



A Nichols Worth of Wine

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September Value Picks

2003 Vereinigte Hospitien QmP Riesling. From the Goldtropfchen (translated - “little raindrops of gold”) Vineyard in the village of Piesport in Mosel, Germany, this riesling is made in the Kabinett style of ripeness with good acidity to match up with a wide array of foods. Crafted with finesse, it is lush with apricot, peach and creamy vanilla flavors and a long, luxurious finish. The wine is drinkable now and will age for a few more years. I found this wine at Haskell’s for \$18, a steal for this kind of quality!

2005 Ramsay “North Coast” Pinot Noir

Finding good Pinot Noir from California for under \$20 is not easy. This Pinot is a second label from Kent Rasmussen, a Carneros region pioneer. 2005 was a good vintage for California Pinot’s with an abundance of black cherry and earthy aromas and flavors; this wine is well balanced and finishes very nicely. Ramsay wines are available at many of the better local wine merchants for \$15 - \$17.

Around Town

Pazzo’s. When was the last time – or the first time, that you went to dinner at a great restaurant and were able to taste six wines for \$20? I have been to Pazzo’s on a number of occasions but never noticed what may be the best wine deal in Naples. This 5th Avenue eatery offers a “Create Your Own Wine Flight,” a 2 oz. pour of any three wines from their extensive by-the-glass selection: \$9.95 for the whites and \$10.95 for the reds. Assuming you have two glasses of wine with your meal, you can work your way through four continents and six countries and never leave your table! With more than 30 wines to choose from, vineyards of Italy, America, France and Australia are well represented. Many of these wines if ordered individually by the glass – a 6oz. pour, are priced up to \$17.

Oh, and did I mention Pazzo’s food is great? Despite the temperatures outside, I highly recommend starting with the hearty Tuscan Bean Soup. The restaurant is located at 853 5th Avenue South.

Old Naples Wholesale Wine Shop. A quick word on a new wine store that I recently found in the most obscure of locations. Tucked between 8th and 9th Streets and 3rd and 4th Avenues South, this shop is well-worth seeking out. It’s not a mega-store, and the owner, Peter Rizzo sells only wine. Refreshingly, he knows every aspect of the wines he sells and prices them fairly! The store has limited hours of operation, so it’s best to call ahead @ 643-2007 or visit the website @ www.oldnapleswholesalewines.com.

The New Crop of Hidden Vines

A recent article in *CNN Money* indicates that the next award-winning wine region will be Greece. A new generation of winemakers with ties to France and Napa Valley and efforts to improve quality has resulted in growing interest in the US where imports increased over 30% in 2005 and are expected to double again by 2008. That’s the great news for wine drinkers! The challenge of course may be in learning the more than 300 indigenous, and not very well-known, grape varieties. In square miles, Greece is smaller than the state of Florida and because 70% of its land is mountainous terrain, the total agricultural area is less than 350,000 acres, comparable to Bordeaux’s vineyard acreage. However small, Greece has a very favorable climate for grapes and has begun producing some very interesting wines from its five principle wine districts.

Exploring the Wines of the World

Okay, I'll admit it, I don't know enough about German wines. More than likely, I am in good company with most of my readers and much of the world. I suspect this has as much to do with marketing as with geography, the difficulty in pronouncing and understanding the labels and the unfortunate perception that all German wines are sweet. It is no wonder then that German wines account for only 3% of wine sales worldwide. Sure we know about the wines of America and France, and maybe to a lesser extent, Italy. We certainly are increasingly aware of the outstanding quality and affordability of the wines that Chile, Australia and New Zealand now offer. But many of Germany's wines still remain somewhat of a mystery, especially as we confront the overwhelming number of wines lining the shelves of our favorite merchants.

Gaining just a modest understanding of the grapes, the wine-growing regions and the winemaking styles of Germany should ease some of the confusion about what to buy and what to drink. Of course, the best lessons learned come with tasting new wines and doing so with German varietals can be richly rewarding. That Germany, because of its most northerly location of any wine producing country in the world, can produce any wine, let alone great wine, is remarkable. German winemakers recognize this challenge and plant their vines to capitalize on the sun and soil in great river valleys with moderate climate. The cooler temperatures in Germany's vineyards are why 85% of all production there is white wine.

Germany is divided into thirteen wine regions, four of which are the most important. Mosel-Saar-Ruwer is considered to be the best region, producing wines of great finesse. Rheingau offers wines that are rich, round, and earthy. Rheinhessen is Germany's largest wine area, producing wines that for the most part are ordinary. The Pfalz is the most southerly of these four regions, creating more eccentric wines with intense fruit and varied flavors.

Riesling, Muller-Thurgau, Silvaner, and Gewürztraminer are the primary grapes of Germany with riesling regarded as the premier grape variety. German rieslings, as all German wines, are generally low in alcohol and high in acidity and match particularly well with many foods. The styles of these wines can be simplified to dry ("*Trocken*"), medium-dry ("*Halbtrocken*"), or fruity.

While the German wine rating system can seem confusing, what is important to learn is that the ratings are based on the degree of ripeness and that quality wine is divided into two categories: *QbA*, generally regarded as good everyday wines, and *QmP*, or the highest class of German wines. *QmP* wines, the wines to seek out, are further divided into six categories in terms of ripeness and are richer, intense and yes, sweeter as you progress up the scale. Starting with *Kabinett*, the most food friendly of German wines, the classification system includes *Spatlese*, *Auslese*, *Beerenauslese*, *Trockenbeerenauslese* (the richest, sweetest and rarest of all German wines) and finally, *Eiswein*, literally ice wine from frozen grapes.

The final word... Go out and explore some of the world's best wines. Start by trying a *Kabinett* or *Spatlese* *QmP* riesling, ideally from the Mosel region. You won't be disappointed!

Did You Know...?

There are over 5,000 varieties of grapes of which about 150 are planted commercially.