A Chianti Classico Standard: Rocca delle Macie

Long a standard at the Olive Garden, Rocca delle Macie Riserva is a fine example of a Chianti Classico that's always on their wine list. And because of their culinary relationship with this special slice of Italy, it will remain an Olive Garden favorite for some time to come.

This wine is from the "original" part of the Chianti known as Chianti Classico. Official wines from this relatively small region are designated with a little black rooster on the top of the bottle, along with the DOCG label.

But buyer beware, the little black rooster does not guarantee a great tasting wine! Due to "loopholes" in the certification process, some of these guys can be really acidic and somewhat lacking in the fine Chianti character. So be sure to get a taste before making any big buys, no matter how good the price looks. The worst of these are not worth too much.

However, with Rocca delle Macie Riserva, you can rely on a really good example of what an above average Chianti Classico has to offer. Their 2006 vintage is no exception, it is rich, opulent, and has a wonderful bouquet of ripe cherries and blueberries. Just perfect for a big pasta dinner with red sauce and garlic!

Now the mystery is, why is the '06 at Phoenix area Total Wine stores for just $21.99? But who cares, this one is a good value at this price and the way Italian vintages go, if you like, buy enough to get through the entire year!

You will probably find this wine an excellent diversion from the more fruity balance of American red wines, so make it a wine tasting experience and contrast it with a Velvet Devil Merlot and a Ferrari-Carano Merlot. Also, if you can get your hands on a California Sangiovese to check out, the more tasting comparisons the merrier.

Serve after 20 minutes in the fridge (about 65 degrees). These wines are capable of aging for 5 more years on the rack with no problem. This is also a nice wine to pair with veal and pork dishes. It's not just limited to pasta pairing.