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Statement of Principles

It is important that readers understand how I collect and evaluate the information that is reported in the pages of **Burghound.com** (the tasting notes and information are the sole responsibility of the author).

- I am personally responsible for all of my business expenses without exception. This includes airfare, hotels and effectively all of my meals. The purpose is as clear as it is simple: No conflicts of interest. *I do not accept nor do I seek any subsidy, in any form, from anybody.*
- Sample bottles are accepted for evaluation and commentary, much as book reviewers accept advance copies of new releases. I insist, however, that these sample bottles represent the final wines to be sold under that particular label.
- Finished, bottled wines are assigned scores as these wines are market-ready. Wines tasted from barrel, however, are scored within a range. This reflects the reality that a wine tasted from barrel is not a finished product.
- Wines are evaluated within the context of their *appellations*. Simply put, that means I expect a grand cru Burgundy to reflect its exalted status.

While the concept of *terroir* remains a controversial issue in the opinion of many people, it is not controversial to the Burgundian mindset—or to me, either. I attempt to convey, where appropriate, how certain wines are particularly good, or particularly bad, at expressing their underlying *terroir*.

This is admittedly a difficult thing, rightly open to discussion among the Burgundians themselves, never mind an outside observer such as myself. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to great Burgundy. Mere "hedonism" is just that: empty pleasure seeking. Burgundy can deliver so much more—if it is asked.

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The 269 Producers Reviewed in This Issue

Chablis:

Abbaye du Petit Quincy
Barat, Michel
Bessin, Jean-Claude
Billaud-Simon
Brocard, Jean-Marc
Bussy, Lionel
La Chablienne
Chardonnay, Domaine du
Chenevières, Domaine
Colinot
Collet, Jean
Damp, Daniel
Dauvissat, Jean & Sébastien
Dauvissat, René et Vincent
Defaix, Bernard
Droin, Jean-Paul et Benoit
Drouhin, Joseph
Duplessis, Gérard
Durup, Jean
Fèvre, William
Goisot, Jean-Huges
Grossot, Jean-Pierre
Laroche
Long-Depaquit
Malandes, Domaine des
Michel, Louis
De Moor, Olivier
Moreau, Christian
Moreau, Louis
Moreau-Naudet
Mosnier, Sylvain
Picq, Gilbert
Pinson Frères
Pommier, Denis
Raveneau, François
Savary
Séguinot-Bordet
Servin, François
Simonnet-Févre
Les Temps Perdus
Tribut, Laurent
Vocoret, Domaine
Vrignaud, Guillaume

Mâconnais:

Aladame, Stéphane
Barraud, Daniel
Beauregard, Château de
Brett Bros/La Soufrandière
Cordier Père
Ferret, J. A.
Fuisse, Château de
Gonon, Domaine
Guffens-Heynen
Lafon, Héritiers des Comtes
Lalande, Domaine de
Lassarat, Roger
Merlin, Olivier
Rey, Michel
Rijckaert, Jean
Robert-Denogent
Rochebin, Domaine de
Rontets, Château de
Saumaize-Michelin
Thibert Père et Fils
La Tour Vayon, Domaine de
Vergé

Côte Chalonnaise:

Chamirey, Château de
Dureuil-Janthial
Ferté, Domaine de la
Folie, Domaine de la
Jacqueson, Henri et Paul

Jaeger-Defaix
Joblot
Juillot, Michel
Lorenzon, Domaine
Meix-Foulot
Mercey, Château de
Raquillet
Rodet, Antonin
Rully, Château de
Salomon, Clos
de Villaine, A. & P.

Oregon Pinot Noir:

Adelsheim
Albin, J.
Anam Cara Cellars
Anne Amie
Archery Summit
Belle Pente
Bergström Wines
Brick House
Broadley Vineyards
Brooks Wines
Cameron Winery
Carabella Vineyards
Chehalem
Cristom
De Ponte Cellars
Dobbes
Drouhin, Domaine
Elk Cove
Erath Vineyards
Evesham Wood
Eyrie Vineyards
Patricia Green Cellars
Hamacher Wines
Jovino
Lange
Lemelson
Owen Roe
Patton Valley
Ponzi
Ribbon Ridge Vineyard
Ridgecrest Vineyard
Rich, Andrew
St. Innocent
Scott-Paul Wines
Serene, Domaine
Soter Vineyards
Stoller
Torii Mor
Twelve Wine
Westrey
White Rose
Willakenzie
Wine By Joe
Ken Wright Cellars

California Pinot Noir:

Alesia Vineyards
Alma Maria Vineyards
Ant Hill Farms
Arcadian Winery
Atascadero Creek
Au Bon Climat
Baker Lane Vineyards
Bjornstad Cellars
Bouchaine Vineyards
Buena-Vista
Calera Wine Company
Clos Pegase
Clos Pepe Estate
Dain Wines
Dehlinger Winery
Deloach Winery

Demetria Estate
Dierberg Vineyard
Donum
Doyle
Dutton-Goldfield
Emeritus Vineyards
Eric-Kent Wine Cellars
Etude
Failla
Gary Farrell
Fiddlehead Cellars
Flowers
Thomas Fogarty Winery
Foley Estates
Foxen Vineyards
Freeman Winery
Freestone Vineyards
Gainey Vineyard
Hansel Winery
Harrington Winery
Hirsch Vineyards
Ici/La Bas
J Vineyards
Keller Estate
Kistler Winery
Kosta Browne
Landmark Vineyards
Laetitia Estate
Lazy Creek Vineyards
Littorai Vineyards
Longoria Wines
Lost Canyon
MacPhail Family Wines
Mahoney Vineyards
Marcassin
Michaud Vineyard
El Molino
Mount Eden Vineyards
Native9
The Ojai Vineyard
Ortman Family Vineyards
Pahlmeyer
Patz & Hall Wine Company
Peay Vineyards
Radio-Côteau
Rivers Marie
Rochioli
Saintbury
Scherrer Winery
Sea Smoke Cellars
Sojourn Cellars
Robert Stemmler
Joseph Swan Vineyards
Talley Vineyards
Tolosa Winery
Vino V Winery
Whitcraft Winery
Wild Horse Winery
Williams-Selyem

En Plus:

d'Auvenay
Boisset, Jean-Claude
Chanson Père et Fils
Chavy, Philippe
Jadot, Maison Louis
Perdrix, Domaine
Ramonet
Rossignol, Nicolas

Progress Reports:

Martinborough (NZ) pinots
Current Release Champagne/Sparklers-
(61 producers reviewed)

US Pinot Noir - 2005

With Other Current Releases from 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2006

Let's get right to the point: when taken as a whole, in my view 2005 is better than both '04 and '03 and at least as good as 2001 and 2002. However, it was by no means an easy vintage and in some cases, quantities are so small as to be derisory. Bud break occurred relatively early and then in some sectors the weather was very cool and wet and in the worst cases, there was a severe frost that all but wiped out the harvest. Coastal and hillside vineyards tended to be harder hit. By contrast, lowland vineyards that flowered early were fine and with relatively large crops. Still, on an overall basis, quantities are generally below average so if you see an offering of one of your favorite producers, don't dally before pulling the trigger.

It must be said though that 2005 is not as consistent a vintage as 2002 as some wines are not completely physiologically ripe and some were deliberately pushed to absurd degrees of ripeness. The cool growing season though really shows up in the reported alcohol levels as the average Oregon pinot is more than one degree of alcohol lower than in 2004 and 1.5 degrees is not uncommon. In CA, I would estimate the difference was on the order of .75% with a range of .5 to 1.00%.

Contributing to this inconsistency was the usual quality driver, that of yields. Some wineries reported yields as low as a barrel per acre and others reported fairly large yields. To illustrate the point, one well known vineyard owner told me that his volume equivalent in hectoliters was a whopping 5.8 hl/ha while another told me that he had the biggest yields since the 2000 vintage. And while dilute '05s are rare, they do exist, particularly from certain sectors of Oregon.

In the important Sonoma Coast region, the spring weather was very difficult with three hail storms, frequent high winds and drenching rain storms up to the middle of June. The flowering was extended and uneven, which would come to cause a very extended harvest, at least for those growers who tried to pick each parcel at optimum ripeness levels. The harvest lasted well into October (in Oregon as well) and several growers reported not finishing until the 15th of October.

Things were similar if not identical in the Willamette Valley. January and February were unusually warm and dry which contributed to an early fruit set yet March, April and May were cool and wet with predictably ugly results for the flowering. Not all of the AVA's suffered accordingly though so this naturally contributes to the variability of the vintage. The summer though was warm and clement and the harvest generally began at the end of September or beginning of October. The early fruit had a tendency to dehydration and those are where the high alcohol '05s usually come from. By contrast, those that picked after the rains, or were heavily irrigated, ran anywhere from perfectly balanced to dilute and flabby as both sugar and acidity levels suffered.

By the same token, relatively few '05s display jammy or super ripe aromas though a fair number do show some degree of crushed leaf, vegetal or herbal elements. However, even in such wines though it's rare to come across unripe tannins or acidities. The structural elements tend to be ripe and there is fine focus and delineation plus the best purity, not only in terms of vineyard character but also fruity purity, since the beautiful and largely classic 2001s. Better still, the average 2005 from either CA or OR has the best acidity levels seen in several vintages as well as malic acid levels were generally higher than normal.

Looking ahead, 2006 looks to be similar to 2005 in many respects though how they got there is quite different other than both shared cool and wet springs. As noted above, 2005 had a tiny fruit set in many sectors whereas 2006 had a big set and thus produced generally balanced but less concentrated wines. As to 2007, while it's obviously very early, everyone that I have spoken to is very excited by the quality prospects. Yields are on the low side but quality is potentially superb. Stay tuned!

As to the wines themselves, you'll find a few really lovely and highly recommended wines, quite a number of average to good efforts and a few laggards, which frankly is about what you would expect to find. The California stars in the 75+ producers that follow include, Ant Hill, Au Bon Climat, Emeritus, Eric-Kent, Etude, Flowers, Keller Estate, Lazy Creek Littorai, Longoria, El Molino, Mount Eden, Native9, The Ojai Vineyard and Rivers-Marie and several other wineries produced one or two stunning wines especially worthy of your attention such as Alesia, Arcadian, Champion, Laetitia Estate, Scherrer Winery, Radio-Coteau, Rochioli, Talley Vineyards and Williams-Selyem. Great wines among the 40+ producers from Oregon include J. Albin, Anne Amie, Archery Summit, Belle Pente, Bergström, Broadley, Brooks, Cristom, Erath Vineyards, Evesham Wood, Lemelson, Patton Valley, Ponzi, St. Innocent, Scott Paul, Domaine Serene, Soter, White Rose and Ken Wright with fine efforts also being turned in by Westry and Torii Mor among others. And as I have mentioned, there are also some difficult to like wines that suffer from some combination of over ripe or stewed fruit, very high or often excessive alcohol levels, less than deft acidification and/or oak regimens that are hardly in keeping with producing balanced pinot noir.

Essay – Whither US Pinot Going Forward?

I have been following the evolution of US pinot since the early 1980s and I have never seen more change in the space of such a few years. Most of it has been for the good but for better or worse, one could indeed say without fear of undue hyperbole that we're witnessing a bona fide revolution, not only in terms of style but also in terms of how wineries are working and acquiring their fruit. Acreage devoted to pinot has exploded, more is being planted every day and the grape seems to attract an ever growing group of young producers eager to try their luck fermenting for gold and fame as it were. A few gifted or lucky newcomers have achieved one or both and they serve as inspiration to those who have not, or those neophytes who want to. To state the obvious, pinot is now definitely mainstream and more importantly, almost certainly likely to stay that way as never before have producers, consumers and, it must be said, the wine media paid more attention to it.

While it's no secret to those who have been longer term readers, I'm not much of a fan of high-octane and high extraction pinot noir. In my view, and I know there will be those who disagree, no wine intended for consumption at the table with food comports itself gracefully at 15+% alcohol levels, not to mention the obvious warmth which destroys balance and meal compatibility. Further, for quite some time there has been a heavy emphasis, for lack of a better term, on ultra ripe fruit, smooth and suave mouth feels and finishes with a lush opulence to them. I know from extensive conversations with the creators of some of these wines that they worked hard to avoid any "relief" in the palate impressions, which is to say no edges or undue detail. Lush and round was the texture goal, indeed even ideal.

Happily, at least from this observer's perspective, these extreme wines are becoming less prevalent, partially because consumers have found that they don't age very well and as the prices for all pinot-based wines have risen, consumers have found it harder to justify paying \$50 or more for wines that they can't successfully cellar. And those portions of the wine press guilty of handing out monster scores for these monstrosities, began to lose some of their credibility as well. This is not to say that there still isn't a market for extreme pinot, just that it's smaller than it once was.

However, a debate about style is not the point of this essay but rather where is US pinot going and why? I was musing on how the merchant side of Burgundy has changed over the past 25 years, and is presently changing before our very eyes and I began to wonder if there wasn't a lesson embedded in that experience for US producers? And will this experience ultimately reflect on how the various styles of US pinot are made?

First, an observation about the state of Burgundy's *négociant* community today. It's no secret that control of Burgundies best vineyards and grape sources began to radically change in the early 1980s. As technology became ever more widely available and as education of young Burgundians increased coupled with a broad willingness of consumers to purchase the issue of unknown domaines, the move to domaine bottling went from a tiny ground roots movement to a full blown ocean swell by the end of the decade. And with that movement came the loss of a huge amount of grape sources for the *négociants*. Prior boom and bust cycles had prepared, and ultimately persuaded, many merchant houses to buy top vineyards whenever they could and thus the best houses today are really hybrids, which is to say as much domaines in their own right as wholesale fruit buyers that rely on their (considerable) marketing skills to sell the resulting wines.

However, anyone who has even a modicum of sophistication buying Burgundy today knows that the optimal strategy when buying merchant-originated burgundy is to buy the wines where the merchant owns the underlying vineyards. This is not to denigrate the quality or ethics of the merchant houses, just that it is completely logical that the more steps along the way that anyone is able to control, the higher the probability that the quality of the resulting wines will be higher too.

Indeed, it is instructive to note that the only category of *négociant* that is growing today is what I call the "micro-*négociant*" and the typical arrangement extant with these small buyers is that the merchant has an arrangement with the vineyard owner whereby he or she can partially, or even fully, dictate viticultural policy. Progressive buyers have in essence said to grape suppliers that they will pay top dollar based on the maximum allowable yield no matter what yield is actually produced. This takes away any incentive the vineyard owner might have had to interfere with the negociant's policies and to crop for maximum yields. And in turn, the *négociant* obtains much higher quality fruit than he otherwise would have. Yes, a high price is paid for this quality but it would have been paid anyway because any grower worth his salt knows exactly what the worth of his produce is.

To counteract this trend, the large houses have begun to put well known vineyards under long term lease contracts, which has taken a lot of the boom and bust cycles away from the growers and put it on the shoulders of the merchant houses, who are in theory better able to tolerate the uneven cash flows by virtue of their size and their ability to blend away "mistakes" when necessary. No matter, the movement to domaine bottling is still continuing and as it does, the best sources will continue to be taken out of circulation. This means that what remains will be increasingly sought after though not on the basis that it was in the past but rather only as best practices and a high quality grower mentality obtain because the prices are too high to do otherwise.

To summarize, the merchant houses are suffering reduced profitability on the *négociant* sides of their businesses and there is no short term reason to believe that this trend is going to reverse itself anytime soon. Indeed, some major houses have told me point blank that their *négociant* activities are being subsidized by the domaine side. And in one case of a very famous old school *négoce* (apologies but I was asked to keep the name confidential), the house is apparently strongly considering getting out of the *négociant* business

altogether and this house is big enough that if it were to happen, it would rock Burgundy to its core for a considerable period I would predict.

So, what lessons if any are to be teased out of what is happening in Burgundy and can these be applied to US pinot producers? The profit potential for small and large grape buyers here would seemingly be rosy indeed. To wit, there are now vast fields of very young vines, planted on various rootstocks and clones, that are soon to be, or are just now, coming into production. That there is little history, or firm evidence, to justify the plantations would appear to be of little import given how red hot the pinot market is. By contrast, fruit from established vineyards continues to command absolute top dollar. In other words, vineyards that have already proved their worth by consistently producing top quality fruit command a substantial price premium, which one could analogize to having a *grand* or *premier cru* vineyard in Burgundy.

However, unlike Burgundy, a key exception is that more vineyards can, and will, be planted in the US. Thus, there is reason to believe that there will be some brake on the price of generically sourced pinot grapes. Supply will increase to match, or at least trend behind, demand and prices will fluctuate according to this demand. Grape growing, rather than wine production, is at its heart still agriculture and there is a different kind of supply and demand risk embedded in that business than the vagaries of consumer wine consumption preferences.

If we make the fundamental economic assumption that the most money to be made on the production side of wine business is through value added practices, which in our case means high quality winemaking coupled with high quality vineyard sources, then that provides a model for future high profitability wineries. Before we accept that however without examination, it bears mentioning that there are some people who have argued that the pure US *négociant* makes the highest profit margins of anyone in the wine business because he/she has none of the enormous capital resources tied up in vineyard holdings. Thus, through winemaking and/or marketing talent, this *négociant* absolves himself of the agricultural and economic risks and takes only what are in essence distribution risks. As long as the *négociant* can craft a saleable product, it's pretty clear that the buy grapes/sell wine model is a good one.

However, what happens if the *négociant* can no longer craft a saleable product, either because consumer tastes change or there is price resistance or because top vineyard sources begin to disappear as they are taken off the market? I am of the view that it's only a matter of time before what happened in Burgundy will happen here in the US as the owners of recognized top vineyards (call them the coming *grands* and *premiers crus*) begin to estate bottle due to the superior underlying economics. Hiring wine making talent is not difficult and if there are higher profits to be had from taking high in-demand fruit and commercializing it directly, it will per force occur. As it does, sources of hitherto high quality grapes will disappear, causing price pressure to occur for less desirable vineyard sources and/or the plantation of still new ones. And it's not piercing insight to observe that paying up for inferior grape sources to compete against superior estate grown fruit is ultimately a loser's game, or if not a loser's game, certainly a less profitable one.

However, now we must come to the potentially explosive subject of *terroir*, or for our purposes, the lack of it. As any wine lover that can still fog a mirror knows, there are people who believe strongly in the concept of *terroir* and there are others who view it as nothing other than marketing hocus pocus. I give many burgundy and pinot seminars in the course of a year and inevitably the question of *terroir* surfaces with some who question the concept and whether it exists. I always offer one explanation which is that I can arrange for financing of hundreds of millions of dollars if someone, anyone, could plant another La Tâche or Romanée-Conti or name your favorite *grand cru*, not just here in the US but anywhere in the world. The point is not whether this can be done (it cannot) but rather can a vineyard site be found that produces wines of equal distinction. If that can be done, then a lot of money will flow to that source of grapes, which validates the notion that there is indeed something special and unique about these vineyards, no matter what the source of this uniqueness is attributed to.

If we extrapolate this line of thinking to our best vineyards here, what consumers are really after in my view is authenticity of taste that can only come from a high quality vineyard. And what the typical US *négociant* is offering is authenticity of winemaking, not vineyard authenticity as reflected in the wine itself; before anyone takes offense, note that I said typical *négociant*, not all. Which is one of the reasons that much *négociant* pinot is pretty heavily manipulated, which not withstanding what the label indicates as a vineyard source. Consider that the model for many *négociants* today is full on ripeness levels, subsequent dilution by so-called Jesus Units (adding back water or the equivalent of turning water into wine, hence the name), extraction enzymes, commercial yeasts, bags of tartaric acid, lots of high toast new wood and a severe sterile filtration. No vineyard anywhere, not La Tâche, not Romanée-Conti or pick your vineyard can stand up to those practices and have any hope of preserving unique vineyard character and individuality. What you're left with is the winemaker's vision of what his clients will pay for and he or she uses the vineyard designation as way to imply that the consumer is in fact receiving something unique.

As an example, I was quite struck by one young *négociant* who publicly stated that he wasn't afraid to make "chemistry class wines if needed". Well, that's all well and good but what would you rather pay for, vineyard individuality or wine making individuality? Anyone anywhere can add acid, water and oak to deliver their special recipe. There is nothing wrong with doing this but the world's best wines, and highest prices, are inextricably linked to a specific vineyard source where the inimitable character of that vineyard is allowed to be clearly heard. Winemakers who don't have access to first rate vineyards must necessarily add something to try and make the wine special.

This is not to suggest that every vineyard owner who makes his or her own wine walks around in a monk's habit and thinks only of expressing the site characteristic of his vineyard as clearly as possible or that every négociant is a card carrying manipulator out to create a house style that crushes all vineyard individuality. Believe me when I say that I know a number of vineyards where third party buyers of the fruit make better wine than the owner does. But as a matter of practice, this shouldn't really be the norm. The vineyard owner/winemaker is doubly motivated to maintain the highest quality possible, not only to satisfy his own clients but to the extent that he sells fruit, to help the reputation of his vineyard, which also inures to his benefit.

All of this is to say that over the next 20 years, expect to see more and more estate bottled examples and either fairly priced but unexceptional generic pinot bottles or expensive but probably less good négociant bottlings from top vineyards. The growers that have gone to estate bottling will save their very best fruit for themselves. That's what has happened in Burgundy and ultimately, the best pinots in the US will be made by those who control their grape sources, either by directly owning the vineyard itself or controlling it through long-term lease.

In closing, I would observe that there's a reason that Clos de Bèze has been famous for almost 1400 years now and it's not because of the consistency of winemaking, it's because a millennium's worth of consumers want to hear and appreciate what Clos de Bèze has to say. Already we have at least some parallels here, be it Camp Meeting Ridge or Hirsch Vineyard or Summa or the East and West Blocks farmed by Rochioli, just to name a few. Burg geeks and pinot freaks are no different in that what they want, and are willing to pay top dollar for the privilege, is to hear the voice of their favorite sites.

As such, winemakers everywhere will, on the whole, modify their approach to favor less manipulation and "softer" vinifications and *élevage* work. This is not to say that all experimentation and those who wish to push the edge of the envelope will disappear, only that there is only one constant that will withstand the vagaries of fashion and taste, and that is authenticity and individuality. Nothing else will stand the test of time.

US négociants will continue to thrive and this essay is not predicting their short term demise. But as their Burgundian counterparts have done before them, they will need to adapt and change to continue to flourish the way that they have been during the last 10 years. And ultimately, they will need to secure on some basis long-term access to the best vineyard sites or be shut out permanently from obtaining fruit, and thus crafting wine from the same vineyards that today willingly provide them with raw materials.

Something to chew on!

Sample review: Regional, villages or premiers crus receiving a } symbol are particularly outstanding for their respective appellations and especially merit your attention; grands crus stand on their own merits.

Arcadian Winery (Santa Maria, CA)

2003	Pinot Noir – Dierberg Vineyard	red	89
2003	Pinot Noir – Fiddlestix Vineyard	red	89
2003	} Pinot Noir – Pisoni Vineyard	red	90
2003	} Pinot Noir – Rio Vista Vineyard	red	91
2003	Pinot Noir – Sleepy Hollow Vineyard	red	86

The 2003 vintage is the current release as wines are bottled relatively late by the typical domestic producer standards. Readers should know that Joe Davis' goal is to create serious, long-lived and intense Burgundian styled wines and to that end, he does not destem; as such, the texture and mouth feel of his wines are decidedly different than much of what you will usually taste from California and Oregon. The wines see a high percentage of new oak and are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Not surprisingly, stylistically the wines do indeed closely resemble the Burgundian model and it would require a careful taster to identify many of the Arcadian wines as US pinots though this group of '03s is perhaps a bit easier than usual. Prices range from \$20 to \$75 per bottle. Note that Davis also produces chardonnay from the Sleepy Hollow Vineyard and both the 2001 and 2002 impressed me. For further information, contact Joe Davis: (805) 688-1876 or visit www.arcadianwinery.com

2003 Pinot Noir – Dierberg Vineyard: (the second vintage from Santa Maria fruit planted in 1997 and bottled at 14.5%). This is already displaying some aromatic development that includes forest floor and underbrush notes on the otherwise pretty red pinot and berry fruit nose that merges into delicious, round and sweet middle weight flavors that retain a fine sense of detail and punch on the persistent finish. Overall, very solid if not sensational quality. 89/2009+

2003 Pinot Noir – Fiddlestix Vineyard: (from Santa Rita Hills fruit and bottled at 13.6%). Classic ruby. A ripe nose of red pinot fruit with hints of earth, spice and raspberry liqueur leads to round, rich, full and powerful flavors that are relatively forward by the usual standards of this wine, all wrapped in a dusty, generous and fleshy finish. At present, this lacks the depth I'm used to seeing though it may very well develop more with time. Either way though, the seductive mouth feel makes this a pleasure to drink already. 89/2009+

2003 Pinot Noir – Rio Vista Vineyard: (from Santa Rita Hills fruit and bottled at 14.5%). A fresh red berry fruit and crushed herb nose marries into rich, intense and solidly detailed flavors that possess excellent punch, depth and a restrained power and vivacity, all wrapped in a finish of impressive length. While the herbal element will bother those who enjoy their pinots on the riper side, there is real vineyard character that comes through here and this could easily pass for a fine 1er from Auxey-Duress or Monthelie as there is a similar mouth feel and texture. An impressive effort and certainly worth a look. 91/2011+

2003 Pinot Noir – Pisoni Vineyard: (from Monterey Country vines and bottled at 13.5%). This is also ripe but slightly less ripe than the Fiddlestix yet more aromatically elegant with higher-toned notes of raspberry and pure pinot that combines with delicious and finer if less concentrated flavors that deliver good length and fine focus. A delicious and relatively forward effort that possesses excellent balance. This won't wow you with size or weight but I like the understated style. 90/2009+

2003 Pinot Noir – Sleepy Hollow Vineyard: (from Monterey Country vines in the Santa Lucia highlands planted in 1974 and bottled at 14.0%). Initially this was moderately candied but with air the nose turned to vegetal and high-toned raspberry notes that lead to slightly gassy middle weight flavors that offer good intensity but the overall quality here is clearly not at the level of the rest of the range or for that matter what one typically expects here. A curious showing given how uniformly excellent most of Davis' efforts usually are and this finishes with noticeable warmth as well. 86/2008?