

# 3 areas in California are good for pinot noir

A recent section of this nation's wine news magazine, the Wine Spectator, is devoted to that most complex and challenging of wine grapes, the pinot noir.

The point of the collection of articles is to argue that, by the evidence of an empirical tasting panel, at least two major American viticultural regions are starting to show themselves consistently as ideal regions for this grape.

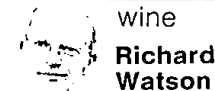
Hardly news for those who follow American wines closely, the Spectator's approach has merit in that its conclusions came as a result of comparatively tasting some 60 wines. The best of the pinot noirs came chiefly from two regions.

A third, one less well-known for pinot noir, also showed very well, probably to the surprise of many.

One of the two better-known areas is the Carneros region of Southern Napa and Sonoma counties. The area is extremely cool during the growing season, drawing this benefit from the winds from San Pablo Bay above San Francisco.

IT IS A wind-swept area of low, treeless hills that formerly was decreed fit only for grazing sheep. Acacia, Beaulieu, Buena Vista, Saintsbury, Carneros Creek and Chateau Bouchane (all available in Michigan) have for several years demonstrated clearly that fine pinot noir can and does come from California when the grapes are grown in the proper location and other conditions are met. Wines from these places did very well in the Spectator taste-off.

That the other great pinot noir region is the Willamette Valley of northern Oregon should come as no surprise to anyone remotely interested in the topic. Oregon pinot noirs have been showing most favorably against some of the most esteemed French Burgundies for several years now.



wine  
**Richard Watson**

Recently some comparative tastings have attained national press coverage. Clearly, they are the equal of, if not perhaps superior to, the Volnays, Nuits-St.-Georges and Chambertins. Names from the northern part of the valley are coming to public attention. (Not the whole valley as the Spectator suggests. The southern part is too warm and produces better cabernet sauvignon in the Salem area).

Some of the names are Eyrie (and its resident genius David Lett), Knudsen-Erath, Adelheim, Elk Cove, Ponzi, Yamhill Valley, Amity, Rex Hill, Sokol-Blosser and Shafer. Fortunately, they are beginning to appear in Michigan as well. Availability will be limited.

It is the third viticultural area, however, that surprises: certain portions of Sonoma county, especially the cooler parts of the Russian River and the southern valley around the city of Sonoma. The country is, essentially, a microcosm of the whole of the California wine industry, showing a wide variety of soils, temperature conditions and mountains intermixed with valley flatlands.

IN AT LEAST two of these, the pinot noir grape excels (in others, the chardonnay and zinfandel are among the best grown in the entire state).

Pinot noirs from Sonoma that were recognized as showing especially well include Robert Stemmler, Rochioli, Acacia, DeLoach, Clos du Bois, Hanzell and Gary Farrell. The last two not available in Michigan. I would add the Jack London series

from Kenwood as well.

Perhaps more than any other grape, pinot noir is dependent on its growing conditions if it is to produce a superior wine. Proper conditions in the western world are few. One need only add the region of Burgundy to the above to have them all identified.

In less than optimal conditions it produces wines that are exceptionally light, tasteless, sharp and generally hostile. And vintage dates are important in choosing these wines. More so than with cabernet sauvignon, there are great differences to be found from year to year. One need only compare the excellent 1983 and 1985 Oregon vintages with the poor 1984 to understand this.

The vine thrives in cool, foggy and somewhat cloudy weather. It presents unusual difficulties in its cultivation, harvest and fermentation. It is a shy producer. There are, in short, innumerable reasons for avoiding the pinot noir business, such as its challenges. It lacks the durability of cabernet, the resilience and bounty of zinfandel and chardonnay's tolerance of its handling. "It is a wine you dance with, not wrestle with," says David Lett.

Why bother?

The answer lies in the occasional fine bottle of Burgundy or pinot noir that one encounters. There is a delicacy, a bouquet, a body that is unforgettable. It can be a velvet fist, a warm and lingering charmer that can seduce even a lover of Bordeaux and its cabernets and merlots.



## Odd couple and poker buddies

Jimmy Launce (standing, left) and Mike Evans (also standing) are the co-stars of "The Odd Couple," presented by Jimmy Launce Productions Inc. of Farmington Hills, in dinner theater format at the Hyatt Regency Dearborn. In this scene, Launce as neatnik Felix Unger busies himself serving drinks and straightening up, much to everyone's annoyance, during Oscar Madison's poker game with his buddies. Trying to play the game are Ed Cable (left), Joe Haynes, Darryl Dalton and Lou Emmert. Performances of

Neil Simon's comedy hit continue Fridays-Saturdays through Jan. 10 at the Club on the second level of the Hyatt Regency. Two choices are available for dinner. Showgoers may dine in the hotel at Giulio's at 6 p.m. or at Kaley's at 7. Dinner at Giulio's and the show is \$29.50 per person. Dinner at Kaley's and the show is \$21. Show only is \$9.50. Cocktails are available at 8 p.m. and the show follows. For reservations, call 593-1234, Ext. 2323.

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