

When I am asked about what wines I have tasted recently, I always have a list. Sometimes I am amazed at how long it is.

Recently I spoke to a class at Auburn. All the students were taking a beverage management course as a part of their requirements for their degrees in the Hotel and Restaurant program. I do this every semester and always enjoy it.

The students asked me about wines I had tasted that day. I stopped and thought. When I did, I realized I had already tasted 15 wines starting around 10 AM. They had 3 more for me to taste and talk to them about.

The subject that day was Champagne and other sparkling wines. The ones they had were a Spanish Cava, an Italian Asti and a French sparkling from the Loire. As we talked about sparklings in general, the students practiced opening, pouring and tasting these wines.

Spanish Cavas represent one the best values in all of wine. For around \$10 you can get a solid sparkling wine that will please most anyone. The same is true for French non-Champagnes. Bouvet, the one we had, is very good and less than \$15.

Italian Asti Spumantes are sweet – sometimes very sweet. For a lighter version try Moscato d’Asti. They are lighter and have fine bubbles.

This summer I have tasted some other sparklings. Those include a stunning Prosecco from Santa Eurosia. At around \$20 it is a great wine. I was also impressed with the Mastro Colombo Prosecco. These two are really fine sparklings.

Staying with Italian wines, I have tasted several dozen this summer. It has been fun because I really enjoy Italian wines.

Pinot Grigio can be an insipid wine. Some of them have almost no color, nose or flavor. Thankfully this isn’t always the case.

The best I tasted was Jermann Pinot Grigio. It was rich in flavor with a long finish. That’s saying a lot for a light wine. Another good one on the bargain side is from Baroncini.

A third one that I liked is Cantina Valdadige Pinot Grigio. It is from the Vallagarina production area. I have added this one to Jimmy's wine list.

Some other Italian white wines of interest are Toscolo Vernaccia, Farnese Trebbiano d'Abruzzo and Cantina Santadi Vermentino Solais. These are all reasonable values and are solid wines. You will find them to be quite food friendly.

On the red side of Italian wines, I have tasted several outstanding examples. The Basilicata Rosso I had was very nice. It had lots of good fruit and flavor. I was very good just to drink – food or not.

A good one from the south of Italy was Cantore Nero d'Avolo. Some wines from this grape and very hot climate can be plain and boring. Not this one. And at \$13 it is a good value.

One of my favorites was I Piston Barbera. It is a powerhouse and very enjoyable. The downside is it was made only in 1.5 liter bottles. But at less than \$40 for what equals two bottles, it is reasonably priced.

Two really fine reds I tasted are Steza Amarone and La Velona Brunello di Montalcino. These are world-class wines and hard to find. The cost will be \$60 to \$80. So they are a special occasion bottle. I added both of them to the list at Jimmy's.

Sterza also makes a "Ripassa" – sort of a junior Amarone. At half the price, it is a find worth getting.

From the Kiona Winery in Washington State we often have nice wines at affordable prices. Two new ones they have released are real winners. They have the great names of Vivacious Vicky White and Red.

These are fun names and fun wines. The name comes from the winemaker's wife, Vicky. He says she lives up to the name.

These are both blends of whatever juice isn't used in other Kiona bottlings. The white has good shot of Chenin Blanc. The red uses some Lemberger. This is nice grape found in Washington.

These wines full and fruity – perfect for tailgating. The winery says they are "racy, delicious and easy to enjoy." You can sure smell and taste them outside. And at around \$10 you can get several.

By the way, the Alabama ABC Board hasn't nixed this label. Better get yours soon. You never can tell.

I also tasted wines from L'Ecole 41. They always make a very good Cabernet. The Kiona Ice Wine made from Chenin Blanc was a good one, too.

From Twenty Rows Cellars in California I tasted their Merlot and Cabernet. The Cabernet is on Jimmy's list. But the one that impressed me most was called "The Grappeler." It's a red blend that is excellent. At no more than \$20, it is a fine one to check out.

Speaking of fine wines, I tasted several new releases from Australia. Two of them were so good that I have to tell you about them.

The first is Lake Breeze Grenache. It is from the lesser-known area of Langhorne Creek. This is a real fruit bomb. It is very nice and a joy to drink. At around \$25 it won't break the bank.

The other one is Hugo Estate Reserve Shiraz. Wow what a good wine. Let's say better than good. The flavors were plentiful and really long lasting. At around \$40 it is special bottle but one I recommend seeking out. I am adding it to Jimmy's list this month.

We are fortunate to have several excellent sources to shop for wines in our area. Rick at The Brass Brassiere, Christine at Christine's and Gus at Fine Wines and Beer by Gus all have lots of wine and knowledge about them. Both our Kroger stores have plenty of wine. Jacob and Stan can help you find exactly what you want.

So all in all it's been a fun tasting summer. The good part - summer's not over. It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it.