

Davis Family Vineyards

2004 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

Every food and wine magazine has written, and continues to inform in volumes about the world's accelerating fondness for Pinot Noir. In fact Matt Kramer of *The Wine Spectator* recently wrote, "Pinot Noir and passion are intertwined and Pinot Noir is the voice of God." (wow!)...and you have seen it called the Holy Grail, or the Heartbreak Grape because of the difficulty in crafting this varietal into something special. Because of these challenges, when you read the reviews there are as many scoldings of Pinot Noir producers as there are praises.

In the tasting room at our little winery in Healdsburg, I get to talk with many of you about the things that excite you in the wines you enjoy most. Although everyone describes the attributes differently, the message I always take away is complexity. If I am talking with two couples about our Pinot, one person will say "I love the aroma, it smells like roses or cherry blossoms", and as quickly as one or two of them will agree another person will say "I smell the cherries and a kind of spiciness, like Danish or muffins baking", - then a third person will throw in sandalwood or bay leaf, or cola or maybe boysenberry and each time someone uses a new descriptor everyone takes another sniff and nods.

This same thing happens as we talk about the flavors and the finish too - the thing most exciting to me is that if they stay and visit for a while (which happens most of the time) someone will smell their glass and the conversation will loop back with "wow - now the raspberry (or whatever) is so pronounced, its really changed in my glass." That is how I hear complexity...and that to me is the Holy Grail - my "bulls-eye" of what I am trying to create.

Growing the grapes in the right place plays a big part in the many things that create complexity. You see, those layers of different flavors that continue to evolve over the course of the meal or the bottle are all different flavor compounds that form in the grape during the growing season - the grape has that magical ability - unlike any other fruit, to take on multiple flavor personalities if it gets to stay on the vine long enough for this phenomenon to happen - then the fermentation unlocks those flavors. I describe the array of flavors like a chain, --- the longer the growing season the more links that are in that flavor chain, and the more complexity of flavors you have in the wine.

That is why the greatest wines in the world come from areas with a buffered marine or "Mediterranean" climate - a warmer, early spring, yet a moderately warm, not hot summer and a long, dry fall. To go one step further each specific area's climate manifests slightly different flavor "links" in the grapes - a "finger print" of that area in the flavor profile of that wine. That is how wine enthusiasts and critics are able to taste a wine without knowing its origin and wager an educated guess as to its source. Then once the vintner has picked on just the right day so to highlight his exceptional area - the details of how to coax each of those flavors out of the grape and into the wine begins. This is where Pinot Noir gets very challenging - to get all the "goodies" from the grapes - full extraction is necessary, however this grape has such a fragile nature, too much extraction can extinguish the beautiful side, those perfumy, pretty aromas and flavors - taking away from that sought after complexity. So it becomes like making love where fiery passion and sensuality must meld for that perfect level of pleasure to emerge.

Maybe *The Wine Spectator* was right...Pinot Noir and passion are intertwined...but perhaps it's not the voice of God but the sighs of a satisfied lover!...and I haven't even touched on the silky mouthfeel! I'm fanatical about my wines so that eating, drinking and times with friends and family all become more fun - Enjoy them with that spirit in mind!

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