

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

If Your
Sweetheart
Drinks No
Noir, She
Pinot Noir

Green Valley AVA is Cool & Hot

There are 13 AVAs in Sonoma County, but it is the western maritime-influenced AVAs that are ideal for growing Pinot Noir. These include the Russian River Valley and its two subsets, Green Valley and Chalk Hill, and the “real Sonoma Coast” (not including the all-encompassing Sonoma Coast AVA). Green Valley is located in the cool western part of the Russian River Valley northwest of Sebastopol (there is also a Green Valley AVA in Solano County where wine grapes are grown). Forestville, Graton, and Sebastopol form the east boundary, and the tiny town of Occidental the west boundary.

Thousands of acres of vineyards were farmed in Green Valley up to the 1870s when phylloxera and Prohibition intervened. Modern viticulture was started in the region by Warren and Gail Dutton who began planting significant acreage near Graton in the late 1950s. They were joined in the late 1960s by Rodney Strong who, along with the Sterlings of Iron Horse fame, ignored the widespread opinion that it was too cool to ripen grapes in the region. Today the Green Valley AVA encompasses 32,000 acres, 1,600 acres of which are planted to vines in 130 separate vineyards. The AVA is farmed by over 100 growers.

Originally most of the grapes grown in Green Valley were picked early and used for sparkling wine. Over the last ten years, there has been a shift to extending hang-time and producing still wines. The special microclimate of the region is due to the dense daily fog which enters the area from the ocean through the Petaluma Wind Gap. Daytime temperatures average 85° during the growing season dropping to the low 50's at night. The cooler morning temperatures are slightly longer than the northern portion of the Russian River Valley, creating extended time for grapes to reach physiological ripeness. It is not unusual for grapes to ripen to mid-October or later (Arrendel Vineyard is picked at Halloween). The soils in Green Valley are of two series: Gold Ridge and Sebastopol (Franciscan), both of which possess good drainage and chemical balance.

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At the inaugural Green Valley Symposium (April 26-27, 2004), the characteristics of the Pinot Noir produced here were detailed. Acidity is typical, what is termed "iced cherries". The wines are closer in type to the Sonoma Coast than the Russian River Valley except that the tannins are less masculine. Bright, intense ripe dark cherries, black plums, wild berries, cola, exotic spice, rich earth, zesty acidity and silky tannins are the norm. If any criticism can be leveled at the Pinot Noirs from Green Valley is that they have lacked depth, and at times have been too austere. However, the influx of multiple clones, including Pommard, Dijon 114, 115, and 777, Wadenswil, Swan, and others, planted in the proper sites should solve this shortcoming. Many notable wineries have found a home here including Dutton Estate, Sebastopol Vineyards, Iron Horse, Hartford Family, Eric Ross, Landmark Vineyards, Miramar Torres Wines, and Scherrer Winery. The wines from the Green Valley appellation have become hot and more and more Pinot Noirs are bearing the Green Valley AVA

Dutton Goldfield is Promising Newcomer

The Dutton Goldfield partnership began in 1998 when grower Steve Dutton, son of Warren Dutton, and winemaker Dan Goldfield started a winery to produce ultra-premium vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs (and Chardonnays) from the vast Dutton Ranch vineyard holdings. The so-called Dutton Ranch is actually over 60 different noncontiguous vineyards in the Russian River Valley, primarily in the Green Valley sub-appellation. Warren Dutton owns 400 acres of vines and leases 375 acres (Chardonnay and Pinot Noir). Dan Goldfield worked with Green Valley grapes when he started as winemaker at La Crema in 1990. Four years later, he started Hartford Family Winery near Forestville. An avid cyclist, Goldfield has ridden extensively throughout the Green Valley and understands the microclimate and terrain as well as anybody. Besides producing wines for Dutton-Goldfield, he is consulting winemaker for Chalone's Orogeny label.

Recently I had the pleasure of tasting through the four 2002 Dutton Goldfield Pinot Noirs.

2002 Dutton Goldfield Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$35, 1,400 cases, 13.5% alc.. A blend of three Dutton Ranch Pinot Noir vineyards: Green Valley Vineyard, Maurice Galante Vineyard, and Freestone Hill Vineyard. Interestingly, the Freestone Hill Vineyard is located on a cold, foggy west slope, one of the southernmost plantings in the Green Valley AVA. In 2002, the fruit failed to ripen and was blended into the RRV bottling. A typical RRV nose of cooked Bing cherry compote and exotic spice is the best feature of this wine. Nicely balanced with a round mouthfeel. The finish is short, but leaves a refreshing dose of acidity.

2002 Dutton Goldfield Dutton Sanchiotti Vineyard (Dutton Ranch) Pinot Noir \$52, 136 cases, 13.5% alc. Sanchiotti was one of the first highly acclaimed Pinot vineyards. It was planted in 1985 for sparkling wine. Goldfield began making still Pinot Noir from it in 1993 for La Crema Winery and in 1994 it was one of the first vineyard designated wines for the Hartford Court label. Dutton-Goldfield started taking the fruit for this, the first vintage in 2002. A complex wine with aromas of roses, licorice, and oak lead to more ripe, dark fruit aromas after airing for an hour. Medium-bodied, soft and elegant, a velveteen mouthfeel, and a very lovely finish that packs a lot of lingering, sappy fruit. Well-oaked. Needs time to open up. A festival.

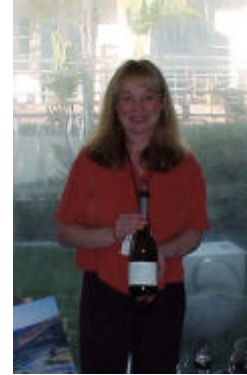
2002 Dutton Goldfield McDougall Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$48, 250 cases, 13.5% alc. Warren Dutton planted 9 acres of Pinot Noir (Dijon 114, 115) on a wind-protected meadow here in 1998. The fruit grown here has thick skins, deep color, and natural spice characteristic of Pinot from the high slopes in the area. This is an aperitif-type wine to ponder over. Dark purple, laced with earth, mineral, dark berries and citrus. Given an hour, it comes together beautifully in the glass into a heady wine with a velvety mouthfeel. A bit oak and tannic now, give this one some cellar time. A wild ride.

2002 Dutton Goldfield Devil's Gulch Ranch Marin County Pinot Noir \$48, 431 cases, 13.5% alc. This exotic vineyard is owned by Mark Pasternak, who lives on the property with his family and is dedicated to increasing the fame of Marin County as a viticultural area. The ranch combines steep terraces (up to 60% grade), shallow soil, the harsh climate of the Marin coast, protected exposure, and well-chosen Dijon clonal selections to produce a small crop of unique fruit. Intoxicating and assertive nose of strawberry, vanilla and cherry syrup. Beautifully balanced, soft, elegant, and harmonious. Coating tannins. The exotic finish dances and changes over time. A unique, seductive, heartstopper. My favorite.

New Releases

A significant number of producers announce their Spring 2005 offerings in February and March. Some wines are available now and others are pre-release offerings.

2003 Castalia Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir Castalia is the personal label for Terry Bering, the cellar master at Rochioli since 1990. She has developed a loyal and cult-like following. The grapes are from the River Block, West Block, and East Block sections of the Rochioli Vineyard. The 2002 release received the highest rating of more than 100 Pinot Noirs in the *Connoisseurs' Guide* (June, 2004). 309 cases, \$50 btl, \$546/case, Limited retail (try Russian River Wine Co, 1-800-477-04900, ext 15).



2003 Cobb Coastlands Vineyard Pinot Noir Cobb wines was established in 2001 to produce Pinot Noirs from the Sonoma Coast. Diane and David Cobb are the owners and farmers of Coastlands Vineyard, Ross Cobb is the winemaker. Grapes from this vineyard were previously sourced by Williams Selyem. The Coastlands Vineyard overlooks the Pacific Ocean near the town of Occidental in western Sonoma County. 150 cases, \$58, \$125 magnum.

2003 Cobb Coastlands & Rice-Spivak Vineyards Pinot Noir This wine is a blend of two barrels of the Pommard Pinot Noir selection from Coastlands Vineyard and one barrel of Dijon Pinot Noir selections from the Rice-Spivak Vineyard in Sebastopol, a few miles from Coastlands in western Sonoma County. 72 cases, \$58. Mailing list. 707-874-1962, www.cobbwines.com.



2003 Williams Selyem Central Coast Pinot Noir \$29, 2003 Williams Selyem Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$38, 2003 Williams Selyem Sonoma County Pinot Noir (primarily RRV) \$32, **2003 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$42, 2003 Westside Road Neighbors Pinot Noir \$62.** In the spring of each year, Williams Selyem releases their "appellation wines". From my past experience, the best two are the Russian River Valley and Westside Road Neighbors bottlings. I was a bit put off by the newsletter mailing which included scores and accolades for the 2002 versions of these wines, not the current releases. Mailing list (what is referred to in the newsletter as THE LIST) and some retail. 707-433-6425, www.williamsselyem.com



2001 Fort Ross Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$34, 355 cases From a vineyard clinging to the top of a mountain ridge overlooking the Pacific Ocean, planted to 5 Pinot clones. Owned by Lester and Linda Schwartz, a South African couple who also planted Pinotage in their vineyard. Their first vintage, made with consultant Fred Scherrer, is underpriced. Dijon clones 115, 777.

2001 Fort Ross Vineyard Sonoma Coast Reserve Pinot Noir \$39, 127 cases. Old Burgundian field selections blended with some old field selections of Pommard.

2001 Fort Ross Vineyard Pinotage \$32, 157 cases. The only vineyard in California growing Pinotage from original South African nursery stock. First vintage. Barrel aged 22 months. 415-701-9200, www.FortRossVineyard.com.

Wal-Mart has teamed with Ernest & Julio Gallo Winery of Modesto, California to produce a line of discount wines in the \$3-\$5 range. While not for wine connoisseurs, there is a market for inexpensive wine. Kathy Micken,, professor of marketing at Roger Williams University in Bristol, R.I., said that the right name on the label is most important. The following suggestions have been considered:

Chateau du Traileur Parc, White Trashfindel, Big Red Gulp, Grape Expectations, Domaine Wal-Mar Merde du Pays, NASCARbernet, Chef Boyardeaux, Peanut Noir, Chateau des Moines, World Championship Riesling, I Can't Believe It's Not Vinegar, Sam's Shiraz, and Nasti Spumante.

The beauty of Wal-Mart wine is that it can be served with both white meat (possum) and red meat (squirrel).



Everyday DRC Drinker

Decanter magazine reports that the Domaine de la Romanee-Conti has released a 2002 Premier Cru from its grand cru vines for the first time since the 1999 vintage. The second release of the Cuvee Duvault-Biochet was unveiled recently along with the other 2002 lineup in Manhattan. The wine is made from declassified grapes from all of the DRC vineyards with some added Richebourg and carries a village name, Vosne-Romanee Premier Cru. The grapes are from a second picking after the best grapes from the older vineyards were harvested for the Domaine's seven grand cru wines. 20,000 bottles were produced. A price has not been set yet, but this "everyday" DRC will be about \$140 a bottle.

In the 1930's, DRC made reds from young vines and bottled them under the Cuvee Duvault-Biochet label, named for the founder of DRC, Jacques-Marie Duvault-Biochet. The practice was revived with the 1999 vintage where good secondary grapes were used to make the Premier Cru that was released in 2002. I tasted the 1999 bottling at a pre-release tasting of the 1999 DRC wines in 2002, and it was very, very stellar. Perhaps too expensive and too good for an "everyday drinker", it is a special bottle of wine worth seeking out for that special occasion.

DRC owner, Aubert de Villaine, called the 2003 vintage "a great year" for Burgundy. Because of the extreme summer temperatures, the DRC wines were initially slightly over-ripe and jammy, but gradually they have become more typical of their terroir. DRC was one of the few Burgundy estates that did not acidity its 2003 wines.

Look for more, including tastings, of 2002 Burgundy in the next issue of the PinotFile