

## Forget Everything You Know About California Pinot Noir

Here are 12 bottles to help you rethink this popular grape.

Brian Freedman

January 29, 2018

We've all heard it before; maybe we have even been guilty of uttering the words ourselves:

*California Pinot Noir? It's just too fruity, and everyone knows that Burgundy is so much better.*

*I never drink sparkling wine—it's too expensive and gives me a headache.*

*I don't like Merlot—it's way too soft and unsophisticated.*

None of these stereotypes are true, but that doesn't stop otherwise open-minded individuals from uttering them when the time comes to choose which bottle of wine to open.

It's so easy to inaccurately stereotype grape varieties, to mischaracterize entire categories of wine, that it's one of the main reasons consumers are often reluctant to break out of their vinous comfort zones. As a result, unfortunately, they miss out on a lot of great juice in the process.

This, then, is the first piece in a series that will explore the myths surrounding wine — and hopefully help to debunk them — beginning with California Pinot Noir.

So let's just get the stereotype out of the way first: California Pinot Noir is **anything but the homogeneously fruity**, somewhat boozy, always-earlier-drinking-and-one-dimensional shadow of **Burgundy** that it's still too often assumed to be. (Maybe—*maybe*—that was once the case, but it sure isn't now.) Just look at where it's grown in the Golden State: From Mendocino to Santa Barbara, and from the Sonoma Coast, with its exposure to the vagaries of the sea and its weather, to the more inland Sierra Foothills, California Pinot Noir **can't possibly be painted with a broad brush** and still be spoken of accurately.

Jamie Kutch, one of the most exciting producers of the variety in California, agrees. "A major misperception about California Pinot Noir is that just one style of wine exists," he explained in an email, "fruity, ripe, sweet, and high in alcohol. This couldn't be more untrue today with so many regions, producers, climates, and soil types all producing a huge diversity of characteristics." His stellar range of Pinot Noir exemplifies that. Kutch specializes in Pinot Noir from the Sonoma Coast, (he also has an excellent Mendocino Ridge bottling, and some great Chardonnay, too), and his single-vineyard

bottlings, even from the same vintage, is each a wholly unique and vivid expression of the tremendous range of terroir even within a single AVA.

This is happening all over California, with individual producers bottling Pinots from individual vineyards and even from different parts of single vineyards, all in an effort to mine the full potential of the grape variety and the land itself. (And don't discount wines that are blends of Pinot from various AVAs—there are some excellent ones out there.)

Indeed, **California** is such an exciting place for Pinot Noir right now *because* of the **range of microclimates and soils** in which it can be grown. Differences in elevations, underlying geology, exposures to the ocean, fog, daytime sun, evening chill, divergent winemaking philosophies, and more continue to create a stunning mosaic of Pinot Noirs throughout California. Really, the only stereotype that consumers should be peddling in right now when it comes to California Pinot Noir is this one: **It's as exciting a time as it has ever been** for these wines no matter what style you prefer. It's a broad brush-stroke, to be sure, but accurate, and one we can all agree upon.

Here are a dozen wines, listed alphabetically, that embody all of the excitement of Pinot Noir in the state right now. If you can't find these particular ones, fear not: Just explore the shelves of your local wine shop. The possibilities, and the potential to be charmed, are infinite.

### **Anaba Pinot Noir Las Brisas Vineyard 2014 Carneros, Sonoma County**

Savory and lifted, with a generous core of fruit, and layers of red cherries, brambly berries, orange oil, and rose water.

### **Cobb Pinot Noir Coastlands Vineyard: 1906 Block (Pommard) 2014 Sonoma Coast**

Aromatically complex, with floral aromas joined by forest floor, and flavors of wild strawberries, red plums, sasparilla, and dried flowers.

### **Dierberg Pinot Noir Drum Canyon Vineyard 2014 Sta. Rita Hills**

Cherries and a distinct minerality are brilliantly structured; with air, allspice and darker fruit emerge.

### **Etude Pinot Noir Grace Benoist Ranch 2014 Carneros, Napa**

A spicy expression of Pinot Noir, with cherries and brambly berries punched up with clove, cinnamon, and star anise.

### **Fort Ross "The Terraces" Pinot Noir Fort Ross Vineyard 2014 Sonoma Coast**

A single-clone bottling that boasts raspberries and black cherries, complicated by mineral, spice, and a hint of kumquats.

### **Gary Farrell Pinot Noir Bacigalupi Vineyard 2014 Russian River Valley**

Scorched earth and wild strawberries on the nose turn to flavors of sweet spice, hoisin sauce, blackberries, and a bit of venison carpaccio.

## Gehricke Pinot Noir 2014 Los Carneros, Sonoma

Drying rose petals with a sappy cherry lift, and flavors of licorice root and dark cherries.

## Inman Family Pinot Noir Pratt Vine Hill 2014 Russian River Valley

Rich yet graceful, with layers of wild mountain berries, Chinese five-spice, underbrush, and violets whispering through the finish.

## Kutch Pinot Noir Bohan Vineyard 2016 Sonoma Coast

Difficult to choose between the 2016 single-vineyard Pinots in this impressive line-up, but the Bohan Vineyard bottling stands out for its remarkably low alcohol (11.3%), aromas of red cherries and cranberries, tomato vine, and roses, and flavors of pomegranates, goji berries, subtle Indian spice, and minerality, with a finish that nods in the direction of rooibos tea.

## MacRostie Pinot Noir Thale's Vineyard 2015 Russian River Valley



macrostiewinery [Follow](#)

128 likes

macrostiewinery Maple Glazed Roast Pork Loin and Fennel with 2014 MacRostie Thale's Pinot Noir **INGREDIENTS:** Pork loin - 1lb (feeds 2-3 people) 2 sweet potatoes (medium size) 1 fennel bulb 8 - 10 cipolline onions 3 sprigs fresh thyme (dried is OK) ¼ tsp cinnamon ¼ tsp turmeric Salt & pepper to taste Olive Oil **GLAZE:** Equal parts Dijon Mustard & Maple Syrup (roughly 4 tbsps) 3 sprigs of fresh thyme Salt & Pepper to taste **METHOD:** Preheat oven 425 F Cover pork in glaze (keep remainder, re-glaze pork later after 20 mins cooking if desired). Sit at room temperature for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, peel & cut sweet potato into cubes, peel onions (leave whole or cut in half), roughly chop fennel (remove tops to garnish later). Toss vegetables in olive oil, thyme, cinnamon, turmeric, salt & pepper. Place in a baking dish. Place pork on vegetables and cook for 35 - 45 minutes until internal temperature reaches 145 F. Rest meat for 5 minutes before slicing, keep vegetables warm in cooling oven. #macrostie #perfectpairing #perfectpairings #wineandfood #winepairing #foodwine #foodiechats #dreameats #food #pinotnoir #winepairing #winepairings #vino #healdsburg #winelover #redwine #valentines

A particularly elegant expression of Russian River Valley, with a gorgeously floral nose preceding harmonious flavors of red cherries, violets, and exotic spice.

### **Pfendler Pinot Noir 2015 Sonoma Coast**

Charred sage, jasmine, and cherry liqueur aromas, and exceptionally complex flavors of black cherries and huckleberries, vanilla-tinged caramel, and roasting cacao nibs. Dense and elegant at the same time.

### **Sea Smoke “Ten” Pinot Noir 2014 Sta. Rita Hills**

Dark and rich on the nose, with black cherries, vanilla oak spice, and something almost meaty, and a juicy, still-youthful palate of spice-tinged blackberry coulis and chocolate-enrobed caramel. Needs time, but will mature beautifully in the cellar.

<http://www.foodandwine.com/best-pinot-noir-bottles>