

PinotFile[©]

Hansel (but no Gretel) Winery

Walter Hansel Winery and Hansel Family Vineyards in the Russian River Valley has been flying under the radar until the recent releases caught the attention of Robert Parker Jr. Walter Hansel was a wine enthusiast who first planted vineyards here in 1978, just down the road from Kistler and Dehlinger. Stephen Hansel, Walter's son, founded the winery in 1996. Walter Hansel Winery farms about 80 acres, 45 of which are planted to 5 different French and California Pinot Noir clones age 3-23 years. The clones are planted in various vineyard blocks and although the land has three distinctly different soils, the flavor variations of the wines are derived primarily from the different clones. The vineyard designated wines are clonal specific. Yields are kept to 12-18 clusters per vine (at 1,000 vines per acre) which historically produce from .9 tons per acre to a high of 1.3 tons per acre. Through leaf pulling and cluster positioning, and because of low yields, spraying has been avoided other than organic matter. Hansel de-stems 100% of his fruit and conveys it into open top fermenting tanks. The harvest occurs at 2:00 AM to insure cold fruit and the tanks are chilled to encourage a cold maceration of up to 5-7 days. The total fermentations lasts for 15-18 days with a three-times-a-day punch down. He then lightly presses into 100% Francois Freres barrels, 65-75% new. All of the oak is sun dried for three years. The wine is left in barrel for 12-15 months and in the bottle for 12 months prior to release. The finished wines are Burgundian in style. No gingerbread, just great Pinot at a decent price.

Current releases (widely available in retail market or call 707-525-3614):

2001 Walter Hansel de la Montanya Vineyard RRV Pinot Noir (\$30).

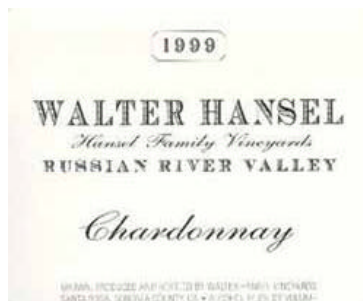
748 cases. A rustic, earthy style of Pinot Noir.

2001 Walter Hansel Cahill Lane RRV Pinot Noir (\$37). 747 cases. Clone 114, 115, and a Pommard clone.

2001 Walter Hansel South Slope RRV Pinot Noir (\$45). 522 cases. Clone 777.

2001 Walter Hansel Three Rows RRV Pinot Noir (\$45). 122 cases.

2001 Walter Hansel Cuvee Alyce RRV Pinot Noir (\$50). 198 cases. Clone 114, 115.



If You Drink No Noir, You Pinot Noir

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Walter Hansel Winery has also released several great Chardonnays made in a Burgundian style. The 2001 Cahill Lane Chardonnay (\$32) is one of only eight Chardonnays rated 95 or higher by Robert Parker Jr in the 2001 vintage. The Cuvee Alyce was rated 97.

Inside this issue:

The Prince's Fairy Tale 2

Orogeny Pinot Noir 2

DRC in Oregon 3

Memorial Day Open Houses in Oregon 3

Black Cap 3

Mondovino 4

The Prince's Adventures Along The Pinot Trail

I am frequently asked how I came to the title “Prince of Pinot”. Well, once upon a time long ago I was labeled an eccentric for liking Pinot Noir. Most wine drinkers considered Pinot Noir an afterthought, a weak substitute for Cabernet Sauvignon. The attitude was fostered by the poor quality of California and Oregon Pinot Noir, which often was atrocious. “Burgundy” was that stuff that Gallo bottled under the label “Hearty Burgundy” (actually a blend of zinfandel, syrah, and other less noble red varietals). But Pinot Noir was all I wanted to drink. The fact that it was touchy, difficult to grow, and notoriously challenging to produce made it even more attractive to me. I was able to find enough bottles early on to convince myself it was the most delicious, sensuous, and overwhelming brilliant red wine in the world.

In the later 1980's, I was practically an outcast to my wine club colleagues who could wax poetically for hours (zzzzzzzzzz) on the virtues of B.V., Mondavi Reserve, Dunn, Chateau Montelena, St Juliens, and Pauillacs. I shocked the established membership by organizing a “Superbowl of Pinot Noir” tasting which featured Pinot Noirs from Longoria, Gary Farrell, Rochioli, Saintsbury, and Domaine Drouhin, among others. As the years passed, the Pinot Noirs from Oregon and California became better and better and I taught the group a few important French words like terroir and Cote d'Or. Cabophiles loosened up and became adventurous. A number of them actually developed a preference for Pinot Noir and were organizing Pinot Noir tastings themselves! They would remark: “Rusty, you're a Prince for introducing me to Pinot Noir.” The moniker stuck and today the Prince of Pinot lives happy ever after.



Orogeny Pinot Noir

The **2002 Orogeny Green Valley Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** (\$19) is the inaugural release of this wine from the Chalone Wine Group (CWG), now owned by Allied Domecq. The Chalone Wine Group has a long history of making outstanding Pinot Noir including Chalone Vineyards Pinot Noir from the Pinnacles region, Acacia Vineyards Pinot Noir from Napa's Carneros, Echelon Vineyards Pinot Noir from the Central Coast, and Edna Valley Vineyards Pinot Noir from San Luis Obispo. When Tom Selfridge joined CWG as president in 1998, he used his years of experience working with the Dutton Family to locate some choice vineyards for Pinot Noir in the Green Valley regions of Sonoma's Russian River Valley. The grapes for this wine are sourced from five small vineyards in Green Valley— four are under long-term contract with the Dutton Family and the other vineyard is a long-term lease to Orogeny. Dan Goldfield is the winemaker.

CWG also has a long-term lease on 20 acres in Marin County which was planted to Pinot Noir in 2001. It is the most significant vineyard planting in the county. This site is ideal for Pinot Noir and will also be made under the Orogeny label.

The name Orogeny is from the Greek oro, mountain, and -geny, birth. Orogeny is the process by which collisions and separations of the earth's crust form mountains. The last orogenic episode in Sonoma County created Green Valley which is the source of grapes for this wine.

Visit the website at orogenyvineyards.com. To purchase call Chalone Wine Group at 707-254-4250.

DRC in Oregon

The Deep Roots Collective (DRC) is a group of wineries in Oregon that are adhering to the following points of unity: non-irrigated vines, organic practices, region-specific wines, true traditional winemaking practices, and low crop load. Member wineries include Beaux Freres, Brick House, Cameron, Evesham Wood, J. Christopher, Thomas, and Patricia Green Cellars. They do not source fruit from vineyards that use irrigation.

The subject of non-irrigated vines leads to considerable controversy and debate in Oregon. DRC wineries feel that irrigation has an impact on the fruit causing a change in the resulting taste. They argue that non-irrigated vines produce better fruit, and allow the vintage of the year to show through. In France, provincial laws prevent irrigation so that terroir can be a significant factor in distinguishing the region. Irrigation advocates, on the other hand, believe that irrigation should be used as a tool as necessary to create consistency and quality from year to year. Towards the end of the summer there is typically a dry period when irrigation can be useful to insure a more consistent fruit. They argue that it probably does not affect the terroir anymore than the application of herbicides to the vines.

Many of the member wineries have well-established vineyards which do not require irrigation. They see the DRC as a marketing tool to distinguish their wines in a highly competitive market.

Memorial Day Weekend the Time to Visit Oregon

Most of the wineries in Oregon are small without tasting rooms. On Memorial Day Weekend (May 29-31), all of the wineries open their doors with tastings of current wines, library wine tastings, special hors d'oeuvres and BBQs, and live music. Tasting fees are usually \$5-10 and include a Riedel glass. For example, St Innocent Winery is charging \$7.50 for a tasting of six of their 2002 releases including the Shea Vineyard Pinot Noir, the White Rose Vineyard Pinot noir, and the Temperance Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir. Food includes grilled salmon, cassoulet, cheeses, special breads, and strawberries with chocolate ganache. Winemaker Mark Vlossak will hang with you and discuss wine, food, skateboards, or whatever. Way cool.

If you haven't heard of Wine by Joe Pinot Noir, Territorial Pinot Noir, Carabella Pinot Noit, Saginase Vineyard Pinot Noir, Kitara Vineyards Pinot Noir, Tempest Vineyards Pinot Noir, Helvetia Winery Pinot Noir, Stag Hollow Pinot Noir, Black Cap Pinot Noir and Capital T Pinot Noir, you should plan on heading to the Willamette Valley to catch up on the latest cult Pinot Noir. For more information go to www.yamhillcountywineries.com.

Black Cap 2nd Generation Oregon Pinot Noir

Jason Lett, the son of Oregon wine pioneer David Lett of Eyrie Vineyards, will be releasing his first vintage. Like his father, Jason believes in traditional Burgundian winemaking practices, such as small batch fermentation, native yeasts, aging in French oak barrels, and bottling without fining or filtration. His inaugural release, the **2002 Black Cap Pinot Noir**, was debuted May 8th at Urban Wineworks in Portland. The wine is a big, chewy, and extracted style Pinot Noir with a plethora of black fruits and tannins that need a few years of cellaring to soften up. \$36.



For more information call 503-226-9797 or go to www.avalonwine.com.

Apparently this country does need a good \$10 Pinot since I received more feedback and inquires about the Sebastiani Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir than any other wine reviewed in the last year. A \$10 Pinot is very appealing if it is soft, fruity, without noticeable tannins, but with some character. When you add the fact that Pinot is a great food wine and factor in the health angle (proven health benefits of red wine, especially Pinot Noir, which has high amounts of antioxidants), you have the perfect beverage. Also, Pinot is easy to say and much more sophisticated than that populist wine - "Chardonnay". I can just see the ads showing a group of four women at a tony restaurant, dressed to the nines, looking up at the waiter and asking: "Got any good Pinot?"

Pinot Noir is not Cabernet. Never has been and never will be. It's not big, heavy, tannic, thick, or heavily-extracted when made properly. It's more Corvette, less Mack Truck. Pinot Noir is about finesse, balance, elegance, and clarity. At it's best, it can be the most complex and satisfying elixir you have ever consumed. It is a chameleon-like wine that can taste different day to day, bottle to bottle, barrel to barrel, and glass to glass. When it's good, it's totally sensual. When people speak of the "Holy Grail", they are always talking about Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir remains the wine most serious winemakers want to make— and most serious winemakers want to drink.



Parker Premiers at Cannes

Jonathan Nossietter debuted a new documentary, *Mondovino*, this past week at the Cannes Film Festival. In the film, Nossietter follows the struggles of the wine world's stars and supporting players across three continents. Nossietter is the son of a former Washington Post reporter and a trained sommelier whose documentary has attracted some attention in this region of wine lovers. The major interest in the film is Robert Parker Jr whose reviews are so influential that many wine buyers consider them to be the gospel truth, and wineries try to produce wines that conform to his taste. In the documentary, Parker, 56, is shown in folksy footage at his house with his wife, Patricia, surrounded by wine bottles. He confirms the fact that his nose and palate are insured for \$1 million. "I'm proud of the fact that winemaking has become pro-consumer," Parker says to the camera. "If there is a legacy for Robert Parker," Nossietter says in the documentary, "it's that he leveled the playing field. In this stratified caste system of wine, dominated by elitists and reactionaries, Robert Parker brought an American, a democratic, point of view. I think that has been a revolution."

Nossietter also follows a high-priced consultant named Michel Rolland, who makes his living helping winemakers make Parker-friendly wines. In the movie, Rolland tells several vintners to "micro-oxygenate," a process which injects oxygen into the tanks and makes wines that are drinkable faster.

The question raised in the film is whether influential people like Parker and Rolland threaten to ply the planet with "Everywine". The result could be the extinction of old cellars run by families over generations who cling to some of their old ways. The wine industry is threatened by the globalization that has consumed other types of business (see Issue #38, Allied Domecq buys Gary Farrell).