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THE 12th ANNUAL

# AMERICAN WINE AWARDS

THIS YEAR, THE NOMINATIONS from our 33-member panel of top sommeliers and retailers read like a Who's Who of American wineries and winemaking talent. By the end of our final blind tasting, *Food & Wine's* 12th annual American Wine Awards included winners in 20 categories (new this year: Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio and Rhône-Style White). The value wines were particularly strong and diverse—and the average price of our above-\$20 winners was substantially lower than last year's, too. Sheer chance? Sea change? You decide. *by richard nalley research by megan krigbaum*



## WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR

**Charles Smith** Nine years ago, this California native was managing rock bands in Copenhagen when he made an unusual career shift:

“I left my life in Denmark and moved to Walla Walla, Washington, where I knew exactly one person.” That was Cayuse Vineyards’ Christophe Baron, who had rhapsodized to Smith about the potential of Washington Syrah. Smith taught himself how to make wine by creating miniscule lots of Syrah for his own K brand. Now his wines are some of Washington’s most sought-after. And Smith’s The Magnificent Wine Company wines (House Wine Red and White) and “modernist” Charles Smith Wines (The Velvet Devil Merlot, Kung Fu Girl Riesling and more) are among the best value anywhere. Despite his success, Smith remains a rocker at heart, with the 80-mph motorcycle habit to prove it.

