



A COOLING TREND

It wasn't planned this way, but the results of this issue's tastings definitely show a trend, with many of the top-scoring wines coming from the cool edges of their respective regions. Take the syrah tastings, on page 43, where the lead wine—Jason Drew's wild, peppery Valenti Syrah—comes from a vineyard six miles from the Pacific in Mendocino Ridge. It's only one among many that reflects a growing preference for cool-climate syrah—a trend Patrick J. Comiskey explores in his article on page 26.

The movement toward marginal climates is just as active in the Southern Hemisphere, especially in Chile, which is turning out exceptional, cool-climate syrah from far-coast vineyards in Lo Abarco, San Antonio and Casablanca (p. 68).

On the other side of the Andes, the Argentines keep pushing higher into the foothills, the best malbecs coming from heights of 4,000 to 5,000 feet. There's also New Zealand, with vineyards far south into the Roaring Forties, turning out some of the most exciting pinot noir in the New World (p. 50).

As always, these picks come from our blind tastings, with panelists who represent some of the industry's best talent. In New York, Talia Baiocchi of winechap.com, Timothy Buzinski of Artisan Wine Shop, Edwin Davila of *Gordon Ramsay at The London* and Blue Pilkington of *Restaurant Daniel* were just a few of the tasters who joined us; our San Francisco panels included sommeliers Chase DuBay of *Cyrus* in Healdsburg, Dan O'Brien from *Cavallo Point* and Dustin Wilson and Chad Zeigler of *RN74*.

You'll find a detailed description of our tasting process on page 42. For notes on all recommended wines and listings of all the wines tasted for this issue, go to wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

Year's Best

- 40 Syrah
tasted: 259 top wines: 23 best buys: 17
- 44 Zinfandel
tasted: 226 top wines: 13 best buys: 16
- 47 Rhône
tasted: 160 top wines: 23 best buys: 13
- 50 New Zealand Pinot Noir
tasted: 44 top wines: 12 best buys: 6
- 52 Priorat & Montsant
tasted: 45 top wines: 23 best buys: 15
- 53 Argentine Malbec
tasted: 98 top wines: 21 best buys: 6

New Releases

- 56 Chilean Cabernet Blends
tasted: 135 top wines: 30 best buys: 5
- 59 American
tasted: 562 top wines: 44 best buys: 28
- 65 Imported
tasted: 711 top wines: 91 best buys: 35
- Total
tasted: 2,240 top wines: 280 best buys: 141

YEAR'S BEST NEW ZEALAND PINOT NOIR

Our blind panels tasted **44** new-release New Zealand pinot noirs over the past 12 months. **Joshua Greene**, our critic for New Zealand, rated **12** as exceptional (90+) and **6** as Best Buys. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

94 | Rippon \$47
2008 Central Otago Rippon Pinot Noir Nick Mills has tuned his vines to the cool elevations of Wanaka, working through natural viticulture and winemaking to produce this explosively schisty pinot noir, a Central Otago classic. The wine's earthy power is checked by layers of red fruit and scents of rhubarb and rose, sustaining a remarkable balance of sweet fruit and racy acidity. The flavors last, encouraged by long exposure to air, promising years of development ahead. *Station Imports, Colorado Springs, CO*

94 | Rippon \$89
2008 Central Otago Tinker's Field Pinot Noir Rippon is a high-elevation vineyard in Wanaka, a north-facing slope against the bank of a glacier lake. "Tink" Mills planted some of Central Otago's first vines here, now farmed by his son, Nick, who established a biodynamic regimen for the vineyard after returning from Burgundy in 2002. Tinker's Field is a block on the property that includes the oldest pinot noir vines, planted between 1982 and 1989 and grown on schist gravels. The wine has the harmonic intensity of classical jazz, a small voice easily filling the room and echoing for minutes. From its fine rose scents to its saturated depth of sweet fruit, this wine's lusciousness is grounded in a taste of the place that's hard to forget. *Station Imports, Colorado Springs, CO*

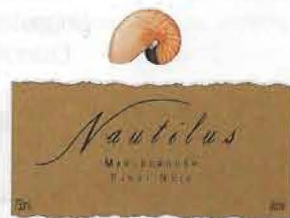
93 | Craggy Range \$39
2008 Martinborough Te Muna Road Vineyard Pinot Noir A little pistol of a wine, this packs a range of complex flavors into a tight space. Foresty red fruit flavors are at the center, surrounded by complex herbal notes ranging from black tea to woodland moss and something sharper, like the bite of fresh parsley. Oak rounds any of the fruit's sharp edges to yield a velvet texture, youthfully compact with the energy to age well. *Kobrand, Purchase, NY*

93 | Felton Road \$79
2008 Central Otago Block 5 Elms Bannockburn Pinot Noir The north-facing benchland at Block 5 is a mix of clay with

fine, schist-derived sandy loam. The vines, planted in the early 1990s, grew a voluptuous pinot in 2008—heady with rose scents and juicy red berry flavors. There's a brightness to the wine, the fruit vibrant and glistening, as if lit from behind. Firmly structured and content in its balance, this will age with grace. *Wilson Daniels, St. Helena, CA*

92 | Brancott Vineyards \$32
2008 Marlborough Terraces Pinot Noir A single-vineyard selection, this has an earthy woodland note to complement its clean red berry scent, compelling in its tight weave. The *fraise de bois* flavors are juicy, touched by the smoky toast of oak in the end. It's small in scale, with impressive aspirations, a simple pleasure with fine shadings of complexity. For pan-roasted sea bass with a red wine reduction. *Pernod Ricard USA, Purchase, NY*

92 | Villa Maria \$30
2008 Marlborough Cellar Selection Pinot Noir Blended from vineyards in the Awatere and Wairau valleys—some of the lots fermented with added yeast, some without—this is a pure and rosy pinot with spiciness that lasts. A hint of gamey complexity at the end makes this a delicate match for roast quail stuffed with wild mushrooms. *Chateau Ste. Michelle, Woodinville, WA*



91 | Nautilus Estate \$27
2009 Marlborough Pinot Noir This wine's round, red cherry flavors are layered with heady scents of autumn leaves and darker, tarry notes that lend complexity. The texture is supple and full, the sweet fruit flavors lasting with an herbal spice. For roast duck. *Negociants USA, Napa, CA*

91 | Felton Road \$79
2009 Central Otago Block 3 Pinot Noir Block 3 at the Elms Vineyard forms the bench of a north-facing hillside, where the fine sandy loam allows vine roots to penetrate more than three meters deep. The soil derives from schist, the site giving a concentrated wine in 2009 with blunt, growling tannin under rich violet and lavender-scented fruit. The wine's mineral intensity needs bottle time to mellow. *Wilson Daniels, St. Helena, CA*

91 | Tarras Vineyards \$35
2008 Central Otago Pinot Noir Blended from two estate vineyards planted in 2003, this is an impressively vibrant and concentrated pinot noir. Floral scents rise from the dark aroma of oak, while red fruit emerges in the finish from the blacker, earthy intensity of the wine's tannin. Give this several hours in a decanter before serving with grilled sirloin. *Saranty Imports, Harrison, NY*

91 | Villa Maria \$40
2007 Marlborough Reserve Pinot Noir This wine presents complex tension between the fruity side of Marlborough pinot noir and its more savory, earthy character. It's long on red cherry and raspberry flavor, interwoven with oak-driven spice (warm scents of cinnamon) and intriguing herbal notes. For roast quail. *Chateau Ste. Michelle, Woodinville, WA*

90 | Brancott Vineyards \$18
2007 Marlborough Reserve Pinot Noir This is light and simple up until the finish, where the gentle, grape-scented fruit brightens toward scents of herbs and deepens into mineral tannins. The finish has an ocean air salinity, to pour with roast sea bass. *Pernod Ricard USA, Purchase, NY*

90 | Tarras Vineyards \$25
2007 Central Otago Scene 17 Pinot Noir (Best Buy) Decant this wine and the dark, musky scent turns brighter, with floral notes of jasmine and spice. It's more mineral than fruity in tone, with a texture juicy enough to make all that fine, savory tannin mouthwa-