

The most exciting wines of 2016

Decanter experts around the world named the five bottles under £55 that impressed them most this year. After tasting and rating the 195 nominated wines, and assessing them on harmony, complexity and wow factor, our three judges compiled the ultimate top 75 across all styles. Christelle Guibert reports

THIS YEAR, INSTEAD of simply pulling together the top-scoring wines from our 2016 panel tastings, features and supplements, we have cast our net wider, by asking our in-house team, regular contributors and *Decanter* World Wine Awards Regional Chairs which five bottles, under £55, they enjoyed most over the past 12 months.

Our experts provided a brilliant selection that showed real diversity, both geographically and stylistically. While classic regions were represented, we also had wines from Cyprus, Canada, Israel and Japan, as well as a surprisingly high number of orange and amphora wines.

Over two very enjoyable days in October, I was joined by Sarah Jane Evans MW and Andy Howard MW (see below) to taste through the 195 nominations. As with all *Decanter* panel tastings, the wines were tasted blind; only the grape variety and vintage were disclosed.

This year, we wanted to pay particular attention to

wines with 'wow factor'. As Evans summed up: 'We were looking for the most complete wines, the most individual, fascinating and the most genuinely enjoyable. They did not have to be classically perfect wines, just memorable.'

And memorable they certainly were, with more than 97% hitting the Highly Recommended mark (90 points or more). And as most of the wines are available at independent merchants rather than supermarkets, this offers *Decanter* readers a great opportunity to seek out new wine shops and build relationships with local wine retailers.

So if you are looking for exciting and delicious wines this festive season – wines that have been recommended personally by a *Decanter* expert and further endorsed for their wow-factor in our blind tasting – you're guaranteed to find it here in one of our two lists: the top 50 still wines and the top 25 sparkling, off-dry, sweet and fortified wines. We hope they'll become some of your favourites too.

The tasters

Sarah Jane Evans MW



is chair of the Institute of Masters of Wine and the *Decanter* World Wine Awards Regional co-Chair for Spain and Sherry

Christelle Guibert



is *Decanter's* international tastings director, with more than 21 years' experience in the wine industry in France and the UK

Andy Howard MW



is a wine consultant who writes and judges regularly for *Decanter*. He has 30 years' experience as a buyer for retailer Marks & Spencer

1 Descendientes de Palacios, Villa de Corullón, Bierzo, Spain 2012

£35 Hailsham Cellars, Harvey Nichols, Highbury Vintners, Laytons, VinCognito
The concentration of this wine is impressive. A very complex, individual style with a dense palate bursting with crunchy red plums, black fruit and cedar oak. The penetrating acidity of the Mencía variety is very well balanced by the rich fruit flavours plus the rasp of tannins and oak. Finishing with a lovely dark, sour cherry note, it is a long and memorable sip. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alcohol** 14%

2 Albert Boxler, Riesling, Grand Cru Sommerburg, Alsace, France 2014

£41 Armit, Lay & Wheeler
Very precise with great purity as well as being vivid and punchy. This Riesling is all about limes, kumquats and tinned peaches with a hint of honey too. Fresh and inviting with lemon and crisp apple characters. Toasty, savoury and mineral on the finish, this has the ability and the class to age many years because the high-acid backbone will carry it right on through. **Drink** 2017-2023 **Alc** 13.5%

3 McGuigan, Shortlist Semillon, Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia 2007

N/A UK www.mcguiganwines.com.au
Glorious! This is what Australian Semillon is all about. It is amazingly fresh considering its age, with a jab of lime juice and beeswax on the nose. The piercing acidity, elegance and lower alcohol is a classic example of the unique characters of the Hunter Valley region. There are delicate apple characters with gunflint too. Still young at nine years old. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 11%

4 Domaine Agapé, Riesling, Grand Cru Rosacker, Alsace, France 2013

£38.80 (2011) Hedonism
This is starting to show some real Riesling development on the nose and palate with citrus lemon and that classic petrol note. A dazzling explosion of lime acidity comes in, adding great intensity and depth. This speaks of its origins with floral, white peach and apricot characters giving a finesse and vibrancy that ensure it will age very well. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 12% ➤

