



Hello,

# DARLING

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The Winter Release

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## A Letter From Ashley

February 1, 2022

Friend!

I'm so happy you've received this box of wine. It comes straight from our hearts in Sonoma, CA to your home. We made these wines in the fall of 2020, a vintage like no other.

Since the California wildfires compromised most crops that year, we were lucky enough to make the small amount of beautiful wine that we did; and these wines are the last bottles that we have from the vintage.

They were inspired by the idea of spending time around a communal table cultivating connection. We envision these wines paired with laughter and food that was made with intention, ingredients that have been tended and cared for, or recipes that have been passed down through generations.

While Thomas is our head winemaker, I focus on the storytelling behind our venture and our "why." The packaging you see here has been designed to tell the story of "where" and "how." Our blue label represents the coastline of Sonoma and the oceanic influence it imparts. Fog, spindrift, and sea mist make their mark on the grapes through tunnels of windy gaps. The green label is a nod to towering Redwood forests that surround sloping vineyard sites in Mendocino, where the air smells of pine, feels cool to the touch, and sacred-like mountains and valleys span for miles. Since everything we do in the winery prioritizes purity, our labels are purely monochromatic designs that depict the fermented juice inside. We're trying to showcase our minimal-intervention processes through minimalistic and clutter-free design as a brand promise to you.

Lastly, the little cut-out notch that points west on every bottle points to where we are focused on sourcing and producing wines from; as close in proximity to the Pacific Ocean as we can. Additionally, we personally moved west to build our dream of a life together in California, and that was exactly what our grandparents and great-grandparents did when they emigrated from Ireland and Bohemia.

We're now lucky to share this adventure with our six-month-old son, Desmond. I spend the majority of my time with him right now, while working in tandem with Thomas to keep all the wheels of our life in motion. Desmond is more beautiful than I ever could have imagined. He inspires me to view the world through a lens of awe and wonder. When we go outside and into the backyard, he is in utter shock, his eyes light up watching leaves whirl and twirl and fall onto the ground. It's so fun being in the present moment with him, and I've never invited this much play into my daily life ever before. It's the moments when I find myself using a burp cloth to polish a wine bottle for Instagram while picking up a toy with my big toe, that makes me chuckle and think, "How lucky am I?"

So, here's to more play, deeper connection and extraordinary wine.



Ashley Darling  
Owner





## About the Vintage

In the last Fall Release brochure, we shared a bit about the wildfires, pandemic, and other challenges that we were facing during the 2020 harvest outside the four walls of our house. This Winter Release, we'd like to let you in on what was going on within our four walls throughout the harvest and winemaking season.

We had just experienced a miscarriage in the summer of 2020 leading up to harvest. It was the most physically and emotionally painful event we had endured together. We wanted a way to respect and mend the wound, so we planted some flowers in our backyard to remember the love and joy we had felt.

We were (basically) living on a construction site, living in our home while renovating it in anticipation of a growing family. Including Mylo, we lived in a 400 sq ft studio, and if you

think back to what life was like in 2020 (i.e. fear of being anywhere other than your home) let's just say it was a lot of "quality" time. The work-from-home Zoom calls were made from the bedroom, which was also the kitchen, living room, and dressing room. Don't mind the loud tile saw and hammering in the background!

We were looking forward to harvest as it is our most exciting time of year. Then the lightning fires hit; we'll never forget sitting in that tiny studio looking out the small



window to see the haze of smoke and orange glows. It was worse than we ever could've expected. After moving through the pandemic, it felt like a blow. We received call after call from our grower partners stating the crop was surely compromised and we felt for them; we all needed a break.

As it turns out, we did catch a break. With how small our production is, we were fearful about what not making a 2020 vintage would mean for our business, so we stayed in touch closely with Julien Teichmann, the Vineyard Manager at La Cruz Vineyard. We visited every other day to monitor the smoke drift and ripening levels in the vineyard. Fortunately, because the vineyard is so close to the windy San Pablo Bay, the smoke drift stayed at a safe distance away, and we were able to harvest our fruit without any smoke taint. The result? A stunning white wine from a beautiful organic/biodynamic block.

The growers who provided us with these grapes are incredibly dedicated to utilizing organic and biodynamic farming practices, which proves challenging in cooler, coastal climates. The family that owns the Chardonnay vineyard, La Cruz, emigrated from Switzerland to Mexico in the early 1900s, where they built the first hydroelectric power plant as a form of renewable energy. After moving to California, they purchased their dream property in Sonoma and with the assistance of noted viticulturist and winemaker Ted Lemon, they planted their vines in 1989.

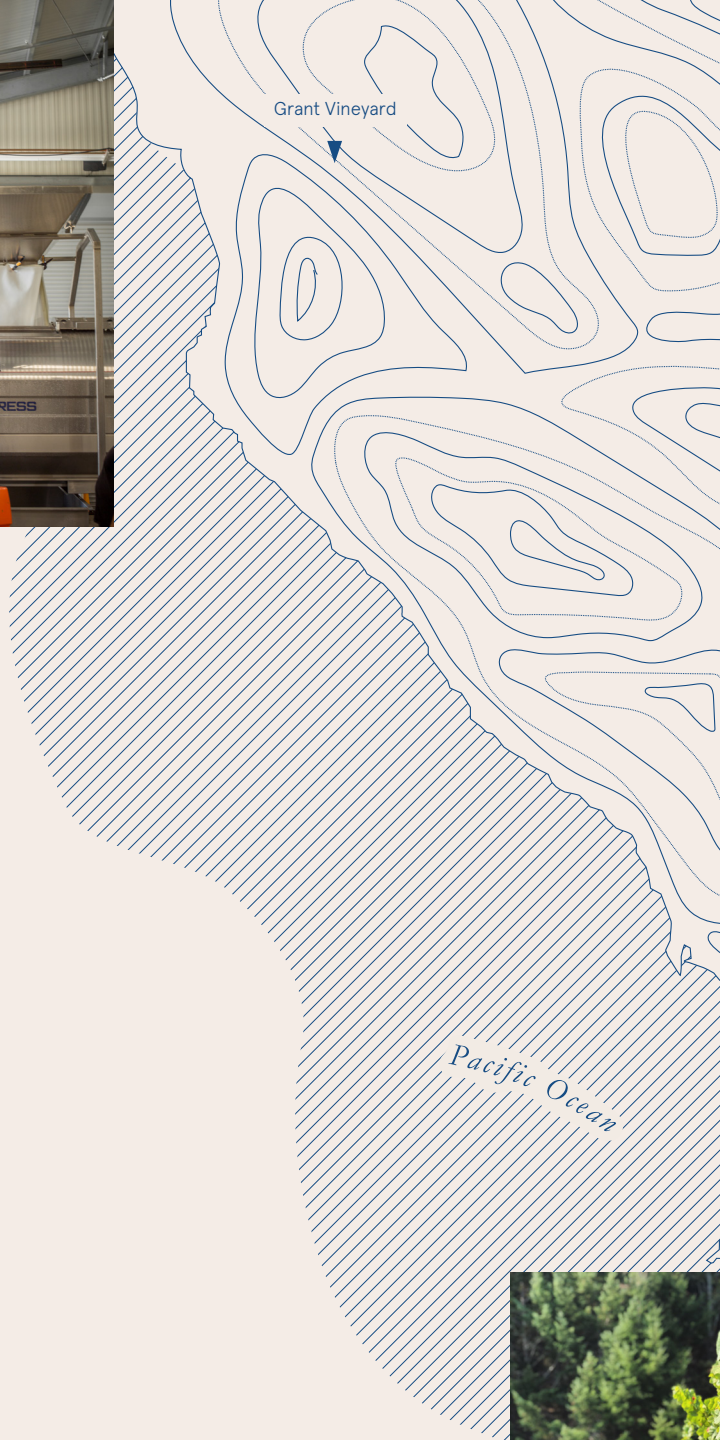
Our second break came when a friend called and said he had another friend with extra Pinot Noir in Anderson Valley. We hadn't explored this region before, but we knew its clout well within the California Pinot Noir world. Even better, the vineyard was located in the cooler, "Deep End" of the Anderson Valley, right where we would have chosen to make wines from if we could. We were put in touch with the Grant family and immediately visited their vineyard days after we got the call. The fruit was ripening perfectly on the steep, sandstone hillside, within a gorgeous, Redwood forest bordering, and most importantly, it was outside any fire zones. We sampled the sugars and called the pick for just a few days later, and today we have one of our favorite Pinot Noirs we have ever produced.

In the wine industry, we talk at great length about grapes, clones, rootstocks, soils, microclimates, and more, and sometimes we overlook the people and the stories behind what was going on when the liquid in our glass was made.

We are grateful to have made any wine at all from 2020 and given the small amount we did make, you can bet they got our full attention from harvest all the way to the bottle. We know our wines intimately, and in 2020 with what seemed like only a few barrels in the cellar to look after, we have an even deeper connection with these wines, these time capsules, that you have received today.



**Left:** "In memory of the love and joy we shared with our first pregnancy." **Right:** "This is our home where we were crazy enough to live while making these 2020 wines!"



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## Chardonnay

La Cruz Vineyard

This Chardonnay was ripped out last year as the 2021 drought proved too tough for these 32-year-old low-yielding Chardonnay vines. The vineyard owners made the difficult decision and thus, 2020 will be the final vintage from this special site.

The vineyard crew at La Cruz use a combination of organic and biodynamic practices to care for the vines by hand. This takes an incredible amount of time, effort, and intention, which we appreciate so much as we feel it shows in the finished wine.

Our final La Cruz Vineyard Chardonnay bottling is focused around the acidity and texture this rocky hillside exudes. It is absent of buttery, sweet, or oaky characteristics found in most California Chardonnays since we choose to harvest grapes before there is too much sugar in them, which in turn keeps our finished alcohol levels quite low. The wine tastes like Meyer lemons, key limes, Opal apples and sourdough. Enjoy for 3-4 hours over dinner or multiple days and watch how the flavors and aromatics evolve with time; taut and lean upon uncorking and growing softer and more broad as it airs.

### INGREDIENTS

Organically-grown  
Chardonnay grapes,  
minimum-effective sulphur  
(less than half the organic  
wine limit)

### FOOD PAIRINGS

Oysters  
Moules Frites  
Goats Cheese  
French Onion Soup



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## Pinot Noir

Grant Vineyard

We were able to acquire a few bins of this pristine Pinot Noir in 2020 and we honestly aren't sure if we'll ever have access to it again.

Nestled in the heralded "Deep End" of the Anderson Valley, the vines are planted on steep slopes of sandstone surrounded by Redwood forests. These slopes provide a generous amount of texture and tannin we don't typically see in our more gentle Sonoma Coast sites. This wine will need a 45-60 minute decant in order to open fully and express itself.

Once open, incredibly high-toned aromatics inspire flavors of Rainier cherry, ripe plum, pine sap with persistent texture that will lend well to pairing and aging. This is a Pinot Noir with a little more backbone than our normal so it will stand up to heartier winter dishes and meats. Decant before dinner and enjoy through dessert, this wine will open and evolve beautifully over 3-4 hours and additionally over 4-5 days.

La Cruz Vineyard

### INGREDIENTS

Organically-grown  
Pinot Noir grapes,  
minimum-effective  
sulphur (less than half  
the organic wine limit)

### FOOD PAIRINGS

Lasagna Alla Bolognese  
Sesame Crusted Tuna  
Mushroom Stroganoff





# Women Who Love Wine

## Customer Feature

Our customers are the foundation that make all of this possible. Meet professional cyclist Jess Cerra and learn why she drinks DARLING.

“As a professional cyclist, chef, and founder of a small food company, combining the joy of riding, good food, and wine is an important aspect of my life. Savoring a glass of wine in the evening is part of my daily ritual and reward for hard work and dedicated training on the bike. Unfortunately, that would often come at the sacrifice of feeling good, sleeping well and recovering optimally. Discovering DARLING changed all of that for me because this wine fits perfectly into my lifestyle and helps me continue to achieve my goals as an athlete and busy professional. Having an organically sourced, lighter, lower alcohol wine makes all the difference in how I feel and recover, yet still offers that distinct flavor that I crave in a glass of wine. I honestly tell every athlete, foodie, and wine lover in my life about this wine.”



Check Jess out on Instagram at [@jesscerra](#), or her Montana cycling event at [@thelastbestride](#), as well as the energy bar company she's founded at [@jojebar](#).





Learn more from Amanda McCrossin at [@sommvivant](#) and the Wine Access Unfiltered Podcast.

## Advice From a Sommelier, Amanda McCrossin.

What's one thing you can do to improve your wine almost every time? Nope, it's not buying some fancy new gadget: It's decanting. The fact is, few things do as much for your wine as decanting does. From rounding out and softening tannins, to helping the wine fully express itself, a little bit of air can go a long way. And believe it or not, it's not just for big, tannic reds. Champagne, White Wine, and yes, even Pinot Noir, can really benefit as well. Here's how to do it and a few pointers to make you look like a pro.

First, you'll need just a few things: a decanter, a light source (an unscented candle or even iPhone flashlight work great), and a little extra time. With the decanter in one hand, and bottle in the other, hold both at about a 45 degree angle with the neck of the bottle situated over the light source (\*\*if using candle don't get it so close that you heat the neck!). Slowly pour the wine from the bottle into the decanter slowly and gently so the wine just grazes over the neck of the decanter and doesn't splash. As you near the end, start to look for any sediment in the neck (you may not have any in younger wines or in white or Champagne) and stop pouring once you see it. Let the wine breathe at room/cellar temperature for anywhere from about 5 min to 30 min – most wines won't need more than that, so don't overdo it! More is not more with decanting so there's no need to let it breathe for hours on end unless you want to lose some of the great aromas and flavor of the wine.



## Who We Are

Handcrafted, extraordinary,  
minimal-intervention wines for  
those who seek the best for  
themselves and their communities.

With a modern and open mind, we are committed to people  
and place, while rooted in traditions that stand the test of time.



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