

# PINOTREPORT

for people passionate about western pinot noir

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## Santa Rita Hills in 3 Days...

*Or, Fear And Loathing Out In Pinot Country*

**THIS PAST JANUARY, MY FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE MICHAEL DOTSON AND I DROVE DOWN THE CALIFORNIA COAST** for five days of intensive tastings and visits in two of the South Central Coast's primary regions for Pinot Noir: Santa Rita Hills and the Santa Maria Valley. Despite many similarities that make these two regions outstanding places to grow and produce Pinot, they are at two very different places in their development. And as I expected when I made plans for the trip, we tasted some amazing wines, met some great people and amassed lot of interesting things to tell you about.

**This first installment is about the Santa Rita Hills** and my most recent trip there was in several ways a **real eye opener**. First, I was reminded of how small and compact the AVA is.

Secondly, I was struck by how **open, communicative and mutually supportive** the winemaking and grape growing community is. Part of that may be due again to its relatively small size.

Finally, it was refreshing to see the raw enthusiasm that these vintners and growers—rookies as well as veterans—have for what they are doing. **These are people genuinely passionate about wine** and I have no doubt that most would be doing what they are doing even if the region hadn't received so much recognition. The energy and enthusiasm is contagious.

The notes and observations that follow are more or less a chronological account of our trip. I think it's the most interesting way to present it, but also to give you an idea of how much we were able to fit into two days of active visit time. We didn't visit every winery and vineyard—there simply wasn't time.

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### ***Monday: On the road***

I left Sonoma in the morning and headed south to pick Michael up in **Palo Alto** at his restaurant, **Euvia Estiatorio**. We loaded and headed south on Highway 101 through San Jose and Gilroy, and after a time into the Salinas Valley with the **Pinnacles National Monument** and the **Chalone AVA** on our left and the massive alluvial benchland that makes up the **Santa Lucia Highlands** on our right. We stopped for lunch about an hour and a half later in **Paso Robles**.

I wasn't sure where we'd end up having lunch or whether we'd just drive on through until we got to our destination. Michael brought me back from my "type-A" travel mode (just get there as fast as you can) with a simple declaration of "we need to stop for lunch somewhere!" Fortunately, Paso Robles was the next town. We looked around the town square for a place to eat. One of my favorites, **Villa Creek**, was not open for lunch, so we ended up across the street at **Bistro Laurent**. Chef and owner **Laurent Grangien's** terrific French bistro has been a fixture in the Central Coast for nearly 15 years. **Our restraint was admirable** as we were back on the road in about an hour.

We proceeded south on Highway 101 through **San Luis Obispo** and along the coast for a brief period as the highway passed through **Pismo Beach** and **Arroyo Grande**. We drove on south through **Santa Maria** (we'd be returning here later in the week) and finally exited Highway 101 at Highway 246 in the town of **Buellton**, long known to Highway 101 travelers as the home of **Pea Soup Andersen's** restaurant. Today, it's better known to Pinot lovers everywhere as **the epicenter of the "Sideways"** phenomenon. We headed west on Highway 246 for about 20 minutes through the heart of the **Santa Rita Hills AVA** to the town of **Lompoc** and checked in to our hotel rooms at the Holiday Inn Express.

We had about an hour to shake the dust off from our day, get unpacked and check on the wireless high speed internet access before we needed to head out to meet a few friends for dinner. So, while we're doing that, here's a little background on the city of Lompoc.

**The city of Lompoc** (pronounced "Lom-poke") sits just outside the western end of the Santa Rita Hills AVA. The first settlers in the Lompoc Valley were the **Chumash Indians** and their predecessors who lived in the area long before the



establishment of the **La Purisima Mission** in 1787. A little less than a century later, the **Lompoc Land Company** was formed for the purpose of forming a temperance colony in the area. Shortly thereafter, in 1888, the city of Lompoc was incorporated. Agriculture, particularly flower seeds, and mining operations for diatomaceous earth, were the major industries through the early 20th century. In 1941, the **U.S. Army** established **Camp Cooke** on the coast west of town as a training base. That base became **Vandenberg Air Force Base** in 1958 and was the **Air Force's** first missile base. Vandenberg was a key part of the **Space Shuttle** program until the **Challenger** explosion in 1986, after which the West Coast shuttle program was terminated. Lompoc also has a federal prison adjacent to Vandenberg. The population is around 46,000.

Just driving around the city, Lompoc feels like any other rural, coastal California city. At first glance, it's hard to believe that it's home to some of California's hottest Pinot Noir producers.

### ***Monday: 6:30 p.m.***

We headed out of Lompoc, back to the east on Highway 246, to Buellton for dinner at the **Hitching Post II Restaurant**. Although the Hitching Post's fame skyrocketed after the release of **"Sideways,"** it's been a gathering place for local vintners since **Frank Ostini Jr.** opened it in 1986. Inside and out, the Hitching Post looks like a rustic western steakhouse and bar. But step inside and you'll notice a couple of differences. First, people are sitting at the bar sipping red wines out of big, Burgundy-style glassware. Second, the back bar (and the wine list) is loaded with great bottles of wine.

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**Brian Loring** of **Loring Wine Company**, who helped coordinate a lot of the visits for this trip, also set up the dinner at the Hitching Post. Among those in attendance were Brian, his sister and partner **Kimberly Loring**, **Andrew Vingiello** of **A.P. Vin**, **Tim Perr** of **Pali Wine Company** and **Peter Cargasacchi** of the **Cargasacchi Vineyard** and **Point Concepcion** wines. The menu at the Hitching Post is an amazing amalgam of Old West and wine country bistro—great steaks, grilled meats and seafood, along with some local specialties. Michael and I both agreed that we would have loved to order a bunch of things to explore the menu, but we were there on a **very special night**. Monday at the Hitching Post in Buellton is **“Burger Night.”** Everyone at our table ordered burgers; Brian suggested to me that we order “double cheese.” We did. We also ordered several of the **Grilled Artichokes** as appetizers—these are a specialty of the house and are served with smoked tomato ancho chile mayonnaise. **They were delicious. So were the burgers.**

Wine-wise, we started out with Champagne—a bottle each of the **Dom Perignon 1998** and the **Taittinger 1996 Comtes de Champagne**. We opened a bottle of **Penfold’s Yattarna Chardonnay 1995**, a high-end Chardonnay developed by Australian producer Penfold’s as a white wine counterpart to their Grange Hermitage; it was excellent with rich, melon and fig notes and excellent structure. We also opened an **Aubert Chardonnay 2001** which was also delicious with great acidity and rich fruit. **Pinots on the table** included a **2000 Sanford Winery La Rinconada**, a **Shea Wine Cellars Willamette Valley Estate 2004**, and then Frank Ostini brought out two **Hitching Post Pinots**—the **2004 Cargasacchi Vineyard** and the **2004 Highliner**. While I loved the Hitching Post Cargasacchi—it was ripe and deep with terrific structure—it was the Highliner that I drank more than my fair share of. There’s no other word to describe it other than delicious. As the evening progressed, “head fiddle” **Kathy Joseph** of **Fiddlehead Cellars** sat down and chatted for awhile and someone at the table spotted **Richard Sanford**, formerly of **Sanford Winery** and now with his new project **Alma Rosa**, and roped him into coming over for a bit. The Hitching Post is without question **one of the main gathering places** here for people who love wine—consumers and vintners alike. If you find yourself in Buellton for whatever reason, you need to spend an evening at the Hitching Post, even if it’s just eating and drinking at the bar.

### *An Interlude...*

Before we head out on our tour of Santa Rita Hills, it seems to be an appropriate point in this account to give you a little background on the Santa Rita Hills AVA.

The Santa Rita Hills AVA petition was submitted in 1998 and approved by the then Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (now the TTB) in 2000, but the history of grape growing and winemaking in this area began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the priests at the Mission La Purisima in Lompoc. Their plantings of the Mission grape did not ripen well in the cool Lompoc climate and they were abandoned for other crops. Skip ahead nearly 200 years and you’ll find **Richard Sanford**, looking at the unique valleys that make up the Santa Rita Hills and reasoning that these valleys because of their cool, fog influenced climate, would be a good place to grow Pinot Noir. And in the early 1970s, well ahead of the curve, he planted the **Sanford and Benedict Vineyard** and before too long, his Pinot Noir from this vineyard was getting quite a bit of critical acclaim. Others began to follow, slowly at first, but now there are at least 30 vineyards—most small and family owned operations—planted in the Santa Rita Hills area. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are the standout grapes.

**So what makes the Santa Rita Hills so special?** It’s the **orientation of the two primary valleys** that make up the AVA. These valleys, the **Santa Rita** and **Santa Rosa** valleys, are transverse valleys—that is, they are oriented east to west as opposed to most valleys on the Pacific Coast that are oriented north to south. The Santa Rita Hills AVA is bordered roughly in the north by the transverse **Purisima Hills** and on the south by the transverse **Santa Rosa Hills**. Dividing the AVA into two valleys in the middle are hills known as the **Santa Rita Range**. The confluence of these three ranges of hills at the western end of the AVA near Lompoc in what locals call a “maritime throat” focusing the cooling fog and significant winds into the two valleys. The eastern boundary of the AVA is really where this cooling influence ends as you get closer to Buellton. The elevations in the AVA range from just about sea level to 1,800 feet on the ridge lines.

**You may remember that recently I wrote** about the mandated name change for the Santa Rita Hills AVA to **“Sta. Rita Hills.”** This change was forced by an irate (and in my opinion, absurdly paranoid) Chilean wine producer who had threatened to sue any and all Santa Rita Hills producers who

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marketed wine outside the US with “Santa Rita Hills” on the label because such marketing would cause consumer confusion with the company’s Vina Santa Rita brand. The Santa Rita Hills producers agreed to the name change and petitioned the Federal Tax & Trade Bureau (TTB) to make it official. Thus, after January 2006, any new wines from the AVA must carry the new name on the label.

### **Tuesday, 7:30a: Breakfast**

We met our guide for the day, **Peter Cargasacchi**, for a good, stick-to-your-ribs breakfast at the Cajun Kitchen Cafe across H Street from our hotel. Peter grew up in Lompoc and his family has been involved in agriculture there for many years. He established his **Cargasacchi Vineyard** on family land at the western end of the Santa Rita Hills in 1998 and has been growing amazing Pinot Noir for several top producers. He’s now also making his own wines under the **Point Concepcion** and **Cargasacchi** labels.

Peter gave us a brief background on the area while we ate and we piled into his truck and began the tour. “Even though both the Santa Rita Hills and the nearby Santa Maria Valley are similar in that they are transverse valleys, the geography of the Santa Rita Hills **creates a more focused funnel** for the fog,” he said. It creates cooler, windier conditions year round, while the Santa Maria Valley is more homogenous from a geographic standpoint—a broad flat plain from the ocean east to where the vineyards are. The fog tends to come in more evenly. The marine influence in both areas **makes for a very long growing season**. Santa Rita Hills is “one of the coolest areas for Pinot Noir in the world,” according to Peter. “The latitude causes early bud break and a late harvest, giving us tremendous hang time.” Soils in the area are made up mainly of layers and layers of maritime deposits, sand and calcareous shales. The two major soil types are a sandy loam and a clay soil called botella clay.

Our first stop was a vineyard located in the **La Purisima Hills** just outside of the official AVA boundaries. **Doug Braun** established his **Presidio Vineyard** to grow mostly Pinot Noir and some Chardonnay. He’s making his Pinot Noir under the **Presidio Winery** label.

Peter got us back on eastbound Highway 246 headed for our next stop: **Melville Vineyard and Winery**. **Chad Melville**, the assistant winemaker and vineyard manager, met us at the western end of their vineyards. We walked through the

vineyard and up to the top of a knoll called Kerry’s Block to take in the view. The western vineyard was planted in 1996 to mostly Pinot Noir. The wind in this area, according to Chad, can be “vicious” in the spring, stressing the vineyard in the early stages of the vintage. The terraces on the low hills tend more toward the botella clay and have the maximum exposure to the wind. “The wind just sucks the water out of the vine and the fruit,” said Chad. His challenge is to not allow the wind and conditions to overstress the vines. “We like healthy vines—we want them in shape, but also just a bit hungry.”

From there we drove to the **Melville winery** and spent a few minutes chatting with **Greg Brewer**, the winemaker at Melville (as well as his label **Brewer-Clifton**). With the Melville Pinots, Greg wants to achieve stem ripeness and works hard to integrate stems into the process. Stem inclusion helps with the structure and helps define the lush core of fruit in the Melville Pinots. The different soil types in the vineyard also add different characters to the wine—the sandier soils result in more elegant characteristics while the clay soil results in denser wines. **The 2004 Melville Estate Pinot Noir** demonstrates this deft balance; it has a beautiful core of deep dark fruit with amazing structure and balance.

Next door to Melville is **Babcock Vineyards**. **Walt and Mona Babcock** established the Babcock Vineyard in the early 1980s before the Santa Rita Hills AVA was established. In 1984, with their son Bryan as winemaker, they decided to make their own wines. Today **Bryan Babcock** is making an interesting range of wines from the winery’s 80 acres of estate vineyards, including several bottlings of Pinot Noir. The Pinots are made in a balanced style with much complexity.

Back on the road with Peter Cargasacchi, we made our way back down toward Lompoc on Highway 246 and just before we came into town, we turned left on Highway 1 and then left again on Santa Rosa Road and headed back to the east, winding our way into the **Santa Rosa Valley**, the southern valley in the AVA. Before too long, we arrived at our next appointment, **Fiddlestix Vineyard**.

### **Tuesday, 10:05a: Fiddlestix Vineyard**

Fiddlestix is a partnership between **Kathy Joseph** of **Fiddlehead Cellars** and **Beringer Blass Wine Estates** and is a grape source not only for her Fiddlehead Pinot Noirs and those from Beringer’s **TAZ Vineyards**, but also for many other area producers. The first plantings were in 1998 with

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subsequent plantings in 1999, 2001 and 2005. The vineyard's 133 acres were previously planted in flowers and are situated on a gently sloping benchland in soils composed mainly of shale and chert along the **Santa Ynez River**. We met at the small farmhouse on the property.

**Kathy Joseph is a dynamo**—she seems to be always in motion and she always seems to have a smile on her face. And even though you know that she's told the story of Fiddlestix hundreds of times, her enthusiasm makes you feel that it's the first time.

Kathy established Fiddlehead Cellars to make the two wines she loves best: Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. Her Sauvignon Blanc is from vineyards in the **Santa Ynez Valley**, while her Pinot Noir bottlings are sourced from vineyards at opposite ends of West Coast Pinot Country: the **Willamette Valley** and the Santa Rita Hills. Fiddlehead's production is around 5,000 cases per year. Kathy produces three Pinot bottlings in an average vintage; we tasted these Pinots from her 2002 vintage, the current release.

**2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills "728"**: The "728" bottling is named for the mile marker on Santa Rosa Road at Fiddlestix and represents the broadest expression of the vineyard. The 2002 was deep and rich, with earthy and spicy notes and a great core of black cherry fruit, moderate tannins and good structure and balance.

**2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills "Lollapalooza"**: This is Kathy's best selection of Pinot—"lollapalooza" means "one of a kind." She strives to make this bottling her most elegant and balanced. The 2002 had deep and subtle aromas that really blossom in the glass; elegant core of black cherry fruit, good structure and wonderful texture.

**2002 Fiddlehead Cellars Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills "Doyle"**: The small-production Doyle bottling is named after Kathy's husband Tony Doyle and is the single best barrel from the vintage. The 2002 is very deep and somewhat closed on the nose, with lots of black cherry fruit, black pepper, moderate toasty oak and tannin. Despite the bigger framework of the Doyle, it is still very well balanced and texture driven.

While discussing Kathy's winemaking regimen, the topic of filtration came up. Peter, not a fan of filtration, said "filtration makes the baby Jesus cry." To which Kathy countered, "but he did also make the diatomaceous earth..."

### **Tuesday, 11a: La Encantada Vineyard**

We pulled out of Fiddlestix and headed east on Santa Rosa Road. We soon pulled off the road and headed up a dirt road

into the hills and **Richard Sanford's La Encantada Vineyard**. From there we had a great view roughly to the east of the **Sanford Winery** and its **La Rinconada Vineyard**. We also had a sweeping view of the Santa Rosa Valley: Fiddlestix below, **Richard Longoria's Fe Ciega Vineyard** and the **Sea Smoke Vineyard** directly to the north across the valley. La Encantada was planted in 1998 while Richard was still at Sanford Winery; the vineyard's production went into the Sanford wines prior to Richard's departure in 2005. He retained control of the vineyard after he left and it is he base for his new **Alma Rosa Pinots** (more on these later). We continued to drive further up into the hills south of Santa Rosa Road until we reached another vineyard site, **Rancho La Vina**, where the views of the rest of the valley were stunning.

We worked our way back down the hill to Santa Rosa Road and headed west. We soon turned off to the right on a wide, well-traveled farm road, across the Santa Ynez River through some extensive row-crop plantings, and up near the base of the Santa Rita Range, the hills that divide the AVA. Our first stop was at the western-most vineyard in this part of the Santa Rita Hills, Peter's own **Cargasacchi Vineyard**.

### **Tuesday, 11:35a: Cargasacchi Vineyard**

**Peter Cargasacchi is the fifth generation** of his family in California but the first one who was born in California. His great, great grandfather was the first to come from Italy and he founded a restaurant and hotel in **San Francisco**. The hotel was destroyed in the fire and earthquake of 1906. Subsequent generations, though born in Italy, have lived and farmed in the California Central Coast since the early 1900s. Peter's father came to the South Central Coast, took up farming and eventually met Peter's mother. Peter planted the Cargasacchi Vineyard in 1998. He has another vineyard, **Cargasacchi Jalama**, located outside the Santa Rita Hills AVA. Peter and his wife **Julia** established the **Point Concepcion** label in 2000 to make their own wines.

**Peter's passion for his vineyard was obvious** the minute we got out of the truck and started walking up the rows. Cargasacchi Vineyard is situated on benchland at the base of the Santa Rita Range. The soil is alluvial botella clay and gravel. Peter takes his cues from his local microclimate and the specific needs of his vineyard site. He's a big proponent of **encouraging beneficial insects and natural cover crop** to help maintain his vineyard's equilibrium. He's not one to use a

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Burgundian technique just because it's Burgundian. He shakes his head when he talks about such blind adoption:

### ***Tuesday, 11:55a: Fe Ciega Vineyard***

We could have stayed at Peter's vineyard for the rest of the day, listening to him talk about Pinot Noir, his vineyards and life in general, but we were on a tight schedule and already running a little behind. So, we climbed back into Peter's truck and headed up into the hills above his vineyard. We came to a gate and as we went through it, we had to take care to not let the horses out. Our destination, up the hill even further was the **Fe Ciega Vineyard**, developed and farmed by **Rick Longoria** of **Longoria Wines**.

"**Fe Ciega**" means "**blind faith**" in Spanish and Rick Longoria likes to say that in all of his three decades in the wine business, he had never taken on the challenge of planting a vineyard. So with blind faith he decided to plant Fe Ciega—eight acres of hillside planted in 1998 with three clones of Pinot Noir: Pommard, Dijon 115 and 667. Soils in the vineyard range from botella clay at the bottom to a mixture of botella clay and shale on top. In another interesting twist, the vineyard blocks are **named using initials from the names of members of the cult, progressive rock band from the 1960s, "Blind Faith."** Block E is for **Eric Clapton**, Block G is for **Ginger Baker**, Block R is for **Ric Grech** and Block S is for **Steve Winwood**.

### ***Tuesday, 12:25p: On the Road***

We made our way back down the hill and through the gate, again taking care not to let the horses out, and down past Cargasacchi Vineyard and back out on to Santa Rosa Road, headed back into Lompoc to catch some lunch before heading out to our next destination. We grabbed sandwiches and ate them in the truck on the way back out Purisima Road and then east on Highway 246. We were now back in the Santa Rita Valley and headed for perhaps the most famous vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills of recent times, **Clos Pepe**.

### ***Tuesday, 1p: Clos Pepe Estate***

About midway through the Santa Rita Valley on Highway 246, Peter turned left into **Clos Pepe Estate** and drove back past the fountain, through the vineyard toward the rear of the property where a beautiful Mediterranean-style house was in the final stages of construction. It was there that we met **Wes**

**Hagen**, Clos Pepe's vineyard manager and winemaker. Wes is about as passionate an advocate of the Santa Rita Hills as you'll find—in fact he was the primary author of the petition to create the Santa Rita Hills AVA back in 1998. He's a driving force behind the continued improvement and promotion of the region. But above all of that he is a serious wine guy.

**Clos Pepe Estate is not only a benchmark vineyard** for Pinot Noir in California, but also a Pinot Noir producer of growing importance. Clos Pepe is owned by **Steve Pepe** and his wife **Catherine Hagen Pepe** (Wes' mother), both successful labor lawyers in the Los Angeles area. Steve has been involved in home winemaking and wine judging for years before establishing Clos Pepe. In addition to selling its Pinot Noir and Chardonnay fruit to wineries all over California, Clos Pepe produces its own Pinot and Chardonnay under the Clos Pepe Estate label. The estate, a former horse ranch, is made up of 28 acres planted in vines with 24 acres planted to Pinot and four acres to Chardonnay. The first plantings were in 1996.

Wes took us on a quick walking tour of the house, prior to sitting down to taste some of his Clos Pepe wines. Wes got us started on the right foot: "Ok, we got crusty bread, we got cheese, let's get to work."

**2000 Clos Pepe Estate Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills:** This wine was the first Clos Pepe Estate wine made from the third leaf of the vineyard and is drinking exceptionally well right now. Deep, rich, open and spicy with deep cigar box notes, deep, dark fruit, great texture and balance.

**2003 Clos Pepe Estate Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills:** An interesting contrast to the 2000, this Pinot was tight and closed, but with definite black cherry and toasty notes pushing to the surface. It's still extremely well balanced and needs a bunch of time in the glass to open up—it opened up quite a bit in the relatively short time that we sat there tasting.

**2004 Clos Pepe Estate Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills:** Tight and very concentrated on the nose; very deep tart black cherry fruit with great structure and balance. Again, the wine needs time to open up—I look forward to tasting it on release.

**2004 Clos Pepe Estate Chardonnay Santa Rita Hills:** This was a real treat! Crisp, clean and steely with lots of citrusy fruit and great structure—about as close to Chablis as any California Chardonnay I've tasted in a long while. The wine sees no oak and spends 11 months in stainless steel barrels.

We also had an opportunity to taste the **Clos Pepe Estate Olive Oil** with our crusty bread. The bright, fruity flavors really jumped out for me; Michael liked it so much that he bought some for his restaurant.

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We thanked Wes and owner Steve Pepe who dropped in to say hello and made our way back out to the highway and our next destination outside of the Santa Rita Hills AVA in Buellton.

### ***Tuesday, 1:42p: "Camping Out"***

We turned off Highway 246 in Buellton just before U.S. Highway 101 down a side street and into a nondescript light industrial park. Located there is the temporary headquarters of Richard Sanford's new wine venture, **Alma Rosa**.

Richard Sanford, as I've said elsewhere, is a true wine pioneer. When he arrived in Santa Barbara County in 1969 and envisioned planting Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and starting a winery west of the town of Buellton, most of the farmers thought he was crazy. It turns out he was decades ahead of the rush of vintners who would eventually see what he saw in the Santa Rita Hills.

It was with that vision and desire to make world-class Pinot Noir that **Sanford & Benedict** (later Sanford Winery) was born and a long string of terrific Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays followed. Richard's commitment to making great wine runs alongside a broader commitment to preserving the environment. He thus began a quest to make everything at Sanford from his vineyard practices to the dream winery he would eventually build "green" and sustainable. Richard left Sanford Winery last year over differences in philosophy with his partners.

In his new wine venture, **Alma Rosa**, Richard and his wife and partner **Thekla Sanford** are producing Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris, **all in bottles finished with screwcaps (hooray!!)**. His commitment to the environment is as strong as ever. In fact, with Alma Rosa, he is even encouraging his customers to return the empty bottles to him so that they can be washed and reused.

As part of his separation from Sanford Winery, Richard was able to hold on to his **La Encantada Vineyard** and the 2004 Pinot Noir from that vineyard. That was instrumental in allowing him to launch Alma Rosa so quickly. But Richard yearns to set up shop permanently again on Santa Rosa Road in the original Sanford Winery tasting room. In the mean time, they are "camping out" in Buellton and have built a marketing campaign for the launch around the camping theme, from draping the inside of their industrial park tasting room to look like the inside of a tent to "camping out" messaging on

their business cards.

**The bottom line:** his wines are terrific. Here are my notes:

**2004 Alma Rosa Pinot Gris Santa Barbara County:** beautiful aromas of peach, floral and pear; crisp and clean with good structure and nice peach and pear notes on the palate. Very tasty.

**2004 Alma Rosa Chardonnay Santa Barbara County:** rich, ripe apple and pear aromas, crisp, fresh apple and pear flavors with some toasty oak, great structure and balance--delicious.

**2004 Alma Rosa Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills:** bright, black cherry aromas; rich and deep with black cherry, savory spices, sweet oak, silky texture; long finish.

**2004 Alma Rosa Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills La Encantada Vineyard:** expressive aromas of earth and black cherry; deep and rich, earthy, black cherry, some tannin and sweet oak, good structure and balance.

Richard and Thekla Sanford have gone back to their roots with Alma Rosa and I think we are in for some terrific wines to come.

### ***Tuesday, 3:10p: Peter Work***

**Peter drove us back west** on Highway 246; about 15 minutes later, we turned left on Mail Road and then left again on Santos Road. Our destination was **Work Vineyard**, the estate vineyard for **Peter and Rebecca Work's Ampelos Cellars**. Peter Work met us as we drove up the road to his house.

We sat on the back patio behind the house and sipped a **2003 Guigal Rosé** from the **Côtes du Rhône**. With the wind kicking up and cooling things off considerably, we admired the sweeping views of the Work Vineyard while Peter Work told us his story.

The Work Vineyard and Ampelos Cellars (formerly known as **Worx Cellars**) are the passion and dream of Peter and Rebecca Work, two former corporate Americans who in 1999 purchased land at the eastern end of the Santa Rita Hills at the convergence of the Santa Rita and Santa Rosa valleys. The idea was that they would eventually plant a vineyard there and make wine. In 2001, after the **9/11 attacks**, they decided it was time to get out of the corporate world. They planted their first vines in 2001 with a 15-acre planting of Pinot Noir (Pommard and Dijon 115), Syrah and a tiny amount of Viognier. Subsequent plantings in 2004 added another 10 acres of Pinot Noir, Syrah and Grenache. Their first Pinot Noirs, produced in 2002 and 2003, were made using grapes from Fiddlestix Vineyard. 2004

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was the first harvest from their estate vineyard, some of which went to **Ken Brown** and **Bruno D'Alfonso** for their respective brands. In 2005, 85 percent of the vineyard production went into Ampelos Cellars bottlings. Ampelos shares a winery with **Ken Brown Wines** in Lompoc.

Peter W. (Peter Work) poured glasses of his **2003 Ampelos Cellars Fiddlestix Vineyard Pinot Noir** while we continued to talk. It was full and rich with cherry and cola notes, good structure and balance. Peter W. said that his goal all along is for the vineyard to be sustainable, both in the viticultural sense as well as in a financial sense.

When it was time for us to leave, we took a driving tour of the vineyard and then headed back to Lompoc. **But our day was far from over.** We headed back to the hotel to pick up my car and then followed Peter C. to our final destination of the day: The Pinot Prison.

### ***Tuesday, 4:39p: The “Pinot Prison”***

**The Pinot Prison**—it’s a colorful name that conjures up a multitude of images. It’s also the perfect name to describe the light industrial building that is the home of Pinot producers **Loring Wine Company**, **A.P. Vin**, **Cargasacchi/Point Concepcion** and the newest inmate, **Pali Wine Company**. While the “Pinot Prison” moniker came to be because of the relative proximity of the winery to the federal prison at Lompoc, you only need to spend a little there with these guys and you’ll see **that the name actually fits** even without the prison nearby.

After a quick tour of the winery, Michael and I sat down with **Brian Loring**, **Andrew Vingiello** of A.P. Vin, **Tim Perr** of Pali Wine Company and **Peter Cargasacchi**, who had quickly changed hats from **able tour guide** to **vintner** of Cargasacchi/Point Concepcion Wines. We tasted through a range of 2005 wines in barrel—here are my notes sorted by producer:

### ***Loring Wine Company***

Brian Loring’s journey from Pinot “geek” to Pinot winemaker began after he met and later befriended **Norm Beko** of **Cottonwood Canyon Winery**. He convinced Beko 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, he had most definitely crossed the line, and the Loring Wine Company was born. The 2004 vintage has clearly set a new

high watermark for Brian’s Pinot Noirs. Not only did he make incredible wines from a challenging vintage, but he also expanded his lineup of Pinots to 10 with bottlings from **Garys’ Vineyard**, **Rosella’s Vineyard**, **Keefer Ranch**, **Rancho Ontiveros**, **Brosseau**, **Naylor Dry Hole**, **Cargasacchi**, **Durell**, **Clos Pepe** and a blend named **Llama Farm**. For 2005, there’ll be one or two more new bottlings. All of Brian’s wines are finished in screwcaps.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Durell Vineyard:** deep, lots of spice, earth and cherry fruit; great core of cherry fruit, deep and complex with great structure. This is Brian’s second vintage from this vineyard and I think it’s going to end up being one of his best bottlings.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Rosella’s Vineyard:** deep and complex with incredible aromas—rich and ripe with deep black cherry and plum, great structure and balance. Delicious.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Chalone Brosseau Vineyard:** lots of deep earthy and plum aromas with good structure and a bit of tannin; very nicely knit wine.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Chalone Naylor Dry Hole Vineyard:** rich, deep, very complex aromas, almost inky at this stage, deep fruit, good structure.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Paso Robles:** rich, very earthy aromas, deep and complex; nice fruit, rich and full on the palate. This is a new bottling from the cooler west side of Paso Robles.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard:** deep, rich aromas of cherry, spice, pepper; great depth and complexity, deep core of cherry and plum fruit, great structure and balance. Very, very nice.

**2005 Loring Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Vineyard:** Deep aromas of earth and cherry with some savory spices; lots of black cherry fruit, great structure and balance—the flavors go on forever.

### ***A.P. Vin***

**Andrew Vingiello** is the equities trader turned vintner behind the A.P. Vin label. After his “Pinot epiphany” at a family dinner in 2002 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. Since then, Andrew has moved into the Pinot Prison full time and has expanded his Pinot lineup to include **Rosella’s Vineyard**, **Rancho Ontiveros**, **Keefer Ranch**, **Kanzler Vineyard**, **Turner Vineyard** and **Clos Pepe**

## OUT IN PINOT COUNTRY

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Vineyard bottlings, all finished in screwcaps.

**2005 A.P Vin Pinot Noir Green Valley Keefer Ranch:** some toasty oak and cherry fruit on the nose with a lush core of juicy red cherry fruit and some oak on the palate; silky texture, good structure and balance.

**2005 A.P Vin Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard:** a bit of earthiness and toasty oak on nose, bit closed now but still very deep and complex.

**2005 A.P Vin Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard:** rich and deep, with loads of black cherry and smoky bacon notes, rich and well balanced, silky and delicious.

**2005 A.P Vin Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Rancho Ontiveros:** deep, spicy, rich cherry aromas and flavors, some pepper notes, cola, great structure.

### ***Point Concepcion***

**Peter and Julia Cargasacchi** make their **Point Concepcion** and **Cargasacchi** wines at the Pinot Prison. After hearing so much about Peter's vineyards earlier in the day, we were anxious to taste some of the wines. What we tasted were clonal and barrel selections from his two vineyards.

**2005 Point Concepcion Santa Barbara County Jalama Vineyard Clone 114:** Juicy, rich and ripe with just the right amount of toasty, sweet oak; great structure.

**2005 Point Concepcion Santa Barbara County Jalama Vineyard Clone 115:** Deep, rich, more complex than the 114, more angular in structure and showing a bit more oak now.

**2005 Point Concepcion Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Vineyard:** lots of great cherry and raspberry aromas and flavors, rich and deep on the palate with great structure—it's big but well balanced.

### ***Pali Wine Company***

**Pali Wine Company** is owned by a group of more than 20 friends and co-workers 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, **Durell Vineyard** in the Sonoma Valley, **Cargasacchi Jalama** in Santa Barbara County and **Turner Vineyard** in Santa Rita Hills. Brian Loring is Pali's winemaker and **Tim Perr** is probably the closest thing to the leader of the band.

**2005 Pali Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Shea Vineyard:** deep and rich aromas of cherry, spice and earthy notes, full and rich on the palate with complexity and balance.

**2005 Pali Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Olivet Grange Vineyard:** rich aromas of red cherry and cola; supple and silky even at this early stage, good structure and balance.

**2005 Pali Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Cargasacchi Jalama Vineyard:** big, earthy aromas; deep and rich earthy, cola and cherry fruit—great flavors and structure.

**There's a certain chemistry** among the "inmates" at the Pinot Prison that makes them all work so well together. They have fun together—they definitely don't take themselves or each other too seriously. One thing that they do take seriously is Pinot Noir and serious Pinot Noir they all make.

### ***Tuesday, 6:30p: Thai Food!***

Michael and I met a bunch of the vintners we'd visited during the day at a **small but great Thai restaurant** just a short distance south of our hotel on H Street in Lompoc. In my opinion, there's nothing like great Thai food to wake up a fatigued palate, and this dinner did not disappoint. The courses came fast and furious, some very spicy and some just vibrant and delicious in their flavors. I decided to just put away my notebook and enjoy. Of course, we drank some interesting wines too: among them a **2004 Loring Chardonnay**, a **2004 Loring Rose** (both delicious) and the **2000 Clos Pepe Estate Pinot Noir** we had enjoyed so much when we visited there earlier in the day.

What a day—great wines, fascinating and beautiful countryside and an **amazing guide, raconteur and skilled driver** in **Peter Cargasacchi**. We headed back to the hotel for a good night's sleep

### ***Wednesday, 9a: Sea Smoke***

**We headed out on our own** Wednesday morning for our first appointment of the day (and our last vineyard visit of the trip) at the **Sea Smoke** vineyard. While the winery is located in the **Wine Ghetto** in Lompoc, the Sea Smoke vineyards are on south facing slopes of the Santa Rita Range at varying elevations overlooking the Santa Rosa Valley. We drove out Highway 246 east from Lompoc and turned right on Mail Road and continued past **Work Vineyard** where we'd sat with **Peter Work** the day before. It had rained overnight and into the early morning and it was muddy and wet everywhere. We drove around the eastern horn so to speak of the Santa Rita Range and into the Santa Rosa Valley and came to a gate. It was there that we met **Victor Gallegos**, Sea Smoke's general manager.

## OUT IN PINOT COUNTRY

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The land that became the Sea Smoke vineyards was once part of a 900-acre horse ranch. Sea Smoke founder and owner **Bob Davids**, a very successful entrepreneur who invented the handheld **Draw Poker** game among others, worked long and hard to convince the owner of the ranch to sell him the land for vineyard development, and in 1999 Sea Smoke was born. The name “Sea Smoke” refers to the all-important and persistent fog that blankets the vineyards. Of the vineyard’s 23 blocks, 22 are planted to 10 different Pinot clones (the 23rd block is Chardonnay). Elevation ranges from benchland just above the Santa Ynez River to about 650 feet. Across the river to the south of Sea Smoke are the **Fiddlestix Vineyard** and Sanford Winery’s **La Rinconada** and **Sanford & Benedict** vineyards.

We followed **Victor** through the gate and through the huge horse ranch to the west side of the property and into Sea Smoke’s vineyards. After a short walk through some very muddy vineyard rows, we decided it was just too wet to walk, so we piled into Victor’s truck and drove around the vineyard and then up to the highest point. These vineyards are meticulously maintained, quite a feat considering the steep slopes of certain blocks.

After the vineyard tour, we headed back into Lompoc to the Sea Smoke winery, located in Lompoc’s Wine Ghetto, to meet and taste with winemaker **Kris Curran**.

### **Wednesday, 10:14a: The Wine Ghetto**

The **Lompoc Wine Ghetto** is the same sort of light-industrial park you probably drive by a dozen times in the course of your daily life. There are no signs, just address numbers on the buildings. But drive into this industrial park and you’ll see that the alleys between the buildings are alive with activity depending on the time of year: forklifts, barrels being cleaned, trucks unloading grapes and trucks picking up case goods.

It’s a great statement about the focus and priorities of many of these winemakers—it’s about making great wines, not so much about building great buildings.

**Kris Curran** is a terrific and thoughtful winemaker; she’s also grew up in the Santa Ynez Valley. In crafting the Sea Smoke wines, she keeps the 10 Pinot clones planted in the estate vineyard separate until it’s time for the final blend to produce each of the winery’s three Pinot bottlings. “**Botella**” is the “lightest” of the three, but still a full, balanced Pinot.

“**Southing**” is bigger with more new, toasty oak. “**Ten**” features the best selections from each of the 10 clones planted in the vineyard.

Because she keeps the clones and blocks separate, that’s how we tasted through the winery. We tasted her 2004s mainly because the 2005s were at varying stages of finishing their malolactic fermentations.

**2004 Sea Smoke Santa Rita Hills Blocks K & L Clone 777:** rich, deep, great core of black cherry fruit, good structure and balance. These are two contiguous blocks in the upper tiers of the vineyard. This lot was in a barrel from **Tonnellerie Boutes** fired only enough to bend the staves. Kris likes these barrels because she “doesn’t want to hide what each clone has to offer.” Another lot from the same blocks and clonal selection, but in a barrel from **Remond**, reflected the toastier notes of the oak.

**2004 Sea Smoke Santa Rita Hills Blocks T & S Clone 677:** elegant, bright, red cherry fruit, deep and spicy, great aromatics, silky texture. Blocks T & S sit on the upper bench at the eastern end of the vineyard.

**2004 Sea Smoke Santa Rita Hills Block E Clone 2A:** This particular lot was a candidate for the Ten blend—incredible depth, deep aromas of spice, pepper and black cherry, great structure and balance.

**2004 Sea Smoke Santa Rita Hills Ten (In progress):** This lot represented a blend of eight of the 10 clonal components that make up the Ten bottling. It was big, deep, with complex aromas of spice, black cherry plum and earth; deep and rich in the mouth with a great core of black cherry and plum fruit, great structure and balance.

According to Kris, **the 2004s are going to be terrific**. “The vintage toward the end was fast and furious with heat spikes—you had to be ready to move and we were.” The 2004s that I tasted demonstrated to me that Sea Smoke continues its upward climb in quality. And I have no doubt that the 2005s will be even better.

### **Wednesday, 11:15a: Rick Longoria**

We had a little time before lunch and since we had been chronically behind schedule, we decided to try and move up our appointment with **Rick Longoria** of **Longoria Wines**.

**Longoria Wines** specializes in small-lot bottlings of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and a range of Bordeaux, Rhône and Italian varietal bottlings. Rick Longoria has nearly three decades of experience making wine for several wineries in Santa Barbara County. He and his wife Diana started the Longoria label in 1982 and continued to make small amounts of wine between

## OUT IN PINOT COUNTRY

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that first vintage and when they decided to make Longoria their full-time occupation in 1997. The Longoria tasting room is located in **Los Olivos**, and he was the first tenant to move his production facility into the Wine Ghetto. Rick's Pinot bottlings include a regional Santa Rita Hills blend, a bottling from his **Fe Ciega Vineyard**, a bottling from **Sanford & Benedict Vineyard** and a bottling from the **Bien Nacido Vineyard** in the Santa Maria Valley. All are full, rich and complex Pinots with a great core of fruit and great balance. We tasted through his 2005 Pinots in barrel.

**2005 Longoria Santa Rita Hills Fe Ciega Vineyard Block E Pommard Clone:** rich and deep with lots of spice, black cherry and earthy notes, great structure and balance.

**2005 Longoria Santa Rita Hills Fe Ciega Vineyard Block G Clone 667:** deep, closed but definitely has a lot below the surface, big and husky, with good structure and moderate tannin with good balance.

**2005 Longoria Santa Rita Hills Fe Ciega Vineyard Blocks S & R Clone 115:** deep and fruity on the nose and palate with some earthy, cheese rind notes, definitely leaner than the 667 and a little shorter on the finish.

**2005 Longoria Santa Rita Hills Sanford & Benedict Vineyard:** big, rich and earthy on the nose, with spicy, cherry and plum flavors, toasty oak and lush texture. Rick made some of his earliest Pinots from this vineyard and then when the vineyard ownership changed in 1992, he lost access to the grapes until 2002.

**2005 Longoria Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Vineyard:** big and deep with a lot of earthy aromas and flavors with some savory spice notes. This vineyard is owned by Foley Estate Winery.

**2005 Longoria Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard:** big, full and rich with deep aromas of red cherry, savory spice and earth; good structure, moderate tannin with great balance.

If you haven't tried Rick Longoria's Pinots, you really should. His Pinots have maximum character, complexity, flavor and balance without being over the top.

### **Wednesday, 12:30p: Lunch**

We walked back over to Sea Smoke and met up with two of our fellow lunchers, **Kris Curran** and **Bruno D'Alfonso**, the former winemaker for Sanford Winery and now at the helm of his own Pinot label called **Badge** (named after the Cream song written by Eric Clapton and George Harrison). We met **Peter Work** of Ampelos Cellars and his son, Sea Smoke's assistant winemaker **Don Schroeder** at a great little restaurant in town called Sissy's Uptown Café.

Aside from a great lunch and interesting conversation, you can probably imagine that we had some interesting wines. Here are notes on a few:

**2004 Ampelos Syrah Rose:** ripe, delicious fruit, crisp, good structure.

**2004 Curran Grenache Blanc:** dry, bright, spicy aromas, crisp, clean and delicious. Curran is Kris Curran's label.

**2003 Badge Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills:** spicy aromas with cherry and cola notes, moderate toasty oak, good structure and balance. Fruit was from the Rio Vista and Ashley's vineyards.

**2004 Badge Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills:** bright, spicy, great core of black cherry fruit, nice structure and balance. Bruno sourced fruit for this wine from Ashley's Vineyard and the Work Vineyard.

**The Badge Pinots** are really interesting and very tasty. Bruno's really on to something with these wines. He says that after all his years of making Pinot at Sanford, his Badge wines are really the style he wants to pursue.

### **Wednesday, 2p: Flying Goat Cellars**

We headed back to the Wine Ghetto and more tasting with **Norm Yost** of **Flying Goat Cellars**.

Flying Goat Cellars is named for the athletic prowess of **Norman and Pam Yost's** "kids," their two pygmy goats. Norm came to Santa Barbara County to work as winemaker at **Foley Estate Winery** in the Santa Rita Hills. Flying Goat Cellars was a natural progression for him. Norm handles the winemaking while Pam does marketing and promotion. The Pinot focus is on vineyards in Santa Barbara County and includes bottlings from **Dierberg** and **Solomon Hills** vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley, **Rancho Santa Rosa** and **Rio Vista** vineyards in Santa Rita Hills.

Flying Goat shares space in the Wine Ghetto with **Doug Braun's Presidio Winery**. We met up with Norm Yost and proceeded to taste through a selection of 2005 Pinots in barrel.

**2005 Flying Goat Santa Maria Valley Solomon Hills Vineyard:** rich and ripe aromas and flavors, great core of lush red cherry fruit, interesting spicy and earthy notes.

**2005 Flying Goat Santa Maria Valley Dierberg Vineyard:** big and deep, with lots of earthy complexity, lush cherry fruit, cola and spice; great texture.

**2005 Flying Goat Santa Rita Hills Rio Vista Vineyard Clone 115:** spicy, with great black cherry aromas and flavors, ripe, rich with just enough sweet oak.

**2005 Flying Goat Santa Rita Hills Rio Vista Vineyard**

## OUT IN PINOT COUNTRY

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**Clone 2A:** rich, ripe lots of cherry and pie spice notes, forward and very tasty.

**2005 Flying Goat Santa Rita Hills Rancho Santa Rosa Clone 667:** tart fruit, more of a blueberry core, good structure and balance, some cola notes.

### **Wednesday, 3p: “Ghetto West”**

As we left Norm Yost and the Wine Ghetto, we headed into the home stretch of our whirlwind Santa Rita Hills tour. Our final stop was a visit to the “Ghetto West,” another light industrial park home to the winery shared by **Ken Brown Wines** and **Ampelos Cellars**.

### **Ampelos Cellars**

We’d already met **Peter Work** and heard the story of Ampelos Cellars—now we had the opportunity to taste through some of his wines in barrel. Peter explained that the Clone 115 from his estate vineyard typically makes up the backbone of his Pinots with the other clones used as his “spice cabinet.” Typically, he uses one-third new oak each year.

**2004 Ampelos Cellars Santa Rita Hills Estate Clone 115:** rich, deep, spicy with rich cherry and cola flavors, great structure and balance.

**2004 Ampelos Cellars Santa Rita Hills Estate Pommard Clone:** very ripe and rich with spicy, cola notes and a lush core of cherry fruit, great balance.

**2005 Ampelos Cellars Santa Rita Hills Estate Clone 115:** ripe, cherry, plum aromas and flavors, great depth, concentrated flavors with moderate tannin; great structure and balance.

**2005 Ampelos Cellars Santa Rita Hills Estate Pommard Clone:** beautiful, deep, rich core of black cherry, great silky texture, excellent balance.

### **Ken Brown Wines**

There are few people making wine in Santa Barbara County with as much experience in and knowledge about growing and making Pinot Noir as Ken Brown. His nearly three decades in the area, beginning as winemaker at **Zaca Mesa Winery**, clearly makes him a pioneer. But what really sets Ken apart was his decision to start **Byron Vineyards & Winery** in 1984 in the cool Santa Maria Valley and concentrate on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, while everyone around him was still trying to make Cabernet.

Following the purchase of Byron by the **Robert Mondavi**

**Corp.** and the subsequent sale of Mondavi, Ken set out to get back to his roots and make his own small-production Pinots under the Ken Brown Wines label. **His 2003 vintage Pinots are terrific** and we now had the opportunity to see how his 2004 and 2005 wines were shaping up.

**2005 Ken Brown Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard:** deep, rich, smoky notes, lots of red cherry flavor, deep and complex on the palate, big and rich, moderate tannin; the depth and complexity along with great structure and balance really make it stand out.

**2005 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard:** spicy, lots of sweet oak, very tight and integrated flavors, rich, full fruit, hint of pepper, great structure and balance.

**2004 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard:** deep, rich and complex with well integrated spice, black cherry and plum flavors.

**2005 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Sanford & Benedict Vineyard:** complex aromas of earth, cherry and plum follow through on palate for a rich, earthy wine with great structure and balance.

**2005 Ken Brown Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Vineyard:** This wine was still going through malolactic fermentation at the time, but the pedigree of the vineyard was evident.

The combination of Ken Brown’s experience in Santa Barbara County and his **magic touch** for making superbly balanced Pinots make his Pinots a “must have” on the Pinot wish list. My best advice is something I seem to say a lot: get on his mailing list while you can.

### **That’s a wrap!**

**The Santa Rita Hills** is, in every way I can think of, still in its infancy. **Finding and fine-tuning** the right micro-sites and clonal combinations in the vineyard keeps guys like Peter Cargasacchi up at night. **Refining tried and true** Pinot Noir winemaking techniques (and some new ones as well) to fit this unique area is a constant challenge to winemakers. The “style” of Santa Rita Hills Pinots is still very much in development.

All that having been said, it’s as clear to me as the first time I tasted my first Sanford Pinot Noir that this is a great place for Pinot. **And it’s only going to get better.** I can’t wait for the 2005s—I think that **these will truly be benchmark wines.**

After Michael and I left Lompoc, we headed north to the **Santa Maria Valley** and the second half of our week-long road trip. More on this in the next issue.

-- Gregory S. 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.

#### Amici Cellars

Amici Cellars was founded in 1992 by Jeff Hansen and a group of friends, primarily focused on Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Chardonnay from selected vineyards in the Napa Valley. Amici in Italian is "friends" and that's the spirit behind these wines. Amici has recently started making Pinot Noir from Mendocino County and the wines are focused and interesting.

#### Amici Cellars

##### *Pinot Noir Mendocino County 2003*

Medium-deep ruby purple color; lightly spicy aromas with cherry notes; rich, spicy red cherry flavors, with some wood and forest floor notes; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Nice balance and spicy flavors make this an enjoyable medium bodied Pinot.

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**500 cases made      \$42      Score: 87**

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

Oregon Philanthropist Dr. Robert Pamplin had the future in mind when he purchased the Chateau Benoit winery in 1999 to create Anne Amie Vineyards. He and winemaker Scott Huffman began a quest to completely renovate the facility and the estate vineyards. In the mean time, Huffman began sourcing Pinot Noir from other Willamette Valley vineyards. Located in the northern Willamette Valley between the towns of Carlton and Lafayette, Anne Amie's vineyard sources include Deux Verts Vineyard near the town of Yamhill, Hawk's View Vineyard in the Chehalem Ridge and Yamhill Springs Vineyard.

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Hawk's View 2003*

Medium-deep ruby purple color; bit closed, some forest floor, berry aromas; deep, concentrated berry flavors with earthy notes, moderate toasty oak, good structure, long finish. This is a big style of Pinot that needs some time in the bottle.

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**342 cases made      \$42      Score: 86**

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley La Colina Vineyard 2003*

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, closed aromas with some berry notes; deep, black cherry, berry and wood flavors, moderate tannin and toasty oak; good structure; long finish. Big and full, this Pinot shows much better after a couple of hours of air.

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**214 cases made      \$65      Score: 87**

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Laurel Vineyard 2003*

Medium ruby color; deep stewed fruit aromas, some earthy notes; earthy and woody flavors, with stewed cherry fruit, moderate oak; good structure, long finish. Big earthy style with stewed fruit flavors; needs a hearty dish.

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**161 cases made      \$45      Score: 86**

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Rainbow Ridge 2002*

Medium-deep ruby purple color; bit closed on nose with some earthy, forest floor aromas; big and full on the palate with berry, earthy and woody flavors; moderate oak and tannin; good structure; long finish. This Pinot has a lot of earthy, berry flavors with just a little too much of a woody note. Pair with a hearty roast or braise.

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**196 cases made      \$40      Score: 87**

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2002*

Medium-deep ruby purple color; some berry/cherry aromas

### MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

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*"Powerful flavors..."*

#### Testarossa Vineyards

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2003*

Medium-deep ruby purple color; complex black cherry, herbs and earth on the nose; full and complex black cherry and plum with a dose of sweet oak; moderate tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Testarossa really does a nice job with the Pisoni Vineyard fruit—lots of power and yet full and flavorful.

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**228 cases made      \$54      Score: 93**

### SMART BUY!

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*"Delicious style..."*

#### Stephen Ross

##### *Pinot Noir Edna Valley 2003*

Deep ruby purple color; rich cherry and spice aromas; rich, ripe, cherry flavors, silky texture, spicy with a touch of oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Delicious middle of the road style with a lot of great fruit flavors—perfect with a wide range of foods.

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**967 cases made      \$25      Score: 91**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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with earthy notes; rich, full flavors of cherry, berry, earthy forest floor; good structure and balance; long finish. This is a Pinot made in an earthy style and yet it still has plenty of ripe cherry flavors to offer.

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**2,750 cases made    \$25    Score: 89**

### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

Walt and Mona Babcock established the Babcock Vineyard in the early 1980s in the region that would become the Santa Rita Hills. In 1984, with their son Bryan as winemaker, they decided to make their own wines. Today Bryan Babcock is making an interesting range of wines from its 80 acres of estate vineyards, including several bottlings of Pinot Noir. The Pinots are made in a balance style with much complexity.

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

*Pinot Noir Monterey County/Santa Barbara/Sonoma County 2004*

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Medium ruby color; deep, rich aromas of stewed cherries and savory spices; rich and full with stewed cherry, savory spice and earthy flavors; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Not a big, heavy style, this lighter Pinot has a lot of complex and interesting flavors.

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**4,237 cases made    \$19    Score: 88**

#### Babcock Winery & Vineyards

*Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Grand Cuvee 2004*

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Medium ruby color; deep aromas of stewed cherry, spice and earthy notes; rich, deep and complex flavors of stewed black cherry, lush spices, earthy notes in the background; just the right touch of sweet oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Very interesting and well balanced style of Pinot—deep, lush fruit with so many great flavors I want to just sip it.

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

### Beauregard Vineyards

Beauregard Vineyards was established by Ryan Beauregard in 1999, but it is by no means the Beauregard family's first foray into the wine business. Ryan is the fourth generation of growers and vintners in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Ryan brought winemaking into the business and today Beauregard Vineyards produces Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Chardonnay and Zinfandel. The Pinot is sourced from the Trout Gulch Vineyard in Aptos, south of Santa Cruz.

#### Beauregard Vineyards

*Pinot Noir Santa Cruz Mountains Trout Gulch Vineyard 2003*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; some berry/cherry aromas with herbal and earthy notes; berry fruit flavors with some herbal and earthy notes, moderate tannin; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Herbal and earthy style of Pinot.

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**226 cases made    \$35    Score: 87**

### Beringer Vineyards

One of the largest and most well known of Napa Valley wineries, Beringer Vineyards is probably most famous for its Private Reserve Cabernets. But for some time now, Beringer has been producing interesting Pinot Noir as well, from the Founders Estate Pinot Noir (a consistently good value) to the Napa Valley and Stanly Ranch Reserve bottlings.

#### Beringer Vineyards

*Pinot Noir Napa Valley 2004*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, some berry and cherry aromas; deep berry flavors with some earthy notes, moderate tannin and oak; good structure; long finish. Deep and full of fruit; this Pinot has a bit more tannin than it needs.

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**11,000 cases made    \$20    Score: 87**

### Brogan Cellars

At least in terms of wine, Margaret Wierenga is very much her father's daughter. Like her father, Williams Selyem co-founder Burt Williams, Margi is a focused, hands-on winemaker with a passion for making the finest Pinots for her Brogan Cellars. Brogan's Pinots are sourced from several carefully selected vineyards from Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast and Anderson Valley including Buena Tierra, Lingenfelder, Benovia Ranch (formerly known as Cohn Vineyard) and her father's Morning Dew Ranch in the Anderson Valley. Total case production for Brogan is approximately 1,500 cases.

#### Brogan Cellars

*Pinot Noir Anderson Valley 2004*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep rich aromas of spice and cherry; ripe, rich, nice spice and red cherry flavors, deep, silky texture, some toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and ripe with a lot of interesting flavors—a great Pinot for the table.

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**79 cases made    \$40    Score: 91**

#### Brogan Cellars

*Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Benovia Vineyard 2004*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; bright, spicy, cherry aromas with hints of nutmeg; bright cherry fruit, crisp, spicy, cinnamon and nutmeg notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Bright, opulent fruit with crisp acidity make this a delight to drink.

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**50 cases made    \$50    Score: 92**

#### Brogan Cellars

*Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Buena Tierra Helio Doro Block 2003*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich strawberry, cherry aromas with a touch of earth; rich and opulent, slightly sour cherry flavors with spice and some earthy notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Ripe and delicious fruit,

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

opulent, with complexing earthy notes; try this Pinot with a hearty mushroom pasta.

**150 cases made      \$75      Score: 91**

### **Brogan Cellars**

***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Lingenfelder Vineyard 2004***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; spicy, earthy and slightly closed on the nose; deep, rich, dusty, lush earthy flavors with black cherry notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and complex, with lots of interesting earthy notes; pair with a rich braised dish.

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

### **Brogan Cellars**

***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2004***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, rich black cherry aromas; big, earthy, forest floor notes with deep black cherry fruit, silky texture, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and earthy Pinot with great depth and layers and layers of flavors.

**300 cases made      \$45      Score: 93**

### **Brogan Cellars**

***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Summa Young Vine 2004***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, earthy, forest floor aromas; deep, earthy, black cherry flavors, intense and complex, nice sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. A terrific, deep and intense Pinot with complexity that makes it perfect for many complex dishes.

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

### **Calera Wine Co.**

Calera Wine Company is one of California's most enduring outposts for Pinot Noir. Calera's founder Josh Jensen was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area and after living in France for several years, he developed a love and fascination for

Burgundy and its wines. He returned to California in 1971 to search for a site to create his own wine estate and Burgundian-styled wines. Josh produces four bottlings of Pinot; Jensen, Selleck and Mills. The fourth bottling is a Central Coast blend. He releases his wines later than most everyone else—typically his current Pinot vintage is 2-3 years behind the average vintage in the market.

### **Calera Wine Company**

***Pinot Noir Central Coast 2002***

Medium ruby red color; deep, cherry cola and earthy aromas; rich, deep, great cherry fruit, intense and complex, earthy, dusty notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, complex and earthy; this Pinot has great structure and some bottle age to really make it shine.

**6,392 cases made      \$20      Score: 91**

### **Calera Wine Company**

***Pinot Noir Mt. Harlan Mills 2001***

Medium ruby red color; deep, dusty, earthy with nice cherry aromas; dusty, earthy flavors with stewed cherry flavors, moderate soft tannins, toasty oak; good structure and balance; long finish. Big and earthy with moderate tannins, this Pinot definitely needs more time in the bottle.

**1,096 cases made      \$40      Score: 87**

### **Calera Wine Company**

***Pinot Noir Mt. Harlan Ryan 2003***

Medium ruby red color; spicy, red cherry and dusty, earthy notes; big, rich, ripe cherry flavors, dusty/earthy notes, moderate tannin, long finish. Earthy flavors and moderate tannins really make me want to lay this wine down for another year or so.

**769 cases made      \$40      Score: 87**

### **Calera Wine Company**

***Pinot Noir Mt. Harlan Ryan 2002***

Medium-deep ruby purple color; slightly closed, dusty, stewed cherry aromas; deep, rich, earthy, stewed cherry, tannic with a

## MAKE ROOM IN THE CELLAR!

*"Big and powerful..."*

### **Siduri**

***Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard 2004***

Deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, black cherry, plum and a bit of pepper; big, deep, complex with lots of black cherry, pepper, earth, moderate tannins and toasty oak; good structure and balance, very long finish. Big and powerful Pinot with enough structure and balance to let it age gracefully. From the Clos Pepe Estate in the Santa Rita Hills.

**270 cases made      \$52      Score: 94**

## SMART BUY!

*"An opulent Pinot..."*

### **TAZ Vineyards**

***Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County 2003***

Deep ruby purple color; deep red cherry, savory spice notes, rich and deep with delicious red cherry, spice and savory notes; lush texture, good structure and balance; long finish. A great style of Pinot for the table, this opulent wine from TAZ really delivers regional flavors with great balance.

**3,200 cases made      \$25      Score: 92**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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good dose of toasty oak; long finish. This Pinot has complex earthy notes but the fruit seems to have dropped out in the middle.

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**115 cases made      \$40      Score: 87**

### **Calera Wine Company** ***Pinot Noir Mt. Harlan Selleck 2001***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, stewed cherry aromas; rich and complex with lots of opulent stewed cherry flavor, good, earthy dusty notes, some tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. Complex, earthy and yet with a lot of interesting fruit, this Pinot stands up well to a flavorful roast.

---

**439 cases made      \$55      Score: 90**

### **Carrefour Vineyards**

Greg and Marilyn Nitz founded their 18-acre estate vineyard in Napa Valley in 1997 with plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Plantings of Sauvignon Blanc and Petite Verdot followed in 2000. Greg and Marilyn also wanted to produce Pinot Noir under their Carrefour label, so they sourced grapes from Truchard Vineyards in Carneros.

### **Carrefour Vineyards** ***Pinot Noir Carneros 2003***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, ripe and spicy aromas with black cherry notes; rich and ripe with nice black cherry, spice and cinnamon flavors, complex earthy notes; nice structure and balance; long finish. A delicious Pinot that has everything you'd want—a nice statement of the level of Carneros Pinot today.

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**589 cases made      \$28      Score: 93**

### **Chalone Vineyard**

Located on a benchland of the Gavilan Mountains in the shadow of the Pinnacles National Monument, Chalone Vineyard began its journey on the wine frontier more than 100 years ago when a Frenchman, Charles Tamm, planted the first grapevines on the isolated property. Today, Chalone Vineyard and the other wineries that made up the Chalone Wine Group are now part of drinks conglomerate Diageo. The Chalone estate is comprised of almost 1,000 contiguous acres, of which nearly 310 are planted to vines. Dan Karlsen has been the winemaker at Chalone Vineyard since 1998 and the winery's signature Pinot Noir and Chardonnay have never been better.

### **Chalone Vineyard** ***Pinot Noir Chalone 2003***

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Deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, cherry and earthy notes; deep, rich, complex cherry flavors with a lot of earthy and savory spice notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Powerful without being overbearing, this Pinot really has deep and complex flavors and great balance.

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**6,971 cases made      \$25      Score: 93**

### **Chalone Vineyard** ***Pinot Noir Monterey County 2004***

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Deep ruby purple color; deep, berry aromas; rich and deep, lots of berry flavor with toasty oak; moderate tannin and a little hot; good structure; long finish. A full flavored Pinot with a lot of berry flavors, tannin and some heat. This is Chalone's new Monterey County bottling.

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**n/a cases made      \$15      Score: 87**

### **Copeland Creek Vineyards**

The chilly Petaluma Gap is the primary influence on the Sonoma Mountain vineyard, situated along Copeland Creek, that is the source for Copeland Creek's Pinot Noir. Copeland Creek is part of Pfendler Vineyards, owned by Peter Pfendler. Winemaker Dom Baumhefner, long involved in winemaking and restaurants in Sonoma County, focuses on making elegant and subtle Pinots that really pair well with food.

### **Copeland Creek Vineyards** ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2003***

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Medium ruby purple color; deep and spicy with black cherry and cinnamon aromas; rich, lush black cherry, spice and some sweet oak; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Another elegant and yet very flavorful Pinot from Copeland Creek—great for a wide variety of foods.

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**348 cases made      \$30      Score: 93**

### **J. Wilkes**

Jeff Wilkes worked for 18 years for Bien Nacido Vineyard beginning in 1984 helping to market and sell the grapes from that vineyard to wineries throughout California. In 2001 he and his wife Kimberly ventured into the winemaking side of things and launched J. Wilkes. Jeff's Pinot bottlings include block selections from Bien Nacido Vineyard and Solomon Hills Vineyard, as well as the Vall-Foss Vineyard in Napa Valley. His Pinots are rich in the lush red fruit typical of the Santa Maria Valley. He also produces a terrific Pinot Blanc from Bien Nacido.

### **J. Wilkes** ***Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard Block Q 2003***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, earthy aromas with red cherry and plum; earthy, red cherry, cola and plum flavors with sweet oak, some tannin, good structure and balance with a long finish. This is a rich, deep Pinot that has the structure to age, but also drinks well right now.

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

### **J. Wilkes** ***Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard Hillside 2004***

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Medium ruby purple color; spicy, red cherry and cola aromas;

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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rich, ripe red cherry, spice and earthy flavors with sweet oak, good structure and balance; lingering finish. Spicy and full, this Pinot has the rich core of fruit typical of Bien Nacido.

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

### **J. Wilkes**

#### ***Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Solomon Hills 2004***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, earthy, black cherry aromas with a hint of savory spice; rich and ripe black cherry, earthy flavors with savory spices; silky texture, sweet oak, good structure and balance; lingering finish. This is a full and rich Pinot with delicious black cherry flavors and a silky texture.

---

**325 cases made      \$38      Score: 92**

### **MacMurray Ranch**

The land that is MacMurray Ranch today was originally homesteaded by Colonel George Porter, who came to the Russian River Valley in 1846. In 1941 actor Fred MacMurray purchased the ranch. In 1996, several years after Fred MacMurray's death in 1991, the 1,700-acre ranch was purchased by the E.& J. Gallo winery and the brand created. MacMurray Ranch focuses on Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris.

### **MacMurray Ranch**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2003***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; spicy, earthy and rich berry aromas; spicy, earthy with lots of blackberry fruit bordering on jammy; spicy, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a spicy, interesting Pinot with a lot to like—the fruit is just a touch on the jammy side for my taste.

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**4,800 cases made      \$35      Score: 87**

### **MacMurray Ranch**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley River Cuvee 2003***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, closed aromas with hints of black cherry and forest floor; rich, deep, lush black cherry fruit, some earthy notes, silky texture, sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep, rich and opulent, this Pinot has the structure to support some bottle age.

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

### **MacMurray Ranch**

#### ***Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Winemakers Block 2003***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy but somewhat closed on the nose; deep, rich red cherry flavors, sweet oak, silky texture, spicy cinnamon notes; good structure and balance; long finish. Rich and delicious cherry and spice flavors really make this Pinot a great candidate for any table.

---

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

### **Phillips Hill**

Phillips Hill is a small Pinot producer based in the Anderson

Valley. Winemaker Toby Hill sources his Pinot Noir from the Oppenlander Vineyard north of the Anderson Valley in the tiny town of Comptche, just 10 miles from the ocean. Production of his 2003 Pinot is tiny, with the 2004 growing to 250 cases or so. Phillips Hill is a small artisan producer worth watching.

### **Phillips Hill**

#### ***Pinot Noir Mendocino County Oppenlander Vineyard 2003***

---

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep red cherry, earthy, concentrated aromas; rich, deep, cherry pie flavors, rich and ripe, good structure and balance, long finish. A ripe and tasty Pinot with a beautiful core of fruit.

---

**100 cases made      \$40      Score: 91**

### **Ponzi Vineyards**

Dick and Nancy Ponzi are part of a very small group of pioneering vintners who essentially created the Oregon wine industry. They founded their family winery and vineyards in 1970 and in 1974 produced their first commercial vintage: four barrels of Pinot Noir. Since then, Ponzi Vineyards has steadily grown in both size and prestige, now producing Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Arneis, Dolcetto and White Riesling. Today, a second generation of Ponzis operates the winery and vineyard; Luisa Ponzi is winemaker, Maria Ponzi Fogelstrom handles sales and marketing and Michel Ponz is operations director. Ponzi's Pinot bottlings include Tavola, Willamette Valley, Reserve and Abetina.

### **Ponzi Vineyards**

#### ***Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2003***

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, earthy and spicy aromas; tangy cherry flavors, some earthy notes, forest floor, some oak and tannin, good structure and balance; lingering finish. A tasty Pinot with just enough earthy complexity to make it a good bet for the table.

---

**3,579 cases made      \$30      Score: 89**

### **Robert Hunter**

Robert Hunter Winery is primarily a sparkling wine producer and a small one at that, producing only about 1,000 cases annually. Robert Hunter's estate vineyard is on the west side of the Sonoma Valley south of the town of Glen Ellen. Robert Hunter and his son Rob also produce 300 cases of a still Pinot Noir from the estate vineyard.

### **Robert Hunter**

#### ***Pinot Noir Sonoma Valley 2003***

---

Medium-deep ruby purple color; ripe and rich aromas of cherry and berry; ripe, some spicy notes, bit thin in middle, some tannin, good structure, lingering finish. Ripe and spicy, this Pinot has a lot to like; I wish it had more in the mid-palate.

---

**300 cases made      \$35      Score: 84**

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### Saintsbury

Saintsbury was founded in 1981 by winemakers Richard Ward and David Graves with pretty much one objective in mind: to make great Pinot Noir. At that time, most California Pinots were dull and uninteresting. With Saintsbury came a new style: bright, crisp and full of fruit. Ward and Graves named their winery after a famous British wine writer from the past, George Saintsbury. Today, Saintsbury focuses on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir; total production is around 55,000 cases, two thirds of which is Pinot. The Pinot bottlings include "Garnet," a fresh and bright Pinot, the Carneros bottling, a solid, classic Carneros Pinot, a Reserve Pinot and a limited Brown Ranch bottling that is sourced from Saintsbury's Brown Ranch vineyard, planted in 1991 a short distance north of the winery. In addition, a Vin Gris is also produced.

#### Saintsbury

##### *Pinot Noir Carneros Garnet 2004*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, ripe red cherry and strawberry aromas with some spicy notes; ripe, tangy cherry flavors, simple and bright, good structure and balance; lingering finish. A bright and delicious Pinot, perfect for lighter meals.

---

**16,081 cases made    \$17    Score: 89**

#### Saintsbury

##### *Pinot Noir Carneros 2003*

---

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, cherry and some toasty notes; ripe and rich, clean cherry fruit, spicy notes with a touch of earth and tannin; good structure and balance; long finish. A ripe and delicious example of nicely balanced Carneros Pinot.

---

**21,273 cases made    \$30    Score: 90**

### Savannah-Chanelle Vineyards

Savannah-Chanelle's winery and vineyard site was actually established in 1892 by French immigrant Pierre Pourroy on a plateau in the Santa Cruz Mountains, four miles above the cities of Saratoga and Los Gatos. The current estate sits on 58 acres; Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Zinfandel and Chardonnay are planted in the estate vineyards. Michael and Kellie Ballard purchased the property in 1996, naming it after their two daughters. Production is in the range of 8,000 to 10,000 cases per year. Tony Craig (also of Sonnet Wine cellars) has really brought these wines along since taking over as winemaker.

#### Savannah-Chanelle

##### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Tina Marie Vineyard 2003*

---

Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, spicy black cherry aromas, earthy notes; deep, stewed black cherry, with lots of spicy and toasty oak notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Lush and full, this Pinot really stands out on the table. I love the intense, deep core of fruit.

---

**212 cases made    \$50    Score: 92**

### Siduri Wines

Adam and Dianna Lee made their first Pinot Noir together in 1994. The tiny-production wine was well received and Siduri soon had developed cult status among Pinot lovers. More than a decade later, after a lot of time on the road and in the cellar, the hard work is really paying off with mainstream acceptance of their artisan Pinots. Adam and Dianna really know how to make delicious, complex Pinot Noir. Their Pinot bottlings are sourced from a wide variety of vineyards in the Willamette Valley, Sonoma Coast, Russian River Valley, Santa Lucia Highlands and Santa Rita Hills, both as vineyard designates and as regional appellation blends. Siduri has become a benchmark for great Pinot from up and down the West Coast.

#### Siduri

##### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2004*

---

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy, red cherry aromas; rich and ripe with bright red cherry flavors, and spicy notes, silky texture; great structure and balance; lingering finish. This is a delicious, rich and lush Russian River Pinot, and a bargain as well. Another in a growing list of Siduri's really nice "Appellation Series" wines.

---

**1,020 cases made    \$26    Score: 93**

#### Siduri

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2004*

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Deep ruby purple color; deep, spicy with lots of earthy notes; rich and full with lots of deep black cherry, spice, and earthy notes; great structure and very well balanced; long finish. Big, complex but extremely well balanced Pinot from a legendary Pinot vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands.

---

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

#### Siduri

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Cargasacchi Vineyard 2004*

---

Deep ruby purple color; deep and slightly closed, some earthy, plum aromas; big, full, rich with toasty oak, plum and black cherry flavors, earthy, good structure and balance; long finish. Deep and complex, with a lot of interesting flavors just below the surface. From Peter Cargasacchi's vineyard in the western end of the Santa Rita Hills.

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**333 cases made    \$52    Score: 94**

#### Siduri

##### *Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard 2004*

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Please see "Make Room In The Cellar!" on page 15.

#### Siduri

##### *Pinot Noir Sonoma County 2004*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; bright spicy cherry and toasty aromas; ripe and lush with nice red cherry and cinammon notes; silky texture, good structure and balance; long finish. This Pinot shows just how nice a "lowly" Sonoma County blend can be in the hands of the right winemaker. Another

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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very nice "Appellation Series" Pinot from Siduri.

---

**1,393 cases made     \$19     Score: 92**

### Siduri

#### *Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2004*

---

Medium ruby color; deep, earthy, forest floor, with berry notes; spicy, deep, earthy and forest floor notes, good structure and balance; long finish. Complex and earthy Pinot with lots of interesting flavors.

---

**1,391 cases made     \$19     Score: 91**

### Stephen Ross Wine Cellars

Steve Dooley has come a long way from his first job in the wine industry as a "shoveler" moving pomace out of red wine fermentation tanks at the Louis M. Martini Winery in the Napa Valley. Today, he probably still shovels pomace from time to time, but at least he's shoveling it out of his own tanks at his own winery—Stephen Ross Wine Cellars. After making wine in South Africa and Australia, Steve settled in as winemaker in 1987 at Edna Valley Vineyards, the joint venture between The Chalone Wine Group and Paragon Vineyards in the Edna Valley. Steve's Pinots sourced from Edna Ranch, Bien Nacido and the Stone Corral vineyards—are complex and full of flavor but not overpowering—great for the table.

### Stephen Ross

#### *Pinot Noir Edna Valley Stone Corral Vineyard 2003*

---

Deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, cherry, spice, cinnamon on nose; rich and deep, lots of complex cherry fruit, cinnamon, earthy notes, toasty oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Big and rich Pinot with lots of depth and concentrated flavors.

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**144 cases made     \$45     Score: 92**

### Stephen Ross

#### *Pinot Noir Edna Valley 2003*

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Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 13.

### Stephen Ross

#### *Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard 2003*

---

Deep ruby purple color; deep, rich red fruit aromas, smoky, earthy notes; full, rich, lots of red cherry and strawberry notes, earthy with some sweet oak, good structure and balance; long finish. Full and rich style of Pinot with just enough earthy notes to add complexity.

---

**270 cases made     \$35     Score: 91**

### TAZ Vineyards

TAZ Vineyards gets its name from the nickname of founder Bob "Taz" Steinhauer. Steinhauer earned that nickname (short for Tasmanian Devil) by his feverish approach to vineyard

development first in the Napa Valley and later in the Central Coast as the senior executive in charge of vineyard development for Beringer Blass, owner of TAZ Vineyard. Steinhauer was also instrumental in developing, in partnership with Fiddlehead Cellars' Kathy Joseph, the Fiddlestix Vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills. TAZ Vineyards winemaker Natasha Boffman, with experience in California and Australia, crafts the TAZ Pinots in a style that is bold, yet balanced. Pinot bottlings include a regional Santa Barbara County blend and vineyard designates from Fiddlestix and the Cuyama River bottling from the North Canyon Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley.

### TAZ Vineyards

#### *Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County 2003*

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Please see "Smart Buy!" on page 15.

### TAZ Vineyards

#### *Pinot Noir Santa Maria Valley Cuyama River 2003*

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Deep ruby purple color; deep black cherry and raspberry notes on nose; rich berry, cherry fruit, lush, sweet oak, some spice and earth, good structure and balance; long finish. Lush and full of rich fruit, this Pinot is just a delicious by itself as with a meal.

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**500 cases made     \$28     Score: 91**

### TAZ Vineyards

#### *Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Fiddlestix Vineyard 2003*

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Deep ruby purple color; deep, black cherry, spicy, with a touch of mint on the nose; deep and rich with complex earthy and spicy notes, lots of black cherry fruit, good structure and balance; long finish. Big, rich style of Pinot that has the right balance to make it a delight to drink. Serve with a hearty beef or lamb dish.

---

**1,900 cases made     \$35     Score: 92**

### Testarossa Vineyards

Rob and Diana Jensen founded Testarossa in 1993 and quite literally have not looked back. Their passion for wine in general and Pinot Noir in particular has driven them to find and secure some of the best Pinot vineyard sources California has to offer and then deliver wines scoring among the highest anywhere. Testarossa's winemaker is Bill Brosseau and the Pinot bottlings are sourced from vineyards up and down the West Coast. The Pinots are wonderful expressions of both the individual character of their vineyard sources and the Jensens' vision for what Pinot should be.

### Testarossa Vineyards

#### *Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2003*

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Please see "Make Room In The Cellar!" on page 13.

## IN THE MARKET: Recent Pinot Noir Reviews

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### TR Elliott

TR Elliott was founded in 2002 by wine industry veteran Ted Elliott to produce small lots of Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley. He sources fruit for his "Queste" bottling of Pinot from the Vine Hill Vineyard and from the Goldridge Vineyard, both located in the rolling hills between Sebastopol and Forestville. The TR Elliott Pinots are balance and subtle in style with lots of earthy, forest floor notes.

#### TR Elliott

##### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Queste 2003*

---

Deep ruby purple color; deep, stewed cherry, rhubarb notes on nose; concentrated fruit flavors, stewed cherry, earthy notes, with toasty oak; lingering finish. Deep, stewed cherry flavors fall off just a bit in the middle of this Pinot; a good choice for an earthy mushroom pasta.

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**480 cases made      \$28      Score: 86**

#### TR Elliott

##### *Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Queste 2002*

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Medium-deep ruby purple color; rich, ripe, spicy cherry aromas with some earthy notes; rich cherry flavors with earthy notes, moderate oak; good structure and balance; lingering finish. Rich and earthy, this Pinot has a lot of deep interesting flavors.

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**380 cases made      \$26      Score: 88**

### Truchard Vineyards

Truchard Vineyards in the Carneros region was founded as a vineyard in the mid-1970s and as a winery in 1989, but the winegrowing tradition in the Truchard family dates back to 1887. Founder Tony Truchard, a medical doctor by training, developed his first vineyard back in 1974. Tony and his wife Jo Ann Truchard quickly developed a reputation as farming one of the outstanding vineyards in Carneros. The Truchard Pinots are big, deep and yet very expressive of the vineyard; more complex than most Carneros Pinots.

#### Truchard Vineyard

##### *Pinot Noir Carneros 2002*

---

Medium-deep ruby purple color; deep, rich, red cherry, earthy, forest floor aromas; deep, rich opulent red cherry flavors, lots of complex earthy notes, good structure and balance; long finish. This is a delightful, complex and drinkable Pinot from Truchard—another example of how interesting Carneros Pinots have become.

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**n/a cases made      \$28      Score: 93**

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### Contacting The Winery

Below is contact information for wines reviewed in this issue.

#### Amici Cellars

707-967-9560, [www.amicicellars.com](http://www.amicicellars.com)

#### Anne Amie Vineyards

503.864.2991, [www.anneamie.com](http://www.anneamie.com)

#### Babcock Vineyards

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

#### Beauregard Vineyards

831.425.7777, [www.beauregardvineyards.com](http://www.beauregardvineyards.com)

#### Beringer Vineyards

707.963.7115 x2018, [www.beringerblass.com](http://www.beringerblass.com)

#### Brogan Cellars

707.473.0211, [www.brogancellars.com](http://www.brogancellars.com)

#### Calera Wine Co.

831.637.9170, [www.calerawine.com](http://www.calerawine.com)

#### Carrefour Vineyards

707.252.9167, [www.carrefourvineyards.com](http://www.carrefourvineyards.com)

#### Chalone Vineyard

831.678.1717, [www.chalonevineyard.com](http://www.chalonevineyard.com)

#### Copeland Creek Vineyards

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

#### J. Wilkes

805.899.2845, [www.jwilkeswine.com](http://www.jwilkeswine.com)

#### MacMurray Ranch

707.431.5507, [www.macmurrayranch.com](http://www.macmurrayranch.com)

#### Phillips Hill

707-877-1151, [www.phillipshillestates.com](http://www.phillipshillestates.com)

#### Ponzi Vineyards

503.628.1227, [www.ponziwines.com](http://www.ponziwines.com)

#### Robert Hunter

707-996-3056, [www.roberthunterwinery.com](http://www.roberthunterwinery.com)

#### Saintsbury

707.252.0592, [www.saintsbury.com](http://www.saintsbury.com)

#### Savannah-Chanelle Vineyards

408.741.2933, [www.savannahchanelle.com](http://www.savannahchanelle.com)

#### Siduri Wines

707.578.3882, [www.siduri.com](http://www.siduri.com)

#### Stephen Ross Wine Cellars

805.594.1318, [www.stephenrosswine.com](http://www.stephenrosswine.com)

#### TAZ Vineyards

888.544.3223, [www.tazvineyards.com](http://www.tazvineyards.com)

#### Testarossa Vineyards

408.354.6150, [www.testarossa.com](http://www.testarossa.com)

#### TR Elliott

707.237.4900, [www.trelliott.com](http://www.trelliott.com)

#### Truchard Vineyards

707.253.7153, [www.truchardvineyards.com](http://www.truchardvineyards.com)

[PNR]

## **PINOTREPORT**

For People Passionate About Western Pinot Noir

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### **Editorial Philosophy**

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

### **Wine Samples**

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

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

All samples should be sent to the following address:

#### **PinotReport**

Attn: Gregory S. Walter  
625 Ross Court, Sonoma, CA 95476  
Tel: 707.935.0326

### **About Our Tastings**

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

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

### **How We Taste**

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

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

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

### **Wine Prices and Sourcing**

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

### **Our Wine Ratings**

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

### **PinotReport's 100-Point Scale**

<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 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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