





I'm not one for meaty wines that kick my palate like a nervous horse. Rather, I prefer easy-drinking quaffs that while full of character are noted for their laid-back attitudes and versatility. The wines of California's Russian River Valley have that makeup in abundance. The Russian River Valley AVA, or American Viticultural Area (a sanctioned winegrowing region), in Sonoma County was established in 1983 and is home to 110 wineries and vineyards favoring Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes. It's the 2014 Benovia Tilton Hill Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir that piqued my interest at a recent dinner. Refined but not fussy, the dark red glides as you drink but finishes with a zesty pop that lets you know the wine is nonetheless substantial and shouldn't be taken for granted.

Established in 2005 by husband and wife Joe Anderson and Mary Dewane, with Mike Sullivan in the role of co-owner, winemaker, and manager of all things from dirt to bottle, Benovia covers more than 71 acres across three estate vineyards. For Anderson and Dewane, Benovia is home. Their house sits on Benovia's Cohn Vineyard estate, and the family takes great care of home. "We're stewards of the land," Sullivan says. "Taking care of the soil and the land leads to higher-quality wines." Of the work put into producing sustainable and organic vineyards in what is essentially his backyard, Anderson says: "We have dogs running around the farm. There are horses. There are bees. If we use pesticides and other chemicals, the dogs could get sick, the horses could get sick, and the bees could die. Who would want to live there? The work we put into Benovia is work we put into our home." benoviawinery.com

—José R. Ralat

For more information on Benovia Winery, including a recipe and pairing suggestions, visit cowboysindians.com.