

**If You Drink No  
Blanc de Noir  
You Pinot Noir**

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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## Pinot Noir Shootout Prelims

**The 6th Annual Pinot Noir Shootout** began this month with a number of preliminary tastings and will continue until the finals which will be held on January 16, 2008 in San Francisco. Over 250 Pinot Noirs from North America, France, New Zealand, Australia and Chile will be paired down by a distinguished tasting panel to approximately 40 finalists which will be presented to the public, trade and press at **The Pinot Noir Summit** on February 9, 2008 in San Francisco. At the Summit, the public has the opportunity to vote for their favorite wines in a blind tasting, walk-around format, and the results will be compared to the scores given by the professional judges. Attendees will also be able to meet the winemakers and/or winery owners of each of the finalists after they are judged and unveiled.

Affairs of the Vine and Wine Works will conduct The Pinot Noir Shootout and International Wine Review will join the final judging. Affairs of the Vine ([www.affairsofthevine.com](http://www.affairsofthevine.com)) is a wine education company, specializing in corporate events, interactive wine workshops, and Wine Boot Camp held at various locations in California wine country. Wine Works is an informal association of wine writers, educators and consultants. International Wine Review provides the wine trade and wine enthusiasts with a bi-monthly publication that features current and accurate information regarding important wine regions of the world and in-depth tasting reports ([www.i-winereview.com](http://www.i-winereview.com)).

The competition is quite unique for several reasons. During the preliminaries, thirty-two wines are tasted blind in four flights of eight over several hours, allowing attentive and extensive evaluation of each wine. This format tends to eliminate palate fatigue as a factor in judging. At many major wine competitions, judges must sample at least 100 wines per day, and often many more. Judging at The Pinot Noir Shootout is independent of producer, appellation, vintage and price. A 100-point scoring system is utilized, but the emphasis is on the copious notes that the judges create for each wine. The judging panel is comprised of a diverse group of Pinot Noir-loving professionals including representatives from the press (Dan Berger, *Vintage Experiences*; Tina Caputo, *Wines & Vines*; Graham Parnell, *Vineyard and Winery Management*; Jay Youmans, MW, *International Wine Review*; and yours truly), sommeliers (Courtney Cochran; Christopher Sawyer, Carneros Bistro/Lodge), wine buyers (Shaun Green and Keelyn Healy, K&L Wines; Kristi Mohar, Fiesta Market), winemakers (Anthony Austin, Sonoma Coast Vineyards),



restaurateurs (Cluney Stagg, Bistro Des Copains; Ken & Ellen Landis, Landis Shores Oceanfront Inn, Half Moon Bay), wine educators (Barbara Drady, Affairs of Vine; David Jones, Wine Works; Laura Ness, Appellation America; Lisa Zimmerman), and wine writers (Michael Cervin, Ziggy Eschliman, Alan Goldfarb, Ray Johnson, Jordan MacKay, Ben Narasin, and Ronn Wiegand). There are more judges per entry than broad-based wine competitions. The results and reviews are gender-based in that male and female judges' scores and comments are tabulated separately.

Through my participation in the preliminary tastings, I was able to sample almost 100 Pinot Noirs. There were many wines that lacked the elegance, finesse, texture and sensuality that I look for in a good Pinot Noir. Tasted blind, these generously fruited, rather than complex wines, with higher alcohol and heavy oak could easily be mistaken for Syrah. I am always honing in on acidity in particular. Acidity is crucial for refreshment, compatibility with food and aging. Some of these Pinot Noirs had enormous richness and concentration, but lacked acidity. I like to call these wines "P-no-no-R." There were, however, several excellent Pinot Noirs that I can recommend that were not the judging panel consensus favorites, but my personal choices. In talking with other judges, however, there was consensus of opinion on some of my choices that served to verify the pedigree of these Pinot Noirs. The big surprise of the tastings was the quality of a number of Pinot Noirs originating in Monterey County.

An interesting list of flavor and aroma components in Pinot Noir was compiled by Barbara Drady of Affairs of the Vine and handed out to the judges. This list highlights the most commonly encountered aromatic and flavor descriptors for Pinot Noir. Common fruits are cherry, raspberry, raspberry jam, strawberry, strawberry jam, orange peel, tangerine, grapefruit, black cherry, cranberry, blackberry, blackberry jam, pomegranate, plum, ripe tomato, roasted tomato, currant and dried cherry. Floral elements include violets and rose petals. Spice notes include cinnamon, vanilla, cardamom, cola, clove, oregano, nutmeg, pepper, rosemary and saffron. Vegetal descriptors include rhubarb, wet leaves, mushroom, beet, black olive, and green tea. Wood elements are oak, char, smoke, various spices, and cedar. Still other descriptors are chocolate, coffee, barnyard, wet leaves, earth, quinine, spearmint, peppermint, leather, meat, and tobacco. The complete list would take pages.

### Heaven Sent

**2005 Hahn Estates Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 22,000 cases, \$23. The Hahn Estates is located on the Monterey Coast in the Santa Lucia Highlands and sources grapes from estate owned vineyards and non-winery owned vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands and Arroyo Seco appellations of Monterey County. Nicolaus Hahn is a Swiss businessman who became enamored with California wine and purchased the Smith & Hook Winery in 1980. In 1991 he created the Hahn Estate brand. In German, Hahn means "rooster," and the rooster is prominently displayed on the Hahn Estate label. In 2000, the winery and vineyards underwent a large-scale renovation under the direction of president Bill Leigon. The winery's labels now include Hahn Estate, Smith & Hook, Red Flyer and Cycles Gladiator (HRM Rex Goliath was sold to Constellation Brands in 2005).



The current winemaker is Adam LaZarre and consulting enologist is Barry Gnekow. This wine won Best of Class at the California State Fair. Winemaking is traditional and aging is carried out in new and neutral French oak for 10 months. The fruit for this wine came from the Santa Lucia Highlands. *Lovely, clean aromatics of fresh cherries and strawberries. Red fruit driven with deft use of oak, a pillowy texture, and perfect balance. I plan to make this my house Pinot. Astonishing quality at this production level and price point. The 2006 vintage was tasted by another panel and equally well-received.*

**Hahn Estates** Pinot Noir is available on the winery website, [www.hahnestates.com](http://www.hahnestates.com). Hahn Estates tasting room in the Santa Lucia Highlands is at 37700 Foothill Road, Soledad. 831-678-4555.

**2006 San Saba Monterey Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 600 cases, \$28.95. Founded by Mack and Barbara Lemmen in 1975, this winery has been making wines in small amounts since 1981 - who knew? They farm a 70-acre vineyard which lies up against the Santa Lucia Highlands in Monterey County. Wines from the best blocks of the vineyard are bottled under the San Saba "Lions" label, and the remainder of the estate-grown grapes go into a second label, Bocage, made in an easy-drinking style. This wine is the second release of San Saba Pinot Noir. The vintage was extremely prolonged, with harvest extending into mid-November. Clones are 115, 667, 777 and Pommard 4. Aging was carried out in 50% new and 50% neutral oak barrels. The winemaker is Sabrine Rodems. *The nose is intriguing with scents of cherries, violets and a hint of oak and iodine. Demure red fruits are presented in a lighter style with plenty of finesse. Nice soft texture, lively acidity and on point balance.*



**San Saba** wine is available from the winery by phone, 831-678-2212. A tasting room is open daily at 35801 Foothill Road, Soledad. The website is [www.sansaba.com](http://www.sansaba.com).

**2005 Windward Vineyard Gold Barrel Select Paso Robles Westside**

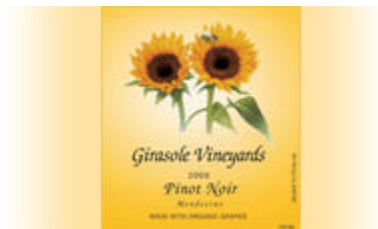
**Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 250 cases, \$60. Owners Marc Goldberg and Maggie D'Ambrosia purchased 25 acres of rolling hills off Highway 46, west of Highway 101 near Templeton. The site's rocky limestone, sloping well-drained soil and location the Templeton Gap seemed ideal for Pinot Noir. They cleared the land (previously a rhododendron farm) and planted 10 acres of Pinot Noir in 1990. The four clonal selections chosen were HMR (Paso Robles), Adelsheim (Oregon), Bien Nacido and Sanford & Benedict. Goldberg's reverence for Burgundy has led him to style his wines in an Old World fashion and his label proudly displays the word monopole (monopole is a Burgundian concept which means the vineyard has one owner and both viticulture and vinification are handled under one roof). The first vintage of 320 cases was 1993 and Windward Vineyard Pinot Noirs have received many accolades since. *Charming perfume of red cherries, strawberries, oak and Xmas spice. Tasty cherry attack which persists with a clean and tangy finish and suede-like tannins.*



**2004 Windward Vineyard Gold Barrel Select Paso Robles Westside Pinot Noir** 250 cases, \$54. *A flashy spice box surrounds the nose with cinnamon and clove. The spice theme carries over to the redder fruits on the palate. Hard to spit out.*

**Windward Vineyard** wines are available on the website at [www.windwardvineyard.com](http://www.windwardvineyard.com). The 2006 vintage has been released but I would advise cellaring a couple of years before opening. Older vintages are still sold to wine club members. Tasting room open daily at 1280 Live Oak Road, Paso Robles. 805-239-2565.

**2006 Girasole Mendocino Organic Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 9000 cases, \$15. Born to Italian immigrants, Charlie Barra planted the home ranch Redwood Valley Vineyards in Mendocino County in 1955 and has farmed 200 acres of vineyards since. He was an innovator (first to use water for over-head frost protection in Mendocino) and an activist (fought for state regulations that changed the way farmers are paid for grapes). BARRA of Mendocino brand was started in 1997 and Girasole ("jee-ra-sol-ay") in 2001. All wines are estate grown and from organic-certified grapes.

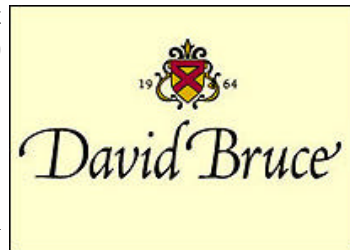


*A very pretty nose of red raspberries, strawberries and violets. Clean red fruits and well-integrated tannins. A wine of appealing harmony.*



**Girasole Vineyards** Pinot Noir is available for sale on the website at [www.girasolevineyards.com](http://www.girasolevineyards.com). Located two hours north of San Francisco, the winery is open for tasting daily. The address is 7051 N State Street, Redwood Valley. Private tours with Charlie (photo left) are available by appointment. 707-485-6784.

**004 David Bruce Tondre's Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 55 cases, \$45 Despite very large production (60,000 cases), this Santa Cruz Mountains winery continues to craft very attractive Pinot Noirs. David Bruce was a true Pinot Noir pioneer in California, and although not heavily involved in the winery now, his family has carried on admirably. The winery was bonded in 1964 and the estate vineyard in Los Gatos has 9 acres planted to Pinot Noir at 2,200 feet. Grapes are sourced from all over California. The winemaker since 2004 is Mitri Faravashi.



*Enticing aromatics of black cherry and cola with a hint of farmyard. Spiced cherry compote lingers on the palate for an eternity. Velvety texture and perfect balance. A queen bee.*

**David Bruce** wines are available on the winery's website at [www.davidbrucewinery.com](http://www.davidbrucewinery.com). The winery is located at 21439 Bear Creek Rd, Los Gatos. 408-354-4214.

**2006 Ventana Vineyards Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 1800 cases, \$28. Ventana Vineyards, founded by former Navy pilot, Doug Meader, was one of the pioneering wineries in Monterey County, and can now celebrate 30 years of winemaking. Over these years, Ventana has become "The Most Award-Winning Single Vineyard in America." Ventana is a Spanish word for window so-named because the vineyard abuts the Ventana Wilderness and symbolizes a "window to the future in viticulture." The current winemaker is Reggie Hammond. The Arroyo Seco region is one of eight AVAs in Monterey County and lies between Soledad and King City, straddling Highway 101. Its neighbor is the more famous Santa Lucia Highlands appellation. *Spiced cherry with a sidecar of oak on the nose leading to nicely-weighted fruits including cherries and red berries, all enhanced by Xmas spice and deft use of oak. Reminds me of a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Quite a charmer.*

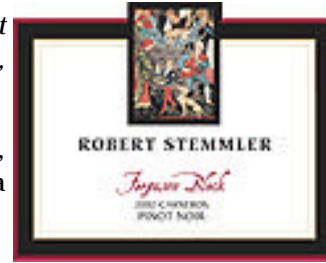


**Ventana Vineyards** are sold on the website at [www.ventanawines.com](http://www.ventanawines.com). 831-372-7415. The charming tasting room is housed in a circa 1919 Old Stonehouse at 2999 Monterey-Salinas Highway, Monterey. Open daily.

**006 Robert Stemmler Nugent Vineyard Russian River Valley** 14.6% alc., 2200 cases, \$40. This is one of three excellent Robert Stemmler Pinot Noirs crafted by winemaker Kenneth Juhasz, the 32-year-old wonder kind behind Donum Estate and Auteur Pinot Noirs. The Nugent Vineyard is an 11-acre site

Planted to Dijon Clones. *Hard to stop smelling this voluptuous Pinot extract which is very haunting and sexy. A fruit-driven wine that is juicy, succulent, long and smooth. Pinpoint balance. Very Caliesque.*

**Robert Stemmler** wines may be purchased on the website, [www.robertstemmlerwines.com](http://www.robertstemmlerwines.com). A tasting room is open on the Sonoma Square in the town of Sonoma. 707-939-0651.



**2005 Row Eleven Wine Co Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 15.3% alc., 800 cases, \$36. Founded by Richard de los Reyes ("Ricardo D" to his colleagues) several years ago, the name comes from searching for the best rows from the best blocks from the best vineyards. Row Eleven is a unique Multi-Alternating Proprietor or MAP that utilizes several winery facilities, each specializing in a particular variety, in contrast to having one central facility to process grapes. The finest vineyards are then linked to these specialized wineries. Reyes crushes only the best rows, uses whole berries and ferments 10° cooler than most other winemakers. His style is fruit-forward. The grapes for this wine are from the Bien Nacido Vineyard, Dijon clones 115, 667, 777 and Pommard. *Darker fruits, particularly black cherries run through this wine from start to finish. The demurely presented fruit has plenty of finesse and the alcohol, which is nicely integrated, creates a sweet note and a velvety texture.*

**Row Eleven Wine Co** Pinot Noirs are available on the website at [www.row11.com](http://www.row11.com). 415-259-2770.



**2006 Ardiri Estate Grown Napa Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 560 cases, \$45. This is a new project produced and bottled by Gypsy Dancer Estates in Oregon for Ardiri. Not much information is available. The name is Sicilian for "taking a risk" and can also mean "being consumed by fire." The Carneros vineyard contains Dijon clones 115, 667, 777, 828 and rare Heirloom selections. *My highest-scoring wine of the tasting competition. Beautiful and complex aromatics featuring ripe red cherry, red berry, floral notes, oak, char and a hint of allspice. Spiced cherries carry the attack with a hint of oak and herbs. The mouth feel is creamy, there is a healthy tannin structure, and the finishing spicy kick is lingering and memorable.*

**Ardiri** website is [www.ardiriwine.com](http://www.ardiriwine.com) according to the bottle label but this is non-operative. I am sure more information will be forthcoming as the word gets out on this excellent Pinot Noir.

**2005 Robledo Family Winery Los Carneros Pinot Noir** \$35. Reynaldo Robledo Sr. came to California from Michoacan, Mexico in 1968 at the age of 16, and along with several relatives, began to work in the vineyards pruning vines. He quickly advanced himself, managing crews of workers within a year. Eventually he became vineyard manager for large vineyards and in 1996 formed his own vineyard management company, Fobledo Vineyard Management. In 1997, he released 100 cases of wine under the Robledo Family Winery name, the first Mexican migrant worker to establish his own winery. Today, his seven sons and two daughters work in the business and production is 12,000 cases of wine a year. Through the years, he purchased several vineyards and now owns 220 acres in Napa, Sonoma,

and Lake counties. *Dark Pinot fruits, primarily black raspberry, and oak lead off followed by more luscious dark fruits front and center. Tannins are well-concealed. A long, scented fresh berry aftertaste is memorable.*

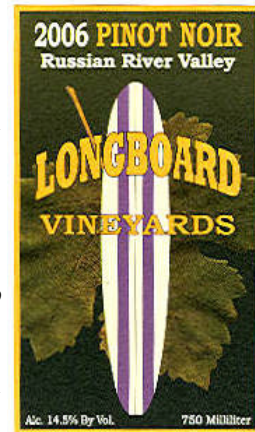
**Robledo Family Winery** is open for tasting by appointment at 21901 Bonness Road, Sonoma. The website is [www.robledofamilywinery.com](http://www.robledofamilywinery.com).



### Knocking On Heaven's Door

**2006 Longboard Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 1053 cases, \$28. This unique winery has the motto, "wine, waves and soul." Surfer, winegrower and winemaker Oded Shakked is the co-owner with Robert Watkins and Bruce Lundquist. Shakked was formerly the winemaker at J Winery and Vineyards. He left in 2005 to start his own label and downsized to a production level of 10,000 cases. The label has actually been producing wines since 1998, but the 2006 vintage is the first for a Pinot Noir. Grapes are sourced from the O'Neil Vineyard and Wohler Bridge Vineyard, both in the Russian River Valley. *Confected cherries and cola dominate the aromas. Elegant in style, the flavors echo the aromas. The finish is pleasing with fine-grained, slightly drying tannins.*

**Longboard Vineyards** has a fun tasting room a few blocks off of the plaza in Healdsburg at 5 Fitch St. There is a redwood surfboard bar and a plasma television showing surf videos. Wines are sold on the website at [www.longboardvineyards.com](http://www.longboardvineyards.com). 707-438-3473.



**2004 Patz & Hall Chenoweth Ranch Green Valley Pinot Noir** 692 \$47 A joint effort between winemakers James Hall and Anne Moses and the sales and marketing team of Donald and Heather Patz. This is the first release from this vineyard located in the hills above Green Valley in Sonoma County. The planting is all Dijon clones. I tasted this wine on several occasions in the last year without much of an impression for me, but now it has finally come around. *Red fruits and a bouquet of roses in the nose. An earthy wine tasting of wood-framed red cherries and red raspberries. A bit muscular but tannins are svelte.*



**Patz & Hall** winery has a wine tasting salon in Napa which is available for private and seated tasting by reservation for \$35 - 85 Bordeaux Way, Suite A, Napa, 707-265-7700. The wines are available on the winery's website at [www.patzhall.com](http://www.patzhall.com).

**2004 Domenico Wines Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., 2000 cases, \$36. Owner and winemaker Dominick Chirichille (Dominic in Italian) has an ambitious lineup of multiple varietals he produces from his winery on the San Francisco Peninsula. Since beginning in 2005, the winery has won multiple awards in competitions. Grapes are sourced from the Santa Cruz Mountains and other California appellations. *Exotic woods and red fruits entice. Baking spices, including cinnamon, and red cherries and oak lead the parade. Mildly drying tannins characterize the finish.*



**Domenico Wines** tasting room (open daily) and event venue is at 1697 Industrial Road in San Carlos. The Bacchus Winemaking Club allows wine enthusiasts the ability to craft their own wine under guidance at the winery. The websites are [www.domenicowines.com](http://www.domenicowines.com) and [www.bacchuswinemakingclub.com](http://www.bacchuswinemakingclub.com). 650-593-2335.

**2004 Sojourn Cellars Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 210 cases, \$42. Owner Craig Hasserot and winemaker Erich Bradley craft this excellent Pinot Noir that has been reviewed in the *PinotFile* favorably in the past. Tasting the wine in a blind lineup confirms my previous attraction to it. *This wine has shed some weight since last tasted and is quite lovely now. Plenty of flamboyant oak and smoke in the nose. Plush soft fruits leaning toward the red side with cinnamon spice. Elegant in style with lively acidity on the finish.*



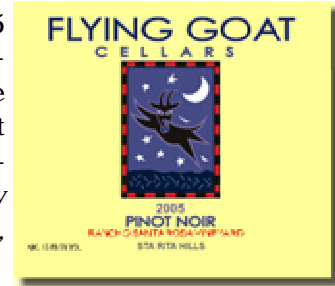
**Sojourn Cellars** Pinot Noirs are sold through a mailing list at [www.sojourncellars.com](http://www.sojourncellars.com). The 2005 vintage has been released.

**2006 Babcock Winery & Vineyards Grand Cuvée Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 950 cases, \$40. Bryan Babcock has been crafting wines from his family-owned winery in the Sta. Rita Hills appellation of Santa Barbara County since 1989. He has won many awards, including being named by the James Beard Foundation as one of the "Top 10 Small Production Winemakers in the World." This wine is 85% Babcock Estate Pinot Noir, 14% Rabbit Ridge Vineyard Paso Robles Pinot Noir and 1% Syrah. Aged for 10 months in 44% new French oak. *The aromas are very earthy, damp and funky. Delicious cherry fruit with sidecar notes of spice and organic matter. The lively finish is very refreshing and urges the drinker to sip on.*

**Babcock Winery & Vineyards** wines are available on the website at [www.babcockwinery.com](http://www.babcockwinery.com). The tasting room at 5175 E Hwy 246 in Lompoc is adjacent to Melville Winery. 805-736-1455. The Grand Cuvée is nearly sold out at the winery.



**2005 Flying Goat Cellars Dierberg Vineyard Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., 425 cases, \$42. Norm Yost produces small lots of several Pinot Noirs from vineyards in Santa Barbara County and San Luis Obispo County. He is a true garagiste with a small winery in the Lompoc “wine ghetto.” He has been at it for many years, knows what he is doing, and his wines have been consistently fine in recent years. *Nice clean mineral infused cherry fruit on the entry which follows thru to the finish. Not particularly complex but well-crafted, harmonious and easy to drink.*



**Flying Goat Cellars** Pinot Noirs are sold through a mailing list, retail distribution, and on the website at [www.flyinggoatcellars.com](http://www.flyinggoatcellars.com). Tasting by appointment. 805-688-1814.

**2005 LaZarre Hahn Estates Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 275 cases, \$50. Adam LaZarre is a former Navy radar specialist who developed a fondness for wine while in the Navy. After his college training at Fresno State, he was brought on board at Hahn Estates in 2001 to revamp and revitalize the brand. He quickly brought the Hahn Estates lineup of wines many accolades and along with Paul Clifton, he proceeded to develop the wildly successful Rex Goliath brand which sold to Constellation Wines for \$30 million dollars. The two of them then went to work developing the Cycles Gladiator label. LaZarre produces a small amount of two Pinot Noirs under his own name with grapes sourced from Bien Nacido Vineyard and Sierra Madre Vineyard. *Complex scents of cherry, oak, cardamom, and iodine. Plenty of sweet and racy red Pinot fruits with plenty of lift and lively acidity on the finish. A great food wine.*

**LaZarre** wines are sold only to restaurants and loyal Hahn Estates customers. See write up on page 2 about Hahn Estates.

**2006 Rodney Strong Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$22 This is one of those venerable long-standing labels you often see in the supermarket but pay little attention to. Times have changed, and these two wines indicate that this winery is producing Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that is both distinctive and qualitatively outstanding. Rodney Strong was among the first modern wine pioneers in the Russian River Valley, planting his River East Vineyard in 1968. The current owner is Tom Klein. The winemakers are Rick Seyre and Gary Patzwald and the viticulturalist is Douglas Mcilroy. This wine is 97% Pinot Noir and 3% Syrah. *Rich, bright fruity perfume with lovely spice and cherry flavors, an oak sidecar, and a healthy tannic backbone. This wine will benefit from more time in the bottle.*



**2005 Rodney Strong Reserve Jane's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$45 The grapes are from a more recent planting of Pinot Noir in honor of owner Tom Klein's mother. *A veritable spice cabinet in the nose along with crushed cherries and a hint of toast. Nicely weighted and balanced, this easy drinker has plenty of spiced cherry, clove and oak flavors with a tart finish.*

**Rodney Strong Vineyards** is located at 11455 Old Redwood Highway, Healdsburg (on Highway 101 3 miles from the town of Healdsburg on Old Redwood Highway). 707-433-6521. The wines are sold on the website, [www.rodneystrong.com](http://www.rodneystrong.com). A hospitality center and tasting room is open daily, along with guided tours of the winery.



## Earth Bound but Worth a Look

**2005 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 475 cases, \$60. Way too young to drink now and thus still unreleased. *Tempting deep, dark fruits which are still engulfed by oak. Plenty of earthy spirit with a citrus lift on the lingering finish.* Website: [www.sonomacoastvineyards.com](http://www.sonomacoastvineyards.com).

**2005 Robert Stemmler Carneros Estate Grown Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 4800 cases, \$36. *Oak, herbs, smoke and cherries are featured in the nose with lightly spiced red fruits and oak on the palate ending with a short finish.* See page 4 and 5.

**2004 Cloud's Rest Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 490 cases, \$100. A lot of disagreement on this wine among tasters. Some liked it, others scored it very low. There will be few takers at this price. *Raspberries and strawberries with noticeable oak and herbs in the aromatics. Plenty of bold fruit and oak, finishing woody and tangy.*



**2006 Five Rivers Winery Central Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 47,000 cases, \$13. A value-play Pinot Noir from the Brown-Forman lineup of wines. Grapes are sourced from select vineyards in Santa Barbara County. Widely available in supermarkets. A good daily drinker. *Light in color. Confectured cherry aromas. Full Pinot fruit flavors which are a bit tart. Nice spice component.* 8998 North River Road, Paso Robles. Website: [www.fiveriverswinery.com](http://www.fiveriverswinery.com).

**2005 Prodigal Wines Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 275 cases, \$36. The first appellation release from this new producer. *Sexy aromatics of red Pinot fruits, violet and subtle oak spice. Elegantly styled. Decent fruit on the attack which fades a bit on the back end. Easy to drink, just wish for more on the finish. A producer to watch with great promise.* Website: [www.prodigalwines.com](http://www.prodigalwines.com).

**2006 G. Gauthier Cellars Rockin' H Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 400 cases, \$30. *A lot going on in the nose with oak spice, char, strawberries and mineral notes. Strawberry flavors carry through with a hint of bitterness on the finish. Quite decent.* No contact information.

**2005 Lucas & Lewellen Vineyards Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 3350 cases, \$20. A partnership formed in 1996 between Royce Lewellen and Louis Lucas, Dan Gehrs crafts the wines from estate vineyards at a winery in Buellton. *Light in color. Scents of barnyard and red Pinot fruits. Light and soft on the palate with lively acidity on the finish. Understated but attractive. Showing better than last year.* Website: [www.llwine.com](http://www.llwine.com).



**2005 Mahoney Vineyards Las Brisas Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir** 325 cases, \$36. Francis Mahoney has 35 years of experience growing grapes and making wine in Carneros. *A very sensual offering in the glass with cherry pie and spice interest. Decent red fruits, but rather simple and lacking punch and fullness on the mid palate. The nose trumps the flavors.* Website: [www.mahoneyvineyards.com](http://www.mahoneyvineyards.com).

## Mark West: Pinot for the People

Alex Cose's spent six years at Napa's Peter Michael Winery under Mark Aubert working as production manager and oversaw the release of high-end Chardonnays costing up to \$150 a bottle. Today, he makes wine for the Purple Wine Co. which produces Mark West Pinot Noir priced closer to \$14. Cose's background was in finance and he worked in the banking industry before a cellar rat job at Monticello Cellars in Napa Valley sent him on a path to pursue formal training in winemaking at Fresno State.

The Purple Wine Co. was started by Derek Benham, who founded Blackstone Winery with his brother, Courtney Benham. Blackstone was begun on a shoestring with 400 cases of Merlot and grew into a wine industry giant that was sold to Constellation Brands for \$144 million. After selling Blackstone, Benham knew that Pinot Noir was the next hot wine.

Cose is an innovator. He was searching for more oak notes in the Mark West Pinot Noir and decided to add a small amount of amply-oaked Chardonnay. This did the trick and now the Mark West Pinot Noir contains 2% Chardonnay. 13% Syrah is also added to the Pinot Noir for structure and color. The wine is sourced from multiple producers and includes both grapes and press wine. Foreign sources of Pinot Noir might include Corsica if availability is tight in the States. Oak staves are utilized instead of expensive new French oak barrels. Alcohol is kept below 14% so consumers can comfortably drink more than one glass. The goal is not to craft wines that will achieve high scores, but to produce readily accessible and drinkable wine that people can enjoy now. Part of the winery's manifesto is "Get affordable Pinot into as many hands as we can." The slogan, "Pinot for the People," is an extension of this goal.

Most of Purple Wine Co. production (they also make Mark West Chardonnay, Avalon Cabernet Sauvignon, Rock Rabbit Syrah, Rock Rabbit Sauvignon Blanc and Bex Riesling) is sold to restaurants and Mark West Pinot Noir is the Marriott Hotel chain's house Pinot Noir.

**2006 Mark West California Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$14. 56% Central Coast, 16% Sonoma County, 12% Mendocino County, 4% Napa County, and 12% other. *Red fruits, spice, oak char and smoke on the nose and echoed in the flavors. Silky, light and easy to drink. Plenty of pinotosity. The fruit lacks punch and is shallow on the palate and on the backend but I have tasted a lot worse for three times the price.*

**Mark West Winery** Pinot Noir is distributed nationally. The wine is made in Graton, Sonoma County. The website is [www.markwestwinery.com](http://www.markwestwinery.com). 707-938-9229.



## Pinot Briefs

**Winemaker of Year** Josh Jensen of Calera Wine Company has been named 2007 Winemaker of the Year by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Three decades of winemaking in a god-forsaken place known as Mount Harlan has finally earned Jensen, now 63, the accolades of an adoring wine drinking public. His wines are distinct and age worthy. Jacques Seysses of Domaine Dujac in Burgundy says, "When you drink wine that is 10 to 15 years old, my feeling is that the only one that can compete with the best Burgundies is Calera."

**DRC Production** The wines of Domaine de la Romanee Conti are scarce and highly valued. Of the lineup of wines, the annual production is: La Romanee-Conti 7,000 bottles, La Tache 24,000 bottles, Grands-Echezeaux 14,000 bottles, Echezeaux 18,500 bottles, Romanee St. Vivant 14,000 bottles and Le Montrachet 3,000 bottles. The numbers change each year and the production numbers have been down in recent years.



**Asia Wine Drinkers Increasing** According to drinksinternational.com, wine consumption in Asia is increasing at more than seven times the global average. Middle classes in India, Japan and China, in particular, are showing significant interest in wine. According to IWSR research, between 2006 and 2011 China's wine consumption will grow by almost 70%. Recent research from Vinexpo Asia Pacific indicated consumers worldwide spent more than \$100 billion dollars on wine in 2006.

**Burgundy Seminars at Scott Paul** Scott Paul Wines in Carlton, Oregon has announced their 2008 calendar of Burgundy Seminars held in a relaxed and informal setting at the winery's tasting room. All classes are on Saturdays from 6-8 PM. Both Burgundy 101 and Burgundy: The Graduate Course seminars are given on multiple dates. The seminars are led by self-professed Burgundy geek, Scott Wright, owner of Scott Paul Wines. Tasting of wines will be accompanied by artisan bread, French cheese and charcuterie. For reservations: [www.scottpaul.com](http://www.scottpaul.com) or call 503-852-7300. Cost is \$40-\$55.

**More Women Supertasters** According to genetic studies, women are more likely to be supertasters than men. Also, there are more supertasters among the Asian, African and South American populations regardless of gender. Supertasters are more sensitive to bitterness and prefer sweetness.

**Luc Morlet has Own Label** Luc Morlet, the son of Pierre Morlet, who directs the family Champagne house, was the winemaker at Peter Michael for five vintages beginning in 2000. He has now started Morlet Family Vineyards which has debuted with the 2005 vintage. The lineup includes La Proportion Doree (Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon blend), Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir Coteaux Nobles (\$75), Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir En Famille (\$85), Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir Joli Coeur (\$95), and a Syrah. I have sampled the Joli Coeur and found it stunning. Stay tuned for further reviews. The website for ordering is [www.morletwines.com](http://www.morletwines.com).

**Open Wine Without Corkscrew** Thanks to the blog, [www.redislife.com](http://www.redislife.com), I found a brief article in *Esquire* (June, 2007) titled, "How to Open a Bottle of Wine without a Corkscrew." The instructions were as follows. Wrap the base of the wine bottle in a towel. Hold the bottle horizontally and proceed to rhythmically pound it base-first against the wall. Be firm, not violent. As the wine sloshes forward with each impact, it will squeeze into the neck of the bottle, creating a primitive water hammer. The cork will eventually be driven out far enough that you can grab it and finish the job manually.

  
**PrinceofPinot.com**

As of 8.07, there were 475,282 acres of vineyards in California

**If You Drink No Blanc de  
Noir You Pinot Noir**

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## Say What?

**This New Years you will undoubtedly be drinking a few glasses of Champagne and/or Pinot Noir. I'll bet you can't say the following after imbibing.**

- 1 Thanks, but I don't want to have sex**
- 2 Nope, no more wine for me**
- 3 Sorry, but you're not really my type**
- 4 I am not a pimp for the Prince of Pinot**
- 5 Oh, I just couldn't. No one wants to hear me sing.**

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## Varietal Labeling

Alsace was the first region in the world to do varietal labeling, beginning in the early 20th century. Today, Alsace, like its neighbor Germany, requires that a wine must be 100% of the grape named on the label.

In America, varietal wines originally had to contain 51% of the grape named on the label. The Wine Labeling Act in 1982 changed increased the amount from 51% to 75%. Proprietary branding, for example that used on Meritage wines, developed shortly thereafter and allowed the use of any percentage blend of grapes on those wines.

Currently in California, a non-estate wine labeled with a county appellation (ie Sonoma) must contain 75% of the grape named on the label. For a sub-appellation like the Russian River Valley, 85% of the grapes must be the named varietal. For vineyard designated wines, 95% of the grapes must come from the named vineyard. For an estate bottled wine, 100% of the grapes must come from the appellation. In all cases, 95% of the grapes must come from the stated vintage (most other countries it is 85%).

Oregon was the first wine region in the United States to adopt labeling regulations. For many varietals such as Pinot Noir, 90% of the grapes must be the varietal named on the label. In New Zealand, 85% has to come from the varietal.

It is not unusual to add small amounts of other varietals to Pinot Noir. Syrah is often chosen to add color and structure. This may or may not be indicated on the label. Many producers prefer not to include this information fearing that the consumer will consider that Pinot Noir that is not 100% Pinot Noir is an inferior product. How the wine tastes is really the final arbitrator of quality and if a tiny percentage of Syrah adds interest or magic to the final wine, so much the better.