

Six Exciting Wine Regions To Explore In 2014

The wine world continues to improve and refine its offerings; even centuries-old regions are trying new things. These six regions are garnering praise for balanced, elegant wines that tend towards lower alcohol and food-friendliness. Some, such as Beaujolais, have been misunderstood. Others have been ignored and some are just now emerging as regions of distinction. The word is getting out so make some time to explore them now... before they become famous.



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1. Cru Beaujolais

Why: Beaujolais' gamay grape is often overlooked and hence underpriced, which can make Cru Beaujolais a terrific value. Cru Beaujolais, which is located within France's Burgundy region, is comprised of ten special villages. The wines from these areas are light-bodied, elegant, earthy and refined with soft tannins, bright fruits and aging potential. They are superior food wines as well. Some to look for: Moulin-à-Vent, Morgon, Brouilly, Fleurie.

Try: 2011 Domaine Marcel Lapierre Morgon. Silky tannins and mouthfeel, layers of earth and cherry notes, fine structure.

2. Franciacorta, Italy

Why: This northeastern region offers an Italian spin on the beauty and elegance of Champagne with its metodo classico wines. Crafted from chardonnay and pinot nero grapes, Franciacorta offers a flattering imitation of the Champagne style—and typically at a better price point.

Try: 2007 Bellavista Franciacorta, Gran Cuvee. Rich and elegant, drinks like a much pricier Champagne with pearly threads of bubbles, rich mousse texture and a fine mineral crispness at the finish. Wow.

3. Western Sonoma Coast, California

Why: Cooler climate wines are the new popular kids in town and Sonoma's far western edge dishes up cool like no other region. Many vineyards sit in view of the Pacific Ocean, at the mercy of fog, wind and chill throughout the growing season. Syrah, pinot noir and chardonnay do best here. Expect wines with vivid acidity, layers of complexity and precise balance.

Try: 2011 Peay Les Titans Sonoma Coast Syrah. Vines grow just 4 miles from the Pacific and are flanked on one side by towering redwood trees. This wine fairly quivers with tension; its sophisticated structure and soft, high-toned fruits belie the acidity and length.

2011 Freeman Akiko's Cuvée Pinot Noir. Layers of dark forest floor, raspberry, pomegranate, and cardamom. I love the wild strawberry and purity from clean, precise acidity. Cerebral and refined, a wine to drink over dinner.

4. Virginia

Why: The wine world's foremost enologist, Eric Boissenot, who consults for all four Médoc first-growths in Bordeaux, lends his legendary expertise to Virginia's RdV Vineyards because of the promise he sees in the wines. Virginia's calling card is red blends and crisp, elegant whites, but it is still a region in development so you'll have to look hard for the wines. Wineries to look for include RdV, Barboursville, Glen Manor and Linden.

Try: 2006 Barboursville Cabernet Franc Reserve. Supple tannins, rich black cherry notes and some cinnamon. The floral, slightly rose-petal note on each sip is complimented by beautiful structure. Virginia wows with this wine.

5. Anderson Valley, California

Why: Located about 120 miles north of San Francisco in Mendocino, the Anderson Valley's cold, foggy, dry and windy climate offers prime growing conditions for pinot noir and chardonnay. Smart winemakers have been experimenting with the terroir over the past 10 to 15 years and the results are elegant, finely tuned wines with soft fruit notes and complex structure. Look for wines from Cakebread (Two Creeks), Jackson Family Wine Estates, (Wind Racer) and even Roederer Estate's sparkling wines.

Try: 2011 Fulcrum Anderson Valley Pinot Noir. Fulcrum delivers layers of cherry, violets and cinnamon over dark earth notes. A nice kick of spice at the finish keeps things interesting.

6. Horse Heaven Hills, [Washington](#)

Why: Washington is earning much-deserved praise for its red blends. Horse Heaven Hills is the state's largest grape growing region, home to the likes of Columbia Crest and Hogue Cellars. The dry, sunny and windy conditions yield prime growing conditions for everything from mourvedre to cabernet sauvignon. Currently four of Washington's 100 point Wine Spectator rated wines are grown in this AVA, but great values are easy to find, at least for now.

Try: 2010 Alder Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon. Blue fruits and coffee-chocolate notes are rounded out with smooth tannins and good structure.

2010 McKinley Springs Chenin Blanc: Brilliant color with crisp citrusy notes, perfect for seafood, especially oysters. Dry, not sweet.

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