

wine

online

Sniff out a bargain or a premium rare drop at these online wine sites, writes Peter Bourne.

Photography **Jennifer Soo**

Dedicated “wineheads” still prefer the emotive experience of sifting through racks of wine in a favourite bottle shop. But many everyday consumers want to enjoy a reliable bottle of their favourite wine style, purchased at the best price in a convenient manner. The net offers this in abundance. In fact, there’s such a profusion of offers and deals online that it gets quite confusing, from retailers and auctions to wine clubs and traditional wine merchants with a strong internet presence.

With the current oversupply of bottled wine estimated to be one million cases, there are certainly bargains to be had. So here’s my guide to the best wine on the web:

Langton’s The market leader in its specialist area of fine wine, langtons.com.au is a very credible online-only operation for top-end buyers. The real action happens with its online auctions of premium wine sourced from private collectors and industry sources. All of the wine auctioned is under Langton’s control, warehoused in Sydney or Melbourne, and all prices are per bottle (not per lot) with a 15 per cent buyer’s premium. The commentary and condition reports are excellent and Langton’s also offers an “exchange”, where you can buy wines sourced from its client base immediately and at a fixed price. There is an upfront joining fee of \$33 per annum or \$165 for life.

GraysOnline The big-volume player that sells everything from computers to cars, graysonline.com sources wine from distressed suppliers, including wineries, distributors and retailers. The auctions are short and sharp (unlike the two-week period of Langton’s) with a daily turnover. There’s a lot of stock available and, correspondingly, the prices are low. Familiar brands appear but look out for the vast array of unknowns – some imported, others local, with a few at the top end. The core business here is wine for everyday drinking and the system works well – there’s a 15 per cent buyer’s premium and you bid for the lot, not per case or per bottle. GraysOnline also offers “buy now” e-tailing with a mix of both credible brands and unknowns. Again, it’s easy to understand and it works well.

Wine clubs The major players, Cellarmasters (cellarmasters.com.au) and Wine Selectors (wineselectors.com.au), dominate the sector with a strong online presence. No auctions here, just a multitude of offers – either mixed dozens or single-case lots. Look out for umbrella websites such as cellarselections.com.au, which is a second site run by Wine Selectors in conjunction with NAB.

Mainstream retailers Kamenys (www.kamenys.com.au) is the front of the pack, offering a complete online service. On the periphery of these web-based retailers are fine-wine-focused clubs such as Wine Ark (wine-ark.com), which offers cellaring and storage facilities, premium wine offers to their wine-club members and an exchange system similar to Langton’s. This is a quality-focused operation targeted at real wine buffs.

eBay At the other end of the scale, you can try your luck on ebay.com.au. But remember the Latin maxim, Caveat emptor – “let the buyer beware”. And good luck. Buying online can be a lottery.



Pikes Traditionale Riesling 2009 (Clare Valley, SA), \$26, or \$18.40 at a wine club

The Pike brothers, Neil and Andrew, are not flamboyant but they are a hard-working winemaker and viticulturalist respectively. Their efforts were rewarded in 2009 with this mineral, lemon-pith-fresh riesling. The palate is taut and fine with an elongated “tail” carried by a steely thread of acidity.



Howard Park Sauvignon Blanc 2008 (WA), \$28, or \$9 on GraysOnline

Howard Park sources the fruit from Margaret River and Pemberton for this juicy, fresh sauvignon blanc. Guava and passionfruit lead the way with a hint of fresh herbs and wild honey. It’s full flavoured and well structured, with its barrel-fermented component carrying the finish to a long and harmonious conclusion.



Jamiesons Run Shiraz 2008 (Limestone Coast, SA), \$18, or \$15 at Cellarmasters

Coonawarra remains the heart of Jamiesons Run with additional fruit sourced from Mount Benson, Wrattobully and Padthaway. The 2008 shiraz has lots of fresh, plummy fruit flavours, a dash of allspice and a generous dose of sweet vanillin oak. Perfect with barbecued lamb.



Sevenhill Inigo Shiraz 2007 (Clare Valley, SA), \$23, or \$19 at Wine Selectors

The Jesuits at Sevenhill have been making wine in the Clare Valley since the 1850s. This shiraz is blessed with black cherry, damson plum and a sprinkling of bitter chocolate. Its bold flavours are curbed by a firm corset of tannin, which augurs well for a long future.



2006 Mount Mary Vineyard Quintet (Yarra Valley, Vic), \$142, or \$120+ at Langton’s

Delicious is an overused word but the 2006 Quintet is just that and it will become even more so over time. It’s fragrant almost to the point of ethereal with perfumes of dried cranberries and fresh mulberries and hints of warm spice and cedar wood. Elegant and fine grained, it has both depth and richness.