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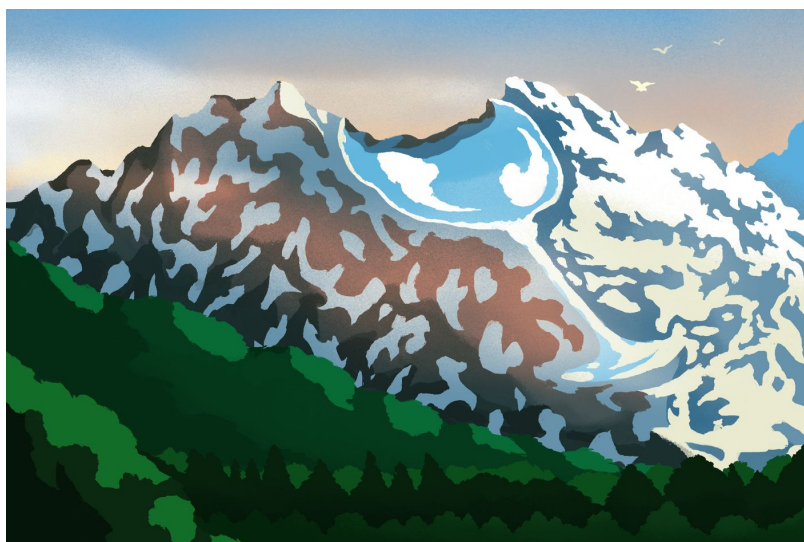
5 Fantastic Pinot Noirs You Don't Know (but Should)

Can we get past Burgundy for a minute? And the usual suspects from California and Oregon? Our wine columnist went looking for Pinots from unexpected points on the globe and found some great values while she was at it.



By [Lettie Teague](#) [Follow](#)

Jan. 5, 2024 12:15 pm ET



HIDDEN GEMS From Argentina to Italy to New Zealand, well-made Pinot Noirs await where you might not expect them. ILLUSTRATION: GASTON MENDIETA

PINOT NOIR is most famously produced in France, California and Oregon. But many wine drinkers may not know it hails from other places as well.

Maybe that's because Pinots from "other" places like New Zealand and South Africa are overshadowed by grapes for which those places are known. And yet good Pinots are made in unexpected places—like the Pinot Noir from Piedmont, Italy, I found recently—a terrific discovery from a region world-famous for Nebbiolo.

Winemaker Silvio Giamello had never worked outside his native Piedmont before taking over his family's winery and wanted to try making a wine from a grape other than regional classics like Nebbiolo and Dolcetto. After considering other grapes, he chose one of the most challenging: Pinot Noir, aka Pinot Nero. He planted his first plot in 2010, in a Barbaresco vineyard.

Giamello's Pinot Nero has turned out to be a bellwether of sorts for the other grapes he grows. "It's the first variety we pick, and it gives us an idea of what the harvest will be like" he wrote in an email. Giamello experimented with various types of oak barrels in the production of his Pinot Nero and sought the opinions of wine professionals. He and a sommelier discussed how, in warm vintages like 2017 and 2022, the wine can resemble Syrah.

I didn't find the 2021 Silvio Giamello Langhe Arneg Pinot Nero (\$36) necessarily Syrah-like, though it was definitely on the more structured and savory side—to my mind, a sort of Barbaresco-ish Pinot. "Arneg" means "renegade" in Piemontese dialect, Giamello noted, and is also associated with a local card game: "When the card changes suit, one says 'arneg,' just like we changed grape varieties planting Pinot Nero instead of Nebbiolo."

Possessed of an equally interesting back story, the 2022 Bodega Chacra Barda Pinot Noir (\$33) was produced by Piero Incisa della Rochetta, whose grandfather Marchese Mario Incisa della Rochetta created the famed Super Tuscan Sassicaia. The younger Incisa della Rochetta produced the first Barda Pinot Noir in the Argentine Patagonia in 2005. He makes other, pricier Pinot Noirs as well as Chardonnays—the latter in partnership with famed Burgundian winemaker Jean-Marc Roulot.

The Barda is "often perceived as the 'village-level Pinot Noir,'" noted Michael Nelson, vice president of education and grower relations at Grand Cru Selections, which imports Bodega Chacra wines to the U.S. In the Burgundian hierarchy, a village wine is commonly a winery's entry-level bottling, often produced from younger vines in comparatively large quantities. In the case of the Barda, that's 90,000 bottles, which makes it easier to find than some other obscure Pinots.

Another Argentine wine, the 2021 Domaine Nico Soeur et Frères La Savante Pinot Noir (\$45), comes from Laura Catena; her father, Nicolás Catena, made Malbec from Mendoza, Argentina, world-famous. The Pinots produced by Domaine Nico in mountainous Tupungato are a bit more obscure. Although the winery was founded in 2016, proprietor Laura Catena and her father spent years researching higher-altitude Pinot Noir. Laura, a Francophile, gave French names to all her single-vineyard Pinots, which are produced in vineyards of varying elevation. La Savante (The Scholar), produced at 4,757 feet, has bright red fruit, elegant style and vivid acidity.

Another impressive wine—and excellent deal—the 2020 Laberinto Cenizas Pinot Noir (\$20) was produced in the Maule Valley of Chile, south of Santiago. Like its Argentine peers, it was a Pinot many years in the making. Laberinto winemaker Rafael Tirado noted that he planted his first Pinot vines in 1995, but it wasn't until the 2008 vintage that he produced his first serious Pinot wine. Clearly the time that it took was time well spent, as the 2020 Laberinto Pinot Noir was a true standout, lush, full bodied, utterly voluptuous.

A few other Pinot Noirs I purchased were from New Zealand, most notably Central Otago. I realize that New Zealand Pinot is not exactly obscure, but New Zealand's blockbuster variety, Sauvignon Blanc, makes it seem so.

Some regard Central Otago, on the country's South Island, as one of the best locations for planting Pinot, and the Central Otago Pinots I tasted were all pretty well made. But the 2021 Quartz Reef Central Otago Bendigo Pinot Noir (\$35) was the true star. Quartz Reef winery was founded in 1996 by three partners. One of them, winemaker Rudi Bauer, studied viticulture and winemaking in his native Austria and in Germany, and worked in Oregon, California and New Zealand before founding Quartz Reef. The Bendigo subregion, near Queenstown on the slopes of the Dunstan mountains, produces particularly full-bodied wines, and the Quartz Reef Pinot certainly fit the profile: a medium- to full-bodied wine with fine-grained tannins, marked by dark fruit notes.

In South Africa, Pinot grows to good effect in several regions, and I hoped to find more wines than I was ultimately able to track down. One that I did find was a particularly good deal: the 2019 Bosman Family Vineyards Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Pinot Noir (\$18), from the Western Cape. According to brand manager Carla Bosman, her family has been making wine in South

Africa for over 200 years, though they only acquired their Upper Hemel-en-Aarde vineyard a couple of decades ago. Overlooking Walker Bay, it's an ideal place for a cool-climate grape like Pinot, she noted.

I tried a few other Pinots from places not known for them—not all of them good. I wasn't entirely surprised by this fact: Pinot Noir is a notoriously fickle grape. On the other hand, the obscure Pinots I tasted were mostly well-priced, which makes one more inclined to experiment. My own venture into unexpected places definitely yielded unexpected rewards.

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1. **2021 Silvio Giamello Langhe Arneg Pinot Nero, \$36.** Planting Pinot Noir in a Piedmont vineyard otherwise dedicated to Barbaresco might seem crazy, but Silvio Giamello made it work. This wonderfully aromatic (earth, red fruit), modestly tannic Pinot is the proof.

2. **2021 Quartz Reef Central Otago Bendigo Pinot Noir, \$35.** Winemaker Rudi Bauer has been making acclaimed New Zealand Pinots for several decades. His experience shows in this remarkably elegant wine marked by crisp acidity and red fruit aromas.

3. **2022 Bodega Chacra Barda Pinot Noir, \$33.** The name Barda (translation: “eroded slope”) refers to the sandy soils where this Patagonian Pinot Noir is produced. The wine itself is an absolute pleasure to drink, all bright, juicy fruit and youthful acidity.

4. **2020 Laberinto Cenizas Pinot Noir, \$20.** Produced from a single organically farmed vineyard in the coolest corner of his estate in the Maule Valley by winemaker-owner Rafael Tirado, this lush, ripe red is a particularly voluptuous expression of the grape.

5. **2021 Domaine Nico Soeur et Frères La Savante Pinot Noir, \$45.** At Domaine Nico, devoted to higher-altitude Argentine Pinot, Laura Catena makes this sleek wine in homage to scholarly women—who she says, can be “feminine and serious at the same time, like this wine.”

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Appeared in the January 6, 2024, print edition as 'Pinots Where We Least Expect Them'.