

Dave McIntyre's WineLine

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Oregon Pinot at a Good Price

Oregon wineries are beginning to feel the pinch of the recession. "Oregon has placed its sweet price point at about \$35 to \$45 a bottle," according to Sam Tannahill, co-owner of Rex Hill Vineyard and co-creator of the popular A to Z line of affordable, high-quality Oregon wines. "When consumers see a \$100 California cabernet selling for \$50, they're less likely to pay \$45 for an Oregon pinot - so there will be some downward price pressure," he said.

Oregon is not known for "bargain" wines. Yet there are a few pinot noir wines that count as good values for \$25 or less, even in the tricky 2007 vintage, when harvest rains forced growers to be patient and choose carefully when to pick their grapes. 2007 is a marked contrast to 2006, when a warm, dry growing season allowed growers to pick grapes whenever they wanted and to push the envelope of ripeness and alcohol content.

As a result, the 2007 vintage is somewhat inconsistent, with stronger wines coming from growers who waited out the rains, and the smaller subappellations of the Willamette Valley. And they tend to be pricey. There are some affordable exceptions that provide excellent value though:

A to Z 2007 Oregon Pinot Noir at about \$20 a bottle shows nice balance and an appealing earthy note under black cherry fruit.

Anne Amie Cuvée A 2007 (\$25) is terrific, with bright cherry fruit, tempered by enough ripeness to prevent the wine from being cloying, and without so much sweetness as to make it heavy.

Benton Lane Willamette Valley 2007 \$26 - There's an earthy, mushroomy note here that makes this sustainably-farmed wine worth seeking out.

So bottoms up! Here's to affordable Oregon pinot noir. Look for my discussion of Oregon terroir and recommendations of seven pinots noir that illustrate such terroir next Wednesday *in The Washington Post*.

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Panther Creek.. around \$25 the last time I checked. Limited availability, but well worth the effort to find it.

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