

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

August 2009
Volume 10, Issue 4

Inside this Issue

- 1 Great wines you never heard of.
- 2 Tasting Notes
- 3 Tasting Notes
- 4 Tasting Notes

Hiller's Markets
24359 Northwestern Hwy
Southfield, MI 48075
www.hillers.com

I Never Heard of That

Let's see . . . What shall I order? Cabernet? Chardonnay? Merlot? Maybe something different for a change . . . "Waiter, I'll have a glass of Pinot Grigio."

The enormous diversity of wine types, wine brands, wine styles, wine grapes, wine regions, wine labels - in short, the sheer number of wine choices available to us is so huge that, as often as not, we retreat to the tried, true and safe. And that is a great pity because being adventurous in your wine choices is easier and, in fact, safer now than it has ever been. Easier in that there is so much more wine on the market from so many places at so many price points. Safer in that we have seen in the last twenty or thirty years a world-wide quality revolution in winemaking techniques that has precipitously dropped the number of spoiled bottles you're likely to encounter and elevated the overall excellence of all wines at all prices.

Recently, at a rather nice restaurant in West Bloomfield with the requisitely heavy wine list, I was dismayed to find that I was familiar with every selection on the list. Admittedly, I get to try many more wines than the average consumer. Nevertheless, I thought it an opportunity lost that whoever developed that list had played the game so very conservatively. A big part of the fun and joy of 'getting into wine' is the stretching of your horizons: finding delight in a taste of wine made from a grape you've never heard of, sampling something from a region utterly unfamiliar, enjoying a blend made by a winemaker willing to push the envelope.

Of course, I preach to the choir here since the members of Jim Hiller's Wine Club are, by definition, a self-selected assembly of brave consumers, else they wouldn't indulge my peregrinations into oenological arcana with their membership dollars. Nevertheless, I urge

you, in the restaurant, in the supermarket aisle, on your next vacation - try something different. In this edition of the Wine Club we present an assembly of oddities, some are wines you may never have heard of, some are oddball blends, some are unusually unrepresentative of their place of origin. We thought them all well worth the effort to find them.

Taster's Table Whites

2008 Wolfgang Vineyards Gruner Veltliner 'Concerto Gru Vee'

Gruner Veltliner's popularity suffers mainly from the general public's inability to pronounce it. (Try 'groina felt lina,' or resort to the generally accepted abbreviations, GV or Gru Vee.) Made in the heart of Austria's Burgenland province, the Wolfgang GV is a lovely example of Austria's best-loved white wine varietal. Known for an explosive, fresh fruit palate and a bright aroma and color, Gru-Vees are remarkably versatile, surpassing even Riesling for their ability to pair with difficult foods. In tasting competitions, Gruner Veltliners frequently best the world's finest white Burgundies and Chardonnays. Generally enjoyed young, exceptional Gruner Veltliners may be aged up to 15 years. The Wolfgang is characterized by a slightly dry, full body and a mildly spicy character. This wine is particularly outstanding served with grilled or roasted meats, fish, and poultry

2007 Finca La Linda Torrontés

Malbec is the best known Argentine wine grape but no less impressive is the white wine grape Torrontés. It characteristically shows gobs of peach, pear and floral notes. Often lychee and melon are mentioned as well. It can carry a high alcohol content without seeming hot and its acidity keeps its cornucopia of fruit flavors in balance. It's an excellent choice as a welcome wine and it pairs well with a wide variety of lighter and spicy cuisines. The 2007 Finca La Linda

Torrontés is full of honey, lychee fruit and floral notes. From the very first sip there is an avalanche of peach notes. All the fruit in the nose and through the palate gives the impression of sweetness but it is well balanced by the tremendous acidity. This wine will pair well with white meats. It'll also be an excellent match for spicy Asian dishes as well as curry. Torrontés is related a group of grapes that originated in the Eastern Mediterranean, but you won't find it grown in Europe. The only other country you'll find Torrontés in is Chile, where it is mainly used to make the liquor Pisco.

2009 Don Cristobal 1492 Verdelho

The Verdelho grape is most often associated with the fortified Portuguese wine made in the Madeira Islands but it is fairly widely grown on the Portuguese mainland and in Australia. An example from the Mendoza region of Argentina is most unusual and it turns out, quite good. The 1492 New World of Wine labels from Don Cristobal are very reasonably priced and all good, honest examples of careful winemaking. With clean flavors, defined aromas and a nice balance, this Verdelho is characterized by its fruity aromas with floral tones and its freshness highlighted by its balanced acidity in the mouth. It's a straightforward, simple but pleasant everyday white worth seeking out.

2008 Domaine de San de Guilhem, Gascogne

Gascony is a rather fuzzily defined area in the southwest corner of France between the Pyrenees and the Atlantic and home to the distilled spirit, Armagnac. Domaine de San de Guilhem, in the Bas Armagnac, was for generations devoted solely to the production of wine for distillation until the declining popularity of Armagnac prodded the current generation to sell white wine as white wine. To that end, they imported Gros Manseng from the neighboring Appellation of Jurançon (see notes on Cahupé below) to balance the Ugni Blanc and Colombard traditionally grown in Gascogne. 40% of this blend is Colombard which gives the wine aromatic power. The rest is divided equally between the Ugni Blanc, which lends a fresh vivacity, and Gros

Manseng, which adds alcohol, length, power, and mouth presence. This is a zesty and lively white wine with a nose of white peach with hazelnut and citrus nuances. It has a clean, crisp feel in the mouth and on the finish.

2008 Quinto da Alorna Arintho

Arinto is a Portuguese white wine grape noted for its excellent balance between sugar and acidity and its fruity and floral aromas. It is responsible for the relatively famous wines of the Becelas wine region but it has adapted well to several others, including Ribatejo, located in the south central part of Portugal, just northeast of Lisbon. Light straw in color with pale green highlights, the Alorna has great aromas of fresh citrus and peach. In the mouth it has a crisp citrus flavor reminiscent of clementines and it lingers with a zingy citrus finish. A great wine for a light nosh or with appetizers, it pairs exceptionally well with mild cheeses or grilled shrimp.

2007 Pacific Rim Autumnus Columbia Valley White Wine

Brand new from Pacific Rim Winery is this imaginative blend of Riesling, Gewurztraminer, and Chenin Blanc from Washington State's Columbia Valley. The Riesling brings floral aromatics and bright, fresh acidity; the Chenin Blanc lends a clean minerality and beautiful citrus characteristics; the Gewürztraminer lends a soft, round mouthfeel with subtle flavors of passion fruit. Crafted to go with a wide variety of foods, it could pair well with a simple salad or with richer foods like grilled fish with a cream-based sauce.

Taster's Table Reds

2007 Georges Vigouroux Pigmentum, Cahors

Most of the Malbec you see these days is from Argentina where the grape has thrived since it emigrated from Bordeaux prior to the outbreak of *phylloxera* in Europe in the 1860s, which wiped out the original rootstock there. Subject to many dampness related ailments, hardly any Malbec was re-grown in Bordeaux post *phylloxera*, but it did find a rebirth in Cahors, where its distinctively dark color and tannic grip has given it the moniker

“the black wine of Cahors.” The Pigmentum shows powerful aromas on the nose of red and black fruits: raspberry, blackcurrant, and blackberry with subtle notes of licorice and smoke. The dark fruit continues in the mouth where ripe, dusty tannins are supported by the fruit and ample acidity.

2008 Tenuta Curezza Prine Salento

Salento is the strip of land in Puglia that forms the heel of the Italian boot in the southernmost part of the Italian mainland, lying between the Ionian and the Adriatic seas. That maritime influence mitigates the blazing heat of the days and helps to develop acidity and flavor in the grapes of the region. Although a huge amount of wine is produced in Puglia, the small amount that is exported to the U.S. is pretty darn good and generally offers fine value for the money. “Prine” is a composite name that comes from the combination of the two premier grapes of Salento: Primitivo and Negro Amaro. Tenuta Curezza is a portion of the Feudo di San Nicola estate where the vineyard receives special Care (*curezza* in Italian). The must from the two grapes macerate together in the same vat and are fermented together in stainless steel producing a rich, complex and hearty wine with a dark ruby color and a nose full of fresh plum, violets, and currants. In the mouth the wine is round and full-bodied with excellent balance and a nice, long finish. A fine choice for roasted meats, pasta dishes, aged cheeses, or on its own.

2008 Maipe Bonarda Mendoza, Lujan de Coyo

The origins and relatives of Boanarda are altogether rather murky. Extensively grown in Argentina, it is currently thought to be unrelated to the variety of the same name grown in Italy and might actually be the Charbono variety imported in the past from California. Whatever its true etiology, it makes some cool wines worth trying. The 2008 from Maipe garnered an 89 score from The Wine Advocate: "The purple-colored 2008 Bonarda offers an enticing bouquet of smoke, mineral, and blueberry. Round and ripe on the palate, it has surprising depth and length for its humble price. Drink this succulent wine over the next

three years." Maipé was the Lord of the Winds for the ancient Andean people. Argentineans still invoke his name to clear the skies after a heavy rain or to temper the summer heat.

2008 Buon Appetito Nero d'Avola

Though Sicily is still Italy's foremost bulk-wine producer after Puglia, boutique winemakers have rediscovered the massive island's native varietals and revolutionized its wines' quality in the process. Sicily has produced wine for four thousand years (it seems at least half of them were spent making Marsala, the syrupy, fortified brew that suffixes "chicken" and "veal" on countless menus). But quality white wine grapes like Grillo and Inzolia have challenged Marsala's Catarratto dominance in the island's western Trapani region. The greatest upheaval has been in the east, however, where the Nero d'Avola grape has mobilized the revolution. Wine made from this assertive, tannic grape is redolent of dark-berry fruit and plush, mouth-filling texture. They are great accompaniments to any rich pasta dish, and, yes, to Veal Marsala.

2006 Miguel Torres Carmenere

The 'lost grape of Bordeaux,' Carmenere is one of the officially countenanced grapes allowed in Bordeaux red wine blends (the others are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, and Petite Verdot). Carmenere emigrated to South America in the 19th century along with its peers and it thrived. But it also lost its identity because it so closely resembles Merlot in leaf shape, berry size, and all other visual appearances. Before long Merlot and Carmenere were pretty much totally interplanted and mixed up one with the other throughout Chilean vineyards. The problem with this miscegenation, however, is that the two grapes do not ripen on the same schedule, so for many years Chilean Merlot was deemed a most inferior wine for its green, unripe features. Only in the last generation has DNA analysis finally given Chilean growers a chance to sort out the mess, and produce Merlot that tastes like Merlot and Carmenere that tastes, quite interesting, as it turns out. The Torres is a fine example with beautiful cherry color

and its fine aromas of blackberries and cassis with balsamic and tobacco notes that culminate in a hint of mandarin orange. The palate is elegant, with sweet and fruity tannins that deliver nuances of leather and spices.

2007 Vina Robles Huerhuero Red

This single-vineyard red blend from the Paso Robles A.V.A. in California's Central Coast combines four grape varieties in an unusual but very successful mix. 51% is Petite Syrah, which is anything but petite and provides structure, backbone, and tooth-staining dark berry fruit flavors. The next biggest chunk is 43% Syrah, which adds spice and cherry qualities. A dollop of Tannat (4%) gives the wine depth and tannic grip, while a homeopathic splash (2%) of Touriga gives floral notes of violet to the bouquet. Ageing 14 months in French oak gives a toasty frame to the intense aromas of blackberries, black cherries and currants. Some of California's most interesting wines are increasingly made by winemakers willing to play with grape varieties outside the mainstream, blended in unusual combinations. We think this one of the tastiest we've recently tried. Serve it with a grilled ribeye steak.

Collector's Club Whites

2007 Domaine Daulny Sancerre

These days New Zealand's Marlborough region is all the rage for Sauvignon Blanc and if one wants to look further, there are plenty more on the shelf from California, Chile, Argentina, and South Africa. But to get to the real deal, look for Sancerre, hard to find though it may be these days. Located at the eastern end of the Loire Valley, Sancerre allows only Sauvignon Blanc in its whites, and when one thinks of French wine made with that grape, Sancerre must come to mind first. Producers generally have multiple vineyard holdings scattered across a number of different terrains and microclimates. The complexity of this wine comes from that sheer diversity of sites. Daulny's 47 acres of vines are spread out over nearly 20 different parcels that cover every conceivable soil type and exposure in the region. Grapes from all of these vines go into the cuvee,

which is made and aged entirely in stainless steel. What's more, the wine sees no malolactic fermentation and thus retains freshness and vibrancy beneath plenty of forward, ripe fruit. The 2007 shows a bright nose of white and pink grapefruit, white flowers, and pronounced minerality.

2004 Domaine de Cauhapé Jurançon 'Ballet d'Octobre'

This is a sweet wine, although not sweet enough to rule it out as an aperitif (it is an exceptional and surprising match with smoked salmon, for example). Made from extremely ripe grapes, with some residual sugar, it exhibits a medium gold color, a rich, citrusy, tropical fruit-scented nose with roasted nut and honey nuance, medium to full body, and light to moderate sweetness. Jurançon is located between the Pyrenees and the Atlantic, its vineyards devoted mainly to Gros and Petit Manseng. The Gros Manseng is principally used in the production of dry white wines while the Petit Manseng gives birth to sweet wines that can be as enticing as the much more expensive Sauternes of Bordeaux. The grapes are gathered by several passes in the vineyards, well past the time of usual harvest for wines intended to be made dry. With this extended hangtime, the grape bunches shrivel and wither. They may freeze or become infected with the 'noble rot,' *botrytis cinera*. All this increasingly concentrates the sugars within the individual grape and leads ultimately to a wine with distinctive flavors of crystallized fruit and great enough acidity to prevent the sweetness from being cloying.

2007 Vina Godeval Godello

Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate* awarded this wine 90 points, saying 'The 2007 Vina Godeval is 100% Godello, one of Spain's more interesting white grapes and one that was virtually extinct until its rediscovery 25 years ago. 2007 was an excellent vintage in Galicia with rain at flowering reducing the crop by 40%. The wine was stainless steel fermented and aged sur-lie. Medium straw-colored, it has an enticing bouquet of mineral, citrus, and lemon-lime. This leads to a concentrated wine with excellent depth, ripeness, and plenty of spicy fruit on the

palate.” The Godeval is one of many outstanding Spanish wines imported by Jorge Ordonez, whose name you should remember as it is as close to a guarantee of high quality and exceptional value as you can find in the world of wine. Spanish whites are usually an afterthought, but they offer outstanding value and the good ones are food friendly gems.

2008 Bodegas Botani Botani Moscatel

This is another beautiful Spanish white imported by Jorge Ordonez that also received a 90 point rating from Parker. “The 2008 Botani is 100% Moscatel de Alejandria fermented 70% in stainless steel and 30% in French oak. Medium straw-colored, it has an alluring perfume of spring flowers, honey, spice box, and tropical fruits. Smooth-textured, ripe, dry, and mouth-filling, this expressive effort is an excellent match for sushi and Thai food.” One thinks of Moscatel as a sweet wine, if one thinks of it at all. This is dry, elegant, complex, and delightfully aromatic with an unexpected mineral edge.

2006 Baglio di Pianetto Ficiligno

This white from Sicily is a blend of 50% Viognier and 50% of the native grape, Inzolia and “offers pretty floral notes in its suggestions of peaches, melon and zesty lemon peel. An underlying vein of minerality frames this rich white by adding a measure of focus and length on the palate.” *Wine Advocate* 88 points. As is the case with whites from Spain, should you see a Sicilian white wine on a restaurant wine list, you are likely to be looking at a pretty good value. It didn’t get there on its popular reputation. Somebody tried it and thought it was going to make a great match for something on the menu. It’s worth asking a few questions to try to discover the who, what, and why.

2008 Bodegas Terrazas de los Andes Torrontes

This is very stylish for a Torrontés, with white peach, chamomile and mineral notes in the nose, lychee and melon flavors on the palate and a firm acidity that carries the exotic aromatics through the tangy, lengthy finish.

Collector’s Club Reds

2006 The Furst Pinot Noir Alsace

Pinot Noir is not an uncommon grape in Alsace, but they are rarely exported. Perhaps more should be. Burgundian in style, that is to say lighter in color, firmer in tannic structure, with aromas and flavors of red fruit, The Furst Pinot is quite lovely and comparable to many a Burgundy at twice the price. A bright cherry red color with strawberry and raspberry aromas framed by toasted notes from its 12 months in oak barrels, it has a firm tannic structure, nice mouth-feel and good persistence through the finish.

2006 Luigi Bosca Pinot Noir Reserva Maipu

If Alsace is the outlier of Old World Pinot Noir regions, Argentina must surely be that of the New World. The Bosco is dark, earthy, and a bit heavy where the Alsatian is practically ethereal. The Bosca needs a bit of aeration before it offers ripe strawberry and plum flavors with licorice and tree-bark accents, while The Furst shows an aromatic and flavor profile of pure red fruit. Bosca’s is solid, a bit less tannic and slightly resinous from barrel aging with greater depth and concentration. Where The Furst is perfume and light, Bosca is smoky and thick. Same grape, world’s apart, both are territories well worth exploring.

2006 Cesari Mara Ripasso Veneto

Amarone is a rich, concentrated, and velvety wine known for its distinctive aromas of stewed plum, its ageing potential and its wonderfully mouth-filling texture. The Cesari Winery makes wonderful, and expensive Amarone. But they make also a Ripasso, the poor man’s version. The ripasso method entails refermenting Valpolicella on the lees of the Amarone which yields a wine with more alcohol, complexity, and structure. Though not so intense as an Amarone, the Mara Ripasso does provide a similarly ripe, concentrated bouquet and a warm, velvety, full-bodied taste. An excellent wine to serve with roast pork, game, and all red meats.

2007 Shady Lane Cellars Blue Franc

As surprising and unusual as any wine we’ve had recently, the Shady Lane

Cellars Blue Franc is made right here in Michigan from 100% Blue Franc which is known as Blaufrankish in Austria and Lemberger in Germany. In fact the grape has some 40 synonym names in countries spread across Central and Eastern Europe. It produces here a wine of extraordinarily concentrated and plush dark berry flavors: blueberry, mulberry, and blackberry with a frame of black pepper and cedar spice. It is powerful but soft, with a big mouthfeel, and lush tannins. Try this with grilled lamb chops seasoned with Middle Eastern spices for a real treat.

2005 Alain Brumont Chateau Bouscassé Madiran

It’s possible that this is the healthiest wine you can drink. The principle grape of the Madiran appellation is Tannat, which Dr. Roger Corder (a cardiovascular expert at the William Harvey Research Institute in London) identifies as having the highest concentration of oligomeric procyanidins (OPCS) of any wine grape and which he credits as the source of red wine’s health benefits. Be that as it may, the wine shows an opaque black color, an intriguing bouquet of spicy new oak, smoke, vanillin, and black-cherries, great concentration and richness, medium to full body, and gobs of tannin in the finish. You’ll want to decant this big boy and give it plenty of time to open up.

2005 Carpazo La Doga Morellino di Scansano

If you enjoy a quality Chianti but want to pay 50% less this wine is a super smart buy. It comes from the southern part of Tuscany and it is made with 100% Sangiovese grapes, like most of the other great wines of Tuscany. It is a full-bodied wine, with a good tannic structure balanced by a lively freshness. The making of Morellino goes back for centuries but its style is very modern and approachable - fairly light-bodied with unobtrusive tannins, so a versatile choice for summer red wine sipping or lighter cuisine. It shows a brilliant and intense ruby red color and an ample and persistent bouquet with plum and red berry tones. The taste is full and pleasant with soft, velvety tannins and a long, spicy finish.

How Do I Buy More?

How do you buy more of a Wine Club selection you particularly like if you cannot find it on the shelf at your local Hiller's Market?

Call Eric Novak at 248-355-2122 ext 1033. He will advise you on availability, best time to buy, and any upcoming discounts.

