

If you drink no  
old Noir, you  
Pinot Noir

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinoaficionados

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## Ageless Joseph Swan Pinot Noir

Joseph Swan was one of the pioneers of Russian River Pinot Noir and his wines have proven to be remarkably age worthy. Despite this, he has never achieved mainstream “cult” status accorded to others like Joe Rochioli, Jr.. In fact, in Matt Kramer’s *New California Wine*, published in 2004, he does not even rate a mention. Among Pinot cognoscenti, however, his Pinot Noirs are now legendary.



At a recent Pinot tasting, winemaker Jamie Kutch was kind enough to share an old bottle of Joseph Swan Pinot Noir: **1981 Joseph Swan Pinot Noir Estate**. I lost my notes but know I thoroughly enjoyed this wine. Jamie says: “Color was bordering on an orange hue. Started with an initial slight funk on the nose which blew off with some air and blossomed into a lovely wine. A beautiful palate of grandfather-type fruit, mature and delicate. Not at all too tired. A very round and smooth mid palate. Hints of earth, cherry, soy and dust and only a touch pungent.”

This wine prompted me to inquire further into the legend of Joseph (Joe) Swan. His story is well summarized on the Joseph Swan Vineyards website and in books by John Haeger, *North American Pinot Noir* and by Steve Heimoff, *A Wine Journey Along the Russian River*. However, for a more personal history, I asked Copeland Creek winemaker Don Baumhefner, who actually worked at Joseph Swan Vineyards on and off for ten years and played tennis regularly with Joe, to share his remembrances about Joe Swan.



In 1967, at the age of 45, Joe bought a run-down Zinfandel vineyard, barn and house on Laguna Road in the Russian River Valley. The house at one time had been a general store for the tiny town of Trenton that is no longer in existence. The area, called Laguna Ridges, is only a few miles from Westside Road but the climate here is much cooler, foggier and wetter than the Middle Reach area to the north where Joe Rochioli, Jr. was concurrently developing his Pinot Noir vineyards. It is not clear whether the two communicated, but Joe’s son-in-law, Rod Berglund, now the winemaker at Joseph Swan Vineyards, said Joe always intended to plant Pinot Noir on the property. Apparently Andre Tchelistcheff had also suggested to Joe that the cool area was ideal for Pinot Noir. In 1968, Joe retired from his job as a pilot for Western Airlines, and after harvesting the Zinfandel that year, he began a replanting of the 10-acre vineyard to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Cabernet.

The original Pinot Noir clones planted here came from Mt. Eden (via France, Paul Masson and then Martin Ray). The Mt. Eden budwood was actually a field selection, not a true clone. Joe's Pinot Noir prospered initially and cuttings, termed Swan Selections or Swan Clone, were used by numerous other vineyards in California. Over the years some DRC "suitcase" cuttings were added to the vineyard, according to Rod Bergland. These were apparently a gift some years ago from an unnamed source. There are now 12 different clones in the Swan Trenton Estate Vineyard.



Photo of Trenton Estate Vineyard of Joseph Swan.

The Wine Lover's Page, [www.wine-lovers-page.com](http://www.wine-lovers-page.com)

Andre Tschelistcheff advised Joe's early winemaking efforts. His first Pinot Noir crop was harvested in 1972 and his first wine released in 1973. He only made Pinot Noir from his own vines. A perfectionist, he always strived to make his wine better. To this end, he went to France every year with Kermit Lynch and Joe provided the French translations as they went from cellar to cellar, tasting and talking winemaking. Kermit Lynch, of course bought the wines and started his wine shop in Berkeley. Joe took notes and improved his techniques. He was always experimenting, always searching for new and better clones. He experimented with whole cluster fermentation for years. His fermentations were allowed to reach a higher temperature than was normal at the time. Joe always used French barrels (but not many new ones) which was unusual in the early 1970s. Manual punching down of the fermentation cap was de rigeur. Anything he saw or heard about in Burgundy, he would try at home. Jacques Seysses from Domaine Dujac and many other Burgundian winemakers visited Joe at his vineyard in the Russian River Valley. In the early 1970s, Joe, Dick Graff at Chalone, Ken Burnap at Santa Cruz Mountains Vineyards, Merry Edwards at Mr. Eden and Francis Mahoney at Carneros Creek (who did extensive clonal experiments and preferred the Swan clone) laid the groundwork for other Pinotphiles to build on in the years to come. Tom Dehlinger made his first vintage at Joe's in 1975. In 1976, Joel Peterson made his first wines at Joe's. Many wine people came to Joe and asked for cuttings and he almost always said yes. Joe Swan passed away in 1989.

Joe's legacy will include his popularization of the old, Burgundian winemaking methods (eschewing the UC Davis methods), his search for better clones and his openness to new ideas. Unfortunately, as good as his Pinot Noirs were, he never was satisfied. His Pinot Noirs are now legendary. Don says he seldom took home a paycheck while working at Joe's, choosing wine instead. Many people can attest to the ability of his Pinot Noirs to age. Pinot Noirs from the Estate vineyard often peak at 10 years. His 1979 is still fantastic, youthfully fruity and amazingly consistent. Joe at K&L wine retailers told Don that he had a 1976 Joseph Swan Pinot Noir recently and it was awe-inspiring.

## Several Readers Know Old Pinot

Tasting older California and Oregon Pinot Noir from the 1970s and 1980s can be fascinating. It has been an old fallacy that North American Pinot Noir can't age. You can be surprised drinking some of the Pinot Noirs produced over 15 years ago. Be prepared, however, for a completely different experience. The fruit is no longer flattering like in a young wine and secondary characters of aroma and flavor like barnyard, exotic woods, herbs, cheese animal and musky elements take over. Remember that aging is just that, a slow-evolving change in the wine and for some connoisseurs this is a glorious transition. Here are some examples.

Tony Ponzio (no relationship to the Ponzi family of Oregon) from Illinois writes that his most memorable recent bottle of California Pinot Noir was the **1977 Sanford & Benedict Vineyards Pinot Noir** in Magnum poured in December, 2004. "It was a 'dead ringer' for a French Corton red Burgundy." He suggests when traveling in Chicago, IL to visit Schaefer's in suburban Skokie, IL to discover a cellar of old California Pinot Noirs ([www.schaefer.com](http://www.schaefer.com)).

George writes and fantasizes about great older vintages of Chalone Pinot Noir, some of which have lasted 20+ years. Here are his top three older Pinot Noirs:

**1982 Hacienda Del Rio Pinot Noir.** The original California garage wine, made by Burt Williams and Ed Selyem in a garage in Fulton, California. "The depth, concentration and balance were/are remarkable. I last had a bottle in 2002 and the core of fruit was amazing in a wine that old." It was the first Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley to reveal to me the potential of that area besides Joe Swan's Pinots."

**1979 La Crema Vinera Winery Lake Vineyard Pinot Noir.** Three promising new wineries started up in 1979 and all obtained fruit from the (then) finest Pinot Noir vineyard in California - Winery Lake Vineyard in Carneros. The three wineries were Kistler, Acacia and La Crema Vinera (later sold and renamed La Crema). The most successful of the three, in terms of quality was La Crema Vinera. The winemaker was Rod Berglund, now the winemaker at Joseph Swan Vineyard. I had a bottle of this wine two nights ago (1/5/06), at age 26, and it was thrilling. Light brick-red, with no hints of orange yet showing. The flavors were light, but showed a remarkable purity of fruit, with nuances of barrel char and cinnamon."

**1976 J.W. Morris "Dry Creek" Pinot Noir.** "I first had this wine when it was 10 years old, in a 1976 tasting during the summer of 1986. It was like discovering Chateau d'Yquem in a Sauternes tasting and was head-and-shoulders above the rest. I believe 13 of the 16 tasters had it first that day. Then came the bad news. Only one barrel had been made of this precious stuff - 25 cases!. J.W. Morris never did make another Pinot Noir. Within a week I acquired 9 bottles from a restaurant that was glad to unlofad this unknown label from their inventory. I last opened a bottle in 1998 with the winemaker and owner of Testarossa Vineyards in Los Gatos. The winemaker at the time, George Troquato (now at Cinnabar) was shocked by how young and fresh it tasted! It tasted like a 10-year old wine, with plenty of fruit and great balance, depth and length. The finish seemed to go on forever. It gets my vote for the greatest Pinot Noir made-in-California-that-no-one-ever-heard-of."

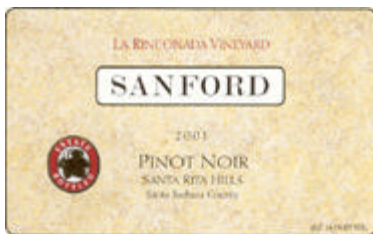
Jamie Kutch believes the best aging California Pinot Noir comes from the Santa Cruz Mountains.

**1977 Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir.** 14.6% alc.. "A musty nose of cheese aromas. Plenty of life left in the fruit. Gamey, animal and exotic. A hell of an accomplishment and a real treat tonight." (Posted West Coast Wine.net, January, 2006).

## Out of Tragedy, Two Promising Sanford Off - Shoots

Richard Sanford is the pioneer winegrower who put the Santa Rita Hills area on the wine map. (Note: after years of debate, the Santa Rita Hills AVA name has been officially changed to Sta. Rita Hills - the pronunciation stays the same). He planted the famous Sanford & Benedict Vineyard in 1971 with partner Michael Benedict. Richard was a student of geography and after considerable study of the area, planted 110 acres to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. At the time he was considered an eccentric. By 1976 his doubters had been proven wrong and he began to craft a long series of delicious premium Pinot Noirs. In 1980 he lost the vineyard and ended his partnership with Michael Benedict. Benedict subsequently sold his share to a British businessman, Robert Atkin, who then invested in Sanford's winery and hired Richard to manage the Sanford & Benedict Vineyard. All farming was strictly organic.

Bruno d'Alphonso joined Sanford Winery in 1983 and the quality of the Pinot Noirs improved further. By 1993, the winery was making 30,000 cases a year. In 1997, Richard planted a second vineyard, the 130-acre Rancho La Rinconada, adjacent to Sanford & Benedict and in 2001 finished his ideal winery on the property. This winery has become an architectural landmark for the community. Alas, the cost rose to over 9 million dollars before completion. The original Sanford tasting



room has gained more notoriety, however, for its cameo in the book and movie *Sideways*. In

the book, Jack purchases a bottle of 1999 Sanford La Rinconada Pinot Noir and exclaims, "Lovely, big and gamy, almost irreverent for a Pinot. I like it. A perfect beginning to this weeklong adventure."

The exact details of the series of tragic events that began in 2002 are unclear but suffice it say, Terlato Wine Group, owners of Paterno Distributing, had been brought in as an investor in the Sanford Winery due to lagging sales. Disagreements and accusations abounded, and in 2005 Richard and Thekia Sanford left to begin a new venture, Alma Rosa. D'Alphonso started his own label, Badge and consults for other wineries. He was replaced in February of this year by Steve Fennell as winemaker at Sanford Winery. From 1999 to the present, Fennell had been the winemaker at Voss Vineyards.

## Alma Rosa Winery & Vineyards

The plan is to produce wines from a combination of purchased grapes and those from the Sanford's 15-acre El Jabali home vineyard which they own, and a new 100-acre vineyard they lease west of La Rinconada called La Encantada. Both vineyards are certified organic. Further details are sketchy.

**2004 Alma Rosa Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14% alc., \$28. Medium dark ruby. Aromas of cherries, black current and chocolate. Ripe sweet red fruits. Well-balanced and just the right size. Fine texture and a nice acidic tang at the finish. Orgasmic with seared ahi. Available from [hitimewine.net](http://hitimewine.net) and [WadesWines.com](http://WadesWines.com) in California. The website under construction is [almarosawinery.com](http://almarosawinery.com), 805-688-9090.

**2004 Alma Rosa El Encanto Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**, \$40. Not tasted.

## Badge

This is Bruno d'Alfonso's new label and the inaugural 2003 release is only 200 cases. With his 23 years of winemaking experience in the Santa Rita Hills, expectations are high for this new project.

**2003 Badge Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$26. A real charmer. A lighter than normal style for SRH Pinot. Very well balanced and well-proportioned. Leaves a lasting impression of fresh black cherries at the end. Great acidity for food. You can serve this one blind to your buddies disguised as a \$70 Pinot. Badgewines.com, 800-736-5761. Available at thewineclub.com and RootsCellar.com in California.

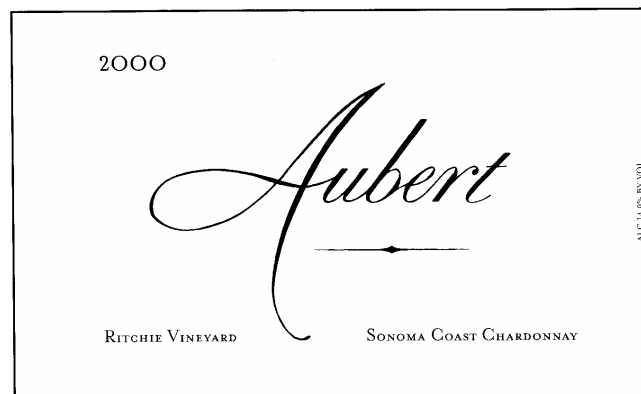


## Aubert Wines

Aubert Pinot Noir has to be one of those wines that many have heard about but rarely sampled. Mark Aubert was the winemaker for Peter Michael for nearly ten years. He grew up in the Napa Valley and talks about his childhood where he and his friends were more likely to drink Champagne than beer. Wine was part of his family's lifestyle. He began his life as a winemaker at Monticello where he made their first lees-stirred Chardonnay. He got to know Helen Turley who was consulting for Peter Michael. When the assistant winemaker at Peter Michael left, Helen hired Mark. In 2000 Mark left Peter Michael to become the winemaker for Colgin, again replacing Turley. He also started his own label, Aubert Wines. He bought a 7 acre Chardonnay vineyard in the Vine Hill area near Forestville in 2000 (Lauren Vineyard) and close-by planted another 6 acres of Chardonnay and 1.5 acres of Pinot Noir (the bud-wood is from a famous source in Vosne-Romanee). The latter is named Reuling Vineyard. He plans to produce four different vineyard-designated Chardonnays and three different Pinot Noirs all from the Sonoma Coast appellation.

He released his first wine, a Ritchie Vineyard Chardonnay, in 2000. A Quarry Vineyard Chardonnay was added in 2002. The Quarry Vineyard was planted on a rugged hillside nearly 13 years ago when he was working at Peter Michael Winery. It is located on a southerly 35 percent slope overlooking Knight's Valley and is planted to three low producing old clones of Chardonnay. In 2003 he added two new Chardonnay wines: Reuling Vineyard and Aubert Estate Vineyard "Lauren."

Mark has a love of Burgundy and is a fan of Dujac, Leroy and Meo-Camuzet. His initial Pinot Noir releases are the 2004 Reuling Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (100 cases or 4 barrels) and 2004 Uv Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. This will be quite a collectible and difficult to obtain as the Aubert Wines are only sold by invitation through a mailing list. Quantities are small. The website is [www.aubertwines.com](http://www.aubertwines.com) and the phone is 707-942-5611. Please pass on to me any tasting notes other than Parker (I believe he anointed the Reuling with a 96 score).



## Rhys Vineyards - Santa Cruz Mtns Newcomer

The Santa Cruz Mountain area has been making quality wine since the 1800s. The region was once known as the *chaine d'Or* or "golden chain" because of the excellence of the grapes grown here. Most of the wineries disappeared with Prohibition, but gradually over the years intrepid winegrowers have reappeared and today 300 acres of Pinot Noir (out of 1,200 total vineyard acres) are scattered throughout the mountains. Perhaps David Bruce, Mt Eden, Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyards and Thomas Fogarty are best known to Pinot Noir lovers.

In recent history, the riches of neighboring Silicon Valley (30 minutes away) have enabled a number of entrepreneurs to establish important wine producing properties in the Mountains. A recent article in *The New York Sun* by wine writer Matt Kramer alerted me to a new Pinot Noir project in the region, Rhys Vineyards, started by a wealthy Silicon Valley software engineer, Kevin Harvey. Rhys (pronounced 'reece') Vineyards has been several years in the making as considerable time, energy and money were used to select and plant new vineyards in the area encompassing three micro-climates and four different geological profiles. The plan is to release vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs from the five estate managed distinct vineyards: Family Farm Vineyard (6.2 acres), Alpine Road Vineyard (13 acres), Skyline Vineyard (3.5 acres), Horseshoe Ranch Vineyard (17.5 acres), and Home Vineyard (10 acres). Only Alpine, Family Farm and Home are in limited production in the 2004 and 2005 vintages. All of the mineral-rich and rocky vineyards are managed with organic and biodynamic methods at great viticulture costs. Yields will be low due to the climate and farming techniques. At each of the vineyard sites, 75% of the property is left in a completely natural state, with less than 25% in vines. In addition to native microflora, herbs, flowers, vegetables and grain crops are to be planted and free-range chicks will help to naturally fertilize the vineyards.



The goal of winemaking here is to produce wines with "a strong sense of somewhereness rather than someoneeness." With wine-growing directed at producing grapes of physiological maturity at sensible Brix levels, the goal is to craft Pinot Noirs at around 13.5% or less alcohol. Construction of a cave and state-of-the-art winery has begun at the Skyline Vineyard and expected completion is 2007 or 2008. Eventually production will reach 10,000 cases.

***"Physiological maturity is critical for wine that is balanced and without excessive alcohol."***

In the Fall of 2006 there will be three Pinot Noir releases: 2004 Rhys Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mtns Pinot Noir, 2004 Rhys Home Vineyard San Francisco Bay Pinot Noir, and 2004 Rhys Family Farm San Francisco Bay Pinot Noir. Matt Kramer tasted the 2004 Pinot Noirs from barrel and said that they "are more than merely promising. They are characterful, with a resonant smack of the earth and typical of other Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noirs in their sizable scale and likely longevity."

A second label, Alesia, will explore wines from purchased grapes. In the Fall the releases will include: 2004 Alesia Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 2004 Alesia Kanzler Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 2004 Alesia Sonatera Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and 2004 Alesia Chileno Valley Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. Producing wines from grapes acquired outside the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation is the norm as yields from vineyards here are limited.

As is the case with so many new unproven but possibly great Pinot Noir producers, the consumer flocks to join the mailing list. At present, the current mailing list is larger than can be accommodated with the 2004 estate bottlings. The Alesia wines will be available. Visit the excellent and informative website at [www.rhysvineyards.com](http://www.rhysvineyards.com).

## Experience Pinot in Paradise



The 2nd Annual Pinot Paradise in the Santa Cruz Mountains will be held March 25th and 26th, 2006. Presented by the Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers Association (SCMWA), the event will feature over 30 Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries pouring their finest Pinot Noirs accompanied by gourmet food from several local restaurants. Last year's event was sold-out with about 800 pinotphiles attending.

The Santa Cruz Mountains has quietly become a distinguished producer of delicious Pinot Noirs. Most of the wineries (there are nearly 50) are small, lack tasting rooms and are scattered over winding roads in the mountains. The Pinot Paradise event allows one to sample Pinot Noirs from most of the wineries in one location. Rare library wines are presented and an auction of desirable Pinot Noirs in magnum format is offered as well.

The region produces Pinots to envy because of the cool weather, a resultant long growing season, the marine influence, and distinctive, rocky, well-drained soils. Pinot Noir is a fickle grape and doesn't show off just anywhere. The Santa Cruz Mountains is a true paradise for Pinot Noir. Here it can strut its stuff in a grand and classic Burgundian style.

**Pathway to Pinot Paradise** Saturday, March 25. The wine lover can taste barrel samples of Pinot Noir at participating wineries including Burrell School Vineyards, Silver Mountain Vineyards, Storrs Winery, Thomas Fogarty Winery, Windy Oaks Vineyards & Winery and more. Some library wines will be poured. This is a self-guided tour. Tickets are \$20 per person.

**Technical Sessions** Sunday, March 26, 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Featured speakers include Randall Grahm (Bonny Doon Vineyard) who will try to answer the question, "Why is Pinot Noir Called the Fickle Grape?" This will be followed by a panel discussion by local winegrowers titled "The Impact of Terroir - Pinot Noir in the Santa Cruz Mountains." Then Joe Miller, well-known expert on Burgundy and a UCSC Professor will discuss "The Parallels (or not) between Burgundy and the Santa Cruz Mountains (including tasting from both areas)." A special vineyard tour will be conducted by Jeffrey Patterson (Mt Eden) and will include a box lunch. Tickets are \$50 per person.

**The Grand Cruz Pinot Noir Tasting** Sunday March 26, 2:00 PM to 4:30 PM. Many small notable Pinot Noir producers will pour their wines including Burrell School Vineyards & Winery, Clos La Chance, Hallcrest Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards, Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Savannah-Chanelle Vineyards, Silver Mountain Vineyards, Sonnet Wine Cellars, Soquel Vineyards, Storrs Winery, Testarossa Vineyards, Trout Gulch Vineyards, and Windy Oaks Estate Vineyards. Tickets are \$50 per person (\$65 after March 1st).

Paradise Passes for all events are a reasonable \$100 per person (\$120 per person after March 1st). To order tickets, call 831-685-8463 or go to the SCMWA website at [www.scmwa.com](http://www.scmwa.com).

## Vintage 2005: One to dream about

Everywhere I go and taste barrel samples of 2005 Pinot Noir I see big sh\*t-eating grins on wine-maker's faces. It is always tricky to anoint a vintage as "great" since fine wines can be made in any vintage these days by talented winegrowers. Generalizations are hazy as the diverse micro-climates that grow Pinot Noir can yield strikingly different results while being only a few miles away. Suffice it to say, that for most regions on earth, it is a vintage to dream about.

The 2005 vintage had a record harvest in California with over 4.3 million tons of fruit crushed (California Agricultural Statistics Service). This is an increase of 19% from 2004 and the highest tonnage since statistics started being kept in 1968. This will be good news to wine consumers who are buying more wine than ever. Americans drank 274 9-liter cases of wine last year which is a 17% jump from 2001 (Adams Beverage Group) at a total value of \$15.5 billion dollars. As of the end of 2005, there were 5,364 wineries in the United States (*Wine Business Monthly*). There is at least one winery in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with most of them (51%) located in California. Between 2004 and 2005 California added 295 wineries! The consumer has more choices than ever before and the competition will hopefully keep prices sensible.

Here are some generalizations about the 2005 vintage in the prominent Pinot Noir growing regions of the world.

### California

There was more winter rain and more later rain than usual. Five inches of rain fell in May disrupting fruit set and flowering of Pinot Noir in Carneros and cooler areas of Sonoma County. Severe shatter had some vineyard yields down 50%. Rare June rainstorms delayed ripening and caused mildew and botrytis. Autumn, however, was ideal with consistent coolness without heat spikes. The result was physiological maturity at lower sugar levels. Expect the Pinot Noirs to have lower alcohol but be perfectly ripe due to long hang-times.

Santa Barbara County. Winter rainfall was way above average. Spring rains caused some botrytis in coastal areas. Fruit set was good. The rains led to healthy canopy growth and heavy crop loads (more than 5 tons/acre in some coastal vineyards). There were more problems with powdery mildew and weeds due to the rains. Pinot Noir is more susceptible to mildew since the grapes are closer together in the clusters than most varietals. Treatment is spraying with a fungicide like sulphur dust. Quality was excellent to outstanding.

Monterey-Santa Cruz Mountains. Similarly winter rains and considerable rain from the year before led to high density canopies. Fruit set was good and berry size was uniform. Some spring frost damage was noted. Powdery mildew was widespread. Spider mites continue to be a problem. Harvest extended from early September to late November and yields were mostly above average.

Sonoma County. Plenty of rain in the spring and early summer followed by a very cool September led to a prolonged harvest lasting in some locations to mid November. In some areas ripening never did occur. There were continuing problems with mites. The rains led to widespread weeds, powdery mildew and botrytis. The cooler the area, the worse the problems. In some vineyards the Pinot Noir crop was reduced due to rainfall during bloom. Yields were generally up by 25% but in some vineyards yields were down 80% or not even harvestable. In Marin County crop load was down to 1/2 ton/acre. Along the true Sonoma Coast late rains completely devastated some vineyards. What was harvested was of excellent quality. The quality in most areas of the Russian River Valley was very good to outstanding.



Mendocino County. There was frost around bud break so some vineyards in the Anderson Valley lost their entire crop. Crop set was poor for Pinot Noir in the Anderson Valley. Rain, rain and more rain created problems with botrytis and mildew. Harvest was late and well into November. Quality overall was good. Goldeneye reported harvesting less than half of what they foresaw. The Anderson Valley fortunately remains free of vine mealybug and glassy-winged sharpshooters.

## Oregon

2005 was nothing like the warm vintages of 2003 and 2004. Winter was rather dry and spring was very wet. Some of the rain came during the bloom period resulting in some poor fruit set. Yields were lower than average, but a little higher than 2004. The quality is said to be good to excellent, but more importantly, the acids will be better, the alcohols lower, and the resulting wines should have great aging potential.

## Burgundy

Some are claiming the 2005 vintage will be the best of all of the 2000s so far. The weather was dry like 2003 but much less heat occurred and the nights were cool. A consistent Northern wind helped to keep the vines healthy. Unlike 2003 where natural acidities were very low, the acidity levels will be higher and more like 1996. Alcohols will be higher than 2003. Allen Meadows is wary of any vintage hype until the wines are in the bottle, but he reports that everyone in Burgundy was "raving about the quality of their 2005." Some claimed that they are "better than 1990, 1999 or 2002."

## Victoria, Australia

According to Michael Dhillon at Bindi 2005 was quite an unusual season. "The summer was very cool and mild but then the end of March was very hot and then followed the hottest April on record. The Macedon Ranges area benefited from this late heat as it pushed the grapes towards outstanding ripeness while maintaining good acidities from the cold summer. The tannins and colours are fantastic in the Pinots. Yields were good, about 1.5 tons/acre. Spot on really. We feel we have produced the spiciest, perhaps most complex wines from our 16 vintages at Bindi. I am not sure how the warmer regions like Yarra and Geelong went because they may have ripened a few weeks earlier during the cooler times before the late heat took hold."

Hoon Hooke writes in *The World of Fine Wine* that "2005 is even better in quality terms than 2002, which makes it the vintage of the century so far."

## New Zealand (Martinborough)

Larry McKenna of Escarpment Winery writes from Martinborough. "The most significant event which influenced the NZ 2005 vintage was the December weather in 2004. Very cold and wet which affected flowering badly with very small crop set. Dec. 04 was colder than August 05, for example. January and February were warm and dry with good ripening and colour development achieved. March was wetter than average causing some botrytis in well set blocks but in general not too much damage. The vintage was about normal timing in the end (April) with good wines resulting. Reds seemed to have fared the best with good colour, structure and flavours." Overall McKenna is pleased with the quality of Pinot Noir. The most successful whites were Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc.

Paul White writing in *The World of Fine Wine* said that "quality ranges from good to excellent, but volumes have fallen well short of expectations. Some Wairarapa, Nelson, Waipara and Central Otago producers saw reductions of more than 50% in tonnage." Basically quality is up, volume is down.

  
PrinceofPinot.com

Got any old Pinot tales? Please send them along.

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## De La Montanya Retraction & Clarification

Last week I ran a feature on the excellent Pinot Noirs from De La Montanya Winery. Dennis De La Montanya e-mailed me that in the photo I published this was not his wife. Published on Valentine's Day yet! Sorry, sorry Dennis

Also Dennis wanted to point out that the "pinup" wines constitute less than 10% of his production and his winery is dead serious about handcrafting quality wine. From tasting several of his wines other than Pinot Noir a few weeks ago, I can vouch for that. He strives for the best fruit sometimes picking vineyards as many as five times over the course of five weeks to get the pH, brix and acidity where he wants it. He also picks for flavors and berry maturity. The crush program includes lightly pressing rarely getting more than 140 gallons from a ton of fruit (most commercial wineries get 165+). The winemaker cold soaks and extends the fermentation process to allow additional extraction time. The blends are co-fermented, also unique these days. The oak program is generally 50%+ new American, French or Hungarian. The bottom line is most people who buy his wine just like the wine and enjoy the fun tasting room. The details are not that important to most. They are important to many of my readers so I wanted to include them here.

## Pinot Releases Close to My Heart

### WesMar

5th vintage release for WesMar. Kirk and Denise report tasting their inaugural 2000 Pinots recently and after five years are aging beautifully. "Vibrant bouquets, lively fruit flavors, harmonious acid, tannin and oak."

**WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 395 cases, \$32, **2004 WesMar Sonoma Coast Balletto Vineyard Pinot Noir** 151 cases, \$37, **2004 WesMar Russian River Valley Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir** 177 cases, \$37, and **2004 WesMar Sonoma Coast Hellenthal Vineyard Pinot Noir** 154 cases, \$50. Magnums of all wines available at 2x the 750 price. 707-829-8824.

### Littorai

The 2004 Pinot Noirs have the highest acid of any Pinot vintage for Ted Lemon. "This created tremendous structure in the wines. They should be appealing early but will certainly age 5 years and may prove to be a very long distance vintage." **2004 Littorai Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 170 cases, **2004 Littorai Les Larmes Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 160 cases, **2004 Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 300 cases, **2004 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 360 cases, **2004 Littorai Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 95 cases, **2004 Littorai Mays Canyon Russian River Pinot Noir** 140 cases, **2004 Littorai One Acre Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 140 cases, **2004 Littorai Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 200 cases, **2004 Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 36 cases, and **2004 Littorai The Haven Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 240 cases. Don't forget the rich Chardonnays. Ordering only through the mailing list. Magnums released a few years after each vintage. Phone 707-823-9486.