

HIRSCH VINEYARDS

History and Profile

INTRODUCTION

Hirsch Vineyards is recognized as one of the finest sites for Pinot Noir in the new world. David Hirsch planted his vineyard overlooking the Pacific Ocean in 1980, making it one of the oldest vineyards on the West Sonoma Coast. Since then it has become a highly sought-after source for Pinot Noir grapes in California, providing fruit to Littorai, Williams Selyem, Kistler and many others. In 2002, Hirsch began producing its own estate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from this complex, cool-weather site.

Located on the extreme western Sonoma Coast, Hirsch is defined by its proximity to both the Pacific Ocean and the San Andreas Fault. The former creates our extreme, maritime climate, and the latter imparts a fearsome complexity to our soils and topography. The result is a highly diverse and fragmented estate: 29 planted hectares, divided into 67 individual farming blocks, corresponding to the dramatic and sudden changes in soil and aspect created by the Fault. This degree of fragmentation is unmatched even by the famously subdivided vineyards of Burgundy's Côte de Nuits. Each block was individually developed and is now farmed, harvested and vinified separately.

HISTORY

"People always ask me how I found this place. The truth is, the place found me."

1978	David Hirsch buys the land that will become Hirsch Vineyards
1980	First vines planted by David (0.4 ha of own-rooted Pinot Noir and 0.8 ha of Riesling)
1989	Riesling grafted over to Pinot Noir
1990-97	Second stage of planting, in which 18 ha of Pinot Noir are planted
1994	First Chardonnay vines planted at Hirsch (0.85 ha)
2002-03	Third stage of planting, in which 10 ha of Pinot Noir and 0.6 ha of Chardonnay are planted
2002	First estate vintage of Pinot Noir produced (offsite)
2003	Winery construction completed, and onsite winemaking begins
2006	First estate vintage of Chardonnay produced
2008	David's daughter Jasmine joins the family business
2011	Conversion to biodynamic viticulture begins
2014	All vineyards, orchards and gardens fully biodynamic

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- 2019 Jasmine becomes Winemaker
- 2023 Fourth stage of planting commences, in which 1.6 ha of Pinot Noir and 0.4 ha of Chardonnay are planted



David (right) building the winery in 2002.

LOCATION

“The most significant terroir in our case is the San Andreas Fault, earthquake terroir.”

Hirsch Vineyards is located 150 km north of San Francisco, in the most northwesterly part of Sonoma County. The Pacific Ocean is 4.5 km to the west, and the San Andreas Fault is just 0.8 km away.

Hirsch is within the tiny Fort Ross-Seaview AVA (American Viticultural Area), which is entirely enclosed within the West Sonoma Coast AVA.

The Fort Ross-Seaview AVA was established in 2012 by David Hirsch and his neighbors, to define this highly unique growing region. The vineyards of Fort Ross-Seaview are characterized by their close proximity to the Pacific, high elevation, rugged slopes, high annual rainfall, and complex geology. This is a mountain region, and the wines reflect that with their fruit intensity and elevated structure.



FARMING PRACTICES

“Biodynamics is the ultimate site specificity. It’s all about identity.”

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Hirsch Vineyards is a 29 ha vineyard situated within a 400 ha ranch. There is only one other vineyard contiguous to ours. We therefore enjoy the unique position and responsibility of being almost completely isolated from outside influences.

Each block is farmed as if it was its own vineyard, with consideration given to what that individual parcel needs, based on the soil, aspect, microclimate, vine condition and vintage. Especially amongst the older and virused vines, the farming must be done vine by vine, with attention given to the needs of each individual plant. The farming is managed by our vineyard manager of more than 30 years, Everardo Robledo, in concert with David Hirsch. We employ a crew of up to 20 vineyard workers at the height of the growing season; no contract labor is used. All viticultural work is done by hand; no machine ever touches a vine.

In 2011 we began the process of converting the vineyards to biodynamic viticulture. By 2014, all vineyards as well as our gardens and orchards were fully under biodynamic practice.

The majority of the 400 ha is left wild. Besides the vineyards, we have gardens (for food, flowers, herbs and biodynamic preparation ingredients), orchards, birds (ducks, chickens, geese), bees and a large compost production. We are hoping to introduce livestock soon, and we continue the reforestation efforts begun by David more than 40 years ago. All employees and family members are welcome to enjoy the fruits of the gardens, ensuring that those who grow the grapes and make the wines are nourished by the land. Our fulltime biodynamic gardener cares for the gardens and orchards, and is responsible for the creation of the biodynamic applications in the vineyard. We create all of our own compost, preps and sprays.

While our initial focus for the biodynamics has been on the vineyards and gardens, we have in mind Steiner's exhortation to foster farm individuality and to treat the farm as an integral whole. We do not intend to develop the majority of the 400 ha; most of the land is too steep for any activity except forestry. However we endeavor to take the entire ranch into our consciousness and consideration when planning for the long-term health of our soils, animals, vineyards, wines, employees and family.



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VINEYARD CHARACTERISTICS

"Every vine has its own life, its own secrets, its own manifestation."

Soil

The soils of Hirsch defy easy characterization. We are located approximately 0.8 km from the San Andreas Fault, which means we are farming within a fault zone. The uplift of the Fault has created a highly complex mélange of soils (officially known as the Franciscan Assembly). Clay, rock, loam and sand formations are found throughout, as well as combinations thereof, leading to highly variegated soil structures and water retention levels. This, along with the diversity of microclimates, led David Hirsch to subdivide the 29 ha into 67 individual micro farming blocks. Please visit [our website](#) for a map of the vineyard.

Climate

Located 4.5 km from the Pacific Ocean, Hirsch is in a maritime climate, defined by temperate winters and cool, foggy summers. We are situated at 38 degrees north latitude. On average we receive 80 inches of rain a year, all in the winter months, making this one of the rainiest viticultural regions in the world. In the summer, Hirsch and all of California enjoy a Mediterranean climate, and it usually does not rain at all between early May to mid-October.

Being so close to the ocean, fog rolls in most nights during the summer, resulting in cool nights and mornings. At our elevation of 490 meters, the fog usually burns off by mid-morning, ensuring long hours of sunlight during the growing season. The fog layer sits below us, moderating temperatures throughout the day.

The complex topography of Hirsch means that certain parts of the vineyard experience more or less fog, resulting in an array of microclimates within the vineyard. Ocean-facing vines, for example, tend to get more fog and wind, resulting in more shatter and later ripening. East-facing vines at lower elevations can be significantly warmer during the day.



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The Vines

The following Pinot Noir clones / selections are planted at Hirsch:

Pommard-Wädenswil	Heritage field blend of two French clones and two Swiss clones of Pinot Noir; brought to Hirsch by Jim Beauregard, who believes they originally came from Oregon.
Swan	Heritage California selection. Our cuttings came from Steve Kistler, who got his budwood from Dehlinger. Originally suitcased from Burgundy to California by Joe Swan in the 1960s.
Mount Eden	Heritage California selection, brought to California from Burgundy in the 1800s by Paul Masson. David took our cuttings directly from Mount Eden in 1989.
Calera	Heritage California selection, brought to California from Burgundy in the 1970s by Josh Jensen of Calera
777	Dijon clone
114	Dijon clone

We use an array of rootstocks, chosen to match the individual soil characteristics of each block.

Planting densities vary widely, from the old vineyards planted to 10x6, to younger vineyards planted to 6x3.25. More detail is [here](#).

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THE WINES

"We must wait for the vineyard to reveal itself."

We make a number of different Pinot Noirs each year from the Hirsch Vineyard, each a unique selection of vineyard blocks. The wines we make have changed over the years, evolving as our understanding of the site has deepened and expanded. Three of our wines (*Boban-Dillon*, *San Andreas Fault*, *Reserve*) express the "macro terroir" of Hirsch: they contain a selection of parcels from across the entire vineyard, and are intended to give the drinker a complete picture of the Hirsch Vineyard, in all its complexity and fragmentation.

Our other wines (*West Ridge*, *East Ridge*, *Raschen Ridge*, *Maritime*, *Block 8*, *The Old Vineyard*) capture individual "micro terroirs" within the bigger vineyard. These sections of the vineyard have distinct identities that come through vintage after vintage, and are both profoundly different from the rest of the vineyard, as well as compelling expressions worthy of being experienced on their own. Detailed histories of each wine can be found [here](#).

We produce on average 7,000 cases per year, of which about 500 cases are Chardonnay and the balance Pinot Noir. All of our wines except one (the *Boban-Dillon*) are 100% estate and 100% from the single vineyard of Hirsch.

Approximately 60% of our production is sold to private collectors in the US. The balance is sold to distributors in the US and importers around the world.

WINEMAKING

"What's in your glass has been delivered directly from Hirsch Vineyards."

In the cellar we believe in minimal intervention, with the intention of allowing the unique character of the vineyard to come through. All Pinot Noir fermentations take place in open top fermenters. Whole cluster is rarely used, but may be incorporated depending on the vintage and vineyard block. No yeast is added. A long cold soak is followed by a natural fermentation, with pumpovers and punchdowns utilized in moderation for gentle extraction. A French basket press is used for pressing.

The Pinot Noirs are bottled after 11 to 18 months in oak. The wines are then aged in bottle for between 12 to 24 months before being released to wholesale.



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The Chardonnay is pressed, settled and racked into oak barrels. Fermentation is allowed to occur naturally. Minimal lees stirring is employed. After 12 months in barrel, the Chardonnay is racked to stainless steel tanks for the final élevage. Malolactic fermentation is also natural and nothing is done to impede or encourage it.

All the wines are aged in Austrian and French oak barrels. An average of 30% new oak is employed on the Pinot Noirs, and 20-25% on the Chardonnay.

Since 2019, our winemaker is Jasmine Hirsch, working together with consulting winemaker Michael Cruse.