

German Pinot Noir

German wine might be synonymous with Riesling for many, but Pinot Noir is now a worthy contender in terms of both plantings and popularity, says Giles MacDonogh



GIVEN A HELPING hand by the German Wine Institute in Mainz, German Pinot Noir is raising its profile and establishing itself directly behind Riesling as the country's most important variety. This position echoes plantings: there are now 12,000 hectares of Pinot Noir in Germany, making it the

third biggest producer in the world. Germans are drinking more red wine as they adapt to southern European norms and drink more wine with food.

Of course, Pinot Noir has existed in Germany for centuries; the Cistercian monks brought it in their baggage from Burgundy. It may be that Pinot finally took second position after northern Europe passed into a cooler period at the start of the 16th century, a time that corresponded to an enthusiasm for beer. Riesling then began to conquer vineyards from the 18th century onwards.

The Rheingau was still known for Pinot in the first half

'It was a pleasure to see so many new stars from the northern Ahr Valley'

Giles MacDonogh is the DWWA Regional Chair for Germany. These wines were a selection of UK-available wines tasted, blind, in Decanter's offices

For full details of UK stockists, see p112

of the 20th century but, until the variety was revived by August Kessler and others, it could be a puny beast. Many of the faults that used to dog it are now being ironed out: sugary, marzipan-scented Pinot Noirs are on the wane, oak is integrated and there is less fear of the wilder, racier style associated with Burgundy. On the other hand, it's still hard to find many of the best wines abroad: top German Pinots are made in small quantities, tend to be expensive and are in great demand by local restaurants.

It was a pleasure to see so many new stars from the northern Ahr Valley here. The results can be stunning (and expensive). Meyer-Näkel used to take all the prizes, but now it has several rivals. Meanwhile, Baden is the key region of the south. The Kaiserstuhl three – Heger, Franz Keller and Salwey – used to rule, but once more the position is changing. Bernhard Huber is top here, and we have seen challengers such as Fritz Wassmer and novelties such as Ziereisen. Baden benefits from more sun, and the wines are both bigger and more alcoholic.

The Pfalz, too, is mounting a challenge, and over the next few years we will see more and better reds from here, especially from the south of the region.

MacDonogh's top wines



JJ Adeneuer, Ahrweiler Rosenthal Spätburgunder Grosses Gewächs, Ahr 2007 18.5/20pts (95/100pts)

£47.99 The Winery

Raspberries and confectionary sugar on a pleasing, attractive nose. Coffee, chocolate, strawberries and cherries – lots of delicious red fruits. Reminiscent of a German summer pudding. Long and luscious. **Drink** 2012–2014 **Alcohol** 14%



Nelles, B Spätburgunder, Ahr 2008 18.5 (95)

£35.99 The Winery

Sealing wax and strawberries on a frank Pinot Noir nose. Nice taste of strawberries on the chunky palate. A weighty wine that rises to a full crescendo. Lovely with chicken in a creamy sauce. **Drink** 2012–2015 **Alc** 14%



Kaiserstühler Winzerverein Oberrotweil, Blauer Spätburgunder Trocken, Baden 2009 18 (93)

£18.99 Touchstone Wines

A little cherry fruit on a quite mute nose. Interesting palate: quite complex with an attractive smokiness alongside raspberries and cherries. Big, sappy and very long. A classy wine that needs a year. **Drink** 2013–2016 **Alc** 14%



Nelles, Ruber Spätburgunder, Ahr 2009 18 (93)

£17.99 The Winery

Nose of strawberries, raspberries and sealing wax. Very attractive cherry palate, with a hint of almond paste pointing to a particularly German style of Pinot Noir. Has the grip for a long life, with plenty of tingling coffee on the undulating finish. **Drink** 2014–2018 **Alc** 13%



Fritz Wassmer, XXL Pinot Noir, Baden 2010 17.5 (91)

£35 Alfred The Grape, Highbury Vintners, Vagabond

Not so intense, but it has a good cherry nose and is an impressive wine given the ill-favoured vintage. Classic Pinot Noir, sappy and long. Gallic in style and a match for an unctuous dish such as chicken in a rich sauce. Will age well. **Drink** 2014–2018 **Alc** 13.5%



Shelter Winery, Pinot Noir Trocken, Baden 2008 17.5 (91)

£36.99 The Winery

Attractive nose of strawberries and loganberries. Something quite exotic on the palate; spicy with some liquorice. Long, sappy and promising. **Drink** 2012–2015 **Alc** 13.5%



Siegbert Bimmerle, Barrel-Aged Pinot Noir, Baden 2010 17.5 (91)

£20 Alfred The Grape, Highbury Vintners, Vagabond
Nice to be told on the label that it was matured in wood. Slightly mute nose showing some dried herbs. The palate is more expressive, with strawberries and raspberries. Gentle power, but needs a year or two. **Drink** 2013–2016 **Alc** 14%



Karl H Jöhner, SJ Blauer Spätburgunder, Baden 2008 17 (90)

£33–£42 Alexander Wines, Halifax Wine Co, Harrogate Fine Wine, Slurp
Coffee and cherry nose. Strawberry jam and marjoram on the palate. Pleasantly jammy with summer pudding appeal. Unctuous and Germanic in character. Slightly marred by a coffee finish. **Drink** 2012–2015 **Alc** 13.5%



Bercher, Spätburgunder Trocken, Baden 2008 16.5 (88)

£33.50–£39.31 Berry Bros & Rudd, Harrods, The Wine Barn
Nose of tinned tomatoes and sealing wax. Some nice strawberry character although the tinned tomato taste persists. Very long and interesting, but not a Pinot for a hedonist. Minerally finish. **Drink** 2012–2014 **Alc** 13%



Reichsrat von Bühl, FP Bühl Spätburgunder Trocken, Pfalz 2008 16.5 (88)

£18.50 Averys, Handford, Hennings Wine Merchants, WoodWinters, World Wine Agencies
Sealing wax and strawberries on an attractive Pinot Noir nose. Decent, light fruit on the palate, with cherry, chocolate and coffee flavours. Soft strawberry finish. **Drink** 2012–2013 **Alc** 13%



Dyade 52, Winemaker's Edition, Baden 2007 16 (86)

£8.99 Touchstone Wines
Showing maturity. Tinned tomato highlights on both the nose and the quite simple palate. A good match for pizza and one to drink up soon. **Drink** 2012–2013 **Alc** 13.5%



Heitlinger, Königsbecher Pinot Noir Trocken, Baden 2009 16 (86)

£19.50 Touchstone Wines
Raspberry and horseradish nose. Spicy, decent raspberry character on the quite light and slightly bitter palate. The bitterness is a distraction here but this is clearly an estate to watch. **Drink** 2012–2014 **Alc** 13.5%



Palataia, Pinot Noir, Pfalz 2011 16 (86)

£8.99 Marks & Spencer
Bursting with fresh fruit on the nose. Rather Beaujolais-like with its red berry palate of strawberries and raspberries. Slightly smoky, with a creamy summer pudding character. Lacks varietal definition for all its charm. **Drink** 2012–2014 **Alc** 13.5%



Becker-Landgraf, Gau-Odernheimer Spätburgunder Trocken, Rheinhessen 2010 15.5 (85)

£16.99 The Winery
Citrus notes on the nose. Oranges and confectionary sugar on the palate, reminiscent of mulled wine. Quite full and individual in an unsophisticated way. Might go well with a plain schnitzel. **Drink** 2012–2013 **Alc** 13.5%



Friedrich Becker, Spätburgunder Trocken, Pfalz 2009 15.5 (85)

£14.80–£20.50 Caviste, Fine & Rare, Harvey Nichols, The Wine Barn
Inscrutable on the nose. Some sealing wax and cherries on the palate but disappointingly light. It punches around for a while then gives up the fight. **Drink** 2012 **Alc** 13%



Fürst, Centgrafenberg, Grosses Gewächs Spätburgunder Trocken, Franken 2009 15.5 (85)

£45.91–£57.99 Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index, Justerini & Brooks
Sealing wax and red cherry nose. Light cherries on the palate. Impressive length, but the lack of overall intensity lets it down slightly. **Drink** 2012–2013 **Alc** 13.5%



Jürgen von der Mark, Imagine My Frustration, Baden 2009 15.5 (85)

£31.99 The Winery
Hard to know what to say about the name, but it has an attractive strawberry bouquet. Slightly limp attack and an almost syrupy sweet, cherry jam-like palate. **Drink** 2012–2014 **Alc** 13%



Ziareisen, Jaspis Alte Reben, Tafelwein 2008 15.5 (85)

£30.60 Howard Ripley
Nice redolence of cherries on the nose, but then the palate lacks bottom. The fruit bears up for a while then sinks. One dimensional style, but might be good with a soft, creamy cheese. **Drink** 2012–2014 **Alc** 12%