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## THE BEST WINES FROM THE GLOBAL PINOT GRIGIO MASTERS

28th January, 2021 by Patrick Schmitt

We bring you the best wines from The Global Pinot Grigio Masters 2020, taking in brilliant bottles from around the world, including Italy and France, as well as England, California, Oregon, Canada and New Zealand.



**It's said** that popularity, like familiarity, breeds contempt, and what's true of people, is also, it seems, applicable to Pinot Grigio. This variety, when used to produce delicate whites at low prices, has become so prevalent, it is often derided – that is, among wine drinkers with a snobbish side.

However, one should consider what it is about Pinot Grigio, or rather, Pinot Gris – it is a French grape after all – that made it so popular in the first place.

Well, its rise to become one of the world's best-selling white grapes, alongside Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, relates to its lighter side as a fresh, apple-scented white from the northern Italian area of the Veneto – now successfully rebranded as Pinot Grigio **Delle Venezie DOC**. Grown in this part of Europe, the grape carved out a market, particularly in the UK, for clean, vinous refreshment at a keen price, and at a time when the competition at this level may have been flabby, oxidative, or off-dry. And the same style of bright, fresh Pinot Grigio is popular today, despite its critics, who tend to mock the wines for being dull and dilute – a fair accusation only for the cheapest expressions from over-cropped vineyards; wines that wouldn't pass the new DOC taste tests.

The vast majority of Pinot Grigio from around the Veneto, however, is a delight, loaded with ripe orchard fruits and lemon zest, with notes of cream and bitter almond too.

But this is just one face of Pinot Grigio, and therein lies its appeal. It can take on many forms, from light pink, or 'gris', to sparkling, bone dry to richly sweet.

Plus, it performs well in a wide variety of climes and soils – with our top scorers this year hailing from Italy and France as one might expect, but also England, California, Oregon, Canada and New Zealand.

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Among the still dry wines, while Pinot Grigio flavour profiles can range from crisp apple and lemon to richer notes of pear and peach, it's really the texture of the wine that tends to vary the most. This is a grape that can, if harvested late from low yielding vineyards, produce wines with a marked and satisfying oiliness, even without residual sugar.

Then there's its affinity for ageing in wood, with nutty characters complementing the variety's yellow fruit notes, and honeyed characters from oxidative handling in barriques balancing the grape's citric edge.

In essence, you'd be wrong to knock Pinot Grigio, as it comes in many styles, and quality levels, from fine barrel-aged whites to fresh, delicate drops.

As for where to go for the best examples, well, look to our medalists in the following tables – with reliably good Pinot Grigio producers including Frescobaldi (Attems), Castello di Roncade, Mission Hill Estate, La Roncaia and Marisco (The King's Thorn).

One final point, and that concerns a loose guide to the type of Pinot Grigio you can expect. Generally, those wines labelled Pinot Gris tend to be richer and more viscous in style. The areas where that character is favoured tend to be Alsace and Marlborough.

So, if you like your whites with weight, look to these parts of the wine world. But if it's something light you're after, then Italy is an ideal source, if not the only place for such a bright type of white, as the results from the competition show.

Please read on for the results in full from 2020's Global Pinot Grigio Masters, along with some comments from the judges, and further information about the competition.

### Sparkling White Pinot Gris

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
<b>Under £10</b>					
Cantina Viticoltori Ponte	Spumante DOC Brut delle Venezie	Veneto	Italy	NV	Silver
La Cantina Pizzolato	Sparkling DOC delle Venezie Extra Dry	Veneto	Italy	2019	Silver
La Cantina Pizzolato	Sparkling DOC delle Venezie Extra Brut "So Easy"	Veneto	Italy	2019	Bronze
<b>£30-£50</b>					
Fox & Fox	Inspiration Brut Blanc de Gris	Sussex	UK	2014	Gold

### Sparkling Rosé Pinot Gris

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
<b>£15-£20</b>					
Think Wine Group	Think Pink	Veneto	Italy	NV	Bronze

### Unoaked Pinot Gris

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
<b>Under £10</b>					
Castello di Roncade	Pinot Grigio DOC Venezia	Veneto	Italy	2019	Gold
Bestheim	Pinot Gris Premium Reserve	Alsace	France	2019	Gold
Citra Vini	Farinelli Pinot Grigio	Abruzzo	Italy	2019	Silver
Poderi dal Nespole	Il Papavero Pinot Grigio	Sicily	Italy	2019	Silver
Perlage Winery	Pinot Grigio delle Venezie DOC	Veneto	Italy	2019	Silver
Cantina Viticoltori Ponte	Pinot Grigio DOC delle Venezie	Veneto	Italy	2019	Silver



Trinchero Family Estates	Three Thieves Pinot Grigio	California	USA	2018	Silver
Cavit	Bottega Vinai Pinot Grigio Trentino DOC	Trentino	Italy	2019	Silver
te Pa Family Vineyards	Montford Pinot Gris	Marlborough	New Zealand	2019	Silver
te Pa Family Vineyards	te Pa	Marlborough	New Zealand	2019	Silver
Yealands Wine Group	Yealands Estate Single Vineyard Pinot Gris	Auckland	New Zealand	2018	Bronze
te Pa Family Vineyards	Pa Road Pinot Gris	Marlborough	New Zealand	2020	Bronze
Attems	Attems Pinot Grigio	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Italy	2019	Bronze
Cantine di Ora/Kellerei Auer	Pinot Grigio DOC	Trentino-Alto Adige	Italy	2019	Bronze
<b>£15-£20</b>					
The Lane Vineyard	The Lane Pinot Gris	Adelaide Hills	Australia	2020	Silver
Cavit	Ruendis Pinot Grigio Trentino Superiore DOC	Trentino	Italy	2018	Silver
Colle Duga	Collio Pinot Grigio	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Italy	2018	Silver
Cabert – Cantina di Bertolo	Pinot Grigio DOC Friuli	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Italy	2019	Silver
Banfi	San Angelo	Toscana	Italy	2019	Bronze
Stopham Vineyard Winery	Stopham Pinot Gris	West Sussex	UK	2018	Bronze
Masottina	Ai Palazzi Dorsoduro DOC delle Venezie	Veneto	Italy	2018	Bronze
<b>£20-£30</b>					
Mission Hill Estate Winery	Reserve Pinot Gris	Okanagan Valley	Canada	2019	Master
Giusti Wine	Pinot Grigio Longheri	Veneto	Italy	2019	Silver
Cantina Valle Isarco	Pinot Grigio Aristos	Trentino-Alto Adige	Italy	2019	Silver

**Oaked Pinot Gris**

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
<b>£10-£15</b>					
Marisco Vineyards	The King's Thom Pinot Gris	Marlborough	New Zealand	2019	Gold
te Pa Family Vineyards	te Pa Pinot Gris	Marlborough	New Zealand	2019	Silver
<b>£15-£20</b>					
Trinchero Family Estates	Joel Gott Oregon Pinot Gris	Oregon	USA	2018	Gold
Nals Margreid	Punggl Pinot Grigio	Bolzano	Italy	2019	Silver
<b>£20-£30</b>					
La Roncaia	La Roncaia Pinot Grigio	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2019	Master
La Roncaia	La Roncaia Pinot Grigio	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2018	Master
Masottina	Ai Palazzi Pinot Grigio Single Vineyard DOC Venezia	Veneto	Italy	2017	Silver

**Rosé Pinot Gris**

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
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**Under £10**

Albino Armani	Colle Ara	Trentino-Alto Adige	Italy	2019	Silver
Cavit	Pinot Grigio Rosato IGT Vigneti delle Dolomiti Terrazze della Luna	Trentino-Alto Adige	Italy	2019	Silver
di Lenardo	Gossip	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2019	Bronze
Concilio	Pinot Grigio Delle Venezie DOC Il Pino	Veneto	Italy	2019	Bronze

**£10-£15**

Attems	Pinot Grigio Ramato	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2019	Silver
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**Judge's comment: David Round MW**

Pinot Grigio is a grape with a reputation for uniformity and inoffensiveness that makes it commercially extremely appealing while failing to excite a feeling of anticipation. This tasting showed in sharp relief the variability of this variety, according not only to climate, but also specific location.

This broad range of styles was evident even in the under £10 category, which revealed Pinot Grigio to be a chameleon of a grape. Sometimes it had a combination of green apple and high acidity reminiscent of Loire Chenin Blanc, while we saw examples with a gooseberry and grassy character that were a dead ringer for Sauvignon Blanc (Mission Hill, Canada). We even saw a lychee character that pointed more towards Gewurztraminer (Yealand, New Zealand and Three Thieves, California).

Winemaking also plays its part. There were lots of wines with a slightly reductive, struck match, hydrogen sulphide character that is clearly deliberate and quite appealing when well-judged. This seems to be common among New Zealand examples (three Te Pa wines from Marlborough), but also Californian (Seaglass) and only really appears above £10.

Below that price level, the most successful examples were showed clean, unadulterated flavours of apple, pear, peach, apricot and gooseberry, often with an added herbal component in the form of fennel or coriander, and the riper examples extended to lychee and guava. Typically the wines had good balancing acidity. The standard was high.

The oaked wines that we saw were pretty much universally successful, showing good integration and harmony.

**Judge's comment: Patricia Stefanowicz MW**

A delightful judging day with plenty of interest and surprises! The global selection contained so many delicious wines with the best having purity, juicy fruit flavours and balance. When oak was used, the wood seemed to integrate rather than dominate.

As expected, northern Italy dominated the inexpensive unoaked Pinot Grigio and Pinot Gris. The best showed lovely custard or peach and passionfruit flavours and balanced acidity with accents of rose petal, white flowers or orange and lemon zest. These Under £10 wines seemed best when dry or nearly dry with relatively low alcohol and sufficient acidity. Easy-drinking, crowd-pleasing wines. There were some lovely Pinot Grigio DOC wines from the Veneto and a couple of exciting Pinot Gris-styles from Alsace and Alto Adige. At £10-15 there were expressive wines from New and Old World regions and a few excellent examples of pure Pinot Gris from Friuli in the far northeastern reaches of Italy, Okanagan in Canada and Santa Barbara in California. Excellent value-for money exists in this price bracket.

Above £15 the wines performed consistently well with many of the wines receiving Silvers at least. At the stratospheric end (for Pinot Gris) was a stunningly good example from Okanagan, which deserves a place on the table as an alternative to unoaked Chardonnay.

The, admittedly few, oaked white Pinot Gris were quite high-priced (£15 and upwards for the most part) and all deserving of silvers, golds and even a Master. These wines had beautifully-judged use of creamy oak supporting the lovely aromas and fleshy flavours of the variety.

The rosé Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio, albeit not a large group, were actually quite nice and relatively inexpensive, under £15. This appears to be growing category and probably with justification for easy-drinking styles, perfumed and juicy without too much sweetness.

Sparkling white Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio at Under £10 appears to be a valid alternative to Prosecco and the wines, with perhaps a little more citrus character and length of finish. One absolute 'cracker' was the (almost) outrageously expensive English Sparkling Pinot Gris, with balance, length, intensity and depth of flavour, worth every tuppence it costs.

*A final comment:* Some excellent wines and some excellent value. In comparison with previous years of The Global Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio Masters, I found much better consistency in every price bracket with not a single wine I would not drink a glass of.