

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Dedicated to Pinot Noir

How Does Your Pinot Grow?

At some point, Pinot Noir enthusiasts want to become involved in the business of growing and making their favorite wine. The drinker finds the wines more enjoyable when he becomes intimately associated with the process, while still yielding the expertise to the grower and vintner. Like a greenhorn apprentice, he desires to nose around a little without getting his fingernails too purple.

This concept is being tested at one of Australia's vineyard retreats, The Lodge. Participants pay \$1,000 to "buy" a row of established Semillon vines in the Hunter Valley for a year. Included in the price is a five night stay in the vineyard's guest house and an invitation to a class on blending. After harvest, the fledgling vigneron receives 72 375 ml bottles with a personalized label packed in presentation cases for personal use or for gifts.

I see this as possibly the next big trend in the boutique winery business. The wine enthusiast pays up front for the privilege of "renting" a few vines with his or her name on them and the freedom to visit and kibitz with the winery staff. He can oversee his exact parcel of vines, sample his exact barrel in the cellar and feel involved in the winegrowing and winemaking stages leading to the finished product. In addition, he can proudly serve and enjoy his personalized edition of the wine. He can boast and brag a little which only enhances the overall experience. The winery benefits by preselling a few cases of wine as futures and solidifying the consumer's interest in the winery's product— basically dirt cheap "pr". Stay tuned.

Oregon Wine Country Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving weekend, November 26, 27, and 28, is a perfect time for Pinot lovers to visit the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Most Oregon wineries are small and open only by appointment. On this weekend, however, every Yamhill County Winery in Northern Willamette Valley opens its doors with special tastings, food, and entertainment. One-third of the state's wineries and vineyards are in Yamhill County. There are over 80 wineries and 200 vineyards. Fall is a perfect time to curl up with a glass of good Pinot Noir in a winery tasting room or cellar. Explore the region's website, yamhillwine.com, and request a copy of the touring map and guide to Yamhill County Wineries. Also check out nearby Portland which is fast becoming a culinary mecca.

Pinot Noir: the world's most sophisticated and cerebral variety of wine.

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"But down in the trenches of small wineries... wine is crafted by hand, not by machines or trends. A cellar isn't an excuse for catered parties, but rather a concrete jungle where weak men die like dogs. And the harvest is nothing less than an extended experiment in sleep deprivation."

Christopher Weir in
Adventures in Wine

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Beyond Cerveza— Former Braceros Now Vignerons

Since the Bracero Program was started in California in 1942, thousands of seasonal Hispanic farmworkers traveled to Northern California's wine country and supplied most of the grunt work in both the vineyard and the cellar. They were the unsung and invisible brain behind the success of largely Caucasian-owned wineries. Now more than 31,000 Latinos, mostly Mexican, live in Napa County and another 5,000 travel to Northern California for the grape harvest every year. Social changes through the years have created new opportunities for Latinos and many have now risen to the highest positions in the wine industry. In mid-2004, 12 Mexican American families and one Mexican in Northern California are making and selling wine under their own labels. There were none doing this in 1990. Recently, Latino winemakers met to form a trade association for networking and joint-marketing of Latino-owned wines.

One example is Rolando Herrera, age 37, who left a job at Paul Hobbs Winery in 2003 to start his own label *Mi Sueno* (My Dream) in Napa County. Several years ago he was impressed by a young Mexican worker, Julian Gonzalez, at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars where Herrera was cellar master. Now Gonzalez is *Mi Sueno*'s assistant winemaker. The **2001 Mi Sueno Napa (Carneros) Pinot Noir** (\$30) has plenty of black cherry and cocoa to please any pinophile. Silky in the mouth and a deft touch of oak adds a spicy flavor to the finish. *Yo Quiero* this elegant, delicious Pinot Noir.

Clearing the Confusion About Organic Wine

In 1990, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill passed and among several provisions, the bill included the Organic Foods Production Act directed at consistent labeling of organic commodities such as wine.

"Organic" label means all ingredients, from the soil to the bottle, are organic and listed on the label. The label must include a statement about the certifying agency and usually includes the USDA Organic seal, or certifying agent seal, or both. The Organic label means the product must contain 95% organic ingredients, have no added sulfites, and may contain up to 5% non-organic components not available in organic form.

"Made With Organic Ingredients" label means 70% of the wine contains organic ingredients, no added sulfites, and has 30% non-organic agricultural components. The winemaker may add sulfur dioxide according to USDA guidelines. No USDA organic seal is allowed on the label.

"Some Organic Ingredients" means the product may contain less than 70% organic ingredients. This product cannot show the USDA organic seal on the label.

Macho Winetasters Pale in Comparison to Girly Girls

Most wine critics, wine writers, wine enthusiast groups, and wine books are testosterone-driven examples of the supposed male superiority with regard to wine evaluation. The fact is, women are better wine tasters than men. Jancis Robinson, a Master of Wine and well-respected wine writer, has stated the facts clearly: "Most of us have heard the pretty conclusive evidence that women are innately more perceptive and reliable tasters than men. This is not a personal boast here, but a generalization backed by solid scientific fact. Women outnumber men two to one in the ranks of "supertasters". I have hundreds of instances of male winemakers around the world confessing to me that it is, in fact, their wives or girlfriends who are the better tasters." The reality is that women are playing a significant role in vineyard management and winemaking, but their achievements have suffered from the macho world that dominates the wine universe. It seems astonishing when one hears that all of the significant wine employees of a winery from owner to winemaker to viticulturist are women such as at Spottswoode Winery in Napa Valley and Chatom Vineyards in Calaveras County, but why should it? Some of our greatest winemakers from Bize Leroy to Merry Edwards to Helen Turley are women.

“Signature Recipe”

Many of us have a recipe that is our signature achievement— a food we are famous for— a food we can make better than anyone else we know. Some of us acquired the recipe as it was passed down from generation to generation, others pilfered it from someone else or a good cookbook along the way. My father never cooked and he passed on without a gourmet legacy. But my mother’s legacy was pies. It seems she worked at a coffee shop as a teenager and learned how to make pie crusts from the Greek owner of the restaurant. There was never any point of asking her for the recipe and many friends and relatives tried, because there was no recipe. She just knew how to do it from trial and error and many years of practice. Anyone who has tried to make a perfectly flacky pie crust will attest to the subtleties of this culinary achievement.

Now I personally don’t really have a signature recipe. I have never been so blessed. Oh, I know how to perfectly grill steaks and make a decent chili, but I never have quite lived up to the reputation of my wife. I don’t really resent this as I feel everyone has a special talent. Her talent is making Caesar salad. When I married her, she could hardly boil an egg. But over the years she has honed her cooking skills and along the way learned to make the best Caser salad, bar none. Of course, she will not reveal her secret and will not give out the recipe. Even I don’t know the recipe. She claims that everyone should have at least one recipe that they do not share.

My two sons and myself love Caesar salad and have ordered it at practically every restaurant we have dined at— it is, after all, a staple on practically every menu from American to Italian to Southwest cuisine. The original Caesar salad recipe actually came from Tijuana, Mexico (see recipe below). We have never found a Caesar salad that even comes close, not even half as good, as my wife’s version. It is astonishing to encounter the frequently bland and mediocre versions passed off as Caesar salad at fine eateries. Many devotees have urged her to bottle it, but this is not an option because really good Caesar salad has to be made fresh on the spot. When she is on her game, the zing of the garlic stays with you through the night. With a great bottle of oaky, buttery chardonnay (Kistler seems to work just fine), it is a feast unto itself and I have actually made a dinner of it enhanced with a few grilled shrimp as garnishes.

The recipe, even if written down, would not be the same if someone other than my wife makes it. So lucky for me I can devour a great Caesar salad anytime I want— for the rest of you here is the original Caesar salad recipe. Be forewarned, it is not THE recipe but still darn good. And don’t try to drink a Pinot Noir with this salad.

Caesar Cardini, the Tijuana restaurateur who invented the Caesar Salad, actually served his namesake salad without utensils and intended it to be eaten with fingers. Most traditional recipes do not follow this premise.

2 servings

1/4 T salt, 1 t coarsely ground black pepper, 3 garlic cloves, minced, 2 anchovies (or 1 t anchovy paste), 2 t Dijon mustard (the real stuff), 1 egg yolk, coddled, (my wife uses raw yolk) and I think this is a key),. 1 1/2 T freshly squeezed lemon juice, 1 t Worcestershire sauce, 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, 1 1/2 t red wine vinegar, 1 large head romaine lettuce, outer leaves discarded, remaining leaves washed and dried, 1 1/2 cups croutons, and 1/2 cup grated imported Italian Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Add salt and pepper to a wooden salad bowl. Grid garlic against the wall of the bowl until it becomes a paste. Then add anchovies, and use back of spoon to grind it into a paste. Follow the same procedure and add the Dijon, egg yolk, lemon juice and Worcestershire sauce one at a time. Make sure that each ingredient is blended into a smooth paste with the previous ingredients before proceeding (purists shudder, but I know my wife uses a food processor), Add oil and vinegar and blend well. Tear or slice lettuce leaves into bite-sized pieces and add to the salad bowl. Toss thoroughly with dressing. Add croutons and cheese, toss again, the serve immediately. The lettuce leaves should be coated, but not soaked, in dressing.




 PrinceofPinot.com

Sean Thackrey is probably the most eccentric winemaker in California. Operating out of his house in Bolinas, California, he crafts red wines that are unlike any other— often reflecting more his winemaking style and his facility location than the terroir from which the grapes originated. In fact, he disdains terroir, calling AVAs— American Viticultural Areas or appellations— a “gerrymandered marketing gimmick.” Nevertheless, he quickly sells all 3,000-5,000 cases of wine he makes each year (40% goes to Europe and Japan). Recently he has begun to make a Pinot Noir— the 2002 Sean Thackrey Devil’s Gulch Ranch Marin County Pinot Noir is the latest release. The *San Francisco Chronicle* says the wine has deep flavors of blueberry and huckleberry with a little earth and mushroom and a funky high note of barnyard. Similar aroma with hints of hibiscus and eucalyptus. Sounds interesting to me— let me know if you snag a bottle to drink. Availability is limited to select retail wine stores and/or sources listed on the website at wine-maker.net

Some Interesting New Releases (Upper End)

2001 Domaine Serene Evenstad Reserve Pinot Noir (\$47). A blend of Pommard, Wadenswil, and Dijon clones from estate vineyards in the Dundee Hills and Eola Hills. Average 1.81 tons/acre, aged 15 months in French oak, 76% new.

2002 Domaine Serene Grace Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$90). One of seven estate vineyards in the Dundee Hills. Planted in 1996 to Dijon clones 777 and 667. 1.74 tons/acre. Aged 11 months in French oak, 94% new. This has been the top scoring wine of the winery and brought the highest price ever paid for an Oregon Pinot Noir— twin 9-liter bottles of Grace Vineyard 2000 Pinot Noir sold for \$110,000 at the 2004 Naples Winter Wine Festival. 2002 was a great vintage in Oregon so this is a no-brainer if you have deep pockets. 503-864-4600.

2002 Ponzi Reserve Pinot Noir (\$50— \$40 on prelease). Again, a great year for Oregon Pinot Noir, a legendary producer with older vines, another no-brainer. The winery’s other wines, 2002 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, 2003 Arneis, 2003 Pinot Blanc, and 2001 Chardonnay are interesting and well-priced wines as well. 503-628-1227.

Loring Wine Company 2003 Brousseau Vineyard, Chalone AVA Pinot Noir, 200 cases, **2003 Cargasacchi Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**, 125 cases, **2003 Clos Pepe Vineyard Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**, 250 cases, **2003 Garys’ Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**, 375 cases, **2003 Naylor Dry Hole Vineyard, Chalone AVA Pinot Noir**, 25 cases, **2003 Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**, 200 cases, **2003 Rosella’s Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**, 250 cases, **2003 The Llama, California Pinot Noir**, 100 cases, a blend of 4 barrels, one each of Garys’, Rosella’s, Brousseau, and Rancho Ontiveros. All wines \$42, free shipping.
www.loringwineco.com.

