



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

Volume 7, Issue 21 July 8, 2009

*Pinot Noir
makes for an
Elusive Kind of
Romance*

2007 Vintage: You're The One That I Want

"The crop size was down, but we harvested beautiful, beautiful fruit this year (2007).
If someone's not making great wine from this vintage, they are in the wrong business"
Winegrower Steve Dutton

2007 was one of those exceptional vintages when the wines were stellar all over California. There were challenges for sure, as rainfall was decreased early in the season in many areas, the resulting clusters and grapes were small leading to limited yields, and rain did intervene briefly at harvest in some areas. What was special about this vintage was that even ripening was the rule and phenolic ripeness was achieved at reasonable alcohol levels.

Vintage charts abound among the wine press. In a cursory look at the web, I found several examples that rate each vintage using a 100-point scale. The different vintage charts show some variance in vintage scores but some years dating back to 1990 in California consistently stand out (all scoring 90 or above): 2007, 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001, 1999, 1997, 1995, 1994, 1991, 1992 and 1990. *Wine Spectator* provides the only vintage charts which break down the vintage according to specific regions in California producing Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley, Sonoma, Monterey, Carneros, and Santa Barbara are highlighted). Internet subscription is required to access the *Wine Spectator* charts.

Was 2007 the vintage of the decade? A look back at the vintage charts for the preceding seven vintages of the decade would not support such a claim because the 2001 and 2002 vintages received higher scores (*Wine Spectator* has yet to release its 2007 vintage score). That said, Pinot Noir viticulture and winemaking has progressed dramatically over the past 5 to 6 years, creating, if not better wines, a larger number of great wines compared to 2001 and 2002. For example, some outstanding producers featured in this issue such as Rivers-Marie (2002), De la Montanya (2003), Eric Kent Cellars (2003), Cima Collina (2004), Pali Wine Company (2005), and Foursight (2007) were not even producing Pinot Noir as recently as 2001. J Winery & Vineyards, whose Pinot Noirs are strikingly good in the 2007 vintage, made a serious commitment to Pinot Noir beginning with the 2006 vintage. Several wine regions such as Carneros and Santa Cruz Mountains have made remarkable strides over the last six vintages. I believe it is safe to say that no other vintage in this decade surpasses 2007 for breadth of quality Pinot Noir throughout California.



There are many California Pinot Noirs to recommend from the 2007 vintage and several of them are reviewed in the pages to follow. My cellar is crammed with California Pinot Noir from 2007 and I plan to buy considerably more. To hell with the recession! The 2007 vintage was more challenging in Oregon than in California, yet many adroit winemakers made excellent wines. The 2007 Oregon Pinot Noirs will be reviewed in the next issue.

A final note about the word vintage. According to *History of Wine Words*, "Although a wine's vintage is the year in which it was grown, and although the English word *age* is right there inside the word *vintage*, the etymology of *vintage* actually has nothing to do with the year of the wine or its age." Vintage literally means "harvesting of the grapes."

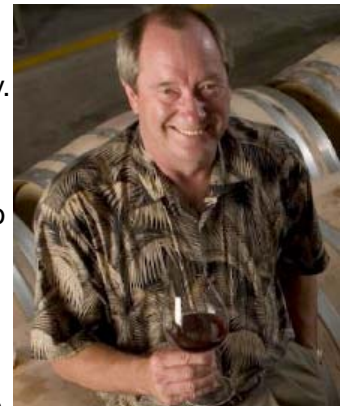
Praiseworthy 2007 Pinots from J Vineyards

The 2007 vintage marks a significant change for J Vineyards & Winery, whose widely recognizable yellow “J” logo has distinguished both J varietal and sparkling wines for over twenty years. With the 2007 vintage, J Vineyards & Winery is launching a new look to the winery’s Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines with the



introduction of a new “J Vineyards” brand and new labeling. The new “J Vineyards” brand and packaging (above) reflects the Russian River Valley which is the primary source of grapes for the winery’s Pinot Noirs and Chardonnay. The background terroir pattern on the simple and sleek labels is infused into the paper, reflecting striations in water, stone and vines, which are the important components of winemaking.

The new labels represent a new commitment to ultra-premium Pinot Noir and Chardonnay under the direction of veteran winemaker, George Bursick, who joined J Vineyards in May, 2006 after a distinguished 22-year career at Ferrari-Carano Winery. Although the 2006 vintage wines were the first fully executed vintage under Bursick’s direction, in 2007 he was able to more fully institute his innovative winemaking techniques which will continue to evolve and be refined over several vintages. Fortunately, J has the financial resources and the drive to give Bursick the freedom to acquire the latest winemaking equipment necessary to fine-tune and advance the varietal wine program.



George Bursick is driven to create Pinot Noir with elegance and balance through detailed and gentle winemaking practices. Most importantly, he is committed to create wine with supple mouthfeel and most of his winemaking techniques, which are often risky, are directed at achieving that end. His winemaking regimen, which is not defined by a recipe and is constantly evolving through experimentation, includes the following: (1) Removal of seeds to reduce immature tannins. Adequate tannin is obtainable from the skins which can be left in the fermenter longer as the skin tannins are less aggressive. Seeds are removed by the de-stemmer, the vibrating table, and special Italian-made tanks which allow easy disposal of seeds which sink to the bottom. In 2007, 40% of the seeds were removed, in 2008 65%-70%, and in 2009 90% of the seeds will be removed; (2) Long fermentations in open-top fermenters are employed resulting in softer extraction. Up to 10 days cold soak followed by 3 to 4 week fermentation and up to 10 days of maceration after dryness before pressing; (3) Use of indigenous yeasts and inoculation with yeast strains from University of Dijon that date back to the 1930s; (4) Minimal new oak aging. Bursick dislikes new oak for Pinot Noir, preferring an “oak slap” for Chardonnay. In 2008 and 2009, he is aging the Pinot Noir primarily in second-year French oak barrels previously used for Chardonnay; (5) Slight fining is done if needed and gentle filtering is made necessary by the high risk winemaking in which minimal sulfur is used.

Judy Jordan founded J in 1986 as a small *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine project at her father Tom Jordan’s winery in Alexander Valley. In a short time, J set the standard for sparkling wine in California. After moving to the old Piper-Sonoma facility in 1996 and remodeling it in 1999, the winery launched an enhanced Visitor Center experience for consumers which remains the industry standard. Today, J produces a Vintage Brut and a Late-Disgorged Vintage Brut, a Non-Vintage Brut Rosé, and a Non-Vintage J Cuvée 20 Brut. The

iconic yellow “J” will continue to identify J sparkling wines. Volume will decrease as the winery’s emphasis shifts to varietal still wines, but the sparkling wine program will maintain and even exceed its level of virtuosity.

J Vineyards & Winery now farms ten estate vineyards totaling just over 274 planted acres in the Russian River Valley. There are 35 sub-blocks, nine rootstocks, 15 clones of Pinot Noir and 3 clones of Chardonnay. Under the direction of noted viticulturist John Erbe, the emphasis is on site-specific wines of great character and sense of place. J also buys fruit from a few prestigious vineyards. A map of the vineyards is on page 4.

In late June, I sat down with Bursick and tasted through the 2007 lineup of J Vineyards Pinot Noirs. The wines are scheduled for a mid-to-late August to September 1 release. When asked about the timing of the release, Bursick replied, “Release is dictated by the aromas. Texture is always present. The wines will be tight initially due to reductive winemaking.” The wines were all decanted before my tasting but I definitely noticed some modicum of restraint initially in the wines with aromas and flavors blossoming after an hour or so in the glass as we tasted through the wines. The Russian River Valley appellation bottling is the best choice to drink now. The other Pinot Noirs are approachable but will benefit from decanting or another six months in the bottle. These are all marvelous Pinot Noirs sporting elegance, smooth textures and impeccable balance. They ooze “pinosity.” Bursick is definitely on to something and as he becomes more familiar with the idiosyncrasies of each vineyard and is able to fully institute his winemaking program, J Vineyards will surely be a reference standard not only for California sparkling wine, but also Russian River Pinot Noir.



2007 J Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 14,500 cases, \$35. A blend of 15 different vineyards from estate vineyards as well as selected growers in the Russian River Valley appellation. Includes a variety of clones, mostly Dijon, as well as Rochioli and 2A. Aged 15 months in 30% new French oak. Blended just before bottling. *This wine is the most expressive aromatically in the lineup. Very fragrant aromas of Bing cherries with an underpinning of baking spices. Cherry-driven flavors with subtle hints of brown spice, herbs and oak. Smoothly textured, vibrant and clean with impressive harmony. Very drinkable now. Quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.*



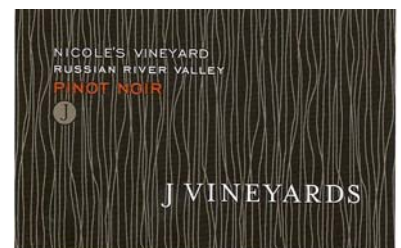
2007 J Vineyards Barrel 16 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 300 cases, \$70. This wine is composed of the 16 best barrels in the cellar sourced from J’s estate vineyards. Aged in 30% new French oak. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color. Shy but appealing scents of deep, dark fruit, herb garden and brioche. Luscious black cherry and black raspberry flavors are discreetly concentrated and have a remarkable persistence on the pleasing finish which displays an added echo of dark chocolate, savory herbs and toast. The tannins are very supple, and the mouthfeel is rich, sumptuous and velvety. About as perfect as it gets. Ridiculous now but will only get better with cellaring.*

2007 J Vineyards Nonny’s Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 350 cases, \$70. Sourced from a 70-acre vineyard adjacent River Road planted in 2000 and newly replanted in 2006 and 2007 to Dijon clones 115, 667, 777, 828 and Calera selection. The soil in this vineyard is Arbuckle Series, a reddish loam with gravel striations. Aged in 30% new French oak. *Forest floor and truffle aromas are front and center with dark fruits finding intensity with time in the glass. Earth-dusted ripe strawberry, black cherry and roasted plum flavors are lush and satisfying. The wine is caressing in the mouth with tannin so fine as to be imperceptible, and ends in a long and powerfully aromatic finish. The soil speaks loudly in this beguiling wine.*

2007 J Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 350 cases, \$70. Sourced from the southern reaches of the Sonoma Coast appellation. Aged in 30% new French oak. *An earthy wine which sports powerfully scented and flavored dark fruits that are feral and exotic in type. A hint of mint adds interest on the nose. Very smoothly textured with fine-grain tannins and the slightest hint of oak on the finish. A bright future awaits this lovely wine.*



2007 J Vineyards Nicole’s Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 1,300 cases, \$65. The fruit for this wine was harvested from J’s crown jewel hillside 42-acre vineyard planted to Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier overlooking the Russian River Valley. The soil is Arbuckle series and uplifted river material. Clones include 2A, Dijon 113, 115. Aged in 40% new French oak. *Richly scented with black cherries and ripe berries. The rich and mouth filling melange of berry fruit is supported by a tannic edge that suggests age ability. The finish goes on and on. My notes say, wow! Enough said.*



2007 J Vineyards Robert Thomas Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 400 cases, \$65. Winemakers talk about vineyards as if they have personalities and Bursick refers to Robert Thomas Vineyard as “feisty.” This 50-acre vineyard is located in a cool westerly location on Westside Road along the Russian River and is one of the last to ripen. Some parts of the vineyard never do ripen fully and are used in sparkling wine. Leaves are stripped from both sides of the vines to attempt to achieve phenolic maturity (Bursick jokes, “Kids, don’t try this at home!”). Soils are Zamora silty clay loam, dense with gravel. The clones are 114, 777, 828, Pommard, Rochioli and Swan. Aged in 40% new French oak. *Brooding and shy aromas of berry preserves, loam and mint. This wine has the most prodigious fruit and structure in the lineup, yet is not jammy. The dark red fruits are highlighted by notes of cola, tea and dark mocha. Like all the 2007 J Pinot Noirs, the texture is as satiny as a baby’s bottom. Needs time and hardy food.*



I visit many wineries in my travels along the Pinot trail, but J’s modern Visitor Center is one of the classiest I have ever met with. The Visitor Center provides several tasting experiences for visitors. When J launched its Visitor Center in 1999, it was the first to blend wine tastings with seasonal food pairings. The Signature Bar is open for tasting daily, except major holidays, 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM (\$10). The J Bubble Room experience (\$55 per person) offers sit-down service of library vintages and small production wines with a tasting menu. When weather allows, a tasting menu is also offered on the outdoor J Terrace (\$35). The J Essence Tasting (\$200 per person) includes transportation to one of J’s estate vineyards, a private vineyard tour, and an intimate seven course wine and food pairing luncheon in the Bubble Room. Reservations are required for all but tasting at the Signature Bar. Tours of J are offered daily at 11:00 AM and 2:30 PM by appointment. J Vineyards & Winery is located at 11447 Old Redwood Highway in Healdsburg. The phone is 888-JWINE-CO and the website is www.jwine.com.

Lane Tanner's Enticing Pinots

Lane Tanner, the Pinot Czarina, is a California treasure who has not received the notoriety that she deserves. She was one of the first female California winemakers to make a credible Pinot Noir in California (1984) and has demonstrated a remarkable resiliency and consistency over the past 25 years. There is nary a mention of her in books on Central Coast Pinot Noir (*Santa Barbara County Wineries, California's Central Coast, The Ultimate Winery Guide*). She works out of a small space at Central Coast Wine Services in Santa Maria Valley which is not on anyone's Pinot Noir winery travel itinerary. She doesn't own any vineyards and her "tasting room" is a closet-size space in the voluminous building at Central Coast Wine Services housing many other wineries. Fortunately, author Judy Reynolds, in her book, *Once Upon a Vine: The Secret Stories of California's Artisan Wineries*, writes about Lane (who she affectionately calls "Bette Midler in a bottle"). Reynolds says, "What do you get when you blend a wry sense of humor with pixy good looks and a yen for chemistry....In the madcap life script that Fate wrote for Lane Tanner, you get a winemaking woman who started her own brand in the earliest days of Santa Barbara Pinot Noir.....and lots of laughs."



Lane is a delightful woman whose charm is reflected in her enticing Pinot Noirs. After graduating from college with a degree in chemistry, she found herself working on the bottling line at Konocti Winery in Lake County, California. Konocti's winemaker, Bill Peese, found out she had a degree in chemistry and moved her into the winery lab. The first day in the lab, she was introduced as the new enologist to the winery's consultant, Andre Tchelischteff. The only problem was that Lane had no clue what an enologist was. Andre kept telling the winemaker, "Have Lane test this, have Lane test that." Fortunately, Andre was charmed by her spunk and her future career was born. Her encounter with Tschelischteff has led to her adopting her current moniker, "Pinot Czarina." Tschelischteff's sister was a Czarina but is now deceased, so Lane decided to carry on the name.

Lane moved to an enologist position at Firestone Winery in Santa Barbara County in 1981 and then started her eponymous label, Lane Tanner Winery, in 1984. Victor Geraci, writing in *Salud! The Rise of Santa Barbara's Wine Industry*, noted, "Lane Tanner proved that a woman could also achieve status as an independent winemaker." Lane's first Pinot Noir was released under the Hitching Post label in 1984 made from grapes from Sierra Madre Vineyard and Santa Maria Hills Vineyard. This was the house wine for the Hitching Post restaurant in Buellton made famous in the movie 'Sideways.' Her first wine under the Lane Tanner label was the 1989 vintage when she released a Pinot Noir from both Sierra Madre Vineyard and Sanford and Benedict Vineyard. She points out that these vineyards are now 100% replanted so are not the same as when she sourced them. Lane was one of the first winemakers to acquire a contract for Pinot Noir grapes from the famed Bien Nacido Vineyard, a contract that continues to the present day. Currently, she is married to Australian winemaker, Ariki (Riki) Smith (Labyrinth Wines) who handles the heavy chores in Lane's current winemaking location.

Because of her extensive experience with California Central Coast Pinot Noir, I asked her what she thought was the biggest change in California Pinot Noir in the last 25 years. Lane said the single most important change in the life of Pinot Noir winemakers was leaf pulling. "Before we started leaf pulling, Pinot Noir grapes

seldom got riper than 23° brix before the crop would be lost to mold. Even at 22° brix, mold was present. The color was always light with an almost watery look. Leaf pulling allowed us as much hang time as we wanted and the color difference in the finished wines was astounding!”

Lane producers about 1,500 cases of Pinot Noir from purchased Santa Barbara County grapes. In 2007, production was down and she made only two wines. As she says, “The crop was way small!” Yields were only one ton or less per acre resulting in wines that are “unusually thick and bolder, even with my finessful (her term) touch.” Lane is known for elegance and sensible alcohol levels. She often picks her grapes before other winemakers. That said, her Pinot Noirs are not “sissy” wines but rather Pinot Noirs of flavor, nuance and charm.

Her winemaking regimen includes de-stemming into 4’ by 4’ by 4’ open-top fermenters. Fermentation goes on with Ausmanhausen yeast over two weeks. The wine is aged 11 months in 46% new French oak barrels with the remainder being one-year-old barrels. The wine is unfinned and gently filtered (“rock and frog filtering”) for visual clarity. All wines are very low in sulfites because Lane is allergic to sulfites. Because of the small clusters and berries in 2007, the wines are concentrated and more on the dark side than is usual for Lane. The alcohols are a touch lower.

2007 Lane Tanner Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 295 cases, \$33. From N Block (Martini clone on its own rootstock planted in 1973). Back label says, “Laugh More-Flirt Often.” *Appealing intense aromas of blackberries, raspberries, plums, raisins and herbs. Tasty earth-dusted berry flavors with pepper in the background. There is a slight roasted quality to the fruit. Alluring richness, smoothly textured, with a tenacious persistence on the finish. Lane Tanner Pinot amped up a notch. Not as expressive as it will be but great cheekbones now.*



2007 Lane Tanner Julia's Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 447 cases, \$36. Sourced from block B4 (Martin Ray selection) of Julia's Vineyard which is located about 3 miles east of Bien Nacido Vineyard. The crop was low so it ripened earlier and harvest occurred about a month earlier than in 2006. Lane was the first to pick at this vineyard. Aged 11 months in 33% new French oak and 44% one-year-old barrels. The wine was not finned and was gently filtrated. *Watch out for this spiced-up mother as it will seduce you. On the extroverted nose there are lovely scents of framboises des boise and cassis liquors which draw you into the glass. The lush berry fruit is rich and opulent with well-integrated tannins and a whisper of oak. Balance is spot on. The mouthfeel is satiny and the long, powerful finish is seductively perfumed. This is a wine with considerable cleavage that is hard to say no to.*

Lane Tanner Wines are available on the website at www.lanetanner.com. There are small amounts of the 2006 Santa Barbara County and Julia's Vineyard Pinot Noirs still available as well as a limited number of library wines. Prices for the 2007 vintage are the same as for the 2006 vintage. Its a no-brainer: great Pinot at a sensible price made by a pioneering and highly respected California winemaker. The Bien Nacido bottling is the least expensive Pinot Noir from this vineyard on the market today (due to a contract that dates back to 1993). Free shipping on orders of 8-12 bottles. Phone Lane for questions or flirting: 805-929-1826.

Eric Kent Wine Cellars:

Wine as Art in Santa Rosa

Like Superman's Clark Kent, there is in reality no Eric Kent. Eric is owner Kent Humphrey's middle name and Kent is his first name. Being on the humble side, Kent just could not bear to be blatantly eponymous. He also could not imagine people in a trendy restaurant asking the sommelier for a bottle of "Humphrey" Pinot Noir. So, he inverted his first and middle names and his "nom de vin" was born.

Kent grew up in California around a family table that enjoyed wine. His college path, however, was not directed toward wine, but rather the doctorate program at University of California Berkeley in French. He soon opted out of academia and pursued a job in advertising. He started his own agency and his company grew rapidly but his youthful idealism was drained and he says, "The work nearly sucked the joy out of life." During the ten years he worked in advertising, he sampled, savored, collected and delighted in wine. When he finally broke from the advertising world, his friends and family encouraged him to seek a career in wine.

He considered attending University California Davis for winemaking training, but realized that many of the wines he most admired were made by people who had no formal training in wine. So he sought out hands-on experience. A few years later, he was offered some classy fruit from top notch vineyards and Eric Kent Wine Cellars was born. He produced 375 cases in the inaugural 2003 vintage and has since grown to 1,900 cases annually. Given his run-in with big business, he plans to stay small and lean with growth stopping at 4,000 cases. The plan for that buildup is sensibly paced and he is content to take whatever time is necessary to do it well. His wines have created a sensation from the beginning and the demand may accelerate his projected rate of growth.

Eric Kent Wine Cellars is a family affair with his wife, Colleen, an accomplished artist, working with Kent in making blending decisions and he helping her choose the individual art works that grace the bottles of Eric Kent wines. Kent's sister, Renee (pictured below with Kent), is the Director of Wholesale and Distribution. Over half of the wine is sold directly to E/K Direct Club members who receive significant discounts. Kent specializes in coastal Pinot Noir, and cool-climate Chardonnay and Syrah.

The works of art featured on the front labels are quite striking. The artwork is from deserving, but yet undiscovered talent. Each artist brings a unique vision that compliments the spirit behind the wines. The labels add another dimension to wine by creating a built-in discussion with every cork pulled. With each vintage, a portion of the wine sales is donated to help support the work of struggling artists.

Kent's winemaking regimen is traditional. He employs a 4 to 8 day cold soak. Stem inclusion is variable and will depend on the appearance and taste of the stems. Native fermentation is employed for the Chardonnays, the Pinot Noirs are frequently inoculated. Aging is carried out in 45% to 55% new French oak barrels.




I tasted the three 2007 E
disparate origins, and ea

ent wines true to their
n River Valley Pinot Noir

will be released in the fall. The 2007 Small Town Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is unfortunately sold out, but the Windsor Oaks Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is still available.

2007 Eric Kent Wine Cellars Windsor Oaks Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 352 cases, \$39 (Club Pre Release \$30.25). Second vintage from a 220-acre Russian River Valley vineyard located east of Highway 101. Planted to 18 varietals, Kent sources four Pinot Noir clones (about 25% of each) including Dijon 114, 115, 667 and 777. An early ripening site that allows for 17% whole cluster inclusion. Aged in 50% new French oak barrels. Label art is by Evan B. Harris. *Ripe, but not overripe, aromas of dark fruits, roses and brown spices. The flavors echo the aromas with an added hint of savory herbs, sassafras and raisins. A pleasing fruit-forward wine with fine-grain tannins and a refreshing finish. Approachable now and showing more pizzazz than the 2006 vintage.*



**2007 Eric Kent Wine Cellars Freestone Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 148 cases, \$48 (Club Pre Release \$39), sold out. The label says, "Freestone," marking the western Russian River location of the two vineyards that provided the grapes. After the label was printed, Kent found out "Freestone" is trademarked and had to change the name to "Small Town" which is the name of the wine on the website. This cool area is most akin to the true Sonoma Coast, with harvest coming three to five weeks later than Kent's other fruit sources and arriving in the winery at a lower brix with more natural acidity. Clones are Dijon 115, 777 with 7% Swan clone from Stiling Vineyard. Aged in 45% new French oak barrels. Label artist is Meghan Adler. Unfiltered. *This is a spectacular Pinot Noir that is packed with nuanced and layered aromas and flavors. Berry compote, black cherry cobbler, anise, herbs, forest floor all show up in a smoothly textured, beautifully balanced, full-bodied and opulent package that has a very powerful charisma. Understandably sold out.*



2007 Eric Kent Wine Cellars Stiling Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., 307 cases, fall. Pronounced "Styling," this vineyard was planted initially in 1989 with Swan clone and then interplanted with Dijon 115 clone. This wine is almost entirely Swan clone. 30% whole cluster. Aged in 55% new French oak barrels. Label art is by John Yoyogi Fortes. *The nose is quite charming and accessible featuring black cherries, raspberries and red plums. Caressing in the mouth with soft tannins and defining acidity, the flavors of dried cherries and baking spice stand out. This vintage offers more elegance and restraint than the 2006 version and is a sleek and seductive wine that is quite stylish.*



Eric Kent Wine Cellars offers wines for sale on the website at www.erickentwines.com. Sign up for the E/K Direct Club to receive significant discounts on purchases. Wines are offered in the spring and fall with the option of designing your club shipments any way you like, up to six bottles of each wine. Like the Freestone bottling above, the wines are frequently sold out through pre release to E/K Direct Club members. There are small quantities of Eric Kent wines available through retail channels and at fine restaurants (see website for locations). The phone is 707-527-9700. Details of the artists whose work appears on Eric Kent labels is offered on the website by Colleen Teitgen (Humphrey), the Curator for Eric Kent Wine Cellars. You must visit the website which is one of the most navigable and comprehensive that I have ever seen for a winery.

Lan ERIC | KENT WINE CELLARS rds

“I will never put my name on a product that does not have in it the best that is in me.”
John Deere

Landmark is not on the beaten path of the Pinot trail since it is located in Kenwood in the Sonoma Valley, and it is better known for its superb Chardonnays (Overlook, Damaris Reserve, and Lorenzo) which rival the best in California. Nevertheless, pinotphiles know that Landmark is a top choice for consistently excellent Pinot Noir as well. I have sampled many vintages of Landmark Pinot Noir but had never visited the winery to meet the owners and winemakers. While visiting Sonoma before the recent Pinot Days event, proprietor Mary Colhoun proudly welcomed me to Landmark’s beautiful landscaped visitor center and winery. I was able to sample both the current 2007 Landmark Pinot Noirs in release and 2008 wines in barrel.

Mary, and spouse Michael, follow a long family tradition of farming and agriculture. Michael's great-great-great grandfather was John Deere, inventor of the first steel plow and the founder of one of the world's largest farm equipment manufacturing companies. Michael's mother, Damaris Deere Wiman Ethridge, along with other partners founded Landmark in 1974 in Windsor, California. The partners subsequently sold the Windsor property and Damaris moved the winery to a scenic site at the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain in the Sonoma Valley in 1979. Damaris, who was John Deere's great-great granddaughter, convinced her son, Michael Deere Colhoun and his wife Mary, to move from the East coast in 1992 to take over the day-to-day operations of the winery. With no experience in the wine business, (Michael was a commercial real estate executive who grew up on a dairy farm), the Colhouns have done a remarkable job in bringing Landmark Vineyards into the upper echelon of California wineries.

The thrust of Landmark from the beginning was Chardonnay, which now makes up two-thirds of the winery's 30,000 annual case production. Landmark obtains Chardonnay grapes from about 28 different vineyards primarily located in Sonoma County with small lots coming from Monterey and Santa Barbara counties. Many of these vineyards have been under contract for years. The Pinot Noir grapes come primarily from the Sonoma Coast (Kanzler, Keller Estate, Flocchini, Gap's Crown and Armagh). A vineyard-designate Pinot Noir is sourced from the noted Solomon Hills Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley.

The current winemaker, Eric Stern, has been with Landmark for twenty years. Stimulated to pursue a career in wine after working as a wine shop manager, sommelier and salesperson for an importer and wholesale distributor of wine, he obtained a degree in enology from California State University Fresno. Stern apprenticed at Acacia and Carmenet wineries and joined Landmark as an Assistant Winemaker in 1989. In 1993, he was promoted to Winemaker and worked with consulting winemaker Helen Turley. The wines have been superb ever since. Greg Stach (pictured below next to the vintage John Deere tractor that stands at the entrance to Landmark), also has an enology degree from California State University Fresno, and is currently the assistant winemaker.



2007 Landmark Grand Detour Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 2,500 cases, \$40. Grand Detour is named for the location of John Deere's blacksmithing shop in Illinois. This wine is a blend of five Sonoma Coast vineyards. Aged in 33% new oak barrels for 10 months. *Dark ruby in color. The nose is scented with black cherries and black raspberries with a hint of dark caramel. Richly flavored, but discreetly concentrated darker fruit flavors with an underpinning of attractive earthiness. Seamless with gentle tannins and a fine nerve of acidity. Like many of the 2007 vintage Pinot Noirs from California, this wine will benefit from more time in the bottle.*



2007 Landmark Kanzler Kanzler Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 500 cases, \$65. Kanzler Vineyard is situated just west of the town of Sebastopol on a 16-acre site. The clonal mix for this wine is 54% 115, 44% 667, 3% Pommard. Each block was harvested separately and fermented individually. Only the best barrels of free-run juice were chosen for this blend. *Similar to the Grand Detour in style and flavor but with the fruit intensity ramped up significantly. Complex aromatic profile of black cherries and blackberries, black grapes, pepper and oak. A plush and creamy palate of dark fruits, dark chocolate and slight toasty oak char all wrapped in a complimentary robe of moderately firm tannins. A tenacious wine that grabs hold and persists through a long and chewy finish. If you are feeling hedonistic now, decant and serve with hardy foods.*



2007 Landmark Solomon Hills Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 120 cases, \$55. This barrel select blend consists of 67% Pommard clone and 33% Dijon 777 clone. A small percentage of whole cluster fruit was used. Aged in new and one-year-old French oak for 16 months (6 months longer than other Landmark reserve-styled Pinot Noirs). *Appealing nose of changing themes including dark red cherries and berries, spices including cardamon, and floral scents. Richly layered with spiced dark stone fruits exhibiting a lovely Pinot sweetness and a slight smoky edge. Sturdy on the palate with a soft and satiny texture and healthy tannins that need time to resolve. Satisfying now, but will improve with another 6 to 12 months in bottle.*



Landmark Vineyards wines are available through fine wine retail stores, at the winery's tasting room and on the website at www.landmarkwine.com. The comfortable tasting room is housed with the winery at 101 Adobe Canyon Road at Highway 12 in Kenwood and is open daily from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Wonderful picnic grounds are combined with views of the Sonoma Mountains, beautifully landscaped grounds for relaxing, and a bocce court for fun. A cottage on the property is available for overnight rental. The phone is 707-833-0053.



Foursight Wines

Part of the New Breed in Anderson Valley

In the past few years there has been a noticeable influx of young winemaking talent in California's Anderson Valley where the new breed is quickly bringing the sedate and sleepy valley to the forefront of California Pinot Noir. Ted Lemon of Littorai first set the bar high in Anderson Valley beginning in the mid-1990s when he began to institute viticultural practices there that would lead to a quantum leap in quality of Anderson Valley Pinot Noir. More recently, a new young cadre of well-trained and passionate winemakers are crafting magnificent wines, taking advantage of the many superbly located and managed Anderson Valley vineyards. Forget boontling, twitter and texting are this vanguard's new language. I can't help but get excited about the Pinot Noirs I have sampled over the last year from such young hounds as Jason Drew, the owner and winemaker at Drew on Mendocino Ridge, Phil Baxter, the winemaker at Baxter on Mendocino Ridge and Jim Ball Vineyards in the Anderson Valley, Jon Grant, the owner and winemaker of Couloir Wines and assistant winemaker at Turley Vineyards, Ginny Lambrix, the winemaker at Richard Berridge Wines, Kristen Barnhisel, the assistant winemaker at Handley Cellars, Bryan Harrington, the proprietor and winemaker at Harrington Wines, Brad Holstein, the winemaker at Husch Vineyards, Anthony Filiberti, Webster Marquez and David Low, owners and winemakers at Anthill Farms, Douglas Ian-Stewart, owner and winemaker at Breggo Cellars, Wells Guthrie, owner and winemaker at Copain Wines, David Rossi of Fulcrum Wines, Christine Griffith, winemaker at Lazy Creek Vineyards, and the subject of this feature article, Joseph Webb, winemaker at Foursight Wines.

Foursight Wines is a family owned boutique producer in the Anderson Valley launched in 2007 by longtime winegrowers Bill and Nancy Charles and daughter Kristy Charles and her spouse, Joseph Webb (they just married and are honeymooning in New Zealand as I write this). The Charles clan arrived in Anderson Valley in 1943 to join the regional lumbar boom. In 1950, they bought land just east of Highway 128 in Boonville, built a sawmill, and started Charles Lumbar Company. In 2001, Bill and Nancy planted the Charles Vineyard consisting of 15 acres of Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. The grapes were initially sold to Navarro Vineyards, Handley Cellars, Papapietro Perry and Schramsberg. After college, Kristy Charles moved back to the Anderson Valley with her then fiancée, Joseph Webb. Both of them were wine enthusiasts and Joseph had received a degree in wine business at Sonoma State University. He apprenticed in winemaking at Sebastiani, Landmark Vineyards and Joseph Swan Vineyards. Kristy is the Executive Director of the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association. Kristy (left) and Joseph Webb at the Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival below.



A tasting room and winery was recently completed and the grand opening was held at this year's Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival weekend. The structure was designed and built by Bill Charles from lumbar grown, harvested and milled on the Charles family ranch.




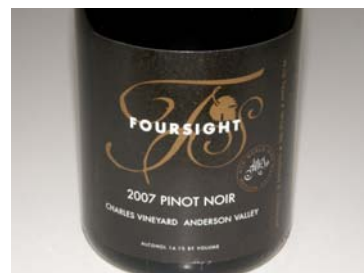
For the 2007 vintage, Foursight Wines has released three Pinot Noirs: "Zero New Oak" Charles Vineyard (all second-year and older barrels used in production), "Clone 05" Charles Vineyard (Pommard 5), and "All-In" Charles Vineyard (all-in is a poker term to describe the inclusion of all the Pinot Noir clones grown in the estate Charles Vineyard). These are all remarkable wines that will be sure to receive considerable chatter on the internet and in major wine publications. The formula for great artisan Pinot Noir is in place: warm people, stellar estate vineyard fruit, and a bright, talented young winemaker.

2007 Foursight Charles Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$46. 100% de-stemmed and fermented with wild yeast. Aged in 33% new French oak barrels. *A redder profile starring plentiful strawberry aromas with wisps of oak, violets and lavender. Very tasty dark red fruits with some underlying earthiness and forest floor. A solid wine with a fine texture and well-integrated tannins.*

2007 Foursight Charles Vineyard Clone 05 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 97 cases, \$49. Select barrels of Pommard 5, one of 4 clones in the estate Charles Vineyard. 20% whole cluster. Wild yeast fermentations. Aged in 50% new French oak. Unfined and unfiltered. *Very sexy nose initially featuring deep berry, especially raspberry, fruit, dark chocolate and cardamon spice. A substantial wine with the most intensity and tannin in the lineup. The hedonistic core of berry and plum fruit shows a touch of grilled meat and oak smoke. Still brooding and lacking the nuances that it will develop over time, but this is a well-crafted Man's wine.*



 **2007 Charles Vineyard All-In Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 407 cases, \$46. Wild yeast fermentation, unfined and unfiltered. Includes all the clones in the estate Charles Vineyard: Dijon 114, 115, 777 and Pommard 5. 20% whole cluster. Aged in 20% new, 31% two-year-old and 44% neutral French oak barrels. *Massively perfumed with exotic dark berries, dark mocha and spice. Discreetly concentrated and tasty dark fruit with hints of sassafras and oak. The berry fragrances and a citrus lift haunt the lengthy finish. A racy wine that is quite enjoyable now for its silky texture and impeccable balance. This one is kissed by an angel.*



Foursight also offers a "Zero New Oak" Charles Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$38), an estate Sauvignon Blanc (\$20), and a Late-Harvest Sauvignon Blanc (\$30). The Foursight Tasting Room is open at 14475 Highway 128, just south of Boonville, from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Friday-Monday. The wines are also sold on the website at www.foursightwines.com. Wine Club members receive significant discounts. Join the mailing list for first crack at these limited production wines. 707-895-2889.

Red Car Wine Company: Grab The Red Car to the Sonoma Coast

Red Car harkens back to memories of the now defunct Los Angeles Red Car Trolley Line. Two Los Angelinos, Mark Estrin and Carrol Kemp released their first wine in 2000. The distinctive Red Car labels and the continuing novella on the Amour Fou bottlings which told of a tragic love affair taking place in 1940s Los Angeles, caught the public's eye, and wine critics were fond of the wines from the beginning. Unfortunately, Mark Estrin passed away in May, 2005. Carroll Kemp has carried the flag since and has pushed the label to greater heights of notoriety.

The partners were not "terroir-istes" at the beginning, believing in making the best wines they could from more than one vineyard source. Their initial 2000 vintage was sourced entirely from Central Coast fruit. In 2004, Red Car Wine Company raised enough capital to buy 120 acres along the Sonoma Coast close to neighbors Marcassin, Hirsch and Blue Slide Ridge vineyards. Over the past five years, preparation and planting of the Red Car Vineyard has progressed and the vineyard will soon bear both Pinot Noir and Syrah for the first time. The partner's early experience with making Pinot Noir led them to prefer vineyard sites located on the cool climatic edge and focus on vineyard-designate wines. By 2006, Carroll had a definite palate preference for Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and by 2008, all of the fruit in Red Car wines will be from Sonoma County. Carroll is so committed to the true Sonoma Coast that he is moving the Red Car winery from its current Central Coast Wine Services location in Santa Maria to Graton in Sonoma County which is close to the Red Car Vineyard.

Paul Sequeira, a Sonoma County native, joined Red Car in 2009 as Director of Sales and Viticulture, and will be intimately involved in all facets of the winery. Photo below shows Carroll (left) and Paul at this year's World of Pinot Noir.



The Red Car style has evolved to date. The initial vintage of Pinot Noir in 2002 was made like their Syrah and was quite popular with Parker who prefers bigger, fruitier Pinot Noirs. The focus now is just the reverse with the Syrahs being made more like Pinot Noirs and the Pinot Noirs taking on less extraction and emphasizing tension. The goal now is to fuse the contrasting forces of tension in wine encompassing alcohol, acid, tannin and fruit so they coexist in harmony. As Carroll notes, "Wines devoid of tension lack a center - that point at which contrasting elements meet. This is often perceived as a lack of complexity. Though many elements may be present, their sum tastes "flat," like a painting without a focal point.....A wine without tension is neither interesting nor balanced, which may indeed be true of life itself." Red Car is committed to quality and is shifting over to all 4-year air-dried French oak in their barrel program. The wines are neither fined nor filtered.

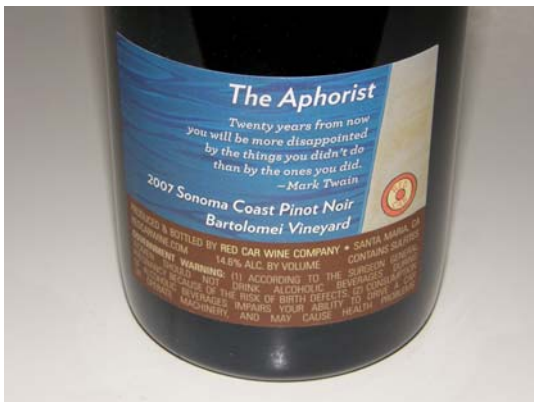
On my way to the 2009 World of Pinot Noir, I stopped at Central Coast Wine Services to taste the 2007 Red Car Pinot Noirs and the 2008 Pinot Noir components from barrel with Carroll and Paul. I also tasted the 2007 Heaven and Earth and 2007 Aphorist several weeks later at home. The wines are still concentrated by Pinot Noir standards, but they are now more interesting, more focused, less extracted and better balanced compared to previous vintages. The 2007 Pinot Noirs were picked at an average 24° brix, the 2008 grapes even lower at 23.5° to 23.8° brix. There is no watering back of alcohol levels. Since I tasted in March, 2009, the Red Car Aphorist and Heaven and Earth Pinot Noirs have receiving very high scores from the wine press and have been lauded in multiple publications. As good as the 2007 wines are, the 2008 vintage wines may be even better, in part due to increasing familiarity with the vineyard sources and ongoing changes in the winemaking regimen.

2007 Red Car Trolley Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 733 cases, \$45. Sourced from three Sonoma Coast vineyards: Zio Tony (60%), La Boheme (25%) in Occidental and Bartolomei (15%) in Forestville. Aged in 57% new French oak barrels. *A darkly fruited wine with aromas of black grapes and berries with a touch of smoke, and deep flavors of black raspberries with an underpinning of oak. Silky mouth feel, complimentary lift of acidity, and a pleasing finish.*

2007 Red Car Heaven & Earth La Boheme Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 350 cases, \$54. Second single vineyard designated Pinot Noir and first from the La Boheme Vineyard which lies just outside Occidental. It is a Red car monopole that is farmed with Ulises Valdez. The Calera clone dominates the blend. *Weighty scents of blackberries, plums, anise, barnyard and a whiff of alcohol. Slightly confected black raspberry fruit flavor with a wisp of earth, black tea and oak. Luxurious and comforting in the mouth, wrapping the tongue in fruit, and ending in a bright and lingering finish that leaves a touch of heat in its wake. A bear of a wine that is a hedonist's delight.*



2007 Red Car The Aphorist Bartolomei Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 300 cases, \$54. The 7-acre Bartolomei Vineyard is planted to 3 clones including Jackson 16, 113 and 777. It is a Red Car monopole farmed with Ulises Valdez. *Lovely demure nose composed of berries and cherries with pleasing hints of hay, chalk, mocha and spice. Packed with earth-kissed dark red raspberry cola with a floral underpinning. Flat-out delicious. The tannins are well-managed, and there is a good grip on the lively and persistent finish which leaves a hint of alcohol behind. Very smoothly textured and a wine that demands contemplation.*



2008 Red Car Bartolomei Vineyard Blocks 1 & 2 Pinot Noir (barrel sample). Clones are 113 and Jackson 16. *Very tasty red and black berries and plum with a cola accent. Smoothly textured with a solid acid spine.*

2008 Red Car Bartolomei Vineyard Blocks 2 & 3 Pinot Noir (barrel sample). Clones are 777 and Jackson 16. *Darkly fruited with more roundness and softness than blocks 1 & 2. Very smooth, aromatic with a refreshing finish. Love this.*

2008 Red Car La Boheme Vineyard Calera Clone Pinot Noir (no stems, barrel sample). *Aromas of fresh plums, dark chocolate, smoke and a hint of leaves. Bright and fresh dark stone fruits in the mouth.*

2008 Red Car La Boheme Vineyard Calera Clone Pinot Noir (20% stems, barrel sample). *Slightly darker in color. More purity of fruit in the nose and in the mouth with more spice. Rounder with slightly more tannin and a longer finish. Definitely prefer this over the stem-free sample. Very educational comparison.*

Platt Vineyard is a new source of Pinot Noir for Red Car and no Red Car wine has been released from this vineyard. The vineyard consists of 20 acres that will be sourced by Red Car, Scherrer and Littorai. All the planted Chardonnay goes to Ramey. A very cold site between Freestone and Bodega, west of the new Kistler vineyards at the extreme climatic edge of viticulture. Unfortunately, the owner who farmed this vineyard, Lew Platt, passed away before any wine was released from this vineyard.

2008 Red Car Platt Vineyard Calera Clone (no stems, barrel sample). 13.48% alc.. *Really attractive flavors of juicy dark Pinot fruits with an appealing earthiness, restrained tannins and a very silky texture.*

2008 Red Car Platt Vineyard 828 Clone (30% new oak, barrel sample). 14.03% alc.. *Somewhat awkward now. Very fruity - "grapey." Minimal tannins. Difficult to evaluate presently.*

Campbell Ranch Vineyard is located in Annapolis on the true Sonoma Coast. Kemp showed me the results of an experiment with 2008 fruit from this vineyard. The grapes were fermented together using free run juice, then the wine was put into two different barrel regimens: 3-year air-dried French oak and 4-year air-dried French oak (100% new). The wine raised in 3-year air-dried barrels had more char in the aromas and flavors. The wine raised in 4-year air-dried French oak had some char but the dark fruit showed through much better with a sweeter mid-palate. Carroll finds that the smoke and char influences from the 4-year air-dried barrels tend to evolve to an attractive spice quality over time. The findings have led Carroll to shift the barrel aging program to 4-year air-dried barrels.

The point to be gleaned from tasting the 2008 barrel samples is that winemakers like Kemp are continually trying to perfect their craft and improve their wines. The ongoing experimentation in wineries is necessary to refine the style of Pinot Noir that embodies the winemaker's goals. In this regard, Kemp has acknowledged the continuing evolution of the Red Car style and the resulting wines have improved through trial and error with each succeeding vintage.

To get on the Red Car, join the mailing list at www.redcarwine.com. The wines are highly allocated. Box Car Pinot Noir (\$28), Rosé, Syrah and Roussanne complete the portfolio. 213-229-2800.

De La Montanya: So Many Choices

Dennis De La Montanya found his namesake winery in 2003 and currently farms over 200 acres of vineyards in Sonoma and Lake County. The stylish barn-inspired tasting room and winery is located three miles from the town of Healdsburg, just off Westside Road on Foreman Lane (halfway between Armida and Twomey). The 2007 vintage is the fourth I have tasted from De La Montanya and I often taste each vintage from barrel, shortly after bottling and several months after release. De La Montanya oversees the winemaking team of Tami Collins (sister of Dennis's spouse, Tina) and consultant Michael Loykasek. For a small winery (production is 4,500 cases annually), De La Montanya produces an astonishing number of different white and red wines (at least 30) under the De La Montanya Estate, Felta Creek and Flying Rooster Red labels from the tried-and-true (Chardonnay, Fume Blanc, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon) to the unusual (Pinot Meunier, Tempranillo). There are wines at every price point. Adding spice to the lineup is a series of "Pin Up" wines featuring attractive women in pin up poses on the front label that are sold at the winery. Special charity bottlings are offered in conjunction with rock legends Journey and Eddie Money.

The Pinot Noirs are sourced primarily from three vineyards: Flying Rooster Ranch in the Petaluma area of the Sonoma Coast, Tina's Vineyard in the Russian River Valley and Christine's Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast. An ultra-premium Pinot Noir, Chanconne, is bottled under the De La Cain label and is a collaboration between De La Montanya and noted Aussie winemaker Daryl Groom. The Pinot Noirs have been consistent winners in the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition and the Sonoma Harvest Fair Wine Competition. At the 2009 Pig and Pinot event in Healdsburg, the 2006 De La Montanya Reserve Pinot Noir was the Pinot Cup Runner Up in a blind tasting of 50 acclaimed Pinot Noirs.

Just before Pinot Days I stopped in at De La Montanya to taste the 2007 lineup of Pinot Noirs. The style is understated and elegant with increasing fruit intensity as one progresses from Tina's Vineyard to the Reserve and Chanconne. De La Montanya describes 2007 as a challenging year but the wines are very impressive.

2007 Felta Creek Pinot Squared Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 74 cases, \$32. A unique combination of 70% Pinot Noir and 30% Pinot Meunier. *A fruity nose leads to slightly tart flavors of red cherries, herbs and leaf. Light in weight and a decent quaffer.*



2007 Felta Creek Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 150 cases, \$24. Sourced from Flying Rooster Ranch and Marg's Vineyard. *A lightly weighted wine that is true to the varietal with dark red fruits supported by a sidecar of oak and good acidity. The silky texture makes for easy drinking. Excellent value in a Pinot Noir for the everyday man. Gold Medal at the 2009 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition in its class.*

2007 De La Montanya Tina's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$40. Pommard clone. *Very fragrant nose of Bing cherries and baking spices. Generous sweet Pinot flavors on the mid-palate focused on cherries. Very harmonious with svelte tannins and a good grip of acidity. Always the most finesse in the lineup, this is a wine of slender grace.*

2007 De La Montanya Christine's Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$45. Dijon clones. *Darker fruit and more intensity than the Tina's with tasty notes of cola, savory herbs and blueberries. Soft and smooth in the mouth with a finish that goes on and on.*



2007 De La Montanya Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 50 cases, \$50. This wine received 3 more months of barrel age. Composed primarily of fruit from Tina's Vineyard with some Ridgeway Vineyard added in. Only two barrels, 100% new French oak. *Masses of perfumed fruit on the nose with a sappy aromatic core that is plush but retains a pleasing elegance. Supple tannins, deft touch of oak and lively acidity. The berry fruit fragrance returns to haunt the memorable finish.*

2007 De La Cain Chanconne Sonoma County Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 75 cases, \$50. Chanconne means slow dance in French. Sourced from 3 vineyards. *Aromas of super ripe fruit including roasted plum and black raspberries, with hints of maple syrup and cigar box. Explosion of intense, ripe dark fruit attacks the mid-palate with undertones of black tea and sassafras. Smoothly textured with modest tannins and admirable balance. A big-boned wine for hedonists that veers to the super ripe side.*





2007 Flying Rooster Red Sonoma Coast 14.2% alc., \$22. A blend of Pinot Noir (75%) and Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petite Verdot. *Rich and plush with hardy fruit, a nice kiss of oak and some persistence on the finish. Not for Pinot Noir purists, but a great inexpensive summer barbecue wine.*

Dennis loves to taste me on some of his other varietal wines. The **2007 De La Montanya '1776' Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel** is the most popular wine in his lineup. With 17.76% alcohol and 1% residual sugar, it offers a huge jammy drinking experience with well-spiced fruit dosed with pepper. I much preferred the **2007 De La Montanya Reserve Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel** (\$45) with 16.5% alcohol and 0.5% residual sugar that is better balanced, more modest in intensity and offering classic Zinfandel black grape flavors with a touch of pepper.

I recently tasted two older vintages of De La Montanya Pinot Noir from Tina's Vineyard. The wines are holding up beautifully.

2004 De La Montanya Tina's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 75% Pommard, 25% Dijon clones. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately light garnet color. Alluring aromas of cherries, baking spice and oak. Sweet-fruited palate of strawberries, cherries and pomegranate with bright acidity. A touch richer than the 2005 vintage with more fruit and less spice. A nice package with admirable finesse.*



2005 De La Montanya Tina's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$32. *Shy perfume of red cherries and Provencal herbs. Nicely composed flavors of tart cherries, strawberries, baking spice, cookie dough and herbs. The tannins are very supple and the finish has a good lift of acidity. A demure wine with considerable charm that is aging gracefully.*



The De La Montanya tasting room is open Friday-Sunday 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM and other days by appointment. The wines are sold through the tasting room, on the website, and through the winery's wine clubs which offer significant discounts. The winery is a soothing place to hang out with a bocce ball court and picnic area shaded by mature apple trees. An adjacent lodging known as the "Little Yellow Cottage," has all the comforts of home and overlooks the Felta Creek Vineyard on the property. It is only a 10 minute drive to Healdsburg and bicycling distance to many Westside Road wineries. Check the website at www.dlmwine.com to order wines and to check availability of the cottage. The De La Montanya crew below.



Rivers-Marie: Show Stopper Pinot Noir

Today was remarkable and one that I will remember a long time. I was writing this issue of the PinotFile in the morning and took a break to taste Pinot Noir. The lineup included the 2007 Rivers-Marie Pinot Noirs from the Sonoma Coast. As I began to taste, I realized I was experiencing some very special wines. I sat quietly for many minutes, stunned by the wines in front of me, desperately thinking about who I could share these wines with. I called in my son, Dane, who is off to the Russian River Valley soon to work as a harvest intern and had him taste the wines. His palate is inexperienced and more beer oriented but the wines evoked a big smile from him. I called Jay Selman, a drinking buddy from Grape Radio, and he dropped everything he was doing and came to the house. Shortly thereafter my wife came home and we all sat around the kitchen table tasting these unbelievable Pinot Noirs. Jay is a hard guy to impress but he was mesmerized, draining all five glasses I had poured for him to taste. My wife loves wine but never makes too many comments. This day she raved about the wines. We passed most of the afternoon, sipping Rivers-Marie Pinots, and talking about everything from politics to barbecue. It was one of those magical days where wine was the focus that brought good friends and family together to celebrate their good fortune. To Thomas Brown, winemaker for Rivers-Marie, we will be forever grateful.

Thomas Rivers Brown and his wife Genevieve Marie Walsh have quietly developed one of California's most cherished Pinot Noir labels. When Brown arrived in California in 1996 from college, he wanted to get into the wine business, but had no leads or connections. He began knocking on doors and was finally hired by Aaron Jordan at Turley. This was to become a fortuitous hire when in 1999 Jordan introduced Brown to Scott and Joan Zeller, the owners of the 6-acre Summa Vineyard that is located in the Occidental region of the true Sonoma Coast. Early on (2002 was the first Rivers-Marie Pinot Noir release), the Summa Vineyard was the only source of Pinot Noir for Brown, but eventually led to other grape acquisitions in the area.

Today, Rivers-Marie produces very small lots of Pinot Noir from three vineyard sources in the true Sonoma Coast, specifically the Occidental-Freestone area. Besides Summa Vineyard, grapes are sourced from the Occidental Ridge Vineyard owned by Richard and Darla Radcliffe which debuted in 2005, and the Willow Creek Vineyard owned by Raleigh and Patricia Wilson-Juckett, which debuted in 2006. Total production for Rivers-Marie in 2007 was 650 cases and in 2008 1,200 cases. It is no wonder that here are 4,000 people on the waiting list hopelessly biding their time for a spot on the mailing list. Managing allocations is more difficult for Brown than crafting the wines!

The Rivers-Marie 2007 Pinot Noirs were previously reviewed in July 2008 when they were quite young just before bottling (see wine reviews under Rivers-Marie).



2007 Rivers-Marie Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 225 cases, \$25. Sourced from clone 667 from Occidental Ridge, the youngest block of Summa Vineyard and three barrels of Willow Creek Vineyard that didn't make the vineyard cut. Aged in 25% new French oak. *Very pretty aromas of red and black cherries, wildflowers and cardamon spice. Tasty potpourri of layered fruits including black cherries, black raspberries, plums and pomegranate with hints of oak and earth. A lift of acidity on the moderately persistent finish makes for easy drinkability. A good wine in its own right that would compete with many wines priced significantly higher, but outclassed by the other wines in the Rivers-Marie lineup. Drinkable now.*



2007 Rivers-Marie Willow Creek Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 84 cases, \$40. From a 2-acre vineyard planted to Dijon clone 777. Aged in 33% new French oak. *Deep reddish-purple color. Very attractive scents of black fruits, sandalwood and spices. A juicy Pinot Noir with vivid, fresh black cherry, cranberry and raspberry fruits. Rich but not cloying with a smooth texture, a good acid spine and soft tannins. Still seems a bit withdrawn and will benefit from decanting if drunk now.*



2007 Rivers-Marie Occidental Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 180 cases, \$45. Clones 115 and 777. Aged in 40% new French oak. *Complex aromatic profile of dark stone fruits, crushed berries, sage, green garden and smoke. Rich and perfectly ripe black raspberry fruit with an underpinning of earth, oak and orange peel.*

Thick and robust, yet perfectly balanced with complimentary tannins and acidity. The aromatic and fruity finish is haunting. A thoroughbred that challenges the Summa Old Vines for superiority.



2007 Rivers-Marie Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

13.2% alc., 120 cases, \$45. Aged in 60% new French oak. *A wowzer nose featuring flamboyant aromas of cherries and berries enhanced with subtle smoky oak. Beautiful core of cherry and berry fruits with hints of pine tar, earth and cola. Packed with flavor yet nimble and harmonious. Smooth in texture with a hint of citric peel on the pleasing finish. Accessible now but will reward patience. A sixty-minute wine: rock 'em, roll 'em, all night long.*



2007 Rivers-Marie Summa Old Vines Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., 100 cases, \$60. Aged in 100% new French oak. *The nose is similar to the regular Summa bottling but with a magical and penetrating Asian spice scent that smells like the most erotic pheromone in the world.*

Unbelievably delicious sappy cherry and berry fruit with wisps of saffrafrs, cola, and exotic spices. The velvety texture is enough to bring you to your knees. An incredible wine that defies adequate description. Suffice it to say that this is a winegasm - one of those Pinot Noirs with such a powerful charisma, that it drives men to do practically anything to get another bottle.



Rivers-Marie has not achieved the cult status accorded to California labels like Littorai, Marcassin, Kistler, Kosta Browne and Sea Smoke, but no one in California is making more striking, more perfectly balanced and age worthy Pinot Noirs than Rivers-Marie. Unfortunately, because of the tiny production, few get the opportunity to taste the Rivers-Marie Pinot Noirs. A shame really, for they represent the incredible potential that California, and in particular, the Sonoma Coast, has for Pinot Noir. Trade in your BMW, cancel your season subscription to the symphony, cancel your wife's Nordstrom credit card, give up your country club membership and buy some Rivers-Marie Pinot Noir. The prices on the secondary market are steep (try www.snooth.com for sources), but you will never regret the investment.

Rivers-Marie Pinot Noirs are sold through an allocated mailing list with a large list of wine lovers eager to join the mailing list. Your best bet is to search the secondary market. Because of the artisan nature of the winery, production will never be large to satisfy the eager audience. 707-225-7122. The website is www.riversmarie.com.

Pali Wine Co.

Spans the Entire Northwest Pinot Trail

A group of twenty-one wine aficionados and coworkers who live in the Pacific Palisades suburb of Los Angeles (hence the name "Pali" founded Pali Wine Company in 2005 in Lompoc, California. The inspiration for the winery came primarily from Brian Loring at Loring Wine Company but also from people like Andrew Vingiello (A.P. Vin), Peter Cargasacchi (Cargasacchi), Ed Kurtzman (August West, Roar, Freeman, Sandler), Michael Browne (Kosta Browne) and Adam Lee (Siduri). This winery has been an ambitious effort, now sourcing Pinot Noir from sites extending from the Santa Rita Hills in the south of California to vineyards in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Ten different vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs and three appellation blend Pinot Noirs are produced in a new state of the art winery in Lompoc that was completed in time for the 2007 vintage. This winery is the first building constructed in Lompoc to be built specifically as a winery. Total production in 2007 was 3,000 cases including a Chardonnay from Shea Vineyard in Oregon, a Rosé from California and Oregon Pinot Noir and California Grenache and a Boer Family Vineyard Chalone Grenache.

The initial vintages including 2007 were crafted by Brian Loring, who vinifies his own Pinot Noirs under the Loring Wine Company label in the same winemaking facility. The current winemaker is Kenneth Juhasz who joined Pali Wine Co. in 2008 and brings extensive Pinot Noir experience from places as diverse as New Zealand, the Willamette Valley of Oregon, Carneros in the Napa Valley and Sonoma's Russian River Valley. When asked about his personal style, Juhasz says, "Something I love about great wines, and that I look for in all wines is that masculine/feminine balance. Creating wines with finesse, acid, perfume and elegance, yet balanced with that masculine structure is something I find myself doing intuitively in everything that I make." The assistant winemaker who oversees all aspects of winemaking at the winery's Lompoc production facility is Aaron Walker. Pali sends consultants to check on the scattered vineyards throughout California and Oregon to work with the growers in monitoring the grapes.

In 2007, Pali introduced a "Cuvée Program" that includes three appellation blends: "Huntington" from Santa Barbara County, "Bluffs" from the Russian River Valley and "Alphabets" from the Willamette Valley. These wines are built using components of each vineyard source and offer the consumer a value-priced pleasing Pinot Noir that reflects the character of the appellation. The vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs represent a selection of the most superior barrels. All wines except the Sunset Rosé are bottled with screw caps.

I recently tasted through many of the 2007 Pali Wine Co. wines. I was impressed most by the Russian River Valley wines in which the fruit seemed to jump out. The smooth and lush textures of all the wines was impressive and the moderate alcohols laudable. All wines exhibited moderately deep garnet color. The wines are bottled under screw cap which is a sensible trend that is slowing making inroads in California and Oregon. I did not taste the Huntington (sold out) and Alphabets blends, also priced at \$19.

2007 Pali Wine Co. Bluffs Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 500 cases, \$19, released Nov., 2008. Aged for 10 months in 50% new French oak. *Restrained aromatic melange of cherries and berries with an oak overlay. Lighter weighted wine featuring flavors of black cherries, cola, spice and oak, with mild dry tannins and a healthy acid spine. A Wednesday night Pinot.*

2007 Pali Wine Co. Keefer Ranch Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 289 cases, \$50, released spring 2009. Clones 777 and Pommard 4. Aged 10 months in 50% new French oak. *The nose starts out earthy and oaky but evolves nicely in the glass revealing hi-tone Bing cherry and raspberry fruit with an oak underpinning. Crisp flavors of dark red cherries and berries with an earthy bent. Smoothly textured and finishing with tangy acidity and bright fruit. The pedigree of the vineyard shows through.*



2007 Pali Wine Co. Thorn Ridge Ranch Vineyard Sonoma Coast

Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 180 cases, \$60, released November 2008. This 27-acre vineyard is farmed by Ted and Kathy Klopp and is located in the hills southwest of Sebastopol. The Goldridge soil has greater clay content than is typical leading to better water retention and allowing minimal or no irrigation of parts of the vineyard. The vineyard clones are

115, 667, 777, Pommard and Swan. This wine contains clones 115 and 777.

Terrific nose displaying bright aromas of dark cherries and berries, cola and a hint of summer herbs. Tasty mouthful of dark cherries, black raspberries, sassafras, and a hint of earthiness, oak and white pepper. Supple in the mouth with cleansing acidity on the persistent finish and impeccable balance. A gregarious Pinot that really delivers the goods.



2007 Pali Wine Co. Durrell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 240 cases, \$50, released November 2008. The vineyard was first planted in 1979 by Ed Durrell and his vineyard manager Steve Hill. It is located in the southwestern foothills of Sonoma Valley. Today, the vineyard is owned by Bill and Ellie Price, but still managed by Steve Hill and his son Ned. Today the vineyard comprises 180 acres planted primarily to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Clones are 115, 667 and Pommard 5. *Scents of darker fruits with notes of oak char and cigar. Lush, chewy and potent fresh plum and blackberry fruit is front and center with an undertow of oak. The supple texture is appealing but this wine lacks nuance at present.*

2007 Pali Wine Co. Inman Olivet Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

13.6% alc., 212 cases, \$50, released spring 2009. Formerly the Olivet Grange Vineyard, this 7.2-acre vineyard was planted in 2000 and is farmed organically by owner Kathleen Inman. The clones are 114, 115, 667 and 777. *Bright aromas of black cherries, strawberries, cola and oak. Tasty and tangy black cherry fruit jumps out flanked by flavors of pomegranates, cherry cola, savory herbs, and oak char. The flamboyant tannins will integrate with more time in the bottle. A charming wine that holds your interest.*



2007 Pali Wine Co. Cargasacchi Jalama Vineyard Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 100 cases, \$50, released November 2008. From a 16-acre vineyard planted in 1999 to clone 115 and farmed by owner Peter Cargasacchi. *Nuanced nose sporting scents of berry compote, oak spice, roasted nuts, vitamins and a hint of alcohol. Concentrated dark berry flavors with an underbelly of forest floor, minerals, oak, pepper and citrus. Smooth and silky with a good cut of acid on the finish. Quite tasty.*

2007 Pali Wine Co. Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir

14.5% alc., 110 cases, \$50, released November 2008. Clones 667 and Pommard 4. *Alive with scents of mushu plum sauce, blueberries, cherries and olives. Multi faceted fruits have a rich, glass-filling presence. A hint of coffee and pepper adds interest. As is typical for this vineyard, plenty of tannin is noted, but the tannin is refined and velvety creating a sensual mouthfeel. The wine was even better the next day when re-tasted from a previously open and re-corked bottle. This Pinot is a real turn-on and one to spend the night with.*



2007 Pali Wine Co. Turner Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 120 cases, \$50, released spring 2009. Turner Vineyard is located between Melville and Babcock vineyards just east of Clos Pepe Vineyard. The vineyard is owned by Dennis Turner and was planted by and is farmed by Ryan Carr. There are 15 acres of Pinot Noir with some Syrah and Pinot Gris. Clones are 114, 667 and 777. *Restrained and brooding earth-kissed black berry fruits with an underpinning of beef jerky and citrus. This is the Big Boy in the lineup, with an intense fruit core that saturates the palate. Despite its heft, the texture is satiny and the prodigious fruit is brought into focus by balancing t n' a. Closed and unrewarding now, but with the structure and tannin edge to suggest age ability.*

2007 Pali Wine Co. Boer Family Vineyard Chalone Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 220 cases, \$50, released November 2008. This 4.5-acre vineyard is farmed by Carrie and Richard Boer. Richard is the current vineyard manager at Chalone. The Boer Family Vineyard was originally named the A-Frame Vineyard and was owned by Phil Woodward, one of the original founders of Chalone Vineyard, and was planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. The vineyard was grafted over to Pinot Noir in 2006 using bud wood from favored blocks at Chalone Vineyard.

The clones are 114, 115, 667 and Pommard 4. All the Pinot Noir fruit from this vineyard is consigned to Pali Wine Co.. *Complex aromatic profile of dark cherries, herbs, char and forest floor. The red and black fruit is super ripe showing flavors of raisins, brown spice and root beer, but stopping short of a port, stewed taste. Flamboyant tannins should resolve with more time in the bottle, but this will always be a ripely flavored wine.*

2007 Pali Wine Co. Momtazi Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 180 cases, \$50, released November 2008. A biodynamically farmed 220-acre vineyard located in the McMinnville sub-AVA of the Willamette Valley. Owned and farmed by Moe and Flora Momtazi. Clones are 113, 114, 115. *This wine has deep color but is lightly flavored. The nose offers aromas of black cherries, strawberries, briar and oak. The sweet dark fruit flavors are juicy and earthy but a bit dilute. An elegant style with supple tannins and a smooth texture.*

Pali Wine Company wines are sold primarily through a mailing list at www.paliwineco.com. A tasting room at 1036 W. Aviation Drive in Lompoc is open Thursday-Saturday from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM and other days by appointment. 805-736-7200. The excellent rosé is reviewed later in this issue.

More Sips of 2007 California Pinot Noir


Ken Dunkley, the owner and winemaker at Seawind Wines, began making wine in 1976 as a University California Davis student studying food microbiology. Fermentation became Dunkley's passion and has been his personal and professional interest for 30 years. He started Seawind Wines in 2006 to craft premium, single-vineyard Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. He sources fruit from vineyards in cool coastal valleys and makes his wines as Crushpad in San Francisco in collaboration with recognized winemakers. His wines are available online at www.seawindwines.com.

2007 Seawind Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 75 cases, \$44. Sourced from older vines, Martini clone. 100% de-stemmed. Fermented in small open-top fermenters with natural and inoculated yeast. Aged 10 months in 33% new French oak. *Dark ruby color. Aromas of black cherries and toasted brioche. Rich and full palate of berries and plums with an earthy undertone. Fruit-driven and linear with supple tannins and a clean finish.*

2007 Seawind Split Rock Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$44. *Dark ruby color. Primarily dark fruits are featured, in particular black raspberries. The bright fruit is complimented by notes of cardamon spice, oak, smoke and citrus. The tannins are corralled, the texture is quite silky and the lively acidity makes for a refreshing drink.*



Black Ridge Vineyards is a boutique 1,200 case winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains just outside of Los Gatos, California specializing in Pinot Noir, Viognier and a Bordeaux-style blend. All wines are 100% estate grown from the 22 acres of vines and range from 50 case to 500 case production volumes. Winemaker Bill Brousseau crafts the wines at Testarossa Vineyards in Los Gatos.

 **2007 Black Ridge Vineyards Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., 198 cases, \$39. *Very complex aromas of black cherries, kid glove, pine forest, green garden, grassland and oak char. Delicious and crunchy dark berry fruit set off by bright acidity. Deeply flavored but not weighty, with deft use of oak, and a finish that goes on and on. A Pinot lover's cup of tea.*



Cima Collina is a small producer of hand-crafted, small lot wines sourcing grapes from the winery's estate vineyard at Hilltop Ranch in Carmel Valley and family owned vineyards in Monterey County. Founded in 2004, the talented winemaker since the winery's founding has been Annette Hoff who writes the award-winning Cima Collina Blog at www.cimacollina.com. The Tondre Grapefield Pinot Noir is my favorite Cima Collina wine and a star from the Santa Lucia Highlands.

Cima Collina



2007 Cima Collina Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir

13.1% alc., 216 cases, \$48, released May 2009. Clones are a blend of one-third each Pommard, Dijon 115 and 667. Fermented in small, open-top bins that were punched down two to three times daily. Pressed off into oak barrels of which 40% were new and aged 11 months before bottling. *Very dark reddish-purple color. The nose is penetrating and intoxicating. Haunting scents of ripe black raspberries and blackberries, exotic woods and musk.*

Luscious dark fruits are plush and deeply flavored with a floral undertone that I find very appealing. Harmonious in every way with bright acidity, ripe, soft tannins and a vibrant and refreshing finish. A memorable wine that gets its hooks into you and won't let go.



Halleck Vineyard is a family affair, founded by Ross and Jennifer Halleck. The Hallecks planted their family estate one-acre vineyard in 1993 with the intention of setting aside profits from this vineyard for their three sons' college educations. The Hallecks also source Pinot Noir from well-farmed vineyards in the western Russian River Valley. They produce three vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs and a Pinot Noir blend from the three vineyards called Three Sons Cuvee. Rick Davis (Londer, Calstar) is the winemaker. Production is 1,500 cases per year sold primarily through a mailing list at www.halleckvineyard.com.

2007 Halleck Vineyard The Farm Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$55. 100% de-stemmed, 5-day cold soak, whole berry fermentation in 5-ton fermentation tanks for 12 days, aged 9 months in 30% new French oak. Clone 777. *Interesting aromas of dark red fruits, rose bush, prickly pear, oak char and a little funk. A dark fruit-driven wine with sides of herbs and oak. There is bright acidity on the finish which falls off rapidly. This wine just doesn't do much for me and I get the impression that it has not completely come together inviting a revisit in 6 months.*

2007 Halleck Vineyard Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., \$55. 100% de-stemmed. 5-day cold soak, whole berry fermentation in 5-ton fermentation tanks. Aged 10 months in 30% new French oak. Clones 115 and 777. *Moderately light garnet color. Perfume of dark red cherries and plums accented with Provencal herbs and oak vanillin with a whiff of alcohol. Discreetly concentrated and tasty dark red Pinot fruits with accents of cola and brown spice. Velvety in the mouth with a fruity and pleasing finish.*



Coho is a partnership between Brooks Painter and Gary Lipp who together have almost fifty years experience working for California wineries. The logo embodies the Coho salmon which reflects the owner's commitment to sustaining our habitats and species that share it. Founded in 2002, the 2006 and 2007 vintages were the first that I had sampled and I found the Pinot Noirs very likable and sensible priced. The website is www.cohowines.com.



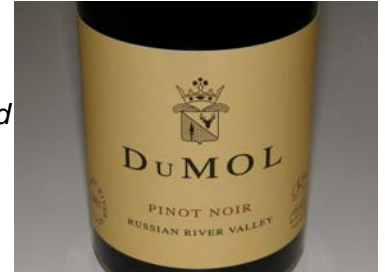
2007 Coho Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 357 cases, \$33. *Confected red fruits and smoke on the nose. Moderately rich core of Bing cherries with a hint of candied sweet character. Leaf and oak flavors add complexity. Admirable elegance, smoothly textured and perfect balance with some persistence on the finish.*



DuMOL was launched in 1996 by partners Michael Verlander and Kerry Murphy. The wines have been consistently stellar and include Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah and Viognier. The partners believe in blending and do not produce a vineyard-designate Pinot Noir. Most of the Pinot Noir grapes are sourced from the Green Valley appellation where DuMOL has a vineyard. Contracts are long-term and grapes are paid for by the acre, insuring that yields can be restricted. The winemaker and viticulturist since 2000 is the talented Andy Smith. The owners have kept to a low profile, preferring not to participate in Pinot Noir events and shunning publicity. A new winery was completed in 2008 in Windsor. Most of the wine is sold through a mailing list at www.dumol.com.



2007 DuMOL Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$65. *Slightly muted aromas of cherries, grapes and a hint of smoke. Luscious cherry-berry compote displaying an appealing crispness and a flourish of baking spices and cola in the background. Discreetly rich with a smooth texture and a dry finish. An immensely satisfying wine that is tre Russian River.*



Expression Wine produces multiple Pinot Noirs from different latitudes representing different “expressions” of Noir. The winegrowing regions represented include Santa Rita Hills, Sonoma Coast, Anderson Valley and Eola-Amity Hills. The goal of winemaker Richard Sowalsky is to showcase the vineyards and the terroir of each region. Sowalsky is a University California Davis graduate with experience at Handley Cellars, Havens Wine Cellars, Robert Mondavi Winery and Big Horn Cellars. The wines are crafted at the Silverado Trail Wine Studio and are sold primarily through a mailing list at www.expressionwine.com.



2007 Expression 39 Anahala Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., . *This is a delightful Pinot Noir. Scents of well-spiced cherries and berries are echoed in the fruit flavors which are delicately kissed by oak. The fruit is full of vim and vigor and well-framed by substantial ripe tannins. Still young and somewhat undeveloped, this beauty will benefit from another 6 to 12 months in the cellar.*



Balletto Vineyards consists of 280 acres of vineyard land planted in western Sebastopol owned by John Balletto. 60 acres are planted to multiple clones of Pinot Noir. The inaugural vintage was 2001 and the winemaker is Dan Cederquist. Balletto and shares a tasting room on Occidental Road with Dutton-Goldfield.



2007 Balletto Winery Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 300 cases, \$22. *Sourced from the best grapes surrounding the winery. Very appealing aromas of black cherries and black raspberries riff with spice and lavender. A solid wine with respectable black cherry fruit intensity, remarkable for its smooth texture and impressive for its very clean finish. An incredible value.*




2007 Balletto Burnside Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 300 cases, \$22. *Demure aromas of dark red fruits with a faint echo of oak. Lip-smacking sweet dark red fruits with a hint of spice and anise. Full-bodied and rich with healthy ripe tannins and a tangy finish. Huge bang for the buck.*



Merryvale Vineyards, a family owned Napa Valley winery known for its Chardonnays, Merlots, Cabernet Sauvignons and Profile Red Wine, is quietly making some superb Pinot Noirs in recent vintages. The winemakers are Sean Foster and Graham Wehmeier. Merryvale owns the Stanly Estate Vineyard in Carneros planted to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah. The Merryvale lineup of wines is available online at www.merryvale.com. The winery's tasting room is housed in a historic building that was the first winery built in Napa Valley after Repeal.

2007 Merryvale Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$35. *The nose is a chameleon, offering scents that vary from cherries to raspberry tart, from herb garden to sweet oak. Perfectly fine cherry flavors with a sidecar of oak toast and baking spices and a baked cookie note. Beautifully balanced and refreshing to drink. Not a blockbuster, but I could be perfectly happy with this wine any night with dinner.*



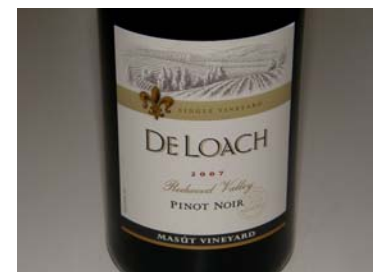
 **2007 Merryvale Stanly Ranch Estate Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., \$45. Sourced from favorite blocks of the sustainably-farmed estate vineyard on the historic Stanly Ranch. *Fresh and vibrant aromas of summer cherries and berries with complimentary oak spice. Medium-weighted flavors of earth and mineral-dusted black cherries with an echo of oak char in the background. Very smoothly textured with dry, ripe tannins. This wine speaks of the soil and is the best wine I have had from this vineyard in recent memory.*




DeLoach Vineyards is dedicated to Pinot Noir and uniquely uses French open-top wood fermenters for all the winery's OFS, Vineyard-Designate and Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs. The winemakers are Brian Maloney and Julia Vasquez. DeLoach dates to 1973 when Ceil DeLoach, a firefighter from San Francisco first planted grapes in the Russian River Valley and acquired numerous old-vine Zinfandel vineyards. In 2003, DeLoach Vineyards was sold to the Boisset Family from Burgundy, France. The Boisset family replanted the DeLoach vineyards after the 2004 vintage and biodynamic farming was instituted. The website is www.deloachvineyards.com.

2007 DeLoach Vineyards Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 1,200 cases, \$45. A blend of several vineyards and clones. Grapes are de-stemmed and undergo native fermentation in open-top vats with hand punchdowns. *Aromas of dark cherries, herbs, oak and mushrooms. Juicy core of black cherries and cola with an underpinning of oak and a petrol note. Soft tannins with bright citric acidity on the finish. Decent.*

2007 DeLoach Vineyards Masut Vineyard Redwood Valley Pinot Noir 15.0% alc., 1,000 cases, \$45. Clones 113 and 115 were planted in 1996 according to biodynamic principles and these vines are tended by pioneers of biodynamic farming. Jacob Fetzer and his family. *Well-oaked dark fruits on the nose. Powerfully flavored earth-kissed dark raspberry fruit augmented by plum reduction sauce, spice and a hint of grapefruit peel on the dry and slightly hot finish.*



 **2007 DeLoach Vineyards Maboroshi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.0% alc., 425 cases, \$45. The vineyard name means "whimsical dream" in Japanese. Farmed by the Kisaichi family and located southwest of Sebastopol. *Intense aromas of black cherries, raspberries, herbal oak and cardamom spice. Beautifully composed and gentle in the mouth with tasty red raspberries and currants, a compelling earthiness, and a tasty riff of oak. Harmonious with impressive glass-filling presence.*



Sips of 2006 California Pinot Noirs

Don't forget the 2006 vintage California Pinot Noir, many of which are still readily available in the marketplace.



2006 Athair Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$36. Athair means “father” in Irish Gaelic. Winemaker Jim McMahon crafts this wine dedicated to the fathers in his life. 3-day cold soak, 8-day fermentation, aged in 25% new French oak barrels for 9 months. *Captivating aromas of cherries, sassafras, sandalwood, sage and oak. Ripe cherry and raspberry core with underlying hints of herbs and forest floor. The mouth-coating ripe tannins need some time to resolve. A very flavorful wine that is immensely satisfying. Decant now if you pop the cork and match with short ribs.*

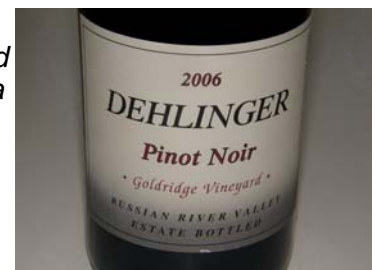
2006 Benziger Signaterra Bella Luna Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$40. *Fairly garnet color. A light and elegantly styled Pinot Noir that has some charming ripe cherry and berry fruit aromas and flavors with underlying dark caramel notes from oak and a juicy grip of citric peel on the bright finish. Harmonious with ripe, dry tannins and alluring finesse.*



2006 Coho Stanly Ranch Los Carneros Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 483 cases, \$30. *Vivid black cherry aromas with faint smoke in the background. Slightly confected cherry and cranberry flavors with a little oak on the edge. A very smooth texture, gossamer tannins and bright acidity on the finish make for easy drinking.*



2006 Dehlinger Goldridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$45. *Aromas of slightly oaked cherries and wet earth. Tasty sweet cherry and cranberry fruit that is modest in weight. Soft tannins with appealing restraint and a grip of acidity on the finish. True to the Dehlinger style marked by finesse.*



Dierberg farms two cool climate estate vineyards: the 160-acre Dierberg Estate Vineyard just outside the town of Santa Maria with about two-thirds of the vineyard planted to Pinot Noir and the newer 70-acre Drum Canyon Vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills planted to Pinot Noir. Jim and Mary Dierberg also own the 230-acre Star Lane Ranch, a warmer vineyard site planted to warm-climate varieties in a valley not far from Santa Barbara. A new winery has been carved into the sandstone of a 1,500-foot-high ridge above Star Lane Vineyard. Nick de Luca is the winemaker for both Star Lane and Dierberg Vineyards. His background includes winemaking tours at Williams Selyem, Fisher, and Byington. Rodolfo Bravo is the vineyard manager for the vineyards. The Dierberg Estate Vineyard is planted in soil with a higher loam content tending to produce Pinot Noirs that are more savory in flavor and powerful in structure. The clones consist of multiple Burgundian clones and unusual California selections. Winemaking for the 2006 Dierberg Pinot Noir featured severe hand sorting, some stem inclusion, natural yeast fermentations, aging in 75% new French oak for 17 months, light fining with egg whites and bottling without filtration.



2006 Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 4,958 cases, \$42. The Dierberg Vineyard is located 14 miles from the Pacific coast at the southern end of the Santa Maria Valley. Dierberg is a small family owned winery founded in 2001 producing hand-crafted wines from estate vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley and Santa Rita Hills.

Vineyard yields were down 35% in this vintage. *A stunning nose composed of aromas of perfectly ripe cherries and berries with subtle hints of baking spice and smoke-infused oak. A really impressive mouth full of delicious dark sappy fruit underlain with smoky oak, earthiness and citrus. Seamless with perfect integration of alcohol and harmonious t n' a portending a long future. The wine is more elegantly styled than usual from this vineyard. The best I have ever tasted from this producer and a memorable wine.*



2006 Halleck Vineyard Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

14.9% alc., 295 cases, \$55. From a vineyard located in Sebastopol that was formerly an apple orchard. *Lovely perfume of slightly confected black cherries, oak toast, and mocha java. Soft in the mouth with generous berry and cherry fruit. Fruit-driven flavors are primary with some earthiness in background. Plenty of acidity adds a lively tone.*



2006 La Crema 9 Barrels Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 225 cases, \$90. The most exceptional nine barrels in the cellar. Clones are 115, 667, 777, 23 and Pommard. All free-run juice and aged for 9 months in 45% new French oak. The Nine Barrel blend is layered and then racked to one-year-old French oak barrels for an additional 5 months of aging. *Deep ruby color. Ever changing aromas of Bing cherries, cherry cola, Asian spice, and oak vanillin. Rich dark blackberry fruit that is intense but not jammy. Oak plays a light supporting role. Plenty of lively acid and ripe tannins to balance the prodigious fruit. Beautifully crafted with perfect harmony. A very good wine but doesn't yet quite deliver the emotion one expects from such an expensive wine. Cellar for at least a year or two.*



2006 Olson Ogden Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 283 cases, \$42. Sourced from two vineyards. Clones are 23 and Martini. Aged 16 months in 55% new French oak. *The nose stars Bing cherries with side notes of Provencal herbs, sage and oak. Crunchy dark cherries, and ripe strawberries with an underpinning of forest floor, savory herbs and a citrus note on the brisk finish. The dry tannins are well corralled. The mid-palate fruit attack lacks some fullness, but this is a very pleasant drink.*



2006 Sierra Madre Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 1,772 cases, \$40. Winery owners and Jan Circle source grapes for their wines from their own Sierra Madre Vineyard. The vineyard, which was planted in 1971, was purchased from Michael Mondavi in 2003. The winemaker is Steve Rasmussen. Clones were vinified separately. Aged in 35% new French oak barrels. *Deep reddish-violet color. The plentiful oak overwhelms the ripe cherry fruit on the nose. Prodigious fruit with touches of cola, herbs and oak. Soft and smooth with a mouth filling presence and admirable acidity. The oak takes over in the glass over time. A man's Pinot Noir that will appeal especially to oak lovers.*



Garys' Vineyard 2004 Horizontal Tasting

On March 15, 2009, the Ides of March, I was invited to a horizontal tasting of 2004 Pinot Noirs from Garys' Vineyard located in the Santa Lucia Highlands. The wines were bought soon after release and well-cellared. There were sixteen wines, one from every producer that year except Truckee River Winery.

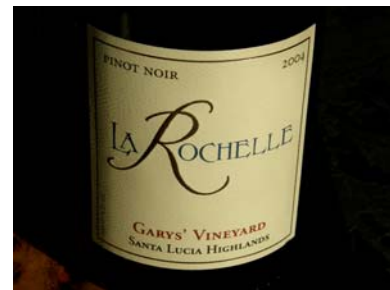
Garys' Vineyard is owned by partners Gary Pisoni and Gary Franscioni (that is why the vineyard is called Garys' and not Gary's), and was planted in 1997 to Pisoni clone Pinot Noir and Syrah. The vineyard totals 50 acres and is located 7-8 miles north of the Pisoni Vineyard in a slightly cooler area. (see www.garysvineyard.com for a map of the vineyards of the Santa Lucia Highlands). Spacing is 6x8 and 5x8 on VSP Bilateral trellising with 1089 and 908 vines per acre. The soil is Arroyo Seco sandy loam. The climate is marine with strong coastal winds blowing off Monterey Bay in the afternoon. Average summertime high temperatures are in the mid 70s. There are currently 19 wineries sourcing fruit from Garys' Vineyard.

Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noirs display dark red fruit which is focused on the midpalate and on the masculine side. While both Pisoni and Garys' are planted to the Pisoni selection, the Garys' Vineyard ripens later and produces more high-toned, red-fruited and higher acid wines. In this tasting of aged Pinot Noirs from Garys' Vineyard, many of the wines featured aromas of black cherries, baking spices and sandalwood. The tannins were soft in all the wines. Alcohols were quite high with eleven of the wines at 14.8% or higher and the alcohol was evident in many of the wines. The biggest fault was a perceived lack of acidity causing the wines to age quickly. If you have any 2004 Pinot Noirs from Garys' Vineyard, drink up now. With a couple of exceptions, the wines did not appreciably benefit from five years of aging.

The wines, which were tasted blind, are listed in the order in which they were sampled.

2004 Marguerite Ryan Cellars Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 57 cases. *Moderately light garnet color. Shy, delicate aromas of black cherries. An elegantly styled wine with no detectable tannins. Flavors of black cherries, spice, oak and brioche with a smooth texture. Faint whiff of alcohol on the nose and finish.*

2004 La Rochelle Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 15.0% alc.. Winemakers Tom Stutz and Claude Bobba. *Slightly hazy with a hint of orange coloring on the rim. Rather flat nose with some faint fruit, oak and spice. Tasty black cherry core elegantly presented with a satiny texture and good alcohol integration.*



2004 Waltzing Bear Wines Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 15.1% alc.. *Brett in the nose with faint scent of raisins. Black cherry and baking spice flavors. Plenty of finishing acidity.*



2004 Morgan Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.2% alc.. *Flamboyant aromas of ripe and exotic berries which faded slowly in the glass. Ripe cherry flavored with a taste of root beer and some citrus on the back end. The tannins have completely faded.*

2004 Miner Family Vineyards Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.3% alc.. *Bouquet of aged aromas including root beer, cola and leather with a sniff of alcohol. Medium-weighted flavors of berries and cola with a smooth mouthfeel secondary to melted tannins.*



2004 Martin Alfaro Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$27. *Shy fruit with scents of black cherry, roasted nuts and a vague funkiness. The fruit tastes like raisins and fermented cherries. Unpleasant.*

2004 Siduri Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc.. *Deep garnet color. Rich and ripe scents of black cherries and raspberries. A hedonistic style that retains plenty of sweet fruit richness and has shed all of its tannins. Stacked and packed with fruit with admirable balance for such a big-boned wine.*

2004 Lucia Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc.. *Fairly deep reddish-purple color. Fresh and pure aromas of black cherries. A masculine wine that retains notable oak but the black cherry core remains impressive and the alcohol remains submerged.*

2004 Miura Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc.. *Deep reddish-purple color. Volatile acidity and diaper on the nose. Rich, full-bodied dark cherry and berry fruit with hints of root beer and brown sugar.*



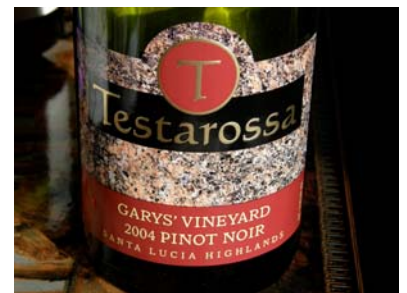
2004 Surh Luchtel Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir *Lovely aged aromas of baking spices, apples, seasoned oak and sandalwood. Discreetly concentrated cherry core with a hint of root beer flavor. The tannins have melted away. Best wine in the lineup.*



2004 Roar Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc.. *Attractive aromas of rich, ripe black cherries, root beer and sandalwood. Rich black cherry fruit core with notable oak. Still retaining some tannin. Some ash shows up on the finish which leaves a little heat in its wake.*

2004 A.P. Vin Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 15.0% alc., screw cap. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color. Scents of cherries, sandalwood, oak char and barnyard (? Brett). Rich brown-sugared fruit with lively acidity and gossamer tannins.*

2004 Testarossa Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$45. *Delicate ruby color. A feminine style with fruit that has faded leaving alcohol to peak out on the nose and finish. Some notes of baking spices and sandalwood add interest.*



2004 Tantara Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 15.1% alc.. *Very strange aromas like fresh paint. Completely over the hill with no fruit evident, leaving behind flavors of root beer and dark ale.*

2004 Vision Cellars Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.4% alc.. *Moderately dark-purple color. Nicely appointed aromas of black cherries, spice and wildflowers. Thick flavors of black cherries and cola with a silky but firm texture and a touch of astringency on the finish.*



2004 Loring Wine Company Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., screw cap. *Aromas of black cherries, blackberries, oak, barnyard and alcohol. Rich and full-bodied cherry and berry flavors with oak in the background. Fresher than many wines in the lineup.*

Pinot Briefs

Gary Farrell's New Label Iconic Russian River Valley winemaker, Gary Farrell, left his namesake winery a few years back to return to his roots with a small boutique winery specializing in small lots of Pinot Noir. The name of the new label is Alysian Wines. Details are few on the website, but the first wines are scheduled to be released soon. Join the mailing list at www.alysianwines.com or e-mail inquiry@alysianwines.com.

Petaluma Gap Winegrowers Alliance Founded in 2005, PGWA is composed of over 50 winegrowers and vintners who are located in or source fruit from the Petaluma area. The Alliance recently launched a new web site at www.petalumagap.com. In addition, the Alliance has been hosting a series of weekend informal vineyard and winery tours at sites not usually open to the public. Teela Ridgeway, the President of PGWA, has been largely responsible for the drive to educate consumers about the unique sites and styles of wine produced in the Petaluma area.

Beverage Information Group Harris Poll® The results of a large online survey of United States adults in April, 2009 indicates that 3 in 10 Americans drink alcohol weekly. 25% of adults in the United States never drink alcohol. Men are more likely to drink alcohol once a week than women (40% versus 19%). One-third of Echo Boomers (aged 18-32) say they drink once a week compared to 26% of Gen Xers (those aged 33-44). One half of women drink domestic wine (56%) compared to 43% of men who tend to be big beer drinkers. According to *Wine Spectator* (May 18, 2009), the *Global Drinks Market* reports that worldwide per-capita wine consumption fell for the third consecutive year in 2008 and current world per-capita consumption is at its lowest level in at least four decades. Much of this trend is due to decreased wine consumption in countries such as France and Italy, particularly among younger drinkers. China may be the country to show the largest growth in wine consumption in the future.

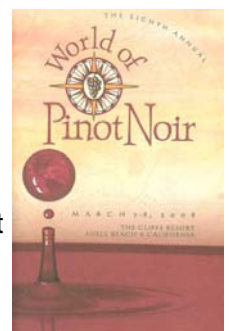
Latest Recommendations on Wine Drinking and Health Arthur Klatsky, M.D., renowned researcher into the health benefits of alcohol and wine and a senior consultant in cardiology at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Oakland, California, spoke with *Wine Spectator* in a roundtable for the May 21, 2009 issue. He said, "It is certainly appropriate to advise people at a relatively high risk of heart attack - which is most middle-aged to older people - that light to moderate amounts of alcohol should be part of their healthy lifestyle, unless they have some special risk."

Chamisal Label Returns Domaine Alfred was acquired by Crimson Wine Group and has changed the name of the winery to its original name, Chamisal Vineyards. The 80-acre vineyard was largely replanted in the 1990s to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The current winemaker, Fintan du Fresne, continues in charge.

2009 Oregon Wine Awards Pinot Noir Double Gold award winners: \$20.01-\$35 - 2006 Brooks "Janus" WV, 2007 Christopher Bridge Satori Springs WV, 06 Seven of Hearts DH, 2006 Stoller JV Estate DH; Over \$35.01 - 07 Reustle-Prayer Rock Reserve UV, 06 Stoller SV Estate DH, 06 Willamette Valley Vineyards Signature Cuvee WV, 06 Winderlea Inaugural Reserve DH.

Mountain Winery Summer Concerts The Mountain Winery amphitheater venue in Saratoga, California announces 55 concerts from July 3 to October 6, 2009. Food is available along with the Mountain Winery Estate wines that include the 2006 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir crafted by Mount Eden winemaker Jeffrey Patterson. Entertainers featured include Indigo Girls, Boz Scaggs, Foreigner, Sheryl Crow, James Taylor, Etta James and Tony Bennett. Tickets at www.mountainwinery.com.

World of Pinot Noir Announces Ambitious 2010 Program 2010 marks the Tenth Anniversary of the World of Pinot Noir and a special program of events has been announced. Seminars include: A tasting of vintage old world Burgundies led by Master Sommelier Fred Dame, a 10-year retrospective of Williams-Selyem library wines led by Executive Winemaker Bob Cabral, and a vertical examination of the famed Pisoni Vineyard. Two Gala Receptions and Dinners will be presented by noted chefs Roy Yamaguchi (Roys of Hawaii) and Budi Kazali (Ballard Inn). Tickets go on sale October 1, 2009. View the schedule of 2009 events at www.wopn.com. See *PinotFile* coverage of past World of Pinot Noir events (2008 - Volume 6, Issue 56; 2009 - Volume 7, Issue 16).



Rosés of Pinot Noir Enliven Summer

Nothing better on a warm summer day than a glass of chilled rosé. As versatile as Pinot Noir is with food, rosés are more complimentary to the outdoor fare of summer. With Pinot Noir rosé, you get the best of both worlds, especially when the wine is vinified dry. Many wineries produce rosé, but often it is a thin saignée which is quickly vinified as an afterthought. The following rosés are serious wines made with considerable care and devotion.

2008 Antica Terra Rosé Willamette Valley 14.2% alc., 88 cases, \$35. 66% Pommard, 33% Dijon 115. 33% whole cluster. Full natural MLF with 6 months aging in 3rd-fill French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately deep reddish-orange color. Lovely aromas of fresh strawberries, blood oranges and a touch of white peach and herbs. A substantial rosé that is mouth filling on the attack strutting flavors of fresh berries, orange peel and savory herbs with some persistence on the bright finish. This is a stunning wine that even a Pinot Noir purist like myself would be proud to take to any classy restaurant. This wine should put to rest any stigma that has been attached to rosé.*



2008 Lynmar Estate Rosé of Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 14.1% alc., \$20. Sourced from estate and selected contract vineyards. Fruit specifically chosen for this wine was de-stemmed, cold soaked for 2-3 hours before undergoing a gentle membrane press followed by fermentation in stainless steel tanks. This wine was supplemented by the saignée method in which lots of Pinot Noir and Syrah were bled from tank after de-stemming with some color and no tannins. The wine was aged in neutral French oak barrels and stainless tanks. Vinified by winemaker Hugh Chapelle. *Lovely orange-red salmon hue. Aromas of white peaches and oranges. The flavors are fresh and vivid, even flirty, echoing the aromas and finishing with some persistence. Among the top rosés every year in California.*



2008 Bybee Vineyards & Habitat Rosé of Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 13.5% alc., 124 cases, \$19. Sourced from estate-grown organic clone 777 grapes. Whole cluster press, cold fermentation. Also crafted by winemaker Hugh Chapelle. *Similar nose as the Lynmar but more restrained with an undertone of summer herbs. White peach, orange and strawberry flavors with a hint of tutti-fruitti and spice. The mouthfeel is unusually rich for a rosé, with a velvety texture and refreshing acidity on the finish. A French-styled, serious wine with plenty of intensity to satisfy.*



2008 Pali Wine Co. Sunset Rosé 13.5% alc., 250 cases, \$15. 90% California, 10% Oregon. A blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Grenache. *Light pink coral color. Attractive aromas of strawberries, orange peel and savory herbs. Crisp and clean flavors of strawberries, blood oranges and summer melons. A subtle note of oak adds interest. Soft in the mouth with a generous lift of acidity on the bright finish. Marvelous.*

