



Rick's Grape Skinny



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"I have enjoyed great health at a great age because every day since I can remember, I have consumed a bottle of wine except when I have not felt well. Then I have consumed two bottles!"
(Bishop of Seville)

Italy's Crown Jewels!

England's Crown Jewels are indeed gemstones...and are best exemplified by the famous *Imperial State Crown*...a modest little headpiece consisting of 3,000 set baubles that showcase that 317 carat Cullinan Diamond!!



Italy's Crown Jewels however are not precious stones at all. Rather, they are orbs of another type – grapes – and the universally coveted wines they yield.



Wine of course is at the core of Italy's rich history...when it was known in ancient times as *Enotria* (Land of Wine). As such, Italy was the virtual epicenter of the world's first globally traded product...wine! A few millennia later, *vino* is also the cornerstone of Italy's current prominence as the leading producer of wine in the world! *Salute!*

What are Italy's "Eno-Jewels?"

Great question...and one that I'm asked repeatedly. The short answer is – there many gems...both red and white...but for this edition, let's stick with six of the "rubies!"

Italy's Top Red Wine Gems

First and foremost is the *King of Wines* and the *Wine of Kings* – *Barolo*. From the *Piemonte* (Piedmont) Region, *Barolo* is made from 100% *Nebbiolo* grapes – and by law, it it's aged for a minimum of 38 months before release...18 of which must be in wood. If it's aged 5 years or more before release, it can be classified as a *Riserva*. *Barolo* is also noted for its long track record of earning 100 point ratings. *Can you say ka-ching, ka-ching!?*

Barbaresco is the next Italian wine gem...and like *Barolo*, it too is from *Piemonte* and made from the *Nebbiolo* grape. But, *Barbaresco* is aged for only 2 years -- with 1 year in oak.

Amarone -- my favorite Italian wine -- is the third great Italian red wine. From the *Veneto* Region, it's made from a blend of partially raisined grapes...making it one of the world's most distinctively and flavorful wines. \$\$\$!

Brunello di Montalcino is Italian wine pearl #4...and for my money, it is *Tuscany's* brightest star! Long thought to be a distinctive grape that only grew around *Montalcino*, it turns out that *Brunello* is genetically identical to *Sangiovese* – the same grape from which its more famous *Tuscan* cousin, *Chianti*, is made. *Chianti* of course is also a gemstone among Italy's Crown Jewels.

Rounding out the line-up of jewels are the more recently "discovered" *Super Tuscans* from *Bolgheri* and *Nero d'Avola* from *Sicily*...which, if you've never enjoyed, waste not another minute! Both are "must try!"



Toast of the Month



“Here’s to the almighty dollar...without which, none of us would have any cents!”
(Anonymous)

The Monthly Bunch!

Red

Zinfandel

1000 Stories Bourbon Barrel Aged 2014

Rich, Luxuriant, Sensuous, and Sexy!

(Mendocino -- Hopland, CA)/\$16-\$18

This deep, dark and über-delicious “Zin twist” is the brainchild of the self-proclaimed rebels of the ever-creative and ambitious Fetzer Wine Group. They aren’t the first to age wine in retired bourbon barrels...but they just might be the best. After dabbling with aging *Cabernet Sauvignon* in used bourbon barrels, they quickly abandoned that endeavor and soon discovered a perfect – if not simple -- union with *Zinfandel*. Each lot of wine is first aged in a combination of French and American oak. Then, a portion of the blend is aged in new bourbon barrels --after which the entire kit and caboodle is aged in used bourbon barrels from various (unspecified) distilleries. How much more American can you get than marrying *Zinfandel* with Bourbon!? Oh...and the 1000 Stories name? Well that odd moniker...along with the wine’s association with the imagery of the mighty Buffalo...are anchored in the “thousand stories” that define our national heritage, and the indefatigable pioneering spirit, hard work, and tenacity that underpin our culture and traditions. And uniquely, they do not advertise a single bit...preferring instead to let the word spread organically among those who know and appreciate a great American wine when they see one! <http://www.1000storieswines.com/>

Cabernet Sauvignon

Mondavi Aged in Bourbon Barrels 2014

(Central Coast – Napa, CA)/\$10-\$12

Deep, Dark and Delicious! A Real Winner! There isn’t a winery or winemaker out there that isn’t trying hard to develop some new wrinkle or nuance in their wines that might give them a

competitive edge – and aging in used bourbon barrels is the latest craze. Hey, it does make a difference...and for those who might find a typical *Cabernet Sauvignon* a tad austere for their palate, the bourbon barrel treatment does seem to tame the tannins – and it does so quite deliciously I hasten to add. Go treat yourself – you’re worth it! Give this new-kid-on-the-block a try and let me know what you think!

<http://www.robertmondaviprivateselection.com/>

Rosé

Blend

Charles and Charles Rosé 2014

Succulent, Mouthwatering & Totally Delicious!
(Columbia Valley, Walla Walla, WA) \$11-\$13

The “Charles and Charles” refers to Charles Bieler and Charles Smith – two of the smartest and best winemaking “wise guys” you could ever meet. Smith is known for his eponymous Charles Smith Wines...while Mr. Bieler is known more for being a winemaking renegade! Interestingly, Monsieur Bieler worked at *Château Routas* – one of France’s most prestigious Rosé producers -- for the better part of 2 years. When he returned from Provence, he drove around the US in a pink Cadillac for about a year hawking *Château Routas Rosé*. These days, when he’s not teamed up with his eno-bud Charles Smith, he’s one of the infamous *Three Thieves* Winemaking team – with Joel Gott and Roger Scommegna being the other two. With a floral nose and fruit-salad palate of flavor, this is a sassy but savory blend of Rhone mainstays – 72% Syrah, 8% Mourvedre, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Grenache, 3% Cinsault, and 3% Counoise. It’s a super versatile “Dry Rosé” that’s a great Spring and Summer porch wine as well as an exceptional food wine! It’s what I call bottled rainbows!

<http://bielerandsmith.com/>