



PinotFile

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Pinot Noir: Life begins at <2 tons/acre

Kutch Wines: 2013 Vintage Provided Compelling & Transparent Wines

It was nearly ten years ago when I first profiled winemaker Jamie Kutch in the *PinotFile* ("Following Your Pinot Dream," www.princeofpinot.com/article/1274/). I like to think I had a little role in his decision to leave a successful Wall Street career to pursue a life's work as a Pinot Noir vintner. Jamie admitted that he had read every issue of the *PinotFile* leading up to his career change. Since 2005, I have followed the evolution of his wines and applauded his success. After years of crafting wine at Deerfield Ranch Winery in Sonoma Valley, he proudly moved into his own winemaking facility in 2012. The new winery gleamed with 30 new tanks including Grenier 4-ton wood tanks from France (the same as used at Domaine Romanée-Conti).



Jamie has become a strong proponent of whole cluster fermentation, a vinification technique that has become more en vogue in California and Oregon in recent years. It is not new, for the Burgundians practiced stem inclusion in the production of Pinot Noir for centuries as historically they had no destemmers. The use of whole cluster fermentation fell out of favor stateside when modern destemmers arrived over fifteen years ago, but a number of vintners such as Jamie have successfully championed the technique.

Inclusions of whole clusters (intact berries and stems) in fermentation adds an extra dimension to the structure, texture, sensuality, and aromatic and flavor profile of Pinot Noir. There are potential pitfalls to this technique such as potential green aromas and flavors, so appropriate vintage, clone and vineyard site are critical for its success. It is important that grapes are sourced from cooler sites where sugar ripeness and physiological ripeness occur in tandem and coincide with stem lignification. Jamie's vineyard sources in the far west Sonoma Coast satisfy this criteria. When vintage conditions cooperate, such as in 2013, 100% whole cluster fermentation can produce seductive wines.

All the following wines were 100% whole cluster fermented using native yeasts, underwent native malolactic fermentation, and were aged sur lie for 10 months without racking. Punch downs were carried out twice a day by foot. Despite the whole cluster fermentation, which can potentially lead to relatively unapproachable wines upon release, these wines can be enjoyed now, but should evolve beautifully in the cellar. All three vineyard-designate Pinot Noirs are distinctive and terroir driven, a conclusion I reached after tasting, and later was corroborated by Jamie.

Commenting on the 2013 vintage, Jamie said he was pleased with the Pinot Noirs. "They show welcome freshness and purity, somewhat akin to the 2011 vintage. Yields were down compared to 2012, but still bountiful." Jamie felt that the wines expressed their sense of place more than any previous vintage in part due to a higher skill level in the winery and the use of equipment to preserve the fruit character. His 2013 wines also benefited from his increasing familiarity with his vineyards with each vintage that allows more precise decisions unique to each site.

What I admire about Jamie is that he is a thinker and innovator, rather than someone who follows the pack. As Jamie notes, "I will never stop pushing the envelope nor play it safe." The Sans Soufre Pinot Noir is a perfect example.

Here is what Jamie told me about this unique wine. "The thought process behind this wine was to push the boundaries and see if it could be done in California. San Soufre means "without sulfur," and none was ever added to this wine during the winemaking process. The results are what I consider to be the purest expression of Pinot Noir. The grapes had very high natural acidity which was important. I fermented the wine partially carbonic (100% whole cluster grapes were sealed in a tank while fermentation continued without punch downs or pump overs). Once the Brix dropped to 10° (half way through fermentation), I began punching down the grapes by foot. The goal was to capture higher levels of CO2 and use its preservative qualities in lieu of using sulfur. The wine was aged in old, neutral barrels and bottled directly from barrel, never racking it to tank. The wine is not the same wine and not sourced from the same vineyards as the Sonoma Coast bottling. For me it is very special and a wine I could drink every day and die a happy man."

2013 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.3% alc., 1,500 cases, \$39. 60% Campbell Ranch, 40% Sonoma Stage and 20% Le Jons vineyards. Aged in 30% new and 70% neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate reddish purple color in the glass. Sumptuous aromas of black raspberry, blackberry and sous bois are tenacious over time in the glass. The mid weight flavors of blue and black berries and plum are intense and seductive on the attack, maintaining an earthy presence on the finish which offers a whisper of oak. The dry tannins are well proportioned and the wine's overall balance is commendable. This wine could use a little more time to fully evolve. 89-90.*

2013 Kutch Wines Sans Soufre Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.1% alc., 45 cases, \$N/A. Restaurant only release. Vinified without sulfur additions. Harvest Brix 19.5° and pH 2.95. 100% whole cluster with some carbonic ferment. Aged 11 months in neutral barrels. Unfined and unfiltered. *Moderately deep cherry color in the glass. More fragrant than the regular Sonoma Coast bottling with a delightful perfume of raspberry, exotic spices and rose petal. Noticeable lift, vibrancy and freshness with copious pure fruit presence similar to a Gamay based Beaujolais wine. Easy to drink with very modest tannins and electric acidity on the finish. 91.*

2013 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.3% alc., 150 cases, \$49. Vines planted in 1972 (clone unknown). Own-rooted, dry-farmed, California sprawl trellising, 10' x 8' spacing, cordon pruned. Aged in 30% new and 70% neutral French oak barrels. *Moderate black cherry color in the glass. The nose is fresh and very pleasant with aromas of dark cherry pie glaze, spice, wildflowers, and conifer. The rich core of tasty black cherry, black raspberry and pomegranate fruits*

are embellished with a complimentary touch of oak. The tannins are fine-grain and slightly rugged, but add textural interest. The long and powerful, sweet cherry finish is beguiling. **92-93.**



2012 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.3% alc., 350 cases, \$59.

Vineyard planted in 2001 in Goldridge soils. Clones are "828," 115 and 777. 580 feet elevation, 8.5 miles inland from the coast. One of the coolest Pinot Noir vineyards in the North Coast with average mean monthly growing season temperature of 60°F. VSP trellising, spur pruned, 8' x 5' spacing. Aged in 100% neutral French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. The nose is mesmerizing with hi-tone aromas of cherry rock candy, raspberry coulis, spiced plum and rose petal. Sleek and seductive and seamless in every way, this wine offers juicy flavors of Bing cherry, raspberry and strawberry robed in modest, soft tannins. Highly approachable with a refreshing lift of tight, defining acidity. More demure and feminine than the McDougall bottling. Wow! 93-94.*



2012 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.2% alc., 500 cases, \$59.

Vineyard planted in 1998 in Graywacke and Sandstone soils. Dijon clone 114. VSP trellising, spur pruned, 8' x 5' spacing. 935 feet elevation, 3.4 miles inland from the coast. Aged in 50% new and 50% used French oak barrels. *Moderately dark reddish purple color in the glass. Lovely scent of black cherry, blackberry jam, wilted rose and underbrush. Delicious mid weight plus flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and boysenberry supported by firm but balanced tannins and the slightest hint of oak. The tremendously flavorful attack of sappy fruit leads to an extraordinarily long and juicy finish. Enjoyable now, this wine will benefit from more tannin integration over time. This is a wine that brings you to your knees, makes you turn your eyes to the heavens, and give thanks. 95-96.*



Kutch wines are in limited production and are only sold through a mailing list at www.kutchwines.com. Two releases a year, in January and July, are offered through email and can be ordered then online. Consistent buying patterns over time lead to increased amounts of wine offered.