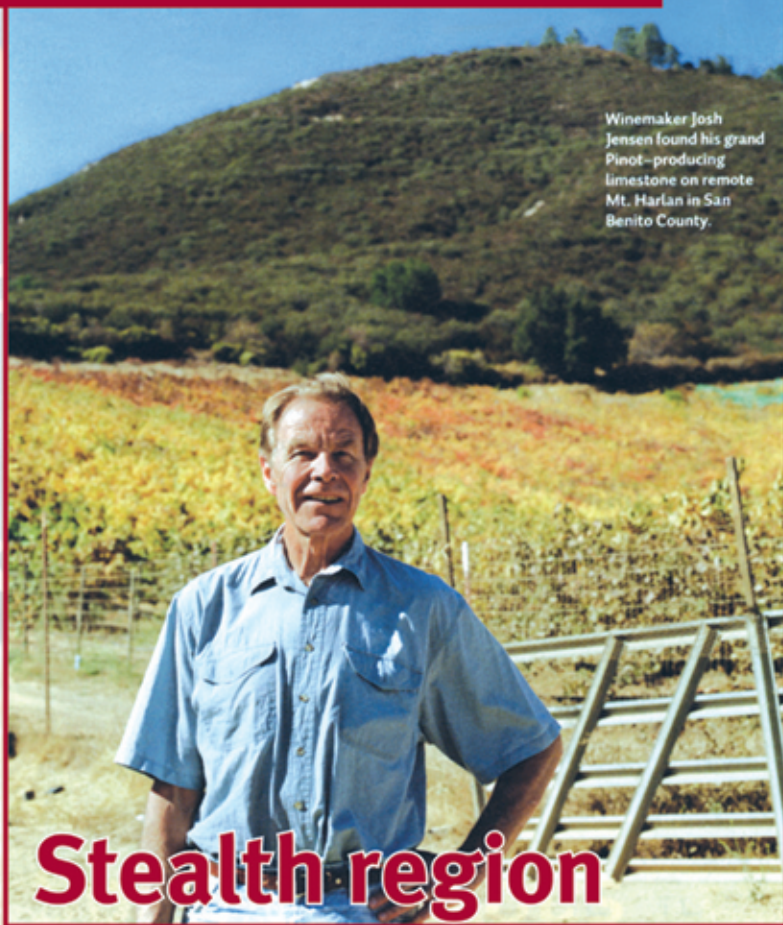


Comfort
favorite

Chicken potpie
easy sausage la



Winemaker Josh Jensen found his grand Pinot-producing limestone on remote Mt. Harlan in San Benito County.

Stealth region

It's time to look for San Benito County on wine labels

BY SARA SCHNEIDER

SAN BENITO COUNTY just might be the oldest California wine region that nobody has heard of. Remember all those jugs from Almaden? Yep, San Benito County. Fifty years ago, Almaden Vineyards' 4-acre cellar here was the largest barrel room in the world. Unfortunately, its "California Burgurdy" wasn't exactly a quality endorsement for the region. So there was no reason for makers of better wine to identify with the source.

But just up Cienega Road from old Almaden, Josh Jensen has been making great wine for more than 30 years—Pinot Noirs that have earned his Calera Wine Company the highest respect from Pinot producers the world over. And according to Jensen, "There are many places in this county that can make as good a wine as any in America."

In the early '70s, Jensen searched the state for two years to find limestone soils. He found them in this "lost corner of California," his part of which also gets a substantial cooling maritime influence.

Back down the road, Almaden now belongs to DeRose Winery, and they're making intense Zinfandel from several acres of 100-year-old vines. Léal is putting out yummy Merlots; Flint Wine Cellars, elegant Pinots; and Pietra Santa Winery, Italian varieties. Look for San Benito County when you're shopping next time. And if it's Pinot you're after, go for Calera's Reed Vineyard for generous fruit, Selleck Vineyard for leather and spice.



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