

# The Ten Greatest Wines in the World

by [Loren Sonkin](#)

This time of year, many publications, writers and bloggers come out with their top ten wine lists for the year. Recently, during a discussion of one of these lists, I was asked what the ten greatest wines were. Before answering such a question, I needed to settle on my criteria for judging. Was it the ten greatest in the past year? Was it the ten greatest bottles which would include vintage? What does greatest mean? After some thought, here is what I came up with.

First, I need to define great. I don't mean interesting, contemplative, unique. I mean superlative. I am talking about the kind of wine that makes everything stop as you taste it because it's just so damn brilliant. Also, I am interested in wines that are produced from year to year and are always (or almost always) great wines. I will not consider one hit wonders. I don't need a long track record, but for example, the 1990 Château Beauséjour-Duffau was an incredible wine. It is, however, so far above the usual quality of this wine that it would not be considered.

Some qualities are optional, consider these tie breakers. Price is a consideration but it can't just be "great for the money." The wine has to be a great wine and then considering price, a mind-boggling value. On the other hand, I have had some wines that were truly outstanding but the price was so high that I could not contemplate buying them, so they could not make this exclusive list unless I would at least consider purchasing them. Geography is a consideration. Only one wine on my list is from the southern hemisphere. While it is a great wine on its own, I gave it a few extra points for that. Scarcity or the opposite, availability is an issue to some extent. I am not interested in wines that are produced in such miniscule quantities that most of us have never even seen a bottle.

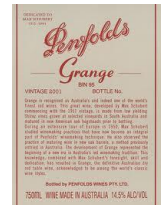
While I would like to think the label does not matter, I am sure that somewhere in the back of my subconscious there is a chance that it does. There are a couple of aspects to this I suppose. One, is whether it is a famous label that carries with it a great reputation. Two, is the label aesthetically pleasing. I am not sure if either of these made any difference on this list, but it would be naïve to think not.

One final criteria is whether I have tasted the wine. I was tempted to list a wine or two that I had not tasted, based merely upon reputation. In the end, I left them off the list. It was easier to make the list without considering them and I thought it fair that I had actually tried the wines I am commenting on.

So without further delay, here is my list:



**10. Luneau-Papin Muscadet Clos des Alees** – This wine is my favorite Muscadet and pretty much my favorite dry, white wine. There are more expensive wines, but I keep coming back to this. Crisp and clean. It works in summer or winter, with food or as a cocktail. It will age better than most people think and is delicious on release. Every time I open a bottle I am stunned by how good it is. And yes, it costs about \$15. The only dry white wine on my list, I will take this over white wines from Burgundy, or California or many other places at ten times the cost or more.



**9. Penfolds Grange** – This iconic syrah from down under is the only southern hemisphere wine that made my list. It has a long track record of greatness. This is a wine that, for those who love a fruit filled, tannic wine, is delicious on release. Yet, it can age (indeed some would argue it must) age for decades to achieve complexity without losing all of its fruit and exuberance. It is a wine that is great in almost every vintage.



**8. Donnhoff Oberhauser Brucke Spatlese** – This is a sweet Riesling from my favorite vineyard of my favorite producer in Germany. It seems like Germany rarely has bad vintages anymore, just different, and this one is awesome in every vintage. On release, it is accessible and delicious; clean, crisp, and sweet with minerals and fruit. Stored in a good cellar, the wine becomes fascinatingly complex as well. Not to mention, they are perfect with almost any food.



**7. Bruno Giacosa Barolo Riserva le Rocche del Falletto** – A sublime wine that needs to be aged. All Barolo fans have their own opinions on which are the best Barolo, but this is my pick. It can be consumed young although to experience all the glory, it needs fifteen or more years in a well stored cellar. It will last for decades. It is not produced in every vintage, but often enough and I include those labeled Riserva Falletto as well.

**6. Chateau Latour** – All of the first growths merited consideration for this list, but for me Latour made it for its consistency. In the best years, I might like Haut Brion or Mouton more, but they drop off in lean years (that is really nit picking, but hey, it's a tough list to make). Latour makes outstanding wine in almost every vintage and they have been doing it for a long time. These are difficult to drink in their youth, so patience is a must. But if you can cellar a wine for ten, twenty, or more years before opening, this is an ethereal wine that exemplifies why Bordeaux has been considered great for hundreds of years.

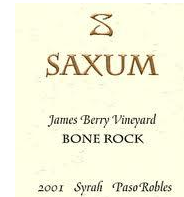


**5. JL Chave Hermitage** – An incredible wine and the second Syrah on the list. If you want to taste how good a wine can be in an off vintage, taste this from 2002. Outstanding! Vintage in and vintage out, Chave makes a wine that is delicious, complex and remarkable. It can be drunk young but then needs to be cellared for a decade or more to be appreciated. It is also a wine that really shows the vintage characteristics as much if not more than the house style. It is much more food friendly than one might think.



**4. Kapsandy Roberta's Reserve State Lane Vineyard** – This is a newer winery in Napa and they have only been releasing wine since the 2003 vintage. Yet, their dedication to quality is second to none. It shows in the wines. I truly believe this is the best Merlot being made anywhere in the world including California, Bordeaux or Italy. The best! The 2007 and 2008 wines are as good as it gets. Even in other vintages, the wine is outstanding. The vineyard has been around for a long time (it used to belong to Beringer), but the vines are still young having been replanted. Imagine how good this will be when the vines get another decade or two of age.

**3. Saxum James Berry Vineyard Bone Rock** – The third Syrah on the list (hey, I love this grape, so I guess I am biased). This comes from Paso Robles and has been made since the 2000 vintage. Every few years though, they seem to ramp up the quality even higher. This version is from a particular parcel of the James Berry Vineyard (I consider it the best vineyard in California) that had a large whale fossil. It's a wine that has huge fruit, high alcohol and is very concentrated. Yet, it is so light on its feet that it dances across the palate without being heavy. Can it age? The 2000 vintage is still young and delicious and gaining complexity every time I am fortunate enough to try it. A really special wine that is my highest rated red and highest rated non-French wine.



**2. Salon Champagne** – Just barely got beat out for the top spot, this is my favorite Champagne and just an incredible wine. It is not made in every vintage, but when it is released it is phenomenal. In off years, it is merely off the charts outstanding. In a great year like 1996, it may be one of the two best wines I have ever had. I don't think the 1996 will peak for a decade more at least. In every vintage it is food friendly, crisp, clean, full of complexity, well balanced fruit and minerality and with a finish that can be measured with a calendar. Just an incredible wine.

**1. Chateau d'Yquem** – Perhaps no surprise but this dessert wine from Sauternes is the greatest wine in the world in my opinion. Made in almost every vintage, it is always outstanding. The 2001 vintage is the single best wine I have ever had. Great fruit and pinpoint acidity, the wine is balanced and complex. I could get lost just looking into a glass. Tasting the wine, in any vintage, is ethereal. There is no wine with a better, longer finish. Every wine lover owes themselves the chance to sample this wine at least once in their tasting lives.



Some comments on my list. This was a difficult job. Like any list as this, I wanted to include a few more than ten, but I limited myself. I was surprised that in the end, half of the wines were from France. Despite the plethora of great wine being made around the planet, France still has many of the best. I suspect if I had increased the list to twenty, the percentage of French wines would be a majority.

With apologies to Burgundy/Pinot Noir lovers, none make my list. I was tempted to put DRC Romanee Conti or La Tache on the list, but I have never had the opportunity to try them. That is not to say there are not great wines in those categories, but it was very difficult to pair my list down to ten. There you have it. So, what are yours?