

PinotFile[©]

Little La Vie Vineyards Is Big!

La Vie Vineyards was founded by two UC Santa Cruz graduates, Ariel Lavie and Angel Hobbs, who developed a passion for each other (they are married) and Pinot Noir while in school. After graduation, they dedicated themselves to making small quantities of hand-crafted and high quality Pinot Noir from premium vineyards in the Santa Rita Hills AVA. In 1998, they acquired their own 40 acre ranch in the Santa Rita Hills.



Schooled in agroecology and integrated pest management, they are firm adherents of organic and bio-dynamic farming. In addition, they have worked with many of the best producers in the Santa Rita Hills appellation, and have developed winemaking skills predicated on traditional and nouveau winemaking techniques. Ariel is currently the winemaker for Rideau Vineyard in Solvang and Angela works at Environmental Seed Producers in Lompoc as the horticulturalist.

The premier 2000 vintage consisted of 50 cases of **Clos Pepe Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir** (\$35). The next year, they released 55 cases of the **2001 Clos Pepe Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir** (\$45) and 75 cases of the **2001 Fiddlestix Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir** (\$38). Both are terrific wines. The Clos Pepe wine received a 90 score from *Wine Spectator*. The Fiddlestix Pinot Noir is produced from the Pommard 4 & 5 blocks of Fiddlestix Vineyard. I had the pleasure of recently drinking this seamless and velvety wine. Conjuring up vast fields of luscious red and black fruits, it finishes with cashmere tannins, fantastic grip, precision, and length. Heaven sent.

Production will increase to 300 cases for the, as yet unreleased, 2002 vintage. Coming soon are the **2002 RastaRita Reserve Pinot Noir**, and the **2002 Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**.

Purchase the wines by contacting Ariel or Angela at 805-291-2111 or going to the website at www.laviewineyards for more information.

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

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Farming organically requires close to a 20% more land to produce the same amount of crop as a conventionally farmed plot. The land production that is 'lost' to the farmer is food for many species including birds, insects, fungus, gophers, squirrels, and rabbits.

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Sine Qua Non Pinot Noir Tasting

Last night I had the pleasure of sitting down to a fine dinner at the Ritz-Carlton with old and new friends and tasting a mini-vertical of Sine Qua Non Pinot Noirs. These quirky wines are the brainchild of Manfred Krankl, a 46-year-old native of Austria and resident of Ojai who is a partner in the Campanile restaurant in Los Angeles. The garage winery is located in Ventura, but the grapes for his Pinot Noirs come from the well-known Shea Vineyard in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Each year the wine has a different name, a different shaped bottle, and an unusual label designed by Krankl himself. He makes the wines in tiny quantities, and most receive rave review from wine critics including Robert Parker. There is a waiting list of over 1,500 people despite the rapidly increasing price of the wines. Naturally, I jumped at the chance to sample the wines when a long-time wine collector, Tony Chiari, offered to share the wines from his cellar.

The Sine Qua Non Pinot Noir program began in 1996 with the first release from Shea Vineyard (\$36, 67 cases). Here is a listing of the wines (only the 1998, 1999, and 2000 vintages were sampled at this dinner):

- 1996 Sine Qua Non Left Field**
- 1997 Sine Qua Non Complicator**
- 1998 Sine Qua Non Veiled**
- 1999 Sine Qua Non Ox** (RP 92)
- 2000 Sine Qua Non a'Capella** (RP 94)
- 2001 Sine Qua Non No 6**

1998 Veiled: This wine is all about finesse and elegance. A sweet, feminine wine that is well-structured and delivers plenty of pleasure.

1999 Ox: A red fruit festival with oriental spices and a complexity that rewarded time in the glass. Soft as silk on the finish.

2000 a'Capella: Lavishly soft but intense, this is pure pleasure. Very spicy, with red currants and black raspberry intensity. A thrill a minute with authority and presence.

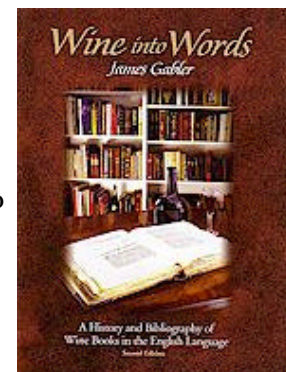
Most years are available on the secondary market. Try www.winecommune.com. Bring money.



Wine into Words

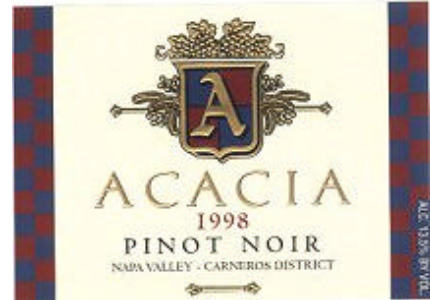
This newly published book by James Gabler is a bibliography of wine books in the English language and much more. It has thousands of annotations covering everything wine-related such as art, literature, history, food, poetry, politics, and war. Plus there are hundreds of biographical sketches of the men and women who pioneered wine's development and recorded its history. Three pages are devoted to Thomas Jefferson, one of the most important figures in America wine culture, and the one who initiated the appreciation of fine wine. This is an important reference book of 500-plus pages and nearly 8,000 entries.

The book can be purchased directly from the publisher, Bacchus Press Ltd (email: bacchuspr@aol.com) for \$75.



Changes in Carneros

Andre Tchelistcheff and Louis M Martini helped to resurrect the Carneros wine industry devastated by phylloxera in the late 1800s and Prohibition in the early 1900s. In the 1930's they both purchased grapes from the famed Stanly Ranch Vineyard and in the 1940s Martini began to experiment with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay clones in this vineyard. In 1983, Carneros, which is derived from the Spanish word, *carneros*, which means "sheep", was granted its own appellation, the first in the United States to be based solely on microclimate and terroir. In 1985 the Carneros Quality Alliance (CQA) was formed to bring winemakers and growers in the region together. A comprehensive tasting of Napa Carneros Pinot Noirs compared to Sonoma Pinot Noirs was conducted by the CQA in 1986. The Napa Carneros Pinot Noirs consistently showed cherry, fresh berry, berry jam, and spicy flavors more intense than non-Carneros wines.



In the 1980s, Acacia Winery crafted some outstanding single-vineyard Pinot Noirs and Saintsbury became the most popular Pinot Noir choice on restaurant lists throughout the country. There were notable successes with Etude and Sinskey. However, the popularity of Carneros Pinot Noirs seemed to waiver in the 1990s, as wines from the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast, Santa Lucia Highlands, and Santa Barbara County overshadowed them in quality.

Over the past 10 years there has been significant changes in the winemaking and grape-growing in Carneros. The "old" Carneros Pinot Noir style has evolved with changes in how the grapes are grown (different clones, rootstocks, trellising methods and irrigation systems) and nouveau winemaker's philosophy. At Acacia Winery, there has been a significant break with tradition. In the past, winemakers have treated Pinot Noir grapes harshly in the vineyard and gently in the cellar. Acacia, on the other hand, has developed a gentle-growing, hard-handling philosophy in working with Pinot Noir. The grapes are free to grow without irrigation and only in the heat of August and September is enough water offered (traditionally water was withheld late in the season, forcing the vines into premature decline). Cover crops are used in the vineyard to increase organic matter in the soil and improve water retention. The hard handling in the winery consists of aggressive cap manipulation and extraction. The fermenting temperatures are allowed to reach 34C and the caps are tended vigorously.

2002 Acacia Pinot Noir Carneros (\$19) From the 150 acre Estate vineyard which reached maturity in the 2002 vintage. It is made from a single block of the Estate vineyard blended with grapes from local growers. This vineyard is planted with newer Dijon clones which are naturally richer than the "old" Carneros style. A spicy black cherry pie. Rich, meaty, earthy notes add to the character. Little Jack Horner would have loved this wine. Over 20,000 cases made and widely available.

Carneros Inn

The 27-acre Carneros Inn is the first new luxury resort built in the Napa Valley in 20 years. At a cost of more than \$65 million and five years in the making, this property is unique in that The Carneros Inn is a gated community with facilities reserved for guests of the 96 deluxe cottages only. The cottages are built and furnished in a "vacation house" style and range in price from \$375 to \$1,200 per night. The resort includes a large swimming pool, a well-appointed spa, and an architecturally dramatic Hilltop Restaurant that offers sweeping views of the surrounding Carneros vineyards. Located on the border between Sonoma and Napa, it is ideally situated for forays into both wine regions. The staff will arrange private tastings and winery visits. 4048 Sonoma Highway, Napa, 707-299-4900, www.thecarnerosinn.com.




Princeofpinot.com

The Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival will be held May 14 through May 16, 2004. On Friday, May 14, a day long Conference at the Mendocino County Fairgrounds features speakers such as Randall Grahm (Bonny Doon), Eric Sterling (Esterlina), and David Bruce (David Bruce Winery). A post-conference barbecue will be at Goldeneye Vineyards in Philo. On Saturday there are demonstrations and tastings at Pacific Echo Cellars in Philo, followed by Winemaker Dinners at Goldeneye Vineyards, Handley Cellars, and Roederer Estate Winery. Wineries of the Anderson Valley hold Open Houses on Sunday. For lodging information and to purchase tickets online: www.avwines.com or phone 707-895-WINE.

Emerging AVAs of Oregon

Vineyards and wineries in the Northern Willamette Valley of Oregon have submitted petitions to divide the large Willamette Valley AVA into six more specific AVAs. Almost all grape growing in the Willamette Valley is done on lower hillsides, avoiding deeply fertile alluvial soils and cooler hilltop microclimates. However, the geographic, geological, and climatic characteristics of each of the six proposed AVAs have a uniqueness that should be discernible in the final wines.

The flavor profiles that distinguish these AVAs are still emerging but some generalizations can be made.

Dundee Hills AVA: A lot of vineyard location variability makes a uniform taste profile difficult, but red (raspberry) and black cherry fruit, particularly bing cherry predominate. Good acidity.

Eola Hills AVA: Bigger, more full-bodied wines. Fruit components are blackberry, black cherry, and plum (stone fruits). A mineral component is often present on the nose and palate.

Chehalem Mountains AVA: More geography than soils that characterize this AVA making it difficult to define a flavor profile. Styles can vary from lightly red-fruited elegant stylings to dark, briery, earthy wines.

Yamhill Carlton District AVA: Distinct aromatics (coffee, cocoa, anis, cedar, tobacco) with black fruits, elevated tannins, lower acidity.

McMinnville District AVA: Defined by black fruits, high tannin levels and elevated acidity.

Ribbon Ridge AVA: Predominately black fruit (black currant, blackberry, black cherry), moderate to high structure bordering on rustic, good acidity, and good extraction. Fine tannins, a range of brown spices and wood spices, fresh-turned earth and chocolate dependent on vintage. Wines are long-lived.

