

Wine Spectator

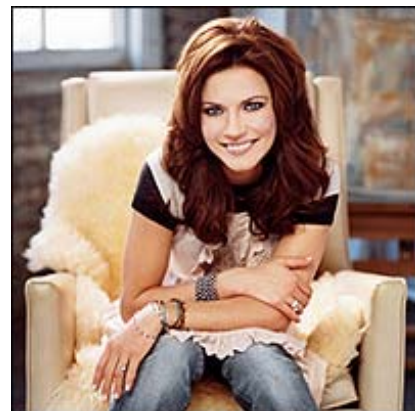
March 25, 2008

Wine Talk: Martina McBride

Country music star has a love of wine but, just as important, equates it with great times and great friends

By Betsey Model

Martina McBride, 41, isn't your stereotypical country singer, relying on lyrics heavy on whiskey, beer and tequila. Part of that may stem from the fact that she's developed a taste for wine as she's toured the world since her debut album in 1992. She's released 10 albums and won many major music accolades, including awards from the Country Music Association, the Academy of Country Music and the Grammys. McBride has sold 16 million records and scored 22 top singles in her career, and in touring the world with her sound-engineer husband, John, she's had the chance to explore wines and wineries in her down time and keep her Nashville wine cellar well-stocked. McBride spoke with *Wine Spectator* while touring through, appropriately enough, Champagne—Illinois, that is.



Martina McBride

Wine Spectator: How seriously do you take wine?

Martina McBride: You know, we enjoy wine but we're still learning—I ask for advice all the time. I'll often try out new wines in a restaurant and I have no problem asking for advice from a sommelier. For example, we're still learning about Italian wines—I love some of the super Tuscans and we're planning a family vacation and tour of the wine country in Tuscany this year. And we're still learning about French wines and wines from other areas. But what we really gravitate toward are the California Cabernets. Cabernet Sauvignon is really what we drink the most of. I tend to like really big wines, bold wines, with a lot of fruit. Then again, I also probably drink a lot of wines a bit younger than most wine connoisseurs would recommend or want me to drink them.

WS: Are you able to find good wines in Nashville?

MM: Nashville actually has some great wine stores and a huge appreciation for wine. There's an annual event in Nashville, a T.J. Martell Foundation event (in support of leukemia research) that is called the Best Cellars Dinner. It's a fund-raiser where country music artists gather with some of the top wine collectors in Nashville, who bring their best wines and then a well-known chef comes in to cook the dinner. People bring amazing, amazing wines from their cellars and it's a fabulous way to be exposed to something you may not yet have tried.

WS: How do you build your collection, and what's in it?

MM: We collect some wine as we're on tour and we order wine from some great sources. Joe Galante, the head of my record label [RCA], took John and I to New York for a dinner and wine tasting and he introduced us to Perry Porricelli at Italian Wine Merchants who, in turn, was happy to turn us on to a Giuseppe Quintarelli '95 Recioto and a '95 and '97 Amarone. He also introduced us to some great super Tuscans, including a '97 Tenuta dell'Ornellaia and an '01 Masseto.

We have a wine cellar with about 600 bottles in there right now. We have probably 25 or 30 different California Cabernets in there currently and we just ordered quite a bit of the 2005 Caymus Special Selection, which we think will age well. And one of our favorites, which we're having trouble finding these days, is the '97 Mondavi Special Reserve To Kalon—an incredible wine. And we're about to run out of the 1997 Beringer Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. We have some Georges de Latour Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon from Beaulieu in the cellar and some great vintages from PlumpJack, Dominus, Cakebread Cellars and Harlan Estate. And I think the Australian reds just keep getting better—we've begun buying some for our cellar.

WS: Do you have much of a chance to visit wine country during your travels?

MM: We've been to Napa a few times and toured the wineries—we love it there. Napa is one of my favorite parts of this country. I grew up on a farm, so it reminds me of a farm community. Just beautiful. If we're [touring] anywhere close in Northern California, within a couple of hours, we'll drive and spend our day off there. We love Caymus Vineyard wines and we've visited with [winery owner] Chuck Wagner. The winery was actually closed for the day but we called and they opened for us and gave us a private tour. We did some barrel tastings—which I'd never really done before—and toured the vineyard and got an in-depth look at the winery. That was really special. He talked a lot about his approach to making wine and he's a big country music fan [laughing], which was really fun to find out.

WS: When you talk about wine and your enjoyment of it, your stories seem to invariably revolve around friends and a lot of laughter. You don't seem to take yourselves—or your preferences in wine—too seriously. True?

MM: That's absolutely true. You know, we're good friends with [singers] Tim McGraw and Faith Hill and they've gifted us with some great bottles of wine over the years, including a fabulous Château Lafite Rothschild and a couple of other *Wine Spectator* 100-pointers. We have a wide variety of wines that we've come to love ... some famous, some not. We don't drink wine for prestige, we drink it because we genuinely enjoy it and because we have found some that really match our tastes.