

Celebrate the Fourth with USA Wines

Written by Jacqueline Coleman, BT Contributor
July 2018

Red, white, and you: Agreeable wine for \$15 or less

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July is a big month here at Vino, as we're celebrating a couple of anniversaries and a bit of a change in the price of the wines we mention.

This column debuted exactly 11 years ago, in July 2007. The great Bill Citara wrote the column for ten years until his retirement in June 2017. My debut column appeared in the next issue, making this month not only the 11th-anniversary Vino column, but also my one-year anniversary as your beloved wine writer. Happy anniversary, Vino and me!

We've also bumped up the price ceiling for the wines we discuss, up to the \$15 mark. Keeping with the mission of Vino, which is to provide suggestions for wines that can be found locally and enjoyed without having to apply for a second mortgage, we decided that an extra three dollars isn't too much more in this thriving economy. It also opens the door to the wider world of delicious wines that can be introduced and appreciated. So let's start this month with some affordable central California red wines you can pair with your summer backyard barbecue.

The central California wine region can be defined as basically anywhere from Santa Barbara

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County up to just south of the Bay Area. You may see designations like Paso Robles or Central Coast on your wine bottles. This area is a little more laid back than Napa Valley, but don't let that fool you into thinking the wine isn't as high in quality. Quite the contrary.

Wines coming out of central California may be perfect for this anniversary column, because just like our mission here at Vino, this wine region delivers top-quality bottles that won't break the bank. Here are a few that can complement your summer cookout.

For a *chronically* good time at your next barbecue, try a bottle of the **2016 Chronic Cellars Purple Paradise**. This "Zin blend" is a full-bodied wine from Paso Robles. Robust and balanced with smooth tannins and a perfect mix of black and red fruit, the wine is so distractingly delicious that you may not even notice the *chronically* cool skeleton label art on the bottle.

The **2016 J. Lohr Cabernet Sauvignon** offers something a little more traditional as a smooth Cabernet at this price point. Always a solid choice, the J. Lohr wine shows hints of spicy smoke and bold dark berries on the nose, and vanilla with currant and juicy red berries on the palate. It makes a great complement to a grilled steak.

Speaking of smoke and spice, pick up Fess Parker's **Lot No. 95 Frontier Red** as a perfect pair to your outdoor feast. I call this the "bacon wine" because I tasted a bit of smoky meat as it hit my tongue, but no complaints here. The Syrah-dominant blend is an unquestionable crowd pleaser.

Mellow out with the **2013 Beyer Ranch Merlot**, which hits with bold blackberries on the nose and in the mouth. A smooth drinker with sturdy tannins, this Merlot holds up nicely with juicy pork or smoked ribs.

Lighten up the mood with a **2016 Noble Vines 667 Pinot Noir**. Not a wimpy wine, but a lovely medium-bodied Pinot Noir with mild tannins, even. I would say this Pinot can hold its own in the lineup of heavier reds, and I really think it's worth a spot at your meatier dinner table.

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Back to Cabernets with the **2014 Liberty School Cabernet Sauvignon**. This wine gives you a mouth full of bold red fruit and a little bit of earthiness you don't expect from a California wine. Full-bodied, mild tannins, and some black pepper on the palate. I'd pair this elegant Hope family wine with a piece of impeccably smoldered meat.

If Abuela is yelling at you to help with the backyard *lechón*, bring her a glass of 2015 Ojalá Cabernet Sauvignon. Ojalá grapes are sourced from the central coast of California, but Ojalá is actually a Miami brand. A mild Cabernet, it is balanced and smooth, and offers an interesting conversation piece, in Spanish. From the vineyards of the central coast to the streets of Miami Beach, Ojalá is a bicoastal wine made for a multicultural city.

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