

# ROAD 31 WINE CO.

*grin-inducing pinot*

## Road 31 Wine Co. 2008 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest dates: September 1 through 28  
Oak: 33% new; (60% French, 40% Tokaji/Hungarian)  
PH at bottle: 3.65  
Alcohol at bottle: 14.3%

Brix at harvest: 24.2 to 27.0  
Time on Oak: 11 months  
TA at bottle: 5.7 g/L  
Total production: 820 cases

**Vineyard:** Three vineyards contributed to this wine. From the Nord Vineyard, at the southern mouth of the Napa River where the water spills into the San Pablo/San Francisco Bay, comes the prettiness of clone 115. Stanly Ranch, in Carneros just west across the Napa River from Nord, provided the structure of clones 114 and 667. Finally, the G block of Suscol Ridge, the brilliant but sometimes-temperamental hillside child, gives us the pizzazz of pomard clone.

**Vintage:** The middle year of a three-year drought, the 2008 is—for that reason—quite similar to the much-heralded 2007. Not that the two wines got to that same point by the same path. Whereas the 2007 growing season was strikingly uneventful, 2008 was much more dynamic with a crippling frost in the spring and vicious wildfires late in the summer. That said, 2008 was indeed a great vintage for me, as the frost barely nipped my particular vines, resulting instead in a flavor-focusing lower yield. Unlike others who had smoke find its way into their wine, my vineyards simply enjoyed a nice haze/sunscreen on the hottest days of the summer. If it didn't cause thousands of Californians to flee their homes, I might wish for a wee bit of wildfire every July.

**Winecrafting:** September weather was calm, cool, and collected, which drew harvest out over the span of a full month (in most years, I pick all vineyards within 5-7 days of each other). The previously frost-nipped vines resulted in lower yields, concentrating flavor and color. A four day cold soak preceded 14 days in fermenter. Run to barrel before the finish of fermentation, the wine sat on its gross lees (without racking) for the entire time it was in barrel, which adds wonderful texture and weight to the mid-palate. Using Tokaj (Hungarian) oak for a portion of the new oak added a nice hint of spice to the profile.

**Wine:** I have, in years past, compared my wines to various Star Wars characters (Han, Luke, Leia...). The 2008 is R2D2: though certainly cute and loveable initially, you will eventually find it has a hell of a story to tell. No wine or vineyard can encounter frost and smoke—as this one did in 2008—and emerge without substantial character. Initially, the nose is on the prettier, floral side, but it is then complemented by cola, cherry, and toasty accents. The wine itself is juicy and lively on the palate, but with a strong base note of fruit followed by a deep and long finish. It will drink wonderfully as Thanksgiving 2010 approaches, but ample acidity assures that it will continue to excel for at least 6 years from vintage date.

**Road 31 Wine Co.** produces tiny batches of one handcrafted Napa Valley Pinot Noir. The label pays homage to the gravel road outside my grandparents' homestead back in Kansas—where I too was born—and the mighty green '66 Ford Truck that drove it regularly. My grandfather, a farmer, willed the truck to me when he passed in '86, and the truck now seems right at home bouncing among the vines of Napa. The green truck and I oversee farming, harvest and hauling of the grapes to cave space borrowed from some friends up in Stag's Leap district of Napa. My hands handle every step of the crafting: fermenting, barrel aging, bottling, and peddling. I am a one-man show (with a little help now and then from my wife, my cousins, and Daisy Dog).

Kent Fortner (Winecrafter/Truck Owner)



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