

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

A bi-weekly report about the upcoming wines being released through LCBO's Vintages program.



OntarioWineReview: LCBO Holiday Gift Guide 2007 – Part 1

It's getting near that time of year when you'll be looking for gifts to give to those who are near-and-dear to your heart, and those that you must get gifts for. The ever-helpful LCBO is gearing up for the holidays with new and wonderful gift ideas from their suppliers. Some are of the hokie and cheesy variety, some I wouldn't waste my money on and others seem like re-packaged rip-offs of something you could buy year round. But then again there are some unique and interesting gift ideas that truly are worth the coin you'll plow down. Here is part one of my LCBO holiday gift guide – there are things that I would spend my hard earned dough on to give to my friends, acquaintances, loved ones and those I just plain wanna (or hafta) suck up to.

For the Wine Lover ...

Most gifts for wine lovers at this time of year really aren't about what's in the bottle as much as the outside packaging and/or the trinkets they come with it. There's the Gioielli Casa Bottega Rosé Spumante (#49700 - \$29.95) that comes with two tapered champagne flutes ... the flutes really aren't much to write home about but the Spumante is a pink bubbly with lots of strawberry, raspberry flavours with a touch of sweetness. This one's a total party pleaser, but at this time of year it's what you're looking for.

For your Italian loving friend (be it wine or the country) check out the Sangiovese Di Toscana (#5520 - \$9.95) in the Leaning Tower of Pisa bottle ... the bottle actually leans and is in the shape of the famous tower – archways and all. The wine inside is an easy drinking, fruity red that is best chilled ... the bottle can either help you convince people they've had too much or can be refilled with the liquid of your choice for display year round.

Your Spanish wine loving friends are in for a treat. Osborne Solaz Wooden Gift Box (#621433 - \$16.95) contains a 2005 Merlot / Tempranillo and a 2004 Tempranillo / Cabernet Sauvignon in an attractive wooden box ... considering that at some wineries the box alone is \$20, this is an excellent deal, and the wines inside are a good value too. So you can think of this in one of two ways: either you've bought two wines and got a free box, or you bought a box and got free wine – either way you win.

Mom likes wine; dad likes to cook (or vice versa)? The Masi Serego Alighieri and Balsamic vinegar box set (#898460 - \$19.95) is the best of both worlds: a bottle of delicious Masi red and a bottle of Masi balsamic vinegar, served up in a corrugated sliding box ... Now mom can watch dad cook with a matching wine in her hand - bon appetite.

Riesling fans have three options ... though in actuality it's the same wine just in different packaging. Moselland brings back its Ars Vitis Winter Scene (#589929 - \$19.95), a bottle with a clear window-like pane at the front of the bottle looking in on the "painted scene" on the back of the bottle. This time you are looking through the window at a winter scene by a lake. What you're paying for here is the bottle, which makes a nice showpiece for the holiday mantle. The wine inside is light and fruity, with plenty of peachy flavours – obviously made to be as much a party pleasing white as ever there was one, especially for those holiday parties it will undoubtedly find itself. This is also one of those artsy-fartsy gifts for those that will probably never drink the wine inside. The same wine can be found in the cat-lovers package (Moselland Riesling Coral / Torquoise Cat Bottle #49676/49668 - \$9.95) a 500ml bottle that Moselland puts out every year in different colours. This year they've added pastel colours to the cat family – for the cat lover or collector on your list.

For the Beer Lover ...

I find myself gravitating towards craft beers these days; beers that toss away the homogeneous flavours and instead give you something bold and unique. I think it comes from growing up with lots of Molson products being consumed by friends and then living in a Labatt town for 12 years (London, Ontario). You get tired of the ordinary and want some diversity, even in your beer. There's a De Koninck Belgian Gift Pack (#612101 - \$13.95) with three distinctly different beers: Blond/Triple/Pur Malt and what my university friends would have

termed a “Big Ass Beer Glass”. The beers are all tasty, the package is well-priced and I could see myself enjoying one, or all three, of these in an evening.

St. Ambroise Raspberry Ale (#45591 - \$3.95) is a beer I'd give my mother, that's not a shot at the beer or my mother. It's a tasty full-on raspberry flavoured brew that seems to forget its beer. It comes in a solid gift tube with only one beer inside, no accessories. I figure in a pinch you could use the tube as a makeshift glass.

Not sure whether this was a gift pack or not because it had no extras, but the Royal Extra Stout 6-pack (#24638 - \$9.85) is a sweet tasting stout with some coffee and toffee notes that is very enjoyable ... and would make for a great gift for those looking for something different, even if it doesn't come with any holiday extras.

Something Different ...

It took a long time for La Cache de Pomme to get into the LCBO – they make the most awesome iced apple wine and were exporting this sweet nectar to many countries before the LCBO finally agreed to put it on their shelves ... could their Quebec address be a problem, hmm? But let's forget the politics and instead check out their offerings for the holiday season. Their Domaine Pinnacle Sparkling Ice Cider (#52365 - \$44.75) and the still Ice Cider (#6924 - \$39.95), each comes with a set of glasses (triangular with the sparkling, mini-ISO's with the straight). Great apple flavours in both: one is bubbly, sweet and light in flavour, the other is intense with sticky apple sweetness. Each comes in an attractive gift box.

For the Liquor Lover ...

The LCBO is being very good to Scotch and Vodka drinkers over the holidays.

For \$99.95 you can pick up the 4 pack of Johnny Walker Family Edition (#630467), 200ml bottles of Johnny's Red, Black, Blue and Gold. Not to be outdone Glenfiddich has their Tasting Collection (#604686 - \$69.95), 3 – 200ml bottles of their 12, 15 and 18 year old scotches.

Vodka lovers will get a chance to try the flavoured world of Absolut with the Five Flavours Gift Pack (#49262 - \$14.95), presented in a cute little holiday rack. 5 – 50ml bottles in lemon, peach, pear, raspberry and grapefruit flavours.

Looking for something a little more interesting? There's the Navan Nomad Gift Pack (#49080 - \$52.95). Navan is a delicious vanilla liqueur that is packaged with two attractive glasses in a suitcase like packaging.

For those Chocolate Lovers ...

There are two choices for those on your list who love chocolate, both from Mozart. There's the Mozart White Chocolate with glasses pack (#3905 - \$36.95) a deliciously creamy white chocolate liqueur that goes well on it's own or as a mix for hot chocolate, The other chocolate lovers treat runs the gamut for cacao devotees. Mozart Trio Pack (#624221 - \$16.95) – 3-50ml bottles, the creamy milk and white chocolate liqueurs and the more liquidy dark chocolate version ... this truly is a chocolate lovers paradise in a glass.

Unique and Wonderful ...

You've read this far and maybe you've checked off a few things, but here's a definite get, if not for a gift then at least for yourself: Nalewka Babuni Gift Box with Glass (#589333 - \$13.60). This gift is incredibly well priced for what you get. Nalewka Babuni is a cherry dessert wine from Poland, fortified to 18%, has deep, rich cherry flavour and port-like thickness, presented in a squat square bottle (750ml) with a large cherry shaped cork. The wide-mouth bottle opening makes it a challenge to pour from, but the liquid inside is delicious. This should be your drink around the fire on Christmas Eve, settin' up your Hanukah bush, decked out in your Kwanzaa attire or whatever you celebrate ... this Babuni will make your holidays even more special, and it's fun to say when people ask you what it is ... Nalewka Babuni.

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What can the Grape Guy do for you ... Michael Pinkus (Grape Guy) provides a variety of wine



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To contact me with feedback, article ideas, comments, concerns or questions – email michael@ontariowinereview.com. I look forward to hearing from you!

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