

WINERY OF THE YEAR!

2008

Wine & Spirits

22ND ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE

CALERA WINE COMPANY



Founded: 1975

Winemaker/Owner: Josh Jensen

Viticulturist: Jim Ryan

Acres owned: 83.6 acres planted

Annual production: 29,500 cases

Estate grown: 40%

Known for: Expressive, mountain-grown pinot noir

Location: Hollister, CA

Website: calerawine.com



In the early 1970s, about the time that Napa Valley began to explode, a young Josh Jensen decided that his path to making wine in California lay elsewhere. Rather than look towards Bordeaux as a model for what California wine could be, Jensen indulged his fascination with pinot noir. From his mentors in Burgundy (Jensen had worked at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti in 1970 and Domaine Dujac in 1971), Jensen learned that limestone soils were essential to growing great pinot noir. To that end, he scoured the state and eventually settled on an old limestone quarry located high in the Gavilan Mountains of Monterey County, about 90 miles south of San Francisco.

Planting began in 1975, with Jensen dividing the initial 24 acres of the Mount Harlan estate into three vineyards; Selleck, Reed and Jensen, all planted around 2,200 feet. Wines from these three sites can be tough in their youth; the '04 Jensen, for instance, takes several hours to reveal the complexity hidden behind the dark, earthy tannins.

One of the Calera's most impressive wines this year comes from the Mills Vineyard, which Jensen planted in 1984 after expanding the estate in 1982. Mills is planted on its own roots at between 2,200 and 2,300 feet above sea level, higher than the original three vineyards. It's typically the richest pinot noir Jensen makes on Mount Harlan, and in '05, these limestone soils yielded a wine of bright intensity and powerful, mineral tannins. The structure is there to cellar this wine for eight or more years.

In 1998, Jensen planted Ryan Vineyard at about 2,400 feet, making it the highest vineyard on the limestone ridges of Mount Harlan. While the vines are still young, the site is proving itself to be one of Jensen's best: Calera's pinot noir achieves complete ripeness when grown at this altitude, yet it remains firm, almost brisk in its expression. In '05, the wine feels bound and tight, gradually revealing a wild raspberry fruit character that's framed by both acidity and minerality. There's an elegance here that challenges accepted notions of California pinot noir. — W.M.W.



CALERA