

# It's what's on the outside

BY MARGARET SWAINE

When I first got involved with wine, critters were all over the labels. Baby Duck was the most enduring if not endearing Canadian offering (the fizzy pink beverage sold eight million bottles annually at its peak in 1973). Luv-a-Duck, Pink Flamingo, Pussycat and Gimli Goose were other less-successful home-grown products of the '70s. Over the

years, many countries have joined the circus. On shelves today are Australia's Little Penguin, New Zealand's Fat Cat, Smoking Loon from California, French Rabbit from you guessed it, Frisky Zebras from South Africa and the list goes on.

The zoo just about complete, contemporary labels have turned to fashion — pants and dresses now adorn some of the LCBO's latest offerings. Artist labels make the most tasteful

attempt to catch our eye. The most famous, those of Mouton Rothschild, which started doing them in 1945, have become collector items not just for the wine within. Ontario's Hillebrand Winery features our province's artists on the labels of its Artist Series. On its off-dry tangerine flavoured Muscat 2007 is *Georgian Blue* by Toronto journalist John Fitzgerald, who calls art his alternate form of communication. It speaks to me.

## RED



### Viña Carmen Classic Cabernet Sauvignon 2006

LCBO No. 78980; \$10.95

This solidly-made entry-level bargain from Chile hails from Maipo Valley. Largely cabernet sauvignon with a small percentage of cabernet franc and syrah, it's been partially aged in French and American oak. Soft, rounded with hints of cedar and vanilla, it's well constructed with a touch of class. Balanced, not too oaky and not too fruity, it has a dose of the winery's reserve wine to knock it up a notch.



### Fabiano Valpolicella Classico Superiore 2005

LCBO No. 34058; \$14.85

With this wine you can decide whether to wear the pants or the skirt. The fashion statement bottles come with two different labels — one has pants and a necktie, the other a red skirt and paper cut-out purse. No matter which label you choose, the wine is the same and that's really what matters. It's good-tasting, supple, cheer-inspiring Valpolicella with aromas of lightly spiced sour cherries. Nicely balanced with only the subtlest oak effect, it's a tippie that does well with simply-spiced pork ribs.



### Girls' Night Out Merlot 2006

LCBO No. 89847; \$12.95

The sassy lineup of Girls' Night Out wines, made by Colio in Ontario's Lake Erie North Shore appellation, are all about friendly fun. My favourite of the lot is the merlot with its provocative back label statement: "If only a man could be as dependable as this silky thing." It is velvety smooth and full of fruit and flavour (notably blackberry jam), with only hints of oak. It's almost as sensuous as the red dress on the label.

## RED



### Fuzion Shiraz-Malbec 2007

LCBO No. 83188; \$7.45

Simply great value, this blend of shiraz, with 30% malbec, looks and tastes twice its price. Argentina's Zaccardi family uses some of their finest hand-picked grapes from Santa Rosa vineyards in Mendoza for this velvety ripe fruit-packed red. Open and ready to drink with barbecued meals of all sorts, it's sweetly friendly but not too soft around the edges.

## WHITE



### Hillebrand Artist Series Riesling 2007

LCBO No. 88377; \$10.95

The hottest summer on record in Ontario helped bring fruit forward in 2007 vintage wines. Hillebrand's entire Artist Series labels are classic expressions of their varietals, albeit in a gentle consumer-friendly manner. The riesling, with its *Spirit* label by painter Darren Thompson, has a nose of blossoms and a taste that's like a juicy bite of a green apple. Finishing lime crisp, it's a light refresher.



### Danzante Pinot Grigio 2007

LCBO No. 26906; \$14.40

From Italy's northern Venezie region, home to much of the country's pinot grigio, this wine was originally created as a joint-venture project of the Mondavi family of California and the aristocratic Frescobaldi family of Italy. Meant to be a contemporary wine for *la dolce vita*, it succeeds in delivering good body and fruitiness at a better price than many of its competitors. With flavours of melon and tree fruits touched by spice and blossoms, it's a nice match for scallops or prosciutto-wrapped cantaloupe.