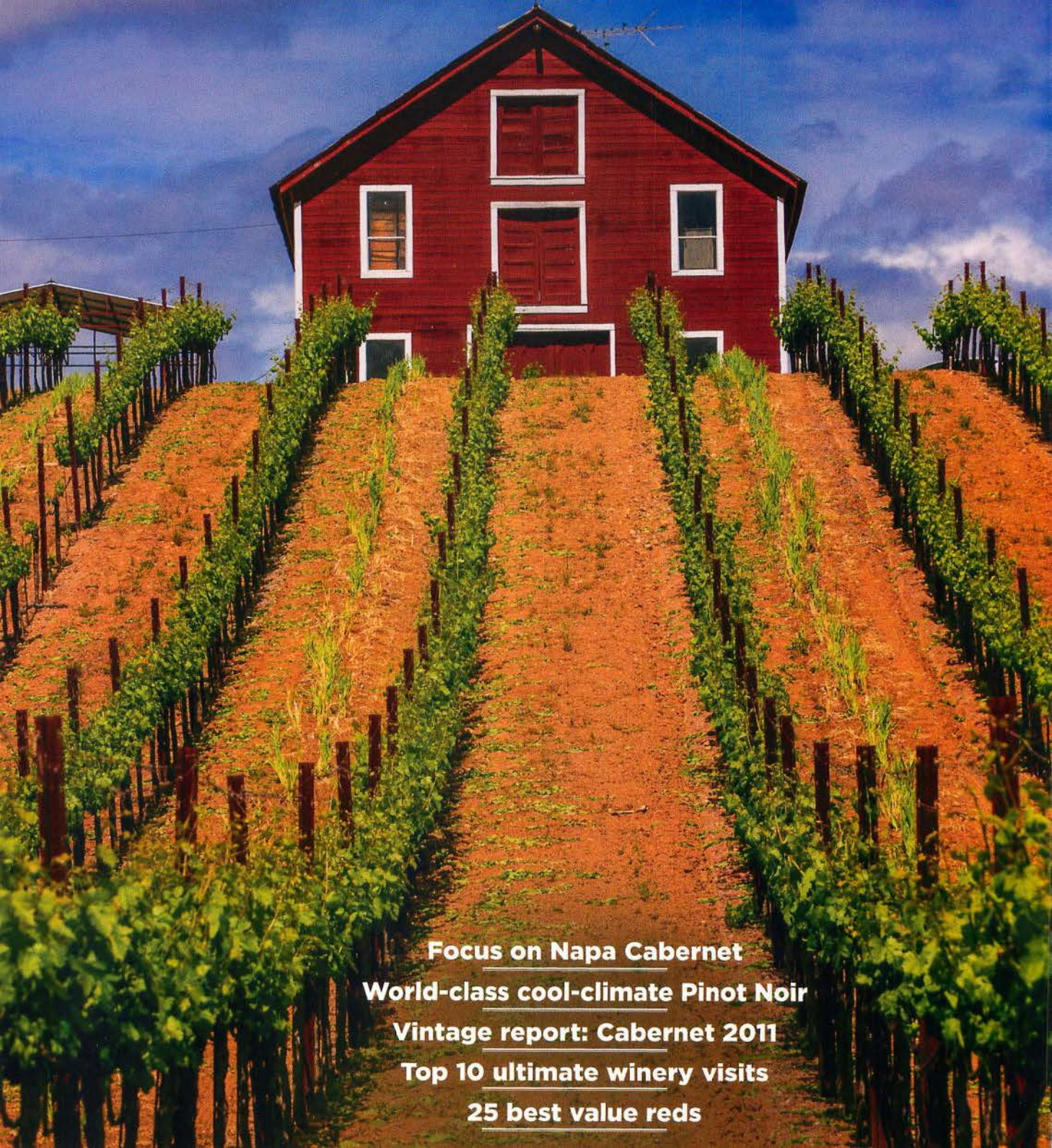


*The world's best wine magazine*

# Decanter

## California 2014



**Focus on Napa Cabernet**  
**World-class cool-climate Pinot Noir**  
**Vintage report: Cabernet 2011**  
**Top 10 ultimate winery visits**  
**25 best value reds**



# Best-value reds under £30

Our search for good value Californian reds proved to be more exciting – and less of a challenge – than anticipated. Try and buy, advises Christelle Guibert

IT'S NOT A trade secret: California is not often associated with value. On the contrary, the Golden State has an image that can seem synonymous with the words 'luxury', 'expensive' and 'iconic'. When I was asked to recommend some good value Californian reds for our readers, despite the sympathetic looks from my colleagues, I saw it as a great chance to find out whether California can do value.

After weeks of tasting, I was pleasantly surprised by the overall results. My focus was anything red below £30, and I quickly realised that if you do purely pursue good value and keep a sense of adventure, it's actually quite easy (even for California). Of course, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir reign supreme, but you should also consider lesser-known varieties; Trousseau from California, for example?

Unoaked, or very subtle use of oak is also a key to good value; some of the reds tend to be lighter in body and are best when the fresh and vibrant fruit characters dominate, rather than the toasted characters from the oak. Syrah is an underdog in California and hard to sell but it proved to be the most popular grape in the under-£30 bracket.

California has a reputation for high-alcohol wines but this tasting came as a surprise; 72% of recommendations came in at less than 14%. They displayed freshness, juiciness and purity of fruit. Originally from Languedoc-Roussillon, the Valdiguié grape offered a 'Napa Gamay' style, while some of the wines made from Cabernet Franc or Rhône varieties were indicative of their cooler-climate homelands.

This tasting has been an eye-opener



and it has certainly changed my ideas about good value in California. Try these wines with an open mind and you will be surprised how they will reward you without breaking the bank.

*Christelle Guibert is Decanter's tastings director*





**Arnot-Roberts, Luchsinger Trousseau, Clear Lake 2012** 17.75 (92)  
£29.95 Roberson

With the exception of Jura fans, very few will have heard of, let alone tasted, a wine made from Trousseau. Hailing from California this is even more unusual. Almost as pale as a darker rosé, there's plenty of floral character with notes of strawberry and raspberry. Light-bodied with a kick from the tannins; a juicy, refreshing style. **Drink** 2014 **Alc** 12.3%



**Birichino Vino, St Georges Pinot Noir, Central Coast 2012** 17.75 (92)  
£22.55 Christopher Keiller, Prohibition Wines, Swig

Grapes sourced close to Santa Cruz Mountains. A small part is whole-cluster fermented with juice from the other grapes poured on top. Raspberry and cranberry aromas with spice. Pretty palate with delicate red fruit and a nice purity; medium weight with peppery finish. Top-value Pinot. **Drink** 2014-2016 **Alc** 13.5%



**Bogle Petite Sirah, California 2011** 17.5 (91)

£14 Widely available via UK agent Enotria Petite Sirah is a descendant of Syrah and Peloursin from the south of France. Often heavy and tannic, this example is quite the opposite: it's refreshing. The fruit profile is dense with notes of plum, blackberry and black pepper. Great complexity with vibrant fruit characters. **Drink** 2014-2016 **Alc** 13.5%



**Bonny Doon Vineyard, Le Pousseur Syrah, Central Coast 2011** 17.5 (91)

£27 Berry Bros & Rudd, Whistle Wines The grapes are sourced from cool-climate vineyards in the Santa Maria area and the result is, as expected, fresh and elegant with black fruit characters and a hint of clove. Nice complexity with mellow tannins, fresh black fruit characters and spiciness on the finish. **Drink** 2014 **Alc** 13%



**Domaine de la Terre Rouge, Les Côtes de l'Ouest Syrah, Sierra Foothills 2010** 17.5 (91)

£18 Bottle Apostle, Butlers Wine Cellar, Corks of Cotham, Fortnum & Mason, Four Walls Wine, St Andrews Wine Co, The Secret Cellar Northern Rhône meets Sierra Foothills. For an entry level wine, it's a very pretty Syrah. The purity combines with peppery and herb notes. A fruit-forward style with precise acidity. Great everyday wine. **Drink** 2014 **Alc** 14.5%



**Decoy, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma County 2011** 17.5 (91)  
£26.50-£27.50 Oddbins, Philglas & Swiggott, Wine Treasury, Wimbledon Wine Cellar

Showing that California can produce stellar, complex Cabernet sub-£30, this is rich and inviting with blackcurrant and blackberry fruit notes. The oak is well-integrated and adds a nice spiciness. Very approachable with soft tannins, to enjoy now. **Drink** 2014 **Alc** 13.9%



**Easton, Cabernet Franc, Monarch Mine Vineyard, Sierra Foothills 2011** 17.5 (91)  
£21 Bottle Apostle, Butler's Wine Cellar, St Andrews Wine Co

I love Cabernet Franc and this mixes Loire eminence with California depth and power. Lovely savouriness with some minerality and complex herbal characters. Fresh on the palate with red fruit characters. Very impressive with a great price-tag. **Drink** 2014-2016 **Alc** 13.5%



**Copain, Tous Ensemble Syrah, Mendocino County 2011** 17.5 (91)  
£24.95 Roberson

As the name 'Tous Ensemble' implies, this is a perfect wine for sharing, over a casual dinner. This great value Syrah is packed with spicy characters and floral notes. Mid-weight with velvety tannins, this has vibrant red fruit perfume on the finish. **Drink** 2014-2016 **Alc** 13.8%



**Eberle Winery, Côtes-du-Rhône, Paso Robles 2009** 17.5 (91)  
£20.99-£22.49 Aged in Oak, Davis Bell McCraith

An atypical blend of southern Rhône grapes Mourvèdre, Grenache and Syrah, this resembles the Rhône but with extra muscle from the deep red fruit and oak. It's a charming wine that has freshness and spice and soft tannins too. **Drink** 2014-2016 **Alc** 14.5%



**Etude, Pinot Noir, Carneros 2009** 17.5 (91)  
£29.99 Corking Wines, Frazier's Wine

Created by Tony Soter, this was initially an under-funded side project. Now a household name, Etude represents the classic Pinot expression. Fresh berry aromas combine with spice and undergrowth. A polished palate, fresh acidity, refined tannins; harmonious and Burgundian. **Drink** 2014-2016 **Alc** 14.4%