

Point Reyes Vineyard

Dressed in cowboy boots, jeans and shirt with rolled up sleeves, Point Reyes Vineyard's owner and winemaker, Steve Doughty, offers no hint at his previous life as a private investigator. The tasting room is an homage to his country lifestyle: the walls lined with family photos, shelves stocked with homemade vinegars alongside his estate wines, and a fridge filled with local cheeses.

Why is a former PI making wine? "Well, I married the farmer's daughter," Doughty says. His late wife, Sharon Doughty, was a third-generation dairywoman whose family's Marin farming roots date to the 1920s. But when she and Steve met and married in the mid 1980s, the county was seeing a shift in land conservation laws and there was a downturn in the dairy industry, so the couple turned to grapes.

"Our first wine was bubbly for my daughter's wedding," Doughty says. Acquaintance Jess Jackson, founder of Kendall-Jackson, was a guest at that wedding. With his encouragement, the couple dove full-force into the wine industry. Doughty's non-vintage sparkling wines, crafted in the *methode Champenoise*, are reason enough to stop by the barn-turned-winery. The wine ferments in bottles for at least 8 years before disgorgement — a process the lone winemaker does by hand. Those unfamiliar with this traditional method will be surprised by the depth of flavor the long, slow fermentation provides.

Come for the bubbly but stay for the Cab. When Doughty first started making still wine, he was forced to leave his first vintage of Cabernet Sauvignon in the barrel for three years. "That's how long it took us to get the proper permits from the county," Doughty explains, "but the wine came out so well, we just kept doing it." The extended barrel aging means Doughty's Cabernets are fruit-forward and



Brant Ward / The Chronicle

full-bodied, but plush with soft tannins and mellow acidity.

Linger just a little longer to talk to Doughty — who will boast about his late wife's influence on the winery's success, talk fondly of his local Marin community, and express in no uncertain terms his love for his work as a winemaker. "It's a nice way to spend the winter of my life."

Wine to try: 2001 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (\$32).

12700 Shoreline Hwy., Point Reyes Station; (415) 663-1552. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Monday. Fee: \$10 (waived with bottle purchase). www.ptreyesvineyardinn.com.

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Marin's honey wine

Heidrun Meadery is named after the myth of Norse God Odin's goat, Heidrun, who produces mead instead of milk.

Wander around the property, taking in the flower gardens and beehives, then step into the tasting room and learn what modern mead is all about.

Gordon Hull's sparkling varietal meads are made with honeys sourced from his property as well as apiaries from the Pacific Coast, Alaska, and even as far west as Hawaii.

"Few people understand that the source of honey is flower nectar and that place, or *terroir*, matters," says Hull, who is often amazed by the broad spectrum of flavor profiles mead can have.

Hull's first love is beer. In fact, in the mid 1990s, he left his career as a geologist to study the art of brewing.

It was around this same time that he began experimenting with honey fermentation. Having tasted through several commercial meads, he found the sweet, "funky" flavors unappealing. "I realized the raw ingredients — honey, water, yeast — have no reason to taste funky." So Hull set out to produce mead that is dry and crisp and expresses its floral source.

Hull made his first batch of sparkling mead using techniques inspired by the *methode Champenoise* — also used to make effervescent *bières de Champagne*. Following the primary fermentation of the honey, water and yeast, he left the mead to ferment further in the bottle, resulting in a lighter, drier, bubbly mead. The last step, riddling and disgorgement to remove the dead-yeast sediment, was a step Hull admits he added somewhat grudgingly, but to appeal to the mass market, accustomed to crystal-clear beverages. "The cloudiness of the unfiltered bottles had customers sending the mead back. They mistook it for a flaw," Hull says.

When Hull went to replicate his mead-making process, his original vendor couldn't supply him with enough honey for experiment No. 2. Hull turned to another beekeeper whose bees collected nectar from a different flower source. The result: "It tasted the same, but different," Hull says, "So then I asked myself, 'What if honey is like grape varieties?'"

Mead to Try: Point Reyes Wildflower 2016 Estate (\$50).

11925 Highway 1, Point Reyes Station; (415) 663-9122. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday; until 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Fee: \$15 (waived with purchase of three or more bottles). www.heidrunmeadery.com



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