vinetur

Wine Spectator honors more than 4,000 restaurants as diners trade down on volume and up on distinctive bottles

The 2026 Restaurant Awards reached all 50 states and 87 countries and territories, with Egypt appearing for the first time.

Friday, June 26, 2026



More than 4,000 restaurants in all 50 states and 87 countries and territories received 2026 Restaurant Awards from Wine Spectator, as operators adapt to diners who are buying less wine overall but spending more selectively on bottles they see as distinctive or high value.

The awards, announced this week, cover three tiers: Award of Excellence, Best of Award of Excellence and Grand Award. Egypt appeared in the program for the first time this year, expanding the geographic reach of a list that spans destinations from the United States to Europe, Asia and Australia.

Wine Spectator said this year’s winners reflect shifts in restaurant wine buying and consumer taste. According to the publication, diners are increasingly seeking quality over quantity, trading up for special bottles, exploring emerging regions and lesser-known grape varieties, favoring lighter styles and showing more interest in wines made with low-intervention farming practices.

That matters for the beverage business because restaurant wine lists remain a key route to market for producers and importers, especially smaller growers that rely on sommeliers and wine directors to introduce unfamiliar regions, grapes and farming approaches to consumers.

The largest group of winners was the Award of Excellence category, which went to 2,083 restaurants. Wine Spectator said those programs typically offer about 100 selections, with lists designed to match both cuisine and price point while giving diners clear information such as vintage and appellation.

A further 1,830 restaurants earned the Best of Award of Excellence, including 201 first-time winners and 86 restaurants that moved up from the Award of Excellence level. Wine Spectator said these restaurants generally maintain cellars with 350 or more selections and place greater emphasis on staff education, wine events and service standards.

The top distinction, the Grand Award, went to 99 restaurants worldwide. Candidates for that honor undergo an on-site evaluation by a Wine Spectator judge. The publication said Grand Award wine lists typically include 1,000 or more selections, with deep

vintage holdings, multiple bottle formats and broad representation from leading producers.

Two restaurants joined the Grand Award group for the first time in 2026: Berria Wine Bar in Madrid and Caruso’s in Montecito, Calif.

Among individual reactions cited by Wine Spectator, Matt Turner, wine director at Lei in New York, a new Best of Award of Excellence winner, said the recognition would help bring visibility to small growers and different winemaking approaches. Ken Hoffman, chief operating officer of Dividend Restaurant Group, which oversees Sullivan’s Steakhouse and Eddie Merlot’s, said the award recognized work in hospitality, wine education and dining service across its concepts.

Scotland Roberts, sommelier at Lazy Goat in Greenville, S.C., which was upgraded to Best of Award of Excellence, said the restaurant had recently invested in a new cellar after expanding its wine list. He said the added attention could help turn those bottles into part of guests’ celebrations rather than leaving them unsold.

The results also point to how restaurants are using wine programs to differentiate themselves at a time when beverage margins are under pressure and guests are making more deliberate choices. For wineries and distributors, placements on recognized lists can offer visibility with consumers who are willing to spend on premium bottles when they dine out.

All winners are included in Wine Spectator’s Aug. 31 issue.