

Collin's Top 10 List of 2011! by Collin Williams

Each year for the past four years I have reflected back in December over the entire year to determine which wines were those that really stood out above and beyond all others that I tasted. As you can imagine, this is no easy task as due to the countless number of examples that we are tasked with judging, evaluating, and to which we give our professional opinion.

Each year I find surprises with my final selections for the best that 2011 had to offer. Sure, my selection of wines is weighted towards more Spanish, but if I am to be truly an efficient buyer my opinion should not be biased and needs to be focused on quality despite the region of origin.

Following is my list for 2011. Hope you enjoy and pick up some for yourself!



#10 Mumm Napa Brut Rose (Napa, California) \$15.99 cash

When I say that a wine tastes like it has a note of Fruit Loops Cereal, trust me it's a good thing! I have always loved the wines from Mumm Napa, but this wine has always been my favorite. In fact, they used to call this wine "Blanc de Noir", but changed it to represent the "Rose" in the name and its connotation. Deliciously fruity with a full bodied mouth-feel and a cherry-candied-jelly-cardamom like flavor combo that I refer to as "Fruit Loops Cereal". Smooth and well balanced, this wine is a steal at the price.



#09 Clos Figueres 2006 \$76.79 cash

Christopher Cannan is one of those figures in the wine business that has held world recognition for many of the most exciting brands on available. Upon meeting him in Spain this summer and discovering that he owned a property in Priorat I grew anxious to sample his wines offerings. WOW, was I impressed at the amazing wine that he was producing. For me, a great wine is one that you taste, enjoy, and are thinking about minutes (if not hours) afterwards. This was the 2006 Clos Figueras for me. A blend of Garnacha, Carinena, and Syrah, this wine displays tons of sweet oak and chocolate character, but really relies on its great fruit flavor and spicy nuances to bring out its complexity. Also, a backbone of slatey minerality makes for a delicious example of the best wine Priorat has to offer.



#08 Hahn Pinot Noir 2010 (Monterey, California) \$11.89 cash

I am in constant search of "The Great Value Pinot Noir" and recently stumbled across this excellent example from the Monterey County region of California. A well-established brand, Hahn Pinot Noir was flying under the radar as I knew the quality but had not tasted it in a long time. This great little Pinot does not list the winery's more esteemed appellation on the label, but does source a lot of the fruit from the Santa Lucia Highlands area. Floral with bright red berries on the nose followed by cherry cola, spice, and cherry glaze on the palate, this Pinot is a winner for me (especially at the price!).




#07 Rupert and Rothschild Classique 2009 (South Africa) \$17.59 cash

This wine is a collaboration between Anthonij Rupert and Baron Benjamin de Rothschild, two famous and well-established names in their own right. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, this wine displays all of the great flavors of these two grapes that you have come to know, but allows the South African character to shine through. Black and red berry fruit are highlighted on the nose with the palate perfectly balanced with bright acidity, tannin, and a subtle layer of spicy complexity that wraps everything nice and tight. Easy to drink and develops more as it opens, I would buy this wine as a everyday wine or one to impress your unsuspecting wine geeks.



#06 Schug Rouge de Noir Brut (Sonoma, California) \$29.79 cash

The Schug Family has a great history of winemaking that stems from the founder's origin in Germany. For decades now, the Schugs have contributed to some of the best wines made in California as well as define a great family brand image for their self-titled wines. This selection is a style of sparkling wine that I have become very interested in lately. Labeled as "Rouge de Noir" as opposed to "Rose", this style of sparkling uses 100% Pinot Noir grapes but allows for longer maceration and extraction times so that the final product is darker and displays a thicker tannin structure. Instead of the appeal of drinking a Rose sparkling wine, this example evokes the idea of tasting a red wine with carbonation. Try it for a unique twist on your bubbly selections. 

Stay tuned next week as I detail my Top 5 picks of the year!

*Check out the Wine Down with Spec's Episodes for my Top 5 Wine Picks of the year @ www.youtube.com/specs1962.

