

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



OntarioWineReview: Vintages Release Saturday November 24, 2007

For today's release the focus is on "premium reds" ... not whites, not rosés, simply reds – and so in honour of these Simply Reds I've named each of the wines I enjoyed after a Mick Hucknall voiced song ... why Mick Hucknall? Because he is the lead singer of the band Simply Red.

To start off our look at these "Simply Reds" we'll start with their most notable songs and move towards the obscure. "Holding Back the Years" goes to this Italian cinnamon-raspberry number that's rich and robust with a touch of cedar: Antonari Pian Della Vigne Brunello di Montalcino 2001 (\$61.95 - #651141) ... what's more, it'll last quite a few years. "Something Got Me Started" takes us to California where many people's first love for wine began; there you'll find Raymond 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve (\$31.95 - #715979) a jammy little number rich in strawberries and cinnamon with nutmeg, pepper and some vanilla-red fruit laced throughout. Zinfandel is my "If you Don't Know me By Now" selection; many know Zinfandel as sweet and pink, but this grape is not normally so effeminate – it's bold and red and furthermore, it's as Californian as sunny days and surf-boards. Chocolate and berries fill the bowl on this one (blackberries and red currants) with cherry cola, white pepper and compote flavours – there are also some interesting seemingly sweet notes on the palate; wondering what wine I'm talking about it's the Rosenblum's 2004 Annette's Reserve Zinfandel (\$54.95 - #686204). Then there's the \$64.95 Catena Alta 2004 Malbec (#982355) from Argentina ... I have never seen or heard of a Malbec for that price, which is why I thought of "Money's Too Tight to Mention" as it's parallel song. It's mostly because I can't afford this beauty, but if you have the dough this expensive and expressive wine is one to get: Chocolate and blackberries that are smooth and easy on the tongue. There is the picture of a stick on the front label of the bottle, so it can serve a dual purpose – first you drink it then throw it to the dog to play fetch with (that or they are being very blunt about sticking it to you at that price).

Let's head off to France for something to "Mellow My Mind", Chateau de Pez 2003 (\$51.95 - #717389) is a wine that should come with a flip-top head for easier access. This tasty number has a nose of cinnamon candied fruit with a whiff of pepper. The tongue acts as a sponge when you drink this one, soaking in all that great flavour – then you suck and squeeze and each time you do it delivers a whole new fruity treat sensation. Another "Thrill Me" red comes from France in the guise of E. Guigal Cote-Rotie Brune and Blonde 2003 (\$81.95 - #352534) – this one's the 4 B's: big, bold, brawny and beaucoup (as in d'argent). Rich blackberry, cassis, plum, smoke and tobacco. We head back to Italy for this "Sad Old Red" not because it's fading fast, but because it's the oldest red on my list of like-it-a-lots. Lungarotti Rubesco Riserva Vigna Monticchio 2000 (\$38.95 - #51771) – a nose of sweet red fruit and hickory; the hickory sticks around in the mouth along with some plum jam, blackberry and a tannin streak that shows that although its 7 years old this wine still has some life left in the bottle. Maybe this is my politically incorrect side coming out, but my "Ghetto Girl" wine is from Spain, Montecastro Y Llanahermosa 2004 (\$34.95 - #15016) – and why you may ask – because this wine is urban in nature ... black black black (colour, nose and taste). Finally, amongst all these "Stars" is this simple red born in Australia: The Colonial Estate 2005 Envoy – Grenache / Shiraz / Mourvedre (\$31.95 - #47563) with its plummy, blackberry jam nose and its lush flavours, despite its higher than usual alcohol; it also has smooth milk chocolate on the palate, a real pleaser. And that's my look at the songs of Simply Red as they pertain to the "Simple Reds" of this week's release ... as for the rest of the impressive wines:

Sparklers and Champagne ... Champagne's the way to go this time round, with a bottle of Ayala Rosé Majeur Brut (\$61.95 - #51359) - good fruit finish with a lively raspberry kick as it goes through the mouth.

White Wine ... As we get closer and closer to those cold months the selection of white wines start to dry up at Vintages; there are only 3 worth getting your hands on this time out; two from California and one from Germany. Two Chardonnays from the West Coast, Beringer Third Century 2005 Chardonnay (\$23.95 - #47696) a light Chard with touches of buttery oak and palate friendly vanilla. On the other hand, the Ferrari-Carano 2004 Chardonnay (\$41.95 - #295055) is a heavy duty Chardonnay with lots of oak, more butter and vanilla than its counterpart above, and plenty of apple, toffee and caramel notes.

There are two German Rieslings in this release, the Mosel wins out as the more elegant of the two at the same price point: Studert-Prum Riesling Spatlese (\$23.95 - #912659).

Red Wines ...

Canada (not Ontario) – You’ve probably heard of Mission Hill out in British Columbia – and with wines like this 2004 Reserve Merlot (\$24.95 - #553313) it’s no wonder. Smooth and supple in the mouth with a touch of vanilla and cinnamon, you’ll also find black fruit and cassis floating around in the glass.

Chile – This is a real beauty from Chile. Estampa Gold Assemblage 2004 (\$18.95 - #47522), a blend of Carmenere, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cab Franc and Petit Verdot that has a rich, if not typical, Chilean nose: black fruit, chocolate and sweet plum. In the mouth it’s rich, smooth and delicious with black fruit and mint flavours. Yum! At this price it’s a multi-pick-up.

Australia – Five Australian reds make the grade this time out, starting with the D’Arenberg The Galvo Garage 2003 Sauv / Merlot / Petit Verdot / Franc (\$26.95 - #907584), loaded with spices and herbs I found it very tasty and what’s more, it’s got lots of other flavours like chocolate, rum, cherries and cola; this one’s another winner from the folks at D’Arenberg. Grant Burge has a 2004 Barossa Vines Shiraz (\$17.95 - #738567) that’s jammy with raspberry and cherry flavours on the tongue – pepper, black fruit and chocolate are the aromas that’ll get up your nose. Grant also has a 2005 Miamba Shiraz (\$19.95 - #727127) a year younger and all red and black fruit with bigger tannins and plummy chocolate in the mouth. Maybe you’re looking for some really ripper stuff from down under, Hope Estates delivers with The Ripper! Shiraz (\$19.95 - #686865), another jammy red fruit behemoth that has candied red fruit on the palate with a big cherry finish. The final Aussie Shiraz and the real monster of these five - one that’ll be going strong well into the next decade - is the Thorn-Clarke Shotgun Barossa Shiraz 2005 (\$24.95 - #18796) is just too good to properly describe: chocolate, cherry with beautiful elegant fruit flavours and a hint of coffee on the nose – this one’s well worth every penny.

France – Not to be outdone, the French bring out a couple of wines that hit the taste mark dead on. A single vineyard Gamay from Beaujolais, Domaine de Champ de Cour Moulin-a-Vent 2005 (\$19.95 - #430876) – a quaffable, chillable red that has some cherries and spice ... delicious. Chateau de Montmirail Gigondas Cuvee de Beauchamp 2004 (\$24.95 - #685198) brings a little something extra to the table in the form of anise, herbs, spice, red fruit and a kick of pepper ... there’s also some coffee bean, mocha and espresso ... all with a high 15% alcohol.

Italy – Another proud wine culture brings us a couple of good reds. Casa Emma Chianti Classico 2004 (\$20.95 - #56952) is soft spicy and plummy in the olfactories, and follows through with the same in the mouth. Then there’s the Monte Del Fra Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2001 (\$45.95 - #47506) everything you drink port for but without the sweetness and thickness – though it smells like it’s loaded with sugar: chocolate, cherry, plum, dried fruit – one of the best deals in this release, even at 46 bucks a bottle.

Spain – The Spanish put another tasty, well-priced red on the table: Vina Hermina Excelsus 2004 (\$22.95 - #50567) – smooth and juicy with sweet red fruit, cinnamon and herbs throughout.

Other Wines ...

Japan – I rarely get to put the land of the rising sun down as its own title so this is a thrill – and so is the sake I am about to recommend. Sudo Honka Sato No Homare Junmai Ginjo (\$38.95 - #740142) – a top grade sake. The smell of sweet sticky rice with a touch of fruitiness; there’s a funky citrus taste on the tongue which cleanses the palate and becomes very enjoyable on the finish.

For Dessert ...

It’s Sherry or Port this time out. I’m a huge Port fan, and the Quinta de la Rosa LBV Port 2003 (\$24.95 - #726885) is a beautiful example of Late Bottled Vintage Port with its sweet cherries, plum, nuts, berries and dark chocolate in the mouth – there’s even a touch of cinnamon that you might be able to smell. But it’s really hard to beat the Gonzalez Byass Noe Pedro Ximenez Muy Viejo (\$25.95 - #721159 – 375ml) – this thick sweet sherry kept me coming back for more and more and more. This “wine” coats the mouth completely and tastes like raisin pie in a glass, or better yet, the pecan pie filling without the crunch of the pecans. This is so lush, so smooth and so delicious I’m salivating just remembering it.

Enjoy ... and Happy Shopping.

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