

# Wine & Spirits

The Little Nell, BAZAAR  
 IRON GATE, Gjelina, Aviary  
 Nopa, Uncork'd, ~~San~~  
 ENOIR, SPAGO, The Modern  
 ROPPHAN'S, Spiaggia  
 Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House  
 Wild Fire, YANGMING, ~~OKA~~  
 THE TRUFFLE TABLE, selden Standard, TINA'S  
 FARALLON, BOUCHON, ~~LOA~~  
 L'Espalier, The Nomad  
 JEAN-GEORGES  
 Le Bernardin  
 AUTRE MONDE, ~~110~~  
 Delfina, A Cote, ABSINTHE  
 Michael's Genuine &  
 The American Restaurant  
 RACINES, Lindey's

Frasca, ZUSCA  
 COCINE, TAXIMA  
 Driskill Grill, DANIEL, AQ  
 Republique, LINCOLN  
 Underbelly, NUSO'S, A VOCE, BARU  
 Bar Jamon, Cape Sea Grille  
 Orchids, Pirelli, Gary Danko  
 ACQUERELLO, Amada, Sepia  
 Gramercy Tavern  
 FEARRINGTON <sup>HOUSE</sup> <sub>INN</sub>  
 Castagna, SEPIA  
 CHEZ PANISSE  
 The Herbfarm, SALM  
 GLENELLEN STAR  
 III Forks, BINKLEY'S RESTAURANT  
 BARRINGTON'S, EVOO  
 Oak Room, Victory 44  
 Picasso, Lotus of Siam, BARU  
 THE PARTISAN  
 Lacroix, Nick's Italian Cafe

Top  
 50  
 Wines  
 American Best  
 Restaurant

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# THE RESTAURANT TOP 50

Guests at America's top restaurants value these wines for their consistency and staying power

The wine list arrives. If there's a sommelier on hand, maybe you ask for a recommendation and land on something new and delicious. On the other hand, maybe you order the same bottle you drank two weeks ago. Experimentation gives one kind of pleasure, but loyalty gives another: getting to really know a producer or a particular bottling, learning how a single wine changes with age or shifts its personality in the presence of a new dish.

The wines in our Top 50 list are the bottlings that restaurant guests return to again and again, not because they're the hottest new thing on the market, but because they're trusted benchmarks. To compile the restaurant Top 50, we ask restaurants to list the ten wines that sold best during the fourth quarter of 2015. We then rank wineries by the number of mentions they receive. The average price includes all bottlings that restaurants listed, using the prices they reported.

At the top of the list, you'll see many California cabernet and chardonnay specialists, brands like Cakebread, Jordan, Duckhorn and Caymus. Some of these brands have been the country's most popular restaurant wines ever since we published our first restaurant poll report in 1990.

On the other hand, the appearance of Merry Edwards in the number three spot speaks to the surging popularity of pinot noir in the last decade. One trend, driven, perhaps, by the strong dollar: a spike in the popularity of Spanish wines (see p. 80), particularly in Rioja (traditionalists La Rioja Alta and R. López de Heredia both made the top 20, and Muga appears farther down the list). And Marchesi Antinori, long a denizen of the Top 50, moves to its highest rank ever.

To some, those wines will be new discoveries, but like all of the wines on this list, quite a few American wine drinkers think of them as old friends.



## W&S Restaurant Top 50

The Most Popular Wines in America's Top Restaurants

1	Cakebread Cellars	\$95	25	Produttori del Barbaresco	\$92
2	Jordan Vineyard & Winery	\$111	27	La Crema	\$49
3	Merry Edwards	\$84	28	Flowers	\$107
4	La Rioja Alta	\$90	29	Argyle	\$66
5	Marchesi Antinori	\$124	30	Angelo Gaja	\$151
6	Duckhorn Vineyards	\$100	31	Ridge Vineyards	\$159
7	Lucien Crochet	\$72	32	Frank Family	\$79
8	Caymus Vineyards	\$159	33	Louis Martini Winery	\$56
9	Justin	\$76	34	Calera	\$59
10	Silver Oak Wine Cellars	\$163	35	Ladera Vineyards	\$72
11	R. López de Heredia	\$79	36	Ramey	\$93
12	The Prisoner Wine Co.	\$93	37	Faust	\$112
13	Stags' Leap Winery	\$77	37	Ferrari-Carano	\$57
14	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars	\$110	39	Bastianich	\$77
15	Catena	\$37	39	Chateau Montelena	\$94
16	Sonoma-Cutrer Vineyards	\$55	41	Frescobaldi	\$61
17	Frog's Leap Winery	\$73	41	Veuve Clicquot	\$130
18	Billecart-Salmon	\$133	43	Do Ferreira	\$61
19	Heitz Wine Cellars	\$88	44	Joel Gott	\$37
19	Chateau Ste. Michelle	\$41	45	Mark West	\$36
21	Columbia Crest	\$30	46	Muga	\$55
21	Hess Collection	\$47	46	Rombauer Vineyards	\$69
23	Cristom Vineyards	\$82	48	Patrick Piuze	\$75
24	Franciscan Estate	\$61	48	Soter Vineyards	\$80
25	Kistler Vineyards	\$128	48	Unti Vineyards	\$49

ANNUAL  
27<sup>th</sup> RESTAURANT POLL

## BY THE GLASS

This year's list of top pours by the glass is more diverse than ever. Three of the brands in the top ten are imported wines, and while it's not unusual to see Italy there, Greece and Rioja have never appeared this high in the category.

Rioja is riding the popularity wave of Spanish wines that we've seen across this year's poll results, with strong showings by the glass for La Rioja Alta and Ramirez de la Piscina. Customers may be a little less familiar with Greek wines, requiring more guidance from sommeliers. Jeff Berlin's top-selling wine at *À Côté* in Oakland was the 2012 Methymnaeos Chidiriotiko from Lesbos, which he sold as part of a flight: "To be perfectly honest, they make an orange and a red, and I called it the 'Lesbian flight.' And that had a lot to do with the sales. But they're amazing wines."

Many sommeliers are using flights and pairings to broaden their by-the-glass lists and encourage customers to be more adventurous. "If you count everything, we offer about sixty wines by the glass,"

says Cedric Nicaise of NYC's *Eleven Madison Park*. "We offer pairings with our prix fixe dinners, which change a lot. That helps us offer more wines by the glass, because we'll pour those wines for other guests who request it. Some of those are wines I couldn't put on the by-the-glass list because they're so limited in quantity."

Ben Teig of LA's *Redbird* notices that customers, especially younger ones, are seeking more adventurous choices on the glass list: "Generally people are asking more and more for nontraditional varieties." But even so, California cabernet, chardonnay and especially pinot noir continue to dominate glass pours. Meiomi Pinot Noir held the top position for the second consecutive year after chardonnay's long domination of that spot. Adriana Camacho of *The Palm* in Las Vegas finds that Meiomi's name recognition drives sales: "People here, at least, have gotten it into their heads that Meiomi is a starter wine, to have by the glass. It's a really affordable wine, and people see it everywhere, so they order it."

"People are more reluctant to throw down for a big bottle, but they're still buying really good glasses. We want it to be motivational: 'Oh shit, \$18 a glass—I have to get that!'"

—Louis Moskow,  
*315 Restaurant and Wine Bar, Santa Fe*

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Melomi	California Pinot Noir	\$14
2	Copain	Anderson Valley Tous Ensemble Pinot Noir	\$17
		Anderson Valley Tous Ensemble Chardonnay	\$16
3	Justin	Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon	\$16
4	Heitz Wine Cellars	Napa Valley Chardonnay	\$18
		Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$24
4	Sandhi	Santa Barbara Chardonnay	\$20
		Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir	\$20
6	Banfi	Toscana San Angelo Pinot Grigio	\$8
		Rosso di Montalcino Certine	\$16
7	Avalon	California Cabernet Sauvignon	\$9
		Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$11
7	Kourtaki	Aitica Retsina White Blend	\$10
		Nemea Apelia Rosé	\$7
9	Ferrari-Carano	Sonoma County Chardonnay	\$12
		Sonoma County Fume Blanc	\$9
9	La Rioja Alta	Rioja Reserva Viña Alberdi	\$14
		Rioja Reserva Ardanza	\$21
11	Hess Collection	Napa Valley Chardonnay	\$12
		North Coast Sauvignon Blanc	\$7
11	Raventós i Blanc	Conca del Riu Anoia Brut L'Hereu	\$13
		Conca del Riu Anoia Brut Rose L'Hereu	\$16
13	Catena	Mendoza Alamos Malbec	\$8
		Mendoza Malbec	\$11
13	Domaine Eden	Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir	\$15
		Santa Cruz Mountains Cabernet Sauvignon	\$25
15	Sonoma-Cutrer	RRV Russian River Ranches Chardonnay	\$14
		Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$16
16	Lucien Crochet	Sancerre La Croix du Roy Sauvignon Blanc	\$20
		Sancerre Sauvignon Blanc	\$19
16	Raymond Vineyard	Monterey R Collection Chardonnay	\$17
		Napa Valley Chardonnay	\$19
18	Bench	Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$15
		Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir	\$15
18	Villa Maria	Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc	\$9
		Marlborough Cellar Select Sauvignon Blanc	\$9

DeLoach	California Heritage Reserve Pinot Noir	\$12	
	Russian River Valley Pinot Noir	\$16	
Joel Gott	Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$8	
	California Unoaked Chardonnay	\$8	
20	Lieu Dit	Santa Ynez Valley Sauvignon Blanc	\$17
Louis Martini Winery	Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon	\$11	
	Alexander Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	\$18	
Maison Joseph Drouhin	Mâcon-Villages Chardonnay	\$12	
	Chablis 1er Cru Chardonnay	\$22	
24	Ramirez de la Piscina	Rioja Reserva	\$16
		Rioja Crianza	\$13
Canyon Road	California Chardonnay	\$8	
	California Cabernet Sauvignon	\$10	
26	Duckhorn Vineyards	Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc	\$17
		Napa Valley Merlot	\$20
Laetitia	Arroyo Grande Valley Chardonnay	\$8	
	Arroyo Grande Valley Pinot Noir	\$16	
Drusian	Prosecco	\$14	
Elk Cove	Willamette Valley Pinot Blanc	\$10	
	Willamette Valley Pinot Noir	\$16	
29	Mirassou	California Moscato	\$8
		California Pinot Noir	\$8
Ruffino	Toscana Lumina Pinot Grigio	\$10	
	Chianti Classico Aziano	\$11	
14 Hands	Columbia Valley Merlot	\$10	
	Columbia Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	\$9	
33	Argyle	Willamette Valley Brut	\$13
Granbazán	Rias Baixas Albariño	\$16	
Chateau Ste. Michelle	Columbia Valley Cold Creek Vineyard Riesling	\$6	
	Horse Heaven Hills Sauvignon Blanc	\$8	
36	La Marca	Prosecco	\$9
Unti	Dry Creek Valley Barbera	\$11	
	Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel	\$13	



# MOST POPULAR WINES BY VARIETY AND COUNTRY

When we conduct our research for this feature, we ask restaurateurs to list their ten top-selling wines in order of popularity. We then assign point values to the listed wines—from ten points for the most popular wine on the list, to one point for the tenth most popular. We use the total number of mentions a brand accumulates to determine its placement on the lists that follow, and then use the total points to break ties. The average restaurant-wine-list price for individual bottlings appear in the far-right column of each chart.

## SAUVIGNON BLANC

For the last ten years, sauvignon blanc has accounted for around seven percent of the most popular wines poured at US restaurants. France accounts for nearly half of the sauvignons on respondents' lists of top selling wines, with the Loire—specifically Sancerre—leading the charge. Regarding Sancerre, Michael Engelmann of NYC's *The Modern* notes, "People know the style, they drink it, they love it."

The US follows France, accounting for a quarter

of the most popular sauvignon blancs, driven by perpetual favorites Merry Edwards and Duckhorn. The "opulent, ripe and lush" style of Napa Valley sauvignon blanc is a draw for diners at Santa Fe's *315 Restaurant and Wine Bar*, reports owner Louis Moskow, who lists Frog's Leap (number 8) among his top sellers.

New Zealand rounds out the list with six of the top-20 placements, mostly from Marlborough.

"Sauvignon blanc is so versatile on every level, whether Italian, French, Slovenian. It's very food friendly."

—John Aranza,  
*Autre Monde, Berwyn, IL*

### MOST POPULAR SAUVIGNON BLANCS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Lucien Crochet	Sancerre La Croix du Roy Sancerre La Chêne	\$71 \$73
2	Merry Edwards	Russian River Valley	\$68
3	Domaine Vacheron	Sancerre	\$76
4	Kim Crawford	Marlborough	\$44
5	Craggy Range	Martinborough Te Muna Road	\$51
6	Whitehaven	Marlborough	\$41
7	Foucher-Lebrun	Sancerre Le Mont	\$61
8	Frog's Leap Winery	Rutherford	\$43
9	Duckhorn Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$65
10	Hippolyte Reverdy	Sancerre	\$69
	Lieu Dit	Santa Ynez Valley	\$62
11	Michel Girard	Sancerre	\$66
	Pascal Jolivet	Sancerre Sancerre Château du Nozay	\$44 \$60
	Domaine Chotard	Sancerre	\$60
14	Villa Maria	Marlborough	\$36
	Bailly-Reverdy	Sancerre Chavignol	\$55
16	Heitz Wine Cellars	Napa Valley	\$51
18	Delaporte	Sancerre Sancerre Chavignol	\$56 \$60
19	Brancott	Marlborough	\$38
	Cloudy Bay	Marlborough	\$70
20	Henri Bourgeois	Sancerre	\$58

## RIESLING

"Tasting flights are the best way to sell riesling," says Jeff Berlin at *A Côté* in Oakland. "But even today, people have a huge reluctance to drink something they think will be sweet." Although it's a sommelier favorite, riesling still receives the fewest mentions of any major white variety in our poll. This year saw an uptick, however, with the most mentions going to Chateau Ste. Michelle's Eroica and J.J. Prüm. Tina Vaughn at NYC's *The Simone* noted, "For the first year that we were open, I couldn't give riesling away. This year, I featured the Prüm by the glass with the cheese course and sold through it so quickly. To be honest, it's that Prüm name; he has a reputation."

### MOST POPULAR RIESLINGS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Chateau Ste. Michelle & Dr. Loosen	Washington Eroica	\$39
	Joh. Jos. Prüm	Mosel Kabinett Graacher Himmelreich Mosel Spätlese	\$40 \$98
3	Peter Lauer	Saar Untersteinberg Saar Barrel X	\$93 \$50
	Selbach-Oster	Mosel Kabinett Mosel Spätlese Zeinger Schlossberg	\$45 \$65

# CABERNET SAUVIGNON

America's thirst for cabernet has remained remarkably consistent, while the demand for most other varieties has waxed and waned in the past two decades. This year cabernet accounted for 13.8 percent of the most popular restaurant wines, compared to 16.6 percent last year, an erosion likely due to a surge in imported wines in the poll responses. But anecdotally, wine buyers at numerous restaurants reported that the demand for cabernet remained strong.

The most popular cabernet this year was Jordan from Alexander Valley, a brand that regularly lands in the top spot, followed closely by Caymus, which shot to the top of the cabernet list last year as diners gravitated to that wine's rich, ample style.

For Bordeaux affordable enough to sell in any volume, wine buyers told us they found more success this year with merlot- and franc-dominant Right Bank wines, though Raj Vaidya at *Daniel* in NYC listed the 1997 Potensac from the Médoc (around 40 percent cabernet) as his biggest new success: "It's not a grand château, not a complex wine, but it's priced in a sweet spot. We picked up a ton of cases and blew through it."

Many wine buyers reported that the market for high-end California cabernet remains strong. At *Binkley's* in Phoenix, one of Rob Sargent's top ten wines was the 2012 Odette, a new single-vineyard project in

Stags Leap—he sold bottle after bottle at \$280. Ambitiously priced cabernets also moved by the glass, many sommeliers said. When Tonya Pitts of San Francisco's *One Market* served the '89 Caymus Special Selection at \$75 a glass, the bottle didn't last a week.

To a large extent, however, sommeliers report that high-octane cabernets are on the wane. "We try to have those iconic names on the higher end. Dunn, Araujo, producers that are making benchmark styles of wine. We're not offering that [overextracted] style anymore," says Haley Guild Moore of *Town Hall* in San Francisco. And Raphael Ginsburg of *Ai Fiori* in New York sold plenty of the 2012 Frog's Leap Rutherford Cabernet: "It's more herbaceous and restrained, and I was concerned it wouldn't have broad appeal, but I underestimated people's palates; they don't always need the richest thing."

Given cabernet's strong performance at so many restaurants, why did it have a somewhat weaker showing in this year's poll? Ben Teig of *Redbird* in Los Angeles offers a generational explanation: "The 'millennial' kids, they're coming in and asking, 'Do you have wine from Jura? Do you have grüner? Do you have any nebbiolo that I can afford?' They don't want to drink cabernet, especially from the New World. And definitely not Napa, because that's what their parents drink."

## MOST POPULAR CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Jordan Vineyards	Alexander Valley	\$114
2	Caymus Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$159
3	Silver Oak Wine Cellars	Alexander Valley Napa Valley	\$155 \$197
4	Justin	Paso Robles Paso Robles Isosceles	\$67 \$110
5	Louis Martini Winery	Sonoma County Alexander Valley Reserve	\$52 \$62
6	Ladera Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$72
7	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars	Napa Valley Artemis Stags Leap District Fay	\$111 \$195
8	Columbia Crest	Horse Heaven Hills H3 Columbia Valley Grand Estates	\$34 \$30
9	Faust	Napa Valley	\$112
10	Heltz Wine Cellars	Napa Valley	\$108
11	Franciscan Estate	Napa Valley	\$62
12	Avalon	California Napa Valley	\$36 \$42
13	Stags' Leap Winery	Napa Valley Stags Leap District The Leap	\$79 \$115
14	Frog's Leap Winery	Napa Valley Rutherford Estate	\$78 \$115
15	Darioush	Napa Valley	\$181
16	Duckhorn Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$129
17	Honig	Napa Valley	\$84
18	Oberon	Napa Valley	\$66
	Frank Family	Napa Valley	\$101
19	Hess Collection	California Hess Select	\$39
	J. Lohr	Paso Robles Seven Oaks	\$37
21	Pied à Terre	Napa Valley	\$52
	Joel Gott	Napa Valley Napa Valley Blend No. 815	\$39 \$33
24	Cakebread Cellars	Napa Valley	\$144
25	Chateau Ste. Michelle	Columbia Valley Indian Wells	\$42
26	Educated Guess	Napa Valley	\$58
27	Round Pond	Napa Valley Kith & Kin Napa Valley	\$68 \$123
28	Chappellet	Napa Valley Mountain Cuvée Napa Valley Signature	\$54 \$150
29	Chateau Montelena	Napa Valley Napa Valley Calistoga Cuvée	\$100 \$98
	Robert Sinskey Vineyards	Carners Napa PDV	\$82
30	Smith & Hook	Central Coast	\$57
32	Alexander Valley Vyd's	Alexander Valley	\$48
	Chiarelllo Family Vineyards	Napa Valley Bambino	\$75
33	Corison	Napa Valley	\$131
35	Nickel & Nickel	Oakville CC Ranch Rutherford Napa Valley Quicksilver Vineyard	\$200 \$140
36	Amapola Creek	Sonoma Valley	\$98
	Newton Vineyard	Sonoma County Red Label	\$80
37	Simi Winery	Sonoma County	\$56
	ZD Wines	Napa Valley	\$95
40	Fisher Vineyards	Napa Valley Unity	\$77