

Spec'ssm

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Owned and operated by the same Houston family since 1962.

TWELVE-UNDER-\$12

You love great wine ... but just now you're looking for a cheap bottle - "an everyday value wine" - that tastes really good. I'm right there with you. I love great wine, but \$12 is about my limit for everyday drinking wines. And to me, value means a wine tastes like it costs more than it does. Here are twelve of my everyday value picks, all priced under \$12.

MEUNIER St. LOUIS, Corbieres, 2000

12x750ml \$8.18 \$88.47

This well-built Southern Rhone-style red is loaded with juicy black grapey-berry fruit and subtle spice with hints of garrigue and Corbieres' earthy terroir. The wine is balanced and fresh in the mouth with a nice, medium-weight feel and a softly chewy texture. The fruit and spice last throughout the finish. It has both the fruit to handle some spice and the stuffing to handle grilled beef. Served cool (55-60°), it may be the perfect fajita wine. Fine. **Bear's Score: 88+ points.**

SPEC's WINERY DIRECT Pinot Noir, Carneros, 2002

12x750ml \$9.97 \$113.65

Much in the same style as our two previous Winery Direct Pinots, this 2002 Carneros shows good weight and richness with plenty of sweet dark cherry fruit, notes of earth and chocolate, and hints of coffee, cola, and spice. The texture is nicely chewy with good structure and balance and a fine, rich feel. The long, fruit-oriented finish resolves to clean and dry. It has developed a hint of perfume since it was bottled. It is very versatile with food and quite drinkable on its own. Fine. **Bear's Score: 89 points.**

RAVENSWOOD "Vintner's Blend" Shiraz, Southeastern Australia, 2002

12x750ml \$8.25 \$91.85

Marketing hype (such as kangaroos replacing the ravens on the label) aside, it's all about the wine and Ravenswood founder Joel Petersen, working with partners at BRL Hardy in Australia, has blended up a winner. This is a juicy deep chewy Shiraz featuring dark cherry and black raspberry fruit with a touch of white pepper and a "Sonoma Zin" personality. It may sound a bit confusing but with its fresh flavors and lovely feel, it works. Really Very Good. **Bear's Score: 87 points.**

AVALON Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 2002

12x750ml \$9.44 \$105.12

Here's the third vintage of this medium-weight, well-balanced, very tasty Napa Valley Cabernet. As with earlier iterations, the fruit is in the mixed-black-cherry-and-dark-berry range with good cedar, tobacco, and black pepper complexity and a note of "Napa dust." It opens up nicely in the glass with a nicely chewy texture and good mouth-feel. This wine offers a great bang-for-your-buck. Really Fine. **Bear's Score: 90 points.**

La VIELLE FERME Cotes de Ventoux Rouge, 2001

12x750ml \$4.94 \$55.06

A blend of 60% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 15% Cinsault, and 10% Mourvedre, this is a juicy fresh lively, light-to-medium-weight Rhone red offering simple grapey dark fruit with hints of earth, pepper, and garrigue at a great price. It opens nicely in the glass. Very Good. **Bear's Score: 85+ points.**

St. URBANS HOF Riesling QbA, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, 2002

12x750ml \$10.91 \$122.83

This fresh, refreshing, classic Mosel Riesling offers prickly green apple and lime juice fruit with notes of peach perfume, steel, slate, and wet stones. It has a thrilling tension in the mouth with its balance of sweetness and acidity. Really lasts; the finish resolves brilliantly clean. Delicious. Excellent. **Bear's Score: 91 points.**

Special for SPEC's KEY holders:

Buy a mixed case consisting of one 750ml bottle of each of our MAY 12-UNDER-\$12 selections for only \$94.94 a savings of \$7.07 over SPEC's already low cash bottle price.

Special price good 05/04/04 thru 06/01/04. (UPC: 00000241992)

LAKE SONOMA Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley, 2001

12x750ml \$11.98 \$133.52

A blend of 95% Zinfandel and 5% Petite Sirah, this 15.4% alcohol Zin is very well-balanced in a medium-weight, somewhat perfumed, claret style. The aromas and flavors feature sweet dark blueberry, boysenberry, and blackberry fruit with notes of tobacco and cedar and classic briar. It is sweet and succulent with a fine feel in the mouth. The berry perfume lingers on and on. YUM! Excellent. **Bear's Score: 92 points.**

VINA ANTIGUA Sangiovese-Bonardo, Maipu (Argentina), 2002

12x750ml \$3.99 \$45.48

Hand Picked Selections brings us this value-priced blend of Sangiovese and Bonardo from Argentina's Maipu district. It offers spicy cherry fruit with good ripeness, nice notes of earth and spice and a dusty dry, chewy character. This super value is perfect as an everyday red for pizza, pasta, burgers, or whatever. Very Good. **Bear's Score: 85 points.**

SILVERADO Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, 2002

12x750ml \$10.99 \$123.12

91% Sauvignon Blanc and 9% Semillon. 46% of the total was barrel fermented and 9% underwent a complete malolactic fermentation. What does all that mean? It means that the wine was the bright fruit and crispness that comes from a temperature controlled, stainless steel fermentation along with some of the richness and creamy texture associated with barrel fermentation and aging and malo-lactic fermentation. The flavors are predominantly grassy and grapefruity with notes of pear and lemon and a hint of anise. Fine. **Bear's Score: 88 points.**

LOS CARDOS Malbec, Lujan de Cuyo (Argentina), 2003

12x750ml \$5.28 \$58.83

Here's a medium weight, spicy grapey dark-berry-and-cherry fruit-oriented Malbec with note of earth, black pepper-spice, and tobacco. It has ample flavor with a nice balance and fine feel in the mouth. Very Good. **Bear's Score: 86 points.**

GHOST GUM Chardonnay, Southeastern Australia, 2002

12x750ml \$9.83 \$109.51

Although it offers classically Aussie pineapple fruit, this is not your typical Australian Chardonnay. It also shows lime and banana fruit with notes of mineral, hints of citrus zest, and a fine balance with a serious feel in the mouth. It is bright with flavor and quite lively. Very tasty. Very Good. **Bear's Score: 87 points.**

ESTANCIA Pinot Grigio, California, 2003

12x750ml \$8.25 \$91.85

A blend of 84% Pinot Gris and 14% Chardonnay, this rare value-priced California Pinot Grigio offers classic pear and lime fruit with a distinct mineral note and hints of spice and other citrus. It finishes clean and fresh. Its two months in neutral oak barrels was just enough to soften it a bit without adding any oak flavors or tannins. It is a very "food friendly" wine. Fine. **Bear's Score: 88 points.**

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SPEC's MAY 2004 12-UNDER-\$12