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THE POUR

A Starter Pack for Aspiring Wine Lovers

Strip away the dry talk and you'll find wine is just delicious fun. For those hesitant to know where to begin, these six bottles are a great introduction.



By [Eric Asimov](#)

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Here's a little secret about wine — it's great fun. It's delicious, too.

You would never know this to hear people talk about wine. Too often, it is buried under a mass of nonsense that has nothing to do with the pleasure and joy it offers.

It's discussed with painstaking precision using complex terminology and pretension, as tasters grapple with metaphorical descriptions of aromas and flavors, and conjecture about methodology and equipment. They ultimately deconstruct wine like anatomy students dismembering a cadaver.

It makes wine seem like very serious business, which, for many people, is a turnoff.

Wine does deserve academic discussion. It can be complicated, with many mysterious elements that people strive to understand. Yet it's also a simple pleasure, a great drink.

The serious, rational side of wine should not overwhelm its emotional appeal. Dry talk about learning to "appreciate" wine obscures the fact that people deeply, passionately love it. It's the difference between fulfilling an obligation and being moved by desire.

Reconciling these two sides of wine can be baffling. It's no wonder that people are hesitant about wine, especially young people, many of whom also fear [alcohol as risky](#). Almost everybody finds it intimidating and often more expensive than other alcoholic drinks.

Nonetheless, people are often curious, too. Perhaps they've seen people enjoying it, and they may have heard that humans have considered wine a great pleasure for thousands of years.

Sadly, the enticements are few. Who wants to be told they may find a subject rewarding only after years of study? No. They want a drink they can enjoy now.

I would like to propose an alternative, a wine starter kit complete with a six-pack of bottles guaranteed to be fun and delicious. These are not bottles to study, they are joyous wines to love now.

What would this starter pack include?

I would suggest six categories: 1. Excellent bubbles. 2. White wine with character. 3. Rosé worth drinking year-round. 4. Orange wine, the inverse of a rosé. 5. Chillable red. 6. A more nuanced red.

Aside from the wines, what else do you need? Hardly anything.

Well, you will need a corkscrew. The choices are many, ranging from a Swiss army knife (only in an emergency) to [a \\$1,300 tool made of aerospace-grade titanium](#). I recommend a simple device known as a [waiter's friend](#) or, sometimes, a wine key. A simple one costs around \$10 to \$12.

You'll also need glasses. Stemmed glasses are best. You can buy [a basic set of four stemmed glasses](#) that you can use for any type of wine for \$40 or \$50 (although you can spend a lot more, too). Honestly, I used to care more about good glasses than I do now. The difference they make is not worth the anxiety if you don't have stems or don't want to invest in a set. Drink out of tumblers,

juice glasses, even jelly jars and don't worry about it. Good wine is more important than good glasses.

Let's get to the wines. Along with a primary suggestion, I offer a few alternatives. Each of these bottles should cost roughly \$20 to \$35.

Bubbles



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Raventós i Blanc Conca del Riu Anoia de Nit Rosado, \$25 (Skurnik Wines, New York)

Just about every place that makes wine makes sparkling wine as well. They come in myriad styles and colors ranging from cheap Prosecco to very expensive Champagne. For now, I suggest [a good cava](#), a catchall term for the sparkling wines of Spain.

The Raventós i Blanc is a pale pink sparkling wine, made using the same method as Champagne, as is required for all cavas. It's dry, tangy and wonderful. Drink by itself, with potato chips, anything fried, pizza or whatever.

If you can't find this bottle, other producers to look for include [AT Roca](#), [Mestres](#), [Loxarel](#), [Bertha](#), [Recaredo](#), [Gramona](#), and [Parés Baltà](#).

White With Character



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

ColleStefano Verdicchio di Matelica 2024, \$20 (Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, N.Y.)

I love this Italian white with the heavy metal-sounding name. Verdicchio di Matelica simply means the wine is made of verdicchio grapes grown in the commune of Matelica in the Marche region of central Italy.

It's delightful, dry, thirst-quenching, simple to drink yet complex and delicious, and it feels great just to roll around in the mouth. You could enjoy this on its own, but it will be even better with food, like a seafood pasta or shellfish, or many vegetable dishes.

If you can't find this bottle, try another Italian white wine, like Etna Bianco, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, Vernacchio di San Gimignano, Gavi, Soave, or a Sicilian grillo or zibibbo. Each will share a dry, tangy character yet be entirely distinctive.

Year-Round Rosé



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Broc Cellars California Love Rosé 2024, \$24

Most rosés are ephemeral, made to be consumed in the summer before they wither like a flower petal. They tend to be pretty but with little substance, more a prop by the pool than a genuine wine. I prefer real rosés, which you can certainly enjoy by the pool, in a park, on a rooftop or wherever, but which you can also enjoy with a meal, any time of the year.

Broc Cellars is one of my favorite moderately priced California producers. This is made from an assortment of red grapes, generally from the North Coast of California. It's a little darker colored than the popular pale rosés of Provence, but it's dry and easy to drink.

Other California rosés to seek out include [Martha Stoumen's](#) Post Flirtation, a lively wine made from multiple vintages, or [Arnot-Roberts](#). Or try something completely different, like Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, a dark Italian rosé that can be both juicy and complex.

Orange Wine, the Inverse of Rosé

[Gulp/Hablo](#) Spain Orange 2024, \$21 for 1 liter (T. Edward Wine, New York)



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Why do I call orange wine the inverse of rosé? Simple. Rosé is made of red grapes, macerated with the skins until the desired color is achieved. Orange wine is made similarly, except with white grapes.

The method is ancient, but these wines have gotten highly popular in recent years. You'll see them sometimes called amber wines or skin-macerated whites, but the term orange wine seems to have stuck.

Gulp/Hablo is a great introduction to the genre, a liter bottle of bright, lively tanginess with just a little rasp of tannin from the skins.

Orange wines tend to be produced in small lots, so you'll never know what you will see in wine shops, but three Italian bottles I like are [Montenidoli](#) Vernacchia di San Gimignano Tradizione, [Monastero Suore Cistercensi](#) Coenobium Ruscum and [COS](#) Terre Siciliane Pithos Bianco.

Chillable Red

[Ampeleia](#) Toscana Rosso Unilitro 2023, \$23 for 1 liter (Bowler Wine, New York)

Red wine is habitually served too warm — a half-hour in the fridge does wonders, usually. But some reds, easygoing wines with almost no astringent tannins, you can serve almost cold. Ampeleia's Unilitro is a perfect example. It's

a red blend that's juicy and joyous, wonderful cold with all kinds of foods and a great wine for cookouts.

Other chillable options include [Broc Cellars](#) Love Red or [Skull](#) Red from California, [Lapierre](#) Raisins Gaulois and [Éric Texier](#) Chat Fou from France, and [Pipeños](#) from Chile.

A More Complex, Nuanced Red



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Monteraponi Chianti Classico 2022, \$35 (Grand Cru Selections, New York)

It's nice to have a wine to pull out for a special occasion, like maybe you've invited some friends over for dinner. The other wines I've suggested are fine, like your favorite pair of jeans. But occasionally it's fun to dress up a bit.

Chianti Classico is well known, but very few realize just how great the wines can be, which makes them relatively good values. They have all the characteristics that people associate with great wines — complexity, the ability to age — yet they are accessible and delicious at any time. Serve it with pasta and any sort of red sauce, with beef or roast chicken, even with pizza, and it will be wonderful.

If you don't see the Monteraponi, other great producers to look for include [Istine](#), [Fontodi](#), [Fèlsina](#), [Castello di Ama](#), [I Fabbri](#), [Terreno](#), [Monte Bernardi](#), [Valle delle Corti](#) and [Montesecondo](#).

Try any of these wines and see if you don't agree that they are fun and delicious. Then, perhaps, it's time for round two.

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