

PLATINUM SERIES

Select, Ultra Premium, Collectable Wines from California's Best Winemakers

If you are familiar with the Fort Ross area of Sonoma County, you might assume that the locale is not widely noted for grape growing or the making of fine varietal wines. This month's *Platinum Series Selection*, Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery, would definitely prove that initial theory wrong. What's more, the owners of the smallish winery point to the fact that the first grape plantings in Fort Ross were established in 1817 with rootstock brought from Peru, thereby predating any plantings in either Sonoma County or Napa Valley.

For the record, Lester and Linda Schwartz are the owners of Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery. It is an incredibly well placed facility located on a coastal ridge just above Fort Ross. The entire vineyard has an unparalleled view of the Pacific Ocean including Bodega Bay and even the Farallon Islands. It also might lay claim to the closest vineyards to the water in all of California.

Lester and Linda Schwartz are both natives of South Africa, and met at the University of Cape Town when they were both students in the 1960's. Lester was a geology student while Linda, a pianist and composer, was studying music. Cape Town's location to South Africa's famed Stellenbosch Valley is similar to San Francisco's closeness to Sonoma and Napa, and the pair discovered a mutual interest in wine.

After settling in San Francisco, the couple finally decided to enter the wine business in 1988. Lester yearned for the country life of his youth and Linda began taking wine-oriented classes to learn more about the field. They found a breathtaking spot just above Fort Ross and decided to plant some test vineyards to see what the growing parameters were for the mountainous terrain.

"We took a great deal of time, more than four years, to see what the results would be," recalled Linda Schwartz. "Most people thought we were crazy, what with the annual rainfall (75 to 125 inches) and the climactic conditions so near the water. We listened to everyone and then did what we thought best."

The area's first planters suffered through a number of circumstances, but eventually developed a growing philosophy that has proven to be correct. Many growers now feel that the Fort Ross area is one

of the finest growing areas for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in California. Sadly, there is little plantable land left to develop.

Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery's first release came in 2000, more than a decade after the first plantings. A total of only 100 cases were produced, but the wines proved to be masterpieces from the beginning. Since then, the winery has been featured at the prestigious James Beard House in New York and the industry plaudits have been many and rewarding.

A total of 50 acres comprises the Fort Ross Vineyard and is located from elevations of 1200 to 1700 feet. The vines are extremely low yield, producing only 1.5 to 2 tons per acre.

"We usually drop fruit two or three times a year," Schwartz informed. "We know exactly what we are after in terms of size and ripeness, and we do whatever is necessary to produce the type of fruit we need for our wines."

One unique fact is that Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery does not release its wines strictly by vintage.

"We only release a wine when it is ready for release,"

added Schwartz. "It drives some of our employees crazy, but it's paramount for our wines and best for our consumers." Above all, the rigors of running vineyards and a winery have been a labor of love for Lester and Linda Schwartz.

"If a business school looked at a model of our operation, they would probably throw up their hands," noted Schwartz with a chuckle. "But when you do things like we do, you might have to throw out all the books. Some call us idealistic so I let our wines speak for themselves."

And those wine speak quite loudly. Most of Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery releases are sold out early, including their wonderful Pinotage, a South African varietal that has won a huge following at the winery.

Lester and Linda have daughters who are professionals in their own right, but have little interest in becoming involved in the winery. Their grandchildren, however, are another matter. Linda Schwartz holds out hope the youngsters will eventually become interested and enter the wine business.

"That would complete everything," she finalized. "Everything."



The road to great wine begins at your door.

TASTING NOTES



FORT ROSS VINEYARD & WINERY · SONOMA COAST

Dear *Platinum Series* Members,

When we started planting our vineyard in 1994, we were told that we were crazy. It would be the closest vineyard to the Pacific Ocean in California and we were warned that the grapes would need to vacation in Miami to ripen. To this day, all Fort Ross wines are still produced only from grapes grown on this single-estate vineyard.

We were not only crazy but also stubborn. We ignored the warnings of the Consultants and Vineyard Contractors and tested our theories by planting a trial vineyard with 16 different grape varieties. When we saw that Burgundian grapes thrived in the cool maritime climate, ripening to a rich fruitiness while maintaining the lively acidity, soft tannins and distinctive minerality characteristic of Grand Cru Burgundy, we began preparing the main vineyard. It took us four years before we were satisfied that we had prepared the first steep hillside blocks to cope with a rainfall that ranges from 75 to 125 inches – more than the Amazon Jungle – and put in 7 miles of fencing to keep the deer out.

Now as we stand in our vineyard, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, watching the buds swell and the first green leaves sprouting of our 12th vintage, sipping our Fort Ross Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, we watch the helicopters fly overhead carrying eager prospective buyers of premium vineyard land in an area where the few plantable acres have been taken and what remains are rocky outcrops. Maybe we were not crazy after all!

We would like to invite you to visit our website for complete tasting notes and to learn more about Fort Ross Vineyard. We are in the process of building the first tasting room in our area, just off the Pacific Coast Highway. If you would like to come visit please join our mailing list so we can keep you informed about our progress as well as upcoming wine releases. www.FortRossVineyard.com.

From our family to yours!

Sincerely,

Linda Schwartz
Owner/President
FORT ROSS VINEYARD & WINERY
SONOMA COAST

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TASTING NOTES

From the winery's mountain vineyard on the "True Sonoma Coast," Fort Ross Vineyard produces limited amounts of Estate grown, cool-climate Pinot Noir. It is this spectacular site, traversing in elevations ranging from 1200 to 1700 feet above sea level that the incredible 2007 Fort Ross Pinot Noir calls home. Dense and garnet in hue, this full-bodied Pinot Noir entices with aromas of black currants and orange pekoe tea, framed by touches of earthy mushroom, cola, and savory hints of sage. The elegant aromatics lead to a complex palate defined by black raspberry, juicy boysenberry and bramble berries, with hints of subtle citrus and a dash of winter spices. Refined, supple tannins and the Fort Ross Vineyard signature minerality are revealed through the layered, velvety finish. *Wine Enthusiast* awards this stellar selection **95 Points** and names it an **Editor's Choice**: "A beautiful Pinot Noir for drinking now with lamb chops or maybe a rich, exotic Ahi tuna tartar. Brilliantly crisp in acidity, with a clean, bracing mouthfeel, it offers dazzlingly rich flavors...for the price, it's a very great buy." *Wine Spectator* awards the Fort Ross 2007 Pinot Noir **91 Points** and calls it "full-bodied, intense and complex." Aged 10 months in oak. 100% Pinot Noir. Enjoy now until 2014.

REORDERS

From one of the closest, if not *the* closest vineyard to the ocean in all of California, comes the remarkable achievement of Fort Ross Vineyard and Winery's 2007 Pinot Noir. This rich, layered wine with elaborately complex flavors proves it can compete in the big leagues, and its price point makes it one you can't ignore.

The **Fort Ross 2007 Pinot Noir** retails winery-direct for \$37.00 per bottle. As a *Platinum Series* member your very special pricing is as follows:

2-Bottle Members..... \$31.00 /bottle*
4-Bottle Members &
Multi-Series Members.....\$29.00 /bottle*
*2 bottle min. order [Plus shipping]

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