
UNITED STATES WINERIES OF THE YEAR

California, New York, Oregon and Washington provided 37 of our Top 100 Wineries this year, including top performances in cabernet from Napa Valley and the Santa Cruz Mountains, pinot noir from the Sonoma Coast and Oregon's Willamette, syrah from Mendocino and Walla Walla and riesling from Washington's Columbia Valley and New York State's Finger Lakes.

These are the players who performed at the highest level in our tastings over the last 12 months, selected from 3,953 US wines assessed blind by our tasting panels. They are the ones that tallied the most home runs and carried the greatest batting averages for the year.

W&S Editors **Patrick J. Comiskey**, **Joshua Greene** and **Luke Sykora** profile these wineries in the following pages. You'll find our 63 imported Wineries of the Year beginning on page 58. For other exemplary wines from estates that release only one or two wines a vintage, check out our 100 Best Wines of the Year (p. 94). And for access to our complete results, listing all wines tasted for the year, go to wineandspiritsmagazine.com.



Josh Jensen

Founded: 1975

Owner/winemaker: Josh Jensen

Viticulturist: Jim Ryan

Acres owned: 84 planted

Annual production: 32,000 cases

Estate grown: 32%

Known for: Terroir-driven, mountain pinot noirs grown on California limestone.

Location: Hollister, CA

Website: calerawine.com



Calera

AFTER SPENDING THE 1970 AND '71 VINTAGES WORKING harvest in Burgundy, Josh Jensen returned to California convinced that limestone was the key to growing great pinot noir in the New World. The problem: There wasn't much limestone in California. He poured over Bureau of Mines maps until he located a limestone-laden mountain in the arid Gavilan Range, complete with a 19th-century lime kiln ("calera" in Spanish). He planted his first three pinot noir vineyards there in 1975.

The limestone on Mt. Harlan is visible in the pale rock jutting out near the crests of the hills, and a finger of that surface limestone deposit makes its way into his Selleck Vineyard. But for the most part it's subterranean. The deepest Jensen's been able to go with a backhoe in his loose hillside soils is around ten feet, finding decomposed granite and mixed gravels. "When the vines go down, they tell us what the terroir is like, but they speak grape juice," he says.

Jensen's been thinking a lot about roots lately. It clicked when he heard a talk given by Burgundy consultant and soil scientist Claude Bourguignon, who said that wines made from shallow-rooted vines express the cepage, the grape variety, whereas wines from deep-rooted vines express the terroir. "If you've got a great terroir, if the vines get to be thirty or forty years old and you're not giving them daily irrigation, and encourage them to dive deep, to search thirty or forty feet down, then the wines will really show everything," Jensen postulates. So in 2010, he started to cut back on watering, going with a few long 24-hour irrigations instead of frequent watering,

hoping to encourage further rooting depth in his vines. In subsequent years, he's tried to give the vines just one 48-hour irrigation despite Mt. Harlan's decidedly arid summer weather. Beyond terroir expression, there's also a more practical consideration: The West, he says, seems to be getting drier due to climate change. He hasn't had any water in his 3.3 million gallon reservoir since 2006, and is anticipating a future in which his vines will have to be nearly dry farmed, like it or not.

His 2010s don't show any sign of imbalance due to the new watering regimen. In fact, they're quite spectacular—the cooler vintage delivering wines that feel long and tensive, balancing shimmering fruit with the deep mineral and wild herb notes that are hallmarks of a Mt. Harlan wine. The old blocks planted in 1975—Jensen, Selleck and Reed—are particularly expressive. Jensen, with its varied exposures, is exotically perfumed and bright fruited. Selleck is bluer in tone with beautiful detail and stony tannins—it comes from a sunny south-facing parcel with an abundance of limestone. And Reed, from a cool north-facing hillside that gives it a particularly long growing season, is the most savory and reticent of the trio, with an energetic crispness to its acidity. All three would be worth cellaring and exploring over the next decade.

That exploration would be about as pure a look into the subtle nuances of expression as you can get. Jensen moved to organic farming around ten years ago, but other than that, he's been making the wines pretty much the same way he has since his inaugural 1978 vintage: whole-cluster fermentation, 30 percent new oak, indigenous yeast. Every pinot vineyard is planted to the same plant material, a selection he got from Chalone on the other side of the Gavilan range, so the differences between the single-vineyard wines really are all about site. —L.S.



TOP-SCORING WINES

- 95** '10 Mt. Harlan Jensen Vineyard Pinot Noir \$75 (8/13)
- 94** '10 Mt. Harlan Selleck Vineyard Pinot Noir \$80 (8/13)
- 93** '10 Mt. Harlan Reed Vineyard Pinot Noir \$55 (8/13)

100 BEST WINES OF THE YEAR

Here are the best bottles we opened in the last 12 months, the most exciting of the 12,500 we presented to our blind panels this year. These are the wines our critics tasted for days before their identities were revealed, fascinated by their flavors, the wines that clearly brought to mind the places where they were grown.

We've arranged them here by country and region, starting with the United States.

Joshua Greene, Patrick J. Comiskey and Luke Sykora reviewed the American wines; **Greene, Patricio Tapia and Tara Q. Thomas** reviewed the imports. To access all of our tasting results from this year, please go to wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

UNITED STATES

Wines are often noted for their powerful tannins. This one shares that power: Grown on red volcanic soils on the west face of a ridge top closing in on 2,300 feet, it builds intensity out of dark fruit tones and the black spice of its tannins. At first, those tannins feel luxurious, richly layered with cedar and cool forest scents. Their complexity gains with air, as does the wine's refinement, subsiding its power into tremendous length of flavor. It brings on a scent memory of camping in the woods—a cabernet that excites the senses and is structured to develop for years in the bottle. (950 cases) *Robert Craig Winery, Angwin, CA*



95 | Diamond Creek
2009 Diamond Mountain District Napa Valley Red Rock Terrace Cabernet Sauvignon The iron-rich red soils of this 10-acre, north-facing hillside produced a cabernet that is as powerful as it is elegant in 2009. It starts off luscious and develops as it takes on air, building on the fresh berry scents with notes of flowers and edges of tannins. Streamlined and focused in its structure, this is glorious cabernet. (508 cases) *Diamond Creek Vineyard, Calistoga, CA*

BEST MERLOT

93 | Frog's Leap \$38
2010 Rutherford Napa Valley Merlot John Williams farms his benchland and valley floor vineyards without irrigation, providing a wine that is both elegant and powerful. (500 cases) *Frog's Leap Winery, Rutherford, CA*

94 | Relic \$52
2010 Napa Valley Old Vines Petite Sirah Grown by Al Frediani at his dry-farmed, organic vineyard in Calistoga—on vines he planted in the 1940s—this wine uses the California sun to its benefit, warming the fruit toward a powerful balance with petite's brutal young tannins. The fruit and tannins integrate with air, their combination a delicious

BEST PINOT NOIRS

95 | Calera \$75
2010 Mt. Harlan Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Vintage Jensen Vineyard Pinot Noir Is it winemaker Josh Jensen's use of whole-cluster fermentation that gives this wine its resinous, brushy aromas, or is it the ambient flora of the surrounding Gavilan Range? When an evocation of a place is so vivid, it hardly matters. The wine smells beautiful, like a hike through California chaparral in early summer: dried flowers, coniferous sap, wild herbs. Its vibrant red berry flavors course with energy, and it continues to gain stature with air, its crunchy mountain-grown structure bringing a sharp delineation to the sunny glow of the fruit. This comes from a limestone-laced hillside, one of the original pinot noir blocks that Jensen planted in 1975, using cuttings from the nearby Chalone Vineyard. Give it five or ten years in the cellar, and you'll have a thrilling partner for grilled quail. *Calera Wine Co., Hollister, CA*

2010 Dundee Hills Laurène Pinot Noir Generous from start to finish, Laurène marries Domaine Drouhin's traditional elegance with tremendous energy and vitality. Scents of plum and black cherry, dark and forward, are framed by warm oak spice, all marked by a high tone. Within all that generosity of

fruit, the wine's elegant structure is most apparent in the end, a lasting impression that suggests this will grow increasingly complex and expressive over the next ten years. (240 cases) *Hirsch Winery, Cazadero, CA*

BEST RED BLEND

96 | Shai Cellars \$34
2009 Santa Ynez Valley Adome Stones, gravel, graphite—this is a powerfully mineral wine. It opens with a firm grip that's intricate rather than oppressive, and doesn't let go. That rockiness feels vertical in direction, as if lifting the fruit from below. It's almost as if the tannins themselves are releasing flavor—point drops of herb-tinged *fraise-de-bois* energy refreshing its sun-ripened warmth. The blend includes cabernet from Happy Canyon, but the primary component is syrah from Tierra Alta Vineyard in Ballard Canyon, a rocky hillside of calcareous soils that rises from 1,000 to 1,250 feet. This is clearly a wine worth the long haul, and its price makes it an attractive case purchase—a performance to watch over the next decade or more as it evolves. (225 cases) *Shai Cellars Buellton, CA*

BEST SYRAHS

96 | Drew \$40
2011 Mendocino Ridge Valenti Vineyard Syrah Most California wine is about flavor. This one is about aroma. It's a dynamic scent, somewhere between freshly cracked peppercorn and coastal forest, bright and compelling enough to drive several of the tasters