



Winemaker Rollo Crittenden and his father Garry have been growing Pinot Noir for more than thirty years.

# PINOT TAKES YOU THERE

## WINEMAKERS ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW MUCH OF THE GRAPE VINE TO THROW INTO THE VAT

MAX ALLEN, THE AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL REVIEW MAGAZINE, APRIL 2019

Pinot Noir tragi- comedies talk a lot about terroir. This devoted sect of the wine-drinking community believes passionately that their favourite red grape variety is better than any other at capturing the physical attributes of a vineyard – the soil, the slope, the sun, the terroir. And they will argue endlessly about the best methods a winegrower should employ to facilitate this translation.

More than 200 pinot-obsessed winemakers, drinkers, sommeliers and media convened on the Mornington Peninsula in February for the biennial Pinot Celebration – two days of tastings, talks and dinners. One of its most fascinating aspects was the question of whole bunches: Should freshly harvested pinot grapes be de-stemmed and crushed before being tipped into the fermenting vat or should they be left intact and chucked in stems and all? Which is the best way to make a wine that tastes of where it's from?

The answer, of course, is it depends – on site, vine age, vintage and whether or not the wine is destined for cellaring. Take, for example, a pinot noir made by Onannon – a collaboration between Sam Middleton and Kaspar Hermann, based at Mount Mary in the Yarra Valley and Will Byron, who works at Stonier on the Mornington Peninsula. For the past 10 years, the trio have been sourcing grapes from a two-hectare vineyard on Red Hill, in the high volcanic soils on the peninsula, and since 2014 have been farming the property.

In the warm, early vintage of 2016, they decided to ferment the grapes from Red Hill entirely using

whole bunches, because the inclusion of the stems helped bring a lively complexity to the wine they felt best captured the spirit of the vineyard. But in the later, cooler 2017 vintage, the whole bunch proportion was dropped back to only 50 percent. “The grapes that year already had plenty of fresh complex flavour,” Byron says. “So we didn’t need so much whole bunch to achieve a similar expression of place.”

**Down on the warmer loamy soils of Dromana, the Crittenden family has been growing pinot noir since the 1980s. For most of the past few vintages their top pinot, the Cri de Coeur, has been fermented with 100 percent whole bunch, to bring the vines into better balance, winemaker Rollo Crittenden dialed the whole bunch back to 50 percent.**

**“For me, when it comes to making pinot, it’s all about finding that purity of fruit,” he says. We’re still refining the technique and also working to vintage conditions. I’m trying to avoid over stemmy characters while still enhancing the structure and complexity of the wine.”**

On the eastern side of the peninsula, at Balnarring, winemaker Kevin Bell has given up on whole bunch fermentation. His Hurley pinots, sourced from discrete blocks, are made from 100 percent gently de-stemmed grapes – so the berries stay intact. And the wines are better, more expressive, more distinctive, than ever. “I discovered very quickly that the flavours (of the stems) dominated,” Bell says. “You could say that the terroir at our vineyard taught us that to use whole bunches overburdens the final wine.”



CRITTENDEN CRI DE COEUR PINOT NOIR 2016

**Mornington Peninsula \$80**

You can taste how two different fermentation techniques mesh to make one bold pinot noir.

The whole bunch brings a tangy brightness and a latticework of snappy tannin; the de-stemmed grapes bring a dense bramble fruit.

**[crittendenwines.com.au](http://crittendenwines.com.au)**