

# PINOTREPORT

*for people passionate about western pinot noir*

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### WINNER

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

## Loving summer's end...

**I THINK IT WOULD BE FAIR TO SAY THAT MANY—IF NOT MOST—PEOPLE LOOK AT THE END OF SUMMER WITH SOME SADNESS.** Back to work, back to school, vacations are over; everyone's back to the daily routine. I guess that in yet another way I am an anomaly—even an oddity—as I always look forward to the end of summer.

The coming of September means brings so many things that I love. Three things in particular top that list: 1.) Harvest! 2.) the last 2 months of baseball, and 3.) the start of football season. So far, my SF Giants are counting the days until they can go home and sleep off this season. On the other hand, things look pretty bright for my SF 49ers. And the 2013 harvest for Pinot is well underway all up and down the West Coast and for the most part the reports I am hearing are good as to the quality and quantity of the vintage. More to come on this as all the fruit comes in.

So, I guess two out of three isn't bad...

I apologize that this issue is being released a little late. Things got a bit chaotic during and after my move. The next issue (#90) will be released before the end of this month.

**A SPECIAL NOTE TO MY WINERY READERS:** I have completed the process of moving my offices (and home) to another location here in Sonoma. I have tried to reach out to as many of you as possible about this, but please do not ship wine to the old address (625 Ross Court) as it will not get to me. Please email me and I will notify you of the new address for shipments.

### *In This Issue*

This issue features new releases from producers including Bonterra, Dutton-Goldfield, Goldeneye Winery, Hanzell Vineyards, Ketcham Estate, Kokomo Winery, Kosta Browne, Patz & Hall, Pence Ranch, Pey-Marin, Riverbench, Russian Hill Estate, Tessier Winery and Waxwing Wines.

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

## 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.

### Bonterra

Bonterra began life in 1992 as a project at Fetzer Vineyards in Mendocino County. The first wine, a field blend from the Fetzer's organic vineyard projects was the outward expression of a philosophy or sustainability that the Fetzer family has had over the many decades that it has been in the wine business. Bonterra was introduced as a separate label under the Fetzer umbrella two years later. Today, after two significant ownership changes, Bonterra has emerged as one of the largest producers of wine from organic vineyards. Winemaker Bob Blue has been involved since that first vintage and produces a wide range of red and white wines. The Bonterra Pinot bottling is from Mendocino County and is a terrific value.

#### Bonterra

##### *Pinot Noir Mendocino County 2010*

Medium ruby color; rich, earthy cherry aromas; forward, dusty cherry flavors with spice notes; some oak notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe, earthy Pinot at a great price.

**6,480 cases made     \$16     Score: 88**

### Dutton-Goldfield Winery

Dutton-Goldfield Winery was launched in 1998 by Steve Dutton, and Dan Goldfield. Dan and Steve decided to partner in this venture after working closely together as winemaker and grape grower since 1990, Dan as winemaker for several brands, and Steve managing his family's Dutton Ranch vineyards. It's no surprise that the majority of the wines they produce under the Dutton-Goldfield label are from the western Russian River Valley, but other very interesting bottlings are sourced from Anderson Valley, Marin County, and the Freestone and Occidental areas of western Sonoma County. The Pinots are

packed with a core of intense fruit and earthy notes, and wonderful texture.

#### Dutton-Goldfield Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Angel Camp Vineyard 2011*

Medium-deep ruby color; full, dusty cherry, spice and herbal aromas; rich, complex earthy red cherry flavors with anise and herbal notes; some oak and fine tannins; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and earthy Pinot with nice herbal and bright fruit notes.

**214 cases made     \$58     Score: 90**

#### Dutton-Goldfield Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch - Emerald Ridge Vineyard 2011*

Medium-deep ruby color; bright berry and cherry aromas with some coffee notes; rich, deep, bright cherry flavors with earthy, coffee notes and some toasty oak; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Bright and rich Pinot that needs some air to open up.

**391 cases made     \$58     Score: 92**

### Goldeneye Winery

Dan and Margaret Duckhorn, long known for their Napa Valley Merlot, decided in 1990 to concede to their growing interest in Pinot Noir and in 1996 launched Goldeneye in the Anderson Valley along the migratory path of the winery's namesake, the Goldeneye Duck. Since its first vintage, Goldeneye's five estate vineyards have grown to 173 acres of vines. Winemaker Michael Fay takes a minimalist approach in his winemaking, resulting in expressive, balanced Pinots. Pinot bottlings include the Anderson Valley blend and several vineyard designates. These are consistently delicious Pinots and the winery is a must visit if you are anywhere near the Anderson Valley.

#### Goldeneye Winery

##### *Pinot Noir Anderson Valley 2010*

Medium-deep ruby color; rich, deep earthy, dusty cherry

## MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

**"Ripe, rich, complex..."**

#### Patz & Hall

##### *Pinot Noir Carneros Hyde Vineyard 2010*

Medium-deep ruby color; deep, complex cherry and earthy aromas with oak notes; deep, earthy cherry flavors with spice and herbal notes; toasty oak; silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe, rich, complex Pinot with terrific focus.

**404 cases made     \$65     Score: 94**

## SMART BUY!

**"Bright and forward..."**

#### The Forager

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

Medium-deep ruby color; complex cherry and forest floor aromas; deep earthy cherry flavors with bright spice and oak notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, forward Pinot with just enough complexity.

**1,350 cases made     \$27     Score: 92**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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aromas; rich, ripe, earthy cherry flavors with herbal and savory spice and toasty notes; rich, silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, deep Pinot with the structure for age.

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**16,293 cases made    \$55    Score: 94**

### **Goldeneye Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Gowan Creek Vineyard 2010***

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Deep ruby color; rich, deep, lush aromas of dark cherry, anise and herbs; deep, complex and lush cherry flavors with earthy, herbal notes; moderate oak and tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, well-structured Pinot that is a perfect match for a grilled steak.

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**800 cases made    \$80    Score: 93**

### **Hanzell Vineyards**

Hanzell Vineyards was founded in 1948 by Ambassador James D. Zellerbach (of Crown Zellerbach) who purchased the 200-acre property overlooking the Sonoma Valley and the town of Sonoma with the vision of creating a small wine estate modeled after the estates of Burgundy. The first vines—Pinot Noir and Chardonnay—were planted in 1953 and those original vineyards are still a part of the Hanzell wines. The winery was built in 1956 and was the first to use stainless-steel fermenters and among the first in California to use French oak for aging. After Zellerbach's death in 1963, the winery was sold in 1965 to Douglas and Mary Day who in turn sold it to Australian-born heiress Barbara de Brye in 1975. De Brye's son Alexander is the winery's current owner. Bob Sessions took over the winemaking reins in 1973 from founding winemaker Brad Webb and remained there for 30 years. During his tenure, Hanzell's Chardonnay and Pinot Noir established a reputation for unique character and longevity. Today's team at Hanzell includes Jean Arnold Sessions as president and Michael McNeill as winemaker. A new winery and adjacent caves has given the winery a modern production facility specifically designed for small-lot winemaking. Grape sourcing for Hanzell's Pinot Noir has been exclusively from the winery's estate since 1965. The winery's 14.5 acres of Pinot range in age from 1953 for the original Zellerbach Vineyard located just below the winery to 1976 and 1993 for the De Brye Vineyard located at the top of the hill on the estate to the latest plantings in 1999 in the Sessions Vineyard on the eastern edge of the property. Hanzell's Pinots are not your typical California Pinot Noirs. They are big, tannic and seemingly unapproachable in youth, but as big as they are, they are balanced and have good fruit and structure. They definitely reward time in the cellar, often times decades. Pinot bottlings include the estate Pinot Noir, a Sessions Vineyard bottling, and a second label named Sebella.

### **Hanzell Vineyards**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Valley 2010***

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Medium-deep ruby color; complex, dense red cherry, spice and

oak aromas; deep, complex, rich red cherry flavors with spice, orange zest and pepper notes; moderate oak and tannin; great structure and balance; long finish. Deep, very complex and structured Pinot that true to form will need time to resolve. There's a lot to like here—well worth the cellar patience.

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**1,287 cases made    \$95    Score: 94**

### **Hanzell Vineyards**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Valley Sessions Vineyard 2010***

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Deep ruby color; ripe, spicy cherry and earthy aromas; deep, complex, forward cherry flavors with layered oak and fine tannins; lush texture; great structure and balance; long finish. Very deep and yet very forward Pinot with rich and complex flavors. I'm looking forward to seeing how this develops.

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**99 cases made    \$95    Score: 94**

### **Ketcham Estate**

Ketcham Estate is the wine project of Mark Ketcham. Mark created the project to make great Pinot Noir but also to give back to their community in terms of using profits to fund local charitable endeavors. Mark, a Palo Alto, Calif., native, retired from his computer company to collect and race vintage Ferraris. Around the same time he began collecting Grand Cru Bordeaux. Eventually his sights turned to Pinot Noir and found he also wanted be in the wine business, so he bought 16 acres in Healdsburg and planted the Ketcham Estate Vineyard. The Ketcham Pinot bottlings include a Russian River Valley blend and a bottling from the estate vineyard. These are rich, delicious Pinots with great structure and balance.

### **Ketcham Estate**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, ripe, smoky cherry aromas with some herbal and cola notes; rich, bright, spicy red cherry flavors with smoky and herbal notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Spicy, forward Pinot with a lot to offer.

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**350 cases made    \$38    Score: 91**

### **Ketcham Estate**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Ketcham Vineyard 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; spicy, ripe red cherry aromas with earthy notes; big, complex and deep earthy cherry flavors with toast and savory spice notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, well structured Pinot with really nice complex flavors. Perfect for something off the grill.

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**250 cases made    \$48    Score: 93**

### **Ketcham Estate**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Savannah & Nick's Cuvee 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, complex, earthy cherry aromas

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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with savory and toasty notes; complex, rich red cherry flavors with earthy, savory notes, some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, deep and yet really pretty Pinot with just the right amount of toasty oak.

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**100 cases made      \$58      Score: 94**

### Kokomo Winery

Kokomo Winery was founded in 2004 by Indiana native Erik Miller. He named the winery after his home town—Kokomo, Indiana—and his first wine was a Cabernet from Mounts Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley. He teamed up with college roommate Josh Bartels and they began to expand their offerings focused on Dry Creek & Russian River Valley fruit. Six varietals are produced in addition to Pinot Noir: Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, Zinfandel and Petite Sirah. Pinot bottlings include a vineyard designate from the Peters Vineyard. Kokomo continues to be a winery to watch.

### Kokomo Winery

***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Peters Vineyard Winemaker's Reserve 2011***

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Medium ruby color; forward, earthy cherry aromas with oak notes; deep, rich cherry flavors with earthy and oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, flavorful Pinot that's great for what's on the grill.

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**333 cases made      \$48      Score: 92**

### Kosta Browne

Michael Browne's original plan when he moved from Washington State to Sonoma County in 1987 was to become an architect. Fortunately for all of us who love great Pinot Noir, Michael found himself working in local Sonoma County restaurants to pay the bills. He got seriously interested in wines while working in these restaurants and he revised his career plan. Michael began his winemaking career working as an

intern with Robert Rex at Deerfield Ranch Winery in the Sonoma Valley in 1997 and became co-winemaker there in 2000. At the same time, Michael's passion for Pinot Noir was growing and he soon teamed up with Dan Kosta, then wine director and head sommelier at the John Ash & Co. restaurant to launch Kosta Browne. There's no question that they've been on a roll ever since. Several years ago the duo joined forces with Bill Price and his Vincraft group as partners to expand the brand's reach. Kosta Browne is now located in a very cool winery facility in Sebastopol at the new Barlow food and wine complex. Kosta Browne's Pinot bottlings include vineyard designates from Kanzler Vineyard and Gap's Crown Vineyard in Sonoma Coast; Koplen Vineyard and Keefer Ranch Vineyard in Russian River Valley as well as Garys' Vineyard, Pisoni Vineyard and Rosella's Vineyard in Santa Lucia Highlands. Regional blends are made from Russian River Valley, Santa Lucia Highlands and Sonoma Coast as well as a "best barrel" blend called 4 Barrel. These Pinots just get better and better with each vintage from this high-achieving group.

### Kosta Browne

***Pinot Noir California 4 Barrel 2011***

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Deep ruby color; complex cherry and toasty oak aromas; big, rich and complex cherry flavors with layers of earthy, toffee and toasty notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, deep Pinot that's really showy and complex at the same time.

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**98 cases made      \$78      Score: 93**

### Kosta Browne

***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, rich, lush cherry aromas with toasty oak notes; lush, ripe, forward cherry flavors with spice and toasty oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Forward, spicy Pinot with nice structure and really pretty flavors.

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**4,525 cases made      \$58      Score: 92**

## MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

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***"Beautiful Pinot..."***

### Kosta Browne

***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Gap's Crown Vineyard 2011***

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Deep ruby color; dense, deep aromas of dark cherry, clove and allspice; deep, rich, complex cherry flavors with earthy and spice notes; well integrated oak and tannins; silky texture; great structure and balance; long finish. Incredibly deep and complex with many layers of flavor. Beautiful Pinot.

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**1,678 cases made      \$78      Score: 96**

## SMART BUY!

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***"Earthy and full..."***

### Russian Hill Estate

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

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Medium-deep ruby color; complex earthy cherry aromas with some spice and oak notes; rich, ripe, earthy, cola flavors with some cherry notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy, full Pinot that would be great with grilled pork or chicken.

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**2,033 cases made      \$35      Score: 92**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### **Kosta Browne**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Keefer Ranch Vineyard 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; rich, deep, earthy cherry aromas; deep, rich, juicy red cherry flavors with earth and rhubarb notes; lush texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Lush, deep Pinot with mouthfilling flavors and texture.

**900 cases made      \$78      Score: 93**

### **Kosta Browne**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Koplen Vineyard 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, dense, complex cherry aromas with earthy and cola notes; rich, deep, complex red cherry flavors with earthy notes, some tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Big, deep Pinot with great structure and layers of flavor that will reward your patience.

**658 cases made      \$78      Score: 94**

### **Kosta Browne**

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

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Deep ruby color; big, plum, dark cherry aromas with smoky, bacon notes; deep, complex, dark cherry and plum flavors with lots of earthy, toasty notes; lush texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, expressive Pinot with a lot to like. I'll take mine with a grilled steak.

**1,693 cases made      \$58      Score: 95**

### **Kosta Browne**

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

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Deep ruby color; deep, bright black cherry aromas; complex, bright, rich cherry and plum flavors with earthy, spicy, pepper notes; some tannin and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, a little more linear than the winery's other SLH bottlings, this Pinot has an elegance about it that I like. Needs air.

**368 cases made      \$78      Score: 94**

### **Kosta Browne**

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

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Deep ruby color; dense, tightly wound aromas of earth and cherry; full, intense cherry flavors with earthy notes; moderate tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Very deep and angular Pinot that really needs a bunch of time to show what it has.

**125 cases made      \$78      Score: 93**

### **Kosta Browne**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Rosella's Vineyard 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; complex black cherry and plum aromas with earthy and clove notes; rich, smoky plum flavors

with earthy notes; some toasty oak and tannin; lush texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Lush, layered Pinot that feels big but is incredibly well balanced.

**433 cases made      \$78      Score: 95**

### **Kosta Browne**

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

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Medium-deep ruby color; tight, rich stewed dark cherry aromas with tea and earthy notes; complex, rich, dark stewed cherry flavors with earthy, forest floor and oak notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, well structured and forward Pinot with nice layered flavors

**5,004 cases made      \$58      Score: 94**

### **Kosta Browne**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Gap's Crown Vineyard 2011***

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

### **Kosta Browne**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard 2011***

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Deep ruby color; tight, earthy aromas with cherry and rhubarb notes; deep, dense cherry flavors with earthy and herbal notes; moderate tannins and toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, big and complex Pinot that needs a bunch of time to open up. Be patient.

**211 cases made      \$78      Score: 93**

## **Patz & Hall**

After working for years for other wineries in the Napa Valley, James Hall, Donald Patz, Anne Moses and Heather Patz founded Patz & Hall in 1988 to make elegant Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. James and Anne have made wine at Flora Springs, Honig Cellars, Far Niente, Spring Mountain, Marimar Torres and Cain Vineyard. Donald handles sales and marketing; Heather handles hospitality. Their focus is on small production bottlings from small vineyard sites in the best wine regions in Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino and Monterey counties. James works closely with vineyard owners to maximize the character in each of their wines. Patz & Hall's Chardonnay bottlings are rich, complex and delicious; the Pinots are finely textured and really terroir-driven. Pinot Bottlings include a Sonoma Coast bottling, and vineyard designates from Chenoweth Vineyard and Burnside Vineyard in Russian River Valley, Hyde Vineyard in Carneros, Jenkins Vineyard in Sonoma Coast, and the Pisoni Vineyard in Santa Lucia Highlands. James also produces a few special Pinot bottlings from other vineyards exclusively for their Salon Society wine club members. These are benchmark Pinots year after year and should be a part of your cellar.

### **Patz & Hall**

#### ***Pinot Noir Carneros Hyde Vineyard 2010***

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

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### **Patz & Hall**

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

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Medium-deep ruby color; spicy, rich berry and cherry aromas; bright, rich, spicy cherry flavors with some berry and toasty notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Spicy, complex Pinot with layers of delicious flavor.

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**286 cases made      \$70      Score: 94**

### **Patz & Hall**

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

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Deep ruby color; big, deep dark cherry and berry aromas with earthy and herbal notes; deep, rich, dense dark cherry flavors with forest floor and herbal notes; some oak and tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Big Pinot with intense flavors. Needs time in the glass to open up and will reward some cellar patience.

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**814 cases made      \$58      Score: 94**

### **Patz & Hall**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2010***

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Deep ruby color; big, tight, plum and dark cherry aromas; complex, dark cherry and plum flavors with earthy, herbs and anise notes; moderate tannin and oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, full Pinot with terrific texture.

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**387 cases made      \$85      Score: 93**

### **Patz & Hall**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Jenkins Ranch 2010***

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Medium-deep ruby color; ripe, full cherry and spice aromas with earthy notes; rich, complex full cherry and berry flavors with forest floor and toasty notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, full, silky Pinot with great structure and texture.

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

### **Pence Ranch**

Pence Ranch is a working ranch and vineyard project of Blair Pence and Holly Brooks located in Santa Barbara County just outside the eastern boundary of the Santa Rita Hills AVA. The estate vineyard was planted in 2006 and comprises 50 acres on a plateau with elevations ranging between 400 and nearly 500 feet. Jeff Fink, winemaker at Pence Ranch, is a Central Coast Pinot veteran, founding Tantara Winery in 1997 to produce Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Santa Barbara County. He left Tantara in 2011 to take the winemaking reins at Pence Ranch. Pinot bottlings from Pence Ranch include the Estate bottling and several small-lot Pinots that are available to the winery's mailing list members.

### **Pence Ranch**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Estate 2010***

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Deep ruby color; ripe, dark cherry aromas with pepper notes; deep, rich plum and cherry flavors with anise and pepper notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, ripe Pinot with nice balance.

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**620 cases made      \$30      Score: 89**

### **Pey-Marin Vineyards**

Husband and wife team Jonathan and Susan Pey have made a definitive statement about the quality of Pinot Noir possible in the western reaches of Marin County. They launched the Pey-Marin label to make Pinot Noir from their estate vineyards, located less than eight miles (as the crow flies) from the Pacific Ocean. They also make one of the best dry Rieslings available in California under the Pey-Marin label. Jonathan and Susan have created an interesting stable of labels under their Scenic Root Winegrowers umbrella: Mount Tamalpais focuses on Merlot from Marin County, Textbook on Chardonnay from Napa Valley, and Spicerack on Syrah from the Sonoma Coast. Jonathan Pey has worked in France with Domaine Louis Jadot and Chateau de Pommard, with Robert Mondavi Winery and Sterling Vineyards in the Napa Valley, and with Penfolds in Australia. Susan Pey works as a senior wine buyer in the restaurant industry. The Pey-Marin "Trois Filles" is named for the Peys' three daughters and is an elegant, expressive Pinot with silky texture and great structure. "The Forager" is their take on the French "negociant"—they "forage" the best fruit from several coastal vineyards. Find these wines. They will make you happy.

### **Pey-Marin Vineyards**

#### ***Pinot Noir Marin County Trois Filles 2010***

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Medium ruby color; deep, full, earthy aromas; rich, lush cherry and earthy flavors with complex oak and forest floor notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, full, lush Pinot with earthy and herbal notes.

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**300 cases made      \$39      Score: 93**

### **The Forager**

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

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Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 2.

### **Riverbench Vineyard & Winery**

The Riverbench Vineyard was first established in 1973 with initial plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir on the Santa Maria Bench at the southeastern edge of the Santa Maria Valley. At that time, fruit from the vineyard was sold to other area wineries. In 2004, a group of local investors purchased the property with the idea of producing their own wines from the vineyard and the Riverbench label was born. The original vineyard consisted of 220 acres of Chardonnay and 55 acres of Pinot Noir. In 2007 the vineyard was expanded by 37 acres

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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planted to Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Viognier. The winemaker is Chuck Ortman, the longtime Central Coast winemaker who founded Meridian Vineyards back in the 1980s. Coincidentally, he sourced fruit for Meridian in those early days from Riverbench. Wines produced included estate selections of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with Pinot Gris and Viognier in development.

### Riverbench Vineyard & Winery *Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, spicy cherry aromas with some smoky notes; rich, deep, red cherry flavors with spice and oak notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Big, spicy Pinot with full flavors and nice structure.

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**599 cases made      \$28      Score: 90**

### Riverbench Vineyard & Winery *Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Mesa 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; rich, earthy red cherry aromas; ripe, bright, red cherry flavors with earthy, clove notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Earthy, rich Pinot with nice complex flavors—a great match for a grilled pork chop.

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**466 cases made      \$48      Score: 92**

### Russian Hill Estate

Ed Gomez and Ellen Mack began their journey in wine making Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay under their Benicia Cellars label in the Solano County city of Benicia. Both severely bitten by the wine bug, they wanted to continue making wine, but also wanted to have a property that would be a suitable place to plant an estate vineyard. They established the Russian Hill Estate in 1997 on 21 acres of low hills in the middle of the Russian River Valley on Slusser Road next door to Sonoma-Cutrer. The property came with an estate house known to locals by the nickname “Tara” because of its architecture and from there came the name of their 20-acre estate vineyard, Tara Vineyard. Planted in 1998 to Pinot Noir, Syrah and a small amount of Viognier (that’s co-fermented with the Syrah), the Tara Vineyard is mostly east facing. Russian Hill has a second vineyard, Sunnyview Vineyard, located on Guerneville Road approximately six miles south of the winery, with 15 acres planted to Pinot and five to Viognier. Ed’s nephew, Patrick Melley, is Russian Hill’s winemaker. Mostly self-taught, Patrick has really dialed in a Russian Hill style that’s really all about a great core of fruit, balance and terrific texture and mouthfeel. Currently Russian Hill produces Chardonnay, Viognier, a Rose, Syrah and five bottlings of Pinot Noir: a Russian River Valley blend, an Estate bottling and vineyard designates from the Leras Vineyard and their own Tara Vineyard and Sunnyview Vineyard. Underpriced and truly under-recognized, Russian Hill should be part of your Pinot cellar.

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

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Please see “Smart Buy!” on page 4.

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

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Medium-deep ruby color; deep, spice and herbal cherry aromas with some earthy notes; rich, cherry and plum flavors with spice and toast notes; silky texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, silky Pinot with terrific balanced flavors.

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**1,051 cases made      \$40      Score: 92**

### Russian Hill Estate *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Leras Vineyard 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; subtle earthy cherry aromas with forest floor notes; deep, elegant earthy cherry flavors with complex forest floor and tea notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Subtle and elegant, this Pinot's depth becomes apparent with some air.

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**194 cases made      \$50      Score: 93**

### Russian Hill Estate *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Sunnyview Vineyard 2010*

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Deep ruby color; big, full cherry and berry aromas with earth and chocolate notes; big, complex and full dark cherry and berry flavors with some tannin and oak; great structure and balance; long finish. Very deep and structured Pinot that while really mouthfilling maintains good balance of all its components.

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**119 cases made      \$60      Score: 94**

### Russian Hill Estate *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Tara Vineyard 2010*

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Medium-deep ruby color; big, rich dark cherry aromas with spice and cola notes; rich, deep, complex dark cherry flavors with cola and earth notes; some toasty oak; lush texture; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich, deep Pinot with the structure and stuffing to pair well with a grilled steak.

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**374 cases made      \$54      Score: 94**

### Tessier Winery

Biotechnology. Protein pathways. Central nervous system diseases. These were the things that drove Kristie Tacey prior to being introduced to the world of wine and winemaking. Once that introduction had taken place, Kristie knew she'd found what she really wanted to do. Prior to launching Tessier Winery in 2009, Kristie had considerable success making Pinot Noir with Lost Canyon Winery. With Tessier she is focused on small-lot Pinot and her early bottlings have been good signs of things to come.

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### **Tessier Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Saralee's Vineyard 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; forward, dusty cherry aromas with cola and herbal notes; rich, bright cherry flavors with earthy and toasty notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, interesting Pinot—would be great with grilled pork.

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**96 cases made      \$35      Score: 92**

### **Tessier Winery**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Reserve 2011***

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Medium-deep ruby color; rich, ripe dark cherry aromas with cinnamon and toasty notes; rich, deep stewed dark cherry with some cinnamon, clove and earthy notes; some toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, toasty Pinot that needs a little time to open up.

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**45 cases made      \$42      Score: 91**

### **Waxwing Wines**

Waxwing Wines is what happened when Scott Sizemore left the world of commercial winemaking in 2006 to stay home with his newborn son. Scott had more than 20 years in winemaking with wineries like Ravenswood, Rosenblum Cellars and Pellegrini Family Vineyards. He saw an opportunity to focus on his own small-lot wines, particularly Pinot Noir and Syrah, from the Sonoma Coast and other appellations. Waxwing Wines is named for the distinctive Cedar Waxwing songbirds that can be seen all over Northern California. Scott's Pinots are rich and silky and worthy of your attention.

### **Waxwing Cellars**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Spring Hill Vineyard 2011***

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Medium ruby color; bright, red cherry aromas with earthy and herbal notes; rich red cherry flavors with earthy and a touch of

forest floor notes; vibrant, good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, tasty Pinot with nice structure.

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**97 cases made      \$33      Score: 91**

### **Contacting The Winery**

Below is contact information for wines discussed in this issue.

#### **Bonterra**

www.bonterra.com

#### **Dutton-Goldfield Winery**

707.823.3887, www.duttongoldfield.com

#### **Goldeneye Winery**

707.895.3202, www.goldeneyewinery.com

#### **Hanzell Vineyards**

707.996.3860, www.hanzell.com

#### **Ketcham Estate**

707.395.0700, www.ketchamestate.com

#### **Kokomo Winery**

707.433.0200, www.kokomowines.com

#### **Kosta Browne**

707.823.7430, www.kostabrowne.com

#### **Patz & Hall**

877.265.6700, www.patzhall.com

#### **Pence Ranch**

805.735.7000, www.penceranch.com

#### **Pey-Marin Vineyards**

415.455.9463, www.scenicrootwinegrowers.com

#### **Riverbench Vineyard & Winery**

805.937.8340, www.riverbench.com

#### **Russian Hill Estate**

707.575.9428, www.russianhillwinery.com

#### **Tessier Winery**

www.tessierwinery.com

#### **Waxwing Wines**

415.902.3468, www.waxwingwines.com

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## PINOTREPORT

*for people passionate about western pinot noir*

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### 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.

To submit samples, please visit the PinotReport website for details.

### 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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