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The related wineries Far Niente (founded in 1979), Dolce (1985) and Nickel & Nickel (1997) have been joined by a new affiliate, En Route, dedicated to making pinot noir in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley. The first vintage was 2007. Winemaker is Andrew Delos; director of winemaking for the group is Dirk Hampson. Grapes for En Route "Les Pommiers" Pinot Noir 2008, Russian River Valley, derive from two vineyards at different locations in Russian River with a touch of grapes from Sonoma Coast. The wine ages 11 months in French oak, 55 percent new barrels. This is — what's the word I'm looking for? — gorgeous, but thinking about the case for a few seconds, I hesitate to use "gorgeous" because it implies a quality of blatancy that the wine does not evince. It is, instead — what's the word I'm looking for? — ethereal or evanescent or beguiling. The hue is moderate cherry-magenta with a slight blue cast, like the color of lipstick that men associate with danger. Aromas of black and red cherries are wreathed with dried cranberries, cloves and cinnamon, while in the mouth, flavors of black cherries, currants and plums nestle in a super-sexy, smooth satiny texture that's seductive without being heavy or obvious. Traces of smoke, truffles and moss comprise a species of ripe earthiness that deepens the wine into layers of spicy oak and a hint of slate-like minerality. Really just incredibly lovely.

