

# Wine Spectator #1 Wine of the Year



*Wine Spectator, December 31, 2017-January 15, 2018*

## Napa First

**T**his issue features our annual Top 100 Wines of the Year—the most exciting wines we blind-tasted among the nearly 17,000 new releases we reviewed in 2017.

The No. 1 wine in the 2017 Top 100 is Duckhorn's Merlot 2014 from Napa Valley's Three Palms vineyard. It's the second Merlot to be crowned Wine of the Year, following the Paloma Spring Mountain District 2001, which earned the top honor in 2003. Merlot may not have the stature of Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir in California, but when it's done right, it can be spectacular.

What makes the 2014 Duckhorn so special? First, of course, its quality. At a classic 95 points on our 100-point scale, it's the top-scoring California Merlot we reviewed this year.

Second, its relative value. In 2017, 14 Napa Valley reds earned classic scores (95 points or higher). At \$98, this Merlot was one of only three to cost less than \$100.

But most of all, we were impressed by the wine's X-factor—the story behind the bottle.

Dan and Margaret Duckhorn founded the winery in 1976, part of the wave of newcomers that followed the founding of Robert Mondavi Winery, established in 1966. Duckhorn made Merlot its specialty and from the beginning focused on one of Napa's most storied vineyards—Three Palms, near Calistoga, which was first planted in 1968.

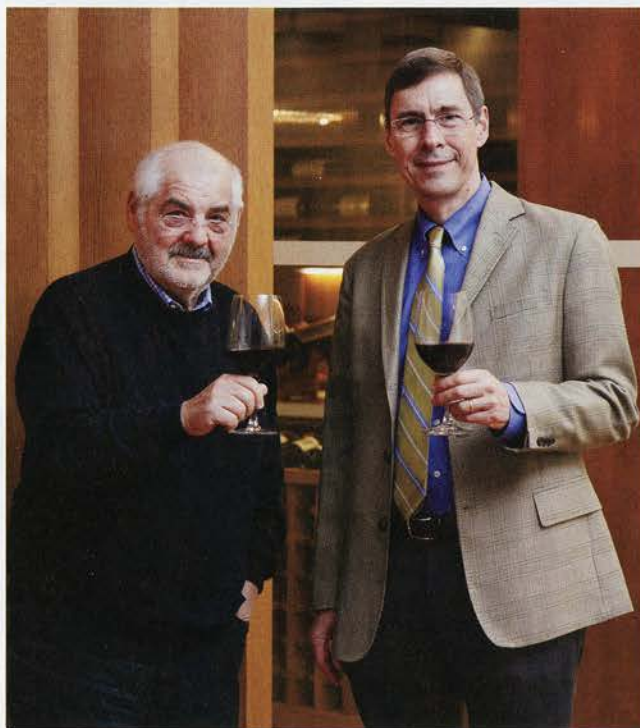
Dan and Margaret sold their winery in 2007, but their departure didn't mean disruption. CEO Alex Ryan has been with the winery since 1988 and winemaker Renée Ary began in 2003. The buyers, GI Partners, invested \$70 million in the operation, including the purchase of the Three Palms Vineyard.

TSG Consumer Partners, a private equity group founded in 1987, acquired Duckhorn in 2016. They have invested in a variety of consumer goods, from Famous Amos cookies to Voss water, and recently acquired Calera, a Central Coast Pinot Noir pioneer. Their stewardship is proof that family ownership is not a prerequisite to top quality.

World-class wine is the product of hard work, deep commitment and great vineyards. Duckhorn's Three Palms Merlot exemplifies all these qualities, and its 2014 vintage earns its place at the pinnacle.

**W**e're sure that our readers are aware of the terrible wildfires that ravaged California in October. We've been following the story closely; you can find detailed reporting on WineSpectator.com, as well as a summary in the news section of this issue. Our thoughts are with all of those affected by the disaster.

December remains a season of celebration nonetheless, so to



give you a head start on your holiday wine-shopping, this issue includes our recommendations for top U.S. sparkling wines and a roundup of 100 great values in styles to match any party menu.

We also congratulate Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, commemorating 50 years of producing fine vinifera wines in Washington state and beyond. Editor at large Harvey Steiman traces the remarkable trajectory of this successful wine company.

There's plenty more to enjoy in this issue, from cheese to chocolate to books about wine. Every year has its happy memories, and its sorrowful ones. We hope 2017 has been good to you, and that 2018 will be even better.

Marvin R. Shanken  
Editor and Publisher

Thomas Matthews  
Executive Editor

# THE TOP

# 100

OUR ANNUAL ROUNDUP OF THE YEAR'S MOST EXCITING WINES

## CONTENTS

- 52**  
Wine of the Year
- 55**  
Top 100 at a Glance
- 56**  
Profiles of Wines  
Nos. 2 to 100
- 62**  
Top 100 by Region  
and Variety
- 72**  
10 Years of Top 10s
- 77**  
Wines of the Year  
1988-2016
- 81**  
Values in the Top 100
- 179**  
Top 100  
Tasting Notes
- 146**  
Classic-Scoring  
Wines of 2017

**T**he rejuvenation of a winery founded four decades ago (No. 1). A new estate created in an area where no vineyards existed (No. 41). A French red that leans toward Italy (No. 72). These are just a few examples on the impressive list of wines whittled down from the thousands of bottles tasted by *Wine Spectator* editors in 2017.

Of the nearly 17,000 wines under review this year, more than 5,600 rated 90 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. From that starting point, we looked for wines that excelled in four criteria: quality (based on score), value (based on price), availability (based on cases either made or imported into the U.S.) and, most importantly, a compelling story behind the wine, something we call X-factor. The result is our Top 100 of 2017, a group that includes time-tested vintners, new labels, up-and-coming regions and a diverse range of grape varieties—a microcosm of the wine world today. On this year's list, the average score is 93 points and the average price is \$43.

This year's Top 100 features a strong showing of wines from the United States: nearly 25 percent are from California, augmented by selections from New York, Oregon and Washington. Overall, domestic wines account for one-third of our class of 2017, including the Wine of the Year.

For the third year in a row, the No. 1 wine is from California. It's the Duckhorn Merlot Napa Valley Three Palms Vineyard 2014, representing a comeback story starring a grape much maligned over the

past decade. An in-depth profile of the wine and the people behind it begins on page 52.

Most of the list comes from three countries: the U.S., France and Italy. Cabernet led the way in California. New projects, including former sommelier Larry Stone's *Lingua Franca* and Louis Jadot's *Résonance*, generated excitement in Oregon. The 2015 vintage in France resulted in a strong presence from the Rhône Valley, Loire Valley and Burgundy. The Italian contingent hails primarily from Tuscany, supplemented by wines from eight other regions.



## WINE OF THE YEAR

# DUCKHORN

Merlot Napa Valley Three Palms Vineyard 2014

95 POINTS | \$98 | 3,170 cases made

Winemaker Renée Ary (left) and president and CEO Alex Ryan lead the team at Duckhorn.



### BY KIM MARCUS

**M**erlot is back, and deservedly so. Despite the comic derision heaped on the variety in the popular film *Sideways*, Merlot can make extraordinary wines in California. Duckhorn's Three Palms bottling in the excellent 2014 vintage is ample proof.

Duckhorn Vineyards was founded in Napa Valley in 1976, and Merlot has been its specialty from the start. Since its first vintage, in 1978, the winery has tapped one of the valley's most storied vineyards: Three Palms, named for the trio of palms that grow in its midst.

San Francisco socialite Lillie Hitchcock Coit owned the site in the late-19th century and planted the palms. But for Margaret and Dan Duckhorn, Three Palms was the anchor that helped them build one of Napa Valley's most accomplished wineries.

Dan Duckhorn had been inspired to make Merlot after a trip in the mid-1970s to Bordeaux, where he was impressed by the grape's approachability in comparison to the sometimes tannic characteristics of its sister Bordeaux variety Cabernet Sauvignon. The Duckhorns rode the boom in Merlot to financial success before the turn of the century, and weathered the fallout that followed the 2004 release of *Sideways*.

Their faith in the grape has been richly rewarded. The classic-scoring Duckhorn Merlot Napa Valley Three Palms Vineyard 2014 is *Wine Spectator's* 2017 Wine of the Year. The 2014 Three Palms is an

elegant expression of Merlot, loaded with red fruit and spice flavors that are supported by medium-grained tannins.

Continuity has been the cornerstone of Duckhorn's success, not only with the vineyard but also with its winemaking and management team. CEO and president Alex Ryan, 51, began working at the winery in 1988. Renée Ary, 41, started in the cellar, located off the Silverado Trail north of St. Helena, in 2003 and has been head winemaker since 2014, making this Wine of the Year honor an auspicious start to her tenure as the winery's lead vintner.

For Ary, the Three Palms site is a somewhat counterintuitive one for Merlot. It is one of the warmer areas in the valley, located just south of the town of Calistoga, whereas Merlot is typically grown in cooler conditions. Ary credits Three Palms' pedigree to the rocky volcanic soils formed by an alluvial fan that forces the vines to set down deep roots, resulting in grapes bursting with concentrated fruit flavors.

"Three Palms is a unique site for Merlot," Ary explains. "It's warm and rocky, and you really have to be on top of things there because Merlot is susceptible to hydric stress," which she manages through timely applications of water from drip irrigation.

And she respects the finicky nature of Merlot, from spring, when it is prone to poor fruit set, to harvest, when it can be damaged by rain and moisture because of its thin skin.

The 2014 Three Palms comprises 86 percent Merlot, 8 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 4 percent Malbec and 2 percent Petit Verdot. All the fruit for the wine comes from the 83-acre vineyard, 50 acres of which are planted to Merlot.

The 2014 was aged 18 months in French oak barrels, 75 percent of which were new. That regimen represents a shift by Ary from protocols that formerly saw 95 percent to 100 percent of the wine aged in new oak. "I've refined the barrel program quite a bit to polish the tannins up yet still give the wine the structure to age," she says. Another practice Ary has instituted is to pre-soak the barrels in water to leach out green tannins from the oak.

The Duckhorns started their winery on a shoestring, financed by a small group of investors. They left day-to-day operations of the business in 2007, selling a controlling interest to GI Partners,



The trademark trio of trees waves above Three Palms Vineyard, key source of Duckhorn's Merlot since 1978. The winery acquired ownership of the site in 2015.

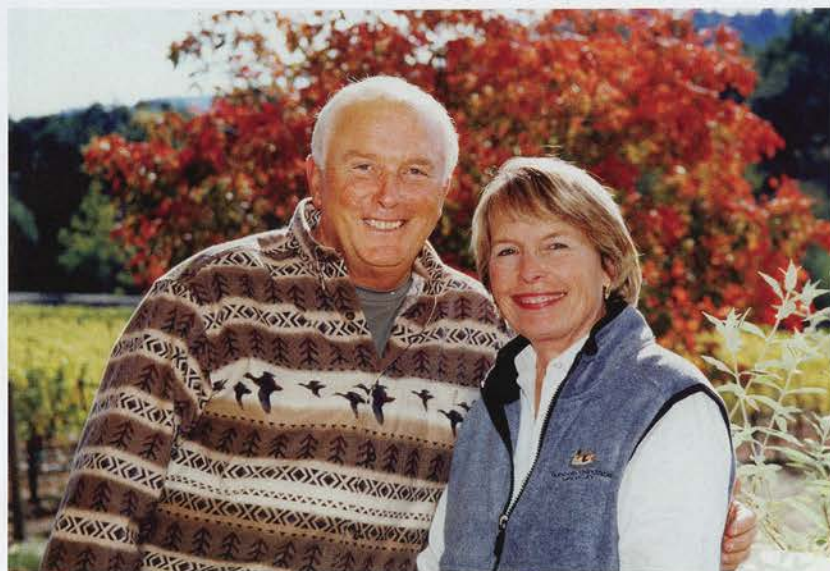
a private equity firm based in Menlo Park, Calif., in a deal that valued their Duckhorn Wine Company at \$250 million.

During its tenure, GI Partners invested \$70 million in estate vineyard purchases, including the acquisition of Three Palms in 2015. It was bought from longtime owners John and Sloan Upton, brothers who originally planted the grapes in 1968; starting in 2011, Duckhorn had been the exclusive buyer of Three Palms grapes from the Uptons.

Duckhorn got a new owner last year, another Bay Area-based equity investment group, TSG Consumer Partners. Besides the namesake winery, Duckhorn Wine Co. also owns Goldeneye, which specializes in Pinot Noir; Migration, a Chardonnay label; Decoy for value-priced bottlings; Paraduxx, a lineup of Napa-grown red and white blends; and an expansion into Washington state Cabernet with Canvasback.

Overall, Duckhorn Wine Co. makes about 700,000 cases of wine a year. And this past summer it purchased Calera, a Pinot Noir pioneer on California's Central Coast.

Tradition and innovation; continuity and transition. Duckhorn is a wine company on the move, built on Merlot grown around three of the most famous palm trees in the Golden State. □



Dan and Margaret Duckhorn, shown here in 2003, founded the winery in 1976, focusing on Merlot for its approachable character. They sold a controlling interest in the company in 2007.

# Wine Spectator

# 2017 TOP 100

Wine Spectator editors reviewed nearly 17,000 newly released wines in 2017. From this pool, we chose the Top 100. These are the year's most noteworthy wines, based on four criteria: high score, large production, value pricing and an X-factor we call excitement. We recommend these wines as outstanding representatives of their types.

## ABOUT THE 100-POINT SCALE

Ratings reflect how highly our tasters regard each wine relative to other wines. The rating summarizes a wine's overall quality; to determine if the wine's style and character appeal to you, check its complete tasting note in the Buying Guide or at [www.winespectator.com](http://www.winespectator.com).

**95-100** Classic: a great wine  
**90-94** Outstanding: a wine of superior character and style  
**85-89** Very good: a wine with special qualities  
**80-84** Good: a solid, well-made wine  
**75-79** Mediocre: a drinkable wine that may have minor flaws  
**50-74** Not recommended

RANK	WINE	SCORE	RELEASE PRICE	RANK	WINE	SCORE	RELEASE PRICE
1	<b>DUCKHORN</b> Merlot Napa Valley Three Palms Vineyard 2014	95	\$98	52	<b>DOMAINE DE MOURCHON</b> Côtes du Rhône-Villages Séguret Tradition 2014	90	\$20
2	<b>K</b> Syrah Walla Walla Valley Powerline Estate 2014	95	\$45	53	<b>PLUMPJACK</b> Syrah Napa Valley 2014	94	\$60
3	<b>CHÂTEAU COUTET</b> Barsac 2014	96	\$37	54	<b>INNOCENT BYSTANDER</b> Pinot Noir Yarra Valley 2016	90	\$20
4	<b>CASANOVA DI NERI</b> Brunello di Montalcino 2012	95	\$65	55	<b>TRIMBACH</b> Pinot Gris Alsace Réserve Personnelle 2015	92	\$38
5	<b>CHÂTEAU DE ST.-COSME</b> Gigondas 2015	95	\$43	56	<b>DOMAINES DOMINIQUE PIRON</b> Morgon La Chanais 2015	91	\$20
6	<b>DOMAINE HUËT</b> Vouvray Demi-Sec Le Mont 2016	95	\$44	57	<b>MASON</b> Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley Yount Mill Vineyard 2016	90	\$19
7	<b>CHÂTEAU CANON-LA GAFFELIÈRE</b> St.-Emilion 2014	95	\$61	58	<b>DOMAINE DE BEAURENARD</b> Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2015	94	\$55
8	<b>MEYER</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2014	95	\$70	59	<b>BODEGAS EMILIO MORO</b> Tempranillo Ribera del Duero 2015	90	\$24
9	<b>PAHLMEYER</b> Chardonnay Napa Valley 2015	95	\$75	60	<b>CASA SANTOS LIMA</b> Lisboa Colossal Reserva 2015	90	\$25
10	<b>BOOKER</b> Oublié Paso Robles 2014	95	\$80	61	<b>CANTINA DEL PINO</b> Barbaresco Ovello 2013	97	\$62
11	<b>ALTESINO</b> Brunello di Montalcino Our 40th Harvest 2012	96	\$65	62	<b>CLOS FOURTET</b> St.-Emilion 2014	95	\$74
12	<b>BEDROCK</b> Zinfandel California Old Vine 2015	93	\$25	63	<b>PURPLE HANDS</b> Pinot Noir Dundee Hills Latchkey Vineyard 2015	94	\$50
13	<b>SIXTO</b> Chardonnay Washington Uncovered 2014	94	\$35	64	<b>JEAN-LUC COLOMBO</b> Cornas Terres Brûlées 2015	94	\$58
14	<b>CLOS DES PAPES</b> Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2015	98	\$109	65	<b>GREYWACKE</b> Pinot Noir Marlborough 2014	93	\$39
15	<b>DOMAINE DES BAUMARD</b> Savennières 2015	94	\$30	66	<b>SCACCIADIAVOLI</b> Montefalco Sagrantino 2011	92	\$40
16	<b>TURLEY</b> Zinfandel Paso Robles Ueberroth Vineyard 2014	95	\$48	67	<b>THE CALLING</b> Chardonnay Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch 2015	91	\$32
17	<b>VOLVER</b> Alicante Tarima Hill Old Vines 2015	92	\$17	68	<b>GORMAN</b> Zachary's Ladder Red Mountain 2014	92	\$30
18	<b>BODEGA COLOMÉ</b> Malbec Salta 2015	92	\$25	69	<b>GINI</b> Soave Classico 2016	90	\$21
19	<b>MARQUÉS DE CÁCERES</b> Rioja Reserva 2012	93	\$31	70	<b>LINGUA FRANCA</b> Pinot Noir Eola-Amity Hills Tongue 'N Cheek 2015	94	\$60
20	<b>SAN FELICE</b> Brunello di Montalcino Campogiovanni 2012	96	\$60	71	<b>DONNACHIARA</b> Aglianico Irpina 2015	90	\$18
21	<b>HARTFORD FAMILY</b> Zinfandel Russian River Valley Old Vine 2015	94	\$38	72	<b>DOMAINE PETRONI</b> Corse 2015	90	\$20
22	<b>SAXUM</b> James Berry Vineyard Paso Robles Willow Creek District 2014	97	\$98	73	<b>POWELL &amp; SON</b> Riverside Barossa 2015	93	\$20
23	<b>MAZZEI</b> Maremma Toscana Tenuta Belguardo 2013	95	\$55	74	<b>DOMAINE DE LA SOLITUDE</b> Châteauneuf-du-Pape White 2016	95	\$50
24	<b>JUSTIN</b> Justification Paso Robles 2014	94	\$50	75	<b>RÉSONANCE</b> Pinot Noir Willamette Valley 2015	93	\$45
25	<b>ROEDERER ESTATE</b> Brut Anderson Valley NV	92	\$24	76	<b>LOUIS CHÈZE</b> Condrieu Pagus Luminis 2015	96	\$69
26	<b>TABLAS CREEK</b> Patelin de Tablas Blanc Paso Robles 2015	93	\$25	77	<b>OBERON</b> Merlot Napa Valley 2015	90	\$23
27	<b>BODEGAS ALTO MONCAYO</b> Garnacha Campo de Borja Veraton 2014	92	\$30	78	<b>PRAGER</b> Riesling Federspiel Trocken Wachau Steinriegl 2015	92	\$35
28	<b>KENDALL-JACKSON</b> Chardonnay California Vintner's Reserve 2015	91	\$17	79	<b>ALBAN</b> Syrah Edna Valley Reva Alban Estate 2013	94	\$98
29	<b>VIÑA SANTA EMA</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley Reserva 2015	91	\$15	80	<b>MICHELE CASTELLANI</b> Valpolicella Classico Superiore San Michele Ripasso 2015	90	\$28
30	<b>HIJOS DE RAINERA PEREZ MARIN</b> Manzanilla Sanlúcar de Barrameda La Guita NV	91	\$15	81	<b>DUTTON-GOLDFIELD</b> Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Dutton Ranch 2015	92	\$44
31	<b>FORGE</b> Riesling Finger Lakes Classique 2015	92	\$19	82	<b>PALI WINE CO.</b> Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast Riviera 2015	90	\$22
32	<b>SIDEBAR</b> Sauvignon Blanc High Valley 2015	91	\$20	83	<b>DOMAINE FAIVELEY</b> Mercurey Clos des Myglands 2015	93	\$53
33	<b>JIM BARRY</b> Riesling Clare Valley The Lodge Hill Dry 2016	91	\$20	84	<b>SIMONE SANTINI</b> Vernaccia di San Gimignano Tenuta Le Calcinie 2015	90	\$18
34	<b>FINCA DECERO</b> Malbec Agrelo Remolinos Vineyard 2015	91	\$22	85	<b>JOSEP MARIA RAVENTÓS I BLANC</b> Brut Nature Vino Espumoso de Calidad de la Finca 2013	90	\$33
35	<b>PAZO DE SEÑORANS</b> Albariño Rias Baixas 2016	91	\$21	86	<b>LANCASTER</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley 2014	94	\$75
36	<b>TAIT</b> The Ball Buster Barossa Valley 2014	91	\$23	87	<b>CHARTOGNE-TAILLET</b> Brut Champagne Cuvée Ste.-Anne NV	92	\$50
37	<b>KARINE LAUVERJAT</b> Sancerre 2016	91	\$23	88	<b>FONSECA</b> Vintage Port Guimaraens 2015	93	\$58
38	<b>LUIGI EINAUDI</b> Dogliani 2015	92	\$16	89	<b>DAOU</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Adelaida District Estate 2014	94	\$85
39	<b>SPRING VALLEY</b> Frederick Walla Walla Valley 2014	94	\$50	90	<b>CONCHA Y TORO</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Puente Alto Don Melchor 2014	96	\$120
40	<b>MATUA</b> Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2016	90	\$12	91	<b>CHÂTEAU LÉOVILLE LAS CASES</b> St.-Julien 2014	95	\$135
41	<b>BODEGA GARZÓN</b> Tannat Uruguay Reserva 2015	90	\$17	92	<b>GAROFOLI</b> Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Podium 2014	90	\$25
42	<b>COLENE CLEMENS</b> Pinot Noir Chehalem Mountains Dopp Creek 2014	91	\$26	93	<b>REVANA</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2014	96	\$165
43	<b>J.-A. FERRET</b> Pouilly-Fuissé 2015	92	\$35	94	<b>DI MEO</b> Greco di Tufo G 2016	90	\$27
44	<b>DOMAINE ST.-PRÉFERT</b> Châteauneuf-du-Pape Auguste Favier Réserve 2015	97	\$55	95	<b>SELBACH-OSTER</b> Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken Mosel Zeltinger Himmelreich 2015	93	\$20
45	<b>KAIKEN</b> Malbec Mendoza Ultra Las Rocas 2015	90	\$20	96	<b>FEUDI DEL PISCIOTTO</b> Nero d'Avola Terre Siciliane Versace 2015	91	\$33
46	<b>IL POGGIONE</b> Rosso di Montalcino 2015	91	\$27	97	<b>ODOARDI</b> Calabria GB 2014	92	\$45
47	<b>BODEGAS PALACIOS REMONDO</b> Rioja La Vendimia 2015	90	\$17	98	<b>PRATS &amp; SYMINGTON</b> Douro Chryseia 2014	94	\$75
48	<b>PENLEY</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Coonawarra Phoenix 2015	90	\$20	99	<b>ROBERT WEIL</b> Riesling Qualitätswein Trocken Rheingau Kiedricher Gräfenberg GG 2015	95	\$92
49	<b>RUST EN VREDE</b> Syrah Stellenbosch 2014	92	\$29	100	<b>SADIE FAMILY</b> T Voetpad Swartland 2015	95	\$67
50	<b>QUINTA DAS CARVALHAS</b> Touriga Nacional Douro 2014	90	\$22				
51	<b>BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS RAÚL PÉREZ</b> Mencía Bierzo Ultreia St.-Jacques 2015	91	\$20				