



winesandvines.com

Wine Ink

Wise & Otherwise

Winery Links

Subscribe

Calendar

Advertise

Links

About Us

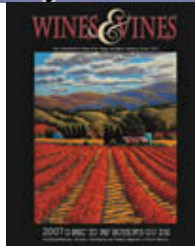
Contact

Subscribe Today



Click Here

Directory & Buyer's Guide



Marketing Software Package



Headlines

Your Source For Wine And Grape Industry Information

11.18.06

Sell Your Wine Before It's Made

Pinot 2.0 podcast project demonstrates new direct-to-consumer model

San Francisco, Calif.—Why wait until grapes are harvested, must fermented, wine aged and bottled to sell your product and fill your coffers? An experiment in "winemaking by consensus," now underway under the guidance of blogger/podcaster/budding winemaker Alan "The Cellar Rat" Baker at San Francisco's Crushpad custom crush facility, will test the feasibility of enlisting input from wine-loving investors who have purchased "futures" in the end product.

Baker, formerly a broadcaster in the Midwest, moved to California in May 2005, intent on learning the wine business, and talked his way into jobs at Peterson Winery and Unti Vineyards in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley. Since then, he's built a fan base with his blogs and podcasts (video webcasts) documenting his experiences and wine country explorations (visit cellarrat.org to learn more).

This year, he invited his "Ratpack" to join him in Pinot 2.0. To enroll, each member anted up \$384, the futures price for a case of wine that they would participate in creating. The process started on Oct. 12, when several joined Baker at Wentzel Vineyards in Mendocino County's Anderson Valley to harvest 2 tons of Pinot Noir grapes, Dijon clones 667, 115 and 777, at 25.4° Brix. From there, the grapes were trucked to Crushpad for the crush, where the consensus building began in earnest.

"We had a big debate over yeast," Baker told *Wines & Vines*. "We had two T-bin fermenters. I wanted to play it safe and inoculate both bins with a different cultured yeast, but there was such a strong desire to let the fermentations go with naturally occurring yeasts that I changed the winemaking plan, and we let one bin go native. Ultimately, I think the wine will be more interesting as a result," he says. "The two fermentations definitely were different. And with Pinot, diversity adds complexity." Baker is documenting every step with his helmet-mounted "ratcam."

Pinot 2.0 is utilizing Crushpad's new Crushnet community winemaking site, so even Ratpackers far distant from the Bay Area are able to chime in. There will be a barrel tasting for members this winter, after MLF is complete—"No reason to freak anyone out who might not be used to tasting very young wine," Baker says—and samples will be shipped to members who cannot attend."

View Recent Headlines

- [Wines & Vines 2007 Directory/Buyer's Guide Now Available For Pre-Purchase](#)
- [The Return of Leafroll Disease](#)
- [Vine Mealybug and Rootstock Improvement Top Research Needs](#)
- [The Myth of "Minerality"](#)
- [Tooth Erosion Update](#)
- ["Winter Pink!" Event Paints a Rosy Picture](#)
- [View All Headlines](#)

View Sample Articles From the Current Issue



Is the Labor Pool Drying Up?
What Climate Change Means for Wine
The Start-Up Winery, Part VI
Staring Down Mother Nature

Winemaking by consensus seems a peculiar premise, particularly when the "winemakers" are not constantly tasting the developing vintage. "I did describe the kind of wine I wanted to make," Baker says, so members knew what he was aiming for. "I don't believe you can make wine by democratic vote," he concedes. "I made the final decisions, based on discussions facilitated on Crushnet. And these discussions definitely influenced my decisions."



Photo: Hayden Mouldis

Alan Baker in his "ratcam" sorts grapes at Crushpad.

Project Pinot 2.0 will continue until the wine is bottled in mid-2007. Of the 100 resulting cases, 41 have yet to be purchased, and Baker will continue to sell cases at the futures price until release. "If there is any wine left by the release date, I expect the retail bottle price to be around \$40," he says.

Baker allows that, "The amount of work involved in managing a group of 50 excited wine lovers was an incredible time investment." He acknowledges that a similar project on a larger scale would require considerable investment by a winery. Pinot 2.0 will just about break even if he sells all the wine, "I did envision this as a commercial venture, and I think it is the first commercial wine produced as a collaboration with a community of wine lovers."

Crushpad CEO Michael Brill, however, thinks Pinot 2.0 presents a radically different model for consumer-direct wine marketing. "If you step back and look at the whole direct-to-consumer market as it's been adopted so far, it's really been a redirection, eliminating one level of the three-tier distribution system to give consumers a little

more access to low-production wines," he told *Wines & Vines*.

The Pinot 2.0 project, as Brill sees it, adjusts the focus from "Producer-centric to consumer-centric, even to the extent of finding out what types of wine to make."

Since Crushpad (crushpadwine.com) is continuing to build-out and promote its platform for Crushnet, giving working wineries the ability to plug into its interactive capabilities, Brill admits his view is somewhat biased. However, he says Pinot 2.0 is a model showing wineries how to "Sell wine before you even pay a dollar for grapes. One part is a great consumer experience. The other part is changing the financial model."

"We know that involving your customers in the process helps them connect with the wine," Baker says. "By engaging them in the myriad decisions that need to be made, they come to a better understanding of what it takes to make a great wine, and have a vested interest in helping make this wine great." And, he adds, "When members of this group share a bottle of this wine with friends, they not only have a story to share, it is their story."

—Jane Firstenfeld

[<< Subscribe to Wines & Vines](#)