

# Wine Spectator

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## CALIFORNIA'S GREATEST CHARDONNAY VINEYARDS

THE STORIES BEHIND DURELL • EL DIABLO • HEINTZ • HUDSON  
HYDE • RITCHIE • SANGIACOMO • AND OTHER LEGENDARY SITES



BIEN NACIDO VINEYARD

JULY 31, 2023  
\$7.99 US



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# Durell

**“V**ineyards are my love,” admits Durell owner Bill Price. “I didn’t expect that. But after I bought Durell, I found that the seasonality of vineyards resonates with me.”

Price is a wine lover with a background as a financial investor and experience in business consulting, but these interests didn’t align until 1996. In 1992, he co-founded Texas Pacific Group (now known as TPG Capital), which would grow into one of the largest private equity firms in the world. When Nestlé was looking to sell off its wine division, Wine World Estates (which it had built after buying Beringer in 1971), TPG purchased Wine World Estates from Nestlé for \$350 million in 1996, renaming it Beringer Wine Estates. TPG acquired Chateau St. Jean, Stags’ Leap Winery and St. Clement before selling the group of wineries to Foster’s for a reported \$2.5 billion in 2000.

Durell was Price’s first personal investment in wine, in 1997, an established vineyard in southern Sonoma Valley where it overlaps with Carneros and the Sonoma Coast. He’s since started his own label, Three Sticks, expanded his vineyard holdings to six, including Gap’s Crown in the Sonoma Coast, and is an investor in several boutique brands. (His former wife, Ellie Phipps Price, also owns a percentage of Durell, which goes into her Dunstan Wines brand.)

One of the draws of Durell is the complexity of the soils. “When I think about Durell, I think about the soils,” says Price. “It’s got the most diverse soils of any vineyards I know; there’s cobblestone river rock, and as you go up the hill, there’s more volcanic rock than I’ve ever seen in Sonoma. There’s tufa and classic volcanic rock—it’s almost like diatomaceous earth. The variations are remarkable.”

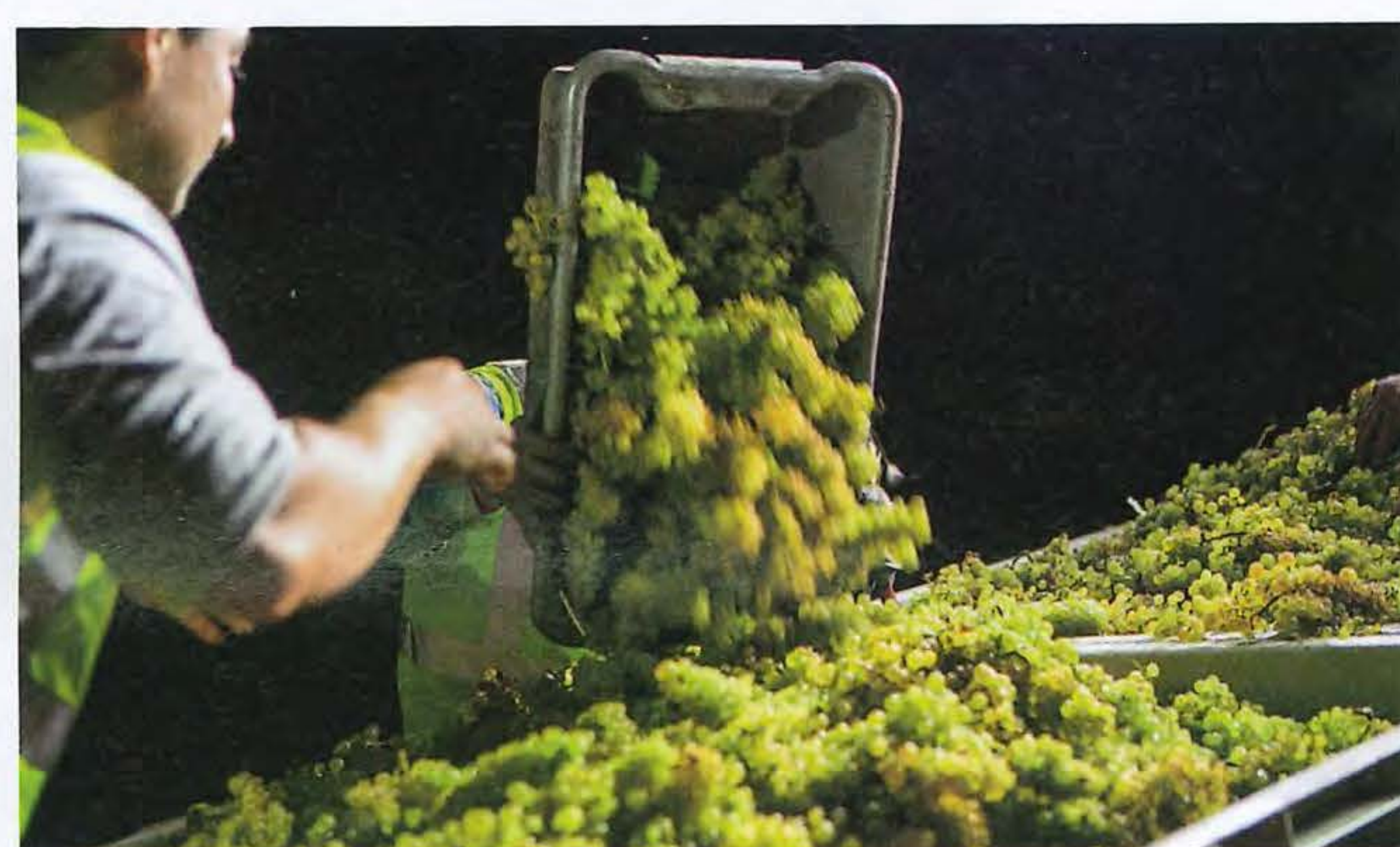
Price explains that the intricacy of the soils helps winemakers

## RECENT CHARDONNAYS FROM DURELL VINEYARD

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
<b>97</b>	<b>KISTLER</b> Sonoma Valley Durell Vineyard 2020	\$95
<b>93</b>	<b>MACROSTIE</b> Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2021	\$56
<b>93</b>	<b>THREE STICKS</b> Sonoma Coast Origin Durell Vineyard 2021	\$70
<b>92</b>	<b>SOJOURN</b> Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2021	\$54
<b>90</b>	<b>DUNSTAN</b> Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2020	\$55
<b>90</b>	<b>SAXON BROWN</b> Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard 2018	\$78



The vines and grapes of Durell Vineyard



## ABOUT DURELL

<b>County:</b> Sonoma	<b>Total acres planted:</b> 152	clay loam; Goulding cobbly clay loam; Tuscan cobbly clay loam; Clear Lake clay
<b>Appellations:</b> Sonoma Coast and Sonoma Valley apply to 100% of property; Sonoma Carneros applies to roughly half	<b>Chardonnay acres:</b> 74	
<b>Year first planted:</b> 1977	<b>Primary Chardonnay clones:</b> Old Wente; Hyde; 95; 76	<b>Certified by</b> California Sustainable Wine-growing Alliance and Fish Friendly Farming
	<b>Soil types:</b> Los Robles gravelly	

make their own version of the “perfect” Durell bottling. “[Vintners] can choose specific soils and exposures that work best with their winemaking styles,” says Price. Kistler winemaker Jason Kesner agrees: “[Durell] has some of the more interesting soils in the area without a doubt. We’re lucky to have vines planted in them for us.”

Rob Harris is director of vineyard operations at Durell. He says that diversity appeals to the vintners he works with. “They don’t want the same grapes to start with. They want grapes tailored to the wines they want to make,” he says, adding that the vineyard stands at a point of transition, from the flats of a riverbed to the coastal hills, which end right at the edge of the vineyard, providing a tunnel for the wind influences from the Pacific Ocean.

“We’re at this confluence of very different effects, which allows us to grow Chardonnay and such meaningfully different styles, but with a consistent quality,” explains Harris. “Producers have embraced Durell because it can fit so many different styles, so many different winemaking protocols.”

Harris adds that there’s been a greater focus on environmental responsibility, as well as a “refocus” on the present and the future, and fine-tuning practices, rather than just doing the same thing forever. “You know, ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,’ is a powerful idea. But it’s one that I personally won’t accept here. I believe in moving forward, not standing still—in pushing boundaries, pushing forward, forging our own kind of path,” he says.

Price is proud to see the Durell name on bottles of wine: “I love the grapegrowing part [of the wine industry]. I love seeing what different winemakers can make from a single vineyard, all of the different expressions.”