

BY THE GLASS

Between Coravins, cans and kegs, “wine by the glass” doesn’t mean what it used to. Restaurants have expanded their offerings, even as many guests this year are looking for the cabernets, chardonnays and sauvignon blancs that dominate the list of the Most Popular By-the-Glass pours. Where have all the geeky wines gone? Over the last few years, somms around the country have reported that people are willing to follow them to more esoteric places for a glass. Increasingly, those wines have gone to pairings.

Even as prices on Burgundy, Bordeaux and Napa cabernet continue to rise, guests are looking for value in those familiar places. Nickel & Nickel topped the list with an average price of \$16 for its Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon.

Still, guests appear willing to shell out for sparkling. Two Champagnes on our Most Popular By-the-Glass list came in ahead of the only other sparkler to make the cut, the Bisol Prosecco. Mark Guillaudeu of Oakland’s *Commis* thinks that showcasing multiple options helps push Champagne as a category. “It’s part of our opening spiel [before the tasting menu]. As soon as you put that word in somebody’s mind, they’re like, ‘Sure, Champagne sounds great.’ Then we built the follow-up question, ‘Well, actually we have three Champagnes by the glass.’”

Name recognition can be a powerful draw, too. It could be the reason Samantha Germani is moving half-bottles of La Rioja Alta at *Lacroix* in the Rittenhouse Hotel in Philadelphia. “I was shocked to see the half-bottle sales were almost always Rioja.” On the whiter side of things, Sancerre and sauvignon blanc are flying off the shelf at Nashville’s *Folk*, says Aria Dorsey: “It’s always going to be an easy go-to; guests will call for it.”

A strong by-the-glass program can draw people in, especially in parts of the country where there’s a drive home after dinner—as at *Yono’s* in Albany, NY, where Dominick Purnomo says that if people are driving, “You want only two glasses of wine, but you want something good.”

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Nickel & Nickel	Rutherford Quarry Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	\$16
2	Billecart-Salmon	Champagne Extra Brut	\$25
3	Luis Seabra	Douro Xisto Ilimitado Branco	\$14
4	Decoy	Napa Valley Merlot	\$18
5	Domaine Leon Barral	Faugères	\$23
6	Peay	Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir	\$24
7	Marc Hébrart	Champagne Rosé Brut	\$32
8	RouteStock	Napa Valley Route 29 Cabernet Sauvignon	\$16
9	Jean Collet	Chablis	\$20
	Justin	Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon	\$16
	Lucien Crochet	Sancerre	\$41
12	Whitehaven	Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc	\$25
13	La Rioja Alta	Rioja Viña Alberdi Rioja Gran Reserva 904	\$24 \$42
14	Bisol	Prosecco Jelo	\$19
	Hedges Cellars	Washington CMS Sauvignon Blanc	\$26
	Henri Bourgeois	Sancerre Les Baronnes Rouge	\$15
17	Failla	Sonoma Coast Chardonnay	\$27
	Maison Joseph Drouhin	Mâcon-Villages	\$13
19	Rodney Strong Vineyards	Chalk Hill Estate Chardonnay	\$13
	Sandhi	Santa Barbara County Chardonnay	\$17



YONO'S, ALBANY, NY

**THE MOST POPULAR WINES
IN AMERICA'S TOP RESTAURANTS**

1 JORDAN, \$116	26 TURLEY, \$79
2 R. LOPEZ DE HEREDIA, \$100	27 DOMAINE VACHERON, \$93
3 STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS, \$122	28 CAIN, \$113
4 FAUST WINES, \$115	29 TAITTINGER, \$91
5 JUSTIN, \$78	30 MARCHESI ANTINORI, \$169
6 FROG'S LEAP WINERY, \$98	31 FRANK FAMILY, \$128
7 CAYMUS NINEYARDS, \$142	32 SILVER OAK WINE CELLARS, \$132
8 FLOWERS VINEYARDS, \$96	33 EMERITUS, \$90
9 DUCKHORN VINEYARDS, \$85	34 MERRY EDWARDS, \$120
10 NICKEL & NICKEL, \$126	35 COSTA LAZARIDI, \$52
11 LUCIEN CROCHET, \$105	36 DOMAINE BAILLY-REVERDY, \$72
11 PAUL HOBBS WINERY, \$111	36 SHAFER VINEYARDS, \$174
13 FELSINA, \$64	36 SONOMA-CUTRER, \$47
14 PASCAL JOLIVET, \$63	39 CHATEAU YVONNE, \$83
15 MAISON JOSEPH DROUHIN, \$80	40 BILLECART-SALMON, \$176
16 OCCHIPINTI, \$65	40 CHAPPELLET, \$81
16 ALPHA ESTATE, \$60	42 LOUIS ROEDERER, \$173
18 KISTLER, \$139	43 A. RAFANELLI, \$88
19 HEITZ WINE CELLARS, \$139	43 DOMAINE SERENE, \$104
20 VEUVE CLICQUOT, \$132	43 HEDGÈS CELLARS, \$43
21 ROMBAUER VINEYARDS, \$83	43 SCHRAMSBERG VINEYARDS, \$80
22 MEIOMI, \$47	43 THIBAUD BOUDIGNON, \$81
23 CRISTOM, \$95	48 STAGS' LEAP WINERY, \$86
24 GRGICH HILLS, \$122	49 BODEGAS VINEDOS RAUL PEREZ, \$48
25 PIERRE PETERS, \$117	49 LA STOPPA, \$76

PHOTOGRAPH BY LOUIS HANSEL/UNSPLASH

In April of 1990, we published the first annual Restaurant Poll. That year, 11 of the 12 most popular wines in America's favorite restaurants were from California. And, for many years after that, Kendall-Jackson and Sonoma-Cutrer ranked at the top, based on the popularity of their California chardonnays.

While California remains a powerhouse 30 years later, the *coup de chard* has long since waned: Originally accounting for 44 percent of the most popular wines, it now accounts for eight, following a slow erosion first by for merlot, then pinot noir and, later, by the increasing efforts of wine directors to source delicious and affordable bottlings from all corners of the wine world.

We compile the Restaurant Top 50 by asking wine directors to report on their ten top-selling bottles in the fourth quarter of 2019; then we tally the number of mentions for each wine reported on their top-ten lists, as well as the rank. The 50 wines presented here earned the greatest number of mentions overall; each is listed with the average wine-list price for all the bottlings our respondents mentioned.

In this 31-year popularity contest, cabernet sauvignon has hovered around 15 percent of top-selling bottles since the early 1990s. This year, Jordan's take on California cabernet—more savory, red and earthy rather than jammy, purple and inky—has propelled it to the top, joined by the stubborn traditionalists at R. López de Heredia in Rioja. Both brands have earned a place on the Top 50 for many years, all the way back to 1989. In last year's Poll, they tied for the number two spot, falling just short of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

We'd like to think their coronation this year owes to diners ordering wine with their meal in mind, eschewing bigger, brasher styles for food-friendly restraint. Even before their first vintage in 1976, Jordan built its facility, its brand and its wines with food in mind: The company would go on to invite sommeliers to meals at the winery prepared by an in-house chef, rather than simply showing the wines with crackers and cheese.

In another current in the poll results, we find natural wines in the Top 50, including Sicily's Occhipinti and the Loire's Château Yvonne. Even the polarizing La Stoppa managed to sneak onto the list. Austin Bridges of *Nostrana* in Portland, Oregon, has found that while La Stoppa's wines aren't for everyone, "repeat customers come back and order it."

Familiar mainstays populate much of the rest of the list, as well as names like Alpha Estate, a Greek winery that has made the Top 50 for the fourth year in a row. Diners still drink what they know, but the interest in this list lies in what they're drinking most.



DOMINICK PURNOMO
Yono's
ALBANY, NY

It's called King Cab for a reason. We don't have a ton of beef on the menu, but a lot of the time people just want a glass of cabernet. If I have one from South Africa or Napa, and they hear Napa, they're off. Like chardonnay—they don't even look at it; it's sort of their default.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Over the past decade, the battle for the top-selling variety has ricocheted between cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir. For now, cabernet sauvignon remains as two-year champion, at just over 15 percent of the most popular wines on respondents' lists. And California is the primary source: The most popular cabernets on this year's list all hail from the Sunshine State, ranking from Napa Valley, Sonoma and Paso Robles (in that order).

Much of this popularity sommeliers chalk up to familiarity and reputation. As Todd Brinkman at *Stoke Charlotte* points out, brands matter. "When we have parties," he says, "that's where the blue chips are—'Jordan, I trust them, let's do that.'"

The comfort that diners feel with cabernet seems to outweigh price concerns: It continues to maintain its title as the most expensive varietal wine. In fact, it's the only variety with averages that have surpassed the \$100 marker for the past three years; this year's average is \$115.

When price is a concern, several sommeliers reported that they tend to reach for Paso Robles examples. "I'm looking for cabernet sauvignon that will impress people, that has power and punch," says James Conley at *Keens Steakhouse* in NYC. "Paso Robles wines

deliver on that—they have a directness and immediacy that gets lost in the more expensive parts of Northern California. When Napa and Sonoma wines get to the size that Paso Robles has, they turn into collector wines, but in Paso Robles, you get roundness with acidity, and producers have not bought into big oak programs. It's rustic and more direct."

People want cabernet no matter whether you're in a fish house or not. They don't buy the same Burgundy or the same Willamette pinot. But with cabernet, people say "I must have Jordan," or "I must have Caymus."



KAT HAWKINS
Shaw's Crab House
CHICAGO



CATHERINE MOREL
71 Above
LOS ANGELES, CA

If people want cabernet, that's fine, but I try and give them something they may not know as well. They may want Caymus Special Selection but what I have is another wine they might be familiar with, like Heitz, at a similar price point. They walk out feeling like they've discovered something.

MOST POPULAR CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

Rank	Brand	Bottling	Avg. Price
1	Jordan	Alexander Valley	\$124
2	Faust	Napa Valley	\$115
3	Stag's Leap Wine Cellars	Napa Valley Artemis	\$129
4	Caymus Vineyards	Napa Valley	\$158
5	Heitz Wine Cellars	Napa Valley	\$139
6	Justin	Paso Robles Paso Robles Isosceles	\$62 \$120
7	Frank Family	Napa Valley	\$128
	Silver Oak Wine Cellars	Alexander Valley	\$132
9	Nickel & Nickel	Rutherford Quarry Vineyard	\$126
10	Decoy	Sonoma County	\$49
11	Silver Ghost	Napa Valley	\$70
12	Turnbull	Napa Valley	\$87
13	Austin Hope	Paso Robles	\$87
14	Mount Veeder	Napa Valley	\$88
	Alexander Valley Vineyards	Alexander Valley	\$54
15	Cain	Napa Valley Cain Cuvée	\$80
	Darioush	Napa Valley Signature Napa Valley Caravan	\$260 \$110
18	Grgich Hills	Napa Valley	\$152
19	Frog's Leap Winery	Rutherford Estate	\$155
20	Ghost Block	Oakville Estate	\$137
21	Franciscan	Oakville	\$54
	Hall	Napa Valley	\$112