

BEER, WINE & SPIRITS

Starter Pack

Find good values for the great varietals.

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In my year-end Drink column, I recounted my favorite wines from 2013. They were all wonderful, but most were expensive, too. However, you don't have to break the bank to drink excellent wine. Most of the wine I enjoy sells for well under \$20 a bottle, and many are under \$10. Whether you're a wine novice looking to explore and learn about the fermented grape, or a wine pro just looking for value, here are some economical wines that are prototypical of their grape variety—and some of my favorites.

For American-made Sauvignon Blanc (sometimes called Fume Blanc), I think Joel Gott (\$10.99) is pretty hard to beat. Sauvignon Blanc typically has herbal, grassy, vegetal flavors; I often think of grapefruit or gooseberries when I'm drinking it. Gott's Sauvignon Blanc is more American in style than classic New Zealand, with papaya, peach, lime and guava notes. It's a gorgeous, clean-tasting, unoaked wine that pairs beautifully with a wide range of foods. Bump (\$16.99), Honig (\$13.99) and Charles Krug (\$16.99) are also terrific choices.

The world's best Chardonnays come from California and France's Burgundy region. They can be costly, but don't have to be. For an inexpensive, well-made French-style Chardonnay, I'd look no further than the renowned Burgundy wine house of Louis Latour. In the well-balanced Latour Bourgogne Blanc (\$16.99), French oak lends subtle vanilla flavors that complement cantaloupe and nutty notes. Also try JJ Vincent Bourgogne Blanc (\$16.99), Selby Russian River (\$19.99), DeLoach (\$9.95) and Franciscan (\$15.99).

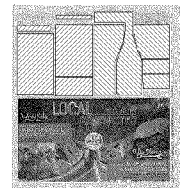
Although the grape varietal can be traced back to Europe, no wine shouts "America!" like Zinfandel. For my money, America's best Zinfandel comes from Will Bucklin's gnarled old vines, some of

which date back to the Civil War era. From Sonoma's oldest vineyard, Bucklin Old Hill Ranch Zinfandel (\$27.99) is complex, spicy and brimming with red and black fruit flavors, ripe tannins and a smooth, beautiful finish. For a little less dough, sip some Rosenblum Cellars Vintner's Cuvée (\$14.79), Rancho Zabaco Heritage Vines (\$15.99), Cline (\$11.95), Ravenswood Vintners Blend (\$12.99) or Carol Shelton Wild Thing (\$13.99).

As with Chardonnay, the Pinot Noir grape produces some of the world's best and most expensive wines. That's especially true of Pinot Noir from Burgundy. But in recent years, California and Oregon wineries have been producing Pinot that rivals some of France's most lauded Burgundy. As I recently wrote, A to Z Wineworks Pinot Noir is a steal at \$18.99. It's brimming with ripe bing cherry, raspberry and strawberry aromas. The tannins are ripe and refined, and on the palate, there are succulent dark-fruit flavors combined with hints of spice and cola. From France, Latour Domaine de Valmoissine (\$15.99), Domaine Faiveley Bourgogne Rouge (\$22.49), and especially Bouchard Ainé & Fils Bourgogne (\$10.95) are fairly easy on the wallet. For cheap but tasty American Pinot Noir, try Mark West (\$12.95), Robert Mondavi Private Selection (\$9.99), DeLoach (\$10.95), Seaglass (\$12.99) and Hahn Estates (\$11.99).

Some of the world's most sought-after and budget-busting red wines come from France's Bordeaux region, where most of the wines produced are Cabernet Sauvignon-based. Thankfully, you don't have to spend \$1,200 for a bottle of 1988 Château Latour. Inexpensive, delicious Cabernet can be had from France, California and even Chile.

For a full-bodied Cabernet with abundant blackberry and cherry flavors, I often look to Chile's



Montes Alpha (\$22.99). This is a terrific ready-to-drink Cab aged in French oak, offering classic Bordeaux-style red fruit and blackberry notes with hints of coffee and vanilla. It's great with grilled meats and pasta

Bolognese. I think you'd also like McManis (\$9.82), Liberty School (\$16.95), Mouton Cadet (\$9.99), Château Recougne Bordeaux Superieur (\$16.49) and Columbia Crest Grand Reserve Estate (\$13.99). **CW**

