



Grapevine

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Wines Not to Be Underestimated...With Our Ratings

It's fun to read the experts' reviews, but sometimes we want to provide our own take on notable wines. This month, we gathered a septet of wines we love. That won't dissuade us from also choosing hedonistic favorites on page 2, but we want you to take note of some otherwise under-the-radar wines, complete with our personalized ratings.

Sheila, a devotee of sparkling wines and chardonnay, remains consistent. From Mendoza, Argentina, **Pascual Toso's Toso Brut** is made from chardonnay in the Charmat method, meaning the second fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks for over three months, then bottled for another three months before release. It has bright, fresh fruit character and a cashmere finish. **90 SM** \$8.66

Ted, always one to find excellent wines where few others think to look, stayed local. Tocai Friulano, the more commonly known name for *Sauvignonasse*, is a mainstay grape in northeastern Italy's Friuli region. Related to sauvignon blanc, it's more floral than grapefruit, fuller bodied than its cousin and is quite dry. The **2019 Millbrook Tocai Friulano Proprietor's Special Reserve** has aromas and



flavors of kiwi, apricot and key lime, with rounded acidity and a lingering finish. **90 TN** \$15.49

Ian...thankfully, there's one you won't pin down. His choice of the **2019 Dr. Konstantin Frank Blaufränkisch** from the Finger Lakes is an elegant entrance into 2022. Native to Austria and Hungary, blaufränkisch is known as *lemlberger* in Germany. Showing its best in cool climates, it has qualities of syrah, pinot noir and cabernet franc. Aged in 80/20 seasoned and new French oak for 18 months, it exudes fragrant notes of plums, blueberries and violets, at once fruity and rich. **92 IP** \$18.99

The **2018 Messmer Pinot Noir Trocken** from Pfalz, Germany is Ben's pick. Farmed with organic and

biodynamic principles, there is also an insistence on minimal intervention to let the terroir shine. Aged in stainless steel and seasoned oak casks for three to four months, the wine has excellent acidity with bright notes of strawberries and raspberries, followed up by silken tannins. **90 BH** \$16.59

Chameleon Bill looked to California for his January gem: the **2018 Laely Cabernet Sauvignon** by Heron Wines from Napa Valley. A 90/10 blend of cabernet and petite verdot, the wine sees a long fermentation, followed by 14 months' aging in seasoned French oak barrels. Accompanying its full body and welcome acidity are notes of dried sage, cedar and lengthy tannins. **91 BP** \$25.49

In a mission to make syrah more resistant to mildew, Dr. François Durif crossed the grape with Alsatian-born peloursin, breeding petite sirah, aka, durif. Evidently liking the result, Brian chose the **2017 Foppiano Petite Sirah** from the Russian River Valley as his unheralded gem. Cellared for 26 months in new French and American oak barrels, the wine spans graceful to boldly fruity and spicy, singing a medley of rose petals and black fruit to dark chocolate and cured olives. **92 BM** \$19.99

And now, David's **2019 Geyser Peak Walking Tree Cabernet Sauvignon** from Sonoma Valley. Aged 18 months in seasoned and new French oak and undergoing a secondary malolactic fermentation, it offers complex flavors and textures. After berries, spice and vanilla, you'll find silk, acidity and tannins. This wine is both soft and structured. **92 DI** \$21.49

We are always in search of good wines, from the gamut of excellent ratings to pleasant companions. Join us in our quest to find those wallflowers, more than worthy of a dance. ♦

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For all the playoff games and Super Bowl LVI, Sheila's Kahlua Chili...

2 Tbsp olive oil
2 lbs 85% ground beef
1 large onion, chopped
1 15 oz can black beans, rinsed
1 15 oz can kidney beans, rinsed
1 25 oz jar Dominick's Tomato Sauce
2 packets chili seasoning mix
½ cup Kahlua liqueur, more if desired
Shredded cheddar and sour cream to garnish
Tortilla chips for serving

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large Dutch oven until shimmering. Add ground beef and sauté until no longer pink. Scatter beef to perimeter of pan and add remaining oil to center of pan; add onions, sautéing until golden, then mix with beef. Add beans, tomato sauce, chili seasoning and Kahlua. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and simmer for one hour, stirring occasionally. Garnish with cheddar and sour cream, if desired, and serve with tortilla chips and a glass of one of the reds from page 1. *Cheers to a Super Bowl tradition.*

Sole Piccata

If you can't find sole, use another thin, flaky, white fish. The 'almost brown' butter makes this dish just a little richer.

4 6-oz skinless fillets of sole, tilapia or sablefish
Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper, to taste
½ cup flour
3 Tbsp grapeseed or other neutral oil
6 Tbsp unsalted butter
1 large shallot, finely minced
½ lemon, thinly sliced
½ lemon, zested
¼ cup dry white wine
2-3 tsp rinsed capers



Turn on the 'keep warm' function of your oven or heat to 170 degrees or lowest temperature. Pat fillets dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper; dredge in flour, shaking off excess. Heat oil and 2 tablespoons of butter in a 12" skillet over high heat. Cook the fillets, flipping once, until golden and cooked through, 3-4 minutes (or more if you're using a different fish). Transfer to a platter and place in oven to keep warm. Turn burner heat to medium. Wipe skillet clean and add three tablespoons

of butter, cooking four to five minutes, until foam subsides and butter just starts to turn golden. Add the shallot and lemon slices to the skillet; cook until shallot is soft, 1-2 minutes. Add wine and let reduce by half. Add remaining butter and the capers. Cook until sauce has slightly thickened and spoon over fish. Shower with lemon zest and serve with Carol's pick or the Modern Royale cocktail, both below.

Modern Royale

Who says refreshing is for summer only? Floral St. Germain balances the citrus, making this a delightful winter cocktail.

2 oz Albany Vodka
2 oz St. Germain elderflower liqueur
½ oz fresh grapefruit juice
½ oz fresh lemon juice
½ oz fresh lime juice
2 oz Toso Brut sparkling wine

Combine first five ingredients in an ice-filled shaker. Shake vigorously and strain into two chilled coupe glasses. Top each with sparkling wine and serve. Could be good with Sole Piccata, left.



January Staff Wine Picks

Sheila: 2018 Neyers Chardonnay (Carneros District) \$17.99 (reg \$20.99) **93 W&S** Ample rain in the winter, a mild spring and long hang time before harvest allowed beautifully ripened grapes. Barrel-fermented, it is medium- to full-bodied with bright acidity and notes of lemon curd, tropical fruits and minerals. **Bacon, onion and Gruyère tart*

Ian: 2019 Delas Saint-Esprit Côtes-du-Rhône Rouge (Rhône Valley) \$11.99 (reg \$13.99) **90 WS** Made from 60/40 syrah and grenache and seeing malolactic fermentation in stainless steel, it is then aged eight months, also in stainless. With notes of wild berries, violets and licorice, it is full and round with delicate tannins. **Grilled lamb burger*

Brian: 2019 The Prisoner Wine Company 'Unshackled' Cabernet Sauvignon (California) \$21.49 (reg \$24.99) Primarily cabernet sauvignon, it is blended with small amounts of petite sirah, syrah and merlot, aged 11 months in French and American oak. Bold, aromatic and fruit-forward, it has balanced tannins and excellent acidity. **Braised short ribs*

Bill: 2015 La Sacristie de la Vieille Cure Bordeaux Rouge (Fronsac) \$19.49 (reg \$22.99) **94 WE** Merlot-driven, this organically produced wine is bolstered with cabernet franc and a touch of cabernet sauvignon, then aged 18 months in new and seasoned French oak barrels. Aromatic of figs, plums and a touch of coffee. **Roasted chicken thighs and mushrooms*

Ben: 2020 Michel Sarrazin et Fils Bourgogne Rouge (Bordeaux) \$20.99 (reg \$24.99) De-stemmed pinot noir grapes are fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in seasoned French oak for this sustainably produced wine. Fragrant of cherries and red berries, it has a palate of red plums. **Seared chicken breast with Dijon cream sauce*

Carol: 2020 Louis Jadot Pouilly-Fuissé (Beaune) \$25.49 (reg \$31.99) **90 WS** From Burgundy's Côte d'Or, the wine is made from 100% chardonnay that is partially barrel-fermented in French oak and partially in stainless steel. It has complex aromas of honey and apples with rich flavors of toasted nuts, lemon zest and brioche. **Sole piccata, see above*