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IGNATIUS LOW

Why do Singaporeans travel to the same old places?

Page 11



thesundaytimes December 21, 2008

lifestyle

Wine Club/Jenny Tan

Herdade de Esporao Reserva 2007, \$45

'Trade down' and drink up

Conversations with wine distributors and retailers in the last few months have constantly led to the same topic: Are consumers drinking in this recession?

The general consensus is that Singaporeans are not giving up drinking wine, even though the term "trading down", which refers to buying wines that are cheaper, was often cited.

"The crunch will come after Chinese New Year. It's generally a quiet period, and 2009 will be worse," a distributor said dolefully over drinks on Wednesday night.

But there are a few silver linings. For one, the many wine sales and generous discounts that distributors have been throwing to offload their current stock have been a wonderful opportunity to spot bargains and stock up one's personal cellar - from cheap table wine to collectibles.

And the recessionist attitude, which is to hunt for super-value wines at lower prices, only means that former label drinkers (wine consumers who drink highly-rated, prestigious wines) are now forced to look elsewhere for alternatives.

Countries such as South Africa, Austria, and the lesser marketed areas in Spain and Italy (such as Toro or Marche), are goldmines where value is concerned.

Another country to keep on the radar is Portugal, which is trying to shed its "port only" image to prove it can produce good white and red wines.

This underrated historical wine-producing country boasts the first demarcated wine region in the world, Douro (founded in 1756). It also has more than 500 native varietals, coupled with a spectrum of various micro-climates.

The result? A dazzling selection of wine styles.

The most famous grapes from Portugal, the Touriga Nacional, often the backbone for ports, have also made their entrance as serious red table wines. These small berries, with their high concentration of sweetness, tannins and aromas, produce wines with fruity ripeness and floral notes. Like the ports, these red table wines generally have the potential to age.

Lesser known white wines are also worth watching out for. The Vinho

Verde, a style of Portuguese white wine that is light and crisp from the Minho region, is perfect for Singapore's hot weather.

Alentejo, which is the most progressive of Portugal's wine regions, may be known for its masculine reds that need time to age, but new winemaking techniques have made the whites noteworthy.

With so much value wines out there to explore, there is no reason why 2009 should be a quiet year for the wine scene.

Taste test

This wine has been aged in oak barrels, and the slightly oaky, nutty notes on the nose bear testimony to that. A fleshy wine, with tropical fruits and melon flavours on the palate. Made from Roupeiro, Arinto and Antao Vaz grapes.

Pair with

Seafood dishes, sashimi and salads.

Available at

Viva Vino, tel: 6291-7866,

e-mail: general@vivavino.com.sg



WIN!

Tell us, in 50 to 100 words, why you will still spend on wines next year. The best three entries will each win a bottle of Herdade de Esporao Reserva 2007, worth \$45.

E-mail entries with your name, IC number and address to stife@sph.com.sg

Indicate LIFE/HERDADE in your header. Deadline is noon on Thursday.

Winners of the LIFE/WOLF contest are:
1. Kwan Edwina
2. Cheong Danny