

Wine & Spirits

Value Brands of the Year

Commit these names to memory and you'll never be at loss for a well-priced bottle of wine. These are the brands that regularly turn out excellent wines for \$18 or less, the ones that you can trust when every dollar counts.

To find them, we looked at all the more than 12,000 wines we tasted over the past year and selected out the brands with the most high-scoring wines in this price range. To make your summer wine shopping easier, we've listed the two top-scoring wines for each brand and present them where we think you'll most enjoy drinking them:

At the beach, a barbecue, a picnic or even at an ambitious evening soirée.

Happy summer drinking!

Lamb on the Grill

Across the Mediterranean, where temperatures are warm and the hillsides are scrubby with wild herbs, sheep are easier to raise than cattle, and lamb takes precedence when it comes to meat.

In the south of France, that lamb might be a shoulder stuffed with black olives and rubbed with herbs. Those dark, meaty flavors find an echo in syrah-based wines like Louis Bernard's Côtes du Rhône-Villages or Lirac, from the southern reaches of the Rhône Valley.

In Morocco, the syrah is just as spicy and rich (check out Ouled Thaleb's 2010 Zenata Syrah for proof) but maybe a touch more earthy—pitched toward the cumin-rubbed, slow-roasted lamb called *mechoui*, or couscous made with mutton and sweet spice.

In Apulia, southern Italy's largest producer of olive oil, the lamb might be cut into chops, doused in that olive oil and wrapped in parchment paper with some herbs, where it will bake, becoming fragrant and rich—a lusty dish that's made for the local negroamaro wines, like Castello Monaci's Salice Salento Liante, with its dark plum flavors and savory mushroom earthiness.

Take the ferry from Bari on Apulia's coast over to Greece, and you'll find lamb in a thousand guises, from straight-up chops (sold at restaurants by the kilo) to ground and wrapped in phyllo for succulently rich pies. To drink, you'll have plenty of choices, from cherry-juicy agiorgitikos in the Peloponnese to tannic, truffley xinomavros from Naoussa—Boutari can help you with both.

When it comes to lamb closer to home, just look for the wines with a Mediterranean feel, whether syrah from warmer quarters, like Columbia Valley—Snoqualmie Columbia Valley Syrah. Or look to zinfandel—Ravenswood's Old Vine Zin is a steal for \$16, cherry-plump yet entirely savory—just the wine for lamb from Rocky Mountain Wooly Weeders, a service that sends sheep out to graze away the weeds between the vines. —TARA Q. THOMAS



Louis Bernard (Boisset Family Estates, St. Helena, CA)
2012 Côtes du Rhône-Villages (90 pts., \$13, 2/14)
2011 Lirac Domaine des Causses (87 pts., \$17, 2/14)



Ouled Thaleb (Nomadic Distribution, Los Angeles, CA)
2010 Zenata Syrah (90 pts., \$16, 2/14)
2010 Zenata Medaillon (89 pts., \$16, 2/14)



Boutari (Terlato Wines Int'l., Lake Bluff, IL)
2011 Mantinia (90 pts., \$15, 8/13)
2009 Naoussa (88 pts., \$18, 8/13)



Ravenswood, Sonoma, CA
2011 Napa Valley Old Vine Zinfandel (92 pts., \$16, 10/13)
2011 California Vintners Blend Petite Sirah (85 pts., \$10, 10/13)



Castello Monaci (Frederick Wildman and Sons, NY)
2011 Salice Salento Liante (92 pts., \$17, 6/14)
2012 Salento Maru (88 pts., \$17, 6/14)



Snoqualmie, Paterson, WA
2011 Columbia Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (88 pts., \$13, 2/14)
2011 Columbia Valley Syrah (86 pts., \$10, 2/14)