

Juiced!: Value wines from around the world

By David Oliver

Unless you're a lucky enough wine lover to have unlimited money to pursue your passion, it's likely that you're always on the lookout for wines that offer plenty of bang for the buck. I know I am.

For me, the most exciting wine finds are not the blockbuster Napa Cabs or "the best vintage ever" of Bordeaux, but delicious wines that sell for \$10 or less that I can enjoy every day. Let's take a look at some gems that are available at a wine shop near you.

ARGENTINA

While there are great values in every wine-producing nation in the world, at this moment in history, the very best seem to be coming from Argentina. The country itself is vast and, in the past couple of decades, prime wine growing land has been cheap and abundant. In addition to local talent, many wineries from around the world have gone to Argentina to explore the possibilities.

Most countries produce wines from a broad variety of grapes. Argentina is no exception, but there is one grape that they are more known for than any other. Malbec dominates the Argentina section of wine lists and retail shelves. While every other wine region in the world that produces Bordeaux-style blends grows Malbec, it is not the focus. There are other, more obscure grapes that you will find from Argentina. Look for Tannat, Bonarda or Torrontes and impress your friends at your next tasting!

Here are some brands to check out:

- Don Rodolfo: From the Cafayate Valley, which, contrary to its name, is nearly 6,000 feet in elevation. High elevation gives you dramatic temperature changes from day to night, which makes for very flavorful grapes.
- Santa Florentina: Another lesser-known region, the Famatina Valley, is up and coming. The quality for the price on these wines is very high.
- Maipo: One of the most exciting new wineries in the Luján de Cuyo sub-region of Mendoza, Maipo is getting plenty of well deserved attention and high scores in the wine press.

AUSTRALIA

Many people have been paying much less attention to Australian wines over the past year or two (and you know who you are). The fact is, some of the best values over the last decade have come from Australia, and despite some hardships, they are still producing some knock-out wines for not a lot of money.

- De Bortoli: A family owned winery that dates back to the 1920s. They have multiple labels at different price points. Look for the DB series for great entry-level wines. They make a great Petite Sirah in that series.
- Oxford Landing: I've mentioned these wines before in this column and cannot emphasize enough how great they are for the money.
- Wilderness: Not many places have this label that consists of only Shiraz and Chardonnay. Ask for it where you shop for a pair of wines that over-perform in a big way for the money.

CHILE

No discussion of value wines would be complete without mentioning Chile. Twenty years ago, when wines from their neighbor, Argentina, were nowhere to be found, Chile was already gaining a reputation for value. All that's changed is the sheer number of wineries. Chile is growing and refining their regions. The climate is ideal and there is no shortage of talented winemakers.

- La Playa: Owned by an American family from San Francisco, this winery produces all estate-grown and -bottled wine. What that means is they have control of every step of the winemaking process, from vineyard to bottle.
- San Elias: A fairly new label, this family owned operation recently converted from being primarily grape growers to running a brand new, state-of-the-art winery. The quality is stunning for the money.

FRANCE • SPAIN • ITALY

It does these countries a disservice to group them together in this discussion, but I only have a certain amount of space. Europe has been making wine for many more centuries than any other part of the world. Because of this, the top producing countries by volume are, in order, Italy, France and Spain. The U.S. is number 4, but Italy produces more than twice the amount of wine.

- Canaletto: Top notch wines from the best regions in Italy for the specific grapes. The Pinot Grigio is from Veneto, the Primitivo from Puglia, etc. Look for the delicious Montepulciano d'Abruzzo!
- **Tariquet Classic Blanc: There are tons of great values from France, but this is one of my favorites. A dry white from the southwest of the country, it's loaded with juicy, ripe Granny Smith apple flavors.**
- Tres Ojos: This old-vine Grenache from Calatayud in Spain is so consistently great from year to year that it's amazing the price hasn't gone up. Plenty of fruit that leans toward raspberry with some undercurrent of spice. Great stuff!

Look for a future column on domestic values.

Cheers and Happy New Year!