



45 value brands of the year

What's your Go-To Wine? With more brands than ever fighting for shelf space at your local wine store or supermarket, we'll help narrow the list for you.

We've combed through a year's worth of tastings—more than 3,900 wines priced at \$18 or less. In the pages that follow, we've singled out the brands that repeatedly scored with recommendations for superior value at the price. We feature forty-five standouts here—the American wineries first, followed by the rest of the world, organized by country.

We've given you some information on what each winery does best, and ideas for ways to enjoy these wines—whether at a summer picnic, a casual dinner party with friends, or with recipes for street food from around the world. These are the brands you can go to for any informal occasion.

American Brand Reports

Patrick J. Comiskey

Wolfgang Weber

Imported Brand Reports

Nicole Drummer

Patricio Tapia

Tara Q. Thomas

Street Food Reports

Alan Tardi

Tara Q. Thomas



YALUMBA

What: Some of Australia's highest-quality wines for the price in the Y-series and the Barossa/Eden Valley varietal bottlings, from Australia's oldest family winery, founded in 1849.

Standout: One of the more satisfying tawnies you'll find for less than \$20, and a violet-scented steal of a 2006 Grenache (\$16).

Where: Yalumba wines still center around the original settlement in the Barossa and Eden Valleys.

When: Uncork the tawny for a nice after-dinner surprise for guests. Enjoy the succulent, black raspberry-scented grenache with roast duck.

Importer: Negotiants USA, Napa, CA

TOP AUSTRIAN VALUE BRAND

FORSTREITER

What: Lively, soil-driven wines from old vines in terraced vineyards along the Danube River.

Standout: The delicate, citrusy '06 Bergwein Grüner Veltliner from the Kremser Kögl (\$12).

Where: Austria's Kremstal, about 40 miles west of Vienna.

When: Any occasion where a crisp white wine is called for, from dim sum to Wiener schnitzel.

Importer: Monika Caha Selections/Frederick Wildman and Sons, NY

TOP BULGARIAN VALUE BRAND

TARGOVISHTE

What: Refreshingly light, dry white wines from one of Bulgaria's largest producers.

Standout: The bright, limey riesling, simple and thirst-quenching.

Where: The province of Targovishte in northeastern Bulgaria, bordered by the Black Sea.

When: Pour a chilled glass of riesling or the delicate, dry muscat with Thai take-out; open the richer chardonnay for roast chicken. All run \$8.

Importer: Bulgarian Master Vintners, Sonoma, CA



Jamón Ibérico di Bellota

If ever a pig could be said to exemplify summer, it would have to be the *Pata Negra* (black hoof) of Spain. Small, dark and practically hairless, it resembles a well-tanned sun-worshiper at the beach. There's even an elite group of these animals that appears to be on an extended luxury vacation, spending much of the time outdoors, gorging themselves on acorns, and being generally pampered and preened by their caretakers. Eventually, of course, the holiday ends, but those happy times live on in an exceptional ham called *Ibérico di Bellota* (pronounced buy-yo-ta), which means "acorn." Best of all, *this* summer you won't have to travel to Spain to enjoy it: Bellota is scheduled to be imported to the United States for the first time in June or July 2008. (*Palleta di Bellota*, a cured shoulder made from these special pigs, is already here, as is *lomo*, cured pork loin).

This will complete the triumvirate of Spanish hams in America. *Jamón Serrano*, produced throughout Spain from the Druoc, or white pig, is drier than Italian prosciutto and has a pale orange tint. Regular *Jamón Ibérico* is fuller flavored and marbled with fat, making it practically melt in the mouth. *Jamón Ibérico di Bellota*, on the other hand, brings to that dense fattiness a distinct sweetness and nuttiness from the acorn diet. Because Bellota are generally aged longer, they are also darker in color. They are considerably more expensive too.

Serrano or Ibérico, sliced by hand into bite-size shards and served with briny olives, salty Marcona almonds and the classic *pan y tomates*, would make a wonderful meal on a hot summer day. But for that special summer outing, splurge on Ibérico di Bellota. All you'll need is a simple, dry Sherry or crisp white or *rosado* wine to wash it down. —ALAN TARDI

Pan y tomates

- 4 thick slices country bread, lightly toasted
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 ripe plum tomatoes, cut in half crosswise
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Coarse sea salt
- Spanish ham, olives and Marcona almonds (see Note)

Rub the bread with the garlic. Then rub the bread with the tomatoes. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Serve with Spanish ham, olives and Marcona almonds.

Jamón di Bellota can be mail-ordered from latienda.com and despanabrandfoods.com