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The **FIRST** Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Clos Saron— Hidden Gem

The winemaking history of the Sierra Foothills (AVA) dates to Gold Rush times of 1849 when miners brought grapevine clippings to the area. When the gold ran out and Prohibition came, the wine industry in this area virtually disappeared. In the 1970's, winemakers from Napa and Sonoma discovered the potential of this mountainous region characterized by warm days and cool nights. They were also attracted by the relatively inexpensive quality land. Now well over 100 wineries call these foothills home and the area has developed a reputation for hearty Zinfandels. Pinot Noir is not the grape that comes to mind when you think of the Sierra Foothills.

Gideon Bernstein and wife Saron have developed a very young and very small vineyard in the northern limits of the Sierra Foothills AVA. With his background of over 25 years in the wine industry as buyer, seller, educator, and writer, and his wife's experience in viticulture, they have set a goal to transcend all of the preconceived notions that exist in people's minds about what is possible in this region. What they do there is unusual from just about every possible point of view. They work with organic fruit exclusively and farm all of their fruit, including sourced fruit, themselves. They specialize in Pinot Noir and "non-traditional blends" of other red and white varietals. Winemaking involves no acid corrections, no fining/filtration, no inoculations, no racking, and virtually no sulfur dioxide additions during barrel aging. The barrels used are coopered by the Rousseau family in Gevrey Chambertin, the wine is aged on its lees for as long as necessary, often until the day of bottling. It is then bottled manually, direct from barrel. Not surprisingly, the wines are very limited in availability and high in quality.

The vineyard and winery is located in a cool microclimate in the Oregon House Valley. 4500 vines are planted on a gentle, well-drained, north-east facing slope. The soils are decomposed granite, formed by mountain erosion over centuries, forcing the vines to probe deeply for nutrients and water. The combination of volcanic, clay, and alluvial elements provides good water retention and drainage. The soil is pure, uncontaminated, alive with microorganisms and earthworms. The growing season is moderate, with enough, but not too much rain, and enough sun without too much cold. Bud break is in late-March to mid-April, bloom in late-May to mid-June, and harvest from late September to mid-October.

Pinot Noir expresses its terroir more than any other grape. The (cont'd)

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

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In California, Pinot Noir acreage bearing fruit more than doubled in the four year period ending in 2002, for a total of 16,815 acres, according to the California Agricultural Statistics Service. Pinot Noir consumption in the US increased from 0.6 million cases to 0.9 million cases in the same time period.

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result is that Clos Saron Pinot Noir is very uniquely expressive of this region. It is not a duplicate any other California Pinot Noir, but stands on its own with remarkable notes of minerality and aromatic subtleties on a plush fruit core.

2002 Clos Saron Pinot Too (\$25). A blend of fruit from the estate young vines (1999) blended with sourced fruit from a high elevation nearby vineyard. This wine is drinking perfectly now. Floral, red-fruited, and ripe, this wine has freshness and great purity. Superb fruit-driven Pinot Noir.

2001 Clos Saron Estate Pinot Noir (\$45). This wine thinks it is a Premier Cru Burgundy. Very dense, deep, and long, it is loaded with kirsch, black cherries, and a cabinet full of baking spices. This wine will age gloriously for 5-10 years (decant for a half an hour if you drink now). Oregon House meets Gevrey Chambertin. Very unique for California and pure magic.

The Clos Saron wines are available at some of the finer Bay Area restaurants and on the website— clossaron.com. You will love the whole package which shows respect for the efforts inside— the Pinot is wrapped in burgundy-colored tissue paper, tastefully labeled, and topped with a wax capsule.



Burgundy in 2002, Beaujolais in 2003

The succulent 2002 Burgundies are finding their way into retail stores now. The wines are consistently fine from the Bourgogne level to the Grand Crus. Although prices are notably high due to the Euro exchange rate, the top Burgundies still are bargains relative to their esteemed Bordeaux equivalents. Top first growth and “garage” Bordeaux wines from 2002 can cost \$400 and up a bottle. Top 2002 Grand Crus like Bouchard Clos de Beze (\$140), Comte de Vogue Bonne Mares (\$275), Clos du Tart (\$135), and Bouchard La Romanee (\$350) are relative bargains. The problem with the Grand Crus is that they really need 10 years of cellaring and for collectors like me who are getting up in age (I will be 61 this month), the concern is that I may never be able to drink them at their peak. Fortunately, there are many, many more modestly priced Burgundies that can bring considerable pleasure much sooner. A sampling of such wines available in stores now include: **2002 Bachelet Cote De Nuits Villages** (\$24), **2002 Bouchard Beaune Clos de la Mousse** (\$25), **2002 Bouchard Nuits Saint Georges Les Cailles** (\$40), **2002 Bouchard Pommard Riegens** (\$50), **2002 Bouchard L’Enfant Jesus** (\$40), **2002 Cathiard Bourgogne** (\$22), **2002 Mortet Bourgogne Noble Souche** (\$26), **2002 Patrice Rion Chambolle Musigny Les Cras** (\$55), **2002 Patrice Rion Vosne Romanee** (\$35), **2002 Girardin Pommard Riegens** (\$55), **2002 Laurent Vosne Romanee Suchots and Vosne Romanee Beaumonts** (\$50). As always, the key to buying good Burgundy is to seek out the top producers.

2003 may be the finest vintage ever for the Gamay grape in Beaujolais. George Duboeuf said it was “the greatest vintage in my lifetime”. The hot, sunny and dry weather produced higher tannin levels giving some backbone to this under-appreciated fruity grape. Morgon, Brouilly, and Moulin-a-Vent feature many serious mid-term cellaring wines at good prices. An excellent source for these wines is Kermit Lynch Imports (510-524-1524) and North Berkeley Wine (northberkeleyimports.com), both in Berkeley, California. Kermit Lynch is a legendary wine importer and retailer who has a predilection for finding obscure French wines. He has over 30 years in the business and sends out very quirky mailers.

One of my readers who is a Beaujolais enthusiast wrote that he recently had his first 2003 Beaujolais— the Domaine de la Madone (Cuvee Unique from North Berkeley Imports). At less than \$12 a bottle, the wine had “a powerful attack of ripe Gamay fruit purity that was amazing.” His girlfriend said it was comparable to most Red Burgundy wines in great years. Everyone needs a girlfriend like that who prizes substance over reputation!

The History of Oregon Pinot Noir Clones

(Excerpted from an article “Mothers & Clones” by Jason Lett in the *Oregon Wine Magazine* 2004)

The fascinating story of Oregon’s quest to import good Pinot Noir clones is at the heart of the success of this state’s wine industry. The clonal selection used for producing Pinot Noir along with soil and microclimate are the most important factors in determining the resultant flavor profile of the wine. A clone is a separate vine genetically identical to its mother plant. It has the same growth habit, flavors, and ripening time as the vine it came from. Clones are propagated by taking cuttings from a mother vine. Seeds cannot be used since after pollination, the new seeds will not be genetically identical. In the early 1960’s there was only one non-virused University-certified clone of Pinot Noir available in the United States. It was imported to UC Davis from Burgundy, but certified in Switzerland at Wadenswil. With that introduction, the story unravels.

- ?? David Lett brought a carload of Wadenswil clone (UCD 2A) cuttings in the trunk of his car from University of California at Davis (UCD) to Oregon in 1965. With time, this clone has proven to be one of the best for Oregon.
- ?? Lett’s Eyrie Vineyards 1975 South Block Reserve Pinot Noir (solely Wadenswil clone) won international acclaim.
- ?? Pommard was the next clone brought to Oregon from UCD. Lett and Charles Coury started a vine nursery in Oregon which included the Pommard clone. It produced a flavor profile that was complimentary to the Wadenswil clone. But not all the Pommard clones were exactly alike. It is suspected that some cuttings were smuggled in from Europe in the 60’s and these vines produced a different tea-like, spicy flavor. The vines they sold as Pommard have since been known as the Coury Clone (UCD 4). This is the most widely planted Pinot Noir clone in Oregon.
- ?? In the early 70’s, three clones were available from UC Davis: Wadenswil, Pommard, and a third minor clone mislabeled as Gamay Beaujolais. There were also a few “suitcase” clones such as the Coury Clone. Early Oregon Pinot Noirs were often a blend of these clones and the resultant wines were very good in good years.
- ?? Serious viral problems in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir clones in the 60’s led French officials to start a clonal program that produced what are now known as “the Dijon clones”. In order to get some of these newer clones from Europe, Oregon growers enticed Oregon State University (OSU) to get an import permit from the USDA so clonal material could be sent directly from Europe to Oregon. Initially, they were only able to obtain low quality Pinot Noir clones through OSU.
- ?? In the 80’s Dr Raymond Bernard, one of the developers of clones in Burgundy and regional director of the Office National Interprofessionnel des Vins (ONIVINS) in Dijon, France became sympathetic to Oregon’s cause. He had spent time with David Lett in 1964. In 1984, Bernard sent Pinot Noir clones 113, 114, 115, and in 1988, 667 and 777. Together they are known as “the Dijon clones” and are all descended from individual plants that grow in vineyards belonging to Jean-Marie Ponsot of Morey-St– Denis. Dr Bernard’s donation had significant influence on the success of Oregon and New World Pinot Noir.
- ?? There are over 200 clones of Pinot Noir. 50 clones are certified and 15 are significantly propagated. The controversy continues over which makes the best Pinot Noir– wine from a single clone or a blend of clones. In addition, there is ongoing controversy about which is better– official clones or “indigenous clones” (types of clones from individual vineyards known as *selection massale*).



Santa Fe Wine & Chile Fiesta is September 22-26 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. 90 world class wineries are represented including numerous excellent wine seminars: 2002 Domaine Dujac and Leflaive (with Win Wilson), Domaine Drouhin Oregon (with winemaker Veronique Boss-Drouhin), and Riedel Sommeliers Glasses (with Georg J Riedel). Many guest chef demonstrations, luncheons and dinners are presented, including notable chefs like Suzanne Goin of Lucques, Los Angeles, Cory Scheiber of Wildwood, Portland, and Mark Miller of Coyote Café, Santa Fe. Live and Silent wine auction and Gruet Golf Classic are on the schedule. For tickets call 505-438-8060, santafewineandchile.org.

Gourmet Tour of San Francisco Bay is a six-day food and wine tour sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. The October 15 trip is aboard the 257-foot Yorktown Clipper and will explore the Bay Area and Napa Valley wine country. The trip begins and ends in Redwood City, with stops in Sausalito, San Francisco, and Napa Valley. Excursions include winery tours, cooking demonstration at the Culinary Institute of America, and a visit to Muir Woods. Master chefs from the Bay Area will prepare gourmet meals. Cost is from \$2,000 per person, double occupancy, plus air fare. 805-884-6436, sbmuseart.org.



PrinceofPinot.com

Small Is Beautiful

2002 Holdredge Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$29). You won't hear about this wine unless you are connected to winemaker circles. With only 500 cases made, it will only be found in the Bay Area. John and Carri Holdredge have been making Pinot Noir for three years and the 2002 vintage is the best to date. This is a small family winery—no staff or employees—just husband and wife making wine in a small winery in Healdsburg. This wine “has a lot of Pinot, and ton of Noir!” Released in May. Benchmarkwine.com.

2002 Bannister Winery Demuth Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$19). 230 cases. Marty Bannister operated VinQuiry, an independent wine lab in Healdsburg that does chemical analysis for growers for many years, and spent considerable time working closely with Paul Hobbs and Zelma Long. She launched her own brand in 1989 focusing on limited production small-vineyard designate Pinot Noirs, Chardonnays, and Zinfandels. Her long-time contacts in the wine country have allowed her to source grapes from selected top vineyards. She holds her Pinots for an additional year or two of bottle aging before release. The Demuth Vineyard release is a Volnay-styled wine that will benefit from additional aging. Available at Wine Exchange in Orange and at thewineprofiler.com.

2002 Woodenhead Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$35). 214 cases. Winemaker/owner Nikolai Stez apprenticed with Burt Williams for 17 years. His style is full-bodied with fruit galore. He is the only one I know of making Pinot Noir from Humboldt County (**2002 Woodenhead Cellars Humboldt County Pinot Noir** (\$28), 147 cases, and **2002 Woodenhead Cellars Elk Prairie Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir** (\$45), 147 cases). Woodenheadcellars.com.