

# The Year's Top 10 Wine Values Under \$20

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If you ask a room full of wine experts about tasting value wines, most often you'll get a kind of collective "ugh" at the prospect. I don't know why, exactly, but I always find the prospect exciting—there's always a visceral thrill when you find an under-\$20 bottle that wildly over-delivers in terms of quality.

## Related

The bottles below are a grab bag: Some appeared in the pages of *Food & Wine* this year, some I tasted at events or industry wine tasting, some I happened across while sitting at a restaurant bar, waiting for a friend to arrive. As a wine writer, your taste antennae are always attuned to the new and the good (and, honestly, smartphones have made note-taking in unlikely places radically easier).

The ten wines below cover a range, from sparkling to still, white to red, light to rich. Essentially, there's at least one representative for every occasion or every palate, or at least I hope there is. At the very least, though, I can promise that all of them are radically better than their modest prices might indicate.

## 2015 Chateau Ste Michelle Dry Riesling (\$10)



*Courtesy of Chateau Ste. Michelle*

At the 2016 Riesling Rendezvous conference this was poured blind against some of the greatest names in dry Riesling—Austria’s Weingut Knoll, Alsace’s Famille Hugel, Germany’s Dr. Loosen. It held its own, startling the audience, and will possibly startle you, too. Vivid and mineraly, it’s an absurd steal (don’t mistake it for the winery’s similarly labeled off-dry bottling though).

### **2015 Moulin de Gassac Guilhem Rosé (\$11)**



This extraordinary Languedoc estate's founder, the inimitable Aimé Guibert, passed away this spring (at 91) but his son Samuel carries on, producing among other wines this vivid, pink-hued wine, a simpler but endlessly drinkable foil to the winery's famed red.

### **2014 The Pinot Project California Pinot Noir (\$12)**



*Courtesy of The Pinot Project*

A \$12 Pinot that actually tastes like Pinot is like a mythical creature—rumored but rarely seen. And yet here one is, a project (hence the name) of NY-based importers Skurnik Wines. It has the cherry-cola spice character of classic Russian River Valley wines at a third (or less) the price.

**2015 Quinta de Chocapalha Arinto (\$12)**



An obscure variety (unless you're Portuguese) from an obscure region, Lisboa (again, unless you're Portuguese), given lovely expression by one of the country's top young winemakers, Sandra Tavares. Who cares if it's winter right now? This citrusy white is summer in a glass.

**2014 Cosentino The Franc (\$14)**



*Courtesy of Cosentino Winery*

Ripe dark fruit and spicy Cab Franc character, all thanks to the generous Lodi sun—this enveloping California red is a perfect pour for winter stews and roasts (or for summertime burgers on the grill). Note: The winery lists it at \$22 a bottle, but it's widely available for much less.

**NV Marietta Old Vine Red Lot #64 (\$15)**



*Courtesy of Marietta Cellars*

The 64<sup>th</sup> “edition” of this non-vintage blend rides along on the same strengths the first sixty-three have always shown: ripe, peppery, berry flavors drawn from old vine vineyards—largely Zinfandel, but a plethora of other varieties, too—throughout northern California.

**2014 Substance Cabernet Sauvignon Washington State (\$17)**



*Courtesy of Charles Smith Wines*

Washington Vintner Charles Smith made news this year when he sold five of his most popular brands to mega-wine-and-liquor purveyor Constellation Brands for a cool \$120 million. He kept hold of this passion project though: A powerful, structured Cabernet that drinks like a wine twice the price, at least.

**2015 Bishop's Peak San Luis Obispo County Chardonnay (\$18)**



*Courtesy of Talley Vineyards*

Brian Talley's Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays that are bottled under the Talley name are some of the finest wines coming from California's Central Coast. Not too long ago, he started this more affordable brand, which gives more than a hint of that quality for a much more modest price; the finely tuned 2015 Chardonnay is a knockout.

**NV Domaine Saint-Rémy Prestige Crémant d'Alsace (\$20)**



© *Domaine Saint-Rémy*

I tasted an impressive number of good, [\\$20-and-under sparklers](#) for our December 2016 issue. But this creamy, biodynamically-produced Alsace Crémant is the one to which my thoughts keep returning—a perfect alternative for people who don't like springing for pricey Champagne. Or even those who do.

### **2014 Broadley Vineyards Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$20)**



*Courtesy of Broadley Vineyards*

A touch more complex (and a touch more expensive) than the other Pinot in this list, Broadley's basic Willamette Valley bottling, silky and pure in flavor, benefits both from a terrific vintage in Oregon and the Broadley family's long experience there.