

RANKINGS

BY LINDA MURPHY

TOP 100

THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE'S

WINES

It was a tough job but we did it — we tasted some 2,500 wines during a 12-month period and came up with the best bottles to recommend to Chronicle readers

OK, so it wasn't that difficult to put so many delicious Sauvignon Blancs, Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs, Syrahs and Cabernet Sauvignons into our mouths, swishing, slurping and gargling them to judge the personality and complexity of each wine. We do this every week, with a panel of wine merchants, wine buyers and sommeliers that tastes, evaluates and recommends quality wines — many of them terrific values — for the Thursday Wine section.

What follows is our list of 100 California wines that stood out in the past year, including those rated "Excellent" and higher by the Chronicle panel and choices made by me and wine coordinator Lynne Char Bennett. Ten of our favorite bottles are matched to recipes developed by Bennett, starting on page 38.

Note: Not all wines listed are available in all stores and restaurants; some are made in small quantities, some are sold only to restaurants and others were released early in the year and may be difficult to find. Shop around, consult your local wine merchant, contact the wineries for sales location information and consider ordering online.

2002 Mason Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$16) — A zingy, lip-smacking wine with honeydew melon, lemon-lime, gooseberry and grassy personality and intriguing hints of fennel, quince and mineral.