

Wine & Spirits

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OUR
TOP 100
VALUES

2014
Heavy
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Blend

JUNE 2017

wineandspiritsmagazine.com

\$5.99 • Canada \$6.99

Display until June 27, 2017

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Value Brands of the Year

Whether you're looking for a Wednesday night wine or a half-case for a backyard barbecue, here are 44 brands you can rely on for good buys at \$18 or less. All of them produced multiple wines that impressed our panels over the last 12 months, delivering more deliciousness and finesse than you'd expect at the price.

Reporting by Patrick J. Comiskey, Joshua Greene, Stephanie Johnson, Luke Sykora, Patricio Tapia and Tara Q. Thomas.





A TO Z

For a taste of what Oregon does best, at affordable prices, A to Z delivers—and you can find it in your local wine store. Winemakers Cheryl Francis and Sam Tannahill work with fruit from all over Oregon to consistently put out vibrant chardonnays, crisp, limey rieslings, and supple, wheaty pinot gris. Pay an extra couple of bucks to score some fine pinot noirs, too.



ADRIANO ADAMI

Adami's wines stand out in the sea of mass-produced Prosecco: The \$15 Garbèl Brut is fresh, floral and lightly fizzy, made for pool-side sipping. The 2014 Sul Lievito (\$18) shows more depth, with toasty notes from a second fermentation in bottle, and lemony acidity that would perk up a fish fry. Dalla Terra, Napa, CA

ALTAVINS

One approach to making value-priced wines is to find old, forgotten vineyards in out-of-the-way places—like Terra Alta, in the mountains of Catalonia. That's how Altavins produces llercavonia, a lush, elegant garnacha blanca, for just \$17; the \$14 Tempus, a smoky, tangy garnacha-syrah-carifèna blend; and Almodi Petit, a bright, fresh \$12 red to chill for summer parties. *Saranty Imports, Harrison, NY*



DOMAINE BOUSQUET

In 1997, the Bousquet family moved from Carcassonne, in the south of France, to the heights of Gualtallary, where they capture the fresh breezes of Argentina's Andes in their wines. If there's fish on the table, grab the 2016 Gaia (\$18), a blend of creamy chardonnay, crunchy sauvignon and spicy, floral pinot gris; if it's meat or mushrooms, opt for the violet-scented 2014 Reserve Malbec (\$17), a particularly juicy, refreshing version of Argentina's signature red. *MHW Ltd., Manhasset, NY*



photos this spread courtesy of Badenhorst

BISOL

Bisol represents a gold standard in Prosecco production, from its prestigious cru-level wines to the value-priced Jeio line. The Cuvée Spumante Brut includes some chardonnay, which gives it more heft than most, with notes of golden apple and pear; the Valdobbiadene Brut is tighter, with finer bubbles, mouthwatering acidity and cool salinity—ready for Wellfleet oysters. *Vias Imports, NY*



BADENHORST

Since 2008, cousins Hein and Adi Badenhorst have been championing South Africa's old, dry-farmed bush vines, putting out attention-grabbing variations on cinsault, grenache and chenin blanc. Secateurs, their "second-tier," offers an easy way to get acquainted with their wines: The fuchsia-hued 2015 Rosé shows cinsault's elegance and spice, while the 2013 chenin is fresh and brisk, with the variety's waxy, broad texture. *Broadbent Selections, San Francisco, CA*



BROOKS WINERY

While Brooks's Willamette Valley pinot noir is one of the deals of the valley, winemaker Chris Williams hit it out of the park with whites in 2015. Check out Amycas, a flower-scented, savory mix of five varieties inspired by Alsace's edelzwicker blends, as well as the Oak Ridge Vineyard Gewurztraminer, a racy, bracingly dry take on the spicy grape—both at \$18.



ALVARO CASTRO

From the foothills of the Serra d'Estrela—home of queijo de Serra, Portugal's answer to Vacheron Mont d'Or—the Dão wines Alvaro Castro and his team grow at the family domaine are equal to Serra in their world-class funky deliciousness. His reds, from local varieties, smell like red roses and taste like rock, if it were suffused by light red fruit. *Domaine Select Wine Estates, NY*

CANTINA DI CALDARO

In Alto Adige, where hundreds of small growers tend tiny plots, cooperative wineries play a prominent role. Cantina di Caldaro is one of the best, producing fresh wines with real varietal character at bargain prices. Try the Classic line for crisp, steely pinot grigio and richly textured pinot blanc (both \$16), while the 2015 Pinot Nero (\$18) stands out for its lively red-berry flavors trimmed with just enough tannins for grilled chicken. *Enotec Imports, Denver, CO*



DOMAINE DE LA CHANTELEUSERIE

If you love fresh reds with depth of flavor, Chanteleuserie is a great source of affordably aristocratic cabernet franc. Named for the singing larks at this limestone plateau in Bourgueil, the domaine consistently puts out fragrant, red-fruited franc from vines dating back to the 1970s. The exuberant Cuvée Alouettes (\$16) grows on sand and clay, the spicy, black-peppercorn-scented Cuvée Beauvais (\$18) on clay and limestone. *Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant, Berkeley, CA*



COMPAÑÍA DE VINOS DEL ATLÁNTICO

Compañía de Vinos del Atlántico produces wines from all over Spain, from the sunny lands of the Levante to Galicia, offering a wine for every occasion. Kick off a party with the Totus Tuus Cava, a radiant sparkling wine for \$17; pour the plump, juicy 2011 Rioja Graciano with grilled sausages. Meanwhile, cellar the 2012 Rioja Calma (\$17): It has the structure and richness to improve with age. *Olé Imports, New Rochelle, NY*



CASTLE ROCK

When prices for Napa and Sonoma fruit started to rise, this California-based brand simply headed north, to the Pacific Northwest. Seek out the lean and smoky 2013 Columbia Valley Merlot (\$11), and the vinous, chillable 2015 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$14) for summer drinking.



CHATEAU STE. MICHELLE

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Chateau Ste. Michelle has been defining Washington State wine since they put their first vines in the ground. Its wines have earned the winery a place on our Top 100 list of best-performing wineries 22 times—more than any other in the US. It's also a regular on this list, putting out a range of great buys at \$18 and less. Whites are a particular strength, especially the lean, brisk sauvignon blanc off the Horse Heaven Vineyard (\$15) and a range of riesling, including a remarkably pure, juicy 2015 Cold Creek Riesling for \$16.



M. CHAPOUTIER

Michel Chapoutier's reputation was built on long-lived wines from the Hermitage hill in France's Rhône Valley, but his firm is equally good at putting out everyday wines. Look for the Belleruche line for Rhône flavor at discount prices; Bila-Haut is his Roussillon estate, where the 2015 vintage gave a fresh, herbal white and a plummy, chocolatey, garrigue-scented red, both for \$14. *Terlato Wines Int'l, Lake Bluff, IL*



CONCHA Y TORO

Concha y Toro, the largest winery in Chile, takes advantage of its extensive vineyard holdings to put out a bevy of wines priced for everyday drinking. Look especially to the Casillero del Diablo line, which excels with cabernet sauvignon: The 2015 Reserva is subtle and gentle in taste and price (\$11); the 2015 Reserva Privada (\$18) is richer and darker, ready for grilled steak. *Excelsior Wine & Spirits, Old Brookville, NY*

FOWLES WINE

Head to the hills north of Melbourne, Victoria, and you'll find the Fowles family vineyards in the heights of the Strathbogie Ranges, where pinot noir grows delicate and lithe in the high elevations and granite soils. Grab their raspy raspberry-scented Farm-to-Table 2015 for \$15. They also make a clean shiraz at the same price. *Fowles Wine USA, Calistoga, CA*



DR. KONSTANTIN FRANK

To make well-priced white wines in New York's Finger Lakes, it helps to have the oldest vinifera vines in the region. That's how Konstantin Frank manages to consistently put out exceptional whites at reasonable prices, like the tight, limey 2015 Dry Riesling at \$15. Look also for Frank's bright, clean grüner veltliner or the rkatsiteli, always herbaceous and invigorating.



JOSE MARIA DA FONSECA

Domingos Soares Franco knows how to grow distinguished wines that sell for a song. Look no further than his latest red from the famed José de Sousa Rosado Fernandes estate, a wine from local Alentejo varieties fermented in stainless steel, as well as ancient clay amphorae, the combination forming a rainbow of colorful flavors, from strawberry to cassis, orange and blackberry. Or check out the warmer Ripanco (\$13), with its pomegranate and bitter orange spice. Either would be delicious with braised duck. *Palm Bay Int'l, Boca Raton, FL*



FAUSTINO

It's hard to find better bang for your buck in Rioja than Faustino. Founded in 1861, it's one of the region's historic wineries, and sticks to a classic style. The 2010 Faustino V Reserva (\$18) flies the flag of traditional Rioja with its light strawberry and brandied cherry flavors; the 2015 Rioja VII (\$12) is its white counterpart, soft and savory, for aperitifs. Pack a few bottles for a grill party with sausages and seafood; one of each won't be enough. *Palm Bay Int'l, Boca Raton, FL*





Château des Jacques in Moulin-à-Vent.

LOUIS JADOT

Legendary for its Côte d'Or domaine and the winemaking legacy of the dynamic Jacques Lardière, Jadot bought into Beaujolais in 1996, at the Château des Jacques. The cool, violet-scented freshness of Jadot's Beaujolais-Villages in 2015 is a step above most négociant wine from the region. The 2015 Bourgogne Blanc (\$18) is a bright, salt-and-green-herb chardonnay for hamachi crudo.

Kobrand, Purchase, NY



GIRASOLE VINEYARDS

Charlie Barra purchased his 200-acre vineyard in Redwood Valley in 1954, and has farmed the benchland site organically ever since. For decades, he simply sold the fruit; then he and his family launched the Barra of Mendocino winery in 1997 and the Girasole Vineyards label in 2001. At \$14, the 2015 Girasole Sangiovese is a terrific alternative to Chianti, a clean, light red with an herb-edged strawberry flavor, while the 2014 Hybrid Red blends sangiovese with merlot, cabernet and petite sirah in a heartier style.

DOMAINE LAFOND

Lafond makes wines in some pricey addresses—like Tavel, where Jean-Pierre Lafond started, and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, where he and his son bought property in 2001. The best bangs for your buck, however, come from Lirac, which sits just across the river from Châteauneuf. There, among the *galets roulés*, the Lafonds grow sophisticated wines, like a 2015 Blanc that's satin-textured and lightly floral, thanks to a touch of viognier, or the 2013 Lirac red, a cherry-bright red with enough spice and tannins to match lamb sausage. Both are bargains at \$16. *Wines of France, Mountaintside, NJ*



FRIEDRICH WILHELM GYMNASIUM

Forget the long name; just call it FWG. Then get over the fear of riesling: After 450 years of growing vines along the Mosel, these people have it down. The Fritz Willi is your go-to, a thirst-quenching white as modern as the clean label. Consider the Schiefer wines—the sleek, stony Trocken or the spicy, floral Feinherb—the gateway to the world of slate-driven riesling. All are \$18. *Schmitt Söhne, Millersville, MD*



HUGL-WIMMER

Lower real estate prices and rich loess soils make Austria's Weinviertel a great place for value-wine shopping. Look especially for Hugl-Wimmer, where Martin and Sylvia Hugl put out bargain-priced grüner. Hugl Weine is the \$13 patio pounder; Wimmer offers more pepper and zing for \$15. Pick up the 2015 Zweigelt, too: Grapey and fresh, it's a cool, spicy \$15 red for sausages off the grill. *Kysela Père et Fils, Winchester, VA*



JUVÉ Y CAMPS

When it comes to Cava, Juvé y Camps has impeccable pedigree: Joan Juvé was a pioneer in Spanish sparkling wine when he began bottling them in 1921. Since then the company has cemented a reputation for fresh, vibrant bubbly. For \$16, choose the Essential, a creamy 100 percent xarel-lo full of spiced apricot flavor, or the Brut Nature Gran Reserva de la Familia, an intensely dry and acidic wine ready to take on a lobster roll. *MundoVino/The Winebow Group, NY*



KIR-YIANNI

Xinomavro is arguably Greece's best red-wine grape, and Kir-Yianni makes it easy to get acquainted. Try the \$15 Akakies rosé for an idea of the variety's savory, sour-cherry flavors, then try the Paranga (\$15) or Ktima (\$18), both firm, elegant blends with merlot and syrah to tame xinomavro's tannins. *Diamond Importers, Chicago, IL*





NOBLE TREE

Thomas George Estates mostly makes Russian River chardonnay and pinot noir—usually expensive commodities these days—but in 2009 the partners decided to launch Noble Tree in an effort to make some wines they could sell for less than \$20. They soon bought two vineyards to support the brand, one on the warmer, inland side of the Russian River Valley where it overlaps Chalk Hill, the other in the remote northwestern hills of Sonoma County. The wines are now 100 percent estate-grown, and run \$18. The 2015 Russian River Pinot Noir is light, trim and fragrant. And the 2015 Noble Blend Blanc—a deliciously bright, orange-blossom-scented blend of viognier and grenache blanc—is one of the best inexpensive California whites we've tasted in a long time.



L'ECOLE NO 41

L'Ecole No 41 is responsible for some of the most highly rated wines from the Columbia Valley in the pages of *Wine & Spirits*—particularly the single-vineyard blends Perigee, Apogee and Ferguson. The winery also excels at more affordable regional blends, like the juicy 2015 Old Vines Chenin Blanc, and the fleshy, quince-scented 2015 Columbia Valley Semillon—both \$15.

PARDUCCI

Parducci is one of California's oldest wine brands, founded in 1932. It's gone through several ownership changes over the years, but has maintained its historical focus on fruit grown in the warm hills and valleys of inland Mendocino County. The winery's Small Lot Blend wines stand out with fresh flavors and varietal typicity—from a curranty, herbal, mouthwatering 2013 Merlot (\$13) to a crisp, clean, lilac-scented 2015 Pinot Gris (\$14).



FRANÇOIS LURTON

Tempted by the sun-drenched, craggy hills of France's Roussillon, François Lurton gave up a career as a flying winemaker to settle at Mas Janeil in 2008. The old vines on this 59-acre estate give intense, concentrated wines, like Le Petit Pas (\$17), a lemony, garrigue-scented blend of grenaches gris and blanc with macabeu; they also provide fruit for Les Hauts de Janeil, a line of wines priced for everyday drinking, like the warm, generous 2015 Syrah-Grenache at \$13. *Cape Classics, NY*



MCMANIS FAMILY VINEYARDS

With over 2,700 acres of vineyard land in inland California, the McManis family farms a lot of grapes. At their River Junction vineyard, planted at the confluence of the San Joaquin and Stanislaus rivers, air drainages form a slightly cooler spot in the Central Valley, which allowed them to grow an unctuous and nutty, yet brightly floral 2015 Viognier. Their rich, purple-fruited 2015 Pinot Noir and clean, grapey 2015 Pinot Gris, both drawn from estate vineyards, are also well-balanced bargains at \$12 or less.



MEZZACORONA

Mezzacorona produces an array of affordable wines from the fruit of some 1,300 grower-members who tend vines on Trentino's steep hillsides. Especially good: the blends of teroldego and lagrein, two local red varieties. The 2013 Castel Firmian Nerofino (\$14) combines them in equal parts for a bright, fruity red; the 2014 Cliffhanger (\$15) is 70 percent teroldego and spent a year in oak barrels to create a meatier, smokier wine. Both would match just about anything off a wood-fired grill. *Prestige Wine Imports, NY*



from left: Peter Leske, Giles Cooke, MW and Fergal Tynan, MW, of One Chain

ONE CHAIN

Setting critter labels back 150 years, Giles Cooke and Fergal Tynan, both British Masters of Wine, collaborate with South Australian winemaker Peter Leske to find fruit sources for their Character labels, each featuring a strange bird dressed in Dickensian garb, the lineup offering a range of deliciousness, from the Opportunist, a sour-cherry-scented shiraz picked just on the cusp of peak ripeness in Langhorne Creek, to the Pugilist, a light, herbal cabernet that's more elegant than the name might imply. *Wine Dogs, Brooklyn, NY*



TALAI BERRI

On the gulf of Viscaya, on the Basque coast, Talai Berri produces some of the most refreshing and balanced Txakoli in Guetaria. The 2015 Finca Jakue (\$17) is full of limey flavor, with an effervescence that underlines the sharp and vibrant acidity; the rosé version (\$18) adds tart, floral cherry notes. Pour the white with raw clams, the rosé with salmon tartare, and feel the ocean breezes.

Regal Wine Imports, Moorestown, NJ



SUVLA

Grown on a peninsula jutting into the Aegean, Suvla's best wines are decidedly Mediterranean in feel. The pale, copper-toned pink could stand in for a Provençal pour; a 2013 Kinali Yapincak, made from a native grape, recalls Rhône whites in its creamy, sunny richness. Both run \$17, and work well with anything from the sea. *Suvla USA, Secaucus, NJ*



STELLA BELLA

Take a love of the savory richness of Pèssac-Léognan whites and move it to Margaret River, where you can grow a bright and zesty blend of semillon and sauvignon and sell it for \$18. That's the successful formula of Skuttlebutt, Stuart Pym and Janice McDonald's suggestion for your next roast fish dinner. Or, if it's roast beef on the menu, their cool and spicy Skuttlebutt red blends shiraz and cabernet sauvignon. *Little Peacock Imports, Wilmington, DE*



ST HALLETT

Best known for their Old Block and Blackwell Barossa shiraz, St Hallett makes a range of less ambitious reds, from the 2015 Faith, a classic Barossa shiraz with black fruit and tarry tannins for \$16, to the 2014 Gamekeeper's blend of shiraz, grenache and touriga, with its tart raspberry flavors and sarsaparilla scents. *Accolade Wines North America, Napa CA*



RED NEWT

A riesling specialist in New York's Finger Lakes since 1998, Red Newt makes as many as a half-dozen single-vineyard designates in any given vintage. What doesn't make it into those wines goes into the Dry Riesling (\$17) or The Circle (\$12). Varietally true, lean and snappy, with scents of lime zest, The Circle has more depth of flavor and mineral length than you might expect in a value-priced wine.



WATERBROOK

Walla Walla's Waterbrook has been value-conscious since its founding in 1984, and has only gotten more so since 2009, when it planted a 187-acre vineyard in Spring Valley's rolling hills. Winemaker John Freeman uses that young-vine fruit to craft some impressive wines at \$13, like a generous, purple-fruited 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon and the 2014 Mélange, a merlot-dominant blend of ten varieties that awaits uncorking at your next barbecue.



GEORGES VIGOUROUX

If you like dark, tannic reds, Cahors is full of bargain-priced options. Malbec stays lean and firm in this southwestern part of France—all the better to go with the duck, goose and cassoulet the region is famed for. Look to Georges Vigouroux's four estates for a range of reds at \$15 or less. Atrium is gentle and easy, Cahors for a picnic; Pigmentum is sleeker, darker and more modern, ready for a steakhouse; Château Leret is for traditionalists, tannic enough to take on cassoulet. *Saranty Imports, Harrison, NY*

VINI

A \$9 pinot noir that tastes like pinot noir, and a \$9 pinot grigio that's clean, floral and peachy, ready for beachside barbecues: Is there really anything more to say? They come from Bulgaria's Thracian Valley, which Homer praised for its wines. It's time we get hip to it. *Bulgarian Master Vintners, Sonoma, CA*



TSELEPOS

George Tselepos is the master of moschofilero, a rose-scented white grown on a high, cool plateau in Greece's Peloponnese, so it's remarkable that his basic cuvée is just \$17. And while his dark, chocolatey agiorgitiko from Driopi Estate asks more than most people would consider an everyday price, his deeply-colored rosé version captures the grape's juicy, spicy flavor in picnic-ready form for \$14. *Stellar Importing Co., Whitestone, NY*



ZACHARIAS VINEYARDS

For one-stop shopping for affordable wines, Greece's Peloponnese is hard to beat. There's the light, crisp roditis and the floral moschofilero for whites, and the juicy, soft agiorgitiko for reds and rosés. For textbook examples of all three, look to the Zacharias family, who have been growing grapes here for decades. The 2015 Agiorgitiko Rosé (\$13) is a particular standout, bright and dry with spiced cherry fruit, thirst-quenching in its acidity. *Stellar Importing Co., Whitestone, NY*

ZUCCARDI

Sebastián Zuccardi is leading the charge for brighter, fresher wines from the Argentine Andes, especially with wines from the cool heights of the Uco Valley. What's most remarkable is how affordable some of them are, like the 2015 Serie A Malbec, a violet-scented red with a fresh cherry center for \$15, or the clean, bright malbec bottled under Santa Julia, their value-priced label. At \$10, it's an easy intro to new-wave Argentine malbec. *Winesellers, Niles, IL*

