

PEAY VINEYARDS

ISSUE 49

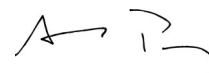
Right now we are bottling our 25th vintage from the Estate vineyard. This is a major milestone for Peay, not only because by now our vines have reached maturity and may potentially make our best wines, but we also have accrued enough knowledge as winemakers, growers, and tasters to have a grip on what we are doing (and why). Enough vintages have passed that even though variances in weather and weather events have left their fingerprint on the individual wines, we recognize the essence of what makes a Peay wine a Peay wine and that throughline is visible over decades.

To prepare for the 25th Anniversary Peay World Tour in 2027-2028, the Peay team sat down in late July and tasted all the Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah we have ever made. That includes the Elanus wines. I will share those notes and insights with you in a future newsletter so you have the benefit of what was, really, a once-in-a-lifetime tasting for us. The brief overall observation was—we are on to something.

Many of the wines from our first decade (the Aughts) are still fresh and appealing despite being 15-25 years old and coming from young vines. The second decade (the Teens) are in various stages of development and, in quite a few cases, are in the sweet spot and are showstoppers. The third decade of wines (the Roaring Twenties) are really interesting. The wines have become more singular in expression and are clearly Peay wines in style. Place is speaking loudly and, in almost all cases, in a beautiful voice that will echo for decades.

These tastings have left me in a reflective mood. As you are likely well aware, it is a very tough time to be a California winery. I discuss this a little bit in my article on page 5 where I make a case for buying wine direct (by the case :-)).

Though we are hustling to sell wine like never before, we have never been more convinced that our wines have a *raison d'être* and we will continue to be an important part of the West Sonoma Coast story. There are challenges to farming here (see Nick's article on powdery mildew on page 4) but the rewards are wines that speak of place and could only come from the West Sonoma Coast. These wines embody the character of the fog, the ocean, and the redwoods. There is energy and focus. There is a freshness and complex harmony in the wines that I have found in few regions in the world. These are not wines to try when you are cheating on Burgundy (or the Rhône Valley). These are world class wines to drink instead of those regions. They have a purpose, a point of view, and a place on all of our tables (and in our mouths.) I hope you feel the same and continue to make wine—and, selfishly, Peay wine—a part of your life. There is much to look forward to.



TO ORDER FROM THE 2026 FALL RELEASE

As a **Friends of Peay** member, we offer you new wines at a special lower price during the three-week release period. After three weeks, prices increase. We do not sell these wines into distribution and, eventually, to restaurants and retail stores for an additional six months giving you the opportunity to order more or to place an order after the release period if you were busy when we initially reached out. When a wine is sold out online, however, it is likely gone for good. If this happens, please contact us and we will see what we can do to find you a few bottles.

To order, please **use the link and code in the Release email** you received on August 5th. It will send you straight into the Members section of our web site. If you do not see the release email, please check your spam folder. If you do not see an allocation email or have any other issue, please contact Jonah at Jonah@peayvineyards.com, Andy at andy@peayvineyards.com or Jenn at jenn@peayvineyards.com. **Thank you.**

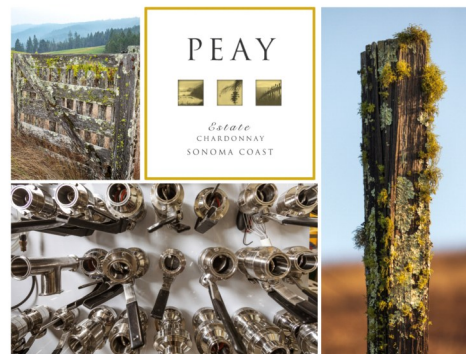


THE 2026 FALL RELEASE TASTING NOTES

2024 MARITIMA ESTATE CHARDONNAY

225 CASES

The name *Maritima* is Portuguese for maritime, a defining feature of our vineyard pressed up against the Pacific Ocean and nestled in the cool and damp marine layer. In 2024 we had an unexpected spring frost that nipped the Chardonnay blocks. As a result, we made only *half* as much *Maritima* as in years past. Sigh. But, the good news is the style and quality are superb delivering a fresh, energetic profile with silky texture that has become the hallmark of Peay Chardonnay. The nose presents youthful aromas of white flowers, orange peel, flint, and melon. The wine is incredibly energetic with a steely spine draped in a silky robe. The finish is quite long and mouth-watering with lingering brine, cream, and mint notes. Why are some of my favorite vintages the ones where we hardly make any wine! Rats. **\$65/btl during release, \$70/btl post release.**
Half bottles available



2024 AMA ESTATE PINOT NOIR

400 CASES

Last July we tasted every vintage of *Ama* we have made since inception in 2009. I have always liked *Ama* but, admittedly, this cuvée has lived in the shadow of *Pomarium* and *Scallop Shelf* who were released into the world 4 years earlier. Though they had a head start, the library tasting made clear that the youngest child has all the character and personality to not only be yummy and promising on release but to also become something equally as special, perhaps more special, as time goes by.

The 2024 *Ama* makes a strong case for why this might be the “best” 2024 Peay Pinot Noir out of the gate. The fruit aromas on the nose are nervy and bright with raspberry, rhubarb, and apple skin held down by base noted lead mineral aromas. This is a fresh and bright expression of *Ama* and does not have the weight or cherry robustness found in warmer vintages (like 2017 or 2013) and more than compensates with elegance, harmony, and complexity of flavors. If opening in the near term, I recommend a decant (as I do with all our young wines, including whites) to let exuberant youthful flavors calm down a little and more base noted aromas to emerge. After an hour decant, the 2024 *Ama* was singing with cherry notes coming to the fore and a darker note lingering on the very long finish. A great wine. **\$75/btl during release, \$80/btl post release**



2024 SCALLOP SHELF ESTATE PINOT NOIR

500 CASES

This is a classic expression of the *Scallop Shelf* cuvée. If *Scallop Shelf* is your Peay Pinot Noir, you can buy this with full confidence you will be happy. Aromas of tart cherry skin and rhubarb are encircled by a floral note and held in place by a deep earth note. On the palate, flavors of forest floor (bark, dried pine needle, decaying earth) further accent the fruit and linger in the after taste. There is refreshing acidity and, though there is plenty of flavor and presence on the palate, there is little weight from fruit extract and alcohol. This is such a desirable quality and may be why *Scallop Shelf* has become such a popular wine for us. I recommend decanting it in the first few years to let youthful flavors coalesce and you can hold on to bottles for as long as you’d like. **\$75/btl during release, \$80/btl post release. Magnums available. Half Bottles available**



2024 RICHARDSON PINOT NOIR

300 CASES

Twelve years ago our shepherd whose sheep mow our winter grass invited us to plant a little over 4 acres of our favorite clones of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay on his ranch. We released our first Chardonnay from *Richardson* in 2023 and the delicious 2024 was offered to you this past spring. Now, after 12 years of vine age, we feel the *Richardson* Pinot Noir is singular and worthy of a vineyard designate.

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2024 RICHARDSON PINOT NOIR CONTINUED

The light color and burst of floral aroma tells you this will be a perfumed wine of elegance. Aromas of rose and raspberry mix with the distinct blood orange quality found in wines made from the Pommard selection of Pinot Noir when grown on the West Sonoma Coast. The wine is light and lively with medium weight on the palate. This is not a rich and unctuous Pinot Noir. It trades extract and power for harmony, grace, and elegance. A superb wine and will be versatile at your table. *\$65/btl during release, \$70/btl post release*



2023 WEST SONOMA COAST ESTATE SYRAH 400 CASES

This is our second vintage of the *Estate* Syrah coming from our 25 year old vines. The 2022 was a product of a moderate growing season with warmth at the end that gave the wine mid palate heft. The 2023 growing season on the contrary was cool and long and the aromas really lean into the lavender and floral nature of our Syrah. There is a little pink peppercorn framing the floral notes and a core of deeper fresh blood and red fruit. On the first sip, my mind immediately jumps to a vision of a juicy NY strip steak. Flavors of blackberry linger on the long finish. In many ways, the wine has the weight, structure and freshness of a high quality Sangiovese. It is not heavy, meaty, or juicy and will pair with everything from salmon to pork to red meats. *\$42/btl during release, \$45/btl post release*



2023 LES TITANS ESTATE SYRAH 300 CASES

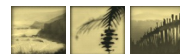
The 2023 vintage allowed for a long hang time and aromas slowly built over the fall months. When it is cool during the verasion to harvest interval the floral, herbal and pepper aromas are emphasized over fruit flavors. The *Les Titans* cuvée is definitely the meatier of our three syrahs and in this vintage the wine just has more of everything found in the 2023 *Estate* Syrah. There is more volume on the nose: The floral element floats out of the glass and into my nose located 4 feet away. On the palate there is greater depth of flavor with more black fruit and hints of iron. This is a youthful wine so if drinking a bottle upon release, give it a decant and drink it with something that has a little fat to help sculpt and soften the wine. This will be a *Les Titans* to enjoy now and it will have a very long life ahead of it. *\$64/btl during release, \$69/btl post release*



2024 ESTATE ROUSSANNE/MARSANNE 60 CASES

This is an exotic, gorgeous expression of our Roussanne/Marsanne. Our Roussanne/Marsanne tastes different from almost any other white Rhône variety wine due to the very cold location of our vineyard. Much in the same way our Viognier is fresh and energetic and snappy unlike warmer climate Viognier, when you drink our Roussanne/Marsanne within the first 5 years from vintage the overall profile is zippy. After 5 years of bottle age, however, the wine relaxes its hold and funky, fun oxidative aromas like almond and beeswax creep in. The wine still has plenty of acidity so the wine doesn't fall apart but gets weird (in a good way.)

Right now, the nose on the 2024 is dominated by a high-toned orange blossom aroma that leaps out of the glass. Surrounding the orange blossom are exotic Tahitian vanilla and clove notes. There is no new oak on the wine so this comes from the wine not a barrel. The flavors on the palate are consistent with the nose and add in a madras curry and apple pear aroma. Despite being nervy the wine is silky and generous on the mid-palate though there is a strong spine of acidity. The finish is very fresh and energetic with citrus peel, coriander, star fruit, and brine lingering for minutes after swallowing. *\$63/btl during release, \$68/btl post release*



OUR COMPLICATED FRIEND, KARL

- WINEGROWER, NICK PEAY



I hope you are having a fine summer. Did you travel? See some national parks, share the 4th with family, or perhaps head off to Europe? I just got off the phone with an attorney friend of mine back from two weeks in Bordeaux and Spain. Apparently, the heat spell his family experienced put a slight damper on what sounded like an outstanding trip (viewed Picasso's Guernica in real life!)

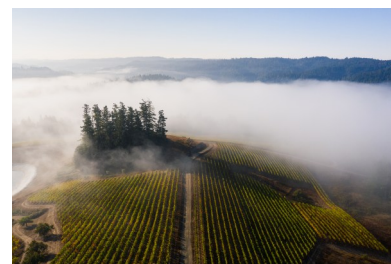
Alas, summer travel is something I am resigned to experience only vicariously as the needs of our little farm prevent me from getting away to mint my own summer travel memories. Don't get me wrong, daily I am amazed at the seasonal progression of our vines. These teeny new shoots, only 3 to 6 inches long, emerge in the spring only to be beaten up by the wind and withstand the ravages

of spring molds while waiting for the drizzle to subside and the sun to return. This sometimes brutal, unpredictable spring weather finally passes and then the verdant vigor of mid-summer growth ensues, shoot tips and tendrils reaching skyward. It is hard to communicate my wonder at the transformation from winter dormancy, skeletal and quiet, shorn of a great mass of woody canes, to such vital and vibrant vines that I see now. There is such vim and vigor. I half expect a Viognier vine to reach out and grab me a la Audrey II from Little Shop of Horrors.

My crew and I work very hard to keep the canopy managed but it is a challenge to keep up with summer growth when you farm 53 acres by hand. It is essential, however, to stay on top of it. If the weather is conducive to powdery mildew growth, an overly shady, dense canopy reduces air circulation and will help the mildew take off. Once it gets a foothold, it is impossible to get out. With our dense fog that is "not-rain" our canopy is almost always very wet in the morning. We are having a very big fog year this year and have been staying ahead of canopy management; tucking shoots through the trellis wires, clipping overhanging or lateral shoots, and tactically picking leaves to allow air to circulate and dappled sunlight to dry out the dampness. But, it is a Sisyphean task until harvest.



Powdery mildew is a highly destructive fungal disease on a wide range of plants. You don't have to worry about the carpet of grey fuzz on your zucchini vine jumping to your grapevine, and vice versa, however. There are different types of mildew that are specific to particular host plants, and the type specific to grapes is *Erysiphe necator*. *Erysiphe necator* thrives and spreads rampantly in humid, shaded, and mild environments (70°F to 85°F), but can spread in dry circumstances. The free moisture from fog (or dew or rain events) triggers ascospore release and (after budbreak, when there is something to grow on), infections by the ascospores will occur on green tissue when temperature exceeds 50°F. We see a pattern of low mildew pressure at the beginning of the growing season which ramps up to its peak in mid-July. The likelihood of fog in the morning is fairly steady from March through September, though no two years have the same timing nor the same number of fog days. Nonetheless, due to our heavy fog every year there is a threat of powdery mildew; it is the specific challenge growers on the West Sonoma Coast accept as the price of growing grapes in a cool and damp climate.

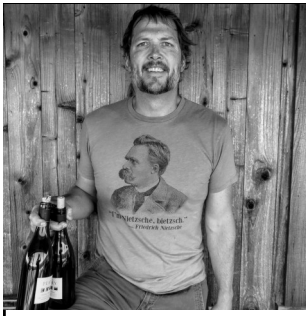


Climate scientists are split over whether the increasing temperatures will lead to less fog on the coast because the air over the ocean won't be cold enough to condense, or whether stronger winds from greater temperature variability will offset that factor. Peter Weiss, a faculty researcher and lecturer at the UC Santa Cruz department of environmental sciences, said that despite a growing narrative of waning fog along the California coast, the data to support that conclusion is "very spotty," with few academic studies performed in the last decade. The reasons include the fog's unpredictability and the lack of a standard way to measure it. "Under climate change, we know the land is warming much faster than the ocean, so that temperature difference across the land and ocean interface is increasing, which could drive stronger winds, which could help preserve this cloudiness," Ian Faloona, a professor of land, air and water resources at UC Davis said. "So there are two arguments you could make about what we theoretically think should happen, and which one's winning out I think is still an open scientific question."

It is wise to simply embrace the presence of the fog, however unpredictable the timing and amount may be. June Gloom is what we've had this year (and others). "July is the coldest month of the growing season (because

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YES, IT MATTERS!

- THE MOUTH, ANDY PEAY

When I first started buying wine in the early 1990s, people in the know suggested I join a winery's Mailing List to receive allocations of all their wines. At 24 years of age and a newbie to buying wine, I found this suggestion a little odd. Shopping for wine via a newsletter in a retro-1960s Sears Catalogue kind of way mixed with a strange level of monogamy I wasn't sure I was ready to commit to (hey, I was 24 and living in Berkeley, California...)? But, I really wanted the Zinfandel this producer

made and the only way to get access to as many bottles as I wanted (not to mention their rare and pricy Cabernet) was through their Mailing List. So, I joined. Receiving their newsletters and offers (and wine) delivered an unexpected benefit to me as it deepened my knowledge and affinity for the people and the stories behind the wines. Over time, this winery and its wines (and the memories made while drinking them) became part of my burgeoning passion for wine and my identity as a "wine guy." Though my taste preferences drifted from their style of wine, I did not veer from my affection for their brand and the people behind it. I continue to recommend their wines to friends I think might like them even though I no longer drink that style of wine.

Fast forward 30 years and today Peay's Mailing List sales—my sales directly to you—account for over half of our revenue. More importantly, it accounts for over 100% of our profitability. How so? If I sell you a bottle of Pinot Noir or Chardonnay I receive 100 cents on the dollar. If I sell the bottle to my distributor who sells it to a restaurant or bottle shop, I receive 50 cents on the dollar. My profit margin on direct sales is not 50%. Even an English major like me understands the math—I need to sell direct! Of course, I need to distribute our wine to states and countries around the world so people are not only introduced to our wines by knowledgeable retailers but they are also able to enjoy them in situ at restaurants and wine bars. Having worked in retail wine, I greatly value my distributor partners and the efforts they exert to build the Peay name. I will always distribute our wines through them, but I cannot allow the majority of my wine to be sold by them, or I won't have a business.

So, how do we try to make buying direct from Peay attractive to you? We offer you almost limitless access to all of our wines, even wines where we don't make very many bottles. You have not been able to buy as much Roussanne, Viognier, or Elanus as you'd like? Want to purchase older wines from our library? Email or call me. We have ways! We also offer our wines at special prices during the release period so you pay the lowest price anywhere in the country

(unless someone discounts) if you purchase on release. We offer reduced fixed shipping prices and sometimes special shipping deals. We try to add value to your dining experiences by hosting diners at restaurants we think are exemplary presenting current and older vintages in the context of their excellent cuisine. Additionally, we host two Open Houses annually where we pour of all our wines and supply a tasty lunch and, though we charge a little for it, we lose money but get to throw a party and meet you in person. And, finally, we attempt to write newsletters that give you insight to our wines and the wine industry in a hope to deepen your understanding of wine so you get more out of the bottles you drink. The more you know about a wine and its makers and the context in which the grapes were farmed and made into wine, the more likely you will have a more nuanced and profound sensory experience while drinking them.

These direct sales allow us to do very critical things at Peay. We can farm organically by hand paying our workers good wages while using regenerative practices. That costs a lot more than conventional, mechanized farming and results in not only high quality fruit, but also helps us fulfill our roles as stewards of our land. It allows Vanessa to make wines to an exacting standard, as well, making Peay cuvées only from free run wine (free run? Email me and I will explain) and to declassify any wine that doesn't meet her quality standards without financial consideration. Choosing to be on the edge of where you can ripen fruit to make wines of freshness and harmony means our weather can be dodgy and the yields erratic and on average very low—half what growers get inland. This effectively *doubles* our farming costs. And, lastly, I cannot remember the last time Vanessa asked me if we could do something that would improve or sustain quality and I said no (the new optical sorter, for example. Ugh. Like buying a house!) When you start cutting corners or "listening to the bean counters," however, that's when quality begins to slip. Death by a thousand small, "reasonable" decisions. We are not profligate, however. Seen my brother's wardrobe? Age of our forklift? Lack of filigree and gold plating at the winery. All cash goes into the vineyard and winemaking decisions.



Peay dinner with Frank Stitt, Stuart Briozza, and me

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KARL...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

it's so foggy.)" Seemed to be the case for Mark Twain, too. Some call July "No sky July" which precedes the month of "Fogust." The persistent summer fog led San Franciscans to embrace and name the marine layer Karl. I distinctly remember observing a string of pea soup mornings in September 1998 and 1999 and wondering if the grapes were *ever* going to ripen. No pattern other than there will be fog.

Amazingly, we have had a very effective material for powdery mildew control at hand for many years. Sulfur is an element, atomic number 16, directly below oxygen on the periodic table of the elements, found in deposits in the ground around the world. Given a little heat and an abundance of oxygen, sulfur will volatilize and form a cloud of gas, sulfur dioxide or SO₂, which is what happens when it is applied to the grapevine leaf. The SO₂ gas serves as a protective environment, quite hostile to *Erysiphe necator* ascospores, though natural and harmless to humans and insects. This volatilization is temperature dependent, more rapid at warm temperatures, so some amount of sulfur will stay present on the leaf where it landed for a period of time, anywhere from 10 days to 2+ weeks. The elemental sulfur sitting on the leaf also makes an inhospitable environment for a drifting ascospore to land and thrive. The only downside is that a little bit of residual elemental sulfur on the grapes will be transformed by our wine yeast, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, into rotten egg-smelling hydrogen sulfide. So, we must make our last spray using some other material, giving ourselves more time for the sulfur on the grapes to volatilize.

What do we do for that last spray pass? JMS Flower Farms Organic Stylet Oil. Just smother it! Biological oils are the only option that *kills* powdery mildew; everything else is solely a preventative. Stylet oil also is a preventative but, unfortunately, it only lasts for seven days. So, we also add biologicals that make claims to persist for 14 days. Biologicals are by-products of fermentation of micro-organisms, usually from the soil, or are the micro-organisms themselves. The first, Polyoxin D, marketed Oso is derived from the metabolites of *Streptomyces cacaoi* var. *asoensis*, which are a strain of soil-dwelling actinobacteria. Polyoxins D interferes with synthesis of the fungal cell walls by suppressing chitin synthase (prevents mildew from making chitin, the stuff the shell of a shrimp is made out of? Mildew makes this? Who knew!)

Another biological available to us is the *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens* strain MBI 600, a naturally occurring beneficial soil bacterium used as a biological fungicide and plant-growth promoter. Marketed commercially as Serifel, currently we are alternating Serifel with Oso year-to-year. There is more in the pipeline like amoeba lysate. A company named Amoeba-Nature discovered that the lysed (i.e. killed, burst) cells of the amoeba *Willaertia magna* C2c Maky, had strong anti-fungicidal properties, inhibiting germination of mildew spores. While they are mainly interested in Downy Mildew control (which we don't have), they also claim efficacy on powdery mildew. This is not yet available in California and we will track its progress. Despite our arsenal of organic weapons, challenges remain: neither the oil nor the biologicals move beyond where they land. Good coverage, meaning a strong sprayer fan with lots of nozzles and judicious canopy preparation, is essential.

It should be noted that though our vineyard's location is responsible for our particular fungal challenges, powdery mildew is just about universal. Warmer, drier places have powdery mildew pressure, just earlier in the season. Places with high humidity (including summer rainfall) have powdery and downy mildew. Oh, the headaches! So, come to think of it, we are truly blessed when the fog does clear, as the relative humidity drops quite dramatically and the air is really quite dry when the sun is out. The presence of a fog layer is just a reminder that we are growing grapes in the cool marine layer all the time, a key ingredient to making great wine.

I am making plans for travel this winter, the time of year when the vineyard is asleep and I can let the rain gauge fill and watch my younger boy stop pucks. The winter is coming and being an el nino year means more snow in the majestic Rockies. Maybe early next year I'll regale my attorney-friend with my travel tales of waist-deep powder! I am certain to view one of Mother Nature's masterpieces, regardless.

YES, IT MATTERS! CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

As you may have read, the wine industry is experiencing a severe downward trend in demand. The causes of this drop are many and I discussed them in our last newsletter (sobriety trend, increased cost of living, GLPs, legal weed, media health scares, et al.) Our sales are down both direct to consumer (you) and to distributors. I have never worked so hard to gain so little. But I knew when I left banking that I was trading in a profit maximizing occupation for one that may be a psychic maximizing occupation. At times, it has been. To grow an idea into a tangible product that brings pleasure to many people is hugely rewarding. This was both psychically and to some degree financially the case until last year. It is my hope that with your help we can return to that dual state again very soon.



CALENDAR OF DINNERS & EVENTS

Peay Fall Release	Via email	8/5-26	Special prices during release period
NYC Dinner TBD	Manhattan, NY	9/15 or 17	Email with details forthcoming
Essential by Christophe Peay Dinner	Manhattan, NY	9/16	646.478.7928
Lucy Anne's Peay Dinner	Greenville, SC	9/21	864.385.1480
Peay Dinner—Location TBD	Greenville, SC	9/22	
Peay Takeover at Terra	West Columbia, SC	9/23	
Peay Dinner—Location TBD	Palm Springs, CA	9/30	
Peay Dinner—Location TBD	Los Angeles, CA	10/1	
Peay Dinner—Location TBD	Raleigh, NC	10/6	
Peay Dinner—Location TBD	Chapel Hill, NC	10/7	
Figure Eight Yacht Club	Wilmington, NC	10/8	Members only
Feathered Fox/Maritime Parc Peay Dinner	Jersey City, NJ	10/16	
BiJou Peay Dinner	Petaluma, CA	10/11	Reservations call 707.753.9155
Elanus Release—2023 Pinot Noir & Chardonnay	Via email	10/14	
Sonoma County Vintners—Peay Tasting	Santa Rosa, CA	10/16	
Peay Takeover at Vida	Indianapolis, IN	10/26	
Peay Dinner—Location TBD	Louisville, KY	10/28	
Peay Open House @ Winery	Cloverdale, CA	11/14	
Pine Creek Sporting Club	Okeechobee, FL	12/11	
Spring Release	Via email	2/1	
Triangle Wine Experience	Raleigh, NC	2/4-6	
West Sonoma Coast Vintners at Park House	Dallas, TX	2/24	
West Sonoma Coast Vintners at Pogos	Dallas, TX	2/25	
Vinous Icons—NYC	NY, NY	2/25-27	
West Sonoma Coast Vintners at Park House	Houston, TX	2/26	
West Sonoma Coast Vintners at Art of Cellaring	Houston, TX	2/27	
Nashville Wine Auction Pairings	Nashville, TN	2/26-27	
Southern Smoke Decanted	Houston, TX	4/3	



CALIFORNIA ABUNDANCE: CAST IRON PAN CHICKEN

The list of grievances of living in California are well known: high cost of living, thick traffic, cheaply built housing, excessive taxes, high gas prices, onerous regulation, etc. I am often asked, why in gods' names do I live there? When paying my mortgage, I have stopped to contemplate this question. And then spring arrives, and with it, the bounty of California fruit and vegetables. Grocery shopping, whether at a store or farmers market, becomes a body-tingling experience. This feeling hits a crescendo come mid-summer when all the peaches and stone fruits are bursting in sweet, tangy exuberance and the squash, corn, beans, tomatoes, sprouts, onions, eggplants, mushrooms, and on and on stack up in colorful piles. It is just a cornucopia of goodness. My shopping cart groans with "must-haves" and "holy wow, look at that" sourced from farms with cute names and stories. The long-time Cali residents may become a little inured to our good fortune until an outsider comes to visit (my out-of-towner was my Costa Rican friend, John). John just about plotzed when he saw the table laid for a midweek dinner including grilled peaches, pan fried corn, seared squash, blackened Jimmy Nardello peppers and rocket onions, alongside salmon caught off the coast of Pt. Arena. We weren't in Playa Grande any longer, Toto.



My wife Ami threw this dish together a few years ago and it has become a summer staple. It is easy, quick, and delicious. There is a lot of room for creativity, so use this as a guide and add in whatever is looking best at the market that day (the photo above has at the base smoked/blackened Japanese eggplant innards used for this dish before the remainder went into baba ganoush). This dish will go great with both our Chardonnay and our Pinot Noir as the juicy fresh acidity in our wines marry well with the tangy acidity of the cherry tomatoes and the green flavors of pesto and creamy ricotta in a bite of seared chicken thigh. A match made in heaven (or a place named California).

Chicken Ingredients:

4 Chicken thighs—organic, free range
Curry powder—I like vadouvan
Thyme (optional)
Butter
Seed oil—to cook high heat
3 ears corn
20-25 cherry tomatoes
3 garlic cloves—diced
Ricotta cheese (or chevre or feta)
Olive oil—to dress

Brine Ingredients:

1 gallon warm water, or enough to cover
1 cup of salt
1/2 cup sugar (optional)
Few sprigs fresh thyme (optional)
Bunch of peppercorns (optional)
Bay Leaf (optional)

Pesto Ingredients:

1 bunch Basil—3 to 4 cups
4 garlic cloves
3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup pine nuts (toasted)
1/2 cup olive oil
Squeeze of a lemon (to taste)

To Prepare:

- **Brine:** Mix together brining ingredients, stir to dissolve salt and sugar (if using). Insert meat, be sure fully submerged. Leave on counter, no need to refrigerate. If you don't brine your chicken, pork et al. let me just say it makes a HUGE difference in the juiciness and texture of the cooked meat. Worth it. I personally don't sweat "over-brining" so go ahead and drop the meat in the brine and go to work and fish it out afterwards. Yes, that is 2-3 times the length recommended by most chefs but don't add excessive salt when cooking and likely it will be a-okay.
- **Pesto:** Mix all ingredients in a food processor or blender and blend until creamy and smooth.
- **Chicken:** Rinse chicken breasts and pat dry with a paper towel. Roll thighs in the curry powder and thyme (optional) dry rub and let them sit as long as you can in fridge until it is time to cook (minutes to overnight).
- Shuck corn and cut the kernels off the ear and collect in a bowl. Chop garlic.
- Heat your cast iron pan on high heat. Add some seed or olive oil to the pan. Place chicken thighs skin down in pan and sear the skin until crispy brown (stop before blackening, see photo). A bacon or meat press is a very effective way to improve the sear. Add some butter to assist in the browning but careful, it burns and smokes. Flip thighs meat side down, lower flame, and cook for 5-10 minutes depending on size of thigh. Wanna have fun, add a few hunks of butter to pan, tilt pan, and spoon the butter over the thigh basting the meat. Yum. When cooked, remove chicken to a plate to rest while you prep the rest.
- If necessary, reheat your cast iron pan on high heat. If necessary, add seed oil to pan and cover bottom. When sizzling hot, add the corn kernels and the cherry tomatoes. Don't stir often as you want them to blacken on the pan side. Scrape across pan with a wooden spoon when you see it getting crispy and tomatoes are bursting. Lower heat, add some chopped garlic, stir. Add chicken thighs as in photo. Add dollops of ricotta and pesto to the pan and submerge a little so they warm up and absorb some juices.
- **Serve:** Drizzle good olive oil over the dish. Serve in the pan for visual effect or plate.

