

Tasting notes

Boot camp Central and southern Italy have an illustrious wine tradition—many of the “grand crus” of Roman times were culled from their vineyards—but the regions’ more recent history has been less impressive. South of Rome, bottles are typically cheaper, and their taste can be as cut-rate as the price. Improved winemaking, modernized tastes, lower yields in the vineyard and star winemakers are all contributing to a regional renaissance. In Abruzzi, two grapes dominate: the first, montepulciano, is capable of creating dark, violet-hued wines of great concentration and intensity, as in this month’s Consignment Pick and Pick of the Month. The second variety, trebbiano, a popular white with a reputation for pleasant blandness, becomes a spectacular old-vine, low-yield wine at the hands of Marramiero (also the producer of the Consignment Pick). At the heel of the Boot, among great quantities of plonk, Apulia is producing some exciting DOCs, such as negroamaro from Salice Salentino and primitivo from Manduria. Farther south, Sicily is starting to show its potential in indigenous varietals, sometimes blended with chardonnay, cabernet and other noble grapes. The four Italian picks below are just the tip of the toe.

Full flavours of toasty oak, butter and crisp, tangy fruit delivered with sophistication and finesse. Silky, balanced—how chardonnay should be made. Deserves to be a regular with chicken, salmon or pasta.

Consignment pick
Marramiero Inferi Montepulciano d’Abruzzo 1997 ★★★★★

Vinaïo Wine Merchants, 416-249-4022. \$36. Abruzzi, Italy
 Aged in new French oak for 12 months. Fascinating depth, complexity and intensity of flavour. Spiced bouquet of hay, menthol, tobacco, oak and sweet dried fruit. Persistent taste of tangy cherry, bitter almonds and more, all structured with an uplifting vitality in body and aftertaste. Harmonious elegance and power.

Vincent Libertore, owner of Pastaio Continental Noodles, always dreamed of importing wine. Friends back home introduced him to Marramiero, an award-winning winery. He also represents Luigi Brunelli of Verona (a top producer of valpolicella and amarone), Spinelli in Abruzzi (great-value general list chardonnay and montepulciano), Ceralti of Tuscany (near Ornellaia) and Cescon (merlot and pinot grigio) in Friuli.

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).

Pick of the month
Farnese Casale Vecchio Montepulciano d’Abruzzo 2000 ★★★★★

Barrique Wine Imports Ltd., 416-598-0033. 612788, \$11.65. Abruzzi, Italy
 From estate vineyards. Low-yield intensity is enhanced by six months in barriques. Spiced bouquet of prunes, raisins and berries. Full, flavourful and richly intense. Very tasty now, with smooth tannins that show it could age several years. Great value.

Cellar keeper
Eileen Hardy Shiraz 1998 ★★★★★

Churchill Cellars Ltd., 416-368-5108. V461368, \$94.95. South Australia
 Winemaker’s selection of the vintage’s best shiraz. McLaren Vale, Padthaway and Clare Valley grapes are open-fermented, basket pressed and matured two years in new and one-year-old oak. Opaque and blackish, huge, with a tight structure and great concentration. Lots of oak showing now. Black pepper, berries, rosemary and other herbs and spice, all held in check by the firm tannins. Give it five to 10 years.



Red wine
35 Parallel Primitivo di Manduria 2000 ★★★ ½

Lacey’s International, 416-690-2557. 612754, \$8.95. Apulia, Italy
 Made from primitivo, a.k.a. zinfandel, quite like a Californian. Exuberant raspberry aroma and taste. Easy to drink; 14 per cent alcohol and a dry finish.

Pepperwood Grove Pinot Noir 1999 ★★★★★

Select Wine Merchants, 416-367-5600. 360479, \$13.45. California
 Largely from the central coast, with a subtle, gentle bouquet suggesting sweet beets, strawberries and earth. Medium bodied with a supple texture, hints of tea leaf and berries.

Frei Brothers Redwood Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 1999 ★★★★★

E. & J. Gallo Canada, 905-602-4575. 612531, \$14.95. California
 Mostly from Central Valley’s Lodi appellation. Aged eight months in oak, it has a medium body with a soft, ripe, fruity character and oaky tones. Agreeably quaffable.

White wine
Masia Hill Oro 2001 ★★★★★

Lacey’s International, 416-690-2557. 610071, \$7.95. Penedès, Spain
 Pretty blend of xarel-lo and muscat, with the lat-

ter’s orange blossom and peel nose. Off dry, fresh and smooth; expressive fruit and grape in a delicate body. For light seafood or Thai.

Covey Run Fumé Blanc 2000 ★★★★★ ½

Dionysus Brands Inc., 416-223-6567. 303909, \$13.95. Washington State
 Sauv blanc (87 per cent) with sémillon and chenin. Aromas of ripe pear, melon, hints of herbs. Rounded by a trace of residual sugar. Balanced fruit taste and a zesty finish.

Duc de Foix Xarello 1999 ★★★★★ ½

Vin Gold International, 416-242-2804. 610055, \$9.95. Penedès, Spain
 Barrique fermented. Spice, fruit and oak in the vinous nose. Clean, dry, with wood, spice, grapefruit. Fruity overall. For white meat and fish.

Girelli Terreiro Grecanico-Inzolia 2001 ★★★★★

Academy Brands International, 905-844-5040. 612697, \$8.95. Sicily, Italy
 Refreshingly modern play on Sicily’s indigenous varieties. Aromas of peach and grape, broad in the mouth; lime and floral notes zest it up.

Simonsig Estate Chardonnay 2000 ★★★★★

Authentic Wine & Spirits Merchants, 905-238-0716. 345389, \$12.45. Stellenbosch, South Africa

