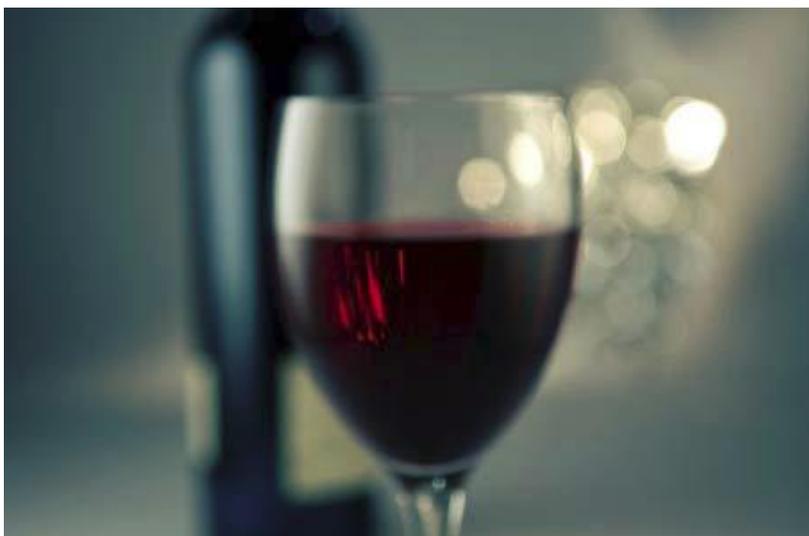




The Trail to the Tastiest Organic Red Wines from a Certified Grape Goddess



"You could consider me the goddess of organic wine because of my longevity," says a *tres* enthusiastic Veronique Raskin of [The Organic Wine Company](#) in San Rafael, Calif. "I've been at it for 30 years so I should know a couple of things."

The French native and head cheerleader for the benefits of organic helped uncork the notion of drinking naturally-farmed grape back in 1979. That's when she brought the first shipment to the U.S. from her family's 200 year-old vineyard, Bousquette, located in the Languedoc region, which borders Provence in the south and produces one-third of France's grapes.

"Back in the 60s, people with small family properties handed down from generation to generation took notice of the damage done by [pesticides and herbicides](#) and began looking for alternatives. We decided non-organic had no future and conventional wine was damaging to the earth, the people working the earth, and down the stream to the public."

Much has changed since those days in 1979 when she shopped her Chateau Bousquette to wine merchants in the Bay Area, singing the praises of its purity.

"I remember I took a bottle into a store called Mr. Liquor. I was this idealistic 30-year-old, and so excited to share the only wine I could drink without getting a headache," she recalls. "The owner looked at me and said, 'Lady, my customers don't give a s...t what is in their wine!' I stood there gasping and didn't have a comeback. I was so stunned someone would say even if wine contains poison, people don't care."

Now that people do care, Veronique Makes it her mission to get the public to seek out wines that are [Certified Organic](#), which guarantees the producer is following strict organic regulations for farming without synthetic chemicals.

She warns us to steer clear of empty references: sustainable practices, ecological development, long term planning and reasonable farming. These are frequently dictated by the greenwashing of the business to keep up with marketing trends.

This wine expert also says the [sulfites in wine](#) issue can be extremely confusing and blown out of proportion in a way that can cause public hysteria.

"Sulfites are naturally occurring in wine as result of fermentation, so it's about adding a minimal amount to supplement what is there already," she says, sighing about this overheated topic.

"A small part of the population, mostly asthmatics, are allergic to sulfites and should be warned with labels," she explains. "But the majority of unpleasant complications are not due to sulfites but the other chemicals added. People should be concerned about pesticides that kill us and cause diseases. Focusing on sulfites is just a distraction."

Après the fine education comes the fine selection. I'm toasting this part because the woman knows from organic reds.

She has been carefully selecting labels for the past 20 years, importing and selling only those wines certified in their country of origin. In terms of the vintage, Veronique finds this mostly applies to rare wines that are generally out of our reach, unless you're a collector with big bucks and a cellar.

"There it can make the difference between a simply good wine and a fabulous one," she says. "This is very much the case in the Bordeaux region where the weather can radically alter the growing conditions from one year to the next."

In guiding the rest of us (those without big bucks or a cellar), Veronique has created a virtual organic wine 101 course at her website – with information based on the great depth of knowledge gained over the years.

Her mission is to foster a community that sees the importance of drinking and enjoying organic. "We're not just merchants, but passionate, idealistic people who happen to be running a business," she says.

I asked her to get down to business and give us the dirt on the best organic reds for sharing with friends over dinner or giving as gifts.

The list comes with these savvy tips:

Let the bottle breathe. "It's like stretching your body when you are in tight clothing."

Drink red wine with food. It's how Europeans do it, and for good reason. The more you taste the food, the more you taste the wine, and they enhance each other. "Wine is nourishment to me. I drink two glasses every day," she says. "My family drinks with lunch but I don't because I'm now part American."

Share red wine with friends. "It is meant to help us relax and partake of each other's company, to open up the heart and enjoy sharing. That's why the typical visual of wine is around the table with friends. Jesus did that with his disciples all of the time. Wine comes from the depth of the earth and grapes are the quintessential symbol of transformation."



Veronique Raskin

Here is the goddess's guide to delicious and affordable organic red wines, some of which can be purchased through her site.

<p>Languedoc Region Chateau Bousquette, Prestige \$27 Chateau Bousquette, \$18 Chateau Veronique, \$15 Mas de Janiny Cabernet, \$30 Mas de Janiny Syrah, \$20 La Marouette Cabernet, \$13.99</p> <p>Rhone Region Domaine des Cedres, \$15 Cotes du Ventoux, \$10.99</p>	<p>Burgundy Region Bourgogne Pinot Noir, \$24</p> <p>Spain Navarrsotillo Rioja Tinto "Noemus", \$15</p> <p>California Sky Saddle Sangiovese, \$24 Le Vin Winery Hillside Estate Organic Vineyards 2002 Merlot, \$28</p>
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