

**Pinot Noir:
You're The
One That I
Want**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotphiles

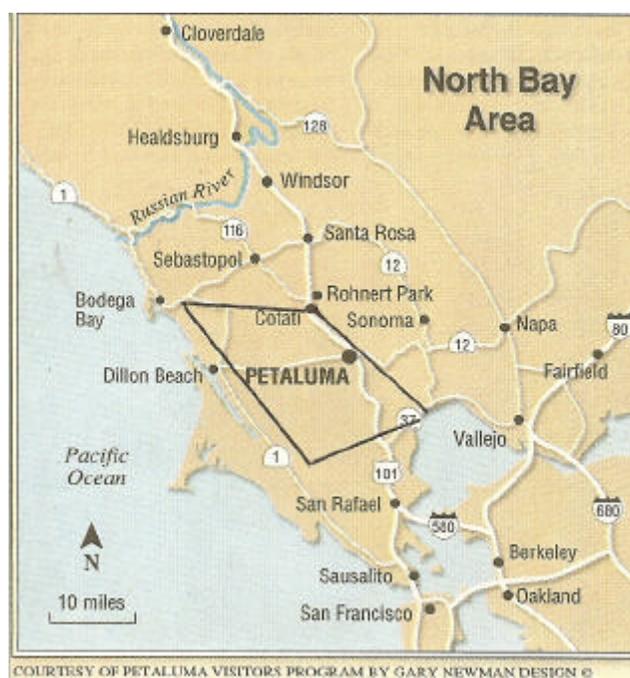
Volume 6, Issue 12

January 15, 2007

Petaluma Gap: Fog Noir

I remember it well and it was very striking. In late December, I was driving south on Hwy 101 in Sonoma County on a brisk, clear morning about 8:00 AM. I had some good Doo-Wop music going and a cup of coffee in hand. Just before I reached Petaluma, I came upon almost a surreal picture. There in front of me was this dramatic fog bank blotting out the blue sky, with fingers stretching east just over Hwy 101. At 75 miles-per-hour, I was through it in no time, but right then I had an understanding of the *Petaluma Gap*.

The so-called Petaluma Gap, a term coined as recently as ten years ago, refers to a narrow opening in the southern Sonoma County countryside connecting the ocean near Bodega Bay and Tomales to the San Francisco Bay. It is roughly 22 to 31 miles in width with walls rising roughly 2,000 to 3,000 feet from the valley floor. The western edge runs approximately from Tomales to Bodega. The southern border is Nicasio and the north and east border starts around Penngrrove/Cotati and runs southeast along the Carneros Ridge ending in San Pablo Bay. On the map below, Bodega is a few miles inland from Bodega Bay and Tomales is just east and south of Dillon Beach. The tiny town of Nicasio is a few miles east of where the Hwy 1 marker is on the map. San Pablo Bay is the body of water bordered on the north by Hwy 37. I have tried to roughly outline the region. In the simplest of terms, it can be thought of as the area south of the Russian River Valley to Mt Tamalpais.



The Petaluma Gap possesses a very unique microclimate. Early morning ocean fog is followed by intense midday heat with cooling Pacific breezes in the early afternoon moderating the heat and leading to very cool evenings. Warren Henderson of Windy Hill Winery notes that “The cool ocean air is drawn into the Bay Area by the rising air of the Central Valley of California. This tube of cooled air moderates the temperature of the surrounding hills providing a cooling effect that lowers the ambient temperature by up to 15 degrees compared to the rest of the county.” The area has been compared to Carneros which is under the same climatic influences, but the fog and wind arrive earlier in the day than in Carneros and stay longer the next morning. Rainfall is moderate (20-24 inches) so that irrigation is required for at least part of the growing season. The climate is ideal for growing cool climate varietals like Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and there has been some success with several other red varietals such as Syrah and Merlot.

Bob Peak, partner in The Beverage People, describes the region’s climate as “...resembling other cool areas like Carneros. In addition, the almost-every-night breeze takes us (Petaluma Gap) one further step beyond the cool, foggy mornings of similar areas. I think the rapid chilling of the ripening fruit helps maintain crisp, refreshing levels of acidity in our grapes all the way to full physiological maturity. The resulting bright, fruity flavors and aromas make many of our wines stand out from others. They can be fully ripe, but have zippy, spicy characteristics in addition to rich fruit flavors.” Mark Pasternak, owner of Devil’s Gulch Ranch in Marin County has consulted on some of the new vineyard plantings in the Petaluma Gap and is quite familiar with the challenges of cool-climate viticulture. He says about the region: “It is very similar to much of the areas with vineyards in Marin County. Both areas have a very ‘site specific’ character top them, where there can be substantial differences in warmth depending upon sun and wind exposure, even with a single vineyard. Some areas of the Petaluma Gap (Tomales, Bloomfield) and Marin (Marshall, Nicasio) are as cold, or even colder than Green Valley (or Freestone, the true Sonoma Coast, Santa Lucia, Santa Maria, and Lompoc). Much of both areas (Chileno Valley, San Antonio Valley, Novato, Pengrove/Cotati, Lakeville) are on par with the Russian River Valley and Carneros areas.”

Paul Clary, owner, grower and winemaker at Clary Ranch in the Petaluma Gap region relates a funny story about the area. Several years ago, he was enrolled in a class in viticulture at Santa Rosa Junior College taught by the esteemed Sonoma County viticulturalist, Rich Thomas. At one class, a guest lecturer proclaimed that “a grape would not ripen west of the Petaluma Firehouse.” He sneered at wines from Carneros. When asked about vineyards in Marin County such as Corda, Stubbs, and Devil’s Gulch, he proclaimed no awareness and no interest. Rich Thomas, on the other hand, felt that the area west of Petaluma was just waiting to be discovered. As we fast-forward a number of years, it is clear that grapes WILL ripen west of the Firehouse and not only ripen, but produce outstanding wines.

Currently there are about 1,000 acres of vineyards planted in the Petaluma Gap. Many of these vineyards are on former chicken or dairy ranches. The Petaluma Gap region is not a separate appellation, but sits within the very large Sonoma Coast appellation. Pinot Noirs from this area are currently labeled as “Sonoma Coast,” but the “Petaluma Gap” designation will probably be added as well in the near future as the area becomes more well-known. Only four wine tasting facilities exist at present (Adobe Road, Corda, Kastania, and Keller Estate), but the area is booming and is estimated that by 2020, there will be at least 10 wine tasting rooms and numerous new producers. As Franc Dusak, winemaker at Adobe Road Wines said, “This area is very similar to the Santa Cruz Mountains where Pinot Noir grows very well and I am sure the Petaluma Gap is a sleeper region that will get much recognition in the years to come.”

Petaluma Gap Grape and Wine Alliance

With the goal of promoting the Petaluma Gap as a microclimate within the Sonoma Coast with its own regional identity, the **Petaluma Gap Grape and Wine Alliance** was formed early last year. This began with a few prominent Petaluman businessmen and winegrowers such as Timo and Frances Rivetti (who farm a 1/2 acre vineyard and produce Que Syra Syrah) and Barry Singer (owner of Barry Singer Gallery in town who makes 6 barrels of wine each year at home) along with Christopher Sawyer and Jason Jenkins (co-owners of Vin & Barrel wine shop in town). The Alliance is now composed of over 20 members and will hold its first group meeting on January 16, 2007. Members range from producers of only a few barrels of wine annually to Keller Estate, which releases 11,000 cases each year. The president of the Alliance is Jeff Maddux (jeff@petalumagap.com) and the Alliance website is www.petalumagap.com.

The current list of notable Pinot Noir Wineries (many are not bonded) and vineyards include the following (starred are featured in subsequent pages). Only those wineries and vineyards producing wine and/or growing grapes commercially are included.

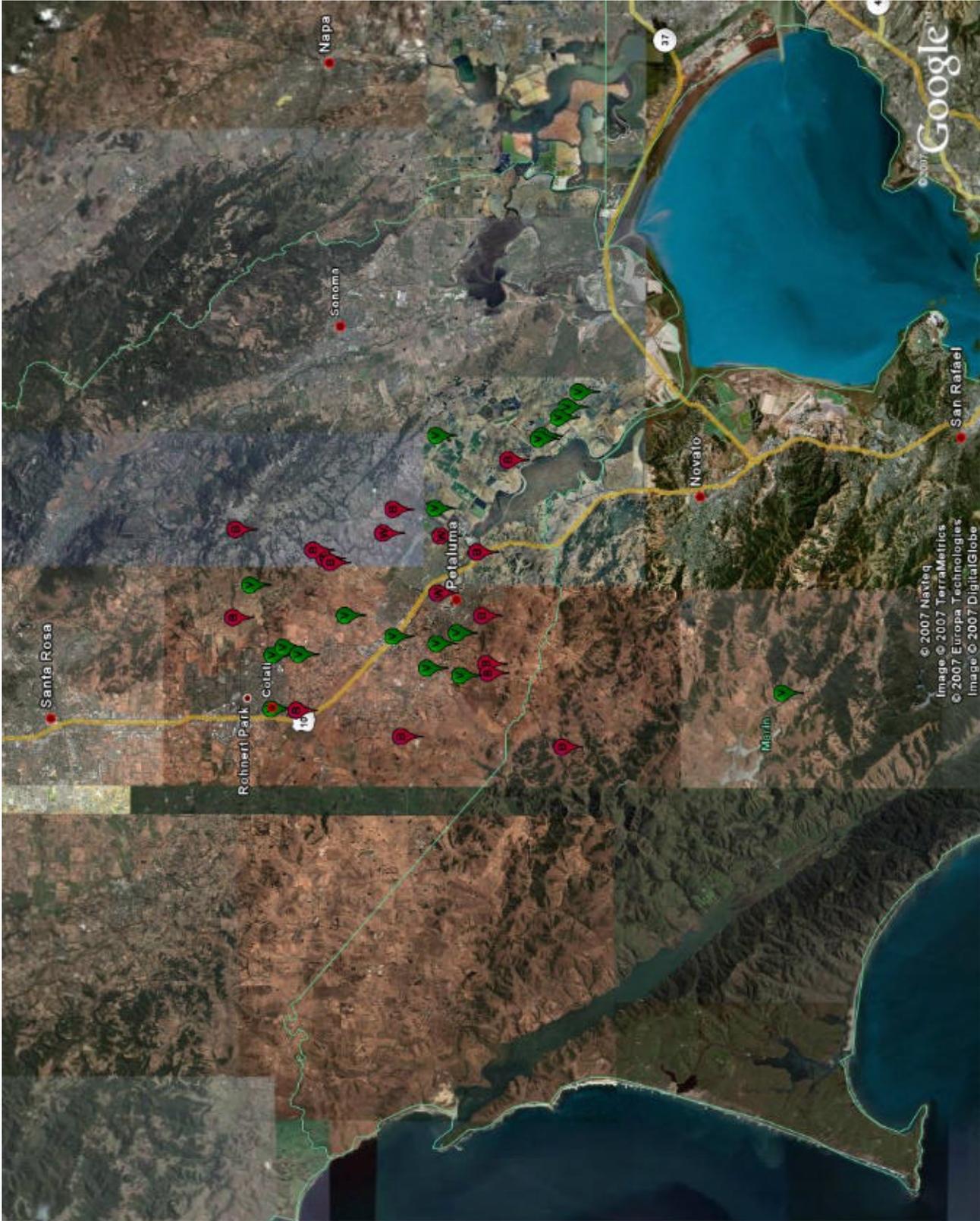
- Adobe Road Winery*** (5,000 cases, multiple varietals)
- Armagh Vineyard** (11 acres Pinot Noir)
- Azari Winery** (5 acres, Pinot Noir and Syrah)
- Bush-Field Estate Vineyards & Winery** (5 acres Pinot Noir)
- Clary Ranch*** (15 acres Pinot Noir and Syrah, 150 cases own label Pinot Noir)
- Cline Cellars**
- Copeland Creek Vineyards*** (15 acres multiple varietals, few hundred cases of Pinot Noir)
- Corda Winery** (35 acres of Pinot Noir and other varietals, 1,500 cases several varietals)
- Corona Creek Vineyards** (10 acres Pinot Noir)
- Devil's Gulch Ranch** (18.5 acres, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer)
- Griffin's Lair Vineyards** (20 acres Pinot Noir and Syrah)
- Herrerias Cellars** (6 acres Pinot Noir)
- Kastania Vineyards*** (5.3 acres of mainly Pinot Noir, few hundred cases of Pinot Noir)
- Keller Estate*** (86 acres of multiple varietals, 11,000 cases of multiple varietals)
- Koos Family Vineyard** (2 acres Pinot Noir)
- Peak Family Vineyards** (.33 acres Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Petite Sirah)
- Ridgeway Family Vineyards*** (8 acres Pinot Noir, 274 cases Pinot Noir)
- Stubbs Vineyard** (11 acres Pinot Noir and Chardonnay)
- Sutton Cellars** (3,500 cases of multiple varietals including Pinot Noir)
- Terra De Promissio Vineyard*** (32 acres Pinot Noir)
- Windy Hill Winery** (36 acres Pinot Noir, 1,500 cases Pinot Noir and Chardonnay).

Partners Jason Jenkins and journalist/sommelier Christopher Sawyer opened the first dedicated wine retail shop, **Vin & Barrel**, in Petaluma in November, 2006. They feature over 2,000 wines in 3,500 feet of cellar space. There is an extensive collection of top wines from Sonoma, Napa and Europe, but the wines of the Petaluma area are featured. Local winemakers visit frequently to conduct tastings and all of the Pinot Noirs from the region are for sale. The store is located downtown at 143 Kentucky St. The website is www.vinandbarrel.com.

I tasted through a number of Pinot Noirs from the Petaluma Gap and was very impressed by every one of the wines. The quality is consistently high with generous sweet fruit flavors, silky textures, and lively acid profiles that bode well for the dinner table. This area will not be a sleeper for long.

Jeff Maddux provided me with the maps on the following pages showing the location of the wineries and vineyards around Petaluma. "V" = Vineyard, "W" = Winery, and "B" = both Vineyard & Winery.





The exact boundaries for inclusion of members of the Petaluma Gap Grape and Wine Alliance have not been determined. Some of Marin County vineyards definitely fall within the Petaluma Gap (Corda, Stubbs, Kendric) and probably also McEvoy, Chalone, and Devil's Gulch Ranch. The Gap Alliance will be like Carneros in that it straddles two counties.

Mark Pasternak tells me there is MUCH interest in the area by winemakers. Jamie Kutch, Pax Mahle, Dave Vergari, and Thomas Fogerty are a few of the "new hounds in the race."

In the following pages I have highlighted a few of the wineries I recently visited and/or of particular interest. I have included tasting notes of recent releases.

Adobe Road Winery

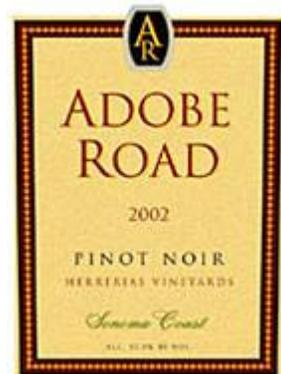
Owners Kevin and Debra Buckler wear many hats. He and his wife, Debra, are owners of Adobe Road Winery, he is a renowned sports car racer, and together they run one of racing sport's most successful businesses, The Racer's Group (TRG). Kevin founded TRG in 1993 and by 2003, he had won every major endurance race in the world in the GT class including the Rolex 24 at Daytona, the 24 Hours of Le Mans, and the 24 Hours of Daytona. TRG also manufactures racing parts and takes aspiring drivers and racing enthusiasts to major racing tracks for experience.



For what is now a familiar story for winemakers, Kevin started making wine in his garage. His early efforts were admired by friends, and together with Petaluman winegrower Ron Herrerias, started the Adobe Road label. Commercial success was quick to follow with the 2002 Adobe Road Winery Herrerias Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir taking a Gold Medal and "Best of Class" at the 2004 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. Kevin and Debra Buckler are now the sole owners of the winery and Ron Herrerias bottles his own Pinot Noir from his vineyard in the Petaluma Gap. A number of varietals are produced from select vineyards in Sonoma County. The current winemaker is Franc Dusak.

2004 Adobe Road Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 246 cases, \$35. Winemaking here is traditional for California Pinot Noir. Aging was carried out for 19 months in 50% new French oak. This wine is one fine cherry bomb. Scrumptious ripe cherries in the nose and on the palate with a hint of spice and herbs. Light to medium in body and elegant in style, this Pinot finishes with a lively kick of acidity and a lingering note of sweet oak. Hi-octane.

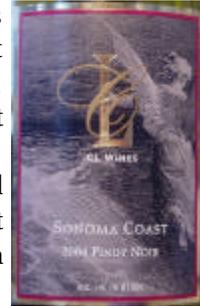
Adobe Road Winery tasting room is open by appointment (707-939-7967). This has to be one of the only tasting rooms in the world where you can sip Pinot while gazing on the world's fastest Porsche racing machines. Adobe Road wines are available on the website at www.adoberoadwines.com and have some retail distribution. Sign up for the Adobe Road Newsletter as well as the Inside Track Wine Club on the website. The winery's other varietals, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah (Double Gold at Sonoma Harvest Fair), Zinfandel, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, and Sauvignon Blanc are also stellar. The winery is located at 1995 S McDowell Blvd. Extension, Petaluma.



Armagh Vineyard

Armagh ('ar-ma') Vineyard is an 11 acre site in the Petaluma Gap consisting of 6 acres of Pinot Noir, 4 acres of Chardonnay, and 1 acre of Syrah. The vineyard is owned by Jim and Gayle Crayne and is named after County Armagh in Ireland, the home of the owner's ancestors. The family has farmed the Sonoma Coast region since 1894. The Pinot Noir grapes are sold to Savannah-Chanelle and CL Wines, both of which produce a Armagh Vineyard- designate wine.

CL Wines Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$21. CL (Cravin and Lattin) Wines are crafted by David Lattin, former winemaker at Acacia. Three single-vineyard Pinot Noirs are produced: Armagh, Doucette, and Griffin's Lair. The Sonoma Coast bottling, tasted here, is a blend from the single-vineyard selections. The Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir is a very popular by-the-glass pour at many top Northern California restaurants. This is a perfectly fine Pinot Noir. It leads off with aromas of fresh crushed cherries and carries the cherries theme to the finish. There is a touch of heat on the nose but it is not intrusive. The texture is soft and the finish clean. Like sharing a cherry float with a cheerleader in a fuzzy red sweater.



The CL Wines are not easy to find. Root's Cellar in Healdsburg carries the wines regularly (866-808-0124, www.rootscellar.com).

Clary Ranch

Paul Clary's agricultural background is in walnuts, but he has been able to transition to grape growing and winemaking quite nicely, albeit with a number of struggles. He grew up helping his grandparents farm their walnut orchard in El Dorado County. While attending U.C. Davis, he majored in Biological Sciences, with an emphasis in Botany. He never actually ventured into viticulture or enology classes while there. In later years, when he decided to embark on his winegrowing adventure, he figured a vineyard is something of an orchard in miniature, so he felt it was a natural choice for him.

He purchased an old dairy ranch in the "Sonomarin" area, at the headwaters to Chileno Creek about 11 miles east of Tomales Bay, and began the job of restoring the land. It had been abandoned for 25 years, the barns were dilapidated, the farmhouse was a "bulldozed pile of rotting lumber," and beef cattle grazed freely over the spent pasture. Paul says he can date the time that the ranch was last a going concern by the discovery of a pull-tab soda can embedded in the dried accumulation of manure that filled the feed troughs in the largest of the dairy barns. It had been a long time since the troughs were filled with hay. He rebuilt the barns, installed an old mobile home scrounged from Dry Creek Valley, fenced the ranch, and began to prepare for planting.

He decided to plant Pinot Noir and Syrah with the advice of his cousin, Mark Bailey, who has been a vineyard manager in Sonoma County since the early 1970s. He figured that the Syrah was the riskier grape of the two, but worth exploring in the cool climate. Pinot Noir had a built-in "Plan B" by virtue of being suitable for sparkling wine if it didn't ripen sufficiently. As Paul put it, "I plowed ahead with more enthusiasm than cautious good sense." He had many doubts including whether he would be successful growing grapes in this cool climate, and if he was, would anyone buy such an unknown quantity?

The topsoil was from 2 to 6+ feet deep and was very slightly acidic. He spread lime, rock phosphorus, potash, and a generous helping of compost, which was ripped to a depth of 4 feet by a D8 Cat. Green bench grafts were obtained. A tall VSP trellis was chosen which gave the option of training to a Scott-Henry system if vigor warranted it. He put the guide wire 42 inches off the ground to minimize stoop labor. A total of 15 acres were planted.

Following his plantings, he enrolled in a U.C. Davis winemaking extension course and was on his way. He offered his initial wines to potential buyers to taste, but poured them nervously, asking the buyers to “look past novice winemaking errors and try to taste the grapes.” Fortunately he found buyers for the grapes. He entered his wines into the Sonoma County Harvest Fair and his Pinot Noir won a Silver Medal and the Syrah a Gold and was in contention for Best Red Wine!

A number of years passed and Paul continued to sell the bulk of his grapes, making a small amount of garage wine. He suffered through a divorce, but managed to keep his four kids on track. By the end of the 2004 growing season, he had more grapes than buyers and decided to make a commercial Pinot Noir. He crafted the wine at Topolos Winery in Forestville. This was a true hands-on effort as he had little help available. He bottled the wine in a pouring rain after 14 months in 50% new French oak. The 2004 Clary Ranch Grower’s Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir was finally released in August of 2006. I tasted it at Pinot Days in San Francisco in June of last year and was impressed. So was the *Wine Spectator*, which awarded it a 91 score. Call it beginner’s luck if you will, but the fact is Paul had nurtured a vineyard for years in what turned out to be an ideal location for Pinot Noir, and the resulting high quality of grapes gave him the raw material for success.



2004 Clary Ranch Grower’s Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., 150 cases, \$50. This Pinot is made in the full-bodied style so popular in California. I tasted the wine briefly at the recent Pinot Days Festival. The winemaker’s notes are probably most helpful: Aromatic, complex, and intense, with a luscious long-lasting finish. Dark and concentrated, yet well-balanced, with good acidity and a healthy tannic backbone.

Clary Ranch Pinot Noir and Syrah can be purchased on the website at www.claryranch.com or by phoning Paul at 707-773-3884. The wines are also placed in a number of top Bay Area restaurants. The ranch is located at 3641 Middle Two Rock Rd., Petaluma, CA 94952.

Copeland Creek Vineyards

Most of the regular readers of the *PinotFile* know that I am a fan of Don Baumhefner’s beautifully made Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs and they have made my annual North American All-American list two years in a row. Details about Don and his wines have been presented in several past issues.

2004 Copeland Creek Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$30. A medium-bodied Pinot Noir of great breeding. Cherries, plums, nutmeg, cinnamon and sweet oak aromas draw you in. Red fruits dance on the palate and that telltale spicy cherry finish that Copeland Creek is known for lingers forever. A beautifully balanced wine of great complexity and elegance. Pick any superlative you wish.

Copeland Creek Vineyards is located at 765 Baywood, Suite 147, Petaluma, CA 94954. Wines may be ordered by phone at 707-765-5750, or online at www.copelandcreekvineyards.com. The 2003 vintage is equally good and still available. The prices are ridiculously cheap for the quality and Don even gives a 10% discount for orders of 6 bottles or more. He also makes an excellent lower-alcohol Chardonnay and Meritage.



Kastania Vineyards

What a pleasure it was to visit owners Hoot and Linda Smith at their new winery at Kastania Vineyard. They are very gracious and warm wine enthusiasts who have launched their own label Pinot Noir for the 2005 vintage. The vineyard is on land owned by the Smith family since the 1860s. Originally it was a very large ranch extending east of the Petaluma River, but was gradually sold off. The plot that remains is quite beautiful, studded with majestic oak trees that are a few hundred years old (see below) and overlooking the eastern portion of the Petaluma Gap. The vineyard sits on a knoll adjacent to Hwy 101 (you have probably driven by it without knowing many times). The picture below shows the view out the back doors of the winery overlooking the Kastania Vineyard, with the Petaluma River in the far distance.



Hoot is an auto and diesel electric expert who operates his own business on the property adjacent to his home. His wife of many years (I forgot the exact number but it was quite a few), told me she collected owls before she met her husband, and “ended up marrying a “hoot.” The owl takes a prominent place on the winery’s label. The couple are pictured below in their attractive tasting room.

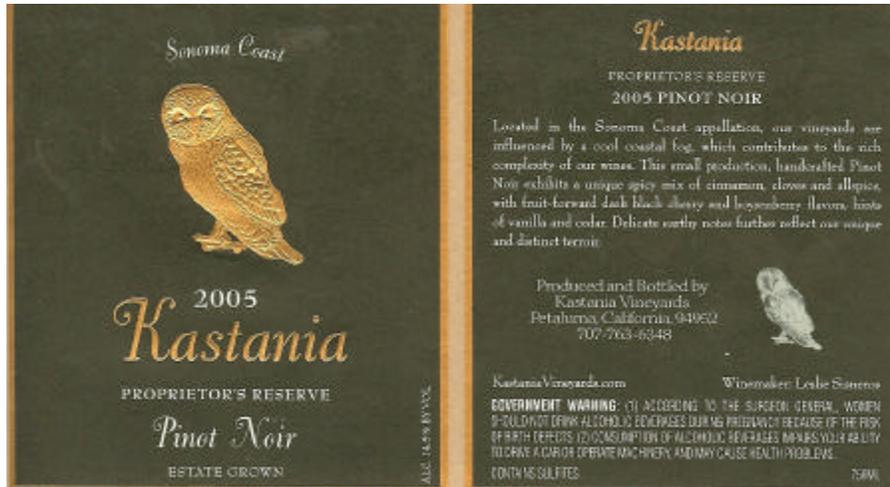


Hoot planted his 5+ acre vineyard in 1995 primarily to Pinot Noir with Pommard 4, 667, 115 and Calera clones. The Calera clone has never performed well here and he is replacing it with a Rochioli Vineyard selection. For 8 years, Kastania supplied grapes for a vineyard-designate Pinot Noir made by Landmark Vineyards in Kenwood. Beginning with the 2005 vintage, he is keeping the grapes for his own label Pinot Noirs. The winemaker is Leslie Cisneros.

I asked about the name “Kastania” and it turns out the word means “chestnut” in Italian. It just didn’t seem right to name the winery “Smith” Hoot told me.

The new winery is nicely sized and very clean and compact (see below). We tasted through some barrel samples of individual clones (Pommard, 667, and 115) which is always interesting. I sampled the two 2005 Kastania Vineyard Pinot Noirs both at the tasting bar and at home after the visit.





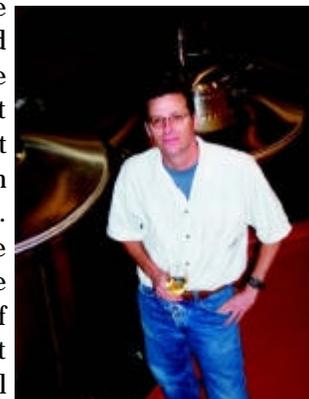
2005 Kastania Vineyards Sonoma Coast Estate Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., not yet released-possibly February, 2007. The wine is still a bit closed and youthful. The perfume offers cranberries, raspberries, and strawberries with a skosh of alcohol. The same fruits are featured in the flavors. The texture is very silky and the finish is lively. Great potential here.

2005 Kastania Vineyards Sonoma Coast Estate Proprietor's Reserve Pinot Noir 14.5% alc. early 2007 release. More plush, more power, more Pinot than the above wine. Give it 6-12 months and it will launch you toward heaven. The wine has a sweet scented nose of decadent warm spiced cherry pie. Waves of spicy, tenacious red and black fruits cascade on the palate with a richness of flavors that shows off California's flashy potential. The texture is cozy and velvety. You'll want to chew on this one.

Kastania Vineyards is located at 4415 Kastania Road, Petaluma, CA 94952. The winery's tasting room is open by appointment (707-763-6348). The wines will be available directly from the winery when released. The website is www.kastaniavineyards.com. I recommend cellaring the two Pinot Noirs for at least 6 months before diving in.

Keller Estate

Arturo Keller's interest in wine began modestly, with him making wine originally for just his friends and family. His continued passion for wine led him to purchase 500 acres in the southeast corner of Sonoma County on the eastern edge of the Petaluma Gap. With the assistance of noted viticulturalist and winemaker Ted Lemon, 86 acres of vines were planted with 9 different clones of Pinot Noir, 4 clones of Chardonnay, and 2 clones of Syrah. Lemon helped with the selection of plant material and the layout of the vineyards. The location of the La Cruz Vineyard is 20 miles from the Pacific Coast, but the fog reaches the vineyard on many days. A modern winery was built under the direction of well-known architects Victor and Ricardo Legorreta. The walls of the winery are crafted from ancient limestone from the 3 Gorges Dam project in China. The first vintage was 2003. Current winemaker is Michael McNeill whose experience includes stints at Chalone, Sylvian Ridge in Oregon, and Savannah-Channelle in the Santa Cruz Mountains.



2004 Keller Estate La Cruz Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$30. This Pinot Noir is darn near perfect. The nose is sweet-scented with violets, crushed cherries and a hint of oak. It is soft as a down pillow and the flavors deliver the whole Pinot experience. Nicely balanced. Maybe the mid palate and finish could have more oomph, but this is being picky. This Pinot was especially good with grilled King salmon with green goddess sauce.



Keller Estate is located at 5875 Lakeville Hwy. Special tours, barrel tastings, and events can be arranged by phoning the winery at 707-765-2117. The wines can be purchased on the website at www.kellerestate.com. They also enjoy fairly wide retail distribution. I have been told that there is also an extensive collection of vintage cars at the Estate.

Ridgeway Family Vineyards

Mike and Teela Ridgeway have really exploded onto the Petaluma Gap Pinot scene with their first release. Teela is a vivacious and energetic women who, along with her two dogs, gave me a tour of the beautifully situated vineyard in the Petaluma Hills just west of town. Teela is a third generation Petaluman. When she met Mike 7 years ago, he was commuting to San Francisco to his chiropractic practice while farming a vineyard on Sonoma Mountain Road near Bennett Valley. Mike had been growing red varietals, primarily Merlot, there for nearly 20 years, and he knew that the Petaluma Gap was a perfect area to grow Pinot Noir. The two of them searched the area for an appropriate property and found an ideal 20 acre estate for their vineyard.

With the assistance of Mark Pasternak they planted Dijon clones 557, 777, 828, and Pommard clone on 8 acres in the rolling hills west of the property's home in 2001 (see photo). Even with Mike's grape-growing experience, the task presented several challenges. After they moved into the house on the property, they discovered that the well could not provide enough water to irrigate the just-planted vines. They had to move out of the house so as not to utilize any water in their residence, and had to drill a new well. Gophers have been omnipresent and Teela showed me deer tracks in the vineyard that indicated deer had leaped the 5 foot fence enclosure around the vineyard.



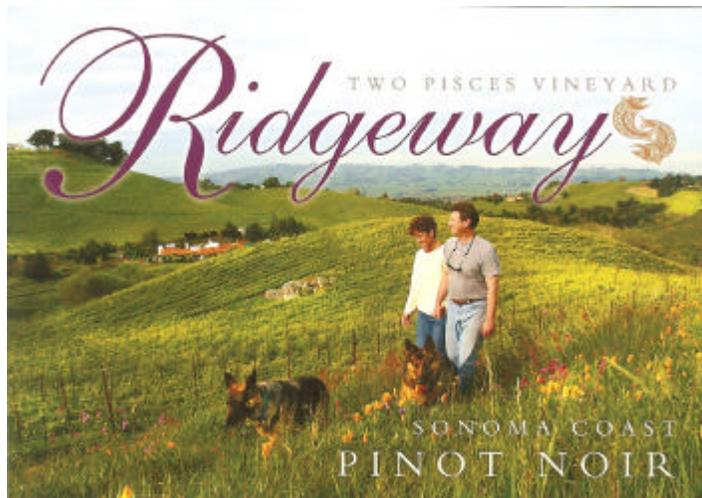
Besides handling the marketing and sales chores for their new venture, Teela has planted olive trees on the property as well and plans to make olive oil for fun. Nearby McEvoy Ranch has a milling facility where the olives can be milled for oil. The small number of trees would probably never make the undertaking profitable, but this is her pet project and she takes great pride in her work.

The Ridgeways were fortunate to team with talented winemaker, Dan Goldfield (Dutton-Goldfield Winery), who made the wine at the Dutton-Goldfield facility in Santa Rosa. The inaugural 2004 vintage comes from the first grapes harvested at the vineyard. This initial 2004 release has received a warm reception, several restaurants have placed the wine on their lists, and the renowned Cyrus Restaurant (Michelin 2 star) in Healdsburg, has been pouring the wine by the glass and going through three cases every two weeks! Coincident with the release of their first Pinot Noir, Mike and Teela were married in June, 2006. Both Pisces, they naturally named their vineyard, "Two Pisces Vineyard."

Mike likes to say that during the warm summer months, each evening, the grapes are "kissed by the breath of the sea." When I asked him about his quick success, he simply smiled and said, "I know how to grow great grapes." He plans to increase production to around 800 cases in a few years.

2004 Ridgeway Two Pisces Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 295 cases, \$25. The nose offers an alluring attack of red stone fruits and vanilla-tinged oak. Once in the mouth, everything is just about perfect: juicy and vivid with great verve and texture. The finish of spiced red fruits is lengthy and satisfying. The wine was still tasty the next day from an opened bottle. A terrific Pinot with that alluring Pinot delicacy. You're the one that I want.

Ridgeway Family Vineyards is currently selling their wines through a local retail distributor. You can buy the wine, as I did, from Teela in her garage at 2847 D Street, Petaluma, CA 94952. The phone is 707-778-0447 and the website is www.ridgewayfamilyvineyards.com.



Terra De Promissio Vineyard

This is a 32-acre Pinot Noir vineyard farmed by Charles Karren, his wife, and her mother and father. All are originally from Russia. Currently they are building a barn on the vineyard where they all plan to live. The 2006 harvest was sold to Patz & Hall, Whetstone, Chasseur, and Notre Vin (a small label that is run by the former winemaker of Chateau Latour). Adam Lee of Siduri will release a Terra De Promission vineyard designate Pinot Noir this month.

Other Wines Tasted

2004 Herrerias Herrerias Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13,8% alc., \$24. This is not a terribly complex wine, but is perfectly fine. Cherries are foremost in the nose and flavors. There is a little funk (what I call dirty diaper but in a good way) among the aromas.

2003 Longfellow Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$42. Nice aromatics here with a bit of gaminess, plenty of ripe cherries, and some toast. The fruit is very sweet tasting and the finish is generously oaked. Decent but overpriced for what it is.

2003 Dutton-Goldfield Devil's Gulch Ranch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., \$40. Call this one deep and dark. The robe is a sexy dark ruby in color. The terrific nose shows off deep, dark Pinot fruits with an edgy earthiness. Great purity of fruit that is lightly oaked and great persistence on the back end. Terrific with chicken and prosciutto tortellini soup. I could sip this guilty pleasure all night long.

Petaluma

The origin of the name "Petaluma" is unclear but it probably is a native Miwok Indian term meaning "fiat hack" or mesas or hills within the valley - "Valley of the Little Hills," or "City of Little Hills." At any rate, historians can date the settlement of Native Americans here back 5,000 years. The City of Petaluma was founded in 1852. The city's Petaluma waterway led to its commercial success. At one time, it was one of California's largest cities (1860) and the third busiest inland port in California. The Petaluma River was used extensively to transport miners and gold from Sacramento to San Francisco.

From the 1880s to 1940s Petaluma was a poultry town and was known as the "World's Egg Basket." At one time, the city was home to the world's only chicken pharmacy. The poultry industry brought great wealth to the area, but by the late 1940s, high costs forced consolidation of small chicken farms. Today, dairy farming, agriculture, tourism, and the high tech industry dominate the Petaluma economy. The city occupies about 13 square miles and has a population of 58,000. The city will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2008.

The historic downtown district is packed with antique buildings and stores with over 150 antique dealers in 30 shops. There is a thriving artists community as well. Boaters tie up frequently in the heart of the Historic Downtown district and walk to the large number of shops and restaurants.

This is a great town to explore while visiting the local wineries and vineyards. The most notable lodgings are the Sheraton Sonoma County Petaluma Hotel located at 745 Baywood Drive on the Petaluma River (707-283-2885) and the Best Western Petaluma Inn in town at 200 S McDowell Blvd (800-297-3846). There are over 100 restaurants, many of which are outstanding. Recommended restaurants include: Della Fattoria (141 Petaluma Blvd N, 707-763-0161; noted for their bread, Don Baumhefner's wife, is the chef here), Café Zazzle (121 Kentucky St, 707-762-1700), Sugo (5 Petaluma Blvd S, 707-782-9298), Souze Wine Bar Café (6 Petaluma Blvd N, 707-762-3743), and Three Blocks Off (220 Western Ave, 707-778-8211). Many of the restaurants carry local Petaluma Gap Wines.



Kay Baumhefner of Della Fattoria

Also worth a visit are Spring Hill Jersey Cheese (Petaluma Creamery Bldg at 621 Western Ave), Marin French Cheese Co (7500 Redhill Rd), and McEvoy Ranch (in the western hills of Petaluma, the ranch has 18,000 olive trees organically grown on 80 acres - the largest olive oil company in the US - occasional tours are offered). For further information: visitpetaluma.com.


PrinceofPinot.com

Have a cup of coffee, drink two or three glasses of red wine a day, take a cup of green tea, eat 100 grams of dark chocolate, and be happy!

Pinot Noir: You're The One That I Want

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Of course it would only be fitting that Hoot has an owl box perched in a prominent place overlooking his Kastania Vineyard in Petaluma



Two Famous Burgundians in Provence

I had heard rumors of the partnership, but Paul Root (www.rootscellar.com) sent out a wine offering recently which clarified the situation. It seems that Jacques Seysses of Domaine Dujac and Aubert de Villaine, co-owner of Domaine Romanee de la Romanee Conti, have been looking for property in the south of France for some time. They discovered an old estate in disrepair, "Domaine du Logis-de-Nans," northeast of Marseille and east of Aix-en-Provence. The winery building was in bad shape and the 100+ acre vineyard was neglected. Much of the vineyard was Ugni Blanc and Carignane, not exactly two varietals that would make the hair stand up on the neck of noble Burgundians. The land was rich in limestone and ideal for viticulture.

The estate is named Triennes. The owners have invested a large amount of money in restoring the winery, purchasing state-of-the-art winemaking equipment, and obtaining new Domaine Dujac Burgundy oak barrels. They then embarked on a replanting and regrafting of much of the vineyard, retaining the old-vine Syrah and Viognier.

There are two wines currently offered: the "Sainte Auguste," a Syrah, Cabernet, and Merlot blend and the "Sainte Fleur," a 100% Viognier wine. You can buy a case (\$175) now for less than \$15 a bottle and that seems ridiculous given the pedigree of the owners. You can buy the wine now through Paul's website.

By the way, I do not own or have any financial interest in Roots Cellar. All I know is that Paul gets all the good stuff, tastes a lot of great wine, writes an irreverent and funny newsletter, and sells wine at a good price. He loves wine, but doesn't take it too seriously. I probably wouldn't mind being him when I grow up.