

36 Of The Best Pinot Noirs Willamette Valley Has To Offer



Michelle Williams Contributor 

Spirits



Some of the founding members of Willamette Valley - Jason Lett (son of David and Diane Lett) of ...

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“Pinot Noir is a particularly philosophical grape,” muses Jason Lett of [Eyrie Vineyards](#), in Willamette Valley. Arguably the most charismatic grape, devotees recognize its illumination of site as supreme.

Speaking of his Burgundian discovery as “love at first sight,” David Lett, founder of [Eyrie Vineyards](#), credits Pinot Noir as his “*raison d’etre*” for coming to Oregon in 1965. As his son Jason explains, after falling in love

with this finicky grape, his father sought the region best suited to its particularities—finding it in western Oregon.

In 1966, David and Diana Lett removed a derelict orchard, prepared the ground, and planted the first modern grape vines in the region, calling the south end of the Dundee Hills home. The Letts were soon joined by nine like-minded families with the same focus—produce world-class Pinot Noir. Today, the region is home to over 600 wineries, all upholding the original vision.

This past year I took a deep dive into the fruit of their labor, studying and tasting dozens of Pinot Noir wines throughout the valley—resulting in this extensive list of what I consider some of the region’s top bottles. Selecting one bottle from each of these producers was excruciating. I recommend getting to know each of these wineries and journey through their entire portfolios.

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A view of Willamette Valley's Chehalem Mountain AVA from Alloro Vineyard MICHELLE WILLIAMS

Chehalem Mountains AVA contains all three important hillside soil types of the region—basaltic, ocean sedimentary, and loess. The highest point in Willamette Valley is located in this AVA, Bald Peak at 1,633 feet, resulting in a geography and climate that differentiates it from the other viticultural areas. Pinot Noir grown here tends to be richer and bigger across the board, more textural and voluptuous.

2017 Ponzi Aurora Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$105) dazzles with wild bramble berries, black licorice, cherry cola, dusty cocoa, brown-sugar peppered bacon, rich, bold, layers of tension, structure, silky mouth-feel, long acid-driven finish ***In the future, this will be included in the newly established Laurelwood AVA**

2017 Alloro Vineyard Riservata Pinot Noir (\$50) offers fresh black and blue fruit, exotic spice, cured meat, violets, cherry cola, ample and weighty, rich, refined, elegant, structure ***In the future, this will be included in the newly established Laurelwood AVA**