



THE GREAT DIVIDE: \$20 AND UNDER...\$30 AND OVER

We taste many, many wines but by no means all of the thousands of wines on the market.

I taste to judge **quality**, then consider **price**—combine them and have **value**.

Value is what we look for regardless of label, vintage or “magic numbers” such as 90+.

Quality is subjective, and can only be judged by experience. The more you taste the better you can judge, and, while there is common ground, opinions, even among experts, will vary, sometimes radically.

Value is the key to Rick’s Picks. But value is also somewhat subjective. It can be found in all price ranges, although some people believe that a \$10 dollar bottle of wine cannot be worth drinking and others cannot imagine a wine worth \$100. Regardless keep in mind, the law of diminishing returns usually applies—the \$100 bottle is rarely ten times better

than the \$10 bottle. Besides, **much of the satisfaction I get from a bottle of wine comes from value.**

For me, wine, but not just any old swill, with dinner is a lifestyle necessity. My dilemma...why go to a restaurant to pay \$40 for a mediocre wine, and for food that is hardly ever better than what I get at home?. The answer...Kathy needs a break!

The Great Divide is the huge disconnect that I find in value vs price and in the difference in the perception of quality by the average consumer. My mission is to do something about it.

So the question comes down to how we judge quality. The proof lies in nearly 24 years of Rick’s Picks. We, at the Madison Wine Shop, consistently recognize quality, and find value ahead of the crowd. We find it in obscure appellations, in little known varietals off the beaten track. We promote them by educating our customers—we offer a taste at the drop of a hat. **Our customers, have become discriminating** and, as Garrison Keillor would say, **“Above average.”**

Tuscany

Fattoria La Ripa, a vineyard property located between Florence and Siena, was owned, in the 15th century, by Antonio Maria di Noldo Gherardini, the father of Mona Lisa (the Gioconda of Leonardo da Vinci). Today it produces some of Tuscany’s best Chianti and an IGT (non-DOC) wine labeled **San Gregorio Alle Rose**, a blend of Sangiovese and Canaiolo grapes. It is **not** a Rosé, even though there is a rose on the label.

San Gregorio Alle Rose, vvv '03 \$14.99/13.49/12.74 is stunning, not only one of my best finds of 2008, it



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Rick—the Value Vulture—finds another Rick’s Pick

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is probably the best value in the store. Pay attention you followers of the “big, full-bodied” Californian Cabs. When you plumb the depths of this wine you will perhaps understand why so many of those big New World Wines remind me of “loud elevator music”. One taste will tell you more than a thousand inadequate words. I have purchased every case and I need your help in moving it out of the store. I am offering a 15% discount on solid case purchases—**that is the \$12.74 bottle price.**

Maremma, the “wild west” of Tuscany, in the south, along the Mediterranean coast, is a fascinatingly beautiful, historically rich region of mountains and swamps; the unspoiled, rural heart of the Etruscan Empire. Its traditional wine region, Scansano, has been upstaged by recent, cult “super Tuscans” such as Sassicaia, the only single-vineyard DOC in Italy, and the DOC of Bolgheri. Maremma is a Mecca for food and wine lovers.

Moris Farms '04 Morellino di Scansano, ✓✓\$17.99/16.19, a classic example of the DOC. The grape, locally known as Morellino, is none other than Sangiovese. The English name, I am told goes back to its original vigneron.

Poggio alle Querce '05 Bolgheri, Il Guado, ✓✓\$24.99/22.49, Cabernet and Merlot, and **Le Grascete '04 Bolgheri**, ✓✓✓\$64.99/58.49, Cabernet, Merlot and Sangiovese are two superb examples of the wines coming from Bolgheri.

Nebbiolo

Nebbiolo is a unique Piedmontese grape. Its finest expression is found in the soil and climate of Langhe, and especially in the Barolo and Barbaresco appellations. It never has the black/purple color of Cab or Merlot and it never has their black fruit flavors. Its color is tawny/bronze and the flavor is earthy, some times tarry. If Cabernet is “fillet mignon”, Nebbiolo is “wild boar.”

We have a great selection of current and mature vintages of Barolo and Barbaresco, but I prefer to focus on Nebbiolo de Langhe, Langhe being the province that encompasses Barolo and

Barbaresco and a source of affordable “shortcuts” to the glory of Nebbiolo.

Cascina-Ballarín '03 Nebbiolo de Langhe, ✓✓✓\$19.99/17.99, instant gratification and endless pleasure.



Icardi, '03 “Surisjvan”, ✓, \$31.99/28.79, stirs my deepest vinous emotions. In flavor and texture it beats most of the big time Barolos and Barbarescos, at about half the price.

Chile

A Basque family, Ezaguirre-Echenique, planted vineyards in the Peralillo area of the Colchagua province around 1750. At some point in time the vineyard became known as Los Vascos—“The Basques.”

In 1988 Los Vascos was bought by Les Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite). **Los Vascos Reserve Cabernet '05**, ✓✓\$19.99/17.99 has become a fixture on our Chilean shelf. Stunning, elegant fruit and silky tannins. The key word is Reserve, which sets it apart from the less expensive, regular Los Vascos Cabernet.

However, there is a new label on the shelf alongside Los Vascos—**Encierra**, which means “an enclosure”, much like the word “Clos” in French. You need a careful look at the label to see that the **2005 Encierra** is a **Vineyard Reserve** wine from the Peralillo-Colchagua Valley, Chile. That is where Los Vascos is located. The back label tells you that the Ezaguirre-Enchinique Family, the original Los Vascos owners are

back in the winemaking business. They made the wine from 60% Cab, 30% Syrah, 5% Merlot, 3% Carménère and last, but not least, 2% Petit Verdot and aged it in French and American oak for 12 months.

An incredibly beautiful wine that will hold its own against any red wine regardless of price or appellation, not sometime in the future, but **now** and for maybe the next 10 years—I kid you not! And it sells for ✓✓\$24.99/22.49

Rising Red Stars in my Crystal Ball

PETIT VERDOT

Petit Verdot, a **ravishing beauty**, has been imprisoned in Bordeaux by a relatively short growing season. The risk that it will not ripen has limited its planting to less than 5% of the Bordeaux vineyard area, making it a minor component of a few Bordeaux wines. Why, you may ask do they even bother? I suspect that the answer is that a little Petit Verdot goes a long way towards spicing up typical (if there is such a thing) Bordeaux. Petit Verdot may be at the bottom of Bordeaux totem pole, after Cabernet, Merlot, Cab Franc and Malbec, but I suspect that it may be the tail that wags the dog. I find that it has a great bouquet and more interesting fruit and structure than either Cabernet or Merlot—even the color is a gorgeous striking plum red.

Petit Verdot is a rising Star and global warming, might be Bordeaux's salvation!!

Benziger's 1992 single-varietal Imagery Series, was my first encounter with Petit Verdot. I was smitten, but the wine disappeared from the market. I carried a torch for the varietal until three years ago when Inaki Castro, a Basque Jai-lai professional who retired 23 years ago and started a Spanish wine import business, brought me his first winemaking effort in Chile—**Inaki** a stunning wine, made of 49% Petit Verdot..which largely accounts for its appealing and irresistible character. The latest vintage, **Inaki '06**, ✓✓\$19.99/17.99.

Two years ago I persuaded Inaki to make me a 100% Petit Verdot. The first vintage, Korta '05 Reserva, hit our shelves in November 2007—an instant success which sold out in short order.

SHIPPING AVAILABLE: INQUIRE

Its successor, **Korta '07 Barrel Select Reserva Petite Verdot**, ✓✓ **\$12.99/11.69** is getting raves. My words are inadequate—**taste it!**



Suddenly it now seems that the Petit Verdot dam has burst—a Spanish bombshell, **Casa de la Ermita's '03 100% Petit Verdot**, ✓✓✓ **\$29.99/26.99**, is a watershed with its gorgeous plum color, seductive bouquet and tangy black fruit. Undoubtedly my wine of the year. It comes from Jumilla. More about that appellation below.

Then, out of the blue I am offered a standout Bordeaux that is 100% Petit Verdot.. A little tannic right now, but all the characteristics of a great Petit Verdot are there. Wait a few years or decant the bottle into a pitcher and pour it back into the bottle. You will only have to wait an hour or two. **Tour de Gilet '05 Bordeaux Superieur, 100% Petit Verdot**, ✓✓ **\$24.99/22.49**. **Hallelujah!** I imagine that Tour de Gilet took advantage of a great vintage. With good fruit in hand, he put all of his Petit Verdot into a single bottling.

MONASTRELL AKA MOURVEDRE

Mourvedre, hides in many southern French wines as part of a blend that often includes Syrah and Grenache. It stands alone in the red wines of Bandol where it needs at least a few years of bottle age to shed some of its tannin.

Jumilla in southern Spain is yet another Spanish wine miracle. Monastrell aka France's Mourvedre has been grown in Jumilla for generations, following traditional viticultural practices where

the vines are allowed to grow as bushes, not, as in modern viticulture, trained on trellises. Jumilla's climate and soil produce ripe grapes bursting with black fruit and moderately spicy tannin. Those grapes were largely sold to producers elsewhere in Spain. In the late 1980's Jumilla's vineyards were devastated by phylloxera. The old vines were ripped out and replanted. Vineyard practices were modernized, modern wineries were built and in 1996 Jumilla became a DOC. In the short span of twelve years the region has sprung from obscurity to, in my opinion, one of the most dynamic appellations in Spain. The epitome of Monastrell from Jumilla is **Juan Gil '05**, ✓✓✓ **\$17.99/16.19**. Its black fruit is tightly balanced and in harmony with slightly peppery and gritty tannin. **The epitome of elegance.**

Then there is **Casa de la Ermita '03 Crianza**, ✓✓✓ **\$16.99/15.29**, Monastrell 40% Temapranillo 25% Cabernet 20% Petit Verdot 15%. **Absolutely outstanding—an entire symphony plays on your palate.** Infinitely complex and exciting.

A Spanish Explosion

Ruberte '07 Old Vine Grenache, Campo de Borja, Spain, ✓ **\$9.99/8.99**. "Fruit Bomb" is a derogatory



moniker for many New World wines, made to grab your attention but incapable of holding it—like loud elevator music—catchy but quickly boring. The raspberry fruit in this wine will grab your attention, but definitely will not bore you. **Its secret is explosive fruit balanced by bright acidity and lively tannins. Refreshing!**

Zinfandel

Sebastiani '04 Dry Creek Zinfandel, ✓✓✓ **\$29.99/26.99** This Zin takes me back to the Zins that I loved back in the seventies. Aromas of ripe fruit and chocolate: dark, deep color and in the mouth, layer after layer of dark fruit, coffee and tar. Tannin and wood are evident but not obtrusive. The balance is high perfect.



You might be tempted to call this wine full-bodied but to me it is full-flavored and stunningly complex. The Zinfandel is from very old unirrigated vines going back 70 years. There is some inter-planted Petit Sirah and Mourvedre in the blend along with a small amount of Barbera that was fermented separately. **Must Try!**

Pinot Noir

Not many years ago, the Burgundians led us to believe that nowhere else on the planet could Pinot Noir produce wine to equal red Burgundy. With the exception of a few visionary non-Burgundian vigneron, we believed them, in spite of the fact that Burgundy produced, and still does, its fair share of mediocre overpriced wine. Zooming out in both time and geography, it is clear that over the last 30 years the world's wine industry has undergone a monumental change. Disastrous vintages have become a rarity, as has bad wine. There is no shortage of mediocre wines, but happily good wines are coming from every corner of the globe. New generations of winemakers and viticulturists are college graduates, some of whom work for corporations, some have taken over family businesses, and some are entrepreneurs in their own right.

As recently as 50 years ago viticulture and winemaking were virtually cottage industries. The agricultural revolution that started in the forties has carried the wine

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industry along with it. Appellation Control Laws, based on new understanding of soils and climate as well as the needs and qualities of various grape varieties, were largely nonexistent fifty years ago. The industry has become smarter and global.

This year the choices for you and me have become greater than ever, and Pinot Noir reflects this perhaps more than any other varietal. Josh Jensen is one of the visionaries mentioned above. In his book, *The Heartbreak Grape*, he tells his story, and it is a worthwhile read even if you're not into wine. In the eighties, great, let alone good Californian Pinot was a rarity. In those days I used to buy a bottle of each of Calera's single vineyard bottlings and taste them over days if not weeks. I invariably ended up with at least one winner. We still have a few bottles of those wines left. For example, 5 bottles of Calera '89 Jensen. Last tasted about 5 years ago, still very much alive and kicking. **Any takers at \$89.99 each?**

Looking for affordable everyday Pinot Noir? Look no further. **Cesari Duetorri '07 Venetie Pinot Noir, ✓✓✓\$9.99/ 8.99**, for a 750ml bottle, and you can even enjoy a saving by buying the big 1.5lt bottle, which you can sip on over several days, for **\$18.99/17.09**.



Humberto Canale '06 Pinot Noir, ✓ \$12.99/11.69 comes from, Argentina's Patagonia, a place that is on my list to visit for its astonishing scenery, and now for wine. The Humberto Canale vineyards were planted in 1904, if you can believe that, on the Negro river at an altitude of 1800 feet. **Great value. Where has it been all these years?**

Another suggestion, **Louis Latour '06 Bourgogne, ✓✓\$14.99/13.49** the latest in a long, unbroken line of consistent vintages. It is young, it needs

air. Decant into any jug with narrow pouring spout, and immediately pour back into the bottle. In twenty minutes or so it will open up, but if you do not have the time, watch it open up as you drink. Your experience will be unique. **This is "food wine"**.

More French values—from Languedoc. **Dom Tresor '04, L'Herault, ✓✓\$9.99/ 8.99; Lurton '06 "Les Salices", Languedoc, '04 \$12.99/11.69**. By the way, anytime you see the name Lurton on a bottle of wine, buy it!

My prediction—in less than ten years New Zealand will be the world's leading Pinot Noir producer. Here is what you can get now—**they ring my bell and will ring yours as well**.

Chimney Creek '06 Marlborough, ✓ \$13.99/12.69, remains a perennial favorite. **Latitude 41 '05, ✓✓✓ \$19.99/17.99**, also from Marlborough, is a classic Pinot Noir. **Mount Difficulty "Roaring Meg" '05 Central Otago, ✓✓✓\$24.99/22.49**, loads of lovely fruit and a bright backbone. **Limited!**

A unique and truly remarkable Pinot Noir/Cab Franc blend. **Domaine St Nicolas '04, Cuvee St Jacques, ✓✓✓\$27.99/25.19**, 80/20% Pinot Noir/Cab Franc from Fiefs Vendéens in Brem on the coast south of the mouth of the Loire. Rich and complex, reflecting **terrior** and the **passion** of the winegrower, Terry Theron.

Get on the 2005 Burgundy bandwagon—here are some of my Picks.

Many have wonderful up-front fruit—irresistible. A few may have started to "close down"—they will appear to have lost their fruit. But do not despair. In time they will come roaring back. How long will that take? I can only guess! But when they do you will be a very happy wine lover. **Buy soon—they are disappearing**.

Guyot '05 Bourgogne, ✓✓ \$29.99/26.99—expensive for a plain Bourgogne, but remember **Rick's First Rule—"Labels Lie."**

Michel Noellat '05, ✓✓\$19.99/17.99; Esmonin '05 "Clos Prieure" Gevry-Chambertin, ✓✓\$24.99/22.49; A. et P. Villaine '05 "La Fortune" Cote Chalonnaise, ✓✓✓\$34.99/31.49. Aubert Villaine, co-director of Romanee-Conti, and his wife Pamela produce

exceptional wines from their Chalonnaise vineyard.

Over the last few vintages I have found the wines of **Domaine de l'Arlet** to be outstanding and '05 is no exception. Prices by my standards are high, but these wine are relative bargains.

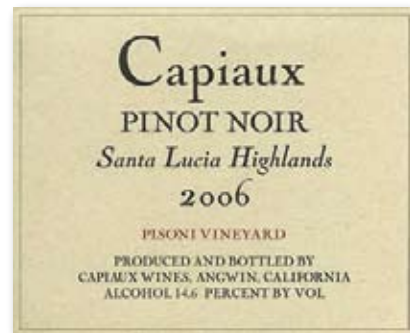
l'Arlet '05, Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru, ✓✓✓\$84.99/76.49, and **l'Arlet "Clos de Forets" '05 Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru, ✓✓✓ \$130/117**. I could not decide between the two so I bought both.

California is producing a river of Pinot Noir—much of it is not up-to-snuff and much is way too expensive. Here are a few of my picks. They are not inexpensive, but each will provide gratification commensurate with the price.

While in college on an athletic scholarship, Joe Davis, the son of a Monterey California fishing family, took a job in a wine shop. One Christmas, a good customer brought Joe a gift of a 1978 Clos de la Roche Grand Cru, Domaine Dujac. One sip and he was completely taken with the flavor and sheer deliciousness of the wine, "To have winemaking as a life pursuit and to make wine like this," he thought, "would be the most wonderful thing in the world." I think he has succeeded with his **Arcadian Cellars '05, Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir, ✓✓\$39.99/35.99**.

Historic Mount Eden Vineyard, 2000 above sea level in the Santa Cruz Mountains, consistently produces world-class Cabernet, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay at prices that are extremely fair. **Mount Eden '04 Santa Cruz Pinot Noir, ✓✓✓\$54.99/49.49**—they know what they are doing, and have for the longest time.

Sean Capioux has in a short time established himself as an accomplished Pinot Noir winemaker. He does not grow grapes, but sources them from top vineyards like Pisoni and Garys'



Vineyard's in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Those vineyards are the creation of passionate winegrowers. These people are a breed apart from the "brand builders" of the wine industry.

Capiaux '06 Pisoni Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands, ✓✓✓\$59.99/53.99 The tiny (1.14 acre) Pisoni vineyard is coming into its prime with age and is producing dark expansive wines with firm structure meant for aging. **Highly Recommended and Very Limited!**

Capiaux '05 "Chimera" Pinot Noir, ✓✓ \$34.99/31.49, is sourced from several Russian River vineyards, hence "Chimera", from Greek mythology, a fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpent's tail. **Lovely wine.**

Sonoma Coast, to be carefully distinguished from **Sonoma Valley**, is a new and up-and-coming source of some of California's best Pinot Noir. Here is one to prove it **Hirsch Vineyards '06 Bohan-Dillon Sonoma Valley Pinot Noir, ✓✓✓\$34.99/31.49**. "There is



a depth to this wine that suggests the mystery touched upon by all true to site wines. Since bottling, the wine has matured and evolved in to a multi-faceted Pinot that will reward the discriminating taster and the casual drinker. Its balance and structure foretell a long cellar life with continued development"—The Winemaker.

Witness Tree Vineyard '06 Pinot Noir Estate, Oregon \$37.99/34.19. What a surprise! Dark in color for a Pinot Noir, and little heftier than one expects of Pinot Noir, but this wine is perfectly balanced—"not a hair out of place" and immensely satisfying.

The 2005 Vintage Bordeaux

The classifications (there are many) of Bordeaux wines are arcane. They are no guarantee of value, an unreliable guide to quality. I do not use "WS" and "RP" ratings, neither do I any longer subscribe to either publication. After thumbing through an issue of the Wine Advocate with nearly 100 pages of dense copy, at about thirty wines per page, I cancelled my subscription. Since I hardly ever buy without tasting, I have no use for either publication. In recent years, the upper echelons of Bordeaux have reached prices that have put them beyond the pale for the Madison Wine Shop, but we have big selection of older vintages that are terrific values—ask!

However, there are countless, inexpensive Bordeaux, especially the super 2005 vintage, that will warm the cockles of your heart. Keep in mind—I do not buy vintages or producers, only what I find in the bottle—make your choice with abandon.

There are some **under \$20 Rick's Picks 2005 Bordeaux**. They all reflect the lovely fruit and balance that is characteristic of this great vintage.

Berthets '05 Cotes de Blaye, ✓✓\$9.99/8.99, the **Value of the Vintage**, but going fast.

La Mothe du Barry '05 Bordeaux, ✓✓\$13.99/12.59, delicious. **Vieux Montagne '05 Montagne-St-Emillion, ✓✓\$14.99/13.49**, a super St Emillion, **Cazenove '05 ✓✓Bordeaux Superieur, \$16.99/15.29**, and **Ch Saint Barbe '05 Bordeaux, ✓✓\$16.99/15.29**, both have exceptional fruit and balance. **Barrail Chevrol '05 Fronsac, ✓✓✓\$19.99/17.99**, could be mistaken for a new-world wine.

Here are some upscale Rick's Picks:

La Gravette de Certan '05 Pomerol, ✓✓\$69.99/62.99, the second label of Ch, Vieu Certan, **Clos Rene '05 Pomerol, ✓✓✓\$ 49.99/44.99**, the 1968 vintage was our not-forgotten house wine, at less than \$3 a bottle!!!!!! **Larrivet Haut-Brion '05 Pessac-Leognan, ✓✓\$59.99/53.99**, another second label.

What About Whites?

Twenty or so years ago white wine sales were better than half the total, but today red wine, at least at the Madison Wine Shop, significantly exceeds the sales of white and rosé. This at a time when so many interesting white varieties from so many sources have become available.

SAUVIGNON BLANC

Sauvignon Blanc is, in my opinion, a far more versatile and interesting grape than Chardonnay. At the very top of the heap—**Terlan Sauvignon "Quarz" '05, ✓✓✓\$60.00/54.00** from Alto Adige, Northeast Italy. I know that few of you are going to rush out to buy this wine, but that is OK because I have precious little.

I am a firm believer in the concept of "terroir"—that there are places where soil and climate endow a wine with distinct and recognizable characteristics.

"Quartz crystals enrich the terroir of the Terlan Sauvignon vineyards, in Alto Adige, high in the foothills of the Alps in north-east Italy, adding complexity to the apricot, elder flavors and light woody notes of rich and long-lasting Sauvignon Blanc."—the back-label notes on this incredible wine, do not, in my opinion do it justice.

Over the years I have grown to appreciate the diversity of styles that can be coaxed from Sauvignon Blanc, by a combination of terroir and the hand of the vigneron. I cannot adequately describe this wine, but it is etched in my non-verbal olfactory memory. If no one is willing pay the price, I'll gladly take it all home.

Look in our New Zealand and Loire shelves for other Sauvignon Blanc treats.

ROMORANTIN AND THE ENVELOPE PUSHER

An almost extinct varietal in the Loire, the source of my "Ultimate Shellfish Wine."

My philosophy of going where all others fear to tread is vindicated, if for no other reason than **Cazin's Cour Cheverny**. Nine years, eleven vintages and thousands of cases after Joe Dressner lured me to his NYC office to taste a wine that

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no-one knew about or wanted. On June 5, 2007, I saw for the first time in any ads, reviews or news letters other than this, The Wine Editorial, the words *Romorantin* and *Cour Cheverny*, and even then they appear disconnected, and without elaboration, in two unrelated paragraphs. I refer to Eric Asimov's "The Pour" column, "To the Envelope Pushers, Cheers!" in the NY Times. I am proud to be an envelope pusher, a ranter and raver, a rabble rouser, or what ever else it takes to lead people to the *Joy of Wine*.

Cazin's Le Petit Chambord '05 Cour Cheverny, ✓✓✓\$15.99/13.49. Originally known as my "Wine of the Millenium", it is now universally known as the "*Ultimate Shell-fish Wine*". No oaky, buttery, fruit bomb here—lemon, lime and other delights with bright lingering finish. It retains its charms long after the bottle has been opened. I still treasure bottles of the original 1995 vintage stashed in my cellar. *It ages beautifully*.

THERE IS TORRONTÉS IN YOUR FUTURE

Torrontés is a distinctly flavored indigenous varietal from Galicia in northwest Spain, but the grape, or clones of it, are widely planted in Argentina and it is rapidly becoming an icon just as Malbec is the icon of Argentinian red wine. The wine which sometimes reminds me of a cameo Gewutztraminer, similar but less assertive, is the white equivalent of Argentinian Malbec, appealing to the palate and attractively priced. We have several versions of the wine. Try **Inca'07 Torrontes-Chardonnay** (80/20%), ✓✓\$11.99/10.79, Argentina. Bright fruit and acidity, light and delicate, without a trace of either oak or that "buttery" characteristic from malolactic fermentation, which is still sought after by Chardonnay lovers.

ALIGOTE!!!!

Jancis Robinson says "This is Burgundy's other white grape. Very much Chardonnay's underdog, but in a fine year when ripeness can compensate for its characteristic acidity, Aligote is not short

on champions"—I am one of them, and as many know, acidity is right up my alley. In spite of wine snobs who are apt to use the word as a pejorative, I have many converts and *you will become one*.

A. et P. de Villaine '04 Bouzeron. ✓✓\$24.99/22.49. Aubert de Villaine who, together with his wife Pamela own this vineyard in northern Chalonais, is also co-owner and co-director of the *Domaine de la Romanee-Conti*. Some of the world's most expensive wines are produced on its 4.5 acre vineyard.

The following is off a webpage /elevation.blogspot.com/2008/07/de-villaine-aligot.html: "After a couple years of bottle age, this wine is lightly golden in color with a waxy lemon and honey aroma, all surrounded by a difficult to describe mineral and floral quality that's simply entrancing. Star fruit? Star anise? Who knows, this is amazing. Actually, the more I think of it, the more it resembles a fine and mature Savennieres.

In the mouth, it's deliciously acidic with sweet lemon, mineral and round waxy flavors and a tangy, savory finish. How do they do this with the lowly aligoté? I imagine the producer is just that good, and that the grape isn't all that bad, provided you treat it with respect." *Do I detect a hint of snobbishness?*

Portugal

For delicious, inexpensive, exciting wines, at the worldwide forefront of Value.

Portugal has a long history of winemaking going back before the British "invention" of Port which has dominated Portugal's wine culture. I owe my passion for wine to Aveleda's **Casal Garcia Vihno Verde** which I fell in love with back in 1946, a unique white wine, that is a perennial top seller at ✓✓\$7.99/7.19. But until quite recently Portugal's dry reds languished. A poor country, with shortage of capital and infrastructure, its winemaking was antiquated, but in a dramatically short time, that has changed. With the exception of Port, there are no expensive Portugese wines, but untold numbers of reds that are immanently drinkable, and, in my opinion, many that offer an alternate to big-ticket wines from both the new-world and the New old-world and at remarkable prices, so low that they may be perceived to be inferior, that I am sometimes tempted to

double or triple their prices, just to see what happens.

Vinha Palestra '06, ✓✓\$9.99/8.99, from the Douro and **Pahla Canas '05, ✓✓\$11.99/10.79**, from Estremadura—both luscious, tasty red wines that offer satisfaction that belies the modest prices.

Setencostas '05 Alenquer, ✓\$10.99/9.89; and **Portuga '05 Estremadura Red** ✓(there is a White—same great price), ✓✓\$9.99/8.99.

Tinto de Anfora '06, ✓✓✓\$13.99/12.59, a stunning blend of five varietals, 60% Aragonez (aka Tempranillo), 20% Trincadera, 10% Touriga National, 5% Alocheiro and 5% Cab. These are the musicians that give a virtuoso performance. *It is unique!*



Vale da Torre Bin 717 '06 Alentejano, ✓✓\$13.99/12.59, Aragonez and Trincadera.

Calcos do Tanha '04 Douro, ✓✓\$14.99/13.49, Typical Douro grapes in the Touriga family—Barroca, Roriz and Franca.

Callabriga '03 Alentejo, ✓✓ and Callabriga '03 Douro, ✓✓ both **\$16.99/15.29**. These two wines are made of different varietals and from different appellations and they are recognizably different, but they share a stylistic similarity—great nose, huge complex fruit and vibrant tannins. Could not choose, so took the easy way—*you tell me!*

RICK'S SUBLIME SPIRITS

As with wine, we seek out the obscure producers who offer pure pleasure, no tail-pipe fire, and value in every price range. We have Scotch, Cognac, Armagnac, Rum, Vodka and Tequilla selections that will make you smile.

Check Us Out!
www.rickspicks.com

A foiled rip-off!

**When the waiter presents the bottle you have ordered—
Check the Label!**

A few years ago, under \$30 wines virtually disappeared from restaurant wine lists. Recently wines under \$40 did the same. **A conspiracy?**

We recently spent a few days in Montauk and had dinner one evening at a fairly decent restaurant that we had frequented before. I chose one of a couple of \$40 wines, thinking that a Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir would not be too shabby, although I had not heard of the producer, MacMurray Ranch. When I tasted the wine I was a little disappointed, but not enough to reject it. While sipping, Kathy asked me where it came from? I responded “Sonoma Coast”. She said “No its Central Coast” A whole different kettle of fish.

Called the waiter, he called the manager who showed up some time later and demanded to know why we had not called it to the waiter’s attention before we started drinking it. I responded that I refused to pay \$40 and offered \$30. She retreated without comment. When we had almost finished dinner and still no response. I went inside to find the manager, but encountered the owner coming through the back door—he had gone home early. Explained the situation to him and he accepted my offer, with an apology and the hope that I accepted that it was not the restaurant’s mistake, implying that the distributor could have invoiced Sonoma Coast, but shipped Central Coast.

On returning home I checked out MacMurray Ranch and found that it is a Gallo product. The back label, which touted the MacMurray family and their ranch, is no more authentic than those two old phonies Bartle and James of wine cooler infamy!

CHAMPAGNE

Many Champagne drinkers do not have the opportunity to taste a range of Champagnes side by side—many differences are subtle and not easily carried over from one occasion to the next. So some consumers base their preferences on a previous memorable

occasion or more often on image and advertizing. As always, price is not a reliable indicator of quality.

I lack enthusiasm for many popular brands of Champagne. Exceptions include the glorious **Pol Roger ‘90 Brut Rosé**, **✓✓✓\$95.00/85.50**, and **Pol Roger ‘88 Sir Winston Churchill**, **✓✓✓\$350.00/315.00**, but I cannot afford to drink them other than on occasions like ringing in the New Millennium.

The Champagne industry is a house divided between the marketing “houses” of which there are about 100 and the “growers” of which there are about 1,900, most of whom sell their grapes to the houses at negotiated prices based on quality and weight—weight is easily measured, quality is not, except in the finished wine. So there is a conflict of interest—the houses want to pay as little as possible, the growers want to get paid as much as possible and have no interest in the finished product. There is a philosophy that wine is made in the vineyard, implying that good wine cannot be made from inferior grapes.

Eight years ago I tasted the Champagnes of **Jean Laurent**, a small, family-owned producer—they’re what I have been looking for, not only in quality, but in price. I knew at last I had my **House Champagne**. Laurent grows only Chardonnay and Pinot Noir—**no Pinot Meunier**. Laurent’s wines are the Champagne equivalent of “**estate-bottled**,” which most popular brands are not. Lately they have acquired the moniker “grower” Champagnes.

During the last few months I have had the opportunity to taste a fair number of Champagnes side by side. A few were from the big houses but most were grower Champagnes. Sadly, only one wine moved me and I bought it. It has prompted me to re-think my view of Pinot Meunier and to beg forgiveness for calling it Pinot Manure. **Paul Berthelot Brut Reserve Champagne**, **✓✓✓\$41.99/37.79**, is made of 45% Pinot Meunier!! The vineyard is a southern-facing amphitheater in the Marne, the western-most region of Champagne—ample sun!! The wine has flavor and character—most enjoyable. **I urge you to try it.**

So I must redirect my ire from the grape to the grower, and to the system that

sacrifices quality for quantity. Beware of brands and the advertising that builds their cult following.

Jean Laurent Brut Rosé, **✓✓✓\$49.99/44.99**. The color is deep rose, the bouquet and fruit are subtle but distinct Pinot Noir, rich and delicious. *Superb with food.* The supply will always be **Limited**.

Jean Laurent Brut, Blanc de Noir, **✓✓\$44.99/40.49**, 100% Pinot Noir—**exquisite**.

Jean Laurent, Rick’s Pick “No Dosage,” Blanc de Noir, **✓✓✓\$44.99/40.49**. Jean Laurent produces this “no-dosage” (no sugar added) Blanc de Noir, especially for us. That wine has become by far our best-selling Champagne. The **absence of sugar simply adds to the brightness of the wine**. If you think you “don’t like dry,” think again. During the holiday season we will be tasting both versions of the Blanc de Noir—you may take your pick.

Jean Laurent Brut, Blanc de Blanc, **✓✓\$44.99/40.49**, **100% Chardonnay – exquisite**, with subtle Chardonnay fruit and a creamy texture

We’ll be tasting them all, come the holidays.

For that big family celebration, we will also have **Jean Laurent Brut Blanc de Noir** in large formats—**1.5 liter, \$110.00/99.00**, **3 liter, \$240.00**, and **6 liter, \$500.00** (no case discount on 3 and 6-liter).

Zeni Metodo Classico Brut, **✓✓✓\$29.99/27.99**, from Trentino, Italy, is of course not Champagne, *but I have never tasted Champagne that compares to this*—it is otherworldly. Chardonnay with, I believe, a touch of Nosiola.

Port

Ramos Pinto Collector Reserve Port, **✓✓✓\$19.99/17.99** is neither a vintage port nor a tawny port. It is a blend of three Late Bottled Vintage ports. A Late Bottled Vintage Port is a Single Vintage Port bottled within 6 years of the vintage—it has 6 years of barrel aging. A vintage port must be bottled within 2 years of the vintage—it has limited barrel aging.

This port is the very best value I have ever been able to offer. You

Continued on p8, col.1

The Measure of Wine is neither Price nor Numeric Rating, but what Pleases Your Palate and Pocket.
Rick's Picks Please Me, and they Please You.

—Rick Lewis

Wise-Up
on wine

WHO?
YOU!

WHAT?
TASTE COMPARE
RICK'S PICKS
AN OCCASIONAL
RICK'S NIX

WHY?
IT'S FUN
IT'S INFORMAL
IT'S INFORMATIVE

WHERE?
THE
MADISON WINE
SHOP, MADISON
CONNECTICUT

WHEN?
EVERY
SATURDAY
12NOON-8PM
MOST OTHER
DAYS, TOO

WISE
UP ON
WINE

Continued from
p7, col.3

can afford to indulge yourself after dinner every day. It will be available for tasting every day through the holiday season. **Don't miss it!**

Want to spend more? We have a huge selection!

Cheers! Italian Style!

by Patricia Roberts

There is something special, almost familiar about Prosecco! In Italy you are often welcomed at the door, or as you are seated at a table in a restaurant, with a blissful glass of bubbles!



SHIPPING AVAILABLE: INQUIRE

Our Prices

We show two prices for each item, e.g. **\$9.99/8.99**. The first is the bottle price, the second is the bottle-by-the-case price—usually reflecting a **10% discount**—Mix-or-Match.

Our Ratings

- ✓✓ = Exceptional Value ✓ = Exceptional Quality
- ✓✓✓ = Katie, Bar the Gate! **Under \$10 in Red**
- ♥ = Loot from the loft

We email
Heads-up info on
Wise-up tastings.
For your copy, email
your name and
phone number to
rick@rickspicks.com.
Your privacy
assured

Varaschin Prosecco Rosé \$15.99/14.39 is a favorite! With its alluring color, bursting berry fruit, it is light and dry. But, for special occasions I go for the seductive '07 **Varaschin Vintage Prosecco, \$39.99/35.99** positively scrumptious with hints of almond and vanilla, sinful! It is my absolute favorite, and well worth the money. Open a bottle to kick off you next holiday or gathering, and **you'll get raves!**

The Wine Editorial is not a catalogue. It reflects only a sampling of our extensive inventory.

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to forgive,
dewine.
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prices subject to
change.

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