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Pinot of
Distinction

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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WesMar: Palate-Pleasing Pinot

WesMar is a small garagiste-styled winery in the Russian River Valley that produces “faat” Pinots (sublime combinations of fruit, alcohol, acidity and tannin). The label is modeled after the original Williams Selyem winery. This is not surprising since co-owner Denise **Mary** Selyem is the daughter of Ed Selyem and both her and her husband Kirk **Wesley** Hubbard worked at Williams Selyem for several years before the winery was sold in 1997. They craft their wines in a small industrial space in a former apple processing plant on Gravenstein Highway in Sebastopol. They are a two person, 50/50 operation, sharing all winemaking and winery management duties. There are no employees, consultants or brokers.

You might be asking yourself, “Why haven’t I heard of WesMar Pinot Noir or seen startling scores in the major wine trade magazines?” The answer is that Kirk and Denise (pictured below at Olivet Lane Vineyard) are a modest couple who shun the limelight. They do not submit their wines for comparative judging to anyone. The truth is, they don’t need to either because the quality of the wines speak for themselves. After seven vintages (they started in 2000), they finally did their first winemaker dinner recently at Clint Eastwood’s Tehama Golf Club in Monterey. The pair want to focus all of their energies on winemaking and not on marketing.

Kirk and Denise do love contact with their consumers. They are very personable and warmly receive visitors by appointment to their modest 1,500 square foot



winery. They run a truly honest and unadulterated winery. I kidded them about selling their wines directly on their website, but they will hear nothing of it, preferring to deal with their customers on a more personal level.



There are two distinctive hallmarks of WesMar (pronounced “Wes-Mare”) Pinot Noir. First, there is consistency from one vintage to the next and one bottle after another, regardless of vineyard source. I can honestly say I have been drinking WesMar Pinot Noir for six years and have never had a bad bottle. Second, their several bottlings from each vintage are all unique. As Denise says, “People tend to gravitate toward that which is familiar. This may be even more true with wines. We all want to replicate the success we have had with a particular vineyard or vintage. To counter this phenomenon, we strive to make wines that all have individual personalities but offer very similar levels of richness.” Denise refers to these distinct terroir-driven differences as “WesMarrior.”

Every knowledgeable winemaker knows the “recipe” for making Pinot Noir. It is the decisions and artistry along the way that make a difference. I have spoken at length with Denise about WesMar’s winemaking regimen, and I am convinced the intoxicating aromatics, irrepressible flavors and attractive textures achieved in WesMar Pinot Noirs are from intuition, experience, a deft touch and hands-on, labor-intensive commitment every step of the way. Pressing is carried out with an old incarnated bladder press once used for apples. Fermentations are in five ton, double-wall, rectangular open top stainless steel milk shipping containers to maximize surface area with reference to height and width (see below). All punch downs are by hand. Portable glycol heaters maintain complete temperature control. Grape skins are removed by hand to be pressed. The entire process is gravity flow.



Denise and Kirk begin by securing the best fruit that is available. They pick the fruit earlier than many producers because they feel the feminine aspects of Pinot Noir are best expressed at lower sugar

levels (Brix). The time of harvesting grapes is critical for there is no formula for correcting a harvesting mistake that will not be evident later in the wine. Destemming varies depending on the vineyard and vintage. Usually, at least 33% whole cluster is utilized, with occasional larger amounts when the vintage is fruit forward, but never above 50%. Denise and Kirk like the nuances and age ability that whole cluster provides, but they feel that too much whole cluster can detract from early drink ability that most consumers demand. No cold soak is employed and inoculation of the must with yeast is comparatively early, 24-36 hours depending on how cold the grapes are when they arrive at the winery. Fermentation is short by Pinot Noir industry standards, from 7-10 days. If grapes are picked over several days, the incoming grapes are never added to the existing must, but rather fermented separately. Aging is carried out in Francois Freres oak barrels. Fining and filtering are unnecessary because the wines are lovingly tendered in small lots and constantly monitored for stability. No flavor nuances are ever squandered by manipulation or intervention.

Denise has an aromatic fetish and happily smells her wines for an extended time (“devouring the nose” as she puts it). The ultimate compliment for a Pinot Noir, she says, “is an aroma that dances in the glass.” Asked to describe the WesMar Pinot Noirs, she touts, “Aromatic, fruit-forward, not overly ripe, with balanced acidity, complimentary fruit tannins and subtle oak impressions, while still displaying richness of flavors, finishing with a cloying mouth feel and flavors that linger long after the wine has left the mouth.” In other words, as the WesMar tagline says, “palate pleasing Pinot Noir.”

Kirk and Denise recently purchased a modest farmhouse on ten acres just outside the town of Sebastopol. Like many properties in the area, it was a previous apple orchard. In time, they plan to plant Pinot Noir and produce an estate bottling.

Each year, the WesMar Pinot Noirs are released on Valentine’s Day. At this time I taste through the previous year’s vintage, an interval that allows for adequate evolution of the wines. My experience has been that the WesMar Pinot Noirs will age perfectly fine for at least six years and even longer in magnum format. At the winemaker dinner mentioned above, a 5 liter bottle of 1998 Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir was opened and the wine was “lively, young and vivacious.”

The current offering includes three vineyard designate and two appellation Pinot Noirs from the 2006 vintage. (There also is an excellent Russian River Valley Zinfandel that their dog, Zinny, loves to drink.) The Pinot Noirs include, **2006 WesMar Salzgeber Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (157 cases, \$45), **2006 WesMar Balletto Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (291 cases, \$40), **2006 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (261 cases, \$37), **2006 WesMar Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (355 cases, \$35), and **2006 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (322 cases, \$35). Denise told me that the 2006 vintage is a “feminine” vintage and “lighter on its feet.” An extended harvest produced fruit-forward Pinot Noirs with medium tannins that reflect a woman’s stalwart qualities.

The 2005 growing season had high spring rain totals causing a late bud bloom. As harvest approached, temperatures were below normal. WesMar fruit was picked ten to fourteen days later than normal. The resulting wines were fruit-forward and lush and the complexities are just now beginning to show. I tasted through the lineup over the course of two days (the opened bottles were re-corked



and tasted the next day. The wines showed beautifully both days. There were a lot of options in this lineup. Each wine was distinctive and there was something to like in each one. All were well-crafted, nicely balanced and none of the wines disappointed.

2005 WesMar Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 115 cases, \$50. Severe spring coastal weather conditions reduced the fruit yields to 80% of average. A field blend of many clones. The vineyard is located on a ridge top near Cazadero above the fog belt overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Average yields are only one and a half tons per acre. She (Denise) said, “Dark in color, dense and concentrated, packing a lot of wallop.” I say, *dark ruby in color. Effusive aromatics of dark cherry, black raspberry, smoke, oak spice and toast. Dark stone fruit profile featuring prominent plum flavors with a little sweetness or syrup inflection to the fruit. Full-bodied, sinewy and earthy with soft tannins. Not as showy now as when released. Next day the fruit attack had softened. Wait a little longer on this one.*

2005 WesMar Vintner’s Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 101 cases, \$45. A selection of the four best barrels of the 2005 vintage. She said, “A fruit basket of flavors. Still young.” I say, *shy nose of strawberries and cherry fruit with a little funk. A hint of heat is evident. Dark cherry fruit, cola and meat are peeking out on the palate but are currently overshadowed by woody notes. Great structure for the long haul. Next day the wine was softer on the palate with more muted tannins but still plenty of tannin to shed. Still a Lolita.*

2005 WesMar Olivet Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 308 cases, \$37. Last vintage from this venerable vineyard. She said, “Tight when bottled but stunning now. Very traditional Russian River cherry and strawberry flavors.” I say, *heady and intoxicating Bing cherry, strawberry and cinnamon spice scents. Most sensual aromatics in the lineup. A WOW wine. Cherry driven with many berries joining the party. The texture is soft as a newborn’s rear end and the finish lasts and lasts. Impeccable balance and admirable acidity for food. Still great the next day. 10 cases left - act now!*

2005 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. 14.1% alc., 268 cases, \$37. This vineyard is located on Vine Hill Road (see photos below). As the vines here have matured here, the fruit profile has trended toward a traditional Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. All Martini clones. She said, “A true crowd pleaser. More cranberry, orange and dark tea notes.” I say, *pour this wine for your wife or best friend. It is one seductive Pinot Noir. The aromas of strawberries, cherries, baking spice and a hint of pepper draw you in and the aromatic theme carries through on the palate finishing long, dry and clean. A hint of citrus adds tang. Feminine in style and demure in weight, it is quintessential Russian River Pinot Noir.*



2005 WesMar Balletto Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 204 cases, \$40. This vineyard is located in the hills of western Sebastopol offering warm Russian River Valley conditions with cooler Bodega Bay breezes. All Pommard clone. She said, "A teasing wine with nuances that ping-pong throughout." I say, *the darkest wine in the lineup. Starts off with deep dark cherry fruit, cigar box, oak and toast on the nose. A big gulp of black fruits with notes of cocoa that is lush and flashy leads the attack. Showing a lot of leg, but a curvaceous one without flab. Soft as a down pillow. Delicious.*

I also tasted two older WesMar Pinot Noirs recently.

2003 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 345 cases, \$29. *Gorgeous scents of Bing cherry, fig, cardamom and vanilla jump out immediately. Light in body, the red stone fruit and berry flavors are enhanced by some cola, blood orange citrus and woody highlights. Plenty of lively acidity carries the finish which lacks the fruit impact of the mid palate.*

2003 WesMar Piner Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc, 206 cases, \$35. *Perfect the minute I pulled the cork. Complex aromatics of black cherry, spice, clove, oak, exotic woods and char. Red and blue spiced fruits flow over the tongue like Mobil 1. Beautifully balanced. An honor to drink.*

Wes Mar Winery mailing address is P.O Box 810, Forestville, CA 95436. Tasting is available by appointment by calling 707-829-8824. The website is www.wesmarwinery.com. The wines are sold through a mailing list with very little retail availability. There is distribution to many fine restaurants including Sona in Los Angeles, Mr Stox in Anaheim, and Cyrus in Healdsburg (all in California), as well as restaurants in Alaska, Hawaii, Louisiana, New York and Texas. Magnums are available for all of the 2006 Pinot Noirs and are priced at just twice the cost of a single bottle.



Russian River Valley in Fall along Gravenstein Highway (116)

Kasuari Pinot Noir

One of the real joys in life is browsing a wine store filled with a cache of Pinot Noirs, handling the bottles, reading the labels and purchasing a wine that lacks a recognizable name but seems to hold promise. Anticipation follows and if you are lucky, a big smile breaks out on your face when you take that first sip. This happened to me recently when I came across Kasuari Pinot Noir.

Kasuari is a rare and dangerous flightless bird that inhabits Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia. It belongs to the family of birds known as Cassowaries from the Indonesian name Kasuari. The third largest bird in the world, it has the capability of killing humans, but fortunately prefers to eat snails, snakes, frogs and fruit.

I asked Michael Peters, who along with Drake Johnson (both pictured below) founded this label in 2004, why he chose this name. His response was, "Kasuari is a rare bird, perfection and paradise all in one... i.e. do it well and enjoy it more!" Now if you can figure that out let me know. Michael has been crafting wine for fifteen years and this label is the result of him "simply chasing his dream to make great wines and enjoy them with every one!" His cousin, Randy Peters, farms the Peters Vineyard located in south Sebastopol, the site of a former apple orchard. The soil is loamy goldridge type and the clone is Pommard.



2006 Kasuari Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 48 cases, \$45. Aged 15 months in 50% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *The nose is shy but sexy featuring red fruits and roseate aromas. Delicious strawberry and cherry fruit are carried on a light and elegant frame. The lingering strawberry-scented finish is flamboyant and vivid with just the right amount of acidic tang. No tannins in sight. This is what Pinot Noir should be, but so often isn't. If you like strawberries, this is your wine. I'm buying more of this one for drinking now.*

Kasuari wines (they also produce a Rosé, Zinfandel and Cab) are available on the website at www.kasuariwine.com. The phone is 707-322-7055.

Kasuari

Morlet Family Vineyards Debuts

Luc Morlet grew up working on his family's domaine, Pierre Morlet & Fils, in Avenay-al-d'Or, Champagne. His father, Pierre, is apart of a fifth generation winegrower family. Upon moving to the Napa Valley fourteen years ago, Luc was hired as head winemaker at Peter Michael where he worked from 2000 to 2005. In 2005, his brother, Nick Morlet replaced him at Peter Michael, and he embarked on his own label with his wife Jodie. His winemaking approach is New World, crafting wines less in the French style and more in the California rich and intense mode.

No expense is spared in the crafting of his Pinot Noirs. He sources fruit from carefully situated vineyards in he Sonoma Coast, all hand picked and sorted. Following hand sorting, he uses a special machine he patented called "The Sorter" to further select out only the finest berries. The wines are coopered in 100% French oak and bottled in very heavy glass with long, expensive corks. Morlet's wines are known for their superb aromatics and he has been called "an olfactory genius."

The premier release of Morlet Family Vineyards wines includes three Pinot Noirs, one Bordeaux-styled white wine ("La Proportion Doree") and one Syrah ("Bouquet Garni") from the 2006 vintage. The three Pinot Noirs are quite similar in style and flavor and all are very polished.

2006 Morlet Family Vineyards "Coteaux Nobles" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 350 cases, \$75. *Sexy and generous aromas of black raspberry jam with an oak veil. Darkly fruited, slightly jammy blackberry and black cherry fruit with a little earth and mineral streak. Juicy, succulent and richly layered, this Pinot Noir is a decadent example of the varietal that will find many fans.*



2006 Morlet Family Vineyards "En Famille" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$85. *Like all three wines, this one is dark purple in color. A sappy aromatic core with a hint of heat. Packed with raspberry and cherry fruit that is muscular but not harsh, flamboyant but not over the top. Svelte tannins and a vivid, lengthy finish.*



2006 Morlet Family Vineyards "Joli Coeur: Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$90. *Starts off with a gorgeous nose of fresh blackberry pie. There are layers of plush, soft and mouth-filling black cherry and blackberry fruit, complimented by tobacco, game, and forest floor. Deft oak lurks in the background. The fruit lingers on the finish for an eternity. Of the three wines, the fruit is showier here and if I had to choose, this would be my pick of the litter. This wine is for lovers of a hedonistic full-throttle style of Pinot Noir that startles with sensual pino-tosity.*



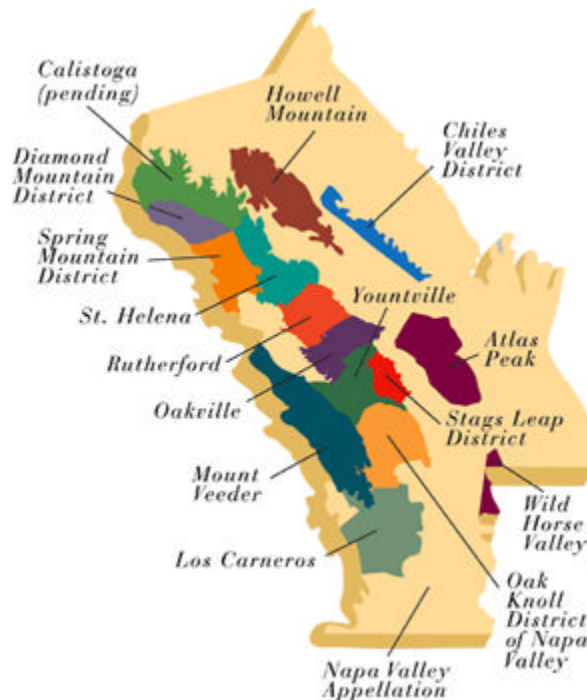
Morlet Family Vineyards wines are sold primarily through a mailing list. To sign up, visit the website at www.moreltwines.com. 707-967-8690. Wines are crafted at Chateau Boswell in Napa. Luc is also the winemaker at Vineyard 7 & 8 on Spring Mountain in Napa Valley.

Wild Horse Valley

Wild Horse Valley is Napa Valley's smallest sub-appellation at 3,300 acres. Only six miles due east of downtown Napa, this mountainous region rises to 1,500 ft in some parts. The area is exposed to chilly winds from San Pablo Bay and is cooler than Carneros to the west and south and is the chilliest AVA in Napa Valley. Leslie Carneros, winemaker for Arista, has called it the "Siberia of Napa Valley."

A limited amount of grape farming has been carried out here since the 1800s but the rough terrain limits the amount of plantable land. The rocky, volcanic soils and maritime climate make it ideal for growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Diurnal temperature swings can often reach 40°F. The growing season is extended often into November and the region is among the last picked in the Napa Valley.

There are three main vineyards in Wild Horse Valley (no wineries): Wild Horse Vineyard, Birkmyer Vineyard, now named Nicols Vineyard (20 acres), and Heron Lake Vineyard (14 acres). The fruit has been highly prized and sourced by multiple wineries including Harrington, Elyse, Newton, Arista, Purple Wine Co., and Marguerite Ryan (see below). The Pinot Noir fruit is said to be intensely flavored with attractive floral aromas.



2005 Heron Lake Winery Miss Olivia Brion Wild Horse Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 400 cases, \$40. David Mahaffey planted Heron Lake Vineyard in 1980 at 1,400 ft. A boutique grower and producer of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, along with vineyard manager John Newmeyer, he has made about 600 cases a year since 1985. His current 14-acre vineyard (downsized from the original 24 acres after unsuitable sites were pulled out) is planted to Dijon and Pommard clones. The label says this wine is a homage to Olivia Brion, suffragette and descendent of a great French wine family. In 1905 she won a huge wager by outrunning a locomotive. Later in life she ignited a



furor by publishing passionate letters from her many paramours including Warren Harding and Paul Gauguin. *Very attractive violets, strawberries and cherries on the nose. Black raspberry flavors and a woody and rustic bent, leading to a dry finish with lively acidity. Good without being special.*

2004 Marguerite Ryan Cellars Birkmyer Vineyard Wild Horse Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 52 cases, \$40. Marguerite (“Peggy”) Ryan is one of many illustrious winemakers trained by Warren Winierski at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars. She is a law school graduate who moved to California, enrolled in enology classes and began her career at Stag’s Leap as a lab technician. She started her own label in 1996 releasing 70 cases of Pinot Noir and has subsequently sourced grapes from several prestigious vineyards like Pisoni and Garys’ in Santa Lucia Highlands. *Dark purple in color, this beauty starts off with gorgeous black cherry fruit and floral scents. Prodigious black cherry and black raspberry fruit nicely spiced. Mouth-coating, almost syrupy texture. A tiny bit of heat peaks out on the finish. This is an opulent wine that is fat on the palate and demands contemplation. Drink now.*



2004 Marguerite Ryan Cellars Peay Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.9% alcohol, 71 cases, \$48. *Dark fruits and a forest floor earthiness dominate the aromas and are echoed in the flavors. The high alcohol creates a rich mouth feel and the heat is only slightly noticeable. This Pinot is light on its feet with gossamer tannins and will provide good drinking in the near term.*

Heron Lake Winery address is 4626 Green Valley Rd, Napa. The phone is 415-710-3632. There is some retail distribution.

Marguerite Ryan Cellars address is 1344 Oak St., Napa. The phone is 707-254-7957. Distributed through limited retail channels.

First Report on 2005 DRC

Linda Murphy, writing in winereviewonline.com (February 6, 2008), reported on her participation at the January 31, 2008 pre-release tasting of the 2005 DRC wines (the formal debut was February 7 in New York). In 2005, DRC bottled approximately 7,800 cases. She noted that the tasting was so formal and quite it was “like being in a church” (I have attended two Wilson Daniels DRC pre-release tastings and the reverence for the wines is evident among all attendees.)

She related that the 2005 reds “are young, tight and unevolved, yet their personalities shine nonetheless, with plenty of sweet red fruit, firm yet ripe tannins, subtle oak influence, electrifying acidity and a mouth feel that is sensuous and smooth at first, wrapping itself gently around the palate then bursting on the finish with succulence and refreshment. Take a sip, swallow, wait two minutes and the taste and texture remain.”

Murphy says the DRC wines consistently display six traits: perfect balance, perfumed aromas, layer upon layer of flavor, silky texture, tremendous aging potential and extraordinary quality no matter what the vintage conditions. I would agree with all but the last trait as I have had very ordinary DRC wines from poor vintages. And I would add a seventh trait: expensive beyond belief.



Naughty Boy Vineyards

Potter Valley is a Mendocino appellation that is rarely seen on wine labels. Matt Karmer (*New California Wine*) dismissed the area saying, “So far, nothing distinctive has emerged from Potter Valley.” Despite this, there are a number of intrepid souls who proudly farm vineyards (1000+ acres) in this inland sub-appellation located eighteen miles northeast of Ukiah and close to Lake County. I first saw this appellation on a bottle of Kalin Sauvignon Blanc, a white wine of extraordinary interest and longevity.

Virginie Boone wrote an excellent article on Potter Valley (*Savor Wine Country*, Winter 2007), but even she failed to put Potter Valley in the article title, deferring to “The Place for Pinot Noir.” If you have visited and spent time in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County and felt like the area was in a toneless time warp with little amenities such as modern lodging and restaurants, you would never be drawn to Potter Valley, which has no cafes, hotels or any tourist attractions whatsoever. Nearby Ukiah provides these services. But, as Boone notes, “Things grow well in Potter Valley, giving it a sense of order, purpose and beauty that relies not at all on the arrival of more people. Nothing grows better these days than wine grapes.”

The Russian River Valley finds its headwaters in Potter Valley. On the neighboring hillsides, Pinot Noir has found a home, while white varietals thrive on the valley floor. Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Semillon, Pinot Gris and Zinfandel are thriving here as well. The daytime temperatures can be quite high, but



the nighttimes are truly cold, making for large diurnal temperature shifts. Early morning river fog makes a regular appearance. Plenty of water is available for irrigation and despite constant spring nighttime frost threats and botrytis pressure brought on by fall rains, Pinot Noir has performed well here and plantings rank second only to Anderson Valley in Mendocino County.

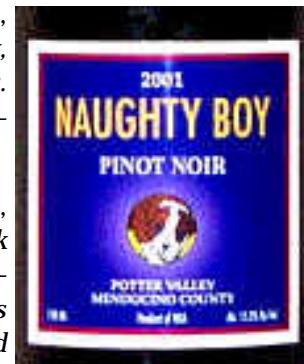
The Potter Valley AVA was approved in 1983. There are no wineries and most locals make their wines in neighboring Redwood Valley. The major growers are McFadden Vineyard, Vecino Vineyards, and Naughty Boy Vineyards. Labels that source grapes from the appellation include Barra of Mendocino, Braren Pauli Winery, Chateau Montelena, Dashe Cellars, Frey Organic Wines, Kalin Cellars, Old World Winery and Sunset Cellars.

Jim and Emjay (MJ) Scott are refugee artists (they call themselves “aging hipsters”) that escaped San Francisco in 1989 and settled in Potter Valley. They carefully nurse their five acre organically farmed vineyard (first planted in the late 1990s), handle all of their own sales and promotion and even hand deliver the wine to local accounts. I ran across the Naughty Boy label a couple years back and recently Jim contacted me and sent me a couple of bottles to sample. The Naughty Boy label proudly portrays the Scotts’ faithful winery dog Little Ricky. The winemaker is Gregory Graziano who also farms his own vineyard in Potter Valley. (L to R, MJ, Jim, Greg, Trudy Graziano).



2004 Naughty Boy Potter Valley Mendocino County Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 397 cases, \$27. *Red Pinot fruits, soy, spearmint and woody aromas. Red cherry, cranberry flavors which pick up interest and intensity with time in the glass. Light on the palate with a respectable and modest tannic structure and well-integrated alcohol.*

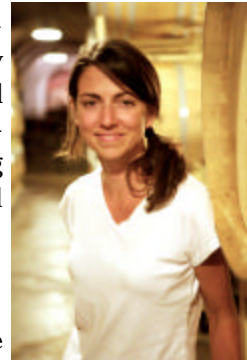
2005 Naughty Boy Potter Valley Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 477 cases, \$27. *Interesting aromatics of wild berries, allspice, herbs and oak char. More red fruits and less tannin than the 2004 vintage. The panoply of exotic fruit and spices is soft and the presentation is elegant. Tangy acidity wraps up a clean finish. This is a mysterious Pinot Noir of unusual breeding that is hard to pin down. I never have tasted anything quite like it and applaud its uniqueness.*



Naughty Boy Vineyards is located at 10000 Gibson Lane, Potter Valley. The phone is 707-743-2868. The wines are available on the website at www.naughtyboyvineyards.com and are distributed throughout California. Tasting by appointment. These are wines for the adventurous, those seeking distinctive artisan Pinot Noirs that do not run with the usual crowd. A Chardonnay and Rosé complete the Naughty Boy lineup.

Lutea Wine Cellars

Lutea's owner and winemaker is Suzanne Hagins, a South Carolina native who developed her interest in wine working in the Charleston restaurant scene for many years. She subsequently went to Burgundy to work harvest under Pascal Marchand at Domaine Comte Armand, returning to the states to study at several wineries including De Loach, David Bruce and Littorai. She continues to have quite a following in South Carolina and her wines are eagerly snapped up by many wine lovers and restaurants there. Her small lots of Pinot Noir quickly sell out every year.



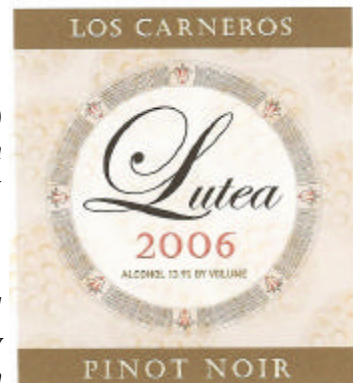
Lutea is the name of the American lotus, a flower native to the southeast United States. The lotus seed is a very long-lived seed which in nature can lie dormant for hundreds of years and still blossom. Suzanne notes that it is a perfect symbol of potential and very suited as a name for wine.

Suzanne insists on sourcing grapes from organic and or biodynamically farmed vineyards in Northern California. Her winemaking begins in the vineyard at harvest where the grape clusters are carefully harvested using scissors (rather than knives which are often utilized by picking crews) to protect the delicate clusters. After de-stemming, there is a 3-5 day cold soak and fermentation proceeds over two weeks. Minimal sulfur is used - the wines always have less than 100ppm, the maximum total sulfur which is allowed for organically grown designated wines. I found that she has a nice woman's touch with Pinot Noir and I especially welcomed the sensible alcohol levels.

2006 Lutea Sonoma County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 150 cases, \$23. aged in 1-3 year old French oak barrels. *Pleasant perfume of black cherry, herbs, oak and smoke. Middle-weighted bright cherry flavors with a refreshing and clean finish. A simple, straight-forward Pinot Noir that offers good casual drinking.*

2005 Lutea Los Carneros Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 150 cases, \$35. Aged 10 months in 15% new oak. *Earthy, plummy, woody and floral on the nose with earthy dark fruits and some animale on the palate. Light on its feet and soft and seamless in texture.*

2005 Lutea Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 150 cases, \$35. Coopered in 20% new oak for 10 months. *This is the most structured and serious wine in the lineup that needs some coaxing to open up. Initially there are aromas of forest floor, mushrooms, oak and a little good funk. With air more sweet cherry notes emerge. Cherry-driven flavors dance on a silky texture and the finish is lively with good acidity. This wine shows great Russian River Valley typicality and should age nicely.*



Lutea Wine Cellars address is 446 Orchard St, Santa Rosa. The wines are sold on the website at www.luteawinecellars.com and through limited retail distribution. The phone is 707-592-0568. Suzanne will soon be releasing her first vineyard designate Pinot Noir from Bybee Vineyard in Sebastopol. She is also the winemaker for B Vineyards & Habitat (Bybee Pinot Noir).

Small Sips of Pinot

J. Keverson Wines This is about four guys who got together often to play bocce ball and had so much fun sharing food and wine afterwards that they started their own label. They began in a garage, found out they could make pretty good wine and took it from there. The biggest challenge was finding a name for their wines that wasn't already taken. The result was J. Keverson, a figment of their imagination representing a combination of all of their names - John Hazlewood (winemaker), Kevin Tompkins, Scott Broome, and Eric Ulicny. Their first two releases, a 2005 Zinfandel and Sangiovese, were medal winners. I was given a bottle of their 2006 Pinot Noir to taste while recently in Sebastopol.



2006 J. Keverson Labyrinth Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc.. *The wine leads off with sweet oak, blackberry jam, a leafiness and a hint of alcohol. Blackberries, dark cherries, tar, blood orange and vanilla carry the medium-weighted flavors. The textural impression is soft and clean and the finish has zingy acidity. I thought it was decent, but my wife like it a lot.*

J. Keverson website is www.jkeverson.com. The phone is 707-484-3083. The Pinot Noir is not available on the website as yet but I am assuming it will be released soon.



Martelletto Wines Greg Martelletto owns a wine distribution company based in San Diego. Driven by his Italian wine heritage, he has started his boutique label, Martelletto Wines. He sent me a bottle of his latest effort to sample and I was quite impressed. I should not have been surprised, however, since he is a fellow Stanford alum and those guys are talented!

2005 Martelletto Gaia Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.6% alc.. Aged 17 months in French oak. *Very appealing aromas of bright fresh red cherries with a complimentary touch of oak. Delicious dark red stone fruits with a sidecar of Asian spice. Noticeable but dusty tannins and a protracted fruity finish. The wine has an elegant bent which I like and avoids the ponderous and showy fruit that some Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noirs exhibit. A very nice effort.*

Martelletto Wines website is www.martelletto.com. Not much information as yet but check back. The phone is 619-269-0874. Greg also leads tours to the Guadalupe Valley wine country in Baja. I visited Baja not too long ago and I was pleasantly surprised by the high quality of wines emerging from this region (no Pinot though as it is too warm).

Brown-Forman Wines Based in Louisville, Kentucky, Brown-Forman Wines sells 5.5 million cases of wine annually. Most of the Pinot Noirs in the lineup fit into the “value” supermarket category and will not appeal to hard-core Pinot geeks. The exceptions are the Sonoma-Cutrer Pinot Noirs which are more high-end, limited release bottlings intended primarily for the restaurant market.

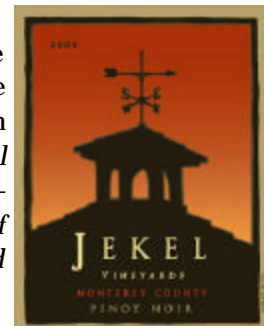
2004 Sonoma Cutrer Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$40. Sourced from Sonoma Cutrer’s Vine Hill Vineyard, Owsley Vineyard, Les Pierres Vineyard and The Cutrer Vineyard and include a “market basket” of clones including Pommard, 667, 777 and 828. The wine is crafted with care typically given to small lot boutique Pinot Noir producers. Terry Adams is the winemaker. *Vibrant wild berry fruit on the nose with oak and green tea notes. Tasty cherry fruit enhanced with oak and herbs. Full in the mouth with soft texture and refined acidity.*

2005 Sonoma Cutrer Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$40. *Oak and char dominate the aromas. Rich dark fruit attack followed by oak and herbal notes that last to the clean finish. Still has some unresolved tannins. More oak driven than the 2004 vintage.*

2006 Gala Rouge Pinot Noir Vin De Pays D’OC 12.5%, \$10. Vintage poster on the label which touts the wine for bunco, poker and weddings. *Plenty of garnet color. Smoky dark fruits from start to finish with very silky tannins. Soft, smooth and easy to drink with simple black fruit flavors. More Syrah than Pinot in flavor and character (must be other red varietals added to this Pinot Noir). Very similar to the Fetzer bottling (see next) but with less tannin.*

2005 Fetzer Vineyards Valley Oaks Pinot Noir Vin De Pays D’OC 12.5% alc., \$9. Pinot Noir grapes are sourced from the Languedoc-Roussillon region. Dennis Martin is the winemaker. *Candied fruit (Jujube’s) and violet aromas. Flavors of black raspberry, licorice, game and tar with plenty of tannin. A hardy drink with substantial structure. Little resemblance to Pinot Noir.*

2006 Jekel Vineyards Monterey County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$17. A more serious bottling sourced primarily from Central Coast vineyards with a little Sonoma Coast fruit added in. Fermented in stainless, MLF in barrel and aged in French oak, 39% new or once-used barrels. *Initially the aromas are strongly herbal and oaky but with air pleasing cherry fruit emerges and the oak fades to the background. On the palate there is rich dark cherry fruit with a hint of spice, a touch of cola, tea and oak and a fine herbal influence. Easy to drink, true to the varietal, and a good value.*



2006 Bolla Provincia Di Pavia Italy Pinot Noir. 12.0% alc., 30,000 cases. 100% Pinot Noir from northern Italy. Fermented in stainless steel and aged without oak. Imported by Brown-Forman. *Light in color. Confectured red fruit (tutti-frutti) on the nose. Thin, watered-down fruit with a bitter and green edge.*

2005 Michel Picard Bourgogne 12.5% alc., screw cap. Fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks. *One sniff and you know this is French with a tell-tale barnyard, gamey and Brett aroma. Simple, light red fruits with an iodine note and substantial tannins.*

Brown-Forman wines are widely distributed. The portfolio also includes Five Rivers Pinot Noir sourced from Central Coast fruit. I recently sampled a current release and it was quite a good value wine. A very limited amount of Sanctuary Pinot Noir is released by Fetzer’s winemaker, Dennis Martin.

Vino V Wines Michael Meagher is one of the young turks crafting wine from vineyards in Santa Barbara County. His first release in 2004 consisted of 200 cases. These are boutique wines crafted with love. As Michael says, "All wines are truly made by hand employing only the laws of gravity (and good beer) for moving and bottled by a group of friends and relatives.

2005 Vino V Solomon Hills Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 112 cases, \$45. 18 months in barrel (20% new). *The aromas are a little funky and earthy with notes of wild red berries, black cherry, hay, and oak. Soft red fruit and green tea flavors finish with tangy raspberry notes. Alcohol peaks out on the nose and finish.*

2005 Vino V Confundido Santa Barbara County 14.5% alc., 120 cases, \$28. 80% Syrah and 20% Pinot Noir. *Dark ruby in color. Attractive scents of rich, dark fruits with cardamom and vanilla. A solid fruit core with notes of anise and tar. A bit tangy and chippy on the finish. I am not usually a fan of blending Pinot Noir with anything, but this is quite decent.*

2004 Vino V White Hawk Vineyard Santa Barbara County Syrah 14.5% alc., 75 cases, \$42. Released last year but really reaching its stride now. Estrella River clone of Syrah. 21 months in barrel (33% new). *Deep, dark purple. Plumy, dark stone fruits with oak and exotic spices on the pleasing nose. Plush dark fruits with well-integrated oak and soft, drying tannins. A very nice black raspberry kiss on the finish. The healthy acidic backbone is refreshing. I like this.*

2005 Vino V White Hawk Vineyard Santa Barbara County Syrah 14.5% alc., unreleased. *Similar to the 2004 vintage but shows more immaturity. Complex aromas of black fruits, ripe strawberries, oak and a little barnyard. Blackberry fruit flavors with an oak sidecar. Moderately fine-grained fresh tannins, a velveteen texture and a long, dry finish. Not as showy as the wine above but will match up nicely with more time in the bottle.*

Vino V Wines website is www.vinovwines.com. The phone is 805-207-7426. The wines are available on the website.

ZD Wines The founder of ZD wines, Norman deLeuze, passed away last October at the age of 75. de Leuze was employed by Optical Coatings Laboratory in the 1960s when he formed a partnership with another aerospace engineer to begin making wine commercially. By 1978, he was working at ZD Wines in the Napa Valley full-time. He was an advocate of non-toxic treatment of diseases and had an ongoing relationship with the University California Davis Oncology Department. ZD wines has a long history of consistently excellent Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays and Cabernet Sauvignons. The winery is still family run and Robert and Brandon deLeuze carry on the winemaking duties with Chris Pisani.

2005 ZD Wines Carneros Reserve Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 950 cases, \$50. Sourced from the 7-acre deLeuze Family Vineyard in Carneros planted entirely to the Hanzell clone. *A hearty and satisfying nose brimming with dark fruits, toast and barnyard. Full-bodied mélange of dark stone fruit preserves with plenty of oak and herbal influence. Nicely balanced with a strong presence. I previously reviewed the regular bottling which was quite good as well, but this is truly a reserve with more intensity and punch.*



ZD Wines is located at 8383 Silverado Trail, Napa. The wines are distributed to fine wine retail stores and are available on the website at www.zdwines.com. Tours of this 30,000 case per year winery are by appointment at 707-433-1385. The tasting room is open daily from 10-4:30.

Sebastopol Sculpture Personifies Quirky

If you spend any time at all in Sebastopol like I do you will notice the quirky metal sculptures about town. These are all part of the urban folk art collection of Patrick Amiot. Amiot was a struggling artist who moved his family to California from Montreal in 1997. He originally planned to settle in San Francisco, but the high cost of housing led him to opt instead for a 1909 bungalow on Florence St in suburban Sebastopol 70 miles north of San Francisco. After moving in, he toiled for several years with little notoriety. After 9/11, he crafted a sculpture of the Statue of Liberty and put it on his front lawn. The neighbors were inspired and intrigued and before long practically everyone on Florence St proudly displayed a Patrick Amiot sculpture on their front lawn.

The whimsical and just plain quirky sculptures Amiot makes utilize urban discards such as license plates, car parts, old appliances, tools and practically any form of usable junk. His wife, Brigitte Laurent contributes as a painter as well. Each sculpture is a unique work of art with great interest, often incorporating humorous figures that typify human diversity. You can't view these sculptures without laughing out loud. I have included a few photos below for your interest. When you are in Russian River wine country, be sure to stop in at 382 Florence Ave and see the master at work. 707-824-9388. The website is www.patrickamiot-brigitte-laurent.com.



Pinot Briefs

Littorai Last week I checked in on the new winery being built on Ted Lemon's estate in the Sebastopol Hills. Ted Lemon's commitment to sustainable farming has been brought to the construction of his new winery. Phase one is a straw bale building (9,000 case permit) built on two levels on the side of a hill and phase two will be 5,000 sq ft of underground caves. The facility is designed for solar power and to maximize energy efficiency. Winery water will be reclaimed through an innovative constructed wetlands treatment system and the water will be re-used for vineyard and farm irrigation. Expected date of completion of the building is August, 2008, after which tours will be available by appointment and wine order pick up will be offered as an option at the winery. Beginning with the 2008 vintage, 90% of Littorai's vineyard sources will be farmed using only organically certified materials, 54% will be farmed biodynamically, and 39% will be estate production.



Climate Change & Wine Conference Attended by 350 people from 36 countries, this conference concluded last week in Barcelona, Spain. As reported in the *Los Angeles Times* (February 20, 2008), there is general consensus in the international wine industry that climate changes are occurring (an average temperature increase of 2 to 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit is predicted by 2100). It is projected that California's Central Valley may eventually not be a viable wine grape growing region, with most of the prime growing areas clustered in California's northern and southern coastal zones. Burgundy vintages will be more reliably ripe and Germany and England are expected to have a notable increase in plantings of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Denmark, Belgium and parts of Central Europe will become new wine growing regions. Down under, Tasmania and New Zealand should be well suited to the warming climate. I recently wrote about global warming effects on viticulture, implying that the problem was largely "human caused." One of my readers, Jay Caplan, a scientist, pointed out that although warming will change the type of grape varieties grown in many regions, the causation of global warming is considered by many in the scientific community to be a sun caused event due to the evolving nature of the sun spot cycle. The sun is actually heating up (burning more brightly than at any time during the past 1,000 years) resulting in warming of all of the planets in the solar system. 10,000 scientists have signed a petition concerning the lack of human causation of global warming. Reducing carbon emissions may actually be harmful, leading to higher costs with no beneficial results. Caplan points out that, "Carbon dioxide is an aerial fertilizer for plants, and higher levels make for more food and fiber production, reducing famine and allowing a higher population on the planet, a second gift from the buried carbon deposits in addition to energy."

Lost Tasting Notes Recovered I had misplaced my tasting notes on Roco and Privé Pinot Noirs for the recent Oregon issue (Volume 6, Issue 52). I came across them recently and here they are.

2005 Roco Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$40, screw cap. A blend of several Willamette Valley Vineyards, including the winemaker's own Wit's End Vineyard. The thunderbird image on the label is derived from a petroglyph discovered in the Columbia River Gorge. On the label: "We believe the wine speaks for itself. Wine is a revelator." *Fairly light in color. Lovely red cherry and all-spice aromas. Very soft and elegant redder fruits with a raspberry kiss on the lingering finish. A very feminine and sexy Pinot Noir that is perfectly crafted and on one word, superb.*

2005 Roco Private Stash Number Three Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$70, screw cap. Third vintage, all from estate grown fruit at Wit's End Vineyard. *The aromatics are stunning with perfectly spice cherry fruit. Similar to the wine above but a little deeper and earthier and more ramped-up fruit flavors. The tannins are gossamer, the acidity is perfectly integrated, and the texture is*

mouthcoating and silky. In two words, more superb.

2005 Privée Le Nord Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., \$42. 20 year-old vines, Pommard clones, on a moderately slopping southwest facing hillside. True artisan winegrowing. *Typical Pommard core of intense black cherries. Pomegranate, cardamom spice and oak add interest. Plenty of forest floor, earthy overtones making this more terroir- than fruit-driven as in previous vintages. Impeccably balanced and a treat to drink.*

Turnkey Pinot Noir Wineries for Sale (1) 3,250 sq ft winery/warehouse/tasting room, 5,000 case bonded winery, 2,500 sq ft storage building, crush pad, 26 acres of premium Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir planted in 1999, 30+ total acres, 4.17 tons per acre yield in 2007, guest house at 3066 Adobe Road, Petaluma, CA (Flying Rooster Ranch). Owner Dennis De La Montanya may assist and advise buyer after purchase. \$4,395,000. WineryX Real Estate - 707-968-9100 (Katie Somple). (2) The Rutz Cellars. 5,000 sq ft cave winery on 4.25 acres in Sebastopol, 10,000 case winery permit, private setting with views overlooking vineyards, valley and mountains. \$2,450,000. Pacific Union Real Estate - 707-529-6225 (Jeff Bounsall).

Pinot Noir Summit The 6th Annual Pinot Noir Summit will be held on March 2, 2008 at Fr. Mason in San Francisco from 12:00-7:30. 267 wines were entered in the competition and the final 40 will be available for blind tasting by the public. The public's scores will be compared to the wine panel scores (the panel included myself) in an award ceremony. After an unveiling of the wines, attendees will be able to meet and talk with the winemakers for the 40 winery finalists. Seminars on Pinot Noir will also be offered. I am moderating a panel titled "Discovering New Pinot Noir Producers." Participating wineries include RN Estate, Three Sticks Winery, Kutch Wines, and B Vineyards & Habitat. Register online at www.affairsofthevine.com. Cost is \$135 pp, but bring a friend, use my password "insider", and receive two tickets for \$170.

Burgundy Bad Boys According to decanter.com (January 24, 2008), the French have banned an advertising campaign from Burgundy because of its implication that wine drinking increases sexual attraction (duh, isn't that common knowledge?). The Evin Law of 1991 in France says that ads must only inform and cannot use words like 'seduce' or anything that suggests wine can be sexually seductive. The Burgundian wine trade body (BIVB) had released an ad showing the curvaceous outline of a beautiful woman in an evening dress of flowing wine. Those French need to lighten up!

Treviso Objects to Paris Hilton Ads While you are "in the mood," here is another report regarding offending ads that portray wine as sexy. Rich Prosecco, which comes in cans, has raised the ire of the wine growers association of Treviso, the northern Italian city in the Veneto region where Prosecco originates. Hilton is pictured in various high-heeled stages of undress in ads for Rich Prosecco. A spokesperson in Trarviso said, "Paris Hilton is sensationalism. It's not good. It's not adequate for Prosecco." (from reuters.com, January 11, 2008).

Biodynamic Wineries Jack Everitt (Fork & Bottle, Santa Rosa, California) has compiled an accurate list of biodynamic wineries in the world. See the list at www.forkandbottle.com/wine/biodynamic_producers.htm.

Able Grape Doug Cook, a former search engineer at Inktomi and Yahoo, has developed a wine search engine - Able Grape. The site, www.ablegrape.com is currently a beta test version consisting of over 10 million pages. It was developed as an up-to-date online source for wine, enology and viticulture information. Its advantage is that it provides a short path to the most useful information and was designed by a wine geek (Cook is currently studying in the Masters of Wine program).

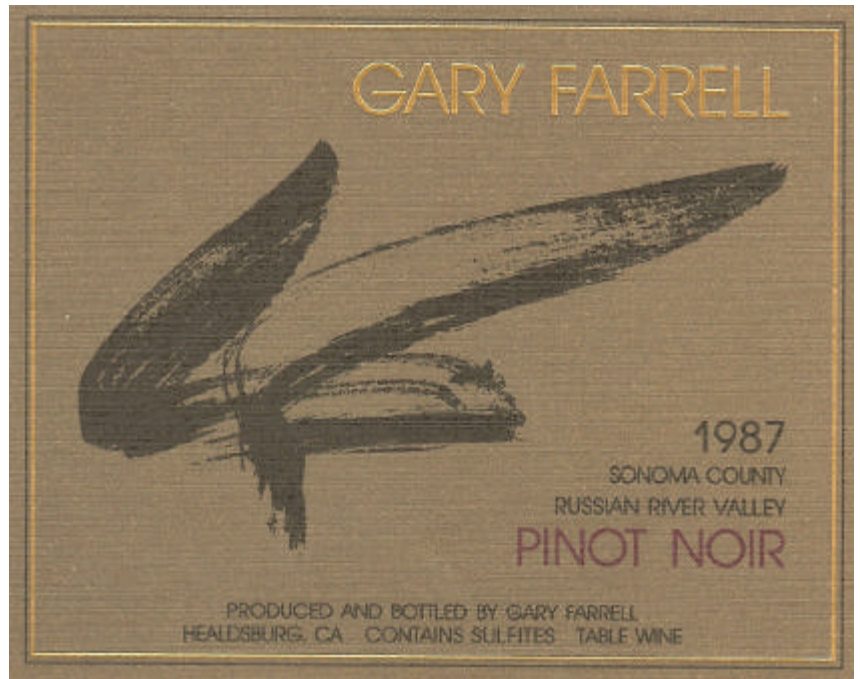


PrinceofPinot.com

Santa Maria Valley next week

**People of Great Character
Make Pinot of Distinction**

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This is a copy of the 1987 Gary Farrell label that I kept for 20 years because the wine made such an indelible impression on my wine psyche.

The Long and Winding Pinot Road, Part V

My love affair with Pinot Noir was now fully engaged and I was looking for a new source I could hitch my grape wagon to. In 1989, Dan Berger wrote a glowing report in the *Los Angeles Times*, calling Gary Farrell a “Pinot Noir Superstar.” In the article, he listed the best Russian River Valley Pinot Noir producers at the time as Joseph Swan, J. Rochioli, Davis Bynum, Williams and Selyem, Laurier, Dehlinger, Mark West, Iron Horse and De Loach. The best of the bunch, however, he said was Gary Farrell. Berger noted that Farrell’s 1988 Sonoma County Pinot Noir (\$15) was superb, but the 1988 Allen Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$25) was a killer and “one of those rare treats worth the price.” In the article, Farrell said, “There are probably fewer than 500 acres of top-quality Pinot Noir vineyard land here. The Russian River hasn’t gotten the publicity of some other areas, but that’s ok. Actually, we’re trying to keep this thing quiet because of the limited acreage out there.”

I had sniffed out Farrell even before the glowing article written by Dan Berger, having made my first purchases of 1987 Gary Farrell Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$20, see label above) several months in advance of the publication. This wine was produced from 40% Howard Allen Vineyard, 40% Bacigalupi Vineyard and 20% Rochioli Vineyard, all located within a few miles of Healdsburg. The grapes were hand-harvested early, gently de-stemmed taking caution not to break the skins on approximately 50% of the berries. The grapes were fermented in small two ton lots using Ashmanchausen yeast for 8 days, inoculated with MCS ML bacteria at 12° Brix. Pressing occurred at dryness and the wine was allowed to settle for four weeks prior to barreling. The wine was then aged for 14 months in 30% French oak barrels.

I became a steady customer of Gary Farrell Pinot Noirs as the wines accumulated numerous accolades and medals over the years. I was thoroughly charmed by their enticing aromas, lush and broad fruit flavors, modest tannins and sweet oak highlights. My loyalty never wavered, but there was another Russian River Valley producer who stole my heart away in the early 1990s. To be continued... ..