



## Costco Red Wines

**A**S MANY of my readers know, I have an extensive background in wine. I lived in Europe for several years and fell in love with wine there and augmented my knowledge and experience through many trips and visits to wineries over the past 60 years, including numerous trips to Australia, New Zealand, South America, and South Africa. During these six decades, I also started building proper wine cellars wherever I lived.

Over the past two decades, I have organized and led many international wine and food visitations to some of the world's greatest wineries. All this introduction is to establish that I have significant experience with wine and food. During the last 19 years, I have also worked as a unique wine



specialist for Costco in the Lake Zurich location. During this period, I have occasionally mentioned Costco's Kirkland wines in the columns I write for Quintessential Barrington.

Within the past decade, many articles have been written about Costco wines, and many YouTube videos have featured Costco wines. Recently, several Costco members have requested that I devote one or more columns to these wines, so here goes!

### GETTING STARTED ON THE REDS

I will not write about each wine but will focus on the best ones in my opinion. Also, I will write only about the red wines in this article as there are at least 16 that I sell. Regarding the ones that I



don't mention, I believe these wines are in general worthy of your consideration as they, as well as the unmentioned white wines for a future article, are good examples of the grapes' attributes and always represent excellent values and a good introduction to the appropriate grape or appellation.

Three of my highest choices are made by Guillaume Gonnet. This man continues to impress me with his offerings starting with Châteauneuf-du-Pape (CNDP). This represents not only an outstanding value (\$20), but a great wine. No, it is not as good as my favorite producer, Beaucastel (at \$120) or the generally regarded best-in-class, Rayas (at \$1,600) but the wine meets all my expectations for a largely Grenache-based CNDP. This is a very food friendly wine to be enjoyed with beef, pork, or lamb without heavy seasoning. The wine drinks well upon release and for five to 10 years afterward.

From a nearby appellation comes his Gigondas (\$14) made largely from Grenache with lesser amounts of Syrah and Mourvèdre. This wine is exceptionally food-friendly with chicken, pork, lightly spiced beef, and vegetarian entrees. I find it to also be a great wine with Southwestern (Mexican) cuisine.

#### RHÔNE VALLEY APPELLATIONS

Gonnet also makes an exceptional value wine from the Rhône Valley named Vacqueyras. It is also a blend of Grenache (80%), Syrah (10%), and Mourvèdre (10%), and an almost unbelievable value (\$12). With telltale signs of Rhône herbs—think rosemary and thyme with red and black berry influences—this is my choice for a perfect match with a hamburger, but it would be great with many other meat and vegetable dishes. All the Gonnet wines are offered only once a year at Costco, so be prepared to buy these in larger amounts if you want them to last a year. During the holiday season, Costco also receives several large (3.0 Liter) bottles of Gonnet's CNDP under his own label, Bel Ami.

Another worthy Rhône wine purchase is Kirkland's Côtes du Rhône Villages for \$8. Largely Grenache, it is in the top 20% of all Côtes du Rhône as signified by the word "Villages" appended to the appellation Côtes du Rhône. This wine is also food friendly and is offered only once a year.

#### BAROLO, A FAVORITE RED

The last red wine for this article is the Kirkland Barolo. Made from 100% Nebbiolo grapes,

Barolo is one of my favorite red wines. When Costco started carrying this wine from the producer Fontanafredda for \$20, I had no intent to buy it as I have a vast number of the best Barolo and Barbaresco (also from the Nebbiolo grape) and could not imagine how I could be impressed by a wine costing only 2% to 30% of those in my cellar.

However, I often use the phrase, 'No matter how smart you are, you cannot know what you do not know.' Therefore, I bought one bottle of the 2015 vintage and bought three cases the next day. It won't get confused with the best Barolo, but it has no flaws and is a very good and affordable introduction to Barolo. There are notes of rose canes, earth, rose petals, licorice, and black currants. This wine is approachable in its youth with a proper decanting and will improve over a decade from its vintage date. Best pairings with Barolo include shavings of white truffles, Fettuccini Alfredo, and aged Parmesan Reggiano (36 months) cheese. Also, this wine comes to Costco only once per year, so consider yourself informed.

A Votre Santé! 

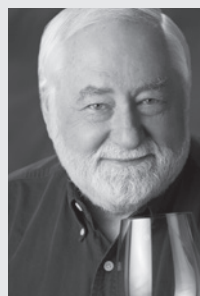


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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