

SAINTSBURY ON PINOT NOIR

Saintsbury is a California Pinot Noir pioneer. While we have been in the game longer than most, it's important to note that the passion for this most elusive of wines has a long history. As far back as the 14th century you can find references to "pinot" being drunk in France. And yet, according to British wine writer Jancis Robinson, there is evidence that Pinot existed in Burgundy as far back as the 4th century. So, while we appreciate the recognition we've garnered for our early pursuit of Pinot Noir in California, we also recognize that our efforts prove the greatness of California-made Pinot Noir builds on an ancient tradition and fascination with this grape.

We made it our goal to prove that given the right growing region and the right techniques, California Pinot Noir of exceptional quality could be made.

Many wine lovers, writers and wine producers have described their absorption with this grape as nothing less than obsession and their search for its most beautiful examples a quest. We would be the last to deny that the subtler, evanescent, charms of Pinot Noir captured our attention early on in our careers. We were taken, like so many others, with the wine's ability to mesmerize and beguile with its soft approach, complex and sensual aromas and its ability to evolve into something no other grape can match as it ages.

When we began our winemaking career in 1981 there was little interest in the hard, green, slightly anemic Pinot Noirs that were the rule in California. We made it our goal to prove that given the right growing region and the right techniques, California Pinot Noir of exceptional quality could be made.

Perhaps more than any other variety, great Pinot Noir must be grown in very specific conditions. This early ripening grape first demands a cool region where the growing season is lengthened and the grapes can take their time developing flavor and retaining acidity while not losing the inherent delicacy of perfume. On this point, our expectations for the Carneros region were borne out. Over the past 25 years we have also come to appreciate the impact and differences of the various clones of Pinot Noir and furthermore how each of these clones demand different growing techniques. Our experiments in the vineyard and winery have led us to adopting new "precision farming," techniques, to revise traditional notions of irrigation timing and grape maturity, and to reassess our maceration and extraction regimes.

Yet, with all of our efforts over the years, we find that the predictable eccentricity of Pinot Noir defines our efforts. Pinot Noir of widely varying character is produced in the various Carneros vineyards with which we work. Our response has been to produce different Pinot Noirs that show off the different styles of wine the grape can produce. From our lighter, more fruit forward "Garnet" Pinot to the richer "Carneros" bottling and on to the deeper, more intensely flavored and structured single vineyard "Brown Ranch" Pinot, we try to honor the intrinsic differences that Pinot Noir on varied sites present.

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Saintsbury is and always will be about Pinot Noir. It must be simply because we are members of that slightly obsessed club that has been captured and subdued by the uniquely fragrant, silky-textured and intellectually stimulating charms of Pinot Noir.

