

# wine-**wise** buying

SAVING MONEY WHEN SHOPPING FOR A BOTTLE OF WINE CAN BE AS EASY AS PICKING GRAPES FROM THE VINE. BY TOM CLAIRE

**a cynic**, observed Oscar Wilde, is someone who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. When it comes to buying a bottle of wine, price and value can frequently be at odds. Nonetheless, choosing an affordable bottle that will satisfy you has never been easier-if you know how to go about it. "When you're shopping for wine it first pays to get to know a local wine retailer-one who will help you develop an informed wine palate," advises Leslie Sbrocco, author of *Wine for Women: A Guide to Buying, Pairing, and Sharing Wine* (William Morrow; \$24.95). "It also pays to experiment a little," says Sbrocco, who recommends sampling a selection of low-priced bottles that might let

you expand your wine horizons.

Where you'll find the best deals, she says, will depend on where you live. While many of us can purchase our chardonnay and pinot noir at small wineshops, others can turn to big-box retailers whose vast volume of wine sales allows them to avoid high markups. National outlets like BJ's, Trader Joe's, and Costco (whose wine racks are shown, *left*) sell so much wine that they can keep prices low-and customers satisfied. David Andrew, global wine director for Costco, says that about 290 Costco warehouses nationwide are licensed to sell wine. "We continually rotate our range and try to offer the best wines from around the world," Andrew says. "What you have to keep in mind,

though, is that selection varies from region to region and from warehouse to warehouse." So where does value come in when buying at a large national discounter? For inexpensive wines, your savings are generally not as significant so you, may as well patronize your neighborhood wineshop. But at the high end-first releases of Bordeaux, for example-you can save considerably by shopping at national warehouses. As David Andrew points out, "A \$50 wine at Costco can cost as much as \$150 at a typical wineshop." Now that is wine-savvy shopping!

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**bear in mind** To get the best price on the bottle, wine authority Leslie Sbrocco says it's wise to ♦ **buy by the case** to get discounts of 10 to 15 percent. ♦ If buying a case is too expensive, **split one with a friend** so you can still enjoy a discount. ♦ Ask your wine merchant whether you can assemble a mixed case-a discount may still apply. ♦ **Shop at a vineyard's tasting room**, where case discounts are not uncommon. ♦ **Look for markdowns:** Many wineshops discount bottles of slow-moving or discontinued wines. ♦ **Check out the Internet** by logging on to favorite vineyard sites or a mass marketer's URL, such as [costco.com](http://costco.com). Note, however, that laws governing interstate commerce in alcohol sales severely restrict wine-buying on-line. -T. C.

