

The 14 Best Wines We Uncorked This Year

Plus, the best tasting room, wine festival, and up-and-coming winemaker.

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Wine can be seductively elusive and changeable, evolving across both decades and hours. You want to chase it, to know it. Of the many new releases we chased this past year, the selections here are the ones that, when sipped, tasted like nothing else—and made us long for more. We varied our approach to winners this time, awarding 15 wines instead of just six, as we did in 2018. Even with the expansion, we agonized, and accomplished wines slipped the net. The wines we chose here span the globe as well as the breadth of varietals and styles, but they all share two things: the potential for long years in the cellar and the ability to be enjoyed deliciously right now.

CABERNET FRANC/ MERLOT BLEND: Gamble Family Vineyards 2014 Mary Ann Red



Gamble Family Vineyards 2014 Mary Ann Red
Courtesy of Gamble Family Vineyards

Interesting blends are quietly being made in Napa, though skittish winemakers don’t necessarily want to mention just how much Merlot might be part of the wine. While the movie *Sideways* put the nail in the coffin for Merlot, in truth, most Merlots of the 1980s and ’90s were not great wines, despite their popularity. But winemakers have learned a thing or two over the years, resulting in some Bordeaux blends in which Cabernet Sauvignon has only a bit part and varietals such as Merlot and Cabernet Franc star. Case in point: Tom Gamble’s Mary Ann (\$185), which is composed of 53 percent Cab Franc and 37 percent Merlot, grown on the rugged terrain of Mt. Veeder’s hillsides. It has an intoxicatingly aromatic nose full of blueberry jam, just-baked waffle cones and wildflowers. Blackberry and strawberry come through on the palate, with lots of savory herbal notes. There’s plenty of structure to keep this wine aging for another decade.