

2008: The year that was

Everything looked so great last January, with the wine industry healthy and happy and the economy rolling along. Then, in the spring and summer, came dark hints of a problem in the home mortgage industry, with nobody quite understood. Suddenly, wham. September arrives, and the stuff hit the fan. Now here we slouching towards 2009, wondering what the hell happened and how much worse things will get before the start to get better.

Still, in my job, there was a lot of great wine in 2008. Here are my top-scoring ones. My employer, [Wine Enthusiast](#), already has released our **Top 100** list, so I don't mean to compete with that. That's worldwide; these are all from California. (All wines have been published in our Buying Guide, or will be over the new few months.)

1. Shafer Hillside Select 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon
2. Arista 2005 Ferrington Vineyard Pinot Noir
3. Signorello 2005 Padrone Bordeaux blend
4. Colgin 2005 IX Estate
5. Stonestreet 2004 Christopher's Cabernet Sauvignon
6. Iron Horse NV Joy! Sparkling Wine
7. Williams Selyem 2006 Rochioli Riverblock Pinot Noir
8. Nickel & Nickel 2005 John C. Sullenger Cabernet Sauvignon
9. Far Niente 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon
10. Hanzell 2005 Ambassador's 1953 Vineyard Chardonnay

The list is heavy on Cabernet and Napa Valley, with a few cool-climate Pinots, a drop-dead gorgeous Chard, and one of the smoothest California bubbliies ever. All are ageworthy, and all are expensive.

TOP TEN BEST BUYS

At Wine Enthusiast we have a specific bottle price/rating formula for the special designation of Best Buy. This is always an important category, but especially in these hard times.

1. Honker Blanc 2007 Sauvignon Blanc (Napa Valley); \$12. (From Tugal)
2. Vina Robles 2007 Sauvignon Blanc (Paso Robles); \$14.
3. Chelsea Goldschmidt 2006 Merlot (Dry Creek Valley); \$14.
4. Hayman & Hill 2005 Reserve Selection Merlot (Napa Valley); \$15.
5. Mandolin 2005 Syrah (Central Coast); \$10.
6. Lee Family Farm 2007 Silvaspoons Vineyard Verdelho (Alta Mesa/Lodi); \$15.
7. TAZ 2007 Pinot Gris (Santa Barbara County); \$15.
8. Fortress 2007 Sauvignon Blanc (Red Hills Lake County); \$15.
9. Mirassou 2007 Pinot Grigio (California); \$12.
10. Lake Sonoma 2007 Sauvignon Blanc (Dry Creek Valley); \$15.

An interesting list, dominated by white wines. Hmm. Not sure what to make of that. Maybe it's easier to make a good, inexpensive white wine than an equivalent red wine. Or maybe I just found these crisp, (mainly) unoaked white wines a refreshment after so many clumsily oaked ones.

Anyhow, here's wishing you and yours a happy, healthy 2009, and may your year be filled with peace, prosperity — and fine wine!





Cheers!

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