

12 OUTSTANDING CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIRS

An exceptional lineup of 2009s from Lynmar

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Posted: May 9, 2011

Lynmar is hardly an overnight sensation. Owner Lynn Fritz has farmed the Quail Hill estate vineyard near Sebastopol since 1980. But the winery has really come into its own since the 2007 vintage. Five 2008 Pinots earned outstanding marks, and in the 2009 vintage 11 bottlings are exceptional, with ratings from 90 to 94 points.

Breakout years usually begin in the vineyard in a great vintage. That tells part of the story. The 65-acre Quail Hill vineyard is one of the oldest in Russian River Valley and employs some 14 different clones, Calera, Swan, 667, 777, Mount Eden and Pommard among them. It is subdivided into many small parcels, so each can be picked at ideal maturity.



Much of the vineyard was replanted six to seven years ago, Fritz says, so the vines are maturing and the vineyard team does all the farming exclusively on the property. But the key is winemaker Bibiana Gonzalez Rave, a 33-year-old native Colombian with an impressive resume that extends from cellars in France to California. She joined Lynmar in 2008, and Fritz credits her with coordinating the winery's efforts to home in on the best parcels.

"She can really work with complexity," says Fritz about working with the different clones and deciding when to pick which blocks. He says she knows how to balance the fruit flavors with the grapes' naturally high acidity.

By many accounts, 2009 is a superb year for Pinot Noir in Sonoma. "The '09s will go and go and go," says Fritz of their aging potential. "2009 is not only our best year, but a foundation year." With 2008, a much more challenging vintage, the wines were remarkably good, and he predicts people will be surprised by the quality of 2010. "2010 will separate the boys from the men," he says. The year had many ups and downs and ended with a cool, damp harvest in many areas.

But that's next year's story. The 2009s are simply tremendous.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Terra de Promissio Vineyard 2009 Score: 94 | \$70

Supple and graceful, with a rich, elegant mix of plum, black cherry, raspberry and wild berry flavors. Medium- to full-bodied and very well-proportioned, maintaining its rich core of dark fruits and adding spice and mineral notes. Ends with an elegant lift. Drink now through 2018. 398 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard Bliss Block 2009 Score: 93 | \$70

Well-structured, firm and tannic, showing spicy berry, plum and raspberry character, with touches of mineral and spice. Full-bodied, gaining depth and velocity on the finish, where the flavors are detailed and subtle. Drink now through 2018. 250 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard Lynn's Blend 2009

Score: 93 | \$70

Generous plum, black cherry and wild berry fruit is supple and well-centered, firming midpalate. Medium- to full-bodied, ending with a clean burst of fruit flavors. Drink now through 2018. 328 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard Old Vines 2009

Score: 93 | \$120

Complex and well-focused, offering cherry and strawberry rhubarb pie flavors that are rich and full-bodied, with a mineral edge on the finish, where the flavors get a lift. Drink now through 2019. 125 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard Summit 2009 Score:

93 | \$70

Firm, weaving a mix of loamy earth, mineral, graphite, ripe plum and dried berry flavors that are well-structured and medium- to full-bodied, building fruit depth and density and ending with a gravelly aftertaste. Drink now through 2019. 175 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2008 Score: 92 | \$40

A graceful, delicate expression of wilted rose, black cherry, plum and spice. Medium- to full-bodied, gaining depth and richness, this ends with a burst of blackberry fruit, toasty oak and fine-grained tannins. Drink now through 2018. 1,977 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Hawk Hill Vineyard 2009 Score

: 92 | \$70

Dense, tight and focused, this red is slow to unfold, but does so with intricacy, offering a mix of mineral, dried berry, plum, raspberry and licorice flavors. Full-bodied, ending with firm tannins and a dash of smoke. Drink now through 2020. 404 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Jenkins Vineyard 2009 Score: 92 | \$70

Very tight, firm and concentrated, with distinct mineral, graphite, blackberry and wild berry fruit that's slow to unfold, but does so gracefully, ending with firm tannins and loamy earth touches. Best from 2012 through 2020. 202 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard 2009 Score: 92 | \$60

Rich and layered, with ripe, dense, focused plum jam, wild berry, spice and floral scents. Full-bodied, gaining depth and tightening up on the finish, ending with an aftertaste of loamy earth. Drink now through 2018. 503 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Zephyr Farms 2009 Score: 92 | \$70

Weaves together a rich mix of pure, ripe blackberry, wild berry, loamy earth, toasty oak and savory notes that are bold and plush. Very well-balanced and structured. Best from 2012 through 2019. 252 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Freestone 2009 Score: 91 | \$50

Trim, tight and savory, with herb-laced dried berry, sage, mineral and tea notes. Medium- to full-bodied, this is slow to unfold, gaining depth and richness, ending a bit clipped. Best from 2012 through 2020. 177 cases made. —J.L.

LYNMAR Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Quail Hill Vineyard Block 10 2009

Score: 90 | \$70

An intense red, displaying firm, ripe wild berry and blackberry fruit, with a note of mineral and hints of roasted coffee, cola and mocha. Medium- to full-bodied, this is drying and a touch herbal on the finish, where the tannins clamp down. Best from 2012 through 2020. 227 cases made. —J.L.