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ADVENTURES  
DOWN THE  
ROAD AT

# KENWOOD

THE STORIED SONOMA  
COUNTY WINERY  
CONTINUES TO BLAZE  
NEW TRAILS

Kenwood Chief  
Winemaker  
Pat Henderson in  
the vineyards.





{ cover story }

Diversity creates a broad palette of flavors for Chief Winemaker Pat Henderson to choose from as he creates the Kenwood portfolio.

ADVENTURES  
*Down the Road*  
AT

# KENWOOD

**BY JEFF COX**  
PHOTOS BY  
**ALEXANDER RUBIN**



The new Six Ridges reserve tier refers to the six mountain ridges that run inland from the coast.



Kenwood's Sonoma County Range has completely revamped packaging.



Kenwood's top tier Jack London range is named for the famous novelist who once owned the property.



## THE STORIED SONOMA COUNTY WINERY CONTINUES TO *Blaze New Trails*



to explore the rich diversity of Sonoma County's appellations and their associated terroirs is to belly up to the bar at Kenwood Vineyards' tasting room in Kenwood, California, and sample what the winery has to offer.

That's because since May, 2014, when Pernod Ricard assumed direction of this well-respected winery, it has focused on showcasing the county's regions and the best vineyards in those regions.

There has been a sea-change in the winery's portfolio as it shifts toward super-premium bottlings. Before May, 2014, three of Kenwood's five categories were wines costing \$12 a bottle or less, with wines in the \$10–\$12 range accounting for 92 percent of the volume. Now the plan is that by 2020, 80 percent of the portfolio will be devoted to wines priced from \$12 to \$35, with a Single Vineyard tier in the \$35 to \$50 range, and the flagship Artist Series Cabernet Sauvignons at \$75.

"We found that we had really interesting wines," says Kenwood's Chief Winemaker Pat Henderson of the label's super-premiumization, "but wanted to beef up our offerings to the consumer, both from an interesting perspective for on-premise and for when guests come to the winery for tastings."

This brings the winery back toward the vision of founder Mike Lee, who, with a couple of family members, bought the old Pagani Brothers winery in 1970 and created Kenwood as a way to explore the best wines that flow from Sonoma County's many and varied climatic regions.

Unlike most places in the world, where a relatively uniform climate extends over a wide area, Sonoma County is a jumble of many climates, soils and elevations. The coast is cold and often foggy, but has high ridges that lift Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vines into the sunshine above the fog line. The Dry Creek Valley, north-west of Healdsburg, balances hot days with cool nights, yielding Zinfandels packed with spice and intensity.



Bordeaux varieties grown in warm interior valleys such as Alexander Valley and Knights Valley develop opulent aromas and layers of flavors. The Russian River south of Healdsburg heads west toward the ocean, punching through a series of hills, which allows cool sea-scented air to flow into the Russian River Valley at night, providing perfect conditions for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Farther south, a wider breach in the hills forms the Petaluma wind gap that ushers cold air into the county's central plain. This air flows up the side of 2,463-foot Sonoma Mountain, cooling the vineyards' grapes as they simultaneously enjoy the intense actinic sunlight that bathes the elevation.



## KENWOOD'S STAKE IN SONOMA VALLEY

On the east side of Sonoma Mountain is Sonoma Valley. Native Americans called it the Valley of the Moon, for the way the rising moon nestles in the mountaintops. The climate is warm, but not too warm. Great Merlot is grown here. And in the heart of the valley lies the small village of Kenwood and its famous winery.

Henderson is taking full advantage of these variations. "We took a look at everything," he says. "It was all on the table and up for discussion, starting with our package on the most commercially viable range—the Sonoma County Range. We've completely revamped the package to make it stand out from the sea of sameness."

The most exciting new reserve tier of premium wines is called Six Ridges. It's named for the six mountain ridges that march from the western coast east to the border with Napa and Lake Counties. The valleys and hillsides between the ridges grow increasingly warmer as you go east.

"Russian River Valley Chardonnay is sourced from the cold Green Valley sub-appellation and yields fruit-driven wines with

limeade character," Henderson says. The Russian River Valley has come to be known as the perfect climate for Pinot Noir, and Six Ridges' delicate yet complex Pinots show off that elegance. Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon completes the Six Ridges wines offered to the trade. In addition, there's refreshing Sauvignon Blanc from the cool Sonoma Coast, Dry Creek Zinfandel from old vines grown along the valley's eastern benchland and Dry Creek Merlot, but for the time being these latter three wines are only available through Kenwood's wine club and tasting room.

As you would expect, all this diversity creates a broad palette of flavors for Henderson to choose from as he assembles

the Sonoma County cuvées called the Sonoma Series. The grapes are sourced from vineyards throughout the county, and each vineyard's fruit is fermented and aged separately in the winery's 125 stainless steel fermenting tanks and then aged in some of its 17,000 small oak barrels. "These wines are made to be enjoyed now," Henderson says. "They're bright, fresh, and balanced. I'm still following Mike Lee's philosophy: make wines to complement food!" This tier is comprised of seven varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Merlot and Zinfandel.


Kenwood's portfolio of rare and historic Single Vineyard bottlings features three wines offered to

the trade and made from fruit grown on 100 acres of high-elevation hills that were part of Jack London's "Beauty Ranch," as London called his spread above the village of Glen Ellen, just a few miles south of the village of Kenwood. London was an adventurer who wrote ripping yarns like *The Call of the Wild* that were the chief home entertainment in days before radio and television. At his ranch, he experimented with sustainable farming techniques that were a century ahead of their time. He died in 1916 at age 40, but his legacy lives on in the intense fruit flavors, fine structure and impressive depth of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Zinfandel grown on his ranchland.

Among Henderson's favorite single vineyards is the Carriger Ranch. "It's on the southwest slope of Sonoma Mountain, up off the valley floor. It has really good soil, perfect exposure and produces grapes with wonderful flavor. The lower part of the vineyard is Sauvignon Blanc and the upper part Cabernet Sauvignon," he says. That exposure faces the Petaluma wind gap, which helps cool the fruit during blazing hot summer days. From 20 to 40 percent of the Cabernet Sauvignon that goes into Kenwood's flagship wine, the Artist Series, comes from the Carriger Ranch. ■







*“We found that we had really interesting wines, but wanted to beef up our offerings to the consumer”*

Chief Winemaker  
Pat Henderson in the  
vineyards at Kenwood.

## TASTING KENWOOD

*Notes by Jeff Cox. All prices are suggested retail.*

**Kenwood 2014 Six Ridges Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$32)** A cool-climate wine with a mouthful of red fruits: currants, raspberries, and pomegranate from a small amount of Syrah in the blend. A careful tasting reveals hints of spices like cloves and nutmeg with a bit of vanillin oak. It has bright flavor, full mouthfeel and soft tannins.

**Kenwood 2014 Six Ridges Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (\$26)** There's apple and citrus at first, but then the wine opens in the mouth to reveal white peach, a smidge of tropical fruit and allspice. *Sur lie* aging with a weekly stirring produces a pleasant yeasty note.

**Kenwood 2012 Six Ridges Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley (\$35)** This rich, full-bodied Cabernet first pleases the nose with aromas of cherries, cassis, spicy cinnamon and cloves, and hints of lavender. Then it's black fruits on the palate: Bing cherries, black plums, and blackberries. A well-balanced wine with silky tannins on the lingering finish.

**Kenwood 2013 Jack London Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma Mountain (\$35)** Here's a Cab of true terroir, grown on the site of Jack London's Beauty Ranch. Its cherry and plum flavors are enhanced by spicy notes of spearmint and even cardamom with a hazelnut component in the background. This is a big wine with sturdy tannins from a great vintage and can be cellared for years.

**Kenwood 2013 Jack London Zinfandel, Sonoma Mountain (\$28)** An exceptional vintage year yielded intensely flavored Zinfandel at the Jack London ranch. Dark and brambly blackberry flavors join with bright red currants and raspberries. Zin's typical spiciness is present, along with a little vanillin oak. The finish is remarkably long.