

Pinot noir • Caribbean Vacation Pork and Beans

When I saw my first bottle of Lodi **Pinot noir** (pronounced PEE-no no-AHR), my response was, "there's no such thing." "Pinot," as we call it, needs a cool climate to thrive--Oregon, Sonoma County, Carneros (southern Napa Valley), Monterey County, Russian River Valley--any place but Lodi. Obviously, being such a popular varietal, I knew that some Pinot probably grew around Lodi, but I couldn't imagine anyone making a Pinot noir varietal wine from Lodi grapes. Keeping with our tradition of risk taking, a few daring Lodi winemakers did it. It started with Ripken's gold medal at the 2013 California State Fair for their 2010 vintage. After decades of being virtually shut out at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition for Pinot noirs over \$20, in 2018, Lodi Pinots made it into the medal rounds for all but one price category under \$36, with Jessie's Grove earning double gold in the \$32 to \$36 category. There is now such a thing as a Lodi Pinot. If you want to get in on the ground floor of an emerging Lodi wine varietal, this is one to follow.

Origin: Pinot noir is an ancient grape thought to have originated in the wild. The name is derived from the French words for pine and black. The tight grape cluster is shaped like a pine cone, and the grapes are dark--almost black. Pinot noir's home is France's Burgundy region, particularly in Côte-d'Or. Any red wine called "Burgundy" is made primarily from Pinot noir grapes grown in that region. If you are old enough to remember the wildly popular Gallo Hearty Burgundy, it was actually made from Zinfandel, Petite sirah, and Carignan, not Pinot. The 2004 movie, *Sideways*, did more for Pinot noir sales than any other single event, boosting sales by 16% in the year of its release and 9% a year ever since. In the movie, Paul Giamatti's character described Pinot noir as a hard grape to grow, with a thin skin, and early ripening. "Only the most patient and nurturing of growers can do it. Only somebody who really takes the time to understand Pinot's potential can then coax it into its fullest expression." This single movie line sent hundreds of thousands of beer and spirits drinkers to the bar for a glass of Pinot noir.

Tasting and Serving: The first thing you notice about a Pinot noir made from fully ripened Lodi grapes is the bright red color and the wine's clarity and transparency. The aromas are subtle, but you should definitely notice some cherry, cranberry, and raspberry. Lodi Pinot, which is usually more fruit forward due to later harvesting, may still give you some of Pinot's characteristic earthy, musty aroma. The tannins are soft but noticeable and leave a pleasant lingering aftertaste. Serve Pinot noir at 55 to 60 degrees (15 to 20 minutes in a refrigerator).

Pairing: Being a light to medium-bodied red wine with some complexity, Pinot noir pairs with just about anything. It's the one wine you can order a bottle of at restaurant and be confident that everyone will probably like it, no matter what food they order. Pinot pairs best with fatty foods like duck. The higher acidity helps cut through the duck fat. Lodi Pinots, being full-bodied and fruity, pair best with grilled and herbed light meats like chicken and pork. The cherry and game characteristics of Pinot pair well with a traditional American sweet and smoky barbecue. Avoid highly spiced or very acidic foods that will overwhelm Pinot's subtle aromas.

I chose to pair Van Ruiten Winery 2015 Pinot noir with my Caribbean Vacation Pork and Beans. This meal is bursting with a wide range of citrus, spice, sweet, and smoky flavors, but they are all subtle and help bring out the fruit flavors of the wine. John Van Ruiten Sr. emigrated from Holland to Lodi after World War II with the dream of growing grapes. He said that cows had to be milked twice a day, but the grapes only once a year. Though he started with a dairy, the Van Ruiten vineyard operation grew to over 800 acres. John Sr. and his children built the winery just before the 2000 harvest. Bill and Angie (Van Ruiten) Rogan run the winery today and recently lured Fresno State University enology professor and chief winemaker, John Giannini, from his cushy academic life to the highly competitive world of commercial winemaking. When you taste Van Ruiten wines, especially their Cabernet sauvignon and Pinot noir, you will quickly see that John had no problem making the transition.

Caribbean Vacation Pork and Beans

Even in wine country, there are life's little mysteries. It's January. The leaves are gone and the vines are dormant. Winter rains have made the ground too wet to walk in the vineyard. The white wines are bottled and the red wines are barreled down for at least six months. The tasting rooms are staffed with skeleton crews. Where are all the Lodi farmers and winemakers? South, Baby! Cabo, Cozumel, cruise ships, Sandals, and Disneyworld. And another mystery: What food do you pair with a Lodi Pinot noir? Pinot noir wines made from two neighboring vineyards can be as different as two varietals. Lodi Pinot definitely has its own character, being less earthy and more jammy than Pinots from the Central Coast, Russian River Valley, or Willamette Valley. It can match a wider food flavor profile than most Pinots, as long as the flavors remain delicate and subtle. So, while the farmers and winemakers are out of town, let's take our own Caribbean vacation and solve both mysteries at once with this easy full-flavored Caribbean pork and bean meal and a glass of Lodi Pinot noir.



Ingredients

1-1/2 pounds pork tenderloin
1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
1/4 cup Nellie and Joe's Key West lime juice
2 TBS fresh oregano (or 1 TBS dried oregano)
1 tsp ground cumin
1 TBS soy sauce
3 cloves garlic, cut brunoise

2 15-ounce cans of black beans
2 TBS Scratch-Made Caribbean Seasoning (page 216)
1 mango, cut small dice (page 205)
1/2 small red onion, cut fine dice (page 65)
4-ounce can Ortega mild diced green chile peppers
1 TBS coriander seed

Preparing the Pork

Butterfly each pork tenderloin slice into an approximately 1/4 to 3/8-inch-thick medallion, as shown in the photo sequence below. In a 2-quart bowl, mix the orange juice, 2 tablespoons of lime juice, oregano, cumin, garlic, and soy sauce. Slide the butterflied pork tenderloins into the bowl, cover the bowl, and marinate for about 2 hours, turning and mixing after the first hour.



1. Cut the tenderloin with the knife at a 45 degree angle to get a 3/4-inch-thick oblong slice larger than the diameter of the tenderloin itself.



2. Hold the slice vertically and make a small cut about 1/2 inch deep in the middle of the top edge.



3. Continue cutting *lightly* several times while pulling the two ends apart. Stop cutting about 3/8 inch from the bottom.



4. You end up with a perfectly butterflied pork tenderloin medallion about 3/8 inch thick.

Making the Salsa

Mix the mango pieces, red onion pieces, and chili pepper chunks in a small bowl. Sprinkle with coriander seed and 2 tablespoons of lime juice and stir. I describe the process of peeling and dicing a mango on page 205. Allrecipes.com has a good video that shows you how to do this.

Preparing the Beans

Pour the can of black beans in 2-quart sauce pan. Add 1 tablespoon of Scratch-Made Caribbean Seasoning. Heat the sauce pan on simmer for about 30 minutes.

Cooking the Pork

Set your grill's burner or add the required amount of hardwood lump charcoal to create a 350 to 400-degree fire. Spread the coals out evenly around the grill. Cover the empty grill until the temperature reaches at least 350 degrees. Lay the pork filets on the grill and cover the grill. Cook for about 3 minutes. Check the underside of the pork filets about every minute or two to make sure they are not burning. Turn the filets over and baste with the marinade. Cover the grill and cook for another 3 to 5 minutes. When fully cooked, the filets should be firm but pliable and slightly browned but not burned or blackened. Discard the marinade.

Presentation

I press a few spoonfuls of my Easy Rice Pilaf-Caribbean Style (page 204) into a 6-ounce sauce cup and invert it on the plate to make a nice-looking mound of rice. Put a couple of large spoonfuls of beans on one end against the rice mound. Lay two pork medallions on either side of the beans. Add a couple tablespoons of salsa in the remaining spot, opposite the beans. Serves 4 people.

The California Ingredient

Most orange juice in the grocery store comes from Florida, which is true. However, while most orange juice is made from Florida oranges, California is the leading state for producing oranges sold as fresh fruit. Florida's warm, wet climate produces more juice and sugar, but the skins develop blemishes rather quickly. California's arid climate with hot, sunny days and cool, dry nights produces oranges with thick, beautiful peels. The dry air keeps superficial blemishes from forming on the peels, making California oranges more attractive to shoppers. Having a thicker peel also aids in keeping them fresh for extended periods, which makes them ideal for displaying on grocery store shelves. If you explore wine country homes around Lodi, you'll see orange trees in just about every yard. In fact, sixty percent of residences in California have at least one orange tree. Orange trees produce most of their fruit during the winter months. While the farmers and winemakers are away on vacation, we always have plenty of fresh California oranges to squeeze for juice to marinate our pork.

Tips and Tricks

Pyrex makes a 10-cup round mixing bowl with a tight-fitting lid (\$10) that's perfect for mixing the marinade and then marinating the pork medallions.

Timing is important to serving everything at the right temperature. Marinate the meat, prepare the spice mix, and make the mango salsa ahead of time. About 45 minutes before serving, start the fire on the grill. Start the beans simmering, then make the rice and get it in the oven. Grill the meat. Everything should be ready about the same time.