

**Pinot Noir is  
an essential  
nutrient**

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinophiles

Volume 6, Issue 57

April 7, 2008

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## Pinots from the Edge

Pinot Noir is a fussy grape that thrives in areas heavily influenced by the ocean. Although Pinot Noir grows in at least twenty-three counties in California, the majority of the planted Pinot Noir is “living on the edge,” that is, growing in the dramatically cool western part of Sonoma County known as the Sonoma Coast. The cold environment of the western reaches of Sonoma County is a relatively new frontier for viticulture. The obstacles are many. Vines take more time to develop, even up to six years to produce fruit contrasted with a typical three years in most other regions. Wet weather is ever present. A wet spring can interfere with bloom and create the perfect environment for botrytis. In the fall, encroaching rains threaten harvest. Due to close proximity to the Pacific Ocean, nighttime temperatures are often in the 40s and daytime highs rarely exceed the low 70s. Cold spring temperatures can result in poor vine nutrition at bloom and lead to poor fruit set. Yields are ridiculously low, typically 1 to 2 tons per acre and in some vintages, so little fruit is produced, viticulture costs cannot be reclaimed. Animals such as deer, gophers, wild hogs, and birds are ever present. Gophers can destroy as much as 20 percent of new vines. It almost seems like madness to attempt to farm Pinot Noir in these environs and many have called the winegrowers here the “mad men of West County.” When the weather cooperates and everything goes well, the resultant tiny Pinot Noir clusters with a high juice-to-skin ratio are worth the trouble and the wines can have remarkably mature tannins and flavors at lower Brix with a high-acid profile. Noted wine writer, Matt Kramer, has said, “Sonoma County West is an extraordinary location for Pinot Noir. It has the capacity - although not yet the achievement - of someday creating America’s grand cru Pinot Noir.”

The Sonoma Coast AVA (American Vineyard Appellation), is the largest AVA in Sonoma County, incorporating 750 square miles. This cumbersome AVA was formed in 1987 primarily for the purpose of allowing certain wineries to include all of their major vineyards within one boundary so they could use the “estate bottled” designation on their wine labels. The AVA is also a distinctive climatic region based on coolness with no more than 2,800 degree days of heat during the growing season (low Region II) . This AVA extends nearly throughout the Sonoma Coast from the Sonoma County borders with Napa in Carneros to the east, Marin County to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Russian River Valley AVA boundary in the north. (map page 2). The Sonoma Coast AVA actually over-



Laps five other appellations - the Sonoma part of Carneros, a sliver of Sonoma Valley, the western part of Chalk Hill, all of Green Valley, and most of the Russian River Valley. As a result, the words “Sonoma Coast” on a wine label can indicate a wine from a vastly diverse geographic area from Annapolis in the north to Petaluma in the south. The Sonoma Coast has been unofficially subdivided into the “true” Sonoma Coast (what Kramer referred to as Sonoma County West) and the “real” Sonoma Coast. The true Sonoma Coast is roughly from Jenner on the coast in the south where the Russian River empties into the Pacific Ocean to Annapolis in the north and from the beaches of the Pacific Ocean to 5 to 6 miles inland including the first two ridges of the coastal range of mountains and the western slope of the third ridge. Besides Annapolis and Jenner, Occidental and Freestone are usually included, although both are south of Jenner. Some have even further subdivided the true Sonoma Coast, separating out the “extreme” Sonoma Coast, located southwest of the Russian River Valley and stretching around the town of Freestone, a mere 4.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean. There are numerous microclimates and soil types in the true Sonoma Coast, but three things are a constant everywhere: fog, ocean breezes and coolness.

Although the Sonoma Coast AVA is 517,000 acres and almost half the size of Sonoma County, only 7,000 acres are planted to vineyards. About fifty growers and six wineries are located within the true Sonoma Coast AVA's borders. The vineyards are situated above the fog line or in lower reaches where the wind blows off the fog early in the morning (see photo page 3 of Ft Ross Vineyard). Most of the vineyards are quite isolated, and only in recent years have vineyard management companies allotted workers to the area full-time. The price of prime land is at least \$20,000 an acre now. This price is misleading and actually much more expensive than you realize because the landscape does not lend itself to farming and you might have to purchase 50 acres to get 10 acres that are suitable for grape growing. Much of the area is essentially a wilderness and too steep for grapevines.



What is distinctive about Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs? The very small berries have a high juice-to-skin and juice-to-seed ratio resulting in very concentrated flavors and amplified tannins. The wines can be bold, dense, earthy and powerful. Ted Lemon (Littorai) has characterized Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir as follows: “Muscle and sinew, grit, structure, more backbone and tannins than the Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs, peppery in leaner years with sage and savory as the prominent spices. Dan Goldfield (Dutton-Goldfield) feels that what sets Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir apart is “the mineral element and very focused tannins compared with the Russian River Valley sweet fruit and floral elements.”

Over the past several weeks, I have had the opportunity to sample Pinot Noirs from all parts of the Sonoma Coast AVA and a report on nearly fifty wines follows. Ripeness can be challenging in many areas and green flavors can result. A number of the wines are quite muscular and need cellaring to soften tannins and/or decanting to open up. Good acidity seems to be a constant. Styles are all over the board and it is impossible to make significant generalizations from such a diverse region.

## Three Fog Horns

**2006 Alcina Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$45. *Beautiful aromas of black cherry, herbs and barnyard. Flavors of spiced cherry, brown sugar, cookie dough. Soft in texture, light on its feet, with finely-tuned tannins, and clean finish. A very nice elegant package.* Website is [www.alcinacellars.com](http://www.alcinacellars.com).



**2006 De La Montanya Flying Rooster Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 100 cases, \$36. *Dazzling aromas of red cherry, concord grape and cocoa. On the palate, there is a lovely potpourri of cherries, strawberries, black raspberries and a subtle sidecar of oak. The finish is clean and dry. Medium-bodied and fruit-forward, I like this wine for its finesse and pinotypicity.* The website is [www.dlmwines.com](http://www.dlmwines.com).



**2006 Kasuari Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$30. *Wilted red roses and red cherries in the nose and a dazzling dose of strawberry and cherry fruit which lingers on the finish for over ten seconds. No tannin in sight. Ready now for prime time. What Pinot Noir should be, but so often isn't.* The website is [www.kasuariwine.com](http://www.kasuariwine.com).



**2004 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Balistreri Family Vineyard Freestone View Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.37% alc., 454 six-bottle cases, \$100. The original 4-acre Freestone View Block of the Balistreri Family Vineyard was planted to a range of Pinot Noir Dijon clones in 1999. The 1-acre Alessio Block was added in 2005, two additional blocks were planted to Pinot Noir: Salmon Creek (3.4 acres) and the Bodega Ridge (4.2 acres).



The southern-facing property is quite special, situated one mile west of Freestone and a mere four and half miles from the Pacific Ocean. Owned by Jack and Kathy Balistreri, this vineyard is one of the coldest vineyards on the extreme Sonoma Coast. High density planting of five Dijon clones (114, 115, 667, 777, 828). Yields are less than one ton per acre. 25% whole cluster. 10-day cold soak after clones blended together. Aged 20 months in 50% new French oak (36-month air dried barrels). *Deep reddish-purple robe. Aromatic profile is complex with intense dark plum fruit, forest floor, steak char, roses and a little good funk. Attractive wild berry core with herbal overtones. Velvety texture and plenty of snappy acidity at end. Still relatively young and shy, cellaring for one to two years will reward the patient.* The website is [www.sonomacoastvineyards.com](http://www.sonomacoastvineyards.com). Sonoma Coast Vineyards plans to build a winery on the Balistreri property in the near future.

**2004 WesMar Balletto Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$37. *Starting with the first whiff of this one, fresh raspberry jam immediately comes to mind. I kept saying WOW! out loud. The raspberry theme carries over from the attack to the finish. There is some croissant notes for good measure. A flawless wine with admirable acidity and fine tannins, I could drink this one all night long. An All-American this year for sure!* The website is [www.wesmarwinery.com](http://www.wesmarwinery.com).



**2005 Williams Selyem Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$72. *Deep ruby color. A big and sappy fruit attack featuring black berries complemented by exotic woods leading to a delicate finish with lingering dark cherry notes. Nicely crafted, smooth in the mouth, with lively and refreshing acidity.* The website is [www.williamsselyem.com](http://www.williamsselyem.com).

## Two Fog Horns

**2006 Benovia Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$45. It has been a couple of years of anticipation and Benovia has finally released this wine, its first Pinot Noir. Benovia has recently purchased two properties which will eventually increase the estate vineyards to 75 acres. The first is a 40-acre parcel adjacent to the winery property on the north side. New plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir here will come into production in 2013. An old house on the property will be renovated to offer a reception center for wine tastings and dinners. The second property is a cool site for Pinot Noir located on Falstaff Road near Freestone, 3.5 miles north of the Petaluma wind gap. 12 acres of Pinot Noir will be planted and will come into production in 2013 as well. These new properties will allow Benovia to eventually reach 5,000 case production. In the Fall, a Cohn Vineyard Pinot Noir and Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir will be released. I have tasted both of these a couple times out of barrel and the Savoy recently after bottling and can tell you these wines are gorgeous, sexy Pinot Noirs. The Benovia Chardonnay, Zinfandel and Rosé are outstanding wines in their own right. This is a cult producer in the making and I would advise you join the mailing list asap. *Plenty of berry, earth, game and shroom on the nose. Rich and ripe plum and blueberry flavors with hints of raisin, accented by toasty oak. The fruit-driven finish is lengthy and tangy.* The website is [www.benoviawinery.com](http://www.benoviawinery.com).



**2006 B Vineyards & Habitat Green Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 336 cases, \$55. The organically-grown fruit for this wine was hand-picked over six mornings within a 2½ week span. After de-stemming, a 3-5 day cold soak ensued. Sulfur additions were kept to the bare minimum even after MLF. The bottled wines contain less than 100 ppm total sulfur - below the maximum allowed for organically certified wines. A proprietor's select Pinot Noir, "Sera," less than 150 cases, is also produced (I will report on this in a future issue).

*Charming demure aromas of red berries with a touch of barnyard. Solid core of black raspberry and cherry fruit with a woody bent. Soft and smooth with elegance to spare. Still weighted-down by noticeable, but gentle tannins, and still a bit closed. Outstanding potential, but not ready for prime time for another 6-12 months.* The website is [www.bpinot.com](http://www.bpinot.com).



**2006 De La Montanya De La Cain "Chanconne" Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 50 cases, \$55 (approx). (Sampled from unlabelled bottle, originally labeled Sonoma Coast but RRV fruit included as well). A top-of-the-line reserve type bottling. *The aromatics are brooding and shy with dark fruits and spice lurking. Very plush blackberry and black raspberry fruit which needs time in the glass to blossom. Nicely spiced oak flavors as well. Velveteen texture, beautifully balanced. Plenty of potential, but needs time to come out of its shell.* The website is [www.dlmwine.com](http://www.dlmwine.com).

**2006 Felta Creek Vineyards Flying Rooster Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 95 cases, \$24. Vinified at Laetitia Winery in Arroyo Grande for De La Montanya. *Very enticing aromas of crushed black cherries, herbs, and oak char. On the palate, the attack of dark berry and dark stone fruits is lip-smacking and the soft texture is alluring. The tannins are noticeable but reigned-in.* The website is [www.dlmwine.com](http://www.dlmwine.com).

**2005 Freeman Akiko's Cuvée Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$ . *Light ruby in color. Very charming scents of red fruits including wild strawberries, with floral notes (violets) as well. A graceful wine driven by flavors of red Pinot fruits with herbal accents. The finish is marred by a touch of woodiness which disappears when the wine is accompanied by food.* The website is [www.freemanwinery.com](http://www.freemanwinery.com).



**2004 Kistler Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 1,328 cases, \$60. *Deep purple color. Lovely perfume of black cherries, lavender and damp oak. The flavors are driven by firm, dark fruits accentuated with Asian spice, and dark chocolate. Nicely weighted and oaked, complex and interesting. Appealing soft texture in the mouth, and lively acidity on the ending which is moderately long.* The website is [www.kistlervineyards.com](http://www.kistlervineyards.com).

**2004 Marimar Estate Dona Margarita Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$36. This wine comes from a 20-acre high-density planting (2,340 vines/acre) in western Sonoma County at 600 feet. Located in the Freestone Valley between Freestone and Occidental, it is only six miles east of the Pacific Ocean. Soils are Goldridge type. Clones are Pommard and 115. *This wine has a "Burgundy" bent. Nutty, earthy nose, and dense black raspberry, smoky, earthy and woody flavors. Some drying tannins still persist on the finish. Quite enjoyable for its distinctive sauvage character.* The website is [www.marimarestate.com](http://www.marimarestate.com).



**2006 Paradise Ridge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 250 cases, \$27. I continue to be impressed by the Pinot Noir offerings from this winery. *Confected and vanilla-dusted cherries in the nose. Very attractive oak-kissed cherry fruit with overtones of herbs and spice. Soft in the mouth. Understated with admirable finesse and very well crafted.* The website is [www.paradiseridgewinery.com](http://www.paradiseridgewinery.com).

**2006 Patz & Hall Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$34. *This wine is all about black cherry and black raspberry fruit with a healthy dose of oak. It is an in-your-face gulp of fruit that will appeal to lovers of this style. There are still some unresolved tannins (the wine is quite young and one of the first wines released each vintage - rushed to the market because of the huge demand). This is a wine you can count on for consistency year in and year out. The website is [www.patzhall.com](http://www.patzhall.com).*



**2004 Ridgeway Family Vineyards Two Pisces Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 295 cases, \$26. Crafted by winemaker Dan Goldfield. *Still nice with another year of bottle aging. Charming aromas of black cherry, nutmeg and smoke. Plenty of red and black fruits to delight with a slight tobacco edge. Balanced beautifully, nice acid backbone, fine tannins and a lingering finish. The website is [www.ridgewayfamilyvineyards.com](http://www.ridgewayfamilyvineyards.com).*

**2005 Ridgeway Family Vineyards Two Pisces Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 425 cases, \$30. The Two Pisces Vineyard is located in southwest Petaluma. The winemaker is Dan Goldfield (Dutton-Goldfield). *Very complex aromas of berries, vanilla, mushroom and flowers with a hint of ethyl acetate. Terrific berry and cherry flavors nicely spiced with a touch of oak. Well-crafted and easy to drink because of suede-like tannins. There is something special about this vineyard.*

**2004 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.23% alc., 1,043 cases, \$60. From seven vineyards in the extreme Sonoma Coast. Clones are Dijon 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, 828, and Pommard 3. Aged 20 months in 50% new French oak. *Deep ruby robe. Intense and rich but reticent nose of dark berries and allspice. Big plush fruit offers a fullness on the palate with notes of lavender, dark chocolate and herbs. Always changing in the glass. This wine reminds me more of Burgundy than most California Pinot Noirs. Obvious sophisticated breeding and winemaking. Needs more time to fully appreciate. The website is [www.sonomacoastvineyards.com](http://www.sonomacoastvineyards.com).*

**2005 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Peterson Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 760 six-bottle cases, Unreleased. Clones 115, 667 from the Peterson Vineyard. Aged 50% in new French oak for 10 months. This wine is offered for earlier drinking than the Sonoma Coast Vineyards and Balistreri Family Vineyard Pinot Noirs. *Lighter violet in color than the Balistreri. Ripe strawberries, black cherry and tar compose the aromas. Elegant presentation of pure and well-defined red berry and cranberry fruit with a touch of mint. Brisk acidity and a pillowy softness in the mouth. Ready for enjoyment now.*

**2006 W.H. Smith Marimar Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., \$48. *The nose is closed down but with coaxing there is a hint of black cherries, spices and forest floor. The flavors shine with very nice raspberry, black cherry and plum fruit with deft oak highlights. Well-balanced with reserved tannins and lively acidity. The best of the 2006 W.H. Smith Pinot Noir lineup. Note: with first pass, the W.H. Smith Pinot Noirs from the 2006 vintage were disappointing to me. I re-corked the bottles and re-tasted the next day. What a difference! This was a lesson in wine tasting and a realization that wine is almost a living, breathing organism. All of the wines were different and much better the next day, showing a softer and smoother side with fruit more front and center. I think the lesson to be learned here is that if you don't particularly like a wine at first, try it later or even the next day and sometimes you will be surprised. That said, the W.H. Smith Pinot Noirs are endowed with plenty of fruit and tannin, and are structured in a California Neuvo style that may not appeal to everyone. Ex-Cab drinkers will probably find the wines quite attractive. (Smith formerly produced Cabernet-based wines at La Jota). The website is [www.whsmithwines.com](http://www.whsmithwines.com).*

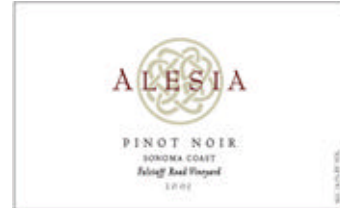
**2005 Williams Selyem Peay Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$54. *Dark as the night. A lovely elegant wine with black raspberries highlighted by earth and cinnamon spice. No tannins in*

and a lengthy fruity finish. This wine is all about fruit. The website is [www.williamsselyem.com](http://www.williamsselyem.com).

## One Fog Horn

**2005 Alesia Falstaff Road Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., \$62. Ron and Judy Loughred farm this vineyard on the extreme Sonoma Coast. This is the second label of Rhys vineyards and features several bottlings from purchased fruit. *Dark violet-red in color. Aromas start off with barnyard and diaper and evolve to cherry, root beer, hay and oak. Woody, earthy, and meaty at heart. With air, the flavors evolve with more black cherry charm. Tannins are well-integrated and the texture is reasonably soft. The finish is a touch sour.* The website is [www.rhysvineyards.com](http://www.rhysvineyards.com).

**2004 Alesia Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$39. Two bottles sampled - the two were completely different. *One bottle shoed nice black raspberry, tobacco smoke and oak char scents with a healthy fruit core of blackberries, raspberries and a hint of herbs and wood. Silky in texture and clean on the finish. The second bottle showed a similar aromatic profile but oak char dominated the flavors and the finish was sour and unpleasant. Oh, the trials and tribulations of tasting wine.*



**2006 Auteur Sonoma Stage Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 146 cases, \$50. *An earthy aromatic profile featuring forest floor and a little oak char with fruit lingering in the background. Earthy on the palate as well, with dark fruits featured. The fruit is pent-up and flat at present. Soft in the mouth with fine-grained tannins and tangy acidity and prominent oak. This is a wine waiting to get out.* The Auteur wines have been highly touted in the wine press and are sold by meager allocations through a mailing list at [www.auteurwines.com](http://www.auteurwines.com).



**2006 Brogan Cellars Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$45. *Light reddish-purple in color. Some grassy and barnyard accents to the red fruit. Tasty red cherry flavors with the grassy theme carrying through to the finish. Light and more feminine than many Brogan Pinot Noirs, it is well-balanced and easy to drink. Not winemaker Margi's best wine, but still quite decent.* The website is [www.brogancellars.com](http://www.brogancellars.com).

**2004 Clouds Rest Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$100. This unique one and three-quarter-acre vineyard is actually on Sonoma Mountain but carries the Sonoma Coast appellation. Frequent fog drifts in from the ocean forming a billowy blanket about 50 feet below the vineyard fence. The Clouds Rest Vineyard is situated at 1250 feet and is the most intensely planted vineyard in the Sonoma Coast AVA and may be the most difficult and expensive to farm. The vines are planted 3 ft x 3 ft (an arm's length apart) in volcanic soils and farmed completely by hand. The planted clones are Pommard 3 and 115, 667, and 777. The wines are aged for 18 months in 50% new French oak and bottle aged an additional 18 months to 3 years. The noted winemaker is Anthony Austin. *The aromatics benefit considerably from decanting. A blackberry bombast. Fruit-driven style with gobs of plush ripe fruit and a mountain-inspired earthy influence. Big, bold and definitely Caliesque in style.* I also sampled the 2003 vintage (dark in color, woody, earthy, prune in flavor) and the 2005 vintage (excellent aromatics of black raspberry and spice, pepper accents, soft texture, toned-down from previous vintages and showing a refinement lacking in other years). The planned website is [www.cloudsrestpinotnoir.com](http://www.cloudsrestpinotnoir.com). 707-765-0841.



**2005 De La Montanya Sonoma Coast Pinot Meunier** 13.4% alc., \$34. One of the few wineries in California that bottles this varietal as a stand-alone wine. I tasted this in barrel last year and like it and

it is really showing beautifully now. A great wine to stump your wine geek friends with. *Very nice aromatics of wild berries, oak spice, buttered toast and new-mown hay. Very juicy darker fruits delicately spice. Straight forward, soft, clean and easy to drink.* The website is [www.dlmwine.com](http://www.dlmwine.com).

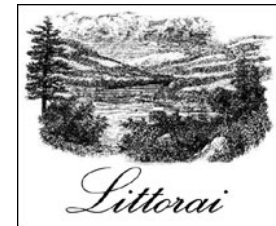
**2004 Hamel Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$31. *A reliable source of restrained, nicely-crafted Pinot Noir. The nose is composed of toast, black cherry, roasted nuts and a hint of alcohol. Very gentle and soft red cherry flavors with a clean finish. An easy drinker.* No website. The 2006 vintage has been released.

**2005 Hartford Court Land's Edge Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$30. Primarily sourced from Annapolis Vineyard with several other coastal vineyards. *Unusual aromas of BBQ smoke, green olive along with strawberry and cherry notes. The smoke continues through on the palate highlighting the dark-toned fruits. The tannins are gossamer creating a silky feel in the mouth. The flavors trump the nose.* The website is [www.hartfordwines.com](http://www.hartfordwines.com).



**2006 Kutch McDougall Ranch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 90 cases, \$48 The McDougall plantings are 3.4 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean at 935 feet. 25% whole cluster. Aged on the lees for 16 months with no new oak. *Moderately light in color. Red cherries and brown spices on the nose. Lighter-styled, with red fruit profile, herbal notes and graham. Lively acidity. Still reserved from bottling.* The website is [www.kutchwines.com](http://www.kutchwines.com).

**2004 Littorai The Haven Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$75. *Darkly colored, this wine offers a very unique aromatic profile of sweet smoke, tar, herbs, char and hay. The brooding fruit is darkly colored and there is a curious whiskey taste. Full-bodied, plenty of woody notes, soft tannins, and a lingering fruity finish. Very unusual for a Littorai wine.* The website is [www.littorai.com](http://www.littorai.com).



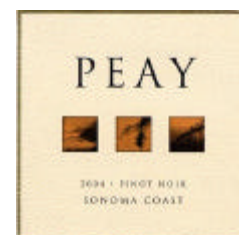
**2004 MacPhail Goodin Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., 325 cases, \$54. Clones 115, 777. *Red fruits, sawdust and green aromas. Nicely composed red fruits with plenty of bright fruit flavor. A hint of greenness carries through.* The website is [www.grapewagon.com](http://www.grapewagon.com).

**2004 MacPhail Pratt Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 250 cases, \$54. Clones 2A, 23, 114 and 777. *Wine-soaked wet oak, dark cherry and musky notes on the nose. Really delicious black raspberry and graham flavors which make you sit up straight. As it opens, the flavors veer toward raisin. Nice tang, grip, length and finish.*

**2006 Landmark Vineyards Grand Detour Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$35. *There is an oak bent to the nose and flavors. Cherry driven with plenty of oak spice. Sexy cherry kiss on the finish. An elegant styled wine that is quite charming. A Sicilian pizza tamed the oak tendencies.* The website is [www.landmarkvineyards.com](http://www.landmarkvineyards.com).



**2003 Peay Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 575 cases, \$45. *Slight orange tinge to the rim. Initially there are captivating aromas of cherries, anise and dried roses. Over time, the nose takes on notes of prune and cigar box. Tart cherry flavors veering toward raisin with staunch acidity, and a clean, dry finish.* The website is [www.peavineyards.com](http://www.peavineyards.com).





**2005 Sonoma Cutrer Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** Darkly fruited from start to finish with plenty of oak and char throughout. Blackberries and boysenberries saturate the palate. Attractive farmyard and herbal accents. Very clean finish. Still some tannins to shed. The website is [www.sonomacutrer.com](http://www.sonomacutrer.com).

**2006 Stephen Vincent Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., \$18. Sourced from the Four Sisters Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast. Light in color, light in the mouth, and very silky. Flavors of red fruits, primarily cherry, with a grassy edge. Kept wanting more, but can't complain for the price. The website is [www.stevenvincentwines.com](http://www.stevenvincentwines.com).

**2006 W.H. Smith Maritime Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$54. A woody bent to the nose and flavors. Shy red fruits a medicinal note in the aromatics followed by black cherry, earth and iodine flavors. After drinking this, I said, "What's the fuss about?" This was a reference to the generous scores this wine received in past. Not so fast! The next day from a re-corked bottle, the wine was quite good with deep dark showy fruit and exotic wood accents. The medicinal note had completely resolved. The mouth feel was pure velvet and the wine was quite enjoyable. No website. 707-965-9726. See previous notes on page 6.

**2006 W.H. Smith Umino Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., \$48. Upon early sampling the nose featured spiced dark fruits which carried over on the palate. Finishes with plenty of fruit energy. The next day from the re-corked bottle the fruit was more integrated with a nice smoky accent and the texture had softened. Much more appealing the following day.

## Other wines tasted but lacking a foghorn

**2005 Alesia Chileno Valley Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$58. Aromas of strawberry, juniper berry and sandalwood are appealing, but a woody and herbal greenness overwhelms the fruit. Like sucking on a wood branch. The green flavors could resolve to some degree with bottle age.

**2005 Benziger Family Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$19. Not particularly appealing forest floor and green tomato aromas. Heavily weighed down by a green vegetable tone throughout. Smooth, viscous texture with fine tannins.

**2006 MacMurray Sonoma Coast** 13.5% alc., \$19. Smoke, tar and confectioned cherry aromas lead to oak-infused dark fruits with a herbaceous edge. Soft but notable tannins. Drink with grilled meats.

**2003 MacPhail Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 120 cases, \$40. Wet oak is overwhelming on the nose with an added unpleasant gasoline station smell. Smooth, plush dark-toned fruits which are trumped by the oak and woodshed flavors. Taste better than it smells.

**2005 Marimar Estate Don Miguel Vineyard Green Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$33. A very earthy Pinot with oak, truffle and woody tannins running through. The black cherry fruit core is flavorful.

**2004 Peay Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$45. Bizarre aromas of celery stalk and sweet cookie dough. Nice cherry, raspberry core with persistent, drying tannins.

**2006 Siduri Terra De Promissoi Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$37. Big stewed tomato and heavily oak spiced nose. Fruit intensity is lacking on the palate with green flavors and oak most prominent. Light in body, soft in texture with plenty of brisk acidity.

**2003 Wild Hog Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 16.1% alc., \$25. Dark ruby in color. Scents of earth, tobacco, pencil shavings and grass lead off. There is a strong attack of potent ripe fruit tending toward raisin. Aggressive tannins. For fans of big tannic zinfandel-like wines. I tasted the 2005 vintage of this wine as well and it was very similar in style albeit with more refined tannins.

## Laura Volkman Takes It Personally

In a recent issue of the *PinotFile* (Volume 6, Issue 52 ), I featured this new boutique producer located in Newberg, Oregon. I was quite impressed with the Pinot Noirs and Chardonnay and looked forward to sampling the winery's top-of-the-line estate Pinot Noir bottlings which were recently released. The two Pinot Noirs turned out to be lavishly soft, offering pure pleasure and silk that was astonishing. After drinking the wines, I had to call Laura Volkman and find out the story behind these fantastic wines.

I spoke with Laura on a snowy day in the Willamette Valley in late March. She told me that she makes ALL the winegrowing decisions herself, performs practically all of the physical work in the vineyard, and for the most part, won't let anyone else touch the vines. In the winery, she is so intense in everything she does, her tolerant husband (bless him!) kids that "she takes every bottle personally." She likens her passion and dedication to an author writing a great book who locks her self away and entirely focuses on the job at hand. "I have blinders on from April until the end of crush," she said.

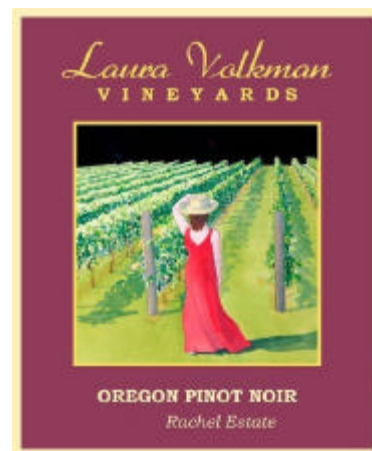


Of all the many grape varieties, Pinot Noir is the most temperamental, a fickle prodigy if you will, and the one that can be brought to perform brilliantly only through meticulous parenting in the vineyard and in the winery. This explains why some of the world's greatest Pinot Noirs come from very small producers who can personally nurse the frivolous grape every step of the way. Laura Volkman personifies this ideal and her wines show the results.

The Laura Volkman Vineyard is located about a ¼ mile from August West Cellars (a cooperative facility in which several winemakers lease space) in Newberg. Together with her husband, she purchased a small farm several years ago, cleared the land and planted vines. Her first releases were from the 2004 vintage. The labels are quite striking and display artwork depicting Laura in her vineyard (from watercolor artist Terry Peasley).

The two bottlings below are distinguished by their different clonal components and the use of different yeasts. Both are charming in their own way and highly (that's HIGHLY) recommended.

**2006 Laura Volkman Vineyards Rachel Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 100 cases, \$38. From the west block of the Volkman Vineyard, clones 114, 667 and Pommard. The 114 provides the aromatic floral component and the 667 imparts a certain femininity. One type of yeast is used to create a more fruity profile and a Burgundian yeast to create a drier finish. *Everything is perfectly in order here. Black cherries, truffle and barnyard in the aromas, soft black cherry fruits delicately spiced on the palate. Very elegant and demure with the kind of plush and velveteen texture that only great Pinot Noir can offer. All I could do was shake my head and smile after tasting this one.*



**2006 Laura Volkman Vineyards Jacob Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 200 cases, \$42. This is the Volkman “flagship” wine sourced from the east block of the Volkman Vineyard. The clones are 114, 115 and 777. Yeasts were manipulated to produce a more edgy wine. *The aromas are very enticing and include fresh-baked cookies, Bing cherries, and chocolate. I went ga-ga over the aromatics and would have been perfectly happy just to smell this wine. But when you taste it, you are led on a journey of pleasure featuring red Pinot fruits with terrific grip and edginess and a lavish black cherry finish that comes and goes in waves. This is the kind of wine that makes you wonder how mere grapes could ever have made such nectar.*



**Laura Volkman Vineyards** address is 13000 N.E. Quarry Road (off Highway 99W), Newberg (August West Cellars). Tasting by appointment. The wines are sold through a mailing list at [www.volkmancellars.com](http://www.volkmancellars.com) or by contacting Laura at 503-806-4047. These are the best Pinot Noirs in this issue for current drinking and you would do yourself a favor by grabbing some for your cellar.

## La Crema - A Label You Can Count On

La Crema Winery is a family-owned estate in the Russian River Valley that specializes in handcrafted, Burgundian style Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs from cool climate vineyards in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Established in 1979, the winery has never allowed visitors, but the label quickly gained a reputation for quality and is a label you can always count on for consistently fine wines. The owners are Laura Jackson-Giron and her sister Jennifer Jackson.

Several winemakers developed the La Crema Winery style through the years, including Dan Goldfield (Dutton-Goldfield). In 2004, La Crema hired Melissa Stackhouse to oversee all aspects of winemaking and the wines have reached a level of remarkable high quality considering the relatively large production and value-pricing. The popularity of the label has never been higher. In the latest *Wine & Spirits* Restaurant poll (April, 2008), La Crema was #12 in the Restaurant Top 50 of wines selling best at polled restaurants. Pinot Noir has become the biggest seller on many winery lists (even in Napa Valley) and La Crema Sonoma and Sonoma Coast bottlings are the most popular (#1) Pinot Noir poured at restaurants.



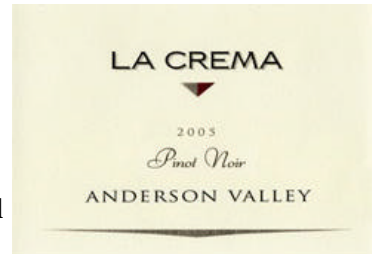
Stackhouse joined La Crema in 2000 as Associate Winemaker. Prior to La Crema, she had worked at Peter Michael Winery, Hardy's Tintara Winery in McLaren Vale, South Australia and Joseph Phelps Vineyards. She holds a BS degree in Viticulture and Enology from the University of California Davis. She has been able to focus on cool-climate vineyards and terroirs, creating finely-tuned wines of admirable elegance and balance. You might see her as well cycling along a road in Sonoma County, as she is a resident of Healdsburg and participates in triathlons. Not surprisingly, she also turns her artistic winemaking flair to creative pursuits such as the symphony and ballet.

At least one of the La Crema bottlings is usually available on your local supermarket or wine retailer shelves. When friends new to wine, and recently that included my son who was invited to dinner, want a suggestion of a Pinot Noir to bring, I often recommend La Crema. They usually thank me afterwards, but it is, in fact, no secret, and an easy recommendation to make.

La Crema has been supporting sustainability since 1999 when they were among the first wineries to become a certified Sonoma County “green business.” La Crema has also been selected to participate in a pilot project with the California Public Utility Commission to develop an Environmental Management System for wineries. 75% of La Crema’s vineyards are farmed using “non-tillage” practices to reduce carbon dioxide output. In all of the estate vineyards, composted grape pomace and chipped vegetation are added to build up organic matter. Habitat boxes in the vineyards for owls, bluebirds and falcons help to naturally control vineyard pests. Riparian areas that border vineyards are planted and maintained. Finally, they use integrated pest management to introduce beneficial insects, helping to eliminate the need for pesticides.

I tasted through the lineup of 2005 appellation designated Pinot Noirs. The wines were more similar than different, despite being sourced from diverse regions, and the unifying features included beautiful balance and attractive textures. They are fashioned for early drinking. The appellation series Pinot Noirs are reliable wines that are well-crafted and consistently fine, but none will really launch you into ecstasy.

**2005 La Crema Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$34. Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777. 33% new barrels. *Fairly dark ruby color. Rather flamboyant scents of dusty cherries. Soft in the mouth, the dark red cherries are highlighted by herbs and spice and a touch of earth, ending with a refreshing acid lift. Delivers more on the nose than in the mouth.*



**2005 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$22. Gold Medal Sonoma County Harvest Fair. *Complex aromatics of wet leaf, mown hay, char and dark fruit. Some appealing minerality and notable herbs and dirt enhance the slightly muted dark Pinot fruits. Velvety mouth feel and a lingering tang, even high strung, finish.*

**2005 La Crema Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$34. 47% new barrels. Dijon and Pommard clones. *This is the most showy wine and has the most appealing velvety texture in the lineup. Starts off with black cherry, honey and green herb scents leading to flavors of Bing cherry with herbs, and woody accents. Clean finish and very drinkable.*

**2005 La Crema Los Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$34. Pommard, 115, 667 and 777 clones. *Deeper, darker and denser than the other wines in the lineup. This one really pumps out the aromas of rich black cherry and boysenberries. The black fruits carry the theme to a slightly dry and tannic finish.*

**La Crema Winery** is located at 3690 Laughlin Rd, Windsor. A tasting room is located in Healdsburg, at 235 Healdsburg Avenue and is open daily from 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM. The 2006 appellation wines from the Sonoma Coast, Russian River Valley and Los Carneros have been released and are available for purchase on the website at [www.lacrema.com](http://www.lacrema.com). The phone is 800-314-1762. The winery also produces a limited amount of Nine Barrel Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (200 cases, \$75). These wines are sold out quickly due to high demand and will be allocated strictly to Wine Club members starting next year. By reputation, the Nine Barrel wines are exceptional.



## Lost Canyon Has New Direction

I have tasted the fine Pinot Noirs from this producer yearly for several years now, and have always been happy to recommend them. The 2006 vintage is no exception. The wines continue to exhibit impeccable balance but this vintage shows a drift toward more restraint and elegance, making them even more suitable for the dinner table.

Lost Canyon Winery was founded in 2001, and like many small new wineries, two of the founders, Jack States and Randy Keyworth, had a background in home winemaking for many years. A third founder, Bob Riskin brings his marketing expertise to the label. Production is small at 3,000 cases. The urban winery is located in a turn-of-the-century warehouse south of Jack London Square in Oakland, California.

The winery focuses on small-lot vineyard-designated Pinot Noir, Syrah and Viognier from vineyards in the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Los Carneros appellations.

**2006 Lost Canyon Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., <525 cases, \$42. Lost Canyon has accessed fruit from Saralee's Vineyard since 2002 (actually three of Saralee's vineyards including Richard's Grove and Saralee Vineyard Block, Trenton Station Vineyard, and Catie's Corner Vineyard). Clones are 115 and 777. *Lightest in color in the lineup. A charmer with nice scents of cherry pie, cream soda and smoke. Red cherry leads the red fruit parade complimented by cocoa and coconut notes. Elegant in style and marvelous in taste.*



**2006 Lost Canyon Dutton Ranch Morelli Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., <575 cases, \$42. *The nose is closed down but with swirling subtle aromas of strawberry, barnyard and wood spice emerge. Red berry fruits, a little baking spice, a hint of oak and herbs make up the flavor profile. A bit reserved and shallow and a touch of green on the backend. Need to try again in six months.*

**2006 Lost Canyon Las Brisas Vineyard Los Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., <400 cases, \$42. *Shy aromas of red and black fruits with grilled meat, smoke and iodine notes. Light in body and showing considerable finesse, the soft and demure red fruit has a gamey and smoky edge. There is a refreshing kick of acid on the finish. My least favorite.*

**2006 Lost Canyon Widdoes Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., <350 cases, \$42. The first year for this vineyard bottling. *Very demonstrable black cherry and candy cane aromas followed by showy and intense black cherry and blackberry fruit shot through with notes of wet oak and spice. A real charmer that is beautifully balanced with no intrusion of alcohol. The wine has enough acidity to compliment food beautifully.*

**Lost Canyon Winery** is located at 2102 Dennison Street, Oakland. A nicely appointed tasting room is open at the winery daily. The wines are available on the website at [www.lostcanyonwinery.com](http://www.lostcanyonwinery.com). Magnums and even Jeroboams of some wines are now available. The phone is 650-703-1496.

## Small Sips of Odds & Ends

Over the last few months I have tasted a number of Pinot Noirs that do not fit neatly into a feature category in the *PinotFile*. There are some gems in the list so check it out.

**2006 A to Z Oregon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., screw cap, \$20. This wine is from A to Z Wineworks in Newberg, Oregon, a fast growing negociant that sources and blends juice from all over Oregon. Founded by Sam Tannahill, Cheryl Francis, and Debra and Bill Hatcher. Very popular daily drinker that is widely available. Byline is "Aristocratic wines at democratic prices." *Pleasant cherry and strawberry fruit in a straightforward style with a likeable smoky accent. Light-bodied and easy to drink, it has decent acidity and is a perfect accompaniment to an Easter ham. The website is [www.atozwineworks.com](http://www.atozwineworks.com).*



**2005 Athair Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 600 cases, \$28. I wrote about this wine previously and praised it (*PinotFile* volume 6, Issue 31). This time around with the same wine I wasn't as sold. *Attractive bottle with embossed label. Dark red-purple in color. Very nicely composed aroma profile of cherries, earth, and oak. Plenty of luscious dark fruits and spice, but encumbered by a woody aftertaste that persists despite lengthy air time. Very nice acidity for the table. The website is [www.athairwine.com](http://www.athairwine.com).*

**2006 george Vintage IV Nuptial Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., \$50. *Light in color and light on the palate. Utterly seductive beginning with sexy cherry, raspberry and new oak aromas and flavors. A healthy acid backbone holds the package together nicely. Very good. The website is [www.georgewine.com](http://www.georgewine.com).*



**2005 Gundlach-Bundschu Rhinefarm Vineyard Sonoma Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 4,900 cases, \$38. Clones are Pommard 5 and Dijon 115, average vine age 16 years, yields 1.8 tons/acre. This year the winery is celebrating its 150th anniversary (1858-2008). *A middleweight with a green vegetal note in the nose. Heavily oaked fruit. Decent acidity on the slightly bitter finish. Website: [www.gunbun.com](http://www.gunbun.com).*

**2005 Ken Wright Shea Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$60. *Terrific nose of brown-spiced cherries, cola and deft oak. A seamless wine which is black cherry driven, but with charming spice and earthy sidecars. This is pure pleasure and silk that is luxurious. I would look for this one every vintage. The winery website is [www.kenwrightcellars.com](http://www.kenwrightcellars.com).*



**2005 Kiara Private Reserve Sylvester Vineyard Paso Robles Pinot Noir** 13.5%, \$25. From one of the few Pinot Noir vineyards in the Paso Robles appellation. *Charming scents of cherries, red raspberries, spices and oak. Light in weight, with simple and shallow fruit flavors and respectable acidity. An easy drinker for fans of a more elegant presentation of Pinot Noir. The website is [www.sylvesterwinery.com](http://www.sylvesterwinery.com).*

**2006 Kutch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 287 cases, \$39. 60% Kanzler Vineyard and 40% La Jouis Vineyard, both located in the Green Valley sub-AVA of the Russian River Valley. 30% whole cluster. Aged 16 months on its lees. *Bright and dark reddish-purple color. Reserved aromas of black cherry and oak char. The fruit is shy but tempting with black cherry and blackberry flavors highlighted by herbs and subtle oak. Only recently bottled, the wine is still reticent. The Kutch style is a work in progress and I like his desire to emphasize elegance, texture and power with restraint. The website is [www.kutchwines.com](http://www.kutchwines.com).*

**2006 Lynmar Winery Jenkins Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 460 cases, \$60. From a 20-acre vineyard planted to Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777 overlooking the town of Sebastopol in the Russian River Valley. Heavy coastal fog and Goldridge soils. Second Lynmar vineyard designate wine from this vineyard. *This wine is all about red cherries, fraise de bois as well as black fruits like plums and blackberries. Restrained and delicate, it is finely spiced and beautifully constructed.* The website is [www.lynmarwinery.com](http://www.lynmarwinery.com). Lynmar wines are world class and highly desirable.

**2006 Malm Cellars Anderson Valley Reserve Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$24. Wax seal. Brendan Malm grew up close to where I live here in Orange County, California and left at an early age for Sonoma to learn winemaking. *Confected (almost too candied) strawberry, red raspberry and cotton candy scents with a touch of alcohol. Silky, noble and round with lovely strawberry flavors enhanced by spice and graham. Very fine-grain tannins and an appealing soft texture. The flavors trump the aromas.* The website is [www.malmcellars.com](http://www.malmcellars.com). Note, the label is a peculiar robin's egg blue, but a retailer told me it really stands out on the shelf and attracts women buyers like flies.

**2005 Neely "Holly's Cuvee" Spring Ridge Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$39. Dr. Kirk Neely owns the Spring Ridge Vineyard and the wines are made by Varner. *The nose offers shy fruit with a woody bent and some alcohol peaks out. Light-bodied and elegant with very shallow fruit and flavors of dried cherry, oak and citrus. The best I can say about this wine is that it has some finesse and a silky texture.* Hard to swallow for this tariff.

**2005 Radio-Coteau Alberigi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 436 cases, \$50. Winemaker is Eric Sussman for this small (3,000 cases) label. *Oak-spiced darker fruits run through this wine which has a healthy tannic backbone. On the palate, there is quite intense and chewy fruit which is well-rounded. A touch awkward now, I have had better bottles of this wine. That said, it was still good.* The website is [www.radiocoteau.com](http://www.radiocoteau.com).



**2005 Red Car Amour Fou Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 273 cases \$55. *Deep violet color. Black fruits, cigar box and toast in the nose and a little heat peaks out as well. Heady, concentrated and sweet black cherry fruit with forest floor and earthy accents. Very powerful wine of intriguing nuances with a charming cherry fruit note on the finish.* The website is [www.redcarwine.com](http://www.redcarwine.com).

**2004 Robert Stemmler Ferguson Block Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 400 cases, \$35. This wine is sourced from the oldest portion of the Donum Estate, planted in 1974 to Martini selection on St. George rootstock. Yields are .9 tons/acre. Aged 11 months in 50% new oak. *This is a wine for fans of dirt. Very earthy with a mushroom and woody edge. Plums, blackberries and boysenberries make up the fruit profile. A decent, but not extraordinary wine.*

**2006 Summerland Rancho Santa Rosa Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 430 cases, \$36. *A nice drink that begins with a complex perfume of red cherries, barnyard and hay. Dried and tart cherry flavors with a hint of cookie dough and grass. Simple and a bit shallow on the backend, but an easy drinker.* The website is [www.summerlandwine.com](http://www.summerlandwine.com).



**2003 WesMar Piner Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$35. *This one comes at you full bore the minute the cork is pulled. Sexy aromas of Bing cherry, Xmas spices, clove, exotic woods and oak char. Beautifully composed and balanced dark berry and cherry fruits that flow over the tongue like Mobil 1. An honor to drink,* The website is [www.wesmarwinery.com](http://www.wesmarwinery.com).



## My Pinot Noir Pet Peeves

- 1 Retailers who self score the wines they sell.
  - 2 Wax closures. These are the devil in disguise. They charm you with their sexy look, but the ensuing hassle negates the glamorous appearance. Haute couture with a vengeance.
  - 3 Overpriced wines. Winemaker says I have to charge a lot for the wine or people won't think it is any good. \$50 sounds about right and plenty expensive.
  - 4 One bottle allocations. Brother can you spare a bottle.
  - 5 Zero bottle allocations. The winery sends you their mailing touting the wines, but your allocation is zero, zot, zilch, nada.
  - 6 Magnum depression. Why are magnums rarer than recent Elvis sightings? What's the BIG deal?
  - 7 Single vineyard overload. Mom and pop are farming two acres because they are retired and need something to do. Another vineyard designate wine for the taking.
  - 8 Invisible winemakers. Come out of the closet (winery)!
  - 9 Scores. The only scores that matter are those in sporting events where the winner proves his metal. Why is it that those who can't make wine, score them?
  - 10 Limited production. Since when did this equate with high quality? It usually means the production was limited by the amount of grapes the producer was allocated by the rock star grower or reduced by the amount of wine that had to be declassified.
  - 11 Newbies. Would you buy a house from someone who made their first one? Or hire a surgeon who has only done a few operations?
  - 12 Hard to get. Just make it clear how to buy it and we can develop a business relationship.
  - 13 Winemakers of the moment. It is what is in the bottle that matters - no pretenders please.
  - 14 State shipping restraints. If you love wine, move to California - no bitching, moaning or griping tolerated. Quit your job, pack up your family, and move. Leave the teetotalers behind.
  - 15 Where are the monks when we need them. We have to classify all of those vineyards that are springing up like weeds in my law
  - 16 Appellation overload. Thank goodness the government has put a stop to all this nonsense. Let's face it, many of these appellations are publicity stunts that are served to tout wines from a particular region.
  - 17 Wineries that are chronic no shows at tasting events. They leave an impression that they are too good. Remember, we are the world (of Pinot Noir).
  - 18 Hackneyed descriptors. Long finish, unfinned and unfiltered, classic, great structure, organic
- Note: This list was composed after a couple glasses of good Pinot and is meant to be tongue and cheek.



## Pinot Briefs

**Grape Radio Wins!!** Tom Wark of Wark Communciations announced today that Grape Radio was awarded Best Podcast or VideoBlog by the American Wine Blog Awards.



Check out my posted interviews from last year's IPNC and Pinot Days and last week's interview with the Grape Radio crew of Scott Paul Wright of Scott Paul Wines. Also, Grape Radio has been named one of the top wine blogs by Guy Kawasaki on his website, [www.wine.alltop.com](http://www.wine.alltop.com).

**Top Ten Restaurant Pinot Noirs** According to *Wine & Spirits* latest restaurant poll (April, 2008), the top ten most popular Pinot Noir labels in restaurants are in order: La Crema, Maison Joseph Drouhin, Maison Louis Latour, J Wine Company, Sea Smoke, Kenwood Vineyards, Merry Edwards, Argyle, Evesham Wood, Flowers and Gary Farrell. Pinot Noir is now second only to Cabernet Sauvignon in popularity in American restaurants. Overall average price for restaurant Pinot Noir from Oregon, California and Burgundy is \$67.17.

**Pinot Noir Prices** According to *Wines & Vines* (March 2008), Sonoma-Marin Pinot Noir production was down in 2007 (9,000 tons lower), and up in price by more than \$300 per ton to \$2,831 (average statewide was \$2,104). Wineries are seeking out Pinot Noir over all other varietals.

**Stop the Nonsense!** Richard Grant Peterson, PhD, a chemist, has written an interesting article at [www.appellationamerica.com](http://www.appellationamerica.com) (March 10, 2008) that attempts to dispel the myth that corks "breathe." He notes, "We did the lab work almost five decades ago! It's been repeated more than once in Australia and all those who've checked this in the lab tell the same story: Sound corks do not transmit oxygen! Even more important, neither is oxygen transmission through closures what we want! Wine aging is anaerobic, never aerobic. Wine aging never takes place under aerated conditions. It's because those are the conditions that will lead only to oxidation in time, and destruction of the good things in wine."

**Vineyard Development Costly** They often say that to make a small fortune in the wine business you need to start with a large fortune. The price for bare prime vineyard land in Yamhill County, Oregon, is around \$25,000 an acre. Planting vines, trellising etc. to produce a functioning vineyard, add another \$50,000 per acre. To have the vineyard managed by professionals will cost at least \$5,000 per acre. Then you have to wait three years to get your first crop of usable grapes.

**DuMOL Building New Winery** The founders of DuMOL, Michael Verlander and Kerry Murphy, met in 1990 when Murphy was dining in Verlander's restaurant in Walnut Creek, California. Murphy had been a hard core Burgundy lover for years. Together, they started DuMOL Wine Co in 1996 with the aim of producing ultra-premium wines from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. The first year they produced 300 cases total of both varietals from Dutton Ranch grapes. Their label took off, fueled by high scores in the wine press and the high quality of the wines. The winemaker, Andy Smith, trained under Paul Hobbs. Each vintage is quickly sold out to a pre-release mailing list and DuMOL was recently invited to be a member of the prestigious Mayacamas Gold Club's vintner program. Production is now 14,700 cases per year from multiple Russian River Valley vineyards and includes Viognier and Syrah. DuMOL has outgrown the Copain Custom Crush facility in northern Santa Rosa so they have begun construction on a nearly 20,000 square-foot winery in Conde Business Park in Windsor. At a cost of \$5 to \$10 million, this will be a state-of-the-art facility with four barrel rooms with different temperatures. The winery's website is [www.dumol.com](http://www.dumol.com).

**AgriVino Wine Center** In May, 2008, AgriVino Wine Center will open at Abbey Road Farm in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Owners John and Judi Stuart refurbished an old equestrian barn on their 82-acre farm and installed a state-of-the-art Enomatic wine tasting system. 56 separate wines will be featured for sampling, including many of the Willamette Valley's small production wines. The Enomatic dispensing system uses argon that pressurizes and displaces oxygen in the bottle. Since air does not come into contact with the wine, the wine stays fresh and bottles can remain open for several weeks. The dispenser is self-service, but a sommelier will be on staff to guide and educate visitors. AgriVino will be open daily from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Abbey Road Farm also includes a popular wine country B&B with five guest suites housed in converted grain silos. Abbey Road Farm is surrounded by 22 wineries in Carlton and more than 200 wineries in the close vicinity of the Willamette Valley. Visit the websites for more information: [www.agrivino.com](http://www.agrivino.com) and [www.abbeyroadfarm.com](http://www.abbeyroadfarm.com).

**The Oregon Wine Explorer** The Oregon Wine Board has created an online portal to assist travelers in planning their trips to Oregon wine regions. The website, [www.explorer.oregonwine.com](http://www.explorer.oregonwine.com), provides a virtual tour of the state's wine regions with turn-by-turn directions. The associated Wine Finders Tool links with the Explorer and allows consumers to search and order Oregon wines. The Oregon Wine Board also has a new "Discover Oregon Wine Country" tool kit that includes a brochure of the state, regional maps with winery/vineyard listings and further assistance in planning a trip. To view and order, visit [www.oregonwinebrochure.org](http://www.oregonwinebrochure.org)

**Wine Village in Santa Cruz Mountains** Eight wineries have joined together in an old industrial park in western Santa Cruz that has been named, "Westside Wine Village." Bonny Doon will form the nucleus of the group, having used the location for wine production for years. They will vacate some space which will be occupied by other wineries including Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Sones Cellars, and Vino-Tabi (a custom crush facility). Bonny Doon will shutter its existing tasting room and move it to this location. Nearby will be Beauregard Vineyards, Pelican Ranch Winery, and Alexander Cellars. The wineries plan to have tasting rooms and market their location together.

**Sonoma Winemaking Complex** A warehouse complex near downtown Sonoma is now home to as many as fifteen wineries including Patz & Hall, Talisman, Castle, Three Sticks, Kamen Estate Wines, Saintsbury, Ledson Winery & Vineyards, MacRostie and Tin Barn Vineyards. The aim with many of these wineries is to have an unglamorous, but well-equipped, spacious and efficient facility to make wine and use capital that would have been spent on a fancy winery and tasting room to buy the best possible grapes and invest in the most useful winemaking equipment.

  
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**Cellars at Latour**

## **The Long and Winding Pinot Road, Part IX**

American Pinot Noir was proving its worth and my passion for it had been vindicated. But it was time to visit the cradle of Pinot Noir, the slopes of the Cote d'Or. Master Sommelier, Rene Chazottes, led a small group of wine enthusiasts on a wine and gastronomique tour of France in June of 2000. Our group's battle cry was "Mon verre est vide!" (my glass is empty). 1 Bus, 2 drivers, 4 hotels, 18 wineries, 22 cities, 24 meals, 185 wines, 370 bottles of wine from Champagne to Burgundy to the Loire Valley and finally Bordeaux. For me the highlight of the trip was the heartwarming sight of the almost unbroken vista of vines carpeting the slope of the Cote d'Or on a glorious sunny day. As we drove leisurely along RN 74, the most evocative signs to villages appeared, the names of which sounded like a roll call of the most voluptuous red wines in the world: Chambolle-Musigny, Vougeot, Vosne-Romanee, and Nuits St. George.

At Louis Latour in Aloxe-Corton I drooled over the library of Burgundies dating to the 1800s. Bottles with no labels and covered in mold. The winemaker's thief was put into action and I tasted some terrific 1999 vintage wines including Corton Charlemagne and Chambertain. Needless to say, I did not spit these wines out. Later that day, we continued south along the Cote de Beaune to the lovely, old, and very rich town of Beaune. Perilously narrow streets, medieval houses, grandiose mansions and a Romanesque church. We settled in at the Renaissance mansion hotel, La Cep, close to the action in central Beaune. It was then off to Vougeot for a tasting and dinner at Domaine Bertagna. With only 200 inhabitants and 67 hectares of vines, Vougeot is the smallest commune in the Cote d'Or. Vougeot's reputation rests principally on the vines from the walled vineyard known as Clos de Vougeot, the largest clos in the Cote d'Or. A spectacular dinner ensued at Domaine Bertagna. Featured wines included 1995 Domaine Bertagna Corton Charlemagne, 1995 Domaine Bertagna Clos St Denis (Magnum), and 1995 Domaine Bertagna Vougeot Clos de la Perriere, Monopole, 1er Cru. We drank and ate and sang the "Ban de Bourgogne." I was beginning to feel at home in Burgundy. To be continued... ..