

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

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Inside this issue:

Pinot Shootout Favorites	2
2007 SF Chronicle Wine Competition	7
2006 Sonoma County Harvest Wine Competition	8
Segue Pinot Noir	9
Molnar Family Pinot Noir	9
Wine Money	10
Drink Up	11

Pinot Noir Shootout

I recently savored the opportunity to participate in **The 5th Annual Pinot Noir Shootout: Women, Men and Pinot Noir**. Over 230 Pinot Noirs were submitted by producers from California, Oregon, New Zealand, Australia, France, Germany, and elsewhere and judged by a distinguished panel through a series of preliminary tastings during December, 2006, and January, 2007. The top 64 Pinot Noirs were then judged in San Francisco on January 17, 2007. The event culminates in **The Pinot Noir Summit** in San Francisco on February 10, 2007, where the final wines are showcased for the public and press.

This competition is quite unique for several reasons. Eight wines are tasted blind in 4 flights over several hours, allowing attentive and extensive evaluation of each wine, and eliminating palate fatigue as a factor in judging. At many major wine competitions such as the recent San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, judges must sample at least 100 wines a day and often many more. Judging at the Pinot Noir Shootout is independent of producer, appellation, and price. A 100 point scoring system is utilized but the emphasis is on the copious notes that each judge creates for the wines. The judging panel is comprised of a diverse group of over 40 Pinot Noir loving wine professionals including representatives from the press (Virginie Boone, features writer, *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*; Lynne Char Bennet, writer, *San Francisco Chronicle*; Laura Daniel, *San Jose Mercury News*; Joyce Goldstein, food and wine writer; Rosina Wilson, editor, *Wine X Magazine*, Leslie Sbrocco, author of *Wine for Women*; Alder Yarrow, wine writer, Vinography Blog; Norm Roby, wine writer; Graham Parnell, managing editor of *Vineyard and Winery Management*; Ron Wiegand, writer, *Restaurant Wine*; and yours truly), sommeliers (Joanna Breslin, Ana Mandara Restaurant; Christopher Sawyer, Tim Gaiser), wine buyers (Kristi Mohar, Fiesta Market in Sebastopol; Shaun Green and Michael Jordan, K & L Wine Merchants), winemakers (Anthony Austin, Sonoma Coast Vineyards; Patrick Melley, Russian Hill Estate Winery), and educators (Barbara Drady, Affairs of the Vine; Skip Hanson, Edgar Vogt and David P. Jones, Wine Works). There are more judges per entry than broad-based wine competitions. The results and reviews are gender based in that male and female judge's scores and comments are tabulated separately.

The winning 40 wines will be announced at The Pinot Noir Summit to be held at 1 Fort Mason in San Francisco on February 10, 2007. Attendees of this event will have the opportunity to judge the wines blind in a walk-around format and

compare their results with the professional judging panel. Consumers will also be able to meet the winemakers and/or winery owners of each of the final Pinot Noirs after they are judged and unveiled.

This year there was an additional element added to the judging: comparison of wines with and without food. At The Pinot Noir Summit, attendees will also be able to taste the wines blind without food and then taste the same wines with specially paired hors d'oeuvres.

Pinot Noir Workshops will also be held in conjunction with The Pinot Noir Summit and include: Here Comes the Clone - Discussion and Tasting; Food and Pinot Noir Pairing - An Exploration of Classic Pairings; The Fashion of Pinot Noir - Who's Driving the Fashion?; A Question of Style - Winemaker panel will discuss their style of Pinot Noir; Discover the Velvet - A Vertical Tasting; Understanding Pinot Envy - Identifying Aromas and Flavors in Pinot Noir; Discovering New Stars - An Introduction and Tasting of Wines; and Location, Location, Location - An Exploration of Appellations.

For those Pinot Noir lovers in the Northern California area, this is a must-attend event. I can heartily recommend it. Consider: blind tasting of 40 top-rated Pinot Noirs, Pinot Noir Awards Ceremony, Pinot Noir Workshops, and a reception featuring noted Pinot Noir winemakers showcasing their wines - **all for \$100 per person! Readers of the PinotFile receive a 25% discount!** When you register for The Pinot Noir Summit online at www.affarisofthevine.com.pn_summit.html, use the word **prince** (all lower case). Attendance is limited to 200 lucky pinoaficionados.

Pinot Noir Shootout Favorites

Through my participation in preliminary tastings and the final tasting, I was able to sample almost 100 Pinot Noirs. One trend in style that seemed to run through the tastings was that a number of the wines lacked the elegance, finesse, texture, and sensuality of Pinot Noir. Tasted blind, these generously fruited rather than classy or complex wines with high alcohol and heavy oak could easily be mistaken for Syrah or other red varietals. They had enormous richness and concentration, but lacked the proper balance of acidity, alcohol, texture, and tannins. A lack of acidity was noteworthy in a number of the wines. Acidity is crucial for refreshment, food, and aging. I like to call these wines "P-no-no-R". There were, however, several excellent Pinot Noirs that I can recommend. Remember, these wines were not the judging panel consensus favorites, only my personal preferences. In talking with other judges, however, there was often consensus of opinion that supported the pedigree of these Pinot Noirs.

An interesting list of flavor and aroma components in Pinot Noir was compiled by Barbara Drady of Affairs of the Vine and handed out to the judges. I would like to share this list with you as it highlights the most commonly encountered descriptors in Pinot Noir. It is by no means a complete list. Cherry, raspberry, raspberry jam, strawberry, strawberry jam, rose petals, pine pitch, orange peel, oak, violets, peppermint, tangerine, coffee, chocolate, cinnamon, earth, cedar, grapefruit, barnyard, black cherry, quinine, Coca-Cola (I would add Dr Pepper), smoke, pomegranate, rhubarb, cranberry, tea, roasted tomato, blackberry, blackberry jam, wet leaves, mushroom, vanilla, plum, licorice, rose, mint, spearmint, currant, and dried cherry.

2004 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 900 cases, \$38. I have participated in the Pinot Noir Shootout for two years now, and every time a Davis Family Pinot is in the lineup, I pick it out as superb. Guy Davis hand farms 7 acres of Pinot Noir from which he produces a single-vineyard estate Pinot Noir each year. His wines are consistently outstanding and available at his tasting room in Healdsburg or through the website at www.davisfamilyvineyards.com. This Pinot is medium-bodied with an expressive nose of spicy cherries. Cherries and raspberries with a touch of oak saturate the mid-palate. The mouth feel is velvety. The finish is satisfying and clean. A complete wine.

2004 D'Argenzio Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot

Noir 460 cases, \$36. This winery was started in 1997 by twin brothers, Ricci and Ray D'Argenzio. Building on their family heritage of wine-making, they have crafted small lots of Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley since their first release in 2000. The website is www.dargenziowine.com. This Pinot has a bright nose of red fruits. Richly oaked red fruits carry through to a lingering finish with moderate fine tannins. A full-flavored style with generous oak features.

**2004 D'Argenzio Klopp Thorn Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 286 cases, \$48.

Hi-tone Bing cherries star in the nose with a hint of violets. The flavors are a cherries jubilee with enticing cola and spice notes. There are some darker stone fruits peeking out here as well. The finish is dry and satisfying. I picked this out as a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir before the unveiling. A Gold Medal winner at the 2006 Sonoma County Harvest Fair.

2005 Annapolis Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 250 cases, \$42. This family-owned winery is located 3 miles from the Pacific Ocean at 1,000 ft. It is open daily from 12 to 5 for tasting and picnicking. A lovely, bright fruity nose is complimented by flavors of strawberries, baking spices, and vanilla. The flavors are well integrated and although this elegant Pinot Noir lacks a persistent finish, it is nicely balanced. The website is www.annapoliswinery.com.

2003 Gloria Ferrer José Ferrer Select Carneros Pinot Noir 11,400 cases (1,900 6-packs), \$35. All of the major California sparkling wine producers now produce still Pinot Noir and the wines have become quite good. This Pinot Noir is a reserve bottling sourced from the winery's 335-acre Carneros vineyard. It is composed of the 43 best barrels in the cellar and made in honor of the founder, José S Ferrer. Dark ruby in color, this plush wine starts with aromas of crushed blackberries, black cherries, and mocha and carries the theme through to the finish. The texture is noticeably silky. Moderate dusty tannins arrive with a rush at the back end. The wine is available at the winery which is open daily for tours and tastings. The website is www.gloriaferrer.com.

2004 Castle Vineyards & Winery Sangiacomo Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 107 cases, \$26.

Castle is located in the historic Buena Vista region of Carneros. The winery was founded in the 1990s by winemaker and vineyard manager Vic McWilliams who focuses on small lots of hand-crafted wines. Total production is 3,500 cases. A tasting room is located on the Sonoma town plaza. The website is castlevineyards.com (this wine is not listed on the site for sale so phone 707-996-1582). I really liked this Pinot. It starts off with a spirited nose of black cherries and spice (notably cinnamon). The flavors repeat the aromas. Oak is nicely integrated here. Perfect weight and balance. I hated to spit this one out. My highest scoring wine of the preliminary tastings.

2004 Patz & Hall Chenoweth Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 692 cases, \$47. Patz & Hall have been making highly-coveted Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays for years. The wines are a joint effort between winemakers James Hall and Anne Moses and the sales and marketing team of Donald and Heather Patz. This is the first release from this vineyard located in the hills above Green Valley. The planting is all Dijon clones. The wine has an attractive deep purple robe. Lovely aromas of cherries, cola and spice waft from the glass. I wanted to drink the nose. The flavors follow in step but are restrained in comparison to the nose. A solid wine with brisk acidity and a touch of dryness on the finish. Right now the nose trumps the flavors but time in the bottle may change that. The winery opened a wine tasting salon in Napa which is available for private and seated tasting by reservation for \$35 (85 Bordeaux Way, Suite A, Napa, 707-265-7700).

2005 Casa Barranca Wines Laetitia Vineyards Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir

125 cases, \$25. A relative new producer located in Ojai which I have featured in past issues of the *PinotFile*. This Pinot is one spicy dude. Bing cherries, nutmeg and cinnamon are featured throughout. The finish offers lively acidity and the whole package is very drinkable. Crafted with 30% new oak, the tannins are very soft. Understated, but really true to the varietal and a suitable dinner companion. Casa Barranca wines are available on the website at www.casabarranca.com. The winery is not open for tasting.

**2004 David Bruce Winery Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**

1412 cases, \$55. Despite very large production, this Santa Cruz Mountain winery continues to craft very attractive Pinot Noirs. The 2004 David Bruce Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (4996 cases, \$40) was also tasted and decent. This wine has it all: a deep, fruity nose, sweet and juicy Pinot fruits, velvety texture, and a crisp finish. The wines enjoy widespread retail distribution and are available on the winery's website at www.davidbrucewinery.com.

2003 Copeland Creek Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 348 cases, \$30. This is another producer that I have recommended in the *PinotFile*. Winemaker Don Baumhefner has a touch with Pinot Noir and he is developing quite a following. I seem to pick out Copeland Creek Pinot Noir in several blind tastings as a favorite. The style here is elegant with plenty of bright cherries, toasty oak, spice and hint of citrus to satisfy. Great scent, juicy, and lovely Pinot delicacy. The wine may be purchased from the website at www.copelandcreekvineyards.com. The 2004 vintage is quite good also and will be released in the spring of this year.

2004 Gary Farrell Vineyards & Winery Starr Ridge Vineyard Dijon Clones Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

179 cases, \$60. Gary Farrell Pinot Noirs are a benchmark for the Russian River Valley and are consistently excellent. The 24-acre Starr Ridge Vineyard is owned by Gary and Debbie Farrell. The style is one of power with elegance and eminent age ability. This Pinot starts with very pleasing aromatics featuring bright red cherries, rhubarb and roses. The fruit has great purity and persistence with lovely depth of flavor and is enhanced by tasty oak. The whole package finishes with a good tannic backbone and acid edge. The wine is available on the website at www.garyfarrellwines.com.

2005 Lost Canyon Winery Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir

340 cases, \$40. This winery is one of my perennial favorites and I seem to often pick their wines out at blind tastings. The winery has a new tasting room adjacent to the winery on the Oakland bay front. The beautiful aromatics feature red and black fruits enhanced by spices and a little exotic wood. Plenty of toasty cherries are offered in a nicely structured wine with a silky texture. A lingering finish makes this a really classy wine. The wine will be released in the spring. I picked this one out as a favorite in both the preliminaries and final judgments. The website is www.lostcanyonwinery.com.

2005 Belle Glos Las Alturas Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands

Monterey County Pinot Noir 1234 cases, \$50. This label is under the Caymus umbrella and the wines have gotten better every year since the first releases in 2001. Chuck Wagner's son, Joseph, handles the viticulture and winemaking for this label. A Pinot with very expressive aromatics featuring cherries, vanilla, and sweet oak. Nice depth and richness of flavor with fine tannins and a clean finish. The best Pinot I have had from this producer. Very sexy label and bottle with red wax draped around the neck (and a nice wax tab for easily removing the wax at the top to access the cork). The wines are distributed to fine wine retailers. No website.



2004 Villa Mt Eden Grand Reserve Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 2400 cases, \$22. A steal from a Napa producer known more Chardonnay and Cabernet. The winemaker is Mike McGrath. This Pinot is heavenly scented with red stone fruits, pomegranate, mocha and toast. The flavors are rich and complex highlighted by exotic spices and earthy red fruits. There is a solid backbone of acidity and tannins. The winery website is www.villamteden.com. The wines are distributed to fine wine stores.

2004 TR Elliott Three Plumes Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 320, \$32. Theodore R Elliott is the man behind Elliott Family Cellars, a very small producer of Pinot Noir in Santa Rosa. He has many years experience as a grape grower and winemaker including time with Sonoma Cutrer. His wines are perfect examples of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. This wine and his other cuvee (Queste) won Gold Medals at the 2006 Sonoma County Harvest Fair. The two Pinot Noirs he produces are cuvees from two vineyards - Vine Hill and Hallberg (formerly Goldridge). The wine is composed of three clones - 115, Pommard 5, and 777. Aging is in 36% new oak. A nicely perfumed Pinot with cherries, rhubarb, and Asian spice. Elegant in style with plenty of appealing Pinot fruits and herbs enhanced with deft wood and spice. A welcome food partner as well. The wines are available online on the website at www.elliottfamilycellars.com.



2004 Kenneth Volk Vineyards Sierra Madre Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 340 cases, \$36. Kenneth Volk was the long-time owner and winemaker at Wild Horse Cellars which is now under the Beam Estates umbrella. He has reinvented himself with this new label. He is a legend in Santa Barbara County, having made his first Pinot Noir under the Wild Horse label in 1983. Visit his nicely composed website at www.volkwines.com for more information. His wines may be purchased on the website. The nose offers plenty of crushed cherries, but also some interesting barnyard notes. Flavors of dried cherries and pomegranates lead to a crisp and lengthy finish. The tannins are supple and the whole package is nicely balanced. This Pinot really exploded with a little rare beef.

2005 Bogle Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 17,000 cases, \$13. The Bogle family has been farming in California since the mid 1800s, but it wasn't until 1968 that father and son, Warren and Cris, planted wine grapes in Clarksburg, along the Sacramento River. Today they farm over 1,200 acres in the Sacramento Delta. They are better known for several other varietals than Pinot Noir, but beginning with the 2003 vintage, they have really hit the mark with Pinot Noir. This Pinot was aged 12 months in French and American oak. This was one of my highest scoring Pinot Noirs. The aromas of raspberries, cherries, roses, and a hint of oak are voluptuous. Mixed berry and black cherry fruit are racy and sexy. The soft texture is Elvis on velvet. The tannins are soft and coating and the finish is clean and bright. A complete wine that sings with food. It is almost impossible to find Pinot Noir of this quality at this price point. Stock up. There is widespread retail distribution.

2005 King Estate Oregon Pinot Noir 22,000 cases, \$26. Located southwest of Eugene, this beautiful thousand-acre estate has 250 acres of organic vineyards, a grapevine grafting and propagation facility, nursery, orchards, and a lush organic garden. The winery is styled as a grand European chateau. The 2004 Domaine Pinot Noir is sourced from the estate vineyards and includes four Dijon clones (113, 115, 375, 538). Aging is done in 67% new oak for 16 months. This is not a Pinot for wimps. A very rich, monstrous nose of red and black fruits highlighted by vanilla oak leads to a well-endowed Pinot of great allure. The finish lasts for what seems like an eternity. A great sipping Pinot. At 12.9% alcohol, you can indulge heartedly. The wine is available on the website at www.kingestate.com.



2004 La Rochelle Winery San Vicente Vineyard Monterey County Pinot Noir 355 cases, \$20. La Rochelle Winery focuses on small lots of Pinot Noir. Formerly Mirassou, the winemaker Tom Stutz crafts several vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs of high quality. A tasting room is open each afternoon in the Livermore Valley. The wine is available on the website at www.lrwine.com. You won't find a better \$20 Pinot anywhere. The nose is nicely spiced with nutmeg and cardamom. Light on the palate, there are attractive spice and mocha highlights to the red fruit core. The tangy finish completes this nicely balanced and very drinkable Pinot Noir.

2004 Laetitia Vineyard & Winery Laetitia Vineyard Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir 440 cases, \$65. Laetitia has a colorful history going back to 1982 when Champagne Deutz first planted vineyards in the Arroyo Grande Valley. Since 2001, the winery has been under the ownership of businessman Selim Zilkha and the wines have starred ever since. The current winemaker, Eric Hickey, has been at the helm since 1990. This Pinot is nicely perfumed with spicy cherries and floral notes. A little cinnamon candy peaks out as well. Elegant and soft, the palate is all Pinot with emphasis on finesse over fruit heaviness. This finish is clean and zippy. The wine may be purchased at the winery's website: www.laetitiawine.com.



2004 Woodenhead Morning Dew Ranch Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 166 cases, \$46. This producer was featured recently in the *PinotFile*. Nikolai Stez spent 17 years working crushes at Williams Selyem. He now crafts small production, artisan Pinot Noirs of great interest. The wine has a pure red fruit nose of great elegance. Very lush in the mouth with plenty of spice and vim. More fruity than complex, with plenty of power to thrill. A Lolita. Woodenhead wines may be purchased on the website at www.woodenheadwine.com.

There were a number of other Pinot Noirs that did not leave me, as the French say, *aux anges* (floating with angels), but they were perfectly fine and decent examples of the varietal. These wines can often be more Burgundy-oriented and because of a more minimalist and acidic style, do not show well in a tasting lineup with more flashy wines.

- 2004 Carneros Creek Winery Carneros Pinot Noir** 1000 cases, \$40. A shy girl in the back row.
- 2004 Domaine Carneros Estate Carneros Pinot Noir** 1043 cases, \$60. A cinnamon treat.
- 2004 Estancia Stonewall Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** \$25. Very restrained nose.
- 2004 Hallcrest Vineyards Vista Del Mare Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir** 167 cases, \$35. Cherry-vanilla Dr Pepper with a lengthy finish.
- 2004 La Rochelle Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 95 cases, \$75. For oak lovers
- 2005 Flying Goat Cellars Dierberg Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 425 cases, \$42. Simple and fruity, but well-made.
- 2005 Ste Michelle Wine Estates Erath Vineyard Oregon Pinot Noir** 50,000 cases, \$16. Rich palate with hints of tobacco and oak.
- 2005 Fess Parker Winery Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir** 1664, \$25. A big cherry pie.
- 2005 Dr Konstantin Frank Finger Lakes New York Pinot Noir** 560 cases, \$25. Fresh strawberry jam with oak dust.
- 2005 Hahn Estates Winery Monterey Pinot Noir** 22,000 cases, \$18. Exotic woods and hi-profile tannins.
- 2004 Carneros Della Norte Los Carneros Pinot Noir** 400 cases, \$48. Burgundian austerity with appeal.
- 2005 Tom Eddy Monks Gate Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 191 cases, \$55. Rose petals on a soft pillow.

2007 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition

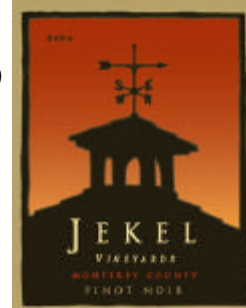
The San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition is the largest competition of American wines in the world - 3,800 wines from 1,500 wineries in over 20 states. Held on Jan 9-12, 2007, the latest competition involved 55 judges. Judging at this event takes some real strong palates as over 100 wines are often judged in only a few hours. The results are widely publicized and a public tasting of the award winners is held in the Festival Pavilion at Fort Mason Center in San Francisco, February 24, 2007 (for ticket information, www.winejudging.com). The public tasting can be a real zoo so you have been forewarned. All of the winners will be announced in February, but the major award winners have been released.



2007 Red Sweepstakes: 2005 Flying Goat Cellars Rancho Santa Rosa Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir. \$44. Winemaker Norm Yost crafts small amounts of Pinot Noir in his Lompoc wine ghetto winery. The wine is available for purchase on the winery website at www.flyinggoatcellars.com.

2007 Best of Class Awards

Pinot Noir < \$15.00: 2005 Jekel Monterey County Pinot Noir \$14.99



Pinot Noir \$15-\$25: 2005 Laetitia Estate Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir \$25



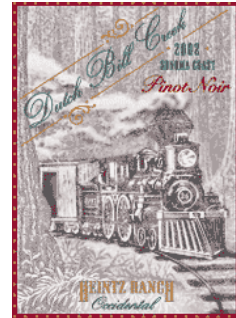
Pinot Noir \$25-\$25: 2004 Sharp Cellars Keenans Lane Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 344 cases, \$32. Owner and winemaker Vance Sharp is one of the few African American winemakers making Pinot Noir. The wine is available on the winery's website: www.sharpcellars.com.

Pinot Noir >\$35: 2005 Flying Goat Cellars Rancho Santa Rosa Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$44

2006 Sonoma County Harvest Wine Competition

Best of Class >\$25: 2004 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 300 cases, \$38.

Best of Class <\$25: 2005 Dutch Bill Creek Heintz Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$23. This winery was founded by winegrower Charlie Heintz in 1997 and is a small producer of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (1,000 cases). The label pays homage to William "Dutch Bill" Howard who was a settler in the Occidental area in the late 1800s. The wines are available through a mailing list or by phoning 877-874-3852. The website is www.dutchbillcreek.com.



Gold Medal >\$25

2004 Mietz Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$30

2004 D'Argenzio Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$36

2004 D'Argenzio Thorn Ridge Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$48

2004 WillowBrook Cellars Dutton Morelli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 334 cases, \$42. A newer winery established in 2001. The winemaker is Joseph Otos. Besides this Pinot Noir, there is a bottling from Owl Ridge Vineyard in the Russian River Valley. The wines can be purchased online at www.willowbrookcellars.com.

2004 Mahoney Vineyards Las Brisas Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir \$36. Francis Mahoney is a legend in Carneros where he has been a winemaker and grower for over 35 years. He founded Carneros Creek Winery in 1972 and for 30 years has conducted landmark clonal trials of Pinot Noir. In 2001 he left behind Carneros Creek to concentrate on farming his 110 acre Las Brisas Vineyard in Carneros. The current winemaker is Ken Foster who spent 15 years at David Bruce Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The wines are available on the informative website at www.mahoneyvineyards.com.



2003 Larson Family Wines Estate Carneros Pinot Noir \$30. The Larson family has owned the land where the winery sits in Carneros since 1877. Located just off Hwy 121 near the Sonoma Plaza, the tasting room is open from 10-5 daily. The wines are also available online at www.larsonfamilywines.com. Currently, only the 2003 Reserve Pinot Noir is listed on the website (\$50).

2003 Paradise Ridge Elizabeth & Henry's Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$30

2004 TR Elliott Queste Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$32

2004 TR Elliott Three Plumes Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$32

Gold Medal <\$25

2004 Kenwood Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$18

2005 Taft Street Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$18

2005 La Crema Sonoma Coast \$22

Segue Pinot Noir

Stephen Yafa has written about wine professionally for many years including contributions to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He decided to embark on an adventure of making his own wine and writing a book about the experience. Although he has not found a suitable and willing publisher as yet, he has found an outlet for his experience in his Big in the Mouth Blog at www.segucecellars.com. The blog is very entertaining as it takes the reader on adventures in and out of winemaking. "Cheap shots, unsolicited opinions, and erratic journal entries on my segue from writer to Pinot Noir winemaker."

Along with guidance from noted winemaker Greg LaFollette, he crafted a 2005 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. The wine is a blend of three outstanding Pinot Noir vineyards: Balletto, Van der Kamp, and Sangiacomo. All of these vineyards are in an area of the Russian River Valley where daily fog cools the grapes as it funnels in from the Pacific Ocean, which is about 15 miles to the west. The grapes were cold-soaked for 7 days, then fermented using native yeasts and hand punch downs. The wine was aged in 50% new and 50% neutral French oak for 11 months and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Bottled October 20, 2006.

2005 Segue Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 50 cases, \$42. As the label says, "Like a silky transition between sunset and twilight, the wine in this bottle has been crafted to segue fluently from grape to glass." The nose is classic Pinot Noir with cherry and berry goodness with toasty oak highlights. A little heat is evident but it is not over the top. Perfectly fine cherry cola fruit is presented in a gentle and lighter style. The texture is satiny and the wine finishes with lively acidity. Only some bitter oak tannins on the finish mar the experience. Certainly a very drinkable Pinot and one to be proud of considering this is an initial effort.



Segue Cellars 363 N. Ferndale Ave, Mill Valley, CA 94941. The website is www.segucecellars.com. Stephen Yafa can be reached at 415-389-1183 for ordering wine. 20 cases remain.

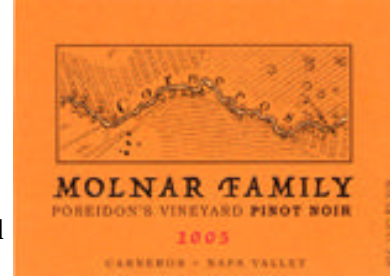
Molnar Family Pinot Noir

Nicholas Molnar is a Hungarian refugee who escaped Communist rule in 1956. In the late 1960s, he discovered Napa Valley and the wines reminded him of those from his homeland. He began buying land and developing vineyards throughout the Napa Valley. In 1973, he planted Poseidon's Vineyard at the confluence of Carneros Creek and the Napa River at the northern edge of the San Francisco Bay. At the time, this was one of the few vineyards in Carneros, which was largely composed of sheep ranches. Cooling winds blow through the Petaluma Gap from the Pacific Ocean and bring fog throughout the growing season to temper the heat. Over the next 30+ years, he supplied grapes to notable wineries such as Joseph Phelps, Heitz Cellars, Steling, Pride Mountain, Acacia, and Mumm Napa Valley. There is a rumor that local Carneros legend, Boonfly, is buried in Poseidon Vineyard.

The Molnar sons wanted to get into winemaking and so they partnered with Michael Terrien to make Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from their own vineyards in the cool southern end of the Napa Valley. Michael Blaise Terrien is a U.C. Davis trained winemaker who crafted wine at Acacia for a number of years and is now at Hanzell. He also makes wine for Kazmer & Blaise and Obsidian Ridge, which like Molnar Family, is part of the Tricycle Wine Company group (www.tricyclewineco.com).

2005 Molnar Family Poseidon's Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir

13.9% alcohol, 1228 cases, \$28. The label shows an 1860 Coastal Survey of the distinctive bends of Carneros Creek which have been used as landmarks. This Pinot Noir is unusual in that the cooperage used was Budapesti Kadar Tokaj oak barrels from Hungary which is also owned by the Molnar family. 34% new barrels were used and the wine was aged for nearly a year. The aromatics are extremely subdued with faint cherry and spice notes. The flavors, however, are very delicious, with cherry pie filling the most evident. Sleek and easy to drink, this lighter styled Pinot has appealing style and grace. Hungarian oak is very tight grained and imparts little to no oak aromas or flavors. It is said to offer a distinctive spice note to Pinot but I don't have enough experience to detect that in this wine. This Pinot Noir is a solid daily drinker that would pair well with simply grilled salmon or roast chicken.



Molnar Family wines are distributed to fine wine retail stores such as Roots Cellar in Healdsburg. There is a mailing list signup at www.tricyclewineco.com

Wine Money

Wine and money are intractably linked because it takes plenty of money to buy a little good wine. You have probably handed over your share of \$100 dollar bills for some great Pinot Noir, but have you ever taken the time to look at our funny money. In 2003, the U.S. Treasury began retooling our paper currency to prevent North Korean counterfeiting. Now it is decorated in pastel colors.

Dan Neil, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, notes that American bank notes picture "Dead White Men." he points out that "If we've relearned anything recently, it's that politicians can't be trusted. Why should we require their image to ratify our money?"

I suggest that we put the images of notable wine luminaries on our money because so much of it changes hands in the purchase of fine wine. I mean, who better to trust than Robert Parker, Jr. who hands out wine scores with unshakeable integrity. He accepts no bribes or advertising so he would make a perfect monetary saint. I would propose that we put his picture on the \$100 dollar bill in honor of the 100 point wine scoring system. We could also use him on a \$1 million dollar bill if we had one to honor his "million dollar nose."



Fred Fanzia, although some of his business practices at Bronco Wine Co have been reproachable, would be perfect for the \$2 bill (in honor of Two Buck Chuck sold nationwide at Trader Joe's markets).

Big business wineries could also sponsor currency. How about the Mondavi \$20, the Gallo \$10, and the Sebastiani \$5?



For the \$1 we need someone ubiquitous, preferably a woman, to grace the bill and maybe no one in wine is in the public eye enough to warrant such an honor. We probably need to look outside wine for a figure here. We could consider Paris Hilton and instead of "In God We Trust," we could put "It's Hot!" on the currency. Or maybe Brittany Spears with the phrase "Howyadoin'" next to her mug shot. Actually, I think I would vote for Rachel Ray because her face graces every newsstand in the country, she is the face of food (and isn't wine food?) and for \$1 we can get a value meal at most any fast food restaurant. "Yum O!"


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Now, go drink the good stuff

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

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This week in 1862, Count Agoston Haraszthy imported 100,000 rootstock cuttings from Europe. He was a Hungarian immigrant who purchased the Vallejo Vineyard in Sonoma County and renamed it Buena Vista. He became known as the father of the California wine industry and Buena Vista became California's first premium winery. Today, Buena Vista is the state's longest continuous operating winery and will be celebrating it's 150th anniversary.



Drink Up or Procrastinate?

One of the wine enthusiasts I know is prone to say, "It's not ready to drink. It's a baby, a Lolita." Sometimes I wonder if he ever enjoys a bottle of wine, since he drinks with guilt, always thinking the wine might be better with more age. Judgments about when wine will reach its peak are very subjective. For me, I don't want to be encumbered by worried thoughts about how long to cellar wine - I just pop the cork when I feel like drinking it.

Most American Pinot Noirs are ready to drink upon release, and although they generally improve with a couple years of time in the cellar, they are not made with long aging in mind. Sommelier Lauriann Greene-Solin has stated that only 20% of wines improve with aging beyond one or two years. This is because current winemaking techniques favor fruitiness and freshness, not extraction of tannins needed for a wine to age well. Over the years, tannins tend to round out, tastes blend together, and complex or secondary aromas (termed bouquet) will emerge if you catch the wine at its zenith.

Good balance in a wine (acidity and tannins in balance with alcohol) are a necessity for aging potential. Balance must be there from the beginning, because wines never become more balanced with time in the cellar.

Persistence is also important for aging. Count the number of seconds a wine's aroma lasts once you spit or swallow the wine. If it lasts longer than six seconds, the aging potential is good. More than eight seconds, and the wine will likely last a number of years in the cellar.

The golden rule of cellaring wine is not to let it slip past its prime. When a wine is over the hill, it will never come back to life. When you discover a Pinot Noir is at its peak, pull the cork on every bottle you own, invite me over, and let's party. If the wine is on the down slope, don't bother to call, for I prefer Lolita over the decrepitude of old age.