

Robb Report

The 10 Best New Pinot Noirs From Oregon's Willamette Valley, One of the Country's Top Wine Regions

Some New World reds that would feel at home in the Old.

With over 19,000 acres of Pinot Noir planted, Oregon's Willamette Valley has become one of the United States' premiere growing regions for the red grape from Burgundy since it was first planted there in the 1960s. That is more than double the amount of all other varieties combined growing there, highlighting the fact that this 100-mile-long region between the Cascade Mountains and the Coast Range is prime Pinot Noir country. In fact, more than 80 percent of all the Pinot Noir cultivated in the state is grown in the Willamette Valley, which is home to over 700 wineries.

To the west, the Coast Range shelters vineyards running along the Willamette River from frigid Pacific air and rainstorms, while on the opposite side the Cascade Mountains provide a barrier to the arid, desert-like climate of eastern Oregon. Temperate summers with cool nights, sunny autumns, and a combination of volcanic and sedimentary soils offer perfect conditions for ripening grapes with complex flavors and vivid acidity. Thanks to the number of French families who have put down roots here, Willamette has been called the Burgundy of the Pacific Northwest, producing New World versions of Pinot Noir that have been likened by many to those from their home region. Concentrated yet elegant, these will pair well with roast or fried chicken, grilled pork, risotto with mushrooms, or pan seared veal chops.

Ponzi Vineyards 2018 Pinot Noir Reserve Willamette Valley Oregon



Dick and Nancy Ponzi produced their first barrels in 1974; the 2018 vintage represents the second year the winery crafted a reserve wine with 100 percent estate grown grapes. It is fermented in small lots with 40 percent whole cluster, aged in oak for 20 months, and then 10 months in the bottle. It is cherry red with aromas of strawberry and red raspberry and is spicy at first sip with notes of anise, clove, and dried Mediterranean herbs accenting the red fruit flavors. The tannins are velvety, and the finish has a nice touch of spice.