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12 of Our Favorite Sonoma Pinot Noirs

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We're living in the midst of an embarrassment of riches when it comes to Pinot Noir in Sonoma. Throughout the county's appellations, including Carneros, which has its foothold in parts of both Napa and Sonoma, the region has been blessed with a string of great vintages that are current on the market, stretching at the moment from the 2016 red wines through the 2019 rosés.

The quality of the 2017s in particular should be noted. While it was the first year California

wasn't in a yearlong drought, it saw dangerous heat spikes during harvest, followed by fires in October. Pinot was picked relatively early, hurried along by the heat—a result of smart decision making and hustle by experienced producers like Gary Farrell, Patz & Hall, La Crema, Flowers and Emeritus.

“The Pinot Noir bottlings shine because the fruit is so vibrant with incredibly lifted, fresh aromas,” said Gary Farrell Winemaker Theresa Heredia. “These sorts of qualities are unexpected from a very hot vintage like 2017, but we busted our ass to bring all the fruit in as quickly as possible before it began to dehydrate, which would have led to overripe qualities and jammy wines with flabby acidity.”

She started picking on the day of the total solar eclipse, August 21, 2017, bringing in only 6% of the harvest. A heat wave came around August 26, and over the next seven days, she harvested 53% of her total tons. Once she saw a severe heat wave on the horizon, she called all her growers to schedule picks of any grapes that were even remotely ready.

Because of this quick harvest period, she and others were able to capture flavors that are bright and lifted, with aromas that are fresh and energetic.

Explore Sonoma's Newest Appellation, the Petaluma Gap

Freeman 2018 Yu-Ki Estate Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast);

\$68, 95 points. Vibrant, focused and well balanced, this medium-to full-bodied wine offers brilliant aromas and complex flavors of ripe black cherries, violets, sour cherries and black tea. It offers a firm, elegant texture, with fresh acidity and fine-grained tannins.

Enjoy through 2026. ***Cellar Selection.*** —*Jim Gordon*



Gary Farrell 2017 Lancel Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley);

\$60, 95 points. From a site near Occidental that's farmed by Valdez & Sons, this wine leaves an indelible impression—a sophisticated and complex take on the grape. Earthy and grippy in tannins, it becomes expansive, exuberant and fresh on the palate, revealing a mix of forest floor, white pepper and pomegranate that skirts the edge of cool, coastal intensity.

—*Virginie Boone*

Patz & Hall 2017 Jenkins Ranch Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast); \$75, 95 points. A

perennial standout in the producer's line-up of vineyard-designates, this wine is lovely, complex and textured. Black tea, forest floor, clove and rhubarb keep it savory and earthy in the glass, while robust and refined tannin, a length of white pepper are there at its finish.

—*V.B.*

Emeritus 2017 Hallberg Ranch Wesley's Reserve Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley); \$75, 94 points. This is a juicy, effusive wine, made from several of the

vineyard's prized blocks year after year. Pomegranate, rhubarb and dried herb highlight a length of concentrated blackberry and rich robust tannin. Elegant from start to end, the

finish is a mix of black pepper and black tea, and is earthy in forest floor. —*V.B.*

La Crema 2017 Nine Barrel Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley); \$90, 94 points.

The winery's special barrel selection, this is a robust, full-bodied and intensely concentrated wine, grippy, layered and ultimately bright. Raspberry and strawberry flavors wrap around silky elegant tannins and integrated oak, showing a hint of clove and cardamom on the finish. —*V.B.*

Artesa 2017 Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir (Los Carneros); \$45, 93 points.

Delicate, crunchy red fruit is lifted by a floral accent in this estate-farmed wine. Crushed rock and iron components add complexity and texture to a rounded, rich and balanced expression of the variety. —*V.B.*

Furthermore 2016 Alchemy Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley); \$85, 93 points.

Sizzling acidity opens the door to a wealth of succulent strawberry, cherry and lime in this small-production wine, dry in tannin and integrated oak. Black tea, forest and grilled mushroom accent the complex lengthy finish. —*V.B.*

Trombetta 2016 Gap's Crown Vineyard Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast); \$65, 93 points.

This well-made vineyard-designate offers a depth of rich cherry, strawberry and raspberry, with hints of cola and spicy nutmeg. Medium bodied, it has refined tannins and a velvety smoothness to the texture, with forest-floor and black-tea elements in savory contrast. —*V.B.*

Alma de Cattleya 2018 Pinot Noir (Sonoma County); \$28, 92 points. Aromas of cranberry, rose petal, wet gravel and slight tar greet the nose. The palate is earthy in tones of crushed rock, dried thyme and desert sagebrush, which give depth to the fresh cranberry-fruit backdrop. —*Matt Kettmann*

Flowers 2017 Sea View Ridge Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast); \$80, 92 points. This is a feral, earthy and layered wine from the famous coastal site, woven with compost, black tea and savory cardamom character. The fruit is tart and intriguing, a mix of pomegranate, rhubarb and wild strawberry that match well with the accents and grippy texture. —*V.B.*

Red Stitch 2018 Sun Chase Vineyard Pinot Noir (Sonoma Coast); \$65, 92 points. Red-cherry candies, wet slate, carnation and a hint of tarragon make for an inviting nose on this bottling. The slightly tart red-cherry and baked red-plum flavors meet with dried hibiscus and rose-petal flavors on the sip. —*M.K.*

Siduri 2018 Parsons Vineyard Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley); \$55, 92 points. Weighty and textured, this richly layered wine shows a density of baked strawberry, pomegranate and rhubarb, the fruit seasoned in clove. Toasted oak supports and complements, finishing in a subtle twist of black tea and cola. —*V.B.*