

Scott Greenberg—The [Vine](#) Guy

## Pinot-Mania

Ah, pinot noir – the fickle temptress of red wine grape varieties that is forgiven all sins when it feels the urge to seduce the tongue and shrink the wallet.

I know that my prose may seem a bit dramatic, but pinot noir can be the most maddening, wonderful, seductive, frustrating grape known to Bacchus. And I am on my way to one of the world's largest gatherings of pinot noir producers and consumers. I have a "Golden Ticket" to this year's International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC) in McMinnville, Oregon where I will swirl, sniff, sip and slurp my way through two glorious days dedicated to the most persnickety wine grape known in wine-dom.

Many winemakers agree that the pinot noir grape is one of the most difficult varieties to grow and vinify, due in part to its thin skin and persnickety nature. But I can tell you that when pinot noir is good, it's great. And when it's great – well, it just doesn't get any better.

Pinot noir originally gained popularity in the Burgundy region of France sometime around the first century, AD. It is widely believed that Roman conquerors brought the noble grape with them during their invasion of Gaul. However, recent evidence suggests the indigenous inhabitants might have already been growing the grape when the Romans arrived.

Today, pinot noir is still revered in the famed French region as well as wine growing countries all over the world, including Chile, New Zealand, Australia and the western United States. And more than any other grape I know, pinot noir can take on a distinctive personality from each locale based on soil and climate.

Here are a few of my favorites from around the globe.

### Chile

Known for their balance between ripe fruit and abundant acidity, wines from the Willamette Valley represent some of the best values in pinot noir in the world. A wonderful match for game fowl.

The **2011 Cono Sur Pinot Noir Reserva Especial** from Casablanca region of Chile offers up scents of violets and black cherries that dominate the bouquet. Charming flavors of wild strawberries and meaty notes swirl around a core of raspberry liqueur. The long finish is supported by nice acidity and a touch of smokiness. **\$15**

### New Zealand

These wines have a tendency to run a little lighter and drier in style with bright berry fruit flavors accenting red cherries. Most pair brilliantly with grilled salmon.

The **2010 Carrick "Unravelled" Pinot Noir** from the Central Otago region of New Zealand offers fresh, ripe red cherries and strawberries play over the entire tongue and lead to a wonderfully light and bright finish. Notes of dried spices and blueberries join in on the back end and are buoyed by the lively acidity and fine-grained tannins. **\$30**

### France

Wines from the Cote Côte d'Or region in Burgundy take on a perfume-like quality. The best of these wines taste of strawberry jam and smoked meat, all rolled into a delicate frame. Serve with roast duck.

**2010 Dublere Savigny-les-Beaune Les Planchots du Nord**, Burgundy, France this may be one of the single best values in Burgundy. It is worth every seductive sip of ripe red cherries, violets and raspberries. The charming notes of wild strawberries on the finish are delightfully elegant on the smooth, lengthy finish. **\$30**

### California

Bigger and more expressive flavors of black cherry and spices define the pinots from Sonoma. These wines are suited more for tuna steaks and Asian cuisine.

**2009 MacMurray Ranch Pinot Noir** from the Sonoma Coast region of California, CA is an excellent expression of the region. Rich flavors of black cherry, blackberry and plum are framed by soft tannins and beautiful acidity. Warm flavors of cherry cola and black raspberries glide all the way through the elegant finish. **\$25**