

The world's best wine magazine

January 2021

Decanter

Wines of the Year

Sensational sparkling
& reds to remember

- 64 expert picks
- From £10 to £100s
- Iconic to offbeat

**CHRISTMAS
CLASSICS RATED**
Champagne
Tawny Port

PLUS

- *Château Petrus*
- *Chablis new releases*
- *Serving sweet & fortified wines*



WINES OF THE YEAR 2020: SPARKLING AND REDS

We asked our experts from around the world, and the *Decanter* team, to nominate the classic, offbeat and value wines that impressed them most in 2020. Our trio of judges blind-tasted and ranked them, and here we reveal the first half of the results, as **Tina Gellie** reports

There hasn't been much to celebrate in the past 12 months. But in challenging times, great wines can always lift the spirits – and our fourth Wines of the Year tasting certainly does that.

We asked Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chairs, key contributors and staff to nominate the wines they have most enjoyed over the past 12 months, under the categories of Classic (a premium, textbook wine style), Offbeat (unusual grape, winemaking method, region or unearthed gem) and Value (a wine that impresses at £25 or under).

They put forward 107 nominations, and here we reveal the 64 sparkling and red wines, of which almost a quarter scored 95 points or more.

Unique tasting

'This is all about experts – who really understand the varieties and wine styles of their regions – choosing wines they love, and that makes it an unique tasting,' explained Beth Willard. 'We've had an incredibly broad range across two days of tasting: some classics, some unusual varieties, and some varieties from regions where you wouldn't expect to find them. And in general, all of these Wines of the Year, at all price points, have broad appeal.'

Andy Howard MW enjoyed the sparkling flight. 'The Champagnes, as you'd expect, were excellent, and the English wine with the extra ageing was an outstanding example.' But it was the Tasmanian sparkling (*overleaf*) that stole the judges' hearts with its maturity, complexity and 'sheer deliciousness – I'd very happily drink that any day', said Howard.

However, it was the red wines which really piqued their excitement. 'It was fascinating to see what our fellow experts had chosen,' said Ronan Sayburn MS. 'Though it was often quite

difficult to judge – like when you taste your first ever Moschomavro (*see p40*), which clearly someone thinks is great, and probably is, but you're not trying it in context with a bunch of other Moschomavros!'

The classic wines were benchmark examples. Sayburn singled out the Pinot Noirs, including a 'delicious, characterful' Sancerre and 'a fantastic IGP Pinot from the Loire – it will be interesting to know the price of that'.

Willard was impressed by the Cabernets. 'I really enjoyed the different expressions from around the world, but the classic regions shone through: Western Australia's Margaret River and Rutherford in Napa. I was also really excited by the Canadian Merlot blend – an outstanding red with great elegance and intensity.'

For Howard it was all about Syrah, and especially the St-Joseph: 'This stood out for me – I always think it's not as great as Côte-Rôtie or Hermitage, but this example was fantastic.'

But the wine of the tasting was an Amarone. 'It was an outstanding example of the genre,' said Howard. 'Its age, depth, complexity of flavour and alcohol – everything was beautifully balanced.'

The judges were keen to point out to readers that prices (and the categories in which the wines were entered) were not revealed, so their scores were based purely on quality. 'For example,' said Howard, 'there was an IGP Puy de Dôme red and a Vin de France Grenache that I suspect are not particularly expensive, but were just really delicious wines to drink.'

'Across the board, whether you are at the exotic end of Amarones, SuperTuscans, Napa Cabernets and Champagnes or down at that IGP level, this tasting showed the diversity of great wines out there.' ➤

NEXT MONTH *Decanter's* 43 top white, rosé, sweet and fortified Wines of the Year



Andy Howard MW is a *Decanter* contributing editor and was formerly a wine buyer in the UK retail sector for 30 years



Ronan Sayburn MS is head of wine at 67 Pall Mall private members' club and CEO of the Court of Master Sommeliers Europe



Beth Willard is buying manager for Direct Wines and was Joint Chair for North, Central & Eastern Europe at DWWA 2020

Thank you to the following people who contributed their recommendations: Sarah Ahmed, Jane Anson, Richard Baudains, Laura Bianco, Jim Budd, James Button, Bob Campbell MW, Jeannie Cho Lee MW, Alistair Cooper MW, Charles Curtis MW, Michael Denton, Sarah Jane Evans MW, Simon Field MW, Aldo Fiordelli, Tina Gellie, Rosemary George MW, Rebecca Gibb MW, Caroline Gilby MW, Charlotte Hale, Michael Hill Smith MW, Georgie Hindle, Stephen Hobley, Huon Hooke, Anne Krebiehl MW, James Lawther MW, Matthew Luczy, Nico Manassis, Caro Maurer MW, Fiona McDonald, Michaela Morris, Rupert Owen, Anthony Rose, Ronan Sayburn MS, Greg Sherwood MW, Cesar Soler, Sonja van Praag, Matt Walls, Amy Wislocki, Sylvia Wu

28 **Château Léoville Barton, St-Julien 2CC, Bordeaux, France 2016**

94 **C** AH 95 RS 94 RS 93

£95-£120 Dunell's, Exel, Grand Vin, L'Assemblage, Nemo Wine Cellars
Intense, luxurious, fresh yet also very classically Bordeaux on the nose. Loads of dark berry and currant fruit, allied to a touch of oaky spiciness. Dense on the palate, but also refined, elegant and smooth. **Drink 2021-2045 Alc 13%** *Michael Denton*

29 **Frescobaldi, Tenuta Perano, Chianti Classico, Tuscany, Italy 2016**

94 **C** AH 93 RS 92 BW 96

£23.99-£29.80 Hallgarten Wines, Vinvm
Classic aromas with a touch of mint, a hint of chocolate and notes of balsamic. Elegant with well-integrated oak, soft tannins, juicy red fruit and savoury notes on the finish. **Drink 2021-2028 Alc 14%** *Stephen Hobley*

30 **Gramercy Cellars, John Lewis Syrah, Walla Walla Valley, Washington, USA 2015**

94 **C** AH 94 RS 92 BW 95
£73.68 The Vinorium

Has a very appealing structure with some mineral notes and subtle oak to support the vibrant dark cherry and berry fruit. An appetising, succulent Syrah with some spice, but the overriding impression is freshness, which leads in to the finish. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 13.6%** *Tina Gellie*

31 **Il Poggione, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy 2015**

94 **C** AH 95 RS 96 BW 91

£31.68-£42 Goedhuis & Co, Morrisons, NY Wines, The Great Wine Co
Super-ripe dark berry fruit, a touch of dried plum and firm tannins coupled with brisk acidity. The anticipated wood structure is there but the fruit coats the wood in a very appealing way. A touch of cooked meats on the finish. **Drink 2021-2025 Alc 15%** *Sylvia Wu*

32 **La Rioja Alta, Viña Ardanza Reserva, Rioja, Spain 2012**

94 **C** AH 94 RS 92 BW 95

£24-£26.50 Armit, WineTrust100
Warming, nutty, complex Rioja with layers of fruit and a softness of dark cherry fruit on the palate. Has soft tannins and is elegantly poised, with a long, savoury finish. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 14.5%** *Sarah Jane Evans MW*





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23 **Domaine Vacheron, Belle Dame, Sancerre, Loire, France 2016**

95 **C** AH 95 RS 97 BW 92

£47 adVINture, Terra Wines

Elegant Pinot nose with red cherry, raspberry and a little sweet cranberry, along with a bacon/meaty aroma and smoky oak. A powerful, forceful expression of Sancerre Rouge on the palate with deep colour in the glass. Some tannic grip showing a touch of Côte de Nuits in style. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 13% Rebecca Gibb MW**

24 **Domaines Barons de Rothschild, Château d'Aussières, Corbières, Languedoc, France 2017**

95 **C** AH 95 RS 95 BW 94

£25.75-£38 Harvey Nichols, Peake Wine Associates, The Oxford Wine Co, Waddesdon Wine Shop

A really good example of warm, ripe fruit from the south of France, showing good integration of oak, lots of red fruit and chocolate character. No rusticity here. Generous and very appealing style. Dark cherry notes and a hint of floral character on the finish. **Drink 2021-2035 Alc 14.5% Michael Denton**

25 **Isole e Olena, Cepparello, Tuscany, Italy 2016**

95 **C** AH 96 RS 95 BW 95

£85-£85.99 Liberty Wines, NY Wines

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Lively, intense, ripely fruited Sangiovese. This shows all of the richness found in this great vintage. Very good purity and density on the palate, all kept fresh by lively tannins and some great acidity. Dark berry fruits and a hint of slightly dried grapes here. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 15% Michaela Morris**

26 **Painted Rock, Red Icon, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, Canada 2017**

95 **C** AH 96 RS 94 BW 96

£54 The Wine Treasury

A rich wine displaying lots of fruit and intensity, but with an underlying elegance. The nose is very pretty, revealing attractive raspberry and other red fruits, while the palate is quite plummy with a touch of mint, red pepper and black pepper spice on the finish. **Drink 2021-2030 Alc 14.6% Sonja van Praag**

27 **Domaine Sauvat, Nymphéa, Puy de Dôme, Loire, France 2018**

94 **V** AH 93 RS 95 BW 95

N/A UK www.sauvat-vins.com

A great Pinot nose with a herbal touch along with kirsch cherry and bacon fat. Well balanced and fresh on the palate with a touch of violet, boiled sweets and raspberry. A fresh, fruity but complex wine to enjoy now. **Drink 2021-2024 Alc 13.2% Jim Budd >**

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