Wine & Spirits
SPECIAL ISSUE

100
Best Wines

100
Best Buys

TOP
100
Wineries
of 2016

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Five of our Top 100:
Fleury, Blandy’s, C. von Schubert,
Dominus and Ochota Barrels
Concha y Toro (2017)

Concha y Toro may be best known in the US for its value-priced Frontera and Casillero del Diablo wines, largely produced from fruit their team purchases throughout Chile. But around the time we started our Buying Guide, Concha y Toro started buying up some of the most prized vineyard land in Chile, adding to their Puente Alto Vineyard—where Enrique Tirado makes Don Melchor—with Peumo, likely the greatest site in Chile for carmenère. That site grows the Terrunyo Carmenère (95 points, 2007 and 2011) and the Carmin de Peumo Carmenère (96 points, 2005 and 2010), reds that earned Concha y Toro its rarified place in the pantheon of New World wine.

_Benchmarks:_ Terrunyo Carmenère, Carmin de Peumo Carmenère, Don Melchor, Terrunyo Pirque Viejo Cabernet

Château Ste. Michelle (2017)

Château Ste. Michelle, our most awarded US winery, put Washington State on the world wine map. It excels with Columbia Valley merlot, cabernet, chardonnay and, particularly, riesling. The riesling program reached new heights after 1999, when Ste. Michelle partnered with Ernst Loosen, best known for his coveted rieslings from ancient, own-rooted vines on vertiginous slopes of the Mosel. Their joint Eroica project has consistently resulted in Washington’s top dry riesling, which regularly earns 93 and 94-point scores. More recently, they’ve capitalized on Loosen’s experience with late-harvest wines. The extremely rare 2008 Single Berry Select earned a 96-point score this year. The Eroica program has been a boon for their other, more widely available rieslings as well: The 2014 Columbia Valley Dry Riesling, a $9 wine, was recently awarded 90 points.

_Benchmarks:_ Eroica, Eroica Gold, Eroica Single Berry Select

Marchesi Antinori (2017)

Seven centuries of winemaking puts 30 years of scorekeeping into perspective, but it’s been quite a 30-year run for Antinori: It has earned more Top 100 awards than any other Italian winery, particularly for its work with Bordeaux planted on some of Tuscany’s best vineyard land. Some of the greatest hits: Solaia 1990 (96 points), 1992 Tignanello (94 points) and, most recently, the 2011 Guado al Tasso (95 points).

_Benchmarks:_ Solaia, Tignanello, Guado al Tasso

Ridge (2017)

When Paul Draper retired earlier this year, he capped off a winemaking career that earned him respect not only in the US, but around the world—it’s not surprising that, under his watch, Ridge has earned more Top 100 nods than any other California winery. Monte Bello, the winery’s flagship from the beginning, never seems to have an off vintage. (The 2005 is the highest-scoring Monte Bello to date, at 97 points.) Ridge has also made age-worthy zinfandels since the 1960s, so if you find a Lytton Springs or Geyserville from the 1990s, snap it up.

_Look for:_ Monte Bello, Santa Cruz Mountains Estate Cabernet, Monte Bello Chardonnay, Lytton Springs

Shafer (2015)

When John Shafer made his first cabernet from his hillsides under the Stags Leap Escarpment in 1978, the tannins were so soft and luxurious people thought it was blended with merlot. Hillside Select became a cult wine when his son, Doug, and winemaker, Elias Fernandez, released the 1991. More recently their vineyard expansion in the Stags Leap District has helped them create One Point Five, a cabernet with all the depth of Hillside Select at less than half the price.

_Benchmarks:_ Hillside Select, One Point Five cabernets

Boutari (2014)

Boutari is a leader in the contemporary Greek wine revolution, a 137-year-old company that first landed in our Top 100 in 1989. At the time, the company was launching a winery in Santorini; it has since become the standard-bearer for Santorini wines—both the bright, clean stainless-steel-fermented style and the richer barrel-fermented style.
Chateau Ste. Michelle, Washington State’s oldest and largest winery, has earned 22 Top 100 awards, the most of any producer in the United States. But its most impressive achievement may be in its extensive work with riesling.

Another Rendezvous with Riesling: In 2016, Chateau Ste. Michelle hosted the fifth Riesling Rendezvous, an event that brings together riesling producers from all over the world to compare notes, share experiences and wines, and consider what “dry” means in Canada, Germany, Austria, France, Australia, New Zealand, Oregon and, not least, Washington State. Chateau Ste. Michelle is one of the driving forces behind riesling’s global renaissance and is, in fact, the world’s largest riesling producer. Most of this volume consists of affordable, reliable appellation wines—dry and off-dry versions. The team saves their best for Eroica, a partnership with Mosel superstar Ernst Loosen that began in 1999 and has become the hallmark of their production.

The Latest (Greatest) Harvest: Each year, Ste. Michelle and Eroica set up a late-harvest riesling program on a scale that few wineries can match. Loosen and Ste. Michelle winemaker Bob Bertheau let as much as ten acres of riesling hang late into the season, most of it in the dips and draws of their Horse Heaven Hills vineyard, waiting for botrytis and, sometimes, freezing weather. Botrytis is almost inevitable here, where fog from the Columbia River creeps in at night and hangs until morning. Clusters and berries with 100 percent botrytis—“not a speck of green,” says Bertheau—go into the Single Berry Select, with sugar levels approaching 55 degrees Brix. The result, in certain seasons, is spectacular, like the wine from 2008 (a miniscule 21 cases were made in the vintage). It’s an irrepressibly immense, wildly powerful late-harvest wine seemingly crammed with flavor and an electric, mouthwatering jolt of acidity, a thrill-ride of weight and momentum.

Riesling For All: The other Eroica rieslings are much more widely available. One recent addition is Gold, a semi-dry, Auslese-style bottling that also benefits from the concentrating effects of botrytis, taking on a delicious tropical richness, the distinctions of which a guy like Loosen can appreciate immensely. “There is usually a very nice apricot character in the aroma,” says Loosen, “which we seldom see in the Mosel.”

Overall, Loosen has always been thrilled with the levels of botrytis that he encounters in Washington, as well as its quality. “Botrytis in Germany is much more risky because of the wet climate,” explains Loosen. “We often have to do a lot of negative selection to remove bad botrytis before we can harvest the good fruit. But what we get in Washington is usually very good, with clean, dry, shriveled berries that are extremely concentrated.”

Meanwhile, the original Eroica continues to set the standard for dry American riesling. And this year, we were astonished by the crisp, pure flavors of Chateau Ste. Michelle’s 2014 Columbia Valley Dry Riesling, priced at $9. It’s one of our 100 Best Buys of the Year. —P.J.C.
scents of olive, smoke and dried beef, while shades of mocha and clove come up from behind. There’s fruit too, but it remains quiet, in deference to the savory notes, the flavors delivered in a generous, luxurious texture that’s mouthwatering, fresh and harmonious. (W&S 8/16; 280 cases) Reynvaan Family Vyd., Walla Walla, WA

BEST ZINFANDEL

96 | Joseph Jewell $34
2012 Dry Creek Valley Grist Vineyard Zinfandel
This wine could be exhibit one in an argument that site matters as much as vine age when it comes to growing great zinfandel. The vines aren’t particularly old in the context of California zin. They were planted in 1974 on a hilltop that looks down on the Dry Creek Valley on one side and toward the rugged, often impassable ridges of the Coast Range on the other. In 2012, the vineyard’s red volcanic soils nourished a wine with unmistakable purity: vivid and tart, with lifted hibiscus and sumac aromas drawn out by the delicate touch of winemakers Micah Wirth and Adrian Manspeaker. Tasted over four days, this wine continued to evolve without flagging in the least. It builds toward a woody red-berry flavor that’s silken yet firm. This is the genius of great California zinfandel: that it can feel simultaneously striking and simple, its pleasure more immediate than intellectual, irresistibly compelling. You could decant this now, or better yet, buy a case and watch it evolve over the next decade or more. (W&S 6/16; 200 cases) Joseph Jewell Wines, Cloverdale, CA

94 | Frog’s Leap $32
2014 Napa Valley Zinfandel
John Williams is on a roll, following his exceptional 2013 Zinfandel with an equally delicious 2014. He dry-farms his 40-year-old vines, harvesting them at the same time as his petite sirah so he can co-ferment the fruit. That brings the tannins together in a refreshing, gentle structure that lifts the fruit flavors, presenting them as perfectly ripe forest berries. The tannins feel plush, even as they carry a note of black-peppercorn spice and manzanita. This is a beautiful Napa Valley red that happens to speak with an accent of zin. (W&S 8/16) Frog’s Leap, Rutherford, CA

94 | Green & Red $30
2013 Napa Valley Tip Top Vineyard Zinfandel (Best Buy)
Jay Heminway got his start in Bordeaux as a college student in the 1960s, working a summer with Alexis Lichine. He founded Green & Red in Napa Valley’s eastern hills in the ’70s, focused on zinfandel. This wine grows at the highest vineyard on the estate, rising to 1,800 feet, where he planted a northeast-facing slope in the late ’90s. It’s a fruit-driven zin, the freshness and sunny aspects pointed up by his team’s work at the sorting table installed in 2013. All that fruit seems to glow from within, surrounded by scents of bay and wild mushrooms. It tastes of plums and strawberries, while tannins grip the fruit with a fine earthen rasp, adding complex notes of cracked green peppercorn and black olive skin. This is a glorious Napa Valley wine, delicious to drink right now and one to brighten holiday meals in the years to come. (W&S 2/16; 720 cases) Green & Red Vyd., St. Helena, CA

94 | Ravenswood $37
2013 Dry Creek Valley Teldeschi Vineyard Zinfandel
Joel Peterson has been making wine from the Teldeschi family’s vineyard on the Dry Creek Bench since 1982. This comes from vines planted between 1900 and 1910 on red, iron-rich gravelly loam; it’s mostly zinfandel, though it gains tannic depth and dark color from petite sirah (12 percent) and allicante bouchet (seven percent) and, perhaps, a little spicy complexity from carignan (two percent). There’s delicious suppleness to the fruit, yet its stony tannins hold a cooling mintiness underneath—a sensation that made our panel think about mountain cabernet as much as zin. The astonishing thing about this wine, aside from its structural integrity, is its sheer range of aromas, from the brightness of pomegranate seeds through anise and cassis to the earthy savor of a damp forest floor littered with black trumpet mushrooms. It feels like a great vineyard capturing a great California vintage. Age it for another five years at least. (W&S 2/16; 4,032 cases) Ravenswood, Sonoma, CA

94 | Storybook Mountain $38
2013 Napa Valley Mayacamas Range Zinfandel
If you were to come back as a vine, Jerry Sepe’s steep hillside vineyard would be a pretty tempting place to put down roots. His vineyard faces north toward Mount St. Helena and east toward the Palisades—not a house or a road in sight, only trees, meadows and craggy rocks left by the volcano. Ideally, you’d come back as a zinfandel vine. The vineyard’s cool morning sun and volcanic soils grow zin with racy energy, a sensa-
tion that’s captured beautifully in this 2013. With air, the wine transforms all of its blueberry flavor, peachy red fruit and youthful oak into something finer, opening over the course of several days toward mouthwatering flavors of fresh-picked black raspberries and bright, rustic mineral notes that seem patterned after the volcanic rock. (W&S 10/16) Storybook Mountain Vineyards, Calistoga, CA

96 | Chateau Ste. Michelle & Dr. Loosen $200/375ml
2008 Horse Heaven Hills Eroica Single Berry Select Riesling
This wine isn’t so much poured as unleashed. It’s ludicrously
over the top, crammed with flavor complexity, as concentrated as a multi-puttonyos Tokaji Aszú, but for all that, true to form as a TBA riesling, with heady botrytis scents of saffron and marmalade, and flavors of treacle and apricot syrup. All of that madding power is carried with aplomb by brilliant, driving acidity, like a linebacker in a tutu. (W&S 12/15; 21 cases) Michelle Loosen, Woodinville, WA

ARGENTINA

BEST CABERNET FRANC

94 | El Enemigo $120
2012 Gualtallary Gran Enemigo Single Vineyard Cabernet Franc Although there are barely 1,700 acres planted to cabernet franc in Argentina (compared to 260,000 acres of malbec), the community of good examples is growing. This Gran Enemigo is one of the best. A selection from the Adrianna Vineyard, planted by the Catena winery at 4,757 feet in the Uco Valley, it’s luscious and fleshy, the flavors of red fruits piqued by herbal notes that offer a sense of freshness. The grainy grip of the tannins is a Gualtallary signature, calling for steak au poivre. (W&S 4/16) Mundovino/The Winebow Group, NY

BEST RIESLING

94 | Wakefield $40
2014 Clare Valley St. Andrews Riesling A selection from the St. Andrews vineyards, this is pressed immediately after harvest, then allowed to settle for a day before racking into a cool fermentation in stainless steel. It’s precisely focused and completely dry, the structure tight up front, then gently expansive as fruit washes up underneath the acidity like the undertow of a wave. That acidity is as malic as red apple skin, as puckering as grapefruit (the pH is 2.98). But then the flavors are more relaxed, opening from earthy talc toward fresh apple, pear and mace. Powerful in its intensity, elegant and refined in its delivery, this is a grand riesling that will age for a decade or more. (W&S 2/16) AW/Direct/Wine Trees Portfolio, Novato, CA; Seaview Imports, NY

93 | Grosset $45
2015 Clare Valley Springvale Riesling Grown at an elevation of 1,500 feet in Watervale, the vines at Springvale benefit from the water-holding capacity of limestone under the red loam soils. They produce a generous riesling, round and juicy, smoky with brisk mineral leesiness. The chalky feel of the acidity closes off the flavors, but after each sip, the fruit seems to pull through that chalk wall, lengthening the finish with lemon zest, lemongrass and tarragon. Decant this if you open it now; best to cellar for eight years or more, to allow the wine to open. (W&S 2/16) Hudson Wine Brokers, Los Angeles, CA

BEST SHIRAZ

94 | Henschke $813
2010 Eden Valley Hill of Grace An elegant vintage from the Henschke’s historic vineyard, this shiraz blends fruit from generations of vines. The oldest date to the 1860s, with subsequent plantings propagated from those original vines. This 2010 has the depth and layered complexity that great old-vine fruit can give. One taster compared it to the long, slow concentration of flavor in a braise. The fruit flavors that rise out of those umami depths add tension and vibrancy to the wine, a sour cherry note of restraint to match the tannic refinement. The long, juicy red fruit flavors have power without any excess weight. Built to evolve for decades. (W&S 2/16) Negociants USA, Napa, CA

94 | Giant Steps $60
2014 Yarra Valley Innocent Bystander Mea Culpa Syrah Phil Sexton and Steve Flamsteed produced this wine from a clone of unknown origin, what they call Red Dog 67, growing at their Tarraford Vineyard. It’s fermented as whole clusters in large oak vats, then aged in oak of varied sizes. And it’s consistently been one of the most compelling syrahs coming out of Australia. Yes, I’m in love with the cracked peppercorn scent of this wine and the raspy red-berry flavors. And I’m fascinated by the way the alcohol comes through as a structural element, completely integrated with the oak and grape-skin tannins. Still youthful, this needs time