SOMMELIER WINE AWARDS

2012

YOUR GUIDE TO THE BEST ON-TRADE WINE
GOLD LIST

VISTAMAR LATE HARVEST MOSCATEL 2011, LIMARI VALLEY, CHILE
£4.25 (37.5CL) @ BOTTLE GREEN WINES
Golden in colour, golden in taste and Gold in the Sommelier Wine Awards, this combines wonderful flavours at an incredible price. There’s honey, marmalade and apricot notes on the nose, and a fine concentration of marmalade and apricot on the ripe body. With good acidity offering a lengthy finish, this is the perfect partner for apricot tart.

SAINT CLAIR AWATERE VALLEY RESERVE NOBLE RIESLING 2009, MARLBOROUGH, NEW ZEALAND
£11.84 (37.5CL) @ HALLGARTEN DRUITT
Fabulous sweetie that appealed to all. ‘Grilled nuts, honeycomb and lemon marmalade’ was how consultant Angela Reddin put it, adding praise for its ‘quite thrilling acid balance’. Meanwhile, The Tate Group’s Hamish Anderson liked the ‘pineapple interplay with spice and smoke’. Ideal matches? Try almond cake or Torta San Marco.

SIMCIC LEONARDO 2005, GORISKA BRDA, SLOVENIA
£23.85 (37.5CL) @ BANCROFT WINES
A complete star, despite the price – ‘mindblowing’ and ‘delightful’ were just two of the adjectives bandied about. A complex bouquet of toffee, coffee, roasted almond and marmalade, there’s a good acid structure to back up the palate full of caramel, fig and orange peel. Ideal with toffee cheesecake or blue cheese. Enjoy!

CASTANO MONASTRELL DULCE 2009, YECLA, SPAIN
£10.86 (50CL) @ LIBERTY WINES
Wonderful to see southern Spain’s Monastrell pioneers, Bodegas Castaño, hitting the top spot with this, the sweet version of this characterful varietal. Sweet and fragrant, with prunes, damsons and intense berry and cherry fruit flavours alongside raisined notes. ‘Beautifully rounded and balanced, this is a classy chocolate-driven wine,’ said consultant Maria Rodriguez. ‘A serious alternative to LBV Port.’
SHARPHAM DART VALLEY RESERVE 2010, DEVON, ENGLAND
£6.33 @ SHARPHAM WINES
A light, fresh blend, this starts with floral notes on the nose alongside grassy aromas, citrus notes and a hint of minerality. Alongside its balanced acidity, texture and medium finish, ‘the apple and pear flavours transport you straight into an English orchard’, said DrinkBritain.com’s Susanna Forbes.

MARJAN SIMCIC PINOT GRIGIO 2010, GORISKA BRDA, SLOVENIA
£9.60 @ BANCROFT WINES
Simčič redefines Pinot Grigio in its Slovenian guise with this wine. Musky, floral notes mix on the nose with gunpowder, leading to a bold, rich yet dry palate, with hints of almonds, good acidity and length, and the merest hint of dried rose petals. ‘Proper, well-balanced wine, this is interesting and elegant,’ said Nigel Lister of Bread Street Kitchen.

VINKARA RESERVE CABERNET SAUVIGNON/MERLOT/SYRAH 2009, ANKARA, TURKEY
£13.90; VINKARA
‘Cranberry, red fruit and menthol throughout,’ said Claire Love of Loves Restaurant. The red fruits mix with violets, oak and herby hints on the nose, leading to a fleshy, mid-weight palate with both grip and spice. ‘Tannic but elegant,’ said Emilie Courtois of Terroirs. (Not available in the UK at the moment; contact winery.)
If you want to know where the trophies are in the Sommelier Wine Awards, well, there aren’t any! We don’t want our tasters to feel under pressure to give out awards in certain categories just to tick a box. Instead, we ask our teams in the final round of tasting to select a couple of their star wines – the Gold Medal-winning bottles that had our tasters going sommelier loco.

These were then re-tasted by a further panel of experts and narrowed down from 30 or so contenders to the dozen wines that you see here.

In terms of both price and style, they’re hugely varied. From a super-dry manzanilla to a Slovenian sweetie; from a great value South African Chenin to a seriously expensive Spanish red. But what they all have in common is that these were wines that our tasters really believed in and got excited about. Try them. We’re sure that you will, too.
9. NURAGHE CRABIONI CANNONAU DI SARDEGNA 2009, SARDINIA, ITALY
£10.34 @ ITALYABROAD.COM
A Critics’ Choice gong for an indigenous grape from Sardinia illustrates why its submitter, ItalyAbroad.com, won our Newcomer of the Year Merchant Award (see p.266). A fascinating wine that intrigued our judges, this comes from family-owned vineyards facing the sea, and an estate named after the distinctive stone towers, the nuraghi, that pepper the island. The elegant wine marries plums and morello cherries with a savoury savoir faire. A real find.

10. ELEPHANT HILL AIRAVATA SYRAH 2009, HAWKES BAY, NEW ZEALAND
£23.26 @ COE VINTNERS
Crowning a succession of top awards for this relatively new Hawkes Bay winery comes this Critics’ Choice gong for its top Syrah, the Airavata. Loved for its expressive bouquet, with spicy ripe fruit, menthol and tobacco notes, what lifted it ahead of the pack was its deft integration of oak, its sumptuous structure and its lingering finish. Enjoy.

11. EL NIDO 2009, JUMILLA, SPAIN
£75.00 @ BOUTINOT
An incredible price for an incredible wine. But then look at its creators: the celebrated Gil family and equally talented Australian Chris Ringland. Getting together just 10 years ago, this is a 70:30 blend of 25-year-old Cabernet Sauvignon with old bush vine Monastrell, which boasts an almost indescribable complexity of rich, spicy flavours married with opulent ripe fruit. Prepare to swoon.

12. SIMCIC LEONARDO 2005, GORISKA BRDA, SLOVENIA
£23.85 (37.5CL) @ BANCROFT WINES
This distinctive wine wowed the critics throughout. But then its birth is quite distinctive too. The Ribolla grapes spend seven months air-drying in wooden cases before being pressed using a traditional hand press, fermented in 130-litre oak barrels and further matured in barrel for two-and-a-half years. The result? A ‘multidimensional’ wine, with ‘infinite concentration’ and ‘fantastic balance’. Pale tawny in colour, the nose alone mixes chocolate orange with caramel, honey and christmas spices.