



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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If you drink no
Noir, you Pinot
Noir

Sips of Recently Tasted California Pinot Noir

I have quite a backlog of wine reviews to share with you so I am going to get into it without much commentary. I can tell you that the Pinot Noir wines I have sampled from the 2012 vintage, in both California and Oregon, are stunning. Pinotphiles have plenty to look forward among the 2012 releases in the coming year. Not only are the wines superb, but they are plentiful. Even the inexpensive bottlings should be very good in 2012. One of your New Year's resolutions should be to stock your cellar with 2012 Pinot Noir.

The quality of North American Pinot Noir is now at an all time high. If you are a pinotophile, you are living in the age of unrivaled excellence, whether you are primarily seeking wines priced under \$35 that are relished for their price value ratio, or collecting the ultrapremium gems where cost reflects the variety's name: PINO (price is no object).

Anthill Farms

2011 Anthill Farms Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., \$44. Demuth Vineyard is located at 1,500 feet elevation above the town of Boonville and owned and farmed by Knez Winery. *Moderately light red in color. Aromas of strawberry, red cherry, clove spice and an imposing note of smoky oak. Oak-kissed dark red strawberry and raspberry flavors on a mid weight frame, with a finish of modest length. The delicate and juicy fruit is overwhelmed by the dark oak imprint.* **86.**

2011 Anthill Farms Abbey Harris Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., \$48. Abbey Harris is a 2-acre vineyard located 1,100 feet above the town of Boonville and farmed by Dona Abbey and Dan Harris. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of red cherry, slate and bark. Middleweight flavors of dark red cherry with an underpinning of humus and oak. Soft in the mouth with substantial tannins which tend to wrestle with the fruit. Reasonably good cherry-driven finish. This wine doesn't currently deliver a message, but may surprise with more time in bottle.* **88.**

2011 Anthill Farms Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$40. This vineyard has been farmed by Randy Peters for over 25 years. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of Bing cherries and spice lead to a rich, plush core of Bing cherry fruit with some blackberry and spice in the background. Soft in the mouth with sinewy tannins and a good cut of acidity, with a finish which of noteworthy length.* **90.**



2011 Anthill Farms Comptche Ridge Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., \$44. This vineyard is located a few miles from the Mendocino coastline just north of the town of Navarro and is dry-farmed by the Weir family. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Enticing aromas of black cherry pie glaze, peat, potpourri, sea breeze and a touch of oak. Delicious marriage of black cherry and blackberry fruit with a compliment of spice and anise. A little earthiness grounds the wine which really attracts your attention with impressive depth of flavor and class. The tannins are nicely balanced, the acidity is harmonious, and the finish is fruit-filled and generous. Extraordinary in this very cool vintage.* **94.**



Black Kite

2011 Black Kite Kite's Rest Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.57, 953 cases, \$45. Aged 11 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely scented with aromas of cherry, ripe strawberry and spice rub. Mid weight tasty cherry core with undertones of strawberry and spice. Refined, elegant and on the lighter side in this vintage. Appealing for its crisp, juicy presence and finish. Holds up nicely over time in the glass. 91.*



2010 Black Kite Angel Hawk Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.61, 114 cases, \$80. The best and most age worthy barrels from the 2010 vintage. Aged 20 months in 100% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish-purple robe in the glass. Complex and expressive nose featuring aromas of black cherry, blackberry, anise, cardamom, wine cave and toasty oak. Much riper than the 2011 release, big and rich but not overwrought, with juicy flavors of darker cherries and berries with inflections of cola, oak and spice. Impressive mid palate concentration, structural backbone and finishing power. A luxurious wine that will appeal to lovers of this hedonistic style of Pinot Noir. Because of the ripeness, a bit of heat shows up on the finish. 90.*

2011 Black Kite Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.55, 273 cases, \$55. Aged 11 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Muted aromas of black fruits, cooked beets, and floral perfume. Extravagantly rich with intense flavors of black raspberry, blackberry and black plum. A little earthy and beefy in character. Silky on the palate with balanced dry tannins and modest length on the dry finish. Solid, but not exciting now, and should benefit from further time in bottle. 88.*

Dutton-Goldfield Winery

The cold, foggy 2011 vintage produced some very appealing Dutton-Goldfield wines with aromatic brightness, fresh acidity and good complexity. Winemaker Dan Goldfield marks 2013 as his 26th harvest and his experience shows in the high quality of his 2011 vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs. It was Henri Jayer who said, "Good wines are made in a great vintage, but great wines are made in a difficult vintage." Dutton-Goldfield is one of the most consistent producers currently crafting wine in California, and that includes all the different varietals he offers. All the wines reviewed were impeccably crafted with harmony. The Pinot Noirs are crafted with de-stemmed grapes, fermented in small open-top fermenters, and cold soaked for 5 to 7 days to gently extract color, spice and fruit characters. Although the wines are approachable and even enjoyable now, they will benefit greatly from a few years in the cellar. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe - pick any one, you can't go wrong. Deft winemaking here.

2011 Dutton-Goldfield Devil's Gulch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., pH 3.52, TA 0.59, 217 cases, \$58. Located in the far western reaches of Marin County, this vineyard is owned and farmed by Marin County viticulture pioneer Mark Pasternak who has been ranching in Nicasio since the early 1970s. Dijon clones are planted in a steep, terraced vineyard with shallow soils. Dijon clones. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of dark red and black fruits with a note of forest floor and cave cellar. Very tasty core of purple fruits including plum and boysenberry, offering good depth and intensity on the mid palate, and finishing long with a riff of electric and juicy red plum fruit. Needs some time in the cellar for the aromatics to arrive and the fruit to maximize its charm. 92.*

2011 Dutton-Goldfield Azaya Ranch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.60, 219 cases, \$58. This vineyard is located in a cold, foggy valley in western Marin County. It was planted for the McEvoy family by Mark Pasternak on an ideal south and west facing hillside in Hicks Valley. The 18-acres contain clones 667, "828," 115, 777 and 2A. This bottling has clone 667 and "828." Aged 17 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with scents of*

black raspberry, Hoison sauce and dried herbs. Very plush and polished on the palate, with magnetic flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, plum and spice wrapped in fine-grain tannins and lively acidity. A marvelous wine with a memorable finish displaying great grip. The velvety texture alone is reason to clap. **93.**



2011 Dutton-Goldfield Fox Den Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 383 cases, pH 3.56, TA 0.62, 383 cases, \$58. This 8-acre vineyard is located at the far western edge of the Green Valley on Stoetz Ridge. Low vigor soil and tiny crop. Clones are 667, lesser amounts of 777 and a touch of 115. Aged 17 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Medium garnet color in the glass. Terrific nose that draws you into the glass with bright aromas of wild berries,*

*black cherries, tea leaf and spice. Super-delicious and captivating, with layers of enticing flavors including black cherry, black raspberry, plum reduction sauce, vanilla and spice. The depth of flavor really sets this wine apart. The oak is complimentary, the mouth feel is creamy, and the lengthy finish offers a refreshing grip. A scintillating wine. **95.***



2011 Dutton-Goldfield Dutton Ranch - Freestone Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.57, TA 0.60, 503 cases, \$72. This vineyard is located on a south-facing hillside above the town of Freestone at the far southwestern edge of the Russian River Valley only a few miles inland from Bodega Bay. A very cold climate very suited to Dijon clones. Yields are low with tiny berries and thick skins. Aged 17 months in 55% new French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple hue in the glass. Shy, but very lovely aromas of wild berry preserves, rose petals and spice. Delicious essence of blackberries and black plums with a wonderful spice presence which makes itself more known over time in the glass. An earthy, sous-bois underpinning adds interest. The svelte tannins are well balanced and there is admirable length to the finish. Still young and somewhat closed, but clearly an extraordinary wine. **94.***

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2011 Dutton-Goldfield McDougall Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 165 cases, \$58 (wine club only). This site is a south-facing ridge close to the coast owned by Mac, Barbara and Rich McDougall. Planted in 1988 near Hirsch and Martinelli vineyards. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Complex nose offering aromas of dark red cherry, raspberry, iron-driven mineral, wild mint and redwood. On the palate, the wine delivers a rush of dark red cherry fruit with a wild, feral character and accents of spice and conifer. Very soft tannins make for easy drinking, and there is noticeable persistence on the cherry drop finish. Definitely better over time in the glass. **92.***

Flowers Vineyard & Winery

2011 Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.8% alc., 300 cases, \$70. Estate grown and bottled. Blocks 2, 13-17. Swan, Pommard, 114, 115 and 2A clones. Planted at 1400 feet in schist and shale soils. Yields 1.67 tons per acre. 25% whole cluster fermentation in 2-ton wooden fermenters. Aged 15 months in 25% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. The aromas veer to the lean side with notes of red cherry, cranberry, dried green herbs, and toasty oak. Light and delicate, even a bit austere, with demure flavors of red raspberry, red cherry, and strawberry. A green thread runs through the background. A pleasant, lacy wine which is easy to drink but is lacking in fruit ripeness. **88.***

2011 Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge Estate Vineyard Block 11 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.0% alc., 42 cases, \$75. Estate grown and bottled. Calera clone planted in schist and shale soils. Yields 1.25 tons per acre. 100% whole cluster fermented in 2-ton wooden fermenters. Aged 17 months in one and two-year-old French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose features dark red cherry and berry fruits with a green vegetal scent in the background. Moderately rich dark red and purple fruits with a hint of grilled Shitake mushroom and green herbs. The wine has bright underlying acidity and a rush of tannins on the cherry flavored finish. The tannins were still daunting one and two days after opening a bottle. Give this wine several years in the cellar for the tannins to soften and integrate, but I am afraid this will always be a tannic wine and the whole cluster induced greenness will never fade completely. **86.***

2011 Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge Estate Vineyard Block 16 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.2% alc., 77 cases, \$75. Estate grown and bottled.

Wädenswil 1A clone planted in schist and shale soils. Yield 2.43 tons per acre. 100% whole cluster fermented in new 2-ton wood fermenters. Aged 17 months in one and two-year-old French oak barrels. *An intriguing wine with considerable nuance. Aromas of wild berries, whole cluster spice, wet fur and a little funky sous-bois. Welcome fullness on the palate with a very smooth mouth feel. Middleweight flavors of dark red cherries and raspberries and an earthy flora undertone are featured. The tannins are more tame in this wine which was very supple in the mouth and highly flavorful two days after opening the bottle.*

Hold this wine in your cellar for at least three years or decant a day ahead of time if you must drink it now. 91.



2011 Flowers Sea View Ridge Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., 300 cases, \$65. Estate grown and bottled. Clones 777, "828," 115, Pommard, Calera and Swan planted in schist, shale, basalt and sandstone at 1400 to 1800 feet elevation. Yield 1.7 tons per acre. 10% whole cluster. Aged 15 months in 30% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Very delicate but pleasant aromas of black cherry syrup, rose petal and spice. Tasty mid weight mix of dark red cherries and berries, elegantly composed with a welcome lift from lively mineral-driven acidity on the finish. Silky and soft in the mouth with modest tannins. Very well crafted with admirable harmony and finishing grace. 91.*

Fogline Vineyards

2011 Fogline Vineyards Floodgate Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.68, 195 cases, \$38. Released April 2013. From an established and respected vineyard located just off River Road in the Middle Reach of the Russian River Valley. Clones 667, 777, 115 and Pommard. Aged in 30% new French oak barrels. A commercial strain of malolactic bacteria is used to produce low biogenic amines in the finished wine. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Very aromatic upon opening with bright aromas of Bing cherry and spice. Oak tends to surface more prominently over time in the glass. The mid palate is lush with deep red cherry and cola flavor and noticeable oak in the background. Fruit-driven with impressive richness, this wine displays balanced firm tannins and a good cut of acidity on the finish which leaves some oak in its wake. 88.*

2011 Fogline Vineyard Sun Chase Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., pH 3.30, TA 0.70, 195cases, \$42. Released October 2012. This 40-acre vineyard is situated at 900 to 1400 foot elevation on Sonoma Mountain in the Petaluma Gap region of the Sonoma Coast. Clones 667 and 777. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromatically alive with dark berry, spiced plum and wooded forest aromas. Well-endowed with prodigious black cherry, black currant, blackberry and blueberry fruits typical of 667 and 777, accented with a touch of spice. The tannins are muscular but well matched to the sappy fruit, and the lingering finish offers a pleasing riff of acidity. Somewhat brooding at this stage, this wine will benefit from further cellaring. 89.*



Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery

2011 Gary Farrell Stiling Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.37, TA 0.62, 266 cases, \$50. Release date February 2014. Owners Don and Barbara Stiling converted a 48-acre apple orchard to vineyards back in 1988. Goldridge soils, coastal fog intrusions. Field selection of Swan clone. Small crop and delayed harvest. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, aged 13 months in 40% new French oak barrels. Racked and returned just once out of barrel before final blending and bottling. *Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. Lovely aromas of Bing cherries, red roses and oak spice. An elegant wine that speaks of the cool vintage with flavors of cherries, blueberries and plum with a hint of oak in the background. Silky and juicy with lively acidity, picking up some intensity over time in the glass. Not a powerful wine by any stretch, but some finishing vigor, very welcoming and easy to like. 89.*

2011 Gary Farrell Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.58, 294 cases, \$70. Release date February 2014. Sourced from several blocks in the 128-acre Rochioli Vineyard planted in 1974, 1995 and 2000. Very low crop size in this vintage due to delayed bud break and rain during the peak of flowering. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, aged 13 months in 40% new French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of ripe dark cherries, cola and a hint of espresso. Light on its feet, even ephemeral in this vintage, with delicate flavors of black cherry, sassafras, cola and spice. Some intensity on the dry finish, but doesn't deliver the punch that we have come to expect from this vineyard. Still, it is a very classy wine that could pick up intensity over time in the bottle. Kudos to the winemaker for bringing out the best the vineyard had to offer in this difficult vintage.* **90.**



Gros Ventre Cellars

Chris and Sarah Pittenger launched the idea of this winery on the banks of the Gros Ventre River in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where they first met in 2003. Chris spent time as a sommelier and developed his winemaking skills at Biale, Torbreck, Williams Selyem and Marcassin. Gros Ventre (grōvant') is French for big belly. Five Pinot Noirs are produced from four vineyards with a total case production of about 700 cases in 2011. Native fermentations, extended maceration, and no fining or filtering are the rule. Typically the wines spend 3-5 days in cold soak, 2 weeks on the skins, with no extended maceration. They are aged 10 months on lees in 17% to 25% new French oak barrels except the First Born wine which spends 14 to 18 months in 33% to 50% new French oak barrels. Whole cluster is dependent on vintage, clone, block and vineyard. In 2011, Chris held off on whole cluster.

2011 Gros Ventre Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., 176 cases, \$48. Pommard 5 and Dijon 115. Aged 10 months in 20% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Aromas of cola, spice and smoky oak lead to a rich palate of plum and blackberry fruit robed in smoky, tobacco-laced oak. Full-bodied, fruity and earthy with supportive tannins and well integrated acidity. Although not particularly expressive now and showing too much oak sheen, this wine may integrate and surprise with further cellaring.* **87.**

2011 Gros Ventre Campbell Ranch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 110 cases, \$54, sold out. Inaugural release from this vineyard located in Annapolis and managed by Ulises Valdez. Clones 115 and 777. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose becomes more expressive over time in the glass revealing aromas of dark berries, game, floral bouquet, and sweet mesquite smoke. Silky smooth on the palate with flowery black cherry, plum and spice flavors in a full-bodied style. The tannins are nicely balanced and the oak is well integrated. A slight vegetal undertone surfaces over time in the glass.* **88.**

2011 Gros Ventre Baranoff Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 97 cases, \$48. This vineyard is farmed by Paul Sloan of Small Vines. A 3-acre parcel located in the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Sebastopol, the vineyard is planted to high-density 4' x 4' spacing of 7 clones. This wine is a blend of the 7 clones (Calera, Swan, 113, 115, 459, 667, 777). Unfined and unfiltered. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of black cherry liquor, cassis and bramble. Densely concentrated flavors of black cherries, black raspberries and cola with a bit of smoky oak showing up in the background and on the finish. Rather linear and bland now, the wine fails to reveal anything distinctive about its vineyard origins, but clearly shows its Russian River Valley origins. Revisit in 6 to 12 months.* **88.**

2011 Gros Ventre First Born Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 155 cases, \$58. A noticeable leap up in quality among the wines of this vintage. This is the winery's flagship cuvée which is a barrel selection of the best lots of the vintage. This wine is dominated by fruit from a vineyard perched at 1,000 feet above sea level along the true Sonoma Coast in the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Magnetic aromas of dark red fruits, spice and seasoned oak. Discreetly concentrated black cherry, plum, cola, dried herbs and toasty oak flavors wrapped in ripe, svelte tannins. Impressive balance with noteworthy finishing length and intensity. Still young, but sends a message.*

92.



LIOCO



2011 LIOCO Klindt Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., pH 3.85, TA 0.57, \$50. This vineyard is located in the cooler deep end of the Anderson Valley. Sandy clay loam soil with fractured rock. Farmed by Bob and Claudia Klindt. Pommard, 115, 667 and 777 clones co-fermented with wild yeast. 30% whole cluster. Harvest Brix 22.4°. 18-day fermentation, aged 16 months in 20% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *The nose is exotic and intriguing, featuring*

aromas of dark red cherries and berries including strawberries, dried rose petals and Nutella spread. Two days later the wine had become even more aromatic, taking on notes of grilled mushrooms with intense scents of spice and bright red fruits. Flat-out delicious on the palate with layers of dark red cherry and berry flavors enhanced with a dollop of exotic spice and toasty oak. The sweet, sappy mid palate attack is attention-grabbing and the finish is fruity and generous. There is a firm backbone of tannin that should integrate with more time in the bottle. A special offering that should age beautifully. **94.**



2011 LIOCO Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.64, \$50. Mt. Eden, Pommard and 114 clones planted in the early 1980s at 1100 to 1400 feet 3.5 miles from the coast on the second ridge in calcereous seabed soils. Harvest Brix 22°. 40% whole cluster. 5-day cold soak, wild yeast fermentation lasting 21 days. Aged 16 months in 20% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Vigorous aromas of wild berries, balsam, forest floor and bark. Both fruity and savory on the palate with a discreetly concentrated core of raspberry, strawberry and blueberry fruits backed by firm tannins. Very silky on the palate with a delectable riff of berry fruit and herbal salad on the finish.* **90.**

2012 LIOCO Indica Mendocino County Rosé 12.0% alc., \$17.95, screwcap. Sourced from a mid-century planting of dry farmed and head pruned Carignan in Mendocino's Redwood Valley. Soils are red clay punctuated with fist-sized rocks. Berries were broke and whole cluster pressed to stainless steel tank. Fermented cool and finished bone dry. Long, slow malolactic fermentation. Gentle filtration. *Light pink-orange color and clear in the glass. Lovely aromas of strawberry, orange peel, rose water and yellow peach. Very refreshing with crisp flavors of watermelon, strawberry, and Mexican lime. Light on its feet with cleansing acidity on the finish which shows a lingering aroma of watermelon rind and lime juice. A superb domestic rosé that, when chilled, is a perfect accompaniment to smoked salmon or shellfish.* **89.**

Loring Wine Company

I haven't tasted wines from siblings Brian and Kimberly Loring recently so it was a pleasant surprise to revisit the latest offerings. These are bold, full-bodied expressions of Pinot Noir, but the oak is held in check and the tannins are well managed. You will need your big boy pants on when drinking these wines. Both the fall and spring releases were tasted here. We are tired of hearing the words "best ever" when talking about a winery's offerings, but there is no better way to put it in this case. The wines, which are very reasonably priced considering their quality, are sold through a mailing list with some retail distribution. All the wines are 100% destemmed and aged about 10 months in 33% new, 33% 1-year-old, and 33% 2-year-old French oak barrels. The wines are bottled unfined and unfiltered/

2012 Loring Wine Company Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$32, screwcap. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of Bing cherry, spice and oak cask which tend to fade a bit over time in the glass. Rich and juicy with plenty of sweet, sappy black cherry fruit accented with cola and peppery spice. A fruit-driven wine with well-integrated tannins that aims to please.* **87.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$32, screwcap. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose veers to a very ripe and roasted fruit profile. The aromas include dark berries, sarsaparilla, raisin, spice and bark. Very well-endowed with sappy, dark berry, black cherry and black plum fruit with a hint of spice and dark chocolate. Despite its heft, the wine is polished with modest tannins. Sta. Rita Hills really shined in 2012.* **88.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$32, screwcap. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Initially brooding, the nose comes alive over time in the glass offering effusive aromas of black berry and stone fruits, cardamom spice and a hint of toasty oak. Rich and luscious on the palate offering an intensely flavored essence of boysenberries with notes of black plums and other black fruits. The mouthfeel is creamy and the tannins are beautifully integrated. The fruit is the star in this wine, coating every nook and cranny in the mouth, and persisting with uncommon intensity on the big finish. A tremendous value. **90.**



2012 Loring Wine Company Keefer Ranch Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., \$50, screwcap. Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Deep aromas of red cherries and berries with hints of bramble, sandalwood and sous-bois. A tasty, moderately rich wine strutting an array of red fruits accented with spice, red licorice and hazelnut. Very soft tannins and easy to drink, but brings a bit of heat on the finish. Likable, but I believe this vineyard lends itself to earlier harvesting which can fully reveal the crispness that the vineyard is known and revered for. **88.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Graham Family Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$50, screwcap. Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy but pleasing aromas of black cherries, black raspberries and oak bark. Vigorous with black cherry and cola flavor, even saucy and lush, with balanced tannins, a very smooth mouth feel, and a powerful display of Maraschino cherry on the flashy finish. **90.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Durell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$50, screwcap. Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Slow to evolve on the nose, but eventually very enticing with scents of ollaliberry jam, black raspberries and baking spices. Full-bodied but streamlined, with a decadent core of dark red berry fruits. Smooth and bright with well-proportioned tannin and a complimentary oak sheen. The amazing finish is ridiculously long, returning over a minute for several encores. The longest finish of all the Loring wines in this vintage. **93.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$50, screwcap. Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. This is the most seductive and elegant wine in the Loring lineup for 2012. Aromatically enticing with deep aromas of ripe red cherries, sarsaparilla and sandalwood. Very soft in the mouth with elegant tannins. A discreetly concentrated array of dark red fruits quite is pure and vivid. The fruit veers to the ripe side but never crosses over to the dark side. **92.**



2012 Loring Wine Company Cargassachi Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$50, screwcap. Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Alluring perfume of fresh blackberry tart, currants and earthy flora. A killer on the palate with massive concentration of deep purple and black berry fruits (but not jammy), with a subtle underlying earthy, animale character. The tannins are reigned in and balanced, and the striking finish grabs hold and won't let go. An unabashed, unapologetic, hedonistic wine of uncommon flamboyance. The expression of earthiness in this vineyard sets it apart. A great vintage for Cargassachi. **94.**



2012 Loring Wine Company Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., \$50, screwcap. Dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. An intoxicating nose reveals exotic spices and fresh red and black berries, becoming more appealing over time in the glass. A big, rich pussycat of a wine with a sappy core of spiced black cherry, blueberry, and dark raspberry fruits. The tannins are well-matched and the finish, which throws a bit of heat, is powerful and generous. A big wine for this vineyard which is usually the most feminine of the Pisoni-Francioni assembly of vineyards. **90.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$50, screwcap. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very ripe fruited with aromas of black cherries, plums, and oak-driven vanilla and smoke. Rich, plush and decadent flavors of vanilla-infused black cherry cola with a touch of oak sheen. Highly approachable, with modest tannins and some finishing presence that leaves some oak in its wake. Very good for this style. **89.**

2012 Loring Wine Company Russell Family Vineyard Paso Robles Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., \$50, screwcap. *Very dark purple color in the glass. Aromas of black raspberry, black currant, tar, cigar box and clay loam. Full-bodied with a load of very ripe, dark berry fruit. Big, big, big, almost syrupy with a velvety presence and a charge of oak on the finish. A brute of a Pinot Noir that lacks appeal. 86.*

2012 Loring Wine Company Aubaine Vineyard San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$50, screwcap. *Dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. Well-spiced black raspberry aromas hinting of whole cluster. Delicious and hedonistic, with full-bodied flavors of dark berries, black cherries, exotic spices and mocha. A huge wine that still has some grip and lift and is appealing for its tamed tannins and balanced composure. 93.*



Patz & Hall

2011 Patz & Hall Hyde Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 650 cases, \$65. Patz & Hall have worked with the fruit from this iconic vineyard since 1996. Several sections of the vineyard are planted exclusively for Patz & Hall including older plantings of the Hyde-Calera selection. Yields of only 1.5 tons per acre. Wild and cultured yeast fermentation aged in 65% new Burgundian French oak barrels. Bottled without fining or filtration. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Reluctant aromas of black cherry, dark berry, loam and bramble. Very smooth and velvety on the palate with moderately rich flavors of dark berries and plum, finishing with a touch of green herbs. The texture is very appealing but the flavors are not in a generous mode at this time. More refined than the Sonoma Coast bottling but more closed now. Revisit in 2 to 3 years. 89.*

2012 Patz & Hall Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$46. 25th vintage. Released September 2013. The core of fruit for this wine is from Gap's Crown Vineyard. Grapes are also sourced from Dutton Ranch, the Martinelli family, Charlie Chenoweth and Steve Hill. Wild and cultured yeast, aged in 42% new Burgundian French oak barrels, bottled without fining or filtration. *Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. Vibrant aromas of raspberry and blackberry, spice and rose petal leap out of the glass, becoming more intense over time in the glass. Deeply flavored on the palate with an earth-kissed array of dark fruits, encased in muscular, but not harsh tannins. A consistently dependable bottling that delivers every year, especially in this phenomenal vintage. 90.*



Three Sticks

2011 Three Sticks Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.58, TA 0.65, 206 cases, \$60. Released September 2013. Aged 14 months in 50% new French oak barrels. \$60. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Dark red cherry and berry aromas and flavors are featured in this wine with a marked oak vanillin accent. Modest in weight with fine-grain tannins, a soft mouth feel and admirable balance. Oak hovers over the finish. 87.*

2011 Three Sticks "The James" Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.67, 163 cases, \$60. Released September 2013. Sourced from Burning Creek and La Riconada vineyards. Aged 14 months in 67% new French oak puncheons. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Lovely black cherry and dark raspberry fruit highlight the nose that shows a marked oak presence. Delicious core of dark raspberry fruit, intensely flavored and nicely spiced. Oak also stands out on the palate. Balanced tannins and bright acidity are well matched to the fruit. 88.*



Tin Barn Vineyards

Tin Barn is a specialist in single vineyard wines from Sonoma County. The name of the winery derives from Tin Barn Road that winds along the remote Sonoma Coast to the source of the debut wine, and the fact that the winery is housed in a “tin barn” warehouse in rural Sonoma. The winemaker and co-owner is Michael Lancaster, a graduate of the University of California at Davis enology program. He acquired winemaking experience at Quail Ridge Cellars and Gloria Ferrer Champagne Cellars before forming a partnership with friends and launching Tin Barn Vineyards in 2000 in a collective known as Eighth Street Wineries in Sonoma.

2011 Tin Barn Ricci Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., pH 3.85, TA 0.38, 161 cases, \$34. Released September 2013. This family owned vineyard is located on a south facing slope facing San Pablo Bay in a cool foggy area. 66% 777, 34% Pommard. Aged 14 months in 30% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Persistent aromas of black cherry, spice, dark chocolate and sweet smoke fill the glass. Very tasty core of black cherry and black raspberry fruits with accents of cola and brown spice including cinnamon.* Oak highlights add a welcoming tone. Very uplifting and juicy despite the lower acidity. I liked this wine the more I tasted it. The wine definitely has a Carneros imprint with its darker fruit and earthy, mushroom tone. **92.**



Vaughn-Duffy

This very small producer in the town of Fulton in Sonoma County was launched by “two kids,” Sara Vaughn and Matt Duffy, who “didn’t really know any better.” Vaughn started out as a harvest intern at Siduri and then spent three years working at the Vinify custom crush facility. The label was launched in 2009 when the couple bought a ton of Pinot Noir grapes. Their first commercial wine was released from the 2011 vintage coinciding with the birth of their first child. The label is eye-catching.

2012 Vaughn-Duffy Suacci Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 59 cases, \$34. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely appointed nose with deep aromas of dark cherries and berries and baking spices. Middleweight flavors of boysenberry and plum with a touch of spice and tarry oak. Velvety smooth in the mouth with restrained tannins and a short, but enjoyable finish.* **89.**



WesMar

I agree with Denise that the WesMar wines in this vintage are more feminine with lower alcohols and higher acidity levels. She says these wines will take a little longer to harmonize and will age well in bottle. The percentage of whole cluster was not increased so my perception of more whole cluster spice in these wines is a reflection of the vintage. No wine was produced from Hellenthal Vineyard in 2011 since picking was not an option before the rains because sugars were too low and the grapes picked after the rains did not make the cut. WesMar wines can now be ordered on the winery’s website so I won’t have anything to nag Denise about.

2011 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0.% alc., \$37. A blend of the three vineyard sources in this vintage. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Gorgeous aromatics featuring bright scents of blueberries, pomegranate juice, cherry, and whole cluster spice. The flavors echo the nose with plenty of Asian 5-spice compliment. The tannins are balanced and the finish has a good grip of refreshing acidity. A bit unusual for Russian River Valley in that the fruit veers to blueberries rather than black cherries, but spice lovers will relish this wine.* **91.**

2011 WesMar Salzgeber Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$42. *Aromatically inviting scents of black cherry, blueberry and exotic whole cluster spice. A gentle wine that is soft and velvety on the palate, offering modest fine-grain tannins and good supporting acidity. Reasonably good depth of dark red cherry and blueberry flavor with a welcome touch of spice. Needs time.* **89.**

2011 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., \$40. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Hi-tone aromas of cherry, spice, BBQ sauce, sweet tobacco and grass you smoke. Delicious and bombastic on the palate with a luscious core of red cherry, strawberry, plum, hay and pumpkin spice flavors. Juicy, crisp and silky in the mouth with supple tannins, lively acidity, and an intense cherry-flavored finish. A flamboyant wine that leads with a cherry theme. 92.*



2011 WesMar Balletto Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

13.8% alc., \$40. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Intriguing aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, plum, dark rose petal and whole cluster spice. Discreetly concentrated flavors of darker cherries and berries and black plum which are long in the mouth. Substantial structural bones match up to the fruit nicely. Very satisfying, with a dramatic, drawn-out, Hollywood finish. The most tannin, the most concentration of fruit, and the biggest finish in the 2011 WesMar lineup, yet not as big a wine as the previous two vintages. I always seem partial to this Pommard clone offering. Pommard is my Pinot paramour. 94.*



W.H. Smith

These wines received big scores from the *Wine Enthusiast* but I felt they were very good to outstanding but not extraordinary.

2010 W.H. Smith Maritime Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 382 cases, \$54. A blend of several vineyards representing the best offering from the vintage. Aged 10 months in 100% new French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherry, toasty oak, sandalwood and campfire. Luscious oak-kissed red cherry core wrapped in sinewy, balanced tannins. Plenty of current drinking appeal with some finishing persistence. I am not a big fan of oak, but I could see how some might love the marriage of oak and fruit in this wine. 88.*

2010 W.H. Smith Marimar Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.2% alc., \$48. Sourced from Marimar Torres' organic, 12-acre Dona Margarita Vineyard. Located only 6 miles from the Pacific Ocean between the towns of Freestone and Occidental in Western Sonoma County. High-density planting of 2,340 vines per acre. Clones are Pommard 667 and 115. Aged 9 months in 100% new French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose offers an array of red cherry and berry aromas with a little funkiness and earthy flora scent which reminds me why I love Pinot Noir. Smooth and elegant on the palate with nothing out of place. Mid weight flavors of dark red cherries and raspberries with a hint of peppery spice and complimentary oak. The tannins are reserved, the acidity is supportive and the wine is drinking beautifully now. This wine has the best integration of oak of the three wines tasted here. 92.*



2010 W.H. Smith Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 226 cases, \$48. This vineyard is owned and farmed by Gard and Lori Hellenthal and lies only 5 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. Clones are Pommard and 777. Extreme growing conditions were challenging in 2010. Aged 9 months in new and used French oak barrels. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of cherry, cranberry and smoky oak. Gentle and light in weight in this vintage, with delicate flavors of spiced cherry, red berries and oak-driven toast and smoke. Welcoming finesse with less tannin presence in this vintage and some finishing length. The wine showed more oak presence the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 88.*

Williams Selyem

The Williams Selyem wines in 2011 are not big and lush, but very forward and easy to drink with supple tannins and plenty of sneaky charm.

2011 Williams Selyem Rochioli Riverblock Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$79. *Medium reddish-purple hue in the glass. This wine veers to the ripe side with aromas of blackberry, black currant and spice, and flavors of darker cherry, berry, plum and tobacco-laced oak. Very easy to drink with a silky texture and gossamer tannins. Well-crafted with impeccable balance, but lacks some flavor intensity and inspiration. 88.*

2011 Williams Selyem Eastside Road Neighbors Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$52. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of dark red berries, bramble, green herbs, geranium and earth. Medium weight flavors of dark red and black berries and silky smooth in the mouth with soft tannins. A little green, earthy flora riff is evident in the background. Noticeable finishing length. 87.*

2011 Williams Selyem Calegari Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$55. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Elevating aromas of Bing cherry, spice, toasted brioche and woodshed. Strikingly soft and ephemeral on the palate with juicy flavors of black cherry, cola and spice. Modest in concentration, with very supple tannins, and a pleasing finish of some length. Plenty of Pinot singing in this delightful wine. 92.*



2011 Williams Selyem Foss Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% a;c., \$55. *This vineyard is located on Westside Road just north of Williams Selyem. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Dreamy nose that draws you into the glass with aromas of spiced Bing cherry, cola and dark red rose petals. Ambrosial flavors of black cherry, red and black raspberry and spice on a moderately rich frame with supple tannins and a silky, raspberry-infused finish of considerable persistence. Beautifully balanced and extremely soft and smooth on the palate. Quintessential Russian River Valley character but with a lighter, immensely appealing footprint reflective of this vintage. 94.*



2011 Williams Selyem Ferrington Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$65. *Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. This captivating wine really requires study to reveal all its many nuances. Aromas of blackberry, ollaliberry, spice box and toasty oak. Flavors are complex and varied, including earthy dark berries, tar, spice box including cinnamon, fennel, and seasoned oak. Sappy, with a noticeable mid palate grip and tenacity, and a long finish. Beautifully balanced for long term aging. 93.*



2011 Williams Selyem Burt Williams' Morning Dew Ranch Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$75. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is filled with hi-tone strawberry, cherry and baking spice aromas. Vivid and flamboyant on the palate with discreetly concentrated and sappy flavors of dark red cherries and berries and a hint of spiced purple plum. An enchanting wine with a velvety mouth feel, balanced tannins, bright acidity, welcoming finesse, and an extremely long and intense finish that will leave you saying, "Oh man!" In my opinion, Williams Selyem's best Pinot Noir. Burt's legacy lives on in his vineyard. 94.*



2011 Williams Selyem Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$75. *Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy but pleasing aromas of black cherry, spice and brioche picking up intensity and interest over time in the glass. A plethora of sweet, mouth coating black cherry and plum fruit is balanced by a good grip of acidity and muscular tannins. Plenty of cherry goodness on the generous, soprano finish. Inviting potential here, but this wine needs more time in the cellar. 92.*

2011 Williams Selyem Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$58. *Medium reddish-purple robe. Very shy nose with demure aromas of cherries and berries and a hint of spicy oak. Modest in weight but flavorful, with tastes of black cherry, black raspberry, dark chocolate and cola. The tannins are reigned-in and there is a delightful vein of underlying acidity bringing the wine to life. The finish is crisp and refreshing. Currently, the aromatics are lagging the flavors, but there is potential down the road. 90.*

Windy Oaks Estate Vineyards & Winery

2010 Windy Oaks Estate Limited Release Wood Tank Fermented Schultze Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$55. Estate grown, produced and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Fermented up to 8 weeks in French oak, one-ton, open fermentation tanks. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is both complex and interesting, offering aromas of cherry, baking spice, mocha, and graham. Crisp on the mid palate with vigorous flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, and toasty oak, finishing with a long and juicy, oak-kissed cherry riff. Easy to like now.* 91.

2010 Windy Oaks Estate Limited Release Wild Yeast Schultze Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$55 (wine club and tasting room only). Estate grown, produced and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose draws you in with aromas of dark red cherry pie glaze, baking spices including nutmeg, graham, black oak and dried rose petals. An earthy wine with plentiful dark red cherry and berry flavor and a complimentary oak and leesy accent. Very well crafted with a silky presence and some finishing aplomb.* 90.

2010 Windy Oaks Estate Proprietor's Reserve Schultze Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$60 (wine club or tasting room only). The winery's signature wine, primarily sourced from the 1.5-acre Bay Block of the original 3-acre planting. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Dark red cherries and berries and spice are featured on the precocious nose. Delicious core of mid weight dark red Bing cherry, blueberry and blackberry flavors accented with well-integrated oak-driven notes of vanilla and dark chocolate. More concentration and richness in this bottling, with more spirit, and a grand cru finish of extraordinary length.* 93.



Still more Pinot

2010 B.R. Cohn Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.63, 2,400 cases, \$40. 44% Lera's and 56% Dutton vineyards. Clones 667, 777 and Pommard, average age 12 to 17 years. Whole berry and whole cluster fermentation with natural and inoculated yeasts. Aged 19 months in 64% new and 36% 1-year-old French oak barrels from several cooperages. Previously reviewed 9/29/13. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Aromatically alive with scents of strawberry preserve, cherry, vanilla and haunting oak. Mid weight flavors of ripe strawberry, black cherry, cola, mocha and sassafras with some toasty oak in the background. Very Caliesque in style with full-on extraction and generous oak treatment. The fruit is well balanced by firm tannins, the mouth feel is velvety, and the wine finishes with good intensity albeit showing a hint of heat.* 89.

2007 D'Alfonso-Curran Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$55 (sold out at the winery, available discounted at retail). The partners have nearly 50 years of combined winemaking experience who prefer to age their wines before release. This is their current offering! 100% destemmed, 4-day cold soak before inoculation, macerated 23 days, aged in 100% new French oak barrels for 56 months before bottling. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose shows an aged bouquet with notes of cherry pit, root beer, cherrywood, old closet and leather. Ripe mid weight cherry and red berry flavors with hints of baking spice, tea, and dried herbs. Easy drinking with soft, yet firm tannins and a dry, drawn-out finish. An extended barrel aged wine that will appeal to fans of aged Pinot Noir.* 91.



2011 Citruzzola Vineyards Gloria San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$N/A. The vineyard is located 7 miles east of the town of Cambria on California's Central Coast. 5 acres are planted to Pinot Noir including Pommard 5, 667, "828," 115 and 23. *Moderately light red color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of red cherry, sandalwood and a hint of new oak. Elegant and supple on the palate, with modestly intense flavors of fresh red cherries and a hint of wood tar and spice in the background. The tannins are silky and the acidity adds enough verve for refreshing drinking. A very feminine, pleasing offering that is cozy and approachable.* 89.

2011 Husch Nash Mill Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 26 cases, \$38. A 4-acre vineyard located in the hills above Husch. The vineyard takes its name from the history of logging at the site. Jim Barr planted the 4-acre hillside vineyard in 2003 after adding a total of 150 tons of crushed limestone. 3 Dijon

clones. Moderately light reddish color in the glass. Aromas of red cherries swamped by oak. A very demure Pinot Noir with gentle flavors of red cherries and berries and oak under tow. A subtle green note is detectable in the background. The tannins threaten to drown the shallow fruit. The more I taste this wine, the less I like it although it retains some sneaky charm. **86.**

2011 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 345 cases, \$55. This vineyard is located 3.5 miles inland from the coast at 935 to 1,030 feet elevation. Clones are 114 and 115. Vine age is 15 years. Farmed by noted vineyardist Ulises Valdez. Hirsch Vineyard is on the next southern ridge. 50% whole cluster. Aged sur lie for 10 months in 50% new French oak barrels. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Vibrant aromas of black cherries and whole cluster floral spice. Delicious core of well-ripened black cherries with complimentary spice and a very subtle green thread in the background, finishing with depth of fruit, juicy acidity and a rush of dry tannins. When tasted the following day from a previous opened and re-corked bottle, the wine had dramatically transformed. The wine had really come together, the green thread had disappeared, and the tannins had softened considerably. This will be a very enticing wine for whole cluster fans. I recommend aging this wine at least 2 to 3 years. **93.**



2012 Laetitia Estate Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$25. The Laetitia Estate Vineyard is a coastal terrace 3 miles from the ocean. Soils are rocky clay loam with a volcanic ocean floor parent material. A blend of 10 clones including 113, 115, 459, 667, 777, "828," Pommard 5, 2A, Martini 13 and Mt. Eden. Aged in 30% new and 70% neutral French oak barrels for 11 months. Estate grown, produced and bottled. Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, plum, boysenberry, white pepper and spice box lead to a light weight core of fruit mimicking the aromas, with hints of spice, mocha and smoky oak. Mild tannins and very approachable, finishing on a light, fruity note. **87.**

2011 Pisoni Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$70. Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. Complex nose exhibiting an array of aromas including blackberries, spice, leather Prada coat, cigar box and smoky oak. Very approachable with modest tannins in this vintage offering well-endowed but not imposing flavors of black stone and berry fruits, with touches of spice, exotic dark chocolate, tobacco and oak. The fruit is simply gorgeous and perfectly ripened, and the pleasing finish is very generous. Still young and showing a shadow of oak which should integrate over time. A California treasure that is truly unique. **93.**



Sips of Recently Tasted Oregon Pinot Noir

Antica Terra

2010 Antica Terra Antikythera Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., 440 cases, \$100. Released October 1, 2013. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Demure aromas of dark red cherries and berries and espresso. Middleweight core of black cherry fruit buried in charred, smoky oak. The tannins are soft and the juicy finish is pleasing with good mineral-laden acidity and length. There is not enough fruit in this delicate wine to stand up to the oak. Smokers should like this wine. Tasted previously on January 19, 2013 with a similar impression. 86.*

2011 Antica Terra Botanica Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., \$75. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very shy, but pleasant aromas of black cherry, forest floor and oak. Good dark red fruit presence in the mouth with an earthy, cedary oak undertone. Substantial tannins with lively acidity and some length to the vibrant, oak-tinged finish. On the austere side in this vintage. I like the flavor of this wine but the oak and tannins are out of balance with the modest fruit. About the same the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 87.*

2011 Antica Terra Ceras Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.7% alc., \$75. Botanica's counterpoint. *Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. Nicely blessed with aromas of cherry, red plum, spice and rose petal with a touch of fine oak. Beautifully composed and harmonious with a delicious mid weight core of dark cherry and blueberry fruits backed by an oak imprint. Very polished and sophisticated, juicy and invigorating with plenty of potential. Definitely seems to have been made with some whole cluster fermentation. 92.*



A to Z Wineworks

2011 A to Z Oregon Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$15, screwcap. *Moderate ruby red color in the glass. Pleasant aromas of black cherries and oak spice. Refined, brisk and elegant, featuring flavors of cherry and raspberry with a shadow of oak in the background, finishing with a flourish of cherry and a kick of citrus-laden acidity. A little too much oak on board for my taste with the oak becoming more evident the longer the wine sits in the glass. 85.*

Cristom Vineyards



2010 Cristom Marjorie Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.69, TA 0.59, 363 cases, \$55. This vineyard was originally planted in 1982 and is one of the oldest vineyards in the Eola-Amity Hills AVA, and home to some of the oldest vines on the Cristom estate. It is situated on a gently sloped east facing hillside between 480 and 615 feet above sea level. Named for owner Paul Gerrie's mother, the first single vineyard estate Marjorie was released in 1994. The soil is primarily Jory in type. Phylloxera struck the vineyard in 2000, and beginning in 2007, replanting was initiated with Dijon clones 113, 115, 777, Pommard and Wädenswil grafted onto phylloxera-resistant rootstocks. The vineyard produces very small, concentrated clusters. Aged 17 months in 53% new Burgundian cooperage. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Bombastic and exotic aromas of red and black cherries, whole cluster spice and floral notes, smoky oak, incense and licorice. Delicious core of cherry fruits which are broad in the mouth and supported by integrated notes of spice, fennel, anise and mocha-laden oak. A special wine that is built for the long haul, with firm, fine-grain tannins, refreshing acidic verve and a lengthy finish of great energy. A whole cluster triumph that really impressed me. 95.*



IOTA

2011 IOTA Pelos-Sandberg Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley

Pinot Noir 12.9% alc., 767 cases, \$38. 11.5-acre vineyard planted to Pommard, Wädenswil and Dijon 667 and 777 clones. The vineyard, first planted in 2002, sits at 300 to 500 feet elevation, and is dry farmed. The family run winery was established in 2006. Johanna Sandberg is co-winemaker and owner. The wine contains all four planted clones. Aged 10 months in 3-year, air-dried French oak barrels and an additional 10 months of bottle aging. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color and unfiltered appearance in the glass. Lovely aromas of fresh black cherry pie glaze, Christmas spice, and earthy flora. Full, deep and plush on the palate with remarkable flavor intensity in this cool vintage. The flavors of black cherry and black raspberry are complimented by a touch of smoky oak. The tannins are nicely balanced and the finish is noticeably persistent and aristocratic, urging you to take another sip.* **93.**



Ken Wright Cellars

Ken Wright's wines are impressive in 2012 and he believes these are his best wines ever. Vineyard sources are superb. The wines do need decanting if opened now, or more time in bottle for full expression as shown by the gradual evolution of aromas and flavors in the glass over time.

2012 Ken Wright Cellars Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 725 cases, \$45. Sourced from three blocks ranging in elevation from 450 to 600 feet, originally planted in 1989. Willakenzie sedimentary soils. Vineyard is owned by Dick and Dierdre Shea. Pommard and Wädenswil clones. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Muted aromatically with delicate scents of autumnal forest floor, pine forest and dark red berry fruits. More expressive on the palate with moderately rich flavors of red and black raspberry, pomegranate, black cherry and plum. Nicely balanced tannins and acidity, with a juicy texture and a big, cherry hard candy finish. Very young and primary, becoming more giving over time in the glass. Check back in another year or two.* **90-92.**

2012 Ken Wright Cellars Guadalupe Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 400 cases, \$45. This vineyard was planted in 1989 in Willakenzie soils. Clones are Wädenswil and Dijon 115. Small berries and clusters are typical. Owned by Jim Stonebridge and Kathleen Boeve and managed by Joel Myers. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy, but pleasing aromas of black cherry, sassafras, raw beef and spice. Very smooth on the palate with a tasty core of sweet cherry and raspberry fruit. Very juicy, with balanced, supple tannins, and bright underlying acidity lifting the soprano finish that is flush with cherry flavor. This wine needs time for full expression.* **90.**



2012 Ken Wright Cellars Meredith Mitchell Vineyard McMinnville

Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 310 cases, \$45. This vineyard was planted in 1988 to own-rooted Pommard clone. Yamhill soil - silty loam over basaltic bedrock. Owned and managed by Susan Meredith and Frank Mitchell. Typically produces small berries and clusters and is well-structured, requiring a bit more aging. *Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. A wide array of aromas appear in the glass, including black raspberry, forest floor, bramble, leather, vanilla and spicy oak. Very soft and smooth on the palate with ripe flavors of red and black raspberries, Satsuma plum and cherry. Impressive depth of flavor and a persistent finish that is almost painfully intense. The tannins are firm and muscular and make an appearance on the finish. Much better the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with more integration of tannins. Tremendous aging potential. I find wines from this vineyard to be in the upper echelon of the Willamette Valley.* **94.**





2012 Ken Wright Cellars Abbey Claim Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

14.0% alc., \$45. 17 acres planted to Pommard, 777 and 115 at an elevation of 450 feet above sea level. Soils are varied but primarily ancient marine sediments among the oldest in the Willamette Valley. The vineyard is owned by Ken and Karen Wright and managed by Mark Gould.

Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is subdued and slowly evolving with aromas of dark fruits including spiced plum with a hint of earthy flora and oak. Flat-out delicious on the palate with attention-grabbing flavors of dark cherries and black raspberries accented by baking spice and an echo of oak. Discreetly concentrated with modest, firm tannins, and a lovely texture that is pure velvet. Beautifully composed with the balance for long-term aging. 94.



Lenné Estate

Proprietor and winemaker Steve Lutz told me the following about his 2011 vintage wines. “Oddly enough, though there will be much hype about the 2012 vintage wines which are plush and reminiscent of the 2006 wines, I see the 2011 wines following in the footsteps of the 2007 wines. They are not very developed on the nose or palate yet, but every time I sit with them, I see promise and they really capture me after I have had them open for a day or two. The 2007 vintage turned out to be one of my favorites even though the wines started out quite lean, very similar to the 2011 wines. The 2012 vintage could have been great, but we had a week of warm east winds in September that completely changed the nature of the vintage, pushing it away from being like 2008 and towards being like 2006.”



2011 Lenné Estate Le Nez Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.73, 642 cases, \$30. Released May 31, 2013. Harvested November 1, 2011. Aged in 21% new French oak barrels. Infant wine of Lenné Estate. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Very aromatic with hi-tone scents of black cherry, spice, and sandalwood. Middleweight flavors of cherry and red berry with a complimentary touch of oak. Forward and easy to drink with very supple tannins and a light finish. 89.*

2011 Lenné Estate Kill Hill Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.67, 76 cases, \$55. Released November 14, 2013. Primarily clone 667. Harvested October 26, 2011. Aged in 66% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, spiced plum, currant, raisin and nutty oak appear over time in the glass. Delicious core of black cherry and dark wild berry flavors with some underlying spice and a touch of oak. Ripest, fullest, and darkest fruited wine in the lineup with plenty of juicy sap. The tannins are nicely integrated and the finish is long and robust. 92.*

2011 Lenné Estate Jill's 115 Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.50, 50 cases, \$55. Released November 14, 2013. Harvested November 1, 2011. Aged in 25% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Demure aromas of wild berries and forest floor lead to mid weight flavors of black cherry and dark red berries wrapped in modest tannins. The finish offers an appealing carry-over of juicy cherry fruit. Solid, but not very giving, even the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Give this wine at least another year in bottle. 89 now, but could surprise over time.*

2011 Lenné Estate Karen's Pommard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.76, 75 cases, \$55. Released November 14, 2013. Harvested November 1, 2011. Aged in 50% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Explosive aromas of Bing cherries, cherry syrup, cassis and espresso-laced oak. Grand mid palate intensity with a huge, bombastic finish. Dark cherries are featured with accents of dark chocolate, and oak-driven caramel and spice. Firm but not astringent tannins allow for drinking now, but this wine is clearly a few years away from prime time. Appealing the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, but still moody. 93.*



2011 Lenné Estate Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.70, 642 cases, \$45. Released November 14, 2013. Harvested November 1, 2011. 30-acre vineyard on a steep south facing slope east of the town of Yamhill. Shallow soils, dense spacing and diverse clonal mix (Pommard, 115, 114, 777 and 667). Best barrels of each harvest. Aged in 40% new French oak barrels.

Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Lovely, fresh and vibrant aromas of cherry, red raspberry, cherry tart and Christmas spice opening nicely over time in the glass. Round and polished, elegant and restrained, featuring flavors of red berries and cherries and a hint of Moroccan spice and sous bois. Soft, but evident tannins, and nicely integrated acidity. The finish is highly satisfying offering a flourish of spicy cherry fruit. Extraordinary the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. A dancing Pinot that is a fabulous food magnet. 94.



Penner-Ash

2011 Penner-Ash Dussin Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., pH 3.76, TA 0.53, \$60. From the estate vineyard located on a southeast sloping hillside surrounding the winery. Volcanic and sedimentary soils. Harvest Brix 20.8°-22.6°. Aged 10 months in 38% new, 28% 1-year-old, 25% 2-year-old and 9% neutral French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The aromas arrive slowly in the glass, offering notes of black cherry, forest floor, and oak spice. Mid weight core of oak-toned black cherry and plum fruit flavors. Very elegant and polished in style, with a soft mouth feel and balanced tannins. Very likable, although showing a moderate oak sheen at this time which should moderate with more bottle age. 89.*

Privé Vineyard

Winemaker Tina Hammond crafted two of the greatest Oregon Pinot Noirs that I have tasted in recent memory. She noted in her fall 2013 newsletter the following. "Without a doubt, the 2012 vintage will go down in Oregon history as one of the greats! Our growing season started off cool with a late spring, then a wonderful summer abundant with sunshine. Summer was followed by a long, beautiful fall with cool nights, giving us a window to choose our perfect harvest dates." Privé Vineyard has a new website designed to give a bird's eye view into life on the vineyard and in the winery. The photo gallery displays a year in the life of a grape at Privé Vineyard. Visit www.privevineyard.com.

The two Pinot Noirs reviewed here are crafted from the north and south blocks of the old vine estate. Extreme crop thinning and extra small berry size in 2012 led to the development of flavors that winemakers who make Pinot Noir long for. A reserve bottling, the 2012 Joie de Vivre, is a combination of both le nord and le south, and was offered in a beautiful etched bottle (132 bottles, \$90). A fruit-forward Willamette Valley Pinot Noir was also offered in 2012 (150 cases, \$35), as well as a Ruby Pinot Port that has spent 11 years in barrel, produced in the Solera style (50 cases, \$50). A 2012 Syrah and Malbec from Walla Walla are also available.

Privé Vineyard is one of Oregon's best reflections of terroir. Although the north and south blocks of the vineyard are separated only by the Hammond's home, the two wines are noticeably different.



2012 Privé Vineyard le sud Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 75 cases, \$65. 100% Pommard clone planted in Jory soil on a southwest facing hillside. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. This wine defies description. The nose is heavenly with broad aromas of black cherry, black raspberry tart, exotic rose petal, potpourri and a hint of truffle. Upon entry, the wine explodes with a delicious array of fruit flavors including black cherry and black*

raspberry with many nuances adding complexity including spice, rose hips tea, sassafras, vanilla and nutty oak. Not overwhelmingly rich but exceedingly flavorful with a royal presence, offering silky tannins, appealing barrel presence,



and a finishing array of fruit that returns for several encores. Balance is spot on so this refined wine will age beautifully. I could go on, but you get the idea. *Orgasmic.* 98.



2012 Privé Vineyard le nord Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 100 cases, \$55. 100% Pommard clone planted in Jory soil (rootstock dates to 1980) on a southwest facing hillside.

Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is complex and captivating initially, with aromas of black raspberry, black currant, licorice, spice and purple rose petals. The wine hits the mid palate with an unctuous core of black cherry and black raspberry fruit caressed by soft tannins and brought to vivid heights with bright underlying acidity. Very smooth and sexy, with a gorgeous finish replete with perfectly ripened blackberry fruits. Darker fruits, earthier and a little more sap and tannin than the le sud, with more evident acidity and a brighter finish. This wine is like le sud's teenage sister - more rebellious, untamed and immature. Much better when re-tasted later in the day. Awesome. 97.



Raptor Ridge

Raptor Ridge was founded in 1995 by Annie and Scott Shull. The winery gets its name from the many families of raptors (red-tailed hawks, kestrels, sharp-shinned hawks, and owls) that share the winery's 27-acre estate. The vineyard is named "Tuscowallame," the indigenous word for "place where the owls dwell." This 18-acre estate vineyard includes blocks dedicated to Pinot Noir clones 115, Wädenswil, 667, 777, Pommard and 114. A small amount of Grüner Veltliner is also planted in the site's Loess-based Laurelwood soils. Located on the northeastern side of the Chehalem Mountains, 10 miles north of Newberg, Oregon, the winery is known for Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Total production is about 8,500 cases annually which includes wines from the estate vineyard and grapes sourced from Aubre Vert, Bellevue Cross, Carabella, Goodrich, Gran Moraine, Harbinger, Meredith Mitchell, Olenik and Shea vineyards. The winemaker is Scott Shull. Raptor Ridge is a supporter of [Salud!](#) (a charity that I also support) donating 10 cents for every bottle sold to the [Salud!](#) Foundation for vineyard worker healthcare in Oregon. Raptor Ridge Winery was the first winery to employ this practice. Visit the website at www.raptorridgewinery.com for more information.

2011 Raptor Ridge Estate Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.5% alc., <600 cases, \$50, screwcap. Released May 2013. Grapes harvested at ripeness on October 25, 2011, just before the fall rains at 21° Brix. 10-day cold soak, inoculated with Williams Selyem liquid yeast culture, aged 9 months in 27% new French oak barrels. A selection of the finest barrels. *Moderately light red color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of strawberries, cherries, spice and graham. Delicate but flavorful, featuring red fruits, baking spices and the slightest oak, finishing with a very juicy, citrus-driven finish. Impressive balance and integration of oak. Judged in the context of the vintage, this wine is quite reflective and enjoyable.* 90.

2011 Raptor Ridge Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 12.5% alcohol, <935 cases, \$45, screwcap. Released September 2013. 49% Estate, 17% Meredith Mitchell, 12% Shea, 10% Aubre Vert, 7% Goodrich and 5% Olenik vineyards. Harvest between October 18 and November 2, 2011. Diverse yeast program, 19 day fermentation, aged 9 months in 18% new French oak cooperage. *Effusive scents of dark red cherry pie glaze with a hint of toasty oak. Mid weight dark cherry and plum fruit is featured backed by supple tannins, juicy acidity and complimentary oak. Slightly more fruit intensity and finish than the Estate bottling. The finish is worth special mention as it is strikingly long and lush. This wine will continue to develop and pick up interest with another year or two in bottle.* 91.



2012 Raptor Ridge Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 1825 cases, \$28, screwcap. A blend of grapes from several vineyards including Meredith Mitchell, Shea, Aubre Verte, Goodrich, Olenick, Atticus and the Estate. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Appealing aromas of spicy marionberry jam, blackberries and a hint of oak vanillin. Discreetly concentrated flavors of spiced berries, pomegranates, and plum with echoes of oak and vanilla in the background. Soft in the mouth and easy to drink, with restrained tannins and refreshing acidity. A touch shallow on the mid*

palate and finish. 88.



2012 Raptor Ridge Gran Moraine Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 127 cases, \$45. Released November 2013. Willakenzie soils. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is extravagantly appointed with bright aromas of fresh black cherries, black berries and a hint of oak. Rich and sappy, but not jammy, with deep, mouth coating flavors of blackberries, black cherries and Hoison sauce with many additional nuances including spice, vanilla and cola. Very soft and luxurious on the palate with a firm, but not astringent tannic backbone, and a long, long finish. Still needs time to fully integrate the tannins but this wine is brimming with pleasure.*

94.



2012 Raptor Ridge Estate Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 276 cases, \$55. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. A complex and chameleon nose that changes in the glass over time. Aromas of black cherry, dark berry jam, marzipan, humus, earthy flora and oak emerge. The boysenberry, black cherry and black plum fruit has a glass-filling presence but the wine is endlessly gentle. A little sous bois adds interest. The tannins are muscular but not astringent and need time to soften and integrate. The wine becomes significantly better over an hour's time in the glass. Great potential here long term.* 92-93.

Solená and Hyland Estates

Long time Oregon winemaker and business owner, Laurent Montalieu of Northwest Wine Company, is celebrating his 25th harvest and the 10th anniversary of Northwest Wine Company, one of the most technologically advanced custom winegrowing and winemaking operations in the Northwest. Laurent and his wife, Danielle Andrus Montalieu, and business partner John Niemeyer, are one of Oregon's largest vineyard owners (625 acres) and wine producers. In the last year, Domaine Loubejac and Wildewood vineyards were acquired adding to the historic and coveted Hyland Vineyard that was bought in 2007. Since founding Northwest Wine Company in 2003, the trio has created Oregon's premier custom winemaking facility and the state's third largest producer with over 122,000 cases made in 2012. Northwest Wine Company is home to over 40 labels including proprietary labels such as Brella and Kudos, as well as custom winemaking for notable producers such as Four Graces. In 2011, the trio launched Hyland Estates which offers several varietals including Pinot Noir and a bottling of the Coury clone. In 2012, the Soléna Estate production facility was sold to Jackson Family Wines, but the Montalieu's retained the Soléna label. All the wines reviewed here were vinified by winemaker Laurent Montalieu.

2010 Hyland Estates McMinnville Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.64, \$35. Released May 31, 2012. From blocks 1, 3, 5 and 6 in the Hyland Vineyard, planted in 1971, 1979, 1984 and 1989 respectively in mainly volcanic Jory and Nekia soils. Clones are Coury, Wädenswil and Pommard. Harvest Brix 23.9°. Aged 18 months in 38% new French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple robe. Aromas of black cherries, spice, tea leaf and underbrush lead to an earth-kissed black cherry core with accents of black currant, plum and truffle. Silky and easy to drink with modest balanced tannins and a long and refreshing finish. Still pumping out the aromas and flavors the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* 90.

2011 Hyland Estates Coury McMinnville Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., pH 3.68, \$60. The Coury "clone" is a suitcase selection brought to Oregon from Alsace by Charles Coury in the early 1960s. The cuttings were first rooted in Carneros and later in Coury's vineyard in Forest Grove. Cuttings from these initial plantings were established throughout Oregon including Hyland Vineyard. The true identity of the Coury "clone" remains a mystery. Sourced from Block 3C, planted in 1971 from stock obtained from Charles Coury, and block 6, the second planting of the Coury "clone" in 1989 propagated from Block 3C vines. Harvest Brix 23.3°. Aged 10 months in 56% French oak cooperage. A limited barrel selection. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose brims with fresh aromas of red cherries and raspberries with hints of sandalwood and mushroom. Impressive mid palate attack of delicious red cherry, red plum and raspberry fruits with a hint of dried herbs in the background. The fruit is notable vivid, the acidity is nervy and juicy, and the finish is riff with intense red cherry flavor. Delicate in this vintage but plenty of charm.* 90.



2011 Solená Grand Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 5,300 cases, \$25. Released July 2012. Grapes were combined from a variety of Willamette Valley appellations. Yield 2.8 tons per acre, harvest Brix 23.0°. 100% de-stemmed, 26 days of skin contact, aged 8 months in 33% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. The fruit-driven nose features aromas of blackberries and boysenberries. Moderately rich, dense, and very soft on the palate with appealing flavors of black cherry and dark red and purple berries with an echo of spice and oak in the background. The tannins are firmly defined and slightly astringent on the crisp finish. A direct, fruit-driven wine. 87.*

2011 Solená Hyland Vineyard McMinnville Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., pH 3.60, 175 cases, \$50. This vineyard was planted in the 1970s, and was purchased by the Montalieu and the Niemeysers in May 2007. The estate is 200 acres with just over 120 acres planted densely to vines. Soils are volcanic Jory and some Nekia. The vineyard is composed of 47.21 acres of own-rooted, old vine Pinot Noir, 41.84 acres of newer, grafted Pinot Noir clones, and small amounts of Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewürztraminer and Müller-Thurgau. 100% de-stemmed, Yield 1.9 tons per acre, harvest Brix 23.4° 18 days skin contact, aged 11 months in 28% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. The nose offers an array of dark red and black berry aromas with added scents of spice and espresso oak. Elegant and flavorful, with a modestly weighted core of black raspberry, black cherry and nutty oak flavors supported by svelte tannins and a lively cut of acidity. The fruits are vivid as they cascade across the palate, finishing with impressive intensity. Considerably more appealing the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle with better oak integration, more finesse and more forward fruit. 91.*

2011 Solená Domaine Danielle Laurent Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., pH 3.56, 1200 cases, \$50. The Domaine Danielle Laurent Vineyard land was purchased in 2000 as their wedding gift to each other and they registered with premium nurseries for Pinot Noir vines as wedding gifts. Now 20 acres, the vineyard has been farmed biodynamically since the second leaf. The predominant soil type is Willakenzie. Clones planted include Pommard, Swan, and Dijon 114, 115, 667, 777 and "828." Harvest Brix 21.4°. 100% de-stemmed, 18 days skin contact, aged 13 months in 37% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. The aromas of fresh dark red berries and cherries draw you into the glass. Very soft and seductive in the mouth, with a perfect harmony between ripe red fruit, vital acidity and refined tannins. The oak is complimentary without being intrusive and the palate cleansing, iced cherry finish makes you reach for another sip. 91.*



Soter Vineyards

2011 Soter Mineral Springs Ranch Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., \$45. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherries, dried herbs and mushrooms. Light, elegant and soft on the palate, with flavors of cherries and blueberries caressed by gossamer tannins. A very delicately flavored wine that is true to the Soter style and mirrors the vintage. That said, the wine is appealing but not special. 88.*

TREOS Wines

A young winery producing a mere 300 cases in 2010, rising to 500 cases in the 2012 vintage. All released wines have been sold to a growing fan base and to upscale gourmet Oregon restaurants. Pinot Noir is crafted in two styles, the differences coming from the Pinot Noir clones used in each version. The Founder's Choice Pinot Noir is an attempt to make the richest, boldest expression of Pinot Noir possible. The clones originated in a famous grand cru Burgundy vineyard known for a bold expression of Pinot Noir. The darkly colored and dark fruited wine is meant for consumers who prefer more full-bodied wines like Syrah. The Elegant Reserve Pinot Noir is an attempt to make an elegant style of Pinot Noir while maintaining depth of flavor using multiple clones that originated from multiple Côte de Nuits appellations. A Dry Muscat and Pinot Gris-Muscat blend are also offered. In 2014, a Pinot Noir-based port styled wine infused with roasted Oregon hazelnuts will be released along with a full-bodied Albarino wine. The winemaker is Dave Jepson who has a vision and his wines are true to that vision. Visit www.treoswine.com.

2010 TREOS Estate Founder's Choice Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., 898 bottles, \$48. Yield 0.70 tons per acre. Harvest date October 13-14, 2010. Harvest Brix 22°. Aged 6 months in 3-year, dry-aged French oak barrels. Fined with Bentonite, no filtering. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Big aromas of black cherry, earthy flora, truffle and a hint of menthol, and big flavors of dark cherries, black raspberries and spice with a slight roasted fruit taste in the background. The oak is evident but supportive, the mouthfeel is soft and luxurious, and the dry finish displays some power and persistence. A big gulp of Pinot. 88.*

2010 TREOS Estate Elegant Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., 859 bottles, \$48. Yield 0.72 tons per acre. Harvest date October 20, 2010. Harvest Brix 21.9°. Aged 6 months in 3-year, dry-aged French oak barrels. Fined with Bentonite, no filtering. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Enticing aromas of red and black cherries, baking spices and vanilla. More pinotosity singing in this wine with a tasty core of redder fruits with an earthy, grilled mushroom undertone. Moderately rich with supple tannins, bright acidity, and a huge finish that fans out over 30 seconds. Still currently reserved and will benefit from more cellaring. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine displayed more bright fruit, more crispness and an even longer finish. 90.*



Heart & Hands Finger Lakes Pinot Noir Challenges Regional Skepticism

I wrote last year about the Tom Higgins and the Heart & Hands Wine Company in the Finger Lakes wine region of New York (www.princeofpinot.com/article/1235/ and www.princeofpinot.com/article/1278/). Tom is one of a small group of dedicated vintners making strides with Pinot Noir in this very cool growing region. Along the banks of the Finger Lakes there are sites that are ideal for Pinot Noir, with soils redolent of Onondaga formation limestone and outcroppings of shale. The proximity of the vineyards to the lakes and the gently sloping sites offer vineyards protection from harsh winter weather. The Finger Lakes is on average one of the wettest wine regions in the world during harvest, the biggest threat to winegrowing in this northerly region.

Evan Dawson posted a report in the *New York Cork Report* ("A Change of Heart About Pinot, and Another Sign that the Finger Lakes is Rallying Around This Red," January 30, 2013). There are only about eight vintners crafting Pinot Noir seriously (the region is much more successful with the more commercially viable Riesling). Finger Lakes Pinot Noir has been accused of being "wimpy" by judges in wine competitions because the wines are lighter, less fruity and not showy. The wines are more Old World, being more austere, higher in acid, lower in alcohol, and less richly endowed with fruit. Bob Madill, general manager at Sheldrake Point Vineyards, said, "Some people don't know what the fuss is about, but great pinot is subtle."

Tom is crafting about 1,500 cases annually of exciting Pinot Noir, Pinot Noir Blanc, Brut Rosé, and Riesling at his winery on the shores of Cayuga Lake using grapes from several top winegrowers in the region. Curiously, he vinifies his Pinot Noirs with significant whole cluster (the Barrel Reserve is 100% and the regional bottling is typically 50%) which seems to defy all logic for this very cool region where grapes are typically picked at low Brix. His experience working at Calera Wine Company and sampling many whole cluster wines from the similar cool climate of Burgundy led him to believe it could be done in the Finger Lakes. His pioneering efforts in this region have alerted others and in 2012 more than 50% of his Finger Lakes colleagues were incorporating some amount of stem inclusion in their Pinot Noir programs. He has worked with Cornell University for a few years to better understand his stem program.



Tom reports that the 2011 vintage in the Finger Lakes had an abundance of moisture in the spring, followed by a warm and dry summer with intermittent thunder storms. Harvest received considerable moisture from two hurricanes. Despite the challenges at harvest, the Pinot Noir wines are aromatically expressive. 2012 offered a mild winter and unseasonably warm March causing a record early bud break. Warm weather continued throughout the summer leading to the earliest harvest on record. The Pinot Noir benefited from the heat resulting in intense flavors and additional structure.

The wines reviewed here must be appreciated in the context of where they originate. The wines are far from the richly endowed Pinot Noirs of California, but they have their own delicate and enduring charm. The use of significant whole cluster fermentation gives the wines a slew of interesting aromas and flavors without any significant intrusion of unwelcome vegetal tones that can be associated with stem inclusion. The tannin structure is also noticeably different. The Pinot Noirs are generally vinified in 1-ton fermenting bins for about 14 days, basket pressed and aged 12 months in 100% Francois Frères oak barrels. All wines are bottled under glass closure (Vino-Seal). Visit www.heartandhands.com for more information.

2011 Heart & Hands Finger Lakes Pinot Noir 11.8% alc., pH 3.51, TA 0.66, 628 cases, \$21. Sourced from Patrician Verona, Elaine's and Hobbit Hollow vineyards. Yields 1.9 tons per acre. 50% whole cluster. Aged in 32% new French oak barrels. *Light reddish-salmon color in the glass. Delicate aromas of red cherries, red raspberries, dried herbs and the slightest oak. Very demure and elegant, but offering pleasant flavors of red fruits and some satisfying cherry on the finish. The oak is slightly imposing and there is a subtle canned vegetal note in the background.* **85.**



2011 Heart & Hands Elaine's Vineyard Finger Lakes Pinot Noir 11.9% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.67, 49 cases, \$31. This vineyard overlooks the eastern shores of Seneca Lake. Vineyard manager John Santos employs balanced vine strategy. Yield 2.1 tons per acre. 100% whole cluster. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light reddish-salmon color in the glass. Charming aromas of cherries, rose petal, baking spice and herbal oak. Good intensity of cherry flavor with a hint of brown spice, rose water and complimentary oak. Noticeable but not intrusive tannins with an uplifting backbone of acidity. A juicy wine with some charm.* **88.**



2011 Heart & Hands Hobbit Hollow Vineyard Finger Lakes Pinot Noir 12.3% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.62, 49 cases, \$31. This vineyard is located on the western side of Skaneateles Lake on the lakeshore. The owner is Mike Falcone and the vineyard manager is Paul Wellington. Yield 1.8 tons per acre. 100% whole cluster. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light reddish-salmon color in the glass. More intense cherry aroma and flavor in this wine with a dusting of oak and spice. The firm but not astringent tannins are supportive and the mid palate fruit carries over nicely to the satisfying and juicy finish.* **89.**



2011 Heart & Hands Patrician Verona Vineyard Finger Lakes Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.66, 49 cases, \$31. This vineyard is located on the western side of Cayuga Lake. Yield 2.3 tons per acre. 100% whole cluster. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light reddish-salmon color in the glass. Complex and enticing nose offering scents of black cherry, spice, forest floor, deep red rose petal and toast. Very flavorful with a core of fresh cherry fruit accented by red currant and dried herb tastes. Modest in weight with integrated tannins, supportive oak and an appealingly polished demeanor.* **90.**

2010 Heart & Hands Barrel Reserve Finger Lakes Pinot Noir 12.3% alc., pH 3.78, TA 0.62, 320 cases, \$41. 54% Hobbit Hollow, 31% Elaine's, and 23% Patrician Verona vineyards. Yield 2.0 tons per acre. A barrel selection, aged 18 months in 52% new and 48% used Francois Frères oak barrels. *Light reddish-salmon color in the glass. Strikingly aromatic with hi-tone scents of red berries, red cherries, brown spice, molasses, beet root and spice. Very elegant and charming with a tasteful array of fruits including red cherries, red raspberries and cranberries. Wonderful whole cluster spice and a hint of root beer. Modest in weight with balanced tannins, a bright acid backbone and a wholesome finish of some persistence. Very exotic and interesting. At the end of the day, when I had a dozen opened wines to choose from, many of which were from California, this was the wine I chose to drink before and with dinner.* **93.**



2012 Polarity Finger Lakes White Wine 12.3% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.60, residual sugar 0g/L, 62 cases, \$26. 100% Pinot Noir, whole cluster pressed with minimal skin contact. Barrel fermented on the lees with gentle stirring every few days. Aged 9 months in oak barrels. A Pinot Noir blanc. *Very light apricot color and clear in the glass. Aromas of honeydew, almond and chalk dust lead to flavors of muted cherry, tangerine, kumquat zest, persimmon and vanilla cream. A delicate, but unique wine, with robust acidity and a very seductive creamy mouth feel.* **88.**

CIRQ.

Kosta Browne's winemaker, Michael Browne, has debuted a new label with a circus theme specializing in Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. The first vintage produced an estate Pinot Noir from Treehouse Vineyard, and subsequent vintages will include an estate Pinot Noir from a second vineyard, Bootlegger's Hill Vineyard.

Like many winemakers who have sourced Pinot Noir for their wines, Michael has dreamed of planting his own vineyard and making wine from it. He decided several years ago to pour significant resources into developing distinguished sites that could produce world-class Pinot Noir. Michael enlisted the services of noted vineyardist, Charlie Chenoweth, to plant his two vineyards.

Production will be very limited, with only two Pinot Noirs, each from a single estate vineyard. The 13.5-acre Treehouse Vineyard is located 8 miles inland from the Pacific Coast at an elevation of 750 feet above the fog line. Because it is above the fog, Treehouse receives more hours of sunshine than almost any other site in the Russian River Valley, yet benefits from the fog's cooling effects. The vineyard is planted to 5 clones on 101-14 rootstock: Mariafeld 23 (35%), Swan, Pommard, Calera and Mt. Eden 37. Soils are iron-rich Franciscan. Remarkably, this vineyard delivers exceptional flavor, intensity and textures early in the ripening phase.

The 30-acre Bootlegger's Hill Vineyard also sits at about 750 feet above sea level and is above the fog line. Like Treehouse, it is surrounded by redwood and fir trees. However, Bootlegger's soil is mainly Goldridge, valued for its excellent drainage and low fertility. Bootlegger's is a little cooler than Treehouse and combined with a different soil type, the resultant wine is more elegant and red-fruited. The planted Pinot Noir clones are 115, 667, Pommard, Mt. Eden 37, Calera and Elite(?). Two blocks (4 acres) of Wente clone Chardonnay are also planted here.

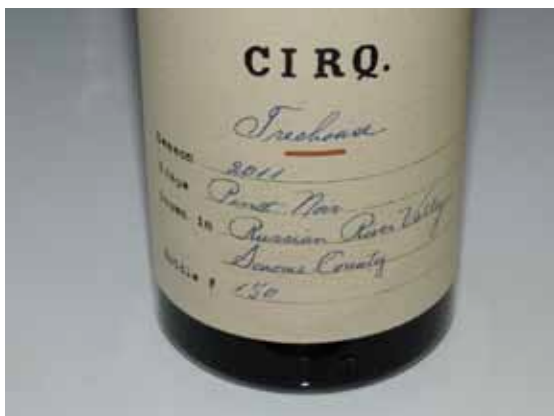
The inaugural bottling is the 2011 Treehouse Vineyard Pinot Noir, offered in early December 2013 for release in early March 2014. The wine is held back a year in bottle to give the tannins more time to integrate and more complex aromas to develop. Clones are a mix of 23, Swan, 37, Pommard and Calera. Yield was 1.1 tons per acre. The wine is offered only in a 3-pack at \$100 per bottle.

Visit the clever and informative website at www.cirq.com to view a number of relevant videos and sign up for the allocation list. The back label on the bottle is a clever take on a circus admission ticket.



2011 CIRQ. Treehouse Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.40, TA 0.60, 462 cases, \$100. Decanted for two hours and re-tasted eight hours later. *Very dark reddish-purple color in the glass. This wine has a nose you could drink with deep aromas of black raspberry jam, plump blueberries, black cherries, spice and subtle oak. Ripe and exuberant on the palate, with a full arsenal of rich flavors including blueberry, black raspberry, pomegranate and black currant, finishing with a burst of luscious berry fruit. A hint of the finest artisan dark chocolate and humus add interest.*

This is a bombastic wine that is extremely flavorful, yet balanced, sensual and inviting. It tastes like it was made from very small berries with a high skin to juice ratio. After decanting, the tannins were supportive but not imposing. The more I tasted this wine, the more I liked it as I continued to contemplate its nuances. When tasted later in the day, the wine had evolved and became silkier and livelier, and was a beautiful accompaniment to grilled King salmon. The flavor profile and structure are more reminiscent of true Sonoma Coast than Russian River Valley. It's an outrageously flavored and expensive wine, but it is damn good. 94.



Recent Sips of Chardonnay

2011 Arista Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.3% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.57, 213 cases, \$N/A. Kent Ritchie has owned and farmed his namesake vineyard since the early 1970s. The soils are well-drained Goldridge type and the clones are predominately old Wente selection of Chardonnay. *Mild yellow-gold color and clear in the glass. Highly aromatic with vibrant scents of fresh lemon, baked apple, peach and burnt caramel. Slightly creamy and very flavorful on the palate with tastes of lemon, baked apple, crème brûlée and toasty oak. A fruit-driven wine that still offers some wet stone minerality in the background, especially on the finish. Very enjoyable.* **90.**




2011 Patz & Hall Hyde Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay 14.2% alc., 1,209 cases, \$58. From a renowned vineyard planted in 1981, specifically the Hyde-Wente selection planted on the best soils at Hyde Vineyard. Whole cluster pressed, 100% indigenous yeast fermentation, aged sur lie with weekly stirring, 100% malolactic fermentation in barrel, aged in 60% new Burgundian French oak barrels, and bottled without filtration. *Moderate yellow-gold color with slight haze (unfiltered) in the glass. Aromas of lemon, nectarine, sea breeze and creamy caramel lead to a moderately rich palate of lemon, grapefruit, pear and buttery oak flavors. Unapologetically rich and raunchy, but with a refreshing cut of underlying vibrant acidity, and some noticeable finishing persistence. This wine is a meal in itself, and is for lovers of decadent Chardonnay.* **93.**

2011 Rodney Strong Reserve Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.5% alc., pH 3.32, TA 0.69, 808 cases, \$40. One of the winery's artisan wines. A selection of special lots created in the winery's small lot winemaking facility under the direction of consulting winemaker David Ramey. Aged 13 months in 38% new French oak barrels. Unfiltered. A Sweepstakes winning white wine at the 2013 Sonoma County Harvest Fair and the James Guymon Memorial Award winner. *Medium yellow-gold color and clear in the glass. Generous aromas of lemon, apple, white peach and toasty, buttery oak. Tasty core of lemon drop, pastry cream and green apple with a prominent riff of citrus-driven, steely acidity bringing up the finish. More acid-driven than many Russian River Valley Chardonnays.* **90.**

2011 Three Sticks Durell Vineyard Origin Sonoma Valley Chardonnay 13.5% alc., pH 3.55, TA 0.71, 269 cases, \$42. From Old Wente 5 Block (ripe flavor) and V9 Block which is one of the rockiest and windiest areas of Durell (broad flavor and minerality). Fermented in concrete egg and aged in stainless steel for 14 months. No malolactic fermentation. Winemakers Don Van Staaveren and Tracy Bledsoe. *Moderate yellow gold color and clear in the glass. Vibrant and pure aromas of lemon, peach jam, cantaloupe, passion fruit and a hint of butter. Crisp and lively in the mouth, with refreshing flavors of lemon, yellow grapefruit and peach. The finish displays a good bite of acidity along with steely, iced lemon flavors. This wine will please lovers of clean, unoaked, and unplugged Chardonnay.* **92.**



 **2011 Three Sticks Durell Vineyard Sonoma Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., pH 3.43, TA 0.69, 511 cases, \$48. Sourced from Old Wente 1 Block, one of the oldest, coldest and windiest sections of Durell and Rocky Flat Block planted to Dijon 76. Fermented in concrete egg and oak barrels, aged in 60% new French oak barrels for 14 months. 100% malolactic fermentation. *Moderate yellow-gold color and clear in the glass. Very nicely perfumed with aromas of lemon, pear, nori and the faintest oak. A delicious wine of elegance, class and sophistication featuring vivid flavors of lemon curd, lime, spice and toasty oak. Crisp and juicy, with excellent underlying mineral-driven acidity, finishing with length and lemon goodness. I am partial to barrel fermented, 100% malolactic fermented Chardonnay, and this wine delivers without being overwrought with oak-driven accents.* **94.**



The \$9.99 Pinot Noir Challenge

Once in a great while I dip into the bottom shelf, inexpensive Pinot Noirs, to experience what many people are drinking. Let's face it, most of the Pinot Noirs I review are wallet-draining expensive, limited in availability due to minuscule production, and not for drinking on a nightly basis.

I chose a case of wines that were priced at \$9.99 or less, either based on the current retail price or the price after discounting (many of these wines are found in supermarkets that often discount them by up to 30% if the consumer buys six mix and match bottles).

Wineries often divulge little production details on their value-priced wines, so I chose not to supply a bevy of technical nonsense. The wines may not be 100% Pinot Noir (wines can be labeled Pinot Noir as long as other varieties do not exceed 25 percent). Many carry the California appellation and grapes are sourced from several regions.

Two decades ago, wine writers attributed the expense of premium Pinot Noir to the fact that it did not lend itself to large-scale winemaking, responding best instead when crafted in small batches. The demands of Pinot Noir winemaking were considered so challenging that the wine's subtleties were easily lost in large production regimens. While this still holds true, the remarkable advances in large-scale Pinot Noir winemaking using selective manipulation have led to a plethora of good drinking Pinot Noir under \$20 and even under \$10. Claims that these cheap Pinot Noirs would ruin the lofty reputation of Pinot Noir have proven wrong since the wines are decent. They have made the grape more accessible to the general wine drinking public, and as a result, Pinot Noir has replaced Merlot and Zinfandel and challenged Cabernet Sauvignon as the go-to red for most regular wine drinkers.

It still holds true that very good, cheap Pinot Noir is an oxymoron, and with Pinot Noir you definitely get what you pay for, but when you need to grab a bottle of Pinot Noir for a casual meal, it is comforting to know that some inexpensive Pinot Noirs can fill the bill and are true to their heritage.

The wines reviewed here were fresh from supermarket or wine retail stores and were tasted soon after acquiring to replicate the consumer's experience (most consumers drink wine within a day or two of purchase). 8 of the wines had natural cork or cork composite closures, 3 had screwcap closure, and 1 had a synthetic closure. None of the back labels provided any relevant information as to vinification of the wines except the Mark West bottling.

All the wines were true to Pinot Noir, but several had imposing oak imprints. The three that I can recommend are 2011 Mark West California Pinot Noir, 2012 Red Rock California Pinot Noir, and 2012 Noble Vines 667 Monterey County Pinot Noir.

2012 Cono Sur Bicicleta Chile Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$6.99, screwcap. Imported by Vineyard Brands, Birmingham, AL. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is devoid of fruit, offering aromas of wooded forest, pine cone and Christmas tree. Soft in the mouth with a cherry core, bright acidity and notable oak presence. Balanced oak tannins and a cherry-infused short finish complete the picture. 79.*

2011 Castle Rock Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$9.99. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of oak-laced cherries with a hint of geranium. Decent cherry core with oak in the background. Rather bland, lacking in finishing pleasure, but drinkable. 81.*

2012 Hahn Winery California Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$9.99. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of cigar oak dominant the nose. Flavors of oak-laced black cherries and tobacco with good fruit concentration and mild tannins. Full-bodied but not redeeming. 82.*

2012 Redtree California Pinot Noir 12.5% (label), 13.08% (website) alc., pH 3.63, TA 0.58, 60,000 cases, \$8.99, screwcap. From Cachetti Wine Company. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Very aromatic initially with scents of cherry, cranberry, red licorice, spice and pipe smoke, fading some over time in the glass. Middleweight flavors of black cherry and raspberry draped in firm tannins. 83.*

2012 The Pinot Project California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$8.99, screwcap. Founded in 2009 by importer Michael Skurnik. Raised in approximately 15% French oak barrels and 85% stainless steel for 4-5 months.

Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is lacking in fruit appeal, showing aromas of exotic spice, oak and underbrush. A bit thin and flat with flavors of black cherry and anise and some finishing presence of black cherry fruit. Pleasant, but dilute and unexciting. **83.**

2012 Bogle Vineyards California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$9.99. Moderately light reddish-purple hue in the glass. Pleasant aromas of cherries, baking spice and oak. A solid wine with modestly intense flavors of oak-kissed cherry and cranberry backed by balanced dry tannins. Easy to drink with a spark of acidity on the finish. **84.**

2012 Cloud Break California Pinot Noir 12.5% alc., \$8.99. A Total Wine & More exclusive brand. Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with fresh aromas of cherries, baking spices and subtle oak. A flavorful core of cherry and cranberry fruit is supported by good acidity and balanced tannins. A solid wine that is nicely crafted and easy to like. **85.**

2012 Estancia Monterey County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$9.99. Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Pleasing aromas of fresh red cherries and supportive oak. Tasty essence of dark cherries with oak highlights in the background. Smoothly textured with firm but not astringent tannins and a welcome cherry-infused finish. **85.**

2012 Sean Minor Central Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.71, TA 0.57, \$9.99. A blend from five appellations, mostly Monterey County. 100% Pinot Noir. Fermented in open-top stainless steel fermenters with punch downs two to three times a day. Aged in oak. Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of berries, underbrush and oak. Darker berries, black cherries and plum fruit flavors are featured in a mid weight style that is soft in the mouth with some finishing intensity. Juicy fruit flavor but there is too much oak on board. **85.**

2011 Mark West California Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$7.97. Fermented in small tanks with daily punch downs. Aged in French and Hungarian oak barrels for about 8 months. Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. The most aromatically attractive wine in this tasting with scents of cherry pie glaze, spice and sandalwood. Middleweight flavors of red and black cherries with an annotation of brown spice and oak. Modest tannins and nicely integrated acid. **86.**



2012 Noble Vines 667 Monterey Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$9.99. Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Classy aromas of dark cherries and dark red berries lead to a mid weight palate of flavors that echo the nose. Nicely balanced and very forward, with complimentary hints of spice and oak. A gentle wine that aims to please. **86.**



2012 Red Rock Winery Reserve California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$9.99. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very fragrant upon opening with aromas of darker berry fruits and a floral accent, fading some over time in the glass with oak showing up. Soft and cozy on the palate with a tasty black cherry and black raspberry core. Impressive balance and harmony. **86.**



Memorable Quotes in 2013

“Wine is liquid humanism.” Wes Hagen, winemaker, Clos Pepe Vineyards

“Deference and humility are the key for the production of great Pinot Noir.” Jasper Morris MW, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 41

“Conversation with producers of all shapes and sizes across the land (New Zealand) made one thing clear - nobody is making money out of Pinot....almost all the small companies that are Pinot-predominant are living hand to mouth.” Jasper Morris MW, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 41

“Pinot Noir tells the truth because it offers nowhere to hide.” Scott Wright, proprietor, Scott Paul Wines

“Pinot Noir does not let you get away with any bullshit.” Scott Wright, proprietor, Scott Paul Wines

“Beyond what I do in the vineyards, 90% of winemaking is the picking decision.” Ross Cobb, winemaker and proprietor of Cobb Wines

“Even if you pick at 29° Brix and water back to 24°, it (Pinot Noir) still tastes like 29°” Ross Cobb, winemaker and proprietor of Cobb Wines

Quality comes, in part, from working at the margins of ripeness, and accept that this marginality promotes subtlety in the expression of vineyard identity.” Remington Norman, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 39.

“Wild fermentations are anything but wild. Yes, you have a strain that is identified as wild. But that strain is almost immediately overwhelmed by house yeast. Within the first few days of fermentation, they are gone. The commercial strains fight it out for domination.” Ken Wright, owner and winemaker Ken Wright Cellars

“Obsessing over alcohol content of California wine is approaching Howard Hughes levels of paranoia.” Tim Fish, *Wine Spectator*, Jan 31-Feb 28.

“If all the wines on the shelf taste the same, then there’s no reason for them all to be there. The position I’ve taken is, I like Brett, but I wish we knew more about how to manage it.” Chris Howell, winemaker Cain Vineyard & Winery, *Wine Business Monthly* August

“Grape variety is the most important factor of terroir, followed by climate, then landscape and soil. Some vineyards consistently produce fine wine, but when the weather is just right during the growing season, these sites produce exceptional wine, and those vintage differences have nothing to do with the soil.” Dr. Greg Jones, research climatologist Southern Oregon University

“The term minerality is now entrenched, so it’s too late to turn back the tide, but the term should be used as a metaphor, not as something directly derived from soil minerals where the vine is located.” Alex Maltman, grapegrower, winemaker and professor of earth sciences University of Wales

“Being able to actually taste the vineyard geology in the wine....in any literal way is scientifically impossible. Whatever minerality is, it is not the taste of vineyard minerals” Alex Maltman, grapegrower, winemaker and professor of earth sciences University of Wales

“I feel like there are people abusing the word (minerality) - putting it in wine notes, just because it is a nice evocative word, with no relationship to the sensory properties of the wine.” Jordi Ballester, Burgundy-based researcher

“Minerality to me is like when you put stones in your mouth as a kid. There’s a subtle taste there....its a combination of clean earth and rock.” Richard Arrowood, vintner

I think minerality might come from a complex of sulfur compounds found naturally in grapes, not the sulfites added as a preservative. But I have no scientific basis for saying this.” Dr. Hildegarde Heymann, Professor of Enology, UC Davis

“Minerality by itself is definitely not an island. It is associated with a complex of other things, the most important of which is likely acidity.” David Killilea, mineral scientist at the Nutrition and Metabolism Center

“No one specific, precise detail can recognizably define minerality....it is a combination of many attributes.” Ann Noble, developer of the Wine Aroma Wheel

“Fostering soil life of fungi, earthworms and other small-scale fauna, in turn help the vine roots to grow deeper which leads to greater mineral expression.” Claude Bourguignon, French microbiologist

“I will argue that blind tasting cannot succeed in controlling for the influences it aims to screen off, that it is not obviously desirable to have those aims in the first place, and it can hide from us things that we want to discern when we taste wine.” Jonathan Cohen, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 41

“Scores also carry with them the implication that perfection in a wine is both attainable and desirable. Anything less than the maximum number of points intimates unconsciously that something in the wine is lacking.” Eric Asimov, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 39

“The wine media in general, in my opinion, is overly focused on greatness - on killer wines, as too many Americans like to say....We need to pay greater attention to wines intended for drinking rather than wines that will be collected.” Eric Asimov, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 39

“There is a groundswell of belief that at best, wine talk is empty, and at worst, bogus.” Barry Smith, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 40

“Every wine has a story to tell. As judges, we need to listen to that story, then interpret it for others, regardless of price and reputation, what the producer or distributor tells us about it, or what we, in turn, think about them.” Michael Bettane, *The Journal of Fine Wine*, Issue 40

“Have wines actually gotten that much better, or has grade inflation become as common among wine critics as it has among high school personnel?” Lettie Teague, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2-3

For many of us, wine is so much a part of the daily fabric of our lives that we tend to take some of its captivating, magical qualities for granted. We focus so much on the hard work, the difficult financing, the capricious market and the fierce competition that go into making and selling a bottle that we forget how enchanting a simple bottle of wine on the table becomes.” Jake Lorenzo, *Wine Business Monthly*, February

“Young people are becoming more confident. Consumers are much more confident in their ability to decide what they like and they don’t like. Wine isn’t perceived as an elitist beverage anymore.” Stephanie Gallo, *Wine Business Monthly* February

All the wines in the \$8 category are from here (San Joaquin Valley). We are the California appellation. We’ve been the hidden gorilla; we’re 60 percent of the California wine industry, but nobody knows where San Joaquin Valley is.” Steve Shafer, San Joaquin Wine Co., *Wine Business Monthly*, April

“We do not look at wine on tap as simply another format. We see it as a better glass of wine. Kegs are the best way to ensure consistent high quality wine by the glass.” Bruce Schneider, Gotham Project, *Wine Business Monthly* April

“There’s too many doctors and lawyers moving in here and putting in their Chateau Cashflow.” Zan Overturf, owner of a Paso Robles plant nursery, *Los Angeles Times*, September 2

“It’s rarely discussed, but wines tend to reflect the personalities of their winemaker.” Rusty Gaffney, *The PinotFile*

Pinot Briefs

California Sparkling Wine Making a Comeback After a number of years in which California sparkling wine was in the doldrums and a hard sell, many boutique Pinot Noir specialists are now producing stellar examples that have revived interest and are “sparkling” a mini-trend. Sta. Rita Hills producer **Kessler-Haak** is offering their inaugural release “sparkling brut squad,” consisting of a sparkling Brut (75% Pinot Noir and 25% Chardonnay) containing all Sta. Rita Hills estate fruit and a sparkling Brut Rosé (100% Sta. Rita Hills estate Pinot Noir). Both wines were produced by méthode champenoise with 10 month tirage. **Brewer-Clifton** is announcing their release of their 2011 3D Vineyard Sparkling Chardonnay made in a blanc de blanc style. This is the second vintage of sparkling wine made in the traditional méthode champenoise and hand disgorged at Brewer-Clifton winery. Also in Sta. Rita Hills, **Flying Goat Cellars** has been featuring “Goat Bubbles” for several years. Three outstanding sparklers are now offered: 2010 Goat Bubbles Blanc de Blancs Sierra Madre Vineyard (previously reviewed in the *PinotFile* and rated 94), 2011 Goat Bubbles Rosé Solomon Hills Vineyard, and 2011 Goat Bubbles Crémant Sierra Madre Vineyard. A favorite of mine is the Brut Rosé Sparkling Wine offered by **Inman Family Wines** sourced from the OGV Estate Pinot Noir. The 2012 vintage can be ordered now for shipping in February 2014 (think Valentine’s Day). These boutique sparklers are not cheap, but reflective of the quality of the grapes they contain, the higher taxation on finished wines, and the more intensive winemaking procedures required to produce a high-end sparkling wine by méthode champenoise.

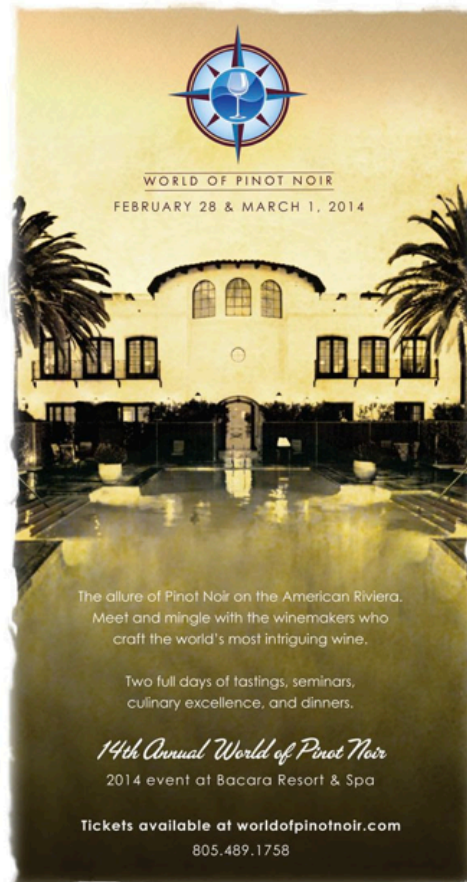
Movie on Robert Sinskey Released Sinskey is an interesting study because he did not attend wine school, rather he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Parsons School of Design in New York City. Over the past 25 years he has grown the 100% organic and Biodynamic® certified winegrowing operation started by his father to over 200 acres of vineyards in the Carneros and Stags Leap districts of the Napa and Sonoma Valleys. Robert Sinskey Vineyards was one of the featured wineries at the 2012 IPNC and is a highly popular producer of Pinot Noir and Vin Gris of Pinot Noir. Visit www.cdsavoia.com/#!/artists/robert-sinskey.

Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards This new label was inspired by a backyard Chardonnay vineyard Elliott and Lynn Dolin planted behind their Malibu home in 2006. Since its launch in 2005, Dolin has emerged as one of the leading producers in the burgeoning Malibu Coast, a region poised to attain AVA status in early 2014. After three vintages of Chardonnay, the winery is expanding its Malibu production to include several more wines from the region and by the middle of 2014 will release a line of Central Coast Pinot Noir wines from notable vineyards such as Talley Rincon, Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills. The winemaker is Kirby Anderson who crafts the wines in a Central Coast facility. Visit www.dolinestate.com for more information and to buy the 2011 Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards Chardonnay (\$39) or 2012 Dolin Rosé of Pinot Noir (\$22).



Darkest-colored Reds are Healthiest *Men's Health* recently reported that research by professor emeritus Dr. Leroy Creasy of Cornell University suggests that wines with the darkest skins that are grown at the sunniest sites have the most health benefits. Darker wines contain more anthocyanins, the antioxidants that are present in grape skins. Grapes that are exposed to the highest levels of ultraviolet light produce the highest amounts of antioxidants. It is believed that antioxidants such as resveratrol can reduce the risk of heart disease.

Gift Tickets to World of Pinot Noir Your wine-loving friends have plenty of wine, but they would welcome a gift of tickets to the World of Pinot Noir, February 28 and March 1, 2014 at the luxurious Bacara Resort & Spa in Santa Barbara. There will be opportunity to taste Pinot Noir from more than 100 domestic and international producers. Visit www.wopn.com for a schedule of events and tickets.



Waving Inflatable Tubes Deter Birds from Grapes *The Wall Street Journal* and gizmodo.com reported that inflatable nylon tubes in the image of arm-flailing tube men are an effective deterrent to grape-stealing birds at harvest. The Department of Agriculture is studying the comparable effectiveness of the bird-repelling inflatable tubes to other conventional means of crop protection.



“Pinot Express” Zipline *Great Wine News* (December 13, 2013) reported on a new 1,800-foot “Pinot Express” zipline at Margarita Adventures which starts on a mountaintop forest and descends over Pinot Noir vines at the historic Santa Margarita Ranch in Paso Robles wine country. The Pinot Express is the highest, longest and fastest zipline of the Margarita Adventures other four zipline tours. Cost is \$99. Tours end with an optional wine tasting of Mike Sinor’s Ancient Peaks Winery wines which specializes in wines grown on Margarita Vineyard. See the video at www.greatwinenews.com/pinot-express-zipline-over-pinot-noir-vines/.

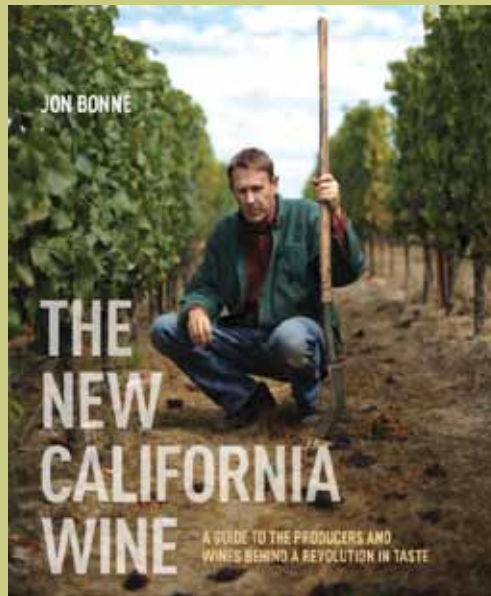
9th Annual Pigs & Pinot Weekend. Chef Charlie Palmer again brings together the culinary and wine worlds on March 21-22, 2014 at the Hotel Healdsburg. Attendees experience the pork creations of 20 chefs and the wines of over 60 wineries. This year’s participating pork authorities are Amanda Freitag, chef and owner of Empire Diner and TV Food Network personality, Bryan Voltaggio, chef and owner of VOLT and RANGE, Frank Crispo, chef and owner of Crispo Restaurant and Philippe Rispoli, chef and owner of PB Boulangerie Bistro. Gala dinner winemakers include Michael Browne (CIRQ.), Pierre Emmanuel (Domaine Pierre Gelin), Tom Rochioli (Rochioli Vineyards & Winery) and Mike Weersing (Pyramid Valley, New Zealand). All proceeds benefit Share Our Strength® and local scholarships and charities. Pigs & Pinot Hotel Lodging Package and a la carte ticket sales start Thursday, January 16, 2014. Visit www.pigsandpinot.com.

New Online Wine Magazine: *Grape Collective* Former *Wall Street Journal* wine columnist Dorothy J. Gaiter and former *Bon Appétit* editor-in-chief Barbara Fairchild are notable contributors. The founder of the magazine is Christopher Barnes, the former president of the *New York Observer*, was inspired by the lack of digital platforms available to easily obtain wines that are written about. Subscriptions are free at www.grapecollective.com.

Oh My God! Pinot Noir in a Can! Union Wine Company in Oregon has released a Pinot Noir in a 12-ounce can, hoping to “beerify” wine among consumers. The label, Underwood, offers both Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris at a retail price of \$5. The cans save about 40% in packaging costs compared to glass bottles.



Burgundy Vigneron & US Music Exec Partner on Oregon Pinot Noir *Wine Spectator* (Katherine Cole, November 18, 2013) reported that California cofounder of I.R.S. Records Jay Boberg and vigneron Jean-Nicolas Méo, who trained under the legendary Henri Jayer, have formed a partnership to produce Pinot Noir in Oregon. Jean-Nicolas and Jay have been friends for over 30 years, and Jay has been a longtime friend of music industry veterans David Millman who is the managing directory of Domaine Drouhin Oregon and Scott Wright of Scott Paul Wines. In 2013, the pair will produce about 300 cases of Maresh Vineyard Pinot Noir. Kelley Fox, the winemaker for Scott Paul Wines, made the wine with consultation from Méo. Some whole cluster fermentation was used, with careful trimming of each cluster by hand in a certain fashion. Eventually, production will increase to 2,000 cases and will be moved into a separate facility for the 2014 vintage. The name of the new label has not been officially released. There will be a special cuvée from this partnership that will be released under the Scott Paul label sometime in 2015.



The New California Wine

A Guide to the Producers and Wines Behind a Revolution in Taste

Author Jon Bonné is the award-winning wine editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He arrived in Seattle from the East Coast in 2000 where he began his wine writing career and settled in California in 2006.

After reading this book I wasn't sure what "New California Wine" was exactly. From a Pinot Noir writer's perspective, I assumed it meant wines that were crafted with earlier harvested fruit and resulting lower alcohol percentages, that were void of winemaking shenanigans, and that were more reflective of terroir. In other words, a more "subtle and deliberate touch as opposed to full-flavor." Bonné attempts to be an arbitrator of taste in this book and lambasts California's producers of "Big Flavor" wines which he infers are passé to serious wine lovers. The implication is that Big Flavor has retarded the ascent of Pinot Noir into the realm of significance. Not so fast!

Bonné states that the reign of Big Flavor began with this century in earnest and was prevalent when he arrived in California in 2006. The result for him was that wines all tasted the same and drowned out all sign of terroir. He states authoritatively, "At the heart of Big flavor lies a quest for ripeness....But what is the optimum point of ripeness? Defining it has created a schism between the proponents of Big Flavor and pioneers in a post-Big Flavor world."

Bonné singles out Sea Smoke, Loring Wine Company, and Aubert as examples of Big Flavor Pinot Noir and cruelly lambasts Kosta Browne as "the ultimate example of irrational exuberance," while implying that only novices are fans of these "brash" wines which lack terroir expression. Brash is a contentious word, defined as "vulgarly self-assertive," and I respectively take exception to its use in this context.

I get the notion that Bonné has not tasted the full lineup of Kosta Browne wines in recent vintages. I have. The more current Kosta Browne wines are considerably more refined and stylish than those offered in the mid-2000s and definitely show no lack of terroir expression. I can easily separate the Kosta Browne offerings of Keefer Ranch, Koplen Vineyard, Rosella's Vineyard and Pisoni Vineyard based on my extensive experience of tasting wines from these distinguished sites. I like to describe the rich Kosta Browne wines as analogous to "bombs bursting in the mouth," or as Michael Browne is want to call them "rock 'n roll wines." They are delicious examples of California Pinot Noir produced with a clear vision of the winemaker's intention and they have a huge dedicated fan base. Reportedly there are 35,000 people on the Kosta Browne waiting list eagerly trying to buy some of this so-called "brash" wine.

I asked Michael Browne to comment about the "Big Flavor brash" wine tag given to his wines in this book and

he, like myself, found the remarks insulting. Michael said, "I do not have a battle here, we are just trying to make the best wines we can and find people who like them. If someone wants to throw out awkward and brash statements about the wines that they really do not know, so be it. Not much we can do about that."

I agree with Brian Loring of Loring Wine Company who thinks that it is dangerous to create a style or cultural war when it comes to wine. As Adam Lee of Siduri Wines points out, it is bad for the wine industry.

There should be no questioning the motivation of winemakers like Brian Loring and Michael Browne. They resent the implication that they are making wines to get high scores from certain reviewers and not making wines that are based on terroir. The truth is, most artisan Pinot Noir winemakers strive to make wines that reflect the terroir of the sites they work with and they often succeed. Bonné may not agree with the results, but their passion and dedication is every bit as ingrained and admirable as the winemakers that Bonné reveres.

I absolutely love Ted Lemon's Littorai wines (Ted is featured on the cover of the book and referenced extensively within the pages of the book) and I have the utmost respect for him, but his wines are not low alcohol, delicately flavored wisps, but rather beautiful expressions of California Pinot Noir made in his vision. Calera Wine Company appears prominently in the book as well, but it is hardly part of a new California generation, having celebrated its 35th vintage with the 2005 wines. Some of Calera's 2009 vintage Pinot Noirs clock in at 14.8% and 14.9% alcohol. Generalizations are always difficult when applied to wine styles.

Now that I have that off my chest, let me comment further about the book. Bonné does a credible job in Part 1 of the book, "Searching for the New California," relating the complicated evolution of California winegrowing and winemaking post-Prohibition. I know of no other book that provides this information in such a succinct yet comprehensive fashion.

Part 2, "The New Terroir: A California Road Trip," is less successful. Several key winemaking regions are detailed in a historical and current context, but a number of important regions are omitted including Mendocino County, Carneros, Marin County, Santa Lucia Highlands and Monterey, and Santa Maria Valley (Santa Barbara County is included but there is only brief mention of the Santa Maria Valley).

In Part 3, "Wines of the New California: A Guide," Bonné only includes very personal choices that are suitable to his palate. There are so many notable wineries omitted that those included are nothing more than the author's personal agenda. Even among those wineries chose for inclusion, there is too much significant diversity in stylistic expression to neatly categorize them in the "New California" grouping. Wineries listed such as Littorai, Longoria, Calera and Ridge have been making wine for decades without significant changes in their winemaking style, yet the press, in reviewing this book, implies that the book offers a comprehensive coverage of California's "new generation." Some of Bonné's guardians of "New California Wine" such as Pinot Noir producers Domaine De La Côte, Ghostwriter, Lost & Found and Vaughn Duffy, have only a couple of vintages under their belt and although novel, are unproven with little stylistic ideals evident.

There are a two minor inaccuracies in the book. Williams Selyem's early winery was in a leased garage in Fulton on River Road, not in Graton as is stated in the book. Williams Selyem moved to the Fulton garage in 1983 and remained for five years before relocating to Allen Vineyard on Westside Road. Regarding Dijon clones of Pinot Noir, Bonné states, "In 1987 and 1988, Oregon winegrowers and their counterparts at Oregon State University persuaded Raymond Bernard to share genetic material he had isolated in Burgundy... nicknamed the Dijon clones." In truth, according to David Adelsheim, Dijon Pinot Noir clones 113, 114 and 115 and Dijon Chardonnay clones 76, 95 and 96 were brought legally into Oregon from Dr. Bernard initially in 1984. Dijon Pinot Noir clones 667 and 777 were sent to Oregon in 1988 and all the Dijon clones were shared with FPMS in California in 1988-1989.

I believe wine critics should hold to a responsibility to separate personal stylistic preferences from an objective assessment of wines. In other words, try to reward wines for their excellence regardless of style. It boils down to distinguishing between appreciating and liking. As one wine writer noted, "If the style is not one of my favorites, I hope I have the generosity to appreciate what the winemaker set out to accomplish." Another respected wine writer, Charles Olken, recently said, "The wines of Kosta Browne, Paul Hobbs, DuMOL and Dehlinger are lovely, rich, deep interpretations of Pinot Noir....They are not raisined or sweet or simple. They are authentic, real and wholly enjoyable. There is simply no calibration for taste." I agree wholeheartedly.

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