

# **NORTHERN ILLINOIS** **Weekender**

YOUR GUIDE TO ARTS & LEISURE IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS

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## UNCORKED By JAMES NOKES

An expert taster shares favorite finds to consider adding to your own wine racks.

# Savor newfound nuance of Edna Valley pinot

**F**red Delivert will break the stigma.

The affable, French-born winemaker at Tolosa has made a sublime pinot noir, loaded with flavor, elegance and highlighting everything that is special in the varietal in Edna Valley.

Attention isn't easy to come by for wineries in California's Central Coast. Wedged between Napa Valley, which rose to prominence after the Judgment of Paris wine competition in 1976 and a subsequent influx of Silicon Valley money, and Santa Barbara, whose pinot noir was the star of the Academy Award-winning movie "Sideways," in birth order, Edna Valley is the youngest-born child.

Yet, it can be done. Paso Robles rose from the white noise of the Central Coast conversation to be a premier wine-growing destination with its Rhone Rangers and world-class wines. Edna Valley has the potential to be next.

Delivert has delivered **Tolosa 1772 Edna Valley Pinot Noir 2017 (\$70)** with a velvety soft texture and rich plum, raspberry, earth, spice rack and leather flavors. In the glass, its color is light. But the tension between acidity, fruit, spice and earth flavors is refreshing and lithe.

"There's people that still see Central Coast on a label and rows and rows of chardonnay that sell for \$9.99 per bottle at (a grocery store)," Delivert said. "That's something we have to go against. Edna Valley is not really known. We are lacking recognition from the larger public. It's a bummer, but we have to put the word out that we make great wines."

For 20 years, Delivert made wines in Napa and Sonoma Valley and saw the industry trend towards hedonistic wines with big, bold flavors and high-alcohol content. Wine critics awarded high scores to these wines, and the chase to make bigger and bolder wines was on.

Now in his third growing season at Tolosa, he is tasked with capturing the nuance offered by Edna Valley pinot noir.

"Winemakers thought big wines get big scores" Delivert said. "So, let's make them so they can sell. The current of thinking

went more in that direction, and the market responded. But winemakers remembered there's something else to what we are making. Maybe they can bring more elegance and freshness. The DNA of Edna is not that and has never been that. I made pinot in Napa and Sonoma, too, and I saw potential here (in Edna). Pinot noir doesn't have to be inked up; 15% alcohol is not what pinot is."

Located in a transverse valley perpendicular to the coastline, Edna Valley has a direct opening to the Pacific Ocean and thus a "huge marine influence." Temperatures are mild all year, and the vines have a short dormancy period. With an early bud break, Edna Valley vineyards have a long hang time. California sunshine's influence is moderated by cool summer days, and the grapes retain acidity well.

Winemakers also have what Delivert said is "a mosaic of soils." There's a ridge on the east edge of the Santa Lucia Highlands that is volcanic, an ancient seabed and sand and limestone among the 60 different soil types whose wide variety is a "patchwork that brings more complexity" to the wine.

Tolosa owner Robin Bagett started planting vineyards in 1988 and founded the winery in 1998. He founded Alpha Omega in Napa in 2006, and it's grown into a solid producer of Bordeaux varieties. With 720 acres at the Edna Ranch and a winery with everything Delivert needs, Tolosa's Edna Valley pinot noir is ready to stand with wines it makes from California's other AVAs.

"I want to be true to varietal," Delivert said. "I brought that philosophy here. It's the perfect spot to make wine that I want to make. The nature of the grape lacks pigment. You will see light through it. Pinot noir is not a big wine, but it has to be elegant and it can be powerful. So, let's capture that acidity and get power from layers of flavors; there's a long length to that. It's a blast to make those wines."

• James Nokes has been tasting, touring and collecting in the wine world for several years. Email him at jamesnokes25@yahoo.com.



Photo provided

A marine layer influences the Edna Valley in California, south of the city of San Luis Obispo and part of the larger Central Coast AVA.

## ~ Tasting Notes ~

### Sourcing California pinot noir

**Anderson Valley AVA** – Isolated and surrounded by redwoods, the sleepy hamlet two hours north of Napa makes a "subtle, elegant and terroir-driven type of wines," according to Domaine Anderson winemaker Darrin Low. Check out bottlings from Domaine Anderson, Fel and Maggy Hawk.

**Carneros AVA** – It starts in Napa, spills into Sonoma and has a cooler climate because it is closer to the frigid waters of San Pablo Bay. Artessa, Bouchaine, Cuvaion and Donum are standout producers.

**Edna Valley AVA** – "We can't do big jammy pinot noir," said Delivert about the pinot that is lighter in color and loaded with fresh acidity.

**Petaluma Gap AVA** – Designated an AVA in 2017, its fog-covered terrain comes from cold air off the Pacific Ocean that enters through an opening in the coastal mountain range and travels east to San Pablo Bay. Adobe Road and Anaba make great pinot; the Sangiacomo Family Vineyards are stellar.

**Russian River Valley AVA** – The raspberry and spice flavors stand out to Delivert. A plush mouthfeel has been a calling card I've noticed as well. Tolosa makes an RRV pinot. Flowers, Freeman, Gary Farrell, Inman

Family, La Crema, Landmark and Windracer are just a few of many bottlings out there.

**Santa Lucia Highlands AVA** – An incredibly long growing season due to abundant sunshine, fog, vineyards planted at elevated heights and roaring winds from the nearby Monterey Bay leads to rich pinot with great depth of flavor that retains its acidity. Pisoni, Roar and Wrath are some of the top producers in the AVA.

**Santa Maria Valley AVA** – Bien Nacido, Julia's and Solomon Hills are star vineyards in the rare mountain range with east-to-west orientation to the Pacific Ocean. Delivert said, "Solomon Hills is very aromatic and full of citrus, I want to show that blood orange and grapefruit in our Tolosa bottling."

**Sta. Rita Hills** – An unmistakable collection of spice, tobacco, cracked pepper and leather flavors mixed with fresh strawberry, cherry and even cranberry flavors emerge from SRH bottlings. Alma Rosa, Babcock, Fiddlehead, Foxen, Longoria, Melville, Sea Smoke and The Hilt are a few of my favorites.

**Sonoma Coast** – Rugged and windswept; the Pacific Ocean and San Pablo Bay are the temperature moderators here. Flavors include cherry, black cherry, strawberry, wet earth and dried leaves. The Kosta Browne bottling has a 10-year vertical in my cellar. Kutch, Peay and Rivers-Marie stand out.