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# **New generation in wine stores**

Select wine merchants Buying wine online is a useful and convenient way to source wines from unusual wine varieties. There are many advantages, and a couple of pitfalls to buying wine online.

Why buy wine online?

This may seem an unnecessary problem to you at first. If you can buy wine at your local supermarket, liquor store or off licence then why should you bother with the Internet?

Well, the answer is that it is all about choice. If you want a wider choice then online is the way to go. You can choose just about any wine and compare prices. If you are into wine, then you should use online buying to pursue your passion for new, exciting and different wines with ease.

Who should you buy from?

There are basically two choices for buying wine online. You can buy directly from the winery, or you can buy from specialist online wine and liquor merchants.

Buying from the winery is fine if you know that you want a particular wine. Most wineries have a mail order service that will be integrated into their website. You will fill in an online form, or download one to mail or fax and the wine will be on its way. Very simple. But there are a couple of catches. You will probably need to buy a minimum of a dozen, or perhaps six bottles. If you really just want to try different wines, which is what McLaren vale cellars is all about, you might only want one bottle of an unknown wine. You can usually order a mixed dozen, but again you will be restricted to wine from that particular winery.

The second catch when buying wine online is freight. If you are buying wine online from within the same country you may get the wine freight free. It's not really free, but included in the price. If charged, freight is generally reasonable if you are buying a dozen or more bottles, and live in the same country as the winery.

Buying from a specialist online merchant has two advantages.

You can generally make up a mixed dozen of wines from different wineries, regions or even countries. You will get a much better deal on freight for foreign wines. The merchant has imported the wine for you, and handled any customs issues. There is considerable competition between merchants. Consumers buying wine online are likely to benefit from competitive prices, high commitment to service, deals on freight and special offers.

Is it safe?

The online commerce industry is growing quite rapidly. The merchants are very sensitive to consumer concerns about security. Huge expenditures on research and development have led to systems to protect the consumer, and the reputation of the merchants. For example many merchants use VeriSign which is an integrated system to secure the transmission and storage of sensitive data such as your credit card details.

If you are buying wine online from an established merchant you can be reasonably sure that they will deliver. They should have a privacy policy and a secure data system. There will be information about these issues on the website, often accessible from links or icons on the foot of the homepage.

There can be an issue about where to get the wine delivered to. If you are not at home during the day the wine could disappear from your front doorstep. Some delivery services allow you to give instructions such as 'leave at the side gate.' You may need to make arrangements with a neighbour or get the wine delivered to work.

There are risks in every activity we undertake. We just cannot avoid risk, otherwise we would never cross the road. We can however minimise risk by taking sensible precautions. If you are a slightly adventurous type you will see that the rewards of finding and buying new wines far outweighs the risk.

Getting started

It is worth doing a little research on before jumping in to buying wine online. Check out a couple of merchants to see what they offer in terms of range of wines, delivery charges, security policies etc.

Some tips for buying wine online

1. Buy wine, not freight. Get your wine from a source in your own country if possible. Buy in dozen lots or more to average the freight over more bottles.
2. Buy from established merchants. These guys know their business. They stay in business because they work on getting satisfied customers who come back for more. This is your best protection against unsatisfactory service.
3. Use the shopping cart to organise your purchases. Don't be afraid to fill up your basket as you browse through the merchants range. You are not committed to buy until the end, usually called the checkout or something similar. You can adjust the quantities of each of your selections before the final transaction. With some merchants you can also order the wine online and complete the credit card payments by fax or telephone.
4. Compare prices and freight. Try a couple of merchants to check out the best deal, including delivery costs. This is a great use of the Internet, allowing you to do comparison shopping from your desk. Most merchants will have specials from time to time, they are in a competitive business so they are keen to get your trade.
5. Have a secure delivery address. If you are not at home during the day, get it delivered to work or to a friend or relative (if you trust your relatives.) Virgin Wines say that they will replace wine that is nicked after delivery but some sensible precautions can save you the hassle. You may be able to insure your wine until delivery, but you need to consider if it is really worth the extra cost.
6. Beware of unsolicited offers. Scammers try to find gullible punters by mass emailings, put this stuff straight into the rubbish where it belongs.
7. Sign up for merchant's online newsletters. This is a bonus for those buying wine online. Competitive markets mean that merchants are actively promoting new products. Some newsletters contain useful and interesting information, but others are little more than a sales pitch. As they are free they are worth trying. If you don't want the newsletter any more it is easy

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