

Au Bon Climat

From one of Santa Barbara County's most historic vineyards, this wine offers a beautifully restrained expression of Pinot Noir, where red and black fruits, cedar, and star anise unfold with quiet authority.

94 WineEnthusiast



Alcohol :13,50 %

Composition: 100% Pinot Noir

Sanford & Benedict Vineyard Pinot Noir 2021

California, USA

Region and Vineyards

Sanford & Benedict holds a foundational place in the story of Santa Barbara Pinot Noir. Planted in 1971 by Richard Sanford and Michael Benedict, it is widely recognized as the first great vineyard of the area and a crucial proof point that **Burgundian grapes** could excel in the cool western reaches of what is now Sta. Rita Hills. Au Bon Climat notes that it has sourced fruit here continuously since the mid-1980s, a relationship of more than four decades, and places the site within its Santa Barbara Historic Vineyards Collection.

The vineyard's distinction is not only historical but geological and climatic. According to the winery, Sanford & Benedict combines a cool Region 1 climate influenced by the nearby Pacific with deep, well-drained soils covered by **siliceous chert gravel**. Sanford Winery likewise describes the site as a landmark cool-climate planting whose farming and block diversity reveal subtle differences in soil and mesoclimate. In this bottling, Au Bon Climat selects fruit from one of the old-vine, own-rooted sections, adding another layer of rarity and identity to the wine.

Winemaking

This wine is made from **100% Pinot Noir** harvested on 22 September 2021. The fruit is handpicked in the early morning so it arrives at the winery cold, allowing for a cold soak and a slower fermentation. Au Bon Climat explains that this extended, measured process is intended to draw out fruit-driven aromas and flavors gradually, while also supporting a more even extraction as alcohol levels rise during fermentation. About **50% whole clusters** were included, a choice that often brings aromatic lift, spice, and structural detail to Pinot Noir.

After fermentation to dryness, the wine was pressed and transferred to François Frères French oak barrels, **50% new**, where it matured for a total of 20 months. It was gently racked in late spring and returned to barrel, with no fining or filtration required before bottling. The finished wine sits at 13.5% alcohol, with 5.5 g/L acidity and a pH of 3.64, numbers that support its combination of silkiness, freshness, and aging potential. This is a thoughtful, traditional élevage designed to deepen complexity without masking vineyard character.

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Tasting Notes

- **Color:** Pale ruby to light garnet, luminous and delicate in the glass, signaling a refined, cool-climate Pinot Noir rather than a heavy or deeply extracted style.
- **Aroma:** With aeration, the nose opens on perfumed red and black cherries, dried cranberries, star anise, and cedar; Wine Enthusiast also notes crisp raspberry, pomegranate, and rose petals.
- **Palate:** Silky, nuanced, and layered with spice, the palate is energized by lip-smacking acidity; the critic's note adds pomegranate, lemon peel, and peppercorn, reinforcing the wine's freshness and fine-boned precision.

Did you know?

Sanford & Benedict is one of the rare vineyards that can claim a truly formative role in modern California Pinot Noir. Au Bon Climat describes it as the first "great" vineyard in Santa Barbara County, while Sanford Winery's own history places Richard Sanford and Michael Benedict among the pioneers who set out to prove that a cool-climate coastal site could produce wines of European-level distinction. That historical importance, combined with Au Bon Climat's more than 40-year sourcing relationship, gives this bottling a sense of **lineage** as well as place.

Wine Pairing Ideas

- **Roast turkey:** The wine's bright acidity and silky texture complement the tenderness of the meat, while its cranberry and spice notes echo classic roast-bird accompaniments.
- **Peking duck:** Pinot Noir's aromatic lift and fine structure work beautifully with crisp duck skin, subtle sweetness, and savory hoisin-like flavors.
- **Oak-grilled pork chops:** The wine's cedar, spice, and red-fruited freshness meet grilled pork naturally, especially when the meat carries a gentle smoky edge.
- **Lamb roast:** The layered, savory complexity of the wine stands up well to lamb, while the acidity keeps the pairing polished rather than heavy.

Wine Enthusiast (WE) : 94 Points (2021)

Very light colored in the glass, this bottling by a legendary producer from the region's most important vineyard begins with aromas of crisp raspberry, pomegranate and rose petals on the delicate yet inviting nose. The palate is energized with fresh and zippy acidity that presents flavors of pomegranate, lemon peel and peppercorn.

Robert Parker (RP) : 93 Points (2021)

The 2021 Pinot Noir Sanford & Benedict Vineyard is scented of raspberry preserves and cranberry sauce with nuances of saline, tea leaves and underbrush. The medium-bodied palate is grainy and fresh, with a concentrated core of elegantly earthy fruit and a long finish with spice and floral accents.