

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Elegant Beaver State Burgundy

It was 1988 and Terry Casteel (owner of Bethel Heights) was showing famed Frenchman Robert Drouhin (owner of Maison Joseph Drouhin in Beaune) around his Pinot Noir vineyard. Drouhin had first visited the Willamette Valley in 1961, found the climate very similar to Burgundy, and was setting up a winery in the Red Hills of Dundee. He wanted to buy grapes from neighbors to tide him over until his own vines came into production. The first thing he told Casteel was to drop a ton of fruit on the ground. Casteel was producing about four tons on an acre at the time, but he followed the advice. Drouhin bought the grapes, and made a \$30 Pinot Noir that garnered worldwide praise.

Drouhin purchased a 225-acre estate on the crown of the Red Hills opposite Hilltop Road and overlooking the town of Dundee. He asked his then 25-year-old daughter, Veronique, to take charge. Today, Domaine Drouhin Oregon (DDO) produces 15,000 cases of elegant Pinot Noir (and some Chardonnay) in a modern four-level, gravity-flow winery.

DDO was a pioneer among Oregon wineries with several firsts to their credit. They were the first to plant vines onto phylloxera-resistant rootstock. (the only exception being their initial plantings in 1988 of Pommard and Wadenswil clones on their own rootstock). The Drouhins were also the first to utilize high-density vine plantings similar to those found in Burgundy. Initially, the vines were placed one meter apart and the rows seven feet apart. Subsequent plantings were in a 1-meter x 1.3-meters pattern (most Oregon wineries were planted with rows 8-10 feet apart, and the vines 6 or more feet apart so as to accommodate the tractors that were then available). Finally, they were the first to plant the new Dijon clones of Pinot Noir. Today, DDO has over 3100 vines per acre (a typical Oregon vineyard has 800-1400 vines per acre). As of 2001, there were over 70 acres planted to Pinot Noir with plans to plant another 50 acres, a few acres each year.

Veronique, now Drouhin-Boss, is a long-distance winemaker. She spends most of her time at home in Beaune with her three young children and husband who works for the negociant's association in Burgundy. She gauges how the wine is maturing from barrel samples sent by Fed Ex. Three times a year, during the harvest, the racking, and the bottling, she travels to the Willamette Valley. Her father comes every so often and makes recommendations, which at times fall on deaf ears, although they

Pinot Noir: A Very Selective Escort

Volume 4, Issue 27

February 27, 2005



"All of our efforts in the vineyards and winery are directed toward our ultimate goal: wines of supreme elegance, finesse, and complexity, wines that will improve significantly over time and show great longevity.

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both prefer the same style of Pinot Noir.

Domaine Drouhin's Pinot Noirs have been consistently good from the beginning. The first three releases, (1988, 1989, 1990) were made entirely from purchased grapes. The style features more extraction and fruitiness than those from Joseph Drouhin, but less extraction -and therefore more subtle- than many other Oregon Pinot Noirs. The **DDO Estate Pinot Noir** has been described as a soft, fruity (berry and cherry flavors), accessible wine style (10,500 cases, \$34). The **DDO Laurene Cuvee Pinot Noir** has a little more intensity and more extraction, and a little more ageability. The Laurene captures the best the year has to offer. Cuvee Laurene was named after Michel and Veronique Drouhin-Boss' first daughter, who was born in 1992 (the first release of this Cuvee was 1992, 2,000 cases, \$42). The **DDO Louise Cuvee Pinot Noir** is said to have a little less structure than the Laurene, but with more elegance and finesse (named after the couple's second daughter, limited, \$75).

The consistently high quality of the DDO wines have opened some eyes in Burgundy, but no one talks about it. The conservative members of Robert Drouhin's generation still run the show in Burgundy, which probably explains why his is the only Burgundy house with serious Oregon interests.

A motley Crew met at Gulfstream Restaurant on a recent rainy Sunday afternoon to taste through several vintages of Domaine Drouhin Pinot Noir. A good time was had by all and the general consensus seemed to be as follows. (1) All of the older wines aged remarkably well and would be welcome partners at your next meal. (2) Like all good Pinot, the wines changed and evolved over the four hours of tasting. Wines that were preferred early on were frequently replaced by favorites that took more time to open up. (3) The favorite wines were the 1991 Estate and 2000 Cuvee Louise, with the 1993 and 1994 Estates garnering serious interest also. (4) Winemaker Greg Saunders had many technical comments about the wines which I will not bore you with here, but suffice it to say he enjoyed the experience immensely. (5) The wines are a little closer to Burgundy in style than many Oregon wines.

1991 Domaine Drouhin Estate Pinot Noir 13.5% alc. A delicate, light-bodied Pinot with impeccable balance. Practically everyone loved this wine. A little funk added to the appeal. Very close to a well-aged Cote de Beaune.

1992 Domaine Drouhin Estate Pinot Noir 13.5% alc. A lot of barnyard initially which blew off. Bold and bright sweet fruit with cinnamon and floral overtones. A bit tart on the finish that left a sherry taste due to slight oxidation.

1993 Domaine Drouhin Cuvee Laurene Pinot Noir 13.0% alc. Restrained aromas and fruit initially. Blossomed in time into a moldy, woody, earthy and musky masterpiece. Oodles of pleasure.

1994 Domaine Drouhin Estate Pinot Noir 13.5% alc. A deep and big wine with generous amounts of creamy, dry Pinot fruit. Lovely aromas of rose petal, cherry and green tea. Velvety mouthfeel.

1995 Domaine Drouhin Estate Pinot Noir 13.5% alc. A fruit bomb with a little barnyard and earth. Elegant and soft with low acid. The fruit may be a little muted by oxidation.

1999 Domaine Drouhin Cuvee Laurene Pinot Noir 13.0% alc. Like a picnic on a farm— woody, weedy, and plenty of hay. Incredible fruit, but still restrained and needs more time. Plenty of licorice for sweet teeth.

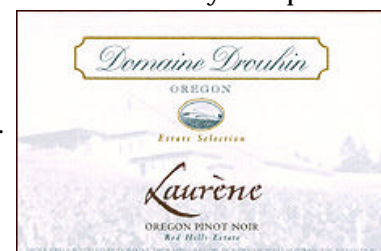
2000 Domaine Drouhin Cuvee Laurene Pinot Noir Corked, DNF.

2000 Domaine Drouhin Cuvee Louise Pinot Noir 13.0% alc. From select barrels. The most extracted wine of the lineup. Full-bodied and dark purple. Complex aromas of lavender, roses, and tea. More body and spice than Byoncé. A favorite.

2001 Domaine Drouhin Estate Pinot Noir 14.1% alc. (10,500 cases, \$34) Tasted at home. A very nice package. The aromatics are a bit stingy, but the flavors of brandied cherries and cassis are very appealing. Finishes with refreshing acidity.

2001 Domaine Drouhin Cuvee Laurene Pinot Noir (2,000 cases, \$42) Tasted at home. Similar to the Estate but ramped up a notch. Decadent and luxurious. Look for plums, candied cherries, and a satiny texture. A Lolita.

DDO tasting room now open. 503-864-2700, domainedrouhin.com.



Wine Razzies

All the interest this weekend was for the Oscars which preempted *Desperate Housewives* on Sunday night. There are also little-known awards called Razzies which are ego-deflating Oscar counter-awards. Below I present raspberries in honor of wine's worst achievements over the past year. And the Razzie goes to... ..

Charles Shaw (thank heaven no Pinot yet)

Less than \$10 Pinots (why bother?)

Pinot-Syrah blends (don't bother)

Screwtops (and any other type of industrial closure)

Illegible labels (please supply magnifier)

High (\$50) corkage fees (what's in your wallet?)

Wine scores (90-point wines wag the winemaker's dog)

Overpriced wine by the glass (especially when poured from a small decanter with the bottle behind the bar)

1 bottle allocations (can you spare it?)

Ridiculous prices at wine auctions (it's only fermented grape juice)

Wineries that use last year's scores to push this year's vintage (hoping you wouldn't notice)



Milk Thistle - Liver's Best Friend?

Recently I noted a small feature in *Prevention* magazine that milk thistle (*silybum marianum*) mutes the damaging effects of alcohol on your liver. I decided to research this further and here is what I discovered.

Milk thistle is an herb related to the artichoke. It has been used for centuries as a herbal medicine for treating liver disease. The Roman naturalist Pliny The Elder wrote about the medical benefits of milk thistle. It is an annual or biannual plant indigenous to Europe and the Mediterranean but is also found in some parts of the United States, Asia, and Australia. The active ingredient, Silymarin (silybinin, isosilybinin, etc.) was first isolated from the plant's seeds in 1960 by German scientists. Silymarin is claimed to be hepatoprotective by its anti-inflammatory effect and its promotion of new liver cell regeneration after liver damage. It has been used therapeutically for many types of liver disease including cirrhosis, hepatitis, and damage due to alcohol abuse.

80% of deaths each year caused by liver disease are due to alcohol consumption. The liver has many vital functions including the breaking down of alcohol. A medication that would protect and restore the liver from the harmful effects of heavy recreational alcohol use would be of great value. This has stimulated interest in milk thistle.

The current conclusions of the National Institutes of Health are that the clinical efficacy is not yet clearly established. There are sporadic reports which are either poorly controlled or utilize poor study methods. The mechanism of action is not fully defined.

If you are so inclined to take milk thistle as a hepatoprotective agent at times of heavy social imbibing, capsules of 70-80% silymarin are available over the counter. The dosage is 200-400 mg a day. The herb is safe and only mild initial stomach upset and laxative effect have been reported.

Luscious New Pinot Releases

Whitcraft The 2001 Q Block Bien Nacido Pinot Noir appeared in 'Sideways'. During the 90's, winemaker Chris Whitcraft lived during harvest in a camper parked behind the Hitching Post Restaurant and spent many nights watching sports and talking wine with the locals. Rex Pickett (the author of the novel) showed up on several occasions. Whitcraft was asked at one point to consult on the film, but this never materialized. All of his Pinot Noirs are made without fining, filtration, pumping, and as little sulfur as possible, nothing else except natural acid adjustments, if needed, and occasional non-native yeasts, again, if needed. **2003 Whitcraft Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** (\$30). A blend of the Q and N Block Bien Nacido Vineyard with some added Melville Vineyard. **2003 Whitcraft Melville Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$45). According to Whitcraft, "an outstanding Pinot in the mouth with a lushness and palette-coating taste and finish. 805-965-0965, whitcraftwinery.com.

Etude The Heirloom Pinot Noir program at Etude in Carneros is confined to a seven-acre parcel of the Estate vineyard planted to ten rare Heirloom clonal selections. All of these Pinot Noir vines are shy-bearing clones with a tendency to produce small, irregularly shaped bunches and very small berries. Growers hold such vines in low regard due to their inability to produce consistently viable crops. These rare vines produce an unusually complex wine comparable to a Grand Cru Burgundy with a California accent. The 2002 vintage produced low yields. **2002 Etude Heirloom Pinot Noir** (700 cases, \$80). 707-257-5300, etudewines.com.

Beaux Freres A series of stringent blending selections and a 30% declassification of production led to the smallest Beaux Freres blend since 1998, almost 1,000 cases less than the 2002 release. Although not as approachable on release as the 2002 vintage, the 2003 Beaux Freres continues the string of classic offerings from this winery. **2003 Beaux Freres The Beaux Freres Vineyard Pinot Noir** (1675 cases, \$75) Reminiscent of the 1999 and 1993 wines. 80% new Francois Freres Barrels. A concentrated and deeply colored Pinot Noir with a classic nose of black fruits, floral notes, and forest floor. **2003 Beaux Freres The Upper Terrace** (810 cases, \$75). This 10-acre vineyard is located just above the original Estate vineyard blocks. This is the second vintage from these young vines. The biggest, richest, and most muscular Pinot Noir in the lineup. This bruiser will need a few years to approach and should keep for another 10-15 years. **2003 Belle Soeurs Pinot Noir** (1275 cases, \$45). This is a blend of 45% from the Beaux Freres Vineyard 36% from Shea Vineyard, 15% from the old Ana Vineyard and 4% from a one-acre parcel of Grenache planted on The Upper Terrace. This is a charming blend which will drink well for the next 5-8 years. The wine was fined to soften and sweeten the tannins. 503-537-1137, beauxfreres.com.



International Pinot Noir Celebration

The annual IPNC in McMinnville Oregon will be held Friday, July 29 thru Sunday, July 31. Tickets are \$795 for the event and are sold on a first-come, first-serve basis beginning March 1, 2005. The event features alfresco dining and tastings, including Pinot Noirs from the 2002 and 2003 vintages. Guest speakers for the seminars include Michel Bettane, Michael Broadbent, Andrea Immer-Robinson, Alexander Payne ("Sideways") and Pierre-Antoine Rovani. The highlight of the event is the Saturday evening traditional Northwest Salmon Bake where salmon is prepared native Northwest style on alder stakes over a huge fire pit.

"The town of McMinnville has become the Beaune of the New World and is the site of the annual event, where Pinot freaks from Australia to Auxey-Duresses gather every summer to celebrate their passion" (Jay McInerney, *House & Garden*)

To register or for information: ipnc.org, 1800-775-4762.

The latest issue of *Wine Business Monthly* (February, 2005) reports that there are now more than 4,700 wineries in the United States. 3,382 are bonded grape wineries and another 1,358 are virtual wineries making wine at leased facilities. In the last 10 years the number of wineries in the United States has doubled and there is now at least one winery in each one of the 50 states and in Washington, D.C.. About half of the wineries are in states other than California. California, with 2,445 wineries leads the nation, followed by (in descending numbers) Washington, Oregon, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Texas, and Michigan. California has experienced the largest bonded winery growth (33% of new bonded wineries). The top 30 wineries make about 90% of the wine in America by volume.



'Sideways' Continues to Star

The movie 'Sideways' has been ubiquitous in the press of late. A recent article in *The Arizona Republic* (February 24, 2005) featured a "Sideways" quiz on wine and matching personalities. Supposedly Pinot Noir fits you best if you are mysterious, soft but with a firm constitution and a soul as deep as the sea. You like to read history and obscure novels, listen to old music like folk, blues and classical. Your home is comfortable with many interesting things in it. You can also be explosive as well as talented (like Al Pacino). After reading this I was a little despondent since I did not fit the description at all. The only mystery about me is which Pinot Noir I will choose for dinner tonight. I do take a daily constitution in the bathroom. I mainly read wine and food books while listening to Doo-Wop music. The most interesting thing in my home are old soldiers (empty wine bottles commemorating the past). I have many interesting articles on Pinot Noir scattered throughout the house, but my wife insists they be returned to my office daily. As far as talent goes I am good at drinking Pinot Noir and can use "pinot speak" with the best of them (like Allen Meadows). The only time I remember being explosive is when my wife used a bottle of good Pinot from my cellar for cooking.

All of the cast from 'Sideways' were at the Oscars, but the two people upon which the story is based, Julian Davies and Roy Gittens, were conspicuously absent. Davies is the wine buyer for the Silver Lake Cheese Shop and friend Roy Gittens is a DJ. Together they host many wine tasting events in Los Angeles. They are regular imbibers of wine who disdain any snobbery for the grape.

And finally a bit of trivia. The scene where Miles downs the spit bucket at the tasting room bar takes place at the fictitious Fress Canyon Winery which is actually filmed at the Fess Parker Winery. The term "fress" refers to termite excrement!

