

# What we were, and will be, drinking

**(1) BACK IN BUSINESS:** We have “no special talents or purpose” in the business of retailing alcohol, the government told us in July 2002. Unfortunately that didn’t mean they would be turning it over to those who have. So we’re stuck with our talentless and purposeless monopoly indefinitely. And as of February, we get to pay an extra three percent tax on our purchases as well. Better hope the extra \$55 million will keep a few more hospital beds open.

**(2) WHAT WE’RE MISSING:** On one side of the street, there’s the sad, drab government liquor store in the Harbour Centre; on the other, the brand new “Wine Thief” store, part of the Steamworks Brewpub (375 Water Street, 604-689-8729). The LDB store is as interesting as Wal Mart on a rainy day; Steamworks has a couple of hundred well-chosen wines, attractively merchandized, mainly in the \$15-30 range. A good place to get hard-to-find B.C. and Australian wines like Stag’s Hollow Merlot (\$19.75) or Rothbury Estate Brokenback Shiraz (\$31.25).

**(3) WHAT WE’RE DRINKING:** According to the LDB, our favourite wine is the bargain-priced Farnese Sangiovese (\$8.18), by now an urban legend, the Vancouver equivalent of California’s Two Buck Chuck. After that it’s Wolf Blass Yellow Label Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.61), Jackson-Triggs Proprietor’s Selection Merlot (\$9.79) and Lindeman’s Bin 65 Chardonnay (\$11.99). In the Lower Mainland, reds are still red hot, especially 2000 Bordeaux and Argentina.

**(4) AND WHAT WE’LL BE DRINKING NEXT:** ABC—once it meant Anything but Chardonnay, now it means Anything but Common. The private wine stores all agree that their customers want Albarino, Barbera and Carignan, not to mention Dolcetto, Grenache, Grüner Veltliner, Marsanne, Mourvèdre, Verdelho and Viognier. Grapes with character and personality that make wines with aromas, textures, and tastes full of the flavour of the place they come from.



**(5) AND WHERE WILL THE WINES COME FROM:** There are high hopes for some new wines from South Africa—try the spicy, berry, cherry 2002 Fairview Pinotage (\$24) at Liberty Wine Merchants. Spain is satisfying—look for the new Artadi Tinto Garnacha (Grenache) from Navarra at Marquis Wine Cellars (about \$20); and Portugal is promising—a leading European wine merchant calls it the new Eldorado. The intense, gamey 2001 Quinta de Chocapalha from Estramadura is a stunning LDB buy in limited supply at \$15.45.

**(6) AND B.C. OF COURSE:** B.C. VQA now accounts for 16 percent of provincial wine sales. No one would now dispute that we can make great reds, though rarely in great quantities. And we’re getting good at marketing. You might not have bought Pinot Noir from the Fraser Valley’s A’Very Fine Winery (owned by the Avery family) but maybe you will now that it’s called Lotusland from Mt. Lehmann Vineyards, sporting a striking label that uses people and places to remind us that B.C.’s a very fine place to live.

**(7) AND BETTER:** Premiumization—it’s an ugly word, but that’s what the LDB and every booze news website calls drinking less but better. The trick is to make sure that you are getting more value than you pay for whether the bottle costs \$15 or \$55. One reason why wines from off the well-worn wine track are becoming so popular—an unusual beauty is the supple, rounded Vina Doña Paula Malbec from Argentina (\$18.95) with its warm blackberry fruit.

**(8) RESTAURANTS KNOW THIS:** The old rule of buying a boring brand from the LDB and doubling the price is dying, if not entirely dead. Cru has a neat, colour-coded list that makes it dead easy to match wine with food. Parkside offers 60 unusual wines under \$60—and most of them are well under that. Vij’s, Tojo’s, Banana Leaf, Simply Thai, Velvet and Wild Rice

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