Wine & Spirits

US NEW RELEASES

PINOT NOIR

95 | Emeritus $68

2011 Sonoma Coast William Wesley Pinot Noir Brice Jones, who founded Sonoma-Cutrer in the 1970s and sold it to Brown-Forman in 1999, purchased 88 acres of land near Annapolis in 1996, developing the far coast property into a vineyard in partnership with Aubert de Villaine of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Jones later bought out de Villaine and now uses the vineyard for his Emeritus label. The soil here is Goldridge sandy loam over sandstone, just above the fog line on a steep slope at around 1,000 feet of elevation. De Villaine convinced Jones to pursue dry farming, and 2011 is the first vintage that's been completely dry farmed, after vineyard manager Kirk Lokka weaned the young vines off irrigation. The result is a commanding coastal pinot noir, powerful but not fat, its aroma cool and spicy, like green cardamom pods and rhubarb. Firm sandstone-grown tannins dominate the structure, yet the wine feels perfectly integrated, that stony character moving with the flavors rather than locking them down, carrying the wine's fresh, meaty red fruit into a savory finish that lasts. This is the far Sonoma coast in Technicolor, full of brightness and tension, an example of just how good coastal pinot noir can be in the cool 2011 vintage. *Emeritus Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA*

93 | Emeritus $42

2011 Russian River Valley Hallberg Ranch Pinot Noir (Best Buy) Brice Jones spent five years courting Don and Marcia Hallberg for their apple orchard in the cool, rolling hills of Green Valley. He closed on the property just weeks after completing the sale of Sonoma-Cutrer, which he'd founded in 1972. As of the 2011 vintage the vineyard is completely dry farmed, forcing the now-mature pinot noir vines to dig deep into the vineyard's sandy Goldridge soil. This feels like a site-driven wine, a tense, gamey pinot noir with savory aromas of pinesap and forest mushrooms surrounding a sanguine fruit intensity. It's firm and bright, youthful and wound-up right now—give it a few more years in bottle to unfold. *Emeritus Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA*

92 | Emeritus $68

2012 Sonoma Coast William Wesley Pinot Noir While not quite as electric as the 2011 (above), this is a strong performance in its own right. It feels ensconced in oak at first, but the cool richness of the fruit powers past the wood, the wine's energy shaped by the firm tannins and bright acidity of fruit from this coastal ridge-top vineyard. The flavors are deep and satisfying, a dark cherry richness infused with foresty bay leaf aromas. (450 cases) *Emeritus Vyds., Sebastopol, CA*