

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

February 2010
Volume 11, Issue 2

Inside this Issue

- 1 Recession Busting Wines
- 2 Recession Busting Wines
- 3 Tasting Notes
- 4 Tasting Notes

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

Recession Busting Wines

Have your wine buying habits changed in the last year or two? If you are like most American wine drinkers, they have. You may be buying as much or even a little more wine than you used to, but you are almost certainly buying wine at lower price points than was your former pattern. What's more, you have found that those lower priced wines aren't all that bad. Your newer discoveries may be coming from different areas than those you used to buy but the quality of these new wines has been surprising. You are also seeing more new labels available and you are more willing to give them a try if the price seems right. In fact, you might be hard pressed to remember the last time you bought a bottle of good old Chateau whatever-that-was-that-I-used-to-buy-all-the-time. Now that you think about it, you don't even see that old stand-by on the store shelves as much as you used to.

Welcome to the new order of things as the world of wine responds to the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The deflationary pressure on wine prices in the past year has been unprecedented in our time as the "conspicuous consumption" of just a few years ago has come to a screeching halt. *The Wine Spectator's* cover article in March 2008 was titled "The World's Richest Vintage." This month's cover shouts, "At Last, A Buyer's Market!"

Indeed, this is a terrific time to be a buyer and a rotten time to be a supplier in the wine market. Expense account purchases of high end wines in restaurants have come to a virtual

halt. Overall restaurant wine sales are severely depressed as folks eat out less often and buy wine by the glass when they do. In response to these falling sales, many producers and distributors have slashed prices, increased promotional spending, tried to move inventory through internet liquidation sites, developed second or third labels, and even sold off excess juice on the bulk market (which, by the way, is one reason why the quality of many of those cheaper labels that you have tried has been better than you expected.) Inexorably another crop comes in even if the previous year's wines remain unsold, putting more pressure on prices. Prime Napa Valley Cabernet grapes from the 09 harvest sold for half what they commanded just two years before. Rumor has it that more than a few well-known wineries have quietly put themselves out for sale but attracted no bidders. Meanwhile wines from less prestigious areas look more and more attractively priced.

The upheaval is worldwide. Vineyard owners are being urged to uproot vines in Australia. A portion of the 2009 Champagne harvest is being held off the market in an attempt to force down supply as demand drops. Exports to the U.S from all European wine growing regions are off by a fifth or more as the dollar's weakness against the Euro has shifted the competitive advantage to wines from Chile, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. America's willingness to try those wines has forced the Euro Zone producers to hold off or roll back price increases that otherwise would inevitably have come.

Meanwhile two other megatrends that we've written about previously continue apace and rebound to the further benefit of the consumer. There has been for thirty years or more a world wide quality revolution in wine-making techniques- from a shift toward sustainable, organic, and biodynamic agriculture to night and hand harvesting of fruit to temperature controlled cold fermentations to antiseptic handling and storing procedures to the improvement of cork quality or its elimination. There has also been the development and blossoming of newer wine growing regions. Think of how New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc has completely changed and expanded the market for that grape variety or how remarkable it is that Washington State a generation ago produced only a trickle of wine, but in 2009 produced the #1 wine in the world, according to *The Wine Spectator's* recent Top 100 rankings. Think of all the varieties we take for granted today that were hardly available even ten years ago, e.g., Malbec from Argentina, Albarino from Spain, Chilean Carmenere, or Michigan Riesling, to name just a few.

So if there is a silver lining to the economic doldrums we currently face, it should certainly be seen by the wine consumer. For this edition of the Wine Club, we started out by looking for what wines might still be on the market from the various Best of 2009 lists put out by the major wine mags. There is *The Wine Spectator's* Top 100 of 2009, *The Wine Enthusiast's* Top 100 Best Buys of 2009, *The Wall Street Journal's* Great Values under \$12, the Top Best Buys of 2009 from winebestbuys.com, and many others. Wines can earn "Smart Buy," "Editor's Choice," "Top Value" and other such designations from the pundits.

We have assembled 24 of our favorites from the lists we reviewed. The quality of what we gathered will astound you. Six selections are on *The Wine Spectator's* list of the top 100 wines in the world. Four are on *The Wine Enthusiast's* list of Best Buys. Well over half are 90 point or above efforts and those that didn't break 90 all scored 88 or 89. Wines reviewed this glowingly almost always disappear from the market within a month of the encomium's publication. That we were able to put together this many superstars is perhaps the best evidence we could present of how enormous a buying opportunity we're in.

Tasting Notes

Taster's Table Whites

2008 Big House White California

Several times a Wine Club selection over the ten year history of Jim Hiller's Wine Club, the Big House White 2008 vintage garnered the #1 spot on *The Wine Enthusiast's* Top 100 Best Buys of 2009 and earned a 90 point score as well. "Continues the solid trend of this label producing some of the best values in California. Dry, crisp, and delicious, with mineral infused flavors of oranges, honeysuckle and buttered toast. A blend of Malvasia Bianca, Muscat Canelli, Viognier and Rousanne."

2008 Veramonte Reserve Sauvignon Blanc Casablanca Valley

Another white that made *The Wine Enthusiast's* Top 100 (at #79 and an 89 point score) and has been a prior Wine Club pick as well, the Veramonte Sauvignon Blanc has for the past five or six vintages been one of the most consistent of Chilean whites. "Veramonte knows how to capture the pungent, alert character inherent to Sauvignon Blanc. This is

a peppy wine with spikey tropical and green-fruit aromas and flavors. It's a mash up of citrus and nettles, with a controlled, fairly long grapefruit-driven finish. Modest in price, but the real thing."

NV Mionetto Brut Prosecco Italy

Dorothy Gaiter and John Brecher each year publish a list of a dozen Great Values in their "Tastings" wine column for *The Wall Street Journal*. We have long admired their unpretentious and joyful approach to wine appreciation and found their recommendations to be spot on. Of the Mionetto they write, "Prosecco is yet another kind of wine that has made its mark in a short time. It is soft, relatively low in alcohol, slightly bubbly – and, we found in a tasting, consistently tasty. Consider these notes on the Mionetto: 'Some Champagne-like finesse. Minerals, toast and real fruit tastes, especially apple and pears. A little bit of weight makes it especially good with food. All that for \$9.99? Wow. This is great to sip alone, with light savory appetizers or as dessert alone or with cookies, fruit or nuts.'"

2008 Chateau Saint Jean Fume Blanc Sonoma County

This wine is rated highly by just about everybody. The 2007 vintage, for example, got a 90 point score from the *Spectator*, 88 from the *Enthusiast*, and 89 from the *Advocate*. If it is not on your list of go-to wines, it should be. It should also be on your don't-miss list should you vacation in Sonoma's wine country – the manicured gardens at the winery may be even more spectacular than the wines. Here's the *Spectator's* 88 point review of the 2008: "Intense smoke and honeysuckle aromatics mingle well together, leading to crisp and refreshing lemon, tangerine and

yellow apple flavors on a medium body, with good acidity.”

2007 Casillero del Diablo Chardonnay Casablanca Valley

A Best Value from *The Wine Spectator*, the Casillero 2008 Chardonnay joins that label’s consistently excellent Carmenere and Cabernet as wines to always have at hand for everyday. *The Wine Advocate* chimes in with 88 points and “The 2007 Chardonnay reveals pear, apple, and pineapple in its fragrant perfume leading to an intense, ripe, and lengthy Chardonnay for drinking over the next 12-18 months.” *The Enthusiast* agrees: “Mass Chardonnay from Chile doesn’t come much better or more consistent than this. It’s toasty on the nose, with candied, lightly creamy banana and citrus flavors. Very nice as a fresh young wine, with a touch of heat on the finish. Great for picnics and backyard summer parties.”

2008 Chateau Ste Michelle Chardonnay Columbia Valley

A 90 point Best Value from *The Wine Spectator* and a great example of the outstanding quality and value for the money that can be found from Washington state wines, the Chateau Ste Michelle Chardonnay is “Bright and jazzy, with pretty pineapple, grapefruit, elderflower and spice flavors that linger on the finish without excess weight. This just floats on for a while.”

Taster’s Table Reds

2008 Thorn-Clark Terra Barossa Shiraz

“The 2008 Terra Barossa Shiraz Winemaker’s Selection was aged in French and American oak. A glass-coating opaque purple color, it is ripe, rich, yet light on its feet. Flavorful, layered, and well-balanced, it will evolve for 2-3 years and offer a drinking window extending from

2011 to 2020. It is an outstanding value.” saith *The Wine Advocate*, beneficently dispensing a 90 point blessing. We thought this a terrific value when it came in a 750 ml bottle. For a full liter bottle at the same price, it’s a steal.

2008 The Wolftrap Western Cape

30 on *The Wine Enthusiast’s* top 100 Best Buy list, the Wolftrap has been one of the most successful South African brands on the market. A blend of Syrah, Mourvedre, and Viognier, its “nose of red fruit, spice and violet is followed by fresh but lush aromas of cherries, blackberries and a touch of smoke and dark chocolate. Smooth and integrated, with a pretty, aromatic character.”

2006 Hogue Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot Columbia Valley

“This 55/45 Cab – Merlot blend is a gem. The aromas are rich with black berries, black currants and black olives; and in the mouth the two grapes are nicely balanced and full-bodied. Nothing wimpy here – this puts most other such blends to shame. You’ll pick up a hint of licorice and a touch of herb as well.” 88 points and ranked as the 69th Best Buy of 2009 by *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2008 Redtree Pinot Noir California

This wine became one of 2009’s most talked about after James Laube of *The Wine Spectator* raved about it in a blog entry, then later reviewed it with an 88 point score and Best Value and Wine of the Week designations. “Offers baked cherry pie, with rhubarb and blueberry, showing a wonderful fruit profile that’s spicy, elegant and easy to drink. Great balance.” Google it up if you want to see scads of further accolades. We’re not sure it’s as good as all the hype, but given the Pinot price inflation of the past few years since the release of the movie

Sideways, it is a pleasure to see any drinkable Pinot under ten bucks.

2006 Monte Antico Rosso Toscana

Not only did this lovely wine get a 90 point score and a Best Value designation, it was #61 on *The Wine Spectator’s* list of the Top 100 wines of 2009. A blend of Sangiovese, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon from Tuscany, it shows “Bright plum, dried cherry and flowers on the nose. Full-bodied, with fine tannins and refined berry and cherry flavors.” When you can buy a Top 100 super Tuscan for ten or twelve bucks, you’re in a heckuva buyer’s market.

2008 Piccini Buon Appetito Nero d'Avola Sicilia

Nero d’Avola (a.k.a Calabrese) is a grape variety native to Sicily capable of producing wines of complex aromas and excellent aging potential. Reddish-purple in color with violet hues, the Buon Appetito is a well structured, well-balanced wine with an intense bouquet of ripe red fruit with hints of licorice and bread crust. For great bargains in Italian wines, look toward the south. This earned 90 points and was a Top 100 Values selection from *Wine & Spirits*.

Collector’s Club Whites

2007 La Crema Chardonnay Sonoma Coast

This vintage of La Crema Chardonnay received 90 point ratings from *The Wine Advocate*, *Wine & Spirits* and *The Wine Enthusiast*. *The Advocate’s* review says it well: “It exhibits plenty of tropical fruit and honeysuckle along with a touch of spice, full-bodied, rich flavors, and a subtle note of oak. This wine was 100% barrel-fermented and was put through 100% malolactic fermentation, but the oak is kept in the background. This Chardonnay / Pinot Noir specialist should receive rave notices from bargain hunters

looking for a top-flight Chardonnay that is complex, rich, and widely available.”

2008 Chateau Ste Michelle/Dr Loosen ‘Eroica’ Riesling Columbia Valley

If you look up past ratings of this wine from any major reviewer you see practically nothing going back to its introduction in 1999 but 90 point scores and above. The 93 point review in *The Wine Enthusiast* for the 2008 is hardly atypical. “The 10th vintage of Eroica may be the best ever. It’s supremely fresh, spicy, and mineral-driven. The well-textured mouthfeel runs the gamut from celery, chervil and other fresh herbs into melon, citrus and stone. Though technically off-dry, this is a low pH, high acid wine with plenty of length and depth.”

2008 Spy Valley Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough

“Serves up a fragrant medley of tart black currant, grapefruit and crushed stone nuances. Sea salt and oyster shell give this a savory edge, with fresh thyme and lime extending through the finish. Drink now.” 89 points in *The Wine Spectator*.

2008 Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough

This was #40 on Spectator’s Top 100 of 2008 and earned a 91 point score. “Fragrant and complex, with a refreshing burst of lime, guava, grapefruit and grass flavors. Wet stone, passion fruit and oyster shell accents add interest, with bright acidity highlighting the vivid finish. Another outstanding Sauvignon from a perennial success.” A Smart Buy and still generally available.

2007 Trimbach Riesling Alsace

91 points, a Smart Buy and #55 on *The Wine Spectator’s* Top 100 list, “This subtle Riesling offers a finely woven mix of white peach and

crushed pine needle flavors, with hints of brine and smoke. There’s racy acidity, but it’s well-meshed, and a mineral note lingers on the delicate finish.”

NV Gloria Ferrer Brut Sonoma Coast

90 points, a Smart Buy and #78 of the Top 100 from *Wine Spectator*, the Gloria Ferrer is “Lively and fun to drink, with creamy Asian pear and citrus aromas that lead to crisp, easygoing apple, yeasty cinnamon and mineral flavors.” Heading for the Napa Valley from San Francisco for a weekend of wine tasting, the Gloria Ferrer Winery was almost invariably my first stop for their lovely outdoor porch from which one can sip Champagne and gaze south over the Carneros flats toward the San Pablo Bay.

Collector’s Club Reds

2006 Benziger Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma County

“A very nice Cab, at a good price. Shows real fanciness in the ripe blackberries, currants and spices, with a rich overlay of smoky oak. And the tannins are just right. Now–2012.” 90 points in *The Wine Enthusiast*.

2006 Terrazas de los Andes Reserva Malbec Mendoza

“Quite juicy, with raspberry, cassis and briar notes riding over fresh acidity through a bouncy dark fruit- and spice-filled finish. Drink now through 2010.” An 89 point Smart Buy in the *The Wine Spectator*.

2007 Bodega Catena Zapata Malbec Mendoza

Malbec is the hottest varietal on the market these days and Catena has been a star in the category for years. The 2007 cracked the *Spectator’s* Top 100 list at #69: “A sleek, polished style, with alluring mocha

and raspberry ganache notes leading the way, backed by dark plum, hoisin sauce and graphite flavors that push through the finish. This has serious weight, but stays focused and driven. Drink now through 2011.” Gets a 91 point score and a Smart Buy.

2006 Frei Bros Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley

According to *The Wine Advocate*, “one of the best value producers in the Gallo empire is the Frei Brothers Reserve. [The Cabernet’s] deep, dark ruby color is followed by notes of creosote, roasted herbs, tobacco leaf, black currants, and cherries. This smoky, medium to full-bodied, impressively endowed Cabernet should drink well for a decade.”

2006 Bodegas Emilio Moro Ribera del Duero

Made the *Spectator’s* Top 100 and garnered a 91 point score. “Ripe cherry, fig pudding, vanilla and spice flavors mingle in this firm, lively red. There’s plenty of structure, but the red fruit flavors are bright and expressive. Drink now through 2016.” It also earned 92 points from *The Wine Advocate*: “The 2006 Emilio Moro was aged in French and American oak for 12 months. It has a superb bouquet of smoke, roasted herbs, scorched earth, and blackberry. Layered on the palate, it has tons of fruit, plenty of spice box notes, a firm structure, and years of aging potential. This lengthy effort should provide pleasure through 2026.”

2007 Brancaia Tre Toscana

“There’s wonderful intensity of fruit in this wine, with crushed raspberry and blackberry and hints of coffee and fresh flowers. Full-bodied, with velvety tannins and a long, soft-textured finish that shows loads of fruit. Sangiovese, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Best after 2010.” A score of 93, a Smart Buy and #10 on *Spectator’s* Top 100.

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 1058. He will advise you on availability, best time to buy, and any upcoming discounts.

