

Las Jaras Wines

2020 MENDOCINO PINOT NOIR

Mariah Vineyard | Mendocino Ridge

When we made our first foray into pinot noir, it may have been a surprising move for our somewhat iconoclastic brand, but we like to make wine we want to drink and share with others. At the top of our list is drinking wine made with a beautiful Burgundian grape. Joel had spent much of his winemaking career working with pinot noir for his corporate overlords before founding Las Jaras Wines with Eric. A deep love of Burgundy and new world pinot noir made with a focus on freshness and balance. When we decided we wanted to make a pinot noir in 2018, we first looked for a site in Mendocino Ridge appellation, but turned to Oregon when we could not find a good, organic fruit source. In 2019 our dreams came true and we found an appellation on the second ridge from the Pacific Ocean. This appellation is also known as Islands in the Sky because the vineyards on high elevation ridges above the fog line. There are great sites on the first ridge, but it is often too cold to get consistent results unless you are making sparkling wine. We are also of the mind that pinot noir needs to achieve a bit of ripeness (but not too much) so that the wine is not green tasting.

Thankfully, the 2020 vintage was smoke free up at this high elevation site. 2020 was quite a warm year, so and we had to scramble to pick the grapes before a heat spell. We love high elevation vineyards because the nighttime temperatures are relatively warmer and the low diurnal shift creates pinot noir with beautiful balance. It allows us to pick the grapes earlier to preserve freshness and create a wine that shows restraint. This wine has a ruby color but with medium light intensity. The nose shows subtle strawberry, Santa Rosa plum and savory notes of damp earth. The palate excites with wild strawberry in the attack and layers of raspberry and red licorice with a frame of lime and slate mineral. There is a ton of tension on the palate but the tannin is like it is not even there. What we like the most about this wine is the nerve and the freshness. It is also very linear without the huge blockyness or saltyness you see in many California pinot noirs.

Vineyard: Mariah vineyard is farmed organically and certified regenerative by the Savory Institute. The vineyard is situated at 2400 feet elevation on a remote ridge near Point Arena and has black loam soils. The vineyard was originally planted to syrah, zinfandel and merlot starting in 1980. The syrah and merlot blocks have been replaced with pinot noir, sauvignon blanc and chardonnay.

Winemaking: The grapes were picked on September 21st at night. After they were picked, Dan Dooling, who owns and farms the vineyard, loaded the grapes onto his beautiful 1960's Peterbilt and trucked them down to the winery. We chose to bring in 3 tons of Dijon clone 115 and 1.5 tons of Dijon clone 667 pinot noir. Since this is mountain fruit, we were scared of the chemistry. Mountain fruit tends to have a high pH and high acidity which leads to a salty tasting wine. Many winemakers will add lots of acid to pinot noir when it hits the tank in this situation but we don't. Our strategy is to let the fermentation drop out all of the extra potassium naturally. Our strategy was successful and led to a wine with pretty normal chemistry and no saltyness!

The grapes were destemmed and dumped into the tank. We warmed the tank to get the fermentation to start naturally and then let it ferment at cool temperatures with very gentle cap movements. Surprisingly, this wine fermented very quickly and we held it for a couple of days to get a bit more extraction. Afterward, we drained the tank and transferred the free-run wines to new and used large-format barrels. The press wines were aged separately and added to our Glou Glou wine. The free-run wine was very light in color as usual. Pinot noir puts on color when it ages in barrel and now it is a beautiful jewel. We left the wine to age on its lees until one month before bottling, when it was racked clean. Before bottling, we racked the wine clean from tank to tank, and we were able to bottle without fining or filtration.

Label Art by Blanca Miró Skoudy

*Production: 283 cases | ABV: 13.24% | TA: 5.51 g/L | pH: 3.65 | VA: 0.72 g/L | DCO2: 920 ppm
Total SO2: 44 ppm | RS: 0.73 g/L | Turbidity at bottling: 60 NTU*

