



*La Fenêtre*

## James Suckling Uncorked



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### When Sommeliers Become Winemakers

Posted: 12:17 PM ET, June 13, 2008

I just spent a few days in Los Angeles visiting family and friends, and when I arrived at my hotel, the [Chateau Marmont](#), a half-case of wine was waiting for me. It was a range of wines produced by Josh Klapper, a sommelier from [Sona](#), one of my favorite restaurants in the city, and a *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winner. He sells the wines under the name La Fenêtre, or "the window" in French.

He makes from 48 to 127 cases of each wine. So they're small, hand-made bottlings. All the grapes are sourced from Santa Barbara County. There were three Pinots, a Chardonnay, a Syrah and a Cabernet in the box. All were 2006, which Josh says is "a great vintage." He sells most of his wine in Southern California in top restaurants and at two or three retail stores.

Josh asked me to taste his wines because he wanted get someone with a European perspective to take a look at them. So, I tasted the wines yesterday in my room with Nat Gunter, the wine buyer at Marmont, and we talked about the wines, and about Santa Barbara viticulture in general. It was fun and interesting. Obviously it was not a blind tasting, nor an official tasting for the magazine, or anything like that.

The Pinot Noirs were clearly the best of the lot and showed solid stylistic differences, which is important. Sometimes single-vineyard designations in California don't seem to show a lot but in this case the Pinots did. I also liked the Chardonnay, although it was a little hot on the finish, and the Syrah and Cabernet were good but nothing special. My tasting notes are below.

More and more sommeliers, wine buyers and restaurateurs, particularly in California as well as Nevada (Las Vegas) are becoming vintners, which I think is a great and fun development. It



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makes them better-educated about wine and even more dedicated to bringing you great bottles of wine in restaurants. Plus, it's cool to have all these interesting small, hand-made bottlings in the market – although some are much better than others.

Here are the notes:

2006 La Fenêtre Chardonnay Bien Nacido Vineyard Block Eleven Santa Maria Valley: Pretty aromas of apples, cream and toasted oak. Full-bodied, with good fruit and an apple, honey and cream character. Burns a little on the finish. Drink now. Very good.

2006 La Fenêtre Pinot Noir Cargasacchi Jalama Vineyard Santa Barbara County: Light ruby color with plum, strawberry and tea aromas. Medium-bodied, with a soft and fruity palate. Very Burgundian in character. A little advanced in color and character but delicious. Drink now. Very good.

2006 La Fenêtre Pinot Noir Le Bon Climat Vineyard Santa Maria Valley: Very fruity red with strawberry jam aromas and flavors. Medium body, with a solid core of fruit and a clean finish. Slightly one-dimensional. Give this some bottle age. Best after 2010. Very good.

2006 La Fenêtre Pinot Noir Calmant Creek Vineyard Santa Rita Hills: This is more Californian in style, with blackberry and ripe strawberry jam character. Chocolate. Full-bodied, with a soft and velvety texture and lots of chocolate and vanilla. Good fresh finish. I like this a lot. Outstanding.

2006 La Fenêtre Syrah Santa Barbara Highlands Vineyard South Mesa Santa Barbara County: Tar aromas not much Syrah character. More like Carignan. Medium-bodied, with some good fruit but a little diluted in the mid-palate. A good wine but not much too it really. Very good.

2006 La Fenêtre Cabernet Sauvignon Santa Barbara Highlands Vineyard Santa Barbara County: Dark ruby-colored. Blackberry, mineral and currants, even eucalyptus. Medium-bodied, with a slightly olive, green undertone, yet hot and alcoholic. A little unbalanced and showing sign of raisiny fruit with hydraulic stress. Good