



JOHN WINTHROP HAEGER

PACIFIC
PINOT NOIR

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JOHN WINTHROP HAEGER



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To our memories of

Bryce Bagnall

Michael Bonaccorsi

Jimi Brooks

Duane Cronin

Reginald Oliver

and

Don Talley

*Passionate growers and crafters of American pinot
noir who recently passed from the scene*

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As always, the responsibility for errors, omissions, and other shortcomings is mine alone.

 *About This Book*

When I wrote *North American Pinot Noir* between 1999 and 2003, wine publications and consumers had just begun to rediscover American editions of pinot noir after a long, cold winter of discontent. That book's seven main chapters covered pinot noir's European origins, what is known about its genetics, the history of its transplantation to North America, the regions where it is grown, its clones, the winegrowing and winemaking processes, and the delicate matter of how Burgundies and American pinots compare. Seventy-two American producers were then profiled, in an effort to tell part of the story through histories, descriptions, and assessments of individuals and businesses who had played or were then playing important roles in establishing the legitimacy of pinot as an object of viticultural and enological attention, and whose wines illustrated, more or less, the state of the art.

Four years after publication, the book's main chapters are still largely current, but the profiles have aged prematurely. Specific information about proprietors, winemakers, plantings, fruit sources, cellar treatments, and wine programs has changed, of course. A few iconic labels have changed hands entirely, and some veterans are now in business under new names. Furthermore, as I explain in the Introduction, the number of players has exploded. Some of this growth can be attributed to a vanity effect—a me-too scramble that may not be durable over the long run—but many of the new entrants are impressively serious and are at least as dedicated to pushing the envelope with American pinot as any of their predecessors were a quarter century earlier. Taken together, the seventy-two profiles in *North American Pinot Noir* now paint a much less satisfactory picture of the state of play than they did at the beginning of 2004. To set things right, an entirely new and much expanded family of profiles seemed well warranted, and for this updated collection I have chosen a new title, *Pacific Pinot Noir*.

With producer profiles identified as the new book's core content, it seemed important to establish a consistent and defensibly objective methodology for determining which producers to report. In *North American Pinot Noir*, I focused on producers with a substantial *stake* in pinot noir and with a *track record* consisting of at least four vintages made and released by press time. I also allowed my selection to be biased in favor of producers whose personal or corporate stories contributed disproportionately to the overall story of pinot in North America, because they were pioneers or early-adopters, or because they set benchmarks, made exemplary wines, or attracted special respect and attention from their peers. In the end, however, the criteria were soft and very imperfectly objective. Conversely, however, using totally objective criteria—such as “largest-selling brands” or “largest-selling restaurant brands”—would have been plainly incompatible with sensitivity to outstanding quality and sympathetic attention to small and often benchmark producers. Critic ratings, the meat and potatoes of the American wine industry, are nonobjective by definition, even when they are aggregated or averaged.

For this book, I wanted an approach capable of identifying producers who are more than routinely visible in the national marketplace for very good wines and who attract the attention of people serious about fine wine. This segment of the wine market can be defined as the channels and venues where wines are selected by knowledgeable and often passionate staff who usually have a tolerance for a variety of wine styles offered at a range of price points, who are not put off by wines that are available only in tiny quantities, and who taste constantly and quasi-comprehensively. Thus, it made sense to give special attention to producers who repeatedly figure on the lists of restaurants with very serious and intelligent wine programs or on the shelves of retailers with similar discipline. It also made sense to afford attention to the coverage of a few widely read and trusted critics—although not to their wine ratings—and to the participant lists of some of North America's largest consumer-and-trade events focused on pinot noir, where participation is filtered directly or indirectly by peer review. Because there is no way to derive from industry or regulatory sources a comprehensive list of wineries, producers, brands, or labels that make one or more editions of American pinot noir, nor is there a variety-based trade group, the producer list featured in this volume had to be built incrementally from the bottom up, not winnowed from the top down. In the end, I collated information from serious wine retailers and wine-friendly restaurants in major markets throughout the country, along with lists of winery participants (over the last five years) from the two largest consumer-and-trade events devoted to pinot noir, reviews from trusted critics, and the entire list of pinot producers known to *Wine & Spirits* magazine, regardless of whether or how favorably their wines were reviewed. This aggregation generated a base list that appeared to reflect producers' visibility in the *hand-chosen* marketplace. However, since simply collating the three dozen source lists produced more than 800 producer names, it was necessary to sift it. The

inclusive list was reduced to 238 by eliminating producers whose names appeared fewer than three times in the combination of sources. Something in this range seemed a reasonable target: large enough to represent, more or less reasonably, the seriousness of purpose associated with pinot and the current state of play, but small enough to be managed in the time available.

The methodology is, of course, not unimpeachable. Its most obvious flaw is that only three dozen information sources were used—a very small sample of the nation’s serious wine shops and restaurants with important wine lists. The small size of the sample means that some producers covered here would not have been covered if the list of selected retailers and restaurants had been compiled only slightly differently. Another limitation is that wine lists from my chosen sources also reflected, of necessity, producers whose wines were available at the time the lists were provided; such lists must be understood as snapshots, not as comprehensive histories of all pinot producers represented in the retailers’ stocks or on the restaurants’ lists over the course of the preceding or ensuing months or years. Overall, however, the list of 238 produced few serious anomalies. If skewed, it is biased in favor of qualitative superiority adjusted for price performance, which seems a reasonable outcome. Consumers can thus expect to find here information about *most* of the wines they will find on lists in good, pinot-friendly restaurants and on retail shelves where wines are carefully selected by knowledgeable staff.

Inevitably, a small number of the producers I sought to cover opted out, were unresponsive, or could not provide essential information. In a very few cases, it was simply impossible to make mutually convenient appointments. This reduced the final tally to the 216 producers featured in the Table of Contents. Once this final group was composed, my personal favorites and qualitative judgments were not a selection criterion, although personal favorites have been flagged.

One consequence of my selection methodology is that no producer outside what, in *North American Pinot Noir*, I called the Pacific Pinot Zone, survived into the final list. With utmost apologies to the intrepid pinot-makers working in British Columbia, Ontario, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Virginia, New Mexico, Texas, and other states, sometimes with impressive results, the entries in this book are ultimately confined to producers working in California and Oregon. Simply put, the Pacific Pinot Zone, which stretches from the mouth of the Columbia River to the Santa Barbara Channel and extends no farther inland than about 25 miles from the Pacific coast, accounts for more than 95 percent of North American pinot activity and for virtually all of the activity visible in interstate commerce.

Each profile contains a bit of history and background, either personal or corporate, as appropriate; a summary of wines produced now and in back vintages, including the vineyard sources for each; notes about winegrowing and winemaking protocols; an overall assessment of the producer’s style with pinot; and tasting notes. This

information cross-references the discussions of regions, plant material, winegrowing, and winemaking that were presented in *North American Pinot Noir*, but these discussions are not repeated in this book. Full-color regional maps that locate individual vineyards can also be found in *North American Pinot Noir*; only simplified, larger-scale black-and-white maps that locate American viticultural areas but not individual vineyards are included in this book. Readers unfamiliar with winegrowing terminology may wish to consult the main chapters of *North American Pinot Noir*, its glossary, or other reliable sources of general information like *The Oxford Companion to Wine* for help. With the exception of a few who are no longer in business or who no longer make pinot noir, most California and Oregon producers profiled in *North American Pinot Noir* are reprofiled here. Where stories or circumstances have changed since 2004, the profiles have been substantially revised, but some information has also been slightly condensed for reasons of space.

At the head of each profile, a series of small icons appears, which conveys information about that producer. The icons denote whether public tasting is available and whether it occurs regularly or by appointment; whether the producer's wines are based on estate-grown grapes, purchased grapes, or both; how much wine is produced; how extensively the producer's wines are distributed; and how the wines are priced. A key to the icons appears on page *xli*. Web sites and telephone numbers appear on page 411. Readers are advised to consult Web sites, or to contact wineries by telephone, for completely current information about visits, tours, and tasting. Producers themselves are also the best source of information about the availability of their products. The icons that represent total production and producers' distribution strategies, taken together, are a measure of how hard or easy the product may be to find, but nearly all producers are happy to provide specific details if asked, and most producers can and will ship to customers in most states.

In order to shorten the descriptions of winemaking that appeared in *North American Pinot Noir*, the present book assumes, in general, that most producers follow a common, consensus-derived protocol. Most begin by separating individual berries from their stems, and then discarding the stems. They then allow the fruit to macerate cool or cold before fermentation starts, to extract some color, flavor, and related "stuff" in a nonalcoholic environment. This step is called cold-soaking or pre-fermentation maceration. The fermentation vessels used for pinot noir—typically plastic bins, wooden cone sections, or stainless steel tanks—are usually topless, so that cellar workers have easy access to the fermenting fruit and juice and can manipulate them with their hands or feet, or with plungers. Most makers add an active, dried form of one or more cultured yeasts to each fermentation vessel to kick-start the fermentation process. New wine is generally drained or pressed off the skins, seeds, and other detritus when all the grapes' sugar has been converted to alcohol, although some makers prefer to press the must before full conversion or to extend skin contact after active

fermentation ends. At this point the new wine goes into barrels where it is “raised” for at least ten months, directly or after a short period of settling in tanks. Blends—essentially decisions regarding which lots of wine will go into which final bottlings—are made during or at the end of *élevage*, and the finished wines are bottled, with treatments designed to ensure clarity and microbiological stability. In this book, most of the winemaking notes are confined to *departures* from this “consensus protocol,” to interesting adaptations, or to the explanations individual winemakers give for particular choices. The most common of such, and perhaps also the most consequential, are elimination or truncation of cold-soaking, fermentation at very hot or very cool temperatures, full reliance on resident or ambient yeast populations for primary fermentation, long postfermentation maceration, and *élevage* that extends until after the following vintage.

Readers should be aware, when digesting these notes, that no artisan winemaker treats all grapes the same way, or the same way every year, since the properties of the fruit vary from year to year as a function of weather and other factors. Cellar conditions may also fluctuate. These descriptions reflect general approaches and

A WORD ABOUT BARRELS

Most red wines spend some period of time in oak barrels after fermentation and before bottling. This phase in the life of a wine is usually called by its French name, *élevage*, and wines so treated are often described in English as “barrel-raised.” (Wines raised without time in barrels are usually called “tank-raised.”) Winemakers’ barrel choices are aesthetic and subjective, but they have a huge impact on wine style. In these pages, I try to capture the main elements of choice. These are, first, how long the wines spend in barrels; second, what percentage of the barrel stock is newly purchased for each vintage, versus the percentage that is being reused a second, third, or fourth time; third, from which manufacturers the barrels are purchased; fourth, whether the winemaker has a preference regarding where the stave wood for the barrels was sourced; and fifth, whether any idiosyncratic choices have been made about the dimensions of the barrels, the manner of their manufacture, or pre-use treatments after the barrels have been delivered. Most American pinot producers rely entirely on barrels coopered from French oak, on the theory that its flavors are subtler than Hungarian or American oak and more flattering to pinot. Wood from trees grown in the Allier, in central France, is said to be especially tight-grained, which means (in theory) that “oaky” and “vanilla” flavors leach slowly into the wine. Wood from trees grown in the Vosges, the mountain spine between Lorraine and Alsace, are usually described as imparting “sweet” or “meaty” flavors. Among widely used coopers, François Frères, well-known for intense flavors of chocolate and vanilla, is often chosen by winemakers who like barrels to leave a strong imprint on their wines; Remond, Sirugue, and Gillet are more frequently chosen by makers who place primary emphasis on subtlety, finesse, and bright fruit flavors. Many winemakers describe the signature of Rousseau barrels as exotic, imparting spicy, mocha, or earthy flavors. More information about barrels is found in Chapter 6 of *North American Pinot Noir*.

sensitivities, but these practices are not invariable or industrial formulae. It is also appropriate to bear in mind that when vintners pick grapes very ripe, for whatever reason, a variety of interventions and adjustments may be required in the cellar, including but not limited to additions of water, acid, or both, and additions of yeast nutrients to keep the active yeasts working even as the amount of alcohol rises during the course of fermentation. In some cases makers resort to industrial processes to reduce the percentage of alcohol in the finished wine or to stabilize wines that contain both unfermented sugar and yeasts or bacteria, using additives that deactivate microorganisms. Some makers are reluctant to talk about these matters openly, so their descriptions of winemaking may be elliptical. Generally, my notes reflect only what a winemaker has been willing to tell me.

Most profiles also report information about the vineyards from which the producer sources grapes. Some of these are so-called estate vineyards, which the vintner owns and farms; others are independently owned and sell grapes to one or several producers. When several producers source fruit from the same vineyard and use the vineyard name on the label, I flag this fact for easy cross-reference. As far as possible, I provide information about the location, geology, and mesoclimate of each site and describe when and how each vineyard was planted. Most winegrowers believe that various properties of site—soil, mesoclimate, aspect, exposure, and air circulation—are critical determinants of wine character and quality, especially when wine is made unblended, from grapes grown in a single site. They summarize these properties as “site-specificity” or use the French word *terroir*. How a vineyard is laid out, and when it was planted, can also be significant. Metrics like row orientation and vine spacing are much debated by viticulturists and winemakers, although it is generally (if not universally) accepted that older vineyards, where vine plants are fully established and deeply rooted, show site-specificity better than vineyards that have only recently begun to produce. It complicates the picture, however, that mature vineyards in California and Oregon (though not in France) almost always display wide vine spacing, whereas vineyards planted in the last decade and a half reflect a “modern” view that more vines per acre and less fruit per vine is associated with better wine. This view is deservedly controversial. Beyond the facts of planting, abundant evidence suggests that special viticultural practices, including dry, organic, and biodynamic farming, are not only good for the planet in general, but correlate well with better flavors in finished wine and better expression of site-specificity. Because these matters are all arguably consequential for finished wine, they are called out in many vineyard descriptions.

In addition, a major topic of discussion among winegrowers and winemakers is the identity of the plant material used in each vineyard. Although all the world’s pinot noir has a common origin, mutation over time has created hundreds of distinctly different instances of the variety, among which growers choose today when they set out to plant or replant a vineyard. These instances of pinot, called selections or clones,

are known by a jumble of overlapping alphanumeric designations and “common” names that are actually far from common and are sometimes also imprecise. A full discussion of clones and selections is found in Chapter 5 of *North American Pinot Noir*, but a few essentials are summarized in the box below.

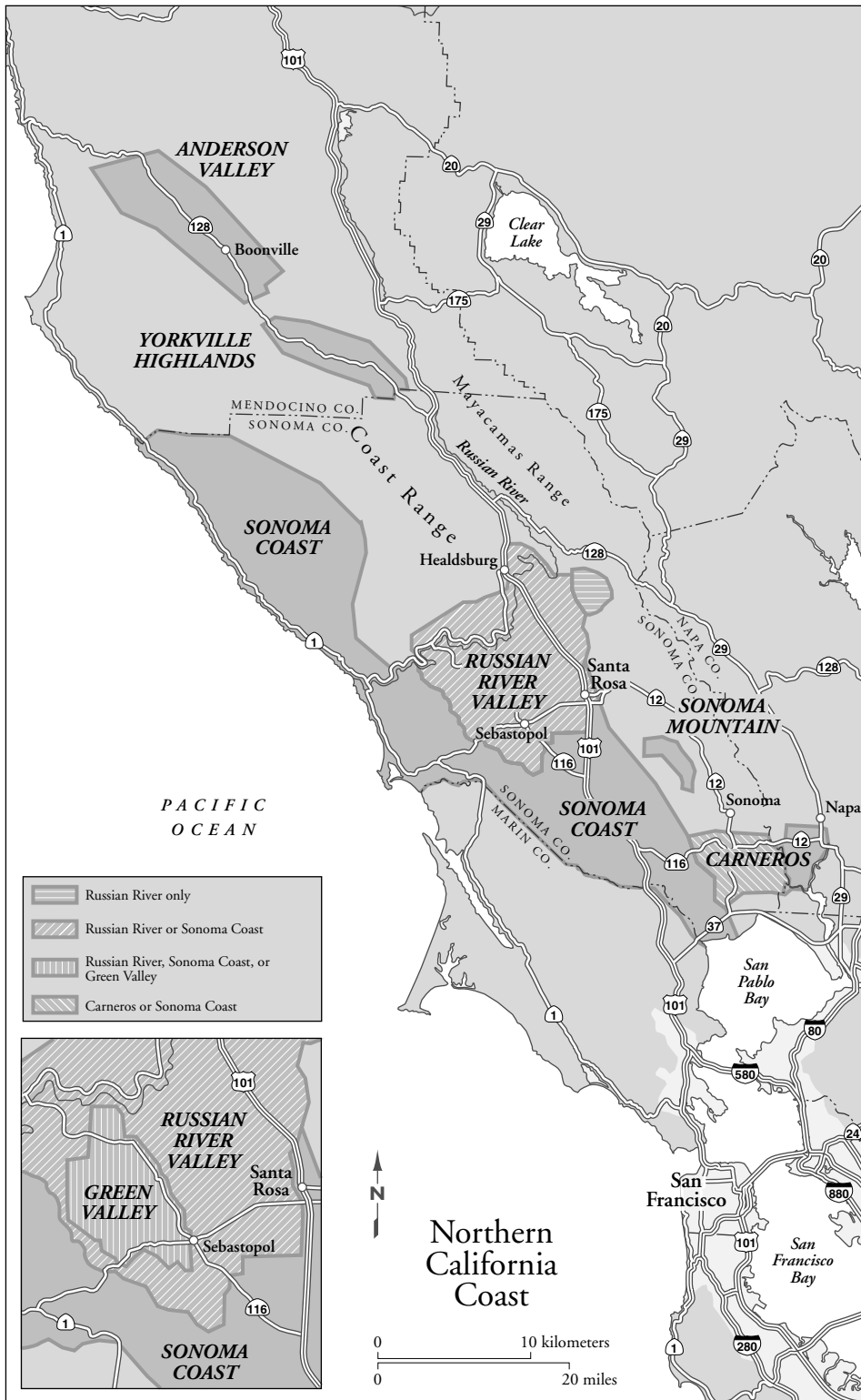
Most insiders agree that clones are different and that they result in wines with distinctly different flavors and structural properties, but the fingerprint of clones is generally less distinctive than the stamp of the wine’s *terroir*.

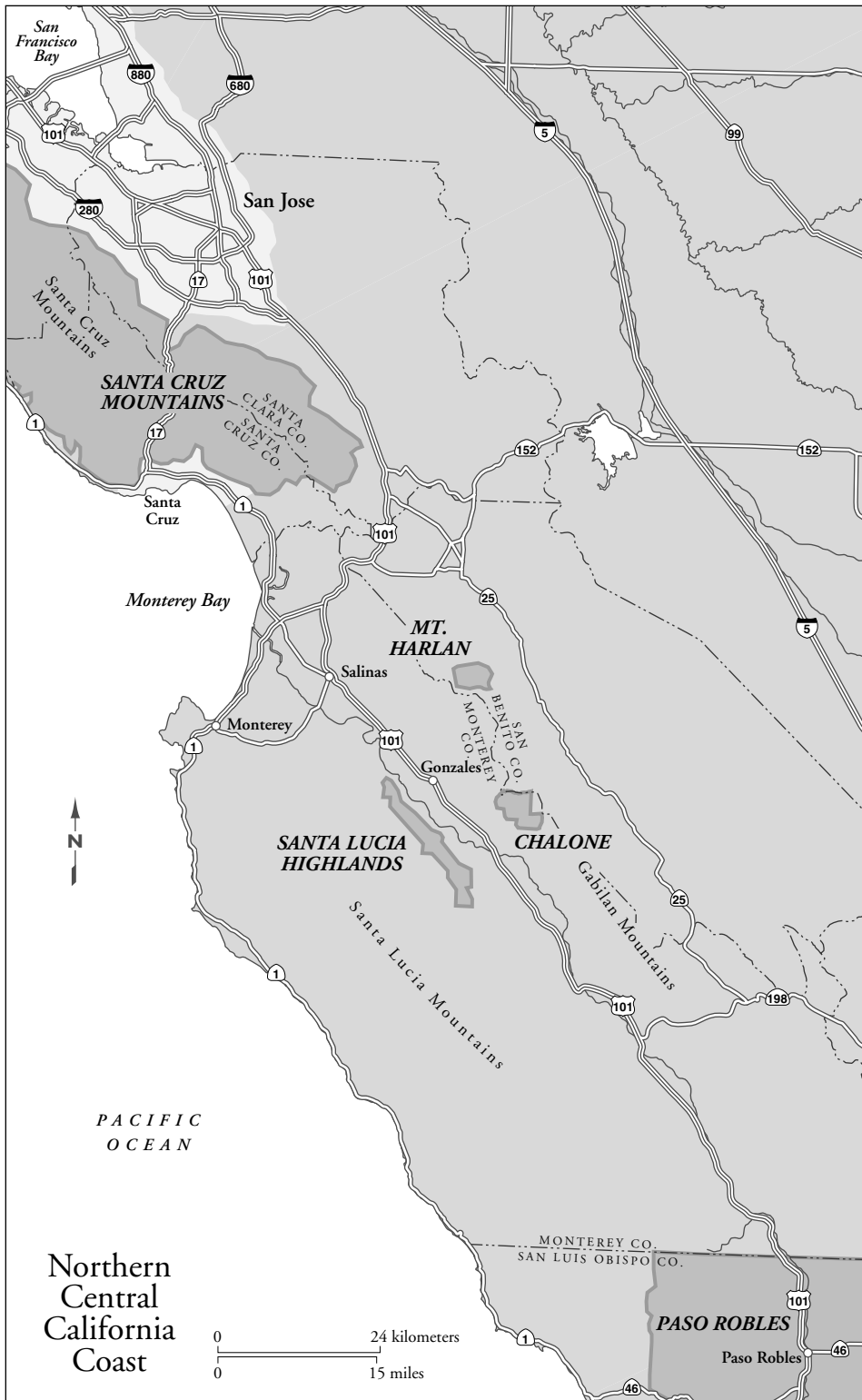
CLONES AND SELECTIONS OF PINOT NOIR

Most selections of pinot noir discussed in these pages fall into one of four groups:

- Selections made in France since about 1950 identified by three-digit numbers assigned by the Comité technique permanent de la sélection (CTPS). The most important subset consists of selections made in Burgundy that are commonly called “Dijon clones.” Selections identified in these pages as “Dijon 113” and so forth fall into this group. These selections were not available in North America until the 1980s and 1990s, but now account for a majority of new plantings. Their common characteristics are low yields and early ripening. Many exhibit black-fruit rather than red-fruit flavors. Dijon 828 is an especially muddled story; see the Archery Summit Estate profile for details.
- Selections made in several European sites by persons affiliated with Foundation Plant Services at the University of California Davis between the late 1940s and the 1960s, and then quarantined, tested, and certified disease-free at Davis and distributed officially since about 1955. These selections are known by one- or two-digit numbers preceded with the “UCD” label, for example “UCD 4,” but they also have common names. For example, UCD 4 is commonly known as the “Pommard clone.” Selections in this category account for an overwhelming percentage of the pinot noir planted in California and Oregon before 1990.
- Selections made from California vineyards, then tested and certified at the University of California Davis. The earliest examples were distributed in the 1950s, but new selections are still made and released after testing and treatment, nearly every year. The most important selections in this category are the Martini clones, also known as UCD 13 and 15, which were widely planted in Carneros, in Monterey, and along the Southern Central Coast in the 1960s and 1970s.
- Undocumented selections taken directly from European vineyards, which have existed since the middle of the nineteenth century. Unlike other selections, undocumented selections often originated with cuttings taken from multiple vines, which makes them heterogenous “mass” selections rather than homogeneous “clonal” selections. Sometimes informally identified with the name of the European vineyard from which they were allegedly culled (e.g., the “La Tâche clone”), they are more commonly known by the name of an American vineyard where they were planted on this side of the water (e.g., “Mount Eden selection”). Because it has been illegal to import plant material without appropriate quarantine since 1948, many undocumented selections are dubbed “suitcase” or “Samsonite” clones in the trade.

As in *North American Pinot Noir*, the tasting notes at the end of each profile are intended to give readers a good picture of my recent experience with the producer's wines and a fair picture of what to expect from that producer, pinot-wise, overall. Most wines described in these pages were tasted at home, unblind, twice: once with food and once in clean-palate circumstances, using Riedel Vinum Burgundy glasses or their equivalent. In some cases, however, wines were tasted with producers, on their premises, or even at wine events, where some aspects of the tasting experience were beyond my control. Most of the individual wines described herein will have disappeared from the market before the book is published, however, so readers will be disappointed if they attempt to use *Pacific Pinot Noir* as a buying guide. Readers are also cautioned that all wine tasting is existential. Even the same wine will taste different to the same taster at different moments in time. All fine wines evolve constantly, and there is inevitable bottle-to-bottle variation. And pinot noir has a well-documented tendency to go through "tight" or "dumb" phases after it has been bottled, sometimes repeatedly. During such phases, the wine can seem aromatically mute or unexpressive, or flavor challenged.





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