

PinotFile[©]

Greg Brewer

Winemaker Greg Brewer has developed quite a following in the Santa Ynez Valley. His philosophy is different from many winemakers: "I do as little as possible in the winery and as much as possible in the vineyard." He believes that growing the best possible grapes is critical. Once you get the grapes to the winery you get out of the way and let them express themselves. His wines reflect this philosophy of being more vineyard driven than winemaker driven— a more mineral quality and citrus base rather than being tropical and big.

Along with Steve Clifton, he started Brewer-Clifton Winery in 1994, a no-frills winery in the Sobhani Complex in Lompoc. The winery consists of a large warehouse with equipment necessary to make wine— no tasting room or gift shop. They own no vineyard, but access grapes from premium vineyards in the Santa Rita Hills appellation. Production is only 1,800 cases a year with projected increase to 2,400 cases a year over the next three years. Since Parker favorably reviewed their wines their mailing list has been full and their wines are only available on the secondary market (ie winecommune.com).

Greg Brewer also is the winemaker for Melville Vineyards located in Lompoc on Highway 246 in the Santa Rita Hills appellation of the Western Santa Ynez Valley. This is a much larger and more high-profile winery with a beautiful Mediterranean-style facility. The **2001 Melville Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir** (\$20) was a big success. The *LA Times* said: "This bottling is delicious. A wine this graceful goes with about anything." The wine is still available in many wine stores, but the **2002 Estate Pinot Noir** has just been released. The 2002 wine is a product of the very dry 2002 growing season in which the vines had to work harder resulting in less yields. Production was 40% less than the 2001 vintage. The wine itself, however, is similarly successful and highly recommended for the price (also about \$20). The winery's special Pinot Noir releases— **2001 Carrie's Pinot Noir, 2001 High Density Pinot Noir, and 2001 Clone 115 Indigene** are all sold out but sometimes released as library selections available only at the winery. A good time to visit would be Oct 11-12 when an open house and barbecue is scheduled at the Melville Winery.



Pinot Noir is like a woman: you can devote your whole life to figuring it out.

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In New Zealand, the country now has as much Pinot Noir in the ground as the entire state of California— a remarkable development, considering New Zealanders got started with wine-growing just a decade ago and their population of wine drinkers is smaller than a Los Angeles suburb

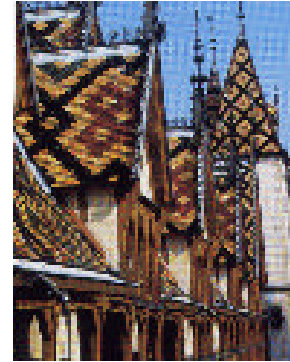
Inside this issue:

Burghound	2
New Wine Fund	2
US Drinking More	2
Sept Releases	3
Blue Slide Ridge	3
Carafe Wine	4
Commentary on the French	4

Allen Meadows— aka Burghound

Since 2001 Allen Meadows has been publishing a quarterly wine newsletter, *Burghound*, devoted exclusively to Burgundy. An annual subscription to the internet version is \$110— not cheap, but then if you are buying Burgundy you know that without proper guidance you can make a lot of expensive mistakes. Over 2,000 readers enthusiastically subscribe and welcome his trustworthy advice.

Meadows is a 49-year old ex-banker from Woodland Hills in Southern California who, like Parker with his Bordeaux followers, is a prophet for Burgundy cultists. He also uses the 100 point scale, but is a tough grader, scores of 90 or above are only given to exceptional wines. His writing style is analytical and lean, without the passion shown by Parker. He is a devotee of *gout de terroir* and looks first for the terroir in a Burgundy, rather than a huge amount of fruit. The wine must have certain characteristics that reflect the vineyard, a recognition that comes with tasting wines from a vineyard many times. Meadows makes three trips a year to Burgundy and in a typical day will visit five domains and taste 50-75 wines. His current favorite domains include Fichot, Roulot, Carillon, and Fourrier. www.burghound.com



New Wine Fund

A new wine investment fund plans to invest in blue-chip wines from Bordeaux (two-thirds), Burgundy, Rhone, Italy, California, Spain, and Australia. Amphora is a newly-formed company based in the Cayman Islands that is seeking investors. The fund's wine advisor and director is Christopher Burr MW, chairman of internet-based wine exchange Uvine. The portfolio will include en primeur and young wines as well as rare, mature collectibles. The wine will be acquired from private cellars, merchants, negociants, and even chateaux whenever possible, although this would have to bypass the well-established and powerful negociant supply chain.

Wine has proven to be a reasonably good investment over the years. Subscribers to the fund will be charged a management fee of 2% per annum and a 15% performance fee will be payable annually from April 1, 2005. Further information at www.decanter.com.

“I am confident the fund will deliver good competitive returns to investors”

US Wine Consumption Growing

Consumers drank more premium wines in 2002 than the past 16 years according to the 2003 edition of Adams Wine Handbook. The growth in wine consumption in 2002 occurred despite a weak economy, a glut of grape supplies, and high inventories from a slow 2001. Consumption increased to 246.3 million 9-liter cases in 2002, up 5.0% - the largest percentage increase since 1996. Imported wines soared 16% to almost 50 million cases while domestics were up 3.5% to 171 million cases. Australia overtook France last year to become the second largest exporter of table wine in the US after Italy.

Generally Americans are experimenting and trying more imported wines. Consumers are more budget-minded and look for value wines. Increasing retail distribution, improved quality in mid-priced domestic wines due to excess of premium grapes, and decreasing prices for both imports and domestics account for the increased wine consumption last year.

September Pinot Noir Releases

September is traditionally a big release month. Some releases include:

Marcassin: 2000 Sonoma Coast Blue Slide Ridge Pinot Noir (see next article), 2000 Sonoma Coast Three Sisters-Lambing Barn Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2000 Sonoma Coast Three Sisters-Sea Ridge Meadow Pinot Noir.

Martinelli: 2001 Sonoma Coast Blue Slide Ridge Pinot Noir, 2001 Russian River Martinelli Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir.

Ojai Vineyard: 2001 Bien Nacido Pinot Noir.

Patz & Hall: 2001 Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Alder Springs Pinot Noir.

Pisoni Vineyards and Winery: 2001 Estate Pinot Noir.

Williams Selyem: 2001 Flax Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Vista Verde Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Weir Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Ferrington Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Coastlands Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Rochioli Riverblock Pinot Noir, 2001 Allen Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2001 Precious Mountain Vineyard Pinot Noir

Blue Slide Ridge Vineyard

Blue Slide Ridge is named for its magnificent formations of blue rock. Directly below the vineyard, a sheer cliff drops into Sproule Creek, showing off great cerulean shards jutting out from beneath the earth's surface. This vineyard site was nearly named "Rattlesnake Ridge" due to the large number of rattlers that populate the cool hollows beneath the great blue rocks. In 1995, Lee and Carolyn Martinelli planted this 6 acre vineyard of Pinot Noir on a steep slope which was once prime grazing land for sheep. This small vineyard was planted to the specifications of Martinelli Winery's winemaker, Helen Turley, and her husband John Wetlaufer. The vines are on a dense vertically trained trellis system with the fruit hanging between 24 and 28 inches from the ground. This style of lower trellising is more labor intensive to farm but the vine yields about 3 pounds of fruit compared to the earlier standard plantings, 10 by 12 feet apart, which may yield a heavy crop of 20 to 30 pounds. The denser spacing creates more intense flavor in the grapes because each individual vine is asked to focus more attention onto a fewer number of grape clusters. This vineyard is truly a "coastal" vineyard, being located on the second ridge inland from the Pacific coastline. Since its first vintage in 1997, Pinot Noir from this vineyard by both Martinelli Winery and Marcassin has never received less than 91 points from Robert Parker.

Orange County Fair Value Pinot Winners

While looking at the Pinot Noir Gold Medal winners at the recent Orange County Fair Wine Competition I saw an emerging label and an old label that offer good Pinot at a modest price.

Crosspoint Monterey Pinot Noir 2001 (\$8): A new label from J. Lohr (the Cab also won Gold) in an attractive price category. Flavor is ripe, but soft and fruity. Like foreplay with chocolate-covered strawberries— simple, smooth, and gets the juices flowing.

Echelon Pinot Noir 2001 (\$11): A second label for Chalone, this has been a reliable product for several years. Plenty of lingering fruit, too gutsy and rich for the money. Like lumberjacking with JLo— woody, wild (berries), and a full but sexy body.

Rumor is out about a tiny Swiss boutique producer of elegant Pinot Noir. Gantenbein, which sends maybe 200 bottles to this country each year, sells out immediately at \$80 a bottle

If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir.


PrinceofPinot.com

A standard wine bottle is often too much at dinner. You may want a taste of white wine with your first course and red with the main course. Order by the glass and you are limited to a paltry list of low interest selections on the list, and a whooping bill as markups for wine by the glass are notoriously high. Some restaurants have found a solution by offering wines by the carafe. In the style of small, family-run restaurants in France, the pots de vin program gives the diner a choice of low-priced, high-value labels. The idea is for the restaurant to source countrified, rustic, affordable, and still really good wines that go well with the cuisine. Diners just don't want to order trophy wines every time they go out, and besides, they often are not good food matches. When wine comes in a carafe, less often more.

Some Comments About the French

The strong Euro against the dollar is weighing on Burgundy export sales with the result importers are living on stocks and placing few new orders. Many small-scale growers in Burgundy are in financial difficulty. The most serious indignation, however, is that Burgundy was not served during the official ceremonies this year at the French Grand Prix.

A French company has come up with a cork-plastic hybrid solution to the TCA contamination problem. A coating of silicone is applied to the end of the cork to protect the cork and wine from taint.

We have been very hard on the French of late, but one thing the French can be respected for is that they have more fun than Americans. Long vacations, short work weeks (it is illegal to work more than 35 hours a week),



lots of dancing, good eating, and drinking. Why can't we loosen up? The scene along the boulevard St Michel in Paris a few weeks ago on the night before Bastille Day was one big party. A crowd was tangoing away in an open-air amphitheater. Hundreds of others were picnicking and impromptu block parties in neighboring streets were everywhere—straight and gay, young and old, black and white— all dancing to salsa. France is enjoying itself while we seem to be fixated on stuff— cellphones, SUVs, boats, huge houses. Our puritanical notion of religion seems to force us to work harder and harder. Maybe we need to savor life a little more, spend more time with our families, take up the tango or salsa, and drink some wine. Sure the French are arrogant, but just maybe they have good reason to be.