

BOTTLE SERVICE

The 2021 Wine Lover's Guide 61 bottles, regions, and winemakers you need to know now

THE PAST TWO DECADES have seen vast changes in the world of wine. Before 2000, the classics were clear: classified Bordeaux, grand cru Burgundy, top Champagnes, Napa Valley Cabernet, a few others. Now overlooked grapes like Chenin Blanc are standards, volcanic terroirs are hot spots (literally, for Mount Etna), natural wine provokes passionate debate, and many winemakers well below legal age in 2000 have become top talents in the field. So while the old benchmarks are still vital—don't turn down Pètrus if someone hands you a glass—here are the regions, grapes, and trends helping to define the new wine world. Seek them out: They'll tell you about what wine is today and where it's headed—and they also happen to be delicious. —RAY ISLE



Regions such as Spain's Sierra de Gredos, California's Santa Cruz Mountains, and France's Aube are new stars.

Many of the Republic of Georgia's wines come from vineyards in the Kakheti valley, under the peaks of the towering Caucasus Mountains. OPPOSITE: Spain's Sierra de Gredos region under snow; its ancient Grenache vines have survived 70 or more winters like this one.



10 NEED-TO-KNOW REGIONS

MOUNT ETNA SICILY

Make wine on an active volcano? Great idea, if you're after the particular character that volcanic soils give to wine (up until the thing erupts, of course). Etna is one of Italian wine's recent success stories, producing aromatic, detailed reds and stony whites unlike anything else from Sicily—or from Italy at all for that matter. Passopisciaro, an early star, remains so on the strength of wines like its ruby-hued, red currant-rich **2018 Passopisciaro Passorosso** (\$39).

BEKAA VALLEY LEBANON

Lebanon's wine culture is ancient, but American awareness of it has only just started to rise. About time: the Bekaa Valley is an ideal place to grow grapes, with warm days, cool nights, and rocky limestone soils. Start with the **2017 Domaine des Tourelles Red** (\$20), its succulent black currant and mint notes wrapped up in fine-grained tannins, and then explore other names like Ixsir, Château Kefraya, Château Ksara, Château Marsyas, and of course the groundbreaking Chateau Musar.

THE ROCKS DISTRICT OREGON

If there's an award for most appropriately named wine region, the Rocks District wins it. The surface of this subsection of the Oregon side of the Walla Walla Valley AVA is covered in fist-size stones. But give Syrah vines a chance to take root and you'll get magic in return—black-peppery, powerful, savory reds. Buty Winery blends that Syrah with Cabernet Sauvignon for its alluringly spicy **2016 Buty Rediviva of the Stones** (\$60).

Young vintners in Spain's austere Sierra de Gredos region took inspiration from France's legendary Château Rayas to focus on the Grenache variety's transparency and grace.

STA. RITA HILLS CALIFORNIA

The first significant vineyard was planted here in 1971, but budding awareness of how great its Pinot Noirs could be hit in the early 2000s, and now its wines are cool-climate benchmarks. Try the **2016 Brewer-Clifton Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir** (\$40) to taste the brambly wild berries and faint salinity that characterize these wines.

GEORGIA

Archaeological findings near Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi show wine being produced here nearly 8,000 years ago; on the other hand, U.S. awareness of Georgian wines dates more to, say, 2010. Traditionally made in huge clay *qvevri*, these skin-contact whites (i.e., orange wines) and vivid reds thrilled sommeliers when they started to appear here. Track down the savory, amber-hued **2019 Orgo Dila-O Rkatsiteli-Mtsvane** (\$17) to see why.

SIERRA DE GREDOS SPAIN

Mountainous and austere, the Sierra de Gredos region west of Madrid started to gain acclaim 10 years or so ago as a source for gorgeous cool-climate Grenache, as young vintners took inspiration from France's legendary Château Rayas to focus on the variety's transparency and grace. The **2019 Comandante G La Bruja de Rozas** (\$30) is characteristic, with its translucent ruby hue and herb-scented wild strawberry flavors.



PHOTOGRAPHY: CARLA CARALBOVIC/EPHES PICTURE LIBRARY; (OPPOSITE) ESTANIS MUÑEZ

SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS CALIFORNIA

The Santa Cruz Mountains have a storied winemaking history, but it seems only in recent years that wine lovers have realized how amazing the vineyards are. Whether the region does Pinot, Chardonnay, or Cabernet better is an open question, but there's no doubt that the lemon blossom-scented **2017 Mount Eden Vineyards Estate Chardonnay** (\$60) is as ageworthy and complex as any great white Burgundy.

THE AUBE CHAMPAGNE, FRANCE

For a long time, the Aube's grapes were used as anonymous components in big-name brands. But recently, this region in Champagne's far south has exploded into view. The Drappier family, which has been here since 1808, provides a great introduction to the Aube's strengths with the Pinot Noir-driven, nonvintage **Champagne Drappier Carte d'Or** (\$49).

SWARTLAND SOUTH AFRICA

Lying along South Africa's western coast, this region of rolling scrubland is also home to extraordinary old-vine Chenin Blancs, Syrahs, and field blends. The Swartland Revolution group of winemakers ignited awareness, pushing a more elegant style that thrilled wine lovers around the world. Founding members Andrea and Chris Mullineux's **2017 Mullineux Syrah** (\$38), meaty and white peppery, speaks of the place brilliantly.

ENGLAND

Fifty years ago, southern England was too cold to ripen Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, the varieties used for great sparkling wine. Thirty years ago? Not true anymore. And about 15 years ago, English sparkling took off. The best have thrilling acidity and incredible focus, like the **Nyetimber Classic Cuvée Multi-Vintage** (\$55). It isn't inexpensive, but it rivals similarly priced wines from, you know, those French fellows across the Channel.

5 WINES THAT ROCKETED TO POPULARITY

Once ignored, now powerhouses: these are today's super-successes.



2001 MALBEC

Argentina turned Malbec, once a forgotten variety, into one of the world's most popular wines. The U.S. boom started around 2001. The peppery **2018 Catena Malbec** (\$24) makes it clear why.



2005 PROSECCO

Champagne, elegant; Prosecco, fun (and far less pricey). There's the recipe for a jet-powered ascent in popularity. The citrusy **NV Nino Franco Rustico** (\$21) is one of the best around.



2007 GROWER CHAMPAGNE

Grower Champagnes (single-estate, family-owned) hit wine lists in the mid-2000s and have never left. **Champagne Larmandier-Bernier Rosé de Saignée** (\$110) is a stellar example.



2008 ROSÉ

Imagine: Before the mid-2000s, dry rosé wine was a thoroughly dead category. **Whispering Angel Rosé** (\$25), its 2019 vintage juicy with wild strawberry notes, helped change that forever.



2014 RED BLENDS

Juicy, ripe, and often with a faint hint of sweetness, red blends stormed supermarket shelves in the 2010s. **The Prisoner** (\$40) is the archetype—and far better than many of its imitators.

