

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



OntarioWineReview: Vintages Release Saturday August 4, 2007

This time out Vintages is taking us to Spain – or, more appropriately, they're bringing Spain to us, with a selection of Spanish reds, whites, sparkling and dessert wines. Of course a trip through the wines of Spain must include Sherry, and there are two in this release; but I am going to forego the Sherries and instead focus in on some of the amazing dessert wines being offered. I'll start with the aperitif (sparkling), move to the whites then reds and finish off with the sweet stuff – then I'll move on to the other 19 wines from around the world that are worthy of your hard earned cash.

To me Spain has always been a good value region for wine ... their price points have always been phenomenal for what you get; and they have a system in place where "reserve" wines are actually reserve: in this release alone you'll find wines from as early as 1998 some 2002 and a number of 2003, and many for well under thirty bucks – so let's get right to it.

Spain (Sparkling) ... The only sparkler in this release, Segura Viudas Lavit 2003 Brut Natura Cava (\$14.95 - #277269) is fresh and lively with an almost sweet-like fruit palate and dry pleasant finish. This is a perfect orange juice mixer for those lazy Sunday mornings or on its own later in the evening.

Spain (White) ... With 6 whites to choose from in this release, and some that look very interesting, including a 1996, which remains fresh even 11 years on, the real Spanish treasure is Martin Codax 2006 Burgans Albarino (\$17.95 - #945063) ... made from the Albarino grape. The problem with some old world wines is even when they put the grape on the label you don't recognize it. One look at this bottle and you'll want to shy away from it, as the label is probably one of the cheesiest I've seen in a long time – but forget the outside and concentrate on what's IN the bottle. The nose has wonderful upfront peach and apple aromas – and those flavours follow right through on the tasty palate with a good long finish. I'd say it's a must try, even if it's just to say you've had a wine made from Albarino.

Spain (Red) ... Out of the 17 reds being offered up this release I've managed to cull it down to my top five "value for taste" selections, and one that's bubbling under. Let's start off with my surprise of the release: Cellar Pino Sacra Natura 2005 (\$21.95 - #30171) ... a surprise because usually I shy away from organic wines – and to say this is the best organic wine I've ever tried doesn't say much about the wine; but considering I was ready to recommend it before I knew it was organic is saying something. Simple, easy drinking, dusty tannins with good red fruit throughout. Next up, the Emina Vinho Rojo (\$18.95 - #993220) is from one of those up-and-coming regions, so now's a good time to get on the bandwagon before there's no more room to squeeze yourself on. Good plum, blackberry, dark fruit, oak-spiciness and nice integration of tannins – this is one tasty little bugger and the price of Emina won't make it feel like you've been given an enema (that was too easy – couldn't resist). Here's one that I thought was worth every penny because it's tasty now, but has some longevity for the cellar: Finca Sabreno 2003 Crianza (\$19.95 - #40360) – pick up a few bottles and try it occasionally over the next 5 years. Julian Chivite 2001 Gran Feudo Vinas Viejas Reserva (\$20.95 - #948067) is a blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot that has been aged 18 months in barrel from a number of old vines (the Temp and Garn at least). Already 6 years old, this wine has staying power to go at least another 6 – where else but Spain could you get a wine of this age and quality for twenty bucks; red fruit, cedar, sweet tobacco notes and some spiciness that makes it great to drink now but given time it'll smooth out into something even better. From the Vintages Essential library, be sure to check out the Torres Gran Coronas Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva (\$18.95 - #36483) – always available and always good value, with its rich tannins, black fruit and drink-now-or-hold-ability for later enjoyment. Finally, from one of, if not the, top producer in Yecla, comes Castano Coleccion 2004 (\$22.95 - #35493) – the value for dollar is definitely there as Castano consistently puts out incredibly good wines. Their lower-end (or entry level) wine, Hecula, comes close to selling out the day of release (scant few can be found in the system) and this one should too. Look for a great nose that lures you in, followed by dominant dark fruit tastes.

Spain (Dessert) ... The ultimate pleasures in this release are the Spanish treasures called dessert wines. One's a sweet port-like red; the other is pure Spanish gold. Castano 2004 Dulce Monastrell (\$25.95 - #35501) with its port-like nose of plum, chocolate and rich black cherry compote ... not as thick as port, but just as delicious. The ultimate dessert wine is the Cellar Pinol 2005 Josefina Pinol Vi Dolc Blanco (\$24.95 - #39867) which is outstanding in both value and taste ... and is like nothing you've had before. This is truly an "oh no" wine, because it is just so darn tasty you could find yourself drinking the whole bottle very quickly but beware the next morning you might just become a worshiper of porcelain. The packaging is as unique as the wine itself – a 500ml square bottle – inside you'll smell and taste dates, figs, tropical fruit, apricots, apples, pears and raisins; succulent and devilishly sweet. A long finish lingers in the mouth. Then there's the analogy to Spanish gold, which comes from the golden-amber colour. If you buy only one bottle this release it should be this one.

But let's say you wanted something else, not dessert wine, and not from Spain ... let's take a look at those other winemaking countries of the world and see what else is available this fine August Saturday.

France (Sparkling) ... It's from France but it's not from the Champagne region so it's called "sparkling wine made in the methode traditionnelle" ... this beauty from Alsace: Pierre Sparr Cremant D'Alsace Rosee Brut (\$19.95 - #39016) is made from Pinot Noir grapes, is pink and loaded with strawberry, raspberry flavours. This one's big on fruity and a delight in the heat of summer.

Chile (White) ... I've always stressed Chilean wines and value – and yet again they deliver. Miguel Torres Santa Digna 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (\$12.95 - #177444) a savvy b. made in the New Zealand style – all citrus on the nose and palate, a pink grapefruit finish, with good length; all at an excellent price.

Chile (Red) ... I think where Chile really delivers is in the red department, not always ageable, but always good value in a drink now style (meaning over the next 3 years or so – though that is starting to change). Two good reds are being released from the same producer: Ramirana ... the 2004 Gran Reserve Syrah (\$18.95 - #41715) and the 2005 Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14.95 - #41467). The Syrah has a good nose, but a better taste: chocolate, red fruit, spice, plum and pepper. Good length and smooth. Even better, and worthy of a couple of years in the cellar, is the Cab Sauv. Sweet smell of red fruit and chocolate which follows through on the taste ... this one's yummy and very-Chile ... if you're a fan of their reds this is another fine example you'll love and at \$14.95 how can you pass this one up.

Australia (White) ... You can go years without seeing a Verdelho come through the LCBO and in this release we see two, both from Australia no less. It's worth checking out the First Creek 2006 Verdelho (\$16.95 - #37358) over the other guy's ... good apple and pear nose with pineapple, tropical fruit, orange blossom on the palate and a good clean finish. This release also sees one of my favourite Australian producers, Nepenthe, come out with their 2005 Tryst Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon (\$15.95 - #39115). Parker gave it a 91, which will be enough for some people; the nose is fresh and lively with bunches of citrus as the taste shakes hands with your tongue in a friendly grapefruit, lime way; the taste can appear sweet, but that's due to the good balance of acidity and fruitiness. This is tasty and great for summer sipping right now.

Australia (Red) ... As with the whites there are two good Australian reds in this release. Juniper Crossing 2003 Shiraz (\$18.95 - #34231) is as easy as Sunday morning ... typical Aussie Shiraz with its fruit-bomb nature and sit around the BBQ friendliness. For a little more longevity you'll want to pick up the Magpie Estates 2005 The Fakir Grenache (\$21.95 - #39644) – rich jammy red fruit with some black cherry and blackberry ... the pleasant tannins and acidity should bring this wine through the next few BBQ seasons.

Germany (White) ... You know I'm not lying when I say Riesling is the perfect summer wine, and it can be made so many ways: puckeringly dry or syrupy sweet and many ways in-between. The Germans have perfected Riesling in all its ways, and here's another beauty for sitting in the backyard and sipping while in a hammock or just around the table soaking up some rays. Schloss Schonborn 2004 Riesling Kabinett (\$18.95 - #928184) is so tasty and enjoyable ... creamy smooth fruit flavours full of apples and pears, a little bit sweet with enough acidity to keep it brisk. I would even sit on it for 5 or more years and let it develop the typical petrol aromas and tastes, right now this one is lovely – and sure to get better.

California (Red) ... Beringer 2005 Third Century Pinot Noir (\$23.95 - #43786) Pinot Noir is not a wine for everybody's tastebuds, mostly due to the "earthy" or "dirty" taste the wine imparts on many people. New World Pinot from hot climates foregoes the earthiness for more fruity flavours, making Pinot more accessible to the masses. This is one of those. Rich and fruity, easy drinking with stewed fruit characteristics. There is still a touch of earthy, but it is far from prominent. Good flavours of strawberry and black cherry with good length and a fresh fruity finish should make this an easy recommendation especially for those who don't like

Pinot as a rule. More typical California wine comes in the form of Toasted Head 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.95 - #686824); red and black fruit, a touch of white pepper on the nose while through the mouth there's lots of good red fruit dominant flavours. Delicious, easy drinking and everything you'd expect from a Cali-Cab, but at a reasonable price.

South Africa (Red) ... My one complaint against many South African wines is that typical tarry-leathery nose and taste, most people have smelt, or tasted, it and wondered "what the heck is that" as they gag the wine down. It's here in this Swartland Winery 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot (\$15.95 - #37580) with "Serengeti" written on the label, but this one doesn't end that way. The finish is surprisingly smooth and fruity and makes up for the harsh beginning – luckily the harsh beginning also mellow with some time open and aeration. Great BBQ companion for now and over the next few years.

France (Red) ... From Bordeaux comes this 2003 Chateau Coucy (\$28.95 - #46516) something to drink now or hold for the next few years ... oaky dusty tannins with plenty of dark fruit flavours. And from the Rhone we have a whale of a wine in the Cellier de Marrenon 2004 Orca III (\$18.95 - #33886), red fruit and supple strawberry flavours with some short-term cellar-ability, say up to 3 years.

Italy (Red) ... Last, but not least, a couple of Italian wines make the grade in this release. A Tuscan red, Colognole 2003 Chianti Rufina (\$16.95 - #974501) strawberry, plum and pepper with good follow thru and some ripe tannins ... good price and something to age 5 years with excellent results. And then we have the Soprano special from Sicily – Mazzei 2005 Zisola (\$24.95 - #30080) with the big purple fingerprint on the label (all they need is the mug shot on the back label). Sweet in the mouth with lots of red fruit, licorice, vanilla and cherry – a yummy wine that's been receiving good accolades - an easy recommendation.

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