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Arnot Roberts (January 2014)

I was completely blown away with the wines I tasted at Arnot-Roberts. Duncan Meyers and Nathan Roberts operate out of a warehouse-turned winery just outside the Healdsburg town square. The setting is spartan but functional, with the feel of a vintage car shop. As for the wines, well, they are pretty amazing. In particular, this year I was struck with a number of wines from the Santa Cruz Mountains, which I continue to believe is the single most overlooked terroir in California. The Arnot-Roberts wines make an eloquent case for the greater recognition of these sites. Overall, the 2012 Pinots and Chardonnays show the open personality of the year. In 2011, Syrah is more successful than Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2013 Pinots I tasted are gorgeous. Higher acidity and smaller berries than 2012 give the wines a sense of energy and focus the prior vintage doesn't have. As always, Arnot-Roberts picks on the earlier side relative to some of their peers. There is no shortage of depth or flavor here, though. The wines are made with native fermentations, a high amount of whole clusters (often 100%), aged in neutral oak and bottled at about 10 months. Unfortunately I was not able to taste the Compagni Portis white, as it had just been racked. This year, there is an addition to the range, a Ribolla Gialla fermented in amphora sourced from Elisabetta Foradori in Trentino, Italy. Readers who can get on the Arnot-Roberts list should not hesitate. As someone who has the privilege to taste the benchmark wines of Italy, France, California and elsewhere on a regular basis, there is no doubt in my mind Arnot-Roberts is one of the world's great wineries. Arnot-Roberts now sources fruit from many appellations within the state. I have included all of their wines in this article for ease of reference.

2012 Arnot Roberts Ribolla Gialla (Amphora) Vare Vineyard The 2012 Ribolla Gialla (Amphora) Vare Vineyard spent 60 days on its skins, but it isn't markedly different from the non-amphora bottling. Structurally, the Amphora Ribolla is a bit bigger and richer than the non-amphora bottling, but the flavor profile is quite similar. 90 2014 - 2016 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Pinot Noir Coastlands Vineyard Another striking wine, the 2012 Pinot Noir Coastlands Vineyard is simply stunning. Here the floral and savory notes from the whole clusters are much more evident than in the two preceding Pinots. A fabric of bright cranberry, pomegranate, cinnamon and floral notes captivates the senses in a wine that conveys the essence of this rugged coastal site. 96 2014 - 2022 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Pinot Noir Legan Vineyard The 2012 Pinot Noir Legan Vineyard, from the southern edge of the Santa Cruz Mountains, fleshes out beautifully in the glass. Sweet red berries, rose petals, mint and a hint of orange peel meld together in a Pinot of nearly indescribable elegance and class. The 100% whole clusters are beautifully integrated and are felt mostly in the wine's structure, but less in the aromatic/flavor profile. A final burst of Chambolle-like sweetness leaves a lasting impression. What a fabulous wine this is. 96 2014 - 2022 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Syrah Clary Ranch Constantly changing in the glass, the 2012 Syrah Clary Ranch is wild, eccentric and striking in its beauty. Orange peel, white pepper, cranberries, crushed rocks and game are all very much alive in a complex, utterly beguiling wine of the highest level. This is one of the more aromatic, lifted wines in the Arnot-Roberts range. Today, the 2012 is flat-out stunning. 96 2014 - 2022 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Pinot Noir Peter Martin Ray Vineyard Black cherry, plum and baking spices are some of the many notes that emerge from the glass in the 2012 Pinot Noir Peter Martin Ray Vineyard. Here the style is dark, powerful and structured, which is to say beautifully contrasted to the more gracious voice of the Legan. A big, structured Pinot within the Arnot-Roberts range, the 2012 could use at least another year in bottle to fully come around. Peter Martin Ray is located above Corralitos, closer to the northern edge of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Along with the Legan, these two Pinots show the breadth the Santa Cruz Mountains are capable of. 95 2014 - 2022 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Chardonnay Watson Ranch The 2012 Chardonnay Watson Ranch is drop-dead gorgeous. Almond, yellow stone fruits, flowers and sweet spices meld together in a Chardonnay endowed with incredible class and pure elegance. Subtle and understated, the 2012 impresses for its balance and total sense of harmony. The openness of the year comes through beautifully on the finish. This is easily one of the most striking 2012 Chardonnays I tasted. 94 2014 - 2020 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Trousseau The 2012 Trousseau is another drop-dead gorgeous beauty. Sweet tobacco, mint, leather and dried cherries literally waft from the glass in a wine of pure sensual beauty. The style is aromatic, lifted and gorgeous. The Trousseau is hard to describe with words,

but imagine a fine, aged red Burgundy in the bouquet with the fruit density of a young, mid-weight red. Faded rose petals and sweet dried cherries linger on the close. The 2012 is a blend of the three sites, Luchsinger (the source of the original fruit for this bottling), Bohan-Dillon in the Fort Ross-Seavie AVA, and Bartholomei in the Green Valley AVA. 94 2014 - 2018 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Ribolla Gialla Vare Vineyard A big, broad-shouldered white, the 2012 Ribolla Gialla Vare Vineyard is laced with expressive almond, hazelnut, spices, orange peel and dried pears. The style is warm, rich and slightly oxidative, with lovely burnished tones and fabulous overall balance. In 2012, the Ribolla Gialla saw six hours of contact on the skins prior to being fermented in stainless steel and aged in oak. All things considered, the straight Ribolla is not that different from the version rendered in amphora. 91 2014 - 2016 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Chardonnay Trout Gulch Smoke, slate, gunflint and bright citrus notes jump from the glass in the 2012 Chardonnay Trout Gulch. A wine of pure tension and energy, that captures all of the magic of the Santa Cruz Mountains. There is a translucency and crystalline purity to the 2012 that are impossible to miss. What a gorgeous wine this is. 96 2014 - 2020 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Syrah Griffin's Lair Vineyard Graphite, game, savory herbs, tobacco, smoke and black fruit inform the 2012 Syrah Griffin's Lair Vineyard. The intensity of the fruit is matched pound for pound by the tannin. As is often the case with Griffin's Lair, the fruit is insanely beautiful, but will it outlast the tannin? I am not sure about the future, but the 2012 is striking today, even if it is a bit rustic. 92 2016 - 2022 Jan 2014

2012 Arnot Roberts Syrah North Coast The 2012 Syrah North Coast is dark, juicy and loaded with personality. Black pepper, black cherries, cloves, menthol and new leather jump from the glass. There is plenty of immediacy and pure pleasure to be found in this supple, beautifully layered Syrah. The 2012 can be enjoyed upon release and over the next handful of years. The vineyard sites are La Cruz, Clary Ranch, Alder Springs, Griffin's Lair and Baker Lane, a site in the Sebastopol hills that is part of the blend for the first time in 2012. 91 2014 - 2020 Jan 2014

2011 Arnot Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Clajeux Vineyard The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Clajeux Vineyard is soft, open and wonderfully accessible. Dark red/blackish fruit, smoke, tobacco, menthol and new leather meld together in a juicy, approachable Cabernet. The wine's mid-weight structure appears best suited to near-term drinking, but I doubt that is going to be much of an issue here. Sweet floral notes reappear on the expressive finish. There are no hard edges or angular contours here. 91 2014 - 2023 Jan 2014

2011 Arnot Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Fellom Ranch From a site in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Fellom Ranch is the clear standout in this flight of 2011 Cabernet Sauvignons. A super-classic profile of sweet tobacco, spices, plums and new leather wraps around the palate. Like all of the 2011 Cabernets here, the 2011 is medium in body, gracious and built to be enjoyed sooner rather than later. 92 2014 - 2021 Jan 2014

2011 Arnot Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Bugay Vineyard The 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon Bugay Vineyard is silky and approachable, but it lacks a measure of mid-palate depth and pliancy. Dark red and black cherry notes emerge from the glass in a soft, mid-weight Cabernet that appears best suited to near-term drinking. The elements never seem to fully come together here. 88 2014 - 2019 Jan 2014

2013 Arnot Roberts Pinot Noir Peter Martin Ray Vineyard Another winner, the 2012 Pinot Noir Peter Martin Ray Vineyard is absolutely gorgeous in this vintage. Broad and ample on the palate, the 2013 has more than enough fruit to fill out its large-scaled frame. There is a pure resonance and creaminess in the 2013 that is striking. Dark, baritone nuances develop in the glass, giving the wine a sense of gravitas and depth that is impossible to miss. (93-95) 2015 - 2023 Jan 2014

2013 Arnot Roberts Pinot Noir Trout Gulch Vineyard All of the hallmarks of the Arnot-Roberts house style come together in the 2013 Pinot Noir Trout Gulch. Bright cranberries, freshly cut flowers, crushed rocks and mint literally jump from the glass. The tannins are precise, chalky and super-refined. Simply put, this is a breathtaking effort. (94-96) 2015 - 2023 Jan 2014

2013 Arnot Roberts Pinot Noir Legan Vineyard The 2013 Pinot Noir Legan Vineyard hits the palate with an exotic mélange of savory herbs, orange peel, red fruit and crushed flowers. The 2013 is a bit more savory, tannic and structured than the 2012, the result of a vintage with higher acidity and smaller berries. This is a fascinating comparison to the much more feminine 2012. I can't wait to taste it in bottle. (94-96) 2015 - 2023 Jan 2014