

Refreshing Wine Values

IN QUINTESSENTIAL BARRINGTON'S MAY/JUNE 2008 ISSUE, I wrote about some great value wines in the marketplace, at that time. Since the wine market is constantly changing and we're still in a sideways economy, it's time for an update. . . . The all-time best wine value I've ever found is currently in the marketplace: 2010 Eclat de Sauvignon from the Despagne family in Bordeaux. The grapes are grown in less expensive locations between the Dordogne and the Gironde Rivers. This wine is crisp and clean tasting with evidence of minerality as well as white fruits, e.g., pear, peach, and nectarine. I've been drinking this wine regularly over the past month and like it more each time I have it. Everyone I know who has tried it has bought multiple cases. One night my wife and I had a glass with provolone and bruschetta and loved it. For the entrée, we had a red snapper, accompanied by one of the greatest Sauvignon Blancs ever made - 2005 Didier Dageuneau Silex from the Loire.

I SPENT MANY HOURS locating it and spent \$100 to buy it. While it was better than the Eclat, there are few Sauvignon Blancs at any price which would come between them in quality. Try this, and if you feel as I and many others do, dig deeply and buy a lot, as I don't expect to find a better bargain. I truly feel this wine (priced to \$7 at Costco) is underpriced by three to five times. It pairs wonderfully with bruschetta, guacamole, scallops, any mild, white fish, artichoke, asparagus, ceviche, or gazpacho, as well as by itself.

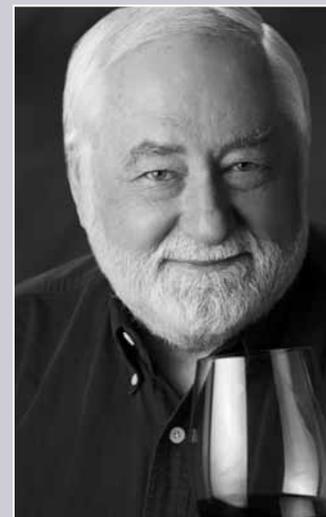
My other featured white wine is 2009/2010 Pazo de Señoráns Albarinó. The Albarinó grape is responsible for one of Spain's most famous white wines, and most of the world's production comes from the Rias Baixas region (in the far Northwest corner of the country). This is one of the most famous producers. In 2010, the 2009 release was voted one of the five best Spanish wines by a United States publication, along with four other red wines that ranged in price from \$400-\$800 (sounds like a value to me at \$18).

Pazo de Señoráns was in the forefront of reviving Albarinó, the once forgotten grape with a crisp, citrus-melon flavor. This wine has great minerality and acidity (although rich and creamy at the same time) and is a great wine with shrimp, scallops,

bouillabaisse, mussels and most white fish, and is terrific as well when consumed by itself.

Juan Gil is a fabulous expression of one of my favorite grapes - Mourvèdre (French), Mataro (United States) and Monastrell (Spain). Mourvèdre is most famous for being a major contributor to the complexity of one of the world's greatest wines, Chateaufort du Pape, from the Southern Rhône. It performs very well in Spain, and in particular, in the Jumilla region where Juan Gil is produced. This grape is sophisticated and complex, and is terrific with many foods. It pairs well with vegetable dishes, especially ratatouille, and beef, chicken, pork, lamb and Manchego cheese. The wine is redolent of plums, figs, and offers a welcome change to the ever-present Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot fruit and oak bombs so popular in the United States. Juan Gil is widely available in this area from \$12-\$15 and represents an outstanding value.

Finally, again we go to Spain for an unbelievable value: Evodia. This wine is produced from very old (100 years) Grenache vines in Calatayud and is commonly available from \$7-\$10 which makes it my best red wine value ever. It is part of the Eric Solomon Spanish portfolio, and is one of the best. Because the vines are so old, the wine



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is very dark and intense compared to most Grenache-based wines, and the blue and black fruit flavors are very stunning. The wine has uncommon complexity for such an inexpensive wine. Grenache is the most widely planted red wine grape in the world (#1 in France, and #3 in Spain) and as such you can be assured it is food friendly. This would be a great party wine since it is an easy-going, crowd-pleasing choice that will please even finicky palates. And at the price, this is hard to beat! It is the overwhelming majority grape in Chateaufort du Pape, so is well-paired with continental cuisine. A santé! 

EDITOR'S NOTE: Find an archive of Jim Bryant's Down Cellar articles online at www.qbarrington.com. Click on "Down Cellar".