



2018
Santa Lucia Highlands
PINOT NOIR

PRODUCTION Twelve barrels

LOCATION Smith Home Ranch and Sarmento Vineyard

CLONES Dijon 943, Dijon 115, and Pommard

VINEYARD

The Smith Home Ranch is located towards the southern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands appellation. The Sarmento is located roughly five miles north in the middle of the area. The Sarmento is at a high elevation with rockier soils than typical of the region. It is the Dijon 115 portion. The other two blocks are located at lower elevations and share the sandy clay loam soil that is most prevalent. All three sites made significantly different wines. The Sarmento was dark and smoky. The Dijon 943 produced a racy lightweight with strong floral and herbal tones. The Pommard was medium in color extract with substantial tannins. The weather for the vintage was ideal for Pinot Noir. It was cool throughout with no periods of high heat. Heat is the bane of California Pinot Noir, and it is unusual to get through the ripening season without some. I consider this vintage the best since 2007. It is one of the top two or three in my four decades of Pinot Noir production.

WINEMAKING

When you are dealing with a great vintage such as 2018 there's no need to get fancy with the winemaking. The most basic French wine farm recipe works like a charm. Fermentation was in small hand punched down bins. Free run wine only was employed. The wine was aged for 11 months in French oak barrels. The new barrels were puncheons which seemed to work very well. The wine was aged in 1/3 new oak with most of the balance being once used barrels.

FLAVOR STYLE

When it comes to Pinot Noir, I am a classicist. I want a medium bodied wine with high levels of perfume and a dynamic palate where both the tannins and the acidity are evident. Vintages such as this will deliver the correct style as long as you harvest them in the early middle of their ripening curve. I have never been a proponent of high ripeness in Pinot Noir. I believe that Pinot is about elegance and balance – not about power. Wines made in this style tend to age more gracefully as well for those who care about it.

FOOD PAIRING

Pinot Noir is ever the diplomat at the table and gets along with almost everything. I like to pair it with fowl – the richer flavored ones such as quail and pigeon are particularly good foils for Pinot. Smoked and salted foods are also a great choice. Many people seem to enjoy Pinot with Salmon. If I were pairing it with cheese I'd choose a goat cheese.