



# SPEC's UPDATE

A PUBLICATION OF

OCTOBER 2000

*Spec's Wines, Spirits, & Finer Foods*

*Owned and operated by the same Houston family since 1962!*

2410 Smith Street Houston, Texas 77006 713-526-8787 [www.specsonline.com](http://www.specsonline.com)

## OCTOBER IS TEXAS WINE MONTH

October is Texas Wine Month, an occasion to celebrate both what Texas wine is and to look forward to what it is becoming. As a native Texan, I tend to be as chauvanistic about things Texan as the French are about things French, But as a professional wine geek, I am forced to take a critical view of wine no matter where the grapes are grown. The Texan in me wants very badly for Texas wines to rock but my inner wine geek has had a hard time with many of Texas' wines. Much of the stuff made in the '80s and in to the early '90s sold only because of state pride and a sort of novelty interest. Fortunately for me and my conflicted soul, a handful of Texas producers are on the right track and more look to be headed in the right direction.

### THE CHALLENGES

There are problems to overcome in any venture and wine growing in Texas has been no exception. As in any new wine-growing region, there are problems of infrastucture and support, there is the problem of getting the right grapes planted in the right soils and the problem of waiting for the vines to get old enough to bear high quality fruit. Additionally, there are the problems faced by any new business: finding adequate captialization and the time necessary to make and market a product without being eaten alive by

the cost of money. As a result of the money crunch, some Texas wines have been priced too high for what they are. Texas also suffers from a climate which is too hot and often too humid for many of the most popular grapes to make fine wines.

As Texas' wine industry is still relatively small and new, the infrastructure of both governmental and commercial services geared to the wine industry is still coming on line. While colleges and universities in California have long offered classes in grapegrowing, winemaking, and, more recently, wine marketing, Texas universities (most notably Texas A&M and Texas Tech) are just catching up. While California's Agricultural Extension Service is well versed in wine issues, Texas ag agents are geared more toward cattle, cotton, corn, melons, onions, citrus, and hay (and rightfully so). As the wine industry grows, this is changing. None of this is intended as criticism of either the programs or the people involved; they're all coming up to speed. Likewise, support businesses are growing but it will be a while before Texas is home to, or can really support, businesses such as mobile bottling lines and wine-growing-and-making equipment dealers that cater exclusively to wine production.

Perhaps the biggest problem facing Texas grape growers is which varieties to plant and where to plant them. The world market wants Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, and Merlot but these popular *vinifera* varieties are better suited to cooler climates. They can ripen too quickly in our warm climate so they don't always get the "hang-time" needed to develop the complexity and depth of flavor that makes for the best wines. Our heat makes it harder for the grapes to retain their natural, refreshing acidity which is essential to the wine's balance, to say nothing of its potential to develop and age. Some grape varieties can tolerate high daytime temperatures as long as it cools off substantially at night. The "where" to plant is determeined as much by temperature and the availability of water as by soil type. Only experimentation with more varieties and more areas will answer the question of which varieties are best planted where.

Some experts have suggested that growers plant hybrid grapes (European *vinifera* varieties crossed with native American vines) that grow well in our climate. Unfortunately, the market has made it very clear that wines made from hybrid varieties have only the

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Prices in this publication are subject to change without notice. All prices listed are for Spec's Warehouse and include a five percent discount for cash. (Many items are available at Spec's neighborhood stores where they may be sold at different prices.) All items are offered "first come, first served" and are subject to availability; some quantities are very limited. Spec's reserves the right to restrict quantities. Any "sale" prices are good from 10-06-2000 through 11-04-2000. Spec's is not responsible for errors in printing. "Spec's" and the rabbit logo are service marks of the C. B. Jackson Company and are registered with the State of Texas.

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## OCTOBER IS TEXAS WINE MONTH

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most limited niche so there is no real future in hybrids. There are fine *vinifera* grapes that do well in warmer climates but so far no one has demonstrated any real confidence that the market will embrace these later ripening, southern European varieties. Muscat, Viognier, Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Tempranillo, Graciano, Petite Sirah, Carignan, Bordeaux's Petite Verdot and Sauvignon Blanc, Italy's Barbera, and the red varieties used to make Port all seem better suited to Texas' heat. Perhaps Texas grape growers will take heart in the increasing sales of wines made from many of these grape varieties as grown in Spain, the south of France, California, and Australia.

So far, Texas growers have chosen the more familiar varieties with some interesting results. Although no one in Texas is making great Chardonnay on a consistent basis, certain areas can produce good Chardonnay and a few wines have risen beyond just good. Since the Llano Estacado 1986 "Slaughter-Leftwich" Chardonnay stunned the world with a double gold medal at the San Francisco fair, there have been a handful (from Llano Estacado, Slaughter-Leftwich, Teysha, Fall Creek, and now Becker) that have pushed into the upper quality range. Unfortunately, Slaughter-Leftwich and Teysha have since become casualties of the wine wars.

While Cabernet Sauvignon success has been achieved by Llano Estacado, Fall Creek, and Becker, these wineries have pushed beyond basic Cabernet with proprietary, Meritage-style wines. (Meritage wines are those US wines that blend two or more of the five Bordeaux grape varieties - Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, and Petite Verdot.) Llano Estacado's Viviano was the first really fine, complex red I tasted from Texas. Its over \$20.00 price set it apart from the Texas pack almost as much as its higher quality and St. Emilion-style. Ed Auler's Fall Creek Meritus is another over \$20.00 Cabernet-and-Merlot-based red that backs up its fancy price with plenty of flavor in an elegant, balanced, Bordeaux-style. Becker's Claret 1999 is a Cabernet Franc-based pleaser with good ripe fruit, plenty of richness and a dusty-sweet layer of oak. These show that it can be done. Now the question is whether it be done consistently and at a more economical level.

Several Texas wineries haven't had the opportunity to answer any of these questions. Teysha, Ivanhoe, Schoppaul Hill, Slaughter-Leftwich, Bieganowski, and many others weren't able to hold on. Some combination of factors including time lags in getting product to the market, production problems, product mix, initial quality issues, cost of money, and plain-old-bad-wine ultimately knocked the wheels off, in some cases before they were really up and running. There are some Texas wineries in business now that won't be around in two or three years but others will pop up in their place. And there will continue to be successes.

### THE SUCCESSES

Success is measured both in terms of sales and in head-to-head quality comparisons with comparably-priced wines from elsewhere in the US and around the world. At least in Texas, sales are so good that even the truly mediocre have had a fighting chance. That Texas wines sell well in Texas should come as no surprise (We're Texas chauvanists, remember?). The true test comes when Texas wines are compared on a dollar for dollar basis to the rest of the winemaking world. Are there real successes from Texas? You bet. In addition to the Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay wines mentioned above, Texas is producing some consistently good

Rieslings, Muscats, Chenin Blancs, Sauvignon Blancs, dessert-style white wines and Port-style red wines.

Against all odds, Messina Hof makes a semi-dry Riesling in the apple-juice fruity style of a German Mosel Kabinett. This is unusual because Riesling is the ultimate cool climat grape and it shouldn't do well in Texas. Messina Hof also makes a bang-up off-dry Gewurztraminer. Another success has been Cabernet Franc. Becker and Delaney Cab Francs have been among the best Texas reds I've tasted and, with their under \$15 prices, are within most wine lovers' reach.

From Fort Stockton in West Texas, the Ste. Genevieve wines represent good buys in value-priced wines that compete favorably with wines in the same price range from Chile and the south of France. Whether Cabernet, Chardonnay, Merlot, Zinfandel, or Sauvignon (or Fume) Blanc, these wines offer a good, honest drink at a really everyday-price (under \$7 for a 1.5L magnum and under \$4 for a standard 750ml bottle). While these wines aren't great, and they don't try to be, they are great values.

One caveat concerning any Texas wines: Read the labels to be sure the wine you're buying is from Texas. Some wineries have been known to sell wine from other US states or even the south of France (Vin de Pay d'Oc) with their Texas-looking labels on the bottle.

If you look at the climate in the parts of the world that make the best fortified wines (Port, Sherry, Madeira), you might think that Texas could make good fortified wines, and you'd be right. Bryan/College Station's Messina Hof makes a couple of versions of its acclaimed Papa Paulo Port. One sells for under \$14 per bottle and the other for under \$21. Both are quite tasty and compare well with the likes of Sandeman's Founder's Reserve and other real ports. Llano Estacado and Becker also play in the Port game with under \$15 entries that are worth a try by anyone who drinks Port or Port-style wines from the US or Australia. All three offer good sweetness and plenty of juicy grapey fruit in a fairly fresh, medium-to-full-bodied vintage-character style.

In addition to its Port lineup, Messina Hof offers three sweet white wines: Angel Late Harvest Riesling, Late Harvest Semillon, and Late Harvest Muscat. All three are fresh and well balanced with ample fruit. The Riesling is more apples and spice, the Muscat leans to honeysuckle and apricot, the Semillon tastes of ripe figs, melons, and honey. All three exceed an "auslese" level of sweetness which is to say that they are for sipping after dinner, either with or as dessert. At under \$14.00 per 750ml, there aren't many dessert wines this good at this low a price from anywhere in the world.

Muscat is another quiet Texas hit. Whether from Becker, Messina Hof, Llano Estacado, or Cap\*Rock, Texas Muscat hits the spot. Most often it's lightly-sweet, briskly-balanced and very refreshing, somewhat in the style of Italy's Moscato d'Asti. So far, I haven't found one that wasn't at least good. Sauvignon Blanc also shows some promise with Llano Estacado, Grape Creek, Becker, Texas Hills, and especially Spicewood making credible Hill Country versions that feature a light but refreshing style and plenty of fruit without too much of the grassiness that Sauvignon can exhibit in some climates. Any of these Sauvignons will make a nice aperitif or taste great with grilled catfish.

As to which brands to look for, Messina Hof, Llano Estacado, Becker, Escondido Valley, Grape Creek and Ste. Genevieve all make wines that are, at the very least, consistently good. Some may leave you less than completely dazzled (but that's true of most

any good-sized winery in the world) but you won't go too far wrong with current releases from any of these labels. Newcomers Spicewood and Texas Hill Country had good initial showings and also seem to be improving with time.

State pride has carried things this far. More wineries are now doing their part by making better and more competitively-priced

wines but, with a few exceptions, Texas wines have a good way to go before they're discussed in favorable terms along side comparably-priced wines from California. Still, if they can at least get close, the Texan in me wants to drink Texas wine.



# SPEC's Texas Top Twelve

Here are SPEC's picks for 12 of the best wines made in Texas from grapes grown in Texas. **Buy a mixed case of all 12 Texas picks for \$114.45, a savings of \$9.31 off our already low everyday price.**

**LLANO ESTACADO Chardonnay, Texas, 1998**  
12x750ml **\$9.38 \$105.38**

Dry, balanced, somewhat mineral nose with a hint of green banana fruit. The wine is sweeter and richer in the mouth with plenty of ripe banana and pineapple fruit flavor. Long and balanced with a fine, rich texture in the mouth. Finishes dry and clean - a real pleaser. Shows why Llano has such a good reputation for Chardonnay. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89 points.**

**LLANO ESTACADO Cellar Select Cabernet Sauvignon, Texas, 1997** 12x750ml **\$14.88 \$165.17**

Not much on the nose but opens beautifully in the mouth. Nice, dry black-berry fruit with mineral notes and hints of sweet cassis and black raspberries. Fine chewy texture with a nice mix of oak and tannins. Long and delicious with a fine, lively balance. Fine+. **SPEC's Score: 90+ points.**

**LLANO ESTACADO Cellar Select Port, Texas, NV**  
12x750ml **\$14.88 \$165.17**

The nose features semi-sweet powdered chocolate and sweet raisins. The palate is sweet with dried fruit and nutty flavors over notes of chocolate and citrus peel. Long and sweet with a good intensity. Somewhere between a dark tawny Port and an Australian Tokay in style. Really rich but well-balanced; not at all cloying. Not terribly Port-like but immensely enjoyable. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91 points.**

**SPICEWOOD Estate Bottled Sauvignon Blanc, Texas Hill Country, 1998** 12x750ml **\$13.98 \$154.80**

A blend of 94% Sauvignon Blanc with 5% Semillon and 1% Muscat, this Entre Deux Mers-style white features fresh melon-pear-and-peach fruit with a nice richness in the mouth despite the fact that it sees no oak and did not under go malolactic fermentation. The finish is long and fresh. This is Texas' answer to a refreshing white Bordeaux. Really Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 87 points.**

**ESCONDIDO VALLEY Merlot, Texas, 1997**  
12x750ml **\$6.60 \$73.26**

The rich plum and mixed-cherry fruit-dominated nose shows hints of black pepper and very ripe raspberries. It is rich and satisfying in the mouth with ample, almost lush fruit flavors and a good level of soft tannins to round out the texture. Maintains a fine balance staying fresh despite its richness. Holds on to its chewy cherry fruit through the end. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89 points.**

**ESCONDIDO VALLEY Pinot Noir, Texas, 1999**  
12x750ML **\$6.60 \$73.26**

Featuring a bright, medium-red color, this light-to-medium-bodied Pinot Noir smells of earthy, almost chocolaty, fresh red-cherry fruit. Hints at black pepper and exotic wood. The palate is fresh and balanced with plenty of cherry fruit and just enough tannin to give it a nicely chewy texture. Finishes long, clean, and dry. Escondido Valley makes the best Texas Pinot Noir I've tasted to date. Best served cool (55-60°). Fine. **SPEC's Score: 88 points.**

**BECKER VINEYARDS Merlot, Texas, 1998**  
12x750ml **\$13.98 \$154.80**

So far, this is the best "grown in Texas" Merlot I've tasted. Sweet dark fruit is complemented with dusty oak and pencil shavings on the nose. These flavors continue on the palate which features a juicy texture and a nicely chewy mix of oak and ripe tannins. Fine feel in the mouth. The finish is long and rich with dusty oak and sweet fruit to the end. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91 points.**

**BECKER VINEYARDS Chardonnay, Texas Hill Country, 1999**  
12x750ml **\$13.98 \$154.80**

Rich and ripe on the nose with notes of sweet oak, ripe banana, and pineapple. Almost lush in the mouth with lots of ripe, juicy pineapple fruit and more of the oak and banana complexity. Has enough lime acidity to balance the creamy texture and ripe fruit; it feels good in the mouth. Finishes dry and clean. Fades off quickly but still Really Fine. **SPEC's Score: 90+ points.**

**MESSINA HOF Johannisberg Riesling, Texas, 1999** 12x750 **\$6.54 \$73.45**

Every year, Messina Hof does a great job with this Riesling. The classic apple-juice fruit you'd expect from German Mosel Riesling is there along with apricot and citrus peel notes that suggests a bit of Muscat may be in the blend. The Mosel-style is also evident in the crisp balance and Kabinett-like weight and sweetness. Super fresh and refreshing. Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 86 points.**

**MESSINA HOF Gewurztraminer, 1998**  
12x750ml **\$6.54 \$73.25**

Richer than the Riesling but with a similar Kabinett-style balance, this refreshing Gewurztraminer offers fresh, spicy-sweet peach-pear-apricot-and-citrus-peel fruit with a slightly bitter, hoppy complexity. The hint of hoppy bitterness and the citrus notes help keep this semi-dry wine balanced. It finishes long and clean with good fruit notes to the end. Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 86 points.**

**MESSINA HOF "Glory" Muscat Canelli, 1998**  
12x750ml **\$13.78 \$150.97**

"Glory" is right; this shows just the sort of delicious wine Muscat can make in Texas. Rich and ripe with honeysuckle perfume and lots of apricot and candied citrus peel fruit, the zesty lemon acidity keeps it well balanced and on track. It nicely splits the difference between an Italian Moscato d'Asti and a French Muscat Beaumes de Venise. Good length with balanced but sweet fruit to the end. Great for a leisurely Sunday afternoon. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89 points.**

**Ste. GENEVIEVE Texas Red, NV**  
12x750ml **\$2.62 \$29.04**

Tasting this wine the first time was a shock. How could an under three dollar bottle of Texas red be this good? Made from a mixed-bag of red varieties grown in Ste. Genevieve's Fort Stockton vineyards, this wine contains a big dose of Zinfandel and Barbera. The Zin gives it dark fruit and spice while the Barbera adds its own grapy fruit and contributes to the wine's refreshing balance. Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 85 points.**

# Let Lukas' Liquors Loss be Your Gain!

One of our competitors, Lukas Liquors Superstore, has gone out of business and we have bought their entire inventory. Due to Texas law, they had to sell to all their inventory to one licensee and SPEC's is the only wine and spirits retailer big enough to swallow all Lukas' inventory. While they carried a lot of the same products we do, Lukas also carried a number of products we don't normally carry. Because of the nature of their inventory and the fact that much of what they had in stock was good, current vintage merchandise, and because they weren't really in business long enough (less than two years) to accumulate too many problems, we paid Lukas their true wholesale cost for the goods. They had anywhere for 3 to 20 cases on hand of a few items but most of what we bought was their shelf stock - mostly "few-of-a-kind items" of which they had from 2 to 15 bottles.

Why are we telling you all this? Well, for two reasons. The first is to explain to you why some SPEC's stores are crowded with so many new and unfamiliar products. Much of the inventory from Lukas went to our downtown SPEC's Liquor Warehouse at 2410 Smith Street and most of the rest was distributed to our west-side SPEC's "Superstores" (and yes, we do plan to have some fun with "Superstore") on Memorial @ Dairy Ashford, Bunker Hill @ the Katy Freeway, and Westheimer @ Kirkwood. A good portion of that inventory is unfamiliar to most of our customers and even to many of our employees.

The other reason is to let you know how Lukas' loss can your gain. There are two ways you can save on buying these products. The first is that, while we paid Lukas wholesale cost for these goods, we're using SPEC's markups to sell them. Many wines they sold for \$13.99 therefore will be priced at \$12 to \$12.50. Beyond that, remember our policy on the last few bottles of something. If you want to buy a case and we don't have a whole case, we'll give you the case price on however many bottles we do have (as long as you buy them all). Since there are a lot of these wines and spirits where we only have a few bottles, when you find something you want, take advantage of that extra discount. These extra case discounts vary by product but are often in the 8-10% range. The net result is that bottle Lukas sold for \$13.99 might be had for as little as \$11.10.

One way to tell whether the wines and spirits you're looking at are "Lukas" inventory is that they are mostly displayed on racks or shelves outside the normal section for similar products. A better way to tell is to look for the code. All SPEC's shelf tags include a four digit supplier code printed just above the cash bottle price (please see box on page 2 titled "How to Read SPEC's Price Tags"). If that supplier code is "1000" the inventory came from Lukas. To help make it worth your while to seek out these wines and spirits, we are offering (through November 11) double SPEC's KEY points on any wine or spirit showing a "1000" supplier code.

*Happy bargain hunting!*

## SOME OF THE "FEW OF A KIND" WINES SPEC'S BOUGHT FROM LUKAS

*All wines listed here are in 750ml bottles.*

Barwang Shiraz	\$8.39	\$93.11
Bendigo Water Wheel Cab Sauv 1996	\$11.99	\$133.20
Cupid Chardonnay	\$8.99	\$99.90
Frankland Estate Chardonnay 1995	\$17.60	\$195.40
Hardy's Coonawarra Cab. Sauv. 1994	\$17.52	\$194.47
Yarra Ridge Sauvignon Blanc 1996	\$8.75	\$97.10
Brancott Estate Chardonnay	\$20.15	\$111.82
Brancott Estate Sauvignon Blanc	\$21.83	\$121.15
Reserve Sainte Chanelle Sparkling Brut	\$5.87	\$65.13
Bruno Paillard Artist Label Champagne	\$48.71	\$270.33
Delamotte Champagne Blanc De Blancs	\$35.68	\$198.00
Gosset Brut Grand Millesime 1989	\$58.79	\$326.27
Gosset Champagne Brut Grande Res.	\$41.99	\$233.03
Lanson Gold Brut '90 Champagne	\$30.88	\$342.72
Lanson Noble Cuvee '88	\$46.34	\$514.42
Laurent Perrier Cuvee Rose Brut Nv	\$46.42	\$515.22
Piper Heidsieck Brut Millesime 1985	\$41.15	\$456.74
Contadi Castaldi Brut Franciacorta	\$13.43	\$149.05
Hardy's Sparkling Shiraz	\$19.84	\$110.09
Duncan Peak Cabernet '96	\$29.99	\$333.00
Evoluna Reserve Cabernet '97	\$8.39	\$93.11
Greenstone Cabernet Sauvignon '96	\$10.90	\$120.95
Ste Chapelle Cabernet Sauvignon 1995	\$10.50	\$116.55
Badger Mtn. Cabernet Franc Organic '97	\$12.23	\$135.73
Davis Bynum Laureles 1995	\$23.52	\$261.07
Trefethen Cabernet Franc Napa 1996	\$13.33	\$147.99
Badger Mtn Chardonnay Organic	\$9.23	\$102.43
Diamond Ridge Chardonnay	\$7.12	\$78.99
Gabrielli Dennison Chardonnay	\$11.99	\$133.20
Grosset Picadilly Chardonnay	\$23.50	\$260.81

Hendry Ranch Chardonnay	\$16.79	\$186.35
Phelps Chardonnay Ovation	\$34.99	\$388.81
Pope Valley Chardonnay Napa 1998	\$12.90	\$143.19
Badger Mountain Merlot	\$12.23	\$135.73
Gabrielli Sangiovese Rosato 1998	\$9.90	\$109.89
Christopher Creek Syrah 1996	\$16.63	\$184.62
Pietra Santa Dolcetto	\$14.40	\$159.84
Pietra Santa Sangiovese 1995	\$19.30	\$214.19

### How to Read SPEC's Price Tags

We put as much information as we can on our shelf tags. They tell us the product's name and UPC, who we buy the product from, what size it is, how many are in a case, and what are regular and cash discount prices are by the unit and by the case. Here's how to read a SPEC's shelf tag.

The diagram shows a shelf tag for Lyeth Meritage Red wine. It is divided into sections: Product Description (LYETH MERITAGE RED), Vendor ID Number (1091), Size & Pack ((750ML) 01/01), Case Price (CASE 117.63), Cash Price (CASH 12CS \$10.52 EA), and UPC (01715193302). Arrows point from these labels to the corresponding information on the tag.

The \$117.63 and \$10.52 are the regular case price and bottle price. The \$111.75 and \$9.99 include spec's 5% discount for "cash" (including checks and debit cards). The date (here "01/01") tells us the last time the pricing was changed in any way on this product.



# NEW & NOTEWORTHY

*Some of the best and most interesting wines we've tasted lately*

## GREAT 1997 NAPA CABERNET

1997 is proving out to be a great year for Napa Valley Cabernet. This Sequoia Grove offers as fine a bang for your Cabernet buying buck as I've found.

**SEQUOIA GROVE Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 1997**  
12x750ml \$22.76 \$252.68

The nose shows classic Rutherford dust, spicy oak, cedar pencil shavings, and sweet blackberry fruit. The palate follows with all of the above wrapped around a juicy, dusty dry texture with hints of tobacco and black pepper. Solid and satisfying in the mouth. Fine length. Stays balanced and flavorful to the end. Delicious and Excellent (and a great value). **SPEC's Score: 93 points.**

## TWO FROM DROUHIN

Here are two nicely balanced, subtly flavored, under \$20 Pinots that are versatile enough to go with a wide range of foods (grilled Salmon, roast pork, smoked chicken or a variety of grilled meat and fowl) making them perfect wines for keeping around the house.

**JOSEPH DROUHIN Maranges 1er cru, 1997**  
12x750ml \$17.77 \$194.58

Nicely built Pinot Noir with subtle cherry fruit and hints of bitter-sweet chocolate and black pepper. A nice note of cherrystone bit-

terness keeps it lively. Medium weight and fresh tasting. Long and dry with crisp fresh red fruit to the end. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 88 points.**

**JOSEPH DROUHIN Ladoix 1996**  
12x750ml \$16.48 \$180.79

This has a nice bit of earthy richness with good black and red cherry and mixed berry fruit on the nose. The palate starts with sweet cherry and strawberry fruit and adds notes of pepper, spice, and cedar. Medium weight and nicely structured; not big or flashy but is multifaceted enough to hold your interest. Good length with a nice focus. Really Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89+ points.**

## TWO ITAL-VARIETAL WINNERS FROM LUNA

Noted Napa winemaker John Kongsgaard (of Newton and Kongsgaard fame) has fallen for Italian wine varieties and created Luna as a brand under which he could make Napa Valley wines from those grapes. Here are two winners.

**LUNA Pinot Grigio, Napa Valley, 1999**  
12x750ml \$14.88 \$165.17

Rich, well integrated Pinot Grigio with a bit of a Chardonnay-like character. Good weight and feel in the mouth. Lots of juicy fig and pear fruit with a hint of bitterness. Fresh and refreshing with a

*(Continued on page 6)*

## *From Spec's Humidor . . .*

**AVO - New Domaine Sizes, Pyramids, and Torpedos**

**GRIFFIN - These new Maduros are very smooth with no bitter aftertaste.**

**DON TOMAS - New Camerron wrapper, Full-bodied, Great Figuardo shapes.**

**DON TOMAS DOMINICANS - Medium-to-full bodied smokes with a great finish**

**ACID - Something really different; an aromatic cigar at a great price.**

**BUTERA - New Tubo; always at the best price in town**

**HOYO EXCALIBUR - A new Villazon cigar with a spicy Camerron wrapper.**

**SECONDS IN STOCK NOW: La Gloria, Padron, Upmann, Macanudo, Davidoff, Don Diego, Montecristo, and Puros Indios.**

**For our SPEC's KEY Customers - Don't forget to register for the Daniel Marshall Humidor Giveaway (in selected stores).**

Visit SPEC's INCREDIBLE WALK-IN HUMIDOR to see these and hundreds of other fine cigars. SPEC's stocks a large selection of high-quality cedar-lined humidors, travel and pocket humidors, Colibri and Prometheus lighters, and cigar scissors and snips. And all CHEAP! **Don't forget SPEC's 5% discount for cash!**

## NEW & NOTEWORTHY

(Continued from page 5)

crisp balance but still really satisfying. Long and focused. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91 points.**

### LUNA Sangiovese, Napa Valley, 1997

12x750ml \$16.19 \$179.69

This well-focused blend of Sangiovese with Merlot and Syrah offers lots of ripe cherry fruit with hints of raspberry and white pepper. Notes of bitter cherry stones help keep it lively. Really nice texture and feel in the mouth and super length. St. Emilion feel with Tuscan flavor. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 93 points.**

## GREAT 1998 ZINFANDELS FROM DELOACH

Cecil Deloach is a retired San Francisco fireman who got into grape growing when he bought a weekend property in Sonoma's Russian River Valley. The property, Papera Ranch, was planted with an old Zinfandel vineyard. When he sold the grapes, he made enough to make the payments on the property. Soon he was buying more vineyards and began to make the wines himself. The bank told him if he wanted to borrow any more money, he'd have to quit his day job as a firefighter and work full time as a wine maker, Deloach quickly developed a reputation as a top producer of Chardonnay and Zinfandel. We featured Deloach California Zin in our May 2000 12-Under-\$12. Here are the rest of Deloach's 1998 Zins.

### DELOACH Estate Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$14.51 \$162.94

A blend of 95% Zinfandel from the five ranches (single vineyards) along with 5% Petite Sirah from the Flagstaff Ranch. Elegant, spicy style of Zinfandel with good dark cherry and berry fruit. Fresh and juicy with nice briar and subtle pepper notes and hints of tobacco and mint. Good length with a fine fresh mouth feel. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91 points.**

### DELOACH Peletti Ranch Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$21.87 \$239.54

(Planted in 1928) Richer and softer than the Estate with blueberry fruit as well as blackberry and a bit of black cherry. The focus is a bit blurry but it has good weight and richness with lots of flavor and a fine feel. Fine now but may improve to excellent. **SPEC's Score: 89 points.**

### DELOACH Gambogi Ranch Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$21.87 \$239.54

(Planted in 1909) Still very tight but there's a lot going on in there. It's closed on the nose but the palate features a big structure and lots of undeveloped dark fruit with some briar and plenty of spice and pepper. This one is still improving; it begins to open up with some time in the glass. Decant this one 30 minutes or so prior to serving. At least Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89-92 points**

### DELOACH Barbieri Ranch Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$21.87 \$239.54

(Planted in 1934) The Barbieri is the single vineyard Deloach that is most like the estate Zinfandel. Good focused raspberry, blackberry, and black cherry fruit along with the expected notes of briar, cedar, and pepper. Long and alive with precise, bright, almost juicy fruit and flavors. Really delicious. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 92+ points.**

### DELOACH Saitone Ranch Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$21.87 \$239.54

(Planted in 1895) This well structured, somewhat open wine splits the difference between the Barbieri and the Gambogi. Plenty of dark berry fruit with a nice medium-weight structure and classic Zinfandel briar and pepper complexity. Strikes a fine balance with a fine feel in the mouth. Long and clean. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91+ points.**

### DELOACH Papera Ranch Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$21.87 \$239.54

(Planted in 1934) Fresh and lively in an easy to get at, medium-weight style, this is the most accessible (that is drinkable now) of the five vineyard designated Deloach Zins. The nose has a subtle cherry-berry-briar-spice perfume. The palate follows suit with lots of red and black cherry fruit flavor layered onto a medium-weight frame. Not deep or intense but really pretty. Long and clean with the fresh fruit lasting well into the finish. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89 points.**

## ROSEMOUNT HILL OF GOLD REDS

Over the last few years, Rosemount has bought and improved some old vineyards in the Mudgee district. The wines from these vineyards are being marketed as Hill of Gold after an old winery that came with some of the vineyards. The red wines made from this new area are rich and flavorful. Here are our notes on the first two releases.

### ROSEMOUNT HILL OF GOLD Cabernet Sauvignon, Mudgee, 1998

12x750ml \$19.99 \$227.89

A bit closed on the nose but really jumps in the mouth. Full of fine dark ripe fruit. Rich, almost fat with a great texture in the mouth,

## SPEC'S OCTOBERFEST FOOD SPECIALS

<i>Bahlsen Hit Cookies</i>	\$ .99
<i>Continental Bratwurst</i>	\$4.82/lb
<i>Franks</i>	\$5.37/lb
<i>Mestemacher Breads</i>	\$1.88 each
<i>Applinaris Water</i>	\$.99/liter
<i>Gerolsteiner Water</i>	\$1.00/liter
<i>Bismarck water</i>	\$1.04/liter

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<i>Tilsit cheese</i>	\$4.49/lb
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<i>German Swiss</i>	\$3.15/lb
<i>Zerto Parma Prosciutto</i>	\$10.66/lb

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(Continued on Page7)

# SPEC's Notices (Classes, Dinners, etc.) . . .

## SPEC's and The Wine School present WINE 101: THE BASICS OF WINE AND WINE TASTING

At 7pm on Wednesday, October 18th, join us at l'Alliance Francaise (427 Lovett Boulevard ) for a look at THE BASICS OF WINE AND WINE TASTING in which we'll taste nine wines representing a range of styles. Topics of discussion will include the basics of tasting, grape varieties and wine types, buying wine for your home and ordering wine in restaurants, proper wine service and glassware. WINE 101 will cost \$40.00 per person. For reservations or more information on this class, please call SPEC's at 713-526-8787 or go to [www.specsonline.com](http://www.specsonline.com) and click on Upcoming Events.

**SAVE THE DATE** for these upcoming classes (details to follow via email and on [www.specsonline.com](http://www.specsonline.com))

November 1, 2000 (Wednesday): l'Alliance Francais presents a French-American comparative tasting

November 9, 2000 (Thursday): Classic California Cabernets - the sequel (originally scheduled for November 8th)

November 15, 2000 (Wednesday): Great Zinfandels - the sequel

November 28, 2000 (Tuesday): Port Wine Class

November 5, 2000 (Wednesday): l'Alliance Francaise presents French Fizz - the Sparkling Wines of France

Many events are finalized too late to get a detailed notice into print. The best way to find out about SPEC's upcoming events is via email. To add your name to our email list, please sign up for a **SPEC's KEY**, making sure your email address is correctly entered on the key application. If you already have a **SPEC's KEY**, just send an email with your **name and home phone number** or SPEC's Key number to [bear@specsonline.com](mailto:bear@specsonline.com).

For more on events, please log onto [www.specsonline.com](http://www.specsonline.com) and click on **UPCOMING EVENTS**.

## NEW & NOTEWORTHY

(Continued from page 7)

a nice balance of tannin and oak, and a great mix of fruit, oak, and terroir flavors. Great feel, fine length. Delicious, Excellent. **Spec's Score: 92 points.**

### ROSEMOUNT HILL OF GOLD Shiraz, Mudjee, 1998

12x750ml \$19.99 \$227.89

A lot of the same weight, texture and feel as the Cabernet but the fruit is more in the raspberry range with a white pepper nuance. Good length and weight; the white pepper lasts through the end of the finish. This is a solid, satisfying Shiraz Fine+. **SPEC's Score: 90+ points.**

## MORE NEW & NOTEWORTHY WINNERS . . .

### DUXOUP Syrah, Dry Creek Valley, 1998

12x750ml \$20.32 \$222.59

From a unique red wine only, gravity operated winery, this Syrah is ripe with juicy, chewy blackberry fruit and good pepper and spice notes. Lots of fruit. Sweet in the mouth with a nice feel. Long and fresh with a hint of earthy richness. The finish hints at earth and smoke but the fruit is still there. Fine+. **SPEC's Score: 90 points.**

### PEDRONCELLI Bench Vineyard Merlot, Dry Creek Valley,

1997 12x750ml \$12.59 \$139.73

Lots of juicy-sweet plummy fruit with some nice dusty oak notes on the nose. The palate shows lots of plummy-grapy fruit with a nicely chewy texture. This is a super value in a fine Merlot that should appeal to both Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot drinkers. Really Delicious, Fine. **SPEC's Score 89+ points.**

### LOUIS MAX Beauchame Bourgogne Pinot Noir, 1997

12x750ml \$13.78 \$150.79

Ripe red cherry fruit with a nice earth note on the nose. The palate features lots of mixed cherry fruit with notes of coffee, chocolate and earth. Good feel in the mouth with a nice level of richness. Long and alive, finishes clean. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 88 points.**

### LIPARITA Chardonnay, Carneros (Napa), 1997

12x750ml \$23.15 \$254.06

Well-focused Chardonnay with lively peach, pear, and apple-scented fruit. Pure and rich with a great feel and a burst of ripe fruit and sweet oak that fills the mouth. Well-integrated with enough acid zip to give it a chance at elegance. Frankly delicious in a flashy, classically California style. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 93 points.**



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# Twelve-Under-\$12.00

Sometimes you don't really want a "great" bottle of wine. Sometimes you just want a cheap bottle of wine and it wouldn't bother you at all if it were to taste really good. Not only do we understand,

we're in the same boat. We're always looking for that really good, really cheap bottle. "Really good" means the wine tastes like it costs more than it does. "Really cheap" always means under \$12.00. So here are twelve of our favorites, all priced under \$12.00.

## KENWOOD Chardonnay, Sonoma, 1999

12x750ml \$11.75 \$130.40

Well-balanced, full-flavored Chardonnay showing plenty of good, ripe banana and tropical fruit with hints of mineral and tropical lime and subtle oak notes. It has good malolactic-and-oak richness but the tropical lime acidity keeps it fresh and balanced. There is a whole lot here to like. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 88 points.**

## DOMAINE PIERREDON Cotes du Rhone, 1998

12x750ml \$9.53 \$105.55

From a single property vinified by Caves des Estazargues, the best co-op in the south of France, this blend of equal parts Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre is sweet, juicy, and absolutely ripe with flavor. Great grapy, chewy texture, it is supple and alive in the mouth with a great feel. Full of succulent, juicy fruit flavors; Stunning in its depth and richness at an incredible price. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91 points.**

## DOMAINE DE TOURELLES Coteaux de Languedoc Rouge, 1998

12x750ml \$10.46 \$114.74

Chewy sweet, juicy red featuring lots of dark mixed-berry fruit and hints of pepper, spice, and Rhone-style Syrah. The palate is filled with dark, ripe fruit and fresh berry tannins for a nicely chewy texture. Finishes long and clean with lovely pure, ripe fruit lasting through the end. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 90 points.**

## CH. PARENCHERE Bordeaux Superieur, 1998

12x750ml \$10.81 \$118.58

A Cabernet Sauvignon dominated petite chateau featuring a classic oak-and-cassis Bordeaux nose, this medium-weight, well-balanced, moderately chewy claret offers nice dark cherry-berry fruit that hints at sweet juice. Its touch of oak melds nicely with the tannins and the subtle cedar and tobacco Cabernet character. The fruit and woody complexity lasts and lasts. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 88 points.**

## MARQUES DE CACERES Rioja Rose, 1999

12x750ml \$5.99 \$66.72

Fresh, crisp, strawberry fruit-dominated almost-dry rose featuring hints of black pepper and exotic woods. Long and focused, this is refreshing, satisfying, delicious drink that will be perfect with picnics or on a weekend afternoon. Really Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 87 points.**

## ROSEMOUNT Estate-Bottled Sauvignon Blanc, Southeastern

Australia, 2000 12x750ml \$8.53 \$95.79

Fresh, lively dry Sauvignon Blanc with nice lemon, green-pear, white-peach and fresh-cut-grass notes. Crisp and refreshing; the fruit and grass last well into the long, clean finish. Not "serious" Sauvignon but really delightful. Really Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 87 points.**

## EHSES HANSEN Zeltinger Himmelreich Riesling QbA 1999

12x1-liter \$7.20 \$79.92

I've never been as worried about a new wine as I was about this one. Its predecessor, Wehlener Klosterberg QbA, has been my personal house white for much of the last 16 years. When Ehses sold the Wehlener Klosterberg vineyard, he said he could make much the same wine in the same liter

## Special for SPEC's KEY holders:

Buy a mixed case consisting of one 750ml bottle of each of our **October 12-Under-\$12** selections for only **\$100.74** a savings of **\$8.05** over SPEC's already low cash bottle price. (UPC: 00000700740)

bottles at the same price from the Zeltinger Himmelreich vineyard. I said "We'll see." He did. The wine tastes and smells like fresh, crisp, refreshing, adult apple juice. There is a touch of mineral and floral underlying the juicy apple fruit. Long and delicious, it is semi-dry and alive with flavor but finishes clean. Very Good+. **SPEC's Score: 87+ points.**

## LYETH Red Meritage, North Coast, 1997

12x750ml \$9.99 \$111.75

A blend of 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, and 15% Cabernet Franc, this is a balanced, somewhat grapy red with great fruit and hints of dusty oak and pencil shavings. The palate reveals sweet black cherry and blackberry fruit with nice Cabernet and wood complexity and a bit of sweet spice. It is long and alive with a fine dusty texture and a great feel. This solid, satisfying red offers a great bang for your wine-buying buck. Excellent. **SPEC's Score: 91 points.**

## CODICE (la Tierra de Manchuela) Tinto, Spain, 1998

12x750ml \$6.88 \$76.18

This "simple tinto" is made from 100% old vine Tempranillo by the winemaking team from Rioja's Sierra Cantabria. The nose features pencil shavings and dark, ripe fruit. The palate follows with lots of black cherry and mixed grapy-berry fruit. Dusty dry in the mouth with a fine feel but the fruit is the thing - mouth filling and delicious. For best results, splash it into a decanter, carafe, or even a pitcher before serving it cool (55-60°). Really Fine. **SPEC's Score: 89+ points.** (If you don't decant it and serve it too warm, knock it down to 87 points.)

## ABADIA RETUERTA Rivola, Sardon del Duero, 1998

12x750ml \$11.49 \$127.30

This blend of 60% Tempranillo and 40% Cabernet Sauvignon is aged three months in barrels made with American oak staves and French oak heads. The wine has lots of dark berry, grapy fruit along with notes of meat, game, roasting coffee, dusty oak and a hint of green pepper. Rich and chewy, it is long and fresh in the mouth. A great new style from Spain. Very Good. **SPEC's Score: 86+ points.**

## FETZER Barrel Select Chardonnay, Mendocino County, 1999

12x750ml \$10.19 \$114.98

Subtle, flavorful, balanced wine with subtle Chardonnay-banana fruit well integrated with the oak and mineral structure. The touch of citrus-lime character keeps it fresh and focused. Finishes with fruit and oak to the end. Clean. This was a pleasant surprise. Fine. **SPEC's Score: 86+ points.**

## FETZER Gewurztraminer, Mendocino County 1999

12x750ml \$5.97 \$67.01

The nose is almost dry with hints of hops and flowers but the wine is rich in the mouth with good sweetness and plenty of spicy apple-peach-pear fruit. Rich but still fresh, this is a clean finishing, super Sunday afternoon sipper. Very Good+. **SPEC's Score: 87+ points.**



Prices listed in 12-Under-\$12 are SPEC's Warehouse prices. Prices for individual wines may vary by location.