



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## Wayfarer Releases Inaugural Wines from a Remote Ridge on Sonoma Coast

Like so many wine aficionados, Jayson Pahlmeyer's passion for wine was ignited by the wines of Bordeaux, and his eponymous winery in Napa Valley, Pahlmeyer, has been among the top echelon of wineries producing Bordeaux-styled wines as well as Chardonnay. He would admit, "All I could think about was creating my own California Mouton." Over time, with that goal well in hand, he became increasingly captivated by the wines of Burgundy, exclaiming, "Every oenophile eventually gravitates to the wines of Burgundy."

Driven to produce world class Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Pahlmeyer's inspiration soon hinged on a fortuitous discovery in 1998 by his winemaker, Helen Turley, and her viticulturist spouse, John Wetlaufer. She found a farmstead called Wayfarer not far from her own vineyard that was for sale. Located at 1,100 in elevation, two ridges and five miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, in what is now the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA, this secluded site was deemed "the future La Tâche of California" by Turley. Pahlmeyer had already become entranced by this region after an epiphanic tasting of Turley's Marcassin Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, declaring, "These are the truly finest Pinot Noir and Chardonnay I have ever tasted - better than Richebourg and La Tâche."



Wayfarer had been a small organic fruit and vegetable farming operation owned by Dorothy and David Davis who sold their produce to noted San Francisco Bay area restaurants including Chez Panisse and Zuni Cafe. The 70-acre ranch had proven to ripen melons and tomatoes, thereby suggesting that wine grapes would ripen as well. The Davises founded the Wayfarer School on the property as a boarding school for troubled teens to learn the land and heal the spirit.

I can vouch for the remote location of Wayfarer Farm, because I visited the vineyard in 2007 along with Pahlmeyer's winemaker at the time, Erin Green. It is located a 45-minute drive along twisting and narrow two-lane roads from Jenner where the Russian River Valley empties into the Pacific Ocean.

Planting of Wayfarer Vineyard began in 2000 under the direction of David Abreu and was completed in 2002. Twelve different clones and selections of Pinot Noir were chosen (37, Bacigalupi Old Wente, Dijon 115, 667, 777, and "828," Hyde Old Wente, Pommard 4, Pommard 5, Swan and Wayfarer) and 24 acres were field grafted onto four different types of low-vigor rootstock. Four Chardonnay clones and selections (Berlenbach Old Wente, Dijon 95, Hyde Old Wente, and Mt. Eden) were planted over 6 acres. The vines were closely spaced at 6' x 3', and laid out in roughly one-acre blocks to mesh seamlessly with the topography and matched to the sun aspect, elevation and slope. The soils are homogenous and 100% Goldridge in type.

The first harvest arrived in 2005 and the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes from Wayfarer were initially blended with fruit from the Russian River Valley to create wines under the Pahlmeyer moniker. By 2012, the vineyard's extraordinary character became evident and an estate-grown, single-vineyard Wayfarer label was launched.

Noted winemaker, Bibiana González Rave, crafted the inaugural 2012 Wayfarer wines. A native of Columbia, she studied and worked in the vineyards and cellars of Burgundy, Côte-Rôtie, Bordeaux, Alsace and Cognac, eventually earning a Diploma of Oenology, with honors, from the University of Bordeaux. She gained 14 years of experience working at California wineries such as Au Bon Climat, Peay, Qupe and Lynmar Estate before joining Pahlmeyer as a consulting winemaker in 2012 explicitly to grow and make Wayfarer Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. She remarks, "Wayfarer is a gem hidden in the wilderness. It is an extremely special site, presenting an opportunity to create something exceptional."



Yields are kept very low in the vineyard, an average of three pounds per vine. The ability to oversee 30 acres affords an intimate relationship with each vineyard block. The cross-referencing of terroir and clone provides a spectrum of fruit to work with, and particular clones are blended for ideal harmony or kept separate for a unique single clone expression.

Pinot Noir grapes are hand-harvested in the pre dawn hours, the clusters are hand-sorted, and the de-stemmed berries are hand-sorted again before going to small open top tanks. After a 4 to 5-day cold maceration, native yeast fermentation ensues, and after two to three weeks, the Pinot Noir is gently pressed and moved to barrel where it completes both primary and secondary fermentations.

Chardonnay grapes are gently whole-cluster pressed and settled overnight before being racked to barrel where it undergoes 100% native yeast fermentation followed by malolactic fermentation.

Barrel cooperage, toast level and percentage of new oak is based on the individual character of each wine. The wine ages about 15 months in French oak barrels before being bottled unfinned and unfiltered.

The 2012 growing season at Wayfarer was ideal. A mild spring led to a warm, dry summer. Mid to late summer temperatures did not spike, allowing the fruit to ripen slowly and steadily. Harvest started when both ideal aromatic and physiological maturity had been obtained.

These wines are clearly marked by style and sophistication. Beginning with the tall-neck bottles and very long corks which attract attention, the wines unfold slowly in the glass, finding more traction over time, and developing even more nuance and oak integration from opened bottles one and two days later. There is no rush to consume these wines for they will evolve beautifully over many years. Among the Pinot Noirs, the "Wayfarer Vineyard" bottling is the most approachable at this early stage. The deep reddish purple color of the wines is striking. Each of the wines stand on their own for certain aromatic, flavor and textural features that display their individual uniqueness.

**2012 Wayfarer “Wayfarer Vineyard” Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.60, 780 cases, \$90.** A blend of 12 Pinot Noir clones and selections. 8% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 15 months in 78% new French oak. Moderately deep reddish purple hue in the glass. Aromatically alive with scents of cherry, raspberry, spice box, sous-bois, and rose petal that hold up over time in the glass. The mid weight core of dark red cherry and raspberry, blueberry and pomegranate has noticeable richness and ripeness, and is accented with oak-driven toast and anise. Very soft on the palate with modestly firm tannins and some finishing length to the oak-kissed fruit. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the nose was very sexy with bright aromas of sweet cherry, rose and violet and the texture was dreamy soft. Approachable now, but there is certainly no hurry. **92.**

**2012 Wayfarer “The Traveler” Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.62, 170 cases, \$N/A.** A single “suitcase clone” from Burgundy’s most revered vineyard. 22% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 15 months in 63% new French oak. Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The intriguing nose is embellished by the whole cluster, offering an array of scents including dark berries, rose petal, sous-bois, and oak-driven spice and vanilla. The mid weight boysenberry, raspberry, plum and red currant flavors are satisfying on their own, but added notes of savory herbs and floral nuance bring the wine up a notch. This beauty has a touch more body and intensity than the “Wayfarer Vineyard” bottling, with more finishing length. Tannins are well managed. Still a bit reticent, I was able to discover more subtleties over time in the glass, and the wine was considerably more expressive the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine has not been released and understandably so, but there is much to look forward to. **93-94.**

**2012 Wayfarer “Golden Mean” Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 250 cases, \$115.** Pommard 4 & 5 clone, and Swan selection. 10% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 15 months in 80% new French oak. Moderate dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is totally seductive, offering a luxurious melding of aromas of fresh cherry, berry, herbs, sous-bois, rose petal and subtle oak. It is easy to find superlatives for this luscious wine. It has a little more sap and structure than “The Wayfarer” bottling, but retains a silky elegance that is charming. The flavors of blackberry, boysenberry, spice and earthy flora are framed by a seamless integration of smooth tannin and spicy oak. The finish is notable for its expansive, intense and lengthy presence. **93.**

**2012 Wayfarer “Mother Rock” Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.56, TA 0.59, 400 cases, \$N/A.** Clone 37 (Mount Eden) and Dijon 777 co-fermented. 24% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 15 months in 56% new French oak. This wine is named for Wayfarer’s sandstone substrate. Moderately deep reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is highly expressive, picking up interest and intensity over time in the glass. Aromas of fresh raspberries, cherries and strawberries are glass filling, accented with very subtle spice and vanilla. The mid palate attack is rich and satisfying with mid weight flavors of red berries and plum carrying the charge through a generous finish. This wine has very complimentary integration of oak, the balance is spot on, and the texture is soft and luxurious. I was completely seduced by the mouthfeel which sets this wine apart from all the Wayfarer wines in this tasting. Still delightful the next day when tasted from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. **94.**

**2012 Wayfarer “Paige’s Ridge” Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.62, 140 cases, \$N/A.** This wine is named for Jayson Pahlmeyer’s spouse Paige. Dijon 667 clone. 20% whole cluster fermentation. Aged 15 months in 17% new French oak. Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Aromatically reserved upon opening, slowly releasing its charms over time in the glass, revealing aromas of red, blue and black berries, cherries, sois-bois, and vanilla. The strawberry, raspberry and cherry fruits are notable but a bit overshadowed by the prominent role of French oak and the wine’s firm tannic backbone. The citrus-imbued and fruit-charged finish is noticeably more robust over time in the glass. This is a young wine that has not been released and currently lacks the nuances that it undoubtedly will display with more time in the bottle, and may warrant a higher score in the future. **90.**

**2012 Wayfarer “Wayfarer Vineyard” Fort Ross-Seaview Sonoma Coast Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.41, TA 0.59, 660 cases, \$80.** Dijon 95 clone, and Berlenbach Old Wente, Hyde Old Wente and Mount Eden selections. Aged 15 months in 65% new French oak with frequent lees stirring until malolactic fermentation was completed. Unfined and unfiltered. Moderate lemon yellow color and clear in the glass. The enticing aromatics featuring lemon, baked apple, pear, buttery brioche and flint fill the glass. On the palate, the experience can be likened to biting into a crisp Golden Delicious apple. Notes of white-fleshed fruits, lemon curd and nutty oak add interest to the captivating flavor profile. The mouth feel is full, polished and slightly viscous, the acidity is sound, and the finish lingers on with saturating goodness. The overall impression is one of harmony and vibrancy. **93.**