

PinotFile[®]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Along the RRV Pinot Trail

A recent trip to Pinot's promised land renewed my love for this bucolic wine country. Much of the region still retains the unhurried and blissful charm that it had in 1983 when it was declared an American Viticultural Area. While the Napa Valley exudes haute couture, the Russian River Valley is truly farm country where an old pair of worn sneakers fits in just fine.

The most distinguishing feature of the Russian River Valley is the "maritime incursions." Fog flows into the valley with regularity in the early evenings due to the confluence of cool Pacific Ocean air and the marine influence of San Pablo Bay. As a result, evening temperatures drop 35 to 40 degrees from the daytime high. The fog retreats in the early morning. The result of God's air conditioning is that grapes can mature over an extended growing season. Sure enough, the first morning in the Russian River Valley, I awoke to fog hanging over the Olivet Grange Vineyard and took this photograph.



Russian River Valley Part II

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Russian River Valley Wine Boot Camp is July 23. Wine Boot Camp challenges recruits to dive into wine by rolling up their sleeves and plunging into wine-growing and wine-making. A 12-hour intense wine encounter begins in the vineyard tending vines and ends in the winery blending and bottling. Conducted by Affairs of the Vine, Wine Boot Camp is a highly enjoyable training program. Enlistment is \$395 which includes all seminars, lunch in the vineyard, dinner paired with wines, extensive wine tasting, a bottle of wine created by the recruit, transportation, and a cap and T-shirt. Boot Camp is at Acorn Winery and Paradise Ridge Winery. To enlist contact Major Drady at 707-874-1975.

There are several high-end places to stay in the Russian River Valley including the Farmhouse Inn and Restaurant in Forestville, the Applewood Inn and Restaurant in Guerneville, and the Hotel Healdsburg, Duchamp Hotel, and Les Mars Hotel on or near the square in Healdsburg. In addition, there are numerous B&Bs, both close to Healdsburg and scattered throughout the valley. To really get a feeling for the countryside, we chose the **Olivet Grange Farmhouse** located at the intersection of Olivet Road and Piner Road in the heart of the valley's many vineyards. This early 1900s craftsman-style farmhouse has been lovingly restored by Kathleen and Simon Inman and is akin to visiting your grandmother's house. Homey and well-stocked with all the essentials, the house is surrounded on three sides by well-manicured vineyards of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. The farmhouse reminded me of the small home I grew up in which had three bedrooms, but only one bathroom. If you travel with three couples like we did, there will be a lot of good-natured competition for that one precious bathroom. Details for renting this farmhouse are at olivetgrange.com, 707-235-2071.



Kathleen and Simon Inman came out to the estate on a glorious Saturday morning to walk the vineyards with us. The interesting history of the vineyard and Inman Family Wines has been reported in a recent issue of the *PinotFile* (Issue 39). The **2003 Inman Family Olivet Grange Pinot Noir** (\$45) is the inaugural release from this new vineyard and is a fine example of Russian River Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir's relative, Pinot Gris, also likes the cool Russian River Valley. The **2004 Inman Family Russian River Valley Pinot Gris** (\$24) is a blend of grapes from the Olivet Grange Vineyard and Saralee's Vineyard. It is a crisp wine with good acidity that makes it ideal as an aperitif or an accompaniment to Sonoma's famous Hog Island oysters. It is bottled with a screwcap as Kathleen is quite a fan of this closure. In fact, she plans to bottle 600 cases of her next vintage of Pinot Noir with a Stelvin screwcap closure. Last year, the couple harvested their Olivet Grange Vineyard Pinot Noir on September 1st which was their 20th wedding anniversary. To celebrate and mark the occasion a rosé was produced, the **2004 Inman Family Endless Crush Olivet Grange Rosé of Pinot Noir** (\$20). The rosé was made intentionally rather than drawing off freerun juice. Only 50 cases were vinified and it is being offered to mailing list customers first. It is a dry, crisp thirst-quencher perfect for summer barbecues or to celebrate a summer anniversary. The winery's website is at inmanfamilywines.com, or phone 707-393-0689.

I was repeatedly reminded on this trip that the best Pinot Noirs are produced by those winemakers who are also trained and talented wine growers and are fastidious about caring for their vineyards. Many wineries use slogans like “our wine is made in the vineyard,” but this is a gospel that all celebrated Pinot Noir producers adhere to. Kathleen Inman practices some of the basic tenants of biodynamic farming. She lovingly applies a nourishing compost to the base of her vines made from scraps of food from the best restaurants in the Bay Area (see Pinot Gris vines below). Imagine a lucky vine receiving nutrients from leftover and discarded fruits, vegetables, shellfish, etc. from Chez Panisse, Boulevard and Gary Danko!



A short distance away is the beautifully-situated and manicured Pinot Noir vineyard farmed by Guy Davis of Davis Family Vineyards. Guy searched for seven years to find a suitable site “destined for greatness” to grow his beloved Pinot Noir. The vineyard is planted on a hillside with north/south row direction. From the deck of his home, he can survey his 9274 vines (he prefers to refer to individual vines rather than the 7 acre vineyard as a whole since his philosophy is individual attention to every vine - what he terms precision viticulture). Guy has matched the site with exact rootstocks and a variation of clones most suited to the soils and location. He is a cerebral winemaker who leaves nothing to chance. His philosophy is for every vine to receive twelve touches during the growing season from pruning to harvest. Along with his son, he does almost all vineyard work from thinning the crop, to positioning shoots, to removing undesirable clusters. Then when the season’s work is finished, he is “obsessive, focused, and fanatical” about choosing the right day to pick. Guy says, “there is a day that is exactly the day - as ripe and supple as possible without crossing that very fine line of overripe. Pinot will show it if you pick too early or too late.” Having complete control over his own vineyard allows him the liberty to pick different blocks at different times within the vineyard. On page 4 is a photo of the Davis Family Estate Pinot Noir Vineyard.

A complete winemaker profile of Guy Davis is available at WineRelease.com (June 15, 2005 Monthly Newsletter written by Neil Monnens). Guy’s interest in wine developed working in a French restaurant while attending college. After a few years as a stockbroker, his love of wine and food led him to a wine buyer job

in Sonoma County. He was able to taste extensively and became inspired to produce wine himself after working at Sky Vineyards atop Mount Veeder in 1989. He took a number of requisite viticulture and enology courses at UC Davis. Guy ran his own import and retail wine company called Passport Wine Club in the 1990s during which time he acquired his Russian River Valley property. He planted the Pinot Noir vineyard in 1996 and Davis Family Vineyards was born in 1997.



Guy is a very talented winemaker who makes an excellent Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, a fine Dutton Ranch Chardonnay, a limited amount of old vine Zinfandel/Syrah blend, and a luscious Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand labeled Gusto (the growing season is opposite in the Southern Hemisphere, so he travels to New Zealand's Marlborough region to create a special wine from that country). But it is his Pinot Noir that pinoficionados swoon over. The **2003 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$35) is a very classy wine. A common winery refrain, "this vintage is better than the last," is often more marketing than truth. In this case it rings true. The 2002 version was superb, but the 2003 edition is even better. The wine is just beautifully composed. A wonderful potpourri of Pinot aromatics lead to a complex fruit compote which is elegant and silky. There is a plenty of fruit and power, but it is beautifully integrated with velvety, fine-grained tannins. The wine reminded me of some of the great Chambolle Musignys I have drank. They are often described as "an iron fist in a velvet glove" and this description suits the Davis Family Pinot just fine.

Guy Davis has built an attractive small winery and tasting room along the shores of the Russian River just a few blocks from Healdsburg. The photo on page 5 of "The Wine Goddess" heralds the entrance to the winery grounds and was commissioned from a local artist. More artwork adorns the tasting room. Adjoining picnic tables afford a perfect setting for a picnic overlooking the Russian River. 52 Front Street, 707-569-0171. The winery's website is davisfamilyvineyards.com. Guy's annual newsletter is one of the most professional and newsy of its kind and is sent to mailing list customers. Guy also makes a mean dipping-style olive oil sourced from olive trees in the Sierra Foothills (\$25 for 500ml)





As any faithful reader of the *PinotFile* knows, I really like the WesMar Pinot Noirs. The 2003 WesMar Pinot Noirs were reviewed in Issue 41. Our group met up with co-owners, co-winemakers and co-sailors Kirk and Denise and headed for the Russian River's newest park, Riverpoint. Life is good when you are picnicking on a Friday afternoon under a grove of redwood trees, next to a river, drinking older vintages of WesMar Pinot Noir and eating gourmet treats from Fiesta Market in Sebastopol. As we tore open the picnic goodies, we enjoyed the crisp and **2001 WesMar Chardonnay**. Then as we scarfed down plenty of great bread, cheese, cold cuts and more, we savored the **WesMar 2000 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**, the **2001 WesMar Olivet Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir**, and the 2001 and 2002 **WesMar Piner Ranch Pinot Noirs**. All of these beauties have aged gracefully. What is their secret? They make wines that they like to drink - thrilling aromas, irrepressible flavors, and attractive textures. Just chalk it up to intuition or a sixth sense - some have it and some don't. Kirk and Denise shun marketing and are so modest, they refuse to put their picture on their newsletter or website. I am hardly that modest so I am featuring a photo of them on the next page shot in front of Olivet Lane Vineyard. Kirk "Wes" and Denise "Mar" can be reached at 707-829-8824.





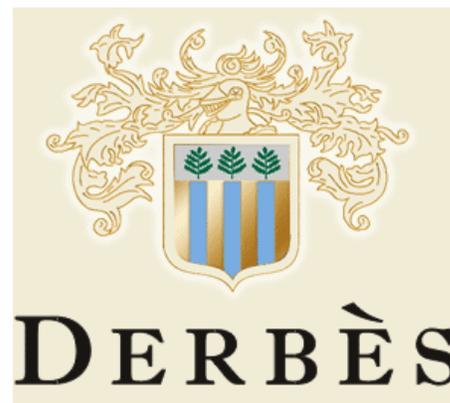
When we stopped at the end of the driveway at the Derbès' residence, we were warmly greeted by Billy and Cécile. She was hobbling on a recently broken foot, was visibly eight months pregnant, and had two two-year old twin boys under her charge. And if that wasn't enough, she is the winemaker for Derbès Wines. And you think you have it tough?

Cécile was born and raised in Champagne where her family had a vineyard. She had aspirations to be a medical doctor, but switched to viticulture and enology in her freshman year of college. In 1990 she obtained her Master's degree in enology at the University of Reims, in the heart of Champagne. She continued to work with her family vineyards as well as at Champagne Bollinger and Champagne Jacquart. In 1991, Cécile moved to California to work for Schug Carneros Estate Winery and later Korbel Winery. She returned to France after a stint at Golan Heights Winery in Israel, but found few opportunities in France for woman winemakers. She returned to California in 1998 where she was in charge of wine production at Opus One Winery for three years. She met her future husband Billy, an aerospace engineering consultant, and began a family. She became a consultant winemaker for small wineries in the North Coast and started Derbès Wines with her initial releases in 2001. Future plans call for a small vineyard on her home property and a winery on the premises. At present she sources grapes from premium Russian River Valley and Carneros growers.



We tasted her current releases on a table made from Champagne riddling racks in her home. **The 2001 Derbès Carneros Chardonnay** (\$40, 284 cases) and **2001 Derbès Russian River Valley Chardonnay** (\$45, 194 cases) were outstanding. The Russian River Chardonnay is from the highly-regarded Heintz Vineyard and

the Carneros Chardonnay is sourced from the Double T Ranch. Both wines were in the white Burgundy style with appealing minerality and refreshing acidity in the background and finish. The wines underwent partial malolactic fermentation and were bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. The **2002 Derbès Les Pinots** (\$40, 210 cases) is a blend of 53% Pinot Meunier and 47% Pinot Noir. The grapes are from Moore Vineyards, Saralee Knude in the Russian River Valley. A fresh, different wine that has a lovely bouquet of raspberries and strawberries. Lighter-bodied and feminine in its approach, it is a perfect table wine. The two Pinot grapes are a blissful marriage in Champagne so it is not surprising that they blend so nicely here. Generally I am not a fan of blending Pinot Noir with another varietal, but here it works beautifully. Maybe we should christen this hybrid wine Pinot Noier. There is clearly winemaking talent here and this is a winery to watch. The unfinished website is at derbeswines.com where you can join the mailing list. The phone is 707-887-8601.



For more information and source material on the Russian River Valley, consult the following websites: rrvw.org (Russian River Valley Winegrowers of Sonoma County who publish a helpful guide to the region), Sonomawine.com (Sonoma County Wineries Association), wineroad.com (Russian River Wine Road), Sonoma.com/lodging, beautifulplaces.com, RR Getaways (call 800-433-6673) and Sonoma County Farm Trails (call 800-207-9464 to receive a free Farm Trails Map and Guide). Many of the producers are very small with no tasting rooms but they are happy to see you by appointment. It is not unusual for Russian River Valley Pinot Noir producers to receive you into their homes or farms to taste their wine and it is fairly common practice for them to deliver wine to your residence if you live in Sonoma or your accommodations if you are visiting. An annual Grape to Glass Weekend in August and Barrel Tasting Weekend in March allow you to visit many of the wineries to taste the wines and meet the winemakers.

What does a Prince do at the end of a hard day of tasting Pinot Noir?

