

PinotFile[®]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Curly Flat of Macedon Ranges

Phillip Moraghan developed his love for Burgundy while studying in Switzerland in the 1980's. He soon dreamed of having his own winery in a cool climate suited to Pinot Noir and with his wife, Jeni, searched for 18 months for the vineyard land that is now Curly Flat. Located in Lancefield in the Macedon Ranges near Melbourne, this region is one of the coolest viticultural areas of Australia. This high-altitude vineyard is ideally situated for wine growing, with well-drained volcanic soils and moderate rainfall. The first vines were planted at Curly Flat in 1991 and progressive additions have brought the total current vineyard to 33 acres, principally Pinot Noir, with some Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. The first commercial wines, the 1998 Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, were released in Australia in 2001 to high accolades. A new gravity-based winery was built for the 2002 vintage (pictured below) and at the same time Phillip took over the winemaking role with consulting assistance from a notable Aussie Pinot-Noir specialist.



Phillip admits to being “reasonably inexperienced and relatively untrained” but he has worked with Pinot Noir for 15 years both in Australia and abroad. Most recently, he worked the 2002 vintage with Luisa Ponzi of Ponzi Vineyards in Oregon's Willamette Valley. He feels the tagline for Pinot Noir, “the heartbreak grape”, is a misnomer: “I think it is simply a matter of Pinot Noir being a very selective escort. She only likes particular environments and when planted on the better sites, in the right regions, the only heartbreak comes when viticulturists and winemakers are ill-mannered in how they look after her in the vineyard and the winery. This is no ordinary variety— she is of the highest class and must be treated accordingly.”

**Pinot Noir is
the Sommelier's
Wine of Choice**

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Australia's Biggest Bottle of Pinot Noir: This year Curly Flat donated a 15 liter bottle of Sommelier's Selection 2003 Pinot Noir to be auctioned at the Deafblind Association's 7th Annual Wines of the Decade Charity Auction in Melbourne. The blend was decided upon by three of Australia's top sommeliers, Stuart Halliday, Tony Harper and Nick Stock.



The focus of Curly Flat is on the vineyard. As is often said in the wine business, you can't make great wine from bad grapes. Five clones of Pinot Noir are planted in the vineyard with the goal of creating complexity for the resulting wine. The choice of trellis systems is quite unique. The trellis is horizontally divided and two types are used: the main type is the Lyre trellis (shaped like a bird's tail) - the other is Geneva Double Curtain. Divided trellis systems are more costly to construct and manage and are thus rarely used. The resulting vine canopy has two curtains of foliage allowing maximum exposure to sunshine and facilitating better ripening.

I had the pleasant opportunity recently to taste through the 2000, 2001, and 2002 vintages of Curly Flat Pinot Noir. As I usually do, I tasted them over a few hours both with and without food. The most notable feature of these wines was their interesting character— the lovely way they blossomed in the glass, the subtle differences they offered over time, and the unique features each vintage expressed.

2000 Curly Flat Pinot Noir The color was a bit more orange than usual for Pinot Noir. An alluring nose of cherry and vanilla led to delicate flavors of cherry and cranberry. The texture was soft and the spicy finish featured a nice dose of clove. A thoroughly enjoyable wine of great finesse.

2001 Curly Flat Pinot Noir A captivating nose of fresh strawberries, cinnamon, and Oriental spices. The aromas were just plain awesome. The wine had more body than the 2000 and plenty of stuffing but was reluctant to offer all of its charms. The fruit tastes were muted and the wine seems to be in a 'dumb' phase right now.

2002 Curly Flat Pinot Noir The pick of the litter and the most complete and harmonious wine. This wine sparkled like a dark ruby in the glass. A complex nose offered sweet dark fruits, earth and mineral. A good dose of oak was evident. The mouth feel was velvety and the body was a good fit. The finish displayed plenty of freshness. With food, *poisson* and *pommes frites*, this wine rocked! An eye-opening precursor of great Pinot Noirs to come in the future from this vineyard.



Curly Flat is definitely a winery on the march. The Chardonnays produced here are also very fine. James Haldiday gave the winery a Five Star Rating (Outstanding winery regularly producing exemplary wines) and at the 2004 Macedon Ranges Wine Exhibition, Curly Flat won trophies for Best Pinot Noir, Best Chardonnay, and Best Wine of Show (2002 Chardonnay). I believe that the Curly Flat wines are not currently distributed in the US, but are available in the UK and direct from the winery. The winery is often for tasting on the first Sunday of each month and the original 1890's homestead on the property has been renovated to accommodate special tastings and events. Contact Phillip Moraghan at 03 5429 1956. More information is available on the excellent website: curlyflat.com.



Although the Mornington Peninsula and Tasmania regions of Australia are often more highly touted, the Macedon Ranges shows great promise. Another outstanding Pinot Noir from this area is Bindi, which is made by a young winemaker named Michael Dhillion. It is also a world-class Pinot Noir distributed by Johann Innerhoffer who also distributes Sassacaia, Petrus and Cheval Blanc in Italy.

Reduction in Wine

There are a number of 'winespeak' terms that are freely thrown around by winemakers and the wine press that are generally poorly understood by the consumer. This article is the first of a number of short features I plan to include in the *PinotFile* to clarify misinformation and misunderstandings. I have asked wine grower and winemaker, Gideon Bienstock, of Clos Saron Winery in the Sierra Nevada Foothills, to clarify reduction in wine.

The Chemistry of Reduction & Oxidation Chemically speaking, reduction is the opposite of oxidation: when a substance "borrows" electrons from another, it becomes "reduced", and when it passes these electrons on, it becomes "oxidized". It takes two to tango- whenever one substance is oxidized, another becomes reduced. Another way of describing the same process is as an exchange of oxygen atoms. When a molecule "gains" an oxygen atom, it becomes oxidized and when it "looses" an oxygen atom, it becomes reduced. This means that at any particular point in time, two or more participating substances in such chemical dances are in specific equilibrium between reductive and oxidative states. This balance may change, or even swing back and forth with changes in the environment.

Reduction & Oxidation in Wine Wine is a complex chemical solution, containing hundreds of substances. These substances constantly interact with each other as a function of changes in the environment (temperature, light, sound, and vibration), the action of its micro-residents (yeasts, bacteria), and the presence of oxygen or lack thereof. Since many of the processes in the life of a wine occur in the absence or near absence of air (fermentation, bottle aging), wine components undergo many reductive processes and phases. The introduction of oxygen in a given situation may affect or reverse a reductive state and sometimes it may not. When slightly oxidized, a wine appears more "open", fruity, and appealing to our senses than when it is slightly reduced. Strongly oxidized or reduced wines are both unpleasant to our senses. The younger the wine, the more oxygen it can "handle" chemically without showing the negative effects of oxidation (aldehydes, ethy lacetate, etc.). That means that the wine has more "reductive strength". Oxygen is used for its phenolic polymerization and color stabilization. In its absence, various components may go into a reductive state, in which they smell and/or taste less appealing to our senses. Common ones are hydrogen sulfide (smells like rotten eggs) and mercaptans (the source of a range of unsavory aromas like burnt match, garlic, stewed or rotten vegetables, rotten meat, farts, and sewage). Sometimes all it takes is a simple decanting or a few minutes in the glass to dissipate these odors. At times they can be more persistent. Most of the time they vanish with longer bottle aging. Rarely the wine can be permanently flawed and can no longer recover from the reductive state.

Reduction & Winemaking Some grape varieties are more prone to oxidation and reduction fluctuations than others (Pinot Noir and Syrah are two prime examples). Darker colors, higher extract and phenolic content, higher sulfur levels, extended lees contact, larger size cooperage (aging the wine in vats or puncheons rather than small barrels), and avoidance of racking will increase the reduction in wine. One school of winemaking advocates keeping young wines in a slightly reduced state to "protect" their more delicate aromas from oxidation. The theory is that although such wines may appear less appealing early on, in time they will recover a fuller array of pure essence aromas and live longer than wines made in other ways. When first introduced to this idea, I for one thought it was simply rubbish and meant to be a way for a mediocre winemaker to explain his failed wine. Time has taught me otherwise and in my own winemaking at Clos Saron, I have adopted a number of such reductive methods for the same purpose. A lot about wine is about patience, about respecting the time all processes take. It requires twelve years for a vine to reach its prime age and it may take five, ten, or even fifty more years for a wine to reach its prime. As a lover of old wines, the notion of making "Slow Wines" which hold a special reward for the patient drinker appeals to me as well. Let the hurried drink CocaCola. Fine wine takes its time to unfold. For all wine lovers, learning to understand the phenomenon of reduction in wine can help in the recognition and appreciation of wines made in this way, rather than overlook or misunderstand them.

Asuncion Ridge Vineyard and Inn

Philip Krumal is a Pinot Noir lover whom I met at the recent World of Pinot Noir. He has created a very unique vineyard and lodging high on a ridge overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Atascadero, California. 300 acres and a residence were purchased here a few years ago. The residence was converted into a beautiful Inn consisting of three elegant suites with king-size beds, fine linens, large private baths with soaking tubs, and patios. Philip has traveled to Mexico to obtain very interesting Spanish-themed furniture which is both large in scale and tasteful. A gourmet breakfast cooked by Philip is served in the large kitchen/dining room or on one of the patios overlooking both ocean and forest views.



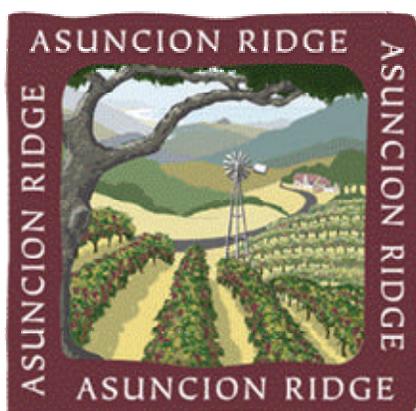
A 7 acre Pinot Noir vineyard has been planted adjacent to the Inn on a well-drained hillside at 2,200 feet. Now in its third leaf, several clones of Pinot Noir are included: Pommard 4 and 5, HMR, 777, 115, 2a, 667, and 23. Farming practices are primarily organic and a cover crop is used between rows (see picture below— the cover crop is ready to be mowed). The cover crop is intended to reduce vigor, add deficient nutrients naturally back into the soil, and promote beneficial insects and microorganisms. Philip has learned his grape growing and winemaking skills from Marc Goldberg who has been a pioneer Pinot Noir producer in the Paso Robles appellation.

The inclusion of the old HMR clone into the Asuncion Ridge Vineyard is of interest. Recently Hoffman Mountain Ranch Vineyard (HMR) has undergone a revival. It is one of the oldest Pinot Noir vineyards in California, planted in either 1963 or 1965 (the exact date is controversial) by Dr. Stanley Hoffman. The vines are 16 miles from the Pacific Ocean in San Luis Obispo at an elevation of 1,700 feet in the Santa Lucia Mountains. A number of prize-winning Pinot Noirs were made there in the late 1970s by consulting winemaker Andre Tchelistcheff. In 1994, a 400-acre portion of the vineyard was bought by Adelaida Cellars, including 32 acres of Pinot Noir. The current winemaker is Terry Culton who honed his vintner skills at Wild Horse, Edmeades, and Calera. He has modernized the wine program at Adelaida Cellars and is pulling the potential out of the 40 year old vines. The 2002 Adelaida HMR Pinot Noir has won some praise: an intense wine with a subtle underlying raspberry element and a lingering minerality finish that keeps going. (The information on HMR Pinot Noir was excerpted from an article by Larry Walker in *Wines & Vines*, April 2005).



When you are traveling in the Paso Robles area, Asuncion Ridge is only a twenty minute drive from the town of Atascadero, but it is another world of beauty and tranquility. Call for reservations at 805-461-0675. The website is asuncionridge.com.

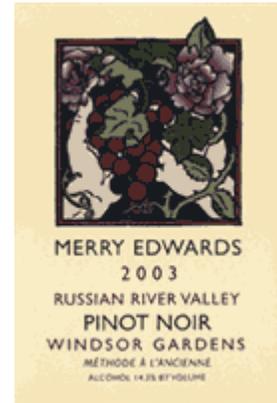
The Paso Robles area has never been thought of as Pinot country, but there are selected meso-climates where it can do very well. Besides Adelaida Cellars and Windward, there are a few other small Pinot Noir producers in the area. Hug Cellars (next to Garretson off Hwy 46) makes some Pinot Noir on occasion and one of my readers writes that Augie's (the owner and winemaker) **2002 San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir** and **2002 Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** are both very good. In the near future, look for Asuncion Ridge Pinot Noir.



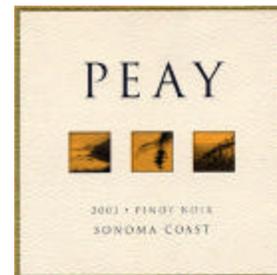
New Pinot Noir Releases

Here are some recommended new releases in no particular order. These Pinot Noirs are suggested because of the reliability of the producer and/or are newer vintages of wines I tasted last year and savored.

Merry Edwards 2003 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$29) Low crop load in 2003 led to more expression of the cool Sonoma Coast terroir. **2003 Olivet Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$54) Merry Edwards calls this wine the *Ode to the Cherry*. Fresh, ripe cherry, Bing cherry, wild cherry. Olivet Lane is a venerable old vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Its hallmark is intense cherry flavors. **2003 Windsor Gardens Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$57) The swansong for this heritage vineyard that was planted to the Martini clone thirty years ago. Its dry-farmed vines are to be ripped out for residential development. This is the fifth and last vintage from this vineyard for Merry Edwards who calls this wine “a Pinot drinker’s Pinot”. **2003 30 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$90) A special Pinot Noir release, limited to 333 cases, celebrating Merry Edwards’ three decades in winemaking. The wine is from three vineyards— Olivet Lane, Quail Hill, and Windsor Gardens.. Merry Edwards Wines, 1-888-388-9050, merryedwards.com.



Peay Vineyards This 48 acre cool climate hilltop vineyard is located in the far northwestern corner of the true Sonoma Coast just four miles from the Pacific Ocean at Sea Ranch.. 66% of the vineyard is planted to Pinot Noir, now in its fifth vintage. Besides producing their own Pinot Noir under the Peay Vineyard label, grapes are sold to three other wineries including Williams Selyem. Andy Peay owns the property, Nick Peay is the winegrower and his wife, Vanessa Wong, is the winemaker. The **2003 Sonoma Coast Estate Pinot Noir** (\$45) is the winery’s second release. Production is limited to 335 cases. The wine is a blend of Swan, Mt Eden, Pommard, 115, and 667 selections/clones. Last year’s 2002 vintage is just now hitting its stride. A serious and well-run winery that is pushing stardom. The very informative websites and newsletters are indicative of the commitment here. The wine is primarily sold via a mailing list but some retail availability (Wine House and Liquid Party-works in Los Angeles) Website is peayvineyards.com.



Hirsch Estate This famed Pinot Noir vineyard is sourced by the likes of Kistler, Siduri, Flowers, and Littorai among others. David Hirsch built a winery on his property and decided to make his own Pinot Noir in 2002 (see PinotFile June 7, 2004). **2003 Hirsch Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (\$50) is the second vintage of this wine from blocks of the vineyard that previously went to Williams Selyem (Pommard and Mt Eden clones). Consulting winemaker is Vanessa Wong. The wine is sold primarily by mailing list. 707-847-3800.

Siduri Wines 2003 Olivet Grange Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$45) All of the clones from this organically farmed vineyard were kept separate— the 777, 667, 115, and 114 clones were fermented and barreled as separate wines. The final wine is a blend of the best barrels. According to Adam Lee, this is one of the stars from the Russian River appellation in this vintage. **2004 Muirfield Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** (\$39) From a vintage in Oregon that was very California in character. This 13-year-old vineyard did well in 2003 since its deep roots allowed the vines to draw water from the ground despite the dry conditions. Siduri also has a few bottles of the **2003 Arbre Vert Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$39), **2003 Amber Rose Pinot Noir** (\$65), and **2003 Cargasacchi Vineyard Pinot Noir** (\$52). 707-578-3882. The winery Open House is Saturday May 21, from 10 AM to 4 PM at 980 Airway Court, Suite C, Santa Rosa. Several vineyard owners will be present pouring wines from their vineyards and cooperage representatives will be discussing the nuances of oak barrels. There promises to be plenty of Pinot Noir to drink as well.

Favia Annie Favia is the vineyard manager at David Abreu and has worked at Newlan, Pahlmeyer, and Harlan. She has partnered with Andy Erickson who has spent time at Harlan, Staglin, Spottswoode and Hartwell. The **2003 La Josefina Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$65) is from Butcher Farms on Westside Road ("the Rodeo Drive of Pinot Noir") close to Rochioli, Allen, and Williams Selyem. Limited retail. (Liquid Partyworks in Chatsworth, CA., and wadeswines.com).

Melville The 2003 Estate Small Lot Collection is available to mailing list customers and at the winery's tasting room. The wines are an attempt to produce site-specific expressions of Pinot Noir from the Melville Santa Rita Hills estate. The execution in the cellar is almost identical for each wine. This is a unique opportunity to try four different Pinot Noirs from the same estate crafted in nearly identical fashion to bring out the particular site and clonal selection of the site. **2003 Clone 115 Indigene Pinot Noir** (98 cases, \$40). The name is derived from the indigenous, or native yeast, used in fermentation (the only wine produced at Melville where wild yeast are used exclusively). It is 100% Dijon clone 115. 15.3% alc. **2003 Terraces Pinot Noir** (242 cases, \$46). A unique site on the estate which is exposed to the elements, primarily wind. Five clones, Swan, Mt Eden, 115, 667, and 777. 14.5% alc. **2003 Carrie's Pinot Noir** (245 cases, \$46). Carrie's block sits on a mesa overlooking the Terraces. The wine consists of clones 114 and 115. Yields are only 1 lb/plant. 14.7% alc. **2003 High Density Pinot Noir** (49 cases, \$40). High density (4 foot by 3 foot spacing) one-third acre has 11 of the 14 clones planted on the estate. 14.3% alc. 805-735-7030 (mention mailing list offer).



Keller Estate This new producer planted 200 acres of vineyards on the Sonoma Coast in 1989 and sold the grapes to W.H. Smith and Landmark Vineyards for their excellent Pinot Noirs. When he decided to make his own wine, he hired Ted Lemon (of Littorai fame) as the consulting enologist and Michael McNeill (formerly of Savannah-Chanelle and Chalone) as winemaker. The initial releases have been highly praised in the wine press. **2003 La Cruz Pinot Noir** is the fourth vintage for this wine. The 2002 was a personality-filled Pinot Noir with richness, yet elegance. The label features the Keller's family key-themed crest (Keller is German for "cellar keeper") Widely available at retail wine stores (ie Root;s Cellar in Healdsburg) and on the website at kellerestate.com.

Lachini Vineyards This is a small boutique winery located in Dayton, Oregon. In the *Wine Press Northwest* magazine, two Lachini Pinot noirs earned top rating in a judging of 107 Northwest Pinot Noirs. **2003 "S" Pinot Noir** (175 cases, \$37) was rated as outstanding. "Opens with inviting aromas of sweet spices, dark cherries, and a whisper of oak. The flavors reveal rich, round, ripe berries backed with bright acidity and velvety tannins. Layer after layer of goodness." The 2002 vintage was highly-rated by me also. 503-864-4553, website is lachinivineyards.com. Limited retail (try avalonwine.com,).



Domaine Drouhin The first release from 2002, the **2002 Cuvee Louise Pinot Noir** will be available for purchase at the winery or online at domainedrouhin.com on May 29, 2005. There are only 200 cases, price is \$85 (may purchase up to three bottles, packed in a custom 3-bottle wood case). Members of the mailing list can purchase the wine at a Pre-Memorial Day celebration at the winery on a pre-release basis. RSVP to arron@domainedrouhin.com.

Alcina Cellars This is a very small producer I heard about through the grapevine. **2002 Pisoni Pinot Noir** (50 cases) and **2003 Sangiacomo Pinot Noir** (118 cases). The Pisoni has apparently a very unique flavor profile for a wine from this vineyard. Winemaker Greg Piatigorski, who learned a few tricks from Brian Loring, aged the wine 26 months in barrel with only one racking. Join the mailing list at the website: alcinacellars.com.



Drew See next issue of the *PinotFile* for a review of the four 2003 releases from

If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir.


PrinceofPinot.com

The well-known wine scientist, Pascal Chatonnet has recently claimed that the incidence of *Brettanomyces* in red wines is much higher than previously thought. Chatonnet said that for *Brett* characteristics to become noticeable in a wine, the concentration must be above 600 micrograms per liter. Five years ago, in a survey he conducted, he noted that 28% of red wines were above this threshold. But now, he estimates the figure to be close to 60-70%. In concentrations under 500 micrograms per liter, *Brett* can add to the complexity, but above that it is very noticeable as a defect in the wine (although people vary in their ability to detect *Brett*). It is very difficult, if not impossible, to make wine that is completely free of *Brett*.

Letter to the Prince

When I sent out the last issue (35) of the *PinotFile*, I included a quote as I always do. These quotes are chosen for their interest and to incite commentary and do not necessarily reflect my opinion. The last quote was from James Laube of the *Wine Spectator*: “The biggest hurdle to a broader acceptance for Pinot is that it is, for the most part, an acquired taste. It’s not a populist wine that has enjoyed consumer allure. One reason is that the measure of greatness for Pinot is red Burgundy, and buying Burgundy can be trickier than walking blindfolded through a minefield”. I received a response from Gideon Bienstock, the owner and winemaker of Clos Saron and I wanted to reproduce his remarks here as I agree completely with his reply.

“I for one do not at all agree with our learned friend’s proclamation about buying Burgundy. I think he simply exposes his ignorance by repeating this worn-out piece of conventional “wisdom”, without giving it any real thought. And saying that Pinot Noir is an acquired taste is simply ridiculous. In my observation serving and selling wines to thousands of people over 25 years, it is one of the easiest wines to like! This kind of statement could have been correctly made a few decades ago, but since, the general quality level in Burgundy has both improved and become more homogenous. Especially when buying imported Burgundies over here— most of which are selected by ratings and reviews anyway— the risks are relatively minimal. Getting GREAT Burgundies is the real challenge and they are as rare as truly great wines anywhere. The relative esoteric status of Burgundies have more to do with the relative physical remoteness of that region and its appearance on the export or world markets relatively recently, with the fragmentation of the vineyards, and very complex appellation system, with the less commercial and political nature of its ownership and industry, etc.. Arguably, Burgundies are also less consistent than, say, Bordeaux, but in my view this is more in the sense of having more individuality and character, than being less even in quality. There you go, I have spoken.”

The **2003 Clos Saron Home Vineyard Pinot Noir** (26 cases, \$45) will be released June 1. The **2003 Clos Saron Pinot Too** (53 cases, \$30) may or may not be released on that date due to its current reductive state. Both are nearly sold-out so proceed quickly if interested. The website is clossaron.com.