

So Much
Great Pinot,
So Little Time

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinoaficionados

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Oregon Afternoon Delights

The gloomy weather of late has had me thinking about Oregon. Then I saw a picture of Oregon's Jim Prosser in a recent issue of *Food & Wine* coated in snow and grinning while drinking some very cold Pinot. Turns out he is a snowboarding enthusiast as well as an excellent maker of Burgundian-styled Pinot Noirs for J.K. Carriere. I thought it would be pretty cool for wine writers to get into the Winter Olympic spirit and praise a showy Pinot by saying, "It's got backside 9s on lock" (snowboarder talk praising a competitor's showy tricks).

Recently I have been reaching into my cellar for some Oregon Pinot and found a number of delights. In addition, I sent out two of my Pinot-drinkers-in-training to the Willamette Valley to report on the action there. So here is a little of this and a little of that, but mainly Oregon Pinot Noirs to savor.

Lachini Vineyards

Ron and Marianne Lachini came to Oregon in 1997 to indulge their pursuit to produced world-class Pinot Noir. They began producing limited single-vineyard Pinot Noir with the 2001 vintage. Estate wines come from their 45-acre vineyard in Newburg, Oregon. 24 acres are planted to Pinot Noir. Recently 3 acres were added with 828 and La Tache clones. The winemaker through the 2004 vintage was Peter Rosback of Sineann. Currently, Laurent Montalieu (Willakenzie, Solena) is the winemaker. The wines have quite a cult following and the 2003 vintage is sold out. Most of the wine is sold through a mailing list - www.lachinivineyards.com. 503-864-4553. Three Pinot Noirs are currently produced: Lachini Estate, Lachini 'S', and Ana Vineyard.



2003 Lachini Vineyards S 14.7% alc., \$40. This wine is from 100% estate fruit. Dark ruby in color with a big, ripe fruit nose. A luscious full-bodied Pinot that exudes Pinot fruit but retains an appealing smoothness. A little heat on the nose and finish is common for the hot 2003 vintage and is not unwieldy. Does that 'S' stand for saucy or sensuous?

Styring

Styring Vineyards in Newburg, Oregon makes artisan-styled small-production wines sourced from the Ribbon Ridge AVA. Farming emphasizes cropping, typically six clusters per vine. Winemaking is traditional with aging in French oak barrels for up to two years. The wines are sold through the website at www.styringvineyards.com. The phone is 503-866-6741.

2003 Styring Vineyards Red Hills Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 175 cases, \$28. Dark ruby in color, this wine offers attractive aromas of spicy cherries. Medium-bodied, it reveals flavors of dried cherries and smoky oak. The finish is low-key with fine tannins. The high alcohol is not intrusive. Really good with pork chops and mushrooms from a slow-cooker.

2003 Styring Vineyards WIT Reserve Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 125 cases, \$38. This wine is a blend of fruit from the Dundee Hills cropped to six clusters per plant and two old cropped vineyards. "Sun, soil, rain and discipline nurtured an outstanding 2003 harvest. Time, passion and craftsmanship carefully sealed this Pinot Noir in its bottle. Pure Wit." This Pinot Noir is for lovers of a full-throttle style. The color is almost black. The nose features very ripe dark berries, even a touch stewed. The wine has prodigious ripe Pinot fruits with overtones of sandalwood and mocha but is very well balanced with silky, fine tannins and a clean finish. A well-crafted heavyweight.

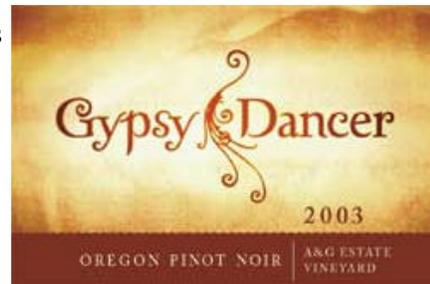
2003 Styring Vineyards Six Cluster Pinot Noir Dessert Wine. 16.9% alc., 75 cases, 375 ml, \$38. 100% Pinot Noir distilled spirits were blended in mid-fermentation and aged 2 years in French oak. An unusual wine that I really enjoyed. The nose is port-like and reminds me of port-soaked raisins. The wine is amazingly smooth and elegant and carries the alcohol beautifully. A real treat.



Gypsy Dancer Estates

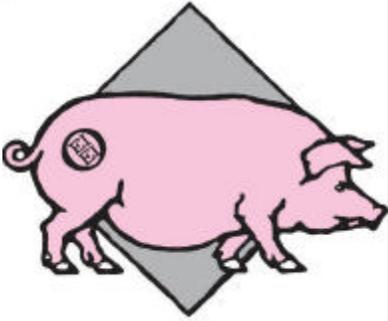
Gypsy Dancer Pinot Noir is the first of a Pinot Noir trilogy which includes estates in Oregon, New Zealand (Christine Lorraine in Central Otago) and Carneros. The winemaker is Gary Andrus, the former owner of Pine Ridge in California and Archery Summit in the Dundee Hills of Oregon. In 2002 he bought Lion Valley Vineyards in Cornelius, Oregon and along with his wife, Christine, started a small winery project. The winery is named after his daughter, Gypsy. This is a new winery that promises interesting wines. Visit the website at gypsydancerestates.com or avalonwine.com for retail purchase (the Avalon Wine website offers a nice personal write-up about Gypsy Dancer Estate).

2002 Gypsy Dancer Preview Cuvee Gary and Christine's Vineyard Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., \$34. Gary Andrus is known for fermenting his Pinot Noirs in wooden fermenters, a tricky proposition that has paid off for him at Archery Summit. The wine has a seductive nose of sweet, ripe cherries with baking spices. Interesting floral notes (even lavender) compliment the red berry fruits. There is plenty of oak in the nose and oak tannins in the finish, a typical feature of Andrus's Pinot Noirs.



The wines here will only get better as Andrus learns the vineyard. This is a very unique trilogy concept that will make for very interesting comparison tastings in the future.

EIEIO & Co



Jay 'Old' MacDonald owns the Tasting Room in Carlton where he sells Oregon Pinot Noir from top producers like Ken Wright, Domaine Serene and Domaine Drouhin. In 1995 he started EIEIO & Co to produce his own Pinot Noir from leased vineyards and became a fully-bonded winery in 2003 (the wines are made at Bergstrom). Jay is a fun-loving guy who describes his winemaking as "no tomfoolery." He produces several single-vineyard Pinot Noirs as well as blends. The website is www.onhisfarm.com and his phone is 503-538-9578.

2003 EIEI Wind Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 150 cases, \$40.

The Wind Hill Vineyard was planted in 1972 to Pommard clone. The nose is for oak lovers with a nice blend of toasted oak, stone and dark fruits. The fruit starts out a little thin and then takes on more and more power with air time. Very soft and elegant in texture. A nose for oak lovers but a taste for Pinot lovers. Only sexual analogies can do it justice.

The word is the 2004 Wind Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir is a little more restrained than the 2003 with a more Burgundian bent. For those that like Big Babe Pinots the 2003 EIEIO Broadley Vineyard sports over 16% alcohol and is a big dude.

Siltstone

Siltstone is owned by Joel Meyers who has run Vinetenders, a vineyard management company, since 1984. His clients include Domaine Serene and Soter Vineyards. In 2000 he decided to make a Pinot Noir under his own label from one of his managed vineyards, the Guadalupe Vineyard owned by Jim Stonebridge and Kathleen Boeve. Retail distribution includes avalonwine.com.

2002 Siltstone Guadalupe Vineyard Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 165 cases, \$26. A medium ruby color leads the nose into an interesting nose of berries, oak and a touch of curry. The wine cascades over the tongue like creamy cherries. Finishes clean with a slight kick of acidity. This wine is for lovers of elegance.

Kirkland Signature (Costco)

In 2003, Costco (which is one of the largest wine retailers in the US) rolled out a line of wines under the Kirkland Signature label. The 2003 Pinot Noir was respectable. A simple and light Pinot Noir with attractive strawberry and spice flavors and decent acidity. I sampled the 2004 also recently. The Pinot Noirs are produced at the Wine Exchange in Newburg, Oregon.

2004 Kirkland Signature Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 7,000 cases, \$16. The wine is light in body with shallow but decent fruity aromas and flavors. It is balanced and very quaffable. This wine probably saw little or no new oak. A daily drinker.

White Rose

In 2000, Greg Saunders purchased the White Rose Vineyard in the Red Hills of Dundee. This vineyard was planted on its own roots in 1980 to Pommard and Wadenswil clones. Through the years some magnificent wines have been produced from this vineyard by Torri Mor, St Innocent, and Panther Creek among others. Greg is a bright, largely self-taught winemaker who has a passion to excel with Pinot Noir. His benchmarks are Grand Cru Burgundies which he tastes regularly to set his sights. The White Rose Vineyard is located on a hilltop with a magnificent view of the Willamette Valley. Neighbors are Domaine Serene and Domaine Drouhin. The photo below shows a portion of the view and the new winery and tasting room that Greg constructed. Greg looks in trouble on the left.



The wines are available from the website at www.whiterosewine.com, or call Greg at 949-275-8021.

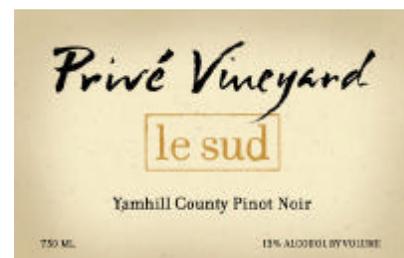
2003 White Rose Quotee's Lair Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 350 cases, \$40. From the eastern side of the vineyard which receives morning sun and is cooler. The aromatics are the star in this wine and Greg has a knack for bringing out seductive aromas. Rose petal, cherries and vanilla in concert. A smooth and elegant style that finishes with bracing acidity and oak tannins.

2003 White Rose Michelle Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 300 cases, \$50. The west side of the vineyard receives afternoon sun and Greg feels it produces "truer" Pinot Noir fruit than the cooler east side. The nose on this wine is more reserved. This is a bigger wine with a fuller palate of fruit. The finish is pure silk and lingers on with a hint of acidity. The tannins are suede-like. Greg named this one after his wife so you know it has to be worthy.

Privé Vineyard

Mark (the vineyard steward) and Tina (the winemaker) Hammond are vintner-owners of this French-style boutique winery on Chehalem Mountain in the Willamette Valley. Approximately 250 cases of Pinot Noir are produced yearly from the 2-acre estate vineyard first planted in 1980. The first vintage was 2001. Three wines are produced: le nord, from the upper part of the vineyard, sees 15% new oak, 165 cases, \$42; le sud, from the lower block up to 100% new oak, 85 cases, \$59; a reserve labeled Joie de Vivre (joy of life) in limited amounts, \$85. This is essentially a 'private' winery closed to the public and the wines are only sold through a mailing list. www.privevineyard.com, 503-554-0464.

2003 Privé Vineyard le sud Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$50. A gorgeous nose of spicy cherry jam on buttered toast. The Pinot fruits are flirtatious and well-rounded. Outrageous finish that sends your senses swirling. A complete Pinot Noir. If this wine were a lover instead of a wine, it's one that would make you abandon your family, leave your job, forfeit your hard-won position in the community for but one more fling. You have been forewarned.



Report From the Front Lines

I recently sent two of my pinot-trainees on a weekend sojourn to explore several wineries in the Willamette Valley. I was a little concerned as they are ex-Zin drinkers who tend to cross over to the Dark Side. At **Privé Vineyard**, however, they had a Pinot epiphany and from their comments I think they have graduated to full-fledged pinotphiles: "Talk about passion for making wine, quality of life and carving out a little niche of heaven. They got it right." About the 2004 le nord Pinot Noir, "Wow, this is everything I like about Pommard, dark red and black fruits, meaty, what a wine." They returned with huge smiles on their faces and six or seven more cases of heaven for their cellars. Here are a few more select comments.

Belle Pente: Brian O'Donnell is now one of my ATF winemakers. He just does it right. As drinkable as all of Brian's wines were they still have the structure to get even better after at least 5 more years in the cellar. If I can characterize his wines in one word it would be "balance." What a find. The 2002 Estate Reserve was a blow your socks off wine. Gamy, meaty, woodsmoke, Pommard at it's best. 11 acres of dewnsely planted young estate Pinot Noir. The name Belle Pente means "beautiful slope" which aptly describes the O'Donnell's 70-acre farm near Carlton. 503-852-9500.

JK Carriere: Winemaker Jim Prosser is committed to making his style of Pinot Noir. He is very enthusiastic, self-assured and knows exactly what he wants to do and how to do it. Great guy! His goal is to make high acid, low tannin Pinot Noir that ages. Can you say Burgundy? His wines are not user friendly until they reach 5-6 years of age. Jim has a tagline on his website that says, "We believe the variety is Pinot Noir... not Merlot Noir." Tasted his 2003 Glass which is a very unique and yummy rosé from free-run Pinot Noir juice which has had Chardonnay lees added. The lees subtract some of the color so that the wine has a lovely light salmon hue. Peaches, lychee nuts, spice and cherries - fruit forward but dry with a long finish. Wow! A great wine for \$17 but sold out. He shared multiple barrel samples of 2004 and 2005 wines. The 2001 JK Carriere Willamette Valley Pinot Noir showed dark red fruit, spice and a clean finish. Very elegant but needs a few more years. The 2003 vintage of the same wine reflected the hot vintage and was a big sucker! Jk Carriere was started in 1999. The 2003 vintage produced 1500 cases of Pinot Noir. The humble winery is located amidst a working hazelnut orchard in Yamhill County. Jim's wines are sold through a mailing list and to a few restaurants. The website is www.jkcarriere.com, the phone 503-781-1150.



Patricia Green Cellars: We met the co-winemaker, Jim Anderson, who is another passionate pinot-maker. Once he found out we were pinot geeks he opened the barrels. I couldn't keep track of all the different wines tasted, but one that stood out in both the bottle and barrel was the Etzel block. My ATF. The 2004 Patricia Green Estate Pinot Noir is mostly Pommard with some Dijon clones and Wadenswil. Killer juice but really young. Dark red fruits, spice, blueberry, a little smoke. The 2004 Estate, Etzel Block Pinot Noir was a real charmer. We loved this wine. Like the Estate but with more of everything, more complexity, more, more, more. The 2004 Patricia Green Notorious is a blend of the best from four vineyards - Croft, Balcombe, Anden and Estate. 100% new Cadus barrels. Another ATF along with the Etzel. Anise, black cherry, silky, killer juice. After the visit here we had lunch at Tina's in Dundee and had a bottle of the 2000 Patricia Green Eason Vineyard Pinot Noir. Damn this was nice. It shows that her wines can age well. Great nose, red and black fruits, spice, a little smoke in the back, silky mouthfeel giving way to a really long finish. The acid so apparent in the young wines had integrated seamlessly after six years. Patricia Green Cellars is located in the Ribbon Ridge district of Yamhill County on a 52-acre estate purchased by Patty Green and Jim Anderson in 2000. Total production is 6,500 cases. The website is www.patriciagreencellars.com. The phone is 503-554-0821.

Carneros Della Notte - Glowing Debut

Three wine guys formed a partnership and founded Carneros Della Notte in 2003. David Harmon, the former founder of wine.com, Sal Godinez, a Carneros vintner for over 20 years, and Darin Applebury, a United Airlines pilot. The name, Carneros Della Notte, means “Carneros of the Night” and reflects the winery’s practice of picking at night when the chemistry in the grapes is stable. Their label is the first of its kind - a glow-in-the-dark sensuous earmark of quality inside. The debut 2003 vintage Pinot Noirs were released in April, 2005. The website is www.carnerosdellanotte.com. Phone: 707-256-1830.



2003 Carneros Della Notte Los Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 400 cases, \$48. From three different clones grafted onto three different rootstocks with the goal of achieving consistency in the final blend year after year. Appellation is Los Carneros. The wine is aged for 16 months in 50% new French oak. The nose is intoxicating - buttered toast with berry jam. Sweet and spicy dark Pinot fruits are presented in an elegant style. The consistency is silky. Plenty of firm framing acid to pair with food. The finish could be a little more plump but hard to complain about this wine. The aromatics are the star and definitely glow.

2003 Carneros Della Notte DIII Vineyard Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 100 cases, \$150. Appellation is Napa Valley. Aged 16 months in 70% new French oak barrels. Not tasted - sold out.

As a side note, Carneros wineries approved the name “The Carneros Wine Alliance”, formerly “The Carneros Quality Alliance” and embarked on a three-year strategic plan to overhaul the branding and imaging of Carneros wines. Carneros was one of the first wine regions to be designated an American viticulture Area (AVA) in 1983. Also it was the first trade association to give equal weight to the importance of both vintners and growers when it comes to what is poured into a wine glass.

Carneros overlaps the southern portions of both the Napa and Sonoma Valleys. Carneros is also known as Los Carneros or “the sheep.” The Carneros Wine Alliance now has more than 85 members and is respected for its unique partnership between its growers and vintners. Many famous vintners source their grapes from Carneros. And, most importantly, the Carneros region has retained the same rustic character that it had at the time it was first settled by farmers a century ago.

Pinot Loves Food

David Rosengarten is quite the foodie. He writes a monthly gourmet food and wine newsletter, *The Rosengarten Report* (www.DavidRosengarten.com), which I highly recommend. In this newsletter he reviews and recommends the best US mail-order sources for foods. He also wrote the bible of food and wine matching, *Red Wine With Fish*, and *The Dean & DeLuca Cookbook*. In the latest issue of *Wine Enthusiast* he raves about tandoori chicken and fruit-driven Pinot Noir from California and Oregon. He says, “the wines’ good acidity cuts the richness of the preparation, their fruit and spiciness line up unusually well with Indian spices, and their medium-weight textures bond with the medium weight of chicken.”

Another great match for Pinot? Try the deli classic - Reuben sandwich.

Patz & Hall: Dependably Excellent

There are some producers of premium Pinot Noir that have a consistent record of excellence year in and year out yet they do not receive the publicity and notoriety they deserve. Often they are overshadowed by the latest hot label. Patz & Hall have been producing wines since 1988. Partners James Hall, his wife Anne Moses, and Donald and Heather Patz created their first vintage after years of experience working for other wineries in the Napa Valley. Donald Patz and James Hall became friends in 1985 when both were working at Flora Springs. They pooled their resources, all of \$5,000 and started making Chardonnay initially. Their inspiration was Burgundy and the Burgundian model of small vineyard sites and small lot, barrel by barrel winemaking. Patz & Hall is now starting their 18th year and produce ten different bottlings of six Chardonnays and four Pinot Noirs. The website is www.patzhall.com.



2004 Patz & Hall Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., \$36. The third release of this Pinot Noir cuvee from the Sonoma Coast. The 2004 was unique in that it contains grapes from the Parmelee-Hill Vineyard farmed by Steve Hill, one of the legends in Sonoma viticulture. This Pinot Noir won recently won the Red Wine Sweepstakes Award at the prestigious San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. The wine has a pretty purple robe. The nose is restrained. It explodes on the palate with oodles of cherries with a spicy tang. A little wildness or feral component adds interest. Beautifully balanced. Slides down like, well, great Pinot. The alcohol is well integrated. Any pinot maniac would like this wine. Widely available retail (often for less than the suggested retail price of \$36) and from the website. Half-bottles (\$20) available at www.wallywine.com.

2004 Patz & Hall Hyde Vineyard Napa Carneros Pinot Noir \$55. The Hyde Vineyard is one of the superstars of Carneros and is well-known for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Tasted twice, once blind. Tasted with a small group, it was very popular. The aromatics are pure Pinot Noir - cherries, spice, cinnamon with floral overtones. Silky texture that ends smoothly with lip-smacking acidity. A reference wine for Carneros Pinotology 101.

Other releases available: **2003 Patz & Hall AlderSprings Vineyard Mendocino County Pinot Noir** (\$50), **2003 Patz & Hall Pisoni Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** (\$75), **2004 Patz & Hall Burnside Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** (\$60).

Pinotblogger

This is a wine blog that holds considerable interest for Pinot geeks. The blog relates the story of a new Pinot Noir vineyard and winery, Capozzi Winery, in the Russian River Valley. On November 18, 2005, construction was begun on a family winery across the street from Joseph Swan Vineyards & Winery. The purpose of the blog is to relate "the long and painful process of starting and building a family winery in the Russian River Valley. It is written in a very personal style and depicts the trials and tribulations of a start-up winery. In addition, there is practical writing on a number of subjects interesting to Pinot geeks like radiofrequency identification system for barrel tracking and a few postings on clones. You can subscribe (free) on the site and also sign up for the winery's mailing list. The site is www.pinotblogger.com.

Round Barn Winery

Michigan is not the first state outside of California and Oregon that one thinks of as having a winemaking tradition, but the fact is that winemaking was in full-force here by 1880. At that time the grapes used were native varieties and were grown on the shores of Lake Erie, where there are no significant vineyards today. According to Tom Stevenson, writing in *Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia*, Michigan transitioned to French hybrids in the 1950s and 1960s. The first European varietals were planted at Tabor Hill Vineyard by Len Olsen and Carl Banholzer in 1970 in the southwest part of the state, in what is now Lake Michigan Shores AVA. Now most of the wine-producing vineyards are adjacent to Lake Michigan in the northwest (Old Mission Peninsula and Leelanau Peninsula) and the southwest area of the state. The winds from the Lake ("Lake Effect") are cooling in the spring preventing frost damage and warming in the summer and early Fall extending the growing season. Today Michigan has 15,500 acres of vineyards, making it the fourth largest grape-growing state. Most of the grapes, however, are juice varieties such as Concord so Michigan is only the eighth largest wine producing state. There are over 40 wineries.

Michigan is particularly well-known for its Rieslings and Pinot Gris. There have been some notable Pinot Noirs in a fruity style with some complexity from Chateau Chantal, Leelanau Cellars and Black Star Farms. Michigan has certain micro-climates that have ideal soil for Pinot Noir. All styles of wine are produced in the state including sweet, dry, still, sparkling and non-grape fruit wines.

The Round Barn Winery in Baroda, Michigan, is located in the southwest portion of the state in the Lake Michigan Shore AVA. Rick Moersch has been growing Pinot Noir for some twenty years, mostly for sparkling wine cuvees. In his vineyard, he has Mariafelder, some Pommard, and a few Dijon clones including some 667 and 777 planted eight years ago. In addition, Rick uses Pinot Noir grapes grown by physician and farmer Bryan Staffin (667, 777, 114 and 115 on 101-14 rootstock). 150 cases produced per year. In addition, he crafts many other wines, more than fifty different products! He is proud to say, "If you grow it, I will ferment it." The winery's distinctive label features a 1911 Amish Round Barn which sits at the center of the winery property. The website is www.roundbarnwinery.com. The phone number is 1-800-716-WINE.

2003 Round Barn Winery Lake Michigan Shore Pinot Noir 13% alc. This wine has an earthy nose complimented by oak and vitamins. The flavors are not in the classic frame we are used to in California and the wine is not as fruit-driven. Strawberries and cranberries are noted with overtones of iodine and sherry. The mouth feel is soft and the acid is in correct proportion. A well-balanced and well-made wine that would appeal to those adventurous souls interested in all the various permutations of Pinot Noir.



I received a communication from another Pinot Noir producer in Michigan. James and Rae Lee Lester grow Pinot Noir grapes and produce wine in southwest Michigan also. Their label, Wyncraft, was begun in 1998. Their Pinot Noir comes from a 1-acre portion of the Avonlea Vineyard planted in 1990. Their wines are sold mostly to an exclusive mailing list by the case and the wines have been placed on several wine lists of prominent restaurants in Michigan and Illinois. The owners are real Pinot lovers and taste widely. The website is www.wyncraftwine.com.


PrinceofPinot.com

No PinotFile next week. I will be at the World of Pinot Noir in Shell Beach, California and then touring in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

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So Little Time**

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Would You Like to Supersize That Wine?

Many experienced wine drinkers believe that magnums are the most advantageous format for fine wine. Wine often seems to age slower and taste better in magnum than in the standard 750 ml bottle. There is less air in the bottle between the wine and the cork slowing down oxidation. In addition, magnums are an impressive presentation on the table at any gathering. They make a statement that forecasts some serious drinking is ahead. Their scarcity only enhances their desirability. As Jay McInerney wrote in *Bacchus & Me*, "This is an occasion and we're going to have some serious fun. Or even 'partay.'" Of course a magnum is equally appropriate for an intimate gathering of two. Olivier Krug, of Krug Champagne once joked, "A magnum is the perfect size for two."



Two Pinots Worth a Search

These two Pinot Noirs come from very small producers whose wine is mainly distributed in Northern California retail stores and restaurants. They are both quite good and sensibly priced. Victoria's Secrets.

2003 TR Elliott 'Queste' Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 20 barrels, \$32. A very small producer in Santa Rosa, California. Theodore R Elliott is the owner of Elliott Family Cellars. If you were teaching a wine class and wanted a typical Russian River Pinot Noir, this would be it. A warm nose of cherries, spice and cola. Elegant but powerful ripe red fruits. Finishes bright and clean. Over time the oak seemed to displace the fruit in the finish. Not a powerhouse - just a love fest.

2000 Whitethorn Hyde Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$34. Humboldt County is not known for high-quality wine producers, but Tasha McCarkle - McKee has been turning out stellar Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays for several years now from the small community of Whitethorn. If you have been to restaurants like Gary Danko, Chez Panisse or the French Laundry you will see Whitethorn regularly on the wine list. The winery is unique in that the wines are released several years after the vintage - the current release is 2000. Medium ruby in color, this charmer starts out with a deep nose of cherries, cinnamon toast and a little licorice. The flavors feature ripe plums and other dark fruits with a touch of tea and oak. Call it feminine if you want, it is very practical and not a macho wine.

