

**Pinot Noir: I
Love What
You Do To Me**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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Domaine Alfred: Symbiotic Success

The old saying that “It takes two to tango” certainly is applicable to Domaine Alfred Winery in Edna Valley, California. The winery’s recent success is due to the combination of talents of owner Terry Speizer and winemaker Mike Sinor. Terry has a computer background and handles the marketing and promotion of the label. A gregarious sort, he loves to travel and talk wine to distributors and consumers. He is one of the few vintners who actively challenged wine shipping laws in Michigan. Mike, on the other hand, is more grounded, a true “cork dork” from way back who shuns computers and is totally immersed in the winemaking challenge. In fact, when I visited along with a small group in early October of this year, Mike admitted that this was his first contact with the public in two months. The photo below shows Mike proudly clutching his 2005 harvest notebook.



Domaine Alfred's estate vineyard, Chamisal, was the first Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to be planted in the Edna Valley way back in 1972. At that time the Edna Valley was unheard of as a grape producing region. The partnership between Edna Valley Vineyard (Niven/Paragon Vineyard) and Chalone in 1980 brought recognition to the region. Chardonnay has been the dominant grape in the Edna Valley, but Pinot Noir plantings have dramatically increased in the region since the mid 1990s. The Chamisal Vineyard was dormant when it was purchased by Terry Speizer in 1994. In 1996 it was replanted to six clones of Pinot Noir on 30 acres and five clones of Chardonnay on 30 acres. Additional plantings of Pinot Noir have brought the current total to eight clones on three rootstocks spread over 38 acres. Different clones are vinified separately and ongoing experimentation with different barrels and yeasts are aimed at achieving a style that best shows off the Chamisal Vineyard potential. The winery has committed to organic and biodynamic (within reason) farming since 2002.

Mike Sinor came to Domaine Alfred in 2000 and it was shortly thereafter that the quality of the wines changed dramatically. Mike was introduced to the wine business in 1991 when he got a job at Corbett Canyon Vineyards to help pay for college. He quickly developed the "wine bug" and worked at several Edna Valley wineries while attending Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. After graduation, he was hired by Ken Brown at Byron Vineyard and Winery in Santa Maria. He quickly progressed from a harvest position, to cellar position, to enologist, and then assistant winemaker to Ken Brown. During his tenor at Byron, he traveled to France to study the vineyards and wineries of Burgundy. In addition, he was intimately involved in the design and construction of the new Byron Winery following the purchase of Byron by Robert Mondavi. He has used this experience to design and supervise construction of a recently completed modern winery at Domaine Alfred. Besides his winemaking duties, he directs all vineyard operations. Although he has done his share of hand punch downs through the years, he has plenty of help in the new winery (see photo right).



Domaine Alfred offers both an Estate (Chamisal) and Califa style of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The word "Califa" is of Indian derivation and means "most beautiful girl." The Califa bottling is a bolder reserve style wine with more oak and tannin built for aging. It is a blend of multiple clones. Winemaking for all wines is traditional with aging in a combination of new and one and two year-old French oak. The Pinot Noirs are New World in style. Da Red is the winery's inexpensive 50/50 blend of Pinot Noir and Syrah and contains some non-estate juice. This winery bottles plenty of magnums, a policy I wish more wineries followed.

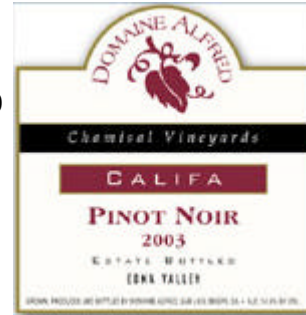
2002 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyards Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 1950 cases, (\$28) A powerful nose of black cherries with purple flowers and spice. The sweet, ripe and smoky fruit is at its best after 45 minutes. The mouth feel is seductive and the finish is clean.

2003 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyards Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 1950 cases, (\$28) Pleasant cherry and strawberry aromas duplicated in the flavors. Light on its feet, it finishes nicely with refreshing acidity.

2002 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyards Califa Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 660 cases (\$48) A heady smoky nose of black and blue fruits with added vanilla and game. The package finishes with a long

and intense panoply of dark fruits. More structured, more complex and more refined than the regular Chiasmal bottling.

2003 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyard Califa Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 890 cases, \$48 Clones 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, 2A and Pommard. More of everything compared to the regular bottling - bigger nose, more palate richness, and a longer, smoother finish. The dark purple color is syrah-like and the emphasis is on dark fruits. A big boy with nicely integrated alcohol and silky tannins. The Full Monty.



Domaine Alfred's tasting room at 7525 Orcutt Rd in San Luis Obispo is open daily from 10 to 5. The room (see photo below) is small and quaint and fits in well with the back roads location of the winery. The winery's phone number is 805-541-9463. Wines are widely distributed in California and may also be ordered on the winery's website, www.domainealfred.com.



Like many winemakers, Mike Sinor also has his own label. Sinor-LaVallee Wine Company was founded in 1997 by the husband and wife team of Mike and Cheri LaVallee Sinor. Mike met Cheri while attending Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 1993. They were married in 1996 in the town of Beaune in the heart of Burgundy. Cheri was bitten by the "wine bug" after meeting Mike and now is CEO of both the Sinor-LaVallee Wine Company and the Sinor-LaVallee household (two boys). I barrel tasted two 2004 Pinot Noirs that Mike has crafted and they both show tremendous promise. One 2004 Pinot Noir is from the noted Talley Rincon Vineyard and the other from the 15 acre Aubaine Vineyard located on a hillside above Latitia. Mike only gets fruit from 1 acre of Rincon and 2 acres of Aubaine so production is miniscule. The Aubaine is one big rich pussycat. Mike also makes small amounts of Syrah and Vin Gris. Call Mike at the winery to sign up for his mailing list while you still can.

Mike likes to do something distinctive at each harvest - a different hair cut (ie Mohawk), a different beard, etc. His music of choice at harvest? - the Gregorian chant.

Visiting Edna Valley is Going Back in Time

The Edna Valley countryside of rolling hills, charming vineyards and majestic oak trees is but a few miles from the hustle and bustle along Highway 101, but it seems a world apart. Time seems to slow down here and the rustic charm of uncrowded wineries makes visiting a true pleasure. Even the large wineries like Edna Valley Vineyards and Talley Vineyards maintain a sense of tranquility and friendliness.



The Old Edna townsite located on Price Canyon Road was founded in the early 1800s and was home to a saloon, butcher, store, blacksmith and dance hall. A tin-roofed building marked the site but was burnt to the ground in 1906. It was rebuilt but remained abandoned for over 20 years. In 1998, Jeff Kocan and Pattea Torrence, who bought and manage the original Edna townsite, lovingly restored the Historic Tin Building. Today it houses an excellent gourmet deli named Fiala's (see photo below)



On the same property and behind the deli is Suite Edna, a vintage three bedroom farmhouse built in 1908. The romantic cottage has been lovingly restored and managed by Pattea Torrence who has a passion for making her guests at home. It sits on two acres with a small garden cottage, a gypsy wagon, a vintage Packard, majestic cypress trees, a rippling creek and the adjacent MacGregor Vineyard. The original stagecoach road (Pismo Boulevard) that linked San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach runs through the property. The farmhouse is a B&B that can comfortably accommodate two to three couples (only one bathroom but that is half the fun!). We had a delicious lunch from Faila's Gourmet Café served on the front porch of the farmhouse. Suite Edna is perfectly situated for exploring the Central Coast and Edna Valley wine country. For information contact Pattea at 805-544-8062. The website is www.olderdna.com.



Picnic Pinots from the Central Coast

I recently asked readers to recommend any good under \$20 Pinots that they had drunk recently. Now I don't make a regular diet out of Pinot Noir is this price category for it is so often disappointing, but I do like to "test the waters" occasionally to see what is available. In addition, there is considerable interest among wine drinkers for a reliable Pinot that doesn't cost more than a good meal at home. Two wines producers that were enjoyed by readers were Avila and Mark West.

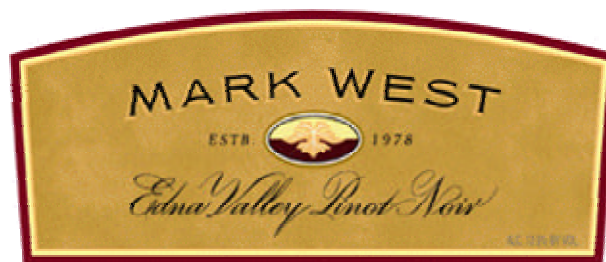
Avila, named after nearby Avila Beach, is a second label of Laetitia and is sold through the Laetitia Vineyards and Winery, Arroyo Grande, California. The Laetitia Vineyards are just four miles from the Pacific Ocean in San Luis Obispo County. The Avila label is marketed for "fun-loving, value conscious crowds that bask in the simple pleasures of the Central Coast." All 16,000 cases of the 2004 vintage are sold out at the winery!

2004 Avila San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$13 (but can be found for less). Clones 13, 2A, 777, 113, 115. Aged in oak for 8 months. This wine is atypical for a Pinot Noir and I could have sworn there was Syrah in it (stat sheet says Pinot Noir only). A pale nose delivers some cherry and cedar. Plenty of hearty fruit. A passable picnic or pizza Pinot.



The Mark West Winery is located in Graton, Sonoma County, California. It is a virtual winery in that there is no land, no vineyards, and no actual winery. The marketing approach is based around a "Pinot For The People" campaign. "For too long we have waited for affordable Pinot. For too long we have endured Merlot. We do not ask for thin, uninspired plonk to satisfy our desire for Pinot. We demand rich, fruit-inspired, easy-drinking wine." Winemaker Alex Cose left the banking world to pursue his passion for wine. He gained his experience working at Joseph Phelps and Peter Michael wineries. Owner Derek Benham created and subsequently sold the successful Blackstone wine brand before purchasing the Mark West label.

2004 Mark West Central Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$14. A pleasant enough drink that is very light-bodied. The nose is a touch stinky and the wine is a skosh tannic. There is an interesting white pepper kick to the finish. Decent but nothing to get excited about.



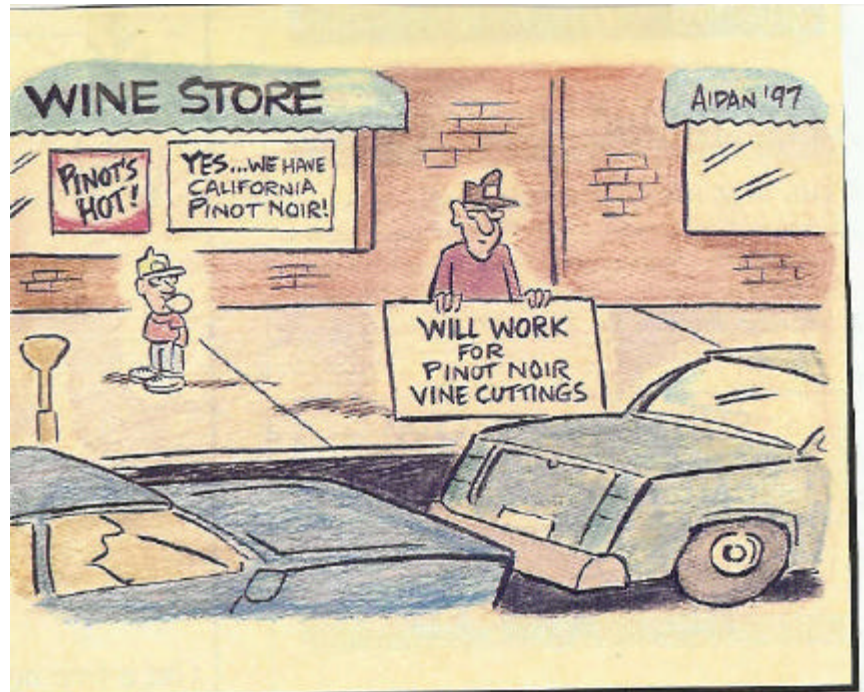
For some unknown reason I decided to try a 50/50 blend of the two wines. This worked wonders and greatly improved the nose, the mid palate and the mouth feel of the wine! Wonders of wine never cease to amaze me. 1 plus 1 equal 1 good Pinot.

PrinceofPinot.com

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The “Big Three” varietals (Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) continue to dominate the retail arena. However, the most popular varietals outside of these three are Pinot Noir, Syrah and Pinot Gris. Pinot Noir continues its scorching sales streak, gaining 83 percent in dollar sales and 77 percent in case sales in the 13 weeks ending June 4, 2005 over the same time period in 2004. Syrah rose 18 percent in dollar sales and Pinot Gris 20 percent.



Frederick J. Wildman was a well-respected wine merchant who wrote a booklet in 1960 titled, “A few wine notes.” He offered this advice: “The following selections should cost about \$200: One bottle each of Romanee Conti, Chambertin, Clos Vougeot, Volnay Santenots, Ch. Lafite, Ch. Haut Brion, Ch. Ausone, Ch. Petrus, Le Montrachet, Chablis Gran Cru, Hermitage Chante-Alouette, Ch. Yquem, Soave, Berncastler Doctor, Johannisberg Steinholle, Amontillado Sherry, Tawny Port, Vintage Brut Champagne, New York State Riesling and one ease each of Beaujolais Superieur, Chateau Talbot, Pouilly Fuisse, and California Pinot Noir.” This snippet of history makes you stop and think about the incredible inflation of wine prices in the past 45 years.

... .. *Wine into Words*, James Gabler, 2nd Ed.