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California is cool again.

In the mid-nineties, some Golden State wine-makers began over-oaking because bolder flavor profiles win competitions. Now they're "going back to winemaking from the seventies and eighties," says Eric Railsback, who runs Les Marchands wine shop in Santa Barbara (that means moderate oaking, lower alcohol, and higher acid levels). "It's kind of a renaissance." Here, three of California's bright spots.

SANTA BARBARA

Yes, *Sideways* put Santa Barbara on the map 10 years ago. But now it's attracting younger producers like Justin Willett, who is doing lighter-bodied Pinot Noirs in Lompoc, and Rajat Parr, who is crafting Chardonnays in the Santa Rita Hills. Try Willett's Santa Barbara County and Parr's Sandhi Bentrack, both 2012s.

LAKE COUNTY

Lake County has long been a hidden source for quality blends. Now the secret's out. Obsidian Ridge's 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon has a touch of vanilla, and Six Sigma's 2009 Tempranillo Reserve lays claim to the region as the most hospitable U.S. home for the Spanish grape.

ANDERSON VALLEY

Though its first vineyards appeared in the eighties and nineties, Anderson Valley never developed into a tourist spot: If you were driving from San Francisco, you'd have to bypass Sonoma (and all of its hotels, restaurants, and wineries) to get there. Breggo's Savoy Chardonnay 2011 is spicy and floral.

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Your next destination: the Greek Isles

"Santorini has this volcanic, poor soil, but when you taste wines like Assyrtiko, you're blown away by how everything is so light and refreshing," says Laura Maniec, who opened a second Corkbuzz shop in New York City last summer, adding that Greek wine's bad rep comes from the pine-resin taste that flavors the traditional stuff, called Retsina. "And then you have wines like Vinsanto. The grapes are grown in these basketlike shapes so the wind doesn't blow them off the vine. It's interesting to see how the environment will change the way grapes are grown."

08. Choosing a wine isn't always about the fanciest bottle. It's about knowing your audience.

When Caroline Styne, wine director at the Los Angeles Mediterranean restaurant Lucques, was charged with creating a list for a Barack Obama fund-raiser in 2011, she stayed close to home. "I chose Emanuel Tres, which is by a guy named Chris Keller," Styne says. "A young, innovative winemaker seemed to make sense for this occasion and for this president. He seems to reflect Obama himself."

NO. 09

The only app you need is Delectable...

IT'S WHAT YOU WISH YOU'D HAD ALL OF THOSE TIMES YOU WERE IN THE WINE STORE IN DESPERATE NEED OF ADVICE. THE APP LETS YOU TAKE A PHOTO OF A LABEL, UPLOAD IT, THEN SEE WHAT EXPERTS LIKE MICHAEL MADRIGALE, HEAD SOMMELIER AT BAR BOULUD IN NEW YORK CITY, HAVE SAID.

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... and the only book you need is *The Essential Scratch & Sniff Guide to Becoming a Wine Expert*.

Seriously, if you're in the wine world, you're touting master sommelier Richard Betts' charming guide. It demystifies winespeak, taking readers on an engaging, scratch-and-sniff journey through "all the wine smells." The book looks like it's for kids—it's printed on thick stock, with illustrations and stickers that smell like stone fruit, leather, grass, etc.—and yet it's not, which is why it's so much fun.

NO. 12

It's okay to ask your sommelier dumb questions.

"EMPATHY AND HUMILITY ARE CHARACTER TRAITS THAT YOU CAN DEMONSTRATE IN SERVICE," SAYS ROBERT BOHR, CO-OWNER OF CHARLIE BIRD IN NEW YORK CITY. "IF YOU DON'T KNOW A LOT ABOUT WINE, YOU WILL INEVITABLY ASK QUESTIONS THAT ARE A BIT SOPHOMORIC. HOW DOES SOMEONE REACT TO THAT? YOU DON'T STUDY IT FOR A LIVING. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD BE TREATED WITH DISDAIN."

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Ignore the stereotypes. These regions have been unfairly maligned.



CHABLIS, FRANCE

KNOWN FOR: The California interpretation sold by the jug in the eighties.

NOW: The real stuff from the north of Burgundy (Chablis is a village in the region) is 100 percent Chardonnay—high-acid and no oak. "Patrick Piuze does one called Terroir de Chablis [left]," says Carlton McCoy, head of the Aspen wine mecca Little Nell. "It's stunning, and it's less than 20 bucks."



BEAUJOLAIS, FRANCE

KNOWN FOR: Beaujolais Nouveau. Marketed as a wine to drink right after the fall harvest, it doesn't have time to develop, giving it a rep as that tasteless stuff moms put on the Thanksgiving table.

NOW: The best Beaujolais, like the Pascal Granger Moulin à Vent 2011 (left), are examples of what happens when Gamay grapes aren't rushed into production. "I've always preferred Beaujolais," says Pierre Derrien, co-owner of Bones, a popular new Paris restaurant. "It's a strange thing, this image that it has."



CHIANTI, ITALY

KNOWN FOR: Being the wine in the straw-basketed bottles at Italian joints.

NOW: Today's best Chianti Classicos are "good values for high-quality wines," says Jeff Porter, who oversees the list at Del Posto in New York City. He prefers Chiantis that are 100 percent Sangiovese or blended with the traditional Colorino or Canaiolo, like Isole e Olena's Chianti Classico (left).

