



## Wine Proprietor Uses an Artist's Touch to Make Exceptional Pinot Noir

By Miranda Franco

Thomas T. Thomas has long loved music, and he loves wine. He is a self-taught guitar player from the outskirts of Toledo, Ohio, who studied music at Ohio University (shout out to all my fellow Bobcats) before transferring to the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music to study voice. However, Thomas knew music was not the most lucrative career direction, so he earned an MBA and took a position with GE Capital in the Corporate Finance Division. Later, he became a finance executive at the biotech company Genentech. A fortuitous trip to Burgundy in 1999 would change everything. Thomas was taken by the French soil and those superb Pinots. He became intoxicated with the thought of recreating that experience.

So, in 2001, Thomas and his wife bought property in Anderson Valley – a region in western Mendocino County that routinely produces exceptional Pinot Noir. Over the next ten years, they built a house, designed and planted a vineyard, and sold fruit. In 2017, Thomas decided to develop his own brand. He shortly thereafter stopped selling fruit to third parties to focus exclusively on his Pinot Noir wines with labels that adorn his artistic creations.



Thomas' business background and artistic bent work together to create some jaw-dropping, rock-star wines. It should also not go unsaid that Thomas released his first vintage (2017) in March of 2020, right as the pandemic took hold. I was first introduced to the wines of Thomas T. Thomas Vineyards in 2020 by Patroski Lawson, Founder & CEO of KPM Group. He was kind enough to share a bottle, and I was immediately enchanted. Lawson also curates extravagant wine lunches for the D.C. policy crowd. Most recently, Thomas trekked from California to D.C. for one such lunch at the WineLair, where Thomas kindly shared his wines and an opportunity for an interview. I sat down with him to talk about his upbringing, how he came to own a vineyard in Anderson Valley, and why he loves Pinot.

When I asked how he thinks his music and business background supports being a player in the wine world, he noted, "Studying music gave me the capacity to understand frameworks, and once you understand frameworks, you can pull anything into a direction." He also noted that, "Music composition and art require balance to be good, and wine is no different. Essentially, you take disparate pieces with wine -- wood, yeast, alcohol, flavor, and balance them. All aspects of your decisions are reflected in the taste of the wine." Regarding his business acumen, he noted, "That business is all about benchmarks, for example, the S&P 500, with wine, you also use benchmarks." Thomas further stated that he "tries to make one or two big decisions a year to see how they impact the wine." An example of such decision-making is a recent move from 100 percent Allier Forest barrels to utilizing a blend of other tight/fine grain French oak offerings to see what combination may work best.

When asked to explain what he loves about making and drinking Pinot Noir, Thomas noted that "Pinot provides flexibility and so much complexity; much more so than Cabernet." I also pressed on why Anderson Valley caught his eye. Thomas shared, "Anderson Valley has some of the best new thinking on winemaking and is one of California's most promising areas for making fine Pinot Noir in a focused, precise style." Given Thomas's affection for Burgundy, the Valley's appeal makes perfect sense given its cool climate that facilitates elegant Pinot akin to Burgundy. Thomas also shared his affection for the mom-and-pop wineries that neighbor him and provide high-quality wines at affordable prices. One of those neighbors is Randy Schock, the head winemaker at Handley Cellars, who has been instrumental in working with Thomas over the last five years.



I also chatted with Thomas about the wine labels he designed that further showcase his artistic range and prowess. He initially wanted to showcase African American art, but it proved challenging given approvals and copyright issues. So instead, he utilized his own creations. Thomas noted that "the wine in the bottle reflects the art on the outside – it's new but with respect to the old."

Lastly, we discussed where to buy and try his harmonious and nuanced wines. You can visit and taste his offerings by reservation only for those in the area or traveling to California. Additionally, you can

directly purchase his delectable Pinot Noirs (and now a 2020 Chardonnay) from his website at <https://www.thomasthomasvineyard.com/Wines/2018>

I've done some of the hard work for WRO readers and sampled a selection of his wines. They all have a perfect combination of ripeness, tension, and aromatic complexity reminiscent of Burgundy. Please find my reviews below on a sample of Thomas's offerings and then try them yourself. You won't be disappointed.

**Thomas T. Thomas, Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Reserve 2017** (\$80): This 2017 small-production Pinot Noir shows vibrant flavors of tart cherries, ripe strawberries, violets, and baking spice. Well-integrated tannins and bright acidity keep the wine flavor packed. It walks a beautiful line between the concentration of flavor and a light-footed frame, and it finishes with addicting juiciness. This certainly has several years of aging potential.

**Thomas T. Thomas Vineyards, Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Buster's Hill 2018** (\$85): The 2018 Buster's Hill Pinot Noir will undoubtedly become one of California's highest praised Pinot Noirs. This 2018 is loaded with raspberry, black cherry, rhubarb, and perfectly integrated baking spices. The structured palate offers swells of fresh acidity and polished, fine-grained tannins. It is the pinnacle of North California's essence. It's a joy to drink and greatly over-performs more expensive estate bottlings from California.

**Thomas T. Thomas Vineyards, Anderson Valley, Pinot Noir 2019** (\$45): This 2019 draws you in like a magnet with its gushing, high-toned aromas and flavors of plum, strawberry preserve, violet, and cherry. The palate is lushly textured with beautiful tension. This is poised to impress and gives you a glimpse of what you would find in Burgundy without the daunting price tag.

**Thomas T. Thomas Vineyards, Anderson Valley, Estate Grown Pinot Noir 2019** (\$65): This 2019 Estate Grown Pinot Noir is a bit more tertiary forward than the aforementioned 2019 Pinot Noir. It has fresh cherry and plum flavors, but it then evolves to notes of seductive earth, crushed rose, and baking spice. With each swirl, you're guaranteed to uncover another rich layer with perfectly balanced acid and tannins.

**Thomas T. Thomas Vineyards, Anderson Valley, Chardonnay 2020** (\$38): The 2020 Chardonnay is yellow-gold in the glass, with aromas of white peach, citrus, crushed chalk, and the lightest touch of oak. It has excellent texture and concentration, but it also has freshness and vibrancy with Chablis-like salinity. As Thomas suggested, "this is Burgundain in spirit with California flair."