Road 31 Wine Co. 2006 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest date: September 20-25	Brix at harvest: 24.2 to 25.8
Oak: 80% French, 20% Tokaji/Hungarian, (33% new)	Time on Oak: 11 months
PH at bottle: 3.64	TA at bottle: 5.53 g/L
Alcohol at bottle: 14.2%	Total production: 700 cases

Vineyard: Four 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 clone 114. Finally, Suscol Ridge, the brilliant but sometimes-temperamental mountain child, gives us the pizzaz of pommard clone. And this year, I tried out a new vineyard, Poseidon's, in quantities too small to really impact the overall profile, but big enough to try on for size (and fit it did).

Vintage: It was a second consecutive wet, protracted spring in 2006. However, we then had incredible weather for set, which resulted in packed clusters, further feeding the worry of Botrytis that hovered over the entire season. Late spring was nice, followed by some heat strikes in late June and July. The heat relieved some of the botrytis pressure, but hot weather is never great for Pinot. But then came harvest, and it was a peculiar synchronization of timing. For the clusters that were botrytis infected, all was lost, but those that weren't received a beautiful, cool, flavor-retaining September. Although we had to sort aggressively off the vine, I couldn't be happier with what ended up in the fermenter. And, about the time all the Pinot in the valley was picked, the skies opened up on the Cabernet still on the vine. Although things did eventually dry out, I'm glad I'm in Pinot Noir.

Winecrafting: We picked at daybreak on all four vineyards. Sorting paid off in the fermenter, with clean, easy, slow fermentations, with no botrytis impact to speak of. It was a more delicate, elegant vintage from the moment it was picked, so I approached the new wine with appropriate delicacy in the cellar. Wines went to barrel by the 15th of October, with the Budapesti Kadar (Hungarian) barrels again showing well right away, and the Mercurey (French) barrels coming along later in the aging cycle. The wines remained very clean, and were held separate without racking until bottling.

Wine: If the 2003 was Darth, the 2004 more like Luke, and the 2005 an obvious Han Solo, the 2006 completes the cast as a beautiful, slightly-surly Pincess Leia. Hailing from royal—but also complicated--origins, there is no denying this wine's intrigue and beauty. The nose has notes of cherry, coffee and cola, with sweet oak as a wonderful background. In the mouth, it is initially lively, with a racy, spicy characteristic quickly melding into the smooth, juicy, sweet texture that has come to define my Pinot Noir. This wine is more patient in its development than previous vintages: it is still a bit tight upon release, and I anticipate it to really hit its stride come the holidays (of 2008) and be quite gorgeous for another four years after that. (Eventually, Princess Leia lets her hair down…)

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)