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Oregon Pinot Noir under \$30



Oregon was once the go-to for great-value Pinot Noir. It's a lot tougher these days to find value options, says Samantha Cole-Johnson, but these tips and wine recommendations will help.

Only a few decades ago, an 'under \$30 values' report on Oregon wine would have been amusing to both producers and consumers. The reason being that, at that time, there was at least as much good wine in Oregon under \$30 as over \$30. While the state had a growing reputation for Pinot Noir from the Willamette Valley, it still functioned as a lesser-known region prized by educated consumers who loved the wines of Burgundy and California but were looking for less-expensive alternatives.

In 2022, things have changed. The quality of Willamette Valley Pinot Noir has been acknowledged worldwide. Last year Willamette Valley was recognised as a PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) by the EU. It is only the second US wine region, after Napa Valley, to receive this recognition. Oregon is also the only state on the US west coast to have seen sustained wine volume growth, as well as wine value growth, since 2018. The Willamette Valley AVA has carried this growth.

Predictably, this has meant that land prices have risen as producers have flocked to the Willamette Valley. As planted acreage has gone up, so has demand for vineyard stewards, increasing labour prices. Both stressors have contributed to rising wine prices, as has the changing structure of the wine industry.

Willamette, and Oregon more generally, has long been a familial place (see [Adelsheim's Founders' Stories](#) podcast). These family wineries have often been willing to accept a business capable of covering overheads and a workable, if not always comfortable, salary for themselves and family members. But as the region has grown in prestige, the rate of acquisition has increased, such that, of the founding families, only Elk Cove, Sokol Blosser, Oak Knoll and The Eyrie remain under the original family's ownership. Corporate investment has increased the focus on creating growth and returns for investors, often leading to increased volume and standardisation at entry-level prices and increased premium offerings at higher price points. However, it's not all bad news for seekers of affordable Pinot Noir. Having just tasted 72 Oregon Pinot Noirs priced at \$30 or less, I've found that high production does not mean lesser quality.

While Oregon's reputation was built on small-production (under 5,000-case) wineries, the variability in resources and in the experience of winemakers at small operations means that in my recent tastings, the smaller producers accounted for both the best and worst wines I tasted (barring one). In contrast, large-production winemaking teams showed themselves to be skilled in keeping consistency, stability and varietal typicality. This was especially evident in Pinot Noirs (I'll write about non-Pinot Noir value picks from Oregon next week), with Union Wine Company's labels Alchemist and Amity Vineyards (acquired in 2014), King Estate and Willamette Valley Vineyard proving that large-production wine can often outperform small in terms of quality for under \$30.

In the 15 wines below, you'll find that the one 2018 shows the vintage to be ripe and warm. The 2019s tend to be restrained and well balanced, with most begging another year for full integration of acidity and tannins (it was cool and wet). 2020, unfortunately, is absent due to a high number of [smoke-affected wines](#), and 2021 swings back to opulent, ripe, warm wines of which most are quite ready to drink now. While the

Willamette Valley is responsible for the largest number of high-quality Pinot Noirs in the list below, look also to Columbia Gorge, also represented here.

Some of my favourites under \$30 are listed below, currently ordered alphabetically by producer name but you can change this.

Select sorting option ▼

Amity Pinot Noir 2021 Eola-Amity Hills

Pale ruby with a hint of purple. Bright and juicy on the nose with blackberry, black cherry and violets. The palate is dense with black fruit, medium, grippy tannin and medium-plus acid. Medium finish with more texture than fruit. A slight lactic yogurt quality on the finish. Needs some time to integrate. It has all the right elements but I'm certain it will get better with another year. (SCJ)

13%

Drink

2023

-

2026

16 +

Bryn Mawr Pinot Noir 2019 Willamette Valley

Screwcap.

Pale ruby in colour. Red cherry, pine and forest floor. Savoury and earthy with blacker fruit on the palate. Medium, fine-grained tannin and medium-plus acid. This presents the much more savoury side of Pinot Noir. Well done for under \$30! Do decant. (SCJ)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16

Chehalem Pinot Noir 2021 Chehalem Mountains

Screwcap. B Corp certified.

Pale ruby with a hint of purple. Bright strawberry and cherry fruit on the nose. Medium-plus acid that presents just a bit sharp. Orange peel and cherry on the palate. Medium, fine-grained tannin. Well balanced but not yet as well integrated as it will be. Give it a year. (SCJ)

13.5%

Drink

2023

-

2026

16 +

Dobbes Family, Amelia Rose Cuvée Pinot Noir 2019

Willamette Valley

Pale ruby in colour. Sweet black and red cherry on the nose with some vanilla from oak. Medium-plus acid, medium, sandy tannin and a medium finish. Overall, quite nice and fruity - well balanced. Ripe, especially considering the vintage. (SCJ)

13.5%

Drink

2021

-

2025

16

Flâneur Pinot Noir 2021 Willamette Valley

Pale ruby. Medium intensity on the nose with sweet black-cherry fruit and ripe fig. Medium-plus acid on the palate with light, fine-grained tannin. Just a touch of bitter cherry on a medium finish. Typicality and a bit of stuffing. Nicely done and very well

balanced, especially considering how hot 2021 was. (SCJ)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16.5

King Estate Pinot Noir 2021 Willamette Valley

Pale purple in colour. Warm black-cherry nose. Weighty and ripe palate with dark cherry and vanilla. Medium-plus, fresh acid and medium tannin. Much more impactful and richer on the palate than on the nose. Warming alcohol. This wine is balanced but is certainly fruit-forward and warm. New World all the way and nicely executed! (SCJ)

13.5%

Drink

2022

-

2026

16

Lemelson, Thea's Selection Pinot Noir 2019 **Willamette Valley**

Pale ruby in colour. Red and black cherry on the nose and a vanilla wood note. Quite a nice New World-wood-and-fruit nose. Medium-plus acid and medium tannin. Medium-plus finish. Well balanced but not yet fully integrated. I'd give it another year. (SCJ)

13.3%

Drink

2023

-

2026

16.5 +

Love & Squalor Pinot Noir 2019 Willamette Valley

Pale ruby in colour. Savoury with a microbial earthy quality on the nose, wet leaves and an undercurrent of ripe black cherry and plum. Well balanced on the palate between medium-plus acid and medium, sandy tannin. This needs a good decant. The acid is still a tad sharp. I'd give it another year. (SCJ)

13.5%

Drink

2023

-

2027

16 +

Phelps Creek, Le Petit Pinot Noir 2021 Columbia Gorge

Screwcap. Certified sustainable by LIVE.

Pale ruby in colour. Quite aromatic! Lovely fruitiness bursts from the glass akin to Beaujolais Nouveau. Ripe raspberry, red cherry and cherry yogurt. Quite a fun and expressive nose. Medium, fine-grained tannin and medium-plus, refreshing acidity. It may not be the longest but it's quite refreshing and pretty. Incredibly drinkable. Would do very well with Thanksgiving. (SCJ)

12.8%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16

Scenic Valley Farms, Wild Hare Pinot Noir 2019 Willamette Valley

Pale ruby in colour. A lovely dry-leaf and ripe red-cherry nose. Cola and cinnamon. Medium-plus, verging on high, acid that's not yet fully integrated. Medium, slightly gritty tannin. The flavour profile on this is really lovely but the structure is just a bit sharp at the moment – not uncommon for 2019s. Give it another year or have it with food and it should sing! (SCJ)

12.4%

Drink

2023

-

2027

16.5 +

Union Wine Company, Alchemist Pinot Noir 2021 **Willamette Valley**

Pale ruby in colour. Black cherry and yogurt on the nose with a bit of wet leaf. Medium-plus, verging on high, acid and medium, very grippy, slightly astringent tannin. The structure is quite forceful. Medium finish. Would do well with some food. The restraint of this wine with the ripeness of the vintage is nicely executed. (SCJ)

13%

Drink

2022

-

2026

16

Willamette Valley Vineyards, Whole Cluster Pinot **Noir 2021 Willamette Valley**

Pale ruby in colour. Stemmy nose with black cherry, bramble and yogurt. Medium acid and medium, silty, fine tannin on the palate. It does have some grip. Quite viscous and textural. Ripe and dense – for those who love big Pinot Noir. A bit sickly on the finish. (SCJ)

13.8%

Drink

2022

-

2025

16

Winter's Hill, Watershed Pinot Noir 2021 Dundee Hills

Certified sustainable by LIVE.

Pale ruby in colour. Really ripe red cherry and red plum on the nose. Smells like cinnamon graham crackers. Ripe and viscous on the palate with red fruit, medium grippy tannin, medium acid and a medium-plus finish. They've done quite well with this, but it's certainly for New World wine lovers - very fruit- and oak-forward. (SCJ)

13.7%

Drink

2022

-

2026

16

Winter's Hill, Watershed Pinot Noir 2019 Dundee Hills

Medium ruby in colour. A bit quiet on the nose with subtle red-cherry aromas. Red and black cherry on the palate. Medium-plus, fresh acidity. Medium tannin. Medium-plus finish. Ripe but very balanced fruit character. Nicely done. A bit more refreshing and less viscous than the 2021, reflecting the vintage character of each. (SCJ)

13.1%

Drink

2021

-

2026

16.5 +

Yamhill Valley Pinot Noir 2018 McMinnville

Screwcap.

Pale ruby in colour. Sweet, ripe and jammy fruit on the nose – California style. Very ripe red cherry and a whack of vanilla. This absolutely expresses the hot, ripe, dense 2018 vintage. Round and plummy on the palate with medium-plus acid and medium tannin. The finish is medium and carried by acid and tannin. As long as you like New World ripe and fruity with oak backbone, this is ready to drink now. (SCJ)

14.2%

Drink

2019

-

2023

16