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THE F&W GUIDE TO

FRENCH WINE

By Ray Isle

If there's one country you need to know about when it comes to wine, it's France. It produces some of the greatest wines in the world and is home to the most famous wine regions, but it's still a deep well of great wine values, too. Here's our guide to the best French wines to buy now.



8 STELLAR SAUVIGNON BLANCS

SANCERRE IS UNSTOPPABLY POPULAR, and it appears on every by-the-glass list you see these days. But as demand has risen, production and prices have gone up dramatically, so consider this: There are only 6,000 or so acres of Sauvignon Blanc in Sancerre itself but more than 25,000 acres of it throughout the Loire Valley. Might some of that other wine fulfill your Sancerre cravings? I'd say so. Here's a grab bag of great options.

2025 PATIENT COTTAT LE GRAND CAILLOU SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$18)

Named for a famed mid-19th-century master goldsmith, this lime-scented Sauvignon Blanc comes from the Fournier family, which has been making wine here for generations. Its flavors are silky and lingering.

2024 JOSEPH MELLOT SINCÉRITÉ VIN DE FRANCE SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$22)

Joseph Mellot's family started making wine in Sancerre in 1513, with one member becoming wine adviser to the king back in the 1600s. Today, Mellot makes benchmark Sancerres as well as this citrus-and-hay-scented white. It's full of grapefruit flavor and a remarkable bargain.

2024 LAPORTE LE BOUQUET VIN DE FRANCE SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$23)

A scent of white flowers, lemon, and grapefruit announces this fresh, lively white, which continues with bright citrusy flavors. Founded by the Laporte family in 1850, the domaine is now owned by the grandsons of Sancerre producer Henri Bourgeois.

2024 DOMAINE DU TREMBLAY QUINCY (\$27)

The tiny appellation of Quincy lies southwest of Sancerre but produces equally distinctive Sauvignon Blancs. This one rises from the glass with herb, grass, and even briny aromas, and it's ultra-crisp, ending on a stony note. Fun, and with a surprising depth of flavor.

2024 J. DE VILLEBOIS VAL DE LOIRE SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$20)

Juicy passion fruit and lemon-grass define this deftly made Sauvignon Blanc, the grapes for which come from a variety of Central Loire appellations. It's crisp and drying on the finish, making you wish for another sip.

2024 LADOUCETTE LES DEUX TOURS SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$23)

Ladoucette's origins go back to 1787, when Comte Lafond purchased the estate from the illegitimate daughter of Louis XV. Today, the estate makes benchmark Pouilly-Fumés as well as this affordable, fresh Touraine bottling, which is full of lively lemon flavor.

2024 ISABELLE ET PIERRE CLÉMENT MENETOU-SALON (\$25)

The Clément family's history in Menetou-Salon dates to the 1500s, long before there was an official appellation (which came only in 1959). This is a vividly fragrant white, all lemon candy and minty herbs, with an impressive depth of flavor.

2024 FRANCIS BLANCHET SILICE POUILLY-FUMÉ (\$29)

Deep quince and Meyer lemon flavors end on a classic smoky note in this vivid white that ends minerally. The name, Silice, is a nod to the vineyard's stony, flint-filled soils. (Flint is a form of silica.) Eight generations of Blanchets have worked these vines; that experience shows.





7 STONY, SEDUCTIVE CHABLIS

LIKE CHARDONNAY? YOU'LL LOVE CHABLIS. The region is located at the northern tip of Burgundy, and its cool (even cold) climate and Jurassic period limestone soils push Chardonnay to produce precise, seashell-minerally whites. Gone are the days when Chablis was firmly out of fashion and its great wines could be had for a song. But it is a top source for distinctive whites, and while the wines aren't inexpensive, they're still less pricey than Côte d'Or wines of similar quality. Here are seven great bottles to look for.

2024 DOMAINE VINCENT DAMPT CHABLIS (\$34)

Vincent Dampt grew up around winemakers—his father, Daniel Dampt, and grandfather Jean Defaix both own acclaimed Chablis estates—and he founded his own domaine in 2004. Twenty years in, he's at the top of his game, as this beautifully balanced, lightly stony wine shows.

2024 CLOTILDE DAVENNE PETIT CHABLIS (\$39)

The Petit Chablis appellation, on the outskirts of the overall Chablis region (and representing about 19% of the entire region's production), produces lighter-bodied, lightly floral wines. This bottling adds a cool herbal note to those spring flower aromas and is refreshingly bright and zippy.

2023 DOMAINE DE L'ENCLOS CHABLIS (\$42)

Brothers Romain and Damien Bouchard founded this organically farmed domaine in 2016. While they remain somewhat under the radar, Chablis lovers have recognized their talents, which are fully on display in this savory, white peach- and citrus-accented white.

2024 WILLIAM FÈVRE CHAMPS ROYAUX CHABLIS (\$46)

Fèvre's Champs Royaux cuvée is a reliable introduction to Chablis, its green apple and citrus flavors wrapping up with a classic hint of chalkiness. Fermentation and aging almost entirely in stainless steel keeps it impressively crisp and linear.

2023 DOMAINE GÉRARD DUPLESSIS CHABLIS (\$65)

This five-generation-old family-owned producer is now run by Lilian Duplessis, who keeps to Chablis' classical character: that signature scent of pavement after the rain, leading into creamy green apple flavors and a chalky, minerally finish.

2024 DOMAINE BILLAUD-SIMON CHABLIS TÊTE D'OR (\$72)

Winemaker Olivier Bailly uses the domaine's top parcels in the Chablis appellation to craft this impressive white. It's more complex than a typical village wine (you could easily mistake it for a premier cru), and its elegant balance of fruit and savory elements ends on a lingering, cool, herbal note.

2023 ALBERT BICHOT LES VAILLONS DOMAINE LONG-DEPAQUIT PREMIER CRU (\$77)

Bichot is well known as a Burgundy négociant, but this rich, seashell-minerally premier cru comes from one of its domaine properties, founded in the 1700s and now holding almost 160 acres of vineyards.