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PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

*Pinot Noir: Its
What's for
Dinner*

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Buena Tierra Vineyard

The first plantings of Pinot Noir (or vines closely allied to Pinot Noir) in the Russian River Valley were reportedly farmed by the Fountaingrove Winery north of Santa Rosa in the 1930s. The modern age of Pinot Noir viticulture in the Valley began when the Bacigalupi family planted Pinot Noir on Westside Road in 1964. Several other venerable vineyard names followed including Rochioli Vineyard in 1968 and Joseph Swan's Trenton Estate Vineyard in 1969. By 1973, Davis Bynum had released the first vineyard-designate wine from the Russian River Valley, a Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir, crafted by Gary Farrell. Tom Dehlinger followed two years later and released his first Pinot Noir in 1977.

The Buena Tierra Vineyard was planted in 1978, making it one of the oldest vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Owned and farmed by Joseph R. Miller, this venerable vineyard is located 1.5 miles southeast of Rochioli Vineyard in the low hills of the Laguna Ridge where the Russian River turns to head west to the Pacific Ocean. The site is ideal for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with well-drained sandy clay loam soil, cooling morning and evening fog from the ocean and bright sunshine during the day. Selectively irrigated, the vineyard is planted to several clones.

Through the years the vineyard has been the source of grapes for many notable bottlings including those of Williams Selyem and the now defunct Seven Lions Winery (owned by deceased Fred Williams). With the sale of Williams Selyem in 1997, former Williams Selyem alumni Margi Wierenga (Brogan Cellars) and Nikolai Stez have been major recipients of Pinot Noir grapes from Buena Tierra and both produce a vineyard-designate using grapes from the original plantings. Buena Tierra vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs have also been bottled in recent years by Renteria (no longer), Irony, Reynolds and White Oak. The Chardonnays from this vineyard have been impressive as well from producers such as Turjanis, Alban, Keegan Cellars and Shibumi Knoll. Brogan Cellars will bottle a 2008 Chardonnay from the Buena Tierra Vineyard as well. From my recent tasting of several vintages of Buena Tierra Vineyard Pinot Noir from both Brogan Cellars and Woodenhead, I can highly recommend the bottlings from these two producers. They are quintessential Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs with bright flavors of cherries, spice and cola.

Brogan Cellars



Margi Wierenga is the daughter of Burt Williams and shares his hearty laugh and passion for Pinot Noir. Photo above shows Margi (right) pouring her wines at the 2007 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival. She was a teenager in the 1970s when Burt began to make his first wines in the family's garage. She later worked as a volunteer at the original Williams Selyem winery in a rented garage on River Road in Fulton and became a paid employee at the

subsequent winery location on the Allen Vineyard property on Westside Road. With the sale of Williams Selyem in 1997, she started her own label, Brogan Cellars, named after her paternal grandmother. She released her first wine, a 1998 Russian River Pinot Noir, working out of a cramped converted garage, using the same dairy vats for fermentation made famous by her father. Her contacts at Williams Selyem allowed her to source top vineyard sources for her wines including the Buena Tierra Vineyard.

The Buena Tierra Vineyard Pinot Noir is the favorite of many of Brogan's customers and some have called in "Sex in a Glass." The Buena Tierra Pinot Noirs come from the vineyard's oldest "Helio Doro Block". The Helio Doro Block is 2.5 acres and was named by Fred Williams when he discovered the vineyard in 1999. The name refers to one of the employees who has worked the vineyard for many years. In recent years, Margi has produced several Pinot Noirs from her father's Morning Dew Ranch in Anderson Valley. Production remains small (less than 2,000 cases) and includes other varieties as well. Most of the wine is sold through a mailing list at www.brogancellars.com. 707-473-0211.



2001 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$75. Aged 14 months in 50% new French oak. *Very enticing aromas of black cherries, oak, mocha, sage and spearmint. Bright and sweet black cherry flavors with a little plum, cola and earth notes. Fairly dense and structured with a silky texture and a dry finish. Lip-smacking good. At its peak now, but will hold a few more years.*

2002 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.2% alc., \$75. Aged 11 months in 75% new French oak. *Dark earth-kissed cherry and berry aromas are echoed in the flavors. The ripest, thickest and most brooding of the Brogan wines sampled. A touch dry and rough with a slight citric tang on the finish.*

2003 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.1% alc, \$75. Aged 15 months, unfinned and unfiltered. *Shy nose of black cherries, black raspberries and baking spice. Delicious black cherry and blackberry core with chocolate accents and a citric note on the clean finish. The powerful black raspberry scent carries a finish that lasts at least half a minute.*



2004 Brogan Cellars Buena Tierra Vineyard Helio Doro Block Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 14.8%alc., 220 cases, \$75. Aged in 75% new French oak, unfinned and unfiltered. *Demure scents of Bing cherry, toast and a touch of barnyard. Immensely satisfying wild red berry and red cherry flavors wrapped in baking spices and chicory. Delicate and bright with a suave texture, slippery tannins and a flashy aromatic lift on the finish. This is drinking beautifully now and is definitely "sex in a glass."*

