

The Twelve Best Wines Of 2022

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I cover what's interesting in wine, spirits, food, and travel.

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The stunning Vine Hill Ranch estate in Napa VINE HILL RANCH

The “Best Wines of 2022” list reflects the most distinctive and outstanding wines from a year’s worth of tastings. As a wine journalist, I spend most days tasting, comparing and evaluating wines and the ones that made this list dazzled me for different reasons. Some were so decadently complex and flavorful, I wanted to steal the whole bottle for myself. Some were distinctive—from an extraordinary location, or a pioneering winemaker doing cool things. Some were full-on delicious and offered at a crazy-good price point. I say this every year – it’s a fine time to be

a wine lover. This list includes fantastic wines from Canada, Texas, and Sicily as well as California, Oregon, and France.

Vine Hill Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon, CA, 2019: This vineyard estate, farmed by three generations of the Phillips family since 1959, has long been a source for legendary wines. The fruit from Vine Hill enjoys a long history of playing a supporting role in some of the region's finest wines (BOND, Colgin, Harlan Estate, and Dalla Valle to name a few). Over the past decade, owners Bruce and Heather Phillips have been quietly crafting a Cabernet Sauvignon from 12 of the estate's premium parcels—a row here, a block there—the blend varies with each season but keeps two things in focus: freshness and luxuriant fruit. This vintage shows polish, precision, and complexity with layers of black cherry and cassis laced with spice, dried herbs, and a savory finish that keeps you wanting more. It's only a matter of time before the site is recognized alongside To Kalon and Stagecoach as being among Napa's most elite vineyards, which means you should buy bottles now, while you still can. \$269 (online)

Calera Mt. Harlan Pinot Noir Reed Vineyard, CA, 2019: Calera founder Josh Jensen passed away this summer and is remembered as one of California's winemaking pioneers. After working in the vineyards of Burgundy, Jensen came back to California where he spent two years sleuthing out the right soil types to make world-class pinot noir. In 1975, he found it in the Gavilan Mountains. The vineyard sits 25 miles east of the Monterey Bay at an elevation of 2,200 feet, making it among the highest and coolest vineyard sites in California. Today, this wine exudes a dynamic tension with savory notes and a silky mouthfeel that brims with ripe black cherry, warm spice and black tea notes, making it both decadent and serious at the same time. \$85

Penfolds FWT 585, FR, 2019: This FWT (short for French Winemaking Trial) is a first-ever Bordeaux wine from Penfolds—a world class expression that blends ultra-premium fruit from across France’s venerated Medoc region. As Penfolds’ Senior Winemaker Emma Wood explains, “The wine feels like Penfolds, but you don’t know where it’s from.” Composed entirely of Haut-Medoc cabernet, merlot and petit-verdot, Wood’s winemaking skills imprinted Penfolds’ house style onto French fruit, building plushness and roundness around the more linear French fruit’s structure and tannins. Ripe yet savory black cherry, balsamic and spice notes, velvet texture. An intriguing delight to drink; delicious now or cellar. \$120

Abbot Claim Vineyard Pinot Noir, Yamhill-Carlton, OR, 2018: Sustainability is part of the holistic state of mind here as the team works to bring together organics, biodynamics and polyculture to yield elegant and balanced wines such as this one. The palate dances with high-toned red fruits, cardamom and notes of violets. No-till farming, compost tea applications, and dry farming bring out the best in terroir while maintaining a vibrant ecosystem. Ethereal and savory, this is a marvelous, world-class wine to serve all evening long. \$75

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Stark Conde Three Pines Syrah, SA, 2016: This South African wine gets the nod for one of the best deals in red wine. It’s a single-vineyard Syrah, very small production, crafted from older vines—all of which explain this wine’s vibrance and complexity. The blue-black fruits are rich and supple while the

palate and finish are delicate and complex. Small but mighty, and a bargain at \$30.

Joseph Phelps Proem No. 1 Freestone Estate Pinot Noir,

CA, 2018: Proem means a preamble to a story and this wine does a marvelous job of telling the story of a single plot growing amidst Sonoma Coast's wild and wicked conditions. High elevation vineyards paired with ocean-chilled air conspire to create a pinot noir of uncommon delicacy and heft—a prize fighter in ballet slippers. Focused and precise, it makes for a fascinating wine to drink, especially with food—forest floor meets black cherry and raspberry with silky tannins and a mouth-watering linearity. A one hour decanting is suggested before enjoyment, or add to your cellar for 10-15 years. \$225

Champagne Bollinger Rosé: One word comes to mind when sipping this Champagne — ethereal. Fine pearly bubbles and a palate of fresh wild strawberry, citrus cream, orange peel, and brioche conspire to make you drink the entire bottle. Bollinger is a very pinot noir-focused domaine and this rosep is no exception, comprised of 85% Grand and Premier crus fruit, it is 62% Pinot Noir, 24% Chardonnay and 14% Meunier —a polished balance of freshness, structure and elegance with a pleasing note of creaminess throughout. Absolutely delicious. \$107 average online

C.L. Butaud Tempranillo, Texas, 2019: This succulent, savory Tempranillo is a fabulous example of the polished finesse and freshness that Texas terroir can deliver. Winemaker Randy Hester worked for over a decade in Napa Valley for top wineries such as Colgin, Caldwell, and Cakebread before returning to his native Texas in 2014. There, he and his wife Brooke, who used to work for Patz & Hall, started C.L. Butaud. This is their flagship wine, a Tempranillo that rivals anything in Spain and a varietal that Randy believes is ideally suited for growing in Texas—I'd have to agree. \$54

Marchesi Alfieri, Alfiera Barbera d'Asti, IT, 2018: This wine is produced by one of the Piedmont region's most venerated winemaking families. Crafted with 100% barbera fruit grown in a historic estate vineyard, the wine reveals densely woven flavors with superior structure and a silky texture. Blackberry and cherry notes mingle on the palate followed by a finish of dark chocolate and spice. A tremendous value for \$30, buy a case and drink now or cellar for a few years.

WHITE WINES

Catena White Clay, Lujan de Cuyo, Semillon Chenin Blanc, AR, 2021: Winemaker Dr. Laura Catena is a remarkable force of nature—she has so many projects going on (researching soils, sustainability, vine health, oh and she's also an ER doctor), it's a wonder she ever has time to make wine, let alone a wine this fabulous. White Clay is a luscious blend of semillon and chenin blanc. The palate has a silky texture followed by a finish with brisk acidity and plenty of ripe tropical notes. But, it's the \$20-ish price tag that lands this one spot on the list—just a tremendous value.

Mission Hill Perpetua Chardonnay Okanagan Valley, Canada, 2020: Canada's Okanagan Valley should be on everyone's radar. The region is delivering intriguing, elegant wines and this richly textured 100% chardonnay is a prime example. Its structure and complexity can easily hold up against any world-class chardonnay. Made from select estate fruit, the wine shows tropical notes up front, lush pineapple and lime, with wet stone and savory elements on the finish. For now, these wines are hard to find, but drink them when you have the chance.

Feudo Disisa Lu Bancu, Catarratto Montreale, IT, 2020: A Sicilian wine made from Catarratto Bianco, it is silky and fresh on the palate with ripe notes of pink lady apple, melon and honeysuckle followed by marvelous structure built with acidity.

Juicy and mouth-watering , great to pour with friends for an afternoon on the porch. First place winner of the Decanter World Wine awards. \$20

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