

# Wine Reviews: Bouchaine's Carneros Pinots

BY ISAAC BAKER, DECEMBER 17, 2022



Credit: Bouchaine Vineyards

The clonal variability of Pinot Noir is a fascinating thing. The propensity it has to mutate means there are hundreds of clones available, although not all are commercially important.

There's rarely a single clone that winemakers swear by in all circumstances. Rather, similar to the way a rock climber places specialized protection in particular cracks and fissures, winemakers try to plant the right clone in the right spot to achieve their goals.

California's Bouchaine knows this process well. In the cooler Carneros region of Napa, Bouchaine has 87 planted acres, more than half of which are planted to Pinot Noir. Different clones in different blocks allows them to craft a diverse palate of Pinot expression.

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I recently had the pleasure of tasting through four wines from winemaker and general manager Chris Kajani. The Napa native has been making wine at Bouchaine since 2015, and really knocked it out of the park in 2019. “We’re in the vineyard all the time. I’m there every day,” she described in a recent webinar. “We basically are picking based on taste.” Of course they run tests and check numbers, “but in the grand scheme of things there’s normally a certain flavor that I’m looking for and a certain ripeness to the tannins.”

With slight variations in soils, it gives the clonal uniqueness a chance to shine. “Pinot Noir has more clonal options than any other variety,” Kajani said. “And that’s why Pinot people can’t stop talking about clones. It’s what we do.”

Take the Swan clone, for example, which was planted by old-school Sonoma legend Joseph Swan at the advice of winemaker André Tchelistcheff. He also advised Bouchaine proprietor Tatiana Copeland on planting this clone on the Bouchaine estate. It certainly has found a great home in Bouchaine’s vineyards, as their wine is exquisite.

I tasted through four of Bouchaine’s elegant Pinots, three of which were single-clone bottlings, and the fourth is a blend of different estate clones. They’re individually delicious and very well-made, but collectively they offer a much more nuanced look at this grape and place. Parsing the differences between the three clonal selections, and comparing those to the bigger-picture blend, is a captivating and enjoyable process. And, considering the reasonable prices on these wines, this would be a great way to dig further into Carneros Pinot with a group of wine nerds, family, or friends.

And 2019 is a great vintage to dive into the intricacies in these wines. It’s one of my favorite vintages in Napa and Sonoma in recent memory — plenty of ripeness, but an airy, vibrant quality to many of the wines as well. It’s a vintage that drinks incredibly well right out of the bottle, but a lot of these wines have the stuffing for serious cellar improvement as well.



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These wines were received as trade samples and tasted sighted.

**2019 Bouchaine Pinot Noir Estate Swan Clone** *(USA, California, Napa, Carneros)*

**94 Points**, IJB

Light ruby color. Such a delight to sniff, it has this vibrant, airy, effortless appeal, with waves of roses, rhubarb, white pepper, along with crunchy cherry, pomegranate and juicy raspberry fruit. Notes of spicy, clay and tilled soil add a lot to ponder. And then the palate hits, which is a bright and spritely show of strawberries, raspberries and tangy red cherry fruit — so alive and zesty. The dusty tannins provide structure, and the balance is delightful. Notes of rhubarb, mint, white pepper, rose hips, clay and some wild herb tones offer a complex, delicious and balanced wine. This is really something — crisp, airy, yet deep and complex. Hat's off! Aged 10 months in 20% new French oak.

**2019 Bouchaine Pinot Noir Estate Pommard Clone** *(USA, California, Napa, Carneros)*

**93 Points**, IJB

Juicy cherry color. The nose shows deep vibes, but it's also alive and fragrant, with black and red cherries, along with violets, rose petals, some spiced black tea and dusty earth tones. The palate is packed with juicy black cherries and summer plums, with a nice tannic backbone, and a full but fresh appeal. This has a lot of savory goodness, with these bay leaf, mushrooms, pepper and paprika tones, along with complexities of rocky earth, cinnamon, spiced black tea, and light roast coffee. Delicious, deep but vibrant, this should age wonderfully over the coming decade. Aged 10 months in 25% new French oak.

**2019 Bouchaine Pinot Noir Estate Dijon Clone** *(USA, California, Napa, Carneros)*

**93 Points**, IJB

Deep ruby color. Aromas pop with juicy black cherries and jammy raspberries, along with a lovely mix of herbal and spice tones (pine, spiced tea, tobacco, cedar), with notes of rhubarb and dried rose petals to round things out. The palate has ripe tannins and tangy acidity, well-balanced, with a mix of juicy black cherries and tangy strawberry fruit. The floral and earthy complexities make for a lot to ponder, as this needs air and swirling, but I love the earthy, peppery tones mixing with the cola and mocha elements. This has a lot to offer now, but I'd let it age gracefully for a few years first. Delicious stuff. The estate boasts five different Dijon clones, and this is made solely of Dijon 667. Aged 10 months in 33% new French oak.

**2019 Bouchaine Pinot Noir Carneros** *(USA, California, Napa, Carneros)*

**91+ Points**, IJB

Vibrant ruby color. The nose rocks with these chilled strawberry and juicy raspberry aromas, backed up clearly by rhubarb, clove, bay leaf, dried roses and some cola tones. The palate is bright and focused, with lively acidity and tannins that have a fine, lightly dusty feel, combining for a round but fresh Pinot. Cherries, pomegranate and strawberry fruit, ripe but crunchy, with perfumed tones of roses and violets, along with some rhubarb, bay leaf and spicy pepper elements. There's a lot going on in this wine, especially when you consider the price. This is a great intro to this producer's style, and a ton of Pinot goodness for your money.