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## *Thoughts on Pinot noir*

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Pinot noir, as I have said earlier, was my *raison d'être* for coming to Oregon. When I discovered Burgundy for the first time while attending UC Davis, it was a case of love at first sight, and the romance has been going on for about 34 years now. Although life with Pinot noir both as a grower and winemaker can have its ups and downs, it's not much different than any other romantic relationship. Indeed, to quote my long time friend Rodney Strong, Pinot noir "should be approached like a beautiful woman—with respect, some knowledge and great hopes".

It has been called a difficult grape to grow, and in many ways it is, but I think it is often put in this context by the fact that for it to produce its best wines usually requires a "difficult" climate. Pinot noir's clusters are usually small and to make decent wine it is well known that there can't be too many of them on a vine. (Our average yield for 29 years is 2.2 tons/acre.)

Those little clusters contain rather thin skinned grapes making them subject to powdery mildew and bunch rot the spores of which are so prevalent in the very climates where Pinot noir produces its best wines. In contrast, Cabernet Sauvignon produces large, loose clusters of thick skinned, hairy chested, fully colored, tannic grapes. It usually yields 6-8 tons per acre with ease...and grows best in easy warm climates almost anywhere in the world.

I just mentioned "fully colored" in discussing Cabernet Sauvignon. All red vinifera varieties contain nine anthocyanin coloring pigments—all, that is except Pinot noir (and Pinot Meunier)—which are missing four of these pigments. This should be adequate evidence that God never intended Pinot noir to be a deeply colored wine and indeed it rarely is if grown in the cool climates which allow full expression of the fruit's varietal character.

A lot of media these days would have us believe that Pinot noir should look and even taste like an Amador Zinfandel. In fact there are winemakers who are manipulating Pinot noir into this conformist niche. I spoke recently with a friend in Burgundy who said "extract" no problem, just add some chestnut powder, "color" no problem, just make a call to the South. (It's been said that Oregon can never replicate Burgundy because we're not close enough to the Rhone Valley.)

I should add that most reputable winemakers of both Burgundy and Oregon don't play these games.

To The Eyrie Vineyards. Obviously we have the oldest Pinot noir in The Willamette Valley—30 years old this vintage. These are own rooted vines planted at a rational rather than metaphysical spacing of 6 x 10 feet. We have four vineyards within a mile of each other, but at elevations ranging from 250' to 750'. These differences in elevation usually mean two weeks difference in harvest time. Each of these sites produces its own signature. No insecticides or herbicides are used in our vineyards and only elemental sulfur and copper as fungicides. The grapes are hand harvested by our skilled long-time crew which insures that any flaws are left in the vineyard. Thus the grapes which arrive at the winery are the best that we and nature can provide.