

Talisman: A Sonoma Pinot

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Talisman is currently making some of the best Pinot in California, period. And when you take a closer look you can see many reasons why.

It begins with great people. Talisman is owned and operated by the husband and wife team of Scott and Marta Rich. Scott is the winemaker and before starting Talisman he attended graduate school in the

enology programme at UC Davis and also worked as a research enologist at R.H. Phillips and at Robert Mondavi Winery. He has been winemaker at Mont St. Blanc and at Etude where he made a number of highly praised Pinot Noirs. Marta has a degree in psychology and spent 18 years at Robert Mondavi working her way up the ladder there and eventually leading the Northern California sales team. In addition to making the wines at Talisman, Scott makes the wine at ultra-boutiquey Moraga Wines in Bel Air, CA. The very steep Moraga vineyard faces the Getty Museum and Scott produces tiny amounts of award-winning Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc from there. Not easy to get hold of this wine, but Michelle Obama has ordered cases. Newspaper titan Rupert Murdoch apparently likes the wine too: he bought the vineyard and winery from founder and former Northrop-Gruman Chairman Tom Jones in 2013.

Of course you won't get great wine without great vineyards. Scott and Marta have arranged to buy grapes from the best vineyards they could find within their self-imposed boundary of a half day's maximum drive from their Sonoma winery. They work very closely with their growers and so proximity is a must. The strength of their bond is seen in the pictures of



each of their growers which adorn the walls of their very cozy Glen Ellen tasting room, about 15 minutes North of the town of Sonoma. Currently Talisman is producing wines from Weir, Adastra, Red Dog, Wildcat Mountain, Huckleberry's, Spring Hill, and Gunsalus Vineyards, all within the Sonoma County.

Focus is another reason for their success. They only make wine from one varietal: Pinot Noir. Small lots is another. Total

production varies between 1100 and 1500 cases annually; individual bottlings are all single vineyard of which case production of a given wine will usually be between 150 and 300.

Their winemaking philosophy centres around texture. This is no surprise when you learn that Scott grew up with a father who collected Burgundy. They build their wines to age. Wines are typically released a year or two later than most other California producers: while at the time of writing most producers are selling their 2012s and some 2013 Pinots, Talisman is offering

their 2010s and just in the process of releasing their 2011s.



We were led through this tasting by Amanda Lorren, their tasting room manager, whose charm immediately relaxes you and manages to make a very comfortable room even more comfortable. This is not your typical tasting room; no bar to stand up to, just comfortable sofas and easy

chairs that gives the impression of a classy living room. The walls are adorned with pictures of Scott and Marta and of each of the vineyard owners they buy fruit from. Waiting on the tables are large Burgundy-shaped Reidel stems.

You don't feel like you are in a place of business, you feel as if you are in a home. Amanda takes you through the wines just as you would want: enough information to keep it informative and interesting but still lets the wines do most of the speaking. She likens each of the wines to different personalities and the more time you spend with the wines the more accurate you realize her descriptions of these Pinots are. And as these tasting notes show, these are stunning bottles of Pinot. *(continued)*



Talisman: A Sonoma Pinot (continued)

Each of the following wines spends 21 months in French oak, 50% – 70% new. None of the wines came across “oaky” as the fruit and structural components were there in just the right proportions to keep the wines balanced and graceful.

2010 Talisman Pinot Noir Spring Hill Vineyard

Medium red with a slight fade at the rim, the expressive nose of raspberry and cherry immediately captivates as the background notes spices (clove, nutmeg) come forward with a little air time. Medium to full body, the palate's spicy red fruits are joined by mushroom and forest floor to form a complex blend that finishes long and savoury.

Excellent \$44 at their Tasting Room

2010 Talisman Pinot Noir Wildcat Mountain Vineyard

Bright cherry notes on the nose have earth tones beneath and greet your nose well before it reaches the glass. The minerals and baking spices let you know the vineyard was appropriately named and make a nice counterpoint to the black cherry flavour profile. There is a hint of vanilla on the finish. A few years in the cellar will further integrate these very expressive flavours...if you can manage to keep your hands off of it!

Excellent \$57 at their Tasting Room

2010 Talisman Pinot Noir Adastral Vineyard

This vineyard sits just on the Napa side of Carneros, where the South ends of the Sonoma and Napa Valleys meet. The rest of the vineyards where Talisman sources fruit from are in Sonoma. This was the darkest in the line up and probably the biggest wine of the group. Full body with a rich texture, this wine is fruit driven and is all about black cherry and blueberry aromas and tastes. A nice streak of acidity keeps things precise. Still a youngster this wine will round out a bit more and bring even more pleasure over the next year or two and continue to develop for another decade. Balanced and loads of personality!

Excellent \$61 at their Tasting Room

2010 Talisman Pinot Noir Weir Vineyard

Medium red, this wine has a highly expressive nose of black cherry, Kirsch and spice. Medium/fully body there is a silky/satiny mouthfeel that Pinot lovers adore. Notes of stewed rhubarb join the red fruit driven flavour profile with a finish that does not quit. Extraordinary poise as each component matches with the others and makes this perfectly balanced. I would love to see this wine in a blind tasting with some of the cult names that go for 2 and 3 times its price.

Excellent/Extraordinary \$70 at their Tasting Room

2011 Talisman Pinot Noir Gunsalus Vineyard

This wine combines blueberry and cherry with allspice and is the boisterous life of the party personality. More tangy and spice-driven, this was the only wine we tasted from the difficult 2011 vintage. Perhaps not as full as its older brothers, it enjoys a mouth-watering acidity that begs to be paired with food. A wine to drink now as you wait for your Weirs and Adastras to age!

Very Good/Excellent \$50 at their Tasting Room

2010 Talisman Pinot Noir Huckleberry Vineyard

There are only 35 cases of the Huckleberry made, but what a treat if you can find some! This wine returns us to where we began: back at the red end of the spectrum as the nose revisits the cherry and raspberry tones that we started with in the Spring Hill. The dials are turned up in this very expressive wine. Flavours of strawberry, cherry and spice are delivered in a silky medium + body with a silky mouthfeel. The fruits dominate but the spice and earthy undertones keep it complex and evolving.

Excellent

Talisman Wine is located in the town of Glen Ellen, about 15 minutes North of the Sonoma Plaza just off the Sonoma Highway (12). Tastings are by appointment (707-721-1628) and it is an experience you do not want to miss!

