

CROIX

PRESS & TRADE FAQ

Q: What is behind the name “Croix”

A: Deriving from the French term “Croix” meaning “Cross”, the name speaks to the situational convergences we find throughout the founding of the project. It reflects Kirk Venge’s desire to “cross the regional divide” between Napa Valley and Sonoma County to build his Sonoma County legacy, producing California’s finest Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. It also represents the convergence of winegrowing ideals old and new, and our ability to take the best practices of our craft and apply them accordingly.

Q: Where are the Croix wines Produced?

A: Croix wines were being custom crushed at Venge Vineyards & Winery. Venge’s state of the art, gravity fed winery provided us with an unparalleled level of control with one of the most talented winemaking teams in the industry. Venge Vineyards recently acquired the Robert Rue Winery of Russian River Valley, renaming it Croix Estate (see page 4).

Q: How involved are you in the farming of the vineyards and what per cent are estate grown?

A: We made a purposeful decision to plant our Sonoma County roots with one of the most talented farming operations in the region—Dutton Ranch. Their commitment to a pesticide free and sustainable environment is a mirror image of our vineyard stewardship in Napa Valley. Their knowledge and ownership of the region’s finest vineyard sites provides us with unique access to many regional climates and convergences, resulting in superior wines from the onset. We have long term contracts in place at Morelli Vineyard, Manzana Vineyard, Thomas Road Vineyard, Jewell Vineyard, Freestone Vineyard, and Widdoes Vineyard. We work closely with the Dutton Ranch team to perfect our style and control the picking times accordingly.

Q: You only make two wines. Are there plans to add more than just Chardonnay and Pinot Noir?

A: Our mission is to farm Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the best vineyard locations throughout Sonoma County to produce wines on par with the very best in the region, building a family legacy of producing California's finest Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

How does one acquire your wines?

A: We are taking Croix to five select markets (CA, MA, NC, NY, PA) and targeting select on-premise and trusted independent retail accounts. The wines are sold in three-bottle increments with a maximum allocation of 80 3-packs per state. We will also allocate wines direct to consumer in three-bottle increments through our website croixestate.com. We are currently 100% subscribed with a waiting list for future vintage allocations.

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Q: Why are your wines named the way that they are and not a “vineyard designate”?

A: All of our wines will be named to reflect the situational convergences found at each vineyard location. We will take the vineyard named and add to it. For example, Starling Morelli Roost is aptly named due to the thousands of starling sparrows that roost in the old oak trees at the Morelli Vineyard. Old Manzana Slope was once an old apple orchard that was converted to Pinot Noir. Apple farming led Sebastopol’s entry into agricultural significance.

Q: Why Russian River Valley? Will you venture anywhere else?

A: Russian River Valley is a proven AVA for growing remarkable Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, with a broad diversity of growing environments. We believe starting here gives us the best chance at proving our mettle with each variety. Our intention is to start here and go wherever our inner wine geek takes us next.

Q: What is your winemaking approach to Pinot and Chardonnay and how does it differ from what you do with the “Venge” wines?

A: Kirk Venge’s first enology job was the experimental winemaker for Mumm, working on the Fowler brand of still Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. This experience has informed his winemaking style greatly as it relates to Burgundian varieties. The principle goal in our approach to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay is to extract as much verve and flavor from each variety, making a wine that is greatly enjoyable upon release, with the ability to age in bottle beyond the typical window of life for each variety.

Chardonnay production consists of picking in the cool mornings and whole cluster pressing in our bladder press. A light press is conducted so as not to press seed tannins into the juice. We will flow from the press via gravity to 75% new and 25% used French oak barrels where native yeasts will take hold for primary fermentation. We will split the six-barrels into separate regimens of secondary fermentation, allowing a combination of full malolactic to zero malolactic fermentation to take place. The wine is settled on the lees for a seven month period before being racked and aged for a total of 14 months. The final blend is crafted to build a full flavor profile with a definitive ridge—a “backbone”—of structure to enhance long-term aging. The finished wine is bottled unfiltered to preserve the flavor temperament of the final blend.

Pinot Noir production also consists of picking in the cool mornings. We will take 25% of the harvest and set whole clusters into 1/2 ton open top fermenters and top with dry ice to chill the aggregate lots, to ferment on the stems. The remaining 75% will be destemmed via our Pellenc sorting system, producing what we call “Pinot Caviar”. We will then move the grapes via gravity into 1/2 ton open-top fermenters for the 5 day cold soak. Primary fermentation is 100% carbonic with 100% native yeasts, with a cold fermentation lasting 18 to 22 days. The free run juice is captured into 50% new and 50% used air-dried French oak barrels. The press fractions will be kegged for minor add-backs as the wine ages to build tannin structure as needed. The wine will age in barrel for 16 months and bottled unfiltered. All of our Pinot Noirs will bottle age one year before being released.

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Q: Sonoma has a vast heritage of producing alternative varietals. Will you branch out beyond Pinot Noir and Chardonnay”?

A: Our fundamental purpose is to build a reputation for producing noteworthy Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the region. However, we are absolute wine geeks at heart and cannot resist the calling of producing wines that speak to history and heritage within their region. Take Zinfandel as an example of something produced in Sonoma County that is complex, gorgeous, very “west county”, and unlike Zinfandels we produce in Napa Valley. We have high hopes to produce and release an old vine Zinfandel that is on par with some of the best examples from the region within the next two years.

Q: How did the vision for the wines, the packaging, and brand come about?

A: General Manger for Croix Estate, Jason Williams, has worked with Proprietor and Winemaker, Kirk Venge, at his namesake winery, Venge Vineyards, for over seven years.

"I have learned more about winemaking and the business of running a family owned winery in the last seven years than I could have ever imagined. 17 years ago, I was fresh out of college with a dream and zero job prospects when I left Arizona for Napa Valley. It has been one hell of a journey. I look back fondly on my time with Merryvale Vineyards, Opus One, the Robert Mondavi Corporation, and Lancaster Estate; however, nothing tops my experience working with the Venge family.

“It was during the spring of 2009 that Kirk Venge introduced the name ‘Croix’ and a rough idea for property and an eventual winery in Sonoma. I remember the moment like it was yesterday. Kirk threw out this name and spoke of crossing the bridge between Napa and Sonoma and founding a 'Sonoma County heritage'. Ideas were all over the board for a solid two years.

“I had worked the Williams Selyem pick-up party a few years prior to joining Venge Vineyards, and recalled being blown away by the quality of the wines and the winemaking operation—rustic, pure, focused. That property is such a legendary benchmark for producing noteworthy Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, right on par with Marcassin, Dumol, Rocchioli, and Merry Edwards. From this thought, Croix slowly blossomed and came into focus - farm Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the best vineyard locations throughout Sonoma County, building a family legacy of producing California's finest Chardonnay and Pinot Noir - hands down.

“With the introduction of the Croix wines, I have brought all of my experience to the project, breathing life into an aesthetic that is worthy of the phenomenal wines Kirk Venge is now producing from Sonoma County. For the both of us, it has been a labor of love, with no energy spared in our efforts to achieve perfection.”

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Robert Rue Winery Acquisition

Q: Venge Vineyards recently acquired the Robert Rue Winery in Fulton, Russian River Valley and renamed it Croix Estate. How did this come about?

A: Croix was founded in 2012 with our vintage of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, with the intent to one day have an estate in Russian River Valley to call our own. We have been looking for property in the Russian River Valley area since 2013. We had many properties of interest along the way that simply didn't come through. Also, our requirements changed as time went on, as we narrowed our search from available land, to an existing operational structure that would have the turn key elements we were looking for, such as, an existing use permit, existing estate planted vineyards, and the ability to host clients in a Sonoma County aesthetic. The acquisition came to us through our real estate agent.

Q: What are your plans for the property?

A: First and foremost, we are farmers, so we need to spend time listening to the land. The property is 10 acres, with approximately 9 acres of century-old vine Zinfandel. The vineyard needs attention and care, such as deep ripping the soils, trellis repairs, irrigation repairs, and canopy positioning. All of the sustainable, land-first practices we use on our Napa Valley estates will be employed here to a healthy and balanced ecosystem in place. We figure it will take us three years to really figure out the strengths and weaknesses of the vineyard. Once the foundation is known, we will look to replant a small portion of the vineyard to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, while preserving a good portion of the Zinfandel for our Estate wine production.

We currently produce 300 cases of wine under Croix Estate: 150 cases each of single vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Our plans are to grow to three single-vineyard designates under Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, an appellation blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and an Estate old-vine Zinfandel. Total production will grow to approximately 2,300 cases per year. Chardonnay prices will range from \$50 to \$125 per bottle. Pinot Noir prices will range from \$65 to \$225 per bottle. Our Estate Zinfandel will price at \$50 per bottle.

Much like the vineyard, the gardens are in great need of attention and clean up to give the property a sense of oneness within its environment. All of the elements are there, they just need a new direction that speaks to what we are attempting to accomplish aesthetically.

Visitation for Croix will be a non-public, private retreat, for clients booking by advance reservation only. Much like we do at Venge Vineyards & Winery, we will accommodate a small number of guests each day, not to exceed 20 visitors per day, as production is extremely limited.

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