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WINES OF THE TIMES

The Taste of Cool In a Pinot Noir

By ERIC ASIMOV

I HAVE to confess, I don't drink much California pinot noir. The prevailing thick, fruit-and-oak-drenched style, often with a touch of sweetness, does not appeal to me.

I find that these wines are clumsy at the table, overwhelming and fatiguing. In short, many of the leading California pinot

To gauge the effect of the cooler weather, the wine panel tasted 25 bottles of Russian River Valley pinot noir from the 2005 and 2006 vintages.

Florence Fabricant was out of town for this tasting so I was joined by three guests: Laura Maniec, director of wine and spirits for B. R. Guest Restaurants, Rebecca Foster, a wine representative with Empire Mar-



Tasting Report: Berries and Spice from the Russian River Valley

De Loach Russian River Valley O.F. S. 2005	\$35	★★½	Emeritus Russian River Valley 2005	\$33	★★
Medium-bodied with raspberry, cinnamon and spice flavors.			Dry and spicy with flavors of raspberry, rhubarb and vanilla.		
Mia's Play Russian River Valley 2005	\$40	★★½	Lynmar Russian River Valley 2005	\$40	★★½
Balanced and elegant with good energy.			Raspberry and spice flavors augmented by wintergreen and vanilla.		
BEST VALUE BearBoat Russian River Valley 2005	\$30	★★			
Earthy, raspberry aroma with spicy ginger and cola accents.					

Lynmar Russian River Valley 2005	\$40	★★½
Raspberry and spice flavors augmented by wintergreen and vanilla.		
Porter Creek Russian River Valley 2005	\$35	★★½
Light, elegant and unimposing with good energy.		
Russian Hill Russian River Valley 2005	\$30	★★½
Dark, compact and balanced with cherry and raspberry flavors.		
Freeman Russian River Valley 2005	\$55	★★
Fresh flavors of red and black fruit with a hint of spiciness.		

WHAT THE STARS MEAN:

Ratings range from zero to four stars and reflect the panel's reaction to the wines, which were tasted with names and vintages concealed. The wines represent a selection generally available in good retail shops, restaurants, on the Internet and from the vineyards themselves. Prices are those paid in shops in the New York region.

Tasting Coordinator: Bernard Kirsch

Recent wine columns from The New York Times are online. This week, panel members discuss Russian River Valley pinot noirs: nytimes.com/wine.

pinot noir, the growing season was far cooler than it had been in recent years, leading to a longer, later harvest. The 2006 vintage, too, was marked by cool weather — a throwback to the early 1990s, before a run of intense heat began to mark the wines.

Selyem or Kosta Browne.

Like the vintages, the style of these pinot noirs was on the whole very different from what we've gotten used to in recent years.

Very few were of the candied, super-saturated fruit bomb

with some acidity and more definition.

This, in my opinion, is all to the good. Yet, I do not want to get carried away. Despite the lack of heavy fruit flavors, some wine-makers stuck with an overbearing oak treatment, resulting in a generic sort of cherry-vanilla

norm, they still, for the most part, lack finesse.

More to the point, many displayed a tepid tameness that contrasted with the sort of risqué elegance I seek in pinot noir. Bruce tended to agree with me, while Laura and Rebecca were more positive about the wines.