

BEST VALUE WINES 2006

By Laura Holmes Haddad

Looking for value in wine buys is always a challenge, so we went into the field and talked to wine directors and sommeliers across the country to get their value wine picks for the coming year. Value is a tricky term, but for our purposes we defined it as wines that provide a bang for the buck, no matter what the price point. Our experts picked wines from regions around the world, and even found a few in regions that are up and coming. All prices listed are wholesale.

Jonathan Ballau SOMMELIER AT HOTEL JEROME IN ASPEN, COLORADO

"What I look for is classic varieties from different – uncommon – regions," says Jonathan Ballau. Ballau favors South Africa, Central Otago New Zealand, and Spain and turns to Paso Robles for his California picks. "I'm looking at South African wines. They're pushing their technique rather than varietal and moving away from sweet dessert wine and Pinotage. The values right now are in Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay and in certain areas Pinot Noir," he says. From New Zealand, Ballau recommends any wine from Kim Crawford. "Buyers won't ever be disappointed; the wine drinks well beyond the price point," notes Ballau.

Ballau recommends:

1 Beyerskloof Cabernet Sauvignon (South Africa) **2** Lanzerac Merlot 2002 (Stellenbosch, South Africa) **3** De Westhoff Chardonnay (South Africa) **4** Kwarau Estate, Central Otago (producers of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc) **5** Felton Road (Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, and Riesling) **6** Justin Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (any vintage)



Belinda Chang SOMMELIER OF OSTERIA VIA STATO IN CHICAGO

Belinda Chang looks for value wines from the regions of Sicily, Puglia, Sardegna, and Basilicata for her Italian-only wine list. Some of her favorite producers include Cusumano and Baglio di Pianetto. "I look to areas that traditionally are not known for great wine. If you asked someone ten years ago about a chardonnay from Sicily, people would have scoffed at you," says Chang. "Antinori now has an investment in Sicily; they are really starting to create high quality wine. We are also getting in on the ground floor; once they get the high scores they won't be values anymore," she says.



Matthew Gundlach SOMMELIER AND WINE DIRECTOR AT MOTO IN CHICAGO

Matthew Gundlach believes you can find value no matter where you go. "I believe there are values within every region," says Gundlach. "But value wines abound in New Zealand, in Oregon, and Spain. Even Portuguese table wines are outstanding for the price," he says. Gundlach is a fan of Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs and recommends Sadler-Wells Sonoma Coast 2002 Pinot Noir (\$240/case.) "I personally love German Rieslings from the Mosel area; they are excellent with every course. In particular I like the Riesling from Markus Molitor Estate," says Gundlach.



Luis de Santos

DIRECTOR OF BEVERAGE WOLFGANG PUCK
FINE DINING GROUP IN LAS VEGAS

Luis de Santos keeps several points in mind when searching for wines for his restaurants. "When I shop for the wines I also shop for the clients. Being on the on-premise side the last thing I want to know is that the wine is in all the local wine shops," he says. "I see 'value' meaning is this wine worth what it's tasting," notes de Santos.

Luis de Santos recommends:

- 1 Hatton Estate New Zealand's EC2 Unoaked 2003 Chardonnay (\$200/case)
- 2 Gold, White Table Wine, Barossa Valley 2005
- 3 Niebaum Coppola Rubicon
- 4 Eden Canyon Vineyards Paso Robles 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon
- 5 Kloster Eberbach "Steinberger" Riesling Kabinett 2003 (Rheingau, Germany)



Paul Rakovich

SOMMELIER AT EMERIL'S DELMONICO
STEAKHOUSE IN LAS VEGAS

Paul Rakovich says finding value wines takes work. "It takes a lot of hard work. We kiss a lot of frogs," says Rakovich. For Rakovich, value wines aren't limited to any one wine region. His recent value finds include Napa Valley's Carneros and New Zealand's Central Otago for Pinot Noir. But in California, Rakovich has a clear favorite: "Paso Robles is the best bang for the buck," he says.

Rakovich's Recommends:

- 1 Solaris Pinot Noir Carneros
- 2 Chateau Margene 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon and 2002 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon
- 3 JC Cellars 2003 California Cuvee Syrah (\$240/case)
- 4 Two Hands Angel Share Shiraz
- 5 Kaesler "Stonehorse" Shiraz 2004 (Barossa Valley) (\$256/case)



Juliette Pope

WINE DIRECTOR OF
GRAMERCY TAVERN IN
NEW YORK CITY

Juliette Pope made her choices based on taste rather than a specific region. "In each case, the wine tastes delicious on its own; allows typicity of varietal and appellation to shine through; and is excellent with food due to minimal or no oak intrusion and good clean acidity," says Pope.



Pope recommends:

- 1 Chateau Lamothe 2004 (a white Bordeaux)
- 2 Cavas y Almas del Amancay Malbec 2001 (Mendoza, Argentina)
- 3 Domenico Armani Teroldego 2004 (Alto Adige)
- 4 Francois Pinon NV Vouvray (sparkling)
- 5 Sticks Pinot Noir 2004 (Yarra Valley, Australia; \$136/case)

Jeff Morgenthau

WINE CONSULTANT, FORMERLY SOMMELIER AT
JOEL ROBUCHON AT THE MANSION IN LAS VEGAS

Jeff Morgenthau says "What I would look for in a 'value' wine is typicity – does it taste like it comes from that particular country. The wine should be true to the place and also it needs to be interesting. It needs to be something that isn't stacked up at every retail outlet. You always want to find something that is exciting and unknown. You want to differentiate yourself because you want your customer to try your wine," he says. Morgenthau lists Spain and Italy (reds from Sicily in particular) as countries with excellent values.

Morgenthau recommends:

- 1 2004 Ken Forrester Chenin Blanc Stellenbosch South Africa
- 2 2002 Dehesa de Rubiales 'Alaia' (Prieto Picudo-Tempranillo-Merlot) Vino de la Tierra de Castilla y Leon
- 3 2004 Achaval Ferrer Malbec Mendoza
- 4 2003 Lucky Country Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon Barossa Valley (\$136/case)
- 5 1996 Chateau Pierre-Bise, Coteaux-du-Layon 'Chaume,' Anjou

