

**Pinot Noir
Tastes Like
Itself**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Picking Plump Pinot in Petaluma

Chris and Karen London farm 20 acres of Pinot Noir in the Chileno Valley west of the town of Petaluma on a south-facing hillside that is cool and windy. Near the Marin County - Sonoma County border, the area is uniquely influenced by fog from the Pacific Ocean which reaches inland for miles through the Petaluma Gap. The resulting hang time is prolonged with picking this year on September 27 and 29, a few weeks behind the warmer neighboring Russian River Valley vineyards.



“There is truly nothing as luscious as the full ripe flavor of Pinot Noir grapes at picking time. The taste of the grapes was so rich, I had to take a breath after my first bite to give time to process the explosion in my mouth.”

... Ross Halleck, Halleck Vineyard

Chris is a Captain for United Airlines, flying the Airbus out of San Francisco. Karen was a former hostess for United Airlines. They both became interested in agricultural pursuits and in 1999 purchased their property on Western Road in Petaluma (above). Chris was a friend of noted Sonoma viticulturist Warren Dutton. The two had flown together frequently and Chris was in the process of assisting Warren in obtaining his instrument rating when Warren suddenly passed away from a heart

attack while riding his horse in 2001. Warren had planted his first parcel and started the famed Dutton Ranch in 1964. He was a visionary in Sonoma County agriculture and one of the first to plant Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in western Sonoma County. At the time of his passing, the Dutton Ranch owned or leased over 1,000 acres of vineyards.

Both Chris and Karen have attended classes in viticulture at University of California Davis and Santa Rosa Junior College. They are among the new generation of younger winegrowers. They had been advised to grow field crops and potatoes on their property and discouraged to farm grapes because of the coolness of the site. Warren Dutton thought otherwise and provided the Londons with valuable direction as they planted their vineyard over three years from 2000 to 2002. Much of the budwood came from the famed Bien Nacido Vineyard and clones 2A, Pommard 5, Swan, Calera, 114, 667 and 777 were chosen. The vines are planted on well-drained silty clay soils with considerable underlying fossil decomposition. The cool, windy conditions are challenging, requiring extra care and attention and every vine is personally tended throughout the season. The vines tend to be small, the clusters ripen slowly, and the skins tend to be thick, imparting dark color to the finished Pinot Noir wines.



The Londons have a modern barn on the property and all of the equipment required to be self-contained. Chris has designed and modified several types of heavy duty farming equipment including a sprayer, all of which are quite innovative and practical.

In addition to their vineyard, the Londons raise livestock on their property. They have the only two Kobe beef cattle in Northern California and Chris recently purchased more. He plans to cross breed the Kobe cattle with the Scottish Highlander breed he also raises to produce prime beef. The cattle are treated very humanely and are fed a special diet high in grain residue picked up weekly from a neighboring brewery. (In the United States the term Wagyu beef is often used synonymously with Kobe beef. The truth is that real Kobe beef can only come from Kobe, Japan - just like Champagne can only come from France. The American equivalent - Wagyu breeds - need only have one parentage of genetically pure Kobe heritage.)



Scottish Highlander



Kobe calf (foreground)

The 2007 vintage was the third at Spring Hill Vineyard. The grapes were sold to Flowers Vineyard & Winery in Cazadera on the Sonoma Coast (destined for their Sonoma Coast bottling), and Nickel & Nickel in Napa Valley (to be bottled as a vineyard designate). Next year, the Flowers allocation will be sent to Landmark, Patz & Hall, and Scherrer. An additional 5 acres is being planted for Jamie Kutch of Kutch Wines.

I was invited to lend a hand at harvest and headed north to join in the celebratory event. There is something very therapeutic about sticking your hands in bins of grapes, sampling the harvest and really getting down and dirty. The Londons make quite a team. Chris runs the forklift, loads the bins on trucks, and supervises the whole operation. Karen, who is really the chief tractor butt, drives the Polaris like a Nascar professional, shouting orders and leading the charges of pickers and directing the field grape sorters like myself. It was nine hours with few breaks, but I never enjoyed work more. I would encourage any reader with an interest in wine to try and participate in some way in harvest. Every vineyard and winery welcomes the help and a good time is had by all. The photos that follow will give you some idea of the day's action.



6:00 AM



Feeling no pain



Chris



Karen



Winery Dog Likes Shotgun



Picker



Tractor Crew



Pinot in Heat



Off to Cazadero

2005 Nickels & Nickels Spring Hill Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 321 cases, \$55. Nickel & Nickel is the sister winery to Far Niente founded in 1997 and dedicated to single-vineyard wines including Chardonnay, Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah Zinfandel and Pinot Noir (over 24 finished wines!). They are expanding their Pinot Noir program and recently purchased the Amber Ridge Vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Darice Spinelli is the winemaker and Aaron Fishleder the viticulturist. The wine was aged 10 months in French oak (40% new, 60% once-used), *The color is dark, dark, dark ruby. The complex nose offers a dried flower potpourri, black cherry, oak and cigar box. Powered by a healthy core of dark fruits, this unique wine offers mushroom, game, forest floor and herbal overtones, It is broad-shouldered, but soft in the mouth with well-concealed tannins. Atypical for Pinot Noir, it will appeal to those who like the muscular and exotic expression of this varietal.*

Nickel & Nickel Winery, Oakville, CA. 707-967-9600. The wine may be ordered on the website at www.nickelandnickel.com.



Prince Meets Namesake Equine

Recently I traveled to Hidden Springs Ranch just outside of Prescott, Arizona to visit my namesake thoroughbred horse, "Prince of Pinot." A good friend of mine, John Maggiano, has taken a financial interest in several thoroughbred race horses over the years. Most of these horses have finished last or next to last in races. Undaunted and willing to burn some money, he has recently invested in a horse with great promise. The name was chosen from three submitted to the jockey. When you think about it, the name makes since as great Pinot Noirs are often referred to as thoroughbreds.

The horse is now 9 months old and the day after I visited was to begin "school" to learn how to race. Hopefully he will race within 4-6 months on a track in Southern California where I can go and root him home. The trainer says the horse is feisty and has quite an attitude, both attributes that indicate a competitive streak. He will take a little longer than most to train.

I brought an apple to give him, but he wouldn't take it. I might have known he would prefer grapes.



Pellegrini Olivet Lane Heritage Pinot Noir

Bob Pellegrini is one of the wine patriarchs of the Russian River Valley. He has been involved with wine in one way or another his entire life and he can weave many fascinating tales about the wine business both during and after Prohibition. The Pellegrini Family traces its wine business heritage to the early 1900s when brother Nello and Gino Pellegrini immigrated to New York City from their native Tuscany. They soon traveled to California and began shipping Sonoma County grapes throughout the United States for home wine-making. They also supplied the many Italian San Franciscans who made wine in their basement both before and during Prohibition. After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, they started the Pellegrini Wine Company, shipping grapes from Sonoma County and making wines for San Francisco's best restaurants. Later the family moved into wholesale distribution of imported and domestic wines.



In 1973, Nello's son, Vincent, purchased a 70-acre apple and plum orchard on West Olivet Road in Santa Rosa. Vincent's son, Bob, was fresh out of school and had just returned from a tour of Burgundy when he had the idea (crazy at the time) to plant Pinot Noir on the property. In the early 1970s, Pinot Noir vineyards were far and few between in Sonoma County (Joe Rochioli first planted his East Block Pinot Noir in 1968). In 1975, Bob planted the Olivet Lane Vineyard to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (Martini clones) with the only cuttings available at the time. Fortunately, the family had a wine import business which kept them afloat as the winegrowing business developed. Bob says today he was just naïve enough at the time to think it would work, but if he knew then what he knows today, he would never have done it. The Olivet Lane Vineyard continues to thrive on rootstock vulnerable to phylloxera and has now seen 32 vintages. It is one of California's cherished heritage Pinot Noir vineyards. Bob is pictured left. Note the large trunk size of the old vines.



Vincent Pellegrini died in 1989, and remaining family members Robert, Richard and Jeanne took over management of the wine business with the aim of focusing on premium estate-bottled artisan wines. Besides farming the Olivet Lane Vineyard, the family had acquired the 55-acre Cloverdale Ranch in the Alexander Valley allowing them to produce a whole range of varietal wines. In 2001, a state-of-the-art Tuscan style winery was built on the Olivet Lane Estate. In 2003, the family purchased a 12-acre vineyard of old-clone Zinfandel alongside the Olivet Lane Estate. A top winemaking team was assembled headed by talented Kevin Hamel. The wines have steadily improved and numerous awards have been forthcoming.



You must avail yourself of Olivet Lane Estate Pinot Noir. There are only a few other heritage vineyards in the Russian River Valley including J. Rochioli East and West Block and the Bacigalupi Vineyard, both on Westside Road, and the Trenton Estate Vineyard at Joseph Swan.

2005 Pellegrini Olivet Lane Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$30, sold out. *Pretty flashy, with aromas of earth, leather and spiced black cherries. Styled with finesse over fruit heaviness and great verve. So juicy and tasty you will want to “nibble” at it.*

2006 Pellegrini Olivet Lane Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$35. 10% whole clusters placed with remainder of the destemmed fruit and lightly crushed. After a 3 day cold maceration, the vats were inoculated with a selected strain of yeast. Fermentation lasted 12 days with traditional hand punch downs. Aged 11 months in a combination of French and Eastern European oak, 33% new. *Sensuous aromatics featuring Bing cherry, anise, toast and strawberry. The core of red fruits is tasty and forward but elegant in presentation. The wine is supple in the mouth with pleasing persistence and has a refreshing acid lift on the finish. Impeccable balance. Ready to drink now, it will remain a really lovely wine over time. With a comfortable price point, this is one to buy by the case.*



Pellegrini Family Wines is located at 4035 West Olivet Road in Santa Rosa. The tasting room is warm and inviting and the staff is very friendly. Located in the winery, it is open daily from 10:30 to 4:30. Tours are by appointment and highly recommended if Bob or Kevin are available. 1-800-891-0244. Wines may be ordered on the website at www.pellegrinisonoma.com. There is good retail distribution.

De La Montanya Sweeps

I wrote about De La Montanya Vineyards & Winery recently (*PinotFile*, Volume 6, Issue 39). Proprietor and winegrower Dennis De La Montanya (pictured right with his wife) is a relative newcomer to the Russian River Valley but his family has farmed grapes for several generations. His **2005 Christine's Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** won the coveted Sweepstakes Award for red wine at this year's annual Sonoma Harvest Fair.



Last Saturday night, the awards ceremony, Sonoma's equivalent of the Academy Awards, was held with 2,000 people attending. The wine competition began in 1975 with 59 entries and the 2007 version attracted over 1,000 wines all made from Sonoma County grapes. Judging was done by 25 professionals including several international experts. The Pinot Noir winners:

Sweepstakes

2005 De La Montanya Christine's Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 241 cases, \$40.

Best of Class

Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards Sonoma County Blanc de Noirs, \$20

2005 MacMurray Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, \$24

Double Gold

2005 Paradise Ridge Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, \$35

Gold Medal

2005 Armida Winery Bacigalupi Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$39

2005 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$40

2005 Everett Ridge Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$40

2004 Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards Rust Rock Terrace Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir, \$40

2004 Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards Sonoma County Brut Rose, \$42

2005 Hartford Court Winery Lands Edge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, \$45

2006 Mayo Family Winery The Barnstormer Sonoma County Pinot Noir, \$30

2005 Moshin Vineyards Estate Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$55

2006 Paradise Ridge Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$35

2006 Rodney Strong Vineyards Estate Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$22

2004 Rodney Strong Vineyards Jane's Vineyard Reserve Russian River Valley, \$35

2004 & 2005 Sapphire Hill Vineyard Sapphire Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$40

2005 Willowbrook Cellars Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$34

2005 Willowbrook Cellars Kastania Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, \$48

2005 Willowbrook Cellars Morelli Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, \$42

De La Montanya Pinot Noirs may be ordered by calling 707-433-3711 (2 bottle limit on Christine's). The website is www.dlmwine.com.

Pinot Briefs

Dutton-Goldfield After a four year hiatus, Dutton-Goldfield is releasing a Freestone Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. This is a vineyard that requires perfect October weather to ripen and when it does reach maturity, the result is lively blue and black fruit, alluring baking spice, and all of the depth that coastal Pinot Noir can provide. Dan Berger declared it "Exceptional" in his newsletter and in a future issue of the *Wine Enthusiast* it will receive a score of 96. Only 361 cases, \$58. Can be ordered online at www.duttongoldfield.com. 707-823-3887.

Varietal Wine Grape Juice First Blush is an exclusive offering through Whole Foods Markets. The four juices include Cabernet, Merlot, Chardonnay and a Zinfandel rosé (no Pinot Noir so far). Aris Janigian, part of a grape growing family in the San Joaquin Valley of California is the co-founder of the First Blush juices along with Victoria Briggs. The juice is made from grape concentrate, not pressed juice. Cost for 16 oz is \$4. Sugar content is 16%+. Although the marketing material emphasizes the health benefits of the antioxidants in the juice, grape juice without alcohol does not confer the same health benefits as wine. www.firstblushjuice.com.

25th Anniversary of Wine Touring in Willamette Valley

November 23-25, 2007 marks the 25th annual Wine Country Thanksgiving in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Many small, family-owned wineries are only open to the public Thanksgiving and Memorial Day weekends. Each winery organizes their own events ranging from tours, to sampling new releases and library wines, to artisan food tastes, art displays and live music. More than 120 wineries will welcome visitors Thanksgiving weekend. Looking back to the first Wine country Thanksgiving, there were only 9 wineries: Adelsheim, Amity, Arterberry, Chateau Benoit (now Anne Amie), Elk Cove, Erath, Eyrie, Hidden Springs, and Sokol Blosser. For a complete listing of wineries open during Thanksgiving weekend, visit the Willamette Valley Wineries Association website, www.willamettewines.com, and request a free touring map and guide. The 2008 Guide to Willamette Valley Wineries includes 167 member wineries and tasting rooms. Besides highlighting Willamette Valley's seven American Viticulture Areas (AVAs), it includes dining, lodging and attractions. For additional travel information, consult www.TravelOregon.com.



Silhouette Wine Glass Now that you have several different types of Riedel stems crowding your cabinet space for your various red and white wines, along comes a novel design that claims to do the work for all of them. A notched wine glass, Silhouette, is a handcrafted crystal stem that is said to be "the only wine glass in the world that harmonizes the true dimensions of taste." Its notch design allows easy pouring with no dripping and the shape creates a "cyclone effect" that aerates the wine quickly, and allows the drinker to intimately extend the proboscis into the glass to capture the aromas. I have not personally sampled the stemware, but I am leery of the hype. They are priced at \$54 each at www.greatestwineglass.com.



A Moveable Thirst Two people chronicle their travels throughout the Napa Valley visiting every tasting room that allow visitors in the Valley (141 to be exact). Rick Kushman, who wrote the book, is a television columnist for the Sacramento Bee, and his companion was Hank Beal, wine buyer for Nugget Market. This is an excellent guide of wineries to visit sprinkled with many humorous anecdotes about tasting room experiences, many of which we can all relate to.

