

EL VIAJE

Next week, Sharon and I fly to Marrakech to act as wine experts for Lindblad Expeditions. After a tour of the Atlas Mountains, we will board the National Geographic Endeavor in Safi and sail to Kenitra. From there, we head north to Portugal for several stops including a visit to a port lodge in Oporto. Leaving Portugal, we stop in northern Spain and Mont St. Michel, France before disembarking in Portsmouth, England.

WINE

Last week Sharon navigated four industry wine tastings where she met with Spanish winemakers and sampled a huge array of exciting new releases. Out of a hundred wines tasted, these really stood out:

SIX REDS

Salanques, Priorat, 2005, \$45.00: This younger sibling of Mas Doix is *muy* tasty and it is ready to drink now! More fruit forward than other wines from the Priorat, it has plenty of structure along with balanced flavors of ripe currant, mint and an enjoyable flintiness. 93 points from his honor, Robert Parker.

Hacienda Monasterio Ribera del Duero, 2004, \$50.00:

An old favorite of ours! We have always loved this exquisitely crafted wine from Peter Sisseck. A small amount of cabernet in the blend gives it tremendous structure and on the palate, flavors of ripe plum and blackberry meld with notes of tar and smoke. Will improve for 20 years but we aren't waiting ~ 94 points from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate.

Rondan, Rioja, 2001, \$10.99:

When we tasted this tempranillo from Rioja, we were blown away by the quality at this price. It is packed with layer after layer of ripe bing cherry, vanilla and leather flavors. At our house, it paired perfectly with gambas *al ajillo* but would compliment with any dish incorporating garlic. Poured by the glass at Tango Restaurant.

Customer favorites now back in stock:

Semele, Ribera del Duero, 2002, \$12.99:

This great wine from Ribera del Duero is a steal at \$12.99. Inky as night, with flavors of rich black cherry and a touch of muskiness, this wine opens up nicely after a little breathing. Delicious from the first taste!

M-5, Monastrell, \$12.99:

This 100% monastrell is rich and dense, with aromas of fresh berries and expressive ripe fruit. "Dark, ruby colored, it has a serious perfume of smoke, mineral, blueberry and blackberry. Ripe and full flavored, it has excellent depth and length." ~ 90 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate

BEST BUY

Evohe, Somotano, 2005, \$8.99: One of the best wines available from D. O. Somotano, this old vine garnacha packs power and full ripe fruit. It's great with spicy foods so open a bottle and throw some ribs on the BBQ to celebrate spring. If you are looking for a budget-friendly weeknight wine, this one can't be beat!

THREE WHITES

Veramonte Sauvignon Blanc Reserva 2007 \$8.99: This lovely non-oaked Sauvignon Blanc from Chile is made in the style of a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and is a terrific bargain! The grassy, grapefruit flavors on the front end lead to a pleasingly tart, long finish. Well structured, this is a perfect wine to serve with cracked dungeness crab.

Pedrolonga Albari o, 2006, \$26.99:

This fantastic Albari o is one of the best white wines I've ever tasted. Elegantly crafted, the delicate green apple and citrus flavors are backed up with subtle minerality and a long lingering finish.

Now back in stock, our best selling Rueda!

Basa, Rueda 2007, \$11.99:

This wine from Telmo Rodriguez is one of our all time favorites! Fermented in stainless steel and made with 50% Verdejo, 40% Viura, and 10% Sauvignon Blanc, the crisp and crunchy texture is plain delightful. Notes of grapefruit, white currants and flowers come together on the palate with an excellent underlying acidity.

MOTHER'S DAY

Sunday, May 11th is Mother's Day. We have great and unique gift. We just received a new shipment of

hand painted ceramics from Spain and for Basque mothers, have trays decorated with Basque figures. We also just restocked **Maja soap** & hand lotion. For foodie mothers, what could be more perfect than a gift of **Jamón Iberico**? And

to really celebrate the day, serve a bottle of bubbly, **Cava**, traditional white or a cheerful sparkling dry rosado.

TAPAS

We like to keep ingredients for a few simple tapas on hand. One thing we like to have handy is a jar of **Matiz Olive Spread**. It now comes in three flavor profiles, hot, traditional and sweet. The hot actually comes from an olive with natural spiciness. Sugar is added to make the sweet version. Serve with crackers or bread.

Cantimpalitos

are another favorite. These little, bite-sized chorizos, can be kept sealed in your reefer until you need them. Then braise them using a little left over wine or sherry. Spear each with a toothpick and you have a tapa.

QUESO DE LA SEMANA

Kaikou:

A pasteurized sheeps' milk cheese from the Pays Basque region. Currently at the Spanish table we carry 7 different delicious Basque region sheep milk cheeses; Kaikou is our customers favorite. Kaikou is nutty, buttery and slightly herbaceous with a delicate, smooth texture. This wonderfully balanced complexity of flavors will please the most discriminating palate.

Feta:

We carry an assortment of feta cheeses. Everyone knows to include feta in Greek salad but the other night we served roasted feta to our dinner guests' enthusiastic response:

Roasted Feta:

Preheat your oven to 375. Place a 6 oz block of Feta in a small (12 cm) cazuela. Sprinkle about 1 teaspoon Oregano over it then drizzle with 1 tablespoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil. Grind 1/2 teaspoon pepper on it and slide the cazuela into the oven and bake 12-15 minutes until top is golden. Anoint with a splash of EVOO and serve with sturdy crackers.

Steve Winston & Sharon Baden, Owners