

WINE 101

His hand's in several marvelous pinot noirs

After knowing of Mike Sinor from afar for his great work as head winemaker at Ancient Peaks Winery in Santa Margarita, I was finally able to meet him at the World of Pinot Noir Wine Festival pouring his Sinor-LaVallee pinot noirs.



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After tasting Sinor's exceptional pinot noirs that evening, I knew I had to schedule an interview with

him. I recently had an opportunity to sit down with Sinor at SLO Wine Storage in Edna Valley, where Sinor produces its outstanding wine.

Sinor started his career in wine in 1991 at Corbett Canyon Vineyards pouring wine and using the income from this "fun job" to pay for college at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Like so many great winemakers before him, Sinor was soon hit by the wine bug and starting working at other wineries doing anything and everything, while still attending college.

After graduating in 1994, he turned his back on a potential lucrative career in the then booming industrial technology field for his newfound love, winemaking. His big break came in 1994 when he took a harvest position, which turned into a permanent cellar position at Byron Vineyard in Santa Maria.

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He had the opportunity to work under and learn from Ken Brown, one of the most respected and acknowledged winemakers in California, whom Sinor acknowledges as his mentor. In 2000, Sinor accepted the position as winemaker for Domaine Alfred Winery and was there until 2006. He is currently the winemaker at Ancient Peaks Winery. His wines at both wineries have received high ratings from critics.

I was surprised to learn from Sinor that during all of his winemaking history, he had the time start his own winery, Sinor-LaVallee Wine Co., which he and his wife, Cheri LaVallee-Sinor, founded in 1997. They produce about 400 cases a year and focus on high-quality pinot noirs.

I was able to barrel taste a new venture of his, a 2009 pinot rose, which was exceptional. We also had barrel tastings of his 2008 pinot noirs from the Talley-Rincon Vineyard in Arroyo Grande, Aubaine Vineyard on the Central Coast and his "Anniversary" pinot, which included grapes from both vineyards.

While I like them all, my preference was the Talley-Rincon. I then tasted his 2007 syrah and it was outstanding. Three out of four of his 2007 pinot noirs received ratings in the 90s from Wine Enthusiast and his syrah received a 90 rating. After tasting Sinor's great wines, I am glad that Mike Sinor passed up on a career in industrial technology and I am sure the wine world is also.

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