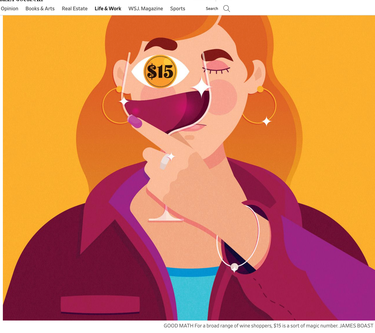

GOOD MATH For a broad range of wine shoppers, $15 is a sort of magic number. JAMES BOAST

ON WINE

The 10 Best $15 Wines: From Chardonnay to Rosado

In the world of wine retail, $15 is the sweet spot: Some shoppers won't go above it, others won't go below it. Our wine columnist found some outstanding values at that price point—red, white, pink and bubbly.

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By Lettie Teague
Aug. 20, 2021 8:14 am ET

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SOME NUMBERS mean more than others in the world of wine—and I'm not referring to wine critics' scores. Here I'm talking specifically about the number 15: Some oenophiles won't go above it and others won't go below it when shopping for wine. I've heard $15 cited so often I decided to search for bottles that cost exactly that figure (at least in the wine stores where I shopped). While I turned up some duds—it's especially challenging to find good domestic bottles at that price—I did find the following 10 well-made red, white, rosé and sparkling wines that should please buyers on both sides of the numerical divide.

Bargain Bubbles

2018 Raventós i Blanc Blanc de Blancs Conca del Riu Anoia

When Raventós i Blanc proprietor Pepe Raventós set out to make traditional method (aka Champagne method) sparkling wine in the Penedès region of Spain, he decided not to call his wine Cava, which one normally expects to see on the label of a Spanish bubbly, believing the name signals "cheap" to wine drinkers. Instead, his Blanc de Blancs (a wine made entirely from white grapes) is labeled "Conca del Riu Anoia," denoting the specific geographical area where the wine was produced.

The moniker may be a mouthful—not as snappy as "Cava" or as well known—but the wine, a blend of four grapes, is crisp, elegant in character and very well made.

Oregon's Other Pinot

2019 Willamette Valley Vineyards Pinot Gris

Although Pinot Noir garners most of the press coverage when it comes to Oregon wines, a fair amount of Pinot Gris comes out of the state as well. Indeed, it's Oregon's most-planted white grape. Willamette Valley Vineyards has been producing Pinot Gris for nearly 30 years. The winery is publicly owned—you can become an "owner" with a minimum purchase of 300 shares ($1,515 at $5.05 a share)—and turns out 20,000 cases annually of this soft, almost tropical, easy-drinking white.

Under-the-Radar Portuguese Red

2017 Beyra Reserva Beira Interior

A still-obscure wine region in the center of Portugal, the Beira Interior DOC was created less than two decades ago. Likewise largely unknown to most of the wine-drinking world, the region's reds, whites and rosés are produced from native varieties with tongue-twisting names. The reds are (so far) the easiest to find in the U.S.

Winemaker Rui Roboredo Madeira is one of the leading producers of the region and the talent behind this earthy, lush red made from a blend of Tinta Roriz (aka Tempranillo) and Jaen grapes, aged in a combination of American and French oak.

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Crisp Catalan Chardonnay

2019 La Coline Aux Fossiles Chardonnay

Wine importer Eric Solomon, founder and owner of European Cellars, and his French winemaking partner, Jean-Marc Lafage, focused on two vineyard sites in the Côtes Catalanes wine region of the Roussillon—in French Catalonia—to produce this lovely Chardonnay. Its name refers to fossils found in the vineyards' gravelly soils. This medium-bodied white is marked by a refreshing, bright acidity, notes of lemon and a hint of tropical fruit. It's a very promising first vintage and a great value, too.

Approachable Argentine (No, Not a Malbec)

2018 Catena High Mountain Vines Mendoza Cabernet Sauvignon

The Catena family is widely credited with putting Argentine Malbec on the world wine map. But their winery does an equally good job with Cabernet Sauvignon, which they've been producing for several decades (though U.S. sales remain about 10 times lower than those of their Malbec). Their High Mountain Vines Cabernet Sauvignon, harvested from vineyards approximately 4,000 feet in altitude, is approachable and fairly soft, with fine grained tannins and a moderate alcohol level. It's a pleasure to drink.

Good-Time Grüner

2019 Hiedler Löss Grüner Veltliner

This is the Hiedler estate's "introductory" Grüner Veltliner according to the winemaker, Ludwig Hiedler Jr., styled to reflect Austria's Kamptal region as well as his winery's particular style. Made from a blend of grapes from several parcels—mostly young vines—it may not be a "serious" Grüner, but it's an easy-to-like, easy-drinking white marked by bright acidity and notes of sage and citrus. A terrific summer aperitif.

Snappy Kiwi Sauvignon

2020 Spy Valley Marlborough New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc

With this bottling from the Marlborough region, in the northeast part of New Zealand's South Island, a long-established producer hits all the notes one expects from a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc: bold aromas of grapefruit and herb, with a zippy dose of acidity from the much-heralded 2020 vintage. The owners aren't CIA operators but, rather, winemakers with a sense of humor: The name nods to a satellite monitoring station located in the Marlborough region.

Perpetual-Favorite Pink

2020 Bodegas Muga Rosado

I buy certain wines again and again because they are well priced as well as reliably good, and the rosado from Bodegas Muga has been a go-to pink wine for me for at least five summers. (It's a favorite among WSJ readers too, judging by their emails.) A blend of Viura, Garnacha and Tempranillo with a pale-pink hue, a soft, approachable style, and a lively acidity, this rosado has been a staple of the historic winery in Rioja, Spain, since 1932.

Low-Key Pinot Noir

2019 Lawson's Dry Hills Marlborough Pinot Noir

Without question, Sauvignon Blanc is the superstar of New Zealand's wine industry and of Marlborough in particular. But good Pinot Noir grows in the region, too, and it sells for similarly reasonable prices. The Lawson's Dry Hills Pinot Noir disappeared from the American market four years ago, but it has recently returned, with around 1,000 cases of the wine in the U.S. at present and plans in place to import more. That's very good news for lovers of Pinot Noirs like this one: an appealing red marked by cherry and spice, with pleasingly restrained fruit and a lowish (13%) alcohol count.

Barolo-Adjacent, Nicer Price

2019 Domenico Clerico Visadì Langhe Dolcetto

I can't think of many makers of great Barolo who don't also turn out a first-rate Dolcetto—the "other" red grape of Italy's Piedmont. (It's said the producers themselves drink Dolcetto while waiting for their Barolos to mature.) The Domenico Clerico estate, founded by a legendary modernist Barolo producer in Monforte d'Alba in 1976, has gained fame for its single-vineyard wines in particular. Although Dolcetto translates as "little sweet one," this wine is totally dry and rather savory. A deep violet-red in color, it's still quite young and hence a tad tannic. (Decanting is helpful.) That said, this wine is delicious now and terrific with food.

Write to Lettie at wine@wsj.com

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