

# Why the Dinosaurs Went Extinct

At last, after centuries of “scientific” chicanery, we can reveal the true story of why the dinosaurs went extinct.



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## Three Excellent Pinots From Gregory James

We wrote a brief review of [Gregory James Wines](#) in [Part 2 of our Garagiste Northern Exposure preview](#). We liked their wine

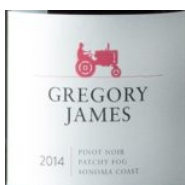
so much we ordered half a case. We've now tasted each of the three wines. We were not disappointed. And, as an added bonus, their 2014 Patchy Fog Vineyard is a major bargain at \$31.



(click for  
larger  
image)

The **2013 Hawk Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$48)** opens with aromas of earth and leather. The palate is bright with Bing cherries and notes of spice with a hint of cranberry. The finish is long and complex with lingering spice. This wine will improve even more with another year or two in the cellar. (We also have several bottles of the 2014 but two seemed like enough for last night. We'll add to this review in the coming days.)

The **2014 Hawk Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$48)** carries a lesson in how the California wine industry has evolved. If you have any friends who still believe vintage doesn't matter in California wines, have them taste this side by side with the 2013. The two could not be more different. This one starts with aromas of Bing cherries and raspberries leading to bright cherries on the palate. The characteristic long finish with a terrific acid – tannin balance rounds out a great experience.



(click for  
larger  
image)

The **2014 Patchy Fog Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$31, major bargain!)** begins with lush, ripe aromas of black cherries and chocolate. The palate is more black cherries, a bit of licorice, and a hint of spice. Another long, complex finish makes this a terrific experience.

## About Gregory James

The winery name is a combination of the first names of the two owners. Greg Adams is the winemaker and viticulturist. Jim Demuth is the president and handles the business side of the operation. They share a mutual love of the land and grapegrowing – in fact, they met while digging around in a vineyard.



Greg (left) and Jim (click for larger  
image)

From their website:

*Site matters to Gregory James.*

*We grow and source our grapes from vineyards located within the maritime reach of the Pacific Ocean. Here, the cool foggy nights and mornings dramatically shroud the varied terrain producing grapes of remarkable intensity and character.*

*Our vineyard sites are tucked away among rolling hills, bucolic valleys and dramatic ridge tops of the West Sonoma Coast where each location tells its own story.*

*We invite you to share in the hard won results of farming in the extreme coastal environment of the Pacific Ocean.*

Greg and Jim actually have help from a third partner.



Charley the vineyard doodle. “Fastest doodle in the west.”

*Charley joined the family in 2009 thanks to a gift from cherished friends Paul & Jamie. He has been an integral part of the wine team specializing in moral support and gopher scenting. He leads a charmed life in the hills and vineyards*

*of the Sonoma Coast.*

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## Garagiste Northern Exposure in Sonoma Preview Part 2

This is part 2 of our [preview of Garagiste Northern Exposure](#). We advise [reading Part 1 first](#) if you haven't already.

As an overview note, many wineries were pouring 2013 and/or 2014 vintages. We preferred the 2013's by and large.

[Gregory James Wines](#) is, like several others, named after owner **Jim Demuth** and winemaker **Greg Adams**. Their pal Jenny greeted us and gave us the rundown on the wines and the winery. She was pouring two 2014 pinots. The **Hawk Hill Vineyard (\$48)** and the **Patchy Fog Vineyard (\$31)** are both on the western edge of the Sonoma Coast AVA just outside Freestone, a town south of Occidental and west of Sebastopol. In other words, terrific terroir. And the wines are excellent.

[Fallon Place Wines](#) was represented by winemaker **Cory Michal**. The winery is named after **Fallon Place on Russian Hill in San Francisco**, one of the famous staircase walkways in the city. Cory used to make a barrel of wine on the landing outside his apartment when he lived there. Luckily for us, he turned

professional. His 2016 Herbitage Vineyard (\$38) is an excellent representative of the Carneros AVA. It will improve over the next few years, so be patient.

[Betwixt Wines](#) featured **owner-winemaker Tim Tello**. They, too, are located in San Francisco. Their 2015 pinot noir (\$40) is from Anderson Valley's Helluva Vineyard (say it out loud). Tim makes about 450 cases per year including grenache, grenache rosé, and chardonnay. The pinot is all of 85 cases so get it while you can.

[La Pitchoune Winery](#) was our last stop of the day. **Owner Tracy Nielsen** greeted us with enough enthusiasm to bolster our flagging energy. They featured two pinots, both 2014. One is a Sonoma Coast blend (\$48). The other is from the Holder Vineyard in the Russian River Valley (\$68). Tracy offered us their **2017 Sonoma Coast *vin gris* of pinot noir (\$28)**, a heavier style of rosé. That process preserves more of the pinot character while still retaining rosé quaffability. **All three wines were as charming as Tracy herself.** Incidentally, **La Pitchoune is a Provençal expression for "the little one"**, deriving from the Occitan word pichon. It's also the name **Julia and Paul Child gave to their cottage in Provence.** Which, by the way, [you can now rent on AirBnB](#). (For our regular readers, Tracy is quite familiar with [Picayune Cellars](#). We've written about them [several times](#).)

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# Garagiste Northern Exposure in Sonoma Preview Part 1

On May 12 we traveled north to the town of Sonoma for the first Garagiste event north of Paso Robles: [Garagiste Northern Exposure](#). And we were not disappointed. We found **eight new wineries, each producing at least one pinot noir**. Quality varied from **very good to outstanding**. This is part 1 of our summary in roughly the order we tasted the wines. We'll publish part 2 followed by more in-depth articles about individual wineries in the future.

As an overview note, **many wineries were pouring 2013 and/or 2014 vintages**. We preferred the 2013's by and large.

[Burning Bench Cellars](#) owner, grapegrower, winemaker, and bottle washer **David Mease** greeted us. These folks only make pinot noir. And it's really good. All 175 cases per year are from their Moon Hill Vineyard in the North Coast, Marin County AVA. The 2013 and 2014 vintages are **\$45 each**.

[Camlow Cellars](#) offers their **Magna Porcum Estate Pinot Noir**. **Yes, that's a wild boar in their logo**. The winery name is a hybrid of the names of **owner Alan Campbell and winemaker Craig Strehlow**. They make all of 400 cases per year, including a **pinot noir rosé featuring the winery mascot, Pigasus**.

[Von Holt Wines](#) featured **two 2014 pinots, both Sonoma Coast**. The Sonoma Coast blend is \$35, while the Suacci Vineyard is \$45. Both are excellent. **Co-owner Chris Von Holt** probably has no problem collecting his accounts receivable. The winery is his second career. He retired after **20 years as a Secret**

**Service agent.** (The other co-owner is his wife Pam.)

**Charlie Chenoweth** greeted us with an amazing story about [Chenoweth Wines](#). Charlie grew up in agriculture. **In 1980 they ripped out their vegetables and planted grapes.** And we sure are happy they did. Their pinots are a blend of three vineyards: Treehouse, Bootlegger's, and the estate Home Ranch. The 2013 is \$55 and the 2014 is \$65.

More coming, hopefully next week.

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## Two GSMs from Dilecta



Orion and Tony

Dilecta was one of our discoveries on [our trip to Paso Robles](#)



in January. Following the recommendation of **Wills and Kath Carter** (proprietors and hosts at the fabulous Canyon Villa), we visited the winery for a delightful hour of tasting and conversation. Owner – winemaker Orion Stang knows his way around the standard GSM grapes. But technically these are not GSM in that he often uses only two of the three grapes. Tonight we opened the **2014 Unorthodox and Cookie**. The two could not be more different. Before reading further, here's some advice. **If you have these in your cellar, leave them for at least another year, and two would probably be a good idea.** They're tasty right now but will improve with more age.

Unorthodox 2014 78% syrah 22% mourvedre opens with aromas of earth, licorice and black raspberries. The palate is spice with some tannins and more black raspberries. A long and tangy finish rounds out a very pleasant experience. This one could wait another year. (The 2014 is no longer available from Dilecta. The 2015 is \$52.)



Playful Dilecta dog

**The 2014 Cookie is big. Really big.** The wine opens with deceptive aromas of black olives, black raspberries and spice. The palate is a bomb. Deep, rich, and opulent with more spice and dark fruit. Youthful tannins with a good acid

balance and fruit backbone imply this one will continue to improve for at least five years. (The 2014 is no longer available from Dilecta. The 2015 is \$62.)

Orion's mom is an artist. She designs the labels for the wines. These labels are much wider than the traditional size. As such, only a video clip can do them justice.

<http://californiawinefan.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DilectaLabel.mp4>

If you're a fan of syrah, you can do no better than Mr. Stang's wines.



(click for larger image)

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## Sean Minor Returns

[Editor: Mr. Minor never really left. What went missing was the author's brain.]

We were excited to [get an e-mail from this old favorite](#). And we were even more thrilled to discover that **Sean is still making pinot noir**. We ordered a mixed case. This review will cover tastings made over the course of a week. We've [reviewed Sean's wines before](#), but somehow he fell through the ever-

widening cracks in our brains.

We had remembered – incorrectly, as it turns out – that Sean had stopped making pinot noir. Thankfully, a helpful employee refreshed our ever more failing memory. He stopped making *Carneros* pinots, shifting instead to the Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast AVAs.

## The Wines

His **2016 Central Coast pinot “Four Bears” (\$16)** opens with mild aromas of black cherries and leather. The palate is lush and full with flavors of chocolate covered cherries and a hint of spice. The finish features long, smooth, silky tannins. Another terrific deal.

The **2016 Central Coast chardonnay “Four Bears” (\$14)** tends to lemon curd. Aromas of citrus and smoke lead to pineapple and lemon curd palate. A nice long finish rounds out the experience.

But the real champion is the **2015 Sonoma Coast pinot noir (\$22)**. Aromas of cranberries and bing cherries lead to a palate that features more cherries and spices. A long, complex finish opens with smooth tannins and a touch of acid, merging seamlessly into more spice. At \$22 per bottle this counts as a major bargain. Get this one while it lasts. And don't be afraid to let it sit for a year or two. This one has some aging potential.

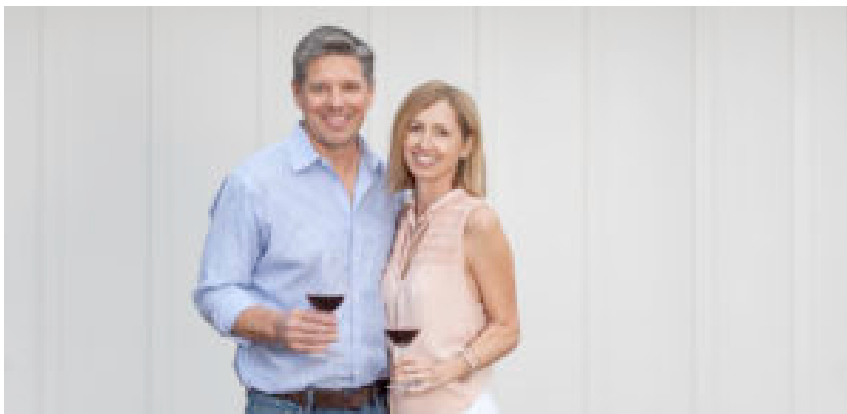
## The Business

The website has been updated significantly since our last visit. Vibrant colors with a sparse, almost Japanese, layout. The design is warm and welcoming. Here's an example:



(click for larger image)

Sean and Nicole are the perfect winery couple. For those who are curious, the “Four Bears” designation refers to their four kids.



Followed by a clear, clean statement of purpose. Companies searching for a mission statement could learn a lot from this:

Not long after Nicole and I were married, we discovered our second largest monthly expense was wine. We enjoy wine every day with dinner, when friends and family come to visit, during celebrations... actually, I can't think of times we don't enjoy wine.

After a number of years in the industry, I knew there had to be a better and more affordable way to produce great wines without severe consequences on the pocket book. In 2005 we started our wine business and began producing wines from premier appellations throughout California. With the help of a family friend and colleague, Will Bucklin, our initial production featured a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Central Coast Chardonnay, and Dry Creek Sauvignon Blanc.

Will continues to be our consulting winemaker and we collaborate on the selection and blending of all wines. Will is a graduate of UC Davis prestigious ecology program and started his career with an internship at the historic and world-renowned Chateau Laffite Rothschild. Following a stint with Thomas Hardy in Australia, Pilevero Vineyards in Mendocino he worked as we both did at King Estate in Oregon. He has now settled in Sonoma County where he works closely with many of the vineyards we source from.

You will find our wines at fine restaurants and gourmet grocery stores all over the country, and of course here on our website. I am happy to share my love of wine with you.

- Sean

(click for larger image)

An interesting side note: Sean was born in Kansas “surrounded by surrounded by agriculture and the hard work and values responsible for the enviable work ethic of Midwestern

people.” It happens that Tony’s maternal grandparents owned a farm in Kansas. He spent many summers there when he was a child. [Editor: That’s what Tony claims. Given the state of his memory, I would be skeptical.]

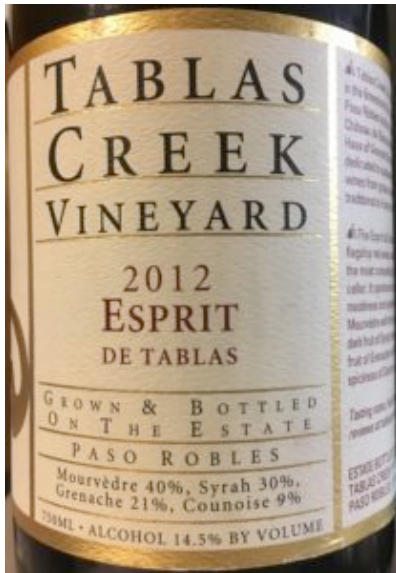
These are good folks making wines that are incredible values. If you’ve never tried them before get online and order a case or two! Here’s their team:



Stuart, Nicole, Larry, Barbara, Sue,  
Sean, Kristi

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## **Tablas Creek 2012 Esprit de Tablas**



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“Like a French Rhône, only good!” were the first words out of my mouth. The [Tablas Creek 2012 Esprit de Tablas](#) opens with aromas of smoke, leather, and black cherries. The palate is black raspberry, cassis, black tea, and sweet spices. A nice finish, with silky tannins. You can’t buy this from the winery, [even though it’s listed in their library](#).

A quick search of several wine retail websites produced zero hits. [Wine.com](#) estimates the retail at around \$55. If you go looking and find a place that has some for sale, please let us know.

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# Dante Robere 2012 Reserve Syrah



**Rummaging in our Eurocave I ran across this goodie.** It's been a while since we visited Dante Robere, one of the best wineries in the Livermore Valley. The Dante Robere 2012 Reserve Syrah was **excellent after decanting.** Smoke and black raspberries on the nose. Palate of spice, milk chocolate, and more raspberries. A long, delicious finish with well-structured, silky tannins. **If you own a bottle or two, this may be the time to pop the cork.**

They're selling the 2015 vintage right now for \$42. Pick up half a case if you have the patience. Dan and Bob know their stuff.

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**Colene Clemens Vineyard 2014  
Dopp Creek (Chehalem  
Mountain) Pinot Noir**



Our friends at [Artisan Wine Depot](#) recommended the Colene Clemens Dopp Creek pinot noir. Lush aromas of strawberries and dark fruit. Lush, dense palate of black cherries with bright acid and spicy tannins. Long finish with notes of five spice and more tannins. **Artisan's price: \$24.97 a bottle. They have just a few bottles left, but are expecting more soon.**

Click to get to [their website](#). For our full review, [click here](#).

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## A Day in Paso Robles

When William and Katherine invited us to spend two nights at [The Canyon Villa](#), we jumped at the chance. As always, the **food, friendship, and accommodations were superb**. We got January off to a good start by spending a day in Paso Robles. And we found **two terrific wineries we did not know about**. As an added bonus, **we were the first to visit the tasting room at a third winery that doesn't even open until February**.





Lauren Rava and Leslee Falkenberg of Rava Wines (click for larger image)

We promised Lauren and Leslee that we wouldn't do a full write-up of **Rava Wines** until they release their full wine lineup next month. We'll just say that **what we tasted shows a lot of promise and potential**. We'll write a longer review in February. But you can taste their excellent sparkler and albariño right now. They are also pouring a selection of Brophy-Clark wines. (John Clark is doing double duty as the winemaker at both Brophy-Clark and Rava.) Make an appointment first. And ask for a tour of the spectacular facilities. By the way, Rava is a must-visit for the scenery, architecture, and good vibes. Those planning a wedding or other event should consider this place.



Ryan and Grace (click for larger image)

Next up was [Deovlet Wines](#) (pronounced Dev'-let). We were greeted by **Ryan Deovlet and Grace**. Three outstanding pinot noirs led to one question: why haven't we found these folks before? It turns out that we had visited their tasting room once. But it was occupied by 4 Vines.



Dilecta dog wants to play

Finally, we arrived at [Dilecta](#). William and Katherine have their wines on The Canyon Villa's in-house wine list. We were greeted enthusiastically by the winery's golden retriever who

was eager to play. **Owner – winemaker Orion Stang** rescued us from the puppy and proceeded to pour us some yummy GSMs. We're normally not big fans of Rhône-style blends, but Dilecta has made us believers.



Dilecta's Orion Stang and Tony (click for larger image)

Three for three on the day. And 2018 is off to a very, very good start.