



the
FRANZ
FILES



Cuvaision 2021 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Napa Valley (\$42) When all of the wines in a portfolio seem to excel in every vintage, an entire team is surely to be credited, but Cuvaision winemaker Steven Rogstad still deserves top billing.

This Pinot is already more complex, integrated, and simply delicious than many examples with significantly higher selling prices and advantages in maturity. Its core of Bing cherry, cranberry, and strawberry remains pristine despite ten months of aging in (35% new) French oak barrels. The wood adds spice notes and just a bit of beneficial grip without intruding on the fruit's purity. **93**



Balverne 2021 Forever Wild Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley (\$45) This graceful, fresh Pinot is impressive for its delicacy and its ability to improve with age. Lithe and taut for now, with excellent acidity that recalls Burgundy more than California, it will benefit greatly from a few years of aging to unwind and develop

tertiary characters. Bright red cherry and strawberry ride alongside darker berry notes with a nice, subtly spicy edge. **91**

Archetype 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (\$45) I find it hard not to look askance at a screwcapped Cabernet with a \$45 price tag and a broad "California" appellation, but this wine proves very persuasive. Dry but not austere or harsh, it possesses a natural, unmanipulated character: Dark cherry and berry flavors intermingle with subtle oak influence, and the tannin load is just right for the wine's moderate weight. Preconceptions are often correct but not in this case—versatile in profile and very well made, this belies them quite impressively. **93**

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Balverne 2019 Forever Wild Cabernet Sauvignon, Chalk Hill, Sonoma County (\$48) Labeled as varietal Cabernet, this seems more like a blend—and one from Bordeaux at that, with its complex and impeccably dry, mineral-tinged finish. That's because it is a blend: 79%

Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Petit Verdot, 9% Malbec, and 3% Cabernet Franc. Medium-bodied, with nicely integrated oak and fine-grained tannins, it's more stately than showy and better suited to the table than the bar. Ready to rip now, especially with food, but capable of improving for another five years. **92**



Trione 2018 Henry's Blend, Geyserville Ranch, Alexander Valley (\$60)

Comprising 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Merlot, 13% Petit Verdot, 13% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Malbec, this blend is greater than the sum of its parts, drawing extra textural fleshiness from the Merlot and interesting aromatic and flavor nuances

from the other varieties. Already well integrated, it will become even more complex with age but is showing beautifully now. It could easily stand up to a grilled steak but could also play nicely with roasted duck—that's impressive versatility. **94**



Sean Minor 2021 Invid Series Grenache, Rossi Ranch, Sonoma Valley (\$75)

Made with gorgeously pure fruit picked at a perfect balance between ripeness and acidity and then handled with respectful restraint in the cellar, this wine displays a host of little nuances even at its tender age, including spicy top notes and savory undertones, all swirling around a well-defined core of red cherry and cranberry. I tasted it twice and loved it both times. **95**



Viña VIK 2019 Milla Cala, Millahue, Cachapoal Valley, Chile (\$49)

This is gloriously open, generous, complex, and harmonious, with an invitingly soft texture and exceedingly broad adaptability to moderately robust foods. Based on Cabernet Sauvignon at 61%, with three other Bordeaux varieties and Syrah, it's so integrated and proportional that the precise component stats are irrelevant. A charmer rather than a bruiser, it echoes the style of the 2019 flagship VIK (\$150, which I scored at 99)—but for only one-third the price. **94**