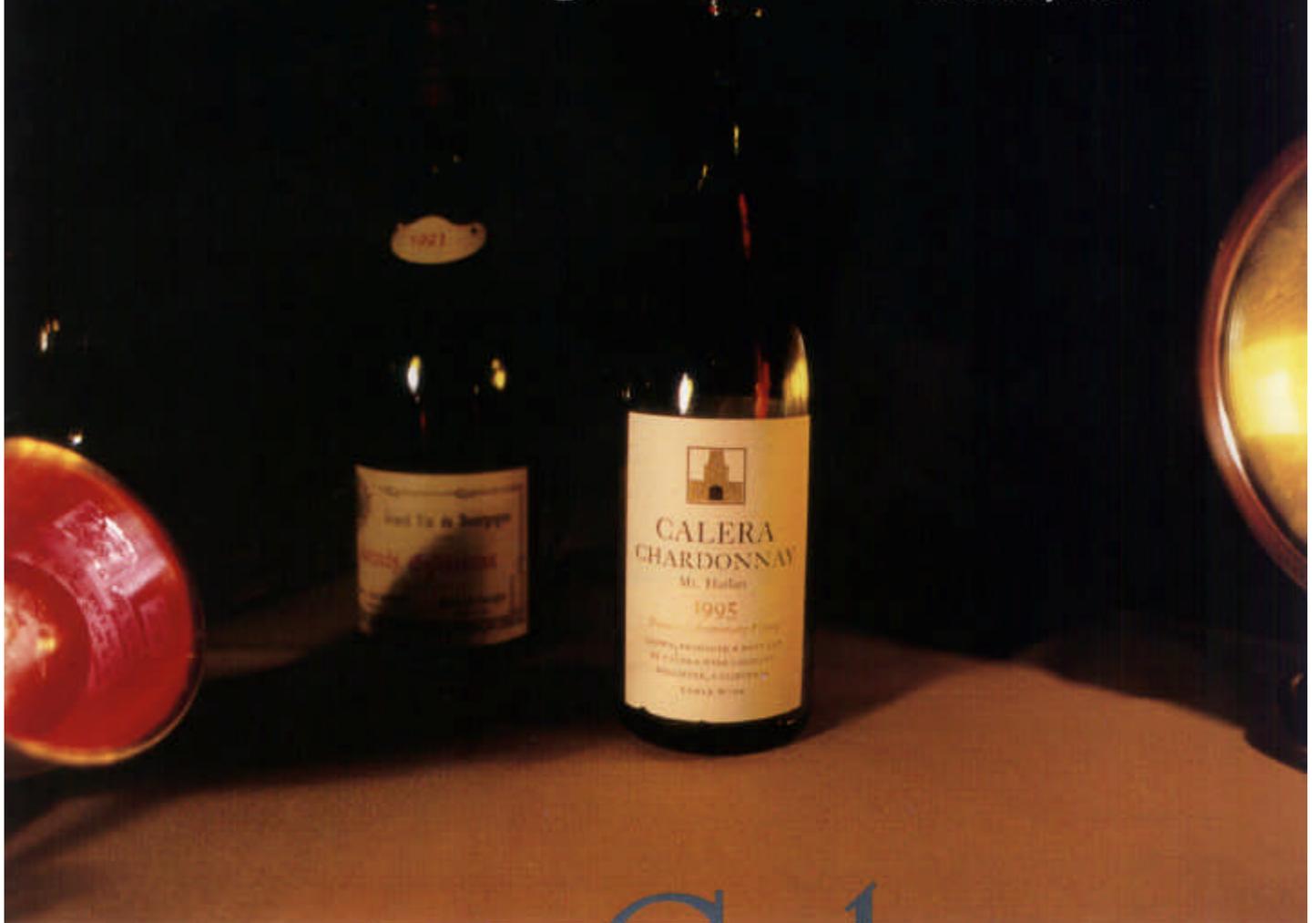


As seen in...

T H E U N D E R G R O U N D
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Calera:

The Great Limestone Gamble

ARTICLE BY Jim Burns



[above: Maverick Winemaker and Oxford graduate Josh Jensen ©R.DODDS
left: Two wines from the comparative tasting ©JOHN LACROIX]

For reasons no one fully understands, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay must be grown on limestone-derived soil, as in the Cote d'Or, to make great wines

Our story begins on the pages of an adult comic book in Japan during the summer of 1999. The hero of “Sommelier,” Joe Stake, who solves crimes on the side, is being tested by a rival sommelier. In a blind tasting of two wines, Satake must choose between a legendary Domaine Romanée-Conti and a Calera Jensen. Which wine is the best? At the last moment, after the rival sommelier has already tried to trick him, Satake realizes that there is only one wine to best the Burgandy – and he declares Calera the winner.

Much to winemaker Josh Jensen’s surprise, when this manga was published, it instantly elevated Calera Wine Company’s wines to a cult status in Japan, a feat usually reserved for king-maker Robert Parker. In fact, on subsequent trips to both Tokyo and Osaka, tastings produced long lines of folks who wanted to buy Calera wines – and have Jensen autograph the bottle!

But, back here in California, what we wanted to know was whether life would imitate art, and so we planned our own comparative tasting, which was held earlier this year in the wine cellar of the Sutton Place Hotel in Newport Beach, near our offices.

Any who have followed Josh Jensen and Calera know that this maverick winemaker,

who set up shop on Mt. Harlan near Hollister, CA, some 140 miles south of the good life in Napa and Sonoma, has gone to great lengths to make his wines in the Burgundian style. The native Californian lived in France for several years after graduating from Oxford with a master's degree in anthropology. After leaving England, he worked two consecutive harvests, 1970 at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and 1971 at Domaine Dujac. It was there that he fell in love with Burgundian wines.

Upon returning to his native California, Jensen was determined to find land that mimicked that of Burgundy, for as his French mentors had told him, "For reasons no one fully understands, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay must be grown on limestone-derived soil, as in the Cote d'Or, to make great wines." Jensen spent the next two years searching for limestone in a land mostly composed of granite. Finally, he found his Grail in early 1974, a 2,200-foot-high parcel next to Mt. Harlan, some 25 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. His 24 acres didn't include water, electricity, telephone or any modern conveniences, but there were several million tons of limestone deposits. In fact, limestone had been commercially quarried on the property 100 years earlier.

With the proper *terroir* in place, Jensen was ready to begin his first planting of Pinot Noir. Sticking with Burgundian tradition, he named each parcel separately: Five acres became Selleck vineyard, after family friend Dr. George Selleck, who first interested Jensen in wine, another five acres became Reed vineyard, while the remaining 14 were named Jensen vineyard. Dry farming the land produced a small initial crop in 1978. Jensen then planted an additional 23 acres of Pinot, Chardonnay and Viognier in 1983 and 1984, with 28 more acres coming under the vine in the late '90s. In 1990, Jensen witnessed



[above: Joe Satake, hero of "Sommelier"]

Calera and Burgundy Notes

- 1985 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Jensen Vineyard (91) \$25
- 1985 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Reed Vineyard (91) \$25
- 1985 Echézeaux Grand Cru Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret (84) \$50
- 1985 Mazis-Chambertin, Grand Cru, Domaine Maume (85) \$100
- 1988 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Jensen Vineyard (89) \$30
- 1988 Mazis-Chambertin, Grand Cru, Domaine Maume (89) \$70
- 1993 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Jensen Vineyard (87) \$38
- 1993 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Mills Vineyard (90) \$35
- 1993 Grands-Echézeaux Grand Cru Domaine Laurent (93) \$112
- 1995 Calera Chardonnay Mt Harlan (90) \$30
- 1995 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Reed Vineyard (84) \$35
- 1995 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Selleck Vineyard (89) \$38
- 1995 Corton-Charlemagne, Grand Cru, Leroy (85) \$215
- 1995 Corton-Renardes, Grand Cru Leroy (85) \$220
- 1995 Richebourg Grand Cru Domaine Jean Grivot (85) \$190
- 1996 Calera Chardonnay Central Coast (94) \$16
- 1996 Calera Chardonnay Mt Harlan (83) \$30
- 1996 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Mills Vineyard (89) \$55
- 1996 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Reed Vineyard (91) \$65
- 1996 Albert Grivault Meursault (83) \$35
- 1996 Meursault-Genévrières, Hospices de Beaun, Premier Cru, Cuvée Baudot, Michel Colin-Deléger (85) \$80
- 1996 Romanée-St. Vivant Grand Cru Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (85) \$226



[The Wine Journal tasting panel in the Sutton Place Hotel's cellar room, decides on a score ©R. DODDS]

Mt. Harlan's approval as an American Viticultural Area (AVA). The winery now produces about 30,000 cases annually.

Another unique feature of the Calera property is its gravity-flow winery, in which wine is moved in the gentlest way possible – by the force of gravity, down to the next level of each different step in the winemaking process. Incredibly, there are no pumps involved. Jensen accomplished this feat by maximizing what was already there: a multi-level, hillside, limestone-crushing plant that was never completed by the former owner.

Calera Pinot Noir is mentioned in the same sentence with Pinots from Williams Selyem (before its sale to John

Dyson) as well as Domaine Drouhin. Jensen has also begun raising his prices to keep up with the competition. His top Pinots range from \$55 to \$80 a bottle.

Jensen spoke with the panel that evening, and gave an explanation of his methodology as well as his Burgundian philosophy. All of the wines we pitted against one another were from Jensen's cellar. As you can see from the notes and scores below, mostly we agreed with Joe Satake. In fact, if we can get in touch with him, we'd like to invite him to our next tasting.

Calera

[Tasting Notes]

Josh Jensen at Calera has demonstrated his ability to produce the finest collection of Pinot Noir over the longest period of time of any New World producer we have yet seen. With our tasting at the Sutton Place Hotel in Newport Beach, CA we had the opportunity to taste wines from the 1988 through 1996 vintages which showed remarkable consistency of character and promise of even greater potential with continued cellaring.

His bottles, which include multiple vineyard designations from the same Mt. Harlan location, age gracefully. Jensen's fanatical commitment to traditional Burgundian methods of viticulture, enology and barrel selection yield fruit and wines of such high character that this property more than any other California property deserves to be recognized as *Grand Cru*.

Although California wines have the potential to outshine their French counterparts during blind tasting conditions, it is important to note that the Burgundies we tasted on this occasion did not live up to expectations and previous experience, perhaps due to their storage. Some wines were purchased at auction, others from retailers.

WHITE

1996 Calera Chardonnay Mt Harlan

Clear, brilliant golden pineapple color with a green tinge. Complex nose with scents of pineapple, vanilla, butter, oak and mineral with a hint of sulfur, some nutty aromas and just a whiff of alcohol. Attack of good round fruit on the palate. Cooked pear and hazelnut flavors along with apple, lemon and wood. Good acid structure with medium body. The finish contains butter, nut, apple and alcohol. Overall, wood seems to permeate the wine from beginning to end. \$30

A	N	P	F	O	
9	21	21	20	12	83

1996 Albert Grivault Meursault

Warm golden hue in appearance. Sweet fruit on the nose, almost to the point of botrytis. Aromas of dry straw, old oak barrel, some apple and a touch of oxidation. The palate seems to be lacking depth. Attack of acid on entry with citric lemon, pineapple and tropical fruit followed by nut flavors at the end. The finish has some length and reflects the fruit, however, there is too much acid - heavy and ponderous. \$35

A	N	P	F	O	
9	21	20	21	12	83

1996 Calera Chardonnay Central Coast

Brilliant pale gold with greenish tinge. Clean, attractive scent on the nose of apple, rich pear, lemon rind, Graham Cracker and some pleasant nutty aromas. Attack of harmonious fruit on the palate with pineapple, Golden Delicious apple and lemon flavors along with toasty oak and a whisper of peach. Well-balanced with good acid, it displays good varietal expression. Clean and complex at the end

with the alcohol in check. The finish is lingering and elegant with delicate fruit, hinting at roasted nuts and butter. \$16

A	N	P	F	O	
10	23	24	23	14	94

1996 Meursault-Genevrières, Hospices de Beaun, Premier Cru, Cuvée Baudot, Michel Colin-Deléger

Golden color with a slight bronze patina and a ring of water around the edge. Heady nose with aromas of cashew nut, mineral, camphor, turpentine, resin and a hint of sulfur. Big mouth-feel with an attack of intense lemon acid and fruit. Long dry finish with nut skin, dried lemon and more acid. Marvelous food wine, possibly with Coquilles St. Jacques. \$80

A	N	P	F	O	
9	22	21	21	12	85

1995 Corton-Charlemagne, Grand Cru, Leroy

Watery gold in appearance. Aromas of deep lemon/lime fruit followed by mineral, wood, green almond, nut and a hint of oxidation. Slightly bitter on the palate with hints of rich citrus, limestone, hay and wood. Just a bit watery on the mid-palate. Medium bodied with good acidity. Good length on the finish with lime and alcohol. This wine is somewhat lacking in varietal fruit character. \$215

A	N	P	F	O	
9	21	22	21	12	85

1995 Calera Chardonnay Mt Harlan

Brilliant light gold color with green reflections. The nose has aromas of jasmine, pineapple, green papaya, lime blossom, a touch of apple and a bit of basil. Medium-bodied palate with round, expansive flavors of Golden Delicious apple, pear and buttered toast with nut and mineral notes. It seems to jump a bit from the entry to the

mid-palate to the end. Nice long finish with delicate fruit, roasted nut and a bit of alcohol showing on the back. The oak is balanced and well integrated; not too creamy or woody. Somewhat lacking in acidity. This wine has potential to develop further in the bottle. \$30

A	N	P	F	O	
10	23	22	22	13	90

RED

1988 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Selleck Vineyard

Garnet-brick color with an orange rim. Rich jammy nose with complex layers of deep, red fruit and some stemminess. Aromas of raspberry, spicy cherry, coffee, red currant, rhubarb, tobacco, and vanilla. Ripe fruit on the palate with wood evident. Flavors of raspberry, cherry pit, cranberry and hints of raisin plus high acid. The finish is truity and dry with good length, though not completely integrated with the oak. \$30

A	N	P	F	O	
10	22	22	22	13	89

1988 Mazis-Chambertin, Grand Cru, Domaine Maume

Brilliant cherry red color with mauve tones around the rim. Subdued, somewhat closed nose then opening to restrained aromas of ripe, red cherry, attractive herbal, earth, leather with a hint of alcohol and acid. Soft attack of dried cherry and raspberry fruit on the palate followed by high acid. Hint of oak in the mid palate. Medium long finish with simple fruit. \$70

A	N	P	F	O	
10	22	22	22	13	89

1993 Grands-Echezeaux Grand Cru Domaine Laurent

Medium dark ruby color. Lovely Burgundian nose. Sensual aromas of stewed fruit, tart cherries, smoked meat, plum, barnyard and somewhat herbaceous in the back. Good typicality of fruit on the palate with an attack of complex and silky fruit flavors. The gentle power of the rounded red cherry/strawberry fruit continues through the velvety long finish. Deliciously elegant wine. \$112

A	N	P	F	O	
10	23	23	23	14	93

1993 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Jensen Vineyard

Medium garnet red color with a watery orange rim. Candy nose of pomegranate,

cranberry and cooked strawberry with Maraschino cherry overtones. Attack of light, simple fruit flavors on the palate with straightforward acid and hints of pepper. The finish shows some balance with spicy fruit and a bit of smoke. \$38

A	N	P	F	O	87
9	22	22	21	13	

1993 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Mills Vineyard

Brilliant cherry ruby color. Perfumed nose with aromas of oak, deep ripe fruit, fresh leather, spice and roses. Good entry onto the palate with attack of red cherry, pomegranate and acid followed by leather, fresh violets and herbs. The finish has good acid with cherry and red plum flavors but is bit short on the length. \$35

A	N	P	F	O	90
10	23	22	22	13	

1985 Echézeaux Grand Cru Domaine Mongeard-Mugneret

Garnet appearance with a rim of water and an edge of tile brick color. Deep Pinot Noir nose with extracted fruit. Dried floral aromas with a light veil of smoke. Good attack of red cherry and plum fruit on entry, though a bit metallic and medicinal. The finish is thin with some cherry and alcohol. Short on length. Signs of age are showing. \$50

A	N	P	F	O	84
9	21	21	21	12	

1985 Mazis-Chambertin, Grand Cru, Domaine Maume

Brilliant medium ruby color with good legs. Plum, red fruit and leather on the nose with alcohol overtones. The dry, cherry pit and plum flavors on the palate are fairly intense with good acidity and show some balance and complexity. The finish has deep fruit and a hint of leather. Big wine; complex, dry and balanced. \$100

A	N	P	F	O	85
10	21	21	21	12	

1985 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Jensen Vineyard

Dark purple-red color. Intense, deep red fruit on the nose with complex aromas of strawberry, cherry, dried roses and a hint of alcohol. Fresh, lively, loud fruit on the entry along with acid. Flavors of spicy red

cherry, stems and a trace of clove. Edgy yet refreshing in the mouth. The finish hints at the palate flavors with an overtone of straw and dry hay. \$25

A	N	P	F	O	91
10	23	23	22	13	

1985 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Reed Vineyard

Brownish brick red color with a rim of water, yet still brilliant in appearance. Complex nose of dried strawberry, red plum, cherry, baking spices and a hint of leather. Attack of dry fruit on the palate. Great mouth-feel. Clean, dry, medium long finish with some acid and just a hint of fruit. \$25

A	N	P	F	O	92
9	23	23	23	14	

1995 Corton-Renardes Grand Cru Leroy

Deep ruby red color in appearance. Extracted nose of red fruit, dried straw, cherry, mineral and a whiff of alcohol. Attack of high acid and firm tannins on the palate with some cherry. Some length on the finish. This is a tight, close wine. \$220

A	N	P	F	O	85
10	21	21	21	12	

1995 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Selleck Vineyard

Brilliant reddish color with traces of maroon. Intense cherry and strawberry on the nose with a hint of leather. Vibrant fruit in the mouth. Flavors of cherry pits and red currant with some acid that tapers quickly. Good length of fruit on the wellbalanced finish. This is a well-made wine that shows some elegance. \$38

A	N	P	F	O	89
10	22	22	22	13	

1995 Richebourg Grand Cru Domaine Jean Grivot

Deep ruby color with a rim of water. The nose is somewhat restrained with aromas of dark fruits, alcohol and a bit dusty. Attack of acid and unripe fruits on the palate. The tannins and acid seem to mask the fruit flavors. The finish is a bit angular with unripe and youthful fruit with some stemminess. \$190

A	N	P	F	O	85
10	21	21	21	12	

1995 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Reed Vineyard

Medium ruby color with a slight brown edge. Lemon and strawberry on the nose with some clove and green herb. Fruity entrance on to the palate followed by bright cherry acid. Some length on the finish with unripe fruit that is a bit overwhelmed by the acid. The fruit and alcohol seemed somewhat unbalanced. \$35

A	N	P	F	O	84
10	20	21	21	12	

1996 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Mills Vineyard

Bright medium ruby color. Deep raspberry/berry nose with red plum and geranium. Intense fruit and violet on entry with good acid, black cherry and black currant. Tight in the mouth. Similar intense fruit on the finish with some acid. Good depth of flavors all in balance. \$55

A	N	P	F	O	89
10	22	23	22	12	

1996 Romanée-St. Vivant Grand Cru Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

Dark ruby color with mauve reflections. Bing cherry on the nose with smoke and plum. The palate has extracted cherry fruit and string acidity. The finish has some length and balance. This wine is a bit tight and close, yet some underlying Pinot Noir fruit shows through. \$226

A	N	P	F	O	85
9	22	21	21	12	

1996 Calera Pinot Noir Mt Harlan Reed Vineyard

Medium ruby color with brilliant reflections. Deep and complex layers of red fruit on the nose with aromas of cranberry, raspberry and a touch of rhubarb. Intense raspberry fruit dominates the palate. Similar flavors on the finish with all elements coming together. A bit tight, but it shows good length and depth. Potential for those who have the patience to wait. \$65

A	N	P	F	O	91
10	23	23	23	12	

TASTE Rating System	<table style="font-size: 0.8em;"> <tr><td>Old Scale</td><td>Rating</td><td>TASTE</td></tr> <tr><td>15 - 15½</td><td>Good</td><td>75 - 79</td></tr> <tr><td>16 - 16½</td><td>Very Good</td><td>80 - 84</td></tr> <tr><td>17 - 17½</td><td>Excellent</td><td>85 - 89</td></tr> <tr><td>18 - 20</td><td>Outstanding</td><td>90 - 100</td></tr> </table>	Old Scale	Rating	TASTE	15 - 15½	Good	75 - 79	16 - 16½	Very Good	80 - 84	17 - 17½	Excellent	85 - 89	18 - 20	Outstanding	90 - 100	<table style="font-size: 0.8em;"> <tr><td colspan="3">Scoring Legend</td></tr> <tr><td>A Appearance</td><td></td><td>10%</td></tr> <tr><td>N Nose</td><td></td><td>25%</td></tr> <tr><td>P Palate</td><td></td><td>25%</td></tr> <tr><td>F Finish</td><td></td><td>25%</td></tr> <tr><td>O Overall Integration</td><td></td><td>15%</td></tr> </table>	Scoring Legend			A Appearance		10%	N Nose		25%	P Palate		25%	F Finish		25%	O Overall Integration		15%	<table style="font-size: 0.8em;"> <tr><td>Highest Possible Score</td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: 1.5em; font-weight: bold;">100</td></tr> </table>	Highest Possible Score	100
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