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Jim Bryant's Value Wines

KEEP THIS LIST FOR YOUR WINE SHOPPING

FOR THOSE OF YOU who have recently moved to the Barrington area, we're glad you're here! I wanted to reintroduce myself to you and other readers. For 55 years, I have been in the world of wine. For all of this period, I have been a student of wine and continue to be so. Along the way, I have worked in many vineyards around the world during harvests (for 25 years), imported and sold wine, written about wine, and have led tour groups of friends to wineries around the world over the past 15 years.

During this entire time, I have consumed many of the greatest wines ever made and I continue to seek the greatest wines available. During these current times, I am convinced that the quality of the inexpensive wines has soared. Accordingly, I am going to focus this article on the best values in the

\$7–25 price range with most being well under \$20.

As many readers know, I have worked for Costco for 15 years in Lake Zurich in the wine department. As you may know, Costco is the nation's largest wine retailer by far and is proud of its heritage regarding keeping all Costco prices low for its members. With its buying prowess and very low margins on wine and all other products, it is an obvious choice for value wines in an industry which tries to operate on gross margins double that of Costco, without its buying prowess.

Although I am going to list both Kirkland (Costco's own brand) wines as well as other labels, I list only those wines in each category that I personally endorse and buy for my own consumption. Those who know me well know it is a fact that I do not need to buy any more wine of any type for

the rest of my life, but I cannot resist a world-class value involving excellent wines. In fact, most of my wine volume purchases fall into this category with the remaining bottles from several top Italian producers (Piemonte, Tuscany, and Veneto), one from Spain, Australia, Argentina, and a select few from the Rhône and Bordeaux. These wines are very rare and expensive and involve a great deal of searching. With my quality bar set high by these wines, it actually brings me great joy to find wines featured in this article which meet my requirements. The Kirkland wines are available only at Costco, but the others may be available in other Illinois wine shops. Note: QPR—Quality Price Ratio—is a commonly used abbreviation regarding wine value. Below is my list for value wines.

NON-COSTCO WHITE/ROSE WINES

Perrin Côtes de Rhône Blanc Reserve, \$10. This is an unbeatable QPR. Made from Grenache Blanc. It is mouth-filling with a beautiful nose.

Michel Gassier, Nostre Pais Blanc, \$18. Outstanding QPR. A blend of Grenache Blanc,

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Viognier, Roussanne, Clairette, and Bourboulenc, this is a great wine for many foods and by itself. It is rich and satisfying without a heavy mouthfeel.

Tablas Creek Patelin Blanc, \$19. A blend of Grenache Blanc, Clairette Blanche, Viognier, Marsanne, and Roussanne. This wine, as are all of Tablas Creek wines, is made from Rhône varietals only. With a nose of nectarines, jasmine, peach, sweet spice, and a taste of passion fruit with great acidity, it is a spectacular wine.

Quinta da Rede Grande Reserva Branco, \$20. This is a great wine of which I never tire. Made from native Portuguese grapes. Is it sophisticated in taste and pairs well with big fish, as well as light meals. It is more like a great bodied, lightly oaked Chardonnay than a Sauvignon Blanc.

Catena El Enemigo Chardonnay, \$20. Outstanding QPR. This is an unbelievable value. It has the nose of 'flor', reminiscent of the smell in a sherry storage facility. One of the greatest wine finds of my life. It is worth multiples of its price.

St. Hillaire, \$10. This is France's oldest sparkling wine. Outstanding QPR. This is from the monastery near the Spanish border where Dom Perignon learned to make sparkling wines. Though lighter in style than most Champagnes, it is very well made and loved by most who try it.

COSTCO (KIRKLAND) WHITE/ROSE WINES

Sancerre (Sauvignon Blanc, Loire Valley), \$16. Outstanding QPR—one of the best Sancerres. Excellent by itself, or a match with white fish or with goat cheese (Chevre).


Chablis 1ere Cru, \$18. Outstanding QPR. Unoaked Chardonnay. Perfect match with shellfish, Boullabaise, and Ciopino.

Sauvignon Blanc, Ti Point, Marlborough, N.Z., \$7. Outstanding QPR. Best with Brushchetta, and great with mussels.

Champagne, \$20. Outstanding QPR. Made by one of France's small growers. Great body, meets or exceeds all expectations.

Rose, Provence, \$9. An excellent QPR which is obviously dry (as are all French roses) and never leaves the palate fatigued. Excellent by itself on a warm day and pairs beautifully with Niçoise salad and light seafood.


In summary, I feel that all the Kirkland wines reviewed are good values and are generally worth at least two times their retail price. I did not list vintages because I have found remarkable consistency across all these wines by vintage. Most of the wines arrive only once per year, so they do not last long even if large quantities are received. So be prepared to buy in advance to be rewarded over the upcoming year. A Votre Santé! 🍷



Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

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