

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



OntarioWineReview: Vintages Release Saturday September 29, 2007

This Vintages release focuses on the Rhone and South of France, where the rules aren't as strict and the wines are lots more fun ... and good wine is very affordable. You don't have to deal with the high priced Bordeaux or the finicky nature of Burgundian grapes (which also amount to high prices). In this part of France we deal with the freethinkers and experimentalists, who jones to try and do something exciting and new. And that preamble leads us right into this release, with 5 reds and 1 white fitting the bill.

Rhone & South of France (White) ... Talk about a mish-mash of grapes you've probably never heard of ... but according to sources these are the white grapes of the Rhone (not all of them, just the top 6): Viognier, Rousanne, Marsanne, Clairette, Bourboulene and Grenache Blanc. All blended together to give you something fruity and enjoyable. Melon and peach dominate with some fresh lemon-like acidity on the finish. With only the two wines to choose from in this category it's a no-brainer, skip the \$58 wine and pick up a few of the Guigal Cotes du Rhone Blanc 2005 (\$16.95 - #290296).

Rhone & South of France (Red) ... From Provence comes this Cuvee Carolle Cote de Provence Rouge 2004 (\$16.95 - #43174) ... sure it says organic, but it would seem that some French producers have wrapped their heads around what makes for a good organic wine and not just organic for organic-sake (or jumping on the bandwagon to make a little extra money). A nice cherry, woody and smoky nose is followed by rich red fruit in the mouth. Don't like organic you say ... this one's very interesting, and worth the purchase. The Rhone itself brings us a few very nice cork-poppers, starting with Chateau du Trignon Sablet Cotes-du-Rhone-Villages 2004 (\$20.95 - #33878) a blend of Grenache (70%) with a splash of Syrah and Mourvedre (15% each) ... the nose seems a little closed at the moment giving me little to nothing to smell, but in the mouth it's very fruity with tons of rich, ripe red fruit. This is one tasty sucker for something I couldn't even get a whiff of. Here's another tasty number that's primarily Syrah and Mourvedre (heck, I don't recommend it if it don't taste good – what would be the point?) – Chateau Le Devoy Martine Lirac Rouge 2004 (\$17.95 - #33803) – floral and dark fruit dominate the nose with an Asian inspired taste: blackberries soaked in soy sauce – interesting and yet yummy at the same time. Another fruity mouth-filler is the Domaine Grosset Cairanne Cote du Rhone-Villages 2004 (\$17.95 - #33852) ... I'll start by describing their great old time movie poster-style label, the name rushes in from the background as if to say "It Came from Grosset". Next comes the taste: cherry and raspberry all the way through – pleasant, enjoyable (and chillable if you wish). It came from Grosset alright, and thank goodness. Finally, I've always gotta put at least one higher priced feature wine into each report; this time it'll only cost ya \$35.95 for the Domaine Duclaux Chateauneuf-du-Pape 2004 (#722264) but for your money you're getting intense strawberry and red fruit on the nose – lush red licorice, anise and a smoothness you won't soon forget. Pricey, but I wouldn't turn down a glass ... if you're buying I'll be your drinking buddy.

California (White) ... From the country that made wine famous to the state that made wine infamous. I'll kick it off in California with a 2005 Chardonnay by Kali Hart (\$19.95 - #46417). Pineapple, vanilla and oak hit the nose then amalgamate in the mouth with a smooth tasty finish.

California (Red) ... A few weeks ago I opened a bottle of 2005 Ancient Vines Zinfandel from Cline that was superb; now here comes his brother: Ancient Vines 2005 Carignane (\$18.00 - #32177) – another superb offering from Cline. Deep rich black fruit on the nose with some cedar and a titch of red fruits playing backgammon at a corner table. The sweet mouth on this one tastes of plums, red licorice and rum; to me it tasted almost Zin-like ... and crazy-enjoyable.

Chile (White) ... Chile again brings value to the table in the form of this \$15.95 2006 Antiguas Reservas Chardonnay from Cousino-Macul (#730044). My notes say "yummy" in bold letters, with vanilla, oak and lemon on the nose; melon, banana, vanilla and a soft touch of oaky on the tongue ... this one gave me a warm and fuzzy feeling inside ... was it the wine or was it the price for such a delectable wine? You decide.

Chile (Red) ... This wine took many turns both in my nose and on the palate, but in the end it was very pleasing. First the nose of pine nuts and red fruit. Then tasty red fruit in the mouth and a finish that's black fruit and nutmeg. A few interesting checanes but this Torode Piedra 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14.95 - #39262) is good value and receives high marks from me.

Australia (White) ... Yalumba is a name you'll see on the general list and they make some well priced decent wines. But this 2006 Viognier (\$22.95 - #954644) deserves its place in Vintages. Hints of honeydew on the nose, lively and lemony in the mouth with a bit of a bite from the acidity and a crisp clean finish that lasts; in addition this is quite a powerhouse in the alcohol department at 14.5% - so be careful when drinking. A little pricey, but Viognier seems to go that way.

Australia (Red) ... Two Aussies caught my eye this time out. Elderton 2005 Friends Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.95 - #595389) – a perennial favourite. Luscious cherries and chocolate are the best words I can use to describe it ... and it's definitely a sharin' wine, very enjoyable with friends around to help you polish off a bottle. It wouldn't be Australia if we didn't talk Shiraz, and the Two Hands 2006 Angels Share Shiraz (\$30 - #9480) is truly stunning. Lots of plum, raspberry and spice with a sweet nose and palate. My notes say "smooth, delicious and lush" – another high alcohol wine (15.2%) that you should be careful with ... this'll go down easy and the next morning you'll wake up uneasy.

Italy (White) ... Rarely, does it seem, that I am recommending an Italian white wine, but this Fazio 2006 Catarratto (\$13.95 - #51680) is very enjoyable with lemon, peach, melon and a touch of honey on the nose; soft lemon and smooth acidity on the palate. This wine is a Sicily exclusive, so sit back relax and let your mind and tongue take you to southern Italy.

Argentina (Red) ... The best word that I can use these days for Argentinean wines is "Value" ... add an extra two words and they would be "for money". \$12.95 for a red that drinks like a wine twice that price: Jean Bousquet 2005 Malbec (#36988) has dark chocolate, anise and deep red fruit on the nose; black raspberry, plum and a tannin bite in the mouth – very nice indeed. And you can throw some age onto it too ... what a value.

New Zealand (Red) ... Here's a tasty treat from New Zealand that's not too much money: Sileni Estates 2004 The Triangle Merlot (\$18.95 - #586081) soft and easy now, but could stand to be held for a few more years. The notes I have say "red fruit – long finish – excellent" – that about sums it up.

France (Red) ... We'll end this report where we began, back in France ... we'll stop into Burgundy for a check in on the Louis Jadot Santenay Clos de Malte 2005 (\$37.95 - #47811) ... pricey, but what good Burgundy isn't? The nose is cherry and red fruit dominated, while the palate has black cherry, cinnamon, cedar and good tannin heft. Of the two Burgundies in this release this one is definitely better, and is well worth the \$5 price difference.

Interesting ... One more for good measure. From Portugal comes this J.P. Vinhos Moscatel De Setubal 2001 (\$11.95 - #996181) – the price is right to take a chance on. It's fortified Moscatel de Satubal (17% alcohol), a cousin of Port and Madeira. The nose intrigued me with pine needles, honey coated grapes and some orange peel ... the taste was also funky, with dominant orange and apricot notes, a tasty oxidized finish that lasted and lasted. This really is tasty, but not something I could drink too much of – it is definitely a limited quantity sipper. Got twelve bucks? Wanna try something interesting. Plunk it down and give it a go.

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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