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Martinelli Family, Farming and Tradition

*These pioneering California winegrowers excel with
Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and Chardonnay*

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PINOT NOIR
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COCKTAILS**



Sonoma vintner Lee Martinelli Sr. talks about the vines of his family's Jackass Hill Vineyard, planted in the 1880s, like they are people: "They're still producing, we love the fruit. We don't ask too much of them. They are family and we take care of them."



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28 Martinelli: Legacy and Promise For five generations, the Martinellis, first arriving from Italy in the late 19th century, have been farmers in Sonoma County. Transitioning from apple orchards to grapegrowing many decades ago as the landscape of Sonoma agriculture changed, the family has since founded prestige vineyards such as Blue Slide Ridge on the extreme Sonoma Coast. The lineup today consists of sought-after Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays and old-vine Zinfandels, and the next generation of Martinellis is set to carry on • *Tim Fish*

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THE

MARTINELLI

STORY

LOVE SONOMA PINOT NOIR AND ZINFANDEL? THANK THE HARD WORK OF FIVE GENERATIONS OF THIS CALIFORNIA GRAPEGROWING FAMILY

BY TIM FISH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAWN HEUMANN

N DEERE

Lee Martinelli Sr. is the heart of the third generation, carrying on the legacy of his parents and grandparents and also guiding his own children and grandchildren in the family business.





Blue Slide Ridge Vineyard lies on the extreme Sonoma Coast in the relatively new Fort Ross–Seaview appellation.

When you come to the edge of civilization in the mountains of the Sonoma Coast, and the road crumbles to dirt and stone, and just as the GPS fails and you're looking for a place to turn around and head back home, you're almost at Blue Slide Ridge Vineyard.

It's a path the Martinelli family knows well. On a morning in April, three generations of Martinellis are riding in an SUV as it treads up to a summit about 1,100 feet above the Pacific Ocean. At the wheel is Lee Jr.; Lee Sr. sits in the back with his granddaughter Tessa Gorsuch and winemaker Courtney Wagoner.

After weeks of dark skies and storms, the land is green and glowing in the sun as everyone climbs out of the vehicle after the 90-minute trek from Martinelli Winery outside Santa Rosa, Calif. We're in the heart of the family's Sonoma Coast property in the Fort Ross–Seaview appellation, where four vineyards sit in proximity: Charles Ranch, Three Sisters, Wild Thyme and Blue Slide. Gorsuch opens a bottle of Three Sisters Pinot Noir 2021 and pours a taste all around. A taste of Blue Slide soon follows.

"I get winemakers asking me all the time if there's any Blue Slide for sale," Wagoner says. "'No, I get 100%,' I reply, so a lot of them are jealous. This is a very special place, Blue Slide in particular. It gives [the wine] an intensity, but it's an approachable intensity and the ageability of it is just incredible."

Lee Sr., a spry 84 who looks a decade younger, takes it all in. He has been making the long drive up the mountain since he was a young man courting his future wife, Carolyn Charles Martinelli,

who grew up on this remote 465-acre wilderness that the Charles family homesteaded in the 1860s. "This ranch produced lumber and livestock back in the day," Lee Sr. says. "And now it's grapes."

As the patriarch, Lee Sr. is the keeper of tradition, a man devoted to the perseverance of family and farming. The Martinellis are the epitome of a rare breed in California wine country. Their ancestors came to Sonoma County from Europe before the turn of the past century and eked out a place of their own, passing on a better life to subsequent generations on the land. When grapes began replacing apples and prunes in the local agriculture, they were savvy enough to see the future. Today, the Martinellis farm 450 acres of vines in Russian River Valley and Fort Ross–Seaview and produce some of the most sought-after Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays and Zinfandels in California—and so far have resisted selling the family business like so many of their neighbors and old friends.

The red hop kiln is a familiar sight as you drive along River Road toward Russian River Valley. Its three towers, once used to dry hops for beer, give it an Old World look. The historic structure serves as a logo on many Martinelli labels, and in some ways it's symbolic of a family that stays true to its roots. Five generations of

Martinellis have farmed in Sonoma County. Lee Sr. is the third generation, and he and Carolyn have four children. Julianna (Julie), now 61, is the eldest, followed by Lee Jr., 58, George, 54, and Regina, 51.

Growing up, they all worked in the family vineyards and orchards, and later the sisters focused on sales and marketing for the winery while the two sons managed the family vineyards with their father. Julie's daughter Tessa Gorsuch, 38, is the winery's estate director and represents the fifth generation. The Martinelli story is more than just one family, however, it's three: Charles, Bondi and Martinelli, and all three are key to the clan's considerable legacy.

Giuseppe and Luisa Martinelli eloped from their small village in Tuscany in the late 1880s and came to Sonoma County. He was 19; she 16. They built a house, a small winery and planted Jackass Hill Vineyard in 1890. Paulo and Gemma Bondi arrived from Italy a few years later. Their daughter Alma married Giuseppe and Luisa's son Leno Martinelli. Alma's brother Tony Bondi planted apple orchards throughout the Russian River Valley. Two of Uncle Tony's orchards are now producing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay: Bondi Home Ranch and Zio Tony. It was Tony Bondi who bought the hop barn property in the 1950s with the intention of paving it over for a trailer park. That never came to pass, to the relief of many farmers in the area.

The Charles family had arrived in Sonoma County much earlier, in the mid-1800s. George Charles, Carolyn's father, was losing money as a sheep rancher on the rugged Sonoma Coast when in 1982, Lee Sr. convinced his father-in-law to plant Chardonnay. There was only one other vineyard in the region at the time and most of the agricultural community believed the coast was too cold to ripen grapes. It was certainly a struggle for the first few years. Farming was rigorous and expensive at such a remote location and finding vineyard workers was nearly impossible. "He could not sell those grapes the first few years," Lee Sr. says. "I forget how many letters he wrote to wineries, and nobody would buy." That would soon change.

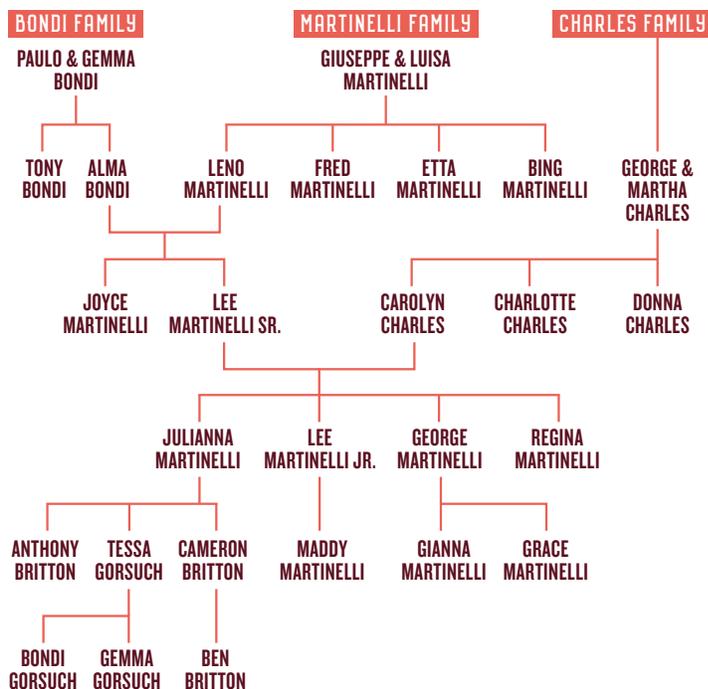
With three agricultural families influencing him, all Lee Sr. ever wanted to do was farming, even though his parents warned him there was no money in it. He was already helping his father, Leno, in the family vineyards and orchards when he was just 6.



Above: The Martinellis circa 1900: Giuseppe and Luisa (center) with children Bing (left), Etta, Fred and Leno (front). Right: Leno Martinelli and his horse Gerry plow the home garden in 1949. Below: Tony Bondi in his Gravenstein apple orchard in the late 1960s.



THE MARTINELLI FAMILY TREE



COURTESY OF MARTINELLI

Leno himself had been only 12 when his father, Giuseppe, died and he was forced to take over the farming. After Lee Sr. married Carolyn, he worked at a local electronics plant for five years before receiving his teaching credentials at the University of California, Davis, in 1967. He taught agriculture at Santa Rosa High School for a few years, until Tony Bondi died and Lee Sr. inherited his orchards. When Leno finally retired at age 87 in the early 1990s, Lee Sr. was running the entire family business. “I was sure he would be out here looking over my shoulder all the time,” Lee Sr. said of his dad. “But he never said a thing.”

Today, Lee Sr. lives where he grew up; his house nestled in the redwood-covered canyons of Russian River Valley west of Forestville, a pocket of relative warmth in a cool

region where Jackass Hill Vineyard rises above the family’s other Zinfandel vineyards. The story of how the vineyard got its name is obvious when you stand at its base and look up the dramatic 60-degree slope. Only a jackass would farm a hill that steep. The family sold Jackass Hill grapes for years to Williams Selyem, which bottled them with a Leno Martinelli Vineyard designation for years. After Lee Sr. took over farming the hill, in 1993, and took over the treacherous task of discing it with his John Deere, he decided it was too damn much work not to keep the grapes for himself.

Even in their earliest days in California, the Martinellis were making wine for home use. The family recently opened a magnum-size bottle of 1936 Zinfandel that Leno made. “It was delicious,” Julie says.

They first made wine commercially in 1986, with winemaker Daniel Moore focusing on Zinfandel. Lee Sr. renovated the hop kiln to serve as the winery, and the hop barn to house a tasting room. By that time, it was clear to Lee Sr. that Russian River Valley’s days as an apple capital had waned. Ironically, some of those orchards had once been vineyards before Prohibition—was Sonoma County agriculture coming full circle?

“Washington could grow apples so much cheaper than we could and there was a lot more demand for grapes than apples,” Lee Sr. says, recalling his reluctance to remove orchards that had been in the Bondi family for decades. “I knew I had to pull the apple trees out, but it took me 10 years to do it.”

While the Martinellis were considering the future in Russian River Valley, things were happening on the coast. Winemakers Helen Turley and John Wetlaufer planted Marcassin Vineyard near Charles Ranch in 1991 and quickly became Pinot Noir and Chardonnay darlings. The families became friendly, and there’s an oft-told tale about the day Lee Sr. was walking with Wetlaufer when Lee Sr. pointed out a parcel of land, adjacent to Charles Ranch, that he had just purchased. Wetlaufer liked what he saw, telling Martinelli



Lee Sr. and wife Carolyn in 2016

it would make a great vineyard, but Martinelli brushed him off, saying, “No, that’s where I hunt pigs!”

Lee Sr. soon changed his mind and by the time that patch of land became Blue Slide Ridge, in 1995, Turley was the Martinelli winemaker and Wetlaufer was consulting on future vineyards, such as the nearby Three Sisters. The 6-acre Blue Slide is situated on a steep, well-drained slope that faces east and was planted to Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777, plus the mysterious X clone. “We can’t say what it is,” Gorsuch says.

Turley saw the potential of the Martinelli properties. “I had fallen in love with Jackass Hill,” she says. “And I knew something wonderful could be made from their various Sonoma County and Sonoma coastal sites.”

Blue Slide was always her favorite, particularly section four, which she shared with Martinelli, bottling a vineyard-designated Pinot Noir for both labels. “We shared that block and they divided it fairly. I imagine it always pissed off Lee Sr. that ours always got higher ratings,” Turley says playfully.

As Julie told *Wine Spectator* in 2004, “When dad started working with Helen, he went from a grapegrower to a winegrower.” It wasn’t an easy transition. Old-school growers farmed for quantity—more grapes meant more profit—but when quality is your goal, the math is different. “Lee Sr. was kind of a fox in the beginning,” Turley recalls. “I told him that we needed to take down the crop on a Chardonnay vineyard by more than 20%, and he did it, but only for the first eight to 10 vines in each row, thinking that I wouldn’t bother to go farther into the vineyard.”

Lee Sr. recalls another time early on when Turley asked him to cut 50% of the fruit from a vineyard. “So that meant leaving one cluster per cane,” he says, remembering his father’s credo of leaving two clusters per cane. “When [Leno] saw all of those clusters on the ground, he jumped in his pickup and came up to the house. ‘What the hell are you doing?’ He couldn’t hardly believe it.” Yet Leno was convinced a couple years later when he tasted the wine the vineyard produced and heard how much it sold for per bottle. “Jesus,” he said, “I had a hard time getting that much for a ton of grapes.”

“I HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH JACKASS HILL. AND I KNEW SOMETHING WONDERFUL COULD BE MADE FROM THEIR SONOMA COAST SITES.”

HELEN TURLEY

The Martinellis now farm more than 15 estate vineyards, spanning more than 45 miles of western Sonoma County, with about 400 acres in Russian River Valley and 50 on the coast. Most are on rolling hillsides and planted in tight spacing, with about 2,000 vines per acre. The *terroirs* range widely. The Russian River Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards such as Bondi Home Ranch and Zio Tony are defined by the fog that often lingers until midday, and the resulting wines are generally more full-bodied, floral and generous.

The coastal vineyards are planted on the second ridge from the ocean—by comparison, Flowers and Peter Michael’s vineyards are on

TOP: NAT & CODY



Lee Sr. and his children (from left) George, Julianna and Lee Jr. and Julianna's daughter Tessa (right) all play important roles at the winery.



Martinelli winemaker Courtney Wagoner

the first ridge—and it generally remains above the fog line. That means Three Sisters, Blue Slide and other vineyards there receive lots of sun, but the cool air flowing from the Pacific moderates the heat during the summer, making for cooler days and warmer nights. The acid and mineral profiles are more distinct on the coast, while the color from the grapes is generally lighter. “And in the winter we get twice as much rain on the coast,” says Lee Jr., who has managed Charles Ranch since 1989.

“The soil up there is really old, 140 million years,” Lee Sr. goes on. “It’s very well-drained but it’s not rich in nutrients, so the vines have to struggle a bit more but I think it gives the wine more character and flavor.”

It’s also windy, so new vineyards like Wild Thyme, which is across the road from Marcassin, have trouble getting established: “It took us three years for the rootstock to take off at Wild Thyme,” adds Lee Sr. “Some we just had to dig out and replant. Farming is a lot more difficult out there.”

Martinelli produces about 13,000 cases annually, with 32 different bottlings of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Syrah and old-vine Muscat of Alexandria. About half of that production is Pinot Noir, and 30% is Zinfandel. But that’s just a fraction of the grapes they grow. The family sells about 80% to 85% of their grapes. “That ranges from wines selling for \$20 a bottle to over \$100 a bottle,” George says. About 20 to 25 wineries buy grapes every year, including Patz & Hall, Benovia, Raen, Williams Selyem, Gary Farrell and Ramey, but only a handful produce vineyard-designated wines.

“When we choose growers to work with, it’s partly the site and the planting material used and it’s partly the farmer,” says winemaker David Ramey, whose Fort Ross–Seaview Chardonnay is harvested from Charles Ranch. “The Martinelli family, all of them, are just exceptionally good farmers. And it’s not just that they’re good farmers—are they good people? And a measure of this is that we have no written contract. We’ve got nothing written down.”

While Turley set the Martinelli house style—big wines that are richly structured yet retain finesse and detail—that has evolved since she stopped consulting in 2010.

“JUST THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX A LITTLE BIT. THAT HAS HELPED US IMPROVE QUALITY.”

COURTNEY WAGONER

Current consulting winemaker Erin Green is phasing out her role, while Courtney Wagoner, who joined Martinelli as assistant winemaker in 2015, was promoted to winemaker in 2017. Wagoner’s résumé includes Artesa, Wild Horse and Gundlach Bundschu.

Wagoner made changes in the winery, which is located just up the hill from the old hop kiln building. She takes full advantage of two temperature-controlled fermentation rooms, one for red and the other for white. The winery processes about 250 tons of fruit each year, which is usually spread over more than 100 individual lots that are separately vinified. The Pinot Noir is cold-soaked for five days, with punchdowns and pumpovers during open-top fermentation. After a light pressing, the wines go to barrel for malolactic fermentation.

The oak regimen has also evolved. About 60% to 70% new French oak was the previous standard; Wagoner dialed it back to about 50%. “I use a lot of François Frères and Remond for the Pinots, and the Syrahs get Taransaud,” she says. “Pinophiles are a little more of the academic crowd who want to analyze everything. They want to know the clones and the barrel breakdown. With Zin it’s just, ‘Where’s the appellation and how old are the vines?’ The interest is not as precise.”

The key to Wagoner’s approach is trying to remain true to the vineyards and the wines of

the past while bringing more balance to the house style. “The alcohol doesn’t matter, the acid and the sweetness don’t matter. Balance trumps everything. The wine has to be balanced,” Wagoner says. The most significant changes have been in the vineyards. Farming practices, Lee Sr. says, have changed dramatically.

“There’s definitely a ton of improvements in the vineyard in the almost eight vintages I’ve been here,” Wagoner says. “And the family is willing to do that, willing to look at cluster counts, at overall health and nutrition in the vineyard. Just thinking outside the box a little bit. That has helped us improve quality.”

Many of the Pinot Noir clonal selections have been converted in existing vineyards. At Bondi, which was planted in 1997, clone 115 was replaced by 943, which physiologically matures at a lower level of ripeness.

Wagoner admits that she has a “softer palate” than her predecessors, but she has to walk a thin line. Martinelli sells 80% of its wines direct and has an almost cultish following. “I’ve been making the picking calls by myself, and I probably pick earlier. The wines don’t always have to be intense and in your face but I have to keep that identity through each vintage. The customers know the wines and expect them to be a certain way,” she says.

While the Pinots remain essentially true to form, Wagoner revamped the Syrah program, playing down the green olive, earthy edge and blousy ripeness of the hearty red. “I’m a Zin girl and I like a lot of fruit and flavors,” she says. “I don’t like a lot of tannins in Syrah. I think that’s where I’ve made the most changes in



Harvest at historic Jackass Hill Vineyard

winemaking.” The Syrah now spends more time in barrel and goes through extra racking to round the edges.

Once the grapes arrive at the winery, the family is relatively hands-off, but Wagoner says she had to earn that trust by showing results. Lee Sr., for his part, is pleased with the new wines. In the old days, he drank mostly Zinfandel, but grew to love Pinot Noir. His current favorite is the more delicate and floral Pinot from Sky Ridge, a Pinot vineyard planted in 2017. “The velvet in my mouth was like, oh God, this is what I love,” he says. And while he never cared for the old Syrah and admitted to never drinking it, he added, “I really like it now.”

It’s May 5 and the annual Sonoma County Barrel Auction is getting underway at McMurray Ranch just outside Healdsburg. Lee Sr. and Carolyn are being honored as icons of the Sonoma wine industry. Julie is on stage to introduce her father.

“My parents gave me and my siblings really the very best childhood,” she tells the crowd. “We grew up on 1,000 acres and there were woods and creeks, so I’d get up in the morning and ride my horse all day and swim in the creek with my cousins. It was just really a fabulous upbringing.” The auction crowd stands as Lee Sr. comes on stage for a brief speech. His emotions are near the surface. It has indeed been a good life for Lee Martinelli Sr., and at age 84, he’s still planting new vineyards and driving his tractor across perilous Jackass Hill.

“Tradition is big in my family, honoring our roots, and that has been instilled in all the generations from a very young age,” says Gorsuch, the first of the fifth generation working full time at the winery. After graduating from the California Polytechnic State

University in 2003, Gorsuch worked at Benziger and other Sonoma wineries for about 10 years before rejoining Martinelli. That too is a family tradition.

“She did not want to come to work for Martinelli right out of school,” her mother, Julie, says. “And I thought, ‘You need to go and work for somebody that might possibly fire you.’ She brought so much knowledge home.” Lee Jr. agrees: “You kind of take it for granted when you’re young, but then you realize what you have and appreciate it.”

While Julie, Lee Jr. and the others of the fourth generation grew up on the same ranch as their father, their childhoods were easier. Lee Sr. tells stories about working dusty, hard land with a hoe on hot summer days while his friends were swimming in the river. His father never paid him. “I used to have to beg my dad for a dollar to go to the movies,” Lee Sr. recalls. “As soon as I was 14 and got my driver’s license, I went to work for somebody else down the road.”

Julie recalls harvesting grapes on Jackass Hill with her grandfather Leno when she was 8 or 9. Her bucket toppled over on the steep slope and it rolled down the hill. “I thought, ‘Oh, I’ll just get another bucket,’ but my grandfather was right behind me, and he said, ‘You go get that bucket, and on your way back up, you collect every single cluster.’ That was money on the ground and you’re not just going to leave it there.”

Lee Sr. made sure his children were paid to polish apples and work harvest for apples and grapes. Julie recalls, “Dad on Saturdays would have us hoe around the vines, or when he was planting a new vineyard, we’d be out there tying the vines. It wasn’t like we had to work for a whole big 8-hour day. And we always tried to get out of it. He was never a slave driver.”



The clan, from elders to youngsters, gathers for a meal

Lee Jr. was running a crew of five apple pickers when he was only 10. “It was just a little bit of money [dad] paid us, but it gave us a sense that money is something you have to manage. And you have to be responsible with it,” Lee Jr. says.

Gorsuch and her siblings and younger cousins were raised with a similar ethic. She also picked grapes on Jackass Hill, like her mother. “We spent a lot of time in the winery with her. She had work to do and we would do our homework. If your last name is Martinelli, you’re on the floor packing wine or recycling boxes and washing wineglasses during the summer,” she says. “We had to work on the bottling line every summer when I was a kid. Now my cousins are doing that.”

And yet, Lee Sr. wasn’t the easiest father. “He was tough but he has mellowed a lot. Growing up, of course, we deserved to have some tough attention,” Lee Jr. says, laughing. “But he has always been very smart, and he really thinks things through.”

Few old farm families have adapted to the times as successfully as the Martinellis, and Wagoner attributes that to Lee Sr.’s vision. “I think that goes to his curiosity and his past as an educator. He likes looking at big picture,” she says. “He likes improving. I mean, he was the one who had the foresight to mow down the apples and put in vineyards.”

In the past 10 years, Lee Sr. has scaled back his management of the business side, but he still works six days a week. His children now share ownership and he leaves many of the details to them. “He wants to be out in the vineyard, on the tractor, working on projects,” says Gorsuch, who has taken on an increasingly significant role at the winery. “I’m excited at the potential of my cousins coming on board and helping as the older generations retire.”

Selling the family business is not a topic often discussed. “I can’t even imagine the look on my grandfather’s face if it came to that,” Gorsuch says. “The thing that makes him happiest is the thought of having our business continue long after he’s gone, to be owned and run by family. My grandparents’ goal was to create a sustainable business that could be passed on in an economically viable way to future generations. And I think that they’ve really succeeded at that.”

As he’s gotten older, Lee Sr. is nostalgic for the old days. Of all the family vineyards, it’s Bondi and Jackass Hill he holds most dear. His mother was just 3 when the Bondi family moved to the ranch, and growing up he ate Sunday dinner there every week, watching dad Leno and uncle Tony play pinochle and drink wine. “When I was 6, they would fill a glass almost to the top with water and put a splash or two of red wine in it for me,” he remembers. He and Carolyn did the same with their children.

As for Jackass Hill, he talks about the vines as if they are people. “They’re still producing and we love the fruit, but we don’t ask too much of them,” he says of the 133-year-old vineyard, which produces 4 tons total in a good year. “It’s tradition and we’ve been doing it a long time. They’re part of the family, so we have to take care of them.”

Family and tradition are two words the Martinellis use frequently. History for them inspires the future. “I love working with my children, having them involved, and I think about my grandparents who came here with a dream and achieved probably more than they expected,” Lee Sr. says. “That they worked so hard for it and we’ve been able to carry that on. I never want to do anything that they wouldn’t be proud of.”

MARTINELLI'S TOP VINEYARDS

Blue Slide Ridge

Appellation: Fort Ross-Seaview

Acres: 6

Variety: Pinot Noir

Planted: 1995; land in the family since 1994

The San Andreas Fault runs along the Sonoma Coast and over the eons has pushed up a series of ridgelines. Located on the second ridge from the Pacific, Blue Slide vineyard takes its name from the dramatic blue rock formation that juts from a cliff just below it. Lee Martinelli Sr. bought the property, which is adjacent to the family's Charles Ranch, never intending to plant grapes there. When neighbors Helen Turley and John Wetlaufer of Marcassin said the site would make a great Pinot vineyard, Lee Sr. initially brushed them off. He soon changed his mind, and Blue Slide is now Martinelli's most coveted wine. Situated on a steep slope about 1,100 feet above the ocean, the vineyard is generally above the fog line so it receives plenty of sun. The marine air and wind moderate hot summer days, and evenings are generally warmer than Russian River Valley. The soil is well-drained sandstone and clay loam, and the ridgetops in the area annually receive the most rain in Sonoma County.

Wild Thyme

Appellation: Fort Ross-Seaview

Acres: 3.75

Variety: Pinot Noir

Planted: 2009; land in the family since 2009

Named for the fragrant scent of the wild thyme that thrives on the property, this is one of the



Martinelli family's newest vineyards. Sitting along a ridgeline between Blue Slide and Three Sisters, and with Marcassin vineyard just across the dirt road, it's located in an impressive neighborhood for Pinot Noir. Wild Thyme sits above the fog line and is the coolest and highest-elevation vineyard the family farms. It's on a gentle slope that's perched on the edge of a deep and sheer canyon that old-timers called Devil's Canyon. The soils are Goldridge and Josephine, and large rocks are scattered throughout each row.

Jackass Hill

Appellation: Russian River Valley

Acres: 3

Varieties: Zinfandel, some Muscat Alexandria

Planted: 1889; land in the family since the 1880s

Secluded in the redwood-covered canyons of West Sonoma, Jackass Hill is among the oldest vineyards in California and, teetering on a 60-degree slope, it's also one of the steepest. It's a treacherous hill that the family has preserved like a monument, because it can never be replanted under modern regulations. The vineyard's name becomes obvious when you stand at the bottom of it: Only a jackass would farm it. Italian immigrant Giuseppe Martinelli was only 19 and his new bride, Luisa Vellutini, just

16 when they planted Jackass Hill. The vines are head-trained, thick and twisted with crusty bark, yet surprisingly fragile. As with Bondi Home Ranch, Lee Sr. is sentimental about Jackass Hill. When Giuseppe died, Lee Sr.'s father Leno left school to farm it, and continued to do so for 75 years; Lee Sr. took over in 1993. The vineyard produces intense Zinfandels with distinctive personality.

Zio Tony Ranch

Appellation: Russian River Valley

Acres: 45

Varieties: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir

Planted: 2000, 2001, 2006; land in the family since 1959

Named for Lee Sr.'s Uncle Tony ("zio" means "uncle" in Italian), this vineyard was once planted to Gravenstein, Rome and Jonathan apple trees. Tony Bondi was for a time one of the largest orchard ranchers in west Sonoma. Tony, the first in his family born in America, had no heirs when he died in a traffic collision in 1971, so Lee Sr. took over his business. By the late 1980s, Sonoma's apple industry was on the wane and grapevines were replacing trees, but because of family tradition, Lee Sr. hesitated to make the switch for a decade. "They were really tasty apples," he says. Located just north of Sebastopol,





Zio Tony Vineyard in Russian River Valley

Zio Tony is planted on rolling hills with Goldridge soils of fertile clay loam. It has a warmer climate than the coastal vineyards and produces rich, full-bodied wines.

Bondi Home Ranch

Appellation: Green Valley of Russian River

Acres: 17

Variety: Pinot Noir

Planted: 1997; land in the family since the 1880s

Paulo and Gemma Bondi, Lee Sr.'s maternal grandparents, emigrated from Italy and settled on this rural property west of Sebastopol, in what is now the southern edge of the Russian River Valley AVA. The family planted potatoes at first and later apple trees. It was more than a century later that Lee Sr. pulled out the apples and planted vines. The Bondi homestead holds a special place for Lee Sr. There's a lot of history there. Alma Bondi, his mother, was only 3 years old when the Bondis settled there, and he spent his youth eating family dinners there every Sunday. The ranch is a gently rolling landscape with fine, sandy loam soils that locals call Goldridge. The vines have an eastern exposure and benefit from the region's morning and evening fogs.

SELECTED RECENT RELEASES FROM MARTINELLI

WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews using the online Wine Ratings search.

SCORE	WINE	PRICE	CASES
96	MARTINELLI Pinot Noir Fort Ross-Seaview Blue Slide Ridge Vineyard 2021	\$105	281
96	MARTINELLI Pinot Noir Fort Ross-Seaview Wild Thyme Vineyard 2021	\$105	178
95	MARTINELLI Pinot Noir Green Valley of Russian River Valley Bondi Home Ranch Vineyard 2021	\$76	863
95	MARTINELLI Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Zio Tony Ranch Vineyard 2021	\$76	512
94	MARTINELLI Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Moonshine Ranch Vineyard 2021	\$76	345
93	MARTINELLI Chardonnay Russian River Valley Lolita Ranch Vineyard 2020	\$62	226
93	MARTINELLI Chardonnay Russian River Valley Martinelli Road Vineyard 2020	\$62	295
93	MARTINELLI Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Lolita Ranch Vineyard 2021	\$76	256
93	MARTINELLI Zinfandel Russian River Valley Vellutini Ranch Vineyard 2021	\$62	209
92	MARTINELLI Chardonnay Fort Ross-Seaview Charles Ranch Vineyard 2020	\$62	169
92	MARTINELLI Zinfandel Russian River Valley Lolita Ranch Vineyard 2021	\$62	222