

Robb Report

26 Stellar Wines Under \$100 (That Taste Like They Cost a Lot More)

These wines definitely punch well above their weight.

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A wine cellar populated with expertly curated, closely managed bottles—maturing through time to their optimum drinking moment—is a wonderful thing. Should you be so lucky to be sitting on such a collection, your special occasions are covered as those bottles meet their moments. But what of the spontaneous Friday night? Friends are popping by to share the rib eyes you've snared on your way home from the office. You're not in the mood to reach for one of the \$350 Napa Cabs you got on allocation, and yet you want to drink well. What you need then are bottles that go easy on your wallet but over-deliver on their price.

Such bottles are in reach. A few savvy strategies lead to wines priced under \$100 that offer the great fruit and skilled winemaking of much more expensive bottles. The only thing you might have to give up, in some cases, is the potential for long aging. But that's the point on a spontaneous Friday night—pop these corks and enjoy.

Trust Your Favorite Producers

At risk of stating the obvious here, skill in the cellar doesn't take a break just because a winemaker has turned his or her attention from the flagship—expensive—label to the juice destined for more affordable bottles. Winemakers in general, in fact, take great pride in the quality of their second-tier wines. The grapes might not have come from the very best rows in the vineyard (but often very near them), and the wine might not have seen as much time in new French oak. That only means you can expect a slightly different style—a wine with more immediately enjoyable fruit, a wine that won't take a few more years in your cellar for the oak to integrate and the tannins to unwind. A wine, in other words, to enjoy without premeditation.

Lail Vineyards "Blueprint" 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

From industry veteran (and member of one of Napa Valley's most historic wine families) Robin Lail of Lail Vineyards, Blueprint (\$80) is a Cabernet blended from great vineyards across the region. Noted winemaker Philippe Melka deliberately shapes a wine with ripe fruit available in the moment but with impressive complexity. Lush blackberry, cherry, and plum are layered with fresh mint, exotic spice, and mocha.



Lail Vineyards Blueprint Cabernet Sauvignon