

## French wines going red with envy

The LCBO's February 20 collection focused primarily on selections from France and new world Pinot Noir. Outside of the two French reds that made our Top 5 Best Value list, the smart buys were to be found in wines from Australia, Argentina and Portugal and one Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand.

The Essentials Catalogue promoted a selection of French wines from various regions – Champagne, Chablis, Burgundy, Bordeaux, Rhone, Southern Rhone and Loire all represented – so red wine lovers will have no difficulty finding well-rated labels across the entire price range. However, Pinot Noir selections from Ontario, New Zealand, South Africa and Oregon demonstrated that you get what you pay for, with one exception. Montes Limited Selection Pinot Noir 2018 from Chile did well on average although its contested scores mean it might be a good steal only for those willing to take a risk on its \$15.95 price tag.

Looking at the rest of the release on an aggregate level, a smaller number of more expensive wines drove up both the average scores and price compared to last time (up \$2.90 per bottle from \$22.49, the average score went up 0.69 from 88.87). This should come as no surprise because of the French-focused theme meant more pricey old-world Bordeaux and Rhone reds were destined to hit the shelves.

Two well-aged 2013 vintages in the luxury price range – a Clemente VII Gran Selezione Chianti Classico 2013 (\$34.95) and Ramirez de la Piscina Gran Reserva Tempranillo 2013 (\$46.95), both rated at an average 90.5 score – were interesting offerings. Buyer beware: the Tempranillo's scores were very disparate, ranging from an 88 to 93, meaning it could be a little more speculative of a buy – depending on your personal taste preference (as always – all scores are entirely subjective).

The surprising low mark of the release comes from the usually reliable Coppola Winery from California with their Diamond Collection Chardonnay 2018 (\$24.25). Wine notes of “highly stylized dusty, toasty oak” translated into an average score of 86.4, only slightly higher than the lowest release mark 86.0 from a Portuguese blended red for \$13.95. Good judging really helps before shopping!

### By the numbers

Total wines included in Value Index.....55  
Average wine rating aggregate ..... 89.56  
Average wine price ..... \$25.39

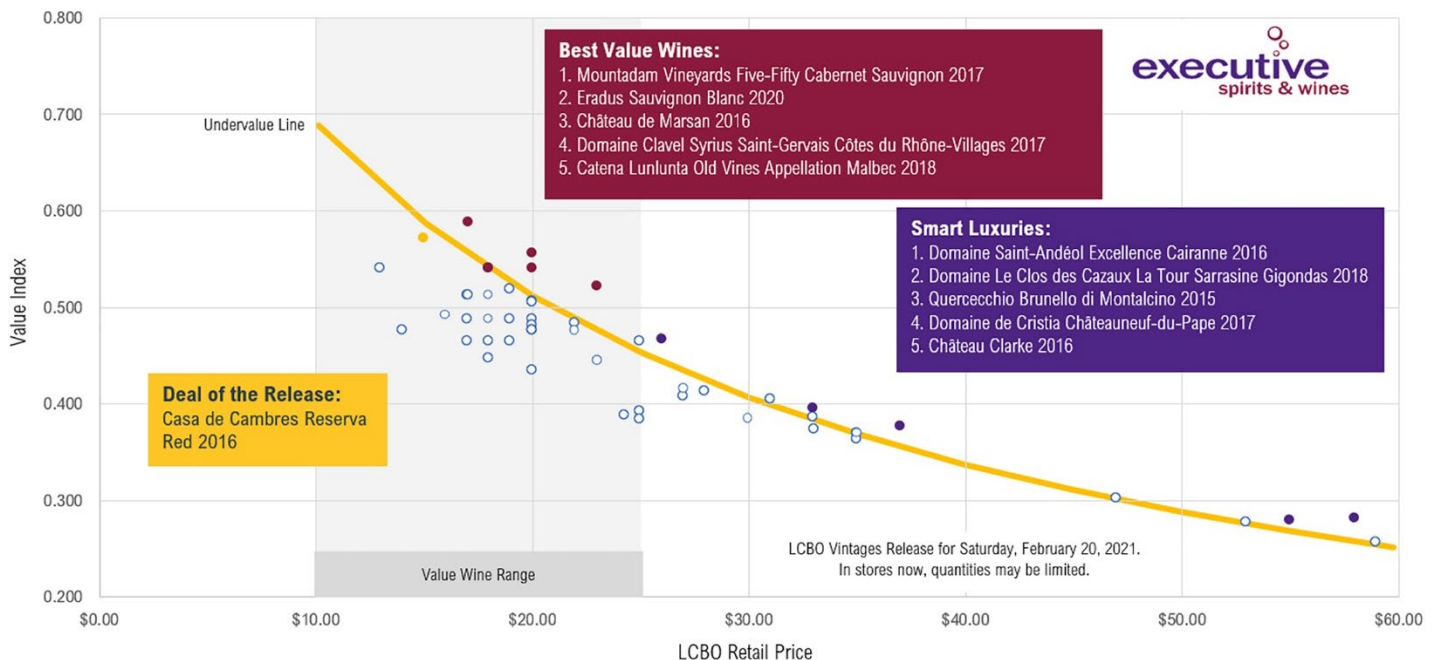
**By price:**

\$.....	\$10.00 - \$15.00.....	3
\$\$.....	\$15.01 - \$20.00.....	26
\$\$\$.....	\$20.01 - \$25.00.....	8
\$\$\$\$.....	\$25.01 - \$40.00.....	13
\$\$\$\$\$.....	Over \$40.00.....	5

By type:		Country:	
White.....	11	Argentina.....	2
Red.....	41	Australia.....	3
Sparkling.....	3	Canada.....	6
		Chile.....	2

Vintage:		Country:	
2015.....	2	France.....	19
2016.....	8	Germany.....	1
2017.....	12	Italy.....	7
2018.....	19	New Zealand.....	4
2019.....	4	Spain.....	2
N/V.....	10	USA.....	6
		Other.....	3

## Value Index for Feb. 20, 2021: SMART LUXURIES FOUND IN FRANCE AND ITALY



## SMART LUXURIES FOUND IN FRANCE AND ITALY

### Best deal of the release

- ❖ Casa de Cambres Reserva Red 2016 (\$14.95)

### Best value wines

- ❖ Mountadam Vineyards Five-Fifty Cabernet Sauvignon 2017 (\$17.00)
- ❖ Eradus Sauvignon Blanc 2020 (\$19.95)
- ❖ Château de Marsan 2016 (\$17.95)
- ❖ Domaine Clavel Syrius Saint-Gervais Côtes du Rhône-Villages 2017 (\$19.95)
- ❖ Catena Lunlunta Old Vines Appellation Malbec 2018 (\$22.95)

### Smart luxuries

- ❖ Domaine Saint-Andéol Excellence Cairanne 2016 (\$25.95)
- ❖ Domaine Le Clos des Cazaux La Tour Sarrasine Gigondas 2018 (\$32.95)
- ❖ Quercecchio Brunello di Montalcino 2015 (\$36.95)
- ❖ Domaine de Cristia Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2017 (\$57.95)
- ❖ Château Clarke 2016 (\$54.95)

### Other notable details from the catalogue analysis:

- ❖ Of the 71 wines that went through the algorithm, 26 were spit out due to lack of data or poor fit.
- ❖ Several 95 and 97 scores disqualified wines because they were cited from tourism boards or trade associations and could not be verified by other professional critics, or in two cases, no other references to these wines could be found at all.
- ❖ Average scores can be deceiving. Some wines, such as Domaine de la Plaigne Régnier 2017 (\$17.95), scored consistently in the 85 to 87 range but were boosted by one critic's scoring that is notoriously generous.

### Bargain bin deals (great wines, low prices)

Due to popular response, here's a list of well-rated wines that will help you restock your empty wine cabinet for under \$17. These wines prove that good deals can come from a variety of historically strong wine-producing countries (Spain, Chile, France and Germany, respectively) and allow you to enjoy even on the most modest of budgets.

- ❖ Alceo Tempranillo 2017 (\$12.95)
- ❖ Montes Limited Selection Pinot Noir 2018 (\$15.95)
- ❖ Thierry Delaunay Touraine Sauvignon Blanc 2019 (\$16.95)
- ❖ Modernist Dry Riesling 2019 (\$16.95)

### Good things grow... in Ontario

Let's continue to support local. Here are three highlights from the Niagara and Lake Erie North Shore regions that all scored an average of 89 and cost less than \$20.00.

- ❖ Flat Rock Riesling (\$17.95)
- ❖ Flat Rock Twisted White (\$17.95)
- ❖ Pelee Island Vinedressers Reserve Pinot Noir 2017 (\$19.95)

Being as patriotic as the next Canadian, that inevitably means The Tragically Hip's music was a valued part of growing up in the "Great White North". Unfortunately, loyalty to Gord Downie's legacy does not extend to the band's latest wine project. The Tragically Hip Fully Completely Reserve Red 2018 (\$24.95) did not fare well and scored an average of 86.5. Loyal fans may still want to buy it for the album cover label artwork.

We strive to provide objective review of wines and spirits that are actually available at your local LCBO store or local restaurant. No impossible-to-find collectables here. [The top picks are available to read on our website.](#)

### About the author:

**A. Paul Mitchell**, former restaurant critic for *Metro News*, loves wine, spirits and data analysis and tries to merge them together when he can. Aside from blind tasting and increasing his wine appreciation through WSET certification, he's the 2012-2013 National Blind Tasting champion (spirits division), Whisky Ambassador, Bourbon Steward, Fine Vintage Spirits graduate and Edinburgh Whisky Academy certificate holder.

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