

FINE WINE
EDITIONS



THE FINEST WINES OF
CALIFORNIA

A Regional Guide to the Best Producers and Their Wines

STEPHEN BROOK

Foreword by Hugh Johnson | Photography by Jon Wyand

Dutton-Goldfield

Dutton Ranch is one of Sonoma's largest commercial vineyards. It was founded in 1967 by Warren Dutton, who planted Colombard and some of Russian River's first Chardonnay. The Ranch's 1,000 acres (400ha), of which half are planted with Chardonnay, are dispersed into almost 50 blocks in various parts of Russian River, including Green Valley. For decades, Dutton has supplied many top wineries such as Kistler with excellent fruit. Today, the property is run by two brothers, Joe and Steve Dutton, and in the 1990s each brother developed his own winery.

Joe Dutton established Sebastopol Vineyards, renamed Dutton Estate in 2005, using fruit solely from the ranch. Steve formed a joint venture with winemaker Dan Goldfield. Their backgrounds are very different. Steve Dutton is a fifth-generation Sonoma farmer, while Goldfield began his professional life as a research chemist at Berkeley. Fascinated by great Burgundies, he enrolled at UC Davis, graduating in 1986. Thereafter, he worked at various wineries, including Mondavi, Schramsberg, La Crema, and Hartford, where he sourced grapes, as well as making wines. Dan is lean and wiry, no doubt the consequence of spending a great deal of time riding a bicycle at high speed.

The first vintage at Dutton-Goldfield was 1998, and the winery operates on a different principle from Dutton Estate. Although much of the fruit does come from the Dutton Ranch, Goldfield buys it on the same commercial terms as any other client winery. He admits that he has an inside track: should a particular block show great promise, his partner Steve may well tip him off. Dan also buys fruit from outside sources. About 80 percent of production consists of two blended wines—a Chardonnay and a Pinot Noir—and the remainder consists of vineyard-designated wines made in quantities that range from 200 to 500 cases.

Right: Dan Goldfield, whose intelligent grape sourcing and winemaking have helped to take his wines into the top flight

The winemaking style has not altered much, so Dutton-Goldfield has a very consistent hallmark. The wines are certainly at the leaner, more elegant end of the spectrum. Good acidity gives the wines their cut and edge



Although Russian River is a cool area, it can easily deliver, in the hands of certain winemakers, big, voluptuous Chardonnays. Goldfield aims for a very different, steelier style. To achieve this, he has specific criteria for the fruit he buys. He likes old vines because they give naturally lower yields without draconian interventions in the vineyard. He favors five specific blocks on the Dutton Ranch because the fruit routinely has high acidity, which gives backbone to the wines. He also favors east-facing sites that receive more morning than afternoon sun, thus avoiding rapid sugar accumulation. All the Chardonnays are barrel-fermented, with the proportion of new oak ranging from 30 to 50 percent, and because of the high acidity, full malolactic fermentation is de rigueur here. His only rule when deciding the proportion of new wood is, “When in doubt, use less.”

Pinot Noir comes from around seven sites, chosen for their ability to ripen fruit at lowish Brix levels. The grapes are destemmed but not always crushed. After a six-day cold soak under dry ice, the must is inoculated with yeast; during fermentation, the cap is punched down, and there is usually a post-fermentation maceration of up to seven days. The proportion of new oak is slightly higher than for Chardonnay, and the wines are generally aged up to 16 months in barrel. Goldfield aims to keep alcohol levels below 14%, because he wants the varietal character to shine through. “If Pinot Noir isn’t beautiful, it isn’t Pinot Noir,” he says.

The winemaking style has not altered much, so Dutton-Goldfield has a very consistent hallmark. The wines are certainly at the leaner, more elegant end of the spectrum. Good acidity gives them their cut and edge. The most extreme wine, in this regard, is the Pinot Noir from Devil’s Gulch Vineyard in Marin County. This county, just north of San Francisco, is better known for its population of hot-tub-loving, New Age–infused suburbanites than for vineyards, but its proximity to the ocean means that

even when grapes ripen, they are high in acidity. That is certainly true of this property, which sells grapes only to Dan Goldfield and to Sean Thackrey.

Careful and intelligent vineyard sourcing and meticulous winemaking have pushed Dutton-Goldfield, in just a few years, into the top ranks of Burgundian-style producers in Sonoma.

FINEST WINES

(Tasted 2008–10)

Chardonnay

2007 Dutton Ranch Rued Vineyard ★ Vibrant and complex pear nose, oaky and with a salty minerality. Very rich and concentrated stone-fruit flavors, and weighty without being heavy, the oak giving grip rather than overt oakiness. Long.

Pinot Noir

2007 Devil’s Gulch Marin County Rich raspberry nose. Lean and medium-bodied, with red-curranty fruit, high acidity, grip, and elegance.

2007 Dutton Ranch Freestone Hill Vineyard ★ Intense, smoky nose, with spearmint, thyme, and red fruits. Lean, sleek, and concentrated, with fairly lush cherry fruit, integrated tannins, and ample spice and acidity on the finish. Still youthful. Long.

2007 McDougall Vineyard Stern nose, fairly closed, with hints of dried fruit. Dense, full-bodied, weighty, and brooding; a tannic style, but complex, vigorous, and long. Clearly needs time.

2006 Dutton Ranch Sanchiotti Vineyard Delicate nose: red fruits and tomato. Concentrated, with marked tannins and plenty of spice; not the most elegant Pinot, but it has vigor and abundant fruit.

Syrah

2007 Dutton Ranch Cherry Ridge Muted, blueberry nose. Fairly rich but also limpid and intense, a cool-climate style with tangy red-fruit flavors and a long, sweet, peppery finish. The 2006 is equally fine, but richer and plumper.

Dutton-Goldfield

No vineyards

Average production: 60,000 bottles

3100 Gravenstein Highway N, Sebastopol, CA 95472

Tel: (707) 823-3887

www.duttongoldfield.com