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# Top Sommelier Tip-Offs: 4 Four-Star Wine Bargains

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They say drinking is recession-proof. But when I read a story a few weeks ago in the International Herald Tribune stating that alcohol consumption has dropped—even in Ireland!—during these lean economic times, I knew things were bad. Here in San Francisco, luckily, the question seems to be not will we drink, but what will we drink? In regard to wine, the most expensive bottles are gathering dust. “People are not ordering that second bottle,” says Jen Knowles, head sommelier at Waterbar. “We’re seeing more corkage, and people are going straight for the value-driven wines.” The good news is that an inexpensive Cab can deliver the same grace as its pricey counterpart; even the best sommeliers at the fanciest restaurants have hidden delicious value wines among the titans on their list. It’s actually a source of pride for a sommelier to find a good deal. All you have to do is ask—so we did.

SAVE  
\$540!



**Alan Murray**  
**Masa's**

**Dream: Bryant Family, Napa, Cabernet, 2004, \$700**  
**A big cult Cabernet**

**Reality: Wolf Family, Cabernet, 2004, \$160**

Try the little-known but “well-made and delicious” Wolf Family Cabernet. “It’s made by Karen Culler,” says Murray, “She’s an extremely talented winemaker, and the wine, from St Helena, has not just loads of fruit, but elegance and some savory notes too.”

SAVE  
\$908!



**Nicole Burke**  
**Epic Roasthouse**

**Dream: Château Lafite Pauillac, 1995, \$998**  
**A fully-loaded, profound Bordeaux**

**Reality: Château Pichon-Longueville “Pauillac”, 2005, \$90**

Try a wine from the same subregion of Pauillac. “It’s from a great producer but it’s unusual,” says Burke. “It’s labeled so simply, it must be some sort of declassified juice. But it has all the fruit and minerality you would expect from something much more expensive.”

Courtesy of Mark Leet  
Photography

SAVE  
\$255!



**Rajat Parr**  
Michael Mina

**Dream:** Coche Dury, Meursault, 2006, \$300  
A fine white Burgundy

**Reality:** Domaine Jacques, Tissot “Classique,” 2006, \$45

Try a great Chardonnay from a region just outside of Burgundy. “This one has everything you want from a good French Chardonnay—acid, fruit, minerals, structure,” says Parr. “It’s incredibly versatile—sharp enough to pair with fish, but rich enough to balance out a cheese course.”

SAVE  
\$113!



**Matthew Fitch**  
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**Dream:** Château de Beaucastel, 2003, \$171  
An epic wine from the Côtes du Rhone

**Reality:** Château Rayas, “La Pialade,” 2005, \$58

This wine is from the same region and is produced by one of the greatest estates in France, but “a fabulous bargain,” says Fitch, “delivering the qualities of an expensive Rhone wine—beautiful kirsch and wild berry flavors, flowers, bramble and dried herbs.”