



Basic Juice Article **Attack of the Clones**

by: *Beau Jarvis*

Almost all wine, with perhaps the notable exception of that teal-colored stuff next to the beer in the supermarket refrigerator case, is made from the same species of grape: *Vitis vinifera*. This begs the question: Whence wine diversity? The wonderfully diverse wine selection that fills up shelves in your local wine store can be attributed to different grape varieties rather than different grape species. Do you find it difficult to get your mind around the concept of grape varieties? Think about apples. Compare Granny Smith to Gala to Golden Delicious to Fuji. They're all apples, right? Yet each one smells and tastes dramatically different from the other. These differences are attributed to apple *variety* not apple species. So, while Merlot and Chardonnay are both made from *vinifera* grapes, they are quite distinct wines made from entirely different grape varieties.

Now that we have the grape variety concept all squared away in our minds, let's scramble our brains again. You've seen wine labeled "Pinot Noir" before, correct? What about wine labeled "Pinot Grigio" or "Pinot Gris?" "That's easy." You say. "They are just different varieties." Not so fast, Einstein. Technically speaking, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris/Grigio are the same grape variety. Pinot Gris/Grigio is simply the mutant clone of Pinot Noir. Huh?

A quick French lesson will help us out of this clonal confusion. "Noir" means black *en français*; and "Gris" is the Gallic word for gray. These terms refer to the grapes' appearance. Pinot Noir's skin is dark red, or black. While Pinot Gris's skin is gray (well, pinkish gray to be exact). And, boy, do these mutant-clone siblings produce dramatically distinct wines.

Pinot Noir is among the most persnickety of grapes to grow. Noir vines have an affinity for cool climates, yet they are susceptible to spring frosts. Pinot Noir is also vulnerable to almost any and all vineyard pests, gout, mold, taint, etc. In fact, many growers don't want the headaches that planting Pinot Noir unavoidably brings. As a result, Pinot Noir isn't as common as other wines. It's also noticeably more expensive due to the fact that it's such a high maintenance vine. However, when Pinot Noir is planted and successfully raised, it can produce a beautiful bottle of wine. Pinot Noir wine ranges from lovely scents of strawberry and cherry to otherworldly scents of mocha and eucalyptus. The gold standard for Pinot Noir is the Burgundy region of central France. Up-and-coming areas for Pinot Noir include Oregon, New Zealand, and the central California coast. Treat yourself to a mini Pinot Noir flight from the simple (*Brancott Pinot Noir, '03, \$11 – New Zealand*), to the complex (*Carneros Creek Reserve, '01, \$20 – California*), to the sublime (*Chehalem "Rion" Reserve Pinot Noir, '01, \$50 – Oregon*).

Pinot Gris comes bottled to most wine drinkers as "Pinot Grigio" ("Grigio" is how someone named Vincenzo would say "gray"). Pinot Gris/Grigio produces white wine that varies in character depending on how it's grown and vinified. Once upon a time

Pinot Grigio was going to be the next big thing - a la Chardonnay. As a result mucho Pinot Grigio was planted and mucho mediocre wine was produced. When grown and vinified with care, Pinot Gris/Grigio can produce a fairly full-bodied wine with both citrus and floral character. When aged in oak barrels, a layer of spicy-sweet complexity is added. Like its dark clone, Pinot Gris/Grigio prefers cool climates. Oregon winemakers are producing ever more and ever better Pinot Gris. The northern Italians also produce *molto* Pinot Grigio. Learn to love this clone; try *King Estate Pinot Gris, '02* (\$16) and *Kris Pinot Grigio, '02* (\$13).

In conclusion let me say....Oh my god! Did you see that? Pinot Gris just mutated into another clone. The grape's skin is kind of a grayish-white color. Actually, this Pinot Gris clone has been around for quite some time. It's called Pinot Blanc. Think of it as sort of a second clone-cousin to Pinot Noir. This mutant clone makes a white wine, which is more about texture and acidity and less about aroma and flavor. While it doesn't provide the nose with much action, Pinot Blanc will make your mouth water and your tongue feel, well, better lubricated. It's what I would call a frisky, viscous-y wine. Let your tongue dance to *Trimbach Pinot Blanc, '02* (\$12). And get your mouth watering with *Steele Pinot Blanc, '02* (\$16) from Santa Barbara.

Raise your glass to varieties, mutations, and the three Pinot clones. Cheers.

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