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Ten Overlooked Wine Genres Poised for a Comeback in 2026, Says NYT Critic

Eric Asimov spotlights Bordeaux, Merlot, Sherry and more, urging wine lovers to rediscover forgotten classics and emerging styles.

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Eric Asimov, the chief wine critic for The New York Times, has published his annual list of wines to watch for the year 2026. Rather than focusing on specific bottles, Asimov's article highlights wine regions and grape varieties that he believes deserve renewed attention. He notes that many of these wines have been overlooked due to changing tastes, persistent stereotypes, or shifts in the wine industry.

Asimov points out that wine trends are cyclical. Some styles fall out of favor as new preferences emerge, but he argues that quality wines should not be dismissed simply because they are no longer fashionable. In his selection, he identifies ten genres of wine that have either been unfairly disregarded or have faded from public consciousness. He also recommends a few bottles within each category, spanning a range of prices.

Among the wines Asimov discusses is Bordeaux, which he describes as medium-bodied and savory, with subtle fruit flavors. He recalls a conversation with British wine writer Hugh Johnson, who praised Bordeaux for its drinkability. Asimov encourages readers to look beyond the expensive, well-known labels and seek out lesser-known producers offering good value.

California Chardonnay is another genre he believes has suffered from stereotyping. Once known for being overly oaky and buttery, California Chardonnays now come in a variety of styles, from fresh and lively to rich and full-bodied. Asimov urges consumers not to overlook these wines based on outdated assumptions.

Merlot is included on the list as well. Its reputation took a hit after the 2004 film "Sideways," which favored Pinot Noir and disparaged Merlot. Asimov acknowledges that many Merlots produced at the time were uninspiring but insists that the grape is capable of producing excellent wines, especially when grown in the right conditions.

Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon also makes the cut. While these wines are often expensive and sometimes criticized for being old-fashioned or overly ripe, Asimov maintains that well-made Napa Cabernets remain relevant and can offer complexity and balance, especially with some age.

He also highlights fortified wines such as Port and Madeira. These styles have fallen out of favor as after-dinner drinks have become less common. However, Asimov suggests they are worth revisiting, particularly aged tawny Ports and Bual Madeiras, which can be enjoyed with cheese or on their own.

Ribera del Duero from Spain is another region he singles out. Known for powerful red wines made primarily from Tempranillo (locally called Tinto Fino), Ribera del Duero has seen a shift toward more restrained styles in recent years. Asimov recommends seeking out producers who are embracing this approach.

Sauternes and Barsac, sweet wines from Bordeaux affected by noble rot (Botrytis cinerea), are also featured. These labor-intensive wines are expensive but offer unique flavors and pair well with foods like blue cheese or even oysters.

Savennières, a dry Chenin Blanc from France’s Loire Valley, is described by Asimov as an intellectual’s wine—elegant but often overlooked. He advises giving these wines time to open up before drinking.

Sherry, specifically Fino and Manzanilla from Andalusia in Spain, is another category he feels deserves more attention. These bone-dry fortified wines are traditionally served as aperitifs and pair well with foods like almonds and cured ham.

Finally, Asimov includes Spätlese Riesling from Germany. These slightly sweet yet vibrant wines have lost ground to drier styles but remain versatile at the table due to their balance of sweetness and acidity.

Throughout his article, Asimov emphasizes the importance of keeping an open mind about wine genres that may have fallen out of favor or been misunderstood. He encourages readers to explore these categories anew in 2026, noting that each offers a range of styles and experiences worth discovering.