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Theresa Heredia Of Gary Farrell Winery On ‘Capturing The Essence Of Place’

Theresa Heredia is the chief winemaker at Gary Farrell Winery in Sonoma’s Russian River Valley. While the winery itself doesn’t own any vineyards, there is an elemental importance placed on grower partnerships. Many of them made on “handshake deals” with pioneers of the region: Rochioli, Allen, Hallberg and more.



Gary Farrell Winery has partnerships with some of the pioneering growers of Sonoma County.

“Coming to Gary Farrell in 2012, I had access to growers I’d always looked up to,” says Heredia, who has a reputation for experimenting with winemaking techniques that match the growing site. Heredia and her team are able to select from specific vineyard sites around the region to produce the Gary Farrell portfolio, a selection that is defined by terroir. “I have adapted winemaking techniques for each vineyard and producer,” says Heredia. “With no formula, I can capture the essence of place.”



Theresa Heredia

PHOTO COURTESY: GARY FARRELL WINERY

For example, Heredia makes a [Pinot Noir](#) from fruit grown by Lester and Linda Schwartz in the [Fort Ross-Seaview AVA](#), a cool ridge that is one of the closest vineyards to the California coastline. These vines are high above the fog layer, exposed to both sun and cool temperatures. Heredia says this site expresses the “true west” of the Sonoma Coast and produces rustic, savory wines that express salinity and aren’t necessarily driven by fruit flavors.

She also makes a [Pinot Noir from Bien Nacido Vineyard](#) in the Santa Maria Valley, a prestigious growing site and long time partner of Gary Farrell Winery. A vineyard with a generous fog layer and cool afternoon breezes, this spot produces wines with juicy acidity and exotic spices; Heredia says this is her “sexy spice box” wine.

The Gary Farrell portfolio is comprised of six to eight single vineyard Chardonnays and 12-14 single vineyard Pinot Noirs. There is also a handful of Russian River Valley Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, as well as a scattering of other releases: a Sauvignon Blanc, a rosé of Pinot Noir made from whole cluster press, a couple of Zinfandels and, on occasion, other inspired and unique wines.

While a single vineyard filled with Pinot Noir or Chardonnay might seem straightforward, Heredia sees these spaces in terms of the clones that are planted there. Pinot Noir, for example, has dozens of clones, and Heredia often works with vineyards with some level of clonal diversity, such as Hallberg Vineyard in the Green Valley sub-appellation.

From this space, she’s made two single vineyard bottles: one dedicated to Dijon clones (667 and 777) and one that includes other clones from blocks she selected personally (667, 777, 828, Pommard and a mysterious “suitcase” selection, originally believed to come from Romanée-Conti).



2015 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir and 2015 Olivet Lane Vineyard Chardonnay
PHOTO COURTESY: GARY FARRELL WINERY

The concept of single vineyard winemaking is the bedrock of the trade, and yet many consumers don’t get the opportunity to distinguish one parcel from the next, unless they are able to experience this in a tasting room.

Ordering in a restaurant, buying from the shop or even enjoying bottles at home often doesn't allow for side-by-side comparison.

To solve this, Gary Farrell winery offers a unique virtual tasting experience custom-made to illustrate terroir: the [Russian River Valley Neighborhoods Package](#). Estate Sommeliers Tiffany Kuhn and Kevin Patterson lead participants through a virtual at-home tasting of six single vineyard wines (one from Hallberg Vineyard, mentioned above, is included).

Also available virtually is the [Beyond the Russian River Valley Package](#), featuring four wines from around Sonoma County (this includes the Fort Ross-Seaview wine mentioned above).

For visitors ready to visit wine country, the Tasting Salon is open now [by appointment only](#).