

PINOTREPORT

for people passionate about western pinot noir

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INSIDE

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FIELD GUIDE TO WESTERN PINOT NOIR

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Time to Hit The Road...

JANUARY IS A TIME OF YEAR WHEN, LIKE THE WEATHER, THINGS ARE A BIT SUBDUED for most in the wine business; the pace a bit slower. The busy harvest through holiday crunch is over; the non-stop winemaking tasks, the end-of-year marketing and sales push, and family holiday commitments are done for now. The vineyards are in their dormant stage; it's generally cold and/or rainy, so the tasting rooms are a bit less crowded. Everyone's just a bit more relaxed.

For all of these reasons, January is the perfect time for someone like me to hit the road and see what's new out there in Western Pinot land.

This coming week (starting January 16), my friend and colleague Michael Dotson and I are headed down to the **Santa Rita Hills** and **Santa Maria Valley** regions—with a few interesting stops along the way—for a week of intensive tasting and visits. The following week, I'll be headed up for a quick trip to **Oregon**.

I expect to find an amazing number of new and terrific wines to report on, a preview into how the **2005s Pinots** are coming together and an equally large number of interesting stories to tell. My wife has been giving me a hard time, calling this my "Sideways" trip—I laugh it off, but I did promise her I wouldn't crash my Explorer into a tree. Stay tuned to upcoming issues for the coverage.

In This Issue...

Because of the rush to get this issue out before I leave, I'm keeping the commentary to a minimum this issue and just delivering some really interesting Pinots for you to check out. One more housekeeping note: **The annual "Pinot Passion Awards" Issue** will be published in early **February**, giving me the opportunity to slip in one more issue prior to that when I return from my travels.

As always, I thank you for your support and hope that you enjoy this latest issue.

-- Gregory S. Walter, editor and publisher

This Issue's Tasting Notes

All wines were tasted blind and scored before knowing anything other than that the general region they were from. My notes and comments follow.

CALIFORNIA

Abundance Vineyards

Abundance Vineyards is owned and operated by the Mencarini family and is based in Lodi, Calif. Owners Ron and Dino Mencarini have a long history of farming in the Lodi region and source their grapes from estate vineyards in Lodi and from all over California. Their Pinot Noir bottlings are from Bien Nacido Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley and from the Brick Hill Block in the Sonoma Coast appellation.

Abundance Vineyard

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard 2001

Medium ruby red color; subtle aromas of cherry and earth; rich, ripe cherry flavors, subtle, spice and herbal notes; silky texture, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Subtle and elegant, this Pinot with fruit sourced from the Bien Nacido Vineyard is drinking very well now.

259 cases made \$22 Score: 91

Abundance Vineyard

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Brick Hill Block 2001

Medium ruby red color; deep, earthy and spicy aromas; rich and deep with black cherry, earthy and forest floor flavors; toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy, subtle Pinot that has benefited from some additional bottle age.

994 cases made \$18 Score: 90

MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

"Big, balanced Pinot..."

Russian Hill

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Meredith Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; big, deep aromas of red cherry and forest floor; deep and dense cherry flavors with earthy, forest floor notes; some tannin, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a big Pinot, no question about it. The sweet oak and rich flavors make it a delicious companion to a hearty mushroom-enhanced dish.

277 cases made \$40 Score: 93

Fetzer Vineyards

Fetzer Vineyards has been a mainstay in fine wine from Mendocino County since the 1970s. Founded in the late 1960s by Barney and Kathleen Fetzer, and based on a firm belief that Mendocino County has the potential to be a world-class wine region, the Fetzer family set off on a two-decade quest to make the finest, at first, the finest Cabernets and Zinfandels. Much growth and expansion followed as the family achieved those goals and branched out to Chardonnay and other varieties. By 1992, the Fetzer brand was very well known and the family sold the company to drinks giant Brown-Forman Corporation. Over the years, Pinot Noir has not been a big part of the lineup, but recent bottlings from the company's new Five Rivers Ranch winery in Paso Robles are not only delicious, but great values as well.

Fetzer Five Rivers Ranch

Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich cherry, plum aromas, rich, spicy cherry and plum flavors, nice texture, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Terrific middle of the road style with a lot to like in the rich, bright fruit flavors.

25,000 cases made \$10 Score: 88

Inman Family Wines

Simon and Kathleen Inman met when Simon, on vacation visiting Napa Valley, stopped at the tasting room where Kathleen worked. They exchanged a few words. Simon later wrote a letter to the owner of Napa Creek Winery asking if he would pass a second letter on to Kathleen. Two years later, they were married and living in England. They continued to develop their passion for wine, particularly Pinot Noir, and in 1998 they left England to settle in California and make wine. Their wine estate, Olivet Grange Vineyard on Olivet Road in the center of the Russian River Valley, is planted to Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris—both wines are terrific and worth seeking out.

SMART BUY!

"Rich and bright..."

Fetzer Five Rivers Ranch

Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich cherry, plum aromas, rich, spicy cherry and plum flavors, nice texture, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Terrific middle of the road style with a lot to like in the rich, bright fruit flavors.

25,000 cases made \$10 Score: 88

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Inman Family Wines

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Olivet Grange Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, cherry, cola aromas, some earthy notes; big, deep, dense cherry, earthy and spice flavors, moderate tannin, toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A many-layered Pinot with a lot of complex, interesting flavors.

503 cases made \$40 Score: 91

John Tyler

John Tyler is a new wine venture from two very old and established Russian River Valley wine families. John Bacigalupi and Tyler Heck are the two namesakes of this brand. The Bacigalupi family has been growing grapes on Westside Road since the 1960s when John's father, Charles Bacigalupi, planted Pinot Noir and Chardonnay at the suggestion of Tyler Heck's grandfather Paul Heck, whose family has owned Korbel Champagne Cellars since 1953. John provides the Pinot Noir fruit from his Bacigalupi Vineyard and Tyler makes the wines, and a deep partnership between two long-friendly families continues. The current bottling of Pinot Noir, from the 2002 vintage, is a good start.

John Tyler

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Bacigalupi Vineyard 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; sweet cherry and strawberry aromas; big and rich, with deep cherry/berry flavors, moderate tannin and some sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot has lots of rich, ripe flavors and a good dose of tannin and oak—it needs time in the glass to really open up.

826 cases made \$42 Score: 91

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

The wine estate that is now Laetitia Vineyard & Winery, located in the Arroyo Grande Valley south of San Luis Obispo, was born in 1982, when Champagne Deutz in partnership with Beringer Wine Estates and vineyard owner Jean-Claude Tardivat, planted approximately 185 acres of Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir and for the next 13 years, produced delicious California sparkling wines. Tardivat bought out his partners in 1997 and renamed the winery Laetitia, after his daughter. Tardivat shifted the focus away from sparkling wine hoping that the site would be as suitable to still Pinot Noirs. He was right. In 2001, current owner and entrepreneur Selim Zilkha purchased Laetitia. Winemaker Eric Hickey's excellent Pinot offerings include an estate bottling, a reserve bottling (made up of the best lots from the estate) and single vineyard bottlings that highlight specific blocks in the estate vineyard. Laetitia is also the parent company of Barnwood Vineyards and Avila Winery.

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, deep black cherry and plum aromas with some spicy notes; rich and full cherry and plum fruit, silky texture, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a delicious Pinot—from the great cherry and plum fruit to the silky texture.

11,000 cases made \$25 Score: 93

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley Reserve 2003

Please see "Make Room In The Cellar!" on page 4.

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley La Colline 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep and complex, black cherry and plum aromas with some earthy notes; rich and full, layers of black cherry fruit and spicy notes, complex, sweet oak notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Another deep and interesting Pinot from Laetitia—this bottling is part of the winery's vineyard selection series.

220 cases made \$60 Score: 91

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley Les Galets 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, full, earthy aromas with toasty oak; big and full on the palate with earthy, cherry flavors, toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Big and deep, this is another Laetitia vineyard designated Pinot.

220 cases made \$60 Score: 90

MacPhail Family Wines

James MacPhail founded MacPhail Family Wines in 1998 with a passion to make great Pinot Noir. His family had been in the appliance sales business for years and James felt it was time to take another path. He searched out and found some terrific vineyards and released his first Pinots from the 2002 vintage: bottlings from the Toulouse Vineyard in Anderson Valley and a Russian River bottling. His second vintage, 2003, added a bottling from Sangiacomo Vineyard in the Sonoma Coast. These are small production, hard to find and worth the search.

MacPhail Family Wines

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Toulouse Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, complex, spice, black cherry and lavender aromas; rich, complex, lush black cherry, spice and lavender, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, rich and subtle Pinot—another interesting bottling from the Toulouse Vineyard in Anderson Valley.

312 cases made \$35 Score: 92

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

MacPhail Family Wines

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, intense, earthy, animale, cherry aromas; big and rich, with lots of black cherry, earthy and game flavors; sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and intense, this Pinot has great character and interesting flavors.

196 cases made \$40 Score: 93

MacPhail Family Wines

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Sangiacomo Vineyard 2003

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy, spice and pepper notes on nose; ripe red cherry flavors with earthy and spicy notes; good structure and balance; lingering finish. This Pinot has a lot of ripe, interesting flavors that just need a little time in the glass to open up.

120 cases made \$40 Score: 92

MacRostie Winery

Steve MacRostie has been making Pinot Noir in and around Sonoma and Carneros for three decades, starting his career just out of UC-Davis in 1974 at Hacienda Wine Cellars. In 1987 he founded MacRostie Winery to focus on Chardonnay, Merlot and Pinot Noir from the Sonoma side of the Carneros region. In 1998 he planted his first estate vineyard on Wildcat Mountain in the western highlands of Carneros. Today he produces Chardonnay, Merlot, Syrah and Pinot Noir, in a balanced, high toned style. His first wines from his Wildcat Mountain Vineyard—Syrah and Pinot Noir—are deep and complex and promise even more interesting wines to come.

MacRostie Winery

Pinot Noir Carneros 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, complex, smoky, cherry

aromas; rich and silky with nice cherry and spice flavors; a nice touch of toasty oak; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Rich and spicy, this Pinot is just loaded with interesting cherry flavors—great for the table.

2,984 cases made \$26 Score: 91

Marimar Estate

Marimar Torres has been involved in the wine business all her life. Born in Barcelona, Spain, her family's Torres wine company has been in the global wine business for three centuries. Marimar came to California in 1975 and after two years of searching acquired the land and created the Marimar Estate in the Green Valley appellation of western Sonoma County. Marimar Estate's has two vineyards Don Miguel Vineyard, named for her late father, and Doña Margarita Vineyard, after her mother. Marimar Estate produces Chardonnay and Pinot Noir—the Pinots are deep, with lush cherry notes and fine, elegant structure and balance. Three Pinot bottlings are produced: an estate bottling, the "Cristina," bottling, named for Marimar's daughter, and the Earthquake Block bottling, a special selection from a vineyard block that was so damaged by erosion one year it looked like the ground had been split open by an earthquake.

Marimar Estate

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Don Miguel Vineyard Earthquake Block 2003

Medium ruby purple color; deep, rich toasty aromas, some earthy notes; rich and deep with black cherry, spice and earthy notes; moderate toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and really rich, this Pinot has great black cherry flavors with terrific balance.

50 cases made \$42 Score: 91

Martin Alfaro Winery

Martin Alfaro Winery is a Pinot label that combines the talents

MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

"Complex and very deep..."

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley Reserve 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep and slightly closed with black cherry and earthy notes underneath; rich, deep and complex with layers of black cherry, smoke, chocolate, and sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and very deep, this Pinot has a lot to offer for current drinking but will also improve for a few years in the cellar.

530 cases made \$40 Score: 92

SMART BUY!

"Deep and fruity..."

King Estate

Pinot Noir Oregon 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; bright cherry aromas with a touch of forest floor; rich and forward cherry fruit, spicy notes and a bit of forest floor for complexity; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Another great everyday Pinot from King Estate—deep, fruity and great with food.

n/a cases made \$25 Score: 92

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

and names of Joseph Martin and Richard Alfaro. Their Pinots are made primarily from vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains—a truly under-appreciated Pinot appellation. Keep an eye on this new label, it definitely bears watching.

Martin Alfaro Winery

Pinot Noir Santa Cruz Mountains Schultze Family Vineyard 2003

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy with some plum and game aromas; rich and deep with plum, earthy and gamey flavors, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot definitely has a strong earthy and gamey, smoked meat component that really adds some interest; great for the table.

120 cases made \$28 Score: 90

Martin Alfaro Winery

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2003

Medium ruby purple color; deep, spicy, cherry and plum aromas with some smoky notes; rich, ripe, plum and black cherry flavors with spice and smoky oak, silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and delicious, this Pinot has a great presence in the mouth and is a delight to drink with food and by itself.

140 cases made \$39 Score: 91

Mayro-Murdick Wines

Mayro-Murdick is a new Pinot venture from Michael and Tina Cox of Sonoma, created as a platform to explore and share great Pinots from great Pinot Noir growing regions. Mike Cox is the winemaker at Schug Carneros Estate in Sonoma and brings 17 years experience making Pinot to the venture; Tina's expertise is in wine marketing. The Mayro-Murdick name is taken from the first names of their paternal grandfathers. They've created the Hunterdon label for more value-oriented Pinots. These are delicious, and they belong on your table.

Mayro-Murdick

Pinot Noir Carneros 2003

Medium ruby purple color; spicy cherry and cola aromas; rich, strawberry, cherry flavors with some cola, spice and earth notes; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Bright and interesting, this Pinot really shines on the table. The fruit for this bottling comes from 20-year-old vines in the Iund Vineyard.

484 cases made \$35 Score: 92

Hunterdon

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands 2004

Medium ruby purple color; deep and rich with earthy and plum notes; deep with crisp plum and some sour cherry flavors, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Crisp and bright,

this Pinot has a lot of juicy, pure cherry fruit. Hunterdon is the second label for Mayro-Murdick.

1,650 cases made \$15 Score: 91

Row Eleven

Richard de los Reyes is a winemaker with decades of experience making wine and helping others do the same behind the scenes as a consultant for wine brokers Joseph W. Ciatti Company and Turrentine Wine Brokerage. Richard decided he wanted to be on his own and that he wanted to make Pinot Noir. He'd also come up with his two rules for making great Pinot: first, you need a winemaker brave enough to do it, and second, you need to find the best 11 rows of grapes in any top vineyard. And that's how Row Eleven was born. His initial Pinot offerings are from Santa Maria Valley (mostly Bien Nacido Vineyard) and a blend from San Luis Obispo and Mendocino counties.

Row Eleven

Pinot Noir San Luis Obispo/Mendocino 2002

Medium ruby purple color; deep, candied cherry, herbal aromas; big, herbal with some cherry flavors, moderate tannin and toasty oak, good structure, long finish. Big flavors with balance that moves more toward tannin and oak. Needs time in the glass.

1,352 cases made \$24 Score: 85

Row Eleven

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard Quarter 116 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, cherry/berry aromas with some herbal notes; full and big with berry and cherry flavors, herbal notes and moderate tannin and oak; good structure; long finish. Big and full, this Pinot is more tannic than it needs to be. It has some nice flavors underneath, but it's a bit tough to get to them.

250 cases made \$35 Score: 85

Row Eleven

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; herbal, berry and toasty oak aromas; big, full and rich with deep berry flavors, moderate tannins and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. This wine has a lot of interesting flavors despite its weight; pick a hearty meal to pair with this Pinot.

1,084 cases made \$29 Score: 86

Russian Hill

Ed Gomez and Ellen Mack began their journey in wine making Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay under

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

their Benicia Cellars label in the Solano County city of Benicia. Both severely bitten by the wine bug, they wanted to continue making wine, but also wanted to have a property that would be a suitable place to plant an estate vineyard. They established the Russian Hill Estate in 1997 on 21 acres of low hills in the Russian River Valley on Slusser Road next door to Sonoma-Cutrer. The property came with an estate house known to locals by the nickname “Tara” and from there came the name of their 20-acre estate vineyard, Tara Vineyard. Russian Hill has a second vineyard, Sunny View Vineyard, located on Guerneville Road approximately six miles south of the winery, with 15 acres planted to Pinot and five to Viognier. Ed’s nephew, Patrick Melley, is Russian Hill’s winemaker. Mostly self-taught, Patrick has really dialed in a Russian Hill style that’s really all about a great core of fruit, balance and terrific texture and mouthfeel. Russian Hill produces four bottlings of Pinot, a Syrah and a Chardonnay.

Russian Hill

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Estate Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich red cherry, spice and a touch of earth on the nose; rich and full with juicy red cherry, spice and earthy notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. This is a delicious Pinot—great for just about any meal and really nice by itself.

446 cases made \$32 Score: 92

Russian Hill

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Tara Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; earthy, cherry and spice aromas; rich, deep, cherry flavors with some forest floor and earthy notes; lots of sweet oak adds complexity; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot has great structure and balance, and plenty of rich, ripe flavors to make it drinkable now.

274 cases made \$42 Score: 93

Russian Hill

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Leras Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, complex, earthy cherry aromas; rich and ripe with red cherry, spice and earthy flavors, some tannin and toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe, but well structured, this Pinot really opens up in the glass.

100 cases made \$38 Score: 92

Russian Hill

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Meredith Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; big, deep aromas of red cherry and forest floor; deep and dense cherry flavors with earthy, forest floor notes; some tannin, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a big Pinot, no question about it. The sweet oak and rich flavors make it a

delicious companion to a hearty mushroom-enhanced dish.

277 cases made \$40 Score: 93

Sarah’s Vineyard

Sarah’s Vineyard was founded in 1978 in the Hecker Pass area between the western Santa Clara valley and the Pacific Ocean, an area that has a long history of producing fine wines. Current owner Tim Slater purchased the estate in 2001 and began a new focus on small lot production of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Merlot, Roussanne and Zinfandel. Both Slater and Winemaker Dave Heiber are committed to finding the high-quality, low-yield vineyards in their area to source for their annual production, which they say will stay between 2,500 and 3,000 cases.

Sarah’s Vineyard

Pinot Noir Santa Clara Valley Estate Reserve 2002

Medium ruby red color; deep, cherry and earthy aromas; deep, reduced plum and sour cherry flavors, deep with moderate tannin and oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a deep, earthy Pinot with concentrated fruit; needs a bunch of time in the glass.

200 cases made \$30 Score: 86

Sea Smoke Cellars

Sea Smoke Cellars is named for the persistent and consistent layer of cool, evening coastal fog (sea smoke) that is funneled over the estate vineyards in the western end of the Santa Rita Hills wine region. Founded in 1999 by owner Bob Davids, Sea Smoke’s all-estate Pinot Noirs have proven out the beneficial influence and unique geographic features of its site. Winemaker Kris Curran employs 10 Pinot Noir clones in the south-facing vineyard blocks and keeps all clonal lots separate until it’s time for the final blend to produce each of the winery’s three Pinot bottlings. “Botella” is the “lightest” of the three, but still a full, balanced Pinot. “Southing” is bigger with more new and toasty oak. “Ten” is the bottling featuring best selections from each of the 10 clones planted in the vineyard.

Sea Smoke Cellars

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Botella 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep and rich with spicy cherry, pepper and earthy aromas; rich, deep and full with forward cherry fruit, spicy notes, sweet oak and an almost silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot is big and full without being excessively tannic—the forward, delicious fruit makes it a delight to drink.

1,000 cases made \$30 Score: 94

Sea Smoke Cellars

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Southing 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, complex aromas of

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

cherry, earth and pepper; deep, rich and complex black cherry, currant flavors with earthy and pepper notes; moderate tannin, sweet oak, great structure and balance; long finish. Big, rich and full, this Pinot has amazing presence and yet remains very well balanced. Another impressive Pinot from winemaker Kris Curran.

1,500 cases made \$50 Score: 93

Sea Smoke Cellars

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Ten 2003

Deep ruby purple color; dense, complex aromas of black cherry, earth, pepper and black pepper; deep and complex black cherry flavors with pepper/earthy notes; tannic with considerable toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. The “Ten” bottling is a selection of the winemaking team’s favorite barrels from the 10 clones that make up the mix. It’s big, toasty and full of flavor.

500 cases made \$70 Score: 93

Sonnet Wine Cellars

Tony Craig has come a long way from his previous life as a Shakespearean actor from the English town of Newcastle. Prior to founding Sonnet, Tony spent 12 years as the winemaker at David Bruce Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains; he’s currently also winemaker at Savannah-Chanelle winery. Tony’s Sonnet Pinots are rich, elegant and really nicely balanced. His 2003 bottlings were from three vineyards: the Tondre Grapefield in Santa Lucia Highlands, Amber Ridge Vineyard in Russian River Valley and Kruse Vineyard in the York Mountain region near Paso Robles. These Pinots are hard to find and worth the search.

Sonnet

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Tondre Grapefield 2003

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy with plum and smoky aromas; rich and deep with silky texture, lots of plum and smoky oak notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and deep with a lot of concentrated plum flavors, this Pinot really screams Santa Lucia Highlands.

230 cases made \$40 Score: 92

Waltzing Bear Wines

Brad Lowman is the founder, winemaker and whimsical muse behind Waltzing Bear Wines. Brad’s mission is to make small-lot, vineyard-designated Pinots from small vineyards throughout the Central Coast. His first vintage was 2002; his 2003 Pinots hail from such stellar vineyards as Garys’ Vineyard in Santa Lucia Highlands, Rancho Ontiveros and Solomon Hills in Santa Maria Valley, and the Cargasacchi Jalama vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills. Why the name Waltzing Bear? From Brad’s website: “Because the waltz is the most elegant dance, and Pinot is the most elegant wine, and Brad is as clumsy as a bear on the dance floor, but still enjoys the elegant

things in life!” I think that he’s off to a great start—he may not be able to waltz, but his Pinots rock.

Waltzing Bear

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys’ Vineyard 2003

Medium ruby purple color; deep, rich and smoky aromas with earthy and plum notes; rich, deep, lots of plummy fruit, silky texture; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Forward and silky with a lot of interesting plum and smoky notes, this Pinot has a delicacy that will work well at the table.

148 cases made \$45 Score: 91

Waltzing Bear

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, earthy aromas with cherry notes; rich and deep, lots of red cherry and spice, silky with sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and rich, this Pinot has all the complexity you expect from Rancho Ontiveros and a silkiness that makes it all that much more interesting.

74 cases made \$42 Score: 93

Waltzing Bear

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Solomon Hills 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep and earthy aromas with plum and cassis notes; rich, deep and complex with opulent cherry fruit, toasty oak, earthy notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Big and rich Pinot with great depth and a myriad of interesting flavors. Give it some time in the glass and pair it up with a hearty steak or braise.

125 cases made \$45 Score: 93

Waltzing Bear

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Jalama 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, earthy aromas of cherry and cassis with hints of herbs; rich, complex and silky in the mouth with more cherry, cassis and herb notes; great structure and balance, long finish. Complex, silky and earthy, this Pinot is packed with flavor and balanced impeccably.

97 cases made \$42 Score: 92

Waltzing Bear

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Jalama 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; big, deep aromas of earthy plum, cassis and mint; deep and full with rich cherry and cassis flavors, moderate tannin, toasty oak, good structure; long finish. A big, complex Pinot with a lot of layered flavors. This Pinot not only needs time in the glass, it needs a hearty meal to drink it with.

100 cases made \$36 Score: 92

OREGON

King Estate Winery

King Estate is located in the Southern end of the Willamette Valley, southwest of Eugene, Oregon near the town of Lorane. Founded in the early 1990s by Ed King III and his father, Ed King Jr., the 1,033-acre wine estate specializes in Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris but does produce a few other varieties as well. The 110,000 square foot winery's design is based on a French chateau and the estate vineyards are located at elevations ranging from 800 to 1,100 feet. Winemaker Bill Kremer's Pinot offerings include the Signature Collection bottling—always a good value, some vineyard designated bottlings and the top of the line Domaine bottling.

King Estate

Pinot Noir Oregon Domaine 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, earthy aromas; deep cherry and earthy flavors with sweet oak and a touch of tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. This is a big, deep Pinot with many layers of flavor. The domaine program uses all organic estate grown grapes and is the top of the line for King Estate.

1,060 cases made \$50 Score: 93

King Estate

Pinot Noir Oregon 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; bright cherry aromas with a touch of forest floor; rich and forward cherry fruit, spicy notes and a bit of forest floor for complexity; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Another great everyday Pinot from King Estate—deep, fruity and great with food.

n/a cases made \$25 Score: 92

Sokol Blosser Winery

When Bill Blosser and Susan Sokol Blosser planted their first vineyard in the Dundee Hills of the Willamette Valley in 1971, they were on the leading -- and more likely the bleeding edge of Pinot Noir in Oregon. They were truly working without a net and working without many local winery models to emulate. They persevered and Sokol Blosser released its first wines from the 1977 vintage. Today, the winery is one of Oregon's leaders in organic and sustainable viticulture and winemaking, produces 40,000 cases and is still very much a family business. Russ Rosner is the winemaker and he produces several Pinot Noir bottlings along with Pinot Gris and some proprietary blends.

Sokol Blosser Winery

Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Dundee Hills 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, earthy, some forest

floor and berry aromas; rich, deep, earthy flavors with black cherry, forest floor and toasty oak flavors; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and earthy, this Pinot is a great complement to a earthy mushroom risotto.

4,112 cases made \$26 Score: 91

Contacting The Winery

Below is contact information for wines reviewed in this issue.

Abundance Vineyards

209.334.0274, www.abundancevineyards.com

Fetzer Vineyards

707.744.7600, www.fetzer.com

Inman Family Wines

707.395.0689, www.inmanfamilywines.com

John Tyler

707.473.0123, www.johntylervines.com

King Estate Winery

541.942.9874, www.kingestate.com

Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

805.481.1772, www.laetitiawine.com

MacPhail Family Wines

707.433.4780, www.macphailwines.com

MacRostie Winery

707.996.4480, www.macrostiewinery.com

Marimar Estate

707.823.4365, www.marimarestate.com

Martin Alfaro Winery

831.728.5172

Mayro-Murdick Wines

707.996.3023, www.mayromurdick.com

Row Eleven

415.259.2770, www.roweleven.com

Russian Hill

707.575.9428, www.russianhillwinery.com

Sarah's Vineyard

408.842.4278, www.sarahsvineyard.com

Sea Smoke Cellars

805.737.1600, www.seasmokecellars.com

Sokol Blosser Winery

503.864.2282, www.sokolblosser.com

Sonnet Wine Cellars

408.353.4250, www.sonnetwinecellars.com

Waltzing Bear Wines

818-370-8955, www.waltzingbearwines.com

[PNR]

PINOTREPORT

For People Passionate About Western Pinot Noir

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Contributing Editor

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Editorial Philosophy

PinotReport is an independent newsletter owned, written and published by Gregory S. Walter. All tastings unless otherwise noted are done blind by the Editor. Any and all opinions and analysis expressed in these pages unless otherwise noted belong to Gregory S. Walter, who has no financial involvement or connection whatsoever in the production, distribution or sales of wine.

Wine Samples

PinotReport accepts wine samples for use in its general "In The Market" new releases tastings as well as its special tasting reports. Please follow these guidelines for submitting wine samples for review.

1. All samples should be fully finished bottles ready for market.
2. Please submit two bottles of each wine.
3. Each wine submitted should include a data sheet with at minimum the suggested retail price, case production and distribution data.

All samples should be sent to the following address:

PinotReport

Attn: Gregory S. Walter

625 Ross Court, Sonoma, CA 95476

Tel: 707.935.0326

About Our Tastings

Generally, there are two types of tastings that appear in each issue of **PinotReport**. The first are our regular "In The Market" tastings of Pinot Noirs new on the market.

The second are our special "Tasting Reports" where we from time to time focus on a particular appellation, producer or style.

How We Taste

We taste wine in small flights with no more than 12 wines in a tasting session and one tasting session in a day. While all scores are finalized before the wines are revealed, wines are usually kept open for a day or more to see how the wines develop. Additional commentary may be added based on this, but scores are not changed.

All tasting unless otherwise noted is done blind by the Editor. Other tasters may participate, but their scores and comments are not part of the official tasting record. The tasting coordinator (who does not taste) arranges and bags all wines, which are then scored and comments recorded before bags are removed. Duplicate wines are inserted in tastings to measure consistency.

Our tastings are done under controlled, consistent conditions. We do not under any circumstances use tasting notes from large tasting events or other sub-optimal tasting venues in our published, scored tasting reports.

Wine Prices and Sourcing

Wine prices vary all around the country and can often vary significantly within the same city. We make every effort to only publish a winery's suggested retail price. This price in some cases will be higher than those you can find in your local markets. The wines we taste either come from the wineries in the form of tasting samples (always finished bottles ready for market) or wines we purchase at retail or at the winery.

Our Wine Ratings

The wines we taste are rated using a 100-point rating system. We fully understand the ongoing debate over the use of the 100-point system and while we respect the right of those who simply despise the system to continue to do so, we believe that the scale has value when used with the accompanying tasting notes as a **relative guide** to wine quality that has the added benefit of **being familiar** and **truly intuitive** for most consumers.

PinotReport's 100-Point Scale

96-100	SUPERIOR; it doesn't get better.
90-95	OUTSTANDING; approaching the best
86-89	ABOVE AVERAGE; a good Pinot.
80-85	AVERAGE; OK if it's all you have.
60-79	BELOW AVERAGE; not recommended.
50-59	UNDRINKABLE.

PINOTREPORT

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