

# Fresh ideas for your glass

Spain, Portugal and Argentina deserve chance in the spotlight



By Michael Pinkus

**Spring** is a time of renewal.

The leaves come out, the flowers bloom, the birds come back, baby animals are born, and the weeds come back in your lawn. OK, so maybe not all of what spring brings to the table is good.

What spring really should do is inspire your curiosity to try something new. New recipes, new plants for the garden, new things for around the house and, of course, new wines.

Traditionally, in Ontario wine country, springtime is when the new white wines come out from the previous growing season: think Rieslings, Sauvignon Blancs, Pinot Gris and unoaked Chardonnays. And with those first bottles, we get an idea of how the vintage actually was – not just speculation based on what we see out our windows.



Michael Pinkus

Some pundits have already written off the last season as being inferior, but let's wait and see before we write the obit on the vintage of 2013.

I also mentioned above something about curiosity and springtime. As much as I might preach the gospel of eating local food and drinking Ontario wine, being monochromatic — one kind of wine or from one region or country — can put blinders on your palate. And let's face it, it can get pretty boring too.

Drinking outside your region is also a great way to compare local wines with those from around the world. So let's take a brief peek at some regions that are offering really good wines that you should keep an eye on this year.

## Spain

Every year I think Spain is going to bust onto the scene in a big way, and every year they seem content to stay in the background.

Spain used to be all about wines from the Rioja region, but these days, this country is busting at the seams with great wines coming from a variety of excellent regions: Jumilla, Ribera del Duero and Calatayud are just three that come to mind. Sure, they may not be household names like Napa and Sonoma, but trust me when I say there are great inexpensive wines coming from this country.

Three producers to look for:

- Juan Gil (“Gos” / Silver Label / White Label);
- Bodegas Castano (“La Casona” / “Hecula”);
- Miguel Torres (“Celeste” / “Coronas” / “Infinite” / “Sangre de Toro”).

## por tugal

This country seems to be in the same boat as Spain. Every year you think this is Portugal's year to shine, and every year they continue to quietly make wine their way. Maybe it's because they refuse to give into international grape variety pressures, meaning you don't see many Cabernet Sauvignons, Merlots and Shirazes coming from there. Instead it's grapes like Tinta Roriz, Touriga Nacional and Baga that adorn labels.

They stick with their indigenous grapes and it pays off in the glass – once you taste one of these well-priced wines, you'll keep coming back again and again.

Three wines to look for:

- Veedha Douro Red (\$13.95 - #255851);
- Balcalhoa JP Red (\$8.95 - #286195);
- P+S (Prato + Symington) 2010 Post Scriptum (\$18.95 – Private Order).

## argentina

Argentina is no stranger to the spotlight, and these days Argentinean Malbec is all the rage. But I hope they don't get caught in what I like to call "the Icewine-trap." When Icewine took the world by storm, Ontario sat on its laurels and allowed the world to believe all we did was Icewine.

Instead we should have taken a cue from New Zealand, which piqued the wine-world's curiosity with Sauvignon Blanc.

But once established, they started showing us other wines they do, like Pinot Noir — proving they weren't just a one-trick pony.

Argentina would be wise to take that example, and you should too – sure they have a white grape called Torrentes they are trying to push, but I think the next true star from Argentina will be Bonarda. So jump on the bandwagon before others do.

Three Bonarda-based wines to look for:

- La Posta Cocina Blend (\$13.25 - #269860);
- La Posta 2011 Estela Armando Vineyard Bonarda (\$14.95 - #261586);
- Las Moras 2010 Black Label Bonarda (\$15.95 - #260901).

## Clo Ser to home

Now that your radar has been tuned to what to look for, get out there and try all you can, but also remember to drink a little local along the way.

Three Ontario selections:

- Tawse 2012 Spark Limestone Ridge Riesling (\$19.95 – LCBO in April);
- Vineland 2012 Cabernet Franc (\$13.95 - #594127);
- Chateau des Charmes 2011 Barrel Fermented Chardonnay (\$13.95 - #81653).

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