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Wine Adviser

Bonjour Bordeaux, ciao Classico, hello cabernet

By Paul Gregutt

Special to the Seattle Times



Among the many pleasures of spring are the new releases that flood the market. I could devote an entire column

to any one of the wineries mentioned here, but that would require another 52 weeks in the calendar year. Here are recent highlights from in and out of state.

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From Chadderdon Selections (distributed by Elliott Bay)

This outstanding importer has a wonderful collection of French white wines from Alsace, Burgundy, Bordeaux and the Loire valley. Along with the **Domaine de la Tourmaline 2005 Muscadet "Saint-Fiacre" (\$14)**, a Pick of the Week last month, here are some others to look for:

Jean-Pierre Dirlor 2004 Estate Riesling (\$21). This biodynamic producer owns a superb portfolio of Grand Cru vineyards, but their estate riesling, at half the price, is almost as good. A ripe, full, fleshy mix of fruit, spice and stone, it is finished at a modest 12.5 percent alcohol.

Chateau du Seuil 2004 Graves Blanc (\$22). This racy white Bordeaux includes a generous proportion of 50-year-old sauvignon blanc, along with a "dollop" of even older semillon. Organically farmed, it's fragrant, bracing and textural — definitely for those who, as I do, like the snap of good clean acid.

Domaine Jean Collet 2005 Chablis "Vielles Vignes" (\$26). Anyone who loves Chablis has watched with dismay as prices have tripled over the past decade, with no end in sight. A cult producer in his hometown, Collet ferments this old vine cuvée in stainless steel and bottles it right from the spigot, unfiltered. You get true premier cru Chablis flavors (lemon-lime, wet stone, chalk) with elegance and penetration.

Inama (distributed by Noble)

Pick of the Week

Oroya 2005 White Wine; \$7. This classy-looking import from Freixenet was specially created to go with sushi. Spanish wine with raw fish? Why not? Spain is a fish-loving, fish-devouring country, and Oroya works like a charm. It's a clever blend of three Spanish grapes. Airén, a workhorse white, provides a neutral base and a light floral touch to the nose. Macabeo adds weight to the midpalate, and Muscat enhances the impression of fruity sweetness. Oroya is off-dry, just 11.5 percent alcohol, crisp and unoaked. It should be drunk quite cold. The attractive bottle has a vertical white label with Kanji lettering spelling "sushi" in reflective silver. (Alaska Distributors)

If your taste runs to stylish, cool-climate Italian wines, you will want to sample these outstanding offerings from Inama. The winery, in the heart of the Soave Classico region, was founded a half-century ago by Giuseppe Inama. It is now part of a small portfolio of complementary brands being marketed in the U.S. by Dalla Terra. When you see the word "Classico" on an Italian wine label, it indicates that the vines are grown in the very center, the best part, of the region. And so it is with the Soaves of Inama:

Inama 2005 Vin Soave Classico (\$13). This entry-level bottling carries amazing weight, extract and texture for such a light (12.5 percent alcohol) wine. Hints of honey, brioche and fig lend authority; it comes on like a fine

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semillon, penetrating and long.

Inama 2005 Vigneti di Foscario Soave Classico (\$20). For another few bucks you get a darker, more concentrated wine, almost oily in its thickness. The fruit is peachy and ripe, and the alcohol is boosted a full percentage point. Is it better, or just bigger? You decide.

Washington state wineries

Canoe Ridge

(distributed by Alaska)

Canoe Ridge 2006 Snipes Vineyard Gewürztraminer (\$16). In the midst of crush in 2005, Canoe Ridge brought in a new winemaker, French-born and trained Christophe Paubert. I have been eager to taste his 2006 releases, the product of his first full year in Washington. They are exciting wines that portend a return to form for this Walla Walla winery. The gewürz includes 10 percent riesling in the blend. It is scented with rose petals and toasted nuts, and finished quite dry, fresh and youthful. You could cellar it, but I would not want to miss it in its youthful prime.

Canoe Ridge 2004 'Block 1' Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (\$45). Just 100 cases of this estate-grown cab were produced, and it claims to be the first reserve cabernet ever made at Canoe Ridge, though I seem to recall some earlier reserves made by John Abbott. In any event, it's a fine bottle of wine, with a good mix of black cherry, fig and plum fruit that rounds into a ripe finish marked with chocolate and clove.

Chatter Creek

(distributed by Elliott Bay)

Chatter Creek 2006 Viognier (\$18). Bracingly fresh scents of peach, apricot and ripe melon lead off this young, tart, immaculately clean white wine. It opens with crisp, slightly bitter notes of lime and citrus, then fans out, adding a creamy texture to the midpalate.

Chatter Creek 2004 Clifton Hill Vineyard Syrah (\$30). Clifton Hill vineyard, in the Wahluke Slope AVA, has established itself as a premier source for syrah. One look at the glass shows you why: It's as black as the night sky, with only the rim showing purple/garnet. Concentrated yes but neither fat nor jammy; it has already smoothed out nicely and washes into a soft finish with all of its fruits wrapped in a lick of butterscotch.

Forgeron

(distributed by Elliott Bay)

Forgeron Cellars 2005 Chardonnay (\$25). This is quite consistent with the winery's 2004 in terms of style, immediately showing lots of vanilla-laced bourbon barrel aromas, with spice and buttered nuts set in a tight, stylish frame. Fresh, ripe citrus and green apple flavors are crisp and penetrating. It is a well-made Washington take on a good village Burgundy.

Forgeron 2003 Syrah (\$30). Pure syrah, fragrant and loaded with spice, this has a lovely mix of citrus, pepper, smoke, spice, acid, toast and tannin, melding together elements from all of them. The fruit is sweet and brambly; while the herbal components add notes of leaf and tobacco.

In Memoriam

Just as this column was being written, I received the sad news that Lance Baer, the owner/winemaker at Woodinville's Baer Winery, had passed away at the too young age of 38, after a sudden illness. Lance made his first commercial vintage in 2000 and specialized in a pair of substantial Bordeaux-blend red wines playfully named Ursa and Arctos. His winemaking talents were immediately apparent, and his star was definitely on the rise. His death is a terrible loss, both to his friends and family, and to the Washington wine industry.

Finding the wines

Unless noted, all Wine Adviser recommendations are currently available, though vintages may sometimes differ. All wine shops and most groceries have a wine specialist on staff. Show them this column, and if they do not have the wine in stock, they can order it for you from the local distributor.

Paul Gregutt is the author of "Northwest Wines." His column appears weekly

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in the Wine section. He can be reached by e-mail at wine@seattletimes.com.

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