

Pont Neuf receives some great press from The Wine spectator  
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Zio Tony Ranch, Russian River Valley

# Wine Spectator

## Winery To Watch: PONT NEUF

Augustus Weed / Issue: July 31, 2014

New California label Pont Neuf brings owners Douglas and Mary Danielak full circle. Trained in Burgundy, Douglas has worked in Napa since the late 1980s, helping to establish Rhône varieties there as winemaker for Jade Mountain and Paras Vineyards, and also working with Cabernet and Sauvignon Blanc at various consulting jobs. Now, with Pont Neuf, the 53-year-old is returning to his Burgundian roots, focusing on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. He is joined by his wife, Mary, who has worked in wine retail. "We wanted to create relationships with growers and vineyards before starting," Danielak says, referring to the methodical pace of the project. Danielak's journey didn't begin with wine. Raised in Michigan, he aspired to be a professional hockey player. Then, on a high school trip to France, he tasted his first glass of wine. He continued to learn about wine while earning degrees in French and foreign relations at Michigan State University, frequenting the campus wineshop, where he acquired a taste for Burgundy. In 1985, Danielak moved to Burgundy to study winemaking at the Lycée Agricole et Viticole in Beaune, and worked his first harvest at Château de Chambolle-Musigny. At the same time, he interned with wine exporter Becky Wasserman at Le Serbet, where his job included translating for California vintners visiting the local domaines and co-ops. His clients included Pinot Noir and Chardonnay stars such as Helen Turley and David Ramey, who would later become a mentor.

When he returned to the United States, Danielak set his sights on California. Trading on relationships he had established at Le Serbet, he started working for Jim Paras, founder of Jade Mountain and later Paras Vineyard on Mount Veeder, where the repertoire included Nebbiolo

and Rhône grapes such as Syrah. Since 2006, Danielak has consulted at St. Helena-based Pont de Chevalier.

All the while, however, he was looking for the equivalent of grands crus to produce his own Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. "The great part is having this Burgundian training, but we also have the California terroir, which can be very distinct," says Danielak. His search led him to Martinelli's Zio Tony Ranch vineyard in the Russian River Valley. The Danielaks released their first wine from the vineyard, a 2010 Chardonnay called Vignoble Gli Zii, in 2012.

Danielak's goal at Pont Neuf is to create wines that are Burgundian in style, which he describes as "wines that are saturated in flavor but aren't weighted down," and that express the terroir of the vineyards he sources. To achieve this, he ferments his Chardonnay in barrel using native yeasts, employs battonage and ages the wine in a mixture of new and used French oak. He bottles the wines unfinned and unfiltered.

Production for the Chardonnay is limited, but Pont Neuf is adding other single-vineyard wines from Martinelli and Ulises Valdez in the 2013 vintage. Danielak is deliberate in his selection, opting for specific clones from vineyards that are at least 10 years old.

"The whole point of growing [the label] slowly is to make the wines that we want to make," he says.

Chardonnay	Russian River Valley	Vignoble Gli Zii	2010	94	\$50	150 cases
Chardonnay	Russian River Valley	Vignoble Gli Zii	2012	90	\$55	135 cases