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I scout the globe for the best experiences in wine, food and travel.

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TRAVEL 1/05/2017 @ 2:41PM | 9,653 views

The 10 Best Wines of 2016

The wines listed below are my top picks from a year's worth of tastings (shoot, some were so good I needed a cigarette after finishing a glass), but my caveat has always been this: these are only a small slice of the many, many amazing wines in the world. In this year of wine events, tastings, travels, and simple gatherings of friends I encountered what continues to be impressive quality and diversity in wine. For me, these wines were the memorable ones. I can still recall the taste of each one and the way I felt drinking the wine. There is a special (and arguably odd) type of geeky excitement wine lovers get when they open a bottle and discover the wine is a stunner—much like a reader feels starting into a great book; you tuck into the experience and let it consume you completely. Resolve to drink well this year, and hopefully this list will get you started.



Cloudy Bay Te Wahi

Wines are listed in no specific order; average prices quoted from [Winesearcher.com](http://www.winesearcher.com)

Peay Vineyards Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast, 2011: The Peay vineyards are some of the most extreme coastal sites in California—which yield conditions that make intense and complex wines. I'm a fan of the chardonnays from these sites, but this pinot noir is still my favorite. It's juicy with bright cherry and earth and hints of spice and vanilla. Complex and mouth-watering, with harmonious acidity, fruit and tannin. Average online price, according to [winesearcher.com](#), \$44.

Te Wahi Pinot Noir, Central Otago, 2014: This is the third year of production for this Otago-based pinot noir from Cloudy Bay and there can be no doubt that they are on to something in this wild and remote region of southern New Zealand. This is also the first vintage that blends fruit from two prized but quite distinct vineyards, bringing together the character and density of the Calvert vineyard with the rustic structure of the Northern Vineyard. Beautifully complex, this wine hits all the high notes: dense, earthy, with supple tannins and a core of silky rich fruit. Average price \$65.

Domaine Jamet Cote Roti, 2010: Perfumed, decadent and savory with an addictive silky texture and heaps of blackberry and blueberry fruit. A stunningly complex wine—something the Jamet family achieves by blending syrah selections from 25 different sites within the appellation. 100% syrah. Can be found online and at auction, average price on [WineSearcher.com](#) \$155.

Damilano Cannubi Barolo, 2009: The wine is crafted from nebbiolo grapes grown in Barolo's prized "grand cru" Cannubi vineyards. In fact, the fruit from these vineyards is so remarkable that as far back as 1752 there are bottles that specifically designate the Cannubi vineyard on the label. The wine is savory and rich, velvety with rustic notes of black cherry and spice, very focused and vivid with a fresh finish. If you don't want to spring \$80 for the Cannubi—and I promise you at that price it is an astonishing steal compared to grand cru wines from Burgundy and Bordeaux—then try their less pricey "drink-it-now" wine: Barolo Lecinquevigne, a blend of nebbiolo grapes from five different vineyards. Average price \$73-\$80.

Achaval Ferrer Finca Altamira, 2013: A stunning red blend from Argentina with a texture of crushed velvet. This wine drinks like a world-class Bordeaux offering deep brooding complexity married with brilliant freshness. Savory and mouth-watering, it has the perfect triumvirate of acid, fruit and tannins all in balance. This year marks the anniversary of the 15th bottling of Achaval-Ferrer's Finca Altamira. This wine was also the first Decanter Five Star Award wine in Argentina and the first 96 point Wine Spectator wine from all of South America. \$150 is current SRP for Achaval Ferrer's 2013 vintage, which is the vintage still on shelves. They have now started shipping the 2014 from Argentina, and it should be on shelves soon.

Caiarossa IGT Toscana, 2011: This bold red from Tuscany's Maremma region is savory and earthy with dark cherry and anise notes, leather and spice. The coastal vineyards, not far from the Tyrrhenian Sea, are certified biodynamic. Made from seven different grape varieties (merlot, cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, syrah, sangiovese, petit verdot, alicante) which are all harvested and vinified separately. Average price \$55.

Domaine Mittnacht Freres Grand Cru Rosaker Riesling Alsace, 2012: This Alsatian producer uses biodynamic vineyard practices throughout the estate—practices that many argue lend purity of taste to the final wine. This Grand Cru Riesling hails from the famed Rosaker vineyard (named for the roses that surround the vines) –



yielding a tropical, juicy, rich, refreshing and compulsively drinkable wine laced with intriguing minerality. \$32
Donkey and Goat “Improbable” Chardonnay, Eldorado, 2014: Donkey and Goat winery makes small lot bottlings of amazing California wines and this one is no exception. The palate is tropically luscious and mouthwatering with a crushed stone backbone and ripe peach and orange peel notes. I am a big fan of these wines—they tend towards restraint but not in a lean, annoying way; it’s a coiled restraint, full of complexity and savory elements. Immensely drinkable and wonderful with food. \$22.99 on klwines.com

Laurenz V Charming Gruner Veltliner Kamptal Reserve, 2014: The Laurenz (Lenz) Moser Family is a fifth generation Austrian producer who focuses entirely on crafting Gruner Veltliner. This particular wine is a blend of fruits from 30+ year-old vines. Boasting minerality and richness, this wine shows both juicy peach and sassy citrus notes. A wonderful wine that showcases the value and quality of Austrian winemaking. \$30

Catena Alta Chardonnay, 2013: I tasted this lovely Argentine wine at 33,000 feet on a recent Delta flight and it knocked my socks off. Kudos to Delta’s wine expert, Andrea Robinson, who selects wines on the ground and then tastes them at altitude to ensure the flavors come through (things change on the palate when you are flying). This chardonnay has a flavor-rich palate of cream, lemon, pineapple and freshness. A hint of oak. Fruit cultivated from a high altitude vineyard which breeds complexity into the final wine. Average price \$29.

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