

Feb 2003

Tasting notes

In the gewürz way Bargain basement prices are not the only reason Eastern European whites have been gaining ground at the LCBO. Having cast off the hammer and sickle of the Eastern bloc, these wines are finally improving in quality. Domaine Boyar's gewürztraminer (featured below) is a case in point. Under the socialist regime, the Bulgarian wine industry served the Russian market, which quaffed 500 million bottles of its wine annually. Everything about the wine-making process was industrial, and consumers cared about quantity not quality, according to Boyar CEO Margo Todorov. In 1996, the company bought two wineries, in Shumen and Iambol. The wine from the Shumen estate was "basically undrinkable. We knew we had to update the wineries." Two years later, backed by private investors and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Boyar invested millions of dollars to upgrade equipment and quality. Now that the wineries are running smoothly, it is tackling the problem of an unreliable grape supply. The solution: self-sufficiency from grape to bottle. In 2001, it hired an Australian group to oversee a viticulture project. They plan to add 200 hectares to the plot each year until their holdings reach 1,000 hectares. It's a slow process, finally beginning to bear good fruit.

Pick of the month

Caves des Papes Côtes-du-Ventoux 2001 ★★★★★

Eurovintage, 416-494-2881. 569095, \$9.60. Rhône Valley, France
Punch for the price: grenache, syrah, cinsault and mourvèdre with a spicy black pepper, ripe-fruit warmth. Intense bouquet and flavour; velvety mouth feel, tight tannins lurking. Full bodied, with 14 per cent alcohol. Use for and drink with braised meat.



Cellar keeper

Fürst von Metternich Schloss Johannisberger Riesling Kabinett 2001 ★★½

Authentic, 905-238-0716. V953299, \$28.45. Rheingau, Germany
From a property with a 900-year history, a riesling library from 1748 and the world's oldest riesling vineyard (est. 1720). The most northerly point for making wine, 50 degrees latitude, runs through it. Classic aromas of minerals, fusils and grapefruit zest. Lovely, tangy citrus, with a hint of sweetness to counter zingy acidity. Balanced and elegant, it drinks well now but can age several years. Have with pork or fish or on its own.



Red wine

Indaba Cape Classics Shiraz 2001 ★★★★★

H. H. D. Imports, 519-884-7600. 630384, \$9.95. Western Cape, South Africa
Ripe, ready and full bodied. Meaty, gamy character suggests tar, smoke and oak as well as fruit. Soft tannins and a long, smoky finish. For spiced stews, casseroles or braises.

Penfolds Koonunga Hill Cabernet Merlot 2001 ★★

Southcorp, 416-504-3830. 613240, \$14.95. Southeastern Australia
Only 16 per cent merlot. Minimal oak emphasizes the fruit. Ripe berry, with woody tones in the bouquet. Big, firm tannins, full body and plummy fruit. Age should smooth it out.

Spirito di Rallo Nero d'Avola Cabernet 2000 ★★½

The Small Winemakers Collection, 416-463-7178. 612762, \$9.35. Sicily, Italy
Native nero d'avola and cab sauv result in a vinous, gently tarry bouquet and dry tannins tempered by crisp fruit, leather. Cocoa bean finish.

Wyndham Estate Bin 333 Pinot Noir 2001 ★★½

PR Canada, 905-405-0410. 179242, \$13.60. Southeastern Australia
Pale red, with straw-

berry jam aroma and fleshy texture. Hints of earth and sweet berry in a medium body.

White wine

Domaine Boyar Gewürztraminer 2000 ★★★½

H. H. D. Imports, 519-884-7600. 619825, \$7.45. Bulgaria
From Shumen, near the Black Sea. Rose petal aromas. Soft, light-bodied, easy-drinking style, just off dry. Clean, with gentle spiciness, it's a good beginner's gewürz.

Konrad & Conrad Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2002 ★★★★★

Vergina, 416-386-1080. 616243, \$13.95. South Island, New Zealand
Expressive, typical nose of nettle, gooseberry and lime. Equally pronounced, crisp taste of tropical fruit overlaid with herbs. Yummy mouthful with a supple, rounded finish.

Fortified wine

Gonzalez Byass Elegante Amontillado ★★★★★½

Russell Woodman, 416-767-5114. 586537, \$8.95. Jerez, Spain
From renowned Gonzalez, made from palomino fino and pedro ximenez grapes aged in oak. Medium dry, with a distinctive, pungent bouquet of walnuts, hazelnuts and old wood. Nuttiness carries through in the taste, along with dried figs and spices.



Lovely, long finish. A match for consommé, butternut squash soup or chilled madrilène.

Consignment pick

Inniskillin Montague Estate Vineyard Pinot Noir 2000 ★★★★★

Atlas, 905-564-3003. 586404, \$24.95. Niagara Peninsula
Inniskillin's Montague Estate vineyard consistently produces the top pinot noir in Canada for the price. The 1999 can be found on Vintages shelves, but so far the 2000 is available only at the winery and select Wine Rack stores or by private order. Aged 11 months in French barriques, it has a lovely nose, forward yet complex, and a taste of cherries, raspberries, earth and beet juice. Supple cherry fruit finishes crisp and elegant.

Have with duck, roast turkey or chicken, pork or vegan dishes.
Atlas Wine Merchants is part of Vincor, North America's fourth-largest wine company and owner of Jackson-Triggs and Inniskillin in Niagara, R. H. Phillips in California, Hogue in Washington, and Hawthorne Mountain and Sumac Ridge in the Okanagan. They also just purchased Goundrey in Australia. Atlas represents Ginstet wines, including excellent Bordeaux estates, such as Gruaud Larose, Haut-Bages Libéral, the wines of the Boisset conglomerate and those of Joseph Verdier in the Loire.

These notes list producer-shipper, agent (and telephone), CSPC number (V indicates a Vintages bottle), price per 750 mL and region. Consignment bottles are generally bought by the case from the agent. Rating is on a five-star system that stresses quality for price: ★ (basic), ★★ (acceptable), ★★★ (good), ★★★★ (very good), ★★★★★ (exceptional).