

From: "BrightWines.com" <brightwines@brightwines.com>
Subject: the BrightWines "Top 14" of 2014
Date: December 13, 2014 12:17:18 AM CST
To: The BrightWines Beacon

The BrightWines Beacon for 12/13/14: the "Top 14" of 2014 at BrightWines!

This is the time of year when a trending topic in the media becomes the annual year-end "best of" lists. Recent issues of the Wine Spectator and Wine Enthusiast featured their annual Top 100 issues, and the upcoming edition of Robert Parker's Wine Advocate will have a recap of the year in wining and dining too. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned in my newsletter the range of wines from the Wine Spectator's Top 100 list (probably the most widely read and respected of the annual wine "best of" lists) that either are - or were - available to purchase via BrightWines. For this weekend's newsletter, I have an updated on a couple of those W.S. Top 100 wines to mention. And I have also finished writing up **the BrightWines version of the "best of" lists, highlighting the Top 14 of 2014 here at BrightWines! The most popular wines, the best wines and wine "themes" that seemed to resonate with most customers.** It's a not-quite annual newsletter, and is always a fun look-back at some of the most exciting wines and newsletter topics of 2014.

** Today's THE LAMP IS LIT: Store Hours and Tasting schedule for this weekend and next week

** The BrightWines Top 14 of 2014! A combined edition of "The View from the Top" and Bright Lights"

THE LAMP IS LIT: Store Hours and Tastings

** **SATURDAY December 13th: OPEN from 10am to 6pm - plus RSVP Guided Tasting at 6pm**

-- tasting details --

Saturday evening, December 13th, at 6pm (note the early start time) will be a **Guided Tasting of wines related to the BrightWines Top 14 of 2014. RSVP by e-mail if you would like to attend.** We'll taste roughly half a dozen wines, whites and mostly reds, inspired by today's newsletter topic. We'll taste a variety of wines inspired by the best of 2014 here at BrightWines. This tasting will begin as close to 6pm as my regular Saturday business allows and my goal is to be able to close up shop by 7:30pm. As many of you also do, I'm sure, I have a social obligation this Saturday evening so the tasting running early to accommodate. RSVP by e-mail if you would like to attend, despite the late notice there are already a handful of rsvp committed to Saturday evening and space is limited to approximately 25 tasters. I'll confirm space available by e-mail by Saturday later morning through midday for the 6pm Saturday tasting.

** **NEXT WEEK: Monday December 15th through Saturday December 20th, OPEN REGULAR HOURS**

BrightWines will be OPEN from 10:30am to 6:30pm, or later, all week next week! Stay tuned for in-store tasting details for next weekend, possibly to include Thursday evening...

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP - and - BRIGHT LIGHTS (a combined edition)

This is the time of year when a trending topic in the media becomes the annual year-end "best of" lists. Recent issues of the Wine Spectator and Wine Enthusiast featured their annual Top 100 issues, and the upcoming edition of Robert Parker's Wine Advocate will have a recap of the year in wining and dining too. About five or 6 years ago, I thought it might be fun to create my own "best of" list. I created the Dave's "Top Twenty of BrightWines" list. It turned out to be one of the most popular newsletters of the year! I did the same again the following year, and once again it was very popular. I missed a couple of years in the meantime due to calendar issues with the way the holidays lined up with other events and weekends, but this year I have created the Top 14 of 2014, as reflected by The BrightWines Beacon newsletters.

The BrightWines Top 14 of 2014 is **my listing of the 14 most exciting wines and newsletter themes from the past year here at BrightWines - sort of a Dave's Top Picks of the newsletters of 2014.** I list them in order of overall importance/popularity with a slight edge given to topics that are the most recent/current. Since this is a retrospective look at the past year's worth of newsletters many of the wines mentioned are not necessarily currently available (sorry). But with that in mind, and in order to keep the list more relevant to what is in-stock here for current selections, I will include a brief listing of wines that are in-stock now that are somehow related to each of the top twenty selections, in case you want to use the list as guidance for wine purchases this holiday season.

So without further ado, here is Dave's listing of the "BrightWines Top 14" of 2014

#14: Pinot Blanc. Pinot Blanc is not that broadly planted nor widely revered. It often plays second fiddle to Pinot Gris or to Chardonnay, but for whatever reason I found that several of the best-tasting and best-value white wines of the past year were Pinot Blanc. You may have heard me say something like "I'm loving the Pinot Blanc lately" here in the shop. My newsletters, seasonal sale lists, and offsite events in 2014 featured two Pinot Blanc whites from Italy (Cantina Bolzano Pinot Bianco from Alto Adige and Zamo Bianco from Friuli) two Pinot Blanc from the west coast (Foris from Oregon and The Gardener from California) and one from Alsace, France plus two off-the-beaten path options too - one from Germany (Valckenberg) and one from Lake Michigan (Ship of Fools). That's a lot of Pinot Blanc for one year at BrightWines, and I loved them all! **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #14:**

Valckenberg dry Rheinhessen Pinot Blanc @ \$10.79 per bottle (sale) - and - The Gardener 2013 Carneros Pinot Blanc @ \$19.99 per bottle

#13: David vs Goliath. I don't want to be too self-serving nor too political, but the question I was asked most this past year by BrightWines customers was if the local opening of several national wine/liquor "superstores" would affect business at BrightWines. My answer is "I don't think so, but who knows" and that I will continue to "zig, when the big guys zag" and do my best to keep offering the best wines I can find at a wide variety of prices and styles. I believe there is room in the market for big-box as well as small niche purveyors, and for neighborhood standbys too. I have rarely, if ever, had any complaints about my pricing. If/when I do offer a big name wine, I only do so when I can offer the best pricing (or darn close) in the market. And many of the customer favorites around here are not the sorts of wines that can be found even at superstores (or if they are, they are easily lost in the shuffle). I wrote a newsletter this spring when the first of the superstores opened in town called "chef-driven" wine retail, and I promised to write a "part 2" on that topic at some point. I guess the proof that so far my business continues as normal is that I never did have time to write that part-two. Perhaps I will this winter sometime...

**** IN-STOCK NOW related to #13: Azul Portugal 2010 Palmela vinho tinto (red) @ \$8.99 per bottle.**

This dry fruit-rich red wine from Portugal comes recommended by both Wine Enthusiast AND Robert Parker's Wine Advocate. Both magazines list it as a \$12 retail wine, yet it's priced at \$8.99 per bottle here. Oh, and BrightWines is the ONLY place in Minnesota you can buy this fun red wine. Yes, BrightWines has this wine exclusively in Minnesota, I bought it direct from the exporter when I got back from my trip to Portugal - a country that is offering some of the best quality/value in the world of wine.

#12: acceptance/demand for truly OFF-the-beaten path wines. This year I have noticed that YOU have noticed that sommeliers and wine writers have been really giving a lot of street-credibility (would that be "Somm-cred" or street-cred) to wines from seemingly rare and far off the beaten path. Within just the past couple of weeks I have had 3 different inquires for wines from the Jura/Arbois region of eastern France, plus a request for a top-end white wine from Switzerland's Valais region. Add that the great response I got to the newsletter on the wines from my bicycle trip to Michigan (the Ship of Fools white was one of my best-sellers of the summer) and the Finger Lakes wines that I've featured in-store and at consumer events, and I have to say that this has been a relatively adventurous year for BrightWines customers and I plan to continue the trend in 2015 too. **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #12:**

Salmon Run 2012 unoaked Chard - dry Riesling (Finger Lakes) @ \$9.99 per bottle (sale price)

Chateau Grand Traverse 2013 "whole cluster" dry Riesling (Lake Michigan) @ \$12.99 per bottle (sale price)

Dr Konstantin Frank 2013 Dry Riesling (Finger Lakes) @ \$14.99 per bottle (sale price)

Ravines 2012 Cabernet Franc (Finger Lakes) @ \$19.99 per bottle

Robert Gilliard 2012 Fendant - Chasselas blanc (Valais-Switzerland) @ \$29.99 per bottle (limited, 90-points W.E.)

#11. Casual-drinking Italian (reds). Italian red wines are often thought of as dinner wines, or at least wines that need food to show their best. Every summer I have a lot of fun with Italian white wines, from Pinot Grigio to more exotic choices, that are just plain fun to drink and are alternatives to Sauvignon Blanc. This year, I found that some of my more popular casual red wines were also Italian. We had fun with bargain (screw-capped) Primitivo, oaky/fruity Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, juicy/purple Nero d'Avola, and several fun Sangiovese and Barbera too. Sure, many Italian reds are "food wines" but this year we found plenty of casual red wine from Italy to love too!

**** IN-STOCK NOW related to #11:**

La Fiera 2013 Primitivo (screw-capped) @ \$5.99 per bottle (\$69.99/case = \$5.83 each)

BACARO 2013 NERO d'AVOLA @ \$10.79 per bottle (\$119.88/case = \$9.99 each)

MODA (Talamonti) 2013 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo @ \$10.79 per bottle

i Quercioli 2013 Reggiano Lambrusco @ \$10.79 per bottle

LUNA NUDA 2013 PINOT GRIGIO @ \$12.99 per bottle (\$139.99/case = \$11.67 each)

BRUNORI 2013 Verdicchio di Castelli di Jesi Classico (white) @ \$12.99 per bottle (sale price)

#10: Chateau Lamothe Vincent (Bordeaux). Whether it's the 3 versions of Bordeaux rouge, or their whites or the dry Rose - the best quality/value in Bordeaux this year (with a June newsletter and the recent November/December Bordeaux petite chateaux Bordeaux offer too) the best-selling Bordeaux of the year has been from Chateau Lamothe-Vincent. Jancis Robinson (MW) said of Lamothe-Vincent "This is where the real value in Bordeaux lies" and I could not have said it better. **IN-STOCK NOW related to #10: Chateau Lamothe-Vincent 2012 "Intense" Bordeaux rouge @ \$14.99 per bottle (\$159.99/case = \$13.33 each)**

#9: the return of dry Rose/pink wines. Actually the return to popularity for dry Rose was a few spring/summers ago, but this year definitely saw that trend continue AND saw the continued popularity of dry Rose/pink wines (they are just like white wines but with pink color and made from red grapes) into the winter too. I may not currently have as many options, but the ones I have seem to keep selling even though it's wintertime. That's a good sign for this previously ignored category of wine. **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #9:** over half-dozen choices from \$8.99 per bottle to \$19.99 per bottle, including a new 90-point rated Brut Rose sparkling from Washington on order to arrive early next week!

#8: the return of Australian Shiraz. This is truly a return to form for a formerly very popular and reliable red wine category that had pulled a bit of a disappearing act the past few years. With the 2012 vintage, the Aussies have great wines and good stocks to offer. Here at BrightWines I had extensive offerings of Australian wines twice this year, both in spring and in fall, and both offers were widely popular up and down the prices. So popular, in fact, that I find myself rather low on stock right now - but if you are a fan of Aussie Shiraz I do have a bargain one and a 90-pointer from Barossa available. **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #8:** Oxford Landing (Yalumba) 2012 Shiraz @ \$6.99 per bottle (\$79.99/case = \$6.67 each) AND Three Rings 2012 Barossa Shiraz @ \$15.99 per bottle (sale, 90 pts W.S)

#7. Languedoc. The past few years have been very good for the French wines, in particular the reds and whites (and rose) of southern France have been successful and popular since the 2009 vintage at least. Way back in January of 2014 I had an MLK weekend flash sale of highly rated reds from the Languedoc and Rhone, then in July for Bastille Day I expanded the selection and focused more on the Languedoc region. 100% of the wines from both of those features had sold out by the end of the season for each, respectively. In order to give equal time to other regions of France, my most recent features have been on Bordeaux (and the seasonal Beaujolais nouveau)

#6: Portugal. It took over a year, but this October I was finally able to get some of the wines directly related to my wine tour of Portugal from last year into the store and the newsletter. As Wine Spectator editor, Matt Kramer, said this year in his blog: "Portugal is arguably the most exciting wine place on the planet today." He certainly seemed to convince his other wine critics and editors at Wine Spectator, who not only made a vintage Port the #1 wine of the year in the Top 100 - but also included several dry red wines from the Douro region of Portugal on that same list. 3 of the top 10 wines, and 4 of the top 13, on that list were from Portugal, in fact. Wow, that's praise normally reserved for places like France or Italy or California. Here at BrightWines, I did my part. I had vintage Ports galore as well as good values in dry red Douro too over the entire course of the year. **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #6:**

AZUL Portugal 2013 Vinho Branco (white) @ \$7.99 per bottle (sale price)
AZUL Portugal 2010 PALMELA vinho tinto (red) @ \$8.99 per bottle (sale price)
AZUL Portugal 2011 Reserve DOURO @ \$10.79 per bottle (sale price)
KOPKE 2011 Vintage Port (94 points, W.S.) @ \$59.99 per bottle (very limited)

#5: Tuscany. I'll be the first to admit that over the 14 year history of BrightWines that I have become well-known for French wines, Chile/Argentina, Washington/Oregon, Australia/New Zealand, and lately Portugal (!) as some of my favorite wine regions to feature. I certainly make a point to annually feature South Africa and Spain too. Naturally, I absolutely often feature wines from Italy. But unlike some wine shops that perhaps are more famously Italian specialists, BrightWines treats Italy as just one piece of the puzzle for Europe. I like Italian wines, and I enjoy featuring them from all of the regions in that fabulous wine country. And 2014 is a year where I think we might have had more fun with Italy than any other in recent memory. I already mentioned down at #11 the popularity of the casual-drinking Italian reds. Well, to start off the "top 5" there is no doubt that some of the best wines, and most popular wines, of the year were from Tuscany! The 2010 vintage led the way, but other recent vintages have kept up the pace. From wines last winter/spring like Bocelli 2010 Sangiovese and Tortarossa and Centine Rosso, to the currently featured Borgo Scopete Chianti Classico and the Poggio al Tufo by Tommasi and the soon-to-be-restocked Mormoraia 2012 Colli Senesi, the reds of Tuscany have been some of my best, and best-selling.

**** IN-STOCK NOW related to #5:**

MORMORAIA 2012 Colli Senesi rosso @ \$12.99 per bottle (sale price, more arrives midweek)
BORGO SCOPETO 2010 Chianti Classico (92 points, W.S.) @ \$14.99 per bottle (sale price)

#4. the 2012 vintage. There is no such thing as a "universally great" vintage in the whole world of wine, given the diversity of wine regions, climates, and styles of wine around the world. But sometimes a vintage bats closer to 1.000 than most. Here's how Bill Ward of the Star Tribune put it: "Good news for wine drinkers - here's a vintage you can count on. Shop by the numbers. Or rather, shop by one number: 2012." The year 2014 follows two years after 2012, and for many-many wine regions and wineries the new releases tend to be about two "years" after the vintage. I cannot tell you how many great, fun, exciting, popular, rated, ect wines from the 2012 vintage have come through BrightWines this year. And there are MORE to come, to be sure! In fact, rather than list out the many-many wines I have in-stock now from the 2012 vintage, let me just offer an Affordable Luxury example - one of the highest rated red wines in the store. It's a 2012 vintage Malbec from Mendoza, Argentina. Yes, the LUCA MALBEC 2012 is in-stock now! **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #4:**

LUCA 2012 MALBEC @ \$29.99 per bottle (in-stock now, very limited, inquire for solid case pricing)
rated 92 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate AND **93 points Wine Spectator!** (Top 100 for W.S. at #19, listed at \$32 retail)

#3. standout one-hit wonders, with staying power. Not every exciting wine in my newsletter is related to a particular theme. Whether they be "flash sale" wines, or extended-play "one hit wonders" the newsletters and my sale features are always full of great wines that seem to have a great following over the course of weeks and months. This past year was no exception. Remember some of these favorites? VC Cellars dry creek Petite Sirah, Piattelli premium 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, Chakras 2012 Mendoza Malbec, Light Horse 2012 Pinot Noir, Caymus (40th anniversary) 2012 Napa Cabernet (liter bottles), The Saint Rioja Reserva, Paro Russian River Pinot Noir, among many others! **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #3:**

LIGHT HORSE 2012 @ \$9.99 per bottle (sale price)

The SAINT 2008 RIOJA Reserve @ \$10.79 per bottle (sale price)

CHAKRAS 2012 Mendoza MALBEC @ \$11.67 per bottle (\$129.99/case = \$10.83 each)

PARO 2012 Sonoma Mountain PINOT NOIR @ \$19.99 per bottle (sale price)

2. off the beaten path - yet staying within California. Raise your hands if you recently visited Paso Robles - or the central coast, or Lake County north of Napa, or Mendocino north of Sonoma. This year I know many BrightWines customers did just that. I heard stories, saw pictures, chatted winery picks, and drank wonderful gift bottles too, all courtesy of folks like yourself who chose to visit California wine country this year - but did not do Napa/Sonoma. The wines that excited customers here in the newsletters and the store also represented some of these fun (and great) other regions of California too. This year my newsletters had features on Lake County (north of Napa) including an in-store meet/greet with the owner of Shannon Ridge and Vigilance, Clay Shannon. We had a "mendo-blendo" feature highlighting Mendocino by way of Steele and Jaxon Keys. Some of the best-selling wines of the year were from Paso Robles (remember all the Midnight Cellars wines, and the Opolo, among others) and some of the best-attended instore tastings were the tastings associated with those themes. We all really enjoyed exploring off the beaten path, yet staying within California!

**** IN-STOCK NOW related to #2:**

SHANNON RIDGE 2012 (lake county) Cabernet Sauvignon @ \$9.99 per bottle (sale price)

VIGILANCE 2012 Cimarron (lake county - Zin blend) @ \$12.99 per bottle (sale price)

OPOLO 2010 Grand Rouge (Paso Robles) @ \$14.99 per bottle

STEELE 2013 cuvee Chardonnay (Mendocino, and more) @ \$14.99 per bottle (sale price)

"Cane and Fable" Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon @ \$19.99 per bottle

The Chorus Effect (Field Recordings) 2012 Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon @ \$29.99 per bottle

and the most exciting wine/feature of 2014 at BrightWines...

#1: Red blends. Move over Pinot Noir, hit the sidelines Malbec, definitely not Merlot, and tried-and-true Cabernet just can't compete. There is no question the most popular category of red wine is the category loosely termed "red blends." Whether they are meritage-style Cabernet/Merlot, or the many "old vine red" blends, or field blends or winemakers blends, or "nickname" wines (there are alot of those) it almost doesn't matter. If a good quality red blend is available in the proper price range - it's been a good wine to have on hand. The in-store tastings for the newsletters related to red blends have been popular, and many of the best selling wines of the year have been blends. Admittedly there is nothing magical about a blend, but many of the world's famous wines and regions are blends - but there are plenty of great varietal wines too. But if there was one category of wine that seemed to outsell the rest, this year it would be a red wine blend - and probably from California. Remember some of these favorites? Raymond "R Collection" field blend red, the newsletter on the Triple C blends, Wrangler Red and Vigilance Cimarron by Shannon Ridge, Ca' Momi rosso di Napa, Casillero del Diablo red blend and Devil's Collection red, Jaxon Keyes Farmhouse Red, Horse and Plow Farmstead Red, Opolo grand rouge, and the top-selling wine of my fall sale: Bogle Essential Red (and Phantom too). That's quite a list, and it's just the highlights. Yes indeed, the highlight of highlights for 2014 were the red blends. **** IN-STOCK NOW related to #1:**

Ca' Momi 2013 Rosso di Napa (napa valley) red @ \$9.99 each (**\$8.99 mix/match** case price) **** COMPARE** to Bogle Essential Red !!!

CRIOS 2012 limited edition Malbec red blend @ \$12.99 per bottle (sale price)

Vigilance 2012 "Cimarron" Zinfandel blend (Lake County) @ \$12.99 per bottle (sale price)

Santa Rita "120" hero's red blend (triple c) @ \$5.99 per bottle (\$69.99/case = \$5.83 each)

OPOLO 2010 Paso Robles grand rouge @ \$14.99 per bottle

COYAM 2011 Colchagua red @ \$24.99 per bottle (Syrah, Carmenere, Merlot, Cabernet, Malbec, Mourvedre)

(rated 91 points RP, and interestingly both the 2010 and the 2011 of the Coyam were in my newsletters this year)

So there you have it, Dave's recap of the 14 most exciting wines and newsletter themes of 2014. I am sure there are plenty more I could have mentioned. And of course there are still two fun newsletters left to go this year too! Next week will be the annual newsletter theme for "The Gift of Wine" and the week following will be all about sparkling. If I hit "send" on this one, it should go out before midnight! -- Dave

The Right Wines are BrightWines!

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