

10 Best Online Wine Shops

From mega-Web sites to tiny, quirky specialists, these e-merchants can procure great wines in top condition.

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DESPITE YEARS OF SHOPPING FOR WINE ON THE INTERNET, I still can't quite get used to the idea. Wine, after all, isn't like a book or CD. Holding a bottle, inspecting its label—you just can't replicate that experience inside a browser window. Yet I do most of my wine buying online. Why?

For starters, the comparison shopping is unbeatable. With search engines like Wine-searcher.com and Google (which most retailers love), you no longer have to go to the Montrachet; the Montrachet will come to you. Cross-

referencing the latest scores and top recommendations is blissfully easy, and especially pleasurable when you can do it at home in your bathrobe on a Saturday morning.

Certain things separate the top Web sites from the also-rans. Ease of use and good customer service matter, for a start; so does price. But ultimately, what really counts is selection. Maybe that's why so many of the 10 terrific sites below are established retailers with online divisions: They have the best access to a wide range of wonderful wines.

the top 10 online wine-buying web sites

APPELLATION AMERICA appellationamerica.com

This four-year-old site is the ultimate source for obscure American wines—Merlot from North Yuba, California, say, or Ohio River Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. It also offers wines directly from more than 120 wineries. One to try: the appealing 2005 Bowers Harbor Vineyards Semi-Dry Riesling (\$14) from Michigan's Old

Mission Peninsula. **Tip:** A search tool parses each state's shipping laws to determine which wines shoppers can buy.

AVALON WINE avalonwine.com

Run out of a modest Corvallis, Oregon, wine shop of the same name, this is a comprehensive source of top Washington and Oregon wines from producers like Beaux Frères and Leonetti

Cellar—though it sells great wines from obscure producers, too. **Tip:** Avalon's wine clubs, like the Northwest Big Reds Club and the Reserve Pinot Noir Club (membership costs \$90 per month), are a great way to access up-and-coming stars, like Oregon's Daedalus Cellars and Washington's O-S Winery.

BOUNTY HUNTER RARE WINE & PROVISIONS bountyhunterwine.com

Mark Pope's Bounty Hunter is a restaurant in downtown Napa, as well as a catalog and Web site featuring top Napa and Sonoma wines. One recent find: the rare 2002 Mount Veeder Progeny Cabernet Sauvignon (\$75) from Marco DiGiulio, who also made the cult Lokoya wines. **Tip:** Download the catalog; it's an always-enjoyable read.

BROWN DERBY INTERNATIONAL WINE CENTER brownderby.com

Great deals in Missouri on California wines? Brown Derby owner Ron Junge uses his long-standing connections to bring great California wines like Copain Syrah home to the Show-Me State. He also offers hard-to-find gems such as the 2002 Diebolt-Vallois Blanc de Blancs Champagne (\$60). **Tip:** Many, but not all, of the wines here have low markups. Low inventory numbers ("Only 6 left!!") are often a guide to bottles that are going fast.

CHAMBERS STREET WINES chambersstwine.com

Owners David Lillie and Jamie Wolff are consummate wine geeks who have assembled an impressively esoteric inventory

MY CART 



2002 Marco DiGiulio Mount Veeder Progeny Cabernet Sauvignon (\$75) One of many top Napa Valley Cabernets sold at Bountyhunterwine.com.

PROCEED TO CHECKOUT