

# Amherst Wines & Spirits

October 2009

## SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

As we move into the Fall our Saturday tastings take a more seasonal tack featuring wines which reflect bolder food styles. We think we have an exciting lineup this month and invite you to drop by between 2:00 – 5:00 as we pop corks, slice fresh baked baguettes, and generally relax and have fun discussing the wines or anything else that seems appropriate. It's fun, casual, and you get to taste things you might not have. All compliments of the house. Please drop by.

### October 3: Red Bordeaux Under \$15

Bordeaux is not known for good, inexpensive reds, but we've been hard at work ferreting out some interesting values which may surprise you. Come try some wines from this iconic region.

### October 10: Chianti

Many new wines in the shop since we last featured Tuscany's most famous red. We're in a run of good vintages now and these wines are showing beautifully.

### October 17: Whites from South America

Both Chile and Argentina are bottling an increasing array of whites which represent dazzling value. Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, blends – some very good wines here flying beneath the radar.

### October 24: Zinfandel

The current crop of Zins from California is the best we've been able to offer in many years. If there are better comfort wines than these for the cooler weather, we haven't found them yet. And remember – Thanksgiving is coming.

### October 31: Southern Italian Whites

Used to me the only wines worth drinking from southern Italy were reds. No more. The Chardonnays are terrific, but wait till you taste Vermentino, Falanghina, and Greco! Prepare to be pleasantly surprised.

## THE "OTHER" COGNAC

Although it predates Cognac by 200 years, Armagnac is a much smaller area and has never achieved the fame and snob appeal of its more famous neighbor to the north. Armagnac is made in southwestern France, a product of several local grapes – Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche, and Bacco. It differs from Cognac in several ways. Cognac is distilled twice, Armagnac only once at relatively low temperatures which helps foster robust flavors. Cognac is aged in white oak, Armagnac in black oak which results in more pronounced tannins. Good Armagnac (read "avoid the mass market brands") is racier, rounder, fruitier, earthier, and with a more pungent aroma than Cognac. It is a wonderful after dinner "digestif", a superb alternative to Cognac. If you enjoy Cognac, you may want to check these out. All are from Bas Armagnac, the most favored area of the Armagnac region.

Labiette Castille . . \$29.99  
Tariquet . . \$32.99  
Chateau du Laubade VSOP . . \$46.99  
Cerbois XO . . \$62.99  
Chateau du Bédât 1986 . . \$65.99  
Chateau du Laubade XO . . \$67.99  
Darroze "Réserve Speciale" . . . . .

\$ 9 7 . 9 9

## OLIVE OIL

Our veggie garden is pretty much finished for the season but we still have some good tomatoes. Last week we sliced a big one and drizzled some olive oil from **Trasemino Mills** over the slices. Heaven. This very special oil is from organically farmed orchards in Italy's Umbria region, famed for its richly flavored, lightly peppery oil. We stock three sizes; 250ml - \$12.99, 500ml - \$19.99, 750ml - \$26.99. Trust us, this is the real stuff. Great gift item.

# CHIANTI

Italy's most famous wine producing region lies between Florence and Siena in Tuscany. The region has a checkered history. Many remember the squat, straw-covered bottles, called *fiasco*, which is an apt description of the quality of the wine inside. Best used as candle holders, these have given way to a more traditional bottle as the Chianti producers have upgraded the blends and are now allowed to add other grapes such as Cabernet, Merlot, and Syrah to Sangiovese. The Chianti region contains eight smaller sub-zones, Classico being the most well-known of these. The Sangiovese grape, still the major player in Chianti, is late ripening, often not harvested till October. It contributes noticeable acidity to the resulting wine. When paired with food this acidity seems to elevate the flavors of both food and wine. Good Chianti is, in our opinion, one of the very best "food wines" and, because it is not overly heavy, pairs well with a wide variety of dishes. There are some strong vintages in the pipeline just now and better overall value than we've seen in years. Check 'em out.

**Cavatina 2008 . . \$8.99**

*Your Tuesday night pizza red. Captures the Chianti style perfectly at a silly price. Trying is believing.*

**Baroncini 2007 . . \$9.99**

*A blend from the different sub-zones of Chianti. This shows a slightly riper, rounder style than most.*

**Masi 2007 . . \$10.99**

*One of our favorite Chianti producers, Renzo Masi perfectly balances ripe fruit with good acidity in his basic Chianti.*

**Masi, Rufina 2006 . . \$12.99**

*Rufina is of the eight sub-zones. Its wines show a softer, earthier sense and this is a beauty at a great price.*

**Tomaiolo Riserva, Classico 2004 . . \$12.99**

*The "Riserva" designation means the wine spent extra time in barrel. The extra age here has added complexity.*

**Frescobaldi 2006 . . \$15.99**

*One of the oldest and most trusted wine families in Tuscany, Frescobaldi has delivered a gem – elegant & pure.*

**Vignamaggio Classico 2006 . . \$17.99**

*This Classico shows pretty red cherry flavors nicely balanced with acidity. Good example of the Classico style.*

**Le Sorgenti "Respiro", Colli Fiorentini 2006 . . \$18.99**

*Another of Chianti's sub-zones, Colli Fiorentini is the hills around Florence. Elegant, complex, lightly earthy. A beauty.*

**Savignola Paolina, Classico 2006 . . \$19.99**

*Rather full-bodied Classico with firm tannins supporting beautifully ripe flavors with mineral notes. Classic Classico.*

**Felsina, Classico 2007 . . \$22.99**

*Ripe, full, bursting with flavor, zesty acidity. Just at the beginning of its best years. One of the finest we've tasted.*

**Antinori "Peppoli", Classico 2006 . . \$26.99**

*The silky texture introduces exquisitely crafted flavors of blackberry & black cherry with mineral undertones. Oh, yes!!*

**CHIANTI SPECIAL: Put together any 4 bottles from at least 2 producers and deduct 10%. If part of a case with other wines, an extra 5% discount will apply to the Chiantis.**

## WHAT ELSE YA' GOT??

When looking for U.S. whites, where Sauvignon Blanc and especially Chardonnay have been do dominant, many folks in the shop have begun asking some version of the above question. Truth be told, it's a big world grapewise and U.S. producers have not been shy about trying new things. Some have fared better than others. We've been following developments closely and have found some wonderful wines for those who would venture on the road less taken. Here's just a sampling.

**Pinot Grigio, Brownstone . . \$7.99**

*Italy's most popular white grape has been adopted by a few California vintners. The flavors mimic the Italian version, but the body is a bit rounder and the acidity a bit lower.*

**Chenin Blanc, Kiona 2007 . . \$12.99**

*From its home in France's Loire Valley this grape has transitioned nicely to Washington state where this winery has bottled a lovely white. Just a click off-dry with oh-so-pretty flavors of Anjou pear and Delicious apple. Yeasty, full, yummy.*

**Aligote, Shooting Star 2006 . . \$13.99**

*Aligote is the second white grape of France's Burgundy region, found in most cafés in the area. It is also the basis for "kir", the local wine cocktail mixed with crème de cassis. California winemaker Jed Steele has gone to Washington to source grapes for his wine. It's a beauty – full, unoaked, quite dry, with a lovely minerality to the crisp flavors. We love it.*

**Pinot Blanc, Fish Hook 2007 . . \$16.99**

*In Italy it's called Pinot Bianco, in France's Alsace region simply Pinot Blanc. The grape likes cool and this one comes from Oregon's Willamette Valley. Sleek, dry, unoaked, and elegant with notes of pear and lemon zest.*

**Semillon, l'Ecole 41 2006 . . \$16.99**

*The principal grape in France's sweet Sauternes, Semillon can also be fermented dry. Full-bodied, showing notes of fig and melon. 14% Sauvignon Blanc adds a crisp finish to this bold white. Definitely worth a shot.*

## BEST BETS UNDER \$9

We're constantly trolling for wine bargains. With the recent softness in the market we have had some success discovering good things. Truth is, it's never been hard to find inexpensive wines. The trick is to find inexpensive wines which are well made and taste like what's on the label – if it says Cabernet Sauvignon it should taste like Cabernet. Even with lower priced wines the flavors should be ripe and clean and the wine should have enough acidity to support the ripeness and keep the it fresh. We have quite a few in this price bracket. Here's a modest sampling.

### WHITE

#### **Chardonnay, Opera Prima 2008 (SP) . . . \$6.99**

*We did a double-take at our program at a recent trade tasting. Who would think a Chardonnay at this price would taste like this? Clean, unoaked, with vibrant flavors of green apple. Dry but not too. Chardheads – you've gotta check this out.*

#### **Sauvignon Blanc, Hill & Dale 2008 (S. AF) . . . \$7.99**

*South African wines often follow Europe stylistically. This Sauvignon Blanc shows the delicate, dry, crisp character of many French SB's, especially from the Loire Valley. A practically perfect pre-meal sipper or to accompany lighter fare.*

#### **Pinot Gris, Lurton 2008 (ARG) . . . \$8.99**

*If too dry is not for you, here's the thing. The flavors of white peach with a touch of mandarine are bright and vivid, with natural acidity providing freshness and a dry finish. Made by French folks in Argentina. Delicious.*

#### **Chardonnay, St. Martin 2007 (FR) . . . \$8.99**

*Southern France is home to several large wine cooperatives which buy grapes from many small growers and make a full palate of wines, some offering exceptional value. We've not tasted a Chard as good from anywhere at this price.*

#### **Grillo, Arancio 2008 (IT) . . . \$8.99**

*The Grillo grape is native to Sicily and yields a charming white which can be found in many trattorias on the island. Dry but not at all sharp, showing a bit of pear in the bouquet and a hint of anise in the flavors. Almost like being there.*

### RED

#### **Nero d'Avola, Palazzo 2007 (IT) . . . \$6.99**

*As with Grillo above, Nero d'Avola is hard to escape in Sicily. We love this simple, honest red for its earthy style. You can almost taste the Sicilian sun here. Medium-bodied, Easy drinking.*

#### **Sangiovese, Monte Degli Angeli 2007 (IT) . . . \$6.99**

*Sangiovese is the principal red grape in Tuscany, but this is from Puglia, the "heel" of the "boot." The warmer growing conditions round out the wine and add weight, and yet the alcohol remains a svelt 12.5%.*

#### **Zinfandel, Painter Bridge 2007 (CA) . . . \$7.99**

*We remember when the street was littered with good Zins under \$10. No longer. This label, produced by a winery offering pricier stuff, delivers the wild berry flavors Zinheads crave, but without the weight (or price) of the big boys.*

#### **Le Petit Mas 2007 (FR) . . . \$7.99**

*This blend of Grenache, Syrah, & Carignane from a growers' coop in southern France captures the earthy, sunny sense of the region while delivering a totally satisfying, medium bodied red. Red & black fruits, a hint of earth.*

#### **Cabernet Sauvignon, Viu Manent 2007 (CH) . . . \$8.99**

*Over the past three years this has been our largest selling Cab from anywhere. It has consistently delivered classic Cabernet flavors of black fruits marked by a touch of toasty oak, balancing ripe fruit and a backbone of ripe tannins.*

## REDS FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

The arc following the Mediterranean coast from Marseilles to the Spanish border is a bit over 300 miles overall, yet produces more wine than the entire U.S. It is the red wine pumping station of France, cranking out large quantities of good, inexpensive wines which grace the home tables and bistro carafes throughout the country. The past 15 years has seen an enormous uptick in quality. We think these represent some of the best red wine values available from anywhere. We stock too many to list all of them, but here are a few of our current faves. There's more. Come in. We'll talk.

#### **Le Coq Rouge 2007 . . . \$9.99**

*A blend of 45% Merlot, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Syrah, & 8% Grenache from a growers' coop. If there's a better red at this price, we'd like to know about it. Perfect balance of fruit, acidity, ripeness.*

#### **Merlot, Domaine Gournier 2007 . . . \$9.99**

*French Merlots show a drier, firmer style than what we're used to from CA. Here's a great example combining ripe, black plum flavors with a firm backbone of fine grained tannins.*

#### **Pinot Noir, Luc Pirlet 2007 . . . \$12.99**

*If you've given up looking for Pinot Noir that tastes like real Pinot Noir at an affordable price, here's some good news. The delicate, earthy flavors of this elusive grape are picture perfect in this modestly priced bottling.*

#### **Domaine Lafage "Cuvée Nicolas" 2007 . . . \$12.99**

*100% Grenache from vineyards close by the Spanish border. This is a young, somewhat muscular red with deep flavors of raspberry, a touch of cola, and a mouthful of fruit. Nothing shy here. Will continue to improve in bottle.*

## NEW ARRIVALS

### WHITE

**Versi Bianco Fondo Antico 2008 (IT) . . . \$8.99**

*Crisp, fragrant, dry white showing lovely fruit flavors. There's an herbal twist running through which plays off against the ripe flavors. Unoaked, delicate, a perfect aperitif wine or with seafood, salads, even chicken. Really charming.*

**Chardonnay, Hahn 2007 (CA) . . . \$10.99**

*The fog shrouded Santa Lucia Highlands region of Monterey is prime Chard growing area. The cooler climate yields grapes which, in the right hands, can become striking whites at a great price. This is one. The flavors are subtle, not overdone, with a pretty vanilla bean nuance and silky texture. Serious value vibes for you Chard freaks.*

**Frascati, Villa Porzia 2008 (IT) . . . \$10.99**

*We always knew Frascati as a crisp, super dry, close-to-tasteless white - a \$7 summer sipper, no more. Then we tasted this. A stunning bouquet of flowers and spice introduces this white which made us forget Frascati's of the past. The Malvasia grape is the major player, contributing a full bodied style with a dry honey/apricot flavor profile.*

**Viognier, Chateau de Trignon 2007 (FR) . . . \$10.99**

*Lovers of classic, understated, yet complex French wines need to try this. The Viognier grape shows its floral, fruit-inflected bouquet while the flavors have an elegance and precision which impressed us mightily. From the Rhône Valley.*

**Montlouis "Clos Habert", Chidaine 2006 (FR) . . . \$24.99**

*Montlouis is a small appellation in France's Loire Valley just across the river from Vouvray and, like its neighbor, is 100% Chenin Blanc. Just slightly off-dry and showing rich flavors of apricot and ginger. This is a gorgeous white combining both power and elegance. A long finish completes the package. Dramatic now, will continue to improve in bottle.*

### RED

**Casa Castillo 2007 (SP) . . . \$10.99**

*Deeply colored, with a dark purple robe, this sexy red offers up aromas of sweet fruit and wild herbs. The flavors are full and ripe, blackberry jam with a mineral underpinning. Worth more, we think. Spain's Monastrell grape.*

**Aglianico del Vulture "Grecos", Grifalco 2006 (IT) . . . \$10.99**

*Aglianico, an ancient grape indigenous to the volcanic regions of southern Italy, is normally much pricier. We were thrilled to stumble onto this one. Aglianico's are elegant, perfumey wines, never too heavy or overripe. This one shows lovely red fruits supported by natural acidity. There's a sense of proportion, a notion of "place" about this wine. We love it.*

**Cabernet Sauvignon, Huntington 2007 (CA) . . . \$11.99**

*An unapologetically CA Cabernet - full-bodied, brimming with ripe fruit (blackberry, dark cherry). A light touch of oak adds interest. This is not a complex wine, but is very well made and shows a deft touch. A Tuesday night burger red.*

**Valpolicella, Sartori 2006 (IT) . . . \$15.99**

*When Valpolicella is right it presents a mouthwatering combo of ripe fruit and crisp acidity. This is as right as it gets. We were thrilled at the perfect balance of ripe red cherry & pomegranate flavors, firm and full.*

**Barbera d'Alba "Due Gelsi", Guidobono 2006 (IT) . . . \$17.99**

*From Italy's northwestern Piedmont region, here's an old vines Barbera showing amazing concentration. This is a powerful, intense red with big fruit tied together with the grape's natural acidity so it stays firm and focused.*

**Pinot Noir "Hillside", J. Wilkes 2006 (CA) . . . \$38.99**

*Elegant, complex Pinot Noir from Santa Barbara's Bien Nacido vineyard, considered prime growing area for this grape. With its delicate style, flavors of strawberry & red cherry, and long finish this reminds us of good Burgundy. Classy stuff.*

**AMHERST WINES & SPIRITS 233 North Pleasant Street Amherst**

**Tel: (413) 549-0900 www.amherstwines.com Email: [steve@amherstwines.com](mailto:steve@amherstwines.com)**