

Arnot-Roberts

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By [Josh Reynolds](#)

Duncan Meyers and Nathan Roberts are unapologetic fans of high-acid, emphatically racy white wines but are leery of excessively sulfured whites "where anything subtle is beaten down by the SO₂." When I visited their winery this spring one thing Duncan said about a particular chardonnay vineyard stood out: "you wouldn't want to live there." He was referring to the cold and windy climate that makes for a long growing season and necessitates late harvesting "at full phenolic maturity but with low Brix levels and good retention of natural acidity." Meyers and Roberts are such acid freaks that they've actually taken to roasting their own (excellent) coffee from green beans to a very light color because they find all of the commercially available coffees they've tried acid-deficient. Interestingly, their red wines, while also decidedly on the fresh side, can show real heft and fruit sweetness, but nothing that screams "New World" in any way. Yields were higher than usual in 2012, as might be expected, but the cool sites that work "never throw a large crop anyway, so a larger crop is a relative thing."

2012 Arnot-Roberts Chardonnay Watson Ranch Vineyard Napa Valley

Bright yellow. Vibrant aromas of pear skin, iodine, agave and salty minerals, with a subtle floral note in the background. Tight and stony on the palate, offering vibrant citrus fruit and quince flavors that show a refreshing bitterness. Finishes dry, linear and long, with resonating mineral and orchard fruit notes and excellent clarity. There's zero fat here. **92**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Chardonnay Trout Gulch Santa Cruz Mountains

(sourced from 35-year-old vines planted in sandy loam soil; fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak): Pale yellow. Spicy orange zest and melon on the fragrant, mineral-accented nose. Dry and tightly wound, offering tangy Meyer lemon and green apple flavors and a richer note of nectarine. Finishes with suave florality and excellent tangy persistence, leaving bitter citrus zest and mineral notes behind. **92**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Ribolla Gialla Vare Vineyard Napa Valley

(fermented in stainless steel and aged in neutral oak for ten months): Bright yellow-gold. Ripe citrus and orchard fruit flavors are lifted by a zesty mineral nuance and a touch of ginger. Dry and taut in the mouth, offering intense green apple, lemon zest and quinine flavors. Closes tangy and long, with building spiciness and very good clarity. This racy wine checks in at 11.5% alcohol. **91**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Old Vine White Compagni-Portis Vineyard Sonoma Valley

(a blend of sylvaner, riesling and an array of obscure white varieties that were planted 58 years ago; stainless steel-fermented and aged in neutral oak): Greenish gold. Quince, pear skin, herbs and white flowers on the mineral-accented nose. Dry and nervy on the palate, offering tangy lemon pith and dried orchard fruit flavors with a refreshingly bitter edge. Finishes tight and long, with a touch of smokiness and good stony cut. **90**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Trousseau Luchsinger Vineyard Clear Lake

(made from fruit grown in the Luchsinger, Bohan Ranch and Bartolomei vineyards; vinified with 100% whole clusters and native yeasts): Light red. Dried strawberry, blood orange and rhubarb on the incisive nose, with a spicy nuance adding complexity. A juicy, tightly focused lightweight that offers refreshingly bitter red fruit flavors and notes of white pepper and succulent herbs. Very accurate to the variety, finishing with strong cut, gentle tannins and a lingering cherry pit quality. **90**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Pinot Noir Legan Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains

(made with all whole clusters, from 33-year-old dry-farmed vines on their own roots that are planted on sandy loam at an altitude of 1,400 feet): Brilliant ruby-red. Highly perfumed bouquet evokes fresh strawberry, raspberry, blood orange and candied rose. Deeper-pitched cherry-cola and candied violet qualities become spicier with aeration, showing very good depth and mineral lift. Finishes tangy and quite long, with resonating minerality and gentle tannins. **92**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Pinot Noir Peter Martin Ray Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains

Bright red. Wild, intensely perfumed cherry pit and potpourri aromas are complicated by Asian spices and smoky minerals. Concentrated, lively and sharply focused, offering bitter cherry and red berry flavors that become sweeter with air. The energetic finish shows excellent clarity, silky tannins and resonating floral character. **92**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Pinot Noir Coastlands Vineyard Sonoma Coast

(made entirely with whole clusters): Vivid red. Mineral-accented aromas of cherry, rhubarb and blood orange, with a hint of rose oil building with air. Bright and energetic, offering sharply focused bitter cherry and floral pastille flavors and a hint of star anise. Shows excellent lift and clarity on the finish, with the red fruit and spice notes echoing. This is the first vintage for this bottling. **92**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Syrah North Coast

(made from fruit grown in the La Cruz, Baker Lane, Clary Ranch, Alder Springs and Griffin's Lair vineyards; all whole clusters and neutral oak): Brilliant ruby. Pungent, smoke-accented blackcurrant and cherry on the nose, with a bright mineral quality adding complexity and focus. Firm, vibrant cherry and violet pastille flavors show very good concentration but no excess weight, with juicy acidity adding cut. Aeration brings up deeper blackberry and licorice notes that linger on the persistent, youthfully tannic finish. **91**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Clary Ranch Sonoma Coast

(100% whole cluster and 12.2% alcohol): Bright violet color. An intensely perfumed bouquet evokes raspberry, blueberry, cinnamon, smoky herbs and minerals. Tangy and precise, offering slow-to-open, gently sweet red and dark berry flavors plus hints of Asian spices and tangy minerality. Closes with outstanding clarity, energy and persistence, leaving peppery spice and mineral notes behind. **92**

2012 Arnot-Roberts Syrah Griffin's Lair Vineyard Sonoma Coast

(all whole clusters and 13.2% alcohol; neutral oak): Dark purple. Exuberant aromas of blackberry, blueberry and floral oils, along with hints of smoked meat and licorice. Fine-grained, silky dark berry flavors are complicated by floral and peppery spice notes, with lively acidity adding lift. Finishes on an emphatic smoky note, with excellent clarity and length and slow-building tannins. **93**

2011 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Clajeux Vineyard Chalk Hill

(12.7% alcohol; made with 30% whole clusters and native yeasts; aged in one-third new wood for 22 months): Vibrant ruby-red. Zesty redcurrant and cherry on the nose, with a smoky mineral quality adding urgency. Taut red berry, bitter cherry and licorice flavors show good power but no excess fat, picking up tangy minerality and spiciness with air. Juicy, sharply focused cabernet, with subtle tannins adding finishing grip. **90**

2011 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Bugay Vineyard Sonoma County

Bright ruby. High-pitched aromas of cassis, minerals, lavender and bitter chocolate. Juicy and precise on the palate, with intense, mineral-tinged dark berry and bitter chocolate flavors that put on weight with air. Unwinds with aeration and picks up a sweet floral pastille quality that carries through a smoky, youthfully tannic finish. What this cab lacks in weight it makes up for in flavor intensity and energy, but I suspect that those whose benchmark for the variety are warm-year Napa versions will be less impressed than I was. **91**

2011 Arnot-Roberts Cabernet Sauvignon Fellom Ranch Santa Cruz Mountains

Inky ruby. Blueberry, cassis, bitter chocolate, licorice and pipe tobacco on the fragrant nose. Silky and sweet on the palate, with smoke-accented cassis, cherry and bitter chocolate flavors underscored by a zesty mineral quality. Becomes more energetic with air and finishes spicy and long, with pliant tannins coming on late. This vineyard is in a warm site, Roberts and Meyers pointed out, "so it didn't suffer nearly as much or have the ripening problems as most did in '11." (JR). **91**