

IRON HORSE

ESTATE



David Munksgard

Founded: 1979
Winemaker: David Munksgard
Viticulturist: Laurence Sterling
Acres owned: 160
Annual production: 26,000 cases
Estate grown: 100%
Owners: Audrey, Barry, Joy and Laurence Sterling
Known for: Elegant sparkling wines, chardonnay and pinot noir.
Location: Sebastopol, CA
Website: ironhorsevineyards.com

THERE ARE NO SIGNS ON THE ROAD TO PARADISE.

It's just a narrow track leading off Highway 116, down into a fog-trapping gully and then up a steep hillside of roses and vines. Rodney Strong led Audrey and Barry Sterling there when he was just beginning to plant the vineyard. The Sterlings bought the estate in 1976 and started making sparkling wines as their chardonnay and pinot noir vines matured.

While any number of heavily financed Champenois ventures flourished in Carneros and Napa Valley, the Sterlings' Green Valley sparklers began to gain traction. Today, Joy Sterling, Audrey and Barry's daughter, runs the estate with her brother, Laurence. This fall, she's on her way to Washington, DC, to take part in an inaugural event in Hillary Clinton's Diplomatic Culinary Partnerships initiative: purely American bubbles.

What is paradise if not a place in the clouds, one that converts Goldridge soil, cool morning sun and overnight banks of ocean mist into chardonnay and pinot noir grapes that develop flavor depth before they turn too fully ripe for

sparkling wine? That flavor depth adds spicy citrus and delicate red fruit to the '03 Brut LD, while it creates the refreshing contrast in the 1997 Joy!, a wine that rested for 14 years *en tirage*, developing Bosc pear and pie crust richness tamed by green apple acidity.

Laurence works with winemaker David Munksgard and consultant Daniel Roberts to shepherd individual blocks toward sparkling wine or a range of chardonnay and pinot noir bottlings.

Their 2010 chardonnays are impressive, particularly the Heritage Clone from a 20-acre block Roberts helped the Sterlings plant in 2005 and 2006. It's cool and vibrant, fragrant with citrus blossom scents. The 2010 Rued Clone is equally floral, with a textural elasticity and snap to its clean pear flavors. Corral Vineyards is at the southeastern corner of the property, at the entry point for the fog, an eight-acre block planted in 1987 that builds a richer beeswax texture into its wine, along with tangy citrus sweetness that would be delicious with crab, whether at the White House or at home. —J.G.



TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93 '03 Green Valley Brut LD \$85 (12/11)
- 93 '97 Green Valley Joy! \$179 (12/11)
- 92 '10 Green Valley Heritage Clone Chardonnay \$48 (10/12)

LAMOREAUX LANDING

2013 WINERIES OF THE YEAR



Mark Wagner

Founded: 1990
Winemakers: Mark Wagner, Josh Wig, Colin Grant
Viticulturist: Mark Wagner
Acres owned: 105
Annual production: 15,000 cases
Estate grown: 100%
Owners: Mark Wagner, Josh Wig
Known for: Crisp, youthful Finger Lakes riesling.
Location: Seneca Lake, NY
Website: lamoreauxwine.com

MARK WAGNER'S FAMILY HAS BEEN IN THE Finger Lakes grape business in one form or another since his great-grandfather's day, growing *vitis labrusca* and French-American hybrid grapes for sale to wine producers since the early 1940s. Mark took over the family vineyard in 1978 and began a shift toward growing *vinifera* grapes for local wineries. He started producing his own wine in 1990 and built a winery in 1992, named after the 19th century steamboat landing near his vineyards on the eastern shore of Seneca Lake. Today, Lamoreaux Landing has 105 acres of vines at seven sites and at altitudes varying from 400 to 1,800 feet. The lake's proximity offers not only aesthetic benefits, but also viticultural ones: Its 4.2 trillion gallons of water act as a natural insulator for Lamoreaux's microclimate.

Today, Lamoreaux's vineyards are almost entirely *vinifera*, a quarter of them devoted to riesling, the balance in chardonnay, gewurztraminer, merlot, pinot noir, cabernets franc and sauvignon,

and a little vidal. The team farms sustainably and composts their pomace, leaves and vine cuttings. That team includes winery partner Josh Wig (married to Wagner's niece) and Colin Grant, both of whom share in the winemaking with Wagner.

A standout among Lamoreaux's reds is the T23 Cabernet Franc, made in a style inspired by the Loire and aged in stainless steel. But the focus here is on riesling. All are fermented in steel, marked by crispness and driven by acidity. The 2011 Dry Riesling yields tart notes of passion fruit and lime leaves, a vivacious wine with a long line of flavor. The single-vineyard selection from Red Oak, a five-acre parcel of riesling planted on Honeoye silt-loam, shows a lot of complexity from vines just six years old. It's a juicy wine with pear scents and a sharp edge of flint, bright and youthful. The Semi-Dry offers a richly floral scent and a modest sweetness, balanced to age. All of these 2011s buzz with a bright, delicate drive. —L.D.



TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93 '11 Finger Lakes Dry Riesling \$14 (10/12)
- 92 '11 Finger Lakes Red Oak Vineyard Riesling \$20 (10/12)
- 91 '11 Finger Lakes Semi-Dry Riesling \$14 (10/12)

ESTATE