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New pinots in every price range pop up in Oregon

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By Special to The Oregonian

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WINE NOTES: As producers multiply, so do the choices among new noteworthy labels

I don't know about you, but I can't keep up with all the terrific new local wineries out there. The Portland Indie Wine Festival in May is a great way to get familiar with all the hottest up-and-coming producers in the state. But until then, I like to periodically gather up all the new labels I can find and taste the wines blind to find out what's showing best right now.

In a recent roundup of some 20 Willamette Valley pinot noirs from emerging producers, I found a couple of bargains and a few more worth spending a bit more for. Here's what I'll be drinking for the next few months:

Katherine Cole samples pinot noirs from the Willamette Valley:

Start with best buys

2008 Underwood Cellars Oregon Pinot Noir (\$10.50): This second-label offering from Union Wine Co. (which also produces Kings Ridge) is the best deal in Oregon pinot noir right now. Although the winery is headquartered in Tualatin, the fruit for this bargain-basement beauty was sourced from the Umpqua and Rogue valleys in the southern half of the state. A delightful every-night quaffer, it has notes of cherries and spice, with zippy acidity on the finish. Find it at Food Front Cooperative Grocery Hillsdale and Northwest; Liner & Elsen, any New Seasons Market and most Whole Foods Markets.

2007 Viridian Estate Grown Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$13.50): How can Viridian offer such high quality for so low a price? From what I gather, low cost of entry: The Olsen family has owned the 500 acres of Willamette Valley farmland they recently planted with grapevines for five generations. Thanks to them for sharing their bounty with us. With a restrained nose of raspberries, blackberries and roses and an earthy palate, this is a lovely wine for a wicked-good price. Find it at Cork a Bottle Shop Alberta and Lovejoy; E&R Wine Shop; Fred Meyer Burlingame, Hawthorne and Northwest Best; Great Wine Buys; Lamb's Palisades Thriftway Marketplace; Mt. Tabor Fine Wines; New Seasons Market Cedar Hills and Orenco Station; Oregon Wines on Broadway; and Strohecker's. (Note: This wine may still be available in the 2006 vintage, which is also nice.)

2008 Haden Fig Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$20): Elegant and understated, this is the exciting new offering of Russ Raney acolyte Erin Nuccio, who makes his wine at his boss's Evesham Wood Vineyard in Salem. With its floral notes and delicate minerality, this is a pinot to pair with lighter foods like fish and salads. Find it at Cork a Bottle Shop Alberta and Lovejoy; E&R Wine Shop; Liner & Elsen; Alu Wine Bar; Barbur World Foods; New Seasons Market Seven Corners; Oregon Wines on Broadway; Pastaworks and Storyteller Wine Co.

2007 Beacon Hill Estate Yamhill-Carlton District Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$21): An alluring floral nose, earthy minerality and undercurrent of power make this a wine one wants to know more about. The owners of Beacon Hill, a stately new winery on a distinguished piece of property in Gaston, are using biodynamic farming practices. Keep an eye on this label. Find it at E&R Wine Shop; Great Wine Buys; Liner & Elsen; Vinopolis; Whole Foods Market Pearl and any

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Zupan's.

2007 North Valley Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$30): This isn't a new wine, but rather, a newish second (that is, more affordable) label from Soter Vineyards, whose pinots normally range from \$45 to \$60. Pure marionberry fruit and floral perfume combine with a silky texture to deliver the total package for a more recession-friendly price. Find it at Cork a Bottle Shop Alberta & Lovejoy; E&R Wine Shop and Oregon Wines on Broadway.

2007 Hawks View Cellars Hawks View Vineyard Chehalem Mountains Pinot Noir (\$36): You'll find delicate and earthy notes of cinnamon, cherries and dried herbs on this impressive debut from a new winery on an established vineyard that also supplies fruit to fave local labels like Torii Mor, Raptor Ridge and ADEA. Admirable restraint makes for a food-friendly wine. Find it at E&R Wine Shop; Fred Meyer Burlingame, Hawthorne and Northwest Best; Pastaworks; Strohecker's and Whole Foods Market Bridgeport Village.

2008 Big Table Farm Resonance Vineyard Yamhill-Carlton District Pinot Noir (\$45): Sur lie aging and a careful combination of new and used oak make this splurge wine a delight for the senses, with a silky texture and lightly spiced baked fruit flavors. Josephine the cow, a resident of Big Table Farm, gets a star turn on the keepsake-worthy label. Find it at Cork a Bottle Shop Alberta and Lovejoy, and Storyteller Wine Co.

Note: As always, the aforementioned prices are approximate and store lists may be incomplete. You can ask your wine merchant to special-order any wine listed in this column.

Follow Oregon's wine scene with Katherine Cole on Twitter at twitter.com/kcoleuncorked and on YouTube at youtube.com/kcoleuncorked. E-mail her at katherine@katherinecole.com

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