

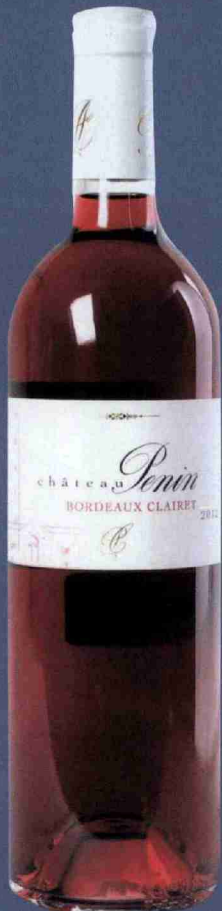
Arneis

Some folks are perhaps too exuberant about this white companion grape to Barolo, so curb your expectations. But the grape does produce well-structured wine with tree-fruit aromas and flavors — a Chardonnay feel with a bit of a flavor *oomph*.



**Bordeaux
Clairat**

Clairat is a style of wine halfway between a rosé and a red — a great Merlot-Cab Sauvignon-Cab Franc combo that is Bordeaux's answer to Beaujolais, as a great summer picnic and barbecue wine that can be served chilled.



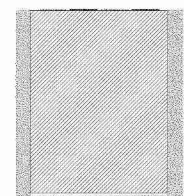
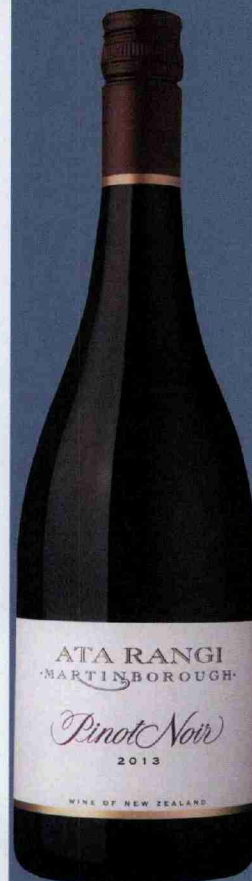
**West Coast
Merlot/Syrah
Blends**

Syrah and Merlot are great individually, but consumers like them even more when they are blended together; not surprising, as winemakers in Italy and Australia have been doing this for years. Some of the more interesting ones come from the Paso Robles area and from eastern Washington state, combining Merlot's fruit with Syrah's savoriness.



**Martinborough
Pinot Noirs**

I personally prefer both the Pinot Noirs and Sauvignon Blancs from this small town on New Zealand's North Island to those coming from more-famous Marlborough on the South Island. Both have more richness and edginess in this slightly warmer area.



Mid-Atlantic Italian Varietal Blends

The sad thing about eastern U.S. wines is that they seldom are seen outside the region, which is really not so bad since it's a beautiful place to visit. Chardonnay and Merlot grow well in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland, but the intriguing wines, I think, are the blends that are made from northern Italian varietals. You may have to search a bit, but take a roadtrip and be rewarded.



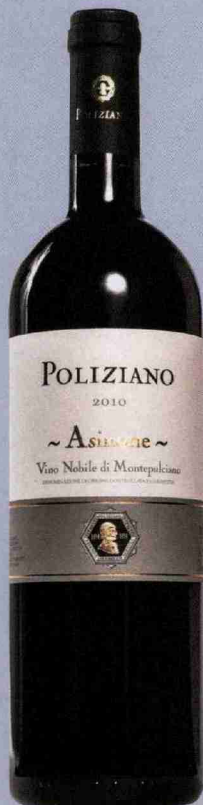
Nero d'Avola from Sicily

Since being given the chance to show that this hot region can make more than baked reds, Sicily winemakers have responded with many good to great wines. Their go-to red grape has been the native Nero d'Avola, which combines spiciness with richness and deserves a promotion to the "A" list.



Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

Less well-known than Chianti or Brunello, day-in and day-out Vino Nobile Sangioveses outperform most Chianti Classicos, but still generally trail those of Brunello. The good news is that their price is much less for excellent quality.



Ventoux

This mountainous region to the east of Avignon has been making great "everyday" wines for years, but now Ventoux – part of Vaucluse – has upped its game, using the same mix of reds and whites as Châteauneuf-du-Pape and other southern Rhone regions. It's a beautiful region for wine roaming in person or in books, with many gems to discover.

