

WINE News

A Spotlight on the Tiny Producers Making Massive Waves



MAY 1, 2023 FEATURES

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Finding New Favorites and Supporting Small Producers

By Ryan Woodhouse, Domestic Buyer



After a long, cold, wet, snowy winter, spring is finally here! During this season of freshness and renewal I'm reminded that one of the things I love the most about working in the wine business is the endless possibilities of discovering something new, something you've never heard of, something you know nothing about—and just like a wildflower super bloom, it astonishes you! Sure, we all have our favorite,

go-to wines, our safe places that we know and love; but exploring, finding new things to share and enjoy, that's where the real excitement lies, at least for me. So, in that spirit this edition of Wine News will be a collection of new things that have me all fired-up and eager to share. What's more is that I've deliberately focused on some of the smallest, most boutique producers that we work with, some I'm sure many of you may not have heard of before. All of these wines deliver fantastic quality and value for money and represent the cutting edge of what's going on in California today.

La Lomita - Edna Valley, California

I first became aware of La Lomita Wines while scrolling through my Instagram feed one night. The sharp packaging caught my eye, plus the intrigue of a wine brand I'd never heard of. A few clicks later I was intrigued enough to send an email to the winery to see if I could check out the wines for potential inclusion in our selections at K&L.

As I read more about the wines, my excitement continued to grow. The estate, located in Edna Valley, close to San Luis Obispo, is the only vineyard in the region to be planted on the actual slopes of one of the famed "Nine Sisters" or "Morros." This chain of jagged peaks runs from Morro Bay to San Luis Obispo. They were formed some 20 million years ago when magma was forced up through fissures in the earth's crust. As the softer sedimentary rocks around them eroded away over the millennia these dramatic, volcanic peaks were left to tower over the landscape. So, La Lomita's "Islay Hill Vineyard" combines Edna Valley's cool, ocean-influenced climate with highly unusual pure volcanic soils. The soil geek inside of me was intrigued! Then I saw that Mikey Giugni was the estate's winemaker! I've known and loved Mikey's wines for

many years from his own brand (and K&L favorite) Scar of the Sea. Mikey and his wife Gina (winemaker at Lady of the Sunshine) have been instrumental in shining a new light on SLO wines and really elevating the level of wines coming from the region. Their winemaking is very much non-interventionist, focusing on crafting wines with a sense of place, freshness, and vibrancy. After connecting with the winery directly, samples arrived at my door and I was thoroughly impressed, the wines exceeded my already high expectations! The production of these wines is truly tiny, all are less than 200 cases total production, with some under 100 cases! As far as I'm aware we're the only place selling them outside of the winery. They also just got some fantastic scores and write ups from *Wine Enthusiast*! Here's what we have currently:



2020 La Lomita "Islay Hill Vineyard" Edna Valley

Albariño \$29.95 94WE I'm a huge believer in Albariño from coastal California. The climate, soils, and marine influence seem to work well with this varietal. This beauty

from La Lomita is case in point! A perfect combination of racy, snappy acidity with wonderful ripe citrus, kumquat, lychee, and lime leaf. Textural but focused, flavorful but tense. Awesome.



2019 La Lomita "Chêne Vineyard" Edna Valley Pinot Noir \$39.95 94WE Not from the Islay Hill Vineyard, but from the nearby Chêne Vineyard, which is farmed by Gina Giugni using meticulous biodynamic-certified methods. This is one of the more elegant, nuanced Pinot Noirs I've tasted this year. Delicate dried rose petal aromas, alpine strawberry, crushed raspberry, baking spice, truffle, clove, woody tones, and sous bois. Deep and complex but airy and fresh, too.

2020 La Lomita "Islay Hill Vineyard" Edna Valley Syrah \$39.95 93WE This highlights the volcanic soils with smoky, spices, black pepper, charred meat, violets, mulberry, damson preserve, and a little leafy garrigue touch. Quite savory and Old World in style. Try with duck confit or roast chicken.

2020 La Lomita "Islay Hill Vineyard" Edna Valley Grenache \$49.95 96WE I'm a little obsessed with Grenache and this is a



Islay Hill vineyard was formed 20 million years ago. Today, it's a haven of cool-climate terroir with pure volcanic soils and ocean breezes.

beauty! Very lifted in its aromatic profile, lots of Asian spice, red fruits, pepper, bramble, and incense. Medium-bodied, lovely acidity keeps everything dynamic and fresh on the palate. Tasted blind it could almost be a Mt. Etna wine. Really cool, one of the best Grenache bottlings I've had this year.

Gondak Cellars - Russian River Valley, California



I discovered Gondak Cellars via another winery whose wines are made at a small custom crush facility in Geyserville, Sonoma. Will Gondak is the young winemaker overseeing the operations, but one who has already clocked up plenty of experience around the globe. After a decade of harvests in New Zealand, South Africa, and

closer to home at Odette in Napa, he returned to his native Sonoma to put down roots. I sent a note to Will to see if he was interested in working directly with us here at K&L, and a week or so later headed out through the dirt roads of Geyserville to visit the winery.

The place isn't glamorous (an old, converted warehouse that once housed Safeway's mushroom farming operations), but it certainly is functional. Will is making wines for numerous clients, all with varying levels of input and styles. His own wines are tiny productions that he is ultra-passionate about. The entire lineup was super impressive; unfortunately he had only a handful of cases to sell. Fortunately, with two of my favorite wines, he did have enough of his new releases to sell a few cases, and I readily accepted.



2021 Gondak "Catie's Corner Vineyard" Russian River Valley Grenache Blanc \$24.95 Ever since working for Randal Grahm 15 years ago at Bonny Doon Vineyard, I've been fond of Grenache Blanc. For me it's a white Rhône grape that typically has a little more verve and a fresher acid line than stablemates such as Roussanne, Marsannae, and Viognier. The revered Catie's Corner Vineyard, planted in 1988 in the Russian River Valley, has

long been a benchmark source for Rhône grapes and other aromatic white varieties. Will picks fairly early (12.9% ABV), ferments with native yeasts in neutral oak, and bottles unfiltered and unfiltered. Expect an explosive nose of honeysuckle, summer meadow, yellow stone fruits, yuzu, stony mineral, and a mouth-watering finish. Only 80 cases made.



2021 Gondak "Campbell McKinney Vineyard" Russian River Valley Grenache Noir \$29.95 Another wonderfully aromatic wine from Gondak, this stunning Grenache Noir from a terraced hillside vineyard with 30+-year-old vines. Fermented with some whole-cluster, gentle extraction, and a short élevage in neutral oak to keep it fresh and lifted. Ripe raspberry, pomegranate, spiced citrus peel, allspice, and loamy earth touches. So pure and delicious. Only 125 cases made.



Doctor's Orders - Natural Wine Co. - Ojai, California

When I received an email from the sales manager at Doctor's Orders, I must admit my first thought was, "Oh here we go again, another new natural wine." However, as I read a little further, things started looking up. The winemaker was the son of Washington/Oregon vintner David O'Reilly of Owen Roe Winery. He had spent time in the cellar at Ojai Vineyards under the tutelage of the inimitable Adam Tolmach. Perhaps the most important part of the whole email was the postscript: "P.S. our wines are clean :-)" Alright, they had to be worth checking out right? Well, I must say I'm delighted that I did. A subsequent meeting with winemaker Dom O'Reilly and great tasting of the wines proved they were indeed clean, pure, and very well made across the board, and yet at the same time still very much true to a non-intervention, natural winemaking philosophy.



2021 Doctor's Orders Highlands District Paso Robles Malvasia Bianca \$17.95 A super aromatic, crisp, bright, juicy Malvasia from French Camp Vineyard in the Highlands District of Paso Robles. This vineyard, owned and farmed by the Miller Family of Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills fame, is a great place for folks looking for unusual grape varieties farmed under sustainable and organic certification. The fruit is whole-cluster pressed, fermented native in neutral oak, and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Minimal SO2 is the only addition, and it's vegan friendly.

2016 Doctor's Orders "Meadow Farm Vineyard" Santa Barbara County Chardonnay \$29.95 This truly unique, singular wine

floored me. It's sourced from a vineyard just a few hundred yards from the ocean in the small enclave of Hope Ranch in Santa Barbara. The Chardonnay was naturally fermented in French oak where it rested on fine lees for an astounding 36 months. The wine is hard to put into words. It has a floral nose, sliced white peach, ripe quince, an astounding crystalline acidity, detailed saline minerality, and phenomenal length on the palate. Amazing how much flavor is packed into such an elegant, focused wine.



2020 Doctor's Orders Santa Ynez Valley Grenache

\$19.95 This remarkably inexpensive bottle of old-vine Grenache is from vines planted in the 1970s on a hillside terrace overlooking the Santa Ynez Valley. Native ferment, lots of whole-cluster, partial carbonic. A pop of cherry blossom, beautiful brambly fruit, earthy tones, and spice cake. Delicious and too easy to drink!



2020 Doctor's Orders Highlands District Paso Robles Barbera

\$29.95 This is a big, robust Barbera with great mid-palate fruit to sink your teeth into. Again, sourced from the organically farmed French Camp Vineyard in the Paso Robles Highlands, this bottling perfectly combines Barbera's naturally high acidity with Paso's ability to produce wines with power and density. Big brawny dark fruit, bramble, redcurrant, leather, and spice. A fantastic wine to have around this summer when firing up the grill.



Filomena - Napa Valley, California

Alright, so these aren't totally new to us. We've carried a couple of Filomena's wines before, but my excitement for them is renewed after tasting with winemaker Luke Nio and his wife Kathleen in Napa a few weeks back. Luke worked for several years as cellar master at Bedrock Wine Co. and is now the assistant winemaker at the beloved Green & Red Vineyards in Chiles Valley.



Filomena is a tiny project he's been making on the side for a few years now. Tasting the wines again reminded me of just how passionate Luke is and how his craftsmanship shows through in the quality of the wines.

2021 Filomena "Unti Vineyard" Dry Creek Valley Vermentino \$24.95 A beautifully aromatic and textured Vermentino (aka Rolle) from Unti Vineyard in Dry Creek. This fruit comes from just four rows on a steep hillside block facing east. The vineyard is organically farmed. The fruit is whole-cluster pressed into neutral oak for nine months aging on the lees before being bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Just two barrels, 50 cases, produced. Floral, mineral tinged, spiced

pear, and yellow stone fruit with a twist of citrus in the brisk finish.

2020 Filomena "Ricci Vineyard" Carneros St. Laurent \$24.95 Ricci Vineyard in the heart of Carneros is home to a unique planting of St. Laurent. This unusual variety is genetically related to Pinot Noir and most commonly found in Austria. Filomena's version employs 50% carbonic maceration (like with Beaujolais Nouveau) and aging in once-used 400L puncheon. The wine rests on lees for nine months before being bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Just 65 cases were produced. Hard to describe...but it's almost like part Pinot Noir, part Syrah, and a smidge of Gamay?! Elegant red fruits meets cracked peppercorn, and a dollop of macerated dark cherry and salinity from the proximity to San Pablo Bay. Really cool wine.



2017 Filomena "Griffin's Lair Vineyard" Sonoma Coast Syrah

\$39.95 From a Grand Cru site for Syrah in California, Filomena's Griffin's Syrah is simply epic. Luke was inspired by his time working with Warren Gibson (also one of my all-time favorite Syrah winemakers) at Trinity Hill and Bilancia in New Zealand. This wine has everything you could possibly want in a cool-climate Syrah. Fermented entirely whole-cluster and raised in 500L puncheon. This is the very essence of the varietal.

Finally: Sunshine! Rosés to Enjoy Day or Night



I normally say that there is no such thing as rosé “season” because I like to drink pink wines year-round! But that was a real winter we just had in California! Record breaking snowfall, widespread flooding, and damaging winds. There were some frigid days there that had me reaching for a hearty stew and deep savory Syrah. But, spring is now well and truly here. As I write this article we’re heading into

the 80s for the first time this year here in Napa, and I’m ready to quaff some rosé in the backyard. Here are a few options I’ll personally be stocking up on:



2022 Paysan Central Coast Rhône Blend Rosé \$17.95 Ian Brand’s Paysan rosé is hands-down one of the best made in the state of California. It also happens to be wonderfully inexpensive, which is awesome, because you shouldn’t have to spend a fortune on rosé for it to be totally delicious. This is a delightful blend of 81% Mourvèdre, 12% Cinsault, and 7% Grenache.

2022 Bedrock Wine Company “Ode to Lulu” California

Rosé \$22.95 A perennial favorite is back again and already proving to be one of our best-selling domestic rosés. Bedrock’s “Ode to Lulu” is inspired by Lulu Peyraud of Domaine Tempier in Bandol. The wine is sourced from exceptionally old vines dating back to the 1880s. Composed mostly of Mataro (Mourvèdre) with contributions from Grenache and Syrah. Crisp and dry, but vibrantly flavorful and layered. And...hold on to something...it now also comes in a **3L Bag-In-A-Box \$89.99!**



2022 Tablas Creek “Patelin de Tablas” Paso Robles Rosé \$21.95 Yep, Tablas Creek continues to lead the field with their incredible Rhône-inspired wines from Paso Robles. Every year this is one of the very first rosés I reach for, and I’m never disappointed. Made with 67% Grenache, 21% Mourvèdre, 9% Counoise, and 3% Vermentino, it is a benchmark wine.

2022 Arnot-Roberts California Rosé \$26.95 Normally one of our

fastest domestic rosés to sell out each year (for good reason), the 2022 from Arnot-Roberts is fantastic. Mostly Touriga Nacional with small portions of Tinta Cão, Trincadeira, and Grenache sourced predominantly from the Luchsinger Vineyard in Lake County. The cobbly volcanic soils and long, slow, cold fermentation preserve the wine’s stony, mineral core. Mouthwatering.



2022 Ovum “Pink Salt” Columbia Gorge Rosé \$18.95

A distinctive wine from Ovum, but that’s to be expected! Tart, crunchy, herbaceous. From 40-year-old organically farmed Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the Columbia Gorge. Cold soaked for eight hours and lightly pressed. Then 2% of Ovum’s “Big Salt” white blend is added (a blend of Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Early Muscat, and Sauvignon Blanc).

Minimal SO₂, bottled unfined and unfiltered.

And for anyone seeking a bargain in the rosé category (who isn’t?!)...we have some great options too!

2021 Kobus “Estate” Russian River Valley Rosé of Pinot

Noir \$9.95 (Previously \$28) A beautiful fresh, dry, snappy red-fruited rosé of Pinot Noir from a tiny 2.5-acre vineyard in Russian River Valley. The winemaker for Kobus is Reed Skupny of Lang & Reed who knows a thing or two about crafting delicious, crushable wines! And with our special last-of-vintage pricing it’s a stellar deal!!!



2021 Josie “Marsh Creek Vineyard” Contra Costa

Mourvèdre Rosé \$14.95 (Previously \$23) A crisp, fresh, delicious dry Mourvèdre-based rosé from a sustainably farmed vineyard at the foot of Mt. Diablo in Contra Costa County. Amazing value with our winery direct pricing!

2021 Lorenza “True Rosé” Lodi Rosé \$9.99

(Previously \$22) Just an incredible deal on this fantastic rosé made from ancient vines in Lodi, including the legendary Bechtold Vineyard’s 1880s planted Cinsault and other 100+-year-old sources. Lorenza is a mother-daughter project focused solely on rosé. It is one of the best, deliberately, methodically made rosés in the market and at this price it’s an absolute steal. Buy a case!



K&L REDWOOD CITY

3005 El Camino Real, Redwood City, CA 94061

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