

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



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This Vintages release seemed to be taking us to Italy (mama would be so proud), because there were at least 12 Italian wines on the table ... but recently I learned the focus was Burgundy (France) – of which there were only 10 wines, all from the '05 vintage. Being that this report was already based on the Italians I thought I would keep it that way (with apologies to Burgundian wine fans).

I'm a big fan of Italian wine; in fact Vapolicella and Ripasso are some of my favourites, because they offer up some really good values, the Ripassos especially due to their ageability. Now with the holidays just around the corner, the LCBO thinks you'll be in the mood to plunk down a little more money for a bottle of wine, Italy just happens to be the country to deliver those bottles. Speaking of bottles, the folks at the BO also think you'll be willing to buy big bottle (maybe you'll be doing some entertaining, or going to entertainments, at this time of year) so they have magnums (1.5 litres) and double magnums (3 litres) – that way one bottle will quench all, but remember, big does not always mean less expensive. Let's take a look.

Italy ... As mentioned there are plenty of over-priced Italian wines this time out. For value I was able to pick out two. The Montezovo 2004 Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso (\$29.95 - #23523) an elegantly packaged wine that follows it up on the inside. Plum, dried fruit and cherry on the nose; rich blackberry and cherry flavours with a touch of apparent sweetness (but have no fear, it's dry). A wine you could easily hold on to for the next 3-5 years. Then there's the Zanato Ripasso Valpolicella Superiore 2004 a wine where you go high (or in this case big) or go home. You can buy the sample size (375ml) for 13.95 (#43547) or go all the way up to the 3-litre bottle for \$127.95 (#43554) – great dried fruit and plum, but you're either buying a little or a lot, there's just no middle of the road here. Then there's the Michele Chiarlo Nivole Moscato D'Asti 2006 (\$12.95 – 650440 – 375ml) – small packaging seems to be all the rage (as you will soon see) – this fizzer has a big grapey taste and it's got some good sweetness to liven up the tongue – there's tons of fun in this little bottle. Buy a few to make the fun last – or better yet, use it as a way to start off that special breakfast for the one you love over the holidays, or the one you are trying to impress.

France (Champagne) ... We come home from Italy with very little to show for it ... so let's move north to France and see if we can't pick up something nice there. Those looking for some French sparkle should check out the half bottle (375ml) Drappier Carte D'or Champagne Brut (\$21.95 - #40576) – toasty-apple and citrus notes with an interesting touch of sweetness (apparent again) in this extra-dry wine.

France (White) ... How 'bout a little white Burgundy (one from this month's feature) – Maison Champy Pernand-Vergelesses 2005 (\$29.95 - #8151) with its buttery, vanilla, nutmeg nose – you'll find the buttery gives way in the mouth to tree fruit and vanilla – quite yummy. We move on to the Loire for another fine white, this time it's a Chenin Blanc – Les Coteaux de Tuffiers Vouvray Demi-Sec 2005 (\$15.95 - #57018). Sure there's a little bit of sweetness (for real), but what do you expect from a wine that has so much fresh sweet pineapple on the nose and follows through on the mouth ending with peaches and pears ... this one's delicious.

France (Red) ... Wanna pick up some French red? Well then the Chateau Fugeres 2001 (\$51.95 - #46748) is all Bordeaux Grand Cru, right down to the price. Licorice, black fruit, cinnamon and cedar (nose) with a lush and smooth mouthfeel that was just too good to spit – you can drink now or hold for a number of years with great results. There's a Cotes de Blaye that's more than okay, in fact it's red and black fruit based with a touch of cedar and some bold tannins, all at the nice price of \$19.95 – Chateau Roland La Garde Tradition 2003 (#46565). Lastly, in Franc there's the Chateau de la Gardine Chateauneuf-du-Pape 2004 (\$35.95 - #604124) with dark fruit, chocolate, plum and cherry – the mouth also feels cool (even when the wine is warm), full on cherries and soft cedar. It's an easy drinking red that's got some ageability to it.

Portugal (Red) ... Staying old school, or old world, we'll go to Portugal for two nice reds. The Quinta Das Sentencastas Alenquer 2005 (\$13.95 - #50930) has deep, dark, rich black fruit throughout; while the Porca

de Murca Reserva Tinto 2003 (\$17.95 - #684753) brings more to the table for its four-dollar bump: juicy red and black fruit, some plum and chocolate notes – and, hold-ability (3-5 years easy).

Spain (Red) ... Something's definitely not kosher in Spain, well hold on a second, this one is, Makor De Elviwines 2004 (\$18.95 – #39917) red and black fruit with a touch of coffee on the nose, great cherry flavours with some plummy in the mouth – there are so few good kosher wines, but this one has the stuff, and what's more, it'll keep for a couple of years – don't Passover this one. Where else but from Spain can you find a wine just released onto shelves for under \$20, that's 8 years old and still tastes vibrant and alive. Vina Albani Gran Reserva 1999 (\$17.95 - #9621) has well integrated berry fruit and some wood, along with a touch of tannin – drink now or over the next two years.

Georgia on my mind (*Red*) ... I've been waiting a long time to use that opening line in print; Georgian wines aren't usually all that good, sure they have their fans, but they are rarely worth recommending, nine times out of ten the packaging outshines the wine inside the bottle. But here's one that just might be worth your \$15.95 – Telavi Napareuli (#48116) – it's one of the best Georgian wines I've ever tried with its cinnamon-red fruit flavours and aromas.

California, here I come (*Sparkling*) ... Only seems fitting after the Georgia song quote, but now it's off to the new world to check out what's coming out. We'll start you off with some bubbly: the Gloria Ferrer Sonoma Brut (\$11.95 – 53504 – 375ml) to be exact. Good apple and citrus notes on the nose with a light bubble in the mouth and at half the price of the French wine this may be your ticket to happiness.

California (White) ... Two nice whites come out of California this time out. The 30th Anniversary Vintage from Calera, 2005 Chardonnay (\$22.95 – #713313) – upfront fruitiness with tree and tropical aromas and flavours; there's also a nice lingering, almost sweet, finish, thanks to the vanilla and oak. Speaking of sweet, if you haven't checked out Ironstone's Obsession Symphony (2006) – (\$14.95 - #355784), you owe it to yourself to do so. It's made the same way every year from the Symphony grape (a cross between Muscat of Alexandria and Grenache Gris) ... the smells are grapy and Riesling-like, while the taste is best described as Asti without the fizz.

California (Red) ... There's big and small coming out of California this release – and I'm not just talking about taste. There's the J. Lohr Seven Oaks 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon that has chocolate, mint, cherries, plums and cinnamon all the way through. The LCBO doesn't care what size bottle you buy because there's no break for bulk: 750ml, 19.95 (#656561) or 1500ml, 39.95 (#16915) – in fact it's 5-cents cheaper to buy two small bottles. It's also no deal to buy the bulk (1500ml) of the Joseph Phelps 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon with its fruit bomb cherry flavours. A half bottle (375ml) will run you \$39.95 (#36939) while the big boy (1500ml) will set you back \$179.95 (#36921) – you do the math on this one, remember you need 4 of the smalls this time to make up the big gun. Coming out in standard bottle size (750ml) is both the Toasted Head 2004 Merlot (\$19.95 - #969816), so typical Cali-Merlot I can't even describe it cause you've tried it a hundred times before, if you like California Merlot try it, you'll like it; and the Truchard 2003 Zinfandel (\$18.95 - #54858) – all the typicity of Zin, but I like Zin (and I like this Zin), so shoot me for recommending it.

Argentina (Red) ... Altos Las Hormigas 2006 Malbec (\$13.95 - #640490), there's good value in this bottle. Spice, chocolate, oaks, berry flavours with some coffee inspiration – drink now or hold up to 3 years.

Chile (Red) ... One high priced and one low priced wine – both very nice. Casa Lapostolle 2005 Cuvee Alexandra Merlot (\$32.95 - #459206) has deep rich colour to go along with its red fruit and chocolate nose, cherries, chocolate and coffee, by way of mocha, in the finish; absolutely lovely ... if not for the price I'd be buying 3 or 4. The Vina Casablanca El Bosque Syrah 2005 (\$15.95 - #46276) is more in my price range. This Aussie knock-off, with a hint of mint and eucalyptus, goes whole hog to copy Ozland, except for the name; they opt for the French spelling. Smooth with a touch of pepper along with some chocolate and red fruit for good measure.

Australia (Red) ... You knew sooner or later I'd get to these guys, can't go a whole report without touching on something from the great down under. There's a Shiraz any good Australian wine lackey would love: Kilikanoon The Lackey Shiraz 2005 (\$17.95 - #5199) pepper, black fruit nosed, and chocolate cherry smoothness on the tongue. Then there's the Two Hands Gnarly Dudes 2006 Shiraz (\$24.95 - #660043) smooth with spicy black fruit and some white pepper on both the nose and taste. But the real wows come from Yalumba. Tricentenary Vines Grenache 2003 (\$30.95 - #588186) with a fantastic smoothness and flavour that has been squeezed from those low yielding vines; and the 2002 Signature Cabernet Sauvignon/Shiraz (\$44.95 - #528356) – big fruit, rich tannins, good acidity – this one's big and brawny with tons of age-ability to spare.

South Africa (Red) ... Regular readers have heard me talk about the typical South Africa stench in their wines (road tar, galvanized rubber, earthiness) but it seems as you go up the price ladder the smell goes away. Graham Beck 2002 The Ridge Syrah (\$26.95 - #607812) foregoes "the smell" for spices and fruit (red plum, cassis and black pepper); very nice.

Canada (Red) ... How's about a quick detour into our own country before heading off to the desserts table ... Church & State Wines from out British Columbia-way has this 2004 Merlot (\$24.95 - #56861) that caught my fancy. With its oak, pepper, cherry, plum nose and taste, it's a little sweet in the mouth with a high 14.51% alcohol and almost port-like aromas (cherries and dried fruit), but it's a lovely wine from the other coast.

What's for Dessert ... There are lots of treats this release, from ports to sheries and some great stuff from the fringes of winemaking, so let's get right down to it. From *Hungary* comes Royal Tokaji Aszu Blue Label 5 Puttonyos 2000 (\$19.95 - #972836 – 250ml) as sweet as the day is long, but heavenly for those who like their botrytis wines, imagine Riesling icewine without the price tag. *Sherry-lovers* get a double dip this release, with two half bottles from Emilio Lustau. There's the sweet East India Solera Sherry (\$13.95 - #713636 – 375ml) with its almond and apricot flavours and smells; or the nutty and drier Palo Contado Almacenista Vides (\$21.95 - #745554 – 375ml). *Port-fans* will be glad to see the return of Quinta de la Rosa Finest Reserve Port (\$21.95 - #715540), which is down a dollar from last year's price. Rich cherries, plums and chocolate dominate, with all kinds of other delicate and robust flavours and smells – your favourite chair in front of the fire beckons for this one. Finally my fringe dessert selection comes from south of the border; we go back to *California* for Quady Elysium 2006 (\$13.95 - #276840 – 375ml) a 15% alcohol Black Muscat sweetie. Raspberry, strawberry, blackberry and a touch of alcohol hit the nose, while the taste is wonderful and delicious, if not fully explainable in words. This one's a must try – serve it over the holidays.

Enjoy making your list and Happy Shopping.

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