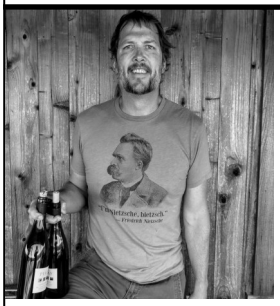
Peay Vineyards

Spring Release

Issue 48

Like no other place on earth

This is the 24th vintage from our estate vineyard on the coast. Every growing season leaves a unique fingerprint on the wines. I love that. It is one reason why wine is such a singular and intriguing beverage. I discuss this a little further in my article *To Be a Human*. But, weather is not the only factor making an impression on a wine, slight changes in winemaking and winegrowing that Vanessa and Nick make every year affect the wines, as well. Though the goal has remained the same since we bought the land in 1996, the fine tuning is in the pursuit of further coaxing out the essence of our site. Those tweaks add up over long periods of time. Vanessa discusses her relationship to aging wines in oak barrels in her article *Assembling a Dream Team*, as an example. Though Vanessa uses little new oak in our wines, what she uses and in what blend has a little to do with why Peay wines are increasingly more complex and compelling. And, I might add, like wines from no other place on earth. We hope you pop a bottle of Peay from a previous release while reading, and hopefully enjoying, this newsletter.



To Be A Human

- Andy Peay, Wine Guy

I vividly recollect the feeling unfolding in my mind in the late fall of 1998 as I drove our new John Deere tractor down the long rows of Chardonnay. It felt not so much that *I* was the one sitting atop the tractor casting seeds and raking them into the freshly tilled topsoil. No, I had a surreal feeling I was a protagonist from a novel set in rural America I had read as an undergraduate English major. A Steinbeck story, no doubt. Those stories always ended badly for humans. Well, they usually started badly, too. Bleak. Tortured beings as unforgiving and uncommunicative as the poor dirt they banged their head against. Life doomed at birth. Was this me? Was this my fate? How did I get here when I thought I had stepped off the conveyor belt of conventionality and *routine* by leaving Wall Street to backpack across Southeast Asia to see how others lived and maybe find a path of my own choosing? Yet, here I was four years later, preparing the newly planted vineyard for the oncoming winter rains dressed in faded Carthartts and broken Blundies. As I drove another long row at 3 mph, I felt a dread that I had chosen a path that was difficult and often tragic. Hail and windstorms stripped plants bare the night before what would have been a bountiful

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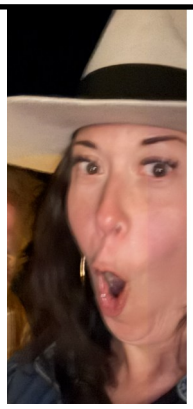
On The Road

- Brooke Sabel, Sales/Marketing



I've been a fan of Peay wines and what Nick, Vanessa, and Andy have been doing since the 2004 vintage. The wines followed along with me at the various wine programs I ran or built: Whether I was managing a national fine wine retail juggernaut; or writing wine lists for Bobby Flay, Wolfgang Puck, and Michael Mina; or designing luxury resort openings with Sir Richard Branson. Peay wines always had a happy home with me.

Fast-forward to 2023, when I joined the Peay team as their National Sales & Marketing Director, a role Andy Peay proudly performed for 20+ years. I've known Andy for many of those years and have called him a friend since day one. But taking over for him, I knew I had some big shoes to fill. My home now is wherever I am that week—often meeting incredible wine professionals or those of you that are enthusiastic Peay supporters. I am also out sharing the Gospel of Peay, spreading the West Coast love, and making new converts. Last fall, a close friend introduced me to a local entrepreneur in New Jersey who was launching an athleisure brand. Naturally, I pitched the idea to pour Peay at his official kick off party with several professional athletes in attendance, and he agreed. Knowing I would be surrounded by such professional

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To Order The 2026 Spring Release

First, please do! We have an excellent selection of wines to choose from this year.

As a **Friends of Peay** member, we offer you new wines at a lower price during the three-week release period. After three weeks pass, prices increase. **To order**, please **use the link and code in the Release email** you received on February 4th. It will send you straight into the Members section of our web site. If you do not see the release email, please check your "Other" or spam folder. If you have any issue at all, please contact me at andy@peayvineyards.com or Jenn at jenn@peayvineyards.com. **Thank you.**

The 2026 Spring Release Tasting Notes

2024 *Estate* Viognier — 225 Cases

Peay Viognier does not resemble typical French or American Viognier in style. This is due to our very cold growing conditions and Vanessa's desire to capture our site's unadorned, singular expression of Viognier in the bottle. She ages in 100% neutral barrels to promote floral elegance and to reveal the nervy, high acid, mineral character; the result is the opposite profile of a typical Viognier.

The 2024 Viognier is true to form delivering high-toned floral aromas of honeysuckle and white flowers with hints of kaffir lime and lemongrass. The mouthfeel is not fat and ponderous but fresh and vibrant. Flavors of slate, lemon, and oyster shell combine with sour peach and salt on the palate. Peay Viognier has found an enthusiastic audience and is selling out quickly so please grab your bottles soon to enjoy this throughout the summer and the rest of the year. ***$48/btl during release, $50/btl post release***

2024 *West Sonoma Coast* Chardonnay — 200 Cases

The 2024 *West Sonoma Coast* Chardonnay is made exclusively from barrels of our Estate Chardonnay. The vineyard experienced a very early spring frost and it hit the early budding Chardonnay badly, but at least uniformly! Secondary buds are less fruitful and we lost about 60% of our potential yield and ended up making only 200 cases of *West Sonoma Coast* Chardonnay. But what does it taste like?

If you enjoyed the style of the 2023 and 2021 *West Sonoma Coast* Chardonnays, then you are in for a treat. The nose is tense and bright with green and citrus notes. The aromas remind me of biting into a warm ginger scone with lemon curd spread on top. There is a "mineral" flavor and a directness delivered by a solid backbone of acidity. This is not a rich, buttery, heavy Chardonnay. If you are one of the many people who tell me "I don't like California Chardonnay but I like Peay Chardonnay," this is what you like. There will not be any bottles left over after the release period so please buy yours now. ***$48/btl during release***

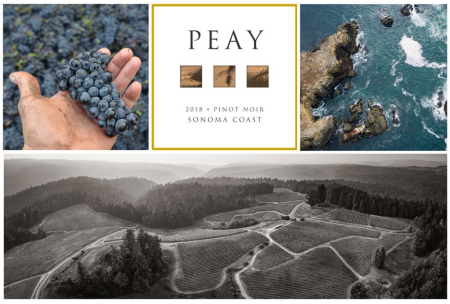
2024 *Richardson* Chardonnay, West Sonoma Coast — 240 Cases

We released our first *Richardson Vineyard* Chardonnay—the excellent 2023—last Spring. A dozen years ago we gave budwood from our favorite blocks of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to the Richardson family who owns the land across the ridge from us and they planted a few acres for us. The second vintage delivers even further on the promise of the site and is quintessentially a West Sonoma Coast AVA Chardonnay in expression.

The nose features the typical lemon curd notes I noted above along with some spearmint and thyme. The texture on the palate is silky with an oatmeal biscuit flavor creeping in kept fresh and lively by a metallic, oyster shell-like minerality on the long finish. This is a lovely expression of Chardonnay and has a little less of the richness found in the 2023 with the structure to age for a decade or longer. ***$62/btl during release, $65/btl post release***

2026 Spring Release Tasting Notes

2024 *West Sonoma Coast* Pinot Noir — 1,700 Cases



This blend has emerged as the signature Pinot Noir from our estate vineyard incorporating most of the clones and blocks we grow. Barrels of Scallop Shelf, Ama and Pomarium are in this wine and, as a result, it is exemplary—elegant, complex, deep in flavor yet aromatic, and approachable— and all at an affordable price.

The 2024 *West Sonoma Coast* Pinot Noir is flat out gorgeous. It has the depth of flavor and texture of the 2022 with the lift, grace, and balance of the 2023. The nose features top notes of Earl Grey tea with raspberry fruit emerging over time. On the palate, additional aromas of boysenberry and brass come to the fore in the mid palate with a dried leaf and forest floor note serving as the base drum. This is the fourth vintage in a row where I am just gob-smacked by the *West Sonoma Coast* Pinot Noir and feel the 2024 is perhaps at the pinnacle of this cuvée's potential. Drink this wine now and over the next 10-15 years. ***$48/btl during release, $50/btl post release***

2024 *Savoy* Pinot Noir, Anderson Valley — 320 Cases

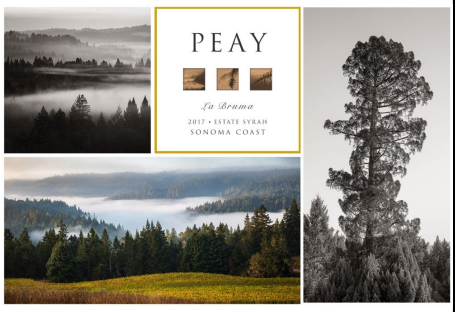
Savoy Vineyard in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County is one of California's most highly-regarded, classic Pinot Noir vineyards, and for good reason. The wines are compelling and have concentration and depth while speaking loudly of their specific place.

Over the past twelve vintages, Vanessa has been sought to capture and feature the floral elegance of the older blocks of *Savoy* while embracing but containing the more hedonistic, fruit-driven personality of Pinot Noir from this vineyard. She nailed it in 2024. Tart red fruits lean into darker cherry flavors and are framed by a lead mineral quality. The "Mendocino spice" aroma critics often note is evident with brown spices originating from the skin of the fruit not from barrel as the oak expression is invisible. This is as sophisticated an expression, while staying true to form, that *Savoy* gets and is excellent right now and will be for at least the next decade. ***$75/btl during release, $80/btl post release***

2024 *Pomarium Estate* Pinot Noir — 525 Cases

The 2024 *Pomarium* has grace, complexity, and power. In its youth, the *Pomarium* cuvée relied more on fruit presence for appeal, which is common among young vine Pinot Noir. With time, the more nuanced floral and tea aromas have elevated the complexity of the wine and softened the muscular notes. I often speak of plum skin, jasmine tea, and even a light sandalwood hippie aroma when describing this wine. All of that remains true in the 2024. With 26 years of vine age, however, there is just more flavor, depth, and persistence with less bombast. I'd like to think that will be the case with all of us as we age? I'm not so sure that's true but one can hope. This is a wine that is very enjoyable right now but absolutely will be one to age and drink over a lifetime. ***$75/btl during release, $80/btl post release***

2023 *La Bruma Estate* Syrah — 275 Cases



The cool fall weather in 2023 led to long hangtime and allowed the full development of the white and green pepper aromas that accent this incredible *La Bruma* Syrah. Immediately upon smelling the wine, I recollected a juniper berry and pepper venison dish I had on a ski trip in the Rockies. Aromas of violets and crushed dried lavender cradle the berry fruit and iron flavors and made my toes dance in anticipation. In the mid-palate, the flavors persist and are deep but not heavy or cloying as the wine clocks in at only 13.0% alcohol (which is the norm for us). There are soft tannins in the wine so if you drink it in the next three to five years, I recommend a quick decant and pairing it with something with fat. We also make this wine in half bottles and magnums and encourage you to try our Syrah if you haven't had it before. ***$67/btl during release, $70/btl post release***

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Assembling the Dream Team

- Winemaker, Vanessa Wong

I've never been much of a sports fan, although a family of sports nuts surrounds me. Growing up, my eldest sister, Marcella was a huge 49ers fan, even before the golden era of Joe Montana, Jerry Rice, and Dwight Clark of "The Catch." She slogged it through with our hometown team, even during the back-to-back 2–14 seasons with Steve DeBerg and O.J. Simpson, who was famous at the time for his swiftness and jukes on the field (and at Hertz) before he became infamous for his evasive maneuvers at slow speed in a white Bronco. My sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins are all San Francisco Giants, Golden State Warriors, and 49ers fans, often attending the home games and always following the weekend games on tv. I get a flurry of pings on the family group chat whenever there is a close match with everyone cheering or biting their nails.

The nuclear family circle of my three boys has both practitioners and avid followers of ice hockey, soccer, and basketball, so the talk around the dinner table is filled with stats on shots, goals, and fouls whether we're talking about youth sports or the NHL, NBA, or Premier League. I never have much to add to these conversations as I do not have very much knowledge of the play of the game or of any of the players. But, I do take it all in by proximal osmosis and learn a few things. For example, I could tell you that Victor Wembanyama and Connor Bedard were both first draft picks for their respective sports. Or, that I know Alex Ovechkin topped Wayne Gretzky in career goals and how many triple-doubles Nickola Jokić has gotten this season in pursuit of Russell Westbrook's record. Or, that I learned that Luka Dončić's trade to the Lakers for a bunch of players and a far in the future first round pick was weird and unexpected. Likewise, for Quinn Hughes in a similar trade for much more than a bag of pucks, as they say. However, when asked who our favorite teams are, it dawns on me that my boys do not ever root for any one team, in particular. People always assume that our loyalties lie with the local squad, but my sons and Nick are much more interested in the characteristics and merits of individual players no matter what team they are on. The attention to the minutiae my boys have to player details and stats is incredible. It always baffles me that my son will know exactly how many seasons Trevor Zegras played with the Ducks before he was traded and yet not have a clue about where his jacket can be found after school.

I get way out of my depth when it comes time for the NHL playoffs when Nick makes each of us fill out the brackets to the finals. I simply cannot remember enough about all the players to fill out the brackets astutely, but I just can't leave myself to fill it out willy-nilly, either. So, I study the stats of the various teams to get a feel for how they would do in a probable match-up to help guide me. My youngest son views this methodology with profound derision and scoffs at my lack of expertise in the matter. I think he's still sore from when I successfully predicted the Stanley Cup champions two years ago. What can I say? I like to use information and observation to make decisions. Which brings me to…

People often ask me what barrels I use in my winemaking and, occasionally, they ask how I choose the barrels that I do. I have been told that I have a "judicious use of oak in my wine élévage program." I am quoting one of our barrel salespeople here—ironically, the compliment is not conducive to increasing barrel sales. It is true, I don't use a lot of new oak in our wine at Peay Vineyards so that makes what barrel choices we do make even more important. Along with farming practices, it is what we have learned to fine tune the most in our 28 years of farming grapes and making wine. My philosophy with new oak barrels is that on a basic level the oak character should not stick out and be the foremost impression when someone tastes the wine. It should enhance the wine's innate character, not be a character in and of itself. Then, more granularly, the oak character of the barrel should match with the character of the wine that is in it and, furthermore, the different barrels should work well together in the cuvée or blend as a whole.

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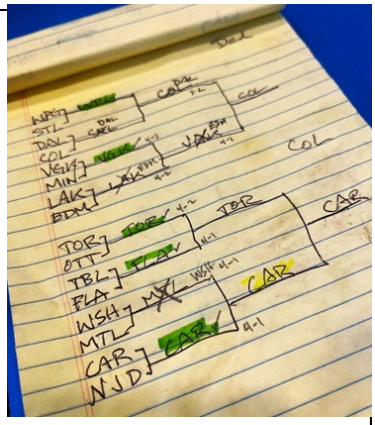
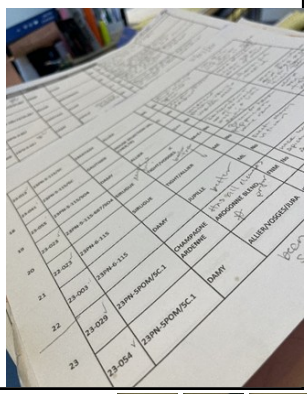
Dream Team...Continued from page 4

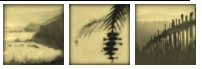


The variation in oak used to make wine is as myriad as there are winemakers. A couple of decades ago, I read an article in a trade publication titled, "The Art of Using Way Too Many Barrels." It profiled a winemaker who loved experimenting with different types of barrels so much that he had more than 40 different cooperages resulting in hundreds of barrels that he worked with and delighted in adding to and changing the types of barrels each vintage with seemingly infinite number of combinations. His philosophy was to experiment and try everything because he said, "nothing can be gained without trying." Although with his carefree personality he took experimentation to an extreme with this scattershot approach. I am personally acquainted with this winemaker and thus know his exuberant enthusiasm for all things. So, when I recently ran into him at a cooperage tasting event, I chuckled with him that after 20 years of experimenting, he was still on the hunt for new barrels to check out. Then, I realized that after more than 24 years of making wines for Peay Vineyards, we, too, are still trying out new barrels albeit in a far more restrained and circumscribed manner. In the pursuit of finding the barrels that bring out the best in each of the wines, we meticulously observe and track how the wines show with that barrel's influence on the nose and palate. And with each vintage we continue to fine tune.

Although it would be fascinating to try every barrel under the sun, this scattershot methodology does not serve us in homing in on which barrels match well with our wines. There are many factors that go into the crafting of a barrel that affect how it can impact the smell, taste, and texture of a wine: forest of origin, grain tightness, wood aging/seasoning conditions and time, stave bending method and toasting level which is dictated by source and degree of heat, time and depth of the toasting. While there are nearly an infinite number of variables, we do streamline by keeping only with barrels that are: made with oak (sometimes other woods like acacia or chestnut are used); originating from only French forests (as opposed to American or Eastern European); handcrafted with split staves (as opposed to machine sawn) that are exclusively air-dried instead of kiln-dried. So, what we focus on is each cooperage's crafting of their barrels with respect to forest selection and their toasting technique and how that shows through in our wines.

You would think that there might be uniformity or standardization among the cooperages when they categorize a toast level as Medium but nothing can be further from the truth! Each cooperage seems to have its own idea of what "Medium" toast means to them and it is across a wide flavor spectrum. Sometimes the cooperage won't even use any meaningful designation choosing a proprietary fanciful name like "Elegant" or "Aphrodite" that doesn't signify anything qualitative in name alone. So, to contend with this lack of descriptive consistency we taste through all the new barrels each vintage side by side and form our own internal calibration of the barrel's impact to the wine itself and, in comparison, to each other. In these tastings, we compare different barrels to one another on the same wine lot or compare how the same or similar barrel performs on different wines. We taste, discuss, and take notes every year for all of our wines whether they are estate farmed grapes or from grapes we purchase, and for each variety that has new oak in the blends: Pinot noir, Chardonnay, or Syrah. Then, all these notes for individual barrels are compiled into one big document so we can track and compare the barrels with the different lots of wine year after year. This helps me observe the nuances and study the trends when we make incremental changes with the choice of cooperage, oak type, and toast for each wine. We observe which barrels bring out the spice notes in our wine and which bring out the floral character. We can better understand the interaction of the oak with a certain kind of vintage and the interplay between different barrels on the footprint of the wine. From this, I can tell the cooperage what customized tweak I would like them to make for my barrels the next vintage and we can steer the barrel selections to an ever more balanced and Continued on page 8

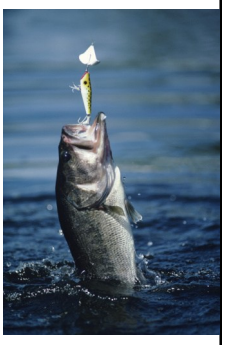




To Be A Human...Continued from page 1

harvest. Infestations slowly ate away at crops and farmers' souls as they watched helplessly from a busted porch. Drought. Bank seizures. Why in gods' names had a boy raised in the Cleveland suburbs chosen to go into farming?! Ah, right, *wine*.

Those who have known me since high school or college are aware I always had a fancy for a beer or three as a young lad. Back then it was all a means to good fun and to fuel camaraderie. I wasn't a beer snob. The concept of a beer aficionado was nascent in the late 80's and I would splurge on a German Dunkel or our local Catamount ale on occasion but mostly as a poser. Focusing on what was in my glass did not really start in earnest until I washed up on the west coast and was living in Berkeley in 1994 trying to figure out what color my parachute might be (with credit to Richard Nelson Bolles who wrote the book of the same title.) My brother Nick would drive up from Santa Cruz where he made wine to brew beer with me in my in-law apartment. He would bring wine and beermaking supplies and I would cook and spin new jazz records I'd picked at the Ashby flea market. Those of you who have made home brew know it takes quite a bit of time, and that leaves room for talking and eating and drinking and, generally, getting to know the person you are brewing with. That is how I got to know my brother, who is four years my senior, and for various reasons was not really a major character in my life until this time in my early twenties. These occasions were when I was introduced to wine as something a little different from the everyday Tusan red, Monte Antico, my dad poured most nights for dinner or the coddled bottles that emerged from their cellar that my mom had picked up at Sherry Lehman's in Manhattan. Instead, Nick would open multiple bottles and enthusiastically tell stories about the people and places where these wines hailed from. Each was a discovery for me. A new grape variety, a new region. He often would jump down deep rabbit holes of geological or enological (or god forbid organic chemistry-ical) detail that would leave my slightly fuzzy brain under a mink coat of confusion. His enthusiasm was infectious. I wanted to see these places, taste their wines, meet the people who felt that their bit of dirt was the best place to make that wine. This was a vast world full of discovery with more questions than answers. I wanted in!



Sensing he had a fish nibbling his hook, Nick directed me to work a harvest. In 1995 I went up to Spring Mountain to labor for the superb people at Cain Vineyards and in the late fall I took a job at a wine shop in San Francisco so I would be exposed to a lot more wine. As the green sales rep at an Australian-focused wine shop, the wine distributor sales reps would home-in on me and pour me all the wines the head buyer would never buy. I would bike home with a dozen half open bottles in my backpack to share with my roommates at night. I joined tasting groups (3 per week at one point) exploring all the regions of Burgundy in one, the wines of Italy in another, and American wines for the third. I learned Chardonnay from one region could taste completely different than Chardonnay from another. Further, Chardonnay from the same exact vineyard would taste different based on the vintage and/or the age of the wine when I drank it. Huh? Cool, I would not tire in this field. I was hooked! Nick and I would proudly make California wine that spoke of place and at a quality level commensurate with the best wines of the world.

There was only one problem. I pretty much only drank European wine at this juncture in my life. I did not like the bombastic, fruit forward, souped up wines coming out of California in the 80s and 90s. Those wines spoke of ego – "have you met muckity muck cult winemaker X" - and process – "ahem, 100% ML, and let me tell you ad nauseum about my barrels." That was not what thrilled me. I was intrigued by discovering what a *place* tasted like. I liked wines that told the narrative of the people, the culture, and the physical place. Where people growing the grapes and making the wine knew they had something unique to reveal in their wines. To obscure this narrative body under a wardrobe of easily manufactured winemaking flavors was not only a sin, but worse, uninteresting.

Nick assured me that we could make wines of place in California, that indeed a handful of people were already doing it. We just needed to stray from the elysian fields and valleys of inland northern California wine country to the rocky, chilly coastline. California sun brought forth the bounty of fruits and vegetables that fed most of the Country but the sun also brought all the sugar and fruit concentration that made the powerful, monochromatic, flabby wines I disliked. If we wanted site expressive wines with moderate alcohol, bright acidity, tension, and flavor complexity we needed to hide from the California sun and embrace the cold waters of the Pacific Ocean.

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On the Road with Brooke...Continued from page 1

prowess, I decided to pour one of our rare *Elanus* Pinot Noir bottlings. Those of you that are fans, know that this bottling is only made in exceptional vintages, from the three best barrels and the name *Elanus* means 'driven'. Rather fitting for this audience, I thought. Every one of the attendees came back for more wine, of course. Two of the athletes, in particular, wanted to delve deeper and began asking questions; what is it like to make these wines so far out on the coast, what are the backgrounds on each of the family members, what and who inspires them, what restaurant wine programs feature Peay? As pro athletes, they knew what it took to be at the top of their specific games and wanted to know more about these wine players and how they got there.

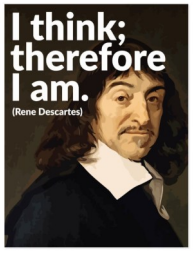
As the event began to wind down, they invited me to join them outside by the fire. They inquired about my background and how I got into wine (I was originally going to be in the golf industry but one wine class in college changed that—a story for another time.) They were gracious and hospitable and poured me more wine while we chatted. As I left, they told me to pass along to Vanessa that the wines were "absolutely remarkable", "one of the best Pinot Noirs I've ever had…wow, just wow," and to tell Nick, Andy and the entire team congratulations for a job well done. They took my card, hugged me, and sent thank you texts afterwards.

This past week, I was able to send one of them a congratulatory text, as he was just inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame joining his companion to his left (see picture). While all the athletes made it a Peay Day that day, for me it was the rare opportunity to sit down and share a rare bottling of ours with these two baseball legends that was truly a home run. I call that a good day on the road.

To Be A Human...Continued from page 6

The rest of the story can be found on our web site but, as you well know, we eventually found a piece of land on the coast and were the first to plant grapes in the colder northern reaches of what is now the West Sonoma Coast AVA.

Looking back, we have had tremendous critical and, at most times, financial success. Currently, we are experiencing challenges to a degree not unlike the ones I imagined while riding on the tractor. Farming challenges aside, this is a tough time to make fine wine. Heck, it's a tough time to make alcohol. Period. But wine is not just alcohol. It speaks of a singular season and, in the most evocative examples, of one place. Only an estate winegrower can make wine from their grapes and that result is singular. When we drink that wine the unique sensory impressions are a catalyst and trigger emotions and memories from instances when we have had it before or smelled something similar to it. The wine, and the story behind it, become part of the fabric that clothes us and using our senses and our mind gives our life texture and meaning. I do not think we are doomed as a family business or as an industry. At least I hope not. If so, the loss will be greater than just our individual dream but nothing short of an important factor in what it means to be a human.



A Quick Rant on the Temperance Movement

I have been tracking the reports and studies on alcohol and health emanating from gov't bodies (US, WHO, NASEM) over the past few years. Conflicting and vague messages abound as data and research is either lacking, poorly gathered, or does not make the point funders and governing bodies wish them to make but nonetheless feel compelled to make. In that vein, there has been a loud, well-publicized campaign bombarding the media waves over the past year. The message? Alcohol is bad. In any amount. Doesn't matter what form it comes in (wine, beer, spirits). Less is better. None is best.

Is this position based on scientific evidence? No. Well, at least mostly, no. People who suffer alcoholism and its effects clearly should not drink. Just like people with diabetes should avoid sugar. Their bodies cannot process it well. They should avoid it for the sake of their health and the relationships in their lives. For alcohol, there is no safe amount for people who are addicted as they cannot stop at one or two drinks (considered moderate consumption). For others, they lack the enzymes necessary to process alcohol and feel the effects more acutely and for longer leading to dangerous situations. How about the other 99% of people who are able to enjoy beverages that contain alcohol in moderation? Can they have a drink Continued on page 10

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compelling match between wine and barrel. What if we were to take our favorite barrel and use only that kind for all our wine? Wouldn't that simplify things and make my work a whole lot easier? Some wineries do this. Many Bordeaux châteaux use not only a single kind of barrel, but they also use that new barrel in 100% of their wine. And there is a well-known Sonoma County Pinot producer that uses the same barrel for all of its wines made from vineyards sourced throughout northern California—its imprint on their wines is so recognizable that I can identify the producer in a blind tasting nearly every time. Don't get me wrong, it is a genuinely nice barrel and it can match with the majority of their wines but it does make them all taste similar to one another no matter where the grapes are from and, thus, rather monochromatic and predictable.

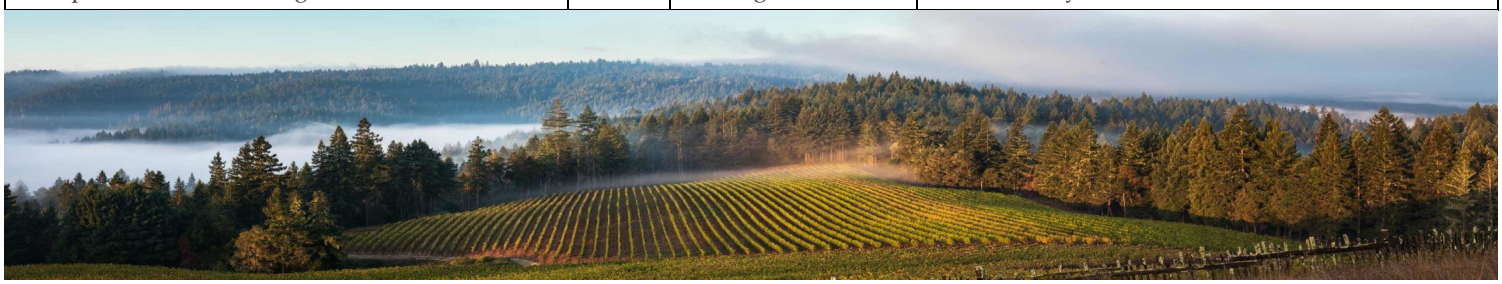
Do we have favorite barrels? Sure, but what is ultimately most important is how well the one barrel complements other barrels and wines in the final blend. Since we use only a few new barrels per cuvée—anywhere between 10-30%--it is crucial that the new barrels work well together. That is why not having all of the same character is good. A balance of slightly different but equally instrumental characteristics makes for a more interesting and well put together composite. In our years of trying, tasting, and tracking our different barrels through the vintages, do we find clunkers that we drop? Most certainly. Sometimes there are barrels that show too strongly of an off-putting or not quite pleasing character or are too inconsistent from year to year even within their own parameters let alone being consistent with others. Those are not right for Peay wines. But at times there may be a barrel who has a character that is singular or even a bit of an outlier and yet is interesting enough to keep if it can be successfully melded into the larger blend. I usually shy away from barrels that present a lot of smoke or charred character, for example, but we have a couple of coopers whose barrels have more than a one-dimensional carbonized note and instead present a deeply complex smoked tone like a good kielbasa sausage or a meaty note like prosciutto. These barrels, although not something we would like to use a lot of since on their own their profiles are too much of a particular character, add something special in very discreet doses. So, we keep on with a couple of those types every year to contribute to the blends at large.

Last basketball season, my elder son and his uncle, Andy, got into a hilarious back and forth text debate on the merits versus the faults of various NBA players but mainly of Warriors forward Draymond Green. Although a skillful and stellar player, he is fiery, outspoken, aggressive and often criticized for being a "dirty" player. Andy is a big fan, but his nephew countered his praise of Green with a laundry list of on court altercations involving him shoving, hitting, choking, kicking, stomping on other players and even punching his own teammate in the face. When pointed out that Green has almost the most ejections from the game in the league because of unsportsmanlike conduct, Andy conceded that the star player was a bit of a hot head. Despite his strong character, Draymond is no doubt a playmaker and makes a seriously lethal duo with his teammate Steph Curry. So, even the "baddies" can be part of the essential synergy of a team like barrels can in a blend in the right measure. Finding those barrels is a big part of bringing out the terroir of our estate wines without overpowering them. In a way, I like to think of myself as a draft scout but for barrels--finding the right merits in the right mix.

With the Olympics coming up and given my penchant for making observations and gathering data, I muse that perhaps I should try my hand at assembling a theoretical Dream Team to rival the USA's 1980 Miracle on Ice hockey team. But since I don't play hockey or even really understand the rules or how to play the game, I would probably not be good at putting together an all-star team. Certainly, my son would think that notion is utterly laughable. So, it is best to stay in my lane, have myself a glass of Pinot noir, sit back and enjoy a game and ask, "Who is the team in orange?"

1st Half 2026 Calendar of Events

Peay Spring Release	2/4-25	Worldwide	Three Week Release Period
Triangle Food & Wine Experience	2/5-7	Raleigh, NC	frankielemmonfoundation.org/twfe/tickets
Emmer and Rye Wine Dinner	2/17	Austin, TX	emmerandrye.com or 512.366.5530
River Oaks Country Club—Pinot Seminar	2/19	Houston, TX	Members Only
30A Wine Festival-Grand Tasting	2/19-22	Alys Beach, FL	30awinefestival.com
Little Flour Wine Dinner	2/24	Memphis, TN	Email: littleflour@enjoyam.com
Jackson Hole Food & Wine	2/25-29	Jackson, WY	jhfoodandwine.com
Nashville Wine Auction Pairings	2/26-29	Nashville, TN	nashvillewineauction.com/pairings
Ojai Food & Wine--Opening Night Reception	3/5	Ojai, CA	ojaifoodandwine.com
Pacific Club Tasting & Dinner	3/18	Newport Beach, CA	Wine Committee Only
Boston Food & Wine—West Sonoma Coast Dinner	3/20	Boston, MA	boswineandfoodfestival.com/event-calendar
Houston Racquet Club Wine Dinner	3/25	Houston, TX	Members Only
Southern Smoke Decanted Wine Auction	3/26-28	Houston, TX	southernsmoke.org/southern-smoke-decanted-2026
High Wine Auction – Dinner, Gala, Auction	3/26	Atlanta, GA	high.org/wineauction
Taste of Vail--Opening Reception & Grand Tastings	4/1-4	Vail, CO	tasteofvail.com
Asador Wine Dinner	4/1	Chicago, IL	Reservation link sent 10 days before open to public
Mister Jiu's Peay Takeover	4/16	SF, CA	Reservation link sent 10 days before open to public
Peay Spring Open House at the Winery	4/18	Cloverdale, CA	RSVP to Jenn@peayvineyards.com
Inn at Newport Ranch Dinner	4/18	Fort Bragg, CA	Make a reservation at theinnatnewportranch.com
The Somerset Club Tasting & Dinner	4/21	Boston, MA	Members Only
Coje Wine Dinner	4/22	Boston, MA	Reservation link sent 10 days before open to public
YPO Global—Wine Tasting	4/28	Chicago, IL	
Shuttlecork Wine Auction – Dinner & Auction	4/30-5/1	Kansas City, KS	nelson-atkins.org/events/signature-fundraisers
Cree Wine Company Wine Dinner	5/7	Hampton, NJ	Make a reservation at 908-200-7772
Waveland Crush Camp – 3 day WSC immersion	5/5-7	West Sonoma Coast	wavelandevents.com
Pall Mall Event	5/13	Melbourne, Australia	
Cru Bar & Cellar	5/14	Brisbane, Australia	
Sydney Event	5/18	Sydney, Australia	
Bellota Dinner	5/20	Melbourne, Australia	
Nantucket Wine Festival	5/27-31	Nantucket, MA	nantucketwinefestival.com
Statebird Provisions Takeover	6/4	San Francisco, CA	Reservation link sent 10 days before open to public
Wine Dinner TBD	6/24	Washington D.C.	
Metropolitan Club—Tasting & Dinner	6/25	Washington D.C.	Members Only



Steelhead Trout in a Vietnamese-Style Marinade

My wife, Ami, came upon this recipe a few years ago and I have yet to find the upper limit on how many times per week I can eat it. Steelhead trout is related to salmon though it is a unique sub-species with a more buttery texture and milder flavor. It is the texture that really attracts me as it maintains a silkiness and the flesh does not dry out as easily as salmon though the cooking method really drives the result. Both fish live in fresh and salty waters though steelhead spends more of its time in fresh water and can handle warmer waters. Fortunately, steelhead is a little less expensive than most salmon and we find it almost year round in our markets in northern California.

This recipe has two important features that make the dish so delicious. The first is the marinade. Many people balk at fish sauce as it is pungent and, well, smells a little fishy. You really want to balk? Look up how fish sauce is made. In a judicious dose, however, fish sauce is delicious and an umami bomb. That fifth taste sensation that is somewhat indescribable but adds the impression of richness and depth of flavor. Mushrooms have it as do cooked tomatoes, cheese, meat, soy sauce, and...fish sauce. If the aroma bothers you, open a window in the kitchen to let the smell dissipate. Despite the aroma, the fish won't taste "fishy", and as a rule, steelhead tastes less fishy than salmon. Also, I am not really a person who measures ingredients when I cook. I tend to pour, sprinkle, stir, taste and then adjust. Please use ingredient measurements as a guide, not as a rule.

The second important feature of this recipe is the cooking method. You cook the fish under a broiler for 7-10 minutes which crisps and blackens the outside of the flesh, yet the interior cooks evenly and is neither raw in the middle nor tough on the exterior. The caramelized sugars on the exterior accentuate the umami sensation and, man oh man, it is magical! If the fish is blackening too much (you smell a burnt aroma), put tin foil over the top of the fish once it has reached the desired stage you like (sweetened, caramelized flavors, not burnt, carbon flavors). If the skinny side of the filet is overcooking, feel free to cut it off after 5 or so minutes and let the fat part of the filet continue. Also, the fish will "coast" once out of the oven, so peek at the interior to check doneness and pull it when it is still very pink, slick, and slightly undercooked.

I suggest serving the fish with some crispy greens and one of our Pinot Noirs. I particularly think it pairs well with a young Pinot Noir as the assertiveness of the flavors in the wine match up against some of the strong blackened flavors on the outside of the fish. The acidity in our wines will also cut the fat in the fish and elevate the aromas. Okay, that did it, I'm headed to the store to buy some steelhead right now.

Marinade Ingredients:

1 cup soy sauce
1/3 cup fish sauce
1/3 cup orange juice
1/2 cup sesame oil
2 green onions, diced
1 Tbs chopped/grated ginger and/or lemongrass
1 Tbs crunchy garlic chile
1/3 cup honey

To Prepare:

Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl (except honey) and whisk together. Taste the marinade. Too much soy? Too much fish sauce? Too spicy? Not enough diced green onions? Adjust. No rules, use your palate as a guide.

Place the filet in a Pyrex or other ceramic/glass baking dish. I recommend you line it with parchment paper for ease of cleaning. Pour the marinade over the fish so it covers the entire fish, drizzle honey, and put in fridge for as long as you can (30 minutes to a few hours). Not enough liquid to cover? Make more or, in a pinch, flip the fish flesh side down so the "top" is steeping.

20 minutes before cooking allow the fish to come to room temp. Once the oven has reached broiling temperature, slide the dish in the oven on the middle rack and set a timer for 7 minutes. If the marinade begins to burn, tent tin foil over the fish. Remove the fish with a spatula leaving the skin behind and pour the remaining marinade over the top of each section of fish.

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without suffering negative repercussions? There is some debate about that because there is zero – no – research on moderate consumption. All studies lump in health outcome statistics from heavy drinking with moderate drinking and then make claims about the risk of moderate consumption. Heavy drinkers tend to be smokers, to be obese, to exercise less, and so on. Moderate drinkers? Not so, and quite the opposite. According to one research paper, moderate drinkers tend to have healthier eating habits, exercise more often, and have greater wealth, which is also positively correlated with better health outcomes. A recent statement warned of the increased risk of breast cancer in women who drink one or more alcoholic beverages per day every day. The increased relative risk is very small (12% chance for all women increases to 12.84%) but there appears to be some scientific basis. How about the studies that claim moderate drinking lowers the risk of coronary heart disease (10-30% lower risk), the #1 killer of Americans (20% share of mortality)? The data behind that conclusion may be confounded by healthier lifestyles of moderate drinkers listed above, perhaps, but the claim has stood the test of time.

None of the data or studies touch on the sociological benefits of moderate consumption, specifically, the increased socialization, relaxation, and stress relief experienced while consuming moderate amounts of alcohol. The isolation and lack of social ease among Americans is dire these days, particularly among younger generations. The links among social isolation, depression, and negative health outcomes is strong and increasingly well-studied. Do you need to drink to socialize and to relax? No, of course not. Do you need to avoid alcohol to be an overall healthy and responsible person? No, of course not.

Moderation has clearly been shown, in almost every aspect of life, to be the most sustainable and healthiest option for humans. You don't want to drink alcohol because you don't like how it makes you feel or behave or you genetically have a high risk of breast cancer or risk of alcoholism? By all means, that is a personal decision, and I support everyone's right to make whatever decision they want for themself. Just please don't tell others what to do based on health claims that are inaccurate, biased, and/or misleading. There are costs to our health, and to our general well-being, from that message, as well.