

# WINE News

*Our holiday buying guide to the best values for holiday entertaining and top picks for that special gift.*



## DECEMBER 1, 2014 FEATURES

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## Our Top 10 Best Buys from 2014

These holiday picks, selected by our buyers from all of our regional wine and spirits departments, are among K&L's biggest-selling bottles of 2014, and you can still get them this December—great gift ideas for your relatives, friends, or even for yourself.



**1997 Potensac, Médoc\* (\$26.99)**

We have sold over 5,000 bottles of this wine in 2014. Why? Because it is a delicious, mature red wine perfect for drinking now or over the next five years. It's very tough to beat for the price.

**2009 Bodegas Muga "Selección Especial" Reserva Rioja\* (\$39.99)**

Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo and Graciano. This wine is rich,

with an intense, purplish color and terrific fruit purity. Blackberries, baking spices, violets and chalky minerality all come together in wonderful balance. For under \$40, I cannot think of a better red wine cellar candidate. 95 points WS, 92 points RP.

**2013 Foucher-Lebrun "Petit le Mont" Sauvignon Blanc Loire Valley (\$11.99)**

This Sancerre wannabe is just perfect to enjoy right now. We have sold over 2,000 bottles of this value in the last four months. Floral and clean on the nose with hints of white stone fruits and soft minerals. Coming from organically farmed vineyard sources and fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks. 90 points RP.



**2012 Erik Banti "Carato" Toscana\* (750ml \$7.99; 1.5L \$14.99)**

A mini Super Tuscan! This sumptuous wine tastes like it should cost much more—it's full, smooth, and flavorful, with excellent balance. An extraordinary value.



**Michel Lorient "Authentic" Brut Champagne\* (375ml \$16.99; 750ml \$29.99; 1.5L \$65.99)**

One of our very best aperitif bottles, with a round, toasty quality that comes from three years of aging on the lees and an amazing 50% reserve wines. This tastes like a \$50-plus bottle!

**2013 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Pinot**

**Noir Marlborough\* (\$26.99)** From our bestselling New Zealand winery, this has a darker edge to the fruit and a broader, richer, silkier mid-palate than previous incarnations.

**Laphroaig 15 Year Old K&L Exclusive Signatory Single Refill Sherry Butt Single Malt Whisky\* (\$169.99)**

This is the perfect vessel and age for Laphroaig. It's achieved a finesse missing in younger expressions, but retains intensity and power. For lovers of peat, Islay, and Laphroaig, it's the ultimate offering at any price point.



**2011 Domaine Jean Pascal & Fils Bourgogne Blanc "Les Riaux" (\$19.99)**

This lovely gem is a Puligny-Montrachet in all but name. It comes from one single vineyard in Puligny, just across the Grande Rue from the winery. Estate bottled, and under \$20, this charmer has interesting white flower notes on the nose and a nice mineral note on the palate,

accompanied by a hint of oak and nice drive. Bravo, Alexandra Pascal!

**2012 Domaine de Bila Haut "Occultum Lapidem" Côtes du Roussillon-Villages\* (\$26.99)**

This Rhône-styled blend from Michel Chapoutier's property in the south of France is a knockout, and was one of our biggest hits this past summer. Mostly Syrah, this wine is full and voluptuous, yet balanced and focused. 94 points RP.

**2011 Opus One Napa Valley**

**Bordeaux Blend (\$229.00)** True to its roots, this wine smells and feels like a classic Bordeaux wine. A great short to mid-term cellaring candidate, the 2011 is even showing well right now. 92 points AG and JS.



# Clyde's Bordeaux Picks for Holiday Gifts

## The Stickies: Great Value Dessert Wines



**2001 Doisy-Daëne, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$44.99) 94 points RP: "With terrific acidity, abundant botrytis, and a long, full-throttle finish, this spectacular effort is unquestionably one of the finest Doisy-Daënes I have ever tasted."

**2001 Nairac, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$39.99) 95 points WS: "Intensely botrytised, with

loads of allspice and mineral character, yet lively and exciting."

**2001 Coutet, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$39.99) 93 points RP: "A brilliant combination of power and finesse..."

**2005 Coutet, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$19.99) 92+ points RP, 94 points WE, and about half the normal price—what are you waiting for?

**2009 Nairac, Sauternes\*** (\$39.99) We found this superb bargain on our April trip to Bordeaux. The wine is so lush and sweet, and it has great acidity to balance this richness. 95 points RP.

**2010 Haut Charmes, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$13.99) Haut Charmes is a very special Sauternes bottling, made from the younger vines of the region's *most* legendary château.

**2010 Raymond Lafon, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$19.99; 750ml \$39.99) 93 points RP: "...A complex bouquet with lemon peel, almond and quince aromas, and is well-defined with an impressive sense of energy."

**2010 Doisy-Daëne, Barsac\*** (\$49.99) Fabulous wine, perfectly delicious now and will age for 20 years. Spicy aromas, coconut and pineapple flavors. Lush. 95 points Clyde.

**Fabulous 2011 Vintage in Sauternes**  
**2011 Doisy-Védrines, Sauternes\*** (\$49.99) 95 points WS: "Pure, with piercing persimmon, pineapple, white peach and quince flavors..."

**2011 Suduiraut, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$42.99) Huge. Full of botrytis with tons of coconut and pineapple aromas and balanced with fabulous acidity. 93-95 points Clyde.

**2011 d'Yquem, Sauternes\*** (375ml \$229.99; 750ml \$459.99) 99 points WS; 97 points RP.

## Red Bordeaux



### Under \$30 Values

**2009 de Birot, Côtes de Bordeaux\*** (\$9.99) An absolute killer value from an outstanding vintage. We sold 6,000 bottles this year—our last batch just arrived.

**2007 La Prade, Bordeaux\*** (\$14.99) WS: "Aromas of licorice, tar and some blackberry...medium body, with light tannins and a fruity, delicate finish." Delicious.

**2009 Arnauton, Fronzac\*** (\$18.99) 91 JS and 92 points Clyde. Spicy and lively.

**2009 La Cardonne, Médoc\*** (\$19.99) An overachiever in 2009. Superb wine with forward fruit and plenty of structure to age.

**2011 Domaine du Bouscat "La Gargone" Bordeaux Supérieur\*** (\$21.99) 90 points RP: "A major sleeper of the vintage."

**2001 Lanessan, Haut-Médoc\*** (\$21.99) We have sold over 10,000 bottles of this wine in the past five years. This second-to-last batch arrived just arrived at our door. RP: "Lanessan's 2001 is a consistent overachiever in Haut-Médoc."

**2011 Capbern Gasqueton, St-Estèphe\*** (\$24.99) A super sleeper—92 points WE.

**1991 Labegorce, Margaux\*** (\$29.99) We sold the first 25 cases in two weeks—and this batch is selling quickly, too. Soft and ready to drink; elegant, old school.

**2010 Boyd-Cantenac "Jacques Boyd," Margaux\*** (\$29.99) Tasted in April; absolutely delicious value wine. Soft and elegant.

### \$30-\$100

**2005 Ormes de Pez, St-Estèphe\*** (\$39.99) 92 points WE and 91+ points Clyde.

**2005 Barde-Haut, St-Emilion\*** (\$44.99) Always great values from this property. 93 points RP.

**2010 Cantemerle, Haut-Médoc\*** (\$44.99) I'm a 95 here, I love it—will be perfect for 30 years or more. Their best wine since 1949? 94 points RP and JS.

**1995 Poujeaux, Moulis\*** (\$64.99) One of our favorite châteaux. Mature and delicious. 91 WS and 92 Clyde.

**2009 Les Pagodes de Cos, St-Estèphe\*** (\$79.99) Superb vintage and one-fifth the price of Cos.

**2009 Pauillac de Latour, Pauillac\*** (\$99.99) One of the truly *great* values in Bordeaux—a baby Latour for one-fifteenth the price. Clyde scores it 93 points.

### The Best of the Best \$100+

**2006 Pape-Clément, Pessac-Léognan\*** (\$129.99) 95 points RP: "Following the prodigious 2005 Pape-Clement, it would be hard to believe the next vintage could nearly match its predecessor. However, that is what has happened..."

**2000 Calon Segur, St-Estèphe\*** (\$149.99) For the cellar. 93 points WS.

**2005 Valandraud, St-Emilion** (\$199.99) 50% of the normal retail. Quite delicious.

**1990 Léoville-Barton, St-Julien\*** (\$249.99) A superstar property and a great vintage.

**2004 Latour, Pauillac\*** (\$619.99) For those who have everything.

—Clyde Beffa Jr.

## K&L Wine Clubs: The Perfect Holiday Gift Idea!

Have a loved one, relative or friend who is tough to shop for? K&L has the perfect solution: Give them a K&L Wine Club membership. We have five wonderful club options and we're sure one of them will be the ideal holiday gift. You can sign them up for as few as three shipments, and we can ship to them directly or allow them to conveniently pick up in one of our three store locations. We can send out a gift letter announcement or send you a printable PDF gift letter to enclose in a holiday card. Signing up is easy—just go online to [KLWines.com](http://KLWines.com) and click on **wine clubs** and follow the enrollment steps.

# Domestic Wines at any Price: Top Picks



## Best Domestic Value

**2012 Columbia Crest "H3" Horse Heaven Hills Cabernet Sauvignon (\$9.99)**

An absolute steal for this price! Dark, rich Cabernet flavors explode from the glass and coat your mouth. This wine is loaded with fruit and finishes lush and smooth. This should be your holiday party red! 92 points *WS*.



## Best Domestic Buy Under \$50

**2006 Roederer Estate "L'Ermitage" Anderson Valley Brut (\$39.99)** Although it may seem crazy to refer to a \$40 bottle of domestic sparkling wine as a "value," when comparing the 2006 Roederer Estate L'Ermitage to French Champagne, this bottle is a bargain! This wine shows tons of richness and complexity with hints of toasty brioche; all of which is held together nicely with acidity and verve. I would put this up against any of the big French houses' vintage Champagnes.

## Best Domestic Cabernet Buy Over \$50

**2012 Joseph Phelps Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59.99)** 100% estate grown, the 2012 Phelps saw 40% new oak barrels and 60% two-year-old barrels. Fans of California Cabernet will love this wine. It is rich and concentrated in the mouth, with blackberry fruit, graphite and spicy oak. I love how rich the fruit manages to be without turning sweet. There is structure and tannin, but it is balanced, seamless and silky on the finish.

—Trey Beffa



## BLENDMASTERS' CORNER *Exclusive K&L Barrel Selections*

### 2013 Talley/K&L Wine Merchants Edna Valley

**Chardonnay\* (\$24.99)** Back in the early spring of this year I was trying to identify a Chardonnay producer with whom we could do a co-branded wine. Considering the wines that are popular with our customers, I thought Talley would be a great fit for the project. With aromas of white flowers, baked apple, sandy soil and a richer core of peach flesh, the nose of this wine flies out of the glass. Add great entering cut and resonating energy throughout this richly weighted Chardonnay, and you have one intense wine.

### 2013 Au Bon Climat/K&L Wine Merchants "Bien Nacido Vineyard" Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir\* (\$24.99)

Last year's co-branded Pinot Noir from Au Bon Climat was such a hit, we couldn't help but make it again! Believe it or not, we nailed this blend on the first go-around! Immediately drinkable, this is packed with boisterous red fruits on the nose of Bing cherry and muddled raspberry with a hint of sassafras, tarragon and finely ground white pepper. With delicious flavors of red plum, dragon fruit, cola, violets and Rainier cherries, this will please just about anyone.

### 2013 Ancient Peaks/K&L Wine Merchants Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon\* (\$24.99)

Last year's Zinfandel bottling was a hit, but this year we decided to show off their amazing Cabernet fruit. Plum, cassia and a touch of mildly toasty oak come together instantly for a surprisingly integrated and pretty nose. Ripe, with plenty of plush fruit and a medium-full weighted palate, the wine shows plenty of blue and red fruit interplay along with tobacco, gravel and pencil lead. We couldn't be happier with the wine and we hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

—Bryan Brick



### 2013 Margerum "K&L Blend" Happy Canyon Sauvignon Blanc\* (\$18.99)

Margerum always makes one of my favorite Sauvignon Blancs. We were lucky enough to get to blend several different vineyards into this lovely little wine. Crisp and clean but with a nice weight in the mid-palate. A great wine for the holiday party season.

### 2013 Brewer-Clifton/K&L Wine Merchants "B-C. Kessler-Haak Vineyard" Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir\* (\$39.99)

A few barrels sitting in the corner of the Brewer-Clifton winery when we were visiting became this delicious Pinot Noir. The vineyard is farmed organically and is located about seven miles west of the town of Buellton, in the heart of the Santa Rita Hills appellation. The wine is bright and ripe, with great underlying notes of baking spices and earthiness. Only 161 cases produced.

### Top Value

This last one is not our blend, but all the staff loves the quality of the wine and it's my top value:

### 2013 Luli Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir (\$19.99)

This wine is a team effort between winemaker extraordinaire Jeff Pisoni (Pisoni, Fort Ross, Shared Notes) and Master Sommelier Sarah Floyd (former restaurateur and wine broker). The wine is the combination of two worlds: The lushness of the Pisoni winemaking style integrated beautifully with the sommelier's desire for structure and acidity. Red fruits intermingle with touches of baking spices, sassafras, tea and rose petal. An amazing wine and one of the best at this price point.

—Michael Jordan

# Bigger Stocking Required: Best Spirits Buys

## Best Under \$50

### Faultline Straight Bourbon Whiskey\* (\$39.99)

The well-received Faultline Bourbon remains one of K&L Spirits Department's proudest achievements. The result of a single cask selection gone crazy, we ended up dumping a delicious and spicy seven-year-old high-rye bourbon into the cask of 10-year-old that we were looking at. When we took a sip, the two bourbons had enhanced each other's best characteristics substantially. Master blender John Little carefully recreated our bespoke mixture and the result is this wildly tasty and well-balanced bourbon that you can only get at K&L!



## Best Value

### 1998 Mortlach 16 Year Old K&L Exclusive Signatory Sherry Butt Finish Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky\* (\$99.99)

When I talk about value, I'm not talking about going cheap, I'm talking about the stuff that far outshines comparative products that are higher-priced. We're always on the lookout for more Mortlach, especially sherry-aged barrels, so when we found this cask in Signatory's Pitlochry location we took it immediately. The sherry influence is beautiful here, highlighting the fruit with notes of gingerbread, cinnamon, and apricots and pears dipped in cocoa, yet this retains its rugged Mortlach spirit. The current age-stated release in the UK is a 500ml bottle going for more than \$200. When you taste this beast at under \$100, you'll know what I mean by value.



## Best High End

**Dudognon 60 Year Old K&L Exclusive "Paulin" Grand Champagne Cognac (\$799.99)** This represents the ultimate expression of its region and proves that occasionally our perception of value, the true worth of a product, is much more complex than its price alone. Dudognon's Paulin is without question the finest unadulterated cognac I have ever experienced. Dudognon is the only distillery in the region that I can personally guarantee never has, and never will utilize additives (save for the addition of water) in their brandy. This by no means qualifies them as the best Cognac house, but it just happens to be that they are. The eau-de-vie that go into this blend were produced exclusively by the grandparents of the current owners and represent some of the finest aging stocks of brandy in the world. While there's a tiny bit of gold leaf on the bottle, you're *not* paying for it. The value of this product is strictly in the juice and it should be treated with all the reverence due to any legendary wine you've ever heard of. This is like the '47 Cheval Blanc of Cognac.

—David Othenin-Girard



## THE BEST WHISKY *You're Not Drinking*

**Most people don't understand what grain whisky is.** Which grain are they talking about? Isn't that what they blend with single malt to make blended whisky? Isn't it considered lower in quality? These are all good questions, and they're queries that don't get answered often or accurately. Much like bourbon, grain whisky is usually made from corn on a Coffey or column still, and aged in used oak barrels to create a mellow flavor (that part being unlike bourbon). Nikka is one of the few single malt producers to actually bottle a separate expression of their

grain whisky, so it's not something you'll see on most liquor store shelves. There are scattered Scottish grain whiskies available, but few are from the producers themselves; only from purchased casks bottled for sale by independent labels. The **Nikka Coffey Still Japanese Grain Whisky (\$62.99)** is an odd duck in a misunderstood genre,

making it a tough sell at K&L. Until you taste it, that is. Soft vanilla, creamy corn, and a fruity finish overwhelm you instantly. "My God!" you scream. "This is delicious!"

Yes, it is. Now you can understand why we've sold

hundreds of bottles of this whisky to our insiders. It's time, however, that we let you all in on the secret. If you love Scotch, but want to try something different, or if you love bourbon and want to try something Japanese, this is right in your wheelhouse. There's no age statement on the bottle, but having just visited the distillery I was able to ask the distiller himself, who admitted it was a 10-year-old expression. If you need a surprise gift with a 100% guaranteed success rate and a bit of a twist, look no further: this is easily the best whisky you're not drinking.

—David Driscoll



“Now you can understand why we've sold hundreds of bottles of this whisky to our insiders.”

## Top Picks from Italy

Italy is full of special wines for the holidays, and the Italians know how to celebrate holidays! Here are three that stand out in my mind for their value and character: a vibrant, refreshing white from Puglia, a subtly smooth and smoky Sangiovese from Montalcino and a powerhouse Barolo from a stupendous vintage at an incredible price!



### Best Value

**2013 Fujanera "Bellalma" Falanghina Puglia\* (\$11.99)**

This 100% Falanghina is delicious. It's fermented in stainless steel and then kept on its lees for two months before being bottled. The nose is a complex perfume of elderflowers and white peach, with a bit of crushed stone that is couched in a medium-to-full body, and it has a long and decidedly refreshing finish. Perfect with crab or just by itself!

### Best Under \$20

**2012 Tenuta di Sesta Rosso di Montalcino\* (\$15.99)** What a bargain for the price. Classic Sangiovese aromatics that cross between

plum and cherry; the warmth and richness of Montalcino's south face allow this wine to flow across your palate, so supple and easy to drink! However, decant this wine for an hour and the simple suppleness turns to complexity. Long, balanced and flavorful, this wine is ideal for roasted pork tenderloin with a bit of rosemary, sea salt and black pepper—so good, you'll need to buy more!



### Top Pick

**2010 Cantine Ascheri Barolo (\$25.99)** This wine is powerful;

a bold and forceful statement on the palate says *Barolo* in a big way. The nose is a classic, full of spice, smoky earthiness and intense fruit, and is replicated on the palate. While a big wine, it has drinkability now. The luscious fruit and supple texture come through in waves of flavor without losing grace and balance. This is the perfect accompaniment to a Brasato al Barolo (Piemontese pot roast) or a porcini-laced risotto. The price is so incredible, you should drop a case or two into your cellar.



—Greg St. Clair

## For You from Morey and Chambolle

As you drive down the Route de Grand Cru from Gevrey-Chambertin towards Morey St. Denis, there is a small house just before you enter the village of Morey: the home of **Domaine Odoul-Coquard**. Since 1992 Thierry Odoul (the son-in-law) has been tending the vines and making the wines. But shortly before harvest in 2009, Thierry turned the reins over to his son Sebastien. The change in the wines is profound. Where Thierry tended to produce very solid Burgundies in a burly, old-school style, Sebastien, who trained at the Lycée Viticole, aims to adhere to the concept of terroir, of place. His goal is to make the wines by his work in the vineyard, and treat the resulting fruit in a fairly non-interventionist manner, to let individual character show through.



For my top holiday picks from Burgundy, I'd like to suggest three terrific wines from Sebastien. The first is the **2011 Domaine Odoul-Coquard Chambolle-Musigny\* (\$43.99)** from a vineyard not far from the Morey border, just below Les Baudes, Premier Cru. It has pretty red fruit notes as the first impression, followed by a recognition of the lovely subtle texture of this wine. The tannins are round and very well-robed in character. Overall, this is charming, attractive, and very much has a lovely Chambolle style, with both richness and elegance. It is, quite simply, lovely.

If you want to move up a step, do not miss the **2011 Domaine Odoul-Coquard Morey-St-Denis 1er Cru "Clos Riotte"\* (\$67.99)**. A total production of only three barrels comes from this vineyard, which is located

next to the village, just across the road from the winery. It is terrifically vibrant and alive with a very fine-grained tannin structure at the finish. Rather black fruit notes, but an elegant rather than burly profile.

Finally, my favorite of all of his wines, the **2011 Domaine Odoul-Coquard Chambolle Musigny 1er Cru "Les Baudes"\* (\$71.99)**. This vineyard lies directly below Bonnes Mares, Grand Cru, and tends to make a firmer styled wine. But this may be the exception that proves that rule, since it has lovely, rich red fruit, an elegant character and a long finish. It shows rich and pretty raspberry and cherry notes and can only be Chambolle. Bravo, Sebastien!

À Santé!

—Keith Wollenberg

# Bubbles for All Budgets from Champagne

December is here and it is time to let the Champagne corks fly! This year we have stocked up on more Champagne than ever before and we are ready to supply all of your holiday needs. If you need bottles for big parties, intimate gatherings, business or personal gifts, we have the right Champagne for you.

For larger holiday gatherings, nothing beats magnums. At our house, we open them whenever we are more than three people! Almost all of the Champagne magnums that we carry are aged from one to three extra years on the lees when compared to the equivalent 750s, giving them more complexity, depth and richness. Because the airspace is the same they also have more snap and freshness. Our fastest-selling magnum of Champagne is the **Launois “Cuvée Reserve” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Magnum\*** (1.5L \$74.99), which is composed entirely of estate-grown, grand cru Chardonnay. This wine has fabulous brioche aromas and great high-toned white fruit to balance out the richness. We also have magnums from Aspasie, Billecart-Salmon, Bonville, Charles Heidsieck, Louis Roederer, Ruinart and Veuve Clicquot, to name just a few.

Special, intimate holiday gatherings are enhanced by well-aged vintage Champagne, and I am proud to be able to offer two at very good value. While the other big names are already selling wines as young as eight years as their top offering, both of these have been released at 15 years old. The **1999 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart” NFB Brut Champagne (\$99.00)** is one of our best famous-name

Champagnes, composed of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay. It has an incredible bouquet of cream, high-quality toast and even some Nutella. It is rich Champagne with plenty of texture, but the very low dosage snaps it right into focus. The **1999 Thienot “Cuvée Alain Thiénot” Brut Champagne (\$99.00)** is all estate grown and deserves its 93 point rating from *Wine Spectator*. With plenty of nutty flavor and great chalky cut on the back end, this complex, long-finishing Champagne is appropriate for the most special of occasions.

For the most special of gifts, nothing makes quite the same impression as the estate-grown, gorgeous, elegant **2006 Louis Roederer “Cristal” Brut Champagne (\$199.00)**. Roederer farms the mid-slope grand and premier cru sites that compose this wine to a higher standard than any other big name, and it shows in the finished product. The Cristal has not just class and restraint, but also scintillating, chalky energy and extraordinary cellar potential.

We are also happy to announce that the **2006 Louis Roederer Brut Nature Champagne (\$69.99)** has just arrived. This entirely biodynamic Champagne pushes the boundaries for Grand Marque wines with its ripe, naked purity. While all of the other wines at this great house are blended after fermentation, this wine is co-pressed with the Chardonnay and the Pinot Noir together. It has no added sugar, and is as dry and full-bodied as they come!

A toast to you!

—Gary Westby

## Best Value

### Ariston Aspasie “Carte Blanche” Brut Champagne\* (375ml \$15.99; 750ml \$27.99)

This is not just our best value in Champagne, it is one of our best values in any category in the store! The Carte Blanche is an all estate-grown cuveé of 40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir and 30% Pinot Meunier from the picturesque village of Brouillet, just northwest of Reims. As it is cool here, the Ariston family harvests the

grapes for this wine about 10 days after the rest of Champagne, and the additional hang time translates into more complexity in the bottle. While most of our sub-\$50 Champagne gets up to three years of aging on the lees, this Apsasie gets five years, giving it exceptional depth and toast. If you are looking for balance, look no further—this has the grace that you deserve at a price you can afford!



## Best Under \$60

### 2005 Launois “Spécial Club” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne\* (\$59.99)

This wine comes from the two oldest, best plots of the extensive grand cru holdings of the Launois family. The vines were planted in the 1950s before the modern, cloned plants took over Champagne. The 2005 vintage was a ripe and generous one in Champagne, and this Spécial Club shows the giving character of the harvest. It is a rich, toasty, full-bodied wine that is balanced by the pure chalk of its pedigree Les Mesnil origin. We have been dealing with the Launois family directly for a decade and feel very fortunate to offer this at such a fair price. If you are looking for something very special this year, this is a great choice. Many of the Champagnes that we carry for double the price cannot touch it.



## Best High End

### Krug “Grande Cuvée” Brut Champagne (\$149.99)

I believe that Krug deserves its place alongside Château Latour, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Château d’Yquem—the best wines in France. For nearly 150 years, Krug has had a history of quality on the highest level. The Grande Cuvée is released ready to drink and at a price that is not completely out of reach. It is ready to drink because the current batch is composed of 11 vintages, spanning from 2006 all the way back to 1990, a commitment to maturity that no other Champagne house can claim. This is no wallflower. It is big, rich, bold and full of flavor. For the connoisseur, it offers complexity like no other, but at the same time it is refreshing and moreish. If you have never had a chance to taste it, treat yourself this year!



## A Few of My Favorite Things From Montfaucon



One of our best Rhône producers is **Château de Montfaucon**. Under the supervision of Rodolphe des Pins since 1995, Montfaucon is based in Lirac, just across the river from Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Their average vine age is around 40 years, with many as old as 90 years. The **2012 Château de Montfaucon Côtes du Rhône\*** (\$11.99) is always one of our favorite values from the Rhône and is the perfect wine for entertaining this holiday season. It is full of ripe raspberry fruit and spice, with a hint of garrigue. It is great from the first pour until the last and will evolve gracefully for a couple of years in bottle. We even have a limited number of magnums available (**1.5L \$24.99**). These large format bottles will make you the most prized guest at any holiday party.

As great as the reds are, Montfaucon makes equally wonderful whites. The **2013 “Comtesse Madeleine” Côtes du Rhône Blanc\*** (\$16.99) is a plush and full-bodied white with notes of peach, nectarine and honey. It has a lovely texture and weight to it that makes it an excellent alternative to Chardonnay for you full-bodied white drinkers out there. A truly special bottling from Montfaucon is the **2012 Clairette Vieilles Vignes “Vin de Mme la Comtesse” Côtes du Rhône Blanc\*** (\$29.99). Made from 100% old vine Clairette,

this rich and weighty wine is fascinating on the palate. It makes me think of persimmons, wet stones and white flowers. This is not bombastic but instead reminds me of the whites of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, especially Beaucastel’s old vine Roussanne. Enchanting stuff.

We did a little bit of cellar raiding last summer with Montfaucon and were delighted with the 2005s they had in their library. So much so, that I had to get more for the holidays because they are so good! How often do you get some bottle-aged Côtes du Rhône unless you stored them yourself? Perfectly evolved and ready to drink is the **2005 Château de Montfaucon Côtes du Rhône\*** (\$21.99). It shows its full measure of spice and earth with polished tannins and supple red fruit. This still sings and should drink well for a few more years. More powerful is the **2005 “Baron Louis” Côtes du Rhône\*** (\$29.99) with its fuller body and more explosive nose. The 2005 vintage was a great one and this shows just how good. Still showing ripe fruit, the tannins have integrated nicely and the fruit is still bold. This could continue to evolve in bottle for a few more years but give it an hour in the decanter and your holiday meal will be a thing of great joy, with a great wine. 90 points WS.

—Keith Mabry

## A HALF DOZEN 2012 RHÔNES To Own

Because 2012 was another stellar vintage in the Rhône Valley, with that comes the difficult choice of which wines to buy when there are so many tantalizing possibilities.

What makes the Rhône Valley so remarkable is that unlike with many other wine regions, you can still procure many of their top offerings for under \$100—try doing that in Napa Valley, Bordeaux, Burgundy

or Italy, and you won’t even get your foot in the door. Below are my top six choices, a mix of quintessential producers, artisan producers and up-and-coming estates. Most of the selections below are pre-arrival and are due in early 2015.

There probably isn’t a better entry-level offering than the **2012 Oliver Hillaire “Tradition”**



**Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (\$39.99 PA), which flawlessly displays the depth, power and sexiness of the 2012 vintage; 93 points RP.

If you want power, the **2012 Domaine de la Mordoree “Reine des Bois” Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (\$69.99) fits the bill with an intensely flavored wine that just oozes with dark fruit and spice; 95 points RP.

If you’re a fan of iconic estates, we have a wonderful trio for you—each under \$80, pre-arrival—to give you the quintessential Rhône experience: **2012 Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (\$79.99 PA), 96 points RP; **2012 Pégau “Réserve” Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (\$79.99 PA), 94 points RP; and the **2012 Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe “La Crau” Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (\$79.99 PA), 94 points WS and 93 points RP.

Lastly, we have the **2012 Clos du Mont Olivet “Cuvée de Papet” Châteauneuf-du-Pape** (\$89.99 PA), from a small, relative unknown that is crafting some of the most exciting

“What makes the Rhône Valley so remarkable is that you can still procure many of their top offerings for under \$100.”

wines in all of the Rhône Valley. This is a producer whose bandwagon you should be hopping on! 92 points WS and 94 points RP.

These six choices not only spotlight the greatness of the 2012 Rhône vintage, but also provide you with an amazing cross-section for under \$100 a bottle.

—Alex Pross

# Around the Globe Values, Under \$35 and Top Picks

## Loire and Germany

### 2013 Domaine de la Noblaie Chinon\* (\$14.99)

A nice, fruity style of Chinon, with subtle, peppery spice. Ripe, dark berries and a soft, chalky minerality really make the fantastic character of Cabernet Franc come to life. There are rich tannins on the finish and a juicy freshness throughout.



**2007 Reinhold Haart Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Spätlese (\$34.99)** This shows both the richness and elegance of 2007, with salty minerals, lush fruit and lingering juiciness on the finish. Winemaker Theo Haart has come to be known as the top producer in Piesport. His high standards in the vineyard and winemaking style accentuate the minerality and purity of fruit of the Goldtröpfchen.

**2012 Domaine Didier Dagueneau “Blanc Fumé de Pouilly” (\$62.99)** While Didier Dagueneau, the “wild man of Pouilly,” is sadly no longer with us, his legacy lives on at the domaine he built, now run by his son Louis-Benjamin. This is the winery’s “entry level” bottling, a pure expression of Sauvignon Blanc packed with chalky minerality and citrusy deliciousness. It is made from younger vines planted in Kimmeridgian and clay limestone and farmed biodynamically.

—Eric Story



## Spain

**1999 Bodegas Puelles Gran Reserva\* (\$19.99)** We continue to sell this beautiful, savory, classic Rioja Direct Import more than nearly any other wine in the store, at any price. This is now our official last call, as the winery is sold out—they reserved their entire production for us! Considering that this is produced from primarily older vines, organically farmed, and aged for as long as it is, it’s hard to believe that this is under \$40, let alone under \$20. A great value in fine, mature red wine.



**1998 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos Gran Reserva Rioja\* (\$29.99)** This Gran Reserva smells of ripe red fruit and chewy, dried fruits as well, with a subtle hint of tobacco. On the palate, the red fruits show great development, with lots of chalky minerality and the elegance of a middle-aged Gran Reserva. A perfect blend of rusticity and elegance, this is a must-try for fans of reserva Riojas.

**1989 Remelluri Reserva Rioja (\$99.99)\*** Sourced from a perfectly sited, cool cellar in Basque country, this wine shows amazingly youthfully. With expressive fruit, roasted coffee bean aromas, and hints of roasted meat, the palate is very elegant—this is a classic example of Rioja’s occasional tendency towards a Bordeaux style, and will be drinking well for at least another decade.

—Joe Manekin

## South Africa, New Zealand and Australia

**2013 FRAM Shiraz Swartland\* (\$14.99)** Up-and-coming winemaker Thinus Kruger’s FRAM wines are what he calls “wines of exploration.” Fruit is selected from the most interesting and distinctive vineyards he can find. This is a juicy, bright, medium-bodied Shiraz overflowing with violets, crushed berries, cracked black pepper and smoked meat. A serious value at our importer direct pricing!

**2013 Elephant Hill “Le Phant Rouge” Bordeaux Blend Gimblett Gravels Hawke’s Bay\* (\$19.99)** If you are still unversed in the wonders of New Zealand’s Bordeaux-style reds from Hawke’s Bay, this is your chance to taste one excellent example at a crazy good price! Wines from Gimblett Gravels have Bordeaux-like qualities combining lovely, rich black and blue fruits with powerful structure, stony minerality and some cedar or tobacco qualities. A must-try for any Bordeaux lover!

**2012 Henschke “Mount Edelstone” Shiraz Eden Valley (\$119.99)** This 60th annual release is made with fruit from 100-year-old vines, some of the most treasured vines in Australia. At a recent tasting I substantially preferred this bottle to its more expensive and more famous kin, “Hill of Grace.” This potentially “greatest ever” Edelstone leaps from the glass with heady aromas of purple fruit, exotic spice and pencil shavings. The palate is saturated, rich and mouth-coating, but has ample acidity and long, fine tannins that lend balance and length. This has at least 20 years of life ahead of it.

—Ryan Woodhouse



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