

**Pinot is its
own reward**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

Volume 6, Issue 55

March 17, 2008

Inside this issue:

Pinot Noir Summit	9
Aromatic and Flavor Elements of Pinot Noir	14
Pinot Pleasure	16
Pinot Noir Events	19
Pinot Briefs	20
Millenials Thirsty for Pinot Noir	22
Long & Winding VII	22

Pinot Paradise on Horizon

Each March I look forward to this region's Pinot Paradise Weekend. Pinot Noir has found a home in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A hardy brotherhood of passionate Pinot Noir producers are fueled by mountain spirit and are bringing many distinguished wines to the marketplace. Production is still very small (around 1,200 acres cultivated), and most of the wine is eagerly snapped up by locals in the know, but the Pinot Paradise Weekend says to the world, "Come celebrate with us, meet our dedicated and eclectic vintners, travel our charming back roads, and taste our juicy Pinot Noirs which are heaven in a bottle."

The roots of winegrowing in the Santa Cruz Mountains go back over 150- years when George Jarvis planted wine grapes in the Vine Hill area of Santa Cruz County. Many Santa Cruz Mountain winemaking pioneers followed and their names reflect a storied history lesson of California Pinot Noir: Charles Le Franc (New Almaden Vineyards), Leland Stanford (Palo Alto Vineyard), Agoston Haraszthy (Crystal Springs), Paul Masson (Paul Masson Champagne Company), Martin Ray (Mt Eden, photo right), David Bruce (David Bruce Winery), Dick Graff (Mt Eden), Merry Edwards (Mt Eden), and Randall Grahm (Bonny Doon).



The Santa Cruz Mountains Viticultural Appellation was federally approved in 1981 and was one of the first AVAs to be defined by geophysical, altitudinal, and climatic factors. The appellation includes the Santa Cruz Mountain range extending from Half Moon Bay in the north to Mount Madonna north of Gilroy in the south. The east and west boundaries are defined by elevation, including mountainous land above 400 feet on the western side, and from 400 to 800 feet on the eastern side. The squiggly outline of the Santa Cruz Mountains AVA reflects the fog line that surrounds the mountains (see map, page 2).

This large appellation rambles across 380,000 acres in three counties: Santa Cruz County to the west, Santa Clara County to the east, and San Mateo County to the north. Santa Clara County has the most vineyard acreage. Most vineyards are 1- to 20-acres. Beauregard Vineyards, the largest grower, manages about 100 acres. Because of the limited number of vines, many wineries source grapes from outside the appellation, but the Santa Cruz Mountains fruit remains the most prized.

Santa Cruz Mountains has its own Santa Cruz Wine Club called "Pinot Only!" 4 bottles of selected Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir are shipped twice a year with average cost of \$130 to \$150 plus shipping. The club website is antacruzwineclub.com.



The location of the Santa Cruz Mountains allows for a coastal climate very cozy for growing Pinot Noir. Warm days, cool nights, coastal fog in the morning, and soft breezes in the afternoon lead to complex and balanced flavors, food-friendly acidity, and age-worthiness. Out of the total acreage planted in the Santa Cruz Mountains, only 25% or 300+ acres are planted to Pinot Noir. Slightly more acreage is devoted to Chardonnay, not surprising because the terroir on the western side of the mountains is ideal for both Burgundian varieties. There are upwards of 75 Pinot Noir vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, primarily on the western mountain ridges above Monterey Bay, closest to the coast and cooling fog influence. Located at elevations of 800 to 2,600 feet, most are under 15 acres in size.

The soils are varied throughout the appellation, and include decomposed rock, clay, loam and limestone. The overriding effect in most areas is a fresh, mineral character in the wines. Although the soil type is not uniform, the ocean fog influence is consistent and ties the appellation together. The Pinot Noir vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains can be grouped into five sub-regions: Watsonville area (fog rushes into the valley “like a freight train” during the extreme fog events of summer), Corralitos (fog washes in and out like the tides, rising higher and staying longer in some areas), The Summits (west and south facing summit vineyards experience the cooling effects of lower fog events even when the fog has not risen to their heights), Ben Lomond (an area that faces the coast and receives the first ocean fog without it ever crossing much land resulting in dramatic temperature and moisture variations), and Portola Valley (in and out tidal motion of the fog). Photo below is a view from Silver Mountain Winery towards Monterey Bay on a chilly morning with fog apparent in the distance.

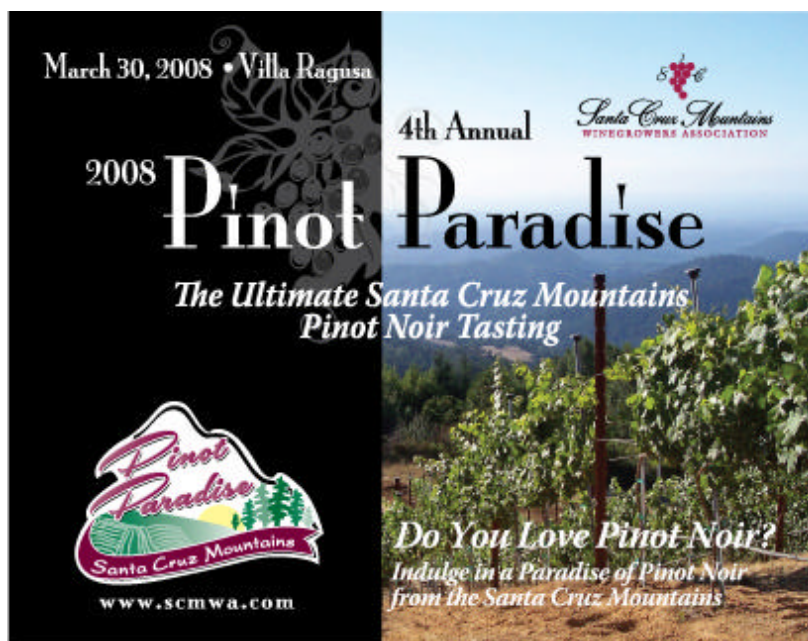


At the 2008 San Francisco Chronicle International Wine Competition, Santa Cruz Mountains wineries were awarded seven Gold, seven Silver, and five Bronze Medals for Pinot Noir made from appellation grapes. Gold Medals for appellation wines were won by Soquel Vineyards, Storrs Winery, Windy Oaks, and Hallcrest Vineyards. Hallcrest Vineyards won four Gold and two Silver Medals for wines from several different appellation vineyards. (For a complete list, go to www.vascm.org).



The Pinot Noirs from the Santa Cruz Mountains have lovely aromatics, luscious red and dark fruit flavors, easily approachable tannins, lively acidity, and are usually packaged in a light- to medium-bodied sensual style so juicy you can “nibble” at them. The Pinot Noirs are very modern in style with generous value-to-price ratios. The wines deserve every pinotophile’s serious interest. I recently tasted a number of Pinot Noir releases from the Santa Cruz Mountains and my notes are included in the following pages. The wines from this appellation remain a relative secret, but if you visit and taste, you will be thoroughly charmed by the wines and the dedicated vigneron in the mountains. The region is still populated with eccentric and Bohemian folks who have plenty of interest in the other crop you can smoke rather than the one you drink, but the wine populace is more than welcoming.

The **4th Annual Pinot Paradise** weekend is Saturday, March 29 and Sunday, March 30, 2008. On Saturday, drive the mountains on a self-guided tour of participating wineries and enjoy barrel samples and library wines as part of **Pathway to Pinot Paradise**. Be forewarned, arm yourself with a map (available from the Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrower's Association) as winery signage is practically nonexistent (the locals won't allow it and often remove any posted signage), and GPS systems are inaccurate and unreliable. Cell phones are usually worthless. Plan on visiting three, maybe four wineries a day at the most as you will inevitably be delayed on the narrow, zig-zaging roads, miss a turn, or become hopelessly lost. Allow plenty of time to travel between wineries, bring sufficient water along, and consider a designated driver. Despite the challenges, you will find your excursion a memorable one and you will be well-received upon your arrival. This is one of the few remaining wine country outposts where you will never see a limousine and the tasting room staffs are actually eager to see you. It is an adventure well-taken. Suggested travel itineraries are available on the event website (below). Participating wineries include: Alfaro Family Vineyards, Bargetto Winery, Beauregard Vineyards, Burrell School Vineyards, Byington Winery & Vineyard, Domenico Wines, Hallcrest Vineyards, Hunter Hill Vineyard & Winery, Nicholson Vineyards, Pleasant Valley Vineyards, Roudon-Smith Winery, Sarah's Vineyard, Silver Mountain Vineyards, Sonnet Wine Cellars, Soquel Vineyards, Thomas Fogarty, Windy Oaks Estate Vineyards & Winery and Wines of Vine Hill. Sunday morning, the **Technical Sessions** at Villa Regusa in downtown Campbell from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM will feature experts discussing the growing and making of Pinot Noir in the Santa Cruz Mountains (may include some tasting), Lunch is included at a nearby restaurant. The **Grand Cruz Tasting** of Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noirs will be from 2:00 to 5:00 PM after the Technical Sessions. 35 wineries will be pouring their latest releases in a casual walk-around format and food will be served from local restaurants. Wineries participating in addition to those listed above include Ahlgren, Black Ridge Vineyards, Cinnabar Vineyards & Winery, Clos LaChance Wines, Clos Tita, Heart O' The Mountain, Kings Mountain Winery, Loma Prieta Winery, McHenry Winery, Mount Eden Vineyards, Muccigrosso Vineyards, Pelican Ranch Winery, Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Sarah's Vineyard, Storrs Winery, Testarossa Vineyards, Trout Gulch, and Woodside Vineyards. Individual tickets are \$25 for Pathway to Pinot Paradise, \$65 for the Technical Sessions, and \$55 (in advance) for the Grand Cruz Tasting. Passes for all events during the weekend are \$125 per person. For tickets and information, phone 831-685-8403 or consult the Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrower's Association website at www.scmwa.com.

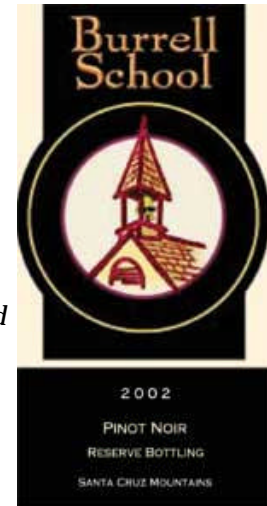


Burrell School Vineyards & Winery Dave and Annie Moulton craft multiple varietals from estate and sourced vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A historic red schoolhouse dating to 1854 marks the property on Summit Road.

2003 Burrell School Veranda Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 675 cases. The Veranda Vineyard sits 800 feet above Monterey Bay and is planted to Pommard and Dijon clones. Aged in 50% new French oak. *Rich aromas of black cherry, herbs and nicely toasted oak. Black cherry, anise and oak flavors carry the attack. A burly wine with a woody edge throughout. Soft in texture and finishing with still lively acidity.*

2003 Burrell School Estate Reserve Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 325 cases. The first estate bottling. Pommard and Dijon clones, aged in 70% new French oak. *The nose features bright red scents of red cherries, cranberry, and rhubarb. Sweet tart black cherry and berry flavors are encased in fine French oak throughout. Better integration of oak here than in the above wine. Earthy and woody with a mildly dry finish that features refreshing acidity. Very primal.*

Burrell School Vineyards & Winery is located at 24060 Summit Road, Los Gatos. 5,000 cases produced. Tasting room with beautiful view of estate vineyard and distant mountain peaks is open weekends. The website is www.burrellschool.com. 831-439-9238. Dave has been a driving force in the Pinot Paradise event . If you visit, ask to see his tractor collection.



Clos Tita David and Britta Estrada farm a one-acre estate vineyard at 900 feet in the Scott's Valley area of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The vineyard is meticulously managed by hand and all 700 vines are pruned by David, who is also the winemaker and cellar master. As a practicing dentist, his patients are always startled to see his purple fingers under his gloves during harvest. Production is tiny with only 75 to 150 cases of Estate Pinot Noir and a few hundred cases of a Pinot Noir Cuvee from purchased Santa Cruz Mountain grapes. The Estate Pinot Noir is aged for two years in 75% new French oak.

2003 Clos Tita Santa Cruz Mountains 14.0% alc.. *Very attractive scents of bright red cherry, sawdust and cinnamon spice. Delicious cherry core with cranberry, raspberry, and earthy notes. Still has some tannins on a moderately lengthy finish and needs food to blunt the tannins.*

Clos Tita Winery is located at 4 Kendall Lane, Santa Cruz. The wines are sold directly with limited retail distribution. The website is www.clos-tita.com. 831-439-9235.



Loma Prieta Paul and Amy Kemp have an estate home and vineyard at 2,600 feet in the Santa Cruz Mountains with sweeping views of the Monterey Bay coastline. Their 3-acre vineyard was planted in 2003 with primarily Dijon clones of Pinot Noir and is laid out in front of their home. Paul produced his own inaugural wine in 2003 from purchased grapes using a consulting winemaker for guidance. Essentially the wine was made in his garage. Both his 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir won Gold Medals at the 2006 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. When I visited last year at this time he had just obtained a permit to built a winery on his property and hopes to produce 500 cases of Pinot Noir in the future from primarily estate grapes. The Loma Prieta label depicts a whimsical magician holding a glass of wine and flying over Mount Loma Prieta with an earthquake fault clearly visible.

2006 Loma Prieta Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 195 cases, \$50. Grapes for this wine come from Saveria Vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Gold Medal, 2008 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition (\$35 and over category). *Confected cherry aromas. Plenty of well-spiced cherries on the palate with coffee and herbal highlights and an appealing soft texture. A well-bred Pinot that still has some tannins to shed on the long, stylish finish.*

Loma Prieta Winery is located at 26985 Loma Prieta Way, Los Gatos. The wines may be ordered on the website at www.lomaprietawinery.com. A tasting room should be open this summer. 408-353-2950.



McHenry Vineyard Owner Henry McHenry (not a misprint) is an anthropology professor at the University of California Davis. A soft-spoken and reserved man, his quiet charm is reflected in the personality of his Pinot Noirs. The 2-acre McHenry Vineyard on Bonny Doon Road was planted by the McHenry family in 1972, but succumbed to Pierce's Disease in 1992. Replanting commenced in 1997, the last summer of Chancellor (University California Santa Cruz) Dean McHenry life who was an original partner in the venture. The vines are planted on a sandy mountain slope at 1,800 feet, five miles from the Pacific Ocean.

The McHenry Pinot Noirs are quite unique in today's market which is flushed with "Frankenpinots," big, extracted, alcoholic and generously oak-infused Pinot Noirs. The McHenry style is one of elegance and understatement. The wines are examples of pure Pinot Noir unencumbered by alcohol reduction, toasted oak, and super ripe grape flavors. There is a purity of Pinot Noir in the McHenry wines that I rarely encounter in wines made in California. Priced ridiculously low considering the quality, the average consumer may scratch their head after drinking these wines and wonder why I make such a fuss over them. The reason is, these Pinot Noirs personify delicacy, grace and power without weight. They force you to seek out subtleties rather than bludgeon you with a fruit onslaught.

2004 McHenry Santa Cruz Mountains Estate Bottled Swan Clone Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 62 cases, \$28. From a Swan clone block of the McHenry Vineyard. The clone is planted on its own roots in the non-irrigated vineyard. Aged as the above wine. *Very light rose in color. Demure aromas of crushed strawberries, roses, spice and subtle new oak. A silky entry of red berry fruits, especially wild strawberry enhanced by Xmas spice, with a light and elegant format ending with perky acidity. A perfect food wine with lighter fare.*

2004 McHenry Santa Cruz Mountains Estate Bottled Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., 320 cases, \$22. Aged two years in Francois Freres French oak barrels. *Very light rose in color. A little deeper pitched aromas with more cherry. Slightly more fruit intensity on the attack with delightful tangy cherries, wood spice and herbs. A perfect example of "power in a velvet glove" that makes wines from Chambolle-Musigny so sensual and desirable.*



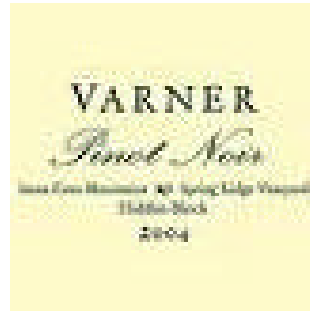
McHenry Vineyard wines are sold thru email on the website at www.mchenryvineyard.com. 530-756-3202. I don't know if older vintages are served in anthropology class.

Muccigrosso Vineyards This is a small family-run operation headed by Michael and Lynne Muccigrosso. They are long-time residents of the Santa Cruz Mountains who first planted vines in the early 1980s. Jacob Kauffman is the winemaker and David Agretelis the vineyard manager.

2005 Muccigrosso Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$35. *Complex aromatic profile with wet leaf, minerals, flowers and shy stone fruits. Light-bodied and soft in texture with a cherry and earthy sole. A decent but not exceptional wine with dusty tannins and a mildly dry finish.*

Muccigrosso Vineyards is located at 21450 Bear Creek Rd, Los Gatos. The wines are sold on the website at www.muccigrosso.com.

Varner Wine Twins Jim and Bob Varner quietly farm a 14-acre vineyard in Portola Valley which was planted in 1980. They helped out during the 1980s at Thomas Fogerty Winery where they learned the business. Since their first wine was released in 1996, Bob has handled the winemaking and Jim directs the sales and marketing. The winery is located on the estate vineyard property.

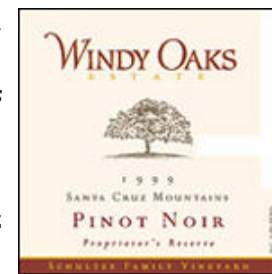


2005 Varner Spring Ridge Vineyard Hidden Block Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$42. *Light strawberry red in color. Appealing perfume of strawberries, baking spice, herbs and oak. Red Pinot fruits are framed with deft oak and grassy notes. Light on its feet and downy in texture, the style is straight-forward, elegant and likeable.*

Varner Wine is located at 648 Menlo Ave., Suite 5, Menlo Park. The wines are sold on the website in half and full case lots at www.varnerwine.com. Varner has become more well known for their Chardonnays which are superb. Three separate bottlings come from the estate vineyard and a value-priced Foxglove label Chardonnay is sourced from Edna Valley. 650-321-4895.

Windy Oaks Estate Vineyard & Winery Proprietors Jim and Judy Schultze are escapees from the high-tech world who have used their twenty years of interest and experience in artisanal winemaking and winegrowing to create Windy Oaks Estate in the Burgundian monopole model. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are produced from a 15-acre vineyard located at 1,000 feet on a ridge overlooking the town of Corralitos and the Monterey Bay beyond.

2005 Windy Oaks Estate Cuvee Schultze Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 285 cases, \$35. *A beautifully balanced Pinot with an attractive dusty cherry nose backed by a little barnyard and complimentary flavors of black cherries, pomegranate, spices, gingerbread and herbs. Oak adds interest and support. Everything is in proportion from oak tannin to acid to fruit intensity.*



2005 Windy Oaks Estate Limited Release Wood Tank Fermented Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 26 cases, \$44. *Aged 22 months in 100% new French oak. Intensity is the key word here. Flamboyant black raspberry fruit aromas fill the glass. Juicy black berry jam flavors have subtle oak, chocolate, and marzipan overtones. Power to spare in the mouth ending in a lovely raspberry-infused aromatic kiss on the backend.. The oak is perfectly integrated. A touch of heat peaks out but is not intrusive.*

Windy Oaks Estate Vineyard & Winery is located. 85% of the wine is sold to an eager mailing list of pinotphiles. I am also a fan of the Windy Oaks Chardonnay, produced from 1 acre of the estate vineyard. The Schultzes have just released a special bottling made from Burgundian-sourced vines of unnamed origin (26 cases, aged 26 months in 100% new oak, \$95, special commemorative silk-screened label). The website is www.windyoaksestate.com. 831-786-9463, Tasting and tours by appointment.

Pinot Noir Summit

The 6th Annual Pinot Noir Summit was held at Fort Mason Center in San Francisco on Sunday, March 2, 2008. I had participated in some of the preliminary judging sessions back in early January. Judging at this event is unique in that the number of wines tasted is kept to 32 each day. This allows reasonable time to thoroughly evaluate each wine. Approximately 270 Pinot Noirs were entered from all over the world, with the majority from California. The final 40 wines were presented to the public at this event in a walk-around blind tasting format. The consumers were asked to rank their favorites and the results were compared with the judging panel preferences. After unveiling the wines, additional tastes were offered by the winemakers and winery reps. A unique added feature is that the men and women judging results are kept separate. Organizer and hostess of the event, Barbara Drady (photo right), of Affairs of the Vine, likes to search for gender differences in stylistic preferences of Pinot Noir.



Winners - Men Judging Panel

1st Place: Tie, **2005 Adobe Road Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 2005 Heart O' The Mountain Estate Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir**

2nd Place: **2005 David Bruce Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir**

3rd Place: **2004 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**

Winners - Women Judging Panel

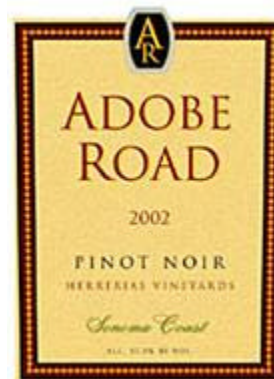
1st Place: **2005 David Bruce Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir**

2nd Place: **2005 TR Elliott Three Plumes Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**

3rd Place: **2006 Ardiri Napa Carneros Pinot Noir**

Winners - Men Consumers

- 1st Place: **2005 Adobe Road Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
- 2nd Place: **2004 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
- 3rd Place: **2005 Bianchi Garey Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**



Winners - Women Consumers

- 1st Place: **2004 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
- 2nd Place: **2005 Gryphon California Pinot Noir**
- 3rd Place: **2005 Bianchi Garey Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**

I tasted through all 40 finalists blind at the event rather quickly and amidst much distraction. For what its worth, my favorites are listed below.

Most Outstanding

2005 Bianchi Garey Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$25. Note: I recommended this wine in a recent issue of the *PinotFile* and was happy to see my tasting abilities verifiable and vindicated both in a non-blind (for the newsletter) and blind (at the Summit) situation. This was my favorite Pinot Noir of the final 40.



- 2005 David Bruce Winery Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Gryphon California Pinot Noir**
- 2005 LaZarre Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Paraiso Vineyards Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**
- 2005 RN Estate Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Robledo Family Winery Rancho Rincon Carneros Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Vision Cellars Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**

Excellent

2005 Adobe Road Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

2006 Ardiri Napa Carneros Pinot Noir (Best Dressed - see below)

2005 Cakebread Cellars Napa Carneros Pinot Noir

2004 Clouds Rest Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

2005 David Bruce Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir

2005 Robert Stemmler Nugent Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

2006 San Saba Monterey Pinot Noir

2004 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir



Good

2005 Cima Collina Chula Vina Vineyard Monterey Pinot Noir

2005 Davis Family Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

2005 Handley Cellars RSM Anderson Valley Pinot Noir

2005 Jekel Vineyards Monterey County Pinot Noir

2005 Kenneth Volk Vineyards Santa Maria Cuvee Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir

2006 Longboard Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

2005 Signorello Las Amigas Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir

2005 Stephen's Cellar Encell Vineyard San Luis Obispo Pinot Noir

2005 TR Elliott Three Plumes Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

2006 Twin Oaks Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir

Other Finalists

- 2006 Amity Vineyards Sunnyside Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Amphora Windsor Oaks Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Bernardus Winery Monterey County Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Claiborne & Churchill Edna Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Heart O' The Mountain Estate Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Laetitia Vineyard & Winery Reserve Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Laetitia Vineyard & Winery La Colline Vineyard Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Mahoney Vineyards Mahoney Ranch Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Mark West Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2006 Phillips Hill Estates Oppenlander Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard Branciforte Creek Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Savannah Chanelle Tina Marie Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Three Sticks Durrell Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
- 2005 Willowbrook Cellars Kastania Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**

The complete list of entrants for the Pinot Noir Shootout leading to the Pinot Noir Summit event will be available later this month on the Affairs of the Vine website at www.affairsofthevine.com. Case production and prices will be listed as well as some pertinent judge's comments on the wines.

As part of the Pinot Noir Summit, I moderated a panel on Discovering New Stars Along the Pinot Trail. Four wineries were featured: B Vineyards & Habitat, Russian River Valley (represented by owners Gerald and Shaun Bybee), Kutch Wines (represented by owner Jamie Kutch, below left), RN Estate (represented by owner Roger Nicolas, below right), and Three Sticks Wines (represented by winemaker Tracey Bledsoe, below right)). A podcast of this seminar will be posted on my website later this summer.



Every wine enthusiast is searching for the next great star producer of Pinot Noir. This is not surprising for many of these pinotphiles are interested in getting the latest news and what do the first three letters of “news” spell? Who is going to be the “new” Sea Smoke or Kosta Browne? Finding and identifying new Pinot Noir producers is a challenge because most of them are small, boutique operations with little or no marketing budget. Their total production is often less than 1,000 cases, and samples may not be sent to major wine publications for review. In addition, winemakers by nature tend to be shy and unassuming and promotion is not their long suit.

Not a week goes by that I don't discover a new producer of Pinot Noir. How do I find new stars? Sometimes the new producer contacts me, sends me samples, and invites me to visit and taste. In other cases, I meet the producer at a Pinot Noir Festival (at least a dozen such events are held yearly now in California and Oregon) or a wine tasting event. Retailers, the wine press, and wine blogs can also be valuable sources of introduction.

What do I look for in a new winery? There are many factors to consider, but most importantly, I look at the vineyard sources and vineyard management, the winemaker's background and experience (a caveat here is that many accomplished winemakers have learned more by experience than by classroom study), the owner's (if she or he is not the winemaker) commitment, and the approachability and availability of the winery principals to the consumer. Most of all, though, what differentiates a potential new star is the quality of the juice in the bottle.

I met Roger Nicolas of RN Estate at a Wine & Fire event in Santa Rita Hills last year, Jamie Kutch was a reader of the *PinotFile* who related his story and aspirations to me. Gerald and Shaun Bybee contacted me and invited me to taste and visit. I read about Three Sticks Wines in the wine press and was alerted by Barbara Drady, the organizer of this event. RN Estate, Kutch Wines and B Vineyards & Habitat have been profiled in previous issues of the *PinotFile* (search Back Issues at www.princeofpinot.com). Three Sticks Wines was Founded in 2002 by Bill Price who is also the owner of Durell Vineyards in Sonoma Valley and thus has the enviable position of having Durell Vineyards as his estate vineyard. The first three vintages of Three Sticks were produced at custom crush facilities. In 2005, a new facility was initiated on the east side of Sonoma which contains state-of-the-art winemaking equipment and a unique design that utilizes moveable tanks, crush equipment and basket press in order to most efficiently utilize winery space. The winemaker is Don Van Staaveren who brings to Three Sticks years of experience. He directed the conversion of Artesa Vineyards & Winery from sparkling to still wine production and crafted many notable Cabernet Sauvignons at Chateau St. Jean during the last decade. Assistant winemaker Tracey Bledsoe was also at Artesa where she worked for five years. She holds a Master's degree in Microbiology from University of California Davis. Three Sticks plans to produce small lots of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the estate vineyard and a Cabernet Sauvignon from two vineyards in Sonoma Valley. 1,000 cases will be released with the 2005 vintage. The **2005 Three Sticks Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** is a blend of Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777 from 8-year-old vines yielding 1.75 tons per acre. Winemaking is Burgundian with minimal handling and the wine is aged 14 months in 50% new French oak. A website will be developed soon for wine purchases. The current phone is 707-935-1863 and the address is 21692 Eighth Street East, Suite 280, Sonoma 95476. This is a new producer to keep tabs on.



Aromatic & Flavor Elements of Pinot Noir

Barbara Drady of Affairs of the Vine has compiled a comprehensive list of the aromatic elements of Pinot Noir which she has kindly allowed me to reproduce here. This is a very handy reference list that you can use to improve your tasting acumen. The list is not all-inclusive. I have revised it slightly.

Aromatic & Flavor Elements of Pinot Noir

- Cherry, Black Cherry, Wild Cherry, Dried Cherry
- Raspberry, Raspberry Jam
- Strawberry, Wild Strawberry, Strawberry Jam
- Blackberry, Blackberry Jam
- Pomegranate
- Rhubarb
- Cranberry
- Current, raisin
- Plum
- Tangerine, Grapefruit, Orange Peel
- Rose Petals, Violets
- Roasted Tomato
- Earth, Wet Leaves, Forest Floor, Barnyard, Mushroom
- Meat, Game, Animale, Sauvage
- Tea, Coffee
- Licorice
- Mint
- Clove
- Lavender
- Herbs, Herbs de Provence
- Cinnamon
- Pine Pitch, Cedar, Oak
- Vanilla
- Peppermint
- Smoke
- Cola
- Chocolate
- Quinine

Oak-Derived Aromas & Flavors

Earthy: ash, mushroom, shoe box, wet cardboard, musty, leather

Herbaceous: weedy, dill, mown hay, menthol, grass, tobacco

Woody: cedar, sawdust, pencil shavings, sappy, green, pine, tar, resin

Astringent: harsh, chewy, bitter, angular, tannic, drying

Spicy: clove, cinnamon, coconut, vanilla

Toast-Derived Aromas & Flavors

Sweet: brown sugar, bourbon, cotton candy, chocolate, maple syrup, butterscotch, hot fudge, caramel, molasses, honey, toffee, soy

Creamy: vanilla, cream soda, marshmallow, lactic, butter

Yeasty: popcorn, baked bread, bread stick, cookie dough

Nutty: hazelnut, walnut, almond, peanut butter, coconut

Roasted: cedar, graham cracker, toasted bread, coffee, mocha, cereal

Smoky: barbecue, grilled meats, bacon, sweet smoke, burnt sugar

Spicy: nutmeg, cinnamon, clove, licorice, anise

Off-Odors

Sulfur dioxide

Rotten egg (hydrogen sulfide)

Mercaptan (sulfur-containing cpd - onion or garlic)

Brettanomyces/Dekkara (horsy, stables, sweaty saddle,)

Wet newspaper, wet cardboard (corky)

Burnt

Perdicoccus (metallic)

Wet dog

Pickle/sauerkraut

Rubbery

Diacetyl (a ketone-buttery or cheesy)

Acetaldehyde (oxidized smell, sherry)

Ethyl Acetate (acetic acid + ethanol - fruity)

Acetic acid (vinegar)

Open Your Wallet for Pinot Pleasure

Confiscate your wife's Nordstrom credit card and subscription to *Vogue* magazine, cancel your kid's cell phone account, discontinue any superfluous insurance premiums, start riding your bike to work, anything to save some money for the following Pinot Noirs. Let's face it, the best sex you have ever had is still not as good as some of these sensual Pinot Noirs and they can give you prolonged ecstasy in a bottle for several hours. Cancel the gardener (big deal, you can mow the lawn), tell your wife to cut her own hair, and send your kids to public school. Pinot Noir is a life-changing, mood-altering experience and its time you jumped in and indulged with commitment. The following wines have just been released and you need to act now or Pinot nirvana will never be obtainable. Pop a cork and have an aromatic orgasm, how easy is that?

Drew Wines

Jason Drew has been making wine since 1980 when he helped out his uncle plant a vineyard in the Napa Valley. He received his winemaking training in both California and Australia. In 2000 he founded the Drew label with his wife Molly while he was associate winemaker at Babcock Vineyards & Winery in the Santa Rita hills. In 2003, he left Babcock to concentrate on his own label, and in 2004, purchased a ridge top property overlooking the Anderson Valley to the east and the Pacific ocean three miles to the west. A winery was built on the property and the Drews' first estate vineyard was planted. Currently the winery's Pinot Noir grapes are sourced from Santa Barbara County, Anderson Valley, Sonoma Coast and the Yorkville Highlands. I tasted the current releases and was stoked. All of the wines tasted have a pretty ruby color and similar moderate weight.

2006 Drew Cargasacchi-Jalami Vineyard Potbelly Block Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 286 cases, \$35. *This is a young wine and the nose is quite subdued with subtle notes of red cherry, grass and sanded wood. The lovely red Pinot fruits are accented with herbal and woody flavors. Light in body and offering some finesse and lively acidity, this is a good food wine whose flavors trump the aromas at this stage.*

2006 Drew McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 193 cases, \$50. 7-acre vineyard at 1,300 feet four miles from Pacific Ocean. *Rich cherry aromas with a little plum, rhubarb and sawdust. Darker stone fruits are featured with a charming earth and herbal note on the finish. Plenty of dirt here. The texture is plush with gossamer tannins. Alcohol is well-integrated. A clean, lingering finish draws you to another sip.*

2006 Drew Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 187 cases, \$50 (sold out, try www.wadeswines.com). Weir Vineyard is 15 acres which includes rare DRC and Rochioli selections. *Very enviable aromas of mineral-inflected black cherry fruit, strawberry and cookie dough. Highly likeable raspberry and strawberry fruit flavors with a glamorous fruity aftertaste accentuated with spice and a little white pepper. The fruity finish sneaks up and expands in the mouth over a minute - very sexy. The demure presentation of fruit is very attractive. I like this wine a lot and it is admirable for its perfect balance and purity. The best from this appellation I have ever sampled. Hock your kids for this one.*

2006 Drew Fog-Eater Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 495 cases, \$42. Made from two Anderson Valley vineyards heavily influenced by coastal fog. *This wine has the most flamboyant aromatics of the lineup with spiced cherries, watermelon, fresh sawn oak and a little barnyard. Plenty of lovable Pinot fruits, fine-grained tannins which could use some time to shed, and velvety texture. Doesn't have the twinkle that the Weir has, but perfectly fine in its own right.*



Drew Wines have limited retail distribution and are sold on the website at www.drewwines.com. The phone is 707-877-1771.

Halleck Vineyards

I recently wrote a feature on Halleck Vineyards in the *PinotFile* (Volume 6, Issue 45). I recently tasted through the 2006 releases and I am happy to report that the wines are stellar. The winemaking here is very refined with tannins and alcohol well integrated. The velveteen texture that makes Pinot Noir so sensual and appealing are prominently featured in all of the Halleck Vineyards lineup of Pinot Noirs. These are fruit-driven wines of robust intensity that will reward cellaring. The Three Sons Cuvee is the most approachable now. After tasting the wines, I sampled them all with a corned beef sandwich (it was the day after St. Patrick's Day) and they all shined with the food, but the heightened acidity of the Three Sons Cuvee made it the best food wine of the lineup at this time. These wines are a true representation of California's interpretation of Pinot Noir and they deserve every pinoaficionado's attention. These are pure artisanal Pinot Noirs, lovingly crafted in small quantities from a producer who welcomes fans to connect with the winery family. Production is 1,500 cases each year.

2006 Halleck Vineyards Three Sons Cuvee Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 1300 cases, \$42. This wine is a blend of several vineyards in the neighborhood of the Halleck estate vineyard. The name pays homage to the Halleck's three sons, Conner 14, Adam 13, and Quinn 10. *The lightest in reddish-purple color of the lineup. Heady black cherry and new-sawn wood aromas leading to a dark fruit profile enhanced with herbs, oak and cinnamon spice. Silky on the palate and briskly acidic on the finish. The lightest wine in the lineup but not a weakling by any stretch of the imagination. While the other wines brood, this frisky youngster is offering considerable pleasure now.*

2006 Halleck Vineyards Clone 828 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 266 cases, \$55. From grapes grown near Annapolis four miles from the Pacific Ocean. 30% new French oak (the usual regimen for Halleck Pinots). This clone is rarely bottled as a stand-alone wine and is a newer Dijon clone planted only in recent years in California. *The nose is rife with smoke, cigar box, and gingerbread. Soft, dark Pinot fruits including cassis and black raspberry, complimented by oak char and cookie dough create a feast of flavors. This wine is the darkest in nature of the lineup and the most unique. The tannins are reigned in but peak out at the finish and will soften with bottle age. Yummy.*

2006 Halleck Vineyards Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 295 cases, \$55. From a Sebastopol vineyard that was once an apple orchard where the Hallecks purchased apples and apple juice. *Wild berries, sen-sen, cherries and crusty bread aromas draw you in. The wine offers a solid core of dark Pinot fruits with a sidecar of oak and earth, a dusty texture, admirable acid backbone, and a slightly dry but persistent finish. No octane in sight. A lot of potential lingering in the background here which needs time to break out. Be patient with this one. Even better from re-corked bottle next day.*

2006 Halleck Vineyards The Farm Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 250 cases, \$55. From a 2-acre vineyard that was previously blended into the Three Sons Cuvee. *Expressive nose of red and black cherry jam. Very fruity. Lovely red-fruits presented in an elegant, soft and silky style. A delight to drink and an idol in the making. The longest and most intense finish in the lineup. Already showing some leg, but will be more revealing with maturity. Keep this hidden from your relatives.*

Halleck Vineyards wines are largely sold through the faithful admirers on the mailing list at www.halleckvineyards.com. There is limited retail distribution. The address is 8088 Washington Ave, Sebastopol and the winery address is 3785 Burnside Rd, Sebastopol. Jennifer Halleck handles sales and marketing when she isn't trooping her three boys to their after school activities. 707-738-8383.



Roessler Cellars

Brothers Richard and Roger Roessler founded Roessler Cellars in 2000. Together with talented winemakers Wells Guthrie and Scott Shapely, they craft marvelous Pinot Noirs from appellations throughout California. I have been a fan for quite some time now and I recently tasted two of their newest releases. I feature them here because they are worthy of your immediate attention.

2005 Roessler Cellars Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir

14.1% alc., 250 cases, \$45. Richard Savoy farms one of Anderson Valley's premier Pinot Noir vineyards located just west of the town of Philo. Seven clones are included in this wine. *Deep ruby color of great intensity. With air and coaxing, very nice ripe dark fruits emerge with some earthy and oaky notes. Substantial fruit core showy of black cherry and black raspberry with a hint of wild strawberry. Earthy, even tasting of soil-dusted fruit. Flirty tannins and plush in texture. More dirt-driven than the 2004 Savoy which I was ga-ga for, but equally appealing in its own way.*



2005 Roessler Cellars Clos Pepe Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 175 cases, \$45, *Utterly charming aromas of a freshly-baked cherry pie with a hot browned crust. Delicious stone fruits, silky mouth feel, and a clean, scented and lip-smacking finish. Impeccable balance. This wine has the whole package and there is nothing to critique here, just pure, unadulterated drinking pleasure. Brilliantly crafted and one of the best wines from Clos Pepe Vineyard I have ever had. This one has everything you could hope for and some things you didn't know to ask for.*

Roessler Cellars is located off the town square in Sonoma at 380 First St W. Tasting here by appointment - 707-933-4440. Production is 6,500 cases. Roger and Richard are very personable and passionate about wine. Make an effort to get to know them and their wines. The wines are sold on the website at www.roesslercellars.com.



Pinot Noir Events to Stroke Your Passion

Santa Barbara County Vintner's Festival This annual event will be held on Saturday, April 19th, 2008 at River Park in Lompoc, 1-4 PM. Over 100 local wineries, artisan foods from local restaurants and caterers, live music, plenty of Pinot. Tickets are \$75, \$89 at door. A Vintner's Visa may be purchased which is valid Festival weekend for 12 of your favorite wineries and includes tasting fees: \$35. To purchase tickets or for more information visit www.sbcountywines.com or call 805-688-0881.

Pinot Plus Trade Auction The Second Annual Pinot Plus Auction will be held on March 29, 2008 at The Carneros Inn in Napa, CA. Sponsored by the Carneros Wine Alliance, the auction features a group of unique and rare lots featuring never-before winery and vineyard partnerships and magnums from non-resident Carneros-label star winemakers. Magnums offered in the Silent Auction include those from Kistler Vineyards (I have NEVER seen a magnum from Kistler), HdV, Ramey Wine Cellars, Shafer Vineyards, Laird Family Vineyards, Provenance, Charles Creek Vineyard, Steele Wines, Benziger Family Winery, Nickle and Nickle, and Neyers Vineyard among others. Additional lots include a special lot of Cuvaison Pinot Noir Block 8 from its Carneros Estate Vineyard Calera clone grapes, one of only ten available 3-liter bottles of ZD Wines Reserve Pinot Noir, a barrel selected Pinot Noir from MacRostie Winery's Wildcat Mountain Vineyard's Saddle Block, and 18 magnums of 2007 Pinot Noir from the Donum Estate blocks including East Slope, West Slope, and Ferguson. The Michael Mondavi family will introduce its Hangtime Carneros Gallery Vineyard Pinot Noir and other unique lots will be offered by boutique wineries including Adastra, Ancien, Fasmer & Blaise, Molnar Family Wines, Madonna Estate, Talisman and Toad Hall Cellars. Proceeds from the Live Auction will benefit the education, scholarship and training programs of early stage wine and food professionals. Proceeds from the Silent Auction will benefit the newly established Carneros Land Stewardship Foundation. For tickets and information visit the website at www.carneros.com.



Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival The 11th Annual Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival will be May 16-18, 2008. A Technical Conference kicks off the event on Friday, May 16 followed by a BBQ at the historic Day Ranch at Standish Wine Co in Philo. The Grand Tasting will be on Saturday featuring Anderson Valley's finest producers at Goldeneye Winery in Philo. Winery Open houses will be on Sunday, May 18. Accommodations are limited in the Anderson Valley so RSVP as soon as possible. For tickets and further information, visit the website at www.avwines.com. One of my favorite wine festivals.



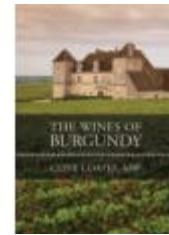
Paso Pinot & Paella Cook Off The 5th Annual Paso Pinot & Paella Cook Off will be held Sunday, June 8th, from 2-5 PM. 16 chefs will be cooking their version of paella and 20+ Paso Robles area Pinot Noir producers will be pouring their wines. The event is held under the towering trees at Templeton Park and will include music and a dance exhibition. Tickets are \$65 and can be purchased from the event website at www.pinotandpaella.com. All profits go to the Paso Robles Youth Arts Foundation.

Pinot Briefs

New Wine Shipping Packaging New Vine Logistics and International Thermal Wizards have developed “WineAssure” packaging that provides insulation during shipping that prevents temperature swings that can damage wine during shipping in warmer months. The packaging keeps wine cozy below 70° F and above 35° F throughout a five day period, regardless of the outside temperatures. This innovative packaging allows shipping of wine in most areas year-round and reduces shipping costs by eliminating the necessity of overnight shipping and replacing air shipping with ground shipping. The secret to the insulation is a water and salt solution. Two bottle packages cost \$15 now and insulated boxes accommodating up to a case and magnums will be available before the approaching summer. The packaging and insulation is made from recyclable materials and can be re-used by the recipient, discarded with other recyclable materials, or returned to New Vine Logistics at no charge. For more information visit www.wineassure.com.



Wines of Burgundy Clive Coates has just released the sequel to his *Cote D'Or: A Celebration of the Great Wines of Burgundy* published ten years ago. *Wines of Burgundy* is a thoroughly revised and updated book detailing all of the major vintages in Burgundy from 2006 back to 1959 and includes thousands of tasting notes of the most notable wines. Coates is a Master of Wine who has spent much of the last thirty years in Burgundy. A book signing tour begins this month. Hardcover, \$60 (available on preorder at www.amazon.com for \$37.80).



Irreverent Newsletter W.R. Tish is a wine jack-of--all-trades - wine writer, standup comedian, speaker and wine event organizer. When his fancy strikes, he sends out an irreverent e-newsletter, www.wineforall.com, which will make you laugh, guaranteed. The newsletter is billed as “my exercise in poking fun at this thing called the wine biz.” The companion site is www.wineskewer.com where this currently includes a hilarious spoof titled “100-Point Hall of Shame.” An excerpt: “These stark naked numbers - which remain no more or less than a single human being’s opinion - are imbued with guru-esque significance and tattoo-like permanence. Ratings are the wine world’s equivalent of tabloid pablum - the very opposite of intelligent discourse... the obsolete relic of last century’s coming-of-age wine market.” Check Tish out.

Say What? A retailer, The Wine House, sends out periodic e-newsletters touting wines on their shelves. The latest one I received features a Pinot Noir from Languedoc-Roussillon for \$11.49 per bottle. The wine is billed as “The Pinot Noir of the Languedoc.” but the newsletter starts off saying, “This wine tastes nothing like Pinot Noir.” Say what? Throughout the rambling, the wine is likened to Pinot Noir in every way, exalting its “soft, caressing mouth feel, soft tannins, and the subtlety and class of Burgundy.” The last sentence spills the beans: “Mostly Carignane finished with Grenache and Syrah.” It is a sad day when Pinot Noir is used to pimp other wines.

Chateau Petrogasm Benjamin Adams Saltzman and Andrew Stuart have founded a website, www.chateaupetrogasm.com, that “uses images to break down hegemonic language barriers.” Wines are described using colors, sketches, photography, and other visual media to convey the character of a wine along with an overall impression of it. It has been said that “Wine is art,” so the shoe fits.

La Paulee San Francisco The second La Paulee took place two weeks ago in San Francisco. The event is held annually in New York. Organized by sommelier Daniel Johnnes of Daniel Restaurant, over 300 burgphiles paid \$1,400 for the Friday night six-course dinner prepared by luminary chefs Daniel Boulud, Michael Mina, Traci Des Jardins of San Francisco and Regis Marcon of France.. Rare bottles of Burgundy were uncorked with abandon and wine writer and *Decanter* contributor Jordan Mackay said, “If they keep having events like this, there won’t be any old Burgundy in five years.”

Decanter as Art Say you have around \$3,000 that is burning a hole in your wallet. Your 5,000 bottle wine cellar needs a conversation piece. The N°4 Decanter is the perfect choice. The decanter, pictured right, was designed by Frenchman Etienne Meneau and holds exactly one bottle of wine. For information, www.decanter.free.fr.com.



New World Pinot Noir a Pretender? In the February, 2008 issue of *Decanter*, Jasper Morris MW wrote an article titled, “Pinot Noir: The New Pretenders.” The premise was that “The New World’s many fledgling Pinot regions often look to Burgundy as the ideal to aspire to. But do any of them even come close in quality terms?” The conclusion was essentially that New World Pinot Noirs would never be mistaken for Burgundy and producers should not try to imitate the Old World. One caveat was that New World Pinot Noir can deliver plenty of pleasure but “we do not yet see the consistent track record which will surely emerge when the right sites have been tracked down in each of the budding regions, the ideal plant material selected and the roots given time to dive down deep into the soil.”

Vigneron Stephen Pepe of Clos Pepe Vineyards and Estate Wines sent me the response to this article written by winemaker Wes Hagen of Clos Pepe. The following is a portion of Hagen’s comments. “Traveling to Burgundy every few years helps me understand where Pinot Noir has been. Burgundy is an initiation into the deeper wisdom and potential of the Pinot Noir grape. Burgundy crafts the most profound wines in the world... ..There are some Pinot Noir winemakers in the New World, and I would include myself in their ranks, that believe Burgundy should be left in Burgundy, and that the attempt to model New World Pinots on the Burgundian model is not only folly, but is antithetical to the attempts to establish our own regional identities. Much of Burgundy is steeped in winemaking mythology and anecdote. Stem-inclusion, viticultural romanticism, rustic production methods, native ferments, and the idea that providence can trump craftsmanship are all dangerous ideas for a New World winemaker to imitate. To bring that mythology to the Sta. Rita Hills and try to imitate Burgundian winegrowing or enology would be like trying to bring a fringe sect of Hinduism to Salt Lake City... .. So let’s leave Burgundy to the Burgundians... .. For now, let’s all try to accentuate the regional characteristics of Pinot Noir and stop this imitative nonsense... ..The New World is trying to establish our autonomy, but instead of working tirelessly to hone our craft, many of us are trying to hitch our wagons to the style of the Cote d’Or, and this is distracting us from our true goal to produce wines of distinction and quality that represent THIS place. Pinot Noir reminds me of the Princess in the folk tale, ‘The Princess and the Pea.’ You can lay her down anywhere, but if she’s uncomfortable in the least, she will let us know. There are so few places where Pinot Noir can thrive, let’s celebrate the flavors and differences and what Burgundy cannot imitate (and vice versa)... ..Jasper, if you’d ever like to come visit us in Sta. Rita Hills, I would be happy to give you a dirt-kicking tour of the AVA and show you all the ways we are distinct from Burgundy (and why that may be a good thing).”



Now go drink some good Pinot

Pinot is its own reward

© 2007
Pinotphile is a Registered Trademark

Millenials Overwhelmed by Wine

When I attended the recent Pinot Summit in San Francisco, I noticed a significant number of millenials in attendance, eager to taste Pinot Noir. Their eagerness was tempered, however, by a lack of understanding of how to taste without swallowing, the mystery surrounding pinotspeak terms being bantered around like “silky,” “seductive,” “layered,” “grip,” and “supple,” and just exactly how Pinot Noir is supposed to taste. A recent study commissioned by Constellation Wines U.S., and reported in *Wines & Vines*, confirmed my observations, with a large portion (23%) of consumers overwhelmed by wine. We need to direct more wine education and tastings to the uninitiated and curious, many of whom are young and anxious to try new drinking experiences. We must strive to lift the mystique surrounding wine drinking and emphasis the pleasures, health benefits, and joy of wine on the dinner table. Let’s start by embracing millenials at wine events and offering programs directed at them. And doesn’t it make long-term sense to offer today’s young people discounts on fine wine purchases?

The Long and Winding Pinot Road, Part VII

The group was formed in January, 1989 as a monthly gathering of wine enthusiasts. The instigator was Ron Marshall, proprietor of Mr. Stox Restaurant in Anaheim, California. The guidelines were that “Members have a serious interest in wine, have their own wine collection, and have a desire to enhance their palate and wine education through group tastings. The premise was that this was not to be a pompous group of wine snobs and “good jokes would be encouraged at all tastings.” The origin of the group’s name, Le Grand Crew, is lost in history.

Le Grand Crew was a major source of my wine education and inspiration and the group, with few member changes, has persisted to the present time. Meeting monthly over dinner, we (women were not specifically banned but few dared to attend) tasted all of the world’s greatest wines from the entire globe and developed friendships for life.

Early on, I was an outcast and weirdo, the butt of many jokes for my professed love of Pinot Noir. The members were dedicated Cabernet and Bordeaux drinkers with little interest or patience for other wines. That was all to change, when in 1991, I organized my first “Superbowl of Pinot Noir” dinner tasting. The idea was to present the champions, the best of the best New World Pinot Noirs available in the marketplace at that time. Over the years, the members look forward to the “Superbowl,” and many abandoned the dark side for Pinot Noir.

The wines at “Superbowl I of Pinot Noir” were the following: **1987 Au Bon Climat Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Santa Ynez Valley** (\$30), **1987 Calera Jensen Vineyard Hollister** (\$30), **1987 El Molino Napa Valley** (\$30), **1987 Williams Selyem Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley** (\$40), **1988 Gary Farrell Allen Vineyard Russian River Valley** (\$25), **1988 Robert Mondavi Reserve Napa Valley** (\$29), **1988 Signorello Proprietor’s Reserve Napa Valley** (\$25), **1988 Williams Selyem Sonoma Coast** (\$25), **1989 Byron Santa Barbara County** (\$18), **1989 Etude Napa Valley** (\$22), and **1989 Williams Selyem Olivet lane Vineyard Russian River Valley** (\$25). Looking back, a heck of a lineup and a glimpse of Pinot history. To be continued... ..