

## Three Perfect Days at Anderson Valley Pinot Festival

*Against the idyllic back drop of Anderson Valley's majestic mountains, I recently attended a weekend of wine, food and learning at the 17th annual Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival.*



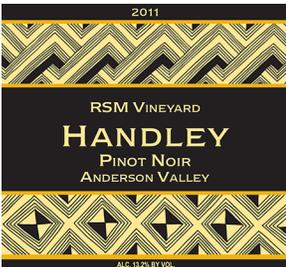
The event kicked off with a Champ de Reves fete featuring several of the host's wines paired with carved roast beef and plank salmon. Previously known as Edmeades, Champ de Reves (which means "Field of Dreams,") was an 1988 acquisition by Jackson Family Wines, a thoughtful addition to their impressive portfolio.

Friday's technical conference was moderated by Greg Walter, editor of the Pinot Report. It featured subjects such as nature conservancy, water usage and focused on the challenges of grape growing during drought. Then an esteemed panel of winemakers spotlighted Angel Camp Vineyard and how they interpreted the sought after fruit. Clark Smith, the author of much heralded "Postmodern Winemaking" capped-off the conference with his unorthodox, creative and insightful look at winemaking challenges.

Friday culminated in a delightful, wine-filled barbecue at Foursight Winery. It was catered by a local pit master, Bone Daddy of Bones Roadhouse. Lively tunes were provided by Dean Titus & The Cowboys.

On Saturday morning I was privileged to join the press tasting at Balo Vineyards. Jim Laube of Wine Spectator was on hand. Greg Walter of Pinot Report as well as Rusty Gaffney a.k.a Prince of Pinot attended. In addition, writers from publications such as Wine & Spirits, Connoisseurs' Guide, and the San Francisco Chronicle covered the event, proving that Anderson Valley has earned its place on the wine map.

The Grand Tasting was held at the stunning Goldeneye Winery. Guests were treated to dozens of Pinot Noir based wines; sparkling ones, roses, and of course, Pinot Noir. The 2011 vintage were elegant, restrained and age worthy. In contrast, the 2012 offerings, were opulent, playful, fruit forward and palate pleasing. The accompanying food was fantastic, with the highlight being Pennyroyal Farms cheeses. Featuring a bevy of delicious cheese, their creamery, winery and goat farm looked most inviting to tour. The auction benefiting local charities was as lively as ever.





Saturday featured a glorious meal at Handley Cellars which was prepared by Chef Janelle Weaver, the Chef from The Bewildered Pig. Janelle is a self-taught, extensively traveled cook (her passport bears stamps from France, Russia, Ireland, South America etc.). She came to Napa Valley in 2003 and was soon hired by Meadowood Resort. Later, she served as the Executive Chef for Kuleto Estate, followed by a stint at Peter Michael Winery. She's won many accolades for her thoughtful, delicious fare and has been featured in multiple television and media outlets. Weaver served us a beautiful and unforgettable meal paired with lovely wines from Bink, Handley, Greenwood Ridge and Waits-Mast. I was enamored by Bink's Sauvignon Blanc and the Handley Cellars 2010 RSM, a profound and soulful wine.

I urge future guests to stick around for the Sunday open houses. Most wineries, even those that are typically closed to public, open their doors (and cellars) to festival guests. Each featured culinary delights paired with their wines; often pouring library selections. Balo Vineyards, for instance, treated guests to wood-fired pizzas and lamb chops served on a bed of fresh rosemary and a complete portfolio of their wines. Depending on the venue guests were offered the opportunity to play bocce ball, listen to live jazz or to simply relax on the veranda and enjoy the stunning views.

If you would like to stay for dinner afterwards, you will eat better than you think possible for such a small, rural area. Many don't realize that the legendary French Laundry restaurant shares a connection with the Anderson Valley. After selling the French Laundry to Chef Thomas Keller, Don and Sally Schmitt, the restaurant's original owners, moved to the Anderson Valley. There they purchased the beautiful Boonville Hotel and established Table 128, a fabulous restaurant that turns out Michelin-quality food.

Also, don't forget to check out the just-opened, and wildly popular, Stone and Embers Restaurant. Its owner, Chef Patrick Meany, previously of Bouchon and Gary Danko, offers delicious wood-oven fare that garners raves from the locals.

Don't miss next year's festival. Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association, with the leadership of Janis MacDonald and Kristy Charles, will see to it that you will enjoy a remarkable wine and food experience.

The secret is out. The Anderson Valley has emerged as a top player in the Pinot scene and this marvelous event is the perfect way to be introduced to this magical region.

