

PinotFile[©]

Rising Star Michael Bonaccorsi Dies

In several recent issues I have touted the Pinot Noirs from Michael Bonaccorsi and included the Bonaccorsi Wine Company on my “best” Pinot Noir producer list for 2003. I was shocked to open the *Los Angeles Times* on Saturday and read that he had passed away from an apparent heart attack at the age of 43. He was well-known as a Master Sommelier who worked at Spago in Beverly Hills for several years and was very well-respected for his wine palate by restaurateurs and customers alike. He had finally achieved his dream of making his own wine, and his Pinot Noirs from Santa Barbara County had received outstanding reviews in the Dec. 18 edition of *Wine Spectator Weekly*.



At the First World of Pinot Noir in 2001 held near San Luis Obispo, Michael was debuting his first ever Pinot and Aubert de Villaine from DRC came by. He gave Michael a thumbs up expression after trying his Pinot and Michael never looked back after that experience. I truly enjoyed the fruits of his passionate winemaking efforts and will sadly miss this rising vintner star.

Affairs of Vine Pinot Noir Shootout

Each year Affairs of Vine has a one-day Pinot Noir Summit in San Francisco at which 100 attendees taste and rate the top 20 Pinot Noirs of the year. This year's event, will be held February 7, at the City Club in San Francisco. The cost is \$120. Contact Barbara Drady at 707-874-1975 for information.

The top wines of the 2002 shootout were: 2000 Davis Bynum Rochioli Vineyard Le Pinot RRV (\$85), 2000 Villa Mt Eden Grand Reserve RRV (\$23), 2000 Papapietro Perry RRV (\$34), 2000 Stephen Ross Edna Valley (\$28), 2000 David Bruce Carneros (\$35) Sonoma County (\$25), RRV (\$35), and Windsor Gardens (\$40), 1999 Domaine Carneros (\$34), 1999 King Estate Reserve (\$35), 2000 Trentadue RRV (\$28), 1999 Bouchaine Gee Vinyard Carneros (\$50), and 2000 Testerossa Santa Lucia Highlands (\$55).

**If You Drink
No Noir, You
Pinot Noir**

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Bonaccorsi worked harvests at wineries in Sonoma county and, in the late 1990s, in Burgundy for Domaine Georges Roumier. He had told James Laube of the *Wine Spectator* that “there seemed to be so much potential to be realized” in making Pinot Noir in the Santa Rita Hills appellation of Santa Barbara County.

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Woodenhead— Another Williams Selyem Offshoot

Owner and winemaker Nikolai Stez is a self-professed “woodenhead” - moody, grumpy, and reclusive who loves to make Burgundian Pinot Noir in a California style and also pounds nails as a contractor for a living. He lives to make and drink Pinot Noir, but hates to sell it. With a 17 year apprenticeship under Burt Williams at Williams Selyem, he knows what he is doing. Additionally, he has lived on the Russian River since age one, and considers Sonoma County his back yard. His wines are truly handcrafted— hand punched, basket pressed, aged in French oak in small and unique lots. Unfined and unfiltered. Expensive. He also is the only producer I know of who sources Pinot Noir from Humboldt County. Oh, and he also does Zin. His 2002 Pinot Noirs have just been released (source from www.woodenheadwine.com, and Wine Exchange):

2002 Woodenhead Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

2002 Woodenhead Anderson Valley Wiley Vineyard Pinot Noir

2002 Woodenhead Humboldt County Pinot Noir

2002 Woodenhead Russian River Valley Buena Tierra Vineyard Pinot Noir



Walter Hansel Vineyards

Walter Hansel was a wine enthusiast who planted Pinot Noir vines in the Russian River in 1978. Stephen, Walter's son, now carries on the tradition of producing Burgundy-style Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The Hansel Family Vineyards, founded in 1996, currently consist of 75 acres with ten different French and domestic clones ranging in age from 23 to 3 years. The wines are unique and crafted in small quantities. Parker said: “...this estate is on fire...stunning wines”. They are difficult to find on the market— try www.winesearcher.com.

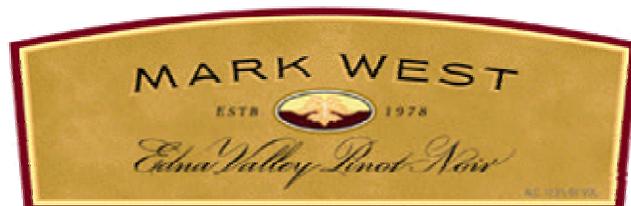
2001 Walter Hansel de la Montanya Vnyd Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$28)

2001 Walter Hansel The South Slope Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$28). This wine received a 92 score from RP— “Chambolle-like red fruit and earth flavors, a Burgundy nose.”



Mark West— “Trainer Pinot”

I call this wine a “trainer Pinot” because it is a very simple, soft, Pinot that won't offend anyone trying Pinot Noir for the first time. At about \$9, the 2001 Edna Valley Pinot Noir falls into that category of introductory Pinots that might make the neophyte move onto to bigger and better things. One review I read called it “scrumptious with generous streams of creamy red and black raspberry richness.” The superlatives are understandable from a wine retailer, but hardly speak the truth. The package is quite nice for the price with an attractive Burgundian bottle and sophisticated label, but don't expect a lot from this Pinot. That old adage, “you get what you pay for”, still holds true here, but you can't say a whole lot negative about the offering.



Name Dropping

The Aussies have a monopoly on unusual names for wines, but I have run across several other wine names that piqued my interest. Several examples are listed below.

Rex Goliath (Hahn Estates), Toasted Head (RH Phillips), Leaping Horse (Ironstone), La Prima Donna (Pennsylvania wine), Poizin, Seven Deadly Zins, Seabiscuit Syrah, Ladybug Red and Recall Red (Milano Family Winery, Hopland), Red Rooster Zin (Martin Family), Retriever Red, Plonque, Red Monkey, Hip Chicks Do Wine (Oregon), Leapfrogmilch (Frog's Leap), and Roasted Slope (Andrew Murray).

Aussie standouts: YellowTail, The Laughing Magpie, Fat Bastard, Thirsty Lizard, Starve Dogbone, The Dead Arm, Black Guts, and my favorite, The Ball Buster.

The French, of course, would never condone such blasphemy.

Predicting Wine Aging Very Subjective

One of my wine buddies is prone to say, "It's not ready to drink. It's a baby, a Lolita." Sometimes I wonder if he ever enjoys a bottle of wine, since he is always thinking it might be better with more age. Judgments about when wine will reach its peak and be at its best are very subjective. You really have to own 6-12 bottles of every wine to follow its development and know when the wine has reached its "peak". For me, I don't like to be encumbered by worrying about how long to cellar a wine— I just pop the cork when I feel like drinking it. I like wine when it has a lot of fruit and is fresh. Allowing your wines to age is a very personal preference and makes sense only if you like the taste of older wine. There are a few hard and fast rules that can guide those who choose to age their wines.

Most wines, particularly American white wines and Pinot Noir, are not made with aging in mind and will not improve noticeably in the bottle. It has been quoted by Sommelier Lauriann Greene-Solin (president and founder of French Wine Explorers) that only 20% of wines will improve with aging beyond one or two years. This is because the winemaking techniques favor fruitiness and freshness, not extraction of tannins needed for a wine to age well. Over the years, tannins will round out, the tastes will blend together, and complex aromas like truffle will emerge if you catch the wine at its zenith.

Also, quality is a big consideration in aging potential. Only quality wines become more interesting with cellaring. Cellaring a bad bottle of wine for ten years will not turn it into a better wine. If you put a bottle of two-buck Chuck in your cellar for ten years, you are not going to find a bottle of Margaux when you finally decide to drink it. Since only 30% of wines are "quality", and since some of these quality wines are not meant for aging, it can be estimated that 20% of wines can be aged successfully,

Good balance in a wine (acidity and tannins that are in good balance with the alcohol) is a necessity for aging potential. Balance must be there from the beginning because wines do not become more balanced with time in the cellar.

Sommeliers like Lauriann Greene-Solin also talk about persistence. Count the number of seconds a wine's aroma lasts on your palate once you spit or swallow the wine. If it lasts longer than 6 seconds, the aging potential is good. More than 8 seconds, and the wine will likely last a number of years in the cellar.

The golden rule of cellaring wine is not to let it slip past its prime. When a wine is dead, it will never come back to life. When you discover a wine that is at its peak, pull the cork on every bottle you own, invite me over, and let's party. Don't be disappointed, however, if I prefer Lolita to Grandma Moses.

Super-ripe Pinot Noirs lack acidity that complements most foods. Also, high alcohol wine is volatile in the glass, making the taste of big Pinots sweet when drunk alone, but often bitter with food. The point is, big, extracted Pinots can garner high scores, but are not food-friendly and best sipped alone.

If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir



Scientists have found that wine kills potentially fatal bacteria. A team of researchers at the University of Illinois have reported in *New Scientist* magazine that red wine acts like an antibiotic in the body. Concentrated extracts of Pinot Noir wine and resveratrol were tested on certain bacteria and found that both compounds stopped the growth of colonies of bacteria. One strain of bacteria that wine killed was *Chlamydia pneumoniae*, which has been shown to increase inflammation and clog arteries by producing fatty deposits. More great health news for Pinot drinkers!

La Crema Winery

La Crema Winery is located in the heart of the Russian River Valley in Windsor, California. Since 1979, this family-owned estate has produced consistently high-quality Burgundian style Pinot Noirs from vineyards along the Sonoma Coast. The winery is run by Laura Jackson-Giron and sister Jennifer Jackson. The wines have been big sellers on restaurant wine lists for years in part because they offer good value, and in part because the name is easy to pronounce, sounds French, and rolls easily off the tongue when ordered. At the 2002 San Francisco International Wine Competition, the 2000 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir won Best of Class and winemaker Jeff Stewart the Andre Tchelistcheff Winemaker of Year award.

Melissa Stackhouse, who was an assistant to Jeff Stewart since 2000 has recently been named winemaker. She previously worked with Peter Michael Winery, Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Sterling Vineyards, and Robert Mondavi Winery. A UC Davis graduate, she enjoys the fine arts and cycling as well as crafting elegant and balanced Pinot Noirs.

Releases include a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, a Carneros Pinot Noir, an Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, and a reserve Nine Barrel Pinot Noir. The winery is not open for tasting or tours, but the wine is widely available at the retail level. The winery phone number is 800-588-5298.

