

PinotFile[©]

Pontificating About Wine

When we are asked to comment on a particular bottle of wine, we often go into a disquisition, releasing ourselves of everything we know or think we know about the wine. It should be as easy as saying whether it is good or bad— and to what degree. I remember, for example, being at a private tasting years ago where the participants droned on and on about the wines in question. It was wine whining at its best. Anyway, later in the evening a friend of one of the group's members who was well-respected in the wine community stopped by on another matter. He was thrust a glass of mystery wine over which many in the group had gushed at length. Several people asked, "What do you think of that?" The surprised taster swirled the glass beneath his nose, nodded a few times, and then raised the wine toward his lips, drawing a small amount over his tongue while making a slight slurping noise. Once again he nodded. The tasting group edged forward in their seats, hushed in expectation. "Well," asked one of the group, "What do you think?" Their was still silence. Finally the taster said, "This wine, this wine is... .GOOD," whereupon he set the glass down and left the room. The group was stunned— stunned because he was right and stunned because he had managed to say in one word what had taken them paragraphs. The wine was GOOD. The moral of all this is that with wine-tasting, like anything else, the simplified approach is the best.

"Fine" Wine

While on the subject of wine whining, a few comments about the word "fine" are in order. Fine is an all-embracing expression of superior quality. It is probably the most overworked adjective in winespeak. A "fine" wine is a wine someone, especially someone important in the wine world, thinks is fine. Fine is also a process as in "to fine," which is a way of removing particulate matter from wine. Finally, there is also what your date or spouse says to you when you ask him/her if they like the wine. If they say, "It's fine," you know it's all over. A different segment of abusers of the English language have turned what was once a word indicating superior quality and turned it into "acceptable" or simply "OK."

**Great Pinot
Noir Inspires
One To Create
New Sins..And
Wish To
Commit Them!**

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Top scoring US Pinots in Wine Spectator over last 20 yrs:

Marcassin Sonoma Coast Marcassin Vineyard Pinot Noir 1998 (96) and 1996 (96), and Rochioli West Block Reserve 1994 (96).

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King Estate Pinot Noir

The vineyards of King Estate, in Oregon's Willamette Valley, recently received Oregon Tilth Certified Organic recognition. So did their nursery, Lorane Grapevines, that produces premium grafted grapevines that have established vineyards throughout the USA. Their Domaine Pinot Noir, which is from Estate grown vineyards started by Lorane Grapevine stock, is a leading example of the Estate's dedication to sustainable vineyard and winemaking practices.

The **King Estate 2000 Domaine Pinot Noir** recently won Best of Show at the 2003 Oregon State Fair Professional Wine Awards. There were 61 wineries participating, with 7 Gold Medals awarded (the other Gold Medal Pinot Noir was Kramer Vineyards 2000 Pinot Noir Rebecca's Reserve).

What is the value of large wine competitions? Most serious drinkers seem to rely on two sources...the *Wine Spectator* and Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate*. In both cases, scores are principally the subjective evaluation of one experienced and highly respected taster. Competition tastings have multiple judges, usually including restaurateurs, buyers, brokers, sommeliers, collectors, and consumers all with varying degrees of experience. Many top wineries have built their reputation on years of carefully crafted, image enhancing strategies. They view it as too risky to enter their wines in major competitions where they might receive a bronze or even a silver medal that could be a kiss of death. However, for those wineries that cannot afford or prefer not to develop expensive image-building programs, winning medals in major wine competitions has proven to be good exposure and a good marketing tool.

Burt Williams Resurfaces

Burt Williams, along with Ed Selyem, put the Russian River Valley on the map as far as the place for California Pinot Noir. Burt Williams became a legend in the early 90's by crafting compelling Pinot Noirs from separate vineyards such as Rochioli, Allen, Olivet Lane, Hirsch, Summa, Ferrington, and Riverblock, and proving that *terroir* did exist in California.

Williams, now 63, resides in a cabin in Forestville, California. He still loves Pinot Noir and wouldn't trade a bottle of his Pinot for any Napa Valley Cabernet. In 1998, Williams and Selyem sold their winery to John Dyson, a wealthy New York industrialist. As part of the sale, Williams signed a non-compete agreement that expires this year. He has planted 12.5 acres of Pinot Noir on a 40-acre property in Mendocino County over the next ridge from Ferrington Vineyards.

"I'm still young. There should be a crop this year. Maybe I'll make some Pinot Noir."

Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

Historically, the sommelier job was seen as a male-only job, dominated by stern older guys who had a lot of experience in the restaurant business, but were a bit cold and standoffish. Now the sommelier position is a new, hot, creative career which is attracting more and more women. This is not surprising as women are known to be excellent tasters, and seem to have a knack for avoiding confrontations with male customers.

At the Everest restaurant in Chicago, IL, Alpana Singh is a 26 year old MS (the youngest ever) who is very approachable, likes to laugh, and stays well-rounded. At the Blue Fin restaurant in New York, NY, Laura Maniec is the sommelier. She started as a server/bartender but was encouraged to learn about wine by the management. Now she is very excited by wine and loves to teach staff and customers more about wine.

A total of three women (including the two above) were among the five *Wine & Spirits* Best New Sommeliers of 2003.

J Vineyards and Winery

Judy Jordan, daughter of Jordan Winery owner Tom Jordan, founded J Vineyards & Winery in 1986, south of Healdsburg, near the intersection of Old Redwood Highway and Eastside Road. Initially she specialized in one wine— J Vintage Brut sparkling wine. Eventually she branched out into Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir under the guidance of winemaker Oded Shakked.

The winery's current Pinot Noir offerings include the following (older vintages are available at the winery back to 1997):

2000 J Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$25)

2000 J Nicole's Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$35)

2000 J Robert Thomas Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$35)

Although the J Sparkling Brut and Dry Creek Valley Pinot Gris are world-class, the Pinot Noirs have not made it into the top echelon of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. The Pinots are like a rookie southpaw with a 100 mile per hour fastball—tight, talented, and packed with promise, but not delivering yet.



U.S. PINOT NOIR

Goldeneye Appoints Winemaker

Duckhorn Wine Company has hired Zach Rasmuson as winemaker for its Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir brand. Rasmuson was an assistant winemaker at Robert Sinskey vineyards for two and a half years before moving on to Husch Vineyards where he was the winemaker for the past three years. He will craft the 2002 vintage, the winery's sixth, which is currently in barrel.

Goldeneye sources fruit from five different Estate Vineyards comprised of 200 vine acres planted to 18 different clones of Pinot Noir on 11 rootstocks in 92 separate vineyard blocks (yiks!) With this selection of Estate vineyards and clonal diversity, there is a broad palette from which to assemble the final Goldeneye blend. Eventually the smaller production Estate Grown and vineyard designated wines will be offered in addition to the Anderson Valley Pinot Noir. Declassified wine is bottled as Migration Anderson Valley Pinot Noir— a lighter style than Goldeneye and priced at half the cost (\$25). www.duckhorn.com

Wines of the World Competition

The Wines of the World competition has been a part of the L.A. County Fair for 64 years, the longest tenure of any county fair wine competition in the United States. Nearly 800 winemakers enter about 4,000 bottles in 300-plus classes. It is considered one of the country's most prestigious wine contests.

The judging took place in May, but offered no public tastings. But September 12-28, you can taste the gold-medal winners at the fair. Wine tasting and wine education classes will be in The Vineyard, near the Flower and Garden Pavilion, at the Fairplex in Pomona. 909-865-4231, www.fairplex.com.



A new wine boutique with daily wine tasting in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere has open in Newport Beach. Called "Great Legs Wine", the store is located at 2901 W Coast Highway, Suite 100, 949-515-VINO.

**If You Drink No Noir, You
Pinot Noir**


PrinceofPinot.com

Disneyland in Anaheim actually has one of the best wine cellars in America. The Napa Rose Restaurant in the Grand Californian Hotel has a 17,000 bottle wine cellar with more than 1,000 wine choices. The restaurant has 26 certified sommeliers, including the chef Andrew Sutton and manager-sommelier Michael Jordan. The wine list has 75 different half-bottles and 60 wines by the glass. Multiple vintages of Harlan, Bryant Family, Colgin, Dalla Valle, Screaming Eagle, Grace Family are available as well as smaller amounts of Marcassin Chardonnay and Sine Qua Non Syrah and Pinot Noir. Prices are on the high side but where else can you get these wines? Corkage is \$17. There is nothing Mickey Mouse about the wine program here.

Only Bodacious Pinot Will Do

The Prince had a birthday recently and maybe you were wondering what he drank. Now I didn't drink all this Pinot by myself- I had some help. The wines were pretty damn good- like getting locked in a walk-in wine cellar with a sex-deprived nympho- black and blue fruit, spice, and wood everywhere you turn.

2000 Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Magnum

2000 Sine Qua Non a'Capella Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir Magnum

2000 Peter Michael Le Moulin Rouge Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir
Magnum

1999 Beaux Freres Willamette Valley Estate Pinot Noir Magnum

1996 Domaine D l'Arlot Nuits St. Georges Clos des Forets St. Georges Monopole 1er Cru Magnum

1998 Domaine Denis Mortet Nuits St. Georges Lavaux St Jacques 1er
Cru Magnum

