



Russian River Valley Neighborhood wines are notable

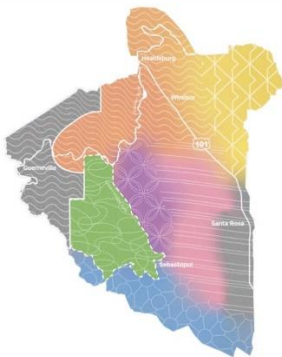
Gary Farrell releases are among the area's most striking offerings

The Russian River Valley is widely known to have the finest terroir for pinot noir and cool-climate chardonnay outside of Burgundy. The large Sonoma County appellation extends north from Healdsburg to areas south of Sebastopol. To that end, the Russian River Valley Neighborhood Initiative divides the appellation into six areas, each with distinct climates, soils and marine influences.

Of the six neighborhoods, the Eastern Hills, east of Highway 101, is the most inland where it is warmer with early ripening grapes. The Middle Ranch is the heart of the appellation with alluvial soils that produce succulent, fruit-driven wines.

In the flat Santa Rosa Plains, throughout the western portion of the city, pinot noir and chardonnay vines share space with zinfandel. With heavy clay soils, this neighborhood produces more acidity and spice-driven flavors.

Green Valley and Laguna Ridge are northwest and northeast of Sebastopol. Both neighborhoods have mostly Goldridge soil that promotes lush fruit and more tannins. Sebastopol Hills, south of the town, is the coolest neighborhood with high winds and marine influence that allow grapes to retain their natural acidity.



Areas in The Russian River Valley Neighborhood have distinctive climates. (Courtesy photo)

In 1982, long before the Russian River Valley appellation was designated, Gary Farrell was producing fine pinot noir and chardonnay. Today, his legacy continues under the leadership of winemaker Theresa Heredia, who arrived in 2012 from Joseph Phelps' Freestone Vineyards.

Growing up in Contra Costa County, Heredia was drawn to wine through biology and chemistry and holds degrees from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo and University of California, Davis. She was a 2020 nominee for Wine Enthusiast magazine's Winemaker of the Year. Recently, Theresa led a discussion of the Russian River Valley Neighborhood Initiative by introducing new Gary Farrell vineyard-designate chardonnay and pinot noir releases.

Planted in 1975, the Olivet Lane Vineyard is located in the Santa Rosa Plains neighborhood where cold nights enable grapes to retain acidity. The **Gary Farrell 2017 Olivet Lane Vineyard Chardonnay (\$45)**, aged in 35% new French oak, offers intense stone fruit aromas and flavors with hints of citrus and a lingering minerality.

The Ritchie Vineyard, planted in the 1970s near Forestville, contains silty, sandy soil that is common in the Laguna Ridge neighborhood. The **2017 Ritchie Vineyard Chardonnay (\$60)** has a lush mouthfeel with tropical fruit and mango notes. It is lean at mid-palate and pairs well with food.

The Rochioli Vineyard, located in the heart of the warm Middle Ranch neighborhood, has been sourcing pinot noir and chardonnay fruit to wineries for decades. I am always drawn to this vineyard designation, especially the mineral-driven chardonnay.

From alluvial soils, the **2017 Rochioli Vineyard Chardonnay (\$65)** is aged nine months on lees and offers tropical and stone fruit flavors, a lush mouthfeel with the ever-present minerality through the finish.

The Hallberg Vineyard, located in the Green Valley sub-appellation, north of Sebastopol, is closest to the ocean and marine influences. Sandy loam soils allow for deep root penetration that produces pinot noir with earthy characteristics.



Gary Farrell 2017 pinot noir and chardonnay are substantive and balanced. (Courtesy photo)

Bright aromas of dark berry and cherry in the **2017 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55)** introduce earthy, savory flavors combined with those of concentrated fruit. It differs from the next release.

The historic Bacigalupi Vineyard, in the Middle ranch neighborhood, is one of the oldest pinot noir vineyards in the Russian River Valley. One of Gary Farrell's top selling wines, the **2017 Bacigalupi**

Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$65) is whole-cluster pressed and aged 15 months in 40% new French oak. The fruit-driven flavors are complex, balanced and expressive.

Located in the Laguna de Santa Rosa area, east of Sebastopol, the Martaella Vineyard experiences fog and large temperature shifts. Described as the tightest wine of this vintage, the **2017 Martaella Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$65)**, partially whole-cluster pressed, produces floral and spice aromas, dark berry flavors, lush mouthfeel and evident tannins that will allow it to open up nicely.

Set in the southern Sebastopol Hills neighborhood near the town of Cotati, the McDonald Mountain Vineyard is close to the Petaluma Gap where fog and heavy winds tend to linger. From deep, rich soils, the **2017 McDonald Mountain Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$70)**, 40% whole-cluster pressed, expresses an elegant balance between savory and fruity on the palate. Hints of pomegranate, licorice and cloves add depth to the flavor profile.

Wines of substance and balance, the 2017 Gary Farrell releases provide a master class on the neighborhoods of the Russian River Valley.