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NOTES ON TASTING WITH JAMES MOLESWORTH

Domaine Anderson's Pinot Noir Star Shines in Anderson Valley

The Rouzaud family-backed Mendocino County estate has been steadily on the rise for more than a decade



Domaine Anderson makes three attention-worthy and distinct single-vineyard Pinot Noirs. (Courtesy of Domaine Anderson)



By James Molesworth

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“When you learn how to farm, it’s an ongoing thing,” says Domaine Anderson’s Darrin Low while a herd of sheep graze in the estate’s Dach Vineyard in Mendocino County’s Anderson Valley.

Low joined the Domaine Anderson team as winemaker in 2016, and has implemented holistic farming practices in the vineyards, employing both organic and biodynamic principles along the way. And he’s seen the effect on both the soil and the wines.

“The soils are healthier, so the vineyard is healthier. And all that lends itself to winemaking. It gives you confidence for when harvest approaches, that you can do what you want with the grapes to get the purity we want in the wine,” he says.

Low grew up in Healdsburg and his parents had a wine shop in town, so the wine bug bit early. Now 56, [Low already has 37 harvests under his belt](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/innovative-california-chardonnay-winemaker-interviews-073124>] , most of them with Carneros and Sonoma Pinot Noir and Chardonnay operations, including J [https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=J&text_search_flag=winery&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pi] and Flowers [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/huneeus-forms-partnership-with-flowers-4517>] .

There was a Cabernet stop at [Grgich Hills](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=grgich+hills>] in Napa along the way. ... “That just made me realize I missed Pinot Noir and Sonoma,” says the affable Low with a light laugh.

Domaine Anderson has moved to the head of the class among Anderson Valley Pinot Noir producers since being purchased by [France’s Rouzaud family](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/turning-cristal-into-gold-52309>] in 2011. Not surprising, given the Rouzauds have cemented their reputation as top-quality producers with

their Champagne Louis Roederer

[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Louis+Rc_gcl=1*1kktdbe*_gcl_au*MTQ0Mjk2MDA3OC4xNzQ0MDYzMzQ1*_ga*MTA4NTEwNTQyLjE2NjE0NTg4OTc.*_ga_65Y4BX], Château Pichon Lalande [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/2024-bordeaux-barrel-tastings-pichon-baron-lalande-lynch-bages>] in Bordeaux and Delas [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=delas>] in the Rhône Valley.

Nearly all their California ventures have represented esteemed properties as well, with the purchase of Merry Edwards [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/roederer-buys-merry-edwards-winery>] and Diamond Creek [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/roederer-champagne-owners-buy-napa-s-diamond-creek>] to go along with Roederer Estate [https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Roederei_gcl=1*1g38amx*_gcl_au*MTQ0Mjk2MDA3OC4xNzQ0MDYzMzQ1*_ga*MTA4NTEwNTQyLjE2NjE0NTg4OTc.*_ga_65Y4B] and Scharffenberger. But when Frédéric Rouzaud acquired Domaine Anderson, it was very much a fixer-upper.

In 2004, what is now Dach Vineyard was mostly apple orchards and a junkyard, says Low. That's when Chicago-based lawyer Jim Ball bought the property from John Dach (pronounced "Dash"). Ball started planting vines in 2009 but couldn't make it work, and in swept Rouzaud.

Initially the grapes went to sister property Roederer Estate's sparkling wine production.

Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/precision-and-finesse-40642>] oversees winemaking for all of the Rouzaud winery operations. He hired Low and charged him with selecting the best Pinot Noir parcels from Roederer Estate's sparkling wine vineyard base and re-orienting them for still wine production.

"And that's a totally different mindset, from the farm to the winemaking," says Low, who has so far isolated 15 acres of Pinot Noir out of the total 620 acres of Rouzaud-owned vineyards in the valley. "And the trials continue, from canopy trials, new trellising, cover crop and grazing and our own composting. All of it is help in the search for the 'Super Dach,' as Jean-Baptiste calls it. That's the best piece of the vineyard to make a single vineyard-worthy Pinot Noir."

While he's been doing that, Low is sold on Anderson Valley. The area's Pinot Noirs have been quietly making a name for themselves over the past three decades.

"We get plenty of sun. Juicy fruit isn't the problem. Trying to hold that back a little is the key. Texture and finesse is important to me, intellectually," says Low. "The flipside is Anderson Valley is coastal. We're 25 miles from the coast, so it's not the same as that more bracing style on the West Sonoma Coast. But we have plenty of coastal wind and fog consistently, which helps in maintaining a freshness in the wines."

The **2022 Domaine Anderson Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Dach Vineyard** manages to stay silky, pretty and refined as it brims with expressive mulberry and boysenberry fruit flavors infused liberally with hibiscus and iris notes. Its long, shimmering finish is supported by a deftly inlaid mineral thread and it's easily one of the best bottlings to date from the winery.

"I took my winemaking aesthetics from [Jason \[Jardine\] at Hanzell \[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/a-new-hanzell-emerges\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/a-new-hanzell-emerges), from the time I spent with him at Flowers," says Low. "Whole cluster [\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/whole\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/whole) works well here for the Dach bottling because it's a warmer site. Overall I've dialed back on new oak and extraction. There's less [extraction \[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Extraction\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Extraction) time, as I press off before it's dry. And there's less [punch-down \[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Punch\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Punch), more [pump-over \[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Pump\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/index/word/Pump). It's more infusion now than extraction."

A few miles to the north of Dach, in the "deep end" of the valley as the locals call it, Pinoli Vineyard sits on weathered sandstone as opposed to the sandy loam and clay of Dach. It's also the coldest of the three vineyards that Low draws on.

The **2022 Domaine Anderson Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Pinoli Vineyard** shows a very seductive, plush yet lightweight texture, with a display of dark yet fresh mulberry and boysenberry fruit. Hibiscus, wet pine forest and warmed anise accents add more range through the finish.

"[Pinoli is] my most 'California' vineyard," says Low. "It's the biggest ball of fruit and it takes the longest to ripen up its acids during the season."

At the southern end of the valley sits Walraven Vineyard. Here Low's trials are most clearly on display, as the vineyard is still being transitioned to cane pruning. Its soil has the highest clay content of the three, and it's the warmest as well.

The **2022 Domaine Anderson Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Walraven Vineyard** shows that warmth in its alluring feel, with a smoldering black tea note that curls around a core of silky textured mulberry and raspberry fruit flavors, all set against a backdrop of hibiscus and dried anise.

All three single vineyard bottlings are made in limited volume—200 cases or fewer—and retail for about \$70. A base Anderson Valley AVA blend combines fruit from the three along with some additionally sourced fruit. It's an ideal introduction to both the Domaine Anderson and Anderson Valley profiles, and you'll have an easier time finding it, as production totals about 1,000 cases, with an SRP of \$55.

It's been a decade of steady progress at Domaine Anderson. And as he approaches his 38th harvest with 2025, it seems as if Low is just getting started.

"Oh, it's a long game for sure," he says. "I just try to be consistent in the winemaking and the direction of the farming we want to go in. And that way the vineyards get to say more and more each passing year."

Read more of James Molesworth's Winery Intels [<https://www.winespectator.com/display/stirring-the-lees-with-james-molesworth>] , hear his interviews with leading winemakers on Wine Spectator's Straight Talk podcast [<https://www.winespectator.com/straighttalk>] , and follow him on Instagram at [@jmolesworth1](http://instagram.com/jmolesworth1/) [<http://instagram.com/jmolesworth1/>] .