

THE WINE-LOVER'S GUIDE TO PINOT NOIR

This elegant, versatile grape makes both food-friendly reds and fantastic champagne, says wine expert *Zeren Wilson*

WHAT IS IT FAMOUS FOR?

Sometimes referred to as the 'heartbreak grape', as it is notoriously tricky to grow, pinot noir has tightly packed bunches of grapes and delicate skin that make it susceptible to rot and mildew. Nonetheless, it's one of the three main grapes – alongside chardonnay and pinot meunier – used in champagne and other sparkling wines, adding body and structure.

WHERE IS IT GROWN?

All over the world, although its heartland is the Burgundy region of France, where medieval monks first cultivated the grape and sought out growing sites on the slopes of the Côte d'Or. Elsewhere, it prefers cooler spots, such as the coastal vineyards of California, New Zealand, Australia and Chile. It's also the most widely planted grape in British vineyards.

WHAT IS ITS WINE STYLE?

Typically, pinot noir produces a lighter type of red than grapes such as syrah, cabernet sauvignon or merlot; its thin skin means lighter tannins and less body in the finished wine.

AND ITS FLAVOUR?

The varietal evokes red cherry predominantly, often supported by characteristics of raspberry and cranberry. These fruity aromas can develop into more earthy scents as the wine ages. In warmer climates such as California's Central Coast, you'll often find bolder, lushier styles with darker fruit flavours at the fore.

WHAT FOOD DOES IT GO WITH?

Pinot noir is extremely versatile when it comes to food pairings. Duck and goose are classic matches, as its naturally high acidity helps cut through the richness of fatty meats. As a lighter style of red, it also lends itself to white meats. This makes it a cracking accompaniment to dishes featuring pork (that acidity stands up well to fatty crackling) and chicken. The wine also reigns supreme with terrines, pîtes and charcuterie. In its spiritual home of Burgundy, pinot noir is enjoyed with *œufs en meurette* (eggs poached in wine), *Epoisses* cheese, and *boeuf bourguignon*.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I PAY?

The most expensive wines come from the Grand Cru vineyards in the Burgundian village of Vosne-Romanée: the combination of tiny production and high demand means these bottles command many hundreds of pounds. Fortunately, many other great examples of the grape are more accessible, with good value to be found in Chile, New Zealand, Australia and California. As a fairly tricky and capricious grape to grow, pinot does tend to cost more than other reds.

A wine hitting the sweet spot for quality and value – displaying the complexity and charm of the grape – would be in the £12-20 bracket.

PINOT NOIR IN A NUTSHELL?

Silky, supple, fragrant. A beguiling grape that produces some of the world's finest wines.

THREE PERFECT PINOTS TO TRY...



667 Noble Vines Pinot Noir
2007 California, USA* (bin 413020, £15.99) Treasured vine stock from Dijon is very much at home in the breezy Monterey region. This soft, juicy red offers light tannins, bright acidity and plenty of fruit flavour.



Nanny Goat Pinot Noir 2017/18
Central Otago, New Zealand (bin 446791, £19.99) The extreme climates of the mountains on the South Island make for interesting reds. This is brimming with wild berry fruits, alongside hints of coffee and sweet toasts.



Domaine Begude Pinot Noir
2018 Languedoc-Roussillon, France** (bin 860319, £11.99) Soft, elegant and bursting with cherries and raspberries, this is a beautifully balanced, organic red. Serve lightly chilled (10-13°C) with lamb or duck. Outstanding value.



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