

Life consists not
in holding good
Pinot, but in
drinking the
Pinot you hold

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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TYOP (Trust Your Own Palate)

Many wine enthusiasts are grateful for the guidance that wine critics have offered in turning them on to the pleasures of great wine. The word guidance is the key here for everyone's taste is their own. Wine importer Neal Rosenthal has said that "Your taste is your patrimony. You play with it as you play with your hands. You mark your own territory."

Robert Parker, Jr. is the world's most influential wine critic. He has a unique tasting ability unlike most of his followers. In *The Emperor of Wine* by Elin McCoy, she notes that Robert Sr., an enthusiastic hunter who kept blue tick hounds, told Robert Jr. on a hunting trip that you could tell the breed of a dog by its smell. Robert Jr., a boy at the time, thought he was joking. Only much later in life did he realize that his father had an acute sense of smell and that he had inherited this same ability.

John Woodward III, M.D, a neurologist writing a review of "The Emperor of Wine" on Amazon.com, believes Robert Parker Jr.'s tasting abilities are "incredible." He thinks that he has a unique tasting genius perhaps related to a tasting synesthesia (synesthesia in its various forms is associated with special genius, for example, writer Vladimir Nabokov and composer Scriabin). If that is the case, it is probable that most of us cannot taste the nuances of wine espoused by Robert Parker, Jr..

Parker has been criticized for his preference for vibrant young wines and wines that have rich, concentrated flavors and a soft velvety sensation in the mouth. The result is that high scores are awarded to wines that fit this profile. Hugh Johnson in his new book, *A Life Uncorked*, calls Parker a "dictator of taste and absolutist." Johnson told Andrew Jefford in an article to be published in *Decanter* in October that "Parker's life work has been predicated on the fact that there is 'better' and 'worse' in wine whereas Johnson's own life's work is chiefly concerned with the word 'different'. I agree with Johnson that diversity is part of the appeal of wine.

W.R. Tish, writing in his online wine newsletter, *wineflash*, made a brilliant analogy. "He (Robert Parker, Jr.) is to wine what Dr. Benjamin Spock was to baby care: an iconoclastic, pied-piper-ish guru. Just as advice-hungry parents of the mid-20th century followed Spock's prescriptions for raising infants, wine drinkers of the 1980s and 1990s latched on to Robert Parker, Jr. and his ratings. Eventually, parents learned that not everything Spock said was right and ultimately realized that every parent has to find this/her way... I trust that, someday, the same evolution will come to wine."

"I've always felt a bottle of Pinot Noir should come with a sachet of oak chips to dunk like a teabag into a glass, according to one's taste."

... Michael Broadbent at this year's IPNC

It may be that preferences in wine have nothing to do with taste, per se, but rather an individual's physical build. Steven Spurrier has spoken about his 'body-type theory,' of taste proclivities. Slim ectomorphs like delicate wines while big, burly mesomorphs like Robert Parker, Jr. gravitate toward big, brawny wines that match their physique.

Regardless of your physical stature or genetic gifts, trust your own palate and enjoy wine for its taste, not its score. Remember that the way a wine is judged has nothing to do with the way wine is consumed. My good friend and Master Sommelier, Rene Chazottes, sums it up most perfectly: "The best wine is the wine you have in your glass if it gives you pleasure. It doesn't matter where it came from or what it cost."



Pinot Noir Dominates Wine Lists

A recent *Los Angeles Times* article referred to current cult Cabernets languishing on restaurant wine lists as "Cab's so over." Sommeliers say demand for California Pinot Noir is out of control. Amy Christine, an A.O.C. Restaurant sommelier said, "'Sideways' gave people the license to start talking about wine, to start having fun with wine." Now the rage is eclectic wines and to many diners who have had a steady diet of Cabernet and Merlot, Pinot Noir is as eclectic as any wine out there.

The best selling wines at top Los Angeles restaurants include: 2003 Babcock Santa Ynez Valley Pinot Noir (Sona), 2003 Merry Edwards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (Patina), 2000 Arcadian Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir (A.O.C.), and 2003 Scott Paul "La Paulee" Oregon Pinot Noir (Campanile). In San Francisco, at the Fifth Floor, 50% of the wine list selections are Pinot Noir, mainly Burgundy, at Atelier, a third of the choices are Pinot Noir, at Bacara, 25% are Pinot Noir, and at Restaurant Danko, 20% of the 1600 selections are Pinot Noir.

Converted Cabernet Sauvignon drinkers like Pinot Noir because it is fruit forward and diverse in style and taste. Pinot Noir is collected by people who drink, while Bordeaux is collected by people who collect. The downside for Pinot Noir lovers is that although there is a market for older California and Oregon vintages, they are not available from wineries or on the secondary market. Pinot drinkers drink up. Restaurants would love to have older vintages featured on their wine lists not only because of their potential increased markup, but to enhance dining pleasure. The fact is that very few Pinot Noir producers have libraries. People coming into wine today, and especially those with a love for Pinot Noir, never develop an appreciation for old Pinot.



Wild Hog Vineyard - a Sonoma Coast Original

For 28 years Dan and Marion Schoenfeld have been producing excellent hand-crafted Pinot Noir in near obscurity. Wild Hog Vineyard is a small winery and vineyard located 5 miles from the Pacific Ocean in the hills between Cazadero and Fort Ross on the Sonoma Coast. The farm encompasses 110 acres including a 2000 sq ft winery powered by solar and hydro electricity, a three acre family garden and fruit orchard, and 5 acres of certified organic grape vines (Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Petite Syrah and Syrah). The growing conditions here are ideal for Pinot Noir with hot days, cool nights, and plenty of rainfall. Frugal drip irrigation is employed and the grapes dry-farmed at maturity. The vineyard was planted in the mid-1970s and has been certified organic since 1981 (see photo of vineyard). Cover crops between the row apply nutrients to the soil and provide a home for beneficial insects. All weeding is done by hand. The remoteness of the property means there are many wild hogs and other wildlife. Hand-netting of the vine rows is necessary to deter the birds and fencing is required to keep out the deer, turkeys and hogs.



Daniel Schoenfeld began making wine as a home winemaker in 1977. His is a minimalist in his approach. All wines are unfiltered and racked two to three times during barrel aging. The winery produces 3,000 to 4,000 cases per year depending on the vintage. Those who have tasted his wines remark about the rich, natural, bright fruit flavors and silky, vanilla-laced textures and creamy consistency. The wines are still somewhat of a closely-guarded secret among Pinot Noir lovers primarily due to the very limited production and distribution.

Current Pinot Noir releases:

2003 Wild Hog Vineyard Estate Pinot Noir (\$50) Very limited production. Cherry-berry fruitiness with intense flavors and a big structure.

2003 Wild Hog Vineyard Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$50, 650 cases). The grapes come from this 146 acre site first planted in 1989. The vineyard is an experimental one with literally hundreds of different rootstock and clonal variations. Wild Hog has obtained grapes from this vineyard since 1994. There are 7 or 8 different clones in this Pinot Noir.

To order wines, contact Daniel or Marion Schoenfeld at info@wildhogvineyard.com. The phone number is 707-847-3687. The website is www.wildhogvineyard.com. Limited retail distribution including RootsCellar.com in Healdsburg.



