

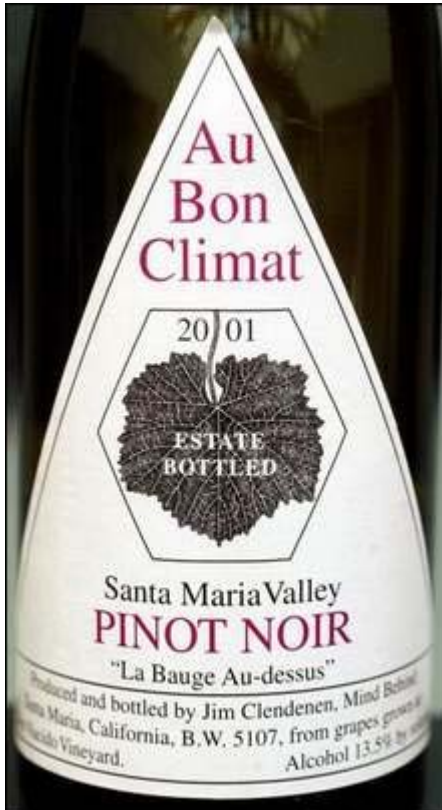
TENNESSEAN

Every day matters. .com

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Tennessean**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print

< < Back

Take a shot at top-notch California pinot noirs



The 2001 Au Bon Climat Au-des-sus Pinot Noir has a textbook-pretty nose and well-balanced taste.

Published: Monday, 06/20/05

Continuing our series on pinot noirs — given a sales boost by the movie, *Sideways* —today we look at some of the higher-priced wines of the kind the lead character in the movie often imbibed on California's Central Coast.

Because pinot grapes are hard to grow and grow well — they can be easily damaged by climate fluctuations or poor manipulation by a wine maker — good pinot noirs are often on the expensive side. When they are good, they are really good. When they are bad, they are ... well you get the idea.

I asked my wine-tasting group to compare five Central Coast Pinot Noirs in the \$25 to \$50 price range. Here are the results of our tasting:

2001 Clos la Chance Pinot Noir at \$24.99. In the aroma, we detected scents of dried strawberries, red currants, raspberries, vanilla beans, tomato vines and firewood. In the mouth, the wine was drier than the nose suggested and not as fruity. It

had a dusty flavor on top of the fruit, and the wine tasted of high alcohol. It was well-balanced with a nice finish.

2000 Calera "Mills Vineyard" Pinot Noir at \$44.99. This wine had a savory aroma with hints of cinnamon and rosemary. In the mouth, it showed good fruit, good structure and rich texture. It tasted a bit hot from the alcohol.

2002 Casa Cassara Burning Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir at \$33.99. The nose suggested black cherries and black raspberry jam with notes of rose petals. In the mouth, the first impression came from strong fruit. The wine had mouth-drying tannins (substances in grapes that give wine structure) and was very dry on the finish.

2002 Foley "Santa Rita Hills" Pinot Noir at \$29.99. The aroma reminded us of prunes, figs and Dr. Pepper. In the mouth, it was, as one expert described it, "a fruit bomb, making it appear more sweet than it actually is." It finished with a sweet impression with metallic notes.

2001 Au Bon Climat Au-dessus Pinot Noir at \$29.99. This wine was the clear favorite in our tasting. In the aroma, it had bright cherries, dried herbs and tobacco — a textbook-pretty pinot noir nose. It was lean in the mouth (meaning not overly fruity) and well-balanced. The structure was firm, and the finish elegant.

Surfing the wine shelves

2002 Sokol Blosser Dundee Hills Pinot Noir at \$26. This was a new appellation for Sokol Blosser, which produces superb pinots costing over \$50. With the great vintage of 2002, this new wine showed very well, with aromas of plums, blueberries, black cherries and a delightful earthiness.

2004 Chateau Souverain Sauvignon Blanc at \$14. The nose suggested lemon and other citrus fruits, with floral notes. It was bright and lively in the mouth, with a hint of vanilla.

2002 Jackson-Triggs Grand Reserve Merlot at \$24.99. The aroma of this Canadian wine suggested cherries, blackberries, vanilla and pepper. It was spicy in the mouth, with tastes of plums and ripe dark fruit.

2003 Jackson-Triggs Proprietor's Reserve Chardonnay at \$12.99. This was a nice wine for the price, with tastes of green apples and citrus followed by a crisp finish.

2003 Crane Lake Merlot at \$4.99. The aroma suggested cherries and black pepper. In the mouth, these notes followed through in flavor, along with plum. It had a short, soft finish with a hint of acid.

2003 Ca' del Solo Big House White at \$10. This blend of white wines from Bonny Doon smelled of grapefruit and honey. In the mouth, it was soft but clean. It was not overly sweet and had just enough acids to balance it nicely.

2004 Ca' del Solo Malvasia Bianca at \$13. The aromas of litchi and jasmine gave impressions of a slightly sweet wine. In the mouth it was pleasingly dry and crisp with a hint of grapefruit rind on the end.

2004 Ca' del Solo Big House Pink at \$10. This blend of Italian varietals, including zinfandel, had fruity strawberry and guava notes in the aroma. In the mouth it was more crisp than the nose suggested, reminding us of a dry rose. •

Published: Monday, 06/20/05
