

## **2006 Vintage Release Letter**

### **The Vineyards**

With spring around the corner, 2008 will mark my fourth vintage as a winemaker, and exciting opportunities are on the horizon. Perhaps the best news over the last several months is how I will work with Chris and Karen London to custom plant Pinot Noir in the cool climate of the Sonoma Coast for Kutch. In the spring, we will begin preparing the land to plant 'suitcase' clones of Pinot Noir. Calera & Swan clones have already been grafted onto rootstock to supply the four acre, south facing slope eloquently called Spring Hill. Before I say more, let me revert back to the beginning of 2006 when my quest for new vineyards began.

Initially, searching for vineyards that would provide great quality fruit which wouldn't need major winemaking steps to correct the wines was a tall order. After numerous months, I felt like I finally found the one white grape amongst all the reds when I secured a few rows from a vineyard out on the 'true' Sonoma Coast. Located just over three miles from the Pacific Ocean, 1.5 miles away from Hirsch Vineyard at an elevation of 935 feet, McDougall Ranch truly is a great and unique site. As for the farming, that's left in the hands of Ulises Valdez, whose attention to detail and whose track-record working with world class winemakers is unprecedented. To say I am excited about the vineyard is an understatement, as the 2006 is my first vineyard designate.

As fortune would have it, my continued persistence in courting Steve Kanzler for some of his fruit finally paid off in early 2006. Located on the southern border of the Russian River Valley, I knew Kanzler was an exceptional site in terms of soil composition, vine age and terroir. Steve offered me a one acre block of old vine 667 Pinot Noir clone, which I graciously accepted.

Continuing my quest, I dropped letters in vineyard owners' mailboxes, explaining my search for high-quality fruit. What turned up was a small one acre vineyard whose fruit had recently become available. "La Jons" is planted in the cool banana belt of Green Valley, and is extremely promising. I had the distinction of being the sole recipient of the fruit from this site and the ability to manage and pick at my will. I am happy to say that I continued with all of these vineyards in the 2007 vintage.

One final vineyard from which I received fruit unfortunately didn't make the cut, as shortly after harvest I made the difficult decision to sell unfinished wine in barrels from this newly discovered site. My concern was that I found the vineyard didn't express any sense of place. I further chose to sell all my pressed barrels from all my sites, as I found that the quality was inferior when compared to the beautiful free-run juice which was barreled down separately. Inevitably, these choices decreased my production by 30%, but I believe maintaining high quality is paramount.

## The 2006 Vintage

The 2006 growing season was characterized by incredibly wet, and in some cases, record-setting winter weather. This condition set the stage for what could have been significant early season botrytis pressure. Fortunately, the combination of diligent farming practices as well as favorable windy weather kept both mildew and rot at bay. The soil's added moisture resulted in delayed early season irrigation, vigorous canopy growth, and larger than usual berry size in all our vineyards. To compensate for this, we choose to thin shoots & leaves and drop green fruit cluster at 80% verasion. This allowed us to have balanced canopy to crop ratio, thereby keeping good berry flavor development and concentration in place, as well as balanced yields. Temperatures were moderately cool without any major heat spikes throughout the summer growing season. The difference between daytime highs and nighttime lows, known as diurnal variation, was high. This phenomena allowed the grapes to retain good levels of acidity. Harvest finally commenced at the beginning of October, with McDougall Ranch being picked first, followed by Kanzler and La Jons towards the end of the month, only a day apart. In the winery, the 2006 vintage exhibited a sexiness, evocative of Pinot's feminine side.

## The Wines

### *McDougall Ranch – 90 Cases*

After hand harvesting 1.48 tons, 75% of the fruit was de-stemmed, while 25% remained whole cluster. The juice fermented in ¾ ton bins on its own yeast and completed native malolactic fermentation in barrel. During fermentation, the cap on the de-stemmed fruit was punched down with the palm of the hand, while the whole cluster bin received pigeage by feet. The two lots of four barrels aged separately on their lees for 16 months without racking until final assembly.

With no new oak, this wine expresses McDougall Ranch as pure as can be. The nose is resplendent with its characteristic aroma of rose petals. On the palate, it has good grip and power without being heavy, and the tannin/acid structure should allow the wine to age for five plus years.

### *Russian River Valley – 287 Cases*

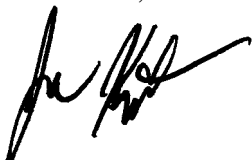
This Pinot Noir is a mélange of two vineyards, Kanzler and La Jons, whose sum has made a better wine than its parts in this vintage. 70% of the fruit was de-stemmed, while 30% remained whole cluster. The juice fermented in ¾ ton bins on its own yeast and completed native malolactic fermentation in barrel. During fermentation, the cap on the de-stemmed fruit was punched down with the palm of the hand, while the whole cluster bins received pigeage by feet. After fermentation, the wine was placed in French oak barrels, 30% of which were new, and aged on its lees untouched for 16 months. Finally, for assembly, each barrel was racked by gravity in preparation for bottling.

On the nose is Bing cherry, compost and cola notes; while the palate is comprised of raspberry liqueur and sweet tannins, showing fine length. The wine will be best enjoyed in its youth at between 3-5 years. I am pleased to note that my alcohol levels are down one full percent from my inaugural release.

For maximum enjoyment, these wines should be served near cellar temperature (60-65 degrees).

Please visit my newly-designed website, which I spent many hours building. An interactive map of Northern California enables you to see the location and photos of each vineyard site from which I pull fruit. It can be seen at <http://www.KutchWines.com>

Drink well,



Jamie Kutch