

In Down the Aisle, the editors at *The Tasting Panel* rate retail beverages based on a combination of elements that can affect off-premise potential, including packaging, branding/credibility, value, and user friendliness.

“Talkies” are the little cards appended to retail shelves that educate the consumer through tasting notes and, sometimes, ratings. They are an invaluable tool when there isn’t a knowledgeable employee available and/or the customer is too intimidated to ask for help. For this reason, we are supplementing the traditional rating system with our “Talkie” rating system to assess retail wines/spirits/beers based on the aforementioned factors—and, of course, taste!

1 TALKIE 

Clear, legible label; solid branding. Good overall for retail.

2 TALKIES  

Eye-catching label and memorable branding. Very good for retail.

3 TALKIES   

Creatively inspiring in both packaging and branding. Great for retail.

4 TALKIES    

A near work of art and meaningful branding. Excellent for retail.

5 TALKIES     

A masterpiece in packaging and a new benchmark in branding. A must-have for retail.



101 North NV Chardonnay, California (S7) The 101 North collection, which also includes a Pinot Grigio in addition to the Cabernet Sauvignon and Moscato reviewed below, decidedly overdelivers on quality for the price point. The Chardonnay shows summer peach and a squeeze of lemon as well as clean notes of vanilla custard and tangerine on its crisp palate. 12.5% ABV. **89**



THE WINE GROUP



101 North NV Cabernet Sauvignon, California (S7) Fruit-forward, with notes of dark cherry and sweet plum. The lush body accents the finish of cocoa and oak. 12.5% ABV. **89**

THE WINE GROUP



101 North NV Moscato, California (S7) With an ABV of 10.5%, this pure expression was built for Moscato lovers. It’s well balanced, with a juicy, sweet, and generous dollop of mandarin orange, peach nectar, and vanilla bean. **89**

THE WINE GROUP



Gnarly Head 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, California (S12) Twisted, head-trained old vines are the inspiration for the Gnarly Head label. This dashing red certainly overdelivers, linking bold notes of blackberry and espresso with sturdy plum-skin tannins. Pencil shavings, dark chocolate, and a meaty core lend layers of depth. 13.5% ABV. **89**



DELICATO FAMILY WINES



Singerstone 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, South Pacific Coast, Central Valley, Chile (S15)

Light and crisp, this delightful white shows its playful side with a zing of grapefruit on the nose and palate. Minerality cools the tongue, with honeyed pear and floral tones following. **90**

VIÑA SUR ANDINO

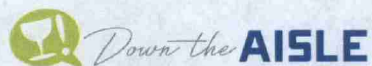



Simple Life 2020 Chardonnay, California (S13)

Fermented in oak and stainless steel with no malolactic fermentation, the forward and ripe fruit shines through. Blended with small percentages of Viognier and Chenin Blanc, it evolves through a delicate floral pattern that alternates with a richer one of lemon chiffon, tangerine, banana, and vanilla. **89**



DON SEBASTIANI & SONS

 **Down the AISLE**



Tattoo Girl 2018 Red Wine. Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13) This blend of 69% Merlot, 15% Malbec, and 16% Cabernet Sauvignon shows an array of flavors and aromas, including grainy notes of dark chocolate-covered cherry that introduce a wave of texture and taste. Spice and smoky oak combine with grip and grace. **91**
 WILLIAM WEAVER WINES

 **Map Maker 2020 Sauvignon Blanc.** Marlborough, New Zealand (\$15) Herbal aromas of dill and tarragon match with lemon zest on the nose of this graceful, stainless-steel-fermented wine. Lime ice is crisp and thrilling on the palate, which opens further with hints of guava and yellow-floral tones. The finish lingers. **92**



SARANTY IMPORTS

 **Ryder Estate 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon.** Central Coast, California (\$15) Aged in a combination of French, Hungarian, and American oak as well as stainless steel, this wine shows bold, spiced flavors on a satin-like palate. Salted plum, lilac, and sweet tobacco set the tone before tart pomegranate enters midway, followed by white pepper and mocha on the finish. **90**



SCHEID FAMILY WINES

 **Roaming Dog 2020 Riesling.** Columbia Valley, Washington (\$15) Named for the winery dog, Blue, this label has been making some great value wines from Washington. On the heels of scents of lemon ice and sweet summer pear, round and mouth-filling notes of honey, lemon drop, lychee, and jicama lead to a jasmine-inspired finish. A touch of salinity gilds the rose. **91**



 **Old Soul 2020 Chardonnay.** Lodi (\$13) Aromas of banana-nut bread, vanilla pudding, and lemon verbena flourish on the nose as mouth-filling notes of guava, lemon curd, and caramel converge within a medium-bodied yet round and sumptuous frame. A touch of wet stone lingers on the finish. Aged eight months sur lie in 70% French oak and 30% American oak. **89**



OAK RIDGE WINERY

 **Tribute 2019 Chardonnay.** Monterey County (\$15) This alluring white from Chris Benziger offers a hint of buttered caramel and banana that's gentled by white flower petals and perked up by pink peppercorn. Lemon verbena highlights the wine's sassy side along with spiced apple, cashew, and bright acidity. **91**



THE WINE GROUP

 **Elicio 2020 Vermentino.** IGP Méditerranée, France (\$15) This 100% Vermentino hails from a region south of the Luberon, where it's hot, dry, and windy. Clay and limestone soils add character; while aging for seven months in stainless-steel tanks creates vibrancy. Rich notes of ripe pear, heather, and salted kiwi are bathed in what the producer identifies as the flavor of olive oil, and on the finish, a hint of hazelnut leaves you wanting more. **91**



JP BOURGEOIS

 **Gancia NV Prosecco DOC Rosé.** Veneto, Italy (\$13) We fell for this perky bubbly from its attractive bottle to its pastel onion-skin hue. Powdered vanilla and fresh strawberry are unleashed on entry, while white rice, sweet melon, and bright minerality impact the clean, crisp finish. **90**



ROUST

Down the AISLE



Louis Jadot 2020 Beaujolais-Villages AOC, France (\$15) This lively 100% Gamay shows stark acidity; a lean yet juicy frame; and an earthy core of spiced-cherry aspic and pomegranate-tinged tartness. **90**

KOBRAND



Umani Ronchi 2020 Velodoloro Pecorino, Terre di Chieti IGT, Abruzzo, Italy (\$17) Creamy flavors of white tea flowers and lime chiffon congregate with marvelous minerality on a tart and well-balanced palate that pops with zingy energy. **91**

VINEYARD BRANDS



Muirwood 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Arroyo Seco, Monterey County (\$16) The label of this American oak-aged red represents the redwoods of Muir Woods National Monument. Plum brandy, black currant, and a wave of mocha sashay with sweet tobacco as big, juicy notes of toasted caramel converge with a spicy pinch of cardamom and round, supple tannins. **89**



Bonterra 2020 Young Red, California (\$16) Showing more depth, spice, and intensity than a rosé, this fresh-faced, lighthearted red contains a plethora of organically grown varieties: 30% Viognier, 23% Grenache, 22% Malbec, 5% Muscat, 4% Zinfandel, 3% Syrah, 3% Nebbiolo, 2% Petite Sirah, 2% Carignan, 2% Sangiovese, and still others encased in a lively spice box with fruit and floral tones. Part of the blend fermented in barrel and the rest in stainless steel before it aged in neutral French oak for five months. From sweet herbs, hibiscus, and red raspberry to sweet red fig and rose petal, a refreshing array of flavors gathers in a summer garden. **91**

FETZER VINEYARDS



Nick Goldschmidt Boulder Bank 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Fitzroy Vineyard, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$18) Startling acidity, green herbs, and white grapefruit manifest in this shiny white. Notes of copper penny show off fine, salty minerality before lemon-lime surges on the juicy finish. **91**



Notorious Pink 2020 Rosé of Grenache, Vin de France (\$19) Minerality shows through beautifully in this wine from an estate in the south of France, revealing fresh mango, strawberry, and apricot. Tangerine blossom adds floral character as fine acidity brightens the palate with racy verve. **91**



Truth & Valor 2019 Zinfandel, Paso Robles (\$20) French and American oak are used to age this 100% Zin for 17 months, lending it a spicy, creamy mouthfeel. Floral tones arise in a peppered, cherry-toned frame. It's medium-bodied and not at all jammy, with seamless tannins, bright red fruit, and pleasurable notes of red-peppered oak on the finish. **89**



J. Lohr 2019 Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$17) The addition of Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, and Malbec along with dollops of Cab Franc and Syrah lend complexity to this easy drinker through vibrant aromatics and dense texture. Notes of ripe, juicy cherry as well as vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg intertwine with toasty sandalwood and tilled earth as roasted coffee infuses flavor into the supple tannins. Aged 12 months in 60-gallon American oak barrels. **90**



Pike Road Wines 2019 Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$20) Aged in 100% French oak for ten months, this wine opens with generous scents of wild strawberry and sweet basil. The glossy palate shows caramel apple dotted with white pepper, and a spark of lively acidity plus a finish of sage and iron add complexity. **91**



Cannonball 2019 Merlot, California (\$16) This easy-drinker is a fine food-pairing wine thanks to its good acid structure, light body weight, ABV of 13.5%, and balanced fruit tones. Aromas of dark cherry and a hint of cocoa introduce a flavor profile marked by firm, dry tannins. Spiced plum and a thread of minerality keep the ball rolling. **89**

SHARE A SPLASH



Freakshow 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Lotli (\$20) Juicy and fragrant, with wild strawberry, dark plum, and baking spices uniting under a big top. The tannins are marked by a bold layer of fudge and espresso, and ripe red fruit on the mid-palate gives way to white pepper on the mouthwatering finish. 82% Cabernet Sauvignon and 14% Petite Sirah with some Merlot and Cab Franc. **89**

MICHAEL DAVID WINERY



Frey Vineyards 2018 Biodynamic Zinfandel, Mendocino (\$20) The shadowed fruit in this red would be considered jammy if the balance of acidity and fine structure weren't so elegant. Dark cherry and dusty tannins make it a rich, satisfying sipper and a great food-pairing wine. 15.5% ABV. **91**



Baron de Ley 2018 Tres Viñas Blanco Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$20) The Viura, Malvasia, and Garnacha Blanca in this wine from the Najerilla Valley in Rioja Alta are vinified separately before the blend is aged in American oak for 12 months. It's creamy and aromatic, with notes of dried orange peel, candied pineapple, and raisin. Tapioca and cashew converge with unique minerality that plays hide and seek with honeyed stone fruit. **90**



St Hallett 2019 Faith Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia (\$22) Scents of ripe boysenberry, cranberry, and vanilla lead the nose to a palate of dark-blue fruit and more tart, high-toned cranberry. Dried flowers and chalky tannins impart a dry mouthfeel before flavors of roasted coffee and textured minerality appear on the finish. **90**



Dogwood & Thistle 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Mendocino (\$22) Bright, with grassy aromas punctuated by lime chiffon. A harmony of kiwi, pear, and melon merges with spice and zing on the palate alongside focused minerality. Ripe orange notes linger on the long finish. The label was designed by Cynthia Kirk and Robert Hunt, who created the DreamWorks Animation logo. **92**



Trujillo 2020 Madelyn Cuvée, California (\$24) This white blend of 47% Sauvignon Blanc, 41% Gewürztraminer, and 12% Viognier is sourced from Napa and Mendocino counties. It's distinctive, elegant, and enticing, with tropical flowers blooming alongside fresh lemon, linen, lychee, and vanilla bean. A stunning, stainless steel-fermented beauty. **93**



VIK 2021 La Piu Belle Rosé, Cachapoal Valley, Chile (\$25) Aromas of vanilla and blackberry are deep and inviting, and on the palate, dark-fruit notes offer unexpected beauty alongside brown-sugared strawberry and rose petal. Lively yet plush, with a balanced acid structure. **93**



GUARACHI WINE PARTNERS



Ravel & Stitch 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Central Coast (\$25) Rich and concentrated with ripe blackberry and clove-spiced cedar. Generous, approachable, and round tannins appear with espresso on the finish. **90**



WENTE FAMILY ESTATES




One Stone 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20) Amanda Wittstrom-Higgins, executive VP at Ancient Peaks Winery, is also president and founder of Dream Big Darling, a nonprofit that aims to mentor and inspire the next generation of women leaders in the wine and spirits industry; five dollars from every case sold of this blend of 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 4% Petit Verdot is donated to that organization. Aged 16 months in French and American oak, it's well crafted and generous, with broad strokes of blackberry preserves, dark chocolate, espresso, and cedar encased in a silky texture. **92**

Down the AISLE



Penfolds 2018 Max's Cabernet Sauvignon, South Australia (\$25) Espresso, anise, and plum form a remarkable alliance on the nose and palate before opening up to reveal wildflowers planted among sage and mint. Dried fruits and Italian herbs underscored by cedar make for a structured red aged 12 months in French and American oak. The bottle displays the Penfolds "stamp" inspired by the winery's legendary former winemaker Max Schubert. **91**

TREASURY WINE ESTATES



Devil's Candy 2018 Red Wine, Napa Valley (\$30) The fruit in this blend of Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, and Charbono is super-ripe. On the heels of candied plum and blueberry, a well of dark chocolate leads to the long finish. Aged in French oak for 12 months; 15.5% ABV. **89**

689 CELLARS



King Palm 2019 Chardonnay, Monterey County (\$25) The addition of 3% Viognier brings a floral presence to this graceful white. Joining stunning notes of caramel, orange, vanilla wafer, and lemongrass, a burst of chamomile and honeysuckle lingers with a wave of wet stone. **92**

SUMMERLAND WINE BRANDS



Sculpterra 2018 Héroe Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$25) Old World acidity and ripe cherry brighten the glass as top notes of blueberry, cranberry, and Italian herbs grace the palate. **89**



Sean Minor 2019 Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$25) Ten months of aging in French oak impart a character of sweet cream and buttered peach to this endearing white. White-floral notes and vanilla merge on the silky, shiny palate. **91**



Unshackled 2019 Rosé, California (\$27) From The Prisoner Wine Company, this blend of Pinot Noir (80%) with Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvèdre is sourced from vineyards that span from Monterey to Sonoma and further north to Mendocino County. Bright cranberry shows a dusting of minerality and bright acidity. Wild strawberry and sweet tangerine linger on the finish with candied apple. **91**

CONSTELLATION BRANDS



Rabbit Ranch 2019 Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand (\$28) Light and easy-drinking, this 100% estate-grown red shows earthy scents of red cherry and pomegranate. Bright acidity and red-berry character keep it cheery and fresh. **91**

SARANTY IMPORTS




Wente Vineyards 2020 Niki's Pinot Noir Rosé, Arroyo Seco, Monterey (\$35) This dry and delicate small-lot sipper has a nose of raspberry and rose petal that translates to the palate. The floral notes are light and floaty, and the gossamer texture brings out whispers of red fruit on the finish. **93**



Sculpterra 2019 Primitivo, Paso Robles (\$40) Tart cherry is striking on the nose, and the lean entry and fine acidity give this Italian variety that Old World feel. Dusted cocoa and wet earth work seamlessly into a spiced pomegranate middle and bright finish. **89**



Cherry Pie 2019 San Pablo Bay Block Pinot Noir, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$50) Robust in body and pleasurable to sip, this French oak-aged Pinot Noir is distinctive, with smoky cedar, sage, black cherry and black pepper. Round and earthy, with unexpected muscle. **93** **IT**

VINTAGE WINE ESTATES

