



Wine of the week: Pinot noir catches flavors of the Carneros

*BY PEG MELNIK
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT*

Pinot noir is naked.

“The most challenging thing about pinot noir, especially when making a nuanced style like ours, is that the flavor of the wine is very transparent,” said Anthony Truchard II of Truchard Vineyards in Napa. “If it is not well made or grown, you can taste it in the wine. The faults are not hidden by tannins, rich fruit, or excessive oak. The wine is there for everyone to taste its beauty or its faults.”

The second-generation vintner is behind our wine-of-the-week winner – the Truchard, 2012 Carneros, Napa Valley Pinot Noir at \$35.

The crisp pinot wins you over with its breezy approachability. The wine is complex, and yet unfussy. It’s Bing cherry meets bright acidity, and the pinot has great balance, which makes it a smart pick for food pairing.

“Our house style is to make wines that express the true essence of the varietal while highlighting the exceptional and unique expression of Carneros,” Truchard said. “Because my father, (Tony Truchard I) was one of the modern pioneers of Carneros, we really want our wines to express the bright, crisp and clean style for which this appellation is known.”

Truchard said the winery is always shooting for wines with finesse over opulence because it believes that's the true expression of Carneros.

The appellation, at the base of Sonoma County and Napa Valley, was granted American Viticultural Area or AVA-status in 1983. It's best known for making world class pinot noir and chardonnay.

"Pinot noir has gone through a lot of changes in the past ten years," Truchard said. "It used to be a wine that was sought out by wine geeks looking for something different and unusual. Now pinot noir is much more popular."

Truchard said there are two main, popular styles of pinot noir in the U.S. One is the traditional style that more closely resembles burgundy. It's more aromatic and slightly earthy with notes of red fruits like strawberry, cranberry, and raspberries. A style has also arisen in the past 10 years that is more rich and opulent. The flavors tend toward the darker fruits of plum and blackberries.

The Truchard pinot falls into the first category. "Pinot noir is the most fascinating grape with which to work, both in the vineyards and in the winery," Truchard said. "It is very delicate, always changing, and very finicky. Lots of people make pinot noir, but it can be very difficult to make great pinot noir."

Truchard said the most gratifying part of producing pinot is tasting the effort.

"Since it's the most challenging grape with which to work, tasting it after all the hard work brings a smile to my face every time," Truchard said.

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Wine of the Week: Scouting for the tastiest pinot noirs

Wine writer Peg Melnik had a blind tasting this week of pinot noirs, and most of the wines showed well. Our wine-of-the-week winner is the Truchard, 2012 Carneros, Napa Valley Pinot Noir at \$35. While some contenders scored higher, this tasty pinot noir edged out the competition because it's in good supply and it offers great quality for the price.

TOP PICK

Truchard, 2012 Carneros, Napa Valley Pinot Noir, 14.1 percent alcohol, \$35. ★★★★★ A crisp pinot that wins you over with its breezy approachability. The wine is complex, and yet unfussy. Bing cherry meets bright acidity. Great balance. A smart food pick.

Other impressive wines

Merry Edwards, 2011 Meredith Estate, Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, 14.4 percent, \$57. ★★★★★ 1/2 A pinot with intensity. Aromas and flavors of black cherry, herbs and spice. Has an appealing earthiness. This wine has depth. Top rate.

Small Vines, 2012 Sonoma Coast, Sonoma County Pinot Noir, 13.2 percent, \$55. ★★★★★ This is a tasty pinot noir with complexity. It has generous fruit – raspberry and cherry – and good bones or structure. Great minerality. Impressive.

Rodney Strong, 2012 Russian River Valley, Sonoma County Pinot Noir, 14.5 percent, \$25. ★★★★★ An elegant pinot noir with layered flavors. What's most appealing is its bright cherry fruit and its silky texture. There's also a tasty note of vanilla in the mix. A smart pick.

Edna Valley, 2011 Paragon Central Coast Pinot Noir, 13.9 percent, \$20. ★★★★★ 1/2 A tasty pinot with aromas and flavors of cherry, plum, pomegranate and spicy oak. Budget-savvy for the quality of this pinot.