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# Ready-to-Drink California Pinot Noir

In the rush for the latest and greatest, it's easy to overlook the producers who release their wines when they're at their best.

BY MATT KETTMANN



Few things in the wine world are more exciting than getting your first taste of the latest vintage. Nowhere is that more true on the red grape spectrum than with Pinot Noir, whose fresh fruit and acid-driven qualities are enjoyable when young, as evidenced in this month's promising report on California's best 2012s.

But the timing of those current releases isn't just based on how good they taste. In fact, many of the 2011s and 2010s I've reviewed in recent months—also the latest offerings from their respective producers—were way more nuanced, interesting and complex wines than the younger 2012s. (Let's not even talk about the handful of submitted 2013s.) So why do winemakers release wines young—especially Pinots, but often other varieties as well—when holding back a year or so will deliver a much better wine?

The answer is manifold: one, keeping the cash flowing is a critical component of any business, but it's even more dire in a seasonal waiting game like wine; two, wineries need inventory, so when the 2011s run out, the 2012s need to appear; and three, when checking out a retail shop shelf dominated by 2012s, consumers often think that there must be something wrong with the lone 2011 or 2010 bottles. In that regard, it's a lot like keeping up with the Joneses.

Take it from me: There's probably nothing at all wrong with those older bottles, and they're likely even better. Flying Goat Cellars' Norm Yost is one winemaker who does hold back. "I'm more old school," he said. "I don't like to drink them too young. I like to see all the components there and all the qualities. I don't like to tell people to imagine what it will be like in six or 12 months."

To Yost and other Pinot Noir veterans like Ken Brown and Steve Dooley of Stephen Ross Cellars, it's about presenting the vineyards they work with at the best possible time, but they all also understand the market-driven need to release earlier, especially for younger brands. "Luckily, we are in a financial position where we don't need to push it," explained Yost. Hopefully younger winemakers start taking cues from these experienced elders, because their brands will be better for it.

## 2011s And 2010s To Try:

**94 Boekenoogen 2011 Estate Pinot Noir** (Santa Lucia Highlands); \$50.

**94 Ken Brown 2010 Rancho La Viña Vineyard Pinot Noir** (Sta. Rita Hills); \$60.

**93 Flying Goat Cellars 2010 Rancho Santa Rosa Pinot Noir** (Sta. Rita Hills); \$48.

**93 Savannah-Chanelle 2010 Regan Vineyard Pinot Noir** (Santa Cruz Mountains); \$50.

**93 Stephen Ross 2011 Stone Corral Vineyard Pinot Noir** (Edna Valley); \$52.

**92 Mercy 2010 Cedar Lane Vineyard Pinot Noir** (Arroyo Seco); \$38.