

price.

8) Showing the magnificence of the nebbiolo grape, **Marchesi di Barolo's** 2004 Barolo (\$55) made me confident that the traditional methods, combined with modern technology, will always produce wines with the distinctive taste of the terroir. The balance of alcohol and tannins is perfect, and though young, this is a wine to drink with great pleasure right now and to cherish having in the future.

Sirah

9) I'm not ready to get overly excited by most current offerings of American petite sirah (shiraz in Australia and New Zealand), but the 2004 vintage by California's **Ehrhardt Estates Winery** Clarksburg (\$26) hits that sweet spot of price versus value with minty, peppery mineral notes and complexity throughout. The ideal wine for roast pork or a hot dog slathered with strong mustard.

10) I drink more and more riesling these days because as the sweetness drops away and Germany, Austria, Alsace and America learn to make drier styles with better balance of fruit and acid, I find them attractive as aperitifs and as wines that go best with seafood. I particularly love Fritz Haag Brauneberger Juffer Sonnenuhr Auslese (\$35), a bold, bright, peachy wine as good with poached trout as with a pan of hot chestnuts.

(John Mariani writes on wine for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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Top 10 Wines Feature Duckhorn Merlot, Clos Du Val Chardonnay

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Review by John Mariani



Jan. 5 (Bloomberg) -- There's an old saying that you deserve to drink a good wine in good times and need to drink one in bad times. Fortunately, I drank enough reasonably priced good wines in 2008 to avoid Grand Cru withdrawal.

Here are my picks, in no particular order, for the 10 best wines I drank in 2008 and have every intention of enjoying in 2009. All are available in stores or online.

1) Barbera wines, especially from the Alba and Asti regions, have risen well above their once pedestrian image. One of the finest Piedmontese winemakers and consultants, **Renato**

Ratti, makes a big, beautiful, bountiful Barbera d'Alba Torriglione 2006 that ranks with more illustrious wines from the region that cost three times as much. At just \$20, it brimmed with fruit and had the faint, farm-like back taste I'd missed in so many other examples.

2) A vintage Champagne under \$100 a bottle? Yes, indeed: **Charles Heidsieck** Blanc des Millenaires Brut 1995 (\$90) has just the right age on it for real character, which in this case is woodsy, not musty, with none of that faint oxidation that can so easily push vintage bubbly over the edge.

3) Chateau Rocher-Calon is a big, brawny Saint-Emilion from the excellent 2005 Bordeaux vintage. It's as easy to enjoy for its richness with a sirloin as with a honey lamb stew, and at about \$19 a bottle it's an outright steal. It will also take some aging, so at this price, stock up.

Chardonnay, Merlot

4) **Clos Du Val** has long been one of my favorite California wineries, with more than three decades of experience on its side. It shows in the delightfully crisp 2006 Chardonnay (\$24) with its pretty vanilla notes. This is a cool-climate chardonnay, easily distinguishable from the overripe, heavily oaked examples from other parts of Napa Valley.

5) American merlot has suffered from too much success, which has led too many wineries to make the stuff. One of the first in Napa to champion the grape was **Duckhorn**, whose 2004 Estate Grown Napa Valley Merlot (\$85) I would rank with the finest from France's Pomerol district, certainly a match for chateaux like Clinet, L'Evangile and Latour- Pomerol. Duckhorn tastes of plums and sage, with 5 percent cabernet franc blended in.

Chile

6) Don Melchor's 2002 cabernet blend shows at every level just how fine the best wines of Chile can be, especially those from the Maipo Valley. This one is layered with spice, tannins, fruit and acid in lovely equilibrium and will taste even better next year and the next. At about \$50 it's a great wine for winter's meats and game.

7) As Champagne houses go drier and drier with their wines, the sparkling market elsewhere is retaining a commitment to the expressive flavor of the grape itself. **Lucien Albrecht** Cremant d'Alsace Brut Rose (\$20) is pure enchantment, with a medium-rich body and enough zesty effervescence to drink with spicy Asian food. Nothing out of the Champagne region comes close at this