

35TH ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE

Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE



TOP 100



WINES, WINERIES + BEST BUYS



TOP 100

BEST BUYS OF 2021

AS BILLIONAIRES' SPACE ROCKETS HEAD TO THE STRATOSPHERE, PRICES FOR GREAT Bordeaux and Burgundy continue to follow. Down here on earth, there are still plenty of places to go for an affordable drink—like the headlands of the Duero or the hills of Priorat; the gnarled, bush-trained país in Chile's Secano Interior; the forgotten carignane from Mokelumne River; the *chocolatine* territory in Southwest France. Here are the 100 wines that outperformed their peers in our blind tastings this year, reaching high with their quality and character without overreaching on price. We present them by country, starting with the US, by state and variety, then moving through the rest of the world by region. Patrick J. Comiskey, Joshua Greene, Stephanie Johnson, Tara Q. Thomas and Corey Warren give the reviews. *To find our Best of the Year for \$12 or less, head to page 106.*

UNITED STATES

CALIFORNIA SPARKLING



91 | Scharffenberger \$23
Mendocino Brut Excellence This is clean and crisp with rich undertones of brioche and lemon custard. It offers a balance of the soft and the lively, a refreshing sparkling wine to kick off a dinner party. —J.G. (W&S 8/21)

CALIFORNIA WHITE

CHARDONNAY

94 | Trail Marker Wine Co \$34
2019 Santa Cruz Mountains Chardonnay This appellation bottling is sourced from Trail Marker's main Santa Cruz Mountain sources, Quink and Chapel. It's lean and acid driven, with a lemony scent and a freshness and energy that's impressive. It starts out simply quaffable, but after a day the wine's layering and quiet complexity informs the texture, becoming brighter and more focused. It's a lot of wine for the price. —P.J.C. (W&S 10/21; 130 cases)

92 | Vanderpump \$22
2019 Sonoma Coast Estate Grown Chardonnay Here's a steal: A brisk, bright chardonnay with depths of flavor for \$22. The wine's umami side brings to mind huitla-

coche, fennel and toasted sesame seeds. Ready to drink now with bacon and Brussels sprouts. —J.G. (W&S 10/21)

RIESLING

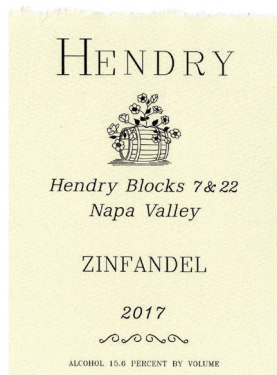
93 | Maidenstoen \$22
2019 Arroyo Seco Zabala Vineyard Riesling Maidenstoen submitted three rieslings from three AVAs, all showing fidelity and sensitivity to climate that was inspiring. This one grows at a vineyard near Soledad that catches wind from both the Santa Lucia Highlands and Carmel Valley. The wine is relatively forward, the aromas of honeycomb and burnt caramel adorning sweet peach. The flavors attack with a beguiling sweetness, heavy in dry extract and hinting at opulence but remaining dry, powdery and restrained. —P.J.C. (W&S 8/21; 135 cases)

vest grapes and, eventually, launch her own wines in 2016. She describes Weed Farms as “beyond organic,” with no spraying of any kind—the vines are pruned, the grass is mown and the canopy leafed for air flow. Since the fruit has no other disease protection, she harvests early, at 21 to 21.5 Brix. And then she continues to treat the fruit as it was on the vine—with no additions (until bottling, when she adds a little sulfur). The tinkering she does involves the stems: In 2019, she fermented this wine in two separate bins; one included half the fresh stems, measured by weight; she dried the other half of the stems for a week before adding them to the other bin. A blend of the two lots, this wine smells like rocks, wild strawberries, red spice, black olives...and something clean but sweaty, like a vegan triathlete just off the cycle. The wine’s tannic spice seems to rivet the flavors directly to the earth. With apologies to any vegan readers, I want to drink this with roast baby goat. —J.G. (W&S 2/21)

93 | Holly’s Hill \$27

2018 El Dorado Fenaughty Old Vines Syrah While Carrie and Josh Bendick are focused on their estate vineyards, planted by Carrie’s parents, Tom and Holly Cooper, they make this one wine from Fenaughty. In 2018, the site grew a savory syrah that hums with energy, juicy red cherry and bright black-berry flavors set in motion by the equally juicy tannins. Tart, feral and gamey, this presents the Sierra Foothills with gentle, comforting power. —J.G. (W&S 2/21)

ZINFANDEL



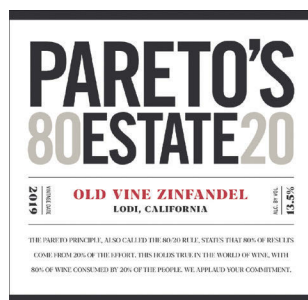
95 | Hendry Ranch \$38

2017 Napa Valley Blocks 7&22 Zinfandel These two blocks of zinfandel, in the benchlands at the base of Mount Veeder, were both planted to clone 2; the vines at Block 7 date to 1975 and to 1995 at Block 22. It’s interesting to taste this side-by-side with Block 28, comparing fruit from a mass selection of old

vines with a clonal planting. Block 28 may be more complex in its tannins; the wine from Blocks 7 & 22 may be more comforting and delicious, its complexity held in a floral scent, like pollen collected in a beehive. Or floral dark chocolate, a richness that smooths the tannins and their mineral spikes of power. Cellar both wines and you may find yourself grabbing one or the other, depending on your mood. —J.G. (W&S 6/21; 1,294 cases)

93 | Joseph Jewell \$29

2018 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel Adrian Manspeaker blends this wine from three sites—Dutcher Crossing (60 percent), Grist and Raymond Burr. Fermented with ambient yeasts and aged for 18 months in François Frères and Rousseau barrels (25 percent new), its gentle and bright layers of red fruit and herbs gain depth and complexity with air. The wine has sunny freshness and clarity to its full-on flavors—Berkshire sommelier Michael Kowalski found it “rich enough for a ribeye with Béarnaise sauce.” —J.G. (W&S 6/21; 168 cases)



91 | Pareto’s Estate \$15

2019 Lodi Old Vine Zinfandel Classic warm-region zinfandel from Lodi, this wine is juicy and bright from the moment it’s poured. A simple dark-berry scent carries over to its flavors, all delivered with a rich core of fruit that is in no way baked, and a tangy finish for grilled chicken. —P.J.C. (W&S 6/21; 1,225 cases)

NEW YORK SPARKLING



92 | Dr. Konstantin Frank \$25

2017 Finger Lakes Brut A dramatic wine with a lively mousse, this smells of fresh apples and bread crust. The flavors attack with impressive breadth and depth—baked apple, pear and melon—only to finish with abrupt and edgy acidity, a mineral line that gives the wine its invigorating cut and length. —P.J.C. (W&S 8/21)

NEW YORK WHITE

CHARDONNAY

91 | Heron Hill \$19

2019 Finger Lakes Unoaked Ingle Vineyard Chardonnay Bright and lifted, this leads with a fruit blossom scent and mild cinnamon apple notes. The flavors are fresh and zippy, the acidity in a lemony mode, bright and compact. For trout. —P.J.C. (W&S 10/21; 201 cases)

RIESLING



92 | Fox Run \$14

2019 Finger Lakes Semi-Dry Riesling Fellow taster Stacie Hunt wrote “very German” in her notes, speaking of its diesel and lees scents, its zinc-like dry minerality and, especially, the ease of its balance—rich with honeycorn sweetness and flavors of peach and pear, shored up beautifully by zippy acids. It has the poise and stuffing to age. —P.J.C. (W&S 8/21; 3,195 cases)