# 11 Approachable California Pinot Noirs

New reviews of budget-friendly Pinots from the 2012 and 2013 vintages



Photo by: Diageo Chateau & Estate Wines

Wild mustard flowers grow throughout Acacia's Napa Valley vineyards.

Augustus Weed Posted: June 1, 2015



Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

Although it may be a challenge to find charming Pinot Noir at a fair price, we've discovered nearly a dozen bottlings that fit the bill, including a jazzy Sonoma Pinot for \$20 and a stunning value from Mendocino for \$13.

Mendocino is a go-to for well-priced wines from a host of different grapes, but it's best known for its Pinot Noirs. Handley and Castle Rock produced two striking examples using the broad Mendocino County designation, which may include grapes from any of its 10 appellations. The inland Potter Valley AVA experiences some of the greatest temperature variations in the region and is home to Paul Dolan's fragrant and delicate Pinot.

Hailing from farther south is Acacia's taut and spicy Carneros bottling, which will be easy to find, thanks to the large quantity of first-rate Pinot harvested in 2013. Other Carneros versions to look for include a trim and well-done effort from Robert Mondavi and the attractively priced Beaulieu Vineyard.

Pali Wine Co.'s appellation blends typically offer solid quality for the price, with each named after a neighborhood in the Pacific Palisades. The 2013 Huntington from Santa Barbara County is a strong follow-up to the 2012, a *Wine Spectator* Top 100 selection, with lightly smoky oak notes adding extra dimension to the core of rich berry flavors.

### AMICI Pinot Noir Sonoma County Olema 2013 Score: 91 | \$20

Presents a lively, refreshing, complex mix of snappy wild berry and raspberry flavors, firm and vibrant, ending long, clean and complex. Drink now through 2020. 6,000 cases made.—J.L.

## THE FORAGER Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2013 Score: 90 | \$26

Refreshingly clean and vibrant, with well-structured flavors of snappy raspberry and wild berry, offering firm, modest tannins and a complex aftertaste that echoes dusty earth details. Drink now through 2021. 1,200 cases made.—*J.L.* 

#### HANDLEY Pinot Noir Mendocino County 2012 Score: 90 / \$25

Well-structured, with the core of wild berry offering texture, depth and persistence. Presents a minerally mix of firm tannins and acidity. Drink now through 2020. 2,159 cases made.—*J.L.* 

# PALI WINE CO. Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County Huntington 2013 Score: 89 | \$23 Light smoky oak adds dimension to the rich core of wild berry and raspberry flavors, which are pure, clean and well-focused. Ends with a persistent, lingering aftertaste.

Drink now. 3,861 cases made. - J.L.

#### ACACIA Pinot Noir Carneros 2013 Score: 88 | \$28

A vibrant offering, taut and spicy, with red plum, black cherry, anise, cedar and crushed rock notes. The tannins have grip. Should benefit from short-term cellaring. Drink now through 2020. 58,000 cases made.—*J.L.* 

# BEAULIEU VINEYARD Pinot Noir Napa Valley Carneros 2013 Score: 88 | \$19

Combines ripe red berry, spice, mineral and floral anise notes before firming, with taut tannins and a hint of suppleness emerging in the texture. Drink now through 2019. 1,200 cases made. -J.L.

# CASTLE ROCK Pinot Noir Mendocino County 2013 Score: 88 | \$13

This is a refreshing, clean and vibrant effort, centered on crisp, structured dark berry, spice and light oak notes. Drink now through 2019. 88,815 cases made.—*J.L.* 

# DE LOACH Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2013 Score: 88 | \$24

Pure and direct, with a core of cherry, plum and wild berry that gains depth and nuance before tightening up on the finish, where the tannins reign. Drink now through 2019. 4,600 cases made.—*J.L.* 

# PAUL DOLAN Pinot Noir Potter Valley 2013 Score: 88 | \$30

A fragrant, delicate style, with fresh watermelon, cherry and wild berry flavors, presented in a medium-weight manner. Clean and easy. Drink now through 2020. 2,000 cases made.—*J.L.* 

#### ROBERT MONDAVI Pinot Noir Napa Valley Carneros 2013 Score: 88 | \$26

Well done in a trim, tapered style, with a mix of dried berry, mineral, cedary oak and dried herb notes. The tannins are firm and fine-grained, easing along on the finish. Drink now through 2020. 25,589 cases made.—*J.L.* 

# RUSACK Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County 2013 Score: 88 | \$30

A solid, firm effort, with loamy earth, dried berry, sage and cedar flavors. The fruit core comprises dried red berry and anise notes. Drink now through 2019. 2,348 cases made.—*J.L.* 

#### More from California:

Friday, July 31, 2015

California Chardonnay Alphabetical Listing

Monday, July 6, 2015

10 Thrilling Napa Cabernets

Thursday, July 2, 2015

How to Stay Relevant, Part 2: Caymus and the Wagners

Wednesday, July 1, 2015 A \$315 Million Bet on Pinot Noir

Wednesday, July 1, 2015

EXCLUSIVE: The Inside Story Of Joe Wagner's \$315 Million Sale Of Meiomi

More from California

# See Also

~

Monday, July 6, 2015 10 Thrilling Napa Cabernets

Monday, June 29, 2015 10 Wines for Summertime Grilling

Friday, June 26, 2015 16 Tasty Wines from the Finger Lakes

Monday, June 22, 2015 12 Standout California Pinot Noirs

Friday, June 19, 2015 13 Diverse Wines from Sicily

See all from Tasting Highlights