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LIFE & WORK | FOOD & DRINK | ON WINE

The Best Everyday Wines to Stock at Home—According to WSJ Readers

What's your house wine? Our readers shared the affordable, easy-drinking, food-friendly wines they rely on. These five stood out.



CORK VALUES What's the wine you always want to drink? The one you make sure to have on hand at home, that pairs well with food and consistently pleases your guests?

ILLUSTRATION: KATTY HUERTAS



By

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TWO MONTHS AGO I asked readers to send me the names of their favorite everyday wines. I thought I might hear from a few dozen at most; I was wrong. I've

received over 180 emails as of this writing and the correspondence goes on.

The wines were nearly as varied as the readers' reasons for choosing them, though certain wines showed up over and over, notably Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and red wines from Italy. Many readers offered a bit of background regarding their choices—which I particularly loved. It's always interesting to learn why people choose the wines they do, and I learned about some wines that were new to me, too.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Which everyday wine favorites of other WSJ readers do you also like? Are there any missing from this list? Join the conversation below.

Chuck Vukotich of Pittsburgh sent an email several paragraphs long naming wines his family loves. “We drink a lot of wine,” he stated—clearly the truth. I will share just a few highlights. Mr. Vukovitch wrote that he is so fond of the Three Wine Company Zinfandels from Contra Costa County, Calif., that he

always keeps one or more on hand. (The winery currently makes six Zinfandels.) “We love them all, but our favorite is the Bigelow Zinfandel, made up of predominantly Zinfandel with Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Carignane and Mataro,” he wrote. “[They] are big Zins with bold and complex flavors.” His note was my introduction to these Zinfandels.

‘What’s not to like? It’s a good crisp taste, refreshing, goes with all sorts of food and the price is right.’

Mr. Vukotich named other house favorites, including Vinho Verde, Gewürztraminer and German Sekt—a rare instance where a reader mentioned a sparkling wine. Do bubbles seem too festive for a daily drink? Not for Bruce Riordan of Los Angeles, who wrote in praise of Ferrari Brut, the Champagne-method wine from Trento, Italy. “My wife, Vittoria, was born and raised in the region next door to Trentino and spent her youth in Cortina d’Ampezzo in the Dolomite mountains above Trentino,” Mr. Riordan explained. “There she developed a taste for sparkling wine, be it Champagne or Prosecco from Conegliano Valdobbiadene, so long as the wine was sparkling, dry and ice cold.” The couple discovered Ferrari years ago, thanks to a sommelier at Spago, Beverly

Hills.

Though few rosés were cited as daily favorites, Lisa Manley of Virginia emailed to say her everyday wine is the Gabriele Rausse Rosé de Malbec (\$16) from a local Charlottesville winemaker. “He’s the groundskeeper at Monticello and he also makes a great Cab Franc and Malbec,” Ms. Manley wrote. Gabriele Rausse has been the director of gardens and grounds at Monticello since 1995. (When I contacted the winery I was told that its rosé is currently sold out.)

Another reader loyal to wines from his own region, Brian Murphy, who lives in the Seattle area, chose A to Z Chardonnay (\$14) from Oregon as his everyday drink. “I live in Seattle, so I lean toward Pacific Northwest wines to support the locals,” he wrote. Anne Michalski of Eugene, Ore., drinks Pinot Gris from a couple Oregon wineries. “I like to drink local wines as much as possible to support local producers,” she wrote.

While Zinfandel can be too big, rich, high in alcohol and hard to pair with food, WSJ readers are clearly undeterred. They are big Zin drinkers. Some reported happily sharing Zinfandel—whether from Barefoot, Turley or Bogle—with friends. As Jonathan Greer of San Clemente, Calif., wrote, “Any time I pull a Rombauer Chardonnay or Zinfandel for my guest, they have a smile on their face and always ask for a refill.”

The list of favorites from Jack Aden, who lives on Lake Hartwell in South Carolina, came with a funny self-deprecating note: “I hope by these selections you have not tagged us as a couple who drank Ripple from the bottle 50 years ago. If so, you’d be correct!” Aden family favorites include two boxed wines: Block Chardonnay and Canyon Oaks Chardonnay. “Both are soft, fruity and unoaked,” Mr. Aden wrote.

Sometimes readers mentioned where they purchase their wines. Donald Bricker of Dallas reported finding the “mellow, cheap and consistent” Campo Viejo Rioja (\$12) at grocery stores and gas stations. Generally, though, the word “cheap” didn’t come up often. More often, readers used the term “reasonably priced”—and they applied it widely, to wines priced from \$2 to \$25 and occasionally a little bit more.

Patty Karp wrote to explain that rosés bore her, so she and some friends created

an everyday-wine cocktail: a half cup of Rombauer Vineyards Chardonnay, a tablespoon of Marie Brizard Peach Liqueur, 3-4 cubes of ice and a lemon twist. Ms. Karp and friends named it Monet, because the color reminded them of those found in the Impressionist painter's work.

Dozens of readers shared the names of New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs. Among the Kiwi brands that showed up: Whitehaven, Oyster Bay, Babich, Spy Valley, Cloudy Bay, Matua, Wairau River, Craggy Range and Nobilo. With the exception of Cloudy Bay (\$25), all are affordably priced and easy to drink. As Donna Bond of Indiana said of the Matua, "What's not to like? It's a good crisp taste, refreshing, goes with all sorts of food and the price is right."

One wine I was surprised to see mentioned over and over again: Allegrini Palazzo Della Torre, a red blend from Veneto, Italy. It's reasonably priced—I paid \$16 for a bottle—but not exactly a household name. It is, however, well distributed, thanks to Lux Wines, a division of E. & J. Gallo Winery. The Palazzo Della Torre is sold in all 50 states, and most of its production (25,000 of the 30,000 cases made) is sold in the U.S.—though one reader who drinks it regularly discovered it while traveling in Italy. Robert Ahlstrom of South Huntington, N.Y., wrote, "Four summers ago my family was in Milan at a 'locals place' where I was served the house red. I thought it was wonderful. The server advised it was for sale in the States, and we have been drinking Palazzo Della Torre by Allegrini ever since." Mr. Ahlstrom added that it's also now the house wine for several of his friends.

A number of readers sent lists of "special" wines in addition to everyday wines, to give a fuller picture of their palate or cellar. While Rombauer Vineyards Chardonnay was an everyday wine for some readers, it's a "special" wine for Charles and Vickie Nurnberger of Williamsburg, Va. "If someone walked into our home right now they would be served what I'm drinking, Butter Chardonnay," Ms. Nurnberger wrote. "If you are visiting, let us know, the Rombauer will be chilled."

The Nurnbergers were far from alone in citing the pleasure of drinking wine with friends. Whether New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, Chianti or Zinfandel, as WSJ readers reminded me, a wine always tastes best when it's shared.



OENOFILE / Everyday Wines, Far From Ordinary

1. 2020 Pine Ridge Chenin Blanc + Viognier White Blend \$12

This Chenin-dominant white is fresh, fruity and easy to drink. It's low-alcohol (11.7%), too, and versatile—good with food and as an aperitif. Napa-based Pine Ridge Vineyards has been producing this reliable wine for decades.

2. 2019 Marietta Román Estate Grown Zinfandel \$16

Many readers wrote about Zinfandel, yet no one label rose above the rest. I like this bold, juicy one with a bit of a peppery kick, from Sonoma's Marietta Cellars. It's not over-the-top in terms of fruit or alcohol and it pairs well with food.

3. 2017 Allegrini Palazzo Della Torre \$16

This juicy red from the venerable Veneto-based Allegrini family was cited by several readers as a favorite. Approachably styled with soft tannins and lush fruit as well as a pleasingly piquant bitter note, it's now one of my new favorites, too.

4. 2020 Matua Marlborough, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc \$10

Of the many New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs named, the Matua seems to me to best exemplify what readers said they like about the Southern Hemisphere whites. It's light, bright, zippy and fun to drink.

5. 2018 Felsina Berardenga Chianti Classico \$19

Chianti came up often. I like the entry-level Chianti Classico of one of my favorite

producers, the ever-reliable Fèlsina. Their 2018 bottling is fairly light bodied and lithe with notes of herb and spice—a super-flexible food wine.

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