

PinotFile[®]

The FIRST Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

A Fool and Forty Acres

A Fool and Forty Acres. Conjuring a Vineyard Three Thousand Miles from Burgundy. Geoff Heinricks. McClelland & Stewart Ltd (Canada). 2004 \$35

Geoff Heinricks is a modern day “Pinot pilgrim”. In the mid 90’s, he left the comfortable city life in Toronto, Canada, and become a winegrower in Prince Edward County, a peninsula along the eastern end of Lake Ontario. This region previously had no experience with *vinifera*, and did not even receive a mention in John Haeger’s newly published book, *North American Pinot Noir*. Heinricks had no experience in Burgundy, no formal winemaking or grape-growing training, but he was well-read and knew that the soils and climate of Prince Edward County was close to that of Burgundy.

This is an inspirational and often humorous story of Heinrick’s successful attempt to farm Pinot Noir in a climatically marginal and hostile viticultural environment. His persistence reminds one of the Cistercian monks of the Middle Ages whose work ethic led to the cultivation of Pinot Noir in the Cote d’Or. He had no modern tools, no tractor, no access to modern Pinot Noir clones. He foraged the wild grapevines of the area for hearty rootstock. Mentors were nonexistent, and very little advice was forthcoming.

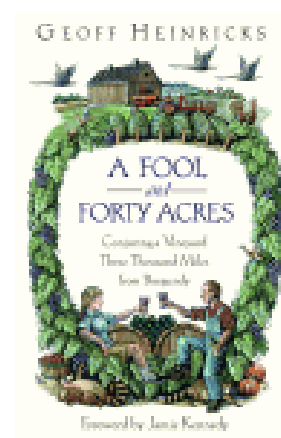
After planting the first vines by hand in 1995, his story is one of dedicated, backbreaking work. He confronts every obstacle— rain, cold, mildew, drought, birds, raccoons, voles, mice, insects, and even phylloxera. But the story is really much more than one man’s farming adventure. It is a tale of Prince Edward County, it’s history, the conscience of the area, it’s people, culture, architecture, and geology. A local poet, Al Purdy, is often quoted. Like the author, he was a refugee from the city who came to Prince Edward County and became somewhat of a prophet for the area.

In 1998 the land at Heinrick’s vineyard, Domaine La Reine, provided 41/2 bottles of Pinot Noir, and in 1999 2 cases. But that miniscule amount is not the point. Like modern California Pinot Noir pioneers, Martin Ray, Dick Graff, and Josh Jensen, his passion was indefatigable and his resultant success admirable. Today viticulture in Prince Edward County has rapidly progressed and over sixty vineyards have been planted in the past few years.

The book has not been released in the United States, but you can obtain a copy from amazon.ca. Every serious pinotfile who has dreamed of farming their own plot of Pinot Noir must read this enthralling true story.

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

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My Blue Tooth Days With Pet (and another story of 40 acres)

My formative years with wine involved many bottles of Mateus, Lancers, Blue Nun, and Spanada. After my medical training and stint in the Air Force, I had enough spendable income to dabble in real wine. I was drawn to Petite Sirah because of its bold sweet blackberry jam flavors and black pepper spice. It seemed to me the perfect wine to pair with a grilled steak. In those days my cooking repertoire was largely limited to barbecuing steaks. There was one Petite Sirah (nowadays lovingly referred to as Pet) in particular that caught my attention— Concannon Vineyard. Maybe it was the fact that Concannon was the first California winery to label the varietal on the bottle (1964), or maybe it was because the winery had some familiar kinship (founder James Concannon was born on St Patrick's Day in Ireland). Most likely it was because I liked the masculine wine and as a young bachelor, identified with its machismo style.

Concannon Vineyard, located on the East Bay in Livermore, California, was the first winery I actually visited. It was around 1975 when I bought my first case of wine at the winery, one of life's rites of passage. Concannon Vineyard is now a member of California's 100-yr-old-club and its history is fascinating. Founder James Concannon left Ireland in 1964 at the age of 17. He was an adventurous type who would need all of his intelligence, character, perseverance, and luck to succeed. He landed in Boston and eventually found a job as a bellboy at a hotel in Augusta, Maine. It was there that he met and married an Irish lass, Ellen Rowe. In 1874, Concannon, his wife, and new baby, traveled in a covered wagon across the country to Oregon.

After initially managing a sheep ranch, Concannon moved to San Francisco and made a great deal of money selling rubber stamps throughout the West Coast. He became a respected businessman at age 32. His success allowed him to pursue an interest in viticulture. He enrolled in college to learn everything he could about grape growing. He went to France to find good rootstock and, in 1883, he planted his first 40 acres in the Livermore Valley, east of San Francisco. The cuttings were from Chateau Y'Quem. A few years later, Concannon became the first Irish immigrant to make wine in America. He built a Victorian house for his family (now 10 children) and sold his wines.

When Prohibition came into effect in the 1920's, Concannon was one of the few wineries that legally stayed in business because Petite Sirah was a main ingredient in sacramental wines. The winery has passed through a few hands (first Wentz, most recently The Wine Group), but direct descendent Jim Concannon is still involved in the day-to-day operations at the winery. Petite Sirah has remained the flagship wine for Concannon Winery.

The family lineage of the Petite Sirah grape is intriguing. The father grape is Syrah, the noble variety that originated in France's Northern Rhone and is the basis of the great wines of Hermitage. The mother, Peloursin, is from a more humble background, originating in Southern France. Dr. Francois Durif in Isere, France, married the two grapes, giving rise to an alternative name for the grape— Durif. Since cross-regional breeding of grapes is frowned upon in France, it was not accepted there and found a new home in the United States where, along with Zinfandel, has become America's own varietal.

Petite Sirah, like James Concannon, has shown a lot of pluck. It was first brought to American from France in the 1880's. It survived phylloxera in the 1890's, both World Wars, the Depression, and Prohibition. In the 1960's, it was a major blending grape in fine red wines produced at the time.

Plantings of Petite Sirah have declined from 14,215 acres in 1976 to 4,398 in 2002. But an annual Petite Sirah Noble Symposium is in its third year, a fan club called "P.S. I Love You" is very active, and plans have been made to establish a heritage clone vineyard for Petite Sirah. Last month, the 2002 "R" Petite Sirah, Salman Vineyard, Clarksburg, received Best in Show at the California State Fair.

I have a soft spot for Petite Sirah and occasionally pop a cork on a bottle from Concannon, Foppiano, David Bruce or any one of the other more than 100 producers of Petite Sirah in California. Of course the barbecue is always lit at the same time.

Papapietro Perry Winery

Like many California boutique wineries, the foundation is a partnership between two people with a passion for Pinot Noir. Owners Ben Papapietro and Bruce Perry met while working at the San Francisco Newspaper Agency. It was here also that they struck up a friendship with another employee, Bert Williams, who co-founded Williams Selyem Winery. In the 70's, Ben helped Bert make Pinots in Bert's garage in Sonoma County. After Williams Selyem Winery was started, they worked the harvest every year and Bert became their mentor. In 1980, Ben began making his own "garage" wines. Bruce joined him a few years later, and by 1990, they were producing Pinot Noir. With encouragement from family and friends, they started Papapietro Perry Winery in 1998 and released 75 cases of Pinot Noir. They quickly received notoriety and favorable reviews in the wine press and they have gone from the garage to the big house in just a few years.



2002 Papapietro Perry Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$32). This wine is a blend from two vineyards in the Russian River Valley appellation— Leras Family Vineyard and Eisbree Vineyard. The vineyards have a large mix of clones giving a field blend of flavors. The bouquet is packed with berries and it is juicy and mouthwatering on the palate. The wine has that special Pinot mouthfeel. A good acid backbone suggests some aging potential. Best of Class 2004 Los Angeles County Fair Wine Competition, Double Gold 2004 San Francisco International Wine Competition. A no-brainer. 904 cases.

2002 Papapietro Perry Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$35) The grapes are from Randy Peter's vineyard located a few miles west of Sebastopol near the Sonoma coastline. This former apple orchard is planted with Pommard and 777 clones. Cool ocean fog in the mornings and evenings and hot sunny days bring out some tantalizing intense flavors. The first vineyard –designate wine for this winery. This wine is a little sturdier than the above, but similarly crafted. I would have wished for a longer finish, but otherwise a classy Pinot that could use a little time to reveal its full charm. Gold Medal 2004 Los Angeles and San Francisco Wine Competitions, a *Wine Spectator* 91. 1080 cases.

Both wines are available from the winery's website, papapietro-perry.com, and numerous retail wine stores. See if you can pronounce Papapietro Perry after two glasses of one of this winery's lush Pinots.

Pinot On The River Pinot Festival

More than 30 small-production Pinot Noir producers are gathering with Pinot Noir lovers for the first Pinot On The River Pinot Festival in Guerneville October 29, 30, and 31. Participating wineries include Acacia, Hanzell, Hartford Court, Holdredge, Kosta Browne, La Crema, Loring Wine Company, Lynmar, MacPhail Family, Martinielli, Merry Edwards, Orogeny, Papapietro Perry, Peay, Roessler, Scherrer, Shea Wine Cellars, Skewis, Tandem, Testarossa, Williams Selyem, and more. In-depth tastings are scheduled including a vertical tasting of Merry Edwards wines and a special tasting of Tandem Winery wines. A gala dinner at the Retreat Resort kicks off the event on October 29, especially prepared by Chefs Duskie Estes and John Stewart of Zazu Restaurant in Santa Rosa. Vineyard tours, seminars, cheese tasting, silent auction, and walk-around tasting of current releases and library wines round out the weekend. 3-day full access pass is \$625 per person available by calling Retreat Resort and Spa at 1-866-737-3529. For single events, order at www.pinotfestival.com.

Charles Coury was one of the Pinot pioneers whose name is lost in history. He was born in Trenton, New Jersey and moved with his family when he was nine years old to Southern California. He earned a BS degree from UCLA in meteorology. He became a salesman for Julius Wile, an importer of fine European wines. In a motel somewhere in Monterey, California, Chuck and his wife Shirley decided that it was time to change from selling fine wine to making fine wine. The family moved to Sacramento so Chuck could obtain a master's degree in viticulture from the University of California at Davis. He wrote his master thesis called "Cold Limit Amerloration Hypothesis". It hypothesized that vinifera varietals produce their best quality wines when they ripen just at the limit of their growing season. In 1966, he chose Oregon as closest to Northern European climates and planted some of the first Pinot Noir vinifera in post-Prohibition Oregon. Charles Coury Vineyards, near Forest Grove, Oregon, produced some extraordinary Pinot Noirs from the "Coury Clone" as it has become known. Chuck died of lung cancer recently at age 73. He will be remembered as one of the pioneers of Oregon wine.



PrinceofPinot.com

There Is A lot of Good Sh.. Out There

It is pretty easy to find good Pinot Noir nowadays. Like a blind squirrel, you can pretty much buy most anything from California \$20 and over and it will bring it. The Prince has recently found some special nuggets that would make any blind squirrel, well, a bit squirrely.

2001 Fort Ross Reserve Pinot Noir (\$37) Look for a feature on this new winery in the weeks to follow. Fred Scherrer has been making some terrific Pinot from Fort Ross and is now the consulting winemaker for this new winery. The wine has a raspberry and spice nose that is soft and appealing and holds up over time. Not a big or great wine, but really good.

2001 Girasole Savoy Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$45) Made by Ken Bernards of Ancien. Earthy, woody, oak, and smoky. Could this be the first Pinot-stem-only-Pinot?— only joking. I liked this wine a lot and would recommend it for the down-and-dirty.

2002 Navarro Deep End Pinot Noir (\$45) Earthy, meaty, and full of bittersweet chocolate. This is a man's Pinot. Fruits are dried and concentrated. Never guess it was from Mendocino— this is definitely from the deep end. Very enjoyable and one to have in the cellar.

2002 Geantet-Ponsiot Bourgogne Le Fin (\$22). At 12% alcohol you can drink all of this you want and still perform. Luscious, attractive Pinot with silky, cherry-toned finish that keeps on going and going. Bring on the salmon.

2002 Castalia Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$50). This is a slam dunk. Fruit from the revered Rochioli Riverblock and East, West, Little Hill, and Three Corner Vineyards, made by Terry Bering who is cellar master at Rochioli, in a great vintage like 2002. This wine is more fruity than the Queer Eye Five.