

GORD ON GRAPES

Why two bottles of the same wine taste totally different

GORD STIMMELL
 WINE CRITIC

As my faithful readers know, I am privileged to taste new wines destined for Vintages before the actual release date. This allows wine critics such as myself to gather notes, sort them out, and have our columns in print before the wines flood onto shelves. It also allows me to steer you clear of the mundane and mediocre and direct you to the great stuff sleeping among the dozens of new wines.

But sometimes, odd things happen. I'm sure many of you have at some point experi-

enced a favourite wine that suddenly was not as great, or was much better, than what you had been buying from the same year. This is often due to batch variation. Wineries assemble final wines from different tanks and casks, and sometimes absolute consistency of aromas and flavours falls by the wayside between the various bottlings.

Perhaps that's what happened to the **Lammershoek 2007 Pinotage** (LCBO #954594, \$18.95). Tasted in the LCBO laboratory, it merely rated an 88/100, which is good for any pinotage, in my book. But it showed hints of tar and asphalt and rusti-

ness among the sturdy fruit. Then I got a hold of another bottle and what a difference. All of a sudden, it rose to first class, with rich smoky coffee bean, blackberry and summer plums wrapped in a totally silky texture.

This rates 90. I frankly do not know which batch will be hitting shelves. If it is the silky seductive one, it is definitely worth a serious detour as this summer's quintessential barbecue red. If it is the rougher-edged, more rustic pinotage, then it's slightly overpriced.

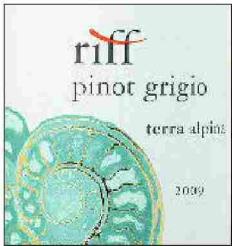
I'm penning this two weeks before this column appears, so I will have to find out

myself when it hits shelves.

Winemakers globally are always challenged to create consistent wines for any one label. Larger producers have the advantage of blending grapes from several regions, or varying the varieties in a blend to make it fit the house style from year to year.

Meanwhile we have five very consistent candidates for wines of the week from the 114 entries just released at Vintages. They speak for themselves in the reviews below. Happy wine hunting!

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RIFF TERRA ALPINA 2009 PINOT GRIGIO \$13.95 (ITALY)

This is from stellar wine producer Alois Lageder and is gob-smacking good. Pure anjou pear, lime and apple spice in the nose and very pleasant marshmallow, pear and quince flavours. Excellent value.

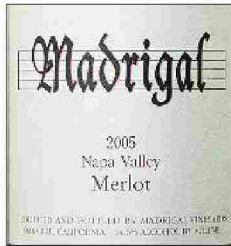
LCBO: #66415
Food suggestion: Cornish game hens
Rating: 89 (out of 100)



BECKER-STEINHAUER 2008er RIESLING KABINETT \$15.95 (GERMANY)

My top choice among the eight spotlighted German rieslings in this release. Classic golden apple and honeydew aromas, with sweet apple and jasmine flavours. It's a bit soft, but totally mellow and delicious.

LCBO: #161786
Food suggestion: Weiner schnitzel
Rating: 89+



MADRIGAL 2005 NAPA VALLEY MERLOT \$18.95 (CALIFORNIA)

A serious merlot from the Napa Valley, but not a powerhouse. Aromas show minty black cherry, cedar and a hint of black currants. The flavours are very mellow, with chocolate, black cherry, vanilla and cassis layers.

LCBO: #184838
Food suggestion: Thick rib-eye steaks
Rating: 90



BABICH 2008 PINOT NOIR \$19.95 (NEW ZEALAND)

A delightful, character-driven pinot from Marlborough on the South Island. Full earthy black cherry, vanilla and cedar aromas herald rich flavours of black cherry, strawberry and beetroot with a hint of chocolate on the finish.

LCBO: #216
Food suggestion: Duck confit
Rating: 90+



CHÂTEAU ROQUETAILLADE LA GRANGE 2008 VIEILLES VIGNES \$21.95 (FRANCE)

My top Bordeaux this time is the lush Château Garderose 2006 (#176941, \$24.95, 91) but Grange wins on price. Smoked bacon, cherry and cedar aromas, with flavours of black cherry pulp, roasted nuts and mocha.

Excellent.
 LCBO: #125666
Food suggestion: Coffee-braised rack of ribs
Rating: 90+

