

The Press Democrat

Wine of the Week: MacRostie 2017 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir

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This week's blind tasting

Pinot Noir

TOP PICK

MacRostie

2017 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 14.5% alcohol, \$34. ★★★★★

This pinot offers complex, generous fruit — weighted to red — and impeccable balance. Aromas and flavors of Bing cherry with a streak of cranberry, tobacco and cracked black pepper. Crisp acid keeps this fruit-forward pinot in sync. It's a steal for the quality of this Sonoma Coast pinot noir.

Tasty ALTERNATIVES

Gary Farrell, 2017 Toboni Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County Pinot Noir, 14.5%, \$55. ★★★★★: An elegant pinot noir with a great tapestry of flavors — cherry, pomegranate, forest floor and cracked black pepper. Balanced. Striking.

Paul Mathew, 2016 Bohemian Vineyard, Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, 13.5%, \$60. ★★★★★: A smart pinot with bright fruit and earthy notes. Aromas and flavors of cherry, herbs and spice, all riding on crisp acid. Well crafted.

Black Kit, 2017 Gap's Crown Vineyard, Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, 14.8%, \$62. ★★★★★½: A refreshing, cool climate pinot noir with aromas and flavors of black cherry, cranberry, herbs and a kiss of vanilla. Buoyed with crisp acid. Bravo.

Sea Smoke Southing 2017 Biodynamic Estate Vineyard, Sta. Rita Hills, 14.5%, \$70. ★★★★★½: This pinot wins you over with its depth and balance. Its generous fruit is kept in check with its crisp acid. Notes of Bing cherry, a hint of pomegranate, herbs and mineral. Top rate.

The Sonoma Coast is full of intrigue for winemakers puzzling together a blend. They're scouting the rugged terrain for vineyards that deliver something unique.

But if you're Heidi Bridenhagen you don't stop there. The winemaker of Healdsburg's MacRostie Winery takes grapes streaming in from 30 different vineyards and creates 100 different, 1-ton fermentation lots.

"With these micro fermentations, I'm really trying to tease out all the diversity Sonoma County has to offer," Bridenhagen said. "It's really a big blend, but it's really fun to make."

The winemaker of these uber blends is behind our wine of the week winner — the MacRostie 2017 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir at \$34. This pinot offers generous fruit — weighted to red flavors like cherry — and impeccable balance. It has aromas and flavors of Bing cherry with a streak of cranberry, tobacco and cracked black pepper. Crisp acid keeps this fruit-forward pinot in sync. It's a steal for the quality and complexity of this Sonoma Coast pinot.

"Pinot noir can be very elegant and nuanced, and so trying to capture that and accentuate it and not overpower it, well that's the challenge," Bridenhagen said.

The geographic reach of these vineyards stretches from the San Pablo Bay to the south to Sea Ranch to the north.

"I really try to take the time to learn what pinot has to offer," Bridenhagen said. "I explore the vineyards, trying to see what kind of elegance and nuance they have. First and foremost, you need a cool climate to make pinot noir sing. The Sonoma Coast really offers a diverse vineyard portfolio."

Bridenhagen, 36, joined MacRostie in 2011 after a stint at Vinwood Cellars, a Geyserville production facility owned by Jackson Family Wines. She graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2006 with a degree in biochemistry and a minor in chemistry.

"I loved the field, and I thought I'd go to medical school or get a job in biotech," Bridenhagen said. "But after graduation, I took six months to travel all over — western and eastern Europe, Scandinavia and Russia. I was exposed to wine and the culture around it ... In college we weren't wine connoisseurs."

After the trip, Bridenhagen moved to the Palo Alto area, and a day trip to Sonoma County changed the trajectory of her life.

"I fell in love with Sonoma County that day," Bridenhagen said. "The wine itself was very eye-opening, and I loved the culture and lifestyle. So that's how I became a winemaker."

The career, she said, is a good fit, particularly when it comes to producing pinot noir.

"It's a very delicate grape, and it needs to be handled very intentionally and gently," Bridenhagen said. "But it's also what makes it so special."

Getting it right, the winemaker said, is very gratifying.

“When you open a bottle that you and your team produced, and when it’s tasting really good, you remember everything that went into making it,” Bridenhagen said. “It’s the ultimate reward at the end of a hard day.”

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Heidi Bridenhagen, head winemaker of Healdsburg's MacRostie Winery (MACROSTIE WINERY)

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