



Peregrine 2006 Pinot Noir (Central Otago)

A pleasant stylistic change from Peregrine, whose wines have been somewhat chunky in the past, this vintage nicely captures Pinot's elusive silky texture and complex aromas. It's highly perfumed, with hints of herbs and roses wrapped around a soft core of lush black-cherry fruit. Finishes long, framed by soft tannins. (Editor's Choice)

92 Points

Whitehall Lane 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

For 40 bucks, this is a sumptuous, lush young wine that offers all of the fancy fruit and oak you expect from an upscale Napa Cab.

91 Points

Pegasus Bay 2005 Pinot Noir (Waipara Valley)

This vintage of Peg Bay's Pinot shows the firm structure of year, suggesting 2-3 years of cellaring. But while the black cherry fruit may not be immediately accessible, there's plenty of it, touched with herbal, minty complexity and a touch of oaky toast on the finish.

90 Points

Toad Hall 2004 Bodacious (Napa Valley)

This is 50-50 Cab and Merlot, and while it doesn't have much depth, it appeals instantly for a rich array of flavors. Cherries, blackberries, cassis, mocha, mushu plum sauce—all of it slightly sweetened, but tannic enough to qualify as dry.

87 Points

Zaca Mesa 2004 Z Three Red Wine (Santa Ynez Valley)

This wine is stylish and elegant, with a smooth, silky texture. But it's just a little too sugary sweet to earn a higher score, with the blackberry and cherry fruit having a jellied, candied edge.

86 Points

Lancaster 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (Alexander Valley)

It's a gorgeous Cab, softly complex, rich in cassis, cherry, spice and oak flavors anchored with warm, earthy tannins. In fact, the earthiness stands in it in good contrast to Napa Valley, making it wholesome and complete. (Editor's Choice)

97 Points

Burgess 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley)

Simple, easy and balanced, this crowd-pleasing Cab will satisfy for its wealth of ripe fruit and oak flavors. Floods the mouth with cassis, licorice and melted chocolate, wrapped in smooth, gentle tannins.

86 Points

Miner 2005 Rosella's Vineyard Pinot Noir (Santa Lucia Highland)

Miner's '05 Rosella's is a deliciously compelling wine, dry and complex. With its gentle polished tannins and adequate acidity, the blackberry, cherry, cola and cinnamon spice flavors are wrapped into a beautiful texture.

90 Points

Miner 2005 Gary's Vineyard Pinot Noir (Santa Lucia Highlands)

Soft and lush, the flavors are just delicious, ranging from cherries and cassis of cola, cocoa, gingersnap cookie, rose petal tea and Asian spices. With every sip, you find something new.

87 Points

Etude 2005 Estate Pinot Noir (Carneros)

This is a little heavy and full-bodied, although the tannins are silky and refined. It has the weight of jelly rather than the evanescence of a more ethereal vintage, and doesn't seem like an ager.

86 Points

Toad Hall 2005 Lavender Hill Pinot Noir (Carneros)

This is a dry wine, and properly silky, with earthy cola and cranberry cherry flavors. It's also young and tight and a little hit, but it's not a wine to cellar.

85 Points

Morgan 2004 Tierra Mar Syrah (Santa Lucia Highlands)

A big, thick, dry, tannic wine suggests a young Saint-Joseph, without the acidity. There's a strong white pepper edge to the cassis, but the tannins are bigtime.

90 Points

Cline 2006 Ancient Vines Zinfandel (Contra Costa County)

Too sweet and simple, this wine has sugary flavors of blackberry, cherry and raspberry jam.

86 Points

Shafer 2005 Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay (Carneros)

Shafer's '05 is drier, crisper and more minerally than its predecessors from warmer vintages. You might even call it leaner. But it still shows the elegant balance that always characterizes the wine, with brilliant acidity.

89 Points

Whitehall Lane 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (Napa Valley)

In Napa Valley, unless Sauvignon Blanc gets fully ripe, those gooseberries veer toward cat pee and mint. But there's just enough pink grapefruit and honey flavors to save the day for this dry, crisp wine.

85 Points

Dona Paula 2006 Los Cardos Cabernet Sauvignon (Lujan de Cuyo)

A little bit of leather and smoke meat give the blackberry bouquet something different, while the palate is round, forward and shows good plum and berry flavors. Some heat and spice on the finish do not detract from the overall package, which makes the grade if it doesn't blow you away. Best Buy

86 Points

Dona Paula 2006 Los Cardos Malbec (Lujan de Cuyo)

Big and fruity, and for the most part holds together and exhibits more good qualities than its faults. The flavor profile drives full-bodied black fruit and a finish that cuts out quietly.

85 Points

Pegasus Bay 2004 Prima Donna Pinot Noir (Waipara Valley)

Full-bodied and surprisingly muscular for a Prima Donna, the 2004 features big plum and cherry fruit, wrapped in hints of hickory smoke, mint and cola. Finishes with enough dusty tannins to suggest cellaring another year or two.

90 Points

Main Divide 2005 Pinot Noir (Waipara Valley)

This is a dark, plummy Pinot Noir that's plump and easygoing in the mouth. Hints of leather, chocolate and wintergreen spice it up a little, adding a mouthwatering freshness to the finish.

89 Points

Felton Road 2006 Pinot Noir (Central Otago)

A bit disjointed at this early stage of its evolution, this shows plenty of brown sugar and plum sweetness, but also crisp acids and some dry, dusty tannins.

88 Points

Kumeu River 2005 Chardonnay (Kumeu)

The citrus and pineapple flavors are reined in by structure, finishing lean and citrusy, with just enough peach to provide flesh.

90 Points

Kumeu River 2006 Village Chardonnay (Kumeu)

Boasts plenty of tropical fruit and citrus flavors, all rolled into a fresh, crisp wine. It's a simple fruit cocktail, but with well-judged balance and zesty, food friendly acids.

87 Points

Villa Maria 2007 Private Bin Sauvignon Blanc (Marlborough)

This medium-bodied wine has balance, minerally mouthfeel and crisp, citrusy flavors ideal for matching with simple seafood dishes.

88 Points

Kumeu River 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (Marlborough)

A fresh, fruit-forward style, this wine offers bold passion fruit and gooseberry flavors with just a hint of nectarine. It's not terribly complex, but the refreshing flavors linger nicely on the finish.

87 Points

Vranken 2000 Demoiselle La Parisienne Premier Cru Brut (Champagne)

A rich wine, creamy, with nut and toast flavors following fresher, crisper aromas. It is softening and coming well into its own, but still keeping a fine structure, along with ripe apple tastes.

90 Points

Heidsieck & Co Monopole NV Premier Cru Brut (Champagne)

A full-bodied, rounded, well matured bottle, with plenty of attractive toasty flavors rather than fruit. This is a delicious bottle-aged Champagne in an old style, that will be great with food.

90 Points

Vranken NV La Demoiselle de Champagne Tete de Cuvee (Champagne)

Fully rounded, and crispy dry, this has a great foamy, creamy texture, filled out with red apple skins, pink grapefruit and an open aftertaste.

89 Points

Vranken NV Diamant Brut (Champagne)

While it has lost its early freshness, it certainly has gained in complexity, offering ripe, soft, toasty flavors to add to green plum fruits and acidity.

89 Points

Heidsieck & Co Monopole NV Blue Top Brut (Champagne)

Always an enjoyable non-vintage. It has a soft, open-character, but never seems sweet, and is more rounded with creamy apple flavors and well-integrated acidity.

88 Points

Heidsieck & Co Monopole NV Rose Top (Champagne)

A lively Champagne, initially all froth and fizz. But get through that and there is a pleasant, slightly sweet wine- perhaps more full-bodied than some. The primary red-fruit flavors have been lessened by some bottle age, leaving a wine which has a hint of maturity.

86 Points

Tenuta Cocci Grifoni 2006 Colle Vecchio (Offida Pecorino)

Only a few producers import wines made with the Pecorino variety, and if you like fresh, light Italian whites they are definitely worth trying. The expression is redolent of fresh pear, honey and Gold Delicious apple and even has a slightly greenish hue within its pretty golden highlights.

86 Points