

Segue Into Autumn with Pinot Noir

WINE By Richard Fadeley


We've danced around red wine all summer with occasional Bordeaux or California zinfandel, or maybe a Côtes-du-Rhône, but with summer heat, red wine can be tough. Pinot noir, on the other hand, can be just what you want for an autumn evening.

It does not take a master sommelier to suggest that pinot noir is a good choice for cooler weather and fall

cuisine. It may already be your favorite red wine, but if not, we would suggest trying a few pinots with appropriate fare.

The enigmatic pinot noir grape can be a struggle to produce, as evidenced by its per-ton price (almost twice that of cabernet sauvignon), and its nickname, "the heartbreak grape". But the 2014 vintage seems to be the biggest harvest in history, which should result in some interesting "second-label" wines (wines from respected producers that aren't their main label).

Be on the lookout for '14 Oregon pinot noirs, along with pinot gris. Pinot noir seems to have found a fertile footing in the cooler reaches California's Sonoma, Carneros and Russian River Valley, not to mention the stable of elegant winners from throughout Oregon, where they host the International Pinot Noir Festival in McMinnville each July, a three-day fete to pinot noir.

For this tasting we assembled 17 wines and tasted them blind with light food, finishing our favorites each night with a meal. We got underway each night with a refreshing flute of sparkling wine, two from France and one from California, all made from pinot noir. Pinot noir is one of the three approved grapes in Champagne, along with chardonnay and pinot munier. These wines are an affordable option to the marquis Champagnes. California produces some very nice sparkling wines under \$20 that can make any occasion seem special. 

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Pinot Noir Review

SPARKLING WINES FROM PINOT:

Louis Boillot NV Crémant de Bourgogne	★★★★	Lovely Sparkling Rosé	France	\$18.99
Lucien Albrecht Crémant d'Alsace	★★★★	Another Nice Bubbly	France	\$19.99
Gloria Ferrer NV Blanc de Noirs	★★★★	A Star from California	California	\$16.99

PINOT NOIRS:

Louis Latour '12 Bourgogne	★★★★	A Star of the Tasting	France	\$15.99
Thevenet & Fils Bourgogne	★★★★	A Best Buy	California	\$18.99
Acrobat '12 Pinot Noir	★★★★	Consistent Winner	Oregon	\$18.99
Philippe-Le-Hardi '10 Mercurey	★★★★	Good Value Burgundy	France	\$24.99
Oyster Bay '13 Marlborough	★★★★	A Best Buy	California	\$12.99
Latour '12 Valmoissine, VDP	★★★★½	A Group Favorite	France	\$13.99
Kudos '12 Willamette Valley	★★★★½	Good Value Here	Oregon	\$18.99
D'Autre Fois '12 Reserve, VDP	★★★★½	A Best Buy	France	\$15.99
Gueneau '12 Le Clos Chartier, Sancerre	★★★★½	A Lighter Style Pinot	France	\$17.99
Chavy Bourgogne Grand Ordinaire	★★★★½	Another Best Buy	France	\$13.99
Mark West, Russian River Valley, '12	★★★★½	More Fruit Forward	California	\$14.99

Our four star rating system and how it might compare to the Wine Spectator 100-point scale:
 ★ Good(80-83), ★★ Very Good(84-87), ★★★ Very Good/Excellent (87-89),★★★★ Excellent (90+)
 All ratings are only opinions of our tasters and not meant to offend your personal favorites.