

There are nights when nothing but Cabernet Sauvignon will do, and we relish Zinfandel, Syrah and fine wines made from most every red variety depending on the evening meal. But, as cuisines have become a bit lighter, if no less flavorful, well-made Pinot Noir has become a regular staple on our tables, and Pinot's still-rising popularity suggests that we are not alone. In this issue, wholly devoted to Pinot, we take a look at a host of new California releases from recent vintages as well as a collection of high-achieving Pinot Noirs from Oregon. We also take time to check in on how Pinot Noirs from the highly acclaimed 2009, 2010 and 2012 harvest are faring with age, and, what we find is that, while wines made from Pinot Noir can be deliciously seductive in their youth, good examples from good years can develop beautifully for a decade and more.

PINOT NOIR

Our recent tastings of new Pinot Noirs only adds to our excitement for those from 2018 and 2019 and confirms that the variety fared exceptionally well up and down the state in both vintages. We also get our first look this month at a number of finished, just-released bottlings from 2020 which was, without question, one of the most difficult vintages in memory for much of California. 2020 was, as anyone with an interest in California wines is well aware by now, the year of fire and smoke throughout much of the state. Many vineyards on the North Coast and as far south as Monterey suffered mightily with more than a few top-tier producers choosing to make no red wines at all rather than risk their reputations by making substandard wines from smoke-tainted grapes, and, overall, Pinot Noir production was far lower than normal. It is important, however, to remember that not every Pinot vineyard was adversely affected, despite sensationalist headlines, and there are actually some very good Pinots to be had in the vintage... just not as many as we have become accustomed to seeing. Yes, Pinot lovers would be wise to stock up on the splendid 2018s and 2019s, but they would be equally wise in not dismissing those from 2020 out of hand.



🌸🌸🌸 92 BALDACCI Reserve Carneros Napa Valley 2019

Fully deserving of its "Reserve" designation and the deepest and richest of Baldacci's very good 2019 bunch, this is a Pinot that hits all the right varietal marks from its incisive, wonderfully continuous, ripe cherry fruit to its careful appointment of oak and its lovely, slightly velvety texture. While a bit fuller than its two same-vintage mates, it is uncannily lithe and light on its feet, and its seamlessly fit complement of fine-grained tannins provides the structural spine to ensure upwards of a half-dozen years of improvement without distracting in any way from its considerable present appeal. 🍷 🍷 🍷 \$75.00

🌸🌸🌸 91 BALDACCI Russian River Valley 2019

Deep and generously juicy, Baldacci's Russian River Valley Pinot is a complete and polished, nicely layered synthesis of richness and elegance. It is medium-full-bodied with fine fruity volume and varietal precision, and, even though possessing the energy and balance to age effortlessly for a good half-decade or more and show a bit of nuanced complexity as it does, it is already so tasty and invitingly supple in feel that its enjoyment is in no way conditional on further cellaring. 🍷 🍷 🍷 \$55.00

🌸🌸🌸 90 BALDACCI Carneros Napa Valley 2019

Wispy notes of dried brush, clean earth and toasty oak provide a slightly savory backdrop to the ripe cherry- and berry-like fruit that takes the lead in the nose here and reappears as complexing accents to the moderately full, well-fruited flavors that follow. Following a rounded palatal start, the wine inflects to structured firmness that augers well for some three to five years of cellaring without getting too stiffly tannic as to rule out enjoyable drinking right now with the likes of a savory pork loin roast. It may not demand age but will be better for it. 🍷 🍷 🍷 \$65.00