

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

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The Mediterranean

In the middle of the snow and the slush and the grey and the cold of a February day in Michigan, silently say the word "Mediterranean" to yourself and immediately images of bright sun, warm breezes, blue waters, exotic foods, and lip-smacking wines begin to release you from your frigid thoughts and massage away the ice from your frozen soul. What better time can there possibly be to hold firm to that imagery while taking a vinous vacation to the cradle of the wine grape? For this edition of Jim Hiller's Wine Club we have put together a collection of Mediterranean wine getaways for you, selections from Iberia to the Levant, many of the wines made from grapes that thrive only in the Mediterranean.

Historians and archeologists place the earliest evidence of organized winemaking in Northern Persia, but if the Mediterranean's coastal shores were not the actual birthplace of wine, they were certainly the incubator. The great civilizations that formed the Western world - the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans - all not only produced wine, they apparently revered it, often placing it at the center of their religious practice and observance. (Osiris, Dionysus, and Bacchus were all major figures in their respective pantheons.) Wine was an important lubricant for the commercial wheels that spread the influence of those civilizations and it often became one of the most important pillars of their various domestic economies. One might even argue that a correlation existed and continues to exist between the extent to which an area embraced and developed its wine industry and the degree of its overall economic success. Of course, war, technology and a few other peripheral factors might also be involved in so broad a speculation, but so what? While we sip and enjoy these lovely

wines and fantasize on their gorgeous provenance, why should we not speculate broadly?

Taster's Table Whites

2006 Santa Giustina Ortrugo

Light straw color and an intense floral and golden apple bouquet precede the refreshingly citrus palate of this nicely balanced, lightly effervescent wine (The Italians call this light sparkle 'vivace' or 'frizzante'.) Its very obscure white grape (100% Ortrugo) hails from the equally obscure Colli Piacentini region of Emilia Romagna in Italy. Emilia Romagna is the home of Lambrusco, but the only thing this wine has in common with its pedestrian cousin is its semi-sparkling character. This is dry and very refreshing with a racy acidity and notes of lemon and mineral that is well-suited as an aperitif wine, but would do wonders for a dish as heavy and rich as a turkey with an oyster stuffing.

2005 Bodegas Ladera Sagrada Castelo do Papa Godello

Showing pale yellow color, with expressive aromas of tropical and stone fruits, lime, mineral and dry herb notes in the bouquet, the Papa on the palate is clean and fresh, with hints of green apples and grapefruit and an enjoyable balance between acidity and alcohol. It's an outstanding food wine suitable to be paired with appetizers, seafood, paella, tapas, chicken, ham, or any light to medium weight Mediterranean meal.

2006 Condado das Vinhas

This Portuguese white is a blend of Roupeiro, Arinto, and Antao Vaz. Pale straw in color with aromas of citrus peel, chalk, mineral and spice, it is lush in the mouth, with delicious nectarine, citrus, and ripe peach flavors on a well-balanced frame of fruit and acidity. Somewhat reminiscent of a sauvignon blanc, the bouquet has a vegetal note (coastal grasses, perhaps?).

2006 Xarmant Arabako Txakolina

From the Baque region in the northwest of Spain, made from indigenous grape varieties none of us can pronounce or have ever heard of (Hondarribi Zuri, Hondarribi Zuri Zerratia, Izkiriota, Izkiriota Ttipia), this terrifically refreshing and delightful wine fully lives up to its name – Xarmant is the Basque spelling of the French “charmant” or charming. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and bottled with residual carbonic that gives the wine its natural spritz. Only indigenous yeasts are used so that the grapes reflect the true qualities of the unique soil and site. It shows a floral nose with hints of minerals that give way to a crisp palate of apples, pears and sweet berries.

2006 Sella & Mosca La Cala Vermentino

After the harvest of 100% Vermentino grapes, selected bunches are exposed to the warm autumnal sunlight and undergo a brief, natural drying process which concentrates flavors and extract producing a fullness of flavor with an underlying acidity that gives a supple impression in the mouth. Vermentino wines are a versatile match for a wide array of appetizers and entrees, especially shellfish and seafood dishes. The wine shows very pale straw color with lemony green highlights. The nose is intense and complex, the structure well-balanced. The fruitiness of the mid-palate is underpinned by notes of sea salt, then the finish concludes on a long, drawn-out note of softness. This wine is a natural partner to all that the sea has to offer.

2006 Care Rosado

The Cariñena region of Spain (“Carallana,” or “flat face” in Roman times, hence the label art) has been an important centre of wine production since the Romans. The Care Rosado is made with Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo grapes and displays a strawberry pink color with bright ruby hues. The nose shows clean and very intense aromas of ripe red fruits – raspberry, strawberry, and a touch of watermelon - with floral tones. On the palate the wine is full, fruity and fresh. The balanced, persistent and long finish

makes it a fine match for a fruit salad or other light lunch fare.

Taster’s Table Reds

2005 Zumaya Tempranillo

Zumaya takes its name from the small owl that lives in the region, not from the Tiger’s short reliever. It is, however, a different concept for a wine from the D.O. Ribera del Duero; it is soft, well rounded and easy to drink – made, in fact, to be drunk early as opposed to most wines from the area which can age for decades. Produced from 100 per cent hand-picked tempranillo, grapes grown on 25 year-old vines close to Aranda del Duero, in the heart of the D.O., the color is dark, the nose a mix of smoke and meaty red fruits. The palate shows cranberry and black fruits with bits of vanilla and mocha from the American oak barrels it is aged in.

2005 Cruz de Piedra Tinto

Cruz de Piedra translates as ‘cross of stone,’ referring to the stone crosses that mark the pilgrim’s road to Santiago de Compostela. There is a particularly beautiful example near the vineyards which is what gives the area its name. The wine is made from ancient low bush vines planted in the D.O. Calatayud high in the mountains of Northern Spain between Madrid and Zaragoza. It has a very intense, fruit-forward bouquet. On the palate it shows concentrated berry flavors and a touch of spiciness, supported by a firm structure, although the tannins are quite smooth. It pairs very well with full flavored meat dishes, particularly lamb and game.

2004 Feudi di San Marzano Rosso Salento

A blend of Sangiovese, Malvasia Nera, and Aglianico that is sourced from the city of San Marzano and neighboring districts in the area of Taranto, the Feudi di San Marzano is ruby red in color with hints of violet at the core. Lush red fruit across the nose and palate with light balancing acidity and whispers of spice and leather lead into a medium-bodied palate with supple tannins and light oak on the finish. An excellent glass before the meal or paired with salami, tomato

based dishes, risotto, and lighter meat courses.

2004 Castello D’Alba Colheita Seleccionada

Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, and Tinta Roriz, the grape varieties in this yummy Portuguese dry red, are also prominent grapes in Port, the signature sweet wine of Portugal. The intense plummy fruitiness of the bouquet will immediately confirm that heritage, but you’ll be surprised by the elegant structure and balance of the palate as well as the long, persistent, and satisfying finish. There are not yet a lot of Portuguese dry red table wines on the market, but grab them when you see them. They are outstanding values, full-flavored and easy-drinking.

2005 Massaya Classic

Massaya’s entry-level red is 60% Cinsault, the rest Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. A bit closed on the nose, with black fruit and reductive tar, there is also ample leather, spice, tobacco and even a hint of coffee/chocolate to give depth to the juicy fruit. On the palate it is concentrated and ripe, with plenty of slightly perfumed, violet character to frame solid, rich, berry fruits. It has a meaty texture and plenty of substance, with lovely tannins and excellent length and balance. Massaya is owned by the Lebanese brothers Sami and Ramzi Ghosen, and winemakers Dominique Hébard of Bordeaux and Daniel Brunier of Vieux Télégraph in the Rhône. The Massaya reds are like meatier and richer versions of Chateaufort du Pape, with soft, spicy chocolatey fruit and excellent structure.

2002 Domain Saint Antoine Syrah

This unfiltered Syrah from Domain de Saint-Antoine is in the Southern Rhone area located southeast of the ancient Roman city of Nimes and offers impressive body and lushness. It has ruby red color, juicy ripe fruit flavors highlighted by notes of currant, cherries and plums, dark chocolate and lovely herbal notes. All flavors integrate nicely with balanced acidity and a velvety, almost sticky texture. The finish has some length to it but then ends in a short, succinct finish.

Collector's Club Whites

2005 Camille Cayran "Les Salyens" Blanc

From vineyards located in the village of Cairanne on the left bank of the Rhône river and blended from 6 different varieties: 50% Grenache blanc complemented with Clairette, Bourboulenc, Roussanne, Marsanne and Viognier, this is white Rhone at its most elegant. The color is pale yellow with gold tints. The first impression on the nose is of delicate aromas of cut hay, vanilla, and hawthorn. Further aeration reveals notes of white peach, pear, apricot and honey. The palate is ample with a bright fruit attack and flavors of stewed apples, cinnamon and flowers.

2006 Statti Greco

Greco Bianco is a sub-variety of Greco Nero, a white wine grape of ancient origin, probably Greek, grown extensively in southern Italy. Both varieties are used to produce dry and sweet wines from semi-dried grapes. Greco di Tufo is seen rather more frequently in American markets, but this effort from Calabria deserves attention. (With almost 800 kilometers of coastline stretching from the heel to the toe of the Italian peninsula, Calabria is the country's most southerly region). The color is pale yellow with a light golden hue, the bouquet is intensely and pleasantly aromatic with notes of very ripe apples, almonds, and flowers. A fresh acidity and a nice glycerol/alcohol balance on the palate lead into a pleasing and long finish. Zippy enough for any simple fish preparation, it is also flavorful enough to stand up to an elaborate seafood stew.

2006 Ca' Montini Prosecco

Prosecco is made in the *Charmat* method, a sparkling winemaking process by which the second fermentation (the step that produces the all-important bubbles) is induced in a pressure tank rather than in the individual bottles (as in the hallowed *methode champenoise* in France's Champagne region). Ca' Montini prolongs the *Charmat* method to 3 months, which slowly refines the perlage, making for smaller bubbles and

intensifying the rich flavors and seductive aromas. Aromas of wild flowers, the clean, fresh flavors of ripe peaches and apples, the zippy acidity and the slight bitterness in the aftertaste make this one of the finest Proseccos we've tasted in a long while.

2004 Papaioannou Winery Ai Lia Assyrtico

Assyrtico is one of the most important of Greece's indigenous white varieties. Its home is the beautiful island of Santorini but it is now grown widely throughout Greece. Coming from an extremely hot climate, the wine is inherently very high in acidity (the quality that makes you salivate after a sip). Assyrtiko is harder than most varieties to describe. The aroma is very subtle but beautifully flowery and fruity. Light to medium bodied, Assyrtico wines are at their best at 2 - 5 years, when the ferocious acidity has abated. It is sometimes compared to Viognier and Chenin Blanc, but also to Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Grigio, even Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. It's tough to pin down, but very easy to drink. Papaioannou grows a gorgeous example on the dramatic slopes of 'Ai Lia' (Saint Elias), an extinct volcano near Nemea.

2005 Sella & Mosca Terre Bianche Torbato di Alghero DOC

The Sella & Mosca estate in Alghero constitutes the final preserve of the Torbato grape on the island of Sardinia. While other Sardinian wine producers have abandoned this high-maintenance grape variety, Sella & Mosca has dedicated resources to protecting this rare legacy of Sardinia's rich and ancient winemaking heritage. Challenging to grow, difficult to maintain and naturally low in terms of yield, Torbato's reward is a unique white wine of immense varietal character, quality and appeal. Stems are fragile and bend easily as grape bunches develop. Great care is required once grapes reach maturity, when they are liable to drop to the ground on account of their increased weight. Moreover, Torbato grapes are rich in fiber; consequently, yields in terms of juice are relatively low. Almost translucent with a delicate straw gold hue, the bouquet is notably fragrant,

complex, persistent; and very elegant.. The taste is fresh, crisp and flavorful, with a naturally assertive and pleasing acidity, complemented by nuances of vanilla derived from the oak aging.

2006 Antonopoulos Mantinia

The Wine Spectator described the Antonopoulos Mantinia as "A fragrant white, with extracted peach, apple, citrus and spice flavors. The finish is filled with fruit and savory herbal notes that end firm and crisp." The *Spectator* also noted that "the most interesting [Greek wines] so far are well-structured white wines based on native grapes such as Moschofilero, which offers crunchy apple, peach and mineral elements that are reminiscent of fine Riesling." We think this is a fine example of that emergent Greek excellence. Made from 100% Moschofilero, the wine is pale yellow in color with a hint of green. It shows aromas of citrus fruit flowers, rose, pear and jasmine on the nose. In the mouth it shows vigorous fruit with bright acidity and good persistence. This is an outstanding pairing with any shellfish, pastas with light white cream sauces and fruits.

Collector's Club Reds

2005 Mas Hereu Sola Classic Priorat

Priorat is a small region within Catalunya in northeastern Spain along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea that has rapidly gained recognition for producing international varieties and outstanding wines from old vine plantings. In 2001 Priorat became only the second region in Spain to earn Denominación de Origen Calificada status, the highest category within the Spanish wine classification system. (Rioja is the other) At first glance, the region hardly seems suited for vineyards. Steeply sloping hills are protected by a long ridge of craggy mountains. But the terraced vineyards offer cool, slow-ripening sites. The unusual soil provides enough water to nourish the vines without irrigation and the vines produce low yields of very concentrated grapes. The Mas Hereu estate, founded in 1777 and still controlled by the founding family, produces its Sola Classic from 57% garnacha and 43% carinena – grapes that

are, in France and elsewhere called Grenache and Carignan. The wine is very modern in style: fresh, sleek, clean-fruited, tightly wound, but very concentrated and classy with touches of spices, minerals and vanilla around a pronounced dark fruit core.

2003 Bodegas Matarredonda Libranza

As is typical in the D.O. of Toro, the Libranza is 100% Tinta de Toro, the local clone of Tempranillo. It comes from a 12-acre vineyard of pre-phyloxera Tinta de Toro vines ranging in age from 100-140 years. The wine received 14 months in French and American oak. Purple-colored and deeply extracted, this wine is a bit tight aromatically but with coaxing –open it well in advance of your meal or decant - notes of vanilla, earth, spice, and blackberry emerge. On the palate this large-scaled wine has a supple texture, layers of fruit, and plenty of ripe tannin and a long and captivating finish. Everything is in balance and showing all the traits needed for successful ageing for years to come.

2006 Valle dell'Acate Il Frappato

I've heard this delightfully easy-drinking and pleasant wine characterized as being like both Beaujolais and Zinfandel. Counterintuitive as that may sound, it's a valid insight. Il Frappato, made entirely from an indigenous Sicilian grape variety of the same name, is as quaffable and refreshing as a Beaujolais while being as richly fruited and flavorful as a Zin. Its light ruby red color gives way to a bouquet of brightly fragrant blackberry and raspberry. The palate is light-bodied but persistent through the finish with the same black and red fruit flavors and a touch of black pepper and minerals. Paired with cheeses, cold cuts or pâtés, or as an accompaniment to simpler fish dishes, the nice acidity and clean fruit will frame, not overwhelm, the food.

2001 Sella & Mosca Tanca Farra

Sella & Mosca's Tanca Farra is an innovative blend of 50% Cannonau and 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. Cannonau is a variety that has long thrived in Sardinia, while Cabernet is a more recent introduction to the island. Sella & Mosca has experimented with Cabernet since the late 1890s and planted Cabernet vines in

its highly acclaimed Marchese di Villamarina vineyard in the late 1950s. The name Tanca Farra ("Iron Earth" in the Sardinian dialect) refers to the high iron content of the soil in this portion of the estate, a factor credited with a conspicuous role in the resulting complexity and depth of this wine.

One of Italy's most impressive and progressive wine estates, this impeccably maintained 1,600-acre property in Sardinia is credited around the world with placing Sardinian wines firmly on the international wine-lover's map. Moreover, it includes the second largest contiguous vineyard in Italy. The two grape varieties each undergo a three-day cold maceration and fermentation (at 40°-42°F). Only in the final phase of fermentation are the two varieties blended together. The wine is then aged four years in large Slavonian oak casks and a further period in bottle prior to release. Ruby red in color, it shows a bouquet of ripe fruit with subtle herbaceous notes. Full-bodied, dry and graceful, it's a splendid match for hearty red meat dishes, game and mature cheeses.

2004 Massaya Silver Selection

The Romans built the temple of Bacchus in Baalbeck, some 30 minutes away from the Tanail Estate and its Massaya winery. Thus Massaya carries on a wine tradition dating back some 5000 years and that evolved through multiple stages of Phoenician, Roman, Arabic, and French influences. The vineyards of the Tanail Estate are located at an altitude of 1000 meters above sea level in the Bekaa Valley, where the slopes are protected by Mount Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges. Free of frost and disease, the Bekaa Valley enjoys a climate with long gentle summers, wet winters and an moderate temperatures, perfect for viticulture.

Lebanese reds can be remarkably distinctive and to some, off-putting. Carignane or Cinsault, two lesser-known grapes native to France's Rhone Valley, often form their backbone. They're supplemented with Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Stylistically, the wines fall somewhere between Bordeaux and the Rhone, but they're more unique than that. Chateau Musar may be the best-known

and most "distinctive" Lebanese winery with its hallmark presence of the yeast *Brettanomyces*, which adds a rustic barnyard aroma. Though winemakers usually shun Brett, Musar devotees seem to love this nuance, but the wines aren't for everyone. By contrast, Massaya's wines are clean as a whistle. The Lebanese Ghosn family, plus Massaya's notable French partners (from families associated with Bordeaux's Chateau Cheval Blanc, and Chateaufeuf-du-Pape's Domaine du Vieux Telegraphe) deserve credit for the modern winemaking approach.

The Silver Selection, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault, Grenache, Merlot, Mourvedre, Syrah, and Tempranillo opens with a mix of earth and briar notes, plus blackberry, licorice and aromas of old well-worn leather. Vanilla and hints of herb-rubbed meat are added to the mix, with a dark, anise-filled, slightly bitter palate. More angular than a Chateaufeuf, less structured than Bordeaux, it ends bright and long. It could age another five years, but is a lovely and unique experience right now.

2003 Domaine Michel Ogier "La Rosine" Syrah

There are accidents of geography that sometimes give rise to tremendous bargains in the wine world. Such is the bad luck of Domaine Michel and Stéphane Ogier and the good luck of the consumer who happens across this bottling from a tiny 6 hectare estate in the Northern Rhone that straddles parts of both the prestigious Côte Rôtie and the Condrieu appellations. La Rosine is a bottling of pure Syrah from vineyards located between Côte Rôtie and Condrieu, and averaging 15 years in age. The wine is vinified in new, one and two year-old barrels. The wine displays the classic Côte Rôtie aromas and flavors of smoked meats, ripe plums and spice but it is not entitled to the Côte Rôtie label because it is not 100% with the geographical delineation of the appellation. Nevertheless, this is a remarkably high quality wine from the northern Rhône, and is a fraction of the price of a good Côte Rôtie.