



PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinotphiles

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Pinot Noir has
More to say
than other wines

Kutch Wines, Sonoma, CA

Jamie Kutch is an enthusiastic proponent of whole cluster (whole bunch) fermentation that gives his wines an extra dimension compared to many other California Pinot Noirs that are 100% de-stemmed. Whole cluster fermentation refers to the fermentation of intact clusters of grapes as they are picked from the vine with no intervention of machines leaving all berries and stems intact. The Burgundians have practiced whole cluster fermentation for centuries, as historically they had no de-stemmers.

The New World has largely moved away from whole cluster fermentation or limit it to 10%-30% of the clusters. Many winemakers use intuition in deciding whether stems from a certain vineyard will contribute positively or negatively. Stems have a high tannin content and can give wines added tannins and a green aroma. (Countering this is the fact that the seeds remain encapsulated in the grape keeping seed tannins to a minimum.) Adding stems to a wine increases the pH and decreases the TA and this may necessitate acidifying the wine depending on the vintage and ripeness at picking.

On the other hand, whole cluster fermentations tends to be longer, with more carbonic maceration (fermentation within the grape), and lower fermentation temperatures. When successful, the results of whole cluster fermentation can be sensational. Winemaker Jeff Fink (Tantara, Aether) says, "The aromatics can be thrilling and literally spine tingling. There can be a purity, depth and freshness to the bouquet that almost defies description. Stem inclusion brings depth, texture, fragrance, age ability and that mysterious element of intrigue that all great Pinot Noir should have and aspire to."

An interesting study was conducted at Rex Hill Wines and reported at the first annual Innovation + Quality Conference held in Napa Valley in March 2016. Four different treatments were devised to evaluate the impact of stems in various capacities on a final wine while all other winemaking protocols were standardized. The four treatments were: (1) Fully de-stemmed, (2) Fully de-stemmed with 100% of stems added back to the fermenter, (3) 100% whole cluster, and (4) 100% whole cluster with a 100% stem addition (200% stems). The study found that tannin levels increased in wines as more stems were added. The 100% stem-added-back tannin levels (2) were higher than those in the 100% without de-stemming treatment (3). Adding stems back led to more tannin in the catechin family (the type of harsher tannin often associated with commercial seed) - the type of tannin usually winemakers are trying to avoid. Through tasting, there was a clear difference as stem percentage increased. The biggest difference in the two 100% stem lots (one de-stemmed and added back and the other whole cluster) was in the aromas. More stems in the tank caused potassium to go up and the pH to increase. All alcohols were remarkably similar, There were more polymeric anthocyanins with stems confirming the belief that stems help fix color for a longer period.

Jamie told me that winemakers have a tendency to say each vintage, "These are the best wines I have every made." He does, however, sincerely believe these are the best Pinot Noir he has produced to date. "They are cool, fresh and pure, and I strongly believe they will age incredibly well (maybe 30 years) on their own balance."

2016 was the first vintage that the Sonoma Coast bottling was a 100% declassified single vineyard Pinot Noir from the winery's four sourced vineyards (Falstaff, McDougall, Bohan and Signal Ridge). Fruit from Sonoma Stage and Campbell Ranch vineyards that typically went into the Sonoma Coast bottling were dropped. This practice of declassifying improved the quality of the Sonoma Coast bottling and also increased the quality of the single vineyard wines since barrels were culled out that

were not the best from the site and rather than going into the single vineyard, they were blended into the appellation wine.

The wines were fermented 100% whole cluster and not acidified because of high natural acidity. Native yeast primary fermentation and native malolactic fermentation were employed. The wines were bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. Jamie recommends that the wines be decanted if opened soon.

Jamie was fortunate to escape from the October fires. He told me the fire came within one-half mile on one side and one and one-half mile on the other side of the winery in Sonoma.

Kutch wines are sold to a dedicated mailing list at www.kutchwines.com. There is both a spring and fall release.



2016 Kutch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.1% alc., \$39. Release January 9, 2018. Moderate garnet color in the glass. Soaring aromas of black raspberry, spice, burnt tobacco and tutti-fruitti. Sleek and eager to please in a forward drinking mid weight style, featuring flavors of black cherry and black raspberry with a tasty spice riff and a carbonic maceration note. Well-structured, with a compliment of oak, taking on more pride with time in the glass. Perfectly fine when tasted up to four days from a previously opened and re-corked bottle indicating good age ability. Drink this wine now and over an extended time of cellaring. **92.**



2016 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 11.3% alc., \$49. Release January 9, 2018. Moderately light ruby red color in the glass. A pheromonic nose offering a deep well of fresh cherry, strawberry, and raspberry fruits along with exotic spices including mulling spice. A wine of ethereal refinement, with searching and perfumes flavors of red cherry and berry, spice, tobacco and bacon fat. Very silky mouthfeel with a buried but supportive structure and a refreshing finish that drives another sip. Only Pinot Noir could offer a wine of such delicacy and sensuality while knocking your socks off with flavor. This is a wine to share with your partner for it could easily lead to romance. **97.**



2016 Kutch Falstaff Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.0% alc., \$59. Release January 9, 2018. Vineyard is located 8.2 miles from the Pacific Ocean. Soils are marine quartz sandstone and Goldridge. Vine age is 13+ years. Clones are dijon "828," 115 and 777 on 101 x 14 rootstock. A very cold site. Planted in 2001 by owners Ron and Judy Lougheed. Very intense and small clusters with berries the size of peas. Yields often less than 1 ton per acre. Moderate garnet color in the glass. Intoxicating nose of pie cherry, pipe smoke and exotic spice. Mouth filling goodness in a mid weight style offering flavors of cherry, raspberry, burnt tobacco and spice. Plenty of tannic backbone for support working in harmony with welcome acidity. The polished mouthfeel is striking as is the extraordinarily long finish. Still exceptional when tasted four days after a bottle was opened and re-corked. This wine shows the most whole cluster character of the wines in the 2016 lineup. **95.**



2016 Kutch McDougall Ranch Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 12.0% alc., \$59. Release August 14, 2018. Vineyard is situated 3.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean at 935-1,030 feet elevation. Soils are Graywacke and sandstone. Clones 114 and 115 on 44-53 rootstock planted in 1998. Located 1.7 miles north of Hirsch Vineyards. Vineyard managed by Ulises Valdez. Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Other worldly aromas of crushed black cherry, pine, spice and burnt tobacco. Amazing attack and expansive mouth filling presence of black cherry fruit. A fruit grenade combined with an ephemeral demeanor. This beauty offers exceptional length, vibrant underlying acidity and uncommon finishing intensity. A complete wine that has everything you could ask for in Pinot Noir. Still great when tasted four days after opening the bottle. Ridiculously good. **98.**



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2016 Kutch Signal Ridge Vineyard Mendocino Ridge Pinot Noir. 12.0% alc., \$49. Release August 14, 2018. Second vintage from this vineyard. The vineyard is often referred to as an “Island in the Sky” because it is the highest vineyard in all of Sonoma and Mendocino County at 2,800 feet elevation. Located just north of the Sonoma Coast AVA. Moderately dark garnet color in the glass. Intriguing aromas of exotic floral bouquet, crushed red grapes, spice, and potpourri. Mid weight flavors of blackberry, purple grape, plum and black raspberry entice as does the accents of burnt spice, tobacco a edible flower. Plenty of whole cluster goodness in this wine with integrated tannins, welcome vibrancy and a juicy finish. An adventurous wine that was much better at the two day and four day interval after opening. **93.**