

PinotFile[©]

Wine Cask 2004 Futures Program

The Wine Cask is a terrific restaurant, wine bar, and wine store in Santa Barbara owned by Doug Margerum. For 15 years, Doug has directed the Santa Barbara County Wine Futures program. A catalogue of wines offered for advance sale beginning today is available on line at win-cask.com. The wines can also be tasted at two futures tasting events at the Wine Cask, March 13 and April 24. However, many of the desirable Pinot Noirs are in very limited supply and become sold out even before the first tasting event on March 13. Pre-release prices in the catalogue are about 20% less than the release price. Minimum purchase is 6 bottles of any one wine. Some highlights of the offering:

2001 Au Bon Climat Mt Carmel Vineyard "Larmes de Grappe" Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir. At \$119.95, this is the most expensive wine in the catalogue. 68 cases were produced of this onetime release. The wine was kept in all new Francois Freres barrels for 24 months, and 100% stems retained. At 3/4 ton per acre yield in the vineyard, the result is a big, dark wine that reminds Doug of a Grand Cru from Dujac.

2003 Babcock Cargasacchi Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir. 200 cases produced from eight barrels from Peter Cargasacchi's vineyard located at the extreme western end of the Santa Rita Hills appellation. \$32.95

2002 Costa De Oro "Reserva Oro Rojo" Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir. Sourced from the winery's Gold Coast Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley, this wine is not big but very correct for Pinot Noir. Winemaker Gary Burk has produced 200 cases of a very complex and textured wine. \$27.95.

2003 Drew Family Cellars Arita Hills-667 Clone Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir. This meticulously farmed 10-acre vineyard produced very low yields. Black cherry taffy on the nose with plum spice and rose petals. 100 cases. \$27.95.

2003 Flying Goat Dierberg Vineyard Santa Ynez Valley Pinot Noir. Fruit from this vineyard is very distinctive and a favorite of the Wine Cask staff. 325 cases of a great Pinot Noir. \$27.95.

2002 Hitching Post Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir. Gary Harley describes it as spunk water—the water that rests in the hollow of a tree. Like drinking Pinot Noir on a forest floor after a rain. 100

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

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The Wine Cask will be hosting several Santa Barbara County vintners with six course dinners in March and April. The vintners will be pouring current releases and library wines. C Foxen, Melville, Foley, Drew Family, and Au Bon Climat to name a few. Dates and details at wine-cask.com

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Longoria

Rick Longoria has been producing stellar wines under the Longoria label for twenty years in Santa Barbara County. He doubles as the winemaker for Gainey. Through the years the Pinot Noirs have won many top awards in wine competitions. His recent releases seemed to be his best to date. David Beaulieu of *The Wine News* said that “Over a broad range of varieties, Rick Longoria may be the best winemaker in the area.” Current Pinot Noir releases are difficult to find but can be purchased at the website, www.longoriawine.com.

2001 Fe Ciaga Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$36. 94 pts *Wine Enthusiast* (“a gorgeous wine”), 86 pts Robert Parker. The vineyard was planted by Rick in 1998 on eight acres in the heart of the Santa Rita Hills. It is located one mile west of Sanford & Benedict Vineyard. This vineyard site has great potential for the future.

2001 Mt Carmel Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$36. 93 pts *The Wine News*— one of the best of blind tasting of 35 Santa Rita Hills Pinots, 87 pts Robert Parker, Best in Tasting out of 81 South Central Coast Pinot Noirs *Wine Country Living Magazine*. Until recently, all of the grapes from this esteemed vineyard were used by Babcock, but since 2000 a few tons are allocated to Longoria and Au Bon Climat.

2001 Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$36. The fruit is sourced from two blocks from this highly regarded vineyard.

Pessagno Winery

Stephen Pessagno, winemaker at Lockwood, has been dreaming of producing his own limited edition wines for twenty years. He started with the 1999 vintage and now handcrafts Pinot Noir from prestigious vineyards in Monterey and San Benito Counties. The vineyards are carefully overseen and the wines are made using the finest modern winemaking techniques. The style is one of elegance, balance, and finesse, with each vineyard allowed to express its own terroir.

2001 Pessagno Gary’s Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$50
The 2000 vintage was highly acclaimed in *Wine Enthusiast* (93).

2001 Pessagno Spring Grove Vineyard San Benito County Pinot Noir \$25

2001 Central Avenue Vineyard Reserve Monterey County Pinot Noir

Wines may be purchased at pessagnowines.com, 831-484-1154.



Hamilton Beach Thermos Wine Chiller

This classy designed stainless steel thermos will keep your wine at a constant serving temperature for up to twelve hours. The 10-setting guide suggests the correct degree for red, white, blush, and sparkling wines. No more wet Champagne bottles dripping on your starched tablecloth. You can now use your ice bucket for a planter. Great in summer.

Available through the Home Depot catalog or homedepot.com for \$80.

Wine Crisis in France— Sacre Bleu!

French wine exports sank by nearly 10% last year and domestic sales fell by almost 5%. The average French adult drank 58 liters of wine last year, compared with about 100 liters during the 1960's. Only 37% of the French consider themselves regular consumers compared with 61% in 1980. Wine consumption in restaurants has decreased 15-20% according to the Cotes-du-Rhone wine board.

Insiders say that between 600 and 1,000 small, independent Bordeaux wine producers are on the verge of bankruptcy. There has been a sudden collapse in the price of vineyards which around Bordeaux are now selling for about 23,000E per hectare compared to 37,000E in 2002.

There are many factors involved in this looming crisis, but sales abroad have been severely hit by wines from Australia, California, and Chile, which between them planted 100,000 hectares of new vineyards from 1998 to 2000— the equivalent of the entire Bordeaux winegrowing area. Also, French government health and safety campaigns have impacted the drinking of wine. Drunk-driving enforcement has become a significant priority and the French are drinking less in restaurants as a result. The growers also have been hampered by strict advertising laws passed in 1991. Both the Bordeaux and Burgundy wine boards have recently been taken to court by the National Association for the Prevention of Alcoholism for advertising campaigns whose slogans included: "Let's drink less, but let's drink better."

The final blow to the French ego is the trend in the European community to use English instead of the French language as their preferred working language.

Santa Barbara Vintner's Association's 2004 California Tour

The 2004 Golden State Tour will allow you to taste your way through 40-50 wineries at each event. The winemaker and/or owner will be present along with hors d'oeuvres and the music of Ray Fortune. This is a good opportunity to taste different examples of Santa Barbara Pinot Noir, or the unique offerings of a specific AVA like Santa Rita Hills, or the diverse styles of your favorite Santa Barbara winemakers. Cost is \$40/person and reservations can be made by calling SBCVA at 800-218-0881 or on the web at www.sbcountywines.com.

Dates include: March 10, Santa Barbara; March 28, Beverly Hills; March 24, Orange County; March 25, San Diego County (Del Mar), and April 22, San Francisco.

Specialized Program in Wine Studies

The University of Irvine is offering the Specialized Program in Wine Studies, a practical, content-based, comprehensive wine education and tasting course for consumers and professionals engaged in the wine industry. Students can complete the program in two to three quarters. The prerequisite course is *Fundamentals of Wine Studies* and a total of 90 hours of instruction is subsequently required in any elective. Topics include wine tasting, grape growing, winemaking, regional differences, economics of the wine industry, food and wine pairing, production methods, wine service, history, chemistry, and wine product knowledge.

The program is the only university-level wine study program in Orange County designed especially for the serious wine connoisseur.

For information and registration: UCI at 949-824-6335 or email them at unexarts@uci.edu.



James Laube in the recent issue of *Wine Spectator* (March 31, 2004) made some comments about California Pinot Noir and Burgundy comparisons which I found right on. He stated, “Over the course of the lunch, the wine (‘59 La Tache) evolved to deliver what can only be described as the ultimate wine-drinking experience, the kind that nearly defies description and invariably is cited by wine lovers as the sort of perspective-altering sensation that in some instances forever change’s one’s view of wine. The infant Pinot Noir (2002 Bonaccorsi) was dark-hued, rich and multi-flavored, and more than held its own against the older, pedigreed La Tache. I don’t think it will ever be anything like La Tache, which is fine with me. I doubt that any La Tache, even when young, ever tasted so rich and fruity. These wines (California Pinot Noir) aren’t going to best, or even match La Tache, nor need they try to. They are different wines from a different place for a different audience.”

Gold Ridge Pinot Noir “Nouveau”

Brice Jones, the founder and ex-owner of Sonoma Cutrer, has been developing an old, 150 acre apple orchard on the outskirts of Sebastopol to produce world-class Pinot Noir. The Gold Ridge Vineyard is meticulously planted and trellised on the estate. The estate will carry a “Russian River Valley” appellation.

The initial harvest from this vineyard, 2003, turned out to be of much higher quality than anticipated. The wine was made by a duo of unnamed very well known enologists, one with long-term experience in Burgundy. Due to the inherent nature of adolescent fruit, they decided to emphasize the fun loving, medium-bodied character of the grapes utilizing the time honored French Nouveau technique of “Carbonic Maturation”. This means introducing full, uncrushed bunches of grapes into the winemaking process. The result is a rich, lightly tannic, nominally age-able wine with the taste of Spring. This will be a coveted first release from what is certain to be one of the most coveted new Pinot Noir producers of the North Coast.

Remarkably, the entire 232 cases is being sold for only ten bucks a bottle. The wine is lower in alcohol than usual California Pinot Noirs (probably around 11%). Taster Paul Root exclaimed, “beautiful, transparent ruby color, odors of cherry extract, still-warm red-vine licorice, blackberry compote, and fermenting concord grapes. The luscious fruit-grenade flavors echo the concentrated Pinot essence while adding a silky, round and seamless finish which leaves a trace of sweet berries on the tongue”. The perfect Spring wine for around \$100 a case!

Www.rootscellar.com or 866-808=0124.