

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Family Winemakers Tasting

Last week I attended the Sixth Annual Family Winemakers of California Trade Tasting in Pasadena. Among the 275 wineries pouring their wines, over 90 California Pinot Noir producers were there. Walk-around tastings are really not the ideal way to taste Pinot Noir: the wines have often traveled some distance and may be a little “shocked”, after tasting multiple wines they can begin to taste rather similar, and the noise and crowd can be quite distracting. Since this was a trade tasting, it was more business-like than most walk-around tastings where the public look upon the event as a “drinking party” rather than a “tasting”. Anyway, there were many, many good Pinot Noirs and here is the report from along the Pinot Trail

Adobe Road Winery: This was a new one to me but I was curious as their first Pinot Noir, the 2002 Herrerias Vineyard Sonoma Coast, won a gold medal and “Best of Class” at the 2005 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. The winery was co-founded in 2002 by Kevin Buckler, a professional Porsche race team owner and driver who has won the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans, and winegrower Ron Herrerias. A number of varietals are produced from select vineyards in Sonoma County and the estate Herrerias Vineyard. This was quite an appealing Pinot Noir with yummy aromas of raspberry and wild roses, ripe Pinot fruit flavors on fine-grained tannins, and a nice finish. Only 250 cases, \$30. 707-939-7967. A winery to watch.

Davis Family Vineyard: The 2003 Davis Family Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir will be released May 1. Founder, farmer, and winemaker Gus Davis had just returned from New Zealand where he makes a very good Sauvignon Blanc. He is justifiably proud of his newest Pinot Noir offering and claims “it is hands down the best Pinot I have ever crafted!” The wine is similar to the outstanding 2002 vintage, with a little more red and a little less black fruits. A balanced, harmonious Pinot Noir that was near perfect and one of my favorites at the event. \$35. 707-569-0171, daviswines.com.

Dutton-Goldfield: The Pinot Noir lineup from this excellent producer was reviewed in the *PinotFile* (Vol 4, Issue 25). The beauty of these wines is that winemaker Dan Goldfield has a very drinkable style that is recognizable across all four offerings, but yet, each wine uniquely reflects the origins of the grapes. A surprise to me was the 2002 Cherry Ridge Vineyard Syrah— a RRV Syrah made in the Pinot Noir style— terrific!

Pinot Noir: I'll
be Your *Unami*
Tonight

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Family Winemakers of California (FWC) is opposing SB 656 (Romero) which would raise the sales tax on wine consumed at restaurants and bars. The fees would range from 1%-5% of the selling price. FWC also passed a bill in 2003 that allows wine sales at selected nonprofit events. FWC supports direct shipping of wine.



Copeland Creek: Don Baumhefner is a small producer out of Petaluma who is the vineyard manager, winemaker and sales manager for Pfendler Vineyards. His 2002 Copeland Creek Pinot Noir is made from grapes he grows on a small vineyard planted with the latest Dijon clones on the Sonoma Coast. I really like his delicate style of Pinot Noir. The 2002 is a winner— a wine of great finesse and charm with a mid-palate explosion of spice that goes on and on. 13.5% alc., \$30. He also produces a Pfendler Vineyards Meritage from Sonoma Mountain (13.5% alc.) and a Happy Lab Chardonnay (12.9% alc.), both of which are also light on their feet, easy to drink, and made for food. Don's wife is a chef and they own a very good restaurant in Petaluma called Della Fattoria. 707-765-5997, pfendlervineyards.com.

Esterlina: This winery is located high on a ridge overlooking the Anderson Valley and a wonderful place to visit. Winemaker Eric Sterling is a part-time emergency room physician who works with all members of the Sterling family to craft small lots of Pinot Noir and other varietals (the Rieslings are outstanding). The 2002 Anderson Valley Estate Pinot Noir is an easy drinker with a nice acid kick at the end. The 2002 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is more earthy and lush. 707-895-2920, esterlinavineyards.com.

Fort Ross Vineyard & Winery: Spend some time with owners and South Africans Linda and Lester Schwartz and you will be charmed by their enthusiasm for winegrowing and winemaking. The current offerings are from 2001, their inaugural vintage. Their 4-year old vines are on a ridge overlooking the Pacific Ocean on the historic Sonoma Coast Fort Ross property. Winemakers are Fred Scherrer and Ed Kutzman. The 2001 Fort Ross Pinot Noir has a stunning nose of berries and flowers, a decent body of fruit, and a comforting finish. 14.5% alc., 275 cases, \$34. The 2001 Fort Ross Reserve Pinot Noir is a step up in complexity and is terrific juice that will get better with a few years in the cellar. 14.5% alc., 112 cases, \$39. A very nice 2002 Vin Gris (Pinot Noir + Pinotage, saginee method) and a Pinotage in tribute to their heritage are fun wines. Contact them in San Francisco at 415-701-9200, FortRossVineyard.com.

Kosta Browne Wines: This winery has created a buzz of late and I use the word buzz because all of the three appellation wines poured at this event, 2003 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (740 cases, \$28), 2003 Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir ((\$270 cases, \$38), and 2003 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (440 cases, \$38) were either close to, or over 15% alcohol. These are "big babe" Pinots which will appeal to lovers of big extraction, lush fruit, and high alcohol. This Pinot Noir-only winery was co-founded by Dan Kosta and Michael Browne in 1997 in Sebastopol. 707-823-7430, kostabrowne.com.

Londer Vineyards: Retired ophthalmologist Larry Londer is off to a fast start in the Anderson Valley. With Greg LaFollette as winemaker, they have crafted two Pinot Noirs. The 2002 Londer Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$28) is a nice example of the noticeable acid backbone of Pinot Noirs from this Valley. The 2002 Londer Parabol Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$45) is a bigger, more serious wine that carries plenty of oak and needs decanting or a little time in the cellar to show its best stuff. The winery's Ritchie Vineyard Chardonnay and Gewurtztraminer are also excellent. 707-895-3900, londervineyards.com.

Lynmar Winery at Quail Hill: This is a small, family-owned estate specializing in Russian River Valley Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The estate's Quail Hill Vineyard is the source for the Quail Cuvee and Reserve Pinot Noirs, as well as the core blend of appellation-designated wines. In 2004, the winery launched an ambitious program to replant the Quail Hill Vineyard in phases, and build a state-of-the-art gravity flow winery, hospitality center, and wine caves. The winemaker is Hugh Chapelle, consulting winemaker Paul Hobbs. The 2002 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$2,276 cases, \$30) poured at the event was just ok— their Quail Hill bottling is more impressive and the future looks bright for this winery.

Merry Edwards: A Pinot Noir producer that continues to accumulate accolades and rightly so. The 2002 Merry Edwards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir was fresh, brimming with Pinot fruits and sap. Highly recommended. The 2002 Merry Edwards Klopp Ranch is a muscular style with a generous amount of concentrated fruit and big-time tannins. A wine like this needs time in the glass and doesn't show that well at a walk-around. 2003 Merry Edwards 30 Pinot Noir will be released in the fall: a blend of Olivet Lane, Quail Hill, and the last vintage of Windsor Gardens, \$90. 888-388-9050, merryedwards.com.

Inman Family Wines, Fiddlestix, Talisman and others will be featured in future issues.

Lost Canyon Winery has Winning Trio

Lost Canyon Winery was started by Jack States and Randy Keworth in 1978 as a “gargiste” operation named Lost Canyon Cellars. They later teamed up with Bob Riskin, a former Levi executive with a passion for wine, and the Lost Canyon Winery was bonded in 2001. The urban winery is located in a renovated vintage 1900’s warehouse on the San Francisco Bay waterfront south of Jack London Square in Oakland. No expense has been spared at the new winery which has state-of-the-art equipment. Their 2002 releases were favorably reviewed in the *PinotFile* (Vol 3, Issue 40). Recently I tasted through the lineup of 2003 Pinot Noirs.



Lost Canyon
WINERY

2003 Lost Canyon Winery Dutton Ranch Morelli Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 225 cases, \$38. The Morelli Lane Vineyard is in the Green Valley area of the Russian River Valley. Clones are Dijon 115, Pommard, and Beringer. The wine has a very pretty nose with wild raspberries, a little oak and vanilla, and some spice. The style is delicate with well-integrated dark fruits, earth, and notable tannins. The silky finish leaves a good impression.

2003 Lost Canyon Winery Los Carneros Los Brisas Vineyard Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 365 cases, \$38. Two clones, Dijon 115 and UCD 18, are used from this vineyard farmed by Francis Mahoney. My experience over the years with Carneros Pinot Noir has been spotty but these producers seem to know how to bring out the best this region has to offer. A pleasant nose of candied cherries leads to spicy red fruits. The experience ends with a soft, spice kick. The wine has a nice acid backbone for food. I found it very enjoyable and appropriate while listening to Larry Chance and the Earls sing ‘Moonlight Kiss’, especially since there is a moon on the label. (Note— the first bottle I tried was muted and disjointed with very little interesting fruit, not anything like the second bottle, which was superb— demonstrating the fact that even the best wineries occasionally produce a bad bottle for whatever reason, TCA, Brett, etc.).

2003 Lost Canyon Winery Russian River Valley Saralee’s Vineyard Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 275 cases, \$38. What an innovative concept— instead of flowers and barnyard and pomegranate— a wine that actually tastes like Pinot Noir grapes! I was drinking this wine and actually stopped in my tracks because it really did taste just like grapes. Very juicy, long folds of silk, a velveteen mouthfeel, finishing with a slight kick of alcohol.

The winemaking crew here have obvious talent for Pinot Noir. These wines will continue to show better with time. All were bottled under the sign of Leo and everyone knows the lion’s share is the best part. 510-534-9314, lostcanyonwinery.com.

How the Prince Passed His Medical School Entrance Exam

A physician on the entrance committee was interviewing college grads for admission to medical school when it became my turn. The doctor, after hearing my Irish brogue and seeing me drinking Pinot in the waiting room, thought, "We're not going to admit that drunken Irishman." He decided to give me a special test, hoping I wouldn't be able to answer the questions, and therefore allowing him to refuse me admittance without facing an Irish discrimination suit.

The first question was, "Without using numbers, represent the number 9." So I say "Dat's easy," and proceed to draw 3 trees. The doctor says, "What the hell's that?" I say, "Tree an' tree an' tree makes nine." "Fair enough," says the physician.



The second question was, "Same rules, represent 99." I stared into space for a while, scratched my head and took a sip of my Pinot. I then made a smudge on each tree. "Der ya go, sir," I said. The doctor scratched his head and said, "How on earth do you get that to represent 99?" I tell him, "Each tree's dirty now, so it's dirty tree, an' dirty tree, an' dirty tree, dats 99."

The doctor is now getting worried he is going to have to admit me, so he says, "All right, here is question three. Same rules again, but represent the number 100." I stare into space again searching for the answer and then it comes to me. I make a little mark at the base of each tree and say, "There ya go sir, 100." the doctor looks at my answer and thinks, "Ha!, got him this time. Go on Rusty, you must be crazy if you think that represents a hundred." I leaned forward and pointed to the marks at the base of the trees and said, "A little dog comes along and craps by each tree, so now you've got dirty tree an' turd, dirty tree an' a turd, an' dirty tree an' a turd, which makes a hundred."

I was admitted to the medical school the next semester.

Global Warming: What Me Worried?

One way to validate global warming is to use grape harvest dates, which are related to temperature, to reconstruct temperatures in the vineyards over time. The French did exactly that by going back several centuries in Burgundy and published the results in *Nature*. The results show that the 1520s and the period between 1630 and 1680 were as hot as the end of the 20th century. 2003 was still the hottest year ever recorded in France.

The Burgundians have been recording harvest dates for Pinot Noir back to the 13th century, and the recent re-analysis of this data by the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique suggests that global warming may be a misnomer. It turns out that some years are just hotter than others, and the grapes ripen as a result.

The Enquirer, not that Enquirer, a Cincinnati newspaper, recently reported on a female-only wine tasting group called appropriately, the 'Wine Divas'. The original intention was to have a single six month session on the basics of wine at Polo Grille, but a second class had to be added and even that

The perception of many woman and everyone associated with servers to winery owners are are being talked down to in fine This is, in fact, largely true, for always handed to a male (when wine list along with a menu to result, women want to learn



is that wine is male-oriented wine, from retailers to wine male. Many women think they wine stores and in restaurants. in restaurants the wine list is can we get restaurants to hand a everyone at the table?). As a more about wine.

The irony of this whole scenario is that women in this country account for 60 percent of the wine consumed.


PrinceofPinot.com

Oriel

Oriel is a new concept in which a single label has been created featuring wines from all over the world made by accomplished winemakers from each country. The idea is to have an “all-star” lineup under the same label with a California winemaker making California wine (veteran Dan Goldfield makes the ‘Dylan’ Russian River Valley Chardonnay and the ‘Jasper’ Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir), a Tuscan winemaker making an Italian varietal, a Bordeaux winemaker making a Bordeaux Rose and so forth. Nine appellations in five countries compose the lineup. The founder of Oriel is John Hunt, a successful businessman who founded the Seattle Coffee Company and the software company Obongo, now owned by AOL Time Warner.

2002 Oriel Jasper Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$20. Nowadays it seems that any wine coming from the Sonoma Coast appellation is good— it is almost a guarantee of quality. The Sonoma Coast is truly the emerging star of California Pinot Noir. I can think of only two other areas which hold a similar potential and those are the Green Valley region of the Russian River Valley and Marin County. Anyway, this wine is about what you expect for \$20. You won’t be taking a bottle to your wine club’s World of Pinot Noir All-Star Tasting, but it does deliver true varietal fruit in an appealing package. Dan Goldfield knows how to craft balanced and structured Pinot Noirs and he excels again with the material provided. A good starter Pinot and one you can serve neo-pinotphiles without apologies and without extending your credit card balance to uncomfortable levels.

