

PinotFile[©]

“What This Country Needs Is a Good \$10 Pinot”

These are words that Thomas Jefferson may have said except that he would have referred to “a good \$1 Pinot” - equivalent to \$10 today because of inflation. The mantra for Pinot Noir has been that quality Pinot Noir can only be achieved when production is low (less than 5,000 cases) and with wine is literally handcrafted. Small production, intensive hands-on labor translates into \$50 a bottle. The fact is, there will always be a market for high quality artisan \$50 Pinot Noir. But the trend I have seen develop over the last five years is the appearance of really very good wines that smell and taste like Pinot Noir for \$20 or less. Bottlings like A to Z from Oregon and Castle Rock from California have proven that daily drinkable Pinot Noir can be made affordable. Market studies have shown that woman buy most of the wine in this country (they are, after all, the consumer backbone of our economy). And, the studies have also found that women do not have a fetish for wine like men— ie they rarely spend more than \$15-20 a bottle for wine. Woman also are attracted to a wine like Pinot Noir because it offers upfront enjoyable fruit, soft tannins, and compatibility with all types of food. That is why we need good daily drinkable and affordable (under \$20) Pinot Noirs.

Sebastiani, like no other historically significant winery, has reinvented itself recently to fill this niche. This winery (in operation since 1904) has for years been producing over eight million cases of serviceable wine under various labels. Recently, they changed dramatically by down-sizing and overnight became a single-brand company producing small lots of super-premium wine from Sonoma County. They upgraded their winery in Sonoma and emphasized new, technologically advanced vineyard techniques. They reduced production to 190,000 cases. The result has been that Sebastiani’s wines have rocketed to the top echelon and recently the winery was name “California Winery of the Year” by *Quarterly Review of Wines* magazine.

The **2002 Sebastiani Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$10)** is the third offering from the winery from a vintage which is better than any previous since 1994. It is a multi-vineyard blend (estate vineyards in Carneros and Dutton Ranch in Russian River Valley, all in the Sonoma Coast appellation) that is aged five months in French and Hungarian oak and lightly filtered. It is a very fruit-forward Pinot that is soft and drinkable. Absolutely the best \$10 Pinot Noir I have ever drank. This is not some lightweight Pinot pretender. Think intense black fruits, like a baked black cherry pie just out of the oven with a whole pantry shelf full of spices. 17,200 cases. Rampant hedonism for a tenspot— Thomas Jefferson would have loved it.

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

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EQ Pinot Noir

Now its not everyday that a Pinot Noir of admirable quality comes from Chile. But listen up. EQ (stands for equilibrium or harmony between soil and grapevine) is a new premium brand from Chile . The estate actually dates to the end of the 19th Century with the arrival of Jorge Matetic Celinja from Croata. But it is only recently that the winery has entered the 20th Century. Organized as Matetic Vineyards, Americans Ann Kramer (production supervisor in charge of the vineyards) and Ken Bernard(consulting winemaker from Ancien in California) have been brought on board to assist winemaker Rodrigo Soto in making a quality range of wines including a Pinot Noir worthy of notice. The grapes are from an organically and biodynamically farmed vineyard planted on a north-facing coastal slope with deep red soils that are relatively infertile with abundant clay on the surface and decomposed rock extending to a depth of 40cm. Low yields are harvested, cold macerated for five days, and the wine is aged in French oak for one year. A wine aging cellar is being built underground inside one of the hills along with a gravity-fed winery which will be finished for the 2004 harvest.



The inaugural release of the Pinot Noir was 2001. The **2002 EQ Pinot Noir (\$25)** is a serious wine which is interesting for its departure from the usual Pinot Noir profile. There is some sweet black tea and chocolate-covered strawberries lurking in the flavors. It does not have that cherry pie and spice so typical of Russian River Pinots. Kind of like the Osbournes— a little weird, but very enjoyable if you are open to different things.

The wine is available at hitime.com. The website is mateticvineyards.com.

Pey-Marin Pinot Noir

A few issues back I wrote about the unique terroir of Marin County and the emerging Pinot Noirs from this area. One of the pioneers here is Jonathan Pey whose day job is GM at Robert Mondavi, while his wife, Susan, is the Wine Director for Il Fornaio Restaurant Group. Collectively, they have 40 years experience in the wine industry. They are now endeavoring to create a Pinot Noir revolution in Marin County.

The current release is the **2002 Pey-Marin “Trois Filles” Pinot Noir (\$29)**. The vintage yielded only 2.3 tons per acre from an 11 acre vineyard estate less than eight miles

from the Pacific Ocean in northwest Marin County. The vineyard is planted to Dijon clone 115. Following four days of “cold soak” in open top fermenters, fermentation was began with both native and Burgundian yeasts. Primary and secondary fermentation was carried out in 100% French oak barriques. 120 cases were produced. The name “Trois Filles” is a loving gesture to the parent’s three young daughters. The wine is not an “UltraCalifornian” high-extracted style, but more about delicacy, finesse, and balance suitable for enjoyment with foods.



If you love individualistic, hand-crafted Pinot Noir, this is exactly the type of wine to put in your cellar. You can purchase the wine by calling 415-455-9463.

Setting the Issue Straight on Hectares

In the last issue of the PinotFile, page 3, I made a grievous error when I referred to the total acreage of the Premier Cru vineyards of Vosne-Romanee as “58 hectares (24 acres)”. One of my readers, who is an engineer, picked up on this error and wrote me a sarcastic e-mail to the effect that, in fact, my conversion should have read 59 hectares (about 143 acres). He also defamed my natural science educational background. Finally, he went on to tell me that there are 2.4710434 acres/hectare if you start with a precision definition of ft/meter (3.2808330), know what a hectare is (10,000 sq meters or 100 meters squared), remember or calculate that an acre is exactly 43560 square feet (since there are 640 acres per square mile), and control the number of significant figures in your calculation.

Now it has been well-known for some time that doctors, as a group, seem more interested in wine than any other group. Engineers are next. Nobody seems to know why. Maybe the above answer gives a clue—engineers love to play with the numbers and the scientific underpinnings of wine discourse.

Why Can't We Serve Some Decent Wine?

This past weekend I went to my 35th Medical School Reunion. It was quite an experience after all these years to see colleagues I had spent four years with learning how to poke and prod the human body. As an aside, and maybe I have become an intolerable wine geek, the food-wine combinations served at the cocktail reception and dinner were quite simply, awful. This was held in the Faculty Club of one of our most prestigious centers of higher learning in California (I won't mention the name). The hor d'oeuvres were small goat cheese pizzas, chicken skewers with a mild Thai-type sauce, and asparagus with prosciutto. The wines offered? A very bad California Chardonnay and Merlot. Where was the Sauvignon Blanc? Then at dinner, the entrée was a grilled salmon with a papaya-based salsa along with sweet potatoes. The wine offered? A lousy Bogle Cabernet Sauvignon! Now if a dish ever called for a Pinot Noir, this was it. Why is it when we attend these group functions the only wines offered are cheap, watered-down versions of Chardonnay and Merlot and occasionally Cabernet in crummy little standard wine glasses. It would take only a little bit of thought to offer some interesting value-price wines to complement the food. And some stylish, yet inexpensive wine glasses would create a sophistication and elegance that most people would find enjoyable. I guess it is assumed that everyone is so consumed with conversation that they just don't care. Physicians have been prescribing wine, as we know from records in ancient Canaan and Cairo, for at least 5,000 years. We need to practice what we preach and learn that wine is an unforgettable element in our hospitality to friends and demands some respectful us-

The Cork Saga Goes On

A wine writer recently related that during an extensive wine tasting of Northwest United States wines, about 30 corked wines were found out of nearly 600 that were tasted. And at the Riverside International Wine Competition in Southern California, the panel had about 25% corked wines the first day. The cork industry reports a 3 percent incidence of corked wines and this is closer to what I find in day-to-day drinking. I think that professionals at big wine tastings are more sensitive and alert to very tiny amounts of cork taint—most normal drinkers do not find a slight amount of funk particularly offensive. I think that people are getting a little too cranky about this cork taint thing. Screwcaps are becoming more popular and are fine for me on white wines. But corks on Pinot Noir are sacrosanct.






Princeofpinot.com

High school sweethearts, Mike and Joy Kaufmann grew up in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Many visits to California wine country strengthened their love of wine. Finally they purchased 32 acres west of Eagle, Idaho, off Idaho 16. 13 acres have been planted and a new 3,400 sq-foot winery building was constructed under the supervision of their son Chip. Next door is a 3,100 sq-foot tasting room and retail area. Mike also operates a successful smoke-house business supplying smoked meats and cheeses to California wineries and culinary schools. The Winery at Eagle Knoll is an ambitious project in a state not known for wine production. They have just released the 2002 Idaho Pinot (a blend of Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir). Their website is the wineryateagleknoll.com. Wines can be purchased along with smoked meats and cheeses.

Gary Farrell Sells Out

Gary Farrell Wines has been purchased by wine and spirits giant Allied Domecq who also own Clos du Bois, Buena Vista, Atlas Peak, and Mumm Napa Valley in California. I have a soft spot for Gary Farrell in that one of his Allen Vineyard Pinot Noirs from the mid-1980's first really turned me on to Russian River Pinot Noir. Farrell began making Pinot Noir in the late 1970's for Davis Bynum Winery in the Russian River Valley, and later, for Rochioli and Limerick Lane. His own label was started in 1982 with 50 cases of Russian River Pinot Noir made from prime grapes from Allen and Rochioli Vineyards. His own wine was made for 18 years at Davis Bynum until his own facility was built on Westside Road and opened in 2000. Unfortunately, Farrell was something of a recluse, and never appeared in public very often on behalf of his wine. He never commented much about his winemaking techniques and never appeared at any tastings or meetings that I was aware of. This prevented me, from warming to his Pinot Noirs over the years although I admired his style of restraint. In addition, I found that, after purchasing his wines yearly, they really did not age very well and were best consumed within a year or two after purchase. He definitely is a talented winemaker, and has made very notable Merlots, Cabernets, Chardonnays, and Cabernets also.

The sale of the winery is a reflection of the current economic difficulties of operating a 15,000 case winery. Distribution and sales is a tiring job, leaving little time for personal enjoyment. Farrell will stay on at the winery as winemaker, but relinquish all administrative and sales duties. Unfortunately history has shown that similar takeovers by large drink companies have rarely benefited smaller wineries from a quality standpoint since corporate profits become the driving force of the operation. None of Domecq's California labels are particularly noteworthy.