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Wine of Week- Pfendler Vineyards 2018 Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County Pinot Noir

- Peg Melink, November 26, 2019

For your Thanksgiving feast, you want to uncork a pinot noir crafted by a winemaker whose palate was shaped by a serious home cook.

Erica Stancliff grew up in Forestville, and her kitchen was always filled with enticing aromas of delectable dishes her mother, Rickey Trombetta, had concocted.

Being raised by a chef, Stancliff said, is what makes her pinots food-friendly; she sees wine through a food lover's lens. Her mother always had a garden ripe with herbs, vegetables and flowers, as well as orchards and blackberry bushes. And she would harvest the garden to make dinner.



Erica Stancliff, winemaker at Pfendler Vineyards

Stancliff's tasting prowess revealed itself when she was 10 years old. After tasting a glass of wine, she rattled off descriptors — vanilla, cinnamon, blackberry, pie crust — and vintner Paul Hobbs was unduly impressed. The family friend, at the house for dinner, looked at Stancliff's parents and said "she needs to be a winemaker."

Today the food-centric winemaker is behind our wine of the week winner, the Pfendler, 2018 Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County Pinot Noir at \$55.

While Stancliff's first official harvest with Pfendler as winemaker was in 2019, she finished the winning 2018 pinot noir. It's an elegant, food-friendly pinot, one fit for a feast. It has tangy fruit, crisp acid and impeccable balance. This pinot has layered flavors of raspberry, cherry, clove and herbs. The Pfendler has a Bing cherry lingering finish, and everything about this pinot is spot on.

Stancliff, 31, has been the winemaker of her family's label since it was founded in 2010. She has a bachelor of science degree in enology from Fresno State, and she credits Hobbs with guiding her to her calling. "I was walking through a vineyard one year right before harvest with Paul Hobbs, and he started talking about the passion behind winemaking, making something with your hands that's a labor of love," Stancliff said.

At your Thanksgiving feast, you no doubt want to pour a labor of love. Crisp, fruit-forward pinots marry well with rich and savory dishes, from turkey and dressing to mashed potatoes and gravy. Thanksgiving has always been a special holiday for the Pfendler family because it marks the end of harvest, according to owner Kimberly Pfendler.

"My parents moved from Minnesota over a decade ago and live in a home overlooking our Pullis vineyard, so my whole family has a very special connection to our wines," she said.

Pfendler is located in the Petaluma Gap region of the Sonoma Coast, where Mother Nature grooms crisp yet ripe pinots with its foggy mornings, sunny days and windy afternoons.

"Since starting the winery in 2007, Pfendler Vineyards has earned a reputation for quality," Stancliff said. "The wines have a unique character to them, which could only come from the Pfendler vineyards. Kimberly Pfendler makes meticulous farming a priority, and only the best fruit makes it into these wines."

