

PEE-no-NWAR

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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Expand Your Pinot Horizons

Pinot Noir is often associated with Burgundy, but it is grown all over the world including every continent except Antarctica. According to Professor Carole Meredith of U.C. Davis, Pinot Noir most likely came from northeastern France or southwestern Germany. It probably arose from a wild grapevine in Burgundy or nearby in Champagne or southwestern Germany. It became the dominant grape in Burgundy because it originated in that region and was widely planted because of its recognized superior quality.

Burgundy has fostered a mystique about Pinot Noir since the 1300s. The French have arrogantly maintained that they do not make Pinot Noir, they make Gevrey-Chambertin or Vosne-Romanee. John Winthrop Haeger, author of *North American Pinot Noir*, says "There's a stubbornness in being unwilling to admit other countries are now making a very similar wine." According to W. Blake Gray writing in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (04/28/2005), "Burgundy's loss of unquestioned superiority may have had an effect beyond its own sales. Here was an area where, as recently as ten years ago, most wine buyers believed France was truly incomparable. Now, the French are just selling Pinot Noir - like everybody else."

Pinot Noir is grown in practically every wine-producing country in Europe including Germany (where it is known as Spätburgunder, Blauburgunder and Blauer Klevner), Switzerland (Rotclevner, Cortailod), Austria (Blauer Spätburgunder), Yugoslavia (Burgunder Crni, Hungary (Nagyburgundi), Czechoslovakia (Rouci, Rouci Modre) and Italy (Pinot Nero). It flourishes anywhere in the world where cool growing conditions produce sound grapes: California, Oregon, New York and other states, Canada (British Columbia, Niagara, Prince Edward County), South American (Chile), Australia and New Zealand.

Improved viticultural methods, the spread of Dijon clones, and advances in wine technology in general have led to dramatically improved Pinot Noir wines worldwide in the last ten years. In addition, more wines than ever are being exported and Pinot Noirs from lesser known countries and regions are appearing on menus and wine retailers offering lists. Recently, I stepped "outside the box" and tasted some surprisingly good Pinots along the less-traveled Pinot trail. I have also included some Burgundies from lesser-known appellations of Burgundy which provide astonishingly good value in recent vintages. Sources for locating the wines include wineaccess.com and wineseacher.com.

It is difficult to determine exactly when Pinot Noir was imported into California because it arrived under many different names: "Black Burgundy," "Petite Pinot," "Pinot Noir, Black," and "Pinot Noiren." Possibly the first vines were brought in by Agoston Haraszthy in 1862.

Loire Valley, France

2003 Lucien Crochet La Croix du Roy Sancerre (Rosenthal Selection) 13.0% alc., \$30. Initially the nose is subdued but with time it becomes very expressive of cinnamon-tinged strawberries. Medium-bodied, this simple wine has respectable fruit and a soft, gentle finish. Very balanced. Sancerre Rouge and Rosé are produced in relatively small quantities and have become quite fashionable in Paris bistros. Pinot Noir is the official variety for red and rosé wines in Sancerre. Some Sancerre Rouge wines can have surprising power and concentration, but many are simply fresh and fruity and made for drinking shortly after release. Other top producers include Domaine Vacheron and Franck Millet.

2003 Domaine Henri Pellé Menetou-Salon Rouge, Les Cris 12.5% alc., \$29. Menetou-Salon lies adjacent to and west of Sancerre. The area is made up of 450 hectares of hillside vineyards planted on sedimentary limestone dating from the upper Jurassic period. This appellation is obscure compared to Sancerre which makes the wines from here an even better value. This wine comes from the enclosed vineyard, Les Cris, situated just above the domaine's cellars. A New World style Pinot Noir that can go one-on-one with many macho California Pinots. Plenty of fruit and oak integrated smoothly. Finishes with soft tannins. Even comes in a big, heavy Burgundy-style bottle with a big punt. Serious stuff. "Oo-ee, oo-ee baby."

Alsace, France

2000 Domaine Marcel Deiss Burlenberg Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$32. Pinot Noir is the oldest identifiable vine cultivated in Alsace where it is called Pinot Noir d'Alsace, *Rovae d'Alsace*, or *Rosé d'Alsace*. Alsatian Pinot Noir has become very popular with the locals due to the escalating prices of Burgundy. The wines have improved greatly over the last fifteen years. Color has always been a challenge here but newer extraction methods have led to well-colored Pinot Noirs. Oddly, the Pinot Noirs from this region are bottled according to law in the *flute d'Alsace*, a tall, long-neck style bottle usually used for Riesling. Jean-Michel Deiss was the first in this region to bring the Pinot Noir varietal to the level of the other grape varieties. His wines can be rich, smoky and powerful. This Pinot Noir has a deep ruby color with intense purple fruits and oak on the nose. It is a big-bodied fella that has a generous tannic spine. Pleasant but one-dimensional. The finish is a little tight and acidic in spite of the addition of Pinot Gris meant to soften the finish.

Germany

Robert Parker, Jr., in his latest edition of *Parker's Buying Guide*, states that "Spätburgunder is the German Pinot Noir, a grotesque and ghastly wine that tastes akin to a defective, sweet, faded, diluted red Burgundy from an incompetent producer." So why bother with German Pinot Noir? Certainly if you like big-muscled Pinots, you won't like these wines. Spätburgunder is made in very small quantities so that the wines that reach our shores are usually the lowest quality wine made by large blenders. The top Spätburgunders are snapped up in Germany by enthusiastic collectors and the top wines sell for over \$100 a bottle.

2004 Weingut Binz Nackenheimer Spätburgunder 14.0% alc., \$13. A light-bodied Pinot that carries a prominent spicy note making it taste similar to Grenache. Goes down easy. Stump your wine geek friends with this one.

2003 Bercher Jechttinger Eichert Spätburgunder Spätlese Trochen 14.5% alc., \$29. A dark ruby color suggests a serious wine here. An appealing nose of cherries and vanilla. Rich flavors of cherries and red licorice. The mouth feel is silky and the wine finishes with clean, bright acidity. This wine comes from the warmest growing region of Germany, the Kaiserstuhl in the southwest corner of Germany, where some of the most sought-after reds in the country originate. The red wines from this area are typically rich and powerful. This wine could make Parker swallow his words.

Chile

Chile's wine growing climate is similar to that of California's Napa Valley and Bordeaux. There are, however, some fog-cooled valleys near the Pacific Ocean that are more suited for cool-climate varieties. Pinot Noir ripens easily here and newer Dijon clones have been planted on disease-free rootstocks. Many Frenchmen have realized the potential in Chile and travelled to this country to direct winemaking operations. Valdivieso began cultivating Pinot Noir in Chile 120 years ago, when its champagne-loving founder enlisted French expertise to create a copy of Champagne. Valdivieso remains Chile's sparkling wine power player. Chile has become a reliable source for reasonably-priced Pinot Noir.

2004 La Misión Del Clarillo Maipo Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$10. La Misión is situated on the site of an 18th Century French missionary station on the banks of the Rio Clarillo in the Maipo Valley. The winery and equipment is state-of-the-art. Winemaking is under the direction of William Fevre of Chablis fame. Vineyards are at various locations in the higher Maipo Valley and the Curico Valley. This wine has a lovely wild strawberry nose. The flavors are a mélange of cranberry, strawberry, and citrus. This Pinot reminded me of Smuckers strawberry jam. A decent Pinot quaffer.

Lesser-known Burgundy appellations, France

Burgundy offers a lot of well-made wines of lesser-known appellations at honest prices. The vintage and the name of the grower are key here. Both the 2002 and 2003 vintages offered many excellent wines from less well-publicized villages in Burgundy. Two examples are offered here.

Marsannay is located at the most northern end of Burgundy, almost in the suburbs of Dijon. All of the wine from here was labeled Bourgogne until 1986. Now you find more and more single-vineyard wines. Top producers include Bruno Clair, Fougerey de Beauclair, Meo-Camuzet, Joseph Roty, and Saint-Martin.

2003 Domaine St. Martin Les Champs Solomon Marsannay 13.0% alc., \$20. A very light and simple wine. The nose of cherry, spice and oak dominates the flavors. Smooth, balanced, feminine.

Fixin is adjacent to Marsannay and north of Gevrey-Chambertin. Historically the wines from here had a reputation of being firm (what the French call *sauvage*). Quality has improved. The premier crus, three of which are monopoles, tend to be expensive. The best producers include many of the same names as for Marsannay. Lucien Le Moine is a newcomer who has ramped up the price of Fixin wines.

2003 Domaine St. Martin Fixin les Hervelets Premier Cru 13.5% alc., \$30 From the top Premier Cru vineyard in Fixin. A medium-bodied Pinot with a terrific nose of burnt cherries, cooked red fruits and smoke. The flavors are dominated by snappy red raspberry and Oriental spices. The 2003 vintage has led to more fruit and less acid in this wine. Leaves quite a sweet impression. Really good for what it is and needs no "fixin". Lip-smacking.

Jack Creek Cellars

I am always on the lookout for small, handcrafted Pinot Noir producers. They seem to pop up in the most unlikely places every week or so. How about Templeton? Not the first place you think of when searching out great Pinot Noir in California. But read on.

Jack Creek Cellars Pinot Noir is the pride and joy of Doug and Sabrina Kruse. They are truly hand-crafting outstanding Pinots from their Krause Vineyard situated in a cool micro-climate at the south end of the Santa Lucia Mountains. This vineyard of 30 acres has shallow, rocky, calcareous soil. Planted in 1998, it is located about seven miles west of Highway 101. The grapes are exposed to foggy mornings and warm afternoons cooled by coastal breezes which consistently flow through the Templeton Gap.

The Jack Creek Cellars Pinots are presented in a heavy Burgundy bottle with an attractive label - a classy package. Website is www.jackcreekcellars.com.

2003 Jack Creek Cellars Kruse Vineyards York Mountain Pinot Noir 14.6% alc. Aromas of wet stone, vanilla and dark fruits draw you in and luscious cranberries, cherries and blueberries saturate the palate. Smooth, soft and seductive. The tannins are dry and dusty. The finish is just right. Tastes so good you'll get lost in it.



2003 Jack Creek Cellars Kruse Vineyards York Mountain Reserve Pinot Noir 14.9% alc. The nose is a little alcoholic. A full-bodied fruit bomb. Reminiscent of many strong-shouldered Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noirs. A smooth mouth feel and finish. Pretty good but I prefer the regular bottling for its finesse. This wine is nearly sold out so this style obviously appeals to many Pinot lovers.

'Adopt a Barrel' at Crushpad

The grapes from the 2005 vintage have been picked, pressed, fermented and placed in barrels at Crushpad, the San Francisco urban winery. This year Crushpad has extra barrels of wine and wine enthusiasts with the itch to make their own wine can adopt a barrel and direct the winemaking from hereon out. This is a unique opportunity for those passionate about wine to become a "weekend" winemaker.

The 2005 vintage in some Pinot-producing areas of California such as the Russian River Valley is being compared to the great 1994 vintage, both in quality and quantity. Crushpad has 50 barrels of wine waiting to be adopted including Pinot Noirs from the Russian River Valley and Anderson Valley. The list of barrels available for adoption are at www.crushpadwine.com.

Once a barrel is adopted, the customer is in charge. He or she can meet with an in-house winemaker to direct the winemaking plan, the aging, the package design and the bottling. After the wine is finished, it can be shipped or stored by Crushpad.

Crushpad has been a big success since starting last year. Today Crushpad has winemaking customers in more than 25 states as well as 4 countries. One of the Pinot Noirs featured and recommended in the PinotFile, Dain Wines, is made at Crushpad (photo at right of David Dain at Crushpad)

Crushpad is a company "determined to liberate winemaking from its traditional stereotypes of impossible wealth, expensive chateaus and golden retrievers. To become a winemaker, phone 415-864-4232 or visit the website.



Recent Pinot Releases

Dutton-Goldfield 2003 Dutton Ranch Pinot Noir (1,218 cases, \$35), 2003 Devil's Gulch Pinot Noir (392 cases, \$48), 2003 Sanchiotti Vineyard Pinot Noir (187 cases, \$52). In 2003 bloom season brought heavy rains followed by record heat leading to a very small per acre tonnage for Pinot Noir. The Pinots from this vintage are especially floral. (Partners Steve Dutton and Dan Goldfield in photo) www.duttongoldfield.com, 707-823-3887.



Red Car 2004 Amour Fou Pinot Noir (14.7% alc., 400 cases, \$50, 6-pack only, \$140 magnum). Previous releases (the first in 2000) were vinified much like Syrahs but now the goal is more aromatic complexity and more separation between the layers of subtle flavors. Also the grapes are now sourced only from chilly sites along the "true" Sonoma Coast. 53% of the fruit comes from the inaugural vintage of the D.Giovanni Vineyard located in Green Valley and 47% from the Sleeping Beauty Vineyard owned and farmed by George Martinelli. Best tagline in the business: "Life is a journey. Get on the Red Car." Join the mailing list at www.redcarwine.com or phone 310-839-7300.



Elke Vineyards Mary Elke has been farming Pinot Noir in the Donnelly Creek Vineyard in the Anderson Valley for many years. She also farms Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Merlot in the Napa Valley for wineries like Mumm, Mondavi and Far Niente. Initially the goal was to produce a food-friendly wine for family and friends but it quickly evolved into a passion for producing an affordable, drinkable Pinot Noir for everyone. No more than 1,000 cases of Elke Vineyards Pinot Noir have ever been produced in one year. Most of it is sold directly from Mary. 2002 Elke Pinot Noir (\$25) and 2002 Elke Gold Label Pinot Noir (\$32) sold in half case and full case combos. Wines may be ordered online at www.elkevineyards.com where library wines are also available.

Ambullneo Vineyards 2004 Mastiff Carneros Pinot Noir (Hyde and Hudson Vineyards, \$77), 2004 Bulldog Reserve Santa Maria Pinot Noir (\$77), and 2004 Canis California Pinot Noir (blend of the other two, \$90). Winemaker is Scott Ames. The philosophy of owner Greg Linn is to blend and not be site specific. Blending grapes from several great vineyards can produce wines of unusual good character. Magnums also available. Fax 714-992-1499. www.ambullneowines.com.



Calera Wine Company 2002 Central Coast Pinot Noir (14.4% alc., 6,392 cases, \$20, from purchased fruit), 2001 Selleck Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir (14.5% alc., 439 cases, \$55, Burgundian style that needs cellar time), 2001 Jensen Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir (14.3% alc., 1,972 cases, \$50, always a terrific bottling from Calera), 2001 Reed Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir (13.5% alc., 412 cases, \$45), and 2001 Mills Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir (14.2% alc., 1,097 cases, \$40). Calera was founded in 1975 and this year marks their 30th Anniversary. Dan Berger wrote about Calera recently, "Calera's pioneering efforts on a plateau that's among the highest of coastal vineyards in California have brought them fame mostly in places like Burgundy and Oregon where their burgundy-colored jewels are most appreciated. They also have developed a fast following among lovers of Pinot Noir." The Pinot Noirs from Calera are known for showing a distinct terroir and aging beautifully. Calera was selected for inclusion in the book, *The Great Wines of America: The Top Forty Vintners* by Paul Lukacs. Order the wines from the website at www.calera.com or phone 831-637-9170. Calera is one of the few wineries that offers library wines periodically - currently they are selling the 1995 Mills Vineyard Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir.



Siduri Wines 2004 Novy Van der Kamp Pinot Meunier (75 cases, \$25, Pinot Meunier is a genetic mutation of Pinot Noir that makes a good still wine on its own - this wine has both great acidity that Pinot Meunier is noted for and great concentration), 2004 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (1,226 cases, \$19, a blend of four vineyards and seven clones), 2004 Siduri Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noir (95 cases, \$45, only 1.485 tons from almost 3 acres), 2004 Cargasacchi Vineyard Pinot Noir (333 cases, \$52, a big and concentrated Pinot Noir). A few months ago the 2004 Russian River Pinot Noir, 2004 Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir, and the 2004 Clos Pepe Vineyard Pinot Noir were released and may still be available. 707-578-3882, www.siduri.com.





PrinceofPinot.com

Look for the All-American Pinot Noir
Issue coming this month

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I Be Blogging: Currently there are 18.7 million blogs online (the blogosphere), with new ones added every day. Google has a specialty search engine to sift through the Internet's millions of frequently updated personal journals. The tool, blogsearchgoogle.com focuses exclusively on weblogs. Over the last few years, blogs have become a popular way for sharing opinions and information. Some people have even found blogs profitable and have been able to make a living off their blogs. The Google blog search engine turns up about 1.5 million blogs devoted in some way to food and another 679,421 blogs dedicated to wine. A few good wine blogs are listed on the link page of the Pinot-File website at princeofpinot.com.

Shalimar or Pinot Noir?

Pinot Noir is referred to as the Guerlain of the wine world. Guerlain is France's oldest established perfumer and many of its fragrances have become great classics. The House of Guerlain has gradually developed from small-scale production in the 19th century to an international firm with 321 fragrances, the broadest product range in the French perfume trade.

Now if you love the aromas of wine, you can rub a little of the fragrance of wine behind your spouse's ears. As reported recently at Decanter.com, (Nov 30, 2005) Christian Delpeuch, general director of Bordeaux negociant Ginestet and president of the Bordeaux trade body (CIVB), has developed a line of three perfumes from wine molecules. The lineup includes 'Botrytis' which "recalls a great Sauternes in its sparkling autumnal silk robe" with aromas of "honey, candied fruits and gingerbread," 'Le Boisé' for oak barrel aroma lovers which is packaged in a wooden case and smells of "the light vanilla touch of the oak" used to age Bordeaux wine, and finally, a perfume that has the scent of Sauvignon Blanc that smells of "grapefruit, white peach and box tree aromas." But seriously why would anyone want to smell like grapefruit when they could have the lovely scent of Pinot Noir?

A Pinot Noir fragrance cannot be far behind. To create a perfume, you need to blend the "key note" (the fragrance that is instantly perceptible like cherries maybe?), the "core note" (the fragrance that gives the perfume its character like barnyard) and the "basic note" (which holds the entire structure together like maybe rose petal). Since perfume is created by mixing notes that are fruity or tart, woody, flowery or sensual, Pinot Noir is a perfect candidate for its own fragrance. Shall we call it 'Peacock's Tail'? It could be sold in a miniature wine bottle and like many fragrances, marketed for its image of luxury, sensuality and mystery.