

PinotFile[©]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

The Pinot Noir Summit

The Pinot trail led to San Francisco on Saturday, April 16 for The Pinot Noir Summit . The event was conducted by Affairs of the Vine, a wine-education company formed in 1999 by Barbara Drady. Barbara is a tireless advocate for wine and has been recognized by *Wine Business Monthly* as one of the leading women in the wine industry.

2004 Pinot Noir Shootout— The Final Showdown

Consumers, wine industry professionals and media were invited to blind taste the top 31 Pinot Noirs as selected by the Affairs of the Vine tasting panel. The diverse panel of 23 wine professionals (wine writers, wine educators, grape growers, winemakers, restaurant and retail trade) judged 234 Pinot Noirs submitted from all over the world and selected the top 31. The wines were judged blind using a 100 point scale and the top 31 all scored over 90.

The attendees were able to pit their palates against the expert panel by tasting the 31 finalists and voting for their top three. The results were tallied and compared with the final findings of the panel.

Judging Panel Choice (Tie):

2002 Perbacco Cellars Dionysis Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir
2002 Gary Farrell Rochioli-Allen Vineyards RRV Pinot Noir

Attendees Choices:

First: **2001 Wild Horse Cheval Sauvage SMV Pinot Noir**
Second: **2001 Ft Ross Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
Third: **2003 La Crema Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**

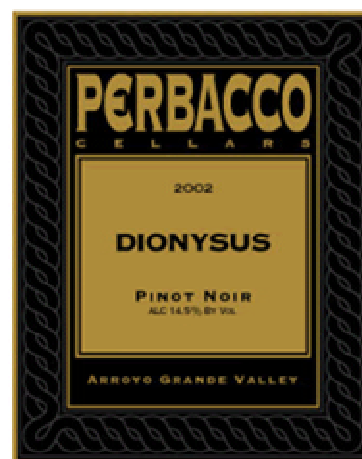
Of these five Pinots, I liked the La Crema the best and the Wild Horse was actually one of my lowest scoring wines— go figure!

I enjoyed most of the wines offered for judging. It is a tribute to modern viticulture and winemaking that such outstanding wines are offered from diverse parts of California (only one wine in the final 31 was from outside California— 2003 Spy Valley Marlborough Pinot Noir). Following are some comments on the wines that I found particularly enjoyable including a couple of new (to me) Pinot Noir producers to watch.

P - N o - N o - R

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2002 David Bruce Estate Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir This was my top scoring wine. This beautiful Pinot is balanced and complex with a multitude of interesting fruit and spice flavors. It is plush like the back seat of a Bentley. The wine is available only at the winery, about 400 cases, \$55. The estate Pinot Noir vineyard is 16 acres and this wine is the third vintage from replanted vines and their best estate bottling to date. David Bruce is the only living California "Pinot Pioneer" and a delight to engage in Pinot talk. A dermatologist by training, he started his winemaking career in Oregon making wine from concord grapes. His early interest in and training in Pinot Noir came from the legendary Martin Ray. David Bruce Winery was bonded in 1964 and he made his first commercial Pinot Noir in 1966. His early trials with Pinot Noir were marked by hits and misses, with *Brettanomyces* causing problems in a number of wines. Years ago, wine writer Matt Kramer was less than enthusiastic about Bruce's Pinot Noirs, but Bruce persisted. His combination of passion and scientific curiosity led to pioneering efforts with Pinot Noir. He was one of the first California winemakers to use whole-berry fermentation in making red wines and one of the first to advocate foot crushing, extensive skin contact, and small-barrel French oak fermentation. Currently, David Bruce is still active in his vineyard and winery, and organizing his memoirs for inclusion in a book about his extraordinary career. In addition to the mountain estate vineyard, the winery sources grapes from over thirty growers in Northern and Central California representing ten different appellations. His appellation Pinot Noirs are consistently fine. A lighter style of Pinot Noir, David & Goliath, is sourced from several Central Coast vineyards, aged in American and Hungarian oak, and offers nice bright cherry flavors. This daily-drinker is value priced and the 2002 vintage is currently sold-out nationally. The website is davidbrucewinery.com.

2001 Villa Mt Eden Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir This winery is better-known for their consistently excellent Chardonnays. Winemaker is Mike McGrath. The website indicates there are also Carneros and Monterey County grapes in this wine. A very delicate style with plenty of finesse. Very lovely and elegant. Plenty of earth, oak, and mushroom to attract your interest. Website is villamteden.com.

2002 Hagafen Cellars Napa Pinot Noir Ernie Weir, who is the winemaker and grower here, started his career at Domaine Chandon while attending UC Davis. His first Hagafan vintage was 1979. He went on to become Chandon's vineyard and nursery manager, while expanding Hagafan's production to 3,000 cases by 1990. In 1997, he left Chandon to build the Hagafan Cellars winery and tasting room on the Silverado Trail. Total vineyard acres are now 21 and production has increased to 8,000 cases, with an additional 1,000 cases of sparkling wine produced every four years. His wines have been sold only to restaurants, mailing list customers, and visitors to the winery. Winemaking is kosher here and the Pinot Noir is flash pasteurized for three minutes. Grapes for this wine are from two vineyards in southern Napa Valley (Carneros). This wine is very distinctive and easily distinguished from the other wines in the tasting. There are unusual (for Pinot) flavors of cotton candy, gingerbread and chocolate, but also traditional notes of strawberry, cherry, and raspberry jam. Interesting aromatics. I like it because it is different and interesting but it won't appeal to many purists. 1,300 cases, \$24. Website is hagafen.com.

2002 Row Eleven Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 1,084 cases, \$29. This is a new super-premium winery founded by winemaker Richard de los Reyes who has had a long, successful career in the wine industry. Known by his colleagues as 'Ricardo D', he has made over 45,000,000 gallons of wine and personally shared ideas with, and helped over 1,000 winemakers and wineries. He was instrumental years ago in bringing Beringer to the Central Coast where they now farm significant holdings. He actually dropped out of the wine business for awhile because he was such a perfectionist and felt frustrated that he couldn't make "the perfect wine". With time the allure of wine brought him back and utilizing his knowledge of the best vineyard locations in California and Oregon, and his friendships with the owners of those vineyards, he created Row Eleven Wine Company a few years ago. The name comes from searching for the best rows from the best blocks from the best vineyards and it started with Row 11. Row Eleven is a unique Multi-Alternating Proprietor or MAP which utilizes several winery facilities, each specializing in a particular variety, versus having a central facility to process grapes. The finest vineyards are then linked to these specialized wineries. He crushes only the best rows, makes sure the seeds are brown before picking, uses whole berries and removes the stems after crushing. He keeps the juice cold all the time and ferments 10 degrees colder than most other winemakers. His style is fruit-flavored with his Pinot Noir featuring dark cherry and spice. The Santa Maria Valley bottling

is a very good example of the modern California style. The grapes are from Bien Nacido Vineyard (primarily Pommard clone). This is a cherry bomb with alluring spice and cola notes. The finish is long and pure. Highly recommended. Row 11 has also released a **2002 Bien Nacido Quartier 116 Pinot Noir** from block Q of the famed vineyard, 250 cases, and a **2002 San Luis Obispo/Mendocino Pinot Noir** from Pommard and Dijon clones (\$24, not tasted). The limited Quartier 116 bottling is also excellent and is one to cellar. It was among the final 31 wines tasted (Row Eleven was one of the few wineries with two wines in the final 31) and was served at the winemaker's banquet the same evening. This is definitely a winery to watch. Look for the tagline "Taste cherries, earth, and fire, Taste Row Eleven" on the website at roweleven.com.



2003 La Crema Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$22) This winery was featured recently in the *PinotFile* where the 2003 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir was highly recommended as a daily-drinker value wine. The winery is located in the Russian River Valley, but since it is not open to the public, it is not well known to many consumers. There have been a string of excellent winemakers here and the wines have been consistently good through the years. The current winemaker (since 2001) is Melissa Stackhouse. La Crema releases four appellation Pinot Noirs— Anderson Valley, Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast, and Carneros, and a reserve labeled Nine Barrels. The Anderson Valley bottling in this tasting exhibited wonderful floral aromatics, embracing cherry and strawberry flavors, all rapped up in an elegant package. Unfortunately this wine is sold out at the winery. The website is lacrema.com.

2001 Ft Ross Vineyards Reserve Pinot Noir This wine I have previously reviewed in the Family Winemaker's Issue. As at that tasting, I found this wine to be stellar and worth seeking out. 415-701-9200.

2003 Halleck Vineyard Three Sons Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (164 cases, \$38) Halleck Vineyard is a one acre site located above the Russian River Valley watershed and flanked on the west by the slopes to the Pacific Ocean. Ross Halleck founded the Halleck Design Group in 1980 and focused the agency in both the high tech and wine industries. Ross and his wife Jennifer moved to Sonoma County in 1991 to develop a Pinot Noir vineyard in the Sonoma Coast. The intent of the vineyard project was to combine the family's passion for Pinot Noir with a source for a college fund for the three boys of the Halleck family. What firmly launched the Halleck Vineyard was winning the 2003 Pinot Noir Summit with their Tandem 2001 Halleck Vineyard Pinot Noir (85 cases). Remarkably, this was the vineyard's first vintage. Ross Halleck then launched Halleck Vineyard with Greg Lafollette as winemaker. The **2002 Halleck Vineyard Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (84 cases, \$58) was very favorably reviewed by Robert Parker Jr. in the February, 2005 issue of the *Wine Advocate* and the wine quickly sold out. The 2002 Estate Pinot Noir was not entered in this competition because of the high demand. Instead the 2003 Three Sons Cuvee was entered and I found it to be one of my favorites. It tends to be in the modern California style but is not a syrah-wannabe. The interesting nose is a bit rustic and gamey, the typical pinot fruits are plentiful, and the finish is dry and satisfying. Website is halleckvineyard.com.



There were several other Pinot Noirs in the tasting I found to be very good and worth seeking out: **2002 Pedroncelli Frank Johnson Vineyard Pinot Noir**, **2002 Perbacco Cellars Dionysis Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir**, **2003 Bouchaine Carneros Pinot Noir**, **2003 Gary Farrell Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**, and the **2003 Roessler Cellars Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**

The judging was followed by a walk-around tasting of the 31 entered wines hosted by the winemakers and/or winery principals. For a full listing of the wines entered in the Pinot Noir Summit and the scores awarded, go to the website: affairsofthevine.com. The event also included Pinot Noir seminars and my favorite, "Aromatic Elements of Pinot Noir" is summarized on the following page.

Aromatic Elements of Pinot Noir

The sensory evaluation and enjoyment of wine is a skill that takes practice and experience. Hearing is the first sense to come into play as we listen to the wine splashing into the stem and begin to anticipate the pleasure to follow. Our sight then allows us to determine the clarity, the color, and the depth of color of the wine. Sticking our nose into the bowl allows the aromas or “nose” to be judged. Most of the sensory evaluation of wine involves the nose. There are at least 10,000 odors we can smell. The aromas of wine are grouped into families such as fruits, flowers, spices, and more. The complexity of a wine is determined by the aromas present. When you find several different fruit aromas in a wine, this is not a complex wine. But when several families of aromas are present, you are blessed with a truly complex wine. The more families you find, the more complex the wine. Complexity is a sign of quality in a wine. When tasting a wine, you have the attack (the first sensation you experience as the wine enters your mouth), then the finish, and finally the aftertaste, if any. Taste buds can detect only bitter, sour, salty and sweet, and a fifth taste, umami. The palate can also detect astringency (the dry, puckering sensation caused by tannins in the grape skins and seeds), viscosity (the “mouthfeel”), heat and cold. Everything else we perceive comes from our sense of smell. The population is genetically divided into three groups: non-tasters, tasters (the majority), and super-tasters. There are significantly more women super-tasters than men— a reality most macho enophiles don’t want to admit.

The French have recently carried the allure of aromas in enjoying wine to the extreme. The Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne, or BIVB, has recently come up with the *Balades Olfactives*, or Aroma Strolls. Via the internet, participants can experience the olfactory sensations of Burgundy. They must purchase an aroma diffuser and then by clicking on “Vineyards in the winter”, for example, their desktop becomes bathed in the smell of damp earth.

In learning the aromatic elements of Pinot Noir, there are several dictums. First, everybody gets different aromatics out of wine. Consumers are often frustrated when they read a description of wine aromas for a particular wine by a wine critic. They purchase the wine but cannot smell the same elements. This is normal! Second, the typical Pinot Noir aromas are cherry (Bing, black, ripe, etc.), strawberry, raspberry, cranberry, cassis, rose petal, cinnamon, and *Coca-Cola*. Third, oak is a prominent olfactory characteristic in Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir takes to new oak better than most other varietals. It can “soak it up” without being over-oaked. Light oak adds vanilla, coconut and sweet wood to the aromas, and heavy oak adds oak, smoke, and tar. Fourth, bad aromas may be present and indicate a defect in the wine. Some wine enthusiasts actually seek out these “off” smells and welcome them in small amounts. When you are offered a small pour of wine in a restaurant, you need to smell the wine to detect any of these aroma defects. The spoilage yeast, *Brettanomyces*, may add a band-aid, wet horse blanket, mousy, sweaty, or leathery aroma to wine. Sensitivity to “Brett” in wine varies widely among tasters. Corked wines contaminated by the compound TCA have aromas of wet cardboard. Wines that are high in volatile acidity (acetic acid, ethyl acetate) may smell like nail polish remover or vinegar. Finally, sulfur compounds used improperly in the cellar can produce obnoxious rotten egg and skunk odors.

The aromatic elements in Pinot Noir must be lodged into your smell memory. A good way to develop this memory is to set up several small paper cups containing the major aromatic elements of Pinot Noir (we did this in a seminar at the Pinot Noir Shootout and is a very good learning technique). Then several Pinot Noirs can be tasted and the perceived aromas checked against the elements in the cups. Suggested elements include cherry, black cherry, dried cherry, raspberry, raspberry jam, strawberry, strawberry jam, pomegranate, cranberry, blackberry, blackberry jam, currant, cassis, roasted tomato, rhubarb, orange peel, grapefruit, mint, vanilla, cinnamon, peppermint, clove, licorice, wet leaves, cedar, oak chips, tea, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, rose petals, violets, and Coca-Cola. Professional aroma kits containing aromas in small liquid vials can be purchased. The *Wine Spectator* is offering a Sensory Evaluation seminar online beginning May 1. The course is intended to improve your tasting skills using tasting exercises. Cost is \$49. Visit winespectatorschool.com

Crushpad: Make Your Own “Cult” Pinot Noir

You have always dreamed of making your own Pinot Noir, right? You want to sort the grapes, get your hands and clothes thoroughly stained with fresh grape juice, supervise the fermentation, make a few winemaking decisions, bottle the wine with your own custom label, and finally, proudly serve it to friends and family. Crushpad now allows the pinotophile (or any enophile) to realize his dreams. Crushpad is a 9,000 square foot winemaking facility in the Mission District of San Francisco which contains all of the technology and equipment to produce premium wine. Founder Michael Brill is able to source fruit from top vineyards that have a proven history of producing excellent wines. Consulting winemakers, including Brian Loring, are on hand to help with the process. The participant can become as involved as he wants in the process. He can simply describe the wine he wants, and one-two years later pick up the custom-labeled wine, or he can participate by hands-on involvement in choosing the vineyards, sorting, crushing, aging, blending, and bottling. Regardless of how much work you do, you can taste and smell the wine as it develops and brag to everyone about how great it is. Meanwhile Crushpad is getting labels approved, paying all of the taxes, and basically doing all the mundane work required. All of the custom wines are handled individually, fermented in their own separate containers, and aged in their own barrels.

Pinot Noir vineyard sources include Russian River Valley (a hillside vineyard adjacent to Gary Farrell’s Starr Ridge Vineyard), Sonoma Coast (Freestone area), Anderson Valley (a premier organic vineyard outside Philo), Chalona, Mendocino, and Santa Maria Valley (Bien Nacido Vineyard).

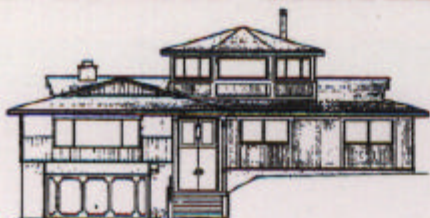
Costs are based on the number of barrels. One barrel typically yields about 25 cases or 300 bottles with pricing running around \$15-25 per bottle (\$3,900 to \$5,900 per barrel). For more information, visit crushpadwine.com or phone 415-864-4232.

Does A Label Make The Wine?

According to wine writer Natalie MacLean (*Nat Decants*, an online wine newsletter), 80% of wine is bought based solely on the label. She notes, “In the old days, merchants simply wrote on the label what was in the bottle. Today, packaging experts design labels that have “pick-up pull” like boxes of cereal and detergent.” Sean Thackrey is a quirky and talented winemaker who holds disdain for the usual gibberish on wine labels. The back of one of his wine labels reads, “This red wine goes well with the sorts of things red wines go well with.” Most of the information on a label is written in such a small font, that the wine buyer simply looks at the winery name and varietal. When I was doing cataract surgery, I could always judge a good result when the patient could read the alcohol content on the label.

On a recent trip I met a university professor and talented home winemaker, Dale Bartley,. From his home (“estate”) in San Rafael, California, he crafts Pinot Noirs that have won numerous medals at home winemaking competitions. He has quite a sense of humor and I enjoyed his home-made wine labels which are reproduced in the next page. Look for Dale in a black hat at the Siduri Open House on May 21.

THE ESTATE BARTLEY



2002

Pinot Noir Excalibur

Thirteen low yield vineyards from Santa Barbara to Oregon's Willamette Valley were fermented together for 28 days in this search for the stuff from which legends grow. The result was bottled nude under full moon by left-handed Druid nymphs fire-dancing with giant frogs through peacock feathers, gold webs and azure fog in San Rafael, California.

THE ESTATE BARTLEY

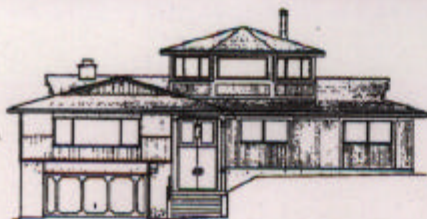
Crowning the ridge separating San Rafael and Terra Linda lies a small estate surrounded by eucalyptus and evergreen trees. The estate's master building commands 360-degree views of the San Francisco Bay Area. This is THE ESTATE BARTLEY.

After years searching the nation for an ideal winery site, the family found it in this estate's garage. In this mix of concrete, no soil and high elevation, exist the ideal conditions for garbage can winemaking.

Above all, it is this family's deep devotion to drinking that has brought you this wine.

Heed this winemaker's philosophy:
"I drink, therefore I was."

THE ESTATE BARTLEY



2002

Devil's Gulch

Pinot Noir

Gold Medals: 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001

Fermented and bottled nude under full moon by left-handed Druid nymphs fire-dancing with giant frogs through peacock feathers, gold webs and azure fog in San Rafael, California.

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