

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Finding Shea-ness

The Crew gathered at Pinot Provence Restaurant in Costa Mesa, California yesterday to have dinner, and taste through the 2001 and 2002 Shea Vineyard Pinot Noirs with guest Dick Shea. We were searching for that certain distinct "Shea-ness" that can be detected in diverse wines from this vineyard. Sure enough, there is a consistent floral character of violets and dark red roses and a certain dark red fruit character with a hint of spice that seems unusually clear.

The Shea Vineyard has become one of the most recognized vineyard terroirs in Oregon. Located in the Yamhill Foothills of Oregon's Willamette Valley, the vineyard was first planted to wine grapes by Dick Shea and vineyard manager Javier Martin in 1989. The property was a former hazelnut orchard and cattle grazing pasture and was viticulturally unproven. The sedimentary soils here, known as the Willakenzie series (named after Oregon's largest rivers, the Willamette and the MacKenzie), were not considered as desirable as the better known Jory soils that comprised the Red Hills of Dundee a few miles to the east. Shea was one of the first to plant Pinot Noir in this area, but is now surrounded by several premier Pinot Noir wineries including Willakenzie, Patricia Green, and Beaux Freres.

A former resident of the East Coast, Dick Shea had become interested in Oregon Pinot Noirs on a trip to Washington state to visit relatives. He had intended to buy some retirement property, but ended up farming grapes instead. In the early years, Shea was able to find knowledgeable people who advised him and later worked for him on the vineyard while he remained on the East Coast working on the Wall Street trading floor until 1999.

Today the vineyard consists of 200 hillside acres of dry-farmed land of which 140 are planted to wine grapes, mostly Pinot Noir. The south-facing vineyard sits at an elevation of 400-600 feet. The soil is Willikenzie type which is shallow (1-2 feet of gray topsoil) and very well draining with sandstone subsoil. The original Pinot Noir vines were Pommard clone planted on their own roots. Phylloxera had developed by 1996, and a program of replanting has been instituted since that year. The older vines consist of Pommard and Wadenswil, the newer plantings add Dijon clones 114, 115, 777, and 828. The 135 acres of Pinot Noir are divided into 33 blocks and represent many different sub-terroirs within the Shea Vineyard terroir.

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Shea accolades:
"An American Grand Cru," Patricia Green

"Among the elite terroirs of New World Pinot Noir," *Oregon Wine Report*

"One of the top 5 vineyards for Pinot Noir in the U.S.," *Wine Enthusiast*

"One of 13 Great American Vineyards," *Wine News*.

Inside this issue:

DePointe Cellars & 3

Bellee Vallee Pinot 4

A million new 4
Oregon Pinot Noir

Shea Vineyard is perhaps Oregon's only true grand cru Pinot Noir vineyard and fruit from this impeccably maintained site is sought by 20 of Oregon's finest vintners. Ken Wright, one of Oregon's most acclaimed winemakers, legitimized this area and this vineyard with wines he made from Shea Vineyard grapes at Panther Creek and Ken Wright Cellars. Shea still sells fruit to Ken Wright, as well as to Beaux Freres, Bergstrom, J.K. Carrie, Elk Cove, Highlands, Francis Tannahill Wines, Panther Creek, Patricia Green Cellars, Penner-Ash, Raptor Ridge, Scott Paul, Shea Wine Cellars, Sine Qua Non (California), St. Innocent, Stevenson-Barrie Cellars, and Westray. Since 1998, Dick Shea has made his own Pinot Noir under the Shea Wine Cellars label. He keeps some of the best vineyard sections, using about 15% of the fruit from the property. Production is small, about 2,500 cases. His wines are eagerly sought after and already have become a cult-classic collectable.



The evening began with an aperitif wine, **2002 Shea Vineyard Chardonnay** (very limited production from 2 acres) and ended with a dessert wine, **1999 St. Innocent Shea Vineyard Pinot Gris Vendange Tardive**. These wines were fine for what they were.

First Flight (with seared diver scallops, chanterelle mushrooms, Madeira jus):

- 2001 Shea Wine Cellars Block 23 Pinot Noir** 190 cases, \$48, 100% Pommard clone
- 2001 Shea Wine Cellars Block 32 Pinot Noir** 175 cases, \$48, 100% Wadenswil clone
- 2001 Shea Wine Cellars Homer Cuvee Pinot Noir** 140 cases, \$65 Best barrels in cellar
- 2001 Sine Qua Non No 6 Pinot Noir** winemaker Manfred Krankl, California
- 2001 Ken Wright Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir**, Block 2, \$40

The Block 23 has become the "signature wine" of Shea Wine Cellars. The style is very pretty, with an intoxicating floral nose and soft and elegant mouth feel—clearly the Crew's favorite of the flight. The Block 32 is very similar on the nose, but a little more spice and earth on the finish. Homer Cuvee (named after Dick Shea's—no relation to Shea Stadium—interest in baseball) is more serious but the fruit is subdued and this wine needs some time to flush out. The No 6 is clearly a Shea Pinot Noir although made hundreds of miles away in the Santa Barbara area of California. This wine is meatier, earthier and really opens up with air. I loved this wine. The Ken Wright version was flat and hollow, both in the nose and taste.

Second Flight (with roasted quail, beet emulsion):

- 2001 Raptor Ridge Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir** Block 9, \$38
- 2001 St. Innocent Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir** Block 20, The Terrace, \$30
- 2002 Ken Wright Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir** Block 2, \$40
- 2002 Belle Soeurs Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir** Block 29, \$45
- 2002 Francis Tannahill "The Hermit" Pinot Noir** 69 cases, 80% Shea Vnyd, 20% Monatazi Vnyd

The Raptor Ridge was the lightest wine of the evening—fruity-tutti and strawberries—not exciting. The St. Innocent had a controversial Burgundian funky nose and taste that split the group. The Ken Wright, like the 2001 above seemed out of sorts with a funky nose and earthy taste. The Belle Soeurs (made by Beaux Freres) was a beautiful wine with that Shea floral nose, glorious red fruit, perfect balance and a spice cake finish. The Francis Tannahill Pinot Noir was pleasant and it was hard to say anything negative, but it did not make your hair stand on end like the preceding wine.

Third Flight (with Braised Kobe beef shortrib and filet, marscarpone risotto and carrot puree)

- 2002 Shea Wine Cellars Estate Pinot Noir** 800 cases, \$35
- 2002 Shea Wine Cellars Pommard Clone Pinot Noir** 900 cases, \$38
- 2002 Shea Wine Cellars Block 23 Pinot Noir** 205 cases, \$48
- 2002 Shea Wine Cellars Block 25 Pinot Noir** 145 cases, \$48
- 2002 Shea Wine Cellars Block 32 Pinot Noir** 75 cases, \$48

The last flight of wines were consistently spectacular and they had to be to steal the show from the mouthwatering entrée. The nose on these wines is so intoxicating that one can achieve some sense of nirvana without actually drinking the nectar. The Estate wine is Dijon clones and, not surprisingly, is fresh, open, and ready to go now. The Pommard Clone Pinot Noir was made by Patricia Green (who also made all of the 2001 Shea Wine Cellar Pinot Noirs— the remainder of the 2002 Shea Wine Cellar Pinot Noirs were made by Sam Tannahill, formerly of Archery Summit). The Pommard Clone bottling is 20% Block 23 (Pommard), and 89% Block 21. My notes were uninspired for this wine but only because of the company it was with. The Block 23 makes you get on your knees when you smell it. A full-bodied wine with both yin (feminine) and yang (powerful). The Block 25 is Wadenswil clone and is more Burgundian and earthy, with basted beef, cassis, and toasted brown spices. And finally, the Block 32 may be the best of the lot with an incredibly complex nose featuring cinnamon and roses, a velvety touch of spicy oak complimenting the flavors of berries, bittersweet chocolate and plums. What a way to finish.

These are very sensuous, voluptuous Pinot Noirs with abundant red and purple fruits, lots of spice, plums, smoky meat, and black cherries. All Shea Wine Cellars Pinot Noirs have an outrageous nose and a ridiculously long finish. A feast.

Shea Wine Cellars Pinot Noirs are available at certain retail stores such as Wine Exchange in Orange, California. The wines can be ordered from the website at sheawinecellars.com. The 2003 vintage which compares favorably with 2002, will be released soon. Dick Shea will be pouring at “Pinot On The River” festival, October 29-31, at the Retreat Resort & Spa in Guerneville, California (pinotfestival.com).

Isabelle Dutartre Crafts Two New Pinot Noirs

Isabelle Dutartre assisted close friend Veronique Drouhin in making five vintages of Domaine Drouhin wines. She was trained in classical Burgundian enology and viticulture in Beaune, France, and worked extensively under the Maison Joseph Drouhin. Isabelle made highly-acclaimed wines for ten vintages in Burgundy before working in Oregon. She is one of France’s leading experts on wine barrels and is a consultant for a French oak barrel producer. She currently resides in the south of France and makes frequent trips to Oregon to oversee the winemaking at two family-owned wineries, DePonte Cellars and Lachini Vineyards. Her winemaking style is influenced by the traditional Burgundian philosophy of making elegant wines with emphasis on finesse and complexity, rather than full-bodied bruisers.

DePonte Cellars is located in Oregon’s Dundee Hills between Archery Summit and Domaine Drouhin. Owner Buddy Beck has taken over a 30 year-old vineyard consisting of 3 acres of old vine Pinot Noir and 3 acres of Melon, headpruned zinfandel-style. With only 450 vines to the acre, these ancient vines are remarkable for their drought tolerance and resistance to disease. A new trellising system has been installed to open up the canopy and expose the grapes to air and sunlight. The remaining 11 acres were planted to Pinot Noir in 1999. Some fruit is also sourced from nearby Saga Hills, 7.5 acres of Pinot Noir planted by Buddy. The inaugural release is **De Pointe Winery Pinot Noir 2002**, \$28. Available at northwest-wine.com.

Lachini Vineyards is focused on crafting small lots of world-class Pinot Noir from their estate vineyards. Ron and Marianne Lachini had a passion for Pinot Noir and a dream of owning a small winery specializing in Pinot Noir. The site was purchased in 1998 and consists of 45 acres located in Newberg. The sloping estate vineyard is comprised of Willakenzie series soils ranging from 18 to 48 inches in depth. The shallow, fine silt loam over sedimentary rock has low water capacity and forces the vines to compete and develop deep root systems. The first five acres were planted to tightly-spaced vines with Pommard clone in June of 1999, after clearing and natural site preparation. In the following 2000, 2001, and 2002 growing seasons, they planted additional blocks of Pinot Noir for a total of 21 acres. The first release was the **Lachini Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, 2001**, 100 cases. I recently tasted the **2002** vintage (\$38) and found it to be impressive. A little more sappy than most Oregon Pinot Noirs, I found it rich and aromatic, with a riot of red, blue, and black fruits and an exotic finish. Nice heavy bottle and classy label shows some class. Lachinivineyards.com.



Decanter magazine announced its World Wine Awards in the latest issue. 4,500 wines were tasted by 22 regional panels of experts. There were over 450 wines in the North America section. The best North American Pinot Noir was Oregon's Belle Vallee Cellars Pinot Noir 2002 (\$24). The wineries founders, Steve Allen and Mike Magee grew up in Oregon. A third partner, winemaker Joe Wright, joined the duo 10 years ago. Joe Wright began his career at Willamette Valley Vineyards, where he trained under Joe Dobbs for seven years. Belle Valle buys its grapes from 13 vineyards based in the Willamette and Rogue Valleys. The sorted fruit is not crushed after destemming to ensure a percentage of whole berries are fermented. The fruit is cold-soaked in stainless steel tanks for 2-10 days. The wine is aged in oak for 11 months and bottled unfined and unfiltered.

New Oregon Pinot Noir Producers Proliferating

Small boutique Pinot Noir producers are popping up everywhere in Oregon. It is easy for budding pinotphiles to become overwhelmed by the million new Pinot Noirs on the Oregon market.

Domaine Meriwether, a sparkling wine producer, is now making still wines including a Yamhill County Pinot Noir at Carlton Winemakers Studio. Studio co-owner Eric Hamacher has unveiled a line of nonvintage "H" wines as well as a negociant label called Carlton Winemakers Studio (the Pinot Noir is \$14). Newcomer Scott Paul is sourcing grapes from Shea Vineyard, and the winery's new label, La Paulee, is at the Carlton Studio.

Ribbon Ridge Vineyards has launched a Pinot Noir. Rex Hill winemaker Aron Hess and Peter Rosback, vintner behind Sineann, Medici, and other labels, have formed a partnership called Jezebel. Hess's other side label is Daedalus Cellars. Rosback is also producing the "S" Pinot Noir for Dayton-based newcomer Lachini Vineyards.

Chris Carmada, of Washington's Andrew Will Winery, is traveling south to Oregon to make a line of estate-grown Pinot Noirs from Satori Springs Vineyard, south of Oregon City, for Christopher and Susanne Carlberg at Christopher Bridge. Two winemakers have ventured to California for fruit recently. At Solena in Carlton, they are making a Pinot Noir from Toyon Vineyard in Carneros, California. Patricia Green Cellars crafts a Pinot Noir from Sonoma Coast Hirsch Vineyard.

Yearling Pinot Noir wineries include Cherry Hill Vineyard in Rickreali and Namaste Vineyards in Dallas. Paradis, a Silverton vineyard for wineries such as King Estate, has hired Paschal winemaker Joe Dobbs to produce Pinot Noir. Also Rocky Ford Pinot Noir from Francois Frere barrel company rep Rick DeFarrari, Siltstone Cellars Pinot Noir from Joel Myers of Guadalupe Vineyard, and some side-project Pinot Noirs by Ken Wright, Roads End, and Carter Vineyard.

And finally there are a flock of micro Pinot Noir producers in Philomath, six wineries producing a total of 1,000 cases in an "enthusiastic year." Chris Heider heads up this group at 720cellars.com.