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A THANKSGIVING SPLURGE: SANTA BARBARA PINOT NOIR

By Jon Bonné, November 9, 2012

As everywhere else in California, 2010 was a nailbiting vintage in Santa Barbara - as much as anything because it underscored the divergent Pinot styles being pursued, especially in Sta. Rita Hills.

The best examples played to the year's cooler side and brought out fresher flavors, whether the intense, almost salty flavors of that area or the more generous fruit flavors of Santa Maria Valley.

While the blended bottles (in the \$30 range) are often the strong suit in this part of the world, many were a challenge this time around. But some were quite strong, as were some designates from vineyards with familiar names.

If there's any concern, it's that price creep is making these wines tougher to enjoy. But all the choices here would grace any holiday table with pride - and show the true potential of the Central Coast.

2010 Sandhi Sanford & Benedict Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (\$65, 13%):

Sommelier Rajat Parr and winemaker Sashi Moorman have produced an extraordinary reminder that Richard Sanford found Santa Rita's sweet spot a full four decades ago. A dramatic, age-worthy bottle, with a duskiness and intense mineral power to match taut red fruit, bayberry, kirsch and dried thyme. Too many mediocre S&B bottles have appeared in recent years; this is a reminder of the vineyard's timelessness.

