

December 30, 2016



WEEKLY WINE INTEL  
FROM KAREN MACNEIL

SUBSCRIBE

2016 **WINES** OF THE **YEAR** SPECIAL EDITION

## The Top Ten Wines of the Year

Great wines take us places. Sometimes literally. But always emotionally. This is what makes wine the enormous gift that it is. Over the last year, I've had the pleasure of drinking many stunning wines. Here are the ten that stood out the most for me in 2016. I hope some of them will be in your future.

WINE  
OF THE  
YEAR

### BIG TABLE FARM

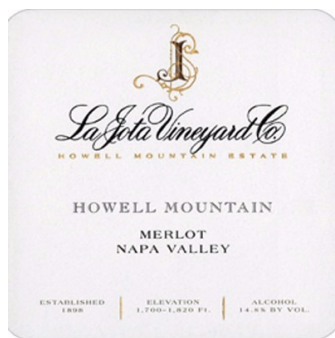
**"Elusive Queen" Chardonnay 2014**  
(Willamette valley, Oregon) \$85

*Big Table Farm's Chardonnay is my pick for Wine of the Year—not only because it is an amazing wine (which it is). But also because, in a sea of utterly ordinary chardonnay, it reminds us just how inspiring artisanal chardonnay can be. Here's my review from our October 14th edition.*

To say that this chardonnay is closer to great white Burgundy than any other American wine I have ever tasted is true; but it may not give the wine enough credit, for Elusive Queen is an otherworldly ascent into complexity and hedonism. The wine, rich and languorous, seems held together by shimmers of energy. The golden flavors, laced with minerals, are impeccable and intriguing. This is not a typical chardonnay; this is exquisite and daring music.

98 points KM

Available at [Big Table Farm](#)

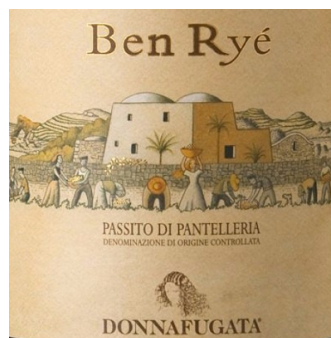


**LA JOTA**  
**Merlot 2013**  
 (Howell Mountain, Napa Valley,  
 California) \$85

Atomic density is the middle name of wines from Howell Mountain, and this La Jota Merlot is no exception.

It thunders out of the glass with vividness, intensity, and astonishing precision. What is most remarkable, however, is that the wine also possesses a sense of beauty and ease. For a merlot born in fierce volcanic mountain rock, it is surprisingly robed by soft finesse.

**SEND WINESPEED  
 TO A FRIEND**



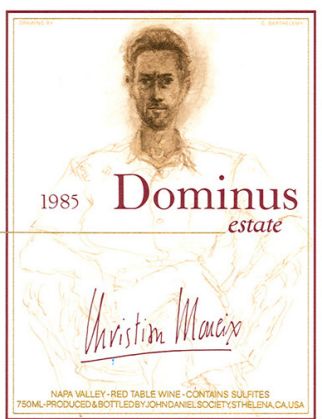
**DONNAFUGATA**  
**"Ben Ryé" Passito di  
 Pantelleria 2014**  
 (Pantelleria, Italy) \$40 (375  
 ml)

A masterpiece of beauty, Ben Ryé (the name means "son of the wind") is one of the most exquisite, artisanal and rare wines in the world—a wine that isn't so much sweet as it is rich (and devastatingly delicious with hard cheese). It's made from zibibbo grapes on the windswept volcanic island of Pantelleria off the coast of Tunisia. Half of the grapes are laid out by hand on mats to dry in the sun for several weeks. The resulting wine—langorous and almost neon orange—must be tasted to be believed.



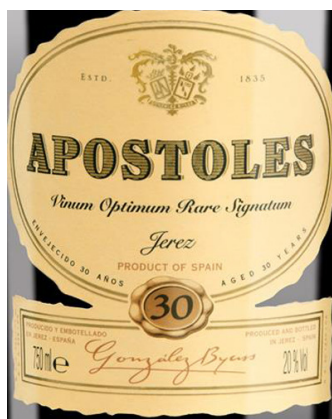
**KONGSGAARD**  
**The Judge Chardonnay  
 2013**  
 (Napa Valley, California) \$175

The 2013 vintage of Kongsgaard's "The Judge" may well be the only chardonnay in Napa Valley with a waiting list as long as the ones for the cabernet sauvignons from superstars Harlan and Colgin. A mere three hundred thirty cases are made (hence the price). The Judge is unlike any California chardonnay I have ever experienced. The flavor equivalent of a tightly woven golden-colored tapestry, it is a wine of unbelievable textural sumptuousness with long lines of intensity punctuated by pinpoint spots of what can only be described as energy.



**DOMINUS**  
Red Wine 1985  
(Napa Valley, California) \$200

A thought in honor of Valentine's Day: like wine, love might just get better with time. As for this Dominus, there was no question. In fact, it was one of the most sensational cabernets I've tasted in many years. At 30 years old, it was nothing short of ballet-like, moving over the palate in magical choreography. The flavors—echoes of spices, pipe tobacco and deep forest undergrowth—were straight out of the Bordeaux playbook. Indeed, this early Dominus was made by Jean-Claude Berrouet, former winemaker for Chateau Petrus. Inimitable.



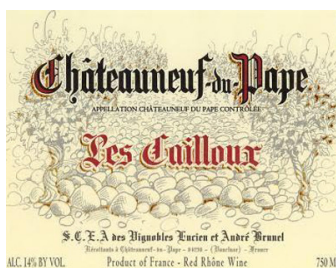
**GONZÁLEZ BYASS**  
"Apóstoles"  
Very Old Rare Sherry  
(Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, Spain)  
\$50 (375ml)

Because it is International Sherry Week, I couldn't resist telling you about Apóstoles, one of the most wildly seductive Sherries in existence. It comes from a solera set up in 1862, and only very small amounts are bottled (in half bottles) every year. The color of burnt oranges with a neon green tinge at the edge, Apóstoles tastes of dark roasted nuts, tangerine rind, brown butter, sea salt, crème brûlée, and caramel. The flavors are so vivid and concentrated, they have an almost gravitational pull on the taster. The texture is pure satin. Sherries such as Apóstoles are primordial in their appeal, and no wine lover should miss them. Drink this slightly chilled as an aperitif on a cold night.

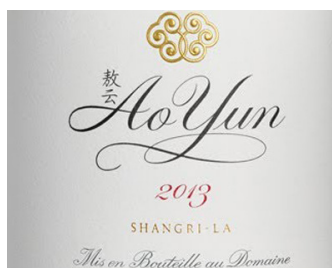


**MUGA**  
"Prado Enea" Gran Reserva  
2005  
(Rioja, Spain) \$50

Muga (which I've drunk for 25 years) is one of the top producers of traditionally-styled Rioja. These are wines evocative of rich coffee, old leather-bound books, unlit cigars, cool dirt, spicy incense, and a subtle sweet vanilla-cherry character that is mind-blowingly delicious. Primarily a blend of tempranillo and garnacha, Prado Enea is an utterly silky Gran Reserva that spends four years in barrels of different sizes, before being aged by the bodega for another three years in bottle. It tastes like it costs twice as much as it does, and is a wine that invites surrender.



**DOMAINE LES CAILLOUX by**  
**ANDRÉ BRUNEL**  
"Les Cailloux" Châteauneuf-du-  
Pape 2013



**AO YUN 2013**  
(Shangri-La, China) \$280  
Just now released, this is



**WISTON ESTATE**  
**Blanc de Blancs 2010**  
(South Downs, United  
Kingdom) \$60

(Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Rhône Valley, France) \$55

Great Châteauneuf-du-Pape has a lushness and beauty that is show stopping. And Les Cailloux ("The Round Rocks") from the Brunel family is one of the best.

Penetrating and intense, it rides on rich waves of ripe dark fruits, violets, and white peppery spice. There's a wildness and energy to this wine, as if something untamed was suddenly unleashed. But there's also exquisite finesse. Wines of this distinctiveness, at this price, should not be missed.

— BUY THE —  
WINE BIBLE

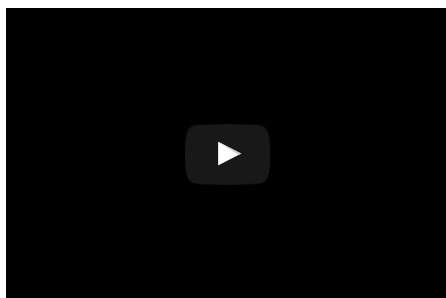


the first vintage of Ao Yun, the Chinese cabernet sauvignon from Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton. Made from vineyards at 8,000 feet on the edge of Tibet in the Himalayas, the story of the creation of Ao Yun is straight out of Indiana Jones (Among other things the wine was made without the benefit of electricity or running water). The intensely earthy, chocolatey wine is black and deep—not just in color—but in character. Drinking it makes you feel like you've been pulled down into the dark body of the earth itself. Despite the wine's power, structure and full body, it also has a freshness and sense of aliveness. A new chapter in the book of cabernet has just been written. Extremely limited production.

Britain's sparkling wine vineyards sit in the same limestone soils, in the same geological strata, from the same era, as do the vineyards of Champagne. No surprise then, that the best UK sparklers are immaculate wines of finesse and precision. The utterly delicious Wiston Estate 2010 Blanc de Blancs has a wonderful "starched" crispness, and aromas reminiscent of seashells and lemon meringue. It's delicate and pure. It feels like one is drinking snowflakes.

## THE WINE CLIP

### Why I Drink Champagne



## VERBATIM

"The pop of the cork should sound like a gunshot with a silencer."

--Clovis Taittinger,  
Taittinger Champagne

# TELL US!

Thank you WineSpeed Readers!

This has been WineSpeed's first full year, and we've been overwhelmed by the positive response we've received from you. Please keep your comments coming. We want to know what you like best and what you like least. And what you want more of. You can reach me at [karen@karenmacneil.com](mailto:karen@karenmacneil.com).

--Thank you so very much, Karen & the WineSpeed Team

SUBSCRIBE TO WINESPEED



[Forward to Friend](#)

Share:    

[Privacy](#) | [Terms](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © 2016 [Karen MacNeil & Co.](#), All rights reserved.

[unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)