

Wine & Spirits

The Little Nell, Bazaar
 IRON GATE, Gjelina, Aviary
 Nopa, Unxitted, Soto
 Lenoir, Spago, The Modern
 Brixian's, Spiaggia
 Del Frisco's Double Eagle, Steak House
 Wild Fire, YANGMING, BOKA
 THE TRUFFLE TABLE, selden Standard, TINA'S
 Farallon, Bouchon, 101
 L'Espalier, The NoMad
 Jean-Georges
 Le Bernardin
 AUTRE MONDE, 1030
 Delfina, A Cote, ABSINTHE
 Michael's Genuine
 The American Restaurant
 RACINES, Lindey's
 NECTAR
 Chops LOBSTER BAR
 Ai Fiori, Pearl
 GRAFTSTEAK

Frasca, ZUSCA
 COsme, TAXIM
 Oriskill Grill, DANIEL, A&Q
 Republique, LINCOLN
 Underbelly, Hugo's, A VOCE, BARU
 Bar Jamon, Cape Sea Grille
 Orchids, Pucci, Gary Danko
 ACQUERELLO, Amada, Sepia
 Gramercy Tavern
 FEARRINGTON HOUSE INN
 Castagna, SEPIA
 CHEZ PANISSE
 The Herbfarm, SALOM
 GLENELLEN STAR
 III Forks, BINKLEY'S RESTAURANT
 BARRINGTON'S, EVOO
 Oak Room, Victory 44
 Picasso, Lotus of Siam, BARU
 THE PARTISAN
 Lacroix, Nick's Italian Cafe

Top 50 Wines

in America's Best Restaurants

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The Little Nell, Bazaar by Jose Andres
 BISHMAN'S, République, Daniel
 The Modern, Le Bernardin
 Castagna, Farringham

THE AGE OF DISTRACTION

As if to catch a moment of your attention before the next Instagram post appears on your phone, here's a taste of a Swiss white.

Tina Vaughn asks if you like it.
 In a speed-dating sort of way, you hesitate.
 Off she goes to find something else.

Even at *The Simone*, the most analog of restaurants on New York's Upper East Side, where her husband, chef Chip Smith, bakes the breads and pastries every morning and leaves the kitchen only to chat with guests as service comes to an end, Vaughn greets you with one of a range of wines she has opened that night, a Bellet from the hills above Nice, a cannonau from the coast of Sardegna, until she finds the juice for the moment.

This sort of classic French bistro, a contemporary incarnation, perhaps, of André Soltner's *Lutèce*, complete with Alsatian tart and duck confit, has little to do with restaurant trends in 2016—except in wine. You can drink things as wildly out there at *The Simone* as you can find at *Wildair*, the esoteric wine mecca downtown. Or at *Autre Monde* outside Chicago. Or at *À Côté* in Oakland.

This year, restaurateurs reported selling more and more wine through pairings and tastes rather than bottles ordered off a static wine list. Are diners distracted, or just intrigued?

Sommeliers were once defined by those who hired them as carriers of wine, schleppers of boxes, haulers of bottles from the cellar. Now they self-define as guides to new worlds, some leading you into the microbiological chaos of supernatural wine, others seeking horizons in far eastern Europe or Canada, exploring Tasmania or the Sierras.

Aviano
 Delfina
 Farallon
 Gjetina, Absinthe
 AQ, Iron Gate, The Partisan
 Sotto Sotto, Wrecking Bar, Brew Pub
 Lenoir, Second Bar + Kitchen
 Island Creek Oyster Bar, Barrington's
 Loyal Nine, Yangming, Alden & Harlow, The
 Charles
 Oak Ro

Spago, L'Espalter, Spiaggia,
 Ramercy Tavern, Jean-Georges
 Lincoln, The NoMad, Untitled
 House Inn, Acquerello, Nopa
 Herb Farm, Truca Taxis
 Autre Monde, Chez Panisse
 Genuine Sepia
BOUCHON
 Red
 Giro
 Michael's

Sommeliers, whether young or seasoned, are building lists that defy conventions. And American diners, once resistant to a change of taste, are now facilitating that change every time they order a glass. It might be wine, cider, a cocktail or a spritz. It might be anything that tastes good, rather than simply tasting like what you expect.

The results of our Annual Restaurant Poll show that Americans still act on what they know, still buy on brands and expectations, but the barriers to entry that strong brands once built have fallen to a new low. Make great Rioja and people will drink it. Make great grower Champagne and people will buy it. Even Chablis, that name maligned for years by innocuous jug wine has the flash of new cachet—real Chablis, from some of the greatest chardonnay vineyards in the world. It's a sign that times have changed: American diners, especially the young and the restless, are out to taste something new.

O'Leary's Seafood
 Chiapparelli's
 Sorellina Boka
 Capital Grille, Jeff Ruby's, Niche
 Zia
 Ellen
 Star
 Racines
 Cosme
 Acote
 Anada
 Gary Danko
 Quince
 Driskill Grill
 Restaurant Eugene
 contigo Austin
 Nectar
EVOO

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BY THE GLASS

This year's list of top pours by the glass is more diverse than ever: Three of the brands in the top ten are imported wines, and while it's not unusual to see Italy there, Greece and Rioja have never appeared this high in the category.

Rioja is riding the popularity wave of Spanish wines that we've seen across this year's poll results, with strong showings by the glass for La Rioja Alta and Ramirez de la Piscina. Customers may be a little less familiar with Greek wines, requiring more guidance from sommeliers. Jeff Berlin's top-selling wine at *À Côté* in Oakland was the 2012 Methymnaeos Chidiriotiko from Lesbos, which he sold as part of a flight: "To be perfectly honest, they make an orange and a red, and I called it the 'Lesbian flight.' And that had a lot to do with the sales. But they're amazing wines."

Many sommeliers are using flights and pairings to broaden their by-the-glass lists and encourage customers to be more adventurous. "If you count everything, we offer about sixty wines by the glass,"

says Cedric Nicaise of NYC's *Eleven Madison Park*. "We offer pairings with our prix fixe dinners, which change a lot. That helps us offer more wines by the glass, because we'll pour those wines for other guests who request it. Some of those are wines I couldn't put on the by-the-glass list because they're so limited in quantity."

Ben Teig of LA's *Redbird* notices that customers, especially younger ones, are seeking more adventurous choices on the glass list: "Generally people are asking more and more for nontraditional varieties." But even so, California cabernet, chardonnay and especially pinot noir continue to dominate glass pours. Meiom Pinot Noir held the top position for the second consecutive year after chardonnay's long domination of that spot. Adriana Camacho of *The Palm* in Las Vegas finds that Meiom's name recognition drives sales: "People here, at least, have gotten it into their heads that Meiom is a starter wine, to have by the glass. It's a really affordable wine, and people see it everywhere, so they order it."

"People are more reluctant to throw down for a big bottle, but they're still buying really good glasses. We want it to be motivational: 'Oh shit, \$18 a glass—I have to get that!'"

—Louis Moskow,
315 Restaurant and Wine Bar, Santa Fe

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Meiom	California Pinot Noir	\$14
2	Copain	Anderson Valley Tous Ensemble Pinot Noir	\$17
		Anderson Valley Tous Ensemble Chardonnay	\$16
3	Justin	Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon	\$16
4	Heitz Wine Cellars	Napa Valley Chardonnay	\$18
		Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$24
5	Sandhi	Santa Barbara Chardonnay	\$20
		Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir	\$20
6	Banfi	Toscana San Angelo Pinot Grigio	\$8
		Rosso di Montalcino Centine	\$16
7	Avalon	California Cabernet Sauvignon	\$9
		Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$11
8	Kourtaki	Attica Retsina White Blend	\$10
		Nemea Apelia Rosé	\$7
9	Ferrari-Carano	Sonoma County Chardonnay	\$12
		Sonoma County Fume Blanc	\$9
10	La Rioja Alta	Rioja Reserva Viña Alberdi	\$14
		Rioja Reserva Ardanza	\$21
11	Hess Collection	Napa Valley Chardonnay	\$12
		North Coast Sauvignon Blanc	\$7
12	Raventós i Blanc	Conca del Riu Anoia Brut L'Hereu	\$13
		Conca del Riu Anoia Brut Rose L'Hereu	\$16
13	Catena	Mendoza Alamos Malbec	\$8
		Mendoza Malbec	\$11
14	Domaine Eden	Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir	\$15
		Santa Cruz Mountains Cabernet Sauvignon	\$25
15	Sonoma-Cutrer	RRV Russian River Ranches Chardonnay	\$14
		Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$16
16	Lucien Crochet	Sancerre La Croix du Roy Sauvignon Blanc	\$20
		Sancerre Sauvignon Blanc	\$19
17	Raymond Vineyard	Monterey R Collection Chardonnay	\$17
		Napa Valley Chardonnay	\$19
18	Bench	Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$15
		Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir	\$15
19	Villa Maria	Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc	\$9
		Marlborough Cellar Select Sauvignon Blanc	\$9

20	DeLoach	California Heritage Reserve Pinot Noir	\$12
		Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$16
21	Joel Gott	Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$8
		California Unoaked Chardonnay	\$8
22	Lieu Dit	Santa Ynez Valley Sauvignon Blanc	\$17
		Louis Martini Winery	Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon
23	Maison Joseph Drouhin	Alexander Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	\$18
		Mâcon-Villages Chardonnay	\$12
24	Ramirez de la Piscina	Chablis 1er Cru Chardonnay	\$22
		Rioja Reserva	\$16
25	Canyon Road	Rioja Crianza	\$13
		California Chardonnay	\$8
26	Duckhorn Vineyards	California Cabernet Sauvignon	\$10
		Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc	\$17
27	Laetitia	Napa Valley Merlot	\$20
		Arroyo Grande Valley Chardonnay	\$8
28	Drusian	Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir	\$16
		Prosecco	\$14
29	Elk Cove	Willamette Valley Pinot Blanc	\$10
		Willamette Valley Pinot Noir	\$16
30	Mirassou	California Moscato	\$8
		California Pinot Noir	\$8
31	Ruffino	Toscana Lumina Pinot Grigio	\$10
		Chianti Classico Aziano	\$11
32	14 Hands	Columbia Valley Merlot	\$10
		Columbia Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$9
33	Argyle	Willamette Valley Brut	\$13
		Granbazán	Rias Baixas Albariño
34	Chateau Ste. Michelle	Columbia Valley Cold Creek Vineyard Riesling	\$6
		Horse Heaven Hills Sauvignon Blanc	\$8
35	La Marca	Prosecco	\$9
		Unti	Dry Creek Valley Barbera
36	Unti	Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel	\$13

MOST POPULAR WINES BY VARIETY AND COUNTRY

When we conduct our research for this feature, we ask restaurateurs to list their ten top-selling wines in order of popularity. We then assign point values to the listed wines—from ten points for the most popular wine on the list, to one point for the tenth most popular. We use the total number of mentions a brand accumulates to determine its placement on the lists that follow, and then use the total points to break ties. The average restaurant-wine-list price for individual bottlings appear in the far-right column of each chart.

CHARDONNAY

“Chardonnay is hard to sell. Even the hundred-dollar white Burgundies that used to fly off the shelf on a weekly basis are far less popular,” says Louis Moskow at *315 Restaurant and Wine Bar* in Santa Fe. Our poll results echo his observation: For the first time since we started keeping track in 1989, chardonnay accounted for less than 10 percent of the most popular restaurant wines. Still, a Ramey chardonnay was one of Moskow’s ten best sellers, and he observed a continued allegiance to Sonoma-Cutrer, which over the last decade has vied with Cakebread for the top spot on our most popular chardonnay list.

“There are certain people who aren’t afraid to say: ‘Hey, I like oak, I like tropical, flashy chardonnays,’” he continues. “And then there’s the person who wants the lean Chablis.”

This bifurcation of the chardonnay market was a common theme as we spoke to wine buyers around the country, and several Burgundy producers nipped at the heels of the top-selling California wines. At *Town Hall* in San Francisco, Haley Guild Moore split the difference, offering both a luxe California chardonnay and a leaner Drouhin Mâcon-Villages by the glass. She found success with both styles, though Drouhin sold the best.

“Chardonnay is suffering from what merlot suffered in the ’90s and early 2000s. It became so popular and then it became uncool,” concludes Erik Liedholm of *Seastar* in Bellevue, Washington. But he sees a light at the end of the tunnel, especially as US producers find a stylistic middle ground. “It will have its resurgence,” he predicts. “Merlot is already on its way back.”

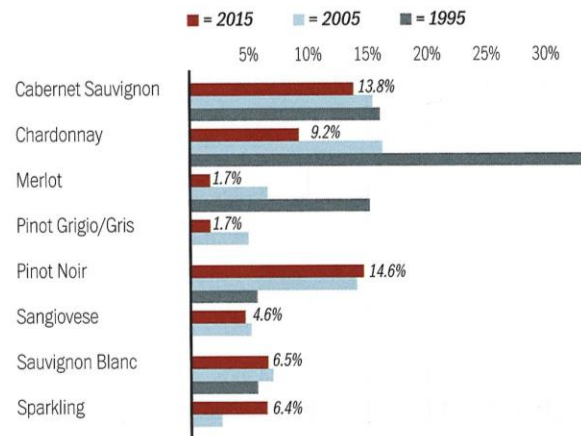
MOST POPULAR CHARDONNAYS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Cakebread Cellars	Napa Valley	\$88
2	Sonoma-Cutrer	Russian River Valley Russian River Ranches	\$51
		Sonoma Coast	\$50
		Sonoma County The Cutrer	\$67
3	Kistler Vineyards	Sonoma Coast Les Noisetiers	\$131
		Russian River Valley Vine Hill	\$145
4	Rombauer Vineyards	Carneros	\$69
5	Patrick Piuze	Chablis Terroir de Fye	\$62
		Chablis 1er Cru Butteaux	\$120
6	Patz & Hall	Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch	\$78
		Sonoma Coast	\$60
7	Ramey	Russian River Valley	\$68
		Sonoma Coast	\$87
8	Calera	Central Coast	\$48
9	Maison Joseph Drouhin	Mâcon-Villages	\$42
		Chablis 1er Cru	\$95
10	Raymond Vineyard	California R Collection	\$40
		Napa Valley	\$55
	Sandhi	Santa Barbara	\$73
12	Chateau Montelena	Napa Valley	\$100
13	Frank Family	Napa Valley	\$56
	Cambria Vineyard	Santa Maria Valley Katherine’s	\$59
14	Kendall-Jackson Vineyards	California Vintner’s Reserve	\$31
	William Hill Winery	Napa Valley	\$48
17	Pierre Yves Colin-Morey	St-Aubin 1er Cru En Remy	\$145

Wine Varieties

AS A % OF TOP-SELLING BOTTLES

Chardonnay was the dominant variety when the poll began in 1989. Merlot came on strong with reports of the health benefits of red wine in the early 1990s, then faded as pinot noir began to rise in our poll results in the early 2000s. Pinot noir is now the most popular variety, in an increasingly diverse field.



“Overall, the interest in chardonnay has petered out. Except for Sonoma-Cutrer, which is still a benchmark for people.”
—Louis Moskow,
315 Restaurant & Wine Bar, Santa Fe



“People don’t drink chardonnay here, even when it’s good chardonnay. I’m more likely to sell a Riviera Sacra white than a chardonnay; [guests] are more willing to try whatever weird thing I put in front of them.”
—Kurt Heilemann,
Davenport, Portland, Oregon

PINOT NOIR

"Pinot noir continues to be the hottest variety," says Arthur Hon at *Sepia* in Chicago, reflecting our poll data as well. After cabernet snuck ahead last year, pinot noir has regained its position as the most popular varietal wine in America's top restaurants. This year its share of respondents' top-selling wines crept up by a tenth of a percentage point, to 14.7 percent, while cabernet's share fell by 2.8 percent.

The style of restaurant doesn't really matter, according to Ryan Fletter of *Barolo Grill* in Denver. "It really just stands on its own. I find that for most guests ordering a glass of pinot noir, it tees up the night, and then they decide to just drink a bottle of it. It's not too light and not too heavy; it's hard to compete with that category."

For the most part, when people drink "pinot," they are drinking US pinot: While Burgundy is in demand, most bottlings from individual producers are too scarce to accumulate significant mentions in the

poll. Instead, Merry Edwards, the Sonoma Coast and Russian River stalwart, leads an impressive list of US producers. She's joined by several other Russian River producers—Emeritus, Gary Farrell, La Crema and Thomas George—in the Top 20.

This year, California brands placed evenly with wineries from Oregon. It's one of the Willamette's strongest ever showings, with Cristom leading the pack. "I think people are looking at Burgundy and California and Oregon, and thinking, what will I get for my money?" says Maximillian Kast at *Ferrington House Inn* in Pittsboro, North Carolina. "If you spend \$80 on a bottle, you'll get better quality in Willamette than in a village-level Burgundy, particularly for wines that are drinking younger, between the 2010 and 2013 vintages. There is an earthiness and subtlety that you get, like in Burgundy, but also more fruit. Willamette is the area right now."



"Even my mother thinks that there's not a bad pinot."

—Dominique Henderson,
Rich Table, San Francisco

MOST POPULAR PINOT NOIRS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Merry Edwards	Russian River Valley Sonoma Coast	\$99 \$85
2	Cristom	Willamette Valley Mt. Jefferson Cuvée Willamette Valley Jessie's Willamette Valley Sommer's Reserve	\$75 \$115 \$95
3	La Crema	Sonoma Coast Monterey Sonoma County	\$53 \$35 \$56
4	Mark West	California	\$36
5	Soter	Willamette Valley Willamette Valley Oregon North Valley	\$81 \$78
6	Flowers	Sonoma Coast	\$98
7	Ken Wright Cellars	Willamette Valley	\$64
8	Meiomi	California	\$49
9	Belle Pente	Willamette Valley Murto Reserve Willamette Valley	\$83 \$73
10	Belle Glos	Sonoma County Santa Lucia Highlands Las Alturas Vineyard	\$75 \$74
11	Emeritus	Russian River Valley Halberg Ranch	\$83
12	Copain	Anderson Valley Tous Ensemble Anderson Valley Les Voisins	\$78 \$60
13	Maison L'Envoyé	Willamette Valley Two Messengers	\$59
14	Thomas George	Russian River Valley Russian River Valley Cresta Ridge	\$68 \$80
15	Stoller	Dundee Hills JV Estate	\$54
16	Patricia Green Cellars	Chehalem Mountains Lia's Vineyard Willamette Valley Freedom Hill	\$48 \$78
17	St. Innocent	Willamette Valley Villages Cuvée Willamette Valley Momtazi	\$58 \$75
18	Gary Farrell	Russian River Valley	\$86
19	Torii Mor	Willamette Valley	\$56
20	Yamhill Valley Vineyards	McMinnville	\$58
21	Arterberry Maresh	Willamette Valley Dundee Hills	\$32 \$48
22	Mouton Noir	Willamette Valley OPP	\$67
23	MacMurray Ranch	Russian River Valley Sonoma Coast	\$58 \$52
24	Erath	Oregon Willamette Valley Estate Collection	\$38 \$70
25	Littorai	Sonoma Coast Anderson Valley Les Larmes	\$98 \$145
26	Crowley	Willamette Valley Willamette Valley Entre Nous	\$53 \$60
27	Angela	Yamhill-Carlton	\$78
28	Failla	Sonoma Coast Sonoma Coast Pearlescence	\$59 \$115
29	Adelsheim Vineyard	Willamette Valley	\$63
	DeLoach	California California Heritage Reserve	\$36 \$54
30	Domaine Drouhin	Dundee Hills	\$92
	Elk Cove	Willamette Valley Willamette Valley La Sirene	\$64 \$42
	Domaine Serene	Willamette Valley Yamhill Cuvée	\$102
33	Hartford Family Winery	Russian River Valley Hartford Court	\$78
35	Angeline	California California Reserve	\$36 \$48

POPULAR BARGAINS

“Most people are more comfortable trying something unknown at a lower price point,” says Jen Fields of Cambridge’s *Alden & Harlow*. American wine continues to deliver value, with Columbia Crest and Chateau Ste. Michelle representing Washington State as two of the most popular brands for \$50 or less on respondents’ lists. Argentina’s Catena vaulted ahead from the fifth spot last year. And inexpensive sparklers gained traction, as guests explore both Lambrusco and Txakoli, while Prosecco holds strong. “I fly through Prosecco,” Rachael Lowe of Chicago’s *Spaiggi* reports. “Three to four cases each week between the café and the dining room.”

MOST POPULAR WINES FOR \$50 OR LESS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Columbia Crest	Horse Heaven Hills H3 Cabernet Sauvignon	\$34
		Columbia Valley Grand Estates Cabernet	\$30
2	Catena	Mendoza Alamos Malbec	\$29
		Mendoza Malbec	\$35
3	Chateau Ste. Michelle	Columbia Vly. Indian Wells Cabernet	\$42
		Washington Eroica Riesling	\$39
4	Joel Gott	Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$39
		California Unoaked Chardonnay	\$30
	Mark West	California Pinot Noir	\$36
6	Hess Collection	California Hess Select Cabernet Sauvignon	\$39
		California Hess Select Chardonnay	\$32
7	Avalon	California Cabernet Sauvignon	\$36
		Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$42
	Kim Crawford	Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc	\$44
9	Whitehaven	Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc	\$41
10	Gorrondona	Txakoli de Vizcaya	\$44
11	J. Lohr	Paso Robles Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon	\$37
		Sonoma-Cutrer	RRV Russian River Ranches Chardonnay
		Sonoma Coast Chardonnay	\$42
13	DeLoach	California Cabernet Sauvignon	\$40
		California Pinot Noir	\$36
	Scarpetta	Friuli Pinot Grigio	\$36
		Friuli Timido Spumante	\$48
15	Angeline	California Pinot Noir	\$36
		California Reserve Pinot Noir	\$48
	Frog’s Leap Winery	Rutherford Sauvignon Blanc	\$43
17	Elk Cove	Willamette Valley Pinot Gris	\$39
		Willamette Valley La Sirene Pinot Noir	\$42
	Unti	Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel	\$49
		Dry Creek Valley Barbera	\$44
19	Coppola	California Diamond Series Merlot	\$36
		California Black Label Claret Cabernet	\$38
20	Marchesi Antinori	Toscana Santa Cristina Sangiovese	\$36
		Chianti Classico Riserva Villa Antinori	\$45
	Calera	Central Coast Chardonnay	\$45
21	Cleto Chiarli	Emilia-Romagna Vecchia Modena Lambrusco	\$43
		Lambrusco Grassaparossa di Castelvetro	\$44
23	14 Hands	Columbia Valley Merlot	\$29
		Columbia Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$36
	Ameztoi	Getariako Txakolina	\$48
		Getariako Txakolina Rubentis Rosé	\$45
25	La Crema	Sonoma Coast Chardonnay	\$44
		Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir	\$45