

**The Best Pinot
Noir Hasn't
Been Made Yet**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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**"It's not traditional
now, but in thirty
years this will be the
traditional style of
Pinot Noir"**

Michael Browne

Kosta Browne Winery

On Saturday afternoon, November 17, the Share Our Wine Foundation of Orange County, California, presented a tasting seminar with Michael Browne of Kosta Browne Winery to benefit local charities that provide specialized services to treat and prevent abuse and neglect of children. Attended by 100 eager wine enthusiasts, Michael graciously donated his time as well as 13 different Kosta Browne Pinot Noirs (including 2006 barrel samples and 2005 finished wines) for the tasting event. In addition, he gifted 3 magnums of 2005 Kosta Browne Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and a 5-liter engraved bottle of 2005 Kosta Brown Russian River Valley Pinot Noir for the auction. This was truly a unique tasting event, the scope of which was unprecedented in the wine community.

Michael Browne and Dan Kosta are alumni of a noted Sonoma County restaurant, John Ash and Co. Michael followed a circuitous route to get there. He was born in the San Francisco Bay Area, but grew up in Washington State. Upon returning to Santa Rosa in 1987, he enrolled in pre-requisite courses at Santa Rosa Junior College to become an architect. During schooling, he worked in wine retail and at a number of restaurants. It was at John Ash and Co that Michael developed a deep love for wine and food and the agricultural pursuit of winegrowing. His ultimate goal became to make a living as a winemaker.

Dan Kosta was a native of Sonoma who grew up



around wine. Dan's father owned a wine store in Santa Rosa and wine was a frequent topic of discussion at the household dinner table. After joining the staff at John Ash & Co, Dan worked his way up to Head Sommelier. He too, had a desire to be involved in a winery, and in 1997, he teamed with Michael to make the first Kosta Browne wine. They put all of their tip money into a "co-op" cookie jar placed in the restaurant's kitchen. After raising \$2,600, they bought a half ton of Pinot Noir grapes, a single barrel, and a used, hand-cranked de-stemmer-crusher to produce their first vintage.

That same year, Michael left John Ash & Co. and became assistant winemaker at Deerfield Ranch Winery in the Sonoma Valley. Dan and Michael attracted an initial investment group and in 1999 made 2,600 cases of Lake County Sauvignon Blanc. This venture proved financially unrewarding and the principals parted ways. In 2001, they teamed with Chris Costello and family who provided a fiscally conservative and thoughtful business plan and success followed shortly thereafter. Michael likes to say he learned his winemaking at "Hard Knocks University." It didn't take him long to achieve a measure of recognition. The 2003 vintage was highly regarded by wine writer James Laube of the *Wine Spectator*. He awarded all of the 2003 Kosta Browne Pinot Noirs scores ranging from 90 to 96. The mailing list quickly filled up and Kosta Browne was on every pinophile's radar. Kosta Browne quickly became a member of the current band of prestigious Russian River Valley wine producers, many of whom had been crafting notable Pinot Noir since the 1980s. (Pictured right, Michael on left)



Kosta Browne bounced around, sharing space in several wineries for awhile. Today, they have found a home in the old Vacu-Dry apple processing plant in Sebastopol. Here they will be able to further refine their craft and follow their commitment to producing better and better wines. Current production is about 10,500 cases which is comfortable for them.

I believe Kosta Browne's success stems from three sources. First, Dan and Michael are congenial and customer service oriented, they are well-liked in the wine community, and are willing to support many fund-raising activities. Secondly, they were able to use their long-standing friendships and contacts to source top growers in the Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast appellations. Quality grape sources are critical to making fine wine. The precedent for this in the Russian River Valley was set by Williams Selyem whose success was built on acquiring fruit from vineyards such as Rochioli, Allen, Cohn (now Benovia), Hirsch, Olivet Lane, and Ferrington. Thirdly, Michael Browne knows how to make great Pinot Noir in a New World hedonistic style that appeals to a broad audience of wine lovers. Wine is one of the few areas of interest where art and science come together. Having met hundreds of winemakers in recent years, I have come to realize that some have exceptional artistic talent, much like great musicians, painters, sculptors and chefs. It is this artistry that separates their wines from the pack. Michael Browne is one of those winemaking artists who seems to have a touch with Pinot Noir.

The pages to follow include a summary of the Kosta Browne tasting seminar with some tasting notes of mine combined with comments by Michael. The entire event was recorded in audio and video format by Grape Radio and will be presented at www.graperadio.com in the near future. The moderators were Jay (Mr. Grape Radio) Selman, and myself.



Flight One - Barrel Samples of 2006 Keefer Ranch Green Valley Pinot Noir

Keefer Ranch is located in the headwaters of Green Valley Creek, with gently sloping, well-drained, south-facing exposure. The vineyard offers fruit that profits from a long, cool hang time resulting in outstanding color and extract with both power and grace due to perfect tannin ripening conditions.

Green Valley is one of the smallest appellations in Sonoma County and actually lies in the southwestern part of the Russian River Valley appellation. It is, however, distinctly delineated both geographically and climatically from the Russian River Valley. It is consistent in terms of soil, climate and flavor characteristics.

Defined by fog, Green Valley is the first place where the fog comes in and the last place where it burns off, making it the coolest, foggiest part of the Russian River Valley. The predominant soil type of Green Valley is Goldridge loam, noted for producing high quality Pinot Noir grapes. Keefer Ranch



wines exhibit the typical flavor profile of Green Valley. Pinot Noir shows ripe cherry and cranberry fruit, spice, lively acidity, soft tannins, supple texture, and beautiful structure. Chardonnay presents a clean, fresh, crisp, Gravenstein apple, complex citrus flavor profile, with a core of minerality, a long finish and great focus.

Keefer Ranch was started in 1989 on the site of a former apple orchard in Sebastopol, California and is farmed by Marcy Keefer and her son Craig Strehlow. They currently sell grapes to many notable wineries (A.P. Vin, Failla, Freeman, Kosta Browne, Loring, Pali, Siduri), and have now begun the adventure of producing their own wine under the label of Keefer Ranch.



2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, Neutral Barrel, Clone 115 Although 115 has the most potential of all of the Dijon clones for producing a complete wine on its own, it often stars when blended with other clones. It is a consistent producer with small to average clusters, early ripening, homogenous, with sugar levels above average and total acidity below average. 115 has strong color with purplish hues, superior rich aromatics, good structure, notable tannins and is suitable for aging. Red fruits dominate the scents and tastes. *Round red cherry flavors with a kiss of spice.*

2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, Neutral Barrel, Clone 2A The Wädenswil clone was imported to the United States from Switzerland in the 1950s. The clone was originally from Burgundy but certified in Wädenswil, Switzerland, the site of a government research station for viticulture. More widespread in Oregon, it accounts for about 1/3 of the plantings there. It is very site-specific in terms of crop loads. 2A is often a blending component that adds finesse to a finished wine. Typically, 2A has brilliant, hi-toned red cherry and red berry fruit. *Notable Xmas spice backbone. Fills the mouth with plush red fruits. Plenty of structure.*

2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, Neutral Barrel, Clone 23 The Mariafeld clone came to the United States from Wädenswil, Switzerland in 1966. It has large blueberry-colored berries, open clusters, resistance to bunch rot, is high-yielding, with higher acid. Typically, it offers strawberry and farmyard aromas with spicy, soft cherry and plum flavors. *Concentrated fruit with good focused acid - adds a laser beam component. Plenty of red cherry and red apple skin flavor.*

2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, Neutral Barrel, Clone Pommard 5 Pommard is a Pinot Noir workhorse clone that is widely planted. It can make great wines on its own (a so called "stand-alone" clone), or as part of a blend. Pommard has good color, big clusters, intense fruit, considerable spice, a meaty/gamey edge to its black fruits, a velvety mouth feel, and good mid palate complexity. *A terrific wine on its own, even without oak influence. Earth tones are appealing in the aromatics and flavors. Silky texture.*

2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, New Barrel, Cadus Allier, Clone Pommard 5 and 2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir, New Barrel, Remond Allier, Clone Pommard 5 *Oak really adds complexity and interest. Spice, vanillin, smoke, char, toast. Pinot Noir loves oak!*



Flight Two - 2005 Current Releases

“What Dan Kosta and Michael Browne have accomplished in 2005 is every bit as staggering as their watershed 2004 vintage.” James Laube

2005 Kosta Browne Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 1,812 cases, \$45. 21% Cohn, 29% Koplen, 28% Amber Ridge, 10% Ketcham, 12% Castaldi. About 10% whole clusters are used in the appellation wines. Fermentation in oak is employed in part. *Seductive strawberry and cherry fruit with cola and spice highlights. Juicy and succulent with a velvety feel. Hard to say no to this one.*

2005 Kosta Browne Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 15.0% alc., 1,821 cases, \$45. 31% Kanzler, 21% Miron, 15% Demeo, 33% Dutton-Manzana. *More grip than the Russian River bottling with a hearty structure and notable tannins. Plenty of blackberry fruit, subtle oak spice and a firm finish.*

2005 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Vineyard Green Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 117 cases, \$62. Clones are Pommard 5, 23 and 777. *Sexy nose of red strawberries, red raspberries and spice. Vivid and flamboyant fruit flavors that echo the aromas. Fine texture, svelte tannins and a lingering finish.*

2005 Kosta Browne Koplen Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.3% alc., 500 cases, \$62. From a 5-acre vineyard planted entirely to Dijon clone 667 in the middle of the Russian River Valley AVA on the east side of Olivet Lane. The vineyard is the warmest location of all Kosta Browne grape sources and yields are vigorous, ranging from 3.5 to 3.7 tons per acre. The vineyard is farmed with passion by the owners. Significant whole cluster is used in this wine. *Deep on the palate, packed with brambly dark red fruit and showing a wild side. Muscular, but velvety in texture with supple tannins.. A real crowd pleaser.*

2005 Kosta Browne Kanzler Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.3% alc., 500 cases, \$62. This vineyard is located in western Sonoma County just south of Bodega Highway on Sander's Road. It

consists of 20 acres on what was formerly an old apple orchard. Its gently sloping location is near the beginning of the Petaluma Gap and receives morning and evening fog, breezy afternoons and bright, but mild, afternoon sun. Clones are Pommard, 115 and 667. *Striking aromatics of crushed black cherries, rose petal and mushrooms which are still a little closed. Plenty of showy dark Pinot extract and a long, chewy aftertaste. Decisive balance and very well crafted. Will age quite well. There is something deep inside here that cannot be denied.*

2005 Kosta Browne Amber Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 510 cases, \$62. Clones 115, 667 and 777. This vineyard is situated adjacent to Gary Farrell's Star Ridge Vineyard in the upper part of the Russian River Valley's middle reach. The vineyard is on a rolling hill in an area characterized by early morning fog that burns off mid to late morning when the warm afternoon sun and cool winds arrive. Clones 115, 667 and 777. *The least showy wine in the lineup - big, robust, dense and brooding. Dark cherry, coffee-infused flavors. Needs time to shed some of its mountainous fruit.*

2005 Kosta Browne Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 15.2% alc., 264 cases, \$62. Garys' is a 50-acre vineyard farmed by Gary Francioni and Gary Pisoni and is located on a sloping hillside in the center of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA in Monterey County. The area receives heavy morning fog, strong coastal winds and an average cool mid-70s summertime temperature. Yields are low and the growing season is long and even. The clone is the Pisoni clone (rumored to originate in a famous vineyard in Burgundy). 25-30% whole cluster. *Still a bit tight, this wine exhibits a full-throttle array of saucy red Pinot fruits with chocolate, cherry cola and spice. Strikingly harmonious with seamless integration of tannins and alcohol. Will benefit from a year or two in the cellar.*



The Kosta Browne business address is P.O. Box 1555, Sebastopol, CA 95473. A waiting list is available on the website at www.kostabrowne.com. Tours and tastings are not available at this time. 707-823-7430. For 2005 there is also a Miron Vineyard Pinot Noir (Green Valley), Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir (Santa Lucia Highlands), and 4-barrel Pinot Noir. Michael handles the grower relations and winemaking jobs, Dan directs the sales and marketing for the label. Look for Michael and/or Dan at any of the major Pinot Noir festivals, but get to their booth early as their wines are quickly sucked up by the crowd that bellies up to their offerings. Kosta Browne wines are available on the secondary market such as www.winecommune.com (prices vary from around \$58 to over \$200 per bottle).

Inman Family Wines: Born in a Tasting Room

“She broke away from a discreetly sipping couple and approached us with a bouncy step and an alacritous smile. She was all of five feet five with short blond hair, framing a pale, lightly freckled face”

Miles, *Sideways*

Englishman Simon Inman was visiting Napa Valley a number of years ago when he stepped into Napa Creek Winery’s tasting room and spied Kathleen McGowan, a college student working the first day of her summer job at the winery. Being a little more discreet than Jack and Miles, he wrote a letter to the owner of Napa Creek Winery asking him to pass along a second letter to the “assistant” to whom he had spoken briefly in the tasting room. Two years later, they were married.

After living in England for fifteen years, the Inman’s developed a passion for both New World and Old World Pinot Noir. In 1998 they left their careers and arrived in California. After searching for a year, they discovered a farm for sale located at the junction of Olivet and Piner Roads in the Russian River Valley. The Greeott family had owned the farm since the 1880s and a vineyard and winery had stood on the site until Prohibition. The Inmans acquired the property and named it Olivet Grange Vineyard, after the family’s English country home: The Grange at Elvington. (Note: because of a challenge from Australia’s famous wine label, Grange, the Inmans have had to display OGV instead of Olivet Grange Vineyard on the front label of their wines beginning with the 2005 vintage).

In 2000, 7,2 acres of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris were planted on the 10.45 acre property, using carefully selected rootstocks and clones (114, 115, 667 and 777 for Pinot Noir, 145 for Pinot Gris) appropriate to their Russian River Valley location. From the start, farming of the vineyard has been organic with the aim of promoting a healthy ecosystem. Interestingly, Kathleen uses “Four-Course Compost,” which is obtained from high-end San Francisco restaurants and hotels and is a valuable, nutrient-rich alternative to synthetic fertilizers.



The three-bedroom farmhouse (below) was lovingly restored and became both a respite for friends and family visiting from England and a vacation rental for wine enthusiasts (Olivet Grange Farmhouse: www.olivetgrange.com). A private tour and tasting of Inman Family wines is part of the rental.



2004 Inman Family Olivet Grange Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 1050 cases, \$45, screw cap. The 2004 growing year was very warm which is reflected in this wine when tasted side by side with the 2005 vintage. *The aromatics are enchanting with deep, dark Pinot fruits and a sidecar of subtle oak. The flavors follow suite, featuring succulent black cherries and a touch of herbs and clove. Tannins are well-concealed and the finish is clean and satisfying.*



2005 Inman Family OGV Olivet Grange Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 750 cases, \$45, screw cap. 2005 was a long, cool, even growing year. The wine is a blend of all clones grown in the vineyard. Aged 11 months in 35% new French oak. *This wine shows great purity of fruit. It is softer, lighter and "prettier" than the above wine with more red fruits evident, especially red raspberry. There are attractive spice and sandalwood notes. Beautifully balanced and a joy to drink.*



Inman Family wines can be purchased on the website at www.inmanfamilywines.com. There is some retail and restaurant distribution. Beginning in 2006, fruit was obtained from Thorn Road Ranch Vineyard farmed by Ted Klopp in the hills beyond Sebastopol. This unique site will provide an additional bottling of Pinot Noir. Some Olivet Grange fruit has been sold in the past to Pali and Siduri who have released vineyard designate bottlings. The Inman Family Rosé (Endless Crush) and Pinot Gris are also excellent and quite popular. Tasting is by appointment at the tasting room, 5793 Skylane Blvd., Suite C, Windsor. 707-395-0689.

Pinot Briefs

Pinot a Perfect Choice at Thanksgiving The California Wine Club conducted a survey and found that most of its club members preferred to serve Pinot Noir on Thanksgiving. Pinot Noir received 34% of the total votes, followed by Chardonnay, Cabernet, Zinfandel, and Champagne/Sparkling Wine.

Pinot Noir Going to the Dogs Carivintas Winery works with well-known winemakers in California to produce special bottlings with dog photo labels. Carivintas is derived from the word caritas (charity) and vin (wine) - blending wine with philanthropy. The sales of the wines generate donations to sponsored organizations. One of the newest releases is Resilient Pups Pinot Noir, a 2005 Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir (\$40). Proceeds from the sale of this wine directly supports the Louisiana SPCA. For this and other wines, go to www.dogloverswineclub.com.



Device to Avoid Wine Headaches University of Berkeley chemistry professor Richard Mathies, who has long had wine-induced headaches, has developed a sensor-filled chip that can measure the amount of amines in a wine. Some amines, such as tyramine, can cause headaches in wine drinkers by elevating the heart rate and blood pressure. Tyramine is more often found in red wines that have undergone MLF. There are plans to produce the device commercially. ((Source: www.decanter.com)).

Wine on Broadway "WINE LOVERS, The Wine Tasting Musical" will premiere with six show performances at the Triad Theatre on Broadway from December 1st to the 10th, 2007. The musical tells the story of two mismatched students attending a wine class led by an effervescent teacher and their journey of discovery. The audience participates in enjoying six wines along with the class and "everyone learns a little about wine... and love." The score is written by wine expert and *Gourmet Magazine* wine consultant Michael Green and award-winning composer Gary Negbaur. Green noted that, "The original concept for WINE LOVERS came out of the inherent theatricality of wine classes and the fascinating reasons why people are driven to attend a class in the first place." Wine Lovers is directed by Holly-Anne Ruggiero (*Jersey Boys*, *700 Sundays*). The musicals tagline is: "See, swirl, smell, sip, and savor WINE LOVERS - a romance in six glasses. For information and tickets: www.wineloversthemusical.com.



"Pastiches" Wine Poster Calendar Noted French wine posterist, Jean-Pierre Got, has published a 13-month 2008 wall calendar featuring a selection of 13 graphic art posters that Got created for French and California wineries and vineyards. Retail price is \$14.99. Available in the USA from GottUSA@yahoo.com, 209-772-1303.

Wine-Flavored Desserts Popular Mercer's Dairy in Boonville, New York is producing wine-flavored ice creams. The ice creams won best new product in the Small Bite, Big Taste competition at The Great American Dessert Expo in 2007. The grapes come from the oldest winery in the United States, Brotherhood Winery in Washingtonville, New York. Each pint of ice cream contains 5% alcohol or the equivalent of one glass of wine. Flavors include Ala Port, Peach White Zinfandel, Red Raspberry Chardonnay, and Royal White Riesling. For information, go to www.mercersdiary.com. David Zablocki and Bret Birnbaum, childhood friends from Queens, New York and both wine lovers, have developed a line of wine sorbets. The Pinot Noir is the most popular of the six flavors which also include Champagne, Cabernet Sauvignon, Riesling, Rosé and Sangria Rojo. The website is www.winecellarsorbet.com. You will need an ID to buy either of these desserts!



Pinot Noir Soda A company in Berkeley, California has introduced sodas made from Central Coast and Northern California grapes, labeled Vignette. The sodas are sweetened with varietal wine grape juice and have the flavors of the grapes (ie Pinot Noir tastes like cherries and violets), but none of the alcohol, tannins or oak. The two flavors are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The sodas are available in restaurants and at specialty food stores. For a complete list of sources, go to the company's website, www.winecountry soda.com.

Final Harvest Reports According to WineBusiness.com, the 2007 Sonoma County harvest was smaller than average, but of very high quality. Steve Dutton summarized the vintage well when he said, "The crop size was down, but we harvested beautiful, beautiful fruit this year. If someone's not making great wine from this vintage, they're in the wrong business." Reports from the Santa Lucia Highlands in Monterey County were similar: potentially "best ever" quality with lower than normal yields. Gary Pisoni noted, "Low winter rainfall left the grapes screaming for water. That early season stress kept yields very low. The 2007 Pinot Noirs from Pisoni and the Santa Lucia Highlands will be fantastic. They are dark, intense, and have great acidity."

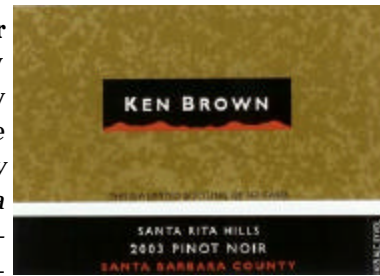
Ambullneo Vineyards Solomon Hills Pinot Noir Greg Linn, proprietor of Ambullneo Vineyards, is a proponent of blended wines. However, when the selection process of barrels for blending resulted in discovering certain barrels from a single vineyard with highly unique features, Greg was forced to bottle them separately. The 2006 Solomon Hills Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir is being sold now as futures for a spring, 2008 release (\$95). Greg notes, "The wine is reminiscent of a great Grands Echezeaux with Asian spice, soy sauce, truffles, earth and cola. The finish is amazing and will reward you with an endless loop that has a hard time finishing." 70% whole cluster fermentation, aging in 60% new French oak. For details and ordering consult the website at www.ambullneovineyards.com.



Spiegelau Has the Curves The new Venus line of wine glasses and decanter are said to have the shape of a well-proportioned woman's body. The company says, "No shame on him, when he thinks of a beautifully curved leg when looking at elegant stems of the high glasses from the Venus series." Check them out at www.spiegelau.com.

Small Sips of Pinot

2003 Ken Brown Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 122 cases, \$45. Initially this was a very intense and heady wine resulting from scant yields (1 ton per acre) and the typically robust fruit from this vineyard. *A few years in the cellar has tamed the beast. Dark ruby in color. Complex aromatics of dark fruits, freshly baked cookies, toast and smoke. Darker Pinot fruits carry the theme to a lengthy and tangy finish. Silky in texture with gossamer tannins. An argument for aging Pinot Noir a few years before popping the cork.* The website is www.kenbrownwines.com.



2005 Figge Cellars Paraiso Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 895 cases, \$42. Gary Figge heads a family-owned winery that produces Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah from various vineyards within Monterey County. Founded in 2004, the first vintage was 2005. Figge was the senior vineyard manager for Estancia from 1988 to 2004, managing over 1,700 acres of vineyards between San Luis Obispo and Monterey. His desire to leave the world of large corporate farming led him to found his own label. This wine comes from the Paraiso Vineyard located at the southern end of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. Owners Rich and Claudia McFarland pioneered Monterey vineyards in the early 1970s. Son Jason now manages the 400 acres of vineyards planted primarily to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Figge accessed fruit from a block planted in 1998 to clones 115, 667 and 777. Beginning in 2006, Figge will release a Pinot Noir from another site - The Pelio Vineyard - which he planted in 2003 in Carmel Valley. *A well-crafted middle-weight style with plenty of charm. Spicy cherries, cola and a hint of fecundity in the nose. Flavors tend toward the earthy with dusted red and blue fruits and a deft touch of oak. A good acid spine backs up the pleasure.* The website is www.figgecellars.com.



2005 Leigh Cellars Silacci Vineyard Monterey County Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$27. The label says "Produced and bottled by Arcadian," but this is the private label of Gerry Frayer who made this wine under the tutelage of Arcadian's Joe Davis. I believe this is Gerry's first Pinot Noir. *This is a very nicely weighted Pinot Noir whose light garnet color indicates that elegance is forthcoming. It possesses a spice cabinet nose with a subtle hint of oak and alcohol. Juicy spiced peach and cherry flavors are followed by a citrus kick on the back end. A pretty wine that is easily approachable.* No website, try e-mailing Gerry at vinonut@sbcglobal.net.

2006 Loring Wine Company Shea Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 530 cases, \$46m screw cap. Brian Loring's first wine under his label from Shea Vineyard grapes (he crafted a 2005 vintage Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir for Pali). *Leads off with blackberries, pepper and oak spice in the aromatics. Darker Pinot fruits predominate, with respectable acidity, silky tannins, and a nice toasty, albeit shallow finish.* The website is www.loringwinecompany.com.



2002 Littorai Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 205 cases, \$55. I have a few thousand bottles of Pinot Noir in my cellar (duh, what a revelation), and a Littorai wine from Ted Lemon is often my choice on special occasions. This was my Thanksgiving Day dinner wine. Ted says that the 2002 vintage was perhaps the greatest vintage at Littorai. "The Pinot grapes were as perfect as anything we have ever seen. The Pinots are a wonderful expression of perfectly ripe fruit with full but integrated tannins." He felt the 2002 Pinot Noirs were entering adolescence and required a few more years of patience. I just couldn't wait. *A wine that defies description. As you sip it, you just*



shake your head and say, "This is great." Precise descriptors don't do it justice. Heaven sent from start to finish with plenty of charisma that only Pinot Noir can deliver. Imagine this wine when it grows up!

2003 Littorai Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 100 cases, \$60. *Appealing scents of black cherries, cinnamon, wet stone and old oak barrel. Plenty of luscious cherry and black raspberry fruit with a mineral and woody edge. A notable tannic backbone. Nicely composed and weighted and perfectly harmonious. An excellent wine that would charm anyone's heart, but the 2002 version can STEAL your heart.* The website is www.littorai.com.

2005 Martin The Salamanaczar Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc.. A winemaker's reserve wine from Dennis Martin who is the winemaker at Fetzer Vineyards. He also crafts small quantities of Pinot Noir under the Sanctuary label from Bien Nacido Vineyard. Fruit for this wine is 71% Solomon Hills Vineyard and 29% Bien Nacido Vineyard. *A darkly-hued, mysterious Pinot Noir that begins with a nose of dark fruit, toast, char and wet oak. Black cherry, mushroom, and cola flavors dominate. A powerful and strong-boned wine that is yet soft in the mouth.* No known availability source.

2006 ZD Carneros Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$40. ZD has been producing Pinot Noir from Carneros for 38 years. Two former aerospace engineers, Norman de Leuze and Gino Zepponi started ZD in a small building in Carneros in 1968. With their first vintage in 1969, they produced 300 cases of Pinot Noir from the Winery Lake Vineyard and a small amount of White Riesling. This Pinot Noir was of historical significance as it was the first wine to have the Carneros designation on the label. A new winery was built on the Silverado Trail in the Napa Valley in 1979. In 1996, ZD purchased an historic vineyard in Carneros and planted 7 acres to Pinot Noir. Christened the de Leuze Vineyard, both Swan and Hanzell heritage selections were planted. The first vintage from this vineyard was 1999, and today grapes from this organically farmed vineyard make up the backbone of the ZD Reserve Pinot Noir. The de Leuze family continues to manage ZD and Norman's son, Robert, is the winemaker. Grapes for this bottling of regular Pinot Noir came from Jim Haire's Vineyard in Carneros (clones 115, 667, 777 and Pommard). *This beauty is a real cherry bomb. Black cherries complimented by black raspberries, vanilla wafers, and a little toast are nicely orchestrated. Supple in the mouth with plenty of finesse and a long, powerful finish.* The 2005 ZD Reserve Pinot Noir is sold out (2006 is not yet released). The website is www.zdwines.com.



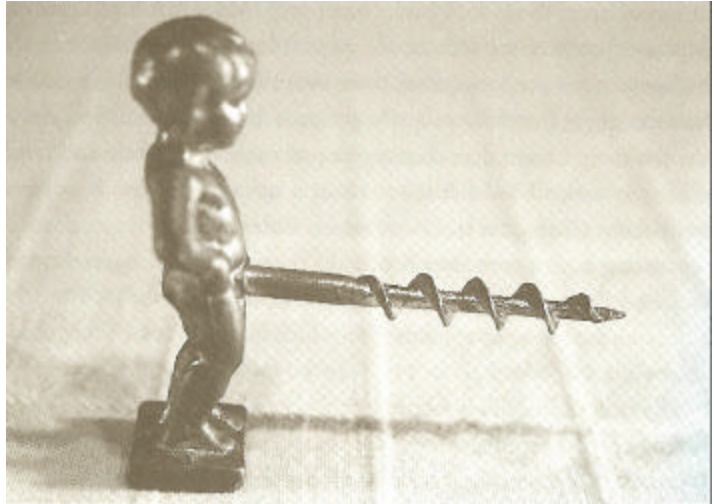

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Christmas Gift for the Pinot Geek Who Has Everything



From *Wine Magic* by Alan R. and Sandra L. Putnam

Confessions of an Empty Glass Sniffer

I confess that I suffer from the common wine drinker's malady, empty glass sniffing. I began rather innocently. At wineries I visited, I often received an ounce or less tasting pour and after I drank or spat out that small amount of wine, I often thirsted for more. I found that I could prolong my sensory high by sticking my nose into the empty glass and inhaling deeply. With Pinot Noir, the wine residue that coats the glass can create an intense aromatic perfume which is quite unlike what one experiences with a half-filled glass of wine. I assume a physicist could explain this phenomenon (something to do with surface area), but why worry about the reason or the details. The experience can be further heightened if the winemaker is present and extols the virtues of his Pinot Noir (the "halo effect").

One should avoid this activity at all costs except in the sanctity of wineries or your own home. Attempts to enjoy empty glass sniffing in restaurants or wine bars encourages puzzled and scornful stares from others in the room. You can be made to feel like a pervert. Treatment of this condition is futile and unrewarding. An understanding support group of friends and family can be very helpful.

