



## PinotFile

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### ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE:

Sojourn Cellars: Pull Up a Lawn Chair

August Briggs Winery: "To Blow a Dandelion is to Make a Wish"

Fulcrum Wines

Talbot Vineyards: Family Inspired

Belle Glos: Caymus Genes

New Zealand Pinot Noir: Latest Sips are Ripe, Bold and Fruity

tasting george pinot vertically

Tasting Scherrer Pinot Vertically

Loring Wine Company: The Sample Pack

Party Whites

Small Sips of Pinot

IPNC Celebrates The Art of Pairing Pinot

Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival

Pinot Briefs

Cooking For Pinot

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in English."

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## Belle Glos: Caymus Genes

Belle Glos (pronounced BELL GLOS) is owned by the Wagner family of Napa Valley Caymus Vineyards fame. Caymus Special Select Cabernet Sauvignon, Mer Soleil Chardonnay, and Caymus Conundrum are well know wines, but the winery has a long history with Pinot Noir, producing some excellent examples from relatively warm locations of the Napa Valley (Rutherford) in the late 1970s and 1980s. They even produced a Pinot Noir Blanc wine labeled "Eye of Partridge."

The Pinot Noir program was revived in 2001 with the release of Belle Glos Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir and the wines have improved every year since. The name comes from Charles J. (Chuck) Wagner's mother, Loma Belle Glos Wagner, a co-founder of Caymus Vineyards. Joseph Wagner, a fourth generation winemaker whose family's roots in the Napa Valley date to 1906, has been the label's vineyardist and winemaker since 2002. Belle Glos is a separate label from Caymus Vineyards, much like Mer Soleil and Conundrum, made independently from wines Chuck Wagner makes at Caymus Vineyards, referred to as "by the Wagner Family" rather than "by Caymus", but distributed by Caymus Vineyards.

Caymus farms Pinot Noir in three coastal regions including the Sonoma Coast, Santa Maria Valley and the Santa Lucia Highlands and produces vineyard-designated Pinot Noir from the estate vineyards in each region. A fourth Pinot Noir, Meiom, is a value-priced wine found in wide distribution and restaurants. A distinctive and excellent rosé, is also produced that revives the name, "Oeil De Perdrix," sourced from the Yorkville Highlands of Mendocino County. The Gambit Series of Pinot Noirs debuted in 2008 at Pinot Days San Francisco. These limited production single-vineyard wines with no added sulfur were intended to offer the rich and voluptuous nature of raw Pinot Noir grapes. I have not seen or heard of these wines since, but they are briefly described on the Belle Glos website.

Caymus acquired a portion of the historic Santa Maria Hills Vineyard in the 1990s. The land, on a west-facing slope of the Santa Maria Valley foothills, had been planted to Pinot Noir from 1972 to 1974, so the vines were almost ancient by California Pinot Noir standards. The vines were own rooted and the clone uncertain, but probably Martini, an heirloom clone that was one of the first Pinot Noir selections to grace California coast lands. I first reviewed the 2001 Belle Glos Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir in the July 7, 2003 issue of the PinotFile, and the wine was generally well received by the wine press. At the time, little was known of the label. Bob Hosmon of the *Miami Sun Sentinel* wrote, "To say that this is one of the best United States produced Pinot Noirs I've ever tasted is not an overstatement... if you're looking for something truly special, you won't be disappointed. Unfortunately no website, mail, e-mail or phone orders." The website is still very basic and offers no opportunity to purchase the wines. With the 2002 vintage, winemakers Joseph Wagner and Jon Bolta (Conundrum) took what was already a low-yielding 76-acre vineyard and reduced the crop even more radically by regular thinning to increase the flavor concentration of the berries. When the grapes were hand harvested, they ended up with just over one ton per acre. The quality was so high and the flavors so distinctive they felt the wine deserved to be named for the vineyard that produced it which was located at the intersection of Clark & Telephone roads.

The 10-acre Sonoma Coast Taylor Lane Vineyard was planted near the town of Occidental in 1995. While Joseph Wagner was in middle school he helped develop this vineyard, clearing trees and rocks from this previously unplanted land, and laying out and planting the vine rows. To get the grapes to ripen in this cool seaside climate, the trellis system was converted to "Trentina," named after the region in Italy where it originated, which maximizes sun exposure on the leaves. There is a very consistent diurnal temperature variation at this vineyard site which insures a good balance between ripeness and acidity. The first Belle Glos Taylor Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir was in 2002.

The Las Alturas Vineyard is located in one of the highest plantable sites in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey County, at altitudes of 540 to 1,210 feet. The site has warmer afternoons and tamer winds from the northern portion of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA. This 15-acre vineyard was planted to match various Pinot Noir Dijon clones to different soils and slopes of the vineyard. Yields are kept deliberately low. The inaugural vintage from this vineyard was 2004.

The Belle Glos Pinot Noirs in the early vintages (2002-2005) were big styled wines with generous extraction, alcohol and oak, and plenty of tannin when young. The fruit intensity reminded one of Caymus Cabernet Sauvignons. The wines went through an extended cold soak and maceration and generous new French oak was used. The recent vintages have shown more restraint and charm. Although the single vineyard Pinot Noirs retail for \$50, they can be found in the marketplace for around \$38 a bottle.

The Belle Glos bottles are among the most esthetically pleasing in the business, offering a long neck dipped in soft, Burgundy-colored wax. An ungodly bright pink color is chosen for the Rosé bottling wax. In recent vintages, a rip cord has been embedded in the wax to ease removal of the wax top, but I am sure many women have cursed this closure after breaking a nail in attempting to unravel the tight rip cord. That said, women can probably


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Wineries in this Article


Belle Glos

understand the value of style over practicality.




**2008 Meiomi by Belle Glos Pinot Noir**  
 13.9% alc., \$24. 65% Sonoma County, 20% County, 15% Santa Barbara County. Pronounced "May-OH-mee," which is "coast" in the language of California's Wappo tribe. · *Intensely fruity and penetrating nose with effusive scents of ripe dark berries accented with notes of sandalwood, oak and cigar box. A rich, but smooth and caressing wine in the mouth, with a multilayered core of berries and a complimentary underpinning of toasty oak. The soft tannins make for easy drinkability and this wine is far more approachable than any of the three vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs from Belle Glos. This Pinot really shows off California coastal fruit, is one of the best values in California Pinot Noir on the market today, and is the best California appellation Pinot Noir bar none.*





**2008 Belle Glos Clark & Telephone Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir**  
 14.7% alc., \$50. Aged in French oak for 9 months. · *Deeply colored. Lovely perfume of red and black fruits with a touch of oak spice. Earthy, briny and meaty dark fruits complimented by oak and cloaked in supple tannins. Very smoothly textured making it easy to drink. A very distinctive wine that is reflective of the Martini selection and this terroir. I am usually not a big fan of Martini selection Pinot Noirs, but this wine really delivers the goods.*



**2008 Belle Glos Los Alturas Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir**

14.8% alc., \$50. Aged 9 months in French oak. · *Don't even think about drinking this wine now unless you decant it first. Brooding aromas that take some swirling to free up. Dark fruits with hints of oak and cardamon spice. Tight in the mouth with oodles of plum and blackberry liquor essence with notes of creosol and savory herbs. Healthy tannins but soft and smooth on the palate. Gets better and better over time in the glass. Not for the timid. Very good.*

**2008 Belle Glos Taylor Lane Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir**

14.6% alc., \$50. Aged 9 months in French oak. Deep, dark reddish-purple color in the glass. · *Intensely fruity nose that improves with time in the glass revealing a perfume of crushed plums, boysenberries, oak spice and underbrush. A whiff of alcohol peaks out as the wine warms. Rustic and sinewy with flavors of black cherries, blackberries, cola, cassis, herbs and oak. The tannins are restrained and there is a good lift of acidity on the finish which shows some persistence. Good.*

Belle Glos wines are in wide distribution. The succinct website is [www.belleglos.com](http://www.belleglos.com).

Previous article:  
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