

Talisman Wines: An In-Depth Tasting of 2014 Vintage & Older Vintage Pinot Noir



One of the great pleasures of exploring the the Pinot Trail is sitting down with a winemaker over an extended time at the winery, tasting and re-tasting his or her wines, and really delving into what the winemaker is trying to achieve.

Sessions like this bring to

mind this quote from Tim Atkin MW. “I believe that the place where a wine was made, not to mention the character, ambition and talent of the person who made it, is highly relevant to how that wine tastes. I want to know about these things, just as I want to know about vintage conditions, personal eccentricities and a winemaker’s take on the world. All these things make wine different: all these things made wine special.”

Winemaker Scott Rich and I have a friendship that goes back over ten years. His father was a physician and this has meant a commonality that we have embraced. I have always been intrigued with his Pinot Noirs since my first extensive encounter with them in 2006 when I experienced wines dating back to 1997. Since then, we have touched bases at many Pinot Noir events, but until recently I had never sat down for an afternoon with him at his winery and really got to know him and his wines.

Scott learned his craft as a research enologist for both RH Phillips and Robert Mondavi Winery and later under Tony Soter at Etude in Carneros. He made the wines and oversaw the construction of a winery at Moraga Vineyards in Bel Air in Southern California. As with many winemakers, his desire for self expression led him to start his small label with his spouse, Marta Rich, in 1992. Scott currently makes his wines in a tiny

warehouse facility on Eighth Street in Sonoma with an office and war room above where we met to taste.

Talisman is a word for a charm and the Talisman logo on the label is a stylized medicine wheel, a representation of the paho, a Native American charm that has been imbued with the power to protect one from harm. The paho has the circle of the life and the four directions that show one’s place in the universe. The rays around the edge represent the sun that gives energy for life on earth (and allows wine grapes to ripen). The name and logo was given to Scott by his Native American mother and is a tribute to her.

Scott’s vineyard sources are truly unique for he is a lover of distinctive, challenging terroir. He says, “I like to express terroir – that is the beauty of Pinot Noir – and that comes through in the more extreme vineyards.” Current production of vineyard-designated Pinot Noir is about 3,000 cases annually. Vineyards range throughout Sonoma County as well as Yorkville Highlands, and Napa Valley.

The tasting took place on May 18, 2017. The 2014 Pinot Noir wines had been bottled at the end of June and July 2016. The wines are still quite young and some are not released as yet for Scott strives to make wines that have age ability and need time in bottle for full expression. As Scott notes, “I make my wines to age, even if no one gives them a chance.” In 2014, the stems were ripe, and although he always uses about 25% whole cluster in his ferments, four of the 2014 wines were made with 100% whole cluster and designated “méthode ancienne.”

I had the opportunity to take the opened wines home with me and re-taste the 2014 vintage Pinot Noirs in my usual fashion four days after opening. My reviews reflect both impressions upon opening the bottles and retasting four days later. — *William “Rusty” Gaffney*

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