

PinotFile[©]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

200th Issue of the PinotFile

It is hard to believe that I have been pumping out this newsletter dedicated to Pinoficionados week after week for over four years! There was a time in the 1980s when people thought I was crazy to like Pinot Noir. I was an outcast and eccentric who was discriminated against by the powerful Cabernet species of man (Anthropos caberpolis) who prowled the aisles of wine retailers. "Oh sure," they would say, "there are some decent wines from Burgundy, but California will never produce any good Pinot Noir." Most devoted wine drinkers considered Pinot Noir an afterthought, a weak substitute for Cabernet Sauvignon. The attitude had been fostered by the poor quality of California and Oregon Pinot Noir at the time, which was often deserving of its denigrated reputation. "California Burgundy" was the stuff that Gallo bottled under the "Hearty Burgundy" label (actually a blend of zinfandel, syrah, and horrors, Pinot Noir from farmers such as Joe Rochioli, Jr.). In spite of this, I had experienced enough shining examples to spark my interest and Pinot Noir was all I wanted to drink. The fact that it was touchy, difficult to grow, and notoriously challenging in the winery made it even more attractive to me. I was convinced that it could be the most delicious, sensuous and overwhelmingly brilliant red wine on the planet..

I had joined a wine club that met monthly to taste wines but I was practically an outcast who was the butt of many jokes. I persevered despite many years of listening to my colleagues wax poetically for hours (zzzzzzzz) on the virtues of B.V., Mondavi Reserve, Dunn, Chateau Montelena, St. Juliens and Pauillacs. I shocked the membership by presenting a "Superbowl of Pinot Noir" tasting which featured Pinot Noirs from Longoria, Gary Farrell, Rochioli, Saintsbury and Domaine Drouhin, among others. As the years passed, the Pinot Noirs from Oregon and California became better and better and I taught the group a few important French words like terroir and Cote d'Or. The cabophiles began to loosen up and become adventurous. A number of them actually developed a preference for Pinot Noir and organized Pinot Noir tastings themselves while cases of Bordeaux languished in their cellars. They would remark: "Rusty, you're a Prince for introducing me to Pinot Noir." The moniker stuck and my passion for Pinot led me to start a newsletter in April, 2001 to spread my enthusiasm. The rest is Pinot history. The *Wine Spectator* has not called for my story but neither has the Grim Reaper so life is good.

**Compromises
Are For
Relationships,
Not Pinot Noir**

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"My husband and I feel we should be sending you a big thank you with each issue of your newsletter. How you can offer this informative, interesting, fun, valuable newsletter on such a consistent basis is beyond us. We just want you to know we acknowledge and appreciate what you do. It is a wonderful addition to our lives."

Readers Marsha & Bob Mayer



Aussie Blokes Hot On The Pinot Trail

When the word “Australia” comes up in a wine discussion, what do most people think of? Shiraz, “Stickies”, Yellow Tail. Pinot Noir is usually an afterthought, but I have news for you. The Aussies have quietly followed the course of events here in California over the last thirty years. They have figured out the best cool locations to plant Pinot Noir and have acquired many of the newer clones so that now there are fifteen significant clones of Pinot Noir prospering in Australia. Using newer trellising, employing crop-thinning methods including meticulous hand pruning, and utilizing modern vinification techniques necessary for Pinot Noir, they are producing world-class Pinot Noir. No more Aussie jokes about Pinots being “fairies”.

The Mornington Peninsula is now recognized as the best place in mainland Australia to grow Pinot Noir. Tucked into the southeast corner of Australia in the Victoria Province, it is one hour south of Melbourne. The Peninsula is surrounded by Port Phillip Bay, Western Park Bay and Bass Strait. The climate here is cool maritime with high summer humidity and rainfall creating a late-ripening region. There are at least 51 wineries in the Peninsula region, with most of them concentrating on Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Gris.. The modern age of viticulture began here in the early 1970s with the initial plantings of Elgee Park, Kewley’s Vineyard, and Main Ridge Estate among others. Main Ridge Estate (see review below) was the first commercial vineyard and winery. Many producers have sprung up in the last ten years, but output of Pinot Noir is still very limited, with most producers farming less than 10 hectares of vines, and many with only 1



hectare or so. The three largest Pinot Noir estates are Kooyong, Stonier Wines, and Yabby Lake Vineyard. Two other areas in Victoria are having some success with Pinot Noir, including the Yarra Valley (generally too warm), and the Macedon Ranges (see previous PinotFile on the excellent Curly Flat Pinot Noirs and this issue’s review of Bindi). The releases from all regions tend to be single-vineyard Pinot Noirs rather than blends.

A past issue of the Australian magazine, *Gourmet Traveller*, had a feature comparing the Pinot Noirs from different regions of Australia. The Pinot Noirs from the Mornington Peninsula were described as characteristically featuring “berries, spices, musk, game, and *sous-bois*. They tend to have less acidity and more alcohol than those from Tasmania, with consistently soft tannins.” The Pinot Noirs from the Yarra Valley and other parts of Victoria are “richer and heavier” reflecting the ripeness created by the warmer climates.

With extremely small production, very little of the premium Aussie Pinot Noir makes it to the California shore. Fortunately, my good friend and Pinot enthusiast, David Glass of Yabby Lake Vineyard, sends me a few choice contraband bottles to sample, hidden in his wife’s luggage, when she travels to California to see her daughter and family. Also, Andy Tan, who works with Sandro Mosele at Kooyong as well as operating a fine wine retail operation (Auric Pacific Fine Wines), manages to get a few special bottles to me occasionally to sample. The following “Tall Poppy” Pinot Noirs were tasted recently.

2003 Moondarra Pinot Noir This is a new quality label owned by Neil Prentice, a former Melbourne-based sommelier/restaurateur and made by Sandro Mosele and Neil Prentice at the Kooyong facility. According to Andy Tan, “this is one of the most impressive Pinot Noirs I have tasted from Australia.” The wine displayed a gorgeous cooked-cherry nose. Complex flavors of oak, smoke and cherries were blended into a lighter style. The finish was slightly tannic, but there was vibrant acidity that allowed the wine to go beautifully with food.

2004 Kooyong Ferrous Vineyard (barrel sample). A wine Andy Tan is co-producing with Sandro Mosele from Kooyong’s Ferrous Vineyard. Two barrels will be bottled under the MAD Pinot Noir label. A young wine that has all the right stuff. Still a little pudgy and needs some integration of oak and tannins. A gorgeous nose. The entry explodes with flavors of blackberry and saturates the palate with fruit, spice and noble complexity. Very soft on the palate. Can you say Gevrey? Impressive.

2003 Main Ridge Estate Half Acre Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir 14% alc., screw cap. Nat White, a graduate of Charles Stuart University in Wine Science, is the owner, viticulturist, and winemaker. Main Ridge Estate consists of 3 hectares of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir planted in 1975. Average vine age now is 29 years. The 2003 vintage had perfect weather but the cold wet weather the year before kept yields very low (1.3 tons/acre). There are two bottlings from this winery: Half Acre and The Acre, with the Half Acre being more intense with firmer tannins. Total production including some Chardonnay is 1,000 cases. Nat says the 2003's may be equal to, or perhaps better than any of the winery's Pinots to date. Well, he's got that right. A flat-out douser which is world-class. This is a Pinot Noir that words just don't do justice to. There is elegant integration of luscious Pinot fruits with refreshing acidity, cashmere tannins, and a spicy kick at the tail end that keeps you wagging. Once you taste a Pinot Noir like this, you will do just about anything to find another bottle like it. The wine will sing on its own (acappella) or is very comfortable with food. Outrageous, worth a trip to Australia.

2002 Bindi "Original Vineyard" Macedon Ranges Pinot Noir 13% alc.. Bindi Pinot Noirs are generally loved by the Aussie wine press and ranked in the top 3 or 4 in Australia by some writers. Winemaker Michael Dhillion is very talented and has worked in the past with some famous vigneron in France including J.F. Mugnier in the Cote-de-Nuits and Jean Vesselle in Bouzy, Champagne. The regular Pinot Noir bottling is a Chambolle-Musigny style, while the limited Block 5 is a bigger, earthier style more like a Morey-St-Denis. He also makes an excellent Chardonnay labeled Quartz and a sparkling wine of note. A fresh nose of toasty oak and cherries. The wines are dedicated to Kostas Rind, a teacher who introduced Dhillion to wine and his picture is displayed on the label. Yields for this bottling were less than 1 ton/acre. A really, really soft wine that goes down like 10W-30. A little herb potpourri and mint adds interest. Tannins are completely submerged. A sensual drink that delivers pure pleasure.

2003 d'Arenberg The Feral Fox Adelaide Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$28. This wine is imported to the US. It caught my eye because of the well-known Australian Shiraz producer, d'Arenberg, and the humorous story on the back label. Since 1912 the Olson family has farmed vineyards in southern Australia. They also purchase fruit from the Adelaide Hills. Feral foxes in the area have an appetite for grapes. The grapes have a laxative effect creating a natural organic fertilizer for the vineyards. This wine is known at the winery as "Funky Feral Flatulent Fox." There is not too much good or bad to say about this Fox. A bit cloudy, the nose is decent if a bit subdued. There are earth and mushroom flavors predominating. The intensity and length are wanting and a little tannic bite makes the finish grouchy. Decent, but not great.

Your Mother Always Told You To Drink Your Noir

The April, 2005 issue of *Wine Business Monthly* reports that in the four weeks ending 1/15/05, Pinot Noir sales have increased 32.6% in dollar value and 26.9% in volume over the same period in the United States in 2004. In addition, there has been a 10% increase over December's numbers in terms of dollar sales and more than 11% in volume. A.C. Nielson reports that Pinot Noir sales are at record levels with nearly 370,000 cases sold from 10/24/04 to 1/15/05, an increase of over 16% versus the same period a year earlier. It is domestic Pinot Noir that is driving the sales growth.

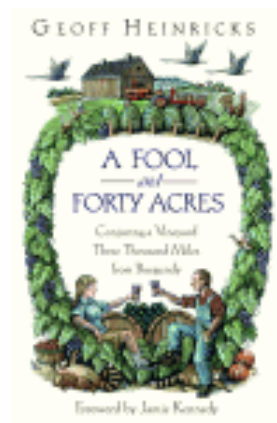
In the recent Wine & Food 16th Annual Restaurant Poll published in *Wine & Spirits* (04/05), Pinot Noir has had the most significant gain over the last four years for any one varietal in the Poll. The restaurant industry often refers to Pinot Noir as a "bridge wine", because if a group is ordering meat and fish, Pinot Noir will usually go well with both. This year's Poll marks the first time that Pinot Noir's sales exceeded 10% of all of the top selling varietals. Of the Restaurant Top 50 Selling Producers, the following Pinot Noir specialists were listed: David Bruce (#26), Acacia (#38), Wild Horse (#40), Merry Edwards (#41), Maison Louis Jadot (#45). Au Bon Climat (#49) and Estancia Estate (#50). Of the Most Popular 25 Brands of Pinot Noir, the top 10 were Merry Edwards, David Bruce, Acacia, Cristom, La Crema, Domaine Serene, Wild Horse, Kenwood, Saintsbury, and MacMurray Ranch. Oregon had 14 of the top 25 brands.

Oregon Pinot Noir production was 1.3 million cases in 2004. The state's 300 wineries sold 540,000 cases of Pinot Noir in 2004, up from 428,000 in 2001.

Farming Pinot Noir On The Edge

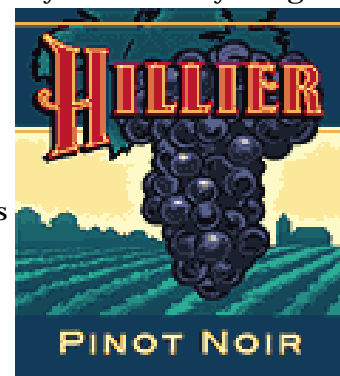
Kent Fortner, winemaker at Green Truck Cellars in Carneros has said, “There’s this theme that repeats itself in wine. The greatest wines are made near the outer fringes of viticulture and winemaking parameters, where the greatest risks also exist.” This description is very apropos for a group of dedicated and hardy wine artisans whose dream to farm Pinot Noir in Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada. Prince Edward County is an island that sticks out into Lake Ontario half-way between Ontario and Kingston. The land is essentially a plateau of limestone spread over 250,000 acres. The Niagara region of Canada has always been described as Canada’s “Napa” for its winery achievements to date, while the emerging Prince Edward County has been compared to Sonoma, Napa’s neighbor in northern California. Although Prince Edward County has much of the rustic farmland charm, the country inns and gourmet restaurants of Sonoma, the comparison ends there. Winters in the County can be brutal and devastating to grapes. If the growing season proceeds in a desirable manner, 150 to 155 days comprise a growing season marked by a warm spring and a hot, dry summer, close in length to Burgundy. But, and this is the rub, the last three winters have been severe with temperatures dropping into the low 30s. Although almost all growers bury their vines, a recent spring brought cold spells down to -4 degrees in May, right after the vines had been uncovered.

The trials and tribulations of growing Pinot Noir in this region were well-documented in the book by Geoff Henricks, “*A Fool and Forty Acres, Conjuring a Vineyard Three Thousand Miles from Burgundy*”, which was previously reviewed in the PinotFile and highly recommended reading for all pinotphiles. Geoff and his wife, Lauren Grice, were the first to come to the County looking specifically for winegrowing land. They purchased their dream in 1994 in the hamlet of Hillier. The vineyard is planted primarily to Pinot Noir with 30 different clones being studied. St. Laurent is also planted as a second red grape and Melon de Bourgogne is the white variety selected for this site. As one of the pioneering vigneronns in Prince Edward County, Geoff has become a mentor and consultant to those who have followed. Currently there are about 12 wineries in the County and over 600 acres of vines planted (from less than 20 acres in 2000). The County is the fastest growing wine region in Canada. Prominent Canadian wine writer, Tony Aspler, has claimed that Prince Edward County has the potential to produce the best Pinot Noir in Canada. There has not been much production to date to support such a claim, but the terroir shouts potential here.



Dan Taylor is a good example of one the small boutique vintner who settled here to focus on Pinot Noir. Dan has been inspired and guided by Geoff Henricks and has worked as a volunteer at Geoff’s vineyard. Dan and his wife, Carrie, bought a small 18 acre property in 2000 and have 4.5 acres under vines. The timing was not ideal as Dan’s wife was eight months pregnant with the couple’s third child. With no Starbucks in site and child care hard to find, she still agreed to support Dan’s dream (he claims he would die unless she conceded but that is an exaggeration, or is it?). The couple live in Picton and farm in Hillier twenty minutes away along a traffic-free beautiful country road.

1.5 acres of the land are planted to high-density Pinot Noir (3ft x4ft spacing or 3630 vines per acre which is triple the norm for Ontario). 1.5 acres to St. Laurent, and 1.5 acres to Pinot Meunier at 3.5ft x 6ft spacing on riparia gloire. A red sparkling wine is planned in addition to Pinot Noir. The Pinot Noir clones are mixed - 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, and 459 on low vigor rootstocks (primarily riparia gloria which grows wild in the region). The soils are shallow and similar to those in Burgundy, that is, loam laced with limestone chunks. Locals call the soil “hillier gravel.” The underlain limestone offers excellent drainage. Because winters are so brutal, fruiting buds must be buried in order to survive, and the plant/trellis structure is all low to





to the ground (see photograph above). There are no trunks as they would die in the cold winters so everything in the vineyard is about 2-3 feet lower than you are used to seeing in warmer-weather vineyards. The fruiting buds are only a few inches off the ground so they are hilled without great difficulty. In April of each year, the vines are de-hilled. In June, the vines go from three inches to three feet tall and the vines are managed within the trellis. Weeding between the vines is done with a grape hoe and neem oil which repels bugs as well. There is no irrigation, farming is organic with inclusion of some biodynamic farming techniques. Late in September if the sugars and fruit are mature by taste, ideally 22-24 brix, the grapes are harvested. If a frost arrives unexpectedly, the leaves die and stop maturing the crop and harvest is forced to begin. The first plantings went in in 2001. A batch of Pinot Noir from the 2002 vintage was surprisingly complex and very Burgundian. The first commercial vintage was in 2003. Harvested at 21 brix, it was fermented with native yeast with no capitalization. An Associate Professor of Urban Planning at Ryerson University in Toronto enjoyed the wine and said, "By the way, your Pinot is a lovely inspiration and a promising example of the possibilities. Still firm tannins, but a terrific pipe-smoke and razzzy-sour cherry nose. Yum." The 2003 vintage produced 1000 bottles and 2004 should deliver 1500 bottles.

Dan also sources grapes from Little Creek Vineyards which has 2.5 acres planted near Hillier. Dan and Carrie's own estate property is called *Domaine Calcaire* (*calcaire* is French for limestone). Eventually Dan would like to build a small winery on his site. He is currently the Economic Development Officer for Prince Edward County.

Interestingly, Geoff Heinrick's vineyard has had some grapes mutate from red Pinot Noir to a white grape, called the "Geoff Heinrichs" clone. Eventually plans are to make a wine from this fruit inspired by Henri Gouges "La Perriere" of Burgundy which is wine made from the same mutation occurrence.

Dan has some background in marketing and I was very impressed by his special programs targeted to drawing consumers into his wine venture. I have been writing about this approach for a few years. Small wineries are always pinched financially but a smart marketing venture like this, intended to get the consumer intimately connected, can be beneficial to both the producer and consumer. Today it is not enough to expect the consumer to join a winery's mailing list, faithfully purchase and drink the offered wine. There is too much competition. The consumer wants to become viscerally connected to the process and the people involved in the winemaking, part of the "pride" so to speak.. Dan Taylor knows this mindset well and offers the

following programs to his admirers.

Club Calcaire: Free Pinot Noir barrel sample and wine tasting notes. Vintage, seasonal and harvest reports plus 'en premier' position for new releases and special events.

Terroir Trio - \$75 or \$125 Three 375 ml or 750 ml bottles of Hillier Pinot Noirs plus a Riedel Burgundy wine glass.

Case Futures - \$288 Pay \$24 per bottle for a case of 750 ml bottles of Hillier Pinot Noir (regular price is \$28). 18 month wait after harvest. Mix cases if you wish. Shipping and handling \$25 per case.

Lease a Row - \$600 Three cases of Hillier Pinot Noir 375 ml production plus a lease certificate, personal sponsorship of a complete row, visitation rights and a winemaker's picnic lunch in the vineyard for you and a guest.

Barrel Club - \$1,000 Buy a barrel for its three year life cycle and get one case of 750 ml Hillier Pinot Noir per year for three years plus sponsorship rights of a barrel, tasting notes and wine updates, barrel visitation, and a tasting for you and your friends. At the end of three years, we will buy back the barrel for \$100 Pinot Noir/ wine credit. (But heck, why not keep the barrel and make a table out of it?)

Vivre Le Vendage - \$2,500 Exclusive one-year sponsorship of our Burgundian open-top oak fermenter. Includes a barefoot crush photo opportunity, a framed photo and plaque, a barrel tasting, six cases of Hillier Pinot Noir from your vivre le vendage vintage and a regional cuisine winemakers dinner for you and a guest at a local restaurant.

Interest in Pinot - \$5,000-10,000 Become a Domaine Calcaire Pinot Patron and receive 10% interest in wine in return for your minimum three-year term fully repayable loan. 10% interest annually paid each year in Hillier Pinot Noir. At the end of 3 years, your \$5,000 will be repaid in full plus you will have collected a tasty interest of \$500 worth of Hillier Pinot Noir each year for three years (or \$10,000 repaid and \$1,000 per year in wine).

Pinot Eny - \$10,000 + Let's talk!

You can reach Dan at calcaire@kos.net. The website is calcaire.ca. Other sites of related interest are: littlecreekvineyards.com, thecounty.ca/wines, and pecountywines.ca.



Great American Pinot Noir is not cheap, but it still is a relative bargain compared to Cabernet/Meritage Wines in the marketplace. I spent a few moments perusing a recent catalogue from a prominent Southern California retailer. Only wines of the 2001, 2002 and 2003 vintages currently for sale were surveyed. There were 263 Cabernet/Meritage wines listed with a low price of \$6.99 (2002 Beringer Founders Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, 2002 Ravenswood Vintners Cabernet Sauvignon, Smoking Loon Cabernet Sauvignon) and a top price of \$120 (2002 Flora Springs 25th Anniversary Cabernet Sauvignon and 2002 Caymus Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon, excluding the \$330 2001 Dalla Valle Maya). Average price of all wines was \$68. There were 122 Pinot Noirs listed ranging from a low price of \$5.99 (2003 Quail Creek North Coast Pinot Noir), to a high price of \$79.99 (2002 Etude Heirloom Pinot Noir). Average price of all wines was \$29. Considering the extra effort that goes into farming and producing Pinot Noir, and the small quantities that can be produced, the difference in price is startling. Drink up, great domestic Pinot Noir is a relative bargain! \$100 may be a badge of success and distinction for the Cabernet Sauvignon maker, but it insures only a steadily accumulating inventory for the Pinot Noir producer.

New Pinot Noir Releases of Interest

2003 Belle Glos Santa Maria Valley Clark & Telephone Vineyard Pinot Noir

2003 Belle Glos Sonoma Coast Taylor Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir

Both wines are made by Caymus. No website or direct winery ordering. Look to your wine retailer.

2002 Domaine Serene Evenstad Reserve Pinot Noir

2002 Domaine Serene Guadalupe Vineyard Pinot Noir

2003 Domaine Serene Yamhill Cuvée Pinot Noir

All wines available from the winery and widespread retail availability.

2003 Gary Farrell Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

2003 Gary Farrell Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir (always an impressive wine)

2003 Gary Farrell Starr Ridge Vineyard Pinot Noir (estate vineyard)

All wines available from the winery's mailing list or direct from the winery; widespread retail distribution

2003 Penner-Ash Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

2003 Penner-Ash Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir

2003 Penner-Ash Goldschmidt Vineyard Pinot Noir

All three wines available retail including avalonwine.com

2003 Etude Carneros Pinot Noir

One of the most reliable and outstanding producers of Pinot Noir in California. About \$36 retail and worth it.

2002 Domaine Drouhin Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

A great vintage from a stellar producer. Available widely in retail markets. Highly recommended

