

PINOTREPORT

for people passionate about western pinot noir

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A Flurry Of Pinot Tasting...

THIS IS THE TIME OF YEAR we all face spring cleaning—and whether that means cleaning out the garage or doing the windows or getting the garden ready for planting, it's all about getting caught up. For me, in addition to all of the above, spring cleaning also means getting on top of the backlog of Pinots I need to taste.

So that's what this issue is—the first in probably several “spring cleaning” issues, no commentary, no news, just wine reviews published as I get them done. I'll have another one for you in a couple of weeks along with my Santa Maria Valley trip report.

I also wanted to take a moment to remind you about the **2006 Pinot On The River Festival**. PinotReport is again a sponsor and organizer of the third annual event, slated for **October 27th, 28th & 29th**. If you missed my email invitation back in late March, **we have some exciting news about this year's event**. This year we are proud to be holding the event at the **Vintners Inn** (home of the John Ash & Co. restaurant) north of Santa Rosa at the gateway to the Russian River Valley. This venue is perfect for our event—it's a luxurious, upscale, wine country destination with beautiful accommodations geared for wine lovers, centrally located and its new conference center is the perfect place for our seminars and tastings. These changes, however, will not change what Pinot on the River is all about: a weekend focused on highly allocated, limited-production Pinot Noirs from the Russian River Valley and from regions up and down the West Coast.

Because you are a PinotReport subscriber, I'm delighted to be able to **offer you a very special weekend package** if you'd like to attend. If you are interested, I'd urge you to visit www.pinotfestival.com and look over the program. Don't wait too long—even at this early date tickets are selling fast.

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

-- Gregory S. Walter, editor and publisher

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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.

Coastal Ridge

Coastal Ridge is a label owned and produced by Fred Franzia's Bronco Wine Company, one of the largest wine producers in the country and the creator of the "Two Buck Chuck" phenomenon. Coastal Ridge Pinots generally carry a California appellation and are value priced.

Coastal Ridge

Pinot Noir California 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; bright cherry and raspberry aromas; rich, ripe, raspberry, cherry flavors, crisp acidity, good structure; lingering finish. A bright and flavorful Pinot—lighter bodied, and a perfect choice for a picnic red wine.

n/a cases made \$7 Score: 88

Davis Bynum Winery

In the early 1970s, Davis Bynum, a former newspaper reporter, purchased an 83-acre ranch on Westside Road in the Russian River Valley and established what would become the first producer of a Pinot Noir to carry a vineyard designate. With a winemaking reputation for balanced, spicy Pinots largely established by Gary Farrell when he worked at the winery beginning in the late 1970s and carried forward by current winemaker Steven Canter, Davis Bynum's Pinot bottlings are all from Russian River Valley vineyards and include a Russian River Valley blend, a Lindley's Knoll Vineyard bottling, a River Bend bottling and "Le Pinot" from the Rochioli Vineyard.

Davis Bynum Winery

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy cherry aromas; ripe cherry fruit, some spicy notes, good structure and balance;

lingering finish. Nice, easy to drink Pinot with a lot to offer for the table.

2,900 cases made \$28 Score: 88

Domaine Alfred

Domaine Alfred began with founder and owner Terry Speizer's purchase in 1994 of the Chamisal Vineyard in the Edna Valley. Chamisal, planted in 1972, was the first vineyard the Edna Valley. When Terry purchased the vineyard it was dormant. He began his replanting in 1996 with 30 acres of Pinot Noir and 30 acres of Chardonnay. Subsequent plantings added additional clones of both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir as well as Syrah, Grenache and Pinot Gris. Domaine Alfred's first vintage was in 1998 and all of its wines are from the estate Chamisal Vineyard. Mike Sinor, formerly from Byron Vineyard & Winery, took over the day-to-day winemaking from Terry in late 2000. Domaine Alfred bottles Pinot Noir under the "domaine" and Califa labels—the wines are supple, complex and delicious to drink.

Domaine Alfred

Pinot Noir Edna Valley 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; earthy, some black cherry aromas; big, rich, earthy flavors, complex, black cherry, toasty oak, light tannin, good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and ripe, this Pinot has a lot of interesting flavors.

1,950 cases made \$28 Score: 90

Domaine Alfred

Pinot Noir Edna Valley 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep rich black cherry and sweet oak aromas; rich and ripe, deep black cherry, savory spice, sweet oak notes; good structure and balance, long finish. This Pinot is ripe and full of flavor—a great mid-range Pinot that's great for a the table.

2,144 cases made \$28 Score: 92

MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

"Great complexity and depth..."

Etude

Pinot Noir Carneros 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, smoky cherry aromas; deep, rich, smoky cherry flavors, complex, some bacon and spice notes, good structure and balance, long finish. Great complexity and depth mark this Pinot—it needs some time in the bottle to develop further.

8,200 cases made \$40 Score: 93

SMART BUY!

"Nice, spicy style..."

Napa Ridge

Pinot Noir North Coast 2003

Medium ruby red color; spicy, cinnamon, some red cherry aromas; slightly stewed cherry flavors with cinnamon and spice notes; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Nice, spicy style with a lot of interesting fruit in a medium-bodied package. Great for the table.

n/a cases made \$10 Score: 90

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Domaine Alfred

Pinot Noir Edna Valley Califa 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, earthy aromas, some black cherry; deep, full, earthy, cherry flavors with moderate tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance, long finish. This Pinot is big and full flavored; it has enough structure to age well and just a little too much tannin at this stage.

890 cases made \$48 Score: 90

Domaine Alfred

Pinot Noir Edna Valley Califa 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; little tight on the nose, some cherry and earth aromas; full, rich, complex flavors of black cherry, toasty oak and earthy notes, some savory spice; good structure; long finish. A big Pinot that while having a really nice core of black cherry, earth and spice, borders on having just a bit too much tannin for my taste.

702 cases made \$48 Score: 91

Domaine Carneros

Domaine Carneros is located in the heart of the Carneros region and is hard to miss as you drive Highway 121 between the Napa and Sonoma valleys. The dramatic French-styled chateau sits on top of a hill surrounded by vineyards. Owned by Champagne Taittinger of France, Domaine Carneros is best known for its terrific sparkling wines, but has also discovered that its estate vineyards are well suited for producing still Pinot Noir as well. What began as a tiny production primarily for internal consumption has become an aggressive Pinot Noir program, complete with a recently completed still wine cellar and winemaking facility directly behind the chateau. Domaine Carneros' Pinot bottlings include an estate bottling and the higher end "Famous Gate" Pinot.

Domaine Carneros

Pinot Noir Carneros 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, complex, spicy, smoky aromas; rich, ripe, complex flavors of black cherry, spice and smoky oak, some tannin, good structure and balance; long finish. Big and rich with great balance; pair with a hearty meal.

n/a cases made \$28 Score: 91

Dutton Estate Winery

Dutton Estate Winery was established in 1995 by Tracy & Joe Dutton. Tracy spends her days managing the winery while Joe is managing the extensive family-owned Dutton Ranch vineyards. Mat Gustafson is winemaker for the family's Sebastopol Vineyards and Dutton Estate Winery brands, producing Chardonnay, Pinot Noir Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah all under low-intervention winemaking techniques. Pinot bottlings include Russian River blends and special designates including the Thomas Road and Jewell Block bottlings. Total

production is around 1,200 cases. The wines are supple, rich and full of the terroir from the Dutton Ranch vineyards.

Dutton Estate Winery

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Thomas Road Vineyard 2003

Medium ruby red color; rich, red cherry, cola and spice aromas; rich, ripe, lots of red cherry, cola, spice flavors with good structure and a lingering finish. Rich and spicy, this Pinot is nice for near-term drinking but could use just a bit more complexity.

147 cases made \$40 Score: 88

Dutton Estate Winery

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Jewell Block 2003

Medium ruby red color; ripe red cherry, savory spice aromas; rich, red cherry, nice core of fruit, spicy, some sweet oak, silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Delicious core of red cherry fruit and the silkiness make this really nice choice for the table.

145 cases made \$50 Score: 91

El Molino Winery

The El Molino winery was founded in 1871 by W.W. Lyman, and operated until Prohibition would shut its doors for more than a half century. Following a successful career on Wall Street, Reginald Oliver purchased and refurbished the long-unused winery and re-launched the El Molino brand in 1981, with his first commercial Pinot Noir and Chardonnay coming in the mid-1980s. Production is roughly 2,000 cases with about half of that in Pinot Noir. Reg Oliver was a maverick in many ways, and remained under the radar producing great Pinot Noir from vineyards in Napa Valley—a region many think is too warm for Pinot. El Molino's Pinot Noirs are consistently among the very best made in Napa Valley each year. They invariably pair well with food because of their balance and silky texture. Reg Oliver died of melanoma in 2005 at the age of 66. His daughter Lily Oliver carries on the work at El Molino and with her at the helm, we can be sure that his El Molino legacy will continue.

El Molino Winery

Pinot Noir Napa Valley 2002

Medium ruby red color; rich, ripe, red cherry, dusty, earthy notes; rich, ripe, red cherry, cola, earthy, dusty notes, sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. A rich and ripe Pinot with lots of complexity.

850 cases made \$52 Score: 92

Etude

Etude began in 1982 as the creative dream of Tony Soter, then a successful consulting winemaker in the Napa Valley. Tony

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

built relationships with key growers and started making intense and interesting Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir under the Etude label. Tony sold Etude in 2001 to Beringer Blass Wine Estates. He stayed on as a consultant to continue to guide the brand and the wines. In 2000 Beringer Blass began planting a new Pinot Noir vineyard on the western edge of Carneros; it became Etude's vineyard source. In 2003 Beringer Blass purchased the closed RMS Distillery in Carneros and refitted it to be the new home of Etude. Today, Tony works with winemaker Jon Priest to craft the winery's excellent Pinot bottlings: a Carneros blend and the Heirloom bottling. The Etude Pinots have intense cherry and earthy notes and excellent balance.

Etude **Pinot Noir Carneros 2003**

Please see "Make Room In The Cellar!" on page 2.

Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery

Financier William P. Foley, founder of Fidelity National Corporation, had a dream of producing great wine near his home in Santa Barbara. His initial foray into making that dream come true was his purchase in 1997 of the historic J. Carey Cellars winery in the Santa Ynez Valley. He renamed that winery Lincourt (a combination of his two daughters' names). He also wanted to produce great Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, so he purchased a 430-acre former thoroughbred horse ranch in the Santa Rita Hills called Rancho Santa Rosa in 1998. He and winemaker Alan Phillips (formerly of Monticello Cellars in the Napa Valley and Byington in the Santa Cruz Mountains) set out to plant 230 acres of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and a small block of Syrah. Foley Estates Vineyard and Winery was born. The Foley Estates Pinots are rich, ripe and well structured, with a deep core of black cherry and plum fruit. Pinot bottlings include an Estate and Barrel Select bottling as well as several clonal selections.

MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

"Amazing depth..."

Papapietro Perry **Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Pommard Clones 2004**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, subtle cherry, spice and cinnamon aromas; deep, rich, ripe core of juicy cherry and plum fruit, spice, earthy, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This is the second vintage that winemaker Ben Papapietro has blended Pommard Clone lots from two of his primary vineyards—Leras Family and Peters vineyards. I loved last year's version and love the 2004 even more. Truly amazing depth and lush, beautiful flavors.

295 cases made \$64 Score: 95

Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery **Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa 2003**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, earthy, cherry, plum aromas with savory spice notes; rich and ripe, cherry and plum flavors, savory spice and some pepper and earthy notes; good structure and balance; lingering finish. A very nice ripe Pinot with great depth and flavor.

3,700 cases made \$38 Score: 90

Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery **Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Block 4D Pommard Clone 2003**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, complex cherry and spice aromas, some smoky notes; ripe and rich, with forward, juicy cherry fruit, nice spicy notes and sweet oak, silky texture; good structure and balance, lingering finish. Beautiful fruit makes this really easy Pinot to drink.

259 cases made \$45 Score: 91

Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery **Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Block 4A Clone 2A 2003**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; earthy, dusty aromas with some oak and berry notes; rich, ripe berry and cherry flavors with earthy, dusty notes; spicy, nice texture; good structure and balance; long finish. A rich and ripe Pinot that for the table.

245 cases made \$45 Score: 92

Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery **Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Block 5C Dijon Clone 667 2003**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; berry and earthy aromas with some spice notes; ripe, forward berry fruit with nice texture, spice and sweet oak notes; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Ripe and forward fruit make this a delicious Pinot, it just lacks a little in complexity.

245 cases made \$45 Score: 90

SMART BUY!

"Nice, fruity Pinot..."

Kendall-Jackson **Pinot Noir California Vintner's Reserve 2004**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; spicy, rich, red cherry fruit with some spice, good structure, lingering finish. Nice fruity Pinot, a little thin in the middle palate, but will work well with many cuisines.

50,000 cases made \$14 Score: 88

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Foley Estates Vineyard & Winery ***Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Barrel*** ***Select 2003***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy cherry and berry aromas with some earthy notes; rich and ripe cherry fruit, complex flavors of spice, dusty earth, sweet oak; good structure and balance, long finish. Complex and very tasty, this Pinot really pulls everything together in one package. A great Pinot for the table.

244 cases made \$50 Score: 92

Gary Farrell

When Gary Farrell moved to Sonoma County in 1971 he soon found himself fascinated by Russian River Valley wines. He began to make wine at home and it didn't take long for him to pursue winemaking as a career. In 1978, he was hired as winemaker at the Davis Bynum Winery. In 1982, he decided that he wanted to make his own wine and that year, he made 50 cases of Pinot Noir from the Rochioli and Allen vineyard, and Gary Farrell Wines was born. He continued to make his and the Davis Bynum wines through 1999 when he took on an investor to help him build his own winery on Westside Road. The new winery came on line in 2000 and Gary left Davis Bynum to focus full time on his own brand. In 2004 he sold the Gary Farrell brand and winery to Allied Domecq (now Peak Wines); he stayed on as winemaker. Pinot bottlings include vineyard designates from Allen, Jack Hill, Rochioli and Starr Ridge vineyards, as well as a Russian River Selection and a Rochioli-Allen blend.

Gary Farrell ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Allen Vineyard Hillside*** ***Blocks 2003***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; spicy, red cherry, some toasty oak aromas; rich, ripe red cherry and spice, sweet oak, some earthy notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and complex with a lot of bright red cherry and complex earthy notes; this is a winner.

171 cases made \$60 Score: 92

Gary Farrell ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Starr Ridge Vineyard*** ***2003***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, earthy, smoky aromas; rich and deep with red cherry, earthy, dusty and smoky oak notes; good structure, lingering finish. Deep and earthy, this is a complex and slightly tight Pinot right now.

968 cases made \$45 Score: 88

Gary Farrell ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Russian River Selection*** ***2003***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; earthy, toasty oak aromas;

earthy, smoky oak, some red cherry and savory spices; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot is bigger than I would have expected; the tannin really overpowers the other interesting flavors.

5,086 cases made \$34 Score: 86

Gary Farrell ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Rochioli-Allen 2003***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; dusty cherry, earthy aromas; rich and earthy, dusty cherry, sweet oak, silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot is very complex and has delicious, developed flavors and great structure.

156 cases made \$65 Score: 92

Gloria Ferrer

Gloria Ferrer was founded in 1982 with the purchase of 250 acres of pasture land in the western end of the Carneros wine region by the Ferrer family, owners of one of the world's largest sparkling wine producer, Freixenet U.S.A. The winery was completed in 1986; Gloria Ferrer is named after patriarch Jose Ferrer's wife. The original estate vineyard around the winery were planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. These vineyards were supplemented in 1997 and 1998 with the planting of the Circle Bar Ranch, about a mile south of the winery. This 128-acre vineyard comprises 13 different blocks and is planted to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Merlot and Syrah. Bob Iantosca is winemaker, Mike Crumley is vineyard manager. Pinot bottlings include a Carneros appellation blend, block selections named Gravel Knob and Rust Rock Terrace, and the Jose S. Ferrer bottling. Gloria Ferrer Pinots tend toward deep, rich aromas and flavors with lots of earthy complexity. The Carneros bottling is drinkable on release; the Gravel Knob, Rust Rock Terrace and Jose S. Ferrer bottlings all benefit from additional age.

Gloria Ferrer ***Pinot Noir Carneros Rust Rock Terrace 2001***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, earthy, spice and cola aromas; rich, ripe, complex red cherry flavors with savory spice, earth and toasty oak; good structure and balance, long finish. While this is indeed a complex Pinot, it's by no means overdone. Very nice nuanced flavors and great balance.

300 cases made \$40 Score: 92

Gloria Ferrer ***Pinot Noir Carneros Gravel Knob 2001***

Medium ruby red color; red cherry, spice, earthy, slight cheese rind aromas; rich and ripe, nice red cherry, spice and toasty oak flavors, earthy notes; good structure and balance, long finish. A complex and well balanced Pinot that's taking on some very nice nuances with some time in the bottle.

392 cases made \$40 Score: 92

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Gloria Ferrer

Pinot Noir Carneros Jose S. Ferrer Selection 2002

Medium ruby red color; deep, spicy red cherry and earth aromas; earthy, rich, red cherry, complex flavors, moderate tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance, long finish. Big and rich with some nice earthy complexity—definitely needs a hearty meal for maximum enjoyment.

1,050 cases made \$35 Score: 91

Gloria Ferrer

Pinot Noir Carneros 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; ripe, rich slightly jammy notes on the nose; ripe and forward jammy fruit, smoky oak, some tannin, lingering finish. Forward and fruity, but lacks structure and comes off as just a bit too jammy.

10,900 cases made \$26 Score: 85

Gloria Ferrer

Pinot Noir Carneros 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, red cherry aromas, cinnamon and smoky notes; rich and ripe red cherry, spicy notes and a touch of dusty earthy; silky texture; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Bright and delicious Pinot with a lot of interesting complexing notes—great for the table.

9,400 cases made \$26 Score: 92

Greenwood Ridge

Since 1980, Allan Green has been making interesting wines high above the Anderson Valley under his Greenwood Ridge Vineyards label. For his Pinot Noir, he sources vineyards both on Greenwood Ridge and in the Anderson Valley below. The resulting Pinots are spicy and earthy with a lot of cool-climate characteristics.

Greenwood Ridge

Pinot Noir Mendocino Ridge 2003

Medium ruby red color; deep, earthy, some cherry and plum aromas; ripe, earthy flavors with cherry and plum notes; moderate oak, good structure, lingering finish. Nice, medium-bodied Pinot with full, rich flavors.

1,000 cases made \$25 Score: 88

Handley Cellars

After starting her career in the mid-1970s working for Richard Arrowood at Chateau St. Jean, Milla Handley moved to Mendocino County and worked for Jed Steele, then at Edmeades Winery before founding Handley Cellars in 1982 in the northwest end of the Anderson Valley. The estate vineyard is planted to 12 acres of Pinot Noir, 13 acres of Chardonnay and five acres of Gewurztraminer. Total production for the

winery is around 14,000 cases. Pinot bottlings include regional Anderson Valley and Mendocino County blends as well as a Reserve Pinot from the winery's estate vineyards. Handley Pinots are balanced and well structured with spicy aromas and earthy, cherry flavors.

Handley Cellars

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley 2003

Medium ruby red color; ripe red cherry, raspberry aromas, spicy notes; ripe and rich with bright raspberry and cherry flavors, sweet oak, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Delicious, forward and fruity Pinot that just plain tastes good.

3,037 cases made \$25 Score: 90

Handley Cellars

Pinot Noir Mendocino County 2004

Medium ruby red color; earthy, dusty cherry aromas; earthy, dusty cherry flavors with some toasty oak notes, good structure, lingering finish. Forward and earthy Pinot with crisp acidity; the oak is just a bit harsh, but otherwise a tasty wine.

n/a cases made \$19 Score: 89

Hook & Ladder

Former San Francisco fireman Cecil De Loach and his wife Christine founded De Loach Vineyards in the 1970s and for three decades made terrific wine in the Russian River Valley. In 2003, following some market setbacks, the family sold the De Loach Vineyards brand and main winery to Burgundy's Jean-Charles Boisset. Hook & Ladder is the reincarnation of the small family owned winery they set out to create in the first place. The De Loach family is fully involved in Hook & Ladder: Son Michael De Loach heads up marketing; granddaughter Sarah De Loach oversees Northern California sales. The winery produces a regional Russian River Valley Pinot bottling.

Hook & Ladder

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; spicy, cinnamon aromas with a touch of cherry; medium bodied, spicy cherry and cinnamon flavors, moderate oak, good structure and balance; lingering finish. A nice Pinot with spicy, interesting flavors.

n/a cases made \$20 Score: 88

J. Jacaman

J. Jacaman was founded in 2002 by John and Danielle Jacaman of Dallas; the winery's logo is derived from the Jacaman family cattle brand. John is an investment banker and real estate developer; Danielle develops and markets unique products for pets. Together they've developed a Pinot Noir specialist winery producing Pinot from the Russian River Valley. This is a new venture but the first vintage shows promise.

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

J. Jacaman

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, fruity aromas; bright black cherry fruit, nice spicy, earthy notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Rich black cherry flavors dominate this Pinot—it's forward and very tasty.

420 cases made \$35 Score: 90

Kendall-Jackson

Jess Jackson's Kendall-Jackson winery is one of the largest wine brands in the country and also one of the largest that is still a family-owned and operated business. Jess Jackson, raised in San Francisco and graduated from UC Berkeley's Boalt Law School, purchased an 80-acre pear and walnut orchard in Lakeport, Calif., in 1974. He converted the orchard to a vineyard and by 1982 produced his first bottle of wine under the Kendall-Jackson label. Today, the Jess Jackson umbrella includes several other Pinot producers: Cambria Vineyard & Winery, Hartford Court and La Crema. Pinot bottlings under the Kendall-Jackson label include Vintner's Reserve, Grand Reserve and the Highlands Estate bottling. These are all great values and solid, interesting Pinots.

Kendall-Jackson

Pinot Noir California Vintner's Reserve 2004

Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 4.

Merry Edwards

Merry Edwards truly has a golden touch when it comes to Pinot Noir. Her winemaking career spans three decades and has had a consistent thread of Pinot Noir running through it. After switching from a graduate program in nutrition at UC Berkeley to the enology and viticulture program at UC Davis, Merry became one of the first female graduates to seek work as a winemaker. Her first winemaking position was at Mount Eden Vineyards in 1974, working for then consulting winemaker Richard Graff for three vintages. Merry moved on to help build Matanzas Creek Winery from the ground up and guided that brand for seven years. Merry left Matanzas Creek in 1984 to pursue new opportunities and to start a consulting business. In 1997 she co-founded Meredith Vineyard Estate Inc. and began searching for the best Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley Pinot Noir vineyards to provide the grapes for her Merry Edwards Wines Pinots, as well as to plant and grow her own Pinot vineyards. Merry's Pinot bottlings include vineyard designates from the Olivet Lane, Meredith Estate and Klopp Ranch vineyards and regional blends from Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast. Her Pinots are full and rich, with a core of deep cherry fruit and great structure.

Merry Edwards

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Klopp Ranch 2003

Deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, complex earthy, forest

floor aromas; deep, rich and ripe with lots of dark cherry, spice and earthy notes; moderate tannin and oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A big, earthy Pinot from Merry Edwards; this wine opens up a lot with some time in the glass, so be sure to open it a couple of hours before you want to drink it.

1,250 cases made \$48 Score: 92

Merry Edwards

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, rich aromas of cherry and earth; rich and ripe, lots of red cherry and cinnamon flavors, earthy, moderate tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and interesting flavors that will add a lot of complexity for the table.

1,700 cases made \$34 Score: 91

Merry Edwards

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Meredith Estate 2003

Deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, forest floor and black cherry aromas; big, dense, earthy forest floor flavors, some black cherry, tannic and oaky with good structure; long finish. Young, earthy and deep, this is another Pinot that really needs some air time—complex flavors await you.

656 cases made \$48 Score: 92

Miller Wine Works

Gary Miller is a chef and a winemaker, and he finds tremendous synergy and commonality between the two pursuits. He found his passion for wine in college while working in a wine shop near Purdue University and took a detour into food with study at the Culinary Institute of America and work in kitchens at the Greenbrier in West Virginia and the Little Nell in Aspen. He ended up in the Napa Valley and with some encouragement from friends, launched Miller Wine Works to make the kind of wines that have affinity and synergy with great food. His Pinot Noir from the Hellenthal Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast is such a wine—nicely balanced with subtle and complex flavors. Miller Wine Works is one of those under-the-radar producers that you should get to know before everyone else does.

Miller Wine Works

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Hellenthal Vineyard 2003

Medium ruby color; elegant black cherry, spice and tea aromas; black cherry with well developed spice and tea notes as well as some forest floor notes; silky, good structure and balance, lingering finish. Gary Miller continues to make good use of his chef's palate to craft this elegant and delicious Pinot from the outstanding Hellenthal Vineyard in the true Sonoma Coast.

124 cases made \$33 Score: 92

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Napa Ridge

Napa Ridge is a label owned and produced by Fred Franzia's Bronco Wine Company. Until recently, Napa Ridge Pinots carried a Lodi or North Coast appellation. Future wines under this label will carry a Napa Valley appellation. The wines are great values with nice, balanced flavors.

Napa Ridge

Pinot Noir North Coast 2003

Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 2.

Native⁹

Native⁹ refers to owner James Ontiveros' status as a ninth-generation Californian. A native of the Santa Maria Valley, James is a descendant of the pioneering Ontiveros family that once owned the land grant on which Bien Nacido Vineyard is located. Today, in addition to owning a terrific Pinot vineyard, Rancho Ontiveros, James is the director of sales and marketing for Bien Nacido Vineyard. His debut Pinot under the Native⁹ label is from his Rancho Ontiveros vineyard. The style is rich and ripe with a great core of fruit and terrific structure and balance. Get on the mailing list now.

Native⁹

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; subtle black cherry, plum and spice aromas; rich, full, deep core of juicy black cherry fruit, spice, earthy, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A beautiful, rich Pinot that just shines on the table.

140 cases made \$48 Score: 94

Papapietro Perry

Papapietro Perry Winery is a wine venture between four friends—Ben and Yolanda Papapietro and Bruce and Renae Perry. For Ben Papapietro, wine was always there—on the dinner table, at all family gatherings and in his grandparents' cellar. In 1980, Ben started his own garage winery at his San Francisco home. He began helping in the fledgling winery of a fellow newspaper employee—Burt Williams, co-founder of Williams & Selyem. It wasn't long before Ben produced his first solo Pinot Noir. A few years later friend Bruce Perry joined Ben in his winemaking ventures. Ben and Bruce went commercial with their wine in 1998, producing 75 cases of Pinot Noir. As they became more established, they built relationships with great vineyards in the Russian River and Sonoma coast regions and continued to make terrific Pinot. Bruce's wife Renae Perry soon took on the sales and marketing for the growing brand. Ben's Pinots are definitely vineyard-driven and thus the styles vary with each vineyard and vintage, but there's always a core of deep fruit, silky texture, great

structure and balance. Pinot bottlings include appellation blends for Russian River and Sonoma Coast, vineyard designates from Peters Vineyard, Leras Family Vineyard, Mukaida Vineyard, Ellsbree Vineyard, and a Pommard Clones bottling that is a clonal selection from the Peters and Leras Family vineyards.

Papapietro Perry

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Ellsbree Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, earthy, spicy aromas with some red cherry; rich, deep, lots of complex red cherry, spice and earthy flavors, sweet oak, some tannin, good structure and balance; long finish. Beautiful, complex Pinot—the earthy, spicy notes really play well with the red cherry fruit. Fruit is from the Ellsbree Vineyard in Windsor. Delicious.

450 cases made \$45 Score: 93

Papapietro Perry

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Leras Family Vineyards 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; spice, red cherry and forest floor aromas; rich, deep, red cherry flavors, complex forest floor, spice and sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. The complex and rich, earthy flavors in this Pinot make it perfect for lamb or an earthy mushroom pasta dish.

560 cases made \$45 Score: 93

Papapietro Perry

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Pommard Clones 2004

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

Papapietro Perry

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Mukaida Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, complex spicy, cherry aromas; rich, juicy core of red cherry fruit, deep, complex and spicy, nice sweet oak, some tannins, good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and deep, this Pinot's delicious flavors just go on forever. From the Mukaida Vineyard, located on Bodega Highway outside of Sebastopol.

195 cases made \$59 Score: 94

Papapietro Perry

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Peters Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; deep cherry, earthy aromas with forest floor notes; rich and ripe, juicy cherry flavors, forest floor notes, silky texture, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A wonderful example of "true" Sonoma Coast Pinot—delicious, deep and lush.

750 cases made \$45 Score: 94

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Verve

Jerome Aubin has spent more than a decade importing French oak barrels from coopers Rousseau and Saint-Martin. In 2001, he founded Aubin Cellars to make small production wines from the Anderson Valley, Russian River Valley and the Sonoma Coast. His first releases were 2001 and 2002 Verve Pinot Noirs from the Russian River Valley.

Verve

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; dusty cherry and spice aromas; dusty earthy and cherry flavors, a little thin in the middle palate, lingering finish. Earthy and spicy; a nice Pinot for the table.

120 cases made \$30 Score: 87

Williams Selyem

Although truly humble in its origins, Williams Selyem was arguably one of the key catalysts and benchmarks in the California Pinot Noir boom that began roughly in the mid- to late-1980s and continues to this day. Many people (including me) realized just how good California Pinot Noir could be after drinking a Williams Selyem Pinot Noir. For me it was the 1985 Williams Selyem Rochioli Vineyard bottling—it just plain blew me away. co-founders Burt Willams and Ed Selyem, two friends who shared a passion for making wine, brought life to the artisanal Pinot Noir movement. Burt was for years a pressman at the San Francisco Chronicle and Ed was a wine buyer and accountant for a market in Forestville, Calif. When the two of them created their first commercial vintage in 1981, neither had any idea what kind of ride was in store for them. The Williams Selyem Pinots of the 1980s and early 1990s were intense, texture driven wines that had great structure and absolutely incredible depth of flavor and nuance. The winery achieved such cult status that there seemed to be a huge waiting list to get on the waiting list to get on the mailing list! In 1998, Burt and Ed decided to sell the winery, in part due to Ed's ongoing back problems, to New York-based vintner John Dyson. Burt stayed on as a consultant for a year; John Dyson hired Bob Cabral to take over the winemaking reins. Today, Bob manages an expanded lineup of Pinot Noir bottlings that includes regional bottlings from Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County and the Central Coast. There are currently at least a dozen Vineyard designates from the Anderson Valley, Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and the Central Coast. The winery has purchased and planted its first estate vineyards—Litton Vineyard and the Drake Estate Vineyard—both in the Russian River Valley.

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Ferrington Vineyard 2003

Deep ruby purple color; deep, cherry, chocolate, earthy aromas; deep with lots of berry and cherry-chocolate flavors,

tannic and oaky, long finish. There's a lot of depth here, but it just seems buried in tannin and oak.

650 cases made \$59 Score: 87

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Central Coast 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, earthy, spicy plum aromas; ripe, black cherry and plum, some earthy notes, spicy, sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and deep and a nice depth of fruit characterize this Pinot.

850 cases made \$29 Score: 87

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Central Coast 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; ripe, pruney aromas with some savory spices; ripe, stewed cherry and prune flavors with earthy and savory spice notes, good structure and balance, lingering finish. This Pinot has some interesting flavors, but the style just doesn't seem to fit under a Williams-Selyem label.

1,478 cases made \$29 Score: 86

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; ripe, full red cherry, cola aromas; ripe, red cherry and spice with a touch of cola and sweet oak, good structure, lingering finish. Ripe and tasty, this Pinot tastes fine, I just wish it had a little more complexity and depth.

2,000 cases made \$42 Score: 87

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; ripe, red cherry and spice aromas with a touch of earthiness; rich and ripe, dense red cherry and earthy flavors, moderate tannin and oak, good structure, long finish. This is a big style of Pinot with a lot of dense flavors; serve it up with grilled chops.

3,020 cases made \$42 Score: 90

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Allen Vineyard 2002

Medium ruby purple color; complex red cherry fruit, spice and oak aromas; rich and full red cherry, complex earthy, flavors with toasty oak notes; good structure and balance with a long finish. This is a beautiful Pinot with subtle and elegant flavors.

445 cases made \$72 Score: 92

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Bucher Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, ripe red cherry and some cola notes; ripe and rich, red cherry and early flavors with

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

some cola notes; some tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot has a lot of deep red cherry flavors and interesting complexity.

n/a cases made \$49 Score: 89

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Westside Road Neighbors 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, spicy, red cherry aromas; rich, ripe and lush, nice red cherry, spice and earthy notes, sweet oak, silky texture, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Rich and silky, this is beautiful and delicious Pinot to drink right now.

650 cases made \$62 Score: 92

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Westside Road Neighbors 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; interesting, dusty, red cherry and spice aromas; rich and full red cherry, complex spice and earthy flavors with sweet oak and silky texture; good structure and balance with a long finish. Lush and silky, this Pinot is a delight to drink with food or by itself.

573 cases made \$59 Score: 93

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir San Benito County Vista Verde Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, savory spice, stewed cherry aromas; ripe, stewed cherry and plum flavors, with earthy and savory spice notes; moderate tannin and oak; good structure, long finish. A big, earthy style Pinot that will go well with a hearty dish.

860 cases made \$49 Score: 87

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; earthy, cherry, forest floor aromas; rich and ripe, with black cherry, earthy and forest floor notes, a touch of toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy and deep, this is a Pinot well-suited to grilled meats.

950 cases made \$39 Score: 88

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; subtle, bit closed, some earthy, forest floor notes; ripe, rich, with some cherry, but mostly earthy flavors; moderate oak and tannin; good structure, long finish. An earthy style with a little more tannin than would make it balanced.

1,317 cases made \$38 Score: 87

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Coastlands Vineyard 2003

Deep ruby purple color; deep, rich perfume of black cherry, cinnamon and earth; deep and rich with black cherry, spice and earthy, forest floor notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, earthy and rich, this is a Pinot with a lot to offer now, but will also handle a few years of age.

430 cases made \$62 Score: 92

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Precious Mountain Vineyard 2002

Medium-deep ruby purple color; concentrated black cherry and plum on nose; deep and complex black cherry fruit, spice, sweet toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Traditionally, the Precious Mountain bottling is one that you want to make sure you open up and give plenty of air—the deep, concentrated aromatics and flavors really shine after an hour or two.

266 cases made \$80 Score: 93

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Sonoma County 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; simple spicy and cherry aromas; spicy, bright cherry flavors, with a touch of sweet oak, lingering finish. A pleasant Pinot to drink, but it really lacks depth and falls off quickly.

800 cases made \$32 Score: 86

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Sonoma County 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; spicy, cherry aromas with some oak; ripe, spicy, cherry flavors, nice touch of sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A ripe, tasty style—not complex, but easy to drink.

1,347 cases made \$32 Score: 89

Williams Selyem

Pinot Noir Yorkville Highlands Weir Vineyard 2003

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep spicy aromas with a touch of oak; ripe, red cherry and spice flavors, with earthy notes; tannic and oaky; good structure and balance; long finish. Another big style with a healthy dose of toasty oak; needs a hearty meal.

480 cases made \$49 Score: 89

[PNR]

PINOTREPORT

For People Passionate About Western Pinot Noir

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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.

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