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All aboard the organic bandwagon

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This is the age of the Barneys-wearing granola-minded folk, and organics is the new cool. Organic bobanic shomanic. As a kid I used to ride my bicycle behind the mosquito fog truck and loved the smell of gasoline fumes, but then I also grew up between a nuclear-submarine base and an air base with nuclear weapons.

I've definitely come around to enjoying the natural way of life and find that it makes sense. Now we have organic cotton, organic tea, organic coffee and organic veggies. And there is a quiet but growing movement in the wine business toward sustainable, organic vineyard practices.

Organic farmers do not use chemical pesticides or synthetic fertilizers to manage the vines, but instead build the soil nutrients with natural methods such as insects and plants. The results are wines that are becoming good to great, with the added benefit of being healthful for you and for the Earth. I've committed to keeping up with the organic trend by doing a quarterly organic wine review.

These three tasty wines will convince you that organics are cool:

2004 Ceago Vinegarden Estate Grown Chardonnay, Jeriko Vineyard, Mendocino, Calif. (\$19-\$23, not pictured) - This wine is made by Jim Fetzer, one of the early pioneers in organic grape farming in California, and is of all estate-grown, organic and biodynamic grapes. The color is golden yellow. The aroma has a nice smoky, yeasty quality with ripe pear and a hint of wood. The taste is dry and large with loads of intense ripe pineapple and lime on the finish. 90 points.

2005 Robert Sinskey Vineyards Vin Gris of Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Calif. (\$17-\$19) - Sinskey is also a leader in the organic movement and a passionate and fascinating gent to talk to. This is a fantastic summer wine. It's lush and tasty, and served chilled it'll stand up to anything off the grill. The color is a gorgeous onionskin rose. The aroma is of red fruit and guava with a floral hint almost like roses. The taste is fat and full flavored with creamy strawberry red fruit. This wine has a nice lingering finish that makes you come back for more. 91 points.

2002 Robert Sinskey Vineyards Merlot, Los Carneros, Calif. (\$21-\$23) - Merlots have taken a bashing in the last couple of years; they were deemed the beginner red because most are too soft and juicy and have very little structure. Historically that's not the case, and it's certainly not with this one. The color is deep ruby and almost opaque. It has great extract. The aroma has earthiness and blueberry with a suggestion of lavender. The taste is huge blueberry fruit, with nice structure and a lushness around the edges. This is not a soft light Merlot for the faint of heart, it's Real Wine and could easily replace a Cabernet Sauvignon at the next dinner party. 93 points.

You should also keep your eyes open for these brands:

Tablas Creek: Highly committed to the organics movement and makes excellent wine.

Lolonis Winery: All estate-grown vineyards are farmed pesticide free or organic. In some of the wines they do use grapes from other growers in the region that are not certified organic. That's OK; they make some tasty juice.

Bonterra Vineyards: One of the early wines on the market using organic farming practices.

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