

The header graphic features a red rectangular background. On the left, a grey-bordered box contains the text 'Littorai Issue'. A dotted line starts from the top left, goes right, then down, then right again, ending with an arrow pointing to the red box. Another dotted line starts from the top left, goes right, then down, then right again, ending with an arrow pointing to a grey oval on the right. The oval contains the text 'Volume 5, Issue 19' and 'January 10, 2005'.

**Littorai
Issue**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter for Pinoaficionados

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January 10, 2005

Littorai: Taste is the Guiding Hand

The Crew gathered at Pinot Provence Restaurant in Costa Mesa, California on January 9, 2006 for a special wine dinner where winegrower Ted Lemon presented his highly-coveted wines from Littorai. This was a spirited event with the excellence of the wines creating a celebratory mood among the attendees. The Littorai story is not well known as Ted Lemon is not motivated by competition, ratings or trends or the lure of publicity. His goal is simple and straightforward: to adhere to a personal and passionate esthetic sensibility.

The evening featured the 2003 Littorai Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, three vintages of Littorai Mays Canyon Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay (1995, 1999, 2003), and a nine year vertical retrospective of Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (1995-2003). This was a rare opportunity to experience the age ability of the Littorai wines as well as to see the vagaries of the different vintages as expressed in the finished wines. The following comments are intended to tell the story of Littorai Wines and convey the spirit of this special evening.

Prologue

The Prince has had a twenty-five year love affair with Pinot Noir. I drank Pinot Noir way before it ever became fashionable in California. Fortunately, I lived through the renaissance of North American Pinot Noir. I had my trysts with the fine Chalone Reserve Pinot Noirs of the 1980s, the brilliant wines of Mt Eden and Calera, and the Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs of Gary Farrell, Rochioli, Dehlinger and Williams Selyem. Then in 1997, Burt Williams and Ed Selyem sold their winery and retired. I was saddened and felt a void.

A short time later, I was talking with Master Sommelier Rene Chazottes who told me in his understated way, "There is a winemaker, Ted Lemon, who is very talented. He was trained in France, he makes good wine." Knowing Rene's excellent wine palate and his sensibilities, I quickly sought out Littorai Wines. At the time there had been little publicity and fanfare about Littorai, although Ted Lemon was a well-known and admired wine consultant in the wine community.

Unfortunately, the current vintage of Littorai wines at the time was sold out, so I signed up for the mailing list. While I waited, I discovered Littorai wines at Pinot Provence Restaurant, so it is only fitting to have this dinner here tonight.

The Littorai wines were an epiphany, a revelation. I was immediately enraptured and hooked and the wines became indelibly imprinted in my sensory memory. They were like kissing your first love in the back of your Dad's station wagon.

When you taste so many California Pinot Noirs, the words that come to mind are alcohol, oak, intrusive tannins and volatile acidity. The wines taste manufactured and the same regardless of origin. When you taste Littorai wines, the words that come to mind are WOW!, what elegance, purity and balance. These are terroir-driven

Wines that show a somewhere-ness. They are a beautiful marriage of classic Old World Burgundy flair and the New World style. They have become one of my standard bearers, a yardstick, against which I judge all other North American Pinot Noirs.

I could go on, but for those of you who have drunk Littorai wines, you understand, and for the uninitiated, you will find the finesse and sensuality of Pinot Noir, which is ever so elusive and rarely tamed, mastered and exemplified in Littorai wines.

I have been trying for some time to have Ted come to Southern California and present his wines. It was an honor to have him finally do so. If you are a basketball fan, your ultimate fantasy would be to meet Michael Jordan. For me, a passionate Pinot Noir lover, it was to meet Ted Lemon.



The Story of Ted Lemon and Littorai Wines

Born in Bedford, New York, Ted Lemon traces the origins of his interest in wine to a high school year in which he studied abroad in Burgundy. Later he attended Brown University where he majored in French literature. In his junior year, he spent six months at the University of Dijon and took a wine appreciation class from the director of Burgundy's tourism office. The director was so impressed with the twenty-year old Lemon, he offered him a job if he ever decided to take up winemaking.

After graduating from Brown University, he was awarded a Samuel T. Arnold Fellowship and returned to France in the Fall of 1980 to study viticulture and enology. He obtained his Enology degree from the Université de Dijon in 1981 and worked at many prestigious estates in Burgundy: Domaine Georges Roumier, Domaine Bruno Clair, Domaine Parent, Domaine De Villaine, Domaine Delorme and most importantly, Domaine Dujac. Ted returned to the United States when his funds ran out and apprenticed with Josh Jensen at Calera Winery in Hollister, California.

Surprisingly, late in 1982, while working at Calera, Ted was contacted by Jacques Seysses of Domaine Dujac who asked him, "How would you like to make Meursault?" At Domaine Guy Roulot in Meursault, one of the oldest and most traditional wineries in France, Guy Roulot had died and his family was searching for another winemaker. Guy's son, Jean-Marc, was in love with the theater, not winemaking and did not choose to follow in his father's footsteps. The Roulot family sought the advice of Jacques Seysses. "Of all the apprentices I've had, and I've had many," Jacques Seysses told Madame Roulot, "none has been as bright and as capable as Ted Lemon. He has so many fine qualities, but there are two problems. He is twenty-five years old and he is American." Although Madame's first reaction was "impossible," after consulting with Aubert de Villaine, Patrick Bize and others, she offered to make him the first (and still only) American winemaker and vineyard manager in Burgundy's

history.

Because Ted spoke French fluently, he was able to assimilate and overcome the initial surprise of the village people. He said, "At first I had to prove myself physically to the cellar and field help. I had to prune as quickly, drive a tractor as well and work as hard as they could. And I had to prove to Madame Roulot, who was so devoted to Guy, that I could keep up the reputation of his wines." He made good wines, was accepted and remained in Burgundy through 1984. Since 1984, Ted has been a partner with the owners of Domaine Dujac in Druid Wine Company, which distributes Domaine Dujac wines internationally and produces wines from Puligny Montrachet and Meusault under its own label.

Upon returning to the United States, Ted was hired by a French family that had purchased a vineyard on Howell Mountain above the Napa Valley. Ted became the founding vineyard manager and oversaw the building of a new winery. Chateau Woltner's Chardonnays soon became a favorite among American wine connoisseurs.



His winemaking skills assured, Ted and his wife Heidi (left) founded Littorai Wines in 1993. The name Littorai (lit'tor-i) is a pleural derivative of the Latin word Litor, which means the coasts. The word Littorai is intended to remind us that wine, the noblest agricultural product, arises from the interaction of place (vineyard), time (vintage) and man. Ted had spent a summer with his wife driving up and down the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington to taste local wines and learn the terroir and history of the local vineyards. He believed the finest Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are grown along the true littoral (coastal) zone of the continent. He became convinced that the geology and meso-

climates of the extreme western portion of the continent north of San Francisco are diverse enough to create a series of unique terroirs, each with its own characteristics. Ted settled on sourcing his grapes from vineyards capable of producing world class wine in western Sonoma and western Mendocino counties. He set out to unearth the finest vineyards at the very boundary of where grapes can be successfully ripened.

No other winery has ever enunciated such a clear statement of future potential for the Sonoma and Mendocino coasts.

All of Littorai's grapes from 1993 until 2002 came from independent growers. Every contract was on a "by-the-acre" basis in which he personally and closely supervised all aspects of vineyard management: pruning, fertilizing, irrigation and crop yields. In 2003, 40% of Littorai's producing acreage is farmed using biodynamic and agro-ecological methods. The biodynamic farming system goes beyond sustainable or organic farming to create a farm in which external inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers are reduced to a strict minimum or eliminated completely. The agro-ecological farming method seeks to create a farm that is a net contributor to the ecological health of its neighborhood.

As Ted finds vineyards which have exciting potential, he plans to add them to the family and make them vineyard designates if they are truly unique. If he finds nothing new to excite him, he will simply not grow. By the same token, if he is dissatisfied with the quality of fruit from a given vineyard in a given year, he simply will not produce it. Called declassification, it is a practice widely accepted and practiced in France. As Ted says, "This philosophy requires that our clients understand, as we do, that fine wine is not a commodity. We cannot simply invent more of it to satisfy demand. Indeed, that is what distinguishes it from its less expensive brethren."

Ted does not own a winery, but manages the Black-Sears Winery on Howell Mountain in Napa Valley. He oversees the making of wines for Howell Mountain Vineyards, the Black Sears Estate and Littorai at

This shared facility. In addition, he has consulted for numerous wineries including Franciscan Estates, Clos Pegase, Keller Estate, Green and Red Vineyard, Reverie, Archery Summit Winery in Oregon and Sauvage Family Vineyards in New Zealand.

Philosophy

Ted's philosophy toward winegrowing is "profoundly French and profoundly Burgundian" since he learned the trade from such eminent winemakers as Jacques Seysses, Aubert de Villaine and Jean Marie Roumier. While Ted honors the Burgundian tradition in his wines, no attempt is made to imitate Burgundy. There is a path between the excesses of many modern California wines and the vacuity of others. This is the path that is sought.

Ted's years in France inspired him to base his winegrowing on the concept of terroir. Terroir-based winemaking postulates that wine of a single place produced by a single estate is the greatest expression of winemaking. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wine grape varieties are uniquely suited to this philosophy. According to Ted, "I believe soil is of major importance in a wine's character. It's clear there are tremendous differences between wines made from vineyards right next to each other even if they are vinified and treated exactly the same way."

Ted seeks to create wines of elegance, length and finesse, wines which gain in complexity as they age. His wines have the balance and proportion to make them uniquely suited to the dinner table.

I asked Ted some time ago to express his views on the current state of California Pinot Noir and wine-making in general. His remarks are still currently relevant. "The future of west coast Pinot, and indeed all west coast wines (I would include Oregon in warm vintages) lies in learning to work with our soils so that we can produce full, ripe and profound flavors at lower brix levels, brix levels which will naturally give us wonderful wines in the 12 to 14% alcohol range. Mother nature does this occasionally on her own. What I refer to as the "Ultraforian" school of winemaking is not interested in balance in the classic, cuisine-driven sense. They are interested in flavor impact. They may speak of balance, but they are using the term in an entirely different way than we do at Littorai. Too often in California, winemakers pick fruit at absurdly high brix levels, claiming that is the genius or forte of California terroir. Imagine the Northern European corollary: picking fruit very under-ripe because it emphasizes Northern European terroir (acidity and freshness). For all wine producing regions, there is a middle ground of striving to produce fully mature fruit which reflects the terroir in which it is grown. Fruit picked at perfect balance will always be the most crystalline reflection of the terroir in which it is born. In no way can the resulting wines be anonymous industrial products. How do we achieve wines of classic balance in the land of dry summers? We must improve our soils' long-term moisture retaining ability. Biodynamics offers the clearest path to this goal and for the last four years we have embraced biodynamics wholeheartedly. Regardless of whether one practices biodynamic farming, the goal will be achieved primarily through increasing our soils' humus content. How many wineries, vineyards or viticulturalists do you know who are speaking about humus? Furthermore, balancing organic matter levels, appropriate long-term management of cover cropping, precise yield control, discriminate hedging and leafing, and judicious irrigation management will all play significant roles. What I describe is an arduous, lengthy undertaking. While any producer will be able to give lip service to such ideas, implementing them will be far more complex."

Littorai's Many Distinctions

- ?? First winery to vineyard designate the following several sites. Other producers (in parentheses) have followed in Littorai's footsteps to purchase fruit from these special sites: Savoy Vineyard (Andrew Fog, Copain, Hartford Court Velvet Sisters), Mays Canyon (Flowers and Bannister Porter Bass bottlings), and Charles Heintz (Williams Selyem, Ramey, Flowers, DuMol).
- ?? Littorai was one of the first and most important purchasers of the famed Hirsch Vineyard. Littorai came to Hirsch at the same time as Williams Selyem and Kistler in February, 1994.
- ?? Littorai was the first modern winery to create a "by-the-acre" contract for grapes. In these contracts, growers are paid for the quality of what they grow, not the quantity. The first contract was written in 1993 for One Acre Pinot Noir. Such contracts have now become the norm for the greatest vineyards in California.
- ?? Littorai was the first producer to clearly demonstrate the future of Anderson Valley Pinot Noir beginning in 1993. Littorai found that world class production could be achieved by low yields, proper clones, vertical trellising, leaf removal and other farming techniques. Since 1993, several great producers have begun sourcing Pinot Noir in Anderson Valley.
- ?? Littorai has maintained a ten year committed relationship with great vineyard sites. In the history of Littorai, only one single site has been discontinued. This is an exceptional record of terroir-based winemaking for California.
- ?? Littorai is a winemaker's property in that it is owned and managed by a professional winemaker who is passionately committed to his craft. He did not come into wine as a second career.
- ?? Littorai produces wines which improve and gain in complexity as they age.
- ?? Littorai's reputation has been entirely established by the quality of the wines in the bottle. Littorai sends out no samples to the media. Ted Lemon is not motivated by competition, ratings or trends, or by the lure of publicity.
- ?? Littorai's restaurant client list reads like a listing of the top restaurants in the United States. In California: The French Laundry, Chez Panisse, Rubicon, Masa, Gary Danko, Lucques, Spago Beverly Hills, Patina, Campanile. In New York: Alain Ducasse, Restaurant Daniel, Gramercy Tavern, Le Cirque 2000, Aureole, Jean Georges, Veritas, Gotham, River Café.

Winemaking Approach

Ted Lemon believes in minimal intervention, long lees contact and gentle handling of the fruit and wine at all times. Pumps and filtration are avoided as much as possible. All of the Chardonnays are barrel fermented. The Pinot Noir wines are fermented in traditional open top fermenters containing from 800 to 1500 gallons. At least some proportion of whole clusters are utilized. Punch down is routine. All of the wines undergo native yeast fermentation and complete malolactic fermentation, as long as nature does not dictate otherwise.

The winemaking style avoids high alcohol levels and overripe flavors. The goal is wines of finesse, balance and length. Alcohol levels that are excessive are considered a detriment to the marriage of wine with fine food. Usually one-third to one-half new oak is used for aging the wines as an element of complexity, but never leading you to think "oak" when tasting a Littorai wine. Wines of balance and harmony can improve and blossom with cellaring and the objective is to make wines that can be laid down. The key word here is patience: patient winemaking and patience on the part of the consumer.

The History of Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noir

In February, 1994, Littorai, Williams Selyem and Kistler arrived at Hirsch Vineyard to visit the property. The older blocks in the vineyard had been planted in 1980. Between 1990 and 1996, 47 additional acres were planted. These 47 acres are divided into small blocks varying in size from under one acre to five acres. The blocks are scattered over a series of hilltops and hillsides on the 1,100 acre property. Soils and exposure of the different blocks varies enormously.

At the time of the visit, each of the wineries chose blocks from which to source fruit. Some of the blocks were shared between wineries and some “monopole” blocks were entirely designated to a single winery. This arrangement has continued to some extent to the present so that no Hirsch Vineyard wines from different producers can be tasted and contrasted in the true sense of a proper terroir tasting in the Burgundian sense of the word.

In 2001, all Littorai grape purchases were converted to a by-the-acre formula. During all of the years of working with David Hirsch, Ted Lemon has worked closely as a partner, providing guidance for pruning, suckering, fertilizing, leaf removal, thinning and pest control. Littorai has always been the largest purchaser of Hirsch Vineyard fruit.

Initially, Ted obtained grapes from a few different blocks and clones. Each block was kept separate during production and then blended before bottling. This has allowed him to refine his block selection over the years and by 2001 he had some preferences. Beginning with the 2001 vintage, Littorai offered a Sonoma Coast bottling consisting of declassified Hirsch blocks, so that only the very best of the Hirsch production was bottled as the vineyard designate. The declassifications have been as high as 50% of the total purchases from the property. Starting in 2003, Ted restricted his purchases to a single block, block 6, which has shown exceptional quality potential. The clones are Swann, Pommard and Dijon 114. The soil is Hugo gravelly loam, usually only found on extremely steep densely forested hillsides in Sonoma and therefore rarely used for vineyards. Learning a site, its terroir, is not a rapid process. You cannot accelerate time and experience. It has taken Ted ten years to intimately know what the vineyard can offer and how best to show it off. As good as the Hirsch Vineyard wines are now, the best is sure to come.

Production of each vintage has been consistent but not identical. From 1995 until 1997 there was 25% whole cluster retention. Since 1998, the wines have been mostly de-stemmed (an occasional lot receives 10% whole cluster). Every vintage has been carefully sorted and received a cold soak followed by a regime which mixes punch downs and pump overs. Some fermenters have been pressed before dryness and finished fermentation in barrel, while others have received a five day post-fermentation maceration. Since 2001, no press wine has been added back to the vineyard designate. Virtually all vintages were never racked between barrel down and the bottling tank. No wine has ever been filtered. The most important rule has been, “Let taste be the guiding hand.”



The Tasting & Dinner

Ted Lemon's insight into his wines and comments about winegrowing in general were the highlights of the evening. He was openly honest and understandable and quite at ease considering he rarely attends this type of event. All of the wines came directly from Littorai's wine library cellar.

After all this buildup, you are probably saying, "Fine, now how did the wines taste?" In three words they were **flat out great**. The verticals demonstrated the vagaries of different vintages and the ease with which these beautifully made wines aged. In fact, the older wines seemed to display more appealing aromas, more complexity and more individuality. The younger wines showed more richness.

Three vintages of Littorai Mays Canyon Russian River Valley Chardonnay were presented. This mini-vertical confirmed that great California Chardonnay can age well. The 2003 vintage was the most "California" of the three at this stage with prominent floral aromas richness and persistence on the palate. 100 cases produced, \$50. The 1999 vintage had a gorgeous tropical nose and brisk acidity that paired it best with the Yuzu jus served with the roasted lobster. 100 cases produced, \$50. The 1995 vintage had yellowed a bit with age and had the appealing minerality so typical of the great wines of Meursault. All three wines were beautifully proportioned and balanced.

I was almost beside myself when I dived into the nine year vertical of Littorai Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. Every vintage ever produced! There were many superlatives being tossed around the room. It was love at first sip. Rene commented that all of the wines had power but in a soft and velvety way. And the fact that all of the wines were superb revealed that Ted Lemon knows how to bring out the beauty of a wine even in a bad vintage. He can adapt his winemaking. As Ted remarked, "Winemaking is part of the terroir."

A few consensus comments on each vintage are presented on the next page. General descriptors for Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir by Ted: muscle and sinew, grit, structure, more backbone and tannin than Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, peppery in leaner years, spices include sage and savory.



- 1995: A lovely, vibrant wine that wears its age well. 164 cases, blocks 7 and block 9 (Mt Eden clone).
- 1996: Ripe aromas with a little barnyard. Excellent with the roasted duck breast with chestnut agnolotti. The vintage featured a very hot July and the grapes were picked on August 23! The surprise vintage of the 1990s - far better and age worthy than either winemakers or the media expected. 356 cases, blocks 7, 9 and 5 (Pommard clone).
- 1997: Many tasters loved this vintage which produced the largest scaled wines of the 1990s. Exotic perfumed with thick, broad flavors. A smoky, tempestuous beauty. 356 cases, blocks 7, 9 and 5.
- 1998: Extraordinary nose, extra depths of flavors, velvety mouth feel. Dusty, fine tannins in the finish which is very, very long. A festive occasion. The 1998 vintage was difficult: no sun in Sonoma for 40 days, ripening was uneven, stems were not ripe. Fermentation was carried out in barrels with short pre-soaks. Proof that even in California there are significant differences in vintages and some years present extra challenges. The badge of a great winemaker is the ability to adapt and create a great wine in a difficult year. 350 cases, blocks 7, 9 and 5.
- 1999: An enjoyable wine from a weak vintage. The generous dollops of red and black fruits are blended with whiffs of roasted meat, pepper and earth. The finish is shy and dry. 617 cases, block 9, 5 and 9C (Dijon 114).
- 2000: This is a powerful wine, not in alcohol or tannins, but enjoyably, in flavors. Ripe fruit aromas lead to lush and persistent cherry and spice flavors balanced on velvet velour. A long finish takes your breath away. Very classy proportioned and a complete wine. A vintage with very low yields - yields at Hirsch Vineyard were down 40%. 330 cases, Block 9, 5, 9C and 6 (Dijon 114, Pommard, Swann), \$50.
- 2001: An enigma: a ripe vintage produced the highest alcohol of the vertical series, yet it is the softest, most elegant bottling of Hirsch Vineyard that Littorai has ever made. A beautiful nose of rose petal and poached red fruits. A magic combination of ripe, succulent fruit, smoky meat and exotic spices. Total seduction. A wine to cellar. 579 cases, block 9, 5, 9C, 6, \$50.
- 2002: There is no lack of beautiful fruit in this young wine with great potential. There is plenty of tannic backbone for aging, yet the tannins are not intrusive. This is more masculine than the 2001 but seamless and velvety with fantastic grip, precision and length. A dream vintage for winemakers. 641 cases, block 9, 5, 9C, 6, \$50.
- 2003: The first vintage sourced solely from block 6. There were two distinct cluster types in Hirsch block 6. The first to be picked were the earlier maturing comprised of very tiny berries on small clusters. They were bottled as the vineyard designate. A separate cluster type had larger, juicier berries which matured a bit later and these were declassified into the Sonoma Coast bottling. Sweet and dark with a hint of cinnamon and vanilla, this is a strapping and hearty wine that is yet supple and silky. Very sexy juice built for the long haul. 640 cases, block 6, \$50.

Note: Alcohols ranged from 13.5% from the older vintages to 14.4%.



Pinot Noir is a Lovely, but
Expensive Mistress.

Littorai Issue

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These highly coveted wines are sold through a mailing list.

Current releases

Mays Canyon Russian River Valley Chardonnay, Charles Heintz Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Les Larmes, Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, Cerise Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, and Mays Canyon Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.

