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Pursuits | Year in Review

The 50 Best Wines Under \$50 From Our Critic, Who Tasted 4,223

Our annual global tour of good value wines now includes nonalcoholic ones, too.

By Elin McCoy
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I know. There's a lot out there to make price-sensitive wine lovers shiver, not least of all inflation and the Trump administration's looming threat of tariffs.

Yet, when I thumbed through my tasting books for 2024, I was once again surprised by how many wines are still relative bargains: succulent, savory reds; crisp, elegant whites; juicy rosés; and even sophisticated sparklers are among the 4,223 wines from 20 countries I sampled this year. I ferreted out some on international trips, others at big importer portfolio tastings or meetings with producers in New York, still others during daily tastings in my home office in Connecticut.

Out of these I culled this year's 50 good buys. As always, I've favored wines that are new or from producers I haven't recommended before. That meant not including many labels that reliably offer excellent value in this price range, such as Massican, Matthiasson and Tablas Creek in California, Champagnes such as Lanson Le Black, Piper Heidsieck and Drappier Carte d'Or, and many, many more.

Most difficult is finding Champagne at this price point. The good news is that the holiday season is prime time for discounts on even top fizz names; the last quarter of the year is when sales spike. So, stock up, in case tariffs do become a reality in 2025.

Where to look for other bargains?

The story is the same as it's been for several years. Italy is at the top for me, with good values in almost every region. France is a close second. Look in Alsace, Macon, the Loire Valley, Muscadet and the Languedoc, and don't forget lesser names in Bordeaux, where producers I've recommended before, like Château Siran, Cantemerle, Tour Saint Christophe and Bellefont Belcier, haven't raised prices even though their wines just keep getting better. Fair warning: Some regions that used to be the source of cheap quaffing vino, like Beaujolais, are now taken seriously, which means prices go up.

Portugal is a growing source of super dry table wines, especially from fascinating grapes people are just learning about. Sauvignon blancs from New Zealand, Chile and elsewhere, which I've written about this year, are still buys, and two other whites—albariño and vermentino—are gaining traction.

Finally, shop around and compare prices. That's what wine-searcher.com is for.

Whites

From light, bright aperitifs to refrigerator sipping to elegant, rich wines for a grand dinner

2022 Knights Bridge Pont de Chevalier Chardonnay (\$50)

Golden in color, this citrus-toned, richly textured white is from the coldest site on this excellent, and a bit under-the-radar estate in Sonoma's Knight's Valley. This is their second-tier quality level; their entry-level KB wines are also super buys, as is their Pont de Chevalier sauvignon blanc.

