



May 25, 2006

## MOODY'S HOT TEN

### Value #5

#### **De Loach Pinot Noir Russian River 30th Anniversary Cuvee 2004 —**

Very true terroir characteristics. Incredible amount of depth. Soil is conducive for the vine's roots to go very deep. Earth and lovely dried mushrooms in the nose. Great weight with finesse and elegance from 36-year-old vines. Served at our table by Jean-Charles Boisset of De Loach at the Hospices of Sonoma Winemaker Dinner on May 19, 2006, with duck leg braised in Pinot Noir with apple-smoked bacon and black lentils.

[www.deloachvineyards.com](http://www.deloachvineyards.com) \$50

#### **HOSPICES OF SONOMA**

By Denman Moody

The third annual Hospices of Sonoma took place on May 19-21 in Sonoma County. Unabashedly copying the world-famous Hospices de Beaune barrel auction in Burgundy, the founders are nevertheless actively seeking a new moniker for the event. I like this one! The beneficiary of the event (besides all the happy attendees and wine personages) is the WCC Charitable Foundation, which benefits children in life-threatening circumstances. Currently WCC is building a house in Santa Rosa to provide a nurturing home for families with children hospitalized in a neo-natal or pediatric care unit at any of Sonoma County's hospitals.

At the event, specially sized barrels holding 10 cases of 2005 Pinot Noir each were auctioned off with the winning bidder given the choice of all 10 or allowing the runner-up bidder five of the cases. In a brilliant display of auctioneering, well-known auctioneer David Reynolds allowed each top two bidders to purchase at the runner-up bid so as not to penalize the top bidder.

Day one found the participants at goldridgepinot tasting and talking with the winery owners and winemakers. During a fabulous dinner, the winemakers and owners switched tables after each course, and special, older wines from each winery were served.

Day two started with another barrel tasting of the 2005 Pinot Noirs for those who couldn't make the Friday event—not to mention the gluttons like myself who just wanted to taste the wines all over again and schmooze with the winemakers and owners.

A fabulous luncheon of hors d'oeuvres-sized servings—over a dozen different dishes from salads to grilled lamb to tiny ice cream cones--was complemented by even more and different Pinot Noirs from each winery. After lunch the auction commenced and raised over \$357,000. There were 35 lots of 2005 Pinot Noirs from Sonoma Coast, Russian River, Green Valley and Sonoma Carneros—all among the coolest and best-suited areas for this varietal in the U.S.—as well as two dinner lots, two travel lots (one including the use of the private jet of goldridgepinot's owner Brice Cutrer Jones) and a single lot of 35 magnums—one from each participant winery.

The five case lots will be bottled some time later in the year, and a special Hospices of Sonoma label will be attached along with a personalized label for the purchaser. Unbelievably, the prices were not out of line, and there might be a charitable deduction to boot!

My favorite '05 barrel samples were from The Donum Estate, Dutton Estate Winery, Dutton Goldfield, Gary Farrell Vineyards and Winery, goldridgepinot, Iron Horse Vineyards, Kosta Brown, Olivet Lane, Patz and Hall Wine Company, Paul Hobbs Wines, Radio-Coteau, Russian Hill Estate Winery, Siduri Winery and Tandem Winery.

Saturday evening found several wineries hosting dinners. We were fortunate to dine at **De Loach** with the larger-than-life, effervescent, ultimate, star-quality bachelor Jean-Charles Boisset, the new owner of De Loach. Boisset knew each person's name after meeting him or her just once, and he royally entertained some 12 tables full of guests between courses. And for the perfect touch for a Pinot Noir lover, dinner was preceded by a blind tasting of 30 Pinots from around the world (many being Boisset Pinots from Burgundy and De Loach Pinots from Sonoma). After the tasting, each guest was given a booklet that resembled a term thesis from a graduate student in enology with tasting notes, minute details, photocopies of labels, etc., of every wine served!

The climax of the event was an incredible luncheon in the vineyards at Iron Horse with the Sterling family, who is among the world's classiest and most charming hosts and winemakers. The Sterlings live among some of the most beautiful gardens and vineyards on the planet.

If you enjoy a boutique, first-class continental-style inn, the perfect place to stay in the area is Les Mars Hotel, a new project about a block off the town square in Healdsburg, our favorite town in Sonoma County. Inside the attractive yet demure exterior are gorgeous rooms with beds that have mattresses so large and comfortable that I felt I was sleeping on a cloud. The ultimate test: I forgot my melatonin and slept like a baby anyway!

Not only are the rooms perfectly appointed with switch-on fireplaces—it was 50 degrees on May 19—original artwork and 18th-and 19th-century antiques, but Les Mars also boasts the best restaurant in Sonoma County, Cyrus, which is as close as you can get to Thomas Keller’s French Laundry in Yountville, at about two-thirds the cost. And the entire hotel operation is overflowing with sincere, smiling attendants who only want to know what they can do to make your stay more comfortable and enjoyable.