

DESERT DRIVE: THE PORSCHE CAYENNE TURBO S TAKES TO THE DUNES OF DUBAI

# Robb Report

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## EXOTIC NEW FRONTIERS

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SPYKER'S C8 LAVIOLETTE

# Drinkable Feasts

*Vintner Merry Edwards makes perfect Pinots for pairing.*

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER with Merry Edwards' wines took place one evening at Charlie Palmer's Dry Creek Kitchen restaurant, located in Sonoma County's Hotel Healdsburg, where I agonized greedily over the choice between Liberty duck and rack of Sonoma lamb. In the hope of breaking this gustatory deadlock, I asked my host, who at that moment was perusing the wine list, what wine he had in mind. "Have you ever tried a Merry Edwards?" he responded. No, I said, I had not.

The butterlike lamb danced a mouthwatering duet with the wine, a 1999 single-vineyard Klopp Ranch Pinot Noir, the memory of whose velvet dark fruit lingers enticingly on my tongue to this day. This was a new vernacular for California Pinot Noir, in that the beautifully structured wine, for all its strength, could have been made with our meal in mind. Too often, new-world wines are showy, anxious to impress upon the palate their spectacular effects. But here was a virtuoso whose talents concentrated on context—whose musical phrases and nuances melded with the chef's to harmonize into a stylish and complex sensory experience. I immediately thought: I want to meet the person who made this wine.

When I finally was introduced to Merry Edwards, I realized at once that, for her, winemaking was not about the wine itself, but about the contexts in which the wine was grown and enjoyed. When we tasted her 2002 vintage, she insisted that we do so over a meal (in this case at Market in St. Helena), during which the subject matter of the conversation ranged widely, from organic gardening to writing to mushroom farming. We covered the topic of wine not in the usual critic's argot but simply in terms of how it paired with our food: Quail would be a perfect match for the Bing cherry in this wine; a nameko mushroom would precisely complement the pomegranate in another.

Edwards explained that she first came to wine through food, having begun cooking with wine early on, thanks to one of her mother's cookbooks from the California Wine Advisory Board. The interaction of different food substances fascinated her, and after she graduated with a bachelor's degree in physiology from the University of California, Berkeley (where she brewed her own beer), she enrolled in the master's program in food science at

U.C. Davis, where she chose an emphasis on enology. In 1974 she joined Mount Eden Vineyards as winemaker. When, three years later, Edwards became winemaker at Matanzas Creek Winery, she traveled to the University of Beaune, where groundbreaking research was being conducted on clonal variations of Pinot Noir.

Ultimately, her work with Pinot Noir would find its highest expression in Sonoma County, under the Merry Edwards label. "The fruit from the area has such a distinctive quality," she said.

Her releases testify to the fruit's quality: They are voluptuous, silky wines with refined tannins. But no description will do any of them justice without a culinary counterpart. With her

2003 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$34)—a blend that exhibits berry fruit, along with dark plum, chocolate, and a peppery finish—Edwards recommends a charcoal-grilled duck breast and wild mushroom salad. The 2003 single-vineyard Meredith Estate (\$48), a sensual symphony of fragrant rose and boysenberry, will pair nicely with braised rabbit and morels. For the 2003 Klopp Ranch Pinot Noir (\$48)—a rich blend of blackberry fruit and liquorlike cassis—Edwards suggests a smoked squab, Moroccan lamb, or a medallion of Kobe beef.

—BRETT ANDERSON

*Merry Edwards Wines, 888.388.9050, [www.merryedwards.com](http://www.merryedwards.com)*



*Merry Edwards' Klopp Ranch and Meredith Estate Pinot Noirs are best enjoyed with culinary counterparts.*