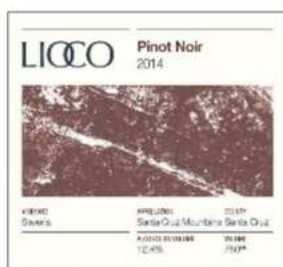


YEAR'S BEST US PINOT NOIR

Our blind panels tasted **1,062** new-release US pinot noirs over the past 12 months. Our critics rated **135** as exceptional (90+) and **26** as Best Buys. **Luke Sykora** reviews the wines of California; **Patrick J. Comiskey** covers Oregon.

Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

CALIFORNIA



96 | Lioco \$52
2014 Santa Cruz Mountains Saveria Vineyard Pinot Noir This is the Lioco team's third vintage working with this sandy site with a view of Monterey Bay, and it's an unforgettable wine. Its leafy raspberry aroma catches the redwood essence of the coast, while its flinty reduction and firm tannins are as imposing as its aromas are enticing. When he first tasted it, Joshua Thomas of SF's *Octavia* said, "You can tell it's going to go somewhere." And it does: With two days of air, its effusive coastal perfume grows more vivid and concentrated, while its stony structure focuses the red fruit into a weightless beam that has the clarity of a delicious Chambolle. Decant one bottle now, and keep a few more in the cellar for five or six years. (W&S 10/16; 240 cases) *Lioco, Santa Rosa, CA*

96 | Tessier \$42
2014 Santa Cruz Mountains Saveria Vineyard Pinot Noir Like the 2014 Lioco Saveria (above), this has a sense of foggy delicacy, the scent you might find while hiking in coastal California just as the sun rises. That precise parallel in the wines is a rare experience in California, where winemaking variables often result in radically different takes on the same vineyard. Saveria—a sandy, fog-cooled site on the Pacific side of the Santa Cruz Mountains, just north of Monterey Bay—may have a vineyard expression that overrides winemaking. Or maybe Lioco's John Raytek and Tessier's Kristie Tacey made similar decisions in the 2014 vintage. In any case,

what you get is a powerful argument that site matters here. This is diaphanous and exhilarating; it's intense, but the flavors settle and cohere rather than explode: strawberry, raspberry, leafy complexity and the earthy tang of rooibos tea all come together in a numinous coastal pinot noir. (W&S 2/17; 140 cases) *Tessier Winery, Healdsburg, CA*



95 | Cobb \$75
2014 Sonoma Coast Emmaline Ann Vineyard Pinot Noir I wasn't sure "infusive" was an actual word when I wrote it down after tasting this astonishing pinot noir made by Ross Cobb. In fact, it is a word: "Having the power or quality of infusion," according to my musty old two-volume *Webster's*. This comes from a foggy, shady site planted on sandy Goldridge soil, not far from Sebastopol—and the wine does seem to infuse the senses with an aromatic fog that you can almost walk around in, noting a spray of juniper, a lattice full of roses, the cool moisture of the soil. There's a tightness to the structure that will reward aging, but the impression is one of inner strength rather than weight. (310 cases) *Cobb Wines, Occidental, CA*



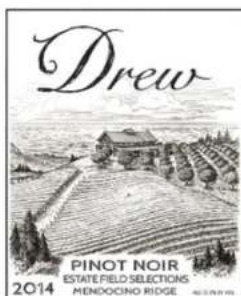
95 | Cobb \$75
2013 Sonoma Coast Jack Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir This tiny, isolated two-acre vineyard near Freestone is bordered on all sides by coastal evergreens. Its sandstone-based soils grew some beautiful fruit in 2013.

Ross Cobb's even hand coaxed that fruit into a pinot noir with a diaphanous clarity that might make you hold your breath, if you didn't want to keep smelling the wine: a hint of strawberry, the airy leafiness of oolong tea, the lift of rose petals. It has a quiet but captivating persistence, nothing excessive, nothing missing—the vinous equivalent of a Basho haiku. (W&S 10/16; 200 cases) *Cobb Wines, Occidental, CA*

95 | Hirsch \$60
2012 Sonoma Coast San Andreas Fault Pinot Noir Representing both the fog-cooled western ridges of the Hirsch estate and the slightly sunnier inland ridges, this is a particularly tense, energetic pinot noir from coastal Sonoma. The wine's flavor and structure are almost indistinguishable, its sandy grip delivering cool, pristine, penetrating flavors of rosy spice and tilled soil. It remains firm and bright even with three days of air, a testament to the maturity of the vines that grew the wine, some of which were part of David Hirsch's initial planting in 1980. Let its lean power unwind for a few years before opening it with something as simple as a roast chicken, allowing the wine to take center stage. (W&S 6/16; 2,098 cases) *Hirsch Winery, Cazadero, CA*

94 | Buena Vista \$48
2014 Russian River Valley Bela's Selection Pinot Noir Brian Maloney makes this pinot noir primarily from three vineyards in the cool Sebastopol Hills, sites defined by thin soils, steep slopes and windy weather. This feels like the quintessence of Russian River Valley fruit: a lush, satiny, perfectly formed red cherry flavor that goes on and on, presenting the region's richness with admirable subtlety. A day of air only clarifies its refinement, bringing out a deliciously crunchy, near-mineral freshness—think wild cherry skin. It may take on more complexity with four or five years of age but it's hard to resist right now. (W&S 2/17; 1,173 cases) *Buena Vista Winery, Santa Rosa, CA*

94 | Cobb \$75
2014 Sonoma Coast Rice-Spivak Vineyard Pinot Noir Like the Emmaline Ann recommended here, this comes from a vineyard planted on Goldridge soil near Sebastopol; this site has a bit more volcanic material and a cool northern exposure. While many coastal pinots from northern California have a foresty aspect to them, this wine seems particularly leafy and delicate, with a cool fruit character that feels as refreshing as iced tea—you can almost imagine beads of condensation on the glass. It's a touch lean right now, needing some age or an hour in a decanter to allow its bright red fruit tones to emerge and throw a layer of silky finesse over its savory spine. (310 cases) *Cobb Wines, Occidental, CA*



94 | Drew \$60
2014 Mendocino Ridge Estate Field Selections Pinot Noir This is the first vintage from the vineyard that Jason and Molly Drew planted in 2011, the vines growing on a site chosen for its marine sedimentary soils amenable to dry farming and its exposure to cool ocean air—you can actually see the blue Pacific from the vineyard. The vines may be young, but the sense of place in this wine is vibrant and invigorating. With its spruce-tip and peppercorn aromas and tart Satsuma plum flavor, it feels as close to Jason Drew's brilliant Mendocino Ridge syrahs as his Anderson Valley pinot noirs: all dark, crunchy, windswept firmness. (If you're familiar with bold, mineral-driven gamays from Morgon's Côte de Py, your thoughts might drift in that direction.) It doesn't feel like a wine that's "made," just a direct expression of an edgy vineyard site and its mouth-watering, deliciously ripened fruit. (W&S 10/16; 149 cases) *Drew Family Cellars, Elk, CA*

94 | Hirsch \$85
2013 Sonoma Coast East Ridge Pinot Noir "Evenly paced," Kelly Evans of *Oro* in San Francisco said. That might not sound like an over-the-moon compliment, but in fact the entire tasting panel was entranced by the stately beauty of this wine, which

comes from vines planted in the 1990s on the warmer inland side of the Hirsch estate. It does feel evenly paced, with cool aromas and flavors that are bright red at one moment—currants and blood oranges—then foresty, like California bay. But the texture is what's most impressive—it manages to feel weightless yet potent, with a gravity-defying fragrance that glides on and on. It's a precise, definitive Sonoma Coast pinot noir to cellar for five years or more. (W&S 8/16; 459 cases) *Hirsch Winery, Cazadero, CA*



94 | Storm \$55
2014 Sta. Maria Valley Presqu'île Vineyard Pinot Noir Given the warmth of the 2014 vintage, Ernst Storm decided to pick the fruit from this vineyard unusually early, on August 14. He seems to have caught the grapes at ideal ripeness—grown in sandy soil, the own-rooted vines at Presqu'île yielded a supremely delicate and lacy pinot noir. It's a quiet wine, but it commands attention with aromas of lavender and wintergreen that sound a cool note despite the hot, dry weather. It finishes with energetic acidity more than tannins, a sensation like pomegranate seeds bursting on the tongue. Drink it with roasted monkfish. (W&S 6/16; 200 cases) *Storm Wines, Los Olivos, CA*

93 | Domaine de la Côte \$45
2014 Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir Rajat Parr and Sashi Moorman farm several former Evening Land vineyards, planted in 2007 in the far western Santa Rita Hills. You can taste the extremity of these cool, windy sites in the wine: a salty crunch, the acidity bright and appetizing, like biting into pomegranate seeds, the aromas clean and invigorating, like rosemary and borage. It's a coastal match for white fish, like halibut or sea bass. (W&S 10/16) *Domaine de la Côte, Lompoc, CA*

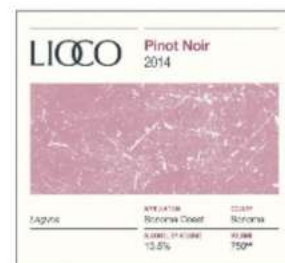
93 | Hirsch \$38
2014 Sonoma Coast The Bohan-Dillon Pinot Noir Hirsch's entry-level cuvée used to include grapes sourced from a few neighbors who also grow pinot noir on Sonoma's coastal ridges, but it has been made exclusively from estate fruit since 2012. This

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might be the best vintage yet. It's reduced at first but with air the wine fully engages, filling the senses with the ethereal perfume of far-coast pinot noir: think hibiscus, orange zest and cherry bark. Okay, maybe it lacks the structural underpinnings of the greatest old-vine wines from the Hirsch estate. Still, it's a crisp, effortless wine to decant now, or save for another two or three years. (W&S 8/16; 668 cases) *Hirsch Winery, Cazadero, CA*

93 | Hirsch \$85
2013 Sonoma Coast Reserve Pinot Noir The Reserve is an annual selection of some of the Hirsch team's favorite barrels, usually from older blocks on the estate's coastal ridges. In the past, it has often been defined by power, but in 2013 the Reserve is perhaps the most fine and delicate of the estate's wines, with high-toned citrus zest and rosehip aromas and a greener herbal edge. It's light and feathery, brightening with air, and though its fine-boned structure won't preserve it forever, it will provide plenty of vivid coastal refreshment for at least the next four or five years. (W&S 8/16; 633 cases) *Hirsch Winery, Cazadero, CA*

93 | Husch \$25
2014 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir (Best Buy) Sourced from six vineyards throughout Anderson Valley, this has to be one of the most place-driven California pinot noirs you'll find for less than \$30. It's a classic cool-climate Anderson Valley wine, full of brisk red fruit and appetizing floral and coniferous scents, its flavors silky and long. Buy two bottles—as once your guests finish off the first, they're likely to ask for another. (W&S 2/17) *H. A. Oswald Family, Philo, CA*



93 | Lioco \$38
2014 Sonoma Coast Laguna Pinot Noir (Best Buy) Lioco winemaker John Raytek blended this from two sites planted on sandy Goldridge soil: Teac Mor, a low-lying vineyard near the Laguna de Santa Rosa flood plain, the other on Burnside Road, higher up in the western hills and closer to the coast. This has a tight, stony structure that speaks