



LOXTON NEWSLETTER
FALL 2016

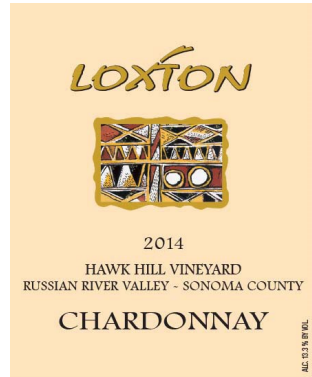
FALL WINE RELEASE

2014 CHARDONNAY, HAWK HILL VINEYARD (RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY)
2014 PINOT NOIR, GRIFFIN'S LAIR (SONOMA COAST)
SHIRAZ (SONOMA COUNTY)
2013 PIONEER CUVÉE (SONOMA VALLEY)
2013 SYRAH, HILLSIDE VINEYARDS (SONOMA COUNTY)
2013 SYRAH, GRIFFIN'S LAIR (SONOMA COAST)
2012 SYRAH, RESERVE CUVÉE ELLEN (SONOMA VALLEY)
2013 CABERNET SAUVIGNON, MCGRAW VINEYARD (SONOMA VALLEY)
2012 PETITE SIRAH, KICK RANCH (SONOMA COUNTY)
2013 PORT (SONOMA VALLEY)



Chris testing sugar levels on fermenting Pinot Noir, harvest 2016

2014 CHARDONNAY - HAWK HILL VINEYARD



Appellation: Russian River Valley

Blend: 100% Chardonnay

pH: 3.30

Alcohol: 13.3%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 221 cases

Bottled unfined and lightly filtered July 13, 2015

Release Price: \$30.00

2014 marks the first harvest at Hawk Hill for new owners Margaret and Bill Yarak. I've been getting fruit from this vineyard since 2001 so when the Michelczyk's told me they were selling I was concerned. It turns out that it has been a seamless transition with my friend Greg Adams retained as a consultant and they have the same vineyard manager and the same winery partners. As I've gotten to know the Yaraks I've found that they have the same enthusiasm and commitment to excellence that I've enjoyed since 2001. It's a good thing as they have a very special vineyard that is a great place for Chardonnay.

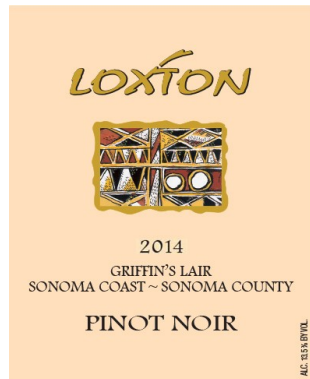
I've opened a number of older Chardonnays from Hawk Hill to show Margaret and Bill how wonderfully the wines age. They seem to build richness to match the lovely acidity and we get a wine that really hits its stride with a few years in bottle. While some might want to rush the wines to market, I've found that 9 months in barrel and another 15 months in bottle is just about right, although the wine seems to be really nice about the time the wine sells out!



Margaret and Bill, owners of Hawk Hill, with vineyard dog Indy

This 2014 follows the style of the 2013, but it seems to be a little richer and creamier at a comparable time in its development, perhaps due to lower yields and the effects of our continuing drought. Lots of lemon notes, then a rich middle palate that hides the underlying acidity that gives the wine tension. It is unmistakably Hawk Hill and I would rank it in the top tier of my Chardonnay wines that I've made and it should continue to improve for another 5 years. An excellent wine with seafood or lemon chicken.

2014 PINOT NOIR - GRIFFIN'S LAIR



Appellation: Sonoma Coast

Blend: 100% Pinot; clones "Pommard" and 115

pH: 3.81

Alcohol: 13.5%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 242 cases

Bottled unfined and lightly filtered August 31, 2015

Release Price: \$35.00

Much has been written about the mystery of Pinot noir and I think it is associated with the quest to make a wine with lots of flavor while still keeping the requirement of not being a heavy wine. These two things seem to be on opposite ends of the spectrum, so it requires a special site to get the flavor without getting the high sugars and hence high alcohols. I think that this happens when Pinot is grown in cool climates and where there is a long period of time for the grapes to develop flavor. Griffin's Lair has the advantage of a warm winter as it sits so close to the San Francisco bay and this means that the vines get an early start in the season. The proximity to the bay also means that it doesn't get very hot in Summer (vines shut down when it gets too hot so as to protect from excessive water loss) so that they ripen over a particularly long season. Thus we get the flavors we want while still keeping the wine at a reasonable alcohol level.

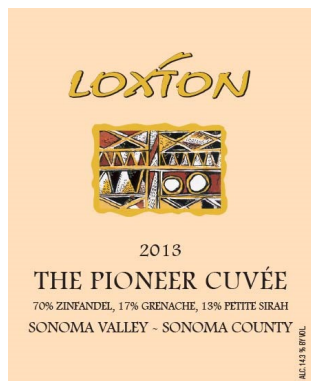
I find this 2014 version a little softer and richer than the 2013 and this makes it very easy to enjoy. While it is so enjoyable now, I still think it has the balance to continue to improve for another 3-5 years. A wine to have with lighter chicken dishes or grilled salmon.



I've really enjoyed the bigger bowl glass - what do you think?

What is interesting is that soon after bottling I liked it much more in the "Pinot noir" glass that has the bigger bowl than in the smaller glass that I use in the tasting room. I never believed that the glass made a difference when I first got into winemaking, as long as it was a nice glass, but lots of my "research" has convinced me that shape matters. Try this some time, I think you might be surprised!

2013 PIONEER CUVÉE



Appellation: Sonoma Valley

Blend: 70% Zinfandel, 17% Grenache,
13% Petit Sirah

pH: 3.84

Alcohol: 14.3%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 169 cases

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, March 17, 2015

Release Price: \$30.00

It must have been a real challenge for the first grape growers here in Sonoma County as there wasn't any experience to tell them what and where to grow vines and they just had to learn on the job. When they were successful, the vines endured and we still have some of these vineyards that were planted more than a hundred years ago. One of these vineyards is the Rossi Ranch here in Glen Ellen. This year I'll be getting grapes from one of these original blocks, although about half the old vines are missing and have recently been replanted. These old vineyards are what we call "field blends" containing many different grape varieties, all usually picked at the same time and co-fermented. It is interesting to see that at the Rossi Ranch, the replacement vines in one of my blocks have continued the heritage of mixed vines in addition to Zinfandel. Sleuthing around, I've noted many of the usual suspects, Alicante Bouschet (for color), Petite sirah (structure), Grenache (for acidity) and on my last trip I found a few I couldn't positively identify. One turned out to be Tannat, with the budwood taken from the historic "Old Hill" vineyard also here in Glen Ellen.



My tribute to the old vineyards is this

Pioneer Cuvee, based on Estate Zinfandel but then adding Grenache (from Rossi Ranch) and Petite sirah (from Kick Ranch). The blending is done months after making the individual wines, so I can get just the right percentages. This has more Zinfandel than the 2012 version, making the wine just a little more fruit driven than before and also a little smoother and richer and with lower acidity. Almost too easy to like, it will be perfect with anything grilled now and for the next 5 years.

The different grape varieties that makeup the Pioneer Cuvée

2013 SYRAH - SONOMA HILLSIDE VINEYARDS



Appellation: Sonoma County

Blend: 100% Syrah; 78% Kick Ranch, 20% Rossi

Ranch, 2% Estate

pH: 3.80

Alcohol: 14.1%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 265 Cases

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, March 17, 2015

Release Price: \$28.00

In the Summer of 1996, just before I made my first wine under the Loxton label, I made the trip to the Northern Rhone. This is the home for the Syrah grape and I just needed to see it. The terraces were hand built in Roman times and have been farmed ever since and this was just the inspiration I needed to begin my own wine project. Amongst many fabulous memories was time spent tasting the wines with Gerard Jaboulet who told me that "Syrah must see the water". I didn't understand it at the time, but back in California I realized that what he meant was that Syrah must be planted on the hillsides. The soils are usually weaker and the slope allows the water to drain away. This makes for smaller vines with smaller berries and more concentrated wine. Here in California with dry soils it doesn't have to be such an issue, but I've taken fruit from hillside vineyards for Syrah ever since.

This wine uses fruit from two of these vineyards. The base wine is Syrah from the Kick Ranch in Santa Rosa (78%) and this contributes soft tannins, round palate feel and cherry and herbal fruit notes. The balance of the wine is from the Rossi Ranch (20%) and this provided the power and structure with the remain-

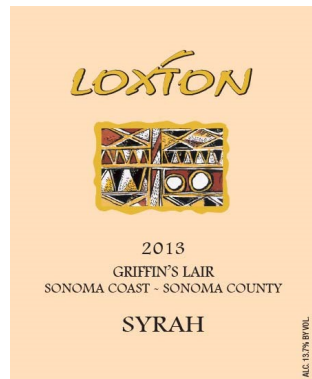


The rolling hills at Kick Ranch

der from here on the estate. While I want the wine to reflect the soil and climate of each vineyard, my commitment is always to make the best wine possible and in this case I felt that the blend was much better than the base wine.

As is usually the case with Kick Ranch Syrah, this is the softest of my Syrah wines, with red fruits and a long finish while the oak seems to have faded into the wine, perhaps adding to the sweetness of the middle palate. A wine to enjoy with almost any food and it should continue to be enjoyable for another 5 years.

2013 SYRAH - GRIFFIN'S LAIR



Appellation: Sonoma Coast

Blend: 100% Syrah

pH: 3.65

Alcohol: 13.7%

Closure: Screwcap

Production: 96 cases

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered March 17, 2015

Release Price: \$30.00

You might wonder why I make a number of different Syrah wines. Even though I make them the same way, each particular wine reflects the soil, the weather and how the vineyard is farmed and so they are unique and I love these differences. It is incumbent on the winemaker to make sure that his or her input is not so strong to mask these differences. The Rossi ranch is perhaps the biggest, the Kick Ranch perhaps the softest and the cooler Griffin's Lair is the spiciest and the lowest in alcohol. Why? Well, they just are. I could tell you that Griffin's Lair is the coolest site and that being closest to the water means that it is warmer in winter and cooler in Summer, and this means a growing season for great flavors without too much sugar and alcohol. But then perhaps wine isn't to explain, it is to enjoy the differences and to be aware of them.

I love to open the Griffin's Syrah when I want elegance, need something food friendly and have the time to enjoy the complexity that comes from multiple clones and barrels. It is a wine to spend time with, perhaps like a good old friend and it just gets better with more time with it. I would like to think the same about the Griffins (does the wine reflect the people?) and dinner at the vineyard with wine from the vineyard

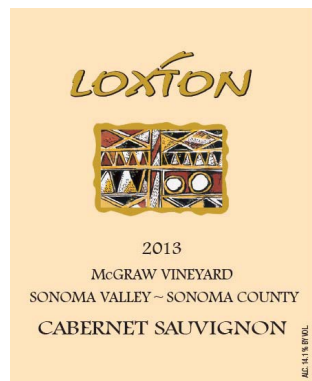


Weed control at Griffin's Lair

is a particularly memorable experience. The wine also reflects the care taken in the vineyard. No other grower spends more time worrying about what plant to put next to the vines (Alyssum), should farming be organic or bio-dynamic (sometimes both), and uses sheep to control weeds and I like to think this adds to the character of the wine.

Enjoy this wine for everything it offers, it should be excellent drinking for the next 5-8 years and would be a great match with savory foods (just don't tell Joan if it's lamb!)

2013 CABERNET SAUVIGNON - MCGRAW VINEYARD



Appellation: Sonoma Valley

Blend: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

pH: 3.74

Alcohol: 14.2%

Closure: Cork Finish

Production: 191 cases

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered July 13, 2015

Release Price: \$35.00

I have been working with McGraws since 2003 when they had just planted the vineyard and we have learned much over this period, walking the rows and observing the vines. We are doing a much better job of farming now than when we started, especially with refining our irrigation and I've settled in on what I think is the best area of the vineyard for the Loxton wines. This area is also farmed differently with different irrigation blocks and different pruning and trellising. It also helps that the new vineyard manager is the neighbor Dino Amantite (co-owner of the Pagani Ranch that has been farmed by his family since the 1880's). The Paganis just happens to be the neighbor here at the Loxton Estate. There is a nice symmetry to it all, I could walk to the McGraw vineyard from the winery, passing just through the Pagani Ranch.

The continuing drought has shown its effects here too, with smaller yields and much smaller berries and more



Does hand sorting really make a difference? We like to think so.

water stress on this hillside vineyard than we normally see. This all translates to concentrated wine and there is a darker fruit element with a riper California fruit note than we normally see and a more dense middle palate sweetness than is the norm. The wine reminds me somewhat of the 2008 version where hot weather also led to very ripe Cabernet flavors (and that wine is drinking beautifully). Enjoyable now for its richness and fruit and soft finish. It will make for excellent drinking for the next 8 years. Certain critics (Robert Parker is one) have proclaimed 2013 as the best vintage for California wines that they have seen and I would not disagree! This is a wine to have with steaks or bigger meals.

SHIRAZ

**Sonoma County • 85% Syrah, 4% Grenache, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Petit Sirah, 2% Zinfandel
pH: 3.70 • Alc: 14.1% • 168 cases • Screwcap**

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, August 31, 2015 • Release Price:\$18

When I started to assemble the Sonoma Reds wine in 2015 I quickly realized that the wine was Syrah based, not in the style of the normal Sonoma Reds, which is Zinfandel based. To avoid confusion I decided to change its name, finally rejecting "KangaRouge" and settling on the Shiraz name I last used for a 2012 wine. It contains several barrels of Syrah from vines along the fence line here on the Estate, a few barrels of Kick Ranch Syrah, a little Grenache and then some Petite sirah for structure as well as small amounts of a few other wines. It continues the line of excellent hand made wines made without compromise that are meant to be enjoyed mid week, while waiting to open the special occasion Loxton wines another day. Lower in acid and softer in tannin than the Syrah bottlings, it has wonderful cherry fruit notes and can be enjoyed with most meals. One of my best Sonoma Red offerings.

2012 SYRAH - RESERVE CUVÉE ELLEN

Sonoma Valley • 100% Syrah • pH: 3.46 • Alc: 14.5% • 123 cases • Screwcap

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, July 3, 2014 • Release Price:\$40

I certainly haven't overused the word Reserve on my labels, thinking it should be the best wines from the best lots of the best vineyards in the best years. So this is my first Reserve Syrah since 2007 and I've decided that it should carry the Cuvée Ellen designation I've used for wine, so as to match the status of the Grandfather's cuvee. This wine comes from the first "Estate" year and is based on the block planted with the 877 clone of Syrah. This is a great clone, beset with virus issues and problematic to farm as it requires much more hand work due to its high yielding nature, but with lots of care, it has outstanding quality. This wine is from the best 5 barrels and is the best Syrah I could make in 2012. I took some to Australia in Spring and dad called a few months later to tell me it was the best wine I've ever made. I expect it to age in the same manner as my other Reserve Syrahs which have all been based on fruit from this vineyard and the '02 is still outstanding!

2012 PETITE SIRAH - KICK RANCH

Sonoma County • 89% Petite Sirah, 11% Syrah • pH: 3.86 • Alc: 14.3% • 102 cases • Screwcap

Bottled unfinned and lightly filtered, July 3, 2014 • Release Price:\$28

It is almost funny that in California we call the grape Petite sirah while the rest of the world calls it Durif, after the person who developed the grape variety. There is nothing petite about the wine at all, it is almost always big and brawny and the challenge of making Petite sirah is to keep it drinkable! At the annual Kick Ranch tasting I've been awed by the Petite sirah, so inky and tannic. A little bit goes a long way (it is like vegemite!) but I have been intrigued by its use in blending and in 2012 I took a few tons of fruit for this purpose. I kept back 4 barrels to watch its progress as a varietal wine and decided that I would bottle some separately as my first Petite sirah. To tame the wine somewhat, I've blended in 11% Syrah, also from the Kick Ranch, but this is a wine to have with very hearty winter fare.

2013 PORT

**Sonoma Valley • 100% Estate Syrah • pH: 3.72 • Alc: 18.3% • Sugar 8.7% • 338 cases • Cork Finish
500mL • Bottled unfinned and unfiltered, September 2, 2014 • Price:\$28**

A re-release of my 12th version of Port which follows the path of the vintages before it. 100% Syrah grown here on the property from the driest soils and thus with the smallest berries. I use pure grape alcohol to arrest the fermentation and leave the wine sweet and this version has one of the lowest residual sugars, more typical of the Portuguese versions. It is still a wine to savor after dinner, perhaps with a chocolate dessert, and can be enjoyed over several weeks without the wine going bad as the alcohol and sugar are excellent preservatives. Tannins extracted from the grape skins and seeds during and after fermentation help balance the sweetness to stop the Port from being cloying.