

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



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In an effort to get more wine onto the market and in front of your eyeballs the LCBO has decided on a new release format – a major release focus (this time Argentina) and a minor focus (Portugal) – it's like being back at school. The good news is that the Argentinean wines are amazing values, and I have picked out 7 must buys for you. 4 Portuguese wines also make the grade, while 13 other wines from a variety of countries are reviewed; I know you'll find more than enough to keep you busy and to empty your wallet.

Major Country Featured: Argentina ...

Those looking for whites should skip ahead, Argentina is all about the reds in this release – big, juicy, mouth-watering, ageable reds: reds with enough power to knock you on your arse ... reds that demand steak (or other red meats) ... reds that are BBQ-ready (no better time to stock up for summer), ... and reds that won't break the bank (many are well under \$20 and over perform for the price). Argentina is the new home for Malbec – their signature grape – a Bordeaux grape that has fallen out of favour in France and that Argentina is revitalizing ... there are also blockbuster Syrah, Cab Sauv, Merlot and even a Tempranillo in this release ... so let's get right down to it.

Argentina is another one of those South American countries that is putting bang for the buck in the bottle (I count them with Chile), but even I was shocked by some of these bargains, so I will be marking exceptional value with a "BFB" (Bang for Buck) in the bracketed section (along with price and cspc number) for those I thought were too good to be true, there are 3 of them, so keep your eyes peeled when you're making up your list of what to buy.

We'll start off this Argentinean look with Malbec: El Portilla Elevado Malbec Reserve 2005 (\$17.80 - #55418) a whopping 14.5% in alcohol this one's all red fruit and alcohol, but it's supremely delicious. There's a *Jean Bousquet Malbec Reserva 2006* (\$17.80 - #55244), it's an organic wine, which is why you're paying a little more, but it has a red fruit and smooth chocolate elegance to it that I wasn't expecting in an organic – she's a real beauty. Here's the first of my "bang for the buck" recommendations: *Saurus Patagonia Select Malbec 2005* (\$14.85 - #55459 – BFB) – rich tannins, delicious chocolate, black fruit galore ... this one will age gracefully over the next 5+ years or you can enjoy it right now. How about a Cab Sauv – there's the *Lagarda Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$13.85 - #55186) with its rich tannins, biting mouthfeel along with black fruit and chocolate. Merlot is a staple all over the world (most of it anyway) and Argentina is no different, the *Weinert 2003 Merlot* (\$14.85 - #656371) is a ripe red fruit number with some cocoa and a decent amount of tannins ... very nice. Then there's the *Finca El Retiro Syrah 2004* (\$12.85 - #928283 – BFB) lovely and smooth, a soft white pepper nose and great red fruit palate ... this one's awesomely delicious and check out that price. Finally, *Finca El Retiro has a Tempranillo Reserva Especial 2004* (\$14.85 - #57216 – BFB), which just might be the best wine of this release. Sweet black fruit and vanilla-oak nose leads to a silkiness in the mouth with a chocolate-based tannin finish – big and biting – I absolutely loved this wine ... and again look at the price. Best of all, every one of the wines listed above you can hold for 3-5+ years. Keep your eye on Argentina for more value wines that I am sure will be coming down the pike.

Minor Country Feature – Portugal ...

Too early to talk about dessert? Not when it comes to Portugal's signature wine: Port. The only one being launched this release is a good one, *Quinta Do Noval Late Bottled Vintage 2001* (\$24.75 - #677815) ... everything you'd expect, red and black fruit, pluminess, spiciness, chocolate – it's all here. A good white wine comes to us from *Quinta de Azeveda Vinho Verde 2006* (\$11.85 - #727115) good value in a youthful vibrant white; it's got a bit of peachy-spritz in the mouth and a crisp acidity that makes it worthwhile for you to pick some up now and wait till the warm weather gets here to enjoy it, if you uncork one now you'll be dreaming of the hot weather to come – it's not summer in a glass, but it sure makes you think about it. There are also two tasty reds coming our way: *Palestia Vinho Tinto* (\$14.85 - #59089) with its sweet fruit plummy and

yumminess – this one has good oak integration throughout. Finally, there's the *Quinta da Alorna Castelao 2005* (\$N/A - #21287), another red fruit sweetie with plenty of oaky-vanilla tones, can be fully enjoyed now or within a few years.

White Wine ...

Australia – How's about we kick off the whites with the king of white – Chardonnay. Actually the real grape king is Cabernet Sauvignon (king of reds anyway) so would that make Chardonnay the queen? Discuss. Anyway, the *Richard Hamilton Almond Grove Chardonnay 2006* (\$16.85 - #741009) has a vanilla cream nose with a palate that's all oaky and creamy with apples and pears ... there's plenty of tree fruit in this glass; more yum from Oz.

France – Time to check in with Riesling, this Alsatian *Domaine Henri Schoenheitz Classiques 2005* (\$16.85 - #62315) is the best Riesling of the release (that includes the German's) ... crisp yet peachy, wonderful in the mouth with its lemony-peachyness, very enjoyable with a friendly mouth-appealing finish.

Italy – Not sure what's up with these refreshing whites coming to market in the middle of winter, I'd expect more winter hardy, oaky Chardonnays to be hitting the shelves, but what the heck it allows me to stockpile wines so that I am ready come the first day of spring. *Bollini Pinot Grigio 2005* (\$16.85 - #951319) would be one of those wines in that collection – this one's fruity and lovely, a clean finish loaded with apples and pears. A real palate pleaser from the country that started the Grigio trend.

Red Wine ...

California – Here's a real red fruit bomb from the Hollywood state, all jammy and very cherry: *Jekel 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$16.85 - #967853) – it's more of a drink now than a hold wine, but it's very enjoyable either way.

Chile – Here's an oddball blend from Chile a *Reserve Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot (2004) from Marchigue* (\$13.85 – #48298) – chocolate and blackberry in the mouth and a surprising vanilla strawberry finish – this rarely seen combination is a steal at the price and what's, more there's plenty of time in this bottle, a 5 year test lie-down would be interesting ... but also buy some to drink now. It's wines like this that proves to me that Chile is still on top of the value board; with Argentina and Spain a close second.

France – One of my pricier recommendations this release is the *Chateau d'Aiguilhe 2004* (\$38.70 - #671370) from the Cotes de Castillo in the Bordeaux region. This wine is beautiful; loaded with black fruit, pepper, cassis and blackberries, very smooth in the mouth with a big tannin grip showing off its potential for ageability. Moving to the Midi region, more specifically Cahors, where they make some of the best value age-worthy wines in the world ... and when I say age-worthy I mean 10 years plus. The *Chateau St. Didier Parnac Prestige 2004* (\$14.85 - #303529) is top-loaded with Malbec (75%) and shows a real difference from the Argentinean versions of this varietal. While the Argentine wines are more fruit forward, the French version is more tannin and acid driven, a wine that will be drinking well long after you've consumed your last bottle from South America. Finally, from our French friends, comes a Syrah from the Northern Rhone – a big, bold, peppery number dominated by black cherries in the mouth, the nose is what will really reel you in though, and for \$16.95 this *Cave de Tain Crozes Hermitage 2003* (#572230) is a real bargain.

Italy – 4 reds here worth mentioning: the *Castello de Nieve Barbaresco 2004* (\$21.80 - #674044) with its cranberry, plum, cedar, herb, spice and touch of red currant ... this one also has sustainability so lying it down is no crime. Then there's the *Taurino Salice Salentino Rosso Riserva 2003* (\$15.85 - #411892); a more drink now style red (or over the next 2-3 years) with cocoa and coffee flavours and good tannin structure. From Veneto comes 2 of my favourite styles of Italian wine, Ripasso and Amarone. There are 2 Ripassos in this release and both are the same price, but for my money I'd invest in the *Delibori Valpolicella Classico Superiore Ripasso 2003* (\$15.85 - #59246) with its richer riper fruit flavours: plummy over pruney and raisiny over grapey – there's good extracted black fruit and heavy tannins that could see this one lying down over the next 5+ years. The Amarone is good for the price, a plummy, dried fruit and chocolate number that delivers good taste, ageability and value at \$34.65: *Due Torri Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico 2003* (#724740).

Spain – Finally, here's a Spanish gem you'll want to hang around with: *Hacienda el Espino 1707 Variedades 2004* (\$13.85 - #673582) – sweet cherries take over on the mid-palate while cedar and vanilla finish it off ... I really liked this value driven Spanish red – but then again I seem to be liking the wines from this country.

Now, make your list, check it twice and go get something to warm your soul this Saturday.

Happy Shopping.

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