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## THE WILDER SIDE OF CALIFORNIA

Doug Wilder, Issue 24

### Three outstanding wineries

St. Helena, CA - November 4, 2005

Out of the many wines I tasted this week, I chose three small production wineries with a diversity of specialties to tell you about. Chalk Hill is recognized as a reliable producer of Chardonnay and Merlot; however, they really crank up the quality with the miniscule amount of Estate Vineyard Selection wines they produce. Next, David Phinney is steadily humming along with his exceptional wines from Orin Swift—I can't remember anything he has made that I didn't like. Finally, the trio of exceptional, small production Pinot Noir from former Williams Selyem hand, Nick Stez. These wines should not be missed.

VINTAGE	WINE	PRODUCTION	750ml	RATING
2001	Chalk Hill - Chardonnay Estate Vineyard Selection	300 cases	\$68	VF 93
2001	Chalk Hill - Pinot Gris Estate Vineyard Selection	250 cases	\$40	VF 93
2004	Orin Swift - Sauvignon Blanc Tofanelli Vineyard	350 cases	\$19	VF 93
2004	Orin Swift - The Prisoner, Napa Valley	8,000 cases	\$28	VF 96
2003	Woodenhead - Pinot Noir Buena Tierra Vineyard, Russian River Valley	86 cases	\$46	VF 93
2002*	Woodenhead - Pinot Noir Wiley Vineyard, Anderson Valley	310 cases	\$42	VF 94
2003	Woodenhead - Pinot Noir Wiley Vineyard, Anderson Valley	238 cases	\$45	VF 95

All wines pre-arrival and ship within two weeks of ordering (\*subject to 3 bottle limit).

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### CHALK HILL WINERY

Owned by Fred and Peggy Furth, Chalk Hill Winery is a fascinating, elaborate patchwork of over sixty micro-sized vineyards covering less than a quarter of the estate's 1,200 acres. As part of the winery's lineup, the EVS (Estate Vineyard Selection) program is something quite special. Harvested exclusively from the estate, it represents the pinnacle of Chalk Hill's winemaking technique. Historically, these wines have produced some of the most memorable releases from the winery.

#### 2001 Chalk Hill - Chardonnay Estate Vineyard Selection, Chalk Hill; Vinfolio rating: 93 points

Picked entirely from the Founder's Block, the grapes are completely fermented in barrel and use 100% native yeast. This process yields a wine of bright golden amber with a nose of rich, intense and expansive butterscotch and *pain grille* along with underlying ripe stone fruit; peach and apricot, along with hazelnut and floral blossom notes. On the palate, the wine delivers a polished and ripe mouth feel, with flavors of crisp green apple, spicy nutmeg and creme brulee. It finishes with hints of hazelnut and mineral.

#### 2001 Chalk Hill - Pinot Gris Estate Vineyard Selection, Chalk Hill; Vinfolio rating: 93 points

From the coolest part of the estate, this is a combination of two Alsatian clones. Pinot Gris (Pinot Grigio in Italy) is one of the most pleasurable alternative whites produced. A rich, exotic nose full of jasmine, melon and smoky citrus, the flavors are lean and fresh with crisp peach and a dollop of smooth hazelnut/vanilla on the finish.

### ORIN SWIFT WINERY

In 2001, David Phinney (assistant winemaker at Whitehall Lane) released his first wine from Orin Swift: 2000 Sauvignon Blanc Tofanelli Vineyard. I was fortunate to find this wine early and was one of the first to write about it (96 points, Top 20 Wines of 2001). That same year, Phinney released the first vintage of The Prisoner. Both of these wines garnered instant success and have advanced Phinney into the vanguard of "discovered" winemakers. I recently tasted the current releases and they are as I expected - great!

#### 2004 Orin Swift - Sauvignon Blanc Tofanelli Vineyard, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 93 points

Exhibiting the uncommon spicy fig and floral notes for which this source is known, along with crisp acidity on mouth entry. The palate fills with smooth, polished ripeness of lemon and white peach.

**2004 Orin Swift - The Prisoner, Napa Valley; Vinfolio rating: 96 points**

Comprised of 51% Zinfandel, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Syrah, 10% Petite Sirah, and 3% Charbono, it is a blend that always offers great richness and enjoyable drinking. Succulent nectar-like fruit aromas (blueberry, nectarine, and cherry) with flavors of dark cherry, tobacco, sweet essences of boysenberry, espresso and chocolate. Another success in the continuing saga of The Prisoner.

**WOODENHEAD VINTNERS**

Woodenhead winemaker Nick Stez worked for 17 years at Williams Selyem before creating his own brand. Continuing to work wonders with Pinot Noir from old vine sources in the area, Stez also produces Zinfandel. Everything is very limited production.

**2003 Woodenhead - Pinot Noir Buena Tierra Vineyard, Russian River Valley; Vinfolio rating: 93 points**

Buena Tierra is one of the oldest vineyards in Russian River at 26 years. Its fruit has gone into many great wines in the past, including Williams Selyem and the now defunct Seven Lions Winery.

The first intriguing quality about this wine is the nose; beautifully defined aromatics with shaved rose petal, cherry, vanilla and spicy pipe tobacco. Full-flavored cherry, wet stone, pie spice on the palate with finely formed acids. Very nice stuff—I tasted it over a period of 8 hours with consistent notes.

**2002 Woodenhead - Pinot Noir Wiley Vineyard, Anderson Valley; Vinfolio rating: 94 points**

At the 2005 *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition this beautiful Pinot Noir took home the Double Gold Medal. This is probably the first and last time I will ever mention a wine winning a major wine competition. So now that we covered that...onto my tasting notes.

Wiley displays a beautiful nose of soft vanilla and cherry blossom, with an exotic spiciness. Very delicate on mouth entry, with a pretty sense of elegance. Higher acidity holds together beautifully.

**2003 Woodenhead - Pinot Noir Wiley Vineyard, Anderson Valley; Vinfolio rating: 95 points**

From another old vine source, 23 year-old Wiley Vineyard is made up of Pommard and Romanee Conti clones. Rich nose of blue plum, black cherry and dates with essences of wild strawberry and spice. The flavors are robust—smoky tea, meaty dark cherry supported by well balanced tannins.

**Coming up:**

I spent last weekend in the Santa Rita Hills Appellation tasting the delicious wines of this newly recognized region. Pinot Noir is causing all the excitement in this cool climate. I will write on my experience in an upcoming expanded *Wilder Side of California*.

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