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THIS WEEK'S POLL

If money were no object, which beach would you visit?

- Fiji Islands
- Saint-Tropez, France
- Malibu, CA
- Key West, FL
- Caye Caulker, Belize
- Kapalua Beach, Maui

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10 Spanish Wines Under \$20

By Maureen C. Petrosky

From the brazen Basque region to the seductive Sevilla, the unending variety of flavor from Spain is sure to infuse your soul. Add some wine to the mix and you'll enjoy a culinary explosion. This list, from a young Albariño to a sweet sherry, is just a sampling of what Spain has to offer for under \$20 a bottle.

1. Freixenet Cordon Rosado, NV Cava, \$12

Most wine lovers know that black bottle of bubbly from Freixenet (pronounced "Fresh-eh-net"), but its sister sparkler in rosy red is just as fun and flirty. While some cava, the name for Spanish sparkling wine, can leave a bubblehead like me searching for the bubbles, this darling strawberry sip is just right. It works equally well for cocktail hour as it does a picnic lunch of crusty bread and creamy pate. It's fresh, bursting with berries, and finishes with finesse.

2. Freixenet Cordon Negro, NV Cava, \$12

There's a reason why this bubbly is so famous. It's consistently yummy and, for the price, it should be your standard "party sparkler." The sexy black bottle bubbling over with crisp citrus fruit flavors is a steal. It's equally fabulous with shellfish and wings — and the perfect toast to kick off any event.

3. Licia Albariño, 2007, \$16

Spain's Riasas Baixas region is known for its Albariño. This charming dry white wine comes in a pretty yellow dress just perfect for a twirl. A sip exudes aromas of fresh green apples with intriguing minerality. The lemony acidity strikes a melodious chord when paired with grilled octopus sprinkled with fresh-squeezed lemon juice, or seared tuna topped with piquillo peppers (small, slightly hot variety from Spain) and drizzled with balsamic.

4. Condes de Albarei Salneval, Albariño, 2007, \$10

Another Albariño, but quite different from the Licia. This little white is more feminine, with flavors and aromas of peaches, creamy vanilla and bouquets of flowers. There's a bit of fizz and faint spritz when it hits your palate, and the body's not too watery or viscous — it's just right. The citrus is more pink grapefruit and orange blossom than lemon-lime. Pair this gorgeous blonde with seafood-tangled Spanish paella or a garden salad topped with fresh herbs and strawberry vinaigrette.

5. El Coto, Rioja Blanco, 2007, \$12

At first glance the daunting buck staring from the label makes you think this white will be most austere. Yet, packed with 100 percent Viura grape, this wine is approachable. The acidity is balanced by a faint touch of sweetness but finishes dry, giving this youthful white a more mature mouthfeel. Drink alongside sushi or seared scallops.

6. Bodegas Montecillo Crianza, 2005, \$10

You won't find a better introduction to Tempranillo, especially at this amazing price. A sip is loaded with dark cherry fruit and highlighted with spicy notes that carry through the finish. It has the bold, but not overwhelming, tannins you want from a Tempranillo. This wine can tango with roasted meats and creamy croquettes, but I prefer a full glass with a simple plate of olives and cheese.

7. Flavium, Crianza, Bierzo, 2005, \$9

Wines from Spain's Northwest region are still relative newcomers to our shelves, which translates to a major price break. Just because these wines don't carry the cachet of the reds from Rioja, they're well worth exploring. These lighter-style reds, like Beaujolais, are full of fruit without big tannic structure. This wine, made from the little-known Mencia grape and spun with sweet licorice and spice, is full of jammy red berries. Flavium is a perfect playmate for cured hams, like Serrano (Spain's version of prosciutto), and the country's biting manchego cheese.

8. Encyclopedia Tempranillo, 2006, \$15

The odd-shaped bottle intrigued me, but the big red, Tempranillo, it promised (compared to Cabernet Sauvignon) wasn't big at all. This Francis Ford Coppola wine pours up more like a table wine than a robust Tempranillo. It has the characteristic deep, dark-red hues, but lacks body and the tannin structure expected from this grape. It's more gentle lamb than one of the grand reds that roar out of Spain.



Francis Ford Coppola's Encyclopedia Tempranillo wine bottle

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