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TASTINGS

By Dorothy Gaiter and John Brecher

While we can certainly enjoy a simple, gulpable Pinot Grigio from the U.S. or Italy, we've always preferred a Pinot Grigio or Pinot Gris with a little bit more stuffing. At its best, these are aromatic wines that can offer some weight, with hints of melon, tangerine and minerals, maybe some mouthfeel and even a hint of oiliness. They should have enough acidity to pull that off without any heaviness.

Our very best of tasting, a Pinot Gris from Bethel Heights Vineyard in Oregon, showed what this can be at its best: a wine of substance that truly tastes like nothing else. Fresh and vibrant, with great melon fruit, but with a sturdy backbone. Fresh tropical fruits at the top, minerals and serious earthiness at the core—bravo.

PINOT GRIS & PINOT GRIGIO
Food & Wine, April 2007

Though the spelling is different and the bottles are usually in different sections of the wine store, Pinot Gris and Pinot Grigio are the same grape. Translate either one and the result is “gray Pinot,” which makes perfect sense: the skins of this grape have a hue ranging from gray-blue to coppery orange, and the grape itself is a mutation of Pinot Noir.

Pinot Gris from Alsace, France, tends to be full-bodied and unctuous, full of spice notes and peach and apricot flavors; Northern Italian Pinot Grigios are bright, light and zippy, with white peach or nectarine flavors and tingly acidity. New World versions are essentially divided into these two styles, and the wines tend to be labeled Gris or Grigio accordingly.

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2009 PINOT GRIS

Harvest dates: September 28 – October 6, 2009

Elton Vineyard 54%, Bethel Heights Vineyard 21%,
Foris Vineyard (Rogue Valley) 18%, Lewman Vineyard 7%

Grapes at harvest (average): Brix: 23.5, pH: 3.3

Finished wine: Alcohol 14.3%, pH: 3.32, TA: 5.4 gr/liter

0.5% Residual sugar

2980 Cases produced, bottled February, 2009

Suggested retail \$16

THE 2009 VINTAGE: Got off to a slow start, but a warm May and June gave us an average bloom date (mid-June) and a very successful set. Perhaps the vines were compensating for the poor flowering in 2008, but in any case 2009 delivered the largest potential crop of the decade. The summer was warm and sometimes hot, with a couple of extraordinary heat spikes, bringing on a relatively early harvest. September was sunny and warm, and continued dry in October but cool enough to extend hang time. The grapes were quite ripe, with great acidity and flavor development. The wines show considerable flesh and intensity.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The grapes were whole cluster pressed and the juice settled for 3-4 days, then moved into stainless steel fermentation tanks and inoculated with commercial yeast. The fermentation was cool and stretched out for over a month. When we decided the wine was in balance, we stopped the fermentation and inhibited malolactic fermentation to maintain acidity. The wine is bottled with a Stelvin closure to protect its freshness.

FOOD RECOMMENDATIONS: The bright, crisp flavors of this Pinot gris are an inviting palate cleanser, pairing well with a light soup, or lightly spiced Thai dishes featuring shrimp or pork. It also works with richer fish, such as salmon and halibut. Its pear, apple and melon flavors also shine with a fruit and cheese platter, especially with almonds, hazelnuts and some interesting dried fruits as part of the mix.