

# 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 Buckle, 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-Buffet. Following a stint with Thomas Hardy in Australia, Niverno 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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# Major Year End Bargain From Knez

We've reviewed [Knez Winery before](#). They were a major find on our jaunt to the Anderson Valley. Now they're offering a year end bargain that's hard to resist.



[Their 2013 Anderson Valley Knez Reserve pinot noir](#) is made from a vineyard located between their Cerise and Demuth Vineyards. Regular price from the winery is \$59 per bottle. Right now this lovely wine is on sale for half price. At \$29.50 this is what you need for your holiday celebrations. We bought six bottles, drank one tonight, and can recommend it without any reservations.

Cheers, everyone!

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# Trader Joe's 2014 "Petit Reserve" Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir



(click for larger image)

Available in the greater Silicon Valley area, we took a chance on this one and were richly rewarded. **This is a major bargain at \$7.99 a bottle.** And the wine has the **notable characteristics of the fairly new Arroyo Seco AVA.** This is our mini-review of Trader Joe's 2014 "Petit Reserve" Arroyo Seco pinot noir.

The wine opens with aromas of black cherries, leather and dust. The palate begins with an explosion of gooseberries and cherries followed by a long finish with bright acids.

We think of **Arroyo Seco as Santa Rita Hills with a bit more rain.** Both have the characteristics we call simply "desert." There's always a hint of sand and dust in there. If you want an introduction to the Arroyo Seco AVA, this wine is for you.

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# Mud House 2014 Central Otago Pinot Noir

[Artisan Wine Depot](#) was offering a deal on [Mud House 2014 Central Otago pinot noir](#) at \$16 per bottle. (The link is to our full review on [New Zealand Wine Fan](#).) We bought four bottles on a whim. Subtle aromas of cherries with hints of leather and tobacco greet you. Be sure to **swirl vigorously**, as this wine is a little shy about exposing itself. On the palate, pure grape juice with bright acidity on the finish.

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# Kramer Vineyards “Celebrate” Müller-Thurgau Sparkler



(click for larger image)

We visited [Kramer Vineyards](#) a few years back on our [Oregon adventure](#). And we brought home up a bottle of

their [“Celebrate” Müller-Thurgood Sparkler](#) (\$22 for the 2014 vintage). Aromas of white peach and blood oranges. Grapey on the palate with a hint of grapefruit. Light carbonation. Highly recommended. Unfortunately, the new label is considerably less fun than what you see to the left.

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## Schloss Biebrich Sekt



Bargain of the decade. [Trader Joe's](#) is offering Schloss Biebrich Sekt for \$5.49 a bottle. This is a sparkler from [Germany's Henkell & Co. Gruppe](#). Trust us, this will not compete with any reasonable quality sparkler – from the US, France, Italy, or – yes – Germany. But it is light, unpretentious, and very quaffable. It's also about 11% alcohol so you don't have to destroy your liver.

We occasionally review serious bargains. At this price you can afford to buy a few bottles to see if you like it.

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# Two Bargains from Trader Joe

We occasionally buy some wine at **Trader Joe's**. But we recently discovered two that are **amazing bargains**. Each is **\$7.99 per bottle**. You will not find better deals on wine anywhere. This is the story of two bargains from Trader Joe.



(click for  
larger  
image)

Over the years Norma has become fond of their **“Trader Moon” Honey Moon viognier**. The **2013 vintage** is so outstanding we had to write about it. Quite simply, this is the best viognier I have ever tasted. Norma is not quite that enthusiastic, settling for **“pretty darn good.”**

Here’s the scoop: **floral and honeysuckle aromas** followed by **passion fruit** and an **amazing orange blossom flavor**. There’s a **hint of lime on the finish**. Viognier, like pinot noir, is very susceptible to **terroir and winemaking technique**. We find most of them overbearing with too much of the natural honey. Not this one.

And a few days ago I brought home a couple of experimental bottles of pinot noir. We’ve only tasted one – and Norma sent

me back the next day to pick up a case. The wine is from **New Zealand**. The **Picton Bay South Island 2014 pinot noir** is light enough to be a summer wine. Aromas of red raspberries and cherries are followed by more raspberries, tart cherries, and a hint of spice. Light enough to support what might otherwise be excessive acidity.



(click for larger image)

According to [Wine Searcher](#), **Picton Bay is the export label for the highly regarded [Mt. Riley winery in Marlborough](#)**. It looks to me like this label was created specifically for the U.S. market and (perhaps) exclusively for Trader Joe's.

Trader Joe's generally gives store managers considerable latitude in choosing non-TJ's wines. **You can probably find the Honey Moon almost everywhere**. I know the **Picton Bay is available at the Trader Joe's on Homestead Road in Los Altos, CA**.

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# Artisan Goes German

Our chums at [Artisan Wine Depot](#) invited us over for a taste of an eclectic mix of wines on June 18. Of the many wines offered, two stood out, both German. Hence, Artisan goes German.



Frank Heyden And Family



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[Weingut Dr. Heyden](#) offered a 2011 riesling from the Oppenheimer Sackträger vineyard Rheinhessen region. Artisan's price is \$19.97. Basil and tarragon with hints of green apple, pear and citrus on the palate. Hints of smoke and cedar on the finish. Described on the label as "old vines, dry style," this wine is not sweet. A major bargain.



**Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt** supplied a trocken Riesling that was also very good (and also \$19.97). The **2013 Schloss Marienlay** opens with a luscious aroma of white peach followed by Asian pear on the palate. The finish is nicely balanced with acid. Another bargain.



Schloss Marionlay

The rest of the German wines were too sweet for us. But we enjoyed the two we bought!

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## Luli Wines Are Welcome Additions

After a tasting at [Artisan Wine Depot](#), we were shopping the pinot noir aisle. On a whim we picked up a bottle of Luli 2012 pinot noir. We were very lucky. Luli wines are welcome additions to the fine pinot noir category.

[Luli Pinot Noir 2012 \(Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County, California\)](#). Bought at Artisan February 12, 2014. Aromas of sweet cherries, rose petals and leather. Black cherry palate with a hint of licorice. Long finish with silky tannins. A bargain at \$20. The winemaker is Jeff Pisoni.

So who are the geniuses behind Luli? Well, the winemaker is Jeff Pisoni. That last name should tell you a lot about Luli's credentials.

From the company's website:

*We live wine. We are a master sommelier, grapegrowers and winemakers. Our partnership—Sara Floyd and the Pisoni Family—came together from different aspects of the wine business. Sara is a Master Sommelier, the owner of Swirl Wine Brokers and has a long history in wine and restaurants. The Pisoni Family is known for its eponymous vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands and for Pisoni Estate and Lucia wines. Deciding that we would make a great team and noting the shortage of handcrafted wines at reasonable prices, we set out to create a new line of wines that you would love, at*

*prices you can afford. We seek high quality fruit and craft exceptional wines.*

*The Luli wines are made from vineyards in or near the Santa Lucia Highlands. Our goal is to showcase the beauty of our region with wines of consistent quality. We source and purchase grapes from lifelong friends in the area, and are therefore able to maintain a close eye on the farming. The wine production, aging and bottling are done entirely at our own winery.*

**Highly recommended.**

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## **Pali Wines Returns to Artisan Wine Depot**

We thoroughly enjoyed tasting Pali's wines in June, so when [Artisan Wine Depot](#) invited us, we jumped at the chance. On the Saturday before Christmas the store was busy, but we were patient. OK, no we weren't.

### **[Pali Wines](#) Returns to Artisan Wine Depot**

Joanie Hudson (Pali's Western Regional Sales Manager) was as charming as she was in June.



Pali's Joanie Hudson and Tony

The first pinot was the **2011 "Shea Vineyard"** (Willamette Valley, \$54.97). We've tasted a number of wines from this vineyard in the past and, frankly, it's appeal has always escaped us. This was no exception. The wine is thin and acid with no mouth feel at all.

The next pinot was the **2010 "Riviera"** (Sonoma Coast, \$16.99). **"Juicy"** is the best word I can come up with to describe this wine. **Black cherry aromas are followed by blackberry flavor with a hint of chocolate. We bought two bottles.** Interestingly, we also tasted this wine in June. It's difficult to believe it could have improved so much in six months, but apparently it has.

Up next was the **2012 "Huntington"** (Santa Barbara County, \$19.99). **Aromas of black cherry and blackberry with a hint of earth. On the palate, flavors of blackberries and plum. This was our second choice. Both the Huntington and the Riviera are genuine bargains.**

The **2010 "Windsor Oaks"** (Russian River Valley, \$44.99) presents aromas of white pepper and oak. **At the moment, the wine is too oaky and tannic for us, but those with the**

**patience to wait three or four years will be rewarded.**

Winemaker [Aaron Walker](#) (previously assistant winemaker under Loring), in conjunction with consulting winemaker [Kenneth Juhasz](#) combined efforts starting with the 2008 harvest. Walker and Juhasz are terroir specialists who strive to bring out the distinct characteristics of each of the sites we source for our fruit.

**The 2012 “Bluffs” (Russian River Valley, \$19.99) presents aromas of earth and is generally a more austere.** This is a straightforward pinot noir with no pretensions. On the palette, lush tannins give way to red fruits.

**It’s always a pleasure to taste Pali’s pinot noirs because they reflect the terroir where the grapes are grown. And the Pali website tells us why→**