

DRINK: PATIO PARTNERS GRAPES THAT GO WITH GRILLS. PLUS, GRÜNER VELTLINER, THE NEW IT WINE. BY CHRISTINA BURRIDGE

Belgians may make 365 different beers, but by the end of a recent two-week trip to Brussels I was frankly nostalgic for the staid, old LDB. Restaurant wine lists were solidly conservative, all too often the last refuge for thin, overpriced wines from obscure French producers. Few regional wines, no Italian, no Spanish, no Portuguese, no New World. For those with money—such as EU bureaucrats—there's more choice, but mainly limited to just about every great and good name from the classic regions of France at stratospheric prices.

Still, it was the beginning of summer and I ate asperges à la flamande every day, sometimes twice: big, fat spears of white asparagus, bruised with purple at the tip, served Flemish-style, drowned in melted butter and festooned with chopped-up hard-boiled eggs. Asparagus and eggs go beautifully together but not so well with wine. Alsace Pinot Gris worked nicely but best (though by far the most expensive) was a nutty, barrel-aged white Graves from Château Chantegrive.

Home again after two weeks of butter, cream and eggs, I was craving the sharp, bright chili, lime and cilantro flavours of Thai food. And I found a new wine to go with them: Grüner Veltliner, the trademark wine of Austria. Don't let the name put you off—it means green grape from the village of Veltline where it's been made for hundreds of years. Wine lovers in New York and Seattle, jaded by too much boring chardonnay, are drinking it up, and now Vancouver gets a chance to see why. Energetic Austrian-born wine agent Alexander Kolterer started bringing it a few months ago and is convinced that GV will be equally successful here. He's importing two from Frank, a producer in Lower Austria. (1) The basic GV appeals for its mineral, peppery, lemon and honey flavour and its fairly low alcohol content. Pale, yellowy green, the slight sweetness offset by sharp citrus, it's perfect well-chilled after work, before a meal or while sitting in the sun with nothing much to do. (2) The Johannesbergen is a single vineyard GV, fatter but still with a steely edge, crisp apple and pear flavours with a bit of wood smoke. Satisfyingly full-bodied, it goes swimmingly with seafood and loves Thai green curries and noodle dishes.

Rosé is my favourite warm weather wine because it always tastes better outdoors and it pairs with almost everything. Buyer beware, though. This LDB doesn't do well by rosé wine, with far too many tired, old vintages on the shelf; we should be drinking the 2003s, so anything older than 2002 is definitely

suspect. At an outdoor lunch of grilled skewers of lamb with grilled eggplant, red pepper and a big dollop of yogurt on the side, the Sicilian Rosé di Regaleali was extraordinarily good (3). A bright, cherry red with lots of acidity and lively raspberry and blackberry flavour, it's a rosé masquerading as a light red wine, one that's perfectly happy with red meat.

Another barbecue favourite is the new vintage of the Okanagan Valley Tinhorn Creek Merlot released earlier this year (4). From the long, hot summer of 2001, it's ripe and fruity with lots of spice and blackberry. Terrific with lamb burgers, Italian sausages or meaty grilled portobello mushrooms.

One of the pleasures of wine is returning to an old favourite, especially when it turns out even better than in memory. It's probably 20 years since I've bought a bottle of Periquita, a bargain Portuguese standby from the days of painfully limited choice at the LDB (5). A light red wine from the traditional grape varieties of Castela, Trincadeira and Aragonez from south of Lisbon, it has recently been updated by José Maria da Fonseca, the company making it for 150 years. Cherries, raspberries, plum flavours, herbs, spice and a light hand with the oak make it simply delicious summer drinking with just about everything. Except perhaps asperges à la flamande. ●

1. Grüner Veltliner 2002, Frank, specialty listing, \$15.95 2. Grüner Veltliner Johannesbergen 2002, Frank, private wine stores and good restaurants 3. Rose di Regaleali 2002, Conte de Tasca Almerita, specialty listing, limited supply 4. Tinhorn Creek 2001 Merlot, specialty listing, \$18.50 5. Periquita 2000, Jose Maria da Fonseca, specialty listing, \$10.95

