

# The StarPhoenix

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So here's an offer to all the wine connoisseurs out there. You bring a bottle of your wine rated 98 points and I'll bring two similar wines rated less than 95. If you can spot your wine, I'll pay for all three. If you can't, you pay for all three, and throw in another bottle of your 98 pointer.

A couple of weeks ago, Sotheby's auctioned off about \$14 million in wine in Hong Kong. Top price went for a 2005 Romanee Conti, roughly four thousand a bottle. First growth Bordeaux was not far off this mark.

People are always in pursuit of perfection. But they forget that the closer you get, the flatter the ascent. Each increment closer to perfection costs you more and more money.

The Brits - the main market for Bordeaux until a couple of years ago - realize this, and have been cheerfully substituting wines from Chile, New Zealand (Hawkes Bay is hot, hot, hot amongst the cognoscenti), and Australia. You can buy wines the Brits, or at least Wine Advocate, rates around 95 sometimes higher for well under a hundred.

If you're rich, I guess those extra three points are worth eight hundred a glass. Me, I'm not so sure.

High end wines from Chile have been trickling into our market for the last five or six years, and I have yet to find one that wasn't worth every penny and then some. Most of them, are

spectacular wines and in the context of Californian and French pricing, spectacular values.

While I love all these wines, they are all different, with much different emphasis within the blends. You need to know what you like, and then explore from there.

**Korta Gran Reserva** is new here and is a great example of why you need to try them all. It's a dark wine, the kind you suspect of harbouring mysteries worth exploring. How can you not take the plunge?

The nose is tremendous: Spicy, hinting at herbs and roasted meats. The palate is remarkably restrained, like James Bond in a tux, trying to hide the muscles. Balanced, thoroughly affable, with a long finish it's a very fine wine.

Grapes? Ah, there's the rub. Petit verdot (40 per cent), syrah, cabernet franc and carmenere (20 per cent each). On paper I find this a typically Chilean eccentric combination. In my glass, well I'll have another please.



**JAMES  
ROMANOW**  
Wine and spirits

**Clos Apalta by Lapostolle** is a more typically Chilean blend, but still unique in the world. This wine was also quite dark in the glass, with a neutral sort of nose, mostly fruit, oak, and a little graphite.

The graphite is of course courtesy of the majority grape, carmenere, at 61 per cent. Cabernet sauvignon and merlot make up another 36 and the last bit is petit verdot.

Although Americans love this wine and winery, the Brits are still a little leery, probably because of the carmenere. I'm surprised because it strikes me as a thoroughly French wine, unfiltered, unfinned, with firm tannins, a dry finish, and an elegant palate. You can drink it now or cellar it for at least another five years.

**Don Amado** was an early example of Chile's high end. This is a wine slightly tilted towards the New World style. Not, I hasten to add, because it's a fruit bomb, but because it's 80 per cent cabernet sauvignon. This grants it shelf space in stores sorting by varietal (and high end red buyers believe themselves all to be lovers of cab sauvignon, despite the huge presence of merlot in their wines).

Regardless of the grapes I love this wine and still think it amongst the best deals in the SLGA. It was the lightest in colour, with a slightly reticent bouquet. The palate is dry, lean and

clean, and the finish the brightest of these wines, with a bit of fruit and the slightest hint of sweetness.

**Don Melchor** is another wine aimed at us New Worlders. Again it is almost entirely cab sauvignon, 96 per cent, with a touch of cab franc to add some earth to the sauvignon fruitiness. The palate is big, fruity and just a touch herbaceous. The acidity is crisp, the finish mellow and slightly sweet.

Regardless of which of these wines you like, they are all wonderful. Enjoy.

**Korta Grand Reserve**, Lontue Valley, Chile 2007.

**Clos Apalta, Lapostolle**, Apalta, Colchagua, Chile 2006. \$74.22

**Don Melchor, Concha Y Toro**, Puente Alta, Maipo, Chile 2006. \$74.22

**Don Amado, Torreón de Paredes**, Rengo, Chile, Chile 2006. \$35.95