

# Thinking small but tasting worldly

By Jon Bonné

CHRONICLE WINE EDITOR

**T**his year was all about thinking small. As in: small wineries, small vineyards, small amounts of wine.

That isn't to say you won't find familiar names among the Top 100 Wines, but much of the most interesting winemaking on the West Coast is increasingly taking place on a small scale. These aren't cult wineries — it's more about vintners who prefer to focus on modest projects they can control from budbreak to bottle.

In part, that reflects the reality that it's difficult to build your own estate from

*Continued on page 6 >>*

**2008 Varner Home Block Spring Ridge Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay** (\$39): Bob and Jim Varner delivered yet another powerhouse lineup from a slightly cooler vintage. This effort from their original parcel outside Portola Valley is edgy and filled with lime zest and thyme, with a hint of honey and a taut mineral presence. Dramatic and tightly wound.



## THE CHRONICLE RECOMMENDS *By Jon Bonné*

### Party wines

Last week we found plenty of wines to kick-start holiday festivities (see [sfgate.com/ZKRL](http://sfgate.com/ZKRL)), but the topic is important enough that it seemed worth adding a few more picks.

Since bottles tend to be bought by the basketful at this time of year, I kept a price cap — this time \$20 or less. Even so, most of today's selections would work not only at a soiree, but also as a gift to bring your host some cheer.

And though all should make for conversation (White Lambrusco? You don't say), they aren't so ostentatious as to steal the show.

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**2009 Foxglove Paso Robles Zinfandel** (\$14): Remarkably focused and fresh for a Zin, as you'd expect from the Varner brothers' second label. Vivacious huckleberry and cocoa powder, with a pleasant grip that doesn't require food but certainly welcomes it. Thoroughly versatile.

### The top vintners not at top dollar

Want a taste of Top 100 winemaking? Here are some other affordable bottles made by some of this year's top winemakers:

- ▶▶ 2008 Acrobat Oregon Pinot Noir (\$20) (King Estate)
- ▶▶ 2008 Alma Rosa Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$32)
- ▶▶ 2008 Broadside Margarita Vineyard Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon (\$20) (Broc Cellars)
- ▶▶ 2008 Cadence Coda Columbia Valley Red Wine (\$25)
- ▶▶ 2009 Calera Central Coast Chardonnay (\$16)
- ▶▶ 2009 Cep Hopkins Ranch Russian River Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$21)
- ▶▶ 2008 Copain Tous Ensemble Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$20)
- ▶▶ NV Domaine Chandon California Rosé Sparkling Wine (\$22)
- ▶▶ 2009 Foxglove Central Coast Chardonnay (\$13) and 2008 Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14) (Varner)