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Fit unfashionably good tastes to these 5 types

WINE / Paul Lukacs



Wine and fashion have much in common. Hemlines go up and down, just as certain wines go in and out of style. With cabernet as with couture, what's in demand at any given time often has more to do with trends or fads than inherent quality.

The big difference is that with wine you never need to worry about being out of step. That's because when you drink a glass, you care about how it tastes, not how you look.

Genuine wine lovers (as opposed to image-conscious collectors) know that some of the most exciting buys often are wines that are out of fashion. That's because demand hasn't made them scarce or inflated their price tags.

What's hot today? California zinfandel, as well as Australian shiraz, 2000 Bordeaux, and just about anything red from Tuscany. You can find delicious wines in those categories, but you'll likely pay top dollar, and the very best bottles may be hard to locate.

By contrast, categories that are currently unfashionable can contain delicious wines that often represent significant bargains. Here are five such types, with brief explanations of why you might want to try them, as well as specific recommendations of wines to buy.

California Petite Sirah

Petite sirah is California's forgotten grape. Widely planted a generation ago, when it was used as a base in many popular generic-labeled blends, it has fallen out of favor today. Why? One explanation may be that, as a single varietal, it has no prestigious European counterpart. California producers like to measure their chardonnays against white Burgundies, their cabernets against red Bordeaux. They have no such foil for petite.

This grape does, in fact, hail from France, where it is known as durif. It plays a minor in the Bordeaux hinterlands, but stars on its own in California, although few people notice, anymore.

Thick-skinned and quite tannic, petite sirah yields dark, winter-weight wines, full of earthy, brambly flavors. The best come from old vines with low yields, so the grape is extremely concentrated.

German Riesling
Loire Valley
Dry Rose
Southern Italy

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