

# JEB DUNNUCK

Your Completely Independent Guide to Fine Wines

## Wine Rating System

100 - 96	As good as It gets. These wines reach the peak of my personal scale of quality.
95 - 90	Outstanding. These wines are outstanding for their type and are worth the extra effort to seek out.
89 - 87	Very Good to Good. These offer real character and can be age worthy. The majority of my cellar and what I drink on a daily basis falls into this category.
86 - 80	Good to Decent. While still good, these wines lack character or fail to show a significant number of positive traits.
79 - 50	Quaffable to Undrinkable. Wines rated less than 80 points are not recommended. They will range from passable to flawed and undrinkable.

I score wines on the above scale and the bottle price, winery/wine reputation, and vintage have no bearing on the score. While a well-written note should not need a score, its inclusion allows a clear, easy to understand delineation of preferences. This allows a more concise note that can focus on the positive aspects of each wine as opposed to always having to explain why a wine rated 88 points isn't as good as one rated outstanding with 95 points. A precise score also forces the reviewer to make a hard decision... and I will agonize over small differences in score. Having said that, and while I believe a reviewer should be as precise as possible (i.e. the old saying "aim small, miss small") readers should interpret broadly and take any rating system with a grain of salt. The only difference between a wine I rate 89 points and one I rate 90 points (or one rated 100 points and one rated 97 points for that matter) is that I liked one a little more than the other. That's all a score tells you and a score represents the reviewer's opinion.

While I use score ranges in the case of barrel samples, I will also use a range if I am unsure of a wine or if the tasting conditions do not allow enough time or focus on the wine. Wines are scored on their overall quality. The note should indicate my best guess at when the wine will be at maturity; however, drinking young, structured wines can provide just as much pleasure as drinking fully mature, completely integrated bottles. If you prefer the latter and don't like young, tannic wines or wines with primary fruit, don't open a newly released Châteauneuf-du-Pape and expect the same level of enjoyment that I get from it. While scores give you a clear idea of what I think of the

wine, please realize that there are times when a less complex, easier drinking wine is actually the best wine for a given situation. I cringe every time I hear someone state that their cellar consists of only 90+ point wines (I'll ignore the source of the point rating) because I truly believe that person is missing out on a huge swath of interesting wines that deliver immense pleasure. Soft and easy are not always bad things and there are times when it doesn't get better than taking big gulps of a fresh, newly released Côtes-du-Rhône with a roast chicken or quaffing a delicious Rosé after work or with dinner. The style of the wine (described by the note), is every bit as important as the score. To me, any wine rated 85 points or higher is a wine I like, believe can be enjoyed, and has noteworthy qualities. In the case of barrel tastings, I use a range for the score. While I think it is possible to evaluate barrel samples (especially final blends), these notes should always be taken with a grain of salt. Scoring is a subjective portion of wine evaluation and as such, is simply my personal preference for a wine at a given point in time. Nothing more, nothing less. Any score or note in isolation is close to worthless and it is only after reading multiple notes and tasting multiple bottles that a reader can start to understand where the note taker is coming from.

**At the end of the day, the only opinion that matters is yours and my goal is to help you find a wine, either via a note or score (or both), that you will enjoy.**

COTIERE	2015	GRENACHE THOMPSON VINEYARD	SANTA BARBARA COUNTY	\$42	RED	89
COTIERE	2014	CABERNET SAUVIGNON LEWELLING RANCH	NAPA VALLEY ST HELENA	\$80	RED	92

These Cotiere releases are made by Kevin Law and he's able to pull fruit from top sites throughout Santa Barbara County. There's some gems in here, but also a few misses.

Starting off the three Chardonnays, Cotiere's 2015 Chardonnay Santa Barbara County comes mostly from the Murmur Vineyard (10% is from the Talley Rincon Vineyard) that was fermented and aged 17 months in 30% new French oak. It's lightly colored, yet has solid intensity in its melon, ripe pineapple and exotic flower-like aromas and flavors. Medium-bodied, nicely textured and ripe, it's a thoroughly enjoyable and delicious wine. From a site in the Santa Maria Valley, the 2015 Chardonnay Murmur Vineyard is another terrific wine from this estate. Spiced apples, citrus blossom, brioche and lots of salinity (which shows more on the palate) give way to a rich, textured, balanced effort that's just a classic example of California Chardonnay. Like all most of the white here, it was barrel fermented and this cuvée spent 17 months in 50% new French oak. From a terrific site in the Rio Grande Valley, the 2015 Chardonnay Talley Rincon Vineyard (barrel fermented and aged 17 months in 75% new French oak) offers notes of lemon peel, fresh apricot, spice and dried earth/stones in a medium-bodied, nicely textured, concentrated, balanced style. It's an incredibly classy chardonnay that has loads to love.

Sporting a deeper gold color, that 2015 Semillon Buttonwood Vineyard is a varietal wine you don't see often, and this is certainly not an argument for more of them. It gives up reserved notes of buttered stone fruits, honeycomb and custard. It relatively flat and straightforward on the palate.

The 2015 Pinot Noir Hilliard Bruce Vineyard is a big, sweetly fruited beauty that offers impressive notes of framboise, spices, incense and dried flowers. Fermented with 30%

CROWN POINT VINEYARDS	2015	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	HAPPY CANYON	\$150	RED	89-91
CROWN POINT VINEYARDS	2015	ESTATE SELECTION	HAPPY CANYON	\$150	RED	92-94
CROWN POINT VINEYARDS	2014	CABERNET SAUVIGNON	HAPPY CANYON	\$150	RED	96
CROWN POINT VINEYARDS	2014	ESTATE SELECTION	HAPPY CANYON	\$150	RED	95

Owned by Roger Bower and located in the Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara AVA, Crown Point is another new estate focusing on Bordeaux varieties and blends. The wines are made by Adam Henkel (previously at Harlan Estate in Napa Valley) with consulting advice from Bordeaux native,

whole clusters and aged 15 months in 50% new French oak, it's ripe, textured and layered on the palate, with building tannin, yet is certainly approachable and enjoyable today. The 2015 Pinot Noir La Encantada Vineyard was fermented with 30% whole clusters and saw 15 months in 50% new French oak. It shows a more refined, pure, nuanced character, with beautiful, candied red and black fruits, earth and forest floor flowing to medium-bodied, elegant Pinot Noir. It shows the vintage beautifully, has solid concentration and plenty of length, all pointing to it evolving gracefully. This vineyard has always given me some pause, yet the 2015 Pinot Noir Presqu'île Vineyard (40% stems and aged 15 months in 40% new French oak) is solid. Blackberries, currants, raspberries, tea leaves and herbs all emerge from this more masculine, earthy style, and it has good acidity, plenty of density and a good finish. Give bottles a year or two and drink through 2025.

Moving to the two Grenache releases, the 2015 Grenache Murmur Vineyard (100% Grenache brought up in neutral barrel) is slightly evolved, with notes of baked cherries, spice and dried earth. Medium to full-bodied, it has solid mid-palate fruit, but dries out on the tannic finish. Smoked herbs, scorched earth, pepper and darker berry fruits define the 2015 Grenache Thompson Vineyard, and it's medium-bodied, juicy and lively on the palate, with plenty of character. Made with 10% Syrah that saw 40% whole clusters, drink it over the coming 4-7 years.

Coming from the Lewelling Ranch Vineyard in St Helena, Napa, the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Lewelling Ranch Vineyard is gorgeous. Blackcurrants, toasted spice, graphite and scorched earth notes flow to a concentrated, full-bodied, layered 2014 that has good concentration, lively acidity and outstanding length. Website: CotiereWine.com

Philippe Melka. The estate covers 104 acres, with 50 planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Everything is estate grown, hand sorted, moved by gravity, fermented in concrete and French oak, and aged in

new barrels. In short, there's no expense spared here, and I'm sure the best is to come.

Starting with the 2015s, I was able to taste both from barrel. The **2015 Cabernet Sauvignon** (100% Cabernet aged 26 months in new barrels) sports an inky color as well as a fresh, lively bouquet of black currants, espresso roast and sappy herbs. Medium to full-bodied, fresh and elegant, it's oak is front and center, and emerges on the finish (like with the bottled 2014 as well). It will be interesting to see how this comes together, but I find the oak obtrusive. The **2015 Estate Selection** is better, with more purity and finesse in its blackberry, cassis, spring flowers and graphite aromas and flavors. Made from 72% Cabernet Sauvignon and 9% each of Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec, it's full-bodied, fresh and elegant, with fine tannin. It will certainly be an outstanding wine and have a long life.

Made from 100% Cabernet Sauvignon that spent 26 months in new French oak, the **2014 Cabernet Sauvignon** is unquestionably the finest vintage from this estate to date. It sports a deep, saturated purple color to go with flat out gorgeous notes of crème de cassis, lead pencil, spice and vanilla bean. Concentrated, broad and expansive, with ripe, polished tannin, it's a big step up from the 2013 and up with the finest Bordeaux blends I've tasted from Santa Barbara County. Give it a few years to integrate its oak and enjoy bottles over the following two decades or more. The **2014 Estate Selection** incorporates smaller amounts of Malbec and Merlot and was also aged just over two years in new French oak. Its similarly inky colored, yet has a touch more freshness and purity in its leafy herbs, chocolaty dark fruits, graphite and mineral-laced aromas and flavors. Concentrated, structured and lengthy, with plenty of ripe tannin, it's terrific today, in a youthful sort of way, but will be better with short term cellaring and keep for two decades. Website: [crownpointvineyards.com](http://crownpointvineyards.com)

DEMETRIA ESTATE	2016	BETON BLANC	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$38	WHITE	86
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2015	CUVEE PAPOU WHITE	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$37	WHITE	88
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2016	ROSE	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$27	ROSE	87
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2014	PINOT NOIR CUVEE SANDRA	STA RITA HILLS	\$68	RED	92
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2014	MOURVEDRE AGNO	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$42	RED	88
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2014	SYRAH NORTH SLOPE	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$43	RED	90
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2014	CUVEE CONSTANTINE	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$47	RED	91
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2014	CUVEE MATIA	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$60	RED	89
DEMETRIA ESTATE	2014	PANTHEON	SANTA YNEZ VALLEY	\$27	RED	88

Brought up all in concrete and a 100% Picpoul Blanc, the **2016 Beton Blanc** is racy and tart, with lot of lemon rind and tart pineapple giving way to a medium-bodied, racy style on the palate. Pair it with food over the coming year. A blend of 45% Marsanne, 25% Grenache Blanc, 27% Roussanne, and 3% Picpoul Blanc, the **2015 Cuvée Papou White** is a unique, interesting white that offers notes of citrus and minerality intermixed with smokier, even meaty (which is rare for a white) nuances. Clean, fresh and classy on the palate, with moderate acidity, drink it over the coming couple of years.

Looking at the rose and based all on Grenache, the **2016 Rosé** offers plenty of strawberry and mineral notes in its juicy, racy, lively style.

The **2014 Pinot Noir Cuvée Sandra** from Demetria is an ethereal, elegant, silky effort that offers alluring notes of dried strawberries, spice, dried flowers and forest floor. Medium-bodied, silky, polished and elegant on the palate, it

has no hard edges, a beautiful texture and a clean finish. It's already hard to resist, yet will keep through 2024.

Made from 100% Mourvèdre, the **2014 Mourvèdre Agno** is a peppery, salty, strawberry and berry-scented effort that has plenty of classic Mourvèdre cured meats and spice. Medium-bodied, lightly textured and elegant on the palate, it's a delicious effort to drink over the coming 5-7 years. The **2014 Syrah North Slope** checks in as a blend of 95% Syrah and 5% Viognier. It's another well-made, balanced, enjoyable Syrah from this estate that offers assorted red and black fruits, spice, peppery herbs and a touch of dusty earth. Medium-bodied, lightly textured and elegant, drink it over the coming 5-7 years.

Even more meaty and spicy, the **2014 Cuvée Constantine** (58% Grenache, 25% Mourvèdre and 17% Syrah) gives up tons of dried berry and currant fruits, leather, spice box and cured meat aromas and flavors. Medium-bodied, elegant and finesse-driven, with fine tannin and good acidity, it will