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Pinotology**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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"This is something I've wanted to do since I was a young man. It wasn't until I moved to Ojai that I decided it was time to do what I truly wanted to do. I am so blessed that I have the chance to live my dream and can make these very good wines while honoring our earth's resources"

... ..Bill Moses

Casa Barranca: The Ethos of Open Mind, Open Heart & Skilled Hands

Ojai, California lies in Ventura County south of the major wine producing regions of Santa Barbara County. Until recently, the most notable wine producer in Ojai has been Adam Tolmach of The Ojai Vineyard. Adam was Jim Clendenen's partner at Au Bon Climat until they split in 1991. Adam and his wife Helen had started Ojai Vineyard in 1983 as a side project, but after leaving Au Bon Climat, he devoted his full energies to his winery and has produced a succession of excellent wines. Unfortunately, his original vineyard in Ventura County was decimated by Pierce's Disease so he sources grapes from several outstanding South Coast and Central Coast vineyards including Bien Nacido and Pisoni.

An avid reader of the PinotFile (a Pinot Queen) told me about the luscious Pinot Noirs being produced at a fledgling winery in also in Ojai called Casa Barranca. I am always seeking out the small Pinot Noir vintners because their wines have plenty of character. My recent trip to Sonoma had me stopping on the way to visit Casa Barranca owner Bill Moses and his assistant winemaker Jean-Benoit. Deslauriers. As we sat on the back patio on a glorious sunny day drinking Pinot, Bill told me the story of Casa Barranca and the Pratt Winery located on the estate.

Bill Moses is a New York transplant whose success in investment banking has allowed him to indulge in his passion for winemaking. He discovered his love for wine in the 1980s while attending school in the South of France, where he lived with a family on their small farm and vineyard. It was here that he was first introduced to sustainability in farming practices. Upon the urgings of a long-time friend, he paid a visit to Ojai and immediately became enthralled by the mountain peaks, orchards and majestic oaks that mark the landscape of this bucolic community. Subsequently, the famous Casa Barranca estate (also known as the Pratt House) in Ojai came on the market and eleven years ago, Bill purchased Casa Barranca and moved west.

Casa Barranca is widely recognized as one of the finest creations of the American Arts and Crafts Movement. It was commissioned by Charles and Mary Pratt to be designed by the most gifted architects of their time, the brothers Charles and Henry Greene who designed the Gamble House of Pasadena, the "Ultimate Bungalow." Charles Pratt was an executive of Standard Oil and could afford the best. He chose a remarkable 54 acre site with commanding views of the surrounding mountain peaks and no expense was spared in building the house.

Bill Moses learned his winemaking skills assisting with custom crush programs in the Coastal wine region. He constructed a winery on the property using a century-old subterranean stone water cistern (the entrance is visible in the background below; Bill on the right, Jean-Benoit on the left). In building the tiered shelving system in the winery for his gravity racking protocol, he used craftsman who employed Old World skills like “mortis and tenun,” and “scarf joinery,” and who finished the walls in a “board and batten” style. The press “hopper” is crafted of oak and is inspired by Greene & Greene design. The winery was bonded in late 2004 and is the first certified organic winery on the Central Coast.



Bill enlisted the assistance of some of the top winemakers on the Central Coast including Richard Sanford and Robert Atkins from the Sanford & Benedict Vineyards and Etienne Terlinden of Cordon and Summerland wineries. Currently he has a full-time assistant winemaker, Jean-Benoit Deslauriers, who shows a spirited passion for Pinot Noir.

Bill is not interested in technical wines, rather more crafted wines. The philosophy of the Arts & Crafts Movement believed in the unity and beauty of a hand-crafted environment that could affect one's spirituality. Bill wants to continue this craftsman heritage by employing organic farming, solar power, and the use of artesian spring water. The attention to detail is evident everywhere one looks.

There is a two acre certified organic vineyard on the property growing Grenache, Syrah and Semillon. Bill plans to add another five acres in the future. The grapes for his traditional Pinot Noir has been sourced from the organically-farmed Sanford & Benedict Vineyard. Unfortunately, Richard Sanford has sold the Sanford Winery to a corporation who plans to discontinue the sustainable organic farming techniques lovingly employed by the Sanfords over the years. Fortunately, Richard and Thekia Sanford have purchased the La Rosa Vineyard from Sanford Inc. and plan to continue their sustainable farming and production in their new Alma Rosa winery. Bill Moses will continue to source grapes from Richard's new project, as well as an organic block of Pinot Noir at Laetitia.

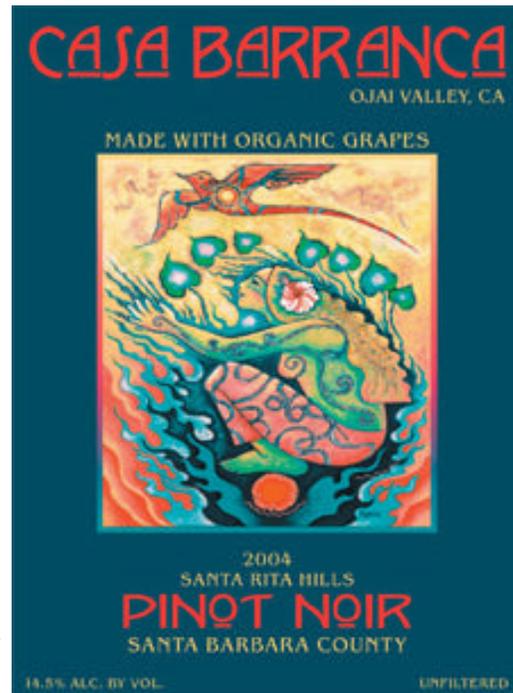
Casa Barranca produced 4,000 cases in 2003 including a “Bungalow Red” Syrah/Grenache blend with sulfites added and a “Arts & Crafts Red,” with no sulfites added. In the future, plans call for a total production of 6,000 cases, 2,000 of which will be sulfite free. Bill feels there is considerable interest in the marketplace for sulfite-free wines. For the sulfite-free wines, he brings the grapes in and crushes them without letting them sit, inoculates the juice and ferments the wine in a timely manner. No wine is truly “sulfite-free” as some sulfite is produced as a byproduct of fermentation (1 to 8 parts per million ‘ppm’). In order for a wine to qualify as organic or “no sulfates added”, it must have less than 10 ppm. Frequently winemakers add 30 to 100 ppm of sulfites to their wines to preserve them and to withstand the temperature fluctuations they are exposed to as they are sold to the marketplace. Organic wines with no sulfites added are therefore primarily intended for the local market and short-term consumption. Bill says that ultimately he would like to create a “world-class” organic Pinot Noir. Ojai customers have embraced his organic Pinot Noir and the 2003 vintage is sold out.

2003 Casa Barranca Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$19. No sulfites added. The nose is a bit shy and a tad funky, but not in an unpleasant way. Red fruit flavors lead the way to a soft finish. Not a terribly complex wine, but unmistakably Pinot in character. A daily drinker.

2004 Casa Barranca Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$30. Bottled 6 months. The beautiful label artwork is by artist Mara Berendt Friedman. This wine is beautifully perfumed with a generous dose of cherries, smoke and earth. The full-bodied flavors march to the same beat. Mouth feel is velvety. A warm finish shows plenty of appealing sweet oak and herbs. A dead ringer for the last Sanford La Rinconada Pinot Noir I drank. Endorsed by a Pinot Queen - how good is that?

This is definitely a label to watch. There is a sense of serious commitment here. I tasted some 2005 Casa Barranca clone 667 juice which hit all the right notes.

For more information about Casa Barranca wines contact the Managing Director, Devin Whatley at 805-640-1224. The winery’s phone number is 805-646-7114 and website is www.casabarranca.com. Casa Barranca, Inc. is a benefactor of the nonprofit Pratt House Foundation, which was formed to support people of all ages who are seeking a healthy, balanced life. The Foundation puts on educational and therapeutic workshops and conducts research on the long-term efficacy of the programs on the overall health and well-being of those who attend. Interested groups may contact Casa Barranca for workshops such as art/craft therapy, yoga classes, personal development seminars. Small groups can be accommodated overnight at Casa Barranca. 805-646-7114.



Love Among the Must

Wine has played an immortal role in the seducing, loving and marrying of a woman by a man. No other beverage has inspired men more in their relationships with women. Although it is Champagne that is often considered the amorous drink of seduction, it is Pinot Noir that is the wine of passion and love. Drinking Pinot Noir together is the safest form of sex ever invented.

Aspiring Pinot Noir vintner, Jamie Kutch, found his love among the grapes at Kosta Browne winery during the recent harvest. Recently I met up with Jamie in the caves at Kosta Browne and he related this remarkable story of romance.

From day one Kristen had agreed to follow Jamie West to pursue his dream of making Pinot Noir in California. Together they left the New York City ratrace and never looked back. Since arriving in California, they have been happier than any other time in their lives. After being together for seven years, Jamie felt it was time to finally ask her to marry him. With harvest approaching, he knew that he wanted to somehow incorporate the big question with the big crush. He schemed and schemed until one day it hit him. He would deliver the ring to Kristen via the sorting table.

Jamie found the perfect diamond and took the rock and a large suitcase up to Michael Browne's house for what would be the two most exciting weeks of his life. Jamie was living in San Francisco, but staying at Micheal's house allowed him to avoid that tortuous one hour commute every day to Kosta Browne's crush pad. The days were filled with grueling work but Jamie soaked up the details of the winemaking process. Nights would conclude with bottles of Pinot Noir, a BBQ and a bunch of tired buddies talking through the evening.

After the first week of harvest, Saturday arrived and Kristen was driving up from San Francisco. The day was beautiful. Kosta Browne had just received 5 tons of Pinot Noir from grower Dennis Koplen and it was to be a busy day. Jamie told Michael he wanted to send the diamond ring down the hopper on the last bin of the day. Michael was stoked and arranged for video and photos to capture the moment.

The day seemed like an eternity and Jamie's nervousness began to build. With four bins left, Michael told the crew to go take a break and do a shot of Vodka. They ran up to the freezer and Michael grabbed a small beaker used to measure wine samples. Bam, bam, bam and the three had a shot of Absolut to loosen up.

Kristen spent most of the day on the sorting table sorting grapes. Jamie stayed on the ground helping to move bins. He managed to get all the helpers aside and explained his plan. He told them that on the last bin, he would propose to Kristen and then Rob, who was on top raking fruit onto the table, would drop the box containing the diamond ring onto the sorting table with the grapes. The stage was set as the last bin was hoisted up with the forklift. There was no turning back at this point. Michael set a ladder in front of the table so as to film the group sorting. Jamie was sorting grapes next to Kristen, nervous as a mouse in a cheese factory. Earlier that day, Jamie and Kristen had spoken about all of the unusual things that one finds while sorting grapes. Someone had found a band aid, a big green tomato worm and a preying mantis. There were past stories of finding a picker's knife and eyeglasses on the sorting table.

As the fruit was being dumped from the bin, the box dropped onto the table with a big clump of fruit. Kristen reached for the box and as she opened it, she said, "Anyone want a box with adiamond in it?" It didn't register right away with her and that was when Jamie grabbed the box from her hand, got down on one knee and said, "Kristen will you marry me?" Her reply was absolutely classic Kristen. She chokingly said, "Get the f#%\$ out of here!" Then she said "Yes!" and gave Jamie a giant hug. It was an amazing moment among the grapes and tears started falling. It took here several minutes to figure out how the box got mixed in with the grapes. Kristen and Jamie and all in attendance were smiling from ear to ear. The Champagne was sent up the ladder and cork was popped. Michael poured a glass for both of them and a toast was raised to a long and happy life together. Wine is a little like love: when the right one comes along, you know it!

That evening the two lovers cleaned up, traveled to Healdsburg and spent the night at the tony Healdsburg Hotel after dining at Charlie Palmer's Dry Creek Kitchen Restaurant. Any chance the wine they drank with dinner was a Kosta Browne Pinot Noir?

Jamie Kutch can be reached through his website, www.kutchwines.com or by phone at 917-270-8180. His inaugural release will be a 2005 Kutch Wines Amber Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.





A woman was married several times to men in the wine industry, Yet she remained a virgin. How could that be? Here was her explanation., My 1st husband was a winemaker and he kept promising how good it was going to be if we waited a few more years. My 2nd husband was a wine critic and he just wanted to talk about it. My 3rd husband was a professional wine taster and all he wanted to do was - well, you know. My 4th husband was a wine collector and he just wanted to look at it. My 6th husband was a wine marketer and although he had a nice product, he never knew how to position it. My 7th and last husband was a grape grower and he just wanted to stomp on me. (Good luck, Kristen!)

... ..Vintage Humor for Wine Lovers, Malcolm Kushner

Tragic Fire Destroys Precious Wines

Many notable Northern California wineries lost their inventory of wine in a devastating fire at the Wine Central Services warehouse Wednesday, October 12. Some wineries such as Long Meadow Ranch, Sean Thackery, and Tres Sabores lost virtually all of their bottled inventory. Some wineries could be put out of business by the loss of an entire year's production. The total losses could exceed \$100 million dollars.

The huge fire began at approximately 3:30 PM on Wednesday afternoon in a warehouse located on Mare Island, near Vallejo, California, where the US Navy once operated a nuclear submarine base. The building's thick concrete walls and roof made it a safe structure for storing wine. The packaging and wood shelving in the building caught on fire, and trapped by the concrete walls, spread quickly through the facility. The fire wasn't extinguished until 11:20 PM. An arson investigation is ongoing.

The facility receives about 30 truckloads of wine per day and had bottled inventory for nearly 90 wineries. Private collectors also stored wine there. The warehouse contained over \$2 million dollars worth of food products such as C&H sugar, pasta and pasta sauce.

Richard Ward, the co-founder of Saintsbury in Carneros, said that the winery lost its entire library of older vintages dating back to its founding in 1979. Possibly the first wine ever made with Carneros on the label was lost in the fire. ZD Wines in Napa claims that its 1969 Pinot Noir was the first wine with a Carneros designation and almost all of the winery's remaining inventory of that wine was in the warehouse. The 1969 Pinot Noir was made by current winemaker and owner Robert de Leuze's father, Norman de Leuze.

Sean Thackery makes unique and highly praised wines out of his home in Bolinas, California. He has been known to wear a shirt with the words "Famous Winemaker" emblazoned on the back in big letters. Unfortunately, he potentially lost all 4,000 cases of his currently marketable wine. Also, he had recently put 40 cases of his most notable wine, the 1997 Sean Thackrey Orion Rossi Vineyard, into the storage facility. Thackrey's modest Bolinas home is not large enough to allow him to store barrels of wine. His insurance company told him they have no record of him renewing his policy. He retorted that "This has a major impact on my existence. I only have just barely enough wine left to drink myself into the grave."

2005 Sonoma Harvest Fair Medal Winners

The Sonoma County Harvest Fair wine competition was recently held and the winners announced. A total of 925 wines were entered, with 135 Gold Medals awarded. The Pinot Noir winners:

Over \$25: Best of Class - Hartford Sonoma Coast 04 (\$26). Golds - Brogan Lingenfelder or (\$48), Chateau St Jean Durrell Vyd 02 (\$45), D'Argenzio RRV S Vyd 03 (\$36), Pezzi-King RRV 02 (\$30), Buena Vista Carneros Ramal Vyd 03 (\$34), Buena Vista Carneros Ramal Vyd Clone 5 Pommard (\$34), and Castle Los Carneros Sangiacoma Vyd 01 (\$30). Among the Silver medals, Brogan, De La Montanya and Navilluys Birney all had two.

Less than \$25: Best of Class - Bella Sonoma Sonoma Coast 03 (\$20). Golds - Copeland Creek Sonoma Coast 02 (\$24), Carneros Creek Sonoma County Ram's Head Res 04 (\$15), Tremani RRV Hansen Vyd 03 (\$24), Sebastiani Sonoma Coast 03 (\$17), Kenwood RRV 03 (\$18), Dutch Bill Creek Sonoma Coast Heintz Vyd 03 (\$22), Buena Vista Carneros Res 03 (\$22), Clos du Bois Sonoma Coast Res 03 (\$22) and Mietz Cellars Sonoma County 03 (\$20).

