



PINOT DAYS NEWS

Discovering Pinot Noir from California and Beyond

December 2006

PINOT RAMBLINGS

2005 California Pinot Noir Barrel Report Get ready for the best vintage since 1995

I have been buzzing around the RRV and Sonoma Coast the past 6 months doing barrel samples of many of the '05 pinot noirs. First, the good news. This vintage will live up to the hype as one of the best ever, although there are many caveats to this statement. In Russian River Valley, Anderson Valley, Carneros, Santa Cruz Mountains and Santa Lucia Highlands, the wines are a traditionalist's dream, with firm acidity, tempered red fruits, and balance, balance, balance.

The Sonoma Coast was crushed by May rains and many of the "fringe" vineyards in the true Sonoma Coast, where weather can be volatile, lost their complete crops when grapes did not set. Others had so much shatter that sometimes clusters had just a few berries and looked like skeletons. For the vineyards that suffered partial shatter, the grapes were concentrated and overblown, which produced fairly big wines that were reminiscent of a hot-weather vintage like 2004. The difference was the grapes were physiologically ripe, and therefore complete. But those of you who are expecting a more traditional and elegant wine from the true Sonoma Coast will be disappointed, as most are big, flavorful, and will need time.

And for those who prefer the more robust style of a modern pinot, you will probably be taken aback by the first few tastes of your favorite producer. My guess is we will hear descriptors like 'lean',
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WINERY PROFILE

Rhys Winery—Santa Cruz Mountains Potential Classics at a very young age

(This profile was written over a year ago but I never published it. Now that the Rhys wines have been released, I thought this was a good time to tell everyone about Rhys. After all, the wines are sold out!)

Kevin Harvey, owner of Rhys and a regular contributor to the Robert Parker Wine Chat Forum, invited some of the board pinot-geeks up to the property for a day-long visit to the vineyards and then much more. Unfortunately, Lisa and I did not get to participate in the "much more," which was a fabulous dinner at the winery, but we did have the pleasure of visiting all of the vineyards and then tasting through the lineup of future release pinots.

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'diluted' or 'light' more often than not from those who cut their proverbial pinot teeth on modern producers in the past 2-3 vintages.

Below are my tasting notes covering the barrel samples I have tasted over the past 5 months. This is by no means a comprehensive tasting, but rather a selective tasting of wineries that I enjoy and have access to from my home base. Pinot Days was an excellent opportunity to taste wines from down south as well. (Unfortunately, I had to cancel my trip to the southern appellations in July and did not get to taste many of the wines I had hoped to include in this report.)

Four wineries, Kosta Browne, Siduri, Freeman and Joseph Swan, have hit it out of the park with this vintage. I have not had the opportunity to try many of the '01s from Kosta Browne, so since my history with their wines comes from 3 rather hot and forward vintages (2002, 2003 and 2004), 2005 marks my first real experience with Michael making a more elegant vintage. Interestingly, Michael didn't cruise through the vineyard making wines the way he made them in the past.

It would have been an easy decision to do so since he has had so much success with the past three vintages, but that's not in the nature of the "great experimenter." Instead, Michael did 100% whole cluster with Garys', used a rotating barrel fermenter on a portion of his Koplein Vineyard, and played with his oak program. The results are simply amazing and some of the best California Pinots I have ever tasted. I await the final blending, Michael's greatest skill, with great anticipation. As the Troll says, "If the 2004's scored 98 points, these will be in the 110 range."

I was also amazed with all of the Siduri pinots (and a couple of the chards). Adam Lee did something

really spectacular with this vintage; he let the vintage speak. I considered Adam a modern pinot producer and my predisposition before tasting the Siduri wines was that they would be pumped up and thus would lose some of the nuances and qualities that a vintage such as this had to offer. Oh, was I wrong! These are elegant wines that hold a mid-palate punch (or more of a jab) and, to my pure joy, absolutely scream of the vintage and the grape. The amazing aspect of Adam's wines is that they are all excellent, from Oregon to Santa Rita Hills. Even the appellation wines are outstanding and, with some of them in the low-\$20's, they are the QPR of the vintage. If you were introduced to Siduri wines over the past three vintages and are expecting the same, you may at first be disappointed because very little about these wines resembles the last three Siduri vintages. However, you will come to your senses and appreciate these wines regardless of your style preference because these are the some of the best and broadest representations of Ca. pinot that have been made in a while.

Did You Know....

- ◇ Russian River Valley wines can also be designated Sonoma Coast.
- ◇ Green Valley wines can also be designated Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast.
- ◇ The Sonoma Coast AVA is nearly 500,000 acres and includes RRV and Carneros. The Sonoma Coast AVA is twice the size of the Napa Valley AVA.

2005 California Pinot Noir Barrel Sample Notes:

The out-of-this-world outstanding wines that will be instant classics:

Freeman Winery Keefer Ranch – The Clone 23 barrels were the best barrels I tasted of the vintage. I should have begged Ed to bottle it separately. Regardless, the blend will be one of the finest of the vintage, if not the finest. Like the KB Keefer, but toned down a notch or two. I had the opportunity to taste the finished product last week with Tom Gutting and I brought the bottle home. After about 4 hours the wine exploded. It is balanced and intense in every respect. It will need a few years to be its best but it is an instant classic and will be difficult to knock off the perch of the best of the year.

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Kosta Browne Garys' – Who would think to try 100% whole cluster on Garys', other than Michael Browne? It works. Although this will be blended, the non-whole cluster is every bit as good. This is amazingly aromatic and when you include the body, mouthfeel and complexity the whole cluster offers, this is as complete and profound of a Ca. pinot as you will find.

Kosta Browne Rosella's - The best Rosella's I have had. An aromatic bomb with incredible complexity.

Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch – The Clone 23 was an absolutely frickin' amazing wine. This will be blended with other clones which will round out the final blend. Green Valley excelled in '05 and Keefer led the way. If you like bright acidity, sour fruits and underlying herbs and mineral in your pinot, this is your Holy Grail.

August West Rosella's - This is another home run. Is there a more aromatic wine out there in the market? Pretty, profound and polished. Surprisingly, it is drinking incredible now and seems to be a early drinker. Buy up, drink up.

Freeman Thorn Ridge – This vineyard ended up in the Sonoma Coast and Akiko's blend, and what a barrel. There was a lush purity in the barrel, but it also had a spicy, RRV quality to it. I hope Freeman eventually makes a single-vineyard designate from this wine; it should be terrific. (Note: Many need to be aware of this vineyard. Although I did not taste the 2005 Talisman Thorn Ridge, I can only imagine the quality considering how good the '04 Talisman was.)

Joseph Swan Estate - A traditionalist's dream. I have never tasted barrel samples before with Rod but I would guess that his wines take longer to come around than most. If so, the Estate will be the best pinot of the vintage. If you bottled it today, it would be in the top 3. It is so good to see J. Swan making outstanding pinot again. This could stand up to the legendary wines of Joe Swan and I look forward to opening one in 2015.

Dain Wines Amber Ridge – David Dain is new to winemaking but you would never know it. I tasted all the clonal components of David's Amber Ridge

and thought they were the best wines I have ever tasted from the vineyard. I know that is not saying much because I do complain that Amber Ridge can be monolithic and too mid-palate focused, but not this wine. I have not had the opportunity to try the final blend but I will guarantee it will be the best Amber Ridge ever made. However, I did not detect a lot of RC Cola in the wine.

Siduri Appellation Wines – Wow - buy these by the cases. Whether it is Oregon, Sonoma County or the RRV, they are delicious and complete. These are so good that you may find it difficult to spend the extra cash on the SVD's, especially if you prefer a blended pinot to most of the vineyard wines, as I do. These three wines, all outstanding, are also very different from one another and represent the place they came from. The Oregon appellation is leaner, more complex and a bit wooly. The Sonoma County is a seducer. The RRV is spicy, intense and very much a food wine.

Siduri Cargasacchi – This wine was my favorite of the 2002 vintage and I guarantee you this is better. Another wine to be nominated as a Wine of the Vintage, this is the proverbial "kitchen sink" pinot. Dark fruits, red fruits, firm acidity, lush mid-palate, spicy, herby, intense, smooth, ripe tannins, integrated, etc., etc. And etc.

Siduri Sapphire Hill – This has always been an underappreciated wine and vineyard, probably because it needed a lighter vintage to bring out its best qualities. The stars lined up for this wine in 2005 as this is a real beauty of an RRV wine. Another red fruit dominated wine with lots of spice and funk wrapped around a lush mouthfeel.

Leigh Cellars Silacci Vineyard - Gerry Frayer handed me a bottle of his wine at Pinot Days and I had forgotten about it for a week or so while Lisa and I deprogrammed. I brought it up from the cellar one afternoon for a quick taste and was shocked at how good it was. So it sat on the kitchen table and breathed a few necessary hours until dinner when Lisa and I consumed it with an herbed pork loin. Wow. Silacci has limped along the last two vintages. Many times the wines have been too green and acidic. This may be the breakthrough year for these vineyards wines if Leigh (and the 2004 Tantara Si-
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lacci, which is the best wine I have tasted from the '04 vintage) is any indication. There is a very unique citrus quality to these wines and some may be taken aback at first by the screaming acidity, but these are food wines and great ones at that. For a first-time producer, this wine is really wonderful.

Rivers Marie – It is hard to single out a specific wine from RM as outstanding, especially since Thomas Brown makes many of these from the edge of Sonoma Coast and they were pounded by weather last year. The ¼ barrel of Old Summa he had was delicious and I look forward to my single thimble allocation. The Occidental Ridge Vineyard was equally as good. Thomas' own vineyard, today called Ridge Top (but that may change), was a big wine that had absolutely no holes. The alcohol was high but you would not know it. These wines are not shy pinots, a result, I would guess, of the amount of shatter. Many will be surprised at how concentrated and muscular they are, especially considering the vintage and the winemaker. But that is the way '05 went in the True Sonoma Coast. Regardless, in the end, this will be another stellar vintage of RM pinots - the fourth in a row in my book.

Ladd Cellars Russian River Valley– This is a new project from Eric Lundblad, a first time winemaker. This was the finest RRV/Green Valley wine (the wine comes from one vineyard, Galante) I tasted of all of the barrel samples. The wine is very complex, has great acidity and showed no holes. There is an intensity to the wine while being seductive at the same time. Truly a great effort, especially for a first-timer.

The Simply Outstanding wines that in any other year would be the best of the vintage:

All of the other **Kosta Browne** wines. Although I need to give special consideration to the Garys' barrels, which in the past I have thought of as fairly boring regardless of producer. With the addition of whole cluster in some of the barrels, this was the greatest amount of style and complexity I have tasted from the vineyard. The Kanzler was terrific, of course. The Koplen surprisingly may have been the best of the lot.

All of the other **Siduri** wines. However, the ones

that shined were the Sonaterra, from the southern part of the broad Sonoma Coast, which showed great balance and bright red fruits. The Hirsch, which was one of the more concentrated wines I have had from the vineyard. This makes sense as shatter diminished the amount of fruit on each cluster and concentrated the grapes. However, do not expect a fruit-bomb either. The wines are deep but the grapes were physically ripe and the wine is full of nuance and character. This is one of the finest young Hirsch wines I have tasted.

Eno Wines Fairview Ranch Vineyard – This vineyard has a very similar profile to Sillacci with hints of citrus in the fore-palate and a polished fruity mid-palate that shows both dark and red fruits. Sasha's first vintage in '02 was from the RRV and I liked it very much. I was sad to see him leave the holy land and make SLH pinot but he has found a way to bring an RRV flavor profile to the SLH with an intense wine that really does show a different side to the traditional SLH characteristics.

Tandem – Greg Lafollette's wines are tough to read in barrel and in their youth. However, many of his barrels were so unique and tasty now, I could only imagine their potential. One barrel tasted like you were scooping up a mound of raspberries on a hot summer day. These wines show a unique style of traditional and modern qualities. Only Ed Kurtzman produces wines in a similar style that reach the height of quality that the Tandem wines achieve.

Zepaltas Suacci - Ryan Zepaltas is the asst. winemaker for Siduri who is making some of his own pinot and syrah. The Suacci is a small vineyard in Sonoma Coast that Ryan has crafted into an elegant traditional wine with great sour fruits and focus. This is another new producer people should pay attention to. (Note: His '04 Rosella's syrah is a big, unctuous syrah that has the makings of a classic.)

At Pinot Days I had the chance to taste only a few wines. One was the **2005 Auteur Sonoma Stage** from the Sonoma Coast. This is a sexy wine with a lush mid-palate and a purity you can only find in Sonoma Coast. I don't know much about the winery, only that Kenneth Juhasz is the talented winemaker. The wine is a balance between modern and traditional with great purity and focus.

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A few others of Rod Berglund's **Joseph Swan** wines were the epitome of complete wines. The White Oak vineyard, which I believe will not end up a SVD, had this wonderful acidic frame around tangy red fruits. The Saralee's vineyard, which tends to be bigger and robust, was smooth and lighter than ever before. Again, completeness prevailed as no wines showed a flaw throughout the palate. These will continue to get better, integrate more if that's possible, and IMHO, end up being the finest J. Swan wines produced since the '70s.

Dain Wines Rancho Ontiveros was the first wine from the '05 vintage I tasted from barrel. I tasted it back in January and you could have bottled it and sent it out at that time. I have not revisited the wine but I could only imagine how good it is now. Rancho Ontiveros is like a polished and pure Bien Nacido, lacking the edginess that comes with BN. That is not necessarily good or bad, just different. I look forward to tasting more wines from this vineyard; in the meantime, this sets the bar very high.

The **Ampelos Estate** pinot barrel sample I tasted at Pinot Days was another wine that teetered along the high-wire of a modern and traditional style. This is a polished wine with a great focus that is more reminiscent of Sonoma Coast than Santa Rita Hills. Once again, there is more structure and red fruits in this wine than expected and it demonstrates ability to age nicely.

You may be surprised to see **DeLoach** on this list. However, Greg Lafollette has taken over the helm as Winemaker and chief viticulturalist and things are changing. I think you will see many of the DeLoach wines on the top of people's lists here in the near future, but for now the wines that impress me most are the inexpensive California and Russian River Valley blends. The California pinot is under \$10 and once you taste it, you will never buy a wine from Trader Joe's again. The quality is incredible considering the price and it may be one of the best values ever. The RRV is in the mid to high teens and as good as the California pinot. It is not better, and you may ask why pay twice as much, but it is pure RRV and when you want an inexpensive wine that profiles RRV, this is where you should go.

The **Dutton-Goldfield Freestone Hill Vineyard** is as light as a wine can get and still be called red wine. This is not a sipping wine; please add food. The components all stand up together nicely but the structure is what drives this to a higher acclaim. A wine that will probably age forever and will need some time, but if you like Beaune in your Burgundy, you will enjoy this wine.

Keller Estate La Cruz Vineyard is a rather large site with many microclimates and styles, so it is difficult to get a read on what the final wine will taste like by just tasting from barrel. However, if the barrels that were from a new section of the vineyard that was planted on the top of the Sonoma Hills of Lakeville Highway have a considerable claim to the final blend, the estate wine will be tremendous.

Olson Ogden – Tim Olson finally convinced John Ogden that they should make pinot; it looks like a great decision. Olson was once the winemaker at Tarius, producers of some fine pinots including Pisoni, back in the late '90s. This wine is a blend of a few RRV vineyards and demonstrates great RRV qualities of spice and earth with firm red fruits. I tasted this in May and it was still evolving, but it showed great promise and the ability to age.

Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyards – I was shocked at how good these wines were. It is good to see SCMV back on top. Jeff Emery is making balanced wines, true to the history of SCMV but with a bit more intensity and punch.

Sonnet Cellars – Tony Craig has made his best wines yet. The Tondre's Grapefield, a Santa Lucia Highlands vineyard was the finest of the group, but all were very good. These are traditional wines that need to be aged and will need the complement of food. The Tondre has a citrus acidic quality similar to the wines that come from the Silacci vineyard. The mid-palate shows traditional SLH dark fruits. The Kruse Vineyard from York Mountain is a rustic wine that needs time but it has the guts to be something special. Again, this will need to age and will be an absolute food wine.

WINERY PROFILE

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Simply stated, these are serious wines from a group of serious folks growing grapes in some serious locales. Many new producers that have hit the radar in the past few years are making good juice, but to Kevin, this is about more than making good wine. This is about the earth, history and heritage of California pinot noir. I spent 15 years commuting in New York City and often wondered if my business endeavors were worth the overhead of getting to and from work. Kevin Harvey and Company have quite a commute up to the Alpine Vineyard, which is on top of one of the Santa Cruz Mountains, miles from civilization. But there is one big difference: Once you stand atop of the vineyard looking out on the vines and beyond, you can see how someone could want nothing more than to get up every morning knowing they will spend the day this close to heaven. The views took our breath away.

Then there are the vines. Kevin and team have taken excruciating pains to make sure the vineyards reflect the soils (dare I say *terroir*) they feed upon. The team has groomed and nurtured these vines to the such an extent that I would not be surprised to learn that they have named each cluster. Everything has been well thought out and nothing left unattended. Nor, it seems, has any cost posed an obstacle. This must be painful when you see a vineyard like Rhys's Alpine Vineyard which, due to the late rains and winds, probably has less than a ton per acre hanging on the vines. That makes for some very expensive berries.

And none of this means anything if you cannot make great wine. Although young and still on the upcurve of experience, Jason Jardine, the wine-maker, knows how to make wine and more importantly, how to make wine from these unique vineyards. These are some of the best wines I have tasted in years. It is hard to believe that this is one of the first vintages from the vineyards because the

wines seem seasoned and mature, as if Rhys has been doing this for years.

Though Kevin's heart is in Burgundy and these wines come from cool vineyards, they are not light, village style wines. Don't get me wrong - they are not big, over-blown fruit bombs either. They are an amalgamation of land and hand, earth and technology, modern and traditional styles.

Did You Know....

- ◇ **1 grape cluster = 1 glass**
- ◇ **75 grapes = 1 cluster**
- ◇ **4 clusters = 1 bottle**
- ◇ **40 clusters = 1 vine**
- ◇ **1 vine = 10 bottles**
- ◇ **1200 clusters = 1 barrel**
- ◇ **1 barrel = 60 gallons**
- ◇ **60 gallons = 25 cases**
- ◇ **30 vines = 1 barrel**
- ◇ **400 vines = 1 acre**
- ◇ **1 acre = 3 tons**

Kevin has accomplished something very special in a short time. At the risk of waxing on, I have to say that Rhys is on the path to greatness. The pinots show the elements that place Rochioli, Williams Selyem and Dehlinger in the top tier of California pinot. The Rhys wines reflect their vineyards, express completeness and demonstrate ageability.

Here are my tasting notes of the Rhys and Alesia (the name on the non-Santa Cruz wines made by Rhys) pinot noirs:

2004 Alesia Chileno Valley Vineyard – Chileno Valley lies in a cool location producing lovely, elegant pinot made by many producers such as Hartford Court and Vision Cellars. These wines hold the style of the area with perfect structure and are very balanced. The fruits are of the lighter red style and are very elegant. This is a food wine that expresses pinot nuance and complexity.

2004 Alesia Kanzler Vineyard – Kanzler is a very popular vineyard right now and the Alesia is right there with the best of them. This is a bigger and fruitier wine than the others in the lineup but still maintains a signature complexity and style found in all of the Rhys wines. It has an intense mid-palate. Matter of fact, everything is intense about the Kanzler, not the least of which is spice and meat. Whether you love modern pinots or traditional, you will find something to love about this wine.

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WINERY PROFILE

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2004 Rhys Family Farm Vineyard – The Rhys wines are all estate wines (the vineyards are owned by Rhys). As I mentioned above, the vineyards are distinct and the wines reflect their environment in the truest sense. The aromatics are so simple and lovely that it is difficult to get down to tasting. The fruits are elegant with lots of strawberry, cranberry and cherry. The mid-palate demonstrates great concentration without throwing the wine out-of-balance. This wine would love food and time to better express what I expect will be greatness.

2004 Rhys Home Vineyard – Simply put, this will someday be a great wine. It will need time and patience, but greatness is 4-5 years away. The wine is another elegant, stylish wine with impeccable balance and symmetry. The mid-palate is concentrated but also shows elegance with lots of red fruits and spice, cola and earth. You can drink this now and enjoy it, but it would be a shame to consume a wine that with time will become outstanding.

Overall, the wines are a synergy of the best qualities of modern and traditional winemaking. The fruits in all the wines are lighter and elegant but show intense, concentrated flavors. None of these wines lack proper acidity and most are built to age and improve. There are very few people out there producing pinots as complete as Rhys's, and that is quite a statement considering the fact this is the winery's first full-scale vintage. This winery is destined to become a classic in the near future.

TASTING FORUM

Keefe Ranch Retrospective

Keefe has quickly risen to the elite of RRV

Twenty of us convened at Casa Rigisich for another organized tasting. Lafon Rochet, the Queen of Burgundy, came up with the idea of a Keefe Ranch tasting months ago and we put the idea to paper by featuring most Keefe producers' past five vintages. Marcy Keefe and her son Craig joined us and offered up invaluable insight into the planting, management and layout of their vineyard. The lineup

Flight 1	Year	Producer	Rating
	2000	Failla	Double Silver
	2000	Flowers	Double Silver
	2001	Flowers	Silver
	2001	Failla	Silver
	2001	Tarius	Double Silver
Flight 2			
	2002	Failla	Corked
	2002	Flowers	Silver
	2002	Lookout Ridge	Silver
	2002	Siduri	Silver
	2002	Tandem	Double Gold
Flight 3			
	2003	Flowers	Silver
	2003	Salinia	Silver
	2003	Siduri	Silver
	2003	Tandem	Double Silver
Flight 4			
	2004	Freeman	Double Silver
	2004	Loring	Silver
	2004	Salinia	Double Silver
	2003	Davenport & Co.	Gold

and scores were as follows:

To view the results, more in-depth tasting notes and an explanation of the scoring, go to the Pinot Days web site (www.pinotdays.com) and click the tab at the top of the screen that says 'Tasting Notes. On the search screen, choose the Event – 'Keefe Ranch'.

Some of my personal opinions:

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TASTING FORUM

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Keefer Ranch is a special vineyard that is destined for greatness. What makes it special? Obviously the quality of the grapes is top-notch, but a wine cannot achieve greatness through grape quality alone. We see many vineyards whose grapes come off the vines with incredible quality, but they fail to demonstrate that quality in the bottle. These wines show beautifully in the bottle and demonstrate such range that everyone's personal style preference will be represented.

The Keefers have planted this vineyard carefully with a broad range of proper clones for their environs. This translates into a breadth of styles within the vineyard – i.e. the makings of complete wines. None of the wines at the tasting lacked any components. Some demonstrated more of one component than another, but that was more a product of winemaker influence than vineyard. All the wines showed great acidity, a wide range of red and dark fruits and wonderful complexity -spice, herbs, flora, mineral and earth characteristics were present in every wine.

This was the highest rated tasting we have done. Since it was the overall best quality tasting we have done, I am happy that the ratings showed accordingly. If you look at the lineup of winemakers who made these wines- Greg LaFollette, Hugh Chappelle, Ed Kurtzman, Efran Jordan, Brian Loring, Adam Lee, Tim Olson, Kevin Kelley - you could expect nothing less. The high quality of people who are making the wines is another reason the wines are so consistent and high in quality. The fact that there was not a single wine that was bronze rated or not-recommended is astonishing. If Marcy had to sell grapes to Joe Schmoe winemaker, you might see some duds. Obviously, she has carefully selected who makes the wines.

Surprisingly, for such a highly rated group of wines, there was only 1 wine rated a Double Gold and 2 others rated Gold. By digging deeper, maybe this



may not be so strange after all. The vineyard produces very diverse styles of grapes, and each style appeals to particular palates. With such a diverse and experienced group tasting the wines, we should expect a broad range of preferences. This caused a smoothing of the results and is a testimony to the quality of the vineyard. These wines have something for everyone's palate; you can always find a Keefer wine that matches your preferences perfectly.

2003 seems to be the best of the vintages with 3 wines in the top 7. This is something I found interesting and supports my personal belief that the '03 vintage is the best since the mid-'90s. The wines have balance and breadth. The giant fruity mid-palate may not be there and, in the end, that is good. If you like wines with firm acidities and complex mid-palates, '03 is your vintage.

These wines can age. The two 2000 vintage wines were the third and fourth rated wines in the tasting. It is difficult to draw such a broad conclusion from tasting only two wines, but it is obvious that these wines have the structure and balance to go the distance. The '02s may not make it to 10 years old as there is too much fruit, but overall these wines are going to age gracefully and I can definitely see myself drinking 10 year old Keefer.

In the end, this was an impressive tasting. The wines demonstrated superior quality, broad diversity and the producers all showed restrained and a fine hand. This is a great vineyard with greater promise.

NEW PRODUCER

Eno Wines—Santa Lucia Highlands Nice guys finish first

Sasha Verhage is a techie by day, working for Yahoo since 2002, and a winemaker the rest of the day, having begun the Eno Wines label in 2002. Sasha's passion for wine was preceded by a passion for beer. Growing up in Michigan, there was not much need for wine; after all, ice fishing and hockey do not necessarily conjure up the thought of a pinot participating pleasures.

When Sasha re-located to California, it wasn't to follow his passion and make wine either. Basically, he



was a software guy. In the mid-90's, when his boss asked him if he would like to assist his father in his wine project, a homemaking wine endeavor, Sasha thought 'Why Not?'. What he found was a renaissance man who, despite his claim that he liked his wine cheap, had a passion and knowledge of wine that was infectious.

Sasha caught his boss's father's bug and soon

began acquiring information from the old-timer and getting further rooted in his own passion to pursue winemaking. In 1999, Sasha decided he wanted to get very serious and make high-end wines and began to call wineries asking if they needed a wine-making assistant. When he called Tom Leaf, an extremely talented and veteran winemaker, Tom just happened to be in need of one. Sasha worked with Tom and Grape Leaf Cellars (Tom's now defunct label) from 1999 to 2001, where in the last vintage he was officially Grape Leaf Cellars assistant winemaker.

In 2002, Sasha launched Eno Wines with a **2002 Morelli Lane Pinot Noir** from the Green Valley area of Russian River Valley. Sasha gave the wine a unique name, as he does all his wines, Presumed Innocent. I first tasted the wine at Family Winemak-

ers in 2004 and thought it was one of the best representations of RRV pinot I have tasted, especially from a first year release winery. Unfortunately, Sasha did not continue to make wine from Morelli but instead chose to make a Fairview Vineyard pinot from Santa Lucia Highlands in 2003. Needless to say I was disappointed, as I was looking forward to the second effort to see if Sasha could achieve greater heights with a year under his belt.

So I tasted the Great Promise, the name of the **2003 Eno Wines Fairview Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands** pinot, with some trepidation, thinking this pinot from a relatively unknown vineyard could not match the wonderful RRV pinot Sasha made in the previous vintage. I was wrong. First, you would never think this wine is from SLH. If anything, you would guess it was a blend of SLH and RRV, since it shows the dark fruit qualities of SLH and the spicy, funky earthy characteristics of RRV. However, it is pure SLH and an outstanding one at that. Also the pinot has this beautiful acidic framework with lots of citrus, more than you find from most California pinots, and Something you seldom find in SLH where the wines tend to be forward and modern. You would not think that a new winemaker in his second vintage, working with a new vineyard could reach these heights.

Then you taste the **2004 Eno Wines Fairview Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands** pinot, named Gifted One, and realize that another year under Sasha's belt seems to guarantee this fine winemaker is simply going to eclipse his previous wines once again. This wine is a very complete pinot with the same wonderful citrus acidity and broad flavors.

Sasha's unnamed **2005 Eno Wines Fairview Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands** pinot is, that's right, even better. The vintage has allowed balance and a restrained intensity, and the wine achieves greater completeness than the 2004.

I am happy to say that Eno will be returning to their roots in 2006 and will make a pinot from the Cummings Vineyard in Russian River Valley. I have extremely high expectations for the wine, as I still believe the RRV and Sasha's style is a beautiful match.

For those who drink wines other than pinot, Sasha

PINOT DAYS NEWS

Pinot Days Goes National Dates set for New York City and Se-

Pinot Days is going on the road in 2007. We have tentative plans for weekend events in the following cities:

New York City - April 13th-15th
San Francisco - June 29th-July 1st
Seattle - July 27th-29th

There is still very little information to share with you. The New York City event will most likely be at the Show Piers on the Hudson at 51st and 12th Avenue. All events will follow a similar format of a 'Meet the Winemaker' Dinner on Friday night. Saturday will have 4-6 focus tastings featuring some of the California AVA's, Oregon, Burgundy and other pinot-related themes.

Sunday will be the Grand Festival featuring over 100 pinot producers, exhibitors of wine-related products and food purveyors. The event will be 6 hours long with the first two hours dedicated to members of the wine trade (retailers, distributors, brokers, sommeliers, restaurateurs and media).

If you wish to exhibit at any of the Pinot Days 2007 events, please go to the web site and click the button 'Become An Exhibitor'.

Also, if you are a producer of pinot noir and would like us to review your wines or write a winery profile for the newsletter and webpage, please email us at info@pinotdays.com.

Regards,
Steven Rigisich

Disclaimer: We own Pinot Days and the Bay Area Wine Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to the education and promotion of the noble grape, pinot noir. Steven Rigisich also is a partner in Ketcham Estate, LLC, a producer of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir. In order to ensure no conflict of interest, this newsletter refrains from all comments regarding Ketcham Estate.