



# Sonoma Wines That Pay Homage to the Rhône

Winemaker Megan Cline is inspired by the wines of the Petaluma Gap



By Vicki Denig | July 15, 2021



*Photo illustration by Allison Kahler.*

Following in her parents' footsteps wasn't the goal for Megan Cline. But after she pursued a BA in Communications and Italian at UC Santa Barbara, it was the time she spent **studying** for a sommelier exam that actually pushed Cline to fall in love with wine, although she'd grown up surrounded by vineyards. After completing sommelier training, Cline returned home to assist at her family's winery, **Cline Family Cellars** in Sonoma.

While many children of vignerons spend their childhoods picking grapes, Cline didn't work her first harvest until her adult years. After her first punch down, she was hooked. Over the years, Cline continued to play around with grape varieties, maceration times, and vinification vessels at her family's estate. In 2017, after much experimentation, she had an idea.

In partnership with her sister Hilary Cline – children number three and four of the seven Cline siblings – the duo founded **Gust Wines**, a Petaluma Gap based project on land that her parents had purchased at a time when the area was considered too cold for grapes. But now, inspired by the area's cool climate and coupled with their love for **Pinot Noir**, **Chardonnay**, and **Syrah**, the Cline sisters decided to bottle their own line of wines under the Gust name. The project's name pays homage to the daily morning fog and cooling winds of the region, which the sisters believe represent the energy and breath of new life that the Petaluma Gap AVA is bringing to **California's viticultural scene**. The wines themselves are made in conjunction with winemaker Tom Gendall, who previously worked in **New Zealand** and **Germany** before joining Cline Family cellars in 2016.

Although known for its Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Syrah is really giving California's viticultural **reputation** a run for its money. "I have a love affair with Syrah," says Cline, describing her father as an original **Rhone** Ranger, and noting that Syrah has always been made at Cline. "What I love most about the variety is the different expressions it can have, from ripe, rich, and powerful, to nuanced and floral," she adds, highlighting her affinity for expressions of the grape coming out of the Petaluma Gap AVA.

"The wines coming out of this region are really reminiscent of Syrahs from the Northern Rhône and are guided by texture before anything else," Cline says. She notes that ample winds and an overall cool climate produce grapes with thicker skins, which translate to a higher skin-to-juice ratio. Petaluma Gap's daily fog also creates a longer growing season, which allows depth of flavor in fruit to develop over time. Gust released their **first vintage of Syrah** this year, which Cline describes as "leaning into the Northern Rhône style, with nicely balanced notes of blueberry, blackberry, and a hint of violets."

**Here are 3 wines she recommends from the region:**



## Keller Estate Syrah “Rôtie” Petaluma Gap 2016 (\$40)

Cline describes Keller Estate as legendary within the Petaluma Gap, and says this bottle is a beautiful and clear illustration as to why. “This Syrah is co-fermented with 7% Viognier, the perfect nod to Côte-Rôtie, which gives it lifted floral aromatics,” she says, describing a wine that consistently makes her come back for more. “It is an incredibly vibrant wine with really high-toned red fruit flavors balanced with the perfect amount of spiciness – a really beautiful expression of the variety.”

Available at [Wine Exchange](#)

