

## BORDEAUX HARVEST FESTIVAL 2007

The French Wine Society will take you on a walk-around tasting featuring more than 100 Bordeaux wines from Margaux, Saint-Julien, Pomerol, Saint-Emilion and Sauternes. 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. at the Embassy of France, 4101 Reservoir Road NW. \$60 for members, \$75 for non-members.

SCOTT GREENBERG *Vine Guy*

# California Dreaming

## Value wines from the Golden State



**D**elicious wines from a famous region for a reasonable price? Pinch me, I must be dreaming — California dreaming, that is.

Several weeks ago, The Wine Institute, the public policy organization that promotes California state wines, brought a piece of the Golden State to Washington to celebrate California Wine Month. It had in tow an assort-

ment of wines from appellations located throughout the state, including Santa Barbara, Sonoma, Napa, Paso Robles and Amador County.

Of course, I was expecting the nation's largest producer of wine to trot out some of its well-known superstars — and I wasn't disappointed. Viader, Etude and L'Aventure, to name a few, all made fine appearances. But what I wasn't expecting was the considerable number of great wines that came in under the \$25 mark. I guess I have fallen victim to my own preconceived notions that: 1) Good wine costs money; and 2) Good California wine costs a lot of money.

Well, silly me. I learned by tasting more than 60 wines during a leisurely afternoon that California quality doesn't have to break the bank. Or even the piggy bank. Now you don't have to suffer the under the same misconception. Take it from me, the Golden State has a silver lining.

Here are my favorite value wines from the California Wine Month road show. Retail prices and availability are subject to change.

### 2005 Meridian Sangiovese, Paso Robles (\$20)

I love sangiovese for its high acidity and bright fruit flavors, and this example hits the bull's-eye. Lively cherry/berry and red plum fruit fills the mouth, and abundant acidity keeps the wine in balance and the palate refreshed. This Italian immigrant is just begging for a bowl of pasta with Puttanesca sauce.

### 2005 J Lohr Los Osos Merlot, Paso Robles (\$11)

A good \$11 merlot? No, I have not lost my palate. On the contrary, this wine offers loads of dark plum fruit, buoyed by hints of clove and licorice all built on a solid frame of spicy tannins. A great value on its own or with Hoisin basted ribs.

### 2005 Justin Vineyards and Winery Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$20)

Dark, brooding fruit exudes aromas of black plum, cherry, cassis and Asian spices on the fragrant nose. The well-structured cabernet provides plush flavors of blackberries, plums and violets with hints of vanilla and toasty oak on the soft finish. Sure to be winner with grilled flank steak.

### 2005 Robert Hall Rhone de Robles, Central Coast (\$18)

Made predominantly from a blend of syrah and grenache with a touch of cinsault and counoise thrown in for good measure, this Rhone blend is worth hunting down. Peppery notes of black cherry, licorice and leather slide over the whole tongue with balance and finesse. The black pepper accent on the finish would be a perfect complement to venison loin.

### 2004 Hook and Ladder Cabernet Sauvignon, Russian River, Sonoma (\$25)

I had to look a couple of times at the label to make sure that I registered the pedigree correctly since I can't recall ever having encountered a cabernet from the Russian River appellation in Sonoma before. But I'm glad I met this one, which was full of jammy plum fruit and hints of cocoa and spice on the lush finish. I'd love to try this with braised ox tail.

### 2004 Clos du Bois Merlot, Sonoma (\$16)

Pretty aromas of plums and cocoa lead to warm, smooth flavors of chocolate covered blackberries on the tongue. Hints of mocha and roasted coffee on the soft finish would provide wonderful company at the end of a meal with a plum tart.

### 2005 Sobon "Fiddletown" Zinfandel, Amador County (\$15)

This 100 percent organic offering provides spicy notes of blueberry, red cherry and kirsch flavors. The symmetry between the fruit and sweet tannins offers a well-balanced, full-bodied zinfandel that would stand up to my wife's Cuban accented chili.

### 2005 Taz "Fiddlestix Vineyard" Pinot Noir, Santa Rita Hills, Santa Barbara (\$25)

A rich, forward-style pinot noir with beautiful scents of dark plum and black raspberry on the impressive nose. Concentrated flavors of black cherry, ripe strawberry, cinnamon and cocoa blend seamlessly over the entire palate. Notes of licorice streak across the luscious finish and practically call out for a slice of seared tuna as a perfect mate.

So if you're looking for some top values, consider looking west. There are great deals to be had in every region of the Golden State.



Do you have a favorite royalty of wine? E-mail me at [scott@vineguy.com](mailto:scott@vineguy.com).