

PinotFile[©]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

WesMar Doubles the Pleasure

The WesMar Winery in the Russian River Valley is the only one I know of where a husband and wife team share the winemaking duties 50/50. Now it is hard enough for a marital couple to equitably negotiate all of the decisions that arise in a marriage daily. What color to paint the family room, who shops for groceries, who feeds the dog, who signs the checks and so forth. Imagine then, in addition, spending the day making wine together faced with the multitude of decisions involved from when to pick the grapes to when to rack the wine, from the type of barrels to use to the many stylistic options to select. Somehow Kirk **Wesley** Hubbard and his wife, Denise **Mary** Selyem are able to work compatibly together to produce Pinot Noirs that are consistently among the most treasured from the Russian River Valley.

The history of the winery goes back to the days when Ed Selyem and Burt Williams were producing their prototypical Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs. With Ed's urging, both Kirk and Denise left their corporate jobs and under his tutelage learned about Pinot Noir and the wine business. Upon Ed Selyem's retirement with the sale of Williams Selyem in 1997, the plans for WesMar began to be laid. In March of 2000, Kirk and Denise found a home in an old apple processing warehouse in Sebastopol and began to carry out all phases of winemaking there. With the contacts and friendships developed over the years in the Russian River Valley, they had access to esteemed sources for Pinot Noir grapes including Olivet Lane and Piner Ranch. They have been successful from the get go.

Their winemaking philosophy is straightforward. They want to produce a style of Pinot Noir that they personally enjoy drinking. "Aromatic, fruit forward, not overly ripe, with balanced acidity, complimentary fruit tannins, subtle oak impressions, while still displaying richness of flavors and finishing with a cloying mouth feel and flavors that linger long after the wine has left your mouth." Harvest is carried out at a lower, rather than higher, brix level. They believe overly ripe fruit is more singular in profile, losing its natural fruit nuances. In order for a wine to express its terroir and complexity of flavors, the wines are crafted with modest fruit tannins and oak notes that are complimentary to the fruit without being intrusive. The resulting style shows its Williams Selyem heritage beautifully and showcases Pinot Noir in a fashion that I personally love to drink. No employees, no consultants, no marketing, just consistently great Pinot.

**If You Drink
No Noir, You
Pinot Noir**

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At WesMar they share many pinoficionados' enthusiasm for magnums. Magnums are a wonderful format for longevity, special occasions, large groups, or a long weekend for two. In response they bottle several offerings in magnums and even have a handful of three liters.

Speaking of big formats - how about that Rafeal Nadal?



The WesMar lineup of 2003 Pinot Noirs are treasures packed with pleasure. One of the notable characteristics of the Pinot Noirs from WesMar is consistency. There is a dependable style since the inaugural 2000 releases. It is kind of like the story of The Three Bears. The Pinots are not too ripe, not too alcoholic, not too tannic, not too oaky, but just right. All of the 2003 releases exhibit some subtle differences, but they all show very appealing aromas, soft and creamy flavors on the palate, harmonious balance, and excellent integration. The wines were released in April and experience at the winery has shown the wines traditionally undergo additional development in June/July and again in November. They expect the wines will age gracefully for at least five years.

2003 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 345 cases, \$29. This wine is a blend of three vineyards in the Russian River Valley, Piner Ranch, Oehlman, and Olivet Lane. The enticing aromas of cherry, blackberry and red licorice draw you close. An explosion of outrageous jammy raspberry, cherry and plum flavors leave you smiling. A big daddy that is clearly the most lush in the lineup. It will take on some polish with a couple of years of aging.



2003 WesMar Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 91 cases, \$29. Two vineyards supplied the grapes, all Pommard clone, An inaugural release from the Sonoma Coast appellation. Medium-bodied and plush. Tantalizing aroma of cherries and creamy strawberries. A fresh and expansive drink that is the equal of any Pinot Noir blend that I have enjoyed from this appellation.

2003 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 168 cases, \$35. This is the most feminine and shy wine of the lineup. This wine seems to pick up heft with some airing and the winery tasting notes indicate this bottling had the most lively fruit left of the entire lineup on day six of their tasting.

2003 WesMar Olivet Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc, 162 cases, \$35. The Olivet Lane Vineyard is farmed by the Pelligrini family and has supplied fruit for years to many top Russian River Valley wineries including Williams Selyem and Merry Edwards. This wine is throwing off sediment at this young age. A phenomenal nose of cassis, spice and cola. Still a slight bit disjointed and needs some time to flesh out.

2003 WesMar Piner Ranch Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 206 cases, \$35. Dark, dark ruby in color. A lovely cherry nose with a good dose of chocolate and coffee. Jumps out of the glass. Velvety and smooth as a baby's bottom. This Pinot will make you coo.

2002 WesMar Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 445 cases, \$29. Sappy, nicely perfumed, with raspberries, red currants, magical mystery spices and a hint of mocha. Seamless.

These wines are an easy call: Selyem bloodline, consistent high quality, food-friendly style, sensible prices, and two great people. Double your pleasure.

To order call Denise at 707-829-8824 (or the website at wesmarwinery.com). Kirk is feeding the dog.

The problem with the designated driver program is that it is not a desirable job. If you ever get suckered into doing it, have fun with it. At the end of the night, drop them off at the wrong address.

New Releases Worth a Look

2003 Halleck Vineyard Estate Pinot Noir Less than 50 cases and orders limited to six bottles each. The release price is \$61. According to Ross Halleck, the 2003 “dances out of the glass with a nose of red cherry that fills the room. While still tight, there is no mistaking the heritage. The flavors linger long past the last drop on the tongue. Raspberry and spice and earthy notes that bond the Estate Pinot Noir to Burgundy and the Sonoma Coast.” Winemaker Greg Lafollette feels the 2003 is the best Halleck Estate release to date with very forward fruit, but also great structure.

Halleck Pinot Noir is now available at the best Bay Area restaurants including Aqua, Bacar, Boulevard, Campton Place, La Folie, Myth, Dry Creek Kitchen, Martini House, Willi's Wine Bar and Zazu. To order contact ross@halleckvineyard.com.



2003 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$36 64% Fiddlestick, 24% Cargasacchi, and 12% Clos Pepe Vineyards. 367 cases. According to Paul Root, “nearly speechless when tasting this stuff which screams aromas of strawberries, plum blossoms and rose petals. Flavors of wild blackberries, bacon, smoke, and a flood of black cherry roll over your palate like an unseen ocean wave on the long, nearly time-able finish.

2003 Ken Brown Bien Nacido Pinot Noir \$36 Classic Bien Nacido Pinot Noir. Again Paul Root says “lush aromas of black cherries, leather, clove, white pepper and Santa Rosa plum are followed by similar flavors in the mouth. A multi-dimensional wine with dark cherry, cinnamon, berry pie spice, vanilla and sweet cassis liquor fill out the yummy finish. A true, purple-blue orgasmic gurgle-bomb.” Now Paul Root is a retailer and owner of Root's Cellar in Healdsburg and he can sometimes get out of control, but Ken Brown does have the breeding to spell success. He founded Byron Winery in 1984. He was one of the pioneer Central Coast vingerons. He retired from Byron but stayed in the limited capacity of utilizing the facility to create his own, micro-production, hand-crafted wines. In his understated way Paul says “These wines are killer!” Available at rootscellar.com or 707-433-4957, or at the Wine Club in Santa Ana, California.

2002 Ribbon Ridge Winery Ridgecrest Vineyard Pinot Noir \$50. Harry Peterson-Nedry planted grapes on Ribbon Ridge at the extreme, western end of the Chehalem Mountains in 1982 and named the vineyard Ridgecrest Vineyard. This is the first release of Ribbon Ridge Pinot Noir from the 37 acre estate, the oldest and best situated plantings on Ribbon Ridge. The 2002 Pinot Noir is Peterson-Nedry's first private label release. Production was only 250 cases. Both the *Wine Advocate* and the *Burghound* rated this release first rate. Available from wineaccess.com.

2003 Londer Vineyards Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc, 748 cases, \$30. A blend from four vineyards in the Anderson Valley.

2003 Londer Vineyards Parabol Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 262 cases, \$48. The wines from the Anderson Valley yield a tad more delicacy and acid than their Russian River neighbors. The grapes for this wine come from the Ferrington and Valley Foothill Vineyards. The 2002 version of this wine is sold out. It received multiple high scores in competitions.

2003 Londer Vineyards Keefer Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 297 cases, \$42. The Keefer Ranch is in the cool Green Valley appellation. Londer winemaker Greg Lafollette (same winemaker as for Halleck above) feels that Pinot Noir thrives in Grass Valley and produces wines with a little more delicacy and acid than the Russian River Valley.



Last week I featured the health benefits of wine. A new study from Israel appearing in the *Journal of Nutrition* shows that eating fresh grapes may prevent atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). Grape polyphenols reduce the accumulation of cholesterol in the cells of blood vessels, reduce oxidative stress, and inhibit the development of atherosclerosis. When cholesterol is damaged by oxidation such as oxidized LDL cholesterol, it is more easily deposited in the arterial walls, leading to a blockage of the blood vessels. This study contributes to the mounting evidence that grapes exert a protective role in heart health. Grapes contain a large amount of antioxidants that inhibit an array of critical factors that can cause atherosclerosis.

Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival 2005

David Hoffman sends a report on this recent event. David stayed on the Mendocino Coast during this event which many attendees do as lodging in the Anderson Valley is tough to come by. A new wine shop owned by Dan Reed has opened in the Mendocino Village with an excellent selection of Pinot Noirs. Also, the Harvest Market in Fr. Bragg has an extensive wine offering with decent prices.

On Saturday, May 21, the Pinot Festival walk-around tasting was held under a tent at Schraffenberger. About 30 wineries poured Pinots from the 2002, 2003 vintages, as well as some 2004 barrel samples. Attendance was limited to 600 making this a very pleasurable event. David tastes a lot of Pinot and he knows Pinot. His favorite Pinots from the event (in no particular order) were: Goldeneye, Claudia Springs, Skewis, Williams Selyem, Woodenhead, Roessler, MacPhail, Londer, Elke, Copain, Navarro, and Lazy Creek. No surprises here as these are consistently top producers from the Anderson Valley. David coined a new word for Pinots from the Anderson Valley - "AV Pinoticity" - and all of these producers showed that style.

On Sunday, May 22, he attended several winery open houses. At Londer Vineyards he was really taken by the 2004 "Hillside" barrel sample of Londer Estate Pinot Noir and the 2002 Elke Donnelly Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir (also made by Londers winemaker, Greg LaFollette). The Lazy Creek 2002 and 2003 Estate Reserve Pinot Noirs were stellar.

