

29th Annual Restaurant Poll

Wine & Spirits

Top 50 Wines in America's Best Restaurants



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YEAR'S BEST PINOT NOIRS

Our blind panels tasted **1,479** new-release US pinot noirs over the past 12 months. Our critics rated **213** as exceptional (90+) and **38** as Best Buys. **Joshua Greene** reviews California wines (reviews by Luke Sykora from previous issues are noted with his initials); **Patrick J. Comiskey** reviews Oregon. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

CALIFORNIA

96 | Hirsch \$85

2014 Fort Ross-Seaview West Ridge Pinot Noir Harvested from the cooler seaward blocks of the estate, West Ridge is a beauty in 2014, distilling the delicate essence of pinot noir and the coniferous imprint of the far Sonoma Coast into a wine that's seamless, transparent and, as editor Josh Greene put it, "unfettered." Maybe it's the suggestive power of the wine's aromatic intensity, but even the bright red color seems a bit magical, as if glinting with inner light. Underneath its pink-rose-petal tone, there's an earthen tug that weaves the aromas into a complex, lasting flavor—imagine the silken yet mineral texture of a great young Chambolle. This should age well—or decant it now for seared wild salmon. (W&S 10/17; 245 cases)—L.S.

96 | Tessier \$45

2015 Santa Cruz Mountains Saveria Vineyard Pinot Noir For the second year in a row, this wine from Kristie Tacey, a research scientist turned winemaker, is nothing short of astonishing. Noted viticulturist Prudy Foxx farms Saveria, a sandy, gently sloping site in the bucolic, aptly named Pleasant Valley on the coastal side of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Maybe it's the regular influx of fog from Monterey Bay that gives the wine its cool, ferny scent and spacious texture. It's lacy yet full of coastal flavor; there's a sweet purple-flower tone saturating the wine until it takes on the richness of fruit—glints of forest strawberry, bass notes of wild mushrooms and cedar. The one downside: There are only 528 bottles of it. (W&S 10/17; 44 cases)—L.S.

95 | Big Basin Vineyards \$55

2015 Santa Cruz Mountains Ben Lomond Mountain Coast Grande Vineyard Pinot Noir Bradley Brown sources grapes for this wine from Jim Beauregard's vineyard in Bonny Doon, a site three miles from the Pacific and 1,300 feet above it, not far from a limestone quarry. He ferments this with whole bunches (about 70 percent of the fruit) and without added yeasts, creating a pinot noir with the energy, clarity and lift of

a wine grown in limestone. It's easy to believe you can smell the coastal forest, the ocean breeze and the limestone there in the wine, but whatever that smell actually might be, it's pretty great. This is an exciting wine that translates the tectonic power of the Santa Cruz Mountains into elegance. (45 cases)

95 | Hirsch \$60

2014 Fort Ross-Seaview San Andreas Fault Pinot Noir San Andreas is the wine that represents the entire Hirsch estate, from the ocean-influenced west ridge to the sun-warmed east ridge; in 2014, it draws from 30 of the vineyard's 61 blocks. It has an undeniable sense of place, capturing coastal breezes and thin sedimentary ridgetop soils in the tight weave of its tannins—the fruit caught halfway between cherry and stone, cool and shady, yet hinting at vibrant rays of sunshine. You can access its complex floral spice now, but it's still mostly structure, nowhere near maturity. Floral, foggy and mineral, it's a wine you'll want to taste in another decade. (W&S 10/17; 3,464 cases)—L.S.

95 | Radio-Coteau \$68

2014 Sonoma Coast Terra Neuma Pinot Noir If you're familiar with the wild, woody scent of Sonoma Coast syrah, check out this pinot noir. There's a rawness to it that's irresistibly compelling—piney, almost abrasive tannins, a feral scent of tanned leather and a more lifted violet scent. The fruit comes from a biodynamically farmed site on the cool southern edge of the Freestone-Occidental hills. In a warm year like 2014, those vines seemed to draw energy from the cooling wind and fog of the nearby Petaluma Gap, the fruit accumulating a dynamic pungency that transforms the wine into something completely delicious as it takes on air. The tannins soften, the layers of flavor become harmonious and supple. Eric Sussman's hands-off winemaking—no additions other than sulfur—contribute to this wine's sense of individuality; it feels more about site than generic "pinot noir" typicity, and will be a fascinating wine to watch over the next decade. (W&S 8/17; 300 cases)—L.S.

94 | Beckon \$45

2015 Santa Maria Valley Bien Nacido Vineyard Pinot Noir Fetzter established Beckon with the 2012 vintage, focusing on Central Coast pinot noir and chardonnay, and winemaker Robert Blue hit it out of the park with this Bien Nacido bottling. The wine feels seamless and gauzy, its high-toned floral scent carried in a gentle and satisfying texture that coalesces around a mushroomy, umami-laden depth of flavor: perfect for a simple roast chicken. Fleurie lovers, take note. (W&S 10/17; 487 cases)—L.S.

94 | Big Basin Vineyards \$60

2015 Santa Cruz Mountains Alfaro Family Vineyards Pinot Noir The yields were so low in 2015 that Bradley Brown had to cajole Richard Alfaro for enough fruit to fill a fermenter and, eventually, four barrels, for this wine. The vineyard is located on the northeastern side of the Gabilan Mountains, just above Corralitos, at an elevation of 1,000 feet. Brown was happy enough with the ripeness of the stems that he fermented this wine as whole bunches, and the resulting pinot noir delivers power directly out of the tannins, dense and closed off when you pull the cork. A day later, it's open and racy, and it doesn't stop generating umami energy, a compression of rose-petal, red-apple-skin and black-mushroom flavors. If you're looking for a seductive pinot fix, look no further. (105 cases)

94 | Calera \$95

2014 Mt. Harlan Selleck Vineyard Pinot Noir Josh Jensen finds that his Selleck vines produce some of his most concentrated pinot noir. Planted in 1975 on a rocky ridge of decomposed granite and pockets of limestone, the vineyard is 4.8 acres with exposures to the south and southwest. This 2014 is saturated with flavor, deep in its bass notes of cherries, rich and bold. It's completely savory, almost staunch in its formal structure, a wine of stature to age for a decade or more. (W&S 12/17; 210 cases)

tion in 1993, grew the leanest and lightest of Hirsch's 2014s. It's wispy and clean, with mouthwatering acidity, a silky structure and lasting rose-petal spice—delicate enough for fish. (W&S 10/17; 345 cases) —L.S.



91 | Iron Horse \$85
2015 Green Valley of Russian River Valley Winery Block Pinot Noir This comes from a four-acre block the Sterling family replanted directly below the winery at Iron Horse, the vines seven years old in 2015. Those vines produced a richly textured pinot, round and supple, with the kind of succulent crunchiness you might get biting into a red-skinned apple. That texture makes it a good choice for cabernet sauvignon fans looking to check out pinot noir. (W&S 12/17; 390 cases)

91 | JCB \$55
2015 Sonoma Coast No. 7 Pinot Noir Though the broad, soft structure of this wine doesn't feel particularly coastal, there's coolness to the fruit and salinity that makes the connection. At first, this is more about sweet fruit than mineral depths, but the structure builds more edgy power with air. Decant it and you'll have a luscious, salty red for a spicy pork braise. (299 cases)

91 | Lioco \$40
2015 Sonoma Coast Laguna Pinot Noir Clean and racy, this carries high-toned scents of rose hips and Moroccan mint tea on a line of tart, cranberry-red fruit. It's a refreshing wine; drink it cool with roast chicken. (W&S 10/17; 1,150 cases) —L.S.



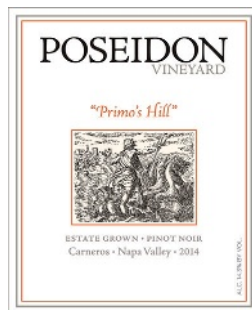
91 | Mignanelli \$36
2015 Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir (Best Buy) Most of this fruit comes from the Nelson Vineyard, planted in 1999 at an

elevation of 1,700 feet, the vines growing in marine sediment over sandstone. Byron Mignanelli sustains the coastal brightness in the wine, even if he brings the grapes north to his home base in the town of Sonoma. Its tangy tannins seem to drive the floral red-cherry flavors, adding chewy cherry-skin notes and mossy forest scents. Decant it for roast salmon. (200 cases)

91 | MacRostie \$56
2015 Sonoma Coast Goldrock Ridge Pinot Noir An ambitiously oaked wine with staying power, this has plenty of richness and weight for that oak to polish, but there's also some fragrance underneath, hinting at citrus and persimmon, promising to add detail to the flavors with time. This grows at a vineyard in Annapolis, in the northwestern corner of the Sonoma Coast. (110 cases)

91 | Montemar \$46
2013 Sta. Rita Hills Zotovich Vineyard Pinot Noir As deep, dark and perfumed as a black-cherry liqueur, this seems to build in clarity and absorb some of its warmth and ripeness as it opens with air. Then the black fruit sings out, saturated and cool. The Zotovich Vineyard is planted on diatomaceous earth and sandy loam. The wine's tannins have a sandy abrasion that give it a sense of elegance. (115 cases)

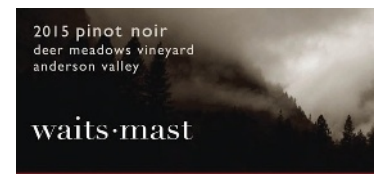
91 | Ousterhout \$65
2015 Russian River Valley Bucher Vineyard Pinot Noir Foresty spice melds with peppercorn scents as this wine develops with air. The initial notes of wood and the heady alcohol warmth integrate into the cola and black cherry flavors, turning them toward roasted meats and black vinegar. It's the savory spice that lasts, tightening up the finish and focusing the wine on roast quail. (W&S 12/17)



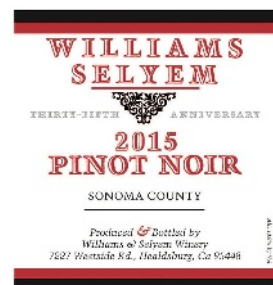
91 | Poseidon Vineyard \$55
2014 Carneros Napa Valley Primo's Hill Pinot Noir Tight raspberry scents lead into this spicy pinot. It's bright and cool, with

pink-grapefruit pithiness and some tomato-leaf character to the tannins, making them feel a little tough. That spicy mace character runs through the fruit, suited to braised pork. (W&S 10/17; 125 cases) —L.S.

91 | Red Car \$70
2014 Sonoma Coast Heaven & Earth Pinot Noir This pinot noir comes from Bohemian Station Vineyard, just north of Occidental. It's powerfully ripe, with a concentrated roasted-cherry flavor that's almost meaty, yet a bit of air brings out its energetic, coastal side. Decant it to coax out its firm spice notes, brighter cranberry flavor and hints of sea spray. (W&S 10/17) —L.S.



91 | Waits-Mast \$58
2015 Anderson Valley Deer Meadows Vineyard Pinot Noir Brian Mast and Jennifer Waits purchase this fruit from Rich Savoy, who farms Deer Meadows, a southeast-facing slope above Boonville at an elevation of 1,600 feet. Mast and Waits ferment it spontaneously as whole berries, producing a foresty pinot noir with savory notes of beef stock and roots. It's a pretty wine, generous enough to serve with seared duck breast. (70 cases)



91 | Williams Selyem \$39
2015 Sonoma County Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Pinot Noir The 2015 harvest was the earliest on record in Williams Selyem's 35 years in business, but despite harvesting in August's heat, their Sonoma County appellation wine seems to capture the abundance of summer fruit at a cool, dewy moment. This blend comes from five vineyards, from Flax, in the heart of the Middle Reach, to Terra de Promissio, on a cool, windy hill above Petaluma. It's a velvety pinot saturated with simple but lovely fruit, lifting in the end on a high-toned violet aroma. (W&S 10/17) —L.S.