

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



OntarioWineReview: Vintages Release Saturday December 8, 2007

The December 8th release has the distinction of not only falling on my birthday but also features “our finest” – coincidence? I think not. What “Our Finest” really means this time out is high priced wines from recognizable producers that have huge reputations to live up to ... and along with those huge reputations comes the price tags to match. Sadly, these days, the gap between the big names and the unknowns, when it comes to taste and quality, has never been narrower – and a bottle with a price tag of \$150 is hardly distinguishable from something selling for one-sixth the price. Alright, I’ve said my piece, if you have the dough you can make the comparison yourself. In this report I’ll unveil 9 wines from the “Our Finest” picks that seem to bring a little more to the table for their inflated price tag ... there’s also 12 reds, 3 whites, a delicious Sherry and something interesting for dessert. So let’s get right down to it.

“Finest” Sparklings and Champagnes ... Kicking us off is the Lanson Black Label Brut Champagne (\$44.95 - #41889), fresh, lively and fruity – a real pleasure to sip on with a seemingly sweet mid-palate ... the bubbles fade quickly so the longer it sits the easier it is to sip. Then there’s the pretty in pink Laurent-Perrier Cuvee Rosé Brut Champagne (\$89.95 - #158550), it claims to be extra-dry but with its strawberry/raspberry smells and flavours it gives the feeling of sweetness in the mouth. Finishing off “Our Finest” sparkling are these highly affordable, delicious numbers, one from California – Gloria Ferrer Sonoma Brut (\$23.95 - #192898), this one’s light and fruity with a gentle fizz, the taste is ripe apples with a citrus splash; the other is from Australia – Katnook Founder’s Block Sparkling Shiraz 2004 (\$19.95 - #53330), everything you’d expect from Shiraz but with some fizz ... imagine black fruit and pepper with a picky bite.

“Finest” Whites ... Fans of Alsatian Gewurztraminer should flock to this Zind-Humbrecht Herrenweg de Turckheim Gewurztraminer 2005 (\$43.95 - #993352) – what a nose ... spicy with rose petals and apricots, the mouth’s reaction is just as nice, here the floral continues along with some dried tropical fruits like papaya and pineapple. Trust the Germans not to let the French steal the show as the Wegeler Riesling Spatlese 2004 (\$29.95 - #918771) is a medium-sweet-Riesling fan’s dream; all peach, pears and apples – this one is just nice to sit and sip on; picture you and whatever friend you deem worthy to join you.

“Finest” Reds ... I was once in a wine cellar where the owner had many back vintages of Elderton Command Shiraz (\$74.95 - #716142), if what he’s holding onto is anything like the 2003 model (the current vintage released) I can see why. There is so much fruit here that it literally overwhelms the senses. First, there’s the nose of floral, pepper, red fruit and plum; then it’s onto the mouth. Starting off fairly innocuously with a slight cherry cola tinge, then everything kicks in – the brawny black fruit, the acid, the tough tannins and yet it all seems to come together in a sweet, smooth finish. Wow ... gotta try that one again. Italy, known for big, brawny, powerful reds – graces the LCBO shelves with La Serre Nuovo Dell Ornellaia 2005 (\$58.95 - #606194) – sweet tannins, good use of oak, lush red fruit, fine tannins ... this wine is elegance and finesse in a bottle. Two Spanish wines will round out the “Our Finest” section of my report: Alion 2003 (\$69.95 - #707166) – with its spicy black fruit which flows creamily through the mouth ending with a lengthy dark chocolate finish; and the Alvaro Palacios Les Terrasses 2004 (\$38.95 - #977843) is even more interesting. Great dark fruit with plum and spice, the tannins are barely noticeable in the mouth as it slips through, leaving behind a sweet cherry kick at the end ... if you buy wine to drink, buy the Les Terrasses, if you buy wine to hold, go with the Alion.

White Wine ...

As I mentioned in a previous report, winter time is not a good time for whites, so those craving pale wine are gonna be disappointed ... 17 whites are being released, of which 3 are deserving of your hard earned cash. California shows up with two of them in the form of these Chardonnays: Rodney Strong 2005 Chalk Hill Chardonnay (\$24.95 - #275552) ... the nose is oak and sweet vanilla, while each sip brings in vanilla and toffee flavours. Then there’s the Sanford 2005 Chardonnay (\$26.95 - #956003), which is at the other end of the spectrum ... kiwi and tropical fruit greet the nose, while in the mouth you’ll find similar flavours and a dash

of vanilla for extra depth of character. Australia is the location of my third and final white wine pick this release: Skuttlebutt 2005 Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon (\$17.95 - #47621) ... you'd swear this one's a New Zealander if you didn't read the label ... grapefruit nose with pink grapefruit flavours – it's pretty smooth going down with fairly light acidity (I didn't get the "zesty acidity" claimed in the notes) – this one's a palate pleasing sipper.

Red Wine ...

Unlike the whites, reds are plentiful this time of year – I have an even dozen to pitch ...

California ... One of my favourite California wineries is Ironstone, they make good wine at prices most people can afford. One of my perennial favourites is their Old Vines Zinfandel (\$16.95 - #951889) – the 2005 edition is jammy with strawberry, raspberry and cherry qualities ... this is typical of Zins in this price range, and probably why I love them so much – because it reminds me of those BBQ ribs I enjoy with it. Ironstone also has a 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$17.95 - #537597) in this release ... this sweet cherry fruit bomb contains milk chocolate and vanilla on the palate. You can buy both these great offerings using two 20's and still take yourself out for a cheapie breakfast afterward.

Oregon ... Not sure why I break the U.S. into states and everybody else into countries – as if California and Oregon are their own separate entities and not part of the greater whole we call the U.S and A (thanks for that Borat). Next time I'll make a conscious effort to amend my way of thinking, but for now let's check in on the Big Fire 2006 Pinot Noir (\$26.95 - #54841). We so rarely see something from Oregon; a state making a name for themselves in the Pinot department ... so here's your chance to find out why. Dry cranberry, sour cherry, red fruit and vanilla oak ... quite nice.

Australia ... I have some Aramis Vineyards wines on my rack, which I have not tried in a few years, but tasting their 2004 Shiraz (\$20.95 - #41202) reminds me why I bought them – this just might be the bargain red of this release: pepper, cassis, blackberry, with a creamy, spicy finish and hold-ability to spare; which is why I'm still sitting on mine. Another value is the Mitolo Jester Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (\$22.95 - #43224), very jammy and rich with plenty of blackberry ... this is a ballsy red, which seems to still find time to mix in some playful floral and herb notes – jester is a good name for it. Of course you can't go wrong with Penfolds, and their Bin 389 Cabernet/Shiraz 2004 (\$34.95 - #309625) is a nice, if not typical Aussie blend, combining the black fruit of Cab with the spiciness of Shiraz, all wrapped up in chocolate ... can't find anything wrong with that.

South Africa ... You've heard me rant and rave about my aversion to the typical South Africa stink (road tar and rubber) I get from many of their red wines, especially the lower priced ones, but Cathedral Cellars Triptych 2004 (\$16.95 - #53124) – a blend of Cab Sauv, Merlot and Shiraz is a value priced wine that finds its footing on the fruitier side of the street. It does have a little bit of funk in the mouth, but it is nothing that won't blow off with time in the bottle or some aeration in the glass or a decanter. When it comes to South African wine I find the Cathedral is good place to start your prayers in the hopes of finding a good one.

France ... Domaine Grand Veneur Chateaufeuf-du-Pape 2004 (\$38.95 - #41954) drops this smooth red fruited number onto Vintages shelves ... it has some sweet herbs on the palate, I would go as far as to chill this one for 30-60 minutes before serving. Another piece of the same pap, Domaine Grand Veneur Les Origines 2005 (\$54.95 – #43059) adds layers of black fruit and hold-ability.

Italy ... If you prefer your wines in the Italian style, and below \$20, you'll get a kick out of Il Conte Villa Prandone Marinus 2004 (\$18.95 - #52456) – plummy-black fruit goodness with flavours of oak and Mediterranean spices. Ending off the reds in this release are these two wines, which are my favourite Italian-red styles, Valpolicella Ripasso and Amarone. Remo Farina Vigna Montecorna Valpolicella Classico Superiore Ripasso 2003 (\$19.95 - #56267) is the best of the Ripasso's in this release. Plummy, black fruit and chocolate nuances, along with a hold factor that could see you drinking this wine 5-10 years down the road. Tenuta Sant'Antonio Amarone Delle Valpolicella 2003 (\$43.95 - #685107) has pepper and spice (and everything nice), dried fruit and plum, black cherry, heavy tannins and high alcohol (15.5%) ... everything we love Amarone for.

Oh Sherry ...

Last time out Gonzalez Byass brought us a half bottle of Noe (\$25.95), a Pedro Ximenez derived sweet sherry ... if you thought that was a little to pricey for such a pittance of wine (375ml) – then you can rejoice in the Osbourne Pedro Ximenez 1827 Sweet Sherry (\$17.95 - #47944) – a 750ml bottle that delivers Pedro

sweetness in spades. This one could almost be considered sickeningly sweet, but it's definitely a "little dab'll do ya" kind of wine. Pecan pie innards, raisin pie, candied raisins (choose your descriptor) with a rich chocolate coating ... there's also a bit of tannin – hard to believe it's there in and amongst all that sweetness, but it is.

And now for Dessert ...

There are plenty of Vintage Ports in this release, ranging in price from \$36.95 to \$69.95 ... and each one has something to offer the Port-lover, of which I am one; but the value of this release in Port-like wines, lies in a sweet wine from Greece: Kourtaki Mavrodaphne of Patras (\$12.95 - #208413). At last year's Gourmet Food and Wine show I discovered this wine just in time for the LCBO to delete it from their general list ... now back at Vintages this tawny-port-like wine has sweet prune, cherry, raspberry notes on the nose, with dried red fruit character in the mouth – so port-like if I poured it for you blind you'd swear it was the real thing. For \$12.95 buy a bottle or two and see what I mean ... well worth it.

Happy Shopping ... Happy Holidays ... Happy New Year. Heck Happy whatever – enjoy the holidays.

About OntarioWineReview: a website devoted to the love, enjoyment and promotion of Ontario's wines, wineries and lots more wine related issues – visit www.ontariowinereview.com to sign up for the free bi-weekly newsletter and feel free to browse around a little while you're there.



What can the Grape Guy do for you ... Michael Pinkus (Grape Guy) provides a variety of wine related services that you might be interested in taking advantage of: he gives lectures, leads seminars, conducts tastings, sets up tours; consults, selects and judges. He also gives interviews, broadcasts, podcasts and writes. [Contact the Grape Guy if you require any of these services or have any questions.](#)



Psst, Pass It On ... keep the good wine flowing. Pass this report onto to friends, family members, loved ones, or any other wine lover on your list of contacts.

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

© OntarioWineReview.com 2007. All rights reserved.

You may use the content of this newsletter by including full credit to Michael Pinkus, Grape Guy and a link to www.ontariowinereview.com