

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

FOOD & WINE®



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(INCLUDING
THIS SALTED
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BOTTLE SERVICE

WHAT TO DRINK NOW

Party Pours 31 stellar, celebratory wines that cost \$25 or less

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produced by RAY ISLE AND LUCY SIMON photography by JENNIFER CAUSEY

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PINOT NOIR

It can be challenging to find Pinot Noir that's both affordable and appealing and that captures the grape's unique gift for balancing intensity and grace without going over the \$25 threshold. And yet, after much hunting and tasting, we found a few Pinot unicorns: Here are four to look for. —LUCY SIMON

2023 DELOACH HERITAGE RESERVE PINOT NOIR (\$15)

It's hard to find a better California Pinot at this price. DeLoach is known for their higher-end Russian River Valley Pinots, and the same care goes into its Heritage Reserve wines. This red is full of rich cherry-berry fruit with warm baking-spice aromas.

2024 YERING STATION PADDOCK RISE PINOT NOIR (\$19)

The Yarra Valley, in the heart of Australia's southernmost mainland state of Victoria, has cool-climate conditions that yield fascinating wines like this lightly herbal Pinot Noir; its flavors suggest green tea and first-of-the-season strawberries.

2023 MURI-GRIES ALTO ADIGE PINOT NERO (\$20)

In Italy's northernmost region, Alto Adige, Pinot Noir (or Pinot Nero, as it's known locally) has been grown since the early 1800s. At Muri-Gries, a historic winery located in a former monastery, Pinot Nero shows its autumnal side with notes of tea leaves and dried fruit.

2023 ACROBAT OREGON PINOT NOIR (\$24)

With grapes from the Willamette Valley and the Rogue Valley to the south, this red uses stainless steel fermentation and nine months in French oak barrels (only 20% new) to let its classic Oregon Pinot Noir flavors shine. Think red cherries, raspberry, and a hint of spice.

P EOPLE BUY MORE WINE during the last three months of the year than any other time, and they buy more of that wine in December than any other month. That's no real surprise—from Thanksgiving to New Year's is a parade of holidays, family get-togethers, work parties, and more. Dry January? Sure. Dry December? Dream on.

While we are 100% certain that you, our readers, are more savvy, wine-invested, and all-around fun-loving than everyone else (not to mention better cooks), we're pretty sure you're in line with the rest of the country in terms of the most popular grape varieties to seek out. Not too surprisingly, the top searches for affordable wines during the holidays are for sparkling wines, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

So, here's a grab bag of the best values in those five categories for holiday drinking, none over \$25 a bottle. And as always, when buying wine for parties, remember that many stores offer case discounts of 10% to 15% or so. Always good to ask. Happy holidays! —RAY ISLE

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

A main-course roast deserves a red with some depth and power, and that's what Cabernet Sauvignon delivers. While top versions from Napa Valley and Bordeaux can cost hundreds of dollars, there are still-impressive Cabernets from regions around the world that you can stock up on by the case, without wondering afterward why your wallet is so alarmingly empty. —RAY ISLE

2024 COMTESSE MARION CABERNET SAUVIGNON (\$13)

France's vast Pays d'Oc region is the source for this medium-bodied (and remarkably good for the price) Cabernet. The flavor recalls blueberries and blackberries, dusted with a little cracked black pepper.

2023 COSENTINO THE CAB LODI (\$20)

Fans of big, rich California reds should seek out this substantial Cabernet from Cosentino. The warm Lodi climate gives it plenty of ripe blackberry fruit, which is bolstered by toasty oak notes.

2023 DUCKHORN VINEYARDS GREENWING CABERNET SAUVIGNON (\$22)

A touch of Syrah and Malbec (2% and 4%, respectively) gives a dash of earthiness to this new Washington state Cabernet. It's echoed by spice notes from aging in French oak barrels (30% new); both play well against the wine's substantial core of juicy red fruit.

2022 COPPOLA DIAMOND COLLECTION CLARET (\$23)

Though Francis Ford Coppola is no longer involved in his namesake winery, the wines haven't suffered for it. This dark-fruited Cabernet blend is nicely balanced, its black-currant notes lifted by crisp tannins and a hint of oak.

2022 CATENA HIGH MOUNTAIN VINES CABERNET SAUVIGNON (\$24)

Roast something big (prime rib, pork shoulder, side of water buffalo, you name it) to go with this powerful Argentinean red. Its cherry fruit has accents of tobacco and mocha from 11 to 13 months in French oak barrels.

2021 RING-BOLT MARGARET RIVER CABERNET SAUVIGNON (\$24)

A light eucalyptus note leads into an abundance of black currant-huckleberry fruit in this Australian red. Margaret River, south of Perth, has long been a source for some of Australia's best Cabernets.

2020 THE PARING RED (\$25)

Matt Dees is one of the Central Coast of California's best winemakers. His world-class Jonata wines are pricey, but this Bordeaux-style blend is a killer deal at \$25. It's bright and vibrant, its red and blue fruit characters nuanced by warming notes of nutmeg and clove.



SAUVIGNON BLANC

As people lean more toward lighter, brighter white wines, Sauvignon Blanc has seen a remarkable climb in popularity in recent years. Its vibrant citrus flavors, hints of (or sometimes full-on) herbaceousness, and brisk mouthfeel seem attuned to the moment—so what better to pour at a holiday party? —*LUCY SIMON*

2024 GROVE MILL WAIRAU VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$18)

New Zealand's Grove Mill employs an impressive range of sustainable practices, from wine labels made from spent sugarcane to powering their winery with solar energy. And their Sauvignon Blanc is great, too—pure passion fruit in the glass.

2024 ATTEMS SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$24)

Grown just a few miles from the Slovenian border, this Italian Sauvignon Blanc benefits from the complex soils, rolling hills, and warm days and cool nights of the Friuli region. It comes alive on the palate with crunchy green apple notes and aromas of apple blossom.

2023 J. LOHR ESTATES FLUME CROSSING SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$14)

If you love California Sauvignon Blanc, buy this wine by the case. Lemon-lime notes blend with ripe pineapple in a pleasantly juicy white. It's aged in a blend of stainless steel and neutral French oak to lend some softness without sacrificing any of its vibrant acidity.

2024 ESTIVAL HORSE HEAVEN HILLS SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$19)

This new wine from Washington stalwart Chateau Ste. Michelle captures the energy of the Horse Heaven Hills. The region sees 17 hours of daylight during the summer months, yet its cool nights preserve Sauvignon's zippy acidity.

2023 ISABELLE ET PIERRE CLÉMENT MENETOU-SALON (\$24)

Located just west of Sancerre, the Menetou-Salon appellation makes distinctive Sauvignon Blancs from the same mineral-rich soils. The results are impressive wines like this one, with its pronounced wet-stone quality and sweet citrus aroma.

2023 RAPAUORA SPRINGS CLASSIC MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$15)

There's a reason Rapaura Springs calls this wine a "classic" Marlborough—it has all the hallmark flavors and aromas of this New Zealand region's Sauvignon Blancs, in a balanced, finessed bottling. Expect pink grapefruit, lemon zest, integrated herbaceous notes, and a long finish.

2024 SEVEN HILLS WINERY COLUMBIA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$20)

While Washington's Columbia Valley is best known for Chardonnay and Riesling, this enticing Sauvignon Blanc is worth seeking out. The flavors recall ripe cantaloupe and mango, and it has a pleasing lemon-peel bitterness.

2024 DOG POINT SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$25)

A perennial top performer from Marlborough, this minerally, organically grown Sauvignon Blanc tastes like a margarita with a salt rim, but without the sweetness. It balances lime zest with just enough pyrazine notes (think bell peppers) to remind you that this is New Zealand.

CHARDONNAY

Lingering memories of hefty, oaky, butter-bomb Chardonnays have made some wine lovers wary of it. Yet Chardonnay is unquestionably one of the great grapes of the world, capable of producing mind-blowing wines like Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's legendary Montrachet (it's also mind-blowingly expensive, at over \$5,000 a bottle) straight through to crisp, complex, and surprisingly affordable examples like these. —RAY ISLE

2023 J. MOREAU & FILS LE SANS BOIS CHARDONNAY (\$15)

This unoaked ("sans bois") French Chardonnay is sourced from cool-climate vineyards in various parts of France, and while not as complex as, say, a top Chablis, it's still entirely appealing: light, bright, and layered with green-apple and citrus flavors.

2022 TRÉNEL BEAUJOLAIS BLANC (\$21)

Most people associate Beaujolais with red wine, but this French region also makes some very lovely—and very affordable—white wines from the Chardonnay grape. Case in point, this bottle from Trénel, with its lingering hints of honeysuckle and citrus peel flavors.

2023 SEGHEISIO FAMILY VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY (\$24)

Winemaker Andy Robinson sources grapes from three regions in California (Monterey, Sonoma, and San Luis Obispo counties) to produce this peachy-citrusy Chardonnay. It's crisp and lively, with a little mineral bite in the finish (in a very appealing way).

2023 ALOIS LAGEDER TERRA ALPINA CHARDONNAY DOLOMITI (\$17)

There's a surprisingly rich texture to this white, given its zesty, lime-inflected character and bright acidity. (There's also a pretty hint of spring-time flowers in the aroma.) It comes from Italy's Alto Adige region and is made entirely from organic grapes.

2024 KUMEU VILLAGE CHARDONNAY (\$24)

Kumeu River makes world-class single-vineyard Chardonnays from sites on New Zealand's north island (mostly near Auckland). They're a bit pricey for everyday drinking, but this multi-vineyard blend is a great introduction to the polished, elegant Kumeu style.

2023 J. LOHR ARROYO VISTA CHARDONNAY (\$25)

If you've got lovers of old-school California Chardonnay coming to dinner, seek out this reliable Central Coast bottling from longtime producer J. Lohr. It's big and luscious, with ripe apricot and tropical fruit flavors accented by vanilla-oak notes, but balanced as well.





SPARKLING WINES

A bottle of actual Champagne (i.e., from the Champagne region in France) will set you back substantially more than \$25 a bottle these days. But bubbles overall are eternally popular, so be thankful that more and more wineries in regions around the world are adding sparkling wines to their portfolios. And don't sleep on sparklers from Prosecco, which continues to produce some of the world's best value options. —LUCY SIMON

NV LE COLTURE FAGHER PROSECCO DI VALDOBBIADENE BRUT (\$16)

This skillfully executed Prosecco from a family-owned winery offers complex flavor and finesse at a low price. Its flavor recalls tart green apples and lime peels, with pleasingly yeasty aromas. Gift it to a friend, and buy yourself a bottle while you're at it.

NV MONGARDA VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO SUPERIORE BRUT (\$22)

This sparkler blends Glera (the primary Prosecco grape) and lesser-known Bianchetta and Verdiso; winemaker Martino Tormena is committed to using and protecting the local grapes of Valdobbiadene.

NV WILDLY BRUT CUVÉE (\$24)

Made with certified organic Chardonnay grapes and minimal intervention, this delightful sparkler from South Australia would be a welcome addition to any holiday party. Appealing aromas of ripe Bartlett pear and roasted pineapple rise from the glass and continue mingling on the palate.

2024 MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROSÉ FRIZANT (\$20)

Taste Cabernet Sauvignon and Mourvèdre's softer sides in this strawberry-inflected sparkling rosé from one of the greatest wineries in France's Languedoc region. It's a great bottle to open with hors d'oeuvres, and it's the perfect match for a ripe Camembert.

NV BISOL JEIO PROSECCO ROSÉ (\$23)

The Glera and Pinot Noir grapes for this bright, fresh sparkling wine are grown in the village of Follina, located within the hills of Prosecco Superiore, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Expect pink grapefruit, red berries, and sweet herbs.

NV SZIGETI GRÜNER VELTLINER BRUT (\$25)

Made from grapes grown in Austria's easternmost Burgenland region, this österreichischer sekt (Austrian sparkling wine) showcases Grüner Veltliner's appley characteristics. A second fermentation in the bottle plus 12 months of aging on the lees impart a lovely breadly quality to the wine.