

BENJAMIN LEWIN: *In Search of Pinot Noir*. Vendange Press, Dover [Delaware], 2011, v + 424 pp., ISBN: 978-0-9837292-0-4, \$45.

*In Search of Pinot Noir* is the third in a rapid succession of serious, meaty books on wine by Benjamin Lewin, a molecular biologist, principal author of a respected textbook on genetics now known as *Lewin's Genes X*, and editor of the journal *Cell* from 1974 to 1999. Lewin, who was entrepreneurial in the field of scientific, technical and medical (STM) publishing, founded *Cell* with MIT Press, then took it private in 1984, founding Cell Press, before selling the title to Elsevier, the world's largest STM publisher, in 1999. He has been seriously (as well as hedonically) interested in wine for most of his adult life, and earned the Master of Wine credential in 2008. His wine books, each a huge project on a topic of high visibility and a physical volume of considerable heft, have appeared with astonishing speed, one each in 2009, 2010 and 2011, all published by Vendange Press, an imprint that (so far at least) publishes only books by Lewin himself.

*In Search of Pinot Noir* is a book about Burgundy, and about wine made from the pinot noir grape anywhere (and almost everywhere) else. Lewin examines most of the basic questions about pinot, Burgundy and other regions where pinot is taken seriously: what do we expect of pinot noir; what do we mean by Burgundian style; how are the pinots of the New World (and other European regions) different from red Burgundies; which properties of red Burgundy are attributable to *terroir* and which to winemaking; have winemakers elsewhere sought to emulate Burgundies or to create new expressions of the grape; what governs the ability of red Burgundies to age attractively, etc.

None of these questions is new, nor does Lewin provide original or startling answers. What *In Search...* does do, however, is to look systematically across essentially all the world's pinot noir with a single intellect and palate, and to assemble in one place a wealth of comparative data about many parameters of winegrowing, especially climate, topography, soils, varietal distribution, viticultural practices and winemaker opinions about the interplay between sites and styles. This *is* new, I think, and an important contribution to the international conversation about pinot. Where else does one find, within the same covers, aerial/satellite views of Clos St-Jacques on which the individual holdings of five vigneronns have been labeled, of the Rochioli Vineyard showing individual blocks by clone and date of planting, and of Central Otago labeled with the sub-regional vineyard area designations? Or same-person tasting notes on a six-year vertical of Treinta y Dos, a recently revived 1932 planting of pinot noir at Bodega Chacra in southern Argentina; an 11-year vertical of Krafuss, Alois Lageder's flagship pinot from the Alto Adige; and a seven-year vertical of Weingut Oekonomierat Rebholz' Spätburgunder from the Im Sonnenschein vineyard in the Pfalz?

Lewin's felicity with visual data presentations also offers readers an uncommonly rich array of charts and graphs expressing such matters as relative price evolution of

Burgundian crus from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (p. 50), comparison of growing season temperatures in the Willamette Valley and Burgundy from 1980 to 2010 (p. 228), and the variability of harvest dates in Burgundy since 1945 (p. 61).

The book is well and reliably sourced overall, albeit based primarily on secondary sources, and on interviews. Occasionally circumstances and events are reported or summarized imperfectly, or in ways that create incorrect impressions. On p. 237, *In Search . . .* says that “Pinot Noir was first planted [in the Russian River valley of California] in the 1960s after Joe Rochioli asked the University of California, Davis for advice how best to use the land; they advised planting grapevines.” This is not quite accurate (although my own book, *North American Pinot Noir*, is cited as its source). In truth, Rochioli was growing grapes well before 1960, *but not pinot noir*, which Rochioli introduced only after UC Extension advisers, asked to install a thermograph in his vineyard, determined that cool-climate varieties like pinot and chardonnay would work better in Rochioli’s site than the colombard and zinfandel on which he had first relied. On p. 244, reporting on the climate of Santa Barbara County’s coastal valleys, *In Search . . .* says that “cooling breezes enter directly from the ocean and are channeled along by the mountains, *and there is strong diurnal variation.*” (My emphasis.) In truth, there is much *lower* diurnal variation in these valleys than in most other pinot-friendly regions of California; the mesoclimatic hallmark of the southern central coast is relatively low daytime highs and relatively mild overnight lows. On p. 217, the caption for the table is misleading: the origin of many Oregonian pinot noir selection does not really “remain unknown;” growers were simply given an opportunity, when surveyed, to omit this information, which then appeared in the state statistics as “did not report.” Most instances of “did not report” are actually either Pommard or Wädenswil.

In his final chapter, Lewis (in his own words) “stick[s] [his] head into the lion’s den.” In fifteen pages, he attempts (1) to define what differentiates pinot noirs from other great red wines, (2) to isolate what differentiates non-Burgundian pinot noir from red Burgundies, (3) to answer the question he explored in earlier chapters about the relative importance of terroir and winemaking, which emerges as an essay-within-an-essay comparing DRC and Leroy versions of Romanée St-Vivant and Richebourg (4) to identify the greatest Burgundian cru (no surprise perhaps that “nothing can rival La Romanée Conti”), (4) to define “perfection” in pinot noir, and (5) to answer through tasting which of an eclectic selection of pinots succeeded best against the aforementioned definition of perfection. I read these pages hoping for epiphanies. Lewin’s familiarity with the turf and impressive command of relevant data were on display, and some interesting observations are recorded – viz, 1995 Williams Selyem Rochioli Vineyard “is a vindication of the notion that Pinot Noir can have alternative typicities . . . [which can be] equally expressive of the grape” and “there was more convergence of wine style [in the “Grand Tasting” with which the book concludes] than you detect when you compare current vintages.” But I have to confess that the argument seemed ruminative to me, and ultimately underwhelming.

Saying that “Pinot noir shows its most delicious side when aging,” a proposition with which I often agree, Lewin ends up with heavy emphasis on felicitous ageability as an *indicator* of wine’s hedonic worth, or at least of pinot noir’s hedonic worth. At one point he cites the auction prices of Domaine de la Romanée Conti as evidence that the market thinks Burgundies age more felicitously than any Bordeaux, and he stops just shy of embracing the notion that wines built to age do not show well when young. Surely, however, the stratospheric prices commanded by DRC wines (*vis-à-vis* those asked for Grand Cru Bordeaux) are primarily a function of reputation vs. minuscule supply. There is also the problem that “essence” arguments about defining properties of any region’s wine, or wine in any given region from a single grape, that are based almost exclusively on the properties of its rarest and most expensive exemplars, risk confusing a few majestic trees for the forest.

Occasionally good books seem needlessly flawed by shortcomings associated with editing, design and/or production. Throughout *In Search . . .* photographs display a mauve tint, and some are washed out, e.g., p. 82. Important topical transitions are sometimes made without benefit of appropriate subheads; e.g., the shift made on p. 313 from a discussion of Australia to information about South Africa. Often text is neither centered nor aligned in the cells of tables; in the table on p. 132 Rheinhessen is unnecessarily truncated to “Rheinness—”. The table on p. 123 would have been clearer if “relative distance to Beaune” had not been expressed in miles; what is apparently meant here is the rough equivalent in miles of differences in latitude, but I had to puzzle this out.

Overall, this is a very serious and interesting book on a matter of growing interest, especially as pinot noir looks more and more like a major international variety.

John Winthrop Haeger  
*Stanford University*  
 jwhaeger@gmail.com  
 doi:10.1017/jwe.2013.8

JANCIS ROBINSON, JULIA HARDING and JOSÉ VOUILLAMOZ: *Wine Grapes: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, including their Origins and Flavours*. Ecco (Harper Collins), New York, October 2012, xxxvii + 1242 pp., ISBN 978-0062206367 (hardback), US\$175.

Jancis Robinson MW has done it again! In addition to being one of the world’s best known wine writers and broadcasters, including being the wine correspondent for the UK’s *Financial Times* since 1989, Jancis has raised the bar once more for global wine reference books. She published *The Oxford Companion to Wine* in 1994 and shepherded it through two further editions in 1999 and 2006. Then in 2007 she