

# Bloomberg

## Wine Critic Elin McCoy: The 10 Best Bottles I Tasted in 2023

From a \$28 Spanish white to priceless reds from a century ago, there was much to choose among.



Every December, I relive my most memorable wine experiences of the year by flipping through my tasting notes and recalling the bottles that really stood out—and why.

Choosing just 10 is never easy. Great wine is as much about the occasion and the people as the liquid in the glass. In 2023, I was lucky enough to sample incredible reds, whites, rosés and bubbly from 21 countries on six continents, from historic vintages of classic Bordeaux to cabernets from California estates celebrating 50th anniversaries, to luscious examples on visits in Italy, and others from such far flung places as Armenia and China. Close to my heart were the growing number from winemakers seriously committed to fighting climate change.

My picks range from traditional to experimental, old to new, super expensive to a perfect bargain. They include a surprising pet nat from China, a first growth Bordeaux from a legendary vintage, a serious white from a woefully underrated grape and a fabulous Italian red that combined my love of wine and art.

All reflect what's important in today's wine world and where it's headed in the years ahead.



### **2019 Susana Balbo Signature Barrel Fermented Torrontés ([\\$28](#))**

This golden-colored, creamy textured white is my bargain of the year. I've always regarded torrontés as a simple tutti-frutti quaffer, but Susana Balbo, Argentina's first female winemaker, changed my mind at an October tasting of her barrel-fermented cuvée at Mostrador in New York. We sipped eight vintages from 2015 to 2022. This one wowed me with its intense tropical fruit and citrus notes; subtle, tangy mineral finish; and the kind of richness you find in a superb aged riesling. The keys, Balbo says, are growing grapes at high altitudes and the use of French oak barrels. The 2019 is very hard to find, so I've linked instead to the 2022, which will be just as elegant with time.



**2022 Domaine Le Moodie Anxious Pétillant Naturel (Price will be \$40 in the US when it becomes available; 120 yuan at wine bars in Guangzhou and elsewhere in China)**

At a global tasting in Sonoma last June, I found my discovery of the year: this silky-textured rosé pet nat sparkler made from pinot noir grown in the arid desert of Ningxia, China. I loved the wine's crunchy red-fruit flavors, aromas of peonies and zingy acidity. Winemaker Muti Mo, who opened the first natural wine bar in Guangzhou and founded his winery in 2021, is the first vigneron in China to specialize in pet nat. (A quick refresher: These bubblyies are made by a simpler process than for Champagne; partially fermented juice is bottled and sealed with a crown cap, and fermentation finishes in the bottle, trapping the bubbles.) It's a window into the future of Chinese wine.



**2021 Littorai B.A. Thieriot Chardonnay (\$110)**

Inspirational winemaker Ted Lemon, founder of Sonoma's Littorai, has long been one of my wine heroes for the way he's redefining farming at his fog-kissed estate. During the annual conference of Areni Global, an independent think tank dedicated to the future of fine wine (I'm a member), I interviewed him at his winery for a small group of attendees. Then we tasted five of his eight incredibly pure pinot noirs and this intensely mineral chardonnay, with lemon-lime aromas, that shimmers with energy and elegance. When it comes to climate change, the philosophical Lemon says, "The only question for humanity now is how will we continue to live on this Earth."



**2020 Quilceda Creek Tchelisteff Mach One Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (\$250; [2019 is available now](#))**

The best reds of Washington state don't get enough attention. That was my takeaway from a lunch with six cabernets made by this pioneering winery. 2020 was the winery's 42nd vintage and the second one for this deep, concentrated single-vineyard, single-clone cabernet from the Horse Heaven Hills AVA. Named for legendary Napa winemaker André Tchelisteff, the uncle of the winery's founder, it's wonderfully balanced and complex and brims with plummy, spicy flavors and notes of crème de cassis.



**2014 Ornellaia Bolgheri Superiore (\$280)**

The celebration of the latest Vendemmia d'Artista release from Italian icon Ornellaia in Venice was an irresistible duet of cutting-edge art and wine. This annual collaboration between the Frescobaldi family-owned winery and a contemporary artist produces a limited number of art-enhanced bottles auctioned off to benefit the Guggenheim Museum. Yes, there was a grand tasting, but the highlight of the event for me was a private dinner with the Frescobaldis and American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, hosted by Giberto and Bianca Arrivabene in their art-filled apartment atop their Palazzo Papadopoli on the Grand Canal. Naturally, we arrived by boat. This Ornellaia vintage is the favorite of Kosuth, who shared his views on conceptual art as we savored its dark blackberry fruit, leather and tobacco notes, and oh-so-silky texture.



### **2019 E. Guigal Côte Rôtie La Turquie (\$399)**

When you're invited to sample the latest vintage of Rhône Valley producer Guigal's single vineyard "LaLa" wines—La Turquie, La Mouline and La Landonne—with winemaker Philippe Guigal over lunch, you go. These syrahs from Côte-Rôtie are among the world's most sought-after reds. My preference always depends on the vintage, and for 2019, I was torn between the savory power of the La Landonne and the verve, spice and complexity of La Turquie. The latter won, at least for now.



### **1982 Château Latour (\$2,600)**

The chance to compare eight wines from Bordeaux's legendary 1982 vintage at a Sotheby's dinner at New York's Benoit restaurant was a rare treat. The lineup included five first growths, second-growth Pichon Lalande and Right Bank stunners Trotanoy and Cheval Blanc, plus commentary by Bordeaux expert Jane Anson. The Latour was the spellbinding wine for me, brimming with power, structure, intensity, a soft, deep, dense texture, and a finish that lasted (yes, I timed it) more than a minute. Those who chase bottles of the great 1982s at auction won't be disappointed



### **1976 Heitz Cellar Bella Oaks Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (Only available at auction, magnum of 1978, \$2,800)**

Napa's Bella Oaks vineyard holds a special place in my wine memories as I knew Belle and Barney Rhodes, who planted it 50 years ago. The first release, made by legendary winemaker Joe Heitz, was a thrilling taste of Napa history, with warm ripe fruit, mint, and damp earth flavors and a long, soft-textured finish. He made the single-vineyard wine under his own label for more than three decades. You could taste the signature of this great vineyard in every wine in a 15-year (1976-2021) retrospective at New York's Modern hosted by art collector and preservationist Suzanne Deal Booth. She bought the vineyard in 2010, replanted and then launched the wine under its own Bella Oaks label with the 2018 vintage. Her 2019 (\$350) will be another classic.



### **1959 Château Ducru-Beaucaillou (\$4,070 in Manila; also at auction)**

My idea of Sunday lunch was forever changed by a five-hour repast and 20-vintage tasting at second-growth château Ducru-Beaucaillou during my spring trek to Bordeaux for the annual en primeur tastings. After a vertical sampling of wines from 2003 to 2021, art collector and food-loving proprietor Bruno Borie served vintages 1996, 1959, 1947, 1923 and 1920 with seven courses at a flower-filled table. The 1920, the 200th anniversary of the estate, was delicate and fading but still alive at 103, with cigar box aromas and flavors, while the 1923, amazingly, showed off intense spicy flavors, and the 1947 was fresh, savory and layered. But the 1959 was the magic one, the stunner, with its aromas of dried rose petals and violets and flavors of red currants, fine leather, cedar and smoke.



**2020 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Montrachet ([\\$14,950](#))**

The layered elegance and stratospheric prices of wines from Burgundy's most famous domaine mean its annual pre-release tasting is always a highlight of my year. Even in the hottest vintage ever recorded in Burgundy and the driest since 1945, the wines are still brilliantly fresh. The top red, Romanée-Conti, was predictably fabulous, but this year the two whites surprised me most. The super rare Montrachet, from a tiny vineyard plot, is surely Burgundy's greatest chardonnay: vibrant, dynamic, powerful and rich, with a satiny texture that coated my tongue. Yes, I drank every drop.