

# PinotFile<sup>©</sup>

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## NY Times California Pinot Tasting

The NY Times wine panel tasted 25 of California's top Pinot Noirs from the 2001 vintage. They were expecting to find wines with big fruit, power, and high alcohol so frequently typical of California Pinot Noir. They found, instead, many wines with perfect balance "nuanced and interesting, combining vibrant fruit with an unexpected earthy character. In short, they were pointing to Burgundy." The tasting did not include some big names like Kistler, DuMol, and Brewer-Clifton, but several top Pinot Noirs were sampled. The number one wine was the 2001 Littorai Sonoma Coast Theirot Vineyard (\$48) which combined California fruitiness with Burgundy's elegant texture. The 2001 Littorai Sonoma Coast Hirsch Vineyard was also favored. I drank this wine the other night and found it to be incredibly good, albeit a little oaky on the nose and palate. If you are a regular reader of the PinotFile, the top rating of Littorai is no surprise.

The tasting did support the finding that I have reported on repeatedly in the PinotFile: price does not equate with quality. Two expensive bottlings, the Williams Selyem Hirsch Vineyard (\$70) and the Paul Hobbs Hyde Vineyard (\$110) were forgettable.

Other recommended Pinot Noirs included: 2001 Flowers Sonoma Coast (\$40) (I have never been able to warm up to Flowers Pinots as they are too big and tannic, but the Sonoma Coast bottling is probably their best), 2001 Talley Vineyards Arroyo Grande Rosemary's Vineyard (\$70) (dense and thick, Talley's single vineyard wines need several years to blossom), 2001 Rochioli Estate (\$40) (a benchmark), 2001 Failla Russian River Valley (\$40) (winemaker is Ehren Jordan of Turley Wine Cellars), 2001 Papapietro Perry Sonoma Coast Peters Vineyard (\$40).

## Whetstone Pinot Noir

James Whetstone is the assistant winemaker at Turley Wine Cellars. The **2002 Whetstone Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$39) was reviewed by Robert Parker Jr: "Aromas of pomegranate, smoke, violets, plums, and underbrush (no relation to underpants). Intense flavor, fine balance. 90/100. 130 cases made.

Available at [www.liquidpartyworks.com](http://www.liquidpartyworks.com)

**Pinot Noir: for those who know these wines, there is no approximation; for those who love them, there is no substitute.**

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Pinot Noir growing areas are characterized by warm days cooled at night by coastal breezes, fog, or elevation. Prime areas include Arroyo Grande, Santa Lucia Highlands, Carneros, Russian River Valley, Anderson Valley, Sonoma Coast, and Santa Rita Hills.

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## Peay Vineyards: 2 Bros From Cleveland

The Peay Vineyard is four miles from the Pacific ocean near Sea Ranch on the Sonoma Coast. The Peays, Andy and Nick, are two brothers, 33 and 37 years old respectively, who bought a total of 280 acres on the Sonoma Coast several years ago. 48 acres are planted and meticulously farmed, 30 acres to Dijon and heritage clones of Pinot Noir. The fruit has been sold to Williams Selyem and Flowers, and soon a vineyard-designate Williams Selyem wine will be released.

Nick's wife, Vanessa Wong, is the winemaker. She was previously the winemaker at Peter Micheal Winery, and also trained in Burgundy, at Jean Gros in the tiny village of Vosne-Romanee. She currently makes the wine for neighbor David Hirsch as well as Peay Vineyards.

**2002 Peay Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (\$50). The 2002 selection is from the best barrels from the best vineyard blocks (only 2/3 of the wine produced made the cut). The grapes in 2002 are the 5th leaf. The wine is aged in 44% new oak for 11 months. 265 cases produced. Think about red cherries in the nose and palate punctuated with exotic spices and grilled meat. A very seductive, sexy, gulpable Pinot Noir. A heartstopper! Decant at least 30 minutes. Available at [www.liquidpartyworks.com](http://www.liquidpartyworks.com) or on the website, [www.peayvineyards.com](http://www.peayvineyards.com).



## Paige 23 “Garage” Pinot Noir

Joe Kalina planted a tiny hillside vineyard in Santa Barbara in 1990 and tends each vine with garden-like care. With his partner, part-time wine consultant and Hollywood screenwriter Chris Keller, and winemaker Stephan Bedford, they produce a Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Chardonnay. The label is so-named because if you don't have a story by page 23, you should stop writing. The **2002 Paige 23 Pinot Noir** (\$18) is redolent of sweet strawberries and hints of violets. The flavor is ripe but soft and fruity. You can feel its French accent. Small production, good value, difficult to find.



The partners are also making a Pinot Noir with noted chef Joe Miller for the wine list at Joe's Restaurant in Los Angeles. 805-686-0015

## Finding Pinot Noir on the Internet

It is always a challenge to find limited-production California Pinot Noirs. I have found the following websites to offer a terrific selection of those hard-to-find collectable Pinots.

**Benchmarkwine.com** This is also a terrific source of cult Cabs such as Abreu, Araujo, Beringer, Caymus, Colgin, Dalla Valle, Grace, Harlan, Pride, etc. You can owner call Stefan Blicher at 707-255-3500.

**Wadeswines.com** Many cult Pinots not unreasonably priced.

**Whwineco.com** Located in Woodland Hills. Also a great source for Burgundy.

**Brownderbywine.com** Located in Missouri. Always some good stuff like DuMol (even Mags).

## Williams Selyem Still Wildly Successful

Williams Selyem was the original “garage” Pinot Noir, starting business as “Hacienda Del Rio” in an old garage in Santa Rosa. Back in the early 90’s Burt Williams and Ed Selyem fashioned some legendary Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs that will stand as some of the greatest ever produced to date in California. They were fortunate in accessing some of the greatest Pinot Noir fruit available at the time— Olivet Lane Vineyard, Allen Vineyard, and Rochioli Vineyard. Recently I had dinner at Pinot Provence (what else?) and drank the 1995 Olivet Lane and Allen Vineyard releases. They were still astonishing good. I could pick out that spicy cooked cherry nose as Williams Selyem from a lineup of 100 Pinots every time.



The Williams Selyem wines seemed to lose their pizzazz after 1996, but recent vintages have shown some flash, and the 2001 and 2002 vintages have received rave reviews in the wine press. Although I still purchase a few bottles out of curiosity, I have never found them a match for their early 90s predecessors. You cannot purchase the wines unless you are on the mailing list and the waiting list to get on the mailing list is over a year. On the secondary market, the wines sell for \$75-175 a bottle. The recent April pickup weekend at the winery was overrun with customers eager to pick up their latest purchases. Winemaker Bob Cabral has done an admirable job in continuing the tradition, but I feel the name has stoked the wave of enthusiasm more than the quality of the wines. Parker has recently gushed, but you need to taste for yourself.

This year I will be hosting a retrospective tasting of the 91-95 Williams Selyem Pinot Noirs (Russian River Valley, Allen Vineyard, Olivet Lane Vineyard, and maybe even a Rochioli Vineyard or two). Stay tuned.

## Wine X Magazine 1,000 Point Scale

*Wine X* is a young adult lifestyle magazine that appeals to all ages for its irreverent look at music, fashion, videos, books, travel, wine and other beverages. It is specifically designed to create a comfortable forum in which young adults can learn more about wine without the usual intimidation. There is no other publication that informs, entertains, and enlightens the Gen X wine consumers with such a fresh, cutting-edge approach. Their byline is “Wine is not a lifestyle, it’s part of one.”

Their e-mail newsletter recently published the tongue-in-cheek 1,000 point scale as a vehicle to help wineries unload their product on distributors intent on reaching a sliver of the adult population:

- 999.99–1,000**— you can’t find it or afford it
- 988.99-999.98**— you may be able to find it, but you still can’t afford it
- 977.99-988.98**— you must be on their waiting list to be on their mailing list
- 966.99-977.98**— even if you are on their mailing list, you can only buy one bottle
- 955.99-966.98**— if you brown nose the winemaker you might be able to get two bottles
- 944.99-955.98**— production was more than 100 cases but less than 105
- 933.99-944.98**— winemaker is cute
- 922.99-933.98**— so is their spouse
- 911.99-922.98**— the highest we’ll score wines with no oak
- 900.99-911.98**— the lowest we’ll score wines with too much oak
- 899.99-900.98**— pure crap

To subscribe to the online newsletter or magazine, go to [www.winexmagazine.com](http://www.winexmagazine.com)

## If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir



**When is the right time to drink a Pinot Noir? You can't drink the wine right after it is bottled because of "bottle shock". When you buy the wine you cannot drink it because of "sticker shock" - you need to have a special occasion to drink such an expensive wine. When the wine is shipped to you, you cannot drink it for at least eight weeks because of "shipping shock". When a special occasion arises, you may not be able to drink it because it is in a "dumb phase". When you finally find a time worthy to drink the wine, it may have peaked and is now on the downslope or in the "senility phase". Best advice? Drink the wine in 2-3 years after buying it and cellaring it properly and keep your fingers crossed.**

## Escondido— the next Napa?

North San Diego county's small winery industry is expanding. North County has eight wineries stretching from Fallbrook to Ramona, but is just a fraction of the size of neighboring Temecula, which has 20 wineries. North County has no large winery such as Temecula's Callaway Coastal.

Belle Marie Winery, opened four years ago by maxillofacial surgeon Mick Dragoo and wife Mary, is situated on the Wine Haven Campus in Escondido. This 20,000 gallon winery has party and wedding venues, tasting rooms, a demonstration vineyard with 29 different grape varietals, wine appreciation classrooms, over 3 acres of orchards, and picnic grounds. The winery is open daily, except Tuesdays for tours and tastings and the various venues are for rent for special events. Over 20 varieties of wine are produced, mainly reds such as a grenache/barbera blend and a nebbioli/cabernet blend. The source for the grapes is the Guadalupe Valley in Baja. The winery owns 150 acres of vineyards in Baja planted in more than 30 different varietals. The wines have music-themed names such as Maestro, Melody, Symphony, Duet, and Allegro, and cost between \$14 and \$24 a bottle.



The newest winery, Chateau Dragoo has opened April 17 adjacent to Belle Marie. Owned by the Dragoos, like its sister winery Belle Marie, it will feature red wines produced from grapes sourced in Baja California's Guadalupe Valley near Ensenada. The focus will be narrower with more experimentation and more limited releases. One of the first wines is Cinq Diamante, a 2001 blend of five red wines. Chateau Dragoo has architecturally a castle motif with turrets in the tasting room and wine caves beneath it.

Dragoo knows Napa, having been a winemaker for 30 years and previously owned a Napa Valley winery, Gourmet Haven. The goal is to make wine comparable to Napa in quality.