

PinotFile[©]

Pennsylvania Pinot Noir??

I just returned from two weeks in Pennsylvania visiting some good friends. I was astonished by the archaic and monopolistic wine distribution system in this state. Wine is only sold in state-operated wine and liquor stores where the stores all carry essentially the same wines at fixed retail prices which are generally \$2-5 higher than we pay in California. The stores have limited hours, stock primarily mainstream unexciting wines, with only a few premium wines offered. The Pinot Noir and Burgundy selection is pathetic. Wine is not sold in markets and beer is only sold in cases at beer-only outlets! Wine from California cannot be shipped to consumers in Pennsylvania. If you live in Pennsylvania and want to buy some Rochioli Pinot Noir from the winery or a wine store in Chicago?- tough luck.

The Pennsylvania wine industry is also very interesting. There are over 80 wineries, but the stores stock very few home-state wines. The only Pennsylvania wine I saw on restaurant wine lists were a Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Chaddsford Winery, the largest producer at 38,000 cases per year. I could not find anyone who actually buys and drinks wine from their own state! Many of the eastern varietals produced such as seyval and chambourcin just don't attract the consumer's eye. There is potential for sparkling wine and Chardonnay can be ok. Pinot Noir is produced in limited quantities, but is a curiosity that lacks the true expression of the grape. The wine industry here is still looking for a varietal that will distinguish itself in this cold-climate agriculture region.

Governor Davis Signs Family Winemakers Bill

SB 88, a Family Winemakers of California-sponsored bill was signed by Governor Davis September 30. This bill allows wineries to sell bottled wine at events held by qualifying nonprofit organizations, bringing together wineries and consumers outside of the tasting room. FWC sponsored this bill because market access is a serious challenge for many wineries. FWC members (now 620 strong) support a wide variety of nonprofit groups to improve local communities, as well as promote their wine. These events are genuine opportunities to broaden brand awareness and sell wine. Earlier legislation sponsored by FWC allowed for orders to be taken at nonprofit winetastings, and for bottled wine to be sold at certified farmers' markets.

**Pinot Noir
Tastes Like
Itself, and It's
Good**

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The Burgundy Wine Federation reports that exports to the US, Canada, and Japan are down 30% in volume the first 6 months of this year. In the US this decrease is due to the prolonged economic crisis and stronger euro against the dollar. Burgundy importers are living on their stocks and waiting for the market to improve.

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Recent California Pinot Noir Releases

Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir 2001— a serious intense wine from own-rooted vines of the Elias Block reserved exclusively for the Pisoni Estate Label. 548 cases 3-pack \$180. 1-800-270-2525.

Peter Michael “Le Moulin Rouge” Pinot Noir 2001— from the Pisoni Vineyard. Reminiscent of Vosne-Romanee, a Stephen Tanzer 93 point wine. \$65. Mailing list allocated. www.petermichaelwinery.com.

Siduri Sonoma County Pinot Noir 2002— a blend of Sonoma Coast and Russian River grapes from six different vineyards. Ready to drink now. 1007 cases \$22. (The 2001 was a WS 91) 1-707-578-3882.

Siduri Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2002— a blend from Pisoni Vineyard, Gary’s vineyard, and Rosella’s Vineyard. Ready to please immediately, not an ager. 552 cases \$32. (The 2001 was a WS 92)

Adrian Fog Savoy Vineyard, Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 2002— comprised of 5 different clones from 7 distinctly different vineyard sections. Full, deep and complex, should age 5-7 years. 300 cases \$75 1-707-431-1190.

Adrian Fog Two Sisters Vineyard, Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2002— from a vineyard planted in 1955. Plenty of blueberries, bing cherries and spice. 75 cases \$75.

Merry Edwards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2001— grapes from Olivet Lane, Meredith Estate, and Klopp Ranch. Bring on the bing cherries, Santa Rosa plums, and red raspberries. \$32 Mailing list allocated. 1-888-388-9050.

Merry Edwards Klopp Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2001—from sandy soils that require irrigation. Swan and Pommard clones, small-berried clusters, a big wine that will age. \$48

Merry Edwards Meredith Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2001—from a vineyard in the Sebastopol Hills owned by winemaker Merry Edwards. The second vintage from this vineyard. Excellent ager. \$45

Although I can recommend all of these Pinots without reservation, I must comment on the Merry Edwards releases. Using the *Methode a l’Ancienne* technique for all of her wines, Merry Edwards consistently fashions luscious Pinot Noirs. I recently drank two previous releases, the 2001 Olivet Lane Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and the 2001 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. These are very compelling spice-laden Pinots. Sweet and seductive in the middle, languorous and slinky in the finish, they are both knockouts.

Cinnabar Gary’s Vineyard Pinot Noir 2001— from a vineyard 1,200 ft above sea level in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey County planted with France’s La Tache clone. Winemaker extraordinaire George Troquato crafted a wine with soft tannins, elegant balance and flavors of asian spice, leather, and berries. 400 cases \$20. www.thewineprofler.com.

DuMol Russian River Pinot Noir 2001— a cellar-worthy Pinot with power and structure to go 6 to 8 years under proper storage. If drinking young, decant for an hour. Needs time to soften and broaden. \$54.50, magnums available. www.thewineprofler.com.

Mietz Cellars Sonoma County Pinot Noir 2002— an incredible quality/ value wine. Classic Sonoma Pinot made in traditional Burgundian style. Hand-crafted including a label drawn by the winemaker Keith Mietz. Ridiculous price of \$15 for this predominantly Russian River Valley Pinot from a great vintage. WS Best Buy of Week. 620 cases. www.rootscellar.com or 1-707-433-4957.



Vintage 2001

Vintage 2001 is on track to provide more outstanding Pinot Noirs than any vintage in California history. Winegrowers, vintners, and wine writers alike have acknowledged that Mother Nature smiled on the entire Golden State during the 2001 growing season. In the January-February edition of *Wine Spectator*, James Laube pronounced that the 2001 vintage “should be a grand one for Pinot Noir, perhaps the finest in the state’s history.”



The 2001 wines are superb and this should come as no surprise to readers of this newsletter which has closely followed Pinot Noir’s rapid ascent in California. Winemakers say the wines are more consistent from year to year as greater insight into where and how to grow this elusive grape has become widely known. Also, Pinot Noir clones are being planted that yield richer wines and farming techniques are being utilized to produce uniformly riper grapes and fewer green wines. It wasn’t all that long ago that California Pinot Noir was considered a finicky, tough grape to grow and even a tougher wine to make, but the 2001 vintage shows that things have changed for the better. It does not get better than this boys and girls.

Vintage 2002

The 2002 growing season was favorable for Pinot Noir but there were challenges that had to be dealt with, most notably the very dry winter endured in Monterey and Santa Barbara Counties. Some wonderfully flavorful grapes without excessive sugar levels were obtained in most areas of the state, however.

The 2002 vintage produced perhaps the finest wines ever in Santa Barbara County. The 2002 vintage was more challenging due to what were basically drought conditions (just over 4 inches of rain during the winter). This led to small clusters and a large number of blank shoots (shoots with no clusters). Growers and wineries had to be prepared for these conditions to avoid unbalanced and tannic wines.

The Santa Lucia Highlands received 7 inches of rain during the winter, significantly below average. Already stressed vineyards could be pushed over the edge in these conditions, but younger, more vigorous vines benefited from the additional stress. Some vineyards produced their finest wines ever and others produced very good but not outstanding wines— a hit or miss proposition.

In Sonoma County, the weather was cool and rainfall was near normal. The wines may show themselves to be consistently superior to their 2001 counterparts.

Oregon’s Willamette Valley fared well in 2002. The weather was warm and extremely dry leading to elevated sugar levels. If the instinct to pick too ripe was curtailed the wines can show uncommon richness and great character. This is the fifth year in a row that Oregon Pinots have the hallmarks of greatness.

One of the healthful ingredients in wine, resveratrol, helps keep blood vessels clear of plaque and may extend life spans. If you're looking for the red wine with the highest documented levels of resveratrol, look to Pinot Noir.

If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir


PrinceofPinot.com

The Spanish government passed a new law on wine that encourages the promotion of wine as part of a healthy diet. Wine will be promoted as distinct from any other alcoholic beverage and campaigns will include recommendations for responsible consumption. Under the law that came into effect this summer, the Spanish government will provide funds for information campaigns, which should promote wine as an integral part of a Mediterranean diet. The law also encourages producers to use environmentally friendly and sustainable farming methods, and the “historical and traditional” aspects of Spanish wine are to be emphasized.

Pinot Noir as a Blending Wine?

In Australia there is an increasing trend to blend a little of the white grape Viognier with their Shiraz. The model for this is the intense red wines of Cote-Rotie in the Rhone Valley of France. The Viognier adds a new layer to the Shiraz, adding that viscosity you see in Viognier whites and filling out, extending, and softening the mid-palate tannins of the Shiraz. It kind of lushes the whole wine up.

The practice of adding white grapes to red wines in Australia actually dates back to the 1930's and '40s. Maurice O'Shea, a legendary winemaker at the 70 year-old Mount Pleasant Winery in the Hunter Valley used to re-ferment red grapes on top of white skins to lengthen the palate and provide silky tannins. In time, Maurice O'Shea also created some luscious and long-lived red wines by blending Shiraz and Pinot Noir. Some of these wines, such as the 1945 Henry II show up at auction selling for \$300-400 a bottle. They still drink beautifully. His successor at Mount Pleasant, Phil Ryan, still makes a similar blend, but it is a hard sell and confined to winery-only sales. Hardy's Steve Pannell thinks that there is great potential for this Shiraz-Pinot Noir blend, but the marketing people at his winery will not even let him do trials.

Things change rapidly in the wine business, and maybe in a few years I will be writing about California's new Syrah-Pinot Noir blends that have become cult favorites. Remember you heard it first here.