

## Mount Eden Pinot Noir: 1984-2016

BY ANTONIO GALLONI | DECEMBER 20, 2019

Trends come and go, but classics never go out of style. This comprehensive tasting back to 1984 showcased the astonishing quality of Mount Eden's Pinot Noir over the last four decades. It was also a poignant reminder of the enormous potential in the Santa Cruz Mountains to produce ageworthy, world-class Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Bordeaux blends of the very highest level. I have long admired Mount Eden for their complex, highly nuanced wines. Needless to say, an opportunity to survey a deep collection of Pinot vintages was a real thrill.



### A Remarkable Track Record...

Mount Eden boasts a remarkable lineage that goes all the way back to 1943, when Martin Ray planted the first Pinot Noir vines here. In the late 1960s, Ray ran into trouble with his investors, which ultimately led them to foreclose. A group of remaining investors reorganized as Mount Eden Vineyards and released their first wine with the 1972 vintage. Taking the Martin Ray and Mount Eden eras together, the property boasts the longest track record of uninterrupted production of Pinot Noir I know of in the United States, and therefore likely the New World.



*The vines lay dormant in winter, with Silicon Valley below*

The estate sits perched atop the Santa Cruz Mountains, a part of Northern California that can feel quite remote because of its heavily forested, rugged mountain landscapes and relatively small amount of vineyard land. And yet the bright lights of Cupertino, San Jose, broader Silicon Valley and the new Apple campus can easily be seen from the vineyards, a reminder of how close we are to one of the world's most dynamic and innovate economic centers.

At four decades and counting, Jeffrey Patterson's track record as winemaker is as impressive as it is rare in California. Patterson arrived at Mount Eden as assistant winemaker in 1981. Two years later, the partners hired Patterson and his wife, Ellie, to run the estate. The Patterson's increased their stake in the corporation over time and became majority owners in 2008. Today, the Patterson's run Mount Eden with their son, Reid and their daughter, Sophie.



*Jeffrey and Ellie Patterson with their son, Reid, at Mount Eden*

## Farming and Winemaking

Ray planted the original vineyard in a square 10x10 layout, with vertical trunks with spurs and basket canes, if the plants were healthy enough. Because of the vertical training, ripeness varied quite a bit from the vines closest to the soil to those higher up. Red leaf virus was rampant. Although this sort of vineyard architecture (and virus) is not considered at all desirable by today's standards, there is no denying the extraordinary quality of the wines made from these vines. Some of the most impressive wines in this tasting were bottles from the 1980s and early 1990s, which were made from the old vines. Replanting eventually became necessary, and Mount Eden carried out significant redevelopment during the 1990s. The original vineyard was last vinified in 1997 and bottled as a separate cuvée, which I was fortunate to taste for this article. One of the major challenges of making wines in the Santa Cruz Mountains is battling the elements. Rainy and cold weather is common during May/June, when vines are flowering, which means yields can vary pretty dramatically from year to year, even with modern farming.



*These steel tanks were used for the Pinot Noir until 2008*

From 1972 to 2007, the Mount Eden Pinots were made in tank fermenters that remain outside the old winery. Mount Eden purchased Domaine Eden (formerly Cinnabar) in 2007 and subsequently shifted production to that facility because it had more modern equipment. In most years, Patterson uses some stems, but the approach varies from vintage to vintage. "When I arrived in 1981, I thought a lot of the wines suffered from too heavy an influence of whole clusters. The wines were too hard," Patterson told me recently. "For years, I only worked with destemmed fruit, but then in the mid 2000s I joined a tasting group with collectors and sommeliers who were deeply versed in the wines of Burgundy, and I started to refine my approach a bit." In the early days, the Pinot spent 20-22 months in barrel, but since 2000 it has been bottled with about 10 months in barrel, a decision taken for practical reasons of space and a desire not to have empty barrels in the cellar for more than is necessary, considered a best practice. The mix of coopers has remained pretty much unchanged over the years at equal parts Sirugue light toast and François Frères heavy toast. Save the rare exception, the Pinot is generally neither fined nor filtered.



*One of Mount Eden's aging cellars in the original winery*

### **In Tasting...**

I was deeply impressed with the wines in this vertical. To be sure the best wines of the 1980s and 1990s, those made from 1940's era vines, have a deep fascination. But there are other, more recent, examples that are just as compelling. The 2011, from a very tough and low yielding vintage, or the 2014, made in the middle of a severe drought cycle, are but two examples. Despite Mount Eden's stellar track record, the wines remain under the radar and exceptionally well-priced given their superb quality and sheer character. I can't think of too many estates in the world that craft gorgeous, artisan, ageworthy wines at this level that consumers can still afford.



## Vintages from Youngest to Oldest

All tasting notes by Antonio Galloni

Vintage ↑	Producer	Name	Tasting Notes	Score	Author	Drinking Window	Release Price	Review Date
2016	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2016 Pinot Noir is especially delicate and perfumed, with lovely red berry, tobacco, cedar and dried flower notes laced throughout. Medium in body, with bright acids, the 2016 is likely to enjoy a long life in the cellar. Yields were down sharply, the result of bad weather in bloom and vines that were exhausted after several years of intense drought conditions. In some ways, the 2016 reminds me of the 2014. The similarities will be even greater if the 2016 gains a bit more volume in aging	<b>93+</b>	Antonio Galloni	2022 - 2036	Not Available	Dec 2019
2015	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2015 Pinot Noir has softened nicely since I last tasted it, although the aromatics remain a bit reticent, most likely because of the 35% whole clusters used that year. There is lovely richness and depth underneath, but readers will have to cellar the 2015 for at least a few years in order to see the wine at its best and most complete.	<b>94</b>	Antonio Galloni	2023 - 2035	\$65.00	Dec 2019
2014	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	One of the unquestioned highlights in this tasting, the 2014 Pinot Noir is brilliant, precise and wonderfully engaging from the first impression. Perhaps most surprisingly of all, the 2014 does not really seem to show any signs of drought. Today, I am quite struck by its freshness, energy and translucence. Put simply, the 2014 is a wine of pure and total class. "Two thousand fourteen was the most severe drought year I have ever experienced, including 1976 and 1977." Jeffrey Patterson added. "I dropped more crop than ever, as I was not sure how much fruit the vines would ripen. It was uncharted territory." In tasting, though, the 2014 does not come across like a wine from a drought year, which is truly fascinating.	<b>96</b>	Antonio Galloni	2020 - 2039	\$65.00	Dec 2019

2013	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2013 Pinot Noir is endowed with real tannic heft and power. Still very young, the 2013 is a big, strapping Pinot. Graphite, black cherry, cloves, leather and licorice add to an impression of gravitas. The aromatics are just starting to open up, but the 2013 still needs time, so readers should plan on being patient. "Two thousand thirteen was the mirror image of 1984," says Patterson. "A lot of everything."	<b>95+</b>	Antonio Galloni	2021-2043	\$62.00	Dec 2019
2012	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	A gorgeous wine, the 2012 Pinot Noir is just starting to show the first signs of softening. Sweet tobacco, mint, crushed flowers, leather, pine and cedar all grace this mid-weight, exquisite Pinot Noir. Beautifully perfumed and light on its feet, the 2012 is all class. It is one of the early highlights in this vertical. Best of all, the 2012 has enough freshness and pedigree to drink well for many years to come. The growing season was marked by cool, late-ripening harvest and a naturally generous crop. "In 2012, the weather was cooperative, cool and moderate during harvest, which was quite a contrast to the 2013-2017, all of which were more frenzied," winemaker Jeffrey Patterson adds.	<b>96</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2032	\$60.00	Dec 2019
2011	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	A totally ravishing wine, Mount Eden's 2011 Pinot Noir is mesmerizing in its beauty. Bright, focused and very young, the 2011 is pure class. Blood orange, savory herb, rose petal and mint are all beautifully lifted. In this vertical, the 2011 is all about tension, precision and energy, all of which it has in spades. This is another vintage marked by poor weather during bloom and a very late harvest. Production was just 362 cases, tiny relative to the norm of a 750-1,000 cases that is typical. As for the wine, well, it is stratospheric. The 2011 is one of the Pinots in this vertical that shows a distinct, but not overpowering, whole cluster character. In a word: stunning.	<b>97</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2036	\$70.00	Dec 2019

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2010	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	Another positively stunning wine, the 2010 Pinot Noir is pliant, expressive and inviting from the very first taste. Crushed flowers, sweet tobacco, mint and dried cherry are all laced throughout this highly nuanced, silky, Pinot. All the elements simply fall into place. The 2010 is just starting to drink well, but has plenty of life ahead of it. I am frankly surprised by how accessible the 2010 is today.	<b>96</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2031	\$60.00	Dec 2019
2009	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	Hard candy, pomegranate, mint, dried flowers and bright red-toned fruits all run through Mount Eden's 2009 Pinot Noir. In this tasting, the 2009 is quite forward and ripe in feel, with a distinctly wild, exotic character. The sweet, candied profile makes the 2009 a stylistic outlier next to the other wines of this era. Today, the oak is more prominent than I recall seeing in the past.	<b>92</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2029	\$55.00	Dec 2019
2008	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2008 Pinot Noir is one of the few wines in this tasting that is disappointing. The combination of the warm year, especially during the end of the season, and high yields resulted in a wine that was not built for extended cellaring. The flavors are a bit candied and overripe, while there is not a ton of complexity, especially within the context of this extensive vertical.	<b>88</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2024	\$55.00	Dec 2019
2007	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2007 Pinot Noir is racy, perfumed and super-expressive, not to mention incredibly delicious. Still quite fresh and bright, the 2007 will drink well for many years to come. Bright red berry, wild flowers, mint and rose petal notes give this mid-weight Pinot tons of punchiness. I suppose the 2007 is not quite as complex as some of the very finest wines in the tasting, but there is an element of sheer joyousness that is impossible to resist. Racy, silky and perfumed, the 2007 is just gorgeous.	<b>95</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2021	\$48.00	Dec 2019

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2006	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2006 Pinot Noir is another impressive and beguiling wine. A whole range of floral and savory notes are pushed forward, while the fruit lies more in the background. Although not an overt or obvious wine, the 2006 is endowed with magnificent nuance and overall complexity." Two thousand six shares quite a bit with 2012," Patterson adds. "Both vintages were marked by cool, late harvests and generous crops.	<b>96</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2029	\$48.00	Dec 2019
2005	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2005 Pinot Noir is quite simply unforgettable. A storm on June 3, during bloom, lowered yields dramatically, which is still felt today in the wine's textural intensity and overall richness. Powerful and ripe in feel, the 2005 offers a breathtaking interplay of soaring aromatics and deep fruit. Super-ripe red cherry, tobacco, cedar and leather are all pushed forward in a flat-out stunning Pinot from Mount Eden. Wow! Total production was just eight barrels from a total of 7 acres of vines.	<b>97</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2030	\$60.00	Dec 2019
2004	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	Deceptive at the outset, the 2004 Pinot Noir needs a bit of air to find its focus. Silky tannins and lifted aromatics give the 2004 a feeling of total sensuality and grace. The wine's mid-weight structure and delicate personality suggest it is more of a medium-term ager, but I doubt too many bottles will be around by the time the wine's ageability is an issue. Today, the 2004 is exquisite, inviting and incredibly harmonious.	<b>95</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2024	\$42.00	Dec 2019
2003	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2003 Pinot Noir is a powerful, rich wine with a huge core of fruit. Creamy, dense and beautifully layered in the glass, the 2003 possesses tremendous density and resonance, especially for a wine of its age. There is perhaps just a touch of brett, but it is not especially noticeable. If anything, the 2003 is a wine of real raciness and appeal. This is an impressive showing.	<b>94</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2029	\$38.00	Dec 2019



2002	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2002 Pinot Noir is one of the most exotic wines in this vertical. Threads of reduction and brett are evident, and yet the 2002 somehow manages to draw complexity and character out of those quirks rather than being adversely defined by them. Soaring aromatics and a range of wild, savory notes add further layers of intrigue. The 2002 is a truly eye-opening wine.	<b>92</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2024	\$35.00	Dec 2019
2001	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2001 Pinot Noir is quite powerful, and yet retains a good deal of translucence. Dried flowers, mint, sweet tobacco, anise and wild cherry are all laced together in this richly textured yet nuanced Pinot. Still quite young, the 2001 has enough depth to age for another 10-15 years, maybe more. Jeffrey Patterson describes the 2001 as his 'problem child' in this flight of early 2000s Pinots. In this vintage, Patterson decided to experiment with higher temperatures in vinification, but ultimately was not fully satisfied with the results.	<b>94</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2026	\$35.00	Dec 2019
2000	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 2000 Pinot Noir is one of the finer wines in this vertical. It is also the first wine in this tasting that is starting to show tertiary character. Even so, it retains terrific depth and textural richness. Sweet tobacco, cedar, mint, leather and incense. Readers lucky enough to own it can look forward to another decade of exceptional drinking.	<b>96</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2029	\$45.00	Dec 2019
1999	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The product of a late ripening vintage, Mount Eden's 1999 Pinot Noir is a very pretty wine. The vestiges of the cold year are felt in the wine's lithe, sinewy personality. Sweet dark cherry, earthiness, lavender, mint, tobacco and leather are all very nicely delineated. I would prefer to drink the 1999 sooner rather than later, as it has just enough freshness to hang on for another few years, but not more than that.	<b>90</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2024	\$45.00	Dec 2019
1998	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1998 Pinot Noir is attractive wine, but also fully mature. Tobacco, leather, smoke, licorice and dried herbs add complexity to this mid-weight, silky Pinot. I would prefer to drink it over the next few years, as the edges are starting to fray.	<b>89</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2022	\$40.00	Dec 2019

1997	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir Cuvée des Vieilles Vignes	The 1997 Pinot Noir Cuvée des Vieilles Vignes is a blend of just eight barrels from the original plantings on the estate, which dated back to the 1940s. In the glass, the 1997 is dense, pliant and deep, especially for a wine of its age. Succulent dark cherry, tobacco and dried flowers are nicely pushed forward. Still quite deep and potent, the 1997 has a lot say. I expect it will remain at its current plateau of maturity for another handful of years, maybe more.	<b>93</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2024	Not Available	Dec 2019
1997	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1997 Pinot Noir is exotically ripe, with a distinctly candied quality to its fruit. Soft and supple, with silky tannins, the 1997 is intriguing, if a touch fleeting. Hints of tobacco, dried herb, mint and dried cherry grace this exquisite, nuanced Pinot. I don't see any upside from further cellaring, so any remaining bottles are best finished sooner rather than later.	<b>92</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2024	\$36.00	Dec 2019
1996	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1996 Pinot Noir is one of the most hauntingly beautiful wines in this vertical. Rose petal, crushed flowers, mint and sweet red berry fruit all lift out of the glass. Ethereal, silky and beautifully perfumed, the 1996 dazzles from the very first taste. All I can really add is that I hope I have the chance to taste it again someday. The 1996 is simply magnificent. What a wine!	<b>97</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2029	\$36.00	Dec 2019
1995	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	Mount Eden's 1995 Pinot Noir is fully mature and also marked by brett to the degree other similar vintages in this vertical, such as 2002, are not. Hints of tobacco, game, dried herbs and worn-in leather are nicely delineated, but the 1995 is now past its peak. Any remaining bottles need to be finished.	<b>87</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2020	\$35.00	Dec 2019
1994	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1994 Pinot Noir is oxidized, fully mature and, sadly, past its peak.	<b>85</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019+	\$34.00	Dec 2019

1993	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1993 Pinot Noir is everything a 25 year-old wine should be. Fully mature, impeccably balanced and absolutely delicious. Time has given the 1993 lovely shades of patina and plenty of character. One of the things I love most about the 1993 is how gracefully it has aged. Scents of dried cherry, leather, sweet pipe tobacco, cedar and worn-in leather add lovely shades of complexity throughout. There is clearly no upside from hanging on to bottles further. The 1993 is so beautiful and so expressive today.	<b>92</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2021	\$25.00	Dec 2019
1991	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1991 Pinot Noir is another truly eye-opening wine in this tasting. Rich and deep on the palate, the 1991 possesses dazzling aromatic intensity and remarkable freshness to match its density and pure power. It is one of the many highlights in this tasting. Specifically, I admire its vivid layers of fruit and overall nuance.	<b>96</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2027	\$25.00	Dec 2019
1990	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1990 Pinot Noir is deep and pliant, with tons of creaminess that builds with time in the glass. It is another wine that has aged remarkably well. Still quite dense and rich, the 1990 will continue to drink well for another handful of years, maybe more. There is so much character and personality here.	<b>95</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2026	\$30.00	Dec 2019
1989	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1989 Pinot Noir is silky, perfumed and light on its feet. In this flight of 1980s Pinots the 1989 stands out for its mid-weight structure, gracious personality and remarkable beauty. The brightness of the Pinot aromatics and flavors is just compelling.	<b>95</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2025	\$30.00	Dec 2019
1988	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1988 Pinot Noir is another wine that has aged impeccably. It is a bit slender in feel next to some of the other 1980s vintages, which makes it feel a bit severe, an yet all the elements are so well balanced. Now fully mature, the 1993 is best enjoyed over the next handful of years, at most.	<b>93</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2022	\$25.00	Dec 2019

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1986	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1986 Pinot Noir has aged impeccably and retains terrific freshness for a wine of its age. Bright red cherry, rose petal, lavender and spice are all nicely lifted in this understated, super-refined Pinot from Mount Eden.	<b>94</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2023	\$20.00	Dec 2019
1985	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1985 Pinot Noir is a racy, sensual wine. Dried flowers, mint and sweet dried cherry are all laced throughout. Forward and quite expressive, this lithe, elegant Pinot Noir is showing beautifully today. The 1985 is not as exuberant as some of the surrounding vintages, but it is very fine, not to mention a real pleasure to taste.	<b>93</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2023	\$25.00	Dec 2019
1984	Mount Eden Vineyards	Pinot Noir	The 1984 Pinot Noir is another wine that has aged impeccably. Sage, menthol, pine and dried cherry confer notable freshness. Like the 1985, the 1984 is a wine of reserve more than power, with veins of supporting tannin that give persistence and a lovely sense of proportion.	<b>92</b>	Antonio Galloni	2019 - 2023	\$20.00	Dec 2019

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