

Pinot Noir from Burgundy to Tasmania

NEIL ALLENBY discovers the wonders of biodynamics when he tastes some of the best Pinot Noir in Tasmania.





Pinot Noir – such a capricious vine! More than any other grape variety, Pinot is considered the real test for ambitious wine producers around the world.

It demands much of vine-growers and wine-makers, but real success is always rewarded with an unparalleled level of excitement amongst wine lovers. Just think of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti for example (known to many simply as DRC). The world's best Pinots certainly attain legendary status.

Pinot's charms are decidedly sensual. These wines share a certain sweet fruitiness and are generally lower in tannins and pigments than the other great French red varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. Pinots are charming in their youth and usually evolve rapidly. The very best still decline quite slowly, however. A Grand Cru from Burgundy will age beautifully and still be drinking well after 40 years if cellared properly.

The ageing process creates greater flavour changes in Pinot Noir than in most grape varieties. Starting with the fruitiness of red cherries when young, it develops earthiness, cocoa, tobacco and liquorice aromas with age. When it comes to choosing the optimal time to drink Pinot Noir, it really is a matter of determining the level of development that best suits your own personal palate. Don't let anyone tell you different.

The ancestral home of Pinot Noir is Burgundy in France, where Pinot grapes are wholly responsible for the wine

known as red Burgundy. Pinot Noir is a particularly old grape variety, known to have existed in Burgundy from the 3rd century AD. It is prone to mutate (into Pinot Gris, Blanc or Meunier for example) and to degenerate into a multiplicity of clones. These clones can be selected to meet the requirements of the *terroir*, such as resistance to rot, early or late ripeness etc. and clones can vary widely.

Burgundy has a continental climate with cold, damp winters and mild summers. The land is composed of rolling hills, which provide different aspects and shelter from wind and sun. Burgundy is characterised by small vineyards, averaging six hectares in size. For the most part, individual families own each separate vineyard and make their own independent decisions about grape growing and wine making.

Due to these various contributing factors, the Burgundy vineyard plots each have their own conditions – called microclimates or *terroirs*. This means there are numerous markedly different Pinot Noirs in Burgundy, grown and produced in the range of different *terroirs*.

Pinot Noir is a thin-skinned grape with delicate flavours. During vinification, it needs constant monitoring and fine-tuning according to the vintage. Temperature control is vital to avoid loss of aromas. Wines are generally matured in older barrels to avoid the oak flavours overpowering them. >>



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In the coming weeks, I will be visiting Château de Pommard in Burgundy with the objective of tasting the wines from different vineyards and of different qualities (called a horizontal tasting flight) and different years (called a vertical tasting flight). This will give me a wide selection from which to determine the Pinot wines that best suit my own individual palate. Such an exciting challenge! Château de Pommard is just south of Beaune and home to Clos Marey Monge. Its new owners have recently converted it to be certified biodynamic.

I'm particularly excited to visit these biodynamic vineyards in France because I've seen such wonderful results from biodynamic winemaking in Tasmania. Recognised as one of the New World's most successful producers of Pinot Noir, Tasmania has much in common with Burgundy. Its complex geography produces a diversity of *terroirs* and microclimates. Situated close to the limits in latitude for grape growing, these microclimates make a big difference.

The most recent winner of the Decanter Magazine Award for Australia's best Pinot Noir was the 2015 Estate



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Stefano Lubiana Pinot Noir. Managed by Steve and Monique Lubiana, the Stefano Lubiana vineyard is located in Granton just outside Hobart. This picturesque site overlooking the Derwent River also has an excellent Italian-inspired Osteria open for lunch – an excellent way to sample their wines.

“We looked long and hard before settling on this site in Granton” says Monique. They were looking for the right combination of poor soils, good drainage, best aspect and shelter from westerly weather.



Fifth generation winemaker Steve Lubiana has a reputation for continual experimentation. He and Monique are obsessed with making small quantities of the best hand crafted wines. Their 25-hectare vineyard was certified biodynamic in 2013.

“Biodynamics is about having respect for the soil”, says Steve. “Its origins are based on ancient farming practices that take into account various lunar events and other cosmic influences. Respect for nature and working with its rhythms, we forego the use of chemicals in the vineyard and instead nourish our soils and strengthen our vines with compost and natural minerals and various plant preparations.

“This has not only proved beneficial to the environment, our employees and customers, ensuring our activities are sustainable, but as a bonus it makes better wines.”

Steve believes that we are caretakers of the land for a short period of history. The land will soon belong to the next generation, and we are duty bound to pass it on in better condition than when we acquired it.

Biodynamics ensures this sustainable future. “I only buy wines from producers who grow their own grapes, getting their hands dirty and putting their heart and soul into farming” says Steve. >>



“With the right plant in the right spot, looked after with great respect, you will produce the highest quality fruit. Then in winemaking, you can’t improve on what is already at 100% quality. Wines are made in the vineyard.”

In concert with these same principles of vineyard management, Steve keeps vine yields low via a green harvest (pruning excess bunches of grapes whilst they are still green) and open canopy pruning to ensure the best level of sunlight. “To make the best wine, we can’t be greedy”.

This top quality fruit is vinified on site at the Stefano Lubiana gravity-fed winemaking facility. This avoids the use of pumps, which Steve sees as “rough handling” of the wine. Gravity also controls the natural flow of the wine.

Wines are matured in specially selected oak barrels. In line with Steve’s obsession with control, he also has his own bottling line.

In the tasting room, in addition to the full range of wines from Stefano Lubiana, we also tasted a 2015 Estate Pinot Noir that had been opened two days prior. It was still in excellent condition, showing the equivalent to a little bottle age. With top quality fruit, careful management and a little controlled oxygen exposure, Steve believes his wines will

be less affected by oxygen once in the bottle, matured then opened. The proof was certainly in the tasting, and I am now a convert to biodynamics.

Yes, Pinot Noir is demanding, finicky and capricious. However, with careful selection and meticulous handling, coupled with biodynamics, the excitement these wines inspire can be electrifying. I can’t wait to explore this varietal further! ♣

