

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti

This past week the Wilson Daniels traveling Domaine de la Romanee-Conti (DRC) show touched down in Orange County for the first time ever. Wilson Daniels, who has imported the Domaine's wines for 20 years presented all eight 2002 DRC wines for tasting at Pinot Provence restaurant. To use the word tasting, however, does not do the event justice. You don't taste DRC wines, you experience them.

There was a buzz in the reception room as guests nibbled on hors d'oeuvres and sipped 1995 Salon Champagne. Finally the doors swung open and the group, heads bowed and quiet, entered a room fragrant with Pinot Noir. Introductory remarks about the vintage and the wines seemed agonizingly lengthy as I stared at the lineup of wines in front of me.

As everyone knows by now, Burgundy experienced many days of sunshine at the end of summer (a so-called "Indian Summer") in 2002 so that the grapes ripened completely and an excellent vintage was guaranteed. The success of a vintage in Burgundy is dependent upon just a few days at the end of the growing season: if it rains during these days, the botrytis proliferates, maturity is not attained, and the harvest will be mediocre; but if these days are fair as they were in 2002, a great vintage can result.

The 2002 harvest began on September 18th and lasted 10 days total. Throughout the harvest the weather was fair, without any rain. The harvest was divided into two parts: the finest grapes were picked in a first harvest and the rest was left on the vine to obtain a bit more maturity and was collected in a second harvest. Most of the second harvest was from younger vines and went into the 1er Cru. This very selective harvesting is overseen by co-director Aubert de Villaine who is in the vineyards daily during harvest. In addition, the pickers are very experienced. The same pickers come to the Domaine from Spain every year and many are part of families that have done this for generations.

The harvest was large, but a lot of the grapes did not make the cut and the total production of the Grand Crus is down compared to 2001. There is less Richebourg than ever for the US market. The wines will be highly-allocated to the US, and the assorted case (which is only offered to the US market) will have no Romanee-Conti or Montrachet.

The 2002 DRC wines are characterized primarily by finesse, grace, and

**A Truly Great
Burgundy can
be better than
a Great
Bordeaux**

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A fascinating read is the book, "*Romanee-Conti, The World's Most Fabled Wine*", written by Richard Olney (Rizzoli, 1995). This carefully researched book tells everything you would want to know about the most fabled vineyard in Burgundy.

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elegance, rather than strength or opulence. Allen Meadows in *Burghound.com* notes that De Villaine has said the 2002 vintage is similar to 2000 with some of the power of 1990 or 1999. A distinguishing feature is the purity of the aromas. Because there was no extended hang-time, the wines are not as plush as many 02s, but they have plenty of acidity for longevity. Except for the 1er Cru, the wines should be kept a minimum of ten years for maximum enjoyment (Don't think about touching the Montrachet for 15 years).

The DRC wines have been reviewed by a number of reputable sources (*Burghound.com*, Issue 17, 1st Quarter, 2005, *The Wine Advocate*, Issue 153, 6/30/04, *International Wine Cellar*, Issue 113, March/April 2004, and *The Vine*, No 229, Feb, 2004). My notes are briefly summarized below with approximate release prices. The wines will be offered to the public April 1, 2005. All tasting was in strict silence to ensure the proper homage to this blessed event.

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti 1er Cru "Cuvee Duvault-Blochet" \$125. The second vintage of this Premier Cru (the last was 1999). Composed of grapes from all of the vineyards obtained at the second harvest. Like all the wines from DRC, the aromas of Oriental spice, cola, and berry are captivating and the sweet finish is soft and long. This wine doesn't have the structure of the Grand Crus, but is a very enjoyable drink in its own right.

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Echezeaux \$225. For a young wine it shows plenty of bright fruit, but is tight. The nose is a bit closed. Light, feminine, and balanced but not up to the quality of the rest of the lineup.

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Grands-Echezeaux \$350. Beautiful toasted cherry aromas lead to a potpourri of Pinot fruits including blueberry. A little rustic. Supple and seductive, but still closed.

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Romanee-St-Vivant \$475. Earthy, stinky, tight nose. Complex berry flavors dominated by strawberry that goes on and on. Exquisite balance. Wonderful and approachable now. Equal to or better than the Richebourg.

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Richebourg \$500. The alien in the lineup. The nose is smoky and earthy but not terribly expressive. Atypical for a Richebourg with a plummy and port-like taste. A concentrated, powerful wine. A lot of Richebourg fruit was dropped at harvest which accounts for the atypicality.

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti La Tache \$575. Absolutely wonderful dark berry nose that pulls you in. Dark cherry and blueberry flavors with just the right amount of spice. Approachable but has a huge future potential. This wine demands your attention. (By the way, La Tache means "the task" and refers to the vineyard which has many big rocks in it making farming a challenge).

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Romanee-Conti \$1,650 625 cases. A voluptuous, almost unctuous nose that can make a grown man cry. Very delicate and feminine (Romanee-Conti is always the lightest of the DRC wines when young, but it becomes more powerful over time and is the longest-lived).

2002 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Montrachet \$1,500. 200 cases for the world. 60 year-old Chardonnay vines. Made in the "clean" style of Montrachet and showing many interesting tropical aromas including bananas and papaya. Soft, viscous, luscious fruit that lingers and lingers. Opulent honey flavors with a touch of straw. Served last in the tasting order as always because it is the most powerful of the DRC wines. Wow, baby.

The prices are hard to swallow, but DRC can be ethereal. If you get a hold of a bottle of aged Le Tache, drink the whole bottle yourself with a truffled risotto and quail and die happy. Or if you are one of the less than 200 people in the world to have a bottle of Montrachet each year, drink it with the best damn foie gras and lobster you can find and don't share a drop with anyone. Self-indulgence in the highest sense.



Garys' Vineyard Not All The Same

The Santa Lucia Highlands is an 18 mile strip of land parallel to Hwy 101 at the base of the Santa Lucia Mountains in Monterey County. The cool climate and the location of the vineyards above the fogline create an excellent terroir for growing cool-climate grapes like Pinot Noir.

Gary Pisoni and Gary Francioni are the two principals in this area, friends that grew up together in farming families in nearby Gonzales. The two Garys are partners in Rosella's Vineyard, planted in 1996 with Pisoni and Dijon clones, and in Garys' Vineyard, planted in 1997 to the Pisoni clone. Garys' Vineyard is a 50-acre site (42 acres of Pinot Noir and 8 acres of Syrah) located in the middle of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. *Connoisseurs' Guide* has called Garys' Vineyard "one of California's premier Pinot Noir sites."

Fifteen different wineries purchase Garys' Pinot Noir grapes by the customized acre. Typical yields are from 2.5-3 tons per acre. The lucky wineries have included Bernardus, Capioux, Cinnabar, Coyote Canyon, Lorca, Loring, Miner, Morgan, Novy, Patz & Hall, Pessagno, Savannah-Chanelle, Siduri, Tantara, Testarossa, and Truckee River. Fruit also goes to Lucia, a brand shared by the two Garys and ROAR, Gary Francioni's own label. Each one of the wineries makes their Pinot Noir in a distinctive style. Here are two contrasting styles of Pinot Noir from Garys' Vineyard

2003 Loring Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir \$45, 375 cases. Brian Loring's style is more concentrated and intensely flavored, ripe and lush. The wine is deeply extracted but still has a velvety mouthfeel. There are earth and mineral overtones that are not usually present in this bottling. Wine retailer Paul Root tells a funny story about a customer who came into his store last summer and asked if he had any Loring Pinot Noirs left in stock. After telling him no, the customer said, "Its just as well, they're so overly extracted as to be undrinkable." Paul overheard this conversation from the back room, popped his head out and told him there as another few 6-packs coming next month from Loring. The guy said, "I'll take all of it. I don't care what it costs." True story! Availability limited. Loringwineco.com.

2002 Truckee River Winery Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir \$35 13.7% alc., 275 cases. The 2001 version of this wine was featured in the Nov 14, 2004 issue of the *PinotFile*. Truckee River Winery is "the highest and coldest winery in the United States." Located in Truckee, California, the winery is at an altitude of 5,900 feet and can be the coldest spot in the continental United States during the winter. The wines are made in a barn by Russ and Joan Jones. Russ uses French and American oak barrels. The wine is made in an appealing soft elegant style. A jolt of cinnamon spice gives it character. A seamless wine with fresh dark fruit, soft tannins, and a long, pure finish. 630-587-4626

2002 Goldeneye

The 2002 vintage of Goldeneye, the winery's sixth, was released recently. Winemaker Zach Rasmussen harvested grapes from five vineyards in the Anderson Valley, including the 202-acre property previously known as the "Floodgate Vineyard". This hilltop vineyard with mature 15-year-old vines was purchased in 2003 by Goldeneye and renamed The Narrows Vineyard. 888-354-8885, goldeneyewinery.com.

2002 Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$52, 14.5% alc. Barrel-fermented for 18 months in 100% new French oak. This is a concentrated wine with a lovely velvety mouthfeel. The pleasant aromas are still subdued. The dark fruits are highlighted by smoke and earth. Well-balanced. Some toasted oak in the finish, and a decent dose of acid. An honest wine that is true to its appellation. At this early stage in the bottle there is a lack of complexity to justify the hefty price tag, but time should correct its brooding nature.

2003 Migration Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$28, 14.5% alc. A lighter style than the Goldeneye meant for earlier consumption and lighter fare.

Upcoming Events for the Dedicated Pinotphile

March 29, 2005 Family Winemakers of California Trade Tasting 2005 at the Pasadena Convention Center in Pasadena. Free to the trade. 415-721-4740 or familywinemakers.org.

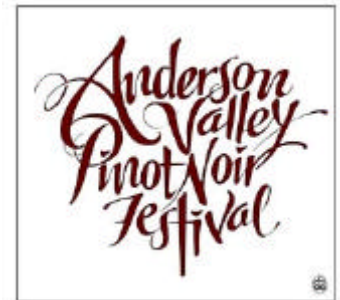
April 12, 2005 Oregon Winemakers Dinner including Dick Shea and Eric Hammacher at Mr Stox Restaurant in Anaheim, Calif. \$80. Limited to 30. 714-634-2999.

April 10, 2005 First Annual Pinot Paradise sponsored by the Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers Association. The event is from 1PM to 5PM at the old Novitiate Winery in Los Gatos. Among the producers pouring their wines are Testarossa, Burrell School, Clos La Chance, Clos Tita, Mount Eden, Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Thomas Fogerty, Savannah-Chanelle, Trout Gulch, and more. Silent auction, cheese, and food. \$30 in advance, \$40 at door. Details at 831-479-9463 or log onto scmwa.com.

April 16, 2005 Pinot Noir Summit at the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco on Saturday sponsored by Affairs of the Vine. In the afternoon is the Final Showdown for the 2004 Pinot Noir Shootout with tasting of 30 of the top-rated Pinot Noirs along with Pinot Noir workshops and a reception with winemakers. Cost is \$135 plus tax and is limited to 100 wine lovers. In the evening there is a Pinot Noir Winemakers Dinner where a winemaker will sit at each table and move around during the evening to answer questions and discuss their wines. Cost is \$135 plus tax, limited seating. Register by calling 707-874-1975 or online at affairsofvine.com.

May 14, 2005 Pinot Noir Technical Symposium directed by winemaker Greg Brewer at Melville Winery in Santa Rita Hills. The event includes a technical discussion, a tasting of Pinot Noir clones from the Melville Estate (available to purchase in a futures format), and a catered lunch by New West Catering. 11AM-3PM. \$75. Reservations by phoning the winery at 805-735-7030

May 20, 21,22, 2005 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival. On Friday, May 20, there will be a day-long Pinot Noir Conference covering the growing and making of Pinot Noir in the vineyards and wineries on the Pacific Coast. \$100. After the Conference is a BBQ at Goldeneye. \$37.50. Saturday afternoon, May 21 is a walk-around tasting of Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs and a silent auction. \$50. Several winemaker dinners are hosted at Anderson Valley wineries on Saturday evening. \$150. All of the wineries in the Valley will hold Open House on Sunday, May 22. Free. Tickets can be purchased online at avwines.com.



Sonoma-Cutrer Premier Pinot Noir Released

Founding Sonoma-Cutrer winemaker Bill Bonetti began experimenting with Pinot Noir the winery had planted for sparkling wine in the 1970s. He made a few barrels of Pinot Noir each year for employees and parties. Current winemaker Terry Adams has undertaken numerous vineyard trials, exploring different clones and vineyard locations, farming techniques and winemaking methods, with the idea of producing a Pinot Noir exhibiting finesse and elegance.

2002 Sonoma-Cutrer Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$unavail, 1,200 cases. The grapes for this debut release came from 4 vineyards: Les Pierres (known for Chardonnay), Cutrer (the winery's oldest Pinot Noir plantings), Vine Hill, and Owsley (the youngest plantings within a few ridges of the Pacific Ocean). The wine is a blend of multiple lots and includes clones 115, 667, 777, 459, and Pommard. The Pinot Noir is made in traditional fashion and aged in the bottle a year before release. I tasted the wine at the WOPN. The wine is easily recognizable as Russian River in origin because of its nice cherry and cola aromas, earthy undertones, and bright, crisp finish. A sample of the 2003 vintage (yet to be released) was even better. Brown-Forman distributor.

It is always worthwhile to look back and see where we have been and where we are now. In going through some old files I found the following information on 1990 California Pinot Noirs.

“In 1990 winemakers were still searching for the right soils and climates, but it was becoming clear that the best Pinot Noir vineyards were in cool coastal climates”.James Laube

The *Wine Spectator* top-rated Pinot Noirs in 1990 were: Gary Farrell RRV Allen Vnyd (\$28), Williams Selyem RRV (\$20), R Mondavi Napa Valley Res (\$28), Rochioli RRV J Rochioli Res (\$30), Williams Selyem Allen Vnyd (\$30), Calera Mt Harlan Mills Vnyd (\$30), Sainsbury Carneros Res (\$24), Morgan Res (\$24), Sanford SBC (\$16.50), and Santa Cruz Mtns (\$15).

The best value Pinot Noirs were Harmony Cellars Paso Robles (\$11), Sainsbury Garnet (\$10), Au Bon Climat SMV (\$11).



Another Wine Movie To Be Released

‘Sideways’ has gotten all the recent attention, but a documentary to be released April, 29 in Los Angeles theaters, ‘Mondovino’, is a very different kind of movie. This is the Fahrenheit 9/11 of the wine world. Director Jonathan Nossiter (ThinkFilm) is a champion of the maverick winemakers of the world and the movie argues against the globalization of wine and the homogenization of taste that leads to the lost of origins of wine. Because of flying winemakers like Michael Rolland, who is a prominent villain in the movie, Nossiter maintains that the wine in Bordeaux, Napa, Argentina, and South Africa have come to taste the same, with a loss of individuality, a wine’s sense of place, and a clue to the wine’s origins.

Nossiter is a Sundance-winning director and son of Washington Post and New York Times correspondent Bernard Nossiter. He was raised in France and trained as a sommelier. In France, the film has divided the wine cognizant. Some see it as a long-needed exposure of the problems in the French wine industry that have caused a sharp fall in wine exports in the face of international competition and others feel the message of the movie is unwarranted.

The heroes in the movie are artisanal winemakers and people like New York wine importer Neal Rosenthal, who imports small quantities of good, but often obscure, wines from France. Director Nossiter feels that there are plenty of good wines available that are inexpensive, but are never easily available to the consumer because the big market forces, like Constellation Brands, push more pricey wines and their inferior wines down the throats of consumers. You know that Nossiter is on to something when you walk along the isle of your local supermarket wine section.