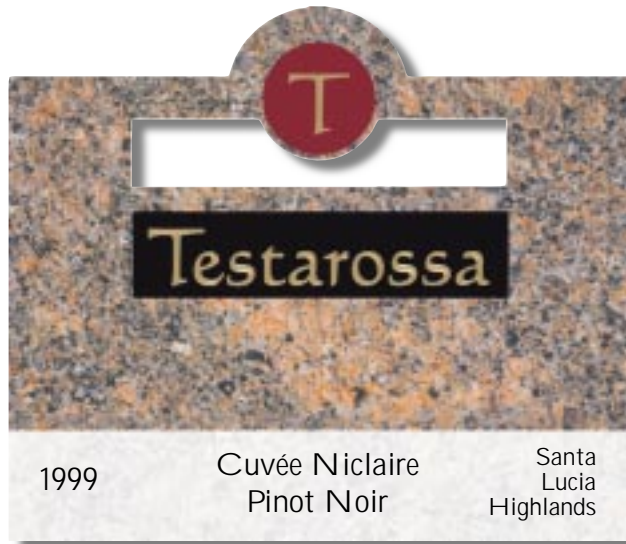


1999 Cuvée Niclaire Pinot Noir



Wine & Spirits

"Super-concentrated and ripe, this pinot comes across as a powerhouse"

Steve Tanzer's International Wine Cellar

"Cool, spicy flavors of raspberry, mint and dark chocolate"

Connoisseur's Guide

"Extravagant richness; long on character"



California Central Coast

1997 vintage

91 points

Deep, rich and spicy, and with a vineyard-driven flavor that shouldn't be taken lightly (it's from the well-regarded Sleepy Hollow and Pisoni vineyards). This is a full-bodied, full-force Pinot that maintains balance. Cinnamon and nutmeg nuances add to the vibrant core of first-class raspberry/cherry fruit.

The Wine Enthusiast, October 2000

★★★ 1/2 General Qualities: medium-bodied, moderately complex, dry, balanced acidity, slight oak impression, soft tannins.

Color: Dark ruby

Aromas: Black cherry, cinnamon

Flavors: Dried herbs, plum

Other Descriptors: Juicy, ripe

New York Times, June 2000

1999 CUVÉE NICLAIRE PINOT NOIR

Our third offering of the Cuvée Niclaire Pinot Noir is comprised of barrels from the Pisoni and Sleepy Hollow Vineyards. Each barrel of Pinot Noir produced from the 1999 vintage was tasted and ranked for quality by the Testarossa staff. Only the barrels with near-perfect scores were selected to become potential Niclaire barrels. Then, through a series of blind tasting trials, we narrowed down the field to six barrels. The blend of these barrels was then blind tasted against other blends until we unanimously decided that our initial instincts were right and that the blend of those six barrels made the best possible cuvée. The name for the wine, Niclaire, is a combination of the names Nicholas and Claire, the children of proprietors Rob and Diana Jensen.

Although the Pisoni and Sleepy Hollow Vineyards are only about 15 miles driving distance from each other, and are both within the Santa Lucia Highlands Appellation, the fruit and resulting wines they produce are very different. The Sleepy Hollow Vineyard lies just a few hundred feet above the Salinas Valley floor and is heavily influenced by the cool breeze, which kicks up every summer afternoon from the Monterey Bay. This moderating effect on the vines gives the fruit a unique spicy quality. The Pisoni Vineyard is higher in elevation and sits in a more sun-exposed area than Sleepy Hollow. The crop is kept very small, both by nature and by crop thinning, and the resulting grapes have a ripeness and intensity rarely seen in California Pinot Noir. By blending the two vineyards together we combined two distinctive yet complimentary sets of flavors and textures.

The 1999 growing season was very similar to 1998, in that they were both unusually long and cool. We harvested the fruit from the Pisoni Vineyard on October 11th and from the Sleepy Hollow Vineyard on October 14th. As a comparison, both of these vineyards were harvested four weeks earlier in the 1997 vintage. After the fruit arrived at Testarossa, we destemmed the grapes without crushing, then gently transported them to five-ton custom-designed stainless steel fermenting tanks. There the fruit sat for a four to six day cold soak, after which we inoculated the tank with Assmannshausen yeast. For the next nine to fourteen days the fermenting Pinot Noir was punched down by our harvest crew, two to three times per day. The free-run wine was kept separate in 1999, and after being inoculated for malolactic fermentation, it was sent to 50% new and 50% used french oak barrels. The blending trials were conducted in November and early December of 2000, and the wine was bottled into six-pack cases on December 12, 2000.

VINEYARDS:

Pisoni, Sleepy Hollow

Appellation: Santa Lucia Highlands
(Monterey County)

First Testarossa Vintage: 1997

HARVEST:

Sugar: Pisoni, 25.5° Brix

Sleepy Hollow, 25.6° Brix

Total acidity: Pisoni, 7.6 g/L

Sleepy Hollow, 8.5 g/L

pH: Pisoni, 3.44

Sleepy Hollow, 3.40

Date harvested: Pisoni, October 11, 1999

Sleepy Hollow, October 14, 1999

BOTTLE:

Alcohol: 14.8%

Total acidity: 6.5 g/L

pH: 3.69

Bottling date: December 12, 2000

Time in oak: 13 months

Percent new oak: 50%

Production: 244 6-bottle cases, 750mL

55 cases, 375mL

Release date: September 1, 2001

Suggested Retail Price: \$68.00

Optimum time for consumption: 2002-2009

Color: Deep garnet.

Nose: Sweet black cherries and plums. Smoky and spicy. Hints of mint and dark chocolate.

Palate: Firm tannins envelop ripe, generous, dark fruit flavors. Cinnamon and nutmeg nuances. Long, minty finish. Best if set aside for a few more months, this super-concentrated Pinot will develop over the next five to eight years.