

FOOD & WINE

INSPIRATION SERVED DAILY

Sonoma Coast Wineries Need Your Love Now More Than Ever

Here are 29 excellent bottles of Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir to look for.

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TONGUE DANCER WINES / COBB WINES / PAPER PLANES WINE COMPANY / RED CAR WINE / EMERITUS VINEYARDS

Despite the way that wineries are often portrayed in the movies, many of them are small family businesses that exist just a single bad harvest or ill-timed hail storm away from financial disaster. As [restaurants close](#) and in-person tastings have been greatly

diminished, this is a good time to support your favorite wineries by stocking up on their bottles. [The pandemic is impacting businesses](#) across the entire swath of the economy, and wine producers are no different. Stocking your cellar is arguably the best way to support them right now, and it has the ancillary effect of making these strange, terrifying days seem a little less fraught. Wine has always been a source of sunshine in dark times, and we could all use that now more than ever.

Sonoma Coast has become one of the most popular, important sources of Pinot Noir in the United States. Due to its large size, however, and the range of [sub-AVAs](#), or American Viticultural Areas, within it, you can't discuss Sonoma Coast in terms of any sort of consistent style.

Andy Peay, one of the legends of Sonoma Pinot who has been at the forefront of the movement for the West Sonoma Coast to gain AVA status, says that painting the entire Sonoma Coast AVA with a broad brush is just as inaccurate as saying that you do or don't like *all* California wines.

"I'm in the very northwest corner of the West Sonoma Coast," he told me. "We don't get out of the low-70s at the hottest time of the day in July or August." Fog from the Pacific Ocean comes through the Petaluma Gap, and while it warms up during the day, it gets a lot warmer in Russian River Valley and inland because the fog burns off, he said. Those differences throughout Sonoma Coast, and from pocket to pocket, can be felt and tasted in the wines.

"The term 'Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir' means nothing and everything at the same time, simply because there is so much diversity in the region as far as microclimates and soil types," said Vanessa Wong, the owner of Fishtown Social, a wine bar in Philadelphia.

The wines are, in general, absolutely delicious, and the overall quality is very impressive across the board. Below are 29 wines from throughout Sonoma Coast worth looking out for. They come from boutique producers and famously large ones, and run the gamut in terms of price and the number of bottles that were made. Some are more lean and mineral in character and others are riper and more generous. What they lack in consistent style, however, they more than make up for in exemplifying why the diversity of Sonoma Coast and the ambition and vision of its top producers are so outrageously exciting right now.



KOSTA BROWNE

2017 Kosta Browne Kanzler Vineyard Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$165)

Floral, powerful, and lifted. The palate shines with sweet fruit with warm spices alongside black cherries, pie crust, star anise, mulling spice, orange-peel oils, blood oranges, and a long tar- and baker's chocolate-tinged finish that is savory and ripe all at once. A complete wine in every sense. Their other single-vineyard offerings are excellent, too.

2016 Anaba Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$42)

Floral and generous, with lovely ripe cherries and black raspberries, cocoa powder, orange oil, and a hint of caramel. I love the use of oak here, which adds excellent weight without overpowering it at all.

2017 Benovia "Tilton Hill" Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$65)

Excellent concentration to the flower- and tar-tinged aromas of black cherries and plums, which turn to a savory and generous palate of mixed brambly berries enrobed in dark chocolate, all finishing with a cafe mocha and soy sauce nod.

2018 Chappellet Grower Collection Calesa Vineyard Petaluma Gap (\$60)

Toasty on the nose, with a ripe fruit core of strawberries, black cherries, and cola-spice notes wrapping around it all. Toasted caraway seed and fennel seed ring through with licorice on the finish.

2017 Cobb Docs Ranch Vineyard - Swan and Calera Selection Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$80)

So delicate and detailed on the nose, gently perfumed with subtle rose water and red-berry fruits turning to a palate of limpid, vibrant fruit whose concentration is surprising given the light cherry color and flavors of juicy red berries, rose water, and Earl Grey tea. So elegant.

2017 DuMOL Joy Road Vineyard Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (Approx. \$60)

High-toned aromas of incense and spiced wild strawberries turn to a palate of weight and elegance, with spicy, persistent flavors of brambly red berries, blood oranges, purple flowers, and bergamot all coursing through a long, lingering finish.

2016 Dutcher Crossing Chenoweth Vineyard Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$52)

Very pretty notes of dried rose petal and red licorice are framed by star anise and allspice that lift cherry and cherry pit flavors.



PFENDLER

2018 Pfenler Estate Grown Pinot Noir Petaluma Gap (\$55)

Toasty aromas of scorched earth and yeast-like tones set the stage for bright, concentrated, and ripe flavors of black and purple plums and whole peppercorns that are joined by more toasty spice, cola notes, and dried violets, all with just a touch of blue fruit at the edges.

2017 Dutton Goldfield Azaya Ranch Vineyard Pinot Noir Petaluma Gap (\$62)

Effusive aromas of cherries jump from the glass and set the stage for a beautifully structured palate that's mouth-filling, propulsive, and layered. A serious skeleton of minerality structures flavors of raspberries, red cherries, and sweet spice. Dutton Goldfield makes a gorgeous, consistently expressive, and terroir-specific range of wines.

2017 Emeritus Vineyards "Pinot Hill" Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$60)

Lifted, effusive, and joyful, with an undertow of forest floor pulling along notes of goji berries and pomegranates. The palate shows notably sweet fruit in the wild strawberry, cherry, and black raspberry vein, all joined by star anise and cinnamon stick. This shows that ripeness and elegance can absolutely coexist.

2017 Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (90)

From vines planted in 1991, this is elegant and nicely concentrated, with a pretty seam of savory minerality and flowers cutting through flavors of raspberries, cranberries, and a hint of tomato vine, salt, and oolong tea on the finish.

2016 Fort Ross Winery “Top of Land” Fort Ross Vineyard Pinot Noir Fort Ross - Seaview (\$80)

Vibrating with spice, the palate is cut through with cardamom and caraway that are wrapped around tart cherries and cranberries. Excellent concentration. Their “Stagecoach” Pinot Noir (\$80) is also fantastic, with orange peel, candied violets, and scrubby herbs.

2016 Gary Farrell Gap’s Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$80)

Brooding aromas of earth, fresh-dug mushrooms, and brambly berries and plums that turns brighter and livelier with less than a minute of air. They precede a palate of unexpected vibrancy, with acid cutting through flavors of red berries, pomegranate seeds, black licorice, raspberries, rhubarb, and toasted fennel seeds.



JESSAMYN HARRIS

2016 Sosie Roberts Road Vineyard Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$43)

Spicy aromas of scorched earth and hot slate precede concentrated flavors of cherries, black cardamom, and floral peppercorns. Another good value here.

2016 Halleck Vineyard “Clone 828” Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$65)

Aromas of bluebonnets and blueberries are wonderfully effusive. The palate shows generosity and weight yet with plenty of energy coursing through it all, with notes of blackberries, black raspberries, mixed mountain berries, chocolate ganache, and plums complicated by cardamom, oolong tea, and spice.

2016 J Vineyards “Strata” Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$55)

Wonderful freshness as soon as you pour it into the glass, with Driscoll’s strawberries (and baking spice, turning to a palate of generosity and plushness, practically overflowing with sweet baking spice, purple plums, and mixed berry cobbler.

2017 Joseph Phelps Freestone Vineyards Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$60)

A distinctly floral expression from the Sonoma Coast, lithe and limber on the nose, with flavors of sweet cherries and blood oranges on the mid-palate that resolve in more savory nuances of forest floor and mineral.

2017 Kendall-Jackson Pinot Noir Petaluma Gap (\$40)

Ripe and fruit-forward, with red and black cherries, blueberries, violets, hints of kirsch, rooibos, tamarind paste, and sweet spice including vanilla and star anise.

2018 Kutch Bohan Vineyard Graveyard Block Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$56)

This vibrates with energy. It’s concentrated and propulsive, with spiced cranberry aromas and a hint of wild strawberries, and flavors of mineral-zipped red cherries, blood oranges, dried flowers, and a hint of cigar tobacco. That blood orange note follows through to the finish, where the bones of this beautifully structured wine promise a long life ahead. Kutch’s other single vineyard Pinots are fantastic, as well.

2016 La Crema “Shell Ridge” Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$60)

Elegant and well-crafted, and while it’s definitely bigger than some, it finds a powerful, spicy sense of balance with scorched earth, smoke, toast, flamed orange peels, purple plums, crushed blackberries, and roasted coffee beans.

2017 Tongue Dancer Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$49)

Generous, joyous, and true to its name, this has bubble gum-inflected flavors of red and black cherries and enough sweet spice to make it particularly food-friendly.

2017 MacRostie Winery and Vineyards Hellenthal Vineyard Pinot Noir Fort Ross - Seaview (\$56)

High-toned and aromatic lifted. On the palate, a chocolate and caramel core anchors the generous red and black cherries, kirsch, and rosemary. Perfect with pulled pork.

2016 Merry Edwards Meredith Estate Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (\$68)

Cranberries and crunchy, fine-grained tannins wrap around a mouthwatering, silk-textured wine with lots of generous, juicy cherries and goji berries, a floral peppercorn note ringing through the finish.

2018 Paper Planes “Hidden Track” Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$46)

Delicate in style, this is translucent in the glass with aromas of cranberries and pomegranate seeds, and red-berry fruit on the palate that’s tugged along by earthy notes of forest floor, mushrooms, and dried roses. Savory and with great acidity, minerality, and energy.

2017 Peay Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$45)

Very pretty aromatics of peppercorn spice and violets with a hint of lavender and orange zest, all preceding a palate of vibrant energy and tons of red-berry fruit, wild strawberries, cranberries, pomegranates, and floral peppercorn spice. Fantastic minerality and structure: Like a laser-beam of a Pinot Noir. I also adore the Peay Scallop Shelf Estate Pinot Noir (\$62).

2018 Ram’s Gate Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$48)

High-toned spice on the nose precedes a notably savory palate with hints of tomato vine and plum skin, as well as pomegranate seeds and kumquats. Ripe brambly and purple fruit emerge with air. This is really interesting, and the exotic spice notes work well.

2016 Red Car Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir Fort Ross - Seaview (\$75)

Lifted and taut aromatics at the same time, with tiny wild strawberries and scrubby herbs setting the stage for a palate vibrating with spice and tart cherries, red licorice, and the suggestion of candied rose petals. Those strawberries follow through to the

palate and are joined by purple plums, pomegranate juice, and blood oranges. The spicy finish rings on the tongue for nearly a minute.

2017 Sangiacomo Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$60)

Almost Burgundian on the nose, with scorched earth aromas joining mashed plums, dried flowers, and spice cake. This is rich and ripe from the first sip, with plenty of plum cake and spice joined by a savory undertow that pulls it along through the palate-coating finish flashing with chocolate ganache and raspberry coulis. I also recommend the Sangiacomo Roberts Road Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$70).

2016 Sonoma-Loeb Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast (\$36)

Dense and rich, with a concentrated and tar-tinged hit of pure black cherries and blackberries on the palate, and a powerful tug of toasted spice through the finish. Fantastic value.

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