

# Decanter

## (Re)Discovering Pinot Noir: 12 great bottles to try from around the world

Will the elegance and delicacy of Pinot Noir be the next victim of global warming? As alcohol levels rise and wines from classic regions get ever richer, Decanter's Burgundy correspondent Charles Curtis MW looks at alternative sources for great Pinot Noir.



Charles Curtis MW

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Vines at The Eyrie Vineyards, Pinot Noir pioneer in Oregon's Willamette Valley in the 1970s.

Credit: Cannon Photography LLC / Alamy Stock Photo

## Oregon

A logical place to start our search is in Oregon, as the US state has been linked to Pinot Noir since its founding as a wine region in the 1970s. The late David Lett at The Eyrie Vineyards and other pioneers started in the warmer, south-facing slopes of Willamette Valley's Dundee Hills. An alternative to this is the cooler climate found to the south in Eola-Amity Hills AVA, where the vineyards are refreshed by bracing ocean breezes from the Pacific ocean through the Van Duzer gap. Ted Casteel at Bethel Heights was one of the pioneers here in the late 1970s, and his son Ben is still making outstanding wines.

## California



Fort Ross-Seaview AVA in Sonoma, California (see opposite) where elevation and proximity to the sea are just right for cool-climate Pinot. Credit: George Rose / Getty Images

Down the Pacific coast in California, many well-known regions are too warm to consistently deliver the finesse and elegance that lovers of Pinot Noir crave. But even here, elevation and location can provide cooler sites, such as Fort Ross-Seaview. This recent AVA (approved in 2012) exploits both proximity to the cooling breezes of the Pacific and elevation (between 280m and 550m) to deliver wines with delicate body, perfumed red fruit character and a fine line of tannin. Mendocino's Yorkville Highlands AVA is even higher in elevation, with vineyards that reach above 700m.



## New York

New York State is the third largest wine-producing state in the US – more than 140m bottles in 2018, according to WineAmerica – and the (very) cool-climate region of the **Finger Lakes** AVA has begun to produce delicious Pinot Noir in recent years. In this marginal climate, *Vitis vinifera* grapes can only be grown in the pockets of warmth provided by the bodies of water. Still, the best sites can produce magnificent results. A prime example is the Argetsinger vineyard (see **Charles' feature on Ravines Wine Cellars**) on the southeast shore of Seneca Lake, where the retreating glaciers of the last ice age exposed a vein of limestone that makes this a prime area for growing Pinot Noir.

## Patagonia

Parts of Patagonia are as far south of the equator as New York's Finger Lakes region is north. Río Negro, one of Argentina's most southerly wine regions, lies in the northern reaches of Patagonia, and vines are planted along the river in loamy soils at an average elevation of 300m – mostly without grafting, as phylloxera does not pose a significant risk here. Another advantage of the gentle climate and lack of pests is the presence of many old-vine vineyards, giving the wines character and depth. At Bodega Chacra, near General Roca, Piero Incisa della Rocchetta, the young scion of Italy's Sassicaia dynasty, has assembled a collection of vineyards planted from 1932 to 1990. The cool temperatures and long days at 39°S help the grapes to ripen well without losing acidity, enabling producers to deliver wines of great balance and finesse.

## Tasmania

Further south still, at 41°–42°S, but on the western shore of the Pacific, Australia's island state of **Tasmania** is an idyllic, temperate outpost of Australian wine-growing. According to WineRegions Australia (*April 2022*), nearly one third of Tasmania's grapes are grown in the Tamar valley, which hugs the coastline of the Bass Strait that separates Tasmania from the rest of Australia. The powerful westerly winds from the Indian Ocean, known as the Roaring Forties, help make this Australia's coolest region. Pinot Noir is by far the most widely planted grape in Tasmania, occupying more than 40% of the vineyard surface, and the cool climate results in delicious, vibrant wines, both sparkling and still.

## Germany



The Urziger Würzgarten vineyard, Mosel, where Erni Loosen acquired Pinot Noir vines among the much more usual Riesling plantings. Credit: Nigel Blythe / Cephas

Spätburgunder – German for Pinot Noir – is nothing new. Some suggest that it was planted as early as the 4th century. But until 20 years ago, the wines often lacked colour and body and were sometimes bottled slightly sweet. There has been a revolution in style in recent years, however, as the wines become richer and more substantial due to global warming. Spätburgunder is finally finding an international audience, and in 2020 represented 11.3% of the planted surface in Germany (*DWI, 2021/22*). The grape has long been found in the Ahr, Baden, Pfalz and the Rheingau, but it can turn up anywhere: Erni Loosen recently told of buying a parcel of vines in the Mosel vineyard of Urziger Würzgarten that was unexpectedly planted to Spätburgunder. Loosen puts the vines to good use, producing both a sparkling rosé sekt and a red Spätburgunder (not yet released).

## Austria

While much of Austria is devoted to white grapes, red wine is also important, and Pinot Noir plays a part, with its total of nearly 590ha accounting for 1.3% of the country's planted area (*Austrian Wine, July 2022*). Known locally as Blauburgunder, the grape is planted in the Thermenregion around the city of Vienna and in Burgenland in the south. Pinot Noir vineyards are even found in Austria's premier region, the Wachau. Although seldom planted in the most promising sites, Pinot Noir can produce lovely lighter styles of wine here, including rosé wines perfect for summer sipping.

## Italy

Pinot Nero in Italy is primarily grown for sparkling wine production in regions such as Lombardy and Franciacorta. While red wines from Pinot Noir are far from common, the grape has been cultivated since the 19th century in the alpine vineyards of the Alto Adige, also known as Südtirol, where its 522ha represent 9.3% of total area planted (*Vini Alto Adige*). It is grown on terraces cut into the chalky gravel soils south of Bolzano at elevations beginning at 400m, where the high elevation and varied exposures produce a range of different expressions. Respected local

## France



Bollinger's La Côte aux Enfants vineyard is the source of its still red Coteaux Champenois. Credit: Leif Carlsson courtesy of Bollinger



Wine lovers searching for fresh, crisp Pinot Noir should not neglect the full range of expressions available in France. The once-obscure still red wines of **Champagne** (Coteaux Champenois) are quickly gaining ground. Coteaux is produced throughout Champagne, with some of the most delicious examples found on the northern and southern slopes of the Montagne de Reims, where styles range from crisp and fruity to rich, tannic and powerful. Many in the region believe these wines will be the next sensation from Champagne.

In Burgundy, much attention is (deservedly) lavished on the headline villages of the Côte d'Or, but there is good reason to climb to the top of the slope as well. The region known as the Hautes- Côtes (see Curtis' 11 May 2022 feature: **'Finding Value in the Côtes de Nuits'**) is an excellent source for wines of intensity, structure, freshness and value. Domaine Henri Naudin-Ferrand is a perfect example. The domaine is run by Claire Naudin (wife of superstar winemaker Jean-Yves Bizot), who produces an exceptional range of wines from her 22ha, located mainly in the Hautes-Côtes.

Blagny is a notable example of the village appellations at higher elevations. This hamlet is located at the top of the slope at the juncture of Puligny-Montrachet and Meursault. Although most of the vines here have been replanted to **Chardonnay**, 5.3ha of Pinot Noir remains. Boutique négociant Benjamin Leroux farms 1.65ha in Blagny, making him one of the largest producers. He loves the reds from this village, noting the potential as temperatures continue to rise: 'With a small crop, you will be ripe even here – some grapes in 2018 were picked at 14%.'

## Bodega Chacra, Barda Pinot Noir, Patagonia, Argentina 2021

My Wines

### SINGLE TASTING

**Tasted by:** Charles Curtis MW  
(at Oregon, 30 Jun 2022)

94

**Part of (Re)Discovering Pinot Noir:** 12 great bottles to try from around the world

**Drinking Window:** 2022 - 2035

This liltingly fresh Pinot Noir is a world apart from many New World examples, with its high-toned currant and pomegranate fruit, hints of violets and firm minerality, and a purity that is astonishing. The texture is approachably supple, but not lacking depth or structure. The grapes are mostly destemmed, fermented on native yeasts in concrete, and aged in older barrels. The vines are own-rooted and biodynamically farmed. The result is nothing short of revolutionary for Argentinian wine.



Producer	Bodega Chacra
Brand	Barda Pinot Noir
Vintage	2021
Wine Type	Still
Colour	Red
Country	Argentina
Region	Patagonia
Sweetness	Dry
Closure	Cork
Alcohol	12.50%
Body	Medium
Oak	Lightly Oaked
Grapes	100% Pinot Noir / Pinot Nero