

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

# SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

April 2014



An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.

## **Michael Fay**

Winemaker, Goldeneye Anderson Valley, Philo, CA  
By Foodservice East

In 1993, Michael Fay tried a bottle of 1990 Panther Creek Pinot Noir from Oregon that opened his eyes to what was to become his passion – “the subtlety and beauty of Pinot Noir.” He became fascinated by the varietal and soon discovered wines from the Santa Maria and Sta. Rita Hills.

# FOODSERVICE EAST

## SECRETS OF SUCCESS

**FSE: California wines seem to have changed a lot in the past five years or so with smaller, more boutique wineries making excellent wines that also offer value. What do you attribute this to?**

FAY: I believe we are in a Golden Age for California Pinot Noir, with people discovering how profoundly site specific the variety can be and then searching for the differences amongst Pinots from different regions. Education and experience have played a huge part in this, as people have discovered that Pinot Noir can only be world-class when it's planted in the right area.

**FSE: What led you into the world of wine? Your bio says you were studying forestry management, which is quite distant from winemaking!**

FAY: During my time in Seattle attending the University of Washington I worked in restaurants to pay my tuition and fell in love with wine through food and wine pairing. I quickly realized I should consider growing grapes instead of trees.

**FSE: Your focus is primarily Pinot Noir though you have a Gewürztraminer and a Pinot Gris. What led to this specialization?**

FAY: When Dan and Margaret Duckhorn founded Goldeneye, they had a very clear vision; they wanted to make a Pinot Noir of equal stature to the Merlots they had pioneered in the Napa Valley. When you're setting a goal this high, you need to specialize, which is why we were so deeply focused on Pinot Noir for so long, and still are. The Anderson Valley has a long history of making outstanding Alsace white varietals due to the climactic conditions here, and we love making them, but Pinot is our baby.

**FSE: What is it about the terroir of Anderson Valley that makes such great Pinot Noir?**

FAY: There are many factors that contribute to the terroir of the Anderson Valley. We have very well draining soils, primarily ancient alluvial soils. I think the most interesting aspect of the Anderson Valley is the large diurnal swing in temperature from spring to harvest. We average about 40-50 degrees difference in temperature from daytime to nighttime. This, combined with the intensity of the sunlight here in the valley, contributes to the color, intensity, and structure of Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs.

**FSE: How do you describe what you call the "essential Anderson Valley-ness of the wines"?**

FAY: Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs are similar to the valley itself. It is a robust and rustic expression of Pinot Noir, but there is also a natural grace and grandeur to the wines that make them stunning.

**FSE: What are your favorite wines and why?**

FAY: I am a fan of most wines but particularly Pinot Noir. Any well-made wine that expresses varietal typicity is okay in my book.

**FSE: What countries/regions today do you see as up and coming in making great wines with lots of value?**

FAY: I've had a lot of great wines from Central and South America and am interested in some of the wines being produced in Baja California, Mexico.

**FSE: What is the hardest part of making wine and what's the most rewarding?**

FAY: The most challenging thing is to learn to trust your instincts when making critical decisions: harvest timing, cap management, barrel choices, etc. The most rewarding is when your instincts are right and you make a knockout wine.

**FSE: What kinds of food do you feel go especially well with your wines?**

FAY: Goldeneye Pinot Noir can be paired well with richer fish like salmon and even with filet mignon. While there is a delicacy and elegance to our wines, there is still enough structure to pair with meats.

**FSE: If you weren't a winemaker, what would you be doing?**

FAY: I would own and operate a Christmas tree farm. It's one of the few jobs you smell better coming home from than when you leave the house.

**FSE: What are the wines you most look forward to drinking next?**

FAY: I am really looking forward to seeing the evolution of our 2011 Goldeneye wines. They are already beautiful, complex wines, but they are also wines with the depth and structure to age very, very well. I am a big fan of the cooler vintage Pinot Noirs from California.

**FSE: What's the 'secret' of your success?**

FAY: Listen to the wine. It will show you the way.