

Wine Spectator

WineSpectator.com

**OUR EDITORS PICK
THEIR FAVORITES**

**VALUES
FOR
EVERY
BUDGET**

200+
WINES
TO TRY



OREGON PINOT NOIR: ELEGANCE IN 2013

**VALENTINE'S DAY SWEETS
WITH MATCHING WINES**

A MASTER WHISKY BLENDER



James Laube

Senior editor James Laube has been writing about wine since 1978 and for *Wine Spectator* since 1981, using his base in Napa Valley as a starting point for exploring

the wine world. He has written four books about the Golden State's wines and pursued his interest in Southern Hemisphere wine regions with travels in Argentina, New Zealand and South Africa, among his recent sojourns. He is lead taster on California Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

California is delivering a run of strong vintages for its most popular wines. On top of that, the wines are showing marked improvement as producers learn more about their vineyards and tweak styles. The fine-tuning for Cabernet, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir is aimed toward wines with greater density, focus, balance and depth, and away from the riper, richer versions of the previous decade.

If you had to pick one year to focus on for Cabernet and Pinot Noir, 2013 would be your best bet. Napa Valley Cabernet remains the workhorse and the show horse, with a dizzying array of exciting wines from each of the valley's subappellations. The sheer volume of exceptional Cabernets from Napa overshadows strong gains being made in Sonoma; don't lose sight of that in your quest for Cabernet.

Chardonnay has been undergoing its own form of remodeling as vintners focus on trimmer styles emphasizing a little more acidity and more measured oak. Most of the top wines grow in close proximity to the coast; if you remember one region for this wine, make it Sonoma.

Sonoma is also the strongest region when it comes to Pinot Noir. Production for the top wines remains small, but usually at very attractive prices given the quality. The key regions within Sonoma are Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast; Carneros is enjoying a revival, and emerging areas such as Petaluma Gap are making strides. The region that has made the most gains, however, is Santa Lucia Highlands. It too has a growing list of superior wines and a distinctive regional character that emphasizes polished, nuanced flavors.

PINOT NOIR

MORE THAN \$50

Donum Pinot Noir Carneros West Slope 2013

95 | **\$90** | 269 cases made

Anne Moller-Racke considers Donum the ultimate Pinot project; West Slope has risen to the top with steady 95-point-plus ratings.