

Bloomberg

These Elite Bottles of Wine Are So Exclusive, You Can't Just Buy Them

Certain rare bottlings from big-name wineries are available only to members of clubs or to people who show up and know to ask. Here are some worth hunting down—and a pro tip: Be nice.

Money alone can't buy you everything in the wine world. Not, for example, access to Napa winery Ovid's latest rich-textured white, Experiment No. W.6.9, or to savory Variazioni di Rosso from great Italian estate Ornellaia, or to SGC Medoc, a plush red from a secret plot of vines in Bordeaux.

To get your hands on those and some other unusual bottles and historic vintages, you have to make a pilgrimage to the winery or join a membership group or mailing list. In one case, you need to be a nice person and give off really good vibes.

Think of such exclusive wines as rewards for intrepid loyalists and wine adventurers willing to go beyond retail.

Let's start with Ovid's delicious "Experiments," whose bottles sport labels that look like the handwritten tags you tie to flasks in a laboratory.

Every winemaker experiments—trying out different grape varieties, ways of growing vines, types of barrels or amphora for aging.

Unlike many of them, Ovid winemaker Austin Peterson has been bottling his one-off trials—in every year since 2005. He calls them "a front-row seat to concepts about winemaking," and some have helped him refine the four terrific "official" reds for which the winery is known.

His latest batch includes 2019 Experiment No. W.6.9, which is a round, ripe, polished, and totally satisfying blend of eight white varieties such as vermentino and picpoul blanc that serves as Peterson's answer to what a California white wine can be. (If you join the mailing list or get to the Napa tasting room, you may be able to buy it for \$95.)

My favorite of the two reds (\$165 each, same process) from this vintage is the violet-scented, dark, intense, almost exotic 2018 Experiment No. R.9.8, the result of his investigation into how vine row orientation affects grapes and the wines that result.

The two reds go for half the price of the rich, inky yet silky main Ovid bottling, or its siblings—intense Hexameter, a savory Syrah, and big, opulent Loc. Cit—and are not quite as complex or refined. The white is the most fascinating of the three experiments; really unique, it's worth hunting down.

The current editions can be had 1,500 feet up, on the winery's rocky, windswept Pritchard Hill. You get an offer to buy them by signing up for Ovid's exclusive mailing list on the website and opening an account. (Earlier vintages of other experiments are occasionally available on the secondary market, at about \$100 for whites and \$180 and up for reds.)

You might be surprised by the number of limited-edition bottles offered only at winery tasting rooms or via their wine clubs. Many aren't even mentioned on winery websites. They range from one-off experiments such as Ovid's to cuvées from tiny plots, rare grapes like Matthiasson's Schioppettino, and no-longer-available vintages you can pluck directly from a winery cellar. In Italy, many tasting rooms are the only places you'll find the wineries' own grappa. Here are nine additional super interesting picks:



Old vintages of Chateau Montelena

If you dream of helping yourself to historic vintages while roaming an iconic Napa winery's cellar, you're in luck. Head for ivy-covered, stone castle-style Chateau Montelena in Napa. (Sorry, its 1973 chardonnay, one of the 1976 Paris Tasting winners, is out of bounds—and probably over-the-hill, anyway.) Still, the library stash includes almost every vintage of its reds and whites, back to the 1970s. Access comes through curated tastings in a new concierge program, starting at \$250.