

Pinot Noir is more like a religion than a grape

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Starter Kit for Pinot Newbies

The writing in the *PinotFile* is often directed at pinotphiles who have an assumed expertise about wine in general, and Pinot Noir in particular. Occasionally I receive e-mails from the uninitiated who are new to wine and are just now getting hooked on Pinot Noir. A reader recently wrote that "I am relatively new to wine collecting and I'm learning more each day. I have taken a keen interest in Pinot Noir wine so your newsletter has been of great interest and very useful." The same reader went on to suggest that I write about "reference Pinots" that would form the basis of educating a newbie palate. He asked that I identify Pinot Noir wines that best reflect various wine growing regions of California and Oregon. Finally, he requested that I list the "top 10 must try" Pinots that should be experienced by those who are just starting out. I thought this was an excellent idea and decided to take on the challenge. So here is a Starter Kit for Pinot Newbies.

Before proceeding, a few bits of sage advice must be emphasized.

v There are a bewildering number of labels and variety of styles. Don't fret, dive in and drink, drink, drink. Knowledge comes with experience. Experiment bro.

v Be wary of proclamations and hype written by winemakers, retailers and wine critics. They can enhance and direct your wine experience, but they cannot BE your wine experience.

v Don't drink labels. As Dr. Maynard Amerine said, "It is not the year, the producer, or even the label that determines the quality of the wine; it is the wine in the glass, whatever the label or producer or year."

v Trust your own palate. If you like it, then it is a good wine. There is no accounting for taste. Mark your own territory. As wine importer Neal Rosenthal has proclaimed, "Your taste is your own. Your patrimony. You play with it as you play with your hands."

v Drink Pinot Noir with company to profit from the impressions of others and by all means have food on the table.

v As you would never judge a book by its cover, never judge the quality of a Pinot Noir by its depth of color.

"Sometimes people equate quality with desirability. If it's good, I want it. There are retailers who thrive on putting two pieces of information on a wine's neck tag, the price and a critic's score. Elsewhere, there is the opposite tendency which is to equate desirability with quality."

Alex Hunt

v Serve Pinot Noir at cellar temperature (60°). Pinot Noir is often served too warm, accentuating the alcohol which is very volatile. The alcohol can overwhelm the nose and palate.

v Purchase some proper glassware, preferably, a Burgundy-styled stem such as the Riedel Vinum series Burgundy glass (\$18) or Schott-Zwiesel Burgundy glass (\$7). The large bowl allows the aromas to develop fully and the shape maximizes the fruit flavors.

v Smell the calm wine in the glass first. You will perceive the most volatile aromas. Then gently swirl wine in the glass with a circular motion of your wrist. This releases the less volatile and more subtle aromas.

v Give the wine in the glass at least 15-20 minutes or more to open fully. Frequent swirling or decanting the wine prior to pouring can hasten this aeration process. Take a sip of wine and leave it in your mouth. To intensify the tasting you can chew the wine (this releases tannins) or you can take in some air with your lips slightly open (this opens up shy aromas).

v Pinot Noir can bring you close to heaven one night and the next night slap you in the face. It is a chameleon of a wine, notoriously variable and changing both in the bottle and in the glass.

v Visit as many wineries as you possibly can. Remember that wines often taste better at the winery (the so-called "cellar palate").

v There are basically two types of North American Pinot Noir: blended and single vineyard. The single vineyard or vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs may or may not justify their higher prices. Some have a distinctive range of flavors and can be outstanding. Blended Pinot Noirs (sourced from several vineyards) can be as good, are often less expensive, and are not as subject to the vagaries of vintage.

v Generally speaking, there are two styles of Pinot Noir but many variations in between. The so-called classic or Old World style brings out the feminine side of Pinot Noir. These wines feature elegance, finesse, subtlety, palatable acidity, and sensuality. The Caliesque or New World style is the masculine expression of Pinot Noir, fruit-driven with plush ripe flavors, intensity, and a healthy backbone of oak and sweet alcohol.

v There are many ways to judge quality and often it boils down to the simple judgment of whether you like or dislike the wine. A popular mnemonic for quality assessment at Master of Wine courses is BLIC. A wine must have Balance (integration of acid, alcohol, fruit and tannin), Length (how long the taste remains after it is swallowed or spat out), Intensity (the perception of impact), and Complexity (a great wine has more than one aroma and/or flavor). I have developed my own mnemonic: BLINGS. Balance, Length, Intricacy (complexity), Nature (character of the wine including intensity), Grain (texture) and Sexiness (the sensuality that is as difficult to describe).

v There are very few bad Pinot Noirs on the market today. Be more concerned with differences than what is good or bad.

v Great Pinot Noir is usually produced in small quantities (50-500 cases). The best source for these small production wines is the wineries which sell much of their wine direct to consumers. High-end wine retailers can also be a valuable source. Networking is invaluable as many wine enthusiasts do not purchase their full allocation of desirable wines. There are three free internet search engines to locate wine: www.wine-searcher.com, www.winezap.com, and www.wineaccess.com.

v Be ready to open your wallet. Pinot Noir is expensive to grow and to produce, Pinot Noir loves oak (Pinot Noir and Francois Frères are good friends) and the best French barrels are now pushing \$1,000 apiece. Many of the trophy wines are "deep-pocket Pinots," but there are numerous excellent Pinot Noirs priced in the sweet spot between \$20 and \$40.

Reference Pinot Noirs by Region

This list is not meant to be all-inclusive. Inevitably some worthwhile omissions will occur. I have omitted highly allocated wines which are only sold through mailing lists that have waiting lists or are available at inflated prices on the secondary market. (ie Kistler, Marcassin, Kosta Browne, Radio-Coteau, J. Rochioli, Sea Smoke, Sine Qua Non). I want to emphasize that these choices do not necessarily represent my favorite wines but rather are representative of the various regions.

Santa Barbara County

Sta. Rita Hills

Alma Rosa (La Encantada Vineyard), Ampelos (Estate Vineyard), Arcadian (Fiddlestix Vineyard), Bonaccorsi (Sanford & Benedict Vineyard), Brewer-Clifton (Mt. Carmel Vineyard), Cargassachi (Cargassachi and Jalama Vineyards), Clos Pepe (Clos Pepe Vineyard), Fiddlehead (Fiddlestix Vineyard), Flying Goat (Rio Vista Vineyard), Gypsy Canyon (Estate Vineyard), Ken Brown (Cargassachi and Clos Pepe Vineyards), Lafond (Estate Vineyard), Longoria (Fe Ciaga Vineyard), Melville (Melville Vineyard), Prodigal (Estate Vineyard), Sanford (La Rinconada Vineyard).

Santa Ynez

Rusack (Estate Vineyard)

Santa Maria Valley

Ambullneo (Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard), Au Bon Climat (Knox Alexander - Bien Nacido Vineyard), Foxen (Bien Nacido Vineyard Block 8), J. Wilkes (Bien Nacido Vineyard Q Block), Lane Tanner (Bien Nacido Vineyard), Native9 (Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard), Paul Lato Wines (Duende Gold Coast Vineyard).

San Luis Obispo County

Paso Robles area

Adelaida Cellars (HMR Estate), Jack Creek Cellars (Kruse Vineyard), Windward (Estate Vineyard).

Arroyo Grande

Talley (Rincon or Rosemary Vineyards), Laetitia (Estate Vineyard), Tantara (La Colline Vineyard).

Monterey County

Santa Lucia Highlands

Garys' Vineyard (multiple producers including Loring, Lucia, Miner, Morgan, ROAR), Hope & Grace (Sleepy Hollow Vineyard), Morgan (Double L Vineyard), Pisoni Vineyard (multiple producers including Arcadian, Pisoni, ROAR, Tantara), Rosella's Vineyard (multiple producers including August West, Loring, Miner, Morgan, ROAR), Tondré (Tondrè Grapefield).

Monterey

Cima Collina (Chula Vina Vineyard)

San Benito County

Calera Wine Company (Jensen Vineyard)

Santa Cruz Mountains (Santa Clara, San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties)

Alfaro Family Vineyards (Lindsey-Paige Vineyard), Burrell School (Estate Vineyard), Clos Tita (Estate Vineyard), David Bruce (Estate Vineyard), Silver Mountain (Miller Hill Vineyard), Thomas Fogerty (Rapley Trail Vineyard), Windy Oaks (Estate Vineyard), Varner (Estate Vineyard).

Napa County

El Molino (Estate Vineyard, Rutherford), Etude (Heirloom), Green Truck Cellars, Saintsbury (Brown Ranch Vineyard), Talisman (Truchard Vineyard), Whitethorn (Hyde Vineyard).

Marin County

Dutton-Goldfield (Devil’s Gulch Vineyard), Miller Wine Works (Kendric Vineyard), Pey-Marin (Trois Filles), Sean Thackrey (Devil’s Gulch Vineyard).

Sonoma County

Sonoma Carneros

Buena Vista (Ramal Vineyard), The Donum Estate.

Sonoma Valley

Gundlach Bundschu (Estate Vineyard)

Sonoma Coast

Brogan Cellars (Summa Vineyard), De La Montanya (Christine’s Vineyard), Flowers (Andreen-Gayle Vineyard), Fort Ross (Estate Vineyard), Hamel Wines (Campbell Ranch Vineyard), Hartford Family Wines (Seascape and Land’s End Vineyards), Halleck (Halleck Vineyard), Hirsch Vineyard (Estate Vineyard), Kanzler Vineyards (Estate Vineyard), Kastania (Estate Vineyard), Keller Estate (La Cruz Vineyard), Littorai (Hirsch, Thieriot and Summa Vineyards), Patz & Hall (Sonoma Coast), Peay Vineyards (Estate Vineyard), Pahlmeyer (Estate Vineyard), Sonoma Coast Vineyards, WesMar (Hellenthal Vineyard), WH Smith (Maritime Ridge), Wild Hog (Estate Vineyard).

Russian River Valley

Anthill Farms Winery (Tina Marie Vineyard), Brogan Cellars (Helio Doro Block Buena Terra Vineyard), Davis Family (Estate Vineyard), Dehlinger (Estate Vineyard), DuMol (RRV, Finn, Ryan), Emeritus (Estate Vineyard), Freeman (Akiko’s Cuvee), george wine co (Nuptial Vineyard), Inman Family (Olivet Grange Vineyard), Joseph Swan (Trenton Estate Vineyard), Merry Edwards (Olivet Lane and Klopp Ranch Vineyards), Lynmar (Quail Hill Vineyard, Five Sisters), Pellegrini Family (Olivet Lane Vineyard), Rochioli (Estate Vineyard), Scherrer (RRV), TR Elliot (“Queste”), Twomey (RRV), WesMar (RRV), Williams Selyem (Allen, Rochioli Riverblock Vineyards).

Mendocino County

Brogan Cellars (My Father’s Vineyard), Copain (Hein Family Vineyard), Drew (Fog-Eater) Elke Vineyards (Donnelly Creek Vineyard), Goldeneye (Estate Vineyards), Handley (Estate), Harmonique (The Noble One), Husch (Estate Vineyard), Lazy Creek Vineyards (Estate

Vineyard), Littorai (One Acre and Savoy Vineyards), Londer (Estate Grown), MacPhail (Ferrington and Toulouse Vineyards), Navarro Vineyards (Deep End Blend), Roessler (Savoy Vineyard), Skewis (Demuth Vineyard), Woodenhead (Morning Dew and Wiley Vineyards).

Oregon

Willamette Valley

Adelsheim (Elizabeth’s Reserve), Anam Cara Cellars (Nicholas Estate Vineyard), Andrew Rich (Reserve). Argyle (Spirithouse), Beaux Freres (Estate Vineyard), Belle Pente (Estate Vineyard), Belle Valle (Wm Valley), Bethel Heights (Southeast Block and Flat Block), Brick House (Les Dijonnaise), Broadley (Claudia’s Choice), Chehalem (Estate Reserve), Domaine Drouhin (Cuvee Laurene), Domaine Serene (Evansted Reserve), Elk Cove (Mount Richmond), et Fille (Maresh Vineyard), Hamacher, Ken Wright Cellars (Guadalupe Vineyard), Patricia Green Cellars (Estate Vineyard), Penner-Ash Wine Cellars (Shea Vineyard), Ponzi (Estate Reserve), Privé (Estate le Sud or le Nord), Scott Paul (La Paulée), Shea Wine Cellars (Estate Vineyard), Sineann (Resonance Vineyard), Soter (Beacon Hill Vineyard), St. Innocent (Seven Springs Vineyard), Van Duzer (Estate Vineyard), Willakenzie (Pierre Leone).

Umpqua Valley

Brandborg Vineyard & Winery (Estate Vineyard)

South America

Argentina

Bodegos Chacra (Rio Negro Valley)

Chile

Kingston Family, CoHo, Matetic

Canada

British Columbia

Blue Mountain Vineyards & Cellars, Quail’s Gate Estate Winery

Niagara

La Clos Jordanne

New Zealand

Ata Rangi (Martinborough), Craggy Range Te Mura Road (Martinborough), Dry River (Martinborough), Escarpment, Felton Road (Central Otago), Rippon (Central Otago), Valli Vineyards (Central Otago), Villa Marie Estate (Auckland). All imported to the US.

Australia

Bindi, Kooyong, Yabby Lake. All imported to the US.

Reference Pinot Noir producers of great historical interest: David Bruce (Santa Cruz Mountains), Chalone (Gavilan Mountains), Hanzell Vineyards (Sonoma Valley), Joseph Swan Vineyards (Russian River Valley), Mt. Eden (Santa Cruz Mountains), Rochioli (Russian River Valley), Schug Carneros Estate (Sonoma Carneros) and The Eyrie Vineyard (Oregon).

Top 15 Must Try Pinot Noirs - California

- 1 Brogan Cellars Helio Doro Block Buena Terra Vineyard Russian River Valley
- 2 Calera Wine Company Jensen Vineyard Mt. Harlan
- 3 Dehlinger Estate Russian River Valley
- 4 Du Mol Finn Russian River Valley
- 5 Etude Heirloom Napa Carneros
- 6 Harmonique "The Noble One" Anderson Valley
- 7 J. Rochioli West Block or East Block Russian River Valley
- 8 Lynmar Five Sisters Russian River Valley
- 9 Littorai Theriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast
- 10 Pisoni Pisoni Estate Santa Lucia Highlands
- 11 Saintsbury Brown Ranch Vineyard Napa Carneros
- 12 The Donum Estate Sonoma Carneros
- 13 Windy Oaks Estate Reserve Santa Cruz Mountains
- 14 WesMar Hellenthal Vineyard Sonoma Coast
- 15 Williams Selyem Rochioli Riverblock Russian River Valley

Top 15 Must Try Pinot Noirs - Oregon

- 1 Argyle Spirithouse
- 2 Auteur Shea Vineyard
- 3 Belle Pente Reserve
- 4 Beaux Freres Estate
- 5 Cana's Feast Winery Cuvée G
- 6 Chehalem Reserve
- 7 Domaine Drounin Cuvée Laurene
- 8 Elk Cove Mount Richmond
- 9 Et Fille Maresh Vineyard
- 10 Patricia Green Estate Old Vine Pinot Noir
- 11 Penner-Ash Shea Vineyard
- 12 Privé le Sud or le Nord
- 13 Scott Paul Wines Audrey
- 14 Shea Wine Cellars Homer
- 15 Soter Beacon Hill Vineyard

Top Starter Inexpensive Pinot Noirs

California

Au Bon Climat (Santa Barbara County), Blackstone (Sonoma Reserve), Cambria (Julia's Vineyard), Castle Rock (highly variable), Chalone (Monterey), Coyote Canyon (Santa Lucia Highlands), Cycles Gladiator (Central Coast), Dancing Bear Cellars (Carneros), DeLoach (Russian River Valley), Handley (Anderson Valley blend), Husch (Anderson Valley), Irony (Monterey County), Kenwood (Russian River Valley), La Crema (Anderson Valley, Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast), J. Lynn (Russian River Valley), Laetitia Estate (Arroyo Grande), MacMurray Ranch (Sonoma Coast), Mayro-Murdick Hunterdon (Santa Lucia Highlands), McHenry Vineyard (Santa Cruz Mountains), Morgan (12 Clones),

Oregon

A to Z, Cardwell Hill Cellars, O'Reillys.

Most of the major producers in Oregon craft a Willamette Valley or Oregon blend which is an extremely good value wine that is very representative of Oregon Pinot Noir. Examples include: Argyle (\$16), Bethel Heights (\$17), Broadley (\$15), Erath (\$18), four Graces (\$17), King Estate (\$23), McKinley (\$16), Ponzi (\$30), Rex Hill (\$20), Torrii Mor (\$25), Willakenzie Estate (\$17), Willamette Valley Vineyards (\$20).

A Note About France

No discussion on developing a palate for Pinot Noir would be incomplete without mention of Burgundy. Now Burgundy can be very intimidating and inconsistent. Jay McInerney (*Bacchus and Me*) wrote, "I love red and white Burgundy only slightly less than I love my children. But unless you are prepared to misspend a year or two of your life in study and thousands of dollars, stay the hell away from the Cote d'Or, the source of more heartbreak and tears than country music radio."

Basically Burgundy wines are classified into four levels in ascending order of quality: Bourgogne (grapes can come from anywhere in Burgundy including even Gamay from declassified Grand Cru Beaujolais), Villages (ie Chambolle-Musigny), Premier Cru (labelled by the vineyard name as well as the village, ie Les Amoureuses, Chambolle-Musigny), and Grand Cru (labelled only by the vineyard, ie Musigny). The Bourgogne (pronounced burr-gôn'yE) wines are perfectly good from the top producers in good vintages and range in price usually from \$15-\$40. Many of them are very comparable to North American mid-priced Pinot Noirs (\$30-40). They can be drunk upon release. I wouldn't even think about getting into Premier and Grand Crus if you are a Pinot Noir newbie as they are very expensive (\$60-\$350), must be cellared for several years for full enjoyment, and require a very trained palate to relate to the different terroirs.

Look for Bourgogne or Village level wines from good vintages (recently, 2002, 2004 and 2005 are fine) and from good producers such as : Bertrand Ambroise, Bouchard Père & Fils, Bachelet, Confuron-Cotéidot, de la Vougerie, Maison Drouhin, Claude Dugat, Dugat-Py, Sylvie Esmonin, Faiveley, Alex Gambel, Camille Giroud, Geantet-Ponsiot, Anne Gros, Michel Gros, Heresztyn, Alain Hudelot-Noëllat, Frederic Magnien, J-Frederic Mugnier, Denis Mortet, Michel Lafarge, Daniel Rion and Joseph Roty.

Some of the French Bourgogne wines have become so consumer friendly to the United States that the words "Pinot Noir" are displayed on the label rather than the traditional word "Bourgogne."

Willowbrook Cellars

John Tracy of Owl Ridge Wine Services has many winery clients at his custom-crush facility in the old Vacu-Dry plant on Gravenstein Highway in Sebastopol. A high-tech entrepreneur with a soft spot for owls, Tracy bought a vineyard in Forestville and then teamed with winemaker Joe Otos to form Willowbrook Cellars. Because of his interest in Bordeaux varietals, Tracy also started Owl Ridge Wines. Otos makes the wines for both Owl Ridge (Sonoma Bordeaux varietals) and Willowbrook (Chardonnay and Pinot Noir).

Joe Otos was attending Sonoma State, majoring in business a number of years ago. While working part-time at Ravenswood Winery, he developed a passion for winemaking. He changed his career path, and developed his winemaking skills under Chris Loxton at Wellington Vineyards. Later he met up with John Tracy and the two have formed a very successful partnership.

Pinot Noir grapes are sourced from the Owl Ridge Vineyard in Forestville, the Dutton Morelli vineyard in the Russian River Valley and the Kastania Vineyard in Petaluma.

2005 Willowbrook Morelli Lane Russian River Valley

Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 264 cases, \$42. The Morelli Lane Vineyard is situated high above the town of Occidental at 900 feet. Its proximity to the coast allows for a constant cool breeze, keeping temperatures down and extending the growing season. Pommard clone. *The nose is very appealing with haunting crushed red berry aromas. Red and blue fruits carry the theme across the palate with a little oak and anise adding interest. Medium in weight with fine tannins, the wine displays a little heat throughout but the overall impression is quite satisfying.*



2005 Willowbrook Estate Grown Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 300 cases, \$34. The 3-acre estate vineyard is planted to Dijon clones. Morning fog, warm daily sun, and cooling ocean breezes allow excellent fruit development. *Funky, shroom nose with cranberry, cherry and rhubarb notes. The fruit is muted and light in weight with herbal overtones. The balance is fine. Seems to be in a dumb phase.*

2005 Willowbrook Kastania Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 302 cases, \$48. The Kastania Vineyard is located in the southern reaches of Sonoma County, near the Marin County border adjacent to Highway 101. The vineyard receives coastal influences from the ocean on the western side and the San Francisco Bay on the eastern side. The vineyard is 7 acres planted to both Pommard and Dijon clones. The clones ripened at different times and a total of four passes were done over a five week period, picking roughly ten rows at a time. *This wine needs time to blossom, eventually opening with a delightful perfume of cherries and violets. Very nice core of cherry fruit with woodshed, forest floor and herbal influences. Supple in the mouth with well-concealed tannins. Balance is right on.*

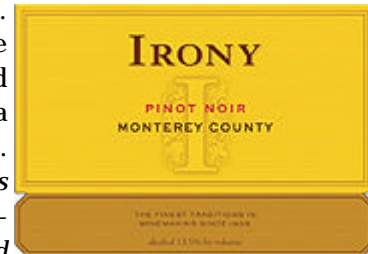
Willowbrook Cellars wines are available on the website, www.willowbrookcellars.com. 707-823-0163.

Note: Owl Ridge Wine Services also operates Sonoma Grapemasters, a service that allows budding winemakers to make a barrel of wine or more. For information: www.sonomagrapemasters.com.

Irony Pinot Noir

There isn't a lot of information available about Irony Wines. The back label on the bottle relays a story of two brothers (Chris and Jay - ? last names) who grew up in a winegrowing family ("finest traditions in winemaking since 1935" it says on the label). After pursuing other careers, the two brothers reunited working again at the family vineyard and winery. The winery is named Life's Strange Twists Wine Company in Manteca, California. They produce a Cabernet, Merlot and Chardonnay as well as Pinot Noir from Monterey County and Russian River Valley (Buena Tierra Vineyard).

2005 Irony Monterey County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 30,000 cases, \$15. The grapes were sourced primarily from the owners' San Bernabe Vineyard which is planted to both Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777, and California heritage clones. The wine was barrel-aged for 9 months in a combination of French and American Oak, both new and used. Presented in a heavy, Burgundian-styled bottle. *This lovely wine draws you in with alluring aromas of cherry compote, mint and roses. Medium-bodied, the wine is light on its feet with satisfying flavors of wild strawberries, raspberries and rhubarb. There is judicious oak, soft tannins and a nice clean finish. A very good daily drinker that will please even hard-core pinotphiles.*



Irony Wines are widely distributed throughout the US. BevMor retailer here in California is featuring this wine. The website, www.ironywine.com, offers little further information.

Finesse is Spoken at McHenry

McHenry Vineyard is a small family-owned producer of Pinot Noir from a single vineyard in the Bonny Doon area of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The original vineyard was planted by Dean, Jane, Henry and Linda McHenry in 1972. Pinot Noirs from this vineyard won numerous medals in state wine competitions. Unfortunately the vineyard was devastated by Pierce's Disease and ceased production in 1992. In 1997, it was replanted. Located on a sandy mountain slope at 1,800 feet elevation, it is 5 miles from the Pacific Ocean.

I was quite taken by the 2003 McHenry Estate Pinot Noir when I tasted it at Pinot Paradise this year. The McHenry wines are made in a very delicate and elegant style of great charm and subtlety. Aging is done in Francois Frères barrels for two years before release.

2004 McHenry Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 320 cases, \$21.50. *Very light Burgundy in color. Cherries, spice and barnyard dominate the aromas. Very elegant red fruits, especially raspberry, are enhanced by Asian spices. A healthy acid spine leads to a tangy finish. This is a restrained wine with plenty of finesse and will not appeal to fans of California Franken Pinots. A perfect partner for lighter foods such as roast chicken or turkey cutlet.*

2003 McHenry Vineyard Swan Clone Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 62 cases, \$21.50. Not tasted.

McHenry Vineyard wines can be ordered by phoning Linda McHenry at 530-756-3202 or e-mailing her at lmchenry@dcn.davis.ca.us. The limited website is www.mchenryvineyard.com. Nothing flashy here, just fine artisan Pinot Noir at a sensible price.



PrinceofPinot.com

Overheard at a bar: He was the opposite of what I'm looking for - his car was old and his wine was new.

Pinot Noir is more like a religion than a grape

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World of Pinot Noir

Registration opens October 1, 2007 for next year's World of Pinot Noir, March 7 & 8, 2008 at The Cliffs Resort in Shell Beach, California. The emphasis this year is on "World" as winemakers from Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Chile and Tasmania will be presenting their wines. Seminars include the study of clone 115 Pinot Noirs grown in several regions, AVAs of Oregon, old clones/old vines versus new clones/new vines, and a focused stemware presentation with Georg Riedel. Over 160 wineries will be pouring at one of the two walk-around focus tastings in the big tent by the ocean. Saturday features a special Burgundy seminar on the wines of Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier. The event wraps up with a Paulée Dinner at Au Bon Climat.

Join the throng of Pinot Geeks. Information and registration is at www.wopn.com.

Last year's World of Pinot Noir is now featured on Grape Radio in a 3-part series, www.graperadio.com.

Sulfites in Wine

Sulfites, which are various forms of sulfurous acid, have been used since the days of the ancient Romans and Egyptians for cleansing wine containers. Sulfites were approved for use in the United States in the early 1800s to preserve foods. The antioxidant and antimicrobial properties of sulfites have been most valuable to winemakers. Sulfites either inhibit or kill bacteria and wild yeast encouraging rapid and clean fermentation of wine grapes. Sulfites are also a natural and minor byproduct of yeast fermentation and are produced in tiny amounts during the wine fermentation process. They are also added to bottled wine as a preservative.

It is commonly thought that sulfites trigger allergic reactions including asthma in wine drinkers. In the United States, wines must be labeled as "contains sulfites." As a result, many people blame sulfites when they have a bad reaction to wine. It is possible that some people do have a real allergic response to sulfites (ie steroid-dependent asthmatics), but Dr. Pamela Ewan, one of the UK's leading experts on food allergies, states that "The sensitivity to wine is thought to be due to the direct effect of various - poorly defined - chemical components of wine." Histamine, which is released into the bloodstream in a true allergic reaction, and is present in small amounts in red wine and much less amounts in white wine, may be one of the culprits. Patients intolerant to wine may not be able to degrade histamine due to a deficiency of the enzyme diamine oxidase.

The headaches, stuffy nose and rosy cheeks that some people develop after drinking red wine is not related to the sulfite content of wine, but probably due to other substances contained within wine such as histamine, tyramine and phenolic flavonoids. These symptoms do not progress to a more serious reaction. Ingesting ibuprofen or acetaminophen prior to drinking can block the "red wine headache syndrome" in some people.

85% of the Chinese and Japanese population have a deficiency of aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH). Alcohol is broken down in the liver by two competing enzymes: alcohol dehydrogenase degrades alcohol to the toxic acetaldehyde and aldehyde dehydrogenase converts alcohol to the harmless acetic acid. High levels of acetaldehyde in people with ALDH deficiency cause an unpleasant flushing response and headaches.