

PINOTREPORT

for people passionate about western pinot noir

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A New Year For Pinot...

A BELATED HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL! And as we move in to 2007 it strikes me that aside from the real-world things we all have to be thankful for, we are also living in one of the best times to be a Pinot lover. Here are a few reasons:

Quality has never been better. Western Pinots are simply better, more interesting and more distinctive than they have ever been before.

We have a wonderful diversity of styles. One of the things I enjoy about Western Pinot Noir is that there is no such thing as a monoculture in wine styles (or in the people who make them for that matter). It isn't just about big versus elegant—Pinot Noir gives the winemaker a virtual symphony orchestra to create wines that truly sing.

Site selection is progressing well. There has been staggering progress in narrowing the search for the true Western Pinot “super sites” in the past five or so years. It's getting harder to find Pinot grown in totally inappropriate and unsuitable places.

“Sideways” wasn't just a fad. The movie “Sideways” was, in addition to being a fun movie, a catalyst that brought people to the tasting bars in astounding numbers to try Pinot Noir. Many have stayed on and sales of Pinot Noir are at an all-time high.

All of this translates into more selection, more new and interesting wines and times that are anything but boring.

This issue I offer a brief, introductory look at the very interesting Pinot Noirs from New Zealand. I've reviewed a few NZ Pinots in past issues, but this is the beginning of a concerted effort to add these wines to my regular scope of coverage. For the most part, **they are balanced wines with good flavors and texture**—and on top of that, many, if not most, are good values.

My regular **“In The Market”** tasting notes include some really terrific wines from perennial Pinot standouts **A. P. Vin, Alcina Cellars, Halleck, Loring Wine Company** and **Tandem**, as well as newcomers **Bush-Field, Golden's Wines** and **Pali Wine Company**.

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

-- Gregory S. Walter, editor and publisher

A New Zealand Pinot Primer

Though Not Yet As Popular As Whites, NZ Pinots Are Wines To Watch

PINOT NOIRS FROM NEW ZEALAND WERE RELATIVELY RARE ITEMS on retail shelves and restaurant wine lists even just a decade ago. Today, New Zealand Pinots, like their Sauvignon Blanc compatriots, are becoming tremendously more visible.

Pinot Noir came to **New Zealand** in the mid-1970s and was first planted in the **Auckland** region. It wasn't long (about a decade) before it was being grown and produced in **Wellington (Martinborough)** and **Hawkes Bay** on the North Island, in addition to many regions on the South Island. The initial demand for Pinot Noir was as a blending component in high-quality sparkling wines, though it didn't take long for the New Zealand winemakers to realize that still Pinot Noir had a big future ahead.

Today, Pinot Noir is **the third most planted grape** in New Zealand, behind Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, first and second respectively. And while we've likely seen the peak of the evolution in New Zealand's delicious Sauvignon Blancs and Chardonnays, we've only seen the beginning of the development of the country's Pinot Noirs.

New Zealand Pinot Noirs, like those from California and Oregon, really come in wide range of styles. The common thread in just about all of them are softer tannins, good balance and rich fruit flavors. As such, these Pinots suit a wide range of dishes, including lean meats and earthy pasta dishes.

Wine Regions

To get you grounded, below are the primary wine regions in New Zealand, listed from south (cooler and better suited to Pinot Noir) to north (warmer and less likely to be good for Pinot Noir).

SOUTH ISLAND

Central Otago

Pinot Noir is the dominant grape variety in **Central Otago**, New Zealand's most southerly wine region. This very fast-

growing region is also very different in climate and soils than New Zealand's other primarily maritime regions. Central Otago has **greater temperature swings and seasonal extremes** than other regions. Pinots from this region show tremendous promise and many believe that with some additional vine age, Central Otago will become the quality benchmark for all New Zealand Pinots.

Canterbury

Canterbury is made up of two wine sub-regions: the vineyards planted around the city of **Christchurch** and the newer **Waipara** area about an hour north of Christchurch. Waipara is inland from the coast and sheltered by a range of hills is the warmer of the two sub-regions and has soil profiles that tend to be chalkier and richer in limestone. Both sub-regions feature long, dry summers with lots of sunshine. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are the most widely planted varieties.

Marlborough

The Marlborough region is easily the **best known** of the New Zealand wine regions. Vines were first planted here in the early 1970s and most of the wine world knows of the delicious Sauvignon Blanc that is the region's most-planted grape. **Pinot Noir is the second most planted** and does well in the abundant sunshine and cool nights that are typical.

Nelson

The Nelson region is located on the western side of New Zealand near the northern end of the South Island. Most of the vineyards are located in the hills and valleys of the region as well as the **Waimea Plains**. The mountains to the west provide a rain shadow effect and the nearby ocean provides cooling maritime air. Cool-climate varieties do best here including Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling.

NORTH ISLAND

Wellington

While you won't likely see the name Wellington on a wine label, it's the official name of the region at the south end of the North Island that encompasses the **Wairarapa** and

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Martinborough sub-regions. Martinborough is definitely Pinot Noir country, with that variety dominating in planting and prestige. Most of the recent development here, like in Central Otago, is in small-production, artisanal producers.

Hawkes Bay

Hawkes Bay has a 100-year history of wine and is the second largest wine region in New Zealand. Its wide range of soil types and growing sites, as well as long hours of sunshine during the growing season make it a great region for growing Chardonnay. There are also significant plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Syrah.

Gisborne

An interesting bit of trivia about the Gisborne wine region is that its **vineyards are the furthest east** of any wine region in the world due to its relative proximity to the international dateline. Most of the vineyards are sited on the high coastal plains and receive long hours of sunshine and shelter from the western weather by a range of mountains. Gisborne is planted mostly to Chardonnay and other white varieties; reds make up only approximately 10 percent of the grapes planted.

Waikato/Bay of Plenty

Focused mainly on Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and of course, Sauvignon Blanc, The **Waikato** and **Bay of Plenty** regions are located south of Auckland. The vineyard plantings, though expanding, are scattered among rolling farmland in a moderately warm climate—not one of the best places in New Zealand for Pinot Noir.

Auckland

The traditional wine regions to the northwest of Auckland are **Henderson**, **Kumeu** and **Huapai**. These wine areas focus mainly on Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay although Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and other white varieties are also planted. The **Waiheke Island** wine area, located in Auckland's harbor, was established in the 1980s for production of mainly Bordeaux varieties. Two newer areas are being established: **Matakana**, on coast about an hour north of the city of Auckland and **Clevedon**, about half an hour south of the city.

Northland

There's been a recent surge of planting in this smallest of New Zealand's wine regions. Northland is actually the site of the

first vineyard plantings back in 1819. Vineyards are scattered in three general areas: **Kaitia** on the west coast in the far north, around the **Bay of Islands** on the northern east coast and near **Whangarei**, Northland's largest city. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay are the region's three most widely planted grape varieties, due to the fact that Northland in general has the warmest growing conditions in New Zealand.

Tasting Notes: Group #1

The following tasting notes are by no means a comprehensive look at all available New Zealand Pinots. In fact, it's offered to give you a brief picture of what's out there. Availability in your market may vary greatly.

This group of notes below are from my regular tastings and were tasted blind, in my office following my normal tasting protocol. I've again organized the notes by region.

Canterbury

Torlesse

Pinot Noir Canterbury 2004

Medium ruby color; spicy, earthy aromas; spicy cinnamon notes with a nice core of red fruits; silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Lots of earth and spice notes make this Pinot a nice match for a subtle pasta dish.

1,000 cases made \$22 Score: 87

Central Otago

Bannock Brae

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium ruby color; spicy red cherry aromas; ripe, rich red cherry flavors, spicy, some oak and tannin, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Spicy and rich Pinot with a lot of pretty red cherry flavors.

n/a cases made \$35 Score: 90

Berridge Vineyards

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium-deep ruby color; earthy red cherry aromas; rich and ripe, with deep and complex red cherry flavors, earthy notes and a touch of sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. This is an earthy, ripe and complex Pinot that makes a nice match for a roasted chicken.

2,000 cases made \$30 Score: 89

SPECIAL TASTING REPORT

Kawarau Estates

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, spicy, stewed cherry aromas; ripe, stewed cherry, spicy, earthy notes, silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe and earthy, this is an interesting Pinot with nice, silky texture.

1,000 cases made \$32 Score: 87

Mount Michael

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium ruby color; deep red cherry, earthy, cheese rind aromas; ripe, silky texture, nice red cherry flavors, earthy notes, good core of fruit; good structure and balance; long finish. Silky and full of fruit, this Pinot is a delight to drink.

995 cases made \$29 Score: 90

Nevis Bluff

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2002

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, spicy, smoky, earthy aromas; deep black cherry, spice, smoky notes, some sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and interesting with smoky, earthy notes that meld well with the black cherry core.

2,000 cases made \$24 Score: 91

Rippon Vineyard

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium ruby color; forest floor aromas with a nice core of red cherry; complex, earthy, rich red cherry fruit, forest floor notes, silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and complex, this is a Pinot that really opens up with some air and will reward a few years in your cellar.

1,000 cases made \$36 Score: 93

Rippon Vineyard

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2001

Medium ruby color; earthy, forest floor aromas with a hint of red cherry; rich red cherry fruit, complex earthy forest floor notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy and complex, and with some added interest due to its age, this Pinot would really work well with a subtle mushroom pasta or a lighter grilled meat dish.

1,000 cases made \$33 Score: 91

Rockburn

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2002

Medium ruby color; earthy and spicy aromas; spice and earthy flavors with a core of cherry fruit; silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe and spicy, this Pinot has a lot to offer.

3,545 cases made \$35 Score: 89

Rockburn

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium ruby color; spicy cherry and earthy aromas; forward red cherry and spice flavors with earthy notes; good structure and balance; long finish. A bright, interesting Pinot with delicious forward fruit flavors.

6,142 cases made \$35 Score: 91

Shaky Bridge

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2003

Medium-deep ruby color; deep aromas of stewed cherry and plum; ripe, rich, stewed plum and cherry, nice earthy notes, sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot has a really nice, well balanced core of plummy cherry fruit; great for the table.

2,000 cases made \$29 Score: 91

Sleeping Dogs

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, dusty cherry and earthy aromas; deep, dense, dark dusty cherry flavors, earthy, oak aromas, good structure and balance; long finish. This is an earthy, deep Pinot with dense flavors. Serve with a hearty meat or pasta dish.

500 cases made \$25 Score: 87

Waitiri Creek

Pinot Noir Central Otago 2002

Medium-deep ruby color; deep spicy, earthy, oaky aromas with some dark plum fruit; big and rich, dark fruit with moderate tannin and oak, spicy notes; good structure, long finish. Big and dense Pinot with significant tannin and oak—really needs a hearty dish as a companion.

1,000 cases made \$27 Score: 87

Hawkes Bay

Morton Estate

Pinot Noir Hawkes Bay White Label 2004

Medium ruby color; earthy, plum aromas; deep, spicy plum flavors, bit tannic, sweet oak flavors; good structure, lingering finish. A big style of Pinot with moderate tannins. Serve with a hearty meal.

4,000 cases made \$27 Score: 86

Marlborough

Brancott Vineyards

Pinot Noir Marlborough 2004

Medium ruby color; deep red cherry, earthy and spice aromas;

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rich and ripe, lots of deep red cherry flavors; spicy, earthy notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Beautiful and spicy, this rich Pinot has a delicious core of red cherry fruit—great to drink by itself or pair with a wide variety of cuisine.

15,000 cases made \$11 Score: 92

Forrest Estate *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2004*

Medium ruby color; spicy, red cherry aromas; deep, complex, interesting red cherry flavors, spicy, cinnamon notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Silky and complex, this is a really interesting Pinot with lots of nuance; serve it with a subtle mushroom pasta or roasted meat dish.

7,000 cases made \$19 Score: 93

Kim Crawford *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2005*

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, black cherry, berry aromas; deep cherry flavors, juicy fruit, some tannin and toasty oak; long finish. A deep, toasty Pinot with a lot of berry flavors; definitely needs to be paired with a hearty meal.

8,000 cases made \$18 Score: 89

Konrad & Co. *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2004*

Medium ruby color; earthy, leather aromas with some cherry notes; ripe red cherry with earthy, leathery notes; good structure; long finish. An earthy style of Pinot with bracing acidity.

2,000 cases made \$19 Score: 85

Mana *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2004*

Medium ruby color; spicy, bright cherry aromas; ripe and bright cherry fruit, with spicy notes, slicky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. A lighter styled Pinot with bright cherry flavors.

2,000 cases made \$15 Score: 87

Omaka Springs *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2003*

Medium ruby color; earthy, meaty aromas; subtle cherry flavors with a hint of spice; earthy notes dominate; lingering finish. A lighter, earthy style that would work well with roasted chicken.

1,000 cases made \$22 Score: 85

Saint Clair *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2005*

Medium-deep ruby color; red cherry and plum aromas with

some toasty oak; red cherry flavors with some spice and earthy notes; nice structure, lingering finish. Lighter style of Pinot with a lot of interesting fruit and earthy flavors.

3,000 cases made \$15 Score: 87

Saint Clair *Pinot Noir Marlborough Vicars Choice 2005*

Medium ruby color; spicy, dusty red cherry aromas, some earthy notes; rich, ripe dusty red cherry, nice silky texture, earthy notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and ripe, delicious cherry core of fruit; this Pinot is delicious on its own or with a variety of dishes.

3,000 cases made \$13 Score: 91

Saint Clair *Pinot Noir Marlborough Doctor's Creek Reserve 2004*

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, dusty cherry, oak and earth aromas; rich and ripe, sweet red cherry flavors, nice complexity from earth and oak; silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and silky Pinot—has all the richness and depth you'd want.

250 cases made \$24 Score: 92

Sherwood Estate *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2005*

Medium ruby color; bright cherry and raspberry aromas; spicy, raspberry and cherry flavors with a touch of sweet oak; slicky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a bright and tasty Pinot that will work well on the table.

10,000 cases made \$16 Score: 87

Spy Valley *Pinot Noir Marlborough 2003*

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, juicy black cherry fruit aromas; some sweet oak notes; deep, dense black cherry fruit, some earthy notes, some tannin and sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Big and dense Pinot with a juicy core of black cherry fruit.

10,000 cases made \$30 Score: 88

Wellington

Borthwick Vineyard *Pinot Noir Wairarapa 2003*

Medium ruby color; spicy cherry aromas; earthy, ripe cherry flavors, lighter in body, spicy notes, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Bright, interesting flavors—a lighter style of Pinot for the table.

1,000 cases made \$25 Score: 89

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Martinus Estate

Pinot Noir Martinborough 2003

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, complex, earthy aromas with some toasty oak; ripe, rich and dark fruit flavors, toasty oak, moderate tannin, good structure, lingering finish. Big and tannic Pinot—if you like this style, this is a good Pinot for you.

200 cases made \$40 Score: 86

Te Kairanga

Pinot Noir Martinborough 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, interesting spice and forest floor aromas; deep, cherry flavors, some forest floor, oak flavors, bit tannic, good structure and balance; long finish. A bit on the tannic side, this is nonetheless an interesting and complex Pinot.

2,500 cases made \$19 Score: 86

Te Kairanga

Pinot Noir Martinborough Reserve 2003

Medium-deep ruby color; earthy, dusty cherry aromas, some toasty oak; dusty, stewed cherry flavors, earthy notes, toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A nicely balanced

Pinot with interesting, nuanced flavors.

500 cases made \$39 Score: 90

Te Kairanga

Pinot Noir Martinborough Runholder 2004

Medium ruby color; spicy, cinnamon, red cherry aromas; deep, spicy cinnamon notes with a great core of sweet red cherry fruit; silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. A lighter style of Pinot with subtle, silky flavors.

375 cases made \$29 Score: 91

Nelson

Greenhough

Pinot Noir Nelson 2003

Medium-deep ruby color; dusty cherry and oak aromas; ripe, dark cherry and plum flavors, some tannin and toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy, rich and big Pinot with a lot to offer. Pair with a grilled steak.

1,000 cases made \$25 Score: 90

[PNR]

Tasting Notes: Group #2

This second group of notes is from a tasting staged by the **New Zealand Winegrowers** organization. The wines were tasted non-blind, and not in my office and therefore carry only brief notes and no scores. I've organized the notes by region.

Central Otago

Quartz Reef Central Otago 2005: deep and nice, good fruit, nicely balanced.

Quartz Reef Central Otago 2004: soft, silky, stewed cherry notes, rich and ripe on the palate.

Two Paddocks Central Otago Picnic 2004: bright, rich cherry flavors; light and fruity; delicious.

Two Paddocks Central Otago First Paddock 2004: rich, ripe red cherry, earthy notes, bit soft, very silky texture.

Wooing Tree Central Otago 2005: deep, dark fruit aromas and flavors, lush texture, great balance and structure.

Marlborough

Brancott Marlborough Reserve 2005: deep, earthy, spicy cherry flavors, balanced and complex.

Culley Marlborough 2005: a big, deep Pinot with husky

flavors; nice finish.

Huia Marlborough 2005: spicy, stewed cherry aromas; simple, great flavors.

Jackson Estate Marlborough Vintage Widow 2005: complex earthy aromas and flavors, rich and ripe, balanced, long finish.

Koura Bay Marlborough Blue Duck 2005: very deep and full of ripe, rich cherry fruit, earthy complexity and a long finish.

Matua Valley Marlborough Estate 2005: big, rich, earthy aromas and flavors, toasty oak, nice balance and finish.

Nautilus Marlborough Estate 2005: ripe and rich, with spicy cherry notes and great balance.

Seresin Marlborough Leah 2004: rich, lots of earthy, meaty aromas and flavors; complex; silky texture, very nice balance, structure and finish.

Waipara Hills Marlborough 2005: rich, ripe, nice fruit; I'm struck by just how well balanced this Pinot is.

Martinborough

Ata Rangi Martinborough 2004: earthy, ripe cherry flavors, deep and dark with a lot of earthy complexity.

Julicher Martinborough 2005: a bit oaky with fruit that's slightly dried out.

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.

A. P. Vin

That he's now in the wine business full time is still a bit surreal for Andrew Vingiello. Up until mid 2005, the Tuxedo Park, N.Y. native worked as a buy-side equity trader for a San Francisco-based money management firm. After his "Pinot epiphany" at a dinner in 2002 where he selected and was blown away by a 1999 Tarius Pisoni Vineyard Pinot Noir and was blown away, it wasn't long before Andrew set his mind to making his own Pinot Noir. Following some serious research and the influence of mentors including Brian Loring, Andrew released his debut Pinot, a 2003 from Garys' Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands that is silky and lush—a beautiful expression of the passion Andrew feels for this new chapter in his life. For 2005, there are seven vineyard designated Pinots. They are a bit more angular than his lush 2004s but no less enjoyable. Andrew has recently moved his winery up to his own facility in San Francisco (where he lives).

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Green Valley Keefer Ranch Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; subtle cherry aromas with some earthy and spice notes; rich, ripe, deep black cherry flavors, spice and sweet oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Lush and rich, this is a truly delicious Pinot with amazing depth. I really just want to drink it all by itself.

200 cases made \$46 Score: 96

MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

"Amazingly rich and silky..."

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Rosella's Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; sweet plum and black cherry aromas with some spice notes; rich, deep, ripe black cherry and plum fruit, with savory spice and smoky, sweet oak; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Amazing richness and silkiness on the mouth, this Pinot just plain tastes great and gets better in the glass. From the always terrific Rosella's Vineyard, Brian Loring hits another one outta the park!

825 cases made \$48 Score: 97

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; rich, ripe black cherry and sweet oak aromas; ripe, rich, lush black cherry, sweet oak, spice and bacon notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Beautifully rich and ripe with flavors that just go on and on.

400 cases made \$46 Score: 93

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Rosella's Vineyard 2005

Please see "Make Room In The Cellar!" on page 9.

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy, rich and ripe aromas of plum and cherry; ripe, red cherry and plum, sweet oak, with earthy notes; good structure and balance; long finish. This is a rich and balanced Pinot with all of the red cherry and earthy complexity you expect from the Santa Maria Valley.

125 cases made \$46 Score: 92

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy, smoky aromas; ripe, lush red cherry flavors; juicy fruit flavors, spicy, smoky notes; good structure and balance; long finish. A deep and earthy Pinot with lush flavors and texture; good structure and balance for heartier meals and for a little age in the bottle.

175 cases made \$46 Score: 93

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Turner Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; rich, lush aromas of black cherry

SMART BUY!

"Full and tasty..."

Alcina Cellars

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2005

Medium ruby color; ripe red cherry, spice and sassafras aromas; ripe and full with very juicy red cherry fruit and spicy, earthy notes for complexity; sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A full, tasty and really well balanced Pinot—an artful job of blending by winemaker Greg Piatigorski for this regional bottling.

335 cases made \$38 Score: 94

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and spice; deep, lush and complex with ripe black cherry flavors and spice notes; a touch of tannin and sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and full of flavor, this Pinot is a great match for a beef braise—will take a few years in the cellar.

100 cases made \$46 Score: 94

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; ripe plum and earthy aromas; savory notes; deep plum and black cherry flavors, sweet oak and a touch of tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy and ripe Pinot with some very interesting savory notes.

250 cases made \$46 Score: 92

Alcina Cellars

Alcina Cellars is the brainchild of Greg Piatigorski, a San Francisco Bay Area Pinot lover turned vintner, now making small lots of Pinot Noir and Syrah. Vineyard sources for his Pinot Noir include the Sangiacomo Vineyard (Roberts Road in the Petaluma Gap), the Ramondo Vineyard in the Sonoma coast and the Pisoni Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands. Greg believes in minimal intervention in the winery, no fining or filtering and careful attention to the vineyard. His style is one that's big and full of flavor, but also nicely balanced. He's definitely a producer to watch.

Alcina Cellars

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2005

Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 7.

Alcina Cellars

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2005

Medium ruby color; bright, ripe, aromas with some spice; rich, ripe, bright red cherry, spice, cinnamon notes, silky notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe and rich and just plain delicious Pinot; a great wine for the table.

74 cases made \$38 Score: 92

Alcina Cellars

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Ramondo Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby color; slightly closed, some deep black cherry aromas; rich, ripe, juicy black cherry flavors; spicy, cinnamon notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, juicy Pinot with lots of depth—perfect for grilled meats.

122 cases made \$48 Score: 93

Alcina Cellars

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Sangiacomo Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby color; earthy, ripe cherry and plum aromas; ripe,

earthy, dusty cherry flavors, complex, nice toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and complex, this is a classic cool climate Pinot. From the Sangiacomo Vineyard in the Petaluma Gap-influenced region to the northeast of Petaluma.

315 cases made \$48 Score: 93

Bush-Field Vineyard

Bush-Field Estate Vineyards & Winery was founded by Alan Benfield Bush in 1999 at the top of Sonoma Mountain where he planted his first vineyard in 1999. Today the estate comprises five acres of Pinot Noir, with plans for another 55 acres. The estate vineyard is at the highest elevation (2,350 feet) of any vineyard in Sonoma County, overlooking the Sonoma Valley to the east. The elevation of the vineyard places it above the fog line for warm sun during the growing season and a constant cooling breeze. Alan was driven to grow and make Pinot by his love of the wines of Burgundy and his estate Pinot is definitely terroir- and texture-driven.

Bush-Field Vineyard

Pinot Noir Sonoma Valley Sonoma Mountain Top Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby color; deep, slightly closed, earthy, dark fruit aromas; deep, earthy, black cherry flavors, tight flavors, toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. A deep and complex Pinot that needs some time in the bottle and in the glass to open up.

70 cases made \$54 Score: 92

Golden's Wines

Barry Golden's journey to making small-lot bottlings of Pinot Noir in the city of Lompoc was a complex one: he grew up in a large New England city, went to college and earned degrees in Biology and Zoology. Now a retired college professor, he took up home beer and wine making while living in Washington state and later in Central Arizona. He wanted to learn more about making wine and wanted to learn while working at a winery. He emailed Brian Loring and asked if he could help out with the harvest. Brian said yes and Barry has been helping out ever since. In 2005, Brian agreed to help him make a small amount of wine and the Golden's Wines label was born. Two vineyard designated Pinots are produced, one from the Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard in nearby Santa Maria Valley and one from the Turner Vineyard in Santa Rita Hills.

Golden's Wines

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; slightly closed, some red cherry and spice aromas; ripe, rich, lots of red cherry and earthy notes, bit of tannin, good structure and balance; long finish. The tasty

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

red cherry fruit and earthy complexity really come out of this wine with some air—it's pretty tight and closed when first opened.

50 cases made \$46 Score: 92

Golden's Wines

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Turner Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; bit closed at first, some spice and pepper notes; big, rich, moderate tannins, deep red cherry flavors with earthy, smoky notes; good structure and balance; long finish. This is a big Pinot with quite a bit of red cherry and earthy notes once it has the time to open up in the glass.

50 cases made \$46 Score: 91

Halleck Vineyards

A passion for Pinot Noir and the desire to fund their three sons' college educations led Ross and Jennifer Halleck to Sonoma County in 1991 with the singular focus of planting a Pinot vineyard in the Sonoma Coast region. The one-acre Halleck Vineyard sits above the Russian River Valley and until the 2002 vintage all of the harvest went to Tandem Winery, where Greg La Follette made the wine as a vineyard designate in his line. Halleck Vineyard has quickly established itself as a definite Pinot "super site." Pinot bottlings include the estate bottling, the Three Sons Cuvee and two vineyard designates, from the Hallberg Vineyard and The Farm Vineyard.

Halleck Vineyard

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Hallberg Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby color; deep, earthy, forest floor aromas; ripe red cherry flavors with earthy forest floor notes; slight tannin, good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and earthy, this Pinot nonetheless is very approachable and will continue

to improve in the bottle for a few years. The Hallberg Vineyard, planted by the Goldridgepinot people, is on the site of a former apple orchard in Sebastopol.

140 cases made \$55 Score: 93

Halleck Vineyard

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley The Farm Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby color; deep, red cherry, spice, earthy aromas; ripe, red cherry flavors, nice earthy complexing notes, sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. This is an earthy Pinot with a lot of red cherry flavors—perfect for an earthy mushroom pasta.

270 cases made \$55 Score: 93

Halleck Vineyard

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Three Sons Cuvee 2005

Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 9.

Loring Wine Company

"Wine geek" and "Pinot Freak" are two phrases Brian Loring uses a lot to describe himself. Both phrases fit this former software contractor from Southern California who turned a 15-year dream into reality and began making his own Pinot Noir. Brian's journey from Pinot fanatic to Pinot winemaker began after he met and later befriended Norm Beko of Cottonwood Canyon Winery. He convinced Norm to let him help out at the winery during the 1997 harvest and ended up making two barrels of his own Pinot Noir. At that point, the die was cast and the Loring Wine Company was born. Right out of the chute, Brian went straight to some of the finest Pinot vineyards in California—Clos Pepe in Santa Rita Hills and Garys' Vineyard in Santa Lucia Highlands among them—and made killer wines in 2000 and again in 2001. The 2004 vintage clearly set a new high watermark for Loring Pinot Noirs. Not only did he make incredible wines from a challenging vintage, but he also expanded his lineup of Pinots

MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

"Deep and lush..."

A. P. Vin

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Rosella's Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; ripe plum and black cherry aromas, some bacon notes; ripe, rich, juicy plum and black cherry flavors; bacon and sweet oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, lush and full of flavors, this Pinot is simply perfect for the table and will work with a huge range of dishes.

400 cases made \$46 Score: 95

SMART BUY!

"Complex and interesting..."

Halleck Vineyard

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Three Sons Cuvee 2005

Medium ruby color; slightly closed, dark fruit, spice and earthy notes underneath; ripe, red cherry, earthy, forest floor notes, toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, interesting Pinot that has really nice structure; needs time in the glass and in the bottle. A blend of three Russian River Valley vineyards: Hallberg, The Farm and Hawk's Roost.

750 cases made \$38 Score: 94

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

to 10 bottlings. The Loring 2005s are no less terrific, just a bit different – they are more structured and a little less opulent. These wines taste terrific now and will benefit from a few years in the bottle.

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir California Hungry Like The Llama 2005

Medium ruby purple color; earthy, dusty, smoky cherry aromas; complex, rich and ripe red cherry with some tannin and lots of smoky, sweet oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Really rich and ripe, this is a great all around Pinot for grilled meats and seafood.

200 cases made \$48 Score: 94

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Chalone Brosseau Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy, dusty cherry aromas; deep, complex, dusty cherry flavors with earthy notes and a bit of tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. An earthier style, this Pinot nonetheless has nice cherry flavors. Great for an earthier pasta or meat dish.

600 cases made \$48 Score: 92

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Chalone Naylor Dry Hole Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy, forest floor aromas with some black cherry notes; earthy, black cherry, forest floor notes with sweet oak and some tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Big, deep style with a lot of complex forest floor notes; needs some time in the bottle as well as in the glass.

125 cases made \$48 Score: 92

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Green Valley Keefer Ranch Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, complex, black cherry, concentrated aromas; deep, rich, ripe, complex and concentrated black cherry, lush, juicy fruit, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, deep and seemingly endless flavors characterize this Pinot. It's just about perfectly balanced and has some cellar potential as well. It seems that these days I like just about everything I taste from the Keefer Ranch and Brian does as good a job as anyone with that fruit.

650 cases made \$48 Score: 95

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Paso Robles Russell Family Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, berry aromas with a hint of pepper; rich, ripe berry flavors with spice and black pepper notes; moderate tannin, sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and full, this is a bigger style of Pinot that

needs some time in the bottle. This is a new vineyard for Loring—it's located in the cooler west side of Paso Robles.

175 cases made \$48 Score: 92

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; rich plum and cherry aromas; silky, spicy black cherry and plum flavors, sweet oak, some smoky notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe and rich, this is a Pinot meant to be enjoyed with grilled chicken or other lighter dishes—the delicate, silky flavors are great by themselves too.

825 cases made \$48 Score: 93

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Rosella's Vineyard 2005

Please see “Make Room In The Cellar!” on page 7.

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; concentrated plum and black cherry aromas; rich, ripe, juicy black cherry and plum flavors; silky texture, sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Delicious, juicy fruit and incredible balance make this a terrific Pinot to sip on its own.

400 cases made \$48 Score: 95

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, complex, earthy, smoky aromas; ripe, black cherry and plum flavors, complex earthy and smoked meat notes; sweet oak; great structure and balance. Deep and complex Pinot with nearly endless nuances of flavor. This wine definitely benefits from time in the glass.

400 cases made \$48 Score: 95

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; spicy, earthy, savory aromas with some black cherry notes; rich black cherry flavors on the palate with savory spice and sweet oak notes; silky and smooth; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, ripe, spicy flavors pair with sweet oak to make a truly delicious Pinot. This is a great example of the Clos Pepe Vineyard—a Pinot that drinks well now with a good several years of aging potential ahead of it.

800 cases made \$48 Score: 96

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

Loring Wine Company

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Durrell Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; ripe, red cherry, spice aromas; ripe red cherry fruit with spice and sweet oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. A ripe and tasty Pinot with just the right amount of complex spice and earthy notes. From the Durrell Vineyard at the southern end of the Sonoma Valley.

525 cases made \$48 Score: 92

Pali Wine Company

Pali Wine Company is owned by a group of more than 20 friends and coworkers in the insurance industry in Southern California. Pali's focus is on vineyard designated Pinot from vineyards up and down the West coast, including Shea Vineyard in the Willamette Valley, Olivet Grange in Russian River Valley, Durrell Vineyard in the Sonoma Valley, Cargasacchi Jalama in Santa Barbara County and Turner Vineyard in Santa Rita Hills. Pali is based in Lompoc at the western end of the Santa Rita Hills AVA and shares winery space with Pali's winemaker Brian Loring and his Loring Wine Company. Tim Perr is probably the closest thing to the leader of the band—having met with him and tasted through his Pinots, Pali is definitely a winery to watch.

Pali Wine Company

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Inman-Olivet Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, earthy, spicy aromas; rich and ripe black cherry flavors, some tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Big and deep, this Pinot has the structure to age a few years in the cellar. Open it a good hour before pairing it with a deep beef dish.

480 cases made \$44 Score: 92

Pali Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Cargasacchi Jalama Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; rich, ripe plum and spice aromas; deep, earthy, plum flavors with moderate tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. A deep and complex Pinot with lots of earthy character—needs time in the glass to open up.

300 cases made \$44 Score: 93

Pali Wine Company

Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Turner Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; spicy, earthy and pepper aromas; rich and ripe, big black cherry flavors, moderate tannin, spice and sweet oak notes; good structure; long finish. Big, ripe and

rich, this Pinot has the structure to age and also stand up to a hearty dish.

130 cases made \$44 Score: 93

Pali Wine Company

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Durrell Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, spicy and earthy with red cherry aromas; rich and ripe, lush red cherry flavors, silky texture with sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Delicious and deep with lush fruit flavors, this Pinot is a delight to drink.

180 cases made \$44 Score: 94

Pali Wine Company

Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Shea Vineyard 2005

Medium ruby purple color; deep, complex spicy and earthy aromas; ripe, rich, deep black cherry fruit, earthy and spicy notes, some tannin, lots of complex flavors; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and deep, this Pinot really needs time to open up, both in the bottle and in the glass.

250 cases made \$44 Score: 94

Tandem Winery

For Greg La Follette, making great Pinot Noir is the ultimate “never ending journey.” There’s always a new challenge to meet, always a new technique to try. Greg is an intriguing combination of savant and zealot. I’ve never met anyone who has such an incredible grasp of the science of making Pinot, while at the same time, revelling in its sheer hedonistic enjoyment. He’s a true Pinot evangelist. Greg began his winemaking education at UC-Davis and continued it in André Tchelistcheff’s real-world classroom at Beaulieu Vineyard. He next moved to Kendall Jackson and Hartford Court and then came to public prominence when he teamed up with college friend Greg Bjornstad to help launch Flowers Vineyard & Winery. After several years and earning much acclaim at Flowers, the two Gregs moved on to start Tandem Winery. Their partnership came to an end and now Tandem is headed up by Greg L alone. He also is the winemaker at De Loach Vineyards in the Russian River Valley. At Tandem, Greg’s Pinots come from a range of great vineyards—from Sangiacomo to Keefer Ranch to Van Der Kamp—but they all share a thread of delicious, lush fruit flavors, great texture and great balance. I, for one, hope that Greg keeps right on spreading the good word—I’ll definitely keep on listening and I recommend you do as well.

Tandem Winery

Pinot Noir Green Valley Keefer Ranch Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, dusty, earthy aromas; earthy, dusty cherry flavors, forest floor and toasty oak notes,

IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

moderate tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Big style of Pinot with moderate tannin and the structure to age a bit in the cellar.

635 cases made \$42 Score: 92

Tandem Winery

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Hellenthal Vineyard 2004

Medium ruby color; earthy, gamey, smoked meat aromas; rich, ripe black cherry, big, full, lots of earthy, gamy notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy, gamey and smoked meat notes really add complexity to this Pinot.

198 cases made \$60 Score: 93

Tandem Winery

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Sangiacomo Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; black cherry, plum aromas, some smoky notes; ripe, rich, black cherry flavors, earthy, smoky notes, sweet oak; intense on the palate; good structure and balance; long finish. Big and rich, lots of interesting flavors—a complex Pinot for hearty foods.

n/a cases made \$48 Score: 94

Tandem Winery

Pinot Noir Sonoma Mountain Van Der Kamp Vineyard 2004

Medium-deep ruby color; earthy, forest floor aromas; rich

black cherry flavors, lots of earthy, forest floor notes; sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. A rich and complex Pinot that just cries out for an earthy cassoulet.

688 cases made \$48 Score: 94

Contacting The Winery

Below is contact information for wines reviewed in this issue.

A. P. Vin

415.218.7161, www.apvin.com

Alcina Cellars

415.722.9393, www.alcinacellars.com

Bush-Field Vineyard

707.655.9761, www.bush-field.com

Golden's Wines

928.445.0503, www.goldenswines.com

Halleck Vineyards

707.829.8170, www.halleckvineyards.com

Loring Wine Company

877.592.9463, www.loringwinecompany.com

Pali Wine Company

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For People Passionate About Western Pinot Noir

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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 very 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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