



Wine Club Tasting Notes

October 2007

2006 Bon Cap Pinotage Robertson, South Africa

I must tell you, when I was brought this wine to taste for this month's wine club I was more than a little skeptical, and I know a few of you out there who are familiar with this grape variety are probably shuddering right now while preparing to dump this bottle right down the sink. All I can say is Stop! Wait! You are undoubtedly going to be just as surprised as I was after you taste it. (The look of pleasantly surprised shock on Kristian's face when he tasted this wine was priceless.) As you've probably gathered, Pinotage is not the most widely accepted wine on the market. But first, you need to learn a little about this curious grape.

In 1925, Stellenbosch University Professor A.I. Perold crossed Pinot Noir and Cinsaut, then commonly referred to as Hermitage in South Africa, and ultimately called it by the contraction Pinotage. It wasn't until 1961 that Pinotage appeared on a wine label, a 1959 bottling from Lanzerac. Finally, in the 1990s, winemakers began treating this grape variety a little more carefully, experimenting with prolonged and cooler fermentations, better managed yields, careful handling in the cellar and usage of French and American oak. All of this experimentation began to pay off – while in 1992, Pinotage was the second cheapest red grape in South Africa, by 1997 old vine Pinotage commanded higher prices than any other grape. Quality steadily increased throughout the 1990s, but it wasn't until two or three years ago that I personally started seeing marked changes in this 'funky' little grape.

Throughout the mid-1990s until now, it was a search to find a decent Pinotage. Why? Because ones that weren't well-made smelled like a wet Band-Aid and tasted like a Band-Aid, with additional flavors of potash, bacon grease and deer blood, to boot. Needless to say, I only tasted a handful of these wines before throwing in the towel, deciding I would put my energies elsewhere. About four years ago, I was tasting wines with a supplier and he pulled out a bottle of Pinotage. I must've had a look of sheer horror on my face, but he said, "No, this is a good one. You're going to try it." (I've known this man for awhile, so I grudgingly capitulated.) It was good, not great, but definitely good. Since then, I've tasted three more that have been quite tasty, with the selection in this month's bag being one of the two best I've ever had. Gone is the potash, bacon grease, Band-Aid and deer blood of yore. THIS medium-to full-bodied Pinotage boasts upfront red and black berry flavors with notes of cherry tobacco, licorice, light spices and leather, balanced by a well structured, but soft, lingering aftertaste. (As I said earlier, this one is TASTY!!) The lesson learned was

to never turn your back on a particular type of wine – you may just miss out on something special!

If you hunt and bring home deer, quail, pheasant or wild turkey, you now have the perfect wine to consume with your catch. Not so much a wild game-meat eater? Well, just pop it and enjoy!