

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir All-Americans 2004

After tasting through over 750 California Pinot Noirs in 2004, I have come to the conclusion that what determines greatness in a wine is often what it is not, rather than what it is. After trudging through many high octane (alcohol), high tannin, high oaked, over-blown and unbalanced Pinot Noirs, it is always a relief to find that special one that makes you say, "Wow!, this is not too dense, not too ripe, not too oaky." The great ones do not push the envelope in any aspect. You just can't say anything negative about them— no junk in the trunk.

I taste most Pinot Noir with and without food in a relaxed atmosphere, replicating the consumer's drinking experience. My wife likes to throw her two cents in so I must acknowledge her contribution. I do not taste blind, but I purchase over 90% of the wines sampled so I have no axe to grind. I don't award scores to wines, preferring to give a short description of the style that the reader can appreciate. The quality of American Pinot Noir is at an all-time high making these "All-Americans" extra special.

First String "All-Americans":

2002 Davis Family Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir
2001 Hope & Grace Sleepy Hollow Vineyard SLH Pinot Noir
2001 Littorai Theirot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir
2002 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir
2002 Miura Hudson Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir
2002 Pey-Marin "Trois Filles" Marin County Pinot Noir
2002 Rochioli Estate RRV Pinot Noir
2002 Salamandre Dijon Clones Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir
2002 Shea Wine Cellars Block 32 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir
2002 Wes Mar Olivet Lane Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir
2001 Woodenhead Buena Tierra Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir

Honorable Mention: 2002 August West Rosella's Vineyard SLH Pinot Noir, 2002 Beaux Freres Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, 2001 Clos Saron Sierra Foothills Pinot Noir, 2001 Etude Heirloom Carneros Pinot Noir, 2001 Girasole Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, 2001 Littorai Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 2002 Melville Estate Vineyard "Carrie's" Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir, 2002 Merry Edwards Klopp Ranch Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir, 1997 Mt Eden Estate Vineyard Villes Vignes Santa Cruz Mtns Pinot Noir, 2002 WesMar Piner Ranch RRV Pinot Noir, 2002 William Selyem RRV Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir is more likely to seduce you than overwhelm you.

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"I believe that the potential for 'John Q. Pinot' to develop a 90-point habit spells trouble for the future of wine in America. I would argue that imitation and misuse of his (Robert Parker Jr.) system have turned the wine heap into a big numbers-driven mess.

... ..W.R. Tish in *Wine Business Monthly* (Dec, 2004)

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SF Chronicle 2004 Wine Awards

The San Francisco Chronicle is probably the most prestigious source for wine awards in the newspaper community. Each year they publish their "Top 100" wines and the Pinot Noir winners were (listed alphabetical): 2002 Amity Sunnyside Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$30), 2002 Broadley Estate Pinot Noir (\$25), 2001 Domaine Serene Evanstead Reserve (\$47), 2002 Etude Pinot Noir (\$40), 2001 Gary Farrell Starr Ridge Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$40), 2002 La Crema Carneros Pinot Noir (\$25), 2002 Lemelson Resonance Pinot Noir (\$35), 2001 Lynmar Quail Hill Pinot Noir (\$35), 2002 Merry Edwards Klopp Ranch Pinot Noir (\$48), Merry Edwards Windsor Gardens Pinot Noir (\$48), 2002 Migration (by Goldeneye) (\$26), 2002 Pisoni Estate Pinot Noir (\$60), 2002 Rex Hill Dundee Hills Cuvee Pinot Noir (\$29), Roar Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$44), 2001 Robert Stemmler Nugent Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$32), and 2002 Testarossa Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$49).

Winemaker of the Year Award went to the "Queen of Pinot Noir", Merry Edwards. She was the first to preach clonal diversity in California. After a 1977 research trip to Burgundy, she returned to present the then novel notion that certain clones, when grown in a specific site, produced wines with special interest and complexity. She presented the first clonal seminar at UC Davis in 1985. Her wine career has taken her from Mt Eden to Matanzas Creek where she was the founding winemaker, to consulting jobs with Pellegrini Family Vineyards, Liparita Cellars, Lambert Bridge Winery, Laurier Winery, and Fritz Winery. Currently she owns, with business partners and her husband Ken Coopersmith, two Pinot Noir Vineyards (Meredith Estate Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast appellation and Coopersmith Vineyard in the Russian River Valley). The 24-acre Meredith Estate property was planted in 1998 to five Pinot Noir clones including UC Davis 37 (Mt Eden clone), a Joseph Swan Vineyard field selection clone, and Dijon clones 667, 777, and 115. She released six Pinot Noirs in 2002— Klopp Ranch RRV, Windsor Gardens RRV (last vintage will be 2003), Meredith Estate Sonoma Coast, Olivet Lane RRV, and two blends, one from Sonoma Coast vineyards and one from Russian River Valley vineyards. Edwards says, "Aroma sets apart good Pinot Noir from great. The nose tells the mouth what the flavors are. Pinot Noir is the most aromatic red wine' Cabernet Sauvignon doesn't have any kind of aromas." Visit merryedwards.com to join the mailing list.



Merry Edwards Wines
meredith vineyard estate, inc.
RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY PINOT NOIR

Oregon Pinot Noir Off To China

With \$10 billion in wine sales and a population of at least 1.3 billion (the middle class alone is larger than the entire US population), China is an attractive country for wine exports. Henry Estate, Amity Vineyards, and King Estate Pinot Noirs are the first Oregon wines heading to the thirsty Far East country, being shipped in November of this year to upscale hotels and restaurants. Apparently there are many superb Italian and French restaurants in Beijing. Also, the Chinese government is promoting wine's heart health benefits. There is some resistance to wine consumption in China as the populace often sees it as intimidating and associated with high-end Italian and French cuisine.

Oregon already sends China grass seed (the 2008 Summer Olympics venue is being planted with Oregon grass seed), nursery stock, roasted hazelnuts, and seafood. California is also exporting wine to Asia, primarily Japan.

Movie Sideways Puts Pinot Noir in Limelight

Alexander Payne's 'Sideways' was voted this weekend the best picture of 2004 by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. Payne was recognized as the best director and shared the best screenplay award with Jim Taylor. Virginia Madsen and Thomas Haden Church won for best supporting actress and actor, respectively. The lead actor in the film, Paul Giamatti, was the runner-up for best actor.



Some little-known trivia about the film:

Sandra Oh is Alexander Payne's wife and learned to ride a motorcycle for the film.

Director Alexander Payne selected the film's wine list.

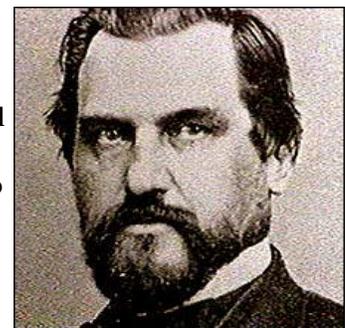
George Clooney was offered the role of Miles.

Most of the wine used in wine-tasting scenes was non-alcoholic but the actors drank so much of it they got nauseated and had to periodically switch to the real thing to clear their palates.

There is an original soundtrack available (anyone remember the music?) from New Line Records on CD.

Leland Stanford was a California Wine Pioneer

Although I attended Stanford University as an undergrad and was aware of several graduates who went on to distinguished careers in the wine industry (Robert Mondavi, Paul Draper, David Bruce, Bob Travers, and Lou Preston to name a few), I never realized until recently that Leland Stanford was one of the first to introduce winegrowing in California on a large scale. He is well-known for his achievements as a railroad builder (he drove the golden spike at Promontory, Utah to complete the transcontinental railroad), a governor and senator of California, a businessman, a lawyer, and the founder of Stanford University in 1885 as a memorial to his only son who died in 1884 from typhoid fever. But it was a trip that he took to France in 1880 with his then 13 year-old son, Leland Jr, that sparked his passion for winemaking. He wanted to produce a fine wine in California that could compete with the best of France. By 1888 he owned three vineyards. The Warm Springs Ranch near Fremont in Alameda County was farmed by and eventually deeded in 1990 to his brother Josiah. A flourishing wine business developed here for several years and included a winery and 275 acres of vineyards. In 1945, Swiss winemaker Rudolph Weibel and son Fred bought the abandoned Leland Stanford Winery and vineyards, but were eventually forced out by urban expansion and moved to Mendocino. The original brick winery still stands in Fremont. Weibel became famous for Green Hungarian and sparkling wine and today makes a Brut named the Stanford Governor's Cuvee. A second winery and vineyard was developed in Palo Alto with 100 acres planted to vineyards. It was adjacent to land upon which Stanford University was built. The Palo Alto Vineyard sold wine to locals and operated from 1888 to 1915 when war, depression, earthquakes, and prohibition wiped it out like many other wineries of the time. The Stanford Barn on campus is the last remnant of the winery, and the Stanford Shopping Center sits on the land where vines were uprooted in 1915. The third of his vineyards, the Vina Ranch, was to be Stanford's most ambitious wine undertaking. He wanted to retire here and produce the perfect dry white table wine. Located along the Sacramento River between Red Bluff and Chico in Tehama County, the Vina Ranch encompassed 2,575 acres of vineyards and was the largest vineyard in the world for the time. He thought the area would produced the best grapes in the world, but unfortunately Stanford misjudged the climate. The area turned out to be too hot in the summer and most of the grapes were used for making brandy. Leland Stanford died in 1893 never having produced a great wine.





Winery dogs are part of every winery's environs. They are often the first to receive customers at the entrance, they hang around tasting rooms, picnic tables, and cellars and often appear to be in control of the action. According to Australian winewriter Huon Hooke, "behind every successful winemaker sits a faithful bow-wow." So its not surprising that dogs have their own wine book. The second, deluxe edition of *Wine Dogs* by Craig McGill is to be published in Australia in early November. The book features over 150 Australian and New Zealand dogs and their tales, with short essays by notable wine personalities. For further information or to order the first or second edition, visit www.winedogs.com.


PrinceofPinot.com

Aubin Cellars Verve Pinot Noir

There has been a lot of buzz about this small production Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley. Jerome Aubin is a barrel broker for a couple of cooperage firms in France (Rousseau of Burgundy and Saint-Martin of Bordeaux). He visits over 250 wineries in the United States annually and has developed many great relationships with wine industry people. He met winemaker Fred Scherrer when he was the winemaker at Dehlinger and Aubin helped him to run his barrel program. They decided to work together on this small production Pinot Noir project (125 cases). Scherrer oversees the vineyard selection (by contract they cannot reveal the vineyard source for the grapes) and the winemaking duties for this new label. The name 'Verve' comes from the word verve meaning energy or vitality in the expression of artistic ideas. The 2002 is the second vintage.

2002 Aubin Cellars Verve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$30. This is a complex Russian River Valley Pinot Noir with both cooked Bing cherries and spices among the aromas. The mouthfeel is round and satisfying and plenty of sweet fruit is evident. A final impression of freshness peeks out but does not persist. A pretty good Dehlinger knockoff worth seeking out. Visit aubincellars.com or phone 510-339-0170. Available from retailers, K & L Wines (San Francisco) and Solano Cellars (Sonoma).

