

CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIR

Our blind panels tasted 429 California pinot noirs for this issue. Our critics recommended 123 as exceptional, and 21 as Best Buys. Joshua Greene covers California's North Coast; Patrick J. Comiskey covers the rest of California. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

CENTRAL COAST

93 | Stephen Ross \$72
2021 Edna Valley Stone Corral Vineyard Pinot Noir Stone Corral is an extreme coastal vineyard jointly owned by Stephen Ross Dooley, the Othmans (of Kynsi) and the Talley family. The fruit of vines now 22 years old, Dooley's take on the vineyard is a pleasingly savory pinot with scents of cut tobacco and smokehouse meats, pepper and plum. There is a satisfying, thick-skinned intensity to the fruit, plummy, dense, balanced and very ageable. (125 cases) —P.J.C.

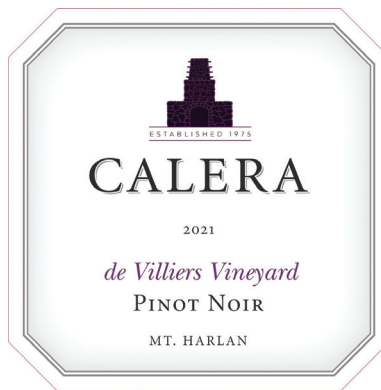
91 | Calera \$35
2022 Central Coast Pinot Noir A bright and brilliant red in the glass, this has an herbal scent of tobacco, its black cherry fruit wooly and rich. The flavors are forward but balanced, with juicy intensity for duck. —P.J.C.

91 | Stephen Ross \$30
2021 San Luis Obispo Coast Pinot Noir (BEST BUY) This wine's scents of raspberry cordial have a hint of turf in the background, which brings some savor. It's firm and on point, with edgy tannins and decent acidity. A lot of wine for the price. (696 cases) —P.J.C.

90 | Tolosa \$150
2021 San Luis Obispo Coast Primera Edna Ranch A barrel selection of the best lots from the Edna Ranch estate, this wine is clearly built for the future in its dark oak tones, leading with deep caramel notes and impressive richness. The flavors are deep but balanced, the dark cherry notes have an earthy, cocoa-dust firmness. It's a substantial wine to cellar. (565 cases) —P.J.C.

MONTEREY

95 | Calera \$95
2021 Mt. Harlan Ryan Pinot Noir Here are the 2021s from Calera's monopole on Mt. Harlan, quite possibly the winery's best bottlings since Josh Jensen sold the brand to Duckhorn in 2017. Made by Jensen's protégé, Mike Waller, all of the 2021s, from separate parcels on Mt. Harlan, seem related but different, sometimes dramatically so. Ryan is a 13-acre parcel, some 2,500 feet above sea level; the vines here now more than 20 years old. Upon first whiff you'll contend with conflicting impressions, the luminous, saturated red fruit flavors, somewhere between plum and cherry, and the dusty chaparral notes — olive leaf, herb oil, the scent of garrigue in the wind. Like all of the Mt. Harlan '21s, the structure is beautiful, firmly planted tea tannins with a subtle power and stony frame, generous and complex and magnificently proportioned. (1,070 cases) —P.J.C.



95 | Calera \$95
2021 Mt. Harlan de Villiers Pinot Noir The de Villiers block is named for Marq de Villiers, author of "The Heartbreak Grape," which, in its time, was the definitive guide to pinot noir in California. Planted in 1997, the block produced a heady, plummy, vinous wonder in 2021. Its clove, cinnamon and generous black cherry scents carry plenty of oak character...and yet the rich, mouthcoating flavors never overreach. The wine's tensile strength handles the heft without effort. This feels like it could age 30 years if you can keep your hands off it. (988 cases) —P.J.C.

94 | Calera \$125
2021 Mt. Harlan Jensen Pinot Noir From the property's oldest vines, planted in 1979, Jensen is all turf and garrigue when first poured, opening to scents of chaparral, and bowlful of red cherries. The flavors are dusty and tense, with dark red fruits and layers of limestone-inflected mineral tannins, powerful, gripping, and long. (620 cases) —P.J.C.

93 | Calera \$95
2021 Mt. Harlan Reed Pinot Noir Reed, a six acre parcel planted in 1975, carries its old-vine savor into the glass, with its scents of mushroom and dusty ash, earth, clove and mace. It's splendidly fleshy, composed in its savory realms, structured like an earthen dam to hold the warm red fruits. It's got the stuff to age. (426 cases) —P.J.C.

92 | Big Basin \$60
2021 Gabilan Mountains Coastview Vineyard Pinot Noir Intensely vinous, this wine's whole-cluster, plum-tea scents have a violet hue, with the florals to match. The flavors aren't so much ripe as sun-kissed, juicy and supple, the tannins firm enough to wrestle with flank steak. (117 cases) —P.J.C.

92 | Calera \$54
2021 Monterey County Chalona Vineyard Pinot Noir Scents of cinnamon and ginger, along with a dusting of warm earth leads in this stylish pinot. It's rich and heady with just a wisp of oak, balanced by brilliant red cherry fruit, reminiscent of the Mt. Harlan wines, in a warmer iteration. (209 cases) —P.J.C.

91 | Big Basin \$55
2021 Chalona Rodnick Farm Vineyard Pinot Noir From an organic property on the western slopes of the Gabilan Range, this is foresty, with an earthy raspberry scent. The flavors are juicy and savory, as if pine and redwood oils had drifted on salt-laden winds from the coast. It's got plenty of sun-warmed berry fruit, ending dry. (245 cases) —P.J.C.

91 | Wente \$50
2021 Arroyo Seco Aly's Pinot Noir This pinot's scent of cranberry and red raspberry has a smoky top note. The flavors hint at

California Pinot Noir

91 | Foxen \$37
2020 Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir (BEST BUY) From its scents of mulled wine, jammy cherry skin and mocha to its fleshy, darkly spicy suite of flavors, this wine brings the mellow benefits of a few years in bottle. It's sweet and supple, dark cherries and spice with a seductive contour for game, like quail. (3,300 cases)—P.J.C.

91 | Foxen \$65
2020 Santa Maria Valley Solomon Hills Vineyard Pinot Noir Vinous and smoky when first poured, this tobacco-scented pinot noir has a controlled power, its flavors earthy with dark plum and cherry skin accents. A big-shouldered red for pork loin. (528 cases)—P.J.C.

91 | Lucas & Lewellen \$38
2019 Santa Maria Valley Goodchild High 9 Pinot Noir (BEST BUY) From a block planted 25 years ago on highest nine acres Louis Lucas farms, this is vinous and smoky, grounded by earthy savor, its cherry notes framed by assertive fruit-skin tannins. Ready to drink with a rare lamb chop. —P.J.C.

91 | Foxen \$68
2020 Santa Maria Valley Julia's Vineyard Pinot Noir This grows at the Jackson family's benchland vineyard at Cambria, where a number of wineries source fruit for their vineyard designates. Foxen's interpretation leads with smoke and crushed flower petals, followed by a crowd-pleasing richness. With air it becomes pure and lifted, still plump but elegant and seamless. (350 cases)—P.J.C.

STA. RITA HILLS

96 | Deovlet \$60
2021 Sta. Rita Hills Sanford & Benedict Pinot Noir Ever since he founded his winery in 2008, Ryan Deovlet has talked about transparency as his goal in his single-vineyard pinot noirs. What does that even mean? It's an exceptional character you'll find in both his 2021 his Sanford & Benedict and Zotovich bottlings—translucent, luminous, delicate but firm. The Sanford & Benedict Vineyard is distinguished from Zotovich by more clay on the site, by own-rooted old-vine fruit, by the slope and the aspect—all of which seem to contribute an additional structural element, more spring, more sinew, more connective tissue, and, likely, some additional aging potential. At both vineyards, Deovlet's picking decisions

were inspired, the wines retaining thrilling tension while remaining full of flavor and expression. (155 cases)—P.J.C.

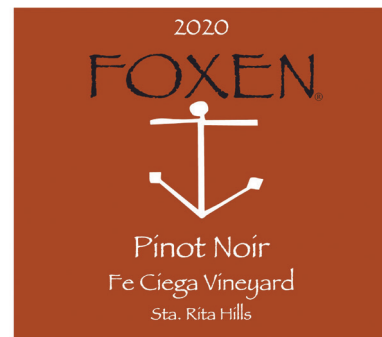
95 | Deovlet \$60
2021 Sta. Rita Hills Zotovich Pinot Noir Tasted blind in a lineup of six Sta. Rita Hills pinots—all delicious, demonstrative, full of regional character—the spectacular 2021 from Zotovich Vineyard stood out in its transparency, luminosity, clarity. Its immensity of flavor is conveyed without weight in a kind of transcendent weave, a bright and lacey texture. The aromas are vinous, smoky, with delicate cranberry and red cherry notes, the texture lively and layered. The wine has a gossamer delicacy and tensile strength, the fruit not so much a flavor but a light, emitted. (145 cases)—P.J.C.

94 | Calera \$54
2021 Sta. Rita Hills Sanford & Benedict Pinot Noir This is Calera's first release of a wine from this classic vineyard; winemaker Mike Waller takes on the challenge with aplomb. Slow to rouse, it has a quiet scent of spiced cherry and cinnamon before it reveals a rich red robe of dark cherry fruit, becoming more full-throated with air. The pliant texture is saturated with mineral tannins that hint at a long life, though it would sing for duck confit right now. (158 cases)—P.J.C.

94 | Domaine de la Côte \$150
2022 Sta. Rita Hills La Côte Pinot Noir This is, perhaps the most earthbound of all the DDLG wines in 2021. It rather wallows in its complex earth tones in a kind of redolent splendor, feral as the bloomy rind of goat cheese and amply supported by dark berry fruit, so tightly woven and compact it seems like the proper definition of the word 'core' for its depth and composure. Finished by earthy tannins, it's fascinating now, but is clearly built to age. (368 cases)—P.J.C.

94 | Melville \$72
2022 Sta. Rita Hills Sandy's Block Pinot Noir Named for Chad Melville's aunt, Sandy's Block is set on nearly pure sand on the property's northeast reaches, and like much Sta. Rita fruit grown on sand, this is pure, lucid and forthright. It leads with a heady perfume, scents of gingerbread, clove and ground cinnamon. It's big at first but settles beautifully after a day, open in attack and midpalate, squared off nicely by the tannins, giving a kind of chewy intensity that hints at the wine's ageability. —P.J.C.

93 | Foxen \$65
2020 Sta. Rita Hills La Encantada Vineyard Pinot Noir From a vineyard planted by Richard Sanford west of Sanford & Benedict, this pinot feels both windswept and quiet when first poured, giving off dried cherry and dried flowers scents. The palate though is rich, ballasted by a mellow weight, soft, silky and balanced, with suede-like tannins for roast chicken. (249 cases)—P.J.C.



93 | Foxen \$75
2020 Sta. Rita Hills Fe Ciega Vineyard Pinot Noir Smoky and hemmed in nicely by scents of stem spice and sea greens, this wine has a smoked berry sweetness to its savor. Composed and firmly constructed, the texture feels taut and focused, with lovely detail. This has cool presence, a fine companion for a salmon bowl. (224 cases)—P.J.C.

93 | Melville \$76
2022 Sta. Rita Hills Block M Pinot Noir The higher elevation of this parcel exposes it to more wind and salt air than much of the rest of the Melville estate, resulting in a brooding red, robust in dark berry aromatics and whole-cluster scents. The flavors of plum, tea and balsamic build on the wine's ample extract and stuffing to guarantee a long life. —P.J.C.

90 | Montemar \$54
2017 Sta. Rita Hills La Encantada Vineyard Pinot Noir Montemar's bottling from La Encantada has a tobacco and fruit leather scent, with flavors that accentuate the savor of dried fruit. It's a good foil for sous-vide, fennel-spiced pork loin. (48 cases)—P.J.C.

93 | Montemar \$65
2017 Sta. Rita Hills Radian Vineyard Pinot Noir Montemar's approach, long bottle age and late releases, works wonders with a vineyard like Radian, so close to the Pacific, with flavors so cool and slow to develop. This is