

Value Brands of the Year

Great wine doesn't need to cost a bundle. These 39 brands prove it. Each one of them boasts multiple recommendations for wines that cost \$18 or less, all standouts among the 14,000-plus wines we've tasted over the last 12 months. We've presented them by country, along with stats from three years of our blind tastings. Here are the brands and regions to check out for great buys.



44,649 Wines tasted last three years



7.9% \$18 and under recommended

Old World
10.0%

New World
8.5%

US
4.1%

Top Three Countries for Value

1.  Greece

2.  Portugal

3.  Spain


Top Sparkling Wine Region for Value



Cava, Spain

Top Ten Regions for Value

(with more than 100 wines tasted over the past three years)

-  Vinho Verde, Portugal
-  Jerez, Spain
-  Central Greece
-  Peloponnese, Greece
-  Crete, Greece
-  Southwest France
-  Abruzzo, Italy
-  Cafayate, Argentina
-  Beaujolais, France
-  Sardinia, Italy

Top Five Mega-Regions for Value

(with more than 500 wines tasted over the past three years)

-  Languedoc-Roussillon, France
-  Rhône, France
-  Veneto, Italy
-  Rioja, Spain
-  Loire, France

US: CALIFORNIA

Blue-chip regions like Napa and Sonoma may have built California's reputation, but the California wines on grocery store shelves are more likely grown in the Central Valley, its fertile but parched soil irrigated by a massive water distribution network that also facilitates much of the country's nut, fruit and vegetable crops.

As the stats on the right show, it's not easy to find a California wine that's both interesting and inexpensive. The wineries that stand out as reliable brands for value-priced wines may irrigate and machine harvest, but they tend to focus more carefully on their fruit, making a concerted effort to match site to variety, growing the grapes themselves or purchasing grapes directly from growers rather than hoping for the best in the unreliable bulk market.

Take the relatively new Line 39 brand as an example. The winemaking team eschews the warmer portions of the Central Valley for its pinot noir and chardonnay program, working instead with growers in the cooler Clarksburg region along the delta that flows into San Francisco Bay, as well as in the wind-cooled Salinas Valley that leads inland from Monterey Bay—California's other volume powerhouse. The 2013 Pinot Noir is especially impressive, with clean red fruit that feels like true pinot noir. For \$11 a bottle, that's pretty hard to accomplish.

Two of this year's California value brands, McManis and Bogle, are family wineries founded by large Central Valley growers. The Bogle family's wines are based around the 1,700-plus acres they farm themselves in Clarksburg as well as some long-term grower contracts. Bogle has been a reliable performer at our tasting table of late, the wines showing clear and clean varietal character, particularly in the bold 2012 Petite Sirah and the savory 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon.

The McManis family, meanwhile, farms eight sites in the Central Valley. While their River Junction Vineyard is in the center of the valley, at the confluence of the Stanislaus and San Joaquin Rivers, it's tempered by cooler air that settles near the river channels. River Junction's unique climate and sandy loam soils earned it recognition as its own AVA in 2001 and it turns out to be an especially good spot for viognier. It grew a 2013 that's rich and earthy, lasting on varietally true scents of jasmine and apricot.

Finally, Courtney Benham's eponymous label benefits from being a side project of the larger Martin Ray winery. It's an opportunistic project that allows winemaker Bill Batchelor to pick up interesting and sometimes inexpensive lots of fruit that don't fit with the Martin Ray brand. The crisp 2013 Central Coast Chardonnay comes from a vineyard in Paso Robles—a region not exactly known for chardonnay. Lucca, meanwhile, is a kitchen sink blend that changes each year. Brambly and flavorful, the 2013

is based on barbera from Mendocino, with some zinfandel and petite sirah and even a couple barrels of declassified Stags Leap District merlot.

—LUKE SYKORA



Bogle Vineyards, Clarksburg, CA

2012 California Petite Sirah (89 pts., \$12, 2/15)

2012 California Cabernet Sauvignon (88 pts., \$12, 12/14)



Courtney Benham, Santa Rosa, CA

2013 Central Coast Unoaked Chardonnay (88 pts., \$15, 2/15)

2013 North Coast Lucca Red (87 pts., \$15, 2/15)



Line 39, Parlier, CA

2013 California Pinot Noir (88 pts., \$11, 4/15)

2013 California Chardonnay (85 pts., \$11, 4/15)



McManis Family Winery, Ripon, CA

2013 California Viognier (88 pts., \$10, 12/14)

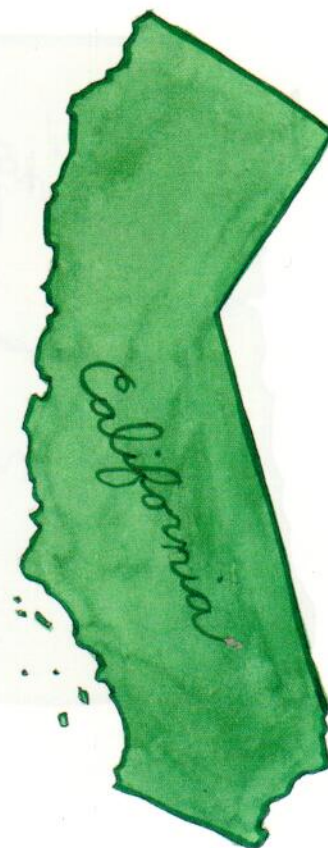
2013 California Petite Sirah (85 pts., \$11, 12/14)

US: PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Despite the recent explosion of vineyards in places like Red Mountain and the Walla Walla Valley, land in Washington's vast Columbia Valley remains plentiful and relatively cheap. It's an ideal place for vines: Sunny, dry summers and a well-developed irrigation infrastructure bring consistent harvests of ripe, healthy grapes.

Well-established subregions like the Wahluke Slope and the Horse Heaven Hills continue to turn out some of the best values in the United States. The latter appellation is where Don and Linda Mercer planted wine grapes on their property 40 years ago, including the prized parcel now known as Champoux Vineyard. For their Canyons Riesling, however, the family sources fruit from cooler sites in the Yakima Valley, Spring Creek and Brooks vineyards, for a bracing white wine that consistently ranks as a top-value riesling in these pages.

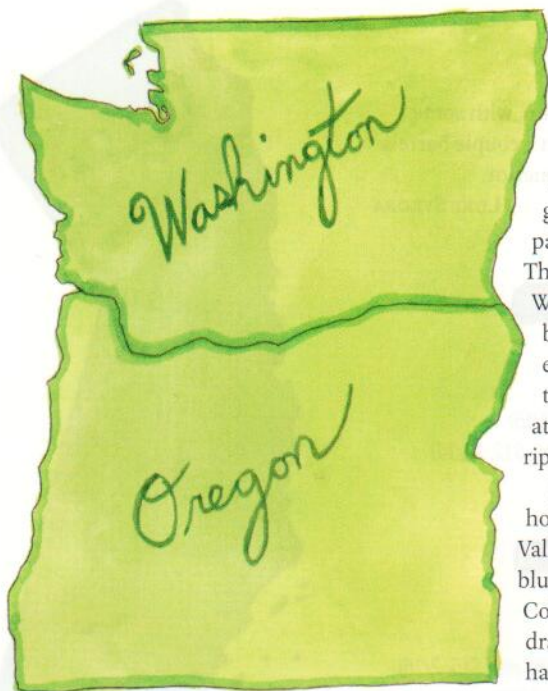
Chateau Ste. Michelle is the state's oldest winery, with its roots in fruit wine and hybrid-grape production in the years leading out of Prohibition. The



US Value Stats:

% OF WINES RECOMMENDED \$18 & UNDER:

New York:	11.5%
Washington State:	6.5%
Oregon:	5.4%
California:	3.3%



company now owns 3,500 acres of vineyards in the Columbia Valley and partners with many other independent growers, giving the winery an incredible palette of fruit sources to draw on. They are responsible for some of Washington's best bang-for-buck blends, and are the largest producer of riesling in the world. It's hard to beat the Harvest Select Riesling at \$10, its off-dry apple flavors rippling with acidity.

Most of L'Ecole N° 41's estate holdings are in the Walla Walla Valley, and provide the fruit for their blue-chip cabernet blends. But their Columbia Valley appellation wines, drawn from all corners of the state, have also developed a solid reputation over the last 25-plus years.

This past year, the brand's whites caught our eye: a refreshing chenin derived from four vineyards in Yakima, all dating to the late '70s, and an elegant, amber-hued semillon with juicy, leesy breadth.

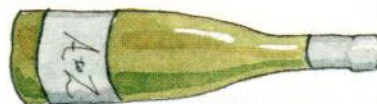
Oregon real estate is still a bargain compared with California; this accounts in part for the wave of California wineries expanding into Willamette Valley. But viticulture in the Willamette, focused on pinot noir, remains an expensive prospect in this challenging environment; many of the vineyards are on lower-yielding hillsides, and the cool climate doesn't deliver maximum abundance. Elsewhere in the state, however—in the Rogue, Umpqua and Applegate Valleys, and on the Oregon side of the Walla Walla Valley—the climate is warmer and drier, the terroirs more forgiving.

King Estate, based in Eugene, and A to Z Wineworks in Dundee utilize fruit from the entire state, which allows them to blend from a variety of climates to create wines that are satisfying and impressively complex, with an enviable consistency. A to Z's 2013 whites—a chardonnay, riesling and pinot gris—are particularly refreshing in their vibrancy and crisp, clear flavors.

But perhaps the best-value white from Oregon came from King Estate: the 2012 Signature Collection chardonnay, a savory steal at \$16. This year's Signature Chardonnay was an anomaly, drawn almost entirely from a single Yamhill-Carlton vineyard, Gran Moraine. In a warm vintage it delivered plenty of forward fruit and a leesy, savory side that could please even the most picky Burgundophile.

—PATRICK J. COMISKEY

Oregon



A to Z Wineworks, Newberg, OR

2013 Oregon Chardonnay (88 pts., \$14, 10/14)

2013 Oregon Riesling (87 pts., \$15, 8/14)



King Estate Winery, Eugene, OR

2012 Oregon Signature Collection Chardonnay

(93 pts., \$16, 10/14)

2013 Oregon Pinot Gris (90 pts., \$12, 8/14)

Washington



Chateau Ste. Michelle, Woodinville, WA

2012 Columbia Valley Indian Wells Cabernet Sauvignon

(88 pts., \$18, 6/15)

2013 Columbia Valley Harvest Select Sweet Riesling

(87 pts., \$10, 12/14)



L'Ecole N° 41, Lowden, WA

2013 Columbia Valley Old Vines Chenin Blanc

(91 pts., \$16, 10/14)

2013 Columbia Valley Semillon (89 pts., \$15, 4/15)



Mercer Wine Estates, Prosser, WA

2013 Yakima Valley Canyons Riesling (88 pts., \$10, 12/14)

2013 Columbia Valley Estates Chardonnay (86 pts., \$13, 12/14)

US: NEW YORK

It's not cheaper to make wine in the Finger Lakes than in any other American viticultural region east of the Rockies. Yet many of the best bottlings from the Finger Lakes—and they can be exceptional, particularly the rieslings—can be had for \$20 or less. And the vineyards tend to be owned by the producers themselves; until quite recently it was rare for would-be winemakers to start a venture *without* an estate vineyard. Nearly all of the wine produced at Knapp Winery on Cayuga Lake, according to owner Gene Pierce, comes from estate sources, which might help explain the winery's sure footing. Pierce founded one of the region's original vinifera wineries, Glenora, back in 1977, and he adds another explanation

