

PinotFile[©]

Littorai Wines

If you were a lover of Burgundy wines and you asked me to recommend the one California winery that produces Chardonnay and Pinot Noir closest to the Burgundy style, I would suggest Littorai Wines. This is not surprising since owner and winemaker, Ted Lemon, received all of his early wine training in France, apprenticesing at several famous Domaines in Burgundy, including Dujac, Roumier, and Bruno Clair.

He was the first American hired as a winemaker and vineyard manager for a Burgundy house— Domaine Guy Roulet in Meursault. Ted is a life-long family winemaker who did not turn to winemaking after another career. He is truly dedicated to making fine wine and shuns ratings, competitions, and publicity.

Ted, and his wife Heidi, founded Littorai Wines in 1993. Grapes are sourced from carefully selected vineyards in western Sonoma and Mendocino counties. The name, Littorai, is a plural noun formed from the Latin word *llitor-*, which means the coasts.

Littorai Wines never appear in retail outlets; the small production finds its way to top restaurants and mailing list customers only. They are justifiably expensive. The 2001 vintage includes the following Pinot Noir releases: **Hirsch Vineyard** and **Thierot Vineyard** (Sonoma Coast) and **One-Acre Vineyard, Savoy Vineyard, and Cerise Vineyard** (Anderson Valley). I felt the **2000 Thierot Vineyard Pinot Noir** was heaven-sent and the best California Pinot Noir I drank last year. I recently had the **2000 One-Acre Pinot Noir**. It was a succulent, soft wine with a lacy and feminine heart, but an explosive, rich personality. Hubba Hubba. The winery's Chardonnays are also hitting on all cylinders.

Littorai Wines: 707– 963-4762, wwwlittorai.com.



Pinot Noir: A Mouthful So Sensuous You'll Need A Cold Shower Afterwards

Volume 3, Issue 14

November 17, 2003

The truth is that the ideal storage conditions under which to age wine are that it be free of contact with light and vibration and kept at a constant temperature (ideally between 55 and 58 degrees).

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Thanksgiving Wine

This time of year the press is filled with articles extolling the virtues of different wines with Thanksgiving dinner. On the table you have turkey with gravy, maybe some spiced cranberry relish, stuffing with wild rice, herbs, and pecans, and sweet potatoes. The dishes are full of strong and assertive flavors which could obscure the wine. If you follow the wine truism that white wine goes with white meat, you could choose a Chardonnay or Riesling. But if you want a wine partner for the feast, you should choose Pinot Noir—the younger and fruitier the better. The spiciness of the Pinot Noir creates a successful similarity to the spiciness of some foods on the table, and the slight sweetness of Pinot Noir complements sweetness of other foods that are part of the feast (ie sweet potatoes with syrup). A vin gris made from Pinot Noir is also a nice choice as long as your guests are not averse to “pink” wine. Ojai Vineyards and Soter make excellent vin gris wines. Of course you know that I am partial to Pinot Noir, but remember: any wine will enhance your dining pleasure and add to the festivity of the occasion.



Nats Decants Wine Newsletter Recommended

Natalie MacLean offers a free e-mail newsletter that will help you make choices from restaurant wine lists and liquor stores, match wine with food, and chuckle over the lighter side of wine (topics such as embarrassing wine situations and wine scenes in the movies). While she tackles each topic to learn something new, she never takes wine—or herself—too seriously, and writes in a highly entertaining way. There are no ads and your e-mail address will be kept confidential. Natalie does this because she enjoys the occasional feedback she receives from those on her list.

Natalie's articles have appeared in the *London Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *National Post*, *Food & Wine*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, and *Ritz-Carlton Magazine*, among others. Her newsletter was named one of the three best wine and food newsletters in North America at the 2003 James Beard Foundation Journalism Awards. Natalie was named the World's Best Drink Writer at the 2003 World Food Media Awards in Australia. To sign up, visit her web site www.nataliemaclean.com or e-mail her at natdecants@rogers.com.

Cardwell Hill Vineyard

It is amazing how small the world is sometimes. I recently bumped into a neighbor who lives a block away and owns a winery in Oregon devoted to small-production Pinot Noir. Owners Dan and Nancy Chapel purchased a neglected vineyard in southern Willamette Valley a few years ago and built a beautiful home and winery on the property. The vineyard was replanted to Dijon clones and consultants brought in to assist in vineyard management and winemaking.

The 2002 vintage is available now. The wine is a typical Oregon Pinot Noir with the essence of red and black berries blended with exotic spices and a tangy acid base. Around \$15, this wine is a good turkey partner.

You can call Dan at his home in the Tustin Hills, 714-730-0608, and he will sell you some Pinot out of his garage. How cool is that?

Beaux Freres New Releases

In 1986 Jackie and Michael Etzel with their in-laws, Patricia and Robert Parker decided to enter into the business of growing grapes. A few years later the family determined that it would be wise to make their own wine. And so, the label Beaux Freres, meaning brothers-in-law was born. Michael actually produces two labels. The Beaux Freres name is reserved exclusively for fruit from the estate's 26 planted acres, with a production of around 3100 cases. The Belles Soeurs ("sisters-in-law" label is used for fruit selectively purchased from other vineyards (ie Shea Vineyard). The Beaux Freres Vineyard is located on an 86-acre farm atop Ribbon Ridge in the Chehalem Valley near Newberg, Oregon. Currently the vines age from 4-13 years and are a mixture of own-rooted Pommard and Wadenswil clones and various of the new Dijon clones on phylloxera-resistant rootstocks. The Upper Terrace is a new parcel of the vineyard, 10 plantable acres of southeast-facing hillsides of Willakenzie soils at elevations similar to those of The Beaux Freres Vineyard.

The final Beaux Freres blend is a reflection of the brothers'-in-law conception of Pinot Noir, with Robert Parker having the final stamp of approval on the released wine. I have traced the wine through 11 vintages (I joined the mailing list in 1992), and found it to be an authentic reflection of the site and vintage. The style tends toward the high-extraction side with a lot of charm and complexity.

Although initially available only through a mailing list, the wine is available now at finer retail wine shops. The advantage of purchasing through the mailing list is the reduced price on futures purchase (about \$56 a bottle versus \$70 a bottle retail after release) and the availability of large formats (magnum, jerobaum, rheobaum). The disadvantage is that you must purchase at least 6 bottles of each wine with no mixing of the vintage's different offerings. The 2002 releases are said to be from the finest vintage in the winery's 12-year history:

2002 Beaux Freres Pinot Noir \$348/6 btls
2002 The Upper Terrace Pinot Noir \$348/6 btls
2002 Belles Soeurs Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir \$240/6 btls

1-503-537-1137 or order online at wwwbeauxfreres.com/futures.html.



"Vintages like 2002 are benchmark years that help us set new standards for what our vineyard site can achieve."

The Ceremony of the Black Goblet

Years ago Master Sommelier Rene Chazottes introduced me to the challenge of identifying a wine presented in a black glass. You want to humble your hot-shot wine friends? Pour a wine blind into a black glass and ask them to identify the color of the wine and the varietal. Most of the time you will get a good laugh at the answer. Although smell and taste are the dominant sensory tools we use to identify a wine, visual clues play a smaller, but significant role.

Our wine social group, Le Grand Crew, developed the "Ceremony of the Black Goblet". To lead off a wine dinner, we would ask the brave participants in attendance to identify the color and varietal of a wine poured in black goblets. I know that I personally have rarely guessed the varietal correctly.

Reidel is now producing an opaque black stem for "blind" tastings retailing at about \$60 per stem.



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

 PrinceofPinot.com

Barging on France's canals is a relaxing way to see the French wine country. The Saint Louis is a deluxe six passenger French canal barge that trolls the Canal de Bourgogne near Dijon, in the very heart of Burgundy wine country. The connoisseur-level wine tasting program (the most complete in the French barging industry) departs every Sunday from April through October. Tasting and tours include visits to Chambertin, Musigny, Bonnes-Mares, Clos de Vougeot, and Romanee. *Forbes F.Y.I.* describes the cruises as "the best provincial France has to offer: wine, haute cuisine, history, and culture amid a luxurious and relaxed atmosphere. Visit the website at www.saintlouisbarge.com or call 1-800-252-9400.

Claude Dugat: A Burgundy Legend

Dugat works vines in Burgundy that his grandfather— a noted horticulturist— had selected for small branches and berries and concentrated juice. He tries to maintain vines at 10-12 tiny clusters to make sure the vines are working hard. The only food is a little cattle manure when the leaves show they need it— about every 4 years. He works in a 13th century abbey wine cellar (Cellier des Dimes) producing profound red Burgundies. Jean-Marc Joblot, a talented Givry producer said it best: “Claude Dugat’s 1996’s are the most beautiful expression of Pinot Noir I have ever had.” Robert Parker described his wines as “mesmerizing” and said “it would take a writer of Shakespeare’s eloquence to do justice to his wine.” Dugat makes very little red Burgundy— for example, around 160 cases of Charmes Chambertin for the world. One could never hope to purchase a bottle unless they are very rich and well-connected, but I recently looked at the latest Acker Merrall & Condit auction catalog (for November 21, 22, 2003) to see what was available. I was shocked at the consistently high scores and the very high asking prices (remember there is a 16% buyer’s premium added onto the price at auction).

Dugat Charmes Chambertin: 1990, 96/100, \$700-900 btl.; 1991, 93/100, \$350-450 btl.; 1993, 96/100, \$750-900 btl.; 1995, 93-5/100, \$350-450 btl.; 1996, 97-99/100, \$650-800 btl.; 1997, 93-5/100, \$325-400 btl.; 1998, 93/100, \$250-350 btl.; 1999, 97/100, \$450-550 btl.; and 2000, 95+/100, \$300-375 btl..

Dugat Griottes Chambertin: 1990, 99/100, \$1400-1700 btl.; 1991, 91/100, \$500-700 btl.; 1992, 93/100, \$400-500 btl.; 1993, 100/100, \$1400-1700 btl.; 1995, 99/100, \$750-950 btl.; 1996, 98-100/100, \$1000-1400 btl.; 1998, 96/100, \$700-900 btl.; 1999, 93-96/100, \$800-1200 btl.; and 2000, 94+/100, \$350-450 btl..

Now maybe we could put together a consortium of 10 pinotphiles at \$150 a piece and drink 2 oz of the 1996 Griottes Chambertin!