Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir is often described as being a "difficult" grape, to grow, to deal with in the winery, and to find truly great examples of.

Pinot noir has many alias and is grown in Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria (called Blauburgunder or Spätburgunder), Brazil, Canada, Croatia (Burgundac), Czechoslovakia, England, France, Germany (Spätburgunder), Greece, Hungary, Italy (Pinot Nero), Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland (Clevner,) and the United States.

The reputation that gets Pinot noir so much attention, however, is owed to the wines of Burgundy. This two-mile-wide, thirty-mile-long stretch of hills, called the Côte d'Or is the only region to achieve consistent success from the Pinot noir vine.

The quality of is due to a number of factors. Its vineyards slope gently down toward the east, providing the vines with long sun exposure yet avoiding afternoon heat. The soil there is very calcareous (chalky; containing calcium carbonate), offering good drainage. Well-drained soils have a higher average temperature, which assists ripening. Pinot noir reflects more pronounced Gout de Terroir, or flavour of the soil, than other black grape types, making vineyard site selection a critical factor.

Difficulties plague Pinot noir at every step, from propagation to even its bottle-aging characteristics. Genetically unstable, the parent vine may produce offspring that bear fruit that is nothing like the parent's in the size and shape of the berry or cluster and will frequently even have different aromas, flavours, and levels of productivity. Nearly every affliction known to affect vines is common among Pinot noir vineyards. Although quite tolerant of cold climates, it is particularly susceptible to Spring frosts, because it is one of the earliest-leafing varieties. The sharpshooter grasshopper finds Pinot noir a perfect host. This bug carries Pierce's Disease, which can destroy an entire vineyard in as little as three years. Leaf-roll virus is prevalent in almost all pinot noir plantings over ten years old. The pinot vines are not very vigorous and often lack adequate leaf cover to protect the fruit from birds, which do much damage. If not picked promptly at maturity, the thin-skinned and tender berries shrivel and dry out rapidly resulting in a raisiny aroma and neutral flavour.

Pinot Noir is also one of the more difficult wines to ferment. Partly due to the presence of 18 amino acids, which are naturally balanced in this variety, Pinot Noir ferments violently, often "boiling" up and out of its container, speeding the process out of control. Colour retention is a major problem for the thin-skinned berries. Pinot is very prone to acetification and often loses the sometimes promising aromas and flavours it seems to display through fermentation and aging, as soon as it is bottled.

Pinot Noir shows promise in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, and in New Zealand, although all may prove to have growing seasons that are generally too short and too humid for consistently outstanding results.
Best Appellation in California Pinot Noir are much the same as for Chardonnay:
Santa Maria Valley (Santa Barbara County);
Russian River Valley (Sonoma County);
Carneros (in both Sonoma and Napa Counties);
Anderson Valley (Mendocino County);
Pinnacles (Monterey County)
Santa Lucia Highlands (Monterey County).

Great Pinot Noir is often one of the most complex of all varietals and can be intense
with a ripe-grape or black cherry aroma, frequently accented by a pronounced
spiciness that suggests cinnamon, or mint.
Ripe tomato, mushroom, and farmyard are also common descriptors for identifying
Pinot Noir.
It is full-bodied and rich but not heavy, high in alcohol, yet neither acidic nor tannic,
with substantial flavour despite its delicacy.
The most appealing quality of Pinot Noir may be its soft, velvety texture.
Pinot does not have the longevity in the bottle of the darker red wines and tends to
reach its peak at five to eight years past the vintage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Pinot Noir Smell and/or Flavor Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variatel Aromas/Flavors:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit: cherry, strawberry, raspberry, ripe tomato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floral: violet, rose petal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spice: rosemary, cinnamon, caraway, peppermint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbal: rhubarb, beetroot, oregano, green tomato, green tea, black olive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>