



**WINE | NEWMAN'S OWN**  
Wine expert Jonathan Newman's  
gold standard for wine buying:  
Quality-price ratio

Every day at least one friend or acquaintance asks me to recommend a wine. There is no one answer; I taste thousands of bottles of wines a year, and I can wholeheartedly recommend quite a few. But considering today's economy, there's one especially compelling basis upon which I can suggest a wine: a good Quality-to-Price Ratio (QPR).

I am always more impressed with my friends as savvy wine lovers when they introduce me to a great \$20 bottle of wine than if they try to wow me with an overpriced \$100 bottle that simply has a well-known name. In the past, I rejected more than 70 percent of the wines that were presented to me, often based on value. And at Newman Wine & Spirits, I have rejected more than 500 offerings; some were delicious, but the QPR didn't work.

It is crucial to be selective as a wine buyer. I seek wines that over-deliver for the price, especially in a contracting economy. Nobody wants to cut wine from their budget, but they don't have extra money to spare for overpriced bottles. A great bottle of wine unites family, friends, good food and a great lifestyle. Enjoying an excellent glass of wine is the fastest way to put a little luxury in your daily life. But there is nothing that leaves a more sour taste in your mouth than overpaying for a bottle of mediocre wine.

Here's the first step to finding good QPR wines right now: Look closer to home.

Because the U.S. dollar is so weak, it's increasingly difficult to find good European wine values. I love French and Italian wines, but I'm drinking far more American wines these days because the QPR is much better.

For best bets, seek out wines from great growing regions, like the Napa or Sonoma valleys. Wines from sub-appellations like Rutherford, Dry Creek Valley or Russian River Valley are even better. I especially like the value and taste profile of red wines from the Dry Creek Valley in Sonoma County. Winemakers like Scott Lindstrom-Dake of Kelley Creek can produce wines with tremendously bright flavors, including his Flow Bordeaux Blend, Cabernet, Merlot and Zinfandel, without charging a fortune for them. And even with the weak U.S. dollar, I'm still finding good QPR wines from spectacular appellations in Australia, particularly the Mak Collection of wines including the 2000 Special Edition Yarra Valley, 2003 Premium McLaren Vale Shiraz and the 2004 Coonawarra Cabernet blend.

It's a great time to be a wine buyer—either for a company or for your own cellar. Drink well and don't overpay. And the most important thing to remember: Trust your own palate and drink wines that you enjoy.

*Bryn Mawr's Jonathan Newman served as chairman of the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board, the largest buyer of wine and spirits in the U.S., and was named Wine Enthusiast's Man of the Year in 2003. He now heads the wine buying firm Newman Wine and Spirits, online at [newmanwineandspirits.com](http://newmanwineandspirits.com).*