

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

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A World Cup of Wine

This summer millions of sports fans around the world (and even, rumor has it, a couple hundred in the United States) watched the FIFA World Cup, the quadrennial championship of soccer, which was hosted this year for the first time on the African continent. In acknowledgement of the host country and with a tip of our hat to the Cup's eventual winner, we present in this edition of Jim Hiller's Wine Club an assortment of wines from South Africa and from Spain.

Ranking ninth in the world in wine production by volume, South Africa has been making - and drinking - its own wine for 350 years, since Jan van Riebeeck, the first governor of the Cape, uncorked a bottle of the first wine ever made there on Feb. 2, 1659. The country's coastal exposure and climate provide an ideal environment for wine grape cultivation. Despite that history and those natural assets, South African wines haven't yet penetrated the American market in a big way. More is the pity, because the quality is certainly there as we think you will clearly see in these selections.

Spain is, of course, a major player on the world's wine stage, ranking first in total acreage devoted to wine grapes and third in total wine production, behind only Italy and France. From bargain basement reds and oceans of Sangria to some of the finest wines in the world from Priorat, Ribero del Duero, and Rioja, Spain competes successfully at all levels of the wine market, always scoring high on the quality to price ratio.

You can get a lot of wine for your money from both of these countries, as you will see by the remarkable number of 90 plus ratings and Best Buys that our picks have earned.

Tasting Notes

Taster's Table Whites

2009 MAN Vintners Chenin Blanc
MAN Vintners is a project of Charles Back (profiled in Jim Hiller's Wine Club's May 2009 issue), José Conde, and Tyrrel Myburgh. The name derives from the initials of their wives' names and the wines in the line strive for a bold, fruity, palate-pleasing, New World style. The Chenin Blanc is made from 25 - 40 year old dry-land bush vines from the Perderberg region of Paarl. Fermented in stainless steel and left on its lees until bottling, the wine shows a lively bouquet of pineapple, honeysuckle, and lime with a mineral touch. It is bright and elegant on the palate with a mouthful of tropical fruit flavors backed by a refreshing acidity. An excellent match for most salads and fish dishes and a dependable choice as an aperitif.

2009 Fleur du Cap Chardonnay
Tasting the Fleur du Cap and the Glen Carlou Chardonnays was like encountering a couple of old friends or putting on a comfortable pair of slippers that had somehow been misplaced in the closet. As the Chardonnay style pendulum has swung decidedly towards unoaked or lightly oaked manifestations of the grape in the last few years, these two examples proudly show their toast - to very good effect as they both have fruit enough to balance their oak components. The Fleur du Cap is as round and easy as a comfortably stuffed chair by the fire with full body and a rich complement of apricot, melon, and lemon/lime citrus aromas and flavors. The oak comes through as toast and spice on the nose, vanilla and roasted nut on the palate. Fresh and layered with a slightly buttery finish, it would pair beautifully with lobster, oysters, or any seafood salad.

2008 Glen Carlou Chardonnay

The Glen Carlou shows plenty of fig, citrus and pear fruit framed by notes of spice and minerals. Balanced and refreshing, it strikes you as rotund and complex, but easy-drinking and food friendly. It's a mouthwatering, ripe, and toasty wine with a lingering spiced butter finish. Perhaps it is a throwback stylistically, but I could sip this all day.

2008 Antonio Barbadillo Palomino Fina

This is an intriguing table wine from Cadiz made from the grape used in Sherry that has some of the same nutty, briny character of a Fino, but is lighter, softer and lower in alcohol. It shows many of the same affinities as a match for appetizers from nuts to cured meats to lightly fried fish. In Spain Fino Sherry is very popular in tapas bars. Though the trend is not much evident here, this lighter version of the profile might convince you to explore the combinations further.

2009 Paso a Paso Blanco, La Mancha

Robert Parker's *The Wine Advocate* awarded this wine a score of 87, saying, "The 2009 Paso a Paso Verdejo is the first Verdejo produced from La Mancha. The advantage is that can be grown less expensively there with the question being how it compares in quality to those produced in Rueda. The answer seems to be so far, so good. It displays an enticing nose of spring flowers, nutmeg, cinnamon, and pit fruits leading to a crisp, vibrant tasty wine for enjoying over the next 12-18 months. It is a very good value." Medium-bodied, juicy and clean, this is a versatile, eminently quaffable white.

2008 Licia Albarino, Rias Baixas

In the northwest corner of Spain, overlooking the Bay of Biscay, is the Rias Baixas, by far the coldest and the wettest wine growing region in the country. So damp is it that the signature grape of the region, Albarino, is grown on high trellises so that the grape clusters can get the maximum possible sunlight and air circulation, else the damp would rot the fruit. This slow ripening and long hang time, however, also gives the fruit the chance to develop its pronounced acidity, which is what makes Albarino

one of the world's best wine pairings with seafood and especially with shellfish. Though it is perhaps my favorite white wine variety, I haven't before been able to afford to select one for the Taster's Table. This is an exceptional example. "The dark straw-colored 2008 Licia Albarino displays aromas of mineral, lemon, and floral notes. Slightly tart on the palate, it is crisp, savory, and in need of food to show at its best." 87 in *The Wine Advocate*. "Peach, pear and pine flavors are fresh and focused in this well-structured white. Crisp grapefruit acidity keeps it firm, and mineral and herbal notes linger." 88 in *The Wine Spectator*.

Taster's Table Reds

One secret to selecting can't-miss, sure-fire, slam-dunk, great wines to wow your friends and impress your date even if you have never seen the bottle before is to know that there are a handful of importers/ *negociants*/ mavens whose names on a label are a guarantee of quality. Jorge Ordonez is one of these. Robert Parker has twice named Ordonez *Wine Personality of the Year* and has called him one of the most significant figures of the twentieth century in the world of wine. His portfolio of Spanish wines is by far the broadest, deepest, most extensive, best-priced, and highest quality portfolio extant. The next three wines are Ordonez selections, are all incredible values for the money and all simply delicious. We will simply present here some of the glowing reviews and impressive scores these wines have earned from major wine writers.

2007 Volver Tempranillo La Mancha

"The 2007 Volver is sourced from a single 72 acre vineyard that was planted in 1967 with head pruned Tempranillo. The wine was barrel-fermented and aged for 14 months in new French oak. Purple-colored, it offers up an alluring aromatic array of pain grille, smoke, violets, black cherry, and blackberry that jumps from the glass. On the palate it is medium- to full-bodied with gobs of ripe fruit, succulent flavors, soft tannins, and excellent balance. This lengthy effort over-delivers big-time and is a superb value. Score: 90. *The Wine Advocate*

"This muscular red shows beef and iron notes, with plum and prune fruit in a thick texture. A bit blunt, but distinctive, with enough acidity to keep it all lively." Score: 90 *The Wine Spectator*.

2007 Bodegas Ateca Ateca

"The 2007 Ateca was sourced from 80- to 120-year-old head pruned Garnacha vines and aged for 10 months in seasoned French oak. Deep purple-colored, it exhibits an impressive nose of crushed stone, black cherry, and plum. This is followed by a full-bodied wine with layers of savory fruit, spice notes, and silky tannin. This balanced effort will evolve for another 1-2 years and drink well through 2017." Score: 90. *The Wine Advocate*.

"Toasted vanilla and smoke notes accent raspberry and black cherry fruit in this sleek red, which has enough tannins for grip. The fresh finish echoes with dark chocolate and spice. Score:90. *The Wine Spectator*.

"Jammy, rich and a little sweet and reduced on the nose, but once this baby unwinds there's no stopping it. The palate is exceedingly fresh and exuberant, with strawberry and raspberry flavors. Lively to the end; a fruit-lover's wine with no leash. Drink sooner than later to capture the wine's pointed red-fruit essence." Score 88. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2006 Bodegas Hijos de Juan Gil Juan Gil, Jumilla

"The 2006 Juan Gil is also 100% Monastrell but aged for 12 months in French and American oak. It was sourced from an estate vineyard with 45 years of age. This purple-colored wine offers superb aromatics of wood smoke, damp earth, violets, and blueberry pie. Layered, succulent, and long, it will evolve for another 2-3 years and be at its best from 2010 to 2018." Score: 91. *The Wine Advocate*.

"This polished red shows black cherry, licorice, mineral and tobacco notes, harmonious and deep, supported by firm tannins. Medium-bodied, well-integrated and stylish." Score 90. *The Wine Spectator*.

"A touch minty and herbal, but also there's chocolate and creamy richness to the nose. This is a big wine that's hugely flavorful. It rumbles from bold berry to



smoky dryness, and along the way there are stops at chocolate, coffee and black pepper. Always one of Jumilla's better wines, assuming you like the extracted, modern style." Score: 89. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2008 Porcupine Ridge Syrah

Porcupine Ridge is a line of hand-crafted wines from Boekenhoutskloof, one of South Africa's most respected wine producers. The pen and ink drawing of a crested porcupine (these critters inhabit the vineyards) on the label is by a noted wildlife artist named Zakkie Eloff. The wine shows a rich warm ruby color with generous viscosity combined with a typical spicy, aromatic profile. Supported by dark fruit flavors, the palate is generous and extends to a lengthy finish with the focus on fruit profile as opposed to oaking detail. "Fresh, with an iron note running through the black tea, braised fig and dark cherry fruit notes. There's a nice plush edge to the open-knit finish." Score: 87 *The Wine Spectator*. "This Syrah has a rustic but elegant nature: aromas of raspberry, black pepper, smoked sausage and cloves prevail, while full-bodied but integrated flavors of anise, pepper and berry follow. The wine is robust but has a velvety character and a spicy finish. Score: 89. *The Wine Enthusiast*. A Best Buy.

2005 Fort Simon Pinotage, Stellenbosch

Pinotage is a red grape bred in 1925 by Abraham Perold, the first professor of viticulture at Stellenbosch University. It is a cross between Pinot Noir and Cinsaut. The latter is known as Hermitage in South Africa, hence the name. It produces wines of deep red color with smoky, bramble, and earthy flavors, sometimes with notes of tropical fruit. It is often blended, made into fortified wine and even red sparkling wine. In just the past year a coffee-infused Pinotage was introduced to the local Michigan market. In its early years Pinotage was justly criticized for sometimes having off-aromas of acetone or burnt rubber. But over the last couple decades the quality and consistency of South African Pinotage has shown great improvement and it is growing in popularity in much of the world, though

not so much in the U.S. The Fort Simon, made from hand-picked fruit grown in prime lowland Stellenbosch vineyards, saw an extended 15 months ageing in French and American oak and shows sweet tobacco notes over a core of cherry and strawberry fruit. A hint of licorice and toasty oak notes frame the palate of this full-bodied, hearty red.

2008 Speir Savanha Cabernet Sauvignon, Western Cape

Showing candied plum, smoke, pepper and vanilla on the nose and on the palate, the Savanha Cab is a lively red berry, pepper and tobacco mélange. Moderate tannins and friendly fruit give it an approachable edge. You can pair it successfully with beef or pasta. "This is a ripe, fruit-forward, slightly jammy Cabernet, with abundant raspberry and red cherry aromas and flavors and a nice vanilla oak frame." Score: 86. "A Best Buy." *The Wine Enthusiast*:

Collector's Club Whites

2008 Hamilton Russell Chardonnay Walker Bay

Hamilton Russell Vineyards, one of the most southerly wine estates in Africa and one of the closest to the sea, specialises in producing highly individual, terroir driven Pinot noir and Chardonnay, which are widely regarded as the best in South Africa and among the best in the New World "Ripe and stylish, with melon, ginger, yellow apple and pear flavors that glide over well-embedded acidity. There's a lingering whiff of grilled hazelnut on the rich finish. Not quite as dense as the 2007, but still outstanding. Score: 90. *The Wine Spectator*.

"Nutty, spicy aromas are followed by a beautiful mélange of toasted nut, cream and fresh fruit. The wine is rounded and elegant with its mineral lift and toasted finish. Pair with lobster, salmon and poultry." Score: 90. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2007 Oak Valley Vineyards Chardonnay

Although a relatively new entrant to the wine industry, Oak Valley is gaining recognition as offering some of the finest

wines in South Africa. The owner had for years supplied grapes to some of the best labels in South Africa and in 2003 decided to produce and bottle his own wine under the Oak Valley label. The 2007 Chardonnay is well integrated and complex, with an elegant minerality. The wine is aged in French oak barrels, and is pale yellow with a tinge of green. On the nose, there is white pear, grapefruit and lime; and the palate includes nutty wood flavors.

2008 Viña Godeval Cosecha, Valdeorras

"The founders of Godeval deserve much of the credit for rescuing the once nearly extinct Godello grape and making the first Godello-based wine in 1986. The 2008 Viña Godeval was fermented and aged in stainless steel. Light gold-colored with an earth/mineral and melon-scented bouquet; on the palate it is creamy-textured with excellent depth and balance. Drink this excellent value over the next 3 years." Another Jorge Ordonez selection with a score of 90 in *The Wine Advocate*.

"Floral, mineral and citrus flavors mingle in this light, fresh white. The acidity is very tart, but the focus and intensity of the flavors keep it balanced." Score 89. *The Wine Spectator*.

"Peachy, mildly sweet, smooth and inviting. Godeval always makes a true and easy wine that showcases the essence of Godello but doesn't go off the blueprint. Flavors of apple and citrus are well blended, and the grapefruity finish is only mildly pithy. Eminently drinkable white wine from Spain." Score: 88. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2009 Veiga Da Princesa Albarino, Rias Baixas

The Estate is located in the most southern and mountainous subzone, Condado de Tea, within the DO Rias Baixas. The cool climate of the region and low yields of the native Albariño grape together produce a beautiful white wine with vivid floral and fragrant aromas. Traditional Galician vine trellises, which stand high so that the grapes are closer to the sun and away from the damp soil, are used in the vineyards. Handpicked grapes are fermented solely with native yeasts. The wine is kept in contact with the fine lees

until it is bottled. Pale gold in color, the wine shows vivid lime and grapefruit on the nose, with spicy mineral, jasmine and sea-smell qualities. Racy, sharply focused citrus flavors pick up richer orchard fruit qualities with aeration, as well as an exotic anise note. The clinging finishing flavors of lime and orange peel are intense and strikingly pure.

“Veiga da Princesa’s 2009 Albarino was sourced from a single vineyard and fermented with native yeasts. Light straw-colored with an attractive nose of mineral, spring flowers, and lemon-lime, on the palate it has excellent richness, lively acidity, and excellent concentration. This lengthy effort will drink well over the next 3 years.” Score: 89. *The Wine Advocate*

2009 Valmiñor Albarino, Rias Baixas

This Albarino shows a yellow straw color and a nose of intense fruity aromas of grapefruit, apricot, and melon. In the mouth, Valmiñor combines the fresh fruit flavors with a rounded acidity, resulting in a beautifully balanced wine of opulence, elegance and a slight spritziness.

“More tan in color than the usual light yellow, with true aromas of flower blossoms, lemon and tropical fruits. The acidity is a bit pronounced and scouring, but that only means that the citrus and green apple flavors cut and cleanse.” Score 87. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2008 Lagar de Fornelos Lagar De Cervera Albarino

Lagar de Cervera’s 2008 Albarino is light gold-colored with an attractive nose of mineral, lemon zest, and floral notes. Balanced and tasty on the palate, it will drink well over the next 2 years. Score: 87. *The Wine Advocate*

“Pear and banana flavors balance on razor-sharp acidity in this nervy white. It has energy, but needs food to soften.” *The Wine Spectator*.

Collector’s Club Reds

2008 Spice Route Chakalaka, Swartland

A blend of 51% Syrah, 16% Carignan, 11% Mourvedre, 8% Grenache, 2% Tannat, and 1% Petite Sirah, this is a rich, robust, spicy red appropriately named after a South African relish.

“Rich, but stylish and alluring, delivering mulled plum, currant and fig notes laced with black tea, supported by a nice graphite edge on the smoky finish.” Score: 90. *The Wine Spectator*.

2007 Ugaba Red Blend, Stellenbosch

In 2005 Hubert de Boiard de Laforest from Château Angéus, a St-Emilion first-growth estate, Lowell Jooste, co-owner of the highly regarded South African wine estate Klein Constantia, and Bruno Prats, former owner of Château Cos d’Estournel, the leading Médoc second-growth, joined forces to create a wine that would combine the richness of fruit and suppleness of texture bestowed by the South African terroir with the elegance and balance from Bordeaux wine-making philosophy. A blend of 63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 17% Syrah, fermented in stainless steel and barrel aged for 10 months in French oak, the wine shows a deep ruby color, and a nose of dense red plum and wild berry aromas. The highly extracted fruit flavors extend into the palate, supported by supple tannins. Pair it with a grilled fillet of beef.

2005 Jardin Cabernet Sauvignon

“Rich, but stylish and alluring, delivering mulled plum, currant and fig notes laced with black tea, supported by a nice graphite edge on the smoky finish. Syrah, Carignan, Mourvèdre, Souzou, Grenache, Tannat and Petite Sirah.”. Score: 87. *The Wine Spectator*.

“This appealing, assertive Cab offers upfront mouthfilling fruit, muscular tannins—but with an elegant, approachable character that gives it food-friendly potential. Aromas of blackberry, mint and spice lead into balanced waves of red fruit, vanilla and black currant. The finish is lingering. Overall, an exciting and accessible wine. Score: 90. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2008 Jaspi Coca I Fito, Priorat

“The 2008 Jaspi is a blend of 40%

Garnacha, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Carinena, and 10% Tempranillo aged for 4 months in French and American oak. Deep crimson-colored, it offers up an enticing nose of Asian spices, earth notes, mineral, espresso, and black cherry. Forward and easy-going on the palate, it has enough structure to evolve for 1-2 years but can be enjoyed now through 2018. It is an excellent value.” Score: 89. *The Wine Advocate*. “Deep and dark on the nose, with licorice, cola and prune aromas. The palate is chunky and full, albeit a touch soft. Saturated flavors of cola, blackberry and chocolate define it as a rich, modern wine, and the finish is appropriately creamy and stacked with sweetness and depth. A lush blend of Garnacha, Cabernet and two indigenous varieties.” Score: 90. *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2004 Laurona Tinto, Montsant

“The 2004 Laurona is composed of 50% Grenache, 25% Merlot, 15% Syrah, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Inky purple-colored, it offers an expressive nose of toasty oak, spice box, black cherry, black raspberry, and black currant. This leads to a medium to full-bodied wine with loads of sweet fruit, excellent concentration and depth, and a firm structure. It will evolve for 3-4 years and drink well through 2020.” Score: 91. *The Wine Advocate*.

2001 Bodegas Puelles Reserva, Rioja

95% Tempranillo and 5% Garnacha, aged for 2 years in American and French oak plus an additional 14 months in the bottle prior to release, this lovely Rioja shows a dark ruby color and a nose packed with loads of cherries and spices. Once it opens, the vanilla oak component emerges. On the palate it shows medium body with flavors of ripe red fruit and vanilla backed up by a balanced acidity. The finish is peppery and the tannins still high, indicating that this wine can age for at least another several years.

“The 2001 Reserva offers bigger fruit and more structure than the 1999 while maintaining an elegant personality. It will evolve for 2-3 years and drink well through 2020.” Score: 92 *The Wine Advocate*.