

Forbes

Seven Great California Pinot Noirs to Try This Year

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The wonderful world of California pinot noir is as dazzling as ever as winemakers from regions such as the Sonoma Coast, Santa Barbara and Anderson Valley continue to produce elegant, vivid examples of this beguiling grape. Frankly, they just get better every year, and more expensive, unfortunately. At this point, they are still cheaper than world-class Burgundies of similar caliber, so stock the cellar while you can. Or enjoy your own Carpe Vinum moment and plan a dinner at home, with a beautiful piece of salmon and pop the cork on any one of these wines below.

2013 Belle Glos Clark and Telephone, Santa Maria—Delicious dark berry fruits with cinnamon and cardamom spice on the nose and palate. Compact and elegant, this wine is a fine example of the amazing pinot noir coming from the Santa Maria appellation. Winemaker Joseph Wagner, named this wine for his grandmother, Lorna Belle Glos Wagner—who must have been a very classy lady. Wagner makes three other Belle Glos pinots and all enjoy his deft, careful touch with wine.

2012 Sea Smoke Southing Sta. Rita Hills—This elegantly sexy wine is one of the pricier wines from the Sta. Rita Hills, but high praise from critics such as Jancis Robinson and Robert Parker will do that to a wine. Some argue the plot of land that Sea Smoke grapes are grown on is one of, if not the finest, plots in California. This is one of my favorites because of the deep, flavor complexity it delivers in such a delicate package. I love a wine that can, as Teddy Roosevelt said, “speak softly and carry a big stick.” Notes of spice, cherry, wet earth and rose petals, lingering finish, great structure, a marvelous wine. **Bubbly lovers**—they also make a stunning sparkling wine from these precious grapes.



2013 Freeman Akiko's Cuvée Sonoma Coast—Think cool-climate winemaking elegance and you have the essence of the Freeman wines. Winemaker, Akiko Freeman, grew up in Japan and brings an innate sense of balance to her wine. The cuvée bottling, a blend of the winery's best barrels each vintage is especially gorgeous with notes of black cherry, violets and earth.

2013 David Family Black Label Anderson Valley—Earthy and dark with cherry/strawberry notes, a wonderful balance of suppleness and minerality. A very concentrated taste in an elegant, layered package.

2013 Guarachi Family Wines Chase—This is the first official estate release from the Guarachi family who have long supplied fruit to other well-known producers such as Wind Gap, Eveningland, Fogline and Tamber Bay. The vineyard sits in Sonoma's up-and-coming district, the Petaluma Gap (a region which has applied for AVA status). Sweet high-toned fruit notes dominate this wine—love the silky mouthfeel and rose petal perfume.

2012 De Coelo Pinot Noir Terra Neuma—This biodynamically farmed winery consistently crafts some of my favorite California pinot noirs. The wines are layered, complex and rich without being over-the-top in alcohol or weight. Elegance and restraint are the watchwords with this wine, silky with dark berry notes, warm spices. This is a wine from the Benziger family—leaders in sustainability and biodynamic farming practices.

2013 Inman Whole Buncha Love Pinot Noir— Think native yeasts and carbonic maceration—it might sound like a science experiment, but it's the terminology behind whole cluster fermenting. Instead of separating grapes from each other and destemming them, they are left in "whole clusters" and allowed to ferment within themselves. The resulting wine is a savory, delicate wine with soft notes of berry and earth and a mouth-watering finish. I also love the **2012 Laetitia Whole Cluster Pinot Noir**—Another whole cluster wine with lively, delightful aromatics (violets, roses, and red berries).

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