

THE 10 BEST WINES OF 2019



JAMES SUCKLING and his team have spent the past year travelling the world tasting 25,000 wines. Here are the best – including the Wine of the Year

My son Jack, senior editor Nick Stock and I are going to remember 2019 for a long time. It was the year that we discovered more than 50 perfect wines among the 25,000 we rated. In fact, we can't remember a year quite like it: every major wine region released great wines on to the market, the majority being from the 2015 and 2016 vintages. These duo vintages will long be remembered much like 1989 and 1990 for Bordeaux. However, 2017 and 2018 should not be forgotten – both produced some exceptional wines, particularly whites.

Every year we list the best wines we tasted. While the emphasis is on quality, special preference is given to more affordable wines. For example, the Top 10 listed here are all priced at less than US\$80 a bottle.

The wines on our list show the diversity of greatness in the wine world today, with entries from Italy, Spain, Germany, France, New Zealand, Chile and Argentina. But of particular note this year were wines from Brunello di Montalcino in Italy's Tuscany region. We tasted close to 200 wines from the 2015 vintage and dozens scored 95 points or more. We gave 11 perfect 100-point ratings. The Siro Pacenti Brunello di Montalcino Vecchie Vigne 2015 is our Wine of the Year. It's a perfect example of what makes 2015 Brunello so compelling to buy and drink. There's a real energy and excitement to tasting it. The 2015 Brunello di Montalcinos are available beginning January.

1. SIRO PACENTI BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO VECCHIE VIGNE 2015

Score: 100

This is a perfect example of what makes 2015 Brunello so compelling. The Siro Pacenti really has a "wow" factor. We tasted it at least five times over the summer and we liked it more and more. Like all the best 2015 Brunellos, the Pacenti Brunello 2015 shows super intensity of cool and dark fruits as well as stones and

flowers, and opens to a full and plush body of expansive yet utterly refined tannins that coat your palate in a caressing way. It shows glorious transparency and communication. It's one of the best young Brunellos I've tasted in my four-decade career and I've been tasting Brunellos professionally since 1983.

Owner Giancarlo Pacenti says his 2015 Brunello is "the wine of his career." And we have to agree. It's very intense on the nose with blue fruit, cool stones, brambleberries and blackberries. Wet earth, too. Full-bodied and extremely dense and powerful with a super center palate of fruit and ripe yet compact tannins. Lightly chewy and expressive. Superb transparency and integration. Goes on for minutes. Try from 2021, but already amazing.

2. RENIERI BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO 2015

Score: 100

Marco Bacci of Chianti Classico's well-respected Castello di Bossi bought this gorgeous Brunello vineyard in the late 1990s. However, it's only now that the wines are coming into their own. This is probably because the vines are at a good age to yield superlative grapes. Renieri has been producing excellent wines – both Brunellos di Montalcino and Super Tuscans – since the 2006 vintage. The former show fabulous depth and fruit yet remain polished.

This 2015 Brunello has earthy aromas: bark, sand, truffles, graphite, rust, terracotta and sandalwood rise up from the deep with Burgundian poise; fruitier orange zest and preserved lemons glimmer in their wake, while riper incense and tar lurk in this dense forest of aromas. There's such richness to the centre palate, but the fruit there is vivacious and elegant, swaddled in robust but generous tannins. The finish is hauntingly long, the aftereffects of the acidity unworldly. This is certainly in a quiet, reserved stage of evolution, and will need time to fully mature in bottle. Drink from 2025.

3. MUGA RIOJA PRADO ENEA GRAN RESERVA 2011

Score: 99

Muga is one of the classic wine estates in La Rioja, Spain. It produces a diverse range of styles, but the owners strive to create classic wines for the region, characterised by finesse and elegance as well as structure and depth. They're made for drinking, but age incredibly well. I'm invariably impressed by the reds, especially the Reservas. The wines spend years ageing in barrels, an important feature in distinctive Rioja-style wines. The Gran Reservas in particular are aged three years in oak and another three years in bottle.

This is the most structured Prado Enea ever. A reduced centre palate that is so compact with dark fruit, dark mushrooms and cedary spice. Full body. Wonderfully polished tannins and a long, long finish. Electric acidity. Muscular and well toned. This is a new classic that reminds me of great Spanish wines from the 1940s and 1950s. Better after 2021, but already so impressive.

4. MARCHESI ANTINORI UMBRIA CERVARO DELLA SALA 2017

Score: 99

What would the wine world be like without the Antinori family? The patriarch of the clan, Piero Antinori, forever changed the way the world views Tuscan wines with the invention in the 1970s of Tignanello, followed by Solaia. Many of Antinori's wines maintain a loyal following among collectors around the world. The sleek, structured wines of Guado al Tasso represent Antinori's continued connection to Tuscany's Bolgheri. Indeed, the Antinoris make wine in many of the key appellations in Italy and the world, but Tuscany remains home.

This is big and powerful, without being ripe and heavy. So much apple, stone and hints of toffee. Aromatic. Full-bodied, layered and framed with phenolic tension and a great finish. Muscular and agile at the same time. One of the best I've tasted. Drink or hold.

**5. SCHÄFER-FRÖHLICH
RIESLING NAHE FELSENECK
GG 2018**

Score: 99

With the hugely talented Tom Fröhlich – who made several savvy vineyard acquisitions after taking over in 1995 – at the head of this estate, Schäfer-Fröhlich has become a standard-bearer for great Riesling from Germany’s Nahe.

Very pure slate here – this is something unique. The elevated, steep and stony site has such strength of character, delivered with such purity. Gunsmoke, gunflint and very fine fragrance with a streak of fresh lemons. It has a super-fine and elegant feel, floating ballet-like over the palate. Such elegance and power. The finesse and length are really ethereal. Yellow-grapefruit juice and pith here. Wildly succulent at the long, salty finish. What a thrilling wine. Drink or hold.

**6. RIPPON PINOT NOIR
CENTRAL OTAGO MATURE
VINE 2010**

Score: 100

This biodynamically farmed wine estate in New Zealand’s Central Otago region not only produces great Pinot Noirs, but it could also be one of the most beautiful wine estates in the world. With a vineyard that sits against a lake, backed by mountains and clear skies, five generations of the same family have turned it into one of the best producers in the region.

This has such freshness, at between nine and 10 years of age. It delivers a very rich, blue-fruit core with spiced earth and light, leathery nuances. The palate has composed and compact tannins and a slinky and rich, powerful array of blueberries and a long, juicy, succulent and vibrant finish. Shows just how well Rippon pinots age. This is just getting started! From biodynamically grown grapes. Maturation release. Drink or hold.

**7. CHÂTEAU LARCIS-DUCASSE
ST-EMILION 2016**

Score: 99

When Larcis-Ducasse brought consultants Nicolas Thienpont and Stephane Derenoncourt into the estate to turn around what looked like a

flailing business, they couldn’t have hoped for better results. The two improved drainage, harvesting techniques and moved to organic methods on the estate, and the wines are now rich, textured and very age-worthy.

The aromas here are so spellbinding, with shiitake mushrooms, wet earth and moss, as well as tree bark and, finally, dark fruit. The palate is incredible as it builds and grows with full body, but is always tight and reserved. It shows so much depth and complexity. Please try not to touch this until 2025.

**8. EREDI FULIGNI BRUNELLO
DI MONTALCINO 2015**

Score: 100

Situated on the northern slope of Montalcino, this small winery makes wines with incredible finesse and intensity. For the last three decades, law professor and family member Roberto Guerrini has been overseeing the wine estate. His wines are as complex and refined as the symphonic music he enjoys. Guerrini is a man of impeccable taste, and he personifies the unique and subtle character of his wines. Hence, the wines here show perfect balance and exquisite complexity.

The purity of fruit on the nose is perfection, with cherries, crushed raspberries, mineral, pumice and citrus fruit. Dust, too. Full body. Powerful, chewy tannins. So long and muscular, yet polished and formed. The most structured Brunello I’ve ever had from here. A wine for decades. Try from 2022.

**9. ERRÁZURIZ PINOT NOIR
ACONCAGUA COSTA LAS
PIZARRAS 2018**

Score: 99

Errázuriz is among the most venerable producers in Chile’s Aconcagua Valley. The winery was founded by Don Maximiano Errázuriz in 1870, which gives it almost 150 years of rich history. Today, Eduardo Chadwick – a fifth-generation family member – manages the estate. Benefitting from the hot summers and cool winters of Aconcagua, Errázuriz’s vineyards are home to Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, as well as Carmenere, Malbec and

Syrah. Aside from high-quality reds of elegance and complexity, Errázuriz also makes Chardonnays with great minerality.

This wine has great aromas of dried strawberries and fresh flowers, such as lavender. Full-bodied yet very tight and focused. Impressive tannic structure, but refined and polished. Lightly chewy. Finishes tight and refined. Best Pinot of Chile. Drink from 2022, but hard to hold back.



**10. CHEVAL DES ANDES
MENDOZA 2016**

Score: 99

A joint venture between Châteaux Cheval Blanc in Bordeaux and Terrazas de Los Andes in Argentina (which is owned by Louis-Vuitton Moët-Hennessy), Cheval Des Andes focuses its efforts on producing the best Malbecs of the region. It’s the best of two worlds: a combination of the intense Argentinean fruit

and the elegance that comes with French style.

Super refined and beautiful with flowers, spices, dried fruit and hints of stones. Medium to full body with very fine tannins and a gorgeous finish. Shows great finesse and depth. Savoury character, as always, but in check. Drink from 2022.

For the full list of Top 100 Wines of 2019, head to JamesSuckling.com