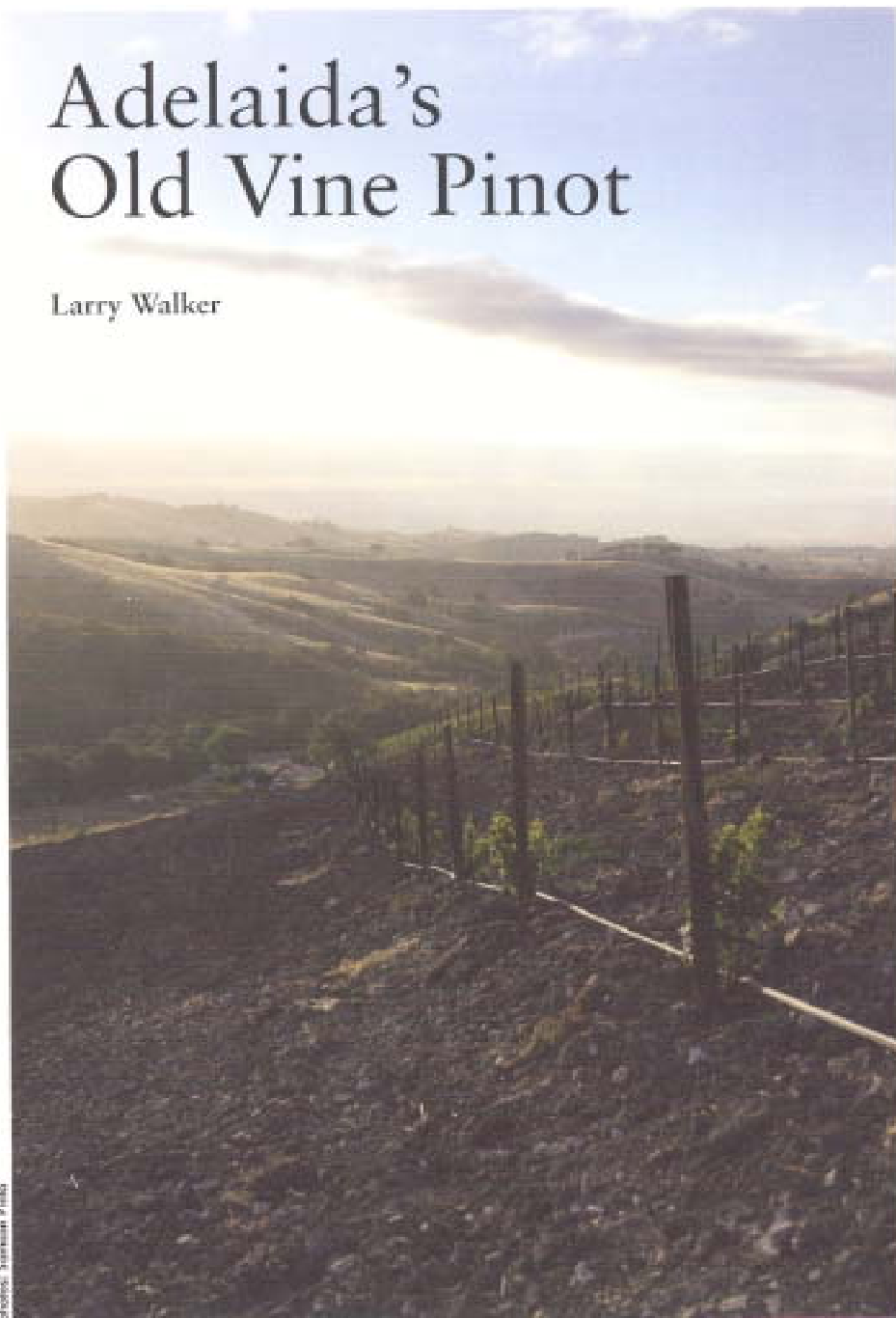


# Adelaida's Old Vine Pinot

Larry Walker

photos: Norman Photo



narrow coast strip that runs from San Diego to Monterey. Tectonic plate movement over the past 20 million years has pushed these deposits north from their origin in the vicinity of modern-day Mexico. Geologists believe they were spawned in the underwater canyons of warm, shallow seas during the Upper Cretaceous period, several million years ago. Native vegetation is oak woodland.

In 1994, a 400-acre portion of the original vineyard was bought by the owners of Adelaida Cellars, including a 32-acre planting of Pinot Noir. For several years, Pinot Noir from the site was routinely aged in American oak. According to some critics, the oak masked the unusual character of the wine. When Terry Culton, a winemaker who has made Pinot Noir his particular passion, came to Adelaida early in 2003, he put the entire Pinot Noir vintage of 2002 into French oak barrels, recognizing the unusual quality of the wine.

"My first job was in 1991 at Wild Horse Winery," Culton said, referring to another San Luis Obispo winery. "We brought in grapes from the HMR Vineyard there, so I've known the fruit for years."

After Wild Horse, Culton made Pinot Noir at Edmeades in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County, then made Oregon Pinot Noir for three years before returning to California and Josh Jensen's Calera Vineyards in Monterey County. Jensen has long been recognized as one of the world's Pinot Noir masters, so Culton has had excellent prep for his current position. Calera also gave him good experience working with calcareous soil at high elevation vineyards.

"At Calera, I worked really low yields and fruit with good concentration, and I got experience with limestone soils. It's really a different flavor profile you get from limestone," Culton said. "At Calera, I saw the potential for HMR fruit."

Culton is using some whole cluster fruit in open-top fermenters, with the cap punched down by hand two or

One of the oldest Pinot Noir vineyards in California is undergoing a revival. Hoffman Mountain Ranch Vineyard (HMR) was first planted in the early 1960s—some say 1963, others, 1965—by Dr. Stanley Hoffman. The vines were planted about 16 miles from the Pacific in San Luis Obispo County on California's Central Coast,

at an elevation of 1,700 feet in the Santa Lucia Mountains. Several prize-winning Pinots were made there in the late 1970s, with André Tchelistcheff as consulting winemaker.

The vines are planted on their own roots in the once standard 8-by-12 foot California configuration, on steep, rolling ridges facing south to southwest. Soils are clay loam over underlying limestone, part of a



Adelaida's old Pinot Noir vines were planted 40 years ago, and still add an indescribable complexity to Terry Culton's wines.

*terroir* of a site. René Barbier, the producer of Clos Mogador and other wines from Spain's trendy Priorato region, commented recently in *Spain Gourmet*, "Terroir is the most important factor, but everything is related. The older the vine, the deeper the roots, so the more character they extract from the soil. The way I work is geared toward getting the roots of my vines to penetrate deeply into the soil; I foster root development with a view to absorbing the character of the vineyard.")

three times a day. "I let the temperature go to 30° Celsius, maybe a degree or two higher, until it is pretty much dry. I'll sometimes do extended cap maceration until the cap starts to drop, then press it off."

Culton keeps the free-run and press separate, then does a hard press for adding to a red blend program for Adelaida's SLO label, which is aimed at restaurant wine-by-the-glass accounts.

"I use all French oak, about 20% to 25% new, in that range. I like to use the oak as an accent, not a dominant element. I want the calcareous soil element to come out," Culton said.

Culton admitted that it is hard to exactly describe what flavor character the soil gives the wine. "It's an edgy-minerally-flinty character on the back of the palate that really stands out as a structural component. It is nebulous, I can't really nail it down." He does think the calcareous soils give Pinot the ability to age longer. "I've had a lot of old Calera Pinot that is really great. It ages at least eight to 10 years," he added. "We make a small amount of Chardonnay from the vineyard, which shows that mineral character very well."

On top of that is the old vine factor. "Old vines give you a complexity that you don't get with younger vines. It's almost a different animal, more complex on the palate. There is great variation from vine to vine because of the disease factor; that adds to the more complex palate of wine from old vines."

(There is also, undoubtedly, a link between old vines and the particular

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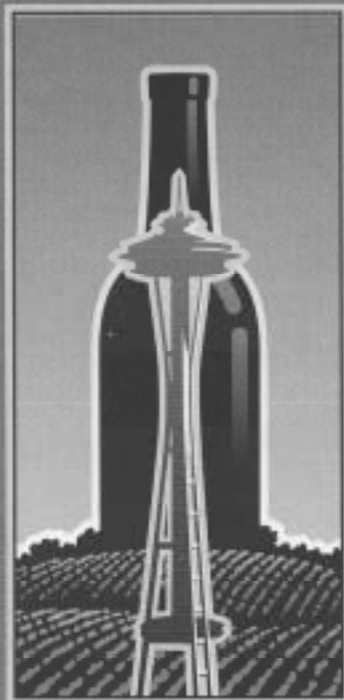
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"The rocky calcareous soils of the vineyard control vine vigor," Culton said. "This results in added vine stress and lower yields, but produces more intensely flavored fruit." Yield is, of course, low, about 1.5 tons per acre, sometimes less. The vineyard is not tilled, encouraging native grasses, wild sage and rosemary to flourish

Native grasses and herbs thrive in Adelaida's 400 acres of untilled vineyards, high above the Pacific in the Santa Lucia Mountains.





between the rows. No chemical sprays or fertilizers are applied. Bud wood from the original vines is used when replanting is necessary.

There is also some Gamay Noir planted on the HMR vineyard, and in 2004, Culton made a Nouveau from 100% Gamay Noir. It's a wine of vivid fruit and bright, lively flavors, yet with some structure and body, which is, perhaps, the old vines speaking.

The 2002 Adelaida HMR Pinot Noir spent 14 months in French oak, with about 30% new oak. Native yeast fermentation lasted seven to 10 days. It was fined by egg whites (one-half egg white per barrel) and bottled in December of 2003. There were 653 cases produced, with wine selected from eight HMR barrel lots. The wine is intense, yet finely balanced with a subtle and underlying raspberry element and a lingering mineral finish that just keeps going. A splendid wine.

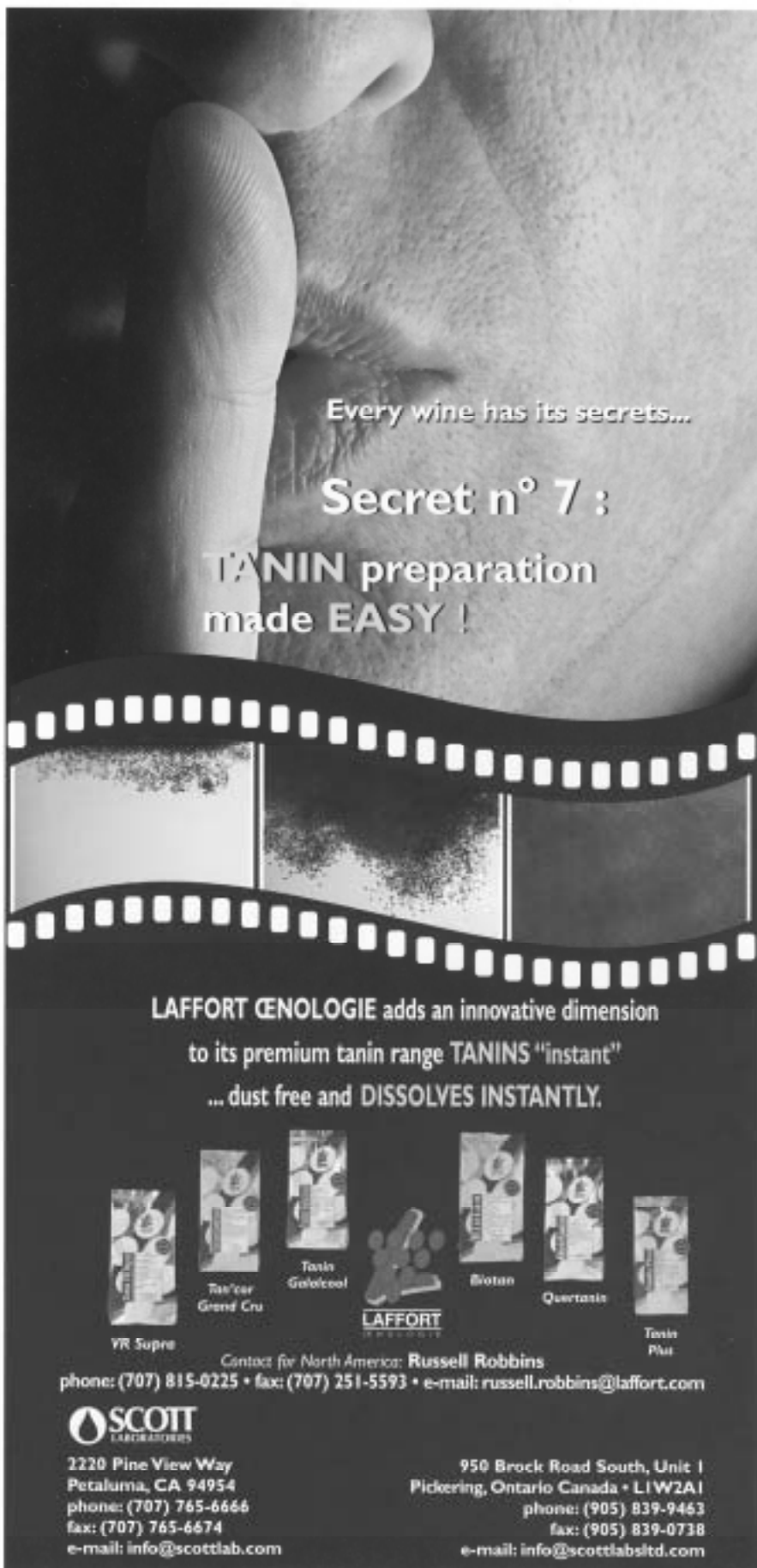
Culton made a Vin Gris of Pinot Noir from the 2003 vintage, using the *saignée* technique of bleeding from fermenting Pinot Noir juice from stainless steel tanks. The wine was aged for six months prior to bottling in 70-gallon stainless steel tanks. It's a real treat. For more information on Adelaida see [adelaida.com](http://adelaida.com).

### Global Traceability Guidelines Are Online

The "Wine Supply Chain Traceability Guideline" was developed to help wine producers and suppliers in the European Union to comply with traceability requirements of the European General Food Law. It was produced by GS1, a facilitator of efficient international business standards, the UK-based Wine and Spirits Association and its French counterpart AFED.

Major wine producers were also involved in developing the guidelines, including Allied Domecq, Constellation Europe, Diageo, Distell, E. & J. Gallo, Waverly, Henkell Söhnlein and Les Grand Chais de France.


Download the guidelines at [gs1.org](http://gs1.org).



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