



# Wine & Spirits

## TOP 100 WINES

*of 2018*

Some people think it's only the big, bold wines that stand out in panel tastings. That's not how it works out at W&S. We find even subtle great wines have the power to silence a table of tasters and compel us to slow down and take a closer look. Often, these wines are the ones that encourage the most conversation as well: They capture our imagination, excite us, and make us want to share them with others.

We devote this section to the wines that brought the most excitement to our tastings over the last 12 months, the ones that stood out among the 15,000-plus that landed on our tasting tables in NYC and LA. **Patrick J. Comiskey** and **Joshua Greene** review the US wines; **Greene** also covers imported wines along with critics **Stephanie Johnson**, **Patricio Tapia** and **Tara Q. Thomas**. We've listed our respective territories on page 12.

## BEST DOURO RED

**94 | Quinta do Monte Xisto** \$80  
**2015 Douro** João Nicolau de Almeida was, until his retirement in 2015, the oenologist and CEO of Ramos Pinto; his sons, Mateus and João, are also talented winemakers and viticulturists. They work together on this family project, a vineyard in the eastern reaches of the Douro Superior, on a high ridge that drops off steeply to the river below. The vines date to 2005, and the family has farmed the site under biodynamic principles from the beginning, allowing the local plants and wildflowers to grow among the vines. They built a winery into the schist at their home near the vineyard, where they foot-trod this selection of touriga nacional, touriga francesa and souzão in stone lagars and then aged the wine in 600-liter barrels. An exceptional vintage, this 2015 has the stone-dust scent of the place, and tastes of fresh herbs, blueberries and bee pollen. It's subtle, dark and sleek, a meaty Douro red that will age for a decade or more. (W&S 2/18) *MundoVino/The Winebow Group, NY*

## BEST MADEIRA

**98 | Blandy's** \$315  
**1977 Madeira Rich Malmsey** Jenny Lakin of NYC's *Ferris* described this wine's chestnut-honey flavors and mouthwatering lift of freshness as "kind of magic." In fact, it's a wine that might have a physical effect on you, one that has nothing to do with drunkenness. The resonance of its flavors completely fills your head with scents of orange, plum, almond and persimmon, while the weave of those flavors comes together to warm you from the inside out, wrapping your senses in something that feels like a silk blanket, weightless and comforting. (W&S 10/18) *Premium Port Wines, San Francisco, CA*

## BEST PORTOS

**96 | W.&J. Graham's** \$200  
**2015 Porto Vintage The Stone Terraces** The arid conditions and early-season heat of 2015 favored north-facing sites, like one of the three parcels at Malvedos that make up the Stone Terraces. The other two parcels face east and west, spared from some of the heat of May and June. The summer was less intense, but no less dry, until substantial rains fell on September 15, resuscitating the vines and allowing for more complete ripeness when harvest resumed several days later. This second release of Stone Terraces combines the energy of its powerful tannins

with the voluptuous richness Malvedos can give in the best years. It has the green *esteva* note of great young Porto—a scent close to Thai basil—and has a purity to the structure that makes it feel grand. (W&S 12/17) *Premium Port Wines, San Francisco, CA*

**96 | Kopke** \$885  
**1937 Porto Colheita** In the Port trade since 1638, Kopke has amassed a cellar full of old Colheitas, including some remarkable rarities that Sogevinus, the owner of the firm since 2006, has begun to bring to market. This 1937 seems to grip every taste receptor with succulent peach flavor while its texture is silken and gentle to the touch. You might expect an 80-year-old wine to be as refined as this, but you probably wouldn't expect it to be as generous, with needles of acidity pricking the cushion of fruit, bringing out a glistening sweetness. The detail begins to fade a few days after the wine is first opened, though it remains delicious. Best to throw a party for your favorite 80-year-old and share the bottle until it's just a fond memory. (W&S 12/17) *Wine In-Motion USA, Union, NJ*

## SOUTH AFRICA

### BEST CHENIN BLANC

**94 | Silwervis** \$25  
**Swartland Smiley V3** A "smiley" is local parlance for a sheep's head, which some consider a leftover after butchering an animal, and others consider a delicacy. Smiley V1 was made up of leftovers from the 2011 and '12 vintages. Then Ryan Mostert began to play with his lots of bush-vine chenin, leaving some on the skins, aging some under a blanket of yeast, and intentionally oxidizing some barrels by leaving them in the sun. He blended V3 from lots aging in neutral barrels, stainless steel and glass demijohns. The cloudiness in the color is contrasted by the clarity of the flavor, as savory as veal stock, as bright as fresh-picked fruit (maybe mango, maybe peach). There's beautiful sunny coolness, along with a zesty shiso-like bite of acidity. It's awesome deliciousness from the natural-wine camp. (W&S 2/18) *PaCa Imports, Newport, RI; Verity Wine Partners, NY*

## SPAIN

### BEST SPARKLING

**93 | Raventós i Blanc** \$33  
**2013 Conca del Riu Anoia de la Finca Vinya dels Fòssils** The vines at Vinya dels Fòssils originate from Manuel Raventós

Domènech's 1888 massal selection. The family planted the latest generation of vines in 1964, a blend of macabeo, xarello and parellada, all growing in a lime-rich soil. This wine's bubbles are small and firm, with a refreshing energy. The ripe white fruit is bathed in herbal touches while fresh acidity keeps adding layers of flavor to discover. (W&S 8/18) *Skurnik Wines, NY*

## BEST GALICIA WHITE

**95 | Palacio de Fefiñanes** \$54  
**2014 Rías Baixas III Año Albariño** The jewel in the crown of the small range of albariños from Fefiñanes, this comes from a selection of vineyards planted on granitic soils in Cambados, in the heart of Salnés. The wine is aged for three years in steel tanks, including seven months in contact with its lees. The result is a delicate beauty presenting flowers, citrus fruits and honey, all in a subtle and refreshing harmony. Nothing feels out of place, all the elements delivered in homeopathic doses, ready to refresh a grilled fish. The finish is clean and herbal, with a note of watermelon that makes it mouthwatering. (W&S 8/18) *Classic Wines, Stamford, CT*

## BEST SHERRY

**96 | Hidalgo-La Gitana** \$50  
**Sanlúcar de Barrameda Manzanilla La Gitana 225 Aniversario** A limited-production bottling to commemorate the founding of this venerable bodega in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, this Manzanilla Pasada has been under a veil of flor for close to 15 years. Deep and concentrated, it starts out feeling sweet, full of dried fruit and spice notes, but that sensation is quickly subjugated by the wine's forceful saline notes. The finish is spicy, full of refreshing acidity. Leave the wine in the glass and it develops more mineral notes and layers of aromas and flavors. A feast. (W&S 8/18) *Hidalgo Imports, Miami, FL*

## BEST RIOJA ROSÉ

**96 | R. López de Heredia** \$35  
**2008 Rioja Gran Reserva Viña Tondonia** Here's a rosé that transcends the category. It's a rare release: The last vintage Mercedes Lopéz de Heredia produced was 2000—and she makes it in the same resolutely traditional manner as her whites and reds. Aged four years in old barrels and another six in bottle, there's nothing frivolous about it. Rather, it feels like a snapshot of the place it was raised, in sepia tones. You can feel the old cellars and their worn-in house-made barrels in the rich,