

**Too Much of a
Good Pinot is
Barely Just
Enough**

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotaficionados

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Donum Estate: *The New Carneros*

It was the early 1800s while California was under Mexican jurisdiction that Mexico's Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo awarded large land grants to allow settlement of the Northern Frontier north of San Francisco. The Carneros region was within the original boundaries of four of the land grants: Rincon de los Carneros, Entre Napa, Nuichica, and Petaluma. The land grants were rapidly subdivided and by the 1840s there was an influx of settlers of American, German, French and Irish heritage drawn by the mild climate and fertile lands. Sheep and cattle ranches thrived alongside fields of wine grapes, pears, plums and apples. The region became known as Los Carneros (Spanish for sheep). The diverse frontier population soon rebelled against Mexican rule and in the famous Bear Flag Revolt of 1846, California briefly became an independent republic.

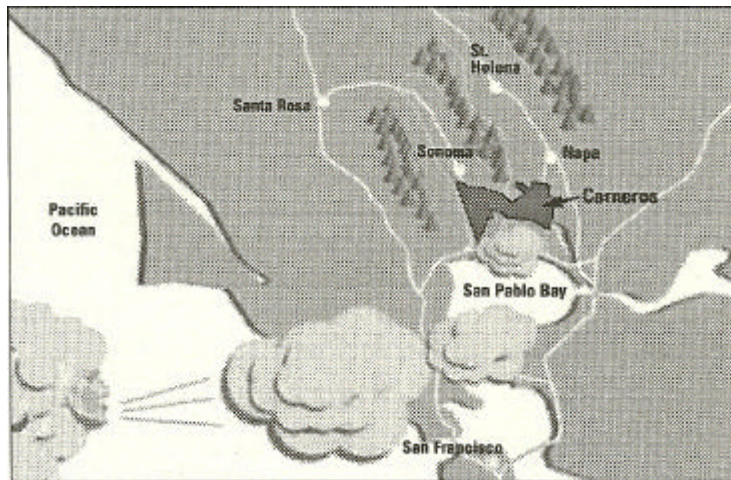
Wine historian William Heintz of Sonoma has stated that Carneros may be the second oldest vineyard area in Northern California dating to the late 1830s. One of the largest vineyards in the 1800s was the noted Stanly Ranch (> 300 acres). Andre Tschelistcheff (winemaker at Beaulieu Vineyards at the time) and Louis M. Martini were the first modern vintners to realize the potential in Carneros for fine wine grapes and purchased grapes from the Stanly Ranch in the 1930s. Martini did extensive Pinot Noir and Chardonnay clonal experimentation in Carneros which led to the Chardonnay clone 108 now widely planted in California today.

Carneros received appellation status in 1983 and is the only AVA in California that overlaps two others in different counties (Napa and Sonoma). It was the first California AVA based on climate rather than geography. In 1983 there were few wineries in Carneros: Acacia, Bouchaine, Buena Vista, Carneros Creek, and Saintsbury. Despite its new-found appellation status, Carneros struggled for recognition against its more well-known neighbors, Napa and Sonoma. Many Napa and Sonoma wineries invested in vast acres of vineyard land in Carneros (Beaulieu Vineyards, Clos du Val, Clos Pegase, Robert Mondavi, St. Clement) and Carneros soon became little more than a silent supplier for these well-known wineries centered in more prestigious appellations. Today, mergers and consolidations have created very large corporate ownership in Carneros, with Allied-Domecq, Constellation Brands, Diageo and Fosters leading the way. There is, however, a renaissance occurring today in the Carneros with smaller boutique producers committed to ultra-premium Pinot Noir that can compete with the best from the more visible appellations of California such as the Santa Rita Hills and

The former Carneros Quality Alliance, formed in 1983, has been renamed The Carneros Wine Alliance, with a new logo and a new Board of Directors. For information: www.carneros.com.

Russian River Valley. Donum Estate and Robert Stemmler are leaders in this movement. Etude has committed to an estate Pinot Noir model after purchasing grapes for many years. Saintsbury is now releasing several vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs in addition to their Reserve Pinot Noir that has been so adored through the years. Newer names are visible such as Byron Kosuge Wines, Carneros Della Notte, Mahoney Vineyards, Paradise Vineyard, and Talisman. The Carneros Pinot Noirs of Acacia, Ancien, MacRostie, Paul Hobbs, Schug and Truchard have been consistently fine examples for this region.

Carneros straddles the southernmost reaches of both Napa and Sonoma. The large (37,000 acres, 9,000 acres planted) region extends from the Sonoma Mountains in the west to the Napa River in the east, and from the Mayacamas Mountains in the north to the Southern Pacific Railroad line in the south. The most distinguishing feature of the appellation is its strong maritime climatic influence. Carneros is an unshielded land open to the nearby Pacific Ocean and adjacent San Pablo Bay (the northernmost reaches of the San Francisco Bay). The result is a moderate climate with adequate sunshine, low rainfall, and plenty of fog and cooling breezes. Water needs are often met by short frequent irrigations throughout the growing season. The soils are dense, shallow (about 3 feet), with high clay content, and low to moderate fertility. The soils and microclimate cause the vines to struggle and yields are low. The growing season is long. This scenario suits Chardonnay and Pinot Noir just fine. The eastern and northern parts of Carneros are significantly warmer (too warm for Pinot Noir), and here Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah prosper.



Carneros has typically been the area one drives through to get to Napa or Sonoma. The landscape is somewhat barren with only a few towering eucalyptus trees that were planted to stem the winds from the Bay. Most wineries are not visible from the main highways that traverse the region. However, if one takes the time to explore the back roads, the beautiful vistas of this area can truly be remarkable. Most of the sheep have long disappeared, but the majestic vineyards planted on undulating hillsides are a welcome sight to wine lovers.

A new resort, the Carneros Inn, is part of the gentrification of Carneros. Most of Carneros is like Napa was many years ago, but change is evident. If you do visit Carneros, and I highly recommend you explore the region, consider a stay at this classy spot. Opened in late 2003, it is located on 27 acres. Currently, there are 86 guest cottages and private homes (expansion is currently underway). On the outside, the cottages are built to compliment rather than clash with the rustic locale and have board and batten exteriors with corrugated metal roofs. Inside, they are luxurious and modern in every way. There is a Hilltop Restaurant for guests only featuring the gourmet cuisine of chef Kimball Jones and a wine list well-stocked with Carneros wines. A casual restaurant, the Boonfly Café, is open to guests and outsiders. An infinity-edged pool, views of surrounding vineyards, and a full spa complete the picture. Rates are \$455-\$1,250 a night. The phone is 888-400-9000. If you have the dinero, you will be very happy here.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Donum Estate, walking the vineyards with winegrower and president Anne Moller-Racke, and tasting through two recent vintages of this estate's Pinot Noir.



Anne is a native of Oberwesel, Germany who came to Sonoma 25 years ago. She gained invaluable experience working with wine authorities like Dr. Phil Freese, Andre Tchelistcheff and Dr. Paul Skinner. In 1983 she was instrumental in obtaining appellation status for Carneros and forming the Carneros Quality Alliance. That same year, she became Vineyard Manager for Buena Vista Carneros and in 1997 was promoted to Vice President of Vineyard Operations. Buena Vista's holdings in Carneros grew from 540 acres in 1981 to 935 planted acres in 1991 under her direction. Besides Buena Vista, these vineyards supplied fruit to several prominent local producers such as Etude, Sterling and Acacia. In more recent years, she has supervised extensive replanting of Buena Vista's vast holdings. With the sale of Buena Vista to Allied Domecq in 2001, the Racke family of Germany split off 250 acres of the Buena Vista Estate to form Donum Estate and grow all of the grapes for the rejuvenated Robert Stemmler label. The Donum Estate (*donum* translates from latin to 'gift' referring to grapes as a gift of the land) is devoted solely to a single Carneros estate Pinot Noir while the Robert Stemmler label produces Pinot Noir from both Carneros and the Russian River Valley as well as a fine Carneros Chardonnay. Anne is now the vineyard manager and president of Donum Estate.

The Donum Estate consists of 70 acres of the former Tula Vista Vineyard and a separate 56-acre Ferguson Block Vineyard located a mile away. Both are on the rolling hillsides north of Ramal Road. Anne considers these two vineyards the "Grand Crus" of her property. The quality of the wines made from these two vineyards holds true vintage after vintage. She values all of her vineyards, but remarks, "not everyone can grow up to be president!" The history of the Donum vineyard is quite unique. In the late 1980s, Anne was having difficulty locating California rootstock for plantings. She contacted a fellow German ex-patriot in the Finger Lakes region of New York, Hermann J. Wiemer, who sold her 3309 rootstock from his extensive nursery in 1989 and 1990. Along with the rootstock, she obtained Roederer budwood, a Pinot Noir still wine clone. This clone's true origins remain clouded and several viticulturalists do not feel it is the same as other Roederer clones from France such as those planted in the Anderson Valley. The berries are very small with thick skins, much like blueberries. To Anne, these grapes are "beautiful." This clone has become named the Donum clone. The Donum vineyard also contains several other clonal selections including Calera, Hanzell, Swan and Dijon 777. Anne's years of experience farming grapes in Carneros have taught her what Pinot Noir selections do best in her vineyard site. She says, "Dijon clones just don't perform here. Dijon clones seem better suited to the Russian River Valley and some other Carneros sites."



The Donum Vineyard is pictured above. The vines are impeccably farmed here. Trellising is 5 wire vertical. Vine density is 6x8 908 vine/acre. Anne suckers early (bringing the normal 2-3 shoots per bud down to 1 shoot per bud) so that shoot size is uniform. Minimal leafing is employed for protection of the grapes from the sun. Primarily, the lateral canopy is removed to provide filtered sunlight. Anne has found through numerous trials that overleafing is undesirable and leads to premature ripening of the grapes. Irrigation is kept to a minimum. "We don't want the vines to be too happy," she laughs.

The Ferguson Block Vineyard was planted in 1974 to a Martini selection. Grafted onto St. George rootstock, it has proven to be phylloxera-proof, but the thick, gnarled vines are "funky" and virused and Anne works hard to get yields of one ton per acre from these treasured vines. The Ferguson Block grapes are used in a vineyard-designate Robert Stemmler bottling and a small portion is included in the Donum Estate Pinot Noir in most years (2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005, but not 2002). The virused wines of the Ferguson Block add mouthfeel and perfume to the Donum Estate Pinot Noir.

After years of farming large acreage for Buena Vista, Anne now has the luxury of practicing precision viticulture. With large vineyards, the winegrower is usually forced to ignore the vast variation in their fields. Every vine is basically farmed the same way, regardless of its location in the vineyard. The truth is, in any vineyard there is a diverse terrain and multiple exposures. Now she can study and attend to every row, every vine. She employs a global positioning system (GPS) to map out the best locations and study yields from different parts of her vineyard. She can hold back irrigation, for example, in some rows at veraison to push ripening. She is able to employ a flexible picking schedule. In 2005, for example, she was able to spread out harvest over a month's time.. As Anne comments, "I have the luxury of pushing quality all the way through since it is a small operation - what I like to refer to as playing around."

Anne is very proud of her Carneros heritage. She talks about the old days here when the land was cheap, large parcels were easily available, and land was easy to develop. Prime grapes sold for only \$600 per ton, and often went into sparkling or anonymously blended wines. Now the scene has changed completely. It is taken time to understand the sites and plant the appropriate selections. Anne strongly feels "Carneros can deliver." Complexity and layering are typical of Carneros. She, herself, drinks primarily Pinot Noir and is constantly sampling wines from other appellations. The Donum Estate Pinot Noir, when matched up blind against Pinot Noirs from other regions, and tasted by wine professionals and winemakers, has performed extremely well. Anne told me a group of Masters of Wine visited recently and told her that Donum Estate Pinot Noir was more Burgundian than many other California Pinot Noirs. Although Donum Estate Pinot Noir has quickly become a vanguard wine for the region, you will not find her resting on her laurels. She admits to being "constantly on a quest with Pinot."

The situation at Donum Estate is quite unique for as a grower, Anne also has a strong voice in the wine-making as well. In many operations, the winemaker walks into the vineyard at the end of the growing season and decides when to pick. As Anne says, "You only pull the trigger once. If you are intimately familiar with the vineyard, you can make a better decision." Anne started the Donum project with noted Carneros winemaker, Ken Bernard. She had sold him fruit for years for his own label, Ancien. Ken consulted the first few years, but it was necessary to bring on a full-time winemaker. Ken knew another Ken who had worked in Mew Zealand and the Willamette Valley of Oregon (Kenneth Juhasz, pronounced 'uhaas') and recommended him for the job. Anne and Kenneth clicked and the partnership began in 2002. Kenneth is an energetic winemaker with a fondness for Pinot Noir and his skills are apparent in the superb wines he has vinified. Ken Bernard still works with the staff on blending decisions for Donum Estate as well as acts as a consultant for the Robert Stemmler label. Photo below is of Anne and Kenneth.



Noted architects Johnson Fain Partners (Opus One, Byron) have drawn up plans for a modern new winery on the Donum Estate but it is on hold for now. Currently the wine is made at a custom crush facility (Copain) in Santa Rosa.

A few words about Robert Stemmler are in order also. In the early 1980s, Robert Stemmler was considered among the best producers of Pinot Noir in California (albeit there were a paucity of quality producers at the time). His first release in 1982 garnered more awards than any other wine in America for a first-release Pinot Noir. He was also the first to produce a Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, long before it became a popular appellation. Robert Stemmler was a German who trained at Bad Kreuznach Wine College in Germany in 1952. After immigrating to the United States, he became a member of the Charles Krug winemaking team in 1961. In 1970, he was appointed winemaker at Simi Winery and subsequently consulted with a number of prominent Napa wineries including Raymond and St. Clement. He founded Robert Stemmler Winery in 1976. For many years, the winery only produced Pinot Noir. Stemmler retired in 1989. Starting in 1999, consulting winemaker Ken Bernard expanded the portfolio to include a number of other varietals as well as appellation-driven Pinot Noirs from Carneros and the Russian River Valley. Currently there is an Estate Pinot Noir from Carneros (a blend

of several vineyards), Nugent Vineyard Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley, a Frederick Block Vineyard Carneros Pinot Noir, and a crisp-styled Carneros Chardonnay. Current production is 10,000 cases annually. Since its beginning, the Robert Stemmler Winery has adorned the label of its wines with the "Le Vendange," a Flemish tapestry created in the 1300s. A tasting room is located on the historic Sonoma Square (Enoteca) which is open daily.

The following wines were all tasted at the Donum Estate. Additionally, the 2002 and 2003 Donum Estate Pinot Noirs were tasted at my residence in my usual tasting fashion, that is, over several hours with and without food. I also retasted the 2003 vintage at Pinot Days. There is a lot of European sensibility and personality behind these wines. I highly recommend them.

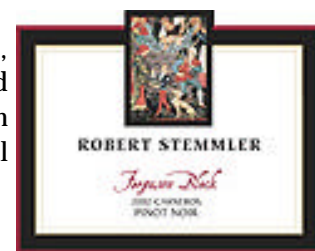
2002 Donum Estate Carneros Pinot Noir 14.4% alc., 458 cases, \$60. The grapes were 100% destemmed, cold soaked for 4 days, aged on the lees in 75% new French oak for 11 months. The 2002 growing season was moderate until September when record heat spikes began and harvest started. Yields were 4 lbs/vine, 1.8 tons/acre. 100% estate fruit. With some air time, the aromatics open up beautifully with deep, black cherry essence, restrained toasty oak notes, and leather highlights. This wine is still a baby, tight and concentrated. The opulent and layered dark fruits are enhanced with a deft touch of oak. The wine finishes with fine tannins which will mature with time in the cellar.



2003 Donum Estate Carneros Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., 575 cases, \$60. Cool weather at bloom caused light set and yields were low (4.14 lbs/vine, 1.88 tons/acre). Harvest was started on September 17 and was completed in 7 days. The winemaking regimen was the same as for the 2002 vintage. 100% estate fruit. This wine took time to come around and was kept in the bottle longer than usual before release (January, 2006). Anne thought maybe she had farmed too dry this vintage but the wine has turned out fine. This wine is all about texture. Anne muses, "Texture is hard to get in Pinot Noir -that rich middle - perfume, flavors and fine tannins are much easier to get." There is plenty of structure and tannin in this wine, but it has that charming delicacy to the flavors and the mouthfeel that only Pinot Noir can offer. The nose entices with dark crushed berries, spice, herbs and a hint of oak. There are layers of complex flavors here including luscious dark fruits, exotic woods, and mushrooms. A distinctively earthy and complete Pinot Noir that has that Pinot fabulousity.

2004 Donum Estate Carneros Pinot Noir I was fortunate to be one of the first to try this wine which was bottled in January, 2006. During blending trials it was found that the addition of 10% Ferguson Block fruit to the estate juice produced the preferred wine. This is an outrageous Pinot. The perfume of spicy cherries, licorice and sandalwood is intoxicating. A little less earthy and more fruit-forward than the 2003, it is perfectly balanced. The peacock tail at the finish seems to linger forever. Heaven sent.

2003 Robert Stemmler Ferguson Block Carneros Pinot Noir 250 cases, \$45, sold out. The aromatics are unique with eucalyptus, herbs and dried cherries. Dark fruits dominate the rich, round palate. The tangy finish is plush with dark cherries, plums and spice, and a lively acidity. This Pinot is a real lip smacker and brings the Robert Stemmler label to a very lofty level.



Donum Estate Pinot Noir may be ordered direct from the winery on the website at www.thedonumestate.com or by phoning 1-707-939-2290. Visits to Donum Estate are by appointment. Robert Stemmler wines may be sourced online at www.robertstemmlerwinery.com. Stemmler has a tasting room on the historic Sonoma Square (Enoteca) which is open daily.

Fortitude Wines: *Endangered Varietals*

Winemaker Tony Soter has always been a champion of dedicated small, family grape farmers and heritage vineyards. His unique Etude Heirloom Pinot Noir is produced from Pinot Noir clones that most vintners had given up on because their yields were very low and the grapes were prone to diseases and other farming challenges. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Tony, winemaker Jon Priest of Etude, and viticulturist Franci Ashton found small blocks of “endangered” varietals, like Semillon, Valdiguié (Napa Gamay), Charbono, and Carignane. In 2004 and 2005, Etude obtained enough grapes to launch a new label, Fortitude Wines, as a tribute to the small family farmers who pioneered California wine grape growing. As Tony says, “When you meet a grower whose family has been doing it through three generations, and who’ve stuck it out through Prohibition, the Depression, Phylloxera, and all the economic ups and downs, you can’t help but be humbled...and inspired. Wine is not a lifestyle to these families, it’s a living.”

The initial releases (slated for late July) include: **2004 Fortitude Frediani Field Blend** which is a blend of Charbono (66%), Zinfandel (14%), Carignane (15%), and Petite Sirah (5%) from 60+-year old vines grown in the Frediani family vineyard near Calistoga in the Napa Valley; **2005 Fortitude Frediani Rosé Valdiguié** made from 85% Valdiguié 30 year-old head-trained vines grown in the Frediani family vineyard near Calistoga blended with small amounts of Barbera, Tempranillo, Primitivo, and Syrah to add color, character and acidity; **2005 Fortitude Luvisi Semillon** which is 100% Semillon from 25-year-old vines grown in the Luvisi family vineyard near Calistoga; **2005 Fortitude Luvisi Very Old Vine Zinfandel**, a blend of 95% Zinfandel and 5% Petite Sirah from 90+-year-old vines grown in the Luvisi family vineyard near Calistoga.

The goal here is to produce wines in small quantities for everyday drinking that are “eminently suited to the table, with vibrant clarity of fruit expression and significantly less alcohol than many wines made today.” Winemaker Jon Priest says they will show a “yesteryear impression of ripeness, that is, ripe enough, but not overripe.” Like so many other things in life today, what’s old is new again. The wines will be reasonably priced (the Field Blend is \$28, the rosé and whites \$18). They will be produced at the new Etude Winery on Cuttings Wharf Road (formerly the Carneros Alambic brandy facility).

Don and Clarence Luvisi are both now in their sixties and like to hold meetings on the tailgate of their old pickup truck. Their grandfather, Jiovachino Luvisi came to the United States from Italy in the early 1890s. He planted the Luvisi Vineyard to Zinfandel grapes, earned enough money to buy out the previous owner and send for his wife, Davina. Don and Clarence’s father, Andrew, was the first Luvisi born on U.S. soil. Don and Clarence planted Semillon in the 1980s after tasting examples they liked in Australia. Now with 35 acres of vineyard, they continue to enjoy farming grapes.

Jim Frediani is a third generation Napa grape grower whose mother, Jeanne, at 85, still keeps all of the family books and has lived on the Frediani property in the same house since 1948. The Frediani family has farmed vineyards in the area since the early 1900s, when Jim’s grandfather, Abramo, immigrated to the United States from Italy. Jim and Jeanne Frediani today farm a 130-acre vineyard planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Valdiguié, and a block of 60+-year-old Charbono vines.

You are probably asking yourself by now, “Why is the Prince writing about varietals other than Pinot Noir?” Well, for a couple of reasons. First, I happen to enjoy obscure varietals such as Semillon and Valdoguié. Happily, the more off-beat the varietal, the cheaper the wine is likely to be. Secondly, like Jack Black said in the movie, *Nacho Libre*, “Sometimes you just feel like stretchy pants!”

Wine & Food Pairings: *Its About Time*

One of the latest trends in winery tasting rooms is the offering of small bites of food to complement the winery's wine offerings. The first place I ran into this was at Lynmar Winery in the Russian River Valley. In their new hospitality facility (pictured right), they employ a chef who produces appetizers that pair beautifully with Lynmar's Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs. The *Lynmar Experience* is available Friday thru Monday by reservation (707-829-3374) and other days by appointment. Four wines and four appetizers are offered for a very reasonable \$20. The setting, both indoors and out, is beautiful. 3909 Frei Road, Sebastopol.



The days are rapidly dwindling when a tasting room visit was met with either no food or a basket of bread fragments and maybe a few chunks of cheese. The consumer wants the full wine and food experience and charging for this does not seem to be a deterrent except to the busloads who frequent winery tasting rooms on weekends to drink rather than to taste.

St. Francis Winery at 100 Pythian Road, Santa Rosa (707-833-0242) has a well-known chef, Todd Muir, creating exceptional wine and food pairings daily. Their new tagline is, "Sonoma by the Sip. And by the Bite." Chateau St. Jean in the Sonoma Valley offers a *Wine and Food Experience* in which culinary pairings are matched with their wines. Reservations are required (707-833-4134). The historic Simi Winery at 16725 Healdsburg Avenue in Healdsburg offers private wine and artisan cheese pairings paired by Chef Eric Lee with Simi Sonoma County wines on Saturdays on their deck (reservations required, 707-473-3236).

J Vineyards & Winery has a rejuvenated Visitor Center where wine and food pairings are available daily from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM alfresco on the Garden Patio. 707-431-3646. They also have an exclusive Bubble Room open Friday through Monday from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM (707-431-5430 for reservations).

I am constantly reminded of that great quote by my friend, Sommelier Rene Chazottes: "Wine was made for drinking with food and when you have the perfect match - that's it - the experience will bring you to your knees."



Pinot Often the Choice on Wine Lists

Pinot Noir is still on a roll and is gaining on Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in popularity on restaurant wine lists. According to the recent *Wine & Spirits* United States Restaurant Poll, Pinot Noir is the most popular choice for white meats, the second choice (behind Chardonnay) for fish, and the third choice (behind Cabernet and Rhones) for red meats. The Poll points out that many diners coming to Pinot Noir first seek out styles that have a big, rich texture like the Cabernets and Merlots they are used to drinking. They soon discover, however, "that the most coveted bottles often contain a liquid that's transparent, relatively light in body for all the complexity of flavor it manages to sustain. Once the bridge has been crossed, few go back." The most popular restaurant Pinot Noirs are Merry Edwards (#1 for two years), David Bruce, Etude, Domaine Serene and Domaine Drouhin. Overall, California Pinot Noirs account for about 65% of sales, Oregon 29%, and Burgundy the remainder.

Blair Pethel: An American in Burgundy

I ran across a fascinating article in the April issue of *Fortune Small Business* about American entrepreneur Blair Pethel who has become a winegrower and producer in Burgundy. Pethel had longed for years to own a vineyard in Burgundy, but he was an unlikely candidate. He grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina and was trained as a concert pianist. He later switched to journalism and found a job in London where he could be closer to his beloved Burgundy. His transforming moment came there at a wine tasting event. He was sampling some Nuits St. George made by Patrice Rion and he quickly struck up a friendship with Rion.

Pethel began traveling frequently to Burgundy to visit Rion and in 1999 he helped out with the harvest at Rion's vineyards. He was transfixed and moved back to the United States where he plotted his return to Burgundy. He learned to speak French and brought French au pairs into his home for his sons. Finally, in 2003, he returned to Burgundy to buy a small amount of premier cru and grand cru property that he could farm himself. His first purchase was 1.2 acres in the grand cru vineyard Corton Charlemagne (\$1.35 million according to *FSB*). This famous red (Pinot Noir) and white (Chardonnay) vineyard is located in Aloxe-Corton in the Cote de Beaune (see map). He also obtained a half-acre in Chassagne-Montrachet for \$410,000. Currently he is renting space in Rion's cellar where he made his first wine, a 2004 Corton Charlemagne.

Before he could become a winery owner in France, he had to pass a ten month course at the Lycée Viticole de Beaune, all taught in French. Then he discovered that his small vineyard holdings could not yet support his family so he had to work for Patrice Rion and Jean-Mark Pillot (Chassagne Montrachet). He hopes eventually to produce 20,000 bottles from his vineyards and make additional wine from purchased grapes, all bottled under his label, Domaine Dublère (du Blair).

According to *FSB*, Pethel has spent \$1.7 million on his business. He is recruiting investors to raise another \$6 million to purchase more land. He is promising an 8% to 10% return when he is producing at full capacity. The promise is not without risk, however, as unexpected climatic events can greatly reduce his yields in any one vintage. But, you have to hand it to him. He has taken on a very difficult challenge and succeeded to date. Not unlike so many other dedicated winegrowers who have pursued their dream.




PrinceofPinot.com

Check out the book, *Marilyn Merlot and the Naked Grape* (\$17) by Peter May who examines wine names and images.

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In 1994 in California there were a total of 6,000 acres of Pinot Noir planted. By 2004, this had more than doubled to 17,000 acres. It is estimated by the end of 2006 there will be another 7,000 acres in production. A good portion of this increase is due to the large commitments to Pinot Noir made by wine industry giants, Gallo, Bronco, Beringer and Kendall-Jackson.



Central Coast Wine Trip with the Prince

Each year I organize a number of wine dinners and wine trips and most of the attendees are nearby friends. For this trip, I can accommodate around 30 people so I am opening it up to any member of the Crew. Here are the sketchy details. Transportation is on your own except for chartered buses to the barbecues.

Fri AM, August 18, tour of Casa Barranca in Ojai, one of five Greenes' bungalows in the USA done in the Arts & Crafts style and on the historical registry. Also tasting of the excellent Casa Barranca Pinot Noir. (casabarranca.com). Free

Check into hotel in Pismo Beach/Shell Beach in the afternoon of August 18. Most are staying in The Cliffs in Shell Beach (cliffsresort.com) and this will be our departure point. There are many hotels and motels close by in the area in various price ranges. Make your own reservations.

Late Fri afternoon the group will travel by small bus a short distance to Edna Valley to the 80 acre Wildwood Ranch (wildwood.com). Here, former Domaine Alfred winemaker, Mike Sinor, will host a barbecue featuring the wines of Wildwood and Sinor-LaValle (sinorlavallo.com). Plenty of Pinot and many other varietals including Syrah and Cab and whites.

Sat, August 19, depart via small bus for 35 min drive along the coast to the 200+ acre Bien Nacido Vineyard and Solomon Hills Vineyard. We will be hosted by the owners and vineyard managers, we will have a tour and tasting of multiple wines, many made by Orange County winemakers (Tantara, Odene, J Wilkes, Ambullneo, etc.). Also included is a barbecue at the historic adobe on the Bien Nacido property which is only open to very special guests. This is a very unique event for pinotaficionados.

Sun, August 20 sleep off the events, bask in the sun and head home. You can join in for one or two days. Your cost for the bus and two barbecues will be sensible. RSVP: e-mail the Prince at princeofpinot.com by August 11.