

Pinot Noir



Napa

California Pinot Noir has been greatly increasing in popularity over the past two decades. The amount of grapes crushed since 1990 has more than tripled (from 32,295 tons in 1990 to 105,000 in 2006). Sonoma County is where you'll find the most acreage dedicated to Pinot Noir; it's followed by Monterey, Santa Barbara and Napa. Mendocino County runs close behind Napa, as more and more growers are discovering the benefits of its climate and rich soil.

So why is Pinot Noir so popular? From my experience, one reason is that it seems to walk a path somewhere between what people love about red—or white—wines. Something about its basic characteristics serve as a crossover, leading people from one “camp” to another. And isn't it always nice to expand one's horizons? Another reason, I think, is how well it pairs with so many types of food. Apparently pork is high on that list, since both winemakers this month decided to pair their wine with it. Try them out and see if you agree.

Winemaker Karen Culler with owners Salvador and Oscar Renteria



Ask almost any winemaker, and he or she will tell you a great wine starts in the vineyard. So it only makes sense that Renteria Wines had just such a beginning—literally. Owner Salvador Renteria began his career in 1963 as a vineyard worker at Sterling Vineyards. By 1987, he started Renteria Vineyard Management, which is now one of the largest grape-farming companies in Northern California. Sal's son, Oscar, assumed leadership of the company in 1993. It was his idea to begin making wine.

The Renteria family now owns 52 acres in Napa Valley. They launched their own wine label in 1997. Along with winemaker Karen Culler, they produce 2,000 cases of Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon annually.

The 2004 Knittel Vineyard Pinot Noir is made from grapes grown in Napa's Carneros region. Its distinctive nose has aromas of succulent strawberries, while its soft, smooth mouthfeel rounds things out. It's paired here with a recipe from a book titled *Frida's Fiestas: Recipes and Reminiscences of Life with Frida Kahlo*.

RECIPE

Smothered Pork Sandwiches

1 1/2 pounds pork loin
1 carrot, cut in half
1 large onion, quartered
3 garlic cloves
3 teaspoons salt
8 crusty rolls

For the tomato sauce:
4 pounds ripe tomatoes
2 garlic cloves
3 medium onions, cut in thick slices
1/2 cup water
3 teaspoons salt

For the spicy sauce:
2 ounces cascabel chiles
2 ounces chiles de arbol
2 teaspoons dried oregano
3 teaspoons salt
1 1/2 cups water

Place the meat in a large saucepan with water to cover. Add the carrot, onion, garlic and salt and cook until tender, about 45 minutes. Let the meat cool, then cut in thin strips.

To make the tomato sauce, combine the tomatoes, garlic, onions, water and salt in a saucepan and simmer about 20 minutes, until the tomatoes and onions are cooked through. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Puree and strain. Serve lukewarm or cold.

For the spicy sauce, roast the chiles on a griddle and remove the stems. Purée with oregano, salt and water.

Slice the rolls in half but not all the way through. Fill with the meat. Spoon tomato sauce over half of each sandwich. Add the spicy sauce to taste.

Serves 8



Serve with Renteria
Knittel Vineyard
Pinot Noir