

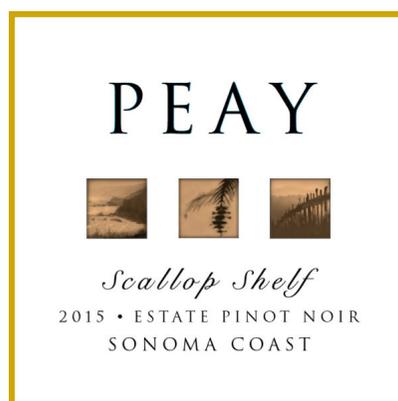
# Why This Bottle, Really?

[artofeating.com/bottle-really-scallop-shelf-pinot-noir-peay-vineyards/](http://artofeating.com/bottle-really-scallop-shelf-pinot-noir-peay-vineyards/)

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## Sonoma Red

| By *Christie Dufault*

**2015 Scallop Shelf, Pinot Noir, Peay Vineyards, Sonoma Coast**, about \$60.

The first time I visited the Peay property, I remember noting the stark difference between this terrain and what I knew of Northern California wine country. Sonoma County's well-known viticultural areas are an hour and a half from San Francisco; Peay is two and a half. They call it a vineyard, and the Peays grow, produce, and estate-bottle their own wine. Yet the location, four miles from the Pacific Ocean, is so far north in the wild, mountainous part of the county, and frankly so rustic, that it feels more like a ranch deep in the forest than a wine estate. The Peays farm 51 acres of grapes, all organically and all planted by themselves over the years to the varieties they appreciate most: Chardonnay and Pinot Noir with small amounts of Syrah and white Rhone varieties.

The resourceful and industrious Peay brothers purchased the property in 1996. Their story is at once old-fashioned and modern: young adult brothers from the Midwest sharing an interest in food and wine, both studying at universities in California, ultimately deciding to start a business together to make fine wine. They married, started families, and put down literal and figurative roots in California. Nick Peay is the vineyard manager and farmer of the enterprise, and his wife, Vanessa Wong, is the winemaker; Andy Peay directs sales and manages the business.

I've been pairing Peay wines with food for over 15 years. Vintage in and vintage out (occasional challenging years have resulted in paltry yields), the wines have maintained an intensity and complexity of aroma and flavor that have become a tell for cool-climate grape growing. The 2015 Scallop Shelf Pinot Noir, named for a cuvée coming from certain parcels with ancient maritime soils and sea-bed fossils, is an exceptional wine. To me, it is reminiscent of Chambolle-Musigny, showing a balance of earth and small red fruits, judicious and elegant seasoning with French oak, and a tension from acidity that makes the wine vibrant and deeply delicious. It is a supremely fine Pinot Noir; it excites me when I taste a California wine of such quality, complexity, and finesse.

The Peays are as serious about food as they are about wine. On pilgrimages to the vineyard, meals have centered on the freshest Pacific oysters and abalone, pit-roasted heritage pigs, and fine Northern California produce. I have enjoyed Scallop Shelf Pinot Noir with bouillabaisse, with cumin-spiced pork loin, and with farmstead cheese. With wine this fine

and compelling, especially a Pinot Noir, when it comes to pairings you can trust your palate and intuition. It is not unlike the intuition and vision that led the Peays to plant their vineyard in such a cold, remote place; they knew the reward would be worth it. ●

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