

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively devoted to Pinot Noir

Pinoiriste Syndrome

Friends have lamented that once I have introduced them to good Pinot Noir, they lose no interest in drinking other wines. Once their heart pounds for a premium California Pinot Noir or their mind swoons over a Vosne-Romanee, they are hooked and everything else pales in comparison. They might have been perfectly happy with Yellow Tail Cabernet, but now their taste has changed. These lucky, but confused, individuals are suffering from what I have termed the “pinoiriste syndrome”. This syndrome is closely related to the “gourmand syndrome” which was first described by Marianne Regord Ph.D. of Zurich and Theodoc Landis M.D. of Geneva in a medical report titled, “Gourmand Syndrome: Eating Passion Associated with Right Anterior Lesions.” The syndrome is defined as a newly-acquired craving for high quality food with an onset dating to an injury or tumor or hemorrhage of the right frontal brain area. This site in the brain is actually where a number of addictive behaviors originate. I have postulated that a really good Pinot Noir somehow significantly modifies the physiological/psychological nerve functions in the anterior frontal brain, causing a hopeless addiction to fine Pinot Noir.

Far-fetched you say? Tannins in Pinot Noir act like histamines and combine with starches during digestion to produce serotonin. Altered serotonin levels in the brain may produce a euphoric buzz. Also, histamine has the effect of dilating blood vessels and this increases the systemic and psychological effect of euphoria. Although Pinot Noir is far from the most tannic wine, it's tannins seems to have more of a brain-altering influence.

Complications include a hoarding instinct— when a sufferer finds an ephemeral Pinot Noir, he will not share it with others and will attempt to hoard it. He may put aside his Bible and begin to read the *PinotFile* religiously. When out socially with friends, pinoiristes may begin to throw out phrases like: “texture of Persian silk”, or “like beef stew on a bed of red roses”, or “enough t (tannin) and a (acid) to fill a chorus line”.

Wine cognoscenti are beginning to see more and more of this pinoiriste syndrome. Once the mystique has taken hold, the sufferers are always looking for that tantalizing experience, always thinking of that jammy strawberry fragrance, that voluptuous mouthfeel, the concentrated cherry flavors, and the exquisite finesse.

Further research is ongoing but not seriously because who really wants a cure?

If You Are Not
A Pinoiriste,
You're Clueless

Volume 4, Issue 11

November 8, 2004

“The simple act of opening a bottle of wine has brought more happiness to the human race than all of the collective governments in the history of the Earth.”

... .Jim Harrison

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SOBs make Pinot Blend for Ill Colleague

Calling themselves the Supporters of Bryce, or the SOBs, Oregon winemakers have joined together to raise money for their colleague, Bryce Bagnall, a 43-year old owner of Bryce Vineyard and winemaker at Witness Tree Vineyard who was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Bryce was extremely well-liked and his winemaker friends got together and solicited donations of Pinot Noir to create a blend that would be sold to raise money for his medical expenses. 38 Oregon winemakers contributed to the blend which was named **Saint Bartholomews 2003 Pinot Noir**. Bryce's car has a license plate, "BART", which stands for Saint Bartholomew, the patron saint of people with neurological diseases, and also the patron saint of growers of vines.

The wine is already for sale in a few tasting rooms in Oregon and online at www.northwest-wine.com. It will be widely sold Thanksgiving weekend when every participating winery will sell Saint Bartholomews at their holiday open houses.

Money from this project has already paid for a van with hand controls for Bryce and a hospital bed. It is quite a credit to the Oregon wine business that so many winemakers came together to support the needs of a respected colleague

3rd International Wine & Heart Health Summit

This annual Conference is held at the Silverado Resort in Napa Valley, California March 2nd-5th, 2005. I attended the first Conference a few years ago and was impressed by the quality of the speakers at the medical symposium. The program is for medical professionals and connoisseurs with an interest in cardiovascular health and a passion for wine. This year's Medical Symposium includes "The Impact of the French Paradox on Contemporary Society", "The Molecular Basis for the Health Benefits of Wine", "Is Wine Better than Beer or Spirits?" and many other presentations about wine and health. The Physicians in Wine Panel topic will be "A Blend of Medical Practice & Wine Culture" featuring doctor-winery owners such as Anthony Truchard, MD (Truchard Vineyards), Ellen Mack, MD (Russian Hill Estate Winery), Donald Olson, MD (Tori Morr Winery), John Bergstrom, MD (Bergstrom Vineyard & Winery), and Justin Ardill, MD (Reilly's Wines). The event also features Exclusive Wine Tasting Venues, Celebrity Wine Auction, and a Reserve Wine Dinner at the Culinary Institute of America in St Helena. Registration fee \$695 before January 1. 520-544-5516.

Notable Pinot Noir Releases

2002 St Innocent White Rose, Freedom Hill, Seven Springs, Shea and Anden (best blocks of Seven Springs), all priced from \$30-35 and all highly rated in the wine press. Available at northwestwine.com.

2002 Sine Qua Non Shea hollerin' M. For mailing list customers and secondary market. Always an interesting Pinot Noir and quite different from other Shea bottlings.

2002 Roessler Cellars Sangiacomo, Dutton Ranch, Savoy, Pisoni, and 2003 Blue Jay (a value-priced blend). Second vintage for this new winery, all top-notch vineyard sources.

2003 Siduri Cargasacchi Vineyard, \$52. Peter Cargasacchi combines the technical knowledge with the instincts of a farmer and is a highly-respect grower in the Santa Rita Hills appellation. A good bet.

Wine Scoring Breeds Pompous Effluvia

Robert Parker's 100-point wine scoring system, which became popular in 1983 and was adopted by the *Wine Spectator* in 1985, has been the guidepost for consumers seeking to buy good wine. Currently, every major United States-based wine critic and magazine uses the 100-point scale. The reality is that the 100-point scale is really a 10-point scale. A score of 85 usually means a wine no one wants to buy or drink (although it is considered "good" in the 100-point scoring system). A score of 95 means a wine you either can't buy or can't afford to drink. Wines between 85-90 may be perfect in the context of a good meal, while wines between 91-95 may require years of cellaring to reach a sensible food-compatibility state. So which wine is really best? There is no point in rating wines worse than 85 because no one cares and greater rating wines above 95 because only the well-healed fanatic can acquire these wines. A major fault with the 100-point system is the supposed measurable difference in say a rating of 89, versus 90. It is impossible to be that precise in judging wine.

Over the years there has been many other scoring systems offered. The UC Davis 20-point scale was introduced in 1959 (17-20 outstanding, 13-16 good, 9-12 acceptable, and 1-8 unacceptable), but is way too objective and does not differentiate between objective observation and subject evaluation. Another 20-point system, the ASTAB, suffers from the same disadvantage.

Hedonic scales are popular because they are quick and simply ask, "How do you like the wine?". The problem is they do not ask for typicality reflective of the varietal or region. There have been several hedonic scales from a 13-scale to a 2-point scale.

10-point hedonic scale (Bo Derek scale): 1-2, dislike extremely, 3-4 dislike slightly, 5-6 neither like nor dislike, 7-8 like slightly, 9-10 like extremely.

10-point hedonic scale (unnamed): 1 would serve to an enemy, 2 wouldn't serve to an enemy, 3 the dog refused to taste it, 4 would prefer to a soft drink, 5 would drink on an airplane trip, 6 would drink at a friend's home, 7 would pay to drink, 8 would serve to friends, 9 would drink during sex, and 10 would prefer to sex..

13-point hedonic scale (International Wine Review), designed so that judges cannot revert to a 20-point or 100-point scale: 1-2 dislike extremely, 3-4 dislike strongly, 5-6 dislike slightly, 7 neither like or dislike, 8-9 like slightly, 10-11 like strongly, 12-13 like extremely.

2-point hedonic scale, the easiest to learn and the easiest to achieve consistency: 1 don't like it (a bad wine), 2 like it (a good wine).

In reality, scoring a wine only matters to the person doing the scoring since we all have different tastes. It is unfortunate that wine drinkers have become so dependent on someone else telling them what they like. Patrick Mott in *Inside OC* put it very well: "I've read books, I've gone to wine dinners and lectures, and God knows I've hung out with people from time to time who know more about wine— and are eagerly willing to tell you so— than anyone in his right mind wants to, and it all comes down to the same result: my ears start to bleed, a high-pitched humming increases in volume, and the next thing I know people are standing over me trying to cut off my clothes." Ahmen— that is why you won't find any rating scores in the *PinotFile*.



Does global warming mean doom to Pinot Noir? During the 2004 Santa Barbara vintage, a 103-degree heat wave hit the region just before harvest in September. Everyone scrambled to pick the grapes before they became dehydrated, but not everyone was successful. Many winemakers in the area, including Kris Curran of Sea Smoke Cellars and Bruno D'Alfonso of Sanford Winery had to "water back" or add water during fermentation to avoid high residual sugars and high alcohol levels. D'Alfonso's Pinot Noirs have 15% water.

Winemaker Tim Spear at Clos Mimi Winery in Paso Robles predicts that "Global warming is going to change winemaking, it's going to kill off all of the Pinot Noir in Burgundy, and make it impossible to grow Pinot Noir there. It will just be too warm. But Syrah will thrive in Burgundy under those conditions and with my experience from this life, I'll be ready to make Syrah in my next life in Burgundy."



Talley Vineyards

Three generations of the Talley family have farmed in the Arroyo Grande Valley since 1948, working to produce the very best from each parcel of land. Originally the family farmed vegetables but in the late 1970s Pinot Noir and Chardonnay was planted in the steep hillsides above the vegetable farm land which comprises Talley Farms. The first wine was produced in 1986, with the release of 450 cases. In 1991, a modern winery was completed at the foot of the Rincon Vineyard. This 8,500 square foot facility was designed with a total gravity system and extensive cooling equipment to maintain cool temperatures during barrel fermentation and aging. Currently the winery produces about 11,000 cases annually. Don and Rosemary Talley, with their son Brian and his wife Johnine, and winemaker Steve Rasmussen oversee the operations of the winery.

There are two vineyard sites on the estate: the Rincon Vineyard and Rosemary's Vineyard. Long-term sustainability is the guiding principle in farming these plots. Pesticides are avoided, cover-crops and compost are used to improve the soil's conditions, drip irrigation is used only sparingly, and leaf pulling is employed throughout the vineyards to expose the grapes to more air and sunlight.

Three high-quality Pinot Noirs are released yearly: Talley Vineyards Estate, Talley Vineyards Rosemary's Vineyard, and Talley Vineyards Rincon Vineyard. The **2002 Talley Vineyards Rincon Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$50), 754 6-bottle boxes, is exceptional. The vines are primarily planted on their own roots and low in vigor. The soil is shallow and composed of loam and clay at the surface, underlain by limestone, like the Cote de Nuits. Yields are less than three tons per acre. The wine offers a striking array of crushed red and black fruits, endless spices, and deep aromas of hallowed earth. A magnificent Pinot Noir that will only improve in the cellar. When you sit down do drink this baby, hold onto your LazyBoy. Limited availability as mailing list is full. Try better wine merchants such as brownderby.com.

