

At \$18, this punchy, energetic malbec wants to be your wine of the moment

By **Dave McIntyre**

November 27, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. GMT+1

This week's wine recommendations include a top-notch natural wine from Argentina that represents one of the year's greatest values, two delicious sparkling wines to help celebrate the holidays without breaking the budget, and a pair of tasty chenin blancs from South Africa.

GREAT VALUE

Raventós i Blanc de Nit 2017

★★★★☆ (Extraordinary/Sublime)

Conca del Riu Anoia, Spain, \$26

Wow. Raventós i Blanc is technically a cava producer, but the winery stopped labeling its wines as cava to distinguish themselves as a cut above in quality. This is a pale rosé bubbly, with just a tinge of pink from monastrell (mourvedre, to Francophiles) added to the classic white blend of xarel-lo, maccabeo and parellada grapes. It is outstanding, delicate and elegant, with an appealing persistence that should impress even a die-hard champagne lover. Alcohol by volume: 12 percent.

Imported by Skurnik Wines & Spirits; distributed by Potomac Selections: Available in the District at Grand Cata (Ninth Street, La Cosecha); Hop, Cask & Barrel; Wardman Wines. Available in Maryland at Alma Cocina, Bin 604 Wine Sellers, Wine Merchant and Wine Source in Baltimore; Bin 201 Wine Sellers in Annapolis; State Line Liquors in Elkton; the Wardroom and Wishing Well Liquors in Easton. Available in Virginia at Barrel Thief Wine Shop & Cafe, J. Emerson Fine Wines & Cheese, Secco Wine Bar in Richmond; Foods of All Nations in Charlottesville; Knead Wine in Middleburg; Unwined (King Street) in Alexandria; Wine Cabinet in Reston.

GREAT VALUE

Santa Julia El Burro Malbec Natural 2010

Santa Julia El Burro Malbec Natural 2019

★★★☆☆ (Extraordinary)

Mendoza, Argentina, \$18

Juicy, punchy, energetic. Grapey, primal, pure. This is not a bottle to stick in your cellar and age. This is a wine for the moment — and that moment may be now or over the next year or two, when someone comes over for dinner or just when you feel like ordering takeout. Santa Julia is made by the Zuccardi family in Argentina's Mendoza region and represents incredible value for the price. This El Burro is Sebastian Zuccardi's foray into "natural" winemaking, with minimal manipulation in the cellar and little or no sulfur added. It offers all the blueberry, plum and wild herb flavors that Mendoza malbec is known for. Stylistically, think of this as an exhilarating trail hike rather than a fancy soirée. It is certified organic, vegan and fair trade. ABV: 13.5 percent.

Imported by Winesellers, distributed by Winebow: Available in the District at Cairo Wine & Liquor, Rodman's, Schneider's of Capitol Hill. Available in Maryland at Balducci's, Bradley Food & Beverage, Shuvam Beer and Wine in Bethesda; Bel Pre Beer & Wine, Fenwick Beer & Wine and Woodmoor Supermarket in Silver Spring; Downtown Crown Wine and Beer, Finewine.com and Grape Expectations in Gaithersburg; Grosvenor Market in Rockville; Petite Cellars and Wine Bin in Ellicott City; Red: Wine, Beer & Spirits in Clarksville. Available in Virginia at Cheesetique (Alexandria, Shirlington).

GREAT VALUE

Cricova Alb de Onitcani Reserve

★★★☆☆ (Excellent/Extraordinary)

Moldova, \$17

I guess this is technically a "blanc de blancs," in that it's a sparkling wine made entirely from white grapes. But who has ever heard of Alb de Onitcani, an obscure Moldovan grape variety that happens to make a delicious bubbly, with ripe peach flavors and a hint of wild herbs. Cricova makes some delicious sparkling wines, and this new offering gives us an opportunity to taste something we're unlikely to find elsewhere. Cricova has several good value bubblys. This Alb de Onitcani is new to the market, so it has limited availability now. I suspect it will only increase. ABV: 13 percent.

Imported and distributed by Salveto Imports: Available in Maryland at Wine Source in Baltimore. Available in Virginia at Oakton Wine Shop in Oakland; Troika Gastronom in Falls Church; the Wine Outlet (Great Falls, McLean, Vienna).

GREAT VALUE

The Winery of Good Hope Bush Vine Chenin Blanc 2019

★★☆☆ (Excellent)

Stellenbosch, South Africa, \$13

Redolent of ripe peaches and apple blossoms, this soft, off-dry, mouth-filling wine is great to drink on its own while watching clouds go by. Try it with shellfish, too. ABV: 12.5 percent.

Imported by PaCa Imports, distributed by M. Touton: Available in the District at Bloomingdale Liquor, the Bottle Shop, Central Liquors, Cork & Fork, Downtown Liquors, Rodman's. Available in Maryland at Downtown Crown Wine and Beer in Gaithersburg; Eastport Liquors in Annapolis; Greenbelt Co-Op in Greenbelt; Hook & Vine Kitchen and Bar in North Beach; Old Farm Liquors in Frederick; Roland's in Chesapeake Beach; Tilghman Island Country Store in Tilghman; Total Discount Liquors in Eldersburg; Town Center Market in Riverdale Park; Westlake Beer & Wine in Bethesda; Wine Source in Baltimore. Available in Virginia at Leesburg Gourmet in Leesburg; the Wine Outlet (McLean).

GREAT VALUE

Bosman Family Vineyards Chenin Blanc 2019

★★☆☆ (Excellent/Extraordinary)

Wellington, South Africa, \$15

Lithe and long, this filigreed white wine tastes of peach blossom and pear. It's dry and minerally, an ideal match for charcuterie or light seafood dishes. ABV: 12.5 percent.

Imported by Wine for the World, distributed by Salveto: Available in the District at Chat's Liquors, Emilie's, the Ministry, Odd Provisions, Schneider's of Capitol Hill. Available in Maryland at Wine Source in Baltimore. Available in Virginia at Department of Beer and Wine in Alexandria; the Little Wine Shop in Chester; Market Street Wineshop in Charlottesville; Union Market in Richmond; the Wine Outlet (Great Falls, McLean, Vienna).

Availability information is based on distributor records. Wines might not be in stock at every listed store and might be sold at additional stores. Prices are approximate. Check Winesearcher.com to verify availability, or ask a favorite wine store to order through a distributor.

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