

The Hanes Wine Review, December 2005/January 2006 Edition

OK, here's the deal. Hanes has more or less been working two full-time jobs for the past two months hence the lack of timely production of our beloved *The Hanes Wine Review*. Since this vehicle is intended to primarily be a review of the specific wines Hanes samples in any given month, and the review has not come out since early November, Hanes has made the Executive Decision to forego the "rant" or "article" or whatever you want to call it that normally appears, why, right here. Ripley's believe it or not, but the "rant" actually takes a long time to produce and right now Hanes no have the time. With luck next month Hanes will return to his usual underemployed state and have oodles of time to inform and delight via his keyboard. And also have the time to type up the 50 or so tasting notes which, as of this moment, remain mere scribblings on his little folded pieces of white paper...

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This month's big winners... A totally yummy wine is Charles Hours' dry (sec) wine from the Jurançon called "Cuvée Marie" and made from Gros Manseng. Yeah, it will be hard to find but for \$18 it's worth the search. Sobon Estate's labels are pretty boring and Amador County isn't a "sexy" region in California but this outfit's \$20 2003 Zinfandel from Fiddletown offers the kind of over-the-top experience that people in Napanoma now charge \$40 for. Hanes never had a wine made from the Ruché grape before so it's hard to compare, nevertheless he indeed enjoyed 'Tavijn's 2004 version of the grape even if \$23 may be pushing it. Two usual suspects in Beaujolais, Clos du Fief in Juliéna and Clos de la Roilette in Fleurie did their usual great job in 2004. Ho-hum. 2004 is producing a much better Chablis experience than 2003 and one to note this time around is Chantemerle's "l'Homme Mort" bottling from a parcel within the larger Fourchaume vineyard. Into the cellar you go! The prices of the top Sancerre wines are now officially Stoopid(TM) and are becoming easy passes except if one is drunk *before* going to buy wine. That said, François Cotat's 2004 Sancerre Rosé is just so delicious that Hanes must recommend it, even at \$30. It's kind of silly to be recommending Champagne *after* New Year's Eve but until Hanes starts getting free samples in November that's the way it goes. Anyway, Camille Savès's Rosé Champers is most excellent. The 2004 Willi Schaefer Riesling drinking fest continues with two Graacher Domprobst Spätlese bottlings with only different AP numbers alone to tell them apart. Hanes prefers AP #9 to #11. Thankfully, Lyle prefers #11 to #9 so there will be more #9 for Hanes to buy for his cellar when next he shops. Karthäuserhof seems to also be worth checking out in 2004, particularly if their Karthäuserhofberg "Feinherb" (Medium-Dry) Riesling offering is any indication.

The best \$15 and under picks... Prà from Vento, Italy more or less quietly cranks out nice Soave Classico wines on a consistent basis and their 2004 for \$13 is another super-duper winner. Javier Sanz from Rueda, Spain is becoming in Hanes's experience a dependable producer of wines from the Verdejo grape and their 2004 "Villa Narcisa" bottling represents serious value at \$11 or so. Paul Pernot in 2004 has done an excellent job with their 2004 white and red "Bourgogne" bottlings and for the price will have a hard time getting beat by the competition. Giving credit where credit is due, while their other wines can be spotty Castle Rock usually does right by the Pinot Noir grape. And for \$11 or so their "Monterey County" designated bottling is a very good wine. Another inexpensive Pinot Noir that deserves the designation comes from Chile's Viña Leyda via their 2004 Las Brisas Vineyard Reserve for \$10. Easy enough to dismiss, for \$8 there's little to complain about in Château Sainte Michelle's 2004 Columbia Valley Gewürztraminer, not too sweet and fairly fluid and tastes like the grape. A new producer to Hanes, Cambra's Cabernet blend named "Dos" from Valencia, Spain made a positive first impression, particularly at \$15. New Zealand producer Mud House is another producer building a good track record of reliability and cheap prices, for \$13 their 2005 Sauvignon Blanc is tasty. Hope those prices don't go up. A nice juicy, cheap Bordeaux comes in 2003 from Château Couronneau. All Merlot, for \$11 goes down real easy like. Cour-Cheverny will be 2006's break out region in the wine world! Yeehaw! What is sexier than the Romorantin grape? Nothing! If you can find Huards's 2002 ye shall be rewarded for a mere \$14. An incredible value is Austrian producer Hofer's Grüner Veltliner as for a mere \$9 you get a full ONE LITER bottle of excellent juice! Music to a drunk's ears.

And the disappointments... Sylvie Esmonin can be categorized as another producer Hanes just doesn't "get" — their 2003 Gevrey-Chambertin was simple and showed little to warrant the \$34 tariff. Yet to have a bottle from this producer to make Hanes's mouth water. OK, they are a corporate entity so it's easy to see how some guy in marketing thought the "Smith & Wollensky Brand" deserves its own house wine. But for god's sake just sell it in the restaurant and not in wine stores! This is a wine that is well enough made but offers little to justify the \$30 price besides the name of a steakhouse. If you think this is a great idea, fer crissakes unsubscribe now and go read a lifestyle magazine like *Wine Spectator*! Hah! Everyone seems to talk about how Washington State is a cooler climate than Northern California and how the wines achieve more finesse and balance as a result. Then why do we get wines like Dunham Cellars' 2003 "Three Legged Red"? It's a dull fruit bomb at best and shows zero sense of place. Clos Rougeard has a nice sizeable presence in Hanes's cellar but their 2001 Saumur-Champigny "Les Poyeux" ain't gonna be there, especially at \$57 per. Their regular 2001 bottling kicks ass over this. In a vintage like 2003 it's hard to understand how a producer like Château Brassac can't do a better job with their Bordeaux Supérieur wine; at \$12 there's a lot wiser selections out there. Hanes had heard a lot about Piedmont's Vallana, a traditional producer. So, he ordered up their 1996 "Boca" which is apparently still the current release of the wine. It was OK, more Vallana wines will be tried as tradition must be upheld!

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Unlike *those other* professional reviews, Hanes only will share what he likes if it is *currently available* in stores for immediate purchase. If these wines are not to be found in some of your local stores, they suck and that's not Hanes's fault.

The challenge. Each month Hanes will try out a new "tagline" for *The Hanes Wine Review* empire. The goal is to sum up and represent The Hanes Brand. This month's entry is...

Tagline #17: "No wine reviewer gets punched down or pumped over more than Hanes!"

Here's the order in which Hanes humbly provides the wine review information:

Winery/Producer Name
Region of Origin, Appellation, Brand Name/Wine Style, Single Vineyard (if any applicable)
Grape Varietal
Vintage Year, Price Hanes Paid (if available), Alcohol Percentage (if available)
Tasting Notes, Hanes's Numeric Score (on the traditional, yet inane, 100 point scale (which for Hanes truly begins at around 80 points and more or less ends around 94 points)

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And here's Hanes's wine reviews for January!

CALIFORNIA RED

Copain
Mendocino County, Yorkville Highlands, Hawks Butte
Syrah
2003, \$52.99, 14.1%
Zero filminess to contribute to its luminescent purple core, completely opaque, thin extremely dark ruby rims. Showing some alcohol in the nose, behind that sharp edges of white grapefruit citrus, olive pit, coffee bean with enough florality to absorb some of the brunt, the other vanilla and cocoa crisp oak notes blurred by the weight of the plum, currant, black cherry scents, taut muscles flexed here. In the mouth it's full-bodied and doesn't let its density get in the way of its fluidity, has more than enough acidic and tannic structure to channel good forward motion too. In addition to the white grapefruit citrus, olives and flowers here adds in more minerality and shades of cured game. The thickness of the black cherry, blackberry, currant fruit obscures the majority of any herbaceousness, little to provide any pucker or sourness. This especially so towards the finish as the toffee, vanilla, menthol accents build into a perfumed residue. Delivers a lot of satisfaction now with potential to develop additional nuances after a few more years. 91

Sobon Estate
Amador County, Fiddletown, Lubenko Vineyard
Zinfandel
2003, \$19.99, 15.1%
Clarity adds to the soft glow in the dark purple core, vivid deep ruby to magenta hues spread throughout. Gently juicy nose of raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit, spiced orange marmalade, licorice, creamy popcorn, moored on an earthy platform. Full-bodied, has a nice streamlined quality which stems most of the outright jamminess in the blackberry, black raspberry, black cherry fruit. Clear, direct profile in the chocolate, coffee accents helps it stay on its toes, solid amount of florality and orange spritz keeps it that way. Modicum of grit in the tannins but not going to get in the way of more easygoing fun. No alcoholic heat a nice added bonus. Rock solid bottom extends the finish for quite some time. High quality juice. 90

Luddite Vineyards
Russian River Valley, Gibson-Martinelli Vineyard, Old Vines
Dry Grown
Abouriou
2002, \$19.99, 14.3%
Ain't no light getting through that opaque black purple core, thin but noticeably dense ruby-magenta rims, no surface shine to be had. Serious concentration in the nose, jam-packed with plum, cassis, black cherry scents, almost drips out on your nostrils, ginger spice, orange blossom, sweet garden herbs, really too dense to get anything else out of it. Full-bodied and just as impenetrable in the mouth, it's like a brick of fruit paste that weighs a ton. All that plum, currant, cherry, blackberry concentrated to the point where it's all flavor and no juice, no sense of progress or fluidity. Seems to have some tannic punch, certainly dry enough, but even tannins move once in awhile. Manages to display more ginger, cummin spice and orange to lemon citrus. Put a mouth guard in before popping the cork. 89

Pax Wine Cellars
Sonoma County, Sonoma Hillside
Blend
2004, \$36.99, 15.4%
The ruby-purple core is saturated to near opacity, displays thick red-magenta rims with no lack of color. Oak is the keyword to the nose, cinnamon, coffee ice cream, butterscotch, toffee, orange sherbet, raspberry and blackberry paste, it's floral too but way too heavy for that to develop. Brashly full-bodied, would almost exceed the boundaries of your mouth were it not for the powdery tannins and acidity. Strong chocolate, caramel, mint, butterscotch bursts and intense burnt toast reveal an exhibitionist streak. Orange to lemon citrus adorn the smoky and semi-tart cranberry, raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit, again, if not for the acidity would be Jam City. Very spicy finish, zero let-up in terms of weight and forward thrust. Hard to figure out when it might settle down. 52% Syrah, 47% Grenache, 1% Roussanne. 88

Castle Rock
Monterey County
Pinot Noir
2004, \$10.99, 13.9%
Dark sort of brightness in the red-violet core, the heavy-set rusty ruby rims have as well a slight magenta glow. Surprising floral touch to the nose, the oak cream scents not overbearing, smattering of spice and orange citrus, straightforwardly honest cherry, raspberry fruit and a

finishing hint of cola. Medium-bodied, floral in the mouth too with sweeter lemon and orange citrus, brings out more ripeness as well in the raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit with a good coating of milk chocolate. Low level of acidity plays up its sappy texture while, overall, it doesn't get excessively sweet. Soft finish, maintains a good ability to coat your palate and thus stretch out its length. Complexity resides elsewhere, flavor here. 88

Sutton Cellars

Alexander Valley, Angeli Vineyard, Carignan
2003, \$19.99, 13.0%

Not murky nor filmy per se but not exactly clear either, deep ruby to purple core, hues seem mixed, redder magenta at the rims. The nose produces sour raspberry, cranberry fruit, suggests a plastic bag full of store-bought moist topsoil with a hint of merde, might have something sulfur-like too, lemon peel, and that's it. Medium-bodied, overripe to the point of taking on a stewed fruit character with plum pudding, sour cherry and blackberry fruit that pushes taking on a stewed tomato edge. Kind of fluffy but big-bottomed too, dull but tangy spice, spiced orange and grapefruit peel, the leather, tar, tobacco does help it achieve a measure of rusticity. The acidity appears appreciably stronger than the tannins, adding to the sour character. Plump overall mouth feel through the finish, the acidity the sole point of relief in this regard. Rough-hewn enough, though, and always consciously off-center. 87

Smith & Wollensky

Napa Valley, Private Reserve
Blend
2003, \$29.99, 14.1%

Beneath the good surface shine you find a mostly opaque violet core, minimal dropoff to dark crimson rims. Gargantuan oak toast in the nose, vast mint, toffee, wet flower petals, stuffed with large-scaled plum, black cherry, currant fruit as well as cedar and then milk chocolate and vanilla swirls, end of story. Medium to full-bodied, while fruity the extraction doesn't quite create a thick, velvety bottom. Still, if you're looking for plum, currant, cherry fruit in spades you'll find it here. Generous surfeit of toast, mint and menthol while possessing enough acidity to stem the tide of undue creaminess. Orange spice, cedar, bare hint of leather or tobacco. Aww, screw it — it's all fruit and oak, alright! But, as such, it isn't bad, the price is more questionable. Mostly Merlot, remainder Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc. Produced by Girard Winery for S&W. 87

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Etude

Napa Valley, Carneros
Pinot Gris
2004, \$26.99, 14.2%

Plain pale yellow hay in color, gains some depth from a green cast, on the flat side with minimal shine. For its large size the nose evinces excellent focus featuring white stone and minerals, thick lemon slabs, dollop of fresh and not-too-sweet honey, the pear, apple, peach fruit scents push deeper into your nostrils with authority. Full-bodied, has a great deal of textural weight and a round, viscous mouth feel. Good acidity, very much on the dry side with a light prickle to it. The minerality and chalkiness dust but not too, too much, brightens via the lemon and lime citrus spritz. Spiciness boosts the red apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit, needed as the latter shows more restraint than

exuberance. Barrels through the finish, you're likely to lose a head-to-head collision. 89

Hansel Winery (Hansel Family Vineyards), Walter
Russian River Valley, Estate
Chardonnay

2003, \$33.99, 14.5%

Layered gold appearance, shimmers well, not very shiny, holds hue strongly through the rims. Razor sharp toast in the nose, the burnt oak notes soaked in lime juice and buffered only slightly by butterscotch, caramel, overall this lends a sour edge to the peach, apricot fruit scents. Medium-bodied, smooth texturally, glides forward with ease. Very high degree of oak here also, softer with butterscotch, caramel, vanilla fudge flavors. The peach, pear, apricot, melon fruit does finally get a word in edgewise, but barely. The florality is a bit cloaked by the toast as well. Average acidity but one's oak-numbered tongue may be incapable of salivating. Very good in its own way, smoothness and focus of purpose are bonuses. 88

WASHINGTON RED

Dunham Cellars

Columbia Valley, Three Legged Red
Blend

2003, \$19.99, 13.7%

Red purple core is dark enough that you can't really see through it but not opaque (note: look up opaque in the dictionary), straightforward dark ruby-magenta rims, deep throughout. The nose is mostly oak, toast, cedar, toffee, whipped cream, chocolate, beyond that dense, if sour, currant, red cherry, cranberry scents, lemon and orange citrus and a brush of florality. Full-bodied, oaky as all get-out in the mouth too, overflowing with caramel, vanilla, milk chocolate, glazed doughnuts, you make it up. Has that lemon citrus touch here too, floral as well but there's nothing else here to suggest any deep flavor beyond the oak and juicy, extracted blackberry, black cherry, currant fruit. The tannins whimper in the corner, cowering in the face of the oak. Impossible to tell what it's about besides the same monotonous procession of oak and fruit. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and/or Syrah. 85

WASHINGTON WHITE

Sainte Michelle, Château
Columbia Valley

Gewürztraminer
2004, \$7.99, 13.0%

Light yellow straw in color with moderate shine, noticeably dilute rims. Nose is filled up well by orange blossom, honey, lemon zest, apricot, peach and yellow apple fruit, about as minerally as it is nutty, a bit of creaminess gives it weight to resist dissolving. Full-bodied, while the attack is quite sweet it shows surprising acidity and from the mid-palate on stays on the dry side. That said, there's durable juiciness in the apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit as well as in the tangerine to lime citrus, helps it soothe the palate. Momentary honey notes, same for grilled nuts, more length in the florality, mineral water and stone parts. Maintains both weight and flavor through the finish, hard to find fault. 83% Gewürztraminer, 11% Riesling, 6% Muscat. 87

OREGON RED

Ransom

Willamette Valley, Cattrall Vineyards

Pinot Noir

2003, \$23.99, 13.7%

Light violet to garnet colored core, offers more of a reddish orange brick color at the rims. Clearly herbaceous nose, plenty of cut grass, on the sour side in the cherry, raspberry department, tart lemon peel, has some minerality too but not in a real "terroir" way, more adds to its generally attenuated character. Light to medium-bodied, dilute and uninteresting from the very start with drying tannins and spice, still heavy on the leafy herbaceous side with tobacco wrapper and earth elements. Not much cherry nor raspberry fruit, probably more lemon peel or minerals as in the nose. You can try hard to focus on it but the finish is so short it makes it tough. Not taking many pains to be enjoyable. 83

FRANCE RED

Clos du Fief (Michel Tête), Domaine du

Beaujolais, Juliéas

Gamay Noir

2004, \$17.99, 13.0%

Immaculate, deep ruby-purple color, remarkably even throughout, just very pretty. Lemon peel and rubbed stone notes give the nose a momentary tart edge but the mellifluous strawberry, raspberry scents mellow things out, the grassiness fits in effortlessly and helps keep it pungent and alert. Medium-bodied, there's a polished sweetness in the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit which helps hold its balance and extend its affability from start to finish. Nothing skimpy about the acidity, just not a limelight seeker. The minerality and pebbles flow underneath it all, willingly ceding room to the lemon citrus. Nice crescendo at the finish with a bright sour pucker. You're a jerk if you don't like this. 90

Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)

Beaujolais, Fleurie, Cuvée Tardive

Gamay Noir

2004, \$21.99, 13.0%

Pale ruby-red in color, not particularly shiny, consistent throughout if dilute at the rims. Not a deep nose but has snap to spare, new green grass, mineral dust, lemon peel, super-tart red cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit scents, penetrates deeply and then — poof! — it's gone. Medium-bodied, the tannins and acidity give it a five o'clock shadow roughness, leaves open pores and crevices for lemon oil, minerals, stone and meadow to seep into. Vague milk chocolate shades soften the bite in the red cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit sufficiently to allow it to get its juice out during the mid-palate as its inherent structure dries it out by the finish. Big bones and very active as well, in need of some settling down into itself. 89

Saint Cosme, Château de

Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Les Deux Albion

Blend

2004, \$18.99, 13.5%

While clear it has a very dark red-purple core that's close to full opacity, saturated and dark red-magenta rims. Firm contours to the nose in spite of the richness in the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, swirls in graphite, tobacco ash, white grapefruit pith, minor murmur of flowers but overall plays it straight-up. Full-bodied with a fully massaged

texture, had all the rough parts sandpapered down.

Possesses ample acidity and good doses of white grapefruit/lemon citrus, milk chocolate, rose petals, earth and leather, no one component dominant. Past the mid-palate it gets powdery, especially on the roof of your mouth. Fruit fades a tick during the finish, otherwise stays the course. 40% Syrah, 30% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre, 10% Carignan, 10% Clairette. 88

Moines, Domaine aux

Loire, Anjou-Villages

Blend

2003, \$18.99, 12.5%

Dark-ruby purple in color, remains on the clear side, while mostly ruby at the rims does show a hint of orange. Thick, almost viscous, nose of currant, black cherry fruit that's on the jammy side, usual bell pepper, tobacco ash, slate, lemon peel type of stuff, maintains a prolonged presence. Full-bodied, not as fruit-laden in the mouth yet nothing shy about the plum, currant, cherry fruit, dense and luscious. Lemon peel, stone, wild meadow grasses and tobacco smoke fight for space. On the whole not as herbaceous as in the nose and much lower bell pepper component. Tannins show some grit as well as maturity. Remains broad through the finish, nothing to actively dislike. 70% Cabernet Franc, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Haut-Segottes, Château

Bordeaux, Saint-Emilion

Blend

2000, \$35.99, 12.5%

Clear brickish red to purple colored core, adequate clarity with thick, if dull, crimson red rims. Has a strong bell pepper streak in the nose while also offering ripe plum, currant, cherry fruit, good graphite and stone boulder notes, a blood iron element too, sits confidently in your nostrils. Full-bodied, dense with thickly layered tannins and here equally heavy on the granite, graphite, miscellaneous stone stuff. Slightly elevated lemon citrus, more generalized herbaceousness and not as clearly bell pepper in nature. Dry powder coats the currant, cherry fruit, not at all underfruited but this element not shining too brightly. Remains full and well-structured and with nice length through the finish, if arguably on the tight side today. 60% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Franc, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Gour de Chaulé, Domaine du

Rhône, Gigondas, Cuvée Tradition

Blend

2001, \$26.49, 14.0%

Presents a basic red-ruby to violet core, surrounded by rust to orange-garnet hued rims. Palpable stoniness to the nose alongside big white grapefruit zest, strong sweet and sour interplay in the cherry, raspberry scents, herbaceous notes give it a high-toned scrunchiness, achieves some floral lift as well. Full-bodied, possesses a solid degree of sap and juice in the blackberry, cherry fruit without overshadowing its other aspects. Chocolatey, the zip in the lemon to white grapefruit citrus trumps much of the florality. The acidity cruises at a consistent altitude, gets mouth-watering without drying out too much. Leather, tree bark, fallen forest matter all appear at moments. Smokiness lingers nicely during the finish. 85% Grenache, 15% Syrah, Mourvèdre, Cinsault. 88

Esmonin, Sylvie

Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin

Pinot Noir

2003, \$33.99, 13.0%

Ruby-violet core, semi-dark while more pure red-ruby at the rims. Somewhat neutral nose of sour cherry, blackberry fruit, cocoa dust, undercurrent of earth and tree leaves and just a whisper of florality. In the mouth it's full-bodied without heaviness, a lot of concentration in the plum, blackberry, cherry fruit, deep and round. Light acidity but not feeble either, earth and stone aspects contribute to firmness. Has a good floral side, almost suggests mint or pine needles at turns. Sweet smokiness carries things past the mid-palate, given its weight it has a nicely clean finish. Not distinct but smooth overall and gets the job done. 88

Rimbert, Domaine

Languedoc/Roussillon, Saint-Chinian, Les Travers de Marceau

Blend

2004, \$13.49, 12.0%

A faint murk pervades the heavy glow in the red-ruby to purple core, turns to dark pink-magenta hued rims. Explosive white grapefruit blast in the nose, overcomes the admirable richness in the blackberry, black cherry fruit scents, the leather, tar, saddlesoap, earth scents seem to be getting revved up but then get stuck in neutral, unfortunate touch of Brett too. Medium-bodied with a strong sappy grip, clings tenaciously to your mouth pores. Mostly prickly white grapefruit to lemon citrus, tea leaf, hay, wet brown earth flavors, suggests moist cedar as well. The tannins quietly build up and the finish ends up noticeably dry. You think its going to get fuller and more leathery but instead it just stretches itself out further without putting on additional weight. Mainly Carignan, remainder Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre. 87

Rame, Château La

Bordeaux

Blend

2003, \$11.99, 12.5%

Bright, shiny ruby-purple in color, for all its reflectivity it stays dark as well, fully consistent to the rims. Juicy red raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit infuse the nose, pure and simple, almost suggests milk chocolate and mint, orange citrus, admirable length. Same story in the mouth, real easy and smooth, arguably too so. Cranberry, strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit stays juicy and fluid. The tannins are relaxed and ready to smile, hints at oak toast but in no way aggressively so. Creeping on tippy-toes you get orange and lemon citrus, lowgrade minerals or leather, really amazing for how straightforward and lacking in complexity it is. Incredibly easy to chug, not a rough edge in sight. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc. 87

Pernot et ses Fils, Paul

Burgundy, Bourgogne

Pinot Noir

2004, \$11.99, 12.5%

Much more dark ruby than violet in color, highly consistent from core to rims, trim and catches light with ease. Herbaceous and downright sour nose, minerals, dried lemon peel and cut grass scents bring out an edginess in the tart raspberry, red cherry, strawberry scents, overall very streamlined and built for speed. Medium-bodied, sleek and showing polish, both the tannins and acidity give it strong support as well as dryness and an unwillingness to relax. The noticeable lemon citrus twists more sourness out of the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit and acts

to further truncate length. Herbaceous and earthy, it all coalesces into a pungent inner mouth perfume which is difficult to wipe out of your mouth. Purity at any cost, even over grace. 87

Pascaud, Château

Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieur

Blend

2003, \$11.99, 13.0%

Bright red-purple core of good richness, vivid crimson to dark magenta rims. Tobacco ash, minerals, black earth, merde, crisp lemon zest make for a pleasingly diverse nose, touch of florality around the straightforward cherry, black currant scents. Medium-bodied, very smooth texture gives it a nice sense of balance while still having the tannins gain some traction and lightly dust the tongue, makes up for relative lack of weight. Adequate concentration, forward movement in the cherry, blackberry, currant fruit, the acidity strong enough to dampen its length. Mostly mineral dust, leaves and twigs, tea leaves, lemon peel for nuance, not especially developed. Only trace of oak comes as toasty fumes when you exhale after swallowing. Even if it is semi-short at the end, all-in-all it's a nice basic Bordeaux and you could do a lot worse. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc. 87

Overnoy, Maison Pierre

Jura, Arbois, Pupillin

Poulsard

2002, \$20.99, 12.5%

Light, dull and filmy strawberry red core, more diffuse garnet to orange on the way to washed out rims. Dusty fumes in the nose of cedar, tree leaves and twigs, old tea bags, earth, dried orange peels, chalk dust, tart raspberry, red cherry scents, overall matured in feel. Light-bodied, dense feel in the mouth but the paucity of flavor makes it hollow and lighter as it sits. Dried out strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit has more tang than juice, same for the lemon citrus notes. Appears to have some acidity but it's so dusty and devoid of juice or even a sense of water content that it is hard to say. Tannins seem tame. Lots of cedar, attic wood, earth, fallen leaves, have to say that it does grow on you, as unique as it is. Buy a bottle to try before you go out buying cases. 87

Jullien, Mas

Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc

Blend

2001, \$36.99, 14.0%

Very dark purple core, opaque with deeply saturated ruby to red magenta rims, well-colored throughout. Quite toasty nose with oak-inspired burnt coconut, fried butter and mint leaf tones, so powerful that except for the black cherry, black currant fruit nothing else is getting through. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a high enough level of tannins to at least semi-hold the oak at bay, some burnt toast and butter, that's it. Displays glimmers of florality, lemon citrus and then a hard-nosed kind of earthiness, herbal qualities. Eye-opening density in the currant, blackberry, plum fruit, obviously ripe and deep yet not overly forthcoming. Its leaden heaviness builds up sufficient momentum to bull through the finish. Hard to know exactly what to make of it. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Carignan, Cinsault. 87

Couronneau, Château
Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieur
Merlot

2003, \$10.99, 14.0%

Scarlet to violet colored core, dark without loss of clarity, more semi-filmy brick red at the rims, deeply hued throughout. Good amount of toast, cedar and mint-like notes at first in the nose before floral dust and orange blossom lead into deeper leather, earth, wet tobacco leaf accents, the black currant to cherry scents on the quiet side. Full-bodied, definitely spared no energy getting all the juice squeezed out of the currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit. Touch more creaminess to the oak here, still toasty though, provides mint, orange peel, cedar flavors. The tannins are round and more of a glue than super-structure. Adequate length during the finish, nothing special, nothing to be ashamed of. Bit of a grinder but has the fruit to please. The oak toast turns things a touch sour at the end. 87

Clos Rougeard
Loire, Saumur-Champigny, Les Poyeux
Cabernet Franc

2001, \$56.99, 12.5%

Has a filmy glow throughout, the deep red-garnet core fades very slowly to more basic orange at the rims. The nose presents a great deal of buttered popcorn and toast before minerals, tobacco, earth and tar get to shine, displays more merde than lemon peel or red cherry, blackberry fruit, fades indecisively. Medium-bodied, showing an equal degree of oak toast, burnt butter and popcorn to the nose. Once it stabilizes there's a decent amount of lemon citrus, mineral dust, tar, dried earth and steadily elevating herbaceousness and bell pepper. The tannins are dull and powdery, the acidity broad enough to sacrifice some bite. Sweet core in the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, strong enough to hold its center mostly to the finish. By the end it starts to congeal into an undifferentiated mass, rolls forward like a wet, raw meatball through your mouth. 87

Breton, Catherine et Pierre
Loire, Bourgueil, Franc de Pied
Cabernet Franc

2004, \$22.99, 12.0%

Very consistent red-scarlet to violet color, practically zero change from core to rims, shines on the surface with a touch of murkiness below. Bright, youthful cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit in the nose, juicy with little room left over for leather, tar, damp earth notes, minimal herbaceousness or citrus as well. In the mouth it is medium-bodied and while just as juicy as the nose a lot tangier to boot. The lemon citrus and dried flowers more present, same for the minerality and stoniness. Same cranberry, red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit, tastes as red as it looks. Appears to have more acidity gong for it than tannins while neither especially powerful. Comes up with olive pit and rosemary, basil nuances as a final perfume as it finishes. 87

Breton, Catherine et Pierre
Loire, Bourgueil, Trinch!
Cabernet Franc

2004, \$16.99, 12.0%

Strong surface reflections give the scarlet-ruby to violet core a hazy appearance underneath by contrast, full-on pink magenta in color by the time it reaches the rims. There's a brief burst of tilled earth, merde and sulfur-like

notes at first in the nose but they easily defer to the fragrant cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit, surreptitiously slides some olive pit, white grapefruit and tree leaves in there when you're not looking. Full-bodied, if not outright plump, in the mouth, serves up a bigger helping of bell pepper and grass as well as minerals, a relief to learn that it is in fact Loire Cab Franc in the bottle. Shades of leather, wildflower scrub, tar and lemon citrus manage to sneak in for a bit. But the cherry, blackberry, raspberry, currant fruit will not be denied for long and eventually reign supreme. Does have some dusty tannins soaking in the fruit somewhere. It's just a fun wine and a good way to get a non-wine geek to dip their little toe into the pool of Loire reds. 87

Billard, Domaine Gabriel
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Milliane
Pinot Noir

2003, \$15.99, 12.8%

Bright and lively ruby-violet with a bit of a pinkish tinge, fades a good bit to purer red along the rims. Light nose of floral dust, lemon zest and vanilla cream pie, the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, open and uncloaked by any undue complexity, almost zero herbaceousness. In the mouth it's medium to full-bodied and super-soft, its downy texture makes it agreeable from the first sip. More of that floral dust plus additional tangerine to lemon citrus of attractive sweetness. Shows some coconut, vanilla notes, touch more herbal here. Nothing remarkable about the tannins nor acidity, structured to keep it simple. Even pace and scale in the presentation of the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit. Moderate finish, stays right on course. 87

Baudry, Domaine Bernard
Loire, Chinon
Cabernet Franc

2003, \$14.99, 12.5%

Crimson-purple in color and of moderate darkness, exhibits strength of hue through to the scarlet to red-magenta rims. Very full nose, gotta give credit to the cigarette ash, mineral and lemon elements as they put up a great fight against the ripeness in the cherry, currant fruit scents, minimal herbaceous or bell pepper notes, keeps coming back to the fruit. Full-bodied, openly knit with relaxed tannins and acidity. Brighter bell pepper notes come here alongside the minerals, ash, tar and graphite flavors. The lemon citrus acts mainly as an embellishment to the firmly ripe red currant, plum, black cherry fruit. Smokiness provides an impetus towards lift yet it remains on the bottom heavy side. Flavorful if not particularly refreshing. 87

Barroul, Louis et Cherry
Regional Blend, Vin de Table de France, Little James'
Basket Press
Grenache

NV, \$11.49, 13.5%

Smooth magenta-violet color, very clear with a nice shine, becomes more straightforward red around its fairly broad rims. Juicy, fruity nose of strawberry, raspberry, cherry fruit, mild peppery kick, more grassiness, touch of orange spritz with chocolate tones and then a touch of poop. Medium-bodied, appears sweet initially with the same array of raspberry, strawberry, cherry, blackberry fruit but then becomes both slightly more tannic as well as more herbaceous. More bite than juice in the lemon to orange citrus, with a measure of stoniness. Has enough of the

tannins and acidity to give it spine, no wimp, but turns confusingly bitter on the finish. Slaps you some gingerbread and clove spice too. Grapes sourced from the Rhône, Roussillon. All 2003 vintage. 87

Grâce Dieu, Château La
Bordeaux, Saint-Emilion
Blend
2000, \$21.99, 12.5%

Dark purple core, turns more to a straight crimson at the rims, full color throughout. In the nose it hits you first with sappy currant and cherry fruit as well as fluffy florality, eventually yielding to more of a bell pepper, tobacco ash, graphite, leather profile, earthiness masks whatever oak may be there. Medium-bodied, on the rough side with angry acidity and tannins which play up the herbaceousness into greenness. Earth, minerals, tobacco and stone trying to distract you into a judgment of rusticity but really it just isn't so friendly and then also lacks the depth in the cherry, currant, blackberry fruit to forgive many sins. Finishes somewhat short too, lingering medicinal notes. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc. 85

Gallois, Domaine Dominique
Burgundy, Bourgogne
Pinot Noir
2003, \$15.99, 12.0%

More clarity than density in the ruby-violet color, rims suggest more of a pink-tinged magenta. Ripe cherry, blackberry filled nose but not that broad in aroma. Light to medium-bodied, starts out with some decent sap in the cherry, currant, blackberry fruit but loses its grip swiftly, especially due to the very filmy tannins. Earthy and slightly stemmy, presents vague moments of orange citrus and spice, tries to avoid it but still comes off as somewhat hard. That chalky, dusty texture eventually takes over the finish making it void of flavor. It's not behind the steering wheel, it's pedestrian. 85

Delesvaux, Domaine Philippe
Loire, Anjou
Cabernet Franc
2004, \$11.99, 13.5%

Dark, near opaque purple core with broad red-ruby to magenta rims. Slate, graphite, bell pepper and straw driven nose, stuffed well with plum, currant, black cherry fruit too, ends with a semi-metallic ring to it. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and a good amount of tannins are laid on the tongue. Tartness in the cherry, black raspberry fruit shortens its presence quite a bit. Anxious feel in the orange, lemon, white grapefruit citrus, like it's unsure if it should really join the conversation. Throws you tobacco and a stony "white smoke" thing to give it some perfume-like feel as it nears the end. Leather, tar and earth too. Overall, has a little of a lot and doesn't come fully together enough to gel into something larger. 85

Avril, Paul
Regional Blend, Vin de Table de France, Le Petit Vin d'Avril
Blend
NV, \$8.99, 13.0%

Tiny violet core, much more ruby-magenta in hue, almost fully pink at the rims, displays minimal shine. Sweet and sour cherry, raspberry fruit makes for a somewhat jammy nose texture, hits you with a graphite chalkiness, orange citrus, good amount of herbaceousness, garrigues, nice thickness. In the mouth it is quite dry with a high level of

acidity and tannins as well as a pronounced grassy edge, tends here to come across with a more bitter side. Lemon and orange citrus out punch the florality, little, if any, graceful relief from the sourness of the red cherry, raspberry fruit, has fruit pit notes too. With strong tree bark, leaves there's little chance for counter-balance from the meager cocoa aspects. Your mouth slowly withdraws into a big pucker, not much sensation nor feeling left to fill in the end. Unspecified percentages of Mourvèdre, Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon. 85

Brassac, Château
Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieur
Blend
2003, \$11.99, 13.0%

Bright shine enlivens the dark red-purple color, vivid blood red to scarlet rims please as well. Lean nose, heavy on the herbaceousness with bell pepper notes too, offers some smokiness and minerality, sour cherry and blackberry fruit, little if any evident oak, pulls up short and not that generous to your olfactory sense. Medium-bodied, the tannins and acidity are not proportionate to the plum, currant, black cherry fruit, the latter taking a serious beat down. Gathers some spice and orange peel, more so earth and leather, here the oak toast is more obvious if still not a big aspect. Grassiness pervades throughout and the wine always has a sour puckering feel. Not horrible but neither friendly nor in contrast a true "vin du garde." 58% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Cabernet Franc. 84

Charles & Fils, Domaine François
Burgundy, Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune, La
Combotte
Pinot Noir
2003, \$15.99, 13.0%

Strong pinkish-ruby cast to the violet core, light overall, soft magenta rims. In the nose stemminess upsets the juiciness of the raspberry, strawberry scents, earthy funk in turn does the same to the lemon citrus and flower shades, overall its joints cannot ditch the "dis" prefix. Light-bodied, consistent level of raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit but as it progresses it becomes increasingly drier and more tart. Also more upfront about its herbaceousness here, adds to the sour character. Dilute earthiness, like a rainstorm ran away the dirt. Fruit still there at the finish and florality becomes more pronounced. A simple wine of meager income but keeps a clean house. 83

FRANCE WHITE

Trimbach
Alsace, Cuvée Frédéric Émile
Riesling
2000, \$33.99, 13.0%

The solid gold color is flat in terms of shine or clarity but it does possess a healthy glow, only slight dilution at the rims. While there's a certain creaminess to the nose the ample rubber, lemon oil and stone elements tighten things up, touch of garden herbs, shows only minimal apricot, pear, red apple fruit scents. Full-bodied and more taut from its initial moments in the mouth, plump in terms of weight yet the acidity reveals nice verve and the lemon to tangerine citrus and minerality lend brightness. The rubber aspect holds a position of dominance throughout. Crisp enough profile in the peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit but not that much depth. As a result it ends up a bit of a "tweener" without enough terroir on the one hand or fruit

on the other to satisfy lovers of either. Still, you're pretty happy to drink it. 90

Hours, Charles
Southwest France, Jurançon, Cuvée Marie Sec
Gros Manseng
2004, \$17.99, 14.0%

Plain golden color, fairly clear with a decent amount of reflectivity. Crisp apple, pear, melon fruit impelled nose, tart rather than sweet lemon-honey, spots of minerality and field grasses but really just smells like the fruit section of a farmer's market in autumn, you just enjoy the spectacle and scents and blink in the fading sunlight. Medium-bodied, razor sharp acidity cuts fine slices of your tongue, very activating and leaves you wide awake. Sharp enough that it develops pineapple, nectarine flavors in addition to the rounder peach, apple, pear foundation. Subtle florality covered over by more vociferous lemon/lime citrus. Possesses such a depth of scrubbing sensations that it goes on for some time. Like sticking your finger in an electrical socket. 90% Gros Manseng, 10% Corbu. 90

Dauvissat, Domaine Vincent
Burgundy, Chablis, Vaillons
Chardonnay
2004, \$47.99, 13.0%

Advanced appearance of very dark gold, has a reflective enough surface but too thick below to really gleam, minor loss along the rims. The nose has a certain creaminess at first, takes its time to blossom into minerals, oily stone, lemon as well as a refreshing herbal side, the overall smokiness tends to overshadow the peach, apple, pear fruit scents, firms up as it sits in the glass. Full-bodied, on the whole accessible while at the same time capable of throwing good punches. The acidity has a nicely honed edge, this comes through in spite of that lingering creaminess. The lively peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit has a strong bottom with just as much if not more lighter sparkle. More dust and powder in the stones and minerals than solidity. The lemon citrus comes off as wedges floating in mineral water. Good flavor and weight throughout, maybe just a touch blowsy. 90

Chantemerle (A&F Boudin), Domaine de
Burgundy, Chablis, l'Homme Mort
Chardonnay
2004, \$34.99, 12.5%

Bright and glassy brown-gold straw color, strong depth at the core, lighter rims. Pleasingly oily, stony nose with thick slices of lemon/lime citrus, both saltiness as well as florality, nothing slight in the peach, pear, apple scents while also not near fruity. Full-bodied, showing admirable firmness, broad and gritty acidity keeps it dry and focused while allowing for a good degree of liveliness too. Vibrant lemon and lime citrus, minerals and white stones, powdered violets all make appearances, suggestion too of a driveway oil slick. Clear delineation in the peach, pear, green apple, apricot fruit, has more heft and muscular strength than ripe juiciness. Does a rewarding job of leaving stoniness as its final emphasis. Moderate aging potential too. 90

Pernot et ses Fils, Paul
Burgundy, Bourgogne
Chardonnay
2004, \$12.99, 13.0%

Golden-brown hay in color, density makes for a full glass but detracts from reflectivity, soft fade towards the rims. Oily and mineral nose pushes turning acrid at times, stones and chalk calm it down some, zesty lemon spritz takes it in the other direction, more herbs to be had than peach, apple, pear fruit scents. Full-bodied in a thickset and semi-brusque manner, the oil, mineral, stone and herbal components even brawnier here and take no backtalk at all. Highly credible acidity puts a further charge into things and highlights the lemon, lime, orange citrus flavors. Maybe a touch more noticeable apricot, peach, pear fruit but this part is an afterthought. Softens just enough during the finish to soak in and thus extend mildly. Rocks out real loud. 89

Huards, Domaine des
Loire, Cour-Cheverny
Romorantin
2002, \$13.99, 12.5%

Brilliant golden color with a light green cast, nice depth while fading appreciably at the rims. Big rubber component in the nose, intense lemon/lime citrus, white mineral rocks, pressed flowers, honey coated peach, apricot, pineapple scents, pleasing fullness without sluggishness. Full-bodied, here not only rubbery in flavor but rubbery in texture too. The acidity is like a stinging smack to your face, leaves you wincing after each sip. Edgy lemon, white grapefruit, lime citrus wields a dangerous blade too. The blend of textures keeps the apricot, peach, nectarine, apple fruit hopping. The stone, mineral water elements don't fully show until the finish. Confidently aggressive wine. 89

Larochette-Manciat, Domaine
Burgundy, Mâcon-Morizottes
Chardonnay
2004, \$11.99, 13.0%

Simple golden hay color of moderate reflectivity, turns noticeably dilute around the rims. Somewhat watery nose, creamy with floral oil, orange spritz, gentle notes of streamwater and stones, evanescent. Medium-bodied, honeyed on the mouth entry with sweet lemon and orange citrus too, enough ripeness bursts through in the pear, apricot, yellow apple fruit to keep the flavors alive while also remaining smooth on the whole. The acidity is average while nothing to really complain about. Has a great deal of spiciness which, along with the cream, fills up most of the finish. Does grow on you and make a more favorable impression over time, the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Smoothness remains strongest attribute even with a few bitter notes on the finish. 88

Girardin, Vincent
Burgundy, Meursault, Les Narvaux
Chardonnay
2003, \$39.99, 13.5%

Bright and sparkly yellow gold with a soft brown tinge, excellent clarity without sacrificing hue intensity. Very keenly edged oak toast in the nose, mint, orange blossom, sweet lemon and lime citrus, the florality actually manages to obscure a portion of the peach, apricot, pear fruit. Medium to full-bodied, quite soft and semi-pliant, doesn't push back against you much and lacks the acidity to maintain focus through the mid-palate to the finish. Not overly creamy but does show a great deal of concentrated toast, mint, fried butter, butterscotch. Floral as well, all perfumed violets and lilacs. The peach, apricot, pear, nectarine fruit has a round pliancy around its contours,

can't say there's no fruit, especially during the attack. Not hard to drink. 88

Raimbault, Philippe

Loire, Pouilly-Fumé, La Montée des Lumeaux
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

Strong golden color with green flecks, especially around the rims, pleasing surface sparkle with only a mild fade at the rims. Aggressive blossoming in the nose of white grapefruit pith, mineral dust, mown lawn, mint and a touch of dried flowers, tight feel in the apricot and peach fruit scents, for all of its punch doesn't last all that long. Full-bodied, has a strong sour side to it, heightened by a degree of chili pepper which the Loire rarely shows. Viscous texture, clings fully to your cheeks. Asparagus, bell pepper, cut grass and tingly, if dusty, lemon to grapefruit citrus lend it an active demeanor. The stones and minerals are consistent but not particularly a major component. Same can be said for the peach, apple, apricot fruit, nice enough flavoring but not very juicy. Its weight and heft its most interesting aspect. 87

Petit Chambord (François Cazin), Le

Loire, Cour-Cheverny, Vendanges Manuelles
Romorantin

2002, \$13.49, 12.5%

Gauzy type of dullness saps a lot of intensity out of the yellow straw color, fair degree of translucency, pale enough that rims don't seem much different. Nose seems all over the place, haphazardly tossing pine cone, vanilla cream, honey, milk, lemon citrus, rubber at you so that you are hard pressed to be able to focus on any apricot, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied with a semi-immobility or at least a glacial pacing. This is not to say that the acidity is weak or incapable of lending briskness for it does indeed, albeit like rain over cement. Lemon, pink grapefruit and lime citrus has a touch of sweetness to prevent a strong puckering sensation. Generous honeyed tones pitch in here, also allowing some concentration to form in the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit. The rubber, oil and milk shades more mute. Stutters some when questioned directly. 87

Quenard, Domaine Raymond

Savoie, Vin de Savoie Chignin-Bergeron
Roussanne

2004, \$23.99, 12.5%

Dull and almost murky yellow color, minimal reflectivity and loses hue intensity along the rims, not much to look at. Nutty, vanilla filled nose, like a Nutty Buddy or something, softly spiced, just wee bits of lemon and stone, the pear, apple, peach fruit simple and understated. Full-bodied, from the start much more likable for its round and plush textures than its flavors. Manages to come up with honey, toffee, vanilla, mint and nutmeg, more lemon and tangerine citrus than might have suggested. The acidity is slight, gets by on its density. Not much flavor nor juice in the apricot, peach, yellow apple, melon fruit. Does have this mineral water, stream stone thing going on which is nice. In the end not a lot of fun to drink. 86

Puzelat, Thierry

Loire, Vin de Table Français
Romorantin

2004, \$20.99, 12.0%

Big contrast between the dark golden core and the mostly transparent rims, not much shine but not dull either. Nose

of pickled vegetables, oil, minerals and orange peel, too much soil focus for more than a swift burst of peach or apricot fruit scents. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, very pickled and spicy with strong olive pit tones. Minerally and earthy too, might as well throw herbaceous out there too. Plenty of sharp bite in the acidity, here too there's a paucity of fruit and what is there is mainly apricot, peach, apple skin/pit. Softens a little as it nears room temperature and gains aeration but remains decidedly off-center flavor-wise. 86

Michel-Andreotti, Domaine

Burgundy, Montagny, Les Guignottes
Chardonnay

2002, \$13.99, 13.0%

Rich golden color, while maintaining shine throughout, does a good job of holding its hue through to the rims. Surprisingly rich nose of floral perfume, mint, butterscotch, vanilla, orange sorbet, lesser but still solid apricot, pear, red apple fruit. Full-bodied, seems soft more from "malo" than from oak, still displays evident toast, butter and toffee flavors. Spiced orange citrus, mint and violet accents mingle among these. The apricot, peach, pear, green apple fruit is sweet yet stretches out well, no cloying concentration. The acidity is about where it should be, can't bitch too much here. A bit lacking in minerality and cut but this is no real reason to not finish your glass. 86

FRANCE ROSE

Cotat, François

Loire, Sancerre, Chavignol Rosé
Pinot Noir

2004, \$29.99, 12.5%

Semi-cloudy zinc orange to pink in color, glows through the murk, fades appreciably near the rims. Takes awhile for the nose to open up into orange rind, minerals, light notes of cut grass and sharp spice, the raspberry to cherry fruit scents are so angular they almost turn sideways and disappear. Medium-bodied, brawny acidity sets the tone early, dry to almost becoming dusty. Orange and lemon citrus zest feels like the residue on your fingers after peeling the rind off, plenty of powdery minerals to be had too. Develops flavors of rose petals, mint and garden herbs as it warms. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit is deeper in the mouth as well as possessed of greater length. Needs a serious decanting and time to get closer to room temperature, then look out. 91

FRANCE SPARKLING

Savès, Camille

Champagne, Grand Cru Brut Rosé
Blend

NV, \$47.99, 12.0%

Very pale salmon pink color with a slight orange tinge, moderately tight and slow moving beads, transparent rims. Earthy nose, real dense, green apple, red cherry, raspberry fruit, juicy lemon accents, develops more stoniness as it sits. Medium to full-bodied, not overly pétillant, delicate mouth entry for a sparkler of its size. Strong cherry, raspberry, green apple fruit, broad presence, plays more towards lemon citrus and florality than minerality. Shows a firm acidic spine, active through an extended finish. Expansive dissolve, its foam comes through more during the finish than anywhere else, in the

final analysis offering more brute power than finesse. 60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir 91

Chiquet, Gaston
Champagne, Special Club Brut
Blend

1997, \$47.99, 12.0%

Dark golden color runs fully from core to rims, very deep, active bubbles but nowhere tight enough to count as beads. Very rich nose too, breadly and honeyed with muscular pear, green apple, peach fruit, orange blossom, soft and pliant with minimal minerality, aims more at an enveloping sweetness. Full-bodied, not that dry in the mouth either although no real faulting the acidity which remains present from start to finish. Powerful mousse is front-loaded and helps bring the minerality out here in the mouth. Lemon and orange citrus comes next with floral touches and a bit of earthiness as well. Crisp profile to the peach, red apple, pear, apricot fruit, has juice but also pit/skin notes too. Minor pie dough or bread elements, this plays down any honey dashes until the finish where there's some residual sweetness. Lush more than bright, wants to fill your mouth and succeeds. 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir. (Disgorged 11/23/04) 90

Hébrart, Marc
Champagne, Premier Cru Special Club Brut
Blend

1999, \$31.99, 12.0%

Golden core, more white straw in general color, average depth of beads and clarity. Hits the nose with its shoulders squared, broad and audacious red apple, peach, melon, apricot fruit scents, not sweet but quite ripe, not much provided by way of stones, minerals, impresses mainly with its sheer heft, about as primary as Champagne can be. Very full-bodied and big-boned, layers itself on the tongue until it feels like a lead coat. Impressive foam breaks a sweat lifting it up and swirling it about. Lemon peel, white stone, streamwater, roses, not many breadly nor honeyed tones, plays it straight ahead. Thickly arrayed apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, cherry fruit helps really stuff the finish. Massive weight will open some eyes and it is to its credit that it keeps moving forward. A real curious one, not an easy sipper. 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay. (Disgorged Mars 24, 2005) 89

Varnier-Fanniére
Champagne, Grand Cru Cuvée Saint Denis Blanc de
Blancs Brut L.28

Chardonnay
NV, \$52.99, 12.0%

Very light and transparent white straw color with a green tinge, the bubbles are a bit lazy, reflective surface. Leesy, yeasty nose, makes a strong initial impression, well-fruited with cherry, peach, red apple scents, orange citrus, caramel, sticks to your nostril hairs but never sloppily so. In the mouth it is very broad and foamy with resonant depth in the pain grillé, honey and apricot, pear, red apple fruit flavors. The acidity is somewhat light weight, you can feel it begin to slow down as it approaches the center. Bitter nuts pair with tar, earth, graphite notes, while the soil speaks it's only one part of the show. Very dry finish but so much textural residue left behind its final imprint lasts for some time. (Disgorged 10/13/04) 88

Peters, Pierre
Champagne, Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut
Chardonnay

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1998, \$58.99, 12.0%

Greenish-gold in color, very nicely hued with an average shine and tight, evenly paced beads. Crisp green apple, pear, melon scents ease into the nose, just hint of creaminess and nuttiness, the foundation of minerality is not showy and easy to miss, more round than driven by cut, fullness its best attribute. Full-bodied, strong pétillance during the attack, fruity with vividly ripe green apple, pear, peach flavors. The lemon/lime citrus has its edge dulled by a doughy quality. The acidity has a roundness which doesn't dry things out but does help create a pleasing outward-pushing presence in the mid-palate. Honeyed notes make a gentle, softening appearance on the back end, in no way to the detriment of the minerality. Touches completely upon every area but doesn't seem to excel in any one, perhaps a product of youthful lack of calm or composure. 88

Larmandier-Bernier
Champagne, Terre de Vertus Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature
Chardonnay

NV, \$49.99, 12.0%

Very light yellow color, pale with OK shine and diffuse beads of very tiny bubbles. Solid toast to the nose, not overly stony, more honey, sweet tangerine to lemon citrus and creamy apricot, peach, pear scents, very rich. Full-bodied, spreads broadly across the palate yet comes off as a bit hollow, all contour with little middle. More minerality here for sure, crisper feel in the white citrus but also diffuse character in the apricot, peach, pear, green apple fruit flavors. The acidity seeks out the sweetness bent on revenge. Chalk, chalk and more chalk as it finishes, the residual foam plays well with this aspect. While certainly dry and with overall focus, not sure you'd call it elegant. (Disgorged Mars 2005) 87

Brun, Jean-Paul
Beaujolais, Terres Dorées FRV 100, Gamay Noir
NV, \$14.99, 7.5%

Only has the lightest pétillance, hardly visibly beading, dark magenta in color and quite clear, fades at the rims a lot. Exceptionally grassy nose, noticeable sweet and sour interplay in the red cherry, raspberry scents, fine mineral foundation, not especially long. Full-bodied, here the foam is very evident from the first sip and while dry overall there's also a forceful ripeness in the black cherry, blackberry, black raspberry, watermelon fruit. Less herbaceous in the mouth yet also less stoniness too. The lemon component comes through loud and clear. Round enough mouth feel to carve out a long finish based mostly on weight and momentum. Interesting and not hard to drink, seems very food-friendly too. 87

Lallement et Fils, Jean
Champagne, Grand Cru Brut
Blend

NV, \$35.99, 12.0%

Fairly dark golden color, just about right to the rims, the bubble beads more or less of average size and intensity. Blockish nose, not really giving up much, touches of mineral and lemon citrus, whisper of bread or honey, not much is going on in the apricot, pear, peach fruit department. Medium-bodied, on the mute side in the mouth too, firm and unyielding. The acidity is deep and broad, more of a clamped down jaw than teeth. Shares more by way of minerals and stone than dough, good dose of lemon peel. Ends up turning bitter if not slightly astringent. Not much foam to lighten things up, resulting

in a clenched finish. Not that appealing. 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay. [Disgorged 9/3/04] 85

ITALY RED

Bea, Azienda Agricola Paolo
Umbria, Montefalco, Vigna Pipparello, Rosso Riserva
Blend
2001, \$61.99, 13.5%

Crystal clear ruby to violet in color, would be darker if it wasn't so clear, offers bright orange rims. The nose is all blackberry, strawberry, cherry fruit with a touch of raisin and then leather, tar, bagged wet grass, dried orange peels, gives up more licorice and flowers as it provides a big final flourish in your nostrils. Full-bodied, feels like a lead weight thrown in your mouth, the tar, earth, leather and pine sap congeal quickly, tannins add to this while luckily the acidity has the verve to fight back. Stronger raisin feel here in the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, very sweet on the whole. White grapefruit, hay bundles, rose petals are there if you like. Not immensely structured but should evolve in an interesting manner. But so good now you may not find out. 60% Sangiovese, 25% Montepulciano, 15% Sagrantino. 91

Tavijn, Cascina
Piedmont, Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato
Ruché
2004, \$22.99, 14.0%

Semi-luminescent hum in the deep violet core, the dark magenta rims also glow softly. Curious interplay of white pepper and lavender in the nose, olive pit, grass and a broad cushion of black currant, plum, cherry fruit, its scents really fill up your nostrils well. Medium-bodied, that peppery spiciness less a factor in the mouth, the florality much more in charge. Pretty spritz of orange/lemon citrus and a pinch of earth, remains focused on polishing up the plum, black cherry, black raspberry fruit. Gauzy tannins at best, while it doesn't feel unstructured, leaves you feeling that structure is also not an issue in how it wants to present itself. Its simple honesty makes you like it even more. 90

Dora, Azienda Vinicola Renato
Piedmont, Pinerolese, Doux d'Henry Rosé
Pinerolese Doux d'Henry
2004, \$16.99, 12.0%

Achingly bright watermelon red to garnet in color, light and transparently clear, couldn't drop off much at the rims as there wasn't much to start with. The nose is angular at first but does soften as the strawberry, raspberry fruit accumulates and settles, blends in white pepper, minerals, lemon citrus and tree leaves yet, even if taken together, cannot challenge the vibrant friendliness of the fruit. Light-bodied, has a youthful crispness about it, all radiant light and warm breezes. The acidity lends verve and gets you salivating, no doubt. Minerals and mild herbaceousness ensue, suggests that white pepper thing. The lemon citrus gives it additional bite, as if it needed it. Unbridled energy courses through the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, giving it length and focus. For whatever complexity it may lack it more than over-compensates for via naive bravura. 90

Cavallotto, Fratelli
Piedmont, Barolo, Vignolo, Riserva
Nebbiolo
1999, \$61.99, 14.5%

Fresh violet to brick red colored core, turns much more to garnet and orange nearer the rims, no lack of clarity throughout. Fully-stuffed nose, there's a plummy feel in the cherry, currant, blackberry scents, abundant licorice and mint, dark chocolate, orange spice, at this moment only hinting at leather, tar or earth. Full-bodied and on the soft side, making it eminently approachable already. The tannins tame to start and the acidity subdued, achieves its scale mainly on the depth of the black cherry, blackberry, currant fruit, barely dries out at all by the mid-palate. Rose petals, sweet orange spritz, tobacco and a brace of fresh leather add breadth as it progresses. Remains stable and full through to the finish, the tannins finally gain traction but overall it doesn't seize up. Real juicy. 90

Cavallotto, Fratelli
Piedmont, Barolo, Bricco Boschis
Nebbiolo
2001, \$47.99, 14.5%

The violet hues absorbed into the deeper red-ruby, brick red hues, consistently colored through the lively and youthful rims. Minty fresh nose, sizeable portion of animal hide and leather, crushed oranges, wet forest floor scrub, pine cone, super-ripe red cherry, blackberry, red raspberry fruit, lingers for a long time before its final dissolve. Full-bodied, juicy enough to cling to your cheeks while not getting sappy per se, just concentrated cherry, blackberry, raspberry flavors as found in the nose. Spicy with straw, leather, brown earth elements and a full dose of lemon citrus, the acidity seems to have more get-up-and-go than the tannins. Almost hints at clove or cinnamon fumes as it finishes, even more lemony too. Can't lose this twiggy aspect but overall it's just out there shaking its big rumpus. 89

Voerzio, Agriviticola Gianni
Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba, Rocchettevino
Dolcetto
2003, \$21.99, 14.0%

Immaculate with a crystalline shine but no denying the darkness of the purple core, fat crimson to red-magenta rims remain fully hued. Musky floral perfume lad across the blackberry, black raspberry scents in the nose, sweet tangerine juice, sweet tea leaves, not that earthy so it gets grapier the more you sniff it. Full-bodied and concentrated to pushing a light prune/raisin feel in the cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit. Straightens out and gets moving but still semi-clunky at moments. The abundant florality pretties it up as does that sweet orange, tangerine and lemon citrus. This trend keeps going with powdered milk chocolate tones. Minimal greenness in the tannins but not much tannins nor acidity anyway. Good vivid flavor, you should focus on that. 88

Mastrojanni, Azienda Agraria
Tuscany, Brunello di Montalcino
Brunello
1999, \$49.99, 13.5%

Muted purple to scarlet core, its overall clarity allows a stronger orange-garnet hue to show through the rims. The nose first reveals pine, forest scrub, wet earth, as it starts to get leathery this gets rolled over by prune/raisin dominated plum, black cherry fruit scents and cocoa powder, just a little too much going on to choose a direction and stick with it. Medium-bodied, a firm streak of acidity tries to keep it fresh and highlight more of the red raspberry, red cherry fruit than deeper blackberry, raisin aspects. Good degree of orange citrus, flower petals and

leather, puts on more weight as it sits in the mouth and loses some energy, that said, the finish is full, hard to complain there. In no way unsatisfying yet doesn't get you truly excited for another glass. 88

Loredan Gasparini, Azienda Agricola Conte Veneto, Colli Trevigiani, Venegazzù Della Casa Blend

2000, \$28.99, 13.0%

Solid scarlet-purple color in its dark core, mostly maintains its depth to the rims where it has more of an orange-red brick hue. Pleasing dustiness in the nose, licorice and flowers spar with leather, tar, mineral dust, indecisive in favor of any party, juicy blackberry, raspberry, cherry fruit scents, more chocolate and light vanilla than out-and-out toast, minimal greenness. Medium-bodied, the well-contoured currant, cherry fruit maintains its presence but not too juicy here either. Spicy, displays some cedar, leather, dried mushroom notes. The tannins form a dust cloud throughout the mouth, overpowers any acidity and lends it a maturing character. Level flying altitude, nothing drops off from start through finish. While not remarkable does a very good job of satisfying. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc, 10% Merlot, 5% Malbec. 88

Giacosa, Casa Vinicola Bruno Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba

Dolcetto

2004, \$23.99, 12.5%

Clear red-violet core of moderate darkness, more red-magenta around the rims, pleasing depth of hue. Bit of funk in the nose, either sulfur or general merde, then earth, dried lemons, muscularly lean cranberry, red cherry, raspberry scents, odd notes of Vicks VapoRub too. In the mouth it is medium-bodied yet its super-firmness gives it a great deal more heft. Sour profile to the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit entirely in keeping with the grape, this buoyed by graphite, stone, lemon citrus and dusty potpourri notes. Admirably structured with both tannins and acidity, even if at times to the detriment of overall flow. A soft milk chocolate coating helps it sink in some though. Crisp snap as it ends, respectably in the face of the downward pull of its weight/structure. 88

Tramin (Cantina Produttori Termeno), Kellerei Cantina Alto Adige/Südtirol

Lagrein

2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Only its vast clarity prevents the black purple core from turning opaque, fiery beet red-purple rims. Spicy, peppery nose with a crisp herbaceous snap, leather, burnt melted chocolate, dried potpourri, the thick and sour cherry, blackberry scents provide ample bottom. Full-bodied, especially during the attack, plenty to chew on here. Loaded with velvety currant, black cherry, blackberry fruit and even brawnier herbaceousness. Sour lemons, tar, leather and chewing tobacco notes fit the overall tenor well. Solid acidity with weaker but broader tannins, even with all that fruit stays dry. While it is one big mouthful of wine, has enough jagged edges that if it isn't served with food it may not make the best impression possible. 87

Moschioni, Vignaiuolo Davide

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Colli Orientali del Friuli Refosco dal Peduncolo

Refosco

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2002, \$32.99, 14.0%

Entirely unblemished, night dark black-purple core, thin, glowing scarlet-red rims. Coconut oil, wet floral perfume, sour cherry, black raspberry and cranberry fruit scents set up the nose, it's not earthy per se but there's something which weighs it down and lends immobility. In the mouth it is fairly full-bodied, if with a certain bitterness which makes you swallow it down prematurely and before it settle in fully. Minerality, earth, stone and straw come through, maybe a suggestion of leather. Concentrated raspberry, cherry fruit, but has hollow moments, tends to peter out a few seconds before you'd like. On the whole it just loses the tightness in its knots slowly past the mid-palate. Adequate but not much more. 87

Vallana, Antonio

Piedmont, Boca

Blend

1996, \$19.99, 12.5%

Not cloudy but not that clear either, medicinal red-purple color turns to garnet before a fuller orange nearer the rims and then finally transparent. Cedar, sandalwood, licorice, menthol, pressed roses, a lot of Brett funk obscures some of the richness in the prune, plum, cherry scents, tightens up the more you try to deeply sniff it. Medium-bodied, the tannins tend to deaden the mouth entry some, takes away some juiciness from the currant, cherry, plum fruit. Accents of tar, lemon peel, leather, potpourri, merde and more Brett leap eagerly into the fray. While it leaves your tongue feeling like it has two coats of fresh paint on it not much texture left by the finish. Hard to fully grasp what it meant to be. 65% Nebbiolo, 20% Vespolino, 15% Bonarda. 86

San Gregorio, Feudi di Campania, Irpinia, Pàtrimo

Merlot

2001, \$128.99, 13.5%

Opaque black purple core, incredibly dense burnt crimson rims, incredibly dark throughout. Brawny toast infuses the whole nose, uni-dimensional and thus allows the metallic, gamey, piney notes to shine, more moist earth and minerals next, the smoky currant, cherry scents possess depth but are more or less inactive. Juicy initially in the mouth, full-bodied with a palpable bitter edge which covers up the milk chocolate, cocoa notes and turns the rest if the oak semi-sour. Real grassy, earthy as well with more of that metal notes, adds in orange peel and leather in uneven waves. The tannins are thick and rough-hewn and do very little to focus or structure things, feels like wood shavings laid on your tongue. Dryness pervades the currant, plum, black cherry fruit by the mid-palate, leaving it further devoid of direction and without the stuffing to last through a longer finish. Attempts to open as it soaks in the oxygen but more or less fruitlessly. One of the heaviest wine bottles you may ever lift. 86

Masciarelli, Azienda Agricola

Abruzzi, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

Montepulciano

2002, \$7.49, 13.0%

Trim red-purple core, its clarity brings it more of a pure red hue around the rims. Sweet and candied nose full of cherry, raspberry fruit, cotton candy, cut grass and whispers of pine and earth, focus decidedly on the fruit. Medium-bodied, full and sweet during the attack, doesn't quite have the natural "oomph" to remain at that level through the finish. That said, pretty smooth and without

any kind of sour or excessively herbal thing to upset the procession of the simple cherry, blackberry fruit, momentary hint of raisin. While not particularly tannic nor acidic, is dry past the mid-palate. Mixes in some nice lemon juice tang. Perfectly acceptable, this is just about what a rational person should anticipate at this price. 86

Gabutti (Franco Boasso), Azienda Agricola
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba
Barbera

2004, \$15.99, 14.0%

Clean red-purple core, barely moves to ruby-crimson at the rims, no loss of hue at all. Mute nose, nice foundation of black cherry, plum fruit but with minimal embellishment beyond some orange peel, earth and tar leaf, more weight than scent. Medium-bodied, gives you a full puckering sensation during its mouth entry, earthy with lemon dust and minerals all mashed together. The acidity elevates tang in all of these elements as well as the herbaceous aspect. Sort of rough, this in spite of good concentration in the cherry, plum, red currant fruit. Displays a bit of cocoa and grill smoke but isn't oaked. Becomes uneven on the finish, attributable mainly to excess energy. 86

Cavallotto, Fratelli
Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba, Vigna Scot
Dolcetto

2004, \$13.99, 13.0%

Unblemished and very reflective garnet to magenta in color, consistent from the center to the full rims. Semi-sour nose of raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, mineral powder, licorice, grows richer as it sits in the glass, minor wafts of lemon citrus and dried flower petals make a swift appearance. Light to medium-bodied, has a fine burst of acidity to ensure cleanliness and adequate length but it could benefit from more oomph in the blackberry, red cherry fruit. Orange spice, rosemary, loose stones, earth and flowers help supplement the fruit, does a decent job of swelling in the center. That said, once this is done it empties out quickly into a perfunctory finish. Nothing wrong with it, nothing exciting about it either. 86

Gabutti (Franco Boasso), Azienda Agricola
Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba, Meriame
Dolcetto

2004, \$13.49, 13.5%

Saturated glow in the ruby-purple core, very much on the dark side, this accentuates the magenta rims in spite of overall hue consistency. The nose is not particularly forthcoming, leather and pressed flowers, semi-sour cherry and blackberry fruit with fruit pit notes, slice of milk chocolate. Light-bodied, sour and woody in the mouth with cedar, dried clove accents in addition to tar, twigs, leaves and dried brown earth for its initial offering. Wakes up a little via the lemon and orange citrus, minerals, no blame to be placed on the acidity which remains formidable throughout. The tartness in the cherry, blackberry, Italian plum fruit makes it recede even quicker than it might otherwise. Slugs you pretty hard on the finish, like a drunk bar room brawler who doesn't win many fights even when sober. 85

ITALY WHITE

Prà, Azienda Agricola F.lli
Veneto, Soave Classico
Blend

2004, \$12.99, 13.0%

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Wonderful surface brilliance, pure gold color, mild hue loss at the rims but so pretty who cares? In the nose a smoky, oily patina is laid on the foundation of super-juicy apricot, peach, pineapple fruit scents, light touch of mint and crushed flowers, not immensely complex but does offer uncommon depth and staying power. Full-bodied with a round, firm texture that adds perceptibly to its mouth weight. Ripe lemon and orange citrus pairs seamlessly with equally ripe peach, pear, apricot, red apple fruit. The acidity remains stable and easily ensures it is never too sweet nor cloying. Allusions to spice and mint add to its overall friendliness. A general tingle contributes freshness to the finish. Unspectacularly spectacular. Mostly Garganega with some Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc or Trebbiano di Soave? 90

Bea, Azienda Agricola Paolo
Umbria, Pagliaro, Santa Chiara
Blend

2004, \$33.99, 13.5%

Thick, semi-translucent gold, one big solid block of color with very light shine, given depth of hue at the core becomes noticeably dilute around the rims. Very heavy, if not ponderous, in the nose, inches incrementally inwards with peach, apricot, pear paste, lemon honey and a pinch of cinnamon, vague milkiness, the florality can't quite get started, more of a textural experience. In the mouth it's just as viscous and full-bodied but ten times more expressive. The tangerine, lemon citrus bright and juicy, the florality broader and supplemented by mint, licorice notes. The poached, paste feel pervades the apricot, peach, nectarine, pear, red apple fruit giving it a concentrated presence throughout, even if without much strut. The cinnamon, nutmeg, clove spice gives it additional depth and picks up the fruit some. The acidity takes awhile to make itself known but ends up quite nice and well-accounted for. Intriguing mixture of textures and flavors and shows a few signs of potentially aging well too. Unspecified percentages of Grechetto, Malvasia, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Garganega. 90

Jermann
Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Pinot Bianco

2004, \$31.99, 13.5%

Light yellow hay, vague translucency throughout, somewhat watery rims. In the nose there's violets, lilacs, chalk, tangerine to lemon citrus, peach, apricot, pear fruit, easy to sniff on, manages to fill your nostrils without being heavy. Medium-bodied, achieves good traction on the tongue via the bottom-heavy apricot, peach, nectarine fruit. Presents sideways-angled florality and orange/lemon citrus, soft and more or less gregarious in how it wants to express itself given its lack of directness. Reveals brighter acidity than you'd think at first, mineral water, lemon water, spicy with a good soft bottom. Never strays into foreign territory while still familiar enough for your putrid, little brain to feast upon. Drink me! 89

Bartoli, Marco de
Sicilia, Samperi, Grappoli del Grillo
Grillo

2004, \$29.99, 14.0%

Really colorless, flat transparency, a vague brown gold hue simmers below the surface, not much shine either. Intense amount of boldfaced oak on the nose, butterscotch, toffee, caramel, mint, vibrant tangerine/orange citrus, man, this is some serious oak, under all that there's ripe peach,

apricot, nectarine fruit and lemon citrus, suggests just about nothing else. In the mouth it's all about vanilla cream, cedar, caramel, clove, nutmeg, not anywhere near as oaky as the nose but spicier. Has adequate acidity yet doesn't appear all that structured. Basic array of pear, peach, green apple fruit. Hits that plateau early, stays extremely friendly, amazing for how you shouldn't like it from an intellectual perspective but your pleasure receptors pop a boner. Smooth, deep and guiltily seductive. 88

Vercesi del Castellazzo, Azienda Agricola Lombardy, Oltrepò Pavese, Gugarolo Pinot Nero Bianco Pinot Nero
2004, \$15.99, 13.0%

Completely, utterly devoid of color, clear as water, does have a good deal of reflectivity. Violet paste, rosewater, lemon drop and licorice make for an intriguing nose, more freshly fallen rain in nature than driven by the peach or pear fruit, lightest of touches. Light-bodied, refreshing acidity lends it additional presence. Very nutty and full of floral oil, minerals there but not sharp on character. Feels alcoholic in how the flavors present themselves, not in terms of "heat," like a liqueur. Subtle peach, apricot, melon fruit, offers no sweetness at all. Builds into a cloud of perfume in the mouth, showing more anise seed and lemon peel. Coats the tongue like a soft blanket. Odd wine. (Note: vinified as white wine from Pinot Noir.) 87

Bisson
Liguria, Cinque Terre, Marea
Blend
2004, \$23.99, 13.0%

Flat yellow to light brown straw in color, a bit too semi-translucent for excess shine but does draw in and bend some light. Full dose of apricot, peach, yellow apple fruit in the nose, lights wafts of florality and then curiously nothing, like it was shot dead in your nostrils. Full-bodied and viscous in the mouth, very different than expected, paste-like feel here to the apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit. The acidity has good speed and pickup, cuts through the paste bringing out more lemon to lime citrus tones. You get additional stone and a little cut grass and fruit pit past the mid-palate. Remains broad in feel through the finish, maintains its weight credibly. Nice minerally prickle as a last effect. Unspecified percentages of Bosco, Vermentino, Albarola. 87

GERMANY WHITE

Schaefer, Weingut Willi
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Graacher, Domprobst, Spätlese AP #9
Riesling
2004, \$31.99, 7.5%

Immaculate white gold in color, inherent shine battles the translucency below the surface, clear rims but hard to notice as white as it is throughout. Mild creaminess in the nose, overall stays refined if not subdued, crystalline minerality, lemon/lime water, smokiness builds and builds as it sits, mild mannered both floral and herbal, the peach, apricot, red apple, melon fruit scents eagerly engage. Medium-bodied, loses some depth due to its sleek, swift pacing. Acidity has bark but not inclined to bite, dry enough to achieve cleanliness while also not restricting the flavors. Very citrusy, rife with pink grapefruit, lime, lemon, tangerine and then some. Minerality powdery, falls prey to the youthful citrus and apricot, nectarine, pear, red apple fruit. Much higher florality here, aids its light touch.

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Dryness on finish doesn't negatively effect its vibrancy. Wonderful stuff. 92

Karthäuserhof, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Eitelsbacher, Karthäuserhofberg,
Feinherb (Medium-Dry) AP #3
Riesling
2004, \$18.99, 11.0%

Bright yellow-green straw color, has shine but much paler at the rims, so much fizz when you pour it it looks like a snow globe turned upside down. While there's an initial creaminess to the nose, there's abundant powdery minerals and pulverized stones, displays pleasing rose water and orange blossom accents too, while on the whole dry there's distinct bursts of apricot, cherry, peach, apple scents. Light to medium-bodied, has an openly-knit texture which allows free movement to the stream water, mineral, stone, chalk components, invigorates from the start. Adds in lemon peel, meadow grasses and twigs, and then more minerals. More "Fein" than "herb," not really sweet, mild punctuating moment in the center as the cherry, red berry, red apple, pear fruit stretches out. Fumes in your mouth linger for a good while. 90

Schaefer, Weingut Willi
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Graacher, Domprobst, Spätlese AP #11
Riesling
2004, \$37.99, 7.5%

The pure white to yellow straw color appears as a solid block, has more than enough depth to distort and drops off minimally towards the rims. In the nose the saline/salt component teams up with the minerality to make sure they get heard, the vanilla cream adds softer character to the apricot, peach, red apple, red cherry fruit scents, very much in control of its self-presentation. Medium-bodied, displays a gritty texture and great grip as a result. The lemon/lime citrus kicks it up a notch even as the chalk and minerality remain semi-shadowy. That salty quality highlights the acidity which at first isn't all that major of a component but then grows exponentially as it progresses through the mouth. Basic, well-contoured, crisp apple, pear, peach, nectarine fruit gets you all the juice it knows you need and not a drop more. Its precision may come as hardness. 89

Schaefer, Weingut Willi
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Wehlener, Sonnenuhr, Kabinett AP #15
Riesling
2004, \$21.99, 8.0%

Shows a particularly light white to yellow straw color, given its clarity it still manages to distort light, completely colorless by the rims. Nose kind of sneaks up on you and each time you sniff something different seems prominent, be it white mineral powder, lemon spritz, dried oil, faded flowers or rosemary/basil herbs or finally the peach, red apple, pear fruit scents. Medium-bodied with surprising firmness, like a crowbar to the jaw. While it is dry it's not archly so and the acidity not so intent on slicing and dicing, again more of a blunt blow. At first you do get a nanosecond of honey before the tangy lemon and tangerine citrus takes over, the super-crunchy pear, apple, peach fruit has more snap in it than a brand new rubber band. The minerality appears lighter than in the nose perhaps lost in the bright lights. Needs decanting or a Xanax. 89

Wittmann, Weingut
Rheinhessen, Spätlese AP #19
Riesling
2004, \$21.99, 9.0%

Flat green to white straw in color, very little shine gives it a blockish appearance. Nose has the contour of a water balloon, has to be thick to hold all that liquid in, all juicy apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, apple fruit, firmed up some by lemon peel and white stone and chalk touches, as it expands in your nostrils the smoky minerality becomes more dominant. Full-bodied and thickly layered on your tongue, the acidity saw the Mongol horde of apricot, red apple, peach, pear fruit on the horizon and headed for the hills. Its sweetness embellished further by sugary tangerine, lemon, pink grapefruit citrus. The aforementioned even enough to minimize the honey and molasses shades. Whispers some stoniness and oil as well as garden herbs but tentative at best. Just get yourself for a kaleidoscope of fruit and pour yourself a glass. 88

Jost, Weingut Toni
Mittelrhein, Spätlese AP #6
Riesling
2004, \$19.99, 10.0%

Cloudy in appearance, dulls whatever shine it might have, green hay in color, distorts light quite a bit. Super-sweet and juicy nose of hothouse flowers, lemon/lime citrus, mint and peach, apricot, nectarine, melon fruit, minimal emphasis on structure just scent power. Full-bodied, while showing slightly more restraint here than in the nose, "fruit bomb" is not far off. The acidity is fairly flattened, breaks a sweat trying to find a place to call its own. This causes a somewhat diffuse presentation of the apricot, peach, pear, yellow apple fruit as well as the tangerine and lime citrus. Hints at a vanilla type of creaminess, caramel too, which blurs things further including the floral dimension. Hard to locate any minerality or stoniness. Vivid flavors, not much else. 86

AUSTRIA WHITE

Schrock, Weingut Heidi
Burgenland, Rust
Furmint
2004, \$22.99, 13.5%

Flat yellow to white gold in color, noticeable surface plane and beneath bends light along long curves. Sweet and bouncy nose without being truly juicy, bountiful florality, crisp lemon zest, big cloud of mineral powder, easy to engage peach, pear, apricot fruit scents, has plenty to kick to last well. Medium-bodied, just as lively and zippy in the mouth with sweet and sour lemon, orange citrus and a florality more of a sharper character than downy perfume. The peach, nectarine, apricot, green apple fruit more juicy here, vivid and deep with a reluctance to end. The acidity is forceful and why the wine has a thoughtful compactness about it, the acidity also keeps it running forward on time. Keeps sparkling with ease through the prolonged finish, every time it might get more complex instead it shrugs and tickles your tonsils. 91

Hofer, H. und M. Weingut
Weinviertel
Grüner Veltliner
2004, \$8.99, 12.5%

The transparent white to gold straw color just deep enough to take advantage of its above average, pretty

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shine. Has almost all the Grüner scents you want, just ratcheted down for general agreeability — white stone dust, white pepper, cut grass, orange/lemon citrus, cut grass, pinch of flower petals as well as stout pear, peach, pineapple fruit, screw complexity when you get solid enjoyment. Full-bodied, expansive in how it forms a blossoming cloud through your entire mouth yet at the same time has the acidic cut to feel erect and alert as well. The tangerine, lemon, white grapefruit citrus is the major component here, once your mouth stops violently tingling you register the more than ample streamwater, stone, mineral chunk elements too. The herbaceousness is there simply as a typical embellishment, not at all green nor really that evident. The peach, apricot, pear, pineapple, red apple fruit keeps doing its thing throughout. Exceedingly slurpable. One liter bottle. 90

SPAIN RED

Cambra, Bodegas Rafael
Valencia, Dos
Blend
2003, \$14.99, 13.5%

Incredibly dark glow in the purple core evokes a solar eclipse, deeply saturated and luminescent red-magenta rims. Sharp, angular nose of toast, roasted game, leather, black smoke, roasted black cherry, plum fruit scents, a bit too heavy for any florality or orange citrus to develop. Full-bodied, has a solid underpinning of peppery tannins to help chip through the dense, block-like feel of the cherry, blackberry, currant fruit. Here the florality comes through better, as well as the lemon to orange citrus. Calmer overall, more provided by way of leather, earth, minerals than full-on game or meats. Mild elevation in the herbaceousness on the finish reminds you that it's half Cabernet Franc. Solid, lengthy finish, loses none of its stuffing. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Cabernet Franc. 89

SPAIN WHITE

Sanz, Javier
Rueda, Villa Narcisa
Verdejo
2004, \$10.49, 13.0%

Flat yellow-brown straw in color, turns to full, colorless transparency at the rims. Active nose full of melon, yellow apple, peach, apricot, pineapple fruit, licorice, sweet herbs, tangerine citrus, mild minerality, fresh with an airy lift. Medium-bodied, blends a softish and sweet feel during the attack with pink grapefruit, lemon, lime citrus and a dewy florality. Minor tones of herbaceousness are in place here and contribute to its freshness. Medium grade acidity, but enough to enliven the chalk and white mineral dust aspects. The gracious sweetness remains throughout in the apricot, peach, pear, green melon, pineapple fruit, a billowy sweetness without heavy concentration nor weight. Very friendly and easy to keep sipping. 90

SPAIN DESSERT

Lustau, Emilio
Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, East India Solera Sherry
Blend
NV, \$19.99, 20.0%

Its black-brown core swiftly turns to a solid yellow beyond the tiny core, excellent hue intensity as well as clarity. The nose is earthy and almost salty, dried oranges and herbs,

glimmer of milk chocolate and honey, the fruit is mainly apricot, nectarine, peach and slowly surfaces through the rest. Medium to full-bodied, delivers enough caramel, vanilla, chocolate, honey to make it bright and lively, stays forward-moving even with its thick bottom. The apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit with time takes on both a deeper paste-like quality and smokiness. Betrays an ever so slight touch of heat but overall its voluptuousness evens this out. More caramel on the finish along with elevating orange/tangerine citrus. Not going to tickle the intellect like reading Tolstoy but leaves you quite satisfied. Unspecified percentages of Palomino Fino, Pedro Ximénez. L 4189. 89

Romero, Bodegas Pedro
Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Dry Oloroso
Full Dry Sherry
Palomino Fino
NV, \$8.99, 18.0%

Very clear amber-orange, concentrated core, trails off to a watery yellow around the rims. Powerful grilled nut scents in the nose, lemon oil, baked molasses, cocoa powder, a moment of herbaceousness stiffens the peach, apple, pear scents. Medium-bodied, maintains a good amount of pressure on the tongue while also avoiding being so dry your mouth is deadened. That said, it's awfully dry and crisp, here the lemon/orange citrus is strong enough to battle the brawny nuttiness. Bitter bite extends through the pie crust and mentholated medicine components. More flesh on the apricot, peach, pear fruit, offers more length and intensity if not juiciness. Expands and broadens through the finish, accumulates nutty fumes while maintaining its bottom. Little bit of heat. L 1545. 88

Lustau, Emilio
Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Solera
Reserva Pápirusa Manzanilla Sherry
Palomino Fino
NV, \$11.49, 15.5%

Virtually colorless, pale white gold at best, very reflective surface with a translucent layered effect beneath. The nose is nutty with sour lemon, dried dough, anise seed, peach and apricot pits, clean and direct if simple. Light-bodied, displays good acidity which leaves the tongue dry, caught between dry and sparkly in feel. The nuttiness dominates with smoother lemon/lime citrus and a pleasing floral touch, lessens any bitterness. The green apple, peach, apricot fruit is consistent and manages to possess a sweet core throughout. There's some dried herb and licorice to pretty up the finish. Displays a nice sense of balance and minimal alcoholic heat. Good refreshing character. L 5011. 88

PORTUGAL RED

Sobral, Quinta do
Dão, Reserva
Blend
1998, \$11.99, 12.0%

Softly glowing red-purple core, the bright brick red rims heightened by a strong orange tinge. You get some sulfur and fart scents first in the nose, weighed down with black pepper and white grapefruit, meadow grass, rawhide leather, while the cherry, plum fruit scents are not juicy they do benefit from a definite prune edge. Medium-bodied, angular tannins give it unusual firmness for its overall weight, about zero fat on it. Very spicy and with that emphasis on black pepper, shows a lower degree of mixed

lemon and white grapefruit citrus. The plum, cherry fruit has that prune edge here too but remains dry throughout. Brown earth, leather and dried tobacco lend it a familiar flavor profile. Super-crisp finish, leaves your mouth feeling scrubbed. Unspecified percentages of Jaen, Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro Preto, Tinta Roriz. 88

PORTUGAL DESSERT

Infantado, Quinta do
Douro, Medium-Dry Vintage Character Port
Blend
NV, \$22.99, 19.5%

Rich, fully opaque purple core, features a dark glow in the thick ruby-crimson rims. Tangerine, lemon perfume is first in the nose, quite floral as well, overall quite clean with cherry, melon, red apple, strawberry scents, medium level of density and thrust. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and possessed of adequate concentration and sweetness, light raisin feel in the cherry, raspberry fruit with cinnamon, ginger spice and a dusting of cocoa powder. Gives a swipe of lemon citrus, while round and mostly smooth there is a touch of alcoholic burn on the way down the chute. Picks up some speed through the mid-palate but remains too homogenous to really hold your attention. Simple, straightforward, makes no promises it can't keep. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão, etc. (Bottled July 27, 2004) 87

Taylor Fladgate
Douro, 10 Year Tawny Port
Blend
NV, \$27.99, 20.0%

Very light crimson to orange-garnet in color, fades to a mixed yellow-orange at the rims, crystal clear throughout. Alcoholic nose, has an odd burnt aspect too, medicinal with chocolate/caramel notes, tea and tobacco leaves, semi-candied red cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit, lemon zest and dried grass. Medium-bodied, smoky with a much sweeter profile than you'd expect from a Tawny, powdered sugar sprinkled on the cherry, raspberry, plum fruit, the latter lacking some in concentration. Chocolate, hot caramel too, spiced orange rind makes a cameo. The acidity and tannin level fairly high for its type too this tends to play up the heat a little. Hits a few turbulent patches towards the finish but manages to stick the landing. Nothing horrible about it but comes off tasting a bit too commercial. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão, etc. (Bottled in 2004) 86

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Grosset
South Australia, Clare Valley, Polish Hill
Riesling
2004, \$34.99, 13.0%

Brilliant pure yellow gold color, light dances on the surface and it develops a greenish cast along the rims. Major rubber component in the nose, closely followed by lemon oil, mint, garden herbs, big puffs of white smoke and mineral dust, whiplash snap of pear, apple, apricot, nectarine fruit scents, set on domination of your olfactory sense. Full-bodied and seriously muscular, about as dense of an attack as possible, like gargling with bricks. The acidity is a mile wide, dry pucker throughout. Richer peach, apricot, pear, pineapple, green apple fruit than in the nose

but by no means fruity and a certain after-ran to the stone, mineral water and lemon peel aspects. On the finish the thickness subsides and it develops a razor sharp prickle. Needs a thorough decant for best effect. 92

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Mud House
Marlborough
Sauvignon Blanc
2005, \$12.99, 13.0%

Virtually completely transparent, in softer light takes on a brown straw cast, brilliant reflectivity, though. Very floral nose with a strong perfume of white grapefruit/lemon mist, white mineral dust, green apple, nectarine, pineapple, pear scents, while it has a full nostril presence it knows when to dissolve too. Full-bodied, offers more tropicality in the mouth via papaya, pineapple, nectarine, pear fruit, angular and exceedingly bright. Has that "thousand pinpricks" type of acidity, gets the mouth watering. Panoply of white grapefruit, lime and lemon citrus, adds in a thick layer of minerals and stones too, very low on the herbaceousness. Holds onto its mouth weight as well as vibrancy through the finish. Slightly richer fruit about all one might ask for. 89

TerraVin
Marlborough
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$18.99, 13.5%

Certain degree of fatness in the golden glow, dense in appearance with normal shine, hue consistent to the rims. Violets, chalk and a curious milkiness first appear in the nose, brief focused burst of chili pepper and then some lemon sprayed nectarine, peach, apricot scents yet, really, not much there by way of citrus nor fruit, medium weight in nostrils. In the mouth it's medium to full-bodied with a concentrated bottom that pushes down into the tongue. Again, mild chili pepper and minerality appear but not altogether spicy. Combine this with average white grapefruit/lemon citrus and average acidity and there's a lack of spring in its step. Anise and floral accents add complexity to the apple, pineapple, peach, nectarine fruit but while decently flavorful not real juicy. Gains more intensity closer to room temperature so ditch the ice bucket. 87

CHILE RED

Leyda, Viña
Leyda Valley, Las Brisas Vineyard, Reserve
Pinot Noir
2004, \$9.99, 14.0%

Very clear red-violet color at the center but not light, subtle shift outwards towards more dark garnet. Real swirling mix in the nose of sour oak and serious herbaceousness, pine resin, leather, lemon oil and smoky raspberry, blackberry, black cherry scents. Medium-bodied, doesn't place undue pressure on the tongue yet in no way dilute, just not trying to outstrip its relatively more humble origins. Maintains that smoky, grassy edge while producing more earth, leather, white grapefruit, orange peel, tar nuances in the mouth. Credible acidity gives life to the cherry, cranberry, blackberry fruit while creating a few mouth-watering sensations. The oak comes off more as toast and caramel/coffee than softer creaminess. Holds onto its energy to fashion satisfactory length at the end. 88

ARGENTINA RED

Portillo, Bodega El
Mendoza, Alto Valle de Uco, Finca El Portillo
Cabernet Sauvignon
2004, \$8.99, 14.0%

Thick ruby to violet in color, pleasing fullness too in the ruby-magenta rims. Good floral aromas in the nose, displays mint, milk chocolate, light coffee cream and orange zest yet not oaky, solid currant, black cherry fruit, all-in-all a good compact package. Medium to full-bodied, shows smooth polish and balance and easy drinkability. Dryish tannins gently squeeze the cherry, blackberry, currant fruit, moderately truncates the finish. Slides you some elements of orange peel, cedar, tea leaf, pinch of earth and that fluttery florality. As in the nose, not overly toasty yet there are milk chocolate, buttered toast notes. Doesn't change much from start to finish but keeps pushing the "drink more of me" button. Good stuff. 88