



## WINES on the WING

by *Eunice Fried* A panel of renowned judges taste, test and tell all about the best wines served in airline business-class cabins.

The Grand Salon Of The Jumeirah Essex House has hosted many spectacular events in its 77 years as one of Manhattan's finest spots for celebrations. In its early years, society and celebrities danced to the big bands of Sammy Kaye, Abe Lyman and Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra. Broadway columnists Ed Sullivan and Walter Winchell often stopped by to look in on the crowd. Albert Einstein and 200 others honored W.E.B. Du Bois on his 83rd birthday. Luncheons, dinners, weddings, receptions and reunions continue to fill the elegant setting.

This spring, the Beaux Arts décor of the Grand Salon was the backdrop for *Global Traveler's* annual Wines on the Wing International Business Class Airline Wine Competition. The 2008 event — the largest ever of GT's competitions — featured a panel of 36 professional judges who tasted and evaluated 140 wines. In keeping with the contest's worldwide participation, this year's wines came from 60 wine regions within a dozen countries.

In competition with 27 other airlines, Iberia Airlines garnered the highest score to win the 2008 Wines on the Wing Award. With every one of its five Spanish wine entries finishing on the Top 10 lists, Iberia set a standard never before reached in *Global Traveler's* competition. For starters, its Veigadares 2006 and Nora 2006 — Albariños from Rías Baixas — placed second and fifth among the Top 10 White Wines, while Ramón Bilbao Rioja 2005 placed third and Casa de las Especies Crianza 2004 from Yecla tied for fifth place among the Top 10 Red Wines. To complete the sweep, Castillo Perelada Brut Reserve Cava NV tied for sixth place in the Top 10 Champagne/Sparkling Wine category.



To find such award-winning wines, Iberia looks to the Todo Vino Tasting Committee, wine specialists led by sommelier Custodio L. Zamorra. From the 5,000 Spanish wines the committee tastes each year, it selects the best and publishes the list in its annual *La Guía Todo Vino*. The committee also tests its choices in the air. Several times a year, it conducts tasting sessions during long-haul flights, the better to understand how a wine reacts at an altitude of 35,000 feet. Its findings: Airborne conditions favor smooth, richly flavored wines with good aromatic intensity and polished tannins. It is

from this publication and the results of the in-the-air tastings that Iberia chooses its wines, purchasing about 250,000 bottles annually at a cost of approximately \$2.63 million.

It is money well spent, considering Iberia's showing in this year's *Global Traveler* competition. "We are very proud to receive this important recognition," said José María Alvarado, manager of Iberia USA and Canada. "We believe our wine selection is a key element in the quality and overall experience aboard our Business Plus class." And by using Spanish wines exclusively, he added, "our wine selections reflect the culture and spirit of Spain."

As the second highest scoring airline, Finnair finished only one half of one point behind Iberia. Its Champagne entry, Joseph Perrier Cuvée Royale Brut Millésime 2000, was not only the highest scorer among the sparkling wines, it was also the highest scorer overall. The judges' praise reflects the high scores. "Creamy, nutty, lovely finish," wrote Louisa Hargrave. Will Helburn called it "toasty, citrus, delicate honey and mineral concentrations." "Superb," added W. R. Tish.

Finnair also took first place among white wines with its Jaffelin Rully Blanc 2006. Darrin Siegfried particularly liked its "good Burgundian typicity," while Molly Choi was impressed with its "structure, good acidity, judicious oak and balance." The airline also tied for fifth place in the Top 10 Red Wines with its Toar 2003, from Masi, Verona, Italy.

Attaining such prominence is no accident, nor is it inexpensive. Before making his wine selections, Magnus Hannukainen of Finnair Catering considers who will be drinking the wines. "Because of our passenger mix, I choose wines that will appeal not only to Finns but also to people from all over Europe, from Asia, from other parts of the world. I taste the wines blind, looking for those that are not only well-made but express their origin and their grape through their bouquet and palate — wines that are clean and classy. And finally, I consider the foods we are serving.