



2001 PISONI Pinot Noir

The Harvest

After the 2000 vintage I was pleased to see yields get back to levels I feel more comfortable with. The warm summer was in many ways reminiscent of the 1997 vintage and I was pleased to see extremely clean fruit and a beautiful set in the vineyard, this was going to be easy! Harvest began on August 31, the exact same day we harvested the 97 vintage yields were about 8% below the 2000 but still a comfortable 32 hectoliters per hectare. Ripe stems and seeds allowed us to once again proceed with 100 % whole cluster fermentation. Acids were slightly lower than normal and we made an adjustment of 1 gram per liter of Tartaric. This was exciting to see such beautiful fruit that would require very little on my part.

The Vineyard

Several parcels now comprise the now famous Pisoni Vineyard. The Main block and the Elias block seem to be the source of the best Pinot Noir fruit. Although I suspect the others will catch up quickly. The fruit for this wine comes from perhaps the most coveted parcel on the ranch. It is at the top of the main block and contains the steepest slope. These are some of the oldest vines on the property and perhaps have the best chance to make the best wine. It is planted to a unilateral cordon with a vertical shoot positioning. With a unilateral cordon you get less fruit generally because you have half of the fruiting canes on the plant. The vertical shoot enables the farmer to prune in a way that allows the clusters to develop in a symmetrical line thus giving uniform ripeness across the clusters. The south east facing slope gives this vineyard optimal sun exposure and the vineyard are set back out of the fog line that is so prominent in the Santa Lucia Highlands. Matt Kramer once explained to me that Pisoni Vineyard was in a nexus, meaning that it was just outside of the area where you think you should plant Pinot just slightly warmer thus giving it something distinctive and amazing. He said only the greatest vineyards are planted in the nexus.

Production

My aspirations for this vineyard are somewhat different than many of the producers working with this fruit. The tendency to harvest very ripe and sometimes overripe grapes to produce a highly extracted wine with deep color and intensity and yes high alcohol has become the norm and has met with both critical and consumer success. While I applaud my colleagues for their successes I do not subscribe to their theories that this is the best way to make Pinot Noir here in California. Don't get me wrong I have been tempted to take this path of least resistance and to conform to what I call the McDonalds method of winemaking but alas I cannot bring myself to purposely throw in the towel. Rather I am looking for much more elegance and balance. I choose to harvest with much more modest sugar levels and much higher natural acidity. The belief that my wines will continue to evolve in the bottle for years to come and that this continued evolution will ultimately produce a much more interesting wine is what drives our philosophy of winemaking.

The fruit was fermented in 1.5 ton open tops and was cold soaked for 72 hours at 10 degrees centigrade. Inoculation was begun using RC212 yeast and nutrients to insure their growth. Fermentation lasted a total of 12 days and was pressed off at .5 degree brix directly to new Francois Freres barrels all from the Allier forest. These were chateau barrels with a heavy toast treatment. The wine continued to ferment and finally completed malolactic on January 28th 2002. At that time it received an addition of sulphur and was put to bed for of the winter. This wine remained on its gross lees until the time of bottling which took place on July 5th. The wine remains in our cellar and will be released in July 2004.