

The Top 10 Wines of 2022, from \$35 to \$35,000

Columnist Elin McCoy sampled 2,481 wines this year. These are the very best she tried, across a range of regions and grape varieties.

(Bloomberg) -- At the end of the year, I flip through my tasting notebooks with nostalgia, recalling all the wonderful wines I've sampled. Singling out the most memorable for my top 10 is never simple. I was lucky enough to taste brilliant wines from 21 countries in 2022, including retrospectives of the California cabernets and chardonnays from estates celebrating 50th and 60th anniversaries, as well as plenty of legendary classics from Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Portugal and Australia. In the mix were reds, whites, rosés and bubblys from lesser-known regions and grapes (completer, petite arvine, areni noir), and many from wineries firmly committed to a green wine future, which looms more important than ever. Many of them wowed me, but those I prized most reminded me that a great wine experience is always about more than what's in the glass. My 10 highlights range from the old to the new, the familiar to the esoteric, the classic to the experimental. They include a bargain Armenian bubbly made from a local red grape, a historic Bordeaux made while World War II raged, a surprising white from an under-the-radar wine country, and the world's ultimate red Burgundy. All reflect what's important in today's wine world and where it's headed in the years ahead.

2017 Keush Ultra Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (\$35) My discovery of the year is this light, zesty, crisp and mineral bubbly made from areni noir grapes in Armenia, whose winemaking tradition goes back 6,100 years. The unusual, super-dry fizz was cooling in an ice bucket on a table of platinum awardwinners from the Texsom wine competition at the Grand Tasting during the organization's annual wine conference, where I was speaking. I was impressed from the first sip. Founder Vahe Keushguerian makes it with the same method used in Champagne. The grapes, a local red variety, grow in vineyards at an elevation of 6,000 feet on land that sits between Armenian and Azerbaijani military bases. The lesson? Good bubbly now comes from even the planet's most surprising spots.

2016 Tasca d'Almerita Regaleali Rosso del Conte (\$70) First made in 1970, the latest vintage of this powerful yet elegant Sicilian red, a blend of native Nero d'Avola and perricone grapes, was a reminder that you don't have to spend huge bucks to obtain an historic wine with serious aging potential. My bargain of the year is compelling, with flavors of crushed tart cherries and hints of mint and spice. In May, over lunch at New York's Marea with Alberto Tasca, I sampled vintages of it along with the rare, more expensive riserva version. Yes, the latter was deeper and richer, but this regular release is irresistible right now, and it will age well, too.

2005 Tyrrell's Winemaker's Selection Vat 1 Semillon (\$98, for 2006) Leading Australian family estate Tyrrell's is the most famous producer of aged Hunter Valley whites from the golden-skinned semillon grape, which are some of the world's great white wines. Bursting with smoke and honey aromas and deep, rich, spreading flavors, this vintage of the powerful white vied with the 2006 at a tasting of seven vintages with winemaker Bruce Tyrrell. It's one of the most profound examples of sémillon I've ever sampled. The 2005 isn't available, but close contender 2006 can be had for under \$100 a bottle.

2018 Donatsch Completer 2018 (\$115) Switzerland has long been under-the-radar as a wine country, but its wines deserve not to be. That was my takeaway from a fascinating tasting and lunch at the Swiss Residence in New York with Consul General Markus Borlin. All eight wines poured were new to me—and stunning, but this white, made by one of the country's top wineries from completer, an ancient wild native variety, really grabbed my attention. Lush and full-bodied, with pure rich citrusy fruit, it had many of the same qualities as a white Burgundy.

2018 Il Caggio Ipsus Chianti Classico Gran Selezione (\$350) A big part of what makes a wine memorable is sharing it with people you love, especially when everyone says "Wow" after the first sip. Over dinner in Montreal with my son and daughter-in-law, we savored the third vintage of this ambitious, pomegranate-scented, smooth and silky Chianti, one of the most exciting new wines to come out of Italy in the past decade. The organic estate at Il Caggio is Giovanni Mazzei's personal project; his noble family produces well-known Super Tuscan Siepi.

1967 Bertani Amarone (\$375) First, a confession: I've never been a huge Amarone fan, with infrequent exceptions. Andrea Lonardi, the winemaker at the Bertani estate, set out to educate me by illustrating style variations in Amarone over eight vintages at New York restaurant the Modern. The deep, powerful 1967, with its intense flavors of orange peel, dried figs and gingerbread hints revealed just how succulent, fresh and energetic Amarone can be—even after 50 years! It showed



what Lonardi calls “Italian soul.” Sometimes it takes the right bottle to make you see a whole category of wine in a different light. 1996 Ridge Vineyards Monte Bello Cabernet (\$485) My pick for the best and longest-lived California cabernet is Ridge’s Monte Bello from the Santa Cruz Mountains, so there was no way I would miss the winery’s 60th anniversary lunch at Gramercy Tavern in New York. We sampled older vintages of their other wines, but the six Monte Bello cabernets, starting with 1964, were the stars. This dense yet mellow 1996, with its perfect balance, scents of cedar, cigars, truffles and spice, and gorgeous deep-berry core of flavor, was my favorite to drink right now. It has the power and structure of a top Bordeaux but remains a true American classic. 2004 Dom Perignon P2 Plénitude Brut (\$500) The glitzy Grand Salon at New York’s Baccarat Hotel, where shimmering light bounces off crystal chandeliers, was the perfect place match to taste the latest edition of this extra-aged grand bubbly; they echoed one another. Dom Perignon sets aside bottles from each vintage to release years later under the “plénitude” designation. I tasted the 2004, in its “second life” as P2, with chef de cave Vincent Chaperon. This vivid, exuberant bottling has wonderful complexity and a rich combo of mandarin orange fruit notes and smoky minerals. 1944 **Chateau le Puy** Emilien (\$14,244) Wine writers flew to New York from Paris and Brazil for Château Le Puy’s epic “Century of Wine” tasting in October. The lineup of 20 vintages started with the 1921 and ended with a barrel sample of the 2021. The surprise was how delicious even the 50- to 100-year-old wines were, especially as the 400-year-old estate, a leader in biodynamic viticulture, isn’t in a prestigious Bordeaux appellation. This 1944 stood out for me. It’s deep flavored and lush, with the flavors of pure sweet fruit and the sensual texture of a Burgundy. But it was also a nostalgic taste of history. It’s the only vintage of Le Puy made by a woman, the winemaker’s wife, who remained at the helm as war ravaged France. 2019 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Romanée-Conti (\$35,000) I’ll admit it. Great red Burgundy is my wine weakness. This year, the annual prerelease tasting of Domaine de la Romanée Conti’s 10 wines was a special, poignant occasion at which the influential, modest Aubert de Villaine, co-manager of the estate for nearly a half-century, announced his retirement. This vintage of DRC’s most famous grand cru, from a tiny 1.8-hectare vineyard, was my high point; it’s everything a red Burgundy should be—and more: Vivid and fresh, it brims with aromas of faded roses, seductive complex flavors and unusual power and density. The price, sadly, makes it a billionaire’s tipple. Is it worth it? Well, remember that Romanée-Conti is the greatest red Burgundy of all. ©2022 Bloomberg L.P.

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