



A Nichols Worth of Wine

October Value Picks

2005 Alois Lageder Pinot Grigio

A less expensive, more expressive alternative to Santa Margherita, this pinot grigio comes from the Alto Adige region in northeastern Italy. It is a rich, well-balanced wine exhibiting peach, mineral and hazelnut flavors. At about \$16 a bottle this wine demonstrates that good Italian wine is available in a color other than red. Found at fine wine stores throughout Collier County, including Old Naples Wine Warehouse in downtown Naples and at the Wine Merchant in North Naples.

2003 Clancy's Red

From South Australia's Barossa Valley, this is a softly textured blend of shiraz, merlot and cabernet sauvignon. The bouquet of chocolate, plums and mint carry through on the palate, and its firm finish makes it an excellent companion to grilled meats and roast chicken. Clancy's Red is widely available for under \$20. If your local store doesn't stock it, ask them to. A winner!

Storing Wine at Home

I learned a long time ago that I was not destined to amass a colossal wine cellar. I tried. The 1978 vintage of California cabernets came close to rivaling the "1968's" and the "1974's" – considered to be banner vintages. I had accumulated more than 100 different labels of these gems and purchased many of them for less than \$10! The problem was two fold: the first being that I was running out of nooks and crannies to store the wines in and secondly, I became increasingly concerned that many of these bottles would "peak" before I could enjoy them at their best. I now keep less than 50-75 wines at any given time – a modest number by some wine collectors standards.

What time has taught me however is to be ever vigilant about storing my wines to ensure an optimal experience when I finally pull the corks of my collection. Despite conventional wisdom, most wines do not require a temperature-controlled, walk-in, custom-built basement cellar.

A few simple practices will help to preserve that once-in a-lifetime wine purchase as well as the bottle you picked up on the way home today for this weekend's barbeque. First, the environment must be cool; you don't want to store wine next to the hot water heater. Store the bottles on their sides. Upright storage dries out the cork allowing for air in and the flavors out. Keep it out of sunlight. This should be a given, but how often have you been in a wine store and noticed the bottles that are prominently stored in, or near, the front window? When you see this, find a new merchant quick! Temperature certainly matters, but what is most important is that a reasonable temperature, ideally under 70 degrees, is constant. Wines subjected to even minor temperature fluctuations can change dramatically, and not for the better.

If a 1000 bottle wine cellar doesn't fit your budget, you may want to consider a small under- counter style refrigerated wine cooler. Many are available starting at \$600. A less expensive and perfectly acceptable option is to clean out the bottom of a little used closet, buy or build some inexpensive shelving, and above all, drink it in its prime!

The Other White Wines

When I think of Italian wines, what do I normally reach for? A red wine of course and since amarone's, brunello's, barolo's and the newest star of Italy – *Super Tuscan's*, are generally incompatible with my budget, I tend to search for the great values that chianti, barbera and valpolicella offer. Rarely, certainly not often enough, do I consider the outstanding, but frequently overlooked white wines of Italy.

Only in recent years have Italian white wines gained market share, and with good reason. Historically, the focus of Italian winemakers was clearly on red wine. Quality white wines were an afterthought for many wineries. Overcoming centuries' old practices in the vineyards and cellars, consumer demand, and modern equipment have all contributed to a marked increase in the quality, variety and production of Italian white wines. What certainly would improve the marketability of these wines would be for Italy to decide on a single approach on how they label their wines. Some are named for the grape, some for the village in which they are grown, and others refer to the name of the grape *and* the location of the vineyard!

New plantings of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc along with the traditional Italian grapes now line the terraced hills of the three principle wine-growing regions; Piedmont, Tuscany and the three northeastern regions known as the Tre Venezie – Trentino, Friuli and Veneto. The vineyards in this area of northern Italy produce nearly all of the best Italian wines – red and white.

The traditional white wines of Italy - *Pinot Bianco*, *Pinot Grigio* (known as pinot gris in France), *Orvieto* from Umbria, *Frascati*, southeast of Rome, *Soave* from Veneto, *Gavi* from Piedmont and *Vernaccia* from the Tuscany region, run a fairly broad spectrum in terms of style.

Pinot Bianco's, also known as pinot blanc, is often blended with chardonnay. They can be full and lush and are generally light to medium-bodied. Gavi, made from the cortese grape, at its best is delicately dry. Garganega is the dominant grape in Soave wines and, when well made, produces wines that are full-bodied with citrus and vanilla flavors. Orvieto, whose primary grape is trebbiano, can offer the greatest character of all the Italian white wines and can be stylistically crisp with lush peach fruit. In the medieval hillside town of San Gimignano in Tuscany, vernaccia can be deliciously fresh and full of vibrant character and fruit. Frascati, a clean, crisp light wine, is served in many of the cafes in Rome and with the increase in American travel there, is gaining in popularity outside of Italy.

Not unlike wines made the world over, Italy produces exquisite wines as well as those better left for the vinegar bottle. First in wine production around the globe, Italian wines continue to improve with every vintage. When matching food and Italian white wines, the simpler the better. Grilled fish, shrimp and clams are excellent choices. Many local wine merchants in the Naples area carry the better producers of Italian wines – red and white. They would be happy to help you select something to match your purse and palate.

Did You Know...

As of 2005, all 50 states in this country are now producing wine.