



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir  
Tastes Like Itself*

## Buena Vista Carneros is Back!

Buena Vista Carneros Winery was turning out 300,000 cases annually of ho-hum wine in the last decade. The winery was certainly not on the pinotphile's radar. Their most-awarded wine was a Sauvignon Blanc made from Lake County grapes, not from their extensive vineyard holdings in Carneros. The winery was California's oldest premium winery, celebrating 150 years of winemaking in 2007, but it was living on reputation alone.

A dramatic renaissance ensued at Buena Vista, starting with the acquisition of the winery by Beam Wine Estates in 2001, and the arrival of winemaker Jeff Stewart in 2003. Stewart had been crafting notable cool climate varietals at La Crema Winery in the Russian River Valley for five vintages. Before that, he made wine at Robert Keenan, Laurier, De Loach, Mark West and Knude. A graduate of the University of California at Davis, he is a talented winemaker with a big physical presence, reminiscence of a bearded backwoodsman, with a winning smile and an unrelenting enthusiasm for his work. His mantra is balance and he says, "As with many winemakers, I believe in balance, both in the vineyard and in the wines. I like to see power and elegance working together."

Beam Wine Estates was picked up by Constellation Brands, Inc. in 2007 and they in turn sold Buena Vista Carneros to Ascentia Wine Estates, headed by former COO of Beam Wine Estates in 2008. Ascentia Wine Estates has provided the financial backing and leadership to allow Stewart to further the resurgence of this venerable winery.



The Buena Vista winemaking facility in Carneros was built in the 1970s, one of the first wineries in the appellation. The winery has been completely modernized and now contains 62 five to ten ton open-top fermenters installed in what was the former barrel room. This gives the winery the capability of fermenting in unison all the wine from the estate.

The estate Ramal Vineyard underwent replanting led by viticulturist Craig Weaver beginning in 2003 with different rootstocks and clones matched to suitable sites on the estate property. Pommard is the Pinot Noir workhorse clone here with other clones (there are a total of 13 different clones) adding interest such as 115 (spice), 667 (structure), 777, 828, 583 (cherry), 23, Martini 13 and Swan. There are a total of 167 blocks on the property creating many different small vineyards averaging 2 acres within a single large vineyard. By 2010, 100 percent of Buena Vista's 800 acres of vineyards will have been replanted. 335 acres are devoted to Pinot

Noir. Sophisticated viticulture technology is now employed including airplane-view (Vine View) infrared mapping of vine vigor which can be used to guide irrigation.



In 2004, management discontinued the previous California Classic and Grand Reserve lines of wines and reduced production to 45,000 cases. The two new lines are The Carneros Series which includes varietal bottlings of Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Syrah, and The Estate Vineyard Series (EVS) which are limited release wines including wines crafted from select clonal material and blocks of the property. New packaging and labeling create a modern and sophisticated tone (I am not a fan of heavy bottles but Buena Vista is trying to make a statement about quality).

Grapes are harvested at night, hand-sorted and de-stemmed, gently crushed, cold soaked for several days, and fermented with both indigenous and inoculated yeasts in open-top stainless steel tanks. A basket press is used to press the wine off of the skins. The wine is aged typically 9-10 months in typically 35% to 40% new French oak barrels. The first wines sealed with screw cap closures appeared in 2008, and the entire portfolio will be transitioned by 2009.

Stewart has a broad palate of Pinot Noir grapes to work with and the benefit of all the latest viticulture and winemaking tools. The result is the best lineup of Pinot Noirs I have ever tasted from Buena Vista Carneros and maybe even the best Pinot Noirs period from Carneros...ever.

**2006 Buena Vista Carneros Ramal Vineyard Estate Vineyard Series Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.66, 4,047 cases, \$38. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. Enticing aromas of earth-kissed dark berries and cherries with hints of cola, roasted nuts and mushrooms coming and going. Juicy core of raspberry and blackberry fruit with a nod to ripeness with an undertone of root beer and currants. Nicely composed with soft-grain tannins. Very good.*



**2007 Buena Vista Carneros Ramal Vineyard Estate Vineyard Series Dijon Clones Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., pH 3.66, 1,120 cases, \$42, screw cap. *Charming nose featuring cherries and berries with hints of savory herbs, green garden and loamy earth. Delicious core of dark red fruits that are sparkling fresh. Velvety smooth in texture, with fine tannins, deft use of oak, and a remarkable persistence on the pleasing finish. A seamless wine of impeccable pedigree.*



**2007 Buena Vista Carneros Ramal Vineyard Estate Vineyard Series Swan Selection Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.78, 911 cases, \$42, screw cap. *Similar fruit profile to the Dijon clones bottling but darker hued with notes of pomegranate and smoke. An earthy tone pervades the luscious core of nicely spiced black cherry and black raspberry fruit. Perfectly composed with a silky, sensual texture, this wine makes for an evening of extravagant pleasure.*



Buena Vista Carneros Winery's Historic Stone Press House, located at 18000 Old Winery Road in Sonoma, is open for tasting daily. Private tastings with food and wine pairing are available. Buena Vista Carneros wines may be purchased online at [www.buenavistacarneros.com](http://www.buenavistacarneros.com). Carneros Wine Club members receive significant discounts on wine purchases. The winery is not open to the public.



# Freestone Vineyards Fall Releases are Exceptional

The 2007 vintage Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from this winery are in the upper echelon of California wines today. No expense has been spared in establishing the vineyards and winery and the resulting wines have been astonishingly good. I first wrote about Freestone Vineyards a year ago after visiting the winery, touring the vineyards and tasting the wines. The two single-vineyard 2007 Pinot Noirs were still in barrel but I was predicting a great future for them. After recently tasting these wines in bottle, I felt they were a tour de force in winemaking, a glimpse of greatness that the wines from the true Sonoma Coast have often hinted at but only occasionally delivered.

Joseph Phelps, founder of Joseph Phelps Vineyards in St. Helena, along with his son Bill, and the Phelps management team purchased a former dairy farm in the township of Freestone in 1999, ostensibly to grow Chardonnay. The popular Joseph Phelps Ovation Chardonnay had been sourced from vineyards in Carneros. The site proved ideal for Pinot Noir as well. In 2000, additional nearby land was acquired and plantings added to include Quarter Moon Vineyard (41 acres of Pinot Noir) and Ferguson Vineyard (6 acres of Pinot Noir).



Planting began in 2000 with phased re-plantings occurring through 2007 on the Freestone Vineyard Estate which consists of three distinct vineyards: Pasturale Vineyard which surrounds the 40,000 square foot gravity-flow winery that is built into a hillside on three levels, Quarter Moon Vineyard which lies a few miles to the west of the winery, and Ferguson Vineyard located on the eastern side of Bohemian Highway close to the winery. The three vineyards lie only 5 to 8 miles from the Pacific Ocean and are planted in well-drained Goldridge series and sandy loam soils. The maritime influence results in low-lying morning fog, afternoon cool breezes, and large diurnal temperature swings, prolonging the growing season. Farming is strictly biodynamic under the direction of veterans Greg Cannon and Joel Robledo who face the constant threat of weeds and gophers among other viticulture challenges.

80% of the estate is planted to Pinot Noir. Pasturale Vineyard consists of 55.5 planted acres (34.67 acres of Pinot Noir and 20.87 acres of Chardonnay). Pinot Noir clones include Dijon 115, 777, and 828, and heritage selections including Calera and Swan. The grapes are used in the Pasturale Vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Quarter Moon Vineyard (pictured below) consists of 41 planted acres, all Pinot Noir clones 115, 777, 828 and heritage selections, primarily Calera. Ferguson Vineyard is 6 acres of leased Pinot Noir, clone 115 which goes into the winery's Fogdog Pinot Noir, an estate and grower blend.

The Director of winemaking is Phelps veteran Damian Parker. The winemaker is Theresa Heredia who was mentored at Saintsbury and in Burgundy (Domaine de Montille and Domaine Comte Armand) and has been at Joseph Phelps Vineyards since 2002. The cellar master is Justin Ennis, a veteran of Williams Selyem Winery in Healdsburg and Villa Maria Winery in New Zealand. Pascal Marchand, an internationally acclaimed winemaker and former manager of Domaine de la Vougeraie and the estate of Domaine Comte Armand, brings expertise as a consultant.

The winemaking for the two single-vineyard Freestone Vineyards Pinot Noirs receive special attention. The Quarter Moon Vineyard fruit was partially hand de-stemmed into a one-ton open-top oak fermenter. The tank was then treated as a whole cluster fermentation, receiving gentle punch downs. The wine was raised for 15 months in 67% new and 33% two to three-year-old French oak barrels and bottled in April 2009. The Pastorale Vineyard Pinot Noir is composed almost entirely of Calera selection grapes that were whole cluster fermented in one of the winery's oak open-top fermenters. The wine was aged 15 months in 67% new and 33% two to three-year-old French oak barrels and bottled in April 2009.



The Chardonnays are on equal footing with the Pinot Noirs. The true Sonoma Coast has not received the same recognition for Chardonnay as for Pinot Noir, but considerable potential has been shown by releases from Hirsch, Marcassin, and Sonoma Coast Vineyards. The 2007 Freestone Chardonnay was aged 15 months in 64% new and 36% seasoned French oak barrels before bottling in April 2009. The Pastorale Vineyard Chardonnay was sourced from superior blocks adjacent the winery, pressed separately, barrel fermented with *battonage*, and aged 15 months in a single, new DAMY 500 liter puncheon before bottling in April 2009.

**2007 Freestone Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 1,300 cases, \$75. *Fresh scents of citrus, caramel and butter. Refreshing flavors of citrus and honey with a slight toasty edge. There is an appealing light touch to this wine which has impeccable balance. Way too easy to drink. Very good.*

**2007 Freestone Pastorale Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** 108 cases, \$100. *Golden yellow color. Constantly changing aromatic profile in the glass showing lemon curd, butterscotch and buttered popcorn. Discreet richness and body with bright mineral-driven lemon flavor underlain with light caramel and roasted nuts. Delicately viscous with an appealing persistence of citrus on the clean finish. I believe even more charm and complexity will come with time in the cellar. This Chardonnay will match up with any comparably priced top white Burgundy. Very good (+)*



**2007 Freestone Pastoral Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 67 cases, \$100. *Very complex array of aromas including black cherries, blackberries, forest floor, flower garden and spice. The savory core of earth-dusted and spiced dark fruits is unctuous and thoroughly satisfying. Framed by supple dry tannins, the fruit lingers long and lush on the finish. Beautifully crafted and harmonious in every way.*



**2007 Freestone Quarter Moon Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 60 cases, \$100. *The nose is flat-out unbelievable showing crushed red cherries and berries with intoxicating exotic spices. Can you make a perfume out of this? Spicy and tenacious berry fruit core with ripe tannins and perfectly balanced acidity. Delicate, yet packed with charismatic fruit flavor. Ends in a lingering peacock finish that is orgasmic. One of the greatest California Pinot Noirs I have ever tasted.*



The winery is not open for public visits due to environmental restrictions. A tastefully built and furnished Guest Center is located nearby at 12747 El Camino Bodega, at the corner of Bohemian Highway and Highway 12 in Freestone. Tasting at the Guest Center is available Friday through Sunday from 11:00 to 5:00 (\$10 per person). The wines are primarily allocated to mailing list members and fine restaurants. Some wines are available on the website at [www.freestonevineyards.com](http://www.freestonevineyards.com). Freestone Private Collection members receive a 20% discount and access to the more limited single-vineyard wines (sign up on the website or call Duane Harris at 888-997-9798).





# Sinor-LaVallee Wines: For Hedonists Only

The husband and wife team of Mike Sinor and Cheri LaVallee Sinor founded Sinor-LaVallee Wine Company in Arroyo Grande in 1997. Mike and Cheri met as students at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 1993 where they had “Chemistry.” They were married in 1996 in the town of Beaune, in the heart of Burgundy. Both have a colorful background in the wine industry.

Mike’s history is intimately tied to the Edna Valley region of California. His first job in the wine business was at Corbett Canyon Vineyards in 1991. Many of you will remember those Corbett Canyon commercials featuring the echo of “canyon, canyon, canyon.” Corbett Canyon was one of the first wineries in Edna Valley, founded in 1978, but has changed ownership several times through the years. Today, it is owned by Rob Rossi, and is a custom crush facility (SLO Winemaker’s Studio) where Sinor now produces his Sinor-LaVallee wines.

Back in 1991, Mike was just trying to earn some money to pay for college, but this job quickly led to a passion for wine. After finishing his studies at Cal Poly in 1994, he took a harvest position at Byron Vineyard and Winery in Santa Maria. Soon he had a permanent cellar position, advanced to enologist, and then became assistant winemaker at Byron working under noted Central Coast vintner Ken Brown. During his time at Byron, Mike traveled to Burgundy and the Rhone Valley to study winemaking. Mike left Byron after the harvest of 2000 to become the winemaker at Domaine Alfred Winery in San Luis Obispo at the site of Chamisal Vineyard.

Chamisal Vineyard was first planted in 1972 by Norman Goss who built a small winery on the property in 1980. Alfred “Terry” Speizer, who sold Electec, his Silicon Valley semiconductor company, bought the dormant 131-acre Chamisal Vineyard property in 1994 and revived the declining vineyard and winery. The Domaine Alfred label was launched in 1998. Mike directed the vineyard operations, instituted biodynamic farming, and crafted wines that brought the winery considerable national acclaim, particularly for Pinot Noir. Domaine Alfred was sold in 2008 to Napa-based Crimson Wine Group, owners of Pine Ridge in Napa and Archery Summit in Oregon’s Willamette Valley.

In 2006, Mike resigned from Domaine Alfred to focus on Sinor-LaVallee Wines. He continues to be much in demand as a winery consultant and started a second brand, Ancient Peaks Winery, where he is in charge of winemaking. Those of you who attend the annual World of Pinot Noir in Shell Beach, California, have probably seen Mike running around directing the show. He is one of the founding board members for the World of Pinot Noir and served as Board President for the 2005 event.

Cheri’s introduction to wine also grew out of a need to pay for college. In the summer of 1991, she worked for a trucking company that transported wine grapes from various vineyards to E.&J. Gallo Winery. She studied Agricultural Business at Cal Poly, but wasn’t really bitten by the “wine bug” until she met Mike. After graduating from Cal Poly in 1994, Cheri worked as the manager of the Corbett Canyon Vineyards tasting room. Later she became the Executive Director of the Central Coast Wine Growers’ Association (CCWGA), a non profit association of growers and wineries. She left in 2001 to manage the growing Sinor household of two young children.

The inspiration for Sinor-LaVallee wines is the Burgundy model: finding specific rows of vineyards with world class terroir near where you live, contract for those rows, and make the best wine you can. Mike produces mainly Pinot Noir along with small amounts of Syrah, Pinot Gris, and Vin Gris of Pinot Noir sourced from vineyards in Edna Valley, Arroyo Grande Valley, Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo. The main vineyards, Talley-Rincon, Aubaine, Corbett, and Margarita, are all within a bicycle ride from where he lives. Total production is about 500 cases annually.

The Sinor-LaVallee label features all the thumbprints of the family members. On the front label, Mike’s on the right and Cheri’s on the left. Tomas and Esmée are on the back label.

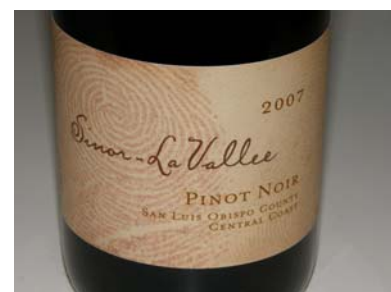
The title of this feature, “For Hedonists Only,” is an apropos description of the style of wines that Mike produces. They are bold expressions of Pinot Noir, packed with pure fruit pleasure, decadent and macho, yet suave. They are wines that say, “*ooh la la*” on the palate.

Mike likes to do something distinctive at each harvest. Sometimes it is a different hair cut (for example, a Mohawk), or a different beard. His music of choice at harvest is the Gregorian chant. The Gregorian chant is said to increase beta wave activity in the brain. Beta waves, or beta rhythm, are associated with active, busy,

or anxious thinking and active concentration: very appropriate for winemaking. Whatever Mike did for the 2007 harvest, it was magical for he crafted a very impressive lineup of flamboyant Pinot Noirs that will find plenty of fans.



**2007 Sinor-LaVallee San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 104 cases, \$29. An appellation blend of several vineyards. *Deep purple color in the glass. Terrific perfume of black cherries, raspberries, graham, cardamon spice and wet earth. Luscious dark berry fruit packed with flavor. Smooth, deft touch of oak, and admirable harmony. Very approachable. I would be happy drinking this daily. Think Sinor-LaVallee Pinot Noir in a skirt.*



**2007 Sinor-LaVallee Talley-Rincon Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., 48 cases, \$40. Sinor has a one acre block of Talley-Rincon Vineyard consisting of 14 rows planted to clone 2A. Yields were .73 tons per acre. *Dark purple robe in the glass. Shy aromas of dark stone fruits and subtle spice and toast. The nose improves in the glass over time. Tasty core of black cherry fruit. Fresh and clean with moderate tannins and aromatic persistence on the finish. Will get better with cellaring but very enticing now. Very good.*



**2007 Sinor-LaVallee Aubaine Vineyard Central Coast Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., 151 cases, \$40. This 14-acre vineyard is located just off Highway 101 between the towns of Arroyo Grande and Nipomo. At an elevation of 840 feet, it overlooks the Pacific Ocean. The wine comes from three different parts of the vineyard planted to Dijon clones 667 and 777. *Dark purple color in the glass. Shy scents of black stone and berry fruits, dried herbs and green tea that expand in the glass over time. Rich and opulent black cherry and black raspberry flavors with a complimentary underpinning of earthiness and oak. Smooth as a baby's bottom and almost viscous in texture. Very leathery but in a \$2,000 Prada coat kind of way. Still has some tannins to shed and some integration to achieve, and a little alcohol peaks out as it warms in the glass, but this is a prodigious wine. Very good.*







**2007 Sinor-LaVallee Anniversary Cuvée Central Coast Pinot Noir**

14.3% alc., 47 cases, \$50. This wine celebrates Mike and Cheri's marriage in Burgundy in 1996. It is vinified in the old style of Pinot Noir using 100% whole cluster. The combination of Talley-Rincon and Aubaine fruit is fermented entirely on stems, using indigenous yeast and natural MLF. Not produced in all vintages, it is often referred to as the "wild child" in the Pinot lineup. *Deep, dark purple color in the glass. An "Oh my God" kind of nose featuring blackberries, plums, forest floor, spice, a hint of oak, and a floral note. A peacock tail of black berry fruits unfurls on the palate, saturating the taste buds but retaining a velvety touch. Juicy and exotic with moderate tannins and perfect harmony. This is what drives Pinot Geeks to throw all caution to the wind to find that one great sensual experience. Crazy good.*



**2007 Sinor-LaVallee Luna Matta Vineyard Paso Robles Syrah** 14.9% alc., 74 cases, \$25. Sourced from a one acre block planted to Syrah clone 174. I tasted this wine with the lineup of Pinot Noirs which is very unfair. Its like driving an Aston Martin and them switching to a Hummer. That said, this is a very exemplary Syrah. *Purple fruits with hints of tobacco, oak and alcohol on the nose. The plum-driven flavors are accented by brown spice. Rich and velvety in texture, with healthy tannins. Decent (+).*



Sinor-LaVallee wines are sold primarily through a mailing list at [www.sinorlavallee.com](http://www.sinorlavallee.com) with some retail distribution. Tasting is by appointment (805-801-2502).



# Chronicle Wines: Master Winemakers' Touch

Proprietor Mike Hengehold founded Chronicle Wines to feature small lot Pinot Noir and Zinfandel from the Sonoma and Mendocino growing regions. Hengehold sought out two noted winemakers in their respective crafts - Ted Lemon (Littorai) with Pinot Noir, and Dan Cederquist (formerly De Loach, now Balletto Vineyards and Crew Wine Company) with Zinfandel.

Ted Lemon's training in Burgundy coupled with his passion for the concept of terroir and biodynamic farming have made him a leading producer of cool-climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. He believes in picking grapes that have sufficient natural acidity and brightness to pair well with all kinds of foods. He does not subscribe to the "bigger is better" school of winemaking since these wines are more for tasting than the dinner table. He is also not unnecessarily concerned with numbers such as Brix and pH as long as everything is in balance. The Pinot Noir grapes for Chronicle wines are hand sorted, de-stemmed without crushing and cold soaked. During natural yeast fermentations, a combination of punch down and pump over techniques are employed. An assortment of French coopers are used. The wines are never racked until just before bottling.

The inaugural Chronicle Pinot Noirs were released from the 2006 vintage.

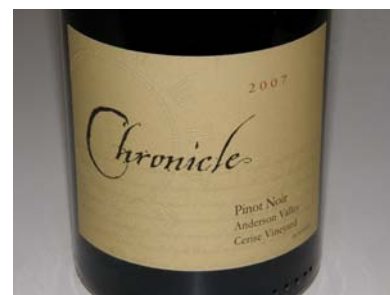
**2006 Chronicle Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 495 cases, \$35. An appellation blend of fruit from McDougall Ranch (52%), located in the true Sonoma Coast northwest of the town of Cazadero, and DeMeo Vineyard (36%) and Castaldi Vineyard (13%), both of which are farther south and more inland in the Olivet Road area of the Russian River Valley. Aged in 33% new French oak for 10 months. Unfined and unfiltered. *Deep reddish-purple color in the glass. The fruit aromas are very ripe, featuring raisins and prunes. The flavors follow in step with a bold core of black cherries and blackberries, notes of root beer and marzipan, and a sweet cherry lift on the finish. Silky textured with supple tannins. For fans of a ripe style. Decent.*



**2007 Chronicle Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 492 cases, \$35. Release date is February 2010. Sourced from Castaldi Vineyard (clone 777) and DeMeo Vineyard (Pommard clone). Aged 10 months in 35% new French oak. *The nose is a bit closed now but still sports delicate aromas of dark cherries, oak vanillin and a touch of good barnyard. Juicy and bright on the palate, featuring raspberry and pomegranate fruits with a little grit. Beautifully composed with supple tannins and bright acidity. A solid, well-crafted wine. Very good.*

**2006 Chronicle Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 240 cases, \$48. Aged 17 months in 50% new French oak. Lightly fined, unfiltered. *Black fruits with noticeable oak char in the nose and flavors. Opulent cherry and berry flavors with flamboyant tannins typical of this vineyard. Still chunky and awkward and lacks upfront charm. Check back in several years. Decent.*

**2007 Chronicle Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 556 cases, \$48. Release date is February, 2010. This 40-acre vineyard sits at between 800 and 1200 feet above the town of Boonville. Soils are thin, rocky, and quite marginal. The vines struggle to produce 2 tons per acre in the very best years. Lemon has sourced fruit from this vineyard since 2001. Clones are Wädenswil and Pommard. Aged 16 months in 50% new French oak. *Alluring scents of spiced plums, blackberry jam, sugared apples, and echoes of oak. Very tasty and charming dark cherry and berry melange with a hint of cola. Very smoothly textured with gossamer dry tannins and a good tang on the finish. More elegant and less tannic than the usual Pinot Noir from Cerise. Tasted fine the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating age ability. This wine strikes your heart.*



**2006 Chronicle Old Vines Russian River Valley Zinfandel** 14.7% alc., 448 cases, \$28. *Aromas of dark red fruits, raisins and oak plank. Plenty of tannin overwhelms the pleasing core of plum and black current fruits. Very dry from the start to the finish. Decent.*

**2006 Chronicle Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Zinfandel** 14.5% alc., 165 cases, \$36. *Lovely nose of fresh black cherries and berries with hints of pepper and oak char. Plenty of sweet fruit with herbal oak in the background. Very smooth and suave with generous fine-grained tannins and a tangy lift to the finish. Lighter in weight than the Old Vines bottling and more appealing to me. Ageworthy. Very good.*



Chronicle wines are sold primarily through a mailing list at [www.chroniclewines.com](http://www.chroniclewines.com) with limited wine seller distribution. Tasting is available by appointment: contact Becky McIver at 707-637-7461.



# Hanzell: More Than 50 Vintages



Sometimes in the rush to find the latest cult Pinot Noir, we forget the heritage wineries that have a long tradition of excellence. Hanzell Vineyards was one of California's first boutique wine estates and has continued with an unwavering vision for the expression of the Hanzell terroir through its Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Diplomat James D. Zellerbach and his wife, Hana, became fond of Burgundy and its wines while he served as an American Ambassador to Italy. Zellerbach was the President of Crown Zellerbach, a large forest products company of the time. The Zellerbachs were so inspired that they purchased land on Sonoma Mountain one mile north of the Sonoma Plaza and built a winery of redwood and local stone fashioned after Burgundy's famed Clos de Vougeot. They planted their first Chardonnay (Wente clone) and Pinot Noir (Martin Ray clone) vines in 1953. The Martin Ray cuttings were reputedly obtained in a clandestine late night raid on a Napa Valley vineyard by Hanzell's initial winemaker, Brad Webb. Over the years the vines have mutated and new vines propagated from them creating a distinct Hanzell selection. The original plantings, now known as the Ambassador's Vineyard, are the oldest continually producing vineyard of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the New World.

Winemaking at Hanzell was Burgundian from the start and Zellerbach was among the first in California to use French oak barrels for aging. In addition, Zellerbach designed the first temperature controlled stainless steel fermentation tanks and he was the first to use nitrogen in bottling. Small amounts of wine were sold starting in 1957, but 1965 was the first full-scale commercial vintage.

The "Hanzell style" was developed by Brad Webb and continued for nearly 30 vintages by Winemaker Emeritus Bob Sessions. He retired in 2005, replaced briefly by Michael Terrien (who continues to consult) and now Michael McNeill. Sessions has spent countless hours and days passing his knowledge to the Hanzell team to insure the house style has remained consistent. The Chardonnays have been the star at this winery and often hold up beautifully for 20 years and beyond. The Pinot Noirs have had many advocates as well.

The ownership of Hanzell Vineyards has passed from the Zellerbachs, to the Days, and to the Countess Barbara de Brie in the 1970s. Since 1991, her son, Alexander, has owned and guided the property. Today, Hanzell's vineyards have increased to 46 acres (27.5 acres of Chardonnay and 14.5 acres of Pinot Noir) which produce 4,500 cases of 100% estate bottled wine from the estate vineyards.

Recently, President Jean Arnold Sessions has directed some changes made necessary by the economic climate. Select barrels of the Chardonnay that do not make the rigorous final selection for the Estate Chardonnay will be bottled separately. This wine is named Sebella to honor Alexander's children, Sebastian and Isabella. Also, a program has been launched to identify the truly Grand Cru enclaves in the Estate vineyards. This will allow production of even finer selection of barrels for the Estate wines, but limit production of Estate Chardonnay and Estate Pinot Noir. In the fall of 2011, these fewer cases will be allocated to long time supporters, including Ambassador's Circle members, and significant business relationships that have been trusted supporters over many years. Lastly, Hanzell is now offering a savings program on their current 2006 releases to align their pricing with the current economic reality. The pedigree and uniqueness and unwavering commitment to creating an age worthy wine more than justify the expensive prices for the Estate wines, but the more favorable pricing will allow Hanzell to compete with similar wines in California. 2006 Hanzell Vineyards Sebella Chardonnay is now \$21.60 a bottle (retail \$36), 2006 Hanzell Vineyards Estate Chardonnay is \$42 (retail \$70), and 2006 Hanzell Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir is \$57 (retail \$95).

**2006 Hanzell Sonoma Valley Pinot Noir** 15.3% alc., \$95. The 2006 Estate Pinot Noir received a week-long cold soak. The must was macerated for nearly a month creating a firm tannin backbone ideal for extended aging. Sourced from the 10-year old Sessions Vineyard and the older de Brye and Zellerbach vineyards. *Moderate garnet color with a burnished copper rim in the glass. Enticing aromas of spiced black cherries, raspberries, dusty trail, oak and a touch of barnyard. With time, scents of currants and raisin appear. Intense and juicy, with very ripe, dark red, and soil-inflected fruits showing hints of brioche, mocha, brown spice and even root beer flavors. The mouthfeel is all velvet, and the finishing cherry and berry fruits have a memorable persistence. Picks up interest with time in the glass. There is enough fruit and tannin to buttress the generous alcohol. This wine makes a case for the affirmative in the argument over whether you can make a Pinot Noir with over 15% alcohol that is balanced. A California classic that will improve beautifully with several years in the cellar. Very good (+).*



As noted above, the 2006 vintage Hanzell Vineyards wines are deeply discounted and may be purchased on the website at [www.hanzell.com](http://www.hanzell.com). The Ambassador's Circle wine club guarantees access to the Hanzell Vineyards Pinot Noir and Chardonnay as well as the 1953 Ambassador Vineyard releases, magnum releases, and library vintages. Guests are received by appointment only (707-996-3860).

# Talisman: Pinots from the Edge

Scott Rich is a winemaker who loves to work on the edge. He is a “terroirist” who purposely seeks out unique vineyard sites where farming Pinot Noir presents formidable challenges. He feels that these sites provide the most interesting wines that convey distinctive and singular terroirs. Scott says, “I like to express terroir for that is the beauty of Pinot Noir, and that is what comes through in the more extreme vineyards.” For example, he has labored at Steve MacRostie’s Wildcat Mountain Vineyard, the highest vineyard in Carneros, where the wind blows unmercifully in all directions at the same time. His mantra fits his appearance, for when you meet friendly Scott Rich, he strikes you as a rugged mountain man.

Scott has an impressive winemaking resume. He attended graduate school in the enology program at University of California at Davis and worked as a research enologist for both RH Phillips and Robert Mondavi. He crafted the wines at Etude with Tony Soter from 1995 to 2000, consulted with numerous wineries including Mount St. John and Carneros Creek, worked harvests in Chile, and made the wines as well as overseeing the construction of a new winery at Moraga Vineyards in Bel Air, Southern California. His desire for true artistic expression led him, along with his wife Marta (who is also the National Sales Manager for Calera Wine Company), to found Talisman Cellars in 1992.



Talisman is a word for a charm and the Talisman logo on the label is a stylized medicine wheel, a representation of the *paho*, a Native American charm that has been imbued with the power to protect one from harm. The name and logo was given to Scott by his Native American mother and is a tribute to her. The *paho* has the circle of life and the four directions show our place in the universe. The rays around the edge represent the sun, which gives the energy for life on earth and allows wine grapes to ripen.



At Etude, Scott had to craft Pinot Noirs that were ready to drink upon release, for over 75% of the production went to restaurants. With Talisman wines he can create Pinot Noirs that have age ability. He says, “I make my

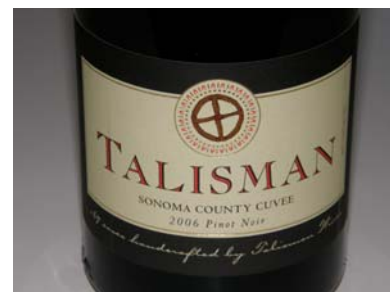


wines to age, even if no one gives them a chance.” The secondary characteristics of Pinot Noir that develop with aging are the most interesting for him. In a past feature in the *PinotFile* on Talisman Pinot Noirs (Volume 5, Issue 34), I sampled wines back to 1997 and they had aged beautifully. His current releases are from the 2006 vintage, at a time when many producers are already releasing their 2008 vintage wines.

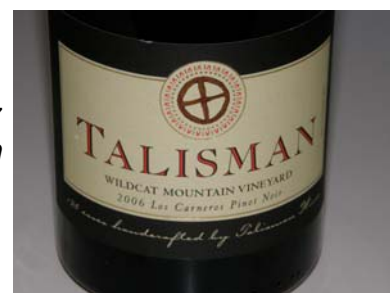
Scott is now at the pinnacle of his craft. He has refined his style to consistently produce classic Pinot Noir that is exquisite, pure and balanced. You won't find any jelly jar blockbusters. It is a tribute to Scott's winemaking practices that he is able to bring out the distinctive features of each wine's terroir. As you read through the reviews below, you will find a remarkable consistency of quality combined with a distinctiveness that reflects each wine's site of origin. I suggest buying a few bottles of your favorites, rest them in your cellar, and follow their progress over the next 10 to 15 years. It could be a revelation.



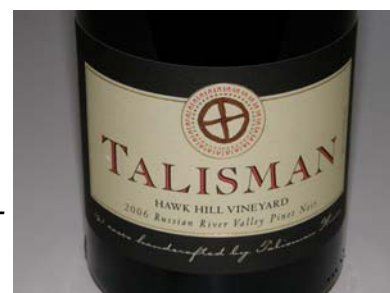
**2006 Talisman Sonoma County Cuvee Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 167 cases, \$26, released July 2009. A blend of barrel lots from several of the vineyards that make up vineyard-designate wines. *Loamy cherry and strawberry aromas and flavors with overtones of oak, baking spice, cola and green beans. Precocious and highly approachable now, the moderately rich core of fruit is elegant in form, silky in texture, and stylistically typical of a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. A wine to buy by the case for daily drinking. Very good.*




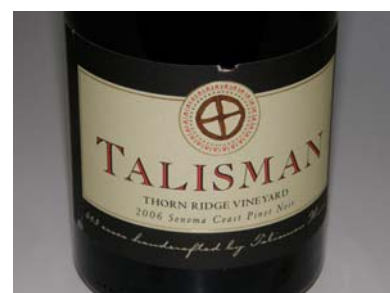
**2006 Talisman Wildcat Mountain Vineyard Los Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 120 cases, \$45, released April 2009. Highest in elevation of any vineyard in Carneros and directly exposed to cool air from San Pablo Bay. The soil is red pebbly clay loam derived from decomposed volcanic rock. Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777. *Unusual aromatic profile of strawberries, raspberries, beets, and green veggies. Luscious berry melange that is very satisfying, set off by supple ripe tannins, leading to a sweet raspberry kiss accenting the full-flavored finish. Like the name of the vineyard, this wine is a little untamed and feral and not your usual respectable Pinot Noir. Even better the next day from an opened and re-corked bottle. Very good.*



**2006 Talisman Hawk Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 141 cases, \$46, released September 2009. This vineyard is east of Freestone on Gold Ridge's southern slope. It's namesake soils are perfect for Pinot Noir. This is a very cool and foggy site. Clones 115 and Pommard 4. *Welcoming aromas of berry compote, spice, sandalwood and subtle oak. Rich flavors of black cherries and raspberries with underpinnings of cola and savory herbs. A harmonious wine that finishes with a welcoming snap of acidity. Its fruit-driven sole shows off the bright fruit so typical of the Russian River Valley. Still drinking beautifully the next day from an opened and re-corked bottle. Very good.*



 **2006 Talisman Thorn Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 503 cases, \$50, released September 2009. This vineyard is located in a foggy, windy site at the edge of the Petaluma Gap. Clones are 115, Pommard and Swan. *Scents of fresh berry pie, winter herbs, pencil lead and oak. Very tasty black cherry and berry core with a touch of herbs, juniper berry, and oak. An earthy wine with mineral nuances that is light on its feet and changes constantly in the glass. Impeccable balance predicts longevity. This wine projects a special pedigree.*



**2006 Talisman Red Dog Vineyard Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 502 cases, \$46, released September 2009. This vineyard is located above Bennett Valley at 1200 feet on the northwestern side of Sonoma Mountain where it is impacted by cold Pacific Ocean air. Clones are 115, 777 and Pommard. *Appealing nose of black cherry, blackberry and plum, forest floor, herbs and toasted oak. The flavors echo the aromas. Hefty tannins and bright acidity with a smooth mouthfeel. Raw, grippy and still very tight. Picked up richness and interest the next day from a previously opened re-corked bottle. Definitely a cellar candidate. Very good.*



**2006 Talisman Adastra Vineyard Los Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 321 cases, \$50, release date February 2010. Chris Thorpe and his son-in-law Edwin Richards farm is vineyard which is organically certified. Clones are 113, 2A, Pommard and Swan. *If you pull the cork early next year, decant or give this wine plenty of time in the glass. Black fruited and very fragrant with toasty herbal oak that has not yet integrated. This wine makes you sit and take notice. Fruit-driven and hedonistic with the most persistence finish of any of the wines in the lineup. Smoothly textured with flamboyant tannins now. The next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle the tannins had smoothed out, and there was a jolt of plum fruit with a pleasing mocha presence on the nose. Don't even think about drinking this wine for several years. This may prove to be the best wine in the lineup in five years.*



Talisman wines are crafted at a gathering of small wineries known as the Eighth Street Wineries at 21481 Eighth Street East, Sonoma, California (eightstreetwineries@me.com). An Open House is scheduled for Saturday, February 27, 2010, with participating wineries besides Talisman to include Tin Barn Vineyards, Parmelee-Hill, Ty Caton, Anaba Wines, Three Sticks, MacRostie, and Enkidu. The Talisman wines are sold online at [www.talismanwine.com](http://www.talismanwine.com) and through a mailing list. Tasting by appointment (707-258-5722).

# george pinot vintage VI

george is an anomaly in the california winemaking business. a number of years ago, he escaped the confines of wall street to work at williams selyem winery in healdsburg, california after having his wine epiphany with a 1991 and 1992 williams selyem rochioli vineyard pinot noir. he interned at williams selyem from 1999 to 2002 at the foot of Burt Williams and learned his winemaking process. he also worked at the smaller brogan cellars which was more closely modeled after the type of winery he hoped to launch himself some day. With grapes from david hirsch of sonoma coast's hirsch vineyard, he released 150 cases of his inaugural pinot noirs in 2003. the wines immediately caught the attention of top sommeliers at high-profile restaurants in las vegas and new york and his pinot noir quickly became a cult wine. i have been a fan from the beginning, entranced by the elegantly styled pinot noirs that he crafts.

george levkoff is a one man show performing every step of winemaking from sorting grapes by hand to numbering his bottlings, as well as marketing and even in many cases delivering his wines. He is a regular at pinot days (see below where we grabbed him for an interview - he is the one sitting next to me behind the george football helmet) where many of you have met him and sampled his wines. many fans have urged him to craft chardonnay, rosé, and syrah and even make an inexpensive pinot noir that restaurants can pour by the glass. he staunchly refuses to take that step, preferring not to take away from his major focus of producing a hand-crafted, ultra-premium pinot noir. george prefers lower case which explains the text in this feature. he also likes casual dress, usually seen in all types of weather wearing cut offs and sandals. george is a casual and lovable guy who crafts high-collar, sophisticated pinot noir.



i tasted the 2008 george vintage VI pinot noirs with george recently. he told me how he makes his wines. he de-stems 100% of the grapes, cold soaks for a few days, uses williams selyem yeast for inoculation, uses only free-run juice (except in the Sonoma Coma wine), and ages his pinots in 100% new francois freres french oak barrels. forget fining and filtration. all the wines below are still lolitas and patience is advised.



**2008 george Sonoma Coma Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 250 cases, \$50. A blend of grapes from Bacigalupi Vineyard on Westside Road (70%) and Ceremonial Vineyard (30%). *The nose is captivating with its scents of cherries, wood shavings, sandalwood and brown spice. The medium-weighted red cherry and berry fruits are subtly spiced and tinged with cola. Oak plays a supportive role. Soft, smooth and way too easy to drink. The most approachable Pinot Noir in the lineup and prototypical Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Very Good.*



**2008 george Ceremonial Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 315 cases, \$50. Farmed by the Martinelli family. *The wine draw you with aromas of Bing cherry, strawberry, wooded forest, seasoned oak and spice. Delicious cherry essence that is rich, full and lip-smacking. Exotic Asian spices, nutmeg and white pepper add accents and the cherry-driven finish is a winegasm. Even better six hours after opening. This is the signature george Pinot that really wants all of your attention.*



**2008 george Lera's Family Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 83 cases, \$50. A favorite in Vegas. *This is the densest wine in the lineup with oodles of purple, even meaty, fruit. Everything is pulled together nicely with a deft touch of oak and well balanced acidity. The rich fruit steals the show, but the wine is focused like a laser, leaving a seductive, satisfying and lingering impression. Very good.*

**2008 george Martaella Vineyard and King Family Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., 130 cases, \$50. A 50/50 blend of the two vineyards that are adjacent properties on Hartman Road. Because of lack of frost protection, over half of the crop was lost from these two vineyards in 2008 so the grapes were fermented together. Pommard clone. *On the fruity nose there are bright oak-infused aromas of black cherries and berries. Moderately rich core of ripe berries with a savory overtone. Still closed, opening gradually in the glass. Supple ripe tannins, tasty supporting oak and admirable delicacy. A solid wine which will get showier with time. Decent (+).*

**2008 george Hansen Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 83 cases, \$50. There is a story behind this wine. george says people either like it or hate it with no in between. Recently he sampled a noted French sommelier on this wine. The sommelier said, "This smells like shit. I'll take a case." Fred Hansen farms this vineyard which is located adjacent a cow pasture, accounting for the unique terroir-driven character. Composed of Dijon and Pommard clones. *This wine is replete with barnyard smells and tastes of fecundity. I am sure the Burgundians would love this wine but I am not a fan. There is a solid nucleus of cherry and berry fruit and the wine is well-crafted but its just not my cup of tea. Decent.*

george wine company Pinot is sold primarily (75%) through a mailing list at [www.georgewine.com](http://www.georgewine.com) with widespread fine restaurant distribution and a small amount of retail wine seller availability. The 2008 vintage is sold out at the winery. 707-495-7783.

# Chasseur: Quietly Crafting Princely Pinots

Bill Hunter is one of a band of winemakers focusing on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grown in the West County of Sonoma around the towns of western Sebastopol, Freestone and Occidental. Hunter developed an early interest in wine working as a wine steward at the famed Chronicle Restaurant in Pasadena, California, which was widely known for its extensive wine list. He went on to graduate from the University of California at Davis and gained his early winemaking experience at Rombauer, Bonny Doon and Chauffe-Eau Cellars. In 1994, he began to make some wine on the side, eventually starting his own label, Chasseur, the French word for Hunter. In 2002, he was joined by partner Alex P. Barhtolomaus, the Managing Director of Billington Imports, allowing Hunter to devote himself full time to Chasseur wines. He now produces 5,000 cases of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay at his small garagiste winery in Sebastopol.

Hunter is a quiet winemaker who shuns the limelight. I have never seen him pouring at a wine event. Regardless, his lineup of Pinot Noirs are quite impressive, particularly the single vineyard bottlings which are all quite distinctive, complex, and widely touted in the wine press. I recently tasted through most of the lineup of 2007 Chasseur Pinot Noirs. The wines are deeply colored, full-bodied and fruit-driven with reigned-in tannins and oak. All the wines are unfinned and unfiltered. The lineup of 2007 Pinot Noirs are very similar but with slight but noticeable differences. None of the wines will disappoint, regardless of which one you choose to drink.



**2008 Cazar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$18. *Well-spiced Bing cherries on the nose. Medium-weighted dried cherry, rhubarb and oak flavors. Savory herbs and earth notes add interest. Smoothly textured with a crisp finish. A pretty good drink that is clean, tasty, and a steal for the tab. Widely available in the retail market.*

Decent (+).



**2007 Chasseur Holder Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 75 cases, \$50. From a 1.5-acre vineyard in the Green Valley farmed by Bruce holder and Mary Ann Wheeler. One mile east of the town of Occidental, the planting includes clones 667 and 115 (2000). *An impressive wine that begins with lovely aromas of black cherries, spice, dark chocolate and a hint of smoke. Tasty black cherry and black raspberry essence with a sweet edge, leaving a lush impression in the mouth. Perfectly balanced with fine tannins and a pleasing tang on the finish. Angelic.*

**2007 Chasseur Umino Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 250 cases, \$60. From David Umino's 11-acre vineyard southwest of Sebastopol on Blucher Valley Road. Planted to Dijon 115, 667, 777 and 459 in 1997. A vineyard-designate bottling since the 2006 vintage. *Aromas of dark berries with a toasted oak and subtle anise edge. Well-defined earth-kissed dark fruits with complimentary oak flavors. Soft, dry tannins and a finish that sails along smoothly. Very good.*



**2007 Chasseur Sylvia's Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., 100 cases, \$60. From a tiny .9-acre vineyard owned and farmed by the Dutton family. Planted in 1994 on a ridge above the town of Graton in Goldridge soils. Clone 115. *A ripe style with flavors of ripe plums and berries, raisin, root beer and port. Well-crafted, easy to drink, but stewed fruit, even when slight as in this wine, is not my thing. Decent.*



**2007 Chasseur Joyce Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 100 cases, \$60. From the Joyce Vineyard farmed by Charlie Chenoweth. 3 acres on a ridge south of Freestone planted to clones 115 and 777. *Enticing scents of berries and cherries highlighted by notes of forest floor and pine. Rich core of juicy dark cherry, berry and plum fruit leaning to the dark red side. The texture is all silk and satin and the tannins are supple. Great now, but withholding some of its potential. It should improve with cellaring because the balance is spot-on.*



**2007 Chasseur Freestone Station Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 375 cases, \$60. Freestone Station Vineyard is owned by the Cleary family and farmed by the Dutton family. Situated in Freestone. Clones 115, 777, 23 and Pommard. Low yielding vineyard harvested late in October. *Plenty going on in the nose with aromas of black raspberries, blackberries, red grapes, rhubarb, spice and complimentary oak. Tasty dark red berry fruit that is silky and viscous in the mouth with a long, clean finish. This wine gets better and better in the glass over time. Very good (+).*

**2007 Chasseur Blank Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 275 cases, \$60. From the Blank Road Vineyard owned by Kenneth Goodin and planted and managed by Jim Pratt beginning in 2001. Clones 115 and 777. *The nose is a bit flat and stinky showing black cherry fruit and oak. Very subdued initially but builds in richness in the glass. Fruit-driven and one-dimensional and difficult to cozy up to now. Try again in a year. Decent.*

**2007 Chasseur Sexton Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 200 cases, \$55. From the Cornerstone Vineyard on Sexton Road planted by James Pratt to clones 113, 114, 115, 777 and 828 in 2000. The vineyard is 500 feet above the town of Freestone. *Unusual aromatic profile featuring black raspberry jam, dried mustard, fennel and Chinese Five-spice. Discreetly concentrated fruit core of berries and perfectly ripe plums that coats the mouth with a velvety richness. Hard to stop drinking this smooth and sensual wine. Very good (+).*



Chasseur vineyard-designate wines are sold primarily through a mailing list. Appellation Pinot Noirs from the Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast are also produced and are distributed in the fine wine retail marketplace. All the above 2007 Chasseur Pinot Noirs and the Russian River Valley Pinot Noir are still available on the website at [www.chasseurwines.com](http://www.chasseurwines.com). Total production, including Chardonnay, is 2,700 cases. The website is quite informative. Chasseur operates under the LLC, Hunter Wine Cellars. 707-829-1941.



# Early Sips of 2007 Littorai Pinot Noir

There is nothing fancy about Ted Lemon's website and you won't find him actively marketing his wines. Littorai wines are never sent to the wine press for review. The reason is that he doesn't have to: the wines speak for themselves.

Lemon was the first American ever hired as a winemaker and vineyard manager of a Burgundian estate, Domaine Guy Roulot in Meursault. In the United States his fingerprint has been on many wineries including Howell Mountain Vineyards, Reverie, Green and Red Vineyard, Keller Estate, Estancia, and Archery Summit. Since 1993, when he found Littorai with his spouse Heidi, Lemon has been producing superb examples of vineyard designated Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from western Sonoma and western Mendocino counties. His wines are the epitome of elegance, nuance and longevity and perfectly suited to the dinner table. I admire the wines for their harmony, the perfect integration of fruit, alcohol, acid and tannins.


I have written about Littorai wines on numerous occasions in the *PinotFile* and you will find a plethora of information about Lemon in this features. I recently sampled a few Littorai Pinot Noirs from the 2007 vintage. The wines were released in February 2009 and only recently shipped to the eager fans, including myself, on the mailing list.

**2007 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$60. *Takes some time to open in the glass. The redder spectrum of fruits are featured in the nose with bright cherries and strawberries, lightly spiced, with herb, oak and floral notes as well. Slightly confected cherry and strawberry flavors with an earthy underpinning and a hint of citrus. I thought I could also taste edible flowers. Moderate tannins, and a refreshing grip of acidity on the finish. Drank beautifully the next day from a previously opened re-corked bottle. This wine will reward further cellaring. Very good.*



**2007 Littorai B.A. Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., \$70. Divorce between the and wife owners of Thieriot required renaming of the source and B.A. was chosen as these are her initials. Littorai continues to have a 25-year lease on sections of the vineyard which Ted farms himself. *The deepest colored wine of the three wines reviewed here. Beautifully perfumed with purple fruits and flowers with a hint of toasted oak. Delicious core of dark cherries, berries and plums with a touch of oak spice. A seamless wine with young dry tannins and bright acidity that is only hinting at its ultimate potential. Will need time to integrate the oak and shed tannins. A debutante with a promising future. Very good.*



 **2007 Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$65. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Complex aromatic profile of black cherries, raspberries, fresh flowers, and earth (what I call muddy boots). Very tasty essence of black cherries and blackberries that really grabs your attention. Refined and delicate with moderate fine-grain tannins, perfect balancing acidity, silky texture, and pleasing aromatic persistence on the finish. Still marvelous and even better three days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. A love letter to keep and treasure.*



Other Littorai 2007 Pinot Noirs include vineyard designates from Summa (Sonoma Coast), Mays Canyon (Russian River Valley), Cerise and Roman (both from Anderson Valley), and The Haven (Sonoma Coast). Some of the wines are still available by contacting Littorai by phone at 707-823-9586). Sign up for the mailing list at [www.littorai.com](http://www.littorai.com). A new estate winery was completed in July 2008 and tours and tastings are available t by appointment. This is a special opportunity to tour a biodynamic farm and vineyard and learn the details from Lemon who is a strong advocate of this agricultural method.

# Windward Vineyard: Unique Paso Robles Monopole



Marc Goldberg and Maggie D'Ambrosia, who are both former hospital administrators and Pittsburgh natives with a love of Burgundy, purchased 26 acres of rolling hills off Highway 46 west of Highway 101 near Templeton in 1989. The area has been referred to as "Paso West" by writer Matt Kramer to distinguish it from "Paso East" which is a much warmer region ideal for Rhone varieties. The site's rocky calcereous, well-drained soil, and location in the maritime-influenced Templeton Gap (a break in the Santa Lucia Mountains north-south chain) is ideal for Pinot Noir. A daily diurnal variation in temperature of 50 degrees adds to the desirability of the site for Pinot Noir. The property was previously a rhododendron farm chosen for its cool climate. The owners cleared the land and planted 15 acres of Pinot Noir in 1990. With the assistance of noted winemaker Kenneth Volk, four clonal selections were chosen: HMR, Adelsheim (Oregon), Bien Nacido, and Sanford & Benedict. The word "Monopole" is proudly displayed on the labels reflecting the vision of total control over both the viticulture and vinification process. Monopole is a French term literally translated as "monopoly" indicating a vineyard controlled by a single winery. The term also eliminates any chance that other varieties of grapes are included in the wine as the case with some "Estate Grown" wines.



Goldberg and D'Ambrosia set out to produce Pinot Noir that rivals those from Burgundy. Goldberg learned his winemaking in Burgundy and under the guiding hand of winemaker Ken Volk. Like Burgundy wines, the Windward Pinot Noirs can be unbecoming when young, but can age beautifully as you can see from my notes below.

The Windward logo was designed by Paso Robles artist David Butz who created an image of the wind god in Goldberg's likeness blowing out a big puff of wind. The name was chosen because of the winds that blow through the Templeton Gap and heavily influence the microclimate of the Windward site.

The wines tasted below are not blockbusters. They display a classic style with admirable finesse and balance. Sometimes the tannins can be too intrusive, but otherwise these are exemplary and distinctive Pinot Noirs from

a unique terroir in the Central Coast. The winemaking consultant for the 1999 and 2001 vintages was Stephen Asséo. Two estate Pinot Noirs are produced: Windward Vineyard Monopole and Windward Vineyard Gold Barrel Select.

**1999 Windward Vineyard Monopole Paso Pobles Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., 1,300 cases, \$20. *Still pumping out attractive scents of spiced red cherries. Rustic and austere and on the lighter side but possessing pleasing flavors of red cherries and berries, wood box, thyme, mushroom and loam with a subtle citrus underpinning. Mild grainy tannins make for easy drinking. The fruit is beginning to fade so drink up. My son loved this wine. Decent (+).*



**2001 Windward Vineyard Monopole Paso Robles Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$30, 1,400 cases. *A riper vintage shown by aromas of dark red fruits, maple syrup and marzipan. Rich and aged flavors of poached fruit, black currants, brown spice, mocha and root beer. Still retaining notable tannins. Decent.*

**2002 Windward Vineyard Monopole Premier Decade Paso Robles Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$30. *Enticing fruity nose featuring black cherries, spice and sandalwood. Soft, smooth and elegant in the mouth with a charming mix of cherry and berry lip-smacking fruits with a slight green note. A feminine wine with style. Very good.*



**2003 Windward Vineyard Monopole Paso Robles Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$48. *Subdued dark berry fruit and a hint of anise on the nose. Fresh, lively and lush blackberries with an earthy edge wrapped in caressing tannins. Very smooth and creamy texture. Very good.*



**2005 Windward Vineyard Monopole Barrel Select Paso Robles Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$60. *Vibrant fruity nose with a spectrum of berries and cherries. Pleasing flavors of cherry pie, red currants and cola with flamboyant tannins. Light on its feet and attractive with a long, grainy finish. Still needs to shed some tannins but will always be a tannic wine. Very good.*

Windward Vineyard winery is housed in a vintage barn with a welcoming tasting room and outdoor picnic area. The address is 1380 Live Oak Rd. The tasting room is open daily from 10:30 to 5:00 and offers a vertical tasting of several recent vintages as well as library wines for a small charge. The 2007 vintage has been released and wines from the 2003 to 2006 vintages are still available. Windward Vineyard Pinot Noirs are sold through a mailing list with significant discounts to Wine Club members ([www.windwardvineyard.com](http://www.windwardvineyard.com)). The owners are the organizers of the annual Pinot and Paella Festival held in Templeton each June ([www.pinotandpaella.com](http://www.pinotandpaella.com)). Windward Vineyard is one of the featured wineries at the World of Pinot Noir, March 6, 2010, and the Paso Robles Zinfandel Festival March 19 and 20, 2010.





# Davis Family Vineyards: Reliably Good Pinot Noir

Guy Davis hand farms his 7-acre southeast hillside estate vineyard in the Russian River Valley, producing consistently excellent Pinot Noirs. Buying a bottle of Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is a sure thing. It's like pulling a bottle of Coke off the shelf at the market: you always know what to expect. Although I have used Pinot Noir as my example of consistency, the same could be said for all of his wines (Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Zinfandel).

Guy Davis developed an interest in wine at the tender age of 19. While working his way through college cooking in a French restaurant, he was able to taste great wines from all the famous wine regions of France, and became so knowledgeable, he soon was asked to buy all the wine for the restaurant's wine list. Although he was educated in economics and began his working career as a stockbroker, the stock market crash of 1987 made him look elsewhere for work. He picked up a job as a wine buyer in Sonoma in 1989, and soon was working in the cellars of several boutique wineries in the region. It was a stint with winemaker Lori Olds at Sky Vineyards a top Mt. Veeder that persuaded him to pursue a career in winemaking. He attended classes at Santa Rosa City College and University of California at Davis, and spent years searching for the perfectly situated site to grow Pinot Noir. In 1996 he bought his own hillside vineyard on Laguna Road in the Russian River Valley. By 1998, he was able to fully concentrate on winegrowing and producing premium wines.

A recurring theme seems to be commonplace among winemakers. They are often attracted to the combination of art and science involved in the challenge of producing fine wine. Guy has a soft spot for creative art as shown by the work of local artists displayed on his tasting room walls and the flamboyant artwork that guards the parking lot of his winery and tasting room complex. Guy says that if he wasn't a winemaker, he probably would like to be a sculptor or some kind of artisan food producer (he actually has accomplished the latter, producing a high quality artisan olive oil from trees planted in 1906 in the Sierra Foothills).

Guy Davis believes the difference between great and just good Pinot Noir is balance and complexity. He says, "Great Pinot Noir has the balance of rich, dark, masculine full-bodied aromas and flavors like black cherries, plums, chocolate, coffee, and forest floor mixed with the elegant and sensual perfume of raspberries, brown spices and sweet cherry blossoms, aligned with textures that are full and mouth coating yet silky and lasting. When harmony exists, the sensual layers seem to unfold forever!"


Davis does not literally farm his 7 acres of Pinot Noir. Rather, he farms 9,274 vines. He tries to get twelve touches for every vine during the growing season from pruning to harvest. He is obsessive, focused and fanatical about picking the right day to harvest. In the winery, his work is meticulous with constant smelling, tasting, and talking to the wines and never intervening unless absolutely necessary. He is an expert at blending, knowing what true greatness requires. As he notes, "Perfect Pinot may be elusive but when discovered and embraced, it is truly heaven."



**2003 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$35. *Lovely and heady black cherry and strawberry scents that fade quickly in the glass replaced by savory aromas of herbs and oak. Juicy and hit-pitched core of cherries, cranberries and strawberries with oak, dark chocolate and black tea in the background. Racy and a bit tart with fine-grain tannins. This wine has aged gracefully. Decent (+).*

**2005 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$40 *Very slight yellowing of rim edge in the glass. Ripe cherries, raisin, cola and a hint of oak toast on the generous nose. Juicy cherry and strawberry fruit with hints of secondary flavors of savory dried herbs, Pinot reduction sauce and sherry. Still vibrant and silky in the mouth. Probably slightly oxidized. Very good.*



 **2007 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$40. Tenth anniversary vintage (1997-2007). Best of Class and Gold Medal at the 2009 Sonoma County Harvest Fair. It must be gratifying to Guy Davis to have such a remarkable wine to commemorate his tenth vintage. *Bright reddish-purple color in the glass. Intense and penetrating aromas of Bing cherries, raspberries, strawberries, spice and cola.*

*Discreetly rich, slightly confected flavors that mimic the aromas. Fresh, clean and juicy with caressing tannins, refreshing acidity and an underlying mineral edge. A perfectly harmonious wine that is quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.*

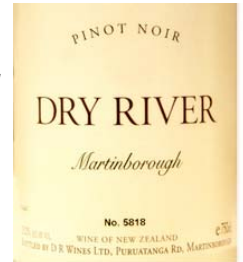


Visit the website, [www.daviswines.com](http://www.daviswines.com), to order wine, or better yet, visit the tasting room at 52 Front St. in Healdsburg and talk Pinot with Guy Davis. Just outside the winery you can picnic on the Russian River. He is a soft-spoken and cerebral winemaker who has a trove of wine information that he can offer in an understandable fashion. Discounts on wine and special events are available for Friends of the Family Wine Club. Prices for Davis Family Wines are very sensible. In 2007, there is also a Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir available. 1-866-338-9463.

# Sips of Pinot from Down Under

Neil and Dawn McCallum planted a vineyard at Dry River in 1979. The area has become known as the Martinborough Terrace, a cool-climate region appropriate for growing Pinot Noir. In 2002, the winery and 30 acres of vineyards were sold to New York executive Julian Robertson and California winegrower Reg Oliver who owned El Molino Winery in St. Helena, California. The new owners unfused cash into the operation for expansion and updating of winemaking equipment. Neil McCallum has remained as the head winemaker. The vineyards are dry-farmed, despite the low rainfall, and crop thinning is employed at veraison to severely limit yields. The wines are known for their complexity and longevity. Look to [www.vinfolio.com](http://www.vinfolio.com) to buy.

**2006 Dry River Martinborough New Zealand Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$90. Imported by RO Imports LLC., California. *Substantial color and structure. Complex aromatic profile that changes in the glass showing dark berries, vanilla, wood spice, browned marshmallows and brandy. Satisfying flavors of plums, currants, and blackberries with a woody and citrus undertone. Intense, even saturating fruit, but not jelly jar rich. Amazing persistence on the finish. The tannic backbone is ripe and substantial and the wine has the balance to age. Easy to mistake for a Grand Cru Burgundy with its expansive and lingering finish. A very unique wine that stands out from the Pinot crowd. Very good.*



Frogmore Creek is a 5 star winery in the 2009 Australian Wine Companion written by noted wine critic James Halliday. Established in 1996 in the Coal River Valley of southern Tasmania, Frogmore Creek bottled its first Pinot Noir in 2002. Internationally, Frogmore Creek Pinot Noir has garnered many awards. Andrew Hood is the consulting winemaker. The property is 445 acres of vines including Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris. The property's climatic profile is similar to Burgundy.



**2006 Frogmore Creek Tasmania Australia Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$20. Imported by Hathaway Co., Inc.. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. Lovely aromatics featuring black cherries, raspberries, spice and violets. Plenty of sweet purple fruit coats the palate with a silk and satin texture, mild grainy tannins, and enough structure to predict some longevity. A well-priced wine that drinks like wines with tonier names. Matches well with kangaroo. Very good (-).*



Andy and Penny Loving of Station Imports spend considerable time in Central Otago where they work with quality labels and import the wines to the United States. I visited Nick Mills at Rippon last year and was impressed by his commitment to biodynamic viticulture. His extensive training in Burgundy and the old vines on the Rippon estate (some dating to 1985) give him the tools to produce classically styled Pinot Noirs.

**2007 Kawarau Estate Reserve Central Otago New Zealand Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$31, screw cap. Imported by Station Imports, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The estate vineyard is located north of Cromwell in the heart of Central Otago and is organically certified by Biogro. *On the nose there is shy cherry and berry fruit with up front green garden, vanilla and dirty boot aromas. Very tasty dark red berry core, moderately rich, encased in soft tannins and complimentary oak. Smoothly textured and easy to drink. The oak has been noticeably toned down from previous vintages. The flavors trump the nose at this stage. Decent (+).*



**2007 Rippon Lake Wanaka Central Otago New Zealand Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$50, Diam closure. Mature vines. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. Imported by Station Imports, Colorado Springs, Colorado. *Immature aromas of black cherries, green olive and seasoned oak. Crisp and juicy black cherry core with a pleasing grip of acidity and minerality on the finish. Still needs to shed substantial tannins. If you drink now, decant, or better yet, cellar for a year or two at least. A little more luscious than usual for Rippon Pinot Noir. A stellar wine that is Very good.*





# Small Sips of Pinot



## **2007 Belle Glos Meiomì Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$25.

The name is pronounced May-OH-mee" and means "coast" in the language of the native Wappo tribe. A blend of several vineyards with different sub-climates in the true Sonoma Coast. *Very expressive nose right out of the bottle smelling of black raspberries, blackberries, dark chocolate, and fermenting Pinot Noir, with a whiff of alcohol. Vivid and fruity with tones of spice and herbs. Likable for its smooth texture and easy drinkability. Tasted on two occasions by the glass at a restaurant recently and at home from a bottle with consistent findings. Very good and very well priced.*



## **2004 Belle Glos Taylor Lane Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$45.

From a vineyard located in the Occidental Ridges planted to Dijon clones. Aged 9 months in French oak. *Deep purple color in the glass. Welcoming scents of black cherries, black olive, toasted oak and a hint of spice. Plenty of dark cherry and berry fruit, accents of tobacco, oak and nutmeg, on a polished, rich platform with minimal tannins. A tasty ripe style of Pinot Noir that seduces with a plush mouth feel. Very good (+).*



## **2007 Dehlinger Goldridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7%

alc., 1,340 cases, \$45. Unfined and unfiltered. *Slightly confected black cherry and black raspberry aromas with hints of pepper and a jolt of cardamon spice. Primarily cherry-driven, discreetly rich with nice finesse, and exhibiting a soft mouth feel. Still needs some time to integrate the oak fully, but hard to resist now. Very good.*



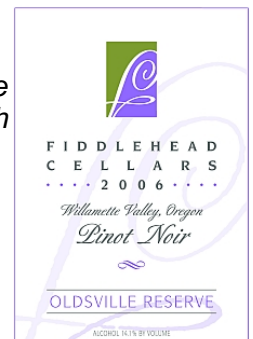
## **2006 Dehlinger Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., 360

cases, \$59. Sourced from the High Plains part of the vineyard planted in 1989. 10% whole cluster. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. Awkward nose with blacker fruits taking a back seat to smoke, oak, marzipan and barnyard aromas. Full-bodied dark berry core which is subdued. The tannins are ripe but prominent, oak char is evident, and there is a gentle hint of citrus on the finish. A brooding wine that will be terrific in 4 to 5 years. Drink the Goldridge bottling while you cellar the Reserve. Very good.*

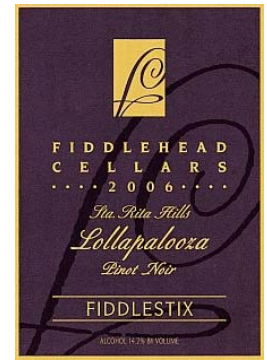


## **2006 Fiddlehead Cellars Oldsville Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc.,

\$50. Sourced from Elton and Allore vineyards. Aged 15 months in 35% French oak barrels and aged an additional 24 months in bottle. Tasted recently at the winery. *The aromatics are striking featuring dark cherries and plum, sage and a kiss of oak. Mid-weight fruit attack with supple tannins, a velvety texture, bright acidity and a lingering finish. This wine yearns for food. Very good.*



**2006 Fiddlehead Cellars Lollapalooza Fiddlestix Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 250 cases, \$75. A selection of the best 6-10 barrels in the cellar intended to represent the best of the vintage. Aged in 35% new French oak barrels and cellared for 18 months in bottle before release. Tasted recently at the winery. *Dark reddish-purple color. Black cherry, blackberry personality with hints of mocha and earth. Grainy ripe tannins still need time to soften. Well-endowed but suave and will benefit for cellaring. Very good.*



**2007 Hamilton Russell Vineyards Hemel-En-Aarde Valley, Hermanus, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa** 13.5% alc., 5,213 cases, \$37. This is a well-respected producer of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay that has received considerable praise from the wine press and retail marketplace. One wine seller recently exclaimed "Rivals the greatest Pinot Noirs of the world." I can only shake my head at such a remark for I have tasted multiple vintages of this wine through the years and never been impressed. This vintage is no exception. Grown, produced, and bottled at the Estate. *The nose is replete with loamy earth, oak and smoke with no fruit. Woody and chemical tasting on the palate with a moderately light core of tart cherry and berry fruit finishing with a rush of tannins. Tastes like a passable Bourgogne wine. Decent (-).*



**2007 JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset No. 69 Sonoma Collection Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Rosé** 14.1% alc., 200 cases, \$12.75. *Pinkish-red watermelon color in the glass. A European-styled rosé with juicy strawberry, cherry, cranberry and melon flavors exhibiting moderate richness and a satiny texture. One of the better rosés I have had from California. Very good.*

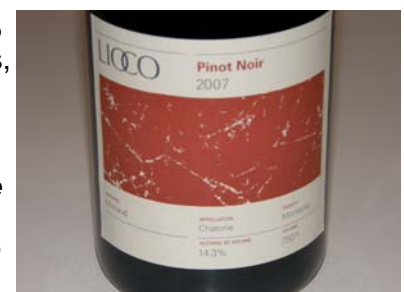


**2006 JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset No. 7 Sonoma Collection Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 338 cases, \$42.50. *The dark-fruited nose is dominated by oak char, brier and green pea scents. On the palate, the well oaked dark berry fruit is earthy and tart with a brisk citrusy finish. Unsatisfactory.*

**2006 JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset No. 22 Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 58 cases, \$63.75. *Lovely scent of dark stone and berry fruits, oak, redwood and rhubarb. Full, plush and striking core of dark berries and plums with a moderate tug of oak, firm tannins and bright acidity. The silky texture is alluring. Very good (-).*



**2007 LIOCO Michaud Vineyard Chalona Monterey County Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 346 cases, \$45. Wild fermentation, 10-day cold soak, manual punch downs, aged 12 months in 1-, 2-, and 3-year-old French oak. Unfined and unfiltered. Sourced from a remote hilltop site at 1,600 feet in the Pinnacles National Monument. An extreme microclimate with daily temperature swings of 40 to 60 degrees. Granite and limestone soils. *Strong aromas of plums, tea, oak, smoke and ground savory. Juicy and concentrated black fruits with an earthy underpinning finishing with a tasty raspberry kiss. Better later in the day from an opened bottle.. A masculine Pinot that will stand up to hearty foods. Will have fans. Very good.*





**2007 Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., \$60. *Hi-tone scents of plums and dark berries with overtones of cigar box and cola. Luscious and rich, almost syrupy, decadent dark Pinot fruits. Packed and stacked and not for wimps. A big wine with a big heart that will stoke Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir fans.*



**2007 Smoking Loon California Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 212,000 cases, \$8.99. Released July 2008. From the Three Loose Screws division of Don Sebastiani & Sons. *On the nose their are shy darker fruits, toasted oak and tobacco. Tasty black raspberry fruit with a smoky edge (the label is appropriate). Medium-bodied, soft in the mouth with minimal tannins. Straightforward and simple and very Decent for the price. Perfect price point for Generation Y.*



**2006 The Bohan-Dillon Hirsch Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$28. Hirsch Vineyards "village" wine. The family cat is featured on the label. *Moderately light in color. Attractive gathering of aromas of cherries, spice, herbs and oak. Oak-toned delicate cherry flavor with soft tannins. A very approachable light drink. Decent.*



**2007 The Bohan-Dillon Hirsch Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$28. *Deeper and earthier than the 2006 version of this wine with exotic woods and oak toast adding interest to the cherry fruit. Medium-weighted core of cherry and cranberry fruit with a silky mouthfeel and a good grip of acidity on the refreshing finish. Not an epiphanic wine, but well-priced and direct. Decent (+)*



**2007 Truett-Hurst Black Sheep Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., \$40. This label is a partnership between Phillip Hurst and Heath Dolan. Paul and Heath Dolan's forebears purchased what was a sheep farm, Truett Ranch, turning it into one of the first vineyard sources for the historic Italian Swiss Colony brand. Grapes for this wine are sourced from Sonoma Mountain and the Russian River Valley. Aged 12 months in French oak. *Very dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy dark fruits on the nose with an emphasis on newly sawn sweet oak and cardamon spice. Plum fruits are the centerpiece of this fruit-driven wine which veers close to overripeness. Harmonious with nicely balanced fruit and tannins, but nothing really stands out either. Decent.*





**2007 Waits-Mast Wines La Encantada Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**

14.2% alc., 25 cases, \$42. Jennifer Waits and Brian Mast are fog bound San Francisco winemakers focused solely on vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs in 25 to 50 case lots from sites in the Anderson Valley, Russian River Valley and Sta. Rita Hills. Clones 115, 667 and 777. 100% de-stemmed, aged 11 months in 33% new French oak. Crafted at Crushpad. *Scents of dark strawberries and cherries, dried roses, herbs and pine. Herb-inflected dark red cherry and berry flavors with hints of oak, green tomato and citrus. Well-crafted, with respectable richness and creaminess, but doesn't strike my fancy. Tasted twice. Decent (+).*



# Pinot Briefs

**A Serendipitous Find of 2007 Drew Pinot Noirs** A few missing cases of the outstanding 2007 Pinot Noirs were recently discovered in the storage warehouse. Visit the website at [www.drewwines.com](http://www.drewwines.com) to see more information of the 2007 McDougall Ranch, 2007 Savoy, 2007, Monument Tree and 2007 Fog-Eater Pinot Noirs.



**Keefer Ranch Offering Holiday Cheer** The terrific 2007 Keefer Ranch Pinot Noir is being offered through 12/31/09 at a 20% savings - \$34. Visit the website at [www.keeferranch.com](http://www.keeferranch.com) or phone 707-829-5950.

**Cathay Pacific Hong Kong International Wine and Spirits Competition** Gold Medal winners from New Zealand include 2007 Amisfield, 2007 Grasshopper Rock, 2007 Tohu, 2007 Wither Hills, and 2007 Wooing Tree (Best New World Pinot Noir and Best Overall Pinot Noir). Wooing Tree is a family owned single vineyard site in Central Otago next to the town of Cromwell specializing in Pinot Noir. The winery's 2007 Pinot Noir has won multiple gold medals in competitions this year. Unfortunately, I can't find any domestic retail availability.

**Americans Buy More, Cheaper Wines** Total U.S. wine sales rose in 2009 but sales of wines priced above \$25 a bottle fell in the past year. Prices of grapes have dropped precipitously making business difficult for many growers. The price of Pinot Noir on the spot market is said to be down 43%. Some growers are custom crushing their grapes and storing the wine to sell on the bulk market in the future rather than accepting a very low offer on their grapes. Small wineries are the hardest hit and it is surprising that more of them have not gone out of business. It is not clear that consumers will ever return to their old buying habits.

**¡Salud! The Oregon Pinot Noir Auction Raises Over \$607,000** The two day event, held November 13 and 14, 2009, was attended by over 400 guests. The event offered the first en masse tasting of the exciting 2008 Oregon Pinot Noirs. One of the live auction items was a Russian River Valley Immersion Weekend hosted by the Prince of Pinot that included lodging at the Benovia cottage, hosted luncheons at Benovia and Lynmar, special tastings at George and Kosta Browne, and a tasting of rare Russian River Valley cult Pinot Noirs. Plan to attend the 2010 event to be held November 12 and 13 in the Willamette Valley where I will offer another Pinot Noir Immersion weekend. All proceeds go to the medical and dental care of seasonal vineyard workers in Oregon. Visit the website at [www.saludauction.org](http://www.saludauction.org).

**Breggo Cellars Sold to Cliff Lede** Napa's Cliff Lede Winery, which focuses on Bordeaux-style blends and Sauvignon Blanc, has bought Breggo Cellars, a noted producer of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay in the Anderson Valley. Breggo Cellars was founded in 2005 by Douglas Stewart and his spouse Ana Lucia Benitez-Stewart. A small winery and tasting room was established on Highway 128 north of Boonville and 7 acres of grapes were planted. Breggo (boontling for sheep) will retain the Stewarts as equity partners and Ryan Hodgins as winemaker. Breggo's 2006 Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Chardonnay is a killer! Visit the website at [www.breggocellars.com](http://www.breggocellars.com).

**SanTásti Evaluated** San Tásti is a new lightly carbonated palate cleansing drink designed to stimulate saliva flow and remove tannin buildup from the mouth. I tried a few sips on several occasions while tasting wines. I found that it gave a sensation of dryness in my mouth with a slight taste of citrus that did not linger. It did seem to neutralize astringent tannin buildup and can be a welcome addition to wine tasting protocols. About \$1.75 for a 12 oz bottle. Visit [www.crackersareforslackers.com](http://www.crackersareforslackers.com).



**Scherrer Winery Offering Library Wines** Fred Scherrer likes to hold back some of his wines for aging and releases some of them each year in November. He also pulls out some magnums, ideal celebratory bottles for the holidays. A library order form is posted on the website at [www.scherrerwinery.com](http://www.scherrerwinery.com). You must register on the website to access the library or call the office at 707-823-8980 to obtain a list of offered wines.

**Shared Ownership Opportunity in Balinard Vineyard Estate** Matt Reidy, an award-winning Pinot Noir winemaker and vineyard owner, is looking for three wine enthusiasts to invest alongside of him in his established Balinard Vineyard Estate, an existing, super premium Pinot Noir vineyard and beautiful home site property located in the heart of Sonoma County's Russian River Valley grape growing area near Sebastopol, Occidental, Graton and Freestone. The entire property consists of 4.8 acres lying within the boundaries of both the Green Valley and Russian River Valley AVAs. The property would be shared in 25% interests between three new partners and Matt. Design drawings are being finished for the new home to be developed on the property. Construction will begin next spring. The modern architectural vernacular of the design is in keeping with the many period country farm houses found throughout the area and will feature modern features throughout. The wine country retreat will take full advantage of the vineyard and outdoor entertaining. Plans include a pool, large wrap around covered porch, automated formal gate with hardscape elements, extensive landscaping, organic herb and vegetable garden, built-in outdoor grill, and several al fresco dining areas and fire pit. The floor plan of the house will be an ideal place for entertaining family and friends and allow the partners to easily share the space. There will be a gourmet kitchen and wine cellar for each partner. The home will include 2 spacious master suites, a media room, an office, two additional bedrooms, and four and half bathrooms. The approximately 3,100 square foot home will be furnished using a comfortable modern design aesthetic. The 2.5-acre organic Pinot Noir vineyard was planted to clones 115, Calera and a special suitcase Vosne-Romanee selection in 2007. Greg Adams, noted regional viticulturist known as "Dr. Dirt," created the vineyard development plan and continues to monitor the vineyard. Another 0.5 acres of Pommard clone Pinot Noir will be added. Matt will lease the vines from the owners and pay 100% of all certified vineyard farming expenses. Each partner will be given the opportunity to create up to 10 cases of premium Pinot Noir from the vineyard with Matt at cost. The owners will benefit from income generated from vacation rentals when the partners are not in residence, and investment potential of the property. Matt will serve as the property manager. By sharing ownership, the partners will have all the benefits of the vineyard and home without the exposure of owning 100% of the property which dramatically reduces the cost of purchase, carrying costs, and attendant hassles of whole ownership. Each partner's total net equity investment is expected to be \$395,658 after debt. I spoke at length by phone with Matt about this shared ownership opportunity (I am not a participant in this but find it very appealing). Fractional resort properties among exclusive vineyard regions have become very popular. Most of these developments, such as Calistoga Ranch in the Napa Valley and The Orchard at the Carneros Inn, are quite large and expensive making Matt's shared ownership opportunity all the more attractive. Contact Matt at MReidy@FremontGroup.com.

**Consider Portland in Winter** Sure it rains cats and dogs, but winter is a great time to take advantage of fantastic deals in the city. Hotel Modera is offering packages for \$125 a night that include valet parking, eco-friendly Modera shopping tote, bottle of Oregon wine, bottled water, Oregon hazelnuts, 250 Alaskan Airline miles, discount coupons from downtown Portland retailers, and a complimentary appetizer with two entrees at Nel Centro Restaurant. While your in town, visit one of the many wine bars including Bar Avignon, Carafe Bistro & Wine Bar, Grolla Restaurant & Wine Bar, Korkage, Pour Wine Bar Bistro, MetroVino, Noble Rot, Pour Wine Bar Bistro, Sip D'Vine, Terroir Restaurant & Wine Bar, Thirst Wine Bar & Bistro, and Vino Paradiso Wine Bar & Bistro. Book by December 31, 2009, by phoning 877-484-1084 or online at [www.hotelmodera.com](http://www.hotelmodera.com), and entering "save" in the Promotional Code.

**Decant Your Champagne During the Holidays** Charles Heidsieck Champagne and Riedel Crystal have partnered in designing a new lyre-shaped decanter specifically for Champagne. The purpose behind decanting fine Champagne is that decanting warms and aerates the Champagne, bringing out the nuances of the Champagne, just as it does for still wines. The decanter's shape preserves the bubbles. Handmade and mouth-blown, the decanters are offered in a wood and leather-lined box set, together with a bottle of 1995 Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millenaires. Retail price is \$600. Another tip: consider drinking your fine Champagne from white wine glasses used for Chardonnay because this allows more aeration, making the Champagne richer and more expressive. The Champenois never use flutes for Champagne!



**Extinguishing the virus with wine** Dr. Scott Hanlon of Chicago recently put on a "Vaccine and Vino" event at the South Loop Wine Cellar. A flu shot was offered along with a tasting of five wines for \$40. The idea was to encourage more adults to get flue shots and apparently it worked.



**La Paulée de San Francisco** Daniel Johnnes presents La Paulée returning to San Francisco March 11, 12 and 13, 2010. Forty-four top Burgundy estates will be on hand to showcase their great wines. This weekend-long all-Burgundy extravaganza is an incredible opportunity to mingle with winemakers and taste current and older vintages from the finest Domaines of Burgundy such as Domaine Marquix D'Angerville, Domaine de L'Arlot, Bouchard Père et Fils, Joseph Drouhin, Domaine Dujac, Domaine Faiveley, Camille Giroud, Maison Louis Jadot, Domaine des Comtes Lafon, Domaine Perrot-Minot, Domaine Ramonet, Domaine Michèle et Patrice Rion, Domaine Georges Roumier, Domaine de la Vougeraie. Thursday, March 11: The Collectors Lunch featuring the wines of Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey and Domaine de Montille. Friday, March 12: Zachys All Burgundy Auction, The Verticals (Three vintage verticals of each participating Domaine's flagship wine), and Rare Wine Dinner (Celebrating 25 years of Burgundies from Domaines Dujac, Leflaive and Faiveley). Saturday: Burghound Seminar (A Study of Terroir with Joseph Drouhin and Maison Louis Jadot), The Grand Tasting (A walk around tasting showcasing the current vintages from all participating Domaines), and The Gala Dinner (The Marquis event). The events feature the cuisine of Michael Mina, Daniel Bouloud, Michael Troisgros and Corey Lee. Wine service will be led by fifty of this nation's most noted sommeliers. Prices range from \$135 for the Burghound Seminar to \$2,750 for the Rare Wine Dinner. Attend all events for \$5,275! For tickets and information visit [www.lapalee.com](http://www.lapalee.com).

**Give the Gift of Safety** Personal breathalyzers have become very reliable and give accurate results in seconds. Their compact size makes them easy to keep in a purse or coat pocket. The BACTRACK B70 Digital Breathalyzer is one of the newest (\$80). No mouthpiece is necessary - simply exhale into the breath tube for testing. Because the device does not require users to touch their lips to a mouthpiece, it is easy to share with multiple users. View this and other personal breathalyzers at [www.breathalyzer.net](http://www.breathalyzer.net).



**ForeFront has Stamp of Gary & Nancy Andrus** Three new wines under the ForeFront label have been released by the Crimson Wine Group. The new label is inspired by wine industry pioneer Gary Andrus, who, together with his wife Nancy, established Pinot Ridge Vineyards in 1978 in Napa Valley, as well as Archery Summit Vineyards in the Willamette Valley in 1993. The Andruses were among to first to encourage tight vine spacing in the vineyard, implement gravity flow in the cellar, and hire a female winemaker in the 1970s. The portfolio of ForeFront wines includes a Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Noir, all priced in the \$16 to \$24 range. The 2008 Pinot Noir is sourced primarily from the Dundee Hills AVA. The wines are crafted by winemaker Michael Beaulac who is at the home vineyard of Pine Ridge. For more information on the wines including a video over view, visit <http://forefrontwines.com/wines.html>.

**La Luz Wines from The Eyrie Vineyards** Michael Alberty at Story Teller Wine Company in Portland is offering a special Pinot Noir and Chardonnay which have never been made before. The La Luz wines were crafted by Jason Lett, replacing for one year his own label, Black Cap. Eyrie's cellar master, Julio Hernandez, is a very important part of the Eyrie Vineyards family. His wife, Guadalupe, a mother of three, is suffering renal failure and badly needs a kidney transplant. The Lett family offered a library offering of all of their Reserve Chardonnays last summer as a fund raising effort. Some of these wines are still available. Eyrie Vineyards is donating all proceeds from the sale of La Luz wines to Lupe's fund and Story Teller owner, Michael Alberty, is donating \$5 for every bottle sold. Regarding the Chardonnay, Alberty says, "It's just so darned elegant and sharp that just by holding the glass in your hand you will feel like Peter Lawford enjoying the stars in the desert sky while standing on the balcony of Steve McQueen's pad." The La Luz Pinot Noir is a multi-vintage wine made with fruit off of own-rooted vines from Eyrie's Rolling Green Vineyard planted in 1988 and Jeremy Saville's Bishop Creek Vineyard, also planted in 1988 in the Yamhill-Carlton District. Alberty says, "The nose on this wine, with that savory meat quality, could be a poster child for the umami movement." These wines are very, very good and only \$36 a bottle. Lett put his entire 2007 Black Cap vintage into these two wines and Black Cap wines normally sell for \$50 to \$60 a bottle. Contact Michael Alberty at [www.StorytellerWine.com](http://www.StorytellerWine.com) or 503-206-7029, 800-753-2531.



# Along the Bumpy Pinot Trail

Dear Loyal Subscribers:

It has become painfully evident to me that wine writing as a journalistic niche is in crisis at the present. Newspaper and magazine positions are being eliminated; print publications that include wine coverage are disappearing. Only a small number of critics are able to successfully charge for subscriptions.

There are many reasons for this trend but the ten major causes include the following. (1) The market for fee-based wine advice is tiny and shrinking. (2) A tremendous amount of free wine advice is available now online and people will take what they can get for free. (3) Consumers are becoming wine critics themselves. CellarTracker, for example, has a database of more than 1 million free tasting notes created by wine enthusiasts. (4) Everyday wine drinkers are becoming more trusting of their own palates. (5) Wine publications have not attracted younger readers. Bloggers appear to have the most chance to resonate with Generation Y, even though the expertise and accuracy of wine blogs is often suspect. (6) Inexpensive or free phone Apps with extensive wine ratings are widely available. (7) Becoming a wine writer is now financially a much more difficult proposition as wine prices have increased. Even Robert Parker, Jr., who at one time bought most of the wine he tasted, now admits that free samples make up by far the largest portion of the wines he tastes. (8) Creating, managing and maintaining a fee-based website is expensive and time consuming. (9) Wine publications from the Internet are easily passed around and shared among friends even though only one member of a friendly group is a paid subscriber. (10) The economic recession has severely affected fine wine sales. Retailers report that the market for over \$40 Pinot Noir, the "dead zone," which includes a majority of the wines I review, has vanished in the last year.

I have run into many headaches administering my website. PayPal has been difficult to deal with to say the least. A couple of months ago someone hacked into my website, diverting Googlebot from my site, and completely erasing my presence from Google search. I could go on about the many challenges I have confronted, but you get the idea.

Beginning January 1, 2010, the *PinotFile* will again become a free online wine newsletter. All past loyal subscribers will continue to receive notice immediately when a new issue is posted on the website, but the newsletter and the website will be available free to all wine enthusiasts. I will not e-mail a pdf copy of the newsletter as in years past when the newsletter was free. Monthly subscribers will have to visit the PayPal website to cancel their subscriptions (regretfully I cannot do this for you). Yearly subscribers who still have unexpired subscriptions need to do nothing unless a refund is desired. You can contact me at [prince@princeofpinot.com](mailto:prince@princeofpinot.com) with your mailing address and I will honor your request.

Please understand that I am not unduly discouraged by the lack of a market for fee-based coverage of wines and in particular Pinot Noir. I will continue to keep my pulse on the world of Pinot Noir and chase down and report the stories that matter. I promise to continue to attempt to take wine journalism in new and important directions. You can still depend on the *PinotFile* to discover the best Pinot Noir and tell you how to get your hands on it. [Princeofpinot.com](http://Princeofpinot.com) will continue to be the largest and most informative Pinot Noir database on the internet.

Thank you for your support and I hope your Holiday Season is celebrated with many bottles of princely Pinot Noir.

Prince

