

# West Side Wine Club

November 2012  
President's Musing's



## Scheduled Meetings

**January 12, 2013**

Annual Gala

**February 15, 2012**

Bordeaux Tasting

**March 21, 2012**

Aroma Kit / Faults & Flaws

**April 18, 2012**

2011 Barrel / carboy  
sample tasting

**May 12, 2012**

Tour, Johan Vineyards &  
Winery

**May 16, 2012**

Speaker, Nicholas Keeler,  
American Sales Manager  
Tonnellerie Allary barrels

**June 20, 2012**

Speaker, Mike Hallock from  
Carabella Winery

**July 22, 2012**

Annual Picnic, Oak Knoll

**August 15, 2012**

Other Whites Tasting

**September 19, 2012**

Other Reds Tasting

**October 17, 2012**

Pinot Noir Tasting

**November 21, 2012**

No meeting

**December 5, 2012**

Planning, Tours, Speakers,  
Events, Elections. Pinot  
Gris/Viognier Tasting

I went to California to visit an childhood friend and we did a little wine tasting in the Russian River and Alexander Valley areas. We ended up at a wine bar in downtown Santa Rosa and started chatting with three people at the bar. The five of us were the only ones at this bar, so the bartender was able to be very attentive and conversational. I had a pinot flight from the Russian River AVA. Since the five of us were the only ones at the bar, the Bartender ended up pouring 6 different pours instead of the usual 3. Being an amateur winemaker always seems to be worth extra pours or discounts where ever I go. As we went along I was curious to see what my friend would think of the different pinots from this area. I tried to pick my favorites before I knew where they came from. I was attracted to the lighter more acidic pinots. The flavors were more focused and refreshing - more "Burgundian". The "bigger" pinots had more tannins and bold flavors. I can't say that any of them were bad, but I found out that the ones I liked tended more to come from areas nearer to the coast that are cooler. I liked all six though which says a lot about the quality of California pinots.

The next day my two friends came up from the Bay Area peninsula and picked me up for some real wine tasting. I did a little research but had to figure out some tastings which turned out to be rather eclectic. We started out at J Winery which produces sparkling wine. Once they knew I was an amateur winemaker they not only gave us free and generous pours, they also gave us a nice view of the disgorging of their wines which happened to be occurring (this was a Friday). The view of their facilities was very cool. They dipped the bottles in refrigerated glycol to freeze the necks of the bottles after machine riddling (those who went on the Argyle tour understand completely). The bottles were then disgorged and a dosage was added to fill the bottles back up after some juices bubbled over. That a machine could do all this was amazing.

Their standard sparkling wine was very good. Lemony but creamy. He also opened up a late disgorged wine - much like the one Argyle opened for us. Also very nice but more aggressive then the Argyle brut. Their pinot noir was good but different then Willamette Valley. I looked up the ph and saw that some of the pinots were at 3.7 and contained far less acid then an Oregon pinot. The tannins were also more aggressive. Their chardonnay was classic Californian, but in a good way. The alcohol was around 14.3 and had a ph of 3.5. This made it bigger then a typical Oregon or white Burgundy. But it was well balanced. Their pinot gris was good, which is about the best that could be said about that grape anyway.

The other wineries were interesting, but very different. They were mostly in the upper valley so we moved away from pinot noir and crisp chards to the big reds which are not really my favorites (I am a pinot guy). Aside from the very interesting dessert wines I was not so impressed. One dessert wine which blew my socks off was a viognier white port. The nose was of melons and tropical flavors. Smooth and complex, it was a brilliant construction of an idea of a wine I had. As one of my friends loves dessert wines, this turned out to be a nice bookend to our tour.

So make sure and visit wineries and ask questions. You can learn a lot. The Thanksgiving weekend wine tours will be occurring soon, so I strongly encourage you to visit some of the smaller or more private wineries to see what they offer. This can serve as inspiration, confirmation or even a future speaker for or club. You might even be able to get some grapes. You have to work your contacts early.

And remember, if you are inspired to organize our speakers or arrange tours, we have plenty of positions available for our upcoming elections. Please see Ken's notes on the positions and let him know ASAP if you are interested. We will not have any meeting in November but will meet on December 5<sup>th</sup> for elections and hopefully wine tasting of Pinot Gris and Viognier.  
Jon Kahrs, President WSWC

Drink Responsibly.  
Drive Responsibly.

## Information & Trivia

Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes. --- Oscar Wilde

### **Paraprosdokians of the month .....**

•Into each life some rain must fall, or we'd get very thirsty!

•Everywhere is walking distance, if you have the time.

•A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel so good.



Winemaker Magazine is having their 2013 National conference in Monterey CA on May 17 & 18. If your interested, go to the following link:

<http://www.winemakermag.com/conference>

### **WRIGHT-ISMS**

• I've been doing a lot of abstract painting lately, extremely abstract. No brush, no paint, no canvas, I just think about it.

• I have the world's largest collection of seashells. I keep it on all the beaches of the world... Perhaps you've seen it.

• I went to a restaurant that serves "breakfast at any time." So I ordered French Toast during the Renaissance.

**NOTICE: There will not be a meeting on November 21 as previously scheduled. Due to scheduling conflicts at Oak Knoll and the Thanksgiving holiday, the November Club meeting will be skipped.**

**The next meeting is now scheduled Wednesday, December 5 at 7:00 p.m. at Oak Knoll. The Pinot Gris / Viognier tasting will occur at the this December meeting after elections and planning as time permits.**

• **Agenda :** Election of officers, planning & member wines tasting and critique of Pinot Gris/Viognier.

• **Snacks:** This will be another potluck; bring a small snack to share.

• **Place:** At Oak Knoll Winery

1.) Please bring two glasses for tasting wines.

2.) Waivers will be present at the meeting. If you have not previously signed a waiver for, please do so at the meeting.

3.) The meeting will begin at 7pm and end by 9pm. If you can get there a little early to help set up, please help to put away chairs and tables at the end.

**WSWC Website:** <http://www.westsidewineclub.com/>

**Message Board:** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Westsidewineclub/>

### October 17 meeting Minutes

27 members present

- We had two guests, Hugh & Kristin Chaney, representing Bridgeport Wine Service, Inc. specializes in supplying wine bottles to the smaller wineries of Oregon and parts of Washington, offering full or less than truckload volumes. If you are interested in purchasing bottles you can contact them through their web page at: [http://bridgeportdistribution.com/wine\\_services/index.html](http://bridgeportdistribution.com/wine_services/index.html)
- Bill Brown also brought a visiting guest, Angie.
- Barb Stinger said the January Gala will again be held at Portland Wine Storage the first or second weekend on a Saturday.
- Received three checks in payment for Chandler Reach grapes. Ken Stinger will deliver these to Dana Blizzard.

### Pinot Noir Tasting conducted by Craig Bush & Phil Bard.

Tasted in the order listed

#1 – Craig & Mindy Bush	2009 Courting Hill Vineyard	Jackson	new oak	Silver	
#2 – Bob Hatt	2010 Stormy Morning Vineyard		6 months new oak	Bronze	
#3 – Scott Nelson/Daniel Larson	2009 Rizzo Vineyard		777 & 667 clones	Bronze	
#4 – Mike Smolak	2009		24 months in oak	Bronze	
#5 – Scott Nelson	Hopewell Hills vineyard			Bronze	
#6 – Jon Kahrs	2010 Sunnyside & Temperance Hill Vineyards		777, 113 & 115	Silver	
#7 - Joe Nadal	2011 Swan Vineyard		Pommard & 777 clones	picked at 19 brix	No Medal
#8 – Robinson/Bush/Kahrs	"Robuka"		various vineyards	Silver	
#9 – Laurence Gellert	2010 PDX Vineyard		18 brix	lots of rot oak chips	Bronze
#10 – Matt Krill	2009 Dundee Hills		24 brix Pommard	30% new oak	24 months Silver

We are requesting that all members seriously consider running for one of the Board positions or a committee chair position. You can also nominate someone else for one of these offices, with their permission of course. If nothing else, consider helping on one of the committees. Please reply to [kbstinger@frontier.com](mailto:kbstinger@frontier.com) or [jekahrs@aol.com](mailto:jekahrs@aol.com) with your nominations soon so we can put a slate together for distribution in advance of the December meeting.

We would like to have a slate in the December newsletter which will be sent early the weekend of November 24/25.

The Board positions\* are:

President  
Treasurer  
Secretary

The committee chairs\* are:

Tastings  
Winery & Vineyard tours  
Group purchases  
Competitions  
Education  
Social events

\*See the last page of this newsletter for more details about the positions.

## Save the Date:

**The annual West Side Wine Club Gala is set for Saturday, January 12, 2013 at Portland Wine Storage. Mark your calendars.**

## Philosophical Wisdom

A professor stood before his Philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, he picked up a large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

The professor then picked up a box of small pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. The sand filled up everything else. He then asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with an unanimous "Yes!"

The professor then produced two glasses of wine from under the table, and proceeded to pour the entire contents into the jar effectively filling the empty space between the sand.

Now, said the professor I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things -- your family, your partner, your health, your children, your friends, your favorite passions -- things, that if everything else were lost, and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else -- the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls.

The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out dancing. Play another round of golf.

There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and wash the dishes. Take care of the golf balls first -- the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the wine represented?

The professor smiled. I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of glasses of fine wine!



There's a bottle of Champagne  
in there someplace

## Choosing Barrels for Pinot Noir

Here are some rough guidelines to help the winemaker match barrel types with four general winemaking styles.  
by Curtis Phillips

When it comes to barrels and wine, in general, and Pinot Noir, in particular, I must admit that I have a number of peeves and biases. For one thing, I can't stand Pinot Noirs where the oak has been used as a "flavorant." Producing a wine that is essentially an oak tea works great if one is pursuing points from **Parker** or the ***Wine Spectator***, but lots of oak for its own sake does not a great wine make.

The real reason I put wines in barrel is for the micro-oxidative, clarifying and concentrating properties of barrel aging. In fact, as far as I am concerned, oak flavor is merely a side effect of *élevage*, not a reason for it. This is not to say that oak doesn't have nice flavors but who wants it to be the only thing that one can taste? It's not that I'm arguing for some mythical-status Pinot Noir, but one of the things about the varietal that I really like is that, for the U.S. market at least, it is a high status varietal that is still appreciated for itself rather than for the almost catnip-crazed addiction to the heavy oak usage in other red varietals.

When choosing barrels for Pinot Noir, one should have a pretty good idea about the Pinot Noir one intends to make. Ideally the barrel choice is driven by the wine style that in turn is driven by the fruit itself which is largely determined by the conditions in the vineyard.

### **Characteristics of Pinot Noir**

Like almost any wine, all Pinot Noir wines are not created equally. Pinot Noir is often cited as the paragon of varietals in expressing terroir.

### **Vineyard Age**

In my experience, the age of the vines can be a very large factor in determining how the final wines will taste. Young vines tend to produce wines that are simpler with a more pronounced berry aroma while it really takes older vines to produce the more complex wines about which Pinot Noir aficionados wax rhapsodic. To put it another way, a young vine mostly expresses the varietal while an older vine mostly expresses the place in which it grows. Of course, this is only a tendency, and as such, it can be overwhelmed by other factors.

### **Location of Vineyards**

More than anything else, what I mean by location is latitude. Latitude translates into hours of daylight during the growing season. I think this is just about the most important and least appreciated aspect of making Pinot Noir. I don't care how "cool" the climate is; a Pinot Noir from Lompoc on the bulge of California's lower Central Coast just isn't going to taste the same as one from McMinnville in Oregon. The day is almost two hours longer in McMinnville during the summer.

This is not to say that great wine can't be made in any of these Pinot Noir regions; but they are all going to differ due to the day-length difference if nothing else--and each may be best when paired with a different barrel.

I have made Pinot Noir from fruit from Oregon as well as several locations at various latitudes in California, including the Anderson Valley, Russian River Valley and Santa Rita Hills. Going over my notes for this article, I find that, in every case, the barrels that I thought produced the best results differed for each region. (Before anyone writes an angry letter, also note that the example was chosen to accentuate the difference in latitude. No slight was intended to Carneros, the Russian River Valley, Anderson Valley, Niagara Escarpment, New York Finger Lakes or any other Pinot Noir-producing region.)

### **A Dirty Question of Soil**

I suppose that most people would view the soil type as being more important than the latitude in influencing Pinot Noir. Certainly, Calera and other Pinot Noir producers on calcareous soils tout this as a benefit. On the other hand, some of the best Pinot Noirs I've had have been from the fairly acidic soils in the Anderson and Willamette valleys. If all the discussion about terroir has any basis in reality, then one should expect the resulting wines to be different.

### **The Terroir Perplex**

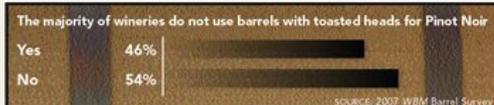
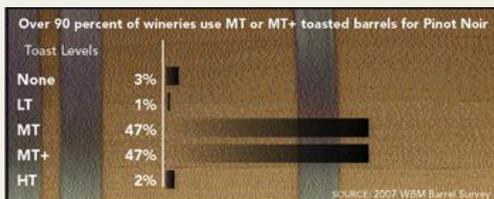
Terroir is a terribly abused term. Too often "terroir" is used as an excuse for sloppy winemaking. Excuse me, but *Brettanomyces* is a defect, not "terroir." This doesn't mean that I am a terroir skeptic. I think it's only reasonable that different soils and microclimates should produce grapes that taste different or even that any such differences should be expressed in the resulting finished wines, provided the winemaking hasn't masked the subtle differences with heavy-handed manipulations.

At its best, I think a wine should reflect the vineyards from which it came. I suppose that would make me something of a "terroir-ist" to some people, but it's really a case of believing that, providing the fruit is good, heavy-handed winemaking is counterproductive. To paraphrase an old theater bromide, "If it ain't in the vineyard, it ain't going to be in the bottle."

### **Defining Pinot Noir Styles**

Pinot Noir is just about the most idiosyncratic of wines. There are just about as many Pinot Noir styles as there are Pinot Noir wines on the market. At the risk of offending just about every winemaker that has ever made a Pinot Noir, I'm going to categorize this diverse group into just four general winemaking styles: Traditional, Extracted, Fruit-Forward and En Primeur. One may also think of these styles according to the regions where they are most popular: Burgundian/Oregonian, International, Carneros/Santa Barbara and Beaujolais Nouveau.

### **Traditional (Burgundian, Oregon, New Zealand and California)**



Traditionally made Pinot Noirs can be described as being texture or mouth feel oriented. Élevage for traditionally made Pinot Noirs can be fairly long, with 18 to 24 months being the norm and 36 months not being unusual. Barrels are generally kept for at least three fills or up to six years, depending upon the length of élevage, with the winery using 30 percent or fewer of new barrels each year. Some of the best examples of this style of winemaking use as little as 10 percent new barrels each vintage.

### Extracted (International)

If one were uncharitable, one could describe the "Extracted" Pinot Noir style as Pinot Noir for Cab drinkers, but that description would only fit the most extreme examples of this style. As my designation suggests, both the fermentation and the élevage of these wines are oriented toward maximizing the phenolic content of the final wine. Barrel usage tends to include a high proportion of new barrels for each vintage, with some programs using all new barrels each vintage. Conversely, the toast levels tend to be a bit higher as well. The élevage tends to be fairly brief, usually only a year or so.

### Fruit-Forward (California)

The "Fruit-Forward" is probably the most common Pinot Noir style in the U.S. It should be noted that there is a very wide range of Pinot Noirs that could be called "fruit-forward." The length of élevage for this style tends to run only nine months or so as the winemakers balance the length of time needed for a Pinot Noir to "settle down" after malolactic fermentation, with a desire to preserve as much of the fruity bouquet as possible.

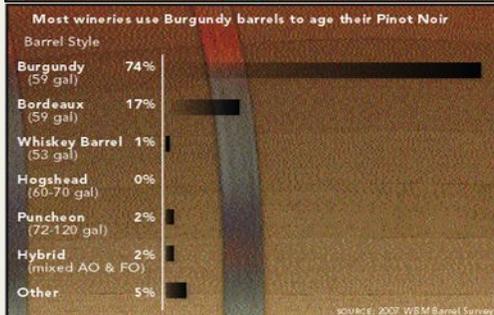
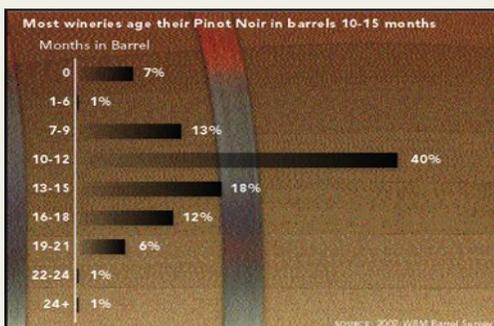
### En Primeur (Beaujolais Nouveau)

Unlike the other styles I've listed here, the en primeur is very well defined. Beaujolais Nouveau is the best-known en primeur--albeit it is made usually from Gamay Noir rather than Pinot Noir. En primeur wine is all about speed to market and, as such, is not generally aged in barrels at all. The winemaking for en primeur wines can start with an extended carbonic maceration where the berries are kept in a pressurized carbon dioxide atmosphere to allow the enzymatic breakdown of the berry tissue prior to primary (alcoholic) fermentation. The technique is almost universal for Beaujolais Nouveau but unusual for most U.S. en primeur wines since most U.S. wineries choose not to invest in the required equipment for pressurized storage.

Primary fermentation for en primeur wines is often kept fairly cool for a red fermentation in order to retain the fermentation esters produced by the yeast. The wines are generally not sent through a secondary, malolactic fermentation, so malic-consuming yeast strains, like 71B, are frequently used.

The noticeable use of oak is not characteristic of this style, but a brief élevage can be useful to settle out the lees while juggling other wines around in the cellar. In this case, I would recommend that it be barreled down to used barrels. Unwanted malolactic fermentation shouldn't be a problem if the élevage is short and the cellar is cold. It's probably best to sterile-bottle any en primeur wine anyway since they are rarely ML-stable and may have some residual sugar.

### Important Barrel Attributes



Almost without exception, choosing a barrel for Pinot Noir means choosing a barrel made from French oak. But "French oak" really is shorthand for oak from either one of two particular species: *Quercus robur* and *Quercus petraea*. These two species are known by several alternative names. For example *Q. robur* is also familiarly known as English, Limousin or Pedunculate Oak and sometimes is given the scientifically synonymous names *Q. pedunculata* (archaic but widely used), *Q. brutia* Tenore (Italian oak), *Q. pedunculiflora* K. Koch (Balkan oak) and *Q. haas* Kotschy (Anatolian oak). Similarly, *Q. petraea* is also known as Durmast or Sessile Oak and given the scientific designation *Q. sessiliflora*. Despite the abundance of pseudonyms, it is important to note that these are just two closely related species (*Q. robur* and *Q. petraea*) that grow throughout Europe, from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains.

All European oak used in making barrels comes from either one or the other of these two species, with *Q. petraea* being more commonly used for wine barrels and *Q. robur* more commonly used for aging spirits. That said, the trees are usually cut without any sort of formal taxonomic classification and are extremely difficult to tell apart once they are reduced to cut logs. Coopers claim to be able to tell Limousin oak from the other French oak by the "zebra-striping" in the grain, but at a minimum it takes an experienced eye to see the difference. Since the Limousin forest is almost exclusively *Q. robur* while the other forests are mostly or exclusively *Q. petraea*, it is possible that this is a difference between the two species.

Since the "zebra-stripes" apparently aren't apparent in the Q. robur wood from other French forests, or apparently in the oak from Spain or Italy which are mostly Q. robur as well, it would seem that the difference is mostly due to the difference in the soil and climate of Limousin versus the forests in the center of France.

Other oak species used in coopering wine barrels include American White Oak (Quercus alba), Oregon Oak (Quercus garryana), and Chinese or Mongolian Oak (Quercus mongolica). Both White and Oregon oak are usually considered too "overpowering" for use with Pinot Noir, but that hasn't stopped the occasional winemaker from experimenting with either. Chinese oak, as yet, is too much of an unknown to be used much.

**Nadalié USA**, the U.S. arm of **Tonnellerie Nadalié**, to choose just one example, has extensively leveraged the idea of oak-terroir as their approach to making and selling barrels to the point of publishing peer-reviewed academic research on the subject. Having participated in Nadalie's ongoing research, albeit as a winemaker rather than as a member of the tasting panel, I think that the differences between the various oak terroirs are both real and extremely subtle. One has to compare different oak sources in barrels from the same cooper to detect it.

### **Oak Seasoning Yard Location and Conditions**

It has been my impression that the conditions in the aging yard appear to make a difference in the flavors found in the finished barrel. French oak staves that have been aged in France always seem a little different from the French oak that has been aged as stave-wood in the U.S. or Chile. Indeed, when **Mendocino Cooperage** was still in operation, it seemed to me that their French oak was always slightly different in character from French oak that was aged elsewhere in the U.S.

There are a number of processes that are going on while the oak is seasoning. First of all, the oak just has to dry out. More than half the weight of a freshly cut oak tree is water. Things can't get too dry, however, because water is used to wash excess tannin out of the wood. The tannins in oak are called hydrolyzable which means that they can be broken down with water.

One key part of seasoning is that fungi growth on the oak is encouraged by the regular irrigation. The fungi digest the wood by sending myceliae (fungal "roots") into the staves. During this time, several tannins--specifically vescalagin, castalagin and gallic acid--are broken down by the fungi to simpler phenols. This has the result of greatly reducing the amount of tannin actually in the staves when the barrel is made.

I'm not asserting that any one location is better than the others; I'm only suggesting that, when possible, winemakers should keep track of where the stave-wood for their barrels was seasoned

If there is indeed a real difference, however, then it is a subtle one that can be subsumed by the cooperage's toasting level and style.

### **Length of Oak Seasoning**

The oak for most barrels is usually seasoned for anywhere from one to three years. Longer is not necessarily better. The harsher, more complex tannins are broken down to simpler "softer" tannins as well as phenolic aldehydes like vanillin as the oak is seasoned; but the vanillin levels appear to peak somewhere between 12 and 18 months and again at sometime after 36 months. At 36 months the levels of several oak tannins can drop quite a bit from the initial levels in the oak.

### **Barrel Toast Level and Toasting Style**

I have discussed barrel construction, including toasting, in some detail in a previous article ("Fire, Water and Oak," *WBM*, May 2007). Anyone interested in the basics of barrel construction or revisiting the thermodynamics of what happens when a barrel is toasted should refer back to that article.

Increasing toast level decreases the "oakness" of the barrel. Heat transforms the tannins into other chemicals, like vanillin and HMF. Taken too far, however, the vanillin can be consumed as well. The dominant trend among winemakers producing Pinot Noir is to use barrels toasted to an MT+ (Medium Toast Plus) level, maybe with a leavening of HT (Heavy Toast) barrels.

Although one might think that the source of the oak itself was most important in determining the character of the barrel, the toasting method and style really have more noticeable impact. More than anything else, this seems to reason that the barrels from certain coopers work best with some varietals or vineyards while other varietals or vineyards seem to be best with different barrels.

Several of the larger cooperages are using multiple toasting styles. For some this just means that they have a wider off-the-shelf selection of barrel types.

### **Barrel Shape**

There are two main forms of the "standard" 225 liter wine barrel (AKA *barrique*). The first, called the Burgundy barrel shape or style, is shorter and wider in circumference. The second style, called the Bordeaux style, is slightly longer and therefore has a slightly smaller circumference. Both hold the same amount of wine but have slightly different surface area to volume ratios with the Bordeaux style having slightly more surface for a given volume than the Burgundy style.

In theory, this difference in surface area should give wines in Bordeaux-style barrels more oak contact than they would have in Burgundy-style barrels. In practice, the difference between the two barrel shapes is minimal to the point of nonexistence. Pinot Noir will age just fine in a Bordeaux-style barrel.

### **Barrel Size**

Barrel size is often linked to barrel shape, but this is not an absolute prerequisite. There is nothing but tradition preventing a cooper from building barrels at almost any arbitrary size. Additionally, many coopers make the two barrel styles to have slightly different capacities. When this is the case, the capacity of the Burgundy-style barrels is generally bumped up to 228 or 229 liters.

The larger the barrel, the lower the relative amount of oak due to the lower surface area to volume ratio. Since the oak in a barrel covers the inner surface of the barrel, increasing the barrel size decreases the amount of oak to which the wine is exposed. For most barrels, however, the difference between surface area and volume is really pretty small. After all, a 225 L barrel has only four liters less capacity than a 229 L barrel. The difference is more acute when comparing barrels that are about twice as large or more than a "standard" barrel (example: 225 L versus 400 L).

#### **Time in Barrel**

For my Oregon Pinot Noirs, the usual *élevage* was 26 to 28 months. A more usual *élevage* might be 14 to 18 months, but I'm also seeing Pinot Noirs on the market after only six to nine months of barrel aging. Longer time does not mean increased oaky flavors. Something like 90 percent of the oak that is going to be extracted from the barrel is extracted in the first week.

**Don Crank**, winemaker at **Tualatin Estate**, noted that, for his grapes, he sees a difference in which barrels work best for a longer or shorter *élevage*. "**Seguin Moreau** barrels show really well in shorter aging, like in the tenth month or so. But when you get into the sixteenth or eighteenth month on the high-end wines that we age for a long time, it's the **Gamba** and the **Cadus** barrels that really win out in the end for us," he said.

Other winemakers I've spoken with, however, use Seguin Moreau barrels for longer aging; so this really is the winemaker's preference.

#### **Vendor Support and Service**

With no real moving parts, one might think that barrels don't really require an extensive support and service relationship with the vendor. Several cooperages will send a cooper out to bang hoops, plug any borer holes and fix the odd broken stave. While this is nice, and it's certainly good customer retention management, it isn't really the sort of service that makes or breaks a barrel sale for me. From a winemaking standpoint, concerns are mainly about the condition and timing of the barrels when they arrive at my door.

#### **How to buy, What to Choose, Tight Budget tips**

With current exchange rates, there are no true bargains when it comes to French oak barrels. It's just plain expensive to barrel-age wines in any case, but there are a couple things one can do if trying to produce a Pinot Noir on a tight budget. Perhaps the best value alternative to French oak is Central and Eastern European oak. Several of the larger cooperages like **World Cooperage**, **François Frères** and Seguin Moreau, as well as several other cooperages, all sell barrels made from these alternative sources.

Another, perhaps more widely used alternative is to use French oak inserts in older barrels as a way to compensate for the loss of extractives in an older barrel. This is a well established practice. The biggest risk is more a problem of winery sanitation for the older barrel than anything else. The inserts do occupy some of the internal volume of the barrel, but losing a half-gallon or so per barrel of capacity is rarely a matter of concern except in very large barrel programs. That said, it's probably a good idea to remember that, with barrel inserts, 120 barrels are only going to hold about 119 barrels' worth of wine.

Another, albeit less efficient, way to make the most of one's barrel-dollar is to buy larger barrels. Ever wonder why the Australians have been using 79 gallon (300 L) barrels while we have been using 59 or 60 gallon (225 L or 228 L) barrels? The larger barrels occupy about the same floor space and require about the same labor as a traditional 59-gallon barrel. One has to check each cooper's price list, but in general, the cost per gallon of storage runs about one or two dollars per gallon less than for a traditional barrel.

#### **Don't Overdo It**

While some Pinot Noir producers use nothing but 100 percent new barrels with every vintage, in my admittedly extremely biased opinion, many of the very best Pinot Noirs use a fairly small percentage of new barrels each year. **Josh Jensen** at **Calera Wine Company** summed up my opinion better than I could when he noted: "We don't use too much brand new oak because we don't want to mask the true character of the wine. For our Mt. Harlan Pinots that means 30 percent brand new each year, and for our Central Coast it's 10 percent new--or less."

#### **Mix it Up**

Several winemakers interviewed for this story stressed that for them the most important aspect of their barrel programs was the fact that they used a mix of barrels from different vendors. **Capozzi Winery** winemaker **Josh Hermsmeyer** summed it up most succinctly when he said, "You need a good mix in my opinion."

#### **Try New Things**

I think it is critically important to keep trying to improve our winemaking. Keep experimenting. In my opinion, if anyone has Pinot Noir winemaking "dialed in" it's Calera's Josh Jensen. Jensen noted that about 10 percent of his new barrel purchases, "are from various Burgundy cooperages my guys want to try out."

#### **Don't Forget Hungary and Other Alternate Oak Sources**

When I got into this business, French oak was held up as the paragon of oaks. I don't think this attitude has really gone away. The funny thing is that 100 years ago, French oak was viewed as being just average. In the 19th century, the best oak for cooperage was reputed to come from Central Europe including the Balkans and periphery of the Danube plain.

I just like Hungarian oak. I came across **Budapesti Kádár** barrels back in the early '90s. Hungarian oak has proven itself to be a real nice match with some of my Pinot Noirs. As I discuss this with other Pinot Noir winemakers, however, I have encountered some reluctance to give them a try. At a minimum, I think anyone that is already using François Frères barrels in their Pinot Noir program should try the François Frères Hungarian barrels.

### **Conclusion**

I have described four styles for Pinot Noir, but these should be treated as only the roughest of guidelines. Their real purpose is to emphasize to the winemaker the importance of determining what style Pinot Noir she thinks is best for a given vineyard and then purchase barrels which best match that style.

When shopping for barrels for Pinot Noir, a winemaker should: 1) Experiment as extensively as possible, but don't form opinions based on only one or two barrels; 2) note that there is more difference between coopers than between forests; and 3) remember that different vineyards may be better suited for different barrel selections even if they're in the same region or AVA.

## **West Side Wine Club Leadership Team – 2012**

President: **Jon Kahrs** [jekahrs@aol.com](mailto:jekahrs@aol.com)

- Set agenda for the year
- Establish leadership team
- Assure that objectives for the year are met
- Set up agenda and run meetings

Treasurer: **Scott Nelson** [nelsonsw@gmail.com](mailto:nelsonsw@gmail.com)

- Collect dues and fees, update membership list with secretary
- Pay bills

Secretary: **Ken and Barb Stinger** [kbstinger@frontier.com](mailto:kbstinger@frontier.com)

- Communicate regularly about club activities and issues
- Monthly newsletter
- Keep updated list of members, name tags and other data

Chair of Education: **Mike Smolak** [Mike@NWRetire.com](mailto:Mike@NWRetire.com)

- Arrange speakers for our meetings

Chair for Tastings: **Craig Bush** [pnoir1@hotmail.com](mailto:pnoir1@hotmail.com) & Phil Bard [phil@philbard.com](mailto:phil@philbard.com)

- Conduct club tastings
- Review and improve club tasting procedures

Chair of Winery/Vineyard Tours: **Jack Seigendall** [jseigend@comcast.net](mailto:jseigend@comcast.net)

- Select wineries to visit
- Arrange tours
- Cover logistics (food and money)

Chair of Group Purchases: **Sammy Nachimuthu** [murugasamy\\_nachimuthu@yahoo.com](mailto:murugasamy_nachimuthu@yahoo.com)

& Daniel Larson [daniel@genesislabs.com](mailto:daniel@genesislabs.com)

Makes the arrangements to purchase, collect, and distribute.

- Grape purchases
- Supplies – These should be passed to the President for distribution

Chair of Competitions: **Miriam Schnepf** [mowntwmn@gmail.com](mailto:mowntwmn@gmail.com) with Washington County Fair staff.

- Encourage club participation in County Fair President will be the contact for the Oregon State Fair.

Chairs for Social Events: Barbara Stinger and Sammy Nachimuthu [kbstinger@frontier.com](mailto:kbstinger@frontier.com)  
[murugasamy\\_nachimuthu@yahoo.com](mailto:murugasamy_nachimuthu@yahoo.com)

- Awards Gala / Holliday parties

• Web Content Editor: **Rick Kipper** [kips@lycos.com](mailto:kips@lycos.com)

Webmaster: **David Ladd**