

**If You Drink  
No Noir, You  
Pinot Noir**

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter for Pinoaficionados

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## The True Meaning of Pinot Noir

I was shopping at the mall the other day and walked by Santa Claus. When I was a kid, I was scared to death of Santa and never would go up and sit on his lap, much to my mother's chagrin. I always felt I missed something in life. I thought it was time to meet the jolly old fellow and I got in line. Soon enough, I was sitting on his lap and beaming to the crowd in front of me. I then asked him, "What is the true meaning of Pinot Noir?" This is what he told me.

The specific origins of the name are unclear, but it is known that Pinot Noir appeared in the Cote d'Or prior to the 14th century, possibly as early as the 5th century B.C.. It was initially called *noirien* long before the word *pinot* appeared. Pinot first appeared in the last part of the 14th century in papers of the dukes of Burgundy: a document of Philip the Bold ordered a shipment to Flanders of "vermillion pinot wine" in 1375. Pinot was initially often spelled *pynos* or *pineau*. At the end of the last century, *pinot* was made official to avoid the Burgundian peasant pronunciation of *pineau* as "peen-yo" or "peen-yew." The grape has had many names in the Cote d'Or, including *franc norien*, *frank pineau*, *plant a bon vin*, *plant fin*, *plant noble*, *franc bourgignon*, *frank pinot*, *petit pinot*, and *morillon*. Today, the word *pineau* designates the chenin blanc grape of the Loire Valley. No other grape varietal has a name that has been in use for more than six centuries.

Pinot is thought to be so-named because its grape cluster resembles a pinecone in shape. In reality, this feature is not readily observable as a distinguishing characteristic. The word *noir* comes from the fact that the grape's skin is a dark blue so deep it is called black. In actuality, the skins of Pinot Noir contain considerably less pigment than other varietals such as Cabernet and Syrah.

If after reading this article you wish to obtain Continuing Education credits in Pinot Noir, please write Santa Claus at the North Pole.

Sources for the origins of Pinot Noir:

*North American Pinot Noir*, J.W. Haeger

*Romanee-Conti*, Richard Olney

*Encyclopedia of Grapes*, Oz Clarke

*Vines Grapes and Wines*, Jancis Robinson



## Beyond Riedel

According to Professor Kathleen Burk (*The World of Fine Wine*, Issue 7, 2005), George Saintsbury “might well be adopted as the patron saint of Riedel.” Writing in *Notes on a Cellar-Book*, first published in 1920 (MacMillan, London), Saintsbury wrote that “Beyond all doubt there is a certain pre-established harmony between different wines and different shapes, sizes and even colours of glasses. Claret never tastes well in a small glass, Burgundy, I think even worse.”

In 1973, in Orvieto, Claus Riedel presented the world’s first glass series dedicated to the hedonistic enjoyment of wine. The series originally consisted of ten sizes and was developed with the assistance of the Association of Italian Sommeliers (ASI). The series was developed further by his son Georg, into an all-embracing state-of-the-art wine glass collection. The glasses offered today come in three series, Vinum, Vinum extreme and Sommeliers. The newest glasses are the “O” wine tumblers, glasses without stems and Overture, glassware which is not hand-blown, much less fragile and inexpensive.



Today, there is a wide variety of quality wine glassware available from numerous producers often offering more value and the advantage of less breakability. Two well-known examples are Schott-Zweisel and Spiegelau. Riedel Burgundy glasses are roughly \$16 per stem, while the Schott-Zweisel and Spiegelau Burgundy stems are about half that price. A new crystal glassware producer, Bottega del Vino, was recommended to me by Damien Casten of Candid Wines in Chicago, Illinois. The glasses are mouth blown and hand finished but are unique in the world because they are not fragile. Damien told me that they have a proprietary alloy that they mix into the crystal making them remarkably light and seemingly unbreakable. “These are the lightest, strongest and most elegant glasses I have ever used, hands down.” The Bottega del Vino Burgundy stems are priced about \$38 apiece. Below is a picture of Rex Pickett, author of *Sideways*, holding a Bottega Burgunder glass (taken from the company’s website, [bottegedelvinocrystal.com](http://bottegedelvinocrystal.com)). The Bottega wine glassware is widely available.



Along with the appropriate glassware, it has become fashionable to have all of the accouterments: stemware brush, special glassware soap, lint-free towels, stemware drying rack, decanters (750 and 1.5L), and carrying case. There even is a steel-frame chandelier that doubles as a storage rack, called The Glass Cluster designed by two Swedish architects and available from the Stockholm design firm Form Nasielsky. The inspired lighting comes in two sizes: the smaller version is lit by a candle and holds 16 glasses, while the large one is lit by a light bulb and holds 40 glasses. ([nasielsky.se](http://nasielsky.se) or 011-46-86-68-25-34).



# The Night Before Harvest

Tw'as the night before harvest  
And all through the house  
Not a vintner was sleeping  
Not even the spouse

The clusters were hung  
Double cordon with care  
In hopes that St. Brix  
Would soon be there

When out from the vineyards  
There arose such a scream  
All within miles  
Discontinued their dream

The sirens were glaring  
And warning a cold drop  
If we let the vines freeze  
We will lose the whole crop

The smudge pots were fired  
The windmills on high  
And the vintners  
Let out passionate cries

On Summa, on Olivet  
Work now to save Cohn  
Alert Rochioli and  
Warn Ferrington

The battle was fought  
Nearly freezing 'til dawn  
The sun lifted spirits  
By golly, they had won!

The harvest was perfect  
The crush was A-1  
Total production was  
Up by a ton

When the must was all bundled  
Up snug in the tanks  
Fermentation awakened  
And we started to say thanks

All panic resided  
Vintners took deep breaths  
And looked askance at  
Their much cluttered desks

Who will now buy it?  
And how will it be priced?  
Will Parker anoint it?  
Will the Prince be enticed?

We'll wait until morning  
We've earned a respite  
A cool glass of Pinot  
And to all, a "Good Night!"

This poem was adapted from a similar poem written by David Fish of Phoenix, Arizona who penned it for Williams Selyem Winery many years ago. The original poem appeared in the Winery's newsletter.

  
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**The Prince & Princess of Pinot Wish You Happy Holidays and  
Sweet Pinot Dreams**

The *PinotFile* began humbly as a half page e-mail to twenty members of my wine club, Le Grand Crew, on April 22, 2001. My original intent was to “keep you apprised of news in the pinotphile world including new releases, winery news, winemaker profiles, and what to buy.” Within a year, the *PinotFile* had assumed a four page true newsletter format and was sent out faithfully on a weekly basis. This newsletter was the first of its kind to be devoted exclusively to Pinot Noir. The *PinotFile* rode the explosion in popularity of Pinot Noir over the last four years to become popular in its own right.

Today the *PinotFile* has several thousand e-mail subscribers, with a couple of new ones added to the Crew almost daily. The number of visits to the *PinotFile*'s website, princeofpinot.com has doubled in the last year and the number of hits has tripled. Subscribers are world-wide including ones from Australia, Canada, Singapore, Great Britain, European Union, Japan, New Zealand, Puerto Rico and others.

I sincerely appreciate the feedback that has been received from readers over the past year. My friend, James Caudill of Brown-Forman Wines was kind to write: “You crank out more good, solid reporting than an army of editorial rooms. I know, because I see virtually everything. Amazing, wonderful job. It's good to have passion!”

Sometimes I think that this newsletter, which began as a hobby is more like a job. But when I consider the far more serious commitment in time, effort and money that Pinot Noir producers put into the bottle, I realize my sacrifice is nominal - all I have to do is drink the wonderful results of their efforts!