

ROAD 31 WINE CO.

grin-inducing pinot

Road 31 Wine Co. 2007 Pinot Noir Napa Valley

Harvest date: September 3-10

Oak: 33% new ; (60% French, 40% Tokaji/Hungarian)

pH at bottle: 3.62

Alcohol at bottle: 14.1%

Brix at harvest: 24.4 to 26.1

Time on Oak: 11 months

TA at bottle: 5.36 g/L

Total production: 800 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 clone 114. Finally, Suscol Ridge, the brilliant but sometimes-temperamental mountain child, gives us the pizzaz of pommard clone.

Vintage: 2007 truly was a dream. “Strikingly reasonable” one of my viticulture brethren said about the growing season. We had cool weather, but not so much that botrytis invaded. We had a drought, but not so severe that we ran out of water entirely, resulting in perfectly stressed vines. We had extremely low yields—clusters so small that four of them would fit in your hand—which might make the bank grumpy, but is splendid for flavor. Finally, we had shockingly even weather at harvest time. Truly, a dream vintage.

Winecrafting: We picked at daybreak on all three vineyards (no night-harvesting at all picks this year, but it was early in the morning and cold). The fruit was incredibly solid: no botrytis, no bird-damage, medium-high brix, great color, and brown stems. The low yields were further emphasized as the fruit was crushed; a low juice to skin ratio made for some “heavy” fermenters, which is great for extraction and concentration. The wine sat on its gross lees (without racking) for the entire time it was in barrel, which adds wonderful texture in the end wine. Final racking and bottling went off without a hitch, although these times are never stress-free. I couldn’t believe I managed to get through the perfect vintage without screwing it up.

Wine: I have, in years past, compared my wines to various Star Wars characters (Han, Luke, Leia...). This year I will simply say that the feeling I got when I’d finally bottled this vintage was the exact same feeling I had as a 7 year old boy walking out of Star Wars for the first time: pure, unadulterated joy and adventure. This wine is my best effort ever. The nose is dark and brooding, with the cola, cherry, and coffee accents. The wine is racy and lively, with a strong base note of dark fruit. It has both length of finish and depth of flavor. While intense, the wine has a delicacy of aromatics that balances the wine in a way I rarely experience with Pinot. It will drink wonderfully right upon release, continue to excel as the first holidays approach, and I believe this wine could cellar for 8 years from vintage date and still deliver.

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)



NAPA VALLEY

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