

# En Route Redux

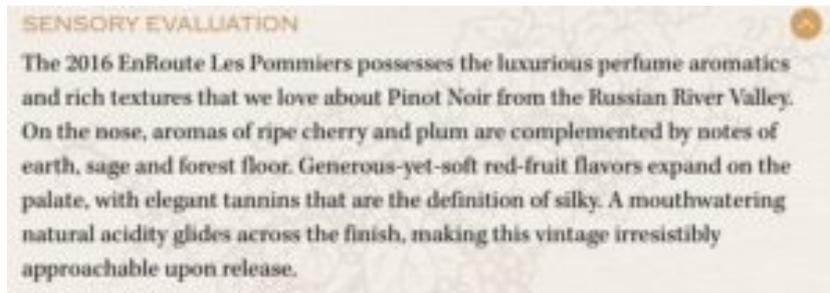


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We discovered [En Route pinot noir](#) at Pinotfest 2015. And we were very impressed. On Norma's recent birthday we took a chance on [The Post, a new local restaurant](#) (full review forthcoming, stay tuned). On the wine list was "Nickel & Nickel Russian River Valley "Les Pommiers" pinot noir." That sounded familiar, so we took a chance. But, frankly, it's hard to screw up grapes from the RRV AVA.

When the wine arrived, Norma looked at it and noticed that **the label said En Route, not Nickel & Nickel**. I did a quick search of [CaliforniaWineFan](#) on my phone and found [our old review](#). Sure enough, this is one of the sisters of that winery.

We are, if anything, more impressed with the **2016 vintage (\$60) and priced fairly at \$75 at The Post**. We can do no better than the sensory description from their website.



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# RN Estate 2012 Pinot Noir Solomon Hills



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If you have a bottle of this beauty laying around, don't hesitate to open it. Aromas of bing and black cherries. The

palate features one of the finest, silkiest tannin finishes I've ever tasted. Mid-palate of cola and spice with a hint of cinnamon. Outstanding. And worth every minute of the wait. Added bonus: the [RN Estate 2012 pinot noir Solomon Hills](#) is available as a library selection for the bargain price of \$49. Scroll to the bottom of the current releases page to find it.

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## Belden Barns 2017 Sauvignon Blanc



### Wine Specs

Vintage: 2017  
Varietal: Sauvignon Blanc  
Appellation: Sonoma Mountain  
Harvest Date: September 28, 2017  
Acid: 6.3  
pH: 3.23  
Aging: 50% Neutral Oak 50% Stainless Steel  
Fermentation: Stainless Steel  
Bottling Date: February 23, 2018  
Alcohol %: 13.5

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We've written about these folks quite a bit over the years. About a week ago we got our wine club shipment. The pinots can wait but the lure of the Belden Barns 2017 sauvignon blanc (\$26) proved irresistible.

And we were not disappointed. Aromas of honey and tangerine with just hint of grassiness lead to a palate of pineapple and honeydew melon. The finish is long and multi-layered moving into a touch of wet slate. This is a major bargain.

The Beldens planted a unique clone of sauvignon blanc. Nate describes it as “the pedigreed vine material originally sourced from Collio, Italy near the Slovenian border.” We are pretty sure the terroir is a contributing factor. Sonoma Mountain is rocky with an interesting soil structure. They benefit from being directly aligned with the Sonoma wind gap. Days are cool and foggy, something very unique for properties east of highway 101 in Santa Rosa.

Buy this wine and try it. Unless, of course, you are a fan of the grassy, vegetal sauv blancs. In that case, this is not for you.



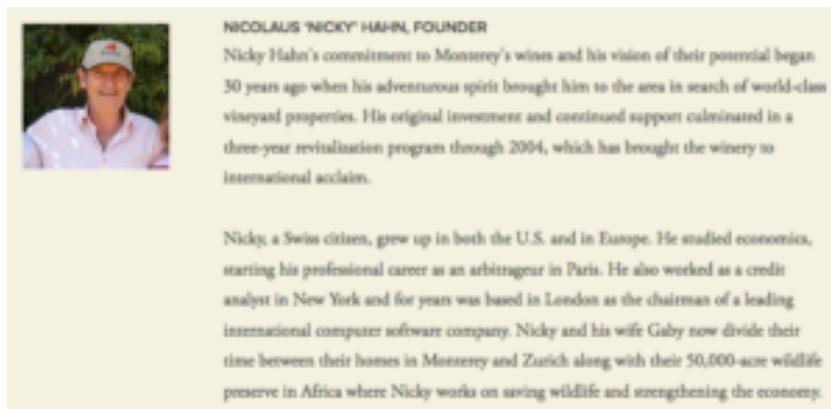
Nate in the barn  
(click for larger  
image)

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# Hahn Visits Artisan

Long-time readers will remember our admiration for [Hahn Family Wines](#). We were delighted to be invited to a tasting by our friends at [Artisan Wine Depot](#). **Hahn visits Artisan** and we are there to report on the event. As always, all prices are from Artisan.

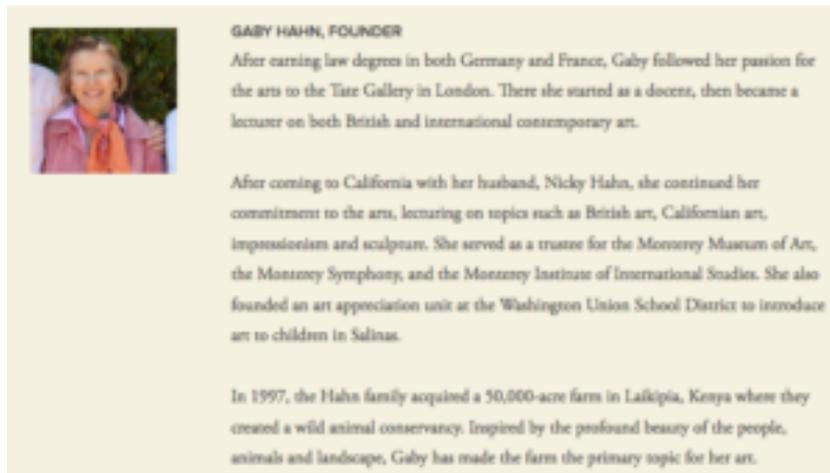
Browsing the Hahn website, we discovered the fascinating biographies of the Hahn family. I'll include photos and bio sketches between wine reviews. Let's start with co-founder Nicky Hahn.



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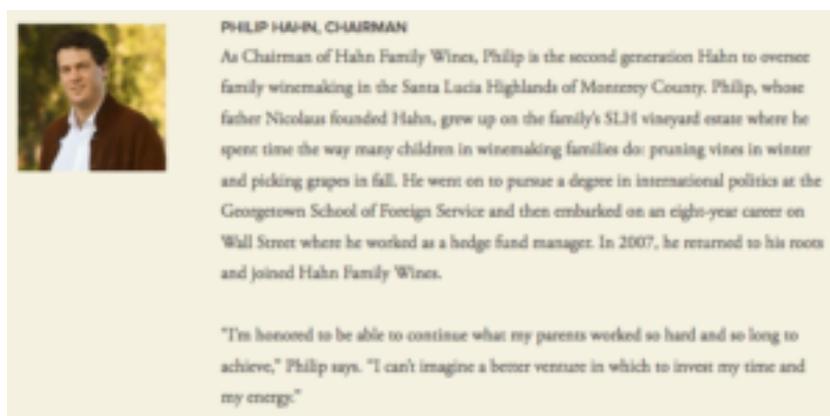
There were ten wines on the menu. In the interest of promoting only the best, we'll limit our review to five of them. (Naturally, we'll skip the Smith & Hook cabernet sauvignon and the Boneshaker zinfandel.)

Hahn's **2016 Monterey County chardonnay (\$16)** is a bargain. The opening is tropical aromas of citrus, and orange zest. The palate is more citrus with a nice acid balance and luscious mouth-feel.



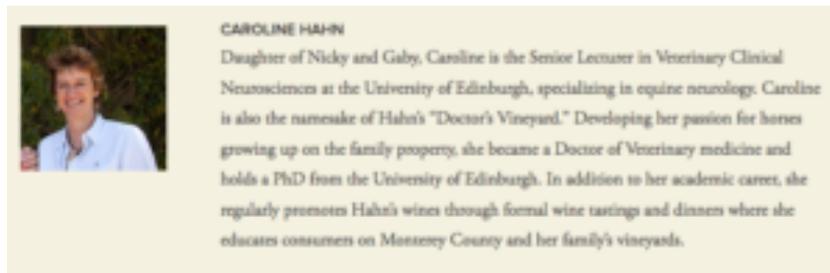
Co-founder Gaby Hahn (click for larger image)

The **2016 “SLH” Santa Lucia Highlands pinot noir (\$20)** is also a **bargain**. This one is the forest floor – earthy style. The nose is ripe cherry fruit with touches of newly-plowed earth. The palate features dark berry flavors, with hints of spice and dried thyme.



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**Lucienne is one of Hahn's higher-end labels. The 2016 Smith Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands pinot noir (\$45)** begins with enticing aromas of strawberry and blackberry with a hint of chocolate. The palate features dark fruit, especially plums with spice undertones. Add a nice acid balance and this is a winner.



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The **2016 Doctor's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands pinot noir (\$45)** is a good illustration of why terroir matters, even at the vineyard level. Aromas are toward the earthy end with hints of leather and, unusually, cedar. Flavors feature wild raspberries, blackberries and more cedar. Incidentally, this vineyard is named in honor of Dr. Caroline Hahn (see bio sketch above).

It was a pleasure to be reminded of this outstanding winery.

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## Three Excellent Pinots From Gregory James

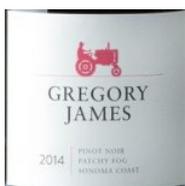
We wrote a brief review of [Gregory James Wines](#) in [Part 2 of our Garagiste Northern Exposure preview](#). We liked their wine so much we ordered half a case. We've now tasted each of the three wines. We were not disappointed. And, as an added bonus, their 2014 Patchy Fog Vineyard is a major bargain at \$31.



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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.



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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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# 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.



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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.

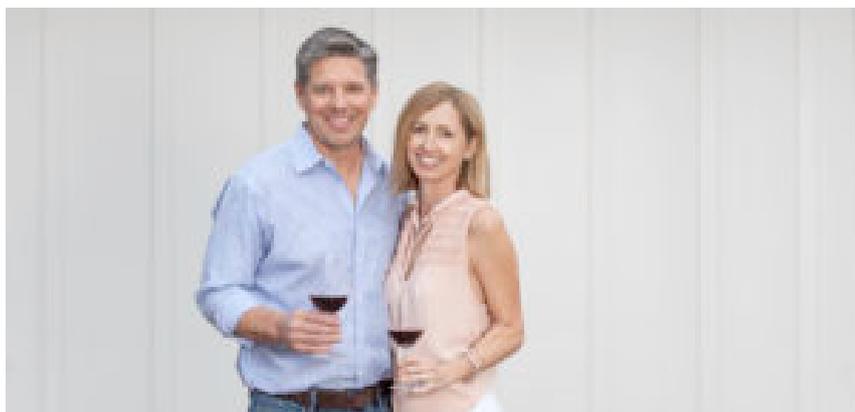
## The Business

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:



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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 LaFite Rothschild. Following a stint with Thomas Hardy in Australia, Nisum Vineyards in Mendocino he worked at us both old and 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 general 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

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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.]

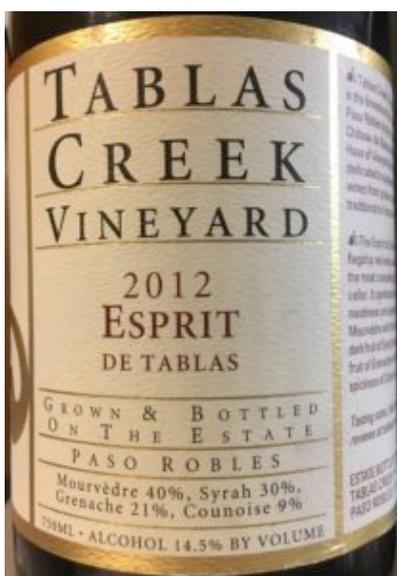
These are good folks making wines that are incredible values. If you’ve never tried them before get online and order a case or two! Here’s their team:



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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# A Unique Experience At Williamson Wines

[Williamson Wines](#) was the top new find on our [trip to Sonoma](#). After a few wines, co-founder Dawn Williamson joined us at the table for a lively conversation. Along with her husband Bill they provide a unique experience at Williamson Wines. First, you can't beat the price for the tasting: \$0.00 for groups smaller than six people. Second, they serve the wine tastes accompanied by food morsels so you can evaluate the wines in the context of an appropriate food.

Dawn and Bill emigrated from Australia about 35 years ago. They've been making wine since 2002. And their wine is great!



Dawn with our crowd (click for larger image)

An unusual, terrific aspect of Williamson is their restaurant. There are a number of [wine and food pairing options](#):

## Wine and Food Pairing Experiences

Fridge Foods & Fine Wines - Complimentary Wine & Food Pairing
Icon Wines & Culinary Delights - \$50 per guest
<a href="#">Rhône Wines &amp; Savory Bites - \$65 per guest</a>
Heritage & Noble Bordeaux Style Wines - \$75 per guest

## Special Tasting Experiences

We grow, make and blend over 40 wines, just too many to taste in one session so our different tasting experiences allow you to focus on the wine styles you prefer. Wine club members receive their special pricing on all tastings so simply click on any of interest to see more.

Reserve Heritage & Cabernet Wines - \$95 per guest - minimum 2 guests
Reserve Wine & Lunch Tasting with the Winemaker - \$125 per guest - minimum 2 guests
Helicopter Ride & Tasting - \$395 includes two guests
Groups larger than Eight - POA

Wine and Food Pairings  
(click for larger image)

Or visit **The Terrace at Eighteen** (18 Matheson St. in Healdsburg).

## The Terrace at Eighteen

Looking for a comfortable place to relax with a glass of great wine accompanied by a delicious food plate? - Try The Terrace at Eighteen, open every day.

**The Terrace at Eighteen - Food and Wine Service**

The Terrace at Eighteen brings local farm-to-table cuisine together with delicious cheeses, exotic spices and our world class wines all with the intimate charm of wine country hospitality.

- Terrace is open to guests 7 days, 12 noon - 6 p.m.
- Four food menu choices @ \$15 per plate
- Wines by glass each day are based on wines being poured in the tasting rooms that day.
  - \$10 - wines with list price less than \$50 / bottle;
  - \$15 - wines with list price over \$50 but less than \$100 / bottle;
  - \$30 - wines with list price over \$100 but less than \$200 / bottle;

Prices on food plates and wines by the glass are fixed however you may purchase any bottle at normal list price and your wine club discount does apply.

The Terrace at Eighteen  
(click for larger image)

If you're feeling flush, a mere \$395 gets you a 30 minute helicopter ride over Sonoma Valley followed by a tasting at the winery:

### Sonoma 30 min Helio Flight & Tasting

Enjoy two extreme sensory pleasures all in the one day.

The total freedom found in helicopter flight is something everyone should experience. Then the unparalleled experience of finding a taste of exceptional wine presented by knowledgeable, friendly staff in an idyllic setting that is Healdsburg.

Depart from Sonoma County Airport for a 30-minute scenic helicopter flight above Healdsburg and spectacular views of the surrounding mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes. Many wineries and vineyards are not open to the public and their beautiful properties are only visible from above.

After your flight a short drive takes you into the delightfully quiet town of Healdsburg arriving at Williamson Wines. Here you will hear the stories of Dawn and Bill Williamson, subjects of the book "Way Beyond Allie" who came to this area from Australia to grow grapes and make wine.

Here you will enjoy an Icon Tasting of multiple wines all paired with individual food dishes prepared by our winery chef. You will experience first hand how wine interacts with the food to reveal the layers of flavor within.

After lunch take a stroll around the Healdsburg Plaza, shop a little, enjoy a coffee, perhaps taste more wines. Take pleasure in this wonderful lifestyle and eclectic culture.

- Price is for two guests for helicopter flight and Legacy food and wine tasting.
- Limit of two persons with a weight limit of 250 pounds per person.

Call: 707-433-1500 or email for details

\$395 - Add To Cart





Flavors of hint of apple and cranberry notes of light leather and soft tannins finish. The food pairing was Moroccan date sauce.

**“Entice Cuvée” Bordeaux-style blend (\$48).** Blend of cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, malbec, petit verdot. Youthful aromas of coffee and blackberries greet you from the glass.. The cabernet sauvignon appears immediately on the palate, but softened by the merlot and malbec. The food pairing was jalapeño and sweet pepper jam.

**2012 cabernet sauvignon “Indulge” Dry Creek Valley (\$65).** Rich plum and blackberry with a hint of tobacco to the nose. White pepper and plum with hints of caramel, tobacco and black licorice on the palate with assertive tannins finish. Age this one for a year or two. The food pairing was blue cheese and honey.

**2015 pinot noir “Rapture” Sonoma Coast (\$56).** Aromas of bing cherry and cranberry with hints of cinnamon and leather. The palate is earthy and big, with notes of brambleberry and clove lead to a long finish with silky tannins. The food pairing was truffle salt.

## **Dawn and Bill Williamson**

Dawn likes **“Wednesday night recipes”** that people can actually cook. As she put it,

*People come to wine country and they think you're going to have the big Viking stove, and you have to have all this stuff. We ship to New York, we ship to Washington, people have beautiful apartments, but they don't have huge kitchens. We like recipes that you can cook in an apartment kitchen, that you can get on the table in a reasonable amount of time, and, as I tell young people, if you screw up it's still going to be all right. ... I have hundreds of cookbooks with all the pretty pictures. I enjoy them. You flip through them and see*

*how pretty they are. You say, "That looks good," then you look closely and it's  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of everything you've ever heard of.*

Together they have put together a **memorable, unique wine-tasting experience**. Assisted, of course, by their terrific wines. Not bad for immigrants from down under!