

# An Entrée to Oregon Pinot Noir

## EARLY-RELEASE BOTTlings PAVE THE WAY FOR RESERVES

by Meg Houston Maker

It's no secret that Oregon makes great Pinot Noir. Since the pioneering plantings in the 1960s, the grape has become something of the state's vinous signature. But with premium Pinots ranging from \$40 to way, way up, customers new to the style face hurdles.

Fortunately, many top producers also bottle early-release wines with prices starting in the teens. These deliver Pinot character, crystalline freshness and vintage expression—at friendly prices.

"In recent years, many wineries have upped their game with their Willamette Valley blends," says Brian Price, Wine Director for fine dining farm-to-table restaurant Clarklewis in Portland, Oregon. Price sees these entry-level wines offering customers "a delightful, interesting and captivating wine at a price point that is still affordable."

Jared Hayes agrees. He's Wine Buyer and Bar Manager at Papa Haydn and Jo Rotisserie & Bar, two properties in Portland also highlighting seasonal Northwest ingredients. "Entry-level Oregon Pinot Noir plays a pretty central part to our lists," he says, "It's from where we're from, and it's world-class."

These wines provide an entrée to the category, helping him sell more Oregon Pinot overall. "People get to know their favorite producers, their favorite profiles, their favorite AVAs and are able to experiment in many different trajectories before deciding to take a larger financial leap down the Reserve road," Hayes says.

And they're food-friendly, too, proving flexible partners to diverse cuisines. Some of Hayes's favorite recent matches include pork shank cassoulet with the earthy, dark-fruited Broadley Vineyards and pan seared duck breast with the red-cherry acidity of Elk Cove.

"I think I could pair an entire menu using entirely entry-level Oregon Pinot Noir," Hayes says, but they also work beautifully alone, complementing the bar program. "Being able to offer these wines by the glass improves the food, the dining experience and the geographical experience of Oregon for our guests."

Given such quality and versatility, it's hard to call them entry-level. But it's easy to call them delicious. ■■



**Erath 2014 Pinot Noir, Oregon (\$19)** Its floral scent is tinged with juniper and clove, while suggestions of saturated pomegranate and cured meat add complexity. Versatile.



**A to Z Wineworks 2014 Pinot Noir, Oregon (\$19)** Light-hearted and zippy, with a fragrance of tangerine and Mandarin orange and sweet raspberry fruit. Try it with sushi or sashimi.



**Broadley Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$20)** A quiet perfume of flowers and spice leads to a bracing pop of dark cherry-cranberry. Pair it with salmon.



**Cooper Mountain Vineyards 2013 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$25)** Minty breezes drift above sharp strawberry and currant fruit, but it darkens pleasingly with air. Best with poultry or pork.



**Anne Amie Vineyards 2014 Winemaker's Selection Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$25)** Cranberry scented and keynoted by tart berry fruits with a wintergreen finish, but its savoriness ties it to rich cuts.



**Ponzi Vineyards 2014 Tavola Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$27)** Earthy, with notes of sundried tomato, forest and spice. Pair it with the braised, smoked or roasted.



**Elk Cove Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$29)** A concentrated style redolent of tobacco and cinnamon. Red cherry and plum lighten it. Great by the glass.



**Roco 2014 Gravel Road Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$30)** Hibiscus, beach roses and sweet cherries adorn a silken body; elegant but with substance to balance rich fare.



**Adelsheim 2014 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley (\$32)** A minty wine with fruit skewing to cranberry and ripe tomato, but its structure and density let it pair widely.