

YEAR'S BEST PINOT NOIRS

EXPLORING ANDERSON VALLEY TERROIR

Wine & Spirits

TOP 50 WINES

IN AMERICA'S BEST RESTAURANTS



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THE RESTAURANT TOP 50

THE MOST POPULAR WINES IN AMERICA'S TOP RESTAURANTS

- 1 JORDAN, \$116
- 2 R. LOPEZ DE HEREDIA, \$100
- 3 STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS, \$122
- 4 FAUST WINES, \$115
- 5 JUSTIN, \$78
- 6 FROG'S LEAP WINERY, \$98
- 7 CAYMUS NINEYARDS, \$142
- 8 FLOWERS VINEYARDS, \$96
- 9 DUCKHORN VINEYARDS, \$85
- 10 NICKEL & NICKEL, \$126
- 11 LUCIEN CROCHET, \$105
- 11 PAUL HOBBS WINERY, \$111
- 13 FELSINA, \$64
- 14 PASCAL JOLIVET, \$63
- 15 MAISON JOSEPH DROUHIN, \$80
- 16 OCCHIPINTI, \$65
- 16 ALPHA ESTATE, \$60
- 18 KISTLER, \$139
- 19 HEITZ WINE CELLARS, \$139
- 20 VEUVE CLICQUOT, \$132
- 21 ROMBAUER VINEYARDS, \$83
- 22 MEIOMI, \$47
- 23 CRISTOM, \$95
- 24 GRGICH HILLS, \$122
- 25 PIERRE PETERS, \$117
- 26 TURLEY, \$79
- 27 DOMAINE VACHERON, \$93
- 28 CAIN, \$113
- 29 TAITTINGER, \$91
- 30 MARCHESI ANTINORI, \$169
- 31 FRANK FAMILY, \$128
- 32 SILVER OAK WINE CELLARS, \$132
- 33 EMERITUS, \$90
- 34 MERRY EDWARDS, \$120
- 35 COSTA LAZARIDI, \$52
- 36 DOMAINE BAILLY-REVERDY, \$72
- 36 SHAFER VINEYARDS, \$174
- 36 SONOMA-CUTRER, \$47
- 39 CHATEAU YVONNE, \$83
- 40 BILLECART-SALMON, \$176
- 40 CHAPPELLET, \$81
- 42 LOUIS ROEDERER, \$173
- 43 A. RAFANELLI, \$88
- 43 DOMAINE SERENE, \$104
- 43 HEDGES CELLARS, \$43
- 43 SCHRAMSBERG VINEYARDS, \$80
- 43 THIBAUD BOUDIGNON, \$81
- 48 STAGS' LEAP WINERY, \$86
- 49 BODEGAS VINEDOS RAUL PEREZ, \$48
- 49 LA STOPPA, \$76

In April of 1990, we published the first annual Restaurant Poll. That year, 11 of the 12 most popular wines in America's favorite restaurants were from California. And, for many years after that, Kendall-Jackson and Sonoma-Cutrer ranked at the top, based on the popularity of their California chardonnays.

While California remains a powerhouse 30 years later, the *coup de chard* has long since waned: Originally accounting for 44 percent of the most popular wines, it now accounts for eight, following a slow erosion first by for merlot, then pinot noir and, later, by the increasing efforts of wine directors to source delicious and affordable bottlings from all corners of the wine world.

We compile the Restaurant Top 50 by asking wine directors to report on their ten top-selling bottles in the fourth quarter of 2019; then we tally the number of mentions for each wine reported on their top-ten lists, as well as the rank. The 50 wines presented here earned the greatest number of mentions overall; each is listed with the average wine-list price for all the bottlings our respondents mentioned.

In this 31-year popularity contest, cabernet sauvignon has hovered around 15 percent of top-selling bottles since the early 1990s. This year, Jordan's take on California cabernet—more savory, red and earthy rather than jammy, purple and inky—has propelled it to the top, joined by the stubborn traditionalists at R. López de Heredia in Rioja. Both brands have earned a place on the Top 50 for many years, all the way back to 1989. In last year's Poll, they tied for the number two spot, falling just short of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

We'd like to think their coronation this year owes to diners ordering wine with their meal in mind, eschewing bigger, brasher styles for food-friendly restraint. Even before their first vintage in 1976, Jordan built its facility, its brand and its wines with food in mind: The company would go on to invite sommeliers to meals at the winery prepared by an in-house chef, rather than simply showing the wines with crackers and cheese.

In another current in the poll results, we find natural wines in the Top 50, including Sicily's Occhipinti and the Loire's Château Yvonne. Even the polarizing La Stoppa managed to sneak onto the list. Austin Bridges of *Nostrana* in Portland, Oregon, has found that while La Stoppa's wines aren't for everyone, "repeat customers come back and order it."

Familiar mainstays populate much of the rest of the list, as well as names like Alpha Estate, a Greek winery that has made the Top 50 for the fourth year in a row. Diners still drink what they know, but the interest in this list lies in what they're drinking *most*.



SAM BOGUE
Central
Kitchen
SAN FRANCISCO

I love chardonnay, and I wish more people would try it. Even in the short five-plus years I've been doing this, the decline in chardonnay has been steeper than I would have expected.

CHARDONNAY

Chardonnay remains a reliable “order-fire” for many diners around the country, clocking in at eight percent of mentions on respondents’ lists of best-selling wines. While that number is a drop of almost a full point from last year (8.9 percent), it seems inconsequential to the 36 percent drop since 1989, the first year of the Poll, when it ratcheted up a tally of 44 percent on the best-selling lists.

The rising prices of chardonnay may have narrowed the brands represented here. Vanessa Rea of *Eastern Standard* admits it’s “hard to come by a good bottle of Burgundy that isn’t going to be wildly expensive.” Indeed, Maison Joseph Drouhin—the only French winery to make the list—accrued more mentions of wines from the Mâconnais and the Côte Chalonnaise than the Côte d’Or.

As for the domestic wines, brand loyalty helps to push the popularity of the more expensive bottlings. Guests “don’t even look at the list; they say ‘I want the Kistler.’ A lot of people know those wines,” says Despoina Karapostokali of NY’s *Amali*.

MOST POPULAR CHARDONNAYS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Maison Joseph Drouhin	Mâcon-Villages	\$47
		Meursault	\$120
		Pouilly-Fuissé	\$60
	Rombauer Vineyards	Carneros	\$88
3	Sonoma-Cutrer	Sonoma Coast Russian River Ranches	\$46
4	Kistler	Sonoma Coast Les Noisetiers	\$139
5	Far Niente	Napa Valley Estate	\$92
6	Cakebread Cellars	Napa Valley	\$81
7	El Molino	Rutherford	\$75
8	Liquid Farm	Sta. Rita Hills White Hill	\$78
9	Jordan	Russian River Valley	\$76

SAUVIGNON BLANC

“Sauvignon blanc drinkers might be just as difficult as cabernet sauvignon drinkers. It doesn’t matter what they’re eating—it’s just, ‘This is what I’m drinking,’” says Samantha Germani at *Lacroix at the Rittenhouse* in Philadelphia. Even while the variety’s allure has paled—it’s now at its lowest point since 2003—it remains the second-most popular white variety after chardonnay by a long shot. And Sancerre is the most popular call—“I can have every village around Sancerre, and people will still go for Sancerre,” Germani finds. Even so, this year an example from Touraine made the list. Price sensitivity may be at work: “Sancerre is twice the price it was not long ago,” says Rory Pugh at *Jean-Georges* in NYC. “Price inflation is greater than I’ve ever seen.” That makes more room for sauvignon from other areas, like New Zealand (Kim Crawford jumped to position #5, up from #9 last year, and Greywacke made its debut at #4) or Napa Valley (Duckhorn).



CLÉMENT LAPEYSSONNIE
L’Accolade
NYC

A lot of people say ‘I like Sancerre’ but it’s because of the flavor profile—that zippy mineral sense. They don’t want Sancerre; they want the profile. If they want Sancerre, I go to the Sebastien Riffault, and I explain it because it’s not what they expect—this one has a little botrytis to it. If what they want is a zippy, mineral wine, I’ll pour them something else.

MOST POPULAR SAUVIGNON BLANCS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Lucien Crochet	Sancerre Le Chêne Marchand	\$111
		Sancerre	\$74
2	Pascal Jolivet	Sancerre	\$59
		Pouilly-Fumé	\$80
3	Domaine Bailly-Reverdy	Sancerre Chavignol	\$66
		Sancerre Les Monts Damnés	\$89
4	Greywacke	Marlborough	\$49
5	Kim Crawford	Marlborough	\$36
6	Domaine Vacheron	Sancerre	\$93
7	Duckhorn Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$78
8	Jean-François Mérieau	Touraine Les Hexagonales	\$48



RORY PUGH
Jean Georges
NYC

Sancerre has absolute dominion over everything else: With New Yorkers, there’s a deep fascination with Sancerre. Pouilly-Fumé doesn’t come close.

31ST ANNUAL RESTAURANT POLL



DOMINICK PURNOMO
Yono's
ALBANY, NY

It's called King Cab for a reason. We don't have a ton of beef on the menu, but a lot of the time people just want a glass of cabernet. If I have one from South Africa or Napa, and they hear Napa, they're off. Like chardonnay—they don't even look at it; it's sort of their default.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Over the past decade, the battle for the top-selling variety has ricocheted between cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir. For now, cabernet sauvignon remains as two-year champion, at just over 15 percent of the most popular wines on respondents' lists. And California is the primary source: The most popular cabernets on this year's list all hail from the Sunshine State, ranking from Napa Valley, Sonoma and Paso Robles (in that order).

Much of this popularity sommeliers chalk up to familiarity and reputation. As Todd Brinkman at *Stoke Charlotte* points out, brands matter. "When we have parties," he says, "that's where the blue chips are—'Jordan, I trust them, let's do that.'"

The comfort that diners feel with cabernet seems to outweigh price concerns: It continues to maintain its title as the most expensive varietal wine. In fact, it's the only variety with averages that have surpassed the \$100 marker for the past three years; this year's average is \$115.

When price is a concern, several sommeliers reported that they tend to reach for Paso Robles examples. "I'm looking for cabernet sauvignon that will impress people, that has power and punch," says James Conley at *Keens Steakhouse* in NYC. "Paso Robles wines

deliver on that—they have a directness and immediacy that gets lost in the more expensive parts of Northern California. When Napa and Sonoma wines get to the size that Paso Robles has, they turn into collector wines, but in Paso Robles, you get roundness with acidity, and producers have not bought into big oak programs. It's rustic and more direct."



KAT HAWKINS
Shaw's Crab House
CHICAGO

People want cabernet no matter whether you're in a fish house or not. They don't buy the same Burgundy or the same Willamette pinot. But with cabernet, people say "I must have Jordan," or "I must have Caymus."



CATHERINE MOREL
71 Above
LOS ANGELES, CA

If people want cabernet, that's fine, but I try and give them something they may not know as well. They may want Caymus Special Selection but what I have is another wine they might be familiar with, like Heitz, at a similar price point. They walk out feeling like they've discovered something.

MOST POPULAR CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Jordan	Alexander Valley	\$124
2	Faust	Napa Valley	\$115
3	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars	Napa Valley Artemis	\$129
4	Caymus Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$158
5	Heitz Wine Cellars	Napa Valley	\$139
6	Justin	Paso Robles Paso Robles Isosceles	\$62 \$120
7	Frank Family	Napa Valley	\$128
	Silver Oak Wine Cellars	Alexander Valley	\$132
9	Nickel & Nickel	Rutherford Quarry Vineyard	\$126
10	Decoy	Sonoma County	\$49
11	Silver Ghost	Napa Valley	\$70

12	Turnbull	Napa Valley	\$87
13	Austin Hope	Paso Robles	\$87
14	Mount Veeder	Napa Valley	\$88
	Alexander Valley Vineyards	Alexander Valley	\$54
15	Cain	Napa Valley Cain Cuvée	\$80
	Darioush	Napa Valley Signature Napa Valley Caravan	\$260 \$110
18	Grgich Hills	Napa Valley	\$152
19	Frog's Leap Winery	Rutherford Estate	\$155
20	Ghost Block	Oakville Estate	\$137
	Franciscan	Oakville	\$54
21	Hall	Napa Valley	\$112