

(savor)



NEW WORLD PINOT NOIR

SEEKING THE HOLY GRAIL

Jasper Morris MW introduces the results of an inconclusive but interesting and wide-ranging tasting, of wines from California, Oregon, and New Zealand, which he shared with **Stephen Brook** and **Mark Savage MW**

It is important to come to such a tasting with mind closed and taste buds open. Objectivity is lost as soon as one tries to guess where a particular wine might come from (ah, we must have reached Martinborough now...). We were not in fact told which country was which, though the preponderance of Stelvin closures for the Antipodean samples was a bit of a giveaway. The division of the tasting into flights by region was a rational decision, but who knows how the results might have changed if wines from all areas had been intermingled at random?

Growers of New World Pinot have zeal, technical competence (usually), and a blessed lack of the furniture of the past that Burgundians need to surmount. Yet the scales remain tipped against these New Seekers of the Holy Grail,

now and for some time to come, until certain inequalities are worked out of the system. The Pinot industries of New Zealand, Oregon, and California are only in their second generation. To some extent, the siting of the vineyards has thus far been, inevitably, trial and error. Original plantings tend to be for social reasons (near the weekend abodes of the enophile doctors and lawyers of this world), and it takes time to work out the combination of climate, soil, and topography where Pinot can thrive.

The first bout of serious modern Pinot production in the USA developed during the 1970s, both in California—where cooler sites, such as Carneros and the Santa Ynez Valley, were selected—and in Oregon, after David Lett's migration north, founding the Eyrie vineyard in 1966. The

story is a little more recent in New Zealand, with pioneers in Canterbury and Martinborough starting up at the very end of the '70s or early '80s. Plantings in Marlborough were initially more designed for sparkling wines, while Central Otago was developed from the late 1980s. It takes at least a generation before it really becomes clear which are the ideal sites to plant.

Then, the vine-stock material can be problematic—there are no favorite old vines that can be used for *sélection massale*. The first options in the new Pinot countries were usually clones suited to sparkling-wine production—high in yield and light in color. Thereafter, the various UC Davis and Dijon clones were developed, but only recently has a grower had a wide selection from which to choose. Equally significant is the absence of old vines. Many of the first plantings had to be replaced after phylloxera problems, so few producers can point to anything like a mature vineyard, and certainly not the 40 years old that a conscientious Burgundian would consider the starting point for *vieilles vignes*.

What are the winemakers trying to achieve? I hear mixed messages when I travel to the various epicenters of Pinot, be it the International Pinot Noir Celebration in Oregon, the World of Pinot Noir in the Central Coast, or the triennial Wellington Pinot Noir Conference in New Zealand. If only I had a bottle of grand cru Burgundy in my cellar for every time a New World Pinot-maker has told me that they make their wine in a Burgundian style... as if there were not almost as many Burgundian styles of making Pinot as there are vigneronns. It is a love/hate relationship, though: On the one hand, the vineyards of Burgundy are seen as the ultimate reference point; on the other, the wines that come therefrom are often decried (“I tasted my wines blind against the DRC wines and mine won...”).

It would be hard to derive any clear statistical weighting from the results of our tasting. New Zealand (excluding the probably faulty bottle of Ara Resolute) pipped California by an irrelevant fraction, though Oregon trailed in a clear third—perhaps because of too many wines that, though competent, lacked enough character to enthuse the judges. Nor were there clear results between different districts, with Russian River/Sonoma barely clear of the Central Coast and results inconclusive from New Zealand, where Marlborough produced both the top two and the bottom two wines, with Martinborough performing consistently between 15 and 15.5 and Central Otago not far behind.

The majority of the wines from all areas were from 2006, with not enough examples from other years to suggest any vintage pattern. Indeed there are as many instances of tasters commenting on a tired aspect to 2006 as for the older Pinots. For the most part, the wines were holding up well, and low marks were as often given for stylistic reasons as for specific faults in a wine.

The fascination of Pinot Noir affects us all differently. One striking point about this tasting is how little agreement there was between the three tasters when scoring the wines, even though tasting notes might be quite similar. Stephen Brook and I both picked out rose petals in the Eyrie Pinot Meunier 2001 (included as a ringer), yet I loved the wine and he did not. Mark Savage was also a fan, though none of us liked the 2002 version of the same wine—a year younger on the label but seemingly older in the bottle.

Some readers might be puzzled by phrases such as Savage’s “nice touch of austerity,” and it would be true to say that none of the tasters is noted for a predilection toward high-octane, deep-colored, noticeably oaked wines. But since the producer’s intentions are usually clear from the first sight and smell of the wine, the key is to judge whether or not the wine is a success in its intended style. We did not always agree: Savage and I have relatively similar descriptors for Brooks Janus 2005 (Willamette Valley), but my conclusion was more positive than his. I remain unconvinced that there is a single definition of “Pinosity”—the charm is that the grape can wear so many different clothes, and sometimes none at all.

We all came away from the tasting curiously unmoved. Acidity and complexity were two words rarely in use in our descriptions; oak and alcohol occasionally intruded, though rarely in glaring fashion. Few sighs of exasperation were to be heard, but rare, too, were the squeaks of pleasure.

Average and range of scores

	<i>Average</i>	<i>Range</i>
Stephen Brook	15	11–17.5
Jasper Morris MW	15	12.5–17.5
Mark Savage MW	14	11–17
All wines	13.5	

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2006 Fromm Clayvin Vineyard Marlborough - 16.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Slightly cooked nose, a good deal of oak, but bright cherry fruit comes shining through. Svelte, luscious, concentrated; has weight and some depth; impressive in being fairly extracted but not coarse or rustic. Some coffee tones on the finish, which is long and spicy. A complete wine; harmonious. **17.5**

JM: Fine mid-purple color. Hard to coax out a nose at first. It remains subdued, though there is no shortage of full, strawberry fruit on the palate. Perhaps an upgrade of complexity is needed to compete at the highest level, but this is certainly very enjoyable. **15**

MS: A nice rose-petal delicacy here is most attractive. Who knows what will happen next, but this is pretty good, and it achieves an original personality without being too "in your face." **17**

2006 Cloudy Bay Marlborough - 16

SB: Fairly deep red. Ripe, slightly confected nose with a tomato tone. Soft, silky, quite seductive fruit; has intensity and acidity; lean and understated and has finesse. It's one-dimensional but clean and bright and enjoyable. Good length. **15.5**

JM: Pure brisk purple in color. Fine, energetic Pinot nose perhaps a point off full ripeness. It shows class and an appealing delicacy, though. Beautifully stylish on the palate, with an appealing red-cherry and light strawberry aftertaste that lingers. **17**

MS: Nice Pinot perfume here, with good fruit flavors and balance, too. This works fine for me. No need to keep it, though. **16**

2004 Cristom Jessie Vineyard Willamette Valley - 16

SB: Fairly deep to deep garnet. Oaky nose, and rather cooked fruit, a lot of vanilla. Sleek, quite concentrated, fresher than the nose suggests; has vigor and bite. The alcohol is a tad above my comfort zone, but not too obtrusive. Ripe and lusty, if far from elegant, with plenty of drive from the attack to the finish. Quite good length. **16**

JM: Palish color with a light rim. Gently fragrant, almost *fraises des bois*, though with a sweeter aspect. On the palate it is delicious and harmonious with maybe just a touch of alcohol showing through. Nonetheless, the balance of sweet and

savory is well judged, and the length of finish proves the class. **17.5**

MS: Rich, but lacks a bit of freshness in the fruit now, and I cannot see that it will go anywhere very interesting. Sound but unexciting. **14**

2006 Dutton Goldfield Dutton Ranch Freestone Hill Vineyard Russian River Valley - 16

SB: Fairly deep red. Sweet, intense, oaky nose; raspberries; has purity. Rich, sumptuous, concentrated, big but ripe tannins, quite muscular for Pinot but not out of balance, even if the acidity is modest. Plenty of spice and vigor on the finish. Quite long. **17**

JM: Full color. Sweetly scented nose, with some oil of cloves. The palate delivers fresher fruit, with some welcome acidity that beds in very well with the brisk red-cherry and raspberry fruit. A dusting of oak at the back is not too obtrusive. Already enjoyable. **16.5**

MS: Correct as an example of ripe, well-balanced fruit, but what happens next to make it out of the ordinary? The vineyard manager and the winemaker have proved themselves competent, but the vineyard has yet to prove that it is exceptional, and that is what makes the final difference between good and great. This remains good. **15**



2004 Hirsch Vineyards Sonoma Coast - 16

SB: Deep red. Firm, toasty nose; raspberry coulis. Lush, broad, opulent, full-bodied; massive fruit here, so not very elegant, but it has some acidity and vigor to keep it assertive. Long, spicy finish. **16**

JM: Fine, bright, youthful purple. Heady and agreeable, ripe raspberry on the nose, with some darker fruit notes; the sort of bouquet that is worth a second and third sniff. Full again on the palate, and on the sweeter side of Pinot, but there is enough variation of fruit poised on the cusp of red and black for this to work. The oak is in the background. Good finish. Purists might want more austerity, though. **17**

MS: There is no shortage of ripe and charming fruit here. The color is deep and appealing, and the commercial appeal must be obvious. Whether it has the capacity to become original and really interesting is not so clear. I suspect it may remain in the ranks of the relatively facile. It is a bit of a fruit bomb. If the vineyard is really good, then it will become much more than that. **15**

2006 Kosta Browne Keefer Ranch Russian

River Valley - 16

SB: Fairly deep red, quite bright. Lively, crushed-berry nose; has vigor and a delicate use of oak. Sleek, svelte, concentrated, bright, and intense, quite peppery; a touch of alcohol on the finish but not enough to wreck the wine. Has persistence and poise. **17**

JM: Medium depth of color. Quite a light but fresh Pinot nose. Well balanced on the palate with a savory aspect, though also a little bit of heat. Beginning to drink well. **16**

MS: Refreshing, sweet, ripe fruit with a hint of cool mint. Plenty of alcohol, but it remains balanced. Nothing very original, perhaps, but good fleshy charm. **15**

2004 Marimar Estate Don Miguel Vineyard Russian River Valley - 16

SB: Fairly deep to deep garnet-red. Heavily oaked nose, some coffee aromas. Soft but concentrated, distinct torrefaction flavors, spicy, grippy, vigorous. Not an elegant style, but virile and packed with fruit. Long, chewy finish. **17**

JM: Fine full purple. The nose has a slightly soupy aspect detracting from the purity of the Pinot. There is both ripe fruit and a little strain of herbaceousness, while the finish is a little more tannic than most wines. Slightly contradictory today, but I like the length and weight of fruit on the aftertaste. **16**

MS: The fruit here has presence all right, but I am a little worried by the extraction. The tannin and the alcohol are perhaps just a shade obvious, but it is a nice wine that will give much pleasure. **15**



2006 Siduri Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands - 16

SB: Fairly deep red. Oaky red-fruit nose, a touch overripe. Soft, rounded, rather slack, lacks some drive; but there are some tannins here to sustain and lift the wine on the finish. Has rude vigor and reasonable length of flavor. **15**

JM: Not quite so much purple in the red here. The nose is quite exotic yet with some complexity, perhaps the faint smokiness that comes with some whole-cluster fermentation. There is generous fruit behind, prevented from any undue heaviness by the finely delineated tannic structure. A very well-made, well-balanced wine that should continue to age well. **17.5**

MS: There is something more Burgundian here that takes it above the level of merely

good varietal expression. It is not just essence of Pinot and fruit expression. It might develop further, too. **16**

2006 Siduri Rosella's Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands - 16

SB: Fairly deep red. Muted cherry and raspberry nose, quite oaky. Broad, supple, quite voluptuous, concentrated; has ripe tannins to give some grip. Plenty of energy here; has weight and power but not unbalanced. Admirable drive and length. **17.5**

JM: Medium-full color just starting to evolve. A little tar and toast on top of the fruit that shows in a slightly mentholated character on the palate. The fruit flows through right to the back, though, to leave a good final impression. **15.5**

MS: Certainly good, but there are bits missing; somehow slightly hollow, and a general lack of harmony stops me from saying it is better than good. But it is very easy to like, all the same, and it may be a bit curmudgeonly to dismiss it as ordinary. One has to wait and see what happens next before making final judgment. For now it delivers satisfactorily enough. **15**



2006 Ata Rangi Martinborough - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Sweet, spicy, cappuccino nose; raspberries. Soft, plump, juicy, but not heavy-handed; quite tannic, so has some vigor, and the finish is long and spicy. Little subtlety here, but forthright and fruity. **16**

JM: Fine, full color. Rich, fruit pastil nose that develops in power in the glass. Most of the fruit is fully ripe, but there is a little thread of green, though this does provide complexity and an element of freshness. Overall, this is a wine with a good nervous tension that should evolve well over the next two to three years. **16**

MS: Rich savory style, but it does not suggest future potential. **14**

2005 Cristom Mt Jefferson Cuvée Willamette Valley - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet-red. Smoky, toasty nose, but lively cherry fruit emerges all the same. Rich, lush, concentrated, spicy, with some depth of flavor and grip. Solid without being heavy or too extracted, though there is no lack of oak and tannin. This has real presence. Perhaps too earthy to be elegant, but this is persistent and serious, and its ruggedness is part of its appeal. **17**

JM: A touch of evolution to the otherwise

fullish color. The heady nose has a slightly burned character, though. This wine may be beginning to die before it has fully lived. The palate also shows a toasty, tarry component that mars otherwise positive fruit. There are some good aspects to this, but today it just misses. **14.5**

MS: A shade more herbaceous than the others so far tasted—not aggressively so, but markedly all the same—and it has a hedgerow scent that sets it apart. Some will like that facet more than others. It is cool and refreshing. **15**

2006 Dutton Goldfield Dutton Ranch Sanchiotti Vineyard Russian River Valley - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Delicate, oaky nose; red fruits, tomato. Quite rich, concentrated, marked tannins, plenty of spice here, vigorous and robust; not an elegant style but there's abundant fruit here. Good length. **16.5**

JM: Full, bright, and deep color. Some sweetly ripe dark fruit has to compete on the nose with very evident oak—which it can do, with a lovely, rich middle palate to which the oak contributes a sweet spiciness. Very seductive, but is there quite enough length for greatness? **16.5**

MS: Rather tired fruit here, I suspect, so I fear for the longer-term prospects. It might have been better a year ago. **13**

2006 Escarpment Martinborough - 15.5

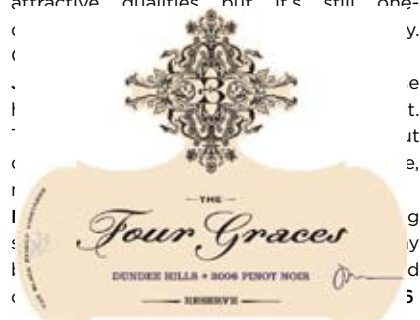
SB: Deep red. Firm cherry aromas. Sleek, juicy, voluptuous, plenty of body and weight here; ample fruit if little subtlety. Straightforward, enjoyable, and not without grip. Quite good length. **15**

JM: Dense purple-black color. Heady, black-fruit nose. This is certainly extracted, but the generosity and class of the fruit, without undue tannins, suggest that the winemaker has stopped the right side of the line—just. The fruit is multilayered, with black-cherry notes standing out. Fine, long finish. **17.5**

MS: Simple fruit... Ripe, but what else? A decent glass of wine, but not much more really, is it? **14**

2006 Forrest Estate Malborough - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Very ripe, smoky nose, a lot of oak; has purity, intensity, and finesse. Supple, quite concentrated, juicy, bright acidity, a touch of spice—all very attractive qualities but it's still one-

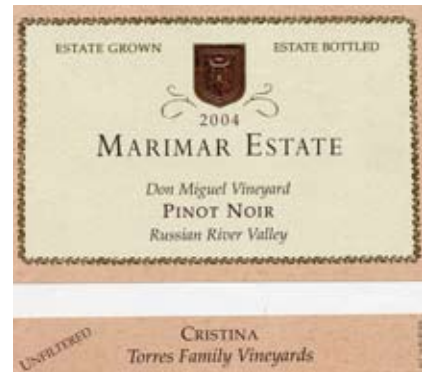


2005 The Four Graces Dundee Hills - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Lush cherry nose, showing real weight of fruit and a good deal of oak. Rich, voluptuous, full-bodied without being heavy; fine acidity; has depth and spice and complexity. The oak is a touch too dominant now, but this has a beguiling ripeness combined with freshness and intensity. Delicious and long. **17.5**

JM: One of the fuller colors. Immediate, crowd-pleasing, lush fruit. Soft, rounded, generous, the sexiness owing something to the overlay of new oak. The hand of the winemaker is evident, but it works. **14.5**

MS: Deep, plummy depth of fruit here, showy and attractive. On the palate, this is very fleshy, as expected: full throttle on flavor but rather hot on the finish. It might become tiring to drink in quantity, and it may not be subtle, but it is certainly not mean. **15**



2004 Marimar Estate Don Miguel Vineyard Cristina Russian River Valley - 15.5

SB: Deep garnet. Stewed cherries on the nose, an overripe style. Soft, broad, rather flabby; has plenty of fruit and what tastes like added acidity, but this seems overworked. A chewy, spicy finish keeps it interesting on the palate, however. Not bad, but emphatically not my style. **15**

JM: Medium color, just starting to turn. The bouquet, too, is moving on from its first fresh fruit to more complex secondary characteristics. There is still plenty of energy in the fruit, which has red- and blackcurrant notes. The oak has been nicely weaved in to create a harmonious texture. Good length; this is a very well-made wine. **17**

MS: Some rather burned oxidative notes here suggest age, without too much grace. It is still a nice drink, but the age does not seem to be adding refinement. **14**

2005 Scherrer Russian River Valley - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Lean nose, tomatoes. Soft, a touch flabby, solid, but lacks lift and freshness. Rather dull and short, but there is no lack of straightforward fruit. **14**

JM: Medium-deep color just starting to evolve. Heady nose, more fruit than oak. This is a big, soft, round ball of fruit on the palate, so ripe as to be almost too sweet in style. Will make many friends, though. Just enough acidity at the back. **16**

MS: A suggestion of new oak helps lift this

Stephen Brook

Since this was a blind tasting, it was hard to make generalizations about each set of wines. Once I was working through the second set, however, I was fairly confident about the identity of each group and later found I was correct. Inevitably, variations of subregion and vintage also make it difficult to reach any useful conclusions.

Many of the Oregon wines were very pretty, wines of charm rather than weight, but none the worse for that, except when the prettiness derived from dilution rather than a light foot on the extraction pedal. In many wines, I was finding primary fruit and some rather too obvious oak character, but what was lacking was complexity. Many of the wines, however well made, remained on the surface.

This may be related to the age of the vines, but then again it may not. There were, however, some more serious and structured wines in the set, and some of these were admirable, though I was perplexed by the lack of evident tannins even in the bigger wines. I regret to say that high alcohol was a frequent problem. I don't mind wines with high alcohol—as long as I don't taste it. A burn on the finish is, for me, a major problem, since it makes me reluctant to return to the wine.

Some of the Oregon wines were distinctly soft, and the same was true of the Californians. High alcohol and flab were also problematic for me. I longed for a bit more grip and persistence. Nor was elegance much in evidence, but given the California climate—even cool regions can get very hot—that may be too much to expect. My higher scores went to wines with some vigor and robust fruit, even if stylistically they may have been a bit more

rugged than my ideal. Again, any generalizations would be fairly meaningless, given that hundreds of miles separate prime Pinot-growing regions such as Russian River Valley from the Santa Rita Hills.

The New Zealand wines were the most homogeneous. There may have been few dazzling wines, but there were very few mediocre wines. As a group they were the most fruit-forward. They showed little depth or complexity, but they were extremely enjoyable and would have been a pleasure to drink. It's not hard to see why they have made an impact on critics and consumers alike. They also had deep colors, which is of little importance, but it was interesting to see that there was less variation than in the American wines.

The New Zealand Pinot vineyards are still young, and it's hard to say whether greater vine age will eventually give wines with more depth and subtlety. I suspect that the best American Pinots will scale greater heights than the best New Zealand Pinots, but that could well alter as time goes by. The American wines live more dangerously, battling with high sugars that can easily result in jammy, tiring wines, which the Kiwis by and large avoid.

Whatever their origin, many of these wines had lovely aromas. Burgundies often shut down soon after bottling, but these wines seem to retain their perfume. This added a dimension to the wines, for although we drink the liquid and not the aroma, part of the pleasure of Pinot is surely that heady scent. On the other hand, there was a certain sameness to those aromas, especially in some of the Oregon flights—but that's a consequence of the artificial setup of the tasting room. For consumers, that would hardly be a problem.



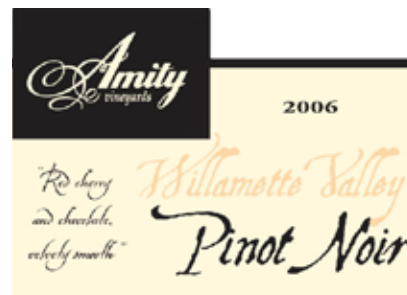
wine, without dominating the fine fruit. 16

2006 Two Paddocks Otago - 15.5

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Ripe and pure red-fruit nose; elegant. Broad, concentrated, doesn't show quite the purity of the nose, since it's rather slack and lacks drive. But an appealing wine for drinking soon. 14

JM: Bright color of medium depth. The nose is a little reticent at first. The palate is both full and complex with the weight delivered at the back. Raspberry and black-cherry notes, with just the right amount of oak in support. An excellent long finish to boot. 17

MS: This has balance but not a lot of individuality. Good but not great, then. 15



2006 Amity Vineyards Willamette Valley - 15

SB: Fairly deep red, still youthful. Delicate raspberry nose, decidedly lean, but pretty. Opulent and juicy, with more weight than the nose suggests; creamy texture, but not soupy, thanks to good acidity. Little complexity, but nicely balanced and shows some finesse. Quite good length. 15

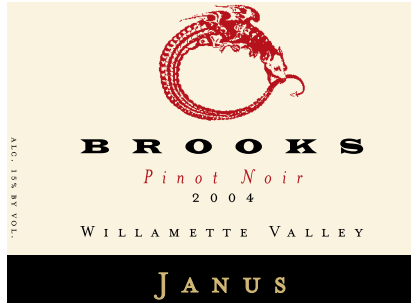
JM: Bright, fresh, youthful purple. Bright, energetic, dynamic young fruit. I can't see the oak for the fruit—what a relief! Middleweight Pinot that refreshes rather than stuns. Just enough acidity. 16.5

MS: Vibrant young purple color reminds me more of young Moulin-à-Vent, perhaps, than Côte d'Or. And the nose does not sing the pure strains of Pinot. There is a slight coarseness to the fruit, a lack of class or finesse, but this is very youthful, very immature, and I think it can develop and improve, without perhaps ever becoming

particularly fine. **14**

2005 Brooks Janus Willamette Valley - 15

SB: Deep red. Oaky, minty, cherry aromas; vibrant. Sleek, velvety; creeps up on, rather than attacks, the palate; light tannins, a discreet style that lacks some verve. Indeed, this is a very subdued wine and makes one



wonder if it is beginning to tire, though the nose is perfectly healthy. All up-front, with little depth and length. Rather short. **14**

JM: Deep, youthful purple—one of the densest colors on show, but vibrant rather than suspiciously black. The first nose is backward but suggests power, and there is a classiness to the oak. Full-bodied yet not heavy; the winemaker has extracted fruit without harsh tannins and the alcohol does not disturb. A tight framework harnesses the fruit to good effect. Better in another two years. **17.5**

MS: Rather dark, somber, purple color, and the aromas are more chocolaty than normal. It makes a bold statement and does so without losing balance. I am not sure where it will go from here, but it could be interesting to follow, even if it does not produce great finesse in the final act. Perhaps a little sharp and short on the finish. **14**

2006 Carrick Central Otago - 15

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Sweet, raspberry nose but a touch of *bonbons*. Supple, juicy, reasonably concentrated, fresh and balanced, fruit and oak in harmony, and some attractive spiciness on the finish. Well made if not that complex. Quite long. **16**

JM: Medium-deep purple in color. Some dark berry fruit to the nose. A beautifully rich mouthful of well-seasoned dark berry fruit, with the tannins perfectly integrated. The fruit comes back again to drive the long finish. This will be better for another two to three years' aging. **16.5**

MS: Rather stewed fruit, and the tannin sticks out too much, along with the alcohol, to give a lack of balance and charm. **12**

2006 Craggy Range Te Muna Road Vineyard Martinborough - 15

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Sweet, ripe, smoky nose, with direct raspberry and cherry fruit; certainly has succulence. Medium-bodied, up-front fruit, quite concentrated, lively acidity; a touch hollow, and lacks structure and complexity, but certainly enjoyable now. **15**

JM: Medium-deep color, a little lighter at

the rim. The nose is a little soupy, which detracts from the elegance of the wine. Medium-bodied, with good acidity, but a touch lacking in grace. Medium length. **14.5**

MS: Some extra vitality in the fruit lifts this up a point. **15**

2006 Erath Prince Hill Dundee Hills - 15

SB: Fairly deep red. Firm, spicy, oaky nose, plenty of red fruits; scented. Medium-bodied, rather slight, but has great charm and considerable finesse, nor does it lack concentration and acidity. No blockbuster but elegant and delicate. Nonetheless, a bit more muscle would not be amiss. Medium length. **16**

JM: A touch of evolution in the color. Oak prevails over fruit on first nose. Then rich plum and strawberry notes emerge in a flamboyant rather than subtle style. Gently rounded, lowish acidity, fair length. **14**

MS: Still quite closed, but there seems to be some concentration here, waiting to burst forth into a more flavorful perspective in time. The balance seems fine, and the wine is promising more. **15**

2006 Felton Road Block 3 Central Otago - 15

SB: Deep garnet-red. Sweet, intense, raspberry nose; exquisite fruit here, enhanced by a whiff of oak. Very ripe, intense, creamy; fine acidity, poised and persistent. This has lovely fruit and fine balance. Delicious and



moreish, with admirable length. **17.5**

JM: Bright color of medium depth. Fresh red berry fruit with just a trace of green. Quite a sweet style on the palate that renders it a mite simple alongside some of its neighbors. But the fruit will certainly give pleasure. **14.5**

MS: Sweet and a bit jammy but not disagreeable. It is, however, the tannin and the alcohol that dominate more than the purity of the Pinot fruit, and the future will not be brilliant. **13**

2005 Hartford Court Land's Edge Vineyards Sonoma Coast - 15

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Slightly jammy nose; *bonbons*, cherry pie. Supple texture, quite seductive if slightly hollow; polished, concentrated, a touch overripe but a persuasive example of this style, despite a kiss of alcohol on the finish. **15**

JM: Full, deep purple color. The nose is almost brutal in its expression of dense but somewhat artificial raspberry fruit. Again, it is a heavyweight on the palate but lacks the

sublime elegance of really fine Pinot. **15**

MS: Sweet, ripe, rather jammy fruit that is superficially rather attractive and will make this a commercial success. There is no lack of alcohol, but there is a lack of sensitivity, perhaps, and the wine might get tiring to drink after a while. But it gets a decent score by virtue of the depth of fruit. **15**

2006 Landmark Grand Detour Sonoma Coast - 15

SB: Medium-deep to fairly deep red. Boiled-sweets nose, red fruits, rather confected. Supple, juicy, fresher than the nose, a touch sweet, but there is some balancing acidity.



Light tannins sustain the wine. Fresh and lively on the finish. Quite good length. **16**

JM: Medium-light color. The oak is a little too dominant on the nose and, indeed, on the palate, though some gentle strawberry notes come through at the end. Pleasing but perhaps a touch on the simple side. **14**

MS: A bit more grip and precision here, more Pinot character and some possible potential (though presumably that is not much of an issue with most of these wines). **15**

2006 Landmark Kanzler Sonoma Coast - 15

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Lightly smoky nose, fruit rather reticent. Fresh, sleek, smoky, stylish; has concentration and some grip; tangy aftertaste, a touch of sherbet. Not a big wine but balanced and persistent. **16**

JM: One of the paler colors, but that is not a problem for Pinot, and the bouquet is supremely stylish, with floral notes as much as fruit. The savory character of grapes picked just on the point of ripeness is evident on the palate, and the fruit delivers a fine, long aftertaste. **17**

MS: Rather sweet and simple, so the word "dull" springs readily to mind. It has no vices, but there is a lack of sense of direction or real purpose. It is a bit hollow. **12**

2006 Landmark Solomon Hills Santa Barbara County - 15

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Delicate nose, cherries, raspberries, tomato. Medium-bodied but reasonably concentrated, sleek, and with some intensity and poise. Good acidity. Fairly lean overall, but none the worse for that. Medium length. Just lacks some personality. **14.5**

JM: Medium-deep, youthful purple color.

(savor)

Delicious, balanced, energetic fruit on the nose continues in the mouth with plums and a mixed bag of red fruits topped with some spice. Oak brings up the rear but supports rather than subdues the fruit. This is thoroughly enjoyable, and the length of flavor impresses! **17**

MS: Slight talcum-powder Pinot perfume makes it just a little vulgar rather than fine. No faults, but no finesse either. **13**

2006 Martinborough Vineyards

Martinborough - 15

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Juicy cherry fruit on the nose. Supple, accessible, reasonably concentrated, fine texture and some bright acidity. Not complex but spicy and vigorous. A lot of pleasure here, if little subtlety. Quite good length. **15.5**

JM: Full, youthful, purple/black color. A mix of ripe fruit and oak on the nose, with the latter still a touch too obtrusive. This also shows through on the palate, with some drying wood tannins. The lush blackberry fruit is enjoyable, but this is not an elegant Pinot. **15**

MS: A hint of more complexity here, but I do not predict any great potential future development. **14**

2006 Neudorf Moutere Nelson - 15

SB: Fairly deep to deep garnet. Delicate, red-fruit nose; has charm. Medium-bodied, slight but attractive, quite polished and sleek; pleasingly understated and has fresh acidity to enliven the finish. Has poise and persistence. **15.5**

JM: Fine, clear, mid-purple color. The nose seems a touch extracted. Dense black and red fruit on the palate, with some slightly unresolved tannins. The wine is still not quite in harmony at this stage, but it has promise. **15.5**

MS: Quite nice balance here, and some charming Pinot fruit, but probably best drunk soon. **14**

2006 Neudorf Moutere Home Vineyard

Nelson - 15

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Ripe, oaky, cherry aromas; direct, quite toasty. Medium-bodied, sleek, reasonably fresh and intense. One-dimensional but enjoyable, and has plenty of up-front fruit and a lively finish. But no complexity. **15**

JM: Medium-deep color. Delicious and classy nose, with lifted raspberry notes. Middleweight fruit in the mouth, some slightly firm tannins meshed with an attractive minerality. Fair length. **15.5**

MS: Very pretty nose, but the palate seems rather tannic and the overall picture is a little harsh. **14**

2005 Domaine Serene Evenstad Reserve

Willamette Valley - 15

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Rich nose, cherry-compote aromas, a bit jammy. Broad, lush, concentrated, and spicy, but alcohol mars the finish. This lacks lift and freshness,

and although the fruit quality is attractive, it's rather soupy and lacks energy. Many people will enjoy the fruit, but I generally want more finesse and balance from a Pinot. Moderate length. **14**

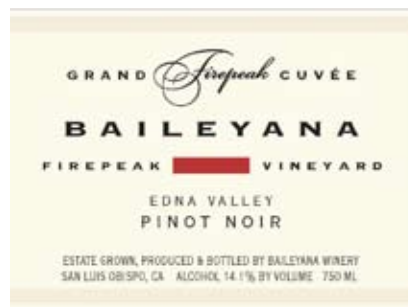
JM: Dense, dark color. The first nose is heady but also heavy—teetering on the edge of overopulence. This is very ripe fruit, and there is some alcohol evident at the finish, but the winemaker has maintained a lush, voluptuous charm through the middle. Not sure how well this would accompany food, but it could be delicious drunk on its own, as the graciously perfumed aftertaste suggests. **16.5**

MS: Warmth, concentration, ripeness, and sweetness, without being confit. The suggestion is warm rather than cool climate, perhaps, but there is nothing baked about the fruit, which is still quite precise and individual. But does it have star quality? Probably not. **15**

2006 Baileyana Winery Firepeak Vineyard

Grand Cuvée Edna Valley - 14.5

SB: Fairly deep red. Lean, stylish, oaky, red-fruit nose; has poise and elegance. Medium-bodied, velvety, quite concentrated. Glossy, and a touch confected, but this has ample



acidity to take it through to the finish. A lot of this could be rather tiring, but the fruit and balance are attractive. It also has quite good length. **15.5**

JM: Bright, fresh purple. Vigorous fruit on the nose, with a toasty overlay that starts to impinge. It delivers an almost sandalwood aspect to the palate, where the fruit otherwise shows an opulent, raspberry-essence character. Plenty of appeal here, but it does not quite come together at the moment. **15.5**

MS: I cannot quite work this wine out. There are no serious problems at all, and yet the thing hasn't quite worked for me, and I want to know why not. Is the plant in the right place? Was the fruit picked at the right time? Is the acid added? I am not convinced by it somehow. There is not enough Pinot singing, and it just falls short of being really interesting. **12**

2004 Domaine Drouhin Laurène Oregon -

14.5

SB: Fairly deep red. Stern cherry fruit, with an oaky sheen; stylish and lifted. Soft, accessible, ripe, juicy, a lot of primary fruit



but balanced by fresh acidity. This has charm and suppleness, but little complexity. Quite good length, but I don't think there is much to be gained by cellaring this. **14.5**

JM: Fullish purple. Rich, heady nose with quite exotic, sweet-scented fruit. Some oak. Opulent, full-bodied, sweet. Red fruit fills the mouth, enough to balance the oak. Good length. Full-on rather than fine. **14.5**

MS: Similar color to the [2006 Firesteed Oregon], with slightly more depth (from which I do not infer better quality), but the nose has more personality, more obvious fruit, with fine balance. Still immature but very approachable. **15**

2005 Elk Cove Vineyards Willamette

Valley - 14.5

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Ripe, smoky nose, cherries and raspberries, discreet oak, has some finesse. Medium-bodied but quite intense, with spicy, minty tones giving the red-fruit flavors some complexity. Good acidity, has drive and vigor. Perhaps a touch too smooth and lacking in grip, but a good and balanced wine. Quite long. **16**

JM: Deep, bright color. Perhaps a touch of reduction on the rather closed nose. This is a dense, flavorsome wine, but the extraction has made it a little coarse for my palate. Some tannins evident at the back, and I would like more elegance in the fruit. **14**

MS: Another nice mouthful of ripe fruit, and it is not jammy, but at the same time it is not very well defined. It has done its job without standing out as individual. **14**

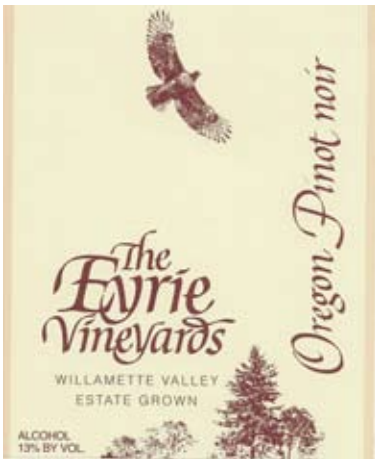
2006 Evesham Wood Cuvée J Eola-Amity

Hills Willamette Valley - 14.5

SB: Fairly deep red. Very ripe, sweet, red-fruit aromas; has charm. Medium-bodied, silky, quite concentrated; an understated style, but then marred by rather high alcohol and a warm, blunt finish. **13**

JM: Bright deep color. Exotic, lush, yet very appealing nose of dark red fruits—loganberry? But still showing energy rather than heaviness. Raspberry on the palate, with a refreshing race of acidity, needed to balance the relatively high alcohol. Oak remains entirely in the background. Good length. It should improve with age. **16**

MS: Immature. Depth of ripe fruit, fresh rather than hot, but I get a feel of well-farmed fruit and well-made wine rather than any sense of something truly original. Nothing to fault, but no real streak of subtlety, either. **15**



2000 The Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Noir Reserve - 14.5

SB: Medium-deep garnet. Lean, oaky, red-fruit nose, mint leaf, light toastiness. Surprisingly light attack, rather attenuated. The fruit is dozy, as though the wine were already past its best. Little energy here, but a slight charm, a discreet silkiness. But it lacks weight, complexity, and flair. Fairly short, too. **13.5**

JM: A light, pretty, pale brick-red color, but still bright and lively. Faded rose petals on the nose. This is stylish Pinot not trying to compete for a Mr Universe title. Just beginning to dry at the back of the palate, but nonetheless, a residue of engaging sweet fruit remains. Very tasty. **16.5**

MS: Maturity evident, but there is still some vitality and charm, enough to make for a refreshing mouthful. It is also quite dilute, and there is nothing more to come now. Very pleasant still, if you like light, mature wine. **14**

2006 The Four Graces Reserve Dundee Hills - 14.5

SB: Medium-deep garnet, a touch evolved. Ripe, cherry nose, but also a hint of *bonbons*, so slightly confected and overly perfumed. Supple, juicy, up-front, very ripe; a fairly rich mouthful with some oaky bite. The vigor is attractive—it's not just texture and fruit. Good acidity, so there is length, too, giving a piquant, minty finish. But there is little complexity. **16**

JM: A paler color than most. Leaner fruit notes on the nose, just on the red side of green. Starts in a low key on the palate but delivers more to the back. More tannin than most, too. This could develop into a stylish, savory Pinot, but it is currently gawky. **14**

MS: This is pleasant enough, but there is a slight lack of crispness and fresh fruit on the nose, and the palate has a slightly tired feel to it that suggests there may not be much more to wait for. **14**

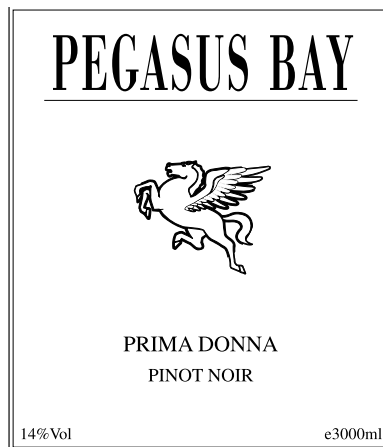
2006 Kosta Browne Kanzler Vineyard Sonoma Coast - 14.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Strawberry nose, and a slight but not unattractive herbaceous character. Very delicate, silky, understated, yet quite concentrated and vigorous. There is

a slight greenness and lack of flesh, but it's pretty, with a somewhat confected edge on the finish, which admittedly is quite long. **15.5**

JM: Deepish color, just moving on from the first freshness of youth. Headily scented, almost liqueur cherries. This is a substantial wine that also shows in the alcohol on the finish. Not for the faint-hearted. **14**

MS: Quite individual fruit character here—not totally convincing as Pinot, perhaps, and certainly not a wine that is trying to think of itself as "Burgundian." It is well made, though, and will give the uncritical drinker much pleasure (unless the price is too high!). **14**



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WAIPARA VALLEY . CANTERBURY . NEW ZEALAND

2006 Pegasus Bay Prima Donna Waipara Valley - 14.5

SB: Deep red. Bright, leafy, cherry nose, very fresh. Medium-bodied, rather sweet and confected, but also has bright acidity; perky and almost racy—quite a lot of alcohol. This is stylistically all over the place, but it's redeemed by that primary fruitiness, which is very appealing. **15**

JM: Fine, bright purple. Nose not yet showing but is present on the palate in the form of an attractive, dark-raspberry character. The tannins are well integrated in this attractive wine, which just needs to blossom on the nose. **16**

MS: Looks very young but smells rather old, which is worrying. **12**

2006 Siduri Shaw Mountain Vineyard Willamette Valley - 14.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet-red. Attractive raspberry aromas married to some elegant oak. Quite soft, approachable, juicy, with some weight of fruit and intensity. Not enough richness to be truly opulent, but heading in that direction. Rather lean and pinched on the aftertaste, though. Moderate length. **14.5**

JM: Full color showing a little evolution. Sweet strawberry fruit erring toward heaviness. This is a powerful wine with rich red fruit, some plummy, spice, and a background of highish alcohol. Not my preferred style, but the length of flavor is

there. **14.5**

MS: Good juicy Pinot fruit character here, uncontroversial in style; perhaps a shade facile, though, as a result. It will please but not titillate. **14**

2005 Sokol Blosser Estate Cuvée Dundee Hills - 14.5

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Lean, stylish, red-fruit nose, quite smoky. Medium-bodied, delicate, sleek, and charming; reasonably concentrated though not that structured; good acidity carries it through to the finish. Not that subtle or complex, but clean, bright, and persistent, with just a hint of boiled sweets on the finish. **15**

JM: Fullish color. The oak is too prominent on the nose, giving a slightly sickly effect. There is more weight to the fruit on the palate, but it cannot quite shake off the initial miasma. This needs brightening up. **12.5**

MS: Depth and personality here, with fresh and ripe fruit flavors and no excessive weight of alcohol, so the balance seems excellent. Delicious now, and it may progress nicely to the next stage of maturity. Extraction without becoming jammy. Nothing too forced, nothing too ripe. Very attractive, fleshy Pinot. **16**

2004 David Bruce Santa Cruz Mountains - 14

SB: Deep red. Baked nose with some Porty tones; lacks freshness. Indeed, not obviously Pinot on the nose. Soft, juicy, cherries and plums, rather sweet aftertaste; a jammy style, with a good deal of alcohol. Coarse overall, with no finesse. **13**

JM: Quite full color, though the purple has given way to a deep brick red. Very little nose at first, and when it comes through there is just a trace of oxidation. On the palate, the fruit has opened out to deliver some complexity, though the finish is just beginning to dry out a touch. The sweetness of the fruit through the middle, though, still delivers pleasure. **16.5**

MS: Rather soupy, slightly stewed feel to this now, with alcohol and power rather than finesse and delicacy. It is beginning to look slightly clumsy. **13**

2006 Craggy Range Calvert Vineyard Bannockburn - 14

SB: Fairly deep to deep garnet. Smoky nose, some coffee tones. Soft, rounded, plump, easygoing. Little structure but reasonably fresh and vigorous; pleasant acidity sustains the wine, but it's just about ready. **14.5**

JM: Full and fairly bright color. There is a worrying toffee aspect to this on the nose. The mouth is not quite as bright and energetic as it might be, though the fruit is certainly there. A soft style of wine just lacking a touch of freshness, and with perhaps slightly unsubtle oak. **14**

MS: This is slightly too confected to be original, and more commercial than intriguing. Ordinary. **14**

Mark Savage MW

I had no firm preconceptions as to the likely results of this tasting, since so much was going to depend upon the choice of wines. Anyone looking for a clear superiority among the three regions will be disappointed. My own average score for each region was between 14 and 14.5. This was achieved by the proximity of most wines to that score rather than a balance between very high scores and very low ones. On the more interesting question of style, the word “satisfactory” seems more appropriate than the word “stunning.” The most pleasant surprise for me was the general absence in my own notes of the feared words “jammy” and “overextracted.” The wines, by and large, had Pinot character, with more of the virtues of the breed than the vices.

Certain wines that I know to be very enjoyable failed to sing on the day, but that is a familiar Pinot Noir trait. The 2002 Eyrie Vineyard was sulking, and the Felton Road was having a bit of an off-day, too. There was nothing from California that I yearned to take home, but the wines were mostly agreeable enough. I did not see the prices, and maybe just as well, since the price:quality ratio might not indicate great bargains.

A Central Otago wine might well have been an antepost favorite, but my palm went to a Marlborough wine from Fromm, which certainly confirmed that Pinot Noir is happily suited to at least some corners of New Zealand. I guess that another race on another day, with different horses, would have produced a different result. On the basis of this particular set of wines, it seems too soon to draw firm conclusions.

2006 La Crema Sonoma Coast - 14

SB: Fairly deep red. Dumb nose. Light and loose, slack and rather flat. Pleasant fruit but rather sharp acidity and no grip. The finish is a bit dry. No energy here, and it seems to be tiring. **13**

JM: Medium depth of color. Fresh fruit, mainly strawberry, but with a touch of raspberry for vivacity. The oak is quite evident on the palate, and the sweeter style takes less of a food match than some. The structure needs tightening up a notch. **14.5**

MS: As my score suggests, this falls into the category of “good wine but with no outstanding features.” There is no special message here. **14**

2005 Duckhorn Golden Eye Anderson Valley - 14

SB: Fairly deep red. Very ripe raspberry nose, some coffee tones, mint. Svelte, moderately concentrated, bright acidity, rapier-like but also one-dimensional, with a touch of heat on the finish. But appealing and quite sensuous. Quite good length. **15.5**

JM: Middling color now starting to mature. Sweet ripe fruit overlaid with oak, which is a touch obtrusive on the palate. Generous and attractive, but ultimately slightly cloying. This would benefit from a better fruit/acid balance. **14**

MS: Still some freshness here on the nose, but rather less on the palate. A little too hot finally. **13**

2006 Erath Oregon - 14

SB: Medium-deep garnet-red, a bit watery on the rim, more evolved than most. Bright nose, cherries, raspberries, mint leaf; pretty rather than suggesting hidden depths. Very soft, rounded, not that concentrated, easygoing, some dilution. Pleasant enough, and with some fresh acidity, but no complexity or discernible structure. **12.5**

JM: Fine, pale, bright color. Elegant, stylish, raspberry-scented. Restrained ripeness. Hints of the briar patch. Mixed red fruits on the palate, a savory rather than sweet approach, with not quite enough density of fruit at the back for an outstanding rating. **15**

MS: Bright color, no suggestion of too much extraction, and I get prettiness rather than power on the palate, with a nice Pinot perfume, slightly in the talcum-powder style. Gentle, harmonious, and refreshing. Ready to drink and may not have the potential for much further development: The structure is slightly weak and the flavors somewhat dilute rather than concentrated. **15**

2006 Erath Estate Selection Dundee Hills - 14

SB: Fairly deep red. Piquant nose, raspberry and cherry fruit, but it's perky and jumps from the glass; minty, too. Medium-bodied, sleek, ripe, fresh, quite creamy, but it's one-dimensional; balanced, with all the components in their proper places, yet it doesn't really excite or suggest much

individuality. However, there is a refreshing bite and persistence on the finish. **15.5**

JM: Middling red. Fruit needs coaxing out; a little strawberry jam... on toast, the barrel showing a little too much. It does so again on the finish, putting a touch too much cream on the strawberries. It might be tiring to share a bottle of this. **12.5**

MS: Medium-depth color, nose rather shy but correct enough and perfectly clean. Palate lacks definition, similarly, but is free of defects, and there is balance. The future potential is not obvious at this stage, but there is likely to be more to come out of this wine in a year or two, though it is not perhaps for the longer haul. **14**

2006 Firesteed Oregon - 14

SB: Fairly deep red. Ripe, aromatic, oak nose; cherries, glossy, a bit confectioned, but has vibrant fruit. Medium-bodied, sleek, rather slight in its fruit; very appealing texture, good acidity, but rather modest overall. Moderate length. **14.5**

JM: Bright middling color, weakish at the rim. A hint of reduction, with plum fruit notes. Oak is somewhat prominent. Full fruit in the mouth, but it does not kick on at the finish. Pleasing rather than outstanding. **13.5**

MS: Attractive young Pinot color, correct depth rather than too dark, still immature. Nose seems rather lean, pinched, unforthcoming, and the flavors are quite similar and subdued rather than fleshy and generous. Will it reveal more with bottle age or simply dry out? Is there a hint of Gamay perhaps on the aroma? **14**

2005 Foxes Island Marlborough - 14

SB: Deep red, lacks luster, and atypical for Pinot. Sweet, stewed aromas; cherry compote. Rich but soft, heavy, hard-going, effortful. This is overripe and lacks brightness and lift. Fairly short. **13**

JM: Fine medium-deep color. The nose is very slightly soupy at first approach. The palate shows an attractive generosity of fruit with some ripe black notes, but the hoped-for purity is not quite delivered. **14**

MS: Rich, ripe, warm Pinot character, quite good fun unless you like more austere stuff, but not up there in terms of real finesse. Good drop, all the same. **15**

2006 Siduri Amber Ridge Vineyard Russian River Valley - 14

SB: Fairly deep garnet. Sweet, ripe nose but a touch stewed. Soft, sweet, rather fatiguing; lacks vigor and is rather cooked. Fairly short. **11**

JM: Medium depth of color. A slightly smoky, dark-fruited nose. Full-bodied, rounded, a little too oaky on the palate, and with a trace of heat—but the fruit lives through these distractions to deliver a powerful if not elegant wine. **15.5**

MS: Some softness showing, with a little maturity here, but the acidity holds it together well. Alcohol evident, too. Can still

last a bit, perhaps, but would it improve? 15

**2006 Siduri Chehelem Mountains
Willamette Valley - 14**

SB: Medium-deep garnet. Smoky, oaky nose, delicate but a touch stewed. Light, simple, pleasant enough but lacks distinction and structure; very much on the surface, and marred by some alcohol on the finish. Tastes overcropped and a touch overripe. Medium length. 12

JM: Paler color, a touch more evolved. The nose shows this, too, but with charm. An agreeable sweet and savory mix. A little herbaceousness is evident but not displeasing to this taster. Very pretty to drink now but not for keeping. 14

MS: No great depth of color here, but there is personality and some maturity in the style. It is more intriguing than many and quite ethereal, with no excess baggage in terms of tannin or alcohol, and the fruit seems to have a mind of its own. It is not a showy specimen, lacks obvious depth, but has individual style and direction with good balance. 16

2006 Ara Composite Marlborough - 13.5

SB: Medium-deep red. Weird nose, milky, coffee, red fruit. Medium-bodied; slight, rather edgy acidity; some greenness here, attenuated, stringy. Tastes overcropped. Medium length. 11

JM: Palish color just starting to evolve. A little touch of green tomato on the nose. Not unappealing but a little undernourished and a touch hard at the finish. 14

MS: Remarkable natural acidity here, or so it seems. Slight dryness on the finish, but there is a nice touch of austerity, and character. 16

**2006 Bethel Heights Eola-Amity Hills
Willamette Valley - 13.5**

SB: Medium-deep red, quite youthful. Perfumed, raspberry nose, but some boiled-sweet tones. Medium-bodied, has some concentration, and quite good acidity gives it some drive, but it's one-dimensional with alcohol on the finish. There's something scrawny about this; it seems polished at first but finishes rather coarsely. 14

JM: Middling bright red. Clean, pure, and relatively deep Pinot nose. Dark raspberry fruit. The oak begins to emerge on repeat sniffing. The fruit leads again at the front of the palate, but again the oak weighs in a touch too dominantly. The fruit is fresh enough to survive, though. 14.5

MS: Youthful, lacks perfume for Pinot, rather coarse and lacking in personality or precision. It is slightly soulless—not unpleasant, but it simply seems a bit processed and has no real song of its own. There is not enough Pinot signature. 12

**2006 Radio-Coteau La Neblina Sonoma
Coast - 13.5**

SB: Fairly deep to deep red. Muted nose, slightly stewed. Soft, rounded, broad, plenty of fruit but lacks lift; does have acidity, but it seems added. Lush, but for drinking now.



There's something cobbled together about this wine; not harmonious. 14

JM: Fresh, youthful purple. Fruit at first hard to coax out. In fact, the nose remains reticent, but the fruit shows to much better advantage on the palate, until too much sweet oak bursts through to take over. The wine is not together today. 14

MS: Another wine that suggests competence rather than genius. Hard to criticize, but difficult to get excited about. 13

**2006 Siduri Clos Pepe Vineyard Santa Rita
Hills - 13.5**

SB: Fairly deep red. Sweet, ripe cherry and beetroot nose; forthright. Rich, rather sweet and alcoholic; coarse. Ferocious finish because of the alcohol. No pleasure here. 11

JM: Bright fresh purple. Lively, raspberry-scented bouquet. Generous, mouth-filling fruit backed by a creamy but not obstreperous oak. Overall this has a rich, suave mouthfeel with a discipline of structure that works very well. Plenty of life ahead of it. 16.5

MS: Solid, rather soulless, and a bit processed. No faults, but it simply lacks the spark of individuality. 13

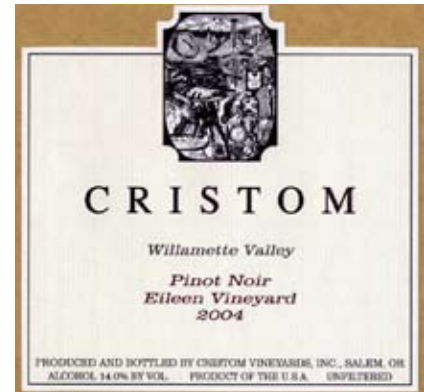
**2006 The Four Graces Willamette Valley -
13**

SB: Fairly deep garnet. The nose is quite oaky and a touch cooked, but there's an attractive lift to it, too. Bright attack, perky and fresh, but then it begins to fade rapidly. A nice dose of primary red fruits but no structure at all to sustain it on the palate. Fairly short. 13

JM: Middling color. A little lifeless on the nose at first; perhaps an underwined barrel. The fruit shows through rather better on the palate, but it is a touch on the jammy side. Fair length. 13

MS: This is relatively soft and mature, but it is rather loose-knit, perhaps, and there is a feeling that it has not got much more to show, that its potential may be limited to what we can see now—which is satisfactory rather than exciting. So, we might say it is

good but ordinary. 13



**2004 Cristom Eileen Vineyard Willamette
Valley - 12.5**

SB: Fairly deep garnet, quite evolved. Sweet, stylish, red-fruit aromas; this has charm and finesse, though the oak is quite pronounced. Very ripe and a touch sweet, with a lot of alcohol on the finish, leaving it coarse and hot. A shame, as the fruit quality is attractive. But this is no fun to drink. 12

JM: Full color. Ripe, sweet strawberry fruit. Not an elegant style but easy to appreciate for the full, rounded fruit. The alcohol is not gentle, though, and I cannot easily see a food match. 14

MS: Slight pruney character here suggests a bit of overripeness in the fruit, hotter conditions, and a consequent lack of vitality. There is tannin, too, and some harshness as a result. It does not suggest a bright future to come and should be drunk up while it still has some fruit. 12

2002 The Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Noir - 12

SB: Fairly deep garnet, some brick tones. Stewed nose, lackluster. Medium-bodied, quite slack, a bit lifeless, seems in decline. Not terrible, but dull, and it needs to be drunk soon. Short and charred finish. 12

JM: Pale color now, clearly maturing. The nose is more old-style Rioja than pure Pinot. Still holding up well on the palate, but somehow misses the nobility of Pinot. Medium length and for drinking soon. 13.5

MS: Looks quite mature, with much more orange in the color than we have seen in most wines. The aroma is also much more evolved, and the word "oxidation" moves on to the radar; old orange peel and cowshed rather than freshly culled raspberries, without any rewarding complexity. I am afraid that this is past its best and further age will do it no favors. 11

The following wine was also tasted but was excluded because of a fault (cork taint): 2005 Ara Resolute Marlborough. ■