

CALIFORNIA

About those 2011s

The 2011 vintage was a tough one for wineries in Northern California. It was unseasonably cold and wet at inopportune times in the vines' growing cycle, leading to fears about grapes not getting ripe enough or falling prey to rot.

Thankfully, declarations of inferior wines were premature, and now that a good number of wines has been released, I've been tasting great things from the 2011 vintage, especially the Pinot Noirs.

Never has it seemed truer that knowing one's site trumps all. The wines that have really stood out confirm this again and again, coming from producers who farm their own longstanding estates, or wineries that have long-term relationships with vineyard owners or managers and will drop fruit when necessary.

There's a vibrancy to the 2011 Pinots and a laser-like sharpness to their fruit, bright red cherry, sprinkled with complex layers of exotic

spice and herb. What I love most is the acidity and accompanying texture to these wines; they are incredibly alive and delicious to drink. That acidity is accompanied by slightly lower than average alcohol levels too, making them a pleasure to enjoy either with or without food.

The vintage really contrasts with the 2012s

I've tasted, which generally are riper, more robust and structured wines. They largely still need time to integrate, while the 2011s, as a whole, are more readily accessible now.

Although California is the star of this issue's Buying Guide, we also take a look at the latest releases from Oregon—another star region for Pinot Noir—as well as hundreds of selections from Chile, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Austria. And, as always, be

sure to check out our complete review database, with thousands more reviews, at buyingguide.winemag.com.

Cheers!

—Virginia Boone

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PINOT NOIR

94 Boekenooogen 2011 Estata Pinot Noir (Santa Lucia Highlands). For full review see page 95. *Editors' Choice*.
abv: 14.4% Price: \$55

94 St. Rose 2011 Nunes Vineyard 777 Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley). Light in color, this delicate wine is herbal and yet bright in Bing cherry, quite nuanced and slight at first, unveiling its concentration and complexity slowly and seductively over time. Made by longtime grape growers, the acidity is lively and the weight slim, traces of restrained oak and garden herb dancing in the background. Only 54 cases made. —V.B.
abv: 13% Price: \$44

93 Clos de la Tech 2009 Domaine du Docteur Rodgers Pinot Noir (San Francisco Bay). For full review see page 96. *Cellar Selection*.
abv: 14.1% Price: \$102

93 Couloir 2012 Monument Tree Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley). Another lovely Monument Tree Pinot from Couloir, this vintage is stemmy and earthy, yet soft, silky and voluptuous in all the right ways. It's pleasantly refined and ethereal, with whispers of cherry and raspberry fruitiness alongside equal parts gravitas and substance. —V.B.
abv: 14.2% Price: \$46

93 La Rochelle 2010 Deer Meadows Vineyard Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley). A high-elevation vineyard (1,700-feet) above Boonville, Deer Meadows imparts a subtle floral violet quality to this wine, which is lovingly faint in color and silky texture. Over time, the perfume builds into a singularly resolved mélange of dark blueberry and tart cherry,

the acidity perfectly able to hit the high notes. This wine should be enjoyable through 2021–2024 minimum, making an incredible partner to mushroom risotto or spring lamb. —V.B.
abv: 14.3% Price: \$75

93 St. Rose 2011 Nunes Vineyard Ten Block Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley). Light in color it's composed of violet and rose petal aromas, zippy in acidity, with layered dark cherry fruit and an earthy, herbal backbone. With texture on the palate, it has a buoyancy and electricity of minerality and finishes with the slightest suggestion of anise. Only 72 cases were made. —V.B.
abv: 13.2% Price: \$38

92 Bianchi 2011 Signature Selection Garey Vineyard Pinot Noir (Santa Maria Valley). For full review see page 96. *Editors' Choice*.
abv: 14.7% Price: \$22

92 Joseph Jewell 2011 Appian Way Vineyards Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley). This Pinot is joyous in fresh berry fruit aromas and flavors, from wild strawberry to taut cherry, the fruit buoyed by lush, velvety tannins and generous acidity. Pretty on the nose and tongue, it discloses a trace of vanilla on the clean, distinct finish. —V.B.
abv: 13.44% Price: \$39

92 Joseph Jewell 2011 Floodgate Vineyard Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley). This tight, classic Russian River Valley Pinot Noir needs coaxing to bring out the lovely, lilting aromatics, splendid in savory dark fruit, cinnamon and tobacco. Restrained use of new oak brings a balance of richness and acidity, softened tannins and velvety texture that works in every way. —V.B.
abv: 13.54% Price: \$42

92 McIntyre Vineyards 2012 McIntyre and Escolle Vineyards Pinot Noir (Santa Lucia Highlands). At first smelling like a bowl of red punch, this bottling quickly slides into dark, savory herbals, featuring a bit of five-spice blend that evolves as you sniff. On the palate, it's smooth and soothing, with blueberry and other dark blue fruits as well as anise. There is noticeable tannic structure, so this will hold well for a few more years. —M.K.
abv: 14.3% Price: \$32

92 Roblar 2012 Gold Collection Pinot Noir (Sta. Rita Hills). Blistered tomato dominates the aromatic profile on Roblar's top-end Pinot Noir bottling. The flavors are also quite pleasing, with the savory umami of stewed tomatoes again leading the way, with some violet and other purple flowers singing back-up. The palate is silky, the finish properly acidic, and the alcohol is nicely restrained. Serve with pasta alla puttanesca. —M.K.
abv: 14.4% Price: \$50

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