



SPENDING WINES

Roll on the good buys

Peter Forrestal says though prices are going up there are still plenty of bargains about for wine drinkers and that's likely to continue. Here's his best-value selection plus three for a special occasion.

It's a matter of supply and demand. An over-supply of grapes has kept the prices of Australian wines – especially the high-volume lines that sell for modest sums – at static levels for most of the past five or six years.

Australian wine lovers never had it so good. But a savage drop in yield from the 2007 vintage – due to drought, bushfires, hail and the like – and the likely concertina impact on the 2008 harvest has triggered an unprecedented scramble for surplus grapes by large companies anxious to supply their well-established brands. With the demand has come price rises even among budget-priced quaffers.

It's been a difficult few years for winemakers and grape growers and price increases have restored some much needed profitability. Many would say higher prices will merely enable them to survive.

It's certainly not all doom and gloom for the consumer. Most price rises have been modest (more than 90% of our wines sell for less than \$20) and the wine industry is so technologically advanced and efficient that our wines in the \$10 to \$20 price bracket are the equal of any in the world.

I think it's more difficult than it was to get outstanding wines for less than \$20. But it's still possible. You just have to work harder, or get better advice.

At these prices reliability and consistency are vital. I've chosen the following wines because the current vintage is outstanding – and because you can expect them to be reliably good from year to year. All wines (under \$20) reviewed here are terrific for everyday drinking. They are approachable and ideal current drinking over the next year or so.

SIR JAMES BRUT DE BRUT NON-VINTAGE \$16.50

Master blender Ed Carr has kept this among Australia's best under-\$20 bubbly for several years. It's made in a dry style ("brut" is French for "dry") and is soft and round with interesting yeasty flavours, creamy texture and fresh, gentle acidity – easy drinking.

YELLOWGLEN 'JEWEL' YELLOW \$13.95

This is a new, low-alcohol (6%), low-calorie (30% lower) version of the popular Yellow. Almost invariably, such wines are lower in flavour, too. But not here. There's intense bread, yeasty, lemon citrus flavours, creamy texture and crisp, clean acidity. A slurpable sparkling wine with some bonuses.

2006 ABBEY CREEK RIESLING, PORONGURUP \$20

Three trophies for this fabulous riesling at the 2007 Qantas Wine Show of WA will put the Dilworths' tiny yet mature vineyard in the Porongurups on the map: delicately fragrant, intensely flavoured with pure lemon juice, tight and fine with slatey mineral acidity finishing dry and long. Inquires: abbeycreek@iprimus.com.au

2007 ANGOVES 'LONG ROW' VERDELHO \$9.95

I judged this little gem at the Riverina Show where it won a trophy for the Riverland's Angove's – Quaff Winery of the Year. There's heaps of pure ripe tropical fruit flavours, vibrance and succulence before a clean, crisp finish that lingers. A hedonist's bargain.

2006 BROWN BROS VERMENTINO \$16.90

An indigenous Italian variety mainly found in warm Sardinia is finding a new life here. Serial innovators Brown Bros have captured vermentino's zesty brightness, restrained savoury character and racy, mineral acidity that leaves the palate with a hint of refreshing bitterness.





**2007 JIM BARRY
WATERVALE RIESLING \$14.95**

The best bargains in retail land will be riesling even though it's more fashionable than it was. This is one of the bargains, from the Watervale locality in Clare, SA: floral fragrances, fresh, clean and intense with lemony, limey flavours, tight structure and zesty crisp acidity that cleanses.

**2007 PETER LEHMANN
EDEN VALLEY RIESLING \$14.95**

Quaff's Wine of the Year, an ethereal white of the rarest quality at this price - from the excellent winemaking team at Peter Lehmann. This has a hint of talc and lemon blossom aromas, zesty mouth-watering lemon-grass and lime flavours that are pure and deep, with finesse, elegance before a taut, racy finish.

**2007 O'LEARY WALKER
ADELAIDE HILLS SAUVIGNON
BLANC \$18.50**

Sourced from a growers vineyard at Oakbank, this is quintessential Adelaide Hills sauvignon at the O'Leary Walker trademark very reasonable price. It has ripe, tropical fruit flavours of passionfruit, guava and gooseberry, wonderful purity, neat balance and a refreshingly crisp dry finish. Great summer drinking.

**2007 PRIMO ESTATE 'LA
BIONDINA' COLOMBARD
SAUVIGNON BLANC \$14.95**

Joe Grilli has established an Australian classic with the consistency and tangy brilliance of his little blonde (La Biondina). There's wonderful balance between the ripe sweet tropical fruit flavours and the cleansing vibrant acidity. As well, there's succulence, juiciness and drinkability.

**2007 SANDALFORD 'ELEMENT'
CLASSIC WHITE \$12.95**

In the hands of winemaking maestro Paul Boulden this atypical blend of chenin blanc, verdelho, semillon and some anonymous bin ends works a treat in 2007, as it did in 2006. There's attractive fragrances, fresh herbal characters, a pleasing juiciness and zippy sweet pea characters lingering.

BEST OF THE BEST 2008

SHOWCASE

Three wines for a special occasion

**N/V AYALA BRUT
MAJEUR \$75**

Now owned by Bollinger, which is also located in the village of Ay, Ayala champagnes represent very good value for money. This is my favourite: a roughly equal blend of pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier that is vibrant with persistent yeasty, biscuity flavours, finesse and delicacy, finishing fresh and zesty. An excellent aperitif.

**2005 MAIN RIDGE 'HALF
ACRE' PINOT NOIR \$55**

Nat and Rosalie White are Mornington's pioneers, producing tiny quantities of exemplary, age-worthy chardonnay and fine, classy pinot noir. The 2005 'Half Acre' is delicately fragrant, with deliciously ripe, raspberry, redcurrant flavours made complex by more savoury notes, slickly smooth with supportive ripe tannins. A satisfying pinot for enjoying over a great meal with the best of friends.

**2005 TYRRELLS 'VAT 47'
CHARDONNAY \$55**

After more than three decades, Australia's first great chardonnay continues to show how well the Hunter Valley can do this classic variety. The 2005 Vat 47 shows pleasing restraint. concentrated white peach and nectarine flavours, impeccably integrated cedary oak, a touch of complex slatey minerality before an attractive dry finish of considerable length. There's finesse, elegance - and drinkability.





SPENDING WINES

2007 PIZZINI ROSETTA \$17

The Pizzinis are making some terrific wines in the King Valley, especially from Italian varietals. This rosé style is made with sangiovese and so the bright strawberry and red cherry flavours are complemented by some refreshing savoury notes, while the finish is crisp, clean and dry.

2005 CAPEL VALE 'DEBUT' CABERNET MERLOT \$14.95

A gold medal in Melbourne, so a great debut for the new Capel Vale livery. Good merlot is harder than you think so enjoy the velvety, dark plum and black cherry flavours, its savoury restraint and gentle, fine tannins. Just what merlot should be like.

2006 DE BORTOLI 'WINDY PEAK' PINOT NOIR \$14.95

One of my best wines of the year - a budget-priced pinot with varietal character, pure fruit, silky smooth texture and a fine, balanced finish that lingers. What you'd expect from *Gourmet Traveller Wine's* Winemaker of the Year, Steve Webber, and his Yarra Valley team.

2005 FERNGROVE 'SYMBOLS' CABERNET MERLOT \$14.95

Frankland River is one of the West's most remote, and vibrant, wine-producing areas and Ferngrove's Kim Horton is making outstanding wines at all price points. This is rich, concentrated and unexpectedly powerful (considering its price), with fleshy, brambly flavours and ripe approachable tannins.

2006 HARDYS 'OOMOO' SHIRAZ \$18

The price of this consistently good McLaren Vale cheapie has crept up a bit but it still represents excellent value. In 2006 it has rich, ripe sweet blackberry flavours, is smooth, succulent and fleshy with fine, ripe tannins. A barbecue red for summer.

2006 LANGMEIL 'HANGIN' SNAKES' SHIRAZ VIOGNIER \$19.50

The Lindner family winery continues to make some excellent Barossa reds. This is terrific value and will appeal to those who enjoy the robust oaky style at which the Valley excels. There's lively vanilla bean aromas, rich, concentrated, dark berry flavours, smooth, almost creamy texture and ripe approachable tannins.

2006 RED KNOT SHIRAZ \$14.95

This second label has been a winner for the McLaren Vale's Shingleback, producing one of the country's best budget-priced reds in both 2005 and 2006. Its succulence makes it immediately approachable while its lush, fleshy texture and spicy, ripe red berry flavours give it length and depth.

2006 SIX FOOT SIX PINOT NOIR \$17.95

The Austin family have been making some smart wines (especially pinots) from their Geelong winery. This cheapie has been a consistent crowd-pleaser. In 2006 it has strawberry, red berry flavours with some complex, savoury, earthy, gamey characters. Clean, fresh, varietal and flavoursome.

2006 WYNNS COONAWARRA SHIRAZ \$18.95

This has been my favourite Wynns Shiraz since 2001: lifted floral aromas with hints of violets, silky smooth texture, good depth of bright, dark berry and plum flavour and balanced ripe, fine tannins. Some ageing potential.

2006 YALUMBA 'Y SERIES' SHIRAZ VIOGNIER \$11.95

The 2005 was 2007 Quaff Wine of the Year: this is the 2008 Quaff Red Wine of the Year. Superb Barossa fruit is the key although Yalumba know-how must play a part, too. It's deeply concentrated with spicy blackcurrant and licorice flavours, succulent, silky smooth texture and lingering spiciness to finish. As good as it gets.

