



It's June. A fine month. The rain abates, the grass in my lawn does not need to be mowed every other day, the beloved Red Sox mount their annual charge toward the top as the David Cone-less Yankees and the heartless Orioles slide back to the pack and all sorts of new wines are released. Despite the new releases the best thing about June is that the very confusing and depressing political primary season is over and the nasty and disturbing political election season really won't get under way until July or (hope against hope) August.

The wines that are out there that are begging to be tried are the 1995 releases of Pinot gris. More and more Oregon wineries are putting out Pinot gris, the vines are getting a little bit older (this is predominantly a very young vine wine in Oregon with most planting occurring after 1990) and an area specific style is starting to be adopted. Pinot gris is a super summer wine because it goes great with outdoorsy sorts of foods. Well made Pinot gris will be light and fruity enough to pair well with salads, sandwiches and grilled vegetables while still having the moxie and weight to complement grilled fish (salmon and halibut especially).

Another pleasing characteristic of Oregon Pinot gris is that it rarely sells for more than \$14. So if you are looking for a drinkable summer style wine that won't break your bank account, check out some Pinot gris. To make the buying easier for you I have resorted to cheap thrills. Yes, I have succumbed to a ranking system based upon the 100 point scale. While it generally is reflective of scales used by much more renowned sources such as The Wine Spectator, Robert Parker, etc., this scale is in no way as formal. The wines were tasted over a period of a few days and often times with many different people who had various levels of input into this column. So here goes.

**88 Cooper Mountain.** Expansive apple and pear fruits leading into a mid-palate containing some clover and nutty nuances. Very clean and crisp floral bouquet makes the wine enticing. Decent richness and combination of flavors. Excellent varietal characteristics. Nice viscosity and mouth feel. \$12.

**87 Oak Knoll Winery.** Very clean and crisp nose punctuated by flowery apple blossoms. Nice flavors of pears, pine nuts and apples with a touch of earth on the finish. A little tingly right now in the mouth but that could settle out leaving nice viscosity and a rich mouth feel. \$11.50.

**87 Torii Mor Winery.** Biggest fruits of all the Pinot gris while still maintaining balance and varietal character. Sliced apple and pear flavors with a touch of earthiness and a hint of citrus. A decent backbone of acid doesn't interfere with the flavors but certainly lends itself to making this more of a food wine. \$13.50.

**86 Adelsheim Vineyards.** Tremendous viscosity and mouth feel. Easily the smoothest and richest of the Pinot gris tasted. A little touch of wet hay in the nose and in the mid-palate are slight distractions to the full bodied pear, melon and apple flavors. Grassiness could blow off in 3-6 months as fruit opens up. \$13.

**86 Autumn Wind Vineyards.** Exceptionally crisp fruits, probably a little bit tight right now. Clean sliced green apple flavors and some nice spice are the dominant features of this wine. May seem a little lean to some but given 3-6 more months in the bottle it will open significantly. \$12.

**85 Elk Cove Vineyards.** Very smooth and viscous in the mouth. A touch lean on the fruit but may open in time. A little hay flavor to it. Lower acid makes for a round, soft wine that is very appealing for drinking on its own or with slightly creamier foods than normally served with Pinot gris. \$12.

**82 Westrey Vineyards.** Leesy (the stuff in the bottom of the barrels that settles out as the wine ages) and banana scented nose. Big fruits centered around bananas, pears and peaches. Maybe a touch overripe as the fruit flavors border on being flabby. Not great weight in the mouth. Not an exciting version of Pinot gris but a departure from usual style. \$11.25.

**80 Bridgeview Vineyards.** Big, fat apricot and peachy nose. Very tart flavors of pineapples, peaches and melons. Higher acid than most Pinot gris. A touch of residual sugar and some grassy flavors makes one think there is excessive young vine fruit or overcropped fruit in the wine. Also a "fiery" quality not unlike drinking orange juice when you have a cut in your mouth occurs perhaps from the acid or from a large CO2 added prior to bottling. Blue bottle and blue cork make for interesting packaging. \$11.50.

**79 Willakenzie Vineyards.** Crisp nose of apples and pears. Light and lean wine with too much residual sugar to give it good varietal character. Wine seems to be heading in the right direction but perhaps the fermentation could not be finished or they cut it off to avoid an excessive alcohol content. \$13.

**75 Erath Vineyards.** Excessively sweet hard candy scented nose. Moderated pear flavors are nice in the front of the wine although 2/3 of the way into the flavor a bitter quality arises and finishes the wine off abruptly. Could be the wine was pressed a little too hard and some phenolics are coming through. \$13.

**73 Bethel Heights Winery.** Simple and light wine with some odd flavors to it. A touch of bubble gum-like sweetness offsets some lean pear and apple flavors. Not a whole lot going on in this wine. First time production by top notch Oregon winery. \$12.

**70 Sokol Blosser Winery.** First Pinot gris they have made. Monstrous nose of decaying mangos. Definitely residual sugar in the wine. Light and weightless except for a

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touch of effervescence that may be due to bottling with some CO2. A very odd Pinot gris. Perhaps if you like White Riesling you would enjoy this wine. If so, you might enjoy the phonetic spelling they included on the back label. \$13.50.

While I did not find anything that blew me away I did find the majority of the Pinot gris out there to be at least good (80+ points) and a handful of very good (85+ points). I and the people with whom I test-drunk were not enamored by the wines that strayed off into a sweeter area although people who are traditionally Riesling or Muller Thurgau drinkers might find these to be nice bridge wines between sweet and dry. In general these wines are still quite young and while drinkable now will certainly be better off given any bottle aging that you can give them. This being said, though, remember that with a few exceptions most Oregon wineries produce fewer than 250 cases of Pinot gris in any given vintage, so if you find one that you like, latch on to a few bottles because it will be gone in a hurry.

**Recommended Wines for the Month:** With the '95 Pinot gris coming out there are also more and more top end 1994 Pinot noirs hitting the shelves these days. This ballyhooed vintage is something that I have intentionally tried to play down because the expectations for every Pinot noir from this vintage are so outrageously high. I maintain that while this may be an exceptional vintage you still must buy carefully to get good deals. Now the top wineries are starting to release their single vineyard, vintage select and reserve bottlings. These are wines to jump on and jump on hard. Most are not ready for immediate consumption due to the concentration and intensity present in the wine. Wines to look for and buy are:

Any Panther Creek vineyard designate -- Bednarik, Shea, Freedom Hill -- big, muscular wines with outrageous concentration and structure, most not ready for quite some time. Fiddlehead Cellars -- deep and bold, loaded with dark, sweet fruits and a lot of spice and a few months away from drinkability. St. Innocent Mt. Jefferson Cuvee -- one of the more accessible wines out there right now. Cristom Temperance Hill Vineyard -- whopping fruit complemented by chocolate and coffee style flavors, a little more oak than I prefer but still well integrated and better in two years.

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