

TOP 100 BEST BUYS 2009



Our editors select the best value-priced wines of the year.

BY THE EDITORS OF WINE ENTHUSIAST MAGAZINE

At *Wine Enthusiast*, our tasting panel's job is relatively straightforward: judge and rate wines blind based purely on quality, with no inkling of producer or price. But at the end of the day when choosing what we'll pour at the dinner table, we're like any other wine lover in these tough economic times: price matters, and we're as thrilled for ourselves as for our readers when we find an outstanding Cabernet for \$15, or a knockout Sauvignon Blanc that won't break the bank.

That's why we're pleased to share with our readers the discoveries we find as reviewers: when the bags that disguise reviewed wines' identities come off and the scores are in, we then determine whether the wine can be given the Best Buy status, i.e. if a wine's score on the *Wine Enthusiast* 100-point scale is high in relation to its price (a very precise formula we keep to ourselves, but 87-points-and-above and \$15-and-below are approximate yardsticks). The higher the rating and lower the price, the more of a quintessential Best Buy a wine becomes—no mystery about that.

Only about 10% of the 10,000 wines we review annually merit this designation. So enjoy this elite grouping of Best Buy wines. In selecting, opening and sharing with friends and family, you won't be disappointed.

Reviews and accompanying text are by Lauren Buzzeo, Joe Czervinski, Paul Gregutt, Steve Heimoff, Susan Kostrzewa, Monica Lamer, Michael Schachner and Roger Voss.

1

90 Big House 2008 White (California); \$10. Continues the solid trend of this label producing some of the best values in California. Dry, crisp and delicious, with mineral-infused flavors of oranges, honeysuckle and buttered toast. A blend of Malvasia Bianca, Muscat Canelli, Viognier and Roussanne.

2

88 Messias 2007 Quinta do Penedo (Dão); \$6. A big dense wine, as tough as the rocks that make up the Dão soil. Its fruit is certainly there, a welter of black berries and plums. But in this young wine, the tannins are still in charge. This is going to develop, opening up, becoming less mineral, over the next three years. Imported by Luiz's Grocery And Liquors.

3



92 Pacific Rim 2008 Organic Riesling (Columbia Valley (WA)); \$14. Made with organic grapes, this hits just 10.5% alcohol and 3.8% residual sugar. Honey, jasmine and tea notes take the off-dry style to a refined level, with the sweetness perfectly proportionate to the acid.

4

89 Marlargo 2006 Fingers Crossed Red (South Australia); \$10. This unlikely blend of 87% Shiraz and 13% Petit Verdot hits the right notes for a bargain sipper, boasting plenty of weight and an interesting juxtaposition of raspberry fruit with dark chocolate. Earthy notes provide depth, and the finish is surprisingly silky for a wine in this price range. Drink now. Imported by Marlargo Wines.

5

88 Rietvallei Estate Wine 2008 John B. Sauvignon Blanc-Colombar (Robertson); \$8. Fruity, floral and feminine, this cheerful white blends Sauvignon Blanc and Colombar. On the nose—lemon zest, minerals and tropical fruit—and on the palate, fruity but crisp citrus flavors are balanced by fresh acidity. Want a go-to summer white for everything from grilled seafood to Indian cuisine? Check this out. Imported by Confluence Wine Importers.

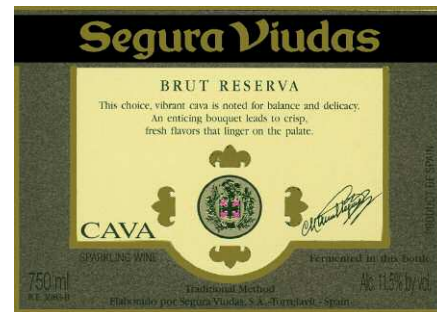
6



89 Viña Requingua 2007 Puerto Viejo Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (Curicó Valley); \$10. A well-done, affordable Cabernet with all the qualities it should have. There are flowery, lavender notes to the black-fruit bouquet, and ripeness, depth and solid tannins in the mouth. The flavor profile of cola, blackberry and chocolate works just fine, and the finish is long and hints at bitter chocolate and tobacco. Imported by Puerto Viejo Wines.

7

89 Hecht & Banner 2008 Rosé Syrah (Vin de Pays d'Oc); \$10. Lovely lilac florals on the nose along with ripe raspberry and honeydew. Round palate with flavors of cherry and mango lifted by bright pineapple core acidity. Quite the lengthy finish for a rosé. Delicious; a steal for \$10. Imported by Frederick Wildman & Sons, Ltd.



8

89 Segura Viudas NV Brut Reserva (Cava); \$10. After a soda-like start that may seem aggressive, this one really settles into a groove. The nose blends citrus and wild green-herb aromas, while the palate has perfectly composed orange and peach flavors. The finish is solid and around every turn it holds the road. Great for the price. Imported by Freixenet USA.

9

90 Dao Sul 2007 Cabriz Colheita Seleccionada (Dão); \$9. Rich, flowery wine that shows the potential for white wines in the Dão region. While it keeps plenty of lemon zest acidity, the apricot and peach flavors combine well with pears. There is spice from wood, but the fruit is the thing with this great food wine. Imported by Aidil Wines & Liquor Inc.

10

90 Rendition 2007 Petite Sirah (Alexander Valley); \$9. Great price for a big, powerful red like this. Tough in tannins now, it shows classic flavors of currants, mocha, anise and pepper, and will develop over time. Classy and impressive.

11

89 Washington Hills 2007 Summit Reserve Late Harvest Riesling (Columbia Valley); \$8. With its 10% alcohol, bright fruit and lush, round mouthfeel, this is more mainstream (and main meal) than the late harvest label would suggest. The sweetness is perfectly balanced against firm acids, and the fruit flavors combine citrus and peach with light streaks of honey.

12

91 Santa Carolina 2007 Reserva de Familia Carmenère (Rapel Valley); \$15. Santa Carolina's Reserva de Familia red wines from 2007 are vastly improved from what the winery has done for the past two decades. This wine—along with the RdF Cabernet Sauvignon—show immense color and fruit, but also balance, structure and a friendliness that can't be mass produced. This wine is loaded with cassis, cherry, cola, mint, toast and bacon. And for \$15 you'd be hard-pressed to find a better, more complete red from anywhere in the world. Imported by Carolina Wine Brands.

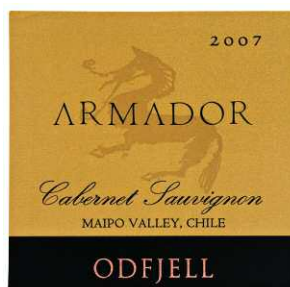
13

89 Kirkland Signature 2006 Merlot (Columbia Valley); \$9. This is the Costco house brand, and the new Merlot comes through with exceptional flavors for the price. It's lush and loaded with black cherry and mocha flavors. Tannins are ripe and smooth, the concentration is surprising, and there are no holes in this wine; it plays out smoothly with a very satisfying richness.

14

91 Sterling 2007 Made with Organic Grapes Sauvignon Blanc (Mendocino); \$13. An absolutely first-class Sauvignon Blanc, and at this price, a fantastic value. Bone dry and crisp in mouthwatering acidity, the flavors range from Meyer lemons, limes, grapefruits and green apples to gooseberries, figs and minerals. Sommeliers, buy this by the case.

15



90 Odfjell 2007 Armador Cabernet Sauvignon (Maipo Valley); \$13. A top-notch value Cabernet with no flaws. The fruit on the nose is pretty and stylish but doesn't force the issue, while the palate is juicy and fresh with flavors of cola, cassis and wild berry. Not a complicated wine, but one that pushes all the right buttons. Ripe and friendly to the last drop. A lot of wine for the money. Imported by Select Fine Wine.

16

90 Provam 2008 Varanda do Conde (Vinho Verde); \$12. A blend of Alvarinho and Trajadura, this is relatively full-bodied Vinho Verde. The creamy texture is the most apparent, always freshened with lively citric acidity, a very light prickle on the mouth. The wine is fragrant and crisp. Drink this summer, but also possible to age. Imported by Admiral Imports.

17

91 McKinley Springs 2007 Viognier (Horse Heaven Hills); \$14. McKinley Springs is showing a deft touch with its white wines. This one has absolutely lovely aromas of beeswax and honeysuckle, leading into lime and

citrus on the palate. Long and refreshing, with no alcoholic burn despite its almost 15% alcohol.

18

91 Emmolo 2007 South 40 Ranch Syrah Rosé (Napa Valley); \$15. Drier and crisper than most California rosés and as a result more elegant. With a pretty orange-rust color, it shows savory flavors of orange pekoe tea, tangerine zest and barely ripe raspberries and apricots, sprinkled with white pepper and vanilla. Sophisticated and compelling, this is one of the best rosés of the year.

19

91 Colomé 2008 Torrontés (Calchaqui Valley); \$15. Much better and way more complex than your average Torrontés. The bouquet is flower power, lychee and tangerine, and overall this is an exotic, driving wine like no other from Argentina. Expect roundness and similarities to Viognier; it's amplified and impressive. Imported by Hess Collection.

20

90 DFJ Vinhos 2007 Grand'Arte Shiraz (Estremadura); \$11. Its dark color promises power, and this wine delivers a broad, chunky Shiraz, with perfumed fruit, dark tannins and a spicy wood structure. Solid concentration gives a wine that somehow manages to assimilate a Franco/Australian variety into a dry Portuguese structure. Imported by Dionysos Imports Inc.

21

91 Merry Cellars 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (Wahluké Slope); \$14. A deep yellow gold, lushly scented with orange blossom, citrus peel, ripe pear and other stone fruits, this rich, oily take on Sauvignon Blanc was done in stainless steel, but has the textural complexity of barrel fermentation. It's a grippingly delicious bottle.

22



90 **Parducci 2006 Petite Sirah (Mendocino County); \$11.** This is classic Parducci Petite Sirah, a near-perfect example of the variety. Dry and robust, yet smooth, it has complex flavors of wild blackberries, blueberries, molasses, dark chocolate, bacon and peppery spices. With beautiful balance, it's a great value.

23

90 **Four Sisters 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (South Eastern Australia); \$13.** New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is the leading imported wine in Australia, which has led domestic wineries to redouble their efforts at the variety. This bargain-priced example features fig and citrus notes underscored by a slight herbaceousness, even some red currant flavors. It's round in the mouth without being overly broad, ending with mouthwatering citrus flavors. Drink now. Imported by Epic Wines.

24

90 **Domaine Serres Mazard 2004 Élevé en Fûts de Chêne (Corbières); \$13.** A terrific example of Corbières terroir at an unbeatable price. The wine, a traditional Rhône-style blend of Syrah, Grenache and Carignan, is so loaded with aromas and flavors of the surrounding garrigue you might think that they threw in a bouquet garni during maturation. Sage, rosemary, menthol, thyme and bay leaves all abound while rich, dark fruit and oak aging (Élevé en Fûts de Chêne means aged in oak barrels) provides support and structure. Silky texture, approachable tannins and a long finish bring it all together. Imported by Pasternak Wine Imports.

25

90 **Kanonkop 2007 Kadette (Stellenbosch); \$13.** Full-bodied with juicy flavors of berry and plum underscored by smoke, spicebox and leather, this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinotage, Merlot and Cabernet Franc has an ageable and elegant character whose slight rigidity will soften over time. Pair with grilled meats, robust cheeses. Imported by Cape Classics.

26

90 **Pedro Romero NV Dry, Rich Amontillado (Jerez); \$13.** What a treat it is to come across an inexpensive Sherry that's this well made and delivers this much purity along with moderate richness. The wine smells very healthy, with nary a flaw. Toffee, peach and almond flavors are the slightest bit buttery, and the feel is lively but comfortable. Imported by Frontier Wine Imports.

27

90 **Tangent 2007 Paragon Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc (Edna Valley); \$13.** Tangent is on the cutting edge of bone dry, crisply elegant and superbly fine white wines at everyday prices, and this bottling is among their best. It's wonderfully tart, with mouthwatering flavors of lemons and limes, Asian pears and minerals. A super value, and a sommelier alert.

28

90 **Sogrape 2006 Callabriga (Douro); \$13.** One of a range of wines from different regions, but all called Callabriga. This wine comes from Sogrape's Quinta da Leda in the Douro. It is a big, burly wine, packed with solid, dense and ripe fruit. Black plums and figs and a sweet core of dark tannins emerge from a structure that is still young. Age for 3-4 years. Imported by Evaton, Inc.

29



90 **Ludwig 2007 Lorelei's Vineyard Riesling (Monterey); \$13.** It's always nice to come across a good California Riesling, because there are so few of them. This one's made from organic grapes grown in gravelly benchlands, and its cool-climate origins show in the brisk acidity that makes the yellow apricot, wildflower and slate flavors so clean. Production was a miserly 448 cases, and the alcohol level is a refreshingly low 13%.

30

89 **The Wolfrap 2008 Syrah-Mourvèdre-Viognier (Western Cape); \$11.** A nose of red fruit, spice and violet is followed by fresh but lush aromas of cherries, blackberries and a touch of smoke and dark chocolate. Smooth and integrated, with a pretty, aromatic character. Imported by Vineyard Brands.

31

89 **Barker's Marque 2008 Arona Sauvignon Blanc (Marlborough); \$11.** Passion fruit and nectarine aromas are joined by hints of jalapeno, while the palate displays stone fruit flavors with tropical overtones and grassy accents. This medium-bodied wine is textbook Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc at a refreshingly affordable price. Imported by Grange Wine Marketing.

32

89 Caves Aliança 2006 Casa d'Aguilar Tinto (Beiras); \$11. An elegant style, the ripe fruit restrained and kept in check by the dry tannins and acidity. The flavors start lightly, but then the wine gives a fine intensity and concentration as it opens up. The berry flavors are balanced by the dried fruits, with a new wood layer coming through to finish. Worth aging for 2–3 years. Imported by Tri-Vin Imports.

33

88 Farnese 2007 Opi Chardonnay (Terre di Chieti); \$9. Farnese's opulent Chardonnay is generous and intense without being too intricate or complicated. Straightforward and genuine aromas include peach, grapefruit and honey-roasted almonds. The wine's texture is smooth and pleasurable. Imported by Empson (USA) Ltd.

34



89 Quintay 2008 Clava Sauvignon Blanc (Casablanca Valley); \$11. Very nicely done for a new brand that we haven't seen before. This is Chilean SB in fine form. It's a mix of green and ripe fruits both on the nose and palate. Aromas of gooseberry and mango are alluring, and in the mouth it bounces along on a wave of bracing acidity. Elegant and easier to process than Quintay's more pungent, angular and demanding Reserva. Imported by Montecastelli Selections.

35

88 Barrière Frères 2006 Jacques Sans Souci (Bordeaux); \$9. A wine that aims to bring out the casual side of Bordeaux, this is friendly, accessible, without losing the essential dry tannins and fresh black currant flavors typical of the region. If only all branded Bordeaux was like this. Imported by Bob Bofman Selections.

36

90 Pascual Toso 2007 Syrah (Maipú); \$14. All sorts of smoky berry, cola and controlled toast aromas get this wine going in the right direction. It tastes very good, with pure, less than bashful plum and cola flavors leading straight to a fruity, lasting finish. This may not have much sauvage, old world Syrah character; but for Argentina it's made right and registers from head to toe. Imported by T.G.I.C. Importers.

37

90 Condado de Oriza 2006 Crianza Tempranillo (Ribera del Duero); \$14. Floral at first, with dark fruit, leather, earth and roasted meat aromas. The mouthfeel is rich and the balance right, while the flavors of black cherry and blackberry are deep, ripe and defined. Chocolate and thick on the finish; this wine is offering a lot for the price. Drink now through 2011. Imported by Luneau USA Inc.

38

90 Upland Estates 2007 Gewürztraminer (Yakima Valley-Snipes Mountain); \$14. Ripe and spicy, this is a very rich and fruity Gewürz, with moderate sweetness (1.6% residual sugar). Melon, mango, candied orange peel dominate, and it's round and tasty, without the soapy or oily quality of the variety.

39

90 Nine Stones 2007 Shiraz (McLaren Vale); \$14. Starts off slightly gamy and meaty, then adds bright blueberry fruit and hints of peppery spice. It's creamy-smooth in texture, medium-bodied and nicely balanced on the juicy, mouthwatering finish. A good value red to lay in for summer grilling. Imported by Vineyard Brands.

40

89 Gräfllich von Hohenthal'Scher 2005 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett (Mosel-Saar-Ruwer); \$12. At \$12 for a single-vineyard kabinett, this is an excellent value, delivering exotic honey, apricot and spice notes. The texture is creamy and silky; the finish is lush and soft. Drink it over the next few years. Imported by Scoperta Importing Co. Inc.

41

88 Quinta das Arcas 2008 Arca Nova (Vinho Verde); \$9. The lovely spritz of fresh Vinho Verde bubbles out of the glass of this lively, crisp and citrus-flavored wine. It has the right edge of fruit skins giving structure to the summer fruits and acidity. Imported by Frontier Wine Imports.

42

90 Viña Santacruz 2006 Chamán Gran Reserva Syrah (Colchagua Valley); \$14. Crusty, dark and big all over; this is a full, mineral Syrah with molten intensity and floral accents. The palate is broad, round and loaded with toasty, spicy plum and other black-fruit flavors. The finish is warm and chocolatey, and as a whole it's delivering a lot more depth and quality than most \$14 wines. Imported by North American Beverage Group.

MONOPOLE: ALL FOR ONE

In France, a monopole refers to an appellation (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée or AOC) entirely owned by a single proprietor. Several occur in Burgundy including paragons of Pinot Noir such as Romanée Conti, which encompasses less than five acres. In the northern Rhône, Chateau Grillet has its own monopole enclave within the Condrieu AOC, taking in nine acres of Viognier. The word monopole appears on the label of wine made from a single-proprietor AOC. —RISA WYATT

43

89 Kungfu Girl 2008 Riesling (Columbia Valley); \$12. This 2008 is the third vintage for this extraordinarily popular Riesling, again showing bright, vivid, punchy citrus fruit and juicy acids. Residual sugar is about 1.5% and once again it is sourced from the Evergreen vineyard. With production climbing to 20,000 cases, this should be easy to find at least until fall.

44



90 Areo 2007 Malbec (Neuquén); \$15. This new wine from the Neuquén region is a winner. It has a deep, exotic nose of black fruit and citrus peel, while the palate is slick, lush and tastes of blackberry, cassis and orange peel. Deep, sultry, chewy Malbec with a robust finish. Imported by Simone International.

45

90 Château Rives-Blancs 2005 Cuvée de l'Odysée Chardonnay (Limoux); \$15. This is a terrific Chardonnay from Limoux, an area more typically known for its Blanquette (which uses the Mauzac grape) but certainly not limited to it. It's a ripe and rich wine, loaded with aromas of red apple, nectarine pit, and almond milk. The mouth shows a bit more vibrancy with flavors of lime essence backed by honeydew. Round and fantastically balanced, with a long finish kissed by toasted oak. Imported by Grape News Importing.

46

90 Cameron Hughes 2006 Lot 113 Syrah (Mount Veeder); \$14. Negotiant Hughes continues to produce compelling wines at everyday prices. This Syrah, from one of Napa Valley's best mountain regions, is dry and thick in refined tannins. But it's so rich in black currants, black cherries, chocolate, pepper and sweet, smoky oak that it's delicious now.

47

90 3 Stones 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (Marlborough); \$15. Richly fruited and tropical, this is a medium-bodied, slightly creamy-textured Marlborough Savvy. Flavors hint at pineapple, honey and stone fruit, yet remain zesty and clean, with a refreshing citrus zing to the finish. Stock up for the summer. Imported by Dreyfus, Ashby & Co.

48

89 Nugan Family Estates 2006 Shiraz (Riverina); \$12. A top value in Aussie Shiraz, grab the remaining bottles before it's supplanted by the 2007, which isn't quite as richly textured. The 2006 is slightly leafy and peppery on the nose, giving a welcome sense of complexity to the blackberry fruit. It's firm without being hard, with a surprisingly long finish. Drink now. Imported by Southern Starz, Inc.

A HARVEST OF TERMS

Words for the wise to know about grapes—from harvest to press:

The Crush: Process that gently breaks grape skins to release juices.

Must: Following crush, this is the juice (plus pulp, skins, seeds) that will ferment into wine.

Free-Run Juice: The liquid that flows—without pressing—from the grapes. Press wine is darker and more tannic than free-run wine; winemakers often blend it with free-run wine to add structure.

—RISA WYATT

49



90 Juvé y Camps 2005 Reserva de la Familia Brut Nature (Cava); \$15. A fine Cava at a very good price. As a brut nature, it's extremely fresh and clean-cut, with light aromas of vanilla bean, dried white fruits and very little in the way of lees or egg aromas. Active bubbles and a crisp finish allow it to achieve its goals. Imported by Winebow.

50

89 Vignobles Boudinaud 2006 Grange des Rouquette G-S-M (Vin de Pays d'Oc); \$12. Strong aromas of the garrigue immediately welcome you into the glass, followed by notes of kirsch, black raspberry, African violets and cocoa powder. Lush and textured in the mouth, the decadent palate is full of dark fruit and chewy fudgy brownie. The evolution of the finish dances between ripe fruit flavors and sweeter mocha nuances, solidifying this blend as an easy pleaser. Imported by Robert Kacher Imports.

51

89 TerraNoble 2007 Reserva Syrah (Colchagua Valley); \$12. Now that TerraNoble is getting its Syrah from warm Colchagua, the end product is dark, roasted and statuesque. There's a lot of beef and structure to this affordable Syrah, and the flavors of plum, blackened toast and tea are manly to say the least. Finishes with a lot of roasted oomph, including spice, espresso and mint chip flavors. Imported by Winebow.

52

90 Angeline 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (Russian River Valley); \$15. Angeline is one of the best second labels in California, in this case from Martin Ray. This '08 Sauvignon smacks of ripe, tangy Asian pear, gooseberry, fig, green melon, vanilla and spice flavors brightened by wonderfully crisp acidity. Just beautiful, and a nice bargain at this price.

53

90 Lagarde 2007 Reserva Malbec (Mendoza); \$15. Intense, saturated and well balanced, with touches of motor oil, earth and herbs on the nose. The palate is flush and mouth-filling, with proper tannic bite, fine acidity and stylish flavors of blackberry and raspberry. Imported by Andes Importers, Inc..

54

90 Ballentine 2008 Pocal Vineyard Estate Grown Chenin Blanc (Napa Valley); \$15. This has been one of the best, most consistent bottlings of Chenin Blanc in California, and Ballentine deserves credit for sticking with it. The wine is a fine alternative to Sauvignon Blanc, dry, crisply acidic, and rich in citrus, spearmint, pepper and Asian pear flavors.

55

90 LaPlaya 2005 Claret Block Selection Reserve (Colchagua Valley); \$15. The days of the 90-point Best Buy are growing short, so rejoice over this excellent blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenère and Petit Verdot. The nose hits with solid mint, coconut, blackberry and fudge aromas, while the palate is ripe, snappy, alert and full of tasty blackberry, cherry and chocolate. It's clean as can be, with immaculate freshness given its price point. Drink up. Only 500 cases made. Imported by Cabernet Corporation.

56

90 Garrida 2006 Quinta da Garrida (Dão); \$15. A blend of Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz, with big, dusty tannins, ripe new wood and black, jammy fruit. The exuberance is held in check by minerality, but the final effect is

of a ripe, satisfying wine, the spicy new wood showing strongly. Imported by Winebow.

57

90 Arbor Crest 2006 Merlot (Columbia Valley); \$15. The opening scents carry an interesting floral note, along with bright raspberry and light chocolate. It's 100% varietal, and rare indeed is the Merlot from anywhere that can carry itself with such powerful fruit and complete structure, let alone at this bargain price. Still young and not quite filled in, this wine has tight berry/cherry fruit, licorice and toast, and plenty of power to age gracefully for up to a decade.

58

88 Santa Julia 2008 Organica Malbec (Mendoza); \$10. The nose is full of mellow raspberry and cherry, while the palate is fleshy and round, with blackberry and a touch of raisin. Plump, not edgy, and ready to drink, with coffee and mocha notes on the finish. Imported by Winesellers Ltd.

59

90 Weinert 2005 Carrascal (Mendoza); \$15. One of the best \$15 red blends being made today. Carrascal gives us 45% Malbec, 35% Merlot and 20% Cabernet in rock-solid form. The nose has toast, mineral, balsam wood and good berry fruit, and the palate provides the troika of cherry, raspberry and plum with no interference or oaky gimmicks. Pleasant, warm and long on the finish. Imported by Broadbent Selections, Inc.

60

90 Bonterra 2006 Syrah (Mendocino County); \$15. Extraordinarily rich in briary flavors of wild blackberries, licorice, cocoa and pepper, this Syrah has the added virtue of finishing dry. Although it's a bit soft, it's a beauty, especially at this price.

61

88 Goats do Roam Wine Co. 2008 Goats do Roam White (Western Cape); \$10. Fresh, spicy and floral, this Rhône-style blend of Viognier, Crouchen Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Gris and Muscat offers a zing on the palate with complex waves of melon and tropical fruit. Fresh and expressive. Imported by Vineyard Brands.

62

88 Septima 2007 Malbec (Mendoza); \$12. Not a cookie-cutter Malbec; the nose is a little rustic and leathery, but with time black fruit aromas rise up and take over. The mouth is juicy and ripe, with tasty black fruit flavors and a dark, handsome finish. Fulfilling Malbec that's very good given the price. Imported by A.V. Brands.

63

90 Milbrandt Vineyards 2006 Traditions Cabernet Sauvignon (Columbia Valley); \$15. Here is another great value from the Milbrandt brothers, based upon their impeccable vineyard sources (they own 1,600 acres, mostly in the Wahluke Slope AVA). Dense and dark, ripe and compact, this Cab/Merlot/Petit Verdot blend brings plenty of macho and muscle, layers of black fruits, black smoke, black tea and black olives. Get the idea? It's a beautiful effort, and really shines at this price point.

64

90 Robert Hall 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (Paso Robles); \$15. The tall, green-tinted bottle is Hall's way of signaling that the wine is dry, and indeed it is. Really nice and crisp, it shows lime, pear, green apple, lemongrass and spice flavors, made clean with rich acidity. Sommeliers, scoop this one up.

65

88 Misiones de Rengo 2007 Carmenère (Central Valley); \$10. The basic cuvée from Misiones may be the best value of its wines because it is deep and earthy, with only the slightest herbal character. The palate has dark, meaty fruit flavors but also good balance. Not overly complex, but the blackberry and herbal plum notes are on the money. Imported by Total Beverage Solution.

66

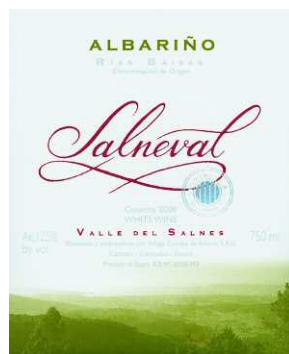
88 Pinhal da Torre 2008 Quinta do Alqueve Fernão Pires (Ribatejo); \$10. A full, weighty, fat wine, almost new world Chardonnay in its texture and richness. It does come back to its roots, though, with the fresh melon and pear flavors in front of a definite mineral background. A food white, for good fish dishes, perhaps with spice. Imported by Robert Kacher Imports.

67



88 Graham Beck 2007 Shiraz-Cabernet Sauvignon (Western Cape); \$10. This red blend starts with plummy, fruity aromas and a spin of cinnamon spice. On the palate, juicy dark berry flavors mingle with smoke and mocha. The tannins are smooth and the mouthfeel velvety, lush. Overall, the wine has a spicy, smoky character that's both complex and attractive. Pair with lamb, grilled steaks. Imported by The Maritime Wine Trading Collective.

68

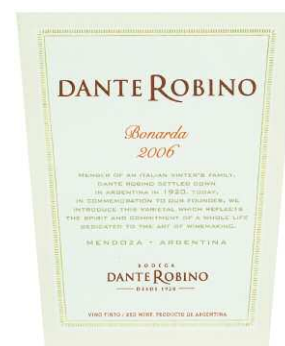


88 Condes de Albarei 2008 Salneval Albariño (Rías Baixas); \$10. The “value” label from Condes de Albarei is always a good bet. Oceanic aromas and a spritz of lime make the nose just right, and the lively palate of lemon, melon and banana is charged up. Tight on the finish, with citrus and almond skins, and then a lasting impression of pineapple. Young and raring to go. Imported by CIV/USA.

69

88 Hogue 2006 Cabernet Merlot (Columbia Valley); \$10. This 55/45 Cab-Merlot blend is a gem. The aromas are rich with black berries, black currants and black olives; and in the mouth the two grapes are nicely balanced and full-bodied. Nothing wimpy here—this puts most other such blends to shame. You'll pick up a hint of licorice and a touch of herb as well.

70



89 Dante Robino 2006 Bonarda (Mendoza); \$13. Mint and rubber band scents open the bouquet, and then black fruit and marmalade aromas take over. This Bonarda is riper, softer and more cuddly than most, with ultraripe black-fruit flavors and soft tannins that make it borderline sappy. Plump, easygoing and loaded with fruit. Drink now to get the soft, giving side of this grape. Imported by Blue Moon Wines.

71

88 Chateau Ste. Michelle 2007 Sauvignon Blanc (Columbia Valley); \$10. Another fine vintage for the widely available Columbia Valley Sauvignon Blanc from Ste. Michelle. This tangy bottle of ripe fruit has juicy, fleshy citrus, grapefruit and green apple flavors. Done in 80% stainless steel, with no discernable malolactic, gives a wine with plenty of acid and a lip-smacking finish.

72

88 Napa Family Vineyards 2006 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley); \$10. Smooth and dry, with appealing flavors of blackberries, cherries, currants and cedar, and a fine, spicy finish. Shows amazing style and elegance for the price. A real sommelier's bargain, with 2,853 cases produced.

WHAT IS BOTTLE SHOCK?

Despite the state of the economy, it is not your feeling of alarm when looking at wine prices. Bottle shock (also called bottle sickness) describes how wine reacts immediately after bottling and corking—a process that causes it to absorb large amounts of oxygen. As a result, the wine tastes flat and often has an off odor. The cure echoes the advice often given by doctors: rest. Most wineries set the wine aside for a few weeks before selling it, and the problem clears up by itself.

—RISA WYATT

73

88 Snoqualmie 2007 Chardonnay (Columbia Valley); \$10. As is the custom, the blend includes 5% Viognier, adding some floral scents that lift the aromas. The 2007 is saturated with a candy/caramel flavor, not unpleasant, but quite prominent. It is not, however, flabby or over-ripe; the buttery flavors work smoothly with the pristine apple, pear and melon-flavored fruit, and the wine has a seamless proportionality that lingers into the finish.

74

89 La Forge Estate 2007 Unfiltered Syrah (Vin de Pays d'Oc); \$13. A beautiful Syrah with aromas of black berries, menthol, pepper, cured meat, cigar box and leather. The medium-weight mouth has a satiny texture and is loaded with more black fruit along with coffee, cassis and cocoa flavors. The finish, powerful and oaky, is long and evolving, steering from dark fruit to more chocolate-covered cherry semblances. Imported by I & B Imports.

75

88 Concannon 2008 Selected Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc (Central Coast); \$10. Bone dry and high in acidity, with lemon, lime and mineral flavors and hints of thyme and white pepper. Very nice and likeable, a sommelier's wine for pairing with a wide variety of food at an inexpensive price.

76

88 Covey Run 2006 Reserve Chardonnay (Columbia Valley); \$10. A good collection of fruit flavors bring interest to this surprisingly ripe Chardonnay. Pineapple, green apple and light tropical fruits are set against pleasing barrel flavors of baked pear and glazed doughnut (really!).

77

89 Mas des Bressades 2008 Cuvée Tradition Rosé (Costières de Nîmes); \$13. Importer Bobby Kacher seemingly has a pipeline to the best rosés around Nîmes, and Mas des Bressades is a perennial favorite. The 2008 features layers of ripe fruit—berries and peaches--

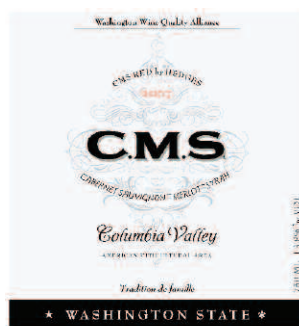
brought together in a lush, full-bodied but not overblown wine. Drink now. Imported by Robert Kacher Imports.

78

89 Rotari NV Rosé Brut Talento (Trento); \$13. You can't beat the price-versus-quality ratio of this lovely sparkling rosé from northern Italy. The wine is intensely fragrant and offers enduring tones of peach, almond and yeast. It has cooling freshness and a touch of spice on the finish. Imported by Prestige Wine Imports Corp.

79

89 Veramonte 2008 Reserva Sauvignon Blanc (Casablanca Valley); \$13. Veramonte knows how to capture the pungent, alert character inherent to Sauvignon Blanc. This is a peppery wine with spiky tropical and green-fruit aromas and flavors. It's a mash up of citrus and nettles, with a controlled, fairly long grapefruit-driven finish. Modest in price, but the real thing. Imported by Huneus Vintners.



80

89 Hedges 2007 C.M.S. Red (Columbia Valley); \$13. A wonderfully fragrant blend, supple and loaded with berries and darker notes of licorice and coffee. This is sophisticated and European in style—meaning lighter alcohol and less sugar—but in return you get substance and grip. Though it's built for near-term drinking, there's nothing light or insubstantial here; and the mouthfeel is that of a much more expensive wine.

81

87 Vini 2006 Vini Vidi Vici Merlot (Thracian Valley); \$8. Soft blackberry, cinnamon and pepper aromas lead flavors of juicy berry and savory spice in this Merlot from Bulgaria. Good tannins and structure give the wine ageability, which will also temper its oaky character. Overall, an impressive effort from an emerging region. Imported by Bulgarian Master Vintners.

82

89 Dashwood 2008 Sauvignon Blanc (Marlborough); \$13. A strong effort from Vavasour's second label, the 2008 Dashwood SB features vibrant aromas of crushed tomato leaf and hints of jalapeño and flavors of green tomato and gooseberry. It's medium in body and slightly creamy in texture, with a crisp, fruit-driven finish. Imported by Pasternak Wine Imports.

83

89 Kenwood 2006 Zinfandel (Sonoma County); \$14. This is a really good Zinfandel for this price. It's dry and spicy, with tons of wild black, red and blue berries and an edge of rich, unsweetened dark chocolate. Versatile and classy. Drink now.

84

89 A to Z Wineworks 2008 Pinot Gris (Oregon); \$13. A to Z puts out a lot of Pinot Gris—more than 32,000 cases of this 2008—but the quality is consistently fine. Lovely spices wrap around fresh citrus and pear, then move into a smooth midpalate that lingers gracefully through a clean and very refreshing finish.

85

89 Umani Ronchi 2005 San Lorenzo (Rosso Conero); \$14. This is a thick, brooding Montepulciano with deep concentration and well-balanced notes of blackberry, plum, prunes and Turkish spice. The wine has inky black consistency covered by oak flavors and long black fruit on the close. It's big in the mouth but not on the wallet. Imported by Bedford International.

86

88 D'Arenberg 2007 The Stump Jump White (McLaren Vale); \$11. It's almost two-thirds Riesling, which gives the wine its tight focus and strong mineral and citrus overtones, but there's also Sauvignon Blanc, Marsanne, Viognier and Chardonnay in the mix, giving it layers of fruity complexity. Awfully good for the price. Imported by Old Bridge Cellars.

87

88 Viña Bisquertt 2007 Casa La Joya Reserve Merlot (Colchagua Valley); \$11. Bisquertt usually does well with its value-priced Merlots, and seeing that 2007 was an excellent vintage in Chile, this wine excels in the value price range. The nose is dark and saturated, but pure and inviting. And the palate is ripe and smooth, with spice, plum, blackberry and herb notes, particularly anise. Finishes clean, smooth and peppery. Drink now. Imported by Prestige Wine Group.

88

88 Domaine Lignères 2003 La Baronne (Corbières); \$11. Moderately intense menthol, black licorice and African violets aromas on the nose. The mouth, full of ripe plum and dark cherries accented by notes of cocoa and fresh mint leaves, has a lovely balance and silky texture. Ends on a somewhat simple yet clean finish. Imported by Acadia Imports.

KEEP IT LIVELY

Claus Meyer, well-known Scandinavian TV Chef and co-founder of Copenhagen's Noma, renews a recipe by switching its acid source. Wine, vinegar and juices from citric fruits and berries each impart a different aroma, he notes. Chef Robert Uy at the Sutton Place Hotel in Vancouver uses juice of the calamondin fruit in place of lemon juice for brighter, more complex sauces. (Available at Asian groceries.)

—JANET FORMAN

89

87 Columbia Crest Two Vines 2007 Gewürztraminer (Columbia Valley); \$8. Off-dry with lemon-drop fruit flavors, a lick of citrus that suggests pear and lime. Though it's a fairly simple, fruit-forward wine, it delivers a concentrated burst of fresh, vivid flavor that's missing from most wines in this price range.

90

89 Santa Rita 2006 Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon (Maipo Valley); \$14. Lots of big fruit is what defines this easy-to-like wine. The nose throws off equal parts cassis, raspberry and plum, while the palate is saturated and dense, with pleasing cassis, plum and chocolate flavors. Given that the price is under \$15 and production was 150,000 cases, it's hard to register any complaints. This is your classic Best Buy Cab all the way around. Imported by Palm Bay International.

91

89 Saint-Hilaire 2005 Brut (Blanquette de Limoux); \$14. A pretty and remarkably drinkable sparkler with soft green apple, tangerine oil and faint yellow floral notes accented with hints of lavender. There's medium carbonation and weight in the mouth, and pear and apple flavors abound with suggestions of honeydew in the finish. Drink now. Imported by Jack Poust & Co., Inc.

92

88 Emiliana 2008 Natura Sauvignon Blanc (Casablanca Valley); \$11. Light, lucid and exactly what we're looking for from Chile. This organic wine has pure varietal aromas of nettles, tarragon and citrus, which are followed by flavors of green fruits, scallion and pepper. It's super zesty and spritzy, with a cleansing finish. About as true as they come in this price range. Imported by Banfi Vintners.

93

88 Stormhoek 2007 Pinotage (Western Cape); \$11. Cloves, pipe tobacco and a touch of pepper start this layered Pinotage from Stormhoek. The wine offers layers of cedar, tobacco, red berry and spice, and medium tannins and a smooth, balanced body seal the deal. An elegant Pinotage with exciting flavors. Imported by Palm Bay International.

94

88 Las Brisas 2007 Rueda; \$11. In cooler vintages like 2007, this white blend from Bodegas Naia excels. It gets going with pear, apple and light, leesy aromas in front of a citrusy palate that is a knock-off for varietal Sauvignon Blanc. Flavors of grapefruit, lime and gooseberry should be familiar, and the crisp fresh-lettuce finish is a winner. Good stuff for the money. Imported by Fine Estates From Spain.

95

88 Alamos 2007 Chardonnay (Mendoza); \$12. One of the best Argentine value Chardonnays on the market. The nose is stylish, with butterscotch, honeyed apple and vanilla notes. Smooth on the palate, with more than adequate apple and peach flavors, and then pure and fairly long on the finish. For clarity and real Chardonnay character, there aren't many better options than this, especially for \$12. Imported by E & J Gallo.

96

87 Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi 2007 Sauvignon Blanc (California); \$8. Woodbridge has done a really good job at producing an ultra-dry, crisply acidic white wine of the type California needs. With elegant flavors of citrus fruits, flowers, cinnamon and a touch of honey, it's a superb by-the-glass sipper. Sommeliers should buy this by the case.

97

88 Montes 2008 Classic Series Chardonnay (Curicó Valley); \$12. A good and lively bargain-priced Chard. Light toast, honey and pear aromas draw you in, and the balanced white-fruit palate is convincing. Sophisticated and with good acidity. Imported by T.G.I.C.Importers.


98

89 Woop Woop 2007 Shiraz (South Eastern Australia); \$14. Not simply a jammy mouthful of fruity richness, the 2007 Woop Woop shows enough structure to ably partner food rather than replace it. Notes of raspberries, roasted coffee and vanilla are slightly confected, but the firmness on the finish proves this is not a cocktail wine. Burgers, anyone?

99

88 Trerè 2007 Vigna del Monte (Sangiovese di Romagna); \$13. This well-priced red wine from Romagna (the Adriatic flank of Italy) opens with rich saturation and a deep ruby color. The wine is layered and rich with beautiful notes of red cherry, spice and espresso that are very well integrated. The mouthfeel is rich and polished. Highly recommended. Imported by Ideal Wine and Spirits Co. Inc.

100

87 El Coto 2008 Viura (Rioja); \$9. Nothing wrong with this crisp, tight number from Rioja. It's so clear in color that it's almost translucent, but the palate has good flavors of kiwi, green melon and lime. Precise on the tongue, with a chalky scour to the finish. It's your basic white Rioja done right. Imported by Frederick Wildman & Sons, Ltd. 

BAR CHEF TIPS

Jamie Boudreau of Tini Bigs, Seattle; SpiritsandCocktails.com; tinibigs.com

- Use Y Peelers instead of regular zesters to create lemon zest: they generate more citrus oil and less bitter pith.
- Never use a muddler to crush leafy products like mint or basil. Just slapping the leaf will release all its essential oils without breaking the cells that hold bitter chlorophyll. Save the muddler for bulkier products like strawberries and lychees.

—JANET FORMAN