

From James the Sommelier – All About Grapes

‘Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours’

Last week’s newsletter talked about the Cabernet Sauvignon grape; this week we introduce you to its opposite number....

Pinot Noir

With comments from eminent wine bloggers and columnists in America describing it as ‘sex in a glass,’ and ‘a seductive yet fickle mistress,’ I would be comfortable in saying that, even though Cabernet Sauvignon inherently whores itself out to the world, Pinot Noir bags the desirability prize. And isn’t it desired! Good Pinot Noir is sought after. Chased after, really. Pinot’s thin skin and sensitive vines make it incredibly hard to cultivate creating this yearning for the wine all over the world. Even its name ‘Black Pine’ conjures an image of beauty and sexiness. It sounds like the code name for a steaming hot secret agent.

As you might have guessed, it is of French origin. More specifically it comes from its most famous region in France, Cote d’Or in Burgundy, an association developed in 100AD where Valois dukes first noticed Pinot Noir’s potential and developed a propaganda campaign to cement the now world famous connection. Typical of French wines, Burgundian Pinot develops into an earthy wine filled with farmyard aromas reminiscent of its European country origins.

Lets not forget New Zealand, however. As Australia’s tiny neighbor, New Zealand is probably most famous for producing one of the best rugby teams in the world. Well, you can add Pinot Noir to its famous list. Martinborough and Central Ortego, two international award-wining regions of the south island consistently produce great Pinots. Contrary to its French counterpart, New Zealand Pinot tends to be more powerful, fruitier and darker. Much like its rugby team I suppose.

Pinot noir is the antithesis of Cabernet Sauvignon. Andre Tchelistcheff put it beautifully when quoted as saying ‘God made Cabernet Sauvignon, the devil made Pinot noir,’ a statement which, I think you’ll agree, looks increasingly more justified. But, how could you tell the Prince from the Pauper without intricate knowledge of the two grapes? The key is in the taste. Pinot is famous for its light to medium bodied structure. This is something which compounds its exclusivity as the taste can be so subtle that finding it can be akin to conjuring. Appreciating it, then, is not only important but also highly necessary. It is, also, the most terrior expressive of red grapes so the region it comes from heavily influences its character. Choose wisely.

TIPS: Pair Old World Pinot noir with light vegetable dishes and New World Pinot with fresh fruit.

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road,
George Town, Penang

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