

Italy

93 Barbi Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 1999, Tuscany

(\$75.50)

A few years back I did a story about 99 Tuscany and the quality of the Sangiovese based wines. In it, I stated that on the whole, the 99 vintage was a better than the highly touted 97s. I still stand by that comment, and as proof I offer up this wine. A powerhouse with a bouquet of tobacco, sweet cherries, humus, cassis and rubber. Full bodied with excellent length. A wine to drink or cellar. (ES)

92 Allegrini Amarone 2000, Veneto

(\$110)

This wine continues to be one the great Amarones, but sadly the price has gone through the roof. It has a bouquet of tobacco, black cherries, plums and chocolate and a sweet mid palate of chocolate drenched cherries. Long finish. Now to 2018. (ES)

91 Fontanafredda Barolo Serralunga d'Alba 2000, Piedmont

(\$45.95)

What a beauty! Just like cracking open a jar of maraschino cherries, with plums and vanilla thrown in for good measure. Excellent length and easily 10 years ahead of it-but why wait! (ES)

91 Masottina Montesco Colli di Conegliano 1999, Veneto

(\$48)

The blend is 47% Cab Sauv, 30% Merlot, 13% Cab Franc and 10% Marzemino, an indigenous grape of the region. It displays a black cherry colour and aromas of spice, cherries, blackcurrant, pencil shavings and a slight vegetal streak. The palate is ripe with a long finish. Now to 2012. (ES)

**89 Fontanafredda Barolo 2000, Piedmont
(\$29.90)**

Usually, I am not a big fan of this bottling. But this is a perfect example of a great vintage elevating an average wine. Lots of sweet cherry and raspberry fruit with tobacco and spice rounding out the profile. Super value from this rather expensive region. Now to 2011. (ES)

**88 Barbi Brunello di Montalcino 2000, Tuscany
(\$41.95)**

A mid weight Brunello with good density and lots of tannin. It is best consumed over the next 5 years to take advantage of the fruit. Cherries, vanilla, Indian spice and tobacco. (ES)

86 Masottina Piave 2004, Veneto (\$16)

This is an attractive wine for both consumers and restaurants looking for a textbook example of Merlot at a reasonable price. Cherries, plums and spice. Good fruit in the mouth and medium length. (ES)

New Zealand

88 TeAwa Cabernet Merlot 2003, Hawkes Bay (\$27.10, PQ)

It is a joy to find a great red wine from New Zealand's pre-eminent red wine region , this given the fact that most liquor monopolies only desire to purchase Sauvignon Blanc from kiwi land. Medium body, it resembles a well made left bank Bordeaux, but with more sweet blackcurrant fruit. Tobacco, cocoa and spice are also present. Drink over the next 3 to 4 years. (ES)

Australia

91 David Franz Lehmann Shiraz Benjamin's Promise, Barossa (\$54.95, Stem Wines)

From one of Australia's top vintages comes this elegant and flavorful red. Plums, cinnamon, vanilla and tar are showcased on the nose and palate. Finishes long, but not heavy, thanks to the acid. Drink over the next 4 years. Also, for those who are fanatical about packaging, the bottle is one of the "sharpest" ones that I have seen in a long time. (ES)

87 Sticks Shiraz 2004, Yarra Valley (\$21.95, Stem Wines)

From the cooler Yarra Valley comes this wine, chock full of plums, black pepper, mint, violets, candied cherry and asphalt. Medium body and very good length. Now to 2008. (ES)

85 Woolshed Cabernet Sauvignon 2004, Victoria (\$14.95)

A workhorse red which offers a core of ripe berry fruit and a touch of mint. Medium length and clean on the finish. An ideal restaurant wine, for sale by the glass. (ES)

Canada

92 Mountain Road Wine Company Cabernet Franc Icewine 2001, Niagara (\$44.95/200ml)

What an incredible offering! Blackberry, plum and cherry jam interweave with vanilla and spice. Super rich and concentrated with loads of plums, cherries, blackberries and chocolate on the palate. The finish is long and succulent. Still youthful so drink over the next 5 years. (ES)

89 Mountain Road Wine Company Cabernet Franc Icewine 2002, Niagara (\$44.95/200ml)

Lighter in colour than the 2001 with a nose that leans more to the red fruit spectrum-raspberries and strawberries with side notes of herbs. On the taste buds there is a floral/ earthy/herbal quality which works hand and hand with the raspberry flavours. A touch of heat at the end. Now to 2009. (ES)

88 Chateau des Charmes Brut NV, Niagara (\$19.95)

Over the holidays I decided to do a little Canuck sparkling wine tasting with a few of my wine loving friends. Unanimously, this was the winner. Made in the traditional method, so there is a lot of pinpoint bubble to accompany the aromas of biscuit, lemon and green apple. The mid palate loses a little but the finish come on strong. Hands down a great value. (ES)

87 Jackson Triggs Grand Reserve Brut 2001, Niagara

This, the second place vote getter in the tasting is also made in the traditional method and aged 25 months on its lees. It displayed a lemony/green apple profile with some yeastiness in the background. (ES)

84 Harbour Estate Rielsing 2004, Niagara (\$11.50)

When I first smelled the wine, there was intense passion fruit, but that soon gave way to peach, lime and minerals. In the mouth the wine is soft and shows a honey/fruit cocktail quality. Soft finish, good length and ready to drink. (ES)