

Feel festive, stay frugal with these vine values under \$15

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All we really want for Christmas? Help mastering the sweet spot of gifting wine during the holidays.

We don't want to spend too much. We don't want to spend too little. We don't want something so obscure that we leave our recipients befuddled. We don't want something so common it is sold on grocery store endcaps. We want bottles with character and terroir. We want bottles that please the palate as much as the wallet.

And that is the gifted wine sweet spot. And this is your answer: Our team of experts has come up with 15 knockout bottles that sell for around \$15 to help you create a wine shopping list that's easy to buy, easy to drink.

Suggested picks span the world of winemaking regions, from New Mexico to the Old World. And if there is one theme to the recommendations it's this: Drink global.

"Look for wines from lesser-known wine regions such as those in Bulgaria, Turkey or Croatia," says Mike DeSimone, who with Jeff Jensen is author of the recently released book, "Wines of California." "They've been making wines for centuries, and besides using European grape varieties they also make single varietals and blends from indigenous varieties. It's a great way to learn about new grapes."

Alder Yarrow, founder and editor of the popular wine site Vinography.com also recommends looking afar.

"Once upon a time, California abounded with sub-\$15 wines, but these days it more resembles a desert populated by sparse and prickly wines that I don't really feel like drinking. Contrast that with the incredible number of reasonably priced imports coming from Greece, France, Chile, Argentina and more, and you have to feel sorry for most American winemakers," he says.

One domestic wine did make it on to Yarrow's list — the 2014 Charles Smith "Kung Fu Girl" Columbia Valley riesling from Washington state, an emerging wine region that offers quite a few undiscovered values. He also recommends the 2014 Skouras "Zoe" Red Peloponnese, from Greece and the 2014 Bodegas Colome Torrontes Valle Calchaqui Salta from Argentina.

Two French wines made the list, with one being the 2014 Chateau de Fontenille Bordeaux Blanc recommended by Ray Isle, executive wine editor of Food & Wine magazine. His other two suggestions, both from Italy, were the 2014 Capezzana Barco Reale and one sparkler, the NV (non vintage) Rotari Brut.

One tip for finding reds that won't land you in the red is to experiment with new grape varieties, advises Jonathan Alsop, founder and executive director of the Boston Wine School. "Sometimes you find great values in wine grapes no one has ever heard of before, like gaglioppo." He recommends the 2013 Enotria "Ciro" Gaglioppo from Campania in southern Italy. Light red in color, it's "very juicy and easy to drink."

Rounding out his picks were the 2013 Colonia Las Liebres Bonarda from Argentina. Bonarda, a red grape, is "the next red wine from Argentina you're going to be drinking after you grow weary of malbec," Alsop predicts.

And from the United States he recommends NV Gruet Blanc de Noirs Brut from New Mexico. "Gruet is the best value sparkling wine in the USA from the unlikely hills above Albuquerque." If you can't find the Blanc de Noirs at the \$15 price point, the lower-priced Gruet Brut also is a good choice.

One more U.S. wine made the cut, the Owen Roe "Lenore" syrah from Columbia Valley, Washington, recommended by David Kravitz, beverage manager of The Smith restaurants in New York City. Loaded with "wild blackberries, pepper, African violets and a hint of bacon," the syrah is a perfect burger wine, he says.

His other choices are the 2013 Pala "I Fiori" Vermentino from Sardinia, Italy, and the 2012 Domaine Deupre Morgon Vignes de 1935, a French red from the Beaujolais region.

For the intrepid, Jensen and DeSimone have some picks that may take a little hunting down. Chateau Burgozone viognier from Bulgaria — "aromas of orange zest and pineapple, with flavors of citrus and stone fruits. It's great as an aperitif before dinner or at a stand up cocktail party with hors d'oeuvres," says Jensen.

The two like Enjingi Grasevina from Kutjevo in Croatia's north. A white wine made from 100 percent grasevina grapes, it's light and fruity and pairs perfectly with lighter holiday recipes, says DeSimone. Another option, he says, is Vinkara Doruk Narince, a "crisp clean white wine from Turkey made from 100 percent narince grapes."

So make that wine list, check it twice — and don't forget to slip a bottle or two in your own Christmas stocking.

After all, notes Kravitz, "there is no greater joy, when it comes to wine, than finding a bottle that has depth, shows a sense of place and that you can afford on any given night."

15 Wines under \$15

Charles Smith "Kung Fu Girl" Columbia Valley riesling 2014

Skouras "Zoe" Red Peloponnese, Greece 2014

Bodegas Colome Torrontes Valle Calchaquí Salta, Argentina 2014

Chateau de Fontenille Bordeaux Blanc 2014

Capezzana Barco Reale 2014

NV Rotari Brut

Enotria "Ciro" Gaglioppo 2013

Colonia Las Liebres Bonarda 2013

NV Gruet Blanc de Noirs Brut

Owen Roe "Lenore" syrah, Washington

Pala "I Fiori" Vermentino, Italy, 2013

Domaine Deupre Morgon Vignes de 1935, France, 2012

Chateau Burgozone Viognier, Bulgaria

Enjingi Grasevina, Croatia

Vinkara Doruk Narince, Turkey

Online

Jenssen and Simone: worldwineguys.com

Boston Wine School: bostonwineschool.com

Alder Yarrow: vinography.com