

Best of 2008 Reds

Issue 120108

Winter is red wine weather at the Tasting Times world headquarters. At this time of year our taste skews towards comfort foods and a glass of something with heft. With that bias in mind, here are our 2008 favorites from warm climates that produce rich, food-friendly wines. They will warm your heart, whether in an ice storm in Boston or the dry wind of San Diego.

Practical notes: As always, use this list as a starting point, but don't forget that others from the same region, and the same vintage, may offer a similar experience. *Order of information in each review: winery, region, type of grape, vintage, country, where to find it, Price, and our enlightened (?) comments.*

*** Australia ***

Water Wheel Vineyards, Bendigo, "Memsie", 2004, Australia, \$14

Sour apricots, tangy cherry, spice, and pepper. A yummy bend of Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon & Malbec. B+

Boots, Barossa, Shiraz, 2005, Australia, \$18

Smoky, spicy, opulent fruits, with flavors of Strawberries and cherry pie. Maybe a little chocolate in there. A

Penfolds, South Eastern Australia, Koonunga Hill, Shiraz, 2005, Australia, Generally available, \$10

Plums, smoke, licorice, cherry jam, and a little pepper. Good stuff. To find comparable wines, look to other SE Australia Shiraz, or branch out to other syrah/shiraz-based wines from elsewhere. B+

Thorn Clarke, Barossa Valley, Shiraz, 2001, Australia, \$27

WOW. Incense, ripe fruits and spice. And, as subscriber Greg noted, "Creosote." A

Peter Lehmann, Barossa, "Clancy's", Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, 2004, Australia, \$16

Mint, Ghanaian chocolate, clove, tobacco, earth, cherry, a whiff of vanilla. Tasted twice. Yum. A-

*** South America***

El Tordo, Mendoza, Malbec, 2004, Argentina, \$15

Inky black color, flavors of cherry, warm strawberry, charcoal, and pepper. Yum. A-

Agua de Piedra, Mendoza, Gran Reserva, Malbec, 2005, Argentina, \$9

Chewy dried cherries and spice. A tasty country wine. B+

*** United States ***

Chateau Ste Michelle, Columbia Valley, Merlot, 2004, United States, \$10

Nose of spice. Flavors of oak, raspberry, bright fruit and roof of the mouth tannin. Yum. A-

Hahn, Meritage, 2004, United States, \$15

This wine includes a range of grapes found in Bordeaux blends: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc, and Malbec. The flavors? Leather, dried Cherry, herbs, sage, wood, oak, vanilla syrup. A-

Cannonball, California, 2005, United States, \$12

Spicy briary flavors, ripe fruits, cloves and pepper. According to the kids, raspberry, cranberry and crabapple (just for the record they had tiny tastes). Black cherry, a hint of chocolate, and warm spice. A-

Estancia, Central Coast, Shiraz, 2004, United States, Generally Available, \$12

Smoky cherries, earth and cloves. Gorgeous and distinct from Australian versions of the same grape. For a similar experience look for other Central Coast Shiraz such as Qupe or Bonny Doone. A-

Renwood, Sierra Foothills, Syrah, 2004, California, United States, \$9.50

Bright cherries, paprika, licorice and vanilla. Good stuff. B+

Estancia, Paso Robles, Keyes Canyon Ranches, Merlot, 2005, United States, \$17

Ripe rich cherries. Smooth, supple tannins. Vanilla. Soft, round, elegant wine. This is a Merlot to sit back and enjoy. A-

David Arthur, Napa Valley, Meritaggio, 2003, United States, \$31

Splurge alert! This wine is above our normal parameters BUT the ripe, jammy, plummy flavors, the multifaceted complexity, with pencil box and warm spice, even faint licorice on top of all the fruit left us very happy indeed. Bordeaux blend with Sangiovese in the mix (hence Meritaggio). A

Fenestra, California, True Red Lot 17, United States, \$11

For the entertainment of comparison we've included this "Rhone – ish" wine from California. The spices and twizzlers hint at Syrah. The mulled fruit and smoke, well, let your imagination run. B+

*** Europe ***

Domaine Paul Autard, Cotes du Rhone, 2005, France, \$12

Pepper, clove, earth, coarse cherry. Just what a Cotes du Rhone should be. A-

Domaine Rene Rostaing, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes, Les Lezandes, Syrah, 2004, France, \$27

Resin, pomegranate, leather, strawberry, licorice, tar, and... hot pavement in a summer rain. B+/A-

Kirkland Signature, Chateauneuf du Pape, Cuvee de Nalys, 2005, France, \$20

Earth, charcoal, cherry, dark fruits. As you may know, Costco is the largest seller of wine in the US. This relatively high-end wine sold under the store brand is one facet of Costco strategy. Yum. B+

Villerambert Julien, Cotes du Rhone, La Syrah de Villerambert Julien, Syrah, 2004, France, \$15

Brown Sugar, chocolate, cinnamon, earth, cherry liqueur, pepper and spice. B+

Chateau Haut Sociondo, Premieres Cotes De Blaye, 2005, France, \$12

A medium bodied dry wine with earth and dried fruit flavors. A hint of spice and a little coarse (a good thing). This wine grew on us. Tasty. B+

Vina Gormaz, Ribera del Duero, Tempranillo, 2006, Spain, \$11

Warm baked fruits, especially red cherries and prunes. Earth. Tasty. B

Castello Banfi, Rosso di Montalcino, 2004, France, \$18

Spice, earth, clove, charcoal, smoky cherry, even a little crab-apple on the finish. Tasty stuff. B+

Castello di Uzzano, Chianti Classico, 2005, Italy, \$17

Mulled fruits, tobacco, and a hint of spice including cloves. Yum. B+

Bodegas El Nido, Jumilla, Clio, Monastrell, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2003, Spain, \$25

Vanilla, butter, butterscotch, honeyed almond. Gorgeous. A

Puech Chaud, Coteaux du Languedoc, 2004, France, \$26

Coarse, earthy wine with licorice, black cherry and pepper flavors. Appealing tannin in this blend of 80% syrah, with the difference made up by Grenache and Mourvedre. Delicious. A-

*** Recipe ***

I prepared this for the Phantom Gourmet on Boston's TV38. It's fun, tasty, and goes perfectly with one of the wines in this issue.

Hogs in a Quilt

Forget Pigs in a Blanket, how about Hogs in a Quilt?!

Pork tenderloin is a tender, tasty cut available at most grocery stores. It's easy to cook, and, in this recipe, is willing to masquerade as a (much much) bigger version of a pig in a blanket. Talk about entertainment value – your friends will never have seen anything like this before.

Prep time: 30 Minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Serves: 6-8

The "Hog"

1 grilled pork tenderloin (1 to 1 1/2 lbs.)

The "Quilt"

3 TB Olive oil

1 medium-size onion (about the size of a pool ball), chopped

1 16 oz. premade pizza dough (available in most supermarkets). If available, whole-wheat dough has the most flavor (and it's good for you!)

6 oz. (about 3/4 pkg.) shredded mozzarella cheese

1 jar (8 oz) Honey Mustard sauce

Grill the pork tenderloin with your favorite rub until done.

Preheat the oven to 400. While the oven is heating, Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat and cook the onion for 10 minutes or until pieces are soft and translucent. Turn off heat. Remove onion to a bowl to cool slightly.

Generously flour a countertop and roll the dough into an elongated oval about 17 inches long and 8 inches wide, narrow enough to allow the tenderloin to poke out each end. Place the tenderloin across one end of the dough, and roll so that the dough encircles the meat. Then spread a thick layer of shredded cheese and onion over about 7 inches of the remaining dough, leaving the remainder of the dough quilt uncovered, and carefully continue to roll the tenderloin over this cheesy layer. Continue to roll up until the 'quilt' is complete, and carefully lift this wrapped package onto a floured baking tray. Tuck in each end, so that the 'hog' peeks out. Place in the oven and bake for 15 minutes, or until the dough quilt is crisp when rapped lightly with your fingernails.

To serve, move the Hog in a Quilt to a large cutting board and slice crosswise with a sharp knife. Serve slices with honey mustard sauce.



*** Wisdom ***

You don't have to use words to taste and enjoy wine

-- Michael Broadbent, at Lower Falls Wine Company, November 4, 2002

In vino veritas,

Tod Dimmick

Editor

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