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Photo: Oksana Shufrych/Shutterstock More on France We think you might also like We use cookies for analytics tracking and advertising from our partners. For more information read our privacy policy. For most people, selecting a nice bottle of wine is a daunting proposition. With an overwhelming volume of options, be it at the liquor store or when pursuing a restaurant's wine list, it can be really hard to know whether what's in the bottle will be exactly what you were expecting. You don't have to be a wine aficionado to be able to make a more informed decision, however. David Duncan, president and CEO of Silver Oak and Twomey Cellars, has decades of experience in his family vineyards and has some fantastic advice on how to select wine like a champion. Trust Your FriendsThere's solid industry data a friend's recommendation is the highest thing to trust. "If you've got a pal who said, 'Hey I drank this and loved it,' and then you see it, that's something to act upon," says Duncan. While a good fine wine shop can be helpful with suggestions, more often than not stores are trying to sell off inventory and that ulterior motive can sway their pushes. "You're better to listen to a friend. 'Forget The Wine Score'I've never been a fan of the 100 point score," Duncan says. "It's really 20 point score because nothing is ever awarded less than 80. You'll see a 92-point \$30 bottle and a 92-point \$300 bottle. Are they equivalent in quality? Probably not. That score is often wrong." Duncan points to some of his Silver Oaks 1998 vintage, which was largely panned by the scorekeepers. "Those bottles aged gracefully and they now drink beautifully. That score puts a permanence for a moment in time on a bottle that will evolve over time." Damion I. HamiltonShip Bottles Under \$20At that \$20 and under price point, across any varietal but certainly for reds, you're generally not drinking fine wine. "Buying a cabernet at the grocery store for \$12 isn't going to be great. Those are Frankenwines, doctored up from a bunch of different blends and they taste accordingly." But don't break out all the benjamins, either. "Above \$250, you're paying for a rarity, which doesn't always account for quality. I won't pay \$400 for a bottle at a restaurant because I don't want to do that," Duncan laughs. "I'll pay between \$75 and \$150 for a bottle of champagne or a really great varietal from an area I want to try." Where's the sweet spot for price? "Drink the most expensive bottle than you're willing to afford. Anywhere between \$50 and \$200, you're often getting what you pay for." Blindly Taste To Find Your Favorite Varietal Completely new to wine? Grab price-equivalent bottles of the big five varietals—cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, zinfandel, and merlot—and do a blind tasting. "Open each bottle, pair it with some hard cheese, crackers and maybe some Italian meats, and see how the food is affected by the different wines. It's a very instructive way to get started and to learn." Damion I. HamiltonTrust Your Palate Especially for newer wine drinkers, you've got to have faith in yourself. "There are enormous resources on the Internet about aroma wheels and how to learn what strawberries smells like or cigar box or whatever descriptor, and so on. Geek out as you will, but know that it takes the average consumer a little time to start to enjoy what they're tasting," says Duncan. "Most people taste beer for the first time hate it because it's bitter. Wine can be much the same." Is It "Yummy"? When it comes to tasting, Duncan's invented his own scoring system, based on the word "yummy." "The 'y' stands for 'why bother? This is flawed or just not for me and I don't like it. 'U' is for 'you may like it, but I don't. This is when a friend recommends something and you don't care for it. 'M' is for 'yum.' Now you've got a good, solid wine that you'd buy again. Add a second 'm,' and you've got something so good, you can't wait to tell everyone about it. And finally, 'yummy.' This is a wine that absolutely knocks your socks off. You want to collect it and have in your cellar for years to come." Try Shopping The New World FirstWine can be loosely divided up into the new world (California, Oregon, etc) and the old world (France, Italy, etc). "I have a bias towards California and Oregon, where we have properties," Duncan says, "But even beyond us, there's so much exciting stuff happening on the West Coast. The Russian River Valley in California is also fantastic." If you do go Old World, you'll have a lot to explore, since folks like the French have a serious time advantage for the likes of burgundy and bordeaux. "Don't try to tackle the whole wine world; it's just too much. Pick an area and explore that region." Buy Big. Literally Large format bottles are great for holidays. "Big bottles, whether they're magnums or three liters, age the wine more slowly, but they're also great crowd pleasers. Ten people opening a magnum adds to the whole joy of the occasion," says Duncan. Stick With a Vintner You TrustWhatever you buy, explore the rest of the label's offerings. "Our winemaker does a fantastic job across the board, offering up a distinct expression from all of our vineyards," says Duncan. "I love our 2016 Twomey Pinot Noir releases, our 2014 Silver Oak Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon—just released a month ago—and our Twomey Sauvignon Blanc. That's got an incredible value and we're treated to more and more Indian summers, so you can drink white wine longer." Above All, Drink What You Like"This is the most important thing: If you like something, drink the hell out of it. Enjoy it and don't let anyone else tell you otherwise. If you're a guy who likes sauvignon blanc on ice, you do you and relish that. And if ever you're in a restaurant with a sommelier who tries to tell you that you don't know what you're talking about and he or she does, stand your ground." Sean EvansDigital Director, Men's HealthSean Evans' bylines have appeared in New York Magazine, Fast Company, Conde Nast Traveler, The Drive, Entertainment Weekly, New York Daily News, and more. There's much more than truth in a great glass of red wine, especially if you ask its maker. Long is the list of variables — both environmental and human — that must align in order for a wine to become balanced, let alone outstanding enough to wind up on lists like this one. While we might feel compelled to look to older vintages when choosing the best red wines to buy now, it's important to invest in the present, too. Shopping younger vintages can be just as gratifying as the hunt for aged, harder-to-find bottles. Whether you're looking to buy a youthful, fresh red to drink right now or a bottle to hang onto for a year or 20, here are our certified sommelier-approved bottles (all released in the last four years) that'll stop you in your tracks time and time again. Courtesy of King Estate King Estate is known for some of the south Willamette Valley's best wines, and though this winery offers a wider selection of varietals than most in the area, you can never go wrong with a solid pinot noir (the region's claim to fame). The 2016 Temperance Hill is a special bottling for King Estate in that its eponymous vineyard site first became available during this vintage after being coveted for years by the team of winemakers — sitting at higher elevation than the majority of King's other vineyard blocks, Temperance Hill has been sustainably farmed since 1999 and yields stunningly complex, earthy wines, as shown by this 2016 pinot noir. Think: notes of truffle, wet forest floor, coffee, violet, rose petal, blueberry, and cocoa with bright, balancing acidity and gentle yet firm tannins. To buy: \$70, kingestate.com Courtesy of Drink PLG Over the last 20 years, winemaker Tara Gomez has steadily been rising to cult-favorite status in the business — her passion and talent run deep, and as an industry pioneer for women and fellow members of the Indigenous community, the impact Gomez has had (and continues to have) on the global wine scene is immeasurable. Kitá, which translates to "our valley oak" in the language of the Santa Ynez Chumash tribe, is a sustainable winery that produces a variety of award-winning wines. While slightly hard to come by, the 2017 Camp 4 Vineyard Grenache is a standout with beautifully intermingling notes of spice, damp earth, cocoa, coffee, ripe red fruits, and violet, bordering on savory at times. While you shop for this bottle, be sure to also check out the range of wines by Camins 2 Dreams, a boutique winery Gomez co-founded with her wife and fellow winemaker Mireia Taribó in 2017. To buy: \$44, drinkplg.com Courtesy of Total Wine For the serious collectors out there, investing in the Penfolds Quantum Bin 98 Cabernet Sauvignon is worth every penny (and every year spent waiting to uncork it). This is a pure and quintessential expression of the winery's signature style favored by major critics. A blend of grapes harvested from Australian cabernet sauvignon vines planted in Napa Valley and a small percentage of old vine Australian Shiraz, the 2018 Quantum vintage has undeniable presence and intensity. Cellar this one for at least five years before drinking. To buy: \$700, totalwine.com Courtesy of FindingWine For Piero Incisa della Rocchetta, wine runs in the family — his grandfather, Mario Incisa della Rocchetta, was the man behind the iconic Super Tuscan Sassicaia, and now Piero is fulfilling his own vinous dreams producing old-vine pinot noir in the heart of Patagonia using organic and biodynamic practices. Bodega Chacra's 2017 Treinta y Dos is an impressive, single-vineyard bottling that's very age-worthy but can certainly hold its own in the glass now after a good decant. You can expect beautiful florality and prominent black and red cherry notes in this pinot, along with finely structured tannins and distinct salinity. To buy: \$100, 67wine.com Courtesy of Wine.com There's always a time and place for big, bold Italian wines — Barolo has long been considered one of the country's top players, and historic producer Pio Cesare, which is family-owned to this day, is known for making some of Piedmont's very best. The 2017 Ornato is especially interesting in that it was the winery's first single-vineyard bottling, along with 1985 the inaugural vintage, and has gained a reputation as being Pio Cesare's most powerful wine, thanks to its intensity and structure. Like the rest of its kind, this Barolo is made from 100 percent nebbiolo, but there's a richness and concentration to Ornato that gives it a special allure. You'll want to cellar this one for at least four or five years if you purchase in 2021. To buy: \$150, wine.com Courtesy of Enoteca Properzio The story behind this stunning red blend by Frescobaldi, an iconic name in Italian wines, is just as compelling as the contents of the bottle. The small island of Gorgona is a penal colony off the coast of Livorno, and the incarcerated residents' winemaking production is a unique social reform project designed to set its participants up for success in the outside world by teaching valuable skill sets, paying living wages equal to Frescobaldi employees, and boosting overall morale, among other benefits. Not only is this operation doing the world some good — Gorgona's recidivism rate is staggeringly low — but the wine itself is delicious. The amphora-aged red wine, Gorgona Rosso, is a blend of sangiovese and vermentino nero grapes and features an ample bouquet of Mediterranean flora and rich spice, and a complex, velveteen palate that leads into a long, volcanic finish. To buy: \$257, enotecaproperzio.com The world of California cabernet is vast, but it's not difficult to find a winery or bottle that stands out from the crowd. Over the past few years, Realm Cellars has amassed a cult following as a consistent top-quality producer with an edge, driven by winemaker Benoit Touquette (a Bordeaux native) and known primarily for its single-vineyard releases, artistic collaborations, and exclusive members' club. Touquette's Bordeaux-style Bard blend is an excellent entry point for those new to his wines (and a treat for the familiar), and the 2018 vintage — a great year for Napa and the North Coast AVA as a whole — is a phenomenally high-value buy. This wine is big and enveloping with deep, dark red and black fruits, delicate florality, and incredible complexity, a cabernet-dominant powerhouse perfect for grilled meats, wild mushrooms, pungent cheeses, cream sauces, and more. You'll want to hang onto the 2018 Realm Cellars Bard for at least a few years, but if you're on the hunt for one to open now, go for the 2011 or older. To buy: \$160, totalwine.com With nearly a century of winemaking under its belt, Domaine Ghislaine Barthod is regarded as a legend in the Chambolle-Musigny area of Burgundy's Côte-d'Or. Ghislaine Barthod, protégé of the house's founder and previous winemaker Gaston Barthod (her father), has a knack for drawing out the purest expression of her pinot noir grapes and the soils on which they were grown. Les Bons Batons is a special wine, sourced from and named for a standout parcel on the house's estate, the 2017 and 2018 vintages being particular favorites within the sommelier community. It's medium in body and is incredibly earthy on both the nose and palate, offering striking minerality and structured tannins with notes of bright cherry, raspberry, and silky spice leading into a beautifully balanced, lingering finish. Drink it now if you'd like, or cellar this bottle for up to 10 years from its vintage. To buy: \$48, slopecellars.com Courtesy of Astor Wines If you're on the hunt for a truly outstanding Rioja, look to one of the region's oldest and most highly respected wineries for consistently excellent expressions of the iconic northern Spanish blend. Marques de Murrieta's 2010 Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva is a particularly impressive one, comprising Tempranillo and Mazuelo grapes for an award-winning, top-tier Rioja that's traditional in composition yet still surprising on the nose and palate. The classic dusty, spicy quality is ever-present among notes of funky, earthy cheese, tobacco, vanilla, and deep plum with graceful-yet-firm tannins. While this wine can sit in your cellar for up to three or four decades, it's a fun and youthful delight to open right now. To buy: \$206, wine-searcher.com Courtesy of Ventisquero Wine Club For fans of Syrah and Shiraz, Chile is a great place to explore, bringing another dimension to the grape's personality outside of what most know and love about the more commonly found French and Australian varietals. Look to Ventisquero's Pangea Syrah for an exemplary representation of the Colchagua Valley, a deep inky purple wine with plenty of black fruits on the nose and palate, accented by notes of black pepper, fresh herbs, and dark chocolate. Serve this wine with roasted or grilled lamb for a crowd-pleasing pairing. To buy: \$59, ventisquerowineclub.com Courtesy of Astor Wines Pioneering winemaker Ntsiki Biyela is the force behind Western Cape gem Aslina, which has become a favorite among global fans of South African wines. The country's first Black female winemaker, Biyela has received countless awards for her work over the years, with her signature Bordeaux-style blend Umsasane taking home the bulk of Aslina's recognitions (and for good reason). The 2019 release is full and round in body with a warming bouquet and palate of ripe dark fruits, cocoa, baking spices, aged vanilla, and subtle tobacco. To buy: \$30, astorwines.com Historic winery Château de Beaucastel is a must for any Châteauneuf-du-Pape drinker, especially fans of biodynamic winemaking practices (this producer was one of the first to embrace biodynamic methods back in the 1970s when the concept initially mainstreamed in France). Beaucastel's 2018 vintage is a top-rated blend of six different Châteauneuf-du-Pape grapes, each of which is vinified individually (as opposed to undergoing co-fermentation), and the resulting wine from this year is a classic and cellar-worthy representation of the AOC, while also bringing a bit of allure to the table with deep, dark notes of cola, black currant, ripe blueberry, licorice, cracked pepper, and chocolate-dipped plums. To buy: \$100 (originally \$125), michaeltownwines.com Thanks for your feedback!

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