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## A woodsy, floral Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir that captures the fresh California springtime

In the latest Wine of the Week, critic Esther Mobley recommends a light-bodied red from Madson, an exciting new label

[Esther Mobley, The Chronicle](#)

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[Madson's 2019 Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir \(\\$29.99, 12.4%\)](#)

California smells so good right now. There's something about the scent of blooming flowers infusing the air at this time of year that, combined with the fresh, piney smell of our ubiquitous conifers, makes me happy to be alive.

Wine has the ability to capture sensations like this — to convey the fragrances and feelings of a specific place and time — and I recently drank a Pinot Noir that seemed to be the vinous incarnation of early Northern California springtime.

The label is a new-ish one called Madson, and its 2019 Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir reminds me of lavender, barely ripe strawberries, mushrooms still coated in wet earth, and Douglas fir needles. This is a pale, slight wine, a Pinot taken to its absolute limit of lightness, yet it feels firmly structured and insistently bright.

Madson is the project of Cole Thomas, Ken Swegles and Abbey Crystal, all three of whom have been working for years in the Santa Cruz Mountains wine world. Thomas and Swegles met while working at Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, one of the region's stalwart producers; for Madson, Thomas is mainly in charge of the winemaking while Swegles, a viticulturist, handles the farming.

They make Syrah, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir — three of the varieties that the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation does best — and all are rendered in a very contemporary style: low alcohol levels, flavors that veer more savory than sweet, bright acidity. All of Madson's red wines are fermented entirely whole-cluster, a winemaking technique in which the grapes are left to soak with their stems, which can imbue the resulting wine with an extra astringency and woody flavors. Whole-cluster fermentations are common among Pinot Noirs made in Burgundy and Syrahs in France's Northern Rhone Valley — wines that the Madson team enjoys drinking.

The 2019 Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir is Madson's entry-level Pinot, a little less expensive than its single-vineyard Pinot Noirs from the Ascona and Toyon vineyards, two complementary sites. Ascona has elevation: It's 2,450 feet high, and gets a dusting of snow in the winter, Swegles says. Toyon has the coastal influence, being just three miles from the Pacific Ocean. The entry-level wine blends wine from those two vineyards together, and it's a fine gateway into the Madson style.

If you've been turned off by saccharine, overdone California Pinot Noirs in the past, consider this a good excuse to give the category another chance. And if, like me, you've been savoring the sensory overload of this new season, consider the Madson wine a chance to experience it in another dimension.

The wine is available from the Madson website or at the following Bay Area retailers: K&L, Paul Marcus, Tofino, Terroir, Summit Store and Vin Vino. It's also available at these Santa Cruz County retailers: Deer Park Wines, Soif, Staff of Life and AJ's Market. Note: Stores may sell out of the wine, so be sure to call ahead if you're shopping in person. The wine's price varies by a few dollars depending on the store.