

Fake Pinot Noir Scandal

By Paul Foster

Fake Pinot Noir Scandal was how Australia's papers put it. And *L'affaire de faux pinot* is what the French are calling it. Some 18 million bottles of red that wasn't what it said. Wine, mainly a mix of Merlot and Syrah, from the Languedoc region of southern France, with not one berry of Pinot involved. Wine that was sold by a group of producers and dealers - 13 defendants appeared in court - to the US wine giant E&J Gallo for its *Red Bicyclette* label, and which made profits of \$5.6 million for just one of the participants.

It is an intriguing tale and you can't but reflect on how many people along the line knew what was up. Plenty, I'm sure: wine estates, managers and makers at the local co-operatives, negociants, and the companies involved in the nuts and bolts of getting the final item into the US. And didn't anyone ask, in Gallo, how they were getting all this Pinot from a non-Pinot region and at such a modest price? You'd wonder, too, at the penalties laid on the guilty for all that faking and flogging. Suspended gaol sentences of between one and six months and fines ranging from \$4,580 to \$274,788 are taps with a feather, regardless of any strong words from the judge.

Something the tale tells us, though, is how strong the demand for Pinot is. It's the variety of choice for first drinkers and polished palates, both, in countries all over the world. Just look at the shelves in our own outlets: Pinots from NZ - Martinborough, south to Marlborough, Canterbury then Central Otago - from our Yarra Valley, from the Mornington Peninsula and Geelong, and from northern, eastern and southern Tasmania. Plus the odd bottle

from the US, Oregon or California, and Italy and several from France, mostly Burgundy.

A good thing is that the NZ and Australian product is steadily improving - with wines more complex, better balanced and freer of faults - and where once you took a chance when you purchased Pinot you can, now, be confident in their quality.

Here are two, but first you might like to know that a US lawyer has filed a class action against the French on behalf of Californian consumers misled by the 'Pinot' label.

Paringa Estate Peninsula Pinot Noir 2008

A beauty, and value, from this small but very successful Mornington operation; Lindsay McCall is the winemaker. Dark plum/dark cherry aromas and flavours. Good depth and length, smooth and nicely textured. \$26

Craggy Range Zebra Pinot Noir 2008

Savoury and majestic. Complex, with dark fruit, spice and some smoke. Nice acidity and ripe grainy tannins. Central Otago fruit, vinified at the Craggy Range Gimblett Gravels winery on Hawkes Bay. \$55.

