

PinotFile®

W.H. Smith Pinot Noir

Bill and Joan Smith started La Jota Vineyard Co in the early 1980 's and the Cabernets from this Howell Mountain winery developed a significant following. Inspired by Helen Turley to try their hand at Pinot Noir, they released their first Pinot Noir in 1992 under a new W.H. Smith Wines label. In 1994 they bought 360 acres along the Sonoma Coast on a ridge above the town of Cazadero. Through the years I have followed their progress, and the newest vintages are their best ever.

Their current releases:

2002 W.H. Smith Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$27)

This wine is a cuvee from the Hellenthal and Maritime Vineyards, planted in the Lakeville wine district.

2002 W.H. Smith Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$32) To be released April 1 (no joke), this wine is from mature vines that have been the source for W.H. Smith Wines since 1992.

2002 W.H. Smith Maritime Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$32) This vintage is the premier release from this 11 acre vineyard planted in 1997-1999. Yields for this wine were barely 1 ton/acre.

The wines are widely available including HiTime, WineClub, and WineExchange.



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

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Brix is a term used to measure the sugar content of grapes, grape juice (must), or wine. Wine grapes are harvested at 20 to 25 Brix, resulting in alcohol after fermentation of 11.5-14 percent.

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Phoenix Vineyards

Three generations are involved in this small, family-owned winery in the Napa Valley. The first vines were planted in 1981, and the first wine made in 1991. The 2,500 case production includes a **2001 Pinot Noir Reserve** (\$20) and a **2001 Estate Pinotage "Song of Africa"** (\$23). Pinotage is rarely produced in this country. The varietal is almost unique to South Africa where the crossing of Cinsault ("Hermitage") and a strain of Pinot Noir produces a medium bodied wine with a flavor profile quite distinct from Pinot Noir.

Jump in Production of Oregon Pinot

Commercial wineries crushed 10,072 tons of Pinot Noir in 2003, up 10% from 2002. Pinot Gris, which in 2002 moved ahead of Chardonnay as the state's leading white-wine grape, came in second to Pinot Noir. Statistics compiled by the Oregon Wine Board also show a record number of vineyards and wineries, and an all-time high in average prices per ton. The number of Oregon acres planted with grapes increased to 13,400, up from 12,100 in 2002. The average yield per acre dropped slightly, from 2.34 to 2.24 tons. The number of vineyards increased from 582 in 2002 to 673 in 2003. A record 252 Oregon wineries now are producing wine! In terms of percentage of total sales, Pinot Noir was on top with 44% of the Oregon market, far ahead of its white cousin, Pinot Gris, at 18.5%.

2003 was a challenging vintage for Oregon, but may turn out to be one of its best. Record heat, on numerous occasions above 100 F, accelerated grape maturing and caused imbalanced ripening in many vineyards. Sugar development far outpaced acid growth and winemakers were faced with the dilemma of picking early to avoid high sugars, or waiting for possible rain to slow sugar development and allow flavors and acids to catch up. What rains did come were sporadic and heat continued to intervene. Mildew had to be dealt with in many locations. The rapid ripening in 2003 resulted in brix levels of 25 to 28 in some cases. The higher the level of sugar, the higher the potential alcohol. Also, in addition to high sugars, the wines had low acidity. The combination of low acidity and high alcohol makes for unpleasant hot and flabby wines.

The winemakers had to earn their pay in 2003. Unlike the vintages of 1998-2001 where the wine made itself, the 2003 vintage required winemakers to intervene to correct the natural imbalance. The high sugar levels meant that fermentation had to be closely monitored to insure that the yeast completed the task of converting all this sugar to alcohol. Water and/or acid had to be added. Adding water can reduce the total alcohol and adding acid (acidulation) can bring the wines into balance. 2003 may become known as the "tartaric acid vintage". Time will tell whether 2003 turns out to be a quality vintage. The lessons learned by Oregon winemakers over the years, and the advances in technology, make it likely that this will be a successful vintage for Pinot Noir.



Finding Burgundy is an Egg Hunt

Every critic has praised the 2001 wines from the Cote de Nuit and some have even said they are superior to 2002. Two incredibly ripe vintages back to back like 2001-2002 is a rarity in Burgundy. The 2001s have arrived on our shores and are worth looking for. The 2002s, because of the difference in value of the US dollar and the Euro, may be as much as 30% more expensive.

But finding good Burgundy is like participating in an egg hunt. You have to be energetic, look high and low, under every rock, behind every obstacle, and open every door. Quantities produced are miniscule in many cases, and retailers often have only a few cases, or even worse, a few bottles to sell. Then when you locate the wine you want, you may have to buy a few bottles of the producer's lesser wines to get the Grand Cru wine you prize. Discounts are infrequent; some retailers give 10% on mixed or solid cases.

The best way to land the Burgundies you are after is to develop a relationship with a one of the few retailers who stock a significant selection. Good sources include whwine.com, wineclub.com, klwines.com, garnet-wine.com, wallyswine.com, burgundywineco.com, and the search engines winesearcher.com and wineaccess.com.

Affairs of Vine Pinot Noir Shootout

On February 7, 2004, 100 Pinot Noir lovers met at the City Club in San Francisco to blind taste 30 Pinot Noirs. The top scoring wines:

2001 Tandem Winery Halleck Vnyd Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 87 cases, \$55, 93

2001 David Bruce Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 93

2001 Fess Parker Bien Nacido Vineyard Pinot Noir 268 cases, \$45, 93

2001 La Crema Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 1200 cases, \$20, 93

2001 Aubin Cellars Verve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 120 cases, \$30, 92

2001 Chumeia Central Coast Pinot Noir \$16, 92

2001 David Bruce Bien Nacido Vineyard Pinot Noir 92

2001 Foley Barrel Select Santa Barbara Pinot Noir 232 cases, \$50, 92

2000 Gloria Ferrer Jose S Ferrer Selection Carneros 900 cases, 92

2001 Holdredge Wines Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 300 cases, \$50, 92

2002 Jewel Collection Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$10, 92

2001 Peka Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 223 cases, \$30, 92

Hot Cocoa Has More Antioxidants Than Wine

Researchers at Cornell University have found that hot cocoa (cocoa powder and water) is higher in cancer-fighting antioxidants. One cup of hot cocoa contains twice the protective antioxidants found in one glass of red wine, three times the amount found in one cup of green tea, and five times the amount found in one cup of black tea. Antioxidants protect against cancer by eliminating free radicals from the body. The benefits may not be found in hot cocoa made with milk, because milk may block cocoa's antioxidant activity. How about an antioxidant diet of one cup of hot green tea at breakfast, one cup of hot cocoa at lunch, and one glass of Pinot Noir at dinner?

Chinese Takeout and Pinot Noir

We all know about the classic match of Peking duck and Pinot Noir. But Chinese food is highly varied and usually beer or a sparkling wine is chosen to cover the wide range of flavors. There are a few Chinese dishes other than duck that pair nicely with Pinot Noir. Any unami-intense course like stir-fried greens with shitake mushrooms, oyster sauce based dishes, soy dipping sauces, soy-braised and soy-roasted dishes. Egg drop soup, shrimp with snow peas, fried rice with or without chicken and shrimp, and simple stir-fried vegetables go nicely with a fruity Pinot Noir. Sweet and sour pork compliments a light Pinot Noir.

But if just have to have kung-pao chicken, pop open a bottle of white zinfandel.





Cowgirl Creamery in Point Reyes, Sonoma County, makes some delightful artisan cheeses. Two that pair well with Pinot Noir are Cowgirl Creamery Mt. Tam (a triple cream cheese made from organic cow milk) and Pierce Point (a cheese modeled after one from Corsica, Italy— a pasteurized organic cow milk cheese coated with herbs, washed with Muscat wine). Other good cheeses with Pinot Noir are gruyere (Swiss origin cow milk), crottin (French goat milk), talleggio (Italian cow milk), aged cheddar, gouda, edam, jack, and provolone.

Cowgirl Creamery: 415-663-9335 or www.cowgirl-creamery.com.



Princeofpinot.com

Lost Canyon Winery

This winery was founded back in 1978 as Lost Canyon Cellars to produce small lots of ultra-premium wines. It was basically a home winemaker operation run by Jack States and Randy Keworth. After teaming up with Bob Riskin, a former Levi executive with an interest in wine, the winery was bonded in 2001. The winery is located in a renovated vintage 1900's warehouse along the Bay waterfront south of Jack London Square in Oakland. Luckily, the winery operation was started at a time when there was a glut of high-quality grapes and they took the opportunity to establish long-term contracts with growers.

The inaugural wines from the 2001 vintage were released in March, 2003. There have been favorable reviews, although the Affairs of Vine tasting reported on page three scored the wines in the 81-85 range. Several Bay Area restaurants have featured the wines. The 2002 Pinot Noirs are to be released in the Spring of 2004.

2001 Lost Canyon Winery Carneros Pinot Noir 175 cases \$38

2002 Lost Canyon Winery Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 250 cases \$36

2002 Lost Canyon Winery Las Brisas Vineyard Los Carneros Pinot Noir 250 cases \$38

2002 Dutton Ranch Morelli Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 200 cases \$38

This is a serious winery to watch. They have acquired excellent sources for Pinot Noir grapes. No expense is spared in the vinification, aging (French barrels), and packaging. The website is impressive (lostcanyonwinery.com) and the wines may be ordered directly from them through the website.

