

Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE

29th Annual
BUYING GUIDE

100

Best Wines
Best Buys

Top 100 Wineries of 2015



WINTER 2015

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Four of our Top 100:
Cobb, Niepoort,
Penfolds and Bollinger

Wine & Spirits

PREMIER CRUS: The wineries that have earned the most **Top 100** awards.

Each winery appears with the number of awards earned since the 1988 Buying Guide, the first, to this issue (2016). The date of the most recent award appears in parentheses. To view a complete list of awards for each winery, visit wineandspiritsmagazine.com.

25 Awards

Penfolds (2016)

21 Awards

Concha y Toro (2016)

Chateau Ste. Michelle (2016)

18 Awards

Antinori (2016)

17 Awards

Boutari (2014)

Ridge (2015)

Shafer (2015)

15 Awards

Louis Jadot (2015)

Bouchard Père & Fils (2016)



Cabernet vines planted in the 1880s at Kalimna Vineyard contributed to Penfolds' 25th Top 100 award.

14 Awards

Iron Horse (2015)

L'Ecole N° 41 (2016)

Qupé (2015)

13 Awards

Flowers (2015)

Joseph Phelps (2016)

Louis Roederer (2016)

Williams Selyem (2015)

12 Awards

Beringer (2014)

M. Chapoutier (2007)

De Loach (2013)

Diamond Creek (2016)

Champagne Krug (2016)

Niepoort (2016)

Storybook Mountain (2016)

Von Strasser (2015)

11 Awards

Andrew Will (2015)

Aveleda (2012)

Cune (2016)

Gary Farrell (2008)

E. Guigal (2016)

Dr. Loosen (2016)

Robert Mondavi (2014)

C. von Schubert (2014)

10 Awards

Catena Zapata (2015)

Henschke (2013)

Kendall-Jackson (2012)

Santa Rita (2011)

9 Awards

Marqués de Cáceres (2008)

Ceretto (2012)

Veuve Clicquot (2011)

Geyser Peak (2007)

Luis Pato (2016)

Ravenswood (2016)

8 Awards

Carmen (2008)

d'Arenberg (2015)

J.M. da Fonseca (2010)

Frog's Leap (2016)

King Estate (2015)

Merryvale (2006)

Quinta do Noval (2016)

Roederer Estate (2016)

Yalumba (2016)

7 Awards

Beaulieu (2010)

Benziger (2013)

Buil & Giné (2016)

Maison Joseph Drouhin (2011)

Gai'a (2016)

Schloss Gobelsberg (2015)

Grgich Hills (2008)

Hermann J. Wiemer (2016)

Paul Jaboulet Aîné (2015)

Kenwood (2014)

Domaine Leflaive (2013)

Masi (2008)

Movia (2016)

Peay (2015)

Rochioli (2014)

Ruffino (2008)

Truchard (2014)

Robert Weil (2014)

Chateau Ste. Michelle

Founded 81 years ago, Chateau Ste. Michelle's history in the Northwest and in the pages of this magazine (21 years as a Top 100 winery) is an unparalleled achievement for an American winery. This year, it set the pace with new styles for a broad range of whites.

The Whites Family: Ste. Michelle's white wine resurgence is partly driven by head winemaker Bob Bertheau, who has made a conscious effort to embrace leaner, more acid-driven wine styles, none more emblematic than their cheeky eleven-dollar 2014 Pinot Gris, a crisp, tangy, mouthwatering wine, as refreshing as spring water. And with six chardonnays in varied styles, the standout this year was the 2013 Mimi, the name a playful riff on Ste. Michelle. The fruit came from the firm's premier chardonnay sites, including Canoe Ridge and Indian Wells. "There will always be consumers that want that two-by-four style of chardonnay," Bertheau says, "but we want Mimi to show more fruit, more acidity, and give less of a lees and oak impression."

The Departing Whites Master: Bertheau says that while the wines are a team effort, Wendy Stuckey's impact has been significant. Stuckey had been in charge of the white wines for the past seven years, and returned to her native Australia this year. "She's really an expert on phenolics," says Bertheau. "We all learned a lot from her." Since May, Ste. Michelle veteran David Rosenthal has headed up winemaking for the whites.

Riesling Rules: Eroica remains a bit of an exclusive province, a joint project between Ste. Michelle Wine Estates and Dr. Loosen of Germany (see page 73), the winemaking headed up by Bertheau and Ernie Loosen. The 2013 vintage was the first of what Bertheau is calling a trilogy of hot seasons—2013, 2014 and 2015—after several that ranged from normal to unusually cool. The team drew from their coolest sites, including Evergreen and Viewcrest. The wine displayed considerable tension in its range of ripeness and its fruit flavors, pulling together flavors of apple and lemon, with a benchmark purity, energy and lift that make this wine the region's archetypal white. —P.J.C.



Bob Bertheau

Winemaker: Bob Bertheau
Viticulturist: Kevin Corliss
Owner: Ste. Michelle Wine Estates
Founded: 1934
Acres owned: 3,500 acres
Cases produced: 3 million
Estate grown: 40%
Location: Woodinville, WA
Website: smwe.com

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93 '13 Columbia Valley Eroica Riesling \$20 (2/15)
- 91 '14 Columbia Valley Pinot Gris \$11 (8/15)
- 90 '13 Horse Heaven Hills Mimi Chardonnay \$20 (6/15)

Cristom

Known for his single-block bottlings and the use of whole clusters in his fermentations, Cristom's winemaker, Steve Doerner, brought his 2012 pinots to peak expression, while his estate syrah, from a marginal site for the grape in Oregon, comes into its own in that warm vintage.

The Ladies of the Eola Hills: Cristom founder Paul Gerrie has named several of his vineyard blocks for the women in his life: Louise, his maternal grandmother; Jessie, his paternal grandmother; Marjorie, his mother; and Eileen, his wife (and Cristom co-owner). Each vineyard block represents significant contrasts in soil makeup, elevation, aspect and exposure to the winds of the Van Duzer Corridor. This year, the wines from Jessie and Louise showed best in our tastings.

According to Doerner, Jessie is like a versatile middle-distance runner, expressive in cool years, performing well in warm ones, too. It's the most diverse in terms of elevation and soil variation, and often yields the most complex fruit. Louise is more of an outlier—Doerner says that it is usually the first *and* the last to reach the crushpad. Its lower blocks benefit from warm autumn days, but a portion of the upper rows, shaded in the afternoon, are often the last to come in.

Cluster Spice: Doerner supplements the character of the blocks with the addition of whole bunches—as much as 50 percent, depending on the vintage—driven, in part, by Paul Gerrie's love of wines from Burgundy's whole-cluster practitioners (notably Dujac and Leroy). The result has been, for decades, a kind of stylistic hallmark for the Eola-Amity Hills: a detailed texture, with a brilliant red core of fruit, cradled in a delicate frame of spicy tannins.

Syrah: It's rare to find an estate-grown syrah in Willamette Valley, but Cristom's continues to impress us. In the best vintages, it can express ethereal aromatic gifts. Even in a warm Oregon vintage like 2012, Cristom's syrah site yields a wine of lavender florals and smoke—coolly rendered varietal character, which Doerner augments with some whole-cluster spice.

—P.J.C.



Steve Doerner

Winemaker: Steve Doerner
Viticulturist: Mark Feltz
Owners: The Gerrie family, with Steve Doerner and Mark Feltz
Founded: 1992
Acres owned: 65 planted
Cases produced: 13,000
Estate grown: 85%
Location: Salem, OR
Website: cristomvineyards.com

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93 '12 Eola-Amity Hills Louise Vineyard Pinot Noir \$58 (4/15)
- 92 '12 Eola-Amity Hills Jessie Vineyard Pinot Noir \$58 (4/15)
- 92 '12 Eola-Amity Hills Estate Syrah \$50 (4/15)

100 BEST WINES OF THE YEAR

This year we tasted more than 15,200 wines at *Wine & Spirits*, recommending 4,647. Those recommended wines tend not to be the noisiest in a tasting. Rather, we try to be on high alert for wines that carry the flavors of a place, wines that might be shy at first but reveal themselves over several days, with the kinds of textures and aromas that emerge with decanting or bottle age. The wines that impress us most have memorable depths of flavor, not just on their own, but also, potentially, as integral parts of a meal.

Our critics selected these 100 wines as the most memorable we tasted over the past year. We present them by country and region, starting with the US. **Joshua Greene, Patrick J. Comiskey and Luke Sykora** reviewed the US wines; **Joshua Greene, Stephanie Johnson, Patricio Tapia and Tara Q. Thomas** reviewed the imports. We hope these wines will prove equally memorable for you, sparking conversation and brightening your dinner table.

UNITED STATES

BEST SPARKLING



94 | Gloria Ferrer \$37
2006 Carneros Royal Cuvée The Ferrer family created Royal Cuvée to serve King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain when they visited California in 1987. Blended from many of the best lots at the family's Carneros estate, it's quite impressive thanks, in part, to a long season that delivered ideal ripeness. Two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, it feels ripe in the best sense, bold in its fruit, with an impression of a juicy Bartlett pear, its fragrant nectar dripping down your chin. Yet it's fully dry and completely harmonious, the mousse fine, the delicate acidity giving it a bright, weightless length. It's not trying to emulate Champagne; rather, it's compelling in another way: delicious and true to place, it captures Californian sunshine in a bottle. (4,400 cases) *Gloria Ferrer Vineyards, Sonoma, CA*

94 | Hermann J. Wiemer \$32
2011 Seneca Lake Cuvée Brut Equal parts pinot noir and chardonnay, from Wiemer's top vineyards, Magdalena and HJW, this sparkling wine is a study in high-toned finesse. Brisk and lifted, with scents of citrus and vanillin anchored by lees, it's delicately fruity, the fine, clean mousse carrying its ripe apple flavors to a graceful finish. It has the focus to pair with poached salmon. (390 cases) *Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, Dundee, NY*

BEST CHARDONNAY

95 | Domaine Drouhin \$65
2013 Dundee Hills Edition Limitée Chardonnay Sometimes a youthful wine seems naturally graceful, like this chardonnay, a wine that went into the bottle balanced and complete. Initial scents hint at future complexity, suggested by the tension between pear fruit and toasty lees accents, between golden fruit flavors—lemon and apple—and a nutty, mushroomy savor. But what might seem disparate is in fact effortlessly harmonious, elegant and seductive. Buy a few bottles and watch this wine change over the next five years. *Domaine Drouhin Oregon, Dayton, OR*

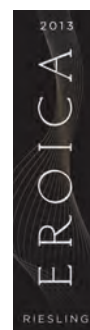


94 | Thomas Fogarty \$70
2012 Santa Cruz Mountains Albutom Vineyard Chardonnay Albutom is an east-facing portion of the Thomas Fogarty estate, planted in 1981 at nearly 2,000 feet of elevation. Winemaker Nathan Kandler channeled it into a completely harmonious chardonnay in 2012, the flavors sunny and luscious yet as bright as pink grapefruit. The interplay of its richness and pithy structure gives it a layered complexity that grows more compelling as the wine absorbs oxygen, picking up savory aromas of wet stones and dried chamomile. Age it for a few years and then match its coastal verve to Dungeness crab. (61 cases) *Thomas Fogarty Winery, Portola Valley, CA*

94 | Evening Land \$35
2012 Sonoma Coast Chardonnay Made by Isabelle Meunier and Erin Miller, this wine was finished by Jamey Whetstone, who has since taken over the winemaking for Evening Land's Sonoma wines. It comes mostly

from the Gap's Crown Vineyard at the base of Sonoma Mountain, which faces west into the coastal wind and fog of the Petaluma Gap. (A few barrels from Evening Land's own Occidental Vineyard also contributed to the blend.) The wine's beauty is immediately apparent in the purity of its orchard fruit aromas, as fragrant as a basket of heirloom apples. It's a chardonnay full of air and sunlight, gentle lees-stirring contributing a supple texture that seems to polish the delicate, gem-like fruit rather than dull it. If you've ever tasted a perfectly ripe loquat, you'll have a spot-on metaphor for this wine's effortless balancing act. (1,481 cases) *The Evening Land Vineyards, Salem, OR*

BEST RIESLING



93 | Chateau Ste. Michelle \$20
2013 Columbia Valley Eroica Riesling Eroica in 2013 is deliciously precise, marked by a green-apple freshness that isn't just a flavor; it's a feeling. Apple informs its lifted scent, its purity of flavor and also its driving, energetic movement. The textures draw to a close through the lens of citrus, lemon and lemon pith, a drawstring of focus and detail. A great aperitif, it would pair beautifully with lemon risotto as well. *Michelle Loosen, Woodinville, WA*

100 BEST BUYS OF THE YEAR

If you're looking for a case of something collectible, or a special bottle to celebrate a major milestone, the preceding pages present our 100 Best Wines. But if you're looking for wines that you can enjoy again and again, consider these 100 Best Buys of the Year.

We winnowed through more than 4,500 recommended wines, singling out 100 that offer astounding value, from a surprisingly lively \$12 California cabernet to a 93-point Beaujolais from Morgon for \$20. All offer the lowest prices for the highest scores in their categories, and most all of them are under \$25.

We've arranged them by country and region, starting with the United States. **Joshua Greene**, **Patrick J. Comiskey** and **Luke Sykora** reviewed the American wines; **Greene**, **Stephanie Johnson**, **Patricio Tapia** and **Tara Q. Thomas** reviewed the imports.

UNITED STATES

CHARDONNAY



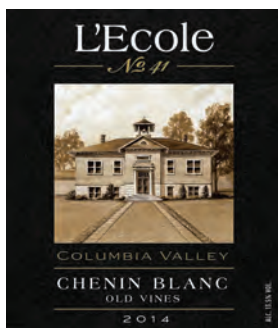
93 | Kunde \$18
2013 Sonoma Valley Chardonnay Most of Kunde's estate chardonnay grows on the warm valley floor, with other blocks perched on a cooler north-facing slope that tops out at 1,450 feet of elevation. In 2013, a dry and warm year, those vineyards delivered a chardonnay with exuberant ripeness and without an abundance of alcohol. Its powerful scents of beeswax and sage lead into a texture that's refined and symphonic. Its layers of complex earthiness bring white truffles to mind, a firm structure and bright acidity holding all that richness in balance: definitive Sonoma chardonnay at a great price. *Kunde Family Estate, Kenwood, CA*

90 | Dominican Oaks \$17
2013 Napa Valley Chardonnay This comes from vineyards scattered throughout Napa Valley, in Yountville, Rutherford and Carneros. Tightly structured in its delivery of earthy rose-scented fruit, it has a leesy character that brings to mind nectarines and white tea. There's a cool, mountain pine forest feel to the finish, a refreshing line of flavor. To serve with bay scallops tossed with braised ginger and leeks. (1,600 cases) *Rutherford Wine Co., St. Helena, CA*



88 | Courtney Benham \$15
2013 Central Coast Unoaked Chardonnay Composed of chardonnay grown in Paso Robles, this is delightfully brisk, modest in its ripeness, clean and silky in its texture, with green-tinged flavors of papaya and pear skin. It feels refreshingly clean and unadorned. (865 cases) *Martin Ray Winery, Santa Rosa, CA*

CHENIN BLANC



90 | L'Ecole N° 41 \$15
2014 Columbia Valley Old Vines Chenin Blanc All of the sources for this chenin are from late-1970s plantings, and it seems you can taste the vine maturity in this balanced white, the spiced apple and lemon-peel flavors given a bit of brightness and lift from a pithy, gathering phenolic bite. An elegant white for pork loin. (4,750 cases) *L'Ecole N° 41, Lowden, WA*

COLOMBARD

90 | Y Rousseau \$20
2014 Russian River Valley Old Vines Colombard Yannick Rousseau's colombard, from 40-year-old vines, has been remarkably consistent in recent years. This is another strong vintage. Yes, it's simple, but it's also refreshing and delicious, a burst of green flavors—grape, lime, pea shoot—that are as crisp as spring water, lifting in the end toward rosy, floral notes. For oysters. (625 cases) *Y Rousseau Wines, Napa, CA*

GRUNER VELTLINER

88 | Dancing Coyote \$12
2014 Clarksburg Estate Grown Grüner Veltliner This is grown in the flatlands along the Sacramento River delta, where cool sea breezes help balance the hot mid-day weather. It's clean and completely varietal, ripe and tropical at its core. Its passion fruit aroma meets hints of celery seed and peppercorn, bright and tangy all the way through. (700 cases) *Dancing Coyote Wines, Acampo, CA*

PINOT BLANC

93 | Anne Amie \$20
2013 Chehalem Mountains Estate Pinot Blanc As crisp as alpine air, this brisk and beautiful white has a scent of lemon zest and chalk; the overall aromatic impression is of purity and freshness. The flavors deliver a slightly broader fruit complement, melon with a spritz of lemon, with a thrilling peppery acidity that keeps the wine zesty and lifted. Great as an aperitif, or you could pair it with something light, like lemon sole. (760 cases) *Anne Amie, Carlton, OR*

PINOT GRIS



91 | Chateau Ste. Michelle \$11
2014 Columbia Valley Pinot Gris Simple, forward and thoroughly delicious, this mouthwatering white has a leesy filigree framing scents of bright citrus and crisp apple. There's spring-water clarity to the flavors, the texture given contour by a mineral tinge. Buy it by the case for summer sipping. *Chateau Ste. Michelle, Woodinville, WA*

RIESLING

92 | Sheldrake Point \$16
2013 Finger Lakes Riesling An absolute steal of a riesling, this attractive white has ripe scents of pineapple and sweet golden apple with a salty overlay. Its flavors are brighter, however, more given to lemon and green apple, with a texture that's fleshy and generous. The wine's slightly sweet fruit has a gentle almond-skin bitterness that contributes length to the finish. For blackened tilapia. (357 cases) *Sheldrake Point Winery, Ovid, NY*

SAUVIGNON BLANC

92 | St. Supéry \$20
2014 Napa Valley Estate Sauvignon Blanc Succulent and round, this takes sauvignon's passion fruit flavors in a red-hued direction. Its full-on fruit has a musky edge, finishing clean. This grows at the Dollarhide Vineyard, a large, bowl-shaped ranch in the hills east of Howell Mountain, a site particularly well suited to sauvignon. *St. Supéry Vineyards & Winery, Rutherford, CA*

92 | Vaughn Duffy \$20
2014 Russian River Valley Hopkins River Ranch Sauvignon Blanc Based on old vines that Bob Hopkins planted in 1976 along with fruit from a neighboring parcel planted in 1991, this is tense and needs decanting. Barrel fermentation in neutral oak gives the old-vine fruit room to expand into a briny shrimp-broth richness that's focused by taut acidity, freshness emerging in aromas of pink

grapefruit and rose petals. It's a sauvignon with concentration and flavor depth, poised to expand with another two or three years of age. (300 cases) *Vaughn Duffy Wines, Santa Rosa, CA*

SPARKLING



90 | Gruet \$17
NV United States Blanc de Noirs This affordable nonvintage sparkler has a lively mousse and a pale poached-salmon hue. Its ripe pear aromas suggest a rich wine, but that richness is enveloped by a firm, rosy phenolic grip. Chill and serve with gravlax. *Gruet Winery, Albuquerque, NM*

ROSE

91 | Vaughn Duffy \$18
2014 Sonoma County Rosé of Pinot Noir As plump and mouthwatering as a white cherry, this bursts with lively scents of rose and jasmine tea, that florality turning spicy at the end, focusing the wine around clean, light, savory pinot noir flavors that last. (500 cases) *Vaughn Duffy Wines, Santa Rosa, CA*

CABERNET-BASED BLEND



93 | Cadence \$25
2013 Red Mountain Coda Ben Smith based this 2013 on cabernet franc (38 percent), the balance cabernet sauvignon (26 percent), merlot (22 percent) and petit verdot (14 percent). Perhaps it's the latter that gives the wine its suave purple tones, its depth of flavor. It's likely the franc provides the gingerbread spice and gentle, mouthwatering freshness, and an elegance that Red Mountain is

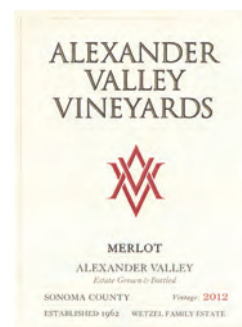
not known for. Despite the wine's firm, framing tannins, this is delicious now; those tannins also provide the stuffing for ten years in the cellar. (1,250 cases) *Cadence, Seattle, WA*

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

91 | Owl Ridge \$20
2012 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon This is gentle and polished, its silky texture intermingling bright, fresh red cherry notes with savory undertones of black olive and tarragon. It's a classic Alexander Valley cabernet, fragrant and approachable, ready to drink with a rack of lamb. *Owl Ridge Wines, Sebastopol, CA*

88 | Bogle \$12
2012 California Cabernet Sauvignon This is a terrific cabernet for the price, lithe and bright, turned toward savory varietal aromas of black olive and herbs as much as red fruit. From vineyards in Clarksburg, Lodi, Sonoma and Monterey, aged in American oak, it's an easy-to-find wine for grilled steaks and portobello mushrooms. *Bogle Vineyards, Clarksburg, CA*

MERLOT



92 | Alexander Valley Vyds. \$20
2012 Alexander Valley Merlot The Wetzel family were among the first to plant merlot in Alexander Valley, starting in 1966. Their current release draws mostly on vines planted between 1993 and 1995, grown at the southern end of the valley on gravelly benchland and hillside soils. If you can handle a bit of Bretty funk, you'll find a silky merlot, the fruit supple and curranty, the tannins fine as ground pumice, with a florality and subtle Alexander Valley leafiness that lasts. It's an elegant take on the variety. *Alexander Valley Vineyards, Healdsburg, CA*