

Pinot Noir is the “Opera Diva” of Wine

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Pinot Noir & Journey Unite for Charity

Wine and music are both the works of artists, but as Matt Kramer has pointed out, “art (music) is creation; wine is expression.” The musician starts with a blank sheet while wine is an expression of place. The end product in both cases is the same: something to embrace, enjoy, and celebrate. Of all of the world’s varietals, it is Pinot Noir that has garnered the most songs of praise. Robert Del Grande of Café Annie Restaurant so eloquently said: “Pinot Noir is the master musician. Where one wine is dissonant with food, Pinot Noir finds the harmony. Where another is brash, Pinot Noir is pianissimo. Where the food is robust, Pinot Noir plays multo-forte.”

Family-owned and distinguished producer **De La Montanya Estate Vineyards & Winery** in the Russian River Valley has teamed with the legendary rock band **Journey** to release a unique limited edition red wine with 100% of the proceeds going to the Greater Bay Area Make-a-Wish Foundation. Only 300 bottles, hand-signed by the five current members of the band, are available.

The front label features the cover art from the band’s latest CD, *Generations*. The Egyptians regarded the divine scarab beetle as a symbol of self-creative power, rebirth, renewal, transformation, and regeneration. The scarab has also become the long-time symbol for the band Journey.

De La Montanya Tasting Room is open Saturday and Sunday only from 11:00 AM to 4:30 PM. (Dennis has kids and a wife). Monday thru Friday by appointment only. The tasting room is very classy with views of the vineyard and adjacent barrel room.



Journey started as an experimental rhythm section formed around guitar prodigy Neal Schon in 1973. The name originated from a contest on radio station KSAN-FM in San Francisco. Neal Schon had been a member of the band Santana from 1971-72. In 1977, the band was joined by vocalist and frontman Steve Perry and went from jazz-rock explorers to mega-pop stars. A string of highly popular albums ensued including *Infinity* (1978), *Evolution* (1979), *Departure*, *Captured* (1981) and *Escape* (1981). *Escape* had three top 10 singles including "Who's Crying Now," "Don't Stop Believin'," and "Open Arms," and the album topped the charts. Through the years the personnel in the band have changed, the one constant being guitarist Neal Schon. The early members reconvened in 2001 to release both the *Arrival* and *Generations* albums and went on a 30th Anniversary Tour. Over these 30 years there have been 18 U.S. releases and 75,000,000 in album sales. Their popular melodic rock style has made them the 29th best selling rock group of all time.

The current five members of Journey (pictured right) who signed the back wine label are: Neal Schon (guitar), Jonathan Cain (keyboard), Ross Valary (bass guitar), Steve Augeri (vocal) and Deen Castronovo (drum).



What makes this wine unique is that although several musical stars have lent their name to wines, a couple of these band members are wine enthusiasts who actively drink and cellar wine and are ardent consumers of De La Montonya wines. In addition, this project was not created for profit, but rather to benefit a very deserving charity.

2005 Generations De La Montonya-Journey Sonoma County Red Wine 14.7% alc., 300 bottles, \$95 (2 bottle limit). The Generations red wine is sourced from De La Montonya's vineyards in Sonoma County (currently over 160 acres). It is composed of 75% Pinot Noir, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Pinot Meunier. A deep, richly colored wine with a toasty nose of dark stone fruits. Black raspberry, mocha and a hint of tobacco march on the palate. More Pinot in the mid-palate and more Cab on the finish. Even better the next day when the fruit becomes sweeter and more lush.



Dennis De La Montonya (the one with hair to the right) is the type of winemaker you love to hang out with. Unpretentious and humorous, with a twinkle in his eye, he never takes himself or his wines too seriously, although the wines are produced with the utmost care and attention. He has won his share of awards and medals after only a short few years of operation, but he keeps them in a drawer in the tasting room. The last thing he wants you to do is buy one of his wines because it won an award. He prefers you purchase something you like to drink, and with 32 different wines offered (most in 50 to 250 case lots), it is easy to find a wine that appeals. I do not think there is another vintner in the Russian River Valley that offers so many choices, including Primitivo, Zinfandel, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Cabernet, Pinot Meunier, Tempranillo, Petite Sirah, Rosé, and Chardonnay, Fumé Blanc, Pinot Gris and more. And just to make things fun, he bottles a "Pin Up" series of wines featuring attractive gals in pin-up poses on the front labels (not government approved) for sale only at the winery.

De La Montanya Estate Vineyards & Winery was profiled in a previous PinotFile (Vol 5, Issue 24). The barn-inspired tasting room and winery is located on Foreman Lane just off of Westside Road, a mere three miles from Healdsburg. Dennis has installed a new wood-burning pizza oven on the premises and has a picnic area shaded by mature apple trees. He also rents out an adjacent lodging known as the "Little Yellow Cottage," which has all of the comforts of home adjacent to his Felta Zinfandel Vineyard (for information contact Tina De La Montanya at tina@dmlwine.com). The winery's website is dmlwine.com.

When I popped into Dennis's tasting room last week, he knew it wasn't to taste his Tempranillo. Lucky for me, he had recently bottled his 2005 lineup of five Pinot Noirs and one Pinot Meunier and we tasted through them along with his entire lineup of wines. The Pinot Noirs are not officially released and Dennis advises customers not to drink them now if they insist on purchasing them. Dennis gave me the open bottles to take home, and I tasted through them the next day along with friends who were traveling with me. I can give some preliminary comments about the wines, but they are still closed and unevolved from the recent bottling. Overall, I was very favorably impressed and these are wines to seek out. The order in which the wines were served to us by Dennis turned out to be about the order of preference and that order is duplicated below. I also tasted a few Pinot Noirs from barrel from the recent 2006 vintage. Infanticide for sure, but the 2006 Flying Rooster Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir will be outrageous. A word here also about the overall style of De La Montanya Pinot Noirs. Dennis, himself, has no aversion to big, bold wines, but his style is more one of restraint, elegance and finesse intended to pair nicely with food. Power in a velvet glove if you catch my drift. Aging is usually 11 months in 40% or less new oak. Almost entirely, the wines are sold through the tasting room, a mailing list, and the winery wine clubs. Prices are very sensible.

2005 Flying Red Rooster Sonoma Coast Red Wine 14.7% alc., \$20. 80% Pinot Noir, 10% Syrah, and 10% Cabernet Franc. This is an every-day drinker, not intended for serious pinotphiles. It is pleasant enough, but finishes more like a Syrah than a Pinot.

2005 De La Montanya Estate Vineyards Pinot Meunier 13.4% alc., 72 cases, \$34. I tasted this wine from barrel last year and it was flush with fruit. Currently it is a little closed, especially the aromatics. There is very decent tart cherries, cranberries, red licorice, and raspberries in the flavor profile along with some smoke from oak. The wine has lively acidity.

2005 De La Montanya Tina's Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 307 cases, \$32. 75% Pommard and 25% Dijon clones. This is a lightly-hued Pinot which needs some time in the bottle to flash more fruit structure. The spicy nose is very appealing. The most feminine Pinot in the lineup.

2005 De La Montanya Christine's Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 13.8% alc., 241 cases, \$38. This beauty hits you immediately with a nose of bright cherries and floral notes. A substantial mouth feel and a long finish make this wine very promising.

2005 De La Montanya Flying Rooster Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., 47 cases, \$36. This could turn out to be the star of the lineup. It is well balanced, silky, and finishes with plush Pinot fruits and spice. There is some earthiness and tea notes here as well. Plenty of structure, but light on its feet. A wine for Pinot lovers.

2005 De La Montanya Reserve Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.7%, 48 cases, \$42. Pommard, and Dijon 777 clones, this is sourced from Tina's Vineyard. The difference is this one is aged in 90% new oak (according to Dennis but label says 50%). This is the Pamela Anderson in the lineup. Voluptuous fruit in the nose and on the palate. Noticeable vanilla and toast on the nose. A 'wow' finish of big plummy raspberry infused fruit. Very showy right now. Parkeresque.

All of the wines including the Generations DLM-Journey Charity wine may be ordered by phoning 707-433-3711. If possible, plan to visit and set up an appointment with Dennis (dennis@dmlwine.com).

Twomey Cellars Pinot Noir



Originally, Twomey Cellars was the dream of owners Raymond Twomey Duncan and his family to employ a labor-intensive approach (*soutirage* traditional) utilized by the classified growths in Bordeaux to make a Napa Valley Merlot of great distinction from a single vineyard, Soda Canyon Ranch. The *soutirage traditional* is a slow process of decanting the wine from one barrel to another without the use of pumps. The wine transfers by gravity using specially-constructed barrels from France. Duncan was a long time owner of Silver Oak Cellars and the winemaker, Daniel Baron, spent considerable time in Pomerol and St. Emilion so the principals were well-qualified to produce this exceptional wine. Angela Kessler, who trained in France, is the assistant winemaker. The Twomey Merlot was released initially in 2000 and was well-received.

In 2001, Duncan leased nine acres on Westside Road in the Russian River Valley. Winemaker Daniel Baron worked closely with Ray Duncan's sons, Tim and David, to craft a Pinot Noir. Initially a special drainage system was installed in the vineyard and seven of nine acres were planted to a mixture of Pommard and Dijon clones. The remaining two acres had been planted to Martini Clone in 1989 and were used solely in the first two vintages of Twomey Pinot Noir. The nine acres are farmed meticulously with rigorous canopy management and crop thinning. The 2004 vintage is the third Pinot Noir made by Twomey Cellars and marks the first time that fruit from the new plantings were included in the blend.

Whole clusters were added to open-top fermenters and a cold soak ensued. During fermentation, punch downs were carried out every six hours. The wines were pressed in a small basket press and transferred to French Burgundy barrels where they completed malolactic fermentation. The Burgundy barrels were chosen because they are slightly rounder and have thicker staves to create a gentler aeration than thin-staved barrels. The wine was aged in barrel for 16 months (8 months of which was "sur lies"). The wine was bottled in January, 2006 and released for sale on July 1, 2006.

2004 Twomey Cellars Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 795 cases, \$45. This Pinot has a lovely mahogany color. It has a nose you could drink with notes of red cherries, rhubarb, herbs and oak. The style is elegant and the mouth feel is luxurious. The finish lingers like what I would imagine to be a multiple orgasm and features sweet Jolly Rancher cherry, cola, spice and toast. Heaven-sent.

Twomey Cellars tasting room is open Monday through Saturday from 9-4. It is located two miles south of Calistoga at the intersection of Highway 29 and Dunaweal Lane (1183 Dunaweal Lane). Tastings, including a Twomey tasting glass, are \$5. The phone is 800-505-4850. The Twomey Pinot Noir may be purchased there, There is limited retail distribution. The wine is not for sale on the winery's website (www.twomecellars.com), with only a brief mention of the wine on the site. It takes some sleuthing to grab onto, but worth the effort.

The Estate Bartley Legend Exposed

Dale Bartley is a home winemaker of some repute in the town of San Rafael, California. He has produced some notable Pinot Noirs from his estate's garage where "the mix of concrete, no soil, and high elevation exist to provide ideal conditions for garbage can winemaking." Earlier this year, I put out the call from *PinotFile* readers to submit their original features for publication. Dale's piece, entitled Pinot Noir Excalibur, The Stuff From Which Legends Grow," humorously detailed his devotion to Pinot Noir and his wine making adventures. I have met Dale and tasted his Pinot Noirs which are very credible and perceived him as a true pinotophile. Because his article was the best of all of those submitted, I awarded him a treasured PinotFile baseball cap and a PinotFile t-shirt to proudly wear.

Imagine my vexation on a recent trip to Marin County when I discovered he was an imposter. A group of us had gathered at winegrower Mark Pasternak's ranch home to taste through most all of the current releases of Pinot Noir from multiple producers in Marin County. The lineup included Dale's 2005 Excalibur Pinot Noir. Unbeknownst to me, Dale was handing out The Estate Barley 2005 Armanino Vineyard "Zinfromdale," a Zinfandel he was aging in the trunk of his Acura. I only found out later that he told my friends they could easily soak off the label so I wouldn't know. A closet Zin maker! And astonishingly, he was touting this wine as the best wine he had ever made. Sadly, he still has the PinotFile cap and t-shirt and I have no legal grounds to recover them. If you should see this imposter at a wine tasting event, do not listen to the wine b.s. he will toss around.

I did sample his "Zinfromdale" and I must admit, it was the best Estate Bartley wine I have ever tasted. I think Dale has a real future with Zin. You just never know about people these days.

More Screwtop Notes

Reader Mark Finley writes about his screwtop experience. Several years ago he and his brother heard that Federated was blowing out 375 ml bottles of Glenmorangie Scotch for \$10 a bottle. They went down to the store and cleaned them out. Soon thereafter, UCLA quit selling beer at their football games, so Mark and his buddy hit upon the idea to use these empty screwtop bottles to sneak wine into the games. After a few years, they switched to some plastic flasks that were a little larger and fit better down their pants. Mark also found that the bottles worked well to store the remaining wine in an opened 750 ml bottle. Eventually the tops gave out and he tossed the bottles— a big mistake. He bought some wine half bottles with screwtops to replace them, but they were tinted and this made it difficult to pour the wine to the top unless he was in bright light. He has discovered that the screwtops on all of these bottles are pretty much interchangeable, but he wishes he had held onto those clear glass Glenmorangies.

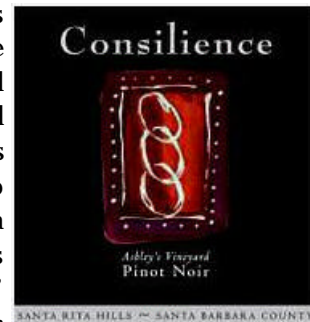
Quarterly Review of Wines (Winter, 2002/2003) published some funny opinions of wine drinkers on screwcaps. One unrepentant cork-sniffer said, "It's ghastly. What's next, Chateau Yquem in pop-top cans and foie gras T.V. dinners?" From a sommelier, "It was bad enough being referred to as a 'cork dork,' now they are going to call me a 'screw ball.' Another comment was "I hate loud popping noises. You know what I'm saying? They give me the willies. A cork pops, and I think it's Big Vinnie coming to get me. Give me a screwcap any time." And finally, from an emergency room worker: Until recently, we had a lot of sommeliers coming in with separated shoulders and dislocated elbows from pulling too hard on their corkscrews. It was heart-rending. But now, with screwcaps, they come in mostly with cramped fingers and minor wrist sprains. So the severity of the injuries has gone way down.

Root's Cellar: Pinot Noir Shrine

Paul Root has been a wine retailer since, well, Prohibition, I think. He takes the time to know the small producers and most of his insider offerings are scooped up by an eager clientele before the word gets out through the stodgy wine publications. I cannot emphasize enough that Paul sells no wine before it is time to drink up the good stuff. No crapola, no second bottlings of orphan juice, no losers. He can be found at Root's Cellar, 1401 E Grove Street, Healdsburg, California. Sign up for his e-mail alerts at www.rootscellar.com (don't be turned off by the website— Paul is planning a make-over) or call 1-866-808-0124. Here are a few recent boxes of juice that will warm any pinotphile's heart. I can't promise you any of the wines are still available.

2005 Molnar Family Vineyards Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Michael Terrien is the winemaker and general manager of Hanzell Vineyards who were one of the first credible Pinot Noir producers in California. He has partnered with Peter and Arpad Molnar to create Molnar Family Vineyards with the goal of producing ultra-premium wine from the Carneros region. The Molnars own Budapest Kadar, a cooerage of some renown in Budapest where they have complete control over every barrel made for the Molnar Family lineup of wines. The family also owns and manages Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards in Carneros (Poseidon Vineyards). Paul says their wines have been a secret and not "Parkerized" or "Expectorated" as yet. Paul is offering a mixed case of the 2005 Molnar Family Vineyards Pinot Noir and Chardonnay for a discounted \$285 (Paul how do you pay for the repairs on your 1972 Accord?). Paul has sampled the Pinot and says "the Budapesti Kadar oak infuses the wine with a unique spice flavor profile that is indigenous to the forests of Budapest." He also says "he can pick out Hungarian oak in the nose of a wine as there is a unique blend of sweet clove, cinnamon and nutmeg followed by unmistakable vanilla which is not found in either French or American barrels." Paul can also smell competing retailers a mile away who are trying to steal his allocation.

2005 Consilience Pinot Noirs. Paul tried to explain the word consilience as "an abstract interpretation of an old world scientific term used to unite the various branches of a complex and multi-dimensional theory." The label depicts a chain of three, white inter-connected rings on a red background bordered by four white streaks surrounded by 29 dots. The human skull is composed of 29 bones, the atomic number for copper is 29 and so on and so forth. What really matters is that they make good wine at their place in Santa Barbara County and none of the wines are "weak-kneed." There are rumors of their sign in Los Olivos that states, "Proudly Not Featured in 'Sideways'." Paul is offering a mixed case of the 2005 Consilience Bien Nacido Pinot Noir and 2005 Consilience Santa Barbara Pinot Noir for \$410. Paul swore the wines were terrific, but he was all lathered up at the time starring at those seriously heavy, low-shouldered, sexy Burgundy-styled bottles.



2004 Robert Mueller Emily's Cuvee Pinot Noir and 2004 Lemelson Thea's Willamette Valley Pinot Noir. The Mueller Pinot is Paul's "I told you so wine." He reviewed it and eagerly sold out of it over 3 months before the Speculator gave it a score of 93. He is offering 4 bottles of this impossible to find Pinot with 8 bottles of the Lemelson which also was a Speculator favorite with a score of 92. The Lemelson won a big local Sonoma Pinot tasting attended by amateurs and wine-savvy types. 93 and 92 makes 185. Double that and you have 390. Paul is charging \$400 which includes his \$10 profit.



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Now, go drink the good stuff!

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Domaine Serene Releases Coeur Blanc

Many wine novices think that the juice of red grapes like Pinot Noir is red. The truth is that it is close to white in color. The red wine in Pinot Noir comes from the pigments in the skins of the grape. A light pink rosé is produced from limiting the contact between the pulp and juice of the grapes and the skins. It is possible to craft a white wine with red grapes if the contact with the grape skins is very limited so only the white juice is utilized.

Domaine Serene in Dayton, Oregon, has produced a limited amount of a fine white wine made with estate grown Pinot Noir grapes called Coeur Blanc ('kooor blahnk'). After harvesting the grapes, they are gently whole-cluster pressed and the resulting "white heart" juice is expressed. Less than half of the available juice is taken from the grapes. The juice is barrel fermented in French oak and aged on the lees for 15 months. The wine is further aged one year in bottle before release. This is a very unique wine that is both rare and elegant in style.

The winemaker's comments about the flavor profile include "rich and complex, displaying flavors ranging from strawberries, cherries and citrus to marzipan, flint and mineral." Kevin M. Vogt, MS, of Delmonico Steakhouse at the Venetian Resort in Las Vegas said, "True to its 'heart' the Coeur Blanc has weight and body without being heavy or cloying. The penetrating fruit cuts a swath across your tongue with laser-like precision and freshness. What a beautiful alternative to Chardonnay." Robert Smith, MS, of Picasso Restaurant in Las Vegas gushed, "This wine is quite wonderful and very interesting. The flavor components are stunning. I closed my eyes, and thought Pinot Noir (Rouge), but then again Blanc."

Only 75 six-bottle cases are available on pre-release order from the winery at \$60 per bottle. The **Domaine Serene** phone number is 1-866-864-6555, ext. 212. The winery will be open to the public Thanksgiving Weekend, November 24th and 25th, 6555 Hilltop Lane, Dayton, Oregon (Willamette Valley).