

LOXTON



LOXTON CELLARS NEWSLETTER

FALL 2017

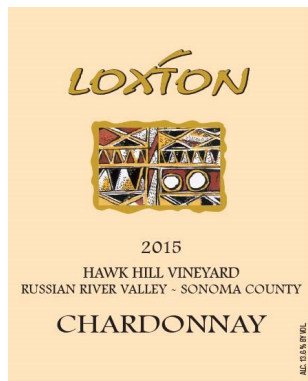
FALL WINE RELEASE

- 2015 CHARDONNAY, HAWK HILL VINEYARD (RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY)**
- 2014 PIONEER CUVÉE, ESTATE (SONOMA VALLEY)**
- 2014 SYRAH, GRIFFIN'S LAIR (SONOMA COAST)**
- 2013 SYRAH, ESTATE (SONOMA VALLEY)**
- 2013 PETITE SIRAH, KICK RANCH (SONOMA COUNTY)**
- 2014 CABERNET SAUVIGNON, MCGRAW VINEYARD (SONOMA VALLEY)**
- 2012 SYRAH, RESERVE CUVÉE ELLEN (SONOMA VALLEY)**
- LATE HARVEST ZINFANDEL (SONOMA COUNTY)**
- 2014 PORT (SONOMA VALLEY)**



Chris has dedicated the 2017 harvest to his father Bob, who has decided to retire at 85! Chris, Malaco and Dirk (our intern from South Africa), toast Bob and the first grapes.

2015 CHARDONNAY - HAWK HILL VINEYARD



Appellation: Russian River Valley

Blend: 100% Chardonnay

pH: 3.31

Alcohol: 13.6%

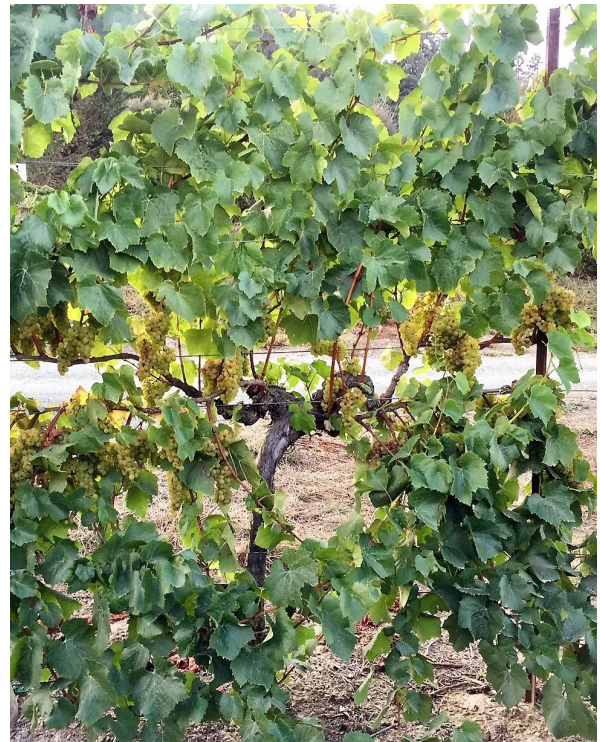
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Production: 163 cases

Bottled lightly fined & lightly filtered July 12, 2016

Release Price: \$30.00

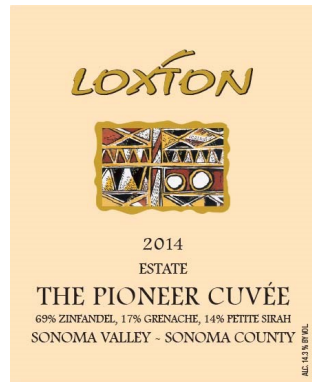
It really helps working with the same vineyard for a long time and I've been working with Hawk Hill since 2001. On the Labor Day weekend when the temperatures soared over 110F, even at Hawk Hill out near the coast, it reminded me of conditions we saw on the same weekend in 2008, so I decided to open that wine to see how it was faring. The wine had absolutely blossomed in bottle since I last tasted it which must have been 5 years ago. At release, it was still a little lean but time has built richness while the acidity in the wine has maintained its freshness and the wine was fantastic with roasted chicken and artichokes. What makes a Chardonnay still so good after 9 years? It's probably the natural acidity and Hawk Hill gives us plenty of that. To get that nice acidity naturally, the vineyard needs to be close to the cold Pacific and Hawk Hill lies just a few miles in from Bodega Bay. This is a tough place to grow grapes due to fog and extreme weather and the method for growing grapes has needed to be fine tuned over the years. Beginning some years ago the vine training system was modified to get better fruit exposure so that the grapes can dry out faster after the fog and this means less mildew and rot. This system, a modified Smart-Dyson canopy so named after the developers, has branches going upwards as well as downwards, increasing the leaf area to intercept more sunlight and help ripening. I think the wines have improved since the adoption of this system.



The split canopy training modified for Hawk Hill

But what about the 2015 I hear you ask? Well, like much of Sonoma Counties vineyards, yields were pitifully low due the extended drought and I made only a little more than half of normal from my rows. As a consequence, this years' version reminds me more of the bigger richer years than the more elegant wines made in '13 and '14. If these latter two wines needed time in bottle to bloom, my guess is that the '15 wine will be at its peak earlier. The wine has excellent richness balanced by crisp acidity and lemony notes with oak being a minor factor. I look forward to trying it at 9 years to see if I'm right, but I suggest drinking it now and for the next 3-4 years.

2014 PIONEER CUVÉE - ESTATE



Appellation: Sonoma Valley

Blend: 69% Zinfandel, 17% Grenache,
14% Petite Sirah

pH: 3.82

Alcohol: 14.3%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 170 cases

Bottled unfiltered and lightly filtered March 23, 2016

Release Price: \$30.00

It has been so inspiring to live and work near outstanding old vineyards here in Glen Ellen and I have come to know the Rossi ranch (planted 1910), Pagani Ranch (planted 1885) and Wellington Vineyard (planted 1892) very well. They are all old “field blends”; planted with many different grape varieties that were originally harvested together to make a multi-variety wine. The concept is that each variety brings something to the overall blend and the diversity means that some do better in warm years and others in cool years, so that each year will favor something in the mix. I’ve often wondered how these pioneers were so smart, but have guessed that the ones who planted the wrong varieties or wrong soils have had their vineyards abandoned over the past 100 years, leaving just the best ones to survive.

In this tribute to these pioneers, I’ve blended individual wines, all made from grapes grown here on the estate. The estate Zinfandel has always been the basis for the Pioneer Cuvée and it was intensely fruity in 2014 and I have used a higher percentage of it than in previous versions. The addition of Grenache (for cherry fruit and acidity) and Petite sirah (for color and structure) complete the wine without taking away the lovely raspberry fruitiness. This is my favorite of the Pioneer blends to date, each being progressively better as the estate vineyard responds to different vineyard practices, and is a worthy companion to the first Estate GSP that I released in the Spring. A wonderful match to any grilled foods, I think it will age very well for the next 5 years



Chris piecing together the Pioneer Cuvée through blending

2014 SYRAH - GRIFFIN'S LAIR



Appellation: Sonoma Coast

Blend: 96.4% Syrah, 3.6% Viognier

pH: 3.64

Alcohol: 13.8%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 94 cases

Bottled unfined and lightly filtered March 23, 2016

Release Price: \$30.00

Syrah from the Griffin's Lair vineyard is different to any other Syrah that I've worked with in the 20 vintages of Syrah that I have made. It develops color and flavor much earlier and at lower sugars than my other vineyards and this can be a plus in making a wine that has full flavor but lower alcohol than some. I like the lower alcohol as it makes the wine better to enjoy and have with food, but I don't want to have this at the expense of flavor. I think that part of the reason for the early flavor development is how close the vineyard is to the Bay where the moderating influence of the water leads to a very long growing season. Without the danger of frost we see leaves and fruit developing weeks ahead of here in Glen Ellen and without our extra heat of summer, the grapes ripen slowly and evenly with great flavor.

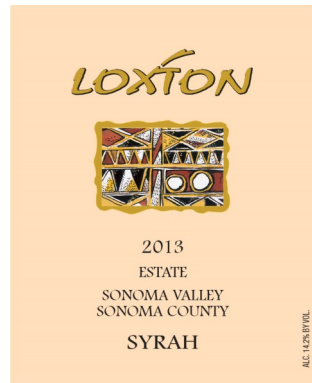
For this wine I've included a small portion of the white grape Viognier, as is often done in the Northern Rhone area of France. The grapes are picked and co-fermented together and the idea is that it adds a floral note to the aromatics and interestingly, it also helps to improve color stability.



It seems odd to let the white grapes through when sorting the fruit

I find the spice of Viognier evident by aroma, but what it seems to have added is a sweetness and volume to the flavor. 2014 produced a very small crop at Griffin's Lair and I have the fewest cases that I've produced, so it may be that the lower yields and the Viognier have both combined to produce the most concentrated Griffin's Lair Syrah to date. Drink with rich foods now and in the next 5 years.

2013 SYRAH - ESTATE



Appellation: Sonoma Valley

Blend: 100% Syrah

pH: 3.65

Alcohol: 14.2%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 246 cases

Bottled unfiltered and lightly filtered July 13, 2015

Release Price: \$35.00

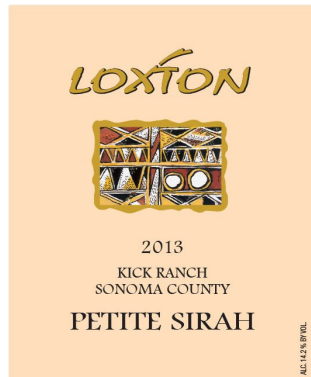
2013 was a pivotal year here at Loxton Cellars as it was the first full year of managing the vineyard. It was easy to keep all the things that have been working well and Rafael Oseguera was retained as consultant/manager but we have tweaked a few things that we feel can improve quality. One was to reduce irrigation and another was to focus on improving the soil. We have added organically composted grape skins back to the vineyard to replenish what was removed when we picked the fruit. We have continued to not use pesticides and have added a few new ideas such as a kite that looks like a falcon to scare away the birds that seem to arrive just as the berries start to taste good for harvest. It replaces netting which is very expensive and time consuming and seems to be more bird friendly as birds sometimes can get caught in the netting. It's a very new idea and we have a nice video of this on our Facebook page.



Assistant winemaker, Malaco, setting up our Falcon fright kite to protect our Estate fruit from bird damage

2013 was also the year that my ex-employer and mentor, Peter Wellington, decided to wind down operations at his winery next door and retire. We had been sharing the fruit from this property for 10 years and I took over the vineyard blocks that he had been getting. It was a great year to do so as '13 was a harvest of excellent age worthy wines and the increased production has allowed me to offer the wine again even though it has been in a previous club release. As I was expecting, the wine has continued to improve with the oak integrating back into the wine and the fruit coming out more. This is still a wine for richer winter dishes and should continue improvement for another 5-10 years.

2013 PETITE SIRAH - KICK RANCH



Appellation: Sonoma County

Blend: 81% Petite Sirah, 19% Syrah

pH: 3.74

Alcohol: 14.2%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 119 cases

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered July 13, 2015

Release Price: \$30.00

Petite sirah has a long and storied history here in California where it has contributed color and structure to many of the original California wines (and the Pioneer Cuvée). Grown in the right place it transcends a tendency towards a chunky and tannic wine to make one that is truly special and particularly long lived. It has an interesting history, discovered as a natural cross of Syrah and Peloursin by Francois Durif in the 1860's in his quest to find a vine with resistance to mildew. Despite this positive trait it has compact and dense bunches and is prone to rot in rainy places and was banned in France but this isn't an issue in California.

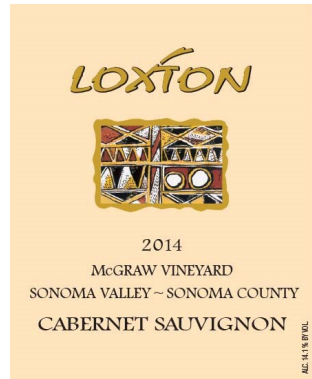
In 2013 I found that it isn't just a matter of being in the right place, but also being there at the right time. I have worked with Dick Keenan's Kick Ranch since 2007 and have admired its Upper Vineyard of Petite sirah which was under contract with a famous Napa producer. The vines have better sun exposure and the weaker soils tend to curb the vigor of Petite which can set



Petite sirah (left) has tight full clusters which don't allow much airflow vs Syrah clusters (right) which are looser and less prone to rot

very big crops. My own rows of Petite at Kick Ranch (before grafting some here at the estate for the '14 wines) were in a good location, but not as favorable, and were featured in last year's 2012 Petite release. As luck would have it, I was in the vineyard when this upper section was being picked and a few tons became available and I quickly traded up to this block. Its smaller berries and naturally smaller yields have produced a richly fruited and more elegant wine than last year's release. I have again added a small component of Kick Ranch Syrah to flesh out the middle palate but this is still a wine to enjoy in winter with its heartier fare. I would imagine this wine will continue to improve in bottle for another 10 years.

2014 CABERNET SAUVIGNON - MCGRAW VINEYARD



Appellation: Sonoma Valley

Blend: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

pH: 3.62

Alcohol: 14.1%

Closure: Cork Finish

Production: 198 cases

Bottled unfiltered and lightly filtered July 12, 2016

Release Price: \$35.00

Cabernet Sauvignon continues to be King of the California red grape varieties for good reason. It has flourished in the warmer regions of Napa and Sonoma producing richly fruited and textured wines capable of aging. I opened a bottle of 1978 Cabernet this year (Diamond Creek) that was spectacular (and the best part was that I bought it as a grad student in Australia and many years later brought it back to within 10 miles of where it was made and that is a story in itself!).

Although ageability is a hallmark of great red wines, I think it is even more important that the wines show a sense of place. When I lined up 10 vintages of McGraw Cabernet for a club event a few years ago they definitely showed a common thread that reflects the soils and weather that define the vineyard. There was a red fruit and herbal note together with good tannin structure through all the wines. This 2014 would place right at, or near, the top in that tasting and might be the most fruit driven wine in the line up. Wine is all about balance and there is so much fruit that at first the oak and tannins seem not to be apparent. I think it would be a great match with steak or other meats.

Some wines are best when young while others are best when they are older, but I think this wine is a great each way bet. It has the fruit to overshadow the tannins so that I find it wonderful now, but those underlying tannins guarantee a long life if cellared under good conditions and it should age well for up to 10 years.



Setting up for a 10 year retrospective of McGraw Cabernet Sauvignon

2012 SYRAH - RESERVE CUVÉE ELLEN

**Sonoma Valley • 100% Syrah • pH: 3.46 • Alc: 14.5% • 80 cases available
Screwcap • Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, July 3, 2014 • Release Price:\$40**

I released this 2012 “reserve” Syrah to wine club members last year but have never poured the wine in the tasting room, preferring to keep it back for club members and to let it age some more with the knowledge that the wine would continue to improve. It was the first reserve wine released in 5 years, as I have always thought that the word reserve should be kept for the best barrels in the best years. This wine, a tribute to my grandmother Ellen, was made using grapes entirely grown here in Glen Ellen on the property around the winery. It was chosen from the best 5 barrels grown on the estate vineyard and shows great fruit and richness along with a oak backbone that is already beginning to fade back into the wine, leaving just the oak richness. This is a hearty wine more suited to that special bigger meal or left in improve in the cellar for another 5 years or more.

LATE HARVEST ZINFANDEL

**Sonoma Valley • 100% Zinfandel • pH: 3.70 • Alc: 15.5% Sugar 4.5% • 61 cases
Cork Finish • 500mL • Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, July 8, 2017 • Release Price:\$25**

It was not my intention to make a late harvest Zinfandel in the past few years, but in both harvests I found myself with a small amount of fruit that had dried up to higher sugars than I like for making table wine. Unfortunately, I ended up with just a barrel of the dessert wine in each year—not enough to bottle separately, but enough if I were to blend the 2 barrels together. Thus we have a non-vintage wine which is almost equal amounts of 2015 and 2016 wines. Perhaps not quite as peppery as some of the ones in the past, and a little softer in tannin structure, it makes a lovely after dinner wine to enjoy with chocolate. I would probably have it colder than red wine, and keeping it in the refrigerator means it should be good to drink for several weeks after opening.

2014 PORT

**Sonoma Valley • 100% Syrah, Estate • pH: 3.60 • Alc: 18.2% Sugar 9.3% • 305 cases
Cork Finish • 500mL • Bottled unfinned and unfiltered, August 31, 2015 • Release Price:\$28**

Every Port I've made has been a medal winner at the Harvest Fair, starting with a Gold and Best Port for the 2002 and now nicely bookended with a gold for this 2014. When I did the retrospective tasting of 10 years of Ports, it was interesting to see that even though they have won a lot of gold medals, the wines do truly reflect the year just as table wines do, with some being bigger and richer and some being more elegant in style. This version, from the 3rd year of the drought is decidedly in the bigger and richer style with lots of fruit making it seem just a little sweeter (even though it is a very small difference from the '13). A lovely wine to end the meal together with chocolate, or by itself. This wine can age comfortably for 10-15 years if desired.