

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

History Repeats! North over South

The Crew (my wine club, Le Grand Crew), gathered on February 3 for the **California Pinot Noir Civil War North vs South** at The Pacific Club in Newport Beach, California. The evening highlights were a fine dinner and tasting of an eclectic group of Pinot Noirs from respected boutique California wineries. In attendance were 13 members of the Crew and guests Greg Saunders, owner and winemaker of White Rose Vineyard (Oregon), and Master Sommelier, Rene Chazottes. The wines were tasted first without food and then with a food course. Having six wines allowed tasters to compare and contrast the wines and play around with wine and food pairings. Not surprisingly, a number of the Pinot Noirs were noticeably better as an aperitif (without food), while other wines by virtue of their acid structure and other factors were more compatible with the food course. There were six wines in each flight and the wines were ranked in order of preference.

North

Supreme of Guinea Fowl Stuffed with Snails, Verjus, Vegetables

2001 DuMol Finn Russian River Valley Pinot Noir A blend of Pommard and Old Beringer field clones. Composed of selections from two low-yielding mature vineyards at the edge of the Russian River Valley. 14.4% alc., \$68. 925-254-8922. Mailing list and retail.

2001 Dehlinger Old Vines Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir This wine has only been separately bottled since 2000 and is very limited. Made from one and a half acres of hilltop vines from a 1975 planting. 14.7%, \$50, 225 cases. 707-823-2378. Mailing list only.

2001 Clos Saron Sierra Foothills Pinot Noir From a 2.2 acre vineyard in the Oregon House Valley of the Sierra Nevada Mountains at 1600 ft. 100% own-rooted Pinot Noir vines. Farming is strictly organic. Soil is volcanic ash. Winemaker is Gideon Bienstock. 13% alc., \$45. www.clossaron.com. Mailing list and very limited retail.

2001 Craven & Lattin Kanzler Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir The vineyard is located west of Sebastopol and is composed of Pommard and Dijon 667 clones. Soil is Goldridge series sandy loam. The winemaker, David Lattin, was the winemaker at Acacia in the 90's and his wife, Kendra Craven has a degree in fermentation science from UCD. 14% alc, \$27, 151

**Fine Pinot Can
Create A
Fantasylike
Remembrance**

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“Sonoma Coast West is an extraordinary location for Pinot Noir. It has the capacity—although not yet the achievement—of someday creating America’s grand cru Pinot Noirs.

Matt Kramer, *New California Wine*

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2002 Hirsch Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir The inaugural release from this vineyard which has been supplying grapes to many premium Pinot Noir producers in California (Kistler, Siduri, Littorai, etc). This wine is about 50/50 Pommard and Mt Eden clones (from the portion of the vineyard previously allocated to Williams Selyem). Winemaker is Vanessa Wong. The Hirsch Winery is located on the vineyard estate in Cazadero. 14.1% alc., \$50. 707-847-3600. Mailing list and limited retail.

2001 Kistler Vineyards Cuvee Elizabeth Occidental Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir The most limited, highest rated, and expensive of all the Kistler Pinot Noir bottlings. 14.1% alc., \$80, 264 cases. 707-823-5603. Mailing list only.

South

Wild Mushroom Risotto and Muscovy Duck Breast

2002 Talley Rincon Vineyard Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir From one of two estate vineyards (the other is Rosemary's Vineyard). A very highly-respected producer of Pinot Noir. 14.5% alc., \$65, 380 cases. www.talleyvineyards.com. Mailing list and very limited retail.

2002 Ambullneo Vineyards Bulldog Reserve Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir A new project by Greg Linn who believes in blending grapes from several sources rather than site-specific wines. This wine is 66% Dierberg Vineyard and 33% Solomon Hills Vineyard. 14.5% alc., \$70, 140 cases. 714-227-3464.

2002 Belle Glos Clark & Telegraph Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir A new label from Caymus. From an established 76-acre vineyard. Yields 1.8 tons/acre. 14.4% alc., \$45. No mailing list, limited retail.

2002 J. Wilkes Bien Nacido Q Block Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir Produced by Jeff Wilkes, former long-time vineyard manager of Bien Nacido Vineyard. The Q Block is one of the most coveted portions of the Bien Nacido Vineyard. Second vintage. 13.5% alc., \$50, 215 cases. 805-899-2845. Limited retail.

2002 Brewer-Clifton Ashley's Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir A very small producer of Pinot Noirs from vineyards in the Santa Rita Hills. Winery is in Lompoc. Winemaker Greg Brewer is also the winemaker at Melville. 14.3% alc., \$50, 200 cases. 805-735-9184. Mailing list only.

Melville Estate Terraces Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir An estate with extensive plantings to multiple clones in the Santa Rita Hills appellation. The inaugural vintage of Terraces. The grapes come from the slope that heads up to Carrie's Block, comprised of five clones (Swan, Martin Ray, 115, 667, and 777). Yields 1.18 tons/acre. 14.8% alc., \$42, 430 cases. www.melvillewinery.com. 805-735-7030. Mailing list or at winery.

As in any tasting there were many differences of opinion and I will summarize the general comments and then list the winners. In general we felt the North Pinot Noirs had more personality and better expression of fruit. They were also better food wines. The South Pinot Noirs tended to be too extracted and "pushy". Also, these wines all tasted very similar. 70% of the group preferred the North Pinot Noirs.

North #1 Kistler-a big wine with gobs of dark fruit, controversial in that some thought it too oaky and ripe but many loved the high level of extracted fruit. Rene felt it was "too sweet" to go with the food. #2 DuMol-an elegant wine, well balanced, a slight bit oaky for me. #3 Clos Saron-a little Brett in the nose gave this wine the most "Burgundian" style. Very complex. Best Pinot with the food. #4 Dehlinger-a beautiful, balanced wine (actually my #1). #5 C & L-a bit extracted with interesting wild flavors, much better with food. #6 Hirsch-nothing special with a finish that was flat. Better with food.

South #1 J Wilkes-most balanced wine, clearly preferred, some thought the best wine of the night. #2 Melville-massive fruit, beautiful Pinot nose, a bit rough at the end for me due to oak and alcohol. #3 Talley-A big, no actually huge style, a lot of fruit and oak. Pretty floral aroma. #4 Ambullneo-An interesting and complex wine in an extracted style. Tannins need time. #5 Belle Glos-Floral, sweet, pleasant but not exciting; acidity a little hard-edged. #6 Brewer-Clifton-tomato-can nose and taste; disliked by many tasters (terroir exposed?). One taster ranked this #1 in the flight, but he brought the wine! (wines were not tasted blind).

Gundlach-Bundschu Pinot Wins in San Fran

The results of the 2005 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition are now available at sfgate.com. 55 judges evaluated over 3,200 wines. Gold Medal winners and Best of Class for Pinot Noir include: \$13-20: **2003 Avila, San Luis Obispo, \$14** and **2003 Meridian, Santa Barbara County, \$16**; \$20-30 **2002 Adobe Road Herrera's Vineyard Sonoma Coast, \$28**; over \$30 **2002 Gundlach Bundschu Rhinefarm Sonoma Valley \$32**. (I have seen this wine on the internet at madwine.com for \$24).

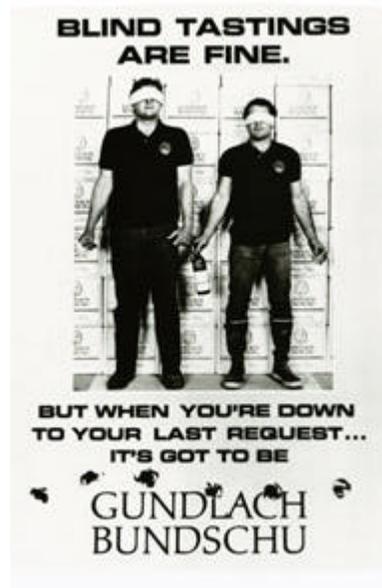
The Gundlach Bundschu wine seemed like an unlikely winner. The winery is now run by the 6th generation to have owned Rhinefarm since 1858. Located at the southernmost end of the Sonoma Valley, this 400 acre vineyard produces 13 different wines, mostly red. The winery is more know for their merlot, cabernet, zinfandel and even gewurtztraminer, than for Pinot Noir.



The Pinot Noir grown on the Rhinefarm Vineyard is located on the lower block, a section that is across the street from the Carneros appellation border and therefore shares the cooling benefits of the fog from San Pablo Bay. The climate and soils combine to produce long hang times and tiny berries with big-time intensity. Some vines were planted in 1970 (Hanzell and Wentz clones) and are among the oldest Pinot Noir vines in California. In 1990, additional plantings were done on a cool site in the vineyard to Hanzell, RV, and St Clair clones.

Winemaking included pre-fermentation cold soak, fermented with twice-daily gentle pumpovers, aged for 11 months in 50% new French barrels, primarily Tonnellerie Remond. Alcohol is 14.3%. The winemaker is Linda Trotta who has been at the winery since 1990. Her interest in wine grew out of her Italian heritage.

The winery has a reputation for good fun and good humor as evidenced by this poster.



Double Gold winners included 2002 Lorca Rosella's & Gary's, 2002 Roessler Cellars Sangiacomo Vineyard, 2003 Soquel Vineyards Partners Reserve Santa Cruz, and 2002 Woodenhead Wiley Vineyard. Other Gold winners included 2003 Brogan Cellars Summa "Young Vine", 2002 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Edna Valley, 2002 Lynmar RRV Quail Cuvee and RRV, and 2002 Papapietro Perry RRV and Sonoma Coast Peter's Vineyard.



Oregon Wine Report is a well-written independent quarterly newsletter on Oregon wines. Author Cole Danehower moved from California to Oregon in 1998 and, finding a lack of coverage of the burgeoning Beaver State wine industry, he started his wine newsletter. The 32-page color newsletter includes extensive and informative winemaker profiles, wine business news, and tasting notes. The *Oregon Wine Report* won the prestigious 2004 James Beard Foundation Journalism Award for the country's best newsletter writing on food, beverages, restaurants, and nutrition. This is quite an achievement for a regional newsletter with a short track record. An annual subscription is \$38 at www.oregonwinereport.com.



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Pinot Noir Styles (Finding Pinotland)

In California and Oregon there are a multitude of variations on three basic Pinot Noir styles. Personal taste dictates individual preferences. The three main categories of style along the Pinot highway are:

Mini-Coopers: lighter-bodied, elegant Pinot Noirs with subtle tastes and aromatics. The minority of wines produced. Alcohol often 13-13.5%. Like the Mini-Cooper, loveable, but not taken seriously.

Corvettes: medium bodied, balanced Pinot Noirs. Harmonious blending of fruit, acidity, tannins, alcohol, and roundness. Perfectly integrated, no one element predominates. Stylish performers.

Hummers: Big-bodied Pinot Noirs made from grapes picked very ripe, often high alcohol and generous oak, struggle for balance. 14.5% or more alcohol. These wines often have lush black fruit and flavors that garner high scores. Expensive and conspicuous.

Jake Lorenzo, writing in *Further Surveillance, Underground Stories of the Wine Business*, speaks irreverently about the Hummers: "... does it make sense to strive for intensity and extraction by letting fruit get very ripe, and then diluting it with water once it gets to the winery? Does all the chemical manipulation necessary to finish high-alcohol fermentations make better wine, or are you just treating the symptoms? It could make more sense to work with your grower to get ripe flavors at lower sugars. That reduces the alcohol, and problems with stuck fermentation and retarded malolactic. If nothing else, think of the money you could save in taxes if your wines were under 14% alcohol."