

**If you drink no
Noir,
you Pinot Noir**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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J Pinot Noir Now Sparkles Too

J Vineyards & Winery was founded by Judy Jordan, daughter of Jordan Vineyards & Winery owner Tom Jordan, in 1986. Begun as a small *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine project at Tom Jordan's winery in the Alexander Valley, J quickly became a marquee producer of cool climate sparkling wine in California. J Vintage Brut, J Cuvée 20 Brut, Late-Disgorged Vintage Brut, and J Brut Rosé have been highly lauded and deservedly so. The yellow J logo on sparkling wine bottles is an instantly recognizable and respected brand label that personifies the winery's by-line, "the essence of style."

Judy Jordan, like the Prince, is a graduate from Stanford University. After receiving a degree in Earth Sciences/Geology, she worked in Geophysics at Western Geophysical Corporation in Denver, Colorado before returning to work at her family's business. Her father, Tom, encouraged her to seek a career in wine and inspired her entrepreneurial passion. Lew Platt, former CEO of Hewlett Packard and Chairman of Boeing Corporation, mentored Judy in the importance of building and maintaining a team aligned with the core values of elegance, integrity, respect and a sense of community. In 1996, she purchased the former Piper Sonoma winemaking facility in Healdsburg and opened a sumptuous tasting room in 1999, becoming one of the first in the winery business to offer a food and wine pairing experience to visitors.

Since its origins, J has fostered a respected tradition in sparkling wine, but the winery's Pinot Noirs have not been distinguished. As much as I personally enjoyed J sparkling wines, I looked the other way when asked about their Pinot Noirs. The Pinot Noirs, made since 1994, were simple, passable, supermarket Pinot Noirs that really did a disservice to the J name. However, when I met Judy Jordan recently and sampled her 2006 vintage J Pinot Noirs, it was clear that she was a committed and dynamic owner who had decided to fully devote the winery's resources to reviving the J Pinot Noir (and Chardonnay) program. With 274 acres of prime vineyard property throughout the Russian River Valley at her reach, Jordan clearly realizes the potential for J to produce world-class Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

The turnaround at J began with the hiring of George Bursick, who spent 22 years as the founding Executive Winemaker for Ferrari-Carano. He is a well-respected winemaker who helped shape the modern era of the California wine industry.

As a close personal friend of Judy Jordan and a godfather to one of her children, he was a natural choice to lead the turnaround at J. George was raised in Sonoma County and developed his early winemaking skills at Beringer Winery. He subsequently obtained a Masters in Enology from University California Davis, with a focus on Wine Sensory Evaluation. His first solo winemaking job was at McDowell Valley Vineyards in Mendocino County. After nine years at McDowell, George joined Rhonda and Don Carano as Director of Winemaking and he remained there for 22 years. At Ferrari-Carano, George had extensive experience with Sangiovese, which he calls "Pinot Noir's twin," because both grapes respond favorably to similar winemaking techniques.



George joined J in May 2006 and his imprint was evident immediately. To make iconic wines, George believes that a winemaker must try approaches that his peers are not willing to do. His main focus throughout his career has been to create wines of supple mouth feel, or increased "wine body." "My understanding of the factors that contribute to wine texture, as well as developing techniques that have the ability to create it has defined my approach to winemaking." George has begun by instituting a number of innovative viticultural practices focused on site-specific blocks which are farmed individually and harvested separately. Using modern computer technology, a modeling profile of all of the soils of the estate vineyards has been obtained. This knowledge is critical for precision viticulture and not without significant complexity as there are 24 different soil types in the Russian River Valley, even more diversity than in Burgundy.

At the winery, individual blocks are kept separate (84 separate Pinot Noir lots, 9 different rootstocks, 15 different clones) to showcase each of the vineyard's characteristics. The different blocks are then exposed to a number of variables including use of indigenous as well as rare, exotic yeasts (some Burgundian strains dating to 1940) and malo-lactic strains, varieties of punch down regimes, slow and extended fermentations, unique French Burgundian cooper impression on different wine lots, as well as thoughtful battonage (Fr. - stirring the lees) during aging. Utilizing these myriad of variables and blending them, George feels he creates a more interesting wine than a wine made of only its singular components.

George uses one winemaking technique that is off the grid for most Pinot Noir winemakers. He has observed that in Burgundy the grapes achieve seed ripeness but not sugar ripeness, while in California there is sugar ripeness without corresponding seed ripeness. Therefore, he chooses to de-stem the fruit and remove the seeds from the winemaking process. In this way, the seed tannins, which are undesirable when unripe and alcohol soluble, are removed from the process. The result is wines that are low in tannin stylistically.

After a five to ten day cold maceration of the must, the Pinot Noirs undergo a two week fermentation and are then transferred to barrel. The French oak barrels are chosen for their tight-grain attributes so that the fruit expression is preserved. Malolactic fermentation is extended, proceeding over a 2 to 4 month period during which time no nutrients are added to speed up the process. The wines are aged in 30%-35% new French oak barrels for 12 months.

George is passionate about his new winemaking venture at J, but he remains an enjoyable and affable fellow of myriad interests. He has been playing music since he was ten years old and has mastered as many as five instruments. Professionally skilled as a drum player, he formed a band called Private Reserve. Started in 1992, Private Reserve is a mix of wine colleagues that currently includes Mike Martini, Ed Sbragia, Jess Knubis, Steve Buehl and John Hawkins. The band plays gigs at wine and winery related events and allows George to keep his love of music, and particularly rock and roll, alive.

Hollis Price remains the assistant winemaker at J Vineyards & Winery. She has been at J nearly a decade and oversees and directs all aspect of J's sparkling wine production. John Erbe is J's viticulturist. He has worked in the agri-business since 1979, managing vineyards at St. Supery, Laetitia Vineyard & Winery, and Guenoc Winery. He oversees J's over 274 acres in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley appellation. The vineyards include: Nicole's Vineyard (Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir clones 2A, 113, 115, 42 acres), Robert Thomas Vineyard (Pinot Noir, clones 32, Rochioli/Wente, Knude 15, 115, 667, 777, 828, and 2A, 52 acres), Back Door Vineyard (Pinotage, clone 1), Canfield Vineyard (Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, 19 acres, Goldridge loam soil, scheduled planting spring 2009), Cooper Vineyard (Pinot Gris, clones 146, 152, 2.5 acres adjacent to winery), Covey Vineyard (Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, 16 acres, Goldridge loam soil, scheduled planting spring 2009), Nonny's Vineyard (Pinot Noir, clones 115, 667, 777, 828, Calera, Pommard), 70 acres planted in 2000), Westside Road Vineyard (Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, Pinot Noir clones Swan, Rochioli, Pommard, Calera, 2A, 115, 667, 777, 828, 44 acres, planted in late 2008), and River Road Vineyard (Chardonnay, clone 4, 20 acres).

The first fully executed vintage of varietal wines at J made by George Bursick were released in May, 2008. I recently attended a tasting of some of the newest 2006 releases at Sona Restaurant in Los Angeles where Judy Jordan and George Bursick proudly presented their wines.

2007 J Vineyards & Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Gris 14.5% alc., 17,500 cases, \$20. Fruit sourced from the Russian River Valley, Dry Creek Valley and Santa Barbara County appellations. Whole clusters gently pressed and fermented slowly at cool temperatures in stainless steel using a variety of Alsatian yeasts. *Alsatian aromatics featuring citrus, wax, and honeycomb. Attractive honeysuckle core, lean and crisp, with lively acidity. Refreshing and easy to drink.* At Sona, this was paired perfectly with Hawaiian Kanpachi, avocado, Meyer lemon vinaigrette and rice tuile.

2006 J Vineyards & Winery Russian River Valley Chardonnay 14.0% alc., 2,928 cases, \$40. All estate fruit. Whole grape clusters were gently pressed with a Coquard Champagne basket press. Free-run juice and press fraction juices were fermented separately with indigenous and wild yeasts. The wine was left to barrel ferment for up to four months followed by two months of malolactic fermentation without nutrients (usually Chardonnay is made "fast and clean" by adding nutrients). The Chardonnay was then blended and aged an additional six months in bottle before release. Viticulture techniques for Chardonnay are directed at avoiding strong green apple and green pear flavors (less ripe) in favor of more melon flavors (more ripe). *Appealing aromas of topical fruits, nuts and understated oak. A wine with charming restraint and delicacy, yet delivering plenty of apple flavor with hints of oak and butter.* Paired beautifully at Sona with Maine lobster risotto and shellfish emulsion.

2006 J Vineyards & Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 21,057 cases, \$38. The flagship Pinot Noir sourced from estate vineyards and selected growers in the Russian River Valley appellation. Winemaking described above. Tasted at Sona Restaurant and at home. *Starts out with subtle cherry aromas with baking spice, herbs and a hint of oak. Picks up intensity with time in the glass*

displaying a more flamboyant cherry perfume. Soft and silky and cherry-driven with a sidecar of oak leading to a dry finish. A straight-forward, perfectly decent Pinot Noir that is ready to drink now. (Note, often found in retail market at less than the full retail price).

J Vineyards & Winery Nicole's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 1,400 cases, \$65. Multiple clones, selected barrels. *This wine is a clear step up in class and will please any pinotophile. A reticent but lovely perfume of cherry compote, herbs and oak leads to an explosion of succulent raspberry fruit and spice on the palate. Elegant and sophisticated with a velvety mouth feel and an elaborate aromatic finish. This is the bomb.*

J Vineyards & Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 389 cases, \$70. Sourced from the southern reaches of the Sonoma Coast appellation, five miles from the Pacific Ocean. Long hangtime with ripening not occurring until just before Thanksgiving. Clones are 115, 777, 828 and Pommard. Extended malolactic fermentation in barrel. *This wine was offered for sampling for the first time. Rather shy and withdrawn nose at this young age. Brooding, highly structured black cherry and black raspberry fruit.. Forceful, yet supple, with brisk acidity to offset the healthy tannins. This is a prodigious Pinot Noir that won't be ready for at least another 6 to 12 months, if then. A wine to contemplate.*

Other wines not sampled but offered by J Vineyards & Winery in their lineup of current releases include 2006 Robert Thomas Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (294 cases, \$65), 2006 Nonny's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (378 cases, \$70), 2006 Barrel 16 (the top 16 barrels in the cellar from the estate vineyards, 395 cases, \$70), 2007 Hoot Owl Creek Vineyard Alexander Valley Viognier (1,100 cases, \$30), 2006 Russian River Valley Pinotage (467 cases, \$38), J Cuvée 20 Brut NV Russian River Valley sparkling wine (18,000 cases, \$32), Brut Rosé NV Russian River Valley sparkling wine (700 cases, \$40), 1999 Vintage Brut Russian River Valley sparkling wine (1,760 cases, \$50), 2000 Vintage Brut Russian River Valley sparkling wine (3,000 cases, \$50), 1997 Vintage Brut Late-Disgorged Russian River Valley sparkling wine (I had this at Sona Restaurant and it was really, really good - probably the best sparkling wine I have ever had from California - 660 cases, \$115), 1998 Vintage Brut Late-Disgorged Russian River Valley sparkling wine (600 cases, \$115), J Ratafia desert wine (\$42 - 375 ml), and J Pear Liquor (\$40 - 375 ml - also sampled - wonderful flavors of butterscotch, pears, and baking spice, and a real treat).

J Vineyards & Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is in widespread retail distribution. The single-vineyard bottlings are sold on the website, at the winery and to wine club members. The winery's Club J offers four tiers of participation and allows members access to limited release wines, regular shipments of still and sparkling wines and invitations to special winery events. The J Visitor Center, which opened in 1999 at 11447 Old Redwood Highway, offers several tasting experiences. J's Signature Bar offers still varietal wines from 11-5 daily. The Bubble Room is a reserve tasting salon that offers a selection of small plates prepared by chef Mark E. Caldwell paired to older vintages and small production wines that are only available at the winery (\$55 per person). The Bubble Room is open Thursday through Tuesday from 11-4. Reservations strongly recommended (707-431-5430). An outdoor wine and food experience in the J Terrace offers J sparkling and still varietals paired with artisan cheeses and charcuterie (\$35 per person, May-October, Thursday-Monday, 11-4, reservations not required). The ultimate luxury wine experience is the Essence Tasting which blends a seven-course wine and food pairing, vineyard tour, and wine education (Thursdays from 11-3, limited to eight guests, \$200 per person, reservations in advance). Tours of J Vineyards and Winery are offered daily 11:00 AM and 2:30 PM by appointment. Explore the J website, www.jwine.com, to order wine and view the new winery blog, "J News You Can Use," www.jvineyards.blogspot.com.



Ferrari-Carano's New Pinot Noir Program

The Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery in Healdsburg, California, was founded in 1981 by Donald and Rhonda Carano and was named after Don's grandmother, Amelia Ferrari. The Caranos are both second-generation Italian-Americans from Reno, Nevada, where they own the Eldorado Hotel/Casino. On a wine buying trip to California's Sonoma County, Don and Rhonda fell in love with the area and purchased an old farmhouse surrounded by 30 acres of wine grapes in the Alexander Valley (The pair still reside there when in Sonoma). They soon developed an interest in winemaking and began vinifying wine in their barn. Bottled under the "Carano Cellars" label, the first wines were given to friends. A serious commitment to Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery began with the acquisition of 250 acres of prime Sonoma County vineyards in the Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys. George Bursick became their first winemaker (see J Vineyards and Winery story, page 1). A winery was constructed beginning in 1985, and the first wine bearing the Ferrari-Carano name (1985 Ferrari-Carano Alexander Valley Chardonnay) was released in 1987. Critical acclaim for Ferrari-Carano wines followed quickly and many wine lovers of my generation remember downing many fine bottles of Ferrari-Carano Fume Blanc and Chardonnay.



Through the years, Ferrari-Carano has dabbled in Pinot Noir, producing a Rhonda's Reserve Pinot Noir (Pinot is Rhonda's wine of choice). A serious Pinot Noir program was finally launched with the 2006 vintage. Essentially, a small Pinot Noir winery was started within the current white wine production facility in Healdsburg (the red wines of Ferrari-Carano are produced at the Mountain Winery Estate in Alexander Valley under the direction of Aaron Piotter). Pinot Noir vineyards were purchased in the Russian River Valley and in the Mendocino Ridge area (Anderson Valley AVA) high above Anderson Valley. The Mendocino Ridge property, Sky High Ranch Vineyard (previously called Hayward Ranch), is located at 1,600 feet, eight miles from the Pacific Ocean. Planted in 2003 to clones 667, 777, 828 and Pommard, yields here are miniscule (.58 tons/acre in 2006, .67 tons/acre in 2007). The name "Sky High" is ironic as the vineyard site used to be occupied by hippies who farmed another crop of some repute. Pinot Noir is also sourced from vineyards farmed by the Dutton Company in the Russian River Valley.

When George Bursick left Ferrari-Carano for J Vineyards and Winery, Sarah Quider was brought in to direct the white wine program and Pinot Noir production. Sarah told me she obtained a degree in Biology, but her first job at a marine research facility in Bodega Bay lasted only a short time because she was deterred by the smell of fish (“ugh,” she says). The smell of wine was a whole lot more appealing and she obtained a harvest internship at Ferrari-Carano where she fell in love with the aromas and the excitement of winemaking. Sarah subsequently worked at Jordan Winery and pursued a degree at University California Davis, graduating in 2003. She became winemaker at Ferrari-Carano in 2006. Her able assistant is Christine Griffith.



Sarah Quider

I recently visited the beautiful Ferrari-Carano estate and tasted through both the two current 2006 Pinot Noir releases and the two 2007 Pinot Noirs from barrel with Sarah and Christine. It was clear that these women show a nice touch with Pinot Noir and it would appear the Pinot Noir program at Ferrari-Carano is in very capable hands. I previously reviewed the 2006 Ferrari-Carano Sky High Ranch Pinot Noir favorably (*PinotFile*, Volume 6, Issue 60)

2006 Ferrari-Carano Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$32. Clusters were de-stemmed, allowing partial whole cluster fermentation. Reductive winemaking throughout. Various yeast strains were used. Barrel aged for 9 months in 30% new French oak. *A cherry-driven wine with a pleasant compliment of underbrush and herbs. Elegant, with adequate acidity, a clean finish, and deft use of oak.*

2007 Ferrari-Carano Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (barrel sample). *A little more complex aromatic and flavor profile featuring candied cherries, herbs, and roseate notes. Elegant and precocious.*



2006 Ferrari-Carano Sky High Ranch Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$46. Winemaking as for the Russian River Valley Pinot Noir except the cold soak was extended and aging lasted 15 months in 50% new Burgundian French oak. *This wine rewards patience and contemplation as it changes constantly in the glass. Impressive core of jammy berries and black cherry with a sidecar of oak spice and chocolate, and a citrus note on the finish. Nicely composed and balanced and more richly structured than the wine above.*



2007 Ferrari-Carano Sky High Ranch Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir (barrel sample). *Similar to the 2006 vintage except better overall weather in this vintage produced even more vibrant and juicy fruit. Still needs time to resolve some tannins, but this will be first rate when released.*

The five acres of gardens at Ferrari-Carano are spectacular and worth a visit. The over 2000 species of trees (including a cork tree) and shrubs are marked with identification tags, and seasonal flower plantings make this one of the most beautiful winery settings in Sonoma County. The sculpture of Bordeaux, a wild boar, heralds the entrance to Villa Fiore (House of Flowers - the Ferrari-Carano tasting room and wine shop). The legend goes that Bordeaux was a nuisance in the Carano vineyards and was enticed with a corn cob before he met his demise. He now haunts the Carano's Alexander Valley home. Be sure and rub his nose for good luck.



Ferrari-Carano wines are available in the Italian/Mediterranean-inspired Villa Fiore Tasting Room which is open daily from 10-5. Downstairs there is a tastefully decorated second tasting room, the Enoteca, where reserve and vineyard select wines are poured with comfortable couches and tables for relaxing. Winery tours are offered daily at 10:00 AM by appointment and four Private Tasting Programs are available also by appointment (contact the Hospitality Department at 707-433-6700). The wines are also sold on the website at www.ferrari-carano.com. Although this is a large commercial operation, visitors are welcomed and tended to with sincerity and warmth. I have never met the Caranos, but the staff shared so much personal information with me that I left feeling I knew them. There is obviously a healthy amount of respect among the staff for the Caranos and I left having acquired quite a bit of admiration for them and good memories of my entire experience.

In July, 2008, Ferrari-Carano purchased the venerable Lazy Creek Vineyards in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County. The Philo winery will continue to operate as a separate facility.

Sebastiani & Sons: Pinot for the Millenials

As reported in recent issues of both *Quarterly Review of Wines* (Spring, 2008), and the *Wine Enthusiast* (May, 2008), Don Sebastiani & Sons is one of California's fastest growing négociant labels (sporting an increase in sales from two million to eight million cases annually in three years with Don Sebastiani at the helm as board chairman). The goal of Don Sebastiani & Sons is to position itself as a quality value producer, with marketing aimed at the younger (millennial) set of wine drinkers. This group of wine drinkers has a growing interest in wine drinking, and with 70 million members, this is a group to be recognized.

A négociant does not own any vineyards and has no winery, a model begun in France centuries ago, but just now becoming a hot trend in California. The title négociant has had a negative connotation for many, since finished wines from other wineries are purchased and sometimes blended to produce a finished product. It is, in fact, simply a way for dealing with the surplus of bulk wine and grapes in the marketplace. In many cases, the négociant is actively involved in vineyard management and wine-making decisions at the source. Winemaker Richard Bruno serves this function at Sebastiani & Sons.

Don Sebastiani & Sons (the sons are Donny and August) was formed in 2001 and is composed of two wine divisions: Three Loose Screws offers appellation and limited release wines such as Pepperwood Grove and Smoking Loon, Mia's Playground Pinot Noirs and Aquinas Pinot Noir. The Other Guys division releases small production labels including Plungerhead, Hey Mambo, and "moobuzz" Pinot Noir.

2006 moobuzz Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 1,540 cases, \$25. A topographical map of the Sonoma Coast is on the front label. Two bottles sampled. Sealed with Zork closure. *The first bottle had a dank cellar aroma and was unpleasant. Dirty cherry flavors with noticeable woody flavors. Soft in the mouth with decent acidity. The second bottle was better. The wine was reduced initially but improved in the glass. The nose evolved and offered black fruits and a hint of oak char. Very fruity and easy to drink. Just ok but would be a good companion for hamburgers.*



2006 Aquinas Napa Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 37,000 cases, \$14. Named after St. Thomas Aquinas, a revolutionary scholar in the 13th century. Closed with NuKork. *Nice perfume of strawberries and cassis. Ripe and racy strawberry and raspberry flavors with a subtle note of oak toast. Admirable fineness and a fuzzy mouth feel. My only nit is the wine finishes a little hot. (this will be submersed with food). A perfectly fine daily drinker. Unbelievable quality considering huge production and reasonable price.*



2006 Mia's Playground Sangiacomo Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 4,200 cases, \$24. Named after Don's sister, Mia. Aged 16 months in French oak. Sealed with NuKork. *Very expressive berry and cherry fruit with a hint of herbs, roses, oak and bacon. Plenty of dark red fruit with interesting compliments of earth, tobacco and herbs. Nicely balanced with a smooth texture and a clean and lingering finish. A serious wine for the tariff and recommended. Tasted three different times with consistent results.*



Sebastiani & Sons wines are widely distributed. Check the websites, www.donandsons.com, and www.togwines.com. Fun wines, innovative closures, odd names. What's not to like if you are young and the least bit interested in wine?

Handley Cellars is a Model of Consistency

Milla Handley has been at it for over 25 years and the winery she directs as both proprietor and wine-maker is now making wines of such impressive consistency that I never tire recommending them. For more than 10 years now, Handley Cellars has farmed sustainably in the Anderson Valley, using organic methods whenever feasible. The winery and surrounding estate vineyards are nestled in the “deep end” of the Anderson Valley in coastal Mendocino County. A wide range of varietal wines are produced, both red and white, including sparkling wine, and all are very sensibly priced.



2006 Handley Cellars Handley Vineyard Dry Creek Valley Chardonnay 15.0% alc., 1,510 cases, \$20. The vineyard is located at the cooler end of the Dry Creek Valley and benefits from coastal fog influence in the mornings. Temperatures were higher than normal in July, 2006, accounting for the higher sugars and resulting alcohol. 65% of the wine was fermented and aged in French oak barrels (18% new); 35% was stainless steel fermented before it was racked to French oak barrels and puncheons. The wine spent six months in oak before bottling. 35% of the blend finished MLF. *I am particularly partial to this style of Chardonnay. The nose offers leesy, butter, peach and lemon peel aromas. On the palate the wine is creamy and fruity with plenty of stone fruit extract. Beautifully balanced with acid under control and a long finish with no alcohol in site. Delicious.*

2006 Handley Cellars Anderson Valley Estate Chardonnay 12.8% alc., 1,934 cases, \$22. Ample leaf canopy protected the Chardonnay clusters from the July heat and they ripened fully during moderate weather in August and September. Fruit was carefully dropped and sorted to ensure quality. The wine received a balanced oak regime, fermenting and aging in a combination of new and neutral barrels and puncheons. The wine was aged *sur lie* for 3 months. 32% of the wine completed MLF. *A bit more apparent acidity and austerity than the above Chardonnay, in part due to lower alcohol. Equally attractive aromas and flavors of green apples, pears, peaches, almonds, and oak with a citrus bent. The texture is edgy and the finish is refreshingly crisp. Beautifully balanced and a treat to drink.*

2006 Handley Cellars Handley Vineyard Dry Creek Valley Syrah 14.5% alc., 570 cases, \$25. *Deep, dark purple color. Penetrating perfume of brambly and earth dusted crushed black fruits. Thick with potent black raspberry and blackberry fruit with moderate fine-grained tannins. Needs substantial food.*

2006 Handley Cellars Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 4,062 cases, \$30. Sourced from several vineyards include Handley Estate (33%), Ferrington (15%), Charles (11%), Helluva (11%), Corby (8%), Romani (8%) and others (14%). The grapes were cold soaked for two days after crushing. Several different yeasts were utilized for fermentation causing variation in fermentation rate among the different lots. The grapes were then pressed, allowed to settle a few days in tank, and racked to French oak barrels, 29% of which were new. The wine was aged 9 months in barrel, with lees stirring, until MLF was completed. *This is still a very young wine and I have experienced some bottle variation at this stage. This particular bottle was fine. Alluring aromas of cherry, baking spices, and sage. Light and easy to drink, the red fruits are juicy with good grip. Soft and pillowy with gossamer tannins. A reliable drinker that won't disappoint.*



Handley Cellars is located at 3151 Hwy 128, in Philo. The attractive tasting room is open daily. The wines are sold on the website and distributed to fine retail stores. The phone is 800-733-3151 and the website is www.handleycellars.com. The Handley Cellars 2003 Brut Rosé earned top honors in the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition (\$36). Two other Pinot Noirs from Handley Cellars have been previously reviewed in the *PinotFile* and are a step up in complexity and quality as well as price: 2004 Handley Cellars Reserve Pinot Noir (\$52) and 2005 Handley Cellars RMS Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$52, Wine Club member exclusive).



Sampling of Pinot Noir under Diageo Ownership

Diageo Chateau & Estate Wines is a large global premium drink business encompassing numerous brands of spirits, beer and wine. The company has offices in over 80 countries and is listed on the New York Stock Exchange (DEO). Diageo was formed in 1997 with the merger of Guinness and GrandMet and is headquartered in London. The name Diageo comes from the Latin word for day (dia) and the Greek word for world (geo).

Recently I was offered samples of Pinot Noirs from three Diageo properties: Acacia, Beaulieu Vineyard, and Orogeny. The Acacia label was started in 1979 by ophthalmologist Robert Sinskey and subsequently sold to Chalone who managed it through many successful years. There have been a long string of distinguished winemakers at Acacia. Acacia owns over 150 acres of prime vineyards in Napa Carneros. Beaulieu Vineyard, founded in 1900 by Georges de Latour, is a Napa icon, known for its long and venerated history and Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon offerings. Beaulieu planted vineyards in Carneros in the 1960s from which they currently source their Pinot Noir. Orogeny is a newer label founded in 2002, sourcing fruit from vineyards managed by the Dutton Company in Green Valley and Mark Pasternak in Marin County.

2006 Beaulieu Vineyard Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$18 Not a name that comes to mind when you think of Pinot Noir, but the last two vintages have been quite good and this is a label to seek out. The Reserve in 2005 was particularly memorable. I received no specific winemaking information, but from the website it would appear several days of cold soak is followed by fermentation in 18-ton stainless steel fermenters with pneumatic punch downs. Some 25% whole cluster is used. *Deep, dark ruby color. Brims with lovely aromas of sweet crushed berries, black cherries, and dried roses. Dark red and black fruits cascade nicely through the palate with complimentary flavors of mocha and oak. Nicely balanced and offering an appealing fuzzy texture. Impressive wine for the money and the best for drinking now in the Diageo lineup.*



Beaulieu Vineyard is located at 1960 St. Helena Highway in Rutherford. The tasting room is open daily from 10-5. Tasting charges vary from \$10 to \$25 pp. Production is a startling 1,400,000 cases annually. A team of three winemakers is headed by Joel Aiken. The website is www.bvwines.com.

2006 Orogeny Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 10,200 cases, \$40. Winemaker for Orogeny is noted cool-climate specialist, Dan Goldfield (also Dutton-Goldfield). *Mineral-inflected crushed berries and cherries with spice. Demure dark red Pinot fruits nicely accented with oak. Very silky in texture with moderate tannins indicating a bright future. Nice drink.*

2006 Orogeny Fox Den Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 330 cases, \$37. An 8 acre vineyard owned by Ed and Sue Smith on the western edge of Green Valley. *The nose is more typical of white wine showing tropical fruits, citrus and vanilla. Black cherry core with noticeable oak char and tannins, finishing with citrus tang. This one is disjointed and unwelcoming.*

2006 Orogeny Redding Ranch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 600 cases, \$60. The vineyard site has been in the Redding family since 1873. Located at the top of a steep ridge above the fog line. Rocky soils, maritime breezes, very low yields, and small berries. *Noticeably deep color. Beautiful rich and concentrated dark stone fruits and berries with a hint of roasted marshmallow. Highly extracted plummy fruit wrapped in oak is front and center, exhibiting a poached flavor. Interesting and complex, with hints of roasted nuts and tangerine peel. Smooth and creamy with nicely restrained tannins. This wine has a lot of cajones and was actually drinking better two days later from a re-corked opened bottle. This one will reward the adventurous.*



Orogeny wines are distributed through retail channels and are not sold on the website at www.rogeny.com. The name, orogeny, comes from the Greek words *oro* (mountain), and *-geny* (birth). The last orogenic episode geologically in Sonoma County created Green Valley. The business address is 240 Gateway Rd. West, Napa. 1-877-254-4250.

2006 Acacia Napa Valley Carneros Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 54,000, \$23. Sourced from estate grapes and nearby Winery Lake Vineyard and Lone Tree Vineyard. *Leading off are aromas of red cherry, pine sap, oak, and animale. Redder fruits including red current and cranberry are featured with a heavy dose of oak. Light and elegant with minimal tannins. The oak overwhelms the fruit.*

2006 Acacia Horseshoe Bend Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 357 cases, \$65. *Very shy aromatics offering black cherry, sage, hay and a touch of alcohol. Dark stone fruits and berries on the palate with a dry and hot finish. Light and elegant.*

2006 Acacia Lone Tree Vineyard Estate Grown Napa Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 1,690 cases, \$55. *Reticent perfume dominated by pine and herb scents. Relatively closed at this time with pleasing flavors of cherry, savory herbs, and a citric tang on the finish. Noticeable tannins to shed.*

2006 Acacia St. Clair Vineyard Napa Carneros Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 200 cases, \$75. *The best and most flamboyant nose in the lineup showing hi-tone strawberries and pleasing oak spice. The aromas are duplicated in the flavors. Light and feathery, yet showing a fair amount of tannin and ending with a tangy acidic edge.*

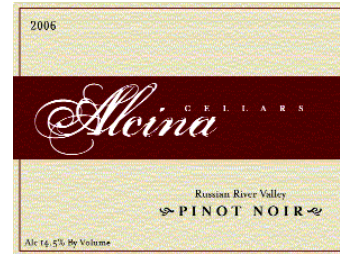


Acacia Vineyard single vineyard Pinot Noirs have a distinct stylistic bent. They tend to be restrained and austere and lack the velvety texture that some drinkers may miss. I suspect that they will age very well. That said, these are very young wines which are not at all showy at this time. I plan to revisit them 6-9 months down the road. The noticeable acidity in the wines demands food if drunk now. The winery and estate vineyard are located at 2750 Las Amigas Rd, Napa. The winemaker is Matthew Glynn. Production is 300,000 cases annually. There is also single vineyard Pinot Noirs from Beckstoffer Vineyard (\$75), DeSoto Vineyard (\$55), and Winery Lake Vineyard (\$55). The wines are sold on the website at www.acaciavineyard.com. Tasting is available daily by appointment. 707-226-9991.

Small Sips of the Russian River Valley

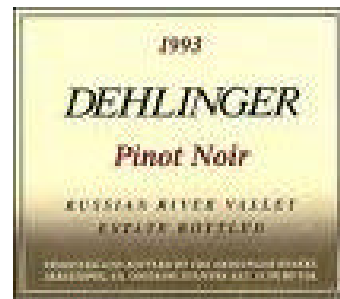
My personal experience shows that the Russian River Valley provides a very consistent range of Pinot Noirs from a multitude of producers. Over the past couple of months I sampled the fifteen different wines below, most of which were from the 2006 vintage and are current releases. Although the Alcina, Dehlinger and Talisman were my clear favorites, all of the wines can be recommended with one exception.

2006 Alcina Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 729 cases, \$35. This label is one of the best of the little known producers of California Pinot Noir. The winemaker is Richard Davis (Londer, CalStar, Halleck). *This wine has it all. Lighter reddish-purple in color. Attractive aromas of cherries and baking spice including nutmeg and allspice which pick up intensity in the glass. The flavors follow in step and the wine delivers restrained tannins and a lingering finish. As the French say, "C'est top!"* The Alcina wines are sold through a mailing list at www.alcinacellars.com.



2006 Brogan Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$45. *Medium-dark reddish-purple color. Complex and interesting nose which changes in the glass. It begins with black cherry, plum, and a hint of oak spice and adds grilled meat scents over time. Blacker fruits, including black raspberry and some raisin are dominant. Finishes clean with a citrus-laden finish. With time in the glass, more oak peeks out.*

2005 Dehlinger Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$65. Dehlinger is one of those labels which has turned out consistently marvelous wines for close to 30 years, but with no marketing, a modest web presence and even lack of phone number on the label, only the most devoted followers have a clue. *Now this is what I'm talking about. Red cherry pie aromas with a friendly oak influence. Delicious redder fruits with a little root beer and rhubarb added for interest. Embraces and surrounds the tongue with flavor. Light and elegant with barely detectable tannins. The balance is dead on. Perfect in every way, reminiscent of Comte de Vogue 1er Chambolle Musigny. Who says you can't make Burgundy in the USA? You want some of this (sold through mailing list only).* The website is www.dehlingerwinery.com and phone is 707-823-2378.



2006 Holdredge Wren Hop Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$34. A small producer located in Healdsburg. *Bright aromas of Bing cherry and dried flowers. Light in weight but a good attack of cherry and cranberry fruit, with overtones of dried herbs. Cleansing acidity on the slightly tart and citrus finish. Decent.*

2006 Ketcham Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$40. This label, owned by partners Mark Ketcham and Steve Riginich and vinified by winemaker Michael Browne (Kosta Browne), is relatively new but has been impressive. *Dark reddish-purple robe. Deep aromas of black cherry liquor with dried herbs, hay, and subtle oak char. Nice black cherry fruit core presented with restraint. Light and soft in the mouth, finishing with gossamer tannins. Very good.*

2005 Littorai Mays Canyon Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$65. *Darker fruits from start to finish with prominent notes of herbs and wildflowers on the nose and oak and smoke on the palate. The tannins are reigned in, the wine is light on its feet, but the finish lacks intensity and length.*

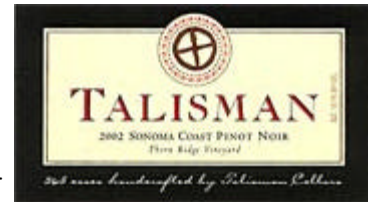
2005 Merry Edwards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$39. *The nose is the star here, drawing you in with heavenly Bing cherry, exotic spices and vanilla. The fruit is a bit shallow and watered-down. There is some attractive oak spice and the tannins are fine-grained. The wine finishes with a tart citrus impression.*

2006 O'Connell O'Connell Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$43. *Showy black cherry and black current aromas with a hint of sherry. A strange wine with stemmy fruit, oak, and medicinal (iodine) flavors. Soft in the mouth with fine tannins. With air, port flavors emerge. Disappointing.*

2003 Rochioli Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc.. *Dark red stone fruits with dried herbs run through from start to finish. Nice finesse, yet a solid tannic structure with brisk acidity on the finish. Very drinkable.*

2006 Rochioli Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$70. *This wine was discovered on the bottom shelf at a BevMor store (a discount wine retailer in California) - astonishing considering the pedigree. This wine needs patience currently. The aromas open slowly exhibiting black cherry, strawberry, forest floor, and hickory. Earthy and plummy on the palate with a touch of savory herbs. Elegant and silky with a short finish. Good but not great.*

2003 Talisman Ted's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 259 cases. *Scott Rich crafts this wine from Ted Klopp's vineyard. Lighter crimson color. Complex scents of cherries, old oak, prune and chimney. Yummy and comforting black cherry and cherry cola flavors with a hint of raisin. Smooth and satisfying. This wine rocked the next day from a re-corked open bottle - smooth as silk with plenty of spice including cinnamon - a hallmark of Talisman Pinot Noirs and a sign that this one has several good years of life ahead.* The Talisman wines are sold through a mailing list and on the website at www.talismanwine.com.



2006 Wes Mar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$35. *Light ruby in color. The nose is reserved but offers pleasant confectioned cherry aromas. Restrained red cherry fruit and a long cherry-driven finish lasting more than 20 seconds. Fairly delicate with bright acidity. Still young and a bit reticent now, picking up interest and flavor with time in the glass. A quite nice wine that shows off Pinot's demure side.*

2006 Whetstone Pleasant Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$50. *Proprietor and winemaker Jamie Whetstone learned the business at Turley Wine Cellars beginning in 1998. Prior to that he found his calling while working as a manager at Mustards Grill in Yountville. He started his own brand in 2002, is a partner in Manifesto! Wines, and hires out as a winemaking consultant. Life is not all work and he is also an avid surfer. His winemaking approach is minimalistic, using native yeasts, and bottling without filtering. A nose of some interest featuring red Pinot fruits, toast, farmyard, pickle, and floral scents. Cherry-driven with a bit of cherry candy, spice, vanilla, and char. Soft with slippery tannins. Perfectly decent.*

2006 Williams Selyem Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$45. *A haunting perfume of warm Bing cherry tart. Bright red cherry, cola and a hint of spice including cinnamon. Light in weight, even a bit too shallow, but smooth from start to finish. An easy drinker, but lacks excitement. Tasted twice.*

Small Sips of Sonoma Coast

2006 Alcina Cellars Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.9% alc., 264 cses, \$53. *The nose evolves beautifully in the glass exhibiting wet and smoky oak, baked cherries, and grilled meat. Delicious black cherry onslaught leaving a gradually fading memory on the mildly dry finish. Very light and diaphanous with a smoky edge throughout. Thoroughly satisfying, the wine holds its alcohol well.* Sold through a mailing list at www.alcinacellars.com.



2006 Alcina Cellars Ramondo Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 336 cases, \$53. *Very reserved delicate cherry perfume. The red fruits, including cherry and pomegranate, are demure and no tannin is in sight. Not showing much leg now, a Pinot in petticoats. Still, a charming drink.*

2006 Arissa Jane Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$35. *Shy dark stone fruits, shrooms, mowed grass, raisin and oak on the nose. Wild berry flavors are fine, but there is plenty of raisin and prune to ruin the experience. The penetrating acidity leads to a puckering finish..*

2006 Kanzler Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$50. The Kanzler Vineyard is on an east-facing slope of a small valley in the coastal hills between Bodega Bay and Sebastopol. Foggy mornings, warm days, and afternoon breezes are ideal for Pinot Noir. Farmed by Stephen and Lynda Kanzler. The winemaker is Greg Stach. *Dark red cherry, strawberry, oak spice and some herbs in the mix as well. Plenty of fruit but not flabby or overdone. Full of charm with a soft, velvety texture, refined tannins, and a clean finish. A seamless wine brimming with juiciness. Highly recommended.* Retail distribution and mailing list sales. The website is www.kanzlervineyards.com.



2006 MacMurray Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$19. *An oak-infused wine with aromas and flavors of confected black cherry, smoke and tar. A herbaceous edge is evident. Soft, but evident tannins. I have seen this wine very favorably reviewed in the wine press but it was disappointing to me. Drink it with grilled meat or fish.*

2006 William Selyem Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$42. *Strawberry, red cherry, allspice, and a hint of pine resin on the nose with light and tart red cherry and blueberry flavors. Soft, feminine and cozy with lively acidity. Simple, but enjoyable.*

2006 Zapaltas La Cruz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$43. *A perfectly fine appellation wine showing the best qualities of the cool Sonoma Coast. Nicely spiced red fruits, silky texture, and lively acidity to match up well with food. Just fine the next day from a re-corked opened bottle.* Sold through the website at www.zepaltas.com, with limited retail distribution.



Hirsch Vineyard: Grand Cru on Sonoma Coast

David Hirsch was somewhat of a visionary who planted one of the first vineyards in the true Sonoma Coast in Cazadero (Mike Bohan was the first to plant in 1973). In 1978, Hirsch purchased 1,100 acres on a remote ridge 900 feet above the Pacific Ocean at the end of Bohan-Dillon Road. Beginning in 1980, David and Marie Hirsch established a vineyard of 48 acres on the ridge tops above the fog line a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. Planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, it became world-renowned when Burt Williams (William Selyem), Ted Lemon (Littorai), and Steve Kistler (Kistler) showed up one day in the early 1990s, chose their blocks, and proceeded to make startling good and age-worthy vineyard-designate wines from the Hirsch Vineyard. The name, Hirsch Vineyard, quickly became synonymous with the true Sonoma Coast.

The vineyard is scattered over several ridge tops with varying exposure, altitude and soil type. With a variety of rootstocks and clones planted, there is considerable heterogeneity to the fruit, and Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noirs from different producers are difficult to compare as they are derived from distinctly different terroirs (refer to aerial photo of Hirsch Vineyard below)



In 2002, the Hirsch's built a 15,000-case winery on the estate in an old lambing barn, and brought in winemaker Vanessa Wong (Peay Vineyards, formerly Peter Michael) to craft the first Hirsch Estate Pinot Noir (vintage 2002). She was subsequently replaced by Mark Doherty (formerly PlumpJack and Davis Bynum). There have been five vintages of Hirsch Estate Pinot Noir and in most vintages, many different blocks are blended to produce the Estate Pinot Noir. In 2005, the yields were so miniscule that outside fruit was sourced to make the wine.

I recently tasted through a few vintages, including the first, of Hirsch Estate Pinot Noir. Early on, the wines can be quite structured and tannic (see 2006 vintage Estate for exception), but with time in the bottle lovely expressive fruit comes to the front and the wines are a delight to drink.

2002 Hirsch Vineyard Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc.. *Ripe plump cherries and oak spice with an infusion of floral scents. Earthy and dusty cherry fruit with some shroom and tangerine peel. Still sporting some tannin creating a dry finish. Still has plenty of life left.*

2003 Hirsch Vineyard Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 15.1% alc.. *Flamboyant and sexy perfume of crushed black cherries and blackberries with a lovely accent of oak and dried herbs. Alcohol peeks out a skoosh. Delicious dark red fruit compote that coats the tongue. Hedonistic, but silky and satiny, with a nice tang on the finish.*

2006 The Bohan-Dillon Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$30. This wine is composed of barrels that do not make the grade for the Estate label. None was produced in 2004 and 2005 due to low crop yields. Yields and tonnage in 2006 were very generous, exceeding all vintages over the previous nine years. At least twice as much fruit was dropped in 2006 as harvested in 2005. The bunches and berries were not unusually large, but very compact. *A simple Pinot Noir that makes a pleasant overall impression. Earth, damp leaf and spiced cherry scents with red Pinot fruit flavors enhanced by tones of herbs and oak. Light in the mouth with a good acid kick on the backend.*

2006 Hirsch Vineyards Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$55. Composed of 32 blocks from the Hirsch estate. *Very complex and constantly evolving aroma mix of dark cherries, cranberry, wet stone, Xmas spices including clove and cinnamon, mint and oak. Earth-dusted black fruits with a hint of raisin. Soft in the mouth with slippery tannins and an appealing elegance.*

2006 Hirsch Vineyards M Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 448 cases \$50. The label says: "It is a Marvelous and Mellifluous Middle cuvee of our site of fruit from 22 blocks. A wine for grownups." *The nose is flat and subdued initially but opens with swirling to aromas of deeply spiced cherries and roses with a whiff of alcohol. Highly structured and built for the long haul. Very earthy with notes of game and oak spice accentuating the black cherry fruit. Not particularly expressive now, but you get the feeling there is plenty of pleasure waiting to get out. Velvety soft in texture and beautifully crafted. A keeper.*



Hirsch Vineyards Pinot Noir and Chardonnay is sold primarily through a mailing list. Sign up on the website at www.hirschvineyards.com. The address is 45075 Bohan-Dillon Road in Cazadero. Tours and tastings are by appointment only (707-847-3600). If you decide to make the trip, allow a full day, and check the weather for Cazadero is an extremely wet site (80 inches of the wet stuff each year). Every true pinotphile should make the pilgrimage to Hirsch Vineyard at least once in their life.

Even More Small Sips

2005 EQ Matetic Vineyards Chile Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$27. EQ stands for Equilibrio, Spanish for balance. Imported by F.P.D. Inc., Carson, California. *Dark crimson color. Scents of wild dark berries with less appealing lacquer, wet stone and stinky aromas. Plump and earthy blackberry and plum flavors tending toward prune. Richly textured with finely ground tannins and well appointed oak. For the curious.*

2006 A.P. Vin Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir. 15.0% alc., \$49. Proprietor and winemaker Andrew P. Vingiello crafts interesting wines from multiple vineyard sources within California. *Very fruity nose with alluring cherry and strawberry perfume accented by spice and oak. Discreetly concentrated super ripe fruit tending toward raisin. Healthy tannins and a clean herb-tinged finish.*

2005 Tyler Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$50. *The nose trumps the flavors here. Like an expensive perfume, the scents of black fruits, roses, and fresh green grass are alluring. A different story in the mouth where the black cherry fruit is tart and lean. A hefty acidic spine dominates throughout.*

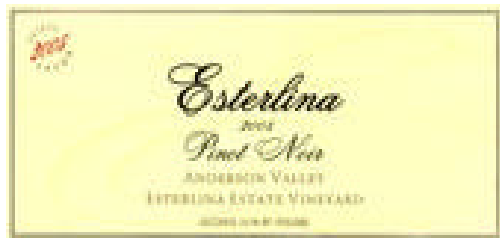
2005 Tyler Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$47. *Confectured cherry with toasty oak, sage and a hint of alcohol on the nose. Red cherry-driven with complimentary savory herbs and oak. Easy on the palate finishing dry and a little sharp.*

2005 Castle Los Carneros Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$16. Castle has been farming vineyards in Los Carneros and the Sonoma Valley for more than twenty years. *The nose is of some interest showing off black cherries, baking spices, and fresh roses. Alcohol peaks out. Light in body and intensity with a soft mouth feel. Flavors of cherries, red licorice, and tobacco are decent. Not a bad drink for the money. My wife liked this a lot (she is partial to bright cherry flavors).*



2006 Robert Sinskey Vineyards Los Carneros Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 369 barrels, \$30.50. *Closed up tighter than a drum. Pepper-dosed dark red fruits which are very restrained and mild grainy tannins that need to be shed. A wine of decent potential that is not showing its best at this young stage. Really peppery!*

2006 Esterlina Estate Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$45. *Noticeably confected cherry and cotton candy aromas with accents of roses and new-sawn oak. Delicious and caressing in the mouth, enveloping the tongue with rich spiced black cherry and black raspberry fruit. A little woody, shroom flavor adds interest. Beautifully balanced with silky tannins and a clean finish that lingers. Love to spend the evening with this one.*



2005 Sarah's Vineyard Estate Santa Clara Valley Pinot Noir 15.9% alc., 502 cases, \$25. This is a historic property, founded in 1978 and planted to a variety of proprietary clones. *The grapes for this wine appear to have hung too long. An over ripe fruit character dominates the wine which displays burnt jam and raisin flavors. The nose offers the smell of ripe cherries, mushrooms, beets and a hint of alcohol. There is plenty of acid and a grapefruit flavor that mars an otherwise lingering finish.*

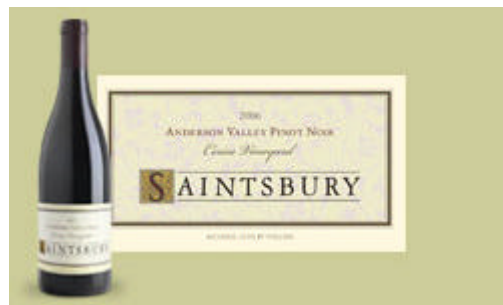
Saintsbury 2006

Since its beginnings in 1981, Sainsbury has a long and storied tradition in Carneros where they currently have more than twelve vineyards under contract, primarily on the Napa side of Carneros. Owners Dick Graves and David Ward have not rested on their laurels, however, and have constantly evolved and progressed to improve their lineup of wines. The winery has been outfitted with solar and is now able to supply all of the winery's electrical power off the grid during sunny daytime hours. Sainsbury is one of eight premium North Coast wineries participating in a new urban tasting venue now open in San Francisco called the Press Club, underneath the Four Seasons Hotel at 120 Yerba Buena Lane. Winemaker Jerome Chery, a protégé of Ted Lemon, came on board with the 2004 harvest, and has directed production of a new line of single-vineyard Pinot Noirs to complement Sainsbury's reliable Carneros and Garnet bottlings of Pinot Noir (the Reserve bottlings were discontinued). I sampled the 2006 lineup of Sainsbury Pinot Noirs and found the wines from this challenging vintage likeable, but not exceptional. The wines are currently shy and withdrawn despite the fact that they were bottled nearly a year ago, and they need at least another year in bottle to really blossom. If you drink them now, decant, and serve with suitable food to blunt the immature tannins.

2006 Sainsbury Carneros Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 24,445 cases, \$35 (available at \$28 some retail sources). Clones Pommard, Swan, 115, 667, 777. Multiple vineyard sources. 5 days cold soak, 15 days tank time, 9 months in 30% new French oak. *The aromatic profile is of interest, offering black cherries, oak, herbs, white pepper and a whiff of alcohol. Packing plenty of berry and cherry fruit with a little earthy bent, and a mildly dry finish, the wine seems bigger than previous recent vintages of this bottling.*

2006 Sainsbury Stanly Ranch Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 495 cases, \$45. Dijon 667 (65%) and 115 (35%). 4-5 day cold soak, 11-14 days total maceration varying with lots, 11 months in 40% new Francois Frères and Taransaud (same barrels used on all Sainsbury Pinot Noirs) oak barrels. Sainsbury has purchased fruit from the historic Stanly Ranch since 1984 and this vineyard has been a significant source for the Carneros Pinot Noir and Reserve Pinot Noir bottlings. The current Dijon 115, 667, and 777 and Pommard clones were planted in 2001 with modernization of the vineyard including spacing and vertical trellising. *Bright red cherry and herb garden with a hint of spice and oak on the nose. Light and elegant in the mouth, flavors of dried cherry, wild berries, and savory herbs are wrapped in relatively soft tannins. The healthy acidic spine is the most noticeable of any wine in the lineup.*

2006 Sainsbury Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 255 cases, \$45. This vineyard of 37 planted acres is on the steep slopes of the southwest facing hills just north of the town of Booneville. Shallow gravelly loam soils provide excellent drainage. Yields are 1.5-2.5 tons/acre. The second vintage of this vineyard-designate. 7 day cold soak, 16 day total maceration. 11 months in 40% new French oak. *The aromas are subdued and slow to evolve but some pleasant cherry, wild berry and dark chocolate appear with swirling. This is a richer and more tannic wine than the Stanly Ranch with a pleasing punch of black cherry fruit, a velvety texture and a very long finish. Cellaring is advised to meld the oak and tannins.*



2006 Sainsbury Lee Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 155 cases, \$45. Ira and Shirley Lee first planted their vineyard on Los Carneros Avenue in 1967. Sainsbury has been using fruit from Lee Vineyard since 1982. 100% Pommard clone. 4 days cold soak, 9 day total maceration. 11 months in 40% new French oak. *The darkest colored and darkest flavored wine in the lineup. Needs plenty of swirling now to bring forth the muted fruits and temper the astringency. Black fruits throughout and very*

woody, earthy and primal. Give this one a year or two and then get down and dirty with a big grilled steak.

2006 Saintsbury Toyon Farm Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 304 cases, \$45. 100% Dijon 777. 5 day cold soak, 13 day total maceration. Aged 11 months in 40% new French oak barrels. This property was originally a horse ranch. Purchased by Ed and Camille Penhoet in the middle 1990s, and the property was transformed into a dressage training facility. Toyon Farm Vineyard was planted in 2000 and 2001 and is located 500 meters east of Saintsbury's estate Brown Ranch Vineyard, separated from it by the famous Hyde Vineyard. Located in the northeastern corner of Carneros, the weather is warmer here and soils of volcanic origin mix with the more typical marine sedimentary clay-loams. *The lightest in color and weight in the lineup. Expressive and alluring aromas of cherries, Asian spices, ginger, and baked cookies. Redder fruits in the mouth with a grassy tone and subtle sidecar of oak. Light on its feet with mild to moderate tannins. The most approachable wine of the lineup now.*

2006 Saintsbury Brown Ranch Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir This is the prize in the Saintsbury lineup and consistently the most outstanding Pinot Noir. The vineyard is planted to Pommard and Dijon 115, 667, and 777 clones on four different rootstocks with many soil types and exposures. Yields range from 2.25 to 3.5 tons/acre. It is the only vineyard over which Saintsbury has complete control. The wine typically shows plenty of earthiness and more black than red-fruit character and its finishing persistence is most characteristic. The wine has a label quite distinct from the other Saintsbury wines. The 2006 vintage has not been released, but Jerome Chery gave me a taste at the Pinot Days event in San Francisco in late June, 2008. *Terrific mouth filling presence with red and black fruits that cascade over the palate in waves leaving a lasting impression. Precocious and pleasing at this early stage.*



Saintsbury wines are offered for sale on the website at www.saintsbury.com, and through widespread retail distribution. The main production facility is located at 1500 Los Carneros Ave. in Napa. The phone is 707-252-0592. Annual case production is 60,000. Excellent Chardonnays are produced as well. As noted above, tasting is available in San Francisco at the new Press Club opening this summer (www.tastepartners.com). Tours and tasting at the winery are available by appointment only.

Pinot Briefs

Drew Winery of the Year Jason and Molly Drew craft memorable Pinot Noirs and Syrahs from distinguished vineyard sources in California from their winery in the town of Elk on the Mendocino coast. I have been a fan and recommended Jason's Pinot Noirs for some time now. I was pleased to hear recently that Drew has been named *Wine & Spirits* 2008 Winery of the Year. Drew will be profiled in the 2008 Annual Buying Guide, on sale in mid-October. The 2006 lineup of Pinot Noirs is sold out at the winery, but you may find some in the retail marketplace. The website is www.drewwines.com.



Partner with Premier Winemakers to make Oregon Pinot Noir Grand Cru Estates in Oregon's Willamette Valley is being launched to allow wine enthusiasts the opportunity to create their own barrel (25 cases) of Pinot Noir to match their personal palate. The 13,000 square-foot winemaking facility broke ground in July, 2008 in the Yamhill Carlton AVA. Partners Domaine Danielle Laurent and Bailey Estate Vineyards have created Grand Cru Estates. Club members will work alongside veteran Oregon winemakers Laurent Montalieu (Solena Cellars, Domaine Danielle Laurent, NW Wine Company, NW Wine Bar, and Hyland Vineyards) and Tony Rynders (formerly winemaker at Domaine Serene). The winemakers will assist members in whatever capacity they envision from participating in the entire vineyard selection and winemaking process to simply allowing the professionals do all the work and simply put their name on the label. Club membership is available immediately beginning with the 2008 harvest with an initial membership fee of \$5,000 for the first 30 founding members, along with a \$20,000 fee for each member barrel. For information on membership, visit the website at www.thegrandcru estates.com.

Abbey Road Farm B&B Opens New Guest Rooms John and Judi Stuart purchased their 82-acre farm in Carlton, Oregon in 2003. They continue to operate the property as a sustainable farm, but also offer a luxurious Bed and Breakfast experience. Recently they converted three working grain silos into guest suites. Two of the silos were already on the farm and they disassembled and moved a third silo from Battle Ground, WA. The restored grain silos feature five separate suites with Jacuzzi tubs and separate showers and are decorated in a country contemporary style. Pastoral views from every room are part of the charm. Guests have the opportunity to participate in farm chores. The B&B is in an ideal location for exploring the wineries of the Willamette Valley. The planned AgriVino Wine Center on the property has not been opened due to local government licensing restrictions. For further information, photos, and to reserve a stay, visit www.abbeyroadfarm.com.

Passion for Pinot Cruise Join Joseph Swan Vineyards on a deluxe 10-day Oceania cruise, departing from Rome to Barcelona, June 17-27, 2009. Rick and Amber Moshin of Moshin Vineyards, Vicki and Paul Michalcyk of Hawk Hill Vineyards, and another soon to be announced passionate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir producer will be joining Lynn and Ed Berglund of Joseph Swan Vineyards to conduct wine tastings, seminars and dinners on the cruise. Sponsored by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers, the program includes airfare from over twenty United States cities and deluxe accommodations and meals, for prices starting as \$3349 per person double occupancy. The number of available cabins is limited. Optional tastings and meals will be offered at top wine estates like Ornellaia. For more information call Food & Wine Trails at 800-367-5348 or email for information at info@foodandwinetrails.com.

3rd Annual Urban Wine Experience Hosted by the East Bay Vintners Alliance, this unique event features 15 premium East Bay wineries partnering with local restaurants and food purveyors along with live music. The date is Saturday, August 9, from 2-5 PM. Tickets are \$45 in advance or \$60 at the door. The venue is The Meadow at Jack London Square in Oakland. The Waterfront Hotel has Urban Wine Experience overnight packages available. Notable Pinot Noir producers that are participating include Aubin Cellars, Eno Wines, Los Canyon and Tayerle Wines. For tickets and information visit www.eastbayvintner.com or phone 510-452-1800.

Casting Call for THE WINE MAKERS Casting calls for season II of THE WINE MAKERS will be held across the country September 7-21, 2008. Audition cities include Boston, New York, Miami, Chicago, Las Vegas, San Francisco and Napa. THE WINE MAKERS joins twelve men and women as they compete for a chance to create and launch their own wine label nationwide. The first season of the program was shot in Paso Robles wine country and will begin airing on PBS affiliates nationwide in early 2009. Clips from the first season can be viewed on www.youtube.com/winemakerstv. Napa and/or Sonoma are being considered as locations for filming season II. To learn how to register for an audition visit the series website at www.winemakerstv.net.

Toast the Right Way It is considered bad luck to toast with an empty glass or with water. Club soda, cola, or fruit juice are acceptable alternatives. The superstition supposedly arose from Navy men in the United States and England who believed that you would be sent to a watery grave if you were toasted with water by someone.

Walk through Wine Country Walking has been a favorite way to see wine country for Europeans for many decades. Wine Country Trekking, a new Sonoma-based company formed by husband and wife Mary and Greg Guerrazzi and Mary's sister Sheila Taylor, wants to popularize wine country walking in this country. The company will specialize in European-style hiking vacations from San Francisco and Sonoma Valley. The company offers three-, four-, five-, six-, and 10-day trips with the 10-day trip taking hikers from San Francisco to Glen Ellen in Sonoma, with stops along the way in Muir Woods, kayaking on Tomales Bay, and wine tasting at small wine estates. For more information, visit the website at www.winecountrytrekking.com.

Foggy Bridge Wine Cruise Experience a premium wine tasting experience with gourmet French bistro food aboard the historic presidential yacht of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the USS Potomac. Food is prepared by a top French brasserie, Left Bank. Massive restoration efforts by thousands of devoted volunteers throughout the Bay Area have brought the yacht to immaculate condition. Friday and Saturday Evening and Sunday Brunch cruises are offered departing from the San Francisco Ferry Building, Pier E. Tickets are \$130 pp and may be purchased by calling 650-372-1546 or visiting the website at www.foggybridgewinecruise.com. Reservations are required.

Zephyr Adventures Active wine country tours on foot, bike, horseback and canoe. Trips include private wine tours, exclusive walks through vineyards, and sessions with noted winemakers. Athletic skills required are minimal. Trips ahead include Oregon Multisport (canoeing down the Willamette River, tastings at Bethel Heights, Cristom and Sokol Blosser wineries - \$1900) August 10-14, 2008, Sonoma Vineyard Walking (\$1900, August 24-28 and October 26-30, 2008), Spain Multisport (\$2600, September 7-13, 2008), Italy Hike & Bike (\$2700, September 26-October 3, 2008), South Africa Hiking (\$3200, October 10-18, 2008), and Chile & Argentina Multisport (\$2700, November 8-15, 2008). Visit the website at www.zephyradventures.com for more information, to read Z-Blogs, and sign up for the "travels with wine" newsletter.




PrinceofPinot.com

Look for an announcement about new
subscribing information for the PinotFile
later this month.

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you Pinot Noir**

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Seven Deadly Glasses

Red wine glasses that are based on the seven deadly sins, with each glass encapsulating a sin, revealed by the ritual of drinking: wrath, greed, glutton, sloth, pride, envy and lust. Each sin has its own artistic interpretation. The pointed glass shown below represents wrath. Each set of glasses is sold in a velvet-lined mahogany case. Hand made in England. For photos and information, visit www.kacperhamilton.com.



Clos d'Ambonnay from Krug: for High Rollers Only

In April of this year, prestigious Champagne house, Krug, released the 1995 Clos d'Ambonnay Champagne, the house's first new release since its rosé which was launched 25 years ago. The Champagne is made entirely from Pinot Noir and is Krug's first blanc de noirs.

Krug purchased the Clos d'Ambonnay vineyard in 1984, and has been adding the wine from vintages prior to the 1995 into its Grande Cuvée. The very tiny, walled, single vineyard Clos d'Ambonnay is located in Montagne de Reims and is about 1.25 acres. The inaugural Clos de'Ambonnay yielded only 14 barrels, or 3,000 bottles (one half of the production of Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Romanee Conti).

Because of its rarity and price (\$3,000 or more) it instantly became a collector's item and the world's most expensive wine release. At Zachy's first commercial auction in Las Vegas, a six-pack case sold for \$26,000.8

Krug dates to 1843 when it was founded by Johan-Joseph Krug, a German immigrant from Mainz on the Rhine. Currently, Henri Krug and Eric Lebel are responsible for the winemaking decisions. The house is now part of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH).

Krug utilizes Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and Chardonnay in their Champagnes. They control 40% of their vineyard sources and purchase 60% from long-term contract growers who consider themselves part of a long-standing prestigious group that openly reveal Krug as the destination of their grapes.

Krug Champagnes all undergo complete barrel fermentation which is unusual in Champagne now. Also, they employ extended lees aging. The result is a noticeable nuttiness and oakiness in Krug, making it quite distinctive among French Champagnes.