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MacRostie Winery & Vineyards: Evolving to Embrace Quality

MacRostie, with a 27-year history of making Sonoma Coast wines, is a defining California winery and a familiar name to wine enthusiasts. The last several years have seen sweeping changes at MacRostie that include the sourcing of grapes from some of Sonoma Coast's most legendary vineyards and the building of a new winery and MacRostie Estate House on Westside Road in the Russian River Valley (the photo below shows the new project under construction in December).



The MacRostie Estate House is located on a hill overlooking Westside Road surrounded by the vines of the 13-acre estate Thale's Vineyard (named after Steve's spouse) planted to Pinot Noir. When completed in early 2015, the MacRostie Estate House will feature multiple indoor and outdoor tasting venues and an adjacent Pinot Noir focused winery.

Steve began his winemaking career in 1974 at Hacienda Winery at a time most winemakers were fixated on Cabernet Sauvignon and the Napa Valley. Steve took another path and embraced the cooler vineyards of Sonoma County, producing exceptional Pinot Noir and Chardonnay at Hacienda during his twelve years at that winery. In 1987, Steve established MacRostie Winery and Vineyards and began his quest to champion quality in the region. By 1992, Pinot Noir had been added to the winery's portfolio, and MacRostie quickly developed a devoted following.

In 1998, Steve planted Wildcat Mountain Vineyard in partnership with Nancy and Tony Lilly. It is located in the Petaluma Gap region on the border of the Sonoma Coast appellation, and has been the source of exceptional MacRostie wines. Today, MacRostie works with more than 30 Chardonnay vineyards and over 15 Pinot Noir sites, representing a remarkable diversity for a small winery.

Since 2011, Steve MacRostie has been working alongside up-and-coming and innovative winemaker Heidi Bridenhagen to expand the MacRostie vineyard program. Although they both spend considerable time in all their vineyard sources, in recent years, they have called on viticultural specialist Allen Holstein (Argyle Winery, Stoller Vineyards and Domaine Drouhin Oregon) to refine the winery's farming program.

The core of MacRostie's winegrowing program are five sites. **Wildcat Mountain Vineyard** possesses volcanic soils and is located in a cool, windy and foggy mountainous site resulting in low yields. Both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are planted here over 18 different blocks spread across five fields with a diversity of aspect. Dutton Ranch, guided by Steve and Joe Dutton, is a source of both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Sangiacomo Vineyard, located in Sonoma Carneros, was MacRostie's earliest source of Chardonnay. The family owned vineyard is located along Sonoma Creek with vines planted between 1974 and 1994. **Goldrock Ridge Vineyard** is located near the town of Annapolis in the West Sonoma Coast region. Four clones of Pinot Noir are planted in Goldridge sandy loam at an elevation of 780 feet at the boundary of the fog line. The **MacRostie Estate Vineyard** (Thale's Vineyard) consists of young plantings of Pinot Noir in the Middle Reach of the Russian River Valley.

Steve and Heidi have also refined their approach to Chardonnay, and re-imagined the Pinot Noir program. They work with lots of Pinot Noir as small as 1 ton, doing upwards of 80 individual fermentations each vintage. Even though MacRostie's vineyard sources have grown to include some of Sonoma Coast's most notable winegrowing families including the Duttons, Sangiacomos, Martinellis and Bacigalupis, the MacRostie style remains consistent - balanced wines with bright acidity and judicious use of new French oak.

As evidence that MacRostie is evolving over time to embrace quality, the winery became the first Sonoma Coast winery to bottle all wines under screwcap.

This was my first opportunity to extensively taste MacRostie wines. They were highly approachable and elegant, with modest tannins and minimal oak overlay. The wines represent outstanding value relative to quality and should be sought out. Visit the website at www.macrostiewinery.com to obtain the wines and plan to visit the new MacRostie Estate House when it opens early this year. In addition to the wines reviewed here there is a 2012 25th Anniversary Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that celebrates MacRostie's 25 years as a Sonoma winery and the opening of the new winery in the Russian River Valley (a six barrel selection, \$54).

2012 MacRostie Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., 4,174 cases, \$34, screwcap. Sourced from Champlain Creek and Wildcat Mountain vineyards in the Sonoma Coast, Hellenthal Vineyard in Fort Ross-Seaview, and Dutton-Hallberg Ranch in the Russian River Valley. 100% de-stemmed, inoculated yeast fermentation, punch downs and pump overs, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% of which were new. · Moderately light ruby color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of cherry, plum and huckleberry with a complimentary touch of spice and oak. Soft and smooth in the mouth with balanced tannins and some finishing fruit presence. Easy to drink. *Score: 89*

2012 MacRostie Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.2% alc., 486 cases, \$42, screwcap. Sourced from several vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, punch downs twice a day in 5-ton fermenters, aged in French oak barrels of which 26% were new, 31% one-year-old and the remaining neutral. · Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opens with appealing aromas of black cherry and dark raspberry, but oak-driven scents of char and tobacco smoke take over. More appealing on the palate where the wine is relatively light in weight with inviting elegance. Forward and easy drinking with a modest attack of Bing cherry, cola and sassafras flavors backed by lively acidity and mild tannins, the wine finishes with an array of darker stone and berry fruits. *Score: 88*

2012 MacRostie Wildcat Mountain Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., 878 cases, \$48, screwcap. Mostly clones 667 and 777. 100% de-stemmed, inoculated yeast fermentation, combination of punch downs and punch overs, aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 28% of which were new. · Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Alluring scents of cherry, raspberry, underbrush, spice and subtle oak. Seamless and polished, with mid weight flavors of cherry and red berries accented with a hint of spice and citrus. Very classy, with soft tannins and a dry, refined finish with impressive length. A sensual wine with nuance. *Score: 91*



2012 MacRostie Goldrock Ridge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., 290 cases, \$54, screwcap. Clones 777 and “828.” 100% de-stemmed, inoculated yeast fermentation, a combination of pump overs and punch downs. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 30% of which were new. · Medium reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of black cherry pie glaze, blackberry jam, oak cask and pipe smoke. Crisp and vibrant, with layers of flavor including dark red and purple berries, black cherry, anise and black tea. Veers to the riper side but retains impressive Pinot character. Lively acidity drives the refreshing and very lengthy finish which is highly satisfying. *Score: 92*

2012 MacRostie Sonoma Coast Chardonnay

14.1% alc., 24,372 cases, \$25, screwcap. Sourced from multiple Sonoma Coast, Sonoma Carneros and Russian River Valley vineyards. Whole cluster pressed, 100% MLF, aged 6 months on the lees in French oak barrels with occasional battonage, 18% of which were new. A few lots were fermented in stainless steel. · Light golden straw color and clear in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of lemon, jasmine and toasty oak. Welcoming flavors of apple, pear and citrus with a hint of nutty oak. Slightly creamy in the mouth with a bright, citrus-infused finish that urges the drinker to take another sip. *Score: 89*

2012 MacRostie Russian River Valley Chardonnay

406 cases, \$32, screwcap. The majority of the grapes were from Keefer Ranch and Dutton-Jewell Ranch, both in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Whole cluster pressed, partial MLF, aged on the lees for 9 months in French oak barrels, 21% of which were new. · Light golden straw color and clear in the glass. A solid offering featuring aromas of lemon-lime, fresh-cut apple and mango. Slightly viscous on the palate with flavors of citrus, apple, brioche and butter toffee, finishing with a wealth of apple flavor. *Score: 88*



[2012 MacRostie Wildcat Mountain Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay](#)

763 cases, \$38. Whole cluster pressed, 100% MLF, aged 10 months on the lees with battonage in French oak barrels, 21% of which were new. · Light golden straw color and clear in the glass. Demure but pleasing aromas of lemon rind, honey, juniper berry and toasty oak lead to tightly wound flavors of lemon, butterscotch, vanilla and toast with a hint of sea spray in the background. Distinctively different from the other MacRostie Chardonnays, this wine challenges the senses, and offers the most lingering finish. *Score: 92*

[2012 MacRostie Sangiacomo Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay](#)

177 cases, \$44, screwcap. Whole cluster pressed, 100% MLF, aged 10 months on the lees in French oak barrels. After assembling the blend, seven barrels were chosen, two of which were new. · Light golden straw color and clear in the glass. Plenty to like in this wine with hi-tone aromas of lemon curd, honeysuckle, vanilla and toast. Plenty of acidic verve compliments and lifts the lemon, pear and biscuit flavors. Good fullness and creaminess on the palate with a tangy, lemon and pear infused finish. *Score: 90*

[2012 MacRostie Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Chardonnay](#)

281 cases, \$44, screwcap. Whole cluster pressed, 100% MLF, aged on the lees with occasional battonage for 10 months in French oak barrels, 25% of which were new. · Light golden straw color and clear in the glass. A complex offering with plenty of aromatic goodness including scents of white peach, lemon rind, tangerine and floral bouquet. Very pleasing in the mouth with a slightly viscous texture, beautifully integrated oak highlights, and pleasing lemon and apple flavors. Great harmony, finishing with admirable tension and citrus infused delight. *Score: 92*

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