

PLENTY

IT'S EASY BEING GREEN

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

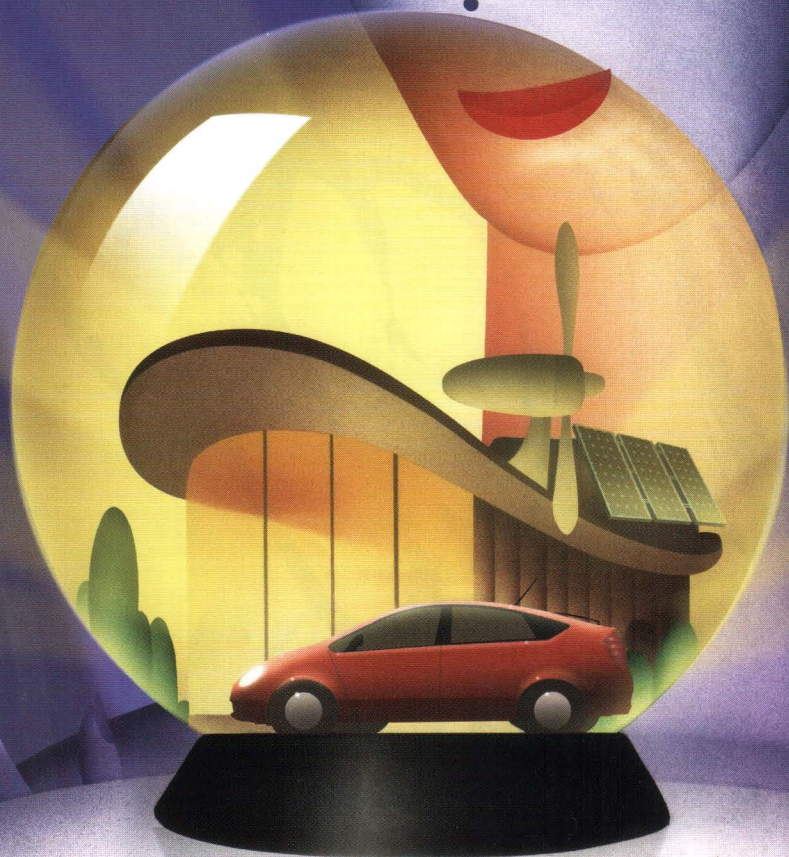
SOUPED-UP
SOLAR CELLS

HOUSES MADE
OF PAPER

HOLIDAY
SPECIAL:

- ECO-TURKEYS
- ORGANIC WINES
- REGIFTING

50
GREEN
GIFTS
UNDER
\$50



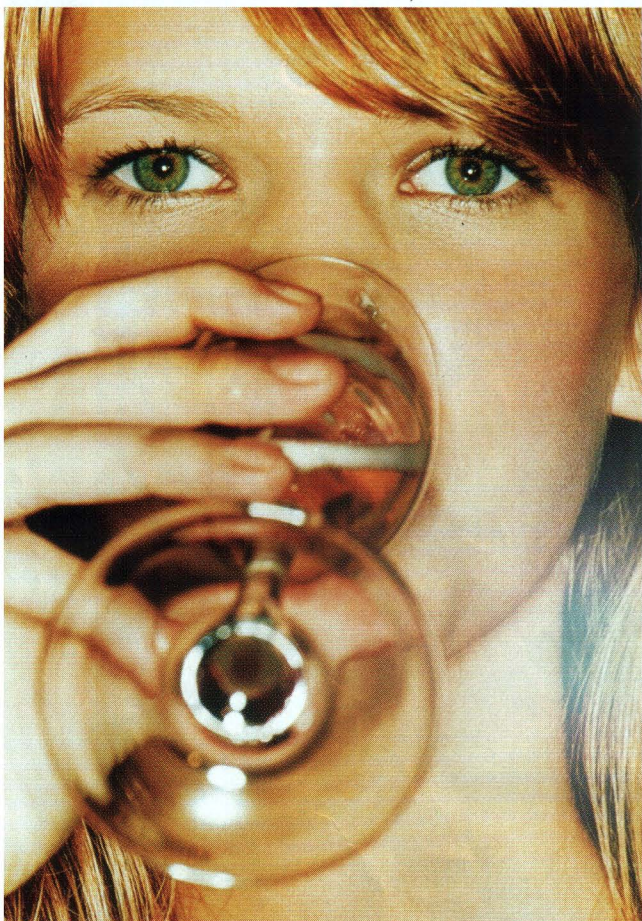
\$4.95US \$5.95CAN



DECEMBER/JANUARY 2006

TASTING NOTES

Plenty editors get to know their palates and pick their favorite organic red wines.



'TIS THE SEASON FOR RED WINE—on the table, under the tree, down the hatch. We at *Plenty* wanted to recommend some organic wines and decided to do a tasting. With gas prices in mind, we picked vintages that are affordable, easy to find, and versatile—wines that would shine at holiday gatherings and work equally well the next night with a plate of leftovers. But as boxes began piling up in our office, we realized we were in over our heads.

That's why, with wine bottles in tow, we headed to Counter, a three-year-old organic vegetarian restaurant and wine bar in New York City's East Village. Co-owner Donna Binder, who has years of experience touring vineyards and sampling wines for her extensive wine list, offered to host our tasting. We started by lining up all of the bottles on a long table in the back of the restaurant, uncorking each to let the wines breathe. Binder brought

us glasses of mineral water and a silver spit bucket, which we eyed nervously.

"Some of the best wines are organic," she said as she poured a table wine from the Nevada County Wine Guild, swirled it vigorously in her glass ("This opens up the bouquet," she explained), and then brought it to her nose for a hearty *Sideways*-style sniff. We grabbed our glasses and did the same. "It smells . . . oaky?" one staffer volunteered. Binder agreed, adding that she also detected some sour cherry. Our olfactory confidence growing, we noted cinnamon as well. After sipping, we agreed that the wine's light, mild flavor would work well with most food. Next, we tried Coturri's Zinfandel. We declared the nose to be smoky, but Binder did us one better, saying that she smelled "currants and cassis—and deep, dark vanilla spice." As for the taste, we were delighted by the balanced flavors of caramel and raisin and the lingering sweet finish.

Once we settled into the sniff-and-sip routine (and had each downed about a glass of wine), we began taking more risks with our descriptions. "This almost tastes like mulled cider," one staffer remarked of the Lolonis

Cabernet Sauvignon, which had a dried berry scent and a flavor marked by pepper and clove. Binder enjoyed the "warm and round" taste of Heller Estate's Cabernet Sauvignon, and when we sipped it, we detected plum, mellow oak, and even crushed flowers. Counter's head chef, Chad Sarno, joined the party, bringing along plates of olives and seasoned almonds. The Frey Sangiovese, which had a burst of fennel flavor when we first drank it, mellowed to deep cherry once we had eaten a few of the savory snacks.

Although we never bonded with the spit bucket (Binder and Sarno used it freely, but we just gingerly poured the contents of our glasses into it), we did leave the tasting with an advanced knowledge of wine etiquette, a heightened appreciation for organic vineyards, and, it must be said, a bit of a buzz. ■

THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR

Below are the seven wines that emerged as our favorites by the end of the tasting. All are made with organically grown grapes, and some (noted with an asterisk) have no added sulfites, a type of preservative.

Look for them at your local wine store or contact Organic Vintages (877-674-2642, organicvintages.com), a distributor that can help you locate a bottle.

	WINERY	VINTAGE
	Badger Mountain	2002 Syrah (Vintner's Estate), \$15
	Bonterra	2001 Syrah (Mendocino County), \$15
	Coturri	2003 Zinfandel (Chauvet Vineyards, East Block—Old Vine Cuvee, Sonoma Valley)*, \$27
	Frey	2003 Sangiovese (Mendocino)*, \$16
	Heller Estate	2002 Cabernet Sauvignon, \$40
	Lolonis	2002 Cabernet Sauvignon (Redwood Valley), \$22
	Nevada County Wine Guild	2004 Our Daily Red (California)*, \$9