

# Vineyard & Winery Management

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## Josh Jensen

Calera Wine Co.



A long time ago and in a galaxy far, far away, Josh Jensen ended his search for the ideal spot in California to grow pinot noir grapes.

He spent years poring over geological maps and scouring the state for the one element he knew was crucial to the production of classic pinot noirs like those he loved from Burgundy. It was limestone in the soil, and the problem was, California has very little of it. When Jensen finally found his holy grail, it was on a god-forsaken, rugged and isolated mountain in San Benito County, a world away from where anyone else was growing wine grapes. Or living, for that matter.

Planting began in 1975 on Mt. Harlan, 25 miles inland from Monterey and not far from Hollister, the earthquake epicenter of California. Neither the absence of electricity and telephone service, nor the unsexy zip code,

deterred Jensen, because limestone was the thing, and he had it in his soils, along with chilly temperatures thanks to the 2,200-foot elevation.

He named his winery Calera for the masonry limekiln on the property, and first planted the Selleck, Reed and Jensen vineyard blocks; a tiny crop was produced in 1978. In 1982, Jensen purchased 300 neighboring acres and planted more pinot noir plus viognier – making him a California pioneer in that variety. Chardonnay went into the ground in 1984, and Jensen continued to plant more pinot noir and viognier, as well as the obscure (for California) aligoté, Burgundy's "other" white grape, over time.

Today, he remains the lone grapegrower on Mt. Harlan, now an AVA, and supplements production with purchased Central Coast grapes that go into a moderately priced line of wines. But it's the estate pinot noirs that are Calera's shining stars, consistently graceful and honest, with stony earthiness, refreshing acidity and capacity for long lives in the cellar.

When Jensen began his quest, California was considered a mediocre, at best, place for cultivating pinot noir, with a few exceptions. Given the abrupt turnaround in that thinking, Jensen's 40 years of pinot devotion can be considered prescient.

"Josh Jensen's pinot noirs are harmonious intersections of Côte d'Or-like complexity and the ripe red/black fruitiness of 'modern' California pinot noir," said Linda Murphy, V&WM's columns editor and managing editor of Sonoma magazine. "He committed every nickel he had to an unproven region and made it work."