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Report # 20 The Santa Lucia Highlands: Unique Terroir, Marvelous Wines

Introduction

The Santa Lucia Highlands is one of California’s premier wine regions for the production of top quality Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. While only established as an AVA in 1992, its rapid learning curve as to which varietals excel in its unique terroir has translated into growing demand, and prices, for its fruit. The terroir—cool climate, morning fogs, strong winds, low rainfall, summer sunlight, and excellent drainage—is ideal for growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and, increasingly, Northern Rhone style Syrah.

The Santa Lucia Highlands [SLH] is a grower’s AVA. Not only is there high demand from wineries outside the AVA for SLH fruit, but strict environmental regulations, water supply constraints, and the difficulties winemakers face in purchasing property within the AVA serve to limit the number of wineries. There are today only twelve growers in the Highlands who also make wine. On the other hand, there are more than thirty winemakers located outside the AVA who make wines carrying the Santa Lucia Highlands name. The fact this is a grower’s AVA puts special emphasis on the vineyards, and a number of SLH vineyards—Garys’, Rosella’s, Sleepy Hollow, Doctor’s, etc.—are famed for producing high quality fruit. The focus on vineyards results in most SLH wines carrying single vineyard designations, a much higher percentage than any other wine growing region in California.

In this our 20th report, the International Wine Review explores this new, premium grape growing region. In preparation for writing the report, we traveled to the Santa Lucia Highlands this past September to meet with many of the grower-producers in the region and to taste their excellent wines. In total, we tasted over 100 SLH wines produced by winemakers in the Highlands and throughout California.

We begin this report by looking at a brief wine history of the region and the catalytic role played by several larger than life personalities. We then focus extensively on the unique Santa Lucia Highland’s terroir and what makes it so special. Since it is the quality of the fruit that makes the Highlands so special, we next explore the vineyards and the viticulture of the region, including advances in the identification of grape clones best suited to the special, cool climate.

The future looks bright for the Highlands—we predict its fame for producing cool-climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay will continue to grow, and before long the Santa Lucia Highlands will become as famous for Pinot Noir as the Napa Valley is famous for Cabernet Sauvignon. The blending of Highlands

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fruit into generic Monterey County and Central Coast wines is likely to give way to increasing production of SLH-designated bottlings.

However, several challenges lie ahead. The combination of very limited arable new vineyard sites, large vineyards concentrated among a few owners, limited water supply, and Monterey County planning and environmental restrictions (however sensible they may be) severely restricts entry by energetic and innovative new young growers and winemakers. The Highlands are thus unlikely to become the tourist destination that Napa is, and most winemakers using SLH fruit will continue to have to transport that fruit relatively long distances from vineyard to winery.

In sum, the Santa Lucia Highlands is a superior wine grape growing region, and its already superb wines will only get better.

Acknowledgements

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Mike Potashnik, Publisher

Don Winkler, Editor

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Santa Lucia Highlands and Monterey: An Historical Note

The Santa Lucia Highlands is one of eight Monterey County AVAs, and its wine development resembles that of Monterey County at large. Monterey County's modern vineyard development began in the 1960s with large Bay Area wineries like Paul Masson and Mirassou searching for less expensive alternatives to Napa and Sonoma Counties. Vineyard development really took off in the early 1970s with syndicates of absentee investors (due to favorable tax laws), and vineyard acreage grew rapidly. Low prices for tree crops, a competing use for the land in the Highlands, contributed to the interest in planting grapes. In many cases the wrong varieties were planted. Vineyard development in the Santa Lucia Highlands in many ways mirrored that of Monterey County as a whole, including absentee ownership of vineyards.

The history of wine in the Santa Lucia Highlands is both short and recent. It begins in the early 1970s when several newcomers to the Highlands—Rich and Claudia Smith, Nicky Hahn, Phil Johnson, and Gerald McFarland—arrived to begin the job of planting vines. Rich Smith did his planting for a group of investors but purchased his vineyard property [Paraiso] in 1994. Phil Johnson planted La Estancia. McFarland planted the vineyard later purchased in 1987 by Steve McIntyre and now known as McIntyre Estate Vineyard. McFarland also purchased the Smith horse ranch in the upper Highlands as well as the Hook cattle ranch below it (with its water rights) and became the founding president of the Smith and Hook Winery, the first winery of the Santa Lucia Highlands. Nicky Hahn purchased Smith and Hook in 1980, at the time of its first vintage. These pioneers played an incredibly important role in the development of Highlands' vineyards, and the vineyards they planted 35 years ago produce some of the most sought after fruit in all of California.



Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans

The Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans group, formed in 2005, is a formal association of vineyards and wineries that grow grapes there or use the appellation's fruit to craft their wines. Their primary goal is to promote this unique viticultural district and increase awareness and appreciation of the Santa Lucia Highlands. The group's online home is www.santaluciahighlands.com where there is a wealth of information on the personalities and estates that make up the S.L.H. Dan Lee, owner of Morgan Winery, is the organization's current President. Dave Muret is the Executive Director.

These early pioneers literally broke new ground, and some mistakes were made. The Smith and Hook Vineyard was planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, and the early vintages, beginning in 1980, were received with some acclaim. But with time it became apparent that Cabernet Sauvignon reached full ripeness only in exceptional years, and so in 2001 owner Nicky Hahn, who had purchased Smith & Hook in 1980, replaced the Cabernet with varietals better suited to the Highland's cool climate.



The success of these pioneers—from the beginning Highland grapes earned higher prices than grapes from elsewhere—stimulated some of the long-time farmers of the Highlands and the adjoining Salinas Valley to try their hand

at grapes. Many of these farmers were of Swiss-Italian descent from the Ticino area of Switzerland and operated dairy farms and fruit and walnut orchards in the highlands in addition to cultivating green crops in the flatlands. Among those in the Swiss-Italian community were Jane and Eddie Pisoni, who used their earnings from celery farming to purchase a cattle ranch at the southern end of the Highlands. In 1982, their son, Gary Pisoni [see box on p. 4] planted a small, five acre portion of the ranch to a special clone of Pinot Noir of somewhat mysterious origins. That small planting demonstrated the potential of Pinot Noir in the Highlands and led to an expansion of acreage as well as favorable reviews from the wineries purchasing fruit from the Pisoni Vineyard. In 1997 Pisoni partnered with Gary Francioni in planting Garys' Vineyard, which quickly became one of the most famous vineyards in the Highlands. Gary Pisoni's flamboyant personality, which attracted the attention of the wine press and made him a *de facto* ambassador to the outside world, also helped put the Highlands on the map. As Rich Smith says, "Gary Pisoni broke the dam."

Numerous other individuals contributed to the development of Santa Lucia Highlands vineyards, in addition to those mentioned above. One who merits special mention is Dan Morgan Lee, who with his wife Donna established the Double L Vineyard in 1996, the first in the Highlands to be farmed organically. Dan is the current president of Santa Lucia Highlands Artisans, which was created in 1998 to promote the vineyards and wines of the Highlands (see box on p. 10). Steve Pessagno is another grower-winemaker who plays a leadership role in the region, serving on the Monterey County Planning Commission, which sets the rules of the game for the future development of wineries within the AVA. Steve also makes wine for Clint Eastwood.

The latest chapter in the SLH saga is the arrival of large commercial wineries. One of the largest is Constellation, which when it purchased the Robert Mondavi Winery also took ownership of the Bianchi vineyard, at 750 acres the single largest in the Highlands. Constellation also owns the 82 acre Stonewall Vineyard. E. and J. Gallo owns the 576 acre Olson Ranch Vineyard, which originally straddled the Santa Lucia Highlands and Arroyo Seco



Wine Pioneers: Rich and Claudia Smith of Paraiso Vineyards

Rich and Claudia Smith are among the early pioneers of the Santa Lucia Highlands. They have also been among the leaders who have built the Highlands into one of the finest California AVAs for premium Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Trained at UC Davis, Rich and Claudia settled in the Highlands in 1973 and began growing grapes on a 400-acre vineyard toward the southern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands bench. Unlike other growers in the area who had been encouraged to grow Cabernet Sauvignon (despite the fact that much of Monterey County is too cool for Cabernet to ripen properly) Rich Smith chose to plant Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Noir. To his good fortune, these grape varieties performed reasonably well, and in 1987 Rich and his family bought the vineyard.



In 1988, the Smiths began producing wine under the Paraiso label. Currently, they produce some 30,000 cases primarily of Pinot Noir and

Chardonnay. Paraiso's wines are high quality and affordable. The premium cuveés such as the West Terrace Pinot Noir and Faite are among the finest produced in the Highlands. In addition to Paraiso's 400 acres of vineyards, Rich Smith's Valley Farm Management owns and manages some 2500 acres of vineyards elsewhere in the Salinas Valley.

In 1992 Rich joined a small group in championing the establishment of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. He was also a founding member of the Monterey County Vintners and Growers' Association. Likewise, the Smiths have been at the forefront in the SLH in the experimentation and use of mechanical harvesting, mobile vineyard pressing, advanced trellising and drip irrigation systems. The Smiths are founding members of the Central Coast Viticultural Team, and Paraiso was the first vineyard in the Highlands to be certified for sustainable agricultural practices.

Today, Paraiso is an artisanal family winery. Rich's son Jason is General Manager while daughter-in-law Jennifer Murphy-Smith handles Paraiso's hospitality. Son-in-law David Fleming is Paraiso's winemaker and a very good one, indeed.



Gary Pisoni

Gary Pisoni is a larger than life personality who has done more than any individual over the past 25 years to promote the wines of the Santa Lucia Highlands. Beginning in the early 1980s Gary founded Pisoni Vineyards where he

planted some of the finest Pinot Noir grapes in the region. Reputedly grown from cuttings from one of Burgundy's finest vineyards, the grapes became known as the Pisoni clone and found their way into three of the finest vineyards in the SLH—Garys' Vineyard, which he planted and jointly owns with his old school friend, Gary Francioni; Rosella's Vineyard, which is owned by Gary Francioni and his wife Rosella; and Gary Pisoni's own eponymous vineyard.

Like many vineyard owners in the Highlands, Gary Pisoni started his farming career growing (and picking) vegetables and raising livestock on his family's farm. As a young boy he played down in the cellar of his grandfather's house (where Gary now lives) in the middle of the vegetable fields in Salinas Valley. Gary has fond memories of drinking out of the barrels of Zinfandel his grandfather made for his milkers and dipping dry bread in wine.

Gary became interested in wine as a student at San Jose State when he started tasting and collecting Bordeaux and Burgundy. After graduation Gary visited France where his love of Burgundy turned to passion. Gary is fond of saying "I drank a half million bottles of Bordeaux before I found out Pinot was better." Gary started making his own Pisoni wine in 1998, but it was only in 2005 that he finally built his own winery in Santa Rosa. Before then he recruited winemaking help from several top winemakers and wineries: Mark Aubert in 1998, Vanessa Wong in 1999-2000, Siduri in 2001-2002, and Copain in 2003-2004. Gary is probably most appreciated as a vineyard owner, judging from the many top producers of Pinot Noir in California like Kosta Browne, Siduri, Morgan, Testarossa and others that regularly buy grapes from Pisoni and Garys' Vineyard. And Gary doesn't sell his fruit to just anyone, even if they're willing to pay the going rate of \$5000 a ton or \$15,000 an acre. To be a customer of Gary's he has to like you and like your wine, and you have to pay your bills.

Today Gary manages Pisoni Vineyards, Lucia and other winemaking ventures with his two sons Jeff and Mark. Jeff, who is a graduate in enology at California State University, Fresno, took over winemaking for the Pisoni and Lucia labels in 2002. Mark, who has a B.S. in Agricultural Economics from UC Davis and a Master's Degree in Farm Business Management from Cornell University, directs the operations of the Pisoni vegetable farm and vineyards. Gary is a lucky man to have two such fine young men following in his footsteps.

AVAs, but Gallo successfully petitioned to move all of its vineyard into the Highlands AVA in 1996. The Wagner Family, of Caymus fame, owns the 495 acre Mer Soleil Vineyard (run by Charlie Wagner) and the 90 acre Las Alturas Vineyard (managed by Joe Wagner). All told, these three wine companies own over one-third of all vineyard acreage in the AVA. If Kendall Jackson decides to petition to move all or part of its 450 acre Panorama Vineyard from the Arroyo Seco to Santa Lucia Highlands AVA, the large winery presence will increase still more.

Santa Lucia Highlands: The Region

The Santa Lucia Highlands is a unique appellation in several respects. It sits to the west of the fertile Salinas Valley, which lies above a major aquifer that provides the water used to irrigate the vineyards. Its porous soils are remarkably consistent in composition with very little capacity to retain water, which enables growers to precisely irrigate—enough to avoid over-stressing the vine but not enough to encourage vigorous vines. The SLH also has a cool, dry climate with persistent morning fog during much of the growing season and strong winds that originate in the opening to the sea that lies to the north. The fog serves to moderate temperatures, reducing extremes of hot and cold. The wind also moderates the summer heat and inhibits rapid sugar accumulation. In short, the SLH climate is ideal for growing Burgundy varietals – Pinot Noir and Chardonnay – that are phenologically ripe with good acidity and fresh fruit flavors.

Geography

The Santa Lucia Highlands [outlined in white in the picture] run north to south between the fertile Salinas Valley and the Sierra de Salinas mountains. The AVA is about eighteen miles long but narrow in width. Beneath the Salinas Valley lies the Salinas River which flows north-northwest towards the ocean at Monterey from its origin near San Luis Obispo. It is a shallow river with most of its water flowing underground, making it the longest underground river in the US. It is the Salinas River that feeds the large aquifer that provides the water to irrigate both the flatland crops that constitute America's "salad bowl" and the vineyards that slope upwards from those flatlands to the mountains beyond. The Salinas River is familiar to those who have read John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

The Salinas Ground Water Basin, or Salinas Aquifer for short, is huge, but its resources are finite. The draining of lakes in the Salinas Valley for agriculture, urbanization, and channeling of the Salinas and its tributaries have



Climate

The principal elements in the SLH climate affecting fruit quality are rainfall, temperature, fog, wind, and altitude. Scarce rainfall, cool temperatures, morning fog, and strong sea winds are what's unique about the Santa Lucia Highlands climate. These elements vary depending on the vineyard's altitude.

Rainfall. Annual rainfall is low (about 13") in the Highlands, in contrast to other important Pinot Noir growing regions like Oregon's Willamette Valley (38" annual rainfall), the Russian River (42") and Burgundy, France (28")². In addition, the wet winter-dry summer rainfall pattern is similar to the Russian River Valley and distinctly different from that of Burgundy with its pattern of precipitation throughout the year.

The rapid drainage of the Highland soils and the infrequent summer rainfall gives the Highlands mandates irrigation for most vineyards. Using regulated drip irrigation, the winegrower is able to precisely control the amount of moisture received by the vine. The heat and wind determine the rate of transpiration, which the grower can monitor to assess stress on the vine and determine when irrigation should take place.

Temperature. As shown in the graph, the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA is definitely cool [Region I, using the Winkler Scale] with 2206 heat summation days. This contrasts with 1924 in Oregon's Willamette Valley and 2580 in the Russian River Valley. The Highlands also have a significantly smaller diurnal temperature variation than other Pinot Noir producing regions. The average difference between the daily low and daily high temperature is 18 degrees in the Highlands, compared with 28 degrees in Burgundy, and 33 degrees in the Russian River. The low diurnal variation combined with cool evening temperatures above 50° ensures the long, slow ripening of grapes without developing the high sugar (and alcohol) that comes from warmer climates. On

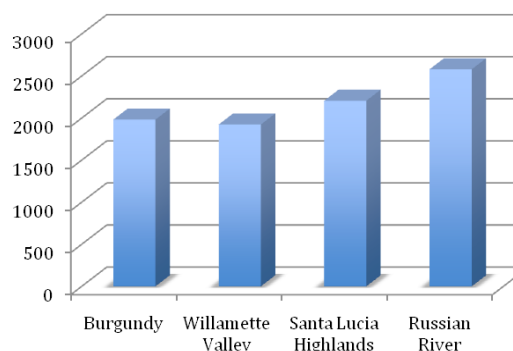
reduced the amount of water entering the aquifer. At the same time, population growth and agriculture have increased pumping of fresh water from the aquifer. One result is saltwater intrusion, first noticed in the 1930s near Monterey and slowly advancing over time to the outskirts of Salinas. The political difficulty of limiting urban growth and the intensive use of water by agriculture make this an almost intractable problem that will one day affect the vineyards of the Santa Lucia Highlands and other AVAs in the Salinas Valley. For now, the main impact on the wine industry is constraints on new wineries and tourism-related development.

The Salinas Valley floor is about 120 feet above sea level with a bench on the western side of the valley that sits 20 plus feet above the valley floor. The bench, which is the name formerly given to the Highlands, gradually rises as one continues west. The vineyards of the Highlands also rise from east to west, reaching a maximum of about 1400 feet above sea level.

Soil

There is remarkable consistency in the soil composition of the Highlands' vineyards. Most are glacial alluvial with a hardpan lying about five feet below the surface¹. In some cases, the hardpan layer is broken up during vineyard development so vine roots can go deep in search of water, but most commonly the hardpan remains in place, rendering the vines highly dependent on irrigation for water. Irrigation is all the more important because the sand and loam soils are highly porous, not retaining water, and once the water reaches the underlying hardpan it quickly flows downhill towards the valley. There are some exceptions to this pattern. Morgan's Double L Vineyard has deep sandy loam soils that allow vine roots to find water, making it unnecessary to irrigate until late August. The other exception to the glacial alluvial pattern is soils of decomposed granite in the upper reaches of the Highlands, an example being the Pisoni vineyard in the southwestern corner of the appellation. In addition, soils located at the crowns of rolling hills are especially thin and poor in nutrients.

Figure 1. Heat Summation Days



¹ While 29 different soil types have been identified in the AVA, just three account for 3/4 of the total. These are the Choalar Loam (48% of the total), Arroyo Seco Gravelly Sandy Loam (18% of the total), and Placencia Sandy Loam (8% of the total).

² Data from Mark Greenspan, http://www.santaluciahighlands.com/pdfs/6719_SLH%20Climate.pdf

a daily basis, temperatures peak shortly after noon and cooling winds begin to blow in around 3 PM. In contrast, vineyards further inland tend to see peak temperatures later in the afternoon.

Fog. Low temperatures are mainly the result of the evening and morning fog and brisk ocean wind that blows much of the day. The fog provides humidity, with the accompanying risk of botrytis (which requires frequent spraying with sulphur), and shields the vines from the morning sun, reducing the hours of sunlight and heat in the vineyard and contributing to the slow, even ripening of grapes so critical to the development of phenological ripeness.

The climate of the Santa Lucia Highlands varies significantly by latitude and altitude. As one progresses from the northernmost vineyard, at Mer de Soleil, to the southernmost vineyard, at Olson Ranch, a distance of about 18 miles, average daily temperatures rise by about 0.5 degree per mile. Thus, southern vineyards are warmer than northern vineyards. This happens because the fog rolls in from north to south and rolls out from south to north. Thus northern vineyards are both the first and the last to feel the fog. Fog that burns off by 9 AM in the south may not burn off until after 10 AM in the north. Fortuitously, the fogs become weakest and often disappear altogether just when needed, in September and October, allowing temperatures to rise and grapes to ripen for harvest.



Wind. Differences in temperature between the hot, southern stretches of the Central Valley and the cool Monterey Bay give rise to persistent, strong winds throughout much of the growing season. The wind serves to rapidly dry the vines after the fog rises or after the rare summer storm, reducing the risk of fungal infections. It also provides an inhospitable environment for many of the pests that make life difficult for the vine, reducing the need for the use of pesticides. Furthermore, the wind contributes to rapid leaf evaporation, which requires that the grower carefully monitor the stress on vines and determine when to water the vine. Finally, the wind results in thicker skins on the grape, possibly contributing more of the elements that give wine its flavor and color.

Just as the fog weakens prior to harvest, the winds can also change with the north to south ocean breeze replaced by a south to north wind that brings in high, dry temperatures that further help grapes to ripen. However, if these changes in temperature are too abrupt and last too long, they can also result in sugars rising too fast and outpacing the phenological maturity of the fruit. What

appears to be a perfect vintage, such as that of 2005, can degenerate to a mediocre one as a result of such late summer heat spikes.

Altitude. The Highlands climate also changes as one moves up in altitude, moving from east to west. At lower altitudes, the vineyards are covered by early morning fog and receive fewer hours of sunlight per day. The fog also serves to reduce diurnal temperature variations. At higher altitudes, especially above 800 feet, the vineyards remain above the fog with more hours of sunlight, higher daytime temperatures, and larger diurnal temperature variations. Combining altitude and latitude, high altitude, southern vineyards, like the Pisoni Ranch, have a daytime climate significantly hotter and a nighttime temperature significantly cooler than low altitude, northern vineyards, like the Lucia Highlands Vineyard.

Viticulture in the Highlands

The Highlands AVA is a very young wine region, barely thirty-five years old. As a region, it is in its infancy compared to Burgundy where the vine has grown for hundreds of years. This means growers have had very little time to fine tune varieties and clones to particular vineyard sites and microclimates. In fact, the Highlands are on just their second generation of plantings, with the original plantings of the 1970s gradually being replaced by new varieties, new clones, and new rootstock. While there is a large rise in altitude from east to west with significant changes in temperature, light, soil and diurnal temperature changes it appears to bear little relation to the varieties and clones being grown. It's difficult to believe that thirty-five years from now one will not find a different pattern of plantings as a result of new experience and, perhaps, global warming.

The high quality fruit produced in the Highlands today is no accident. It reflects a very rapid learning curve dating from the first generation of plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and other varieties in the early 1970s. Wine growers have learned a great deal about which grapes do best in the cool climate of the Highlands. They've also learned about trellising to accommodate the brisk winds, the importance of clones and rootstocks, managing pests, and using environmentally sustainable agricultural practices.

Planting and Training

Vineyard management begins with the planting of the vineyard. One of the first decisions is how to orient the vineyard. Many of the older vineyards in the Highlands are planted east-west, which means grapes can ripen differently on either side of the vine. This also means that growers concerned about having all fruit optimally ripe must make two or more passes through the vineyard at harvest time. Planting north-south largely avoids this problem. Vineyards planted north-south also suffer less from the strong winds, which flow through the vineyard rather than hitting the vine rows head on. Newer vineyards in the Highlands, like Gary Francioni's Sierra Mar and Soberanes Vineyards, are thus planted north-south.

Planting new vineyards or replanting old ones also means making decisions about planting density. There has been some movement towards higher density plantings in the Highlands, with 5x8 plantings being the norm today. While some vineyards are more densely planted—e.g., Garys' Vineyard is 5x6—most growers are skeptical of the benefits of higher density. Higher density is usually advocated as a means of stressing the vine, but given the cool, dry climate and poor soils of the Highlands the optimal amount of stress on the vine can be obtained through regulated irrigation. Regulated drip irrigation has been ubiquitous in the AVA since the 1980s.

Some of the first vineyards planted in the Highlands were often self-rooted and trained in what's called California Sprawl. Today the risk of phylloxera has resulted in everyone grafting to rootstock, which also allows the grower to select rootstock best adapted to the SLH growing conditions. Similarly, growers today almost universally use VSP trellising, although there has been some experimentation (e.g., Belle Glos' Trentino Pergola).

Clonal Selection

One of the most important changes in the SLH vineyard over the past 35 years has to do with clonal selection. The earliest plantings of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay were to the California clones most popular in the 1970s. The advent of the so-called Dijon clones of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the 1980s and 1990s gave growers a larger menu from which to choose and contributed to a much larger number of clones in the SLH vineyard. For example, Dan Lee now has 14 different clones of Pinot Noir in his Double L Vineyard at Morgan.

While clones do make a difference in yield, appearance, and flavor, no single clone is viewed as being consistently superior. Even older clones no longer widely planted, like the Martini Pinot Noir clone, contribute unique characteristics due to their age. One clone may do better in one year and one locale, while another does better in another year and locale. Having a variety of clones in the vineyard reduces the risk of one clone doing poorly and increases the opportunities to the winemaker in creating a final product.

Pinot Noir Clones. The first plantings of Pinot Noir in the Highlands were almost entirely of the Martini, Swan, and Pommard clones, which were popular throughout California in the 1970s. Many of these original plantings were on their own rootstock. The Martini clone came from experimental plantings of Louis Martini from Inglenook Winery budwood; the Martini clone has been used extensively for sparkling wines. The Swan clone comes from Joseph Swan's 1969 plantings at his Russian River Valley Joseph vineyard, but its true origins are murky. It reputedly is a suitcase clone from the Domaine Romanée-Conti³. In any case, the Swan clone has long been a California favorite. The Pommard clone was imported to California in the 1940s by Dr. Harold Olmo of UC Davis. It is known for its mid-palate weight and rich dark fruit.

While the Martini, Swan and Pommard clones are still planted, attention in recent years has been focused on the Dijon clones, especially 115, 667, 777, 828, and 943. Clone 115 is the most important clone from the past decade and can stand on its own. Clone 667 has high-toned aromas but is firmly tannic and thus often blended. Clone 777 is dark and rich. The 828 clone is new and very promising. And clone 943 is also new with huge aromas and very small berries.

Not all new plantings are of the Dijon clones. Steve McIntyre plans to replace his old, self-rooted and lightly colored Pinot Noir with the Wadenswil clone. Finally, of course, there is the so-called Pisoni Clone. Reputedly a suitcase clone from La Tâche but also possibly imported from the Carmel Valley, it is the clone Gary Pisoni first planted at the Pisoni Ranch in 1982. Whatever its origin, it has proven to be a superb clone for the Santa Lucia Highlands and has been widely propagated, including at the famous Garys' Vineyard.

Chardonnay Clones. As in most of California at the time, the Chardonnay planted in the Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay in the early 1970s was mainly the Wente clone (UCD 2A) and UC Davis clones 4 and 5. Most of those original plantings are still bearing fruit. However, most of those vines are also self-rooted and at risk of phylloxera. In addition, some of the old Wente clone plantings, such as those at Talbot's Sleep Hollow, carry a latent virus. Clones 4 and 5 yielded large clusters and large crops. For these and other reasons new plantings mainly use the Dijon clones, especially 76, 95, and 96. All three clones were certified in France by ENTAV [Etablissement National Technique Mélioration de la Viticulture] in 1971 and have been especially successful in the cool climate Willamette Valley.

The Wente clone still remains popular, especially with winemakers wishing to produce a more voluptuous, tropically-flavored wine. Although it's characterized by moderate yields, it has a rich mouthfeel, and tropical and Muscat characteristics. When blended with the

³ The term "suitcase clone" suggests vine cutting expeditions in the middle of the night, but all *vitis vinifera* in California had to be imported from Europe in one form or another, either surreptitiously as in the case of the Swan clone or transparently as in the efforts in the early 1950s by Dr. Olmo to bring cuttings from France to California with the support of the California Wine Advisory Board.

leaner, high acid Dijon clones the combination can be spectacular, as with Pessagno's Intrinity Chardonnay.

Syrah Clones. The two dominant clones of Syrah in the Santa Lucia Highlands are the Estrella clone and the French ENTAV clone 470. The Estrella clone [also called Bien Nacido] is named after the Estrella River Winery in Paso Robles, which started its Syrah vineyard in 1975 with cuttings from the Chapoutier vineyard in Hermitage. It has berry and jam fruit characteristics. Clone 470 has large, loose clusters and relatively low yields and has a reputation for being structured and expressive. The Paraiso Vineyard and Garys' Vineyard are planted to the Estrella clone. Rosella's Vineyard Syrah is a mix of Estrella and the 877 clone, a clone which has been especially popular in the Central Coast. The Boekenoog Vineyard uses the 470 clone. And Morgan's Double L Vineyard is planted to both the 470 and 383 clones; the latter is known for its depth of color and spicy pepper flavor.

Vine Pests

The growing conditions in the Santa Lucia Highlands generally minimize the exposure to serious vine pests. But there are some problems. One is the risk of phylloxera infections in the old, own-rooted vineyards. In addition, there are problems with nematodes and powdery mildew, and in the future the "Syrah Decline" may become a problem.

Nematodes. The presence of nematodes is a particular problem in the lighter and sandier soils of the Highlands. Nematodes are microscopic roundworms that feed on plant roots; they can also cause root galls that disrupt the uptake of nutrients and water. Nematodes can also spread viruses, especially the grape fanleaf virus. The risk of nematodes is increased when vines are planted on land previously used for crops (e.g., apples) that are hosts to nematodes, which is true of some of the vineyard sites in the Highlands. Nematodes can be prevented in part by using resistant rootstock, such as the 5C used in many places in the Highlands. Once infected, a vineyard must lie fallow for some time to allow roots and the parasitic nematodes to die.

Powdery mildew. Powdery mildew is another problem, mostly resulting from the humidity brought in by fog. It's treated by plucking leaves to allow air to penetrate the vines. Keeping yields down also helps. Growers also spray, either with sulphur or, in the case of organic vineyards like Morgan, with Stylet-Oil made from the chrysanthemum flower.

Syrah Decline. This disease is found in many parts of the world. While its cause is viral, researchers are still trying to understand its causes and manifestations⁴. To date the problem appears most severe in warm, inland areas of the Central Coast. While not yet a problem in the Highlands, growers in the warmer parts of the AVA must remain vigilant and select clones and rootstock less susceptible to the virus.

Organic and Sustainable Growing Practices

There is also an incipient trend in the region towards organic or sustainable growing practices. The Highlands are amazingly pest-free, what with the cool temperatures, low rainfall, and strong winds, which makes it a natural for organic farming. The Central Coast Viticultural Team [CCVT], of which Rich Smith was one of the founding members, is the principal certifying agency. The McIntyre Vineyard, the Sarmento Vineyard, and the Doctor's and Lone Oak Vineyards at Paraiso have been certified sustainable by the CCVT. An alternative certifying agency is the Monterey County Certified Organic [MCCO] program run by the Monterey County Agriculture Department. Morgan's Double L Vineyard is the first to be certified organic by this agency. Still another certifying agency is the international Bureau Veritas, which grants the International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 14001 certification for responsible environmental management; Gallo's Olson Ranch has received 14001 certification.

The Vineyards of the Highlands

The Santa Lucia Highlands is unique among California's AVA's in that it is a *grower's AVA*, not a *producer's AVA*. What does that mean? Only a small percentage of fruit grown in the SLH is used by the growers themselves to produce SLH-designated wines. Growers like Hahn, Morgan, and Pessagno use most their fruit to produce their own wines. But they are the exception. Boekenoogen, McIntyre, and Pisoni are more the norm, selling up to 95 percent of their crop to other producers—like A.P. Vin, Siduri, and Testarossa—who own no vineyards in the Highlands (see Table 1). Some growers, like Morgan and Constellation, are both grower-producers, meaning they make wine from the grapes of their own vineyards, and are also purchaser-producers, meaning they also purchase SLH fruit from other growers.

No reliable statistics exist on how SLH fruit is used, but the majority is currently used to produce non-SLH designated wines. Some of this fruit is sold, and some is used by growers themselves for blending purposes. The distinct, cool-climate SLH fruit not only makes superb

⁴ A virus called RSPaV, or Rupestris Stem Pitting Associated Virus, is one possible candidate.

wines on its own but, also, improves the blends of wines that are ultimately sold with Central Coast, Monterey County, or California denominations. For example, fruit from Caymus Mer Soleil Vineyard contributes to Caymus' popular California Conundrum wine, and grapes from Gallo's Olson Ranch Vineyard contributes both to Gallo's Mirrasou wines as well as its Bridlewood SLH Chardonnay.

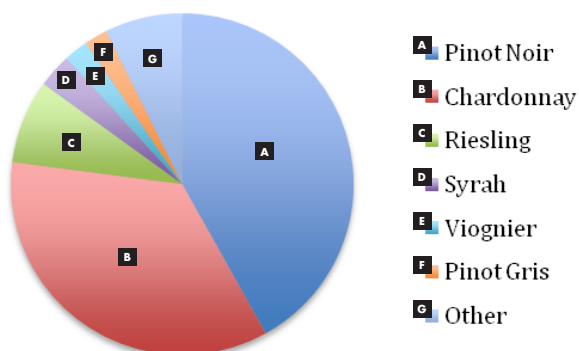
Table 1: SLH Growers and Producers (with examples)

	SLH-Designated Wines	Non-SLH-Designated Wines
Grower - Producer	Hahn, Morgan, Pessagno, Gallo-Bridlewood	Gallo-Mirassou, Mer Soleil-Caymus
Purchaser - Producer	A.P. Vin, Morgan, Siduri, Testarossa	Constellation, J Lohr, Edna Valley

Given that this is a grower's AVA, the vineyards are extremely important. The Santa Lucia Highlands' 6100 acres of vineyards are divided into more than fifty vineyards. Many of these are identified on the Map of the Santa Lucia Highlands Vineyards given at the end of this report. Annex 1 to this report provides more detail on the Highlands' most famous vineyards, including Doctor's, Garys', Pisoni, Rosella's, Sarmento, Sleepy Hollow, Tondré Grapefield and E. & J. Gallo's Olson Ranch. Basic information on all of the vineyards, including the varietals grown and the wineries that purchase grapes and make wines from them, is given in Annex 2.

Grape Plantings

The vineyards of the Highlands are mainly planted to just two varietals—Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which respectively account for 43 percent and 36 percent of total vineyard acreage. As noted earlier, the varietal composition of the Highlands has evolved over time, with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir acreage increasing as growers came to realize how well they suit the Highlands terroir and how poorly does a varietal like Cabernet Sauvignon. As shown in the pie chart, Riesling ranks third in terms of planting acreage, but Syrah is gaining in popularity.



Wines of the The Santa Lucia Highlands

No region in California today is more celebrated for the quality of its Pinot Noir and Chardonnay than is the Santa Lucia Highlands. Although it is a relatively young AVA, its wines regularly receive high ratings from wine writers and consumers who appreciate fine wine. And it is not uncommon to find the wines of Santa Lucia Highlands in the best restaurants and wine shops throughout the United States. In essence, the wines of the SLH have arrived and are expected to get only better in the coming years.

What are the characteristics of Santa Lucia Highlands wines? What are the distinctive characteristics of the region's Chardonnay and Pinot Noir? Are there noteworthy differences among the wines of individual vineyards? Is SLH Pinot Noir different from the Pinot Noirs one finds in Russian River or the Sonoma Coast? These are the questions we tackle in this section. Not surprisingly, we do not offer definitive answers, but rather some preliminary observations and insights based on our tasting of most of the wines of the SLH wines on the market. (See Tasting Notes and Ratings following this section)

Wine Styles

In general, the wines of the Santa Lucia Highlands reflect the geographic and climatic features of the AVA. These features—described fully in the previous section—produce wines we associate with cool climate growing conditions not unlike those of the northern Sonoma Coast or New Zealand. SLH wines are noteworthy for their freshness, ripe flavors and lively acidity. While ripe phenolically, they are not overly ripe or alcoholic and their tannins are generally ripe and round with finishes long lasting on the palate. In sum, cool climate Pinot Noir from the Highlands offers some of the most pleasurable wine drinking experiences.

Pinot Noir. From our tastings we have identified two main styles of SLH Pinot Noir. One of the styles we call *bold dark fruit*, the other *elegant red fruit*. Both are unmistakably California owing to their ripe fruit character. However they are different from each other due to their vineyard sources and the predilections of the winemakers. To illustrate these differences we closely analyzed our tasting notes for more than 15 wines from two of the Highland's top vineyards: Garys' Vineyard and Rosella's Vineyard. Garys' sits in the middle of the Highlands and rises to 300-500 feet. It was planted in 1997 with the Pisoni clone in a north-south configuration. Rosella's Vineyard is just north of Garys' and was planted in 1996 with the Pisoni clone and Dijon clone 828 and has a southeast exposure. Here is what we found.

Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noirs are generally bold in style. They are almost always dark ruby in color when young and display fruit which is usually black cherry to plum in



Dan and Donna Lee Morgan

Morgan is one of the Highland's finest producers. While the winery itself is situated in Salinas, Dan and Donna Lee (pictured at left), the owners of Morgan, have their roots in the Double L Vineyard of the Santa Lucia Highlands. Unlike

many of the vineyard owners of the Highlands who are the descendants of Swiss-Italian immigrant vegetable and livestock farmers, Dan and Donna Lee moved to the Santa Lucia Highlands because of their belief in its future as a wine growing area. Dan currently serves as President of the Santa Lucia Highlands Artisans.

Dan was born and raised in a small town in California's Central Valley. After high school he attended the University of California, Davis to study veterinary medicine but instead decided to make a career in wine. Upon graduation he first went to work for Jekel Vineyards in Monterey County, then moved to Durney Vineyard in Carmel Valley and began consulting with other wineries. In 1982 Dan and Donna established the Morgan Winery, and in 1984 they purchased a state-of-the-art winemaking facility in Salinas. In 1996 they bought the 65 acre Double L Ranch at the northern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands and planted it to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Morgan was one of the first growers to plant in a North-South orientation, plant 5x6 density, and plant multiple clones in the same vineyard using 8 different rootstocks. They harvested their first Double L crop in the fall of 1999. The Lees named the ranch the Double L, short for Double Luck, for their identical twin daughters. The Double L has been farmed organically since its founding and is certified by Monterey County Certified Organic.

Like most of the winemakers in the Highlands, Dan also grows and purchases grapes from other parts of Monterey, which gives him access to warmer climate varieties like Grenache and Touriga Nacional, sold under his Lee Family Farm label. Not only has he mastered the art of making world class, Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, but he has demonstrated that the Highlands can produce some of the best, cool climate Syrah in all of California.

aroma and flavors. The wines tend towards more earthy traits, suggesting mushrooms, lome and brush. The palates are generally dark in fruit flavor and regularly display a kirsh-like quality. These bold style wines are produced by wineries such as A.P. Vin, Loring, Kosta Browne, and Siduri.

Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noirs, on the other hand, are generally lighter in color than those of Garys' and are also more elegant. They have medium ruby hues and red berry fruit (cherry and raspberry) rather than the black cherry and raspberry fruit found in the wines of Garys' Vineyard. While they generally reveal red berry flavors and elegance on the palate they can take on darker fruit characteristics. The wines of A.P. Vin illustrate the contrasts in style, as do those of Kosta Browne, Loring, Morgan, Pelerin, and Siduri, to name but a few.

Chardonnay. The Chardonnay of the Santa Lucia Highlands also benefits from the cool climate and other growing conditions on the bench. Vineyards that grow Chardonnay such as Sleepy Hollow, Talbott, Mer Soleil, and others, are widely recognized as producing some of the finest Chardonnay in California. The quality and distinctiveness of the wines is as much due to the high quality of the vineyards as it has to do with the winemaking itself. In our tastings of selected Chardonnays from the Highlands we were struck by the restrained use of oak and malolactic fermentation, the purity of fruit flavors ranging from tropical (usually from the Wente clone) to citrus and melon aromas and flavors associated with Dijon clones⁵. Highlands Chardonnays also display lovely acidity and crisp flavors on the finish making them ideal food wines. The fact that Chardonnay is picked relatively early, prior to early autumn heat spikes, means there is relatively little vintage to vintage quality variation.

In addition to clonal selection and winemaking, there are some stylistic differences that our tastings suggest come from different vineyards or blocks within vineyards. For example, it is widely believed that the grapes grown in vineyards in the southern part of the Highlands tend to be fleshier and riper due to the difference in exposure to the cool air that rolls in from the Monterey Peninsula. Thus Hahn's Doctor's Vineyard, which is located in the southern Highlands, tends to produce riper flavors in its grapes than Hahn's Lone Oak Vineyard a few miles to the North.

This combination of factors—vineyard location, clones, and winemaking—play an important role in explaining the styles of Chardonnay we observed in our tastings. On the one hand we have the ripe, rich, tropical fruit style found in the Chardonnays of Boekenooogen, Hahn, Lucia, Morgan, Pessagno, and Talbott. On the other hand is the lean, crisp, orchard fruit style found in the wines of Bridlewood, Manzoni, McIntyre, Mer Soleil, and Paraiso. Of course, some producers make wines of more than one style. Thus both Pessagno and Testarrosa make

⁵ See the *International Wine Review* Report #10 on Unoaked Chardonnay for a full discussion of malolactic fermentation, its effects on the wine, and how it can best be managed in the winery.

a tropically styled wine from Sleepy Hollow fruit, while also making orchard style Chardonnays—from the Lucia Highlands Vineyard in the case of Pessagno and from Rosella’s Vineyard in the case of Testarossa.

Syrah. Syrah is not yet widely planted in the Santa Lucia Highlands, but it’s becoming more popular. Still, we were able to taste and evaluate several Syrahs for this report—from Boekenooogen, Lucia, Morgan, Paraiso, Testarossa, and Wrath. These wineries source their fruit from a number of vineyards, including Doctor’s, Double L, Garys’, Pisoni, and Rosella’s.

We find that as a class these wines share the characteristics of cool-climate Syrah noted in our Report # 4 on Syrah of California and the Northwest. These traits are dark fruit, high natural acidity, and notes of earth, leather, black pepper, and smoked meat. For example, of the Morgan 2007 Syrah Tierra Mar we said “it has effusive aromas of soke, roasted meat, pepper and violets that give way to a lush palate of dark red and black fruit and grilled meat with chocolate notes.” In short, SLH Syrahs are reminiscent of Syrah grown in another cool-climate region, the Northern Rhone.

California Syrah is the Rodney Dangerfield of red wine—“it can’t get no respect.” But our tasting of SLH wines suggests it definitely should. We only tasted twelve Syrah wines for this report, but our assessment of those wines is overwhelmingly positive. Of these twelve wines only three scored lower than 90 points. The customer seeking a low risk, extremely flavorful red wine has to do no more than ask for a “Santa Lucia Highlands Syrah, please.”

Vintages.

The Highlands is, like Burgundy, the type of cool, marginal site that allows grapes, and Pinot Noir especially, to attain full ripeness in terms of sugars, phenolics, and varietal flavors. However, the climate also presents its challenges. One challenge that faces growers on a regular basis is coulure—poor fruit set as a result of long cool wet weather during bloom. A protracted set produces the familiar “chicks and hens” – grape bunches with both normal sized, ripe fruit and small berries without seeds. The result is low yields and unevenly ripened fruit that is reflected in the wine. Aggressive green harvesting and double sorting can reduce but not eliminate the problem.

Heat spikes are another serious problem in some vintages. Santa Lucia Highlands summers are characterized by moderate temperatures, morning fog, and cooling winds from the sea, but come late August and September the pattern may reverse, bringing warm, dry winds from the interior and sharply raising temperatures for several days. As a result, sugar levels in the fruit rise quickly, and phenolic ripening fails to keep pace. Depending on the time and duration of the heat spike, the quality of the fruit can seriously deteriorate.

Coulure and heat spikes are the two most important factors affecting the quality of vintages in the Highlands. Surprisingly for California, the vintage differences are quite significant.

Santa Lucia Highlands Vintages 2005-2009

Year	Vintage	Rating
2005	The 2005 vintage was almost ideal with cool temperatures, an extended growing season, and the absence of both coulure at the beginning of the season and heat pikes at the end. More than one observer has called this a “killer vintage”.	Excellent
2006	The growing season got off to a good start but heat spikes for several days around Labor Day accelerated sugar accumulation (fruit development) and adversely affected what could have been an outstanding vintage. Chardonnays are ripe but not as flavorful as in 2007. Pinot Noirs tend toward dark fruit and earthy flavors.	Good
2007	This was the best growing season in recent memory. There was perfect flowering and fruit setting and excellent weather throughout the growing season and the harvest. The Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are showing beautifully. They’re ripe, flavorful and balanced with good fruit character and velvety smooth.	Very Good
2008	Cool weather [55°-65°] in May leads to protracted [2-3 weeks] flowering and fruit set in May at some vineyards, producing clusters with hens and chicks. The harvest occurred under good weather conditions. Thus far, the Chardonnays are showing well, but it is too early to evaluate the Pinot Noir.	Good to Very Good
2009	Late veraison followed by heat spikes in late August led to sugar accumulation advancing quicker than phenolic ripeness; grapes picked early were of lower quality. But cool weather followed and later ripening grapes did well. Some growers had lighter than normal yields, but overall quality is expected to be very good.	Potentially Very Good

The Economics of SLH Wines

Santa Lucia Highlands wines do not sell for under \$30 the bottle, with a few exceptions for non-vineyard designated wines by Hahn, Morgan, Paraiso, Pessagno, and Puma Road. This puts most SLH wines in the rarified atmosphere of \$35 Chardonnays, \$40 Syrahs, and \$50 Pinot Noirs. Given our evaluations of the wines, they are well worth these prices, but they are not necessarily an easy sell in tough economic times.

The high cost of Highlands fruit is one driver of wine prices. SLH fruit has always been pricier than fruit grown elsewhere in Monterey County. The average price per ton of grapes in Monterey County was \$1186 in 2008 with an average yield of five tons per acre. SLH fruit is more expensive. Pinot Noir grapes sell at prices as high as \$5000 per ton with relatively low yields (3 – 3 ½ tons per acre). Vineyards with higher yields receive lower prices, while those with lower yields receive higher prices, with total revenue being about the same (on the order of \$10 thousand/acre) for both. Both Chardonnay and Syrah sells at lower prices with higher yields. Syrah yields about five tons per acre and sells for about \$2000 per ton⁶.

The production of grapes is costly in the Highlands. When they appear on the market, which is rare, established vineyards sell above \$40 thousand per acre. High land costs combined with low yields translate into high costs of production. Also contributing to costs is the need to pump water from the Salinas aquifer on the valley floor. Either that or take one's chances at drilling deep wells, as Belle Glos, Pisoni, and Boekenoogen have done. Furthermore, restrictions on new winery construction have led to some vintners transporting grapes long distances to processing facilities far from the AVA.

The law of supply and demand dictates that the prices of SLH vineyards and their fruit is likely to remain high. The high quality of Highlands fruit is likely to continue to drive demand. At the same time, the AVA is almost fully planted out. There is some land now being used for alternative crops—about a thousand acres of lemon orchards, prickly pear cactus, etc.—which could be converted to vineyards, but at present those alternative crops generate as much profit as growing wine grapes so there is little incentive to undertake the cost of creating new vineyards. In general, the supply of SLH fruit is unlikely to grow significantly in the future.

Land Use Limits

Monterey County environmental and land use regulations contribute to the high cost of vineyards and raise the costs of entry into the Highlands, creating a financial obstacle to new, young winemakers who wish to follow in the footsteps of pioneers like Rich Smith or Nicky Hahn. The requirement that new vineyard estates be a minimum of forty acres in size and environmental regulations that raise the costs of winery construction offer insurmountable financial hurdles to promising young winemakers wishing to create their own wineries in the Highlands. This is perhaps the reason one finds a predominance of vineyards owned by large wine corporations and established families in the Highlands. It's also a reason why a relatively small percentage of grapes grown in the Highlands are made into wines by wineries within the AVA. Some of the Highlands most famous grower-producers make their wine at facilities outside the AVA.

Looking to the future, there might well be more wineries established in the Highlands if Monterey County approves a proposed Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan. The AWCP is intended to facilitate the development of wineries along a corridor in the central and southern Salinas Valley. If approved, the AWCP would reduce the cost of entry for small growers by establishing a permit process for development of as many as fifty wineries and ten off-site tasting rooms along the corridor. Of these fifty wineries, as many as forty would be "artisan" wineries, as small as five acres, and ten would be full-scale wineries producing as much as two million cases annually. The AWCP also allows for the establishment of guest houses and restaurants that would attract tourism to the area. While the AWCP appears to be gaining support, its future is far from certain.

⁶ This was in 2008. The economic recession in 2009 has cut Syrah grape prices by more than half.

Santa Lucia Highlands: Tasting Notes and Ratings

The *International Wine Review* team tasted over 100 wines for this report. This is a high proportion of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA designated wines being produced today in California. While many of the wines are crafted by wineries located in the Santa Lucia Highlands, others are from outside. The wines tasted include Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah, and most of them are vineyard designated. Readers not familiar with this AVA will be surprised to learn how many outstanding California wines are being made from Santa Lucia Highlands fruit.

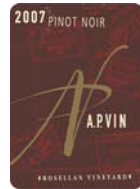
The samples were obtained from national and local distributors and directly from producers. They were tasted at our offices in McLean, VA and during our visit to the Highlands in September 2009. Most of the wines reviewed here are current vintages, which are readily available from the producers or from retailers.

Wines evaluated at our offices were tasted blind with bottles bagged and coded. A tasting session usually consisted of 25 to 30 wines. Wines were organized in flights with their peers. Tastings in the Highlands were held at the wineries with winemakers and vineyard managers.

The i-WineReview rates wines using the 100 point system. We do not write-up wines which receive a rating below 85 points. The ratings are as follows:

- 95-100** A wine of distinction
- 90-94** A wine of outstanding or superior quality
- 85-89** A wine of good to excellent quality
- 84 and below** Not recommended

Reviews that appear in the report are listed in our Tasting Notes Archive on www.i-winereview.com.



A.P. Vin

This artisanal winery located in Lompoc is owned and operated by Andrew P. Vigniello, who also crafts the wine. According to Andrew, his life was changed forever after a first sip of Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir. He found his mentor for making it in Brian Loring of the Loring Wine Company. Adam Lee of Siduri and Michael Browne of Kosta Browne also contributed to Andrew's journey as a winemaker. A.P. Vin produces ripe and big flavored Pinot Noir from Garys' Vineyard and Rosella's Vineyard.

A.P. Vin 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 90

This wine has the ripe black cherry fruit flavors and tannic grip of a young Pinot from Garys' Vineyard. It's medium dark ruby in color with aromas of very ripe, compote-like black cherry fruit. On the palate it reveals ripe black cherry fruit flavors and a full lush mouth feel. The wine is well-balanced with high acidity, tannic grip, and a long persistent finish.

A.P. Vin 2007 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 90

This 2007 vintage of A.P. Vin is unusually dark and earthy for fruit from Rosella's Vineyard. Medium ruby in color, it reveals aromas of black cherry and earth. On the mid-palate it has ripe and tasty dark fruit flavors with a somewhat rustic character. The wine also reveals underlying high acidity and a sustained and flavorful finish.



Belle Glos

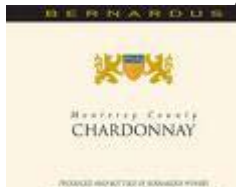


Belle Glos produces distinctive Pinot Noirs from several California AVAs, including the Santa Lucia Highlands. This Pinot Noir is sourced from their 90-acre Las Alturas Vineyard located in one of the highest-altitude and lowest-yielding sites in the Santa Lucia Highlands. All Belle Glos wines including those of Las Alturas Vineyard are ripe, spicy and stylish with bold flavors. The winemaker is Joseph Wagner. (Pictured above pouring his wine for us at the Las Alturas Vineyard.)

Belle Glos 2007 Pinot Noir Las Alturas Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$48) 90

The 2007 Belle Glos Las Alturas Pinot Noir has a velvet palate with layered fruit and toasty oak, finishing long and deep. Medium dark ruby in color, it offers aromas of violets, cassis and smoke and has a soft attack of ripe black cherry fruit with mineral notes. On the palate it is velvety smooth, nicely layered and balanced with toasty oak, excellent acidity and a long lasting finish. The waxed neck bottling is elegant and distinctive. The wine is made from free run juice using commercial yeasts and aged 9-10 months in 60 percent new French barrels.

Bernardus Winery



Founded by Ben (Bernardus) Pon, a Dutch professional sportsman, Bernardus Winery is situated in Carmel Valley on a 220 acre estate consisting of 50 acres of vineyards planted

to Bordeaux varieties. Bernardus' winemaker is Dean De Korth, who studied winemaking in the Loire and has had extensive experience in Burgundy and in local wineries such as Morgan, Talbott and David Bruce. In addition to producing estate bottled wines, Bernardus purchases grapes from Rosella's Vineyard in the SLH for vineyard designated Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Bernardus 2007 Chardonnay Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 88

This Chardonnay from Rosella's Vineyard is light gold in color with aromas of smoky oak, vanilla and ripe pineapple. While rich and creamy on the palate, it reveals light fruit flavors with prominent oak and vanilla highlights. A quintessential Chardonnay from the Highlands.

Bernardus 2006 Pinot Noir Rosella Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$75) 92

The 2006 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard is light ruby red with a garnet rim. It has a lovely nose of cherry with smoky vanilla notes. On the attack it is velvety smooth and has rich red cherry fruit flavors, vanilla and smoke on the palate. Finishes long. It is hard to beat the fruit from Rosella's Vineyard.

Bernardus 2006 Pinot Noir Tondre Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$20) 91

The 2006 Pinot Noir Tondré Vineyard is medium ruby red and has a nose of spicy cherry with a light cola note. The attack is rich, and the palate offers dark red fruit and spice with good intensity of flavor. The wine is well-balanced, beautifully integrated, and has a nice long finish Well done!



Boekenooen

Established in 1998 by John Boekenooen, this 100-acre family vineyard and winery located in the Highlands replaced the family's cattle

ranch business, which had existed for five generations in the Salinas Valley. While 90% of the grapes are sold, Boekenooen produces a Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah.

Boekenooen 2007 Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$36) 89

Yellow gold straw in color, this is a ripe and very flavorful Chardonnay showing stone fruit on the nose. Clean tasting with a lanolin-rich mouth feel with butter and lees notes and flavors of mango, melon and ripe pear fruit. Fermented in stainless steel and aged in two-year old French oak barrels. The end product is well-balanced with very good acidity for a wine this rich. Very well done!

Boekenooen 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$39) 88

The 2007 Pinot Noir is young but shows lots of promise with a velvet and lush palate. Medium dark ruby in color, it shows fresh black cherry aromas with graphite and herbal notes. Soft attack with a velvet smooth mouth feel and a rich palate with layers of sweet dark fruit and mineral notes. The tannins are ripe but firm with an astringent note on the finish, but the wine is still young and is likely to improve with time. Produced from Dijon clones 113 and 115.

Boekenooen 2007 Syrah Santa Lucia Highlands (\$36) 87

The Boekenooen Syrah has appealing berry fruit flavors and is ready to drink now. Opaque purple colored, there's inky blackberry fruit with black pepper notes on the nose. Very firm attack of moderately concentrated blackberry and boysenberry fruit, pepper and graphite. Shows good acidity with dry tannins on the finish.



Hahn SLH Estate

Nicolaus "Nicky" Hahn and Gaby established their first vineyards in the late 1970s in Monterey County. The Hahn Estate now owns 650 acres of

SLH vineyards ranging in elevation from 200 to 1,200 feet. Hahn wines are 100% produced in the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. Hahn Estate is the primary wine brand produced by Hahn, who also produces Lucienne in the SLH and Smith & Hook and Cycles Gladiator elsewhere in California and Copa del Rey in Chile. The winery is now known as Hahn Estate/Smith & Hook Winery. Hahn previously owned the popular Rex Goliath label, which it sold to Constellation Brands in 2005. Paul Clifton is winemaker and Andy Mitchell is vineyard manager at this attractive estate, which is a popular tourist destination in the SLH.

Hahn SLH Estate 2006 Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$25) 90

The very appealing 2006 Chardonnay has an intense yellow gold color with tropical fruit, vanilla, and camphor on the nose. The palate reveals ripe flavors of pineapple and notes of butterscotch and smoke. The wine is nicely balanced and finishes long.

Hahn SLH Estate 2007 Pinot Gris Santa Lucia Highlands (\$20) 89

Pale straw in color, this is a successful Pinot Gris showing very fragrant spicy white flowers with a mint note. It has a lovely, ripe, and creamy palate of lush mango and tropical fruit. Well balanced with good acidity and freshness and a flavorful finish.

Hahn SLH Estate 2006 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$29) 89

This attractive purple ruby SLH Pinot Noir gives everything you could ask for in a moderately priced Pinot Noir. It offers aromas of violets, black cherry, smoke and earth and a velvety smooth palate of dark plum and spice with round and full with sweet vanilla notes. It also has a firm finish with good acidity and balance.



hope & grace

This Napa Valley winery is a personal project of winemaker, Charles Hendricks who has been making wine for over two decades. The project began in

2001 when Charles Hendricks had the opportunity to purchase Pinot Noir grapes from Robert Talbott's Sleepy Hollow Vineyards. He has since produced six Pinot Noir vintages from Sleep Hollow Vineyard. In 2007 his Pinot Noir is sourced from Doctor's Vineyard, another excellent source of Santa Lucia Highlands fruit. The winery produces about 2,000 cases of hand crafted Chardonnay, Malbec, Cabernet and Pinot Noir.

Hope & Grace 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 90

The 2007 Pinot Noir from Hope & Grace shows vibrant, dark cherry fruit with just a touch of toasty oak. It is a lovely, well-balanced wine with a fruit forward attack of pure dark cherry fruit and notes of toasty oak. Shows moderate complexity and a nice long fruit driven finish.

Kosta Browne



A highly successful, Sebastapol boutique winery launched in 2001 by Dan Kosta and Michael Browne in partnership with Chris Costello. The winery produces a variety of Pinot Noirs from Sonoma

Coast and several single vineyard wines from the Russian River Valley and Santa Lucia Highlands. Stylistically the wines are New World. They are ripe, fruit rich and highly extracted, yet can show elegance. The owners recently sold controlling interest in the winery to the Vincraft Group.

Kosta Browne 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$125) 91

The 2007 Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir from Kosta Browne is powerful, yet elegant. It has a dark ruby hue with attractive perfumed aromas of dark red fruit, oak spice, and forest floor. It is delicate on the attack with mouth-filling fruit and a superbly balanced palate with ripe tannins and a lingering finish.

Kosta Browne 2007 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$125) 92

This lush, complex Pinot Noir shows Rosella's Vineyard at its best. Medium ruby in color, there's an effusive nose of candied red berries, smoke, forest floor, and hints of mushroom. It has a soft, lush attack of red fruit with a touch of toast and herbs. It is nicely balanced and elegant with a long finish.



La Rochelle Winery

La Rochelle Winery is based in Livermore, California, and works with vineyard partners throughout Oregon and California. In the Santa Lucia Highlands it sources grapes from the Sleepy Hollow

Vineyard, Garys' Vineyard, Paraiso Vineyard and the Smith-Lindley/Sarmento Vineyard. The wines are full flavored and attractive examples of different vineyard sites in the SLH.

La Rochelle 2007 Pinot Noir Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 90

This Sleepy Hollow Pinot Noir has a ripe, velvet smooth palate with richly, concentrated fruit. Dark ruby with a purple core, it reveals earth and dark plum fruit aromas with smoky notes. Red plum and black fruit flavors on the palate with round tannins and a long finish. Consists of the Martini and a variety of Dijon clones.

La Rochelle 2006 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$60) 90

The 2006 Garys' Vineyard is beautifully crafted with great purity of fruit and superb overall balance. It's dark ruby red in color with dark red cherry with kirsch, vanilla and herbal notes on the nose. Beautiful pure red berry fruit on the palate with notes of toasted oak and vanilla. Firm round tannins with great balance and persistent flavors on the finish.

La Rochelle 2006 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 88

The Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir is an attractive wine with good complexity. It's medium dark ruby garnet fading to the rim. Mushroom, forest floor, and mineral nose. Soft, lush attack of dark fruit with smoky oak and vanilla notes. Nice long finish of purple berry fruit and earth.



Loring Wine Company

Located in Lompoc, Loring produces Pinots sourced from several AVAs, including the SLH. Owner Brian Loring, a software engineer, is passionate about Pinot Noir and has learned how to make

Pinot from some of California's top producers such as Josh Jensen of Calera and Adam lee of Siduri. His Santa Lucia Highlands Pinots are sourced from Garys' Vineyard and Rosella's Vineyard.

Loring Wine Company 2007 Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 90

This Garys' Vineyard shows the pure, ripe fruit we've come to expect from this vineyard. Dark ruby red in color, there are fruit forward aromas of black raspberry and cherry kirsch, vanilla and herbs. Pure, ripe, dark red berry fruit on the palate with great balance and persistent flavors through to the finish.

Loring Wine Company 2008 Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 90

The 2008 Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir offers lots of red fruit with lovely spice and smoke notes. Medium dark ruby in color, there are effusive scents of spicy red raspberry candy with mushroom notes. Sweet, ripe dark red berry fruit and kirsch on the palate with rich earth, spice and smoke accents. Finishes long and pure.



Lucia

Lucía is an SLH project of Gary Pisoni and sons Jeff and Mark. The grapes for Lucia wines are sourced from their Garys' Vineyard and the Pisoni Vineyard. Gary

oversees all aspects of the project, while son Mark manages the vineyards, and son Jeff crafts the wine. Lucia wines are well made and attractive in terms of flavor and complexity.

Lucia 2007 Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 88

This is an easy-drinking wine of significant richness. Yellow straw in color, it reveals aromas of tropical fruit, smoke and minerals. Flavorful palate of ripe fruit with nicely integrated oak. Hangs together very well.

Lucia 2008 Lucy Rosé of Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$18) 88

A lovely rosé sourced from Pisoni Vineyards and Garys' Vineyard. Displays a medium pink hue with aromas of light cherry and strawberry. Dry and full flavored on the palate with light red fruit and a touch of tangerine zest. Crisp finish with good acidity. Fermented in neutral oak barrels.

Lucia 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 90

A delicious Pinot Noir exhibiting a lovely ruby hue with fresh raspberry and cherry aromas with hints of earth and coffee. On the palate it is silky smooth with good concentration of cherry flavors, excellent acidity and outstanding balance. A very good effort. Sourced from young vines of the Pisoni Vineyard and Garys' Vineyard.

Lucia 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 91

The 2007 Garys' Vineyard is an exceptional Pinot Noir. Dark ruby in color, there's smoky ripe plum and brambly black raspberry fruit with a touch of earth on the nose. Soft, lush attack with a freshly flavored palate showing spice and a touch of vanilla. Nicely balanced with good acidity and tight round tannins and a very long finish.

Lucia 2007 Syrah Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 91

The Garys' Vineyard Syrah is one of the best we've tasted from the Highlands. It has an opaque ruby purple hue and shows spicy black fruit, licorice, and spice aromas. These terrific aromas are followed by a soft attack of concentrated ripe fruit and a velvety smooth mouth feel with a touch of pepper. Still young with excellent acidity and firm round tannins that will benefit from more time in the bottle.

Lucia 2007 Syrah Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 90

The Pisoni Vineyard Syrah is another superb, berry-rich and peppery SLH Syrah. Dark ruby purple in color, it has a lush mouth feel with ripe tannins that makes it somewhat more approachable than the Garys' Vineyard Syrah. Shows lovely perfumed, pure black and blueberry fruit and rich loam aromas. There are ripe and fresh blackberry flavors with notes of black pepper.

Lucienne

First released in 2005, Lucienne Pinot Noirs are high-end, single vineyard bottlings of the Hahn Estate Winery. The grapes for these wines are sourced from small blocks of Hahn Estate's Lone Oak Vineyard and Doctor's Vineyard, both located in the SLH. The two Pinot Noirs reviewed here are of excellent quality and differ in character. The winemaker is Paul Clifton.



Lucienne Vineyards 2007 Pinot Noir Lone Oak Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 89

Hahn Estate's Lucienne displays a medium dark ruby hue and spicy dark red berry fruit with licorice, brown sugar and smoked meat notes. It has a sweet, fruit forward attack of nicely concentrated, predominantly red fruit and spice, ripe tannins and a long finish.

Lucienne Vineyards 2007 Pinot Noir Doctor's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$35) 90

This Lucienne Pinot Noir is a first-rate bottling showing a dark ruby hue and spicy dark red berry fruit with a forest floor note. On the palate it offers a sweet attack of moderately concentrated dark fruit and herbal notes. It also boasts dense and persistent fruit flavors through to a very long finish with cola and spice notes. It is somewhat closed and in need of more bottle aging before it shows its true potential.



Manzoni Estate Vineyard

The Manzoni family have been farmers in the Salinas Valley since their arrival from the Swiss-Italian Alps in the 1920s. Today Mark Manzoni with brother Mike (pictured on the left) farm about 350 acres of row crops and 6 acres of vineyards. The Manzoni estate vineyard is located in the cool, northern part of the SLH. The Manzoni family produces Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah. The three wines reviewed here are new releases tasted at the winery. Steve Pessagno helps make the wines.

Manzoni 2007 Chardonnay Lucia Highlands Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$16) 90

The Manzoni 2007 Chardonnay is steely and crisp with a medium weight palate of lemon and lime citrus flavors. It's an excellent, well-made wine. Medium straw gold, it has a nose of light citrus and smoky oak. Very nicely flavored, medium weight palate of lemon and lime citrus with almond notes. Steely and crisp with excellent acidity and a very good finish.

Manzoni 2007 Pinot Noir Family Estate Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$23) 88-9

This 2007 Pinot Noir from the Manzoni's own vineyard is beautifully balanced and nicely flavored. It's medium dark ruby with aromas of pure ripe cherry, toasted oak and vanilla. Rich, velvet-textured palate of ripe and spicy dark cherry fruit and toast. Excellent balance, firm ripe tannins, and concentrated flavors on the finish.

Manzoni 2007 Family Estate Vineyard Syrah Santa Lucia Highlands (\$24) 91

This dark ruby beauty has an expressive nose of violets, black raspberry and smoke. It is full-flavored on the palate with concentrated blue and black fruit, roasted meat, pepper, and sweet vanilla oak. It also reveals soft round tannins on a long finish. (Just bottled)..



Cru Wines

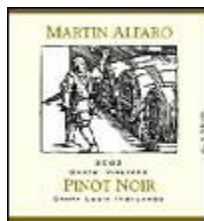
Cru is produced by Mariposa Wine Company based in Madera, California. It was founded in 2003 by Richard Spencer, who with business partner, Michael Conway, also produce Carmichael and Yosemite View brands.

Mariposa 2007 Cru Chardonnay Vigna Monte Nero SLH (\$35) 88

This medium straw 2007 Chardonnay has an expressive nose of tropical fruit, pear and melon with sweet toasted oak. Lovely, creamy mouth feel with underlying delicate tropical and melon fruit and light butterscotch flavors on a nice, long warm finish.

Mariposa 2007 Cru Pinot Noir Vigna Monte Nero SLH (\$35) 87

Medium ruby. Smoky oak and dark cherry aromas with some forest floor notes. Flavors of balsamic, loamy earth, tobacco, and plum fruit. Finishes with persistent plum-like fruit and a slight bitter note.



Martin Alfaro

This small artisanal winery based in Santa Cruz County is owned and operated by Joseph Martin and Richard Alfaro. They produce small lots of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from vineyard sources in Monterey County AVA,

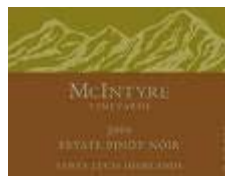
Santa Cruz Mountains AVA and the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA

Martin Alfaro 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$42) 91

What a wonderful expression of Garys' Vineyard fruit! This Martin Alfaro Pinot Noir is dark ruby with spicy, wild black cherry and deep fruit aromas. Beautiful rich attack of concentrated dark red fruit with forest floor, smoke and a dark chocolate note. Finishes with great purity and persistence.

Martin Alfaro 2007 Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$33) 90

Medium dark ruby, this Pinot Noir offers a nose of smoked meat and earth and a rich attack of dark juicy fruit with tobacco and cocoa notes. It is nicely focused and balanced and finishes quite long with ripe tannins and high acidity.



McIntyre Vineyards

McIntyre Vineyards was founded in 1987 by Steve and Kim McIntyre. Steve graduated with a Masters in enology from CSU Fresno and served as managing partner in the Monterey

Wine Company. The McIntyres follow responsible, sustainable viticultural practices.

McIntyre Vineyards 2007 Estate Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$29) 88

The 2007 Estate Chardonnay is an attractive blend of citrus and orchard fruit. It will go beautifully with food. Medium yellow straw with aromas of lemon citrus and tropical fruit with honey and almond notes. Nicely structured palate with delicious apple, pear and melon fruit and lingering toasty oak and lees notes on the finish.

McIntyre Vineyards 2007 Estate Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$42) 90

The 2007 Estate Pinot Noir is on the dark loam and brambly side with good intensity of flavor and a lush palate. It is dark ruby in color with earth,, forest floor and brambly fruit aromas. It shows mainly black fruit on the lush, layered palate with dark loam, cherry, and tar notes. Very nice intensity of fruit with a long finish.



Mer Soleil Vineyard

The Mer Soleil Vineyard is located at the northern end of SLH in one of the coolest and driest grape growing areas of the AVA.

Charlie Wagner, the winemaker and viticulturalist, is one of the finest producers of Chardonnay in California today.

Mer Soleil 2007 Barrel Fermented Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$35) 92

The 2007 Barrel Fermented Chardonnay is a spectacular wine with a complex, beautifully balanced palate and beautifully integrated fruit and oak. Gold straw in color, it shows ripe melon and pear and a hint of camphor on the nose. The gorgeous, complex palate is very rich and suave with crisp acidity and a very long finish.

Mer Soleil 2007 Silver Unoaked Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 90

This medium yellow gold Chardonnay is steely in character but with a ripe nose of tropical fruit and golden raisins. It is soft on the attack with a ripe palate of very mature dried apricot fruit, minerals, and leesy notes. A great example of how rich Chardonnay can taste without oak.



Morgan Winery
Dan and Donna Lee are owners of this winery located in Salinas and its 65-acre organic certified Double L Vineyard situated in the northern section of

the Santa Lucia Highlands. Morgan produces a wide variety of high quality wines sourced from within the SLH and Monterey County as a whole. (see a profile of Dan and Donna Lee in this report)

Morgan 2008 R&D Pinot Gris Francioni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$17) 90

This is a superb Pinot Gris that is every bit as good as Pinot Gris from Oregon. It is light, green-tinged straw, and has a nose of citrus, ripe grapefruit, and a touch of tropical fruit.. The palate has a lovely creamy mouth feel with pear and almond notes. Lovely lingering flavors on the finish. Much improved over the 2007 vintage.

Morgan 2007 Highland Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$26) 91

This Highland Chardonnay is a blend of fruit from several S.L.H vineyards including 40% from Morgan's own Double L Vineyard. It offers an attractive nose of honeysuckle and tropical fruit. On the palate it is rich and creamy with flavors of pear, melon, spice and vanilla highlights. Finishes long. Aged on the lees for 9 months with 35% new French oak.

Morgan 2007 Chardonnay Double L Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$36) 90

The Double L Vineyard Chardonnay is medium yellow gold with attractive aromas of tropical fruit, minerals and toast. It has a rich palate of ripe melon and tropical fruit with lightly toasted oak. Finishes with sweet ripe fruit notes and crisp acidity. Aged for 10 months on the lees with 60% malolactic fermentation.

Morgan 2007 Chardonnay Double L Vineyard Hat Trick Santa Lucia Highlands (\$65) 91

The Chardonnay Double L Vineyard Hat Trick is produced from the Double L Vineyard's three best lots. It exhibits a rich yellow gold color with aromas of rich, smoky tropical and citrus fruit, butterscotch and hazelnut. It has a rich and deeply flavored palate of roasted nuts with a leesy creamy mouth feel and crisp acidity. Fermented in 35% new Burgundian barrels and aged 11 months on lees.

Morgan 2007 Pinot Noir Twelve Clones Santa Lucia Highlands (\$32) 91

Medium ruby red showing ripe dark cherry fruit, smoke, and undergrowth on the nose. Very flavorful palate of spicy dark red fruit with strong earth and vanilla spice notes. Has a long, flavorful finish, again with the fruit shining through and just a touch of cola spice. Excellent intensity of flavor and superbly balanced.

Morgan 2007 Pinot Noir Gary's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$48) 90

The Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir is a focused wine with excellent acidity and bold flavors. Medium dark ruby in color, it offers black cherry, spice and cedar aromas on the nose. On the palate, it is soft with bold cherry, raspberry and plum fruit flavors with cola notes. Finishes with round tannins.

Morgan 2007 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$48) 90

The Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir is an attractive, velvet smooth wine rich in flavor and easy to enjoy. It exhibits a bright medium ruby hue and aromas of pure fresh red berry fruit (cherries, raspberries, cranberries). The attack is soft with a lovely mouth feel, freshness and focus.

Morgan 2007 Pinot Noir Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands (\$48) 91

The Tondre Grapefield Pinot Noir is a beautifully integrated and harmonious wine with some gripping tannins at this stage of its evolution. Medium dark ruby in color, there's red and black berry fruit on the nose with a touch of leather and a round, lush attack of pure spicy fruit.

Morgan 2007 Pinot Noir Double L Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$48) 92

This estate wine displays a medium dark ruby hue and aromas of black cherry, earth, and sweet toasted oak. It has a full lush attack with incredible depth of flavor. Dark cherry underlies notes of sweet oak and brown spice. Long, sweet finish.

Morgan Pinot Noir Double L Vineyard Hat Trick Santa Lucia Highlands (\$85) 93

Like the Double L Vineyard Hat Trick Chardonnay, this bottling is produced from the three best barrels from Morgan's Double L Vineyard. It has a deep ruby hue with aromas of ripe black cherry, blackberry, and cedar. Soft on the attack with flavors of ripe and spicy red berry fruit with notes of earth and leather. The wine is beautifully balanced with a velvet texture and a lengthy fruit rich finish. A superb wine.

Morgan 2007 Syrah Tierra Mar Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 92

This is a classic Northern Rhone style Syrah. Effusive aromas of smoke, roasted meat, pepper and violets give way to a lush palate of dark red and black fruit, grilled meat and chocolate notes. Shows that the Highlands produce more world class wines than Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Morgan 2007 Syrah Double L Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 91

The Double L Vineyard Syrah is lush and loaded with sweet dark cherry fruit with hints of mint and chocolate. Shows integrated flavors, excellent balance, and is full in the mouth, finishing long with raspberry notes. Very attractive.

Morgan 2006 Syrah Double L Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 89

Opaque ruby purple with a nose of blueberries, violets, and black pepper. Fleshy on the palate with excellent blackberry fruit, dark chocolate, spice and liquid violets. Fruity and persistent on the finish.



Paraiso Vineyards is family owned and operated by Rich Smith, son Jason and other members of the Smith family. Rich Smith is a pioneer of the Santa Lucia Highlands having planted his first vineyard in 1973. The

Paraiso Springs Vineyard consists of 400 acres with sixteen different vineyard blocks of varying elevations, micro-climates and soils. The wines are made by Rich Smith's son-in-law, the talented winemaker, David Flemming (See profile of Rich Smith in this report)

Paraiso Vineyards 2007 Paraiso Riesling Santa Lucia Highlands (\$14) 87

The 2007 Riesling exhibits lingering floral and petrol scents. On the palate it offers light green apple fruit flavors, high acidity and overall freshness. This is a good sipper.

Paraiso Vineyards 2007 Paraiso Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$18) 88

The 2007 Chardonnay "Estate" offers light aromas of melon, citrus pear and apple. On the palate it reveals a crisp steely character with high acidity and freshness. Although it spends 10 months in one and two-year old barrels, and passes through malolactic fermentation, it could almost be mistaken for an unoaked Chardonnay.

Paraiso Vineyards 2008 Paraiso Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$25) 90

Medium dark ruby color with inviting aromas of black cherry and plum, and spicy oak. Sweet attack of black cherry, plum, and coffee. Finishes long with firm tannins, high acidity and lingering flavors. Great value.

Paraiso Vineyards 2008 Pinot Noir West Terrace (\$40) 92

The Pinot Noir West Terrace is sourced from Block 7 in the Paraiso Spring Vineyard and an array of Dijon clones (115, 777, 667). Dark ruby. Very aromatic, showing smoke, earth, and dark red fruit aromas. Ripe and flavorful with a silky smooth mouth feel with red fruit, plum and toasty oak. Elegant and approachable with a firm structure and excellent balance. A complex Pinot Noir offering great finesse and flavor. Only a few barrels produced.

Paraiso Vineyards 2008 "Faite" (\$65) 93

Faite represents the pinnacle of Paraiso's four decades of Pinot Noir winemaking. It is also sourced from Block 7 (like the Pinot Noir West Terrace) but the wine is selected from different barrels than West Terrace. Dark ruby in color, it's a big-shouldered wine with intense flavors of concentrated black and red (rich raspberry) fruit and minerals. Focused with velvet-like mouth feel and long lasting on the palate. An intensely flavored and complex wine made only in tiny quantities. Tasted after only 3 weeks in the bottle. Will spend another year in bottle before release.

Paraiso Vineyards 2005 Paraiso Syrah, Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 92

Opaque ruby. Spicy nose of black pepper, inky black fruit, touch of licorice. On the palate, big and juicy of black fruits with violet and dark chocolate notes. Assertive but round tannins. Finishes very long with notes of bitter chocolate and violets. Lovely.



Pessagno

This winery is owned and operated by Steve Pessagno. A former mechanical engineer, Steve earned a degree in Enology from California State University at Fresno in 1986 and went on to work for Jekel

Vineyards and Lockwood Vineyards and also makes the Manzoni wines. He purchased his own winery in 2004. Pessagno produces small quantities of high quality Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, Syrah, Zinfandel and dessert wines.

Pessagno 2007 Chardonnay Lucia Highlands Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$26) 88

The Lucia Highlands Chardonnay is bright, clean and refreshing to drink. Yellow-gold in color, it offers perfumed aromas of apple and pear with notes of fennel and crème brûlée. The medium weight palate is characterized by its freshness and crisp acidity. Has a long pleasing finish, too.

Pessagno 2007 Chardonnay Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$32) 90

The Sleepy Hollow Chardonnay is rich with ripe tropical fruit, yet its high acidity keeps it fresh and a good match with food. Medium gold straw in color, there's ripe mango, pineapple, and lees on the nose. It's creamy and rich tasting on the palate with well-balanced and lingering flavors of butter, toast, coconut and tropical fruit. Surprisingly, this crisp, pleasingly high acid wine undergoes full malo treatment.

Pessagno 2006 Intrinity Chardonnay Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45) 92

The Intrinity Chardonnay is a beautifully crafted Burgundian-styled cuvee. It displays a golden yellow hue and offers aromas of ripe tropical fruit, most notably mango and pineapple, with coconut and dulce de leche notes. It has a lush, cream and lees palate, concentrated flavors, excellent acidity, perfect balance, and lingering flavors. This is one of the very best SLH Chardonnays we tasted. Sourced from the Sleepy Hollow Vineyard (65%) and Lucia Highlands Vineyard (35%) with a selection of the top eight barrels. It is barrel fermented in 60 percent new oak with a medium plus toast to give it caramel richness.

Pessagno 2008 Riesling La Estancia Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$16) 87

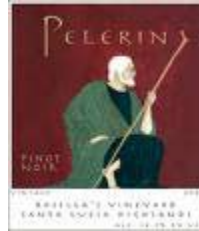
This attractive dry Riesling offers floral aromas with some citrus notes. It is fresh tasting and crisp on the palate with light fruit flavors, excellent acidity and a long finish. The fruit is sourced from 25 year-old vines of the La Estancia Vineyard.

Pessagno 2007 Pinot Noir Four Boys Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$55) 92

The Four Boys Vineyard Pinot Noir offers significant depth of flavors on a very attractive, layered palate. Dark ruby in color, scents of ripe black cherry and plum with a light chocolate note waft from the glass. On the palate there's big, richly extracted flavors of cherry, baking spices and loam earth with cola notes. The texture in the mouth is round, full, and lush with sweet tannins and excellent balancing acidity. Finishes with rich, soft round tannins. Only 200 cases made of this terrific wine.

Pessagno 2007 Pinot Noir Lucia Highlands Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$28) 90

A beautifully balanced and delicious (and moderately priced) Pinot Noir from the Northern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands. Medium ruby hue with earth spice and ripe cherry fruit on the nose. Has a full lush attack of sappy dark red fruit, nicely integrated with oak and finishing long and sweet with light tannic grip.



Pelerin

Chris and Cathy Weidemann, former students at U.C. Davis founded Pelerin (Pilgrim in French), a small artisan winery. Chris serves as winemaker, having worked at Newton Vineyard and Morgan Winery and alongside John Kongsgaard and Dean De

Korth, two of California's top winemakers. Cathy, the daughter of Rick Smith of Paraiso Vineyard, is responsible for management and marketing.

Pelerin 2008 Les Tournesols Santa Lucia Highlands (\$27) 90

Les Tournesols is a distinctive and very flavorful blend of Roussane (72%), Viognier (19%) and Chardonnay (9%) sourced from Paraiso Vineyards. The attractive nose is floral with notes of almond and anise. There's excellent depth of flavor on the fresh, fruit forward and creamy palate. Lees and rich fruit show on the finish. Shows great acidity despite undergoing 100 percent malo. Sees no new oak.

Pelerin 2007 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$54) 91

This Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir is a delicious, ripe and focused wine from a great vineyard. The nose shows pure ripe cherry fruit with spice, earth and raspberry notes. There's excellent density on the palate with concentrated ripe black cherry fruit flavors, again with a raspberry note. Shows great balance, too.



Pey-Lucia

Susan and Jonathan Pey of Marin County produce wines from the Sonoma Coast and the Santa Lucia Highlands

Their Pey-Lucia "Frisquet" Pinot Noir is sustainably farmed in an old, wind swept hillside block. Frisquet is a French term meaning "chilly", an appropriate name for this cool climate site.

Pey-Lucia Vineyards 2007 Pinot Noir "Frisquet" Santa Lucia Highlands (\$39) 89

There's lots to like about this wine, but it's the rich, spicy fruit finish that claims our attention. This dark ruby red beauty shows pure dark red berries, earth and vanilla spice on the nose. There's a soft, lush attack of sweet fruit with distinct vanilla and loam earth notes.



Pisoni

Pisoni Vineyards and Winery produces a single outstanding estate bottled Pinot Noir. The Pisoni Vineyard is a 45-acre mountain top property situated at 1,300 ft. It is owned by Gary Pisoni, one of the

Highlands most illustrious winegrowers. With his two sons by his side, Mark serving as vineyard and business manager and Jeff serving as winemaker, Gary Pisoni produces some of the Highland's finest wines.

Pisoni Vineyards 2006 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$65) 92

This estate bottling is medium ruby in color and displays aromas of brambly red fruit with a touch of cinnamon spice. It offers a soft attack of red plum and berry fruit, grilled meat and loam on the palate. It has excellent acidity and balance, round tannins and a persistent finish. A very tasty Pinot Noir sourced from the Elias Block of Pisoni Vineyards.

Puma Road

Puma Road is the label of Ray Francioni Wines. Owner Ray Francioni produces two wines from the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA, a Chardonnay and a Pinot Noir, both of which are sourced from Vigna Monte Nero Vineyards (also known as Black Mountain Vineyard) a 171 acre vineyard estate.

Puma Road 2007 Chardonnay Black Mountain Vyd Santa Lucia Highlands (\$25) 86

Brilliant gold straw color, showing herbs and pear on the nose. There's a rich, somewhat blowsy palate of lees, herbs, vanilla and nuts. Quite dry on the finish with bitter herbal notes.

Puma Road 2007 Pinot Noir Black Mountain Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 86

Medium ruby with a nose of mushroom, earth, and oak spice. Sweet attack of medium weight red fruit with a distinct vanilla note. Finishes a tad short with firm tannins and quite high acidity.



Roar

Roar wines are produced by Gary Francioni. They

consist of Pinot Noir, Syrah and Chardonnay from some of the top vineyards of Santa Lucia Highlands developed and owned by Gary and Rosella Francioni.

Roar 2007 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 92

The 2007 Rosella's Vineyard is a beautiful, floral styled Pinot Noir with exotic perfumed aromas and a lovely, feminine attack. There are black raspberries, spice and smoke on the nose and soft, sweet dark berry fruit on a silky smooth palate. Finishes long with soft, round tannins. Aged in 64% new French oak.

Roar 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 94

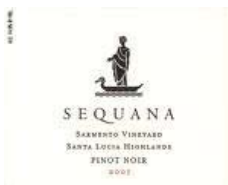
The 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard is a multidimensional SLH Pinot Noir rich in nuance and flavor. It has a heady perfume of smoke, spice and dark cherry fruit with a bright red raspberry note. In the mouth it's supple and juicy with excellent complexity of dark fruit and cola flavors. Made of 100 percent Pisoni clone.

Roar 2007 Pinot Noir Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 92

The 2007 Roar Pinot Noir Pisoni Vineyard offers a balance of power and elegance in a package that will only improve with time. Dark ruby garnet in color, it opens with a perfume of black fruit and licorice with bright cherry notes. There's an intriguing complexity of flavors on the silky smooth, impressively balanced palate. Sees 80 percent new French oak. Superb.

Roar 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 90

This bottling is sourced from the Pisoni, Rossella's, and Garys' vineyards. It reveals a medium ruby color and fresh aromas of dark cherry and raspberry. It is soft on the attack and velvety smooth in the mouth with red fruit and spice, and has round tannins.



Sequana

This Pinot Noir is produced by winegrower James MacPhail from the grapes of the Sarmento Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands. The grapes come

from two separate 10-year old vineyard blocks, each with different clones.

Sequana 2007 Pinot Noir Sarmento Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$32) 89

The medium ruby Sarmento Vineyard Pinot Noir shows black cherry, mushroom and earth aromas. It has a nice attack of pure red fruit and plum and a velvety smooth palate with round tannins and good balance and wraps up with a nice long finish of considerable purity.



Siduri

Established in 1994 by native Texans Adam and Dianna Lee, Siduri Wines is based in Santa Rosa and produces ultra premium Pinot Noirs from 20

vineyards throughout California. Siduri produces three Pinot Noirs from Santa Lucia Highlands: Rosella's Vineyard, Pisoni Vineyard and Garys' Vineyard. The wines exhibit sweet fruit and velvety textures.

Siduri Wines 2008 Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 93

The Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir is one of the best we tasted out of the Highlands. It opens with aromas of dark berries interwoven with forest floor, mushrooms, and loamy earth. The palate shows abundant quantities of sweet, rich dark red fruit with lovely integrated oak and vanilla notes. Spicy on the finish with sweet tannins.

Siduri Wines 2007 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$33) 89

This bottling displays a medium dark ruby and has pure, ripe dark cherry aromas. Soft and round on the palate, it reveals nice purity of dark red fruit and is beautifully balanced with a touch of toasty oak.

Siduri Wines 2008 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$33) 88

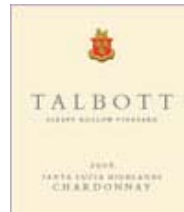
This 2008 Highlands Pinot Noir offers easy drinking with rich flavors. Medium dark ruby with aromas of nicely integrated red berries, cassis and smoky oak. The palate shows ripe dark berries with good varietal character and balance.

Siduri Wines 2008 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 91

The Siduri Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir is elegant, with a layered palate and silky tannins. It's a beautiful wine! Medium dark ruby with aromas of earth, smoke, and dark red plums. It has a nicely layered palate with dark red fruit, and toasty oak. Quite elegant with a soft, velvet attack.

Siduri Wines 2008 Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$55) 93

The Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir is filled to the brim with pure fruit. It opens with raspberry liqueur on the nose with wet earth and violets. Round, full and soft on the palate, it is intensely flavored with black raspberry, smoke, and earth notes. There's a long, long finish of black raspberry and real purity of fruit. An exceptional wine.



Talbot Vineyards

Founded by Rob Talbot a quarter century ago, Talbot Vineyards produces outstanding Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Its grapes are sourced from estate vineyards in two Monterey County AVAs, the

Carmel Valley and the Santa Lucia Highlands. Talbot offers excellent and highly affordable wines in its Kali Hart series as well as higher end single vineyard and special cuvee wines.

Talbot 2006 Chardonnay Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 92

The Chardonnay Sleepy Hollow Vineyard is a quintessential California Chardonnay of a high order produced from one of Santa Lucia Highland's finest vineyards. Golden yellow in color, it serves up aromas of ripe mango and tangy pineapple. It's ripe, rich and velvety smooth in the mouth with intense flavors of mango and very ripe pineapple. Very nicely balanced with a long finish.

Talbot 2007 Pinot Noir Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 89

The 2007 Pinot Noir Sleepy Hollow Vineyard displays light red fruit aromas with high acidity and freshness on the palate. It is delicate on the attack, soft on the palate and has firm tannins on the finish.



Testarossa

Testarossa Winery is owned and operated by Rob and Diana Jensen, both Silicon Valley engineers with a passion for wine. The winery was founded

in the garage of their home in Sunnvale in 1993. In the late '90s Testarossa moved to its current facilities, an imposing 19th century Jesuit-owned Novitiate winery in Los Gatos. Testarossa owns no vineyards and sources fruit from several vineyards in Santa Barbara County, Sonoma County and Monterey County. The grapes for half of its total production (13,000 cases of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah) are sourced from top Santa Lucia Highlands vineyards. Bill Brosseau has been Testarossa's winemaker since 2003.

Testarossa 2007 Chardonnay Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$39) 90

This light straw Chardonnay opens with fresh melon, pineapple and tropical fruit aromas. On the palate it offers good texture, freshness and high acidity with moderate tropical citrus and apple flavors.

Testarossa 2007 Chardonnay Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$39) 91

This attractive yellow gold Chardonnay is sourced from the Talbott Family's hillside vineyard in the northern region of the Santa Lucia Highlands. The wine exhibits delicious tropical fruit aromas and flavors with toasty oak and touches of vanilla. It's ripe tasting and full-bodied with a rich leesy Burgundian character. The grapes for this wine are mainly of the Wente clone planted in the early 1970s and clone 4.

Testarossa 2007 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$59) 92

Ruby hued with ripe dark cherry and earthy aromas. Beautifully balanced on the palate with rich black and red fruit flavors, toasted oak, high acidity and good tannic grip. Lots of stuffing in this wine, which will last for years to come. Cellar this one for a couple of years to maximize your pleasure. Aged for 12 months in 50% new oak.

Testarossa 2007 Pinot Noir Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$59) 92

The 2007 Pinot Noir Pisoni Vineyard exhibits ripe cherry fruit and perfume on the nose. On the palate it offers concentrated red and black fruit flavors with smooth velvety mouth feel. Youthful and slightly tannic, it needs time in the bottle to soften and integrate, but it a wine of great promise with a long life ahead of it. A superb wine from one of the Highlands outstanding vineyards.

Testarossa 2007 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$59) 92

The Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir is an elegant wine exhibiting a medium dark ruby hue and spicy red fruit aromas. On the palate it is beautifully focused and balanced offering cherry and raspberry fruit flavors with notable acidity and a lingering finish. A very fine wine.

Testarossa 2007 Pinot Noir Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$59) 92

The Pinot Noir Sleepy Hollow Vineyard is sourced from 36 year-old vines of the Martini clone. It exhibits a beautiful ruby red color, aromatic cherry and raspberry scents, and a delicate palate of red fruit flavors. It is beautifully crafted with French oak (35% new Francois Frères) and has soft round tannins and a long lasting finish.

Testarossa 2007 Pinot Noir Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands (\$54) 91

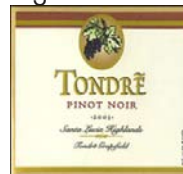
This Pinot Noir bottling sourced from Tondre Grapefield offers ripe dark cherry fruit with spicy notes. On the attack it is soft and velvety smooth with attractive brambly cherry fruit flavors on the palate. It is nicely balanced with round tannins, excellent acidity and a persistent finish.

Testarossa 2007 Syrah Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$54) 89

Dark ruby purple, the Garys' Vineyard Syrah reveals pure plum aromas with notes of black pepper followed by a soft round palate of fresh blueberry and plum fruit. This is a high altitude Syrah with volume and soft and elegant mouth feel, beautiful balance and freshness.

Tondré

This vineyard was originally established by a Salinas vegetable farmer, Tondré Alarid in 1997. It currently consists of 100 acres and is managed by son Joe Alarid and his wife, Penny. The grapes were originally sold to David Bruce and other producers, but are now used for estate designed wines. The winemaker is Tony Craig.



Tondré 2006 Pinot Noir Tondré Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands 87+

Medium ruby with light cranberry and black cherry aromas and just a touch of volatility. There's light tart red fruit and vanilla on a silky palate with a short finish. A good food wine that is easy to drink. Estate grapes sourced from Pommard and 777 clones.



Tudor

The Tudor family began growing grapes in California in the early 1900s and today operates one of the largest table grape vineyards in the country. Based in Santa Barbara, Dan and Christian

Tudor make hand crafted Pinot Noir, sourcing fruit from family owned vineyards in Anderson Valley and the Santa Lucia Highlands. Dan Tudor makes the wines; Larry Brooks has served as consulting winemaker.

Tudor 2006 Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$40) 89

This Pinot Noir has a brilliant medium ruby hue and aromas of cherry and cranberry with a touch of undergrowth. It displays a lovely understated attack of red fruit and minerals with high acidity and integrated flavors of cured tobacco and toasty oak. It boasts a very long finish with a slight bitter note.

Tudor 2006 Pinot Noir Sarmento Vineyard SLH (\$60) 88

The Sarmento Vineyard Pinot Noir is medium light ruby with a cranberry, plum and earth nose and mineral-like aromas. Pure cherry fruit on a velvety smooth palate. Finishes long and flavorful with a slight bitter note.



Vision Cellars

Vision Cellars is a boutique winery owned and operated by Mac McDonald an African American winemaker and son of an East Texas moonshiner. Mac McDonald produces 2,000 cases annually, mainly of high quality Pinot Noir at his winery located in Windsor, California. He sources his grapes from Sonoma, Napa, Mendocion counties and the Santa Lucia Highlands. His three wines from the SLH are reviewed here.

Distributed by Nice Legs, Sterling, VA

Vision Cellars 2006 Pinot Noir Las Alturas Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$42) 91

This 2006 Pinot Noir Las Alturas Vineyard offers very fragrant red fruit aromas followed by a soft and silky attack. On the palate it reveals delicious red berry fruit and spice with light toasted cedar notes. The finish is long and very satisfying. A terrific wine.

Vision Cellars 2006 Pinot Noir Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$42) 90

the 2006 Pinot Noir Garys Vineyard exhibits a medium ruby hue with aromas of brambly red fruit with earth notes and spice. It is soft and velvety on the attack with good fruit concentration on the palate, round tannins, and a long lasting finish.

Vision Cellars 2006 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$42) 90

The 2006 Pinot Noir Rosella's Vineyard exhibits ripe earthy dark cherry fruit aromas and flavors with light toast. On the palate it is soft and velvety and reveals good acidity, wood spice, round tannins and a long finish. A delicious wine but riper and darker than most of the wines tasted from Rosella's Vineyard.



Wrath

This small artisanal winery and its San Saba Vineyard are located just below the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. The estate consists of 72 acres planted with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and other varietals. Steve McIntyre serves as vineyard consultant. The wines are made by the young and talented winemaker, Sabine Rodems pictured here.



Wrath 2007 Syrah Doctor's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands (\$50) 91

A superb Syrah from Doctor's Vineyard revealing a dark ruby hue and ripe smoky black fruit aromas. Soft and elegant on the palate with concentrated black fruit flavors, toasted oak, soft round tannins and beautiful balance. Aged for 11 months in French oak barrels. A terrific wine!

Wrath 2007 877/Noir Santa Lucia Highlands (\$35) 90

The 877/Noir is another attractive Syrah from Wrath. It exhibits dark fruit aromas and is nicely concentrated on the palate with dark cherry and plum flavors, black pepper, and herbal notes. It has a velvety smooth mouth feel with excellent balance and noteworthy acidity on the finish. Aged for 11 months in neutral French and American oak barrels.



Doctor's Vineyard

Doctor's Vineyard is a 243-acre vineyard owned by Hahn Estates/Smith and Hook Winery. It is located in the southern region of the Highlands at an altitude ranging from 250-900 ft and is planted with eleven different clones of Pinot Noir (including own-rooted Martini, Calera

and the Dijon clones 667, 777, and 828), five different clones of Syrah, and Malbec on 5C rootstock. Much of the Pinot Noir is grafted to what was originally Merlot. Grapes from Doctor's Vineyard show riper fruit flavors than vineyards such as Hahn's own Lone Oak Vineyard that is just a few miles to the North, closer to Monterey Bay. Among the wineries purchasing fruit from Doctor's Vineyard is Wrath, which produces a stellar Doctor's Vineyard Syrah, and Bruliam and Petit with their Doctor's Vineyard Pinot Noirs. The Doctor's Vineyard Manager is Andy Mitchell (r) pictured here at Hahn Estates with Editor Don Winkler.



Garys' Vineyard

Garys' is the most famous vineyard of the Highlands and one of the best known in all of California. Garys' vineyard is called Garys' and not Gary's

because it is jointly owned by boyhood friends, Gary Pisoni and Gary Francioni, who established this 50-acre vineyard in 1997. The vineyard is planted to Pinot Noir and Syrah. The Pinot Noir is from the Pisoni clone grafted to 3309 and 5C rootstock. The vineyard soil is comprised of Arroyo Seco sandy loam. Garys' sits in the middle of the Highlands region at 300 feet above sea level and rises to 500 feet. The vineyard is planted 6'x8' and 5'x8' and is trellised in the Vertical Shoot Position (VSP) to maximize ripeness and sunlight on its open canopy. It's planted in a north-south configuration.

Some of California's most prestigious wineries purchase fruit and produce wines bearing the Garys' Vineyard

moniker. These include AP Vin, Kosta Browne, Morgan, Roar, Siduri, and Testarossa. Each producer "owns" specific rows of the vineyard and can specify viticultural practices. The wines made from Garys' fruit thus reflect both the winemaking techniques and viticultural preferences of the winemakers. However, as our tasting notes show, the wines common provenance shows through with great depth of dark fruit flavors and a notable mineral and earth element on the Pinot Noirs. Our high scores on these wines confirms the specialness of the vineyard.



Pisoni Vineyard

This vineyard, established in 1982 by Gary Pisoni, consists of 45 acres and is situated in the rolling foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains at about 1,300 ft. above the Salinas Valley. It is

composed of several small vineyard blocks, each with a unique soil type and microclimate. The property sits at the southern end of the SLH at a considerably higher altitude than the majority of vineyards in the AVA. Its mountainous terrain, consisting of well-drained alluvial fans of very thin decomposed granite soil, stresses the vines, producing grapes of intense character. The vineyard is planted 5x8 and includes Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah. The Pinot Noir is 100 percent Pisoni clone on Dijon 5 rootstock, and yields are 2½ to 3 tons per acre. The Pisoni family produces wine from this estate vineyard under the Pisoni Estate label, as well as the Lucia label. About 85% of the fruit is sold to a number of premium California winemakers. The Pisoni Vineyard Manager is Mark Pisoni, son of Gary Pisoni, pictured here (r) with Publisher, Mike Potashnik. Wineries which have produced wines from Pisoni Vineyard, past and present, include: Arcadian, Capiaux, Lucia, Miura, Patz & Hall, Peter Michael, Pisoni, Roar, Siduri, Tantara, and Testarossa. Its location at the extreme south of the AVA, protected from the fog and valley winds, might suggest very ripe wines with cola notes, but the vineyard's high altitude compensates, and our extremely positive tastings of the Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noirs found superb balance and bright fruit.



Rosella's Vineyard

This outstanding 50-acre vineyard is farmed by Gary Francioni and his wife Rosella. Rosella's Vineyard lies just north of Garys' Vineyard and is just

about in the center of the Santa Lucia appellation with an ideal southeast exposure. Planted in 1996 on Arroyo Seco Sandy loam soil, Rosella grows Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and a small amount of Syrah. The Chardonnay is from Dijon clones 76, 95 and 96 and the Pinot Noir is from the Pisoni and Dijon 113, 667, 777, and 828 clones. It uses VSP trellising. Gary Francioni customizes his wine farming to the demands of the client, including irrigation, leaf pulling, cluster thinning, fertilizing, and timing of the harvest. As a result, wineries get different fruit to which they apply their different winemaking techniques. Among the wineries producing Rosella Vineyard wines are Bernardus, Kosta Brown, Morgan, Pellerin, Roar, Siduri, and Testarossa. While the fruit and winemaking vary considerably depending on the winery, overall we find the Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noirs tending towards elegance and red fruit. They are, in general, of outstanding quality.



Sleepy Hollow Vineyard

This 522-acre hillside vineyard owned by the Talbott family is one of the more northerly-located vineyards in the appellation. It is divided into Sleepy Hollow North [formerly

called the River Road Vineyard] and Sleepy Hollow South & West. Sleepy Hollow West was formerly called Block A, and Sleepy Hollow South was formerly called Block B. Sleepy Hollow North is 115 acres of Chualar gravel-loam soil containing a high percentage of granite-based rock. It was planted to mainly Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in 1992. The vineyard has a mainly northeast exposure. Sleepy Hollow South & West constitute the vineyard planted for a group of investors in 1972. Its soil is almost pure sand and gravel. Sleepy Hollow West [formerly called Block A] includes Chardonnay, Pinot Noir (Martini and Dijon clones 114 and 115), and Syrah plantings, while Sleepy Hollow South is planted to Chardonnay (Wente clone) and Pinot Noir (Martini clone) only. The vines are over 35 years old. Some of the oldest Chardonnay plantings of the Wente clone are planted on their own rootstock, since the sandy soil is inhospitable to phylloxera. Sam Balderas is vineyard manager. Wines carrying the "Sleepy Hollow Vineyard" designation include La Rochelle, Martin Alfaro, Pessagno, Talbott and Testarossa. Our tastings of the old vine Wente clone Chardonnay shows a superb, consistent rich tropical fruit and briskly acidic character that cuts across producers. Pinot Noirs made from the Martini clone tend towards beautiful red fruit.

Tondré Grapefield

Tondre Grapefield was established by father Tondre and son Joe Alarid. Planted in 1997, it currently consists of 100 acres of Pinot Noir planted to Dijon clones 777, 115, 667 and Pommard 4; the most recent plantings (in 2005) add clones 828 and 953 to the mix. The vine densities are 7x8, 4x8, 6x8 and 5x8 with an average of 1075 plants per acre with a NW-SE orientation. Yields are below two clusters per shoot with an average of thirteen shoots per vine, which yields 3.5 tons per acre. The soil consists of decomposed granite, gravel, and sandy loam. The vineyard is planted at 174' to 400' in altitude. Tondre has numerous customers for its fruit, including Bernardus, Vision Cellars, David Bruce, Cima Colina, Morgan, and Pellerin. As our tasting notes show, Tondre can produce beautiful Pinot Noirs with somewhat spicy black and red fruit.



Sarmento Vineyard

The Sarmento vineyard traces its heritage to the Soledad Mission. When the Mexican government expropriated the church's property in the 1830s, the Sarmento family became proprietors of what is now

known as the Sarmento vineyard. Also referred to as the Smith-Lindley vineyard, Sarmento includes 300 acres of Pinot Noir and 60 of Chardonnay and is located 660 feet above the Salinas Valley floor. Co-owned today by Rich Smith and Butch Lindley, Sarmento is located 5 miles north of Paraiso Vineyard.

Sarmento is composed of granitic loam soils and home to both the Pommard clone and Dijon clones such as 115 and 667. Because of their elevation, vineyards like Sarmento receive plenty of late-morning sunlight, being above the fog-line, and are then cooled significantly in the evening by the ocean breezes that crest the Santa Lucia range.

Planted in 2000, this young vineyard is just now beginning to show the quality of fruit it's capable of producing. It uses VSP trellising and averages yields of about 4 tons per acre. Sarmento is sustainably farmed and CCVT certified. Among the wineries which purchase fruit from Sarmento are Champion, La Rochelle, Sequana, Tudor, and Monterey Vineyard.



E. & J. Gallo and Olson Ranch

E. & J. Gallo owns the 2,100-acre Olson Ranch that

is located at the southern end of Highlands bench. Matt Gallo recalls: "When my dad and I first saw the Olson Ranch back in the early 1990s, we felt that the western rim of that valley had the kind of unique soil and climate characteristics that could create outstanding distinctive wines. We felt at home, walking the hillsides, at home in the history and in the landscape—it was something special."

The Olson Ranch rises from 200 ft. above the Salinas Valley floor to some 1,200 ft. It is currently planted with 577 acres of vineyards consisting of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, along with lesser amounts of Syrah, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Viognier. The vineyards on the ranch are planted in 8x5 rows on well-draining gravelly loam-soils with north east and north west exposures. The trellising system is VSP although they also use a divided canopy or modified VSP with careful canopy management to control vigor where soils are deeper and richer. Drip irrigation is used on the property and is fed by a nearby reservoir built by Gallo three years ago. Yields on the property are 3-3 1/2 tons per acre.

Gallo follows sustainable growing practices on the Olson Ranch as it does on all of its properties. At the Ranch about 360 acres of land have been set aside as an oak habitat. And Gallo has planted over 1,500 oak trees. It also has established wild life corridors which divide the property in thirds, one on each end and one in the middle. These corridors along with watering areas allow wildlife to traverse the property without going into the vines.

A few years ago, EJ Gallo planted some 200 acres of Pinot Noir (Pommard and Dijon clones) and Chardonnay at higher elevations sheltered from the wind. The Chardonnay grapes have gone into producing the Bridlewood 2007 Chardonnay Reserve Santa Lucia Highlands, Gallo's first wine from the AVA. The Pinot Noir is bottled under its Central Coast McMurray Ranch label. Gallo also uses the fruit from the Olson Ranch in producing its excellent Bridlewood Viognier and Syrah and in its Mirrasou Pinot Noir.

Gallo is bullish on the future of the Highlands. Jim Collins, Gallo's Senior Director Coastal Winegrowing, believes the future of the SLH is bright and it will only take time and hard work to develop its full potential as one of California's finest growing areas."

Name of Vineyard	Owner/Winery	Acres Planted	Grape Varieties	Location	Altitude	Winery Customers Past and Present
Bianchi	Constellation	750	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Gris, other reds and Whites	Central	275-1100 ft	Estancia
Big Pond	Kelly McFarland	215	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern	700 ft	
Boekenoogen	John Boekenoogen	91	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah	Northern	850 ft	
Costa	Costa Family and J Lohr	111	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Southern	250-350 ft	J Lohr
Doctor's	Hahn Vinyards	239	Pinot Noir, Syrah, Malbec	Southern	250-900 ft	Bruliam, Lucienne, Wrath
Dos Rubios	Kirk Williams	26	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay	Southern		
Escolle	CNH Partners Nunez and Co	124	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern		Morgan, Testarossa, J Lohr
Estancia	Constellation		Chardonnay, other Whites, Pinot Noir	Northern		
Fairview Ranch	Kirk Williams	14	Pinot Noir, other Reds	Central		Wrath/San Saba, Testarossa
Garys'	Gary Pisoni/ Gary Francioni	48	Pinot Noir, Syrah	Central	300-500 ft.	A.P. Vin, Kosta Browne, Loring, Morgan, Siduri, Lucia
Guidotti		11	Pinot Noir	Southern	400-600ft	Testarossa
Hammond	Mission Ranch, LLC	8	Pinot Noir	Southern		
Highlands Ranch		36	Pinot Noir, Syrah	Central		
Hillside	Ed Silva	203	Chardonnay and Riesling		250-600ft	
Hook Ranch	Hahn	121	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Malbec, Grenache Noir	Southern		CrushPad, Tudor, Caraccioli Cellars
Kelly's	McFarlane Ranch	11	Chardonnay	Northern		
La Estancia	Phil Johnson	241	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewurztraminer	Northern		
La Reina	Kelley McFarlane	60	Chardonnay	Northern		
Las Alturas	Chuck Wagner/ Belle Glose	90	Pinot Noir	Southern	700-1,400 ft.	Belle Glos, Vision Cellars
Leavens		50	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern		
Lemoravo		26	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay			
Loma Linda	Linda de Santiago	56	Pinot Noir	Southern		
Lone Oak	Hahn Vinyards/ Lucienne	146	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, other Whites	Northern		Lucienne, CrushPad, Pey-Marin, Calera, Testarossa, Cariccioli Cellars
Lucia Highlands	Brett Sisney and Gary Filicetti	46	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern	140-350 ft	Manzoni, Passagno, Stags Leap, Copola, Morgan
M. Mirassou		8	Pinot Noir	Southern		

Name of Vineyard	Owner/Winery	Acres Planted	Grape Varieties	Location	Altitude	Winery Customers Past and Present
McIntyre	Steve McIntyre	60	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern		Wrath/San Saba
Mer Soleil	Caymus/ Mer Soleil	495	Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Viognier, rousanne, Grenache blanc Other Whites	Northern		
Morgan Double L	Morgan	49	Pinot Noir, Syrah, Chardonnay, Riesling	Northern	140-550 ft	
M.R.	Mark Manzoni Ray Francioni	3	Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris	Northern	250 ft	
Old Dow Property	Ray Francioni	35	Pinot Noir	Central		Not yet in production
Olson	Gallo	576	Pinot Noir, Syrah, Pinot Gris Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Viognier, Chardonnay	Southern	200-1200 ft	Fruit used in wines of Mirrasou, Bridlewood, and McMurray Ranch
Paraiso	Rich Smith/ Paraiso	400	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, Syrah, Viognier, Roussane, Souzao	Southern	900-1,000 ft	La Rochelle, Morgan, Paraiso, Pelerin, Saintsbury, Bernardus
Pessagno	Steve Passagno/ Passagno	2	Pinot Noir	Northern		
Pisoni	Gary Pisoni/ Pisoni and Lucia	47	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Southern	1300 ft	Siduri, Lucia
Roeslla's	Gary Francioni/ Roar	51	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah	Northern	300-400 ft	Morgan, Novy, Siduri, Bernardus, Vison, August West, Minor, Loring, AP Vin Costa Brown, Pelerin, Testarosa, Roar
Sarmiento/ Smith & Lindley/	Rich Smith/ Butch Lindley	343	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling	Central		La Rochelle, Sequana, Tudor, Monterey, Campion
Sierra Mar	Gary Francioni	38	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah	Southern	1,000	Bernardus, Siduri, Kosta Brown
Silva		16	Pinot Noir	Southern		
Silvio Francioni	Ray Francioni	8	Pinot Gris	Northern	300 ft.	
Talbott and Sleepy Hollow West	Talbott Family	191	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling	Northern	400-700 ft	Passagno, La Rochelle, Gallo, Testarossa, Arcadia
Sleepy Hollow South	Talbott Family	216	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern	60ft-600 ft	Constellation
Smith	Nicki Hahn	130	Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Merlot	Southern	1,200 ft	Testarossa
Soberanes	Bianchi Family owners/ Gary Francioni and Gary Pisoni developers	43	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah	Central		NEW
Stonewall	Constellation	82	Pinot Noir	Northern		Estancia
Sleepy Hollow North	Talbott Family	115	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern	60-650ft	La Rochelle, Arcadian, Testarossa, Gallo, Constellation
Tondre Grapefield	Joe and Penny Alarid	103	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling	Central	175-400	Bernardus, Cima Collina, De Tierra, Morgan, Testarosa, Tondré.
Vigna de Monte Nero/ Black Mountain Vineyard	Owned by Maestri Family/ Farmed by Dan and R. Francioni	171	Chardonnay, Pinot Noir	Northern	300-1000 ft	Kendall Jackson, Constellation, Caymus, Cru



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