

**Pinophiliacs  
Smile More**

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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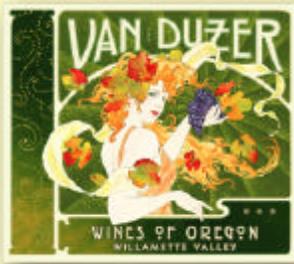
## Three Dousers from Oregon

Van Duzer Vineyards has exploded on the Oregon wine scene in recent years. The change began in 1996 when venture capitalist Carl Thomas and his wife Marilynn purchased the run-down property. Thomas was a managing partner in Parducci Wine Estates in California, and like so many Oregon wineries before them, Van Duzer benefited from an enthusiastic outside investor. Jim Kalacek was hired to upgrade the estate's 65 acres of vineyards and manage the winemaking and winery. New plantings of Pinot Noir were complemented by field grafting of Dijon clones to 15-year old established Pinot Noir vines. By 2001 the efforts began to show in the wines and the 2002 and 2003 releases have put the winery firmly into Oregon's top echelon.

The property is located 60 miles south of Portland, south of Amity, west of Salem, and just east of the Van Duzer Corridor. The Van Duzer Corridor provides a cooling effect for the southern parts of Yamhill County, allowing maritime air to enter the Valley more directly without traveling over the Coastal Range,

This summer ground was broken for a new winery and tasting room on the property. The old winery building will be converted to storage for vineyard operations. Unlike many recently constructed wineries in Oregon, the owners opted not to build a gravity flow facility. Their research indicated that current pump technology is gentler on wine than to drop fruit or wine a distance of 10-20 ft by gravity. A single level winery design was therefore chosen, with the option to use gravity flow in certain situations (ie hand bottling of the block designates) with the use of a forklift to lift the wine above the filling machine. The new winery will be ready for the 2006 harvest and will increase capacity to 20,000 cases when the entire estate vineyard is producing. The adjacent tasting room will provide spectacular views through the Van Duzer Corridor toward the Pacific Coast.

The Pinot Noir program is split into an Estate release and Block Designate wines. The 2003 Van Duzer Estate Pinot Noir (\$25) is a blend from all portions of the estate vineyard and in the 2002 and 2003 vintages, is a luscious and seductive Pinot that is well-priced. September 1, 2003 marked the release of the 2003 block-designate Pinot Noirs (\$35). These wines are produced in limited quantities from selected blocks on the estate that have shown consistently distinctive flavor profiles. I recently had the pleasure of tasting through the three 2003 Van Duzer Block Designate Pinot Noirs.



The Van Duzer label is inspired by Zephyra, the Greek goddess of the gentle West Wind who blows Pacific breezes over the estate's hillside vineyards. The cool microclimate allows for full development of fruit and complexity of the wines.

Some Oregon Pinot Noirs from the hot 2003 vintage can be overripe, over- extracted, too alcoholic and busty. This trio are more representative of the exceptionally balanced Pinot Noirs that have pinoficionados swooning over Oregon. All three are distinctly different Pinot Noirs - like three kids who grow up in the same place but turn out to be unique individuals. Wines are available from [avalonwine.com](http://avalonwine.com) in Oregon. The website is [www.vanduzer.com](http://www.vanduzer.com).

**2003 Van Duzer Vineyards Flagpole Block Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 300 cases. The Flagpole Block was first released as a vineyard-designate wine in 1999. This Block is one-third of an acre of old Wadenswil clone vines, planted in 1982, located near the entrance to the property. This steep vineyard takes its name from the flagpole located at the top of the slope. The nose is a bit shy but has appealing notes of violets and musk. The sweet flavors of sappy dark fruit explode on the palate. Almost saucy. Citrus notes and even stewed prunes add complexity. Everything comes together nicely with a good acid backbone, soft tannins, and an luscious mouth feel. Lip-smacking.

**2003 Van Duzer Vineyards Dijon Blocks Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 300 cases. Originally planted to Chardonnay in 1982, these blocks were grafted to Dijon clones 113, 115, and 777 in 1998 and 1999. An appealing bouquet of red, black and purple fruits enhanced with spice is duplicated in the flavors. The fruit is vibrant with melt in your mouth sweetness. This beauty has a lighter feel than the other wines of the trio. Very well-bred.

**2003 Van Duzer Vineyards Homestead Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., 300 cases. The Homestead Block consists of Pommard vines, planted in 1982. The vines grow on the gentle slope that was the site of the original homestead for the Van Duzer property. Give this wine an hour (it takes its sweet time opening up) and you will think you have been dropped in a vat of fresh crushed cherries. Soft and subtle at the start, it evolves into a black cherry bombast! The nose builds and builds until all sorts of fun is offered including wet stones, smoke, flowers and spice. A bawdy delight.

## Cellaring Your Treasures

I keep some of my Pinot Noir in a large Vinoteque cooler at home and the overflow in a neighbor's cellar. When I purchased the wine cooler a few years ago, I made the mistake of not installing custom racking to accommodate the larger domestic Pinot Noir and Burgundy bottles. Many wine bottles are the standard 3 and 1/4" diameter at the bottom and fit into the racking that comes standard with wine coolers. However, a number of producers use heavier, larger diameter bottles. Remember this if you anticipate purchasing a wine cooler and be sure to allocate some of your storage to custom racking that accommodates up to 3 and 3/4" diameter bottles. A nice compromise is to have a small wine cooler at home for current drinking, and the remainder of your collection in a wine storage facility. The cost is modest and you can have your wines shipped directly to the storage facility, avoiding the problem of your UPS carrier dropping your case of wine outside your home in the warm sun. Plus storage facilities can be great gathering spots for meeting and socializing with other wine aficionados.

General Electric, as part of their GE Monogram Kitchen Appliance Collection has introduced a home Walk-In Wine Vault. The self-contained unit provides for storage of more than one thousand bottles on redwood racks and the racks also accommodate magnums and crates. Temperature is precisely controlled between 50 degrees F and 70 degrees F as desired and ideal humidity conditions are maintained. The walls and door are stainless steel with a high-density foam insulation. An innovative electronic inventory system employs a barcode scanner to track the wines and inventory software lets you search and catalogue the collection. The price is \$30,000 (ouch!).

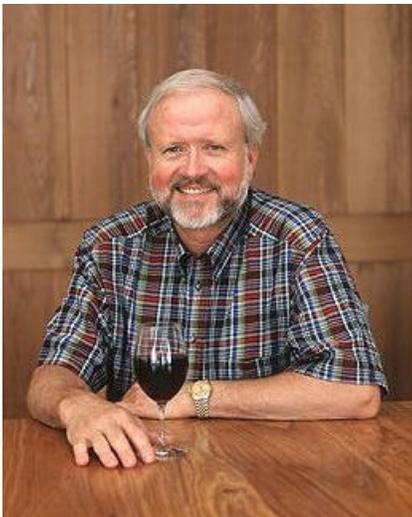


## Pinot Pioneer Ken Brown Re-emerges

I had heard that Ken Brown had retired from Byron and started his own namesake Pinot Noirs. This last weekend I was in Cambria with my wife on our yearly pilgrimage to track down unusual pumpkins. We had dinner at a quaint restaurant in town named the Sow's Ear which has an excellent wine list. I ordered the 2003 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir and a few sips of this wine made us quickly forget pumpkins and delight in the grape. It was terrific from the first pour and my wife loved it. I have to say with no exaggeration that this was one of the best Pinot Noirs I have had the pleasure of drinking this year.



Silky, elegant, beautifully spiced, perfectly balanced and as Virginia Madsen would say, I loved this wine because it tasted so @#%\*&ng good. Unfortunately at the end of dinner my charming wife sensed that the young couple sitting down next to us were there on a special occasion. She struck up a conversation, as she is so adept at doing, and sure enough, they had gotten married that day. Well, she ordered up two glasses and gave them the rest of our beloved Pinot Noir. Taking great Pinot from the Prince is never a wise thing to contemplate but how could I object? That great bottle made four people very happy that evening.



Ken Brown (né Byron Ken Brown) is one of Santa Barbara County's pioneering winemakers. He was one of the first to recognize the potential for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the Santa Barbara area and was the first to introduce Syrah, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc to Santa Barbara County. His epiphany came in 1976 when he met Richard Sanford and Michael Benedict and tasted one of the first Pinot Noirs from the Sanford and Benedict Vineyard. In 1977 he became Zaca Mesa Winery's first winemaker and later with a group of partners founded Byron Vineyard & Winery in 1984 in the then little-known Santa Maria Valley of northern Santa Barbara County. Byron quickly gained national recognition for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Byron Winery was sold to Robert Mondavi in 1990 and an extensive experimental program was launched using various planting densities, clones, and rootstocks. A state-of-the-art gravity flow winery was built in 1996. After 30 years of experience in the region, he decided to retire from Byron to begin producing his own small production

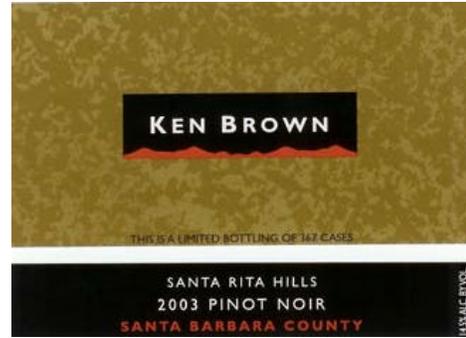
boutique Pinot Noirs, Syrah and Chardonnay. With his extensive contacts in the region, he sources grapes from leading vineyards but focuses on those in the Santa Rita Hills. He makes the wines at Byron and his offices are in Solvang. With only 1,200 total cases, retail distribution is limited but a check of wine-searcher.com reveals several sources. The phone number is 805-688-4482.

The lineup of Ken Brown inaugural 2003 vintage Pinot Noirs:

**2003 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 367 cases, \$35. 64% Fiddlestix, 24% Cargasacchi and 12% Clos Pepe Vineyards in the Santa Rita Hills. The wine was crafted as gently as possible in a gravity-flow environment. Tasting comments on the previous page.

**2003 Ken Brown Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 14.7% alc., 392 cases, \$30. Bien Nacido produces some of California's most desirable wine grapes. Some plantings here are the original Martini clone, but many blocks were replanted in 1996 to newer clones, including Pommard and 2A, which were sourced for this Pinot Noir. I did not taste this wine yet, but Paul at Root's Cellar in Healdsburg said, "A multi-dimensional wine with dark cherry, cinnamon, berry pie-spice, vanilla and sweet cassis liqueur fill out the yummy finish. A true, purple-blue orgasmic gurglebomb. (Paul can get carried away at times).

**2003 Ken Brown Clos Pepe Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 122 cases, \$45. The Clos Pepe Vineyard has 24 acres planted to Pinot Noir. This vineyard is farmed in a meticulous fashion with sustainable agriculture and wines made from this vineyard have consistently showed excellence. Yields for this vintage averaged about one ton per acre. The block sourced for this wine is planted to



## 2005 Harvest From The Front Lines

This time of year it is fascinating to track the harvest of Pinot Noir in the major growing areas of California. One thing is for sure if you are a wine grower: you must have a lot of grit and a good sense of humor. If you are a nail biter, you will have anything to chew on when harvest finally ends. Rains in May and a cool, foggy summer in the Russian River Valley, Anderson Valley and the Sonoma Coast have greatly reduced yield expectations. Fall weather has been cool and the ever threat of rain at the end of the growing season looms over the crop. Because its grapes are closer together than other varieties, Pinot is very susceptible to mildew and botrytis fungus, both of which have been rampant in some areas due to the heavy fog.

**Carneros** For ongoing harvest reports sign up for Kent Fortner's weblog at [kent@greentruckcellars.com](mailto:kent@greentruckcellars.com). Unlike many sporadic blogs, Kent provides detailed reports frequently at harvest time. The weather has featured fog pretty much every morning and temperatures 5-10 degrees cooler than normal (75-80 range). Serious botrytis pressure in the vineyards makes further rain a real disaster. Kent's Nord Vineyard crop was completely lost due to botrytis. Quality from vineyards that have gotten to ripeness without too much botrytis has been fantastic:ripe flavors at 23 brix - a winemaker's dream. There will be a lot of variability from vineyard to vineyard. As of 9/20 there was still 40% of the Pinot Noir from Carneros still on the vine.

**Russian River Valley** Denise at WesMar says that the RRV is very lightly cropped due to an unseasonably cool summer with persistent fog in the last half of August and the first half of September. As of 9/20 many vineyards had not been harvested unless they were young. Everyone is praying for warm weather to increase the Brix numbers and picking dates are starting to come into focus. Steve Dutton of Dutton Ranch says that some vineyards are down 80 percent.

**Sonoma Coasts** Barbara Drady at Sonoma Coast Vineyards says they are still holding their breath. Many vineyards are down as much as 70% due to shatter, shot berries and late rains. On 9/20 one of the vineyards was a whopping 19 Brix. The cooler the area on the Coast, the more Pinot Noir production is down. They are praying for warm weather. The berries that are worth picking could be

exceptional if the rains hold off. The Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc from Sonoma Coast sites could be fabulous.

**Marin County** Mark at Devil's Gulch reports that the 2005 Pinot Noir harvest in Marin is horrible from a quantity standpoint. Pinot for sparkling wine has been harvested from the Corda Vineyard and Pinot for still wine has been picked by Stewart Johnson at Kendric Vineyard (1 1/2 tons/acre). Stubbs Vineyard has not picked yet but is experiencing quite a bit of bird problems. The Chalone Vineyard (Orogeny) experienced an amazing amount of shatter due to June rains and botrytis may result in no harvest at all or at best 1 ton from 20 acres. Mark is hoping to get 1/2 ton per acre from Devil's Gulch Vineyard but he is not optimistic. 2 block of the vineyard are not worth bird netting. Skywalker Ranch's Pinot has a poor to fair crop load, maybe 1 ton/acre, and is a week from harvest. It is hoped that the quality will be high given these small yields. Time will tell.

**Anderson Valley** Zach Rasmussen, winemaker at Goldeneye, says that 2005 may be the most difficult year in 35 years. Goldeneye's crop will be less than half of what is usually expected. Larry Londer at Londer Vineyards says that cool weather has slowed everything way down. He is praying for warmer weather.

**Central Coast** According to Jeff Wilkes of J Wilkes Wines, 2005 is shaping up to be one of the best harvests in recent history. The weather has been cool and the crop load on most vineyards moderate. The average harvest dates will be two to three weeks later than normal meaning great hang time and flavor development. Most of the Pinot Noir in the field has little botrytis so the grapes should benefit from the longer hang time. The Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills Vineyards averaged about 2.5 tons per acre, which is up from last year, but the vines were balanced and the flavors in the grapes are fantastic. Also the berries seem to be smaller this year so there should be a better skin to juice ratio for great concentration in the wines.

**Monterey County** The severe May rains in Sonoma County were minimal in Monterey County. The 2005 Pinot Noir harvest is average to above average. But not much has been picked yet and the later into October they get, the more danger they are exposed to.

## Tennis & Pinot Postscript

I was surprised to receive many responses to the wine and tennis player analogies that I reported in the last issue of the *PinotFile*. Of course, most of the comments came from men about Maria Sharapova.

"I enjoyed reading your article that associated the famous tennis players with the type of wine they reflect. I can't agree more that the charm and unpredictability of Sharapova is a Pinot Noir look alike. Both only excel when they face a challenge."

"How can anyone associate the grace and elegance of Pinot Noir with a Williams sister???"

"We should sue the bugger who said Sharapova is a cali-chard. The only thing common between the two is the headspinning effect - one because she's so cute, the other because it's too darn alcoholic!"

"I'm voting with you on the tennis analogies. That is one beautiful Pinot Noir."

"Most importantly, Maria Sharapova is a babe! And so is Pinot Noir too, by the way."

  
**PrinceofPinot.com**

I welcome your comments about Pinot Noir and any special Pinot drinking experiences that have graced your life in recent times.

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## Open Your Wallet and Say “Pinot”

I frequently cringe when asked “What’s a good under \$20 Pinot Noir?” Unfortunately, it is rare to find a decent Pinot drink for less than \$25 and most good examples of Pinot Noir will cost you more than a casual meal will fetch. For this reason, Pinot Noir has acquired a snooty reputation. Pinot drinkers like to think of themselves as more cultivated and sensitive, but the real truth is that they have more money. How many people have a \$750 a month wine budget? (a \$35 bottle of Pinot Noir five days a week a month).

Many casual wine drinkers are looking for a comforting wine that they don’t have to compare or critically analyze. All they are looking for is a pleasant beverage that goes well with food. Although Pinot Noir can offer this and more, it is simply too expensive to grow and produce at the present time to be inexpensive. Even Bronco Wines has not attempted a “Two Buck Pinot.”

I recently tried several Pinot Noirs from supermarket shelves, all priced in the \$10-\$20 range. Labels included such names as Castle Rock, Benziger, Clos de Bois, Echelon and Pedroncelli. I could not get past the first sip or two with several of these, and the rest were only passable. They just were not acceptable examples of Pinot Noir for me.

I think the best solution is to buy quality Pinot Noir in half-bottles, when available, (ie 2003 Etude Carneros Pinot Noit, \$18) or drink one-half of a bottle one night, put the rest in an empty half-bottle, cork it, and drink the remainder the next night. If you just can’t see yourself spending more than \$20 on wine, try La Crema Sonoma Coast, Sebastiani Sonoma Coast, or Bogle RRV Pinot Noirs.

Great Pinot Noir is one of the true joys of life that justifies the extra expense. As Ralph Steadman said, “It’s a privilege to drink good wine. We should treat it with respect and savor every drop, like experts.”