



CALERA

SINGLE VINEYARD PINOT NOIRS

WQXR-FM
NEW YORK TIMES RADIO

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Broadcast July 14, 2003

It used to be said that pinot noir, the fickle grape of red Burgundy, could not be grown in the United States. The climate wasn't right, the soil was not like Burgundy's, and for years, Americans did little to prove this wrong. But Josh Jensen did not listen. **As a student in Europe, Mr. Jensen became obsessed with Burgundy**, and convinced that if he chose the right place to plant pinot noir grapes in California he could make a comparable if not better wine there.

In the mid 1970's he finally settled on Mount Harlan, in Monterey County, where the **chalky limestone soil** somewhat resembled Burgundy's. He established the Calera Wine Company, planted four separate vineyards Jensen, Reed, Mills and Selleck -- and set about demonstrating how good American pinot noir could be.

Suffice it to say that Calera succeeded, so well that it liberated other American winemakers to commit themselves to pinot noir. But I'm not sure that any other winery has made pinot noir as consistently good as Calera.

At a recent dinner, I was able to taste 1997 Calera pinots from each of the four vineyards. **The first thing I noticed was how much more profound they were compared with most California pinots.** The second thing was how distinctive each particular vineyard was. It's awfully hard to pick a favorite, but I opted for the Selleck: it seemed to combine the best of all the Calera wines, rich fruit and herbal flavors, complexity, power and refinement.

Nowadays Calera is sometimes forgotten among the trendier American pinot noir labels. But to me, it may come closest to great Burgundy in the United States.

This is Eric Asimov of The New York Times.