

**Pinot Noir Will Seduce You Rather Than Overwhelm You**

# PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

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Inside this issue:

More "Best Of's"	3
Pinot Speak 2005	4
Notable American Pinot Noir Producers	5
California Pinot Noir Scores Big in 2005	6
Littorai Wine Dinner	7
Wine Quotes	7

## Pinot Noir All-Americans 2005

The American way is to end the year with "Best Of" lists. After tasting through more than 800 American Pinot Noirs in 2005, I am pleased to present the **Pinot Noir All-Americans of 2005**. It is always edgy to separate wines into better and worse categories and this listing of outstanding performers is intended to celebrate the bounty of great Pinot Noirs in this country. The quality of American Pinot Noirs is at an all-time high which makes these All-Americans extra special. These wines were chosen because, as Virginia Madsen said in the film *Sideways*, they tasted "so fu%\$#\* good." Veronique Drouhin, winemaker at Oregon's Domaine Drouhin echoes my sentiments: "There are lots of good wines in the world that give you pleasure. A great wine gives you emotion."

One of the major trends in the world of Pinot Noir is the stylistic split into two camps with the proponents of each who argue for their preferences. The traditionalists prefer "Table Wines," those that are best with food and for drinking sitting down. French Burgundy is often used as an example because the wines are typically lighter, less fruity, lower in alcohol and higher in acid. They are frequently referred to as "Old World" style and are more like see-through red lingerie than Jimi Hendrix purple. On the other side are the "Social Wines," meant for sipping, enjoying by themselves, and for drinking standing up. They are referred to as "New World" style because of their upfront fruitiness, extraction and higher alcohol. They have assumed numerous monikers including "Big Babe Pinots," "Jelly-jar Blockbusters," "Show Wines," and "Wines on Steroids." They are more Pamela Anderson than Katherine Hepburn. Most pinotphiles can enjoy and appreciate both styles and everything in between. The charm of wine is its diversity.

I taste most Pinot Noirs at cellar temperature with and without food in a relaxed atmosphere so as to replicate the consumer's drinking experience. I do not taste blind, but strive for integrity and objectivity. I have no link to any winery, retailer, or wholesaler and accept no advertising. I do accept some samples to review, but over eighty percent of the wines featured in my newsletter are purchased. I don't award scores to wines, preferring to give an unpretentious short description of the style and spirit of the wine that the reader can appreciate. I do want to acknowledge my wife's (aka the Princess) occasional input. I think this is valuable as she doesn't give a hoot about the label or producer, but only how the Pinot tastes.

### Best Value Pinot Noirs of 2005 (< \$20)

- 2003 Babcock Tri Counties
- 2003 Bogle RRV
- 2004 Chalone Monterey County
- 2003 Twin Fin Calif
- 2003 Sebastiani Sonoma Coast
- 2003 White Rose Nekia

**First Team “All-Americans” 2005**

- 2002 David Bruce Santa Cruz Mountains Estate Pinot Noir \***
- 2003 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \***
- 2002 Copeland Creek Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \***
- 2002 Harmonique “The Noble One” Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \***
- 2002 J. Wilkes Bien Nacido Q Block Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \***
- 2002 Littorai Summa Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Littorai One Acre Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Soter Beacon Hill Willamette Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Sine Qua Non Hollerin M Shea Vineyard Willamette Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Sean Thackrey Andromeda Devil’s Gulch Vnyd Marin County Pinot Noir \***
- 2003 WesMar Olivet Lane Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**

**Second Team “All-Americans” 2005**

- 2003 Brogan Cellars Lone Redwood Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Domaine Drouhin Laurene Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \***
- 2002 Dutton-Goldfield Devil’s Gulch Vineyard Marin County Pinot Noir**
- 2003 Etude Carneros Pinot Noir \***
- 2001 J. Rochioli Three Corner Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2003 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2003 Radio-Coteau Wine Cellars Marsh Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**
- 2002 Row Eleven Bien Nacido Vineyard “Quotiers” Pinot Noir**
- 2001 Skewis Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir**
- 2003 W.H. Smith Maritime Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**

## Honorable Mention 2005

**2003 Ambullneo Vineyards Bulldog Reserve Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2002 Ancien Carneros Pinot Noir \***  
**2004 Babcock TriCounties Pinot Noir**  
**2002 Burrell School Reserve Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir**  
**2001 Clos Saron Sierra Foothills Pinot Noir**  
**2003 Domaine Alfred Chamisal Vineyard Califa Edna Valley Pinot Noir \***  
**2002 Domaine Serene Mark Bradford Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \***  
**2003 Halleck Three Sons Cuvee Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2004 Hartford Family Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \***  
**2002 J. Rochioli West Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2003 Kosta Browne Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2003 Lost Canyon Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \***  
**2003 MacPhail Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2003 Miner Family Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \***  
**2004 Olivet Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \***  
**2001 Scherrer Ft Ross Vineyard Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**  
**2002 Siduri Olivet Grange Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2003 Sonoma Coast Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \***  
**2003 Van Duzer Dijon Blocks Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \***  
**2003 Varner Spring Ridge Vineyard Hidden Block Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir \***  
**2003 WesMar Piner Ranch Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir**  
**2002 White Rose Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \***

Unfortunately many of these All-Americans are sold out, so unlike a movie "Best Of" list, they have disappeared except for the secondary and auction market. \* An asterisk indicates that the wine is probably still available from the winery or retail sources (try [winesearcher.com](http://winesearcher.com), [wineaccess.com](http://wineaccess.com), [wineweb.com](http://wineweb.com), [winezap.com](http://winezap.com)) Also, look for the next vintage of the same wine.

## More "Best Of's"

Best Pinot blog and website: **Green Truck Cellars** ([www.greentruckcellars.com](http://www.greentruckcellars.com), **The Pinot Log**)

Best Pinot winery newsletter (tie): **Beaux Freres** and **Calera**

Best marketing theme: **Red Car Wine Company**

Best American Pinot Conference (tie): **World of Pinot Noir** and **International Pinot Noir Celebration**

Best book on Pinot Noir (tie): **North American Pinot Noir** (John Haeger) and **A Wine Journey Along the Russian River** (Steve Heimoff)

Best newsletter on Burgundy: **Burghound** (Allen Meadows)

Best Pinot bottle label and packaging: **Belle Glos**

Best new undiscovered Pinot region: **Santa Cruz Mountains**

Best Pinot producers that take a special effort to visit: **Calera**, **Chalone**, **Clos Saron**, **Mt Eden**, and any of several on the true **Sonoma Coast** (Flowers, Hirsch, Peay Vineyards, Wild Hog).

Best American Pinot Noir producer: **Littorai** (owner and winemaker Ted Lemon)

## Additions to Pinot Speak 2005

Pinot Noir, more than any other wine, elicits a cornucopia of descriptive prose. Wine reviewers are known to invoke practically the entire human repertoire of aromas and tastes to adequately portray a Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir even has its own lexicon or "Pinot Speak." Last year (Vol 3, Issue 42) I summarized the most common smells and flavors in the language of Pinot Speak. This year there were a number of colorful additions to the Pinot Speak vernacular.

Beef bouillon, beefy, molasses, smoked bacon, fig, Worcestershire, sherry, soy sauce, saffron, wintergreen, spearmint, camphor, anise, toasted anise seed, green herb, Chinese 5 spice, demure pepperiness, root beer, fig, cherry cola, green olive, geranium, pencil shavings, mahogany, loamy earth, dust, rust and iron, old dictionary, old library books, tar, rubber tire, sweaty leather, sweet pipe-tobacco smoke, rustic, and foxy. John Kapon, writing in *Vintage Tastings* (Acker Merrill) is over-the-top when it comes to Pinot Speak. Some of his notable descriptive: sweet brown sugar sprinkled on top of oatmeal, mushrooms on a grill, benevolent stew, garbage aromas, pungent cat action, citric tang, t'n a, vitamin tension, smoke on water, overripe.com, and zip and zing. He even came up with two new words: abfabulous and caliesque (Calif Pinot).

Only a true wine geek knows the meaning of the following words which have become part of the contemporary wine language. You can toss them out at wine dinners or wine tastings or even ordinary social events and people's ears will perk up. Many of these terms are complimentary to Pinot Speak.

**acesense:** volatile acidity which causes a sharp or vinegar-like sensation in the nose. Considered a flaw in wine, it is often due to inadequate control of hygiene or temperature during winemaking.

**hang time;** the period of extended ripening or "fruit residence time."

**inflorescence necrosis:** the dying back of flowers that would otherwise have gone on to develop grape clusters.

**phenolics:** the tannin structure in wine from grape seeds and skins.

**tension:** the negative flavors in wine that, in small quantities, increase the intellectual interest of the wine (according to winemaker Dan Karlsen). Tension comes from skins, seeds, barrels and microbes. A hedonistic wine like Pinot Noir is fruit-driven while the most intellectual wines like Cabernet Sauvignon and Barolo are tension-driven.

**terroirism:** (not to be confused with terrorism). Proponents of terroir believe there are identifiable characters in wines associated with the terroir of their origin. Followers of terroirism worship sense of place. Terroir is one of the few French terms that the French have not forbade others from using (often "gout de terroir"). Currently there is a struggle between those who believe in terroir and those who believe in manufactured wines. According to winemaker Ted Lemon of Littorai, "The terroirists, we're losing."

**vanilliators:** wine producers that make wine by a formula. The wines lack character and all taste the same - "like vanilla."

**vine mealybug:** VMB or *Planococcus ficus*. First identified in 1998 in San Joaquin Valley. Now in 16 California counties. If untreated, causes vine death. Insecticides are the most effective treatment.

## Notable American Pinot Noir Producers: Cult Wines, Emerging Wines, Just Hatched Wines, & Standbys

The explosion of Pinot Noir producers in California and Oregon over the last 10 years is astonishing. I am currently trying to compile a complete listing, but a new vintner seems to pop up almost weekly. A book published in the early 1990s by Cathleen Francisco, *Pinot Noir: A Reference Guide to California and Oregon Pinot Noir* featured 80 prominent wineries. In John Winthrop Haeger's 2004 book, *North America Pinot Noir*, he states that "a fair estimate is that somewhere between 400 and 450 wineries make Pinot Noir" in North America. I believe the number of current Pinot Noir producers considering true wineries, virtual wineries and second labels is significantly more than that amount. I will have the answer for you this year but in the meantime, here is a reference listing of notable producers divided into four categories: Cult Pinot Noirs, Emerging Pinot Noirs, Just Hatched Pinot Noirs, and Standby Pinot Noirs. I have included these wineries because in most cases I have drunk and recommend the wines. The lists are by no means complete and I am sure I have left out some of your favorites. California and Oregon are grouped together.

### Cult Pinot Noirs

A cult Pinot Noir is one that is furiously sought after by pinoaficiandos. It is made in very small quantities and sold mainly through a mailing list, which in many cases is full and has, itself, a waiting list. In a number of cases, the wine is priced significantly above comparable wines from the same area and demands a premium at auction. The cult wine movement was born in California with Cabernet Sauvignons in the 1980s reaching its pinnacle with wines like Screaming Eagle and Harlan Estate. Cult Pinot Noirs are a more recent phenomenon and seem to be unique to California.

Ambullneo, Brewer-Clifton, Brogan Cellars, George, Hirsch Estate, Kalin, Kistler, Kosta Browne, Littorai, Marcassin, Peter Michael, Pisoni Vineyards & Winery, Radio-Coteau, Rochioli (single vineyards), Sea Smoke, Sine Qua Non (2004 is last year for Pinot Noir).

### Emerging Pinot Noirs

Emerging producers are usually those of recent origin who have garnered many accolades and stirred significant interest among wine enthusiasts. Some are long-standing names that have become transformed through ownership or winemaker change into stellar producers, others are a product of the latest boom in Pinot Noir startups. Most have websites.

Adea, Adobe Road, Andrew Rich Wines, Argyle, Artesa, August West, Belle Pente, Belle Glos, Bergstrom, Bonaccorsi, Burrell School, Cargasacchi/Pointe Concepcion, Casa Cassara, Castalia, CL Wines, Claudia Springs, Clos Pepe Estate, Clos La Chance, Clos Saron, Coleman Vineyard, Copeland Creek Vineyard, Cuvaision Estate, Davis Family Vineyards, D'Argenzio Winery, Demuth Winery, Domaine Alfred, Domaine Carneros, Domaine Serene, Dutton-Goldfield, Elke Vineyards, Failla-Jordan, Fess Parker Winery, Fiddlehead Cellars, Forchini Vineyards & Winery, Foley Estate, Freeman Vineyard & Winery, Ft Ross Vineyard & Winery, Goldeneye, Green Truck Cellars, Halleck, Hartford, Inman Family, J, Wilkes, Labyrinth, Lachini Vineyards, Laetitia, Lemelson, Lincourt Vineyards, Londer, Loring Wine Company, Lost Canyon, Lucia, McKinley Vineyards, MacPhail, Moshin Vineyards, Melville, Miner Family, Miura Vineyards, Morgan Winery, Ojai Vineyard, Mystic, Olivet Lane Vineyard, Ortman Family, Papapietro Perry, Patricia Green Cellars, Peay Vineyards, Penner-Ash, Pey-Marin, Prive Vineyard, Red Car Wine Company, Roar Wines, Roessler Cellars, Row 11, Rusack Vineyards, Russian Hill, Rutz Cellars, Savannah-Chanelle, Scherrer, Scott Paul Wines, Sinean, Skewis, Soter Vineyards, Stephen Ross Cellars, Tandem, Tantara Winery, Teritorial Vineyards & Winery, Varner, Van Duzer Vineyards, Vision Cellars, Walter Hansel, WesMar, W.H. Smith, White Rose, Whitethorn, Woodenhead

## Just Hatched Pinot Noirs

Abiouness, Adastra, Alcina Cellars, Amici Cellars, Amplelos Cellars, A.P Vin, Arista, Benovia, Canihan Family Vineyard, Carabella, Cardwell Hill Cellars, Carr, Casa Ba rranca, Clos Noirrien, Coyote Canyon, Dain, Derbes, Donum Estate, Dunah Vineyard & Winery, Dusky Goose, Eieio, Elliott Family Cellars, Gold Ridge, Green Truck Cellars, Harrington, Hamel, Holdredge, Hope & Grace, Jack Creek, Fife, J. Jacaman Wines, John Tyler, Ken Brown, Harmonique, Lookout Ridge, Malibu Hills Vineyard, Patassy, Peka, Pelerin Wines, Perbacco, Philo Ridge, Relic, Ribbon Ridge, Sean Thackrey, Sinor-LaVelle, Sonnett Wine Cellars, Sonoma Coast Vineyards, Stoller Vineyards, St Gregory, Suth Luchtel Cellars, The Four Graces, Summerland, Thumbprint Cellars, Varner, Windy Oaks.

## Standby Pinot Noirs

These are reliable producers of Pinot Noir that have a track record of producing consistently fine wines.

Acacia, Adelsheim, Ancien, Arcadian, Archery Summit, Au Bon Climat, Babcock, Beaux Freres, Bethel Heights, Brickhouse, Broadley Vineyards, Byron, Calera, Cameron, Chalone, Chehalem, Cristom, Davis Bynum, David Bruce, Dehlinger, Domaine Drouhin, Du Mol, Edna Valley Vineyard, Elk Cove, El Molino, Erath, Etude, Evesham Wood, Eyrie Vineyards, Foxen, Gary Farrell, Hamacher, Handley Cellars, Hanzell, Hartford Family Winery, Hitching Post, Husch Vineyards, Iron Horse, Kenwood, Joseph Swan Vineyards, J Wine Co, Ken Wright Cellars, La Crema, Landmark Vineyards, Lane Tanner, Longoria, Lynmar Winery, Marimar Estate, Martinelli, Merry Edwards, Mt Eden, Navarro Vineyards, Patz & Hall, Paul Hobbs, Ponzi Vineyards, Porter Creek, Rex Hill Vineyards, Schug Carneros Estate, Robert Mueller Cellars, Robert Sinskey Vineyards, Robert Stemmler Winery, Rochioli, Rodney Strong, Saintsbury, Salamandre, Sanford (has changed hands so future unpredictable), Sebastopol Vineyards - Dutton Estate Winery, Shea Wine Cellars, Siduri, St Innocent, Talley Vineyards, Testarossa, Torii Mor, Whitcraft, Wild Hog, Williams Selyem, Willakenzie Estate

## California Pinot Noir Scores Big in 2005

Ten years ago scores above 90/100 for California Pinot Noir were far and few between. Since then, California Pinot Noir has undergone a dramatic improvement in quality far more than any other grape varietal grown in the state. 2002 and 2003 were back to back great vintages for Pinot Noir in California. In 2005, wine reviewers handed out scores in the mid to high 90's to several notable Pinot Noirs from these two vintages (including producers W.H. Smith, Kosta Browne, MacPhail, Marcassin, Du Mol, Etude, Laetitia, Hanzell, Morgan, and Foley Estate). Competition for these desirable wines is fierce. The high scorers have representatives from all the major Pinot Noir producing appellations in California including the Santa Rita Hills, Edna Valley, Santa Lucia Highlands, Sonoma Coast, Russian River Valley, and Anderson Valley. There is great Pinot everywhere you look.

The high quality of the current Pinot Noir releases is great news for Pinot enthusiasts but you will have to open your wallet to have the best. The release prices for highly-scoring wines range from \$30 to \$90, with most wines in the \$40 to \$50 range. The prices that top wines command will continue to escalate because grape prices are increasing nearly 8% per year and the cost of oak barrels, bottles and corks continue to rise. It is becoming outrageously expensive to farm Pinot Noir in the currently in vogue cold climate areas where yields are extremely low. The 2005 vintage is being heralded as the greatest vintage in 10 years for California and this, too, will surely cause some price inflation when that vintage is released. Fortunately, the quality of lower priced Pinot Noir is increasing also. There is something out there for every Pinot lover. Remember the line from that old song: **"If you can't drink the Pinot you love, love the Pinot you're with!"**

