

# Lula Cellars Offers Exclusive Limited Production Wines

By Susan Lanier-Graham



Lula Cellars is an exclusive, limited production winery in Mendocino County's Anderson Valley. I sat down this past fall with long-time winemaker Jeff Hansen and sampled some of his wines. I discovered surprisingly complex wines, an idyllic setting and a passionate winemaker.

## About Lula Cellars

Hansen has been in the wine business a long time—nearly 30 years—and says growing grapes and making wine is in his blood. After all those years in the hectic wine industry of Napa Valley, it is clear that Lula Cellars and Mendocino County are now Hansen's passions.

The wines at Lula Cellars (named

after his maternal grandmother Lula) are limited to about 2,500 cases each year and they are not available through distributors. You can get them online or by visiting the new tasting room in Philo, California, right off of Route 128—The Mendocino Highway—that runs from Sonoma County through the Anderson Valley to the California coast near the town of Mendocino. The tasting room sits on 22 acres and includes a lovely pond -- a perfect venue for wine tasting. Be sure to look for Honey, the winery dog.

Lula Cellars produces Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Dry Gewürtztraminer, Pinot Gris and Rosato (Rosé of Pinot Noir) wines. All of the grapes are



Lula Cellars wines in the vineyard

RIGHT  
Lula Cellars Tasting Room

Lula Cellars  
vineyards



from Mendocino County, which is not only one of California's cooler appellations with sunny days and cool, foggy nights, but also the largest US producer of organic wines. Lula Cellars is in the long, narrow Anderson Valley, known as one of the top Pinot Noir regions in North America.

I tasted several 2012 wines and one 2013 wine from Lula Cellars. By combining the abundance of the fertile valley, the cool foggy nights and sunny days with years of experience and just the right amount of aging in oak barrels, Lula Cellars has created some world-class wines and is sure to offer exceptional wines for many years to come.



### Lula Cellars Pinot Noir wines

There are several different Pinot Noirs offered by Lula Cellars. The 2012 Mendocino Pinot Noir is a blend of pinot grapes using four different Pinot Noir clones from two coastal vineyards, both planted in 1998. The blend of this wine is 35 percent Pommard, 30 percent Dijon #115, 15 percent Dijon #777 and 20 percent Dijon #667 clones. The wine is handmade in small fermentation vats, with no pumps or mechanical devices used during the fermentation process. Hansen ages each clone separately for 12 months in 50 percent new French oak barrels, blends the wines, and then returns the blended wine to the barrels for six more months. The 2012 Mendocino Pinot Noir, which sells for \$45 per bottle, is surprisingly complex for such a new cellar, obviously reflecting Hansen's years of expertise. The nose on this one had a classic Pinot Noir sweet-spicy, reminiscent of roses and coriander with cherries. The flavor is full of luscious ripe black cherry and has a nice balanced acidity. Hansen suggests pairing it with something like a pork Milanese.

My favorite Pinot Noir at Lula, however, was the 2012 Costa Vineyards Pinot Noir. This one is bottled from grapes that grow on five acres in the nearby coastal mountain town of Comptche. That coastal climate is ideal for producing

this full-bodied Pinot Noir. The wine is 65 percent Pommard and 35 percent Dijon #115 clones grown in the same vineyard. Again, the fermentation process is completely non-mechanized; the two wines age separately for 12 months in 50 percent new French oak, are blended and then aged for an additional six months. This is an absolutely gorgeous ruby wine, perfectly balanced and full-bodied. The first aromas are that subtle rose and a deep earthiness that comes from the coastal area of Mendocino. The flavors of ripe raspberries bring the wine to life and the finish of plum is finessed with that idea amount of oak aging. I literally felt as if I were tasting the very soul of Mendocino when I drank this wine, which sells for \$45 per bottle.

### Lula Cellars Zinfandel

The 2012 Mendocino Zinfandel is from grapes grown at Mariah Vineyards on Mendocino Ridge. The vineyard, planted in 1980, is dry farmed, with no irrigation other than the natural winter rains. The wine is fruit forward with lovely aromas of blackberry jam. The taste is all about the fruit with a touch of spice. Unlike some of zinfandels, this one remains fruity on the finish without any of that heavy, often chalky feel that can sometimes accompany a zin. The wine is dark and full-bodied, priced at \$29 per bottle. This one would pair

beautifully with braised lamb shanks.

### Dry Gewürztraminer

The 2013 Mendocino Dry Gewürztraminer comes from grapes that grow in the hills near Ukiah. There are some Gewürztraminers that don't seem quite so balanced, ending up either too sweet or without any taste of the fruit. The Lula Cellars Gewürztraminer, however, offers a nice balance with lovely tangerine notes and a crisp acidity and subtle spices that make it a pleasure to drink. It made me want to go grab some seafood (maybe the local Dungeness crabs),



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Lula Cellars Tasting Room

but it would also pair well with a nice smoky cheese or the Thanksgiving turkey. The wine normally sells for \$20 a bottle, but the 2013 is sold out. Lula Cellars will

be introducing the 2014 wines soon, so this might be a good wine to get before it's gone again.

**Rosato (Rosé of Pinot Noir)**



Rosé wines in the U.S. are just starting to gain popularity, in part because people see a “pink” color and think sweet. A true rosé, however, is nothing like those pink, sweet white Zinfandels so popular two decades ago. A true French-style rosé is made by letting the juice have limited contact with the skins. The 2013 Mendocino Rosato was sourced from a single Pinot Noir vineyard in nearby Comptche. The wine is made of five different Pinot Noir clones—Pommard, Dijon #115, Dijon #777, Dijon #667 and Swan—with several hours of skin contact for the juice. The low temperature fermentation process (at 60 degrees F) creates a lush, fruity wine that feels delicate, but with great flavor. When you sip this one—probably my favorite style wine for a hot summer day—you get strawberries and watermelon as you lift the glass to your nose. The crisp acidity keeps it smooth and balanced. As I tasted this one, I closed my eyes and imagined sipping it with a gentle ocean breeze and munching on a salad with goat cheese and citrus vinaigrette. The 2013 Mendocino Rosato sold for \$20 a bottle, but

is also sold out. Definitely another one to watch for as soon as the 2014 Rosatos are released.

**Heading for the Coast**

The next time you head to Northern California, rent a car and drive northwest to the coast of Mendocino. It’s worth the drive to meander along Highway 128 from north of the city, past Sonoma County, into Mendocino County and through the Anderson Valley to the coast. Lula Cellars tasting room is the last one before you leave the town of Philo (or the first one on your way back to the city). Take the time to stop in and sip the wines. Dan, the tasting room manager, will help you find your perfect wine. If you can’t get to Mendocino anytime soon, you can join the Wine Club or order wines online (shipping instructions are clearly stated on the winery’s website). I think I may have to make a return trip just to pick up a bottle of the 2014 Rosato—and take it on over to the coast with me for a day of wine, cheese and ocean breezes. For more on Lula Cellars, visit online at [lulacellars.com](http://lulacellars.com).