

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

2002 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest date: September 12

PH at bottle: 3.76

Alcohol at bottle: 14.1%

Release date: March 2004

Time on oak: 10 months (80% French, 20% Hungarian, 20% new)

Brix at harvest: 24.8 brix

TA at bottle: 6.1 g/L

Total production: 240 cases

Vineyard: The fruit for the 2002 comes from an inspirational piece of dirt called “Green Island Vineyard,” a site farmed by multiple generations of an established Napa grape farming family, the Nords. Although geographically not a true island—it would more likely answer to the name “peninsula”—the site is a spiritual island for sure. If one floats the Napa River as it lazily winds its way south through the valley, the rivergoer travels from warmer Calistoga, St. Helena, and Oakville climates to cooler south-Napa climates. Finally, the water meanders through the town of Napa itself and on through the “cool” region of Carneros (famous for Pinot Noir). There on the left, just as the river spills into the San Pablo Bay (a northern extension of San Francisco Bay), is the tiny spit of land on the East side of the river. That spit, Green Island Vineyard, is a viticultural oasis that is “cooler than cool.” Surrounded on three sides by the windy bay, the vineyard is an ideal site for Pinot Noir. The Nords have put in the most exciting of clones, and they allowed me to pick from the “115” (known for color and power) and “777” (more pretty than powerful).

Winemaking: As with the 2001, harvest happened in the early morning. The “pre-Starbucks” hour, and careful hand-picking, brought the fruit in cool and clean. The two different clones had cooperated in ripening such that they could be picked the same day, and we got to the fruit just in time, because an unseasonable heat wave hit just days later, cooking any fruit subsequently left out on the vine. Fermentation was picture perfect, with even better extraction than ‘01. ML also fell right in line, completing my mid-January. The two clones showed remarkable individuality for the first three months in barrel in the caves, but eventually those differences faded, yielding to the more powerful reflection of the vineyard itself as bottling neared. This wine has intense color and an elegant structure from the clone 115, yet also has a rose petal note and a silkiness that reflect the beauty and aromatics of the clone 777. I attribute the remarkable overall balance of this Pinot to the vineyard itself: cool enough to provide structure and aromatics, sunny enough to develop fullness. As we always strive to do, this wine was bottled unfined and unfiltered.

Mojo: The eponymous green '66 Ford truck got a paint job while this wine was being crafted. It took a long search to find someone who could be true to the color, but find them we did. At first I told the shop I couldn't afford the complete restoration of the outside (\$4K), and I just wanted an original-color overcoat to stop the rust (\$1K). When I went in to check on their progress, they had the entire truck buffed-out, every dent and scratch repaired. Fearing an expensive miscommunication, I went to the manager to confirm. He just shrugged. “We are giving it the basic job,” he said, “it's just that we can't stop Charlie.” He pointed to a pear-shaped man over in the corner, busily hand-painting the emblems from the truck. Turns out Charlie's grandfather also had a '66 Ford truck, and Charlie wasn't going to let a little budget issue get in the way of doing what was right for the vehicle. Charlie didn't drink alcohol, so I tipped him with a dozen Krispy Kream donuts. On another note, just before the time that this Pinot went to bottle, Ben, the bionic-kneed chocolate lab, ascended to the kennel in the sky. So very, very sad, that day, although his life and story was a glorious one. RJ had brought him home from the Seattle shelter, death row in fact (due to his knees), five years ago. Two operations and a \$4K fund drive later, we'd rescued the best dog a family could ever have. Ben was a trusty companion during cellar work, and was an ecstatic partner on scouting walkabouts through the vineyard. If you put your ear to the glass, you can just hear Ben barking at the rabbits as he dashes, bionic knees and all, among the vines.



NAPA VALLEY

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