

CONSUMER REPORTS

LAB TESTS

Holiday wine bargains

More than 20 CR Best Buys, most for \$10 or less

LAB TESTS WINES

Pinot noir ▶

At its best, pinot noir has more subtle flavors than cabernet sauvignon or merlot. In addition to the flavors from the grape, including red fruit and spice, the wine may pick up aromas of wood, vanilla, or smoke as it ages in toasted oak barrels.

Some “classic Burgundian” pinot noirs can even have a touch of rustic aromas—referred to as “barnyard” or “horsey”—that add to their complexity. And that’s OK, especially if you’re serving a gamey meat such as venison or duck or earthy foods such as mushrooms.

These five wines were chosen from about a dozen we tested. They include a more expensive pinot noir that’s also a good value, given its high quality. Though pinot noir is widely grown, these are all Californian.



Estancia 2008 \$15
Pricier than the others, but still a bargain for excellent pinot noir.



Redtree 2008 \$9
Flavors of rich, ripe fruit, with licorice and leather notes, offset by wood.



Angeline 2008 \$12
Nice mix of berry fruit, spice, and herbal notes, offset by wood and acidity.



Castle Rock California Cuvée 2008 \$10
Ripe fruit, rich wood flavors. Tasty, though a bit atypical of a pinot noir.



Black Mountain Painted Ridges 2008 \$7
Jammy fruit, wood, and herbal notes; nice acidity. Sold only at Trader Joe’s.

About our picks

All wines listed here are rated very good overall, except two that are excellent as noted, and are CR Best Buys. Wines are generally shown in order of quality within varietal, from left (best) to right.

Prices are average retail; some stores may offer better deals. If you can’t find the vintage we tested, choose another recent one; most wines in this price range are fairly consistent from year to year.