

PinotFile[©]

Pinot Speak

Pinot Noir, more than any other wine, elicits a cornucopia of descriptive prose. Wine reviewers love to invoke practically the entire human repertoire of taste and smell to embellish the reporting of Pinot Noir aromas and tastes. Recently I did a cursory review of a few published Pinot Noir tastings and found that Pinot Noir really has its own lexicon or “Pinot Speak”.

Blackberry, strawberry, raspberry, cooked raspberry, cranberry, blueberry, cherry, Bing cherry, cherry pie, red cherry, black cherry, candied cherry, tart cherry, cherry syrup, stewed black fruit, plum, cooked plum, candied fruit, candied apple, orange peel, cassis, rhubarb, sassafras, cocoa, mushroom, cedar, anise, violet, cola, coffee, espresso, rose hip tea, lavender, vanilla, sweet vanilla, menthol, caramel, chocolate, mocha, ginger, sweet cream, walnut shells, toasted almond, , herbs, green herbs, lavender, Asian spice, cola spice, brown spice, root beer-like spice, woody spice, baking spice, brown spice, brushy spice, black pepper, cardamom, clove, sage, spicy mint, white pepper, toast, cedar, oak, dusky oak, smoky oak, crème brulee oak, sweet oak, sandlewood, cedar, cedary oak, cedary-mocha woody, dried bark, woody, pine, resin, charred wood, old box, tobacco, pipe tobacco, floral, rose petal, dried flowers, violets, dried violets, brush, tarry earth, loam, dustiness, earth, soft earth, fresh earth, tar, mineral, forest-floor mulch, brush, vegetal, animal fur, beef carpaccio, smoked meat, leather, smoked meat, and smoke.

Personally, I tend to be more pragmatic: either I do or don't like a wine (there is a third, seldom-used category, “Oh, My God!”). I love to tell the true story about a group of wine enthusiasts at their monthly wine tasting meeting. Hunched over their Reidel glasses for a couple of hours sniffing, spitting, and gurgling, they waxed poetically about the subtleties of each wine, using descriptives such as old box, tarry earth, and sassafras. The beauty of spewing these words is that they are unlikely to be disputed. Who can really say they know what sassafras tastes like? A well-known wine writer happened to be at the same restaurant for dinner, and when this became known, the group eagerly invited him in to taste the top wine of the night. After greetings subsided, a hush spread over the group as the celebrity carefully eyed the wine. The tension in the room became almost unbearable as he smelled and then drank a small portion of the anointed juice. After what seemed like an eternity, he remarked, “I like it, it is good,” and with that he turned around and walked out of the room.

If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir

Volume 3, Issue 42

June 14, 2004

Claus Josef Riedel passed away in March of this year at the age of 79. His 37-ounce Burgundy Grand Cru stem (called the “goldfish bowl”) was the first glass in the Sommeliers collection. The collection of 10 different shapes was first released in 1973.

Inside this issue:

Sonoma Coast AVA	2
Wildwood Restaurant & Bar	2
PinotFile Insider Pinot Picks	3
9th RRV Grapes to Glass	3
Cep Pinot Noir	4
Kermit Lynch Words of Wisdom	4

Sonoma Coast AVA

The Sonoma Coast AVA (American Vineyard Appellation) is the largest AVA in Sonoma County, incorporating 750 square miles. This unwieldy AVA was formed in 1987 primarily to allow certain wineries (such as Sonoma-Cutrer) to include all of their major vineyards within one boundary so they could use the “estate bottled” badge on their wine labels. The AVA is also a distinctive climatic region based on coolness with no more than 2,800 degree days of heat during the growing season. The Sonoma Coast is sandwiched between the mountains and the ocean and with its fog, high winds, and cold, is a hostile environment only a Pinot Noir grower could love. The vineyards are perched above the fog line where Pinot Noir loves the cool temperatures. Although there are many mesoclimates and soil types in the appellation, the common thread in this region is coolness.

The Sonoma Coast AVA extends nearly throughout the Sonoma Coast from the Sonoma County borders with Napa in Carneros to the east, Marin County to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Russian River Valley AVA boundary in the north. It actually overlaps five other AVAs— the Sonoma part of Carneros, a sliver of Sonoma Valley, the western part of Chalk Hill, all of Green Valley, and most of Russian River Valley. Since the AVA is immense, the area has been subdivided by some into the ‘true’ Sonoma Coast. The ‘true’ Sonoma Coast is considered the area of Sonoma County known as ‘West County’. This area is roughly west of Highway 116 and out to the coast, containing such towns as Sebastopol, Freestone, and Occidental. This is the coolest area in the Sonoma Coast and is responsible for the long hang time necessary for great Pinot Noir.

The price of land has gone from \$4,000 an acre to at least five times as much in the last decade. The price is misleading and actually much more expensive than you realize since the landscape does not lend itself to farming and you might purchase 50 acres to get 10 acres suitable for grape growing. Much of the area is simply too hostile and too steep for grapevines. There is a diverse variety of clones of Pinot Noir planted. Flowers Winery, for example, has 18 different clones of Pinot Noir in their vineyards.

The list of Pinot Noir pioneers in the Sonoma Coast reads like a who’s who of California Pinot Noir. The names include Helen Turley and John Wetlaufer (Marcassin), Lee Martinelli (Martinelli), David Hirsch (Hirsch Vineyards), Bill Smith (La Jota, W.H. Smith), Chuck Wagner (Caymus), Joseph Phelps, Steve Kistler, Williams Seyem, Ted Lemon (Littorai), Jayson Pahlmeyer, Peter Micheal, and Walt and Joan Flowers (Flowers Winery).

What exactly distinguishes a Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir? Wines from this AVA are sleeker and less fleshy than their Santa Barbara counterparts, yet more powerful and assertive with more masculine tannins than many Pinot Noirs from Carneros. They are typically balanced and bold, with ripe fruit flavors, much like Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.

Wildwood Restaurant Celebrates 10 Years

When you are traveling to the Willamette Valley, a welcome stop in northwest Portland is Cory Schreiber’s Wildwood Restaurant. Schreiber left San Francisco in 1994 after making his name at The Cypress Club. He was eager to define the cuisine of his native region; serving Oregon’s bounty to people who care where their food comes from and how it arrives at the table. The name of the restaurant comes from the Wildwood Trail, a 5,000 acre urban wilderness that is an emblem of Portland’s connection to city-living and nature co-existing. The interior of the restaurant features a striking mural by Max Grover of the Wildwood trail in Forest Park, less than a mile away. A recent 10th Anniversary Menu featured stuffed saddle of local rabbit with marionberry compote and Oregon jewel wild rice. The accompanying Pinot Noirs were the 2002 Patricia Green Cellars, “Wildwood 10th Anniversary Cuvee”, and the 1999 Cristom Vineyards Reserve. In 10 years at Wildwood, the restaurant has sold 72,000 bottles of Oregon Pinot Noir (equivalent to 180,000 pounds of crushed grapes).

PinotFile Insider Pinot Picks

There are many new releases available that are either on retail shelves now or available from the wineries. These are examples of the consistency now found in California Pinot Noir, and a testament to the success with a notoriously inconsistent grape.

Abiouness Stanly Ranch Carneros Pinot Noir 2001 (\$40). This wine is sourced from 10 rows of the old-vine Stanly Ranch. Second release. 280 cases. Try bountyhunter.com

Chasseur Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2002 (\$30). Blend of grapes from the Ritchie Vineyard and two vineyard blocks from Dutton Ranch in Freestone. 150 cases. **Chasseur Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2002** (\$30). From the Twin Hill Ranch in southwest Sebastopol in the "true" Sonoma Coast. 150 cases. Winery 797-8291941.

Mendelson Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2002 (\$37.50). Grapes from the 32-year old Sleepy Hollow Vineyard. 300 cases. Winery 707-255-7825.

Adrian Fog Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 2002 (\$75). The vineyard is at 1520 feet (above the fog) north of the town of Boonville. Said to deliver "a bountiful palate of pomegranate and dark earth". 120 cases. Winery 707-431-1174

Miner Gary's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2002 (\$50) "Quintessential Californian" according to *Connoisseur's Guide*. **Miner Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2002** (\$50). Debut for this wine and only available at the winery or website, www.minerwines.com. Also touted as having "pomegranate essence melded into one curvaceous first vintage".

August West Winery Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia highlands Pinot Noir 2002 (\$42). I tasted this beauty and "I liked it". An instant festive occasion. HiTime and other retailers.

Orogeny Vineyards Green Valley Pinot Noir 2002 (\$25). A Chalone project featured in a recent issue of the PinotFile. The inaugural release from four different vineyards in Green Valley. A great buy for drinking now or a few years down the line. Available at Wine Club.

Castalia Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2002 (\$40). Produced by Terry Bering, Cellar Master at Rochioli Winery for 15 years. His first vintage was 1991, when he produced 115 cases. The wine is 100% Rochioli vineyard fruit. 323 cases. Top scorer in recent *Connoisseur's Guide* (96). Try www.wadeswines.com

Red Car Amour Fou Sonoma County Pinot Noir 2002 (\$45). The first Pinot Noir from this new winery. It is a blend of two Sonoma vineyards, Keefer Ranch in the Russian River Valley and the Clouds Rest Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast. A big, bold Pinot Noir. The packaging is way-cool. Each of their wine series has a unique front label. The label is like the cover of a novel and there is text to the novel on the back label.. The Pinot series is a story of demented love (Amour Fou). 250 cases. Available at HiTime and winery 310-288-0030.

9th RRV Grape to Glass Weekend

With its more than 50 wineries, 200 growers, and an estimated 10,000 planted vineyard acres, the Russian River Valley produces some of the finest Pinot Noirs in the world. The Grape to Glass Weekend, August 20-22, gives the consumer a chance for special winery tours and events featuring primarily Pinot Noir. The event starts Friday with a 10 and 22 mile bike ride followed by a canoe trip on the Russian River Valley. In the evening, there is a salmon bake barbecue and tour of the MacMurray Ranch homestead. On Saturday there are numerous behind the wines tours including (1) Tour of Davis Bynum's Lindley's Knoll Vineyard and vertical tasting, (2) Tour of new scenic DuNah Vineyard & Winery, (3) Tasting of four Meredith Vineyard Pinot Noirs from different producers paired with four different courses of Liberty duck, (4) Tasting of Pinot Noirs with gourmet mushrooms at J Vineyards & Winery, (5) Barrel tasting of Pinot Noir clones at Dutton Estate, (6) Tour of Martinelli Vineyards & Winery with local food delights, and many others. Saturday night there is the "Hog in Fog Backyard Barbecue with 40 wineries, sommeliers, winegrowers and vintners participating at Richard's Grove and Saralee's Vineyard. Finally on Sunday is a brunch at Sonoma-Cutrer. Tickets and information are available at rrvw.org or 707-521-2534.



Cep Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2002 (\$22) is an inexpensive offering from Vanessa Wong who previously worked at Peter Michael and now is the winemaker at Peay Vineyards. This is a complex Pinot Noir with all the typical Pinot charm— rose petal, cherry, licorice and currants. A velvety mouthfeel and a complex finish provide a lot of enjoyment for a little cash. Try astorwines.com or pjwine.com. 130 cases.

During his eight years in Paris, Benjamin Franklin accumulated a 1,200 bottle wine cellar and wrote a friend that wine is “constant proof that God loves us and loves to see us happy.” Thomas Jefferson considered wine a “necessity of life.” Andre L. Simon, co-founder of the International Wine & Food Society said “a man dies too young if he leaves any wine in his wine cellar.” In keeping with that philosophy, just two magnums of Claret remained in Simon’s cellar when he died at the age of ninety-three.

Kermit Lynch’s Words of Wisdom

One of the classic books on wine was written by wine importer Kermit Lynch in 1988, “*Adventures on the Wine Route*.” There is more wisdom in the introduction of this book than in entire volumes on the subject. I love his comments on the interplay between wine and food and I paraphrase some of his brilliant remarks in the following words.

“I decided to stop taking part in blind tastings. Blind, yes, that does sum up the vision involved in this popular method of judging quality. A number of wines are set up side by side, tasted, compared, and ranked. A tally is taken. One wine wins. The others are losers. Such tasting conditions have nothing to do with the conditions under which the wines will presumably be drunk, which is at table, with food. There is a vast difference, an insurmountable difference, between the taste of a wine next to another wine, and the same wine’s taste with food.”

“A wine can only be judged as it relates to the environment in which it is served. I began to notice that most of the blind-tasting champions in my own cellar remained untouched, because I had no desire to drink them. Just as they had overwhelmed the other wines to win a blind tasting, they overwhelm practically any cuisine. Those big rock-’em-sock-’em blockbusters perform one function admirably— they win tastings. Usually such wines give their all in the first whiff and sip, but great wine is about nuance, surprise, subtlety, expression, qualities that keep you coming back for yet another taste. Body has little to do with aging potential. Many ripe, tannic monsters lost their fruit but remain tannic monsters. Well-balanced wines of whatever size develop well.”

Robert Parker is partly at fault for popularizing big, rich, oaky, and high alcohol Pinot Noirs, although it is clear from Kermit Lynch’s comments that the emphasis on “big” and “power” have always been with us. With his de-emphasis on grace and balance, it is no wonder the Burgundians have banished him from the Cote d’Or.