

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir Training

I am frequently asked by neophytes interested in Pinot Noir, "How do I get started?" Often enough, men want to get their wife interested in Pinot Noir, but don't want to buy \$60 bottles to initiate them. It is a wise man who gets his wife hooked on Pinot Noir so that he can justify his buying habit. They say a successful man is one who earns more money than his wife can spend. If you start buying your allocations of fine Pinot Noir and the boxes pile up in the garage, your wife will take notice. Her ears will perk up when the UPS delivery person knows you by your first name.. Pretty soon, you may see an equal number of shoe boxes arrive by UPS from Nordstroms. Or even worse, she may start buying shoes by the case. She may think you are spending more than your share of the household's booty.

If you find yourself in this predicament, there is a plan of subterfuge which I can recommend. First you can utilize any one of a number of excuses for the wine boxes arriving at your house: "It's not all my wine— I bought some for my friends who are sharing my allocation." or "I bought the wine for a special wine dinner for my wine club and I will be reimbursed" or "I am selling some of my wine at auction to pay for this" or "It was on sale" Now the latter your wife can relate to, but the fact is that desirable Pinot Noir is rarely on sale so you are on shaky ground here. Never, never, never ever tell her the price you paid for the wine. If you are pushed into a corner, quote the wholesale price (usually 2/3 of retail price). Do not leave this copy of the PinotFile lying around where it is easily spotted.

Other options include: Have your wine sent to your place of business and bring home a few bottles at a time (not always a good choice as co-workers love to yak about the wine you are buying). Pick up the wine at the winery. Have the wine sent to a single friend or neighbor you can trust. Finally, you can store your wine off premises.

If all else fails, buy some wine your wife likes. Get her interested in Pinot Noir— good things happen when you drink Pinot Noir. I have picked out a perfect starter or training Pinot that is failsafe with a few optional backups. After you have piqued her palate and she wants to move up to "the best Pinot Noir", you are a lucky man. Make sure you have nice Burgundy stems to serve the wine in and carefully let the poured wine breath awhile before indulging. Dress respectfully and turn on some good music. Make it an event.

(cont'd)

There are
Pinot Drinkers
and then there
is Everyone
Else

Volume 4, Issue 30
March 21, 2005



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Starter Pinot: 2003 La Crema Sonoma Coast

La Crema has specialized in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay since 1979. It has been a training ground for numerous winemakers who now work elsewhere but the quality has consistently been good and the value dependable. Current winemaker is Melissa Stackhouse. The winery has four Pinot Noirs in their Appellation Series: Russian River Valley (\$20), Sonoma Coast (\$15), Carneros (\$18), and Anderson Valley (\$18). The latter two are sold out at the winery. The winery also releases a single bottling labeled as 9 Barrel Pinot Noir. This is a type of reserve made by selecting the top 10 barrels in the cellar and then going one better by eliminating one barrel. The current vintage is 2002 and is \$60 (not a starter Pinot).

2003 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc. This wine has a very pleasant, fruity nose with a soft and elegant midpalate, and a sweet fruity finish. Tannins are very fine grained. No bite to this Pinot. A wine that is not complex, but very true to the varietal and very easy to drink. You can liken it to a starter bra: it is holding a lot of promise for those who want to get serious in the future. Widely distributed. Contact the winery at lacrema.com, 1-800-314-1762.



Other optional starter Pinot Noirs (all under \$20): Acacia Carneros, Arcadian Gold Coast, Babcock Tri County, Chalone, Edna Valley, Saintsbury, Wild Horse, ZD, (all California), and Bethel Heights Estate, McKinlay, Ponzi, and O'Reilly's, (all Oregon).

Domaine Alfred: A New Look for a Pioneer Vineyard

Domaine Alfred is a relatively new winery located in the Central Coast's Edna Valley. The Chamisal Vineyard here was the first Pinot Noir planting in the Edna Valley, dating back to 1972. Chardonnay is still dominant in the Edna Valley, but Pinot Noir plantings have increased dramatically in the region since 1995. The Chamisal Vineyard was purchased by Terry Spetzer in 1994 and replanted in 1996 with six clones of Pinot Noir on 30 acres and five clones of Chardonnay on 30 acres. Additional plantings have brought the current total to eight clones on three rootstocks on 38 acres. The winery has committed to organic and biodynamic farming since 2002.



Matt Kramer, in his book, *New California Wine*, published in 2004, calls the wines from Domaine Alfred "one-dimensional and heavy-handed." Although that may have been true early on, the wines since the 2001 vintage have been outstanding. This is due in part to the winery's commitment to improvements in farming, and in part to the hiring of winemaker, Mike Sinor, who joined Domaine Alfred from Byron Winery.

The winery offers both a Chamisal (\$23) and Califa (\$38) style of Pinot Noir.

2002 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyard Pinot Noir 14.5% alc. 1950 cases. The grapes came from the seventh leaf of the replanted Chamisal Vineyard. Vineyard management included vertical trellis, leaf-pulling, and aggressive canopy management. Winemaking was traditional with 70% new French oak, 30% 1 and 2 year old French oak. Unfiltered, unfined. A powerful nose of black cherries and dark berries with purple flowers and spice. The sweet, ripe, and smoky fruit is at its best after 45 minutes. The mouthfeel is appealing and the finish is very nice and clean with plenty of dark berry fruit lingering on the palate.

2002 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyard Califa Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 550 cases. Winemaking was very similar for this bottling but the style is bolder. A nice heady smoky nose of black and blue fruits, flavors mimicking the nose with added vanilla and game, and the whole package finishes up nicely with a long and intense panoply of dark fruits. A little more structured, a little more complex, and a little more refined than the Domaine bottling. Both wines are available retail (ie Wine Exchange), and at domainealfred.com.

Humor From Tish

W.R. Tish (known in the wine trade simply as Tish) is a well-known wine and food writer who was editor of the *Wine Enthusiast* magazine from 1988-1998. Based in New York, his website, wineforall.com, is dedicated to formats for private wine parties and corporate events, wine and fun dinners, and just plain good humor that pokes fun at wine and all of its trappings. The fact that he does not take himself or wine too seriously should not come as a surprise since, while attending Harvard University, he was a literary editor for *The Harvard Lampoon*. He also publishes an informative wine newsletter, *Wineflash*, which is free. I asked him to allow me to reproduce some of his humor.

Everyone knows how outrageous some of the auction lots are at the annual Napa Valley Wine Auction. Well Tish came up with several auction lots that maybe you didn't see among the offerings. One lot that perked my ears up was the following:

Lot #666 Dude Vineyards True connoisseurs know that Napa Valley Pinot Noir can't hold a candle to Sonoma's. Well, somebody in Napa has finally done something about that. Twin-brother vintners Reggie and Rick Dudas (who both answer to "Dude") snuck over to Sonoma County and made off with the famed Rochioli West Block Vineyard. They took not only the vines but the whole terroir, microclimate and all. Now ensconced at a secret location on Highway 29, the plot of Pinot heaven is thriving, and the first vintage is described by Reggie Dude as "a real dog," Rick Dude clarifies: "He means it's so good, it'll make you roll over and beg for more." The Dude Pinot Noir auction lot comes with an 18-liter screwtop that the brothers call "a big-ass bottle." Don't miss this vintage— as soon as the Sonomans figure out what happened to their vineyard, the '99 could be the dudes' first and last.

And finally, a surefire sign that you've been spending too much time in the wine cellar: the thought of getting a "Pinot Dude" tattoo has crossed your mind.

Check out the website— there are many more laughs.

Feeling Dimples

A recent British scientific study showed that it is possible to determine the value of a bottle of wine by feeling the depth of its dimple. Previously this was thought to be an urban myth, but some researchers with nothing better to do actually measured bottles of wine of different prices. It was shown that more expensive wines have deeper dimples. The relationship between depth and price can be expressed by the equation: $\text{price of bottle} = \text{dimple depth in millimeters} \times \$5.65 / 4.314$. The home-made depth gauge, which was used to make the measurements, was auctioned on eBay.

I decided to go into my cellar and feel a few dimples. I used my two fingers (index and middle) as a depth gauge— grading the depth of the dimple as none, first knuckle, and second knuckle. Some dimples have a nipple at the depth of the depression which can affect the score. I sampled many bottles and I found that the scientific results reported by Dr Karl Blanks are valid. Some of my cheap Pinot Noirs (only for guests and cooking) had no dimple at all. Most wines, including a few Chardonnays and Zins had a one knuckle dimple. This seems to be the common dimple size. The two deepest dimples I found (over two knuckles) were a Sine Qua Non Hollerin M Pinot Noir (about \$150 on secondary market) and a Beaux Freres Pinot Noir (\$75).

Now when you are at a party you can amaze the crowd by feeling the dimple and picking out the most expensive wine. Or when you are at your local wine retailer you can wager a bottle of good Pinot that you can tell the more expensive wine by holding the bottle (and subtly putting your two fingers in the dimple). Just don't overdo it, people might think you are some kinda weirdo.

Sparkling Burgundy

Cold Duck or as the Aussies call it, Muckie Beastie, was the rage in the 1970s. The Aussies true love, sparkling shiraz, was shoved into the background. Today, sparkling shiraz, or Black Beauties as it is sometimes called, has resurfaced. The first sparkling shiraz was made by Frenchman Edmond Mazure, who used Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, to make a “Sparkling Burgundy” in 1893. Over time the Aussies learned to make a truly great sparkling Burgundy from shiraz. The shiraz is vinified as dry red table wine and the base wine is then put through Methode Champenoise in bottle, followed by several years of maturation on the lees, and finally topped off with Australian vintage Port (fortified shiraz).

My friend David Glass, of Yabby Lake fame in Australia, relates this humorous story about sparkling shiraz. Boy oh boy, it is a wonder that I can remember all of those red-haze evenings where as an under-age larrikin, I found myself “wide-eyed and legless” thanks to the dodgy benefits of Kaiser Stuhl Cold Duck. I reckon they used to slip in some Mai Tai, such was the pain in the head! The “down-marche” version of sparkling burgundy disappeared from the Australian scene for a long, long time. However, in its place are some of the most beguiling sparkling reds that you can imagine. The very best of them are made from shiraz, however, there are some very good versions made from grenache and merlot. They are nothing like Cold Duck and they bear no resemblance to Lambrusco. These wines are a lot easier to drink than Champagne in that their apparent acidity is considerably less and in fact, they are a perfect aperitif, or evening starter when friends gather at someone’s home before dinner, or before heading out to a restaurant. A huge sparkling shiraz is also a knockout choice when you are wolfing down turkey and cranberry sauce and just like duck and great Pinot Noir, they truly are a marriage made in heaven.

Ok, now you have been forewarned. If traveling in Australia, expect an offering of sparkling shiraz and remember there is no Pinot Noir in the cuvee. Definitely something to sample, like the popular song ‘Ordinary’ says by Deana Carter: “I love to cross the line, Oh wouldn’t it be scary, To be just ordinary.”

Malibu Wine Classic

For those of you who live in the Southern California area, check out this great event. This is a wine and food festival that showcases the wines of Santa Barbara. Over 40 wineries will present their wines and a dozen Malibu-area restaurants will serve their signature dishes. The Classic will benefit the Childhelp USA, one of the oldest and largest national non-profit organizations dedicated to the treatment and prevention of child abuse. The event will be held on Saturday, April 2nd from 1:30-5:30 PM at the Sunset Restaurant in Malibu. Cost is \$50.

Pinot Noir wineries participating include Avila, Barnwood, Clos Pepe Estate, Cottonwood Canyon, Drew Family, Fess Parker, Fiddlehead, Flying Goat, Kalyra, Laetitia, Longoria, Margerum, Mosby, Rideau, Sanford, Sea Smoke, and Summerland. There will be a few interesting Malibu-based wineries as well.

Tickets available at LearnAboutWine.com or call 310-451-7600



Rosé wine fans there is hope. Pink lovers have a new wine club, Rosé Avengers and Producers (RAP), a Napa-based association formed “to avenge all the wrongs done to dry rosé.” Although dry rosé is possibly the world’s most versatile food wine, it gets no respect. The association hopes to convince America’s red-blooded cab and zin drinkers that it is ok to drink pink. RAP will host a rosé wine and food pairing in San Francisco in May. To attend the event or join RAP, go to the group’s web site, www.rapwine.com.

Serious rosé can be produced by one of two methods: maceration and *saignée*. The two techniques are very similar. Rose is essentially grape juice that has been allowed to remain in contact with the skins of dark grapes only long enough to achieve the desired degree of pinkness, and then fermented to dryness.

A new book, *The Book of Rosé*, by Jeff Morgan (Chronicle Books) will be released in the Spring, 2005.

Are you tough enough to drink Pink?

Loose Ends

In the last issue of the *PinotFile*, I stand corrected: Patz & Hall have never made a Garys’ Vineyard Pinot Noir. I omitted Arcadian which has made an excellent Garys’ Vineyard Pinot Noir every year since 1999.

Sonoma-Cutrer was named the most popular wine brand in restaurants in *Wine & Spirits* magazine’s 16th Annual Restaurant Poll. The Sonoma-Cutrer Pinot Noir I featured in the last issue is currently distributed only to restaurants in a few select major cities in the US (\$50-70 on wine lists). The winery’s marketing plan for this wine is a bit muddled so whether the project proceeds and the wine becomes distributed to retailers remains to be seen. As an additional note, the number two winery in the restaurant poll was Cakebread Cellars, who apparently have been making a Carneros Pinot Noir in limited quantities since 1998 (I have never seen a bottle or heard from anyone who has tried it).

The Sideways’ name has been protected by vintner Bill Hatcher of Hatcher Wineworks in Dundee, Oregon. The filing was Jan. 31. Hatcher was the general manager of Domaine Drouhin for 14 years before leaving four years ago to focus on his A to Z Wineworks brand. Hatcher said he has had discussions with Sideways’ director Alexander Payne and author Rex Pickett about collaborating on a wine venture. It doesn’t seem right that the wine wouldn’t come from Santa Barbara County.

Didier Dagueneau of France, which produces outstanding Pouilly-Fume wines, in defiance of the outdated AOC classification system in France, obtained an AOC label for his worst production, made with inferior quality grapes. He calls it “quintessence of my balls.”