

THE TOP

100

Our Annual Roundup Of the Year's Most Exciting Wines

What a difference a year makes. Despite an economy that continues to struggle, wine lovers are reaching a little deeper into their pockets to enjoy top quality wines. Nonetheless, value-oriented wines are still very much in demand. These trends, along with strong regional vintage variations, are reflected in *Wine Spectator's* Top 100 for 2011.

What is consistent is the quality of the 100 wines our editors selected this year. The average rating is 93 points. The average price has dipped, however, to \$44, compared with \$48 last year.

During the course of the year, *Wine Spectator* editors blind-tasted more than 16,000 new releases. Of these, more than 5,400 rated outstanding (90 points or higher on our 100-point scale); these were the initial candidates for our Top 100. We apply four criteria to determine the final selections: quality (as represented by score); value (as reflected by release price); availability (measured by case production, or, for international wines, the number of cases imported); and an X-factor we call excitement.

California dominated again this year, increasing its presence to more than a quarter of the list on the strength of the 2009 vintage for Pinot Noir and 2008 for Cabernet Sauvignon and blends. In fact, there were so many outstanding '09 Pinot Noirs it was difficult narrowing

the selection to just four.

Italy is back on track after its depleted group of last year. Tuscany leads the way again, primarily with the excellent 2006 vintage for Brunello di Montalcino. In France, the Rhône Valley stole the spotlight based on the stellar 2009 harvest, while Beaujolais also made its mark with a pair from '09.

Both Argentina and Australia lost ground compared with last year, while Chile, whose presence was strong a year ago, dropped off the list altogether. This paved the way for a New Mexican sparkler to debut in the Top 100, and Greece makes a return.

No equation determines the final selections; these choices reflect our editors' judgment and passion about the wines tasted by *Wine Spectator* in 2011.

For complete tasting notes of the Top 100 wines, see this issue's Buying Guide. Senior tasting coordinators Alison Napjus and MaryAnn Worobiec, tasting coordinator Nathan Wesley, associate tasting coordinator Augustus Weed and assistant tasting coordinator Margaret Raber, plus associate editors Tim Fish, Mitch Frank and Jennifer Fiedler and assistant editor Ben O'Donnell contributed to the profiles. We hope you enjoy the exciting group of great values, new labels and proven names that make up *Wine Spectator's* 2011 Top 100.

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*Wine
Of The
Year*

KOSTA
BROWNE

2009

SONOMA COAST
PINOT NOIR

ALCOHOL 14.5% BY VOLUME



KOSTA BROWNE

PINOT NOIR SONOMA COAST 2009

95 \$52 5,818 cases made

By James Laube

One of the biggest stories coming out of California in recent years is the steady rise of Pinot Noir. Considered the most challenging of grapes to master, Pinot has found a comfy home in the Golden State, and settled into an amazing groove. Central to that story has been the improbable ascent of a small winery in Sonoma, started more than a decade ago by two restaurant waiters who pooled their nightly tips with the dream of one day making their own wine.

In the late 1990s, Dan Kosta and Michael Browne were working at John Ash & Co., in Santa Rosa, Calif. Each night after work they'd each put \$10 into a white envelope and stash it in a drawer, figuring that once they had enough money, they'd start making wine. That day came in 1997. They took the \$1,300 they'd saved and bought a half-ton of Pinot Noir, an old stemmer-crusher and a used oak barrel.

With no formal winemaking training, Kosta, then 25, and Browne, 29, stumbled along a path of trial and error, learning as they went. In 2000, they bottled their first Pinot under the Kosta Browne label. Their first vintages weren't terribly inspiring. The wines reflected their makers' inexperience and the inherent challenges of the demanding Pinot grape. Some wines were rustic. One flirted with a flaw. But in 2002, one of their four Pinots broke the ice. They'd found a go-to vineyard, which has proven to be one of their stars.

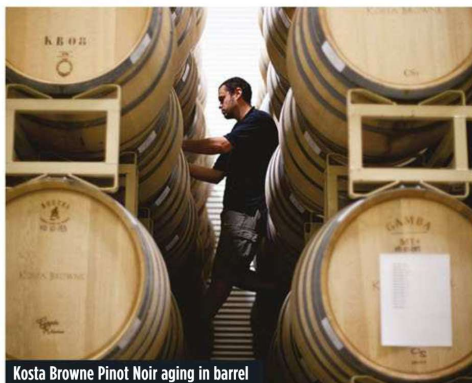
That Pinot (93 points, \$48 on release), from Kanzler Vineyard, near Sebastopol, exhibited the kind of purity of flavor, richness,

depth and finesse that has become Kosta Browne's signature style. In 2003, they bottled seven Pinots, all outstanding or better, followed by eight different Pinots the following year, again all excellent. Since 2002, they've made 66 wines that have earned 90 points or higher. In 2009, the greatest vintage yet for California Pinot Noir, this dynamic duo made 11 outstanding Pinots and their first Chardonnay, including the extraordinary Pinot from the Sonoma Coast that is *Wine Spectator's* Wine of the Year for 2011.

Kosta Browne's string of great Pinots is amazing by any measure. They don't own a single vine and make wine in a makeshift, rented warehouse in Sebastopol. Browne is the mastermind winemaker, ultimately proving that if you pay attention to the details, from sourcing great grapes to meticulous winemaking, something beautiful can emerge. Kosta oversees the sales and marketing side; most of the 15,000-case production is sold direct to consumers. Early on, Chris Costello joined the winery and became an integral part of the business as Kosta Browne took on new investors to raise money to add vineyard sources and buy new barrels and other equipment.

In 2009, Kosta and Browne sold majority control to Vincraft, reportedly for close to \$36 million, as a way to refinance debt and build for the future. They still own just shy of half, and paid off some of their previous investors with proceeds from the sale. Since then, Vincraft has brought in a skilled management team and plans are under way to build a winery in the small, west Sonoma town of Sebastopol, which lies near many of the label's vineyard sources.

"Never in a million years would I have ever imagined this," Browne says, reflecting on his winery's startling success. The Sonoma Coast bottling in particular showcases his talent and the



Kosta Browne Pinot Noir aging in barrel



Ripened Pinot grapes

SARA SANGER



Dan Kosta (left) and Michael Browne

quality of his grape sources. Making a few hundred cases of great Pinot is hard enough; making nearly 6,000 cases of great Pinot is an admirable accomplishment.

Early on, Browne knew 2009 would be a great vintage. As he began to taste through barrels of different lots, he discovered that one blend in particular not only worked beautifully, but kept getting better every time he put together a mock blend for blind tastings against KB's single-vineyard wines. "Every time, that wine came out near the top," Browne says. "It was pretty amazing. It just kept getting better."

The wine comprises fruit from three vineyards: Gap's Crown, from

which the winery makes an individual bottling; Terra de Promissio, near the winery; and a new site, Walala Vineyard, located in the northernmost reaches of Sonoma Coast. The vineyards share a close proximity to the Pacific. But Walala added a red fruit component that gave the wine a brightness and clarity, says Browne. The wine spent about a year in new oak before being released early in 2011.

Sonoma County has long been one of California's most prized winegrowing regions, famous for its diversity of appellations and grape types. But Pinot Noir, a wine many considered least likely to succeed, has become Sonoma's signature red. Leading that parade is Kosta Browne, proving how far dreams can carry you. □

WINE SPECTATOR'S TOP 100 AT A GLANCE

RANK	SCORE	PRICE	WINE
1	95	\$52	Kosta Browne Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2009
2	96	\$90	Hall Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Kathryn Hall 2008
3	96	\$69	Domaine Huët Vouvray Moelleux Clos du Bourg Première Trie 2009
4	96	\$50	Campogiovanni Brunello di Montalcino 2006
5	95	\$50	Dehlinger Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2008
6	95	\$35	Baer Ursa Columbia Valley 2008
7	95	\$55	Quinta do Vallado Touriga Nacional Douro 2008
8	96	\$90	Domenico Clerico Barolo Ciabot Mentin Ginestra 2006
9	94	\$55	Alain Graillot Crozes-Hermitage La Guiraudie 2009
10	94	\$58	Château de St.-Cosme Gigondas Valbelle 2009
11	97	\$45	Denner The Dirt Worshipper Paso Robles 2008
12	95	\$38	Seghesio Zinfandel Alexander Valley Home Ranch 2009
13	95	\$55	Mount Eden Vineyards Chardonnay Santa Cruz Mountains 2008
14	95	\$45	Failla Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Keefer Ranch 2009
15	95	\$36	Efeste Syrah Yakima Valley Jolie Bouche Boushey Vineyard 2008
16	95	\$50	Rivetto Barolo Serralunga 2006
17	95	\$60	Tenuta Carlina Brunello di Montalcino La Togata 2006
18	94	\$30	Januik Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2008
19	95	\$43	Carlisle Zinfandel Russian River Valley Papera Ranch 2008
20	94	\$45	Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2008
21	93	\$15	Georges Duboeuf Morgon Jean Descombes 2009
22	94	\$44	Freeman Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2009
23	93	\$15	Bodegas Resalte de Peñafiel Ribera del Duero de Restia Crianza Selected Harvest 2004
24	97	\$60	La Serena Brunello di Montalcino 2006
25	93	\$24	Owen Roe Syrah Columbia Valley Ex Umbris 2009
26	93	\$24	Descendientes de J. Palacios Bierzo Pétalos 2009
27	93	\$25	Rusack Syrah Santa Barbara County 2008
28	93	\$30	Merry Edwards Sauvignon Blanc Russian River Valley 2009
29	92	\$25	Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2010
30	94	\$42	Sineann Pinot Noir Yamhill-Carlton District Resonance Vineyard 2009
31	92	\$22	Castello di Monsanto Chianti Classico Riserva 2007
32	95	\$72	Andrew Will Sorella Horse Heaven Hills 2008
33	92	\$18	Château Tanunda Shiraz Barossa Grand Barossa 2008
34	93	\$25	Sans Liege The Offering Santa Barbara County 2008
35	94	\$60	Two Hands Shiraz Barossa Valley Bella's Garden 2009
36	93	\$30	Terrabianca Toscana Campaccio 2007
37	93	\$30	Tablas Creek Côtes de Tablas Paso Robles 2009
38	93	\$33	Rex Hill Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2009
39	93	\$32	Tamarack Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley 2007
40	93	\$37	Beringer Chardonnay Napa Valley Private Reserve 2009
41	93	\$37	L'Ecole No. 41 Cabernet Sauvignon Walla Walla Valley 2008
42	90	\$9	Quinta de Cabriz Dão 2008
43	90	\$14	Gruet Blanc de Noirs New Mexico NV
44	94	\$53	Moccagatta Barbaresco Bric Balin 2007
45	92	\$25	Orin Swift Abstract California 2009
46	92	\$25	Argiano Toscana Non Confunditur 2009
47	92	\$22	Hecht & Bannier Côtes du Roussillon-Villages 2008
48	92	\$28	Zenato Valpolicella Superiore Ripassa 2007
49	92	\$29	Fonterutoli Chianti Classico 2009
50	98	\$175	Peter Michael Les Pavots Knights Valley 2008
51	97	\$60	Evening Land Chardonnay Eola-Amity Hills Seven Springs Vineyard La Source 2009
52	97	\$75	Saxum James Berry Vineyard Paso Robles 2008
53	94	\$70	Bodegas Los Astrales Ribera del Duero 2008

RANK	SCORE	PRICE	WINE
54	92	\$22	Vincent Girardin Moulin-à-Vent Domaine de La Tour du Bief Clos de la Tour 2009
55	93	\$45	Roederer Estate Brut Anderson Valley L'Ermitage 2003
56	95	\$80	Casanova di Neri Brunello di Montalcino Tenuta Nuova 2006
57	93	\$37	Fratelli Revello Barolo 2006
58	91	\$24	Bodega Catena Zapata Malbec Mendoza 2009
59	90	\$18	Bodegas Dinastía Vivanco Rioja Selección de Familia Crianza 2008
60	90	\$20	Allegrini Veronese Palazzo della Torre 2008
61	90	\$22	Tormaresca Primitivo Salento Torcicoda 2008
62	93	\$46	Quinta do Crasto Douro Reserva Old Vines 2008
63	94	\$80	Darioush Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2007
64	95	\$70	Quinta do Vale Meão Douro 2008
65	93	\$48	Shafer Chardonnay Napa Valley Carneros Red Shoulder Ranch 2009
66	93	\$48	Leviathan California 2008
67	92	\$23	Zind-Humbrecht Gewürztraminer Alsace L170 2009
68	91	\$18	Buehler Zinfandel Napa Valley 2009
69	91	\$22	Rocca di Frassinello Maremma Toscana Le Sughere di Frassinello 2009
70	91	\$20	Morgan Chardonnay Monterey Metallico Un-Oaked 2009
71	90	\$18	Bodegas Godeval Valdeorras Viña Godeval 2010
72	90	\$16	Ravines Riesling Finger Lakes Dry 2009
73	91	\$20	Fratelli Oddero Barbera d'Alba 2007
74	96	\$125	Marcassin Chardonnay Sonoma Coast Marcassin Vineyard 2006
75	93	\$29	Loring Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2009
76	92	\$35	Kumeu River Chardonnay Kumeu Estate 2008
77	92	\$40	Ayala Brut Champagne Majeur NV
78	93	\$30	Markus Molitor Riesling Spätlese Mosel Wehlener Sonnenuhr 2009
79	93	\$35	Poggio al Tesoro Bolgheri Sondaia 2008
80	96	\$150	Continuum Napa Valley 2008
81	92	\$28	Salomon-Undhof Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Undhof Kögl 2009
82	91	\$21	Margerum Sauvignon Blanc Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara Sybarite 2010
83	91	\$24	Domaine Sigalas Assyrtiko Santorini 2010
84	93	\$26	Domaine La Monardière Vacqueyras Les 2 Monardes 2009
85	97	\$125	Domaine Serene Pinot Noir Dundee Hills Grace Vineyard 2008
86	91	\$26	Domäne Wachau Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Trocken Wachau Terrassen 2009
87	90	\$26	Terredora di Paolo Greco di Tufo Loggia della Serra 2009
88	94	\$65	Nicolis Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Ambrosan 2004
89	91	\$30	Telmo Rodríguez Toro Gago 2007
90	94	\$65	Jean-Michel Stephan Côte-Rôtie 2009
91	90	\$28	Bodegas Beronia Rioja Gran Reserva 2001
92	92	\$32	Bernard Baudry Chinon Franc de Pied 2009
93	91	\$30	De Morgenzon Chenin Blanc Stellenbosch 2009
94	93	\$37	Château Brown Pessac-Léognan White 2008
95	93	\$57	Château Canon-La Gaffelière St.-Emilion 2008
96	93	\$55	Eric & Joël Durand Cornas Empreintes 2009
97	93	\$65	Philippe Colin Chassagne-Montrachet Les Chenevottes 2008
98	92	\$45	Louis Chêze St.-Joseph Caroline Cuvée Prestige 2009
99	90	\$25	Château Ste.-Eulalie Minervois La Livinière La Cantilène 2008
100	96	\$105	Bodega Noemía de Patagonia Río Negro Valley 2009