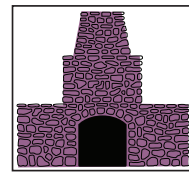




# Visit to Calera & New and Old Wines

John Tilson • 8/8/15

**R**ecently I visited Calera to taste the 2013 Pinot Noirs nearly all of which were bottled. Earlier I tasted them out of barrel. While there I also tasted the 2014s out of barrel. I visited with Josh Jensen, the founder, and Mike Waller, the winemaker. I also took a couple of 1978 wines to have with dinner – one a Burgundy, the other a California Pinot Noir. As we were discussing the 2014s and the very low yield (0.6 tons per acre for the Pinot Noir), I asked if this was the lowest yield ever. Josh answered “no.” It was, in fact, 1988 when yields were 0.5 tons per acre! He went on to say that the 1988s were very closed and not approachable until 10 years after bottling. Then the 1988s began to emerge as one of the great vintages. After talking about the 1988s Josh offered to bring a couple to have with our dinner along with the wines I brought. The following article consists of tasting notes on the 2014s out of barrel, the 2013s nearly all from bottle, and the older wines. Make no mistake. Remarkable wines are being made at Calera. And, as I have said in earlier **Calera Wine Company** articles: If you don’t know Calera, now is the time to change that!



# CALERA





View of Calera's Mills and Chardonnay vineyards at Mt. Harlan.

Calera has two rows of Aligoté in the Jensen vineyard and four in the Chardonnay vineyard. Only 330 vines in total.

### **2014 Calera Mt. Harlan Wines from Barrel**



We tasted the 2014 wines from barrel in the new recently built cave. This cave was chiseled out of the mountainside and is spacious and cool and an ideal place for making and storing wine. Below are my notes on the Mt. Harlan Pinot Noirs as well as the Aligoté and Chardonnay.

### **2014 Calera Aligoté Mt. Harlan**

Aligoté is the great historic white grape of Burgundy that was largely replaced by Chardonnay after phylloxera destroyed most of the vines in Burgundy in the 1860-70s. I love the crispness of Aligoté and there are still a handful of really good ones in Burgundy (to read about those click [here](#)). In California Calera consistently makes one of the finest Aligotés. Alas, there is only a small planting of about ½ acre. In 2014 the yields were way down and only 1 barrel (24 cases) was produced. It promises to be one of the great Aligotés. It has a gorgeous perfume showing a hint of lichee and has very bright intense melon like fruit with citrus tinges and a great underlying crispness.

### **2014 Calera Chardonnay Mt. Harlan**

This Chardonnay shows the intensity of the 4th consecutive drought year with a low yield and great concentration. Only three barrels were produced. I tasted from one barrel and the wine was lush, rich, round and full with tremendous fruit and a bright underlying acidity. This should be a very special Chardonnay.

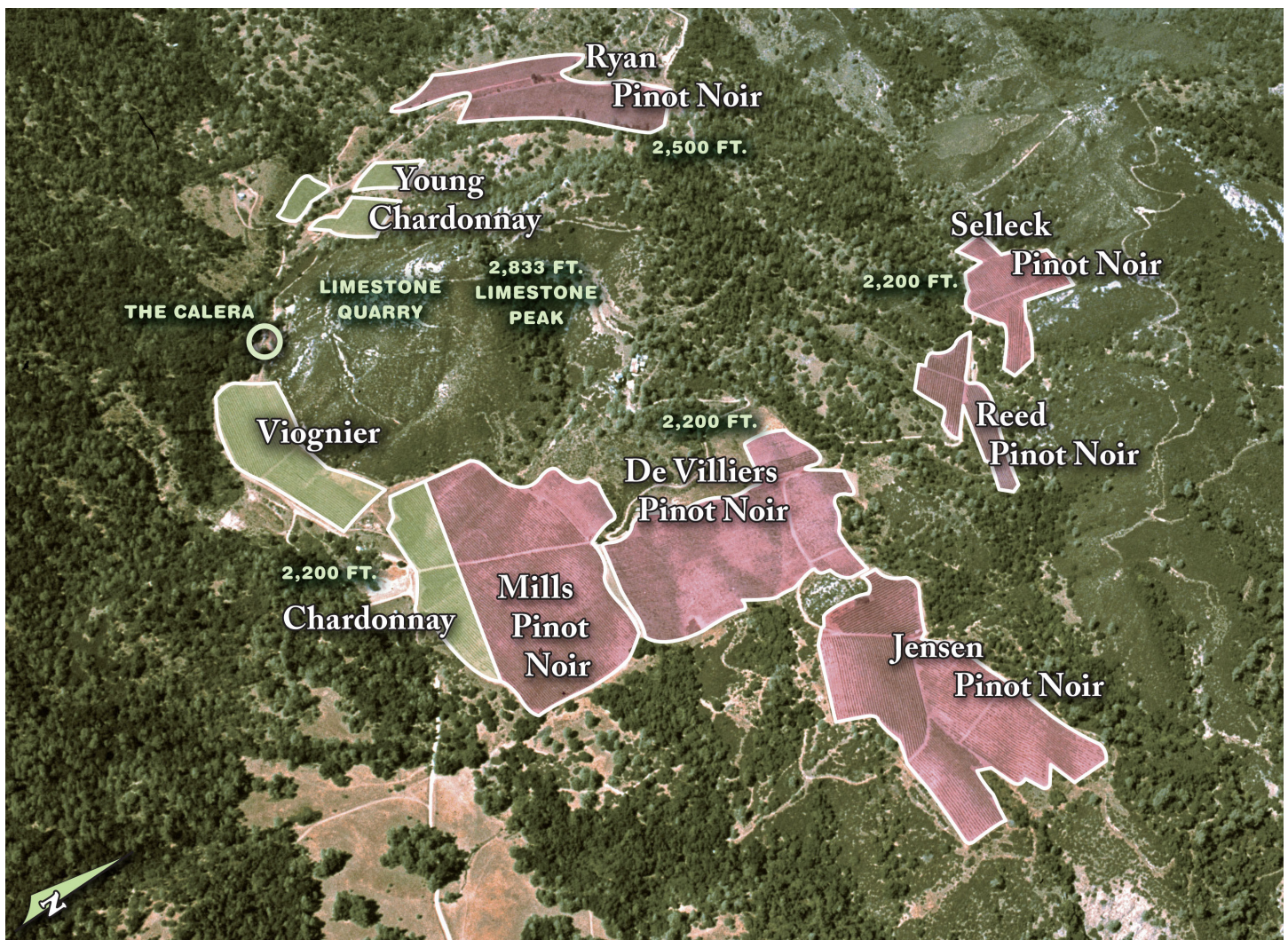




## 2014 Calera Mt. Harlan Pinot Noirs

The **Calera Mt. Harlan Pinot Noirs** are made from six different vineyards: Selleck (5 acres), Reed (5 acres), Jensen (14 acres), Mills (14.4 acres), de Villiers (15.6 acres), and Ryan (10 acres). The production of the Pinot Noir vines is very low. Yields rarely exceed 2 tons per acre with an average closer to 1 ½ tons per acre. And, in 2014 production was only about 1/3 of the average yield! Meticulous care of the vineyards and traditional winemaking with minimal intervention results in consistently high quality wines. These wines are very special and are available from the winery and in limited distribution across the country.

The 2014 Pinot Noirs, as might be expected, are mostly closed at this stage. The tasting was from only one barrel of each wine and the blending will come later and the wines will be offered for sale in calendar 2017. My notes are very abbreviated and give only a glimpse of what the wines might be. However, given the very low yields, a comparison certainly might be made to the 1988s. If that is the case, patience will be required and with patience the wines could become cellar treasures like the 2 great 1988s that are mentioned at the end of this article. *Vamos a ver!*







**2014 Calera Pinot Noir de Villiers Mt. Harlan**

Quite closed, but with tremendous fruit, this De Villiers will require patience. It should be worthwhile waiting for. The concentration and fruit is there and seems ample to carry the substantial underlying tannins.



**2014 Calera Pinot Noir Ryan Mt. Harlan**

Dark in color the Reed has a great perfume, loads of fruit, and is rounded with great intensity. Quite open at this juncture, but surely will close at some point, this is nonetheless very impressive and should make a stunning bottle over many years into the future.



**2014 Calera Pinot Noir Mills Mt. Harlan**

Dark in color and loaded with fruit the wine is full, rich, concentrated and quite expressive at the moment of this tasting. This is very impressive.







**2014 Calera Pinot Noir Reed Mt. Harlan**

The Reed shows a stunning black cherry fruit quality and is rich and full with lots of flavor. The tannins are there underneath the fruit and the wine has structure and depth.



**2014 Calera Pinot Noir Jensen Mt. Harlan**

Relatively forward and expressive with great balance, the Jensen is a stand out. The perfume is stunning and there is an abundance of fruit that shows intensity and richness.



**2014 Calera Pinot Noir Selleck Mt. Harlan**

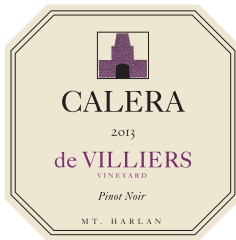
Like the Jensen, the Selleck is relatively open. It has a dark color and a great perfume with great intensity and depth. It is balanced and full of flavor with the tannins masked by the intensity of the fruit. This promises to be a classic Selleck.



## 2013 Calera Mt. Harlan Pinot Noirs

Most of these wines were in the bottle at the time of my visit. Some had been bottled very recently. From my earlier tasting of the 2013s from barrel, I expect that these will be great wines. Just now they are a bit

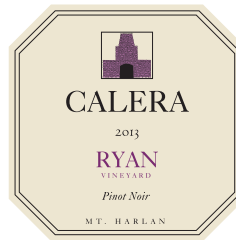
closed. But, they will not be sold until next year and by that time I think they will be showing beautifully. The last few vintages for Calera have been terrific. As I have said many times, *Calera Is On A Roll!*



### 2013 Calera Pinot Noir de Villiers Mt. Harlan

Still in tank at the time of my visit and scheduled for bottling in a few weeks, the de Villiers shows a dark color and a deep perfume with lots of fruit and intensity. Firm tannins lie underneath and the wine has structure and depth. This will make a delicious wine.

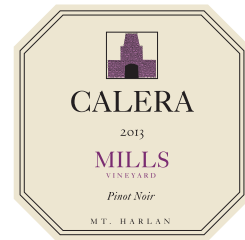
**OUTSTANDING POTENTIAL**



### 2013 Calera Pinot Noir Ryan Mt. Harlan

This wine was still in the tank at the time of my visit. It has a gorgeous perfume and is beautifully balanced with lots of fruit and flavor. This should be a wonderful wine of great purity and a lot of charm.

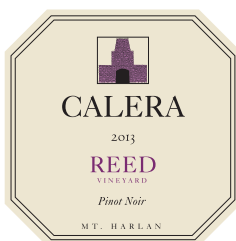
**OUTSTANDING POTENTIAL**



### 2013 Calera Pinot Noir Mills Mt. Harlan

Bottled about a month before my tasting, this wine shows beautiful balance and a lot of supple fruit. It is rich and rounded with great elegance and a lot of depth. To be sure this is a very special Pinot Noir.

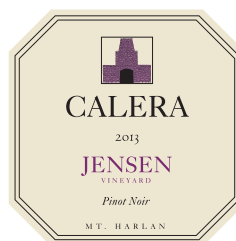
**OUTSTANDING PLUS POTENTIAL**



### 2013 Calera Pinot Noir Reed Mt. Harlan

With a gorgeous perfume this is a lovely Pinot Noir with lots of fruit and beautiful balance. Already showing a lot of charm this is a wine that will give immense pleasure over decades of drinking.

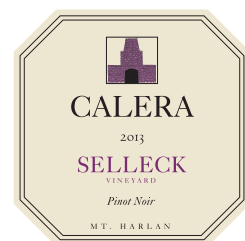
**OUTSTANDING PLUS POTENTIAL**



### 2013 Calera Pinot Noir Jensen Mt. Harlan

With a deep color this wine has superb fruit, balance and flavor. It is rich and supple with lots of depth and a long lasting finish. Without question, this is a classic Pinot Noir with a very long life ahead.

**EXCEPTIONAL POTENTIAL**



### 2013 Calera Pinot Noir Selleck Mt. Harlan

Very rich and concentrated with extraordinary balance and flavor, this is a superb Pinot Noir that should take its place alongside the many great Selleck vintages. It is very harmonious and beautifully integrated with delicious fruit and will provide a lot of pleasure from the very beginning. But, make no mistake; the wine will evolve over many decades.

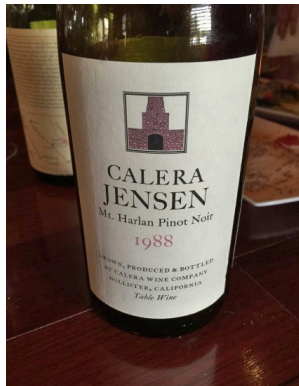
**EXCEPTIONAL POTENTIAL**

## 1988 Calera Mt. Harlan Pinot Noirs

### 1988 Calera Pinot Noir Jensen Mt. Harlan

I tasted this wine on an earlier visit to Calera in late 2011. It was outstanding then and even better now!

With a deep color the wine has a lovely perfume with floral nuances and lots of supple fruit accented by a faint spice tinge. Beautifully balanced and harmonious this is a gorgeous Pinot Noir.



**OUTSTANDING PLUS**

### 1988 Calera Pinot Noir Selleck Mt. Harlan

I had not tasted this wine since it was first released. Now having tasted it, it is simply remarkable. Those lucky few who were patient and kept the wine have an incredible wine that is gorgeous now, but seems to have a long life ahead.

With a deep color the wine has a stunning perfume with a myriad of fruits, tinges of spice, and a faint exotic nuance. There is great fruit and intensity on the palate with harmonious balance and impressive length. While the wine is silky and rounded there is also a well integrated freshness that gives the impression of something younger. Make no mistake the wine is great now, but my guess is that this wine could continue to evolve for another decade and keep for many more years after. **This is a classic California Pinot Noir and one of the very best I have ever tasted.**



## 1978 California Pinot Noir & 1978 Red Burgundy

### 1978 Chalone Vineyard Pinot Noir Estate

This is an absolute classic Pinot Noir. Originally, I had 2 cases of the wine. Just after it was released some 35 years ago, in blind tastings with the best 1978 Burgundies, it always ranked at the very top. And, it has never failed to please. Remarkably consistent I have enjoyed this wine over a dozen times through the years and it is always flat out great! I still have quite a few bottles left and look forward to drinking them over many years into the future. The 1978 Chalone Pinot Noir is a truly amazing wine by any standard! And, yes, it is still in the league of many of the greatest 1978 Burgundies.

Deep in color with a faint amber edge, this Pinot Noir has a knock-out perfume of plums and berries with faint hints of exotic spice, beet root, and green olive. With gorgeous fruit and great intensity, the wine is lush and rounded with a long lingering finish. Impeccably balanced and like velvet on the palate, this is a true legend in the history of California Pinot Noir. It has been drinking beautifully for some 35 years and is now fully mature, but shows no sign of not being able to last for another decade or more. **EXTRAORDINARY**



### 1978 Domaine Jacques Prieur Musigny

This is a lovely fully mature Burgundy that is harmonious and delicious to drink. With a deep color showing an amber tone and amber edge, it has a lovely floral spice tinged perfume and lovely fruit with a silky texture and a nice tinge of crispness on the finish. **OUTSTANDING PLUS**



## Conclusion – *Kudos for Calera!*

Calera wines have a long track record of excellence. The Mt. Harlan Pinot Noirs are stellar examples of what can be accomplished with this variety in California. They are balanced wines with a great ability to improve and age over a long period of time (including wines from the first vintage, 1978, which was bottled only in half bottles because of the minuscule production, as well as the remarkable 1988s noted above in this article). And the amount of consumer information available

on each of the wines is something that every winery should follow. Not only do the back labels have a lot of information, there is even more detail available on the web site. If you are not familiar with the Calera wines, I strongly encourage you to try them. And, be sure to visit the website for more information, including the wine clubs, direct purchases, and the availability of the wines in your area. [www.calerawine.com](http://www.calerawine.com)

