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The **FIRST** Wine Newsletter devoted Exclusively to Pinot Noir

Hirsch Vineyards First Release

The noted Hirsch Pinot Noir Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast is farmed by David Hirsch, a former clothing importer and exporter who purchased 1,100 acres 30 years ago. He tried sheep ranching initially, but could not keep wolves and coyotes away. A viticulturist told him to plant Pinot Noir.

This vineyard is located along the rugged Sonoma Coast at 1,200 feet elevation in Cazadero. It is 80 miles north of San Francisco and about a mile from the Pacific Ocean, making it about as coastal as you can get. You can see the ocean from the fields. The fog rarely climbs higher than 900 feet, keeping the area cool, but allowing the higher reaches enough sun and warmth to ripen Pinot Noir grapes slowly to perfection. 50 acres are currently planted to Pinot Noir, and 50 more acres are in the works.

Some of California's greatest Pinot Noir producers have used Hirsch Vineyard grapes including Williams Selyem, Littorai, and Siduri. The wines have a unique forest floor and pine needle character every year which reflects the nuances of the site from which it derives.

In 2002, Hirsch got a permit to build a winery to produce 15,000 cases per year (he requested 30,000, but after meeting with concerned neighbors, settled for the lower number. The winery is in one half of the old lambing barn which was converted last year. The **2002 Hirsch Vineyard Estate Pinot Noir** was processed at a custom crush facility in Geyserville previously used by Siduri until they moved to their own facility. The 34 barrels produced were moved to the completed barrel room at the ranch in July of 2003. The wine was bottled in December, 2003 and will be released in the Fall of 2004.

The 2002 is composed of the fruit that was previously sold to Williams Selyem— 55% Pommard and 45% Mount Eden clones. The yield was 2.1 tons/acre. Vanessa Wong is the consulting winemaker who oversaw every phase of picking, processing, blending, and bottling. The wine is typical of a Hirsch release: good body, intense flavors, medium color, and supple. Alcohol is 14.1%, but the acidity is more than ample to balance the wine.

To order the wine, contact the Winery at 707-847-3800. A release letter will be sent soon to those that sign up. Orders will be taken in August and the wine shipped in October. This wine is a sure collectable.

**If You Drink
No Noir, You
Pinot Noir**

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The distinctive feature of wines made from the Sonoma Coast is the complexity of the sites: climate (rainfall can vary from 30 to 160 inches/year), soils, and highly differentiated topography. This gives the appellation a unique terroir that the attentive taster can enjoy.

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Davis Family Vineyards

This is a little-known Pinot Noir producer that deserves your attention. Davis Family Vineyards is located on a ridge top in the center of California's Russian River Valley. Small blocks of Pinot Noir are planted along with several other varietals. This is a family winery that is dedicated to producing small lots of great wine.

Founder, farmer, and winemaker Guy Davis lists his top 5 differences between making good wine and great wine: (1) Know what great wine is! At times Davis tastes over 200 wines per month. To make great wine, you must know what the "bullseye" is and know when you have hit it. (2) Have the right grapes and learn your grapes. (3) Pick on the right day. You cannot be too fanatical about this as the decision will make a fair vintage great, and a great vintage something from heaven! (4) Do not make more barrels than you as the winemaker can smell, taste, and talk to every 2 weeks. (5) Approach the creative process, be it grape growing or your precious fermentations as if you are hunting the most elusive of prey. "A great winemaker must be in the flow of total absorption as well as the execution. To love the process not be overwhelmed by it, to be invigorated by the hours and the complexity not exhausted or fatigued.

The **2001 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Pinot Noir** was a terrific wine with dark, plummy fruits dominating the nose and taste. A bit exotic and funky like good Burgundy.

The current release is the **2002 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Pinot Noir** (\$30). This vintage is a blend of estate Russian River vineyards and some small blocks from Dutton Ranch. This wine won a Gold Medal at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition and Affairs of the Vine's Great Pinot Shoot-Out picked the wine as a top finisher with the words "very drinkable essences of flowers, forests and distinct cherry cola leading into a soft, silky, ethereal finish. An artful wine."

Guy Davis has been working in the vineyards and wineries in the Southern Hemisphere for a number of years. In 1999 he started an international label— GUSTO—a Sauvignon Blanc from two different Marlborough vineyards. The **2002 GUSTO** (\$18) was the highest rated New Zealand wine in the 2004 Grand Harvest Awards.



This boutique winery has a new unique tasting bar at the winery open on weekends. An adjacent picnic area overlooks the banks of the Russian River. To order wines or join the mailing list, phone 866-338-9463. The website is at www.daviswines.com.

Low-Carb Wine Out— Pinot Next?

It didn't take long for Brown-Forman Wines to release the country's first low-carb wines. The One.6 Chardonnay and One.9 Merlot are made at the company's Fetzer Winery in Hopland and are named for the grams of carbohydrate in a 5-oz pour. Traditional wine has 3 to 4 grams per 5 oz serving, with sweeter wines having more carbs. With white zinfandel at a relatively high 8.3 grams, could this be the death blow for this chi-chi wine beloved by woman bunco and bridge players?

The wines will retail for about \$10, and already 200,000 cases have been ordered by restaurants and retailers in just two weeks. The wines are already in many Albertson's, Target, and Wal-Mart stores.

Isn't this low-carb mania getting a bit out of hand?

Londer Vineyards Releases New Pinot Noirs

Larry and Shirlee Londer have a picturesque farm in the Anderson Valley near Philo, quite a contrast to Albuquerque, New Mexico where they were long-time residents. They had considered buying a vineyard in Napa or Sonoma for several years, but fate won them an auction item from a benefit for the New Mexico Symphony. The prize was a visit to a winery in the Anderson Valley. They immediately fell in love with the Valley and had an attorney friend search the area for an appropriate wine property. Subsequently, while working in his ophthalmology office examining eyes, Larry received a phone call— "You are now the owner of a farm in the Anderson Valley!" Their friends thought they were crazy, but they left town soon after and have never regretted the change of lifestyle. The farm they purchased had previously provided organic produce for restaurants. The property had established plums, olives, figs, nut trees, and raspberries and blackberries galore. They have planted seven acres of five different clones of Pinot Noir and by 2004 they will have enough fruit to bottle their own estate wine. Eventually they may convert an old barn on the property into a winery.



Their first vintage, 2001, was surprisingly a huge success. They were fortunate to team with Greg LaFollette, formerly of Flowers Winery, who co-owns a custom crush facility in Sonoma and makes his own Pinot Noir under the Tandem label. The first year the Pinot Noir releases included an **Anderson Valley** bottling sourced from several vineyards, a **VanDerKamp Vineyard** bottling (Sonoma Coast), and a reserve bottling titled **Paraboll** (boontling for "red"). The Paraboll was made from grapes from Ferrington and Valley Foothills Vineyards. With age this Pinot Noir has developed into a complex wine with the signature Anderson Valley strawberry and cherry nose, minty earth aromas, and full-bodied flavors of blackberries and spice. Robert Parker, Jr. scored the wine 92 and called it "reminiscent of a grand cru." Look for more vineyard designates, including Keefer Ranch and Dutton Ranch, in the future.

Current Pinot Noir releases include:

2002 Londers Vineyards Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$28). 472 cases. 14.55% alcohol. "Moderate red color, focus on fruit rather than wood. Nose evolves to black fruit after opening up. Medium body with sweet red fruit such as strawberry and even cranberry."

2002 Londers Paraboll Pinot Noir (\$45). 496 cases. 14.90% alcohol. "Dark color, nose of earth and black fruit, like being in a berry patch on a hot summer's day. Echoes of black cherries and cola in the mouth. A long aftertaste of red fruit."

707-895-3900, www.LonderVineyards.com. If you are ever in the area, stop by and visit (by appointment) and try to pry a jar of jam from Shirlee— her preserves are sensational.

Connoisseur's Guide Pinot Noir Issue

The latest issue says the **Sebastiani Russian River Valley Appellation Selection Pinot Noir 2001** (2 puffs, 92) is the best red wine value they have seen. You have to come to attention when they state that this wine is an "opulent look at the varietal." Also a *Wine Enthusiast* 92, this Pinot Noir comes from two blocks of the Dutton Ranch (Beringer and Dijon 115 clones). Mark Lyon is the winemaker. At \$22, this Pinot Noir is sold out at the winery (only 1,170 cases made), but can be purchased at www.grapevinefinewines.com.

The **Taz Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir 2001** was also given 2 puffs, 92. At \$25, this is another value. This label is a Beringer product with fruit sourced from Santa Barbara County vineyards.

The highest scoring wine in the issue was the **Dehlinger High Plains Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2000** (\$48). It was awarded 3 puffs, 95. The other 2000 Dehlinger Pinot Noirs were similarly praised. Mailing list only (Dehlinger is one of those wineries that require you to purchase their other varietals to get the Pinot).

With tennis pro Andre Agassi as a partner, chef Michael Mina has opened his long-awaited restaurant Michael Mina in the Westin St Francis on Union Square in San Francisco. Mina also oversees Aqua at the Bellagio as well as NobHill and SeaBlue at the MGM Grand (Las Vegas) and Arcadia (San Jose). Sommelier Rajat Parr comes from Rubicon and Fifth Floor.



“Of all the world’s wine regions, Burgundy is the most fascinating. The most complex, the most variable. You can walk across a single vineyard and watch the soil change under your feet. Burgundies are the greatest wines to drink, there’s absolutely no question of that. They blow Bordeaux away these days. California is a joke by comparison.

But the real tragedy of Burgundy was that a few prima donna domains, most famously Romanee-Conti, had become so outlandishly expensive that the prices had become skewed. There was great irony there because, in fact, Burgundies were the best-value wines on the market. They had more character, more integrity, and more flesh. There were \$20 Burgundies that iced everything else at the same price. They were the most underrated cheap wines on the planet earth.

Neal Rosenthal, New York Wine Importer

Anthropos pinopolis (Pinot Noir Man)

Anthropos pinopolis is sometimes confused with Homo sapiens but usually can be distinguished by its more imposing proboscis and keen sense of smell. In fact, research has shown that mating in the species is along rhinal lines. A protruding snout commands much respect among other members of the species. It has been found that the sex pheromones of Anthropos pinopolis are identical in molecular structure to Pinot Noir. Both male and female of the species become sexually active species during spring budding when they leave their group gatherings known as “wine tastings.” At these tastings, usually attended by 10-15 members of the species, an elaborate mating ritual occurs when male members try to flaunt their prowess by maneuvering their proboscis suggestively into crystal wine glasses.

The most notable trait of the species is its hoarding instinct. When the species finds a Pinot Noir that is ephemeral, they will not share with other members of the species and attempt to hoard it so they can be adequately satiated to the end.

Their greatest enemies are purveyors of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. They will, however, prey on their own kind if they suspect a gullibility and a desire to approach a Pinot Noir at too early a stage.

Their bible is a newsletter called the PinoFile and they are able to recite verses accurately from a young age. They like to throw out glib phrases like “nose you could drink,” “stinky wonderland,” and “Oh my God kind of nose.”

