



WILLOWBROOK CELLARS

A relative newcomer to the Northern California wine scene, Willowbrook Cellars is the brainchild of winemaker Joe Otos who's making an impressive statement with vineyard designated, ultra-premium Pinot Noirs from Sonoma County's Russian River Valley.



Sonoma County's Kastania Vineyard, ripening Pinot Noir grapes, and Joe Otos with John Tracy.

There seems to exist an incredibly specific passion within the California wine community concerning the Pinot Noir grape, one that is as fixated as it is contagious, and Joe Otos caught the bug early on. Otos is the winemaker and soul behind Sonoma County's Willowbrook Cellars – a major up and coming producer of vineyard designated Pinot Noirs.

In the mid 1990s, Joe Otos was an outdoorsy kid in his early 20s studying Computer Business at Sonoma State University. He thrived on fishing, hiking, backpacking, and anything else that allowed him to experience the beautiful region. Originally from the big city of Los Angeles, Otos was naturally much more at home with the atmosphere Sonoma had to offer.

On one afternoon, Otos and his friends were hiking and decided to go wine tasting at a few local wineries on their way home. Otos had never visited a winery, and after this first trip, his interest and curiosity spiked immediately. Needless to say, wine tasting became a major activity added to the list, and Pinot Noir (with its troublesome nature yet elegant qualities) quickly became his favorite varietal.

"I spent so much time visiting tons of wineries and talking to them about how they got started and how they

ended up where they are today," Otos explained. "I was hooked."

Otos started working part time at Ravenswood Winery while he finished his years at Sonoma State. His coworkers recognized his passion for the industry, and when graduation time came, they convinced Otos to consider a future with wine. They didn't exactly have to twist his arm.

Otos started looking around for jobs, and came in contact with Chris Loxton who at the time worked at Wellington Vineyards in Glen Ellen (Loxton now owns and oversees the neighboring winery, Loxton Cellars). Loxton offered Otos a position, but explained that it didn't pay much. It was an opportunity nonetheless, and Otos jumped at the chance.

"I'm one of those people that when I get into something, I go full bore."

"I assisted Wellington through four harvests, and continued to visit other winemakers to get as much information as I could. I'm one of those people that when I get into something, I go full bore," Otos simply stated. He started dabbling with winemaking and it was during the time he put in
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Views of the beautiful Sonoma County vineyards sourced by Willowbrook Cellars and the happy, hardworking team during harvest.

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at Wellington, that Otos started formulating a business plan that ultimately would become Willowbrook Cellars.

“I decided to allocate two years to see if I could make anything happen, and looking back, it was pretty risky. I was only 26 at the time!” Otos revealed.

While looking for grapes to purchase, Otos met John Tracy who owned a Pinot Noir / Chardonnay vineyard in Forestville. Tracy was an ex CEO of a laser-tech company in southern California, and had recently moved to the Sonoma wine country to pursue his passion for wine. The vineyard yielded excellent grapes, but he needed a buyer, and Otos was just the person he was looking for. The two formed an instant partnership.

Otos also combined forces with a fellow employee at Wellington – Ed Sillari, who had been the VP of Marketing for Johnson & Johnson Company in his recent past. Sillari, like Tracy, had moved to the area in hopes of finding a future in the wine industry. Their combined experiences were all the pieces needed to get Willowbrook Cellars started.

“I knew I wanted to do Pinots, partly because the grape is so challenging to work with (and I love a good challenge), and I like Pinot Noir – good Pinot Noir,” Otos recently revealed. However, John Tracy had Chardonnay in his vineyard, and with some persuasion, talked Otos into doing a small Chardonnay program as well.

During the first two years, production was about 500 cases total and the vineyard designated Pinots were met with rave reviews (including a heap of Gold Medals). In 2003, Willowbrook began expanding the Pinot program by sourcing from a number of interesting vineyards in adjacent wine growing regions.

In 2005, Willowbrook produced its last Chardonnay, and the focus has been entirely on Pinot Noir ever since. “Now we’re just maintaining a balance,” Otos explained. “We’re currently producing about 2,500 cases and we’re in a comfortable spot.”

ABOUT THE VINEYARD



Although Willowbrook sources from a number of Russian River Valley vineyards, the Kastania Vineyard is Otos’ “dream vineyard.” The site receives coastal influences from the ocean on one side and the bay on the other, but since the vineyard is tucked against a ridge on a south-facing slope, the grapes are protected from the blustery Pacific winds and still receive ideal sun exposure.

Otos had been eyeing the Pinot grapes of Kastania Vineyard

since the late 1990s, and finally had his opportunity to get a hold of some with the 2005 vintage. The desirable Pinot grapes of this vineyard yield bold earthy flavors and beautiful floral and cherry nuances, so it’s no wonder the vines had been locked into long-term contracts. Otos was thrilled with the results of this vintage, and calls the 2005 Kastania Vineyard Pinot Noir his “baby all the way through.”

This southern Sonoma County vineyard is just seven acres planted and a beautiful representation of the region’s success with Pinot Noir.

ABOUT THE WINEMAKER



Joe Otos has always been one for a challenge, whether it's through an outdoor adventure or producing a successful vintage of Pinot Noir, and he manages to keep coming out on top. He's humbled by the accomplishments made through Willowbrook Cellars, and remains focused on goals for the winery's future.

Otos' naming of Willowbrook Cellars, by the way, wasn't after a neighboring landmark as one might guess. There were a number

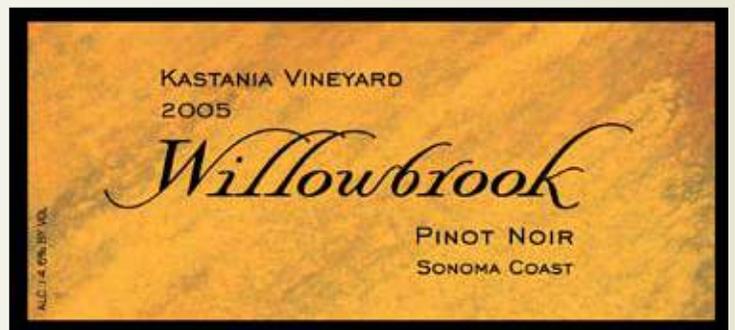
of connections to the name 'Willowbrook' that Otos simply couldn't ignore. "Originally, I wanted to name the winery after my pet cockatoo (Willow) and my business partner's cocker spaniel (Brooke). Then I realized my grandma lived in a Los Angeles suburb called 'Willowbrook,' and I had even lived on a 'Willowbrook St.' while in Sonoma." It seems that this winery (and name) were destined to be a part of Otos' life.

Aside from winemaking, Otos continues to love being outdoors and enjoys hiking and fishing in his free time.

WILLOWBROOK CELLARS 2005 KASTANIA VINEYARD PINOT NOIR

The Willowbrook 2005 Kastania Vineyard Pinot Noir is an impressive achievement from this extremely limited production winery. Medium-light ruby in color, this Pinot exudes hedonistic aromas of cedar, sweet strawberries and dark cherry nuances with intriguing floral notes. Deep, complex flavors of currant, coffee and cola blend with a tantalizing spiciness and cedar undertone that's full of finesse and an excellent representation of Kastania Vineyard's caliber of fruit. This Pinot Noir is as bold as it is elegant and will pair beautifully with a wide array of meals including grilled salmon, lamb, and vegetable lasagna.

Cases Produced 302
Alcohol 14.5%
Enjoy now until: 2012



91 POINTS *California Grapevine* publication

GOLD MEDAL *Sonoma County Harvest Fair*

GOLD STAR AWARD *Santé magazine*

REORDERS

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Grilled Salmon Skewers

- 1 pound salmon filet without skin
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger root
- 1 clove fresh garlic, minced
- pinch of freshly ground black pepper
- 12 fresh lemon wedges
- 12 skewers

Slice salmon lengthwise into 12 long strips, and thread each onto a soaked wooden skewer. Place the salmon skewers in a shallow dish. In a bowl, whisk together the soy sauce, honey, vinegar, ginger, garlic, and pepper. Pour the sauce over the skewers, turning to coat. Let the skewers stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. When finished marinating, transfer marinade to a small sauce pan, and simmer for several minutes.

Preheat an outdoor grill for medium-high heat. Lightly oil grill grate and thread 1 lemon wedge onto the end of each skewer. Cook skewers on the preheated grill for 4 minutes per side, brushing often with marinade, or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Serve immediately and enjoy!



Vegetable Lasagna

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| 12 lasagna noodles | 3 cups milk |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil | 3/4 cup Parmesan cheese, divided |
| 2 heads fresh broccoli, chopped | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 2 carrots, thinly sliced | 1/2 teaspoon pepper |
| 1 large onion, chopped | 1 (10 ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed |
| 2 green bell peppers, chopped | 1 (8 ounce) container small curd cottage cheese |
| 2 small zucchini, sliced | 24 ounces ricotta cheese |
| 3 cloves garlic, minced | 2 1/2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided |
| 1/2 cup all-purpose flour | |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 9 x 13 inch casserole dish. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add lasagna noodles and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente; drain. Heat oil in a large cast iron skillet over medium heat. When oil is hot add broccoli, carrots, onions, bell peppers, zucchini and garlic. Sauté for 5 minutes and set aside. Place flour in a medium saucepan and gradually whisk in milk until well blended. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Cook 5 minutes, or until thick, stirring constantly. In a small bowl, combine cottage and ricotta cheeses; stir well.

Spread about 1/2 cup of spinach mixture in the bottom of the prepared pan. Layer noodles, ricotta mixture, vegetables, spinach mixture and 2 cups mozzarella cheese, ending with noodles. Top with reserved spinach mixture, 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese and 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese. Bake in preheated oven for 35 minutes, or until lightly browned on top. Cool for approximately 10 minutes before serving.

Find these recipes and all of your favorites online at www.GoldMedalWine.com. From the Pinot Noir Series page, click on Winery Recipes and find delicious entrées to pair with your favorite wines.



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