



International Wine Cellar

the consumer's passport to fine wine

Market Monitor

Recent and impending developments affecting the retail wine market:

The international market for wine has become increasingly polarized between the overpriced and the underappreciated. With consumers paying ungodly premiums for the Big Names in 2000 Bordeaux—to cite just one example—they're spending too much to have made good investments and setting up high expectations for these wines that may never be met. Sadly, Bordeaux's breathtakingly priced first growths are destined to be international commodities rather than actual drinks. The good news is that beyond the level of the first growths, super-second, right-bank garage wines and other established collectibles, Bordeaux today is actually quite reasonably priced. Today's claret lover with a cool cellar and some patience can lock in superb wines in the \$20 to \$50 range and drink deep over the next two or three decades.

The same can be said about the categories of wine covered in depth in this issue: while superstars and other rarities are generally overpriced, many bottles of similar quality are still quite affordable. In Alsace, scarce late-harvest bottlings can easily run \$100 or more, while the best communal wines and *lieu-dit* bottlings from top producers can offer stunning value. In Southern Italy, a handful of wines have broached the \$40 price barrier in the U.S. market, while excellent wines are still

available for \$15 or less. And in Australia, wines from established larger producers with long track records for quality are often superb value, while new cult bottlings, often with limited aging potential, have soared to absurd and perhaps unsustainably high price levels. Wine lovers who do their homework should have a field day.

In This Issue:

2000 and 1999 Alsace Wines	1
1999 and 1998 Sauternes	29
Daniel Thomases on Southern Italy	31
Best New Releases from Australia	42

Alsace 2000 and 1999

Alsace is one of the world's most picturesque growing regions, but with the sheer number of different cuvées most producers offer each year (often two dozen or more), and two new vintages to taste, I was lucky to see daylight on my most recent tour of the area's best addresses in early May. I traveled to Alsace to get an early look at the very rich 2000 vintage, as well as to sample the '99s from bottle. While crop levels continue to be too high in the region as a whole, Alsace's most quality-conscious estates have generally done well with their superripe fruit in recent years.

sweet tar, licorice and mocha. Dense and weighty on the palate, with ripe berry, tar and mineral flavors. Boasts a suppleness of tannins and an immediate appeal that few aglianicos from higher elevation give. **89. (Marc de Grazia; numerous importers)**

De Conciliis. De Conciliis is one of the pioneers in the new viticultural area near the temples of Paestum, where fiano, piedirosso, and aglianico are all giving very satisfying wines. **2000 Donnaluna IGT (\$15; fiano):** Golden yellow. Sweet aromas of fig, melon and honey. Full and ripe but also vigorous, with tropical fruit and dried apricot flavors. Much fresher than past releases of this wine, despite undergoing partial malolactic fermentation. **88. 1999 Perella IGT (\$21.50; fiano):** Full gold. Expressive, fragrant aromas of white peach, raisin and honey, plus a light greenness that contributes freshness. Fairly large-scaled and alcoholic, with nuanced flavors of green fig, herbs and minerals. Doesn't have the sweetness or volume of the 2000 Donnaluna, and is theoretically the less important fiano of the two, but finishes with very good persistence. **87. 2000 Donnaluna Aglianico IGT (\$20):** Full ruby. Berries, cured meat, smoke and tar on the nose. Plummy and mineral on the palate; warm, ripe and alcoholic but with plenty of thrust. Still some tannins to be absorbed. **88. 1999 Naima IGT (\$45; aglianico):** Deep, bright ruby. Penetrating aromas of raspberry, clove and vanilla; plenty of oak showing. Full and long but somewhat astringent, with apparent oak tannins somewhat drying the intense, concentrated plum and berry flavors on the close. Obviously still very young for an aglianico, but I have some doubts about the quality of the tannins. As with the fiano, 2000 seems to have brought better ripening for the aglianico of this producer than 1999. **87. (Vignaioli Selection, New York, NY)**

Colli di Lapio/Clea Romano. Lapio is considered the grand cru township for fiano in the province of Avellino, and both the 1999 and 2000 versions from this small grower are exemplary. **2000 Fiano di Avellino DOC (\$22):** Light greenish-gold. Excellent aromatic intensity and penetration, with notes of peach, herbs and minerals. White melon flavor complicated by flinty, stony and herbaceous notes. Nicely focused and very fresh. A very persistent fiano with years of life ahead of it. **90. (Marc de Grazia; numerous importers)**

Benito Ferrara. At the moment, this small house is Campania's number one producer of greco di Tufo. The contribution of an exceptionally talented young Tuscan consultant, Paolo Cacciorgna, has been decisive in lifting quality levels. **2000 Greco di Tufo DOC (\$17):** Light gold. Fragrant, floral aromas of pear and honey. Ripe flavors of apricot and peach with fresh balancing acidity. Finishes with very good length. **88. 2000 Greco di Tufo Vigna Cicogna DOC (\$20):** Deep, full gold. Sweet pineapple, mango and molasses aromas convey no sense of heaviness. Rich and ample on the palate, with dense, enveloping texture and tropical fruit flavors. Full in alcohol without the slightest sense of heat. An unusually large-scaled, weighty greco di Tufo, easily the best I've ever tasted. To make a wine with 14% alcohol from vines planted more than 2,000 feet above sea level is no easy feat. **90. (Marc de Grazia; numerous importers)**

Feudi di San Gregorio. This house is a rising power in the region, with annual production of over 150,000 cases from owned and purchased grapes. The style of the wines has changed considerably since Riccardo Cotarella took over the winemaking from Luigi Mojo in 1999, though the 1997 red wines obviously reflect the approach of the latter. **2000 Falanghina del Sannio DOC (\$16):** Straw yellow with light gold highlights. Fresh, vibrant aromas of lemon and pineapple. Ripe, vigorous flavors of pear and tropical fruits, plus light herbaceous and minty notes. Energetic and fresh. The best of the regular bottlings of the house's varietal wines; its fiano di Avellino and greco di Tufo are less interesting. **87. 2000 Cutizzi Greco di Tufo DOC (\$20):** Brilliant gold. Pineapple, mango and caramel on the nose. Full-blown on the palate, with tropical fruit and vanilla flavors. Some finishing sweetness adds volume and length. **88. 2000 Pietracalda Fiano di Avellino DOC (\$36):** Deep, rich gold. Rich, tropical aromas of mango and papaya, with light, sweet sage and rosemary notes.

Denser and richer than the Cutizzi, with sweet pineapple and papaya flavors, mineral notes and palate-cleansing acidity that freshens and energizes the wine. **89. 2000 Campanaro IGT (fiano and greco):** Full greenish-gold. Peach, apricot, vanilla and nutmeg on the nose. Very good volume in the mouth, with peach and pastry-shop flavors of vanilla and cream. Slightly flinty on the finish. **89. 2000 Idem IGT (\$36; a blend of fiano, greco, falanghina and moscato):** Deep, rich gold. Peach, apricot, and pineapple on the sweet, spicy, slightly musky nose; aromatically the most complex of this producer's four late-harvest wines from this vintage. Very ripe, viscous, and dense on the palate, with flavors of caramelized peaches and apricots. Strong hints of thoroughly ripe muscat grapes. At once ample and focused from the first sip through to the finish. All four of these late-harvest wines resemble *vendange tardive* bottlings from Alsace, but the varieties used here are less aromatic than riesling and gewürztraminer, and the *surmaturité* tends to lessen the differences between them. And unlike their Alsatian counterparts, which go beautifully with the local cuisine, these wines are not at all easy to match with food and seem a bit hard to classify in the regional panorama. I wonder if Feudi di San Gregorio might be better off if it reduced the number of late-harvest wines produced and used a portion of the juice to raise the quality of its regular greco and fiano bottlings. **90. 1999 Patrimo IGT (\$146; merlot):** Fresh ruby. Aromatic, penetrating aromas of berries and light oak. Ripe flavors of blackberry, plum and licorice. An energetic midweight, warm and vigorous on the finish. Doesn't quite offer the velvety, enveloping texture of outstanding merlot, but these are young vines and the vineyards are at 1,500 feet above sea level. The 2000 vintage, tasted from the barrel, is already superior. **90. 1999 Serpico IGT (\$55; aglianico):** Brooding blackish purple. Very powerful aromas of roasted, jammy berry fruits, underbrush and licorice. Impressively concentrated, rich and dense; seems more solid than liquid. Warm flavors of plum and blackberry jam, tar and truffle go on and on on the finish. Here as well, the 2000 vintage appears to be even better, unlikely as that may seem. **94. 1997 Selve di Luoti Taurasi DOCG:** Dark ruby. Slightly tired aromas of plum, minerals, licorice and chocolate; could use a bit more sweetness. Then fairly powerful and persistent on the palate, with red fruit and mineral notes and a slight toughness of texture. Could use some more mid-palate flesh and volume, though. **88. (Winebow, Inc., Hohokus, NJ)**

Galardi. This small grower in the province of Caserta has electrified Italian and foreign markets with its blend of aglianico and piedirosso. Excellent in 1994, 1995, and 1996, it has been sensational over the last three vintages and is simply one of Italy's great wines. Enologist Riccardo Cotarella loves this wine, and it's easy to see why. **1999 Terra di Lavoro IGT (\$38; aglianico and piedirosso):** Solid, blackish ruby-purple to the rim. Ample aromas of blackberry, black plums, truffle, *cepe*, volcanic rock and damp earth. Superbly rich and concentrated, without the slightest hardness. At once firm and silky in texture, with highly complex, mouthcoating flavors of sweet berries, stones, underbrush and truffles. Sheer velvet from start to finish. A wine that gives the taster all the sensations of the territory where it is born: the woods, the rocky slopes, the wild berries, the mushrooms, the leaves and the herbs. **97. (Winebow, Inc., Hohokus, NJ)**

Luigi Maffini. Along with Bruno De Conciliis, the leader in the Paestum area of the province of Salerno, Luigi Maffini was the first producer in Campania to obtain consistently excellent results from the piedirosso grape. **2000 Kratos IGT (\$20; fiano):** Bright gold. Aromas of ripe melon, peach and caramel. Then more tropical in flavor, with notes of mango, papaya and lime, complicated by the classic mineral-iron notes of fiano. A fresh wine with plenty of substance, volume and length. **87. 2000 Kleos IGT (\$20; a blend of piedirosso, sangiovese and aglianico):** Ruby-garnet. Plum, leather, and game on the nose, along with a touch of underbrush. Intense, ripe, persistent flavors of plum, rawhide and lava rock. Finishes with some rather dusty tannins, but the wine's depth and weight suggest that it only needs a bit of bottle aging to come into better harmony. **88. 1999 Cenito IGT (\$20; aglianico and piedirosso):** Deep ruby. Fragrant, spicy aromas of raspberry and vanilla, with a touch of