



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir: Its
What's for
Dinner*

Fiddlestix Vineyard

In each of the wine growing appellations of California that are pinocentric, there are a few notable vineyards that define the region. Fiddlestix Vineyard, located in the Sta. Rita Hills appellation of Santa Barbara County, is a vineyard of such renown that along with special vineyards like Sanford & Benedict, La Rinconada, La Encantada, Cargassachi, and Clos Pepe, the Fiddlestix name on a label has become a guarantee of excellence in Pinot Noir from the area.

The story behind Fiddlestix Vineyard is of interest. Kathy Joseph, the current effusive owner and winemaker at Fiddlehead Cellars, started out as a premed major in college (this is a familiar refrain quite unique to many winemakers). She eventually majored in biochemistry and attended University of California Davis graduate school. After working in the Napa Valley, she founded her own label, Fiddlehead Cellars, in 1988. Kathy searched for a strange or catchy name for her winery by exploring many books, but the name, Fiddlehead, came to her after one day in her garden nurturing some ferns that were just unfurling - Fiddlehead ferns to be specific. She loved the name and the visual connection with it. There was also a curly association - the fern curled up ready to emerge, and Kathy with her curly hair. The "fiddle" theme became the source for the name of her vineyard (Fiddlestix), her own nom de plume, the "Head Fiddle," and her annual event celebrating the wines from her vineyard, "Fiddlefest" (more about this later).

In the mid 1990s, Kathy began searching for her own vineyard in the Sta. Rita Hills region. She found a 133-acre flower farm across Santa Rosa Road from the famed Sanford & Benedict Vineyard. The land shared the same well-drained soils and the cooling ocean coastal breezes that Sanford & Benedict Vineyard enjoyed. As fortune would have it, Kathy had established a close friendship with veteran viticulturalist, Robert "Taz" Steinhauer. "Taz," is short for Tasmanian devil, a nickname Steinhauer acquired because he was a "whirling dervish" with boundless energy in the vineyards. Steinhauer joined Beringer Blass Wine Estates in 1979 and was a veteran of many harvests when he linked up with Joseph. The two formed a partnership with Beringer Blass Wine Estates, bought the ex-flower farm in 1996, and oversaw the planting of 100 acres of Pinot Noir beginning in 1998.



Located at mile marker 7.28 on Santa Rosa Road, Fiddlestix Vineyard is 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean at the western end of the Santa Ynez Valley. The Santa Rosa Hills are to the South and the Santa Rita Hills are to the North. The valley is unique for California in that it has an east-west orientation, drawing ocean breezes in and creating a very long growing season. Fog in the mornings and daytime temperatures barely rising above 75° make the Sta. Rita Hills appellation one of the coolest growing regions in California. The appellation (established in 2001) is a subdivision of the much larger Santa Ynez Valley appellation and is about 100 square miles in size, extending from Buellton in the West to Lompoc in the East and has about 700 planted hillside acres. It is one of three AVAs in Santa Barbara County, the other two being Santa Ynez Valley and Santa Maria Valley. The Santa Rita Hills appellation is officially named Sta. Rita Hills, since Vina Santa Rita, a 123-year-old winery in Santiago, Chile, filed suit in 2001 to stop California vintners from using the Santa Rita Hills name. Sta. Rita Hills is pronounced the same, but reads a little awkwardly. Photos below of Fiddlestix Vineyard are looking north, showing the east-west orientation of the northerly Santa Rita Hills.



The Fiddlestix Vineyard is planted to thirty-five individual blocks, three rootstocks, and seven clones (Pommard 4 & 5, Dijon 113, 115, 667, 777, and Swan selection) of Pinot Noir. Tight spacing (1,556 vines per acre), VSP trellising, and primarily north-south facing rows throughout. The vineyard is under the management of Jeff Newton and Larry Finkle of Coastal Vineyard Care. Shoot thinning, leaf pulling and crop thinning is employed several times each season to limit yields.

Kathy Joseph retains about 15% of the vineyard's output for her own label, and sells the rest on contract to several prestigious wineries including Ampelos Cellars, Ancien Wines, Anglim Winery, Ampelos, Arcadian Winery, Bonaccorsi Wine Company, Dragonette Cellars, Jonata, Ken Brown, Hartley-Ostini Hitching Post Wines, Gainey, Ortman Family Vineyards, Pali Wine Company, Paul Lato, Prodigal Wines, RN Estate, Rusack, Summerland, Tyler, Vogelzang, Wedell Cellars and TAZ. She lives on the vineyard property with her husband, Tom Doyle, a medical malpractice attorney practicing in Northern California (they have a second home in Davis, California, where she spends much of the off season and which is used as the Fiddlehead Business Office). Along with a handful of full-time helpers, Kathy directs all the site-specific and sustainable farming on the vineyard. She has a very loyal crew including the vineyard supervisor, Rafa Medina, who has been at Fiddlestix since the beginning. Kathy recently took a class in Spanish so she could communicate more closely with her vineyard crew. The quality of the grapes from this vineyard are held in such high esteem that those who source grapes rarely request any changing in farming practices.



Beginning in 2006, Kathy Joseph has annually hosted Fiddlefest at Fiddlestix, a tribute to the vineyard that recognizes the winemakers who purchase grapes and craft wines from Fiddlestix Vineyard. It is staged in a refurbished barn on the vineyard property and this year (June 22, 2008), sixteen producers offered their Pinot Noirs. Despite searing heat, a hundred Pinot geeks converged at Fiddlestix to enjoy the luscious Pinots, feast on food from the Hitching Post II Restaurant in Buellton and rollick to the fiddling from The Southside Bluegrass Band. This is one of my favorite Pinot events of the year and is open to the public. Next year marks the 20th anniversary of Fiddlehead and the 10th vintage anniversary of Fiddlestix so a special event is planned (stay tuned at www.fiddleheadcellars.com). Below are some photos that capture the spirit of the event.





The wines that stood out for me at Fiddlefest were: 2006 Anglim Winery Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2006 Dragonette Cellars Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir, 2002-2005 Fiddlehead Cellars Lollapalooza Pinot Noirs, 2006 Harley-Ostini Hitching Post Wines Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2005 La Cancion de Jonata Pinot Noir, 2006 and 2007 Paul Lato Sine Cera Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noirs (both barrel samples), 2005 and 2006 RN Estate Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir, and 2006 Wedell Cellars Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir.

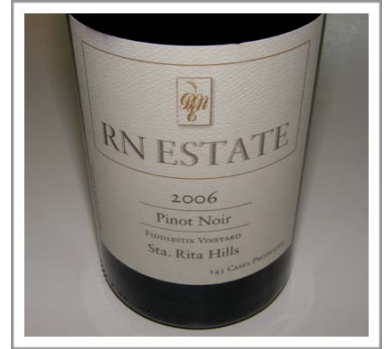
There are a number of recent vintage Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noirs from various producers reviewed in past issues of the *PinotFile* (search wine reviews by Fiddlestix Vineyard). In addition, I tasted several Pinot Noirs sourced from Fiddlestix Vineyard recently and the reviews follow. The wines from this vineyard tend to be very flavorful with bright acidity and structured tannins that give them good age ability. The 2002 Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noirs from Arcadian and Fiddlehead are drinking beautifully now.

2006 Dragonette Cellars Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 144 cases, \$45. Sourced from both Fiddlestix and Gaia (Ashley's) vineyards. Clones 113, 114, 115, 777 and Pommard. The grapes were hand-harvested in the cool early morning hours over several days in September, de-stemmed without crushing, meticulously sorted, cold soaked for 4 to 7 days, then each block was fermented separately over a 14 to 30 day period depending on the lot. Aged on the lees for 17 months in 50% new French cooperage before being bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Toasty oak dominated black fruit aromas with scents of Provencal herbs. Oak-spiced black cherry and black raspberry flavors which fan out on the palate nicely. Soft, fruity and pure with admirable finesse, finely ground tannins and a long, scented finish.*



Dragonette Cellars is a partnership between brothers John and Steve Dragonette and close friend Brandon Sparks-Gillis. The three spent a number of years learning the wine business through tasting, wine sales and winemaking under the tutelage of respected winemakers. To pursue their dream of making wine in the Santa Ynez Valley, they moved their families (a combined three spouses, three children, three dogs, and a cat) to the Valley, to be close to the land and its bounty. 2005 was the first commercial vintage for Dragonette Cellars which is a hands-on operation. The wines (there is a Rosé and Syrah available as well) are sold through a mailing list at www.dragonettecellars.com with limited retail distribution.

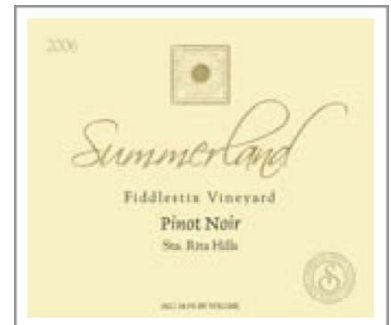
2006 RN Estate Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 145 cases, \$48. Whole cluster fermentation, aged 14 months in French oak. *The nose is reticent but coaxing reveals pleasant aromas of brambly cherry and strawberry with a sniff of alcohol. Restrained, tasty cherry and berry flavors with echoes of spice and oak. Lighter and elegantly styled with bright acidity. This wine should be a knockout with another year in bottle.*



RN Estate is a winery in Paso Robles that specializes in Pinot Noir, red Rhone and Bordeaux varietals. Owner and winemaker, Roger Nicolas, is a Frenchman who grew up on a farm in Brittany, France, and came to the United States at the age of 20. During his years of working at and owning prestigious restaurants, he dreamed of crafting his own wines. The 2005 vintage marked his inaugural releases. I was also quite taken by the 2005 RN Estate Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir which also shows a French sensibility. The small production is sold primarily through the winery. Contact Roger by e-mailing him at rnicolas@rnestate.com or phoning 805-610-9802. The website is www.rnestate.com. Private tastings are available by appointment. Roger participated in a panel of new Pinot Noir producers at this year's Pinot Summit that I moderated. Listen to the recording

2006 Summerland Winery Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir

14.1% alc., 430 cases, \$48. From the winery's Single Vineyard Collection. Clones 113, 667, 777, and Pommard. 6-7 day cold soak, fermentation in 1.5 ton open-top fermenters with hand punch downs, Assmanhausen yeast inoculation, 20-25 day maceration, and aging in 1/3 new Francois Freres cooperage for 11 months. *The nose is a killer. Expressive perfume of crushed black cherries, baking spice, subtle oak, and a hint of fecundity that comes and goes. Black cherry and berry fruit is set off by a touch of herbs and loamy earth with reigned in tannins and lively acidity. Drinking beautifully now.*



Summerland Winery is a boutique producer that sources grapes from multiple vineyards in the Central Coast from Santa Barbara County north to Monterey County. This negociant winery has burst onto the Central Coast wine landscape since its founding by Nebil "Bilo" Zarif in 2001. Zarif was previously the owner of Barnwood Vineyards which he started in 1994. He initially bought 30 acres of land in the Cuyama Valley in Santa Barbara County and expanded the property to 800 acres of vineyards. He also acquired the Maison Deutz Winery as a silent partner which became Laetitia. In 2001, he sold his interest in both Barnwood and Laetitia and founded Summerland Winery. As a resident of Summerland, a hillside community overlooking the Santa Barbara Channel just south of Santa Barbara, it was natural to name his new venture after his beloved home community. He opened a quaint tasting room in Summerland at 2330 Lillie Ave which is open to the public Tuesday thru Sunday from 11-6. Zarif brought talented winemaker Etienne Terlinden with him from Barnwood and Laetitia. Terlinden acquired an appreciation for wine at an early age, playing hide-and-seek in his grandfather's wine cellar at his home outside of Brussels, Belgium. He also makes wine for his own label, Cordon, a boutique Rhone wine label, and The Santa Maria Winery. All winemaking is done at Central Coast Wine Services in Santa Maria, California. Despite contrasting lifestyles, (Zarif is an avid polo player and Terlinden is a surfer) they have formed a highly successful partnership.

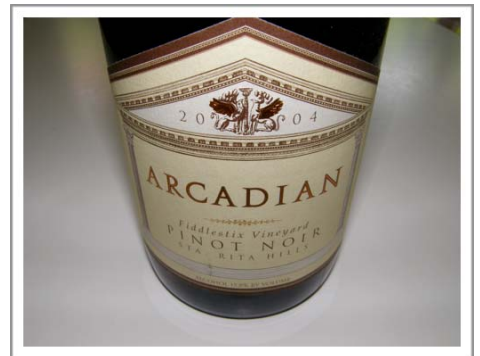
Summerland is an ambitious operation producing 10,000-15,000 cases annually of multiple varieties. The wines are sold on the website and through fine retailers. Both the 2004 and 2005 Summerland Pinot Noir from Fiddlestix Vineyard were very good wines. The website is www.summerlandwine.com and the phone is 805-565-WINE (9463).

2005 Fiddlehead Cellars Seven Twenty Eight Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$38. This is a blend of several clones and aged in barrels from several coopers. It can be drunk at a relatively early age. *This is a darkly colored wine that reminds me of Chunky Monkey ice cream. Delightful chocolate-coated cherries, oak toast, vanillin and herb garden scents lead to similar flavors with black raspberries and black cherries standing out complimented by good acid cut and a note of tangerine peel on the clean finish. The tannins are refined and the whole package is nicely balanced.*



Fiddlehead Cellars is a trusted source of Pinot Noir. There has been a Willamette Valley Pinot Noir in the lineup of wines, but I am not sure Kathy will retain her source for this wine. She crafts two higher-end wines, Lollapolloza and Doyle which I have reviewed in previous issues of the *PinotFile*. Don't forget her Sauvignon Blancs if you are a fan of this varietal as well as her excellent late-harvest wine, Sweetie (Sauvignon Blanc with a hint of Muscat Blanc). Current releases and library wines may be ordered online at www.fiddleheadcellars.com or by phoning 800-251-1225. The tasting room is located in the Lompoc "Wine Ghetto," (call for directions as signage is poor in the warehouse complex) and is open from Thursday through Saturday from 11-4. If you get the opportunity to taste with Kathy, the head Fiddlechick, you are in for a treat. (Photo of Kathy and her husband Tom at this year's Fiddlefest is shown earlier in this feature)

2004 Arcadian Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.8% alc., \$50. Co-owner and winemaker Davis has been a close friend of Kathy Joseph's and began sourcing fruit from Fiddlestix Vineyard in 2001. *Dark reddish-purple wine showing very ripe, raisiny and oak-infused aromas. Cooked dark fruit flavors with grippy tannins, tangy acidity and a dry, tart finish.*



Arcadian Winery winegrower Joe Davis is a believer in Old World (Burgundy) methods of crafting fine Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. A classicist, his wines often need a few years to really offer their charms. As writer Dennis Schaefer has said, "Almost every winemaker who makes Pinot Noir professes to follow the Burgundian model. And, more or less that's true. But with some winemakers, the 'less' part is apparent, and plenty of shortcuts may be employed. With winemaker Joe Davis, everything is always 'more' Burgundian." Founded in 1996, Arcadian owns no vineyards, but Joe spends considerable time in the 60 acres he controls or leases, making him as much a farmer as a winemaker. Production is 8,000 cases annually. The winery is at 4457 Santa Rosa Road, Lompoc. Tasting is by appointment. 805-688-8799. The wines are available on the website at www.arcadianwinery.com and through retail distribution. The 2002 Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir I have sampled in the past was much better and more typical of Joe's wines than the 2004 vintage reviewed here. Unfortunately, a bottle of the 2001 vintage I sampled was flawed by TCA.



2006 Jonata La Poesia de Jonata Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.2% alc., \$90. *A rich, big-boned Pinot Noir with alluring scents of ripe black cherry liquor and a hint of oak char. Full-bodied darker fruits enhanced by savory herbs and oak with a grilled fruit and soy accent. Nicely balanced with a lovely smooth velvety texture and enough acidity to bring the fruit into focus. The aromatic finish lingers on and on. An expensive bottle of wine, but one that really delivers the goods.*



Jonata ("Ho-notta") may just be the most high-profile new cult producer in Santa Barbara County. The winery is under the joint ownership of Charles Banks, a money manager for athletes, and Stanley Kroenke, a Denver real estate developer, who also jointly own Screaming Eagle (purchased for \$90 million). The Jonata estate is

in the Buellton Ballard Canyon area of the Santa Ynez Valley appellation and consists of 586 acres with 83 acres planted to warm-weather red varieties and Sauvignon Blanc. Pinot Noir is sourced from Fiddlestix Vineyard with plans to develop an estate vineyard in the Sta. Rita Hills in the future. The young winemaker is Matthew Dees, an East Coast transplant who learned his winemaking at Staglin Family Vineyard and Craggy Range in New Zealand. He joined Jonata in 2004. The consulting enologist is famed Michel Rolland. There was a second Pinot Noir released in 2005, La Cancion de Jonata, which I assume is a reserve that is priced in the \$125 range on the secondary market. I tasted it at Fiddlefest and its flavor profile was similar to the La Poesia, but an even richer and more brooding style. Jonata wines are sold bundled through a mailing list at www.jonata.com. with very limited retail distribution. 805-564-8591.



For more information on the Sta. Rita Hills appellation including an extensive map showing vineyard and winery locations, visit the Sta. Rita Hills Winegrowers Alliance website at www.staritahills.com.

Buena Tierra Vineyard

The first plantings of Pinot Noir (or vines closely allied to Pinot Noir) in the Russian River Valley were reportedly farmed by the Fountaingrove Winery north of Santa Rosa in the 1930s. The modern age of Pinot Noir viticulture in the Valley began when the Bacigalupi family planted Pinot Noir on Westside Road in 1964. Several other venerable vineyard names followed including Rochioli Vineyard in 1968 and Joseph Swan's Trenton Estate Vineyard in 1969. By 1973, Davis Bynum had released the first vineyard-designate wine from the Russian River Valley, a Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir, crafted by Gary Farrell. Tom Dehlinger followed two years later and released his first Pinot Noir in 1977.

The Buena Tierra Vineyard was planted in 1978, making it one of the oldest vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Owned and farmed by Joseph R. Miller, this venerable vineyard is located 1.5 miles southeast of Rochioli Vineyard in the low hills of the Laguna Ridge where the Russian River turns to head west to the Pacific Ocean. The site is ideal for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with well-drained sandy clay loam soil, cooling morning and evening fog from the ocean and bright sunshine during the day. Selectively irrigated, the vineyard is planted to several clones.

Through the years the vineyard has been the source of grapes for many notable bottlings including those of Williams Selyem and the now defunct Seven Lions Winery (owned by deceased Fred Williams). With the sale of Williams Selyem in 1997, former Williams Selyem alumni Margi Wierenga (Brogan Cellars) and Nikolai Stez have been major recipients of Pinot Noir grapes from Buena Tierra and both produce a vineyard-designate using grapes from the original plantings. Buena Tierra vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs have also been bottled in recent years by Renteria (no longer), Irony, Reynolds and White Oak. The Chardonnays from this vineyard have been impressive as well from producers such as Turjanis, Alban, Keegan Cellars and Shibumi Knoll. Brogan Cellars will bottle a 2008 Chardonnay from the Buena Tierra Vineyard as well.

From my recent tasting of several vintages of Buena Tierra Vineyard Pinot Noir from both Brogan Cellars and Woodenhead, I can highly recommend the bottlings from these two producers. They are quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs with bright flavors of cherries, spice and cola.

Brogan Cellars



Margi Wierenga is the daughter of Burt Williams and shares his hearty laugh and passion for Pinot Noir. Photo above shows Margi (right) pouring her wines at the 2007 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival. She was a teenager in the 1970s when Burt began to make his first wines in the family's garage. She later worked as a volunteer at the original Williams Selyem winery in a rented garage on River Road in Fulton and became a paid employee at the subsequent winery location on the Allen Vineyard property on Westside Road.

With the sale of Williams Selyem in 1997, she started her own label, Brogan Cellars, named after her paternal grandmother. She released her first wine, a 1998 Russian River Pinot Noir, working out of a cramped converted garage, using the same dairy vats for fermentation made famous by her father. Her contacts at Williams Selyem allowed her to source top vineyard sources for her wines including the Buena Tierra Vineyard.

The Buena Tierra Vineyard Pinot Noir is the favorite of many of Brogan's customers and some have called in "Sex in a Glass." The Buena Tierra Pinot Noirs come from the vineyard's oldest "Helio Doro Block". The Helio Doro Block is 2.5 acres and was named by Fred Williams when he discovered the vineyard in 1999. The name refers to one of the employees who has worked the vineyard for many years. In recent years, Margi has produced several Pinot Noirs from her father's Morning Dew Ranch in Anderson Valley. Production remains small (less than 2,000 cases) and includes other varieties as well. Most of the wine is sold through a mailing list at www.brogancellars.com. 707-473-0211.



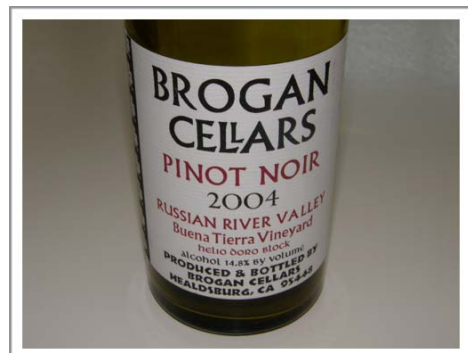
2001 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$75. Aged 14 months in 50% new French oak. *Very enticing aromas of black cherries, oak, mocha, sage and spearmint. Bright and sweet black cherry flavors with a little plum, cola and earth notes. Fairly dense and structured with a silky texture and a dry finish. Lip-smacking good. At its peak now, but will hold a few more years.*

2002 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$75. Aged 11 months in 75% new French oak. *Dark earth-kissed cherry and berry aromas are echoed in the flavors. The ripest, thickest and most brooding of the Brogan wines sampled. A touch dry and rough with a slight citric tang on the finish.*

2003 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$75. Aged 15 months, unfinned and unfiltered. *Shy nose of black cherries, black raspberries and baking spice. Delicious black cherry and blackberry core with chocolate accents and a citric note on the clean finish. The powerful black raspberry scent carries a finish that lasts at least half a minute.*



2004 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8%alc., 220 cases, \$75. Aged in 75% new French oak, unfinned and unfiltered. *Demure scents of Bing cherry, toast and a touch of barnyard. Immensely satisfying wild red berry and red cherry flavors wrapped in baking spices and chicory. Delicate and bright with a suave texture, slippery tannins and a flashy aromatic lift on the finish. This is drinking beautifully now and is definitely "sex in a glass."*



Woodenhead



Nikolai Stez has been fermenting one thing or another since he was a boy growing up in the Russian River Valley. His Russian immigrant parents taught him to make kvas, a drink from fermented bread or fruit. He made wines for his biology and botany classes in college, and began crafting serious home wines in 1986. Although he graduated from the Horticulture/Viticulture program at Santa Rosa Junior College and took a few classes at University of California Davis, he attributes his winemaking skills to common sense and tuition. He was an


assistant winemaker at Williams Selyem for 17 years before founding Woodenhead in 1999 with partner Zina Bower, who handles marketing and sales. The name, "Woodenhead," is derived from a nickname given to him by an old girlfriend who thought he was very stubborn (he is).

Nikolai is a no-nonsense guy who refers to his winemaking as "Burgundian in the California style." His initial release was from Elk Prairie Vineyard in Humboldt County. He produces both Pinot Noir and Zinfandel, with the both wines sourced from excellent vineyards. Besides Buena Tierra, he crafts vineyard-designate wines from Wiley Vineyard and Morning Dew Ranch Vineyard, both in the Anderson Valley, and Fruitland Ranch Vineyard in Humboldt County. His Russian River Valley blend is an outstanding wine as well. Production is 3,500 cases per year.

Woodenhead wines are sold through a mailing list, on the website, and through retail channels. The winery tasting room is located at 5700 River Road in Santa Rosa and is open Thursday through Sunday, 10:30 to 4:30. The phone is 707-887-2703.

2002 Woodenhead Buena Tierra Vineyard Original Planting Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 120 cases, \$45. Unfined and unfiltered. *Rich and sensual aromas of black cherries, exotic spices, and smoke with a hint of raisin. Complex and compelling flavor profile of dark stone fruits and berries, almonds, mocha and earth. Supple and refined with angel hair tannins and a refreshingly tangy finish. A very seductive drink that is showing some aged patina.*

2003 Woodenhead Buena Tierra Vineyard Original Planting Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 86 cases, \$45. Unfined and unfiltered. *Smoky black cherries, cola and mocha carry this smooth and nicely weighted wine. The flavors fan out nicely on the palate and the finish has a lively tangerine peel tang. Still plenty of life ahead.*

 **2005 Woodenhead Buena Tierra Vineyard Original Planting Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.6 alc., 180 cases, \$45. Unfined and unfiltered. *Intoxicating scent of black cherry jam, cola, smoke and spice cabinet. Bright and fresh black cherries and summer berries nicely spiced and complimented by hints of loam, mushroom and citrus. A great expression of Pinot Noir that is seamless in every way and with lively acidity that will make it a perfect companion at the dinner table.*



Brewer-Clifton Recent Retrospective

The Brewer-Clifton label represents the partnership of two outstanding winemakers, Greg Brewer and Steve Clifton. Clifton developed a passion for winemaking while working as a buyer for a restaurant in San Diego in the late 1980s. He moved to Santa Barbara in 1991, staying with a family friend and working as a cellar rat in a number of Santa Barbara County wineries. He moved up the winemaking chain quickly, first becoming assistant winemaker at Rancho Sisquoc Winery, followed by a stint as winemaker at Beckmen Vineyards. He hooked up with another young winemaker, Greg Brewer, who became the winemaker at Melville Vineyards and Winery when it was formed in 1997. Brewer's originally came into wine from an academic background, working as a French literature professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The pair decided to dedicate their new label to single-vineyard Pinot Noir and Chardonnay at a time (1996) when many Santa Barbara wineries were concentrating on varieties blended from multiple sources. They started with their combined meager savings, without assistance from family or investors, and began producing their wines in the unglamorous Lompoc "Wine Ghetto."

They hit pay dirt in 2002 when Robert Parker, Jr., reviewed their wines from the 2001 vintage, and proclaimed the Brewer-Clifton wines to be "the single greatest revelation of my 2001 tastings." The wines have always been crafted in a full-throttle, *neuvo* California style that Parker espouses, driven by very ripe prodigious fruit, high alcohol, and healthy tannins. Vineyard sites in the Sta. Rita Hills appellation have always been carefully chosen and emphasis has been placed on the vineyard as the ultimate determination of wine quality. A vineyard management team has been assembled under the direction of Francisco Ramirez and is currently farming Mount Carmel and Huber vineyards as well as 3-D Vineyard which they planted and developed.

The winemaking regimen is aimed at extracting the maximum amount of flavor. 100% whole cluster fermentation is extended, consisting of a 7 day cold soak, followed by a 2 week fermentation, and at least 10 days of extended maceration. Barrels are sourced from the Sirugue cooperage in Nuits-St.-George. All racking is by gravity and timed with the beginning of the waning moon following Summer Solstice when the wine is most settled. The bottles are capped with an attractive red wax seal. The owners recommend driving the corkscrew through the wax into the cork, but I found cutting the wax on top with a serrated corkscrew knife much easier. The wines are sold in standard-sized Burgundy bottles which are easy to rack and handle and I applaud them for this.

Brewer-Clifton has continued to evolve. With the 2007 vintage, they are offering an "appellation" blended Pinot Noir and Chardonnay which are handled in the winery identically to the other bottlings. These two wines will be bottled with Diam cork with the goal of converting all the vineyard-designate wines to Diam cork closure within a few years (Diam corks are produced with a high pressure carbon dioxide cleansing process which eliminates the risk of cork taint). Brewer-Clifton has also moved into a new winery production facility in Lompoc.

2005 Brewer-Clifton Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.9% alc., 264 cases, \$56. This 30-acre vineyard is owned and farmed by the Pepe and Hagen families. This wine is sourced from a section of the vineyard planted to Pommard 5 clone. *Intriguing nose of black-fruited jam on toast with a touch of chocolate. Surprisingly light-weighted for a Clos Pepe bottling, the earth-toned dark fruits are softly textured and encased in silky tannins. A hint of alcohol peaks out on the start and dry finish but is not obtrusive.*

2005 Brewer-Clifton Mount Carmel Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.6% alc., 911 cases, \$60. Mount Carmel was originally planted in 1991 by Paul Albrecht and Ron Piazza. This 20-acre vineyard, planted on Botella clay, diatomite and limestone, is now farmed by Brewer-Clifton's vineyard management team. Clones are Dijon 115 and Mount Eden. *The nose offers darker fruits enhanced with floral notes, green veggie scents and new-mown hay aromas with a hint of alcohol. Linear dark fruit on the palate which is earthy and nicely balanced by lively acidity. On the lighter side and appealingly smooth with soft tannins and a clean finish.*

2005 Brewer-Clifton Cargassachi Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.5% alc., 576 cases, \$56. From a two acre section of clone 115 planted in clay loam soil replete with calcareous deposits and diatomaceous earth. *Lighter in color than the other 2005 bottlings. Reticent but enticing redder fruits complimented by spice, new leather, funk and dried herbs on the nose. The demurely spiced and savory herb-toned red fruits are losing the tug-of-war with drying tannins that overwhelm. The aromas trump the flavors now and this may or may not blossom in the future as the tannins soften. Tasted twice.*



2005 Brewer-Clifton Rancho Santa Rosa Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 240 cases, \$64. Clone 667 planted on a steep south facing slope replete with limestone. Owned and farmed by Bill Foley. *Dark reddish-purple in color. A wine crafted from what seems like overripe fruit with a nose of stewed, syrupy fruit, and chewy, thick flavors of raisin grapes. A Pinot Noir masquerading as a Syrah with none of the charm of Pinot Noir.*

2005 Brewer-Clifton Ashley's Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 911 cases, \$48. Ashley's Vineyard was owned by the Parker family and named after Fess's daughter, Ashley. It was subsequently sold to Demetria Estate and renamed Gaia Vineyard. There are still bottlings carrying the Ashley's name. This wine is from two blocks planted on steep clay-loam slopes to clones 114, 115, and Pommard. *A cherry-driven wine with flamboyant aromas of fresh black cherries carrying over in the mouth with hints of red licorice and oak. Rich and long, with a creamy texture and admirable balance.*



2005 Brewer-Clifton Rio Vista Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.5% alc., 720 cases, \$46. This vineyard is owned by the Thorne family and is farmed by Buona Terra Farming on the eastern extreme of the Sta. Rita Hills appellation. Clones 667 and 777. *The aromas become quite enticing with time in the glass showing off bright cherry and strawberry fruits with a touch of barnyard and pencil lead. Red fruit-driven with a hint of oak char, this is a simple but tasty wine with soft tannins lending richness and structure and marred only by slightly hot finish.*

As a lark, I combined the Cargassachi, Rio Vista and Ashley's in equal parts to produce a blend. The resultant wine was as least as good as any of the single-vineyard bottlings. Alluring aromas of red fruits, spice and sandalwood with delicious rich red fruits and an appealing soft texture. I do this frequently, but the jury is still out, as blends may or may not trump the single-vineyard bottlings.

2004 Brewer-Clifton Rio Vista Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 16.0% alc., 192 cases. *Appealing scents of dark fruits, oak, herbs and Xmas spice. Powerfully flavored red and black fruits with mildly dry tannins, and a clean, citric finish.*

2004 Brewer-Clifton Rancho Santa Rosa Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 240 cases. *Reticent aromas of black cherries, strawberries and oak char. Loamy fruit with notes of tar and tea, mild grainy tannins, a smooth texture, and a dry finish with a citric tang.*

2004 Brewer-Clifton Melville Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.6% alc., 144 cases. From vines planted in 1997 on clay-loam soil with clones 114 and 115. *Grapey nose with hints of smoky oak. Decent cherry and raspberry fruit which is subdued and rustic. Big-boned but not showy and one-dimensional. Much like a smoky grape popsicle. The tannins arrive with a rush at the end.*

2004 Brewer-Clifton Cargasacchi Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 168 cases. *Shy cherry, forest floor perfume with mineral accents. Black currants and blackberries are featured but although there is prodigious fruit, there is very little taste impact. Noticeable fine tannins carry the dry finish which is also a touch astringent.*

2004 Brewer-Clifton Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 15.5% alc., 504 cases. *The lightest in color of the 2004 Pinot Noirs tasted. Very attractive aromatics featuring crushed black cherries, red berries and spice. Very ripe fruit flavors tending toward raisin. Smoothly textured with a moderate tannic backbone.*

The high alcohols are generally quite well integrated in the wines. Balance is decent, but with acidity lacking in some instances. The wines are ripe fruit-driven and concentrated, but can be linear and lacking in nuances of taste. There definitely is a consumer base for this style of Pinot Noir and Greg Brewer likes to point out that the alcohols listed on his wine labels are accurate, unlike some producers, whose wines are significantly above 14.1%, but fudge in portraying a true listing of the alcohol percentage (a 1% margin of error is allowed).

Brewer-Clifton wines are sold primarily through a mailing list. There is a spring and fall release. The wines used to be highly allocated, but with more production now (between 4,000 and 6,500 cases), availability has increased and buyers may choose among the offerings on a first come, first serve basis. The website is www.brewer-clifton.com and the winery's address is 329 North F Street in Lompoc. 803-735-9184. Greg Brewer is also the winemaker for his own label, diatom, and Melville Winery and Vineyards. Steve Clifton produces highly regarded Italian varieties under his label Palmina and is the winemaker for Tritono, an Argentine producer of Malbec.

Anthill Farms

Founded in 2004, this new producer with the quirky name and unique label has burst on the scene with startling good Pinot Noirs made from purchased grapes. This project is one of many that has ties with the Williams Selyem winery. Three young Pinot amigos, who had worked together as cellar hands at the distinguished winery on Westside Road launched their own winery with three Pinot Noir releases in 2004. Anthony Filiberti grew up in Sonoma County and was lured to wine at an early age. He learned winemaking at Bergstrom Winery in Newberg, Oregon, Hafner Vineyards in the Alexander Valley, and Williams Selyem. David Low grew up in Kansas but got hooked on wine while attending University of California Berkeley. A short stint as a computer programmer was followed by a change of heart and he later worked at both Williams Selyem and Papapietro Perry. Webster Marquez grew up on the East Coast and attended college in Virginia. Here he began working as an assistant winemaker at Jefferson Vineyards. He then moved to Sonoma County where he joined Williams Selyem. Currently he is the assistant winemaker at Belvedere Winery in Healdsburg. The trio's goal is to craft Pinot Noirs which "express the growing site and the characteristics of the vintage, and above all else, taste good." Their emphasis is on the vineyards and have named their winery Anthill Farms to emphasize the many tiny individual vineyards that form "the link between place and product." Their grape sources are North Coast vineyards in Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Anthill Farms Winery is located at 4791 Dry Creek Road, #3-4, Healdsburg, CA 95448. The phone is 707-490-5191. The wines are available on the website at www.anthillfarms.com and through retail channels. As good as these wines are, I was surprised recently to find the 2006 vintage Pinot Noirs still available on the website. I sampled the 2005 and 2006 lineup of Anthill Farms Pinot Noirs and my reviews follow.

2005 Anthill Farms Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.9% alc.. Peters Vineyard is just west of Sebastopol and has been farmed by Randy Peters for more than twenty years. *Terrific aromatics that make the hair stand up on the back of your neck: juicy cherries, cardamon and other spices, and toasty oak. Lovely cherry flavors enhanced by subtle toast notes, sporting a comforting creamy texture. The acidity is just right, toned down from the 2006 vintage of this wine. Refined and ornate with plenty to like here. Age (of vines) has its rewards.*

2005 Anthill Farms Comptche Ridge Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.8% alc.. This vineyard is dry-farmed by the Weir Family and is located north of Navarro, a few miles inland from the Mendocino Coast. *Loamy crushed dark ripe berries with a smoky edge. Appealing richness and respectable acidity with a clean, tangy finish. My only nit is a touch of green tomato in the flavor profile. Decent, but not as good as the 2006 version.*

2005 Anthill Farms Abbey Harris Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc.. This 1.5-acre vineyard is located on a rocky slope at 1,100 feet overlooking the town of Boonville in the Anderson Valley. The owners, Dona Abbey and Dan Harris, farm the vineyard with the Anthill Farms crew.



A wine on the dark side from color, to aromas, to flavors. The nose features dark stone fruits, herbs from Provence and a touch of alcohol. Dark fruits carry the palate attack leading to a dry finish with citrus (grapefruit) highlights. A simple, decent wine.

2005 Anthill Farms Tina Maria Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc.. This vineyard is located in the cool Green Valley sub-appellation of the Russian River Valley and is farmed by Ron Black and Stephan Bessone. *Flamboyant scents of confected cherries, violets and dried herbs that just won't quit. Herb-dusted deep red fruits with a hint of oak, a zippy acid backbone and a tangerine peel finish. Deeper and more structured than the 2006 version. A nicely crafted wine that has plenty of aromatic charm. Prefers this over the 2006 vintage.*



2005 Anthill Farms Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc.. *The powerful aromas shot out of the bottle when the cork was pulled. Extremely fragrant fruit-driven scents of ripe cherries and berries with a hint of plum and marzipan. Absolutely delicious dark red fruits complimented by notes of spice, vanilla and coffee. A complete wine that is impeccably balanced. Everything you could hope for in Pinot Noir.*



2006 Anthill Farms Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$39 . *Like the 2005 version of this wine. a wine of charisma. Bing cherry fruit, nicely spiced and deftly oaked makes this wine a delight to drink. Lighter in color, it is an elegantly styled wine, still retaining some soft tannins that need shedding and finishing clean with a brisk and citric finish. Might be a bit austere and acidic for some, but will partner with food beautifully.*

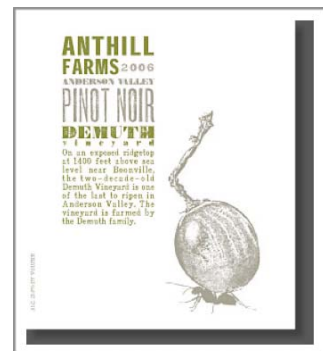
2006 Anthill Farms Comptche Ridge Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$39. *A very floral and fruity nose with just a touch of alcohol. Nicely oaked and candied dark fruits with a loamy bent. A certain fig accent is appealing. Tasty and smooth with mild drying tannins. This wine will find many fans.*

2006 Anthill Farms Tina Marie Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$44. *Complex aromatics featuring wild strawberries, ripe cherries, wildflowers, black olive and exotic woods. Full-on attack of cherries on the palate with earthy accents. Nicely balanced and soft in the mouth, this wine goes down easy. Not a blockbuster, but quite satisfying.*

2006 Anthill Farms Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$32. *Light crimson in color. Cinnamon spice, cherry, and cardamom aromas which are nose-filling. With time in the glass there are more confected grape fruit notes with a touch of alcohol peeking out. Light-weighted and elegant, the wine shows off very appealing cherry and raspberry flavors. Nothing epiphanic but a good drink and perfect for the table. (Reviewed June 9, 2008).*



2006 Anthill Farms Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., \$39. *Light crimson robe. Complex nose showing black cherry, truffle, oak and toffee. Charismatic dark stone fruits with an earthy tone. Healthy tannic backbone. Creamy texture and a slightly dry finish. This will only get better with cellaring. I could drink this all night. (Reviewed June 9, 2008)*



2006 Anthill Farms Windsor Oaks Vineyard Russian River Valley Syrah 14.5% alc., \$25. *Deep, dark ruby color. Penetrating aromas of black raspberries, toast, char and fragrant flowers. Copious dark fruit obscured by overwhelming tannins, oak char and smoke. Needs a big grilled steak.*

Anthill Farms Pinot Noirs have made quite an impression with me. These are food-friendly wines that are elegantly styled with complex aromas and flavors and respectable balance. The Demuth bottlings are clearly the stars of the lineup but you can't go wrong with any of the Pinot Noirs. I would grab some while the getting is good.

Sommelier Winemaker Debuts


Lioco Winery

Sommeliers know wine and understand how the components of wine can act in unison to compliment and enhance the experience of dining. They sense exactly the kind of wine that makes food sing. It is no surprise, then, that sommeliers have begun to launch their own labels, crafting wines that reflect their food sensitivities and their vast background in tasting fine wines. Many have establish close relationships with growers and winemakers through the years, making it comfortable for them to gain access to established expertise in the wine business. Some of the most notable sommeliers who have become winemakers include Rajat Parr of the Michael Mina Restaurant Group, John Lancaster of Boulevard Restaurant in San Francisco, and Kevin O'Connor of Spago Restaurant in Los Angeles.

Kevin O'Connor predates the current surge in sommelier winemakers, having made wine for years under the O'Connor label. Beginning with the 2005 vintage, he teamed with former North Berkeley Imports wine importer Matt Licklider to found the Lioco label to produce vineyard-designate Pinot Noir along with stainless steel fermented vineyard-designate Chardonnay and a Carignan/Petite Sirah blend. Lioco is a combination of the partner's last names. O'Connor works closely with University of California Davis trained winemaker Kevin Kelley (Salinia) to produce non manipulated site-driven wines. The two Pinot Noirs reviewed below definitely reflect their unique terroirs. Winemaking features careful sorting in the vineyard and the winery, wild yeast and partial whole cluster fermentations of mixed clones, and aging for 10 months in 1,2 and 3 year-old oak barrels. Lioco is a "virtual" winery making wines at a facility in Santa Rosa.

2006 Lioco Klindt Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 118 cases, \$45. This hillside site is 11miles from the Pacific Ocean. Soils are sandy clay loam and fractured rock. Very cool climate. *This wine speaks of the soil. Aromas of earth, smoke, grilled mushrooms, plum reduction sauce and a faint whiff of alcohol. Very earthy and darkly fruited with delicious black raspberry jam bringing up the finish. Moderate tannins and bright acidity. Rustic but in a good way. Needs full-flavored dishes such as grilled lamb chops.*



**2006 Lioco Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 256 cases, \$60. The Hirsch Vineyard is the defining Pinot Noir site of the Sonoma Coast. Located 3 miles from the Pacific Ocean at 1,100 to 1,400 feet on several ridge tops, the complex calcareous seabed soils provide a unique expression of Pinot Noir. This wine is from Mt Eden clone. *Oh Boy, put on your seat belts. Fairly modest in color, but delivering a transcendent drinking experience. The nose is brimming with fresh Bing cherry and cinnamon toast perfume. A refined style that is yet vigorous with flavors of dried cherries accented with toasty oak, savory herbs and spices. Elegant and silky, with gossamer tannins and admirable acidity. The balance is spot on. David Hirsch must be proud of this wine.*



Lioco Wines are available on the website at www.lioco.com, at select restaurants, and fine retail wine stores. In the 2006 vintage, there is a third Pinot Noir from Michaud Vineyard near Chalone. The winery business office is located at 11151 Missouri Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90025 and the phone is 310-717-1892.

Small Sips of California Pinot Noir: Just Drink It

In recent weeks I tasted through a large number of primarily new releases from California producers. The tasting confirmed my general impression that there were more superb wines produced in the 2005 vintage than in the 2006 vintage. That said, I found many, many 2006 Pinot Noirs that warrant your attention. The buzz among the wineries and confirmed by my barrel tastings to date, indicate that the Pinot Noirs from 2007 in California will be among the best ever made. The 2008 growing season has been very difficult, complicated by frosts, heat waves, inopportune periods of rain, uneven weather patterns, and even smoke. Yields will be noticeably reduced in 2008 but like any uneven vintage, the top producers will be up to the challenges.

Seeking out the best vintners regardless of vintage is my goal. When you, the reader find some of my recommendations to your liking, ignore the vintage hype. I say forget the year, pull the cork and enjoy. If the wine in front of you gives you pleasure, then it is a good wine.

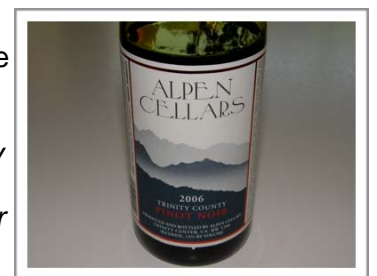
Trinity County



2005 Dubakella Trinity County Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$30. Sometimes good Pinot Noir turns up in the most unexpected places. Andy Carini produces Dubakella Pinot Noir from a vineyard in Hayfork, California, about half way between the cities of Redding and Eureka, in Trinity County. Directly east of Humboldt County, Hayfork sits about midway between the best northern coastal Pinot Noir regions of California and the better Pinot Noir regions of Oregon. The wine is named for Mt. Dubakella, the tallest mountain you can see from Andy's winery in Hayfork. It is a Wintu (local Native American tribe) word for "black rock." Andy began working with this vineyard just before harvest in 2004. The location is uncharted grape growing territory, but seems to be a natural fit for Pinot Noir. The vineyard sits at 2,700 ft on a south facing slope overlooking the Hayfork Valley (the valley floor is at 2,200 ft). The soils are rocky loam with veins of limestone throughout. The climate is very Burgundian with a short, but intense, growing season with only two months of the year sure to be frost free (July and August). Summer day to night temperature swings of 50 degrees are the norm! Hot days and almost cold nights. The vineyard was planted to clones 115 and Pommard on 7 acres (there is 2 acres of Pinot Gris) in 1998 and is certified organic. Andy says, "On paper everything works and sounds nearly perfect. I am just about to the point where I feel I can state with certainty that in practice it is even better than on paper. As my years working with this vineyard pass, and we fine tune our farming to the site, the wines are proving that this is a place for great Pinot Noir, perhaps one of the very best places in the state for it." Andy's winemaking style emphasizes as little manipulation as possible. The only additions to the wine are yeast and minimal sulfur dioxide. There is no watering down, acidification, spinning cone, copper, color boosters, fining, or filtration. The wine is a true representation of its place of origin and the vintage. 90% of the grapes are de-stemmed followed by a cold maceration. After inoculation, the fermentations last between 10-14 days in small 200 gallon open top fermenters. Multiple daily punchdowns are followed by pressing directly to 100% French oak. Typically, aging is for 18 months and the wine is bottled directly off its gross lees. Order winery direct at www.cariniwinecellars.com. *A cherry bombast on the nose and an appealing loamy earthiness to the ornate black cherry and black raspberry flavors. Lithe and clean with a refined mouthfeel and a refreshing finish. An impressive wine well crafted and flashing great charm. The price is ridiculously low considering the effort taken in farming this isolated vineyard and crafting this unique wine.*



2006 Alpen Cellars Trinity County Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$16. Alpen Cellars is located in a small valley beneath the Trinity Alps of northern California. The climate features warm summer days with cool mountain nights. Keith Groves is the winemaker. *A medium-bodied Pinot Noir with interesting scents of confected cherries, cedar, wildflowers and herbs. Primarily red fruits on the palate, especially strawberry, with subtle woody and earthy accents. A bit tart with a short, dry finish. This wine will appeal to those looking for an off-road and different Pinot Noir drinking experience.*



Anderson Valley - Mendocino County

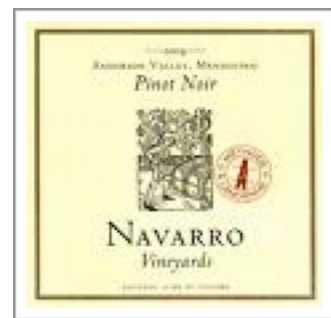


2006 B. Kosuge Wines Manchester Ridge Mendocino Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 300 cases, \$40. From a vineyard located in the boonies (many miles toward the coast from Boonville) at 2,000 feet. The location and climate are more akin to the Sonoma Coast than Anderson Valley. Byron Kosuge is a Pinot Noir and Syrah specialist who formerly was the head winemaker at Saintsbury. *A potpourri of scents including brambly cherries, candied apples, exotic woods, vanillin and winter spices. Mouth filling dusty red cherries that are nicely spiced with echoes of oak. Velvety texture with integrated tannins and a good acid cut. A complete wine with excellent balance and length.*

2005 Goldeneye Confluence Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$75. This vineyard is adjacent to the headwaters of the Navarro River with varying exposures and soils. *Sweet, richly oaked dark cherries, redwood, and old wine cellar scents. Restrained dark Pinot fruits with a faint chemical taste I can't put my finger on. Fairly elegant with fine-grained tannins. A decent wine that may need some time to become more expressive, but there isn't much going on right now.*



Navarro Vineyards Méthode à l'Ancienne Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$33. The top of the line Navarro Pinot Noir. The name refers to gentle punch downs of the fermenting must. The grapes come from the very cool northern "deep end" part of the Anderson Valley and are mostly estate grown. There is a variety of clones including Dijon 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, Pommard 4 and Martini 13, and two field blends of Chalone and David Bruce, all planted on various rootstocks using different trellises at elevations of 300 to 1,300 feet. *A fragrant wine that picks up intensity and interest with time in the glass. Deep, rich black cherry, herb and hay scents. Full-flavored but elegant and beautifully composed with crisp acidity. Cherry-driven flavor profile with savory herbs. A ballerina in full-flight.*

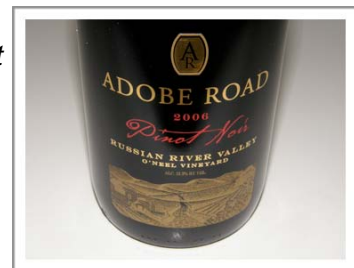


2006 Papapietro Perry Charles Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$44. *Plenty of alcohol on the nose. A middleweight with dark earthy stone fruits that seem flat. The finish leaves a little bitterness in its wake.*

Sonoma

2006 Adobe Road Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 15.3% alc., 1350 cases, \$39. Owned by Kevin and Debra Buckler, this winery is located in the cool Sonoma Coast town of Petaluma at 1995 S. McDowell Blvd. Founded in 1999, production is 5,000 cases of Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. The interesting tasting room features a display of racing cars (Kevin is a well-known sports car racer). The winemaker is Frank Dusak. The 2005 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir was one of the top wines at the 2008 Pinot Noir Shootout and sold out quickly. *The wine pulls you in with attractive aromas of wild berries, earth, pepper and a nice touch of barnyard. Dark-fruited with a strong tug of oak that competes with the fruit. Softly textured with a clean finish that leaves a little heat in its wake.*

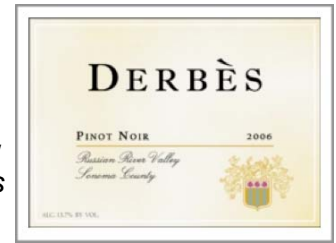
2006 Adobe Road Winery O'Neel Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.3% alc., 250 cases, \$48 *Gregarious nose bursting with rich black cherries, toast and spice. The earth-dusted and oak-imbibed dark stone fruits are discreetly concentrated with tannins that are soft and supple. The balance is admirable with alcohol that is well integrated.*



2006 Aubin Cellars Verve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 145 cases, \$28. Clones 115, 777, Pommard and Beringer. Vines average 12 years of age. Harvest Brix 26 average. 100% de-stemmed, fermented in open-top fermenters, manual punch down of cap, 3 days cold soak and 21 days total cuvaision average. Aged an average of 17 months in 30% new French oak and bottled aged 4 months. *Charming*


aromas and flavors of red current, cherry, cola and root beer. Caressing in the mouth, fine tannins, appealing lightness and very easy to drink.

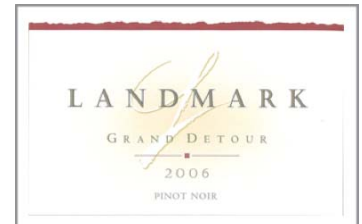
2006 Derbès Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 428 cases, \$40. Cécile Lemerle-Derbès is a master winemaker who has made fine wines throughout the world. This wine was sourced from Sweeney and Moore vineyards. Clones 115 and 777. Hand harvested and sorted, de-stemmed, cold soaked for 2 days, inoculated with Burgundy yeasts, total cuvaision 22 days. Barrel aged for 15 months in 50% new French oak. *This is a wine for those that prize subtlety and restraint. Attractive scents of cherry cola, loamy earthy and barnyard. Very tasty demure cherry cola, spice and smoke flavors. Clean, pure and sleek with great delicacy and perfect balance.*




2005 Flowers Andreen Gayle Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$50. *A rich core of black raspberry, black current and black cherry fruit with an appealing earthy and gamy aspect. Restrained, sleek and seductive with defining acidity that makes this wine a perfect dining companion. Match this with cassoulet and you will be on your knees.*

2006 Iron Horse Vineyards Estate Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., cases, \$40. From vineyards in the cool, foggy Green Valley planted in Goldridge soil. *The aromatic profile features cherries, herbs, oak, stalk and a little good Pinot stink. Redder fruits lead the attack. Silky and fairly light-weighted. A decent wine that carries too much fruit that is on the green side (?unripe).*

 **2006 Landmark Grand Detour Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$33. Landmark is known for its excellent Chardonnays, but has been making a fine Grand Detour Pinot Noir for several years now sourced from several Sonoma Coast vineyards including Kanzler, Keller Estate, Gap's Crown, Flocchini and Armagh. This winery has a consistent track record with Pinot Noir and the wines are year in and year out always excellent as well as sensibly priced. *Alive with the scent of Bing cherry, cola and oak spice and flavors of dark berry fruits complimented by a sumptuous edge of vanillin oak. Well-proportioned and beautifully crafted, I liked this a lot.*



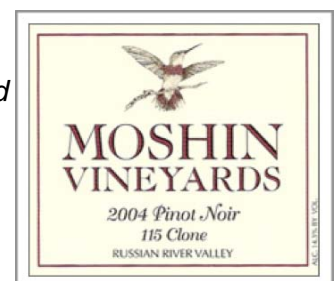
 **2004 Littorai Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 240 cases, \$65. *They say that perfect Pinot Noir hasn't been made yet, but this one comes darn close. Lovely cherry aromas complimented by subtle oak spice and loamy earthiness all carrying over to the palate. Demure yet potent with a persistent aromatic finish. Perfectly balanced and complete in every way. Thieriot Vineyard is a superstar among California vineyards and is clearly my favorite Pinot Noir year in and year out from Ted Lemon at Littorai.*



2005 Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 84 cases, \$65. *Darkly fruited perfume with notes of hay and grass. Similar flavor profile with the fruit showing considerable restraint. Silky with powdery tannins and assertive acidity producing a short, tart finish. Needs patience.*

2001 Martinelli Bondi Home Ranch Water Trough Vineyard Green Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc.. *Secondary aromas of rotting leaves and barnyard. Austere plumy fruit, mushrooms and leather. The tannins are completely resolved and the wine is pleasingly soft. Drink up.*

2006 Moshin Vineyards Lot 4 Selection Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 425 cases, \$40. *Crimson robe. Typical Russian River Valley perfume of Bing cherries and spice. Cherry pie flavors which are straightforward but appealing. Round in the mouth and soft with felty tannins and a dry, slightly sour finish.*



2003 Radio-Coteau Marsh Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 74 cases, \$40. This wine is from a 1.3-acre vineyard planted to Swan selection located west of Occidental and farmed by owners Peter and Barbara Marsh. *Black cherry dominated scents with a hint of alcohol and cocoa dust. Lush red cherry fruit subtly spiced, showing good persistence on the long, chewy and brisk finish. Still drinking nicely.*

2006 W.H. Smith Maritime Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$54. *This is a well oaked wine featuring redder fruits including Maraschino cherry. Dried herbs are prominent as is a slight green note. Very soft and drinkable, with bright acidity on the back end.*

2006 W.H. Smith Marimar Estate Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., \$48. *An elegant, even feminine wine featuring nicely oaked dark red cherry fruit with a sidecar of baking spices. Powdery tannins create a smooth texture and the clean finish shows balanced acidity. Note: both this wine and the 2006 Maritime Vineyard Pinot Noir were a noticeable departure from the 2005 vintage Pinot Noirs from W.H. Smith. The 2005 wines were dense, tannic and big, requiring decanting to enjoy. The 2006 wines are much more approachable.*



2006 Williams Selyem Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$34. *Strawberries, red cherries, allspice and a hint of pine resin on the nose. Light-weighted tart red cherry and blueberry flavors. Soft, cozy and feminine with brisk acidity. Simple but enjoyable.*

2006 Williams Selyem Sonoma County Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$42. *Light crimson in color with a slight haze. Beautiful candied cherries, new oak and a little barnyard stink on the nose. Lightly spiced cherry flavors with an earthy edge. Simple and short, losing interest with time in the glass.*

Marin County



2006 Willowbrook 2006 Marin County Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 245 cases, \$38. This is the first Marin County Pinot Noir from Willowbrook Cellars. From a low-yielding vineyard (less than 2 tons per acre) in an area known for late, lingering fog and intense, cool winds from Point Reyes. Owner John Tracy and winemaker Joe Otos have been making superb single-vineyard Pinot Noirs for six vintages from their winery in

Sebastopol. The fruit was gently de-stemmed, 70% whole cluster fermentation, four day cold soak, aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Very ripe black cherry and plum aromas with a hint of oak, char and roasted nuts. Rather exotic dark wild berry flavors which are haunting. All velvet in texture with a pleasing citrus note to the tangy finish. Perfect with grilled meats.*



Napa Valley

2006 Acacia DeSoto Vineyard Napa Valley Carneros Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 348 cases, \$55. *This wine needs some air time or decanting to fully blossom. Dark stone fruits with a smoky edge which are soft and clean in the mouth. Discrete acidity predicts this wine will benefit from some more bottle aging.*

2005 El Molino Rutherford Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$30 (½ bottle). One of the few Pinot Noirs from Napa Valley and consistently the best. The winery has a colorful history dating to 1871. *Lightly colored. Vivid, fresh black raspberry fruit with an appealing underlying minerality. A hint of raisin and tea adds interest. Nicely weighted with fuzzy tannins and a dry finish. Perfectly fine.*

2006 Judd's Hill Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$25. This winery is owned and operated by generations of the Finkelstein family - Art, Bunnie, Judd and Holly. The family has been making wine since the 1970s. *Deep, darker fruited, jammy aromas with hints of mocha and tropical fruit. Rustic ripe fruits on the attack with an unusual malt and marzipan bent. Smooth, light and nicely composed except for a trailing bit of heat on the finish. A bit off the beaten track but will have some fans.*

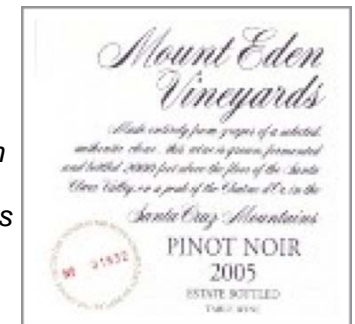


Santa Cruz Mountains

2005 McHenry Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., <200 cases, \$20. From a 2-acre vineyard Bonny Doon at 1,800 feet elevation, five miles from the Pacific Ocean. Aged two years in French oak. *Dark ruby violet in color. The fruit in this wine is veering toward raisin and seems riper than the 2004 vintage. The red stone fruit is discreetly oaked and interesting accents of spice, pepper and forest floor make for a delicious drink. Soft, clean, and seamless. Easily approachable and a delight to drink.*



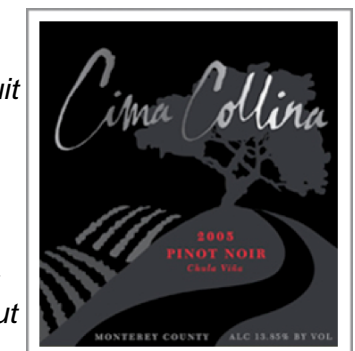
2006 Mr. Eden Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 870 cases, \$43. A historic estate founded in 1945. This wine is from older Pinot Noir selections grown at 2,000 feet above the Santa Clara Valley floor. Jeffrey Patterson has been the winemaker since 1981. *Muted and delicate aromas of herbed berry fruit with a hint of sage and pumpkin spice. The nose opens and gains intensity with time in the glass. A light, elegantly styled wine featuring herbed berry fruit that is slightly tart and a little austere secondary to the brisk acidity. This Pinot Noir screams for food and I found it a perfect accompaniment to chicken curry. This is not a wine for those who prefer a hunky, extracted, bold style.*



Monterey County

2001 Arcadian Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$82 (current retail). Joe Davis crafts this wine differently than many working with Pisoni fruit. He picks less ripe and strives for balance and elegance. *A sturdy wine that is still supple. Ripe, smoky dark fruits, oak spice and barnyard on the nose. Cassis, plum and earth flavors leading to a dry and citric finish with zippy acidity. Drinking beautifully now.*

2005 Cima Collina Chula Viña Monterey County Pinot Noir 13.85% alc., \$28. This vineyard lies in the foothills of the Gavilan Mountains and is exposed to warm afternoons, cooling breezes and fog. *Very ripe fruit aromas tending toward mixed fruit jam and raisin. Similar ripe fruit flavors on the palate including raisin and root beer. Soft in the mouth with fine-grained tannins, admirable elegance and balance.*



2006 Cima Collina Monterey County Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 1,249 cases, \$26. This wine is a blend of various growing regions in Monterey County. *Very ripe dark red fruits that are cooked and jammy trending toward raisin and prune flavors. Silky texture, fine tannins, lively acidity and a dry finish. Well-crafted and easy to drink, but the fruit is a bit shallow and too overripe for my taste.*



2006 Cima Collina Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 158 cases, \$48. This vineyard sits in the southern reaches of the Santa Lucia Highlands above the fog line. Clones 115, 667 and Pommard. Minimalist winemaking by Annette Hoff. Aged 11 months in 40% new oak barrels. *Complex and demure scents of oak, herbs and spearmint coat the lovely dark red cherries, red current and raspberry fruit. The palate is rich yet smooth and soft as an angel's hair with great persistence. Thoroughly satisfying.*

2006 Pey-Lucia “Frisquet” Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 375 cases, \$37. From a 34-year-old site with breezy afternoon sunshine and chilly (“frisquet” is French for very cool), foggy mornings. Down the road from Garys’ Vineyard and bordering Rosella’s Vineyard. Owner and winemaker Jonathan Pey also crafts beautiful Pinot Noirs from Marin County (Pey-Marin). *Deep reddish-purple color. Rich, sumptuous nose of black cherries and rose petals. Hi-toned black raspberry fruit which fills the mouth and coats the tongue. Almost viscous in texture, yet light in weight, with very fine tannins and balanced acidity on the back end. Earth and grilled meat notes add interest.*



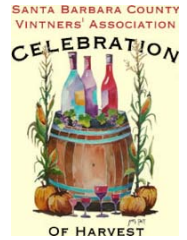
Santa Rita Hills

2006 Sanford Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$40. *Restrained scents of black cherries, smoke, minerals and a hint of alcohol. Plentiful, dirt-crust cherry and black raspberry fruits embrace the palate. A peculiar chemical taste and a bit of bitterness on the finish ruin the experience. Disappointing considering the pedigree of this vineyard.*

2006 Sanford La Rinconada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$40. *Flat out great nose featuring a showy mixture of cherry, raspberry, oak, baking spice and earthy aromas. Lush spiced red cherry fruit showing perfect ripeness and excellent length. Silky textured with an endless echo of the scents and fruit on the finish marred only by a little heat.*

Pinot Briefs

Celebration of Harvest Festival The Santa Barbara County Vintner's Association sponsors this annual Celebration of Harvest to be held October 11 from 1:00 - 4:00 PM at the Rancho Sisquoc Winery in Santa Maria. 100+ vintner members will be pouring their wines and a silent auction of special bottlings will be held. There is also a four day Vintner's Visa program (October 10-13 from 1:00 - 4:00 PM) in which selected wineries are open for tastings. For details and to purchase tickets, visit the Vintner's Association website at www.sbcountywine.com.



2009 World of Pinot Noir Registration Now Open The Ninth Annual World of Pinot Noir will be held in Shell Beach, California, March 6 & 7, 2009. Two days of in-depth Tasting Seminars, Focus Tastings, two Gala Pinot Noir Dinners (one featuring Napa Rose chef Andrew Sutton at The Cliffs Resort and one featuring Lido chef Evan Treadwell), a Paulee Dinner at Au Bon Climat Winery, and the Saturday Featured Burgundy Tasting with the wines of Domaine Henri Gouges moderated by Allen Meadows. Tickets may be purchased for individual events. At this time there is no lodging available at the host Cliffs Resort, but there are many other hotels available close by and shuttles are provided. Always a grand event and highly recommended for pinot geeks.



A Winemaker's Take on Harvest and Ripening Guy Davis crafts superb Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs from his estate vineyard under the Davis Family Vineyards label. He is a very cerebral winemaker and I look forward to reading his newsletters (sign up at www.daviswines.com). His most recent mailing had a very clear description of grape ripening and how he views the "balance bulls-eye" point at which grapes should be picked. He said the following. "There are two types of ripening going on within the vine and grapes: (1) the grapes are getting sweeter and less tart and (2) flavor production is occurring. The sugar is made by photosynthesis of the vine and the acidity is decreasing respiration due to heat/sunlight. The flavor molecules (anthocyanins and flavonols) are being manufactured at the same time, but not always at the same rate. The key relationship is flavor to sugar - encouraging flavor to develop as quick or quicker than sugar, so you have mature flavors and layers of several flavors. That is, complexity without too much sugar since sugar means alcohol. If the vine has all the water it wants, it will keep growing and the flavor progression will be slow, although sugar is being made daily. If the vine has too little water, it will reserve energy and not start the flavor incline. The goal is to find that fine line of what the vine needs but not all that it would like. I find that point

once the grapes change color and hold it throughout the season. How? - obsessive detail to the leaf moisture, soil moisture and upcoming weather, walking the fine line and encouraging flavor. Then in the fall, making the most important decision of the year - the day to harvest - the day when the sugar, acidity and flavor are all in that optimum place - individually and to one another. I focus my sights every vintage on that "balance bulls-eye."

2009 Central Otago Pinot Noir Celebration Since its inception in 2000, this has become one of New Zealand's premier wine events. Held in Queenstown on January 30-31, 2009, the seventh Celebration will focus on a comprehensive study of the Burgundian Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée with a special tasting of Grand Cru Burgundies. Additional events include a master class focusing on sub-regional characteristics of Central Otago Pinot Noir and a Grand Tasting of 42 Central Otago wineries. For registration information, visit www.pinotcelebration.co.nz.



Winery Picnics with Wine Now Permitted in California Legislation was recently signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger allowing wine to be consumed in winery picnic areas. People have been doing this for years in ignorance of the law and now this sensible legislation will make it will be perfectly legal.

New Movie Documentary 'Merlove' The premier and New York release of this documentary film was on September 18, 2008 at Wine 2.0 New York. The movie addresses the "unwarranted" attack on Merlot featured in the 2004 movie 'Sideways.' "Merlove" was filmed by Napa Valley filmmaker Rudy McClain and includes pro-Merlot interviews with noted winemakers such as Jean Claude Berrouet of Chateau Petrus, Peter Mondavi Jr. of Charles Krug Winery and Larry Stone of Rubicon Estate. To view the trailer and check the schedule of the 'Merlove' screening tour, visit www.merlove.com.



Happenings in Anderson Valley Phillips Hill Estates is opening a tasting room in Boonville and Londer Vineyards is still searching for an appropriate tasting room site (Larry Londer still receives people in his kitchen). Three new wineries are going up at Goldeneye (12,000 cases), Jim Ball Vineyard (including a cave) and Foursight Wines. Don and Rhonda Carano bought the Lazy Creek vineyard from Josh and Mary Beth Chandler, who plan to move to Healdsburg. Christy Griffith, a winemaker at Ferrari-Carano will become the winemaker at Lazy Creek. The Lazy Creek name and operations will remain the same. According to *Wines & Vines* (9/16/2008), Navarro Vineyards is planning another vineyard and winery near Boonville.

Clos LeChance Manages Vanity Vineyards Clos Le Chance Winery, under its CK division, assists wealthy homeowners in the San Jose area plant and maintain small vineyards in their back or front yards. According to *Wine Enthusiast* (October 2008), they now manage 41 vineyards ranging in size from ¼ to 10 acres. CK management purchases and harvest the grapes which are then used in Clos Le Chance wines. Clos LaChance Winery produces premium wines including very good Pinot Noir from their facility in San Martin, California.

Wine & Heart Health Summit

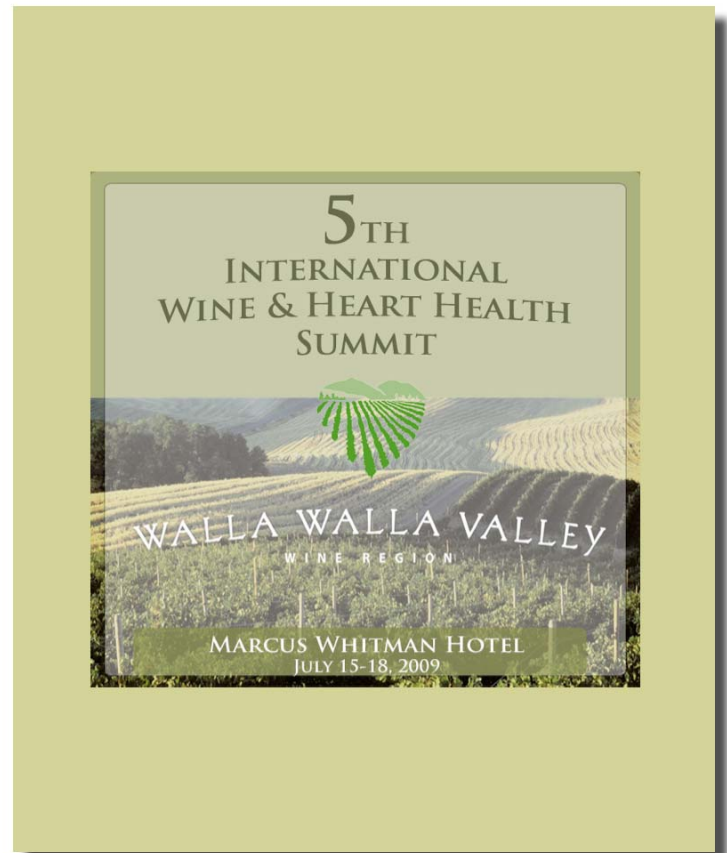
The 5th International Wine & Heart Health Summit will be held in Walla Walla, Washington April 1-4, 2009 at the historic Marcus Whitman Hotel in Walla Walla. (Note, the dates on the poster are incorrect).

There are daily scientific presentations by an international faculty of experts and active researchers in the science disciplines affected by wine, as well as local winemakers and wine celebrities. Gary Figgins, owner of Leonetti Cellar, will be the Honorary Co-Chair of the program. Featured presenters include R. Curtis Ellison, M.D., Roger Corder, M.D., and Arthur Klasky, M.D.

There will be bus tours to Walla Walla wineries, a wine tutorial for spouses, and a hosted Gala Dinner & Benefit Auction.

Tuition is \$795 (\$695 for Renaud Society members).
Marcus Whitman Hotel rates are \$140 per night.
Continuing Medical Education credits are available.

You don't have to be a doctor to attend or to enjoy this program!



Managing Alcohol

Everyone is debating hang times, sugar levels and alcohol percentages in wines from California. The current issue of the *PinotFile* lists several Pinot Noirs with alcohol percentages approaching or exceeding 15%. Vintners want to push flavor profiles and obtain maximum flavor development. To accomplish this task, grapes are left to hang long into the growing season with the result that sugar accumulation in the grapes increases markedly. High sugar, of course, translates into high alcohol in the finished wines.

California has become a leader in higher alcohol wines, primarily due to the warm climate, and the high scores that many of these wines garner from wine critics. The higher alcohol does produce mouth filling taste experiences at the expense of "hotness" which is most evident when the wines warm in the glass.

There are various technologies for reducing alcohol in wine. Vinovation, located in Sebastopol, championed the process of reverse osmosis for alcohol reduction beginning in 1992. ConeTech, with offices throughout the world, including Santa Rosa, California, introduced the Spinning Cone Column(SCC) first into California in 1991. ConeTech claims SCC technology enables precise adjustment of a wine's alcohol level, aimed at achieving the "sweet spot" (between 12 and 14% for most wines) of harmony and balance and without changing the wine's natural flavor. Cost is only a few cents per bottle.

Other options for reducing alcohol include filtering, blending with other wines, and diluting the wine with water. Many winemakers are convinced that all of these procedures sacrifice flavor and mouth feel and significantly change the structure of a wine.

Half of all California is said to undergo some type of technological alcohol reduction. Vinovation claims to have the largest consumer base with over a thousand clients, but neither Vinovation or ConeTech will disclose names of their winery customers. Alcohol adjustment is one of those things that is frequently done but no one willingly talks about it, for fear the consumer will be judgmental about the quality of the wine. There are few winemakers who openly admit to their little secret.