



Jim's Picks: The Reds

IT HAS BEEN TWO AND A HALF YEARS since I wrote articles on my favorite red wine values. In this issue I will again note my favorites with an emphasis on the value, so these wines range from \$9–\$100, with most at lower prices.

BLACK STALLION CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2013 (\$20)

This Napa Valley Cabernet is an incredible value. The property sold its grapes to other wineries until the 2008 vintage, but has distinguished itself ever since. *Decanter* magazine rated the 2011 vintage tied with Joseph Phelps Insignia at nine times the price (\$180) and just one point below the Beringer Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. It is big, but lush, with overtones of red fruit (cherry). It is drinking well now, but will age and improve for 5-10 years at least. Marry this wine with beef steak, roasts, and rack of lamb.



LAMADRID RESERVA BONARDA 2013 (\$14)

Made from the Bonarda grape in Argentina, this grape is largely unknown in the U.S., but is surging in popularity in Argentina. Bonarda reminds me of a theoretical blend of Zinfandel (red) and Barbera. This wine shows ripe flavors of red and black fruit (plum and blackberry), as well as dark chocolate. With overtones of black pepper and minerality, its big finish pairs well with beef, spicy pork, lamb, and chicken. The tannins are round and soft, so while it is full-flavored, it can be easily enjoyed in summer temperatures, whereas many full-flavored alternatives show bigger, bolder tannins which are undesirable in the heat. Drink this wine over the next two years.

MONSANTO CHIANTI RISERVA 2012 (\$19)

This wine is my candidate for the best high quality/price ratio of all outstanding Chianti. It is composed of 80 percent Sangiovese and 10 percent each of Canaiolo and Colorino (all native Italian varieties). These grapes

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combine to produce a ruby red, garnet wine with an intense rich complex nose of black cherry and spice with full-bodied tannins. The taste is medium- to full-bodied, with a silky finish in spite of the tannins. This fantastic value wine goes well with roasted meats, veal chops, and will elevate pasta and pizza to their highest levels. It is important to note that all Chianti need food to be most enjoyable due to the tannic nature of the Sangiovese grape.



KIRKLAND CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA 2012 (\$9)

In the previous review of best value red wines, I listed the 2010 Villa Cafaggio Chianti Classico. If this was warranted, then surely this new choice is valid. Not only is the wine made for Costco by Villa Cafaggio, but it is the Riserva versus the normale (non-Reserva), and the price is 10 percent less than the normale. It has an herbaceous nose with sour black cherry and spice and tastes of the fruit with good acidity and spice. It is an even better wine at a lesser price and has a very loyal following. It pairs with the same foods as listed under the Monsanto review above. This wine is released once a year and sells out within a few weeks.

BODEGAS CASTAÑO, SOLANERA, VIÑAS VIEJAS 2013 (\$12)

This is an outstanding wine value. The blend is 70 percent Monastrell, 15 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, and 15 percent Granacha Tintorera from Yecla, Spain. An Eric Solomon selection, this is a very rewarding introduction to a Monastrell blend. This grape (indigenous to Spain as is Granacha) is one of my favorites and is a prominent feature in many of the world's greatest Châteauneuf-du-Papes from the Rhône. It tells of the earthiness of its terroir, as well as showing sage, pepper, and wild berry overtones. The finish is soft and smooth with just enough oak to add complexity. This wine should be consumed in the first five years and is best with steak, roasts, lamb, or spicy pork.



CHÂTEAU LA NERTHE, LES GRANARIES DE LA NERTHE CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE 2012 (\$30)

This is the best high-quality price/value ratio excellent Châteauneuf-du-Pape I have found. Although not the highest quality Châteauneuf-du-Pape, it is absolutely in a place of its own—bringing an offering from my favorite southern Rhône appellation at an affordable price. It is produced from younger vines at Château La Nerthe, and therefore can be drunk in its youth (3-10 years from vintage). The blend is 42 percent Grenache Noir, 24 percent Mouvèdre, 19 percent Cinsault, and 15 percent Syrah. It is made from organically-grown grapes from the estate. The nose shows black currant and ripe cherry, and intriguing spices. In the mouth the spices are enjoyed, as well as the fruits above. The



tannins are very round and approachable. This wine pairs well with rack of lamb, steak au poivre, spicy pork dishes, duck, hearty steak, and with many vegetarian offerings, especially ratatouille. Enjoy especially during the cold winter climate.

BODEGA CATENA ZAPATA, NICOLAS CATENA ZAPATA 2010 (\$100)



This is the flagship wine of Catena Zapata which is always predominately Cabernet Sauvignon with the remainder being Malbec. The 2010 vintage is 75 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, and 25 percent Malbec. This wine is my first choice worldwide for the best value world-class Cabernet wine. First produced in 1997, it has competed against all First Growth Bordeaux, Sassacaia, and Opus One in each vintage, and has reigned supreme in all years but one, finishing a close second in that case. Almost everyone I know who has been exposed to this wine rates it as his or her favorite. I led 18 people on a trip to Mendoza in January 2016, and we had almost all of Argentina's highest-rated wines, and this was the unanimous favorite of each.

It is big and bold with black fruits, blackberries, black cherries, and black plums mixed with dark chocolate and minerality. The wine is very complex with layers of ripe black fruits accompanied by mocha, anise, vanilla, and minerality. This is a brooding monster with substantial tannins which portends a great longevity.

This wine is a tribute to Nicolas Zapata who has two Ph.D.s in economics and was the one who pioneered the planting of Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon at very high altitudes. It is one of the world's greatest wines and as such, is an inexpensive introduction to elite and most often stratospherically priced wines (most priced at 5-10 multiples of this one.) This wine pairs best with red meat, especially grilled steaks. It will age for two decades at minimum.


In closing, I encourage you to try the above wines and hope you enjoy them as much as I do. Some are more readily available than others and some tend to show up more seasonally. Happy hunting! 



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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