



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Pinot elicits a cornucopia of descriptives

Robert Stemmler: The “Unwilling Prince of Pinot”

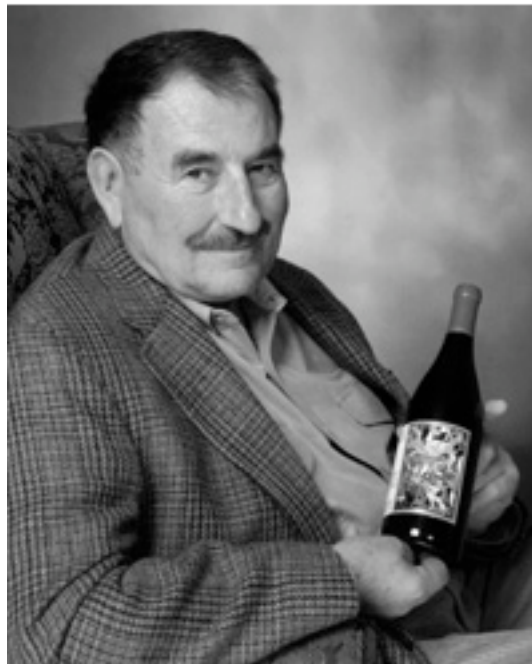
*“Preserve to the utmost the natural character of the grapes;
be first rate but not flamboyant; never compromise with anything.”*

Robert Stemmler

Robert Stemmler grew up in the Baden-Württemberg wine region near Stuttgart, Germany during the rule of Adolf Hitler. He graduated from Bad Kreuznach Wine College and worked as a winemaker in various wine regions of Germany and acquired a reputation in Germany for uncompromising commitment to excellence, “Everything given to the wine, the stars of the show.”

Stemmler was brought to Northern California in 1961 by brothers Robert and Peter Mondavi of Charles Krug Winery in Napa Valley to solve the problem of secondary fermentations in bottled wines. He was the winemaker at Charles Krug for seven years at a time when the Mondavi brothers began to take over their father’s winery. He consulted for several notable wineries including Inglenook, St. Clement and Raymond, and was hired at Simi in 1970 to reactivate the old Simi Winery in Healdsburg.

In 1977, Stemmler opened his own eponymous winery in the Dry Creek Valley of Sonoma County in partnership with Trumbull Webb Kelly who was a former educator that managed the tasting room and retail sales. The tasting room at 3805 Lambert Bridge Road in Healdsburg first opened in 1985. I can remember visiting the original tasting room and Robert Stemmler was one of the first Pinot Noirs I cut my teeth on.



Stemmler produced a variety of wines including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir and by 1986 production had reached 12,000 cases, including 3,000 to 5,000 cases of Pinot Noir. Some wine was produced under a second label, Bel Conte, and Stemmler was also a consultant for several small wineries.

His distinctive label was designed from a slide taken by Stemmler at the Cluny Museum in Paris of a tapestry of a famous Flemish artist of the late 15th century, Les Vendanges, a depiction of the grape harvest woven in Flanders. The artwork was also displayed on a tapestry in the Robert Stemmler tasting room. (Look to the end of this article for photos of the Stemmler label through the years)

Stemmler made his first Pinot Noir under his own label in 1982. He considered cool-climate, hillside or mountain vineyards ideal for growing Pinot Noir and preferred old vines for their consistency. Initially, he sourced Pinot Noir from Jim Forchini's low-yielding vineyard in the Russian River Valley. As fate would have it, Forchini was unable to sell four acres of Pinot Noir after the buyer reneged on a promise to buy the grapes, and he was searching for a buyer.

Stemmler had no plans to produce Pinot Noir at the time, but he saw the quality of the fruit and couldn't resist it. According to Harvey Steinman (*Wine Spectator*), "What struck Stemmler was the high acidity the grapes were showing despite full maturity and they also tasted good." Steinman quoted Stemmler as saying, "That's what was missing from so many California Pinot Noirs. Flavor. They had flowery, sometimes fruity flavor, but they didn't have that berryiness, that velvety lingering flavor that I think makes a great Burgundy."

Stemmler was not inexperienced with Pinot Noir, having consulted at Davis Bynum in the mid 1970s and worked with Gary Farrell as well who took over the winemaking duties at Davis Bynum in 1978.

The 1982 Robert Stemmler Sonoma County Pinot Noir received numerous gold medals, receiving more awards than any other wine during 1984 competitions, and captured the sweepstakes award at the West Coast Wine Competition. A journalist, seizing upon the fact that Stemmler seemingly made the Pinot Noir with some reluctance, dubbed him the, "Unwilling Prince of Pinot."

The 1983 vintage of the wine had even better natural acidity and was a *Wine Spectator* "Spectator Selection." In the ensuing years, many accolades followed with *Wine Spectator* awarding the wines scores in the 90s. Prominent wine writer Robert Finigan rated the 1984 Pinot Noir first on a list of outstanding California Pinot Noirs. The 1984 Robert Stemmler Sonoma County Pinot Noir was sourced from three areas in Sonoma County and won seven major awards, including a Gold Medal at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair. David Pursglove, writing in the June 1987 issue of *Wine Industry News*, said, "The 1984 Robert Stemmler Pinot Noir is among the best Pinot Noirs yet tasted from California. It is almost Burgundian....and better than a lot of reds from Burgundy. 92 points."

ROBERT STEMMLER WINERY

3805 Lambert Bridge Road, Healdsburg, CA
3 1/2 miles northwest in Dry Creek Valley
Visitor's room and wine terrace
Open daily: 10:30 - 4:30
707-433-6334



Established in 1977, Robert Stemmler Winery now produces 12,000 cases annually, predominantly Pinot Noir. Stemmler's winemaking is greatly influenced by both his European education at Bad Kreuznach Wine College and many years experience in the wine industry itself.

Robert Stemmler Pinot Noir is a big, full-bodied wine with smooth texture, incredibly open, aromatic and appealing in its youth, but very rewarding for further aging. Each year the Pinot Noir has been awarded numerous gold medals and has received instant recognition on many of the top wine lists in the country. The first vintage, 1982, received more awards than any other wine during the year of its release. The *Wine Spectator* has consistently rated this wine in the nineties with the 1983 vintage receiving the Spectator Selection. Robert Finigan rated the 1984 first on his list of Outstanding Pinot Noirs. This, along with three gold medals in the U.S. competitions and a silver medal from the International Wine Competition in London, has created a new standard in the industry for Pinot Noir. This pattern of consistency has been maintained in the 1985 vintage currently being released. During pre-release tastings recently, several wine professionals have found it to be the best vintage yet to come.

Robert Stemmler — Co-owner/Winemaking
Jambal Webb Kelly — Co-owner/Public Relations

The 1985 Robert Stemmler Sonoma County Pinot Noir (12.5% alc., 3,000 cases, \$18) scored 15.9/20 and third place in the *California Grapevine* (Oct/Nov 1987), and 19/20 in *The Finigan Wine Letter*. The *California Visitor's Review* raved about the wine, exclaiming, "It is glorious and one of the dozen best Pinot Noirs I can recall tasting in 25 years of comparing wines."

The 1987 Robert Stemmler Sonoma County Pinot Noir came from six different Sonoma County vineyards, each dry-farmed, over ten years old, and offering low yields. The sources reflected Stemmler's insistence on quality vineyards. Stemmler sourced Pinot Noir from the Bohan Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast before there was a Sonoma Coast AVA, and received grapes from the Rochioli Vineyard in the Russian River Valley as well.

In a matter of a few years, and preceding the attention brought to California Pinot Noir by the Williams Selyem 1985 Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, Stemmler had set a new standard in the industry for Pinot Noir.

Stemmler's Pinot Noir winemaking was innovative. He preferred limited (5 day) skin contact, fermented the grapes warm at 88°F with some whole berries, and usually employed natural yeasts. Seeds were filtered before fermentation to reduce tannins and astringency. The wines were racked and blended in January, and aged 12 to 15 months in a combination of French and air-dried American oak barrels (Stemmler became a proponent of air-dried American oak barrels over time), and were bottled without fining or filtering. The wines saw no sulfur until bottling and even then, a very small amount. The resulting wines had moderate alcohol levels and exemplary balance between acidity and tannin.

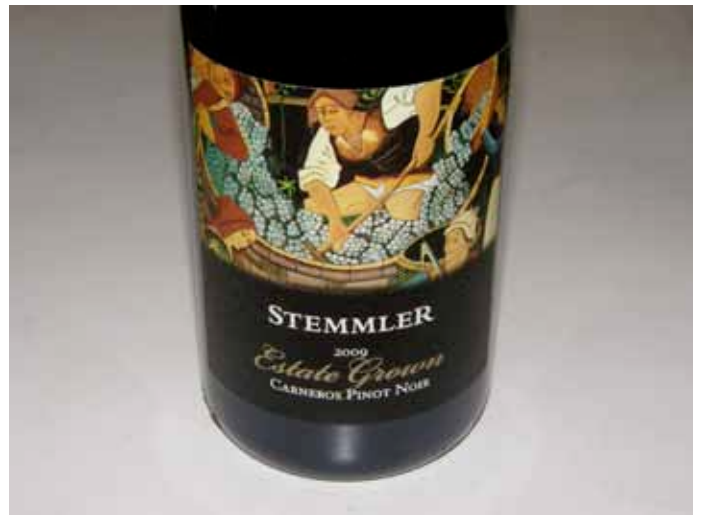
In an April 1989 winery press release, Stemmler summarized the character of his Pinot Noir. "My Pinot Noir has a rainbow of flavors. When it is young, it has flavors of cherries, red berries, and a smell of rose petals. As it develops, it takes on an earthiness, like mushrooms, and the rose petal aroma becomes more soft, more like dried roses, with warmth and richness of fine kid gloves."

Andre Tchelistcheff was said to describe Stemmler's Pinot Noir as having, "The sensual aroma of a woman's leather glove with a hint of her perfume and personal scent." (*Ann Arbor News* 6/24/87, Eleanor and Ray Heald) There are many variations of this famous quote over time purportedly attributed to Tchelistcheff in a number of circumstances.

Anne Moller-Racke, who founded The Donum Estate, arrived from Germany in 1981 to work at Buena Vista Winery in Carneros and became friends with Stemmler. Buena Vista Winery took a sizable equity position in Robert Stemmler Winery, and Stemmler promoted the label nationwide. Finally, in 1989, Stemmler retired to Palm Springs, California, after winemaking for 35 years, and the Racke family bought his label. Stemmler wines were initially a wine club and tasting room brand within Buena Vista, but with the sale of Buena Vista and the founding of The Donum Estate, Robert Stemmler became Donum's sister brand, sharing estate grown fruit and a commitment to quality established by Stemmler. The Robert Stemmler Winery facility in Dry Creek Valley was sold to Pezzi King in 1996.

Beginning in 2008, the Robert Stemmler label was shortened to simply, "Stemmler." The Stemmler estate grown wines are produced by the same winemaking staff as for The Donum Estate wines, and Moller-Racke is the viticulturist in charge of all vineyard management. Both Stemmler and Donum Estate wineries are owned by Winside, Inc. Current releases include a 2011 Estate Grown Carneros Pinot Noir (\$44), a 2011 Nugent Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$44), a 2011 Estate Grown Carneros Chardonnay (\$24) and a 2012 Estate Grown Sonoma Coast Vin Gris (\$20). The website is www.robertstemmlerwinery.com. Wines are sold at significant discount to wine club members.

2011 Stemmler Nugent Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$44. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Highly aromatic, featuring scents of confected red cherry, red licorice, watermelon and sandalwood. Soft on the palate and flavorful offering middleweight core of Bing cherries framed by mild tannin and judicious use of oak. Finishes with some length and generosity. 89.*



2011 Paul Lato Wines: Report on Winery Visit and a Tasting of the Vintage

It has become an annual tradition for me to visit Paul at his winery at Central Coast Wine Services in Santa Maria each year before World of Pinot Noir in early March. Each time I visit, I discover that Paul has expanded his space and is gradually ramping up his modest production.

There is no need to go into detail about Paul Lato as I have written about him extensively in the *PinotFile* and have thoroughly enjoyed and praised his wines since the 2005 vintage. If you like your Pinots elegant with grace, nuance, vibrancy and balance, then Paul Lato is your guy. He is very modest about his accomplishments, but he has an uncanny knack for finding the “sweet spots” in vineyards and sourcing the best possible fruit. Paul doesn’t make a lot (about 2,500 cases of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah), and the wines are only sold through a mailing list and to select restaurants, but if you are fortunate to snag a few bottles, you will be very pleased. You can find Paul each year pouring his wines at the World of Pinot Noir.



The website, www.paullatowines.com, has been updated with a good description of Paul’s philosophy and vineyard sources. All grapes are 100% de-stemmed during vinification.

The first wines below were tasted at the winery and had only been bottled ten days prior. The final wines were tasted at home in September 2013 after 6 months in bottle (Paul had suggested that some of the wines needed time in bottle to make a proper evaluation).

The 2011 was a “wild child” according to Paul. “Some kids have tremendous possibilities, wonderful talents waiting to be nurtured, but need just the perfect guidance to express their potential. There was an early frost, a late frost, spans of unusually cool days throughout the growing season. Yields were low, yet it was necessary to drop more fruit. Every underachieving barrel in the winery was sold in bulk to protect the integrity of the vintage.” Paul did a commendable job with what the vintage dealt him.

Winery Tasting March 2013

2011 Paul Lato “le Souvenir” Sierra Madre Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay 14.3% alc., 250 cases, \$60. 14-year-old Wente clone. 100% malolactic fermentation. Aged in 66% new French oak barrels. *Light golden straw color and clear in the glass. The nose is both floral and fruity featuring aromas of lemon, apple and blossoms. Delicate, but pleasing flavors of citrus, almond, vanilla, with bright acidity and a bone dry finish.* **90.**



2011 Paul Lato “East of Eden” Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Chardonnay 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$65. Mostly Wente clone. 50% malolactic fermentation. Filtered. Aged in 75% new French oak barrels. *Moderate golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Very aromatically enticing with scents of lemon curd, baked apple, and Acacia blossom. Bright and crisp on the palate, offering flavors of citrus, baked pear, and vanilla with an underlying sea-brine minerality. A big, flamboyant wine, yet beautifully balanced.* **94.**

2011 Paul Lato “Duende” Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 75 cases, \$60. Own-rooted Martini clone, old vines. Aged in 50% new French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. The nose is classic Pinot Noir with aromas of griotte, raspberry, forest floor and rose petal. Flavors of purple grapes and plums drive the moderately sappy core, framed by gentle tannins and good acidity. Elegant and soft on the palate, with a juicy finish.* **90.**



2011 Paul Lato “Suerte” Solomon Hills Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 175 cases, \$70. 50% 115, 30% 667, 20% 777. 70% new French oak barrels. Unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Always one of my favorite Paul Lato Pinot Noirs and this vintage is no exception. The nose is quite shy, but aromas of black cherries and spice emerge with coaxing. The plush and creamy palate features intensely flavored blueberries and dark stone fruits wrapped in modest tannins. A sexy, wondrous wine that finishes with uncommon length and generosity and mouthwatering acidity. The wine shows amazing fortitude so soon after bottling.* **94.**

2011 Paul Lato “The Prospect” Sierra Madre Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 100 cases, \$60. Dijon clones 115 and 667. Aged in 50% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Beautifully perfumed with aromas of grapes, plums, forest floor and rose petals. Big-boned and flashy, with a sappy core of black plum and black currant fruit. Velvety with nicely balanced tannins and a big, and I mean big, finish. I really liked this wine.* **93.**

2011 Paul Lato “Seabiscuit” Zotovich Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$70. Dijon clones 115 and 113. Unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of black raspberry and spice lead to a core of pleasing dark stone and berry fruits with an earthy underpinning. Satisfying and elegant with modest fine-grain tannins. Definitely needs more time in bottle.* **90.**

2011 Paul Lato “Lancelot” Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 125 cases, \$85. Own-rooted Burgundy clone over 30 years old. 100% new French oak barrels. Unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. Shy aromas of purple fruits and oak. Recognizably Pisoni, with muscular tannins and layers of copious dark fruit, yet offers a pleasing satiny mouth feel and admirable finesse. Needs time to integrate the oak and tannin, but this is one, big rich pussycat.* **93.**

2011 Paul Lato “C’est la Vie” Wenzlau Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 125 cases, \$70. Clones 115, 667 and 2A. Vineyard is adjacent Sea Smoke. Only vintage. Unfiltered. *Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very pretty perfume of fresh black raspberry jam and rose petals. Juicy with good grip on the palate, featuring flavors of dark berries and plums with a smoky undertone. The signature Paul Lato silkiness is evident.* **88.**

Home Tasting September 2013

2011 Paul Lato “Atticus” John Sebastiano Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 125 cases, \$65. Unfiltered. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Redder fruits are featured on the nose with hints of cardamom spice and earth. Relatively light and delicate, with shy flavors of dark red and purple fruits with a hint of oak. Seamless with a pleasing tangy cherry drop finish. Doesn’t excite initially, but offers more gifts over time in the glass. This is a wine that is still somewhat closed and needs patience.* **88.**

2011 Paul Lato “Seabiscuit” Zotovich Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 100 cases, \$70. Dijon clones 115 and 113. Unfiltered. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Enticing aromas of*

fresh cherry pie glaze, raspberry jam, white pepper, oak and earth. Very soft in the mouth, with discreetly concentrated flavors of perfectly ripe black cherries wrapped in supple tannins. A juicy, charming wine that is the epitome of finesse. 90.

2011 Paul Lato "C'est la Vie" Wenzlau Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 125 cases, \$70. Clones 115, 667 and 2A. Unfiltered. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. This wine needs plenty of coaxing to reveal aromas of dark red cherries and berries, clove and oak spice. The leanest wine in the lineup with flavors of tarry dark cherries and raspberries. The fruit is caressed by soft tannins and underlain with a racy vein of acidity. Well-crafted, but doesn't quite deliver the goods yet. 88.

2011 Paul Lato "Lancelot" Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 125 cases, \$85. Own-rooted Burgundy clone over 30 years old. 100% new French oak barrels. Unfiltered. Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. A dreamy nose featuring bright aromas of black raspberry jam, violets and biscuit. Really delicious and highly expressive on the palate, with unctuous layers of dark red and black fruits, subtle oak spice, and a hearty savory note. The wine sports admirable balance of tamed tannins and juicy acidity. Finishes with an explosion of fruit goodness. Professional grade Pinot. 93.

Also available in 2011

2011 Paul Lato "Alegria" Hilliard-Bruce Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$70.

2011 Paul Lato "Belle du Jour" Hilliard-Bruce Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay \$55. Aged in 45% new French oak.



Sancerre: Pinot Too

"It is Sancerre's reds that are providing the excitement. Unfortunately this is somewhat of a French secret."

Jim Budd, *Decanter*

Sancerre is known worldwide for Sauvignon Blanc, and deservedly so, for the Loire Valley region offers a pleasing, refreshing style that is almost universally enjoyed. However, as Lettie Teague pointed out in her article on Sancerre ("Wine's Tom Hanks: Why Everyone Loves Sancerre," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2013), the soils (both pebbly limestone and siliceous clay) are similar to the soils of Champagne and Burgundy, so it is not surprising that Pinot Noir performs admirably in Sancerre as well.

Jim Budd ("Sancerre's Red Dawn," *Decanter*, September 2009) notes that when the first French AOCs were created in 1936, the Sancerre appellation was for whites only. It wasn't until 1959, that AOC accreditation was awarded to reds and rosés produced from Pinot Noir. Sancerre Pinot Noir was traditionally light and dilute, and the grape was often sold to Champagne houses. The modern era of Sancerre Pinot Noir did not begin until the 1990s when a number of talented Sancerre vignerons began turning to more attentive viticulture of Pinot Noir and vinifying more serious, robust Pinot Noir wines.

Evidence of the existence of vines in Sancerre was recorded by Gregory of Tours in 582 in his *Historiae Francorum*. In the 12th century, cultivation of the vine was given added impetus through the combined efforts of the Augustine monks at St-Satur and the ruling counts of Sancerre. Sancerre was famous for its wines produced from Pinot Noir and exported from the region along the River Loire. The wine of Sancerre was, in the opinion of Duke Jean de Berry, the finest wine to be found in the entire kingdom. In more modern times, the original vineyards, which were predominantly planted to Pinot Noir, were destroyed by phylloxera at the end of the last century and Sauvignon Blanc was then widely planted.

Sancerre red is something of a rarity outside France. Budd reminds that only 22% of the acreage in Sancerre is planted to Pinot Noir, production only accounts for 11% of Sancerre wine, and less than 3% of Sancerre Pinot Noir is exported. I found that many large retailers in the United States carry only a few examples so it was a challenge to find a representative group to sample. Prices are generally quite modest, with many exemplary wines priced under \$30. The top red from Alphonse Mellot, *Génération XIX*, is at the high end at about \$90.

The vineyards of Sancerre are planted throughout the communes of Bannay, Bué, Crézancy, Menetou-Ratel, Méénétréol, Montigny, St-Satur, Ste-Gemme, Sancerre, Sury-en-vaux, Thauvenay, Veaugues, Verdigny and Vinon.



After tasting the following ten wines, I should point out that these wines will not offer the fruit intensity that Americans have come to expect from California and Oregon Pinot Noir. They do offer interesting drinking in a different style and flavor profile, but among the vast number of outstanding North American Pinot Noirs in the same price range, the Sancerre Pinot Noirs will be challenged to find an American audience. My best advice is that if you are curious, stick to a notable importer such as the Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant selections.

2009 Alphonse Mellot La Moussière Sancerre 13.0% alc., \$43.84. Imported by Domaine Select Imports, NY, NY. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Earth-bound aromas of dark berries, briar, forest floor, geranium and vanilla lead to a mid weight core of tasty dark berry and plum flavors, veering to the savory, rustic side with a hint of grilled mushrooms in the background. Firm tannins and bright acidity frame the fruit nicely. Soft in the mouth and easy to like. 86.*

2009 Matthias et Emile Roblin Enclos de Maimbray Sancerre 12.5% alc., \$26. Imported by APS Wine & Spirits, Oakland, CA. *Moderately light red color in the glass. Strong reduction upon opening that doesn't blow off. Aromas of straw, ash and geranium. The wine offers modest red fruit flavors with an underlying hint of ash. The tannins are suave, the acidity is bright, and the finish is of modest length. 79.*

2009 Roger Neveu Le Colombier Sancerre 12.5% alc., \$28. Imported by Robert Chadderdon Selections, NY, NY. *Moderately light red hue in the glass. The aromas and flavors of red cherries, balsam and oak are pleasant. Somewhat dilute in fruit intensity by American standards, but highly accessible with well-balanced tannins and acidity. 87.*

2010 Francois Crochet La Réserve de Marcigoué Sancerre 13.0% alc., 250 cases, \$27.69. Imported by Winebow Inc., NY, NY. 100% Pinot Noir, average vine age 35 years grown in chalky clay soil. Aged in French oak barrels for 14 months. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately dark red color in the glass. Very aromatic from the time the cork was pulled, featuring bright scents of black cherry, conifer and pie crust. Medium bodied flavors of slightly tart red cherries, red raspberries and citrus-infused cranberries with a hint of earthiness and oak in the background. A fruity wine with mild tannins and racy acidity. 88.*



2010 Les Hospices Sancerre 12.5% alc., \$17.49, screw cap. Imported by Vinum International, Napa, CA. *Light red color in the glass. Strong reduction (burnt match) upon opening that doesn't blow off. Shy aromas of dried herbs and oak with little fruit. Light and crisp on the palate with an herbal-toned red cherry flavor, bright acidity and restrained tannins. 81.*

2010 Domaine Reverdy Ducroux BeauRegard Sancerre 12.5% alc., \$14.99. Imported by Winebow Inc, NY, NY. The Reverdy family has been in the Sancerre region since the 15th century. Vigneron is Alan Reverdy. 100% Pinot Noir. *Moderately light red color in the glass. Aromas of cherries, stem and olive. Middleweight core of darker, ripe cherries framed by muscular tannins. Pleasing concentration with bright acidity. 85.*

2010 Daniel Chotard Sancerre 13.0% alc., \$24. Imported by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, Berkeley, CA. *Moderately light red color in the glass. Nicely perfumed with aromas of fresh cherries, raspberries and dark chocolate. Lovely composure and very giving, with an enticing flavor of black cherry carrying through the mid palate to the intense and generous finish. Well-balanced fine-grain tannins and lively acidity complete the wine. 89.*



2010 Domaine Vacheron Sancerre 12.5% alc., \$35. Imported by North Berkeley Wine, Berkeley, CA. *Medium red color in the glass. Opens slowly in the glass, revealing aromas of red cherries and berries. Light in weight with admirable finesse, offering the essence of fresh Morello cherries. Well-crafted with supportive oak, modest tannins and lively acidity. 87.*

2010 Domaine Hippolyte Reverdy Sancerre 13.0% alc., \$23.74. Imported by Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, Berkeley, CA. *Moderately light red color in the glass. The aromas rise from the glass with brightness and conviction, featuring black cherries and smoky oak. Middleweight flavors of dark cherries, raspberries and dark chocolate, with a good dose of oak. The firm tannins and underlying acidity round out the wine nicely. The finish is very silky and extended. 88.*



2011 Domaine Franck Millet Sancerre 12.5% alc., \$16.99. Imported by Premier Wine Company, Richmond, CA. *Light red color in the glass. Very "American" in style and character with pleasing aromas of cherries, strawberries and sandalwood. Light and delicate, but flavorful, offering cherry, strawberry and cranberry notes backed by supple tannins and a good cut of acidity. This wine aims to please and is easy to drink. 88.*



Sips of Wines Tasted Recently

It is a slow time for wine releases, but this short list is packed with “Too Much Good Stuff,” as the ads for Seven-Eleven proclaim.




2012 Alouette Sonoma County Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$24.99, screw cap. Vinified by fifth generation Belle Glos Wines winemaker Joseph Wagner whose family founded Caymus Vineyards. Alouette is the French name for lark, a songbird that is a familiar sight in vineyards along the coast of California. The lark has been romanticized over time and serves as the muse for this wine. 2012 was an exceptional vintage in California and the high quality of the fruit from the coastal regions of Sonoma County show through in this

wine. Aged in 60% new French oak barrels for 9 months. *Aromas of red grapes, spice, violets, toast and oak vanillin lead to deeply flavored notes of cherries, strawberries and sarsaparilla with welcome accents of spice and oak. Very soft and silky in the mouth with balanced tannins that make for easy drinking. Similar to the Meiomi bottling by the same producer. A featured wine at Total Wine & More retail chain.* **90.**



2010 B.R. Cohn Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.60, TA 0.63, 2,400 cases, \$40. Sourced from Lera's and Dutton vineyards. Average vine age 12 to 17 years. Clones 667, 777 and Pommard. Whole berry and whole cluster fermented with natural and Assmanshausen yeasts. Aged 19 months in 64% new and 36% 1-year-old French oak barrels. Winemaker Tom Montgomery. *Moderate reddish-purple color in the glass. Very aromatic initially, offering bright aromas of Bing cherries, cola and toasty oak. Discreetly concentrated core of nicely ripened Bing cherry fruit with accents of cola, mocha, brown spice and oak flavors clothed in soft, dry tannins. The immensely appealing velvety mouth feel is a clincher. This wine will have wide appeal.* **91.**



 **2011 Freeman Ryo-fu Russian River Valley Chardonnay** 13.5% alc., 450 cases, \$40. A blend of two vineyards with the largest component from Keefer Ranch and a lesser amount from Heintz Vineyard (vines dating to 1982). Aged 14 months sur lies in 21% new and 79% 1, 2 and 3-year-old French oak barrels. *Light yellow color and clear in the glass. Aromas of lemon, apple and slate lead to crisp, vivid flavors of citrus, apple, white peach and oak. Plenty to like with forward fruit flavors reigned in by lively acidity, finishing on a high note with lemon-drop memories. Still fine the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **94.**



2010 Furthermore Bohemian Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.56, 74 cases, \$40, 375 ml \$20. Vineyard is 8 miles from the coast in the western reaches of the Russian River Valley. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Harvest Brix 27.3°. Native fermentation, aged 12 months in 33% new French oak barrels. *Dark reddish-purple hue in the glass. A ripe-fruited and full-bodied wine, featuring aromas of black, grilled fruits, peat and fennel and flavors of blackberries and ollaliberries. Dense, concentrated and sappy, but delicious, with a pleasing fruit personality framed by modest tannins, finishing with a burst of citrus-laden fruit. A decadent wine.* **90.**

2010 Furthermore Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., pH 3.66, TA 0.67, 83 cases, \$50, 375 ml \$25. Vineyard is farmed by Gary Franscioni. Clones “828” and Pisoni. Harvest Brix 24.7°. Native fermentation, aged 14 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of spiced dark red stone fruits with hints of vanilla, nuts and stem. Medium bodied core of dark red cherries with an herbal vein running through and a citrus underpinning. Good crispness and supple tannins, with a bright tag of cherry on the finish.* **87.**

2010 Furthermore Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., pH 3.47, TA 0.63, 77 cases, \$40, 375 ml \$20. This vineyard is located at 1,000 feet elevation at the southwestern corner of the AVA. Soils are decomposed granite and gravelly loam. Pisoni clone plus "828." Harvest Brix 27.7°. Native fermentation, aged 14 months in 50% new French oak barrels. *Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Somewhat brooding on the nose with a roasted dark fruit tone accented by nutty, vanillin oak. Delicious, full-bodied core of fresh dark berries with an earthy undertone. Well-managed tannins with bright acidity and some finishing length. Big and fruity, but everything is in its place.* **89.**



2010 Furthermore La Encantada Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., pH 3.39, TA 0.67, 76 cases, \$40, 375 ml \$20. Vineyard planted by Richard Sanford. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Harvest Brix 27.5°. Native fermentation, aged 14 months in 40% new French oak barrels. *Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Appealing aromas of blackberries, black raspberries and a dash of toasty oak. Rich and vivid, with plenty of sappy, dark berry and cassis fruit flavors. Smooth in the mouth with discreet tannins and a pleasing hint of oak in the background. The finish is fresh and lively. This wine is woven together nicely and aims to please.* **90.**



2011 Kudos Single Vineyard Series Carabella Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Oregon Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., \$30. A product of NW Wine Co. Aged 11 months in French oak barrels. *Light reddish-purple hue in the glass. Evocative perfume of dusty cherries and seasoned oak. Noticeable mid palate attack of fresh cherry and cranberry flavors with a citrus-driven, nervy finish. Straightforward, light, and easy to drink, this wine will work beautifully at the dinner table.* **87.**



2011 Kudos Single Vineyard Series Zena Crown Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Oregon Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$25. A product of NW Wine Co. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of black cherries, briar and fennel lead to medium bodied flavors of black cherries, black raspberries and a generous cherry-driven finish. Good richness, soft tannins and well-integrated oak. An impressive offering at this modest price.* **88.**

2010 Lachini Vineyards Lachini Family Estate Chehalem Mountains Oregon Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., pH 3.54, TA 0.731, 285 cases, \$50, Magnums \$115. Multiple clones (667, 777, 113, 114, 115, 2A and suitcase selection) from estate vineyard blocks. Aged 17 months in 26% new and 74% 1 and 2-year-old French oak barrels. Winemakers Mike Primozich and Ron Lachini. *Moderately light reddish-purple color in the glass. Fragrant with aromas of Bing cherries, blueberries, pomegranates, savory herbs and conifer forest. Light and somewhat lean, but flavorful, offering tastes of red cherries and cranberries framed by supple tannins and bright acidity. This wine offers plenty of finesse for easy drinking, and finishes with a tangy burst of cherry fruit. Very Oregon in style and a good reflection of the vintage. 90.*



2012 Liberty School Central Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.77, TA 0.69, 39,895 cases, \$20. From Hope Family Wines, Austin Hope proprietor. Multiple fruit sources including west Paso Robles, Arroyo Seco section of Monterey, and San Benito County east of Monterey. Aged 6 months in 80% French and 20% American oak barrels. Cross-flow filtered before bottling in April 2013. Jason Diefenderfer winemaker. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Quite showy upon opening, fading some over time and taking on a confected note in the glass. Aromas of purple grapes, cherries and ripe strawberries with a hint of violets. Good fruit intensity on the palate with easy to like flavors of red and black cherries with a hint of spice and dark chocolate. Well-managed fine-grain tannins with a sweet cherry finish. Less appealing over time in the glass. 86.*



2010 Rhys Alpine Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay 13.2% alc., \$69. From 1.73 acres planted to Hyde, Wente and Dijon clones at 1,230 to 1,400 feet elevation. 24" of top soil over soft shale. Grapes are slowly whole cluster pressed for 4 hours. The must is settled overnight and barrels filled in morning. 20-25% new French oak barrels are used. The wine is left undisturbed in cask without stirring to complete native yeast fermentation that sometimes can take an entire year. *Golden yellow color and clear in the glass. Appealing aromas of lemon peel, pineapple, slate and a hint of nutty, buttery oak. Delicious core of yellow apple and lemon flavors with a hint of butter brickle and oak. The fruit really pops in the mouth and hangs on for a very long and glorious finish. Juicy, crisp and thoroughly satisfying in every way. Yum. Held up beautifully in an opened and re-corked bottle finished over two days. One of the best California Chardonnays I have ever tasted. 96.*



Alpine Vineyard chalky shale underlies the vines:



2010 Rhys Family Farm Vineyard San Mateo County Pinot Noir 12.7% alc., \$59. From a 6.16-acre vineyard planted to Swan, 115, Pommard and Rhys selection in alluvial clay loam soil. *Moderately dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Very complex nose offering an array of aromas including black plum, black currant, spice, boot leather and hay bale. Moderately rich black fruit flavors with an added hint of cola and tar. There is so much character in this wine that the drinker is quickly sent back to the glass for another sip, looking*

to discover the many nuances over time. The finish is extraordinarily generous and long, and the underlying cut of acidity really brings the wine to life. The balance predicates a long life for this wine. **93.**

2011 ROAR Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., pH 3.61, TA 0.55, 451 cases, \$52. Pisoni, 777 and Pommard clones. Aged 11 months in 84% new and 16% 1-year-old French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish-purple hue in the glass. Brightly perfumed with aromas of dark fruits, briar, forest floor and smoky oak. The core of modest tannins is wrapped in layers of dark red cherry and berry fruit with a prominent charred oak accent. Still, the wine is juicy and pleasing with some length on the finish. The delicate fruit essence is currently buried in oak and the wine will benefit from more time in bottle.* **88.**

2011 ROAR Sierra Mar Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., pH 3.75, TA 0.55, 549 cases, \$52. Pisoni, Pommard and Swan clones. Aged 11 months in 81% new and 19% 1-year-old French oak barrels. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Everything comes together nicely in this wine featuring enticing aromas of black cherry, black currant, spice, forest floor and subtle oak. A mouthful of delicious black cherry, black raspberry and plum fruit coats the palate and hangs on for a long, generous finish. The fruit really sings in this wine now, but the wine will benefit from more aging to better integrate the tannins and oak.* **93.**



2011 ROAR Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., pH 3.54, TA 0.61, 278 cases, \$60. Pisoni clone. Aged 11 months in 58% new and 42% 1-year-old French oak barrels. *Dark reddish-purple color in the glass. Wondrous aromas of black stone fruits, potpourri, forest floor and oak. Stunning on entry with copious flavors of dark cherries and berries and Hoison sauce that has real grip. The wine has some structural muscle but is approachable now. A very smooth mouth feel and an intense, peacock tail finish complete the experience. A hosanna to the Pisoni family.* **95.**



2011 Vino Vargas Rio Ruso Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$45. Rio Ruso is Spanish for Russian River. Aged in 30% new French oak barrels. Winemaker Pedro Vargas. *Medium reddish-purple color in the glass. Aromas of black cherry and ripe strawberry with a slight roasted quality. Fruit flavors of black cherry and blackberry push the ripeness envelope, but are quite tasty. A hint of cola and spice add interest. Nicely crafted and very approachable with mild fine grain tannins.* **88.**



Pinot Briefs

Central Coast Wine & Food Pop-Up Tasting Tour The first annual Central Coast Wine & Food tour will take top California vintners from Santa Barbara County to discerning wine and food enthusiasts in Phoenix (September 2013), Houston (October 2013), New Orleans (November 2013), Miami (December 2013) and Key West, Florida (January 2014). Wine enthusiasts, media, distributors, restaurateurs, and other guests will have opportunities to sample award-winning wines and to meet renowned winemakers in person or via Google Hangouts. California's Central Coast now has 100,000 acres of vines and many of California's best winemakers such as Steve Clifton (Brewer-Clifton), Morgan Clendenen (Clendenen Wines), Wes Hagen (Clos Pepe), Norm Yost (Flying Goat Cellars), and Mickael Sigoin (Beckman Vineyards and Kaena Wines). The tour was founded by intrepid traveler and photographer William Fernandez who criss crossed the United States for three years in a Winnebago, searching for the best slice of the county to put down roots before returning to the Santa Ynez Valley. For more information, visit www.CentralCoastCA.com.



First Annual Fort Ross-Seaview Wine Festival This event celebrates Sonoma County's newest AVA and will be held on an ocean terrace at the historic Fort Ross State Park. The Festival is presented by the Fort Ross-Seaview Winegrowers on Saturday, October 26 will offer a Grand Luncheon prepared by renowned Sonoma County chefs and a Grand Tasting. Participating wineries include Del Dotto, Fort Ross Vineyard, Martinelli Winery, Pahlmeyer, Siduri, Tin Barn, Wild Hog Vineyard, William Selyem and more. For more Festival information, visit www.fortross.org/festival.htm.

The Wandering Palate New Zealand Red Wine of the Lunar Year (Dragon) Veteran sommelier Curtis Marsh writes poignantly about the food and wine of New Zealand and you would be well served to seek out his website at www.thewanderingpalate to read the poem (or song) "Bastards of Pinot Noir," inspired by the New Zealand Pinot Noir Celebration 2013, as well as his latest coverage of the Biodynamic Vigneron of the Lunar Year, Felton Road and its 2011 Cornish Point Central Otago Pinot Noir.



Resurgence in the Use of Concrete Wine Tanks Sonoma Cast Stone, a nineteen year-old wine country maker of innovative precast concrete, was asked by a group of seven Napa and Sonoma winemakers several years ago to develop the perfect concrete wine tank. Originally the company began with an egg-shaped tank, but since then, a variety of square, rectangle, and conical tanks have been added to the lineup. If you have visited a Northern California winery recently, you probably have seen concrete tanks of some variety sitting amongst the stainless steel tanks. Sonoma Cast Stone is challenging the French dominance of concrete wine tanks. Historically, there has been a long tradition in Europe of fermenting and often storing wine in large concrete vats.

The resurgence of concrete in fermentation in North America is a fascinating story. Concrete is a natural insulator and keeps wine at cooler and more consistent temperatures. Tanks made today can include an embedded glycol temperature control system that gives the winemaker precise control and yet keeps the system separate from the wine. Concrete breathes, allowing oxygen to soften the wine, yet it is a neutral vessel, imparting only a hint of minerality. Winemakers often comment that wine made in concrete allows the wine to remain pure and tasting more like where it is from. Even color intensity of the finished wine is noticeably richer.

Today, many famous Napa wineries such as Harlan, Screaming Eagle, Rudd and Quintessa are converting to concrete. A number of Pinot Noir producers in Sonoma County are employing concrete tanks as ancillary fermenting vessels, including Arista, Kosta Browne, Wind Gap Wines, Thomas George Estates (photo below) and Williams Selyem. For more information, visit www.concretewinetanks.com.



Couloir Wines/Straight Line Wine Launch Marin County Tasting Room Couloir's first dedicated tasting room has opened in downtown Tiburon at 72 Main Street on historic Ark Row. Library wines and large format bottles are offered along with current releases in side-by-side flights, by the glass, and by the bottle. The new tasting room is also open to the public for wine tastings, takeaway sales and special events. Owner and winemaker, Jon Grant, crafts small batch, single vineyard designated Pinot Noirs under the Couloir label that I can easily recommend. Straight Line Wine is produced from top appellations at a reasonable price. Total production for both brands is about 2,000 cases. Grant worked in the cellars of many of the top Napa Valley wineries including Turley Wine Cellars, Plumpjack Winery, Corison Wines and Robert Mondavi Winery before founding Couloir Wines and Straight Line Wine in 2007. Visit www.couloirwines.com.

Pinot Noir Shootout and Summit The 12th Annual Pinot Noir Shootout is now accepting entries from wineries. The Shootout finals will be December 14, 2013, in San Francisco. The finalists will be featured at the Pinot Noir Summit in San Francisco in late February 2014. For a submission form or more information contact Barbara Drady at barbara@affairsofthevine.com.

Wine & Spirits 2014 Wineries of the Year Pinot Noir focused producers that made the list include Adelsheim, Bergström, Bindi, Domaine Bouchard Père & Fils, Calera, Domaine Drouhin, Drew, Elk Cove, Felton Road, Gloria Ferrer, Hirsch, Iron Horse, J. Christopher, LIOCO, Rippon, Truchard, Domaine de la

Vougeraie, and Williams Selyem. Not surprisingly, most of these producers are high-profile wineries with significant marketing muscle.

Santa Barbara County Celebration of Harvest This event offers four days in Santa Barbara Wine Country, October 11-14, featuring winemaker dinners, open houses and a Grand Tasting and Silent Auction on the grounds of Rancho Sisquoc Winery where over 100 wineries will be pouring. It is a time when winemakers, vineyard managers and all those working in the vineyard and winery trenches come up for air and celebrate the vintage. Visit www.celebrationofharvest.com for more information.

Pinot on the River 2013 On Sunday, October 27, on the Healdsburg Plaza Square, over 100 Pinot Noir producers and guest artisan food vendors will focus on limited production West Coast Pinot Noir. Participating wineries include all the big names (Belle Glos Wines, Benovia Winery, Black Kite Cellars, Failla Wines, Freeman Vineyard & Winery), J Vineyards & Winery, Keefer Ranch Wines, Littorai, MacPhail, Papapietro Perry Winery, Patz & Hall, Sea Smoke, Siduri Wines, Sojourn Cellars and The Donum Estate) as well as less known boutique producers (Alta Maria, Bruliam Wines, Cartograph, Furthermore, Gros Ventre Cellars, Joseph Jewell Wines, La Rochelle, Masut, Reuling Vineyards, TR Elliott, Waits-Mast Family Cellars and Wren Hop Vineyards). For information and tickets, visit www.pinotfestival.com.



Wine Doctor Preservation Kit This innovative product includes a Grip-Touch Vacuum Pump to evacuate oxygen from a bottle after a bottle of wine is poured and seals it tight with a special True-Seal™ stopper that prevents oxygen from leaking into the bottle after the seal is made. A unique red indicator shows that the seal is achieved and if at some time the seal has been compromised. *Sunset* said it was the most effective device of its kind that they have tested. Available at www.savethewine.com from \$25.

2013 Sonoma County Harvest Fair to Honor Sangiacomo Family The Sangiacomo family is to receive the Lifetime Contribution to Sonoma County Wine Industry Award this year at the Harvest Fair held in Santa Rosa, California, October 4-6. Sangiacomo Family Vineyards has been one of the top growers in Sonoma County since 1969, with vineyards in Carneros, Sonoma Valley and the Sonoma Coast. The first winery to bottle a vineyard-designated Sangiacomo wine was Gundlach Bundschu according the *Press Democrat* (September 16, 2013). Currently, there are 76 wineries sourcing grapes from the Sangiacomo family. Visit www.harvestfair.org.

Pinot Noir Vines in Malibu, California Actor and director Emilio Estevez produces wine at Casa Dumatz with his winemaker spouse Sonja Magdevski. Estevez dug up the front and back yard at his Malibu farm and planted 800 Pinot Noir vines including clones 667, 777 and 115. The couple tend the vines themselves and hope to average 50 cases in a good year. The winery also sources other varieties from the Santa Ynez Valley. A tasting room is located in historic Los Alamos. Visit www.casadumatzwines.com.

Salud! Oregon Pinot Noir Auction Tickets on Sale Oregon winemakers will debut the 2012 vintage at this benefit for Oregon's seasonal vineyard workers and their families. This event is the only opportunity to acquire unique cuvées made exclusively for Salud!. The Cuvée Tasting and Auction is November 8 at Domaine Drouhin Oregon winery and the Dinner and Auction Gala is in Portland at The Governor Hotel on November 9. For information and tickets, visit www.saludauction.org.

Russian River Valley in San Francisco The Russian River Valley Winegrowers and Uncorked Events present a tasting of Russian River Valley single vineyard wines on Wednesday, October 23, at the General's Residence at Fort Mason. More than 25 winemakers and winegrowers will be pouring small lot, single vineyard wines. Participating wineries include Balletto Vineyards & Winery, Davis Family Vineyards, Inman Family Wines, John Tyler Wines/Bacigalupi Vineyards, Joseph Swan Vineyards, La Crema, La Follette, Siduri, Suacci-Carciere, Thomas George Estates, Valdez Family Winery and Williams Selyem. Complementing the wines will be bites of food and DJ Sol will be spinning grooves. Silent auction items will also be on display, benefiting the Russian River Valley Winegrowers continued efforts to preserve the region's agriculture legacy. Tickets are available at www.singlevineyard.eventbrite.com or visit www.rvww.org.