

NEWS WEBSITE OF THE YEAR

# The Telegraph

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Pinot noir from Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Australia, is beautifully fresh, scented and balanced | CREDIT: iStockphoto

## Where to find the best pinot noir outside Burgundy

We all know the spiritual home of this notorious grape variety, but there's a surprising contender for its second best region

Serious pinot noir fans love to row over which is the grape's second best region. First is Burgundy, of course, the spiritual home of this variety – few would argue with that. But where else does pinot excel?

This is a notoriously difficult and picky grape. If it's too hot, its wine tastes baked and jammy; too cold and it's vulnerable to frost on budding, and the thin skin of its berries leave them prone to disease and pests.

Top countries at conquering all this and consistently delivering fine, beautifully balanced, silky smooth pinots are New Zealand and California. I have a long-standing tussle with an old friend in the States over which is the winner (I adore NZ PN). Then there are brilliant pinot noirs made in South Africa and Chile.

But recently I was bowled over by the quality of a set of premium wines from somewhere much more site specific – Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Australia.

This small hook of land (25 miles long and between nine and 12 miles wide), 40 miles south-east of Melbourne, sticks out into the sea at the base of mainland Australia. It's surrounded by three bodies of water – Port Phillip Bay to the west, Western Port Bay to the east and the Bass Strait to the south – and this is key to the region's successful pinot as the cool breezes coming off the water effectively fan the peninsula, moderating the heat.

Indeed, this is one of Australia's only true maritime wine regions, with a long growing and ripening season, low risk of frost and a patchwork of soils and varied elevations. It's just what pinot prefers, allowing for a style that's ripe but beautifully fresh, scented and balanced.

Vines have been grown here since the 1880s but the area only became known as a modern producer of fine wines in the 1970s. It's now a region comprised of small estates, many of them family owned, with a distinct emphasis on quality. As well as top-notch pinot, Mornington Peninsula delivers excellent chardonnay and pinot gris too.

I tasted eight pinots from the region in a recent Zoom event, the winemakers joining us from Oz to offer their views. It was, quite simply, my tasting of the month and beyond.

Even though I used the spittoon and tried to play the poker-faced pro, my written notes are ecstatic: “deeply aromatic”, “lovely, soft and rounded”, “amazing pepper and graphite”, “wow...” When pinot is good, it is blissful. As well as those below, pinots from Moorooduc Estate, Paringa, Ten Minutes by Tractor, Ocean Eight and Scorpo were impressive.

The sobering news is that none of them comes cheap. Making top pinot noir in a small winery, using mainly French barrels, is an expensive business. But these wines are well worth it for a treat and the chance, perhaps, to chew over that favourite wine topic once again.

**Try these...**



From left: Stonier Pinot Noir 2018; Kooyong Estate Single Block Meres Pinot Noir 2018; Crittenden Estate 'The Zumma' Pinot Noir 2019

### **Stonier Pinot Noir 2018**

*Mornington Peninsula, Australia (14%, [Majestic](#), £22.99 or £18.99 in mixed six)*

This reasonably priced pinot is from one of first wineries to be established on the peninsula, in 1978. It's a relatively rich version, with ripe raspberry and plum to the fore, fine tannins and a dab of creamy vanilla. A superb wine for steak or duck breast.

### **Kooyong Estate Single Block Meres Pinot Noir 2018**

*Mornington Peninsula, Australia (13%, [greatwine.co.uk](#), £44)*

A wine made from a small single block of 21-year-old pinot vines on a gentle north-facing slope and aged in French oak for 14 months. Its lovely red-berry fragrance leads on to strawberry, oranges and lightly spiced notes, lively and bright, fresh but wonderfully smooth.

### **Crittenden Estate 'The Zumma' Pinot Noir 2019**

*Mornington Peninsula, Australia (13%, Dartmouth Wine Company, 01803 833579, £25.95)*

Crittenden was another early pioneer of the region, and its “Zumma” flagship wines are sourced from part of their original vineyards planted in 1982. A pinot of true elegance, perfumed and pure with fresh strawberry and red cherry fruit.