



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*If you drink no  
Noir, you Pinot  
Noir*

## Vintage Matters, More So in Oregon

The 2013 Pinot Noirs from California and Oregon are rolling in, but they are not creating the buzz of the 2012 vintage or the potentially spectacular 2014 vintage. I usually tell consumers not to concern themselves too much with vintages, other than to note that vintage variation is a positive in most instances since it results in a variety of styles of Pinot Noir. Variety is the spice of life, right? I also emphasize that great producers seem to vinify special wines in every vintage, indicating that more attention should be paid to the producer than the vintage.

Vintage variation is more pronounced in the Willamette Valley compared to California and this was well demonstrated in 2013. The 2013 Pinot Noirs from Oregon do not generally match the quality of the 2012 vintage Pinot Noirs. Like a bag of M&Ms - the 2013 Pinot Noirs all taste pretty good but few really stand out. Even in California, which experienced a very long and sunny growing season, I have found that the 2013 wines are not as glorious as those from the preceding 2012 vintage.

2013 was a good news-bad news vintage in the Willamette Valley. The summer was sunny and mild and grapes were ripening on schedule, paralleling the weather in California. Climatologist Greg Jones of Southern Oregon University reported that the 2013 growing season for Oregon vineyards was comparable to the 2003 warm vintage. The bad news arrived in late summer when monsoon-like rains inundated the Willamette Valley from September 22 to October 3, dropping 4 inches of precipitation. Some vineyards in the Chehalem Mountains received almost 7 inches of rain in September. Tiny seedless berries burst and that brought in the birds and invasive fruit flies. The most promising grapes were those that were fully ripe and picked before the rains. After the rains, the weather remained cool and dry, and some healthy, remarkably resilient grapes made very good wines, but not all grapes were ideal and some had botrytis. Overall, the crop was bigger in 2013.

Look forward to the 2014 vintage wines from Oregon. Said to be a "Goldilocks" vintage, the weather was not too hot, not too cold, and not too rainy. 2014 was the warmest season on record in the Willamette Valley, but not due to high maximum temperatures, but due to higher than normal minimum temperatures. A warm spring led to an early bud break, and the season maintained warm temperatures throughout. Nighttime temperatures were well above normal and this accelerated ripening. Harvest began at the very beginning of September. The dry weather inhibited disease pressure, leading to large crop loads and a ripe vintage.



The 2013 vintage was generally more successful in California, which experienced a warm growing season and a dry fall. It wasn't particularly hot, but wasn't cold like 2011 or even 2010. Vines budded out early, set early, and grapes were harvested early. There were no significant temperature spikes above 90° F, and ripening was uniform. Crop loads were high in most regions. Adam Lee, winemaker at Siduri, summed it up best when he said, "They (the 2013 Pinot Noirs) are at least very good, maybe better, but I am not certain they are at the level of 2012." A lingering drought in California remains as the biggest concern in coming years.

Vintage challenges have not been a deterrent to the dedicated souls who continue to grow and make Pinot Noir. I still am amazed at the number of new players who continue to enter the business, undaunted by the vagaries of vintage and the current drought in California. To quote Jane Firstenfeld, writing in *Wines & Vines* (January 2006), "Passion will not be denied, and every year, more than a handful of brave souls take heart in hand, lay their money down and take their chances starting new wineries." Increasing Pinot Noir sales have contributed the impetus to court the most darling of all grapes.

The following pages contain recent reviews of Pinot Noir, Pinot Noir Rosé, Pinot Noir Blanc, and Chardonnay, most of which are from the 2013 or 2014 vintage.

# Sips of Recently Tasted Pinot Noir

## August Briggs, Calistoga

Collette and Matthew Gacso bought the August Briggs winery from August Joe Briggs in 2011. As former employees, they have strived to keep the style and vineyard selections as close to the same as possible. Joe's nephew, Jesse Inman, is the winemaker. Visit [www.augustbriggswinery.com](http://www.augustbriggswinery.com).

**2012 August Briggs Dijon Clones Napa Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 181 cases, \$40. Sourced from Green Island Vineyard located in the very cool southern end of the Napa Valley. 100% de-stemmed, 2-day cold soak, inoculated with Assmanhausen yeast. Inoculated malolactic fermentation, aged 9 months in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new and 70% two and three-year-old. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Subdued aromas of black cherry and spice, with mid weight flavors of red cherry and cranberry. Forward drinking with soft tannins and well integrated oak. Not complex, but very easy to like.* **89.**

**2012 August Briggs Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 200 cases, \$38. Sourced from Dutton-Lorenzo Vineyard located in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. 100% de-stemmed, inoculated primary and secondary fermentation, aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 30% new and 70% two-year-old. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Expressive aromas of Bing cherry, raspberry, cola and baking spices. The bright core of cherry fruit is luscious and ripe, holding court on the palate while subtle oak sings in the background. A harmonious wine that is stereotypical of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir at its best.* **90.**

**2012 August Briggs Napa Valley Pinot Meunier** 14.5% alc., 200 cases, \$40. Sourced from Frediani Vineyard in Calistoga. 100% de-stemmed, 2-day cold soak, inoculated with Assmanhausen yeast. Inoculated for malolactic fermentation, aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 25% new, and 75% two and three-year-old. Unfined and unfiltered. *Medium reddish purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of red fruits and balsam lead to a cherry dominated wine accented with hints of purple fruits and oak. The wine is smoothly textured with suave tannins, and very drink able, but not particularly complex. Hard to tell this from a Pinot Noir in a blind test.* **88.**

## Bailiwick Wines, Sonoma

Two more 2012 releases from Bailiwick. The Sonoma Coast, Borderline Marin County and Sangiacomo Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs were reviewed in November 2014. The winery founders are brothers Paul and Bryan Vais who are natives of the San Francisco Bay area. They made wine in their garages for 25 years before starting a commercial label. The winery launched with the 2009 vintage with resounding success. Visit [www.bailiwickwines.com](http://www.bailiwickwines.com).





**2012 Bailiwick Londer Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**

14.5% alc., pH 3.65, TA 0.61, 175 cases, \$38. Clones are 115 and 777. Aged 16 months in French oak barrels, 37% new.

*Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. The nose is deeply perfumed with fresh cherry aromas as wine cave and sous bois play in the background. Delicious spiced cherry flavor that attacks with purpose and finishes with uncommon intensity. The wine has impeccable balance with modest tannins and integrated acidity. Additional time in bottle has benefited this wine. It's cherry season now, so this is an appropriate homage to spring. 94.*



**2012 Bailiwick Silver Pines Vineyard Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.60, 325 cases, \$38. This vineyard was planted by owners Norma and Carole Silverman in 2000. It overlooks Bennett Valley at an elevation of 900 feet. Volcanic, low vigor soils. Clone 115. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels, 36% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. This wine is a nice contrast to the Londer Vineyard bottling. It is more full-bodied, more rustic and more tannic, and takes more time to open in the glass, yet it is almost equally satisfying. Black cherry is the aromatic and flavor theme, persisting through a very lengthy and mildly astringent finish. Bright acidity lifts the wine's fruit load. I would decant or wait another year or two for this one to be fully committed, but its hard to complain now. 93.*

## Bravium Vineyards & Winery, San Francisco

Bravium translates from Latin as "reward, prize or gift." Proprietor and winemaker Derek Rohlfis founded Bravium in 2007 to produce terroir-driven Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines from coastal California vineyards in Anderson Valley, Mendocino Ridge, Napa and Sonoma Carneros, Santa Cruz Mountains, Santa Lucia Highlands, and Sonoma Coast AVAs. Wines are sold direct to mailing list members and to select retail stores and fine restaurants. The wines have a distinct style, featuring significant oak overlay, fruit-driven flavors, and high acidity. Visit [www.bravium.com](http://www.bravium.com).



**2014 Bravium Signal Ridge Vineyard Mendocino Ridge**

**Rosé of Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.23, TA 0.712, 64 cases, \$24. Three winemaking techniques involved: direct press, short-term maceration, and a saignée portion. Fermentation was carried out in stainless steel tanks and neutral French oak barrels with all wine aged in oak for a limited time. Unfined.

*Light cherry red color in the glass. The nose is extremely heady for a rosé and I loved it. Aromas of cherries, rose petal, pine sap, and herbs lead to a flavorful core of cherry, strawberry, spice and herb flavors. A little more substantial than your usual rosé, with plenty of Pinot character, and inviting intensity of flavor on the crisp finish. Highly enjoyable. 91.*



**2014 Bravium Muns Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Rosé of Pinot Noir** 13.2% alc., \$24.

Clones 114, 115, 667 and 777. *Moderately light pinkish orange color in the glass. Aromas and flavors of strawberry, blood orange, nectarine, apricot and a touch of spice and herbs have good intensity. A good grip of acidity underlies the fruit core and contributes a finishing burst of citrus-driven acidity. 89.*

**2013 Bravium Signal Ridge Vineyard Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., pH 3.29, TA 0.77, 336 cases, \$49. Released April 16, 2015. From a vineyard at 2,642 feet elevation that is extremely exposed to maritime influence. It is planted to a variety of Dijon and heritage clones in sandstone, clay and gravelly loam soils. Yield 1.6 tons per acre. 30% whole cluster, native fermentation in one-ton fermenters. Aged 10 months in Francois Frères 4-year air-dried barrels, 33% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate dark reddish purple color in the glass. The fresh aromas of black cherry and spice are framed by scents of espresso and tobacco. Soft in the mouth with middleweight, oak-kissed black cherry, boysenberry and pomegranate fruits that fill the mouth and really grab on to the expansive finish. The fruit load is tempered by plenty of lively, citrus-driven acidity. The fruit in this wine is very special, but there is too much oak at play. Check back in a year or two. 89-90.*

**2013 Bravium Wiley Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 12.7% alc., pH 3.29, TA 0.77, 190 cases, \$49. Yield 1.58 tons per acre. Pommard, 37, 115, 538, 667 and 777. 15% whole cluster. 5-day cold soak, spontaneous fermentation in 1-ton fermenters, pressed into Francois Frères 4-year air-dried French oak barrels, about 15% new. Aged 10 months and bottled in July 2014. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Aromas of red cherry, strawberry and earthy flora with a significant oak overlay. Light weighted and elegant, this wine features delicate red cherry and berry flavors framed by suave tannins. The wine is a bit dilute, under ripe and oak-driven with a somewhat short finish.* 87.

**2013 Bravium Beau Terroir Vineyard Napa Carneros Pinot Noir** 12.9% alc., pH 3.44, TA 0.73, 147 cases, \$39. Prerelease. Vineyard planted in 1994 and located adjacent Stanly Lane Vineyard. Swan, 115, Pommard clones. Yields 1.4 tons per acre. 100% de-stemmed. Native yeast fermentation. Aged 10 months in Francois Frères 4-year air-dried French oak barrels, 10% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of herbs, cherries, and mushrooms on the grill. The light to mid weight flavors of darker cherries and raspberries are accented with tastes of spice, herbs, mushroom and noticeable oak. The tannins are soft and supportive and there is bright acidity on the finish.* 88.

**2013 Bravium Muns Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.44, TA 0.73, 147 cases, Prerelease. Clone 114, 115, 667, 777. Yield 1.8 tons per acre. 20% whole cluster, native fermentation in 1-ton fermenters. Aged 10 months in Francois Frères 4-year air-dried French oak barrels, 20% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very fragrant out of the bottle with aromas of black raspberry, black cherry, apple and spice. Intensely fruity, with flavors of blueberry, pomegranate and black raspberry framed by balanced tannins. Smoothly textured and easily approachable. The intensity carries over to the finish that features an acidic tang and a charge of oak.* 88.

## Charles Heintz Vineyards & Winery

The Heintz family bought the Heintz Ranch land in 1912 and planted apple orchards there in 1914. In the mid-1980s, vineyards were established. Charlie and Karen Heintz are the third generation to farm this land which is now planted to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah. The property is uniquely located in three appellations: Sonoma Coast, Russian River Valley and Green Valley. Hugh Chapelle has been the winemaker since the 2012 vintage and with him on board the wines have been superb. To commemorate the 200th anniversary in 2014 the estate wines are named after family members who have been instrumental in keeping the Heintz legacy alive. A second 2013 estate Pinot Noir will be released from the Swan clone planting exclusively and will be reviewed when released. Visit [www.heintzvineyards.com](http://www.heintzvineyards.com).



**2014 Charles Heintz Sonoma Coast Rosé of Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.36, TA 0.65, RS 0.1%, 250 cases, \$19. This rosé is made from Dijon clone 113 farmed intentionally for a rosé wine. Aged 4 months on lees with no stirring in neutral French oak barrels and 60-gallon stainless steel drums. *Moderate pinkish red color in the glass. Highly fragrant with scents of cranberry, orange peel, marzipan and vanilla. Soft and smooth with good richness of flavor on the palate, offering tastes of strawberry, cranberry and peach. Thoroughly satisfying, with a dry, somewhat lengthy finish.* **90.**

**2013 Charles Heintz “Valentina” Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.74, TA 0.54, 100 cases, \$48. This wine is named after, and is a tribute to, Charles Heintz’s grandparents who first settled Heintz Ranch in 1912. This is a blend of clones and field selections grown on the Heintz Estate. Aged 11 months sur lie in 100% French oak barrels, 40% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Aromatically pleasing, with scents of strawberry, cranberry, cherry, and sandalwood. Middleweight flavors of red berries and cherry are complimented by a welcome touch of spice and oak. Composed in a soft, seamless and easy to like format, the wine finishes with plenty of upbeat, red fruit goodness.* **90.**



## Decoy Wine Company, St. Helena

Decoy, part of the portfolio that includes Duckhorn Vineyards, Paraduxx, Goldeneye, and Migration, offers affordable, and remarkably good wines despite very large production. The current winemaker is Dana Epperson, who previously was in charge of grower relations at Artesa Vineyards & Winery where she oversaw almost 25 different properties. At Artesa, Dana was mentored by Artesa winemaker, and former Duckhorn Vineyards winemaker, Mark Beringer. Dana says, “In a way, I studied the Duckhorn Wine Company style before I ever came to Decoy.” Grapes are picked a little earlier to preserve fresh varietal notes. The wines are widely distributed to retailers and restaurants. Visit [www.duckhorn.com](http://www.duckhorn.com).

**2013 Decoy Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 52,200 cases, \$25. Predominantly from the Russian River Valley and Carneros, and includes acclaimed vineyards such as Sangiacomo and Dutton Ranch. As many as 70 Pinot Noir fermentations are performed each vintage, and the wines are aged in a modest 25% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is more woody than fruity, with aromas of dark cherries and raspberries and prominent oak toast and spice. Easy to like, with a smooth and silky demeanor, modest tannins, and a tasty core of black cherry and black raspberry fruit. A dependable daily Pinot drinker that is quite good considering the huge production.* **87.**

## Frank Family Vineyards, Calistoga

Rich Frank, former President of Disney Studios, and Emmy-award winning journalist Leslie Frank own this winery which produces wines from 380 acres of estate vineyards spread throughout the Napa Valley. The winemaker is Todd Graff. This year, Frank Family Vineyards received Napa Green certification for both its vineyards and its winery. Additionally, the winery received the award for “Best Napa Winery” for the sixth year in a row from the “Bay Area A-List” San Francisco City Voter polls. Visit [www.frankfamilyvineyards.com](http://www.frankfamilyvineyards.com).

The estate Lewis Vineyard is located in Napa-Carneros, near the shores of San Pablo Bay. It was purchased by Rich Frank in 2000, and named for Paul Frank’s son, Lewis. It consists of 86 acres of rolling hills, with 58 acres planted to Chardonnay and 10 acres to Pinot Noir. Soils are primarily shallow and dense clay loam.



**2013 Frank Family Vineyards Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.68, TA 0.61, 5,000 cases, \$35. Aged 20 months in 100% French oak barrels, 33% new, 67% once and twice-filled. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Captivating aromas of black cherry, black raspberry and spice initially, fading some over time in the glass. An elegant offering featuring very ripe cherry and berry fruit flavors with underlying hints of spice, savory mushrooms and toasty oak. Eminently like able and approachable.* **89.**

**2013 Frank Family Vineyards Reserve Lewis Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.58, TA 0.59, 1,000 cases, \$65. Clones 115, 667, and 777. Aged 19 months in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new and 50% once-filled. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opens reluctantly over time to reveal ever-expanding aromas of plum, dark berry jam, black raspberry preserves, and BBQ rub spices. An opulent, full-bodied wine with deep berry and cherry flavors that fill every nook and cranny in the mouth. The oak is beautifully integrated, offering a pleasurable seasoning. The luscious fruit really taps into the brain's pleasure centers and provides waves of goodness that last and last on the finish.* **93.**

## Longoria Wines, Los Olivos

Veteran winemaker Richard Longoria established Longoria wines in 1982, but has worked in the Santa Barbara County wine industry since 1976. He became the winemaker for J. Carey, and later The Gainey Vineyard in 1985, leaving that steady employment in 1997 to devote his full energies to Longoria Wines. In 1998, he moved his winery operation into the "Lompoc Wine Ghetto," the first winery to be established in Lompoc. In 2014, Rick moved into a new winery on the site of Lompoc's historic JM Club, with the Longoria Winery Tasting Room located in the former club house. Pinot Noir is sourced from several notable vineyards in Santa Barbara County and the estate Fe Ciega Vineyard established in 1998 at the western end of the Sta. Rita Hills AVA at the end of Sweeney Road. Total production averages 3,000 cases, with wines handcrafted in small quantities ranging from 50 to 700 cases. Visit [www.longoriawine.com](http://www.longoriawine.com).



**2013 Longoria Lovely Rita Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.45, TA 0.60, 480 cases, \$32. Sourced from Fe Ciega Vineyard and includes Pommard, Mt. Eden, and Dijon 115 and 667 clones. Harvest Brix 23.8°. 100% de-stemmed, aged in French oak barrels, 16% new. Gently filtered but not fined before bottling in late January 2015. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Hard to coax any fruit out of the nose which is dominated now by earth and oak. Better on the palate, with mid weight flavors of black cherry and cranberry accented with nutty oak. Firm, but not aggressive tannins, with a good cut on the citrus-infused cranberry featured finish.* **87.**

**2013 Longoria Bien Nacido Vineyard Block N Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.58, 185 cases, \$50. Longoria has sourced grapes from Block N for over 20 years. Martini clone. Harvest Brix 23.6°. 100% de-stemmed, 2-day cold soak, inoculated yeast strains, aged 15 months in French oak barrels, 36% new. Lightly fined and filtered before bottling in January 2015. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the*

glass. An elegant wine of immense appeal offering both dark red and purple fruit flavors with complimentary oak in the background. Very soft in the mouth with modest dry tannins and memorable finishing length. Should improve even more over the next year or two. **90.**

**2013 Longoria La Encantada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.53, TA 0.62, 100 cases, \$50. Released November 1, 2015. Clone 777. Harvest Brix average 23.5°. 100% de-stemmed, aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. Bottled January 2015 without fining and with a light filtration. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose opens nicely over time in the glass, revealing aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, peat and cardamom spice. Discreetly concentrated flavors of black cherries, purple berries and toasty oak are backed by soft tannins. Good cut on the fruit-filled finish that leaves plenty of oak in its wake. Give this wine more time for the oak to integrate.* **89.**

**2013 Longoria Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., pH 3.64, TA 0.61, 100 cases, \$50. After 20 years of producing Pinot Noir from this vineyard, Rick stopped working with the grapes after the 2006 vintage. In 2013, during a luncheon honoring cofounder Michael Benedict at Sanford & Benedict Vineyard's iconic bar Rick was inspired to return to the vineyard as a source of Pinot Noir. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Intriguing aromas of blackberry pie and incense. Mid weight plus flavors of earthy blackberry jam and Hoison sauce accented with toasty oak. The tannic load is noticeable in this wine resulting in an astringent finish at present. Short term cellaring should alleviate some of the aggressive tannins.* **89.**

**2013 Longoria Fe Ciega Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$55. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Clearly the most appealing nose in the 2013 Longoria lineup with bright aromas of black cherry pie, blackberry preserves, anise and sweet oak. Full-bodied, intensely fruity and structured, yet the wine is in harmony with firm, but not hard tannins. The flavors of dark red and purple fruits, sassafras and spice really draw your attention and persist through a prodigious finish that makes a statement. This wine really stands out from the pack.* **93.**



## Raptor Ridge Winery, Chehalem Mountains

Founded in 1995 by Scott and Annie Shull, Raptor Ridge Winery is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. The winery is named for its location on a ridge in the Chehalem Mountains AVA which is a haven for native raptors. Known for single-vineyard Pinot Noirs sourced from a rich tapestry of select Willamette Valley sites (up to 12 in a given vintage), and the 18-acre estate Tuscowallame Vineyard planted predominantly to Pinot Noir with 1.5-acres of Grüner Veltliner. Scott Shull is the winemaker, assisted since 2008 by Kevin Wiles. Visit [www.RaptorRidgeWinery.com](http://www.RaptorRidgeWinery.com).

**2012 Raptor Ridge Estate Chehalem Mountains Oregon Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$45. Sourced from the estate Tuscowallame Vineyard (means "where the owls dwell"). *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. The nose offers pleasing aromas of cherry preserves, balsam and peat. The light to medium weight flavors of black cherry and strawberry are simple and forward, framed by a hint of oak and back by supple tannins. An elegant wine that aims to please.* **87.**

**2013 Raptor Ridge Willamette Valley Barrel Select Oregon Pinot Noir** 12.5% alc., \$30. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. *Light cherry red color in the glass. Toasty oak dominates the cherry and strawberry fruits in this wine. Juicy and fresh on the palate, with mild fine-grain tannins and a tart cherry finish. The fruit is a bit austere, even under ripe, with an herbal vein in the background, allowing oak to dominate.* **87.**

## Siduri Wines, Santa Rosa

Siduri Wines was acquired by Jackson Family Wines earlier this year. Adam Lee stayed on as winemaker and the winery will continue to function at its current urban warehouse facility in northwest Santa Rosa. Production has increased to 25,000 cases annually, and the Lees needed more capital and wanted more time to spend with their three children. An added bonus will be access to the many Kendall-Jackson vineyards in Oregon and California. Visit [www.siduriwines.com](http://www.siduriwines.com).



**2013 Siduri Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 492 cases, \$32, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Aromas of dusty cherry and cranberry with dominating oak. Light to mid weight flavors of red cherries and berries and Damsel plum with a touch of herbs. A bit shrill and tart, with prominent citrus-infused acidity bringing up the finish. 86.*

**2013 Siduri Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 1,771 cases, \$32, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Appealing scents of black cherry, roasted plum, rose petal and potpourri lead to a good mid palate attack of deep, dark cherry and berry fruits accented with spice and nutty oak, and framed by soft, sinewy tannins. The fruit verges on the over ripe side and hints of raisin show up. 88.*



**2013 Siduri Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 2,037 cases, \$32, screwcap. *Medium reddish purple color in the glass. A bit shy, with pleasant aromas of dark red and black berries. Bright cherry and raspberry flavors complimented with hints of spice and oak. Intensely flavorful, with soft tannins and welcome vibrancy. Excellent density and length for a representative appellation wine. 89.*



**2013 Siduri Van der Kamp Vineyard Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 149 cases, \$49, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very shy nose upon opening and somewhat reserved on the palate initially. I was disappointed until I re-tasted this wine the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle when it really charmed me. Aromas of darker berries, shrub and iron led to a mid weight palate of darker red and purple berry fruits including ripe strawberry. Somewhat rustic and earthy with a riff of exotic spices in the background. A unique wine that offers plenty of discovery for the adventurous. Patience advised. 90-91.*



**2013 Siduri Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 196 cases, \$55, screwcap. *Moderately light reddish purple hue in the glass. The savory nose features earthy flora and forest timber scents with very delicate red fruit aromas. Very little fruit expression in this wine offering notes of cranberry, cherry, mushroom and woody oak. The muscular tannins and oak overwhelm the delicate fruit. Not a typical Hirsch bottling and one wonders if more time in bottle may turn it around. 88.*

**2013 Siduri Sonatera Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 346 cases, \$49, screwcap. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Great purity of Bing cherry fragrance, with added hints of cake spice, oak spice and chocolate, holding up beautifully over time in the glass. Nicely composed with supportive oak bringing out the best in the mid weight dark cherry core. The tannins are well balanced, and the pleasant finish has a bright tick of refreshing acidity. 90.*

**2013 Siduri Lingenfelder Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 249 cases, \$49, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Perfumed with aromas of black cherry, earthy flora and mushroom. Sensual and smooth on the palate with mid weight plus flavors of dark cherry, boysenberry, cola and dark chocolate. I was impressed by the seamless character of this wine. The finish had picked up intensity and length when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. 91.*

**2013 Siduri Keefer Ranch Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 577 cases, \$54, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Inviting aromas of fresh, ripe strawberries and pie spices. Delicious mix of black cherry and dark red and black berry flavors. Impressive balance. Modest in weight but big in flavor with a succulent finish. The juicy fruit is a little riper in this vintage. Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir is always a standout. 92.*

**2013 Siduri Pratt Vineyard Sexton Road Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., 150 cases, \$52, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Enjoyable mix of cherry, rhubarb and nutty aromas. Sappy, sweet flavors of cherry, raspberry and cola in a mid weight style with balanced tannins and complimentary oak. Very juicy and refreshing with a stylish finish. Clearly a step up in quality. 92.*

**2012 Siduri Parson's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., \$50. *Moderate reddish purple hue in the glass. Brooding aromas of Bing cherry and forest floor. Intense and luscious core of very ripe cherry fruit accented with a touch of cola and anise. Impressive attack and finish that leaves some oak in its wake. Firm tannins hold the fruit in check. Alcohol stays in the background. 88.*

**2013 Siduri Soberanes Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 318 cases, \$50, screwcap. *Medium reddish purple color in the glass. Very savory on the nose with scents of underbrush, dried herbs, musk and black fruits. Long and lush, with oak-kissed flavors of black cherry and black raspberry, framed by defined tannins. Aggressive on the attack, with a broad presence on the palate, and good finishing length. 90.*

**2013 Siduri Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 298 cases, \$50, screwcap. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Shy, but pleasant aromas of wild blueberries and blackberries. The most opulent, sappiest wine in the 2013 lineup with a plethora of blueberry, black plum and blackberry fruits backed by very firm, slightly aggressive tannins. The juicy finish is filled with expansive fruit, leaving behind a taste of oak and black tea. 89.*

**2013 Siduri John Sebastiano Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 443 cases, \$50, screwcap. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very fragrant with uplifting aromas of black cherry, spice and toasty oak. The fruit core really sings in this wine, featuring flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and plum, with accents of black tea and anise. The vivid fruit is brought to life with juicy acidity typical of Sta. Rita Hills. A touch heavy-handed with oak, but the fruit really pops in this wine, and the finish has amazing length. I continue to be impressed with wines from this vineyard. 92.*



## **SPELL Estate, Sebastopol**

This Pinot Noir specialist owned by Bill and Tiki Spell offers wines crafted by Andrew Berge, a German expatriot who learned his winemaking with stints in Germany, New Zealand and California. Grapes are sourced from some of California's most outstanding coastal vineyards in Sonoma County and Mendocino County. Visit [www.spellestate.com](http://www.spellestate.com). I found the 2013 wines to consistently offer excellent balance. Some excellent Pinot Noirs from the 2012 vintage are also still available on the website.

**2013 SPELL Nicole's Blend Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 575 cases, \$39. Sourced from DeVoto, Terra de Promissio, Umino and Alder Springs vineyards. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 30% new, 30% once-used, and 40% older. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very fragrant aromas of black cherry, black raspberry, Asian 5-spice and a hint of peppercorn which build in intensity over time in the glass. Smooth and harmonious in the mouth, with flavors of dark red cherry and berry fruits. Very forward drinking, with minimal dry tannins and good intensity on the finish. This is the most approachable and easy drinking wine in the 2013 SPELL lineup.* **90.**

**2013 SPELL Terra de Promissio Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$58. Vineyard is planted to clones 115 and 777 and is located in the Petaluma Gap region of the Sonoma Coast AVA. Primarily 115 with a tiny amount of 777. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 50% new, 25% once-used and 25% older. *Medium reddish purple hue in the glass. Fresh aromas of earthy black fruits. Aggressive attack of dark red and black stone and berry fruits accented with a hint of white pepper and spice. Very suave and definitely earthy, with a pleasing blackberry-infused finish which leaves a hint of heat in its wake.* **92.**



**2013 SPELL Umino Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 121 cases, \$48. Wine club exclusive. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Very shy nose, even when checked two days after opening, revealing delicate aromas of black cherry, spice and toasty oak. A luscious wine, sporting earth-kissed black cherry fruit accented with oak. Fat and full but no excess sweetness. The captivating texture is very silky, plush and tres Pinot. A bit reserved and tight, the wine was better two days after opening when tasted from an re-corked bottle. Give this wine another year or two in the cellar.* **90.**

**2013 SPELL Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 164 cases, \$48. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 43% new, 28.5% once-used and 28.5% older. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Shy aromas of cherry, wood fern, and pennyroyal. Juicy, with vibrant red fruits framed by muscular tannins. Much better two days after opening when tasted from an re-corked bottle, showing more harmony and less astringency on the finish. Decant or hold for two years.* **90-91.**

**2013 SPELL Alder Springs Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 126 cases, \$48. Dijon 459, 115, 667 and 777, and heritage clones of DRC and Calera. Low-vigor volcanic soils located 12 miles west of the Pacific Ocean. Aged in 100% French oak barrels, 43% new, 14% once-used, and 43% older. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Very shy nose, even when check two days after opening. Good attack of fresh cherry and cranberry fruit flavors with a hint of citrus, good cut and balanced tannins, but lacks mid palate intensity and finish. Enjoyable, but not enthralling.* **88.**

## **Waxwing Wine Cellars, Belmont**

Winemaker Scott Sisemore is proud of his latest Pinot Noir Rosé which is a dedicated rosé project and not a bleed or saignée to enhance Pinot Noir lots. Grapes were harvested from Blair Vineyard in the Arroyo Seco AVA at a relatively low Brix (21°-22°). The grapes were whole cluster pressed without going through a crusher/destemmer. The juice was fermented very cool in 70 gallon stainless barrels on the cellar floor. The photo below shows a glass of fermenting rosé juice which is very cloudy due to the enormous amount of yeast cells actively fermenting sugar to ethanol. In the background is a standard Pinot Noir fermentation with the skins fermenting with the juice to extract color and phenolic material. After fermentation, the rosé wine is racked off the fermentation lees, a touch of sulfur dioxide is added to prevent secondary malolactic fermentation and the barrels are stoppered for aging before bottling in early spring. On the way to bottle, the wine is sterile filtered to prevent a secondary fermentation in the bottle.



**2014 Waxwing Blair Vineyard Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir Rosé** 13.1% alc., 86 cases, \$23. Released April 2015. Dijon clones. Aged 7 months in stainless steel. *Light pinkish orange color in the glass. Aromas of nectarine, strawberry, raspberry, blood orange, and dried herbs are replicated in the flavors.*

*Impressive complexity with good polish and harmony, finishing with a good cut of acidity. A highly enjoyable rosé that hopefully won't be sold out by the time you read this. 91.*



## Winter's Hill Vineyard, Lafayette, Oregon

The 35-acre Dundee Hills estate vineyard is south facing, at an elevation of 525-730 feet elevation. Planted to Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris, it is bordered on the East by Domaine Serene, on the South by Stoller Family Estate, and on the North by Vista Hills. Soils are volcanic Jory. The estate has been Certified Sustainable and SalmonSafe since 1999. All Winter's Hills wines are from the estate vineyard. Visit [www.wintershillwine.com](http://www.wintershillwine.com).



**2014 Winter's Hill Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Dry Rosé of Pinot Noir** 259 cases, \$19. Grapes are whole cluster pressed with the fruit remaining on the skins a short time to extract color and tannins. Fermented in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate pinkish orange color in the glass. Inviting aromas of fresh crushed strawberries and wooded forest after a rain. Welcoming body and attack, with hi-tone flavors of red berries, apple and poached pear. Noticeable fruit intensity on the finish that is dry, crisp and vivid. Impressive. 90.*

**2012 Winter's Hill Estate Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 250 cases, \$39. 100% destemmed, fermented in small, 1.5-ton open-top fermenters. Aged 24 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely perfume of fresh cherries, rose petal and bark. The mouth filling, darker cherry fruit is nicely spiced, with some added hints of red berries and sweet oak. The tannins and acidity are well balanced, and there is good intensity of red fruits on the finish. Nicely composed and easy to like. 90.*

**2013 Winter's Hill Estate Reserve Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 150 cases, \$65. A barrel selection from estate vineyards. 100% de-stemmed, aged 24 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. Subdued, but pleasing aromas of cherry and potpourri. A refined and sophisticated bottling featuring mid weight flavors of red cherries and raspberries with a substantial but not imposing tannic backbone and a good acidic underbelly. Impressive intensity that lasts through a generous finish that won't let go. Enjoyable now, but will benefit from more time in bottle. Much to admire. 91.*



## More

**2012 Jeff Gordon Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.62, TA 0.59, 196 cases, \$52. Released June 15, 2015. Sourced from Dutton-Lorenzo Vineyard in the Green Valley of Russian River Valley. Aged 9 months in 100% French oak barrels, 35% new. *Moderately light cherry red color in the glass. This is a very appealing wine that reflects its cool climate Green Valley origins. Highly fragrant scent of red cherries, spice and sandalwood that holds up over time in the glass. Elegant and refined, with pleasing flavors of cherry and cranberry touched by tobacco oak. Soft in the mouth with suave tannins and balanced acidity. Do I dare say, "racy?" 91.*

**2013 Red Car Heaven & Earth Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., pH 3.70, TA 0.55, 570 cases, \$68 (sold out). Sourced from Bohemian Station Vineyard located on a south-facing hillside in a valley, just east of Occidental. The site is notable for its "cool sunshine." Calera and Dijon "828." 15% whole cluster, wild yeast fermentation. Aged in French oak barrels for 12 months, 25% new and 75% neutral. *Moderately light reddish purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of black cherry, plum, spice and rose. Delightful flavors of purple berries, plum and spice are accented with a hint of oak and forest floor. The velvety texture is very seductive, the tannins are firm but not hard, and the finish offers plenty of length. 92.*



# Sips of Recently Tasted White Wines

**2013 Bravium Abbassi Vineyard Sonoma Carneros Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., pH 3.33, TA 0.7, 212 cases, \$34. Sourced from an old vine vineyard planted in 1976 to Wente clone Chardonnay. Whole cluster pressed, fermented in Hungarian oak barrels, most of which had been seasoned for 4 years. Partial malolactic fermentation. Unfined. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. This wine is somewhat unpleasant, even weird, with aromas of lemon curd, Asian pear, oak and pungent herbs, and flavors of lemon, vanilla, allspice and malt. There is decent fullness of fruit on the palate and balanced acidity, but the wine lacks appeal.* **85.**

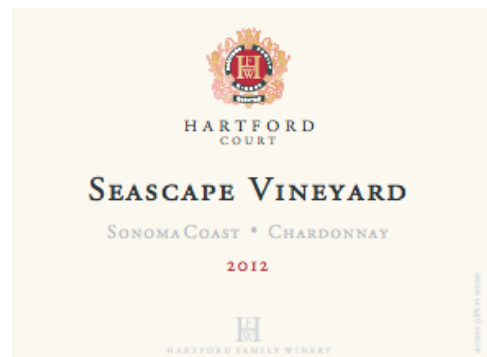


**2013 Decoy Sonoma County Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 39,600 cases, \$20, screwcap. Sourced primarily from Russian River Valley and Carneros with a core of 30% Sangiacomo Chardonnay. A majority of the wine was fermented in stainless steel (10% in new French oak barrels). *Delicate yellow color in the glass. The nose leads with aromas of fresh apple, lemon, hay, nutty oak and salt air. Slightly creamy on the palate, with inviting flavors of green apple, pear, and pineapple. Notable balance and easy drink ability. Amazing quality at this high production level.* **88.**



**2013 Frank Family Vineyards Reserve Lewis Vineyard Napa Carneros Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., pH 3.23, TA 0.64, 1,000 cases, \$65. Dijon clones. Aged 11 months in 100% new French oak barrels. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The nose exudes aromas of lemon oil, crème brûlée, honey and nutty oak. Discreetly lush on the palate with a slightly viscous mouth feel, offering hi-tone fruit flavors of lemon, grapefruit, white peach and pear. A very like able wine with good vibrancy, complimentary oak highlights, and a dry, thirst-quenching finish.* **92.**

**2012 Hartford Court Seascape Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.8% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.65, 330 cases, \$65. From a 6-acre vineyard west of the town of Occidental. Bordered by the well known Coastlands Vineyard. Extremely cold spot with no ridge between the vineyard and the ocean. Yield 2 tons per acre. Aged in French oak barrels, 30% new. Unfined and unfiltered. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. Plenty of lemon zest and floral goodness on the nose. Lovely flavors of lemon and blood orange, infused with saline minerality. Very crisp and vibrant, with a complimentary touch of oak in the background. The wine grows on you and improves over time in the glass. The bracing acidity on the finish makes this an ideal food partner.* **93.**



**2013 Noble Vines 446 San Bernabe Monterey Chardonnay** 14.5% alc., \$12. Clone 4, Block 46. *Very light platinum color in the glass. Welcoming aromas of cut apple, slate and subtle smoky oak. Soft in the mouth with impressive harmony, offering demure but pleasing flavors of apple, pear, melon and vanilla cream. Equal to many Chardonnays offered at two to three times the price.* **88.**

**2013 Red Car Estate Vineyard Fort Ross-Seaview Chardonnay** 13.8% alc., pH 3.31, TA 0.73, 280 cases, \$58 (sold out). Inaugural release. Old Hyde Wente selection. Wild yeast fermentation. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels, 17% new and 83% neutral. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The nose leads with steely aromas of citrus oil and green apple. Refined and smooth on the palate, with good richness of flavors that include lemon curd, baked pear, spice and vanilla. The wine is vibrant, with a good underlying cut of lemon-infused acidity, and some intensity and persistence on the slightly tart, peach-infused finish.* **91.**

**2013 SPELL Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 15.0% alc., 98 cases, \$38. Sourced from Dutton-Sullivan Vineyard planted in 1982 to a Wente selection of Chardonnay on its own rootstock. Aged in 100% French oak

barrels, 25% new, 50% twice-used and 25% older. *Moderately light golden yellow color in the glass. Delicate aromas of peach, pineapple and grilled lemon. Rich and luscious on the palate, with appealing flavors of peach, citrus, poached apple and caramel. The alcohol is well integrated, the texture is slightly creamy, and there is some finishing fruit persistence.* **89.**

## Pinot Noir Blanc

The pulp and juice of the Pinot Noir grape are clear and most of the aromas, flavors and color of Pinot Noir comes from the grape's skins. A white wine can be produced from Pinot Noir if the grapes are pressed after harvesting, avoiding any skin contact with the juice. The resulting wine is the essence of Pinot Noir grape juice or Pinot Noir Blanc.

Pinot Noir Blanc should not be confused with Pinot Blanc which is a white grape genetic mutation of Pinot Noir. It is often confused with Chardonnay, and wineries vinify it in a similar style, sometimes using barrel fermentation and malolactic fermentation. It can also be made into a crisper style wine vinified in stainless steel.

I don't understand why one would take perfectly good Pinot Noir grapes and vinify a white wine that lacks the typical aromatic and flavor profile of Pinot Noir that wine drinkers adore. It is a quirky, curious wine that may interest those looking for something different, but I would rather drink a glass of red Pinot Noir. Because these wines are made from expensive Pinot Noir grapes, the price can be surprisingly high for a white wine, further diminishing its redeeming value.

My favorite Pinot Noir Blancs that I have tasted over the past few years have all been from Oregon: Prismé from Annie Amie Vineyards (\$40), Coeur Blanc from Domaine Serene (\$95), Left Bank Pinot Blanc from Left Coast Cellars (\$20), and "Corduroy" Pinot Noir Blanc from Phelps Creek (\$59).

**2013 Bravium Wiley Vineyard Anderson Valley Steel Tank Aged Pinot Noir Blanc** 12.9% alc., pH 3.29, TA 0.77, \$49. Pommard, 37, 115, 538, 667 and 777. 100% de-stemmed, immediately separated from skins upon arrival at the winery. Spontaneous fermentation in stainless steel drums followed by aging in stainless steel tanks. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Pleasant but highly unusual nose sporting aromas of mashed banana, bergamot, citrus, green leaf and pecans. Similar to a white Rhone wine on the palate, with flavors of pear and peach set off by a subtle herbal tone. Slightly plush in the mouth with good vibrancy on the finish.* **87.**

**2013 Bravium Wiley Vineyard Anderson Valley Oak Barrel Aged Pinot Noir Blanc** 12.7% alc., pH 3.29, TA 0.77, \$49. Pommard, 37, 115, 538, 667 and 777. 100% de-stemmed, immediately separated from skins upon arrival at the winery. Spontaneous fermentation in stainless steel drums followed by aging in neutral French oak barrels. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Shy aromas of citrus oil, white stone fruits and vanilla. Rounder and more polished than the steel tank aged version, with spirited flavors of yellow stone fruits and citrus, and a finish flush with fruit.* **88.**

**2013 Siduri Willamette Valley Blanc de Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 189 cases, \$24, screwcap. *Light golden orange color in the glass. Very shy nose, showing demure aromas of peach, pear, meringue and cask. Somewhat nebulous and curious on the palate such that it defies proper descriptors. A hint of lemon and yellow peach show up. Smoothly textured with good balance, but doesn't excite.* **86.**

**2014 Raptor Ridge Willamette Valley Pinot Gris** 13.5% alc., \$20, screwcap. Whole cluster pressed, fermented in stainless steel tanks. *Very light yellow color in the glass. A crisp, clean wine that offers lemon, grapefruit, lychee and floral scents that are echoed on the palate with added notes of pear and yellow apple. Thoroughly satisfying, with good balance and brightness.* **88.**

**2014 Siduri Arber Vert Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Gris** 13.5% alc., 232 cases, \$24, screwcap. Adam Lee has crafted a Pinot Noir from this vineyard in the past but this is the first release of Pinot Gris. *Light orange color in the glass. Pleasant, but shy aromas of yellow peach and white*

grape. A tasty core of poached pear and peach fruit is downgraded by an herbal, vitamin note. The wine has bright acidity and a dry finish. **86.**



**2013 Winter's Hill Estate Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Gris** 13.0% alc., pH 3.18, 600 cases, \$17. Whole cluster pressed, fermented slowly in stainless steel tanks at low temperature. Malolactic fermentation blocked. *Very light yellow color in the glass. Quite appealing with noticeable harmony, this crisp and refreshing wine offers flavors of apple, pear and citrus, with a lemon-infused finish. It reminds me of biting into a ripe, crisp apple.* **89.**

**2014 Winter's Hill Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Blanc** 13.0% alc., pH 3.05, 286 cases, \$17. Whole cluster pressed within hours of harvest. Fermented slowly to dryness in stainless steel tanks. Malolactic fermentation blocked. *Very light yellow color in the glass. A little reduction upon opening resolves over time in the glass. Aromas of pear, grapefruit and toast. Very high-pitched on the palate with tart flavors of grapefruit and lemon-lime. The wine finishes with a dry, soprano finish. Not particularly enjoyable on its own, this acidic wine will show better with fried or fatty foods.* **86.**

**2014 Ponzi Willamette Valley Pinot Blanc** 13.4% alc., pH 3.23, RS 1.8 g/L, \$20, screwcap. Sourced from Aurora Vineyard (Ponzi's LIVE Certified Sustainable vineyard - 74%), Zenith Vineyard (19%) and Thistle Vineyard (7%). Fermented in temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks. Malolactic fermentation prohibited. *Very light golden yellow color in the glass. Demure aromas of poached pear, nectarine and honey lead to a light bodied, but flavorful, core of white stone fruits with a hint of citrus. A delicate, but pleasant wine with a slightly sweet finish. This wine is more akin to Pinot Gris than Chardonnay and will pair well with shellfish and quiche.* **88.**



# Pinot Noir Précoce: A Little Known Pinot Noir Twin

I have been writing about Pinot Noir for over 13 years, and only recently came across Pinot Noir Précoce. An article in the magazine, *The World of Fine Wine*, titled “Pinot Noir Précoce: An Almost-Identical Twin with a Distinct Personality” written by Anne Krebiehl MW (Issue 47, 2015), was a real surprise.

Apparently, Pinot Noir Précoce is a spontaneous mutation of Pinot Noir (the grape is known to have that proclivity). Also known as Pinot Madeleine or Frühburgunder, the mutation is thought to have occurred in Germany in the late 15th century, but the exact origin remains a mystery. It is an officially recognized grape variety in Germany.



Pinot Noir Précoce is undergoing somewhat of a resurgence in Germany with about 647 acres currently planted in the Ahr and Mosel, where it takes a back seat to the more widely planted and more popular Spätburgunder. A few pockets of the relatively unknown vine are planted in England where it would seem very suitable to the very cool climate there.

The wine made from Pinot Noir Précoce has the enchanting aromatic complexity of Pinot Noir, featuring the typical cherry fruit, floral goodness and earthy flora scents of Pinot Noir, making it a challenge to distinguish from Pinot Noir itself. Sebastian Fürst exclaimed in the article, “Frühburgunder simply has incredibly rich and opulent aromas. When it comes to telling the siblings apart in the glass, however, you can’t do it.”

Pinot Noir Précoce is more of a “heartbreak grape” than Pinot Noir, according to Krebiehl, who notes, “Yields are painfully low. It ripens early, making it susceptible to wasps and birds, let alone wild boar. Small clusters of often very small grapes are prone to rot and vinegar flies, and more recently, also to that latest scourge of vineyards, *Drosophila suzukii*, a spotted fruit fly. It can also turn from ripe to overripe in no time at all.”

The one advantage of Pinot Noir Précoce over Spätburgunder is that because it ripens two weeks earlier, it can allow growers to produce wines in sites where Pinot Noir could not. The article quotes grower Michael Kriechel as saying, “You have the possibility of making fine wines from climatically lesser sites.”

The Pinot Noir Précoce wine is typically vinified like Pinot Noir, but with less oak exposure. The grape tends to have slightly less acidity and tannins.

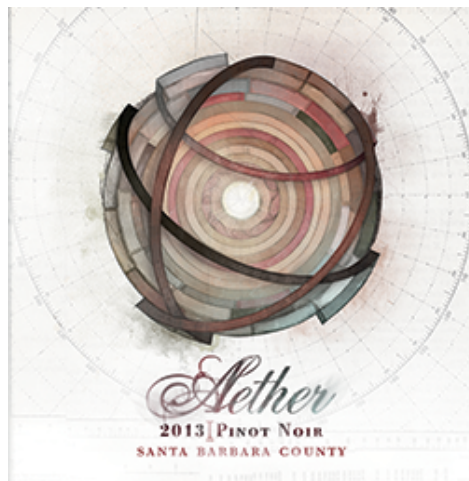
Krebiehl summarizes her thoughts on this Pinot Noir twin at the conclusion of the article. “Its different expressions are clearly capable of delivering those heart-stopping Pinot epiphanies that so many of us seek. Pinot Précoce is a fascinating member of a fascinating family.”

# Pinot Briefs

**Sta. Rita Hills Wine and Fire** The Sta. Rita Hills Winegrowers Alliance has scheduled the 2015 Wine and Fire event for the weekend of August 14-16. The Kickoff Party will be held at the Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Barn which housed the first winery in the Santa Rita Hills. Winemakers will pour library wines, small production bottlings and large format bottles along with an array of pizzas and antipasti to nosh on. The Saturday Morning Seminar pays homage to the “fire” in Wine and Fire with a focus on local chefs and their four unique grilling styles. After the presentation, wine will be added to the fire as winemakers team with local chefs to pair their wines with the BBQ eats. Saturday evening will be the Wine and Fire Grand Tasting at La Purisima Mission where over forty wineries will be pouring along with food from local chefs and farmers. Early bird pricing ends July 31. For tickets, visit [www.nightout.com](http://www.nightout.com).



**Winemaker Jeff Fink Launches New Project** Well-known Santa Barbara County winemaker Jeff Fink (Tantara, Pence Ranch) has launched Aether Wine Company with the release of Central Coast Pinot Noirs and a Chardonnay from the 2013 vintage. Visit [www.aetherwines.com](http://www.aetherwines.com) for more information and to buy wines.



**Maggy Hawk to Participate in Cochon 555** Aspen’s Cochon 555 Grand Cochon event, “Pigs, Pinot and Preservation,” will feature bacons prepared by ten chefs from heritage breeds of pigs. On Saturday, June 20, 2015, Maggy Hawk will present the Bacon Hall of Fame, pouring single clone, single block Maggy Hawk Pinot Noirs alongside some of the most epic cuts of bacon from some of the most singular breeds of heritage pigs. Cochon 555 is a celebration of, and a movement to protect, rare heritage breed pigs. For information and tickets, visit [www.cochon555.com](http://www.cochon555.com).

**2015 Russian River Valley Passport Weekend (formerly Passport to Pinot)** This popular event will take place Saturday and Sunday, June 27-28, 2015. Sponsored by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers (RRVW), more than 30 acclaimed wineries in the Russian River Valley AVA will share current, early and limited release wines. The unique experience will allow access to some participating wineries that are not normally open to the public. A limited number of VIP package tickets are available for the full weekend which includes the two-day Passport experience and an intimate barbecue dinner at Gail Ann's Vineyard on Saturday where the centerpiece will be a whole pig roast. For information and tickets, visit [www.rrvw.org/rrv-passport](http://www.rrvw.org/rrv-passport).



**Breathless Wines Crowd Funding Campaign** Breathless Wines was founded in 2011 by three sisters - Cynthia Faust, Rebecca Faust and Sharon Cohn, as a tribute to the sisters' mother, Martha. Along with winemaker Penny Gadd-Coster, the winery produces 1,500 cases annually of award-winning Brut, Blanc de Noirs and Brut Rosé sparkling wines. A significant portion of the winery's profits go to more than a dozen nonprofit partners such as the Healthcare Foundation of Northern Sonoma County. A crowd funding campaign will be launched in September to build a tasting room in Healdsburg. Use of the space will be donated quarterly to Breathless' nonprofit partners for fundraising and educational events. Visit [www.breathlesswines.com](http://www.breathlesswines.com) to donate.



**Alessi USA Fight Aids By Design Program** The new red "Anna G" (\$67) and "Alessandro M" (\$52) corkscrews designed by Alessandro Mendini are available for purchase at [www.Alessi.com](http://www.Alessi.com). Each purchase helps provide lifesaving medication, that when taken daily, can prevent HIV and mothers from passing the virus to their unborn babies.



**Brown Bag Wine Tasting with William Shatner** A new season of “Brown Bag Wine Tasting” is now available with a sneak peek at what to expect at Ora.tv: <http://goo.gl/rYkuvJ>. The latest show features Executive Wine Editor for Food & Wine Magazine, Ray Isle, who is asked to blindly taste wine and describe it using terms of his occupation. The show was created out of Shatner’s love of wine and conversation, as well as wanting to have a fun wine tasting experience in an entertaining format.

**Notable Wine Expert Steven Spurrier on MUNCHIES** VICE’s food channel “MUNCHIES Presents” heads to England to interview Steven Spurrier, one of the most influential figures in the world of wine. Spurrier relates how he became interested in wine at a young age, made international headlines with his wine school in Paris, and put California wine on the map one day in 1976. Spurrier also takes MUNCHIES on a tour of his Dorset vineyard where he is producing English sparkling wine, and his personal wine cellar with 3,500 bottles. Watch it here: <http://munchies.vice.com/videos/munchies-presents-steven-spurrier>.

**Wines of Danger - Media & Trade Tasting** “Small producers living dangerously” is the tagline for a group of independent winemakers who have joined forces to promote their small wine brands to the trade and media. Wines of Danger - Part 3: The Prequel will be held August 17, 2015, from 11 am to 4 pm at Mission Rock Resort in San Francisco. Current releases will be offered from 20 wineries, including some reviewed in the *PinotFile*, including Scratch, Waxwing, Comanche Cellars, Calstar Cellars, and Ser. Visit [www.winesofdanger.com](http://www.winesofdanger.com) for more information.

### Cool License Plate Recently Spotted



**New Anderson Valley Label from Ferrington Vineyard** On Father’s Day, Father’s & Daughters Cellars will release its first two wines - a 2012 Ella’s Reserve Pinot Noir and a 2013 Sauvignon Blanc from Ferrington Vineyard. Production will be between 60 to 100 cases of each varietal and will be available primarily through a mailing list or by contacting the winery direct at [pacurar.guy@gmail.com](mailto:pacurar.guy@gmail.com). The label represents the collaborative effort of three generations of fathers and daughters: Patriarch Kurt Schoeneman, his daughter Sarah, Sarah’s spouse Guy Pacurar, their daughter, Ella, and Guy’s older daughter, Taylor. While lauded wineries like Williams Selyem, Schramsberg, Flowers and Arista have produced wines from Ferrington fruit, the family has never created and bottled a wine for sale under their own label until now. The wines were first poured at this year’s Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival and the LA Winefest. Subsequent releases will include a 2014 Chardonnay and a 2015 Gewüztraminer from the Ferrington Vineyard.

**Silicon Valley Wine Auction** A wine and food tasting on a grand scale will be held at Levi’s Stadium in Silicon Valley, California, on Saturday, June 20, 2015. 50 wineries from the Santa Cruz Mountains AVA will

be pouring over 150 wines. This is the largest tasting of Santa Cruz Mountains wines ever! For information and tickets, visit [www.scmwa.com](http://www.scmwa.com).



**Solstice on the Summit** Wines grown at seven wineries in the Summit area of the Santa Cruz Mountains will be featured. The event will be held Saturday and Sunday, June 20-21, and features wine tasting, gifts for sale from local artists, live music, food and tours. Tickets are \$25 for both days and are available at participating location. Participating wineries are in the Summit Road area between Santa Cruz and Los Gatos and include Burrell School, MJA Vineyards, Silver Mountain, Villa del Monte and Wrights Station. On Sunday, Muns Vineyard and Radonich Brothers Winery will be at The Summit Store.

**California Vineyard Acreage** *Wine&Vines* (June 2015) noted that The National Agricultural Statistics Service reported that wine grape acreage in California increased by 0.8% in 2014. Bearing acreage was the same at 565,000, while non bearing acres increased 11.1% to reach 50,000. Chardonnay (15.9%) and Cabernet Sauvignon (14.3%) comprise the largest number of total acres planted

**20 Popular Grape Varieties Defined** Tim Edison's WineTurtle website has recently posted summaries of all the major wine grape varieties. Information includes basic history of the origin of the grape, the grape's organoleptic qualities, recommended food pairings, and an expert opinion on what sets that particular grape type apart from the rest. I gladly contributed my two cents about Pinot Noir. Read the post at [www.wineturtle.com/types-of-wine-grape-varieties/](http://www.wineturtle.com/types-of-wine-grape-varieties/).

**Call to Oregon Wineries to Improve Website Content & Communication** Since I visit winery websites every day, I have noticed for some time that many Oregon winery websites are woefully outdated and old-fashioned, lack critical information, and have grammatical and content errors. The incredible rise in popularity of Oregon is amazing when you compare the woefully inadequate marketing acumen of many Oregon wineries with their California counterparts. Sure, Oregonians are laid back and maybe less money driven than Californians, but if you make wine, you must sell it! I was happy to see a recent column by Jim Gullo in Carl Giavanti Consulting Blog at [www.carlgiavanticonsulting.com/blog](http://www.carlgiavanticonsulting.com/blog). Jim reiterates my observations perfectly, stating, "We (Oregon) remain behind on the world stage in marketing generally and content in particular." He points out, "When consumers get the idea that most, or at least a majority of wineries produce wines of a similar quality, it is the story, the presentation and the professionalism of the content - of telling the winery's story - that put it at the top of the list for tastings and direct sales....Wineries that want to stand out also need professional content management and marketing." Only recently have I noticed Oregon wineries enrolling public relations and marketing firms to tell their story: something California wineries have been doing for years. Not infrequently, I receive wines to review from both Oregon and California wineries accompanied by very little marketing information. The wines can be very good, even exceptional, but if there is no background story to tell that makes the wines special, the wines draw little interest from myself and my readers. A winery submitting wines for review can never supply too much information. At the minimum, include a tech sheet that gives the date of release of each wine and its retail price. Even better, email me personally with a hi-res label image and photos that are different from the website image(s). Describe yourself or your team in detail with personal and historical information. Humor is always welcome. Detail your personal challenges in crafting each wine. Let me know where your wines are available in the marketplace and whether you would be willing to give *PinotFile* readers a discount on purchased wines.



## Don't Fuss Over Swirling Wine

Swirling wine in a glass can send a wine through many personality changes. The additional exposure to oxygen from swirling aerates wine by increasing the surface area, releasing and volatilizing more aromatic esters, ethers and aldehydes, and intensifying the nose. I find that swirling often brings out more oak character, if present, in a Pinot Noir. In addition, swirling a wine allows oxygen to react with tannins in the wine to allow the wine to mellow.

There is a proper technique for swirling wine that should be practiced. Hold the wine glass by the stem (never the bowl) between your fingers and thumb, tilt the glass slightly, and gently swirl the wine counterclockwise at the wrist if you are right-handed. Avoid being too vigorous, as wine will inevitably slosh over the sides of the glass: an embarrassing situation. Beginners often swirl wine with the glass placed on a table, since this is easier and equally effective.

It does not matter which way you swirl wine, although a French fable claims that when you swirl wine clockwise, the wine will release fruit aromas, and when you swirl wine counterclockwise, earthy scents will fill the glass. I tested this BS myself and found no aromatic difference concerning the direction of swirling with the same wine. Also, the French believe that rotating wine counterclockwise is bad luck.

Never swirl sparkling wine or Champagne as it will dissipate the bubbles and the wine will quickly go flat.

One of the drawbacks of learning to properly swirl, is that once you have mastered the technique, you will find yourself swirling everything, leading to stares from others as you happily swirl glasses of tap water.