

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



In recent columns, we've explored wines from abroad, and it's time to bring our tasting back stateside. There's always something new to discover when it comes to U.S. wines. One of my favorite things about getting to know our red blends is that each has an interesting story. Isn't that what wine is about?

For a red blend with some intrigue, check out the **2017 Gnarly Head 1924 Limited Edition Double Black Red Wine Blend**. I love the story behind 1924. In 1924, a dark time in American winemaking history, Prohibition was in full swing. It was also the year that a Sicilian immigrant and his brother-in-law bought 68 acres and planted vineyards in Manteca, California, in the Lodi/San Joaquin Valley region. According to the Manteca Hall of Fame, they shipped their grapes back east to Chicago bootleg winemakers. The cherry plum spices, blackberry, blueberry, cranberry, and raspberry flavors of this red are bold beneath the black slate of the bottle. Though mysterious, this wine is not shy and, if consumed under certain conditions, might be the cause for scandal. As a red blend, 1924 is agreeable and sure to appease even the pickiest moonshiner.

How about a California wine aged in Kentucky Bourbon bootlegging barrels? The **2016 Big Six Bourbon Barrel Red Wine Blend**

is sure to get you out of your wine-drinking comfort zone. Named after Mickey “Big Six” Doyle, who is said to be the fastest runner in Kentucky, this wine is aged for three months in Bourbon barrels. A full-bodied red with lingering hints of caramel and whispers of Bourbon, Big Six is nothing if not interesting. It’s smooth and fruit-forward with mild tannins, and produced in limited quantities, so pick up a bottle before they’re gone.

If outlaws aren’t your thing, we’ll take it down a notch to something a little more domestic. So domestic, in fact, you can find it at Target! Target’s new line of wines is approachable and affordable. The **2017 Collection Red Blend** is a lighter-bodied red wine with big red fruit dominating throughout. This wine won’t scare or surprise, but it will work just fine for a red-wine evening.

Perhaps my favorite label of these wines belongs to the **2015 Shannon Ridge Wrangler Red**, which is ABC “Sourced and Certified,” meaning it’s an exclusive at their stores here. I enjoyed the dominating ripe cherry and raspberries on the nose that blended into a lovely multilayered wine. Smooth red fruit continues through the palate as you experience several different grape profiles wrangled together by a fine structure and balance. A perfect treat for an April evening by the grill.

Always an enjoyable brand, the **2014 Hess Select California Treo Winemaker’s Blend** from Napa is a standout, too. The Treo in the name is a tribute to Donald Hess, who retired from the Hess family of global enterprises in 2011, and his two sons-in law, the next generation of Hess family winemakers. On the nose, candied cherries, licorice, and vanilla tantalize and entice you to enjoy a taste of this elegant red wine. Some chocolate will peek through on the palate, but no flavor is overpowering. Sensible and smooth, Treo’s quality lives up to the Hess family name.

Another intriguing label is the **2016 7 Moons Red Blend** from California’s Central Coast. Dark like a moonless night, this blend of seven grape varieties has an astrological complexity to it. Dark fruit and spice take over from the Syrah, but you’ll also find accompanying raspberry and chocolate flavors. Slightly more complex than your average economical blend, it’s easy to see how 7 Moons has star quality.

No journey through U.S. red blends is complete without a wine that directly supports an American cause. The **Yosemite Red Artisan Blend**, made by Adler Fels Winery in Sonoma, is

## California, Here We Come

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part of the National Parks Foundation line of wines. Proceeds from each bottle will go to help “protect, support, and enrich” U.S. national parks. Yosemite red is not a heavy one, but it’s lively and fruit-forward. Though this bottle may not be an award-winner, the cause is certainly just right. It’s wonderful to enjoy a U.S. red blend while supporting an important U.S. cause.

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