

e-mail excerpt from: **The Wine Shelf Select — Rod's Top Summer Wine Picks** *(Subscribers Only)*

Summer Wines

In this Issue:

- *Summer Wines — A Perspective*
- *A Superb Under \$11 Australian Chardonnay from Cameron Hughes*
- *A Rose' Primer & My Top Rose' Picks from the USA, Spain, France, and Chile*

Summer Wines — A Perspective

Wine is a beverage for year-round enjoyment, but of course, when summer arrives we turn to wines that are lighter. I can only speak for myself, but hot weather and "big" (high alcohol) wines just don't mix. I also find big, robust, red wines too strong in the heat and only drink red wines in the summer when the weather cools off to the low 70 degree range (and then only sparingly). ***My general summer wine strategy can best be summarized in two words: "Lighten Up."***

Everyday Summer Wines — Make it White, Make it Pink, Make it Affordable & Make it Easy to Find at Local Stores

To my palate ideal summer wines include lighter whites (ideally \$6-\$17 a bottle with 13.5% alcohol and under) plus Rose' style wines in the \$10-\$17 range, also with fairly moderate alcohol levels. The wines can come from just about anywhere as long as they are refreshing and express the essence of their grape varietal(s), plus speak to their place of origin.

There's an ocean of good and occasionally excellent wines fitting this description so the trick to gaining satisfaction as a consumer is to try a number of styles, grapes, and geographies. Doing so will aid immensely in allowing you to further hone in on the types of wines you enjoy. My opinions are shared not in the spirit of dogma — rather they speak to the preferences I've developed over the years in relentless pursuit of wines that complement food and suit my palate.

The wines below (representing Australia, Italy, Spain, and France) are pure delight with lighter summer foods. None have snob appeal, each is affordable, and all but one can be easily found in Northern California retail chain and grocery stores.

While each tastes delicious, the wines below are just not hip enough to be considered fashionable by the wine crowd — hence they are not overpriced and sell for \$6.99 to around \$13 per bottle. These are the kinds of good table wines people drink when they understand wine, wine styles, their individual palate, finding value, balancing food with wine, and throwing elitism out the window.

A Superb Under \$11 Australian Chardonnay from Cameron Hughes

Available at Costco

An Outstanding Wine Worth Tracking Down (Out of the Park for the Price)

2007 Cameron Hughes Lot 68 Chardonnay

Australia (Margaret River — Western Australia) 14.2% Alcohol

Screwcap Closure (Increasingly common even in Expensive Wines)

Available at: Costco, \$10.99 (most, but not all Bay Area Stores)....in stock at Novato, Richmond, Redwood City, and Danville

A stunning wine for the money - certainly one of the best white wines under \$15 I've had in the last several years

My Tasting Notes: Enjoyed Over Three Consecutive Nights — Both With and Without Food

Lovely wine with perfect balance (what a treat and what a deal at under \$11 a bottle). Its true quality emerges when the wine is served at around 65 degrees (cool but not cold). It's the texture and mouthfeel of this wine that really put it in a league with \$25-\$50 Chardonnays. Just a tinge of oak in the nose and in the taste of the wine. In the mouth the combination of ripe (pure) Chardonnay fruit (apples), a creamy texture, and a soft lingering finish add up to an outstanding wine

experience. Good acidity and citrus components as well. The 14% alcohol does not overwhelm the drinker, but this is a wine best enjoyed during the coolness of evening.

While the fruit is ripe, the wine does not taste of California. A wine with a sense of place — the mark of all wines which merit a special search. This wine proves that quality and low price can go hand in hand. You just gotta look and taste.

Readers — you be the judge, but to my palate, simply outstanding wine!

Taste: 3 Stars Value: 4 Stars (easily) Overall: 3 Stars to 3.5 Stars

Rod's Latest Rose' Picks - All Affordable and Easy to Find in the SF Bay Area

But First - A Rose' Primer

(Based on 25 years of enjoying these wines)

I'm still surprised by the number of regular wine drinkers who don't enjoy Rose' style wines. If you think all Rose' wines are sweet, then you're drinking the wrong stuff! Good Rose' is in most cases bone dry, crisp, well balanced, and full of red and strawberry-like fruits. Often one also finds a peppery component and melon. A good Rose' also has a nice dose of acidity, making it a superb summer aperitif and an excellent companion to a wide variety of foods. ***These are refreshing wines, perfect for the summer.***

Typical Foods Where Rose' Is a Good Match

Salmon, sushi, shellfish, grilled fish of any type, burgers(!), chicken, pastas with light sauces white meat dishes salads, appetizers, Asian food of all types, or as an aperitif. Simply put, a good Rose's is agreeable with just about anything on a warm to hot day.

What I Look For in Tasting and Drinking Rose'

I still consider France (particularly the south of France and the Loire) to be the home of the most satisfying Rose' style wines. That said, good examples come from Spain, the United States, Chile, Italy, South Africa, New Zealand, and Argentina. This is a fun area in which to experiment — seldom are the wines a real let-down. In the under \$10 range the best I've had come from France and Spain. Be very cautious of the domestic Rose' wines under \$10 a bottle.

A Good Rose' Displays the Following Characteristics:

1. It is crisp and refreshing is best served well chilled. Rose' is a wine meant for warm weather and is a wine that tastes best very cold. It's even ok to drop an ice cube in your glass if you wish. On more than one occasion I've enjoyed Rose' from plastic cups and from a small orange juice glass! Remember, pomposity is out if you know and love wine!

2. It has a beautiful, translucent red to pink or salmon-like color (note the Chateau de' Rouet 2007 photo above- it's the wine immediately to the left of the Pellegrino bottle).

3. A good Rose' has bracing acidity. The wine's acid is necessary and welcome as it cuts into the food to provide a taste that is far greater than the sum of its parts — YUM!

If I have a criticism of the Rose' style wines from the United States it's that many examples lack the crisp acidity one finds in the best examples from France. While this isn't always the case, it's something to watch for in domestic versions. A Rose' lacking acidity tastes "flabby" and just isn't a food wine. Domestic Rose' wines can also be very high in alcohol — sometimes 14%+ or higher (again, this is not necessarily what you want when the weather is really hot). **It always merits looking on the label to see the alcohol level, on any wine.**

4. Rose' is usually reasonably priced; meaning \$6 to \$15 or so per bottle. Some Rose' wines above the \$13 range are worth it, but 90% of the pleasure comes for the first \$13-\$14 paid. The improvement in quality above \$15 is usually minor. Prices and demand are up this year, both on imports and domestics.

5. Rose' is meant, with just a few exceptions, to be drunk young (I'd look for 2007's and 2006's now — particularly those Rose' wines priced under \$20 a bottle). A few are meant to age, but always err on the side of buying the most recent vintage possible.