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Salut: New generation B.C. Pinot Noir a magical autumnal red

The world's fussiest grape variety has captured the imagination of a new generation of B.C. winegrowers, and the early results are impressive.

ANTHONY GISMONDI Updated: September 29, 2017



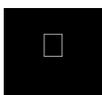
Pinot Noir ripens earlier than any other major red, and that makes it possible to plant it in cooler Okanagan Valley locations, where the results can be extremely captivating. ADAM GIBBS / THE CANADIAN PRESS



There something about the cool, damp, air and the rich autumnal flavours of food in the fall that turns our interest to the magic of Pinot Noir.



Complex, with multiple layers of flavour, Pinot Noir can warm the soul without overwhelming the palate, and it can deal with the rainy days and cool nights of autumn with ease.



Not all that long ago British Columbian Pinot Noir was grown in much the same way Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and often in the same vineyard. A lot of it

COMMENT

was vinified and aged using the same techniques employed to make Cabernet and Merlot.

PRINT

Not any more. The world's fussiest grape variety has captured the imagination of a new generation of B.C. winegrowers, and the early results are as impressive as anything we have seen in the last decade.

What we know now is that Pinot Noir needs constant care and attention, and — even more fundamentally — it must be planted in the right place. Funny thing about that location, it turns out we have a bunch of plots suited to the fussy vine across the province; it's just taken some time to figure it out.

Pinot Noir ripens earlier than any other major red, and that makes it possible to plant it further north in cooler locations, where the results can be extremely captivating.

At last month's B.C. Pinot Noir Celebration, there was a lot of talk about Pinot Noir clones. The mysterious sounding grapes with names like 115, 767 and 777 all stem from genetically related plants grown from a single vine. The growing selection of clones has given winegrowers another set of tools to deal with site and temperature, and the early results across B.C. vineyards are encouraging.

Today we have Pinot hot spots — or more literally, cool spots — in Okanagan Falls, Naramata Bench, Summerland, West Kelowna, East Kelowna, and as far north as Carr's Landing in Lake Country — and that's just in the Okanagan.

World renowned Chilean terroir specialist Pedro Parra is impressed with what he has seen in B.C., and he consults to Blue Grouse Vineyards on Vancouver Island and several Pinot Noirs coming out of the Okanagan Crush Pad project, including a virgin, biodynamic project in the Garnett Valley, just a few kilometres outside Summerland.

It's all happening at the speed of light, but the complexity of growing and making Pinot Noir is having an even wider effect on the B.C. wine community — and it's all positive.

You can't just toss Pinot Noir in a barrel and hope for the best. The machinations of selecting clones and matching rootstocks and tying all that to a specific site is an important journey for any wine grower.

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Reporter Randy Shore shares some important garden hacks you can try at home.

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It's common to see B.C. Lions players in head-to-toe gear, on the field, serious faces on, ready for game day.

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Growing and ripening the fruit is an art. Learning to perfect sensitive, gentle winemaking while understanding which barrels best reveal all the grape has to offer is giving a new generation of B.C. wine workers an important on-the-job education and experience that will only better serve the province's wine business for generations to come.

When you get it right many people love drinking Pinot Noir, especially with food. The same thin skin that makes it so hard to grow and get to the winery safely, is also responsible for Pinot's modest tannins that give it so much flexibility in the food world.

Unlike Cabernet or other high tannin reds, Pinot Noir's delicate tannins do not require a high level of animal fat to balance the match. Wine expert Jancis Robinson has been quoted as describing Pinot Noir as "liquid chicken," or a white wine in red wine clothing. In fact, it is the higher acidity and fruit combined with the lower tannins that make it so amenable to food.

It's hard to imagine a wine that can play with ahi tuna and its attendant soya and wasabi, yet be equally comfortable alongside seared duck breast with figs and olives, or a grilled pacific salmon covered in fennel. Then there are the classic matches: coq au vin, squab, pheasant, mushroom risotto — and we have not even mentioned cheese.

B.C. Pinot Noir is here to stay, and it is only going to get better as we accumulate more and more local knowledge about this heartbreak grape.

The passing of local knowledge from generation to generation is the only real secret of all great wine regions, and it's the last piece of the Pinot puzzle in B.C.

A Proper Pinot Noir selection



Averill Creek Somenos Series Pinot Noir, Cowichan Valley, Vancouver Island, \$38.50

Somenos is a Vancouver Island star — medium weight with silky, rich, savoury, red fruit flavours flecked with orange peel and spice. Serve with chanterelles, duck confit or a salmon. Winery direct.



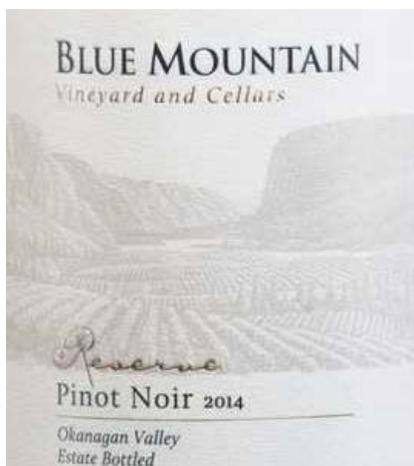
Black Swift The Long Road Pinot Noir, East Kelowna, \$49.99

Hatch winemaker Jason Parkes's hedonistic Pinot is rich in oak and sweet Pinot fruit. Diverse soils, and three clones from a single vineyard shape its complexity. Try with a Parmesan and portobello risotto. Winery direct.



Blue Grouse Estate Pinot Noir, Cowichan Station, Vancouver Island, \$27

Soft cherry, dark raspberry, brooding forest notes with bright acidity. A good example of less is more which is a perfect strategy for Pinot Noir. Try this with Moroccan chicken brochettes. Winery direct, private wine shops.



Blue Mountain Reserve Pinot Noir, Okanagan Falls, \$39.90

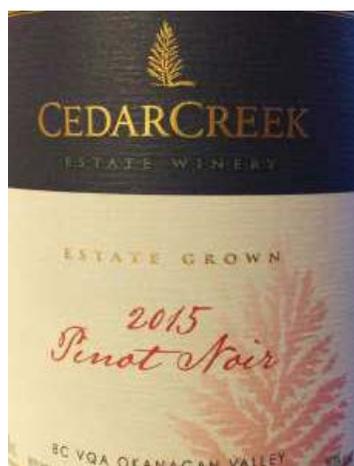
Warm weather has given this reserve Pinot its richest coat yet, but so what? It's delicious drinking and will be through 2022. Try this with duck confit.

Winery direct, private wine shops.



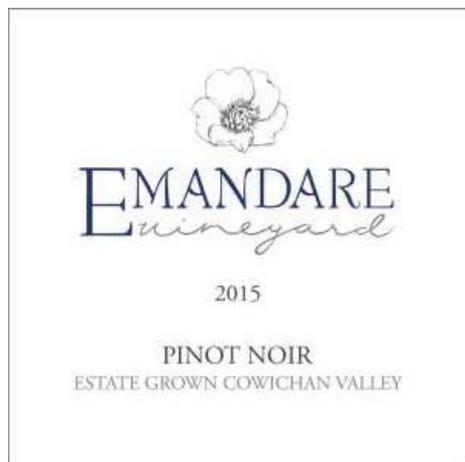
Carson Pinot Noir Naramata Vineyard, Naramata Bench, \$35

Meyer winemaker Chris Carson's own label is rich and delicious. Strawberry fruit with spice and bright acidity entertain. The finish is soft silky and long. Roast chicken is a must pairing. Private wine shops.



CedarCreek Pinot Noir East Kelowna, \$24.49

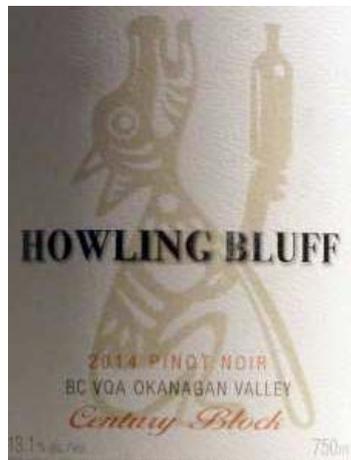
Raspberry jam, cassis, black plum and ripe blackberry fruit leads this ripe warm juicy style of Pinot Noir for mid-week consumption. Serve with grilled salmon burgers. BCLS



Emandare Pinot Noir, Cowichan Valley, Vancouver Island, \$45

The Emandare is a south facing, terraced hillside below Cowichan Valley's

Mount Prevost. The fruit is dry farmed and organically grown using four clones. This is juicy, pure Pinot with salty, floral fruit. Perfect with roasted, lemon chicken. Winery direct.



Howling Bluff Pinot Noir Century Block, Naramata Bench, \$75

Century Block is an homage to the site that was home to over 100 different apple varieties. Today its planted to clones 666 and 777. Darker black fruits with a savoury, sagebrush, spicy undercurrent. Perfect for duck. Winery direct.



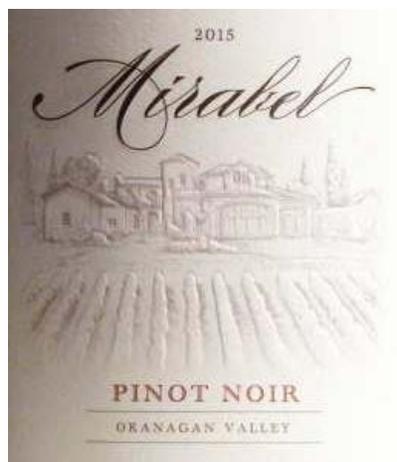
JoieFarm En Famille Reserve Pinot Noir, Naramata Bench and Summerland, \$39.90

Dark cherry, wild cassis, wispy smoke, exotic spicing and savoury cured meats mark the palate of this two-vineyard, nine clone Pinot. Cellar or serve now with wild fowl and wild mushrooms. Winery direct, private wine shops.



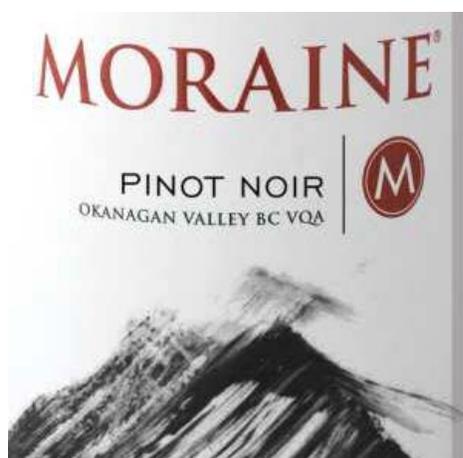
Meyer Family Vineyards Pinot Noir Micro Cuvée, Okanagan Falls, \$60

Micro Cuvée is winemaker Chris Carson's personal selection of his best barrels, what he terms the "most harmonious blend" taken off McLean Creek Road Vineyard. Grilled salmon anyone? Winery direct, private wine shops.



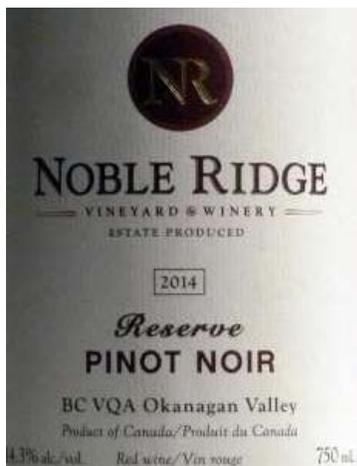
Mirabel Pinot Noir, East Kelowna, \$70

Owners Doug and Dawn Reimer released their own Pinot Noir label in 2015 after a decade of selling in East Kelowna, and the 2015 Mirabel label is their first estate release made by winemaker Matt Dumayne. Try with a mushroom pasta dish. Winery direct, private wine shops.



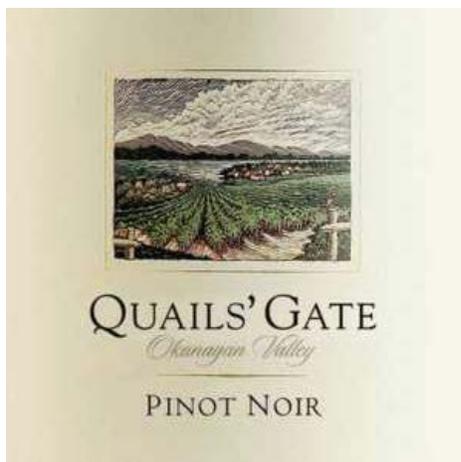
Moraine Pinot Noir, Naramata Bench, \$27

Moraine has a certain elegance and reserve that is well suited to Pinot Noir. The fruit is a mix of plums and cherries with a floral background. Bright and juicy, it's just beginning life. Barbecue salmon is the match. Winery direct, private wine shops.



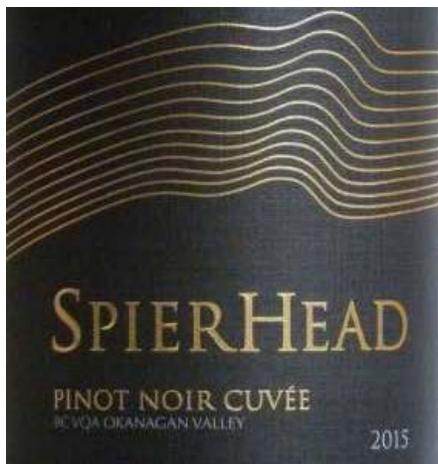
Noble Ridge Reserve Pinot Noir 2014, Okanagan Valley, \$29.90

Enticing dark plum, black cherry and wild raspberry fruit mark the best yet Noble Ridge offering that spends 14 months in French oak (20 per cent new). Try this potent Pinot with some goose pate. Winery direct, private wine shops.



Quails' Gate Pinot Noir, Okanagan Valley, \$24.49

Pinot Noir is the flagship red at Quails' Gate. Juicy, fruity and complex it might be the best value Pinot in the market. Most of the fruit comes off 20-year-old vines. Love this with pulled pork. BCLS



Sperhead Pinot Noir Cuvée, East Kelowna, \$38

The 2015 Sperhead Cuvée is a blend of the best barrels. Red plums and black cherries and spicy oak mark the palate. Cellar, or serve this now with

roast turkey. Winery direct, private wine shops.



Tantalus Juveniles Pinot Noir, East Kelowna, \$21.65

Young vines offer up smoked raspberry, cherry, strawberry notes with forest berries, perfumed raspberries and white pepper all with a touch of minerality. Good value. Seared tuna anyone? Winery direct, private wine shops.

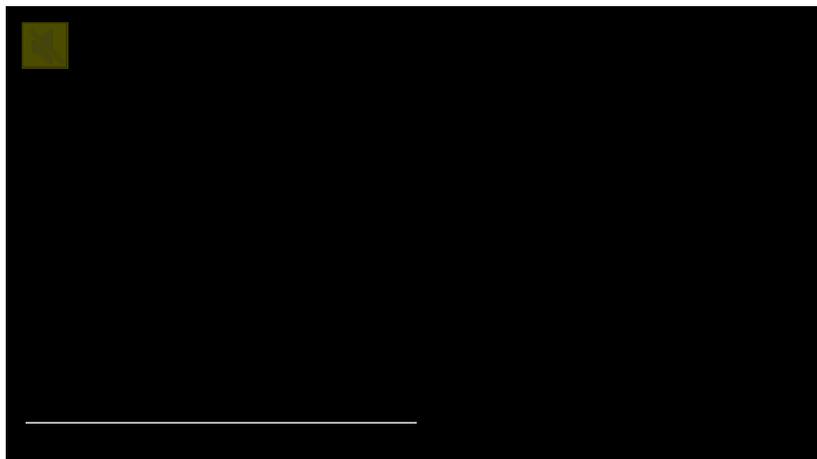
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