



The Rhône River Valley in France.

Great Value Red Wines

OVER THE PAST several years, I have become a great admirer and fan of Raúl Pérez. He is generally acknowledged as one of Spain's greatest winemakers. From Bierzo in the northwest part of Spain, he is the foremost interpreter of the Mencía grape and is also famous for making exceptional white wines from the Albariño and Godello grapes. In fact, the only reason I did not include these two white wines in my last article was the difficulty in finding them due to their scarcity. To illustrate such difficulty, in our trip through Spain for a week last year, we were able to locate his wines in only two of Spain's restaurants.

The good news is that the entry level Mencía is often available in the United States. It is the Ulteira St. Jacques which costs \$20–25 for the 2021 vintage and is without a doubt one of the greatest wine


values I've discovered. This wine is best decanted for several hours if drunk in its youth. It is fresh, herbal, tart, and earthy, but becomes rounder and silky in the mouth with air. These is evidence of smoke and meat, and red and black fruits. I think this is the perfect wine for summer drinking when the food demands a big wine, but without oppressive tannins. This wine is at its best when I have it with great barbecue, especially the North Carolina style, but will pair well with steaks and spicy pork and lamb, as well.

Raúl produces many wines which can be very confusing when buying them. My simplified conclusion is to think of him making an expensive, a mid-priced, and a high-end version of the three grapes. Then buy any of them you can find that fits your budget. All of his wines that I have had were extremely fine choices.





in the heart of Alicante. Monastrell is one of my favorite red wine grapes and although indigenous to Spain, is very well known in the Rhône Valley in France as Mourvèdre, where it plays a major role in the production of Châteauneuf du Pape. The grape has overtones of violets, earth, dark cherries, and leather. The wine retails from \$15–20 for the 2020 vintage, and is an excellent introduction to the Monastrell grape, which goes well with red meats and chorizo sausage. In addition to the dark fruits and olive tapenade flavors, it is smooth and creamy.

My final choice is the Côtes du Rhône Villages made for Costco by great winemaker Patrick Lesec under the Kirkland label. This wine shows notes of strawberries, plums, and red currants. It is juicy and medium-bodied with silky tannins and fresh acidity from Grenache grapes grown along the banks of the Southern Rhône. The word “villages” suffixed to the Côtes du Rhône appellation signifies that it is in the top 20% of all Côtes du Rhône wines and is an almost unbelievable deal at \$8 for the 2023 vintage. The Grenache grape is one of the most food friendly grapes in the world and is a must-buy. Unfortunately, this wine is received by Costco only once each year (in the early fall) so be aware. A Votre Santé. 

THIS KIRKLAND WINE SELLS OUT FAST

My next great wine find is the Villa Cafaggio Chianti Classico Single Estate. This wine is made by the same producer which makes the Kirkland Signature Chianti Riserva. Two years ago, I bought one case of this wine before I went to Italy for two weeks. Upon my return, I found all three pallets of the Kirkland labeled wine had been sold. I called a friend of mine with the distributor and he said he would send me the single estate as a substitute. Based on this wine from the 2019 vintage as well as the current 2021 vintage, I prefer the Single Estate to the Riserva, which I love also. As is the case with all Chianti, this wine almost demands food although it can be as simple as sourdough bread dipped into very good olive oil or a chunk of aged Parmesan. It is excellent with pizzas or grilled beef, lamb, or pork, or rabbit with

traditional Italian spices and complements a wide range of vegetables. The wine is from the hamlet of Greve and is 100% Sangiovese. It is aged for 12 months in large Slovenian oak barrels and then for an additional 12 months in glass-lined concrete tanks. This wine sells for \$10–15 for the 2021 vintage which is shaping up to be one of the greatest vintages of Chianti ever. This wine belongs in all cellars of true wine lovers regardless of its low price. As it sells out very fast, you might hold this column in hand until third quarter of 2025 and then stock up.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MONASTRELL GRAPE

Another outstanding value from Spain is Volver Tarima Hill Monastrell, which is made from 50- to 90-year-old vines that reflect the intensity and minerality of their hills of the Sierra de la Sima



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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.