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8 Engaging Mendocino Pinot Noirs

New reviews of diverse California styles from the 2013 and 2014 vintages



Goldeneye winery founders Dan and Margaret Duckhorn, of Napa's Duckhorn Winery, are making outstanding Pinot in the Anderson Valley.

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

Get ready for high-flying adventure. Grapegrowing doesn't get much more extreme than at Manchester Ridge Vineyard. Teetering on the ocean's edge, this ridgetop vineyard soars to 2,000 feet atop the rugged Mendocino Ridge AVA. It's well above the fog, but is exposed to shivering breezes sweeping in from the Pacific. Auteur's Kenneth Juhasz is one of a handful of vintners who tap this remote site for grapes.

Lazy Creek is showing marked improvement under the watchful eye of winemaker Christy Ackerman. She hasn't taken her foot off the gas since Sonoma's Ferrari-Carano purchased the winery in 2008. This is the best of the winery's three offerings from its Middleridge Ranch estate in the hills overlooking the town of Boonville, at the eastern end of Anderson Valley.

Farther inland, the Eagle Peak appellation stretches across more than 26,000 acres of mountainous,

windswept terrain north of Ukiah. Brothers Jake and Ben Fetzer spearheaded the campaign to establish this AVA, where they farm 40 acres of Pinot Noir for their Masut label.

GOLDENEYE Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Split Rail Vineyard 2013 Score: 90 / \$82

Though the texture is raw and edgy, the flavors of plum, raspberry, smoke, licorice and wild flowers are well-knit and persistent. Drink now. 350 cases made.—J.L.

GOLDENEYE Pinot Noir Anderson Valley The Narrows Vineyard 2013 Score: 90 / \$82

Starts with a tight, rich core of black licorice, dark berry and light oak and builds from there, gaining depth and dimension. The flavors weave together on the long, engaging aftertaste. Drink now. 385 cases made.—J.L.

LAZY CREEK Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Middleridge Ranch 2014 Score: 90 / \$48

Strikes a balance between rich, vivid blueberry, wild berry and plum flavors and smoky, toasty oak, ending with a long, deep finish and a measure of elegance and finesse. Drink now. 418 cases made.—J.L.

MASUT Pinot Noir Eagle Peak Estate Vineyard 2014 Score: 90 / \$45

Packs in a tight core of spicy wild berry and raspberry flavors, accented by hints of cinnamon, tea and dusty earth. Fans out to capture black licorice and dried sage details. Drink now. 1,800 cases made.—J.L.

WALT Pinot Noir Anderson Valley Blue Jay 2014 Score: 90 / \$40

There's lots to admire in this rich, vibrant offering, from the zesty, earth-laced raspberry and wild berry to the snappy, penetrating acidity and tannins. On the finish this pulls back a bit in focus, but the flavors charge ahead. Should be better in a year. Best from 2017 through 2023. 2,800 cases made.—J.L.

AUTEUR Pinot Noir Mendocino Ridge Manchester Ridge Vineyard 2013 Score: 88 / \$60

Tight and firm, with a core of snappy wild berry and wilted rose flavors. Appealing and well-balanced, ending dusty. Drink now. 125 cases made.—J.L.

CHAMP DE RÊVES Pinot Noir Anderson Valley 2013 Score: 88 / \$45

Clean and direct, this is moderately complex, with savory berry, underbrush and cedar notes. Fails to lift off into other dimensions for now. Drink now. 4,995 cases made.—J.L.

LA CREMA Pinot Noir Anderson Valley 2013 Score: 88 / \$50

Aromas of jasmine, rose petal, raspberry and cherry give this a tight aromatic focus. Fresh and snappy, revealing touches of spice and cedar. Drink now. 2,037 cases made.—J.L.