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## Corkheads: Berkeley's Stomping Girl Wines joins East Bay Vintners

By Jessica Yadegaran  
 Bay Area News Group  
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Uzi Cohen always listened to his grandmother -- except when it came to starting a winery.

"It's too much work, don't do it," Grandma Esther told him. She knew. Cohen's grandmother had spent her life making Passover muscat for her tiny village outside Haifa in northern Israel.

But Cohen and his sister, Michal, also knew it wasn't easy. Every harvest, Uzi helped Esther pick the sweet, perfumed grapes from her small vineyard under the searing sun while Michal stomped them with her feet. Still, Uzi's taste for winemaking stuck.

Today, his family winery, Stomping Girl Wines, is the newest member of the East Bay Vintners Alliance. The Berkeley-based operation Uzi runs with his wife, Kathryn, is an homage to Esther and Uzi's grape crushing sister -- and the Cohen daughters, Lea and Hannah, have continued the stomping tradition. But the family doesn't make sweet wines.

Stomping Girl specializes in artisanal pinot noir from three Sonoma appellations, Carneros, Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast. The Cohens, who've lived in Berkeley for more than a decade, started out as home winemakers in 2003. Each year, they doubled production until they eventually outgrew their basement.

In 2008, Stomping Girl Wines went commercial. The Cohens currently produce 500 cases of unfiltered pinot noir and hope to quadruple production in the next few years. They operate out of Donkey and Goat Winery on Fourth Street.

In addition to a space,

the Cohens and the

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Brands of Donkey and Goat share an affinity for natural, hands-off winemaking -- and a connection to France. Tracey and Jared Brandt found their calling for winemaking in the northern Rhone Valley.

The Cohens found theirs in Burgundy.

While Esther was busy making muscat in Israel, the other side of Uzi's family had moved to Paris. Eventually, they wound up in Burgundy. Naturally, the family visits often centered around wine.

"After family time in Nevers, we would continue east to taste wine at the great domains of Burgundy," Uzi says. "It was these trips that ultimately led us to our passion for pinot noir."

Much like the Burgundian vigneron who've established lifelong relationships with grape growers, the Cohens are dedicated to fostering similar ties with farmers.

"What we try to do is -- don't do any work in the winery," Uzi says. "We really pay attention in the vineyard by balancing the crop size, and (we) make sure we pick at the right level of acidity and sugar down to the row of vines."

Stomping Girls' philosophy of achieving balance is in line with many California producers who feel that pinot noir has lost its way. Some of the finest cult bottlings are inching above 14 and even 14.5 percent alcohol, which can lend a "hot" palate to an otherwise delicate wine and leave an impression that is weighty, dark in color and nostril-hair burning -- think light zinfandel -- than the delicate complexity of pinot noir.

While balance is paramount, it's also important to keep your sense of place intact, Uzi says.

"I want to have wine that is well balanced between the alcohol, acidity and tannins," Uzi says. "But it's important to remember that California and its climate is not Burgundy, and Burgundy is not California. I'm trying to make wines that have balance while respecting the place from which they came."

Grandma Esther would agree.



Stomping Girl 2009 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (Contributed)

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## Stomping girl wines

The following wines are available for about \$34 at Weimax Wine in Burlingame, Revival Bar + Kitchen in Berkeley, and online at [www.stompinggirlwines.com](http://www.stompinggirlwines.com).

**2009 Stomping Girl Pinot Noir, Corona Creek Vineyard, Sonoma Coast.** Dark fruit flavors with a hint of roasting coffee aromas.

**2009 Stomping Girl Pinot Noir, Lauterbach Hill, Russian River Valley.** Bright cherry and strawberry fruit with enough silk to spin a kimono. Elegance is the operative word.

**2009 Stomping Girl Pinot Noir, Beresini Vineyard, Carneros.** This is an elegant wine perfumed with cherry and raspberry undertones. Ruby red in color, full body with enough tannins to age gracefully.

— [www.stompinggirlwines.com](http://www.stompinggirlwines.com)

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