

TASTING REPORTS

Cascade Effect

California vintners continue to build on their success with Pinot Noir



Top bottles of California Pinot Noir present diversity and world-class quality. (Dawn Heumann)



By Kim Marcus

From the Oct 15, 2020, issue

Pinot Noir continues its expansion across the Golden State, with rising quality and increased production driven by a surge of single-vineyard wines flowing from key winegrowing regions up and down the California coast, where the cooler, maritime-influenced climate proves ideal for the grape's cultivation.

This past year has been a banner tasting season as I reviewed more than 600 wines since my previous report ("[Coastal Conquest](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/coastal-conquest) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/coastal-conquest>]," Oct. 15, 2019), with the vast majority of the action centered on the 2017 and 2018 vintages. Overall, more than 375 wines reached 90 points or higher, making for a remarkably high level of quality, with three dozen wines scoring in the 94- to 95-point range.

Perhaps even more impressive is the diversity of the appellations where Pinot Noir excels. Classic-rated wines are being made all the way from Mendocino's Anderson Valley, one of the state's northernmost appellations, to Santa Barbara's Sta. Rita Hills, 400 miles to the south. In between, districts in Sonoma, Napa and Monterey also chime in with stellar wines.

This flood of quality is powered by two high-profile but fundamentally different vintages, 2017 and 2018. The 2017 season was the trickier of the two, coming on the heels of a multiyear drought. After copious winter rains fully recharged groundwater supplies—more so in the north than in the central and southern regions—producers saw nearly ideal conditions through the summer. But a searing Labor Day heat wave, followed by a second one later in September, tested the skills of growers in what became an accelerated harvest that delivered lofty quality in the right hands. (The wildfires that devastated many North Coast counties in October did not

significantly affect quality because the grapes had been harvested by the time the conflagrations hit.)

In 2018, conditions were almost perfect, with normal winter rains, and the crop was bigger in many areas than in 2017. Moderate weather conditions prevailed throughout most of the season, with few heat spikes, and fire impacts were nominal. California's normally dry growing season extended well into the fall, as the rainy season did not begin until late autumn, with the fruit long since harvested.

"The 2018 vintage was spectacular for winemaking," says Adam Francioni, whose family-owned Roar Wines is one of the pioneers of Monterey's Santa Lucia Highlands. Francioni describes 2018 as an ideal growing season dominated by the morning fog and afternoon winds typical of the region—from which Roar takes its name. "We harvested our first Pinot Noir lot on Sept. 15 and ended Oct. 6. There were no major weather issues to speak of, thus we were able to pick lots when they had reached ideal flavors. Vintage yields were back to normal after a short crop in 2017. We averaged 3 tons per acre in 2018."

Roar made five outstanding 2018 Pinot Noirs, led by the densely packed Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard (94 points, \$75), from the famed site owned by trailblazing grapegrower Gary Pisoni. The region's best vineyards, like Pisoni, are planted in poor gravel-based and alluvial soils washed down from the rugged spine of the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west, rising higher than 5,000 feet. These top sites are located on a series of majestic terraces and benches above the floor of the fertile Salinas Valley, where vegetable crops are king. The climate is semi-arid but fresh, with air cooled by the summer fog banks flowing in from nearby Monterey Bay. The vines struggle, but that helps to concentrate flavors.

Grapes were first grown in the Santa Lucia Highlands in the 1790s by Spanish missionaries, but it wasn't until the 1970s that local ranching families such as the Francioni began to plant grapes seriously. The AVA was established in 1991, and today the region is one of the most exciting areas for Pinot Noir in California, covering 6,400 acres mostly planted to Pinot and Chardonnay.

"I am excited about our region," Francioni says. "We always mention that we are a young region in the world of wine and have come so far already. What the first-generation vintners have built and continue to build is strong and reputable. As the next generation of winemakers and family farmers continues to come into the fold, I am extremely enthusiastic about the passion and dedication to making great wine."

Although regions such as Santa Lucia Highlands are helping to define the cutting edge of quality, Sonoma County remains the locus in terms of its sheer number of highly rated wines. Eight of the 11 classic-scoring wines in this report hail from Sonoma vineyards, which cover a range of appellations from the coastal areas to the interior valleys. All eight of these wines are single-vineyard bottlings.

One producer that has been firing on all cylinders is Gary Farrell, which delivers five 90-plus Pinots this year, along with four at 89 points. Overall, the winery makes a total of 20 different Pinot Noirs (11 for retail distribution and nine solely for members of its wine club). That most are single-vineyard releases is indicative of the burgeoning number of site-specific wines that have swept across the state. This is the driving model for today's vintners as they seek to satisfy their fans' desire for ever-finer gradations of Pinot Noir. That said, the level of quality is quite consistent across these producers' lineups, so rest assured if you can't find the exact vineyard

designation you're looking for, there are plenty of excellent alternatives.

The highest scorer from Gary Farrell is the powerful and pure-tasting Fort Ross-Seaview Fort Ross Vineyard 2017 (95, \$75), which shows intense cherry and red currant flavors, backed by the fresh acidity that is a hallmark of the region. The wine comes from the edge of the continent, on slopes that are within a couple of miles of the pounding surf of the Pacific, in the rugged terrain of the northern Sonoma Coast—a topography reminiscent of the fabled Big Sur region of Monterey. Located at 1,400 to 1,450 feet above sea level, the vineyard is reputedly the closest to the ocean in all of California.

"The grapes are bathed in fog through late morning, but then drenched in sun during the afternoon, because the vineyard sits well above the fog layer at the time of day," says Theresa Heredia, winemaker at Gary Farrell since 2012. "This produces beautiful tannins from the fruit itself, but also yields nicely ripened stems for whole-cluster inclusion." The success of the Fort Ross bottling, Heredia explains, is part of a larger strategy for the Russian River-based winery. "In the last four years, we've been looking for more coastal fruit to balance Russian River fruit," which is usually riper and more opulent.

For Heredia, the barrel influence is the most important element to consider in making Pinot Noir. She prefers a light toast and tight grain for the wood, with the aim of promoting precise and unvarnished flavors. The winery is owned by Bill Price, who has invested heavily in new equipment, mostly new presses and barrels, since purchasing Gary Farrell in 2011. Price also owns Three Sticks, another top performer, and Gap's Crown Vineyard, as well as being the majority partner in Kistler Vineyards.

To Heredia, tending to all of the single-vineyard bottlings is one of the most exciting aspects of working in the cellar. "There are different [winemaking] recipes for each vineyard," she explains. "Yes, it's hard to keep track of all the vineyards, but I love to see the fruit characteristics of each. It's a very dynamic job."

For many in the industry, the Fort Ross–Seaview appellation is the heart of the true Sonoma Coast, which is also seen as extending south of the Russian River to encompass the western hills of the county. Officially, though, the Sonoma Coast is a sprawling appellation that extends inland all the way to the edge of Sonoma Valley, including districts such as the Petaluma Gap and even overlapping with the Russian River Valley.

There are moves to further refine the region's boundaries with sub-appellations, but in terms of style, the most representative examples come from the western side of the county, where producers are on a roll, delivering a growing number of highly rated bottlings.

This is an apt reflection of how Pinot Noir is maturing in the Golden State. Over the past two decades, there has been a near-constant movement to establish vineyards closer to the coast, with vintners drawn to the region's cooler weather and interesting terroirs. Some of the initial releases were thin and harsh, yet since 2015, there's been a definite surge in quality, with winemakers focused on more exuberant expressions. The result is a spectacular new generation of Pinot Noirs that are balanced and precise, combining crisp acidity and minerality with concentrated red fruit and spice flavors.

These characteristics are exemplified by the top releases from sites nearest to the coast and extending 8 to 10 miles inland. At the classic level, the powerful Aubert UV Vineyard 2018 (95, \$85) shows

mineral richness, the Paul Hobbs Goldrock Estate 2018 (95, \$75) is rich and contoured, and the Lynmar Kanzler Vineyard 2018 (95, \$82) is plush, fruity and well-structured. A number of other standouts clock in at 94 points: the refined and elegant Ferren Silver Eagle Vineyard 2017 (\$80), the unctuous Flowers Camp Meeting Ridge 2017 (\$90), the focused Hirsch Reserve 2017 (\$85), the powerful and crisp Littorai 2018 (\$60) and the delicate and pure-tasting Three Sticks Walala Vineyard 2017 (\$70).

"In 2018, Kanzler vineyard really shined for me," says Lynmar winemaker Pete Soergel. "In the early mornings close to harvest, the aroma in the vineyard reminds me of being in a coastal redwood forest in a dense fog. The wine always has a beautiful, earthy, spicy accent that's present only a few days after the start of fermentation. The 2018 vintage really surprised me with the beautiful purity of the wines, which I had not experienced in a few years. These wines showed refinement and elegance early on in their life, which only got better with time. Stylistically, I hope to maintain the same freshness and vibrancy in future vintages, but 2018 was a special year."

Away from the coast, there are plenty more fine choices. These versions tend to have plusher, creamier textures and riper fruit components than their coastal peers. One of the best, from Anne-Moller Racke's Blue Farm label, comes from the western side of the Carneros district in southern Sonoma: the Sonoma Valley Anne Katherina Vineyard Farmhouse 2017 (95, \$95), with unctuous viscosity to its flavors of macerated cherry and plum.

The source of the fruit comes from a vineyard surrounding her Victorian-era farmhouse (hence the name). "It should have said Carneros for AVA, but somehow Sonoma Valley AVA slipped during the label approval process," Moller-Racke says. "This is a single clone

[selection] that has always had its own voice, layered and exotic. The wine needed a bit more time to mend together. Harvest was pushed ahead due to the heat spike in early September. I harvested on Sept. 6, which is on the early side for my vineyard."

Moller-Racke says she planted the vineyard in 2008 with material from the West Slope Vineyard of nearby Donum Estate, where she helped oversee vineyard development and raise the quality standard of Carneros Pinot Noir. She left Donum last year to focus her efforts on Blue Farm. It should come as no surprise that the Donum West Slope Single Vineyard 2017 (\$125) also rates 95 points and offers full-bore richness and plush, creamy flavors of dark fruits and spice. The wine was made by Dan Fishman, who has been winemaker since 2012, helping to cement Donum's status as one of the top Pinot producers in Carneros.

In Sonoma's historic heartland of Pinot Noir, the Russian River Valley, stalwart producers such as Arista, Dehlinger, Ferren, Hartford Court, Paul Hobbs and Williams-Selyem continue to prime the quality pump with both single-vineyard bottlings and appellation blends. Indeed, the high quality of many appellation blends make them a good buying strategy if you are looking for value. These versions tap multiple vineyard sources within an appellation and are made in significantly higher quantities. They offer solid varietal flavors and structure, with just a bit less concentration and finesse compared with single-vineyard offerings.

From the Russian River Valley, look for the EnRoute Les Pommiers 2018 (93, \$60), MacMurray Ranch 2017 (92, \$38) and Sojourn 2018 (92, \$45). From the Sonoma Coast, there's the MacRostie 2018 (91, \$34), RouteStock 116 2018 (91, \$23), Au Contraire 2017 (90, \$27), La Crema 2017 (90, \$25) and Sean Minor 2018 (90, \$22). And from

Carneros, seek out the Artesa 2017 (91, \$25) and Acacia 2017 (90, \$27).

Outside of Sonoma, the cool-climate North Coast appellation of Anderson Valley continues to up its game when it comes to Pinot Noir. Although Pinot has long been planted in this beautiful region, where vineyards are flanked by redwood trees and other conifers, the biggest growers traditionally used it mostly for the production of sparkling wine. Now there is a growing movement toward still wine, propelled mostly by producers based outside the valley.

They are led by the likes of Fel, owned by the same family as Napa's Cliff Lede winery, and Maggy Hawk, owned by the Jackson Family wine group, each of them delivering a classic-rated version. The Fel Anderson Valley Savoy Vineyard 2017 (95, \$70) is loaded with ripe dark fruit flavors backed by crunchy acidity, while the complex Maggy Hawk Anderson Valley Jolie 2017 (95, \$65) is filled with fine-grained red fruit and berry flavors etched with refined spiciness.

Other names to seek out from Anderson Valley include Golden-eye (owned by Napa Valley-based Duckhorn), Black Kite (based in Sonoma), Kosta Browne (also in Sonoma), Donum (of Carneros) and Anderson Valley's own Foursight.

Anderson Valley is the most northerly region for quality Pinot Noir in California. The most southerly is Santa Barbara County, led by the Sta. Rita Hills appellation, whose east-west orientation is unlike nearly every other coastal valley in the state, which trend southeast-northwest. This allows cool Pacific air to flow directly into the hot Santa Barbara interior during the summer months.

Soils here are unique as well, with a mixture of sands, stones and diatomaceous strata that are the remains of ancient marine terraces

and provide a multitude of terroirs. The highest-scoring release comes from Brewer-Clifton, also owned by the Jackson Family group. Winemaker Greg Brewer, one of the original founders, fashioned the complex Machado 2018 (95, \$80), with lithe minerality and rich savoriness to the concentrated red fruit flavors. This site-specific bottling is a prototype for the best of what the appellation has to offer. Brewer-Clifton offers a fine introduction with its Sta. Rita Hills 2018 (92, \$40), a juicy version with rich minerality to the vibrant red plum and wild cherry flavors.

"Down here, 2018 was a super year," Brewer says. "Nice long season with slow, steady development and a huge aperture of picking opportunity. As a result, I think the wines are very emblematic of our desired aesthetic, as we could take advantage of the long season to fully mature the fruit and stems." Brewer is also confident that 2019 will deliver similar quality, as are many other winemakers across the state. "It was another great year," he says. "Quite cool summer and a later-than-normal start. The wines seem strong."

Other Sta. Rita wines worth seeking out include the effusive and richly spiced Alma Rosa La Encantada 2017 (93, \$62); the big, rich and creamy L'Usine 2017 (93, \$75), from winemaker Dave Phinney (see the profile on page 44); and the rich and vibrant Siduri Clos Pepe Vineyard 2017 (93, \$65), from one of the region's best sites. Another prime vineyard expression comes from Fess Parker, whose Fiddlestix Vineyard 2017 (92, \$60) is creamy and well-spiced.

California Pinot Noir is on the march, from north to south. As inspired winemakers continue to hone their styles, there's growing evidence that even better days lie ahead. The Golden State might produce more powerful reds, but few others express as much finesse,

character and energy as these evocative wines from one of the world's most unique coastlines for winegrowing.

Senior editor Kim Marcus is Wine Spectator's lead taster on California Pinot Noir.

KIM MARCUS' RECOMMENDED CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIRS

More than 600 wines were reviewed for this report. An [alphabetical list \[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/alphabetical-guide-to-california-pinot-noir-101520\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/alphabetical-guide-to-california-pinot-noir-101520) of scores and prices for all wines is available. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews using the online [Wine Ratings Search \[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search\]](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search).

TOP WINES

ARISTA

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Harper's Rest 2017

Score: 95 | \$110

WS Review: Chiseled, ripe and rich-tasting, with intense minerality to the cherry, dried raspberry and damson plum flavors, backed by fresh acidity.

AUBERT

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast UV Vineyard 2018

Score: 95 | \$85

WS Review: Powerful and structured, with minerally richness to the red fruit and savory spice flavors. The sleek finish offers impressive purity.

BLUE FARM

Pinot Noir Sonoma Valley Anne Katherina Vineyard Farmhouse 2017

Score: 95 | \$95

WS Review: Offers well-knit flavors of macerated cherry and plum, with unctuous viscosity midpalate and Asian spice and chocolate hints on the finish.

BREWER-CLIFTON

Pinot Noir Sta. Rita Hills Machado 2018

Score: 95 | \$80

WS Review: Complex, with lithe minerality and rich savoriness to the concentrated raspberry, red plum and currant flavors, backed by crunchy acidity.

DONUM

Pinot Noir Carneros West Slope Single Vineyard 2017

Score: 95 | \$125

WS Review: Offers full-bore richness, with enveloping flavors of dark plum, cherry compote and raspberry tart that are creamy, in a plush style.

GARY FARRELL

Pinot Noir Fort Ross-Seaview Fort Ross Vineyard 2017

Score: 95 | \$75

WS Review: Powerful, pure-tasting and focused, showing intense flavors of cherry and red currant, backed by fresh acidity, with flinty accents.

FEL

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Savoy Vineyard 2017

Score: 95 | \$70

WS Review: Unctuous and ripe flavors of dark plum, cassis and cherry tart are filled with crunchy acidity, with a long, plush and well-spiced finish.

PAUL HOBBS

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Goldrock Estate 2018

Score: 95 | \$75

WS Review: Rich and contoured, with ferrous notes to the red currant, dark cherry and dried blackberry flavors, showing supple minerality on the finish.

KOSTA BROWNE

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Treehouse Vineyard 2017

Score: 95 | \$200

WS Review: Powerful and lusciously spiced, with well-honed underbrush and cedary spice accents to the dried red fruit and berry flavors.

LYNMAR

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard 2018

Score: 95 | \$82

WS Review: Rich, fruity and well-structured, this is redolent of crushed cherry, boysenberry and plum pastry flavors. Plush and creamy.

MAGGY HAWK

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Jolie 2017

Score: 95 | \$65

WS Review: Fine-grained red fruit and berry flavors are etched with rich spice and sandalwood accents, with a juicy finish. Complex and elegant.

ARISTA

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Two Birds 2017

Score: 94 | \$100

WS Review: Delicate, with light floral notes to the freshly crushed cherry and raspberry flavors, backed by crunchy acidity and a succulent finish.

BENOVIA

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley La Pommeraie 2017

Score: 94 | \$65

WS Review: Expressive and complex, with spicy richness to the dark cherry and plum tart flavors, flanked by powerful minerally accents.

BLACK KITE

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley River Turn 2017

Score: 94 | \$62

WS Review: Offers an intensely fruity aroma, with vibrant red currant, raspberry and red plum flavors, followed by brambly

overtones on the finish.

BREWER-CLIFTON

Pinot Noir Sta. Rita Hills 3D 2018

Score: 94 | \$65

WS Review: Rich and fruity, featuring mineral-inflected raspberry, cherry tart and dried currant flavors that are buoyant and lightly creamed.

DEHLINGER

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Goldridge 2018

Score: 94 | \$55

WS Review: Well-spiced and suave, with lively cherry and currant flavors, backed by vibrant acidity. Reveals hints of citrus on the plush finish.

ETUDE

Pinot Noir Carneros Heirloom Grace Benoist Ranch 2017

Score: 94 | \$95

WS Review: Offers an elegant texture, with racy flavors of red berry, plum and currant backed by glistening acidity and a long, refreshing finish.

FERREN

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Silver Eagle Vineyard 2017

Score: 94 | \$80

WS Review: Refined and elegant, with a lithe, creamy texture to the dried red fruit and berry flavors, lengthening out with forest floor notes.

FLOWERS

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Camp Meeting Ridge 2017

Score: 94 | \$90

WS Review: Offers a rich and spicy aroma, with flavors to match, along with a deep core of cherry compote, berry, currant and red plum accents.

GOLDENEYE

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Confluence Vineyard 2017

Score: 94 | \$86

WS Review: Intense flavors of dried red berry, currant and fig paste are rich and luxuriant, with light citrusy accents and Christmas pudding notes.

HARTFORD COURT

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Arrendell Vineyard 2017

Score: 94 | \$100

WS Review: Resonant, with ripe spiciness to the broad, fleshy flavors of dark plum, blackberry and dark currant. The powerfully pure finish lingers.

HIRSCH

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Reserve 2017

Score: 94 | \$85

WS Review: Focused and structured, showing red currant, cherry and plum tart flavors backed by vibrant acidity, with ripe minerality.

HYDE

Pinot Noir Napa Valley Carneros Larry Hyde 2016

Score: 94 | \$70

WS Review: Rich and powerful, with well-framed flavors of dark cherry, plum tart and raspberry, flanked by notes of sandalwood and allspice.

KOSTA BROWNE

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Kanzler Vineyard 2017

Score: 94 | \$165

WS Review: Contoured and rich-tasting, with dark cherry, raspberry and wild plum flavors backed by fresh acidity. Very svelte, plush and powerful.

LITTORAI

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2018

Score: 94 | \$60

WS Review: Powerful and crisp, with saline elements accenting the intense dried cherry and raspberry flavors. The finish lingers with savory verve.

MACPHAIL

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Mardikian Estate 2017

Score: 94 | \$90

WS Review: An unctuous blend of red fruit, spice and creamy flavors is backed by silky tannins in this suave version, ending with minerally richness.

PAUL HOBBS

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Cuvée Agustina Katherine Lindsay Estate 2018

Score: 94 | \$145

WS Review: Fleshy and rich, showing juicy dark currant and raspberry tart flavors, with savory and sanguine accents, followed by a slate-filled finish.

RAM'S GATE

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Ulises Valdez Silver Eagle Vineyard 2016

Score: 94 | \$78

WS Review: Dense, ripe and powerful, showing intense flavors of dark currant, cherry and Asian spice backed by bright acidity and a pure finish.

ROAR

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2018

Score: 94 | \$75

WS Review: Densely packed flavors of ripe dark fruits and Asian spice are layered with chocolate cream accents, powered by fleshy tannins and acidity.

THREE STICKS

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Price Family Estates 2018

Score: 94 | \$65

WS Review: Lithe and fruity, with crushed red plum, raspberry and cherry tart flavors, loaded with rich, spicy accents. Turns creamy on the finish.

WILLIAMS SELYEM

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Eastside Road Neighbors 2017

Score: 94 | \$59

WS Review: This is loaded with well-spiced and broad-textured flavors of cherry, plum tart and dried fig that resonate with lithe minerality.

AU BON CLIMAT

Pinot Noir California Isabelle 2016

Score: 93 | \$50

WS Review: Powerful flavors of dried cherry and raspberry tart are backed by crunchy acidity, with a crystalline structure and intense minerality.

BOARS' VIEW

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast The Coast 2017

Score: 93 | \$125

WS Review: Well-cut, with a minerally cast to the vibrant cherry, currant and plum tart flavors, backed by crunchy acidity and an expansive finish.

BOB CABRAL

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Cuvée Troubadour 2016

Score: 93 | \$125

WS Review: Crisp and fresh-tasting, with crushed red fruit flavors that glide across the palate, lingering with light cardamom and sandalwood notes.

CHENOWETH

Pinot Noir Green Valley of Russian River Valley 2016

Score: 93 | \$75

WS Review: This sleek red offers sumptuous flavors of cherry tart, red plum and dried raspberry, with dried savory herb and cocoa powder accents.

CIRQ

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2017

Score: 93 | \$150

WS Review: Powerful and well-structured, with pomegranate flavors that feature notes of iron, smoke and dried berry, backed by taut tannins.

EL MOLINO

Pinot Noir Rutherford 2017

Score: 93 | \$70

WS Review: Forest floor and wet earth notes bracket taut dried red fruit flavors, with rich, dusty accents. Pure and minerally on the linear finish.

ENROUTE

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Les Pommiers 2018

Score: 93 | \$60

WS Review: Rich, with an enveloping viscosity to the dark currant, plum tart and cherry pastry flavors. Graphite and hot stone notes emerge midpalate.

FORT ROSS

Pinot Noir Fort Ross-Seaview Fort Ross Vineyard 2016

Score: 93 | \$52

WS Review: Finely textured flavors of raspberry, plum and red currant are vibrant and well-focused in this direct style, with mineral and spice notes.

FOURSIGHT WINES

Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Charles Vineyard 2017

Score: 93 | \$49

WS Review: Big and rich, showing flavors of dark currant, cherry compote and dried blackberry, with hints of chocolate mousse on the plush finish.

J

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Foggy Bend Vineyard 2017

Score: 93 | \$70

WS Review: Rich and spicy, delivering unctuous cherry, boysenberry and kirsch flavors that are filled with suave creaminess.

L'USINE

Pinot Noir Sta. Rita Hills 2017

Score: 93 | \$75

WS Review: Big and rich, with Asian spice accents to the ripe dark cherry, plum and currant flavors. The finish oozes with chocolate

brioche details.

LA CREMA

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands 2017

Score: 93 | \$45

WS Review: Offers an explosively spicy aroma, with an alluring creaminess to plum tart and raspberry flavors. Pure and minerally, with a lilting finish.

LUCIA

Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2018

Score: 93 | \$70

WS Review: Richly spiced and finely textured, this version delivers flavors of raspberry, red plum and cherry, backed by glistening acidity.

SIDURI

Pinot Noir Sta. Rita Hills Clos Pepe Vineyard 2017

Score: 93 | \$65

WS Review: This rich red is filled with pure flavors of raspberry, dried blueberry and plum tart, backed by vibrant minerality and fresh acidity.

SOJOURN

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Walala Vineyard 2018

Score: 93 | \$69

WS Review: Complex and broad-textured, offering dark cherry and plum flavors that are accented by hints of roasted grain and touches of flint.

WALT

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast La Brisa 2017

Score: 93 | \$40

WS Review: This rich red is filled with dense flavors of dark plum, black currant, olive and dried savory herbs, followed by a pure-tasting finish.

WAYFARER

Pinot Noir Fort Ross-Seaview Wayfarer Vineyard 2018

Score: 93 | \$90

WS Review: Redolent of raspberry tart, with hints of lemon zest, this is a lively, fruity version that offers plenty of zesty acidity.

TOP VALUES

ARTESA

Pinot Noir Los Carneros 2017

Score: 91 | \$25

WS Review: Refined dried cherry, red currant and plum tart flavors show touches of membrillo and ample toasty notes, followed by a minerally finish.

ROUTESTOCK

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 116 2018

Score: 91 | \$23

WS Review: Svelte, with a crisp, minerally composure to the well-structured dried raspberry and berry flavors, ending with forest floor and floral notes.

LA CREMA

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2017

Score: 90 | \$25

WS Review: Lively floral components accent finely textured flavors of red currant and dried cherry, matched to firm acidity. Lithe and minerally.

ROTH

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2017

Score: 90 | \$24

WS Review: Plush, with spicy accents to the flavors of cherry compote, red plum and dried raspberry, with sandalwood notes and minerally details.

SEAN MINOR

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2018

Score: 90 | \$22

WS Review: Cedar and hot stone notes accent the flavors of dried cherry, plum and pomegranate that glide across the palate, with focused minerality.

BENNETT VALLEY

Pinot Noir Sonoma County Bin 6410 2018

Score: 89 | \$20

WS Review: Broad and open-textured, with luscious spice details to the red fruit and dark berry flavors, showing chocolate notes on the creamy finish.

KENDALL-JACKSON

Pinot Noir California Vintner's Reserve 2018

Score: 88 | \$20

WS Review: Creamy, with hints of sandalwood and crushed stone to the dried red fruit flavors, followed by a plush finish.

ANGELINE

Pinot Noir Mendocino County Reserve 2018

Score: 88 | \$18

WS Review: Taut, with gunflint accents to the dried red fruit and spice flavors, showing hints of green herbs on the flinty finish.

CASTLE ROCK

Pinot Noir Mendocino County 2018

Score: 88 | \$13

WS Review: Sleek, with savory richness to the dark cherry, currant and raspberry flavors that turn creamy. Floral accents enliven the spicy finish.

THE PINOT PROJECT

Pinot Noir California 2018

Score: 88 | \$13

WS Review: Snappy, with zesty raspberry and cherry flavors that feature notes of black licorice. Vibrant acidity powers the spicy finish.

RICKSHAW

Pinot Noir California 2018

Score: 87 | \$16

WS Review: Juicy flavors of dried cherry, forest floor and raspberry tart dominate, with peppery notes on the finish.

HAHN

Pinot Noir Monterey County 2018

Score: 87 | \$15

WS Review: A ripe version, with toasty notes to the dried berry and cherry flavors. Accents of wet earth carry into the savory finish.

THE CRUSHER

Pinot Noir California 2017

Score: 87 | \$13

WS Review: Dried cherry, currant and berry flavors mix easily in this moderately fruity style, followed by citrus peel hints on the finish.

KIRKLAND SIGNATURE

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2018

Score: 86 | \$13

WS Review: Fresh red berry, cherry and plum flavors are filled with zesty acidity in this fruity style, ending with hints of sandalwood and toast.

CASTLE ROCK

Pinot Noir California Cuvée 2018

Score: 86 | \$11

WS Review: Notes of hot stone accent the dried cherry and cedar flavors in this red, followed by creamy hints on the finish.

BOGLE

Pinot Noir California 2016

Score: 85 | \$12

WS Review: Notes of forest floor accent the dried berry and currant flavors. The taut finish features minerally snap, with hints of white pepper.

More California Pinot Noir 2018

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