

OntarioWineReview Vintages Release Guide

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



OntarioWineReview: Vintages Release Saturday September 1, 2007

The release to kick off September features Pinot Noir, in all its forms and tastes from a variety of countries. There is also a mini-release of wines from Austria, 5 whites and two reds. I'll give you the lowdown on the Pinot Noirs, focus your attention on a couple of Austrian's you gotta try; and then we'll check out another 18 wines from around the world.

Pinot Noir ... We start this report off by looking at the Heartbreak Grape, so named because the grape itself can break, and has broken, the heart of many a grower, a winemaker or a wine drinker. It's finicky in the field, tough in the cellar and volatile in the glass; but when you get a good one, supposedly, it's better than sex (or so I have been told). The granddaddy of all places for Pinot is in Burgundy, France, where the world looks for the best and for comparison (i.e.: how does yours stack up next to a Burgundian Pinot?) Some countries don't even try to measure up, while others continually try to better the best. So let's start our look at Pinot there ...

First up, I'll hit you with an absolute stunner, if you're like me it'll take a lottery win for you to buy one, but what the heck, best I tell you in case it does happen: Bouchard Volnay Caillerets 1er Cru Ancienne Cuvee Carnot 2005 (\$86.95 - #43240), every Pinot should be this good; great red fruit driven – cranberry, strawberry, raspberry with sweet nuances of chocolate – fine tannins, wonderful mouthfeel ... a hint of earthiness – I could go on, but I won't. Suffice it to say if you can pick one up do so. Now that we have that stellar Burgundian out of the way its time to move on to ones that are more affordable. Albert Bichot 2005 Pinot Noir Bourgogne Vieilles Vignes (\$18.95 - #43331) represents good value for a quality Pinot. Raspberry and licorice on the nose; light cedar and red fruit on the palate – this one's also chillable; if you dare. Finally, from France, somewhere in-between the two above, we have Pierre Labet 2005 Beaune Clos Du Dessus Des Marconnets (\$42.95 - #661298) ... a delicious and enticing nose of red licorice, cherry and strawberry, followed by bright red fruit in the mouth and fine tannins. There is also that telltale earthiness that seems to be ever-present in good quality Pinot (but just because it's earthy doesn't mean it's good – a little bit of a catch-22 here when it comes to the Heartbreak Grape).

So what is the rest of the world doing with Pinot Noir? First, we check in with New Zealand: Shepherds Ridge Vineyard 2004 Pinot Noir (\$24.95 - #586099) – the nose has that telltale earth along with red fruit and cinnamon, the palate is more friendly with strawberry, raspberry fruit and a touch of vanilla from the wood ... the lengthy finish ends this one off on a high note. Hotter climates don't usually do Pinot justice, because it's a cool climate loving grape; hot climates tend to tone down the earthy and pump up the fruity aspect ... California Pinot, like the Kenwood 2005 Pinot Noir (\$20.95 - #943225) is plummy and red fruit dominated with some mild earthiness and cedar mixed in for good measure. Good acidity and a hint of tannin round this one off nicely. Who woulda thunk Chile would jump on the Pinot bandwagon with any kind of success; well they have and the nose and taste are just what you'd expect from this hot climate. Cono Sur 2006 Vision Single Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$15.95 - #689992) is a jump up in both price and quality from the general list version (though the Cono Sur 2006 Pinot Noir is delicious and great value at \$10.10). Cherries and strawberries greet the nose ... red fruit and beets in the mouth, smooth and smoky going down. The Bio Bio Valley in Chile has one of the coolest climates in the country, therefore the Pinots are more what you'd expect from classic Pinot at a fraction the price: Porta 2005 Select Reserve Pinot Noir (\$15.95 - #38836) has a red fruit and rhubarb nose that conceals those telltale earthy tones, but they're there. The palate is strawberry and cranberry with an easy-drinking, no-nonsense style ... quite tasty and good value.

Austria (Mini-Release) ... Austria is a side-feature this release with a total of seven new wines filling the Austrian void on the shelves. In my opinion only two of those wines do the country proud. Dr. Unger 2005 Gruner Veltliner Oberfeld Classic (\$19.95 - #951756), a little more expensive than the other Gruner in the release, but if you're gonna drink Gruner best make it good. Pear aromas dominate the nose, a sweet pear flavour mid-palate and very dry finish. We'll go from one extreme to the other, Lenz Moser 2004 Prestige Trockenbeerauslese (\$19.95 - #729657 – 375ml) is a stunning sweetie: peach, apple, petrol, apricot and

sweet maple syrup on the nose with a taste of honeyed apricots and papaya ... Prost!

Italy (Sparkling) ... I just can't stay away from those Astis, they're just so darn good and tasty. Gancia 2005 Modonovo Asti (\$15.95 - #46581) a nose of peachy Muscat grapeyness and a peach ginger ale taste; low alcohol (9%) is a trademark of this wine and so is the pleasant finish.

California (White) ... High alcohol is back with a vengeance in both reds and whites. Last release it was a 15.5% red, this release check out the 14.3% in the St. Francis 2005 Chardonnay (\$22.95 - #317131) – banana, peach and mango are there on the nose with tropical fruit and a touch of oak on the palate ... the alcohol is hardly noticeable on either the nose or taste, so watch out.

California (Red) ... Speaking of watching out, the Duckhorn Vineyards 2005 Decoy (\$41.95 - #41343) is mucho pesos, but yummy. Black cherry, chocolate and pepper aromas give way to sweet red fruit, vanilla and chocolate in the mouth. Fans of Zinfandel are gonna love Zig Zag Zin 2004 (\$19.95 - #39982) with its rum, plum and cherry cola nose; plummy, jammy with hints of strawberry and a cola-like finish ... crowd pleasing and very enjoyable.

Argentina (White) ... Argentinean wine is cheap, excuse me, inexpensive, and worth it; they are turning themselves into a value-region for both reds and whites. This Lurton 2006 Chardonnay Reserva (\$13.95 - #591743) has soft butter and tropical nuances on the nose, mango, pineapple rind and some butter in the mouth – quite delicious and well worth the price.

Argentina (Red) ... As mentioned, there are plenty of value wines coming out of Argentina, you might not feel that \$19.95 is a value-priced wine, but considering the Kaiken 2005 Ultra Malbec (#50849) can sit around in the cellar for the next 5-7 years - by 2012 this wine is gonna look like a steal. Woody, oaky, coffee, licorice and black fruit are all in the nose; while black fruit, black licorice and a mouth-drying tannin backbone hold this wine up for the long haul.

Chile (Red) ... These days I see the prices of Chilean wine starting to run the price gamut – some bottles are excellent value (see the Pinot Noir from Porta in this report) while others are tasty but pricey. Gran Araucano 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$32.95 - #675579) falls into the latter category. Lush chocolate and sweet red fruit smoothness with vanilla and cinnamon undertones – and there's some sweet cherries hiding in there too.

New Zealand (White) ... Tired of Sauvignon Blanc yet? Some folks are starting to feel that way, but with the racy, zingy, grapefruit and lemon freshness of this Matua Shingle Peak 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (\$17.95 - #32854) with it's hit of fresh mowed lawn and a taste of pink grapefruit, hay and grass – this is perfect savvy b. at an affordable price ... the long lemony finish also helps.

Germany (White) ... Here's something special for you aged Riesling fans – a Riesling you don't have to sit on to get those great petrol aromas and flavours because Schloss Schonborn has sat on it for you. Their 1997 Riesling Spatlese (\$23.95 - #43349) is heavy on the petrol aromas; in the mouth it's an absolute taste treat with apples, peaches, honey, petrol, hints of floral, good sweetness and an incredible length.

Australia (Red) ... Australia is always good for a couple of reds to recommend in each release. This time it's the Pretty Sally Estate 2004 Shiraz (\$29.95 - #37176) with its full-on white pepper nose and its strawberry, chocolate and sprinkling of white pepper flavours ... interesting. But for my money (\$25.95 of it at least) Torbreck 2005 Woodcutter's Shiraz (#927533) is a real winner worth picking up. One of my favourites from last year, winemaker David Powell ups the ante with his 2005 version. The nose is blueberry, blackberry, sweet cherry and pepper. The mouth is just as expressive with cherry, licorice, strawberry and spice. The finish is lengthy and full of black cherries, a keeper for another 5 years at least. And with Parker doling out the 90's to this winery like a sailor on shore leave looking for a good time gal you know it's gonna fly off the shelves, so get in line early.

France (Red) ... The Rhone brings us another delicious wine, this one made from 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah. Les Vins de Vienne Visan la Tine 2005 (\$26.95 - #33837) – a seriously sweet red fruit smelling nose leads to flavours of cherries and plums with good acidity and drying tannins in the finish.

Italy (Red) ... I'm a big fan of Valpolicella – all kinds of Valpolicella. And Valpol comes in three basic levels as far as I am concerned: beginner (Valpolicella); intermediate (Ripasso) and advanced (Amarone) ... this release features an intermediate and advanced expression of this wine. Luigi Righetti Valpolicella Classico Superiore Ripasso 2005 (\$17.95 - #575787) a nose of sweet fruit and spice leads to a more complex palate with cinnamon, black fruit, peppers, raisininess, spiciness, some oak and fine tannins. A wine that should

hold for the next few years. The advanced candidate is the Speri Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico 2003 (\$62.95 - #38950) – a bruiser of a wine (alcohol 15%) ... a deep nose of cherry, raisin, brown sugar, raspberry syrup and blueberry ... the palate follows suit along with rum and raisin nuances.

Portugal (Red) ... For \$18.95 you can pick up Sogrape Callabriga Vinho Tinto 2004 (#43635) a delicious wine brimming with white pepper, blueberry, spice, vanilla, cola, black and red fruit ... a little stewed fruit on the palate joins all the above – smooth, yet with good acidity and tannins to keep it drinking well for another few years.

Spain (Red) ... Our final stop on our tour of the world of wine is Spain. Torrederos Tinto Crianza 2001 (\$18.95 - #40808) has plums, blackberries, white pepper, licorice, spice and nutmeg. The finish is smooth and elegant with a bit of chocolate and tannin. A buck less and a few flavours short, but still nice, is the Valle de Salinas Crianza (\$17.95 - #664763) – currants and black fruit make up the majority of the nose; ripe strawberry, oak and spice dominate the palate; a good tannin structure finishes it off.

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