

OTHER WAYS to Buy Wine

THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES TO
THE LCBO. *By Alan McGinty*

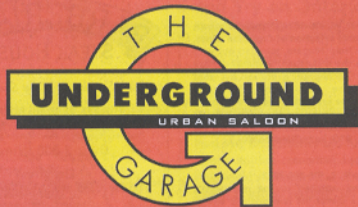
SNAZZY STORES AND smiling staff make for fun wine shopping at the LCBO. But more than 60 per cent of wine brands available in Ontario are not actually for sale at your local LCBO/Vintages. These non-retail or "consignment" wines are sold by agents—more than 700 of them in the province—and most are bought by restaurants. It's no secret that the public can buy too; but few know how.

It's easy, honey, even the first time. Don't be scared. One big reason the LCBO is willing to share its corner is that the agents are basically her working girls. The LCBO collects its full 68 per cent (!) mark-up from every sale. But you have to go all the way and buy the box: consignment sales have a retail-throttling one-case minimum if the wine is imported; but just a one-bottle limit if it's from Ontario.

If you try a great wine at a restaurant, ask for the agent's name. If they don't know, the Ontario Imported Wine Spirits and Beer Association's website (oiwsba.com) has a good search engine. It's worth a try, but no guarantee that you'll find a legal way to get that great wine you tasted in Portugal. "Vintages is dealing more and more with big wineries that can afford to advertise," says Steven Campbell of Lifford Wine Agency. "The small wineries with the most exciting wines are being squeezed out."

You can find esoteric wines at the big wine shows, where agents and producers show off their goods. (Register at localwineevents.com to find out what's coming.) Most happen in fall and spring, including several this month. Sample the wines and, before it all goes to your head, place an order for home delivery.

A monopoly-free option is to buy direct from Ontario wineries via phone or website. Delivery charges of \$10 or so make six bottles the logical minimum, but at least you can mix and match. Contact your favourite winery directly or order from winerytohome.com or wineonline.com. Wineonline has even started offering international selections that can be special ordered. Talk about a revolution.



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