

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

J. Wilkes Pinot Noir

Jeff Wilkes spent his formative years in the OC (Newport Beach) where he became an accomplished sailor. He struck up a friendship with Bill Miller while skippering Miller's sailing yacht. Miller's family was involved in the farming and ranching business for several generations and owned the Bien Nacido Vineyard in Santa Barbara County. Bill Miller was a visionary who saw the potential of the Santa Maria Valley for grape growing. To help him manage and develop his vineyard and business plan, he asked Jeff to join him on the Bien Nacido management team in 1984. Jeff had had his wine epiphany a couple of years prior when, after tasting a 1982 Austin Cellars Bien Nacido Pinot Noir, he knew he had found his passion.

Jeff spent 18 years at Bien Nacido involved in the marketing and sales of grapes, introducing new Pinot Noir clones, and improving viticultural techniques in the vineyard. Initially Bien Nacido sold off their grapes in bulk, but it became evident that for the region to prosper, the grapes should be sold to local small wineries. These small emerging wineries did not have the capital to start their own winery, so Central Coast Wine Services was started in Santa Maria to provide a centralized location for local wineries to lease space and produce their wines. Jeff played a key role in the success of Central Coast Wine Services and this remains an important wine-making facility for the region. Besides J. Wilkes, other wineries include Ambullneo, Bonaccorsi, Foley, Tantara, and Waltzing Bear.

The Bien Nacido Vineyard is located near the town of Santa Maria and overlooks the Sisquoc River, a part of the Santa Maria Valley watershed. The site is close enough to the ocean (17 miles) so that cool nights and mornings prevail, but far enough inland to experience moderately warm days; a combination that creates a climate perfect for growing Pinot Noir. Currently, the vineyard consists of over 900 acres, of which 200 are planted to Pinot Noir. Over 40 wineries buy some of the annual harvest and most designate the vineyard name on their labels. Blocks within the vineyard are custom-farmed for clients leading to considerable variation in the style of Bien Nacido wines, depending on the winemaker. Chardonnay may actually be the best grape produced here, but it is the Pinot Noir that has made the vineyard famous.

During the time spent at Bien Nacido, Jeff visited untold numbers of wineries and vineyards, talking with winemakers, and developed "a real sense of how he wanted to produce wine." In 2002 he left the Bien Nacido team and began his quest to make world-class Pinot Noir.

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

**Volume 4, Issue 20
January 10, 2005**

Gina Gallo on Pinot Noir: "Succeeding with Pinot Noir means more than success with other wines. It's the hardest grape to grow. The hardest wine to make. Even if there is a lot more Pinot Noir, it will always be limited."

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I sat down recently with Jeff and discussed his vision. His winestyle leans toward finesse with a solid acid and tannic backbone to perform at the table and age gracefully. He sources vineyards where the vines require a minimum of manipulation to achieve vine balance and low yields. Ideally, he strives for vineyards that do not require leaf pulling and crop thinning to achieve the right levels of sun exposure and crop load. In the winery he uses a combination of modern and traditional winemaking techniques. An important goal is to achieve that delicate balance between extraction and the natural delicacy of Pinot Noir. After tasting his wines, I feel he is developing a degree of refinement that I personally prefer in Pinot Noir.

2001 J. Wilkes Bien Nacido Q Block Pinot Noir (\$50). This wine is very enjoyable with an appealing cooked cherry nose, a soft but full mouthfeel, and a nice finish of refreshing acidity. The finish acquires interest and complexity over time. 160 cases.

2002 J. Wilkes Bien Nacido Q Block Pinot Noir (\$50). This Pinot is similar to the 2001 vintage, but ramped up a bit. A lovely cherry and floral nose persists over time leading to a fresh cherry-toned and spicy finish. A very feminine, sexy wine. Lipsmacking. 215 cases.

2003 J. Wilkes Voll-Foss Vineyard Napa Valley Pinot Noir (\$27). A delicious Pinot Noir quite different from the Bien Nacido offerings. This wine is darker, deeper, denser with sweet purple fruits and some tantalizing earth notes. Not overblown, but a little fuller mouthfeel. This is 'bomb'. 175 cases.

Also available are a **2001 J. Wilkes Bien Nacido Hillside** (a pleasant wine that is closer to a vin gris in extraction, 95 cases) and a **2003 J. Wilkes Solomon Hills Vineyard Block 3 Pinot Noir** (125 cases, \$37).

The wines are available at select retailers including Hi-Time Cellars (Costa Mesa), Twenty-Twenty Wine Merchants (West LA), Los Olivos Wine & Spirits Emporium (Los Olivos), and several others in Northern and Southern California. Distribution extends to Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey on the East Coast. Many top restaurants in California, Las Vegas, and New Jersey have placed J. Wilkes Pinot Noir on the wine lists. Jefferson (Jeff) Wilkes can be reached at 805-899-2845 or e-mail at jwilkes@jwilkeswine.com.

How To Tell If Your Pinot Noir Is Burgundian

This funny bit was posted by Mel Knox on Weimax Wines & Spirits (Weimax.com) web site. I reproduce it here with their permission.

Test for New World winemakers to determine if they are making Burgundian-styled wine.

Score 1 "plus point" for each Yes answer to these five statements:

1. Your wine is sold in wine shops and restaurants in Paris and Beaune (extra-credit for re-orders)
2. Importers in England pay you for your wine.
3. Writers in France give your Pinot Noir high ratings.
4. Burgundian winemakers debate what commune or climate your wine is from.
5. Lalou gives you the name of her T-shirt designer.

Score 1 "minus point" for each Yes answer to these five statements:

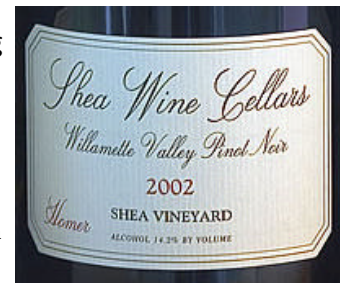
1. Ridge Vineyards winemaker Paul Draper tastes your wine and invites you to join ZAP (Zinfandel Addicts & Pushers)
2. Marcel Guigal says it's the best Chapoutier wine he has ever tasted.
3. Randall Grahm asks if he can get some Nero d'Avola cuttings from your suitcase.
4. The people at the World of Pinot Noir Conference say you're a month early for Hospices du Rhone event.
5. Angelo Gaja introduces you to his sweater-maker.

Shea Wine Cellars Releases 2003 Vintage

Dick Shea says that his 2003 Pinot Noirs bear a lot of resemblance to the 2002s. “2002 was another hot year so the fruit was completely ripe and it shows in the wine. There is a lot of concentration and intensity to these wines and they are unusually forward. The Block 23 and Block 32 are very characteristic of what each spot tends to show each year. The Estate and Homer are quite open for their age.” There is no Block 25 Pinot Noir and no Pommard Clone Pinot Noir in 2003. Prices are unchanged from 2001; Estate \$35, Blocks 23 and 32 \$48, and Homer \$65. Total production was 2,500 cases as in 2002: Estate 1750 cases, Block 23 275 cases, Block 32 175 cases, Homer 145 cases. The Block 23 was released in December, and the rest of the lineup will be officially released February 1, 2005.

I have not tasted the wines yet, but early reviews are very favorable. These tasting notes are from <http://www.northwest-wine.com/shea-wine-cellars.html> where the wines are available for purchase now.

2003 Shea Wine Cellars Block 23 “Similar to 2002. Seductive, rich, always an intense, dark Pinot Noir, the 2003 is more fruit-forward and more immediately approachable than the 2002 vintage. Hearty, black fruit flavors are intermingled with hints of fresh earth, and just a hint of violets in the finish. It’s yummy now, and a good acid/tannin balance lends itself to cellaring for 5-8 years.”



2003 Shea Wine Cellars Estate “Very similar to the 2002, with the addition of a rich, forward quality that results from the riper fruit that had to be carefully sorted out from imperfect clusters. The 2003 Estate incorporates grapes from more blocks, including the highly-regarded Block 25. Flavors are of black raspberry, black cherry, a hint of black currant, subtle notes of smoke and cinnamon. The finish is quite smooth, with seamless tannins meshing well with a slightly lower acidity than is found in the 2002. The wine is lush and dark, but Sam Tannahill has again stayed true to the varietal, and it is a clean, refreshing, lively wine from first scent to the last bit of flavor in the finish. Sam has done a tremendous job with a tougher vintage, and the greater scope of cuvees used in this wine makes it quite a good representation of Oregon Pinot Noir.”

The following 2002 Shea Vineyard wine was released a few months ago and reviewed by Robert Parker Jr. He gave the wine 96 points, the highest ever for an Oregon Pinot Noir. Unfortunately, it is available by mailing list (filled) or secondary market only. Roughly \$125-250 per bottle on the secondary market.

2002 Sine Qua Non Hollerin’ M Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir “Absolutely mind-blowing Pinot, one of the most compelling examples I have ever tasted from Oregon. Deep plum/ruby/purple to the rim, with a glorious perfume of forest floor intermixed with acacia flowers, sweet cherries and plums, as well as hints of pomegranate and blackberries. It cuts a broad swath across the palate. The texture inundates the palate, and it finishes with tremendous voluptuousness and purity. A great hedonistic treat for all the senses, it will provide immense pleasure over the next decade.” I guess he liked it. 704 cases.



There is still availability of the 2002 vintage of Shea Wine Cellars Pinot Noirs. The **2002 Estate** and **2002 Pommard Clone** are in stock at www.northwest-wine.com. Other Shea bottlings, including **2002 St. Innocent**, **2002 Bergstrom**, **2002 Patricia Green**, **2002 Beaux Freres Belles Soeurs**, **2002 Panther Creek**, **2002 Raptor Ridge**, and **2002 JK Carriere** may be available— call the Avalon Wine Store at 541-424-8004. The JK Carriere Winery produces very limited amounts of single vineyard Oregon Pinot Noir. Made by Jim Prosser, these Pinot Noirs are very unique and collectible and are said to age up to 20 years! The Shea Vineyard is \$65, 70 cases produced.

IT'S BACK! The Domaine Faiveley 2002 Bourgogne Rouge Pinot Noir is now available in retail stores. Domaine Faiveley is one of the largest vineyard owners in Burgundy. The 1999 version of this wine was highly recommended by the PinotFile. At \$9 it was an unbelievable bargain for a great every-day Burgundy drinker and the local Wine Club sold over 200 cases of it. Now the 2002 version has been released and is still priced at \$9! Who says 2002 Burgundies are outrageously expensive? Impressive flavor and depth for a regional generic wine, it tastes like a black cherry popsicle with an oak stick.

Do What Your Doctor Does, Drink Pinot Noir

Thomas Fogerty, M.D., professor of cardiovascular surgery at Stanford University Medical School has been recommending two glasses of red wine a day (preferably with meals) for patients for many years. It is now widely recognized by the medical community that the health benefits of red wine (the "French Paradox") are largely due to a natural polyphenol compound called resveratrol (rez-VER-a-trawl). Resveratrol was first discovered in *Polygonum cuspidatum*, a noxious weed whose roots contain high amounts. This plant, called the Japanese knotweed or fo-ti, has a long history of medicinal use in China. Resveratrol (3,4'-trihydroxystilbene) is chemically similar to synthetic estrogen and is now known to occur in over 70 species of plants. It is highly concentrated in grape skins and extracted into wine during the fermentation process. Classified as a phytoantitoxin, resveratrol is part of the vine's defense against stress produced by infection (antibiotic and fungicide), chemicals, changes in temperature, and injury from light.

The amount of resveratrol in red wine is influenced by viticultural methods (ie canopy management and cordon type), and the winemaking process. Carbon fining and filtration do not affect levels but phenol binding resins used in large wineries do reduce levels. skin contact time does not affect resveratrol content significantly, and grapes exposed to ultraviolet light prior to processing have significantly increased levels. Environmental factors are also important. In a study by Leroy Creasy, Professor of Fruit and Vegetable Science at Cornell University, New York state wines had higher levels than any other region in the world. This is explainable by the humid climate in New York winegrowing regions. Since resveratrol is a fungicide, more of it is produced by the grape to fight mildew.

Wines made from Pinot Noir have the largest amount of resveratrol and some New York Pinot Noirs have very high levels. White wines contain negligible amounts.

Many of the health benefits of resveratrol are just being explored, but what is known can be summarized as follows:

Cardioprotective Agent Resveratrol through its phytoestrogenic effect protects vascular endothelium, inhibits LDL (bad cholesterol) oxidation, and is antiatherosclerotic. In addition, it inhibits platelet aggregation (thinning the blood and preventing blood clots) and increases HDL (good cholesterol).

Cancer Chemopreventive Agent Resveratrol inhibits growth of a wide variety of human-derived tumor cell model systems and appears to be a promising chemoprotective agent.

Life-Extending Agent Resveratrol boosts levels of the enzyme Sir2 which increases lifespan by stabilizing DNA (so far only demonstrated in yeast cell model).

Cigarette Damage Reversal Harmful arterial damage caused by cigarettes can be counteracted.

Thanks to a reader, Jay Caplan, for providing references for this article (references available on request).