

These wines are sort of from the South

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Let's face it: Good wines from the Deep South are hard to find. And even when you find a great one, they're somewhat inconsistent, not just vintage by vintage but bottle by bottle within a single vintage.

Which begs the questions: **What's a provincially inclined drinker to do if he can't find a bottle of, say, McRitchie chardonnay** or Tiger Mountain petit manseng? Worse yet, where and to whom should a Southern drinker turn when a bottle of his or her favorite regional wine disappoints?

A talent for rationalization helps. I'm not advocating that you buy a bottle of Yellow Tail chardonnay because it hails from the Southern Hemisphere. But I am arguing that, in a pinch, you might want to stretch your definition of Southern wine to accommodate the work of expatriates and fellow travelers. A tentative and purposely random sampling might include:

- **JD Wines**, imported by Bell Buckle, Tenn., native Jon-David Headrick, draws heavily from France's Loire Valley, especially lesser-known appellations like Chinon. If you like the cabernet francs being made by Southerners, try Domaine de la Noblaie's Les Chiens-Chiens, a cocoa-and-green- olive-perfumed pleaser.
- Gastroenterologists Michael Dragutsky and David Sloas live and work in Memphis. Along with an on-the-ground vineyard manager, they make wine in California's Napa Valley. Their **Howell Mountain** cabernet sauvignon is a textbook pour, loaded with plum fruit, threaded with leather.
- Mac McDonald of **Vision Cellars** is the son of an east Texas moonshiner. Along with his wife, Lil, McDonald farms pinot noir grapes in and around Windsor, Calif. And he makes wines, too. Really good pinot noirs that garner 90-plus scores from the likes of Robert Parker. He also stages an annual collard greens cook-off that has proved popular with fellow members of the Association of African American Vintners.
- **Garretson Wine Co.** of Paso Robles, Calif., has built a reputation on Rhone varietals like viognier and syrah, marsanne and rousanne. In addition to a range of somewhat obscure bottlings, tagged with tongue-twisting Gaelic names, proprietor Mat Garretson, a native of Georgia and a graduate of the University of Georgia, makes Bulladoir, a red-jacketed fruit-forward bomb of a syrah with obvious appeal for alumni.
- Mannie Berk lives in Connecticut, where he directs the **Rare Wine Co.** His line of historic madeiras, blended to the style preferred during the 19th-century height of the fortified wine's popularity, includes two Southern bottlings: a Charleston Reserve, made from drier sercial grapes, and a New Orleans Special Reserve, a tad richer wine with a backbone of terrantez grapes. Both smack of butterscotch and citrus and complement the cookery of their civic inspirations.