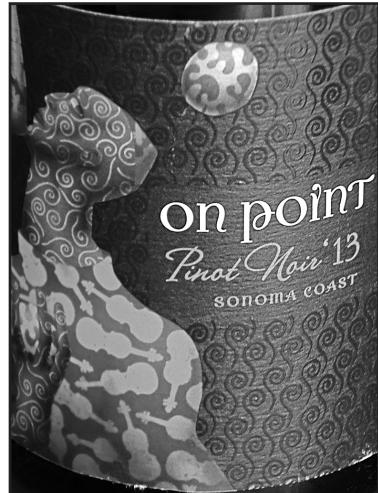


The Wine Corner

2015 Pinot Noir report

By Pierre DuMont

I will cut right to the chase as I have a lot of wines to cover. I went to the Pinot Days tasting in San Francisco last month (a must for Pinot lovers) where over 100 of the best Pinot Noir producers were showing their wares – often multiple vintages and vineyard bottlings – hundreds and hundreds of wines. The following wines were **THE BEST**. The cream of the crop. The ones that deserved to be searched out. These are the best North American Pinot Noirs available in the marketplace today.



On Point is Fulcrum's second label, offering exquisite, elegant Pinots.

• 2013 On Point Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast

This is the second label of David Rossi's Fulcrum Winery. It shows a lighter, less oaky, finesse style of Pinot Noir. The wine reveals deep red cherry aromas and an enthrallingly elegant, silky mouth feel filled with strawberries and currants. It is a complex and beautiful Pinot with ripe fruit finishing on round and supple tannin. www.fulcrumwines.com

• 2012 J. Wilkes Pinot Noir – GOOD VALUE

One of the downsides of the recent surge in the popularity of Pinot Noir is the dramatic escalation in price. Crazy as it is, in today's Pinot world this \$26 wine represents a *good value*. It is a soft, fruit-driven wine with hedonistic levels of cherry fruit in a jammy style that makes for a luscious style of Pinot. Drink now. www.jwilkes.com

• 2012 Keller Estate El Coro Pinot Noir

This wine hails from the cool Petaluma Gap region in the Sonoma Coast appellation. The wine has the pleasant combination of a light, perfumed, floral nose married to a powerful, muscular body with great depth and complexity. This wine will develop and gain complexity with age so patience is a virtue with this wine. www.kellerestate.com

• 2012 Davis Family Pinot Noir Campbell Ranch

Produced from the big, varied Sonoma Coast appellation Davis Family has produced a rich, deep, ruby-toned wine that offers up aromas of raspberries, plums and forest floor. Medium-bodied with gorgeous fruit, a nice texture and a heady finish. It should drink well for 5 or 6 years. www.daviswines.com

• 2012 Anaba Pinot Noir Roberts Road

This is the second year Anaba has been included in the best wines

category and they have put together a beautiful wine. A distinctive nose of plums, figs, sweet cherries and flowers is followed by a rich, concentrated, medium to full bodied Pinot, boasting great purity and stature. An excellent effort that should drink well for a decade. www.anabawines.com

• 2011 Kessler-Haak Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills

Southern California's Santa Rita Hills AVA is producing some outstanding Pinot Noirs. Some of the well-situated vineyards have just the right combination of heat and cool ocean breezes. This lovely wine sports allspice, herb, and plum aromas with a palate of chewy cherry fruit. It has very soft tannins creating a smooth, supple finish. www.keeslerhaakwine.com

• 2012 WillaKenzie Estate Pinot Noir "Pierre Leon"

I thought this was the best Oregon wine of the tasting as it had a little more fruit and body than we usually get from our northern neighbors. Deep ruby in color to the rim, with a sweet nose of framboise, apples, cherries and a hint of darker fruits, this medium bodied wine is packed with luscious fruit and just the right touch of oak. Should improve in the bottle for several years and then last four or five years longer. www.willakenzie.com

• 2010 Kendric Pinot Noir

Haven't had many wines from Marin County but this one sure showed it has possibility. A beautiful bouquet of flowers, forest floor, and currants is followed by a deep, rich, medium to full bodied Pinot fruit with tremendous purity and texture. Should drink well for the next 6 to 8 years. www.kendricvineyards.com

• 2012 Attune Pinot Noir

This small production wine (282 cases) exhibits a sweet nose of plum and black cherry fruit, followed by subtle spicy, toasty oaky notes. In the mouth it is medium bodied and rich with plenty of length and moderate tannin. It should age well for 5 to 6 years. www.attunewines.com

• 2013 Gracianna Pinot Noir Mercedes Riverblock

A beautiful Russian River Pinot. It has an attractive black fruit-scented nose with subtle oak intertwined with herbs, and earth. In the mouth, cherry fruit and toast are presented in a medium to full-bodied, silky-smooth delicious format. Very accessible and should drink well for a decade. The label speaks of the virtues of Grace, Graciousness and Gratitude and this wine shows all three. www.gracianna.com

• 2013 Three Sticks Pinot Noir "The James"

The Sta. Rita Hills appellation in southern California was created specifically to foster the Pinot Noir grape. Several wines in today's article show the success of the appellation. This bottle shows a medium ruby-colored wine with a big, spicy, earthy smoky scented nose, rich jammy fruit, medium body and a lush finish. It should drink well for five years.

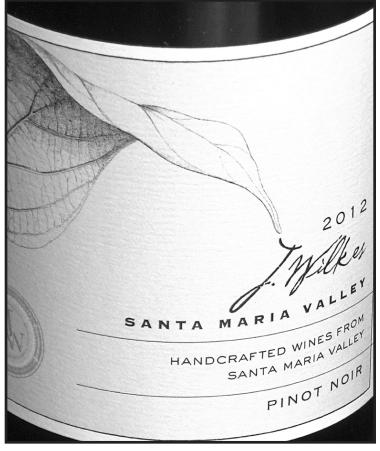
• 2103 Dutton Estate Pinot Noir Manzana Vineyard

The Dutton Ranch farms many vineyards in the Green Valley AVA and this wine is from a select hillside vineyard in Green Valley. The

wine boasts a ripe strawberry, cherry, chocolaty, earthy character. Medium to full bodied, hedonistic and lush it possesses expansive flavors and gorgeous ripeness. It should drink well for 5 to 6 years. www.duttonestate.com

• 2012 Cornerstone Pinot Noir Willamette Valley

Nice to see this Oregon wine in the top group. A highly defined and structured, well-delineated, medium bodied core of ripe cherries, stones and minerals further characterizes this delicious wine. Its long finish possesses a nice tannic backbone that indicated the wine can stand up to some years of cellaring. www.cornerstonecellars.com



Santa Maria Valley's J. Wilkes offered the best bargain of the Pinot Days tasting.

• 2013 Failla Pinot Noir

Ehren Jordan, the man behind many incredible Zinfandels for Turley Cellars, has created a beautiful wine estate called Failla, specializing in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. This bottle shows deep red cherry aromas and an enthrallingly elegant, silky medium bodied wine saturated with raspberries, strawberries and cherries. It is an absolutely beautiful example of Pinot Noir with ripe fruit finishing on round and supple tannin. www.faillawines.com

• 2013 Cellars 33 Pinot Noir Gloria Vineyard

Sourced from the Gloria Vineyard in Sebastopol this young exuberant wine exhibits a deep ruby/purple color, a sweet, jammy berry nose and flavors, excellent body, fine precision to its component parts and a harmonious feel in the mouth. www.cellars33.com

• 2013 Alma Rosa Pinot Noir

Richard Sanford was one of the pioneers of winemaking in the Santa Barbara region with the Sanford and Benedict label. Today he is still turning out delicious Pinot Noirs under the Alma Rosa label. The wine offers a spicy, gamey nose with scents of sweet cherries. There is some tannin, good structure, and a sweet mid-palate. The wine should continue to improve for 1-3 years and last for 8-10.

• 2013 Prim Family Pinot Noir Estate

This is a very rare wine – a Pinot Noir from Napa Valley. The Prim Estate up on Howell Mountain has produced a complex and satisfying wine from an area most suited to Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine shows a meaty, allspice-scented, Gevrey-Chambertin-like nose, in the mouth there are soft, inviting, ripe, earthy berry and plum flavors. This is an attractive spice-driven Pinot Noir to consume over the next 3 to 4 years. www.primfamilyvineyard.com

• 2013 Freeman Pinot Noir Russian River Valley

This bottle has an attractive nose of kirsch, cherries, and spice. The wine possesses excellent concentration, medium body, and crystal clear focus and purity. This fresh vivacious

Pinot should drink well for 3-5 years. www.freemanwinery.com

• 2013 Von Holt Pinot Noir Suacci Vineyard

This medium ruby colored wine displays a Burgundy-like black cherry, earth, herb nose, excellent richness, good texture, and a clean refreshing finish. Good effort from the Sonoma Coast AVA. One hundred cases produced. www.vonholtwines.com

• 2013 Davis Bynum Pinot Noir Jan's Vineyard Dijon Clone 667

Davis Bynum is one of the original Russian River wineries and to this day continues to be a leader in premium Pinot production. They make several Pinots differentiated by the specific clone that is used. The wine shows a gorgeously saturated ruby/purple color, as well as a sweet, intense bouquet of blackberries, cherries and earth. The wine's sweet attack and round opulent fruit flavors are seductive and mouth-filling. www.davisbynum.com

• 2012 Cebada Pinot Noir

From a small estate in the Santa Ynez Valley this wine is bursting with fruit offering copious quantities of black fruits intermixed with minerals and spice. Gorgeously proportioned, medium bodied, with well-integrated tannin and acidity, its vibrancy, purity and liveliness are commendable. www.cebadawine.com

• 2012 B. Kosuge Pinot Noir "The Habitat"

This was a new producer to me and I am duly impressed. It is deep ruby/purple in color with an exceptionally sweet nose of jammy black fruits, roasted meats and herbs. Explosive ripeness and fruit come across the palate as Volnay-like, but bigger and richer. Long lingering finish. Very impressive. www.bkosguewines.com

• 2012 MacMurray Pinot Noir Winemakers Block Selection

Hailing from the Russian River Valley, the Winemakers Block Selection uses the finest fruit to create a sweet, smoky, plum and cherry scented nose, medium body, excellent ripeness and purity of fruit, enough acidity for definition, and a moderately long, easy-going finish with toasty new oak notes. Drinking beautifully now, it should improve in the cellar for up to five years.

• 2012 Bennett Valley Cellars Pinot Noir

I was delighted to taste this producer's wine for the first time. It has a sweet, herbal, earthy cherry fruit nose. On the palate the wine is expansive and medium bodied with lively, fleshy flavors to go along with the intriguing aromatics. This is an earthy, expressive Pinot Noir that should drink well for 6-8 years. www.bennettvalleycellars.com

• 2012 Comptche Ridge Pinot Noir

The cute little hippie enclave of Comptche is in the middle of nowhere, or to be more accurate the coastal mountains east of Mendocino. This beautiful cold climate – just 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean is a perfect spot for the fickle Pinot grape. This is a delicious cherry-scented and flavored Pinot that reminds me of a premier cru Cote de Beaune. Forward and ripe, it possesses a silky texture, and finishes with nice length and just the right touch of oak. www.comptcheridgevineyards.com

• 2013 Belden Barnes Pinot Noir "Serendipity Block"

I discovered this winery last year and was glad to see them in the top group again this year. The 2013 is a deep rich wine with medium body,

ruby color, and an attractive nose of cherries, blackberries and a touch of plum. There is firm tannin in the long, clean finish. While drinking beautifully now, this wine should improve over the next 3 years. www.beldenbarnes.com

• 2012 Wrath Pinot Noir San Saba Vineyard

This wine is sourced from a vineyard quite near the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA and is similar in style. It is a big exuberant wine offering a gutsy, meaty, mineral and peppery personality. It is jam packed with plum and cherry fruit and has a mouth filling flavorful finish. Someone should break out the BBQ'd ribs. www.wrathwines.com

• 2013 St. Rose Pinot Noir Nunes Vineyard Ten Block

The Nunes family have been growing Pinot in the Russian River Valley for some time and have now launched their own label – St. Rose. The wine is medium bodied and rich without any sense of heaviness. There is good delineation from the tangy acidity, and lots of sweet red and black fruits interwoven with aromas of herbs, earth and minerals. Tannin is present but it is silky rather than astringent. Should improve for 5-6 years. www.nunesvineyard.com

• 2012 Aberrant Cellars Pinot Noir "Carpe Noctem"

The name of this Willamette Valley wine is "Seize the Night" which should be doable with a bottle of this on your dinner table. Bottled unfiltered and unfinned, the wine offers gorgeous levels of smoky, earthy black cherry fruit in a full-bodied, lusty hedonistic style of Pinot Noir. Highly recommended. www.aberrantcellars.com

• 2010 Philo Ridge Pinot Noir Marguerite Vineyard

The Anderson Valley is a perfect area for growing Pinot Noir and the tiny family owned Philo Ridge winery has taken every advantage. The wine has sweet blackberry/plum aromas with lots of mouth filling fruit mixed with some earth, tobacco and spice. It has great structure and is impeccably balanced. Only 170 cases produced. www.philoridge.com

• 2012 McPhail Pinot Noir Rita's Crown Vineyard

This exciting Pinot producer never fails to come through with outstanding wines. Though the winery is based in Healdsburg these grapes come from the Sta. Rita AVA near Santa Barbara. The wine offers spicy, sweet cranberry and red currant fruit, subtle oak and meaty flavors. It is medium to full bodied and crisp with good balance. Should improve in the bottle for 5-6 years.

• 2013 Morgan Pinot Noir Double L Vineyard

A long-term quality producer from Monterey County, Morgan sources these grapes from the Santa Lucia Highland AVA. The wine displays a dark plum color, and moderately intense herbaceous, plum and cherry aromas. Restrained but rich with crisp acidity and clean winemaking, this medium bodied, tightly knit Pinot Noir will benefit from another 1-2 years of bottle age and should last for a decade. www.morganwinery.com

• 2012 Burning Bench Pinot Noir Moon Hill Vineyard

This bottle reveals a light to medium ruby color, followed by a textbook Pinot nose of earth, plants, and sweet black cherry fruit. A silky, seductive medium-bodied wine with no hard edges, this round supple Pinot is just plain fun to drink. From the Nicasio area of Marin County.