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## Everyday wines, under \$15



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### NORTHWEST WHITES

While the prices continue to rise on Oregon Pinot Noir and Washington state Bordeaux-style Merlot, the whites from these respective regions are still rock-solid. In Oregon, that means Pinot Gris, and the state's largest producer, King Estate, is still one of its best. Its signature bottling can be had for about \$14. Or pick the fruit-Gris-based blend by Louis Rosenthal, "Evolution No. 1," named for the nine cool-climate varieties you'll find there. \$13.

In Washington, the word is Riesling, and you can find juicy, well-balanced, food-friendly Rieslings from the likes of Chateau Ste. Michelle and Pacific Rim (all less than \$10); for a couple of extra bucks, look yourself in the pants with "King Pin Gris," which winemaker Charles Smith tailors for Asian dishes.

### THE INDIGENOUS ITALIANS

In a little more than a decade, Italy's indigenous whites have been transformed — crisper, thinner and plinkier, they're now fresh, vibrant and full of character. Some of the best-tasting values come from the middle reaches in Umbria and the Maremma, like the Trebbiano d'Abbazia from Farnese (about \$8), or the marvelous 2007 Verdicchio di Matelica from Cappelletti (about \$9). It's worth a slew of awards in the Italian wine press, and it's still about \$14.

### SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE WHITES, PART 2

Chile and Argentina are known for their red wines (on this, more to follow) but each produces vibrant whites as well, from grape varieties they've adopted as their own. In Argentina, that's Torrontés, a crisp, herbaceous variety that smells of citrus blossom and tastes faintly tropical — the best comes from Donato del Plata, under the brand Chos (about \$11). Chile meanwhile has three

### SOUTH AMERICAN REDS

Argentina and Chile still offer great value from their respective adopted varieties. For Argentina, that's Malbec, and it's routinely delicious — mildly spicy, mildly floral aromatics, silky blue fruit flavors, firm tannins and as juicy as raspberries plucked off the bush. There are several to choose from, but I'm liking the Terrazas de los Andes, from the Lujan de Cuyo (about \$10), for its juicy blackberry fruit with a hint of spice.

### AMERICAN BLENDS

Chilean Carmeneres, too, is on the right track. After a couple of initial vintages where the wines seemed green and staid, I'm happy to report that the country is now producing some of the most mouth-filling Carmeneres with deep purple fruit and good power, such as the fully organic Emiliana Carmeneres from the Cautin Valley (about \$10).

### UNDERPRIVILEGED

There are lots of cheap Cali-

forney, but the most interesting is also one of the most appreciated: It's a well-made one made from 85-year-old vines. Many Rhône reds are made heavy, but I also found two terrific Spanish Garnachas worth seeking out — a Grenache-dominant wine from Marston producer Oliver de Capoenes called "Mad Dog" (about \$11), and the other from older vines west of Barcelona in Aragón, from a winery called Monte la Barda (about \$12).

### THE CLOSURES

As I pursued wine stops I paid close attention to the end caps — the case stacks that often form the end of wine rows — and I saw plenty of good wines at unheard-of prices. So I'll recommend keeping a slot open for alcohol deals. I scored a California Syrah from Mendocino County for \$12 (Expansive "Hiver"), that was mostly worth twice that. I saw a reputable Monterey Chardonnay (K&L Hart) selling for a song, and a Burgundy Pinot Noir for less than \$10 (Stellman). For the next six months or so, that piece of real estate is going to be crowded with value; this slot will be in high rotation in your working row.

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ways been in blends, Rhône-style and otherwise. The best of them showcase what a winemaker can craft from myriad elements.

Etude, the reputable Pinot winery in Carmel, has started a new brand called Fortitude that includes two red wines from older vineyards, many of which were planted decades ago with heritage varieties like Cabernet, Carignane, Petite Sirah and Valdiguié. One is called "Friedrich Field Blend" and the other "Brake Ridge." Not only are they inexpensive (as little as \$14) and delicious, I also like them because they're a nod to California's winegrowing past. Or you can choose from more traditional Rhône blends such as Saper's "Los Olivos Cuvee," Andrew Murray's "Tous les Jours," and Steve Beckman's "Cuvée de Réo," all of which hover around \$13.

### WHERE TO BUY

Check out our listing of stores stocking these wines.

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For information about Pacific Rim wines, contact Debbie Emery at 510.207.1306, or [debbie.emery@rieslingrules.com](mailto:debbie.emery@rieslingrules.com)