

## Welcome Back, Kosta

**V**intner Dan Kosta is back, albeit he never really left. A founder of California Pinot Noir powerhouse Kosta

Browne, Dan has launched a new Sonoma Chardonnay and Pinot Noir project called Convене.

He almost can't contain his excitement. "We can't recreate what we did [with Kosta Browne]. And we're not trying to," says Kosta. Kosta says he has evolved, and so has his palate. The Convене wines reflect this. "As I get older, I want wines to be a bit more cerebral, a bit more intellectual. I want nuance. I don't want these wines to just be a delicious beverage. I want complexity."

The name Convене translates on different levels—it refers to Kosta being back in the wine game and to working with his winemaker of choice, Shane Finely. The wines themselves are assembled and blended from grapes purchased from multiple growers.

The Kosta Browne story reads like a fairy tale. The brand was founded in 1997 when friends Dan Kosta and Michael Browne pooled their restaurant tips to buy a half-ton of grapes. Two years later they started a commercial winery, focusing on multiple offerings of Pinot Noir made from grapes sourced throughout California. The 2009 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir was *Wine Spectator's* 2011 Wine of the Year. Kosta Browne was pivotal in defining the modern California Pinot Noir style: fruit-forward and generous.

The brand grew, and with that came changes; it was purchased by two different investment firms in 2009 and 2015, respectively. Since 2018, it has been in the hands of Duckhorn Vineyards.

Kosta says it's not strange seeing his name on bottles of wine he no longer has a hand in. "I think that [Duckhorn] are good stewards [of Kosta Browne]. The more successful they are, the better. We are all in it together, as far as I can see."

I suggest Kosta won the lottery in his wine career, but he corrects me with a smile. "I don't think so—we all worked very hard. It took a lot of work to get there. Did we win the lottery? No. Are we blessed? Yes."

Kosta also launched Pinot Noir brand AldenAlli with Alden Lagasse, wife of star chef Emeril Lagasse, in 2013. The brand



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grew from 700 to 3,000 cases, making terrific Pinot Noir and raising money for charity along the way.

Kosta has been through some big life changes. His home burned down during the wildfires of 2017. In 2018—the year of the sale to Duckhorn—he divorced. "I almost had a moment of semi-retirement," the 50-year-old admits. "But I'm not that old. What am I going to do?" He has since remarried and has a baby on the way.

I tried Convене's first releases informally. They were impressive and definitely an evolution of his previous offerings. The Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2020 (\$52) and the Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2019 and Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2019 (each \$62) show the tension, freshness and structure that Kosta desires, while not shy on fruit. "I have an Old World palate for white wines, but a New World palate for red wines, though with a touch more grip," he explains.

For the first time in 25 years, Kosta is without a business partner, but the winemaker, friend and thread running

through Kosta's wine projects is Shane Finely.

Finely describes his role as one that's in the background, a reliable rhythm section to Kosta's lead singer. The two met in 2003, and they've made wines together nearly every vintage since 2006 (he was on the team at Kosta Browne and the winemaker at AldenAlli). "[Kosta] and I have a good symbiotic relationship as far as our vision of the wines," he says. Finely is also reflective about his own evolution. "You can get to about 90% or 95% of winemaking in the first year, but that last 5%—it can take a lifetime to figure that out."

Their focus is on elevating what the vineyards give them in quality grapes. They plan to include about five or six vineyards in each blend, and grow the case production to about 5,000 cases, at least to start.

Kosta is on a roll; he plans on introducing another brand of single-vineyard wines beginning with the 2021 vintage (he may venture outside of Sonoma here). More than anything, after years of making wines that people couldn't find or afford: "I want to be part of the wine industry that gets non-drinkers to drink wine," says Kosta.

Senior editor MaryAnn Worobiec joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997.