

Moonshine Ranch PINOT NOIR

The fruitful Russian River Valley is filled with Edens for growing Pinot Noir. Gardens of vinifera are dotted throughout this lush valley, resplendent in their supreme capability to produce exquisite wine. These delightful paradises are exactly where our vineyards have been planted. As the birds eye it, the Moonshine Ranch lies one mile from the glistening Russian River. The northern edge of the vineyard is bordered by swaying firs and ancient oaks that line the small creek, abundant with shy turtles and garrulous bullfrogs. The waterway is crossed by a single lane, arched stone bridge, splendidly covered in moss. My favorite part of Moonshine Ranch is the century-old draughty barn, for which the Ranch is named. The high raftered building stands as a relic for times of old, as its heyday was during the prohibition era, serving as a small factory for prune brandy. The barn stands near the creek, as water was needed to cool the copper stills during after-dark administrations to 'the recipe'.

This petite vineyard is densely planted at 2,000 vines per acre and is situated on rocky fertile ground which serves as a natural water drainage. The rows are placed facing the suns daily path for interception of light for even ripening. Three Dejon clones were grafted onto rootstock to match climate behavior and the unique properties of each specific soil series. The exact properties of the soil can be drastically different from one acre to the next. Intense days are spent digging 'soil pits' along the landscape, to analyze the precise make-up of the terroir, then determining which rootstock will flourish best according to its individual growing needs. The grapevines are thinned to bear approximately 3 pounds of fruit per vine and hang 24 inches above the ground. The grapes are picked at about 25 degrees brix to ensure mature ripe fruit flavors. They are hand selected at harvest time by Lee, who tastes the grapes and chooses when to pick according to the developed concentration of flavors in the berries. After picking, the whole berries undergo a long cool fermentation to generate skin contact and expose fruit character and are fermented with wild yeast. The juice is gravity fed into small oak barrels with a touch of residual sugar remaining to complete the fermentation process in barrel until dry. It rests in 75% new French oak on its gross lees for one year. Being a particular and moody varietal to tamper with, the grapes, juice, and then wine are minimally handled. This wine is neither heat nor cold stabilized and is unfinned and unfiltered.

Lee Jr. has kept with the 'spirits' theme of the old farm. Now the old lichen covered barn houses farm equipment which is removed each October for the annual and most famous Halloween party in the land. In the crisp morning air of Fall, the decoration committee gathers at the barn, and from its splintery rafters hangs strands of store-bought cobwebs with red bellied spiders, place yellow-eyed rats amongst the appetizers, they stir the vodka punch in a hollowed pumpkin shell, arrange bloodshot eyeballs to float in the margaritas, call the neighborhood band and then light the propane heaters. For more than a decade Goblins and Witches, Red Riding Hoods and Bo Peeps, Princess' and Black Cats, notorious Presidents and French Maids, have arrived on the scene, dancing till dawn on the bare dirt floor.

Wine Maker: Helen Turley

Assistant Wine Maker: Bryan Kvamme

The Moonshine Ranch Pinot Noir in the Press

2000 Vintage ~ 92+ pts. Robert M. Parker, Jr.

2001 Vintage ~ 91+ pts. Robert M. Parker, Jr. ~ 92 pts. Stephen Tanzer ~ 92 pts. Wine Spectator

2002 Vintage ~ 91+ pts. Robert M. Parker, Jr. ~ 93 pts. Wine Spectator

"Deep ruby colored, with great fruit purity and a muscular, earthy, solid style, the 2002 Pinot Noir Moonshine Ranch (named after ...what else... a moonshine operation popular during Prohibition) requires 1-2 more years of bottle age. A firmer, richer effort, it possesses impressive fruit, but will be less accessible and charming in its youth than some of its siblings. It should last for a decade." 91+ pts. ~ Robert M. Parker, Jr.

"Delicious from the first sip, this is a bold, ripe, richly flavored wine, with a flash of toasty oak preceding a fleshy core of ripe plum, blackberry and raspberry flavors. Shows fine structure on the finish, with the fruit pushing past the tannins. Drink now through 2010." 93 pts. ~ James Laube