

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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## More Pinot Speak

*I barraged him with with hyperbolic hosannas, reaching deep for the metaphors and the polysyllabics which always made him chuckle— Miles in Rex Pickett's novel, Sideways.*

In the *PinotFile*, Volume 3, Issue 42, I listed some of the terms that have become part of Pinot Noir's own lexicon— Pinot Speak. There is no other wine that evokes such a cornucopia of aromas and tastes. A good portion of the entire human repertoire of smell and taste descriptives have been invoked at one time or another to convey a taster's Pinot Noir drinking experience. The Pinot Speak vocabulary is worth adding to your repertoire so you can impress your friends with your sophisticated palate. Whose to argue when, after sipping a Pinot Noir, you describe flavors of sassafras, beef carpaccio, acacia flowers, and rockdust?

Here is some useful Pinot Speak jargon: cherry soda, sour cherry, cherry Jello, cherry Lifesaver, cherry liquor, tart cherry, cherry syrup, chokecherries, cherry gum-drop, tutti-fruity, red-hot candies, Hawaiian Punch, overripe raisins, stewed prune, jammy, medicinal blackberry, cherry tomato, Heirloom tomato, huckleberry, chocolate-covered strawberries, pomegranate, beet root, fig, melon, watermelon, orange popsicle, orange pekoe tea, Seville orange rinds, acacia flowers, toasted coconut, peanut, pine-nut, quinine spice, butterscotch, olive, herbal tone, anise, fennel, cumin, toasted vanilla bean, vanilla-scented candles, cardamom, mint, tobaccoey mintiness, root beer, gingerbreadly spicy sweetness, graham cracker, thyme, lavender, menthol, wintergreen, white pepper, chocolate tannins, espresso, bitter chocolate, white chocolate, Mexican chocolate, chocolate plum cake, chocolate fudge, Kahlua, molasses, cinnamon-spiked coffee, Turkish coffee, dark-roasted coffee, burnt coffee, coffee grinds, rosehip tea, rosewater, smoke, game, veal, bacon, rustic and leathery, saddle leather, kid leather, horsey, sandalwood, cedar, grass, hay, leaf, pine needles, tree bark, forest floor, truffle, manure, crushed rocks, freshly tilled black earth, rockdust, charcoal, matchstick, metallic, wet newspaper, vinyl, rubbery Band-Aid, more like Gamay, Syrah, and late-picked Zin.

*Act one revealed a tart, almost perfumed fruit unlike any Pinot Noir I've ever tasted. Then, somewhere in the middle, I could detect black truffles and rose petals, almost impossible harmonized. Miles rhapsodizes about a 1985 DRC La Tache in Sideways.*

**Friends don't  
let friends  
drink bad Pinot**

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If you haven't read the book or seen the movie, *Sideways*, do it now. In the movie, two buddies (one a frustrated book writer suffering a post-traumatic divorce syndrome and the other, an about-to-be-married actor friend) spend an adventurous week in Santa Barbara's beautiful wine country. Pinot plays a big role.

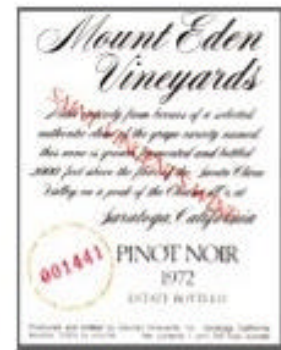
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## Mount Eden Vineyards Cuvee des Vieilles Vignes

The history of Mount Eden Vineyards is closely intertwined with the evolution of Pinot Noir in California. Paul Masson came to San Jose, California from Burgundy, France in 1878, planted a vineyard, and started a winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains next to Mount Eden. The Pinot Noir he planted likely came from one of the holdings of the Louis Latour Family who were friends of Paul Masson. Martin Ray grew up in the foothills below Mount Eden and became a protégé of Paul Masson. Just after Prohibition ended, Martin Ray purchased the Paul Masson Champagne Company from Masson and began his career as a winemaker. Ray was the first to produce a 100% Pinot Noir varietal table wine. At the time, grape varieties were always blended. In 1942 he sold the Paul Masson property and shortly thereafter planted his first vineyard at Mount Eden to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay (Cabernet Sauvignon was added in the 50's). He called his estate 'Martin Ray', and this became the first boutique wine model in California (Martin Ray's years on the mountain are recorded in a book authored by his widow in *Vineyards in the Sky*). Ray eventually lost ownership of the property to his partners and his 1970 vintage was the last he made from those vineyards. The new partners renamed the place 'Mount Eden Vineyards' and produced their first vintage of Pinot Noir in 1972 from 29-year-old vines. Over the years, there has been a succession of capable winemakers including Richard Graff, Peter Graff, Mary Edwards, Bill Anderson, and Fred Peterson. The current owner and winemaker is Jeffrey Patterson who lives in the hilltop house on the property. Visiting Mount Eden is quite an adventure as one must drive several miles up a steep mountain on a dirt road, but the vistas over the Santa Clara Valley from the estate make the drive well worth-while. The winery was newsworthy in 2003 when it installed a 20 kilowatt capacity photovoltaic solar system. The system was installed on a hillside near the assistant winemaker's home, and includes 136 panels (known as "modules") and nine inverters that turn the energy current, as DC current through the solar modules, to AC current for use in the winery. While the energy efficiency and environmental benefits of solar energy have long been known, the initial cash outlay for a solar system has deterred many potential customers. Current state and federal incentives make solar energy more attractive than ever. Mount Eden has an annual electric bill of about \$7,000, but after the solar system became operative, it dropped to virtually zero. Mount Eden expects the system to pay for itself within five to seven years.



According to John Haeger in his book *North American Pinot Noir*, there are seven Pinot Noir vineyards at Mount Eden (one is owned by Martin Ray's stepson, Peter Martin Ray). Five of the original seven acres have been replanted to Pinot Noir; one acre to cuttings taken from the original planting in 1996 (to preserve the Paul Masson pedigree), one acre each to Dijon 115, 667, 777 in 1998, and one acre of the Old Mount Chardonnay Vineyard to 115, in 1999. So, most of Martin Ray's original hilltop Pinot Noir, which had been obtained from Paul Masson's vineyard and grafted to rootstock by a local nursery, was producing until 1997. Yields were down to a 1/4-ton per acre when the old vines were removed in 1997.

To commemorate the last vintage from the old vines, 200 cases of a **1997 Mount Eden Cuvee des Vieilles Vignes Pinot Noir** was bottled separately from the Estate Pinot Noir. This is the only Mount Eden Pinot Noir of the decade to be made solely from Martin Ray's old vines. I recently had the pleasure of drinking this heritagewine and it nearly brought me to my knees. Early on the wine was stinky, with flavors of meat, earth and barnyard predominating. After 45 minutes it blossomed into a silky concoction of raspberries, cassis, cream and layers of complexity that bedazzled my senses. The Garden of Eden. The wine can still be obtained on the secondary market and not too expensive for what it is (about \$40).

For more information on Mount Eden and other area wineries, seek out the book, *Mountain Vines, Mountain Wines: Exploring the Wineries of the Santa Cruz Mountains*, written by Casey Young.

## Red Car Amour Fou

The **2003 Red Car Amour Fou Pinot Noir** is now being offered for sale (release date April, 2005) by the Red Car Wine Company, Santa Maria, California. Amour Fou is a French expression for a mad, obsessive love. The packaging for each of the Red Car wines presents a different “novel on a wine label.” The 2002 vintage had Chapter One on the back label: “Dawn is welcomed by most men, but most men aren’t in my situation. The house is quiet now, but not for long. In an hour it’ll start again— my own private little hell. In this last sixty minutes of silence let me tell you about my mad love, my Amour Fou.” The 2003 vintage is the second chapter of the tale. For the winery owners, “winemaking is storytelling.”

The 2002 Amour Fou was a saturated Pinot Noir oozing with immense purple-black fruits. Not for the timid. The 2003 Amour Fou represents a very similar style. The blend is 70% Keefer Ranch (Green Valley) and 30% from a vineyard owned and farmed by George Martinelli (Russian River Valley— first year fruit bearing). Mark Estrin and Carroll Kemp have brought on Chris King (Lewis Cellars) as assistant winemaker, and Sashi Moorman (winemaker at Stolpman Vineyards) as consigliore. The wine is described as follows. “A nose with the end of summer butter crust cherry and plum pie character that made the 02 so popular and controversial. The mouth-feel is rich, eschewing subtlety for pure pleasure. You can drink it all by itself when you need a shot of unbridled, guilty hedonism.” 275 cases, way-cool package, \$45. Mailing list: redcarwine.com.

## Hirsch Vineyards Inaugural Release

David Hirsch planted 48 acres of Pinot Noir on a steep ridge just east of the Pacific Ocean at Fort Ross beginning in 1980. Along the Sonoma Coast here the weather is cool (around 50 degrees most of the year), but Hirsch’s vines are planted at 900 feet, above the fog line, and enjoy plenty of sunshine. A variety of clones and rootstocks are planted here on low-vigor soils, so the fruit is very heterogeneous. Over the years, Hirsch has supplied fruit for single-vineyard Pinot Noirs from Williams Selyem Littorai, Siduri, Whitethorn, and even Oregon (Patricia Green). In 2001, the Williams Selyem contract for the finest blocks of vines expired and Hirsch decided to bottle his own label using grapes from these highly desirable portions of the vineyard. He felt that the transformation of grapes to wine should occur in the same place. The inaugural release was made in a custom crush facility in Geyserville, but in the future the wine will be produced in a new winery that has recently sprung up in part of the old lambing barn on the property. Vanessa Wong, a star among Sonoma Coast winemakers, is the vintner for the Hirsch Vineyard label. Projected production will be 15,000 cases per year.

**2002 Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (\$60) Paul Root describes the wine as a “dead ringer for \$150.00+ Burgundies. A Francophile would be fooled. A good example of why we all equate Pinot Noir to fine art. Every sip, every look, brings another nuance to the overall impression of the item.” 34 barrels. 2.1 tons/acre. 55% Pommard and 45% Mt Eden clones. A true collectible.

**2002 Hirsch Bohan-Dillon Pinot Noir** A small production “family and friends” wine which is a blend of barrels that did not make the grade for the first vineyard-designate label. It is labeled in honor of the single access road which leads to Hirsch Vineyard.

Call the winery at 707-847-3800 to join a mailing list. Also available at Roots Cellar in Healdsburg and Vintage Wine & Spirits (vintagewines.biz).





**The chilly fall weather means heartier foods especially those flavored with mushrooms . Newspaper reporter Christina Kelly has said that her aunt felt that the velvet earthiness of mushrooms paired with a great wine was “like the anticipation of a culinary kiss.” The choice of wine to pair with mushrooms will depend on the particular dish, but the ones that pair particularly well with Pinot Noir include Chantrelle, Porcini, Morel, Shitake, Portobello, and Crimini. Pinot Noir’s silky tannins seem to be made for mushrooms. Probably the best way to enjoy the full flavor of mushrooms is a simple preparation of pan-sautéing in a little olive oil with light aromatic spices and serving them over pasta.**

  
**PrinceofPinot.com**

## Demuth Vineyards First Estate Release

Chris Demuth farms an 8 acre Pinot Noir vineyard in the Anderson Valley which supplies grapes to several producers including Adrian Fog, Bannister, Domain Danica, and Skewis. The vineyard is uniquely located on the top of Anderson Valley just north of Boonville. At 1600 feet, it is one of the highest points in the Valley. Being cooler than other portions of the Anderson Valley, the grapes take longer to ripen here. And, being a mountain top vineyard, soils are shallow and the vines are stressed so that yields are low. The clones are Pommard and Wadensvil. The vines are 15 years old.

**2002 Demuth Vineyards Estate Pinot Noir** (\$40). The wine was made in the traditional Burgundian method using open top fermenters and punched-down daily. Aging was in 100% Francois Freres barrels of which 40% were new.

The wine was bottled on July 4, 2004! This wine may set a new high standard for Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs. Paul Root says: “Luscious, silky, creamy vanilla, cherry liqueur, black raspberry and sweet spice. The wine has that weighty, ‘drink me now’ slightly promiscuous, nearly cloying consistency, yet the acid and finish say I’m delicious today, but wait a few years and I’ll leave you breathless.”

Available at Roots Cellar, Vintage Wines & Spirits.

