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# Pinot Noir: What to Know and 8 Bottles to Try

From Burgundy to the Willamette Valley, these are the bottles to drink.

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**H**owever, despite its many redeeming qualities, it's not always smooth sailing with this finicky variety.

On the viticultural side of things, pinot noir is actually quite difficult to grow, as its thin skins make it very susceptible to hazardous climate conditions. In the cellar, the fruit's ultra-delicate juice also makes it highly receptive to vinification and aging techniques, so a meticulous attention to detail is required.

When all things work together for good, pinot noir grapes produce some of the most exquisite, aromatic and thought-provoking wines on the market. As always, knowing what you're getting into and seeking out great producers is the key.

Pinot noir is a red grape variety that creates light- to medium-bodied wines high in acid and low in tannins. The grape is known for being highly temperamental, as it requires lots of attention in the vineyard since it can be prone to rot and disease. Pinot noir gets its name for the French word for pine (pinot), as its clusters grow in the shape of a pine cone, and the French word for black (noir), because of its dark-hued skins.

The **pinot gris (or grigio)** grape is considered to be a mutation of pinot noir, meaning that its DNA profile is exactly identical to that of pinot noir. It's likely that pinot blanc was the original form of pinot and came long before pinot noir, though the latter is more commonly cultivated today.

It's believed that pinot noir comes from France's **Burgundy region**, where it's still widely planted today. Its other notable homes include, but are not limited to, Australia, Austria, Germany (where it's called spatburgunder), New Zealand, the United States (**California**, Oregon and New York's Finger Lakes) and elsewhere in France (Alsace, Champagne and the Loire Valley). Pinot noir is one of the most widely planted red grape varieties around the world.

The grape is vinified in a variety of styles, and its final flavor profile is heavily dependent on where it's grown and the vinification techniques imparted on it. A common practice in pinot noir vinification is whole-cluster fermentation, meaning that the grapes are fermented with their whole bunches (stems and seeds included), as opposed to being destemmed prior to vinification. Most pinot noir wines see some form of oak (generally neutral) during the aging process, though there are plenty of steel-vinified pinots found on the market.

stemmy and herbal flavors. When aged in used woods, notes of cinnamon, vanilla and/or baking spice are common. Overall, pinot noir wines are known for their flavors of cherries, red fruits, mushroom and wet soil.

In New World regions, pinot-noir-based wines tend to be juicier, plumper and fuller-bodied. Their alcohol levels are usually slightly higher and the acid tends to be lower. In Old World regions, pinot noir often takes on more earth-driven notes. Alcohol levels are more moderate, and acidity tends to be higher. As pinot noir ages, more vegetal and “barnyard” notes commonly break through on the palate.

Pinot noir’s high levels of acid and low levels of tannins make it incredibly food-friendly on the table. Traditional pinot pairings include game birds, roasted poultry, casseroles and French-inspired stews, though you should also try these wines with charcuterie, cheese boards and fatty fish such as tuna or salmon. Basically, the world is your oyster here, although we wouldn’t recommend pairing pinot (or any red wine, for that matter) with actual oysters.

These are eight bottles to try.

## Chacra Barda (Patagonia, Argentina)



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This textured and tasty pinot noir is produced from biodynamically farmed fruit in the heart of Argentina’s Patagonia region. Expect layered notes of strawberries, tart raspberries, game, mushrooms and earth on the palate. Chacra is a joint venture between Piero Incisa della Rochetta, of the family behind **Sassicaia**, and renowned Burgundian vigneron Jean-Marc Roulot.