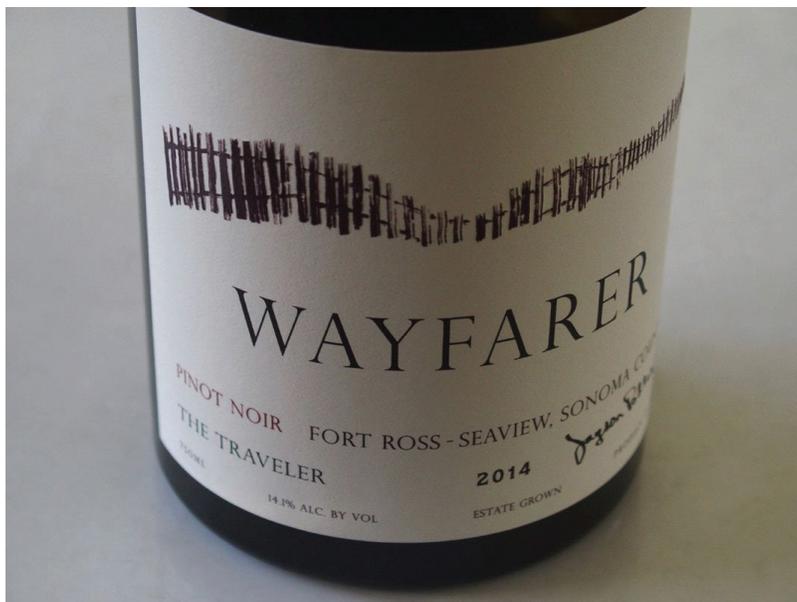


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## Tasting Wine Before Its Time: Experiencing Wayfarer Vineyard Pinot Noir

One of the vagaries of tasting and rating Pinot Noir is that the wines are often presented for review shortly before or after release, and often have not recovered from the shock of bottling or had enough time in bottle to develop their full charm. Predicting how Pinot Noir will evolve is a skill that comes with experience, but is tenuous at best and fraught with uncertainty. I had the unique opportunity to taste the 2014 vintage Wayfarer Pinot Noirs on two occasions seven months apart that shows how wines can benefit considerably from more time in bottle. This repeated tasting was particularly informative because the Wayfarer Pinot Noirs are vinified in a reductive manner that along with their oak interplay and firm tannic backbone require significant time in bottle.



The wines were originally bottled in December 2015 after 13 months in barrel. I first tasted the wines with winemaker Bibiana Gonzalez Rave and owner Cleo Pahlmeyer in May 2016 at Wayfarer Vineyard. My second tasting was done at home in my usual fashion in December 2016, seven months later. The Wayfarer Estate bottling was released in the fall of 2016, but the other wines will be released in 2017 (exact release dates determined by the winemaker). On the first occasion, the wines were opened at least six hours prior to tasting and some needed decanting even then. On the second tasting, the wines were sampled after opening and in a few instances, re-tasted a day or two later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.

Here are the tasting notes on the two occasions to compare. You will note that I have added the month in which the wines were tasted at the end. In the Winery Directory, the reviews show the dates the wines are actually published.

**2014 Wayfarer Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 1,020 cases. Free run juice only. A quality barrel selection. • The nose releases its charms slowly in the glass, evolving into a very engaging mix of cherry and spice aromas. The silky mouthfeel is immediately satisfying in this mid weight plus wine offering intense flavors of blackberry and cassis. Juicy acidity lends vibrancy and tempered tannins make for more approachability. The most open and giving of the wines tasted. May 2016. **91-93**.

**2014 Wayfarer Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc.. Estate grown. • Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Demure, but pleasing aromas of black cherry, blackberry and woodland spice. Silky in the mouth with striking flavors of black cherry and blackberry framed by firm but not imposing tannins. Very good juiciness on the finish. The least extracted wine in the lineup and the most approachable. December 2016. Score: **91**

**2014 Wayfarer Paige's Ridge Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 43 cases. Dijon clone 667. Fermented in a wood tank and aged in two new barrels. · The nose opens slowly in the glass to reveal enticing aromas of black cherry, boysenberry, woodlands and spice. A gorgeous mid weight plus core of dark fruit greets the palate. A bit rustic and earthy, with a hint of thiols and firmly defined tannins. After the wine was decanted and re-tasted, more fruit expression was evident. May 2016. **90-92.**

**2014 Wayfarer Paige's Ridge Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc.. Clone 667, estate grown. Named after Jason Pahlmeyer's wife Paige. · Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of black fruits, damp earth and underbrush lead to a mid weight plus offering that is flat-out delicious. Layers of invigorating black cherry and blackberry fruit are tempered by honed tannins combined with enough acidity to elevate the prodigious sap. A deft touch of oak seasoning adds interest. A harmonious wine with a generous finish that is beautifully crafted in a bold California style. Yes, it is excessive, but so what. December 2016. Score: **94**

**2014 Wayfarer Mother Rock Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 335 cases. Clones are Mt Eden and Dijon 777. · Very sexy perfume of dark red berries and cherries with a lovely spice and floral accent. The deep red fruits really demand attention in this well structured mid weight plus styled wine that offers considerable textural interest. Balance is spot on, the finish is noticeably generous, and the wine has a very streamlined demeanor. May 2016. **92-94.**

**2014 Wayfarer Mother Rock Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc.. A blend of clones 37 and 777. Named for the vineyard's sandstone substrate that fractures into sandy loam. · Dark reddish purple color in the glass. Deep aromas of black fruit compote. This wine is still monolithic and unyielding, opening some in the glass to reveal mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, blueberry-pomegranate and spice framed by muscular tannins. Much more aromatic and friendly when tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine definitely needs decanting or a few more years in the cellar. December 2016. Score: **93**

**2014 Wayfarer Golden Mean Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 515 cases. Pommard and Swan clones. · The nose is currently more oak infused with aromas of spice and vanillin. More fruity on the palate with muscular tannins, and sweet oak dancing in the background. A very sappy, dark fruited mid palate carries over on the intense finish. May 2016. **91-93.**

**2014 Wayfarer Golden Mean Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc.. Pommard and Swan clones, estate grown. · Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. I was enthralled with the nose on this wine, offering hi-tone aromas of earthy black fruits, sous-bois and mocha that were persistent. Both mature purple and black berry fruits form the essence of this mid weight plus wine that is impeccably balanced with a soothing velvety texture and a polished demeanor. The wine speaks to you with open arms: "Take me." December 2016. Score: **94**

**2014 Wayfarer The Traveler Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 195 cases. A suitcase selection. 0% whole cluster. · The most closed wine. Much more expressive after the wine was decanted. The nose is rather primary, offering scents of rose petal, spice, woodland path and oak dust. A charge of glorious blackberry, blueberry and pomegranate flavors are framed by mature tannins. Very sleek and soft in the mouth, with good natural acidity and a very lengthy finish. May 2016. **92-94.**

**2014 Wayfarer The Traveler Wayfarer Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc.. A single suitcase selection. Estate grown. · Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Soaring aromas of blackberry and cassis. Considerably more open than last tasting in May 2016, offering a gorgeous core of discreetly concentrated, well-spiced black cherry and blackberry fruits that are broad in the mouth and display freshness, vibrancy and juiciness. This beauty is very harmonious and giving, finishing with unbelievable length and generosity, and deserves an ovation. December 2016. Score: **95**