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The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

PINK is hip again

I have been feeling a little nostalgic recently and reminiscing about the days when my wine of choice was rosé! It was very hip in the 1970s to drink Portuguese rosés, specifically Mateus and Lancers. They have lost some of their popularity over the years, but now there are a plethora of rosés to take their place. Rosé wine can be made from any red grape varietal including Pinot Noir. It is essentially grape juice that has been allowed to remain in contact with the skin of red grapes only long enough to extract the desired degree of pinkness (*saignée* or bleeding method), and then fermented, in most cases, to dryness. Serious rosés are nothing like the ubiquitous white zinfandel which has some residual sweetness and is often made by blending red and white wines of questionable quality together. The beauty of rosés is that they shine when mildly chilled and go perfectly with summer fare of barbecued ribs (or r & r) or with the nibbles served at a summer bunko party. They are a wine to drink without pondering the nose, body, aftertaste etc. Kind of a wino's beer. If its romance you are seeking, turn to rosé champagne and leave the rosé wine for the picnic the day after.

Walk into any wine store today and you will find 30 or more choices, many from Mediterranean France. 50% of all French rosés come from Provence, with about 75% of all Provencal wines being pink. Other French regions producing rosé include Burgundy and the Loire. Matt Kramer has touted the rosés from Spain made from the grenache grape, but finding them in stateside stores is difficult. Many California and Oregon producers have recognized the market for pink and produce stellar examples. Many premium Pinot Noir producers release a vin gris of Pinot Noir. Whatever the source, good quality rosé rarely costs more than \$20.

One guarantee of quality in choosing an imported rosé is the name of the importer on the bottle. Names to look for include: Neal Rosenthal, Robert Karcher, Kermit Lynch, and North Berkeley Imports. Domaine Tempier Bandol Rosé is considered by many to be the finest in France. For domestic rosés, look to the reputation of the producer. Actually I tasted through a number of imported and domestic rosés recently, and although some were notably better than others, none were particularly bad. I think in general, although I hate to admit it, the rosés based on grenache, syrah and sangiovese, alone or in combination with more substantial red grapes, tend to have more spice and interest than those vinified from Pinot Noir alone. Anyway you drink it, rosé is summer lovin'.

**Pinot Noir:
Hopelessly
Devoted to You**

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For the serious Rosé fan only: *Rosé: A Guide to the World's Most Versatile Wine*. This book is written by Jeff Morgan, a wine writer and wine-maker for Solo Rosa, a Napa winery dedicated solely to pink wine. He has started RAP, Rosé Avengers and Producers, an organization dedicated to encouraging the drinking of great pink wine.

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All of the following wines were sampled slightly chilled in appropriate stemware. They do not have to be treated that formally as they will drink well at cellar temp or warmer and in most any wine glass.

2004 Sofia (Francis Coppola) 12.0% alc., \$12. Packaged nicely in a shapely bottle. A Pinot Noir rosé. Light red in color, soft and thin in taste. Pleasant enough, but very light-weight.

2004 Soter Pinot Noir Rosé Firefly 13.8% alc., \$20. From the Yamhill-Carlton district of Oregon. A gorgeous terracotta color. The nose has fresh citrus and apricot. Tastes a lot like an orange gum drop with a hint of sweetness. Very good and perfect with bbq smoke.

2004 Clos Saron Tickled Pink 13% alc., 500 ml bottle, \$20. 40% Syrah, 45% Grenache, 15% Mourvedre. The label says "The unexpected silly side of a sunbaked slope." I find it a very respectable example of a French-style rosé.

2003 Belle Soeurs Rose of Pinot Noir Ana Vineyard 14.1% alc., \$20. A fairly deep red color offers a raspberry thrust initially, but settles in for mediocrity over time.

2004 Pax Rose of Syrah 14.8% alc., \$18. Sonoma grapes. A substantial wine with an attractive spicy kick at the end. A wine with flavor, exotic spices and some interest. Not for wimpy drinkers.

Other California rosés I can recommend based on past tastings or the reputation of the producer:

2004 Etude Rosé of Pinot Noir \$20 I have had several past vintages of this wine and it is as good an example of California Pinot Vin Gris as there is. Highly recommended as are all of Tony Soter's wines. Easy call. Tony's Oregon Rosé Sparkling Wine is also a winner.

2004 Solo Rosa Rosé \$15 From a producer in California that specializes in rosé - a rarity. An equal blend of Sangiovese, Syrah and Merlot from Napa and Sonoma counties. The wine is barrel fermented dry, and goes through malolactic fermentation (like Domaine Tempier) prior to blending and bottling after 5 months in 2-5-year-old French oak barrels. Bone dry and good.

2004 Copain Saisons des vins Rosé Le Printemps \$10 A blend of 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Syrah. Wine-maker Wells Guthrie has a solid background in Rhone varietals and has created this lovely wine for summer dining. Fresh strawberry and cherry aromas and flavors.

2004 Fiddlehead Pinkie \$12, **2004 Lynmar Russian River Valley Vin Gris Rosé of Pinot Noir** \$20, **2004 The Ojai Vineyard Rosé** \$14, **2004 Saintsbury Vin Gris of Pinot Noir** \$15, **2004 Joseph Filippi SEC Cucamonga Valley Grenache Rosé** \$10 (Orange County Fair Gold Medal), and **2004 Bonny Doon Big House Pink Ca'del Solo**, \$10 (Best Rosé, San Francisco International Wine Competition 2005. Made from Carignano, Zinfandel and Charbono. Randall Gramh likens it to Jolly Rancher watermelon candies.).

The imports below are hard to beat :

2004 Grande Cassagne Costieres de Nimo Rosé 13.5% alc., \$10. A Robert Karcher selection from the west edge of the Rhone Valley. Old vines. A spicy and dry drink with a solid core of strawberry. What could be better than strawberries in summer? I like it.

2004 Clos du Caillou Cetes Du Rhone 14.5% alc., \$18. A North Berkeley Imports Barrel Selection. Gorgeous rose color. Substantial body with good integration of alcohol. One of my favs. The French just seem to do it better!

2004 Chateau Peyrassol Cotes De Provence 12.5% alc., \$20. A Rosenthal Wine Merchant selection. Very pale watermelon pink color in a statuesque bottle. A lovely nose of fresh strawberries leads to herbs, apricot and strawberry flavors well-balanced to the end. This deceiving wine packs a lot more punch than the color would indicate. This will work with most any outdoor faire and the alcohol level is just right.

2004 Lawson's Dry Hills Pinot Rosé 13.5% alc., \$13, screwcap. From the Marlborough region of New Zealand. This will work in a pinch but I don't think the Kiwis quite have the rosé thing figured out yet.!

Robert Stemmler Revisited

Many, many years ago, on one of my first travels to Sonoma wine country, I stopped and tasted at Robert Stemmler. In the early 1980s, Robert Stemmler was considered among the best producers of Pinot Noir in California and the winery's first release in 1982 received more awards than any other wine in America for a first-release Pinot Noir. Through the years the winery has not attracted my interest but recently a friend gave me a bottle of 1983 Robert Stemmler Sonoma County Pinot Noir to try and I purchased a 2001 Robert Stemmler Carneros Pinot Noir to see where the winery is at currently..

Robert Stemmler was a German who trained at Bad Kreuznach Wine College in Germany in 1952, After immigrating to the United States, he became a member of the Charles Krug winemaking team in 1961. In 1970, he was appointed winemaker for Simi Winery and subsequently consulted with a number of prominent wineries including Raymond, St. Clement, and Mill Creek. In 1976 he founded the Robert Stemmler Winery. For years the winery only produced Pinot Noir, but in 1999, consulting winemaker Ken Bernards expanded the portfolio to include a number of other varietals as well as appellation driven Pinot Noirs from Carneros and the Russian River Valley. The current winemaker is Kenneth Juhasz. The winery owns 120 acres of vineyards and produces 10,000 cases annually. A tasting room is located on the historic Sonoma Square (Enoteca) which is open every day. A newsletter is available from the website. Phone is 1-800-679-7355.

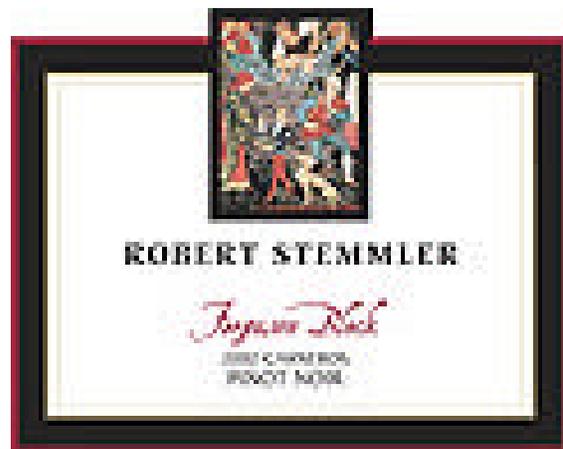
1983 Robert Stemmler Sonoma County Pinot Noir 13.2% alc. The cork was dry and the wine was orange-tinted indicating oxidation. At first there were some pleasant fruit aromas and tastes, but within fifteen minutes several off-tastes of petrol and cleaning solution developed and the wine was undrinkable. A dead soldier.

2001 Robert Stemmler Carneros Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$25, 6,360 cases. This wine just grabs your attention from the start. A vibrant nose of cherries, sweet oak, and earth that is very sexy. The mouth feel is full and loaded with exotic tea and cherry pie flavors. The wine keeps pumping out the fruit over a couple of hours. Something special and one of the top California Pinots I have drunk this year.

There are a number of older vintages of Sonoma County Pinot Noir available on the website - robertstemmlerwinery.com.

The latest releases are the **2002 Robert Stemmler Ferguson Block Carneros Pinot Noir** (\$40), the **2002 Robert Stemmler Estate Grown Pinot Noir** (\$32), and the **2002 Nugent Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$32). The Carneros bottling comes from the Donum Estate, 250 acres of prime vineyard specializing in Pinot Noir. The grapes are the old Martini selection clone. Vine age is 28 years.

Since its beginning, the Robert Stemmler Winery has adorned the label of its wines with the "Le Vendange", a Flemish tapestry created in the 1300's.



Domaine Armand Rousseau - a Burgundy Classic

You cannot talk of Gevrey-Chambertin without mentioning Domaine Armand Rousseau for it is considered one of the greatest and most consistent domaines of not only Gevrey, but of the Cote d'Or. Their wines combine the depth and power of Gevrey-Chambertin with unusual class, style and silkiness.

The Domaine was started at the beginning of the century by Armand Rousseau who had inherited several plots of vineyards in Gevrey Chambertin. His vineyard holdings were increased through his wedding in 1909. Over the ensuing years, he purchased more and more plots including Charmes-Chambertin in 1919, Clos de la Roche in 1920, Chambertin in 1921, Mazis-Chambertin in 1937, Mazoyeres-Chambertin in 1940, more plots of Chambertin in 1943 and 1956, Clos Saint Jacques in 1954 and Chambertin Clos de Beze. Armand died untimely in an automobile crash in 1959, but his son, Charles Rousseau, after studying law and oenology at Dijon University, took over, continued the reputation of the Domaine by updating the winery with modern technology and acquiring additional vineyard properties (he doubled the winery's vineyard holdings). The Domaine today has 14 hectares of vineyard with more than half being Grand Cru. Most of the vines are very old, at least 40 years or older.



Armand Rousseau was part of early the movement over fifty years ago in Burgundy towards estate bottling. A small number of vigneron in Burgundy began bottling part or all of their own wines in the 1920s. Domaine de la Romanee-Conti was bottling part of its Romanee-Conti Vineyard by 1929 and shortly thereafter, the Domaine's other vineyards were being estate-bottled. Henri Gouges of Nuits-Saint-Georges and Armand Rousseau of Gevrey-Chambertin started bottling some of their wines instead of selling them to negociants in the 1920s. Other early estate bottlers were Marquis Jacques de'Angerville of Volnay, Andre Ramonet of Chassagne-Montrachet, and Joseph Matrot of Meursault.

Clive Coates, M.W., says "What exhilarates me about Rousseau wines is their concentration, and their class." Remington Norman in his landmark book on Burgundy, *The Great Domaines of Burgundy*, says that "This is not a Domaine to be described in terms of techniques, but better thought of as an estate where the wines are made by care and by feeling for their soul."

On the most recent Bastille Day, I had the opportunity to taste through the 2002 lineup of Rousseau Burgundies. Curiously, all of the wines had exactly 13% alcohol.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Gevrey Chambertin (\$70). Very light in color, very delicate and shy in bouquet. Acidic on attack, rosé-like in body. Austere. No defects but not exciting especially at this price.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Charmes-Chambertin (\$115). A very pretty rose color. A nice nose of violets and frambose, in fact, a great nose. Chewy flavors of cherry, citrus, and spice with better integration of acid than the Villages bottling above. Melt in your mouth tannins.. Not a Grand Cru finish but overall a lovely drink. Amazingly light in color and body, but delivers the goods. An appealing purchase.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Clos de la Roche (\$125) A deep red-rose color. Captivating earthy and raspberry notes enter the nose like a Harley.. The attack is unbelievable with a perfect integration of acid and fruit highlighted by strawberries. The finish won't let go. Great potential for aging. This is a wine that can be enjoyed now but will blossom even further over time. This was my favorite of the lineup at this drinking moment in time. Bring it on.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Ruchottes Chambertin (Clos des Ruchottes, Monopole). (\$150). A great, fruity nose. Velvety, but closed and a little awkward. Plenty of acid that is well-integrated. Not an appealing wine now that is all nose with a taste that makes you beg for more. Only time will tell.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques (\$200). Classified as a Premier Cru, but really Grand Cru quality. The wine is a light rose in color and the nose is a touch alcoholic. The wine gives so much fullness and tang that you have to shake your head and wonder how something this good can come from mere grapes. A lot of dark fruits highlighted with violets. The finish is smooth as silk and won't quit. A perfectly balanced and wonderful example of Burgundy that will be a star down the road. A must buy if you can open your wallet.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Chambertin (\$375). Lovely aromatics of earthy plum and cherries. The nose offers more fullness than any other wine in the lineup. A spicy black cherry pie. Obviously powerful but still reluctant. A finish that makes you want to stand up and salute - a long, sweet ending that only a Grand Cru can offer. Obviously one of the greatest wines on this planet, if only you could afford it.

2002 Domaine Armand Rousseau Pere & Fils Chambertin Clos de Beze (\$375). A big boy with a lot of fruit but the most reserved and shy wine of the lineup. Closed up like a storm shelter. Still astringent and acidic. Not an appealing wine at this stage.

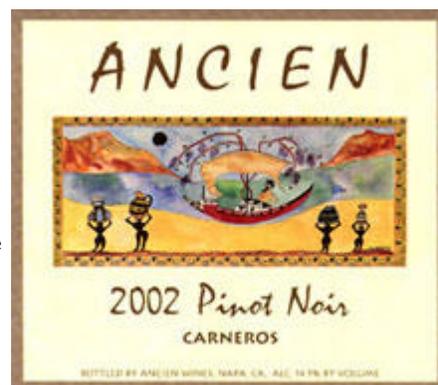
Overall impressions: If you are used to drinking California Pinot Noirs, you would choke at the prices after viewing the offerings. Burgundy needs time and only the most experienced taster can tell you what these beauties will be like ten years down the road. In their youth, even the best Burgundies can taste like sh...t. It is a great experience to taste these wines, but unfortunately, there are very few of us who will ever be rich enough to taste them at their peak. Nevertheless, they are the standard against which all other Pinot Noirs are judged. These are food wines and to sample them in a lineup with bread and water as I did here is one thing, but I would prefer to drink them with food where I know that their charms would be more accessible.



Pinot Noir Standbys

There are certain producers of Pinot Noir that you can count on year in and year out. The following two producers are ones I have found to be dependable, reasonable in price, and consistently good. While a lot of pinotphiles are looking for the next great cult Pinot, these are two Pinots that are comfortable as an old sneaker and always deliver the goods in a luscious and reliable fashion. They may be old school but they are damn good.

2002 Ancien Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$26. Ken Bernards has been crafting excellent examples of California Pinot Noir for many years. His style is very elegant and understated. The wine comes from the Toyon Vineyard planted in 1998 with Dijon 115 and Swan clones. This wine has a dark robe and offers a great nose of toasty cherry fruit compote. Plenty of red and black ripe fruits, but still lovely and balanced by cashmere tannins. My notes say wonderful and that pretty much sums it up. Website is ancienwines.com, phone is 707-255-3908.



2003 Chalone Estate Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$20, 7,000 cases.. For a mass-produced Pinot Noir this one delivers the goods. From replantings of the Chalone estate vineyard which began in 1997 with newer clones. Medium to full-bodied. The nose is dominated by toasty vanilla oak and the attack is full of dark fruits. A really nice mouthful leads to a refreshing acid finish. A masculine style that is still more Pinot than Noir. One drink of this Pinot and its true romance. Website is chalonevineyard.com, available in wide retail distribution.