



“Summer Picks”

Courtesy of Pearson’s Wines of Atlanta
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From Wine Consultant Teresa Eiland, teresae@pearsonswine.net

Anselmi 2003 "San Vincenzo", Veneto: Soave, from northeastern Italy's Veneto region, has long been saddled with a bad reputation. Like "straw basket" Chianti, mass-produced Soave gained popularity in the red-checkered tablecloth Italian restaurants of the '70s...and the watery, flavorless wine served there had as little in common with "real" Soave as the red-sauce-and-pasta dishes had in common with real Italian cuisine. Luckily, artisanal winemakers have taken root in Soave and are now exploiting the previously unrealized potential of both the unpronounceable native grapes (garganega, trebbiano) and the ubiquitous chardonnay. Roberto Anselmi - a testy, volatile character seemingly more suited to the histrionics of Italian opera than to the world of wine - makes one of my favorites, a wine that I buy by the case for sipping (even gulping) on the deck at the end of a hard day. Anselmi's Soave (labelled with the proprietary name "San Vincenzo" rather than the legally defined "Soave" due to ideological differences between Anselmi and the DOC authorities) has a cool, dewy quality to the fruit flavors: more like melon or peaches than the tart citrusy flavor you might expect from an Italian white wine. It's medium-bodied and mouthfilling, full of juicy apple fruit (probably from the splash of chardonnay in the blend) but fresh, clean, and un-oaked. Best of all, it has a wonderfully savory, pleasantly bitter quality to the finish. This Soave is equally delicious as an aperitif or an accompaniment to cheeses (especially goat cheese), shellfish dishes, and fresh salads. **\$10.98**

Domaine du Closel 2002 "Les Caillardieres," Savennières: If I were trapped on a desert island with only one book, one CD, and one case of white wine, I would want a copy of Gabriel Garcia-Marquez' "One Hundred Years of Solitude" (and not only for its perfectly ironic title), Pink Floyd's "Momentary Lapse of Reason," and...Savennières (roughly pronounced - and I emphasize "roughly" - sahv-ven-YAIRH). This unique wine from the Loire Valley is the essence of everything that I want in a white wine but almost never find: intense, powerful flavors balanced with refreshing acidity, minimal oak treatment, and an even more minimal price tag. I could very happily drink Savennières, and Savennières alone, for the rest of my life. France's beautiful Loire Valley is probably the world's best source for white wine that's both cheap and really interesting. It's a large region, one that follows the path of the meandering, chateaux-studded Loire River on its 600 mile journey across France, all the way from the Rhone Valley in the southeast to Brittany on the northern Atlantic coast. "Savennières, the wine" is produced from vineyards that surround "Savennières, the village" on the north bank of the river in the central part of the Loire Valley. Made from the chenin blanc grape, a very under-rated variety, Savennières in its youth is very dry and pleasantly tart, almost Sancerre-like (itself another great Loire white wine).

A typical young Savennières has muted, subtle aromas and flavors of apple and melon, minerals, herbs, and white flowers. It's generally not complex but it is delicious, clean, and crisp...and a lovely companion to fresh seafood and fish. But stash a bottle of Savennières in a cool, dark place for about 5 to 10 years and its true beauty emerges. It is one of the very few white wines that will actually improve with aging. The pale straw color deepens to a rich golden hue, the subtle aromas intensify, the muted flavors become more vibrant and complex. What smelled of apples and pungent fresh green herbs at age 2 will smell like caramel-dipped apples, honey, and dried herbs at age 10 -- its aromas conveying an impression of sweetness but without any sugar whatsoever. The flavors will deepen and the texture will flesh out -- simultaneously thick, lush, and remarkably rich but still quite dry and refreshingly crisp. Domaine du Closel has long been one of my favorite Savennières producers. No less an personage than Robert Parker has called Domaine du Closel "the Montrachet of Savennières." Closel produces four or five different Savennières in any given vintage but the Les Caillardieres is the best introduction for novices. The sand-over-schist soil and old vines (average age is 50 years though some of the vines are reputed to be a century old) produce an off-dry style of Savennières -- not sweet to the palates of most tasters but with just enough residual sugar to plump up the texture and counteract the bracing acidity. It's excellent as an aperitif but rich enough to accompany pork and veal dishes. **\$18.99**

Movia 1999 "Veliko bianco," Brda: Only border guards and their dogs prevent one from inadvertently stumbling from Friuli (free-oo-lee) in northeastern Italy into Slovenia, the lone peaceful remnant of the former Yugoslavia. Unlike the rest of the red wine paradise that is Italy, the glory of Friuli (and Slovenia, too) lies in its crisp, fresh white wines. The ubiquitous chardonnay is grown here and sauvignon blanc, too, but the best wines emphasize local grapes with exotic names: tocai friuliano...ribolla gialla...picolit...as well as the better known pinot grigio and pinot bianco. Vines have been cultivated in Friuli for more that 3000 years, and viticulture is strongly respected. The quality of the wines is remarkably consistent at all price points. The wines emphasize individuality and personality, eschewing the malolactic fermentation (the process that gives many California chardonnays their "buttery" flavor) and excessive oak that have homogenized and neutered the character of so many of the world's other white wines. While Friuli's single-varietal wines show admirable character, it is the innovative, even quirky blends of different native grape varieties that produce its most complex and delicious wines, wines that compete favorably with the great white wines of France and Germany. Collio is usually regarded as the most elite wine-producing zone in all Friuli and actually straddles the line between Italy and Slovenia. The Slovenes refer to the portion of Collio that lies within their borders as "Brda" (don't ask me how to pronounce that poly-consonant nightmare but both "brda" and "colli" mean the same thing: "hills"). Most blended white wines from the region are called simply "Collio Bianco," though some have rather silly proprietary names. The combinations of grapes in the blends may be quite imaginative, as in today's example. The Kristancic family have owned the Movia estate in Slovenia, which dates from 1700, since 1820. They have 15 hectares in Brda, seven in Italy and can blend these as they like, and sell the wine as produce of either country. Each vintage of Veliko bianco is a blend of varying proportions of ribolla, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, and pinot grigio. It's a deep rich golden colour with flavors of baked apples and figs and a fleshy, lush texture. This contrasts perfectly with the cinnamon toast, vanilla and custard characters imparted by three years in French oak barrels. The pinot grigio and ribolla give a delicious light lift to the chardonnay and produce a beautifully balanced wine: rich and flavorful without any heaviness or sweetness. The '99 received 92 points from Wine Spectator: "Aromas of freshly squeezed oranges and lemons, with hints of cream and piecrust. Full-bodied, with rich apple and

sweet cream flavors. Long and caressing, this shows amazing complexity and freshness for a white with such age. A joy to drink. 1080 cases made." **\$27.99**

Firriato 2002 "Chiaramonte" nero d'avola: here's what Gambero Rosso, the influential guide to Italian wine, had to say about this Sicilian estate: "everything is simply excellent." Firriato has a passion for the indigenous Sicilian grape varieties, and nero d'avola is one of Sicily's best red varieties. The nose is filled with spicy red-fruit notes, the hallmark of perfectly ripened nero d'avola grapes. The palate offers exotic spice notes as well as complex, deep red fruit flavors, all nicely balanced by ripe, fine tannins and good acidity. An excellent wine to pair with grilled foods. **\$12.99**

Chateau d'Or et de Gueules 2001 Costières de Nîmes: the name is hard to say but the wine is very easy to like (for what it's worth, the name of the estate is roughly pronounced - and I once again emphasize "roughly" as my French is abysmal- "door ay doo ghoul"). Produced from very old vineyards of grenache, syrah, carignane, and mourvedre in a region due west of France's Rhone Valley. The grapes are hand-harvested at what the French call "sur maturité," a state of such exceptional ripeness that the grapes have started to shrivel on the vine. Stainless steel fermentation preserves the natural intensity of the fruit. The wine is incredibly saturated in color, rich yet silky smooth, with smoky layers of complex black cherry and spice flavors. The flavors are impressively concentrated for a wine of this price. A natural accompaniment to steaks, burgers, pizza, and Tex-Mex. **\$13.99**

Las Rocas de San Alejandro 2003 Garnacha, Calatayud: Las Rocas burst on the wine scene just last year with two wines that sold for dirt cheap and garnered astoundingly high scores from certain critics. The 2002 regular cuvee, made from 75 year old Grenache vines (or "Garnacha" vines, as those crazy Spaniards like to call them), sold for \$7 and was awarded a jaw-dropping 91 points by Robert Parker, the self-proclaimed "world's most powerful wine critic." The 2001 old vine cuvee, made from infinitesimally more antiquarian 100 year old vines, sold for \$12 and scored 93 points, a rarified atmosphere usually occupied by First-Growth Bordeaux and status-label Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon. Needless to say, the unholy duo of a high numerical rating and a low price tag fueled a lemming-like consumer buying frenzy the likes of which I've never seen. I fielded calls from customers demanding...DEMANDING!...to buy 25 cases. People were calling from out-of-state, even out-of-the-country, trying to buy Las Rocas. Little old ladies threatened to beat me with their canes if I didn't save them a case. I was grateful when we sold out in two days. So now the new vintage has arrived and the buzz surrounding it has already reached similarly annoying and potentially life-threatening proportions. I haven't seen any press on the 2003 but the 2002 Las Rocas that whipped the little old ladies into such a frenzy got this review: "The 2002 Garnacha is fashioned from 75-year old Grenache vines planted on pure slate. Sixty percent was aged in tank, and 40% in neutral wood foudres. There are 20,000 cases of this offering, which may be the greatest wine value I have ever tasted. Deep ruby/purple-colored, with a gorgeous nose of kirsch liqueur intermixed with melted licorice and white flowers, this deep, medium to full-bodied, fruit-driven, sumptuously-textured 2002 is loaded. It should drink well for 3-4 years, possibly longer. One cannot bestow enough kudos on importer Eric Solomon for unearthing these treasures." **\$8.98**

From Wine Consultant Erin Brown, erinb@pearsonswine.net

Vincent Girardin Bourgogne Blanc 2003 'Cuvee St-Vincent' - A long-established Burgundy producer with a good reputation. Because of the high temperatures reached and low overall rainfall in 2003, this wine, which is 100% Chardonnay, is plumper and juicier than typical white Burgundies. Ripe apple and pear flavors with just a hint of melon are balanced nicely with only moderate oak. **\$16.99**

Domaine de la Petite Cassagne Rose 2003 - A rose from Costieres de Nimes, a region actually located in the Eastern Languedoc but often considered a western extension of the southern Rhone. This is another wine from the hot summer of 2003, giving it a structure and body not normally achieved. Its color is a lovely, deep pink with a tinge of copper. Dry but very ripe, with dried cherries dominating the palate and spice showing through in the finish. **\$10.99**

Pascal Jolivet Sancerre Blanc 2003 - This wine is from the far east of the Loire Valley where, similar to other areas of France, the region was greatly affected by the atypical weather of 2003. This is displayed by an increase in fruit and richness and a decrease in the steely and flinty notes that usually dominate in this type of wine. This is not to say, however, that it has lost any amount of character or raciness that one looks for in a Sancerre. **\$17.98**

Domaine du Closel Anjou Rouge 2002 - This charming little red is from one of my favorite producers in the Loire Valley. 2002 was considered a classic year in the area, and this wine demonstrates the quintessential attributes of the Loire with such distinction. It is actually made with 100% Cabernet Franc, and its fresh fruit flavors and herbal complexity show it well. It begins light, fruity, and silky, and seems quaffable in its simplicity, but don't be fooled-- this wine will continue to surprise you the longer you drink it. **\$10.99**

Geyser Peak Sauvignon Blanc 2004 - I like this Sauvignon Blanc in particular because it manages a roundness of flavor while retaining the crispness and liveliness that the grape is known for. It is refreshing, not overly oaked or rich as many Californian Sauvignon Blancs can be. Flavors of lemon, grass, and melon are wrapped in a pleasant, fleshy texture. **\$7.98**

Hahn Chardonnay 2003 - Of the almost innumerable California chardonnays, I find Hahn to be one that can appeal to a wide range of tastes. It has the characteristic toasty oak that we've come to expect, but is also has a juiciness that can be so satisfyingly thirst-quenching during the heat of summer. Tropical citrus flavors of tangerine and pineapple are prevalent. It should also be noted that Pearson's has one of the lowest prices in the country. **\$9.99**

*prices quoted are cash or check. Prices ending in '9' are eligible for an 8% case discount.