

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



OntarioWineReview: Vintages Release Saturday August 18, 2007

Whoa Nelly, look out, it's the annual Chilean wine release at Vintages; the time of year when I can literally hear my wallet groan as I see how wide I can open it trying to pull out every last bill. Chile is my go to country for value for quality wines ... this year there are some wines that rise well above the twenty dollar mark, which signals to me that Chile knows their wines are under-priced for the value we've been getting; they're also realizing that they can raise those prices to match the quality; makes me wonder how much longer we'll be seeing those great values and referring to Chile as a value-destination at the LCBO. But for now it's time to open your wallet and prepare to be amazed at what \$15 or less will get you.

Chile (White) ... Chile reminds me of Joe Cocker. Joe has a way of covering songs that are familiar to you, yet somehow he manages to make them his own (think A Little Help From My Friends or You Can Leave Your Hat On). Chile is the Joe Coker of the wine world – they take other country's styles and mimic them to the point where they either make them their own or improve upon them. Take the Veramonte 2006 Sauvignon Blanc Reserva (\$13.95 - #602649) – the nose is lifted straight from New Zealand savvy b's: grassy, grapefruit and gooseberry – heavy on the citrus; yet the taste is grapefruit and hay, which softens the citrusy notes and leaves room for a nice long finish. Casa Lapostelle 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (\$13.95 - #396994) is soft on grassy with hints of lemony freshness on the nose, while the taste is mainly orange blossom, clean, light on acidity and is quite simply an easy summertime sipper. It seems that everyone is interested in making wine in Chile: California's renowned Kendall-Jackson has sunk a few dollars here and opened Calina; their 2006 Chardonnay Reserva (\$15.95 - #640912) is easy drinking with tropical fruit, pineapple and lemon – with a good lengthy finish. Very Nice.

Chile (Red) ... Get out the calculator this is gonna cost you. If you're a fan of Chilean reds I've picked out five that I think are good value and good representation of their varietal. Chilean Merlot is where I cut my teeth on reds, so I have a soft spot for them. At \$13.95 you can't beat the Anakena 2005 Reserva Merlot (#37960) with its pepper, red fruit and chocolate aromas ... they follow through on the palate adding dusty tannins that have a tendency to dry out the mouth; there's some ageability here and at under fourteen bucks it's a steal; pick up a couple at least. Cono Sur 2006 Vision Merlot (\$17.95 - #928291) is what I've come to expect from Chilean Merlot. Great colour, smooth flavours (coffee, red fruit and sweet oak) ... this is exactly what Chilean Merlot should be. The straight Cabernet Sauvignons being released this time out are pricey and/or just not worth it, but Chile does so many other grapes well that you don't have to focus strictly on Bordeaux varietals. Check out the Chocolan 2004 Syrah Reserve (\$14.95 - #38513) with its peppery, red fruit spiciness and easy drinking style, this one's smooth and delicious, more Shiraz than Syrah, but who's keeping score of that anymore. Awhile back, Chile realized they were growing Carmenere right alongside their Merlot and that's why their Merlots weren't as smooth as they could be (Carmenere ripens later than Merlot, so when they were harvested and made together they left the wines with green unripe flavours). Since that realization Chile started harvesting the Merlot and Carmenere at different times and figured they would turn Carm into their signature grape – in the way Sauvignon Blanc was New Zealand and Shiraz was Australian. They're still experimenting with it, trying to get it just right and some producers are getting the hang of dealing with this grape. In Situ 2004 Winemaker's Selection Carmenere (\$13.95 - #37952) has a great spicy-vanilla and cinnamon nose that follows through in the mouth along with some black fruit on the tongue and a red fruit finish. My notes say "wow" – hope yours do too. And it's not just straight varietals that the Chileans are working well with; why not try an interesting and tasty blend from Montgras, 2005 Quatro Reserva (\$13.95 - #50641). This is a wine made from 4 grapes, is firm with black fruit, vanilla, cinnamon and a touch of mint in the background. An oaky finish rounds this one off, and don't forget the chocolate that flows through on the palate. Even after you've paid for it at that price you'll feel like you stole it – so buy a few, it's a good feeling.

And now it's on with the rest of the show:

California (White) ... A nutty, oaky, vanilla infused nose along with almonds, pineapple, mixed greens and

buttered toffee make this offering from the Gallo Family – their 2004 Laguna Vineyard Chardonnay (\$29.95 - #544981) a delicious high alcohol (14.5%) treat.

California (Red) ... Speaking of high alcohol, Newton Vineyard 2004 Napa Valley Claret (\$30.95 - #37994) is one of those wines you just have to respect; a high octane (15.5%) blend of Merlot (56%), Sauv (25%), Petit Verdot (9%), Syrah (8%) and Franc (2%) – chocolate and plum dominate with elegant finesse not usually seen in a wine with this kind of alcohol heat ... goes down so easy that you'll be surprised at the biting headache you have the next morning.

Argentina (White) ... Grape varieties don't get much more rare around these parts (I mean Ontario) than Torrontes, and wines don't come around this deliciously enjoyable and at such a reasonable price often either: this Alta Vista 2006 Premium Torrontes (\$12.95 - #37127) is cheap as chips and pretty much just as tasty. A rose petalish sweet nose gives way to apples, floral notes and rose petal tones in the mouth – more Gewurztraminer-like than anything (if you're looking for a comparison). Pears and kiwi also show up on the palate – making this an extraordinary value in a patio sipper for the summer. The pleasantly long finish makes its value seem even more of a winner.

Argentina (Red) ... Malbec is to Argentina what Carmenere is to Chile (i.e.: signature grape variety). The Trivento 2005 Reserve Malbec (\$12.95 - #974469) is a perfect example of the wine and provides yet another reason for the Argentinean love for red meats. Red fruit and spicy flavours, good mouthfeel (almost creamy upon entry) and unpretentious. Excellent value.

Australia (White) ... This release seems to be filled with high alcohol wines; the Olsen Wines 2004 Big Fella Chardonnay (\$21.95 - #34884) is well named. It's a wine for those who love their Chardonnays heavily staved – solid wood nose and taste with no subtlety what so ever, except for maybe a little vanilla. You'll be glad to know that there is some tropical fruit in this one; but it doesn't appear till the very end. Hold onto this one and allow it to integrate ... should be delicious in a few years.

Australia (Red) ... The Aussies took Shiraz/Viognier blends from the French and adopted it as their own ... considering the Aussies could mention the blend on the label and the Francaises could not makes it look like the idea originated in Oz. The Six Foot Six 2004 Shiraz/Viognier (\$17.95 - #41244) is an excellent example of how Australia has absconded with this blend and made it their own. The interesting story behind his wine only makes it more interesting.

New Zealand (White) ... Quick, what's the first thing that comes to mind when I say New Zealand? Most will respond with Sauvignon Blanc, so a tasty Chardonnay should come as a bit of a surprise to many; but the producer should not. Kim Crawford 2006 Unoaked Chardonnay (\$19.95 - #991950) is loaded with pineapple, tropical fruit and banana peel on the nose; tropical fruit, kiwi and lemon-lime on the palate. There's an apparent sweetness on the finish, but it's mainly due to good fruit characteristics and a steady seam of acidity. Pay attention to that great lingering finish. If Dire Straits had been Kiwis they might have sung "I want my Sa V B" ... and you get another dandy in this release: Te Kairanga 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (\$21.95 - #32805). Not at all typical of the Savvy B's that come out of this part of the world; good sweet fruit like passionfruit and golden plums along with good clean acidity, floral notes, orange blossom, grass, hay and cat's pee in the mouth (I'd never let my cat do it but we let the Kiwis, go figure).

France (White) ... From the Rhone comes Chateau de Nages 2003 Blanc Cuvee Joseph Torres (\$21.95 - #912386) with its vanilla and honey cake nose along with some soft oak, cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla – lushness in the mouth with an unstoppable finish ... not bad for a wine made from 100% Rousanne grapes.

France (Red) ... Out of 12 French reds being released none seemed to grab my attention until I got to the Midi and Rhone regions, then suddenly my tastebuds came alive and the French could do no wrong. Chateau Paul Mas 2005 Clos Des Mures (\$18.95 - #642546) livened me up with blackberries, cherries and spicy oak ... rich tannins with blackberries and currants in the mouth, this should last a few years in the cellar. Domaine Le Haute Marone Gigondas 2004 (\$26.95 - #33845) has ripe, bright cherries and cranberries on the nose with a dry mouth finish and the same fruit as found on the nose ... quite good if a bit pricey – but definitely cellar worthy. Finally, easy drinking never tasted so good as Les Deux Anges 2006 Sablet (\$17.95 – #674069); soft red fruit, cherries, pepper and spice in a Beaujolais style that's built for summertime ease. Serve either chilled or at room temp – this one is beautiful.

Italy (Red) ... Wine nuts love bottles. A bottle can tell you a lot about a producer: what they think about their wine and the care they put into making it. A good heavyweight bottle goes a long way to telling the consumer "we care". Umberto Cesari 2003 Liano Sangiovese/Cabernet Sauvignon (\$32.95 - #660530) comes in a 'we

care' bottle and proves it. Good fruit on the nose with plums, black cherry, chocolate and some tannin heft; this one screams out "Stop BBQing and feed me already." Don't like shelling out \$33 for a bottle, try Mazzei Belguardo Serrata 2004 (\$21.95 - #594887) – the nose is very inviting while the mouth stays closed – for the moment. Sweet scents that are jammy and peppery with spice, blackberries, currants and black pepper. Rich in the mouth with dusty-dry tannins ... decant, open early or lie it down – this one's will reward, especially at that price. Something to drink now would be nice, and the Apollonio Salice Salentino Rossa 2001 (\$16.95 – #45807) fits the bill. Already 6 years old this red is quite consumable with whatever you throw on the grill. Blackberries, licorice, raisins and plums greet the nose; while black currants, plums and cinnamon stick kicks around in the mouth ... some good tannin structure proves it will survive another few years, if you want to let it hang around.

Portugal (Red) ... Quinta De Ventozelo 2003 Touriga Nacional Tinto (\$19.95 - #657452) is a wine for those who dig port. Touriga Nacional is one of the grape varieties that goes into port, so the flavour profile only makes sense. You'll find black fruits all the way through, both nose and taste with port-like flavours of raisins, plums, chocolate and cherries. This one's delicious, decently priced and could age a few more years. I really liked this one.

And for dessert ... Depending how you like your dessert – dry or sweet. Sherry drinkers should jump at another chance to buy Gonzalez Byass Nutty Solera Oloroso (\$12.95 - #35204) not only is it a bargain, but very tasty, and this is coming from a non-Sherry drinker. The nose is rich with almond, raisin and marmalade smells. While the 'nutty' from the name follows through in the mouth: walnuts, almonds, cinnamon and orange marmalade with a bit of peel. Its medium-dryness keeps this one from being bitter. Finally, some euphoria from France: Euphoric Muscat De Rivesaltes (\$21.95 - #40618) a tasty little gem that has grapiness and pears on the nose; and in the mouth sweet white grape juice with a splash of lemony freshness.

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