

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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**KALIN CELLARS
GREAT OLD SCHOOL WINES
NEVER RELEASED BEFORE THEIR PRIME**



Kalin Cellars is one of the great old school producers in the world of California wine. While not stretching quite as far back in history as some of the early pioneers, such as Heitz Wine Cellar, Ridge Vineyards or Stony Hill Vineyards, Kalin Cellars is far from a new kid on the block, as the winery produced its first vintage in 1975. The Marin County-based winery was officially founded in 1977 and is the brainchild of Terry and Frances Leighton, who arrived in the winemaking business as a sideline to their regular positions as eminent microbiologists based at the University of California in Berkeley. Both Frances and Terry hold doctorates in microbiology, with Terry Leighton remaining a full-time member of the faculty at Berkeley until his retirement from the university in 2000, as well as co-directing the winery. Frances Leighton left Berkeley a bit earlier than Terry, as the needs of Kalin Cellars grew in the middle of the 1980s “and got too big for us to manage on weekends” recalls Terry, and it was Frances Leighton who took an early leave from academia and “became the full-time guiding light of the Kalin organization” by handling the day to day management of the winery, as well as co-sharing the winemaking duties with Terry. So Kalin Cellars is far from the typical Napa Valley or Sonoma County winery, and its growth in the California wine scene over the years since its

founding in 1977 is really a testament to the vision of Terry and Frances for crafting long-lived California wines that began with their earliest vintages and which has steadily gained a very passionate coterie of clients since the release of their first bottlings from the 1975 vintage.

As Terry Leighton recalls, “we really got started making wine out of curiosity, as we had been contacted by folks who had taken over a massive, hundred year-old bakery up in Emeryville, which they were converting into a winemaking facility and where they had decided to start producing a Port-styled wine.” He continues, “the folks in charge had said that they felt pretty comfortable with the winemaking itself, but were scared about potential bacterial issues and the general scientific side of production and asked if we would come up and consult for them in exchange for all the Port we could ever possibly drink- so we agreed and consulted for this group for a few years in the early 1970s when they were first getting started.” This was the J. W. Morris Port Works, who began producing Port from grapes such as Zinfandel, Petit Sirah and Pinot Noir (rather than indigenous Portuguese varieties such as Torriga Nacional or Tinto Roriz), and after a couple of years of consulting on the Port, Terry and Frances thought it might be interesting to try and make a bit of wine for themselves while they were up at the facility, so in the 1975 vintage they produced a Pinot Noir and a Zinfandel, which they gave the moniker of Kalin Cellars to when the wines were ready for release a few years later. I asked Terry how the couple had come up with the name for Kalin Cellars, and he responded that both “Frances and myself wanted to use a name that came from the language of one of the original indigenous Native American tribes that had once lived in the San Francisco Bay area, and after a few days of digging in the library, I came across one of the tribes’ word for ocean, which was “Kalin”, and I thought- *voila*, that’s it.” Interestingly, the grapes for both the original Zinfandel and Pinot Noir from the 1975 vintage came from the Sonoma County vineyard of Dave Demostene, and this source for grapes would continue to figure very prominently from this first vintage down until very recently in the Kalin Cellars lineup.

When the first two wines were ready for release in 1978, the Leightons decided they might as well price them at the rather formidable price (at the time) of \$8.00 per bottle, as there were less than a couple of hundred cases of each, and much to their surprise, the wines sold out fairly quickly- mostly to top restaurants in San Francisco and Los Angeles in that first vintage. Despite the fact that they had only made a couple of hundred cases of the two 1975s, when they were received so warmly by top restaurateurs and sommeliers in California, the Leightons felt that there just might be something interesting in continuing to make wines and to perhaps to increase their production as good sources of grapes became available. For Kalin Cellars is a classic, *négociant*-styled California winery- owning no vineyards outright, but contracting with farmers for production from some of the top vineyards in Sonoma, Mendocino and the Livermore Valley. This is not to say that vineyard ownership in California wine country was out of the question for the Leightons, as there were some close calls through the years where they had interest in certain vineyards from which they had a history of purchasing grapes, only to see them scooped up by others when they eventually came on the market. While there was the occasional foray into Santa Barbara, Kalin Cellars has generally been a producer focused on the aforementioned regions as the primary sources for their grapes. There has never been any Kalin bottlings from fruit in Napa Valley. From the start, they sought to find top vineyard sites that were cooler in microclimate, as, prior to becoming winemakers, Terry and Frances had both fallen in love with wine while primarily drinking European wines and were looking to make

wines that would age and evolve with bottle age and felt it was necessary to source fruit from generally slower ripening vineyards.

Over the years, the Leightons have had some very interesting vineyard sources arrive at their doorstep without a lot of searching on their own. As Terry Leighton recalls, there have been several instances when “homeless grapes” would arrive at their facility at harvest time, as one person or another would approach them with a request for them to buy grapes, and several of their vineyard sources over the years arrived quite serendipitously. This started very early on in the history of Kalin Cellars, as one of the Leightons’ earliest forays into the region of the Livermore Valley (southeast of Oakland, about twenty miles inland to the east of San Francisco Bay) arrived when they went to investigate an advertisement for “free grapes” in one of the local newspapers. It turns out that a very large ranch, which was then called Stony Ridge in the late 1970s (but, had been traditionally known as Ruby Hill) and was then owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad, was being managed by a team whose primary mission was not producing wine or growing grapes to sell, so the two hundred acres of vineyard land far, far exceeded anything that they could keep up with at that time. The Ruby Hill acreage of vineyards was planted at that time with *Sémillon*, *Zinfandel*, *Malvasia*, *Barbera*, *Moscato* and *Sauvignon Vert*, but the primary attraction to the Leightons was the *Sémillon*, which was the primary variety that they produced wine from during their association with the Ruby Hill ranch. As Terry recounted, “when Frances and I first went out to take a look at the vineyards here, we found fantastic, hundred year-old vines of *Sémillon*, but, many had not even been pruned for the last six to eight years, and they really needed to have someone looking after them- so we jumped at the chance to start making wine from here.” The Livermore Valley had been a very, very important wine-producing region in California in the nineteenth century- a fact not lost on the Leightons once that had a chance to do a bit of research on the area- as this was the center of Charles Wetmore’s pioneering viticultural work in the 1880s. For many, Charles Wetmore is the founding father of modern viticulture in California. Most of the vineyards planted in Livermore were planted from cuttings Charles Wetmore had brought back from Europe in the nineteenth century- in the case of the *Sémillon* that the Leightons soon started to work with, from *Château d’Yquem*! So while the Livermore Valley was a bit off the beaten path for fine wine production in California in the late 1970s, there was some serious history here and the Leightons recognized the opportunity these great old vines represented.

As Terry relates, “when we told people that we were considering producing a varietal bottling of *Sémillon*, folks in the wine business told us that it was a cheap blending grape and no one could make anything interesting in California from that grape and even if we did, the market would never buy it.” Once one has spent a little time around Terry Leighton, it does not take too long to know that one of the fastest ways to get him to embrace a project is to tell him it has no chance of success! Kalin Cellars produced their first vintages of *Sémillon* from these great hundred year-old vines in 1979, with *Château d’Yquem*’s dry bottling, called *Ygrec*, serving as an early model for their own *Sémillon* cuvée. There were 180 cases of Kalin *Sémillon* produced in that first vintage. Terry Leighton relates that the Kalin Cellars bottling of *Sémillon* from these great old vines in the Livermore Valley met with commercial success right from the outset, and Kalin produced wines from these very old vines for a handful of vintages, before fate intervened and took this vineyard source from the Leightons. The ranch ended up in the early 1980s being purchased by Computerland to serve as a “corporate retreat” in the country, and once they

purchased the ranch, they razed all the old vines in a matter of days to make room for their executive retreat and destroyed one of the great old vine resources in the state of California! So there was no 1982 vintage of Sémillon from Kalin Cellars, as the vines had been unceremoniously bulldozed, but the vintages from 1979 to 1981 has been such a success (adding some new luster to the old name of Livermore Valley), that the Livermore-based winery of Wente Brothers reached out to the Leightons and offered to allow them to buy grapes from their own vineyards to continue their production of Sémillon. As the Wente Brothers grapes also hailed from very old vines planted with vines propagated from the original Charles Wetmore cuttings taken from Yquem (in 2009 these vines celebrated their one hundredth birthday), there was no hesitation from the Leightons. So, Kalin Cellars was back producing an old vine bottling of Livermore Sémillon again in the 1983 vintage (in the end only missing the single vintage of 1982), and this continues to be one of the flagship bottlings in the winery's lineup to this day.

The timing of the generous offer from Wente Brothers, who of course could have used all of the Sémillon that they were growing, was propitious, as the 1983 vintage also saw the arrival of a new bottling at Kalin Cellars- their Sauvignon Blanc. As Terry Leighton recalls, “for a few years, Frances and I had been on the lookout for a source for good Sauvignon Blanc grapes, as we loved Loire Valley sauvignon such as the Baron de L from Château Ladoucette, not to mention, Pavillon Blanc from Château Margaux, but we did not want to make an overtly fruity and very grassy style of Sauvignon Blanc, which was primarily what one was finding out there in those days.” But, prior to the 1983 vintage, they were approached by a vineyard owner up in Potter Valley in Mendocino (the northernmost wine-producing region in California) about tasting a Sauvignon Blanc that he had made (using trash barrels as his fermentation tanks!) from his own grapes. The Leightons were totally surprised that this unlabeled and amateur Sauvignon Blanc was actually excellent- with no overtly herbaceous characteristics and they were intrigued to go take a look at the vineyard. It turned out that the vineyard, the Pauli Vineyard, is planted on a dried-up riverbed, with alluvial topsoils of chalk and clay over a superb base of gravel and the couple knew they had found their source for Sauvignon Blanc! The first vintage produced was the 1983, which was blended with about twenty percent Sémillon from the Wente Brothers' vineyards, as the Leightons thought they could make a very Graves-like style of Sauvignon Blanc from this gravelly soils and a bit of their old vine Sémillon would provide a perfect complementary match for this new source of Sauvignon Blanc. To this day, the Kalin Sauvignon Blanc bottling continues to include about twenty percent Sémillon for added complexity, and for many years now, the Sémillon has also included about the same amount of Sauvignon Blanc, so the cuvées are in several ways, almost mirror images of each other. To my palate, both are the reference point wines produced in California from these two varieties.

Today, Kalin Cellars produces about seven thousand cases a year in their cellars in Novato, in Marin County, though none of the most recent vintage will see the light of day for probably more than a decade! For the winery continues to age their wines for long period of bottle age prior to their release in the market, so that “current” releases in the market include a 1996 Pinot Noir and their 1997 Sauvignon Blanc “Reserve”, and while no timetable is ever set for any particular wine, it seems that eight to ten years of bottle age for all the standard wines in the Kalin Cellars range has now become the norm and it is far from rare for a “new” Kalin release to not have already aged fifteen years in the Leightons' cellars. Terry and Frances Leighton regularly taste their wines that are approaching the threshold for release, and it is only

when the wines have been deemed by both husband and wife as ready for drinking that they are offered to Kalin's clientele. As their New York distributor, Doug Polaner, commented during our tasting out in Livermore in January, when a pair of 2001s were presented in one of the early flights: "Terry, I am certain that these are the first two Kalin wines I have tasted from the new millennium!" Ironically, the two wines in question from the 2001 vintage were from the special "Beau Rivage" project that the Leightons had started around this time, which was to make affordable, everyday wines for early consumption that would sell from the winery for around \$10.00 per bottle and offer up real character for the price. Not surprisingly, this project had evolved from challenges that popped up during conversations with other winemakers that "it was just not possible to make good inexpensive, everyday wines in the California of today- with vineyard and grape prices what they were at the turn of the century" and Terry and Frances were off to prove that it not only could be done, but that it could be done exceedingly well!

When I asked Terry Leighton how the custom of long bottle aging came about at Kalin Cellars, he told me that it was a practice that really evolved over time, "for in the era that we started, wine was purchased by *'amateurs'* who came from a wine culture and **everyone knew** (in those days) that you purchased wine and put it in the cellar until it was enjoyable." He continues, "only after Julia Child so beautifully educated Americans in the 1980s on French wine and food culture did a new generation of (wine) consumers arise that did not have origins in a wine culture" and "many marketing types exploited the burgeoning consumer base by tag lines such as *'Every year is a vintage year in California'* or *'California wine is ready to drink as soon as it is released'* and "we realized the most of our wines would be consumed at approximately ten percent of their potential unless we started holding back at least a fraction of our production." So in the mid-1980s, Kalin Cellars began "reserving" a large percentage of their production with long-term cellaring potential to be released when the wines would be approaching "approximately eighty percent of their potential," recalls Terry, and "as this 'Antiquities Program' gathered momentum, we decided that the goal would be to hold all of the wines up to this point in their evolutions," along the lines of estates around the world such as "López de Heredia, Robert Ampeau, Giuseppe Quintarelli and Château Simone."

From the very earliest years at Kalin Cellars, the wines have been made in a very traditional manner that reflects what many other top producers were doing in California in the era of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as classic European winemaking practices. All of the red wines at Kalin are initially fermented in large, old redwood tanks that hold around four tons of grapes at capacity, and are original to the very first vintage of 1975. After fermentation, the wines are transferred to barrels for a long *elevage*, with the percentage of new oak varying depending upon both the varietal and the style of the vintage. However, the percentage of new oak used has generally been pretty high for many of the Kalin red wines over at least the last several decades, but with the Leightons putting great emphasis on the quality and character of the new wood that they use, I have never encountered a single Kalin Cellars wine that I would term even modestly "over-oaked". As Terry relates, "the first few vintages were, of course, a bit more varied in our use of wood, with a bit of American or Yugoslavian oak sometimes finding their way into the barrel program very early on, but we fairly quickly evolved into only using French oak and looking always for the best quality of barrels and the finest *tonneliers* that we could find." Their search for top quality barrels that synthesized the most seamlessly with the long-lived wines of Kalin eventually led to a long relationship with the French *tonnelier* of Gaston

Billon and his son and the dedication of a special bottling of Pinot Noir from the 1994 vintage to commemorate the passing of Monsieur Billon senior in that year. All of the Kalin Cellars red wines are bottled without fining or filtration.



Terry Leighton, holding court in Aloxé-Corton during our tasting of Kalin Bourgogne wines a few summers ago.

White wines have always been barrel-fermented at Kalin Cellars since the very first vintage of Chardonnay was produced from the Calcaire Vineyard owned by Frank Woods in 1977 (folks of my generation may recognize this name, as it was one of the cornerstones of Clos du Bois' single vineyard bottling program in the 1980s). This includes the domaine's white wines from varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon as well, which have also always been barrel-fermented, and this may well account for at least part of the reason for these varieties' uncanny aging ability at Kalin Cellars, as these wines go on and on like top vintages of white Bordeaux. As Terry Leighton observes, "we have always barrel-fermented all of our white wines and do not even own a single stainless steel tank!" All of the Kalin Cellars white wines also go through full malolactic fermentation, are bottled with only a light fining of bentonite and are always unfiltered, so it is not uncommon to find a bit of sediment in the older whites from this fine domaine. The percentage of new oak used for the white wines at Kalin Cellars varies by varietal, with the Sauvignon Blanc Reserve customarily seeing about thirty percent new wood, the Sémillon about the same (or occasionally a touch more, depending on the vintage's characteristics) and the Chardonnays typically raised in fifty percent new oak. Kalin Chardonnays will usually spend about ten months aging on their fine lees prior to bottling and

are never, ever acidulated (none of the Kalin wines ever see their acids adjusted), as the Leightons take pains to find cooler vineyard sources and pick their grapes at responsible sugar levels so as to retain the backbone of acidity necessary for their white wines to age slowly and gracefully in the bottle.

Though Kalin Cellars has produced a wide variety of both red and white wines over the course of its history, with early bottlings of the winery's reds emphasizing a fair bit of Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon, in addition to Pinot Noir, today the winery's production is generally comprised of about eighty percent white wines and twenty percent red wines. Of the red wines, Kalin produces primarily Pinot Noir these days, though the occasional foray back into the world of Cabernet Sauvignon was still in evidence up through the 1992 vintage, as the "current" winery releases include both a 1992 Cabernet bottling from Sonoma and a 1990 bottling from the historic Cresta Blanca Vineyard in Livermore Valley. When I spoke to Terry about how much I had admired his very Bordeaux-styled Cabernets that I knew from my wine merchant days from the vintages of the 1980s, he commented that "the vineyard source for many of those Sonoma wines was absolutely terrific, but unfortunately, the farmer had difficulties and eventually that superb Cabernet source was lost to us." It has been many, many years since a Kalin Cellars Zinfandel has been produced (the last vintage was 1982), and there was even a Merlot "Reserve" from the winery produced in the 1981 vintage, but these days, Kalin Cellars is probably most famous on the red wine side of the ledger for their extraordinary examples of Pinot Noir, which clearly must be ranked up at the very pinnacle of quality for this varietal in California.

As far as white wines go at Kalin Cellars today, Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc generally account for a tad less than ten percent each of the annual production of roughly 5500 cases a year of whites, with each cuvée annually ranging in production between 400 and 500 cases depending on the vagaries of the year. The balance of the white wines produced here is comprised primarily of various cuvées of Chardonnay, with each lot of Chardonnay typically produced in quantities of between 500 and 1500 cases in any given vintage. Since the outset of the winery in 1977, Kalin Cellars' wines have almost always been single vineyard bottlings, with the vineyard source for each wine typically identified with a cuvée designation; for example, "Cuvée DD" was used for both the Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays that hail from Alexander Valley vineyard of Dave Demostene in Sonoma County and "Cuvée W" for the sixty year-old Chardonnay vines sourced by the Leightons from Wente Brothers. I have never known the winery to produce multiple bottlings of any wines other than Chardonnay or Pinot Noir in the same vintage, so to the best of my knowledge, there have never been any cuvée designations for any other varietal bottlings (excepting of course the winery's superb sparkling wines- Cuvée Blanche and Cuvée Rosé, as well as occasional dessert wines), with both the Sauvignon Blanc and the Cabernet Sauvignon typically labeled as Reserve wines. But, it is quite common for Terry and Frances to produce three, four or even five different single vineyard bottlings in any given vintage of Chardonnay (and up to three of Pinot Noir), and each of these is identified by a different cuvée designation. There have also been some lovely dessert wines produced over the years at Kalin Cellars, with the 1990 Cuvée L d'Or being an example of the winery's take on Sauternes-styled wines, with its heavily-botrytized blend of eighty percent Sémillon and twenty percent Sauvignon Blanc. As I touched upon above, there have also been some absolutely glorious California sparkling wines produced by the Leightons, which are all bottled as Brut Zero (no *dosage*) and are aged for a very long time *sur lies* prior to disgorgement and release into the market. The winery also

produced a handful of inexpensive, *vin ordinaire*-type wines in the early 2000s (the two I tasted were far from *ordinary*) under their *Beau Rivage* project moniker to show that making very good, reasonably-priced wines in the California of today is still quite possible.

One of the unique and very intriguing aspects of the portfolio of wines at Kalin Cellars is that one really has no idea of what is still waiting in the wings in the winery's cellar, as the combination of the intellectual curiosity of the Leightons and the long bottle aging policy of the winery means that there could be several new bottlings that have never been previously produced by the winery waiting patiently in the cellar for the proper time for their eventual release. As Terry Leighton likes to joke, "I always enjoy walking through the library in the cellar and looking at my retirement plan." However, at least at the writing of this piece, it seems likely that the Leightons' ride off into the sunset of retirement is nowhere near and that they will be continuing to craft their beautifully complex, ageworthy and world class "old school" California wines at Kalin Cellars for many more years to come. But, like many of their generation, (Terry Leighton was a young musician and aspiring biologist in Portland, Oregon in the late 1960s- his band used to open in concert for artists such as The Jefferson Airplane and The Doors) the day of retirement will one day come for Frances and Terry, and there is little doubt that we will all be thanking the foresight and willingness to sacrifice short-term gain on the part of the Leightons with a long and varied continuation of new and stunning wines emerging from Kalin Cellars for many years to come as their "Antiquities Program" will roll on long after new Kalin vintages are no longer being produced. Kalin Cellars is a singularly unique California domaine that sits at the very pinnacle of the state's old school producers (which to my palate, of course, translates into the very best wines in California), and the beauty of their holding back their wines until they are nearing their apogees means that one does not have to cellar the wines on release and hope that they are going to evolve in a positive direction- not always a given these days with some of their more trendy, wine-producing neighbors- as it is very rare to cross paths with a single bottle of Kalin Cellars wine that has not already received at least a decade's worth of bottle age prior to its release. This is one of the greatest of all the California classicists!

The following tasting notes are arranged by bottling, with most sections arranged by varietal, with the exception of course of the Sparkling Wines and the "Beau Rivage" project wines, which were produced from a couple of different grapes. Within each section, I have tried to give some background information on the bottling in question, as well as the style of the Kalin Cellars interpretations. For bottlings such as Chardonnay or Pinot Noir, where there have traditionally been several different cuvées produced from different vineyards (remember, every Kalin Cellars wine is a single vineyard bottling, whether or not it is indicated on the label!), I have tried to give brief background sketches on the vineyard origins of each distinct cuvée. Within each varietal section, the wines are listed chronologically from youngest to oldest, and where applicable, alphabetically by cuvée designation. This report would be far less interesting if it were not for the generosity of Terry and Frances Leighton, who warmly invited me out to Livermore in January for a tasting of a selection of Kalin "Antiquities" that really plunged into the depth of the cellar, and they were equally gracious in patiently fielding the litany of questions I sent their way as I tried to piece the history of this great estate together over the subsequent weeks. As we did not quite manage to get through all of the wines prepared by the couple during our tasting in January in Livermore (much to my chagrin, leaving on the table still un-tasted several more old Zinfandel bottlings, the 1981 Merlot Reserve, a couple of Cabernets and two

dessert wines!), the Leightons very generously offered to do a bit more “archeological digging in the cellar” and host a *Part Deux* of our tasting in the not too distant future, so I will very happily be writing a follow-up piece in a coming issue! I should mention that one of the keys to really enjoying any Kalin Cellars wine is to allow the wine adequate aeration time prior to drinking it, as these wines change dramatically in the glass and over the course of the meal. As all the wines are unfiltered, I usually prefer to decant all of my Kalin Cellars wines prior to serving, with the exception of their sparkling wines. This is not only to separate the wines from their (often considerable) sediment, but also to allow them to truly blossom with sufficient airing. At the two large tastings of Kalin wines that form the basis of this article, there was quite a bit of joking that my notes were so slow getting written down as the wines continued to evolve and change in the glass so dramatically that my nearly-finished tasting note was now inadequate for the wine in question!

I should add that I also try to exercise restraint when I have purchased Kalin wines that require shipping, and generally do not open bottles after they have been shipped until they have had, at the very least, a good six months to settle back in from their shaking during transit. These are hand-crafted, artisanal wines that are most emphatically living creatures when they depart the Kalin cellars for the market (of course, they are never young wines once this threshold has been crossed to Frances’ and Terry’s satisfaction and the wines are deemed close enough to maturity to be let out from the winery in the first place!) and so one really must take the time to treat them properly in order to enjoy them at a close approximation to their true character and quality level. To order a Kalin bottling off of a wine list and have it arrive ice-cold from the restaurant’s fridge, popped and poured briskly and then slammed down into an ice bucket is emphatically not the way to truly appreciate the true natural beauty of these wines! As the Leightons and their agents around the country are quite selective as to who receives allocations of Kalin Cellars wines at the restaurant level, this type of treatment is certainly far from characteristic of how most of these wines are handled, but just be attentive, as it may be the head sommelier’s night off and her new assistant may not yet be up to speed on how to best present Kalin wines during service, and it is well worth the effort- if such an occurrence should crop up- to ask for the white wine in question to be decanted and the decanter to be left on the table to come up to proper temperature. And order both your red and white Kalin wines for the dinner at the same time and have the red decanted first, so that it is really going to have had a chance to blossom while you have enjoyed the white wine with the earlier courses! As Terry Leighton sagely observes, “classic, artisanal wine is a journey, not a destination.”

While the focus of this article is on the Kalin Cellars wines from California, I should mention that Frances and Terry Leighton do not limit their winemaking to the US, as they have been making two superb red Burgundies from two tiny slices of vineyards which they own in the Côte de Beaune and which are sold under the “Kalin Bourgogne” label. The two bottlings, a Côte de Beaune “Les Pierres Blanches” and a Beaune premier cru from the Chouacheux vineyard hail from small parcels they purchased from a retiring friend in Burgundy in the mid-1990s. For those interested in the full background on these excellent bottlings, as well as tasting notes on several vintages, please see the feature on the Kalin Bourgogne wines in the 2009 Burgundy report in Issue Thirty-Five (or email me and I will send you a copy).

Sparkling Wines

The first Kalin Cellars sparkling wine was produced in the 1986 vintage, and this continues to be an ongoing project, though not too many bottlings have yet been released from the winery, as these wines receive as much or more bottle age in the cellars as any wine in the portfolio. All of the Kalin Cellars sparkling wines are in reality Brut Zero bottlings (though this does not appear anywhere on the labels) and receive no *dosage*. As Terry Leighton relates, “if you are not going to use any *dosage* on your sparkling wines, then you are simply going to have to resign yourself to the fact that they are going to require some long cellar time before they are really going to get interesting to drink.” Hence the very long aging in the winery’s cellars prior to release. As is the case with all of the Kalin Cellars bottlings, the sparkling wines here are always produced from single vineyards. I have only had the pleasure to taste three Kalin sparklers (thus far): the 1988 Cuvée Blanche, which is a Blanc de Blancs bottling produced from Chardonnay sourced from the Lorenzo Vineyard in the Russian River Valley (Marcassin fans might recognize the name), and two different bottlings of Kalin Cellars’ Cuvée Rosé- the “regular” and the Reserve- hailing from the 1987 vintage. The two 1987 Cuvée Rosé bottlings are quite different, both in vineyard source and in *cépage*, as the “regular” 1987 Cuvée Rosé is one hundred percent Pinot Noir and hails from the B JL Vineyard in Potter Valley in Mendocino. In contrast, the 1987 Cuvée Rosé “Reserve” comes from the Pasternak Vineyard in Marin County (owned and farmed by Mark Pasternak), which is planted to forty percent Chardonnay and sixty percent Pinot Noir and is one of the coolest vineyards sites in all of California- making it a great retainer of acidity in the grapes and ideal for sparkling wine production. The Pasternak Vineyard, which was the source of the first Kalin sparkler in 1986, directly overlooks the Pacific Ocean and is routinely harvested in October. The soils here in these rolling hills, ocean-side hills are comprised of stony shale and limestone.

All the Kalin sparklers go through full malolactic fermentation, age around ten months in older barrels (three to four year-old wood is usually used for these base wines) prior to bottling up for the secondary fermentation and are given long lees aging prior to disgorgement and eventual release for the market. Like every wine produced by the Leightons, there are no acid adjustments for these wines (de-acidification might be the proper approach for the grapes from the Pasternak Vineyard if one were prone to intervention!) and they are probably the longest-lived sparkling wines produced in California today (or, in this case, yesterday, as the most recent vintage I have tasted is the 1988). Certainly, I have not tasted any bubbly from the state with this kind of bottle age coupled to such superb potential for continued, positive evolution in the bottle! There are at least several more vintages of Kalin Cellars sparkling wine aging comfortably in the winery’s cellars, awaiting release (according to the Kalin website, the domaine has also released a 1988 vintage of Cuvée Rosé which I have not yet tasted). As noted above, none of the bottlings state that they are Brut Zero wines on the label, with the labels simply stating- or should I say- “under-stating”- that they are “California Sparkling Wine”. Like so many of the Kalin Cellars’ wines, the three sparklers here improved dramatically as they had a chance to open up in the glass, and each time a fresh pour was added to the glass by the sommelier at the tasting, one had to wait a few minutes for the nose to start to blossom again. The three examples I tasted are amongst the most beautiful California sparkling wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste, and when one speaks of the great wines crafted by Terry and Frances Leighton over the years at Kalin Cellars, one should most emphatically not forget their brilliant sparkling wines!



1988 Cuvée Blanche “California Sparkling Wine”- Kalin Cellars

The 1988 Cuvée Blanche was made from Chardonnay grapes sourced from the cool Lorenzo Vineyard in the Russian River Valley, where the grapes are routinely collected in October. The base wine was barrel-fermented in older wood and unfiltered, and this particular bottle was then aged *sur lies* for seventeen or eighteen years prior to disgorgement. (The first commercial release of the 1988 Cuvée Blanche was disgorged in 1997 and released in 2008 or 2009, but the bottle that I tasted had been disgorged later.) The color is a lovely, pale golden and the wine offers up a superb and very complex bouquet of warm peaches, orange zest, a touch of brown butter, lovely minerality, rye toast, a touch of fresh nutmeg and caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows plenty of acidity still, with a fine core, delicate, fairly gentle *mousse* and beautiful length and focus on the complex and very classy finish. This wine has plenty of life still ahead of it, but it is at its apogee and I cannot think of a better time to drink it than right now! Superb wine. 2013-2025+. **94.**

1987 Cuvée Rosé “California Sparkling Wine”- Kalin Cellars

The 1987 Cuvée Rosé “regular” bottling hails from Pinot Noir grapes that were sourced in the cool Potter Valley in northern Mendocino. The wine is made with no red wine addition and takes its color from “the color of the juice that comes out of the press after its very gentle pressing” as Terry Leighton likes to say. The base wine was raised in three to four year-old barrels and went through full malo, prior to being bottled up for the secondary fermentation. The 1987 is not particularly deep in color, with a gentle salmon shading and offering up a superb,

deep and very fine nose of dried cherries, smoke, wheat bread, a beautifully complex base of soil, smoky tones and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with almost a touch of old Barolo shadings to its flavors as it evolves in the glass to offer up nuances of dried roses and a gentle meatiness. The wine is beautifully-balanced and shows lovely *mousse*, with excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Fine juice at its apogee. 2013-2025+. **92.**

1987 Cuvée Rosé Reserve “California Sparkling Wine”- Kalin Cellars

The 1987 Cuvée Rosé Reserve is another absolutely stellar bottle of sparkling wine, but it is quite different in complexion from the regular bottling. Hailing from a completely different vineyard site, the Pasternak Vineyard in Marin County, which overlooks the Pacific Ocean, and being comprised of a blend of both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, the wine offers up a high-toned and still fairly youthful bouquet of dried cherries, a touch of blood orange, smoke, hints of dried peppers, rye seed, complex soil tones and again, a subtle bass note of meatiness that really recalls very old, very refined Barolo. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, very pure and nascently complex, with a great core of fruit, refined and gentle *mousse*, bright acids and laser-like focus on the very, very long, classy and perfectly-balanced finish. Amazingly, the 1987 Cuvée Rosé Reserve is probably still not really at its peak and will continue to improve for at least then next couple of decades! A brilliant bottle of sparkling wine. 2013-2030+. **95.**

Beau Rivage Project Wines

The Kalin Cellars “Beau Rivage” wines take their name from one of the Leightons’ favorite restaurants in Burgundy, Restaurant Beau Rivage in the small village of Allerey, which lies about fifteen kilometers southeast of Beaune. The restaurant sits right along the riverside of the Saône River and specializes in freshwater fish and has a wine list chock full of inexpensive, bright and minerally local white wines produced from the Chardonnay grape. As Terry Leighton likes to recall, “this project came about, as so often is the case, when our conversations with fellow winemakers came around to the fact that America will never have a real wine culture until high quality, everyday wines can be produced at affordable prices.” So, to the skeptical responses of their winemaking colleagues, who said it simply could not be done in California these days- due to the state’s vineyard areas being too hot, very high vineyard and grape prices, and the dearth of good, limestone-based soils that impart the racy minerality such a part of good everyday-based chardonnay wines in the outer-limit appellations in Burgundy- the Leightons set about showing that it could indeed be done, and both of these wines from the 2001 vintage were eventually released from the winery at the price of \$10 per bottle. The Chardonnay “Cuvée R” hails from a vineyard source up in Clarksburg (just outside of Sacramento) that overlooks the Sacramento River, and it does indeed have a fairly high degree of chalk in its soils. The bone-dry and superb 2001 Chenin Blanc “Beau Rivage” bottling hails from vineyards in Marin County and must have been the best bargain in California wine when it was released after a few years of aging. Both wines were barrel-fermented (like all Kalin white wines) and raised in older barrels, with the Chenin spending ten months on its fine lees prior to bottling without filtration. Most of the production of both wines was sold off to long-time restaurant clients of Kalin Cellars and provided a highly provocative and satisfying “wine by the glass” pour for those lucky enough have secured some cases of either wine. Terry Leighton had dug up a bottle of each from the cellar for one of our tastings in Livermore, as our theme was “just what is possible in the world of California wine” and I was sorry to hear that this had not become an ongoing project at Kalin, as the two wines were really quite wonderful and offered stunning quality for their release prices.

I do hope that somewhere down in the treasure trove of the Kalin cellars, there might be more vintages of Chenin Blanc waiting in the wings, as this was really a wine that would be a welcome, “every vintage” addition to the firmament of California wine!

2001 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée R”

This is a very good wine that was crafted to be drunk right out of the blocks by the Leightons (probably the only Kalin wine ever made with that intention!) and was probably even better on release than it is today- though it has aged quite well and still has some life ahead of it. The deep and mature nose offers up scents of ripe apples, apricots, orange peel, a touch of spiced meats (this would be great with a dish with sausage in it) and a pretty stylish base of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still impressively fresh, with a good core and sneaky length and grip on the crisp and focused finish. Good juice and great bang for the buck! 2013-2017+? **88.**

2001 Kalin Cellars Chenin Blanc “Beau Rivage”

The 2001 Beau Rivage bottling of Chenin Blanc from Kalin Cellars is stunning wine and a very strong argument for the Leightons making more wine from this grape. The wine tips the scales well above thirteen percent alcohol, as it was fermented to total dryness and aged for ten months in three and four year-old barrels prior to bottling. The stunning nose soars from the glass in a still quite youthful blend of pineapple, quince, lemon zest, beautiful, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and racy, with a rock solid core, superb focus and grip and a very long, poised and still quite youthful finish. Whereas the Cuvée R Chardonnay from this same project has had a good run and is starting to hear the far side of its plateau, the 2001 Beau Rivage Chenin Blanc is still a puppy and has decades of life still ahead of it. Imagine a top flight Vouvray Sec produced from a fine plot of vines in California and one can get a sense of how lovely this wine is and will continue to be for many years to come! 2013-2025+. **92.**

Sauvignon Blanc

Since the inaugural release of the Sauvignon Blanc Reserve in the 1983 vintage, this has always been one of my favorite bottlings from Kalin Cellars. I was very fortunate in my early wine merchant days to have access to some of the earliest vintages of this wine and I have very fond memories of the countless bottles of the Kalin Sauvignon Blanc Reserve that I tried to cellar (but always ended up drinking within a few years of the bottles being placed in my collection, as I simply could not keep my hands off of them!) and happily drank in the last years of the 1980s and the decade of the 1990s. In my experience, no one in California crafts a Sauvignon Blanc even remotely in the same quality class as the Kalin example. Year in and year out, this wine ages brilliantly and offers up a depth of complexity out of the blocks (well, err, after release, as this wine is, of course, given several years of bottle age by Frances and Terry prior to be sent out into the market). Clearly, the Potter Valley is a special place in general for this variety, and I have little doubt that the Pauli Vineyard from which this wine has originated since its inaugural vintage must be a particularly fine *terroir* for this grape. As noted above, the Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve is really a wine crafted along the lines of the Pavillon Blanc bottling from Château Margaux and is (like all Kalin wines) built to age. The cuvée has included at least twenty percent Sémillon from the Livermore Valley since its inaugural vintage of 1983, and has always been barrel-fermented and bottled with only a light fining and no filtration.

Having had the chance to work back through several vintages during our tasting in Livermore in January, I would venture to state that to my palate, this is the one varietal at Kalin Cellars that I am most happy to drink once it has been released from the winery, as it has already had invariably seven or ten years of bottle age (or more) and is usually at a magical peak of drinkability when it is released. While the Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve clearly will age for many, many more years after its release, I tend to really like it with the bounce and vibrancy it shows when the Leightons have deemed it ready for the market. It may be my memory playing tricks, but it seems to me that back when I was first becoming enamored of the Kalin Sauvignon Blanc, the wine was held back in the cellars for a bit shorter time than it is today, and I for one would be perfectly happy to see it released a bit earlier again in the future, for it often had just as much character and complexity at age seven or eight as it does today when it is released at age twelve to fifteen. The aromatic and flavor profiles were of course different at that younger age, but to my palate, no less compelling than the current releases are today with significantly more bottle age on them when they first leave the nest of the winery's cellar and stretch their wings in the open market. And being old enough to remember when most wines were meant for cellaring, I would have no problems (today- now that my cellar is a bit deeper or my self-control is a bit more developed!) keeping some of these in the cellar, while having the possibility of drinking a few bottles in the really bouncy and bright stage of this wine at age seven or eight years of age!

1997 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

The 1997 Kalin Sauvignon Blanc Reserve is a lovely bottle that is now fully mature and offering up layers of secondary aromas and flavors. This is a very ripe vintage for this bottling, with the alcohol level above 13.5 percent, and not surprisingly, it is not my favorite as a result of the style of the year. The deep and complex nose is a mélange of lemon, orange, a touch of honey, lovely soil tones, a hint of lanolin and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite mature, with fresher flavors than the deep-pitched nose suggests, with good mid-palate depth and lovely framing acidity to keep the wine focused and well-balanced for at least a few more years. I tend to like my Sauvignon Blanc flavors a tad less evolved than the '97 Kalin is today, but in terms of depth, complexity and continued structural integrity, this remains a very impressive bottle- particularly for a sixteen year-old bottle of California Sauvignon Blanc- but, the riper side of the 1997 vintage will probably make this one of the shorter-lived examples of this varietal at Kalin. 2013-2020. **89.**

1996 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

Whereas the 1997 Kalin Sauvignon Blanc is really quite ripe and uncharacteristically ready for primetime drinking today, the 1996 remains a younger and more vibrant wine and shows decidedly more long-term cellaring potential than the darker-hued 1997. Interestingly, though the 1997 hails from the riper and softer vintage, the 1996 is certainly its equal in alcohol level, tipping the scales at 13.7 percent. However, the wine is much lighter on its feet than its 1997 counterpart, offering up a deep and classic bouquet of fig, fresh coconut, a touch of beeswax, a beautiful base of soil tones, a bit of lanolin and incipient notes of the candied lemon peel to come with a bit more bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunning, with lovely purity and mid-palate intensity, crisp acids and superb length and grip on the focused and perfectly poised finish. To my mind, 13.7 percent alcohol is pretty heady for Sauvignon Blanc, but this wine is beautifully balanced and shows absolutely no signs of *sur maturité* or even the faintest wisp of heat. A superb wine. 2013-2025+. **93+**.

1995 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

The 1995 Kalin Sauvignon Blanc Reserve is an absolute classic in the making. The alcohol is a tad lower than the 1996 and 1997 versions, coming in at 13.2 percent, and the wine has even more cut and backend drive as a result of its slightly lower octane. The brilliant nose soars from the glass in a youthful constellation of figs, a touch of lime zest, beautiful, delicate notes of dried eucalyptus, gravelly soil tones, a bit of wild fennel, smoke and a deft framing of vanillin oak. With air, this wine developed a beautiful aromatic layer of Chartreuse-like herb tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with brisk acids, superb balance and a rock solid core of fruit. The finish is very, very long and even less evolved than the 1996 version, with superb complexity and grip. A brilliant wine. 2013-2030+. **95.**

1990 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

The 1990 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve from Kalin Cellars is a tad less far along its evolutionary arc than the 1997, as the wine hails from a less ripe vintage and only tips the scales at a more customary 12.5 percent alcohol. The deep, mature and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a mix of dried apples, fresh apricot, a touch of toasted coconut, very gentle grassiness, orange zest and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and *à point*, with a fine core, gentle acids and impeccable focus and balance on the very long and complex finish. Though there is not a lot of acidity in reserve here these days, the 1990 Sauvignon Blanc remains very light on its feet and shows plenty of life still ahead of it, as the excellent balance here will carry it for many years to come. 2013-2025. **92.**

1987 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

Terry and Frances Leighton opted to pick the Sauvignon Blanc grapes early in the drought vintage of 1987 and the wine has aged beautifully and seems every bit as young today as the 1997! The complex and vibrant nose offers up a fine mélange of apple, tangerine, a fine base of almost salty soil tones, a bit of marzipan with air, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with fine mid-palate depth, impressive complexity and a very long, focused and still quite vibrant finish. Lovely juice. 2013-2020+. **92.**

1986 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

The 1986 Sauvignon Blanc was bit singular in our lineup of older wines from this varietal at the tasting in Livermore, and I suspect that there is a bit of botrytis in this vintage. The bouquet is deep-pitched and complex, offering up scents of orange peel, new leather, toffee, smoky tones and a fine foundation of salty soil nuances. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and younger structurally than either the 1990 or the 1987, with a good core, but not the same suave nuance and complexity as found in most vintages of Kalin's Sauvignon Blanc. There is plenty of life here, but it deserves a quite specific food companion at the table (wild mushroom risotto or roasted goose would work very well) to bring out its best. 2013-2025. **88.**

1984 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve (Potter Valley)

I sold and drank with some frequency the 1984 Kalin Cellars Sauvignon Blanc Reserve back in the day, and I was very happy at our tasting in Livermore to see the second vintage of this bottling still cruising along brilliantly at nearly thirty years of age! The deep, pure and utterly classic nose offers up scents of apple, tangerine, a beautifully mature and suave touch of herbaceousness (I love the grassy element of this grape when it is managed with such understated sensibility), a bit of petrol, orange peel, great soil tones and still a faint whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and resonant with tertiary

complexity. The finish is long and very vinous, with excellent focus and superb length and grip. The 1984 Kalin is a beautiful bottle of Sauvignon Blanc that has been drinking brilliantly for many, many years and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon! Given how gorgeous this wine was to drink in its relative youth, I suppose I can forgive myself for not keeping the bottles around in my cellar for a longer period of aging, but given how beautifully this showed in January in Livermore, I really wish I could have kept my hands off of at least a couple of bottles! 2013-2025+. **94.**

Sémillon

As the Leightons like to observe, Sémillon is not a grape that takes kindly to rich and fertile soils such as those found in the nutrient-rich, alluvial Napa Valley, and it is really only in the quite unique, thin, iron-infused clay topsoils and very deep bed of gravel subsoils of Livermore Valley that the grape really does well in California. Where the vines do not have to struggle a bit, they end up producing rather heavy-handed and innocuous wine that is far less interesting, as the yields climb exponentially where the grape is most at home and pampered. Today, the Sémillon bottling at Kalin Cellars will typically include about twenty to twenty-five percent of Sauvignon Blanc in the blend, and as noted above, this bottling always goes through a full malolactic fermentation and is bottled after a light fining and no filtration. While the vines that the Leightons have been working with from the Wentz Family Vineyards since 1983 are not quite as ancient as the vines used for those first few vintages, prior to the folks at Computerland destroying the even older Sémillon vines at Ruby Hill, they were planted from cuttings taken from the same original vines brought back to Livermore from Château d'Yquem by Charles Wetmore and were planted in 1909. In my experience, this bottling at Kalin Cellars can vary quite a bit in terms of its alcohol, depending on the style of the vintage out in Livermore, as it is always fermented to total dryness. Witness the 1980 vintage coming in at 13.7 percent and the 1999 at 13.8 percent alcohol, while the 1983 Sémillon only tipped the scales at 12.5 percent alcohol. The color on this wine can also vary quite a bit depending on the ripeness and style of the vintage, and I should caution folks that the color here is hardly indicative of either the quality of the style of a particular vintage, as some of the amber-colored wines at age fifteen can still be stunningly bright, zesty and light on their feet. This has been a flagship bottling from Kalin Cellars right from the initial release of the varietal in the 1979 vintage, and the wine ages extremely well and is probably one of the longest-lived white wines in all of California. In fact, of the vintages we tasted in early January in Livermore, my favorite for current drinking was actually the 1983! Interestingly, Frances and Terry Leighton tend to alternate releases of their Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc bottlings, so that one succeeds the other into the market at the appropriate time- perhaps reinforcing my impression that the two bottlings are mirror images of each other! The Kalin Cellars Sémillon is one of California's greatest and longest-lived dry white wines and probably its most underrated.

1999 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1999 vintage of the Kalin Cellars Sémillon is one of the riper vintages in recent memory, with its alcohol level at 13.8 percent and its color decidedly more evolved than is typical of this wine when it is first released. The wine offers up a deep and ripe nose of apricot, orange zest, toasted coconut, a lovely base of soil, just a dollop of honey and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and tasty, with a good core, fine focus and complexity and a long, wide open finish. This seems like it is totally ready to drink

right now and strikes me as a vintage of the winery's Sémillon that will be relatively short-lived- by the high standards of ageability of this particular cuvée- but, I may be wrong, as it is beautifully balanced and may continue to cruise along for many more years to come. 2013-2020+? **90.**

1998 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1998 Kalin Sémillon, which was, until very recently, the current release of this bottling, is just beautiful on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet offers up a complex mix of apple, fig, a touch of petrol, gentle grassiness, citrus peel, a lovely base of soil tones and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and zesty, with a rock solid core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, bright acids and lovely grip on the complex and still quite youthful finish. This should have no difficulties keeping at least another fifteen years and maybe longer and should prove to be one of the reference point vintages for this iconic California wine. 2012-2025+. **93+.**



1997 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1997 Kalin Cellars Sémillon is one of the riper recent vintages, coming in at around 13.8 percent alcohol, but the wine is fresh, vibrant and marvelously complex on both the nose and palate. The color shows just a touch of amber, but the nose is young and classy, wafting from the glass in a constellation of tangerine, petrol, peach, a touch of beeswax, lovely soil tones, a hint of walnut and a lovely, smoky complexity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is

deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with excellent complexity and mid-palate concentration, lovely acids and a very long, ripe and superbly focused finish. This wine is ripe, but never even comes close to any overripe elements and is a classic in the making. 2013-2030+. **93+**.

1996 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

Interestingly, while the 1996 Kalin Cellars Sémillon comes in with the same alcohol level as the 1997 at 13.8 percent, it is a shade darker in color and seems just a touch riper in personality. The complex bouquet is decidedly more evolved than the 1997, offering up a fine blend of tangerine, yellow plum, a touch of peach pit, petrol, orange peel and a dollop of new leather. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, lovely soil inflection and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. There is just a whisper of backend heat in the 1996 Sémillon that keeps its score down a bit, but this is also a very well-made wine that works marvelously at the table. 2013-2020. **88**.

1994 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1994 Kalin Sémillon is another from a fairly ripe vintage, with the wine coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. This is a lovely wine that is now fully into its apogee, wafting from the glass in a blend of tangerine, orange peel, toasted walnuts, a touch of petrol, hints of new leather and very lightly-roasted coffee beans. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with more apparent youth on the palate than the nose suggests. The wine is rock solid at the core, complex, beautifully-balanced and still has an excellent spine of acidity to carry it along for many more years to come. A fine, fine vintage for this iconic California wine. 2013-2030. **93**.

1991 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1991 Kalin Cellars Sémillon is one of the lower octane bottlings of recent memory from the winery, coming in at a very cool and svelte 12.8 percent alcohol and the wine is an absolute stunner! The color is quite light still for a twenty-two year-old white wine, with both the '96 and '97 far deeper-hued. The absolutely brilliant bouquet of the 1991 Sémillon is still quite youthful and very vibrant, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of fresh spearmint, dried eucalyptus, fresh fig, green apple, lanolin, a touch of petrol, beeswax and a delicate touch of white pepper. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with glorious complexity, a rock solid core, laser-like focus and simply magical length and grip on the endless and perfectly balanced finish. This utterly great wine is still in climbing mode and will only get better with further bottle age, but it is already and absolutely brilliant glass of wine! 2013-2040. **96**.

1985 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1985 Sémillon from the Leightons is a stunningly pure and fully *à point* wine of excellent breed and complexity. This, too, is a less ripe vintage, as the wine tips the scales at 12.5 percent alcohol- not that there is any direct correlation between ripeness level and quality with the Kalin Sémillon bottling! The deep and beautifully mature nose offers up scents of baked apples, figs, orange peel, a touch of peach pit (a tone I find very reminiscent of old Brauneberger rieslings!), salty soil nuances, lanolin and gentle notes of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with superb structure, a great core, sound acids and outstanding complexity and breed on the long, focused and classic finish. Like so many of the Kalin white wines, the 1985 Sémillon really blossomed brilliantly with extended aeration. 2013-2030. **94**.

1983 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The first vintage of the Kalin Cellars Sémillon to hail from the Wenté family's vineyards, the 1983 is cruising along just beautifully at age thirty and is truly a great joy to drink. In comparison to the 1994, the lower octane here (12.5 percent) has produced a fresher profile and slightly more complexity on both the nose and palate, as the wine offers up a superb mélange of toasted coconut, fresh fig, orange, petrol, salty soil tones and a delicate framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very poised, with excellent focus and balance, a fine core and simply stunning length and grip on the complex and still quite vibrant finish. Qualitatively, there is not a big step up from the 1994, but I absolutely love the style and silhouette of this racy 1983 Sémillon. A beautiful wine. 2013-2025+. **94.**

1980 Kalin Cellars Sémillon (Livermore Valley)

The 1980 Kalin Cellars Sémillon, from only the second vintage that the winery produced a varietal bottling from this grape, is still a lovely wine and shows no signs of any imminent decline. The color is far more golden than the 1983, but offers up a deep-pitched and still quite vibrant nose of apricot, coffee, a touch of honeycomb, soil, leather and orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tertiary, but with good structural integrity, fine mid-palate depth and very good length and grip on the focused and still Quié extant finish. This is drinking very well indeed in its more mature profile, but has plenty of life still in it and would really sing paired with the right dish. It is a bit more rustic in style than the wines from 1983 forwards- perhaps owing to the different vineyard sources (and perhaps the greater TLC that the Wenté vineyard received when the vineyard at Ruby Hill was not even being pruned!), but still a complex and very tasty wine. 2013-2025. **90.**

Chardonnay

As is the case with Kalin Cellars' Pinot Noir bottlings, the Leightons have long employed a labeling of their wines from different vineyard sources under a "Cuvée" name, such as "Cuvée LD" or "Cuvée W" to differentiate the various sources from which they have produced Chardonnay bottlings over the years. The naming of each bottling takes the initials either of the vineyard name or the owner of the vineyard, so for example the "Cuvée W" is from the Wenté Brothers' vineyards in Livermore Valley and the "Cuvée LD" hails from the Long Vineyard in the Dry Creek Valley section of Sonoma County (and which has nothing to do with the Napa-based winery of Long Vineyards). Chardonnay was the very first white wine produced by the Leightons, as they made a 1977 Chardonnay from the Calcaire Vineyard owned by Frank Woods in Sonoma County- though this was the only vintage that Kalin ever made a wine from this particular vineyard source. Like all of the Kalin Cellars wines, their Chardonnays are very long-lived wines that improve dramatically with bottle age and are probably amongst the very longest-lived Chardonnays in California, alongside those of Stony Hill Vineyards. However, the two house styles of Chardonnay are quite dissimilar, as the Stony Hill bottlings never go through malolactic fermentation, whereas every Kalin Cellars Chardonnay goes through full ML. However, both wineries share the ability to craft Chardonnays that age very long and gracefully and improve dramatically with bottle age, as is (or was, prior to premo) the case with white Burgundies. Interestingly, I asked Terry Leighton how his experience with premature oxidation has been with his Chardonnays at Kalin and he reported that he has had no difficulties whatsoever- and our old bottles at the tasting in Livermore in January bore this out- so one wonders in what important way the vinification and barrel aging techniques at Kalin are at variance with those in most white wine-producing cellars in Burgundy. One thing that jumps out

at me is that the Leightons have always used an old-fashioned mechanical press, rather than one of the relatively new pneumatic presses for their wines, and perhaps (as others have also speculated), by exposing their Chardonnay juice to a bit to oxygen during the pressing with their mechanical press, they have been able to avoid any issues with premoxy for their white wines.

In any case, the Kalin Cellars Chardonnays are clearly some of the greatest wines produced by this old school estate, with the ability to age and blossom with cellaring far better than any other American Chardonnays of which I am aware, other than those from Stony Hill (though I have also had outstanding success aging Mount Eden Chardonnays). The Leightons have always been very meticulous to search out cool climate vineyards for their Chardonnay bottlings, and have been adamant to only purchase fruit from vineyards where crop yields are kept in the one and a half to two tons per acre range. In fact, the history of Kalin Cellars has witnessed several vineyard sources abandoned by the Leightons after the vineyard became renowned for the quality of its fruit and the farmer decided to let yields creep up over time to take advantage of the heightened demand for his or her grapes. One wonders how much of the growing fame of some of these vineyard sources was due (at least partially) to the superb wines that had been produced from these vineyards by Kalin Cellars! The Kalin style of Chardonnay is always a deep, rich and racy style that shows great emphasis to the underlying soil character of each vineyard from which it was bottled. The wines are always high in natural acidity to age (as acidulation is eschewed at Kalin Cellars) and typically, these days the Chardonnays here are raised in fifty percent new oak- though there has been the occasional “special bottling” raised entirely in new wood. The most single vineyard bottlings of Chardonnay ever produced in a single vintage at Kalin Cellars was five, which were made in the 1995 vintage (and perhaps in one or two others around that time). Typically, a particular bottling will range from 500 to 1500 cases in a given vintage, and these days, the Kalin Chardonnays are generally not released until they have had at least a dozen years of bottle age and recent releases include wines from the 1995, 1994, 1993 and 1991 vintages! They are invariably some of California’s greatest Grand Cru Chardonnay bottlings.

Kalin Cellars’ Chardonnay Cuvées:

Cuvée BL: This bottling hails from grapes grown in the BJJ Vineyard in Potter Valley in northern Mendocino County. This is the northernmost, officially-recognized viticultural region in California, which means cooler growing seasons, slower ripening and better acid retention in the grapes. The soils are clay and limestone, layered over a gravelly, alluvial base from a dried up riverbed. This is the same source that the winery gets its Sauvignon Blanc grapes. Kalin Cellars only produced Chardonnay bottlings from this vineyard in the 1986, 1987 and 1988 vintages.

Cuvée CH: The Cuvée CH bottling of Chardonnay originates from the Charles Heintz Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast. The vineyard is located in Occidental, which is about a dozen miles due west of Santa Rosa. It is situated at the top of a steep hillside, with limestone and shale subsoils and a cool microclimate from the morning fogs that roll in from the nearby Pacific Ocean. It is about five miles further west of the Dutton Ranch Vineyard in Graton, but shares similar soil types. The Charles Heintz Vineyard is planted with low-yielding Burgundian clones and is still a fine source utilized by Ted Lemon at Littorai. There have been Kalin bottlings from this vineyard

source solely in the 1990s (and perhaps in the new millennium?), with 1999 the most recent release and the 1995 still waiting in the wings to fully blossom and be sent packing by the Leightons.

Cuvée D: The grapes for this bottling hail from the famed Dutton Ranch Vineyard in the extreme western end of Sonoma County's Russian River Valley. It is an extremely cool microclimate, with coastal influences and fog. The soils of this hillside vineyard are limestone and shale, which used to keep yields down here, making possible long-lived wines with superb natural acidity levels. Dutton Ranch is probably best known for the wines made from here by Kistler Vineyards, but the Kalin bottlings from Dutton are my own personal reference points for maximized potential from this fine vineyard. It has been an infrequent member of the Kalin lineup, with a handful of vintages produced here in both the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. According to Terry Leighton, there is still an unreleased 1995 Dutton bottling of Kalin Chardonnay aging in the winery's cellars.

Cuvée DD: The Cuvée DD is named for vineyard owner Dave Demostene and the grapes hail from his ranch in Alexander Valley in the northern reaches of Sonoma County, across the Russian River from the Robert Young Vineyard. The Demostene family has been grape growers and farmers in Alexander Valley for more than 125 years, and owned the Sausal Vineyard for many years, until its recent purchase by Silver Oak. Most of the Demostene vineyards were planted to Zinfandel and, to a lesser degree, Pinot Noir, but they had a couple of acres of Chardonnay planted close to where the winery was built, and which the Leightons purchased fruit for many years. The soils here are composed of clay, silt and limestone, and the vineyard lies quite close to the river. Sadly, since its purchase by Silver Oak Vineyards, a lot of fine, old Pinot Noir and Zinfandel parcels have been planted over to Cabernet Sauvignon. There were Kalin "Cuvée DD" Chardonnays produced in a handful of vintages in the early 1990s.

Cuvée LD (or Cuvée L in the earliest vintages): This designation has been used for wines produced from the Long Vineyard on the western end of the Dry Creek Valley in central Sonoma County. It is planted with the original Wente Clones of Chardonnay that hail back to the cuttings John Wente took from Louis Latour's parcel in Corton-Charlemagne. The soils here are light loam over a bed of gravel. The vineyard is a hillside vineyard rising up from the Dry Creek River, with early morning and late afternoon fogs contributing to one of the coolest microclimates in Sonoma. The LD bottling from Long Vineyards hails from a north-facing section of the vineyard.

Cuvée LR: The Cuvée LR is also a bottling of Chardonnay produced from the Long Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley. The LR designation is for a parcel of vines that rises up directly from the river and was sufficiently unique to be bottled on its own. In contrast, the Cuvée LD bottling hails from another section of the Long Vineyard not immediately adjacent to the river. The LR bottling from Kalin Cellars was last made in the 1991 vintage and designated by Terry and Frances Leighton as a "Fin de Siècle" specially-designated bottling, as it will be the last from the vines in this riverside section of Long Vineyard. There were only a handful of vintages here designated from this section, as the first bottlings were done in the vintages of the late 1980s and the vines here contacted Pierce's Disease from a neighboring vineyard and had to be grubbed up after the 1991 vintage. As noted above, there is a 1991 "Stealth Cuvée" of the LR that carries the

additional designation of “Fin de Siècle” and commemorates the last vintage of these older vines from this section of the vineyard. However, this parcel has now been replanted and there may one day be- it could already be resting in the cellars as a matter of fact- another Cuvée LR bottling from Kalin.

Cuvée LV: *The Cuvée LV designation at Kalin has been used for two different vineyard sources over the years. In the late 1980s, the Cuvée LV was for grapes that hailed from the Lorenzo Vineyard in western Sonoma County. This is a cool, coastal microclimate, with foggy mornings and typical western Sonoma soils of limestone and shale also found in the Dutton Ranch. It is planted to Burgundy clones that produce small yields. In the decade of the 1990s, once Kalin Cellars stopped using grapes from the Lorenzo Vineyard, the “LV” designation was shifted over to grapes from the Long Vineyard’s upper sites located close to Dry Creek Road, so as to distinguish this from both the LR bottling from the vines down by the river and the LD from the cooler, north-facing part of the vineyard.*

Cuvée W: *These grapes hail from the Wente Estate Vineyards just outside of the small city of Livermore. These are old vines planted with the original “Wente Clones” brought from Burgundy by John Wente at the start of the twentieth century and which were originally taken from cuttings from the Louis Latour vineyards in Corton-Charlemagne. The topsoils are thin and comprised of clay with a strong vein of iron in them, over a deep bed of gravel (as is the case with the Sémillon that the Leightons also get from the Wente Estate). These are the oldest Chardonnay vines with which the Leightons work and now range from fifty to sixty years of age. The first vintage produced from these grapes was the 1987, and it continues to be an important Chardonnay source up to the present day for Kalin Cellars.*



Vineyards in Livermore Valley- the development in the background testifies to the fate of many old vineayrds. (This photo appears courtesy of Melissa Mermin- her fine work can be found on her website: www.melissamermin.com.)

1995 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée LD” Chardonnay (Sonoma County)

Kalin’s Cuvée LD Chardonnay hails from the Long Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley, which is one of the coolest sites in Sonoma, due to morning and late afternoon fog patterns. The

vineyard is planted with the Wente Clone of Chardonnay, which as the article on Stony Hill shows, is probably California's finest Chardonnay clone. The 1995 Cuvée LD is a superb bottle of Chardonnay that offers up a complex aromatic mélange of fresh nutmeg, pears, tangerines, lovely soil tones, a touch of cardamom, lemon oil and a judicious framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very classy, with fine focus and balance, a lovely core of fruit, bright acids and superb length and grip on the very refined finish. Classy juice. 2010-2025+. **94.**

1995 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LV” (Sonoma County)

The Cuvée LV hails from a slightly warmer section of the Long Vineyard in Dry Creek, and though I did not take a note on the alcohol level of the '95 Cuvée LD when I tasted it a couple of years ago, it is probably a touch lower than the 13.8 percent reported on the label of the 1995 Cuvée LV bottling. That said, this wine seemed a touch less evolved structurally than the very fine LD bottling from the same year, offering up a deep and utterly superb nose of pear, tangerine, fresh mint, a complex base of salty soil, a nice streak of herbal complications, orange zest and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, excellent acids and exceptional length and grip on the focused and racy finish. This is a brilliant Chardonnay in the making, but as good as it is today, I would be strongly inclined to give it at least another year or two in the cellar and allow it to even more fully blossom! Superb wine. 2015-2045. **94.**

1994 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LV” (Sonoma County)

The 1994 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LV” purports to the same ripeness level of the 1995 (13.8 percent), but our particular bottle seemed quite a bit more advanced than the one year difference in calendar age might suggest. The deep, complex and quite tertiary bouquet offers up scents of apples, baked peaches, oranges, a touch of cinnamon, a lovely signature of soil, a touch of custard, buttery oak and a gentle topnote of honey. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with fine focus and complexity, sound framing acids and just the faintest whisper of backend heat suggesting that the wine is getting towards the far side of its plateau of peak maturity and should probably be drunk up in the relatively near-term. Perhaps our bottle was just a touch more advanced, but if it is representative, I would be inclined to drink this wine over the next decade, as it is still quite lovely. 2013-2023. **90.**

1994 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée W” Chardonnay (Livermore Valley)

This has long been Terry Leighton's oldest vine bottling of Chardonnay, as he makes this from one of the Wente family's oldest vineyards, which was planted with cuttings of Chardonnay they brought back from Corton-Charlemagne very early in the history of post-prohibition California viticulture. The 1994 is the current release, and it is a terrific bottle of Chardonnay, as it offers up a deep and complex bouquet of buttered pears, apples, salty soil tones, fresh nutmeg, lemon zest, just a hint of beeswax, toasted almonds and buttery new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wonderfully refined, with a slightly herbal streak through it that only adds to the complexity, excellent mid-palate depth, vibrant acids and truly exceptional length and grip on the perfectly focused finish. Just a terrific bottle of mature Chardonnay with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2013-2030+. **94.**

1991 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée DD” (Sonoma County)

While the Demostene Ranch in Alexander Valley is best known amongst “Kalinites” for the brilliant Pinot Noir that originates here, the Chardonnay is no slouch! The 1991 is excellent, offering up a precise and racy personality that delivers a bouquet of lemon, orange zest, a beautiful base of soil, vanillin oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with lovely, nascent complexity, crisp acids and excellent focus on the long and zesty finish. The DD Chardonnay may not be quite as inherently complex as the LD or W bottlings here, but this is a top-flight cuvée that shows decades of life still ahead of it and may yet improve with further bottle age. 2013-2030+. **91+**.

1991 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LD” (Sonoma County)

Occasionally, the Leightons experiment with different bottling dates for their wines, and this particular bottle of the 1991 Cuvée LD was one of the late-bottled examples. This is an utterly brilliant wine, soaring from the glass in a stunning mélange of tangerine, pear, salty soil tones, orange zest, a touch of straw-like overtones (that recall Chablis a bit), citrus peel and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, nascent complexity, laser-like focus and exquisite balance on the very long and racy finish. At age twenty-two, the 1991 Cuvée LD is still a young wine that has not even reached its apogee! Stunning juice. 2013-2035+. **95.**

1990 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée CH” (Sonoma County)

The 1990 Kalin bottling from the Charles Heintz Vineyard in Sonoma is lovely, but with a decidedly more amber tinge to its color than the 1991 Cuvée LD that preceded it in the lineup. The lovely and quite mature bouquet delivers scents of honeyed oranges, almond-like nutty tones, orange peel, a complex base of soil and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, stunning freshness (and far more than the tertiary nose might suggest) and excellent focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. This is a lovely wine for drinking over the next ten to twelve years. 2013-2025+. **92.**

1990 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LD” (Sonoma County)

The 1990 Cuvée LD Chardonnay from Kalin Cellars is a truly beautiful example of a fully mature bottle of Sonoma Chard at its apogee, as the wine offers up superb refinement and complexity on both the nose and palate. This is a pretty low octane chard by the standards of the 1990 vintage, tipping the scales at an even thirteen percent. The deep and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a complex mix of pineapple, orange, fresh apricot, wonderfully complex soil tones, a sophisticated base of vanillin oak and a lovely, gentle topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely *à point*, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, excellent focus and balance and a very long, refined and suave finish. While the 1990 Cuvée LD is very much at its peak of drinkability, but it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon and has plenty of life still in it. One of my favorite Kalin Chardonnay bottlings for current consumption. 2013-2025+. **93.**

1988 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LD” (Sonoma County)

The 1988 Kalin Cuvée LD Chardonnay drinks very much like mature Corton-Charlemagne, which is of course interesting, as the cuttings for this vineyard did actually originate in Corton-Charlemagne. The nose is deep, mature and vibrant, as it wafts from the glass in a wonderfully complex blend of oranges, fresh apricot, a touch of honeycomb, salty soil tones, citrus peel and a very discreet base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still almost reductive in nature, with a great core of fruit, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. A beautiful bottle of Chardonnay at its apogee of maturity, but with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2013-2025+. **94+.**

1988 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LR” (Sonoma County)

I am not sure if it was our bottle, but the 1988 Cuvée LR seemed a tad more advanced than the Cuvée LD from the same vintage, and did not show quite the same level of complexity. The deep and mature nose offers up a gently honeyed mélange of baked peaches, almonds,

beautiful soil tones, a bit of butter and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core, very good focus and impressive length and grip on the poised and classy finish. This is a lovely wine, and if it was not in the company of the stunning 1988 Cuvée LD bottling, I might have been even more excited about the quality of the LR, but it had tough company to keep on this particular evening in Livermore! 2013-2025. **90+?**

1987 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée BL” (Potter Valley)

At our tasting in Livermore, the 1987 Cuvée BL Chardonnay was fully mature and was probably one of the few Kalin white wines that seemed to have time in hand and would be best drunk up over the next several years. The deep and tertiary bouquet delivers scents of apricot, honey, walnuts, soil tones, a touch of oak and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now starting to get just a tad chunky in personality, with good length and grip, but fairly gentle acids and moderate complexity. It is still a very tasty drink, but not quite in the same league as the 1988s from the Leightons. 2013-2018. **88.**

1987 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée LV” (Sonoma County)

The drought year of 1987 produced a very concentrated example of Cuvée LV, but to my palate, despite its slightly more powerful personality, this wine cannot quite match the seamless complexity of the best 1988 Chardonnays from Kalin that I have had the pleasure to taste in the last few years. The deep and mature nose offers up an intense blend of apricot, tangerine, a touch of passion fruit (one taster at our Kalin gathering here in New York commented that this wine smelt more and more like one of the Coche-Dury Meursault bottlings as it had a chance to blossom with air), nutty overtones, orange zest, a bit of new leather, salty soil tones and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with still very good acids and focus, lovely mid-palate concentration and fine length and grip on the mature and assertive finish. This is a lovely bottle of fully mature Chardonnay, which, at age twenty-six, can dance rings around most ten year-old California Chardonnays, but, at least to my palate, it cannot quite keep pace with the beautiful 1988 Cuvée LD. 2013-2020+. **93.**

1983 Kalin Cellars Chardonnay “Cuvée L” (Sonoma County)

The 1983 Cuvée L (which would eventually become an LD bottling, once the plot in Long Vineyards down by the river begat its own individual bottling as LR) is a lovely wine, but one which shows a bit of botrytis on both the nose and palate and gives it a rather unique profile in the context of all these other classic Kalin Cellars Chardonnay bottlings. The tropical nose offers up scents of apricot, honeyed oranges, new leather, soil tones, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very bright (the touch of botrytis concentrating acids, as well as sugars), with a fine core, good focus and balance and a long, bright and bouncy finish. As I often find to be the case with Chardonnays with a touch of botrytis, the extra tang from the noble rot has come at the expense of more complexity at maturity. But, this is still a very good drink with plenty of life ahead of it, and folks who like a bit of botrytis in their Chardonnay more than I do might score this wine even higher than I do. 2013-2025. **88.**

Pinot Noir

Intuitively, I have always “known” that Kalin Cellars was one of the very greatest producers of Pinot Noir in California, but until our most recent tasting in Livermore, I did not have a whole lot of experience with fully mature examples of this varietal from the Leightons. Now I have a bit more, though I have little doubt that the notes below constitute no more than the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir, and for the rest of my adult life my antennae will be up and I will be studiously adding to my experience with the great, great Pinot

Noirs from Kalin Cellars. As I have written in other pieces on California classic wines, Sonoma County is where the finest examples of Pinot Noir in the state of California originate- or at least this has been my unequivocal impression up until this point (but I am still intrigued about the possibilities of Mendocino Pinot in the context of global warming)- and clearly Terry and Frances Leighton have been on the track of the finest Pinot *terroirs* in Sonoma since their very first vintage from Dave Demostene's Alexander Valley vineyard was released in 1975! There have been the occasional bottling of Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir from Santa Barbara county as well over the years (mostly in the very early days of the winery), but it is fair to say that Kalin Cellars has really been a Sonoma County Pinot Noir specialist from its very earliest days.

There have never been quite as many single vineyard "cuvées" produced of Pinot Noir at Kalin Cellars as has been the case with their Chardonnays, and the most Pinot bottlings produced in a single vintage has been three, which Terry Leighton recalls "occurred primarily in the vintages from the decade of the 1980s." As I have done with the Chardonnays, I have listed below the various iterations of Kalin Pinot Noir that have appeared over the years (and which I am familiar- again, keep in mind, given the Leightons' penchant for holding back wines until they are properly aged prior to releasing them, there may well be more Kalin Pinot Noir "presents" wrapped up under the Christmas tree than I am aware and we will just have to be patient and wait and see what is still to come from the winery in the years to come. I suppose, I could have just asked Terry and Frances Leighton about what bottlings of unreleased Pinot Noir they have in the cellars (not that they would have necessarily answered my queries ☺), but, in any event, I like the thought that there may well be a lot more waiting in the wings here from the Kalin world of Pinot Noir and that there remain peaks yet to climb and perhaps new *terroirs* to discover through the lens of Kalin Cellars. In any event, even if there are new cuvées still unreleased, it seems safe to say that the heart and soul of the fine, fine Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir program has been cool vineyard sources in Sonoma County, with Dave Demostene's Alexander Valley vineyard certainly at the very top of the list of great sites with which the Leightons have gleaned grapes over the years and produced world class wines. To my palate, my experiences with the Kalin Pinots places the "Cuvée DD" (formerly produced from thirty-five year-old vines on average and from a particularly fine clone of Pinot Noir that produces very small berries and delivers terrific skin to juice ratio) at the top of the Kalin food chain with this varietal and I am hard-pressed to think of any California Pinot Noirs that have eclipsed my experience with these bottlings. The vintages of Kalin Pinot "Cuvée DD" that I have been fortunate enough to cross paths with over the years have consistently dazzled me with their breed and complexity.

Like all of the Kalin wines, the various Pinot Noir bottlings here start out life young, properly structured and beautifully balanced, with much of the bottle aging now taken care of by the Leightons prior to release, but with the potential to age and evolve gracefully over many decades after they are let out from the winery's cellars to find their way in a cold, hard world. Typically, Kalin Pinots will be crushed and fermented in the old Redwood *caves* for three weeks, with three to four punch-downs per day done by hand, and the wine then pressed and racked off into barrels for its *elevage* of typically eighteen months or so, depending on the style of the vintage. All Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir cuvées are bottled without racking, fining or filtration. The vast, vast majority of Kalin Pinot Noirs are raised these days in fifty percent new oak, but there are occasional special bottlings (called the "Stealth Cuvées" on the winery's website), such as the brilliant 1994 Cuvée Billon, that are raised in one hundred percent new oak. It is a rare

vintage of Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir that is approachable before its tenth birthday, but not to worry, the Leightons typically keep back their Pinots until they have had (at the very least) a solid decade's worth of aging in the winery's cellars before they will even consider them ready for release. However, unlike the white wines here, even when a Kalin Pinot Noir bottling is released, it is still to my palate a fairly young wine and I heartily recommend that most of these wines be given another five to ten years of cellaring after release to really allow the wines to reach their true apogees of peak drinkability. Since the 1992 vintage, Pinot Noir is the only red wine still produced at Kalin Cellars, and this varietal is clearly one of the specialties of the Leightons and it is my distinct impression that no one does Pinot Noir better in the state of California than Kalin Cellars.

Cuvée DD: *The “Cuvée DD” is named for vineyard owner Dave Demostene and the grapes hail from his ranch in Alexander Valley. This was the source for the oldest Pinot Noir vines with which Terry and Frances Leighton worked, from clones that were originally brought from Burgundy and produce particularly small, concentrated berries and which are known in Burgundy as “Pinot Fin”. The Demostene ranch Pinot vines originated from cuttings taken from Louis Martini’s Monte Rosso Vineyard. The soils in this vineyard are locally known as “Blue Clay”, which, according to Terry Leighton “is the same kind of marl found in Gevrey-Chambertin and Morey St. Denis.” The vineyard itself was primarily planted to Zinfandel, with only a small percentage dedicated to Pinot Noir, and these vines were thirty-five years of age when Silver Oak purchased the vineyard and started planting Cabernet here.*

Cuvée JL: *The “Cuvée JL” bottling hails from the Dutton Ranch in the western end of the Russian River Valley, and the 1980 vintage was the only one produced by the Leightons from this portion of the Dutton Ranch vineyard. It was one of the original “Stealth Cuvéés” in the Kalin portfolio.*

Cuvée LS: *The “Cuvée LS” Pinot Noir hailed from a parcel of vines in Glen Ellen, which were planted on a gentle hillside with easterly exposition. Here, the morning sun gave gentle ripening which allowed good acidity to be maintained through to physiological ripeness. It was used by the Leightons for a small handful of vintages in the early 1980s.*

Cuvée WD: *This is the home vineyard of Warren Dutton, owner of Dutton Ranch, and is located in the town of Graton. It is approximately one and a half acres and was planted to Pinot Noir in the early 1980s, when the Leightons produced their bottlings from this site. It is a hilltop vineyard, and it may well have been the only Pinot Noir vines planted at Dutton Ranch in this epoch. It was only produced at Kalin for a handful of vintages in the early 1980s.*

1997 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée DD” (Sonoma County)

The 1997 “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir is a superb young wine, offering up a deep and still quite youthful aromatic constellation of cherries, sweet cranberries, spiced meats, a touch of mint, a very complex base of dark soil tones, a bit of sandalwood and cloves and incipient notes of *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off great mid-palate depth, with beautiful complexity, tangy acids, moderate tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, perfectly balanced and very classy finish. At age sixteen, this is not a bad drink today, but a few more years of cellaring should be repaid with a silkier and even more complex glass of

superlative Pinot Noir. The wine will certainly continue to age beautifully for several decades to come! 2013-2045+. **93.**

1994 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée Billon”

The 1994 Cuvée Billon from Terry and Frances Leighton is one of the finest young California Pinot Noirs I have ever had the pleasure to taste. This is a special, two barrel selection of their 1994 “Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir that was raised in one hundred percent new Billon barrels and named in honor of the *tonnelier* Gaston Billon (who began his career in 1947, founded his eponymous barrel-making firm in 1960 with his son, and who passed away in 1994). The bouquet of the 1994 Cuvée Billon is very deep and flat out brilliant, as it soars from the glass in a blaze of dried cherries, orange zest, woodsmoke, a touch of cinnamon stick, grilled venison, *sous bois*, new wood and a beautifully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very complex, with tangy acids, lovely mid-palate depth, excellent focus and outstanding length and grip on the bright and very soil-driven finish. Just a beautiful bottle in the making. 2011-2045+. **96.**

1994 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée DD” (Sonoma County)

This was the first time I had tasted the 1994 Cuvée DD” Pinot Noir, and as the Leightons had taken out two barrels of the production from this lot to create the special tribute bottling to Gaston Billon, I wondered how this might affect the style or quality of the “regular” 1994 DD. Naturally, not at all from my vantage point! The absolutely exceptional nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, grilled meat, forest floor, a bit of graphite, woodsmoke, mint and a gentle base of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with moderate tannins, a beautiful core of pure fruit, superb soil inflection and outstanding length and grip on the tangy and youthful finish. This will be a great bottle of Pinot in due course, but I would try to give it at least another three to four years in the cellar to allow the wine to really blossom completely. 2016-2045+. **94+.**

1990 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée DD” (Sonoma County)

The 1990 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée DD” is a brilliant bottle that has not yet reached its apogee and should cruise along marvelously for many decades to come. The deep, complex and very classy nose soars from the glass in a blaze of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of venison, a youthful touch of tariness and a lovely framing of very classy (Billon?) new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and complex, with a rock solid core, impeccable focus and balance, nascent complexity, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised and very intensely flavored finish. This is a young and stunning bottle in the making! 2017-2040. **93+.**

1984 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée DD” (Sonoma County)

The 1984 Cuvée DD is still a relatively young bottle of Pinot Noir and further cellaring is certainly going to be rewarded. The deep, very complex and classy nose wafts from the glass in a mélange of dried cherries, red berries, woodsmoke, a touch of orange zest, fresh herb tones, forest floor, a bit of clove and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully focused, with excellent mid-palate depth, superb complexity and lovely grip and balance on the finely-grained and very long finish. This is a beautiful bottle of Pinot Noir that will continue to blossom and improve for decades to come! 2013-2040. **94.**

1982 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée WD” (Sonoma County)

The 1982 Kalin Cellars Cuvée WD is another fine bottle of Pinot Noir, but it is stylistically much more cut from what I would consider the typical “Sonoma” style of this grape, rather than the more “Burgundian” style of bottlings from the Demostene Ranch in Alexander

Valley. The deep and complex nose offers up scents of red and black cherries, herb tones, damp soil, tea-smoked duck, fallen leaves, a touch of cedar and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely acidity and very fine length and grip on the meltingly tannic and nicely focused finish. This is a fine bottle of fully mature Pinot, with a bit more of the “weediness” I often associate with this varietal in certain sections of Sonoma, but with excellent complexity and balance- not to mention, no shortage of life still ahead of it. 2013-2035. **90+**.

1981 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée LS” (Sonoma County)

The 1981 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée LS” is a lovely wine, which, while not quite at its absolute apogee of peak drinkability, it is nearly there and is a very fine glass for current consumption. The very complex bouquet offers up a classy mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, woodsmoke, gentle notes of venison, fresh herbs, a whisper of tariness and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a lovely core, superb focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and a long, multi-dimensional finish. While this wine is almost its peak, it will be even better with another couple of year of bottle age to let its tannins fully fall away and should drink at a very refined plateau for a couple of decades. High class juice. 2016-2035. **91+**.

1980 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Santa Barbara County”

The 1980 Kalin Cellars “Santa Barbara County” Pinot Noir is the only one I have ever seen from this section of California produced by the Leightons. This was a very interesting source, as the owner here thought that more limestone would be good for his Pinot vines, and he actually added some to his vineyard a few years before this vintage. I am not sure how successful this “instant *terroir* booster” was- or even if such practices are deemed acceptable in the wine world of California- but, the wine at age thirty-three is still drinking very well. It is quite typical on both the nose and palate to what I associate with Santa Barbara Pinot, offering up a deep and black fruity nose of black cherries, a touch of tariness, a good base of dark soil, funky herb tones and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a distinct streak of *herbacité* running down the spine of the palate, a fine core of black fruit, very little remaining tannin and very good length and grip on the complex and well-balanced finish. I have a pretty strong stylistic preference for wines such as the Cuvée DD, but this is certainly a very well-made example of Santa Barbara Pinot Noir and has a good decade of tasty drinking still ahead of it. Given that this was only the Leightons’ fifth vintage and that the fruit did not hail from a prime Sonoma site, this wine has stood the test of time beautifully. 2013-2025. **90**.

1980 Kalin Cellars Pinot Noir “Cuvée JL” (Sonoma County)

The 1980 Cuvée JL Pinot Noir hails from the famed Dutton Ranch in western Sonoma. This is a stunning bottle of Pinot Noir that is now at its apogee of peak drinkability, but shows no signs of imminent decline and should cruise along at this superb level for a decade or two. The deep, complex and fairly black fruity nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, a gentle touch of *herbacité*, espresso, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones and a delicate base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, a bit more of a broad-shouldered personality than many Kalin pinots, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the modestly tannic finish. This is an excellent wine that still has a bit of tannin to drop, and it may yet improve a bit with more bottle age, but it is an outstanding wine that is really a great joy to drink at the present time. 2013-2030+. **92+**.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Kalin Cellars has not produced a Cabernet Sauvignon bottling since the 1992 vintage, and the varietal was never a mainstay of their red wine lineup, even in the early days. This is unfortunate, for after tasting five vintages of Kalin Cabernet from the decade of the 1980s at our tasting here in New York in early February (happily, all but one from my own cellar), it is crystal clear to me that Kalin was one of the greatest producers of classically-styled Cabernet Sauvignon in all of California, and I rank the Kalin bottlings of this varietal right up there at my absolute summit of Cabernet producers alongside Heitz, Mayacamas, Ridge, Corison and Mount Eden. The wines since I first crossed paths with them in the late 1980s have always been pure, structured wines that were very long on potential and properly built for long-term cellaring. In my early days in the wine trade, I thought that they were very, very Bordeaux-like for California Cabernets in terms of structure out of the blocks, for back in the day, top Bordeaux usually required a minimum of twenty years bottle age to start to truly soften up and blossom, and this time-frame certainly seems appropriate for the Kalin Cellars Cabernets I recently tasted from the vintages of the 1980s. At our New York tasting, one of the participants pulled out their smart phone and downloaded Robert Parker's tasting notes on several of the vintages of Kalin Cabernets from this era (even the note on the sole vintage he liked- the 1986- starts out with something along the lines of "I never have liked Kalin's Cabernets..."), which I thought was a bit mean-spirited, given how stunning the wines were showing, how enraptured all the very seasoned tasters around the table were with the quality of these Cabernets, and the fact that Bob's scores seemed to lack a bit of relevance when viewed within the context of all the fireworks that were going off in the glasses on the table. I thought it would have been sufficient just to say that he did not ever seem to understand or appreciate these wines.

The winery has produced Cabernets from several vineyard sources over the years, including most recently a couple of vintages from the historic Cresta Blanca Vineyard in Livermore Valley, which was originally planted by Charles Wetmore in the 1880s from cuttings he brought back to the region from Bordeaux. The vineyard was wiped out during the political plague of Prohibition, but re-planted again by the younger brother of Charles Wetmore, Clarence, when Prohibition was finally repealed. Sadly, the Cresta Blanca "brand" was flipped to liquor companies in the 1960s and 1970s, with the vineyards falling into disrepair and the old cellars closed. Eventually, the vineyards and old cellars were purchased and restored by the Wentz Family Estate in the early 1980s and the vineyards replanted. The Leightons' 1990 Livermore Cabernet Reserve from Kalin hails from these replanted vineyards, but I have not (yet) had the pleasure to taste it. Their 1982 Cabernet Sauvignon hailed from the Tepusquet Vineyard in Santa Maria in Santa Barbara County. This vineyard is in the "inland Mesa" area and was utilized for several vintages by Frances and Terry as the place of origin for one of their Cabernet bottlings. The winery has also used a couple of different sources for their Sonoma-based bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon, with one being the Long Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley. The second site was also in the western end of Dry Creek Valley, planted on a very steep slope that stood 1500 feet above the valley, with a thirty to forty percent grade and a very thin, red topsoil of iron-infused clay, layered over a profound base of volcanic rock. As Terry Leighton recalls, "this was a radical hillside site, which took ten years to come into production after it was planted, yielded between one and two tons per acre and which at physiological maturity was twelve percent alcohol." The farmer eventually had to sell the property, so there were sadly only a bit more than a handful of Kalin Cabernets from this outstanding source, but

based on what I tasted from the decade of the 1980s from this vineyard, it had to be one of the greatest *Cabernet terroirs* in all of California.



One of the hallmarks of the great Kalin Cellars Cabernets is their being produced from ripe, rather than overripe grapes, and typically sugars here will be in the twenty-two Brix range when picked. Many contemporary winemakers in California (and particularly Napa) will tell you that it is simply not possible to make wine from this grape at 22 Brix, as it will be way too green, but the brilliant Kalin Cabernets belie this argument- at least for well-selected sites where the grapes can achieve a certain degree of physiological ripeness at this sugar level. Whether or not this is still possible in an era of climate change in Napa Valley is a matter of debate, but it is, of course, just disinformation to state that no one can make good Napa Cabernet today with potential alcohol levels under fifteen and a half or sixteen percent. One has to recognize that the high octane, “hedonistic” side of California Cabernet is made out of conscious choice, rather than forced by circumstance, and is produced either because the winemaker and/or proprietor really likes this kind of over the top jam juice or thinks that they can make more money crafting these kind of wines. Of course, with alcohol levels well under thirteen percent, classic Cabernets such as Kalin’s start out life with plenty of structure and are not going to win any beauty pageants when the wines are first released, but if one wants true, old school California Cabernet Sauvignon that is going to age and improve dramatically with bottle age, one really has to be on the lookout for wines that emphatically do not win any beauty pageants out of the blocks these

days! This lower octane from well-selected sites gives the wines very classic varietal profiles on both the nose and palate, sane alcohol levels of well under thirteen percent (all the Kalin Cabernets I tasted for this report are between 12 and 12.5 percent alcohol!), and are endowed with classic structures for long-term aging. The Kalin cabs generally spend three weeks in the old Redwood tanks, with twice a day punch-downs during initial fermentation, and then are racked off into barrels for their malolactic fermentations. They are racked after malo is complete and then returned to barrel for fully four years of aging prior to bottling without fining or filtration. Frances and Terry Leighton use more new oak for their Cabernets than for any of their other varietal bottlings (with the exception of a very few special cuvées of Chardonnay or Pinot Noir), with the Kalin Cabernets typically being raised in anywhere from eighty to one hundred percent new oak. These are some of the greatest and least well-known wines produced at Kalin Cellars and I cannot recommend them highly enough!

1990 Kalin Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (Sonoma County)

As I purchased the 1990 Kalin Sonoma Cabernet at auction, there is some possibility that the wine was not stored one hundred percent correctly. As I recall, the description of provenance was very positive and the fill and color were excellent, but when I cut the capsule to decant the wine, the top of the cork showed just a touch of old seepage. Therefore, it is possible that this very, very good wine would be even better from a totally pristine bottle! In any event, while the 1990 Sonoma cab did not have quite the same mid-palate intensity as the remainder of these gems from the decade of the 1980s, the wine was very impressively complex on both the nose and palate. The beautiful and very complex bouquet is a blend of black cherries, a touch of fruitcake, dried eucalyptus, complex soil tones, Cuban cigars, coffee and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very poised, with good, but not great mid-palate depth, excellent complexity and balance, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish of impressive grip and unquestioned breed. In fact, this is very St. Julien-like in profile- though perhaps I should more appropriately state that it is classic Sonoma Cabernet from a properly cool vineyard site! A lovely bottle, and if there are even better ones out there, I would love to try one! Oh yeah, I forgot- alcohol level is 12.5 percent on this wine. 2013-2035. **92.**

1989 Kalin Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (Sonoma County)

1989 was a forgotten year for California Cabernets, but the '89 Kalin from their superb Sonoma vineyard source is absolutely brilliant. This is a classic Kalin Cabernet in terms of ripeness, tipping the scales at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up a simply stunning bouquet of black cherries, cassis, Cuban tobacco smoke, dark soil tones, fresh herbs, incipient notes of chipotle peppers and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a rock solid core of fruit, great acids, outstanding focus and balance and still a fair bit of tannin perking up the extremely long, complex and superb finish. There is more vibrancy to both the flavors and aromatics, not to mention a bit more depth at the core than was demonstrated by the bottle of the 1990 above, which is probably indicative that the 1990 was not a perfect example. But, the 1989 on the other hand, is a pristine bottle of an absolutely brilliant and still quite young wine! 2015-2050. **94+.**

1987 Kalin Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (Sonoma County)

It is interesting that in the drought year of 1987, this bottling still came in at the accustomed level of 12.5 percent (assuming that the labels are accurate in this respect- not sure why I am doing so, given the fact that there is usually a little leeway in this regard on all labels?) and the wine is excellent. I remember well writing an article on the 1987 cabs based on a very

large tasting that a friend organized all the way back in 2002- he had been meticulous in collecting at the outset as many highly-rated examples of the vintage as he could find with an eye on holding this comprehensive tasting, and I was pretty surprised by how poorly so many examples of the vintage had evolved only fifteen years out from the vintage. Michael, my friend, you should have cellared some of this brilliant '87 Kalin Cellars Cabernet! The superb and utterly classic nose soars from the glass in a constellation of black cherries, cassis, dried eucalyptus, tobacco, superb, stony minerality, a lovely touch of weediness (which I find absolutely proper with Cabernets in this stage of development- in fact, if a wine does not display this characteristic, I often wonder what has been done to suppress this natural side of Cabernet Sauvignon!) and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with superb focus and grip, still a touch of remaining tannin and a very, very long, suave and elegant finish. This is more along its evolutionary arc than either the 1989 or 1986, but it is right there and very nearly at the same quality level. A superb wine. 2013-2040. **94.**

1986 Kalin Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (Sonoma County)

When I told Terry Leighton which vintages of Cabernet we had put together for our New York tasting, he mentioned that the 1986 was likely to be the most special in the lineup. Oh, so right he was! This is a young, pure and utterly profound young bottle of Cabernet in the making, offering up magical bouquet of dark berries, cassis, a touch of menthol, cigar ash, dark, stony soil tones, a touch of tariness, incipient notes of Cuban tobacco smoke, herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still very young and primary, with a rock solid core of sappy fruit, stunning focus and detail, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins and simply stunning length and grip on the endless and very intensely flavored finish. This is one of the finest young Cabernets I have ever had the pleasure to taste from California! Though it is certainly approachable at age twenty-seven, I would be inclined to not touch another bottle for at least another five years or so, as this is still a puppy and there is a lot more to come with further bottle age! 2018-2060+. **97.**

1982 Kalin Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (Santa Barbara County)

I do not generally think of Santa Barbara County as Cabernet country, but this 1982 from Kalin Cellars is outstanding (and may get me to re-think the potential for this variety in Santa Barbara). The wine tips the scales at an impressive twelve percent alcohol and offers up a deep, complex and nicely weedy nose of black cherries, a touch of mocha, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, herbal nuances and a touch of tariness. In many ways, this reminds me quite a bit of an old-fashioned, mature bottle of St. Émilion. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, modest remaining tannins and lovely length and grip on the wide open and complex finish. A fine, fine bottle that has been fully mature for several years already, but shows absolutely no signs of slowing down anytime soon. 2013-2035. **92.**

Zinfandel

While Zinfandel, along with Pinot Noir, was one of the first two varietal wines produced by Frances and Terry Leighton at Kalin Cellars in the inaugural vintage of 1975, the couple did not produce Zinfandel for a great many vintages and 1982 was the last year for Kalin Zinfandels. There were both a Livermore Valley and a Sonoma bottling of Zinfandel over the seven vintages that this varietal was produced at Kalin Cellars, with the Sonoma bottling hailing from Dave Demostene's Dry Creek Valley vineyard, and the Livermore Valley bottling coming from a

parcel of old vines on the Ruby Hill Ranch prior to its destruction by Computerland to make their executive retreat. Other than the one example of the 1981 Livermore Valley bottling, this is a varietal that I had never crossed paths with from Kalin Cellars prior to our tasting with Terry Leighton in early January of this year, and I was quite disappointed that we ran out of steam at this dinner and did not get through the other four Zinfandel bottlings that Terry had prepared for our tasting. However, there will be a part two of this article, and Terry has promised that the old Zinfandels we did not get to in our last tasting are still on the table and I look forward to reporting on them in a follow-up feature. The Kalin Cellars Zinfandels were handled like all of the estate's other red wines, with fermentation in the old redwood tanks, followed by a gentle pressing, full malo and aging for about fifteen months in barrel prior to bottling without fining or filtration. The one primary difference for the Zinfandels was that their *elevage* was done in American oak, rather than French oak, of which forty percent was new wood in each vintage.

1981 Kalin Cellars Zinfandel (Livermore Valley)

The 1981 Livermore Zinfandel bottling from Kalin was raised in forty percent new oak, and though I did not take note of its alcohol level, this is by no means a “monster truck” zinfandel, but a wine of grace, balance and harmony. At age thirty-two, the wine is drinking beautifully and shows no signs of imminent decline. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, French roast, lovely spice tones, a touch of grilled meat and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, still a touch of tannin and a long, plump and generous finish. Obviously, this does not have the same breed and finesse as the Pinots from this era, but this is a lovely wine that will continue on for another fifteen to twenty years with no difficulties. Lovely old Zinfandel! 2013-2030. **89.**

Dessert Wines

I only have a single note on any of the Kalin Cellars dessert wines fashioned over the years, and anticipate having more to say on this particular subject after Part Deux of the Kalin Cellars retrospective tastings later in the year. On our proposed lineup for the first tasting held in Livermore in January, there was also a 1979 Riesling on the list, but as I ran out of steam (it was after midnight after all and we had begun our tasting at 4:30 in the afternoon!), we did not get to that wine. Rather than write about the dessert wines at Kalin in this report- where I only have the single tasting note, I will defer this section's elaboration until I have tasted a few more Kalin dessert wines.

1990 Kalin Cellars “Cuvée L d’Or”

The 1990 Cuvée L d’Or from Kalin Cellars is a blend of late-harvested, botrytized Sémillon and Sauvignon Blanc from the great vineyards in the Potter and Livermore valleys that Terry and Frances Leighton have worked with for years. The blend on the 1990 is eighty percent Sémillon and twenty percent Sauvignon Blanc and the wine offers up a deep and mature nose of *crème brûlée*, apricot, oranges, new leather, a touch of tea leaves and a gentle base of almost salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and impressively fresh for its maturity, with lovely depth, good, well-integrated acids and an impressively long, musky finish. A lovely dessert wine that has drunk well since it was released, but continues to offer up a great deal of pleasure. 2011-2020. **90.**