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Cult of Personality

Determined and persuasive, Jamie Kutch produces some of California's most coveted Pinot—from his SF apartment.  
by Jordan Mackay  
posted on June 30, 2008

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*Credits: Joe Budd*

A far cry from Napa and Sonoma is a nondescript apartment on Clay Street near Franklin, crammed with papers, books and, most of all, wine—boxes and boxes of wine. This is where Kutch Wines, one of the hottest boutique producers of Pinot Noir, is based.

It's a good reminder that owning a faux chateau is not necessary to make great wine in California. As founder Jamie Kutch himself can attest, there's a lot to be said for passion, smarts and good old-fashioned hard work. Kutch not only makes Pinot—he sleeps, eats and breathes it. As he confesses in his gentle Long Island accent, "Pinot Noir is like heroin to me."

Describing his Sonoma Coast vineyard sources, he sounds like a child excitedly talking about his new best friend. When he says he wants to make wines that can age like the great California Pinots of the '70s and '80s, he means that he obsessively goes out and buys every old example he can find, all the way back to 1947.

Kutch's story has elements of a go-west-young-man fairy tale. He was a trader on Wall Street, deep into wine and a denizen of E-Bob (in other words, [erobertparker.com](#)), the country's most active Internet wine bulletin board, which quickly became his wine community. A taste of Pinot Noir from Kosta Browne Winery so impressed Kutch that, in rapture, he telephoned its maker, Michael Browne. This phone call began a correspondence that resulted, in 2005, in Browne inviting him to come out to California to learn wine making. After accepting, Kutch announced his decision on the E-Bob bulletin board, a posting that garnered thousands of page views. As he says, "So I'm sitting in New York, not even having moved to California, and I have 400 people who've said they would purchase my wine when it was completed—and that was 21 months before there was a wine."

While the 34-year-old Kutch (who looks a bit like Adam Sandler and has a similar "aw-shucks" demeanor) knows that he owes his instant success to his Internet community, his wine has spoken for itself, inciting *Food & Wine* to call it "impressive enough that getting in touch with the winery about upcoming vintages would be a mighty good idea." Undeniably, he's managed to infuse his wines with his own intensity.

Today, Kutch is still a regular on the bulletin board and he uses [Google Earth's](#) satellite navigation to check out prospective vineyards. His sales experience continues to help him. He cold calls top growers and sends them letters asking whether he can buy a little of their fruit. And not surprisingly, people seem to say yes to Jamie Kutch more than they say no.