



MEET
THE
PINOTS

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CHEVALIER

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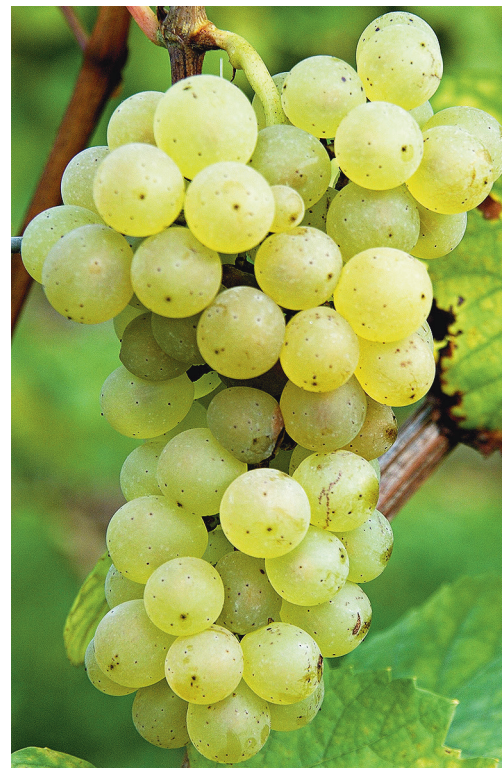
If ever there was a royal family in the wine world, it would most certainly be the Pinot family. No other group of grapes is so revered and adulated, and, collectively, achieves such greatness as do the Pinots. And while Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, and Pinot Gris (or, in Italian, Grigio) are responsible for a wide range of distinct wine styles, it is crucial to note that they have the same origin. In fact, they are practically the same variety! Their primary difference comes from a genetic mutation: Pinot Blanc is a mutation of Pinot Noir with lower anthocyanin levels, meaning less color in the grapes and resulting wine. Pinot Gris, logically, lies somewhere in between the two.

The story, however, does not end there. If color pigment in the skins is the only difference between the three, then shouldn't direct-press white wines—made without any skin contact—from each variety be identical? Any vigneron with the slightest experience working with members of the Pinot family can confirm that there is much more to consider. In addition to pigmentation, these varieties vary in their acidity levels, potential alcohol, berry size, and cluster compactness, among other factors. And, evidently, wines made from each Pinot present aromas and flavors that are entirely their own.

As the head vigneron at Kuentz-Bas, a historic Alsatian domaine, Olivier Raffin crafts a multitude of wines from all three Pinots. Pinot Blanc is traditionally used as a blending ingredient in Alsace's sparkling wines and everyday dry whites, while Pinot Gris—considered one of the region's "noble" varieties—is



Pinot Gris. © KUENTZ-BAS



Pinot Blanc. © KUENTZ-BAS

held in high regard for the rich, nuanced dry and sweet whites it produces. Pinot Noir, by contrast, is less prevalent throughout the region, but is increasingly recognized for its potential to yield qualitative reds when planted in the right Alsatian *terroirs*.

"To me, they are very different varieties," says Olivier. "If these grapes are really from the same family, they are more like cousins than siblings: they share some similarities but have many differences." He points to the grapes' pH at ripeness (low for Pinot Noir and Pinot Blanc, high for Pinot Gris) and

the vigor of each vine (low for Pinot Noir, high for Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris) to illustrate his experience with each, also noting that the diversity of clones within each variety could account for some of this variability. "If a mutation took place, it must have been long ago, and since then each variety has evolved independently," he surmises. "This is just my feeling; I am no expert in ampelography!"

The wines in this month's club shipment explore the nuances between these closely related, yet highly individual *cépages*. In addition to smelling and tasting the differences between each, you will discover how they express themselves across various *terroirs* and production methods: Pinot Gris in one of Olivier's *grand cru* sites bears little resemblance to the exact same grape grown on the hillsides of Friuli, just as the rare Tuscan Pinot Nero is a different animal from a Burgundian or Loire rendition. There is clearly much to love about the Pinot family—not to get too Freudian about it, but certainly enough to inspire a bit of Pinot envy in us all.

—ANTHONY LYNCH

2017 PINOT BLANC “RÉSERVE”

◆ ALBERT BOXLER \$45



WHEN YOU TASTE an irreproachable wine like this one, you wonder why Alsace seems to have so much to prove to the drinking public. Here is evidence that in the right *terroir*, Pinot Blanc is capable of producing *grand cru* wines. Planted in the granite of the great Brand vineyard, this parcel is always bottled separately from the rest of the Boxler Pinot Blanc holdings. It produces a wine with the type of consistency from year to year that is a hallmark of *grand cru* sites: seasonal excesses are smoothed. The result is an intensely stony, dry, regal Pinot Blanc that can age and improve alongside the domaine’s Sylvaner, Muscat, Riesling, and Pinot Gris bottlings.

2018 FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI PINOT GRIGIO

“RONCO PITOTTI” ◆ VIGNAI DA DULINE \$45

MOST PINOT GRIGIO is drunk up immediately, and rightfully so: typical renditions range from thin and diluted at their worst to lean, crisp, and minerally at their best. But with Duline’s Ronco Pitotti, made from vines sixty to eighty years old, that satiating stoniness we crave from Pinot Grigio dances over sublime golden fruit and a hint of toasted almond to give a *bianco* that is concentrated and fleshy, yet still supremely refreshing. Perhaps this is what Pinot Grigio tasted like decades ago, before the mass market existed. With such balance, it is hard to resist right now, but it promises to develop into something else completely for those patient enough to wait five to ten more years.



2016 PINOT GRIS *GRAND CRU* “EICHBERG”

◆ KUENTZ-BAS \$53

EICHBERG IS a *grand cru* of clay and limestone (similar to the *terroir* in Burgundy), below the hilltop town of Husseren-les-Châteaux, where the historic Kuentz-Bas estate has produced fine wine since 1795. A top site for both Pinot Gris and Riesling, Eichberg is known for powerful wines. Here the vines have more soil to dig their roots into, and the wines are lavish, plump, and comfortable, as if the vines have never suffered a day in their lives. You'll want to pair this with a roast chicken or duck, or grilled sausages, when you are in the mood to forgo a red with the main course.



2018 SANCERRE *ROUGE*

◆ DANIEL CHOTARD \$29

THE ROLLING HILLS around the hilltop village of Sancerre, in the Loire Valley, are completely covered with vineyards. It may come as a surprise to learn that Pinot Noir represents almost one quarter of plantings here, with the rest reserved for the Sauvignon Blanc responsible for Sancerre's brisk, citrusy whites. Interestingly, Pinot Noir once dominated these slopes, but planting Sauvignon became the norm after the phylloxera epidemic wiped out all of the region's vineyards in the late nineteenth century. Today, growers in the area are realizing the potential to make fine reds—after all, Sancerre is not so far from Burgundy, and it shares the clay and limestone soils known to yield such noble expressions of Pinot. Simon Chotard experiments constantly in the cellar, testing different techniques in fermentation and aging in order to improve each vintage. This *rouge* saw aging in a combination of stainless-steel tanks and oak barrels of various sizes, the perfect combination to capture bright, fresh fruit while maximizing depth and complexity on the palate. It is proof that red Sancerre deserves to be taken seriously.



2016 TOSCANA ROSSO “CUNA”

◆ PODERE SANTA FELICITA \$48

PODERE SANTA FELICITA is situated east of the river Arno, closer to Italy’s eastern shore than to its western one. In recent years, this stretch has been more olive oil territory than wine territory, but Federico Staderini is a keen student of history. He knows that the Etruscans once made storied wine here, giving him the idea to plant vines. As the enologist at famed Poggio di Sotto in Montalcino, Federico easily could have been content to rest on his laurels there. Thankfully for us, he started this separate domaine, crafting a gorgeous, singular red from Pinot Nero along the unlikely eastern Tuscan border. Floral and sunny—without being over-ripe—this Pinot Nero is fresh, complex, and extroverted. Tannin gives it structure, but the tannin is incredibly soft, primarily due to Federico’s insistence on crushing the grapes with his feet (instead of by machine) and bottling unfiltered, preserving the wine’s juiciness and long finish.



2017 GIVRY ROUGE 1ER CRU “A VIGNE ROUGE”

◆ DOMAINE FRANÇOIS LUMPP \$59

WHEN YOU DRIVE into Givry, an old, faded sign on the road announces you are entering the *cru* that was once the preferred drink of King Henri IV of France. While the sign harkens back to a glory the village knew five centuries ago, modern times haven’t been so kind. In the 1970s, to buck a trend of quantity rather than quality, a few vignerons decided to turn back the clock. Led by François Lumpp, they began a long process of replanting abandoned slopes, cutting yields, farming responsibly, and putting arduous effort into once again making Givry a *grand vin*. The rest, as they say, is history. This bottling contains a lot of ripe fruit (we are in southern Burgundy, after all), but it also has a sheen, sharpness, and smartness, possibly due to this parcel’s high limestone and marl content—a unique identity you would expect from a unique *cru*.





2017 Pinot Blanc “Réserve” <i>Albert Boxler</i> ALSACE	Pinot Blanc	40-year-old vines Granite	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Acacia blossom, apple, citrus Laser-focused, crystalline, mineral, taut	Drink now through 2030
2018 Friuli Colli Orientali Pinot Grigio “Ronco Pitotti” <i>Vignai da Duline</i> FRIULI	Pinot Grigio	Vines planted in 1940, 1958 Flysch (stratified marl and sandstone)	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant optional	Flowers, toasted almond, wet stone Crisp, clean, creamy, fleshy, stony	Drink now through 2028
2016 Pinot Gris <i>Grand Cru</i> “Eichberg” <i>Kuentz-Bas</i> ALSACE	Pinot Gris	25- to 40-year-old vines Clay, limestone, sandstone	Serve <i>cold</i> 50–54° F Decant recommended	Mirabelle plum, dried fruit, yellow peach, gunflint Powerful, broad, plump	Drink now through 2030
2018 Sancerre <i>Rouge</i> <i>Daniel Chotard</i> LOIRE	Pinot Noir	20- to 55-year-old vines Clay, limestone, Kimmeridgian marl	Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60° F Decant optional	Sour cherry, cranberry, wet leaves, hibiscus Bright, juicy, tangy, supple	Drink now through 2030
2016 Toscana Rosso “Cuna” <i>Podere</i> <i>Santa Felicita</i> TUSCANY	Pinot Nero	Vines planted in 2007 Clay, limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant recommended	<i>Frutti di bosco</i> , ripe berries, baked earth, dried herbs Rich, deep, elegant	Drink now through 2035
2017 Givry <i>Rouge 1er Cru</i> “A Vigne Rouge” <i>Domaine</i> <i>François Lummpp</i> BURGUNDY	Pinot Noir	15-year-old vines Clay, limestone, marl	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant recommended	Black cherry, smashed raspberries, earth, game Chewy, tannic, structured	Drink now through 2035

far left, top: Boxler vineyards in

Niedermorschwihr. © GAIL SKOFF

far left, bottom: Lorenzo Mocchiutti. © LYLE RAILSBACK

middle, top: Foudres in the cellar. © KUENTZ-BAS

middle, bottom: Simon Chotard. © DANIEL CHOTARD

near left, top: Federico Staderini pressing off his grapes.

© PODERE SANTA FELICITA

near left, bottom: François Lummpp. © DOMAINE FRANÇOIS LUMPP

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raspberry



cherry



Pinot
Noir



earth



roses

black
tea



lemon



Pinot
Blanc



almond



apple



minerals



cream



wet
stone

white
flowers



Pinot
gris



nectarine



honey



orange
blossom