



Wine Report

by Mark Shipway

Undiscovered Winegrowing Regions

In the winter issue of *The Publican*, I reviewed the advantages of seeking out less famous grape varieties that make interesting and food-friendly wines at a good value. In this edition, I want to extend that idea to encompass some of the more unusual and less famous winegrowing regions of the world. Historically, these regions developed production around the supply of low cost, basic quality table wines to an unfussy, thirsty, domestic population. In recent times, as this consumption dynamic has changed, producers from these regions have been forced to undergo drastic changes in the way they both make and market their wines. The best place to find these rediscovered regions is in the powerhouse nations of the old world, where newfound winemaking expertise has met the need to seek out new consumers.

France might seem like a somewhat surprising choice to find great value wines, especially in the under \$25 range. In this category, France has typically relied heavily on varietally labelled "vin de pays" wines from the Languedoc. Unfortunately, most of these wines are made from headline-grabbing Bordeaux and Burgundy varieties, cropped high and planted on unsuitable terroir. Yes, the wines are cheap and yes, they taste cheap too. The regions to consider for real bargains include the revitalized Loire Valley, particularly the appellations of Saumur, Touraine, and Vouvray where crisp, precise, unoaked whites from Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc grapes can be found in abundance. Similarly styled whites made from various combinations of Sauvignon Blanc, Ugni Blanc and Colombard can be found in southwest France, labelled as "Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne". For mid-priced value reds, the southern Rhône Valley has little equal in France - look out for spicy, herby reds from the Ventoux, Luberon and Costières de Nîmes appellations.

Italy is a country with more appellations than any other, and complete understanding of its regions is a lifetime's work. In general though, it would be fair to say that there are few genuine surprises when it comes to Italian whites. Reds are another matter entirely, and regions to watch include Molise, where stylish wines are crafted from Sangiovese, Aglianico, and Montepulciano grapes, mostly in the Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT) category. Puglia, the heel of

Italy's boot, is also a great source of low cost IGT wines from the local rustic Primitivo and Negroamaro grapes. The best examples here though are the tarry, high-toned, voluptuous reds of Salice Salentino and Copertino Rosso. The wines of Sicily are ever improving and its leading light, Nero d'Avola is proving to be perhaps the finest grape of the south; more often than not, it over delivers on price. Finally, on the toe of the boot lies the truly emergent region of Calabria whose wines have really struggled to gain a foothold when they been available here. Keep a lookout for the characterful, Calabrian reds of Cirò and Savuto.

Spain is changing so fast as far as new appellations and revised wine laws are concerned, that it's hard for even seasoned wine professionals to keep up! Hot new regions in the northwest of Spain include Bierzo for velvety reds from the Mencia grape, and Ribeiro for crisp, aromatic whites from the indigenous Treixadura grape. Toro, in the Duero River Valley, is an appellation to watch out for, producing full-bodied reds from Tempranillo grapes. In the northeast of Spain, elegant whites from Chardonnay, Viura, and Parellada can be found in both Somontano and Costers del Segre. Montsant in Catalunya is the region that surrounds one of Spain's finest, Priorat, and makes similar styled wines at up to a quarter of the price. It continues to impress me with its warm, spicy reds.

Portugal has been a long-time favourite country of mine to buy wines from, particularly reds. Now, unfortunately, the powerful, structured wines of the Douro in the north and the rich, soft reds from the Alentejo in the south have become both admired and somewhat pricey. The regions where real bargains can now be found are the Dão (which neighbours the Douro), producing classy, finessed reds. In the south, look to Palmela and Estremadura (now labelled Lisboa) for softer, richer, fruitier styles.

For many years, **Greece** has been synonymous with Retsina and other low quality table wines poured from large bottles in basic Greek tavernas across the country. More recently, Greece has been working hard to shrug off that image and is currently producing some of the most exciting and interesting quality wines in Europe. There are a number of under \$20 examples available in BC that do the country great justice. Look out for the regions of Santorini and Crete for whites, and Nemea, Naoussa, and Rapsani for reds.



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