

VINEPAIR

The 50 Best Wines of 2019

BY VINEPAIR STAFF



illustration: LAUREN CIERZAN

It's been another wine-filled year at the VinePair HQ, and while the months passed by in a blur, 50 bottles stood out above the rest and etched a place in our memories. To help readers enter the new year (and decade!) with a list of wonderful experiences to discover with a glass in hand, we're sharing our top 50 wines of 2019.

As in previous years, this annual ranking tells a story in 50 bottles. These labels are not only the wines we enjoyed the most over the past 12 months; they're what we consider to represent the most important trends in wine right now.

Leading the conversation is the class and quality offered by American Chardonnay. The days of "anything but Chardonnay" became a distant memory when we tasted the bottles of several domestic producers, who are highlighting the wonders and nuance of the world's most popular white variety.

As the months went on, we became increasingly excited about Spanish wines, especially those from less explored regions, grapes, and producers. Our staff, panelists, and wine director agree Spain is currently offering some of the best value for money, and most exciting drinking experiences right now.

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It's also been a year of triumphant comebacks from grapes that, but for the noble work of a few producers, could have become extinct. Italy more than any other nation proved notably nostalgic in this respect.

All wines in this ranking were first sampled and reviewed by VinePair's tasting department. We then compiled a "short list" of bottles that received an A+ or A rating, and whittled that list down to 50 wines using multiple criteria.

All bottles must be readily available in the U.S., offer great value for money, and be drinking well right now. None of the wines from last year's list could be considered for inclusion, and we placed a limit of one bottle per winery.

The VinePair staff then debated, and debated again where each bottle should place. We finally tasted the potential top 10 multiple times to cement our final ranking.



#1 CHATEAU MONTELENA NAPA VALLEY CHARDONNAY 2016

Though its history stretches back to the late 19th century, Chateau Montelena is best known for the success of its Napa Valley Chardonnay during the now-legendary 1976 Judgement of Paris blind tasting. Deemed by a group of (mainly) French judges to be the best Chardonnay of 10 bottles from California and Burgundy, the victory signified a coming-of-age for America's wine industry, helping place Napa Valley on the map of the world's finest wine regions. Produced on the 40th anniversary of that historic event, Chateau Montelena's 2016 Napa Valley Chardonnay shows that the estate is continuing to operate at the highest level. It offers a blueprint for what oaked American Chardonnay should taste like—beyond butter. Instead, elegance and power shine through in the grape's mineral-driven flavors of fresh melon, apple, and honeysuckle. Meanwhile, careful and considered oak aging provides nutmeg notes and a soft, creamy texture. Buy this wine and raise a glass to the past, present, and future of Napa winemaking.