



# PinotFile

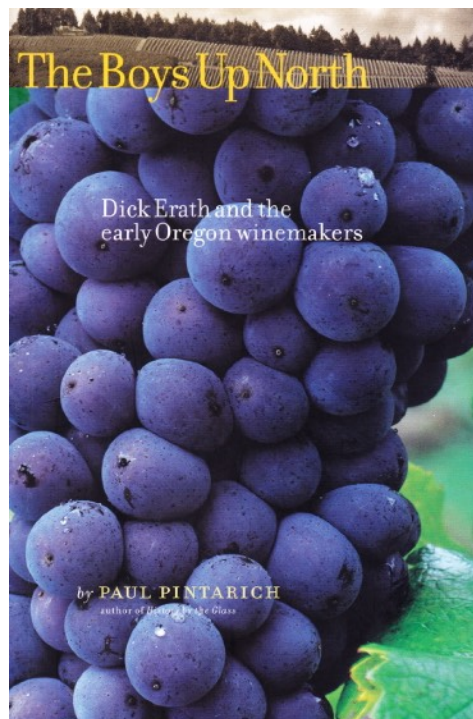
The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## Erath Pinot Noir Clone 95: A Promising Oregon Suitcase Selection

Dick Erath was one of “The Boys Up North” portrayed in the 1997 book by the same title written by Paul Pintarich. This seminal book on the origins of the Oregon wine industry came out at a time when popular opinion was transitioning from an impression that Oregon was rife with hippies making wine out of garages in their backyards. Of course, nothing could have been farther from the truth. Sure, the early winemaking pioneers often sported beards and had a laid back attitude that placed more emphasis on quality of life than material possessions. But using any measuring stick you choose, by the 1990s Oregon Pinot Noir had already become world class.



Erath had a varied background as an electronics engineer, a photographer, a jazz enthusiast, a racer of Corvettes and a grower of Zinfandel and Ruby Cabernet grapes in Walnut Creek, California. According to Pintarich, Erath had his wine epiphany when he drank an older bottle of Italian Malvasia Bianca.

In 1967, Erath enrolled in a two-week course at UC Davis, an experience that turned out to be life changing. He met Andre Tchelistcheff and Louis Martini, and learned of vintners heading to Oregon to launch Oregon's wine industry. Richard Sommer, a UC Davis graduate who founded Hillcrest Winery in the Umpqua Valley and planted the first Pinot Noir in Oregon, was also in the class. Sommers would encourage Erath to also move to Oregon and later coined the phrase “the boys up north” in reference to the newer winemakers in the Willamette Valley that included David Left, Dick Ponzi and Dick Erath.

A year later, in February 1968, Dick and first wife Kina Earth left the San Francisco Bay Area for Oregon's Willamette Valley, and purchased a 49-acre site in the Chehalem Mountains above Newberg. Earth called the property Chehalem Mountain Vineyards and planted the first 4 acres to Pinot Noir, Riesling and Gewürztraminer in 1969 using cuttings from the Wente family, Barney Fetzer and Richard Sommer. He also experimented with a number of other cuttings, working with another Oregon pioneering vintner, Charles Coury, who eventually became his partner in a nursery business, the Erath-Coury Nursery.

Erath quickly became friends with pioneering vintners Dick Ponzi, David Lett, Bill Fuller and David Adelsheim. In 1970, Erath, Lett and Coury lobbied with the Oregon State Legislature to stop the importation of wine grape vines that were not virus free. This is ironic, since this article is about one of the rare instances of a suitcase selection becoming planted successfully in Oregon (others are the "Coury" clone and the "828" clone.). To Erath's credit, he did not smuggle clone 95 into Oregon, but more about that later.

In 1975, Erath formed a partnership with C. Calvert "Cal" Knudsen, the Knudsen-Erath Winery, that lasted until the 1980s. The Knudsen-Erath Winery was the first commercial winery in the Dundee Hills. Knudsen had planted 30 acres of vines in 1972, the largest vineyard of the time that expanded to 60 acres by 1975. The pair built a winery in the Dundee Hills and released many acclaimed wines including Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling and sparkling wines, becoming one of the largest wineries in Oregon. In 1983, Erath planted the 34-acre Prince Hill Vineyard, 1.5 miles west of Dundee on the northern side of Worden Hill Road. This vineyard became the centerpiece of the winery's range of single-vineyard Pinot Noirs. It is planted to Pinot Noir clones 777, 667, 114, 113, 115, Pommard, Wädenswil, "Coury," and "Erath clone 95."



In 1987, Erath bought out Knudsen as the partnership amicably dissolved, and Knudsen went on to form an Argyle Winery partnership with Australian Brian Croser. Erath kept the winery, buildings, and Prince Hill Vineyard and formed Erath Vineyards. The transition was easy since Erath already was the winemaker and grape grower for Knudsen-Erath.

By 1995, Dick Erath had brought on Rob Stuart as winemaker and Erath Vineyards & Winery was producing 35,000 cases of wine, primarily Pinot Noir, with lesser amounts of Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay and Riesling. Gary Homer joined the winery as winemaker in 2002. In 2006, Erath Vineyards & Winery was sold to Ste. Michelle Wine Estates. In 2012, the original Chehalem Mountains vineyard that Erath first planted in 1969 was sold to Judy Jordan, formerly of J Vineyards & Winery.

Erath, now 82, and fifty years since arriving in Oregon, has never lost his thirst for tinkering and innovation. This brings us to "Erath clone 95" and a return to the mid 1970s when the story begins.

In 1975-1976, Erath had a friend visit Clos Vougeot in Burgundy, and while there, he grabbed cuttings that lay on the ground, and smuggled them into the United States. He gave them to Erath, who promptly sent them to Austin Goheen at the University of California at Davis Foundation Plant Services (FPS) to have the vines cleaned up. The original material was given the designation FPS S1 and underwent heat treatment. Goheen retired, and Erath heard nothing more about the fate of FPS S1 for many years. Erath was to find out later that the original material had tested positive for virus in 1986 and underwent microshoot tip tissue culture disease

elimination treatment in 1997, whereby a new selection plus some backup vines from the same material were created and the backup vines were renamed FPS 117.

In 1998, Erath received a surprising letter from FPS telling him the vines he had submitted had been designated FPS 95 and “were ready.” In 2002, FPS sent Erath 16 mist propagated vines that had gone through heat therapy. Using budwood from those vines, Erath then grafted over 20 own-rooted 128 Pinot Blanc vines at his Prince Hill Vineyard in the Dundee Hills. Now there are planted 4 acres on 3309 rootstock with another 7.5 acres going into fourth leaf, also on 3309 rootstock.

FPS 95 was later taken off the FPS listing because it tested positive for leaf roll virus in 2005, although Erath had not seen that virus infestation at Prince Hill Vineyard. The backup vines from the same source material were advanced to FPS Pinot noir 117, and are now available from FPS. The backup vines completed testing to qualify for the Russell Ranch Foundation Vineyard in 2013 and were designated FPS Pinot noir 117.1.

### Pinot noir 117

[Top](#)

**Registration Status** Registered

**Source** Erath Vineyards, Oregon

**Treatments** Heat treatment 62-1 days; microshoot tip tissue culture

**Comments** The original plant material for this selection came to Foundation Plant Services from Erath Vineyards in Oregon sometime in the mid-1970's. The original material initially underwent heat treatment for 62 days. The original material tested positive for virus in 1986 and underwent microshoot tip tissue culture disease elimination therapy at FPS in 1997. The treated material was released as Pinot noir 95 in 2001. Pinot noir 95 tested positive for virus in 2005. Backup vines had been created for Pinot noir 95 using microshoot tip tissue culture therapy from the same source material. Those backup vines successfully completed testing to qualify for the foundation vineyard and were renamed Pinot noir 117.

### Pinot noir 117.1

[Top](#)

**Registration Status** Provisional

**Protocol 2010** Qualifies for [Protocol 2010](#). (*This selection planted in Russell Ranch*)

**Source** Erath Vineyards, Dundee, Oregon (formerly Pinot noir 95 at FPS)

**Treatments** Microshoot tip tissue culture therapy

**Comments** The original plant material for this selection came to Foundation Plant Services from Erath Vineyards in Oregon sometime in the mid-1970's and underwent heat treatment for 62 days. The original material tested positive for virus in 1986 and underwent microshoot tip tissue culture disease elimination therapy at FPS in 1997. The treated material was released as Pinot noir 95 in 2001. Pinot noir 95 tested positive for virus in 2005. Backup vines had been created for Pinot noir 95 using microshoot tip tissue culture therapy from the same source material. Those backup vines successfully completed testing to qualify for the foundation vineyard and were renamed Pinot noir 117. Pinot noir 117 successfully completed testing to qualify for the Russell Ranch Foundation Vineyard in 2013 where it will be Pinot noir 117.1.

Erath believes that FPS 117 (95) is similar to Pommard in appearance and wine character profile. However, it has greater extract, higher skin tannin levels and appears resistant to botrytis. In 2013 in the Willamette Valley, 8 inches of rain fell during harvest, but no botrytis developed in Erath's FPS 117 plantings. Erath believes that this is the most distinctive feature of this selection since Pinot Noir clones in current use are botrytis-prone.

The nearly 40-acre Prince Hill Vineyard has slow-moving phylloxera infestation of unknown origin. In response, Erath has planted 500 vines in sandy soil in a nursery at Grand Island, Oregon, near Dayton, where there is no threat of phylloxera. A single barrel of clone 95 Pinot Noir was produced by Erath from these vines in 2016.

Erath sells clone 95 budwood to raise money for his Erath Family Foundation that advances viticultural and enological science in Oregon. Through 2017, the “Erath clone” has been planted at Hyland Vineyard and Holloran Vineyard. In 2018, plantings are planned for Brick House and maybe Beaux Frères. Word is getting out and Erath expects to see a substantial increase in plantings in the coming years.



A bottle of 2012 "Clone 95" Pinot Noir (designated CL 95) and a bottle of 2012 "Coury" clone Pinot Noir (one barrel produced of each) was reviewed previously: [www.princeofpinot.com/article/1488/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/1488/). Erath recently sent me a bottle of his 2014, 2015 and 2016 "Clone 95" Pinot Noir that he vinified. These were one barrel wines (once-filled French oak) not for commercial sale. Erath also related to me the history of clone 95.

The 2014 and 2015 bottling were based on an attempt to determine the limits of yield versus wine quality. The 2014 vintage was subject to no cluster thinning and leaves were striped only on east side. Yield was 6.7 tons per acre (2.5 lbs per linear foot of Scott Henry trellis). The wine was co-fermented with 10% "Coury" clone, and 15% whole cluster. The 2015 vintage was cropped at about 4 tons per acre (1.5 lbs per linear foot of Scott Henry trellis). Both of these crop levels at harvest would be considered high for Pinot Noir. The 2015 vintage had 45% whole cluster in the ferment. The 2016 vintage was completely de-stemmed and co-fermented with 18% "Coury" clone from Prince Hill Vineyard. Erath believes that the "Coury" clone adds some "higher" aromatics and thinks the combination of the two clones will be best.

**2014 Prince Hill CL 95 Grand Vin De Garage Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** *Light ruby red color with an orange tinge in the glass. Shy, but pleasing aromas of red cherry, strawberry and grill rub spices. Light and delicate, with slightly confected flavors of cherry, raspberry and spice, showing more fruit flavor than one would expect from the light color but still a tad shallow. Silky in the mouth, finishing tangy with a citrus-coated cranberry theme. The higher yields show in the lighter concentration of this wine. 90.*

**2015 Prince Hill CL 95 Grand Vin De Garage Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** 45% whole cluster fermented. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Enticing aromas of cherry, dark berry and sandalwood. The nose is intoxicating. Mid weight flavors of black cherry and black raspberry with a welcome spice accent. The wine offers well-structured tannins that are in balance, a deft touch of oak, and a pleasingly sappy cherry presence woven through the finish. Reminded me of Pommard in character and even a Chambertin. This charming wine*



*continued to evolve in the bottle over a day's time and became flat-out terrific. 95.*

**2016 Prince Hill CL 95 Grand Vin De Garage Dundee Hills Pinot Noir** Harvest Brix 23.9°. pH 3.39, TA 0.61. 100% de-stemmed. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, dried rose petal, balsam and earthy flora. Mid weight in style, with flavors of black cherry, black raspberry, savory herbs, baking spices, vanilla and caramel. Impressive fruit purity and a sterling expression of cherry fruit. Satiny in texture with suede tannins and a very long finish. More enticing when tasted later in the day from an opened and re-corked bottle. 93.*

Laurent Montalieu of Hyland Estates released a 2015 Clone 95 Pinot Noir under the Prince Hill label. Erath assigned the "Prince Hill" mark to him. The wine is exclusively clone 95 grapes that were planted, grown and tended by Dick Erath. The wine commemorates Laurent's and Dick's collective 80 years of experience growing and making wine in Oregon. Apparently, the wine is only available in the Hyland Estates tasting room.



The Duncan family, owners of California-based Silver Oak and Twomey, acquired Prince Hill Vineyard from Erath for their Twomey brand in September 2017. The sale included the “Prince Hill Vineyard” brand, with Twomey having use of the vineyard starting with the 2017 vintage. David Duncan plans to sell grapes from the vineyard in the ensuing years while the vineyard undergoes some replanting with new clones.

# Recently Tasted Pinot Noir & Other Wines

## Big Basin Vineyards, Boulder Creek, CA

I am always intrigued by the Pinot Noir wines from Big Basin because they offer considerable nuance and individuality. They are not at all like so many Pinot Noir wines produced currently in California and therefore challenge the drinker. The aromatics are more savory than fruity, the textures are interesting, and the tannins well balanced. The wines even have a little of that “funk” that one experiences with fine Burgundy reds.

This winery was founded by Bradley Brown and his sister Wendy Brown on an historic site next to Big Basin Redwoods State Park. The Pinot Noir wines are vinified in small lots using significant whole cluster fermentation, native yeast, and no additions other than sulfur dioxide after secondary fermentation is completed.

2015 was a classic, low yielding, high concentration vintage in the Santa Cruz Mountains according to Bradley. Years of drought followed by an early bud break and then spring rains reduced yields in most of Big Basin's vineyards by 50% of normal. Summer was moderate to warm, bringing on rapid ripening during the harvest season. Winemakers had to be cautious to avoid picking excessively ripe fruit.

The wines are sold through a mailing list, wine club and tasting rooms at both the estate winery and in the town of Saratoga: see website at [www.bigbasinvineyards.com](http://www.bigbasinvineyards.com).



### **2015 Big Basin Vineyards Alvaro Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 100 cases, \$60.

Released November 2017. 16-year-old vines planted at 588-730 feet in sandy gravelly loam in Corralitos. Clones 115, 667 and 777. 100% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels.

Bottled unfinned and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet*

*color in the glass. Enveloping aromas of blackberry, cassis, potpourri, fertile earth and ash. Satiny, smooth and flowing on the palate, with impressive richness that fills every nook and cranny in the mouth with serious intent. The mid weight flavors of purple grapes, blackberry, pomegranate, tea and tobacco really saturate the finish. Beautifully balanced, this wine's mouthfeel is highly seductive. Still exceptional when re-tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 94.*



**2015 Big Basin Vineyards Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 200 cases, \$55. Released November 2017. 17-year-old vines in Corralitos planted at 485-570 feet elevation in sandy clay loam over sedimentary bed rock. Mt Eden, 115 and 667 clones. 70% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels.. Bottled unfinned and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very reserved and savory nose, offering aromas of earthy flora, vegetal juice and seasoned oak. Mid weight flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and burnt tobacco emerge royally over time in the glass. Silky in the mouth with gentle tannins and a quenching finish. The wine seems a bit closed even when re-tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Time will tell, but for now, 91.*

**2015 Big Basin Vineyards Coast Grade Vineyard Ben Lomond Mountain Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 70 cases, \$55. Release April 2018. 7-year-old vines planted at 1,240-1340 feet elevation. Pommard and “828” clones planted in sandy loam over limestone base rock. Extensive shatter resulted in a very small harvest. The majority of grapes were de-stemmed since the clusters were sparse and contained some green shot berries that were eliminated. 25% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled unfinned and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Highly aromatic, with hi-tone scents of cherry, rose petal, burnt tobacco and savory herbs. Light to mid weight in style, noticeably fresh and juicy, with flavors of red cherry and cranberry and a hint of tobacco framed by frisky acidity. The most vibrant and juicy wine in the 2015 lineup. Still pumping out enticing aromas when sampled two days after opening. 93.*



**2015 Big Basin Vineyards Woodruff Family Vineyard** 13.0% alc., 80 cases, \$65. Release April 2018. About 38-year-old vines planted at 436 to 515 feet elevation in sandy loam. Unknown heritage selection. 100% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 33% new. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of underbrush, mulch and flower blossom persist in the glass. Quite restrained initially with a primarily savory undergrowth and earth character. When tasted later in the day from a previously opened bottle, this wine showed the most dramatic change, offering appealing mid weight flavors of blueberry, boysenberry, black cherry and spice. The silken mouthfeel attracts. Somewhat rigorous tannins need time to mollify. This is definitely a wine to lay down for a year or two.* **93.**

**2015 Big Basin Vineyards Coastview Vineyard Monterey County Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 155 cases, \$50. Release February 2018. 17-year-old vines planted at 2,200 feet elevation in decomposed quartz Diotite and limestone over base rock. Clones 667, 777, 113, 114, 115, Swan and Pisoni. One lot fermented 33% whole cluster and the other 75% whole cluster. Native fermentation. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Seductive aromas that build over time in the glass including back cherry, spice, floral goodness, pipe smoke and fresh turned earth. Good richness in a mid weight plus style, with flavors of earth-kissed boysenberry and blackberry fruits with a riff of tobacco, toast and spice in the background. A lot going on in this wine with an inquisitive texture of suede and a prolonged finish.* **93.**

## **Cristom Vineyards, Salem, OR**

There isn't a whole to say about this iconic Oregon winery that hasn't been written with boundless enthusiasm over and over. Winemaker and biochemist Steve Doerner has been at Cristom since its founding in 1992 and that is an eternity for most winemakers today. His style is influenced by his time at Calera and study under Jacques Seysses of Domaine Dujac in Burgundy before arriving at Cristom.

Today, Cristom Vineyards consists of eight distinct sustainable vineyards on 65 acres in the Eola-Amity Hills. Four of these vineyards, known as "The Four Ladies," include Marjorie (the only planting that was part of the property when it was acquired and the only vines planted on their own roots), Jessie, Louise and Eileen, and form the quartet of vineyard-designated Pinot Noir wines that has brought Cristom notoriety.



Marjorie Vineyard at Cristom

The Cristom Pinot Noir wines combine Oregon terroir with a Burgundian sensitivity. The wines are produced with some percentage of whole cluster fermentation, a technique not in widespread use in Oregon. The wines are noninterventional, meaning native yeasts, no cold soak, no filtration, and minimal fining and racking. Because of the whole cluster inclusion, acid additions are often necessary.

Perhaps even more unique than the Pinot Noir wines are the winery's other varietals, all of which are outstanding: Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Viognier and Syrah. The Syrah, produced from 1.25 acres of estate vines, was the first estate grown and bottled Syrah in the Willamette Valley when it was first released in 2003.

Cristom Pinot Noir is consistently the number one Oregon Pinot Noir sold in United States restaurants. Cristom wines are also widely distributed in fine retail stores and sold on the winery's website. Despite the popularity of the wines, they are accessible to the consumer. You can book tastings including "The Cristom Experience" or "Picnic in the Vines" at [www.cristomvineyards.com](http://www.cristomvineyards.com). Cristom is currently offering Vineyard Retrospectives, 2008-2013, for Marjorie, Eileen, Louise and Jesse Pinot Noir.

In the 2015 vintage, bud break occurred in March, the earliest ever recorded at Cristom Vineyards and a full 3 weeks earlier than the winery's twenty-five-year average. Warmth continued through spring, leading to bloom beginning in most blocks at the end of May (also the earliest ever recorded at the estate). Warm, dry weather during flowering led to a heavy fruit set and the vines produced sizable clusters with large berries. The result of the vintage growing conditions was a rare combination of abundant quantity and exceptional quality fruit.

The 2015 vintage single vineyard Pinot Noir wines are highly concentrated and not as forward now as the 2014 vintage wines were at this stage. Decanting would be advisable if you plan to drink them soon. Better to lay them down for awhile while you drink the more accessible Mt. Jefferson Cuvée.

**2014 Cristom Estate Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 777 cases, \$50. First produced in 2013 to replace the Sommers Reserve. An ensemble of each of the four estate Pinot Noir vineyards to tell the story of the specific vintage. Whole cluster fermented by native yeast. Unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Comforting aromas of cherry, potpourri, rose petal and herbs. Lighter weighted flavors of cherry and strawberry fruits in a refined, juicy and crisp style with very suave tannins and a modest finish. Elegantly composed and welcoming now, with the slightest herbal oak note in the background. 90.*



**2015 Cristom Mt. Jefferson Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.57, 9,562 cases, \$32. A blend of Cristom estate Pinot Noir vineyards and fruit sourced from neighboring vineyards in the Willamette Valley. The aim with this wine is consistency each year. Clones 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, "828," Pommard and Wädenswil. 41% whole cluster, native yeast fermentation, fined with egg whites, unfiltered. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 12.5% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Engaging aromas of black cherry, ripe strawberry, blueberry, and exotic spices. Mid weight flavors of black cherry and pomegranate have an earthy, rustic lean. Forward drinking and satisfying, with micro grain tannins, adequate acidity and some finishing length. One of Oregon's most true to type wines that offers special value. 91.*



**2015 Cristom Marjorie Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.55, 554 cases, \$70. Marjorie Vineyard is Cristom's oldest estate plantings, predating the company back to 1982. Named in honor of winegrower-owner Tom Gerrie's grandmother. Own-rooted, lower-density plantings. Pommard, Wädenswil and Dijon 114, 115 and 777. Vines produce very small, highly concentrated clusters. 59% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 58% new. Fined with egg whites, unfiltered. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Complex and sexy nose, presenting aromas of dark cherry, blackberry, spice, tobacco leaf, menthol and vanilla. Mid weight flavors of dark cherry and berry framed by husky tannins. Commendable richness and length in the mouth, with the fruit becoming more charming over time in the glass. The juicy, persistent finish rounds out a special wine. Noticeably better when re-tasted later in the day and still exceptional when re-tasted three days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Marjorie is usually my Cristom paramour. 94.*





**2015 Cristom Louise Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.73, TA 0.57, 945 cases, \$65. Vineyard planted in 1993 and named for winegrower and owner Tom Gerrie's great-grandmother, Louise Dinkelspiel. The lowest elevation Pinot Noir planting on the Cristom estate. The first vineyard established by Cristom and densely planted. 43% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 56% new. Bottled fined with egg whites and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry, clove, brioche and barrel lead off. More aromatic the following day, showing attractive cherry, spice and dried rose scents. A well balanced wine with harmonious flavors of dark red and purple berry fruits and firm, but supportive tannins. Silky in texture, with some finishing power, This wine was more expressive when re-tasted the following day and even better when re-tasted two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **93.**

**2015 Cristom Jessie Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.56, 1,006 cases, \$65. This vineyard is named for winegrower and owner Tom Gerrie's great-grandmother Jessie Summers. Vineyard was established in 1994 on one of the steepest hillsides in Oregon and therefore one of the most challenging to farm on the Cristom Estate. High-density plantings of 2,311 vines per acre. 49% whole cluster native yeast fermentation. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 52% new. Bottled after egg white fining without filtering. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of fresh berry basket, spice, burnt tobacco and toasty oak, soaring in intensity over time in the glass. Mid weight flavors of black cherry and black raspberry have a savory spice and tobacco underpinning. Fresh and vivid, with somewhat firm tannins and a satiny mouth feel. A bit tight upon opening, showing more openness and harmony when re-tasted the next day and two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **93.**

**2015 Cristom Eileen Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.56, 1,043 cases, \$65. This vineyard is named for Cristom's co-founder, Eileen Gerrie. Planting began in 1997 and expanded in 2006, resulting in a total of 16.61 acres, making Eileen the largest Cristom estate vineyard. It is also the highest elevation vineyard. Clones 113, 114, 115, 777, Pommard and Wädenswil. 42% whole cluster native fermentation. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 56% new. Fined with egg whites and unfiltered. *Moderate light garnet color in the glass. An array of charming aromas including cherry, rose petal, mushroom and sous bois greet the drinker. Upon opening, the wine is a bit flat and withdrawn. The following day, mid weight flavors of black cherry, dark strawberry, spice, mushroom and green vegetable emerge. The tannins are highly structured, yet integrated with the healthy fruit sap. The whole cluster vegetal note leaves me concerned. Perhaps time in the cellar will fully revive and acclimate this wine and prove the score too conservative.* **90.**



**2016 Cristom Estate Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Gris** 13.5% alc., 602 cases, \$20. 5 acres of vines planted in 1993. The only Cristom vineyard planted solely on sedimentary soils. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Lofty aromas of pear, pineapple, ripened peach, kiwi, nut oil, olive oil and balsam. The flavors echo the aromas with added notes of lemon and melon. Good richness of flavor while maintaining a crispness and brightness. A serious, highly nuanced wine with an uncommon finishing length. Pinot Gris is Oregon's Rodney Dangerfield varietal as it receives little respect. Yet when made in this fashion, it is a connoisseur's wine that is highly versatile at the dinner table as well as offering superb aging potential.* **93.**



**2016 Cristom Estate Eola-Amity Hills Viognier** 14.0% alc., 468 cases, \$30. Cristom pioneered this grape variety in Oregon with a 1993 planting. Barrel fermented in a combination of stainless steel and neutral French oak. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Satisfying perfume of tropical fruits including mango and banana, as well as orange peel and grassland. The flavor profile is quite typical with tastes of peach, apricot, citrus and petrol. Nicely composed and refreshing, with the slightest tannins adding body. The finish has purpose and quenching acidity. Along with the Penner-Ash version, this is the best Viognier currently produced in Oregon.* **93.**

## **Cuaison, Carneros, Napa Valley, CA**

Cuaison is one of California's most established and worthy wineries, dating to 1969. It was one of the first post-Prohibition Napa Valley wineries and played a key role in the evolution of luxury Napa Valley Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Cuaison also championed the recognition of the Los Carneros AVA. For the past four decades, Cuaison has focused on estate grown Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from its expansive 200 acres of vineyards first planted in 1980. With 44 different blocks of Chardonnay and 20 blocks of Pinot Noir, the vineyards are one of the oldest and most diverse sites in the region. Over almost 40 years of farming, the Cuaison team has developed a block-by-block approach to cultivating the vineyard.

A few years back, Cuvaison unveiled their Single Block wines two of which are reviewed here. The wines are crafted by long-time winemaker Steve Rogstad, who designed the purpose-built Chardonnay and Pinot Noir winery. Visit the website at [www.cuvaison.com](http://www.cuvaison.com).

**2015 Cuvaison Single Block Series Spire Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.51, \$52. Clone 115, 18-year-old from a low-yieldings high elevation site on the estate vineyard. This site stands out for its depth and concentration according to the winemaker. Yields in 2015 were down about 40%. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 50% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of dark cherry and a compliment of oak. More expressive on the palate, offering a mid weight plus charge of black cherry and black raspberry fruit flavors underlain with earthiness and notes of dark chocolate and cola, Satiny in texture, with inviting harmony, finishing with some generosity. Can be enjoyed now but will benefit from another year in the cellar.* **92.**



**2015 Cuvaison Single Block Series Adda Carneros Napa Valley Chardonnay** 14.2% alc., pH 3.50, TA 0.58, \$50. A barrel selection of lowest yield Old Wente vines averaging 15 years of age. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels 50% new. *Moderate golden yellow color in the glass. Shy aromas of lemon peel, peach skin and nutty oak. Richly endowed with well-ripened citrus, yellow peach and tropical fruit flavors blessed with a deft touch of oak. Rich and creamy in the mouth, with engaging finishing power. This wine reflects plenty of California sunshine in a style more driven by fruit than acidity.* **93.**

## **Laetitia Vineyards, Arroyo Grande, CA**

**2015 Laetitia Single Vineyard La Colline Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., \$60. Name means "The Hillside" in French. Sourced from low-yielding blocks in the heart of the Laetitia estate vineyard. Only produced in exceptional vintages. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Nicely appointed aromas of cherry reduction sauce, rose petal, pomegranate and terra cotta. Light to mid weight cherry core with a subtle smoky note in the background. Inviting juiciness and balanced fine-grain tannins, finishing a bit flat and short. The aromatics are the most appealing feature of this wine at this stage. I have had much better examples of this wine in previous vintages.* **89.**

**2015 Laetitia Single Vineyard Les Galets Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc. \$60. The name means "Stones" in French. Sourced from low-yielding blocks of modern plantings. Only produced in the most promising vintages. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of purple berry, underbrush and barrel are muted. Mid weight flavors of blackberry and boysenberry with a thread of oak in the background. Very lacy and silky, with spot-on balance, but the fruit flavor is a bit flat and infused with a conflagrante taste that is unusual and persists even over a day's time of tasting. This wine is not up to its usual excellence in this vintage.* **89.**

## **MacRostie Winery & Vineyards, Healdsburg, CA**

**2015 MacRostie Winery & Vineyards Thale's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 740 cases, \$56, screw cap. Steve and spouse Thale founded MacRostie together in 1987. Thale's Vineyard surrounds the winery's new home in Westside Road in the Russian River Valley. The winery's first estate vineyard. Clones 2A and 23. 100% de-stemmed, inoculated with yeast after a 3-day cold soak. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 37% new. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose offers a combination of fruity black cherry aromas and savory notes of earthy flora, herbs and toasty oak. Light to mid weight in style, offering flavors of Bing cherry and purple grape with an accent of baking spice and herbs. Somewhat reserved in character, but displaying satisfactory mid palate intensity and a juicy finish.* **90.**



**2015 MacRostie Kent Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.9% alc., 315 cases, \$46, screw cap. Kent Ritchie has farmed his iconic vineyard for nearly 40 years. Wente selection from original 40-year-old plantings and 15- to 20-year old vines. Whole cluster pressed, barrel fermented and aged on the lees with occasional stirring for 15 months. 15% new French oak.

*Light golden yellow color in the glass. Soaring aromas of lemon, pineapple, pear, creme brûlée and a hint of slate. Lovely flavors of pear, lemon, pineapple and melon that are both intense and lifted by vibrant acidity. Impeccably composed and balanced, with a slightly viscous mouth feel and a grand finish that really holds on. Goes down like mother's milk. A special wine from a venerable vineyard and exceptional by any measure. Terrific price to boot. 95.*



## **Martinelli Winery & Vineyards, Windsor, CA**

The Martinelli family are part of the historical fiber of the Russian River Valley. They have been growing grapes and apples in Sonoma County since 1887, planting their first Pinot Noir in 1970. Two historic hop barns grace the estate property on River Road that were converted into a tasting room and winery. The Martinellis began producing Pinot Noir under their own label in 1993, with Helen Turkey as the winemaker.

Currently, Lee Martinelli, Sr., and his two sons, Lee, Jr., and George, oversee the management of 400 acres of prime vineyard land in the Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast appellations.

Helen Turley left her consulting winemaking position in 2010 and turned winemaking over to Bryan Kvamme. Courtney Wagoner, a veteran of winemaking stints at Wild Horse Winery, Gundlach Bundschu, and Alderbrook. She joined Martinelli as assistant winemaker in 2015 and was promoted to winemaker in 2017. Erin Green has been the consulting winemaker since 2010.

I became interested in Martinelli many years ago, not because of Pinot Noir, but because of their Jackass Hill Zinfandel which I relished. As you can see from my website, I have not tasted many Martinelli Pinot Noir wines, in part because they have never been submitted for review.

Many wines are sold on the winery's website at [www.martinelliwinery.com](http://www.martinelliwinery.com), with special bottlings only offered to tasting room visitors and long time mailing list members. All Martinelli wines are from estate vineyards.

The Martinelli Pinot Noir wines have a distinctive style characterized by high extraction, fruit picked at higher Brix and resultant higher alcohols. Although the goal of winemaking here is to display the individuality of different vineyard sites, the hedonistic, fruit-driven style tends to obscure the terroir. That said, the wines are consistently lauded by the wine press with high scores and this piqued my interest enough to buy two bottles and see for myself.

**2015 Martinelli Bondi Home Ranch Water Trough Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.4% alc., \$70. 23 acres of clones 114, "828," 777, 667, 943 and Calera planted in Goldridge sandy loam soil. *Very dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of black fruits, toast and vanilla creme. Full-bodied and luscious with copious purple and blackberry flavors supported by complimentary oak. The alcohol and tannins are well-integrated in this wine that could be mistaken for a Zinfandel. Well-made in this style that pleases with a slick and smooth mouthfeel. There is less acidity than wines from Green Valley typically offer but there is enough to propel the wine. Noticeably more mellow when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 92.*



**2015 Martinelli Zio Tony Ranch "Grace Nicole" Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.3% alc., \$70. This vineyard is named after Lee Martinelli Sr.'s uncle. Zico means "uncle" in Italian and is pronounced "tseo." At one time, this site was the largest apple orchard in Sonoma County. When Zico Tony passed away in 1971, his



nephew, Lee Martinelli, Sr., took over management of the estate. This 45-acre vineyard was planted to Pinot Noir (115, 777 and “828”), Chardonnay and Syrah wine grapes in 2000, 2001 and 2006. Goldridge sandy loam soil. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Reserved aromas of blackberry reduction sauce, spice, raisin and redwood forest. A mid weight plus styled wine that has a bit more vibrancy than the Bondi Home Ranch bottling and more Pinot charm. The sappy fruit flavors of blackberry and ollaliberry are engaged with a welcome spice note. Very silky in the mouth, with good balance, finishing with willing intensity. Unchanged when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 92.*

## Migration, St. Helena, CA

Since winemaker Dana Epperson has taken over, the brand has increased in quality by leaps and bounds for both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Dana does upwards of 50 individual Pinot Noir fermentations each vintage, with some as small as a single ton.

Migration is now going beyond its Anderson Valley origins and exploring Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from other special cool-climate wine growing regions.

The wines are celled and bottled by Migration, Hopland, CA. Migration is part of the Duckhorn Wine Company portfolio. Visit [www.migrationwines.com](http://www.migrationwines.com).

**2015 Migration Running Creek Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$68. Migration’s estate vineyard located in the heart of the Russian River Valley. A selection of the best blocks and barrels from this site (only about 3% of the vineyard’s total grapes). Second vintage. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Shy, but pleasurable scents of black fruits and gentle oak. A little riper fruit and more sap and structure than the Dutton bottling. Fruit-driven, with hints of cola, earth and oak. Nicely balanced, with a satiny texture and an agreeable ending. 92.*

**2015 Migration Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$68. There is not much specific about the Dutton Ranch designation since the Duttons farm so many acres, but this bottling concentrates on the Green Valley or coolest and foggiest part of the Russian River Valley. Clones 115 and “828.” Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new, 60% neutral. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose opens broadly in the glass, sporting aromas of black cherry, Asian spices, and underbrush. An intense attack of black cherry fruit alerts the senses in this middleweight styled wine that is giving and forward. Creamy and sleek in the mouth, with melded tannins, and compatible acidity. The finish is gratifying but not extraordinary. The mild oak shadow needs some time to fully integrate. 92.*

**2015 Migration Drum Canyon Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$68. This vineyard was planted in 2003 by the Dierberg family and is located at the eastern edge of the Sta. Rita Hills AVA. Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new and 60% neutral. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Reserved aromas of black cherry, earthy flora, toast and cigar box. Stunning on entry, with loads of black cherry, raspberry and spice flavor in a mid weight plus style that delivers immersed tannins and vibrant acidity. Nuances of earth and mushroom add interest. Very sleek and refreshing with the longest finish of the trio of 2015 Migration Pinot Noir wines tasted. 93.*



## Windrun Vintners, Buellton, CA

This winery, founded by Lance Mason in 2010, is a Santa Barbara County-based negotiant focused on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The wines offer outstanding value. Veteran Ken Brown in the winemaker. Wines are celled and bottled by Windrun Vintners, Buellton, CA.. Visit [www.windrunwine.com](http://www.windrunwine.com).

When Lance emailed me in December 2017 offering to send two of the Windrun wines for editorial consideration, I really had to laugh at his clever presentation. I will pass it on in edited form. *“To your Royal Highness. Your Grace. With all respect to your position in the Royal Houses of Ampelography and Oenology, may this humble servant request an audience with your grace for our new offerings. With your indulgence, m’lord, the two wines are quite distinct from each other. May we tempt your Highness with a taste?”*



**2014 Windrun Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir.** 14.5% alc., pH 3.46, TA 0.68, 733 cases, \$32. 100% Wädenswil 2A clone, Sanford & Benedict Vineyard. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Enjoyable fragrance of Bing cherry, cola and brown spice. Light to mid weight oak-kissed cherry core that is more intense on entry than exit. Easygoing, silky and refined, with good acidity and equitable tannins.* **89.**

**2015 Windrun Vintage Selection No. 12 Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.44, 359 cases, \$34. Four clones including 667 and 115 from primarily Evans Ranch and nearby vineyards. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Moody aromas of well-ripened black fruits, raisin, toasty barrel and underbrush. Fruit driven in a mid weight style, with a foundation of blackberry and cassis flavors overlain with toasty, even charred oak. Deep, dark and mysterious, with integrated tannins, a satiny mouthfeel and some finishing intensity. Too much barrel input for my taste.* **87.**

## More Wines

**2015 Belle Glos Clark & Telephone Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$55. Released August 2017. Heavy wax on neck with pull tap opener, Winemaker Joseph J. Wagner. Produced and bottled by Belle Glos Wines in St. Helena. Martini clone. 100% de-stemmed. Up to 2-week cold soak. Fermented in a combination of closed and open-top stainless steel fermenters with punch downs and pump overs. Free-run juice to barrel. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 60% new, 40% seasoned. Racked twice, once after MLF and once before making the final blend. *Dark garnet color in the glass. Aromas of boysenberry jam, vanilla, caramel and menthol. Full-bodied and lush, with flavors of blueberry, boysenberry and blackberry backed by sweet oak and vanillin. There is a vanilla ice cream cone flavor that stands out to me. A flowing wine with a velvety texture that will appeal to those who like a succulent style. Very similar to Meiomi Pinot Noir.* **86.**

**2015 Comartin Cellars R-Bar-R Ranch Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 50 cases, \$29.99 (SRP is \$55 on website). Vineyard is located at 1,100 feet elevation at the southern tip of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Adam Comartin is the winemaker. A puzzling wine for me as *Wine Enthusiast* awarded this wine 94 points. The winery has been highly praised for a number of varietal releases so I was curious to try this wine that I purchased. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. The nose reveals piquant aromas of tobacco, hot smoke and toast. The mid weight core of black cherry fruit is heavily infused with charred oak and green tobacco flavors. Silky in the mouth, with fine-grain tannins and some cherry-driven finishing intensity and length. Unchanged when tasted the following day and somewhat unpleasant to drink. Can't reach any definitive conclusions other than this may have been a bad bottle. Not scored.*



**2015 Yamakiri Filigreen Farm Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$33. Produced and bottled by Balo Vineyards, Philo. Name means, "Mountain Fog." *Moderate ruby red color in the glass. Lovely aromas of red grape, cherry, rose in bloom, and earthy vegetation. Light to mid weight flavors of cherry, cranberry and spice framed by spirited acidity and notable fine-grain tannins. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the wine was even more appealing with better acid and tannin integration.* **89.**

# Pinot Briefs

**Winemakers & Merchants Using Virtual Reality** The VeeR VR Blog at [www.veer.tv/blog](http://www.veer.tv/blog) has posted an interesting article titled, “6 Ways Top Winemakers and Merchants are Utilizing Virtual Reality.” Wineries are using virtual tours of their vineyards and cellars to engage customers. In the case of Brancott Estate, a New-Zealand-based winery, the winemaker created an immersive experience called the “Red Shed,” where the audience gets to walk around their winery while actually smelling and tasting freshly sliced fruit and wine through a specially crafted headset.

**Willamette Valley Sub-AVAs added Regional Reputation Premiums to Prices** A study published in the *Journal of Wine Economics*, Volume 12, Number 4, 2017, looked at 2,221 Wine Spectator-rated Pinot Noir wines from between 1984 and 2008 using a regression analysis to demonstrate that regional reputation premiums have significantly increased with the creation of sub-AVAs, and that the price-quality ratio gap between sub-AVAs and the rest of the Willamette Valley have widened. For example, Dundee Hills was able to collect \$12.69 more on a “90-point” wine than it could before being officially classified as its own sub-AVA. <http://www.wine-economics.org/aawe/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Vol12-Issue04-Price-Effects-of-Establishing-a-new-Sub-AVA-within-Oregons-Willamette-Valley-AVA.pdf>.

**Value of Gold Medals in Wine Competitions** A study by Christopher Bitter in the *Journal of Wine Economics*, Volume 12, Number 4, 2017, looked at competition medals and their relevance. The author concluded that by itself, knowledge that a wine is a gold medal winner appears to have little relevance to the consumer, as these wines do not score significantly higher in major wine publications than silver or bronze medal winners. Evidence suggests that golds from some competitions may be more relevant than others, but it may be difficult for the consumer to identify these competitions. <http://www.wine-economics.org/aawe/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Vol12-Issue04-Wine-Competitions-Reevaluating-the-Gold-Standard.pdf>.

**Wine Freedom News** Wine shipping bills will appear in New York, Massachusetts and Mississippi in 2018, but other new bills may be introduced. Tom Wark of [winefreedom.org](http://winefreedom.org) emphasizes that consumers must take action to support these bills and let lawmakers in every state know they are expected to support consumer rights. Interstate shipping of wine from retailers is banned in 36 states. On Wine Freedom’s “Wine Shipping and Politics” page you can learn where retailer wine shipments are banned, the impact of those bans, and the reasons that states have instituted bans.





**Gains From Participating in Contests** The American Association of Wine Economists posted a Working Paper No. 223 in January 2018, “The Causal Impact of Medals on Wine Producers’ Prices and the Gains from Participating in Contests.” The results of this paper indicated that the producers of medaled wines can increase their price by an estimated 13%. The impact for gold is much larger than for silver and bronze. The incentives to participate in wine contests is high. [http://www.wine-economics.org/aawe/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/AAWE\\_WP223.pdf](http://www.wine-economics.org/aawe/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/AAWE_WP223.pdf).

**Sta. Rita Hills Wine Alliance “Rails ’N Wine”** Alma Rosa Winery and Hitching Post wines will be featured on a fun and informative day trip by rail from Santa Barbara to San Luis Obispo. Taste wine while rolling down the rails on The Silver Splendor vintage rail car as you take in the vistas of the Central Coast countryside. The date is February 24, 2018, and deadline for tickets is February 19. Call Terry Remick at 805-680-0397 between the hours of 9:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m..

**Another Wine Aerator but This One is Digitally Connected** The Aveine wine aerator was unveiled at the January 2018 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Aveine takes the guesswork out of uncorking a bottle to obtain the ideal tasting experience. The aerator is placed on an open bottle and the user can scan the label with their phone to receive the wine’s optimal aeration time. The specifications then integrate with an algorithm created by wine experts to determine the precise condition for decanting and aerates the wine accordingly. Visit [www.avein.paris/](http://www.avein.paris/). (I only offer this new device for interest to the reader as I personally find little use for aerators, preferring to simply decant wines).

**Moderate Alcohol Consumption by Breastfeeding Causes No Harm** An Australian study published in *Drug and Alcohol Review* in March 2017 found that low levels of alcohol consumption had no impact on breastfeeding duration, infant feeding, sleep behavior and infant development at eight weeks. Infants whose mothers drank at eight weeks postpartum had more favorable results for personal-social development at twelve months compared with those whose mothers abstained. The study did not condone excessive alcohol consumption in new mothers.

**Drinking Alcohol and Weight Gain** The International Scientific Forum on Alcohol Research looked at published research in the journal *Obesity* titled, “Change in Alcohol Intake in Relation to Weight Change in a Cohort of US Men with 24 years of Follow-up.” Most epidemiological studies do not find that light or moderate drinkers weigh more than their abstaining peers and some even show lower weight among moderate drinkers than among abstainers. The reasons for this apparent effect are unclear. This study found very slight increases in weight for subjects consuming alcoholic beverages. These increases (mostly less than one-half pound over a four-year period) were statistically significant for beer and liquor, but not for wine or light beer. The investigators concluded that any effects of drinking on weight are very minor and not of clinical significance. The Forum concluded, “While the paper indicates that calories from alcohol are metabolized similarly to those from other foods and do affect weight change, the changes associated with moderate alcohol intake appear to be very minor and would be expected to have very little effect on the development of obesity.”

**UC Davis Century Experiment on How Natural Wine Corks Age** UC Davis researchers are conducting a 100-year experiment to examine how the structure and chemistry of natural wine corks change over time and whether these changes extend the shelf life of the wine. Researchers will determine whether or not certain characteristics of natural corks slow the transmission of oxygen in wine over time, which can directly affect the quality of the wine and how well it ages. The project will examine already bottled wine of different ages, but also follow newly bottled wines for many years. In a separate retrospective study, researchers will examine wines one, three, five, ten and twenty years after bottling using both high-quality and standard-quality corks. The project will also examine oxygen transmission of natural corks for up to 100 years in a prospective study and compare these to manufactured synthetic corks.

**Deborah Hall of Gypsy Canyon Winery Retiring** Deborah Hall is calling it quits as winemaker for Gypsy Canyon Winery in the Sta. Rita Hills. She wanted to recognize two highly talented people who assisted her through the years: Jeff Newton of Coastal Vineyard Care and winemaker Paul Lato. Deborah will be handing over Gypsy Canyon Winery to the next adventurous people who desire to produce wine while enjoying the Santa Barbara County wine country life. If you are interested, drop a note to Deborah at Gypsy Canyon Winery, Sta. Rita Hills, Lompoc, California 93436. The last vintage Paul Lato and Deborah created will be released in the spring 2018: 2015 Gypsy Canyon Estate “The Moment” Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$95), 2015 Gypsy Canyon Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay (\$75) and Gypsy Canyon Estate Ancient Vine Marcelina’s Vineyard

Angelica (\$155 per 375 ml) and the Ground Boots Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, her philanthropic label (\$40). Visit [www.gypsycanyon.com](http://www.gypsycanyon.com).



Deborah bought her 290-acre ranch in 1990 with her physician husband and moved into the 1800s farmhouse on the property. After her husband sadly passed away in 1997, she sold 160 acres and kept 12 acres of vineyards including 9 acres of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris and 3 acres of Mission vines dating to about 1897. After acquiring the property, the Halls were surprised to discover ancient vines covered in brush. Initially, they were thought to be Zinfandel, but DNA testing at UC Davis revealed that they were actually Mission vines. Presumably, the Mission grape was brought to California missions by Franciscan monks leading to the name "Mission" grape. The grape was historically used to make sweet wines for the monks to enjoy. Deborah believes that Dona Marcelina Felix Dominguez, the first known woman winegrower in California dating to the early 1800s, established the Mission vines on Deborah's property. Today, the Mission grape vineyard, now named Dona Marcelina's Vineyard, is the oldest producing vineyard in Santa Barbara County. Deborah has crafted a California Original Angelica since 2001 using notes from winemaker Emile Vache from 1891. It is a very limited production dessert wine fortified with brandy and a rare taste of California history. Angelica is offered in hand blown bottles that are historically correct.



**Huneus Vintners Purchases Benton-Lane Winery in Oregon** Huneus Vintners of Napa Valley has made its first purchase in Oregon's Willamette Valley, acquiring Benton-Lane Winery including the winery, brand, inventory and an option to buy the winery's 142-acre vineyard planted to Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc. Benton-Lane previous owners, the Girard family, will continue to farm the vineyard and produce wines while Huneus Vintners will focus on sales and marketing. Huneus Vintners also owns Flowers Vineyards & Winery in the Sonoma Coast and Quintessa in Napa Valley.

**Sonoma County Winegrowers Unveil New Sustainability Label** Sonoma County plans to become the nation's first 100% sustainable wine region in 2019. To date, 92% of Sonoma County's vineyard acres have completed the sustainability self-assessment and 72% of the vineyard acreage in the county has been certified sustainable according to [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com).



**Taxes on Wine May Be Changing** Congress passed a tax reform package in December 2017 that most probably will include changes in how wine is taxed. Wines under 16 percent alcohol may be all taxed at about 21 cents per bottle. What this could mean is that a domestic Pinot Noir labeled at 13.8% may actually be 15.3 percent alcohol since crossing the 14 percent accuracy line would be permissible. It is unclear what the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau will do and guidance is expected to be forthcoming within a few weeks. Read more at <https://www.wine-searcher.com/m/2018/01/tax-changes-hit-wines-alcohol-levels>.

**Number of Wine Writing Subscription Websites** Richard Hemming MW recently looked at the number of wine writing subscription websites. He found 31. Yearly subscriptions ranged from \$145 (Burghound) to \$32 (The California Grapevine). Readers of Hemming's article contributed at least another six websites to the total. See the list at <https://www.richardhemmingmw.com/blog/how-many-wine-writing-subscription-sites-are-there>.

**Wine Critics Puzzling Reviews** In the latest *Wine Enthusiast* there is a reviewed Oregon Pinot Noir given a score of 92 and the review notes, "A delicate potpourri of rhubarb and wild berry, with a streak of barrel toast. Darker notes of espresso and cocoa emerge on the extended finish." 92, really? All that oak? A Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir was awarded a score of 90 and the review said, "Small amounts of Syrah and Zinfandel, this Pinot swings for the fences....robust oak and a ripe body give it power and weight." 90, really? With robust oak? Does this sound appealing for a Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir with a stated alcohol of 15.3% and given a score of 93? "Rich and lavish, black cherry, chocolate chip cookie dough, crushed slate (?) and light mint....the soft, lush palate is creamy in black-plum pudding and coffee cream flavors. 93, really? Do you relish chocolate chip cookie dough and coffee cream in your Pinot? Another Pinot Noir review mentions aroma of "crushed gravel." Have you ever smelled crushed gravel? And finally, although it is well known that there are literally hundreds of aromatic compounds in wine, is it humanly possible to identify four different herbal scents in a single Pinot Noir that one critic found including sweet dill (I had no idea that dill could be sweet), sage, tarragon and fennel? The lexicon of Pinot Noir or pinot speak can be confusing to the consumer. A large portion of the entire human repertoire of smell and taste descriptors have been invoked at one time or another to convey a taster's Pinot Noir drinking experience. Wine critics tend to have the greatest imagination and the largest pinot speak vocabulary. I am just as guilty as the next wine reviewer for stretching the boundaries of pinot speak.

**I Leave You With a Quote** "Making Cabernet Sauvignon is like coming home every night to the best black Labrador you'd ever owned. No matter how long you have been gone, or how late it is, the dog - tail wagging - is thrilled to see you. Making Pinot Noir is like coming home to the worst cat. The cat would look at you as if to say, Where the hell have you been?"....Winemaker Scott Rich





## Only Pinot Noir Will Do On Valentine's Day

For serious lovers on the upcoming Valentine's Day, Pinot Noir is the drink of choice. Pinot Noir's powerful smells (and alcohol) can bring men and women together. Maybe that is why God invented Pinot Noir.

Canadian writer Konrad Ejbich once claimed, "I look for places where I can drink Pinot Noir with one hand under the table," and said, "Pinot Noir is heaven in a glass....the color of ruby lips, and smells like great sex."

The pheromones of the Pinot Noir grape are very closely related to male pheromones. Certain aromas in the Pinot Noir grape like spice, musk, and barnyard are associated with the principal male sex hormone, androsterone. Truffles, vanilla and other oak smells of Pinot Noir aged in oak barrels are also androsterone-like.

These smells can unlock powerful memories and open the door to lust and desire. The olfactory glands in the nose are directly connected to our frontal lobes in the brain that do most of our serious mental work as well as functioning as the emotional part of our brain. Smells then can unlock very powerful memories and feelings and help unlock natural urges. When the stinky wonderland of Pinot Noir is combined with the psychological effects of alcohol, every man begins to look or at least feel like George Clooney and every woman resembles Beyoncé.

What all this proves is what we have known for years: great Pinot Noir will get you a sure thing. If it wasn't for all those pheromones and Pinot Noir, we might still be walking on all fours.