

PUNCH

Story: Robert Simonson
Photo: Lizzie Munro



For a generation or more, wines lived in a system guided by numbers—a rigid fortress built out of 100 points. The “how” of these wines—their creation stories—were secondary, if they got any sunlight at all. And often, well, those stories were kind of snoozy: Visionary Pursues Greatness, An Obsession with Quality, Modern Man Rescues Old Appellation.

For a variety of reasons, that fortress has been crumbling. Because of generational shifts, sure, but also because wine storytelling has come of age, as the industry always hoped it would. Today’s wine lover expects to discover an affinity with the people making the wine they drink. They’re less concerned with the throw-money-at-it tales of the past and would rather spend their money on human-scale endeavors.

But a tale well-spun is only part of the equation. Today, we’re entering a different kind of precarious territory, where a jaunty tale and a meme-worthy label seem to be all it takes to deem a wine awesome. Taste is now a much harder conversation to have than it used to be.

What I mean is that quality still matters—maybe more than ever—and that more than anything it is what unifies the wines in the 2018 edition of our Hot 25. We may be fighting out what “quality” means and sweeping away creaky notions of taste “objectivity,” but simply being different for the sake of it isn’t enough. In fact, placing quirk over quality is a first step toward a kind of alt-monotony in wine, where offbeat becomes the sole barometer.

So, in a year with no shortage of great wines, the bottles that rose to the top did so for two reasons: They told great stories, and then they backed those tales up with unmistakable mastery. Fulfilling both sides of that equation is crucial, because we’re not only at an exciting time in wine, but also a contentious one. There’s ever more sentiment that wine’s great recent exploratory phase has gone too far, become too weird, and that we need to just stick to the classics. That reactionary view hardly fits today’s wine world. But it’s also a direct result of a recent rash of too much story, without the deliciousness to back it up.

This year’s Hot 25 pays tribute to mastering both. Some of this year’s class are contemporary takes on classic wines—a [Beaujolais](#) that defines that region’s state of the art, or a [Provençal rosé](#) to remind us that not all pink wine need be summer water. Others find a brilliant new perspective—old grapes encountering a better life in the New World, or a renaissance of talent in overlooked spots like the Czech Republic or Portugal, or newfangled winemaking that proves Émile Peynaud’s assertion that tradition is simply an experiment that worked.

That experimentation, that charge toward the new, can be found anywhere. And this year’s class of wines demonstrates that perfectly.



SPARKLING

Jacquesson "Cuvée 741" Extra Brut Champagne

In this era of grower Champagne, sometimes the work of great small Champagne houses gets overlooked—especially Jacquesson, which owns many of its own vineyards but doesn’t quite fit into either the négociant or grower world. The quality of their “nonvintage” wine is unwavering every year—particularly the 741, with its lighter, harmonious pinot noir flavors: cumin spice and ponzu, plus a lemongrass-like savory side and a touch of citric juiciness at the end. The wine is decisive evidence for the art of blending Champagne the old-fashioned way, even if that storyline isn’t as fashionable today.

To read entire article: <https://punchdrink.com/articles/25-essential-best-wines-2018/>

Domaine Nowack "La Fontinette" Meunier Extra Brut Champagne
Julien Braud "La Bulle de l'Ouest" Méthode Petillant Brut
La Vignereuse "Mayga Watt" Pétillant Rosé

WHITE

Jean-Baptiste Arena "Grotte di Sole"
Luis Seabra "Xisto Ilimitado" Branco
Domaine du Closel "Eau de Pluie" Verdelho
Domaine Eleni et Edouard Vocoret "Le Bas de Chapelot" Chablis
A Los Viñateros Bravos "Granítico" Blanco
Dönnhoff "Oberhäuser Leistenberg" Riesling Kabinett
Azores Wine Company "Arinto Dos Açores"

PINK, ORANGE, ETC.

Delinquente "Pretty Boy" Nero d'Avola Rosato
Damijan "Kaplja"
Château Pradeaux Bandol Rosé
J. Mourat "Collection" Val de Loire Rosé
Nestarec "Běl"
Jolie-Laide Rosé of Valdiguié

RED

Domaine Chapel "Côte de Bessay" Juliéna
Jaimee Motley Wines "Argillet" Mondeuse Noir
G.D. Vajra "Claré J.C." Langhe Nebbiolo
Nicolas Carmarans "Mauvais Temps"
Château du Champ des Treilles "Le Petit Champ" Bordeaux
Inconnu "Kitsune" Red Blend
Comando G "La Bruja de Rozas" Garnacha
Jutta Ambrositsch "Rakete" Roter Gemischter Satz
