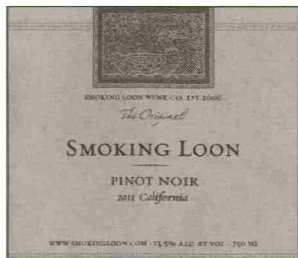


Wine of the Week

Scouting for the tastiest summer sippers.

Wine writer Peg Melnik had a blind tasting this week of affordable summer sippers, from pinot noir to zinfandel to cabernet sauvignon. It was a tasty flight, and our wine-of-the-week winner is the Smoking Loon, 2011 California Pinot Noir at \$8.



TOP PICK

Smoking Loon

Smoking Loon, 2011 California Pinot Noir, 13.5 percent alcohol, \$8. ★★★★★

A juicy pinot with decent structure. Aromas and flavors of cherry, herbs and spice, with a caramel finish. A great summertime quaff.

Others worth noting:

DeLoach Vineyards, 2010 Heritage Reserve, California Zinfandel, 13.5, \$8. ★★★★★ A full-bodied zin with layered flavors of blackberry, blueberry, red current and black pepper. Great structure. Balanced.

Chateau St. Jean, 2008 Sonoma County Merlot, 14.2 percent, \$20. ★★★★★ A tasty merlot with notes of cherry, toast, plum and spice. Nice length. Supple.

Friends.red, 2010 Sonoma County Red Wine, 14.3 percent, \$10. ★★★★★ A lively blend of merlot, syrah and sangiovese. Tangy fruit. Great acidity. A refreshing red.

Rodney Strong, 2009 Sonoma County Merlot, 13.5 percent, \$15. ★★★★★ Layered flavors of blackberry, vanilla and spice. Seamless texture. Lingering finish.

KEY

★★★★★ = Classic

★★★★ = Highly recommended

★★★ = Good

★★ = Limited appeal

★ = Not recommended

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