

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Bling Bling Bourgogne

Bourgogne is French for Burgundy and Burgundy is English for open your wallet. Although in the past bourgogne wines have been at the bottom of the Burgundy feeding chain, the 2002 vintage has pushed them to the forefront and they are consistently bright value-priced wines.

The Cote d'Or in France has four types of appellations according to the AOC classification system. From the most regal to the most lowly are the grand crus, premier or 1er crus (grand and premier crus refer to vineyard names which appear on the labels), appellations communales (name of village like Gevrey-Chambertin or district is on the label), and the regional appellation or bourgogne. Think of bourgogne as analogous to Santa Barbara County or Sonoma County covering a whole region and grapes in the wine coming from anywhere in the region.

Since bourgogne wines can be a mish-mash of grapes from anywhere in Burgundy, it is critical in selecting these bottlings to pay strict attention to the producer's pedigree and reputation. The fact is, the most respected producers in Burgundy make the best bourgogne wines, period. In addition, it is imperative that you pay attention to the vintage. As it turns out, 2002 is one of those vintages where the wines of Burgundy are consistently good across the whole range of appellations. Allen Meadows (Burghound) has said that "2002 is the most consistent vintage I have ever seen in 25 years of visiting the region". There are many terrific values in bourgogne and village wines now on retailer's shelves. 2003 will be pricier due to a smaller crop and the continued unfavorable exchange rate. The 2001 vintage was less consistent among the lower appellations. For fans of ripe, fruit-forward, and opulent Pinot Noir, 2002 is flush with many luscious bourgogne wines.

Here is a sampling of bourgognes I tasted recently. All of these wines showed gorgeous finesse and elegance. None are big and blowsy. Their beauty lies in their pinpoint balance, subtle fruit backbone, understated flavors, plucky acid, silky texture, and sweetness (ripeness, not sugar). As the French would say, they are *bien élevé*, that is well-bred or refined. Prices range from \$9-\$40, with most in the \$20 range. Like all Burgundies, supplies are very limited and retailers often have only a case or two of the most desirable. Producers to look for other than those reviewed below include: Burguet (\$25), Cathiard (\$22), Coche-Dury (\$33), Groffier (\$24), Gambel (\$15), Hudelot-Noellat (\$23), Lafarge (\$20) and M Gros (\$16).

**Pinot Noir is
the "enfant
terrible"**

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The ubiquitous term "Burgundian" is a misnomer because there is no single style of Burgundy. There are hundreds from numerous tiny appellations – idiosyncratic producers using varying amounts of technology and tradition.

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One of the nice features of these Bourgogne rouge wines is that the alcohol level is 12-13% so you can drink them without feeling sideways. These wines are not tiring and really shine with food. There are not so much complex aperitif-type drinkers as table wines meant to enhance your dining experience. The quality and intensity of the wines follows the escalating prices.

2002 Domaine Faiveley Bourgogne Rouge (\$9) 12.5% alc. From one of the largest vineyard owners in Burgundy. An unbelievable bargain. Impressive flavor and depth for a regional generic wine, it tastes like a black cherry popsicle with an oak stick.

2002 Domaine Bachelet Bourgogne Rouge (\$18) 12.5% alc. Always a good bet. Denis Bachelet runs his ten-acre domaine virtually single-handed. Low yields are crucial to him. Lively, complex, and smooth like the Starbucks coffee drink "Serena Organic". The village wine, Gevrey-Chambertan VV also recommended.

2002 Domaine Marquis D'Angerville Bourgogne Rouge (\$20) 13% alc. One of Volnay's most esteemed domaines. A light to medium-bodied wine that is clean, soft, and balanced. Plenty of berries and earth to keep you interested with a sizeable finish featuring good acid.

2002 Emmanuel Rouget Bourgogne Rouge (\$25) 12% alc. A great food wine. Not a blockbuster by any means, but an elegant concoction of cherry fruit and pristine acid. You will rarely find a California Pinot Noir at this price level that delivers like this Pinot.

2002 Dugat-Py Bourgogne Rouge (\$35) 12.5% alc. This wine likes to reveal its charms slowly so be patient. With food, it keeps pumping out the fruit. Long and lush and highly recommended.

2002 Claude Dugat Bourgogne Rouge (\$40) 12.5% alc. The big boy in the lineup. Medium to full-bodied. Dark purple, loads of dark fruit. A velvety mouthful leading to a sappy finish. This baby needs a home in your cellar for a few years. Probably better as an aperitif wine than a food wine now, but it has the stuffing to do it all down the road. This Pinot is almost "Californian".

One other area to look for in quality red Burgundy at affordable prices in 2002 are the lesser-known named communes of Burgundy. **Marsannay** is at the most northern end of the Cote de Nuits. The wines are medium-full in weight, pure, and elegant. There is a trend toward more vineyard-designated wines in this appellation (Clos du Roy, Champs Perdix). Producers to look for include Fougerey de Beauclair, Jean and Jean-Louis Trapet, Joseph Roty, and Bruno Clair. **Fixin** is adjacent to Marsannay. There are some expensive premier crus here but look for simple village wines and the appellation Cotes-de-Nuits Villages which applies to Fixin and neighbors. Many of the Marsannay sources also offer Fixin. For really good Cotes de Nuits Villages look for Denis Bachelet (see above) and Louis Jadot. **2002 Mongeard-Mugneret Fixin (\$23)** 13% alc. A pleasant light-bodied drink. Shines with food. **Pernand-Vergelesses** is in the Cote de Beaune. Quality has greatly improved here due to advances in modern viticulture and technology in winemaking. Some premier crus are special. Producers to look for include Marcus Delarche, Roger Jaffelin, and Regis Pavelot. Close to Pernand-Verglesses is **Savigny-Les-Beaune**. Its wines used to be sturdy and rustic, but are now more refined. The best growers are Simon-Bize, Bouchard Pere & Fils, Bruno Clair, Louis Jadot, and Jean-Marc Pavelot. Pavelot is probably the most outstanding producer who makes several village and premier cru wines. On the opposite side of the main Beaune-Dijon road (the downslope) is **Chorey Les-Beaune**. The emphasis here is on light, soft, fruity, elegant Pinot Noir. Tollot-Beaut is the best grower in Chorey, but Bouchard & Fils, Joseph Drouhin, and Louis Jadot are also good. The grapes from Chorey are often used in the Cote de Beaune-Villages bottlings. **Monthlie** lies further south in the Cote de Beaune. The wines here show the same elegance and delicate style of Volnay at half the price. The best producers are Bouchard Pere & Fils, Michel Deschamps, and J&A Parent. Further south, beyond the communes of Meursault and Chassagne-Montrachet is **Santenay**. Santenay produces some of the greatest values in Burgundy. Names to look for include, Denis Clair, Rene Lequin, and Lucien Muzard. Vincent Girardin offers a wide range of Santenays which are excellent. **Maranges** is the last appellation in the Cote d'Or. The wines offer good value with the right producer who prefers elegance like Vincent Girardin. Further east in the Cote Chalonnaise are 3 villages: **Rully**, **Mercurey**, and **Givry**. Rully is the least desirable. Mercurey wines are bigger, richer, and age better than those from the other two villages. Producers to look for include Faiveley, Antonin Rodet, and Michel Juillot.

Gone Bretty

For some it is a whiff of Calvin Klein Eternity. For others it could be the briny tang of salty ocean spray or the earthy smell of freshly mowed grass. Or maybe the aroma that gets you tingling is Brett. Brett is short for the yeast *Brettanomyces bruxellensis* which produces certain aromas in some wines that some tasters feel lend interest and others feel overwhelms the fruitiness. Wine writer Dan Berger, for example, finds it an unacceptable byproduct of winery hygiene and less than pristine winemaking. Other critics find small amounts crucial to the appeal of the wine and consider it a welcome addition.

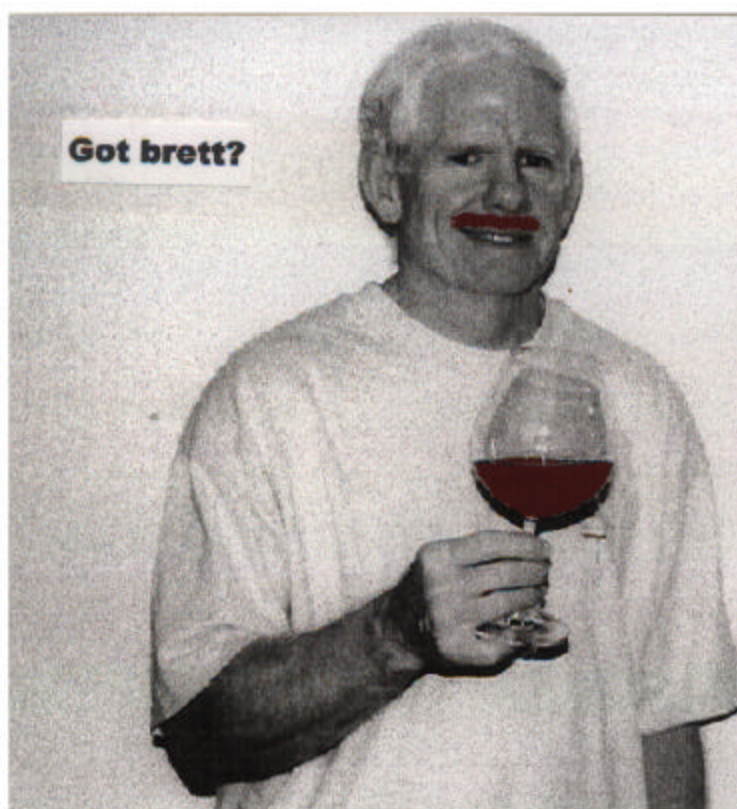
Brett can be isolated from the outside of grapes and in winery equipment and oak barrels. It is found in every wine region in the United States and the world. The yeast loves second use or older barrels in particular which are ideal for growth. Most wines with Brett character become so during barrel fermentation. Older barrels cannot be sterilized, and even new barrels can have Brett. The yeast proliferates under warm cellaring conditions, low sulfur dioxide levels combined with high wine pH, and in wine after bottling particularly if the wine is unfiltered and contains residual fermentable sugar.

Brett produces four byproducts: esterases (can degrade fruity esters), volatile fatty acids (acetic acid and ethylacetate which can impact wine quality), tetrahydropyridines (mousy aroma in high amounts, bready aroma in low amounts), and aromatic or volatile phenols which are unique to Brett. There are three important aromatic phenol compounds: 4-ethylphenol (4-ep) which produces aromas of Band-Aids, antiseptic, and horse stable, 4-ethylgualacol which smells like smoked bacon, spice, or cloves, and isovaleric acid which has the aroma of sweaty animals, cheese, and rancidity. Other descriptives used for Brett byproducts include wet wool, sweaty horse blanket, mousy, wet dog, chicken droppings, gamey, leathery, mushroomy, barnyardy, funky sock, creosote, burnt beans, rotting vegetation, mouse cage, and BBQ. Woo-wee!

Brett is almost exclusive to red wine. Suffice it to say that there is a complicated organic chemistry enzyme process involving tannic substances extracted from grape skins that explains its presence. Aerating wine can help blow off some of the offensive odors. Older Burgundies are notorious for their Bretty aromas.

Of late there has been more discussion of Brett and the questions is whether it is more common or are we just more aware of it? According to Richard Gawel at the Australian Society of Wine Education National Convention (6/04), "the trend toward longer hang-times and riper grapes leading to higher pH and alcohol and residual sweetness to fill out the palate and enhance fruitiness together with minimal use of sulfur dioxide and filtration has allowed Brett to thrive." The winemaker is challenged to balance low sulfite concentration to improve the mouthfeel of the wine with the risk of Brett.

Attribution: more info at makewine.com and aromadictionary.com



Allocated Releases From Respected Sources

There is a lot of great Pinot Noir being offered now if you know where to look. Unfortunately, exceptional wines are highly allocated and often sold to mailing list customers only. It never hurts to try as a number of customers do not take their full allocation of “hostage” wines. Vigilant attention to the retail market will also turn up a valued bottling here and there, at times for less than the full retail asking price at the winery. Remember what Dr Maynard Amerine said, “It is not the year, the producer, or even the label that determines the quality of the wine; it is the wine in the glass, whatever the label or producer or year... ..Drink wine, not labels.” In spite of that truism, here are some labels you can count on.

WesMar You won't see these wines reviewed by Robert Parker and they rarely appear in Pinot Noir tasting reports by journalists, but trust me, these Pinots are naturally made wines, individual wines, with a finesse and complexity that reflects their terroir in an admirable fashion. If you like modest fruit tannins, mild French oak notes, Pinot Noir fruit showcased in a marvelous way, try WesMar. **2003 Piner Ranch Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir** \$35, 206 cases. The last vintage from this 30-year-old vineyard as the vines are being ripped out to be replaced. The last of a treasure. **2003 Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir** \$35 162 cases. A venerable classic in the RRV. **2003 Oehlman Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir** \$35, 168 cases. A feminine stalwart with intriguing complexities. **2003 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$29, 91 cases. Two vineyards, one intense nose. **2003 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** \$29, 345 cases. A blend of Piner Ranch, Oehlman, and Olivet Lane Vineyards. 707-829-8824.



Radio-Coteau This winery exploded on the scene with the inaugural 2002 releases. Winegrower Eric Sussman crafts marvelous Pinot Noirs from select vineyards in the Sonoma Coast and Anderson Valley. Some wines may already be sold out but sign up for the mailing list (radiocoteau.com, 707-887-8335). A cool wet Spring on the North Coast produced a light fruit-set in 2003 resulting in lower yields than 2002. **2003 “La Nebima Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$36, 220 cases. A blend of several select vineyards. **2003 Marsh Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$40, 74 cases. A wine from a pristine 1.3-acre vineyard of Swan selection clones planted in 1999 on a ridge west of Occidental. The vineyard is close to Summa and Coastlands Vineyards made famous by Williams Selyem. Decant or age this beauty. **2003 Hellenthal Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$40, 100 cases. From a hillside vineyard located between Cazadero and Fort Ross. The output is shared with W.H. Smith wines (the Smiths are backers of Radio-Coteau). Mt Eden and Pommard clones about 15 years old. According to the *Pinot Report*, 2002 vintage was “the Best Pinot I’ve tasted all year”. **2003 Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** \$45, 440 cases.

Littorai If you love Burgundy for its precision and finesse, then the 2003 vintage is for you. The Pinots have very good acidity and very elegant fruit. **2003 Les Larmes Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** \$38, 191 cases. One Acre is suffering from phylloxera damage so the fruit was declassified and blended with a few other lots. **2003 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$38, 238 cases. Always a stalwart. Mostly declassified Hirsch fruit from blocks 5 and 6. **2003 Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$50, 660 cases. **2003 Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**. \$50, 230 cases. **2003 Mays Canyon RRV Pinot Noir**, \$55, 100 cases. Second vintage of what should be an exceptional wine with a few years in the cellar. **2003 Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**, \$60, 160 cases. **2003 Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$65, 83 cases. Low yields due to poor fruit set. **2003 Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$60, 100 cases. Always the pick of the litter for me. A concentrated wine that retains elegance and femininity. Previous vintages have been totally sensual. If you splurge on one California Pinot Noir this year, make it Littorai. 707-823-9586.



Dehlinger 2002 Estate Pinot Noir \$40, 1,300 cases. This is a blend of grapes from many hillside and hill-top locations within 18 acres of estate Pinot Noir vines, including the entire High Plains section in this vintage. **2002 Octagon Pinot Noir** \$50, 230 cases. The rarest and top offering with a little greater intensity than the Estate. Made from less than two acres of vines that surround the Octagon structure on the hilltop at the entrance to the property. 707=823-2378.

Siduri Wines 2003 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$25, 423 cases. 43% Olivet Grange fruit, 38% Sapphire Hill fruit, and 19% Keefer Ranch. **2003 Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir** \$43, 605 cases. The fifth crop from this notable vineyard. **2003 Amber Rose Pinot Noir** \$65, 102 cases. To commemorate the adoption of a daughter (Amber) by owner and winemaker Adam Lee and his wife Dianna. This is a blend of seven wines, all vineyard designated wines blended from the vintage. 18% Clos Pepe Vineyard, 18% Cargasacchi Vineyard, 18% Pisoni Vineyard, 18% Shaw Mtn Vineyard, 9% Muirfield Vineyard, 9% Keefer Vineyard, and 9% Olivet Grange Vineyard. Siduri also has several single vineyard bottlings from 2003 still available including Clos Pepe, Cargasacchi, and Pisoni. 707-578-3882, siduriwine.com.



Brogan Cellars 2003 Lone Redwood Ranch RRV Pinot Noir \$48. A favorite of many customers. The 2002 was reviewed recently in the *PinotFile*. **2003 Buena Tierra "Helio Doro Block" RRV Pinot Noir** \$75. Very limited production. "Sex in a glass." **2003 Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$75 Very limited production from older vines.

Loring Wine Company The winery is now located in an industrial park in Lompoc. 4,200 cases total. The wines are \$46 (\$42 to mailing list with free shipping!). **2003 Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 200 cases, **2003 Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**, 375 cases., **2003 Clos Pepe Vineyard Santa Rita Hills**, 250 cases, **2003 Brousseau Vineyard, Chalone AVA, Pinot Noir**, 200 cases, **2003 Cargasacchi Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**, 125 cases, **2003 Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**, 250 cases. There is both a Fall and Spring release of these wines to distributors so you may find them now at retailers (the Wine House in West L.A. has the Clos Pepe now). Wine-maker Brian Loring has a refreshing honesty about his wines and he doesn't hype anything unworthy. His style is bold and plush but the 2003s are sleeker and racier than the plusher 2002 vintage 877-LWC-WINE, loringwinecompany.com.



Sean Thackrey This quirky winemaker from Bolinas in Marin County was reviewed last year in the *Pinot-File*. He is known for his Rhone-style offerings named after constellations. His first Pinot Noir was recently released. **2003 Andromeda Devil's Gulch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir** \$55. Expect something different. This is a terrific Pinot Noir vineyard meticulously farmed. Alcohol is 15.1%. You have been forewarned. Wine-maker.net.