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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

I have lots of reasons to be thankful. Let me recount just a few of them...

I'm thankful for a great family that allows me the time and space to pursue my dream of sharing wonderful wine with wonderful people.

I'm thankful for a fabulous group of co-workers here at Vinesse, who are just as passionate about their individual responsibilities as I am about my overall vision for the company.

I'm thankful for good health, and even more thankful that study after study has shown moderate consumption of wine (red wine, in particular) to provide a bevy of health benefits.

But most of all, I'm thankful for you and your fellow members of the wine clubs of Vinesse. I'm no Einstein, but I'm smart enough to know that Vinesse is nothing without its members. And that's why we place so much emphasis on training our member service representatives.

So, as the season of Thanksgiving draws near, let me just say: Thanks.

Martin Stewart Jr.

Happy Halloween! Now Let's Start Preparing for Christmas

By Robert Johnson

When you start seeing Christmas decorations in department stores, you know that Halloween can't be too far away.

Such is the state of holiday marketing and merchandising in America today. We barely get the kids back in school, and it's time to shop for Halloween candy... and plan the Thanksgiving feast... and figure out who's going to whose house for Christmas or the other important year-end holidays.

It's hectic, but for most of us, it's a "good hectic" because it involves spending more time with the people we hold dearest in our lives — our family. That precious time, fleeting though it may be, makes

all the planning... all the scheduling... all the cooking... all the fretting... worthwhile.

Much of what you'll be reading in this issue of *The Grapevine* deals with the upcoming holiday season and planning for it.

Katie Montgomery devotes her "Cellar Notes" column to Italian dining traditions, inspired by her first-ever visit to a Buca di Beppo restaurant, and also touches on the expanding "slow food" movement.

Our "Cellarmaster" feature offers some ideas on what wines to serve at those big holiday feasts that are (amazingly) just around the corner.

Even our "Wine A-to-Z" feature gets in the holiday spirit as all of the terms this month have something to do with Champagne or other types of sparkling wine.

Enjoy... and Happy Holidays!



Robert Johnson can be reached at Robert@vinesse.com.



OUR MISSION:

To uncover and bring you wine gems from around the world, which you're not likely to discover on your own, and which enhance your wine enjoyment.

YOUR GRAPEVINE TEAM:

Intrepid Wine Enthusiast, Chief Taster and Winehound:

Martin Stewart

Chief Operating Officer (aka "The Buck Stops Here"):

Lawrence D. Dutra

Editor:

Robert Johnson




Wine Steward:

Katie Montgomery

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Now that my son is old enough not only to behave in a restaurant but also enjoy the dining experience, our family recently made the jump from Chuck E. Cheese to Buca di Beppo.

And now, there's no turning back.

Yes, Buca di Beppo is a chain restaurant, so it's automatically suspect in my book. But its founders didn't start out with a grand plan to be the next Olive Garden. They opened their first restaurant in the basement of an apartment building in Minneapolis. It just turned out that their concept was too sound to limit to one location.

The concept: delicious Italian food, all served family-style — just as families have dined most days of the week for generations in Italy.

It's not quite what I'd call "authen-

tic" Italian dining, because it's rare to find such a wide array of dishes and cooking styles in just one restaurant in Italy. There, regional styles are the rule of thumb, with significant differences between Northern Italy and Southern Italy cuisine. At Buca di Beppo, Northern and Southern and all their sub-region iterations co-mingle... and deliciously so.

All of this came to mind the other day as I, for the first time this year, began to think about Thanksgiving. Here in the United States, the Thanksgiving meal is the closest we come to the traditional Italian meal. We celebrate with food once or perhaps a few times per year. In Italy, every dinner is a celebration, with plenty of wine to wash down that tasty food.

However, whereas we tend to pile our Turkey Day plates high with stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, green bean casserole and assorted other family



favorites — much like eating in a smorgasbord — a traditional Italian meal is much more... orderly. Particularly in a restaurant.

Generally speaking, food is consumed in courses, with pasta separate from salad separate from a vegetable separate from risotto separate from a fish or meat dish. Parmesan typically is offered only if it complements the dish you've chosen; asking for some would insult the chef, just like adding salt to a dish without even tasting it first. And if you ask for catsup... you're on your own.

Whether pass-around (like at Buca di Beppo) or more structured (like at a restaurant in Italy), two ingredients you'll find at every Italian supper are friendship and hospitality. That's because meals are treated as *occasions*. No wonder the "slow food" movement, which traces its roots to Italy in 1986, has gained such a large and passionate following.

Unless Martin or Robert has already beaten me to the punch, allow me to be the first to wish you and yours a Happy Thanksgiving. No matter how you celebrate it, I hope you'll do so with the people who mean the most to you, and that you savor every moment, every bite and every sip.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

MENDOCINO COUNTY

Gold Rush immigrants grants first planted winegrapes in Mendocino County's inland valleys in the 1850s.

Today, the county still has predominantly family-owned wineries, 60 percent of which are small estates producing fewer than 5,000 cases annually.

Mendocino wineries and vineyards are thriving, and are well regarded for producing wines of high quality. The principal varietals are Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, Riesling, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Petite Sirah and Syrah.

There are 10 federally-approved American Viticultural Areas — grape-growing areas distinguishable by geographic, climatic and historic features — in Mendocino County. They are Anderson Valley, Cole Ranch, Covelo, Dos Rios, McDowell Valley, Mendocino, Mendocino Ridge, Potter

Valley, Redwood Valley and Yorkville Highlands. The county also is part of the larger North Coast AVA.

Green Pioneers

The pioneer spirit of Mendocino's wine industry is once again evident in the region's dedication to environmental stewardship. Mendocino is a leader in certified organic vineyards with 2,800 of its total 17,000 vineyard acres so certified. The county also is home to the first carbon-neutral winery in the U.S.

From Ukiah to Fort Bragg, Mendocino County offers a variety of activities. The seaside village of Mendocino is a thriving artist community with galleries, live theater and critically acclaimed restaurants. Visitors can board a boat to watch the whales migrate, or ride the Skunk Train for a tour of the redwoods. Adventure lovers can enjoy kayaking, canoeing and hiking along the dramatic coastal cliffs.

And for wine lovers, 59 tasting rooms welcome visitors year-round.



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VINESSE STYLE

CHOCOLATE DESTINATIONS

Last month, in honor of National Milk Chocolate Day, we devoted this space to some of our favorite chocolate destinations.

But such delectable information simply could not be contained within one issue. So, this month, we offer a few more places where you can satisfy your chocolate cravings...

• **Cadbury World.**

Cadbury, founded in 1831, served as a model for Hershey, Pa., in creating a “company town” with abundant amenities for its employees. Today, Cadbury World, located in Birmingham, England, is a multi-media attraction devoted to chocolate. cadburyworld.co.uk

• **La Maison du Chocolat.** Yes, the name would indicate that this choco-

late boutique was founded in France — specifically, Paris. But there’s now an outpost in New York as well, where one may not only sample and buy chocolate confections, but also learn how to make them.

lamaisonduchocolat.com

• **Eurochocolate.** Each October, the city of Perugia in Italy’s Umbrian region plays host to the largest chocolate festival in the world. It runs for nine days, hundreds of exhibitors

showcase their chocolate wares, and more than 1 million people attend. Talk about a mass sugar rush... eurochocolate.com

• **Naked Chocolate Café.** At this Philadelphia destination, chocolate is

made three ways: for drinking, for sipping and for dipping. Want to take some “eating” chocolate home? Ask them to pack your goodies in one of their edible boxes.

nakedchocolatecafe.com



BEING GREEN

At its most basic level, organic wine is made from grapes that have been grown without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides. Winemaking techniques should be organic as well; little or no manipulation of wines by reverse osmosis, excessive filtration, or flavor additives (such as oak chips). Many organic winemakers also prefer wild yeasts for fermentation. When a label says “organic,” it means the wine has met certain standards that are set by a government agency. Different nations have their own certification criteria, so what’s organic in one country may not be so in another.



The Turkey Day Wine Question

In newspapers across the country during the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, one question will be explored over and over and over again.

That question: What wine should be served with the Thanksgiving dinner?

There will be no shortage of pontification as wine and food writers hem and haw over the ham, wax poetic about the sweet potatoes and, in general, parse every parsnip.

That's one category of Turkey Day wine column you'll read. The other takes an

"anything goes" approach, urging readers to simply drink what they like.

Quite frankly, both approaches can work. (Aren't we a big help?) However, certain types of wine absolutely work better than others with the Turkey Day feast. So, if you're

part of the "anything goes" brigade, simply pick out a few of your favorites from among the wines we're going to recommend.

Remember that on Thanksgiving Day, food rules. This probably isn't the day to uncork that special Cabernet Sauvignon you've been saving because the eclectic flavors of the food almost certainly will overwhelm it.

Instead, among red wines, opt for a mix that includes Pinot Noir,

Sangiovese (or Chianti), a Rhone-style blend (of Grenache, Syrah and/or Mourvedre), and anything that is fruit-forward as opposed to ultra-oaky.

Among red wines, save the oaky Chardonnay for a special sipping occasion, and instead choose from among Riesling,

Gewurztraminer, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and white blends.

By selecting a couple of reds and a couple of whites, you'll find that everyone at the table has something – or a few somethings – that they like. It's really that simple.



Four Seasons



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An Architectural Tour of Napa Valley

If you're an architecture buff, few places offer as many diverse styles within such a small territory as Napa Valley wine country.

A recent article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, authored by the newspaper's urban design writer, John King, took readers on an armchair tour of more than a dozen estates that feature noteworthy – good or not-so-good – architectural features.

Here's a list of some of them, accompanied by excerpts from King's *Chronicle* feature...

- **Robert Mondavi Winery.** "Even after 40 years it remains alluring – an unashamed homage to some mythical Spanish mission past, complete with a bell tower, but done with such elegance that the result is a genuine landmark on its own."

- **Dominus Estate.** "It's a container made of containers. The feeling that unfolds inside is something else, a hypnotic exercise in efficient restraint and low-key contradictions."

- **Clos Pegase.** "...The winery tries to be ironic and awe-inspiring at once, a pompous spoof of classicism that includes a single enormous column at the entry."

- **Quixote Winery.** "[A] low building engulfed by a tree-covered roof, with walls of bright meandering tiles and a gold dome that rises from a brick-accented roofline that slips and slides from north to south."

- **Domaine Chandon.** "Great architecture? No. But better than most of its rivals, and the stripped-down forms and rhythmic scalloped roofline make up for the marketing frills inside the visitors' center."

- **Opus One.** "It is designed, emphatically, to make a statement: Approach the front door and you're engulfed by



TOURING TIPS

creamy limestone in a colonnaded plaza. The plaza, meanwhile, is cradled by grassy wings that slide up from out of the earth. Inside there's a spiral stone stairway leading down to the cellars, a



salon off the left filled with antiques and more carved stone than you'll find in Venice. The architectural guide available at the door uses the phrase "subtlety and grace" to describe the architecture. Hardly. But at least it doesn't skimp." (Pictured here.)

- **Plumpjack Winery.** "I'm not a fan of the 'whimsical' statuary or the San Francisco Marina vibe, but ignore all that. It's a dusty quadrangle of wood and stucco structures built between

1880 and the 1930s, shaded by mature oaks – rustic California at its weathered best."

- **Cakebread Cellars.** "You see clean forms and modern lines that draw on the past without trying hard."

- **Frog's Leap.** "...A simple red barn from 1884 has evolved into a snug compound with the restored structure flanked by a respectful imitation and a visitors' center designed to look like a modest Victorian residence. The buildings... are appropriately restrained, and arranged in a way that suggests the grounds evolved naturally."

- **Nickel & Nickel.** "The grounds include a restored farmhouse, a barn-like structure where the wine ages – and a 200-year-old barn from New Hampshire. When its owners learned the barn with its red hemlock planks and white pine beams was targeted for demolition, they purchased the structure sight unseen, then had it dismantled and shipped to St. Helena."

- **Monticello.** "It's a short step from the sublime to the ridiculous – and outside of Las Vegas, it's hard to imagine a landscape where so many buildings try so hard to make you think you're somewhere else. This isn't a new trend in Napa – Jay Corley's replica of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello opened in 1984."

- **Domaine Carneros.** "...[A] lavish knockoff of an 18th century chateau."

- **Castello di Amorosa.** "Vintner Darryl Sattui's 107-room, 121,000-square-foot would-be medieval castle that comes with five tower-like battlements, one of which looks like it endured an artillery barrage. When naysayers compare it to Disneyland, they're missing the point. Imitation was never so sincere..."

- **Darioush.** "It has layers of Persian-themed opulence, such as the 16 free-standing stone columns topped by two-

headed steeds.”

If you're planning to simply drive around the valley and soak in the architectural scenery, just fill up the ol' gas tank and knock yourself out. However, if you'd also like to taste wine at all of these estates... bring money. Lots of it.

Sadly, Dominus Estate, which King calls “the best work of contemporary architecture in Napa,” is not open to the public, and the best views are from the private grounds. The good news is that not stopping by won't cost you anything.

But at 12 of the other 13 estates described, the tasting fees total... are you sitting down?... \$225. *Per person.*

The one winery with a consumer-friendly, no-fee policy is Frog's Leap, which also happens to place an emphasis on environmental sustainability. In addition to its half-acre of photovoltaic panels, King notes that “the visitors' center includes woodwork made from reclaimed pickle vats, and the structural beams had a prior life in a piano factory.”

For Further Information

(All in Area Code 707)

Robert Mondavi Winery

Oakville • 968-2020

Clos Pegase

Calistoga • 942-4981

Quixote Winery

Napa • 944-2659

Domaine Chandon

Yountville • 944-2280

Opus One

Oakville • 944-9442

Plumpjack Winery

Oakville • 945-1220

Cakebread Cellars

Rutherford • 963-5221

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Monticello

Napa • 253-2802

Domaine Carneros

Napa • 257-0101

Castello di Amorosa

Calistoga • 967-6272

Darioush

Napa • 257-2345



Wine, Grappa & Oil Mix Deliciously at Casanova di Neri

*Within the
Montalcino
territory of Italy is
situated a truly
remarkable wine estate:
Casanova di Neri.*

Known worldwide for its “Tenuto Nuova” Brunello di Montalcino, the winery also makes a number of other esteemed red wines, some eye-opening Grappa and a phenomenal extra virgin olive oil.

Casanova di Neri was founded in 1971 when Giovanni Neri purchased a large expanse of land in Montalcino. Since then, the Neri holdings have expanded to four separate and distinct plots, each selected for its wine-grape-friendly setting and climate.

The Fiesole Vineyard is situated adjacent to the farmhouse of the same name, where the winery's cellar and offices are located. This vineyard

produces Casanova di Neri's Brunello di Montalcino, which has garnered ratings as high as 96 points from *Wine Spectator* magazine. Additional grapes for that bottling come from the nearby Poderuccio Vineyard.

In 1986, Neri purchased the Cerretalto Vineyard, which he describes as “a magical place.” Located east of Montalcino, with its land between 250 and 300 meters above sea level, its terroir is unique in the region, as the separate Brunello made from its grapes demonstrates.

The family also owns a vineyard near Castelnuovo dell' Abate to the southeast (known as Pietradonice), as well as a magnificent hillside vineyard near Sant' Angelo in Colle (known as Cetine).

The unique settings of the vineyards accommodate the growing of multiple grape varieties. So, in addition to the acclaimed Brunello wines, Neri crafts a wine called Pietradonice (consisting of Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon), and a simple but delicious Rosso (based on Sangiovese).

If you're a Grappa fan, you'll love Casanova di Neri's Grappa di Cerretalto and Grappa di Brunello. It's a true specialty drink, as only about 4,000 bottles — total — of the two renditions are made each year.

Like many Italian estates, Casanova di Neri also makes olive oil. Its estate-grown olives from Oleaster, Leccini

and Correggioli trees are hand-picked and pressed daily to create a fine, extra-virgin oil.

And while many of the world's top winemaking estates are closed

to the public, Casanova di Neri welcomes visitors with open arms and two apartments within the Fiesole farmhouse. Best of all, each apartment includes something you don't find in all European lodgings: private bathrooms with showers.





WINE A TO Z

With the holidays just around the corner, this month's "A-to-Z" department deals exclusively with sparkling wine.

Blanc de Blanc. Consisting entirely of Chardonnay, if made in Champagne. Elsewhere in France, other white grape varieties may be used.

Cava. Term for sparkling wine in Spain.

Chef du Caves. One name for a Champagne maker, similar to winemaker or cellar master.

Prosecco. Term for sparkling wine in Italy.

Récoltant Manipulant. One who grows grapes and makes Champagne from grapes grown on his own premises.

Sec. French word for "dry." However, if you see it on a bottle of Champagne, the wine is likely to be sweet. (Confusing, huh?)

Vintage Champagne. Sparkling wine made from grapes of a single harvest.

Q AND A

How can I remove labels from wine bottles?

— Carolyn Hale

There is no blanket answer because several different adhesives are used by wineries.

Some people have had success with steaming labels off. Others have used a hair dryer to soften the glue. And still others soak the labels off, finishing the removal with a razor blade. But even a single method such as soaking has its variables. Some use hot water, but others caution that the label colors can fade if the water is too hot. Others have success with cold water, but most label collectors strike a happy medium and opt for warm. One or two drops of liquid detergent in the sink may also help, but more than that can cause the label to fall apart. Once labels have come off the bottles, remove them from the water immediately and blot them dry.

A few companies make "label removers," which basically are plastic pieces that laminate the labels as

you stick them on, and remove the labels from the bottles as you peel them back. We've found this "system" works well with some label glues, and not so well with others.

Our best advice is to experiment on bottles that have labels you're not interested in saving. Or buy a few cheap bottles at the liquor store, use the wine for cooking or watering your plants (sorry — no plant deserves such a fate), and practice on them. Once you hit upon a system that seems reliable, then you can try it out on a coveted label.

Here's one more idea for you: If you're simply trying to save a memory of a special bottle, take a picture with a digital camera and store it as you would any other digital shot. Then you can print out a fresh "memory" anytime you want.

Have a question about wine? Visit Vinesse.com/ask and ask it, then watch for the answer.



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ONE MORE DELECTABLE CHOCOLATE DESTINATION

No discussion of chocolate-themed destinations (to which we've devoted two consecutive "Vinesse Style" features) would be complete without mentioning Ganong Chocolates in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, Canada. The Great White North's oldest candy factory was founded in 1873, and the Ganong family has been creating chocolate confections ever since. Our favorite: sinful dark chocolate "straws" encased in cinnamon. Try to visit during August, when Chocolate-Fest is held. For more info, go online to ganong.com and chocolate-fest.ca.

ADD ANOTHER FACTOR TO THE CORK DEBATE

We've been reporting on "The Great Cork Debate" for as long as we've been publishing *The Grapevine*. For most of that time, the conversation has centered on cork's less-than-perfect record of keeping wine fresh and flavorful; it's estimated that anywhere from 3 to 8 percent of cork-sealed wines are spoiled by oxygen getting into the bottles, and/or tainted by a chemical compound called TCA. Any quality control professional would tell you that even 3 percent is an unacceptable level of failure for any product. The wine industry responded by embracing screwcaps, which typically are aluminum-based and have no tainting issues. Many wineries began the switchover with their lower-



priced wines, adding higher-end bottlings as public acceptance increased. Now, however, another issue has been added to the debate: environmental sustainability. In the cork-vs.-screwcap discussion, cork is the renewable material. And that reality is causing some winery owners to take a second look at cork. Here's the raw data: Mediterranean cork forests cover about 6.7 million acres. Most are privately-owned, which makes them susceptible to developer offers if they fail to maintain desired levels of profitability. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that if the move to screwcaps continues at its current pace, 75 percent of the western Mediterranean's cork forests could be lost within just 10 years. As a result, "The Great Cork Debate" just got a whole lot more complicated.

D'OH! NEW NAPA WINERY GETS THE GEHRY TOUCH

This issue's "Wine Touring Tips" feature includes information on several Napa Valley wineries that double as architectural destinations. In 2010, that list will grow by at least one when Hall Wines unveils its visitor center just north of St. Helena. Its designer is Pritzker Prize-winning Frank Gehry, the man who created the Bilbao Guggenheim and the acclaimed music pavilion at Chicago's Millennium Park, among other structural wonders. Gehry also is the only architect ever to be a featured guest on an episode of "The Simpsons."

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BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

It won't be long until that crispness in the air becomes the norm rather than the exception, as summer morphs into fall. And when the weather starts cooling down, nothing warms the soul like soup. This recipe makes 6 servings, and matches beautifully with a creamy Chardonnay.

Soup Ingredients

- 1 medium butternut squash
- 1 1/2 teaspoons coriander
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 1 small yellow onion
- 1 cup cream
- Milk, as needed
- Salt and pepper
- Dash of cayenne

Crouton Ingredients

- Day-old baguette
- Crumbled goat cheese
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Preparation

1. In a medium-size pot, sweat onion

in a little oil. Add coriander and cook for 1 minute.

2. Add butternut squash, chicken stock and cream, and season with salt and pepper. Simmer over low heat until squash becomes tender. Strain squash and blend in blender until smooth, adding some of the cooking liquid until desired consistency.
3. Strain soup into pot, add cayenne and season to taste. If soup is still a little too thick, add a little milk.
4. For the croutons, cut on the bias, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Crumble a little goat cheese over each one and bake at 350 degrees in oven until golden brown.
5. Serve soup hot with one crouton floating on top.

CABERNET FILET MIGNON

For a special meal, prepare this recipe (which serves 2) and open a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Ingredients

- 2 (6-oz.) filet mignon steaks, 1-inch thick
- Olive oil
- Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup Cabernet Sauvignon
- 2 tablespoons butter

Preparation

1. Bring steaks to room temperature before cooking. Coat steaks lightly with olive oil, and season both sides with salt and pepper (press in with your hands).
2. Cook steaks to desired doneness and remove from pan.
3. Add wine to the pan and bring to a boil, scraping any pieces of steak off the bottom of the pan and stirring them into the emerging sauce. Let the liquid boil until reduced to approximately 1/3 cup. Remove pan from heat.
4. Add the butter and mix it in by swirling the pan.
5. Pour the sauce over the steaks just before serving.



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WHITE WINES **Member Price**

2005 Monkey Puzzle Maule Valley, Chile Chardonnay	\$11.99
2006 Silver Creek White Table Wine	\$12.99
2005 Cross Creek California Chardonnay	\$12.99
2006 Silver Pony California Sauvignon Blanc	\$12.99
2005 Big Ass Chardonnay	\$16.99
2006 Terranoble Maule, Chile Vineyard Selection Sauvignon Blanc	\$16.99
Adler Fels Winery Russian River Gewurztraminer	\$17.99
2006 Guy Harvey California Sauvignon Blanc	\$17.99
2005 Hope Estate Verdlho, Hunter Valley Australia	\$18.99
2005 La Playa Colchagua, Chile Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc	\$19.99
2005 Kono Baru South East Australia Riesling	\$19.99
2005 Kenneth Volk Santa Barbara County, California Chardonnay	\$25.99

RED WINES **Member Price**

2005 El Tiburon California Syrah	\$12.99
2004 Rio Linda Lake County Cabernet Sauvignon	\$12.99
2002 Chateau Bel-Air France Lalande-de-Pomerol	\$14.00
2004 TerraNoble Vineyard Selection Merlot, Maule, Chile	\$16.99
Stella Rosa Piedmont, Italy Sparkling Red Wine	\$16.99
2005 Tarrica Wine Cellars Paso Robles, California Zinfandel	\$18.99
2005 Don Rodolfo Cafayatte, Argentina Malbec	\$18.99
2004 Preludio Syrah, Mendoza, Argentina	\$20.99
2003 Axel Colchagua Valley, Chile Syrah.....	\$21.99
2005 Spinyback Nelson New Zealand Pinot Noir.....	\$21.99
2005 Waterbrook Syrah, Columbia Valley, Washington	\$32.99
1999 Château Pomeaux Pomerol	\$40.00

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