

PinotFile[®]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Mondovino or “Doggyvino”?

Mondovino is a film that is purported to be about the globalization of wine. And although many significant figures in the world wine industry are featured, the dogs in the movie come off as the real stars. As director Jonathan Nossiter, himself, says, “You can actually understand a lot about wine people by their dogs. In a sense, there’s a virtual wine tasting in the film via what you’re feeling is about each person’s dogs.” One of the highlights of the movie is a visit to Robert Parker Jr.’s home where the camera catches his bulldog farting while the wine critic is being interviewed. The lengthy film ends with a male dog showing serious amorous interest in a female dog. She does not find him a worthy suitor and leaves him alone to ponder his fate. This scenario is an appropriate metaphor for the relationship between the wine aristocracy and the small wine producer. If the small guy is not deemed an appropriate partner or won’t sell to the conglomerates, he is left out.

Over 500 hours of footage were condensed into the 135 minute version shown in theaters. A three hour version was shown at the Cannes Film Festival last year where it became a hit with the French. The Americans have treated the film with indifference and when I went to see it, only two other people were in the theater. A 10 part, 10 hour scholarly version will be released on DVD 12/05, primarily aimed at serious wine enthusiasts.

The film was shot on three continents, in five languages, over a three year period. It is not a great film photographically as the hand-held camera jerks around at times and the scenic views are not particularly clear. And although the story is choppy and jumps around a lot, this is an impressive effort to document the politics of wine.

The messages are clear. Globalization of wine has created sameness in wine. Ornellaia, Opus One and Mouton Rothschild, international in scope, but owned or influenced by the Mondavi dynasty, all use the same production methods, and are aiming for the same result. Wine consultants like Michael Rolland have tremendous power in creating wines that have the modern style and sameness that appeals to wine critics. Rolland’s stamp



If You Drink
No Noir, You
Pinot Noir

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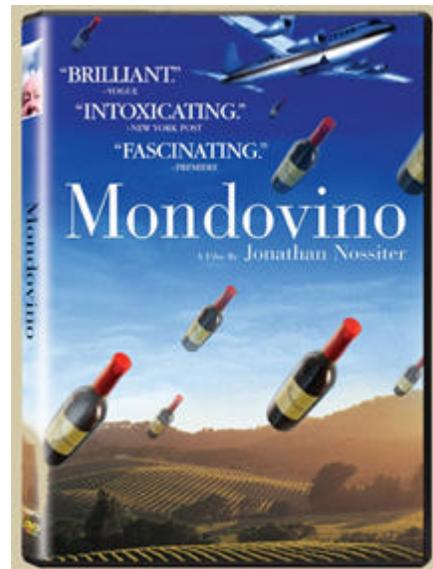
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on a wine is almost a guarantee of a high score and a boost in income to the winery producer. Rolland, who flies all over the world to consult with dozens of wineries, is one of the stars of the movie. He comes off as a jolly character with a hearty laugh who is chauffeured around the French countryside in a Mercedes Benz while puffing on cigarillos. He spends a few minutes at each winery, tasting, spitting, and then pontificating to the owners and winemakers of each estate who follow his advice religiously. His calling card seems to read “microoxygenation”. The power of wine critics like Robert Parker Jr. is approached in the film and Parker makes no apologies for his palate and the international popularity of “Parker-friendly wines”. He really comes off as a likeable fellow sitting at his office desk, surrounded by wine memorabilia and awards, his two dogs at his feet.

Loveable and irascible Burgundian winemaker Hubert de Montille (that’s him on the theater movie poster) is another star in the film. With his Charlie Chaplin duck-like walk and stereotypical French winemaker appearance, he carries the show. He laments that consumerism drives the wine industry and the consumer has no interest in wines of place or wines that age. Americans want instant pleasure and the thrust of European wine-making is currently to make lush, fruity wines that taste good on release. He blames anyone and everyone for the current French wine woes. The interviews with his son and daughter, both winemakers, and their interaction with the patron Hubert, is a highlight of the film. A compatriot Frenchman, Aime Guibert, founder and winemaker of Daumas Gassic, echoes many of de Montille’s concerns about the trend toward wines that fail to reveal terroir.

There are numerous other colorful characters in the movie including Robert, Michael, and Tim Mondavi, Michael Broadbent, Neal Rosenthal, the Frescobaldi and Antinori families (and their maids), and the Staglins. One thing is obvious in the film, the notable wine families, wine critics, and wine consultants live very well. Their rivalries, alliances, and conspiracies could make several captivating movies.

This movie represents a dedicated work by sommelier Jonathan Nossiter, who was the director, producer, writer, cinematographer, crew member, editor, and even an actor in the film. Mondovino raises a lot of questions and really answers none. The subject matter is very controversial so it is admirable that he was able to get some of the principals in the movie to speak on camera about delicate issues. Interestingly enough, the movie has only been reviewed in the mainstream news and magazine press—no wine publication has critically approached it. The film may be just too unsavory for many wine publications whose very existence and popularity is fueled by the proponents of wine globalization.



Kuleto Winery Now Open to Public

Kuleto Estate Family Vineyards is tucked into a mountain overlooking Lake Hennessey east of Rutherford. The property is now open to the public by appointment and promises to be a unique experience for those who trek to the 800-acre property in Napa Valley. The winery is six miles up mountain roads from the Silverado Trail and then two miles on a private road. Kuleto has been making some very good wines from his property since 1997. He hired winemaker Dave Lattin from Acacia in 2000 and his 18,000 square foot gravity flow winery was utilized initially for the 2002 vintage. Much of his current 10,000 case production is Cabernet, but Pinot Noir does surprisingly well in a cool pocket on the property. Pinot Noir grows in the lower sites on the ranch, at around 1,000 feet, where the days are warm, but the nighttime temperatures are very cool. This magic little microclimate provides Kuleto the opportunity for what he calls his passionate planting. This is the only Pinot Noir grown on the east side of the Napa Valley. For a tour and tasting by appointment, call 963-9750 (tours are twice a day, last 1-2 hours, cost \$25 per person).

Mark Estrin of Red Car Wine Co Passes Away

Mark Estrin, the popular co-founder of Red Car Wine Co., died recently at the age of 57 from complications of a brain tumor. Mark was an ex-screenwriter, turned wine salesman, turned winery owner who formed a partnership with film producer Carroll Kemp in 2000 to create the Red Car Wine Co.. The winery's labels were unique in that they told a story. Driving down a gravel road near Santa Ynez several years ago, Mark and Carroll stopped to look at a small vineyard on the other side of a wire fence. The scene was peaceful and beautiful and their inspiration suddenly came to them. "We tell stories. That's what we've always done. That's what we're doing now, only with wine. Winemaking is storytelling." The weather, soil, and vine are woven together to tell the story of a particular vintage and a particular place. The labels are meant to tell a continuing story connected to a romantic, idealized past set in the 1940s-era. A "novel on a wine label." The labels are meant to entertain and when you drink one of the Red Car wines, you are participating in that story.



The winery began in 2000 with Syrah, but the owners were most passionate about Pinot Noir. As Marc said, "when done right, it has a unique character— something at once fruity, earthy, sexy, ethereal, and well, just plain unforgettable. The initial Red Car Wine Co. Pinot Noir was labeled **Amour Fou** ("Crazy Love"), a French expression for a mad, obsessive love. In the text of the mailer for the initial 2002 release and on the back of the label, a married man named Jack recalls how his mad passion for another woman has led him to a very dark place. The 2003 **Amour Fou** was released this Spring. It is a blend of 70% Keefer Ranch and 30% George Martinelli (275 cases, \$45)

In 2004, viticulturalist Dr. Daniel Roberts was brought on board to direct the purchase and planting of 128 acres along the Sonoma Coast. In that same year, winemaker Chris King from Lewis Cellars and consulting winemaker Sashi Moorman from Ojai were hired. Mark and Carroll had quit their jobs and opened an office in Culver City, California. The future certainly looked bright until this unfortunate event.

I was especially saddened by Mark's death as I was one of the first to become intrigued by the clever concept behind the Red Car Wine Co., wrote about the project and wines early on in the *PinotFile*, and even had Mark as a subscriber to the *PinotFile*. Although I did not know him personally, I had a good sense about him. His partner, Carroll Kemp, said about him to the *L.A. Times* this week, "Anybody who met Mark Estrin walked away with the indelible feeling they had met someone who had great personal grace and dignity." His legacy will always be "prose and pinot."



Degree-Days

Thanks to Matt Kramer's excellent book, *New California Wine*, I finally understand the concept of degree-days, the regional climatic classification system for vineyards. Degree-days refer to heat and are totaled from the time a vine starts growing (bud-break) to the harvest of ripe grapes. A vine only grows above 50 °F and every degree above that is one degree-day. A UC Davis viticulturist, A.J. Winkler, and his student, Maynard Amerine used degree-days and the total accumulation of heat to classify growing regions from Region I, the coolest, to Region V, the hottest. Their work was published in 1944. With time it has become clear that Pinot Noir thrives in Region I and II climates. Region I has 2,500 degree-days or less, Region II 2,500-3,000 degree-days. According to John Haeger in *North American Pinot Noir*, North America's Pinot growing regions fall between 2,400 and 2,600 degree-days, compared with Beaune in Burgundy at about 2,400 degree-days. Of course, these are only averages and there is considerable variation among regions, and even within single vineyards.

Ambullneo Vineyards: Its About The Blend

Ambullneo Vineyards is the young winery of dog-fancier Greg Linn. Ambullneo stands for AM-American, BULL-Bull Breeds, and NEO-from Neopolitan Mastiff. The Ambullneo breed of dog is a cross between bulldogs and European mastiffs. Linn's Central Coast Pinot Noir, the Bulldog Reserve, was first released in 2002. Linn believes in blending fruit from different vineyards, the idea being that each contributes a different character to the blend and the blend can be adjusted each year independent of the vagaries of each vintage. Linn, makes the wines along with winemaker Scott Ames in a shared facility with Tantara at Au Bon Climat. The 2002 and 2003 Bulldog Reserve Pinot Noirs each won first place at the prestigious Vintner's Club event in San Francisco held each May in competition with several other Central Coast Pinot Noirs.



I reviewed the **2003 Ambullneo Vineyards Bulldog Reserve Pinot Noir** last year (Volume 3, Issue 33, April 12, 2004) and revisited the wine recently. The blend is Solomon Hills Vineyard (80%), Laetitia Vineyard (10%) and Dierberg Vineyard (10%). The wine is of impressive size, full-bodied, dense, and dark purple. It is packed with dark fruits that tip-toe over a velvety underpinning. 14.7% alcohol is harmoniously balanced with the luscious fruit. To me an attractive Pinot Noir has to have the alluring Pinot aromas and the silky mouth feel so unique to this varietal, and I feel this wine has both. The style is big for me and definitely Parker-friendly, but it is a very fine example of Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir. As it says in the winery's promotional material, "They ain't your Grandma's pinot." The heavy bottle, the packaging, the embossed wood containers all exude confidence and class and the price (\$75) reflects this.

The Ambullneo wines have found their way onto many top wine lists including Gary Danko, Masa's, Fifth Floor, and Tartare in San Francisco, the French laundry and La Toque in Napa Valley, and Picasso, Aureole, Sea Blue, and Craft in Las Vegas. Some of the 2003 vintage is still available from retailers including Hi Time Cellars in Costa Mesa, Wally's in Los Angeles, Wine Cask in Santa Barbara, and K&L Wines in Northern California.

Ambullneo Vineyards is now offering a 2004 Pre-Sale offering through their mailing list. The wines include the **2004 Big Paw Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** (a blend of Block W Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills Vineyards, stainless steel fermentation, zero new oak and 50% malo, 360 cases, \$59), the **2004 Bulldog Reserve Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** (a blend of grapes from Solomon Hills, Laetitia, and Rancho Ontiveros Vineyards, 600 cases, \$79), **2004 Mastiff Cuvee Carneros Pinot Noir** (A blend from blocks in the Hyde and Hudson Vineyards, 350 cases, \$79), and **2004 Canis Major California Pinot Noir** (a melding of Carneros and Santa Maria Valley fruit named after Canis Major or Dogstar, 150 cases, \$95).

To join the mailing list or to order wine: 714-692-1098.



Drew Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir

The Santa Rita Hills is the newest of the four appellations of Santa Barbara County. It is distinguished by its microclimate and specific soil types from the Santa Maria Valley and Santa Ynez Valley appellations (a fourth, Central Coast appellation, is shared with six other counties). Located between Buellton on Highway 101 and Lompox, the Santa Rita Hills is defined by the east-west orientation of the Purisma Hills and Santa Rita Hills which form the northern and southern borders respectively. Most all other California mountain ranges run north-south. The resultant gap allows cool ocean breezes to flow inland keeping the temperatures low in comparison with neighboring Santa Ynez Valley. The growing season is relatively long, stretching from February to October in most years. Santa Rita Hills is one of the smallest AVA's in California with over 700 acres planted, primarily to Pinot Noir. Because most of the plantings are recent, all of the sexy new Dijon clones and new rootstocks are present. The area can be divided into two sections by the type of calcerous soil that predominates. In the northern part, the soils are a mixture of sand and clay, while in the southern part, the soils are clay and decomposed rock known as Botella. Both soil types are ideal for growing Pinot Noir. The first significant planting of Pinot Noir in the Santa Rita Hills was in 1971 when Richard Sanford started the Sanford and Benedict vineyard in what was, until then, an area of unknown potential. Babcock Winery was also a pioneer in this region. With that as background, one of the newest wineries based on the edge of the Santa Rita Hills, Drew, and the winery's lineup of Pinot Noirs are reviewed here.

Drew (formerly Drew Family Cellars) was formed in 2000 by Jason and Molly Drew. Jason has a background in agricultural ecology and viticulture as well as enology and most recently was the Associate Winemaker at Babcock Vineyards. A family-owned, small boutique winery, the wines are sold directly to a mailing list, specialty wine shops and restaurants. Pinot Noir production is about 750 cases. The philosophy of the winery is to feature site-select wines.



2003 Drew Gatekeepers Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (13.7% alc., 420 cases, \$27). This is the only blend in the Pinot Noir lineup and comes from the Rio Vista Vineyard on the far eastern end of the Santa Rita Hills (40%) and Ashley's Vineyard (60%) owned by the Fess Parker family at the westernmost limits of the appellation. Rio Vista contributes more structure and weight and Ashley's more floral notes and delicacy.

2003 Drew Rio Vista Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (13.8% alc., 120 cases, \$30). The inaugural single-vineyard bottling for this vineyard from Drew. The harvest was 100% clone 667.

2003 Drew Arita Hills Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (13.8% alc., 100 cases, \$40). This inaugural release is from a newer 10-acre Pinot Noir vineyard on the south-east side of the Santa Rita Hills. Clone is 667.

2003 Julia' Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir (14.5% alc., 80 cases, \$40). The vines are a Pommard clone, from Block B-4 in the vineyard which is owned by Cambria Winery and planted in 1991.

After tasting through the lineup, I found the wines well-made and very representative of Pinot Noirs from the Santa Rita Hills appellation. They were deeply-colored, rich, and powerfully masculine wines with plentiful dark berry flavors. The aromas were full of crushed red and black fruits. All of them had plenty of fine-grain tannins. If I had to pick a favorite it would be the Gatekeepers which seems more multidimensional and complex and more approachable at this point in time. I also revisited the **2002 Gatekeepers Pinot Noir** and found it very similar to the 2003 but with softer tannins and a more silky mouth feel bestowed by added aging. The blending of vineyards seems to make sense here because the single-vineyard wines were not distinctive enough to tell apart. Even the Santa Maria Valley bottling, which may be a bit earthier and wilder, seemed to have its uniqueness hidden in the fruit and style of winemaking. I am sure Jason Drew can easily tell the wines apart and wax on about the perceptible differences, but honestly I could not. Although Sea Smoke is the darling of the Santa Rita Hills at the moment, the Drew wines match up very favorably.

The Texan, Californian, and Oregonian

A Texan, a Californian, and an Oregonian are out riding horses. The Texan pulls out an expensive bottle of whiskey, takes a long draught, then another and suddenly throws it into the air, pulls out his gun and shoots the bottle in midair. The California looks at him and says, “What are you doing? That was a perfectly good bottle of whiskey!” The Texan says, “In Texas, there is plenty of whiskey and the bottles are cheap.” A while later, not wanting to be outdone, the Californian pulls out a bottle of Cabernet, takes a few sips, throws the Cabernet bottle into the air, pulls out his gun and shoots it in midair. The Oregonian can’t believe his eyes, “What the heck did you do that for? That was a perfectly good bottle of Cabernet!” The Californian says, “In California, we have plenty of good Cabernet and bottles are cheap.” So, awhile later, the Oregonian pulls out a bottle of Pinot Noir. He pulls the cork, takes a sip, and then chugs the whole bottle. He then puts the bottle in his saddlebag, pulls out his gun, and shoots the Californian. The Texan, shocked, says, “Why the hell did you do that?!” The Oregonian replies, “In Oregon we have plenty of Californians and the bottles are worth a nickel.

Phylloxera Ecological Mystery

The war on grape phylloxera (*Daktulosphaira vitavoliae*) dates back to 1860 when this root-sucking aphid made its way to the vineyards of France from America. What followed was a true-life ecological detective story. In Christy Campbell’s latest book, *The Botanist and the Vintner, How Wine was Saved for the World*, (Algonquin Books at Chapel Hill, 352 pp., \$25), he weaves the decades-long saga of overcoming crackpot cures, recognizing the aphid as the culprit, understanding its life cycle, and finally realizing the solution of grafting healthy French cuttings onto resistant American rootstock. It wasn’t until 1893 that the French were able to concede that their Old World vines were genetically uniform and incapable of adapting to the insect. Practically all of the French vines were grafted-over beginning in 1890 and this saved the French wine industry. Although the mystery was solved, outbreaks have continued to the present and combating this pest continues to be a challenge to viticulture researchers.

