



# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir is  
easy to covet,  
but hard to own*

## Briceland: A Pleasing Surprise from Humboldt County

I recently attended a casual blind tasting of various Pinot Noirs and two wines from Briceland Vineyards made an impression on me. I later formally tasted the wines and confirmed my attraction.

Bricelands Vineyards is located in the tiny town of Briceland in southern Humboldt County north of Mendocino County in Northern California. It is not one of the regions that first comes to mind when you think about California Pinot Noir, having considerable more notoriety for a well-known and illegal mood-altering substance. Many maps of California depicting the major winegrowing regions do not include Humboldt County. That said, I have had some very credible Humboldt County Pinot Noirs from Elk Prairie Vineyards and Woodenhead. Several years ago I wrote about Whitethorn Winery which was located in southern Humboldt County and was launched with the assistance of Joe Collins of Briceland Vineyards. Winemaker Tasha McCorkle McKee had a cult following for the Pinot Noir she made, but her sources were Hirsch Vineyard and Hyde Vineyard, both far removed from Humboldt County (her last wines were from the 2002 vintage, although I have read reports that she has resumed her winemaking career).

Humboldt County wine country is about a four hour drive on Highway 101 north of San Francisco. Quietly, the region has developed a thriving wine industry with close to thirty wineries (many indicated by red numbered circles on the map below). At least ten of the wineries produce Pinot Noir. Briceland Vineyards is shown on the map as red dot #3, just 6 miles west of Redway on Bricelands Shelter Cove Road.





Collins pioneered grape growing in southern Humboldt County when he planted an experimental vineyard in the region in the 1970s. He was to be involved in the planning, establishment and management of practically all the early vineyards in the area. Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are most suited to the region. The best sites are south or southwestern facing slopes near 1,500 feet above sea level surrounded by towering redwoods. These locations offer a lower incidence of frost at springtime, a mild temperate climate and rocky soils with ideal drainage.

Most of the red wine production at Bricelands Vineyards is Pinot Noir, sourced from neighbors who farm tiny hillside vineyards in the Redway and Myers Flat area. Pinot Noir is made in small 2 to 3 ton lots, fermented in small bins, and punched down by hand. Aging is carried out for one to two years in French oak barrels. The white wine lineup includes Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine, all grown in southern Humboldt County. Arneis, a rare Italian varietal, is also produced from grapes grown in Mendocino County. Collins' stepson, Andrew Morris, is the apprentice winemaker.

In 2010, Bricelands Vineyards won Best Winery, Best of Show, and Best Wine from Humboldt Grapes awards at the Humboldt County Fair as well as medals at the Orange County and California State fairs.



**2008 Bricelands Vineyards Elk Prarie Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir** Table wine, 125 cases, \$27. 23rd vintage. The vineyard is situated on a ridge that separates the Main Fork and South fork of the Eel River which provides a cooling influence. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is highly perfumed, bright and fruity, featuring well-spiced cherry aromas. Silky and seamless on the palate, with juicy flavors of cherries, raspberries, cranberries and a touch of loamy earth, finishing with aromatic purity and soft, sandy tannins. A wine that aims to please with its teasing pinotosity. Very good (+).*



**2008 Bricelands Vineyards Phelps Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., 50 cases, \$27. Phelps Vineyard is located on Elk Ridge and is farmed by Pam and Todd Phelps. Aged 1 year in French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Aromatically a bit shy initially, but builds in intensity over time in the glass becoming rather flamboyant and displaying scents of ripe, savory dark red fruits. Delicious, even striking, display of dark red stone fruits that fan out on the palate with subtle notes of Asian spice and plum sauce. Elegant and silky textured with remarkable persistence on the pleasing finish. A steamy seductress.*



Briceland Vineyards wines are not sold directly online, but you can contact Andrew Morris for wine purchases as well as a private tour and tasting (707-923-2429 or [andrew@bricelandvineyards.com](mailto:andrew@bricelandvineyards.com)). The wines are available through retail outlets and restaurants in Humboldt County, and can be tasted and purchased at Persimmons Tasting Room in Redway. Open houses are held Thanksgiving and Memorial Day weekends. A Wine Club offers significant discounts.



# Ponzi Vineyards: 40 Years

One of a handful of distinguished Oregon winemaking pioneers, Richard Ponzi was an unlikely candidate. He was an engineer who designed amusement park rides after moving to California in 1962 with his spouse Nancy shortly after their wedding. When Richard Ponzi was a youngster, his immigrant Italian father had made wine at home in Michigan with grapes shipped in from California. Upon arriving in California, he began to make wine at his home in Los Gatos as part of the family tradition and became intrigued with Pinot Noir. Knowing that Oregon had a climate similar to that of Burgundy, he packed up the family and moved to Portland while he began a search for an appropriate vineyard site to produce Pinot Noir.

The Ponzis bought a 20-acre farm southwest of Beaverton, a suburb of Portland, planning to make wine for the local market in Portland. As part of the hippie generation, they were committed to living off the land. Vineyard planting began in 1970 and the first wines were released commercially in 1974. By the 1990s, Ponzi was crafting world-class Pinot Noir and the reputation of Ponzi Vineyards soared. The Ponzi Reserve Pinot Noirs of the early 1990s were a revelation to the wine world. My Oregon wine epiphany was a 1992 Ponzi Reserve Pinot Noir made from a single vineyard that was 18 years old at the time.



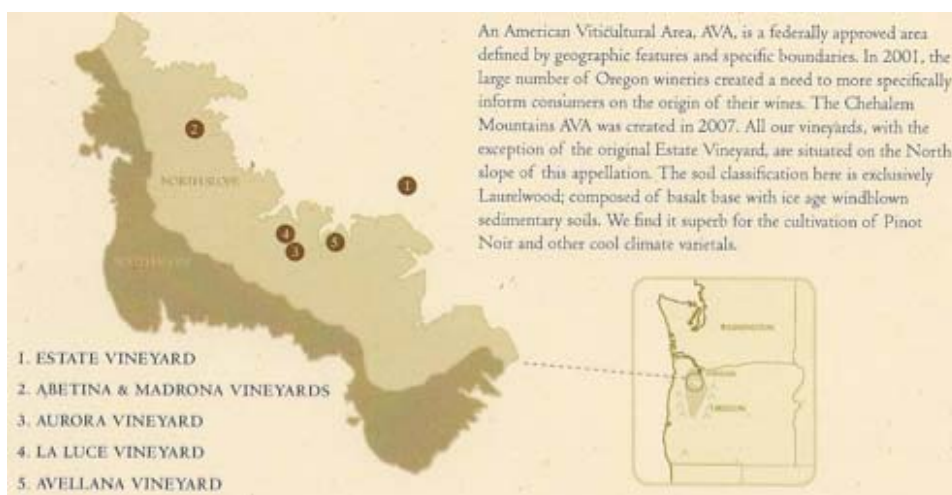
Ponzi's first small winery had no master plan and periodically a new addition would be added in a seemingly haphazard manner. To look at the original winery today, it seems remarkable that nearly 30,000 cases of wine were produced there at one time. Ponzi dreamed of a large, modern winery of his own design and this came to fruition in 2008 with the completion of Collina del Sogno, or "Hillside of Dreams," a 30,000-square-foot green facility in the Chehalem Mountains between Beaverton and Newberg, built on four tiers with a gravity-fed production system capable of producing 50,000 cases of wine annually.



The Ponzis have always been innovators. They were instrumental in obtaining state permission to allow wineries and adjoining tasting rooms to be constructed on agricultural land in Oregon. Together they helped found the Oregon Winegrowers Association and the Oregon Wine Advisory Board (currently known as the Oregon Wine Board). In 1984, they established Bridgeport Brewing Company, Oregon's first craft brewery, and in 1998 established a highly successful regional wine bar and bistro in downtown Dundee. Nancy Ponzi was one of the key founders of the International Pinot Noir Celebration, the Oregon Pinot Camp, and the ¡Salud! Oregon Wine Auction which provides health care for Oregon's seasonal vineyard workers. Ponzi Vineyards has been at the vanguard of sustainable viticulture in Oregon, one of the first to obtain LIVE certification in 2000 for the existing winery and all the vineyards.

Richard and Nancy are now retired from the day-to-day management of Ponzi Vineyards, having passed on the responsibility to their three children, Winemaker Luisa, Sales and Marketing Director Maria and Operations Manager Michel. On August 21, 2010, the Ponzi family hosted a 40th Anniversary Gala at Collina del Sogno. The royalty of Oregon winemakers were in attendance including speakers David Adelsheim, Dick Erath, Myron Redford and Susan Sokol Blosser.

Ponzi Vineyards now farms 120 estate acres in the Chehalem Mountains. All vineyards, with the exception of the original Estate Vineyard, are situated on the North slope of the appellation. Combined with purchased grapes, production amounts to 50,000 cases of multiple varietals including Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, and true to the Ponzis' Italian roots, Rosato, Dolcetto, Arneis and Vino Gelato.



Luisa Ponzi grew up working in the family's vineyards. She had intentions of becoming a doctor and was majoring in biology in college when she realized that medicine was not her calling. She switched to enology, studied in Burgundy, and took over the winemaking reigns from her father in 1993. She has had an impressive run of superb wines through the years while juggling her winemaking career with motherhood (she has four children with spouse and noted winemaker Eric Hamacher).

Ponzi Vineyards wines are sold through the winery's online store, at the tasting room still located at the original winery site at 14665 SW Winery Lane in Beaverton (the new winery is not open to the public), and through national retail channels distributed by Willson Daniels Ltd. Visit the website at [www.ponziwines.com](http://www.ponziwines.com).

I recently tasted through the 2008 lineup of Ponzi Vineyards Pinot Noirs along with a couple of older wines. Luisa has a touch with Pinot Noir and the wines were superb. Luisa called the 2008 vintage in Oregon "magical." Like many other premium Pinot Noirs from the 2008 vintage, cellaring is advised for optimum enjoyment. The hallmarks of Ponzi Vineyards Pinot Noir are balance and consistency.



**2008 Ponzi Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.71, 5,350 cases, \$35, screw cap. Sourced from 8 sustainably farmed vineyards with the largest percentage (30%) from Aurora Vineyard. Aged in 30% new French oak barrels for 11 months. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed nose with aromas of dark Pinot fruits dominated by black cherries. Intensely flavored with sweet, dark stone fruits and black raspberries with a slight confected note and a grip of citrus in the background. The impressively vivid fruit is wrapped in*

*fine-grain ripe tannins, persisting on the highly aromatic finish. A real crowd pleasure that will drink nicely for several years. Very good.*



**2002 Ponzi Vineyards Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc.. *Enticing, flamboyant aromas of black cherries and spiced red plums. Flavors of dark red fruits, cherry pie filling and a hint of juicy fruit coat the mouth and fan out on the generous finish. Very harmonious with melded tannins. A marvelous drink at its apogee from one of Oregon's greatest vintages. I wish I had more bottles in my cellar.*



**2006 Ponzi Vineyards Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$85 (current winery price). A blend of several vineyards, primarily Laurelwood soils in the Chehalem Mountains. *Initially brooding, but opens over time in the glass to reveal appealing scents of dark red and black Pinot fruits with a hint of black tea, earth and spice box. Ripe, dark fruit flavors, vivid and concentrated, with soft tannins. Reflective of a warmer vintage, this remains a beautiful representation of the year and will find fans of intensely fruity Pinot Noir. Very good.*



**2008 Ponzi Vineyards Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., pH 3.65, 442 cases, \$60. 100% de-stemmed. 7-day post-fermentation maceration. Aged for 20 months in 50% new French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Shy aromas of strawberries, red raspberries, cherries and cardamom spice. Elegant, yet generously flavored with spiced dark red fruits. Silky smooth with impeccable balance. More approachable than the vineyard-designate bottlings. A*

*charming wine that wows you with its remarkable staying power on the fruit-filled and aromatic finish.*



**2008 Ponzi Vineyards Aurora Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.70, 50 cases, \$100, etched bottle. Over 70 acres, first established in 1991. This bottling comes from a special section planted as own rooted Dijon clone 777 in 1995. 100% de-stemmed. 7-day post-fermentation maceration. Aged for 20 months in 50% new French oak barrels. Unfiltered and unfiltered and aged 5 months in bottle before release. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Offering very little charm on the nose with demure scents of dark red*

*fruits, polished woods and brioche. Intense and mouth coating flavors of dark red cherries and raspberries, with a citrus note in the background. Still sporting substantial tannins. Not offering the whole package at this time. Much better two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. A little more showy and youthful than the Abetina Vineyard bottling. Cellaring for 3 to 5 years is recommended.*



**2008 Ponzi Vineyards Abetina Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 100 cases, pH 3.66, \$100, etched bottle. From a 2-acre site planted in 1975 as part of an Oregon Clonal Test site with over 20 different Pinot Noir clones planted. Located on an east-facing slope in the Chehalem Mountains AVA on Laurelwood soil. Produced only in special vintages (1998, 1999, 2005 and 2008). 100% de-stemmed. 7-day post-fermentation maceration. Aged 20 months in 50% new French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered and aged in bottle for 5 months before release. *Moderately deep, dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very shy nose, offering subtle aromas of blackberry jam, plums, spice and a hint of toasty oak. Delicious core of ripe dark red and black fruits, especially plum and olallieberry, with a hint of anise and oak. The prodigious fruit has a savory edge and is nicely complimented by firm tannins and juicy acidity. Silky smooth in the mouth with amazing fruit-driven persistence on the finish. A serious wine for connoisseurs that is pouty at present with the structure trumping the fruit. This wine will benefit from several years in the cellar. Very good (+).*



# More Sips of 2008 Oregon Pinot Noir

Wine enthusiasts have tired of vintage hype, but in the case of Oregon's 2008 vintage for Pinot Noir, all the exalted publicity is fully warranted. What sets this vintage apart is a combination of perfect ripeness and luscious flavors at lower alcohol levels (the wines rarely cross over 14%) and impeccable balance that predicts age ability. Veteran Oregon winemakers liken the vintage to 1999, when late harvest sunshine allowed vintners to pick leisurely. Probably the only negatives of this vintage are the reduced yields making top wines challenging to source, and the need for many of the best wines to be cellared for at least five years, delaying the instant gratification that pinotphiles have become accustomed to with Oregon vintages of the past. When you taste, the wines are flirty, teasingly good now, but clearly in need of time to reveal the complexities that are deep within. There were a good many spectacular 2008 Pinot Noirs that I reviewed over the past year, but some have only recently reached the marketplace, and some noted producers, such as Anam Cara and Cristom, are still working through their inventory of 2007s (which, by the way, are ready to drink now while your 2008s rest).



## **2008 Beaux Frères the Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley**

**Pinot Noir** 13.6% alc., \$80. Made from fruit grown on the original estate vineyard. Primarily Pommard and Wädenswil clones planted on their own roots between 1988 and 1995. The vines are not irrigated and farming is organic with some biodynamic practices. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately light in color with a red tone. The aromatics are relatively closed, revealing little fruit but notable toasty*

*oak. The wine offers more on the elegant palate, with moderately rich and pleasing flavors of strawberries, cherries and oak accents that linger on the juicy finish. Well-integrated acidity and tannins offer a harmony that predicts 10+ years of longevity. Stunning the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. There is nothing like older vine fruit.*



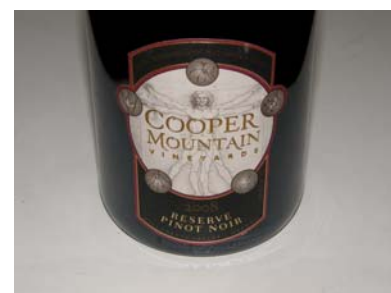
**2008 Chehalem 3 Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.1% alc., pH 3.64, 4,529 cases, \$27, screw cap. 45% Stoller Vineyard, 30% Corral Creek Vineyard, 25% Ridgecrest Vineyard (all estate). Always the first Chehalem Pinot Noir released (February, 2010). Aged 9 months in 23% new, 33% one-use and 44% multiple-use French oak barrels. *Demure fruit aromas with a heavy slug of toasty oak and toffee. The oak is less noticeable on the palate with pleasing flavors of strawberries and black raspberries framed by mild and slightly astringent tannins with balanced acidity. Hints of tea and pepper add interest. An everyday drinker. Good.*



## **2008 Cooper Mountain Vineyards Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot**

**Noir** 13.5% alc., \$24. Sourced from certified organic and Biodynamic vineyards. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Shy black cherry, blackberry and redwood aromas. Rich and intense layered core of black cherries and dark plums wrapped in ripe, firm tannins, and sparked by a lift of acidity. Showing more on the palate than the*

*nose now, but possessing the balance to develop nicely in the bottle. Patience needed. Plenty of Pinot for the price. Good.*





**2008 Domaine Drouhin Oregon Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$34 (winery retail is \$40). Natural yeast fermentation. Aged in 20% new French Oak barrels. 21st vintage. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Beautifully fruited perfume with accents of toasty oak and coffee. Delicious and suave, with vibrant flavors of cherry pie, red currant and strawberries that persist on the long and lush finish. The soft mouth feel is downright seductive. A stellar young wine that will last 15 years and should be part of any serious pinotophile's cellar. There are few competitors in Oregon that produce such consistently excellent, elegant and age worthy wines vintage after vintage.*



**2008 Matello Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., 336 cases, \$20. From Mad Wines Company owned by winemaker Marcus Goodfellow. Sourced from several vineyards. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. On the nose there is a demure perfume of dark cherry fruit with notable scents of oak, earth and cut flowers. An austere and currently disjointed wine with piercing acidity and flamboyant tannins that overwhelm the red cherry, raspberry and savory herb flavors. I don't find the balance for aging. Decent.*

**2008 Matello Souris Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 165 cases, \$36. A blend of Whistling Ridge, Bishop Creek and Cherry Grove vineyards. Aged for 18 months in 33% new French oak barrels. *Moderately intense reddish-purple color in the glass. Demure aromas of ripe Pinot fruits. The tasty core of cherries and berries takes a back seat to a citrus tone imparted by brisk acidity. Linear now with plenty of tannin, but possesses good upside potential. The Matello style reflects the winemaker's background in the restaurant industry and will appeal to acid lovers. Good.*



**2008 Montage Vineyards The Etzel Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.81, <120 cases, \$24.95. Clones 115 and 667 from the Upper Terrace of the Beau Frères Estate. 100% de-stemmed, native yeast fermentation, reductive winemaking, aged on the lees for 18 months in 25% new French oak barrels. *Very shy nose hinting at strawberries, cherries, herbs and loamy earth, coming to life slowly in the glass. Delicate flavors of red berries and cherries with a touch of oak in the background. Simple, yet pleasant, this wine will appeal to lovers of feminine-styled Pinot Noir. Good.*



**2008 ROCO Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., 1,600 cases, \$30, screw cap. Sourced from Wit's End Vineyard and other vineyards all of which are certified sustainably farmed. This is the second vintage at Rollin Soles' new winery located on a small rural farm property on the Willamette Valley floor at the northern foot of the Dundee Hills. The estate vineyards are located in the Chehalem Mountains. A tasting room and offices are being added, but the winery currently is open to the public only a few days a year. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Appealing scent of black cherries, red berries, cinnamon apple and sandalwood. Tasty melange of red berries and cherries with a hint of pomegranate. The wine is on the delicate side, but there is an impressive blast of cherry flavor in the mid palate, carrying over to the finish. Flavors build in intensity over time in the glass. Well proportioned tannins and acidity round out the wine. Even better the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating further aging will enhance this wine. Very good.*







**2008 ROCO Private Stash Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., 150 cases, \$75, screw cap. Sourced entirely from the Soles' family Wit's End Vineyard. *Moderately light reddish-purple hue in the glass. Closed for business initially, opening up over time in the glass. Pleasing, middle weight dark red cherries and berries with a hint of candied spice and Red Vines. The taste profile is more typical of Dundee Hills. A classy wine with admirable elegance that is very smooth in the mouth. It literally grows on you. Definitely decant if you drink now.*



**2008 Soter Vineyards Mineral Springs Ranch Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$35. 30 acres of estate vineyard just east of town of Carlton. 4th vintage from this vineyard. 100% de-stemmed, 3-4 day cold soak, 7-10 day extended maceration, aged 12 to 15 months in 60% new and 40% neutral French oak barrels. Aged 6 months in bottle before release. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Terrific nose with bright aromas of ripe berries, forest floor and good barnyard. Remarkably flavored in the mouth with a depth and richness of cherry and berry flavor that defies description. Soft and elegant with well-proportioned tannin and acidity. One of the best 2008 Oregon Pinot Noirs I have tasted and a superb cellar candidate.*



**2008 The Eyrie Vineyards Estate Grown Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$30.25. A blend of four estate vineyards with an average vine age of 29 years. *A red-fruited aromatic profile is accented by notes of herbal oak and pine needle. Moderately rich on the palate with vivid dark red berries, plums and savory herbs singing in harmony, framed by a spark of acidity. Elegant and approachable now, this is a solid wine with exemplary Eyrie style. Good (+).*



**2008 Verve Stoller Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 12.5% alc., 75 cases, \$30. 100% de-stemmed, fermented in one Rousseau 2 ton French oak open-top fermenter. 14 days on skins. Aged an average of 18 months in 65% new French oak barrels. Bottled March 29, 2010. *Lovely perfume of raspberries, cola and complimentary toasted oak. Fresh flavors of cherries and raspberries with a hint of herbal oak and a citrus tang on the bright finish. Silky, light in weight, with some dusty tannins. A wine with Burgundian sensitivity that can be drunk now. Good.*



**2008 Verve Montazi Vineyard McMinnville Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., 75 cases, \$33. 100% de-stemmed with no crushing, aged 18 months in 35% new French oak barrels. Bottled March 29, 2010. *Very shy nose hinting of sweet dark fruits but showing more prominent aromas of pipe smoke, old wood and herbs. The flavors trump the nose with a hearty medley of dark red Pinot fruits wrapped in firm tannins and an appealing citrus lift on the finish. I would probably wait on this one. Good.*

# Paul Lato: Central Coast Pinot Maestro

After last year's World of Pinot Noir, I stopped by Central Coast Wine Services in Santa Maria to taste barrel samples of Paul's 2008 Pinot Noirs, shortly before they were scheduled to be bottled. Paul said the 2008 wines were the best he has made to date and likened them to Julia Roberts: charming but plenty of structure in the right places. Now, after a year in bottle, I have re-tasted the wines, and they have certainly fulfilled their promise of potential greatness. Each wine is distinctive and reflective of its site.

Paul makes very small lots of distinguished vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs (in 2008 he also crafted "Matinee," a blended, inexpensive bottling), Syrah and Chardonnay. The wines are highly allocated through a mailing list at [www.paullatowines.com](http://www.paullatowines.com). The Lato style epitomizes elegance, restraint, sophistication and Pinot realism in the Chambolle vein. One of my favorite California producers.

## 2008 Paul Lato "Suerte" Solomon Hills Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir

14.8% alc., 175 cases, \$65. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Unfiltered. *Alluring aromas of nicely spiced cherries and strawberries echoed on the palate with an appealing earth, savory herb and oak undertone. Soft and smooth, with supple, grainy tannins and a refreshing juiciness on the finish. Very good.*



## 2008 Paul Lato "Duende" Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir

14.3% alc., 100 cases, \$60. 14-year-old Martini clone vines. Aged in 50% new French oak barrels. Unfiltered. *Subdued aromas of cherries, red berries and balsam which build in intensity over time in the glass. A cherry bombast in the mouth that makes one pause and wonder how a liquid could deliver such luscious flavor. Elegant, soft in the mouth, with powdery fine grain tannins and an endless echo of*

*scent and fruit on the dry finish.*



## 2008 Paul Lato "Sine Cera" Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir

14.7% alc., 125 cases, \$70. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Unfiltered. *Gorgeous aromas of black cherries and Grandma's fresh berry preserves with a hint of spice box including cardamom. The showy dark berry and plum fruit really sings on the palate. A man's Pinot with plenty of sinewy tannin framing the lush fruit, but not at all jammy. The finish has plenty of length. Softer and even more expressive the next day from*

*a previously opened and re-corked bottle. I have three words for this wine: delicious, seductive and beguiling. An All-American.*



## 2008 Paul Lato "Lancelot" Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir

14.8% alc., 100 cases, \$75. Unfiltered. *Subdued aromas of black fruits, herbs and a trace of sweet oak. Earth-kissed red plum and boysenberry fruits with a slight candied cherry note and a subtle underpinning of herbs and oak. Velvety in the mouth with excellent length on the explosive finish. The wine grows on you over time in the glass, and shows beautifully the next day from a previously opened and*

*re-corked bottle. Pisoni unplugged.*



# Rhys Vineyards: Three Vintage Tasting

Rhys Vineyards has caused quite a buzz among the pinoiriste community for its innovative viticulture and terroir-driven wines from the Santa Cruz Mountains. Rhys farms five estate vineyards scattered through the Skyline subregion of the Santa Cruz Mountains, all within a 25-minute drive of each other, and a single estate vineyard in Anderson Valley. It is said that Pinot Noir thrives on the edge and these vineyards represent special challenges to successful winegrowing. The cost of developing the vineyards has been substantial and it has taken several years to learn the vagaries of each vineyard site, and the appropriate mix of Pinot Noir selections and clones best suited to each microclimate.



The model at Rhys is clearly Burgundian and more specifically, the domaines of DRC and Dujac. Several of the vineyards are planted to close spacing using a variety of Dijon and California heritage clones, duplicating the clonal diversity approach in Burgundy. Significant whole cluster fermentation is the rule, making these wines less appealing on release, much like their Burgundy brethren. Meticulous farming allows grapes to be picked early yet possess phenolic ripeness, so that alcohols are under 14.0% and sometimes astonishingly low (under 13.0%). There is no compromise in vinification that would lead to early consumer-friendly drinkability.

A new underground winery was completed in time for the 2010 harvest. Grapes enter the cave entrance and the finished wines exit through another opening in the cave. This is a showpiece winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains, bringing much-needed prestige and notoriety to this often unheralded region.



Proprietor Kevin Harvey conferred the name Rhys Vineyards on his project, using a family name which is the Welsh spelling of Reese. He planted his Home Vineyard in 1995 and four additional vineyards (Family Farm, Alpine Road, Horseshoe Ranch and Skyline) between 2001 and 2005. The Family Farm Vineyard and Home Vineyard are located about 200 feet below the demarcation of the official Santa Cruz Mountains AVA, so they are not strictly in the AVA, and the wines from these two vineyards are labeled San Mateo County. Despite this incongruity, the wines from these two vineyards are Santa Cruz Mountains in character. A sixth vineyard, named Bearwallow, is a 20-acre site in the cool, "deep" end of the Anderson Valley, with 7 acres of established Pinot Noir vines. Additional planting is scheduled along with refurbishment of the existing vineyard. The first vintage from this vineyard was 2008. The first Santa Cruz Mountains estate wines were released in 2004.

Winemaker Jeff Brinkman (below) is bright and talented, having majored in biochemistry in college and learned winemaking on the job, beginning as a cellar rat in 1996. Javier Tapia Meza is the viticulturist. Farming is strictly organic with biodynamic influences.



The winemaking regimen for the estate Pinot Noirs is as follows. The grapes undergo a 10 to 14 day cold soak under reductive conditions. The cooling jackets are then shut off and natural fermentation ensues. The cap is punched down three times a day by foot treading, a method chosen for its gentleness. Fermentation lasts about 3 weeks. The ferment is pressed off with a basket press and the juice gravity fed into barrel. MLF is allowed to continue on its own. Blending takes place either before or after the next harvest after the wine spends approximately 14 months in barrel. All barrels are sourced from Francois Frères and are crafted from 4-year air-dried staves to insure there is no barrel variability. The percentage of new oak varies from 25% to 75% depending on a number of factors. The estate wines are all unfinned and unfiltered.

I recently tasted through both Alesia (Rhys Vineyards wines from declassified or purchased grapes) and Rhys Vineyards wines from the 2006, 2007, and 2008 vintages. Not every wine produced was sampled as many have only come into full production recently and were either offered in miniscule amounts or not available at all to me. I have tasted all three vintages at the winery and my notes are in previous issues of the PinotFile ([www.princeofpinot.com/article/795/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/795/), [www.princeofpinot.com/article/633/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/633/)).

Rhys Vineyards wines are highly allocated and available only through the winery's mailing list. More wine should become available as the vineyards mature and replanting brings vines on line. The winery is not currently open for tasting or tours. Visit the informative website at [www.rhysvineyards.com](http://www.rhysvineyards.com).

**2006 Alesia San Mateo County Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$29. Declassified fruit from the Family Farm Vineyard. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Slightly cooked cherry aromas with notes of polished wood, spice and cut flowers. Crisp and bright, with delicate and tasty strawberry and black cherry flavors with a sidecar of anise and toast. Silky with bright acidity and a thin, short finish. Drink up. Decent.*

**2006 Alesia Chileno Valley Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$29. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of cherries, red punch, green oak and underbrush. Slightly sweet cherry and strawberry flavors with hi-tone acidity and oak in the background. Drink up. Decent.*

**2006 Alesia Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$35. A well-endowed wine with upfront aromas and flavors of rich dark fruits including plum blackberry and cassis with supporting toasty oak. A fruit-driven wine with soft tannins and almost liquor-like dense fruit. Good.

**2007 Alesia Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., \$35. Nicely perfumed with raspberries, cherries and spice box. Tasty essence of red fruits including red plums, cherries and pomegranates with supple tannins and lively acidity contributing a tangy finish. A typical Caliesque wine with in-your-face fruit that will find fans. Good.



**2006 Rhys Vineyards Alpine Hillside Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir.** 13.9% alc., \$49. Sourced from the steepest and lowest yielding section of Alpine Vineyard (see photo above). Deeply colored. Muted aromas of dark fruits with a very appealing hint of exotic spices. Luscious broad-shouldered fruit core with impressive intensity, backed by firm tannins and offering an amazing persistence on the glorious finish. Similar in flavor to the regular Alpine Vineyard bottling but ramped up a notch. Drinking great two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. An impressive effort that should continue to evolve in years to come.

**2007 Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$49. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Enticing aromas of black cherries, black raspberries, spice and vanillin. Richly fruited with dense but crisp flavors of ripe dark fruits nicely spiced, mineral-imbued, and caressed by structured tannins. A silky and seductive wine that has charm. Unchanged one and two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Very good.



**2007 Rhys Vineyards Family Farm Vineyard San Mateo County Pinot Noir** 13.4% alc., \$49. Swan selection, Pommard clone, Dijon 115 clone planted on alluvial clay loam. Yield of 2.1 tons per acre. Aged in 40% new French oak barrels. Moderate garnet color in the glass. Great nose with flamboyant scents of black cherry compote, raspberry jam, clove and other spices, and a hint of smoke. Dark red fruited with intense and vivid red plum and berry flavors framed by exotic spices. The tannins are firm and dry, the mouth feel is silky, and the balance is spot on. A beautiful, black tie Pinot Noir that demands attention.



**2007 Rhys Vineyards Home Vineyard San Mateo County Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., \$59. A field blend of .25 acres planted to 5' x 6' on decomposed sandstone. Yields of 2.5 tons per acre. Aged in 100% new French oak barrels. Deep, dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very ripe fruit aromas of black cherries, raisins, grilled fruit, leather and exotic spices. Moderately dense and thick dark berry and black cherry fruit with an earthy undertone and a hint of anise, all wrapped in restrained, firm tannins. Big-boned but soft on the palate, becoming smoother and more delightful with time in the glass. Very good.



**2008 Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay** 13.3% alc., \$59. Hyde and Wente selections, 76 and 96 clones planted to 6' x 4' at 1380 feet on soils with top soil over soft shale. Yield of 1.8 tons per acre. Moderately light golden yellow color. Lovely perfume of lemon curd, white stone fruits and stewed apples. Delicious and layered, with notes of green apple, pears, brioche and toast. The wine has a bright steeliness due to the lively acidity. A beautiful wine that packs in plenty of flavor at modest alcohol: a win-win situation. Will age.





**2008 Rhys Vineyards Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 13.3% alc., \$59. Heritage and suitcase selections planted to 6' x 4' at 1230 feet on soils with top soil over soft shale. Yields 1.04 tons per acre. *Moderately intense reddish-purple color in the glass. Intense and intoxicating perfume of purple fruits, dried roses, and whole-cluster induced spiciness. A bit reticent, but offering a glimpse of intense plum and dark berry fruits that saturate the palate without being weighty, persisting on the intensely fruity finish that is highlighted by exotic spices and edible flowers. Nothing out of place. Much more open and giving two days later from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Still a Lolita with huge potential.*



**2008 Rhys Vineyards Family Farm Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 12.6% alc., \$49. Swan selection, Pommard clone, and Dijon 115 clone planted to 6' x 6' at 400 feet on clay loam soil. Yield 2.6 tons per acre. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Demure but pleasing scents of Bing cherries and cardamom spice with hints of minty oak and stem. Relatively delicate flavors of cherries, raspberries and red hard candy with a bright citrus peel note. Delivers more intensity with time in the glass but doesn't excite. The nose trumps the flavors at this time. More akin to a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. About the same the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. May improve with cellaring. Good.*

# WesMar: 2008 Garagiste Pinot Noir

WesMar was launched as a bonded winery over ten years ago in the mold of the original Williams Selyem winery. Consistency and quality are the hallmarks at this small garagiste winery, with matrimonial partners Kirk WESley Hubbard and Denise MARY Selyem self-admitted control freaks who manage every detail of the winemaking process from sorting to bottling. The preferred style is a more feminine Pinot Noir, created by picking grapes with a good amount of natural acidity. No additives are employed, and the wines are neither fined or filtered. Kirk and Denise are compulsive about cellar sanitation. If a wine does not meet their expectations, it is declassified and sold as bulk, such as the entire smoke tainted 2008 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir and the 2008 Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir.


With WesMar's latest fall 2010 release of 2008 Pinot Noirs, a 10th Anniversary Special Offer is available. When you order a case of the 2008 vintage, you receive a baker's dozen which includes a bottle of the outstanding 2007 Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir.

Denise said that her vineyard sources were not hit hard by the extended frost in April of 2008 in Sonoma County. The growing season was cool and the resulting wines "are full flavored with a jam-like concentration, providing moderate tannins and acidity with supple textures." Phone the winery to arrange a tasting or to order wines (707-829-8824). The website is [www.wesmarwinery.com](http://www.wesmarwinery.com). All the wines are also available in magnum format at twice the cost of a single bottle.


**2008 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., \$40. The appellation wines from WesMar are not condescending wines inferior to the single vineyard bottlings, but rather are a virtuous blend of the vineyard designate wines of the vintage. *Striking aromatics showing off spicy Bing Cherries. Soft and gentle in the mouth, with understated but pleasing flavors of red cherries, strawberries, and cola. An easy drinker that will be a promising workhorse at the dinner table. Like cherry pie day at cooking school: cherries, baking spices and very interesting results. Very good.*



**2008 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$37. *More darkly colored than usual from this vineyard. Great purity of cherry fruit in the nose and on the palate with a typical addition (for this vineyard) of baking spices. A tasty middleweight with dusty tannins and a fruity finish that is not showing everything now. I would suggest cellaring for another year or two. Very good.*

 **2008 WesMar Balleto Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$40. Pommard clone. Previously this wine carried a Sonoma Coast AVA designation but the boundaries have changed and this vineyard is now in the Russian Rive Valley. *Demure and delicate aromas of gently spiced black cherries. Discreetly concentrated black stone and berry fruits that are full of vim and vigor, wrapped in soft tannins and framed by bright acidity. This wine is offering the most upfront action now in the lineup.*



 **2008 WesMar Salzgeber Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$40. *A chameleon of a wine, constantly changing in the glass over time revealing a panoply of aromas and flavors. The core of red and black cherries and berries make a delicious medley that hits a high note on the divine finish. There are some savory and herbal notes which in some vintages are overwhelming in this wine, but nicely integrated in this vintage. Beautifully balanced with a pleasing silkiness and supple tannins that make for easy drinking. A special date night Pinot.*



# Mahoney Vineyards: Modern Wines with a History

Francis Mahoney can claim over 36 years of experience growing and producing wines in the Carneros region. He established Carneros Creek Winery in 1972 with his wife Kathleen and partner Balfour Gibson. With the goal of making Burgundian-styled wines, the trio built a winery in 1973, the first new winemaking facility in Carneros since the repeal of Prohibition. The photo below shows Francis Mahoney at the Legends of Pinot Noir Seminar during the 2009 Pinot Days in San Francisco.



Mahoney was unique among Pinot Noir pioneers of the 1970s in that he realized besides climate and soil, clones were an important factor in creating great Pinot Noir in California. From 1975 to 1985, Mahoney and Curtis Alley, a professor at the University of California at Davis and a viticulture specialist, conducted experiments on a small 1.5-acre plot planted to various clones near the Carneros Creek Winery. The Carneros Creek Winery Clonal Trial was meant to compare clones from the University of California at Davis (so-called “clean-stock”) with clones not sourced from the clean-stock program. Valuable data was collected on clonal performance and many other vineyards were planted with budwood from this trial. No single clone was considered best. Mahoney remarked, “We liked different clones like we like different children. They had their own personalities and a little bit of this with a little bit of that makes a more interesting wine. We concluded that we would not just plant one clone in a vineyard.” Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the study followed.

Mahoney was instrumental in founding the Carneros Quality Alliance (now the Carneros Wine Alliance), an organization of winegrowers and wineries in Carneros. During the 1980s and 1990s, Mahoney planted the Mahoney Ranch Vineyard surrounding his home, and Las Brisas Vineyard on Ramal Road. In 1998, he sold his majority share in Carneros Creek Winery to investment banker Bill Hambrecht. The winery subsequently passed through several hands and is now owned by Briarcliff Wine Group, LLC. Mahoney founded Mahoney Vineyards and today shares the Carneros Creek Winery facility with Briarcliff. Mahoney hired Ken Foster, a former winemaker at David Bruce Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains, to head the winemaking program at Mahoney Vineyards. Since his hiring, the winery has made significant strides in quality, as the reviews of the wines below testify. Mahoney has always emphasized wines of elegance, balance and true varietal character, reflecting their Carneros heritage.

Mahoney now owns 162 acres of vineyards in Carneros, 149 acres of which are planted to multiple selections of Pinot Noir. Mahoney supplies fruit to Carneros Creek Winery and several other producers as well as Mahoney Vineyards. Mahoney Vineyards currently releases four Pinot Noirs: a Carneros appellation blend, and vineyard designates from Las Brisas Vineyard, Mahoney Ranch Vineyard and Haire Ranch Vineyard.

The Mahoney Vineyard wines are available for tasting at the Oxbow Tasting Room at 708 1st St. in Napa and may be purchased from the winery’s website store at [www.mahoneyvineyards.com](http://www.mahoneyvineyards.com). The winery produces a wide range of varietals, but is best known for Pinot Noir. A very affordable early drinking second label, Fleur de California, is very popular and widely distributed.

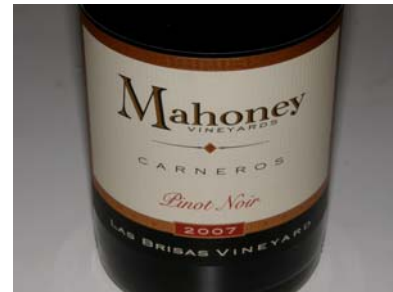




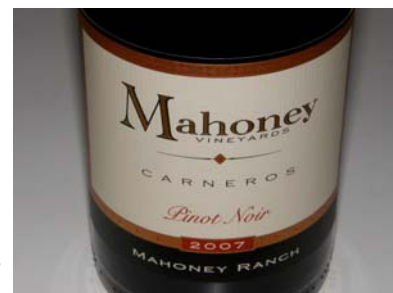
**2007 Mahoney Vineyards Carneros Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.65, 1,570 cases, \$22. 7 Pinot Noir clonal selections from the Mahoney Ranch and Las Brisas Vineyards. Aged 14 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Persistent aromas of black cherries, raspberries and Red Vines that hold up nicely over time in the glass. Well-composed and tasty, this pleasing wine features a moderately weighted core of cherry, raspberry and currant fruits with undertones of spice and earth. The finish is marked by intensely aromatic cherries. A solid daily drinker. Good.*



**2007 Mahoney Vineyards Las Brisas Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.57, 230 cases, \$32. This vineyard is named for the winds that cool the vines. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Typical Pinot nose with bright cherry, Herbs de Provence and oak aromas that maintain intensity over time in the glass. Delicious black cherry fruit flavor explodes in the mouth, with an impressive intensity and persistence, but the wine remains delicate and charming. A hint of citrus and oak in the background adds interest. Very good.*



**2007 Mahoney Vineyards Mahoney Ranch Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir** 13.7% alc., pH 3.65, 230 cases, \$32. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately deep garnet color in the glass. Complex aromatic profile featuring notes of black cherry, allspice, MuShu plum sauce and boot leather. Layered dark stone fruits on the palate with nuances of earth, grilled mushrooms, cola and subtle oak. The wine rises to the occasion and becomes better and better in the glass with swirling. An admirable grip of acidity provides a refreshing finish. A very easy drinker that will please any pinoriste. Still fine the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.*



**2009 Mahoney Vineyards Gavin Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay** 13.8% alc., pH 3.54, 230 cases, \$18. Produced only in outstanding vintages. Barrel fermented and aged 9 months sur-lies in French oak barrels. *Light straw color in the glass. A perfectly fine Chardonnay especially at this price. Lovely scents of citrus, white peach and vanilla pudding. Tasty Asian pear and white peach fruit with a hint of citrus peel. Light and subtle with a good acid spine typical of Chardonnay from Carneros. An exemplary daily drinker.*



**2008 Fleur de California Central Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., pH 3.67, 2,300 cases, \$15. Aged 9 months in neutral French oak. *Moderately light in color. Shy but pleasant aromas of strawberries and raspberries. Light and smooth in the mouth, with some pretty red berry fruit that tails off quickly over time in the glass. Minimal tannins and easy drinkability. Decent.*



**2009 Fleur de California Carneros Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., pH 3.65, 6,700 cases, \$17. Aged 9 months in neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Welcoming fruity aromas of black cherries and dark red berry jam echoed on the palate. Toasty oak adds interest in the background, supple tannins soften the wine, and bright acidity clings to the finish which shows some aromatic fruit persistence. One of the few under \$20 California Pinot Noirs that is worth drinking. Good.*



# More Sips of California Pinot Noir

**2008 Alta Maria Vineyards Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., \$23.

*Moderate color. Lovely scent of black cherries, baking and peppery spices, and subtle oak toast. Light and easy in the mouth with tasty black cherry and darker berry flavors caressed by dry fine grain tannins. Some persistence on the fruity finish which displays a grassy, vegetal note. Good.*



**2009 Byron Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 14.9% alc., \$25. A

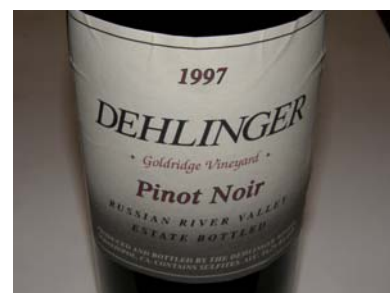
popular wine with 12,835 cases of the 2008 vintage sold out. Aged 10 months in 25% new French oak barrels. Sourced from the estate Nielson Vineyard planted in 1964. *Deeply colored. Nicely scented with aromas of black raspberry tart, black cherries, smoky oak and rose petals. Sweet and rich with a powerful core of dark red stone fruits and berries and underpinnings of earth, anise and grilled meat. The tannins are supple and the wine's richness and velvety mouthfeel courtesy of the alcohol will find fans. A grocery store staple that is in wide distribution. Good.*



**2008 Dehlinger Goldridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.8% alc., \$45. Sourced from

sections of the estate vineyard where the vines are planted on deeper soils causing the vines to be more vigorous. The resulting wines take on a red fruit character and an approachable structure. 100% de-stemmed, punched down by hand, aged in the winery's underground cellar. *Alluring scent of Bing cherries and baking spices that holds up nicely over time in the glass. Discreetly concentrated array of delicious red cherries, strawberries and red currants on the palate, fanning out in waves to reach a pleasing finish that makes you want to take another sip. Beautifully composed and thoroughly harmonious, this crowd pleaser is highly approachable now but will perform well for ten years. This is a wine to buy by the case, but you must be on the mailing list. Eva Dehlinger, who has taken over the winemaking chores from Tom Dehlinger since 2007, is continuing the excellence of this cherished and iconic producer.*

**1997 Dehlinger Goldridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.2% alc., \$39. *Reddish-brown in color. Old wine aromas of old book, roasted plum, sawdust and worn leather. Impressive fruit concentration for a 13-year-old wine and drinking beautifully. The tannins have completely faded away and the juicy and silky dark fruits complimented by hints of citrus, spice and seasoned oak make for a delicious treat. This wine will appeal to lovers of old Pinot Noir. Note the wrinkles in the old hand-applied label.*



**2008 Derby Wine Estates Derbyshire Vineyard San Simeon San**

**Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., pH 3.50, 246 cases, \$36.

The vineyard, planted in 1998, borders the Hearst Ranch and is located one mile inland from the Pacific Ocean. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Aged 20 months in 44% new French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered.

*Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. Powerful and penetrating aromas of ripe, fresh black raspberries and black cherries.*

*Delicious essence of sweet Pinot fruits with the slightest hint of pepper and citrus. Very silky and harmonious with bright acidity that will serve it well at the dinner table. Still singing beautifully the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Impressive effort from a unique coastal California site.*



**2007 Derby Wine Estates Derbyshire Vineyard San Simeon San Luis Obispo County Reserve Pinot Noir** 15.3% alc., pH 3.65, 249 cases, \$42. Clones 115, 667, 777. Aged 34 months in 80% new and 20% neutral French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Deeply colored. The fruit-filled nose offers aromas of plums, black currants, and blackberry jam with toasty and smoky oak in the background. A blocky wine with plenty of sweet dark fruit but too much oak-derived notes of mocha, brown sugar, and toasted brioche. As much as I liked the 2008 regular bottling from this producer, this full-throttle wine represents all that many have criticized Caliesque Pinot Noirs for: overripeness, high alcohol, generous extraction, and too much oak. Decent.*

**2008 Eric Kent Wine Cellars Stiling Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., \$40. Label art is by Kerry Mansfield, photographer. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Lovely hi-tone Bing cherries spiced with cardamom and clove are featured in this juicy and well-endowed wine. Hints of oak toast, cherry cola and red hard candy add accents. Very typical Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. Nicely proportioned tannins, but could use a touch more acidity. Very good.*



**1997 Kalin Cellars Cuvee DD Sonoma County Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., \$35. *Amazing reddish-purple color with a hint of brickish change at the rim. Terrific and impressively nuanced nose offering scents of black cherries, plums, leather, old wood, old book, vitamins and sweet smoke. Rich and full-bodied flavors of sweet black cherries and blackberries with hints of oak, bacon, cola and citrus. Amazingly fresh and vibrant fruit set off by balancing tannins and acidity. The fruit really grabs hold and lingers on the finish. Fades some over time in the glass so drink up when you pop the cork. I have to take my cap off to this incredible 13-year-old California Pinot Noir.*



**2008 Littorai Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$80. Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of ripe strawberries and melons. Charming black raspberry and black cherry fruit with a silky smooth mouth feel. Notes of cola, grilled fruit, hard red candy and tar in the background. A lovely kiss of cherry on the finish. You have to love the soft texture, elegance and balance of the wine and it has charm with a capital C, but from a flavor perspective, it is not my favorite Littorai Summa bottling. Very good.



**2007 Lula Cellars Mendocino Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., 315 cases, \$39. Lula is winemaker Jeff Hansen's maternal grandmother's name.

Hansen was previously the winemaker and owner of Amici Cellars in Napa. The inaugural release from a 5-acre vineyard planted in 1998 in the mountain town of Comptche, 10 miles east of village of Mendocino. 65% pommard, 30% Dijon 115 and 5% Dijon 777. 4-day cold soak.

Aged 18 months in 50% new French oak. Great label. Moderately deep purplish-red color in the glass. Brooding aromas of plum sauce, dark berry melange, and leaf. Charming fruit core replete with vivid flavors of black plums, black raspberries and blackberries persisting on the intensely aromatic finish.

Perfectly integrated oak and well proportioned ripe tannins. This wine has real mountain character, tasting like other intriguing Pinots I have had from Comptche, a little-known, but superb growing area for Pinot Noir.



**2008 MacMurray Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$18. Initially there are attractive scents of spiced cherries and strawberries, but smoke emerges over time as the wine sits in the glass. Moderately rich core of fruit heavily tainted by smoke and tar flavors. Typical of many 2008 smoke affected Pinot Noirs from the Sonoma Coast. Unsatisfactory.



**2008 Montage Vineyards Flocchini Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.82, <180 cases, \$24.95. Pommard clone, Swan selection, La Tache suitcase selection. Vineyard is located in the Petaluma Gap area. 100% de-stemmed, native yeast fermentation, hand punch downs, aged on the lees for 18 months in 30% new French oak barrels.

Initially the aromas of intense strawberry, black cherry and roasted plum are striking but fade some over time in the glass. Very ripe black cherry and raspberry fruit flavors that are fat and opulent with underpinnings of wood spice, root beer and brown spice. Very plush and velvety on the palate. Plenty of Pinot for the price. Good.



Note: Montage is a promising newer producer based in Oxnard, California and owned by John Gooden. Both the Etzel Vineyard and Flocchini Vineyard bottlings are good values and sold through the winery's on-line store at [www.montagevineyards.com](http://www.montagevineyards.com) and various retail locations. Wine club members enjoy a 20% discount.



**2008 Pali Wine Co. Summit Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., \$29, screw cap. 45% Santa Barbara County (Turner Vineyard) and 55% Monterey County (Boer Vineyard). Small lot fermentation, aged 18 months.

Intended for consumption upon release. Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. Lovely and complex perfume featuring aromas of slightly confected black cherries, berries, cola, spice, pepper, and vanillin that persist over time in the glass. Darker stone and berry fruits are nicely spiced and offer a pleasing richness of flavor. A really tasty fruit-driven and user friendly Pinot that aims to please. Very good.



**2005 Porter Creek Hillside Vineyard Old Vine Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$59. *Slight brickish color to the rim. Aromas of red fruits, sawn wood, matchstick and wintergreen. Moderately light array of redder fruits with a hint of oak-derived root beer, a noticeable tannic backbone, and vibrant acidity lifting the finish. Showing charming restraint, very tasty and holding up beautifully. Still good the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Very good.*



Note: The following seven wines were taken from my cellar. I had not visited the wines in a few years. Stylistically, the Radio-Coteau wines are deeply colored, rich, and fruit-driven with plenty of tannic backbone, in some cases generous oak, and savory aromatics. The wines need hearty food. Although this producer has a devoted following, the style is currently not my cup of tea.

**2005 Radio-Coteau La Neblina Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 1,740 cases. La Neblina is Spanish for fog. Sourced from a few select vineyards. Unfined and unfiltered. *Savory aromatics featuring underbrush, green tobacco, leather hide and dried cherries. Stacked and packed with dense dark berry and cherry flavor with a bit of tobacco leaf and oak in the background, linger on the big fruit-filled finish. Decent.*

**2006 Radio-Coteau La Neblina Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 1,592 cases. Unfined and unfiltered. *The appealing perfume of dark red cherries, currants and raspberries is accented with red candies and vanillin. Luscious core of black cherry fruit with a twist of citrus on the lip-smacking finish. The fruit has impressive zip and zing but is somewhat overwhelmed by the tannins. That said, hard to say no to. Very good.*

**2006 Radio-Coteau Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 380 cases. Unfined and unfiltered. *The nose offers aromas of mint, oak and tar. Big-boned and muscular, flush with rich dark berry fruit. Rather linear with generously oaked fruit and not much else. Decent.*

**2007 Radio-Coteau La Neblina Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 1,688 cases. Unfined and unfiltered. *Mysterious, brooding mix of plums, dark cherries and berries with a hint of spice. Moderately intense with well-endowed tannins and a lengthy fruit-driven finish. Good.*



**2007 Radio-Coteau Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., 536 cases. Unfined and unfiltered. *More savory than fruity on the nose with plenty of minty, herbal oak. Richly fruited with flavors of blackberries and plum sauce wrapped in fine-grain tannins. A rugged, beefy wine. Decent.*

**2007 Radio-Coteau Terra Neuma Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 318 cases. Unfined and unfiltered. Sixth generation family owned ranch on a bluff above Bodega a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. *Shy aromas of cherry and berry fruit with oak and bay leaf in the background, echoed in the flavors. Simple and fruity with notable persistence of fruit on the generous finish. Could be from anywhere. Good.*

**2007 Radio-Coteau Alberigi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.4% alc., 296 cases. Unfined unfiltered. *Pleasant scent of cherry pie and balsam. Bright red spicy fruit with supple tannins and a refreshing grip of acidity on the hi-tone finish. Quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot. Good (+).*



**2008 Ventana Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir** 14.3% alc., \$16.50. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. A fruitista perfume of cherries, raspberries and strawberries. Very tasty, slightly confected flavors of strawberries and red raspberries with a hint of sandalwood. Soft and smooth with minimal tannins. An easy, everyday back porch drinker. Good.*



**2008 Verve Laetitia Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.65, 294 cases, \$33. Clones 3A, 667 and Martini. Fermented in one Rousseau 2-ton French oak open-top fermenter. 3-day cold soak, with an extended post-fermentation maceration of 30 days. *The fruit in this wine veers to the ripe side but is hard to resist. Moderately intense aromas of black cherries and cassis with a subtle hint of toasty oak. Discreetly concentrated array of dark red berries and cherries with a little cherry cola, mocha and sweet oak highlights. A very elegant wine with a seductive texture. Very good.*



**2007 Wild Horse Winery & Vineyards Unbridled Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., pH 3.56, >3,000 cases, \$24. The unbridled bottling is sold primarily at the winery. A blend of Garey, Solomon Hills and Ranch Los Hermanas vineyards in the southern part of Santa Barbara County. 100% destemmed, small lot fermentations, 10 day post-fermentation maceration, aged 14 months in French oak barrels. *Moderately deep reddish-purple color in the glass. A savory nose featuring aromas of mushrooms, forest floor, pine pitch and oak. Dark fruits flood the mouth upon entry persisting through a juicy, lingering finish. Still young with substantial tannins which need time to integrate. A subtle earthiness, spice and oak flavor add interest to the rich fruit. Much better the next day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Very good.*



# La Crema: Pinot You Can Rely On

If you had to pick one California Pinot Noir label that year in and year out produces consistently fine Pinot Noir from multiple appellations at reasonable prices, La Crema would certainly come to mind. When neighbors, friends, and young people ask me what Pinot Noir to buy to take to a dinner, I often tell them La Crema. They usually thank me afterwards, but La Crema is an easy recommendation to make. The wines are widely distributed (the winery website, [www.lacrema.com](http://www.lacrema.com), will help you find the wines close to home), with prominent placement on the top shelves of supermarket wine displays.

La Crema Winery is a family owned estate in the Russian River Valley that specializes in handcrafted Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from cool climate vineyards in Sonoma, Mendocino and Monterey counties. Established in 1979, the winery has never allowed visitors (except for special events such as Winter Wineland), but the label quickly gained a reputation for quality. The owners are Laura Jacson-Giron and her sister Jennifer Jackson (family members belonging to the Jess Jackson clan).

Several winemakers developed the La Crema Winery style through the years, including Dan Goldfield (Dutton-Goldfield) and Jeff Stewart (Buena Vista). In 2004, La Crema hired Melissa Stackhouse to oversee all aspects of winemaking, and the wines reached a remarkable high level of quality despite the relatively large production and value pricing. The popularity of the label has never been higher and La Crema is consistently one of the top selling restaurant labels.

Stackhouse first joined La Crema in 2000 as an assistant winemaker. Before La Crema, her winemaking experience including stints at Peter Michael Winery, Hardy's Tintara Winery in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Robert Mondavi, Sterling and Joseph Phelps Vineyards. She holds a degree in viticulture and enology from University of California at Davis.

Winemaking includes careful sorting, de-stemming, 5 to 8 day cold soak, aging for 7-8 months in about 25% to 30% new tight-grain, medium toast French oak barrels, and minimal fining and filtering.

La Crema has supported sustainable farming since 1999, when they were among the first wineries to become a certified Sonoma County "green business." 75% of La Crema's vineyards are farmed using "non-tillage" practices to reduce carbon dioxide output. In all the estate vineyards, composted grape pomace and chipped vegetation are added to replenish organic matter. Habitat boxes in the vineyards for owls, bluebirds and falcons help to naturally control vineyard pests. Riparian areas that border vineyards are planted and maintained. Beneficial insects are introduced to eliminate the need for pesticides.

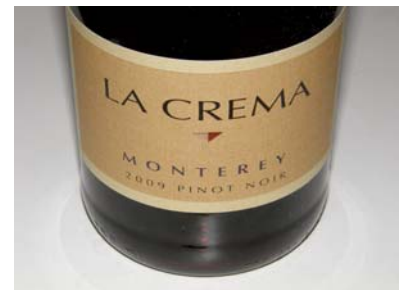
I last tasted through the La Crema lineup of Pinot Noirs in the 2005 vintage when the wines showed beautiful balance and attractive textures but were more similar than different. With the 2009 vintage wines reviewed below, I discovered more appellation-specific character. All the wines can be recommended for early drinking. Prices vary widely depending on the retail source. Appellation-specific coastal region wines are produced from the Russian River Valley AVA, Sonoma Coast AVA, Los Carneros AVA, Anderson Valley AVA and Monterey AVA. La Crema also produces an age worthy reserve small production (200 cases) expensive bottling labeled Nine-Barrel Pinot Noir which has received many accolades from the wine press.

The La Crema tasting room, which is open daily, is located at 235 Healdsburg Avenue in Healdsburg.



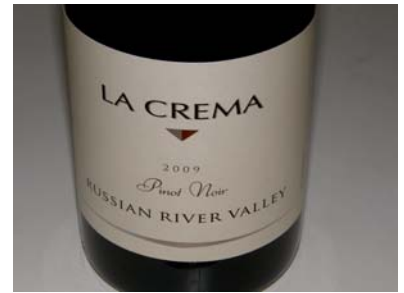
## **2009 La Crema Monterey Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.74, \$24.

Most fruit from a high-density planted estate vineyard in the Arroyo Seco appellation. Aged 7 months in 29% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with scents of black cherries, plum sauce, blackberry jam, spice and prickly pear. Well-structured and composed array of earth-kissed purple and black fruits with fine-grain tannins and bright acidity. A hint of oak-derived anise and dark chocolate add interest. Reminds me of Santa Lucia Highlands fruit. Soft and smooth in the mouth making the wine very inviting. A crazy good wine at this price.*





**2009 La Crema Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$28.  
*Deeply colored. Highly perfumed with Bing cherries, strawberries and a touch of baking spice. Tasty strawberry and cherry fruit which is fully ripe and moderately dense. Soft and plush on the palate with supple dry tannins. Easy to drink and in character for the AVA. Good (+).*



**2009 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 13.9% alc., pH 3.70, \$24.  
Clones 115, 667, 777, 828, Pommard, Martini, 2A, 23, Calera, Mt. Eden and Swan. Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. 100% de-stemmed, cold soaked, open-top container fermentation, aged 7.5 months in 26% new medium to heavy toast French oak barrels, racked once out of barrel before blending. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Subtle but attractive fruit-driven scent of an array of stone fruits and berries. Vivid and pure flavors of cherries and berries backed by sinewy tannins and offered with a softly textured mouth feel. The fruit is really quite charming and has that exotic edge often seen with Sonoma Coast bottlings. An exceptional value. Very good.*





# Pinot Shootout Finals Tasting

I am not a big fan of large competition tastings, preferring to take my time in evaluating a wine. The Pinot Noir Shootout, conducted by Barbara Drady of Affairs of the Vine, is unique in that fewer wines are tasted at one sitting and more time can be devoted to fully sampling each wine in the competition. Recently, I attended the Finals Tasting in San Francisco where 96 out of over 350 wines originally submitted were scored by three groups of judges. The wines were judged independent of origin, price and vintage. Of the 32 wines I tasted during the afternoon, there were many excellent wines and some that really stood out.

## Heaven Sent

**2009 Coghlan Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 300 cases, \$47. *Aromas of oak-kissed red cherry and berry fruit. Delicious oak-imbued fruit with accents of baking spice. Harmoniously composed with impressive length on the finish. A great marriage of fruit and oak.*

**2008 Costa de Oro Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 1,000 cases, \$35. *Flamboyant aromas of cherries, berries, allspice and rose garden that persists in the glass over time. Dark red and purple succulent fruits underlain with an earthy, musky vein. Very smooth on the palate, leaving a lingering impression on the scented finish.*

**2007 Lucienne Lone Oak Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 700 cases, \$45. *The top wine of the tasting for me and my panel. Very enticing aromas of cherries with an underlying minerality. Velvety and delicious with a classy core of silky red and black fruits that have a tremendous breadth in the middle palate and a remarkably persistent aromatic persistence. The mouthfeel is soft and seductive and the wine is beautifully balanced. The whole package.*

**2008 Mueller Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 500 cases, \$29. *Moderate reddish-purple color. Hi-tone cherries, baking spices and sandalwood on the nose. Nicely spiced dark red fruits that attack the mid palate and expand through a juicy finish. Beautifully composed with a satiny mouth feel that is very sexy.*

## Knocking on Heaven's Door

**2008 Bargetto Regan Estate Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 190 cases, \$40. *Pleasing array of Pinot fruits with a yeasty note. A sneaky wine that grows on you over time in the glass. The red-toned fruits are vibrant and the fine grain tannins provide just the right amount of structure.*

**2008 McIntyre Vineyards Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 390 cases, \$36. *Deep perfume of plum reduction sauce, wild berries and a hint of oak. Delicious and plush dark red stone fruits and berries with a substantial tannic backbone and a dry finish that clings to the palate.*

**2009 PARO Sonoma Mountain Pinot Noir** 297 cases, \$28. *Aromas of black cherry tart and sweet black raspberries. Full-bodied and soft in the mouth, like liquid velvet. Forward and highly drinkable with mouth-coating fruit and tannins lingering on the generous finish.*

**2007 Scheid Vineyards Reserve Monterey County Pinot Noir** 390 cases, \$50. *Moderately light rouge color. Veers to the ripe side but the aromas and flavors are intriguing with notes of strawberries, raspberries, red currants and rhubarb with hints of raisin and brioche. Mild dry tannins, soft in the mouth, with some persistence on the finish.*

**2007 Steele Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 8,000 cases, \$22. *Veers to the ripe side but offers a mouth coating load of spicy fruits with accents of brown sugar and root beer. The tannins are reserved and there is a pleasing lift of citric peel acidity on the finish. A good value wine.*

## **Worth a Try**

**2009 Block Nine Caiden's Vineyard California Pinot Noir** 5,000 cases, \$13

**2007 Cameron Hughes Lot 110 Los Carneros Pinot Noir** 12,000 cases, \$18

**2008 Cubanismo Vineyards Estate Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 150 cases, \$39

**2007 David Noyes Wines Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 550 cases, \$35

**2006 Gloria Ferrer Carneros Pinot Noir** 20,155 cases, \$22

**2008 Lucas & Lewellen Goodchild High 9 Vineyard Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 593 cases, \$28

**2008 Nth Degree Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir** 395 cases, \$55

**2008 Petite Abeille Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 75 cases, \$35

**2008 Tarras Vineyard The Steppes Central Otago Pinot Noir** 1,200 cases, \$30

**2008 Vine Hill Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 1,079 cases, \$38

**2008 Woodworth Vineyards Estate Temecula Valley Pinot Noir** 200 cases, \$33

**2007 Windward Monopole Paso Robles Pinot Noir** 1,320 cases, \$38

# 2011 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition

The results of the annual San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition were recently announced. There were 5,050 wines entered from 23 states. The Pinot Noirs were judged in seven classes depending on price. Listed below are the Best of Class, Double Gold and Gold award winners (wines reviewed in the *PinotFile* are indicated by \*). No Pinot Noirs were among the Sweepstakes winners except the 2006 Gloria Ferrer Carneros Champagne Caves Brut Rosé sparkling wine (\$42). Visit [www.winejudging.com](http://www.winejudging.com) for the complete results and information on the judges. A public tasting of the award winning wines will be held at Fort Mason Center in San Francisco on February 19.



## Up to \$19.99

Best of Class: 2008 Kendall-Jackson Vintner's Reserve Pinot Noir \$18

Double Gold: 2009 Poppy Monterey County Pinot Noir \$14.99

Gold: 2009 Angeline Winery Reserve \$18, NV Barefoot Cellars California Pinot Noir \$6.99, 2008 Bogle Vineyards California Pinot Noir \$11, \*2009 Bonterra Vineyards Mendocino County Pinot Noir \$19.99, \*2009 Cameron Hughes Carneros-Napa Lot 199 Pinot Noir \$15, 2009 Coastal Ridge Pinot Noir \$6.99, 2009 Concannon Central Coast Selected Vineyard Pinot Noir \$10, 2009 Cupcake Vineyards Central Coast Pinot Noir \$13.99, 2009 Fat Cat Cellars Pinot Noir \$8.99, 2009 Fat Monk Central Coast Pinot Noir \$12.00, \*2009 Fleur de California Carneros Pinot Noir \$17, 2009 Forever Vineyards California Pinot Noir \$10, 2009 Gnarly Head California Pinot Noir \$10.99, 2009 Goyette Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$14.99, 2009 Jargon California Pinot Noir \$10.99, 2009 Mark West Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$16.99, 2009 Montpellier Vineyards Pinot Noir \$6.99, and \*2009 Sean Minor Four Bears Carneros Pinot Noir \$17.

## \$20.00 to \$24.99

Best of Class: 2008 Diva Cellars Francioni Family Vineyard Monterey Pinot Noir \$24

Double Gold: 2008 CRU Vineyard Montage Central Coast Pinot Noir \$20, 2008 Paraiso Vineyards Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$24.99, \*2008 Montage Vineyards The Etzel Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$24.95, \*2007 Wente Vineyards Reliz Creek Vineyard Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir \$24.95, and 2009 Poppy Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$24.99.

Gold: 2009 Pine Ridge Vineyards Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir \$24, 2008 Willowbrook Cellars Carneros Pinot Noir \$24, 2007 Peter Cellars Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$24.95, 2007 Philo Ridge Vineyards Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$24.00, 2008 Waterstone Carneros Pinot Noir \$22, 2009 Castoro Cellars Blind Faith Vineyard Paso Robles Pinot Noir \$21.95, 2008 McKenzie-Mueller Vineyards Real McCoy Napa Valley Pinot Noir \$22.99, \*2007 Buena Vista Carneros Winery Carneros Pinot Noir \$24.00, 2008 DeLoach Vineyards

Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$24.00, and 2009 Francis Coppola Winery Diamond Monterey County Pinot Noir \$20.00.

**\$25.00 to \$29.99**

Best of Class: 2008 Bloomfield Vineyards San Francisco Bay Pinot Noir \$25

Double Gold: 2009 Hahn SLH Estate Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$29

Gold: 2008 Kenneth Volk Vineyards Santa Maria Cuvee Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$28

**\$30.00 to \$34.99**

Best of Class: 2009 Copious Winery California Pinot Noir \$32

Double Gold: 2009 Balletto Vineyards Winery Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$34, and 2007 Per Bacco Cellars Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir \$30.

Gold: 2007 Bianchi Winery Edna Ranch Edna Valley Pinot Noir \$30, 2008 Cathedral Ridge Winery Dampier Vineyard Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir \$32, \*2008 Costa de Oro Winery Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$34.99, 2008 DiFronzo Vineyard DiFronzo Estate Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir \$30, \*2007 Handley Cellars Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$30, 2009 Jigar Wines Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$30, 2009 Jus Soli Winery Bennett Valley Pinot Noir \$30, 2008 Kenneth Volk Vineyards Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir \$30, \*2007 Ridgeway Two Pisces Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$32.95, 2008 Russian River Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$32, 2008 Sarah's Vineyard Estate Santa Clara Valley Pinot Noir \$34.99, 2008 Tulocay Haynes Vineyard Napa Valley Pinot Noir \$30, and \*2008 Verve Laetitia Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir \$33.

**\$35.00 to \$39.99**

Best of Class: 2008 Nicholson Ranch Estate Sonoma Valley Pinot Noir \$38

Double Gold: 2008 Elodian Monk's Gate Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$39.99

Gold: 2008 Asuncion Ridge Vineyards San Luis Obispo Pinot Noir \$35, 2009 Carmel Hills Winery Monterey County Pinot Noir \$39, 2009 Copious Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$35, 2008 Dutton Estate Winery Karmen Isabella Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$39, \*2008 Fog Crest Vineyard Laguna West Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$39, 2009 Frank Family Vineyards Carneros-Napa Pinot Noir \$35, 2009 Graton Ridge Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$38, 2008 Hook and Ladder Winery Third Alarm Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$35, 2007 Husch Vineyards Reserve Anderson Valley \$35, 2007 Moshin Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$36, 2009 Pichetti Winery Truchard Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir \$36.95, 2007 Salisbury vineyards Avila Valley San Luis Obispo Pinot Noir \$37, 2008 Sierra Madre Vineyard Estate Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$39.99, 2007 Silver Mountain Muns Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir \$38, and 2007 Windsor Oaks Vineyards & Winery Estate 5 Dijon Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$35.

**\$40.00 to \$49.00**

Best of Class: 2008 Gracianna Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$48 and 2008 Truckee River Winery Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$45.

Double Gold: 2008 DeLoach Our Finest Selection Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$40, 2008 Matrix Winery Buoncristiani Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$45, and 2007 Mendelson Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$40.

Gold: \*2008 Benziger Family Winery Signaterra Bella Luna Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$49, 2008 De La Montanya Winery Christine's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$45, 2008 Erath Leiland Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$45, 2008 Fog Crest Vineyard Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$45, 2006 Gloria Ferrer Champagne Caves Vineyard Designate Carneros Pinot Noir \$40, \*2008 Kokomo Winery Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$48, \*2008 Pfendler Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$45, 2008 Sanford Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$42, 2009 Soquel Vineyards P.R. Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz

Mountains Pinot Noir \$40, 2008 Tepusquet Canyon Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir \$40, 2008 Tondre Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$40, and 2009 Uptick Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$48.

**\$50.00 and Over**

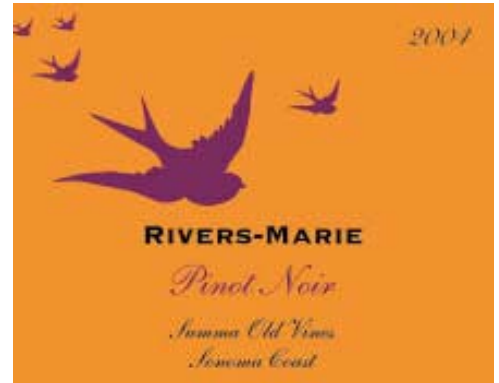
Best of Class: \*2008 Benziger Family Winery de Coelo Quintus Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$70.

Double Gold: 2007 Baxter Oppenlander Vineyard Mendocino Pinot Noir \$60, 2008 Fess Parker Winery Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir \$50, 2008 Lynmar Quail Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$60, and 2008 The Four Graces Doe Ridge Estate Yamhill County Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$75.

Gold: \*2008 Beauregard Vineyards Bald Mountain Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir \$50, \*2008 Canihan Family Cellars Exuberance Sonoma Valley Pinot Noir \$59, 2008 Costa de Oro Winery Dijon Selection Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$59.99, 2008 Fess Parker Winery Ashley's Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$50, 2008 King Estate Domaine Oregon Pinot Noir \$60, 2007 Truckee River Winery Garys' Vineyard Best Man Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$60, 2007 Vision Cellars Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$50, and 2008 Wente Vineyards Nth Degree Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir \$55.

# Pinot Briefs

**Rivers-Marie Update** I caught up recently with winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown at Outpost Winery in Angwin. We tasted the lineup of 2009 Rivers-Marie Pinot Noirs together one week before their release. Rivers-Marie is the hottest label in California Pinot Noir currently. The day the wines were offered, all but the Sonoma Coast bottling were sold out within a few hours. The 2009 wines are superb so this was understandable, although I don't believe anyone had tasted or reviewed the wines. Quantities were low in 2009. Thomas bought the Summa Vineyard previously owned by the Zeller family who will still farm this beautiful site on Taylor Lane in the Sonoma Coast. The old vines in this treasured vineyard were planted in 1978 to a clone that the Zellers refuse to disclose. In 1998, interplanting and additional plantings were added on resistant rootstock. For Brown, the 2009 vintage was the best since 2005 for his style of Pinot Noir, although the 2009 Summa Vineyard Young Vines Pinot Noir lacked character and all of it was added into the Sonoma Coast bottling. Some new vineyard sources are becoming available (Lancel Creek Vineyard and UV Vineyard, both farmed by Ulises Valdez, Silver Eagle Vineyard and all the planted Thierot Vineyard Chardonnay) so a little more wine will become available in 2010 (1,800 cases). I will give my formal review of the 2009 Rivers-Marie Pinot Noirs in a future issue. Suffice it say, with the Summa Vineyard Young Vines added to the Sonoma Coast bottling, this becomes a steal at \$25. The Occidental Ridge and Summa Vineyard Old Vines Pinot Noirs have amazing concentration and persistence yet the fruit is beautifully balanced with lively acidity. Visit [www.riversmarie.com](http://www.riversmarie.com).



**Arista Winery Update** I spent some time with Mark McWilliams touring the new 10 acres of estate vineyards which sit off Westside Road adjacent the Williams Selyem Litton Estate (now Williams Selyem Estate) Vineyard and the Baker Ridge Vineyard owned by Thomas George Estates. The estate vineyards consist of four distinct plantings on different soils: Harper's Rest (2 acres), Two Birds (4 acres), Bee Tree (1+ acre) and Seven Stories (1+ acre). Rather than use nursery clonal stock, the vineyards are being planted with cuttings from famous Sonoma County vineyards such as neighboring Flax Vineyard and Baker Ridge Vineyard. Seven selections have been established in a mother vineyard on the property (pictured below). A site has been chosen for a new winery (the wines are currently vinified at Moshin Vineyards down the road), but construction has been put on short term hold. If you are interested in a focused tasting of Arista wines and a tour of the estate vineyards, contact me and I will arrange your VIP visit with Mark.



**Pinot Noir Themed Clothing** Visit [www.cafepress.com](http://www.cafepress.com) for a large selection of wine and Pinot Noir themed clothing for men, women, kids, infants and dogs. Some of my favorites include: "I Don't Like Keeping Things Bottled Up!", "Will Work For Pinot Noir," and "Money Can't Buy Love, But It Can Buy Pinot Noir."

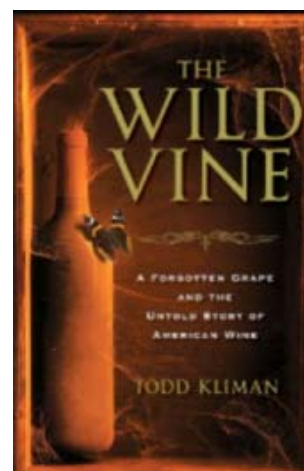


**Kistler Vineyards Evolves** A recent article in *The New York Times* by Eric Asimov spotlighted Kistler Vineyards and in particular, the new winemaking direction espoused by Steve Kistler and his assistant Jason Kesner. Asimov noted, "The Kistler style has changed in the last few years. Following the evolving tastes of Steve Kistler, rather than the pressure of economic necessity, Kistler has stepped back, striving for finesse and energy rather than power." I believe this is good news for Kistler Pinot Noir drinkers especially those who enjoy their wines with food. I have always been critical of the "old" Kistler Pinot Noir style of high extraction, ripeness, and generous oak. Besides stylistic winemaking modifications, Kistler has also committed the Pinot Noir program to primarily west Sonoma County and true Sonoma Coast vineyard sites.

**Wine Writer Survey** According to a report by Tom Wark in *Wine Business Monthly*, summarizing a survey taken of wine writers (I believe I participated online), there are now more than 800 wine blogs on the Internet, but traditional print media and newsletters still have more influence with consumers than blogs. American wine writers are predominantly male (38% are female), over 50 years of age (although there are increasing numbers of writers under age 40) and very educated. In the same vein, there was considerable buzz on the Internet over the last week about whether wine writers should be certified.

**iPads Could Become a Fixture at Wineries** The iPad is being used by wineries to market their wines, train retailers and sommeliers and educate consumers in tasting rooms and at wine festivals and tastings. Jordan Winery recently bought iPads for all 97 employees. More than 2 million iPads have been purchased by businesses and wine apps are multiplying at a startling rate.

**Norton Grape Back in News** The book, *The Wild Vine*, traced the history of the Norton, a hybrid grape accidentally discovered in the 1820s by Dr. Daniel Norton. The grape was found to survive the harsh eastern New World climate and produce a divisive wine that was enjoyed by some, but disdained by others. German immigrants cultivated the Norton grape in Missouri (it is known there also as Cynthiana) and it became Missouri's official grape. Researchers at the University of Missouri in Columbia are attempting to create a Norton and vinifera hybrid that will possess the resistance that the Norton grape has to downy and powdery mildew as well as viral and other pests, and produce a more palatable wine than that resulting from the Norton grape alone. The Norton genome has not been sequenced and this may hold some valuable information about its disease resistance. View the article in *Wines & Vines* (December 9, 2010), and read the review of the riveting book, *The Wild Vine*, in the *PinotFile* ([www.princeofpinot.com/article/943/](http://www.princeofpinot.com/article/943/)).



# Pinot Noir Winemaking 101

## The Decisions involved in making Pinot Noir

Source: Oregon Pinot Camp

“The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one”  
Elbert Hubbard

### Harvest

Determining ripeness: sampling for sugar, acid, tasting for tannins and flavors, visual indicators of ripeness.

Picking: decision and timing, picking methods, picking containers.

### Reception

Equipment & Processes: refrigerating/freezing picked grapes, dumping grapes from picking containers, sorting, de-stemming/crushing/whole clusters, jack sorting, method for filling fermenters.

### Pre-Ferment

Modification of Must: concentration, saignée, chaptalization, addition of water, addition of acid.

Additions to Must: dry ice, SO<sub>2</sub>, tannins, enzymes, oxygen and heat, yeast and yeast nutrients.

### Fermentation

Management of Extraction: fermenter size, shape, material, open top or closed top, cold maceration method and time, punch down/punch over/Pulsair/rack and return, mixing regime, temperature regime.

Pressing - Managing Tannins and Texture: decision to empty fermenter - before, at, after fermentation, extended maceration (length of timing and decision making), method for moving wine, method of emptying fermenter, type of press and method of pressing, separation or mixing of press and free-run.

### Aging

Maturing: settling in tank (if yes, how long), aging in tank or barrel, alternatives to barrels (oak products, micro-ox), lees contact and stirring, racking regime - frequency, indicators, methods, malolactic fermentation (inoculated or not and when), SO<sub>2</sub> regime.

Barrels: barrel size and age (percentage new/used/how old?), oak origin (country and forest), cooper and toasting regime, method for filling and emptying barrels, system for storage of barrels, barrel aging regime (time, temperature, humidity).

### Finishing

Blending: purpose and methods

Stabilization: lab tests performed - purpose and techniques, fining (materials, purpose, methods), filtration (purpose, equipment, techniques), last minute adjustments (acid, SO<sub>2</sub>, alcohol, tannin).

Bottling: closure choice, packaging, use of CO<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>, inert gases, equipment, timing.