

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Ex-Duke Probation Expiring

It was with great sadness last year at this time when I revoked the title of “Duke of Pinot” from one of my wine-loving colleagues. The “Duke”, also known as “Dookie”, had gotten off course and talked frequently of his cheap flings with older zins, merlots, and cabs. He had a number of trysts with the great wines of Piedmont, Pauillac, and Pomerol and had become enamored with amarones. He was heard to remark that “men are from Bordeaux and women are from Burgundy.” He talked enthusiastically about red “leather-pants” wines. At the same time, his humble wine cellar had become deficient in the noble wines of the Russian River Valley, the Willamette, Vosne-Romanee, and the Corton. Even worse, he had failed to read the PinotFile religiously.

At the time, “Dookie” was quite taken by the loss of his title. He cried. He tossed and turned at night, feeling low and unworthy, like a dog without a bone, a politician without principles. Over the last year, he has made some strides. He has stocked his cellar with Pinot Noirs from Dehlinger, Rochioli, and the great crus of Burgundy and seems to have a renewed sensuality and reverence for the only regal wine. A small vertical of La Tache has been assembled and a magnum of ‘47 Comte de Vogue Musigny is proudly displayed in a prominent spot in his cellar.

Being a physician, he has begun to direct his interest in medical research to the science of Pinot Noir. Although he has tried to keep his investigative efforts top secret, I have discovered that he has developed a new hybrid grape that acts as an anti-diuretic. It promises to reduce the number of trips an older person like himself has to make to the bathroom during the night. He plans to market the new hybrid wine as Pinot More.

I am reconsidering his privileges as this Christmas approaches. Is he worthy of the title “Duke of Pinot” again? Can any Piasano be deserving of an entitlement that espouses devotion to and expertise with Pinot Noir? Can a person who reveres Digiorno possibly be deserving? Will he be allowed to wear his baseball cap emblazoned with “Dookie” on it out in the public? Now the Prince is far too noble and proud to accept a bribe, but a gift in the spirit of the season seems beyond reproach. I have been eyeing that bottle of Domaine Denis Bachelet Charmes Chambertin in “Dookie’s” cellarhummmm.

**Silky and sleek,
Pinot Noir is
equivalent to a
sexy satin gown.**

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When it comes to wine, women are usually portrayed as sipping white and men as guzzling red. The fact is, women tend to focus more on wine with food and the social aspects of wine. Women care more about the taste of wine and less about critic’s ratings, and more women than men find wine calming.

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Woodenhead Vintners— Pure and Simple

Nikolai Stez has been fermentating one thing or another since he was a boy growing up in the Russian River Valley. His Russian immigrant parents taught him to make kvas, a drink from fermented bread or fruit. He made wines for his biology and botany classes in college, and began making serious home wines in 1986. Although he graduated from the Horticulture/Viticulture program at Santa Rosa Junior College and took a few classes at U.C. Davis, he attributes his winemaking skills to common sense and tuition. He did work for years with Burt Williams as an assistant winemaker and the Williams Selyem influence can certainly be tasted in his wines. The name, “Woodenhead” is derived from a nickname given to him by an old girlfriend who thought he was very stubborn (he is). His current girlfriend, spouse, and partner is Zina Bower who has been working in the wine industry for many years and is currently the office manager of Diamond Creek Vineyards in the Napa Valley.

Nikolai is a no-nonsense guy who refers to his winemaking as “Burgundian in the California style.” Pure and simple. He speaks of vineyard designation as an over-used title to proclaim greatness for a wine. “Marketing gurus praise vineyard sites with no history, age, or unusual or venerable characteristics.” The particular vineyards that he works with (he produces both Zinfandel and Pinot Noir) are definitely unique terroirs that in his hands find expression typical for their region, but reflective of the site. His wines are currently made at Topolos at Russian River Vineyards in Forestville. His lineup of limited production Pinot Noirs includes the following (each release has a different-colored label to assist identification):

2001 Woodenhead Vintners Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. This wine is from younger plantings, Dijon 115 and Pommard. 148 cases.

2001 Woodenhead Vintners Buena Tierra Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. (\$38) The Buena Tierra Vineyard is directly across the River from the Rochioli Vineyard and is planted to approximately 25-year-old vines. The wine is made from the oldest part of the vineyard, clones unknown, 3 tons to the acre maximum yield. This Pinot Noir is intensely aromatic, with chocolate, cinnamon, and cherries galore. Fruit and spice and everything nice. A very distinctive wine. Unfortunately only 46 cases produced and now largely out of the marketplace.

2001 Woodenhead Vintners Elk Prairie Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir. A very unique site for Pinot Noir in an area little-known for growing grapes. The vines are dry farmed organically on fairly steep slopes at 1500 ft. Clones are Martini 13 and 15. Yields are miniscule, less than 2 tons-per-acre in 2001. A jammy, concentrated Pinot Noir with a healthy dose of tannins and oak that make it a quite different from it's Russian River counterpart. At 15.2% alcohol, truly Californian, but quite special. 95 cases.

2002 Woodenhead Vintners Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. (\$35) “Aromas of black cherry, root beer, and cola, spice, and smoke. Deep red fruit flavors, even some licorice.” 214 cases.

2002 Woodenhead Vintners Humboldt County Pinot Noir. (\$28) An earthy wine, full-bodied, and a good value. 109 cases.

2002 Woodenhead Vintners Wiley Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir. (\$45) Pinot Noir vines were planted here in 1982. Clones are Pommard and Martin Ray (so-called DRC clone #37). This vineyard is the closest to the ocean of any of the Anderson Valley floor vineyards and has a very long growing season. Nikolai says this wine shows red fruits, sweet and sour cherry, hibiscus, green tea, and a hint of tangerine rind. 238 cases.

2002 Woodenhead Vintners Buena Tierra Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. (\$45) According to Nikolai, much better than the 2001 version from this vineyard. I would agree in the sense that it is more refined, sleeker, and velvety. Quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that will add plenty of spice to your life. Highly recommended.



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2002 Woodenhead Vintners Elk Prairie Vineyard Humboldt County Pinot Noir. (\$45) The last Woodenhead wine from this vineyard. The owners want to make their own wine. However, on the same ridgetop about two acres away, there is a new planting of the same clones known as Fruitland Ridge Vineyard which Woodenhead will be purchasing and farming. The last Elk Prairie Vineyard Pinot Noir can get Nikolai quite excited: "Fruit galore, a perfect balance of fruit and tannins, C'est la vie my love!" 147 cases.

Woodenhead Vintner Pinot Noirs can be found at restaurants in both Northern and Southern California, better retail stores, and on the website at www.woodenheadwine.com.

Miura Vineyards— Nobility, Boldness, and Power

The name Miura is derived from Don Eduardo Miura, the most famous breeder of Spanish fighting bulls and a name synonymous with nobility, boldness, and power. Miura Vineyards is a partnership between two U.C. Davis roommates, Emmanuel Kemiji and Byron Kosuge. Kemiji has degrees in Economics and Spanish Literature, but also studied Viticulture and Oenology at Davis. In 1989 he became the thirteenth American to pass the Master Sommelier exam in London, England, and one of only seven to date to pass on his first attempt. In the same year he was chosen "Sommelier of the Year" while Director of Wine & Spirits at The Ritz-Carlton in San Francisco. After having a bit too much to drink one night in 1995, Kemiji decided to try his hand at winemaking, and formed Miura Vineyards. Other winemaking projects followed including Candela Cellars (sister value label to Miura showcasing promising younger vineyards) in 1998, Almvs (a Bordeaux blend- Cuvee Kemiji & Portay) in 2000, Antiv2s in 2001, and two projects in Spain, Arrels and Aristan in 2003. Byron Kosuge embarked on a wine career after obtaining a bachelor's degree in Fermentation Science at Davis. He started out working some harvests at Schramsberg Winery before becoming Assistant Winemaker at Saintsbury in 1987. In 1996 he was promoted to Head Winemaker, but left in 2001 to become a full-time winemaker with Kemiji at Miura Vineyards.

Miura has concentrated on Chardonnay, Merlot, and Pinot Noir. The bottlings are distinctive. They feature not a paper label, but an abstract etching on the bottle of a bull with a red dot for an eye. The image of a powerful, noble, and magnificently aggressive creature is somehow wonderfully apt. Most of Miura's small output is distributed to hotels and restaurants, with retail sales accounting for about 10 per cent of production. Kemiji is now selling his wines to multiple-Michelin-star chef Alain Ducasse in Paris. At retail prices between \$50 and \$70 per bottle, quality doesn't come cheap, but reflects the high-cost of working with small, quality vineyards.

Miura Vineyards 2001 releases included a Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir (705 cases) and a Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir (659 cases). The two 2002 releases are the 2002 Hudson Vineyard Pinot Noir (621 cases) and the Hirsch Vineyard Pinot Noir (294 cases).

2002 Miura Vineyards Hudson Vineyard Pinot Noir. (\$50). Lee Hudson farms 152 acres of vines in the northern part of the Carneros region near the Napa-Sonoma line. Eighteen wineries buy Hudson's grapes with seven of them currently featuring the Hudson Vineyard designation on their labels. Hudson first planted his vineyard in 1981 when Carneros was mostly sheep pastureland. The majority of his plantings are Chardonnay, with only 20 acres devoted to combined Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Hudson learned about focusing on quality grapes from Jacques Seyesses at Domaine Dujac in the Cote de Nuits, and from classmates at U.C. Davis including John Kongsgaard and Tony Soter. He may be one of the most meticulous grape growers in the Napa Valley. This Pinot Noir (yield less than 2.4 tons per acre) was picked at 4:00 AM under tractor light, hand sorted, and fermented in small open stainless steel tanks. It was then fermented with native yeast in Francois Freres "Allier" barrels for 12 months. It was bottled unfiltered. A decadent wine that is all perfume in the nose and in the mouth, and is a heart-stopping spicy feast of berries and earth. A truly magic Pinot Noir. Available at select wine retailers including HiTime in Costa Mesa, California.






PrinceofPinot.com

The 2003 Candela California Pinot Noir (\$24) is a unique “Best of the Best” Pinot Noir blend from Garys’ Vineyard and Pisoni Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands, the Hudson Vineyard in Carneros, and the Hirsch Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast appellation. This is a superstar vineyard concoction from the second label of Miura and crafted by Emmanuel Kemiji and Byron Kosuge. Here you get a little bit of the opulent fruit of Garys’, the power and weight of Pisoni, the charm of Hudson, and the earthy backbone of Hirsch. Nothing fussy, this wine is a great value. Full of creamy young red fruits and sexy spices, it is classy and polished for what it is. Limited availability.

World of Pinot Noir 2005

The Fifth Annual World of Pinot Noir (WOPN) is set to take place March 4-5, 2005 at the Cliffs Resort in Shell Beach on the Central Coast of California. Over 120 Pinot Noir producers (many from California, but some from around the world) will be featured. The WOPN held last March was completely sold out well in advance so you have been warned.

The two-day event starts on Friday morning with “Pinot Noir 101” presented by John Haeger, the author of *North American Pinot Noir*. In depth tasting seminars follow at local wineries including Organic Farming, Regional Examination of the Russian River Valley, and A Walk Through the Cote de Nuits with “Burghound” Allen Meadows. In the afternoon there is a walk-around Pinot Noir tasting including current vintages and library wines along with gourmet hors d’oeuvres. The day concludes with a Gala Pinot Noir Dinner prepared by three local chefs originally from France. 48 domestic and international wineries will host tables at this event with guest sommeliers from around the United States.

On Saturday morning there are two tasting seminars, The Wines of Domaine Comte Georges de Vogue (Jean-Luc Pepin of Comte de Vogue and Allen Meadows will present and discuss nine wines selected from the 1997, 1999, and 2001 vintages), and Pinot Noir Retrospective Tasting (legendary Pinot Noirs from California and Oregon from the winery libraries). The afternoon features another walk-around Pinot Noir tasting with 60+ wineries, and an auction of magnums. The event ends on Saturday night with a Santa Barbara-style Paulee Dinner at Au Bon Climat Winery.

Tickets for individual events or a 2 Day Passport are available at www.wopn.com or phone 805-489-1758.