



Wines Well Worth Drinking

By Ed McCarthy

We fortunate wine writers get the opportunity--through tastings, luncheons, samples, etc.--of tasting dozens of wines each month, some of which are impressive. Unfortunately, we often can write about just a few of these wines. In this column, I focus on the wines that have impressed me during the last few months, but that I have not yet had the opportunity to cover in print.

The wines I am listing here, in no particular order, are all currently available and, in my opinion, well worth buying and drinking:

At a recent tasting of Codorníu Raventós wines, the high quality of Codorníu cava astounded me. Codorníu has always been a leader in Spanish sparkling wines, but it is currently making its best cava ever. Try its excellent Anna de Codorníu Brut NV, 70 percent Chardonnay, 30 percent Parellada (indigenous Spanish variety). Only 11.5 ° alcohol, and very dry (merely 1.3 gr/l. residual sugar). Equally fine is Codorníu's Anna de Codorníu Brut NV Rosé, 70 percent Pinot Noir and 30 percent Chardonnay. Both are very well-priced for their quality, the white retailing for \$12, the rosé for \$13. On another level are the Gran Codorníu Gran Reserva Vintage Bruts (Xarel-lo, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir), which will be released in the U.S. shortly.

Rimat, a wine company in the same group as Codorníu Raventós, makes wine in Spain's emerging Costers del Segre in Catalonia. Its 2012 Xarel-lo Chardonnay (50 percent of each variety) impressed me with its fresh acidity and depth. Xarel-lo, a native Catalan variety, is one of my favorite Spanish white grapes. This wine is just being imported into the U.S. now, and should sell in the \$14/\$15 range.

Five or six years ago, who in the U.S. knew that an obscure Greek white wine, Assyrtiko, from Santorini, would be one of the hottest new white wines in the country? Thanks to newly aggressive promoting on the part of Greece, it has become sought-after in a very short time. Made almost exclusively on the volcanic, beautiful island of Santorini (and in fact the island-base Assyrtikos are also known as Santorini wine), this very dry, acidic and yet rather full-bodied white wine is a perfect accompaniment to fish and seafood, but can also stand up to chicken and pork entrées. Most Santorini wines are 90 to 100 percent Assyrtiko and aged in stainless steel, although a few do have some oak aging. About a dozen wineries produce Santorini wine, Boutari being the largest. Four of the top Santorini producers are Gaïa, Domaine Sigalas (both about \$19-\$22), Hatzidakis (\$17), and Argyros Estate (\$13-\$15).

Champagne Lallier is a small house in the village of Aÿ that makes excellent Champagnes from 100 percent Grand Cru grapes, including its super Grande Réserve NV Brut, which retails in the \$35-\$40 range; you won't find a better Champagne at this price. A real treat is Lallier's NV Blanc de Blancs, a rich wine made from Chardonnay vineyards in Aÿ as well as Cramant and Avize in the Côte des Blancs (about \$55). Lallier's top Champagne is its Grand Cru Zero Dosage NV, made from 70 percent Pinot Noir from Aÿ and 30 percent Chardonnay from Avize and Cramant (about \$80). This is a classy, aromatic, well-balanced Champagne that will go well with all kinds of seafood.

At a recent tasting of Bolla wines, I was pleasantly surprised by the 2011 Bolla Bardolino. Bolla ruled in U.S. Italian restaurants during the 1950s though the 1970s, but went into a period of decline in the 1980s and '90s. Today, Bolla is under new Italian ownership, and Banfi Vineyards is involved, including distributing Bolla in the U.S. In general, I prefer the style of today's Bardolino wines to that of Valpolicella wines; the latter tends to be made in a heavy-handed style. Most of the better Bardolinos are lighter-bodied, fresh, and delicate--the perfect summer red, served lightly chilled. Bolla's 2011 Bardolino, the current vintage, is bright and fresh, with aromas of black cherries and other dark fruits. Yes, you can find other Bardolinos that are better than Bolla's, but not at Bolla's price, \$8 to \$10 (elite Bardolinos will cost twice as much). Bolla's Bardolino is made from 60 percent Corvina, 30 percent Rondinella, and 10 percent Molinara, the classic blend, from vineyards around the village of Bardolino, east of Lake Garda in the Veneto region.

The Dalla Terra company brings in wines directly from Italy. Its entire portfolio, under the direction of Brian Larky, is outstanding. Some of the highlights from a recent tasting follow:

- Cleto Chiarli (Emilia-Romagna)--Can Lambrusco be this good? Yes, in the hands of this producer, its dry Lambruscos are superb; my favorite is its Lambrusco del Fondatore, slightly effervescent, second fermentation in the bottle (just like Champagne). About \$18.
- Badia a Coltibuono (Tuscany)--It's difficult to find a really good, traditionally made Chianti Classico nowadays. Badia a Coltibuono has kept the faith. Made from 90 percent Sangiovese and 10 percent Canaiolo and aged in large, old casks, both the 2009 Chianti Classico Estate (\$19-\$20) and 2008 Chianti Classico Estate Riserva (\$32) are outstanding.
- Selvapiana (Tuscany)--Chianti Rufina is the other exceptional region for Chianti besides Chianti Classico, and Selvapiana is the gem of Rufina. Its fine 2010 Chianti Rufina is a mere \$16-\$17, and its outstanding single-vineyard 2009 Bucerchiale, made from 45 year-old vines, is a steal at \$ 30-\$33. If it were labeled Chianti Classico, it'd be much more costly.
- Marchesi di Grésy (Piedmont)--I am a big fan of this producer from Barbaresco. Every wine that Alberto di Grésy makes is excellent, starting with his 2010 Dolcetto d'Alba Monte Aribaldo (\$19-\$20) and his even better 2011 Barbera d'Asti (\$17-\$18). I love his 2011 Langhe Nebbiolo Martinenga (\$20), made from de-classified grapes from his great Martinenga Barbaresco vineyard. In fact, the last two wines are my everyday house wines. Di Grésy was wise enough to bring to the tasting only the two best current vintages for Barbaresco, 2008 and 2006. The three I tasted all were superb--but of course need time: his 2008 Barbaresco Martinenga (about \$50); and his two single-vineyard Barbarescos, 2006 Gaiun (\$73-\$75) and 2006 Camp Gros (\$75-\$77).
- Boroli (Piedmont)--This small family-owned winery outside of Alba is getting better and better. Boroli's Dolcetto d'Alba, "Madonna di Como," has achieved a reputation as one of the better Dolcettos. Boroli offered its 2009 Madonna di Como Dolcetto at the tasting, unusual in that Dolcettos are usually consumed in their first three years, but Boroli's 2009 (\$15) is perfect now. Boroli's 2009 Barbera d'Alba "Quattro Fratelli," also \$15, is almost as good and well-priced. Boroli's 2006 Barolos, the Cerequio (\$69) and Villero (\$60), are both excellent, but need time. Boroli's 2004 Villero (\$69), however, is really good right now.
- Vietti (Piedmont)--I have written about Vietti's wines many times in past columns. My recent tasting of these wines just reminded me of how good Vietti's single-vineyard Barberas are. Anyone who enjoys good Barbera must try these wines: 2009 Barbera d'Asti La Crena (\$38); 2010 Barbera d'Alba Scarrone, its home vineyard (\$38); and the incredible 2010 Scarrone Vigna Vecchia (\$73). These great wines have made Vietti the leader for the Barbera variety.

I was impressed with wines from the following California wineries that I have tasted over the past few months:

The Sonoma Coast, especially the area known as the True Coast (aka Extreme Coast), located within six miles of the Pacific Ocean, has become *the* region for exciting Pinot Noir in California, in my opinion. Some of the excellent True Coast Pinot Noirs I have tasted recently include Cobb Emmaline Anne Vineyard, both the 2008 and 2009; Littorai's 2010 Hirsch Vineyard; Failla's 2011 Keefer Ranch (plus Failla's 2010 Estate Vineyard Syrah); Hartford Court's 2010 Far Coast Vineyard and 2011 Land's Edge Vineyard; and Hirsch Vineyards' 2010 San Andreas Fault and 2010 Reserve Estate Pinot Noirs. These Pinot Noirs range in price from \$40 to \$75.

Laetitia Vineyard (Arroyo Grande Valley, San Luis Obispo County)--Its 2010 La Colline Single-Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55-\$60) is the best Pinot Noir I've tasted from this winery. It is subtle and finesseful, with good acidity.

Sea Smoke Vineyard (Santa Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County)--I knew Sea Smoke's Pinot Noirs were good, but I had no idea about its other wines. Sea Smoke's 2008 Sea Spray Sparkling Wine is outstanding, definitely one of California's premium sparkling bruts; it's 100 percent Pinot Noir, very aromatic and full-bodied (\$80). Almost as good is its characterful 2010 Chardonnay (\$59). The well-balanced 2010 Sea Smoke "Southing" (\$59) was my favorite of the winery's Pinot Noirs.

Ten Acre (Russian River Valley)--The 2010 Ten Acre Stephens Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$55) is a winner,

with luscious aromas and flavors, and a bargain at this price. This new winery has a bright future.

Charles Krug (Napa Valley)--I admired the quality of Charles Krug's wines; I believe that its wines have never been better. The two that most impressed me were the 2010 Merlot, an absolutely stunning value at \$24; one of the better California Merlots that I've tasted recently; and my favorite Charles Krug Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2010 Family Reserve Generations (\$50), a very good Cab that is drinking well now, but it definitely has a long future, at least 15 years or more.

I end with one of the world's greatest and long-lived wines, Madeira, the fortified wine from the volcanic island of Madeira. At its best, Madeira has the longest finish on the palate of any wine. Two Madeiras really stunned me at a recent Madeira tasting in New York; one was from the largest of the six remaining companies of any size left on the island, Blandy's Madeira Wine Company. Its 1994 Colheita Malmsey (about \$48) was superb; the amazing finish lingered on and on. The other was one of the oldest Madeiras at the tasting, Pereira d'Oliveira's 1912 Verdelho (\$375); its searing acidity holds the wonderful, clean flavors together on the palate. An amazing experience.

I urge you to try some of the wines I have mentioned in this column while they are still available.

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