

# PINOT NOIR

No other grape incites as much passion – not surprising, given the superior drops emerging from Tasmania and Melbourne's dress circle of regions.

It seems that everyone's drinking pinot these days and, frankly, why wouldn't they be? Even my Barossa shiraz-loving, oak-enthused old man has discovered the stuff. Having laughed off countless attempted introductions with a cursory "looks a bit light, mate", he's now phoning me from restaurants to help resolve a stand-off between bottles of Ata Rangi and Kooyong.

Not all that long ago, pinot noir was almost entirely confined to the realm of high-end collectors and wine geeks. In Australia, it was planted on peninsulas by curious cashed-up professionals eager to occupy weekend leisure time and sell a few cases to their friends. The resulting wines were made in generally small amounts with mixed results and high price tags, partly because of uneconomic small-scale farming and partly because enthusiasts tended to run in hard with a wallet full of cash. Good Australian pinot was generally hard to get and expensive when compared with other reds.

Haven't things changed. Recently, a group of Tamar Valley producers set up their card tables at Melbourne's Federation Square, one with a few bottles of stunning 2007 pinot noir that you'll find on the shelves for a paltry A\$19. Who'd have thunk it? For the record, it's the 2007 Josef Chromy Pepik Pinot Noir; seek it out in large amounts.

Australia's biggest wine companies have weighed into the pinot scene with terrific results too. They've turned their considerable resources to good use in delivering complex, consistent pinot about the A\$25-30 price bracket. Coldstream Hills, Lilydale Estate, De Bortoli, St Huberts and Bay of Fires are just a few examples. And you don't have to beg to get onto sought-after mailing lists in order to secure a good bottle of pinot anymore; simply walk into any good bottle shop.

At the pointy end of the pack, things have never been better. The constant search for better sites, better clones, highly refined vineyard management, thoroughly considered and researched techniques in the winery, and another decade of vine age and winemaking experience all add up to convincing top-end wines. The pioneers of Australian pinot are all closer to their targets, there's a bunch coming of age behind them and a pack of savvy young guns snapping at their heels too.

## Regions

Regional focus is sharp and Melbourne's dress circle of regions has established itself as the engine room of Australia's pinot noir. But many future hopes rest on

Tasmania, and there's much discussion about the possible impact of climate change on pinot's future. The world of pinot looks very different today, but there's one unassailable constant in the equation: no other grape incites as much passion and excitement. Long may it last.

### MACEDON RANGES

A unique terroir in Australia and a relatively unexplored, certainly under-exploited, region, but a proven haven for cool-climate pinot noir. "There are a number of great pinot noir sites sitting within 10 kilometres of us," says Bindi winemaker Michael Dhillon. The region is attracting some new interest as the elevated, lean, weathered soils hold potential for distinctive, site-driven wines. Macedon's a cool posting, and there's a need for dedicated vineyard work to make the grade with pinot. Newcomers don't have it easy, but there's an attractive incentive given the success of those who have already braved the quartz, rugged outcrops.

**ICON WINE: 2006 Bindi Block 5 Pinot Noir, A\$90**

A striking, delicate perfume speaks of pinot grown in lean, quartz soils. A very elegant wine. This has a smooth-paced palate with density and balance, beautifully crafted by both site and maker. Block 5 is unchallenged on the region's top rung of pinot.

**EMERGING STAR: 2006 Magnetic Hill Pinot Noir, A\$25**

One of the promising new labels from committed grower Geoff Mackay. This wine has bright cherry fruit and shows plenty of promise and cool, elegant style.

### MORNINGTON PENINSULA

There's been a big transformation on the Peninsula in the past decade. Viticulture is benefiting from greater expertise, and more experienced winemakers are turning higher quality grapes into vastly better wines. There's been an expansion of wines and styles too, as projects have spawned junior cuvees and single-site statements, making Mornington Peninsula pinot vastly more diverse and interesting to explore. The region's capacity to produce rich, dark, cherry-flavoured wines is the result of newer clones, older vines and improved vineyard practices.

**ICON WINE: 2006 Paringa Estate Special Barrel Selection Reserve Pinot Noir, A\$90**

The top of the line from the king of Red Hill is very youthful, showing concentrated dark fruit and plenty of punchy oak. It has impressive palate weight, is really concentrated and certainly an excellent cellaring prospect.





**EMERGING STAR: 2007 Scorpo Noirrien Pinot Noir, A\$30**

This is only the second edition of Scorpo's regional blend, and it looks every bit the part, with deeper colour pinning it to the Mornington. Dark cherry aromas and flavours and approachable, sturdy tannins equate to engaging, balanced pinot.

**YARRA VALLEY**

There's intense competition for the top spot among varieties and styles in the Yarra Valley. After some development and expansion, the region has emerged with a new order. There's a greater subregional focus, with more astute winemakers sourcing pinot from carefully selected areas. The notion of the reserve pinot is now looking a little old fashioned; many are on a quest to deliver distinct and engaging single-site and subregional expressions. The region is now producing wines of consistent quality, often priced between A\$20 and A\$30.

**ICON WINE: 2006 Punch Close Planted Lance's Vineyard Pinot Noir, A\$90**

The Lance family's original vines deliver complex wines with savoury characters. But plenty of supple, sweet-tasting tannins roll through cherry and strawberry flavours. Balanced, complex and complete.

**EMERGING STAR: 2006 Mac Forbes Coldstream Pinot Noir, A\$38** Mac Forbes delivers a clever mix of sweet and savoury characters. This Coldstream cuvee has a fine, bright fragrance and a delicate musky cherry flavour. Elegant and already drinking superbly.

**GEELONG**

This region is home to the man who's arguably done more for Australian pinot than any other winemaker, Gary Farr. And although there's a generational handover in progress, Farr's wines are as striking as ever, an inspirational benchmark for a growing band of dedicated, informed Geelong pinot growers. Geelong does not have the glamour factor of the Mornington across the bay, but there's a grassroots, vineyard-driven vibe with plenty of interest in pushing the hands-off approach to winemaking.

**ICON WINE: 2006 By Farr Sangreal, A\$65**

This smoky, complex pinot oozes classic Farr style, dazzling with complex fragrance and beautifully ripened fruit. The palate flows with seamless charm, classic cherry flavour and chocolate-like tannin texture, smoky oak and superb balance.

**EMERGING STAR: 2006 Lethbridge Pinot Noir, A\$35**

Ray Nadeson and Maree Collis (with pal Adrian Thomas) have zoomed closer to their goal of great pinot. This is deeply perfumed with ripe cherry fruit and gentle, savoury complexity. Finely sheeted tannins, balanced and bright.

**GIPPSLAND**

Gippsland is still evolving, with myriad small growers seeking to create their prize pinot. There's a clear difference between those wines made by trained, experienced winemakers and those that are not. What is clear, though, is that pinot noir is the most promising red grape for the region to pursue, and this year's Gippsland Wine Show confirmed that it's certainly the most heavily backed by local producers.

**ICON WINE: 2006 Bass Phillip 21 Pinot Noir, A\$85**

Gippsland's most renowned pinot man made only one estate pinot in 2006, a blend of fruit spared by frost. A typically complex, untamed pinot with complex aromatics, flavours and texture.

**EMERGING STAR: 2006 Clair de Lune Pinot Noir, A\$30**

A gem from one of the region's smallest makers. Dark spices and toasty oak, lovely ripe, dark cherry fruit and supple, flowing tannins.

**TASMANIA**

There's no question about the rosy future for Tasmanian pinot, just a question about how quickly it will be delivered in commercial quantities. Icons continue to produce wonderful examples from established vineyards, as the rising stars march towards realising their dream vineyards and wines. Hardy's Bay of Fires project is setting the pace and Andrew Pirie is making better wines than ever for himself and the environmentally contentious owners of Tamar Ridge. Stylistically, Tasmanian pinot resembles the feted New Zealand examples.

**ICON WINE: 2006 Pirie Estate Pinot Noir, A\$39**

Terrific intensity and poise. Red cherry and brambly aromas open to a delicate, precise fragrance. Bright acid crunch, plenty of cherry flavour, fine-boned tannins and a long, slender finish. Terrific value.

**EMERGING STAR: 2007 Bay of Fires Pinot Noir, A\$40**

Every complexity has been lavished on this intense, spicy and savoury pinot. A charmingly smooth fleshy texture, launching upwards at the finish with youthful verve.

NICK STOCK

**Icons continue to produce wonderful examples from established vineyards, as rising stars march towards realising their dream vineyards and wines.**

