

BLIND

TASTING

with Deborah Parker Wong

Anderson Valley's Pinot



Many Anderson Valley Pinot Noir producers time the commercial release of their wines around the annual Pinot Noir Festival and technical seminar, now in its sixteenth year. This year's event took place in May, and some 40 producers poured their wines at Goldeneye Winery in Philo. As vintages go, 2010 and 2011 challenged producers in more ways than one. Yields were down in 2010 by as much as 30 percent due to a blast of heat in August. Fruit that wasn't scorched that year ripened, but not overly, resulting in wines with good acidity and flavors. A wet 2011 had many producers scrambling to pick before October rains intensified pressure from botrytis.



While Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs can be roughly sorted as one of two broadly-defined wine styles we'll call "fragrant and sleek" and "bold and deep," the string of cooler La Niña vintages that started in 2009 and continued through 2011 has closed the gap somewhat on that divide. With more generous vintages such as 2012 and 2013, which is shaping as warm and dry, headed our way, it's time to ponder the merits of the wines produced during this cooler cycle.

For this review, a group of new releases made their way to our office to be bagged and numbered by a helper and then put up for scrutiny. Generously aromatic and medium-bodied, the wines that merited inclusion speak volumes about the overall quality of Pinot Noir that's being grown in Alexander Valley.

Try your hand at guessing which wine is being described below:

1. Root beer, sassafras, cinnamon, pure and bright with tart cherry and black spice. \$42
2. Black cherry, cola, cedar, dusty leather and vanilla with savory black cherry skin and spicy tannins. \$40
3. Red fruits, cinnamon, cola, leaner with cardamom-spiced plummy fruit that's persistent and lengthy. \$46
4. Vanilla-infused, expressive red fruit that's nearly jammy with a flourish of menthol on finish. \$32
5. Floral with sweet black cherry, leather, black tea and weighty, black-peppered tannins. \$50
6. Black raspberry, tobacco, dried herbs, lifted strawberry and dark spice on the finish. \$49
7. Strawberry, star anise, leather, orange rind with focused mid-palate and dark, spicy, mineral finish. \$23

The Reveal



1. Copain Wines, Les Voisins 2010; 2. Champs de Réves 2011; 3. Fourright, Charles Vineyard 2010; 4. Claudia Springs, Klindt Vineyard 2010; 5. La Crema 2010; 6. Twomey 2011; 7. Husch 2010