



Client: JP Ramos
Source: The Times
Date: 13/09/2014

Keyword: Marques de Borba
Page: 13
Reach: 398603
Size: 562
Value: 17129.76

New World pinot noir comes of age

Jane MacQuitty



Where can you buy good red burgundy for under a tenner? The answer is you can't. With the past three Burgundy harvests, including this year's, decimated by severe hailstorms, prices are on the up and yields are down. What makes it worse is that the wily pinot noir grape is a devil to grow and vinify. Early budding and ripening means spring frost and winter cold can ruin a crop, while the thin-skinned pinot noir grape and its small, tightly packed bunches are prey to all manner of pests and diseases, with rot and mildew a big problem. To cap it all, that elusive, ethereal, pale pinot noir personality, reminiscent of strawberries, plums, game and truffles — and which, in the hands of a good Burgundian winemaker in a good vintage, reflects the terroir of each Côte d'Or village and plot — often refuses to do the same elsewhere. Or, as Colin Ross, Seresin's viticulturist, noted with admirable understatement recently: "It sulks pretty quickly."

Pinot noir remains the holy grail for the world's winemakers, though, and fortunately a fair few have pulled it off. What's essential for tasty pinot noir is lots of hands-on TLC in the vineyard and cellar, plus a cool — but not too cool — long, dry, growing season. California was one of the first New World regions to crack pinot noir, with some admittedly

dark, beefy, Marmite-scented but nonetheless authentic reds produced from the early Eighties on. Much of

California is too hot really for pinot noir, but the shift to cooler coastal areas, where fog rolls in from the Pacific and chills the vines, has brought with it some cracking pinot noir. Oregon is another prime US pinot noir source but, alas, like California, there's nothing for under a tenner here.

Chilean pinot noir has been on an upward roll since the early Nineties, when Cono Sur pioneered the variety. Again it's the cooler Pacific coastal areas where the grape thrives and Cono Sur's still surprisingly classy Central Valley 2013 Bicicleta Pinot Noir delivers sufficient ripe, spicy damson plum fruit for just a fiver at Asda (Co-op £5.99; Morrison's, £6.59; Tesco £6.99). If you must spend less then go back to southern France for the bold, sweet, plum-packed Vignobles Roussellet Pinot Noir (Aldi, £4.39), topped up with a dash of merlot.

Elsewhere in the New World, Australia's coolest regions again make a good stab at this grape with Asda's 2012 Extra Special Yarra Valley from De Bortoli crammed with rich, leafy, spiced strawberry fruit for £7.98. Otherwise New Zealand is the place to go with great pinot noirs from both islands. If Seresin is beyond your budget (see this week's keeper), try Marlborough's fine 2010 Herringbone Hills Pinot Noir (Majestic, £12.99 or 2 for £8.66 each), which oozes authentic, mature, pale garnet, leafy, gamey, truffle-scented spice.

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This week's best buys



2013 Finest Argentina Malbec, Mendoza
Tesco, down to £6.99 until September 23
 You'll need a big, juicy steak to tame this burly, spiced red fruits of a malbec from Catena, Argentina's first and still best malbec producer.



2011 Finest Saint Mont, Plaimont, France
Tesco, down to £5.49 until September 23
 Gascony's glorious, ripe, floral, apricot, guava and spiced peach-scented gros manseng, topped up with petit courbu and arrufiac, makes a terrific summer into autumn white.



2013 Marques de Borba, Alentejo, Portugal
Tanners (01743 234500), £8.95
 Scoop up this well-priced, aromatic, squeaky-clean, new-wave Portuguese white, with lots of fresh, herby, honeysuckle-scented fruit.



2011 Kerpen Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Kabinett, Germany
Tanners, £11.60
 Mark autumn's arrival with an apéritif glass of a racy, off-dry, mineral, stone-fruit and kerosene-spiked 8.5 per cent Mosel riesling such as this one.

The keeper



2011 Seresin Rachel Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand
Wine Society (01438 741177) £20; Handford (020 7589 6113) and Armit (020 7908 0655), £23.99
 Finicky film-maker turned winemaker Michael Seresin claims to be "just the handprint on the label and the bank", but his six sublime pinot noirs reject the claim. Rachel, named after his mother, is a blend of their three vineyards' best fruit, aged partly in new French oak for more than a year, it is as close to a village-level burgundy as you'll get in the New World. I adored its rich, smoky, textured plum and game fruit, with that umami-lick on the finish that is the Seresin signature. Great now, but even finer in four years' time.



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The pinot noir grape