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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.

BETHEL HEIGHTS VINEYARD

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2008 PINOT GRIS

Harvest dates: October 10th and 21st, 2008

Elton Vineyard 62%, Bethel Heights Vineyard 11%,

Iris Hill Vineyards 25%, Lewman Vineyard 2%

Grapes at harvest (average): Brix : 23.4, pH: 3.2

Finished wine: Alcohol 13.5%, pH: 3.2, TA: 7.4 gr/liter

0.5% Residual sugar

2316 Cases produced, bottled March, 2009

Suggested retail \$16

THE 2008 VINTAGE: 2008 was a unique, cool, classic vintage that kept us on our toes from beginning to end. A very cool spring led to a late budbreak as the vines struggled their way out of dormancy. Then, a very unusual heat event in May really got the vines rolling. Bloom came late in June, when a 102 degree day pushed all of the vines into full bloom, seemingly on the same day. Realizing that we were in for a cliff-hanger because of the late bloom, we ruthlessly thinned our vines in August. The rest of the vintage was magical, with an endless stream of sunny days stretching into late October.

WINEMAKER NOTES: The grapes are whole cluster pressed and the juice is settled in tanks for 3-4 days, then moved into its fermentation vessel and inoculated with commercial yeast. Ninety percent of our pinot gris is fermented in stainless steel tanks while the remaining 10 percent is fermented in 500L barrels. The fermentations are cool and typically will stretch out for a month or longer. When we feel the wine is in balance we stop the fermentation and inhibit malolactic to maintain acidity. We bottle under a screwcap closure to protect the wine's freshness.

TASTING NOTES: Initial deep minerality gives way to aromas of tangerine, lime blossom, and lemon zest. The palate is defined by a firm core of acidity that runs through the wine, giving it structure and fantastic length. Flavors of apricot, white peach, and asian pear develop in the glass.