

**GIFTS GALORE** P.53  
OUR HOLIDAY SHOPPING GUIDE

A SONOMA FAMILY DECKS THE HALLS!  
**SEASONAL SPLENDOR** P.131

**INTERNATIONAL FEAST** P.74  
TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

# sonoma

**THE 2017**  
**100**  
**BEST**

**WINES OF**  
**SONOMA**



NOV/DEC 2017 \$5.95  
0 74820 44444 3 12

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# *top 100 wines of 2017*

BY LINDA MURPHY

**Let's be honest: Sonoma's most acclaimed and highest-quality wines are expensive.**

Top-tier Sonoma Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs, the current darlings of critics and collectors, command \$60 a bottle and up. That's painful for many of us, yet Sonoma wines are less pricey than Napa Valley bottles of similar quality. Heck, even some Napa types slink into Sonoma to source their Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, so admired are our county's grapes.

While this list is studded with wines most would consider special-occasion purchases, there are also many reasonably priced bottles and some crazy-good values. In addition to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, our Top 100 showcases rosé — its popularity soaring now that sweet White Zinfandel is firmly in the rear-view mirror. "Red" Zinfandel remains historically and deliciously important, with high-alcohol versions largely giving way to wines with balance and freshness. Sauvignon Blanc, Rhône Valley-style wines, Bordeaux varietals and sparklers are all represented here, underscoring Sonoma's ability to produce a diverse range of fine wines.

**Drink up, in moderation.**

# chardonnay



**Alexander Valley** ▶  
**Vineyards**

2015 Alexander Valley Estate Chardonnay  
**\$18**

Straightforward and delicious, it's a fine value, with rich apple and pear aromas and flavors, subtle oak and a long, juicy finish. There's a lot to like at this price.

**Anaba Winery**

2014 Sonoma Coast Chardonnay  
**\$38**

The Best of Show White Wine at NCWC, this 98-pointer is beautifully balanced and textured, with just the right amount of oak spice accenting the layered Meyer lemon, pear and peach flavors. It's juicy and vibrant, with great tension and a forever finish.

**Benovia Winery**

2015 Three Sisters Fort Ross-Seaview Chardonnay  
**\$48**

The Martinelli family's Three Sisters Vineyard is chilled by its close proximity to the ocean, and the grapes are always late to ripen. The wait was worth it for Benovia winemaker Mike Sullivan, who produced this complex, beautifully textured wine redolent in golden apple, Meyer lemon curd, mineral and floral character.

**Benziger Family Winery**

2015 Signaterra West Rows Sangiacomo Vineyard Carneros Chardonnay  
**\$30**

Tangerine, candied citrus peel and orange marmalade aromas and flavors mark this wine, which is medium-bodied and focused, delivering dramatic tropical and citrus personality and seamless texture.

**Carol Shelton Wines** ▶

2015 Wild Thing Sonoma County Chardonnay  
**\$18**

This gold medal-winner at NCWC is as good as many Chardonnays sold at twice the price. Shelton, best known for her bold Zinfandels and Petite Sirahs, also has a deft hand with white wines, as evidenced by this ripe, rich Chardonnay showing tropical fruit, Asian pear and Meyer lemon aromas and flavors.

**DeLoach Vineyards** ▶

2015 Russian River Valley Chardonnay  
**\$20**

Here's a relative steal in Russian River Valley Chardonnay: an expertly made wine with fabulous balance and clarity. Granny Smith apple, citrus and unripe pear flavors are wrapped in gentle oak spice and vanillin, finishing long and crisp.



**Dutton-Goldfield Winery**

2015 Walker Hill Vineyard Green Valley of Russian River Valley Chardonnay  
**\$50**

From the coolest part of Russian River Valley comes this bracing wine with layers of flavor that unfold with each sip: green apple, pear, white peach and Meyer lemon, with hints of spice, fresh cream and toasted hazelnut. It's lively and lingering.

**Freeman Vineyards & Winery**

2015 Ryo-fu Russian River Valley Chardonnay  
**\$42**

Ryo-fu is Japanese for "cool breeze," and Akiko Freeman is the maker of this wine. Five vineyards in the path of breezes contributed grapes for the blend, which begins on the nose with evident toast and hazelnut aromas, followed by a refreshing mouthful of green apple, pear and citrus fruit.



# pinot

**Benovia Winery**

2014 Martaella Vineyard  
Russian River Valley  
Pinot Noir

**\$60**

Benovia's estate vineyard gave winemaker/partner Mike Sullivan the grapes he needed to produce this vibrant wine loaded with floral aromatics, spice, and pomegranate, cranberry and wild-berry flavors. Supple and seamless, it has the structure to age beautifully.

**Bucher Wines**

2014 Bucher Vineyard  
Pamard Clone  
Russian River Valley  
Pinot Noir

**\$50**

The Bucher family has grown grapes in Russian River Valley for 25 years, selling them to such producers as Williams Selyem and Merry Edwards. They launched their own brand in 2013. This wine is juicy and lush, with vivid red cherry, cranberry and pomegranate fruit, baking-spice complexity and refreshing acidity. It's sumptuous and satisfying.



**Buena Vista Winery**

2014 Carneros Pinot  
Noir

**\$25**

This fairly priced Pinot has a forest-floor edge that adds interest to the dried cherry and fresh berry fruit. It's medium-bodied and lithe, with a citrus note on the clean finish.

**Davis Family Vineyards**

2014 Russian River  
Valley Pinot Noir

**\$45**

Guy Davis makes a range of Pinots from Russian River Valley, and this is his flagship, a blend of grapes grown throughout the region. It offers lively cherry fruit, hints of cola, sarsaparilla and spicy oak, and goes down ever so easily, thanks to its silky texture.

**Dutton-Goldfield Winery**

2014 Emerald Ridge  
Vineyard Green Valley  
of Russian River Valley  
Pinot Noir

**\$62**

Savory spice, forest floor, black truffle and licorice notes join rich red, black and blue fruit in this luxurious wine with velvety tannins and mouthwatering acidity. It's heady and "big" for a Dutton-Goldfield wine, yet clocks in at just 13.9 percent alcohol.

**Freeman Winery**

2014 Russian River  
Valley Pinot Noir

**\$44**

Silky tannins, bold black cherry and plum fruit, toasty oak and savory spice highlight this concentrated, full-flavored Pinot. Refreshing acidity ties it all together for a balanced drink.



**J Vineyards & Winery**

2015 Russian River  
Valley Pinot Noir

**\$40**

Smoky oak and inviting violet and cola aromas lead to a mouthful of juicy black cherry and blackberry fruit in this generous wine. A licorice note adds interest, and the finish is crisp and lengthy.

**Keller Estate**

2014 El Coro Sonoma  
Coast Pinot Noir

**\$52**

From the Petaluma Gap region in the Sonoma Coast AVA comes this firm, savory wine that displays black cherry, blackberry, forest floor and sandalwood character. Vanillin oak and spice add a layer of complexity.

**Kobler Estate Winery**

2015 Bacigalupi  
Vineyard Russian River  
Valley Pinot Noir

**\$60**

This wine is elegant and enticingly aromatic, with violet and rose petal aromas leading to a supple, soft and sultry palate of fresh raspberry and red cherry fruit. It's an elegant expression of Pinot Noir.

**Merry Edwards Wines**

2014 Olivet Lane  
Vineyard Russian River  
Valley Pinot Noir

**\$62**

Edwards has sourced grapes from Bob Pellegrini's Olivet Lane Vineyard for more than 25 years. From there in 2014, she made a medium-full-bodied wine with purity of fruit (juicy dark cherry and wild berry), seamless texture and a savory, woody element that appears upon aeration in the glass. Be sure to swirl.

**D & L Carinalli Vineyards**

2014 Estate Russian  
River Valley Pinot Noir

**\$25**

Purchase this wine now, before its price escalates to match its quality. Effusively floral aromas lead to a palate of juicy black cherry and boysenberry fruit. Bright acidity and solid structure make it a wine for cellaring, yet ready to drink now.



**"I COOK WITH WINE, SOMETIMES I EVEN ADD IT TO THE FOOD."**

*~w.e. fields*





# other reds

## **Gundlach Bundschu**

2013 Mountain Cuvée  
Sonoma County

**\$20**

Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec from the winery's Rhinefarm vineyard and sites in the Mayacamas Mountains mesh in this bargain red. It's soft and easy, with blackberry, black cherry and pepper character. An honest drink at a great price.

## **Imagery Estate**

2014 Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak Malbec

**\$45**

This NCWC Best of Class wine is plummy and supple, with hints of smoke, earth and spice. The black plum and black cherry fruit is accented by complex notes of cola, black olive and mint.

## **Lasseter Family Winery**

2013 Paysage Sonoma Valley

**\$62**

John and Nancy Lasseter, with winemaker Julia Iantosca, produce wonderful wines at every turn. This Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon-Malbec-Cabernet Franc blend is a standout, sumptuous and supple, with plum and black cherry flavors and a savory herbal edge for interest.

## **Laurel Glen Vineyard**

2013 Sonoma Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon

**\$75**

Cabernet Sauvignon stands alone in this wine, made from organically grown grapes on the Sonoma Mountain estate. It has a distinctive mineral note in the aroma and taste, with scintillating acidity adding brightness and succulence to the black cherry and black currant fruit.

## **Roche Winery**

2014 Carneros Reserve Merlot

**\$45**

Velvety tannins wrap around the rich black cherry and plum fruit, and notes of wood spice and café au lait add to the complexity and balance of this NCWC gold-medal-winning wine.

## **Seaton Family Vineyards**

2014 Red Buzz Dry Creek Valley Red

**\$35**

Buzz Seaton is the man behind this brand and Red Buzz, a blend of Bordeaux grape varieties. The wine, which scored 97 points at NCWC, is big, bold and full-bodied, with solid acid and tannin structure that suggests long-term aging.

## **St. Anne's Crossing**

2013 Estate Dry Creek Valley Merlot

**\$24**

It's rich, soft and juicy, just as many love their Merlots, with luscious plum and dark berry fruit accompanied by notes of dark chocolate, vanilla, espresso and toast. It was awarded 97 points at NCWC.

## **Stonestreet Wines**

2014 Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

**\$45**

This is textbook Alexander Valley Cab, unafraid to show its savory side. Dried herbs, licorice, cedar and forest floor notes add interest to the well-ripened black cherry and black currant core. Medium-full-bodied and muscular, it will benefit from aeration now, or a few years in the cellar.

## **Thirty Seven Winery**

2014 Sonoma Coast Merlot

**\$46**

Merlot from the Sonoma Coast? You bet, as the appellation extends from the coast to eastern Sonoma County, near Sonoma Raceway and Highway 37, where Thirty Seven is located. Growing-season temperatures are warm enough to ripen Merlot, and this NCWC Best of Class wine [96 points] delivers impressive plum and dark berry fruit, silky mouthfeel and crisp acidity.

## **Buena Vista Winery**

2015 The Sheriff of Buena Vista Sonoma County Red

**\$34**

This blend of Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache sounds like it's made from leftovers, yet the stew melds beautifully. NCWC judges awarded it Best of Class for its deep, dark and decadent black fruit seasoned with spice and cocoa.

**\$70**

Named for the winery's address on Highway 12 in Kenwood, this Margo Van Staaveren-made wine is a blend of Petit Verdot, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Syrah. It's unusual and delicious, with jazzy raspberry, blackberry and Santa Rosa plum aromas and flavors kissed by hints of mocha, spice and blueberry pie. Its polished elegance earned it a gold at NCWC.

## **Estate 1856**

Tzabaco Rancho Vineyards Dry Creek Valley Malbec

**\$36**

Black and blue fruit [blackberry, blueberry] fills the mouth in this gold-medal winner from NCWC. It has elegant texture and sparkling acidity, adding lift to the powerhouse fruit and sturdy tannins.

## **Imagery Estate Winery**

2014 Upper Ridge Vineyard Pine Mountain-Cloverdale Peak Sangiovese

**\$42**

It scored an impressive 98 points at NCWC for its textbook varietal character of tart cherry tinged with dried herbs and balanced by bright acidity. Perfect for any tomato-based dish, it also has notes of plums and red currants, with an earthiness and herbaceous elements that marry harmoniously. It's sleek, full flavored and balanced to perfection.

