

RECOMMENDATIONS

★★★★ Exceptional
★★ Excellent ★ Very Good

A few weeks ago, I wrote about two wines made with the pinot gris grape in the Italian “grigio” style — racy, refreshing and light. The “greatest” of this week’s Great Values is a pinot gris from Réthoré Davy in the Loire Valley, a region not known for the grape. It shows a rich style more familiar from Alsace, with its coppery color from extended skin contact (the gris in pinot gris is a dusky purple, much darker than other white grapes) and a mouthfeel that calls for pairing it with substantial foods.

GREAT VALUE
Réthoré Davy Pinot Gris 2017
★★★★
Loire Valley, France, \$15
Here is a rich version of pinot gris. It’s not the crisp, refreshing version the grape gets as pinot grigio. This is full-bodied, rich and complex, with flavors of baked apples,

poached pears and baking spices. Not that it’s sweet — just rich because of skin contact in fermentation in a “natural” style. This is a white wine suitable to pair with winter braises and stews, as well as seafood. Alcohol by volume: 12.5 percent.

Imported and distributed by Simon N Cellars; Available in Virginia at Leesburg Vintner in Leesburg, Tastings of Charlottesville and Wine Warehouse in Charlottesville, Unwined (Alexandria, Bellevue).

Donnafugata Floramundi Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2016
★★★★
Sicily, Italy, \$31
Nero d’Avola is a red grape almost exclusively grown in Sicily. It can make delicious wines that resemble a lithe version of syrah. Intense aromas of flowers and herbs rise from the glass. This has what wine lovers call “lift” in that it seems to levitate, not just the flavors but also the spirits of those drinking it. Absolutely lovely. ABV: 13 percent.

Imported by Folio Fine Wine Partners, distributed by M. Touton Selections; Available in the District at Ace Beverage, Eye Street Cellars, Rodman’s. Available in Maryland at Apple Greene Wine & Spirits in Dunkirk; Franklins Restaurant, Brewery and

General Store in Hyattsville; Old Farm Liquors in Frederick; Port of Call Liquors in Solomons.

GREAT VALUE
Donnafugata Sherazade Nero d’Avola 2017
★★★★
Sicily, \$22
This wine has notes of smoked meat, blueberry and wild herbs that conjure a different story with every sip. ABV: 13 percent.

Imported by Folio Fine Wine Partners, distributed by M. Touton Selections; Available in the District at Capitol Hill Wine and Spirits, Eye Street Cellars, Morris Miller Wine & Liquor, Rodman’s. Available in Maryland at Apple Greene Wine & Spirits in Dunkirk; Bradley Food & Beverage and Georgetown Square Wine and Beer in Bethesda; Chesapeake Market & Deli in North Beach; Crescent Beer & Wine in Bowie; Franklins Restaurant, Brewery and General Store in Hyattsville; Old Farm Liquors and Riverside Liquors in Frederick; Olde Solomon’s Wine & Spirits in Edgewater; Port of Call Liquors in Solomons; Total Discount Liquor in Eldersburg; on the list at Cristina Ristorante Italiano in Wheaton, Harvest Thyme Tavern in Davidsonville, Il Pizzico in Gaithersburg.

GREAT VALUE
Domaine des Coutures La Sélection Saurmur Champigny 2016
★★★★
Loire Valley, France, \$24
Textbook Loire cabernet franc:



TOM MCCORKLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Flavors of black cherry, white pepper and wood smoke walk a tightrope of acidity and backbone. This delicious charmer has a

lingering hint of the character I call “grandpops library,” like the aroma of pipe tobacco and leather-bound books wafting down a hallway. ABV: 12.5 percent.

Imported by Hirsch Collection, distributed by Hop & Wine; Available in the District at Ace Beverage, Rodman’s; on the list at Central by Michel Richard. Available in Virginia at La Fromagerie and Planet Wine & Gourmet in Alexandria, Vienna Vintner in Vienna.

Domaine des Coutures L’insolente Saurmur Blanc 2016
★★★★
Loire Valley, \$20
Chenin blanc stars among white wines in this part of the Loire Valley. This one is full-bodied and dry, with flavors of green apple and

quince, and a hint of roasted almonds on the finish. Enjoy this food-friendly white with just about any casual meal, and while grazing on charcuterie, cheeses and nuts. ABV: 12.5 percent.

Imported by Hirsch Collection, distributed by Hop & Wine; Available in the District at Ace Beverage, Rodman’s. Available in Virginia at La Fromagerie and Planet Wine & Gourmet in Alexandria, Vienna Vintner in Vienna.

Availability information is based on distributor records. Wines might not be in stock at every listed store and might be sold at additional stores. Prices are approximate. Check Winesearcher.com to verify availability, or ask a favorite wine store to order through a distributor.

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Buying habits may be narrowing our choices



Wine
DAVE MCINTYRE

The wine industry is worried, and you, dear consumer (speaking in the global, holistic statistic sense) are the reason.

We can chuckle all the way to the bank (do people still go to banks?) as we save money from dropping wine prices. Our search for value is paying dividends. But our drinking habits, as well as our spending, are giving the wine industry fits. Ultimately, that may not be to our benefit, as our buying habits may have the ironic effect of narrowing our options. And wine’s beauty stems to some extent from its diversity.

I’m drawing this rather dystopian view from this year’s report on wine market trends published by Silicon Valley Bank. The report is an annual exercise in hand-wringing and navel-gazing that assesses the previous year’s sales trends and tries to project the future. It’s a tough task for an industry that by its very nature cannot react quickly to adverse trends. But the annual report also gives a fascinating glimpse of how we, as consumers, are partaking of wine — and that, perhaps, is changing faster than the industry can keep up.

Let’s start with prices: “As an industry, we’re transitioning to a period of flat to negative volume growth, low sales growth and a modest surplus of grapes, which will put pressure on prices,” the report says. On the surface, the reasons are basic economics: abundant supply and flattening demand. The latter stems from demographics and increased competition from craft beers, spirits and a newcomer to the report, cannabis.

The wine boom from the 1980s through the 2000 decade was fueled by big-spending baby boomers, a generation that increasingly is entering retirement. Gen-Xers have entered their most affluent years, but the industry has long salivated over the larger millennial generation. Millennials are almost all now of drinking age, but so far at least, they are not becoming wine drinkers.

“Millennials aren’t engaging with wine as hoped. They lack financial capacity, currently prefer premium spirits and craft beers, and have been slow getting into careers,” the report says. Legal pot is especially popular with younger males, “and that is also likely playing a role in [their] delayed appreciation for wine.” Negative messaging about alcohol’s effect on health is also dampening demand among younger drinkers.

It’s hard to say whether any particular trend starts with the pull of consumers or the push of producers, but this year’s report is remarkable for its frequent references to the “thrifty consumer.” Premiumization, the

idea that we might buy less but pay more for higher quality, is tapering off as we become more price conscious. This doesn’t mean we are drinking any old swill for the thrill, however. Sales of wines that are under \$9 a bottle are “in clear retreat,” while wines from \$9 to \$30 continued to post gains in 2018. But even that growth seemed to slow compared with previous years.

Large retail chains are expanding their private-label offerings, leveraging their buying power to control the supply chain and keep prices low. These are your Costco, Walmart, Target and Trader Joe’s wines. This growth is putting pressure on small, independent wine retailers. “Today, you can buy wine and other alcohol at Bed Bath & Beyond, Starbucks, Burger King, movie theaters, tap rooms, barber shops and laundromats,” the report notes. “You can also have it delivered from a multitude of digital and same-day retailers.”

These new, disparate outlets for wine favor larger distributors who can feed a retail supply chain, creating further pressure for consolidation in the wholesale sector. And many of those wines will be coming from larger producers, further strengthening the seven wineries that produce about 60 percent of all U.S. wines.

And that hurts small family-run wineries, which often struggle to place their wines on retail shelves or restaurant lists. In recent years, these wineries have relied on direct-to-consumer sales, which is dependent on people visiting their tasting rooms and then ordering wine for delivery home. But tasting room visits have declined over the past five years in Napa and Sonoma counties, even while tourism is up. Again, the thrifty consumer has an impact.

“The visit to wine country is no longer about the wine,” the report says. “The older consumers come to wine country, stay at a luxury hotel and visit one or two of their favorite wineries instead of the five they visited as young consumers. Younger consumers come to wine country, share an Airbnb with others to save on cost, and visit one or two wineries that offer the lowest tasting room fees and/or the best experience, which is a different experience from that which the older consumers seek.”

So even while we have more choices of where to buy and enjoy wine, we are increasing pressure that may pinch the range of wines available to choose from. That’s another reason to budget some time and money to support independent retailers and small, family-run wineries, even if we do enjoy an occasional glass of chardonnay while shopping at Bed Bath & Beyond.

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