Noir from Cerise Vineyard in the Anderson Valley. A second highly desirable source of Pinot Noir was found in 35-year-old Martini clone grapes from Hawkeye Ranch in Redwood Valley.

Faith has crafted several varietals including Carignan, Grenache, Grenache Blanc, Albarino, Verdelho and blends thereof under the Farmers Jane Wine Co. label that is a partnership with another winemaker. Her first love remains Pinot Noir and Onward Wines is her main focus and pride. Beginning in 2013, she began exploring pétillant naturelle wines made with Malvasia Bianca grapes from Capp Inn Ranch in Suisin Valley.

### Pétillant Naturele

Pétillant naturel (nicknamed "pet-nat") is a type of sparkling wine made in the *méthode ancestrale* process traditionally used in France. It has caught on in California in recent years, and is a favorite of sommeliers for restaurant tasting menus. The name means "mildly naturally sparkling" in French.

Typically, grapes are whole cluster pressed, and undergo primary fermentation in cold vats with natural yeasts until alcohol reaches 1°-6° Brix. After settling, some of the lees are removed from the unfinished wine (avoiding the need for dosage) but much of the active yeast remains. The juice is then bottled and topped with a crown cap, and continues its primary fermentation in bottle, capturing the carbon dioxide that is naturally released. Usually there is no dosage or addition of yeast before a second bubble-producing fermentation in bottle that is done in *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine production. There are no strict rules for its production allowing winemakers to be creative, and no special wine making equipment is required for pet-nat, unlike traditional Champagne. The process is tricky, however, and has been called the "Russian roulette version" of sparkling wine since the process in the bottle is alive, a number of things can go wrong, and if warmed up, bottles can explode.

The resultant wines are easy to like, often with softer bubbles than Champagne. Part of the fun is that since they are unfiltered and unfiltered, the wines are unpredictable, offering subtle variations in flavor from bottle to bottle. The wines can be dry or have a slight amount of residual sugar, and the alcohol level is lower than in traditional sparkling wine. One producer fittingly notes, "Chill, serve, & chill."

The Onward Pinot Noir program is focused on two distinctly different vineyards and the wines are vineyard-designated as are all Onward wines. Hawkeye Ranch is located in the Redwood Valley AVA of Mendocino County in the upper reaches of the Russian River. The Martini clone Pinot Noir vines were originally planted in the 1970s and are farmed by a fifth generation family of growers. Replanting is ongoing using a selection of the best old vines. Crop load and vine vigor are naturally balanced, allowing for organic farming. The resultant Pinot Noir wines tend to be red-fruited with finesse and inviting charm, described as "pretty" by Faith. Onward is the only winery to vineyard-designate Hawkeye Ranch Pinot Noir. Faith has obtained more rows of grapes beginning with the 2013 vintage, allowing her to vinify the Hawkeye Ranch Pinot Noir Rosé in a dedicated fashion with minimal saignée. Faith considers her rosé to be a "year-round style of California rosé," and laments that the price of \$20 is crazy considering the elevated price of Pinot Noir grapes. A tiny amount of Cerise Vineyard Rosé of Pinot Noir was produced in the 2014 vintage.

Cerise Vineyard is located in the Anderson Valley at an elevation ranging from 650 to 1,000 feet. Farmed by Anthony Filiberti of Knez Winery using sustainably using organic and biodynamic principles. Cerise Vineyard has very rocky and nutrient-deficient soils that limit yield and vigor, resulting in small berries and clusters. The resultant wines have a firm tannic structure, and benefit from more time in barrel and bottle. Faith says, "Cerise Pinot Noir has more structure and layers than Hawkeye, but Hawkeye is prettier."

I would suggest grilled salmon with the Hawkeye, and braised short ribs with the Cerise. Either way, I am checking into Hotel California and ordering the Onward.

**2014 Onward Hawkeye Ranch Redwood Valley Rosé of Pinot Noir** 12.5% alc., 280 cases, \$20. Produced from a designated press lot (5 hours in the press before pressing), cold settled, fermented cool and long in stainless steel, underwent partial (70%) malolactic fermentation in neutral oak barrels with lees stirring. A small amount of saignée was added in to give additional Pinot Noir character. *Light apricot color in the glass. Lovely aromas and flavors of strawberry, cherry, blood orange, spice and savory herbs. This wine is eager to please and way too good for \$20. 89.*

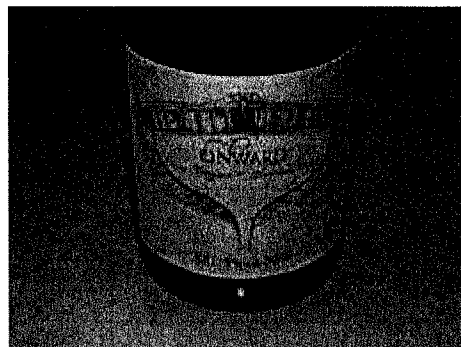
**2011 Onward Hawkeye Ranch Redwood Valley Pinot Noir** 12.1% alc. sold out. *Light reddish orange color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, sous-bois, and sandalwood. Light and silky on the palate, but flavorful and expressive, sporting juicy notes of red raspberry and cherry with a hint of dried herbs in the background. A charming, demure wine that finishes with a generous wealth of cherry goodness. A window into the cool 2011 vintage that is drinking at its apogee now. 90.*

**2012 Onward Hawkeye Ranch Redwood Valley Pinot Noir** 12.6% alc., 275 cases, \$38. More color and concentration and slightly more tannin in this vintage compared to the 2011 vintage wine. 7-day cold soak, 100% de-stemmed, native yeast, cool fermentation, aged in 100% French oak barrels, 20% new. *Light reddish purple color in the glass. Pleasing aromas of cherry, mushroom and forest floor. Mid weight flavors of fresh cherry and spice with complimentary oak seasoning. Similar to the 2011 vintage but more to like with modest tannins and noticeably long finishing length. This wine will give you a pinot high very quickly. 92.*



**2011 Onward Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**

13.4% alc., 150 cases, \$58. 2/3 Pommard and 1/3 115 clones. Yields 1.5 tons per acre. Aged 2 years in bottle. 10-day cold soak, 100% de-stemmed, slightly warm natural yeast fermentation. *This big boy draws you in with hi-tone aromas of black cherry, dark red berry., pomegranate and rose petal. On the palate, the wine is earthbound and deeply flavored with notes of iron complimenting the mid weight, black raspberry, blackberry and pomegranate flavors. There is plenty to discover in this wine, which has firm, chalky tannins and a berry-fueled finish that leaves you begging for more. 94.*



Onward wines are available at a number of fine restaurants in San Francisco including Bar Tartine, Central Kitchen, Gary Danko and Michael Mina, and in New York City at Craft, db Bistro Modern and Momofuku Ko, as well as select retailers in these cities. Joining the mailing list is the best way to acquire the wines. The wines are not sold online but you can contact Faith at 707-812-1777 or [salesinquiries@onwardwines.com](mailto:salesinquiries@onwardwines.com). An "Up Close and Personal" winemaker profile for Faith is featured on the last page of this issue.