



Greg Morthole: Winemaker

Greg Morthole started working for the winery in late 2007 as an associate winemaker. His acumen for winemaking became immediately clear, and he quickly ascended to an appointment as winemaker in the spring of 2010, overseeing all aspects of operations and winemaking.

Mostly raised in Sacramento, California, Greg followed his heart back to the state after attending the University of Wyoming, where he earned a B.S. in natural sciences and mathematics. His degree led him to a laboratory analyst position at Vinqury in Windsor in the late 90s followed by a position with Chalk Hill Winery as an enologist. Greg has a quiet demeanor with a determined, energetic attitude stemming from his belief that winemaking is a serious job for sure, but one that is fun. Greg says, “making wine from Russian River Valley is to follow both long-held traditions and new paths. Being one of the best places on earth to make chardonnay and pinot noir, our expectations are very high.”

Greg’s Winemaking Philosophy

“Russian River Valley pinot noir expresses itself differently depending on location, site specifics, and the nature of the vines themselves. For pinot noir, I seek out the *golden triangle* of the ‘Santa Rosa plain’ region of the valley, just west of Windsor and centered on the intersection of Olivet and River roads. This small area tends to enjoy the very best of the iconic local climate; never too hot during the day, and consistently chilly at night. Then I focus on a handful of vineyards that show superior vine balance thanks to well-drained, shallow and inherently low vigor soils. Finally, when blending the wine, I use different vineyard blocks based on the characteristics of the clones to enhance complexity, while keeping to the food friendly flavor profile that has always been a hallmark of Davis Bynum: a little lighter, without being lean; a little crisper, without being tart; a little more fruit driven, without being distracting; with a round, soft mouthfeel, and less oak and alcohol than you often find in California pinot noirs.”

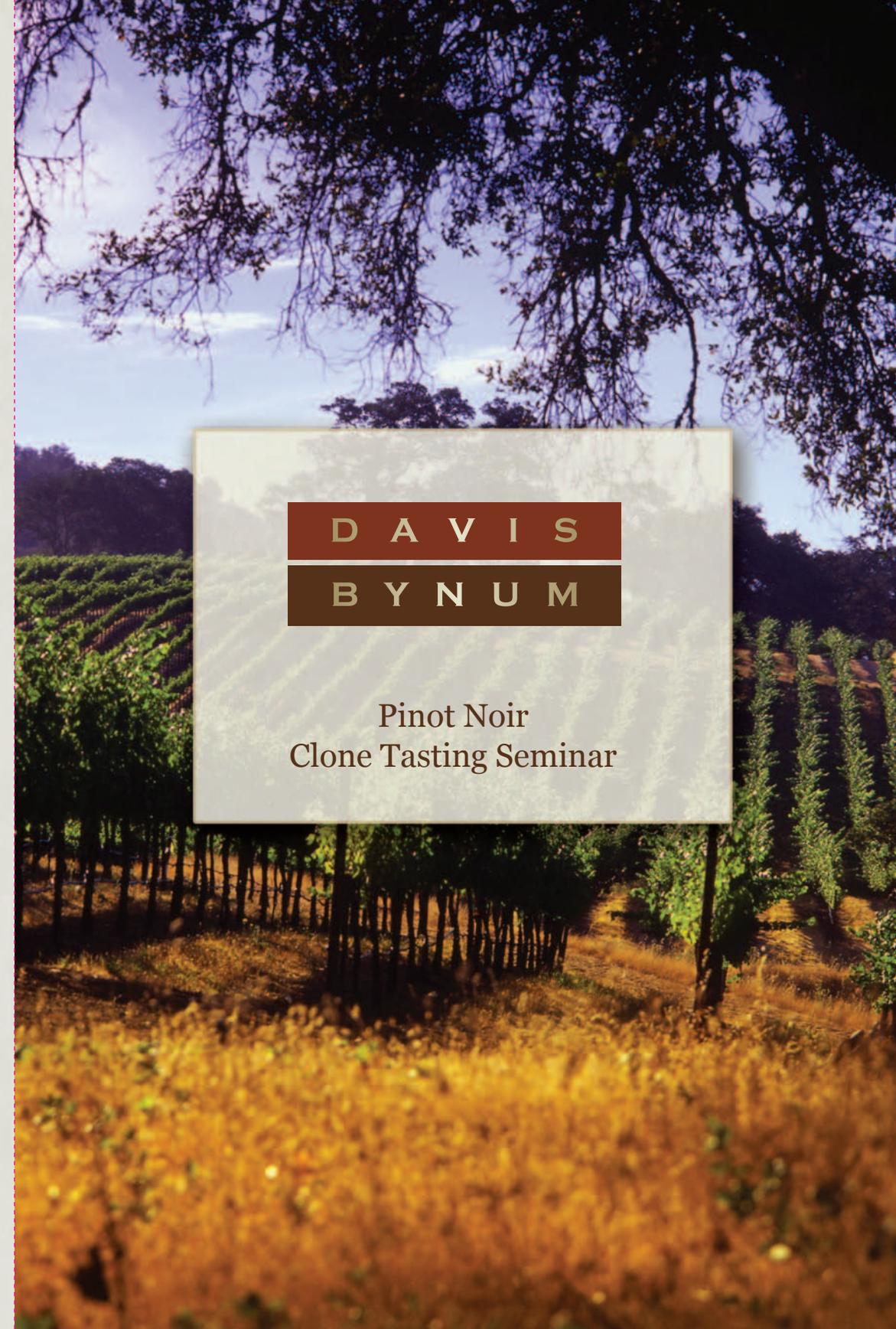


About Davis Bynum

Distinguished as the first winery on Westside Road in Healdsburg, California, Davis Bynum was the first to produce a single vineyard pinot noir from the Russian River Valley. It was from 1973 and the grapes were from Joe Rochioli’s now prized vineyard. Today, nearly forty years later, the heritage of Davis Bynum lives on through the hand crafted creation of pinot noir and chardonnay grown exclusively in Russian River Valley.

Davis was a home winemaker in Berkeley when he was a young reporter working at the *San Francisco Chronicle*. As Bynum recalls with a chuckle, in 1951 he purchased a small amount of petite sirah from Robert Mondavi. Then things became a bit more serious in 1965 when he transformed a warehouse in Albany into a small winery, where he made wine guided by his research at the University of California, Berkeley’s extensive library. In 1971 Bynum purchased a 26-acre vineyard in Napa Valley with the intention to build a winery. Restrictions on construction in the area led him away from that venture and into Sonoma County in 1973, where he found an 84-acre piece of land that quickly became Davis Bynum Winery. There, his name became synonymous with distinctive Russian River Valley pinot noirs and chardonnays. Eventually, acclaim for Bynum wines, along with other area producers, won Russian River Valley recognition as one of the world’s very best wine growing regions.

In August 2007, ready to retire from the day-to-day activities of running a winery, Davis sold his brand to Tom Klein and his family, a fourth generation California farming family and owners of Rodney Strong Vineyards. The focus on Russian River Valley remains the same and the goal to produce excellent chardonnay and pinot noir is unchanged. Davis still shares his insights and support and often enjoys lunch with winemaker, Greg Morthole.



Pinot Noir
Clone Tasting Seminar



The purpose of the Seminar:

Winemakers have many secrets, and one of them is that within each grape variety, there can be several sub-varieties, known to the wine trade as “clones.” Although each clone of pinot noir can make a fine wine that indisputably tastes like pinot noir, there are subtle and sometimes obvious differences that winemakers use to their advantage to build complexity into the final wine. The goal of this seminar is to educate on the nature and history of pinot noir clones, and by tasting through six different examples, gain a perspective into the detailed work that is accomplished behind the scenes by our winemaker, Greg Morthole.

What is a Clone?

A clone is a group of identical genes, cells or organisms derived from one single ancestor. Grapevine clones are those that have been propagated and grown from cuttings from one single “mother,” and were found to have interesting or superior qualities.

There are more clones of pinot noir than there are of any other wine grape variety. This is likely due to the fact that pinot noir has been regularly cultivated for seven centuries, and tends to be one of the most genetically unstable varieties. Growers of the vine have had ample time to notice subtle variations in a single vine, such as cluster size, color, skin thickness, etc. If cuttings from that unique material replicate the same characteristics, a new clone is born. But it is still, genetically, pinot noir.

Pinot noir clones in California all originally stem from Europe, but there are two different avenues from which they have come to exist. The first is the “suitcase selections” where vintners would travel abroad and return with cuttings from vineyards there. The resulting vineyard and its vines, not derived from a single vine but from many, is technically known as a “mass selection.” These new vineyards would then be the source of additional mass selections for additional vineyards, and the name of said “clone” would typically reflect the original propagating entity.

In the 1940s a UC Davis plant geneticist named Harold Olmo travelled around the state looking for single, healthy, mother vines in amongst many of these suitcase selection-

heritage vineyards, and the university began experimental plantings, intending to provide non-virused, true to variety, and successful production material. A method of virus removal called “heat treating” provided a way of eliminating viruses from promising clones. Of these original, cleaned up true clonal offerings, Davis Bynum grows the Martini clone.

By 1948, unauthorized suitcase importation was declared illegal, and UC Davis was chosen as the only official organization by which new material could be imported, certified, cleaned up, and released to vintners. This was known as Foundation Plant Material Services, and Olmo played a significant role. Olmo also travelled to Europe during this time, looking for good examples of healthy, productive vines for additional material. Some of these were among the first offerings made available in 1958. Of these, Davis Bynum grows Pommard, Mariafeld, and Wadenswil clones, all in Backbone Vineyard.

While Olmo’s clonal work tended to focus on disease freedom and reasonable yields, in the 1970s Raymond Bernard, working for ONIVIN in Dijon, France was selecting pinot noir for wine quality as well as varietal “trueness” and health. According to Bernard, most of his selections came from Domaine Ponsot in Morey-St. Denis, Burgundy. The most widely planted selections in Burgundy today of Bernard’s thirty years of work are clones 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, and 828. We grow all except 828.



Grape Clones often found in Davis Bynum Pinot Noir:

Each clone adds its own unique flavor and texture to a finished wine, building complexity.

Pommard: Light to medium red hued, with aromas and flavors of earth, dried mushroom, leather, and pie cherry. Medium bodied, with soft tannins, and typically balanced acidity.

Clone 777: Deeply red hued, with aromas and flavors of black cherry, blackberries and licorice. Full bodied, with medium tannins and balanced acidity.

Clone 667: Medium red hued, with aromas and flavors of cherry, black tea, and warmed earth. Medium bodied, with soft tannins and balanced acidity.

Clone 115: Medium to deeply red hued, with aromas and flavors of rose petal, red cherry, and black raspberry. Medium to full bodied, with soft tannins and balanced acidity.

Clone 114: Medium to deeply red-blue hued, with aromas and flavors of pomegranate, blueberry, cola, and mineral. Medium to full bodied, with medium tannins and balanced acidity.

Wadenswil/2A: Red-blue hued, with aromas and flavors of cherry, raspberry, and rose petal. Medium bodied with medium to firm tannins, and fairly high acidity.

The Region: Russian River Valley

Russian River Valley is named after the first non-native settlers of Sonoma County, the Russians. Their presence from 1812 to 1841, along the Sonoma coast, left a significant impact. Agriculture, including viticulture, was one such impact. Their first plantings at Fort Ross and subsequent vineyards in the Graton area and throughout west-central Sonoma County were planted well before the Gold Rush of 1849.

Although the name Russian River Valley was not used on bottled wine until 1970, the area has a long tradition of winemaking. By 1876 viticulture was well-established in the Russian River Valley, when it was reported that the region produced in excess of 500,000 gallons of wine from about 7,000 planted acres. Some of the first in the region were The Santa Rosa Wine Company in 1876, Martini & Prati Winery in 1880, Korbel Champagne Cellars in 1882 and Foppiano Winery in 1896. The region became an official American Viticultural Area in 1983.



Climate

The overall climate of the Russian River Valley is Mediterranean, with mild wet winters and warm dry summers. During the growing season, the regular evening intrusion of cooling fog from the Pacific Ocean just a few miles to the west drops the temperature as much as 40 degrees. This same fog is slow to clear in the morning, and the overall effect is a modification of the length and strength of the hottest hours of the day, protecting acidity and preserving pinot noir’s delicate flavors, helping to ensure the highest quality pinot noir.

Soils

Russian River Valley soils reflect the parent materials from which they were derived. Deposition of these materials was the result of a long series of geologic events, which continues even today. These primary rock units, subjected to weathering, impacted by biologic processes, as well as being shifted and mixed over millions of years, have resulted in a rather diverse collection of soils types, many of which are excellent for growing high quality pinot noir. Generally these consist of well drained sandy or gravelly loams, with varying amounts of clay, stretching from the valley floor up into the low hills. The best of these are naturally self limiting, with balanced vine growth and even ripening clusters.