



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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*Pinot Noir is what
real wine drinkers
want to drink*

2008 Pinot Noir All-Americans

As 2008 wraps up, “Best of 2008” lists are traditional and what better analogy for great American Pinot Noir than to name the best performers “All-Americans.” As I have done the past few years, I am proud to present the Pinot Noir All-Americans of 2008, the best wines I drank out of the over 1,000 American Pinot Noirs I formally sampled over the past year. Pinot Noir in California and Oregon is now of such consistently high quality that it is difficult to single out wines that stand out from the pack. It is a testimony to the cadre of passionate winegrowers who have scoffed at the suggestion that Pinot Noir is a “heartbreak grape” and have successfully corralled the grape’s temperamental nature. The 2008 All-Americans were chosen in the spirit of celebration of the copious bounty of Pinot Noir that we are blessed with in this country. The All-Americans were selected as much for their fruity, flirty, New World hedonism as for their description-defying sensuality. These wines were technically complete, but more significantly, they displayed a powerful charisma. It is a truth that it is not what is written but what is emoted that truly defines a wine’s greatness. Veronique Drouhin, winemaker at Oregon’s Domaine Drouhin, echoes my sentiments perfectly when she said, “There are plenty of good wines in the world that give you pleasure. A great wine gives you emotion.”

The stylistic split of power versus finesse or “New World” against “Old World,” is still ever present, but the superiority of either style is a tired argument. Most New World winemakers admit that they are trying to craft the best wine they can from their vineyards and not trying to imitate Old World Burgundy. The growing conditions in the New World provide more upfront fruitiness, extraction and higher alcohol. The 2008 vintage was a perfect example, with searing heat at harvest pushing sugars in some vineyards in California close to 30° Brix. The French rarely concern themselves with heat at harvest and French Burgundy is often lighter, less fruity, higher in acid and lower in alcohol, more see-through red lingerie than Jimi Hendrix purple. Most New World Pinot Noirs strike a balance between the two extremes. True pinotphiles can appreciate both styles and relish in the diversity of Pinot Noir.

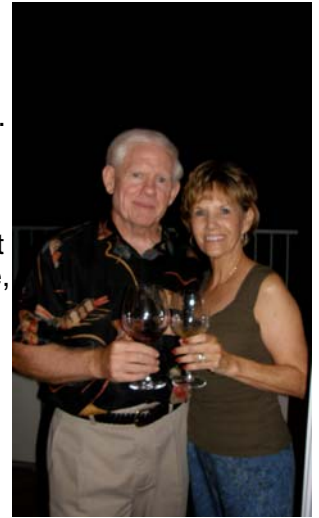
I wish to clarify the steps I take to arrive at the wines I recommend in the *PinotFile* during the year and that make the All-American list at year’s end. I taste Pinot Noir daily in a consistently calm setting in my home in the morning. The wines are sampled at cellar temperature (55° F - 65°F) and are tasted over a couple of hours in a relaxed atmosphere. I give the wines time to open up and make several passes to taste each wine. Occasionally I decant the wines if this will benefit the evaluation. I use either Riedel Vinum Burgundy glasses or Riedel Oregon Pinot Noir glasses. Often I will taste the wines later the same day or the next day from an opened and re-corked bottle. Frequently the wines are re-tasted with food at lunch or dinner to replicate the consumer’s drinking experience. I do not taste for the most part blind, but strive for integrity, consistency and objectivity. “The aim of judgment,” respected French wine critic Michael Bettane said, “is truth and impartiality.” I have no monetary arrangement with any winery, retailer or wholesaler and accept no advertising. I do accept wines for review, but over 75% of the wines I sample are bought directly from the winery or through the usual retail channels. There are a number of Pinot Noirs that I sample casually at social dinners, Pinot Noir festivals, and tastings but I do not include these in the All-American selection process, preferring only to incorporate wines that are formally tasted in controlled circumstances.

I do not award scores to wines, preferring to give an unpretentious and concise description of the style and quality of the wine that the reader can appreciate and use. I attempt to convey that special sensuality in Pinot Noir that is so easy to covet, yet at so difficult to describe. Wineries prefer scores for marketing purposes, but I am convinced that an apropos description is the fairest way to evaluate a wine. Beginning with Volume 7, Issue 3, I began using the Pinot Geek icon (right) to designate wines of exceptional merit of All American quality.



I do not take my reviews or myself too seriously. I preach to the reader to use my tasting notes as a guide, but above all, trust his or her own palate. I do want to acknowledge my spouse's occasional tasting contributions. I think this is valuable, as she does not give a hoot about the label or the producer, only how the Pinot Noir tastes. Let's face the truth, women have incredibly good palates.

Beyond the emotions that a wine can incite and weigh heavily on its enjoyment, there are certain technical aspects of a wine that must be addressed to arrive at the judgment of quality. A quality wine is spoken reverently as a "complete wine." In a complete wine, all the components join together harmoniously. A complete wine is an accolade that is awarded to wines with all the following attributes.



Color: The color of a wine is evaluated according to hue, intensity and clarity. Pinot Noir is found in practically all shades of red and its color is due to anthocyanin in the wine. The color that anthocyanin imparts to Pinot Noir is secondary to the acidity of the wine. Higher acidity (lower pH) gives a lively red color to a new wine while lower acidity (higher pH) produces a less brilliant and more purple hue. As wines age in the bottle, tannins become an important determinant of color, combining with anthocyanin to bestow a brick or brown color to the red. The intensity of color of Pinot Noir is not related to quality in the sense that darker-colored wines do not necessarily provide more drinking enjoyment. Most small production Pinot Noir is unfinned and unfiltered to retain all aromatic and flavor components. Some sediment may result but this is not a flaw in the wine.

Smell: A complete wine will have more than one family of aromas (fruity, floral, spices, etc.). The olfactory system enables the brain to perceive not only odors inhaled through the nostrils, but also the aromatic qualities of a wine conveyed to it from the palate by way of the nasal passage at the back of the mouth. Primary aromas are odors intrinsic to the grape. Secondary aromas are derived from the alcohol fermentation and maturing in wood. Tertiary aromas are known as "bottle bouquet," and develop from aging through recombination of esters and alcohols after alcoholic and malolactic fermentation are complete.

Taste: A complete wine will have more than one family of flavors and all the flavors will be in harmony. Tastes are sensed on the tongue and each flavor remains evident for a time that determines persistence.

Texture: Often referred to as mouth feel, unctuousness or roundness (*moelleux*), texture is the tactile sense of wine in the mouth, on the tongue and in the throat. It is the fabric of a wine. Quality wines are often described as smooth, silky, velvety, well-knit, glossy or polished while lesser ones as flabby, loose-knit, granular or coarse. Silky textures are unique to Pinot Noir and give the wine its sexiness.

Finish: Finish refers to the final aromatic and taste sensations of wine on the palate. A complete wine will have both a long aromatic finish lasting several seconds and an appealing taste (fruit, acidity, alcohol, astringency) at the end.

Balance: A term used synonymously with harmony and referring to the relative levels of acidity, alcohol, tannins and roundness that are felt in the mouth. A well-balanced wine has all of these elements in equal amounts with no element predominating. Aromas have nothing to do with balance. A complete wine will have impeccable balance. If a wine is unbalanced early in its life, it will never become balanced, no matter how long it is aged.

Aftertaste: This term is often used synonymously with finish. For clarity's sake, aftertaste refers to the flavor and olfactory impressions that remain after the wine is swallowed or spit out. A quality wine is described as having "length" when the clean, balanced and full flavors of the finish linger in the aftertaste. Flaws in wine may be perceived in the aftertaste that otherwise might have been overlooked. The most common complaint is a bitter or astringent aftertaste, heightened by the fact that bitterness, sensed mainly at the back of the tongue, also has the longest flavor persistence. Aftertaste is the final indicator of a wine's overall quality, confirming not only if it is balanced and complete, but whether it rates such adjectives as elegance, breeding and finesse.

I consider the All-American wines, particularly the First Team, to be complete wines.

The All-American awards are unique in that the winners include trophy and cult Pinot Noirs that are infrequently submitted for review to tasting panels of major wine publications. The *PinotFile* All-Americans encompass every Pinot Noir produced in California and Oregon. In 2008, All-Americans turned up in all major Pinot Noir producing regions of California and Oregon.

The 137 All-American wines chosen were ones enjoyed in 2008, regardless of year of release. In many cases, the wines represent the most recent release. They are judged on merit, independent of price, style and region of origin. I have also included a listing of outstanding Pinot Noirs from New Zealand as I sampled many this year. I drink a fair amount of red Burgundy, but leave the critical evaluation of these wines to others who are more dedicated to that region (for example, Allen Meadows of the *Burghound* newsletter). Man cannot live on red wine alone so I also indulge in Chardonnay. My favorite producers are Aubert, Benovia, Freestone Vineyards, Hirsch, Kistler, l'Angevin, Littorai, Shea Vineyard, Varner and Windy Oaks.

The awarded wines are listed in alphabetical order. After each wine, the issue in which a review appeared is listed (descriptors often do not do these wines justice!). Some wines are sold out at the winery long ago, but likely to still be available from retail sources or auctions. A search using the following websites will often turn up sources for the wines: www.wine-searcher.com, www.vinquire.com, www.winezap.com and www.wineaccess.com. Keep in mind that there will always be another vintage and stellar producers make quality wine consistently with each vintage. It will not be the same song, but it will be the same composer. Winery mailing lists are a good method of insuring that you obtain a steady supply of desirable Pinot Noir from a talented producer.

Current prices for North American Pinot Noir run the gamut from \$7 to over \$100, but generally life begins at \$40. The average price for all the California and Oregon First and Second Team All-Americans of 2008 was \$55 and \$59 respectively. Collecting and drinking Pinot Noir can be a rich man's game if only trophy or "deep pocket Pinots" are sought after. Fortunately, there are many perfectly fine Pinot Noirs on the market that retail for less than \$30 and the increasing number of these so-called value Pinot Noirs makes good Pinot Noir more available now than ever. The 2008 Value Pinot Noir All-Americans represent the best under \$30 North American Pinot Noirs I sampled this past year. Recently I began using the Value icon (right) to indicate a Pinot Noir having good quality at a bargain price. Value Pinot Noirs do not match up in quality of fruit, aroma and flavor nuances and complexity compared to the prestige bottlings. They do, however, offer a perfectly fine everyday drinking experience that reflects the charm of the Pinot Noir variety. Think of them as Pinot Noir unplugged.



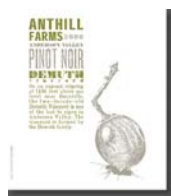
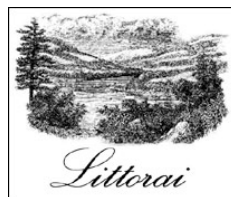
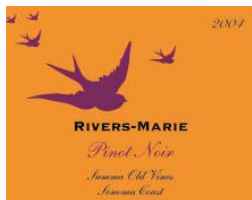
For those wines that were left out this year, the words of Mark Twain ring true, "It is better to deserve honors and not have them, than to have them and not deserve them."



2008 California Pinot Noir All-Americans

First Team

- 2006 Ambullneo Rancho Ontiveros Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 135 cs, \$119, 6.54
- 2006 Anthill Farms Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$39, 6.60
- 2006 Drew Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Mendocino County Pinot Noir 187 c, \$30, 6.55
- 2005 george Vintage IV Nuptial Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$50, 6.61
- 2004 Littorai Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 360 cs, \$55, 6.60
- 2004 Littorai Thieriot Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 240 cs, \$65, 7.3
- 2006 Paul Lato Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$65, 6.62
- 2007 Rivers-Marie Summa Old Vines Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir Unreleased, 6.62
- 2005 Roessler Cellars Clos Pepe Vineyard Ste. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 175 cs, \$45, 6.55
- 2005 Siduri Truett Nolan California Pinot Noir 192 cs, \$70, 7.6
- 2005 WesMar Oehlman Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 268 c, \$37, 6.53



Second Team

- 2006 Alcina Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 729 cs, \$35, 6.62
- 2006 B Vineyards & Habitat Sera Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 144 cs, \$64, 7.8
- 2006 Benovia Bella Luna Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 168 cs, \$58, 7.6
- 2006 Black Kite Kite's Rest Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** <500 cs, \$38, 6.60
- 2004 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 220 cs, \$75, 7.3
- 2006 Freestone Vineyards Quarter Moon Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 50 cs, \$90-\$100, 7.5
- 2004 J Rochioli West Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** \$75, 7.1
- 2005 Joseph Swan Trenton Estate Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** \$47, 6.62
- 2005 Kynsi Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** \$36, 7.6
- 2006 Lane Tanner Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 460 cs, \$33, 6.58
- 2006 Siduri Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 490 cs, \$45, 7.6

Honorable Mention

- 2006 Ambullneo Canis Major Pinot Noir** 135 cs, \$95, 6.54
- 2005 Anthill Farms Demuth Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** \$39, 7.3
- 2006 B Kosuge Manchester Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 300 cs, \$40, 7.3
- 2006 B Vineyards & Habitat Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 336 cs, \$49, 7.8
- 2006 Benovia Savoy Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 220 cs, \$55, 7.6
- 2006 Bianchi Signature Selection Garey Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** \$25, 6.54
- 2005 Bick Wines Weir Vineyard Yorkville Highlands Mendocino County Pinot Noir** \$40, 6.61
- 2006 C. Donatiello Floodgate Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 175 cs, \$57, 6.62
- 2006 Castalia Rochioli Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 328 cs, \$50, 6.62
- 2005 Chasseur Twin Hill Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** 76 cs, \$60, 6.62
- 2006 Cima Collina Tondre Grapefield Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir** 158 cs, \$48, 7.3
- 2005 Copeland Creek Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir** \$30, 6.50
- 2001 Cottonwood Canyon Estate Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir** 709 cs, \$39, 6.54
- 2005 Davis Family Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 957 cs, \$40, 6.50, 6.51
- 2005 Dehlinger Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** \$65, 6.63
- 2006 De La Montanya Tina's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 137 cs, \$40, 6.59

2006 Dragonette Fiddlestix Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 144 cs, \$45, 7.3

2005 Dubakella Trinity County Pinot Noir \$30, 7.3

2005 Dutton-Goldfield Dutton Ranch/Freestone Hill Vineyard 361 cs, \$58, 6.51

2006 EMTU Labyrinth Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 300 cases, \$40, 7.8

2006 Esterlina Estate Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 611 c, \$45, 6/60, 6/63

2006 Ferrari-Carano Sky High Ranch Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$46, 6.60, 6.62

2006 Foxen Winery Julia's Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$54, 7.9

2006 Freeman Akiko's Cuvee Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$52, 6.59

2006 Freestone Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2,700 cs, \$75, 7.5

2006 George Vintage V Ceremonial Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 300 cs, \$50, 7.5

2005 Gloria Ferrer José Ferrer Selection Carneros Pinot Noir 1,067 cs, \$38, 6.62

2004 Green Truck Cellars Napa Valley Pinot Noir 650 cs, \$36, 6.59

2006 Halleck Vineyards The Farm Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 250 cs, \$55, 6.55

2004 Handley Cellars Reserve Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$52, 6.60

2006 Harrington Wiley Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$40, 7.6

2006 Hirsch Hirsch Vineyard Estate Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$55, 6.63

2006 Hook & Ladder "Third Alarm" Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 168 cs, \$35, 7.5

2006 Hug Cellars Cedar Lane Vineyard Arroyo Seco Pinot Noir 190 cs, \$30, 6.62

2006 Inman Family Wines OGV Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$52, 7.5

2006 J Nicole's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 1,400 cs, \$65, 6.63

2006 Jim Ball "Signature Label" Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$60, 6.60, 7.8

2006 Jonata La Poesia des Jonata Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir \$90, 7.3

2006 Kanzler Kanzler Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$50, 6.63

2006 Kastania Vineyards Reserve Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 393 cs, \$42, 6.57

2006 Kasuari Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$30, 6/53

2006 Keefer Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 143 cs, \$42, 6.62

2006 Kenneth Volk Sierra Madre Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$36, 6.54

2006 Kosta Browne 4-Barrel California Pinot Noir 101 cs, \$68, 6.62

2006 La Crema Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 2,000 cs, \$34, 6.60

2006 Landmark Grand Detour Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$33, 7.3

2006 Lioco Hirsch Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 256 cs, \$60, 7.3

2004 Littorai One Acre Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 140 cs, \$70, 6.60

2006 Lost Canyon Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir <525 cs, \$42, 6.57

2006 Lutea Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$50, 7.5

2005 Lynmar Quail Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 1,459 cs, \$60, 6.51

2004 Marguerite Ryan Birkmyer Vineyard Wild Horse Valley Pinot Noir 52 c, \$40, 6.53

2005 McHenry Swan Clone Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 62 cs, \$28, 6.55

2006 Morlet Family Vineyards "Joli Coeur" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 100 cs, \$90, 6.53

2005 Navarro Vineyards Méthode à l'Ancienne Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \$33. 7.3

2006 Phillips Hill Estates Oppenlander Vineyard Comptche Mendocino County Pinot Noir 550 cs, \$42, 6.60

2005 Russian Hill Tera Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$37, 6.58

2005 Scherrer Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$39, 6/58, 7.5

2006 Scherrer High Slopes Fort Ross Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 750 cs, \$40, 7.8

2005 Sinor-LaVallee Talley-Rincon Vineyard Arroyo Grande Pinot Noir \$35, 7.6

2005 Talisman Thorn Ridge Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 359 cs, \$50, 6.61

2006 Tandem Auction Block Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 916 cs, \$60, 7.6

2006 Tantara Evelyn Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir 150 cs, \$90, 6.61

2005 The Donum Estate Carneros Pinot Noir 850 cs, \$65, 6/61

2006 Twin Oaks Cellars Amber Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$42, 6/58

2005 Verve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 375 cs, \$33, 6.51

2004 WesMar Balletto Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$37, 6.57

2004 Williams Selyem Rochioli Riverblock Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$72, 6.51

2006 Willowbrook Marin County Pinot Noir 245 cs, \$38, 7.3

2005 Windy Oaks Estate Cuvee Schultze Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 285 cs, \$35, 6.55

2005 Woodenhead Buena Tierra Original Plantings Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 180 cs, \$45, 7.3

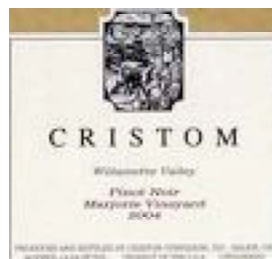
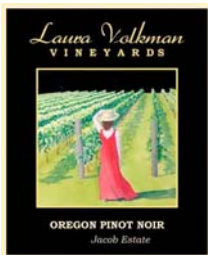
2007 Zepaltas Suacci Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 145 cs, \$49, 7.6

2005 Zina Hyde Cunningham Reserve Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 50 cs, \$50, 6.60

2008 Oregon Pinot Noir All-Americans

First Team

- 2006 Bethel Heights Casteel Reserve Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$60, 7.2
- 2006 Cristom Vineyards Eileen Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$42, 7.2, 7.7
- 2006 Et Fille Kalita Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 303 cs, \$38, 7.2
- 2005 Ken Wright Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$60, 6.52, 6.57
- 2006 Laura Volkman Rachel Estate Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 100 cs, \$38, 6.57
- 2005 Ponzi Abetina Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 2,300 btls, \$100, 6.52, 7.1
- 2005 Ponzi Reserve Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 3,000 cs, \$60, 6.52
- 2006 Privé Le Sud Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$53, 7.2
- 2005 ROCO Private Stash Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 100 cs, \$70, 7.2
- 2002 Sine Qua Non Holler'n M Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$345, 7.1, 7.2
- 2005 Westrey Reserve Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$30, 7.2



Second Team

- 2005 Anam Cara Cellars Nicholas Estate Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 678 cs, \$30, 6.52
- 2006 Angela Clawson Creek Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 400 cs, \$50, 7.2
- 2006 Arterberry Maresh Maresh Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$75, 7.5
- 2006 Artisanal Wine Cellars Adams Vineyard Reserve Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 214 cs, \$38, 7.7
- 2006 Carabella Inchinnan Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 85 cs, \$51, 7.7
- 2005 Cristom Jessie Vineyard Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$42, 7.2
- 2005 Hamacher Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$37, 7.2
- 2006 Laura Volkman Jacob Estate Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 200 cs, \$42, 6.57, 7.7
- 2005 ROCO Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$40, 7.2
- 2006 St Innocent Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 933 cs, \$40, 7.2
- 2006 The Four Graces Reserve Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 2,750 cs, \$42, 7.2

Honorable Mention

- 2006 Adelsheim Ribbon Springs Vineyard Ribbon Ridge Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 299 cs, \$58, 7.7
- 2006 Antica Terra Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$46, 7.2
- 2006 Beaux Freres Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$50, 7.2
- 2005 Belle Pente Murto Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 200 cs, \$35, 6.52
- 2006 Belle Vallée Grand Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 382 cs, \$55, 6.52
- 2006 Bethel Heights Southeast Block Reserve Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 141 cs, \$50, 7.7
- 2007 Bethel Heights Flat Block Reserve Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** Unreleased, 7.7
- 2005 Brandborg "Love Puppets" Umpqua Valley Pinot Noir** 800 cs, \$30, 6.52
- 2005 DePonte Cellars Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$38, 6.52
- 2004 and 2006 Domaine Drouhin Oregon Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$45, 6.58, 7.2
- 2006 Dobbles Family Estate Meyer Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 174 cs, \$65, 7.7
- 2006 Lange Family Vineyards & Winery Estate Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** 285 cs, \$60, 7.7
- 2005 Pali Wine Co Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir** \$45, 6.52

2005 Penner-Ash Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$60, 6.52
2005 Penner-Ash Dussin Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$60, 7.2
2005 Soter Beacon Hill Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$48, 6.52
2006 Resonance Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 100 cs, \$49, 7.2
2006 ROCO Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$40, 7.2
2006 Willamette Valley Vineyards Signature Cuvee Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 321 cs, \$50, 7.2

2008 Value-Priced California Pinot Noir All-Americans

First Team

2006 Aubin Cellars Verve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 150 cs, \$28, 7.6
2005 Chalone Estate Grown Monterey County Pinot Noir 1,065 cs, \$21.50, 7.6
2006 Hahn Estates Monterey Pinot Noir \$15-\$23, 7.6
2005 Handley Cellars Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 4,062 cs, \$28, 6.60
2006 Hug Cellars Paso Robles Pinot Noir 95 cs, \$25, 6.61
2006 Joseph Swan Cuvée de Trois Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 1,100 cs, \$25.50, 6.62
2005 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$22, 6.57
2006 La Fond Winery & Vineyards Ste. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 3,544 cs, \$19-\$26, 7.6
2006 Lane Tanner Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir 556 cs, \$26, 6.58
2005 McHenry Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir <200 cs, \$20, 7.3
2006 Mia's Playground Sangiacomo Vineyards Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 4,200 cs, \$24, 6.63

Honorable Mention

2006 Aquinas Napa Valley Pinot Noir 37,000 cs, \$14, 6.63
2007 B Vineyards & Habitat Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Rosé 115 cs, \$24, 6.59
2006 Balletto Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 3,178 cs, \$20, 6.51
2007 Balletto Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$25, 7.5
2007 Balletto Winery Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$28, 7.5

2006 Beaulieu Vineyard Napa Valley Pinot Noir \$18, 6.63

2006 Belle Glos Oeil De Perdix Yorkville Highlands Mendocino County Pinot Noir Blanc \$25, 6.59

2006 Bishop's Peak Central Coast Pinot Noir \$16, 7.6

2005 Bouchaine Napa Carneros Pinot Noir \$20, 6.62

2005 Castle Los Carneros Pinot Noir \$16, 6.63

2006 Castle Rock Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2,800 cs, \$15, 7.6

2006 Costa de Oro Gold Coast Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$25, 6.54

2005 DeLoach OFS Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$28, 6.51

2006 Hart's Desire Rockin H Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$28, 7.6

2006 Hook & Ladder Winery Estate Bottled Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 4,519 cs, \$35, 7.5

2006 Hunterdon Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$16, 6.57

2006 Husch Vineyards Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 5,518 cs, \$23, 6.60

2006 Jekel Vineyards Monterey County Pinot Noir \$17, 6.53

2005 Kiara Reserve Sylvester Vineyard Paso Robles Pinot Noir \$25, 6.57

2006 Lutea Sonoma County Pinot Noir 150 cs, \$23, 6.53

2006 Navarro Mendocino County Pinot Noir \$19, 6.60

2006 Paraiso Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir \$19, 7.6

2006 Praxis Monterey County Pinot Noir \$16, 6.58

2005 Raye's Hill Vineyard & Winery Henneberg Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 280 cs, \$26, 6.61

2006 Rodney Strong Estate Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$22, 7.6

2006 Soter North Valley Willamette Valley Rosé \$13, 6.59

2007 Mark West Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$9, 7.6

2008 Value-Priced Oregon Pinot Noir All-Americans

- 2006 A to Z Oregon Pinot Noir \$20, 6.57
- 2006 Belle Vallée Whole Cluster Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$17, 6.52
- 2005 Brandborg Vineyards & Winery Benchlands Umpqua Valley Pinot Noir 2,961 cs, \$22, 6.52
- 2006 Cristom Vineyards Mt. Jefferson Cuvee Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$24, 7.2
- 2006 Grochau Cellars Toute de Suite Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$18, 6.52
- 2006 Grochau Cellars Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$24, 6.52
- 2006 Stoller JV Dundee Hills Willamette Valley 3,035 cs, \$28, 7.7
- 2006 Westrey Oracle Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$25, 7.2
- 2006 Westrey Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$18, 6.52
- 2006 Willamette Valley Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 25,121 cs, \$25, 7.2
- 2005 Van Duzer Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir \$24, 6.52

2008 Top New Zealand Pinot Noirs

- 2006 Amisfield Central Otago Pinot Noir \$33, 7.4
- 2006 Craggy Range Te Muna Vineyard Martinborough Pinot Noir \$45, 7.4
- 2003 Dry River Martinborough Pinot Noir \$70, 7.4
- 2004 Dry River Martinborough Pinot Noir \$70, 7.4
- 2006 Escarpment Kupe Martinborough Pinot Noir \$60, 7.4
- 2004 Felton Road Block 3 Central Otago Pinot Noir \$49, 7.4
- 2006 Felton Road Block 3 Central Otago Pinot Noir \$60, 6.56
- 2007 Felton Road Central Otago Pinot Noir \$49, 7.4
- 2004 Olssens Jackson Barry Central Otago Pinot Noir \$23, 7.4
- 2004 Pegasus Bay Prima Donna Waipara Valley Pinot Noir \$65, 7.4
- 2006 Peregrine Central Otago Pinot Noir \$40, 7.4
- 2005 Rippon Vineyard Wanaka Lake Central Otago Pinot Noir \$45, 6.56
- 2006 Wild Earth Central Otago Pinot Noir \$25, 7.4

2008 Pinot Noir Shootout Prelims

Over the past several years I have enjoyed participating in the annual Pinot Noir Shootout organized by Barbara Drady of Affairs of the Vine. The 7th Annual Pinot Noir Shootout preliminary tastings began last month and will continue until the final tasting to be held in San Francisco on January 19, 2009. Over 250 Pinot Noirs primarily from California will be paired down by a distinguished tasting panel to approximately 40 finalists and then presented to the public, trade and press at The Pinot Noir Summit in San Francisco in February, 2009 (date TBA). At the Summit, the public has the opportunity to vote for their favorite wines in a walk-around format with the wines offered blind, and the results then compared to the scores given by the professional wine judges. Attendees will also be able to meet the winemakers and/or winery owners who produced each of the winning wines that qualified for the Summit after they are judged and unveiled. The results from last year's Pinot Noir Shootout can be viewed at the Affairs of the Vine website (www.affairsofthevine.com). Affairs of the vine is a wine education company, specializing in corporate events, interactive wine workshops, and Wine Boot Camp held at various locations in California wine country.

The competition is quite unique among judged wine events for several reasons. During the preliminaries, thirty-two wines are tasted blind in four flights of eight wines over four to five hours, allowing attentive and critical evaluation of each wine by the judging panel. This format tends to eliminate palate fatigue as a factor in judging. At many major wine competitions, judges must sample at least 100 wines a day, and often more. Judging at the Pinot Noir Shootout is independent of producer, appellation, vintage and price. Each wine is judged on its own merit. A 100-point scoring system is used, but the emphasis is on the copious notes that the judges create for each wine. The judging panel is composed of a diverse group of Pinot Noir loving professionals including representatives from the wine press, sommeliers, wine buyers, winemakers, restaurateurs, wine educators, and wine writers. The results of the competition are gender-based in that male and female judges' scores and comments are tabulated separately.

I recently participated in two preliminary tastings, sampling 64 Pinot Noirs. There were many wines that lacked the balance, elegance, texture, and sensuality that I look for in a good Pinot Noir. I am always honing in on acidity in particular. Acidity is crucial for refreshment, compatibility with food, and aging. Some of the Pinot Noirs had enormous richness and concentration, but lacked acidity. I like to call these wines "P-no-no-R." There were a few excellent Pinot Noirs that I personally can recommend.

Heaven Sent

2005 Ampelos Cellars ρ (rho) Ampelos Vineyard Ste. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5%, 376 cases, \$48. This wine is composed of the best 16 barrels from the 2005 vintage. Primarily Pommard clone with 2 barrels of Dijon clone 115. Aged in 56% new French oak barrels. Released one year after bottling. *Very fruity aromas of rich black cherries, raspberry jam and a lovely oak accent. A notable entry of plush dark berry fruits coat the tongue, offering some cherry and pie crust flavors, and ending in a stylish and refreshing finish of admirable persistence. The ripe tannins are nicely held in check and the whole package is thoroughly satisfying. This wine was also tasted at home with the same impression.*



Ampelos Cellars is a family operation owned by Peter and Rebecca Work who biodynamically farm their 25 acres of estate vineyards in the Sta. Rita Hills. In 2000, the Ampelos Cellars label was born and the first estate wines were released from the 2002 vintage. Ampelos is a Greek word meaning "vine." The Greek connection derives from the Work's love for Greece and their guest house on Folegandros in Greece's Cycladic Island group where they spend time each year. The Work's son, Don Schroeder, was the consulting enologist at Ampelos until 2008 when he left to become the winemaker at Sea Smoke. Bruno D'Alfonso (Sanford, Badge, Alma Rosa) has since signed on as the consulting enologist. The Works also supply grapes to Brewer-Clifton, Jaffurs and Samsara for their vineyard-designate Ampelos Vineyard bottlings. Total production is 3,500 cases including a Lambda Ampelos Vineyard Pinot Noir (listed under "Knock on Heaven's Door" below), a Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir, and a Syrah, Grenache and Viognier). The wines are available on the website at www.ampeloscellars.com. Tasting is by appointment at the winery located in Lompoc at 1633 W. Central Ave., Suite B.

2007 Bohemian Vineyard Freestone Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 250 cases, \$45. This wine is from the chilly Freestone microclimate. Vineyard clones include Dijon 115, 667 and 777 on 101-14 rootstock. De-stemmed, 3-5 day cold soak, whole berry fermentation in one-ton bins for 8 days with multiple punchdowns. Aged in French oak barrels for up to one year. Winemakers are Mike Zitzlaff and Chris Nelson. Unfined, unfiltered. *There is plenty of charm in the nose with scents of cherries, rhubarb, herbs, oak and roses coming and going. Carefully oaked and moderately rich black cherry fruit on the attack with supple tannins and a clean, refreshing finish.*



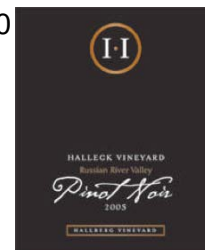
Bohemian Vineyard is one of a small cadre of producers who have taken up the challenge of farming Pinot Noir in the Freestone Redwood Highway corridor of West Sonoma County. Tom Cleary's grandparents bought 40 acres of land in Freestone in 1945. Over the next few decades, the Cleary family operated the V-C Ranch. In 1983, a third generation of the family collectively bought 36 adjacent acres, 11 of which were acquired by Tom Cleary. In 1996, noted Sonoma viticulturalist Warren Dutton approached the Clearys about planting vineyards on their land. Tom and Sue Cleary decided to engage Dutton and the first vineyards were planted by the Dutton Ranch Management Team beginning in 1998. There are now seven acres of Pinot Noir planted at the Bohemian Vineyard. The quality of the grapes have proven to be excellent and have been sold to producers such as Capioux Cellars, Crushpad, David Bruce, Patz & Hall, Roessler and Marcassin. Arturo Robledo has been the vineyard manager. By 2004, the Clearys, like many vineyard owners, decided to keep a portion of their annual harvest and enter the winemaking business. The Bohemian Vineyard Pinot Noir has been placed in several Bay Area restaurants and wine bars and wine retailers (a list is on the website at www.bohemianvineyard.com). The wine is also available on-line. The 2006 Bohemian Vineyard Pinot Noir won a Gold Medal at the San Francisco Wine Competition.

2006 Erath Winery Prince Hill Vineyard Dundee Hills Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 2,079, \$45. Sourced from 25 year-old vines planted in Jory soils. *Very appealing aromas of dark Bing cherries and baking spices. Nicely weighted cherry fruit glides over the palate with notes of brown sugar and chocolate. Softly textured with a clean finish. I could spend some time with this one.*



Erath Winery is one of the Willamette Valley's first Pinot Noir specialists. Dick Erath came to Oregon from California in the late 1960s, driven by the belief that the future of Pinot Noir was in the Willamette Valley. Early on he partnered with Cal Knudsen to form Knudsen-Erath. They built a winery together in the Dundee Hills and released many acclaimed wines. In 1988 Erath bought out Knudsen and later brought on Rob Stuart as winemaker. The current winemaker, Gary Horner, joined the winery in 2002. Erath was sold to Ste. Michelle Wine Estates in 2006 with both Dick Erath and Gary Horner active at the winery. The winery sources grapes primarily from vineyards in the Dundee Hills. Erath releases both an Oregon blend (over 80,000 cases) and single-vineyard Pinot Noirs (Prince Hill, Leland, Fuqua, and Juliard in most vintages). There is also an Estate Selection and the top of the line La Nuit Magique. The wines are sold on the website at www.erath.com and widely distributed through retail channels. The winery's tasting room is open from 11:00 to 5:00 daily. Private tours and tastings are also available by appointment. 503-538-3318.

2005 Halleck Vineyard The Farm Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 250 cases, \$55. From a 2-acre vineyard on the edge of Sebastopol meticulously maintained by vineyard manager Jim Pratt and the vineyard's owners. Planted in 1999 and cordon pruned using clone 777. *Attractive and penetrating nose of cherry jam, brown spice and sandalwood. Well oaked red fruits with appealing spice (particularly cinnamon) and a hint of raisin. A well-endowed fruity wine that is yet elegant and silky with a long aromatic finish.*



Halleck Vineyard is a small family winery operated by Ross and Jennifer Halleck. The Hallecks planted their family estate Pinot Noir vineyard in 1993 with the intention of setting aside profits from the vineyard for their three sons' college educations. The 1-acre estate vineyard overlooks the Russian River Valley in the Sonoma Coast appellation. The first harvest was 1999. The Hallecks also source fruit from stellar vineyards in the Sebastopol area, producing three vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs (Estate, The Farm, Hallberg) and a Pinot Noir blend from three vineyards called Three Sons Cuvée. Rick Davis (Londer, Calstar, La Czar Vineyards) is the winemaker. Production is 1,500 cases annually and is sold through a mailing list with limited

retail distribution. The Hallecks publish a frequent online newsletter of great interest and invite their customers to participate in harvest and travel events. Visit the website at www.halleckvineyard.com.

2006 Heart O' The Mountain Estate Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 500 cases, \$48. Individual clones (667, 777 and Pommard) are hand picked separately and kept apart throughout the winemaking and aging process. The grapes are destemmed into small bins, cold soaked for 6 days, fermented in small open top bins where the cap is gently punched down by hand several times a day. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels. The separate clones are blended before bottling and the wine is aged an additional six months in bottle before release. All winemaking is by gravity flow. Unfined and unfiltered. *Expressive aromas of ripe black cherries, plum and oak. Dark cherry and berry fruits are mouth-coating with some pie crust flavor adding interest. The tannins and alcohol are held in check, the texture is silky, and the finish is lively and persistent. Impressive and recommended.*



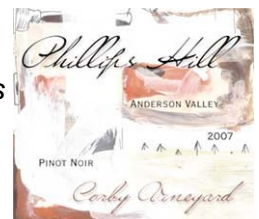
Heart O' The Mountain has a rich history. Established in 1881 by Pierre Cornwall who produced wine under the Santa Sada label, this grape growing property was later owned by the noted director Alfred Hitchcock. Today Heart O' The Mountain is owned by the Robert Brassfield family who produce small amounts of artisan Pinot Noir. Bob Brassfield and his brother were investors in Felton Empire, a Santa Cruz Mountain winery in the late 1970s. In 1978, Bob and Judy Brassfield bought the Heart O' The Mountain estate. They have lovingly preserved this historic estate including the transformation of an old barn on the property into a winery. The first Pinot Noir was released from the 2005 vintage. The Brassfield's son, Brandon, and his father have taken courses in enology and viticulture at University California Davis and vinify the Pinot Noir with a consulting winemaker. The wines are highly allocated and sold in packages of 3, 6 or 12 bottles through a mailing list. Currently the wine is available to non-allocation list members. Visit the website at www.hearttothemountain.com.

2005 Olsen Ogden Milla's Blend Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 67 cases, \$39. *Spice is the theme of this lovely wine. Strawberry and cherry fruits have a gentle strike of oak, and are enticingly spiced. Admirable elegance and impeccable balance. I like this wine for its pinotosity.*

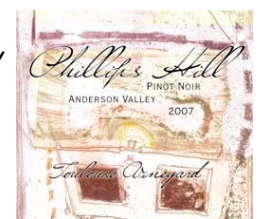


Olson Ogden Wines is a partnership between John Ogden and winemaker Tim Olson. Together they founded this boutique winery in Sonoma County in 2002. About 1,000 cases a year of Rhone varietals and Pinot Noir are produced. Tim Olson began crafting wine in his home garage over 20 years ago. A film major in college, he developed such a passion for wine that to gain experience, he began working gratis at Caymus under Charlie Wagner. Before long, he was rewarded for his hard work with a paycheck and went on to pursue winemaking as a career. He crafted excellent wines for Tarius before starting Olson Ogden Wines. Olson Ogden wines are sold through a mailing list with limited retail distribution. The website is www.olsonogdenwines and the phone is 707-823-6127.

2007 Phillips Hill Estates Corby Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 350 cases, \$40. *Demure spiced red fruit with complimentary oak and graham cracker flavors presented in an elegant fashion with a silky texture and spot-on balance. This wine displays the sensual side of Pinot Noir.*

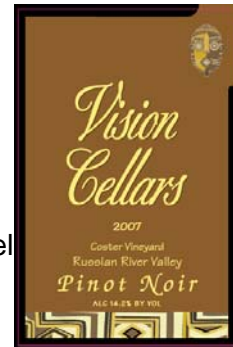


2007 Phillips Hill Estates Toulouse Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 175 cases, \$42. *The nose offers confected cherries, root beer and brown spice. Moderately rich flavors of brown-sugared fruit and mocha. The ripe tannins are fine-grained and the wine is quite rounded and harmonious.*



Phillips Hill Estates impressed me last year with their Toulouse Vineyard and Oppenlander Vineyard Pinot Noirs and I bought some for my personal cellar. Owner and winemaker Toby Hill initially pursued a career in art and his colorful labels reflect this. Living in the Anderson Valley, he transformed his art studio in Philo into a winery when some unfinished Pinot Noir became available in 2002. He is assisted by consulting winemaker John Pepe. Tasting by appointment. The website is www.phillipshillestates.com. The 2007 Pinot Noirs (there is also a release from Oppenlander Vineyard in Comptche and Marguerite Vineyard in the Anderson Valley) have not been released.

2007 Vision Cellars Coster Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 286 cases, \$42. *This is a wine of impeccable balance and breeding and one of the top wines tasted at the Pinot Noir Shootout. Attractive Bing cherry and brown spice aromas with a thoroughly pleasurable core of cherry and berry fruit with fine-grain tannins and a smooth, lingering finish. This wine has the full monty.*



Vision Cellars is one of the few California wineries in which the owner and winemaker is an African American. Mac McDonald's experience with Burgundy wines led him to found his label with his wife Lil in 1995. The first wines were released in 1997. He now produces several Pinot Noirs including both appellation and vineyard-designate wines from Sonoma County, Marin County, Mendocino County and Santa Lucia Highlands. His wines have improved every year and have received considerable favorable wine press of late. The wines are sold primarily through the website (www.visioncellars.com) and via a mailing list.

Knocking on Heaven's Door

2005 Ampelos Cellars A Lambda Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 535 cases, \$35. Also tasted at home before the Shootout tasting. *Lovely nose of fresh picked wild strawberries and raspberries. Well-endowed varietal flavors of cherries and berries with a sidecar of gentle oak. Fresh and juicy, smooth in the mouth with caressing tannins and a pleasant acid lift on the tangy finish.*

2007 Balletto Vineyards Estate Bottled Winery Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 295 cases, \$34

2006 Brutocao Cellars Estate Bottled Reserve Slow Lope'n Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 775 cases, \$40

2005 Halleck Vineyard Hallberg Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 250 cases, \$55

2007 Hunterdon Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 3,045 cases, \$16

2006 J Vineyards & Winery Nicole's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 1,409 cases, \$65

2005 R. Buoncristiani Vineyard Orentano Estate Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 430 cases, \$40

2007 Trincherio Family Estates Main St Napa Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 8,300 cases, \$12

2006 Wenté Vineyards Reliz Creek Arroyo Seco Monterey Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 7,000 cases, \$22

As you can see above, there were three relatively inexpensive Pinot Noirs that showed well up against the heavy hitters in the Shootout (Hunterdon, Trincherio, Wenté Vineyards). These three would make ideal daily drinkers. That is not to say that you should ignore the other wines. They are ideal for weekend special dinners, nights out at restaurants and for that special tête-à-tête.

B Vineyards & Habitat Earns an A+

Gerald and Shaun Bybee farm a former open-space habitat that originally was the home of Miller Dairy, the last certified raw milk producer in Sonoma County. The original dairy processing building still stands on the property and now serves as an equipment and barrel storage facility, but one day may be revived as a winery. The property is adjacent the 30 year-old Hartford Family owned Arrendell Vineyard in the Green Valley appellation of the Russian River Valley. The development of the property has presented many challenges due to its location in the nutrient rich and water laden flood plain near Atascadero Creek. The usual vineyard pests including birds, insects, gophers and deer are plentiful. Nevertheless, the microclimate offers ideal conditions for growing Pinot Noir including morning fog, Goldridge soils, and one of the coolest climates in the Russian River Valley.

Gerald asked noted winegrower Warren Dutton to visit after the Bybees acquired the property in 1996. Dutton advised Gerald to rehabilitate the ponds (there were originally five ponds) and improve the drainage in the habitat. A singular lake was created and when Dutton returned for a visit and gave his blessings and encouragement, a Pinot Noir vineyard was planted in 2000 and 2001. The clones chosen were Dijon 115, 667, 777 and Pommard.

Shaun is a passionate supporter of organic farming and directs the organic and biodynamic practices on the property (organic certification came in 2003). The B Estate Vineyard is the only organically certified Pinot Noir vineyard in the Green Valley district of the Russian River Valley. Shaun says, "The B Vineyards & Habitat wines are meant for those with not only a great understanding of Pinot Noir and all of its intricacies, but also an appreciation of the dedicated farming practices that ultimately determine what ends up in the glass."

Grapes harvested in the early years were sold to Patz & Hall, Lynmar Winery and Lutea. In 2005, the Bybees began a collaboration with winemaker Suzanne Hagins to produce a premium estate Pinot Noir. She vinified the 2005 through 2007 vintages. Lynmar Winery winemaker Hugh Chapelle has assumed the winemaking duties as of 2008. The consulting viticulturist is Greg Adams who specializes in the cultivation of cool-climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in West Sonoma County.

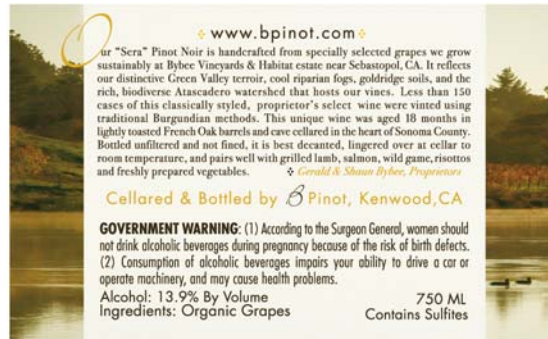
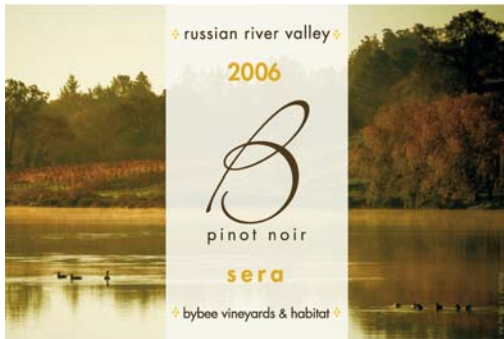


2006 B Vineyards & Habitat Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 336 cases, \$49. Made from certified organic grapes. Aged 10 months in 25% new and lightly toasted French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *This wine has really blossomed since I sampled it first a few months ago. Lovely scents of raspberry, flowers, herbs, toast and even warm cookies. Supple tannins embrace the refreshing core of cherries, raspberries and red currants with the just the right strike of oak. The juicy flavors fan out on the palate nicely and the silky texture is dreamy. The breeding of the fruit shows through in this charismatic and easy drinking wine.*



2006 B Vineyards & Habitat Sera Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 144 cases, \$65.

Named both for the Bybee's daughter, Sera, the Italian word for evening, and the bucolic Green Valley evenings. Select barrels are chosen by Shaun Bybee from micro-picked distinctive estate vineyard areas and rows. 100% de-stemmed, cold soaked for 3-5 days in small fermenters, aged 15 months in 33% new medium toast French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *A completely different reflection of the B Vineyard compared to the regular bottling. The nose is pure black cherry and black raspberry with some forest floor accent. Densely fruited and richer, more darkly fruited and earthier than the regular bottling with a plush mouth feel. Despite its decadence, the wine is clean, stylish and velvety. Still brooding, this nicely balanced wine will benefit from further bottle age to meld the tannins and bring the fruit closer to the forefront. In a year or two this will be one big party.*



B Vineyards & Habitat Pinot Noirs are sold almost exclusively through a mailing list at www.bpinot.com. The 2006 Sera bottling will be released to mailing list members in January, 2009 and to the general public in mid February. Signed, limited edition prints of the habitat photo on the Sera label (below) are free with case purchases of the Sera wine. Gerald Bybee is an accomplished professional photographer and imager whose work is in high demand (www.bybee.com). His client list includes Adobe, AT&T, Pentax, Intel, Microsoft, Kodak, Polaroid, Sirius, Gallo, Mondavi, Sports Illustrated and Time. The Bybees also produce an excellent rosé (the 2007 vintage is whole cluster pressed, cold fermented, 130 cases, \$24). Tasting is by appointment in Sebastopol. 707-823-9199.



EMTU Estate Wines

Pinot Noir From Dedicated Humanitarians

Christmas is a time of year that our thoughts drift to comforting and assisting the less fortunate. Jon and Chris Mason are two extraordinary people who have taken their dedication to humanitarian causes quite seriously. Together, they craft a single estate Pinot Noir from a dry-farmed, 2 acre certified organic vineyard located in Forestville at the juncture of the Russian River Valley and the Green Valley appellations of Sonoma County. They live on their property, farm their estate Labyrinth Vineyard situated just outside the back door of their house, and control all the winemaking. That in itself is quite an accomplishment, but the Masons have looked beyond their farm for self-fulfillment.

The Masons (both of them had the sir name Mason before marriage, but were unrelated, and thus the derivation of the name EMTU, a phonetic spelling of M2)) have been international relief workers since 1999 when they traveled to Kosovo to build homes and shelters in remote villages as part of the relief efforts for homeless families. John is a retired paramedic and Chris is a retired worker in the health care field with a master's degree in dietary science. Every year, during wintertime, they close up the farm while the vines lay dormant and the wine rests in barrels and travel to a foreign county where their skills are most needed. They have been in Gujarat, India helping in the aftermath of a disastrous earthquake, in Bmenda Highlands of Cameroon assisting AIDS educators, and in Chaman, Pakistan where they established medical clinics in two border refugee camps and provided medical aid to over 30,000 refugees. In January 2009, they leave for a few weeks to work in Peru. In 2005, the Masons founded the Labyrinth Foundation for Disaster Relief to allow them to operate independently or in cooperation with other aid organizations. All the profit from the sale of EMTU wines goes to their charitable foundation.



The Labyrinth Vineyard was planted to clones 115 and Pommard 4 and 5 in 1999 and 2003. The vines are rooted in deep Goldridge soils and grafted onto 101-14 rootstock. Each vine is cane pruned individually and every year each vine is carefully assessed to determine the appropriate number of buds to be left as fruiting wood. This balances the vine and permits adjustments in fruit load from year to year. Early passes through the vineyard for shoot thinning and positioning ensure optimal canopy density, with the aim of achieving an even and dappled exposure to sunlight on each cluster of grapes. As the season progresses, additional passes are made to evaluate and adjust vine growth and fruit. If during the growing season the vine seems out of balance, both shoots and fruit are removed to allow the vine to fully ripen the grapes.

A small labyrinth pattern of vines was planted in one corner of the vineyard leaving a small central space unplanted that serves as a place of contemplation and serenity among the vines. The name, Labyrinth Vineyard, is a nod to this unusual planting.

The Masons work to avoid producing a homogenized product, preferring to craft a consistently excellent wine that fully expresses the nuances of the site from which it originates and the conditions under which it matures. They honed their winemaking skills and refined their style over ten years, producing "garagiste" wine initially at their home. The first commercial release of estate Pinot Noir was 2004. The eventual goal is to produce 500 cases of Pinot Noir annually.

2005 EMTU Estate Wines Labyrinth Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot

Noir 14.0% alc., 144 cases, \$36 Grapes were hand picked in the early morning, cold soaked for 3 days, fermented by inoculation of Assmanshausen yeast, punched down by hand, and basked pressed into French oak barrels without settling. Aged in barrel a total of 18 months and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Complex array of aromas and flavors including cherries, berries, brown sugar, mushroom and cardamon spice. There is a vein of oak running through. Light and ephemeral with commendable balance.*



2006 EMTU Estate Wines Labyrinth Vineyard Russian River Valley

Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 300 cases, \$40. Picked at 23.9° brix, 3 day cold soak, inoculated fermentation. Racked every 6 months and bottled after 18 months in barrel. *The wine sports a primarily light reddish hue with a hint of violet. Prototypical Russian River Valley nose featuring Bing cherries, strawberries and cola. A very comforting and elegant wine*

offering a panoply of red fruits, a touch of oak spice and a smooth and clean finish. Beautifully balanced and stellar in every way.

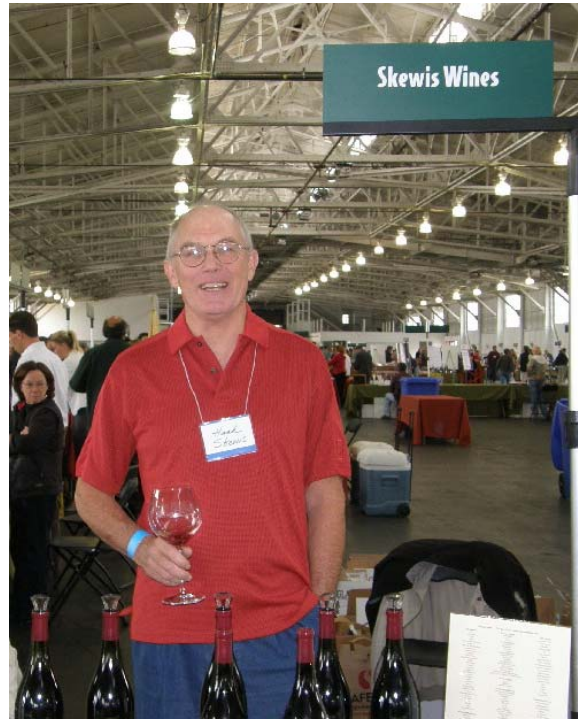


EMTU Estate Wines welcomes visitors for a private tour and tasting (707-887-1239). Be sure to ask to see their barn owls and red shouldered hawks they receive from the Bird Recovery Agency in Sonoma County. They raise the birds until they are able to function on their own and then release them into the local environment. The wines (they also produce a small amount of rosé from a tiny block of Merlot on the property) are available by phone or e-mailing john at jrm1023@hotmail.com. The website is www.emtuwines.com. Remember that when you buy EMTU wines, you not only get to enjoy a good bottle of Pinot, but you are supporting the Mason's humanitarian efforts in third world countries.



Skewis Wines

Hank Skewis is a veteran of over 25 vintages who honed his winemaking skills at Lambert Bridge in the Dry Creek region of Sonoma County before starting his namesake label with his wife Maggie in 1994. That year, grower Fred Peterson of the Floodgate Vineyard in Anderson Valley (now owned by Goldeneye and renamed) offered Hank three barrels of grapes and Hank released 70 cases for sale. Today, Hank crafts less than 1,000 cases annually of premium Pinot Noir from vineyards in Sonoma's Russian River Valley and Coastal appellations. He works out of a shared crush facility, attempting to keep overhead low to match projected income.



Hank works with growers to restrict yields by winter pruning, spring shoot thinning and summer cluster thinning before veraison. He prefers to limit crop yields to 2 to 2½ tons per acre. Winemaking is traditional with minimal intervention. Grapes are gently crushed into small bins, fermented warm, pressed into French oak barrels where primary and secondary fermentations are completed. The wines are typically aged in barrel for 18 months, racked for blending, and then racked a second time in preparation for bottling. They are then aged an additional 4 to 6 months in bottle before release.

Hank's vineyard sources have varied but they have always been superb. One of the greatest challenges of tiny producers is maintaining consistent vineyard sources. Three vineyards compose the 2006 lineup of Skewis Pinot Noirs. Lingenfelder Vineyard, located in the Russian River Valley, is a three-acre site west of the town of Fulton. Planted in 1996 and grafted to UCD 13 (Martini clone), the vineyard is meticulously managed. The soil is Huichica loam typical of this area. The Bush Vineyard is also situated in the Russian River Valley. This 2.25-acre vineyard is just northwest of Santa Rosa. The area is characterized by cooling summer fog which frequently lingers until late in the morning. The soils is Huachita loam, a well-drained mixture of sand, loam and rock. The vines are Dijon clone 115 planted in 1998-1999. The Peters Vineyard is located in the rolling hills southwest of Sebastopol. This 14-acre vineyard is in the Sonoma Coast appellation in an area frequented by fog and maritime breezes. The soil is well drained Goldridge sandy loam, covering a thick layer of clay. The vineyard was planted between 1994 and 2000 with four clones. Skewis sources Pommard and Dijon 777 blocks.

All the 2006 Skewis Pinot Noirs sampled and reviewed here show an appealing earthiness and ripe tannins indicating a long life ahead for the wines. I can vouch for the age ability of Skewis Pinot Noirs for I have sampled older vintages on a number of occasions and they have always been superb. All three 2006 wines were very well crafted and quite similar in style.

2006 Skewis Lingenfelder Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 120 cases, \$45. *Attractive aromas of black cherries, citrus and roses. Medium weighted and nicely balanced, the earth-dusted cherry flavors are bright due to lively acidity. Some beet root, plum and oak adds interest. The tannins are fine grained and dry and the finish is uplifting.*

2006 Skewis Peters Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 200 cases, \$48. *Well-fruited nose smelling of fresh berries with a little grassy note. Red, blue and black berries also lead the flavor parade with some ripe cherries playing a minor role. Very elegant and soft in the mouth with a tangy persistence on the finish. The balance is spot on and this is my favorite of the three 2006 Pinot Noirs.*



2006 Skewis Bush Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 190 cases, \$50. *A cherry-driven wine with a kiss of oak, spice, mint and musk. Dark in color and darkly fruited with notable dry tannins and a good acid lift on the finish. Perfectly fine to drink now, but aging will meld the tannins and soften the wine.*

Skewis wines are available on the website, through a mailing list, fine wine retail stores and restaurants. The website, www.skewis.com, has a valuable section about matching Skewis Pinot Noirs with food and cheese.

Latest Pinot Noirs from Lost Canyon


Lost Canyon Winery was recently acquired by Fritz Winery which is located in the Dry Creek Valley of Sonoma County. Pinot Noir and Syrah wines under the Lost Canyon label will continue to be produced at the Fritz Winery facility. The sale was purely a business decision, partner Bob Riskin told me, who lamented that none of the three partner's children were interested in the wine business. Under the leadership of Randy Keyworth, Jack States and Bob Riskin, Lost Canyon grew from a personal hobby to a sustainable commercial business worthy of a loyal following and many accolades.

Clayton Fritz and his winemaker Brad Longton fell in love with Lost Canyon wines and have committed to retaining their unique style, sourcing the same Russian River Valley vineyards and cooperages. Clayton Fritz and his parents before him, Jay and Barbara, built Fritz Winery over the last thirty years into a prominent wine producer and are enthusiastic about adding Lost Canyon to their portfolio.

The 2007 lineup of Lost Canyon Pinot Noirs are stellar and I believe are the best ever from this producer. All of them are well-crafted and nicely balanced and preference for any one will be predicated on personal taste.

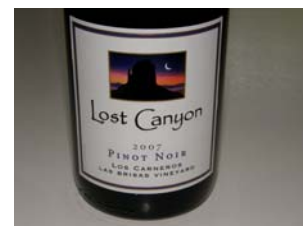
2007 Lost Canyon Morrelli Lane Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.9% alc., <475 cases. *An intriguing nose with scents of crushed berries, cranberries, dried herbs, dark chocolate, oak char and cigar box. Delicious hi-tone and intense flavors of raspberries, cherries and cassis with a slight roasted edge. The flavors veer toward overripeness but never cross the line. Beautifully balanced and pleasingly smooth in texture.*



 **2007 Lost Canyon Widdoes Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir** 14.6% alc., <125 cases. *A subdued but lovely nose featuring Bing cherry, red currant, raisin, Asian spice and gingerbread. Lip-smacking cherry and raspberry fruit, fully ripe, clean and juicy. Nicely composed with admirable acidity, and a persistent finish redolent of sweet oak.*



2007 Lost Canyon Las Brisas Vineyard Los Carneros Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., <275 cases. *Earthy cherry, black raspberry, black currant and plum fruits with a touch of smoke, anise and char. A somewhat brooding wine with a velvety texture and a dry finish. The best Las Brisas bottling ever from this producer.*



2007 Lost Canyon Saralee's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., <850 cases. *When you stick your nose in this one, you get a sensual jolt of spiced cherry and cola. The lightly weighted cherry fruit is surrounded by ripe tannins. The most high-strung and tannic wine in the lineup but quite charming.*



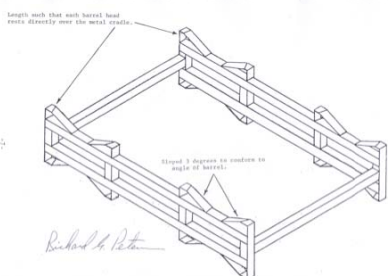
Lost Canyon wines will be available at the Fritz Winery tasting room in Cloverdale and San Francisco, but the Lost Canyon winery and guest center in Oakland has closed. Due to the changeover in ownership, I do not have current retail prices. Visit the website at www.fritzwinery.com.

Wrotham Clone of Pinot Noir

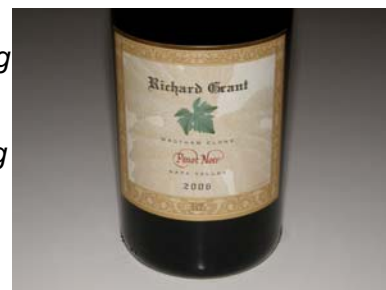
The Wrotham clone was discovered by accident as a wild grapevine growing on a stone wall near the village of Wrotham in southeast England. The softly furred leaves were unlike the Pinot Noir of France, but the fruit clusters were similar. The wild vine displayed a resistance to powdery mildew. DNA studies showed it was identical to Pinot Noir. It has been speculated that the Romans brought cuttings of this vine to England 2,000 years ago. Dr. Richard Grant Peterson brought cuttings to the Napa Valley in 1980 and planted a two-acre vineyard propagated from this single wild vine. To this day, this is the only Wrotham Pinot Noir vineyard in America.

The earliest vintages (2000 through 2005) produced only a Blanc de Noir style sparkling wine. Still Pinot Noir appeared in 2006 and 2007. Dr. Peterson has now decided to produce Richard Grant Wrotham Pinot Sparkling Wine and Richard Grant Wrotham Clone of Pinot Noir in alternate years because of the small number of vines available.

Richard Peterson, now 76, is a well-respected senior winemaker whose accomplishments date back to the early days of E. & J. Gallo Winery when he directed the transition from an emphasis on sweet wines to dry table wines and taught the Gallos how to craft sparkling wines. In 1968, he replaced legendary winemaker Andre Tchelistcheff as winemaker at Beaulieu Vineyard in the Napa Valley and fashioned a number of notable wines including Pinot Noirs. His most notable achievement was designing the steel barrel racking system that allows wineries to safely stack barrels using a forklift. Today he is a viticulture and enology consultant for several high quality wineries in California.



2006 Richard Grant Wrotham Clone Napa Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 516 cases, \$40. *Reddish-violet robe. Complex and fascinating aroma profile featuring berries, pomegranate, prune, dried herbs, wildflowers, wet leaf, and vanilla. The wine is medium-bodied with juicy raspberry flavor very prominent. A hint of raisin and spice adds interest. Moderate tannins and lively acidity with a refreshing tang on the finish. A unique wine of great interest.*



Richard Grant wines are sold on the website at www.richardgrantwine.com. Both the 2000 (\$75) and 2001 (\$50) sparkling wines are available. The full Wrotham Pinot story and Peterson's numerous accomplishments in the wine industry are detailed on the website.

Scherrer Pinot Noir Rocks

It is not unusual to find that a winemaker's personality is reflected in the style of his wines. Fred Scherrer is a modest, cerebral and a very grounded and practical vintner who crafts wines that reflect a similar personality of restraint, complexity and user friendliness. His tall stature, long curly hair and full beard seem to emphasize his scholarly manner. That is not to say that his wines are not exciting. Fred does have a little wild side in him as well, harboring a passion for guitars and loud rock and roll music. Fred works out of a very modest winery facility which was once an apple-picking shed at the end of a gravel road in Sebastopol. The winery is strategically isolated so he can avoid confrontation with neighbors who are not as enthusiastic about wine as he is. The absence of a sign on the road to the winery reflects this. The relative isolation of the winery also allows him to indulge in his music at any time of the day or night. Who knows, this music may ramp up the amplitude of his wines adding a bit of Jimi Hendrix vibrancy. In the photo below you can see Fred showing off one of his guitars to my two sons during a recent visit.



Fred grew up around wine, assisting his father farm the family's Zinfandel vineyard in the Alexander Valley region of Sonoma County. Like many teenagers, he developed an interest in alcohol in high school and began making wine at age 15 at home with his parent's approval. His uncle Mario used to tease him about his winemaking, calling his wine "Zinfandoodle" rather than Zinfandel. He later earned a degree in viticulture and enology from University California Davis and worked at Fieldstone, Greenwood Ridge and finally Dehlinger wineries. He assisted Tom Dehlinger at Dehlinger Winery initially, then took over the winemaking duties and stayed ten years. It was here that he developed his winemaking maxim: Be patient. Let the fruit speak. Listen. Touch lightly. Watch closely. Listen. With encouragement from Tom Dehlinger and his family, in 1991 he began crafting Zinfandel sourced from his father's vineyard. In 1998 he left Dehlinger to make the Scherrer Winery his full time occupation.

Fred's modesty has led him to retain a low profile. He has been accused by his followers of trying too hard not to sell his wine. It wasn't until 2005 that he succumbed to the urgings of others to replace his label which prominently featured the varietal inside the bottle with a new modern label displaying the Scherrer name at the forefront.

Fred is multi talented and produces several varieties including Chardonnay, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Rosé, and Pinot Noir. All the wines are consistently fine. His wines are never heavy-handed or manipulated, just nurtured to reach their full potential. He acts more like a caretaker than an intruder in fashioning his wines.

Scherrer Pinot Noirs are both blends and vineyard-designate wines sourced from various vineyard sources in Sonoma County, the Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast. As he has explored the various vineyard sites, he has employed an increasingly brutal blending selection for his various bottlings. The wines are typically de-stemmed, not crushed, and fermented in simple open top fermenters and manually punched down. They are barreled very shortly after pressing and allowed to rest on their lees for 6 to 10 months before first being racked and blended. Generally, the wines receive 16 to 18 months of barrel time before bottling. The

Pinot Noirs are never filtered. Fred insists on holding back his wines until they are ready to drink and it is not unusual for him to have two or three vintages stored in the winery. In addition, he purposely retains a library stock of wines and releases them periodically. He is currently offering wines that date back as far as 1999.



I recently tasted through ten of Scherrer's wines as well as several 2007 barrel samples. The 2007 Pinot Noirs were really impressive with admirable color, intense fruit and mild, ripe tannins. I also tasted a few wines at home which are reviewed in detail below. Total production is 6,000 to 8,000 cases. Fred could produce more in his winery, but refuses unless he is able to find proper vineyard sources. Such is the mindset of a true artisan.

2003 Scherrer Winery Helfer Vineyard Chardonnay 45 cases, \$35. The Helfer Vineyard is located in the Vine Hill area of the Russian River Valley. Originally a Pinot Noir vineyard, it has been grafted over to a selection of Chardonnay budwood that came from Kistler, the vineyard's neighbor just across Vine Hill Road. The vineyard has densely planted vines that require hand cultivation and yield more concentrated fruit than by traditional California vine spacing. The wines from this vineyard need several years to reach their potential. Unfined and unfiltered. *This wine has really come together and is drinking beautifully. Tasty citrus, a little butter, a hint of oak, and a smooth and silky texture.*

2005 Scherrer Winery Helfer Vineyard Chardonnay 140 cases, \$36. *Plenty of acid grip now with notes of citrus, minerals and pears. Not even close to its best drinkability window.*

2005 Scherrer Winery Vin Gris 350 cases, \$14. A blend of Pinot Noir and Zinfandel fermented in neutral barrels. *Still hanging in there. Roseate, persimmon and vibrant acidity. Fairly plush mouth feel.*

2005 Scherrer Winery Old Vine Zinfandel 890 cases, \$30. Vinified more like Pinot Noir, essentially receiving the same winemaking treatment. The result is Zin for Pinot lovers. Plenty of acidity and not flabby or alcoholic. *Smooth and velvety, brimming with red and black fruits and a touch of pepper. The tannins are not in sight and you can almost drink this like beer.*

2005 Scherrer Winery Bliss Vineyard Syrah 90 cases, \$40. Last bottling as the vineyard was sold to Lynmar Winery. *An elegant Syrah brimming with dark red and blue fruit, grilled meat and a typical silky Pinot Noir mouth feel.*

2006 Scherrer Winery Sonoma County Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$35. *Lightly colored. Nicely woven aromas of cherries, oak and brown spice. Tasty cherry core with a faint echo of earthiness and oak and a pristine freshness. Not a wimpy entry level Pinot, the wine has a decent mid palate richness. Perfectly fine for what it is and a wine that you can enjoy every night at the dinner table. My wife loved the cherry high notes and bought a case of half-bottles.*



2006 Scherrers Winery "Big Brother" Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 420 cases, \$50. Named for its darker fruits and generosity. Blended from a vineyard in Annapolis and one in Bodega Bay. *Exotic and*

intoxicating aromas of wild berries and spice box. Lovely berry flavors with some earthy notes and a faint note of citrus peel lurking in the background. Plenty of fruit, yet stylish and nimble. Harmonious and flawless with supple tannins and decent persistence. No rush to drink this one.

2002 Scherrer Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 860 cases, \$35. *Secondary bouquet of cigar box and good funk joined by dark cherries, red berries and spice. Mildly oaked black cherry and cola flavors with a healthy bolt of oak on the slightly astringent and dry finish. The wine has a nicely aged patina with gossamer tannins.*

2002 Scherrer Winery Ft. Ross Vineyard 'High Slopes' Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 210 cases, \$38. *From some of the highest elevations in this coastal vineyard where the vines struggle. The wine tends to be tightly structured demanding the use of a high percentage of new barrels. An assemblage of the most harmonious barrels. Unfined, unfiltered. Fabulous nose of black cherries and black currants with a touch of allspice. Still a big wine with earth-kissed berry and cassis flavors and noticeable dry tannins. I would recommend drinking this with hearty food.*

I prefer the more recent releases of Scherrer Pinot Noir over the older ones, finding them more fruity and vibrant. The 2005 Scherrer Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is spectacular (previously reviewed) and a required buy for any serious lover of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir.

Scherrer Winery wines are sold through a mailing list with some retail distribution. Many wines are available in both half-bottle and magnum format. Sign up for the newsletter at www.scherrerwinery.com. Tasting is by appointment. Fred's spouse, Judi, handles orders and general business questions at 707-823-8980. Fred is one of the few winemakers who responds to your email or phone inquiries promptly.

2007 Loring Wine Co Pinots

Brian Loring is all smiles these days, doting over his 2007 vintage Pinot Noirs. Every winemaker says that the current vintage is better than the last, but Brian really means it with the 2007 wines. He is not alone, as the 2007 harvest in California was stellar all over the state. Yields were low giving the wines superb concentration and perfect weather at harvest allowed phenolic ripeness to develop without excessive alcohols. 2007 was more challenging in Oregon but adept winemakers crafted very good wines there too.

Brian is a self-admitted “pinot freak” who was at the vanguard of those who in the late 1990s who left other occupations and pursued dreams of making Pinot Noir. Brian came from a software engineering background. His early experiences with Pinot Noirs from Williams Selyem, Chalone, Calera and Sanford lit his fire, but it was the friendship he developed with winemaker Norm Beko of Cottonwood Canyon Winery in the Santa Maria Valley that committed him to the wine business. While participating in the 1997 crush, he made two barrels of his own Pinot Noir and the Loring Wine Company was hatched. The name was a homage to Josh Jensen and his Calera Wine Company.

His success has been predicated in part on his insistence of acquiring first-rate Pinot Noir grapes from prestigious vineyards. He never professed to be a winegrower, so he allowed vineyard owners to farm his blocks as they farmed the ones that were sourced by experienced winemakers. He began humbly, with 150 cases of Pinot Noir in 1999 and currently crafts about 5,000 cases. He has been quite generous to other budding winemakers, eagerly sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge and inspiring a number of others to make their own Pinot Noir, including Greg Piatigorski (Alcina Cellars), Jamie Kutch (Kutch Wines) and Andrew Vingello (A.P. Vin).

An investment group composed of admirers of Loring’s wines started Pali Wine Company and built a large winemaking facility in Lompoc. Brian crafts the Pali Pinot Noirs in exchange for use of the winery where he produces his own Loring Wine Company Pinot Noirs.

The Loring Wine Company style is representative of the New World or “Caliesque” Pinot Noir and Brian has become a “poster boy” for this style of Pinot Noir. He has attracted considerable favorable wine press and has enjoyed widespread popularity, although his wines draw divided opinions among pinotphiles. His wines have been darkly hued, ripe, bursting with showy, sappy fruit, full-bodied in structure, possessing plentiful toasted oak, significant alcohol and firm tannins. To his credit, he is still refining his style and the 2007 vintage wines, although still fruit-driven, have better balance with noticeable but well-managed oak tannins, brighter acidity, appealing aromatics, less jammy character, and less alcohol. They are more refreshing to drink as a result. That said, if I have one criticism, it would be that the lineup of wines, excluding the Keefer Ranch, all taste very similar. All the wines are bottled under Stelvin screw cap.

2007 Loring Wine Company Rosella’s Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 725 cases, \$46. *A big fruity wine with grill-marked black cherry and plum fruits, reigned-in oak toast, and some good Pinot barnyard aromas. Nicely composed and soft in the mouth with a touch of citrus in the background.*

2007 Loring Wine Company Shea Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 14.2 % alc., 400 cases, \$46. *About a third of the barrels containing this wine were bulked out, unusual for this vineyard. Attention-grabbing scents of rich black cherry, spice and a touch of oak. A broad-shouldered gulp of dark fruits with nicely balanced t’n a. Mild polished tannins and noticeable oak on the slightly astringent finish. The aromatics are far ahead of the flavors at this stage and this wine demands a couple of years in the cellar.*



2007 Loring Wine Company Graham Family Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 250 cases, \$46. *Vivid aromas of fresh Bing cherries, a hint of raisin and a slight touch of oak. Plenty of sweet and loamy black cherry fruit accented with flavors of cola and spice. Bright acidity provides a clean finish that sports mild dry tannins.*



2007 Loring Wine Company Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.8% alc., 675 cases, \$46. *Very sensual aromas of dark cherries, baking spices, musk and prime oak. A hint of alcohol peeks out. Clean and uplifting deeply colored cherry fruit, richly flavored with lively acidity and gripping tannins.*

2007 Loring Wine Company Durrell Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 425 cases, \$46. *Earth-kissed dark stone fruits accentuated by oak, soy and herbs. Plentiful tannins are evident on the clean finish.*

2007 Loring Wine Company Keefer Ranch Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 900 cases, \$46. *This wine really stands out from the pack. I would love to bottle the scents of Bing cherries, strawberries, and baking spices. This wine has the reddest fruit profile in the lineup, showing off crushed strawberries in particular. Modestly weighted and easy to drink due to polished, dry tannins and an uplifting, tangy and dry finish accented with grapefruit.*



Loring Wine Company Pinot Noirs are sold primarily through a mailing list. Brian has always maintained reasonable prices for his wines with only a 10% increase in seven years. The prices above include shipping. Visit the website at www.loringwinecompany.com. Tasting is by appointment at the winery in Lompoc. 805-736-0053. For the 2007 vintage, there are seven other releases: Brousseau Vineyard Chalone AVA Pinot Noir (14.0% alc., 300 cases, \$46), Naylor Dry Hole Vineyard Chalone AVA Pinot Noir (13.7% alc., 75 cases, \$46), Aubaine Vineyard San Luis Obispo County Pinot Noir, Clos Pepe Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir, Cargasacchi Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir, Russell Family Paso Robles Pinot Noir and Rancho La Vina Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir. The theme of this year's attractive labels is vineyard gates.



A Long Tradition at Foxen Winery

Bill Wathen and Dick Dore have been making wine together since 1985, when they founded Foxen Winery at the historic Rancho Tinaquaic in northern Santa Barbara County. Known as the Foxen Boys, they released their first Pinot Noir in 1989.

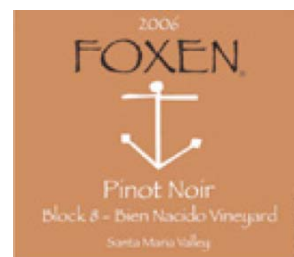
Dick Doré's great-great-grandfather, William Benjamin Foxen was an English sea captain who came to Santa Barbara County in the early 1800s and bought the Rancho Tinaquaic that once totaled 9,000 acres and comprised most of what is now known as Foxen Canyon. (Note: I have also read that the Rancho Tinaquaic was a Mexican land grant given to William Benjamin Foxen after he married the Spanish daughter of a California governor.) He chose to use an anchor for his cattle brand and this became the Foxen Winery logo that is displayed on each bottle's label. The 2,000-acre Rancho Tinaquaic remains in family hands and is the home of Foxen Winery. The Foxen Winery tasting room is located on Foxen Canyon Road. It was an old blacksmith's shop that was adjacent a stagecoach stop on the site 150 years ago.

Wathen, a winemaker, and Doré an ex-banker who had travelled Europe and ended up working at Tepusquet Mesa Vineyard, met at the vineyard and developed a friendship. Wathen was trained in vineyard management and while employed as vineyard manager at Chalone, he learned winemaking from Dick Graff. The partners create very small production and primarily vineyard-designate wines that have received considerable notoriety since the winery was featured in the book and movie 'Sideways.'

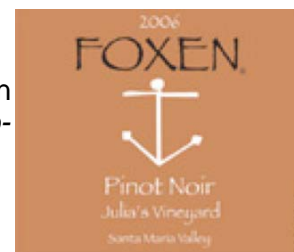
Several varieties of wine are produced, but the four vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs come from Bien Nacido Vineyard, Sea Smoke Vineyard (which Wathen helped develop), Sanford and Benedict Vineyard and Julia's Vineyard. The wines are richly concentrated in style and offer considerable depth and interest. They are dark in color, nicely textured, bursting with fruit on the finish and very nicely crafted. The wines need time to open and benefit from decanting.

2006 Foxen Winery Block 8 Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir

14.6% alc., 480 cases, \$54. Primarily Wädenswil with some Dijon 115 and Pommard. 100% whole berry de-stemmed, 4-5 day cold soak, 10-14 day active fermentation with punch down twice daily, partial lots undergo extended maceration for 30 days. Aged 16 months in 60% new French oak barrels. Bottled without fining or filtration. *The flavors trump the nose at this time. Rather subdued aromas of dark fruits, tobacco and fresh veggies. Intense and ripe dark raspberry flavor. Very smooth in the mouth with supple tannins and a mildly tart citric finish. This wine almost seems like a Pinot Noir in Rhone clothing. I like it for its individuality. The wine improved from the opened bottle later in the day indicating a long life ahead.*



2006 Foxen Winery Julia's Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., 450 cases, \$54. Pommard clone. 100% whole berry de-stemmed. 5 day cold soak, 10 day fermentation with punchdowns twice daily. Aged 16 months in 65% new French oak barrels. *Vigorous with flavor and character featuring herb-infused dark stone fruit with char and cola highlights. Packed and stacked with flavor but smooth and polished. The deep berry flavors leave a memorable impression on the lengthy finish. A delicious wine.*



Foxen Winery Pinot Noirs are sold through a mailing list, on the website and at the tasting room. The 2006 Julia's Vineyard Pinot Noir is still available. The tasting room at 7200 Foxen Canyon Road is open from 11:00 to 4:00 daily and has a picnic area. The website is www.foxenvineyard.com and the phone is 805-937-4251.

"We are doing the wine tour," Jack said, loud enough to be heard in Solvang. "And my wine snob friend, Miles" - Jack hooked an arm affectionately around my neck - "claims Foxen makes one hell of a Pinot." From the book *Sideways* by Rex Pickett.

Small Sips of Russian River Valley Pinot

2006 Chasseur Umino Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 400 cases, \$60. A collaboration between William Hunter and David Umino. *Nicely composed and heady aromatics featuring black cherry, savory herbs and a hint of oak. A saucy and fat core of cherries and berries with bright acidity, a smooth texture, ending with a mildly disagreeable oaky and astringent aftertaste.*

2006 Chasseur Freestone Station Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., 300 barrels, \$60. A collaboration between William Hunter and the Dutton Family. *Commendable nose of red cherries, sassafras and oak evolving with time to reveal herbs and toast. Dark red fruited and delicately oaked. Brisk and refreshing with soft dry tannins and a hint of citrus and oak on the bright and polished finish. A harmonious wine of some interest.*

2003 WesMar Piner Ranch Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., \$35. *Sturdy on the palate with a tasty core of black cherry and black raspberry fruit highlighted by sweet oak and mint. The tannins are forbidding. Match this wine currently with hearty food.*

2005 Merry Edwards Klopp Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., \$57. The grapes are farmed by noted winegrower Ted Klopp in a cool area featuring Goldridge sandy soils. *Darkly colored. Welcoming nose of oak-kissed black cherries, earth, tea and cola. Full-bodied and deep dark stone fruits and blueberries are well integrated with subtle oak and gentle tannins, finishing with some orange peel citric tang.*

2005 Merry Edwards Coopersmith Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.35 alc., \$54. This estate vineyard is located on the Laguna Ridge west of Sebastopol on Hwy 116. Composed of California heritage and Dijon clones. *Dark reddish-violet in color. Sage, oak, hay and cola scents are followed in the mouth by shallow dark fruits and an echo of oak smoke. Silky in texture and adequate in acidity, the wine lacks pizzazz and the finish is short.*

2006 L'Angevin Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 400 cases, \$44. After de-stemming, whole berries are placed into the fermenter without crushing, cold soaked 4 days, relatively cool fermentations, aged 14 months or until the wine reaches appropriate maturity. Unfined and unfiltered. *Restrained and neutral nose which picks up some interest in the glass offering dark cherries, currants and oak spice. A muscular wine with full-bodied darker fruits, moderately ripe mouth-coating tannins, and an echo of grapefruit in the background. This wine needs time to soften the tannins and release the full expression of the mildly jammy core of fruit.*

2004 Paul Hobbs Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7% alc., \$45. *Highly unusual perfumed nose, very floral with peculiar lacquer and medicine cabinet scents. Moderately weighted redder fruits veer toward raisin. Slippery tannins and a brisk, slightly citric finish. Tasted twice with similar results.*

2007 Dain Wines American Beauty Amber Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., \$48. *Very shy aromas of black cherry and oak. Black cherry carries over on the palate with notes of cassis, framed by soft tannins and racy acidity. A bit austere now due to the acidity. Improves in the glass over time indicating this wine is quite immature. Be patient with this one.*

2004 Rodney Strong Reserve Jane's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.6% alc., \$34. This wine is a barrel selection from the finest blocks in Jane's Vineyard. *Green pepper and oak overtake the core of red berry and cherry fruit. Unusually plentiful tannins for a four-year-old wine. Lacks richness and nuance. I prefer the regular Rodney Strong Estate bottling at half the price.*

2006 J. Keverson Labyrinth Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$30. Sourced from the Labyrinth Vineyard farmed by the Masons at EMTU Wines (see feature in this issue). *There is a tasty core of black cherry, raspberry and cassis here but the wine is dominated by oak. Too bad, because the wine has a charming elegance. A Gold Medal winner at the 2008 Sonoma Harvest Fair Wine Competition indicating the wine has fans.*

2007 Brogan Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$40. *Deep, richly perfumed nose featuring black raspberries and Asian spice. Satisfying cherry and berry fruit, subtly oaked and spiced, with a moderate tannic backbone. Light and silky in the mouth. Not as rich on the palate as the nose would suggest but a good drink. A Gold Medal winner at the 2008 Sonoma Harvest Fair Wine Competition.*

More Sips of Pinot

2006 Bouchaine Carneros Pinot Noir 14.1% alc., \$30. A combination of fruit from estate and neighboring vineyards. Dijon, Pommard and Swan clones. Gold Medal San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition 2008. *Ripe flavors of dark cherries, blackberry jam and a little dark chocolate. There is a moderately lush entry attack of dark stone fruit, berries and root beer flavors with an accompanying velvety mouth feel, supple tannins and lively acidity on the dry finish. A reliable drinker from a consistent producer.*




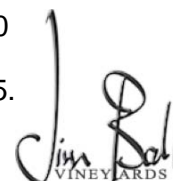
2006 L'Angevin Sonoma Stage Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 15.1% alc., 400 cases, \$58. This vineyard is farmed by the Hyde family. Calera and Swan clonal selections. Unfined and unfiltered. *Dark reddish-purple in color. Subdued but pleasant aromas of black cherries, fresh bread and subtle oak. Darkly fruited with a mild grip of tannins. A decent drink but lacks energy and complexity. This wine will undoubtedly benefit from more time in the bottle.*




2006 Mayo Family Winery "The Barnstormer" Sonoma County Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., 650 cases, \$24. *Moderately light red-violet in color. Fresh picked strawberries explode from the glass with an echo of oak. Redder fruited, light in the mouth, with noticeable oak and veggies on the tight finish. The nose trumps the flavors. Gold Medal 2008 Sonoma County Harvest Fair.*




 **2006 Jim Ball Vineyards "Signature Label" Anderson Valley Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., 690 cases, \$60. From the 10-acre Middle Ridge Vineyard, located at 1,200 ft on a south facing Anderson Valley hillside just outside of Boonville. Clones 115, 667, 777, 828 and Pommard 5. Inaugural release. *Shy but sexy scent of red cherries and oak spice. Delicious cherry and strawberry fruit, nicely spiced with gossamer tannins and a tangy finish. Delicate and elegant with impeccable balance. A ballerina in full flight. This is an up and coming producer of great promise.*



 **2006 Dashwood Marlborough Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$17, screw cap. Produced by Vavasour Wines Ltd, Awatere Valley. This label first appeared in 1989. A blend of fruit from the Wairau and Awatere Valleys. Long-standing winemaker is Glenn Thomas, who joined Vavasour in 1988. Made in an earlier drinking style than the wines bearing the Vavasour label. Imported by Pasternak Wine Imports, Harrison, NY. *The aromatics are really attractive featuring red cherries, herbs, oak and a hint of cinnamon. The flavors echo the aromas. Juicy, light on its feet, with polished tannins and perky acidity on the somewhat lengthy finish. A very good daily drinker and an exceptional value.*



 **2006 Vavasour Marlborough Awatere Valley Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$24, screw cap. The family have made wine from the Awatere Valley since 1989, longer than anyone else. Sourced from high quality vineyards in Awatere Valley. Clones 115, 777 and AM10/5. Aged 9 months in French oak barrels. Imported by Pasternak Wine Imports, Harrison, NY. *Moderately deep reddish-violet color. Rich scent of black cherries with a subtle hint of oak char. Juicy earth-dusted cherry flavors with a riff of oak, citric peel in the background and a touch of smoke on the satisfying finish. Well-balanced and quite satisfying.*



2007 Reserve St. Martin Vin De Pays D'Or Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$10, screw cap. The flagship varietal brand of the Les Vignerons du Val d'Orbieu, one of the largest wine producers in the world. Sourced from high altitude vineyards in the Languedoc region of Southern France close to the Mediterranean. The grapes are not de-stemmed, fermented in temperature controlled cement vats lasting 12 days. Imported by Pasternak Wine Imports, Harrison, NY. *Very floral and perfumed with slight scents of black cherry and oak. Mildly tart berries particularly cranberries with Christmas spices. Soft and light with mild tannins and a prominent acid tang on the finish. A bright acidic wine quite distinctive in character from New World Pinot Noir. A good value and a suitable accompaniment to food.*

2005 Lucien Albrecht Amplus Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$55. Maison Albrecht is a family owned and managed winery founded in 1425 and now in its eighteenth generation. The estate has prestigious terroirs in Alsace. This cuvée was vinified by Jean Albrecht. Made from low-yielding vines. De-stemmed, cold soaked for 2 weeks, total maceration 5 weeks, aged up to 18 months in small Burgundy oak barrels. Imported by Pasternak Wine Imports, Harrison, NY. *This is an oak dominated wine yet has some appealing red raspberry and cherry flavors with refreshing acidity. Silky textured and relatively light in the mouth with a lively finish.*



2005 French Rabbit Vin de Pays d'OC Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$10, boxed. Imported by Boisset America Sausalito, CA. *This wine will be disappointing to regular Pinot Noir drinkers. First off, it is strange to remove a plastic seal and pour the wine out of an aluminum clad box. Strong aromas of prunes and raisins carry over to the flavors. I suspect it tasted less oxidized when first released and fresh. The texture is silky and the medicinal finish is clean. It is definitely a wine but most definitely a poor imitation of Pinot Noir.*



Ojai Vineyard

Zaca Mesa Winery, which opened in the mid 1970s, spawned a multitude of prominent Central Coast winemakers including Ken Brown, Jim Clendenen, Daniel Gehrs, Bob Lindquist, Rick Longoria, Lane Tanner, and Adam Tolmach. Tolmach trained at University California Davis and was the enologist at Zaca Mesa. Jim Clendenen and Adam Tolmach left Zaca Mesa Winery in 1982 and became partners in Au Bon Climat which was begun very modestly in a small dairy barn in Los Alamos. By 1986 Clendenen and Tolmach added Bob Lindquist and Ken Margerum as partners and eventually their winery became established in a warehouse on the grounds of the Bien Nacido Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley.

Adam Tolmach founded his own label, Ojai Vineyard in 1983, along with his wife Helen, but continued as a partner in Au Bon Climat until 1991. Tolmach's initial vintage consisted of a small amount of Syrah produced at Au Bon Climat. The next year he built a winery in Oak View, near the town of Ojai in Ventura County on land that was left to him by his grandfather. All production has originated here since 1984. Pinot Noir was added to the lineup in the early 1990s, initially sourced from Bien Nacido Vineyard. Through the years, Ojai Vineyard has acquired a cult winery status do its small production and exclusivity. Most of the Ojai Vineyard wines are vineyard-designated originating from Tolmach's long term relationships in which fruit is bought by the acre.

Ojai Vineyard wines have been known for their bold and ripe flavors. In an article in the *Los Angeles Times* (January 9, 2008, written by Corie Brown), Tolmach said that he has shifted course and now espouses earlier harvesting of his grapes, lower alcohols and more finesse. He said, "We got the scores we wanted, but we went away from what I personally like. We lost our rudder when we went for bolder, riper flavors." He admitted that he had stopped drinking his own wines and had decided to ignore the future opinions of wine critics. He stated, "My goal is to produce 14% alcohol wines with nuance." He now is committed to picking earlier than many winemakers.

I recently tasted a few Pinot Noirs from Ojai Vineyard from the 2004 and 2005 vintage and I am glad Tolmach has changed direction. These wines were big-fruited and well oaked tannic brutes that lacked elegance. They were highly structured in the mold of Syrah and lacked the charm associated with Pinot Noir. I look forward to sampling the Ojai Vineyard Pinot Noirs from the upcoming 2007 and 2008 vintages.

2004 The Ojai Vineyard Fe Ciega Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$50. *Aromas of sweet berry jam, leaves, oak and a question of Brett. A dark and dense wine featuring blackberries, plum, prune, grilled meat, animale and slight oak char framed by supple tannins and offering a smooth texture.*



2005 The Ojai Vineyard Solomon Hills Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$40. *Complex assortment of aromas including Satsuma plum, spearmint, pepper, stem and oak. Fruit-driven with prodigious linear black cherry and plum flavors with delicate oak and citrus in the background playing off the fruit.*

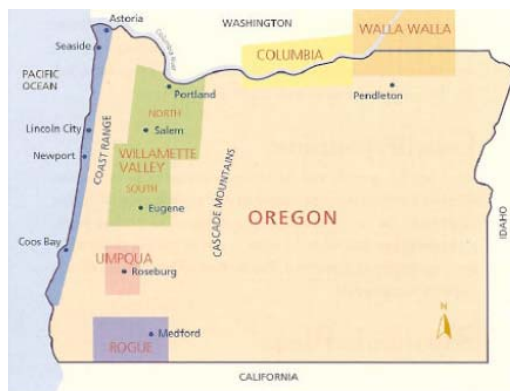
2005 The Ojai Vineyard Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$50. *The grapes come from Block Q widely planted to UCD 13 clone. Focused scents of ripe and dark red berries, wood and spice. Powerful core of dark berries and cherries with a tug of earthiness and thick oak. The tannins are well-corralled, the mouth feel is soft and the finish has both an appealing tang and unappealing touch of astringency.*



2005 The Ojai Vineyard Clos Pepe Vineyard Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$50. *The nose is pure oak with a hint of alcohol. Robust and extracted dark stone fruits complimented by earth, tar, mushu plum sauce and oak. A faint citrus note lingers in the background and on the finish. The dry tannins are still forbidding.*

Ojai Vineyard wines are sold primarily through a mailing list with limited retail distribution. About 6,000 cases are produced each year, divided among fifteen bottlings, including Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier. No tours or tasting. The website is www.ojainevyard.com and the phone is 805-649-1674.

Oregon Pinot Not Exclusive to the Willamette Valley



Most of Oregon's Pinot Noir vineyards and producers are located in the Willamette Valley region. However, small pockets of appropriate microclimates for Pinot Noir have been established and are still being discovered and exploited in the Columbia River Gorge region in the northern reaches at the Oregon and Washington border and the Umpqua Valley and Rogue Valley in the southern part of coastal Oregon. The Rogue Valley is tucked into the southwest corner of Oregon and the appellation is defined by three mountain ranges: the Klamath Mountains to the west, the Cascade Mountains to the east and the Siskiyou Mountains in between. The region is perhaps best known for the annual Oregon Shakespeare Festival held in Ashland and white-water rafting on the Rogue River that courses through the appellation.

There are multiple varieties grown in the varied terroirs of the Rogue region. Pinot Noir is most successfully grown in the cooler Illinois Valley which is similar in climate to the Willamette Valley. The most visible wineries are Bridgeview Vineyards & Winery which dates to 1986 and is Oregon's larger wine producer and Foris Vineyards Winery with plantings dating to 1975.

Del Rio Vineyards and Winery is a newer Rogue producer located along the Rogue River in Gold Hill between Grants Pass and Medford. Del Rio began as a small homesteaded community known as Rock Point, founded by J.B. White in the 1850s. He subsequently sold the property to L.J. White who built the Rock Point Hotel which was used as a stagecoach stop. By the turn of the century, the hotel had closed. F.K. Deuel and others bought the hotel and surrounding land and developed an 800-acre orchard known as Del Rio Orchards. The Rogue Valley became well known for pears grown at Del Rio Orchards. In 1997, Californians Lee and Margaret Traynham bought the land and resurrected the property including the hotel which is one of the oldest structures in Southern Oregon. They transformed the pear orchard into wine grape vineyards and now have over 200,000 vines, twelve varieties and 17 clones. Del Rio currently supplies premium wine grapes to over twenty vintners in Oregon and California.

2007 Del Rio Vineyards Rogue Valley Pinot Noir 13.7% alc., \$28. Dijon clone 777 on 3309 rootstock at 1,089 vines per acre. The winemaker is Frenchman Jean-Michel Jussiaume. Premier release of own label Pinot Noir after growing grapes for others for years. *Appealing aromas of cherries, berries, vanillin, sawn oak and wet earth which are repeated in the medium-weighted flavors. Nicely composed, smooth in the mouth and elegant with a ripe fruit aromatic finish that leaves a bit of oak in its wake.*



Del Rio wines are sold on the website at www.delriovineyards.com. The Del Rio winery is located inside the historic Del Rio Orchard packing house. The restored Rock Point Hotel and Stage Stop serves as Del Rio's tasting room which is daily open year-round. 541-855-0122. Multiple wines are produced including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Malbec, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Viognier.

White Christmas in the Willamette Valley

At the end of December, Oregonians finally crawled out from under the fiercest winter storm in a generation. The significant snowfall left many in the Willamette Valley house bound for two weeks. Snowplows are a rarity in the Valley since snow is uncommon. Sheila Nicholas sent me these photos of her Anam Cara Estate Vineyard in the Chehalem Mountains. Contrast the photo of her vineyard on the left during the summer with the one on the right taken during the snowfall showing starving birds feeding on grain that Sheila provided.



Do not be deterred from buying the 2007 Pinot Noirs from Oregon by the gloomy evaluation in the latest edition of the *Wine Spectator*. The 2007 vintage was rated 84-87, and summarized as follows: "Rain produced light, delicate wines at best; others weak. After spending some time in the Willamette Valley in November and tasting numerous 2007 Pinot Noirs, I can assure you that wines from top producers are classic Pinot Noirs with lovely aromatics, low alcohols and higher acidities perfectly adapted to the dinner table.

Styling the Pinot Noir Highway

In California and Oregon, there are a multitude of variations on three basic Pinot Noir styles. Personal taste dictates individual preferences. The three main categories of style along the Pinot Noir Highway are:

Mini Coopers: Lighter-bodied, elegant Pinot Noirs with subtle flavors and aromatics. The minority of wines produced. Alcohol is often in the 13.0% to 13.7% range. Lovable, but not taken seriously.

Corvettes: Medium-bodied, balanced Pinot Noirs. Harmonious blending of fruit, acidity, tannins, alcohol and roundness. Alcohol usually 14.0% to 14.5%. Perfectly integrated with no one element predominating. Stylish performers.

Hummers: Big-bodied Pinot Noirs made from grapes picked very ripe, resulting in high alcohol. Frequently heavily oaked. These wines struggle for balance with alcohols above 14.6%. Their lush fruit flavors often garner high scores. Expensive and conspicuous.

Jake Lorenzo, writing in *Further Surveillance, Underground Stories in the Wine Business*, speaks irreverently about the Hummers. "Does it make sense to strive for intensity and extraction by letting fruit get very ripe and then diluting it with water once it gets to the winery? Does all the chemical manipulation necessary to finish high alcohol fermentations make better wine, or are you just treating the symptoms? It would make more sense to work with your grower to get ripe flavors at lower sugars. That reduces the alcohol and problems with stuck fermentation and retarded malolactic. If nothing else, think of the money you could save in taxes if your wines were under 14% alcohol."