



The *Beverage Dynamics* National Retailer Wine Panel recommends a lineup of top quality/value **French wines**.

FOR OUR FIRST WINE PANEL OF 2023, we asked panelists to taste and rate French wines. These can be any style and from anywhere in this classic Old World wine country.

As always, these selections include brief tasting notes, a rating and the wine's retail price (which can vary from store to store and market to market). Unless noted otherwise, prices reflect a 750-ml. bottle. If you are a beverage professional with a specialty in wine who is interested in participating in the panel, please contact Editor Kyle Swartz at kswartz@epgacceleration.com or 763-383-4447.

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★

Five Stars (92-100) A top-flight wine. Superior in taste and character and providing an outstanding price/value relationship.

★★★★

Four Stars (86-91) A very good wine and an excellent value. A wine for which customers will keep coming back.

★★★

Three Stars (80-85) An above-average wine, at a reasonable price point, which many customers will enjoy.

FIVE STARS

(98) Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte Rouge 2017 (Pessac Leognan). Dynamic flavors of black cherry, pomegranate and wild berries burst into a medley of rose petals and juicy dark fruits, with freshly picked herbs wafting through the core. The finish shows notes of tea leaf, sandalwood and vanilla bean. (\$121.99)

(97) Les Fillottes Rouge 2016 (Pomerol). The wine shows bright, juicy red cherries and raspberries that sink into a beautifully plush palate.

The midpalate becomes gorgeously creamy while continuing to show red fruit, while also adding notes of violets and rose petals with hints of mocha. The finish is long and tantalizing with whiffs of white herbs, sage and a dusty minerality. (\$88.79)

(96) Domaine Marguerite Carillon Pinot Noir Premier Cru Volnay Santenots 2020 (Volnay). Flavors of black cherry and pomegranate flow through the velvet palate with notes of violets and wildflowers. The mid-palate offers notes of forest floor, fresh meadow flowers and just a whiff of anise that flows into a finish of wild berries, sandalwood and fresh herbs. (\$84.99)

(94) Joseph Le Roi Les Fourneaux 1er Cru 2017 (Chablis). 2017 was a tough year in Chablis. But the grapes that survived the frost produced excellent wines. A taste of mineral, green apple, kiwi leads to a long, persistent finish. If you can spare it, splash a bit on your seared buttered scallops. (\$45)

(93) Domaine des Causses Lirac Reserve Syrah Cru Cotes du Rhone 2019 (Rhône). Fresh blueberry and graphite on the nose. Medium-bodied wine that shows notes of stewed stone fruits and pencil shavings on the palate. Slight bit of chewy tannins, yet balanced and

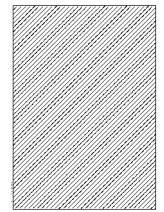
full of structure that one might not expect at this price point. (\$13)

(92) Maison Tardieu Laurent Les Becs Fin Cotes du Rhone 2020 (Rhône). An absolutely gorgeous wine. Ripe blackberry, dark cherry notes and a subtle woodiness give this wine depth and complexity. Sets the bar high for Cotes du Rhone. (\$20)

(92) Chateau Rauzan Despagne Bordeaux Blanc 2022 (Bordeaux). This elegant sauvignon blanc/sémillon blend is lightweight and crisp. Floral fruits like passionfruit and apricot on the nose with notes of crisp pears and lemon-lime zest on the palate. This would be easily paired with any chicken or fish dish, but is also a great glass of wine on its own. (\$16.99)

(92) Cotes de Provence Saint Roch Les 2020 (Provence). 50/50 Cinsault and Grenache. Smooth as silk, an elegant rosé made by a cooperative near Toulon. Laden with strawberry and almond, along with a bit of floral and thyme, this wine is 100% Provençal. Serve it on a spring day with warm brie. (\$18)

(91) Ocean & Vines Chablis 2021 (Burgundy). Light bodied and crisp with citrus flavors of orange blossom and lemon. Due to this wine's





WINE SELECTIONS - FRENCH

terroir, there is a delicate-but-present mineral-ity. Very balanced and round, but its freshness keeps it lively on the palate. (\$26.99)

(91) Oriane Languedoc 2018 (Languedoc). From Gerard Bertrand, this is a blend of 55% syrah and 45% carignan hand-harvested grapes. Baked black fruits with a spicy note on the finish almost like cayenne pepper. Juicy with a lovely structure and finish, this wine longs to be paired with a good cheese board. (\$16.99)

(91) Chateau Dargan Moulis 2019 (Bordeaux). For the price, this is a great expression of the Medoc region. This wine is complex and layered with undertones of earth, vanilla, strawberries, ripe cherries and a velvety, almost-savory tannic finish. Its pleasant acidity keeps this wine feeling integrated and balanced. (\$22.99)

(91) Points Domaine du Haut Bourg Muscadet sur Lie Cotes de Grandlieu 2020 (Loire). This dry white wine has slight hue of green. The aromatics are fresh and floral, with citrus notes. The acidity is pretty balanced in the long, lingering finish. (\$14)

(91) Maison No. 9 Rosé 2020 (Provence). A beautiful and refreshing rosé. Gentle flavors of strawberry and cranberry combined with subtle acidity give this rosé a wonderful balance of flavor and control. (\$20)

(91) Chateau Rauzan Despaigne Bordeaux 2019 (Bordeaux). This is a super-approachable blend with a great structure and an impressive linger with soft tannins. Blueberries, cherry cola and some pepper notes from the cabernet franc are softened by the sumptuous fruit on the palate. (\$16.99)

(91) Chateau Champs des Sables 2019 (Bordeaux). From Montagne de St.-Émilion, this wine opens with a super-expressive nose of ripe black fruits and soft leather. Deep and dark in color, full-bodied and strong with a well-blended, tannic finish. (\$13.99)

(91) Les Sarrins Cotes de Provence Rosé 2021 (Provence). Pale pink with a hue of copper. A delicate and typical Provence rosé, made up mostly of grenache and cinsault. It shows lovely notes of white flowers, citrus and peach. The fin-

ish is long and linear. A wine that will still reward you a year from now. (\$25)

(90) Olema Reserve Rosé 2021 (Provence). Salmon-pink in color with strawberries and watermelon rind coming off the nose. Similar notes on the palate with a tartness reminiscent of sweet tarts. (\$21.99)

(90) Pardon et Fils Beaujolais Villages 2021 (Beaujolais). Gorgeous purple color with grape jelly nose. This wine is lighter style with plum and cassis notes. It would be the perfect complement to any barbeque or picnic. (\$14.99)

(90) Chateau Bois Redon 2019 (Bordeaux). Blend of 75% merlot and 25% cabernet sauvignon. This is fruit forward, full of cherries, raspberries and currants, with soft tannins. This wine should be consumed young and will be appreciated at any event. (\$14.99)

(90) Dune Gris Rosé 2021 (Southern France). Immediate explosion of berry and peach blossom notes with a zesty grapefruit finish. This is an easy go-to for the summer! This could be paired with seafood or as an aperitif. (\$13.99)

(90) Earl Domaine Portaz Apremont 2020 (Vin De Savoie). Quiet and shy at first, then this dry (slightly acidic) white wine opens up to show a great deal of body, along with a flinty, steely note on the palate. The wine also shows notes of citrus peel and white pepper. Bring on the food or the fondue. 11.5% ABV. (\$13)

(90) La Croix Loges Anjou Rouge 2020 (Loire). 95% cab franc, 5% cabernet. Fresh fruit on the nose, ripe plum on the palate, along with notes of summertime soil, all joining and finishing with soft, slightly chewy tannins. This is a light red that you can enjoy with or without food. The type of soft, light red that will pair with almost anything. (\$13)

(90) Fournier Les Belles Vignes Sancerre 2020 (Sancerre). This sauvignon blanc offers bright acidity with grapefruit and gently melon fruit. There is a flintiness which runs through the fruit, and acidity that offers a wonderful depth of flavor and texture. (\$29)

(90) Jacky Blot Brut NV (Loire). 100% chenin blanc from 40-year-old vines. Initially fermented

in used oak, then bottle fermented, just like Champagne. A fine bead invites, with aromas of dark, wheat toast, apple, beer and citrus. (\$30)

FOUR STARS

(89) Little James Basket Press Blanc 2020 (Languedoc). 50/50 viognier-sauvignon blanc. Sourced from Pays d'Oc, the Saint Cosme vineyards of the Rhone Valley produce this crisp, complex delight. Aromatic with stone fruit notes and a touch of mango. The nose is aromatic, and the palate is on the rich side. A great pairing for fried or grilled fish. (\$15.95)

(89) Hecht & Bannier 2015 (Minervois). A blend of syrah, grenache and carignan from a warm and generous vintage. This wine delivers rich dark fruit flavors, with notes of black pepper and cured meat. (\$25)

(88) Olivier Gessler Cotes de Gascogne 2020 (Gascogne). A tremendous value from a region of southwest France better known for the production of Armagnac. Crafted from ugni blanc (better known as trebbiano), gros manseng, sauvignon and colombar. Lower in alcohol, with flavors that are bright, lively and juicy, with floral aromatics. (\$14)