

# PINOTREPORT

*for people passionate about western pinot noir*

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## INSIDE

### IN THE MARKET

*Great Pinots to buy, drink now or add to your cellar.*

**MAKE ROOM** in your cellar for these:

- **Masut Estate** .....2
- **Donum Cameros** .....4

**SMART BUYS** to drink right now:

- **Acrobat Oregon** .....2
- **Alta Maria** .....4

**CONTACT INFO** for wines in this issue .....8

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### WINNER

James Beard Award For Newsletter Writing On Food, Beverage, Restaurants and Nutrition

## Great Sites = Great Pinot...

**THERE ARE A LOT OF “CAMPS” IN PINOT NOIR.** There’s the Burgundian camp, the California camp and the Oregon camp. There’s the fruit bomb camp and the forest floor camp. There’s the big, bruiser camp and the low alcohol camp. I could go on, but it’s probably better if I don’t.

One of Pinot Noir’s greatest attributes—the thing that allows all of these “camps” to exist—is the diversity of possibilities the grape presents to winemakers and ultimately consumers. The common thread that powers all of this diversity is the vineyard. No matter which camp you choose as a consumer or winemaker, you have to start with a great vineyard.

**With very few exceptions, a great site equals great Pinot.**

I was fortunate to be a part of an amazing tasting recently in San Francisco. The tasting was a 20-year vertical retrospective of Pinot from Rippon Vineyard in the Central Otago region of New Zealand (detailed notes will appear in my next issue). Rippon’s winemaker Nick Mills conducted the tasting and spoke at length about why he believes that his family’s property is such a great site for Pinot Noir. And when he talks about Rippon Pinot Noir, he doesn’t talk about barrels or cold soaks or whole berry fermentation, he talks about the site. He talks about the soil and the schists that are such a big component. He talks about the climate. He talks about his goal of having the voice and individuality of the “farm” as he calls his vineyard show itself in his wines.

**I know that if I sat 10 of you down at this same tasting, nine of you would never in a million years guess that the Rippon wines were from New Zealand.** Like all of us, you would work hard to fit the wines into a particular camp. But it’s not about the camp, it’s about the vineyard. It’s about the site. Great sites equal great Pinots.

This issue features new releases from producers including **Alta Maria Vineyards, Bacock Vineyards, Cerridwen, The Donum Estate, King Estate, Laetitia, Masut Vineyard, Native9, Pali Wine Company, Pfindler Vineyards, R Cellars, Roar Wines, Talisman Wines and Waterstone Winery.**

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

*-- Greg Walter, editor and publisher*

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### 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.

#### Alta Maria Vineyards

Alta Maria is the shared wine venture of two wine industry veterans—winemaker Paul Wilkins and viticulturist James Ontiveros—in the Santa Maria Valley. The name Alta Maria refers to the upper reaches of the Santa Maria River. Paul and James produce Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc sourcing fruit from the Santa Maria Valley that they both love so much. All of the Alta Maria wines are terrific and reasonably priced too.

#### Alta Maria Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley 2010*

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Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 4.

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

Walt and Mona Babcock established the Babcock Vineyard in the early 1980s in the region that would later become the Santa Rita Hills. In 1984, with their son Bryan as winemaker, they decided to make their own wines. Today with Bryan at the helm, Babcock is making an interesting range of wines from its 65 acres of estate vineyard currently planted to Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir including a new in-house clone of Pinot called Psi Clone. The winery's Pinot bottlings include regional Santa Rita hills bottlings and a lineup of proprietary, vineyard designated Pinots under the heading "Terroir Wines." The Pinots are made in a big, balanced style with much complexity.

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Paso Robles Déjà Vu 2011*

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Deep ruby color; deep plum and cherry aromas with notes of

anise, pepper and earth; deep and complex berry flavors with earthy notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, berry-fruit driven Pinot that needs air to open up.

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**246 cases made      \$60      Score: 91**

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Precocious 2011*

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep plum aromas with spice and pepper notes; deep cherry and plum flavors with pepper and herbal notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Herbal and earthy Pinot with nice complexity.

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**238 cases made      \$60      Score: 91**

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Psi Clone 2011*

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Deep ruby color; complex, deep aromas of plum with spice and toasty notes; deep, dense plum and cherry flavors with spice, pepper and earthy notes; some toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Toasty, deep Pinot with good structure for aging.

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**268 cases made      \$60      Score: 92**

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Slice of Heaven 2011*

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Deep ruby color; deep aromas of herbs, plum and toasty oak; deep, dense cherry with herbs and smoky pepper notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, dense Pinot that needs air to open up.

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**241 cases made      \$60      Score: 92**

#### Cerridwen

Deborah Bennett came to California wine country first with the dream of being a wine writer. Her goal began to shift away from writing as she became more and more interested in

### MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

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*"Rich and refined..."*

#### Masut Vineyard & Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Mendocino County Estate Vineyard 2011*

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Medium ruby color; deep, ripe stewed cherry and plum aromas with earthy notes; deep, rich, ripe stewed plum flavors with complex earthy and herbal notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, refined Pinot that has great structure for age.

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**1,041 cases made      \$40      Score: 94**

### SMART BUY!

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*"Bright and rich..."*

#### Acrobat

##### *Pinot Noir Oregon 2011*

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Medium ruby color; deep, spicy raspberry and cherry aromas; rich, ripe cherry and earthy flavors with some spice notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, rich Pinot with great flavor—perfect all-purpose wine.

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**32,000 cases made      \$18      Score: 91**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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making Pinot Noir. During her research she met Pinot Noir master vintner Greg La Follette, and he offered her an opportunity to work with him as an intern. After two years working with Greg, she decided it was time to make her own Pinot Noir. Her first Pinot, from the Van der Kamp Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain on the western side of the Sonoma Valley, is complex and interesting and a great start for Deborah.

### Cerridwen

#### *Pinot Noir Sonoma Mountain Van der Kamp 2010*

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Medium ruby color; subtle, spice and cherry aromas with toast and herbal notes; rich, complex stewed cherry flavors with subtle earthy, spicy notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Subtle, spiced Pinot with nice complexity.

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**84 cases made      \$49      Score: 90**

### The Donum Estate

The Donum Estate was established in 2001 by Anne Moller-Racke who came to California from Germany in 1981 to manage the Carneros vineyard holdings of Buena Vista Winery, then owned by German beverage company Racke. During the 1980s and 1990s, she expanded and improved the Buena Vista vineyards on Ramal Road to include the adjacent Tula Vista Vineyard, now known as the Donum Ranch. When Racke sold its interest in Buena Vista to Allied Domecq, then a British beverage company, it retained part of the vineyards and Anne led an effort to create what she thought would be the ultimate Pinot Noir project on the western portion of that Buena Vista property, and Donum Estate was born. Today, Donum Estate is actually composed of four vineyards: The Donum Ranch on Ramal Road; the Ferguson Block, located very close to the ranch in Carneros; the Nugent Vineyard in Russian River Valley and the latest addition, Angel Camp Vineyard in the Anderson Valley. The year 2002 brought in another key player in the project: consulting winemaker Kenneth Juhasz. With experience making Pinot Noir in Oregon, New Zealand and up and down the California coast with his own Auteur label, Kenneth was the perfect partner for Anne to develop the Donum Estate Pinots. In late 2011, the Racke group sold Donum Estate to Winside Inc., a partnership of Danish investors who share a love of fine wines and were also big fans of the Donum wines. Anne Moller-Racke remains as president and winegrower; Kenneth Juhasz continues in his role as consulting winemaker. Five Pinot bottlings are generally produced: the Carneros Estate, the Carneros Estate West Slope, the Carneros Estate East Slope, the Russian River Valley Estate and the Russian River Reserve. As a commemoration, a special Tenth Anniversary bottling from the Carneros Estate was also produced. These are terrific, rich, complex, texture-driven Pinot Noirs and easily among the best Pinot Noirs produced on the West Coast. To be sure, they are not inexpensive, but if you love great Pinot, they are worth every penny.

### The Donum Estate

#### *Pinot Noir Carneros Estate 2010*

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Deep ruby color; complex black cherry and berry aromas with deep floral, herbal and earthy notes; full, deep, dark cherry flavors with herbal and spice notes; complex and lush, silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Lush, silky Pinot that is just beginning to show its potential.

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**589 cases made      \$72      Score: 94**

### The Donum Estate

#### *Pinot Noir Carneros Estate East Slope 2010*

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

### The Donum Estate

#### *Pinot Noir Carneros Estate Tenth Anniversary 2010*

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Deep ruby color; full and complex earthy aromas with deep cherry and plum notes; deep, intense plum and cherry flavors with toasty oak and earthy notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot is a special bottling for the winery's 10th anniversary. It's a selection of lots from the Carneros estate vineyard and has all the rich and structured appeal of the Estate bottling and more.

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**93 cases made      \$120      Score: 94**

### The Donum Estate

#### *Pinot Noir Carneros Estate West Slope 2010*

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Deep ruby color; complex, black cherry and earthy aromas with tea and herb notes; deep, complex black cherry and berry flavors with earthy, herbal notes; some tannin and oak; silky texture; great structure and balance; long finish. A very elegant Pinot with terrific structure and deep flavors. Needs time in the glass and bottle, but delicious now.

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**294 cases made      \$90      Score: 95**

### The Donum Estate

#### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Estate 2010*

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Deep ruby color; interesting red cherry and strawberry aromas with spice and forest floor notes; deep, rich cherry and strawberry flavors with complex spice and earthy notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, deep Pinot with expressive flavors and deep earth complexity.

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**483 cases made      \$72      Score: 93**

### The Donum Estate

#### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Estate Reserve 2010*

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Deep ruby color; complex, tight cherry and forest floor aromas with cinnamon and tea notes; deep, complex cherry and berry flavors with layers of earth, spice and herbal notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Very complex and deep, this is a Pinot that will reward some time in your cellar.

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**176 cases made      \$90      Score: 94**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### King Estate Winery

King Estate is located in the Southern end of the Willamette Valley, southwest of Eugene, Oregon near the town of Lorane. Founded in the early 1990s by Ed King III and his father, Ed King Jr. (who passed away in 2012), the 1,033-acre wine estate specializes in Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris but does produce a few other varieties as well. The 110,000 square foot winery's design is based on a French chateau and the estate vineyards are located at elevations ranging from 800 to 1,100 feet. The winery's Pinot offerings include the Signature Collection bottling—always a good value, vineyard designated bottlings and the top of the line Domaine bottling, as well as wines under the Acrobat label. The Acrobat wines are blends made from grapes from Western Oregon, priced as entry-level wines, and get better and better each year.

#### Acrobat

##### *Pinot Noir Oregon 2011*

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Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 2.

#### King Estate Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Oregon Signature 2011*

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Medium ruby color; ripe cherry aromas with some herbal and earthy notes; rich, red cherry and raspberry flavors with nice herbal and earthy notes; juicy and mouthfilling; good structure and balance; long finish. Juicy, mouthfilling Pinot with nice structure.

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**24,000 cases made    \$27    Score: 90**

#### King Estate Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Oregon Domaine 2009*

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep cherry and berry aromas with earthy, toasty notes; deep, complex cherry and earthy flavors with toasty oak and dusty rose notes; some tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, complex Pinot that

opens to some delicate aromas and flavors with some time in the glass.

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**1,013 cases made    \$70    Score: 93**

#### King Estate Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Oregon Backbone 2009*

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Medium ruby color; subtle, complex aromas of plum and herbs; deep, berry and cherry flavors with herbal notes; some oak and tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Well structured Pinot with restrained, subtle flavors. Still developing.

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**243 cases made    \$55    Score: 91**

#### King Estate Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Oregon Blackjack Block 2009*

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Medium-deep ruby color; subtle, tight aromas of berry and herbs; deep, complex, bright cherry and berry flavors with herbal, earthy notes; some tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, structured Pinot with lean, subtle flavors. Needs time in the glass to open up.

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**170 cases made    \$75    Score: 93**

#### King Estate Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Freedom Hill 2010*

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Medium ruby color; Deep, complex, smoky/toasty cherry aromas with earthy notes; deep, rich cherry flavors with earth and toasty notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, deep Pinot with a great balance of bright fruit and earthy complexity.

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**350 cases made    \$55    Score: 92**

#### King Estate Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Hyland 2010*

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Medium ruby color; subtle cherry, raspberry and caramel

### MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

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*"Absolutely delicious..."*

#### The Donum Estate

##### *Pinot Noir Carneros Estate East Slope 2010*

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Deep ruby color; complex aromas of black cherry, berry and loamy earth with lavender and spice notes; deep, intense black cherry flavors with mouthfilling earth and spice notes; lush and silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Incredibly deep and lush, this Pinot also has great structure. Absolutely delicious.

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**145 cases made    \$90    Score: 96**

### SMART BUY!

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*"Full and complex..."*

#### Alta Maria Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley 2010*

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Deep ruby color; complex aromas of stewed cherry, spice and herbs; rich and deep plum and cherry flavors with spice and herbal notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Full and complex Pinot that is a great match for grilled meats.

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**4,200 cases made    \$28    Score: 93**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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aromas; bright, tart cherry flavors with toasty, caramel notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Subtle though bright flavors characterize this Pinot.

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**175 cases made     \$55     Score: 89**

### King Estate Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Old School Vineyards 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, berry and cherry aromas with spice and earthy notes; complex, rich cherry and berry flavors with some toasty oak and earth notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and toasty Pinot that will pair nicely with grilled or roasted pork.

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**190 cases made     \$55     Score: 92**

### King Estate Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Pfeiffer Vineyards 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, complex plum aromas with savory spice and earthy notes; rich, slightly stewed plum flavor with earth and smoky notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex Pinot with subtle smoky, savory notes.

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**350 cases made     \$55     Score: 91**

### Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

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

### Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley Estate 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, full aromas of black cherry with earthy notes; dense dark cherry flavors with earthy, pepper notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, big Pinot with flavors to match.

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**18,000 cases made     \$25     Score: 89**

### Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley Reserve du Domaine 2010*

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Deep ruby color; big, deep aromas of plum and black cherry

with earthy, oak notes; complex, dense plum and cherry flavors with earthy, spicy notes; moderate tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. A deep, broad-shouldered Pinot that needs time in the glass and the bottle.

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**1,200 cases made     \$40     Score: 90**

### Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley La Colline 2009*

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Deep ruby color; intense, deep aromas of black cherry and berry with earthy notes; big, deep black cherry flavors with complex, earthy and mushroom flavors; moderate tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, intense Pinot with the structure to stand up to a big beef dish.

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**220 cases made     \$60     Score: 91**

### Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley La Coupelle 2009*

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Deep ruby color; complex, dense aromas of plum and earthy with toasty oak notes; complex, deep plum flavors with earthy, forest floor notes; toasty oak and moderate tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, full Pinot that needs time to show what it's got.

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**290 cases made     \$60     Score: 90**

### Laetitia Vineyard & Winery

#### *Pinot Noir Arroyo Grande Valley Les Galets 2009*

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Medium-deep ruby color; full, ripe black cherry and berry aromas with earthy notes; deep cherry flavors with lots of earthy, herbal notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy and spicy Pinot that has the structure and balance for the cellar.

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**276 cases made     \$60     Score: 91**

### Masut Vineyard & Winery

Masut Vineyard & Winery is the continuation of a father's dream by his sons. Brothers Ben and Jake Fetzer grew up immersed in the family's wine business: Fetzer Vineyards. Ben and Jake's father, Bobby Fetzer, was involved in managing the family's extensive vineyards and was dedicated to organic principles and techniques long before they were fashionable. When Fetzer Vineyards was sold to spirits giant Brown Forman in 1992, Bobby Fetzer bought property west of the Redwood Valley with a vision: to grow high-end Pinot Noir using organic methods. He named the property "Masut" which in the language of the Pomo Indians who once lived there meant "dark, rich earth." Bobby Fetzer passed away in 2006 in a river rafting accident; sons Ben and Jake continued their father's dream and Masut Vineyard & Winery was born. The venture's Pinot bottlings include a blend and several block selections from the Masut Vineyard. All of the Masut Pinots continue to defy the assumptions one might make about

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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location (that it might be too warm) and are definitely wines to watch.

### **Masut Vineyard & Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Mendocino County Estate Vineyard 2011***

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

### **Masut Vineyard & Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Mendocino County Block 1 2011***

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Medium ruby color; deep, spicy, herbal aromas with some dusty cherry notes; rich, ripe, bright spicy cherry flavors with earthy and oak notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, forward Pinot with lots of young, vibrant flavors.

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**115 cases made      \$55      Score: 93**

### **Masut Vineyard & Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Mendocino County Block 7 2011***

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Medium ruby color; rich, stewed plum aromas with clove and earthy notes; rich, ripe, forward cherry and plum flavors with spice and oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Spicy, bright Pinot with generous flavors. Drinks well now.

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**115 cases made      \$55      Score: 92**

### **Masut Vineyard & Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Mendocino County Block 11 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, complex, earthy aromas with some berry notes; deep, complex, concentrated berry flavors with earthy, toasty notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and complex, this Pinot is really well structured and needs time in the glass and bottle.

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**115 cases made      \$55      Score: 94**

### **Masut Vineyard & Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Mendocino County Block 13 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; very complex aromas of black cherry and berry with earthy, clove notes; deep, complex dark cherry and berry flavors with clove and spice notes; some tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Bold, balanced Pinot that has a lot going on now but still has much potential ahead. Definitely needs time in the glass to open up.

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**115 cases made      \$55      Score: 94**

### **Native9**

Native9 refers to founder and 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 ventured from Mexico and received a land grant that included a large portion of the Santa Maria Valley. After generations of his family being disconnected from that land,

the Ontiveros family was able to regain ownership of a portion of it that is now home to a cattle ranch and James' terrific Pinot vineyard, Rancho Ontiveros. Since his debut Pinot under the Native9 label, and through some limited sales of grapes to other winemakers, the Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard has become one of the best and most distinctive vineyards in the South Central Coast. James and his partner, winemaker Paul Wilkins, create Pinot that is bold, rich and ripe with a great core of fruit and terrific structure and balance. These wines are pretty hard to find, but worth the search.

### **Native9**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard 2010***

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Deep ruby color; big, rich aromas of plum, cherry and fresh earth with herbal notes; deep, plum and cherry flavors with earthy, herbal notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Big and balanced Pinot that has some elegant complexity as well.

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**310 cases made      \$64      Score: 94**

### **Pali Wine Company**

Tim Perr and Scott Knight, partners in an insurance and actuary consulting firm, founded Pali Wine Co. in 2005 with a group of their friends and colleagues. The winery name came from a popular nickname for Pacific Palisades, where their day jobs were based. Pali Wine Co. got off to a fast start, hiring Brian Loring as their consulting winemaker and making a string of terrific Pinots from vineyards up and down the West Coast. Pali's focus has always been on finding the best vineyard sites and representing those vineyards through vineyard-designated bottlings, including Shea Vineyard in the Willamette Valley, Olivet Grange in Russian River Valley, Durell Vineyard in the Sonoma Valley, Cargasacchi Jalama in Santa Barbara County and Turner Vineyard in Santa Rita Hills. In 2008, Pali hired Kenneth Juhasz (Auteur, The Donum Estate) to take over the winemaking reins and finished construction of a new winery facility in Lompoc, California, in the Santa Rita Hills. Kenneth is now in a consulting role and Aaron Walker is the day-to-day winemaker and has helped develop a very successful series of appellation blends priced very reasonably. Having followed the Pinots for several vintages now, Pali continues to be a winery to watch.

### **Pali Wine Company**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Huntington 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, stewed plum aromas with some earth and oak notes; rich, ripe, juicy plum flavors with earthy notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, round Pinot with a nice mix of flavors—great with roast chicken or pork. A terrific value too.

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**3,535 cases made      \$22.50      Score: 91**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### **Pali Wine Company**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Summit 2011***

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Deep ruby color; deep, spicy cherry aromas with some earthy, toasty notes; rich, deep, stewed cherry flavors with some spice and pepper notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and structured, this Pinot would be great with grilled steak.

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**1,020 cases made     \$29     Score: 92**

### **Pfendler Vineyards**

The chilly Petaluma Gap is the primary influence on the three vineyards at different elevations of Kimberly Pfendler's Sonoma Mountain ranch that are the source for Pfendler Vineyard's Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines. The vineyards were planted by Kimberly's late husband Peter Pfendler beginning in 1992. Peter Pfendler passed away in 2007 and Kimberly took over, hiring Pinot vineyard and winery veteran Greg Bjornstad to oversee winery operations and make the wines. Greg's Pfendler wines include Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and a Rose of Pinot Noir. The wines are truly terrific and the future continues to look bright for this brand.

### **Pfendler Vineyards**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; complex, dark cherry and plum aromas with herbal and lavender notes; deep, rich plum and black cherry flavors with layered notes of earth, dried lavender and spices; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, many layered Pinot with a lot to offer. Open the bottle and walk away for an hour or you'll be tempted to drink it before it really gets good.

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**275 cases made     \$45     Score: 94**

### **R Cellars**

R Cellars is a proprietary label created by Robert Della Santina, owner of the Enoteca Della Santina Next Door wine bar and retail shop in the town of Sonoma, Calif. And yes, you would be correct in wondering why I am reviewing and writing about essentially a private label wine that is not available in stores and restaurants outside Sonoma. Normally that would not fit my criteria for inclusion in the newsletter. But let's face it, life is a string of exceptions and I continue to claim my right to make an exception now. Enoteca offers 30 wines by the glass and at least 200 wines from all over the world at retail prices. The fact is that the Enoteca is my favorite place in Sonoma to drink wine and the Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and sometimes a GSM Rose that Robert has put together under the R Cellars label are worth writing about. Fruit for both the Pinot and the Chardonnay is sourced from the Russian River Valley. The R Cellars wines are also the "house" Chardonnay and Pinot for Della Santina's Trattoria next door. These are terrific wines and the Enoteca is a terrific place that you should make part of

a plan to visit Sonoma wine country.

### **R Cellars**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2010***

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep dark cherry aromas with sage and cola notes; deep, complex, stewed cherry flavors with earthy, cola notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, silky Pinot with the right amount of earthy complexity to pair with roasted meats to a mushroom pasta.

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**100 cases made     \$21     Score: 92**

### **Roar Wines**

Gary and Rosella Francioni, third generation farmers in the Santa Lucia Highlands, are proprietors of Roar Wines, proprietors of Rosella's Vineyard and partners with Gary Pisoni in Garys' Vineyard. With the Roar Pinots, they set out to capture the pure character of the Santa Lucia Highlands vineyards that they know so well. The name Roar refers to the sound that the coastal winds make as they blow through the gaps and down the benchland that makes up the region. Roar Pinot bottlings include a regional Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot and vineyard designates from Rosella's Vineyard, Garys' Vineyard and the Pisoni Vineyard. Gary also has a new vineyard that is beginning to show its stuff, the Sierra Mar Vineyard. It's hard to find a Pinot winemaker in Santa Lucia Highlands who Gary hasn't helped out in one way or another. Ed Kurtzman is the Pinot Master behind the Roar wines. The Francionis are perfect proof that artisan wines are a true reflection of the people behind them.

### **Roar Wines**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands 2011***

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Deep ruby color; tight black cherry aromas with complex smoky, anise notes; deep, full black cherry flavors with earthy and herbal notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, earthy Pinot that needs air to really shine.

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**1,158 cases made     \$40     Score: 92**

### **Roar Wines**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2011***

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Deep ruby color; deep, slightly tight, dark cherry aromas with oak and earthy notes; deep, complex, cherry and earthy flavors with oak and savory notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, complex Pinot with a lot of potential to get even better.

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**641 cases made     \$52     Score: 93**

### **Talisman Wines**

Scott Rich has broad experience as a winemaker—he's been winemaker for the old Carneros Creek Winery and Etude; he's

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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currently winemaker and general manager of Moraga Vineyards in Southern California. And, more to the point here, he and his wife Marta are the founders and owners of Talisman Wines in Sonoma, a small-lot Pinot Noir specialist winery. Scott's experience and intuition about wine and Pinot in particular are reflected in his wines; they are soulful, deep expressions of the vineyard. Talisman's Pinot bottlings include a Sonoma County Cuvee and vineyard designates from the Spring Hill Vineyard in Sonoma Coast, Adastra Vineyard in Carneros, Red Dog Vineyard on Sonoma Mountain, Wildcat Mountain Vineyard in Carneros, Gunsalus Vineyard in Russian River Valley and Weir Vineyard in the Yorkville Highlands. The Talisman Pinots are texture-driven, age well and well worth your attention.

### Talisman Wines

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Gunsalus Vineyard 2009***

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Medium-deep ruby color; complex earthy, leather aromas with some stewed cherry notes; rich, deep, complex stewed cherry flavors with earthy, forest floor notes; rich and mouthfilling; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, interesting Pinot that opens very nicely in the glass.

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**239 cases made      \$44      Score: 91**

### Talisman Wines

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma County Cuvee 2009***

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Medium ruby color; complex spicy cherry aromas with earth and clove notes; rich, ripe, bright cherry flavors with earthy and clove notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and forward Pinot with a nice palette of flavors.

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**218 cases made      \$32      Score: 92**

### Talisman Wines

#### ***Pinot Noir Yorkville Highlands Weir Vineyard 2009***

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Medium ruby color; dense, earthy and herbal aromas with some dusty cherry notes; complex, bright cherry flavors with deep earthy and herbal notes; some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and earthy, this Pinot has great structure for aging. Needs time in the glass and cellar.

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**237 cases made      \$60      Score: 93**

### Waterstone Winery

Waterstone Winery is a collaboration begun in 2000 by winemaker Philip Zorn and wine executive Brent Shortridge, who discovered that they both shared a passion for high quality wines at reasonable prices. Both leveraged their existing relationships with growers in and around the Napa Valley to come up with a line of wines that offer terrific, approachable flavors at great prices. Wines produced include Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Syrah, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon

Blanc and Zinfandel. Waterstone's Pinot Noir is from Carneros and is subtle and full of flavor. Waterstone's tasting room is part of the Taste at Oxbow tasting salon in downtown Napa and is a great place to visit.

### Waterstone Winery

#### ***Pinot Noir Carneros 2009***

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Medium ruby color; rich, spicy cherry aromas with subtle earth and cola notes; subtle, stewed cherry flavors with cola and spice notes; some oak, silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Subtle, earthy Pinot with complex flavors that pair well with roast chicken or pork.

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**1,241 cases made      \$22      Score: 91**

### Contacting The Winery

Below is contact information for wines discussed in this issue.

#### **Alta Maria Vineyards**

805.686.1144, [www.altamaria.com](http://www.altamaria.com)

#### **Babcock Winery & Vineyards**

805.736.1455, [www.babcockwinery.com](http://www.babcockwinery.com)

#### **Cerridwen**

[www.cerridwenwines.com](http://www.cerridwenwines.com)

#### **The Donum Estate**

707.939.2290, [www.thedonumestate.com](http://www.thedonumestate.com)

#### **King Estate Winery**

541.942.9874, [www.kingestate.com](http://www.kingestate.com)

#### **Laetitia Vineyard & Winery**

805.481.1772, [www.laetitiawine.com](http://www.laetitiawine.com)

#### **Masut Vineyard & Winery**

707.485.5466, [www.masut.com](http://www.masut.com)

#### **Native9**

805.937.1991, [www.native9wine.com](http://www.native9wine.com)

#### **Pali Wine Company**

805.736.7200, [www.paliwineco.com](http://www.paliwineco.com)

#### **Pfendler Vineyards**

707.765.5997, [www.pfendlervineyards.com](http://www.pfendlervineyards.com)

#### **R Cellars**

707.938.4200, [www.enotecanextdoor.com](http://www.enotecanextdoor.com)

#### **Roar Wines**

831.675.1681, [www.roarwines.com](http://www.roarwines.com)

#### **Talisman Wines**

707.258.5722, [www.talismanwine.com](http://www.talismanwine.com)

#### **Waterstone Winery**

707.265.9600, [www.waterstonewines.com](http://www.waterstonewines.com)

[ PNR ]

## PINOTREPORT

*for people passionate about western pinot noir*

### Greg Walter

Editor and Publisher

### Patrick Mullane

Contributing Editor

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### Editorial Philosophy

**PinotReport** is an independent newsletter owned, written and published by Greg 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 Greg 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 one bottle 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: Greg Walter

625 Ross Court, Sonoma, CA 95476

Tel: 707.696.7553

### 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

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

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PNRN85