

PinotFile[©]

Life is a Journey. Get on Red Car

Red Car wines is a joint venture of Mark Estrin and Carroll Kemp. Their initial releases included The Stranger, followed by The Window, then The Sugarbaby. All of these wines were Syrahs. Each of the wine series had a unique front label that read like the cover of a novel. The text of the novel is on the back label. The text was a chapter in the novel and the series tells the story of the man on the Red Car trolley. Packaging is way cool and the wines are very good.

The Pinot Noir Program was started in 2002. Grapes were harvested from Marcy Keefer's Ranch in Green Valley and a small vineyard called Clouds Rest on the Sonoma Coast. Whereas Keefer is all about finesse and femininity, the Clouds Rest is wild, forceful, brooding. The first Pinot Noir release is called Amour Fou (French expression for an obsessive, almost mad kind of love). It is a blend of the two Sonoma vineyards described above and harvested in 2002. Keefer Ranch, in the Russian River Valley, accounts for 70% of this maiden voyage, and the Clouds Rest accounts for 30%. The wine spent a total of 16 months in 60% new French oak. It is a big, bold, rich Pinot Noir. Imagine an end of the summer pie filled with red plums, strawberries, rhubarb, and cherries.

2002 Red Car Amour Fou (\$40) Its all about ripeness and heat and the threat of a coming storm. 250 cases Get on the Red Car. Redcarwine.com.

Cobb Wines

The principals in this winery got their badges working at Williams Selyem in the 90s. The wine is a family affair with family members farming the grapes at the Coastlands Vineyard and making the wine. The **2002 Cobb Wines Coastlands Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$58) has just been released. Only 202 cases produced. Grapes farmed organically with ultimate wine quality deriving from healthy vines grown in health soils. Aged in Francois Freres and Ramon barrels for 15 months and produced with minimal technical intervention. Smooth, silky, and complex, this Pinot will be in its prime in 3-5 years, and will age well for 8-10 years.

Www.cobbwines.com, 707-874-1962.

Pinot Noir: Done Right It Has a Unique Character

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Tobin James Winery in Paso Robles has some terrific wine names. They have released a Zin called "Ballistic", a red wine called "Chat La Cacheflo" and a good Pinot Noir named "Pinot Envy".

Inside this issue:

Casa Cassandra	2
Rochioli Estate	2
Many Small Pinot Producers	2
New Zealand Pinot Very Expensive	3
Cartlidge & Browne	3
Brooks	3
Longevinex	4

Casa Cassandra Winery & Vineyard

Owner Bernie Cassara is a brick mason by trade from Orange County, CA. He was looking for a getaway in 1981 when he purchased farm land in what is now the heart of the new Santa Rita Hills appellation of Santa Barbara County. He first planted vines in 1990 on his tiny hilltop estate with assistance from Brian Babcock of Babcock Winery. The first Pinot Noir was made in 1995 by Brian Babcock using Cassara's grapes. In 1998 John Krska came to work at the winery and some magic Pinot Noirs have since been produced. John also manages 24 other premium vineyards over 450 acres in Santa Barbara County. 160-600 cases per cuvee are produced and prices are realistic. The wines are currently made off-site but an estate winery will be completed in late 2003. The following wines were released in October, 2003; the 2002 vintage will be released in April, 2004.



2001 Casa Cassandra Burning Creek Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$29) Best of Show Santa Barbara County Fair 2003; 2003 Andre Tchelistcheff Award, Table Wine Class 8th Annual Consumers Wine Competition.

2001 Casa Cassandra Estate Grown Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$20)

2000 Casa Cassandra Estate Grown Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$20)

www.casacassandra.com.

Rochioli Vineyard & Winery

Rochioli is the standard by which all other Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs are measured. Unfortunately, the wine is only sold through a sold-out mailing list. The single vineyard Pinot Noirs are classics, but the Estate release is muy bien. The **2002 Rochioli Estate Pinot Noir** has just been released at \$40/btl. The grapes were selected from several different vineyard sites with average age of 10 years including Sweetwater Vineyard (37%), West Hills (35%), River Block (10%), Little Hill (10%), and small amounts from East Block, West Block, and Three Corner Vineyards. 2,544 cases made.

A veritable opium-den of flavors, this elixir has more spices than you can recognize and identify. An essence of strawberries and raspberries with red tropical flowers and black pepper. Warning: don't drink this Pinot alone.

“Typical Rochioli character and classic Russian River Valley charm.”

A Veritable Deluge of Pinot Noir Producers

I continue to be amazed at the increasing numbers of small boutique Pinot Noir producers who seem to pop up from everywhere in California and Oregon recently. Often producing only 200-300 cases, they seem to sell out their annual offering with little difficulty. Many of them do not have websites, but are known to Pinotphiles by word of mouth who are attracted to their exclusivity and possible future cult status.

Examples are Maranet Russian River Pinot Noir (\$28) only available at Martini House Restaurant in Napa and bobs@thewineprofiler.com, Keegan Cellars Russian River Pinot Noir, Cobb, Relic, J Wilkes, Lauterbach, Verve, Cuvare, Abiouness, Meitz and others.



New Zealand Pinot Noir Priced Out of Market?

New Zealand is producing a huge amount of Pinot Noir, but they are a tough sell due to their high prices. They have in essence established an inverted pyramid where the high price wines (most wines going for over \$30) are many and low price wines are few. Consumer recognition of the Pinot Noir varietal has not been strong and the high price points are limiting sales.

In New Zealand, Pinot Noir production has boomed from 2624 ha in 2003 to 3120 ha in 2004 and predictions are that by 2006, Pinot producing land will be up to 3745 ha, a 43 per cent increase in just six years. In Marlborough, table Pinot Noir production has jumped from 991 ha in 2003 to 1226 ha in 2004 and is forecast to reach 1509 ha by 2006.

A review of six New Zealand Pinot Noirs available at Hi-Time revealed prices ranging from \$32 (Villa Maria 2001 Reserve) to \$70 (Glaconda 2001).

New Zealand Pinot Noirs have shown promise, but their quality has never matched Pinot Noirs from California, Oregon, and Burgundy. Tough sell at \$30-\$70.



Cartlidge & Browne

An example of the one of the new price conscious wine producers, Cartlidge & Bronwe makes some decent wines that are also a good value. Robert Parker says, "The question that begs to be answered is why so many producers ignore what 'C&B' does better than anybody else in the state— produce fruit forward, pure, varietally correct, delicious wines. In a world of immediate gratification, C&B satisfies the palate as well as the pocketbook."

2002 Cartlidge & Brown Pinot Noir (\$8) This wine has typical Pinot Noir characteristics of sweet and sour cherries, a hint of forest floor, and a soft, pleasing fragrant personality. This wine might not be embarrassed in a blind tasting of Burgundies and other expensive Pinot Noirs. Available at Hi-Time.

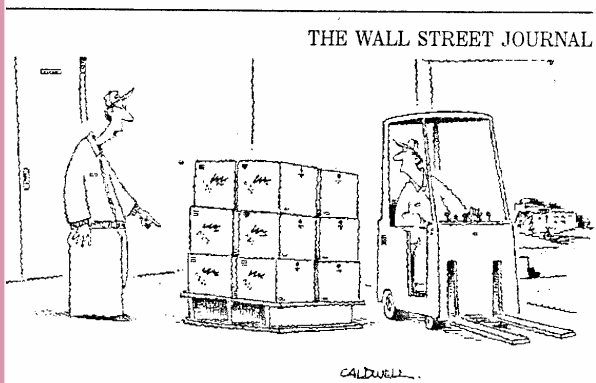


Brooks Oregon Pinot Noir

Jimi Brooks currently buys grapes and leases land until he can afford his own. He grew up in the Willamette Valley, but he didn't study wine-making at Linfield College in McMinnville and didn't even think about it until he lived abroad and worked in Beaujolais wineries. Once he returned home, Brooks apprenticed with an experienced French winemaker and learned the tools of the trade.

Currently he is vineyard manager and winemaker at Monstazi Vineyard/Maysara Winery and also makes his own wine under his own label. His first vintage of 300 cases was in 1998. Like many garagistes, he hungers to own his own vineyard. He currently has four release including **2002 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (\$22), **2002 Amycas Pinot Noir** (\$13), **2002 Runaway Red Pinot Noir** (\$16), and his best wine, **2001 Janus Pinot Noir** (\$33). The **2001 Delara Maysara Pinot Noir** (\$45) is a highly-praised wine from the Monstazi Vineyard, only 100 cases produced.





“Move the chardonnay out and bring the pinot noir in . . . and don’t forget to cleanse the pallet.”

If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir



Pure Grape Power

The world’s first dietary supplement to preserve red wine molecules has been unveiled– it provides red wine molecules without alcohol, calories or sulfites. The new dietary supplement is marketed under the trade name Longevinex .The ingredients are sealed in an airtight capsule similar to the way the cork in a wine bottle prevents wine from turning into vinegar. Longevinex utilizes patented manufacturing methods under exclusive license from Capsugel which is a division of Pfizer. Longevinex provides 15 milligrams of trans resveratrol from French red wine and other botanical sources, equivalent to the consumption of 3-15 glasses of red wine. It is the only red wine extract to provide red wine extract from France. Up to now, due to oxidation and spoilage, the health benefits from concentrated red wine molecules have only been reported from bottled wine, not from pills. For more information go to www.longevinex.com

Along the same idea, I noticed in the recent Costco Wholesale Magazine an advertisement for a product called TruNature Grape Seed Extract With Whole Grape. This product contains the natural grape extracts from the entire grape and is a rich source of flavonoids and other polyphenols, the compounds that have been studied for their role in supporting a healthy vascular system. However, this product has not been studied scientifically and has not been proven to maintain a healthy cardiovascular system. 2 softgels are claimed to be equivalent to one 4oz glass of red wine.

Would you like to dine at a restaurant where you have the chef to yourself, the menu of your choosing, and your own personal host? Near Scottsdale, Arizona, the Charmian Private Dining Room opened recently with a fresh food menu and extensive wine list. There is no sign on the door and don’t even think about showing up without a reservation. Here is how it works. The table seats two to sixteen diners who order their six course meal in advance. Seatings are available at lunch and dinner. The cost of lunch is \$95 for two and dinner \$195, \$295 with wine. Everything is fresh and bought on the day it will be cooked. The food is prepared to the customer’s liking. The Cave Wine Bar, a small bistro with its own kitchen operates next door. Here private tastings can be organized from among 450 wine selections.