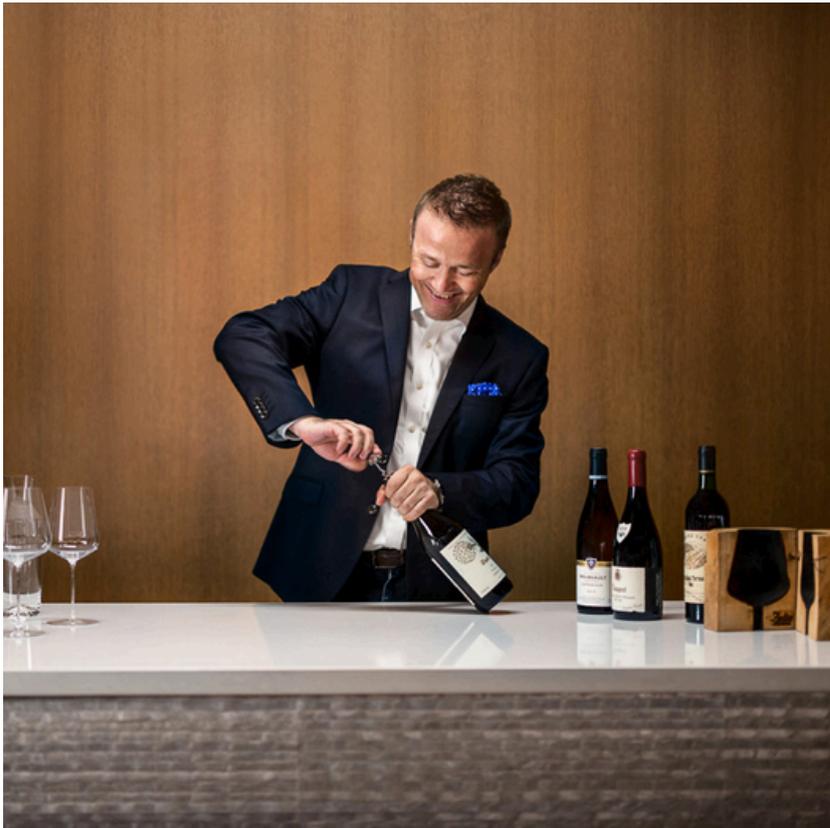


FOOD & WINE

12 Quintessential Comfort Wines from Le Bernardin's Aldo Sohm



© Francesco Tonelli

By [Carson Demmond](#)

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Le Bernardin wine director Aldo Sohm picks 12 easy bottles for his fantasy Austrian *heuriger*.

Anyone who's ever spent time in Austrian wine country in the months following harvest has probably wandered into a *heuriger*—a cozy, casual wine tavern serving up the recently fermented vintage alongside comfort fare. That theme of coziness is something we all seek around this time of year, so we asked Austrian native and Le Bernardin wine director Aldo Sohm for the mixed case he would want stocked in his own fantasy version of the tavern tradition.

“In Austria, it would be the new vintage,” says Sohm. “Austrians like these clean, fresh flavors, where you can just sit down and enjoy your company and not have to think too much. We have a German word—*gemütlichkeit*—that there's no real English equivalent for. If you sit in a chair, and it's really comfortable, that's *gemütlichkeit*. Or you can use it as a verb: You get together with friends and have a blast talking, eating, and drinking... that's *gemütlichkeit* too.”

Sohm, who deals in some of the world's finest wines at both the Michelin three-star restaurant Le Bernardin and the now year-old Aldo Sohm Wine Bar, drew up a list of 12 no-fuss comfort bottles from around the world that he finds facilitate that sort of environment. "You'll just want cold cuts or charcuterie and these easy wines," he says.

1. 2014 Schloss Gobelsburg 'Gobelsburg' Kamptal Grüner Veltliner

"I think Gobelsburg is absolutely one of the best producers right now in Austria, and he makes very pure, very fresh and elegant styles of grüner veltliner in the Kamptal region. He's on a great path, and the wines get better and better every vintage. Tasty and crisp, easy to drink, but still complex enough to make a lasting impression."

2. 2013 Wieninger 'Rosengartl' Wiener Gemischter Satz

"Wieninger is the godfather. He's one of the pioneers of the category of Gemischter Satz and of Austrian wine in general. This is a field blend, which has a long tradition in Vienna, where they would harvest and ferment everything together: grüner veltliner, pinot blanc, neuburger, traminer and riesling. The reason why this wine is so good is that it comes from the centerpiece of the vineyard called 'Nussberg,' which means 'Nut Mountain.' It's very calcareous there (lots of limestone soils), so the wine has this freshness. It's very floral and aromatic. It might not sound like very much, being just a simple field blend, but it's a supertasty, very giving wine."

3. 2014 Peter Lauer 'Barrel X' Saar Riesling

"I can't say enough about this wine. It's one you can chug. It goes well with everything from Asian cuisine to French cuisine. It has just a hint of residual sugar because the acidity is so high, and you can keep drinking and drinking because there's a certain lightness to it. It's so food-friendly, and for the type of restaurant we're thinking about here, you look to have wines that you can sit together with friends and just enjoy. It's the definition of *gemütlichkeit*."

4. 2013 Domaine Roulot Bourgogne Blanc

"I have a special relationship with Jean-Marc Roulot since I did an internship with him this year for harvest. He's a benchmark producer—really a top producer in Burgundy—and I'd love to say 'drink the Meursault 'Perrières,' but that's too serious for what we're talking about here. This one's an entry-level bottle, but it has so much to give, and if you like more complex flavors, if you like Chardonnay with just a little hint of oak, you're going to love it."

5. 2014 Rafael Palacios 'Louro do Bolo' Valdeorras Godello

"Here's this white wine from Valdeorras in Spain, and if you go to a place that is tapas-style, it will work with *everything* on the menu. It's a weird thing: The wine is a little reductive in a sense, but it has a lovely aromatic character and is superfresh. Plus, it's complex enough to satisfy an experienced wine drinker while also being easy enough for someone who doesn't really care that much about wine."

6. 2012 Raventos I Blanc 'de Nit' Conca del Riu Anoia Brut Rosé

"Look, it's very hard to not like this wine. It's in a price range where everybody can afford it. It's tasty. And if you care about *terroir*; if you care about biodynamic wine production, you have it all here. And it's such an incredibly versatile wine. To me, sparkling wine goes with everything. Whatever food you have, it will work."

7. 2014 Marcel Lapierre 'Raisins Gaulois' Vin de France

"You know [*laughing*], it's probably the cheapest wine on the whole list here, but it doesn't take itself seriously, and that's why it's so much fun. Simple, juicy, bright red fruit. I'll give you an honest story: I have some of the 2011 left in my cellar, and a year ago I opened a bottle on a muggy day and grilled some steak. I didn't want to do a round, heavy wine in 90-degree weather, right? So we chilled the bottle, and you know what? It worked with grilled vegetables. It worked even with the steak. It was so good that we opened a second bottle."

8. 2011 Frédéric Lornet Arbois 'Trousseau des Dames'

"This is the wild card in the selection, because most people think of white first when they think of the Jura. But this trousseau has classic flavors that everyone loves. It has that wet stone mineral component. It has *cut*. So whatever you expect from the Jura, you have here in red form. Really pure, eccentric fruit, and a beautiful freshness on the palate. We all chase Overnoy, Ganevat, and Domaine du Pélican, but Lornet

is actually one of the guys who was there in the early days. He doesn't have this same cult following, so the wines are affordable. That's the positive side effect."

9. 2011 Domaine Galouchey 'Vin de Jardin' Bordeaux

"The reason why I love this wine so much is: It's dirt cheap for what it is. It gives you so much value. It's a wine from a tiny vineyard in Pomerol, declassified into appellation Bordeaux. It has hearty fruit. It's luscious and generous; the tannins are supple but really, really fine. It's a really delicious Pomerol wine for very little money, and normally for Pomerol, you'd have to go pretty deep into your pocket. The winemaker is a sommelier from Paris, who is very well traveled—a very experienced sommelier, you can tell—so everything you want, you find in the glass."

10. 2013 Pierre Gonon Saint-Joseph

"The appellation Saint-Joseph in and of itself doesn't say very much because it's so large. It can be so many different styles of syrah. But this is one that over-delivers. It's just over-the-top. There is such heartiness and concentration and layers of flavors, and Gonon masters that beautifully. The only thing that I would do differently for this wine than for the others is give it a little bit of air because it's so young. I would decant it and serve it in big glasses."

11. 2013 Wachter-Wiesler 'Bela-Joska' Eisenberg Blaufränkisch

"This is from a young guy who makes very delicate and finessed blaufränkisch. You have these dark currant flavors, bright acidity and freshness, and yet there's a concentration that goes beyond what you'd expect. I think his wines are amazing, but what caught me off guard is how the press actually responded when we put his basic blaufränkisch on by the glass at the wine bar when it first opened. They wrote about it left and right! They didn't jump on the Bordeaux or the Rhône style wines or any of the more obvious wines. They loved THIS ONE. The average consumer probably wouldn't pick an Austrian red wine, right? But yet, they did, and they loved it."

12. 2012 Vietti 'Perbacco' Langhe Nebbiolo

"You know, Barolo/Barbaresco is an interesting story, because if you buy a wine from a producer like Gaja, for example, you'll spend a ton of money. If you buy one from Conterno, same story. Then you can get some much less expensive Barbarescos, but it's very confusing to a customer since the price range is that broad. Here, you have a nebbiolo that goes for around \$20 retail, and the fun part is that it's a very giving wine for very little money. It's just like a lighter version of those Barolos or Barbarescos. More delicate. And for someone who's just getting into wine and wants to drink all the benchmark wines – Côte Brune from Jamet... That Perrières from Roulot... You can't! So what do you do? Buy the smart wines. Find a great producer, like this one. Get their entry-level bottle, like this one. And you'll have a great wine in your glass."

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