

PinotFile[©]

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Winning Pinots from the Klindts

Mendocino County's Anderson Valley has barely over 3,000 inhabitants and less than 1,500 acres of Pinot Noir vines, but this appellation has pinoficionados swooning over the region's luscious Pinot Noirs. Claudia and Bob Klindt and Claudia and Warren Hein were dreamers back in 1989 who were traveling through the Anderson Valley and came upon a home on 20-acres for sale. They formed a partnership, purchased that property and an adjacent undeveloped 20-acre plot and began to make wine under the Claudia Springs label. Bob Klindt had been a successful home winemaker for a number of years and his early Zinfandel and Pinot Noir releases from Anderson Valley vineyards were well received. Claudia Springs won medals for every release since the first in 1989. The Heins eventually sold their share in the venture. The Klindts planted 12 acres of vineyards on the site in 1998 and released the first Pinot Noir from their own estate vineyard in 2001. Currently they produce 3,000 cases under the Claudia Springs label including several varietals in addition to Pinot Noir. Their tasting room is located in Boonville, on Highway 128 across the street from the Boonville Hotel. The Mendocino Vineyards Tasting Room is shared with Raye's Hill, Eaglepoint Ranch, and Stella Cadente Olive Oil Company. A great spot to taste on your travels in the Valley especially if combined with a meal at the Boonville Hotel.

2002 Claudia Springs Klindt Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$24, 425 cases. A deeply perfumed nose of violets and dark fruits. Flavors lean toward dried cherry and smoke. Opens beautifully over time. A ripe style but everything is held together nicely.

The winery's phone number is 707-895-2926 and website is claudiasprings.com.

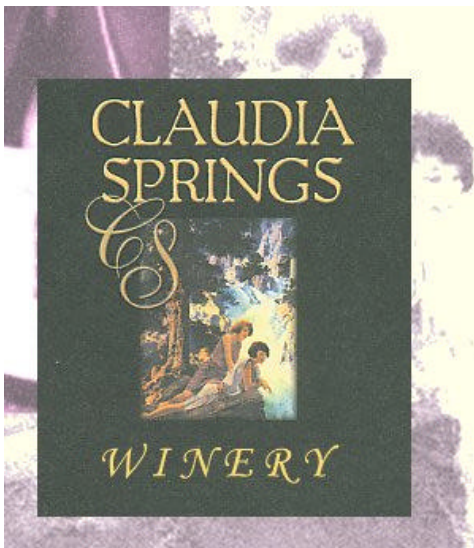
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**If You Drink
No Noir, You
Pinot Noir**

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The three largest vineyard acreage owners in the Anderson Valley AVA are Roederer Estate (242 acres), Goldeneye (176 acres), and Navarro (31 acres).



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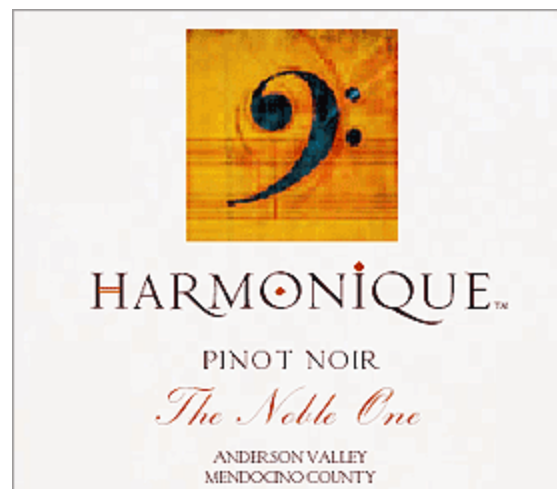
In 2002, Bob Klindt teamed up with Bruce Conzelman, a real estate developer and long-time pinotophile. Their goal was to produce a premium Pinot Noir from Anderson Valley fruit. The vineyards chosen for the new label, Harmonique, include the Wiley Vineyard, with its 29-year old vines planted on one of the two western-most vineyards in the Valley, and the 7-year-old Klindt Vineyard. Winemaking is traditional in small lots, with hand picking, gentle de-stemming, native yeasts and non-interventional techniques. Harmonique is aged in 70% new French Oak for 19 months, separated by vineyard and clone, and blended. Finally, it is aged in the bottled for 6 months prior to release. The first two bottlings of Harmonique Pinot Noir were released in September, 2004. The winery received the award for "Best New Winery" at the Wine Appreciation Guild's 2005 Wine Literary Award Press Tasting in San Francisco.

2002 Harmonique "Delicacé" Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5 % alc., \$48, 200 cases.

The fruit here comes from Pommard clone and cuttings from the David Bruce Vineyard, reportedly sourced from the Romanee-Conti estate in Vosne-Romanee. Multiple medals in competitions. The name, "Delicacé", reflects the feminine style of the wine. The nose is floral and red-fruited. Silky like "The Noble One" but lighter on its feet. A feast of Pinot fruits.

2002 Harmonique "The Noble One" Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.5 % alc., \$48, 370 cases. 85% of the blend is from the six-acre plot of Pinot Noir in the Klindt Vineyard, located just a mile east of the Wiley Vineyard and planted with Pommard and Dijon clones. The remaining portion comes from the Wiley Vineyard. Double Gold Medal 2005 San Francisco International Wine Competition. A dark purple, medium-bodied and opulent offering which has a startling and gorgeous cherry compote nose. Great concentration and texture - very sleek. Stairway to heaven.

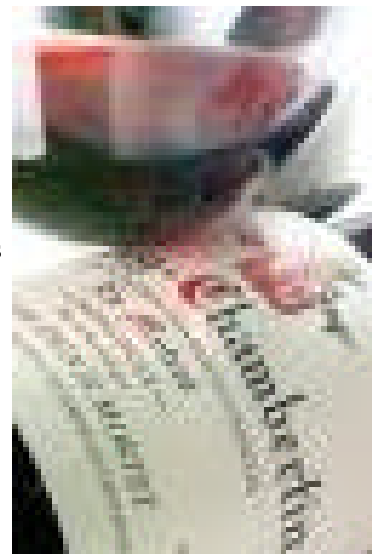
The wines are available from the website at harmoniquewine.com. 2-pack, 6-pack, and 12-pack commemorative wood boxes containing both wines are available. The wine has limited retail distribution including hitimewine.net.



Great Burgundy Website

Bill Nanson has been writing the quarterly missives at burgundy-report.com since 2003. Bill is a no-nonsense independent writer with a clear passion and grasp of Burgundy. He does all of his tastings in the style that I have advocated and practiced myself: no spitting, only serious drinking enjoyment with friends and food. No tasting of an ounce and moving on, but rather savoring a bottle over time as it opens up and presents its charms. And best yet, no scores and no axe to grind as he does this as a hobby.

Nanson's site includes Burgundy producer links, Domaine profiles, maps, lists of the appellations, tasting notes (both red and white Burgundy), and beautiful pictures of Burgundy vineyards and other sites of interest to Burgundy-lovers. Extremely well written and presented, this valuable source of information is available free. Much of the information presented is not easily obtainable from other sources.



Get Some of “da Truck”

Kent Fortner is one interesting winemaker and truck owner. He handcrafts small amounts of Pinot Noir from vineyards in southern Napa Valley under the label Green Truck Cellars. He refers to his customers as “truckers” and writes an informative PLOG (the Pinot Log) about his winemaking and personal life. His website is very informative and educational and I recommend it as required reading.



Kent grew up in Kansas, not exactly a hotbed of aspiring winemakers. After numerous vocations including waiter, wine shop operator, and fisherman in Alaska, he satisfied his wanderlust with trips to Nepal and Thailand. In 1996, he ended up in the remote Gavilan Mountains at Chalone to assist in winemaking and climb at the Pinnacles National Monument nearby. It was at Chalone that he met his future bride who was a ranger at Yosemite. He became engaged in front of his 1966 turquoise green Ford F-100 truck in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and got married in 2000 in a ceremony at Chalone. Kent worked a harvest with Kendall Jackson's projects in Chile and Argentina where he experienced winemaking “in the trenches.” He spent time with Chalone Wine Group wineries in California (Acacia, Edna Valley, Carmenet, and Echelon) and in Washington (Canoe Ridge and Sagelands) and took some classes at UC Davis. He landed a winemaker job at Luna Vineyards in Napa where he crafts Italian-inspired wines during the day, and creates Pinot Noir in his spare time. His green truck is the inspiration for his Pinot Noir and even transports his fruit to the winery, but represents a look back at a colorful three generation family history that is told in detail on his website.

Kent is clear about his winemaking philosophy. He gives himself little credit, instead believing that farming the vineyards is everything in the process. “I don't really make anything - I just sort of provide some steering. Super-skilled winemakers are people who take horribly challenging fruit and make good wine. But I am lucky to work with near-perfect fruit from gifted vineyards. I can't say that I am a masterful winemaker - that's what I aspire to be.”

The 2001 Green Truck Cellars Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., 22 cases. The grapes for this wine came from the Haire Vineyard in the Carneros region. Farmed by third-generation vine-farmer, John Haire, the wine was made from a small block remaining of the classic Martini Clone. Yields were extremely below economically viable levels, and this was the last vintage from the storied vineyard.

2002 Green Truck Cellars Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 240 cases. The fruit came from Green Island Vineyard, a very cool site on an isthmus surrounded on all sides by the windy San Francisco Bay in Carneros. The vineyard is owned by a notable Napa grape farming family, the Nords. Clones 115 and 777 were used.

2003 Green Truck Cellars Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., \$35, 480 cases. As the 2002, the base for this wine is the Nord Green Island Vineyard at the southern mouth of the Napa River. In addition, some Pommard clone from Suscol Ridge was added. This vineyard lies a mile northeast of the Nord Vineyard but the terroir is very different, producing grapes with dark color, power, density, and heavy tannins. A little Hungarian oak is added to French oak to give the wine savory spice. Aromas of violets, purple fruits and earth lead to well-integrated plum and blueberry notes. The nose is a shy alcoholic, but the wine is substantial and comforting. A distinctive wine unlike so many copy-cat versions of Pinot Noir on the market. Good truckin'.

The wine is available almost exclusively through a mailing list with a three bottle minimum. The website is greentruckcellars.com. I found some at retail: hitimewine.net. A lot of Pinot fun here.

Can You Spare a Ten-Spot for Some Good Pinot?



The “value” category of Pinot Noir has elevated itself to higher levels in the last few years. The old saw was that Pinot Noir had to be handcrafted in small lots, and therefore expensive to produce to be any good. While it is true that really great Pinot Noir must, by its fickle nature, be vinified in ridiculously small amounts, there are a number of decent examples now on the market for less than \$20, or even \$10, that are challenging this widely-held belief. These wines are less serious, but no less satisfying, particularly when chilled a bit and enjoyed in the context of a summer barbecue on a warm day. A \$75, 14.6% alcoholic “Big Babe” Pinot Noir just doesn’t fit in that scenario. Recently I drank several examples of lower-priced Pinot Noir and can heartily recommend the following “Fantastic Four”.

2003 Twin Fin California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$10, screw top. A Pinot Noir marketed for the young California lifestyle. Twin Fin winemaker’s inspiration is a mix of California sun, surf and sand. The winemaking team of Hugh Reimers and Sam Burton are trying to craft “a wine that prefers sunny days over dark cellars.” 66% Monterey County and 33% San Benito County Pinot Noir with (gulp!) 10% Malbec to add some plumpness. The wine has plenty of Pinot flavor that improves over time in the glass. Not the complexity of more pricey Pinots, but really good for \$10. Hey Mr Fantastic, surf’s up. Widely available.



2003 David Bruce David and Goliath Central Coast Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., thousands of cases, \$17. A more substantial offering than others in this group. More oak and smoke in the nose and more alcohol apparent. A masculine, oaky style with plenty of char and vanilla. Needs hearty food. Very popular and quite The Thing. Hitimewine sells it, widely distributed in US.

2003 Bogle Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$10. The Bogle family has been farming since the mid-1800’s, but it was not until 1968 that the father and son team of Warren and Cris Bogle planted their first 20 acres of wine grapes in Clarksburg, California along the Sacramento River. Today Bogle farms over 1,200 acres of wine grapes in the Sacramento Delta area. They are better known for Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc, but this Pinot Noir sourced from vineyards in Sonoma is a 2005 Orange County Fair Four-Star Gold Medal Award winner. The nose is undistinguished and wimpy but the taste provides a lot of Pinot enjoyment. Delicate and fruity with nice strawberry flavors integrated with soft tannins. Goes down easy. A steal at \$10 and one to buy by the case for summer entertaining. Just the wine for Invisible Woman.. Hitimewine.net has it.



2004 O’Reilly’s Oregon Pinot Noir \$15. Winemaker David O’Reilly of Owen Roe is known to make a number of sumptuous Pinot Noirs in his short history. The O’Reilly Pinot is from selected barrels that have a more forward and juicy character perfect for immediate consumption. The wine shows off a generous amount of red and black fruit that is ripe and youthful. Still a Lolita, it could benefit from a few months in the bottle, but summer is here now, so why wait? Many wine cognizants believe this is the best Pinot Noir deal in the US. The Human Torch would love this smokin’ deal. Available from avalonwine.com,



Wine development under screw caps continues to be a major controversial issue in the wine business. Opponents of screw caps claim that the potential for reduction is higher, yet corks display a wide range of oxygen permeability and the very best corks are more airtight than screw caps. A recent Australian study showed that oxygen is not necessary for ageing bottled wine. This research gives users of screw caps some comfort in believing their wines will age consistently.

Randall Graham of Bonny Doon Cellars is a strong proponent of screw caps. On his thoroughly enjoyable website at http://www.bonnydoonvineyard.com/dooniversity/screwcap_video he has a hilarious 10 minute video titled “Viva Le Screwcap!” The video is intended to convince viewers that screw caps are superior. The video may not accomplish that, but it sure provides plenty of laughs.

Coming Up For Air: A Funny Tale

I was out to dinner in a nice restaurant last night with two other couples. The wine we had for the evening was a 1997 Lynmar Five Sisters Pinot Noir (magnum) that one member of the group had purchased on release and carefully cellared. He knew that this was one of my favorite Pinot Noirs of the past and I was humbled that he was willing to share his last bottle with me.

The young waiter arrived, opened the bottle and poured the wine. Everyone took a sip. I swirled and swirled, stuck my nose in the glass and inhaled and everyone at the table seemed to hold their breath to hear what I thought of the wine. My first sips were marked by funkiness and unpleasant flavors. I was afraid that this might not be up to speed so I said, “It needs time, let’s wait for it to open up.” I continued to swirl and smell. One of the ladies at the table, who has no pretensions about wine and just drinks wine for what it is, suddenly grabbed her fork. She then proceeded to swirl the fork in the wine as if she was stirring a cake mix. At first I was mortified and glanced around the room to see if anyone was watching. Everyone at the table then looked at each other and started laughing uncontrollably. She jokingly remarked, “Well, you said the wine needed some oxygen so I thought I would speed the process up a little.”

Like a rosebud cut from the vine and placed in a vase, the wine eventually began to open up and reveal it’s charms. It was a complex and thoroughly lovely Pinot Noir. Mature and flaunting, the wine made our dinner very special.

The moral of this tale is that wine is never to be taken too seriously and wine protocol is simply hokey to the uninitiated who love to drink it for what it is. Who needs a decanter when you have a fork?

