

18 top-scoring county wines for budget savvy



The La Crema, 2021 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir at \$28 is ranked 91 points by the Wine Spectator and it's in good supply, with more than 200,000 cases produced. (Steve Cukrov)

You don't have to sacrifice quality with budget-savvy brands as long as you vet the wines carefully.

To save you time, here's a curated list of affordable wines with the first topping the list of the Wine Spectator Best Wine Values.

The La Crema, 2021 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir at \$28 is ranked 91 points by the Wine Spectator and it's in good supply, with more than 200,000 cases produced.

It's not a surprise when you consider La Crema is a brand within Jackson Family Wines, the company that produces the Kendall-Jackson Vintner's Reserve, America's bestselling California chardonnay.

To land a spot on the Wine Spectator's coveted list, value wines need to be widely available, ranked 90 points or higher on the publication's 100-point scale and be priced at \$40 or less.

To add to your list of budget-wise wines, here's a tasty lineup of Sonoma County gems that have been vetted in The Press Democrat blind tastings. They overdeliver and won't disappoint.

Balletto, 2022 Rosé of Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, \$25: Buoyed by crisp acidity, this rosé has high-toned fruit of strawberry and watermelon. Well-crafted.

Bartholomew Estate, 2022 Sonoma Valley Sauvignon Blanc, 14.5%, \$30: Stone fruit meets citrus in this tasty sauvignon blanc. Pretty.

Davis Bynum, 2022 Virginia's Block, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc, 13.5%, \$30: Citrus meets tropical in this zesty sauvignon blanc. Well-crafted.

Dutton Goldfield, 2022 Shop Block Dutton Ranch, Green Valley of Russian River Valley Pinot Blanc, 13.3%, \$33: A beautiful pinot blanc with tasty stone fruit of peach, buoyed by crisp acidity. It also has great minerality and a honeysuckle finish. Impressive.

Eco Terreno, 2019 Alexander Valley, Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon, 14.4%, \$32: A cab that's weighted to black fruit. Notes of blackberry and plum, with a hint of anise. Lingering finish. Well-crafted.

Hamilton Family Wines, 2022 Sonoma Valley Rosé of Grenache, 13.2%, \$34: Tropical flavors of guava and pineapple, with a hint of tangerine. Finishes crisp. Lovely.

Joseph Jewell, 2022 Raymond Burr Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County Vermentino, 12.5%, \$30: Honeydew melon meets citrus – lemon and a twist of lime. Finishes crisp. Pretty.

J. Bucher, 2022, Bucher Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County Rosé of Pinot Noir, 12.3%, \$35: Lively flavors pop in this rosé: Bing cherry, Meyer lemon and pomegranate. Zesty finish. Well-crafted.

Keller Estate, 2022 Petaluma Gap, Sonoma County Rosé of Pinot Noir, 13.5%, \$38: Raspberry and watermelon meet mineral in this vibrant bottling. Riding on crisp acid, this rosé is impressive.

Korbel, 2019 Natural Champagne, Russian River Valley, \$18: With layered notes of raspberry, green apple and a twist of lemon, this bottling overdelivers for the price.

Leo Steen, 2022 Saini Farms, Dry Creek Family Chenin Blanc, 12%, \$22. A crisp chenin blanc with a silky texture. Notes of lemon and almond, with a hint of green apple. Impressive.

Paul Mathew, 2022 Russian River Valley Viognier, 14.2%, \$30: A gorgeous viognier with pitch-perfect balance. Aromas of stone fruit – nectarine and peach – follow through to the palate and ride on crisp acidity. Great minerality with a kiss of honey on the finish. Striking.

Pedroncelli, 2021 Sonoma Classico, Dry Creek Valley Red Blend, 14.4%, \$24: Aromas of black raspberry, black cherry and cracked black pepper follow through to the palate. Lovely.

Morét Brealynn 2022 Rosé of Pinot Noir, 13.1%, \$28: It's a striking rosé with great minerality. Aromas of watermelon and raspberry follow through to the palate, riding on crisp acid. Impressive.

Rodney Strong, 2020 Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon, 14.5%, \$25: A tasty cab with tangy fruit. Notes of blackberry, cassis and cracked black pepper. Nice length. Impressive.

Saini Vineyards, 2021 Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County Zinfandel, 14.9%, \$35: A complex zinfandel with notes of blackberry, pomegranate and toasty oak. Bright acidity. Silky texture. Impressive.

Vaughn Duffy Wines, 2022 Sonoma County Rosé of Pinot Noir, 13.8%, \$25: A layered rosé with a range of flavors: tangerine, strawberry and raspberry with a citrusy finish. Pretty.

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