



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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If you drink no
Noir, you Pinot
Noir

Pinot Noir & Chardonnay I Highly Recommend

I have stopped doing formal reviews of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay but I still drink those wines regularly. On a typical evening before dinner, I will open a bottle or two or three until I find one worth drinking. Life is too short to drink ordinary wine. Below are amazeballs wines that I have enjoyed over the past few months listed by vintage year. My impressions are based on drinking the wines before dinner and with food rather than critical tasting and spitting.

2014 Phelps Creek Vineyards Cuvée Alexandrine Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 416 cases, \$54.

Crafted by fourth generation Burgundian winemaker Alexandrine Roy who chooses the best barrels from the estate fruit. *One of the greatest domestic Pinot Noirs I have had in recent memory! The complete package and drinking beautiful now at 5+ years of age. I reviewed this wine in February 2017 and scored it 96, stating that it needed more time in the cellar. That prediction has come to fruition and the wine would score more like 97-98 now.* Note: The 2015 and 2016 vintages of this wine are currently available on the winery's website (\$54).



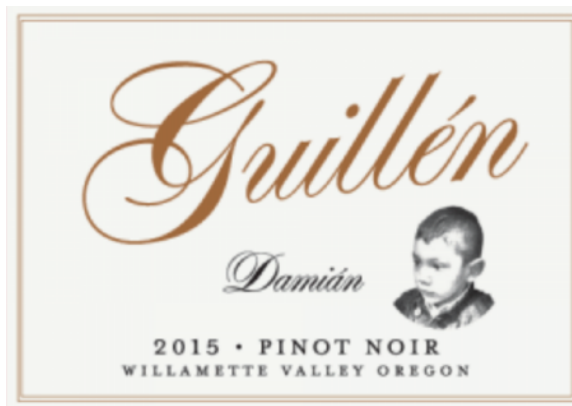
2014 Soliste Solitaire Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 63 cases, \$100. A selection of the very best grapes through multiple passes at harvest at Guidici Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast near Occidental. A monoclonal wine of Dijon "828." 50% whole cluster fermentation. Aged in one 600-liter oak barrel for an extended 28 months. *Rather unctuous yet polished in this vintage, with a complex nose of black cherry and blackberry, forest floor and rose petal and a mid weight plus array of fresh dark fruits kissed by earth and savory herb notes with gracious oak support. The mouth feel is particularly dreamy. Juicy, with amorous tannins and a gutsy finish that persists. Still outstanding the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. This wine is built for the long haul and I almost regret popping the cork so soon. However, the extended elevage has rendered the wine approachable now. Score range 94-95.* Note: This wine is still available through the winery's website store.



2015 Au Bon Climat "Isabelle" California Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 750 cases, \$50. A unique wine that is a blend of barrels from the best vineyards from Santa Maria Valley with Russian River Valley and Monterey County sources included in some years. The blend, assembled by Jim Clendenen, is different each year. *Everything you could ask for in a California Pinot Noir. Elegant, sexy and balanced. This one bowled me over like it did when I reviewed it July 20, 2019. Still giving when sampled the following day after opening. I scored it 96 6 months ago and I still stick with that rating. The 2016 vintage version of this wine is currently available on the winery's website and at \$50 is one of the greatest bargains available in California ultra-premium Pinot Noir.* Note: the 2016 vintage of this wine is available on the winery's website store.



2015 Guillén Family Wines Damian Winemaker's Cuvée Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 13.8%, 73 cases, \$40. Jesus Guillén was a brilliant, young, and self-taught winemaker that I met and tasted with on a number of occasions before his untimely passing in November 2018. He was both the head winemaker at White Rose Estate Winery and Vineyard and winemaker for his own label. This terrific wine, now five years of age, is drinking perfectly. A winemaker's selection on the best barrels in the cellar, it is a blend of three vineyards and two clones: Pommard and Dijon 667. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged 12 months in French oak barrels, 20% new. *This wine really blew me away and I wished that I had more in my cellar. The exotic aromas reflected all the good that whole cluster can bring to Pinot Noir with notes of dark berry, rose petal, cardamom and burnt tobacco. Modest in weight, but highly flavorful, featuring a range of purple and black fruits backed by firm, but not unwieldy tannins. Sterling acidity and a boisterous finish complete the picture. Extraordinary now, but will age beautifully. I scored the wine 94 in early 2018, but this bottle was more in the 97-98 range.* Note: the winery is still operated by Jesus' widow. Curiously, the winery's website has not been updated to indicate Jesus' demise and I am uncertain who has taken over the winemaking duties. Tresider Burns has been hired as the winemaker for White Rose Estate Winery & Vineyard while Dago Guillén continues as tasting room manager and Gavin Joll as general manager at White Rose.



2017 Big Basin Alvaro Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 155 cases, \$60 (magnums \$129). Winemaker Bradley Brown incorporates a significant amount of whole cluster in his fermentations and this beauty was made with the full monty - 100% whole cluster. 18-year-old vines. Clones 115, 667 and 777. Native primary and malolactic fermentations. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered and finished under NormaCork without risk of cork taint. This wine is the standout among the 2017 Big Basin offerings. *Lovely aromas of black cherry compote, spice and burnt tobacco. Sterling balance with plenty of upfront pleasure, packing good ripeness at a modest ABV. Luscious black cherry and blackberry fruit flavors and a hint of turmeric spice. Even better when tasted the following day from a previously opened bottle. 94-95 score range.* Note: the wine is available through the winery's website store. The Lester Family Vineyard bottling has also been a top performer but the 2017 vintage is sold out.



2017 Drew Estate Mid-Slope Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir

13.4% alc., \$70. Jason Drew has been crafting terrific wines from his off-the-grid winery in Elk, overlooking the Anderson Valley to the East and the Pacific Ocean 3 miles to the West at 1,250 feet elevation in the Mendocino Ridge AVA. The 7.5-acre estate vineyard (Drew Ranch) is one of the most westerly vineyards on the North Coast. Clones include Pommard, 943, 115, 667, Mt. Eden, Calera and a Swan selection. The first vintage from this vineyard was 2014 and with this vintage the vineyard is beginning to show its metal. Drew tends to use about 30%-50% whole cluster in most vintages (30% for this wine). The Pinot Noir wines are aged 11 months in about 33% new French oak barrels. Mt Eden clone and Calera and Swan selections. *Engaging aromas of black cherries, black plums, turkey spices and forest floor. Beautifully composed with layers of flavor mimicking the nose and finishing long and pure.* **94-95** score range. Note: Drew continues to source fruit from Morning Dew Ranch, the vineyard planted and formerly owned by Burt Williams. This is always an exceptional bottling as well. Drew wines are sold through a mailing list



2017 DION Old Vines Chehalem Mountains Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

14.3% alc., \$60. This winery produces an exceptional lineup of wines from the 60-acre estate DION Vineyard. This limited release bottling is produced from vines planted in 1976 on the 10-acre Winery Block. The Pommard vines are self-rooted and non-irrigated. The winery's most special wine. *Clearly a special wine, with aromas of exotic spices, black stone and berry fruits along with dark rose petal. Bolder and riper in this vintage in a mid-weight plus style offering delicious flavors of black raspberry and blackberry fruits framed by modest fine-grain tannins. Impeccably balanced, with a surge of black cherry goodness exhumed over time in the glass on the long finish. A very classy old vines treasure that scores in the 93-94 range.* Note: the 2015 Old Vines Pinot Noir (\$55, my score 93) and 2016 Old Vines Pinot Noir (\$60, my score 96) are still available. The winery's Winemaker's Reserve Pinot Noir, based on Dijon clones, is also a consistent star in the winery's Pinot Noir lineup. I am not sure this wine has been released as of yet.



2017 Occidental Freestone-Occidental Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

14.1% alc., \$65. Steve Kistler departed Kistler Vineyards as winemaker to concentrate on growing and crafting Pinot Noir from West Sonoma Coast vineyards extending to Bodega Headlands, almost a rock's throw from the Pacific Ocean. Steve started his label in 2011, hoping to have a project he could pass on to his daughters. The 20-acres of land for the vineyards was acquired in 1999, later adding more parcels to bring the total to 85 acres. The vineyards for the Occidental Wines label were planted in the early 2000s with a Calera selection and field selections from Vosne Romanée that Kistler acquired in the early 1990s and propagated. The four vineyards in 2020 were: Bodega Headlands, Running Fence, SWK and Occidental Station. Kistler built a winery east of the town of Bodega on a ridge next to the Bodega Headlands Vineyard. The wines were initially marketed through the Kistler mailing list, but now the winery is independent and focusing solely on Pinot Noir. For the 2017 vintage, there are four single-vineyard Pinot Noirs offered. The wines feature native primary and malolactic fermentations, and free-run juice only. The wines are aged in Francois Frères oak barrels and bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. This wine is a blend of fruit from the estate vineyards and is essentially an appellation wine. 20-30% whole clusters. Aged in 25% new French oak. *A sophisticated offering that rivals the single-vineyard wines produced in this vintage. Medium plus in weight with an array of enticing dark red and purple fruits on the nose and palate. Beautifully composed with fruit, acid and tannin all in*



complimentary balance and finishing with lingering purple fruit goodness. Noticeably better with improved oak integration when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Score range **93-94**. Note: I was never enamored with Kistler Vineyard Pinot Noirs as they were too ripe and rich for my palate, more in tune with the palate of Robert Parker who in essence has been the only critic to review Kistler's wines over the years. I am much more intrigued with this Occidental wine which that is not as lavishly fruited but more refined and I consider more age-worthy. Occidental wines are sold through a mailing list. Members of the mailing list can visit by appointment the winery and modern tasting room located at the estate.

2018 Loring Wine Company Cortada Alta Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 14.3% alc., 400 cases, \$N/A, screwcap. Clones 23 and "828." Aged 10 months in French oak barrels, 15% new. This is my first encounter with this vineyard that was planted by John Peterson high on a hillside, the highest elevation site in the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Aromas of spiced black cherries lead to an elegantly-styled, mid weight wine that charms with fine-tuned acidity and juiciness. The flavors of black cherry and black raspberry are infused with spice and linger on the palate through an uplifting finish. The tannins are suave, the mouth feel is polished and the overall impression is one of gracious harmony. Still terrific when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle. Score range: **93-94**.* Note: The 2018 lineup of Pinot Noir wines from Loring are outstanding. Brian Loring has bottled his wines under screwcap since 2004



2016 Lavinea Lazy River Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton Willamette Valley Chardonnay 13.5% alc., 220 cases, \$45. Winemaker Isabelle Meunier, formerly of Evening Land, crafts Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from vineyards in five AVAs in the northern Willamette Valley. This was my first experience with a Lavinea wine. A Wine Enthusiast top 100 Cellar Selection for 2019. Barrel fermented in 20% new French oak. *This is a stunning wine that is a dead ringer for a Grand Cru Chablis. Aromas and flavors of lemon curd, yellow peaches, lime and melon. Bright and slightly tart with a clean, brisk arrow of acidity. Still great when sampled the following day from a previously opened bottle. **93-94** score range.* Note: available from K&L Wine Merchants online.



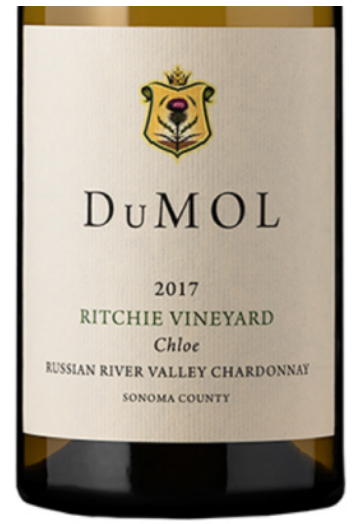
2017 Evening Land Summum Seven Springs Estate Eola-Amity Hills Willamette Valley Chardonnay 13.0% alc., 337 cases, \$100. Yes, this is expensive, but worth every penny. Produced from just 14 rows of the best Chardonnay vines at the top of Seven Springs Vineyard. The winery considers this offering their "utmost" and I agree. Gentle whole cluster Champagne press cycle and aged in neutral Stockinger 500 ml puncheons. Indigenous fermentation and aged 12 months in puncheon and 6 months in tank. Light fining without filtration. *The glorious potential of Oregon Chardonnay is exemplified in this classy wine. Perfumed with aromas of Meyer lemon, poached pear, and slight matchstick reduction. The flavors of lemon-lime and Granny Smith apple are uplifting and long in the mouth. A good compliment of bright acidity infuses the fruit*



flavors with “minerality” and juiciness. **95-96** score range. Note: the wine is still available from the winery.

2017 DuMOL Chloe Ritchie Vineyard Russian River Valley Chardonnay

14.3% alc., 724 cases, \$65. As regular readers know, I consider Ritchie Vineyard California’s top Chardonnay source. Long-time DuMOL winemaker, Andy Smith, has been crafting Old Wente Chardonnay from this vineyard for seventeen years. Vines were 45 years of age in this vintage. Barrel aged 12 months in 33% new French oak followed by 6 months of settling in tank. This is typically a lower-acid Chardonnay with rich, California sun-blessed fruit. *An opulent Chardonnay offering waves of succulent stone fruits and citrus offering an unctuous drinking experience. That said, the wine is not overblown and has good focus and finishing citric drive. I happen to relish this style of Chardonnay and have drank many bottles of this wine over the years.* **95-96** score range. Note: DuMOL wines are sold primarily through a mailing list but bottles do show up at retailers such as K&L Wine Merchants.



Recently Reviewed Wines

Although I have discontinued the regular reviewing of wines, latest releases from Big Basin Vineyards, Bravium and Phelps Creek Vineyard arrived with the senders unaware of my “retirement.” Here are the reviews for those wines.

Big Basin Vineyards, Boulder Creek, CA



2018 Big Basin Vineyards Dune & Mountain Monterey County Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 270 cases, \$39. Sourced from two vineyards: Olson Vineyard located on ancient sandy dunes near Monterey Bay at 180 feet elevation and Coastview Vineyard planted in decomposed granite on a mountain top at 2200 feet elevation. Vine age 19 years. Clones 114, 115, 667 and 777. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation, aged 11 months in French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Welcoming nose replete with whole cluster notes of pine sap and burnt tobacco complimenting aromas of black cherry and nutty oak. Earth-kissed black cherry fruit infuses the mid weight core that is graced by exotic spices. The tannins are modest leaving the wine quite agreeable. The finish is somewhat abbreviated but juicy. Still fine when tasted the following day from previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **89.**

2017 Big Basin Vineyards Old Corral Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.2% alc., 140 cases, \$65. Vine age 11-12 years. Clone 37 (Mt Eden) and a Swan selection. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. The nose is complex and sexy, offering aromas of cherry, red rose petal, cardamom spice and Juicy Fruit. Deep cherry flavor in a mid weight style with an earthy underpinning. Suave in the mouth with very fine-grain tannins and an excellent acid underbelly. When sampled the following day, the wine exhibited a stemmy-vegetal component but in an intriguing way.* **90.**

2017 Big Basin Vineyards Coastview Vineyard Monterey County Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., 290 cases, \$55. Vine age 19 years. Clones 113, 114, 115, 667, 777, and Swan and “Pisoni” selections. 75% whole cluster, native fermentation. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Leading off are aromas of candied cherry, vanilla and earthy flora. Charming and mouth filling on the palate featuring earth-kissed dark red fruits framed by plush, suede tannins and finishing with both power and length. When sampled the following day, the aromas of cherry and earthy flora had come to the forefront, and the mouthfeel had become rounder and more plush.* **92.**

2017 Big Basin Vineyards Lester Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 355 cases, \$55. Vines planted in sandy clay loam and 19 years of age. Clones are 37 and 667 with a Swan selection. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Moderate garnet color in the glass. Generous aromas of cherry, flora and burnt tobacco. A robust offering in a mid weight plus style, featuring an array of red and purple fruit flavors complimented by hints of tobacco and earth. Sleek in the mouth with refined tannins. A wine with power in a velvet fist. The finish is clean but not overly lengthy. When tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle, the intoxicating cherry aromas soared and the finish had taken on more length. **93.**



2017 Big Basin Vineyards Alfaro Family Vineyard Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir 13.3% alc., 155 cases, \$60. Vines planted in sandy gravelly loam and 18 years of age. Clones 115, 667, 777. 100% whole cluster, native fermentation. Aged 17 months in French oak barrels. Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Full review on page 2 of this issue. **94-95.**

Phelps Creek Vineyards, Hood River, OR

2017 Phelps Creek Vineyards “Calamity Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., 1281 cases, \$65. In September of 2017, a firecracker spark on the Eagle Creek trail located some 30 miles west of the Phelps Creek Estate soon brought calamity to the winery door. The howling winds of the Columbia Gorge caused flames to race 13 miles within the first 48 hours. Nothing stood between Phelps Creek Vineyards and the fire,

but tinder dry forest and hundreds of valiant firefighters. As the frontline of the fire approached a mile from the estate, the first raindrops in months began to fall and the Estate was spared. However, throughout the blaze, the estate wines were immersed in tick smoke causing an irreversible effect on the ripe fruit. Only the best blocks were picked and the most intriguing barrels bottled. The resultant wine is intensely smoky. A normal vintage yields 3,000 cases of Pinot Noir from the Estate Vineyard, but only 181 cases of the 2017 vintage were bottled due to the effect of the smoke. \$3 of every bottle will be donated to the National Forest Foundation to rebuild the hiking trails lost in the fire. Pommard clone. Harvest Brix 23.4°. *Light ruby red color in the glass. Red cherry and berry fruit aromas overlain with guaiacol (smoke). Light in wet and rather gossamer, featuring a core of red fruits with noticeable smoky undertones. Forward drinking and juicy with minimal tannins. Best with BBQ. The smoke taint may or may not be averse to the drinker depending on their sensitivity to it. In any case, the wine should be drunk now (the smoke taint may become more evident as the fruit fades over time). Drinking the wine is not harmful N/R.*

2016 Phelps Creek Vineyards Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 13.6% alc., 1,344 cases, \$34. One of the warmest vintages on record. Earliest harvest in the winery's 24 years of wine growing. Pommard and Dijon 115 and 777. Barrel aged in French oak barrels, 15% new, for 15 months. *Moderately light garnet color. A mixture of blackberry and earthy flora aromas lead to a mid weight styled wine offering black cherry and raspberry flavors. Smooth and suave in the mouth with an easygoing manner, finishing with surprising length on the upbeat finish. 88.*

2016 Phelps Creek Vineyards "Les Stagiaires" Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 73 cases, \$N/A. Interns Eddie Valadao, a Fresno State winemaking student and Nicole Henderson a Food Science Program student at UC Davis combined their talents to assemble a 3-barrel blend of estate Pinot Noir from 25 barrels available in the cellar. The goal was to produce a wine with balance. 66% Pommard, 33% Dijon 115. Harvest Brix 23.6°. Aged in one 1-year and 2 2-year French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Lovely perfume of black raspberry, blackberry and spice arriving over time with swirling. Appealing array of purple and black fruits framed by immersed tannins. Very charming, with a silky texture, excellent balance and a lip-smacking finish. 90.*

2015 Phelps Creek Vineyards Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 1,208 cases, \$36. 100% estate grown and aged in French oak barrels. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Very reserved nose even over time with swirling, only giving forth herb garden aromas. Somewhat drab, with a moderate concentration of black cherry and blueberry fruit flavors backed by muscular tannins. Finishes short and astringent. 85.*

2015 Phelps Creek Vineyards "Beehive" Columbia Gorge Pinot Noir 13.9% alc., 99 cases, \$52. In the mid 1990s, Dijon 777 clone was planted in a corner of the estate vineyard that had held some abandoned beekeeper boxes when the land was purchased. As the vines matured, the extraordinary character of the 777 clone in cooler years became evident. Winery owner Robert Morus has an affinity for 777 since he commands regular 777 airline flights internationally. Harvest Brix 23.8°. Aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 1 new, 2 1-year and 1 2-year. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Chic aromas of cherry, spice, rose petal and burnt tobacco. Mouth filling goodness in a mid weight plus style showing great breeding. A substantial but not imposing tannic backbone insures longevity. Finishes noticeable long and powerful. 92.*



2015 Phelps Creek Vineyards "Lynette" Columbia Gorge Chardonnay 13.9% alc., TA 0.64, 239 cases, \$38. Named after winery owner Robert Morus' spouse. Dijon 75 and 76 and Wente clones. Whole cluster pressed, bartonage as required. Aged in French oak barrels, 20% new Cadus. *Light golden yellow color in the glass. The aromas of lemon peel, pear and wax draw you in to the glass. Slightly creamy in the mouth, with showy flavors of pear, white peach and honey. The spirited acidity compliments the fruit load and the wine finishes in a seductively suave fashion. Impressive freshness for a 4+ year-old wine. 92.*

Bravium, St. Helena, CA



2017 Bravium Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., pH 3.42, TA 0.59, 2,980 cases, \$33.99. Released March 1, 2019. Fruit from Valley Foothills Vineyard and Wiley Vineyard. Aged 10 months in French and Hungarian oak barrels (30% new). *Moderately light garnet color in the glass. Reasonably nice cherry and red raspberry aromas. Mid weight in style with the flavor of cherry leather roll-ups, spice, and a hint of oak in the background. Nicely balanced, with good freshness and juiciness. A good value. 89.*

2018 Bravium Signal Ridge Vineyard Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir 13.4% alc., pH 3.85, TA 0.55, 242 cases, \$44.99. Released January 1, 2020. Vineyard planted in 1999 atop Cold Spring Mountain at 2,642 feet elevation. Aged 10 months in French and Hungarian oak barrels, 30% new. *Moderate garnet color in the glass. Alluring aromas of purple plum and grape, spice and burnt tobacco. Hearty on the palate with engaging flavors of blackberry, black cherry and Hoison sauce, finishing joyously long and dry. Typical spice that I find from Hungarian barrels. Still commendable when tasted the following day from a previously opened and re-corked bottle.* **93.**

2018 Bravium Wiley Vineyard Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 13.1% alc., \$44.99. Vineyard is 9 miles from the Pacific Ocean overlooking the Anderson Valley. A treasured, older, true cool climate site. *Light garnet color in the glass. The wine leads with scents of cherry, pine sap and toasty oak. Light in weight with a core of dark red cherry fruit flavor, underlain with notes of spice and earthiness. Easy to cozy up to with very fine grain tannins and cool-climate freshness. Finishes long with lip-smacking vibrancy.* **92.**

Commentary

Would you like some “minerality” in your Pinot Noir?

I found the reviews of Pinot Noir very curious in the January 31-February 29, 2020, issue of the *Wine Spectator*. There were 46 reviews of California Pinot Noir by Kim Marcus. The word, “mineral”, showed up in some form such as “vibrant minerality,” “minerally,” “mineral richness,” “minerally nuances” and “stone” in 19 or 40% of the reviews. 18% of 68 reviews of Oregon Pinot Noir by Tim Fish also included references to “minerality” such as “stony mineral notes,” “loamy mineral,” “river stone,” “crushed stone,” and “stony mineral accents.”

In the March 31, 2019, issue of the *Wine Spectator*, Kim Marcus reviewed 21 California Pinot Noirs and used the word “mineral” and variants of that term in 40% of the reviews. In that same issue, Tim Fish referenced “minerality” in 26% of his Oregon Pinot Noir reviews, and used the term “stony minerality” in five separate reviews.

The word “minerality,” is a relatively new term that first appeared as a fashionable term in the wine lexicon about in the mid 1980s according to Jamie Goode. Minerality is absent from Emile Peynaud’s classic book, *The Taste of Wine* (1983) and UC Davis professor Ann Noble’s *Wine Aroma Wheel* (1984).

Minerality is a vague descriptive word for wine that has no common definition. Wikipedia defines it as a sense of mineral-ness as flavors of slate, schist, silex, etc. Winegrower Kevin Harvey of Rhys Vineyards is a believer in minerality in wine and defines it as “the aroma taste and tactile sensation in wine when grapes are grown on rocks.” In other words, minerality is something we associate with the smell and taste of rocky areas, but have you ever really found much aroma in stones or actually tasted rocks? Being able to actually smell or taste vineyard geology in the form of minerals in Pinot Noir escapes me, especially since there is no evidence that minerals in the soil are transferrable to wine grapes.

Mike Waller, winemaker at Calera Wine Co., who has spoken at seminars on minerality and said, “I don’t get much minerality in red wines. I am an ‘atheist of minerality,’ preferring to ascribe minerality to the ‘lack of fruit expression.’” The problem with this definition is that if the wine isn’t fruity and lacks that attribute, does not mean by inference that a wine has minerality.

Minerality is perceived far more often in white wines presumably related to acidity and sulfur-based compounds due to reduction. It maybe a mystical name for the redox phenomenon. Respected wine critic, Michael Bettane, said, “The only no-nonsense use is to describe a wine marked by salty and mineral undertones, more often a white wine rich in calcium and magnesium as many mineral waters are. For a red wine, I have no idea.”

Another skeptic is winemaker Greg Saunders of White Rose Vineyards in the Willamette Valley. He told me, “When we use language to convey meaning a basic premise is that we are using commonly defined terms. With minerality, we are not using a commonly defined term. If I say something tastes like blackberry, people can agree or disagree, but they can understand the reference. Minerality has no common reference and means different things to different people. Where I come from, if you cannot have a common definition, we usually say the word is BS.”

Perhaps the definition of winemaker Jason Lett of The Eyrie Vineyards is useful, albeit vague, “The minerality of a wine is experienced like a generation of tension in the mouth that is innately refreshing and energizing.” Similarly, wine researcher Clark Smith believes minerality is indefinable and attributes it to an “energetic buzz.”

I believe leaning heavily on the word minerality or its variants in reviews of wines like Pinot Noir relegates those reviews to a vagueness that the consumer finds puzzling and worthless. Robert Joseph wrote, “You ask a hundred people whether they want a wine with minerality and there is probably only two or three who have any idea what you are talking about.” Reviewers should use some reasonably well-defined words to portray a wine’s characteristics.

I just about fell out of my chair when I read in this same issue of the *Wine Spectator* reviews of four 2017 Kosta Browne vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs priced at \$165!! I know that triple digit domestic Pinot Noir is not rare

these days, but who ponies up for \$165? That is almost \$2,000 a case not including tax and shipping. I will take the 2017 Maggy Hawk Jolie Anderson Valley Pinot Noir that is rated 95 in the issue and priced at \$65 any day.

Kosta Browne was a staple at the annual World of Pinot Noir when crowds of pinotphiles would clamor around Dan and Micheal's table. The owners usually ran out of wine within an hour. I noticed this year that Kosta Browne is not pouring at the event although Michael Browne's newer labels, Cheu and Cirq, are listed as participating wineries. Apparently a change in ownership has led to a difference in priorities for Kosta Browne.

Check out the article I wrote and is now published in the most recent (February) issue of *Oregon Wine Press*, "The Wine and Health Debate: A Closer Look at the Risk vs. Benefits of Moderate Drinking." Read the article at www.oregonwinepress.com.