

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



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Keeping with their two-tiered release format, the LCBO brings us more wines from two separate, but possibly equal, sources. This time out it's all about wines that have received scores of 90 or higher (from "outside" sources) and wines that will make your Valentine swoon (these are mainly icewine and dessert wines and some have also received 90+ scores). So let's first take a look at what uncle Michael is recommending to "wine the heart" of the one you love ... and then we'll peak into the world of 90+.

Truth be told, a lot of the Valentine's Day special wines are icewines, and icewines of note can be found reviewed on my website (www.ontariowinereview.com - wine review section) and through the newsletter. But there are 2 outside Ontario Valentine's themed releases I'd like to point you in the direction of: 1) *Cattier Chigny-les-Roses Premier Cru Brut Rosé* (\$43.75 - #64907) a Champagne that has more than just its pretty pink colour going for it; raspberry on the nose with ripe strawberry, raspberry flavours that find a way to be a bit nippy on the tongue. The other Valentine's release should have the LCBO's good friend [Larry Patterson](#) hoping around like a hatter; for years Larry has been trying to rally Ontario's fruit wineries behind the idea of adding chocolate essence to their wines – and then get the LCBO to carry them. Seems the Rosenblum Winery out of California has beat him to the punch with their *Desiree Chocolate Dessert Wine* (\$24.50 - #61093 – 375ml). The nose is pure chocolate, which follows through on the palate, but the finish is more along the lines of a liqueur instead of the robust chocolate hinted at ... but still, who's kidding anyone, it's chocolate right? ... And who can say no to that.

Moving right along so as not to get too caught up with my chocolate obsession ... it's now time to check out those 90+ wines ... that's not the amount of wines in this release, but instead the magic score we're looking for. We'll start with an Australian Riesling – you read that correctly, a Riesling from Oz (they do more than oaky Chardonnay and fruit-bomby Shiraz, you know). This *Henschke Julius Riesling 2005* (\$36.75 - #945055) has great balance, with its apple-peach zing to its sweetness in the mouth – in fact, the "sweetness" is almost not apparent, relying instead on lots of citrus acidity to carry the show – there's even a slight hint of floral intrigue on the mid-palate. Then again you could just stick with the tried-and-true Rieslings from the Fatherland: *Reichsrat Von Buhl Armand Riesling Kabinett* (\$16.85 - #60905) – a good price for a 90-point Riesling – it's everything Riesling should be, and I loved the zingy peach explosion that happens in the mouth. Turning now to the west coast of North America there's the *Columbia Crest Grand Estates Merlot 2004* (\$19.85 - #263418) – this wine has consistently been a winner ever since I tried the 2001 vintage. Soft, supple, red and black fruit intermingle with a touch of chocolate and mocha ... you can see why Merlot is getting raves in Washington State. Speaking of good reds, you just knew Australia would have a few in this 90+ category ... well you're right there are three to choose from: The value priced *Pillar Box Red 2005* (\$17.40 - #685941) – don't let the simple mail slot label fool you, they are far from just mailing this one it ... dark, smooth and heavy (15% alcohol) – black fruit and spice do the dance on the tongue with its partner dark chocolate ... and there's even a holdability-factor of say 5 years or more (Parker gave this one a 91). There's also the *Piping Shrike Shiraz 2005* (\$19.75 - #048504), another high alcohol (14.5%) contender that brings rich plum fruit to the table with a sweet, plush finish – very easy on the palate. Those looking for a little more umph in their Oz can check out The Colonial Estate *Estrange Cabernet Sauvignon 2005* (\$31.55 - #020172) ... lots of plum on the nose and hints of mint in the mouth, very nice – and there's even a steady stream of black pepper throughout.

It wouldn't be a 90+ party if we didn't invite the French, and here they are: the Midi-bargain *Chateau de Se'rane Minervois Reserve de Chateau 2005* (\$22.85 - #651125) does the trick quite nicely. Black fruit flavours with a touch of spice and cedar ... nothing overpowering here, just a nice enjoyable wine for any occasion. With a Parker score of 90+ comes a jump in price (or so I have been told) so I wonder what the *Domaine de Cristia Chateauneuf-du-Pape 2005* (\$42.75 - #67678) would be selling for had it received only an 89. There's sweet strawberry licorice on the nose, which follows through nicely in the mouth – there's even some sweet herbs and floral kicking about in the glass.

Finishing off my look at the 90+ focus at Vintages come a real bargain from Spain (go figure): *Cyan 12 Meses 2003* (\$16.75 - #66936). It's a great winter warmer at 14.5% alcohol and with its café mocha, espresso flavours mixed in with robust tannins, it's one you'll want to savour come BBQ-season; in fact it makes me want to fire up the grill right now, head outside with my shorts on and a spatula in hand. For those not as adventurous, I recommend stocking up on a few of these puppies now, to get the jump on the Q-ing season ahead.

The Best of the Rest ...

We've looked at what the world thinks are 90+ wines, now let's look at what potentially could be in next year's release.

Let's kick it off by having our dessert first, "Russian-style" as my mother used to say, with this Sherry that I'm head over heels about: *Lustau Deluxe Cream Capataz Andres Solera Reserva* (\$9.90 - #48132) – full on nutty aromas lead to dates, figs and prunes on the palate ... and a sweet Sherry finish ... this one is pure amber coloured gold.

It's **Uruguay** or the highway (say it slowly) – alright maybe I'm getting a little silly here – but this wine really has something going for it: *Don Pascual Viognier 2006* (\$9.95 - #695031), it's very Chardonnay-like with oaky-vanilla nuances along with apples and peaches; no barrels were harmed in the making of this wine, but it's flavour profile suggests some extended lees contact ... this one's surprisingly enjoyable for \$9.95.

Out of **South Africa** comes a beauty of a white that leads me to believe that the signs of spring are just around the corner. A fresh fruit salad nose with nothing syrupy about it – in the mouth it develops a more citrus beginning before turning into a sweet fruit finish ... it's totally springy and enjoyable: *Kanu 2006 Chenin Blanc* (\$11.55 - #907089)

I don't find myself offering up a lot of **South African** reds for recommendations, and long time readers know it's because of the **South Africa** stink I find in a lot of their wines – it's as if they make their wines in the same place they make road tar and then through osmosis, well you get the picture ... but in this release there are two wines that buck that trend. First there's the *Boekenhoutsloof 'The Wolftrap' Syrah / Mourvedre / Viognier 2006* (\$14.75 - #626333) – I had a four year old Wolftrap a few months back and it was delicious, though I'm positive it didn't have the Viognier in the blend ... this version still had a bit of the stink, but the Viognier helps fruity-it-up and lying it down for a few years should calm everything right down. The second S.A. wine is a perennial favourite from Fairview, *Goats Do Roam in Villages* – this, the 2005 edition – (\$15.75 - #566851), is alive with fruit on the nose – the dirty arrives on the palate to a minor degree, but it mixes pleasantly with the black fruit and white pepper, sufficiently so that it is not detrimental to the flavours.

If you suddenly have the urge to speak French then you are in luck because we find ourselves in **France** (Alsace) ... and while there pick up a *Domaine Allimant-Laugner Pinot Gris 2006* (\$16.85 - #61317). Pretty in the mouth with floral and perfumey notes and the bite of a yellow delicious apple, tasty. Another Alsatian pick up should be this *W. Gisselbrecht Pinot Blanc Reserve Speciale 2006* (\$12.75 - #955872) – floral and perfume hits the nose and this time it is very Gewurzt-like in the mouth – with even a touch of something spicy ... the clean smooth finish leave you begging for more. At that price you might wanna think about picking up 2 or 3.

Hankering for a **French** red, then there are two to pick from here too ... *Chateau Jean Voisin 2001* (\$31.85 - #61804) with good heft and high acidity, this one will require a pound of flesh, if you're planning to consume early ... or you can lie it down and give it some time to settle. Your other option is a little less pricey and more drink now – though a few years in the cellar won't hurt it at all. *Domaine de l'Ameillaud Cairanne 2006* (\$14.75 - #660605) with its red fruit and floral nose and smooth enjoyable finish.

Sure our French friends made good Pinot Gris – but these days the **Italians** are on a role with it. So from **Italy** comes *Bottega Vinaia 2006 Pinot Grigio* (\$15.85 - #51623) – a light fruity nose with lots of citrus refreshment in the glass. This is what grigio is all about.

If you like your Pinot Noir on the juicy side check out the *Byron 2005 Pinot Noir* (\$33.75 - #704643) from the **U.S.A.** (California to be exact) – at first it lacks the usual tell-tale signs of Pinot (earthiness) instead it seems more spicy and fruit-driven, by the time the earth shows up to your mouth-party red fruit, cinnamon and oak have already stolen the show.

Chile is showing great promise with Carmenere after finding it in their vineyards and separating it out from

the Merlot. The *Equus Carmenere 2006* (\$12.75 - #55491) is chocolate all the way through with sweet tobacco and herbs supporting silky tannins. This one's full bodied (at 15% alc.) and very tasty – I would go as far as saying it's big and meaty, but without the price to match.

We'll end this tour through the wine world in Australia, as we check out the *Glen Eldon Dry Bore Shiraz 2004* (\$27.75 - #54197) – this could have been in the 90+ feature because Parker gave it a 92 – in someone's infinite wisdom they failed to put it there (maybe by press time that will be rectified). This one's all plummy, blackberry and Zin-like on the nose with a flavour profile that follows suit; there's also a great chocolate undercurrent and good tannin backbone. Zin-fans might gravitate towards this one more than your usual Aussie Shiraz-ophiles.

Happy Shopping.

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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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