

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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**Great Pinot  
Noir has No  
Beginning and  
Never Ends**

## From The Pinot Front Lines

I just returned from the 5th Annual World of Pinot Noir celebration held at Shell Beach, California (located on the South Central Coast near Arroyo Grande). This near-religious experience has affirmed my love for Pinot Noir and given me renewed strength for spreading the gospel. My report from the front lines of the event will begin with some observations and impressions.

First, Pinot Noir lovers, whether they be winegrowers, winemakers, sommeliers, retailers, or consumers, are genetically a fun-loving bunch who live to share their coveted grape with others. “Here try this, you have got to try that, let me pour you some of this” and so on. There are no wine bores or hogs in the bunch. Pinotphiles are a very selective breed that have survived years of preying upon by cabernet and Bordeaux wine snobs.

Secondly, the quality of American Pinot Noir is at an all-time high. You may disagree with some styles, but you have to admire the content. We are fortunate to be living in the Golden Age of American Pinot Noir. Make no mistake about it, Burgundy at its best is the pinnacle of Pinot Noir, but with very little tradition, but a lot of ingenuity, we are making consistently good wines year in and year out.

Thirdly, although Miles in the movie ‘Sideways’ has replaced Robert Parker as the number one wine critic in the world, Allen Meadows (aka Burghound) remains our most treasured authority on French Burgundy. Meadows has a knack for speaking succinctly and pertinently about his favorite subject and peppering his commentary with interesting factoids and personal anecdotes. His fluent French adds to the interest. If you have but the slightest curiosity about Burgundy, avail yourself of any chance to hear him speak and consider immersing yourself in his excellent online newsletter at burghound.com.

Fourthly, the concept of “terroir” can best be learned by tasting Burgundy from different communes or different vineyards from the same producer. Terroir is a French term for the “taste of place”. It is not an earthy taste from the soil as many people mistakenly believe, but a taste that reflects “somewhereness” as only Pinot Noir can. In the 1930’s the French classified all of the vineyards in the Cote d’or (“coat door”) into four levels by distinguishing their unique terroirs, and this has remained very true to form and agreed upon to the present day. An astonishing feat.

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Many California winegrowers believe in, and are farming organically, but few are strictly adherent to all of the regulations (ie some vine pests require use of non-approved inorganic pesticides). In addition, few seek organic certification because of the voluminous government paperwork required and the failure of organic certification to bring higher prices for their wine in the marketplace.

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## Excerpts From Pinot Noir 102

At the WOPN, the event kicks off with a “crash-course” in Pinot Noir led by John Haeger, the author of *North American Pinot Noir*. Here are some factoids you can use to astonish your wine-loving friends over a glass of Pinot.

Pinot Noir is now cultivated on every continent (even Japan and China in Asia) except Antarctica.  
 Pinot Noir is grown in practically every wine region of Europe including Portugal, Hungary, and Romania.  
 Worldwide there are only 130,000 acres of Pinot Noir, less than 1% of total planted vineyard acreage.  
 Pinot Noir is an orphan group, that is, its parents have never been found.  
 Pinot Noir has many offspring including Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Melon, Aligote, and a bunch more.  
 Pinot Noir has less than half the tannins of most red varieties.  
 Pinot Noir is indigenous to Burgundy and probably was dispersed from Burgundy no earlier than 15th century.  
 Pinot Noir grows side-by-side with many other varieties— Chardonnay in Burgundy, Sauvignon Blanc in Sancerre, Syrah in the US, Cabernet in the UF (Sonoma Mountain).  
 Burgundy is farther north in latitude than any American wine-growing region except the Okanagan (B.C.).  
 Pinot Noir vine densities are much higher and the average vine age is much higher in Burgundy.  
 Compared with Burgundy, our yields are similar, cellar practices and equipment are nearly identical.  
 Burgundies and American Pinot Noirs are very difficult to differentiate in a blind tasting.  
 Varietal Pinot Noir was made in California as early as 1889 when it was labeled “Chambertain”.  
 California-grown Pinot Noir was sold as Gamay Beaujolais during the 1960’s.  
 Between 1979 and 1997 there was no overall increase in planted Pinot Noir acreage in California. Since 1997, the acreage has doubled making about 50% of the vineyards less than 10 years old.

## Burgundy Pearls from the Burghound

Listening intently to Allen Meadows can allow you to navigate through the difficult world of Burgundy with some success. Here are some pearls I picked up over the weekend.

Regarding vintages: **1997** is a soft vintage with many pleasant wines. Some are great wines but primarily they are just good wines. They do not have the phenolic ripeness of 1999. Production was small, but the grapes were healthy and no chaptalization was necessary. Grand crus can be enjoyed today but will reach their full potential in 2012-2015. **1999** vintage was very hot with a big crop and a large production. The wines have drunk well from the beginning and are easy to drink now. The top crus are approachable now, but will age 25 years. **2000** is a very pleasant and underrated vintage for drinking now. Many wines from this vintage are still on the market and Allen Meadows, himself, buys and drinks this vintage regularly now without feeling guilty about “committing infanticide”. **2001** was a technically challenging vintage. The summer was too cool. The wines have very ripe acidity, are impeccably well-balanced, and have good aging potential. It is a “classical” vintage to Burgundy purists in that the wines reflect their terroir very closely. Others find the subtle tastes challenging to discover and dislike the “edginess”. At the top (top 10%), the wines are better than 2002 but 2002 is better overall from top to bottom. The wines are better as you go north, ie in the commune of Gevrey-Chambertain. A favorite vintage for Meadows. **2002** is a very ripe vintage that will appeal to many California Pinot drinkers. The wines are consistently good from Bourgogne up to the Grand Cru level.

Regarding communes: Chambolle Musigny is “the” commune in Burgundy, possibly rivaled by only Vosne-Romanee and Volnay. The wines from here show richness, spice, depth, and delicacy. They have “power without weight” and float across the palate. Very unique and desirable.

Regarding great Burgundy: The one hallmark that distinguishes a great Burgundy is a long finish.

## The Wines of Domaine Comte Georges De Vogue

At the WOPN, Jean-Luc Pepin and Allen Meadows presented a tasting of three vintages (1997, 1999, 2001) of Grand Cru Musigny Vieilles Vignes, Grand Cru Bonnes Mares, and 1er Cru Les Amoureuses. I don't want to gloat, but I will. This whole tasting was "knee-bending". There is no question in my mind that Musigny is one of the greatest Burgundies I have ever sampled.

Domaine Comte Georges de Vogue (comp-d-vog-u-way) dates back to 1450 and is the greatest estate in Chambolle-Musigny. The domaine owns 7.25 hectares of Le Musigny vineyard (80% of the site), along with 2.75 hectares of Bonnes-Mares (bone-mar) and 1.8 hectares of Premier Cru Chambolle-Musigny. The winery is run by estate manager Jean-Luc Pepin, winemaker Francois Millet, and vineyard manager Eric Bourgogne. The average age of vines in Le Musigny is 40 years old and all of it is bottled as Vieilles Vignes. Owned by the same family for generations, the estate ranks as one of the very best in Burgundy.



**Domaine Comte Georges de Vogue Les Amoureuses 1er Cru** A tiny holding immediately below Le Musigny. The average age of the vines is 31 years. Some believe this vineyard is Grand Cru quality and should be upgraded. The wine is described as a ballet dancer with power and strength. A woman with true character. It is a "petite" Musigny with not quite the power of Musigny but more approachable and with more spice. The 1997 was very approachable with beautiful aromatic expression and a long, long finish. The 2001 was less forthcoming but again displayed an incredible finish. The 1999 stole my heart with a great perfume, wonderful fruits and flowers (violet), and impeccable balance.

**Domaine Comte Georges de Vogue Bonnes-Mares Grand Cru** A masculine, robust wine that is austere and angular when young and requires lots, and I mean lots, of bottle age (20 years). There is probably only one other Burgundy wine that needs as much time and that is Corton, which requires 20-25 years. Bonnes-Mares is considered the "alien" of the three top Vogue Pinots. The 1997 was closed, tight, masculine, and muscular. Very powerful. The wine is distinguishing by its blueberry fruit. The 2001 was hard to get close to. The 1999 was the most approachable Bonnes-Mares of the tasting with a huge amount of fruit and fine-grained tannins.

**Domaine Comte Georges de Vogue Musigny Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru** Musigny combines the power of Bonnes-Mares with the seductive elegance of Les Amoureuses. It can age for decades. "If Chateau Margaux was re-incarnated as a Bourguignon then this is what it would be. Mesmeric, God-given, le magie de Musigny is the ultimate organoleptic pleasure". Words do not justice here. The 1997 had incredible power, a nose of roses and cream, and a lovely taste of Oriental spices. Approachable but needs a few years. The 2001 was not as approachable as the 1997 but very similar in content. The 1999 was utterly mouthcoating and seductive (knee-bending).

After the tasting, we adjourned for a tasting lunch in a restaurant with wonderful vistas of the central coast and featuring the **Domaine Comte Georges de Vogue Chambolle-Musigny Village 1999 and Chambolle-Musigny Premier Cru 2000**. The food was very artistically prepared by Jeff and Janet Olsson of New West in Buellton and featured pan roasted monkfish medallions with house smoked bacon, frisee, and truffle-soy vinaigrette and crisp confit of duck with wild mushroom mole and whipped golden potatoes. Both were very apropos with the wines which were beautiful accompaniments. The 1er Cru, in particular, was very classy with harmonious balance and pure succulent fruit.

This was an experience of a lifetime. Life is good. The distinguishing features of these wines were the impeccable balance and the long finish, regardless of the vineyard or the vintage. Consistency and excellence were evident across the entire range of wines. If you are looking for a Burgundy for a special occasion in the near future, buy a bottle of Les Amoureuses (\$225 range) or Musigny (\$350 range) and die happy.

## Gala Dinner— Bring It On!

At the WOPN the Friday night tradition is a Gala Pinot Noir Dinner. There were five courses meant to be paired with Pinot Noir from participating wineries. Things like wild mushroom cappuccino, “bourguignon” of monkfish, roasted veal tenderloin with pommes fondants and braised vegetables, and assorted French artisan cheeses were offered, but really the attention was focused on Pinot. Again, excuse me for gloating, but these are most of the wines poured at my table during the evening: Sonoma Cutrer Russian River Valley 2002 (inaugural vintage) and 2003 Pinot Noir (nice aromatics, but not distinguished), Windward Paso Robles Pinot Noir 2002, Acacia Beckstoffer Pinot Noir 1999 (nice quaff), Adelaida HMR Paso Robles Pinot Noir 2002 (just ok), Dierberg Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 2001 (notes say so-so), Morgan Double L Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2002, Kazmer & Blaise Carneros Pinot Noir 2002 (very good, aged sur-lies creating funky Burgundian overtones), Michaud Chalone Pinot Noir 2002 (nice aromatics, sweet fruit, very enjoyable), Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 2002 (a killer), Mon Lis Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Pinot Noir 2002 (very good, but stingy finish), Hanzell Pinot Noir 2002 (give it a few years), and Yabby Lake Mornington Peninsula Australia Pinot Noir 2003 (silky smooth and elegant, a revelation to several at the table). Most of these good wines were overshadowed by the Burgundies: Domaine Dujac Chambolle-Musigny Les Gruenchers 1990 (unbelievable aromatics, a fricking party), Dominique Laurent Clos De La Roche 2002 (hi-octane fruit but soft and elegant, complex, soars in the glass, unbelievably approachable for a young Grand Cru), Jean Gros Chambolle Musigny Clos de Reas 1988 (stinky, funky, earthy and almost indecent), Potel Charmes Chambertin 2000 (balance and more balance with more sweet fruit than the Queer Eye dudes), Berthod Chambolle-Musigny 1996 (whoa, some rockin old time Burgundy). Talk about a Pinot Noir orgy! Merci.

## Sideways Revisited

What would be your favorite way to spend a morning? How about attending a private screening of ‘Sideways’ at a small, old-time, one-screen theatre in Arroyo Grande and talking with the author of the novel ‘Sideways’ Rex Pickett, after the movie? Well I lived the experience last Sunday. A group of local wine people gathered at the vintage Fair Oaks Theater in Arroyo Grande. As I approached the old theater, I could smell the freshly popped popcorn. I grabbed a glass of Hanzell Pinot Noir (from many labels available), some cheese and popcorn, and headed into the private showing. What could be better than drinking Pinot Noir in a movie theater and watching ‘Sideways’? People have become enthralled by the places visited and the wines consumed in the movie. Santa Barbara has replaced Napa as the wine region on everyone’s mind. Chris Burroughs, the wine pourer at Sanford has become a celebrity and has had recent appearances on TV and in magazines. Domestic Pinot Noir sales are up 35% in California. Life is good.

Rex Pickett revealed many interesting anecdotes about his novel. He was a screenwriter with an interest in wine, particularly Pinot Noir. He prefers Pinot Noir because of its wide range of expression, Cabernets being all alike in comparison. He calls Pinot Noir “levitational”. In the 90’s, he started writing what was to become ‘Sideways’. From his home in Los Angeles, he traveled to the Santa Ynez region many times and hung out at the bar at the Hitching Post restaurant. Finally, in 1998 he completed the novel and submitted it to several publishers where it was unanimously rejected. The original name was “Two Guys on Wine”. He sent it to Alexander Payne where it laid on his desk for 9 months before he read it and decided to do a movie based on the novel. He never imagined in his wildest dreams that the novel and movie would achieve such popularity.

When you watch the movie a second time you see it on several other levels and I highly recommend you re-view it. This movie is really about the rite of passage for middle-aged guys. There is considerable sub-textural meaning and many symbols and metaphors in the movie. For example, the touching scene where Miles talks with Maya about Pinot Noir is really a metaphor for his own similarity to Pinot Noir.

## Wine Cask Futures Program

Every year, Doug Margerum, owner of the Wine Cask wine store and restaurant in Santa Barbara, offers a futures program that allows pinotphiles to purchase Santa Barbara County wines in advance of release at a reduced price. Margerum and wine director, Wendy Van Horn, travel throughout the county to find small-release, high quality, unique, and rare wines. Some of the 2003 vintage offerings were tasted in bottle, but many of the 2003 and 2004 wines were tasted in tank or barrel. Margerum has a lot of experience in this game and can recognize winners at an early stage. The wines will be offered for tasting on Saturday, March 19 and Saturday April 23 at the Wine Cask in Santa Barbara (tickets are \$45 per person— to order call 805-966-9463 or online at [winecask.com](http://winecask.com)). Many of the wines, however, are very limited and will be sold out shortly after the March 19 tasting. The Futures Program catalog can be downloaded from the website now. Minimum order is six bottles of any wine, except the very limited futures which may only be available as one or a few bottles.

There are several Pinot Noirs offered from the Fiddlestix Vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills. This 133 acre vineyard is regarded as one of the finest sites for producing Pinot Noir in the Santa Rita Hills. The vineyard is a joint partnership between Kathy Joseph, owner and winemaker of Fiddlehead Cellars, and Beringer. The wineries offering Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir include Ampleos Cellars (Peter and Rebecca Work purchased 82 acres of ranch land in the Santa Rita hills in 199 and planted their first Pinot Noir vines in 2001— next year their estate wines will be ready for the futures program) 2003 (\$24), Arcadian (Joe Davis is a respected Pinot Noir producer who ages his wine 22 months in barrel and an additional 10 months in bottle before release. He picks grapes that are not as ripe as many of his Santa Barbara colleagues, instead concentrating on lower yields in the vineyard and balanced fruit. His wines are built for the long haul) 2002 (\$40), Bonaccorsi (the 2003 vintage was begun by Mike Bonaccorsi and finished by winemaker Greg Brewer after Mike's untimely passing) 2003 (\$37), Fiddlehead Cellars 2002 (\$40), and Hitching Post (Hartley-Ostini produced who have ignored their fame and still sell to long-time customers only) 2003 (\$32).



There are two offerings from the respected Clos Pepe Vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills. Loring Wine Company (software designer turned winemaker Brian Loring began making wine in 1999 and has exploded on the scene with his big Pinot Noirs beloved by those who like this style) 2004 (\$40), and Ojai Vineyard (Adam Tolmach is a winemaker extraordinaire) 2002 (\$45).

Other prominent producers offering excellent Pinot Noirs include Au Bon Climat, Babcock, Cargasacchi, Costa De Oro, Drew Family, Flying Goat, Foley, Foxen, Longoria, Rusack, and Sea Smoke. This is an opportunity to purchase Sea Smoke on futures now. The winery is red-hot since the label appeared in the movie 'Sideways' and prior to that was well-regarded by Pinot enthusiasts. The 2003 Sea Smoke Botella (limit 3 bottles) is \$29, the 2003 Sea Smoke Southing (limit 3 bottles) is \$45, and the 2003 Ten (limit 3 bottles) is \$55.



TEN

APPELLATION SANTA RITA HILLS  
Santa Barbara County California  
750ML 14.1% ALC/VOL

**Some interesting facts about 'Sideways'**

**In the scene on the golf course, author Rex Pickett (who is a 2 handicap golfer) is the one who actually hits a golf ball about 100 yards and strikes the golf cart of the group following them on the course.**



**This past weekend, winemaker Gray Hartley, who along with Frank Ostini, the chef at the Hitching Post, produces Hitching Post Pinot Noir, was in Japan for the release of the movie in that country. The movie still has not been released in every area of this country and internationally.**

**The hotel scenes were shot at the current Day's Inn. Previously the Inn was called the Windmill Inn. The original signage was purchased by Alexander Payne and used in the movie. The scenes were actually shot at the hotel— a wall was knocked down to allow cameras to film from an adjoining room**

**The scene where there is a dialog about Pinot Noir between Miles and Mya is so subtextually erotic and captivating that it is used in acting classes now.**

**Producer Alexander Payne spent 3 months in the Santa Ynez Valley prior to filming.**

**No sequel ('Sideways' 2) is planned.**

