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## IN THIS ISSUE...

### Moody's Hot Ten

- Value #1  
Borsao Red wine (Campo de Borja, Spain) 2005 - \$8.99
- Value #2  
Grayson Cellars Chardonnay Dry Creek Valley 2005 - \$9.99
- Value #3  
Wolf Blass Merlot (South Australia) 2004 - \$11.99
- Value #4  
Pretty Sally Estate Rose` (Victoria, Australia) 2006 - \$14.95
- Value #5  
Nickel & Nickel Cabernet Sauvignon Dragonfly Vineyard 2003 - \$100
- Other Great Values
- Article: Terroir

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## MOODY'S HOT TEN

### Value #1

**Borsao Red wine (Campo de Borja, Spain) 2005** — 75% Garnacha, 25% Tempranillo. Attractive presentation and surprisingly substantive wine for the price. Excellent color, attractive nose, redolent of berries and spice, and a fullness and completeness that would justify almost twice the price.

Very pleasing fruit flavors with a richness belying the price tag. Almost perfect for cheeseburgers, although will stand up to more sophisticated fare. Imported by Tempranillo, Inc., Rochester, New York. A Jorge Ordinez selection. \$8.99

[back](#)

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### Value #2

**Grayson Cellars Chardonnay Dry Creek Valley 2005** — From an AVA known for its Zinfandels, here is a crowd-pleaser at the right price. With a hardly noticeable 14.5% alcohol, it has lovely fruit and is easy on the oak.

A very good sipping Chardonnay and even better with food. Gold medals at both the San Diego International Wine Competition 2006 and the L.A. County Fair 2006. [www.graysoncellars.com](http://www.graysoncellars.com)

\$9.99.

[back](#)

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#### Value #3

**Wolf Blass Merlot (South Australia) 2004** — “Attractive plum, cherry and chocolate characteristics,” this is a ready-to-drink red for those who want to sip a red instead of a white.

Should be a great match for quail or chicken breast done the way you like it. If served with a sauce, pour a little of this into the sauce during the preparation thereof! [www.fosters.com.au](http://www.fosters.com.au)  
\$11.99

[back](#)

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#### Value #4

**Pretty Sally Estate Rose` (Victoria, Australia) 2006** — This is one of the most exciting rose`s I've tasted. It's made from 100% free-run juice from Pretty Sally's Estate Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. It is “crisp and bright with lively notes of berries, cherry and spice.”

Although made in the style of superlative French rose`s, this wine rivals the best of them if you're looking for a ripe, succulent beauty. Perfect with crab cakes at The Post Oak Grill in Houston last week. [www.prettysally.com](http://www.prettysally.com) \$14.95

[back](#)

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#### Value #5

**Nickel & Nickel Cabernet Sauvignon Dragonfly Vineyard 2003** — Even though 2002 was generally a better vintage, I prefer the 2003 Nickel & Nickel offerings. Somehow, they just keep getting better and better. Unlike parent Far Niente's outstanding Cab, which is a blend of several “home” vineyards and is more like a Meritage wine, the Nickel & Nickel wines are all single-vineyard and single-varietal.

This exciting four-acre vineyard is located at the base of Spring Mountain and has a “gentle” southern exposure. Some refer to this area as a “banana belt” microclimate. Beautiful, dark purple-garnet color with rich, ripe bold-fruit flavors. In the '02 vintage, my favorite Nickel & Nickel was the Martin Stelling. For '03, although every Nickel & Nickel I've tasted is excellent, I am partial to Dragonfly . One of the great reds in this price range that justifies the money spent. Four of the other five Nickel & Nickel Cabs are about 20% less. [www.nickelandnickel.com](http://www.nickelandnickel.com) \$100

[back](#)

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#### Other Great Values

##### White:

**Don Cristobal 1492 Chardonnay (Mendoza, Argentina) 2006** — [www.doncristobal.com.ar](http://www.doncristobal.com.ar) \$10

##### Red:

**Las Moras Bonarda (Mendoza, Argentina) 2005** — A new grape to some. Well worth a try!  
[www.fincalasmoras.com.ar](http://www.fincalasmoras.com.ar) \$7.99

**Santa Julia Merlot (Mendoza, Argentina) 2006** — From the superb Bodega Familia Zuccardi. The Santa Julia Malbec is just as good a value. [www.familiazuccardi.com](http://www.familiazuccardi.com) \$7.99 each

**Saurus Select Pinot Noir (Patagonia, Argentina) 2004** — From Familia Schroeder, the Malbec is equally good and equally priced! [www.familiaschroeder.com](http://www.familiaschroeder.com) \$14.99 each

**Terrazas Malbec Reserva (Argentina) 2004** — One of the best values in Argentinean wine today! [www.terrazasdelosandes.com](http://www.terrazasdelosandes.com) \$14.99

#### Bonus Values from Argentina:

##### White:

**O Fournier Urban UCO Sauvignon Blanc (Mendoza, Argentina) 2006** — [www.ofournier.com](http://www.ofournier.com)  
\$6.50

**Sophenia Altosur Sauvignon Blanc (Argentina) 2006** — [www.sophenia.com.ar](http://www.sophenia.com.ar) \$8.99

**Bodega Del Fin Del Mundo Postales Chardonnay(Patagonia, Argentina) 2006** — [www.bodegadelfindelmundo.com](http://www.bodegadelfindelmundo.com) \$11

**Red:**

**Finca Flichman Malbec Reserva (Argentina) 2005** — [www.flichman.com.ar](http://www.flichman.com.ar) \$9.99

**Alta Vista Premium Cabernet Sauvignon (Argentina) 2004** — [www.altavistawines.com](http://www.altavistawines.com) \$12.95

**Vicien Malbec Reserve Organic Grape (Argentina) 2006** — [www.tizac-vicien.com](http://www.tizac-vicien.com) \$13.95

**Broquel Bonarda (Mendoza, Argentina) 2004** — [www.trapiche.com.ar](http://www.trapiche.com.ar) \$16

**Bodega Norton Privada (Mendoza, Argentina) 2004** — Malbec, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. [www.norton.com.ar](http://www.norton.com.ar) \$18.95

**Trivento Malbec Golden Reserve (Argentina) 2004** — [www.trivento.com](http://www.trivento.com) \$21.95

**Dessert:**

**Santa Julia Tardio (Mendoza, Argentina) 2006** — A lovely, sweet blend of Torrentes (80%) and Viognier (20%). [www.familiazuccardi.com](http://www.familiazuccardi.com) \$12.99 (500 ml bottle)

[back](#)

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## **TERROIR**

By Denman Moody

Terroir, a French word, has been described as the combination of all the natural elements prevailing in a vineyard. Components of terroir include type and quality of soil, elevation, slope, direction the vineyard faces, amount of annual sunshine, winter freeze (or not), differences in daytime and nighttime temperature, annual rainfall, drainage, presence of fog, etc. Some add the contributions of a vineyard manager and winemaker to the mix, including their respective practices regarding thinning, space between vines, natural vs. cultured yeasts, little oak vs. lots of oak, and generally being a minimalist in the winery vs. attempting to sculpt the juice that comes from the vineyard into some particular outcome other than terroir.

In other words, each vineyard is unique in at least one aspect. For example, two vineyards ten feet away from each other might have a slightly different microclimate, disparate slopes, facing directions, soil compositions (or at least some different minerals or microorganisms living therein), etc.

A true devotee of terroir generally believes that the goal should be to do everything possible to bring out the unique aspects of a vineyard. In fact, there are certain wines of the world that some say cannot be duplicated nor even matched in quality by the same grape. I agree with the duplication part, but it is very easy to find information belying the notion that the same quality can't be matched.

All one has to do is pour through wine magazines and find out who wins, for example, international Rhone-style tastings—hint, it's sometimes not a Rhone wine—or a Bordeaux-style tasting—hint, sometimes it's not a Bordeaux. And if it were a California Meritage-style tasting, I'm certain that an Australian Cabernet/Merlot or a Super Tuscan sometimes might be the winner!

I've always had this interesting thought that I've never seen discussed. Not every vineyard in the world is perfectly situated within the scope of fabulous terroir. It seems to me that a winemaker many times tries to make the best wine he or she can—not just to bring out a possibly flawed terroir.

Another interesting idea—you'll probably recognize this one as original also—is that one's banker may actually be a part of a vineyard's terroir. If improvements need to be made to a vineyard, such as drainage, pest control, hand sorting, and other expensive items, and the banker won't loan the money, then he or she is partially responsible for the detriment of the wine by thwarting the desires of the terroir enthusiast.

There is no question that sustainable farming, organic farming, certified organic farming and the mystical biodynamic farming will add rather than subtract from a vineyard's terroir. After all, just about any foreign substance, like pesticides and inorganic fertilizers, is going to take away some of the naturalness that would otherwise prevail. On the other hand, installing owl houses and hawk stands for controlling moles and voles is not introducing a foreign substance. Likewise,

recycling crushed grape peels, seeds, leaves and stems back into the vineyard would not be considered a foreign substance.

At present, there are, among others, those who live and die by terroir, and those who understand the ramifications of the word but don't think it's that important. Obviously, those with century-old vineyards in the Old World are more inclined to this expression than a New World vintner who has just planted 10 varietals in a new vineyard location.

In blind tastings, it sometimes is not too difficult to guess a grape or even whether it's Old World or New World. But it's a horse of a different color to guess the types and mineral content of the soil the grape derived from.

In closing, although not exactly related to terroir, one great story is that of a connoisseur who guessed the mortgage on a vineyard from a sip of the current release of a local wine. He exclaimed that the wine was quite a bit off compared to previous offerings. The owner must have been in financial trouble and overcropped the vines, and by the amount the connoisseur perceived the overcropping, he guessed the amount the vintner had to borrow against the vineyard to continue in business!

[back](#)

Have a question for Denman? [Click here](#) to send him an email.