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WEDNESDAY WINE | with Edward Deitch

## A Great California Pinot Noir and Chardonnay

**From its vineyard within sight of the Pacific Ocean, Fort Ross produces highly individual and beautiful wines**

**By Edward Deitch, Wine columnist Jan. 26, 2006**

For better or worse, I have a tendency to let wines sit around for a while — sometimes quite a while — before I try them. Such was the case with the 2001 Fort Ross Pinot Noir Reserve from a prime area of the Sonoma Coast region of California, until I finally opened this exceptional wine on a recent weekend away from the city.

Skiing was on the agenda, with a night at a bed & breakfast and, hopefully, a nice dinner at a local restaurant. As I often do, I brought along several wines that I had been meaning to try, including the Fort Ross Pinot Noir (the wine critic in me will never leave home without a few bottles for the road).

And so, after a day on the slopes at a ski area we like in the Catskill Mountains, we wound up at the Peekamoose Restaurant in Big Indian, New York, which must be unique among names of towns in this country. The area, about two and a half hours from New York City, is as off the beaten track as it sounds, which made the great food, atmosphere and service at the Peekamoose all the more satisfying.

You never know about bringing your own wine into a restaurant, but everything here was cool, as my kids like to say. The corkage fee — the service charge for opening the wine — was all of \$10 or so, something that would be almost unimaginable at restaurants back in New York; that is, if they let you bring your own wine at all.

Across the country, Fort Ross is also in the mountains; actually its vineyard parcels sit atop some mountain ridges not far from the town of the same name and just a mile from the Pacific Ocean, making it one of the closest vineyards to the ocean in California. As the winery explains on its Web site, [fortrossvineyard.com](http://fortrossvineyard.com), “The cool coastal climate slowly and evenly ripens the grapes to produce a palette of intense and complex flavors.”

This was evident immediately on tasting the pinot noir. “Vivid, bright berry notes,” I wrote. “Raspberry, blueberry, plum, spice and earth.” The fruit has great concentration and, with perfect acid balance and well-integrated oak from aging in new and used French barrels, is not at all “hot” on the palate. We ordered the New Zealand rack of lamb, which was succulent and came with a delicious reduction sauce that included oven-roasted tomatoes and small, caramelized onions. The wine had the intensity to pair seamlessly with the robust meat and the sauce.

The next night, back in the city, I went straight for another Fort Ross wine still sitting around in the “to taste” area of my cellar. It was the 2001 Chardonnay and it, too, was memorable, a wine of great elegance and balance, almost Burgundian in its leanness but unrestrained in its wonderful fruit that is clearly the foundation of Fort Ross. The combination was irresistible. The wine shows notes of pear, cloves, muted citrus, vanilla and minerals. I served it just slightly chilled with sautéed skinless chicken breasts with lemon and capers.

These are limited production wines, available in major markets and by direct shipment from Fort Ross to some states. The 2001 Pinot Noir Reserve is sold out and the 2002 is now available at a suggested price of \$49. There are also regular '01 and '02 Pinot Noir bottlings at \$34. The '01 and '02 Chardonnays are \$32. These special wines are not inexpensive, but their individuality and value come through in every sip.

Edward Deitch's wine column appears Wednesdays. He welcomes comments from readers. Write to him at [EdwardDeitch@hotmail.com](mailto:EdwardDeitch@hotmail.com)

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