

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



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This week in Vintages there's a major and a minor spotlight. The major focus is on California – both white and red; then there's a smaller look at some wines from Israel. Let's start there then move on to the rest of the world of wine.

Israel ... We'll start with Israel because there are only 6 wines to choose from (1 white, 5 red) ... but not all 6 are worth picking up; in fact, I can recommend two and highly recommend one. There's the consumer friendly Tulip Winery 2005 Just Cabernet (\$19.95 - #35097), nothing earth shattering here, in fact the nose might turn you off, but the mid-palate should swing you back into the yes column, with sweet oak, vanilla and some red and black fruit flavours. But if you only want one Israeli wine that'll shine, check out the Vitkin Winery 2005 Carignan (\$19.95 - #35071) – ignore the high alcohol (14.5%), focus instead on the spicy red fruit nose; or the licorice, red fruit and sweet oak flavours ... this one's the real winner from the promised land. Pick up a couple, this one should age nicely over the next few years.

Now that we're done in the holy land it's time to look at La La Land ... Cali-forn-i-a. There's a lot of pricey stuff coming out from the Schwarzenegger-state, but there are also some good values too; if you're willing to look for them.

California (White) ... Value isn't what Grgich Hills is all about, it's about the name – Mike Grgich was one of those winemakers who helped topple the French during the '76 tasting. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying this is a bad Chardonnay, just the opposite in fact, this is a darn tasty Chard that has good staying power for the cellar and a wonderful fruit finish – but value it's not: Grgich Hill 2004 Chardonnay (\$60.95 - #43901). Save it for that really special occasion.

California (Red) ... A few different reds, a few different styles. Blackstone 2005 Syrah (\$19.95 - #740035) has good pepper and spice, which follows through on the palate. Two Zins are better than one, as long as they aren't deadly. There are a few in this release, it being the unofficial grape of California and all, but only two really stand out. The Wine of the Month, Gnarly Head 2005 Old Vines Zinfandel (\$17.95 - #678698) is made by the Delicato Family. This is textbook old vines – the red fruit is there, so are the rum and raisin aromas, the stewed fruit compote and an overly ripe squishy-peach. The palate is delicious, seemingly sweet, but definitely dry with its all red fruit compote flavours. If you have never tried a Zin, the Head is where you should begin. After that you can graduate to this next one: Rosenblum 2005 Zinfandel – Appellation Series from Paso Robles (\$29.95 - #31781). This has a typical Zin nose that any Zinfandel fan could pick out across a crowded room with the added bonus of black plum. The taste is almost typical with its sweet plum and ripe strawberry, but there are a few bonuses thrown in for good measure, like a dash of rum and coke ... and the finish is quite persistent. Stonehedge 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (\$24.95 - #25122) has a peppery black fruit and raisin nose, but currently the fruit is masked by the weight of the oak. There is some smooth chocolate and white pepper in there though, making this an easy recommend - but let it sit for a bit to better integrate with the wood ... try it again in the next year or two. Finally, the Tablas Creek 2004 Cotes de Tablas Rouge (\$25.95 - #36624) is very consumer friendly, with lots of red fruit and sweet berries; there are some smooth tannins here too. A blend of Grenache, Syrah, Mouvedre and Counoise it's a very interesting wine, especially with the red licorice finish that seems to hang around an extra, extra, extra long time. Though I think the Parker score of 88 jacked the price past the twenty-dollar mark where it belongs.

Australia (White) ... Summer's here so the whites are back in vogue. Australia has 2 Chards and a blend that might speak to you white wine lovers. First, there's the Tapestry 2004 Chardonnay (\$19.95 - #31500) with a fantastic nose of melon and tropical fruit, the palate has similar features and some barely detectable oaking. Definitely worth its price. Tobacco Road 2005 Unwooded Chardonnay (\$16.95 - #30924) is a welcome wine from the Aussies; it's good to see them scaling back from the heavy use of wood in their Chards. This one is more pear than apple on the nose with tropical tastes and a mere hint of butteriness, although it is unoaked, hmmm ... tasty though. Watershed 2006 Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon (\$16.95 - #31468) is a great summer refresher with citrus and grapefruit on the nose. In the mouth, the Semillon reigns

in the more citrusy Sauv and creates a nice harmony of flavours – this one's an easy recommendation for those hot summer days.

Australia (Red) ... Summer's here and the BBQ season has most certainly begun (must find all kinds or reasons to praise summer while it's here). There are a number of Australian reds that'll go perfectly with those get togethers around the grill. Kicking things off there's the perennial favourite Clarence Hill 2004 Shiraz (\$19.95 - #599811) with good spicy red and black fruit and a mouthful of tannins ... this wine has red meat written all over it. D'Arenberg (you know the wine with the red line across the label) has The Cadenzia 2004 Grenache Shiraz Mourvedre (\$25.95 - #661587), I always find that the price of these wines is going up, but so is the quality. There's a wonderful nose of sweet cherries and rhubarb pie with a titch of black pepper, the taste echoes the nose with a good tannin grip. Taltarni 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$21.95 - #940692) has a sweet red fruit and mint nose; the palate is red berry dominated with smooth tannins and a good lengthy finish. Finally we have two wines from Lucky Country, a 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$16.95 - #29389) and a 2004 Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon blend (\$16.95 - #642702), both are good value for what's in the bottle, but for the same price go for the blend there's just a whole lot more going on and it's as fun to smell as it is to drink.

France (White) ... Hooray for Alsace, especially this time of year, they're always making great whites to enjoy and the price doesn't take too big a bite out of you. Willm 2005 Gewurztraminer Reserve (\$16.95 - #686303) is a prime example of that. Soft rose petal and lychee on the nose while in the mouth there's orange peel, white peach, and some floral notes that have a faint roseyness about them. This one truly is delicious and worth every penny.

France (Red) ... We're also being supplied with some really nice bargains in the red department this month. Starting it off in Bordeaux, Graves to be exact, the Chateau de Gaillat 2001 (\$20.95 - #35834) – smoke and black fruit dominated with some cedar on the palate ... this one has the stuffing to last a few years anyway, so give it a little rest in the cellar. Cheateau de Vivier 2003 (\$19.95 - #35618) from the Medoc has licorice, black berry and some raspberries on the nose, with cinnamon, vanilla and black fruit on the palate; there's also some oak in this one, my recommendation is to hold this one for a couple more years, cause it's only gonna get better. Chateau Rousset 2003 (\$18.95 - #731380) has good cinnamon with allspice on the nose, along with black fruit and licorice. The palate is rich and loaded with black fruit, thick tannin and oak. This one should also find a spot in your cellar for 2-4 years. Finally, rounding off our adventure in France is a fun little wine called Le Grand Noir (Black Sheep) 2004 Cabernet/Shiraz (\$15.95 - #30296). Here's another of those animal labels, though sheep don't usually don't inspire one to buy wine – well think again. This one has both red and black fruit on the nose and palate, with touches of cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla brought on by the 6 months spent in oak. Here's a BBQ wine that's fun for the whole family – the kids can look at the outside and the adults can have what's inside.

Germany (White) ... Dr. Pauly- Bergweiler 2006 Riesling (\$13.95 - #596601) from the Mosel ... need I say more. Alright, how about this, enjoyable sweetness in the mouth, lemon and peach on the nose, good acidity, well balanced, lingering finish, 10% alcohol and \$13.95 ... what are you waiting for, write it down, circle it, but for godsake don't pass this one up.

Spain (Red) ... Ending this tour through the world of Vintages we stop in Spain for this Marques de Valcarlos Gran Reserva 1998 (\$22.45 - #687251) – this 9 year old wine has good plum, spice, raspberry and raisins on the nose; the plum and raspberry continue on to the palate with some strawberries for good measure; there's also enough tannins here to match well with something from the BBQ – you decide what you want to eat, just make sure it's grilled. Happy eating, and drinking.

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