

**A Great Pinot
is a Perfect
Antidote for
Life's Stresses**

PinotFile

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Fiddlehead Cellars

“As the snow flies
On a cold and gray Chicago morning’
A poor little baby child is born”

These words are from the song, “In the Ghetto,” recorded by Elvis Presley in Memphis, Tennessee in 1969 soon after his 1968 Comeback Special. The song’s original title was “The Vicious Circle.” The lyrics make me think of Kathy Joseph, owner and winemaker, of Fiddlehead Cellars, Lompoc, California. Kathy was born in Chicago and has now settled comfortably in the ghetto - the Lompoc “Wine Ghetto,” that is. The ghetto is an industrial warehouse park behind the Home Depot on East Ocean Avenue, near the intersection of Highways 1 and 246. 27 different labels currently call the ghetto home.

I recently visited the FiddleHeadquarters in the ghetto and spent the day with Kathy (known as the head or first fiddle, left) and her assistant Karen Steinwachs (known as the second fiddle, right). Although the outside of the warehouse is nondescript, inside Fiddlehead winery there is a passion and playful exuberance that is infectious. The inside is filled with the latest winemaker’s tools and the space is as organized and tidy as a newborn nursery. Kathy has names for each of her fermentation tanks such as, “Dimples” (this one is dented), “No Name,” “Nokia” (this one swallowed her cell phone), and “Bad Boy” (this one sits in the corner). All of this in good fun, but believe me, the wines here are seriously hedonistic and play second fiddle to none.





Kathy, like many winemakers I have profiled in these pages, started out as a pre-med major in college. She ended up majoring in biochemistry and attended University California at Davis graduate school. After working in Napa, she started her own label, Fiddlehead Cellars, in 1988 (for the origin of the name “Fiddlehead” see page 7). Unlike many winemakers with a Burgundian slant, she focused on Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. Kathy has produced Pinot Noir from both Oregon and Santa Barbara County and now has eighteen vintages of both under her belt.

In the mid 1990s, Kathy began searching for her own vineyard in the Sta. Rita Hills region of Santa Barbara County. She had her eye on a choice 133 acre plot across Santa Rosa Road from the famed Sanford & Benedict Vineyard in the middle of the Sta. Rita Hills. With the help of investor partners including Napa Valley’s Beringer Blass, she purchased this land in 1996 and named it Fiddlestix Vineyard. Planting commenced in 1998 along with the assistance of a talented vineyard management team (Jeff Newton and Larry Finkle of Coastal Vineyard Care) who have stayed with Kathy to the present time. Fiddlestix Vineyard currently has 97 acres planted to 35 blocks. Clones include Pommard 4 and 5, and Dijon 113, 115, 626, and 777 (some Swan clone has also been recently added) on three rootstocks. Spacing is tight, with each row only 7 feet wide, resulting in 1556 vines per acre. This was no easy task for a small winery but in a short time, Fiddlestix Vineyard has become one of the most acclaimed sites for producing Pinot Noir in the Santa Rita Hills. Currently, Kathy keeps 15% of the vineyard’s production for her own label, and sells the rest on contract to many prestigious producers including Ampelos, Ancien, Arcadian, Bonaccorsi, Ken Brown, Hitching Post, Gainey, Ortman, Summerland, and TAZ. Kathy lives on the vineyard property with her husband, Tom Doyle, a medical malpractice attorney (they have a second home in Davis, California, where she spends much of the off season and which is used as the Fiddlehead Business Office). Along with three or four full time helpers, she directs all of the site-specific and sustainable farming here. The quality of the grapes that originate here are held in such high esteem that those who source grapes rarely request any change in farming practices.

To give you a feel for the location and beautiful setting of this vineyard I have included several photos that follow. The Santa Rita Hills is a western subdivision of the much larger Santa Ynez Valley Appellation. The appellation is officially Sta. Rita Hills, since Vina Santa Rita, a 123-year-old winery in Santiago, Chile, filed suit in 2001 to stop California vintners from using the Santa Rita Hills name. Sta. Rita Hills is pronounced the same, but reads a little awkwardly. The Santa Rita Hills appellation is one of the few spots along the California coast where the mountains run east-west instead of north-south. The result is a gap that allows cooling Pacific Ocean winds to flow inland. When it is hot in Santa Ynez which is 10 miles to the east, it is 10 degrees cooler in the western Santa Rita Hills. Fog hovers over the vines until mid-morning and the temperature barely rises above 75 degrees. Well-draining calcareous soils (limestone, chalk and clay) combine with the cool climate to make this area ideal for growing Pinot Noir. There has been some success with Chardonnay and Syrah as well.

The photo below shows the beautifully manicured Fiddlestix Vineyard viewed to the north showing the east-west oriented rolling hills. The old barn on the property has been lovingly restored and events such as this year's 1st Annual Fiddlefest are held here. At the Fiddlefest, all of the producers who source Pinot Noir from Fiddlestix Vineyard pour their wines, and the music, of course, features fiddling. The view from the barn window looking south is striking.





Above is the view of the vineyard toward the south with the Sanford & Benedict Vineyard in the distance. Hillside plantings at Fiddlestox are seen to the left. Below is the view from the hillside vines looking north toward the Sea Smoke vineyards on the distant hillside.



The thrust of Kathy Joseph's winemaking is blending barrels to produce the best wine. At many Pinot Noir wineries the emphasis is on the clone or the vineyard. Here, all of the grapes come from the estate vineyard but with different sites in the vineyard, multiple rootstocks and clones, different yeasts and coopers, hardly any two barrels in the winery are identical. Recently Kathy and Karen tasted through a dizzying number of barrels - 180 - to select the ones for each of the three Pinot Noirs produced here. **Seven Twenty Eight** is named for the mile marker at the Fiddlestix Vineyard (7.28 on Santa Rosa Road), **Lollapalooza** (say that after three glasses of Pinot) is chosen from many of the best barrels of the vintage, and **Doyle**, which is only produced in exceptional vintages and is a vin de garde worthy of long-term cellaring. The average total Pinot Noir production from Fiddlestix Vineyard is 150 barrels of which 30 barrels make the cut for the Lollapalooza. The same rigorous selection process is employed for the Oregon Pinot Noir, **Oldsville Reserve**, named after SW Oldsville Road in McMinnville (Willamette Valley) where Kathy made the wine every year until 2003 (they are now transported via overnight refrigerated truck from Oregon to the winery in Lompoc). The Oregon Pinot Noir is a blend of grapes from four different vineyards located primarily in the Eola Hills. Total production at Fiddlehead Cellars, including three Sauvignon Blancs, a Rosè, and a dessert wine from Sauvignon Blanc is 5,000 cases per year.

For Kathy, it is all about "taste, taste, taste." I got some feel for how she puts the barrels together as we sampled several barrels of 2005 Pinot Noir, clones 113, 115, 626, and Pommard. Frankly, I found it all a bit overwhelming, but then that is why I am writing about wine and not making it! When asked about her winemaking style, Kathy has said, "I think my wines reflect my curly-haired personality." I am not sure what style of Pinot Noir that is. When pressed for a serious answer, she says she goes for "prettiness," and specifically taste, texture and structure. Well-known Santa Barbara restaurateur and winemaker, Ken Margerum, has summed up her style in the past: "Her liveliness, exuberance, enthusiasm and zeal come through in the glass. I also taste evidence suggesting a streak of firm resolve and self-discipline. Hers are wines of complex character and distinctive personality."

Tasting Notes

The wines below were tasted at the winery with the Fiddlehead gang over lunch. The 2006 Sauvignon Blanc had been picked the day before, and Pinot Noir was still a week or two away so it was a convenient time to pause and get acquainted. A nice table had been set outside the winery under a tent and we all reveled in some great food and wine. The ghetto was a great place to be on this afternoon.

Sauvignon Blancs

Sauvignon Blanc grapes are sourced from vineyards in the eastern end of the Santa Ynez Valley appellation including Stolpman on Ballard Canyon Road, and Vogelzang and Westerly in the Happy Canyon area.. Here the days are quite warm, even hot compared to Fiddlestix Vineyard, but with cool evenings well-suited for Sauvignon Blanc. These vineyards are contractually custom farmed to Kathy's specifications under the direction of Coastal Vineyard Care. Depending on the vintage, three distinctly different styles of Sauvignon Blanc are produced. Note that Kathy feels strongly that her Sauvignon Blancs benefit from some bottle age so the wines below are current releases.

2004 Fiddlehead Cellars Santa Ynez Valley Happy Canyon Sauvignon Blanc \$24. This is a cuveè from three vineyards, Vogelzang, Westerly and Stolpman. Whole cluster pressed, part fermented in stainless steel, part in tight-grained French oak, non-malolactic. Not tasted

2001 Fiddlehead Cellars Santa Ynez Valley Goosebury Sauvignon Blanc 14.1% alc., 194 cases, \$32. This wine is 100% Vogelzang Vineyard Musque clone from specific rows of the vineyard. 100% cold fermented, non-malolactic, no oak influence. This is a bright, crisp and refreshing wine with laser focus and racy acidity. Very appealing aromas and flavors of stone fruits, citrus and minerals make it a perfect match with cevichè. Fresh as a daisy.

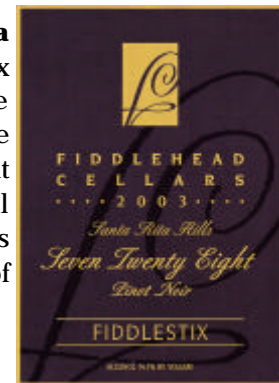
2001 Fiddlehead Cellars Santa Ynez Valley Honeysuckle Sauvignon Blanc 14.0% alc., 500 cases, \$32. This wine reflects Kathy's love of Bordeaux-style white wines. This is a richer wine with a bigger and creamier mouth feel reflecting aging in 100% new tight-grained Sequin Moreau and Damy barrels for eight months. Whole cluster pressed, non-malolactic. In the past, Kathy "fiddled" with trying some Semillon in this wine like the Bordelais, but preferred 100% Sauvignon Blanc. Clone 1 and Musque clone from Vogelzang Vineyard are co-fermented in each cask. This is a layered and complex Sauvignon Blanc which features appealing flavors of honey, roasted nuts, spice, citrus and vanilla pudding. A harmonious wine with great appeal. A blanc lovers feast.

Pinot Noirs

Tasting these wines, I am reminded of a quote by David Autrey of Westrey Wines in McMinnville, Oregon: "Women show a sense of balance in winemaking that you don't see with men." Kathy bottle ages the wines before releasing them for sale. She believes this results in a wine with more integration, better balance, and more drinking enjoyment.

2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Willamette Valley Oldsville Reserve Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 793 cases, \$40. This is the last vintage of Oregon Pinot Noir that was fermented, aged and bottled in Oregon. This Pinot is a blend of old Pommard clones and Dijon clone 115 from four vineyard sources. This is a restrained and elegant Pinot Noir yet it possesses full flavors at the core. There are nice notes of cherry and brown spices and the suede-like tannins give the wine an appealing plushness.

2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Seven Twenty Eight Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$38 (current release is 2003). A selection of six clones on three rootstocks fermented in small vats and aged in barrels from five French coopers. The 728 typically has attractive aromatics early on and can be enjoyed at a relatively young age. This Pinot exhibits finesse over fruit heaviness. The aromatics of dark berries and cherries jubilee lead to a mouthful of racy fruits highlighted by tea, cola and spice. The whole package is beautifully balanced and the lengthy finish is uplifted by bright acidity. A lot of Pinot magic at work here.



2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Lollapalooza Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 300 cases, \$50. Lollapalooza is old English slang for "something outstanding of its kind." This wine is the end product of extensive tastings during the 16 month aging period. Certain barrels shout "Lollapalooza!" Individual barrels are selected on their merit, but also chosen to blend harmoniously with other nominees. Aromas of sweet pipe-tobacco and crushed dark cherries waft from the glass. The flavors are vigorous with dark, plummy fruit and stylish notes of mocha and cinnamon. The texture is marked by silk and satin. Flat out beautiful.

2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Doyle Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 2 barrels, \$97. A Pinot Noir of extraordinary breeding, only produced when the vintage delivers. 1 barrel produced in 2003, none in 2004. This is the second time I have had this wine and both times I found it incredibly exotic. Fat and opulent, tight and concentrated, it must be decanted before drinking. It is a dense and powerfully structured Pinot Noir, with perfect integration of oak and alcohol, soft coating tannins, and a finish that you can taste the next day. I would swear there is some Vahlrona chocolate in this Pinot. This is a wine to cellar if you can keep your hands off it. A mouthful so sensuous you will need a cold shower afterward.

Kathy also makes a couple of fun wines. There is a dry rosè called **Pink Fiddle** which is so popular the 2005 vintage is already sold out, and a late harvest Sauvignon Blanc with a hint of Muscat Blanc named **Sweetie**. Sweetie is a labor of love named after Kathy's husband and sweetie, Tom Doyle.

2005 Fiddlehead Cellars Sweetie 11.7% alc., 287 cases, 1/2 bottles ("little fiddle screwys"), \$25. 50% of the grapes are dehydrated on the vine with extended hang time (35 Brix) and 50% are dried in trays to concentrate the pure fruit fragrance. The wine is fermented cold, non-malolactic, with 14% residual sugar. This was served ice cold at dessert time with vanilla bean ice cream topped with fresh pineapple and a little caramel syrup and was one of those wine-food matches that bring you to your knees.



Also tasted in the vineyard:

2003 Fiddlehead Cellars Seven Twenty Eight Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir We sat on a rustic picnic table under an old oak tree and looked across the vineyard in the late afternoon as the shadows began to settle over the vista. It was a magical time of the day and this wine suited the occasion just fine. It followed the theme of the 2002 728 described previously but also had noticeable white pepper and spice flavors.

2001 Fiddlehead Cellars Lollapalooza Fiddlestix Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir (still available from the winery's library stock). A touch of gaminess in the nose reminds one of Burgundy. A very elegant and mature wine with a rich, sweet palate, and an Asian spice finish. A Grace Kelly of a Pinot.

Some library wines dating back to 1997 are for sale from the winery's library. Current tasting notes are also posted. On October 15, 2006, the day following the Santa Barbara County Vintners' Association Celebration of Harvest, Fiddlehead will be having a library wine tasting and sale open to the public from 1-4 PM at the winery in Lompoc. Current and library wines may be ordered online at www.fiddleheadcellars.com or by phoning the winery at 800-251-1225. The winery's tasting room is open Thursday thru Saturday from 11-4. Now is a perfect time to visit, meet the Fiddlechicks, and get a feel for the harvest activity going on in the winery. I would call ahead for directions for there is no signage in the Lompoc wine ghetto.

Footnote: When Kathy was contemplating what to name her brand, she decided she wanted something more fun than Kathy Joseph Cellars, for example. She and her husband, Tom Doyle, used to pour over books, looking for strange and wonderful names. One day she was in her garden nurturing some ferns that were just unfurling - Fiddlehead ferns to be specific. She loved the name and the visual connection with it. Also, there was the curly association: the fern curled up ready to emerge and Kathy with her curly hair.

Night Moves: Picking Pinot

Night harvesting of Pinot Noir has become common in Pinot Noir vineyards throughout California. In the early morning hours, the grapes are cold and can be sent to the winery in a fresher, crispier and pristine state for processing into wine. Wineries also save significantly in cooling costs. Pickers are happy as they avoid the daytime heat, harvest can proceed without concern about daytime heat spikes, and winemakers prefer receiving cold grapes.

Actually, the idea is not new, but the technology for night harvesting has only become available in the last ten years. At Pisoni Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands of California, workers wear miner-style LED headlamps and begin picking at about 1:00 AM. At Pisoni Vineyards, night harvest is completed by two 12-person crews before sunrise. Since different blocks ripen at different times, pickers work most of September and October in the dark.

At Fiddlestix Vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills of California, lights are pulled by tractors and picking commences at 3:00 AM. The lights are so efficient that Kathy Joseph and her crew can actually sort the grapes in the field so that only prime grapes arrive at the winery (below).



Many other vineyards, including Bien Nacido Vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley of California are “returning to the Dark Ages” to improve the quality of the resultant wine. At Bien Nacido, part of the impetus to pick at night is to meet their rigorous delivery schedule that finds multiple wineries wanting their grapes on the same day.

Chambolle-Musigny

I don't write frequently about Burgundy because there are several other better sources of information (burghound.com, burgundy-report.com, and Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar* to name a few). That is not to say, however, that I don't immerse myself in the fascinating but intricate and convoluted number of producers, crus, and wines. I do drink Burgs often and my personal cellar is about 40% red Burgundy (primarily from Chambolle-Musigny and Vosne-Romanee). Since they are precious and expensive, I rarely open a bottle for review and critical tasting, preferring to pop the cork when special dinners with friends arise.

I recently came across a dreamy article in the October 2006 issue of *Wine & Spirits* authored by Fiona Morrison, MW. This article was titled "Chambolle-Musigny: New Names Rise to the Top of Pinot Noir's Pantheon." This was a superb piece of wine writing which succinctly portrayed the top wines and personalities of this fabled tiny village. The author was most favorably impressed by the wines of Mugnier, Roumier and Barthod. She says, "They are the champions of a style that emphasizes the fresh, pure elegance of Chambolle, great wines which, as Frédéric Mugnier says, "make you feel good."

The wines of Chambolle-Musigny are characterized by elegance and finesse although the degree of these two markers will vary from producer to producer. There is also fine structure and acidity. The whole package is utterly seductive.

Frédéric Mugnier makes his wines at the Chateau of Chambolle-Musigny from 10 acres of vines. 15,000 bottles are produced annually. His lineup ranges from a village Chambolle-Musigny (\$60) to premier crus Les Fuées (\$75) and Les Amoureuses (\$270) to grands crus Bonnes Mares (\$160) and Les Musigny (\$350).

2002 Domaine Jacques Frédéric Mugnier Chambolle-Musigny 12.5% alc., (\$60). Very light in color and body. A delicate wine with stunning aromatics of cherry, rhubarb, spice and a touch of barnyard funk. It flows over the palate like Mobil 1 and finishes with a lengthy and charming dose of Asian spice, cinnamon, strawberry and red cherry. Nothing out of place and nothing weighty or awkward here. Pure harmony. Smooth as silk, cool as air.



Burgundy Side Notes:

Bernard Ambroise has bottled his 2004 Bourgogne under screwcap - a first for Burgundy.

Henri Mayer recently passed away. Many Burgundy enthusiasts admire him with up most reverence as do the younger generation of Burgundy winemakers. I personally never had the pleasure of drinking one of his wines as I could never find anyone else to buy a bottle (his wines command very high prices on the secondary market). My friend and Burgundy enthusiast Andy Tan said: "I have never tasted a better, more thrilling Echézéaux than those from Mayer and they are among the most special Burgundies I have experienced in my life. I simply can't think of many others in Burgundy who are capable of pulling out such amazing juice." That last sentence would make a great epitaph.


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On Sunday, October 15, 2006, the winery that houses Au Bon Climat and Qupé at Bien Nacido Vineyards will be open to the public. This Fall Open House runs from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The \$15 admission fee includes lunch and tasting of wines from Au Bon Climat, Qupé, Verdad, Cold Heaven, Makor, Ici/La-Bas, Vita Nova, Il Podere dell' Olivos, and Barham Mendelsohn. Call the winery at 805-937-9801 for further information and directions. Jim and Morgan Clendenen and Bob and Louisa Lindquist will be hosting the event.

Randall Grahm Getting Serious

Randall Grahm grew up in Los Angeles, California and received an undergraduate degree from the University of California Santa Cruz in philosophy. This explains the origins of his esoteric newsletters. Subsequently he obtained a degree in viticulture from the University of California Davis and bought land in Bonny Doon near Santa Cruz. His original goal was to make great American Pinot Noir. Unfortunately, his initial efforts were not very good and he grafted the vines over to Syrah, Rousanne, Marsanne and Viognier. Over the years, he has built his labels, Bonny Doon and Ca'Del Solo, into a multimillion dollar wine enterprise. Known for his eccentricity and thesaurus-like vocabulary, his wines feature clever names (for example, " Critique of Pure Riesling") and labels. He ventured into varietals where others feared to tread and many of his quirky efforts were very popular.



Recently, Grahm has had a midlife crisis and has decided to downsize and return to more serious winemaking. He has sold over half of his wine production to the Wine Group. His remaining low-priced brands will become known as Pacific Rim wines based in Washington and will produce 120,000 cases a year. His 125 acre Soledad vineyard (where his Ca' del Solo Italianesque wines originate) will be regrafted to fewer varietals and employ biodynamic farming. Grahm will also look to buy vineyards or secure long-term leases so he can concentrate on ultra-premium, small production Rhone varietals and, once again, Pinot Noir. I can't wait to hear the name he comes up with for his Pinot Noir.

Grahm perhaps hinted at his intentions in a mailer sent out to his flock months ago titled, " Da Vino Commedia." This lengthy allegory concludes: "It was well before the popular film, "Sideways" That André (Tchelistcheff) made California's greatest pinot noir. We bid farewell and strode onward into the gathering haze."