The Cool-Climate Petaluma Gap Captures Winemakers' Attention with Alternative White Wine Varieties

Three Petaluma Gap Winemakers Take Center Stage at WIN Expo's "The New White Wine Playbook"

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PETALUMA, Calif., September 29, 2026 — Long recognized for distinctive Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah, the cool-climate Petaluma Gap American Viticultural Area (AVA) is attracting attention for something less than expected: a growing collection of alternative white wine varieties that are thriving in the region's wind-driven climate.

That emerging story will be on display on December 3 at the North Coast Wine Industry Expo (WIN Expo), where winemakers from three Petaluma Gap wineries—Erica Stancliff of Deodora Estate Vineyards, Shane Finley of Thirty-Seven Wines and Gary Brooks of Brooks Note Winery—have been selected to participate in *The New White Wine Playbook: Winemakers Leading the Charge with Alternative Varietals*. They will be joined by Bill Guadagni of Orsi Family Vineyards, with Massican winemaker Dan Petroski moderating the discussion.

The prominence of Petaluma Gap winemakers on a panel devoted to the future of alternative white wines is not a coincidence. These lesser-known varieties are producing wines of exceptional quality, earning impressive recognition and scores at competitions including the North Coast Wine Challenge: Deodora's 2023 Riesling – 99 Points and Thirty-Seven's Albariño – 97 Points & Best of Class. The same climatic forces that established the AVA's reputation for outstanding cool-climate Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah are equally compelling for white varieties that are relatively uncommon in California.

"The Petaluma Gap is defined by persistent afternoon winds and cool marine air that enter through a gap in the coastal mountain range and then move east toward San Pablo Bay. This cooling influence slows ripening and extends the growing season, allowing grapes to develop flavor and aromatic complexity while retaining the bright natural acidity that is particularly prized in white wines," said Erica Stancliff, winemaker for Deodora Vineyards.

For a growing number of Petaluma Gap winemakers, those conditions are opening the door to experimentation—and producing some exciting results.

"What we're seeing is that the Petaluma Gap isn't simply a great place to grow a handful of cool-climate varieties," said Dan Berger, wine journalist and founder of Dan Berger's International Wine Competition. "Winemakers are discovering that the Petaluma Gap's wind and extended growing

season can bring remarkable freshness, acidity and character to white varieties that wine consumers may not know are grown in Sonoma County. The fact that three Petaluma Gap winemakers were selected for this panel speaks to the experimentation already taking place there."

The WIN Expo session will explore why alternative whites are gaining consumer interest, cover emerging varieties that show potential for expanding wine sales, and examine how winemakers are using alternative grapes and production techniques to create distinctive new styles. While Pinot Noir remains the Petaluma Gap's most widely-recognized grape variety, its winemakers are increasingly exploring what else this unusually cool and windy corner of California can do.

The results suggest there is much more to explore. These unconventional white varieties are producing vibrant, distinctive wines that offer a fresh expression of the Petaluma Gap—and are giving wine drinkers new reasons to pay attention to what is coming out of this cool-climate AVA. Many of these wines will be available for tasting at the Alliance's annual Wind to Wine Festival taking place on October 17th at Gambonini Family Ranch.

About the Petaluma Gap Winegrowers Alliance

The Petaluma Gap Winegrowers Alliance is a nonprofit trade association dedicated to promoting the wines, vineyards and distinctive growing conditions of the Petaluma Gap American Viticultural Area. Located in southern Sonoma County and northern Marin County, the Petaluma Gap is distinguished by its wind-driven climate, created by an opening in the coastal mountain range that allows cool marine air to flow inland from the Pacific Ocean.