Top Ten West Sonoma Coast Wineries

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West Sonoma Coast is a leading producer of ultra premium Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and cool climate Syrah. It is home to some of my favorite growing areas, including magical Occidental, Freestone, and the newer Fort Ross-Seaview sub-appellation.

There are plenty of great wineries in Sonoma's sub-appellations but the Coast has always held a very special place in my heart. Folks from this stunningly beautiful area are pretty easy to find irresistible, as are their wines. They are farmers at heart and love their land and their community with abandon.

This list practically wrote itself, as I have been around most of these fine wineries for years. On the other hand, it was very difficult to pare the group down to a mere ten.

My top ten are:

Benovia Winery

If you are not purchasing Benovia, you are seriously missing out on value priced wines—including some from one of the most important vineyards in the world, Cohn. I followed Mike Sullivan, winemaker, from his Hartford Winery days and can unequivocally state that he is an enormous talent. I would encourage you to try these gems. Warning: you will never look back.



Doc's Ranch Vineyard

Odds are you have never heard of this vineyard, but you've likely tasted wines made from grapes grown at Doc's Ranch. Owner, Bryon Sheets, sells fruit to the likes of Red Car and Evening Land. It was only a matter of time before he kept some for himself. I would suggest you get on the mailing list, pronto. Read more here.



DuMOL Wines

Founded in 1996, DuMOL is a partnership between Michael Verlander, Kerry Murphy, and winemaker/viticulturalist Andy Smith. Smith's background includes a stint at Martinborough along with making wine under the tutelage of Ted Lemon (Littorai) and Paul Hobbs. Their first vintage yielded 300 cases, with the production growing steadily ever since. DuMOL specializes in Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah and Viognier. In addition to several blends, there are some exceptional single-vineyard wines named after their family members.



Failla Wines

Winemaker and industry veteran, Ehren Jordan is a virtual alchemist, who loves innovation and experimentation. One of the most versatile winemakers of our time, he can turn out massive Zinfandels with the same ease as an elegant, feminine, understated Pinot Noirs. His cool climate Syrahs are some of the best in California. His still makes wine for the cult Zinfandel producer – Turley Wine Cellars. Ehren sources fruit from prominent sites on Sonoma Coast, including his own vineyard, all the way to Anderson Valley. His wines are site-driven, focused and perfectly harmonious.



Furthermore Pinot Noir

Two couples with shared love of wine were sitting around the fire one night pondering a wine brand. See my article on their full story. What ensued is an “opportunistic” grape sourcing from some of the best vineyards on the North and South coasts. They focus exclusively on producing Pinot Noir. Their wines are made in miniscule quantities and can be purchased directly from the winery.



Lioco Wine

Matt Licklider and Kevin O'Connor became friends while Kevin was the wine director at Spago in Beverly Hills and Matt sold wine for North Berkeley Imports. They immediately connected based on their shared philosophy that delicious wines need not be big nor monolithic. That "less is more" approach led them into launching their own brand which became an instant hit. Nuanced, balanced and food friendly, their wines found a receptive audience. The duo continues to produced dynamite Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, with fruit sourced from predominantly old-vine vineyards in Sonoma, Mendocino and Santa Cruz.



Peay Vineyards

Sourcing fruit from their breathtaking, meticulously farmed Sonoma Coast vineyard, the talented trio (Vanessa Wong, winemaker and brothers Nick and Andy Peay) are dedicated to producing cool climate wines of consummate integrity. Vanessa Wong previously made wine at Peter Michael Winery. Prior to Peter Michael, she worked in France at Château Lafite-Rothschild and Domaine Jean Gros. Their shared vision of optimizing their estate vineyard and letting the fruit express the terroir in all its glory, results in hauntingly beautiful wines. In addition to Syrah, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, I was blown away by their two barrel Rousanne/Marsanne blend. Bright, minerally, and intensely floral, it's well worth seeking.



Red Car Wine

See also



Red Car Wines has been a success story from day one. It was founded in 2000 by winemaker Carroll Kemp and his partners Mark Estrin and Richard Crowell. Starting small, their first release consisted of a mere two barrels of wine. The winery name is a tribute to the electric trolley

that ran in their hometown, Los Angeles, until early 1960's. Today, Kemp continues to make fantastic cool climate Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah. The wines are still made in small lots with a low intervention approach. Purity and intensity of flavor is Red Car's calling card.



Senses Wines

Senses is the brainchild of three childhood friends: Chris Strieter, Max Thieriot (yes, of *that* well-known vineyard) and Myles Lawrence-Briggs. Having tried other careers, all three came to the inevitable conclusion that wine was in their blood. Utilizing top quality fruit, sourced primarily from their families' vineyards, they make miniscule quantities of spectacular, value-priced Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.



Wayfarer Vineyard

When Helen Turley recommends a vineyard, and it's down the road from her own Marcassin, one ought to listen. Her longtime friend and colleague, Jayson Pahlmeyer did exactly that and Wayfarer brand was born. Winemaker, Bibiana Gonzalez Rave, crafts wines of exceptional elegance, impeccable balance and refinement. I would put them in a blind top flight Burgundy tasting with my eyes closed. And they would win.



This list represents some lesser known brands that ought to be on any Pinot lover's watch. I must also mention a few well established, stellar, consistent producers whose offerings I have cherished over the years:

- Who doesn't love **Flowers Vineyards**? Established by the legendary Greg La Follette, it has been consistently producing some of the area's best Pinots and Chardonnays.
- **Hartford Family Winery** never misses. Every single Pinot and Chardonnay from their extensive portfolio rocks.
- I have been impressed lately with by Justin Ennis' offerings from **Joseph Phelps Vineyards**. His restrained, elegant Pinots and Chardonnays channel fine Burgundies.
- I have always liked **Paul Hobbs**' wines. They are refined, varietally sound, delicious on release, and age gracefully.
- **MacPhail Family Wines** is another winner, crafting small lots of plush, fruit forward, unapologetic gems.
- **Ramey Wine Cellars** is a rock star winery. With legendary David Ramey at the winemaking wheel, every bottling is stellar. I am obsessed with Ramey's Chardonnays and crave them for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

- Adam Lee from **Siduri Wines** is perennially everyone's favorite. I adore his wines almost as much as him. Straightforward, pure, effortlessly elegant and always authentic, his wines are a must in any cellar.
- **Small Vines Wines** is an amazing brand. They pursues perfection through sustainability and thoughtful viticulture and winemaking.

There is a great event that takes place every August, called West of West Wine Festival that offers a great opportunity to try all of these wines and showcases the infinite range of West Sonoma Coast viticultural and winemaking prowess. Read more here.