

Service, Selection, Value



more than just a mission statement...

Three years ago I wrote an editorial for our newsletter that \$15 was the new \$10, a comment on how customers were eagerly “buying up” and it was hard to sell inexpensive wines. Of course wineries and importers were happy to oblige, whether quality dictated the increase or not. My how times change!

Recently I read an article that Gallup reports American consumers are spending thirty to forty percent less than the comparable period last year. Of course we have noticed as our sales started to reflect this trend in the third quarter of last year. Now it appears that \$10 is the new \$10 and if we have something for \$9 then all the better. While some in my industry may lament this change in consumer attitude I am quick to say, “it’s about time.”

For too long the producers, particularly in the New World, have forgotten that wine is an everyday beverage. It is designed to make food taste better and ease tension. A little financial “correction” is just the sort of thing to bring everyone back down to earth and remind them that wine, in the end, is just fermented grapes. So this newsletter celebrates all that is good about wine. Most of the selections are less than \$15 and those that are above are really thoughtful, well made wines, that offer quality way above their selling price. All of the stores have these selections in stock but don’t wait too long to visit, some are in short supply.

The classes and events are now listed only on the website, per location. Visit timswine.com and select your local store for a listing of tastings, classes and special events.

4 GREAT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

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St. Augustine Beach 904.461.0060

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**For franchise information contact Tim Varan
407.895.9463 or tim@timswine.com**

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**For information on joining our clubs,
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REALLY USEFUL WHITE WINES

Not every night is a special occasion. Sure, drinking great wines is fun, but most nights I want a glass of wine that provides me with a little character for not a lot of money. The wines in this section offer a lot of complexity and character but also don't break the budget. The best part is that most of them can be opened one night and finished the next, without much loss of quality. So stock up; everything here is in good supply unless noted otherwise.

Oxford Landing Pinot Grigio 08 (\$9)

Unlike most of the inexpensive wines from Australia that are created from oceans of wine in tanks, Oxford Landing is an actual piece of dirt, planted by the Yalumba family in 1958. In fact it is one, 200 acre single vineyard site!

There are no bad wines in this line but the Pinot Grigio stands out as a really stunning wine for the price. Like most Pinot Grigio this one was fermented cold, what is the shocker is that it was done with wild/indigenous yeasts. The slower, more erratic fermentations create a greater array of aromas and flavors. Although common in more expensive wines you usually don't see this sort of attention for a \$9 wine.

So the nose smells like fresh fuji apples, magnolia blossoms and fresh cut kumquats. The feel in the mouth is surprisingly broad but also shows some fresh, limey qualities around the edges. A great cocktail wine, don't miss keeping a bottle cold all summer. Serve with soft ripened cheese and homemade rye crackers.

Indaba Sauvignon Blanc 08 (\$9)

It is starting to be a bit of broken record about how much quality this brand offers but here is another delicious example. Produced from vineyards on the Western Cape of South Africa, this wine has more in common with a \$15 New Zealand example than most producers there would admit.

Like the NZ method, a portion of the vineyard was harvested and fermented early to lend vivid acidity to the final blend. The balance of the fruit was then harvested at normal ripeness and fermented cold to preserve delicate aromas and flavors. The two parts were then assembled before bottling to yield a wine with great fruit but lively acidity too.

So when you pour a glass of this wine you get the whole aromatic profile of SB; green melon, limes, gooseberries and a little bit of wax pepper. The texture on the palate is shockingly broad for this price, with great depth and a dry finish. Stunning for the price, try with grilled shrimp with a spicy remoulade.

Santa Julia Torrontes "Organica" 08 (\$10)

Back in the early 1990's we were selling a lot of Argentinian Sauvignon Blanc that did not smell like any other examples from around the world. It turns out what they bottled as Sauvignon Blanc was actually Torrontes. Now, almost 20 years later it seems so obvious but then again, I did not spit as much then.

This version is a great example of a slightly nervy style of Torrontes, which bares some resemblance to dry Muscat. This one shows the nose of rose petals and white peaches, kissed with notes of white peppercorns. In the mouth this wine is fairly precise and juicy, like pineapple juice, with a long, spicy finish. Serve with currys and sweet/sour oriental foods.

Ste. Chapelle Riesling 06 (\$10)

I bet you have never had a Riesling from Idaho before. For those of you who like a little more sweetness in your wine, it is hard to ask more of a nice little picnic wine than this one.

The nose starts out with a charming sense of fresh red apples, baked pears and hints of cinnamon and nutmeg. In the mouth this wine has a soft, generous sense of fruit not unlike biting into a fresh Jonagold. Serve this wine with baked ham with an apricot/ginger glaze or with pork chops stuffed with apples and dried cherries.

Bin 36 Chardonnay 05 (\$13)

Bin 36 is a famous winebar in Chicago that decided to produce their house wines for some broad market distribution. Their Cabernet Sauvignon is already a huge hit so I thought we would bring in the Chardonnay to shake that category up.

Ok, unwooded Chardonnay has its place but every once in a while you want to taste the oak! So here it is, toasted pecan shells, vanilla, baked pears, cinnamon and clove all wrapped up in a rich, buttery shell of Chardonnay fruit. Of course it comes from Monterey so there is a little bit of acidity at the finish, but that keeps it interesting and you coming back for more. If you want to serve this baby with food try an apple and bacon stuffed turkey breast or grilled pork chops with a bourbon/apple glaze.

REALLY USEFUL RED WINES

Goodnight Cabernet Sauvignon 06 (\$12)

In this economy there are a lot of expensive wines selling for less than their MSRP. That said you will not likely taste many Cabernet Sauvignons with this pedigree that was designed to sell for \$12. Produced at the Firestone winery, this is a fantastic, serious Cabernet Sauvignon for a very reasonable price.

The fruit for this wine comes from two sources, the estate vineyards of Firestone in Santa Ynez and parcels they own in Paso Robles. After fermentation the wine was aged in a combination of French and American oak barrels, 30% were new! In this price range it is very rare to see oak barrels anymore, let alone new barrels. The wine was then aged for 18 months before bottling.

So when you pull the cork the first thing you should do is put this wine in a decanter. It is charming right out of the bottle but as half an hour passes the wine evolves and broadens, with the nose picking up more and more complexity with each minute. After 30 minutes you will see the nose shows a complex combination of fresh cherries, green tea, cooked raspberries and muddled mint. In the mouth this wine shows a big sense of fruit framed by moderately firm, dusty tannins. Good now, this wine will likely improve a lot over the next three to five years. How often can you say that about a \$12 bottle of wine! Serve with steaks, hearty pasta dishes or with a rack of lamb.

Capestrano Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (\$12)

I used to think of Montepulciano as a cheap jug wine only suitable for pizza and pasta. In the past decade the producers of the area have improved their quality a lot and I now think the region represents some of the best values in the country.

This bottling is 100% Montepulciano, a grape that smells a little like Sangiovese but it has lower acidity and more color. The nose is a ripe blend of sour cherries, pipe tobacco and grains-of-paradise. In the mouth this wine is initially plump, with a fantastic interplay of cherries and raspberries wrapped with notes of spice and earth. Certainly good with pizza or pasta, also try with baked, stuffed mushrooms, or grilled flank steak.

Rutherglen Shiraz/Petit Sirah 06 (\$14)

I recently attended a trade event where this wine was being poured and I thought it was really good for the price. You may notice that Petit is not spelled as the typical "Petite," apparently the new rule is that Petite Sirah cannot grow anywhere but the US so our government now makes everyone else label theirs without the "e." I guess they don't want anyone to be confused, lots of luck there.

The color of this wine is really deep, with the color staining the tears as it oozes back into the glass. The nose has a spicy, bright color, with notes of red peppercorn, red currants and wet red clay. In the mouth this wine has fantastic concentration, with a rich, powerful feel that is surprising for the price. This wine also finishes with soft, well integrated tannins that make themselves known only at the very finish. Serve with a thick, grilled steak rubbed with chili powder or with a pork roast, glazed with cherries in a balsamic vinegar glaze.

La Madrid Malbec 06 (\$15)

Now that Malbec is all the rage it is important to understand the differences between the good cheap ones (I mean inexpensive) and the well made versions that cost more. Like everything, the cost sometimes relates to quality, sometimes not.

The good inexpensive ones, \$9-\$12 a bottle, offer a lot of up-front fruit, good mid-palate texture and a little bit of complexity at the finish. The expensive ones, \$20+ a bottle, usually begin to show oak notes, are denser on the palate and have a much longer finish. The reason I go through this exercise is because there is a wasteland of wines between \$12 and \$20 a bottle that are hard to categorize because they are not really complex enough to be expensive but more concentrated than the cheaper bottlings. Then you get one like La Madrid, which delivers expensive qualities in an almost everyday price.

The color of this wine is very deep, with garnet tears rolling down the glass. The nose offers classic blueberry and blackberry fruit notes, complicated by sweet vanilla, licorice and clove. On the palate this wine displays a deep vein of fruit balanced with a mocha quality from oak, but soft, almost insignificant tannins. This is a wine built to drink now and for the next two years. Serve with Cuban pork and black beans or lentils and sausage.

NEW ITALIAN ARRIVALS

The wines in this feature are from a new importer called Small Vineyards. Cut from the same cloth as we are, they seek small producers doing extraordinary work in unique places. The wines featured here are not your run-of-the-mill Italians and they are also not ultra-modern. They are from a school of thought I call “enlightened

traditionalist.” They use the ancient grapes to make interesting wines, but with enough modern touches to make them clean and thought provoking.

All of these, and any real Italian wines, should be served with food so plan your menu accordingly.

Tenuta Ponte Fiano d’Avellino 07 (\$20)

Tenuta Ponte Campi Taurisimo (Aglianico/Sangiovese) 05 (\$15)

This ancient estate in Campania takes its name from a bridge on the property built by Hannibal during his campaign through the area in 251 B.C. Alessandro di Stassio is one of the true innovators of this region, in the mountains surrounding Naples, being one of the first in the area to green harvest and install solar panels on the winery for power. His wines are modern interpretations of ancient grapes, simultaneously thrilling and original.

Fiano d’Avellino is one of the most interesting of Italian white varieties, offering exotic aromatics and a full bodied texture. This one smells of fresh peaches, green melon, ripe banana and cooked pineapple. In the mouth this wine shows stunning depth into the mid-palate then develops a vein of minerality into the finish. Good now through 2011 with almost any seafood dish.

Their **Campi Taurisimo** is an exotic blend of the local grape, Aglianico, with a little Sangiovese to provide freshness. The nose is an enticing blend of ripe plums, candied cherries, tobacco and dried thyme. This wine is firm and focused in the mouth, with a ripe but not cooked quality to the fruit in the mid-palate. There is a long, slightly leathery side to the finish, perfect for braised lamb shanks. Drink over the next three years.

Stebbi Casole 06 (\$20)

This is likely the first wine from the DOC Casole you have ever seen, I know it is my first! This appellation exists inside of a small valley east of Siena in what I would call a banana belt. The warm climate and exceptionally sunny weather allow for a quick ripening of the Sangiovese and also builds bigger texture and flavor. The Mantovani family has only been farming the area for thirty years but has only made serious wine for five. Don’t discount this wine for lack of experience, it is a very polished and well made wine.

Produced from 80% Sangiovese and 20% Merlot, this wine displays deep garnet color but little staining in the tears. I don’t have the technical details of the winemaking but the use of oak is apparent the moment you put your nose in the glass. There is an immediate sense of mocha, vanilla, dried cherries, dried raspberries, bay leaf and sage. The texture is big and broad, with smooth edges showing a touch of sweet oak before a touch of minerality creeps up on the finish. Good now this wine should age gracefully for five to six years. Serve with a grilled t-bone, rubbed with olive oil, garlic and salt.

Tre Donna Barbera d’Asti “Donna Bruna” 05 (\$25)

The name of this estate actually means “three women” because it is run by the three Lequio sisters, Daniela, Rosella and Antonella. Their father, Alessandro, vowed he would only turn the estate over to a son, a three generation tradition, and when the third, and final child was born a girl he cried for half an hour. Years later the three daughters convinced him to let them try their hand in the winery. To his surprise their first efforts received more awards than his entire career and he allowed the girls to take over the estate.

The Lequio family own thirty hectares of vines (almost 100 acres) scattered across Barbaresco, Barolo and Gavi. They are assisted by Giuliano Noe, the Gambero Rosso Oenologist of the Year 2005, and they produce nine different wines. The house style is one of elegance, with plenty of primary fruit framed by proper but not imposing acidity or tannins.

This Barbera d’Asti is named for their mother, Donna Bruna, and comes from a single parcel of fifty-year-old vines. It is a Barbera with deep color and a spicy nose of Tellicherry peppercorns, licorice, dried plums and cooked raspberry jam. The feel in the mouth is big, with brushy acidity providing plenty of frame into the long finish. This is a very stylish, modern Barbera that drinks like a much more expensive wine.