

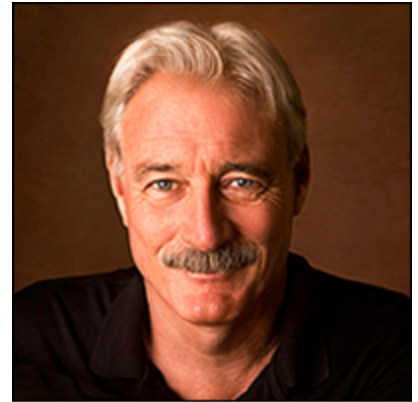
## James Laube Unfined

### Exciting New Pinots From Saintsbury

Posted: 02:32 PM ET, April 13, 2009

Things are looking up for [Saintsbury Pinot Noir](#), and that can only be good news for Pinot lovers.

This Carneros winery is an important player in the Pinot world. It offers a range of wines that extends from the \$20 Garnet bottling (with 13,000 cases) to its Carneros appellation bottling (\$35, 24,000 cases) to its single-vineyard bottlings topped by the \$60 Brown Ranch.



Greg Gorman

I also think that the next big thing in California Pinot will come from Carneros. This is a large appellation with thousands of acres of Pinot. Many vineyards that were planted in the 1980s have been redesigned, with new clones, spacing, etc., and there is greater attention being paid to winemaking. I believe Carneros will soon be offering wines that will compete with the other top Pinot districts in the state. If Pinot achieves the kind of uniform success that Chardonnay enjoys from this appellation, then Carneros will be an even greater factor in the Pinot market.

I [recently wrote in this space](#) about the magnificent 1990 Saintsbury Reserve, a truly great wine. But those kinds of experiences have been too few and far between. The past few vintages for Saintsbury have been hit and miss, with only a few stellar wines. But with the 2007 vintage, quality is up a couple of notches. I recently tasted the five single-vineyard wines with the new winemaker, Jerome Chery, and they were all of outstanding quality, distinctive, rich and complex.

We also tasted a few 2005s, Chery's first vintage, and they were tight, herbal, tannic and marked by cola-sassafras flavors. They were, simply put, not much fun to drink. The best Saintsbury Pinots have been charming, supple and medium-bodied, with fragrant plum, cherry and berry fruit and silky tannins. But lately some of those attributes have been missing.

2006 was also a [tough year for many Pinot producers](#), including Saintsbury, because of the cool weather and uneven growing season.

But 2007 is a far superior vintage for Pinot, and at Saintsbury, greater attention to vineyards, winemaking expertise and a new winery within the winery aligned to give it its best vintage in years.

All of the 2007 Pinots are and intense and well-balanced, and they show off the sites where they're grown.

The Cerise (\$45), for example, is from Mendocino's Anderson Valley, one of the still up-and-coming appellations for Pinot. It is aromatic, tight, and has loamy berry character and hazelnut spiciness.

The 2007 Lee Vineyard (\$45) is more subtle, polished and refined, with vibrant black cherry and wild berry fruit. The 2007 Toyon Farm (\$45) is also tight, rich and concentrated, with a unique mix of wild berry and black raspberry. The Stanly Ranch 2007 (\$45) is more firmly tannic, with a concentrated mix of plum, cherry, anise and spice.

The Brown Ranch (\$60) has been part of the Saintsbury Pinot program the longest. In 2007 it, too, is tight, vibrant and concentrated, and pulls you in with rich Pinot flavors that fan out nicely.

All in all this is the most promising mix of Saintsbury Pinots I can recall, and an indication of greater things to come from Carneros.