

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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## Mountain Top Pinot Noir

Truckee River Winery bills itself as “the highest and coldest winery in the United States” and I don’t think anyone will dispute that. Located in the Sierra town of Truckee, California, the winery is at an altitude of 5,900 feet and is frequently the coldest spot in the continental United States during the winter. It is far too cold to grow grapes in Truckee, so Russ and Joan Jones purchase grapes from top quality vineyards in more moderate California regions and make the wine in a little red-and-white barn located on the Truckee River behind their house. Here they have the best of both worlds— they can ski, enjoy life in the mountains, and make wine. Both Russ and Joan grew up in Truckee and have been sweethearts since meeting at Truckee High School. Joan urged Russ to take the plunge into wine-making and his first effort, a 1989 Pinot Noir, won a bronze medal at the California State Fair.

**2001 Truckee River Winery Gary’s Vineyard Pinot Noir**, \$33. The grapes come from the well-known Santa Lucia Highlands vineyard planted to the Pisoni clone so the breeding of the wine is no surprise. Both French and American oak barrels were used. Russ shows a deft touch with Pinot Noir in this silky, polished wine. This beauty is packed with violets, candied orange peel, rich black cherries and supple tannins. Maybe it’s the bit of snow he adds to the fermentation tank. This high-altitude smoothy is a primetime performer. 270 cases. 530-587-4626.

## Revised Book on B.C. Wineries

John Schreiner, the authority on British Columbia wineries, has just released his latest book, *The Wineries of British Columbia* (Whitecap, \$23), an updated edition of his 1994 guide. When the 1994 guide was released, there were only 40 wineries included. In the latest edition, 122 wineries in the Okanagan Valley and beyond are featured.— a remarkable statement of the excitement and world-class wine production potential of this region. The author weaves interesting tales of the characters behind the wineries and the struggles that each of these pioneers have endured. The guide includes addresses, phone numbers, winery hours, and a description of the wines offered including ratings. Don’t go to B.C. without it.

**Pinot Noir  
Makes Any  
Meal A Feast**

**Volume 4, Issue 12  
November 15, 2004**

Another mountain winery in western Nevada, along the eastern front of the Sierra Nevada range, Tahoe Ridge Winery, has released the first commercial wine made from Nevada-grown *vitis vinifera* grapes— the 2001 Tahoe Ridge Winery Chardonnay. The biggest challenge here is managing the vines in the severe winters.

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## Family Winemakers of California: Report on Pinot Noir From the Frontlines

Family Winemakers of California is an association of California table wine producers, now 435 wineries strong. The organization holds trade tastings in San Francisco twice a year (11/04, 8/05) and in Southern California once a year (3/05). The recent tasting in San Francisco on November 7 and 8 was also open to the public on Sunday, November 7. This event features all varietals, but is fast becoming THE Pinot Noir tasting of the year. My friend and “pinot correspondent”, David Hoffman, attended both days of the recent event and tasted upwards of 100 wines, almost all Pinot Noirs. The quality was consistently high from nearly all producers. Most of the wines were 2002 from bottle. The following comments are taken from his notes.

**Arcadian:** all the 01's very good, polished.

**Aubin-Verve:** tasted like Dehlinger, \$30 btl, Fred Scherrer involved in winemaking, popular among crowd.

**Calera:** really liked the wines, very Burgundian and different from the rest.

**Chasseur:** very good, deep, rich, and textured, estate vineyards

**DuNah:** '02 definite step up from the solid '01, worth the search.

**Flying Goat:** liked all 3, good expression of the SRH “style”.

**Hartford Family:** very good but pricey, KJ pourers had “attitude”.

**Hitching Post:** another winner for the SRH contingent, riding the “Sideways” success wave.

**Inman:** fine Pinot Noir and very superb Pinot Gris

**Kosta-Browne:** serious stuff here

**Londer:** the best from Anderson Valley, Parabol one of my favs of the event.

**Loring:** can't get enough of Brian's Pinots. The '03s were quite stunning. The A.P. Vin “Garys” also poured.

**Lost Canyon:** very solid efforts from new producer using purchased grapes

**MacPhail:** very good wines from RRV, decanting really helped open them up, best “label art” at event.

**Martinelli:** very sweet, OTT style by Ms Turley, don't understand high alcohol style of these wines.

**Melville:** basic SRH Pinot, fine value

**Merry Edwards:** huge fruit and structure, needs a cellar nap.

**Nicholson Ranch:** very good, maybe a bit much for some palates.

**Papapietro Perry:** very fine Pinots, especially the Sonoma Coast.

**Pisoni:** the Lucia version was more accessible, the Pisoni was huge, black, dramatic, too much for some.

**Roar:** they showed very well, the SLH is more open, the Rosella's more reserved.

**Roessler:** lots of fine Pinots, up and coming player, Wells Guthrie is winemaker.

**Siduri:** Adam Lee is one of the top CA winemakers. The '03 Cargassachi SRH Pinot was notable.

**Skewis:** all four Pinots were top notch. Good aging potential.

**Tandem:** leading edge producer, liked the Keefer Ranch.

**Testarossa:** bright fruit and fine balance.

**William Selyem:** they were pouring only the basic Sonoma Coast version; in this room if put them in shadows.

**Woodenhead:** not surprisingly reminded me of the old Wm. Selyem efforts. Very good Pinots.

Other producers David liked included Dierberg, Dutch Bill Creek, Dutton Estate, Dutton-Goldfield, El Molino, Fiddlehead, Flowers, Holdredge, Jacaman, Jeriko Estate, Judd's Hill, Sanford, and Talley.

The controversy over Pinot Noir style, that is, highly-extracted, high-alcohol Pinot Noir (often from SLH and SRH) versus more elegant, “Burgundian” style (often from RRV) was ongoing at the event. William Hunter of Chasseur was adamant that the true expression of Pinot Noir comes from the RRV, especially the Green Valley appellation. In his opinion the Pinot Noirs from SLH were syrah-like and all tasted the same. There were an equal number of opposing opinions voiced that Pinot Noir has many expressions and the “ultracalifornian” style suits their palate just fine. The diversity of opinion and differences in taste make wine such a fascinating adventure. It would be regretful if every Pinot Noir was uniform in style— like every bottle of Coca-Cola.

Contact Family Winemakers of California at [www.familywinemakers.org](http://www.familywinemakers.org).

## Wine Blogosphere

Blogs or Weblogs have multiplied on the internet and now provide the wine enthusiast with free and readily accessible information and opinions from numerous other passionate wine lovers. The format is often very creative and humorous, for many bloggers do not take themselves too seriously. The text can be chatty and informal, at times rambling, but always earnest and well-intended. By the end of this year, more than 10 million blogs are expected to hit the internet: 5 percent of the 128 million American internet users have created a blog. A good place to start to explore the wine blog universe is [wineblogwatch.rrr.net](http://wineblogwatch.rrr.net). Some good examples include:

Vinography: A recent issue included a report from the Pinot on River event held in Guerneville, CA. The author's faves were the 2002 Peay, the 2001 Merry Edwards Sonoma Coast and Windsor Gardens, the 2002 Woodenhead Elk Prairie, and the 2003 Loring Rosella's.

Also, Turn the Screw, Vine Sugar, The Nose Knows, The Big Red Diary, Bainbridge on Wine, Wine Rant, Purple Sunshine, Red is Life, The Caveman's Wine Blog, A Wine Greek speaks, H. Johnson's World of Wine, Jamie's Wine Blog, The Caveman's Wine Blog.

## Root's Cellar Roots Out The Good Stuff

Allocations for coveted Pinot Noir are miniscule and devoted pinotphiles are constantly searching for a source. I have found Paul Root at Root's Cellar in Healdsburg, California to be a dependable place for the good stuff. Paul has been in the wine business for 36 years. He had his first job in a wine shop in San Marino, CA when he was 15 years old! He was the district merchandiser/buyer for Safeway Stores during the California wine explosion of the late 1970's and early 1980's. He left Safeway in 1983 to open his first shop called "Tip-Top Liquor Warehouse" in Healdsburg, subsequently worked at Dry Creek Vineyards, and then opened Root & Eastwood wine store next to Safeway in Healdsburg in 1990. That store flourished until 2000 when Safeway expanded and took the space, forcing Paul to relocate across the street to open Root's Cellar in 2001 (the grand opening was September 10, not the best day to start business in retrospect). Early on, Root's Cellar was the place for Zinfandel and was dubbed the "Zinfandel shrine" by a local Congressperson. In the last eight years the shop has evolved into a Pinot Noir/Syrah specialty store. Since Paul has been in the business so long, he knows everyone, and receives decent allocations of wines that newer retailers would never see. In the past he has focused on RRV and Sonoma Coast producers, but recently has welcomed inclusion of wines from all major Pinot-growing areas, including Burgundy and New Zealand. In the last couple of years there has been intense interest in Pinot Noirs from the Santa Lucia and Santa Rita Hills appellations and Paul loves wines from this regions because of their character and dimension. His favorite producers tend to be some of the "garagiest" guys in the ghetto facility in Santa Barbara (Loring, etc.), although he has always held the Sonoma Coast and RRV producers in highest esteem (Rochioli, Williams Selyem, Flowers, Gary Farrell, Cobb, etc.). Paul believes the future of California wine sales will be impacted by the central coast region and the Sonoma Coast and RRV will always hold a strong percentage of sales regardless of the success from Pisoni, Morgan and company. Pinot drinkers always need a white wine and Paul knows and sells the best Sauvignon Blancs too.

Paul's e-mails are required reading for pinotphiles (sign up at [RootsCellar.com](http://RootsCellar.com)) They are packed with useful and insightful wine speak and will always put a smile on your face. Small production Pinot Noirs are often offered in combination in 6 and 12 bottle lots. A recent case offer included: Williams Selyem Coastlands, Flax Vineyard, Viste Verde, and Ferrington Pinots, Gary Farrell Rochioli and Star Ridge Pinots, Rochioli-Allen and Bien Nacido Chardonnays, Redwood Ranch Sauvignon Blanc, and Williams Selyem Forchini Zin all for \$620. All the good stuff at respectable prices from a true Pinot enthusiast. Call Paul at 1-866-808-0124.



  
**PrinceofPinot.com**

**How much has changed in the world of Pinot Noir in the last 15 years. In 1989, Australian Pinot Noir was a novelty at best. No one had ever heard of New Zealand wines. South African wines were not allowed into the United States. Essentially France and California owned the world's Pinot Noir wine trade. Now there is hardly a wine store in the United States that doesn't have some shelf space devoted to Pinot Noirs from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and even the potato fields of Long Island. As a result, Burgundians are looking at trimming the overall number of wines made and exported. The lesser-known appellations of Burgundy will fall by the wayside as Burgundy puts all its efforts in featuring the more easily recognized wines. If you are interested in Burgundy from less well known regions such as Maranges and Santenay, now is the time to stock up as they are inexpensive and very good and will become less and less available in the future.**

## Porter Creek Winery and Vineyards

Porter Creek is a little-known winery and vineyard estate on a 34-acre ranch situated adjacent to Porter Creek along Westside Road in the Russian River Valley. The three small, largely dry-farmed, Pinot Noir vineyards, Creekside, Hillside, and Fiona Hill, produce a very distinctive wine for the region. Unfortunately, the Creekside Vineyard has been slowly destroyed by viruses and Pierce's Disease and was removed in 2002. The 2000 and 2001 vintages are the last ever for this vineyard which has been the cornerstone of Porter Creek for two decades. The Hillside Vineyard is among the oldest continuously bearing Pinot Noir vineyards in the Russian River Valley. The Fiona Hill Vineyard is planted to high-density vines on a steep hillside.

George Davis and his son Alex run the operation. The elder Davis bought Porter Creek in 1979, deciding to switch careers after many years of success as a sailboat designer and builder. He converted a barn on the property to a winery and taught himself winemaking. His son, Alex, attended enology school at Fresno State and worked at Sonoma-Cutrer after graduation. He then went to France to learn about terroir and worked under Christophe Roumier of Domaine Georges Roumier in Chambolle Musigny. He returned to Porter Creek to take over the winemaking chores.

**2001 Porter Creek Creekside Vineyard Pinot Noir** \$36, 450 cases. The wine was produced from yields down to 11/2 tons per acre. A very restrained Pinot Noir with a stony, chewy texture uncommon in California Pinot Noirs. Black pepper and cherries with a nice touch of spice. A Burgundy-lover's heaven and paradise.

The wines are primarily distributed by mailing list. Website purchase is available at [www.portercreekvineyards.com](http://www.portercreekvineyards.com).