

BY ROBERT PARKER

These Pinot Noirs Live Up to the Hype

THANKS TO THE 2004 MOVIE *Sideways*, pinot noir has become absurdly popular. Truth be told, most of this wine, whether domestic or imported, is of little interest and often overpriced. The following wineries' pinot noirs, however, display the true glories of this grape. All are from the 2004 vintage in California's Santa Rita Hills, the wine country northwest of Santa Barbara where the film takes place.

Sea Smoke Cellars Botella

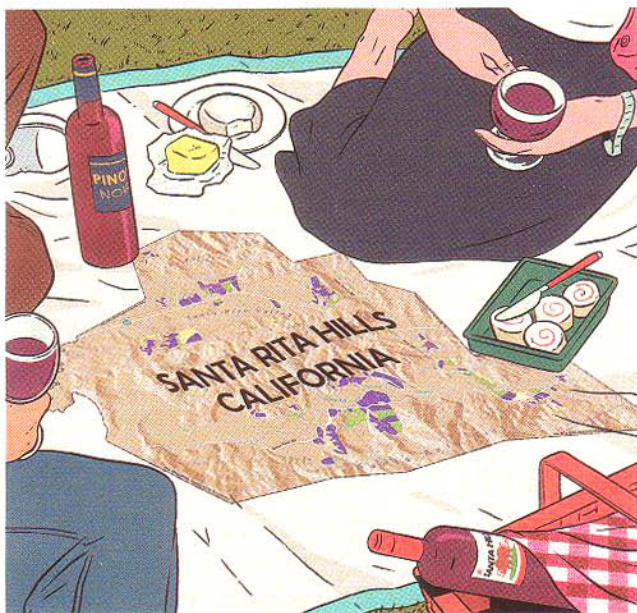
92 points. A dense ruby/purple hue is accompanied by aromas of black currants, black cherries, and a hint of flowers. Full body, sweet tannin, enough acidity to provide freshness and definition, and a textured, savory mouthfeel give this wine an early charm that makes it enjoyable now. Still, this pinot noir possesses enough concentration and length to last for a decade. \$30

Foley Estate Rancho Santa Rosa

90 points. Cherry, plum, and pomegranate characteristics are present in this well-made, medium-bodied effort. With an enticingly plush texture, it represents California's version of a top-notch Beaune premier cru from Burgundy. \$38

Hartley-Ostini Hitching Post Rio Vista Vineyard

92 points. This pinot noir is a brilliant effort exhibiting aromas of flowers and forest floor intermixed with black cherries, plums, and currants. It's a complex, medium- to full-bodied wine with a deep ruby/purple color, sweet tannin, and enough acidity to provide zest and focus. It is a charming, seductive beauty to enjoy over the next five to seven years. \$40



Melville Clone 115 Indigène

95 points. Sweet forest floor, jammy cherry, strawberry, and a hint of blueberry-like aromas roar from the glass of this full-bodied wine. With fabulous intensity, as well as purity, and brilliant nuances, richness, and depth, it is a classic Santa Rita Hills pinot noir to drink over the next five to six years. \$42

Foxen Vineyard Sea Smoke Vineyard

96 points. This pinot noir's ruby/purple color and its intense, glorious perfume of sweet kirsch, black currants, flowers, and underbrush suggest a wine built for the

long haul. Tremendous opulence, richness, and intensity in addition to a dazzling finish with great flavor precision result in one of the finest Central Coast pinot noirs I have ever tasted. It can be enjoyed over the next decade. \$64

Brewer-Clifton Melville Vineyard

95 points. First you notice a deep ruby color, and then you pick up wonderful aromas of forest floor, strawberry jam, black cherries, and flowers. In the mouth, notions of plums, cloves, and sweet cherries are presented in a broad, savory style with enormous richness and concentration but no sense of heaviness. This offering should drink well for 10 or more years. \$64

Sine Qua Non Covert Fingers Arita Hills Vineyard

95 points. A knockout effort, this deep ruby/purple/plum-tinged pinot exhibits a slightly restrained nose, revealing sweet cranberry and cassis aromas interwoven with hints of flowers, charcoal, and oak, a savory, broad texture, and an opulent, voluptuous finish. This beauty should drink well for at least a decade, probably longer. \$75

Robert Parker is the world's most influential wine critic. Visit eRobertParker.com to see tens of thousands of tasting notes, buy his books, or subscribe to his newsletter, *The Wine Advocate*.

Wines rated from 96-100 are extraordinary; 90-95, excellent; 80-89, above average to very good. For more Parker picks, go to businessweek.com/extras