

PALM BEACH[®]

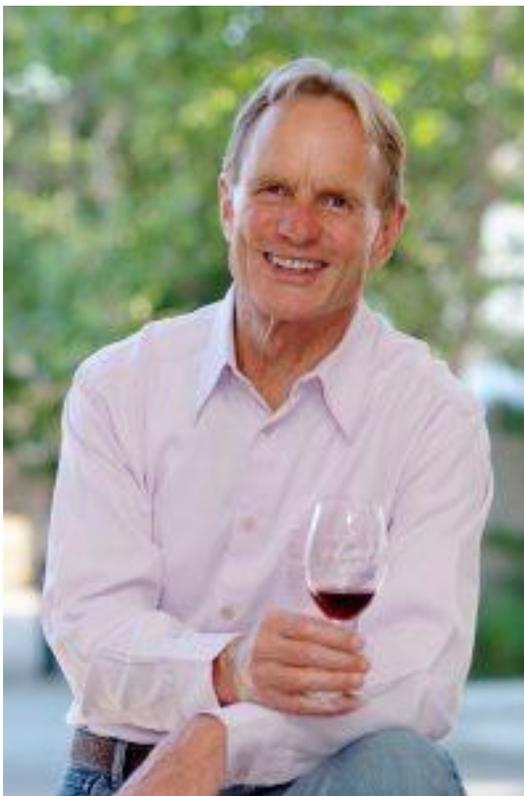
I L L U S T R A T E D

Gems from the Santa Rita Hills

Alma Rosa Winery fulfills Richard Sanford's vision

By
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Without Richard Sanford, it's safe to say that we wouldn't have the Santa Barbara wine region as we know it today. While searching for a place to grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the tradition of Burgundy, he was the first to grasp the area's potential. That realization led him to plant the iconic Sanford & Benedict Vineyard in 1973 with botanist Michael Benedict; the site became the fruit source for the Sanford Winery, which Richard left in the early 1980s. He went on to found Alma Rosa winery in 2005, continuing his commitment to organic and sustainable farming. Richard sold the estate in 2014 and still serves as winery ambassador.

The oldest vineyard site at Alma Rosa is El Jabali, planted in 1983 on the north-facing slopes of the Santa Rosa Hills. It was the first certified organic vineyard in Santa Barbara County, devoted to reflecting the unique terroir of the Santa Rita Hills appellation. The fruit benefits from the cool breezes that come off the Pacific Ocean and traverse the East-West mountain range. While many vintners in California aspire to produce a Burgundian style of wine, this microclimate provides a

promising head start: gentle sun exposure during the day, little rain during the growing season, and temperatures that are ideal for encapsulating the natural acidity of grapes.



The 2018 Alma Rosa El Jabali Vineyard Chardonnay (\$48) has a bright, lively nose perfumed with aromas of citrus, minerals and spice. On entry, the wine is clean and direct, with firm acidity and all the mineral character promised on the nose. The mouth feel is fresh and appealing, with no excess weight, no residual sugar and no intrusive oak: the overall effect is reminiscent of a top-flight village Burgundy from a good producer. While charming to drink on its own, this would also pair well with shellfish, fish in generous sauces, and simple dishes of poultry, pork or veal.

The fragrant nose of the deeply colored 2018 Alma Rosa El Jabali Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$68) is packed with ripe black cherries and hints of earth and undergrowth (or *sous bois*, as they say in Beaune). On entry, the wine displays tart cherries and rhubarb, with the fruit enlivened by bright acidity; the earth notes persist through the mid palate and onto the finish, which is long and complex. All in all, this is a delicious wine that makes you stop and think.

In addition to the other attributes of the Santa Rita Hills, it is one of the few appellations in California to escape the effects of the 2020 wildfires—either in terms of vineyard damage or the more pervasive aspect of smoke taint. Compared to many parts of Napa and Sonoma, these are high-end wines consumers can purchase without concern.

Mark Spivak specializes in wine, spirits, food, restaurants and culinary travel. He is the author of several books on distilled spirits and the cocktail culture, as well as three novels. His latest release, [Impeachment](#), is now available on Amazon.