

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Road 31 Wine Co. 2012 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest dates: Sep. 30 and Oct. 5
Oak: 33% new; (60% French, 40% Tokaji/Hungarian)
pH at bottle: 3.61
Alcohol at bottle: 13.9%

Brix at harvest: 24.8 to 25.7
Time on Oak: 11 months
TA at bottle: 5.81 g/L
Total production: 880 cases

Vineyard: Three vineyards contributed to this wine. From the Nord Vineyard, at the southern mouth of the Napa River where the water spills into the San Pablo/San Francisco Bay, comes the prettiness of clone 115. Stanly Ranch, in Carneros just west across the Napa River from Nord, provides the structure of clone 114 and the robustness of clone 777. Finally, a “new old” friend, a re-planted vineyard on a hillside that I used to get fruit from (before it was torn out): Castrucci Vineyard on Suscol Ridge provides a more powerful, hillside presentation of clone 115.

Vintage: 2012 was the year the lid lifted off the popcorn popper and the waffle batter spilled out the side of the iron. Unlike the bleak financial outcome (but stunning enological triumph) of 2011, the 2012 harvest provided both quality AND quantity. Predicting yields is always difficult, but in 2012 though berries were small, the clusters were numerous, were heavy, and kept coming. Most wineries I know reported yields in excess of 25% larger than average. Typically, high yields come at the cost of concentration, but somehow—I believe because it was coming on the heels of the tiny 2011 crop—the juice and resulting wines from 2012 were packed with phenolics and flavor. The relatively cool fall weather created wines with aromatics intensity and good natural acidity.

Winecrafting: A three-day cold soak preceded nearly a score of days in fermenter. This was a vintage that begged for a long, drawn out fermentation. Run to barrel before the finish of fermentation, the wine sat on its gross lees (without racking) for the entire year of aging, which adds a creamy texture and significant weight to an already intense wine. A mixture of Tokaji (Hungarian) and Mercurey (French) oak contributes a nice blend of spice and vanilla to the profile.

Wine: You know that album you had as a teenager—the one you could play over and over again and it would never get old (wait a minute, I am dating myself, let’s call it a “playlist”). This is the wine equivalent. This is classic Carneros Pinot Noir, with aromatics redolent of red fruits, a hint of cola and just a touch of dried herbs. On the palate darker fruits are revealed and even a bit of earthiness, with medium-weight and a creamy texture. The cool fall weather during the vintage means good acidity and juiciness, with a gloriously long finish. This is the wine you can go back to again and again without tiring.

Road 31 Wine Co. produces tiny batches of one handcrafted Napa Valley Pinot Noir. The label pays homage to the gravel road outside my grandparents’ homestead back in Kansas—where I too was born—and the mighty green ’66 Ford Truck that drove it regularly. My grandfather, a farmer, willed the truck to me when he passed in ’86, and the truck now seems right at home bouncing among the vines of Napa. The green truck and I oversee farming, harvest and hauling of the grapes to cave space borrowed from some friends up in Stag’s Leap district of Napa. My hands handle every step of the crafting: fermenting, barrel aging, bottling, and peddling. I am a one-man show (with a little help now and then from my wife, my cousins, and Daisy Dog).

–Kent Fortner (Winecrafter/Truck Owner)



NAPA VALLEY