

Great Pinot,  
like great sex,  
makes you  
hungry for more

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotaficionados

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Inside this issue:

Davis Family	4
Pey-Marin	6
Laetitia Estate	7
Andrew Lane Gamay Noir	8
Pinot Noir Events in California	9
Spring Releases	11
2004 Leroy	13

## Eric Kent Wine Cellars

I was hanging out a few months ago in Healdsburg and stopped in at Root's Cellar to talk with Paul Root. Paul really is the go-to-guy in the area if you want to know about the hottest, most highly-allocated wines on the market (he recently moved his retail store from 216 Mill St to 1401 Grove Street, still in Healdsburg). He was hunched over his computer mumbling something about all the damn work involved in sending out his e-mail alert wine offerings (very humorous by the way), when I stuck my head around the corner and asked him who was the latest local Pinot star. He said, "Eric Kent, whose unique labels have art from unknown talents." I took it from there.

First of all you must know that there is NO Eric Kent. "Eric" is Kent Humphrey's middle name and "Kent" is his first name. Being on the humble side, he just couldn't bear to be blatantly eponymous. He also couldn't imagine people in a nice restaurant ordering a bottle of the "Humphrey." So he inverted his first and middle names and his "nom de vin" came to be. Designing a logo with two nice, short words seemed a good way to go.

I asked Kent to fill me in about his past lives and his story unfolded as follows. He grew up in California around a family table that enjoyed wine, so his vinous introduction came early in life. He spent a year in France as part of his undergraduate schooling and he was hooked on wine. However, the path he chose was initially not wine, but rather the PhD program at UC Berkeley in French Literature (quite happily with a full ride as a Regent's Fellow), until he decided that academia was not the world for him. He yearned for something that had more basis in "real life." That led to a job in advertising (great potential for irony there, no?).

After working for his boss for a year, they decided to start their own agency and hired a third employee to be part of the founding management team. Over the next ten years (during which time he took two years off to freelance before returning), the company grew to more than fifty people and eventually was sold to a giant holding company. That experience gave him an in-depth look at big companies - their politics, their creative accounting, and their inherent failure to put people first. As a result, Kent's youthful idealism was completely decimated and nearly "sucked the joy out of life."

On the bright side, during these real-life experiences, he sampled, savored, collected, raved about and delighted in wine. When he finally decided that he had to

Kent and Colleen have a knack for coming up with their best ideas over dinner and a bottle of wine. They designed their engagement ring using a blue crayon and a place mat from a local pizza place, and they decided to showcase artists on their labels over burgers and Zinfandel poured into paper cups.

leave the advertising world, his friends and family told him he should work in wine and he said, “What, are you crazy? Take my favorite interest in life and turn it into work?” After about six months, Kent woke up one morning and realized that they were right.

At the same time, his wife (who worked with him at the advertising agency as an Art Director) went back to school to get her second degree in fine art. He debated whether to go to U.C. Davis or Fresno State University, but then noted that many of the wines he most admired were made by people who had no formal training in wine. So, he rolled up his sleeves and went to work at two different winery and custom-crush facilities, starting at the very bottom with a novice’s enthusiasm and surely driving those who hired him crazy with all of his silly questions and smiles.



A couple of years later in 2003, fortune smiled on him. I was offered the chance to obtain some really good fruit from outstanding vineyards. While a year earlier than I had planned, I couldn’t pass up the opportunity and so Eric Kent Wine Cellars was born. Kent chose to make Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah because drinking these varietals gave him the most personal pleasure. He produced 375 cases that first vintage. Since he has grown to roughly 950 cases in the 2004 vintage and plans to level off at around 1200 cases for 2005 and 2006. Given his run-in with big business, it should come as no surprise that his goal is to stay a very small business. Kent does all of the winemaking and his wife, Colleen, a respected artist herself, seeks out the artists they put on our labels. She helps him with her outstanding palate as he debates blending decisions and he helps her when it comes time to choose the individual works that grace the bottles of Eric Kent wines. Both Kent and Colleen still freelance as an Art Director/Copywriter team to pay for the winemaking habit they have developed.



New works of art are featured on every Eric Kent wine. The art is from deserving, but as yet undiscovered talent. Each artist brings a unique vision that compliments the spirit behind the wines. With every vintage, a portion of the wine sales is donated to help support the work of striving artists. As Paul Root so aptly put it: “The wines speak for themselves and the labels add another dimension to the wine by creating a built-in discussion with every cork pulled.”

The inaugural 2003 vintage was met with huge success. The Stiling Vineyard Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast Chardonnay and Bennet Valley Syrah were sold out long ago and Kent, himself, only has a few bottles left in his library. The wines were snapped up by many notable Sonoma and Napa restaurants as well as San Francisco’s best including Gary Danko, Boulevard, Farrallon and Aqua. There were only 4 barrels of the **2003 Eric Kent Stiling Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** and I personally did not get to taste the wine. The label, which is pictured on the next page, is by Erik Jacobsen. I did get to savour the **2003 Eric Kent Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** (15.5% alc., 9 barrels, \$29). The grapes came from a true Sonoma Coast property in south-west Sebastopol. Indigenous yeast fermentation was utilized. The wine spent a total of 15 months in barrel (lengthy for a Chardonnay) with monthly lees stirring to add roundness and body. This beauty is a “Kistler Killer” for half the price. The high alcohol might scare of some, but it is so well integrated here that it adds structure without being intrusive. The wine has a beautiful straw color. Aromas of tropical fruits, lemon and buttered popcorn lead to generous citrus, vanilla and oak flavors. The wine has a terrific acid backbone and the finish is tangy. Both a treat on its own and a suitable accompaniment to a classic Caesar salad.



The 2004 Chardonnays and Pinot Noir were offered in April on pre-release (the two 2004 Syrahs will be released in Fall). There is a **2004 Eric Kent Russian River Valley Chardonnay** (\$34, sold-out at the winery) and a **2004 Eric Kent Sonoma Coast Chardonnay** (\$32.50). The Russian River Chardonnay comes primarily from the Stiling Vineyard located between Dehlinger and Kistler near Sebastopol. Label art is by Simmin Joy Terry (left). The Sonoma Coast Chardonnay features artwork by Lori del Mar. It is titled 'Spin the Bottle' (right).



**2004 Eric Kent Stiling Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 15.2% alc., 10 barrels, \$35. The Stiling Vineyard was planted in the mid 1980s and is farmed by Don and Barbara Stiling. This wine is sourced from two different vineyard blocks, one hillside and one valley floor. The grapes are primarily a field selection of Swan clone. 75% of the grapes were destemmed, but not crushed, and placed on top of the remaining 25% whole-cluster fruit. The wine was aged for 14 months in 60% new French oak. The nose is outrageous - luscious cherry pie with cinnamon ice cream. Oodles of fresh red berries and ripe plums with lovely spice accents cascade over the mouth like silk. Beautifully balanced. I usually shy away from Pinots with more than 15% alcohol, but this flamboyant sucker won me over. Really, really, really good. A feast. Label artist Kevin Keul.



Eric Kent wines are sold through the website at [www.erickentwines.com](http://www.erickentwines.com) or by phoning 707-527-9700. Currently, shipping is limited to only a few states outside of California but this will change in the near future. Roots Cellar (1-866-808-0124) has the wines in stock and is offering a case of all three 2004 wines for \$385, a ridiculous bargain considering the pedigree.

## Davis Family Vineyards: Taming the Goddess of Pinot

Buying a bottle of Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Pinot Noir is pretty much a sure thing. It's like purchasing a bottle of Coke from the market: you always know what to expect. Consistency is a hallmark for Guy Davis and although I use Pinot Noir as my example, the same could easily be said for all of his wines (Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet, and Syrah).

Guy Davis developed an interest in wine at the tender age of 19. While working his way through college cooking in a French restaurant, he would taste great wines from all of the notable wine regions of France and became so knowledgeable, that he soon was purchasing all of the wine for the restaurant's wine list. Although he was educated in economics and began his career as a stockbroker, the stock market crash of 1987 made him look elsewhere for work. He picked up a job as a wine buyer in Sonoma in 1989 and soon was working in the cellars of numerous boutique wineries in the region. It was a job with Lori Olds at Sky Vineyards atop Mt Veeder that convinced him to seriously enter the field of winemaking. He took classes from Santa Rosa CC and U.C. Davis, and in 1996, after searching for years for the perfectly situated site, he purchased his own hillside vineyard on Laguna Road in the Russian River Valley. Guy continued to run his own import retail wine club (Passport Wine Club) while he replanted his own vineyard. He sold Passport Wine Club in 1998 to concentrate fully on winegrowing and producing premium wines. Today he farms 7 acres of Pinot Noir with the assistance of his oldest son. Guy manages to do everything from carefully tending the vines, making the wines, and selling them through his tasting room in Healdsburg near the Russian River. His small winery serves as a backdrop to the tasting area which features a lengthy serving table which he designed and built and is a unique piece of art unto itself.



A recurring theme seems to be commonplace among winemakers. They are attracted by the combination of art and science that the challenge of producing fine wine presents. Guy has a soft spot for creative art as shown by the work of local artists displayed on his tasting room walls, the clever sign seen in the photo crafted by an artist friend and the flamboyant artwork which guards the parking lot. Guy says that if he wasn't a winemaker, he probably would be a sculptor or some kind of artisan food maker.

Guy Davis believes the difference between great and just good Pinot Noir is balance and complexity. "The balance of rich, dark, masculine, full-bodied aromas and flavors like black cherries, plums, chocolate, coffee and forest floor mixed with the elegant, sensual perfume of raspberries, brown spices and sweet cherry blossoms, aligned with textures that are full and mouth coating yet silky and lasting. When harmony exists, the sensual layers seem to unfold forever!"

He starts with a vineyard site destined for greatness. That is, hillsides with north-south row direction (see aerial view of the Davis Family estate Pinot Noir vineyard - a very old block of Zinfandel is seen in the lower right corner) close proximity to the coast to lengthen the growing season and a vineyard matching the exact rootstalks and variation of clones specific to the soils and location. Winegrowing requires, what Guy terms, "precision viticulture." He does not literally farm 7 acres, but rather 9274 vines. He tries to get 12 touches for every vine during the growing season from pruning to harvest. The grapes must be picked on the right day for Pinot Noir will show it if you pick too early or too late (one must be obsessive, focused, and fanatical to hit the right day!). In the winery, work must be meticulous with constant smelling, tasting, and talking to the wines, never intervening unless necessary. Finally, one must be an expert at blending, knowing what true greatness is. **Perfect Pinot may be elusive but when discovered and embraced, it is truly heaven.**



**2004 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 800 cases, \$38. This is one of the most highly-awarded Sonoma Pinot Noirs from the 2004 vintage. Accolades include 95-100 points from Gerald Boyd of the San Francisco Chronicle, a Gold Medal at the 2006 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, and a top ranking in the 2006 Pinot Noir Shootout. As a judge in the Shootout, I tasted this wine blind on two separate occasions and both times picked it out as one of my clear favorites. Words can't probably do the wine much justice after all of these honors. The nose is very provocative and complex with notes of cherries, raspberries, cola, sandalwood and even a little sauvage. The bright and layered Pinot fruit flavors are perfectly entwined with a fine tannin backbone. The mouth feel is plush and the finish is clean and lingering. Complete in every way. A love letter.



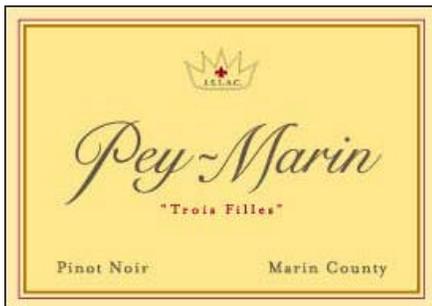
Visit the website, [www.daviswines.com](http://www.daviswines.com), phone 707-569-0181, or better yet, visit the tasting room at 52 Front St in Healdsburg and talk Pinot with Guy Davis. He is a soft-spoken and cerebral winemaker who has a trove of wine information that he can offer in an understandable fashion. Discounts on wine and special events are available for the Friends of the Family Wine Club. This is a good family to belong to. Some limited retail distribution is available in fine wine stores. A final note: Guy also makes a terrific dipping-style artisan extra virgin olive oil from an organic olive orchard in the Sierra Foothills planted in 1906. Only 60 cases made. Break out the baguettes.

## Pey-Marin Vineyards

I am a fan of Marin County Pinot Noirs. The region is a leader in sustainable farming and the climate is quite suitable for Pinot Noir. Yields are tiny, often around 1.5 tons per acre, and property is so valuable here that the number of vineyards is limited. The result is that Marin County Pinot Noir is a rare treasure to be savored. The wines have attractive aromatics, good structure and earthiness, and fine acidity.

Pey-Marin Vineyards Pinot Noir is a standout in this bucolic part of California. The 2002 vintage *Trois Filles* (three daughters) was one of the *PinotFile's* first team All Americans. The 2003 vintage was equally delicious (reported below) and the 2004 vintage has just been released. The Peys were one of the few asked to pour their Pinot Noir at this year's World of Pinot Noir in Shell Beach, California.

Both Jonathan and Susan Pey have an extensive background in the premium wine business. He has worked for Domaine Louis Jadot and Chateau de Pommard (Burgundy), Robert Mondavi and Sterling Vineyards (Napa Valley), and Penfolds (Australia). Susan is the Wine Director for a large and prestigious restaurant group based in the San Francisco Bay area. She personally evaluates hundreds of wines each week. The couple produce wines under two labels: Pey-Marin Vineyards Pinot Noir and Riesling (Marin's first release of this varietal from the 2005 vintage) and Mount Tamalpais Merlot and Vin Gris.



**2003 Pey-Marin "Trois Filles" Pinot Noir** 13.8% alc., 269 cases, \$33. 2003 produced less than 2 tons per acre. This wine comes from two vineyards (7 and 15 years old) located less than eight miles from the Pacific Ocean in west Marin County. Bud break is earlier than neighboring regions, but as the season progresses, the cold weather pushes flowering, "set," and harvest to at least three weeks after the so-called "cool-climate" areas of Carneros and the Russian River Valley. Cold soak was employed for four days after destemming and crushing. The wine was aged in 59 gallon French oak barriques, 60% new, for 14 months with zeroracking and

extensive "sur lie" stirring. The name "Trois Filles" is a tribute to the Pey's three young daughters. I really like the gentle, perfumed, ethereal style here. The nose features the aromas of roasted duck with spiced cherry sauce, and the black cherry and cassis flavors are offset by an attractive earthiness reminiscent of mushrooms. The palate is plush and creamy and the finish features bright acidity. A Pinot to envy

**2004 Pey-Marin "Trois Filles" Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 372 cases, \$36. Yields were very low in this vintage due to very late rains in May and June, but vine health was very good with low disease pressure. The wine was crafted in the same fashion as the 2003 vintage. I have not had a chance to taste this, but will report after my visit to the Marin County Pinot Noir Celebration, June 9-10, 2006 (see details of this future event in the recent *PinotFile*, Vol 5, Issue 34).

The Pey-Marin website is [marinwines.com](http://marinwines.com) where the latest releases may be purchased. The phone is 415-455-WINE. I am starting a vertical of these Pinot Noirs for I feel they will improve with cellar time.

## Laetitia Estate Pinot Noir Consistently Tops

Call it a value wine, call it a quaffer, call it whatever you want, since the 2002 vintage the Laetitia Estate Pinot Noir is one heck of a yummy Pinot that outshines many California Pinots at three times the price (suggested retail is \$25 but it can be found easily for about \$18). It just might be the best Pinot on the planet for less than \$20.

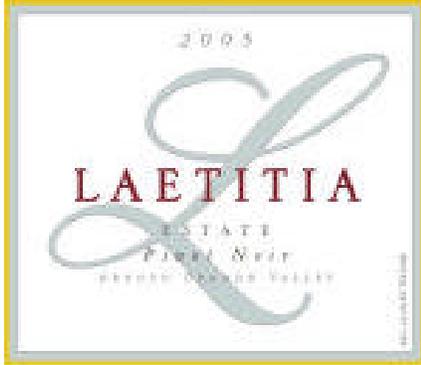
The history of Laetitia lies in French origins. In 1982, Champagne Deutz from Epernay was part of the French wave (which included Tattinger, Domaine Chandon, and Roederer) looking for an appropriate site to produce Champagne-style sparkling wine in California. Deutz decided to purchase 185 acres four miles from the Pacific Ocean along Highway 101 in the Arroyo Grande appellation. The soil and climate here were very similar to that found in Epernay. In 1983 they planted Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc and successfully produced Maison Deutz sparkling wines for thirteen years. The market for sparkling wine in California never really took off and in 1997 the winery and vineyards were sold to Jean-Claude Tardivat. He renamed the winery Laetitia (Latin for expression of joy and happiness) after his daughter and shifted the emphasis to still wine. A year later, Laetitia was acquired by a partnership that included foreign businessman, Selim Zikha, who became the sole owner in 2001.



The Arroyo Grande estate today consists of 432 acres of Pinot Noir. The Laetitia lineup of Pinot Noirs includes the Estate bottling, a Reserve bottling and single vineyard designations including La Colline, Les Galets and Nadia's Vineyard (the latter three are priced near \$50). Laetitia also owns Barnwood Vineyards and Avila Wines (Avila is a San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir that is very popular to the value-conscience market - all 16,000 cases are sold annually at a price of \$13). Laetitia continues the tradition of Méthode Champenoise sparkling wines with both vintage and non-vintage offerings. The sparkling wine program is directed by winemaker Dave Hickey who started with Deutz in 1985. His son, Eric Hickey, has worked at the winery since age 16 and is in charge of the still wine program. Selim Zikha's daughter, Nadia Wellisz and her husband, Tadzio Willisze, M.D. along with winemaker Erick Hickey, produced limited quantities of Pinot Noir from special blocks on the Laetitia estate in 2001 and 2002. This boutique label, Malvolio, is based in Los Angeles ([www.highlandscellar.com](http://www.highlandscellar.com)).

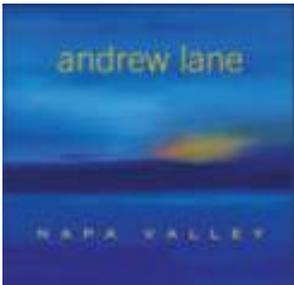


**2005 Laetitia Estate Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir** 14.1% alc., 5000 cases, \$25 (retail but Trader Joe's has it for \$18). The 2004 Laetitia Estate Pinot Noir was the judge's pick as the number one wine at the 2006 Pinot Noir Shootout. The clonal blend for the 2005 vintage is 30% Martini clone 13 and 70% Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777 combined with Wädenswil clone 2A. The growing season was mild allowing for ripe flavors at relatively low sugar levels. Yields were 2 to 2 1/2 tons per acre. The wine was aged 8 months in 30% new French oak barrels. This is the first of the 2005 vintage from the Central Coast that I have tasted and, if any indication, this should be a terrific and even landmark year for Pinot Noir from the California Coast. This Pinot is dark violet in color, but is surprisingly light on its feet. The charming aromas and flavors feature plums, black cherry, earth and spice. There is plenty of structure here to appeal to those who like a bigger mouth feel, but the overall impression is one of sexy silkiness. Nicely balanced and easy to cozy up to now. How do they do this for \$18?



The Laetitia Vineyards & Winery tasting room is located off Highway 101 just south of the town of Arroyo Grande. It is open daily. The website is [www.laetitiawine.com](http://www.laetitiawine.com) (wines may be purchased here). The phone is 805-481-1772. There is also good retail distribution.

## Andrew Lane Wines Revives Gamay



Andrew Lane Wines of St. Helena, Napa Valley has released a **2004 Andrew Lane Gamay Noir** (\$19). The winery is a small, family-run affair, named after owner and winemaker David Dickson's two sons (Andrew and Lane). The wine is advertised as an "incredibly fruit-forward, vibrant, anytime, anywhere wine." It is produced from one of the few remaining Gamay vineyards in Napa Valley (over 50 years old). This Gamay Noir is low in alcohol (12.9%), has fresh acidity, is low in tannin and aged in neutral oak barrels. The result sounds like a perfect summer wine.

Unraveling the convoluted history of "gamay" in California is no easy task. The best information that I could discover on the subject was written by John Haeger in his book, *North American Pinot Noir*. I still am not sure I understand the whole story but here is my take on it using Haeger's information. In the late 19th and early 20th century, there were a number of different "Pinot Noir" selections brought into California. Some of these vines were true Pinot Noir (so-called *pinot tordu*), but others had a different, more vertical growth pattern (*pinot droit* or "upright pinot") and were called gamay and Gamay Beaujolais. They were also known as Napa Gamay since nearly all of the plantings were in the Napa Valley. These vines were unrelated to Gamay planted in Beaujolais, France (designated gamay noir a' jus blanc) except that they both shared a Pinot Noir parentage. To make matters even more confusing, some of the vines in California called gamay were actually valdiguié, an obscure variety from south-eastern France. The UCD designation for the Gamay Beaujolais clones of Pinot Noir became 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 (20 and 21 since withdrawn). The California gamay prospered here, producing larger clusters and higher yields than in France and was used mainly in blending. In the 1960s and 1970s, Beaulieu and Mirassou made a wine labeled Gamay Beaujolais which was actually from Pinot Noir grapes. At the time, Gamay Beaujolais was considerably more marketable than Pinot Noir as the name sounded more French and was easier to say. Until 1973, Inglenook made a Gamay Beaujolais from Pinot Noir and Napa Gamay, but subsequently primarily from Pinot Noir. Archaic labeling laws still allow any Pinot Noir producing in America to be sold as Gamay Beaujolais (this TTB law expires in 2009). Andrew Dickson states that the grapes for his Gamay Noir are gamay noir a' jus blanc. The winery's website is [www.andrewlanewines.com](http://www.andrewlanewines.com)

## Pinot Noir Events Abound in California

The summer is alive with special Pinot Noir-themed events and festivals. There is enough fun to make any Pinot Geek giddy. You will see me at many of these celebrations so please say hello.

**Marin County Pinot Noir Celebration** June 9-10, 2006. This event was featured in the *PinotFile*, Volume 5, Issue 34. Tickets and details at [www.malt.or](http://www.malt.or) or 415-663-1158.

**Wine & Fire: A Celebration of Sta. Rita Hills** June 9, 10, & 11, 2006. Inaugural event! The Winegrowers Alliance of the Sta. Rita Hills (SRHWA) are organizing a weekend of tasting, seminars, food, and a screening of the Santa Barbara Film Festival favorite, 'From Ground to Glass', a wine documentary by local director Rob Dafoe. Only 250 tickers will be sold to keep the event cozy and maximize hospitality, tasting opportunities, and one-on-one time with local winemakers. On Friday, June 9, there will be a screening of 'From Ground to Glass' in Lompoc, and at the La Purisma Mission in Lompoc, artisanal wood-fired pizzas from American Flatbread Company of Los Alamos, along with more than two dozen winemakers pouring their Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noirs and/or Chardonnays. On Saturday, June 10, at the historic Rancho La Vina on Santa Rosa Road, there will be a mid-morning 'Seminar in the Round' where four panels of winemakers will introduce their wines and an in-depth tasting will ensue. Lunch on Saturday will be under the trees at Rancho La Vina nibbling a gourmet lunch from New West Catering ((I can attest that their food is outrageously good) designed to pair with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. While dining, winemakers of the Sta. Rita Hills, will wander table to table pouring both current and library wines. Saturday night features special winemaker dinners throughout the Valley (not included in the ticket price). Sunday, June 11, will feature Open House celebrations at wineries, vineyards and tasting rooms throughout the Santa Rita Hills. Tickets are \$325 per person and are available through the SRHWA website, [www.staritahills.com](http://www.staritahills.com).

**Carneros Heritage Weekend** June 9-10, 2006. The former Carneros Quality Alliance, formed in 1983, has been renamed The Carneros Wine Alliance, with a new logo and new Board of Directors. The CWA is sponsoring the First Annual Carneros Lamb Cook-Off and Sheep Herding Exhibition. There will be two days of barbeques, winery and restaurant dinners pairing Carneros wines and lamb dishes. For information: [www.carneros.com](http://www.carneros.com).

**Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers Association 17th Annual Vintner's Festival "A Taste of the Mountains"** June 3-4 (Eastside) and June 10-11 (Westside), 2006. Purchase a ticket in advance for \$30 and receive a commemorative glass to use at 56 wineries at 45 locations. Barrel tasting, food, music, art exhibits, winery tours and special tastings. For tickets: 831-685-8463, or order online at [scmwa.com](http://scmwa.com).

**New Zealand Winemakers Grand Tour Tasting** June 8, 2006 in Los Angeles at the Hotel Bel Air, June 11 in Orange County at the Center Club, and June 14 at The London Wine Bar in San Francisco. Importer Meadowbank Estates is the sponsor and the growers will be pouring New Zealand wines including Escarpment, Foxes Island, Pegasus Bay, Peregrine and Voss Estate. Appetizers include New Zealand lamb, Tasmanian crab cakes, Emu carpaccio and more, all with a New Zealand flare. The event s are in a walk-around format. Cost is \$65 at the Orange County event and tickets are sold online at [www.hitime.net](http://www.hitime.net) or calling Patty Quick at 800-331-3005 (ticket deadline June 5). The San Francisco event is sponsored by The Jug Shop. Tickets are \$30 at [www.jugshop.com](http://www.jugshop.com). For details of the Los Angeles tasting, contact Naomi C. Barber of Meadowbank Estates at [nbarber@empousa.com](mailto:nbarber@empousa.com).

**Pinot Days** June 23-25, 2006 The 2nd Annual Pinot Days Festival is a celebration of Pinot Noir from California, Oregon and Burgundy. Winemakers and winery owners do the pouring of their wines so there is an opportunity to interact and develop a personal relationship with the different producers. Tickets may be purchased for one or all of the events. The events include:

The Best Pinots from the Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley. Sat, June 24, 3:00-6:00 PM, Fort Mason, \$75. Producers include Freeman, Williams Selyem, Fort Ross, Copeland Creek, Failla Hirsch, Merry Edwards, Kosta Browne, Keller Estate, Dain, Lynmar, Joseph Swan, Roessler, Scherrer, Inman Family, Dutton-Goldfield and Davis Bynum. What a lineup!

2004 Pisoni, Garys' and Rosell's Vineyards Pinot Noirs. Sat, June 24, 7:00-10:00 PM, Fort Mason, \$80 Sixteen wines from these three notable vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands. The Pisoni clan and many producers will attend.

2006 Pinot Days Grand Tasting and VIP Tours. Sunday, June 25th, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM. Festival Pavilion Fort Mason, \$65. Starting two hours before the Grand Tasting, these VIP tours allow an opportunity to explore wines from particular regions. Up to three tours can be attended covering different appellations, vineyards, and styles. Specifics are available on the website.

2006 Pinot Days Grand Tasting. Sunday, June 25, 1:00 - 4:00 PM, Festival Pavilion Fort Mason, \$45. Heaven for any Pinot Geek - over 150 producers of Pinot Noir representing the single largest gathering of Pinot Noir producers in the world. The walk-around event includes artisan foods, a demonstration on making Pinot Noir, and an charity auction of Pinot Noirs.



**Central Coast Wine Classic** July 13-16, 2006. The 22nd Annual four day event celebrates the wines, cuisine, music, art, and lifestyle of California's Central Coast. The events are held at the official site of the event, The Cliffs in Shell Beach, as well as various wineries in the region. On Thursday, July 13, the Classic starts with a Barrel Tasting of the unreleased wines of over 50 West Coast wineries. That evening is a Black-Tie Dinner at Hearst Castle (\$1,000 per person, patron sponsorship required). There are multiple tastings including the Pinot Noirs of the Edna and Arroyo Grande Valleys and Paso Robles (think Baileyana, Domaine Alfred, Laetitia, Jack Creek and more). A special dinner featuring seven bottlings of Joseph Drouhin Marquis de Laguiche Le Montrachet is held at the home of the owners of Wedell Cellars (\$1,000). Much, much more. Tickets may be purchased for individual events. Contact [www.centralcoastwineclassic.org](http://www.centralcoastwineclassic.org) for tickets and information.

**Russian River Valley Grape to Glass Weekend** August 18-20, 2006. The 11th Annual event includes winery and vineyard tours and tastings at wineries like Balleto, Davis Family, TR Elliott, Kosta Browne and Pellegrini Family. Friday, August 18, is a Seafood BBQ and viewing of 'My 3 Sons' at the MacMurray Ranch which is only open for this event. Saturday is the Hog in Fog BBQ at Richard's Grove and Saralee's Vineyard where 50 wineries will be pouring along with a wine auction. For information and tickets: [www.rrvw.org](http://www.rrvw.org).

## Time to Stock the Cellar

Spring is not only a beautiful time of the year for flowers, it marks the season for new vintage releases of Pinot Noir. I picked out some that I feel are particularly worth pursuing. Don't be discouraged if the 2004 releases are sold-out - simply join the winery's mailing list to be notified next year when the exact date of release is planned. Also remember that three free online wine search sites are good tools in locating a special Pinot Noir: [wine-searcher.com](http://wine-searcher.com), [winezap.com](http://winezap.com), and [wineaccess.com](http://wineaccess.com). The wines are listed in no particular order.

**Red Car Wine Company** 2004 Red Car 'Amour Fou' Russian River/Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$60). The team of Carroll Kemp, Chris King, Tim Spear and Sashi Moorman carry on the vow to Mark Estrin (who sadly passed away a year ago) to constantly improve the quality of Red Car wines in his honor. The word from Paul Root is that in a recent tasting of 12 Russian River and Sonoma Coast wines conducted by local wine professionals, the Amour Fou came in unanimously first. I tasted this wine at the WOPN and enjoyed it. Sold primarily to mailing list at [www.redcarwine.com](http://www.redcarwine.com). Root's Cellar in Healdsburg has some.

**Londer Vineyards** 2004 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (\$30), 2004 Londer Estate Grown Pinot Noir (\$46), 2004 Parabol Pinot Noir (\$52), and 2004 Keefer Pinot Noir (\$42). Inaugural release of the Estate Grown Pinot Noir which I tasted at WOPN and loved it. The Londer Pinot Noirs get better and better every year. [www.londervineyards.com](http://www.londervineyards.com), 707-895-3900. Pouring at Pinot Days.



**Domaine Serene** 2003 Evenstad Reserve Pinot Noir, (\$52), 2003 Winery Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$75), and 2002 Monogram Pinot Noir (\$200 - not a misprint). The wines from this Willamette Valley producer always receive great press, and for those that can afford them, they are outstanding examples of Oregon Pinot Noir. The Monogram Pinot Noir is a prerelease sale of this inaugural wine. It is produced in extremely small quantities and only in certain vintages. Only 150 six-bottle cases available presented in handsome wood boxes. [www.domaineserene.com](http://www.domaineserene.com), 1-866-864-6555.

**Tantara** 2004 Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir (\$30), 2004 Bien Nacido Adobe Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir (\$45), 2004 La Colline Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir (\$45), 2004 Brousseau Chalone AVA Pinot Noir (\$52), 2004 Pisoni Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir (\$60), 2004 Evelyn Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir (\$80). I recently had the La Colline Vineyard bottling from Laetiti's estate. 14.5% alc., \$39 (discounted price). A very complex nose of sour cherry, cranberry, rhubarb, graham and toast. Tangy, sweet Pinot fruits flow over the palate like silk. A firm-bodied Pinot that was delicious. The winery is at Bien Nacido Vineyard. [www.tantarawinery.com](http://www.tantarawinery.com).

**Hope & Grace** 2004 Hope & Grace Pinot Noir (\$35) 1,200 case production from Sleepy Hollow Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands. Aged 16 months in Allier French oak. Winemaker Charles Hendricks has a wine showroom in Yountville where his wines are available for tasting daily. [www.hendrickswines.com](http://www.hendrickswines.com), 707-944-2500.

**Gypsy Dancer Estates** 2004 Emily's Reserve Pinot Noir (1150 cases, \$30), 2004 Gary & Christine's Vineyard Pinot Noir (540 cases, \$35), 2004 A&G Estate Pinot Noir (375 cases, \$50). Gary Andrus of Archery Summit fame, purchased Lion Valley Vineyards and planted 4,000 vines. The winery debuted in 2002, the year Andrus and wife Christine's first daughter, Gypsy was born. The website is [www.gypsydancerestates.com](http://www.gypsydancerestates.com). Also available from [avalonwine.com](http://avalonwine.com) and [brownderby.com](http://brownderby.com)

**Sinor-LaVallee** 2004 Aubaine Vineyard Pinot Noir (176 cases, \$35), 2004 Talley-Rincon Vineyard Pinot Noir (100 cases, \$35), and 2004 Anniversary Cuvée Pinot Noir (46 cases, \$40). Mike Sinor has made quite a name for himself at Domaine Alfred where he has been crafting a series of outstanding Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from the Chamisal Vineyard. I believe the latest 2004 vintage Domaine Alfred Pinot Noirs (there is a Chamisal and a reserve style Califa bottling) scored in the mid-90s in a recent major wine trade publication. Sinor-LaVallee is Mike's own label. He founded Sinor-LaVallee Wine Company in 1997 along with his wife Cheri. Cheri is currently the CEO of the Company as well as the Sinor-LaVallee household. The winery will be bonded soon. I barrel tasted the 2004 Aubaine Vineyard and Talley-Rincon Vineyard Pinot Noirs last October and was ready to take home a bottle of each on the spot. Mike only gets fruit from 1 acre of Rincon and 2 acres of Aubaine so production is miniscule. The small production allows him to tender the wine with a lot of care and attention. The Anniversary Cuvée (limit 2 bottles per person), is meant to celebrate family and the marriage of Mike and Cheri in Beaune, Burgundy in 1996. The best clusters are picked from each vineyard and put into a one-ton bin to ferment. About 3-7 days later, the family and their friends climb into the bin for an old-school punch down. The picture shows Mike and Cheri's daughter, Esmée, in the 2005 vintage of the Anniversary Cuvée. These three Pinot Noirs are an absolute must for any pinotophile. The wines are sold through a mailing list. The website is [www.sinorlavallee.com](http://www.sinorlavallee.com) and the phone is 805-4732-8313. Mike was featured in the movie, 'From Ground to Glass' (watch the video at [www.fromgroundtoglass.com](http://www.fromgroundtoglass.com)). He also has a wine blog at [www.sinorlavallee.blogspot.com](http://www.sinorlavallee.blogspot.com).



**Merry Edwards** 2004 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, (\$30), 2004 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$36), 2004 Olivet Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$56). The "Queen of Pinot" consistently produces a royal feast of Pinot Noirs. She has been at it a long time (since 1974), but has evolved to more of a winegrower than a winemaker, spending most of her time in diligent care of her vineyards. She works in the winery only to protect and develop the hallmark flavors that personify each vineyard. Perennially a restaurant list favorite, these allocated wines are sold through a mailing list. The website is [www.merryedwards.com](http://www.merryedwards.com), the phone is 1-888-388-9050. Tasting by appointment.

## 2004 Domaine Leroy Wines Atypical

According to Allen Meadows writing in the *Burghound*, Lalou Bize-Leroy declassified all of her upper level wines to villages level. The result is extraordinary wines from Burgundy appellations. It is very unusual for a Burgundian to blend wines from several grand cru and premier cru sources into a single wine. For example, she blended the entirety of her Richebourg and Romanee Saint Vivant into her Vosne Romanee wine. She said she did it because her late husband Marcel Bize had passed away and she became depressed and found it difficult to take her normal care with her wines. She found the wines lacking in vibrancy and the level of quality with which she believes her customers deserve to find in wines from Domaine Leroy. So she declassified all of them. Meadows says, "After tasting through the range, I commented that the wines were astonishing and in response, Mime Bize allowed that perhaps she shouldn't have declassified them after all. When one sees the truly admirable quality achieved, it seems a mild shame that so many potentially wonderful individual wines were blended away. This is an incredible group of wines, particularly the Bourgogne and all of them are recommended."

LEROY

The wines are now being offered on a prearrival basis by several major wine retailers in the United States including The Wine Club in California (contact ronvan@thewineclub.com). The prices will vary considerably and escalate once the word gets out. The prices I have listed are for The Wine Club. The **2004 Bourgogne Rouge** (\$80, BH 92) is from Pommard Vignots, Savigny Narbantons, Volnay Santenots, Clos de Vougeot, Clos de la Roche and Corton-Renardes - wew! Meadows says "This is of top 1er quality and while the structure is supple, this clearly will age." The rest of the lineup includes: **2004 Chambolle Musigny** (\$250, BH 94) from Musigny, Charmes and Premieres, **2004 Vosne Romanee** (\$250, BH 95) from Richebourg, Romanee Saint Vivant, Brulees, Beaumonts and Genevieres, **2004 Gevrey Chambertain** (\$250, BH 95) from Latricieres, Chambertin, Combottes and a bit of villages, and **2004 Nuits St Georges** (\$200, BH 93) from two 1ers Boudots and Vignerondes plus villages).

These would be excellent special occasion wines for those who cannot usually afford Leroy Burgundies

## Oregon the place to be over Memorial Day

Many of the small wineries in Oregon are not open to the public. Twice a year, over the Thanksgiving Holiday and the Memorial Day weekend, all of the Willamette Valley wineries throw open their doors and celebrate with tastings, food, music and frivolity. There are many pre-Memorial Day events and post Memorial Day weekend happenings as well. For a complete listing for May 27, 28, & 29 and the weeks before and after go to [www.willamettewines.com](http://www.willamettewines.com) or pick up a copy of the Oregon Wine Press (website is [oregonwinepress.com](http://oregonwinepress.com)). You may also subscribe to the monthly Oregon Wine Press for \$15 a year postpaid. It lists wineries, tasting rooms, wine shops, restaurants and wine-related locations throughout the state and region. If you do plan to go at the last minute, be warned that lodging is very limited in the Willamette Valley (there is currently some pressure to build "Napa-style" hotels in the area) and sold out by now for the Memorial Day weekend. Two other good locations are Portland and Salem. Both are about an hour's drive away from the heart of the Willamette Valley, but the drive from Salem is much less hurried and more picturesque.



PrinceofPinot.com

Thomas Haden Church of 'Sideways' fame is cast as the villainous Sandman in the third installment of the Spiderman series of movies (due out in June).

**Great Pinot, like great sex, makes you hungry**

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As a followup to last week's feature on the Finger Lakes, a reader wanted to remind me of the influence of Hermann 'The German' Wiemer on the history of the Finger Lakes wine industry. To some, he is considered the greatest Riesling winemaker in the United States. He has an extensive nursery, produces 300,000 vines a year and supplies rootstock to all of the major wine producing areas of North America. A Chardonnay clone, the 'Weimer Clone', is named after him. The reader also highly recommended his Pinot Noir: "I was taken aback by the cherry and hints of spice." He said that he was poo pooing Pinot Noir from the Finger Lakes until he tried the Wiemer rendition. Wiemer came to the United States in 1968 and purchased 140 acres which he planted with European vinifera grapevines. The winery is enclosed within a seventy-year-old scissor-trussed barn designed in 1982 by Cornell architects. The tasting room here is open year round.

Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, located on Route 14 on the west side of Seneca lake. The winery produces 12,000 cases each year. The Pinot Noir is \$21. The website is [www.wiemer.com](http://www.wiemer.com). Phone 800-371-7971.

## Sorry, Sold Out

There are a few small Pinot Noir producers who have created such a stir that their wines are sold out literally on release. Kosta Browne, for example, in the Russian River Valley, produces 4,000 cases of Pinot Noir each year. All of the wine is sold to a mailing list of 3,000, with another 1,500 waiting in the wings to grab some wine if someone should drop off "the list." To sign up for the waiting list, go to [www.kostabrowne.com](http://www.kostabrowne.com). The wines are often available on the secondary auction market such as [winecommune.com](http://winecommune.com).

Another winery that comes to mind is MacPhail. James MacPhail has been featured in previous issues of the *PinotFile*. He became an accomplished classical pianist and bagpiper, as well as a dedicated sportsman. Reading the newspaper this morning that a seven-year-old boy swam the Golden Gate from Alcatraz yesterday, I was reminded that MacPhail did the same in 1983, at which time he was the youngest to do so. He founded MacPhail Family Wines in 2002 and purchases his grapes from growers who share his passion for sustainable farming. The novel label on his wines features grapes in a Radio Flyer wagon. A while back I took a 2003 MacPhail Russian River Valley Pinot Noir to a party and everyone was so stoked, the bottle was gone in 10 minutes. The wines scored well in the recent Pinot Noir Shootout and in the wine press. The Spring Releases of **2000 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**, **2004 Anderson Valley Fratney Shams Vineyard Pinot Noir**, and **2004 Anderson Valley Toulouse Vineyard Pinot Noir** are sorry, sold out. The Fall Releases are **2004 Sonoma Coast Goodin Vineyard Pinot Noir**, and **2004 Sonoma Coast Sangiacomo Vineyard Pinot Noir**. To join the mailing list, go to [www.macphailwines.com](http://www.macphailwines.com).

