

The Hanes Wine Review, July 2005 Edition

* * * * * URGENT BREAKING NEWS!!! * * * * *

Yes, it's true. Hanes has finally gotten off his lazy ass and begun work on his website. True, there is absolutely zero design value to be had, it looks like a third grader did it. Hell, most third graders probably have slicker looking websites. But screw that, it's not like Hanes to trying to attract advertisers or satisfy any lame capitalist mandates. He just wants to share! To date, the following has been accomplished:

1. All past articles (going back to 1999) are available in standalone format for your reading pleasure. You won't know whether to laugh, cry or hurl.
2. The current edition is available online in the event anyone "accidentally" deletes this email.
3. The current and recent editions are all **available in PDF format**. This may help make it more portable or easier to read/print. Or it may not.

The awesome firepower of Hanes's tasting note database and its 8,000 or so entries is *not* yet available. This is the hard part. And, uhh, the part that costs money. Vanity doesn't pay as much as it used to, especially for the unemployed.

In any event, the articles are still pertinent (on the whole) and remain full of all the joy and mirth Hanes brings to the written word. Or something like that.

<http://www.haneswinereview.com/>

* * * * * END OF URGENT BREAKING NEWS!!! * * * * *

It's no secret that Hanes is rapidly becoming disenchanted with high alcohol wines. Any regular reader of *The Hanes Wine Review* will pick this up in the 36.2 average words s/he reads of each voluminous edition. While there is no doubt he still pounds back many of these high octane swills, it is reflected in the tasting note verbiage — and horrors of all horrors, yes, the numeric score — that they just are not making the positive impression they perhaps once did. But why? Has Hanes lost his insatiable lust for inebriation? Prithee, he says thee nay. It's more that he has *finally* figured out that he wants the "buzz" without the "burn"!

OK, so what is it about higher alcohol content that bothers Hanes? It's not the alcoholic content per se, it's the imbalance high alcohol can create among the wine's constituent elements as well as the burning sensations of heat in the nose and throat while all he wants is to peacefully soak in the scents and flavors. What does this mean? Lucy, you got some 'splaining to do...

Of course, we ALL know that alcohols are predominantly produced by yeasts during the fermentation process of the grape must into wine. That's why it doesn't say "Welch's" on the side of the bottle. Alcohol is a desired outcome of this fermentation process. How much alcohol is produced depends on a veritable plethora of factors. These include, but are not limited to, the natural inclination towards ripeness of any given grape type, the climatic factors influencing the vineyard site, the length of time the grapes are left to ripen on the vine ("hang time") before picking, the yields of the vines in terms of bunches per vine or tonnage per acre, the vinification process of the freshly pressed grape juice, and whether or not the wine has been fortified. That's a lot of factors. Many dictated by the whims of nature but many firmly within the effective powers of the vineyard manager and the winemaker.

By volume wine is mostly water with alcohol the next biggest component. Ethanol is the main alcohol — it has no taste and almost zero flavor. Ethanol's primary functions are to create a sweet sensation in the mouth and add weight/body to wine due to its viscosity, which is greater than water. More importantly, alcohol delivers most of a wine's aromas and flavors. Hanes understands how higher alcohol can create a more full-bodied wine (the chemical compound glycerol also plays a role in a wine's sweetness and to a lesser extent viscosity but "they say" this has been traditionally overrated). However, the sweetness factor always weirds Hanes out as he is easily confused. When one thinks of dry table wines, sure, the higher in alcohol ones are generally sweeter. Think Californian Zinfandel, Australian Shiraz or a bunch of French Viognier wines. But then most German Rieslings are very low in alcohol and many are quite sweet, including of course the dessert wines. With the Germans is it simply an issue of robust ripeness (must weight) and not necessarily sweetness (sugar) per se? Plus, many German Rieslings also seem quite full-bodied without the high alcohol content. Hanes has decided to allow this mysterious point of confusion to persist as the future search for an answer will provide him with a reason to keep living. And give his smart aleck swell pals a chance to send him emails explaining it all.

Anyway, alcohol is supposed to be a factor which provides balance to a wine. If one were to remove the alcohol from a wine the resulting imbalance would not be pleasant. Conversely, the higher the alcohol the more the wine needs increased flavor concentrations and (non-alcohol produced) body to achieve and maintain balance. Yes, indeed, "balance" is the key word here. And it is becoming more and more apparent to Hanes that the concept of "balance" is highly subjective and a vast source of "cognitive dissonance." Especially if one pays one's rent via the wine trade.

The basic scientific facts seem to be that at high concentrations ethanol produces a feeling of “heat” in the nose and mouth that can at times be displeasing if not outright painful. Human perception of alcohol depends on yet more damn factors. For example, the higher the serving temperature of the liquid, the more evident the alcohol. Conversely, the cooler the wine the less perceptible will be the alcohol. Always factor in serving temperature when thinking about the “burn” of the alcoholic heat in any given wine. This probably explains why a 14.5% alcohol white wine usually tastes less “hot” than a 14.5% red wine — they are served at very different temperatures, the cooler one partially masking the alcoholic burn. This is further borne out if the white wine in question gets warmer or if one chills down the red wine before consumption. Note that serving temperature has zero impact on the true alcoholic content of the wine, which remains constant.

First, let’s talk about burning sensations in the nose as this is where most people will encounter the presence of excessive alcohol and any attendant imbalance. As counterpoint, let’s look at hard alcohol beverages first. Brandies and other distillates are primarily supposed to be enjoyed for their aromas with only small sips being taken of the actual liquid. Why? Because there’s too much alcohol in the liquid to just chug with abandon (not to say people don’t do this, you know who you are). You get less burn in gently sniffing your single malt scotch than you do kicking back shots of it in a single gulp. By “burn” here Hanes means the basic sensation of heat but also a sense of having every single pore of one’s nose being stripped and scrubbed into a raw state. This is not a “clean” or “fresh” sensation but something which makes your nose react by scrunching up or recoiling from the glass. One ends up almost shaking one’s head side-to-side to try to dislodge the aromas and sensation. Is this the effect desired by the producers of high alcohol wines? Recoil? To be fair one has to venture that the answer is “no.” Unless they own a lot of shares in manufacturers of neck braces. But how do so many wines make it to the general market when they *do* produce these burning sensations? Good question.

It is very important to note that nose burn happens both nasally and retro-nasally, the latter occurring as persisting fumes in the mouth which hit one’s olfactory sense through the “back door.” Swallowing and coating the mouth and throat with liquid creates more fumes and thus greater exposure to burn. Note also that higher alcohol content increases the type of volatility which drives evaporation into fumes and even more burn. About 75% of what normal humans consider to be taste is actually one’s olfactory sense at work. This is paramount because retro-nasal sensing gets overlooked and creates a “disconnect” between many wine writers who spit and decrease retro-nasal sensing and end consumers who, err, pay for the right to swallow the damn wine. The latter people get the whole retro-nasal enchilada and a lot more potential burn than the wine reviewers who spit out the wine before it touches the back of the throat (even if they intentionally agitate the wine while it is still in the front of the mouth).

But Hanes why don’t *you* just spit if you don’t want the burn? He simply cares too much about relating the *full* experience of the wine to his readers, that’s why! If aromas continue to be registered by the nose after you swallow, wafting up through the mouth into the nasal cavity, simply in the opposite direction than sniffing through the nose directly, then that is part of the complete experience and Hanes truly does seek to express the complete experience. If a taster spits s/he doesn’t get this effect and loses out on extending the olfactory enjoyment and/or analysis of the wine. So, don’t listen to all those people who spit and then say the wine’s aromas are muted or dull — Hanes swallows which means at least 73 more descriptive words on a given wine’s nose!

Alcoholic burn persists more in the mouth than the nose partially due to the fact that the sense of smell is, although the easiest to stimulate, the easiest to fade away or “fatigue.” This “sensory adaptation” makes scents fade quickly and makes the presence of alcohol fade as well. As with so much in life, you have to take the good with the bad. This is part of why many seasoned tasters (sounds better than “alkies”) take many repeated short violent sniffs of wine than one big whoosh in — they are trying to combat olfactory fatigue. But in the mouth it’s kind of lame to try and replicate this via many repeated small sips. And it doesn’t work. The burning sensations persist much more powerfully in the mouth, particularly due to the tactile viscosity which the higher level of alcohol brings. The liquid clings to your mouth pores and thus the burn continues. The only thing which really stops the burn is when one’s mouth is either freed of the liquid’s presence or rendered so numb it can’t register the burn any longer.

OK, so it is fairly easy and straightforward to explain the factual nature of alcoholic burn in wine. But this does little to explain *why* there has been an increase in the quantity of wines possessing such burn or heat. Delving into the “why” is where Hanes is most likely to engender scurrilous invective from his wine industry brethren.

It is generally accepted that wines produced from grapes grown in warmer climates have the capacity to accumulate higher levels of sugar and hence higher levels of alcohol and become in turn bigger wines. As a result, the warmer the climate of the growing area, the more higher alcoholic content will be an issue for the grower and producer. Duh. As alluded to before, there are many techniques which may be employed to manage alcoholic content and strive for a balanced wine. Yet, as also alluded to before, many wine critics and such don’t really get the wine’s “Full Monty” effect and perhaps, just perhaps, this contributes to their growing affection for massively-scaled wines which are very ripe and also frightfully alcoholic. To be fair (for once), end customers themselves don’t seem to be putting up much of a fight here either. They willingly accept — if not energetically seek out — high octane bruisers and look askance at more fully balanced wines. As a result of the feedback of the majority of the wine writing world and consumer behavior, wineries produce more and more big-bodied, fruit-driven, high alcohol wines. After all, we’re all good capitalists, no? Who can blame the wineries entirely?

Luckily for the winemakers of the world there are more and more ways to attempt to achieve balance in the final wine while still going for maximal ripeness (and running the risk of out-of-control alcohol). To restore balance to a wine it may be de-alcoholized with a centrifuge or a process called reverse osmosis. Wines may be watered down, acidified or have

tannins added back in. These are not “natural” processes and, as a result, *may* effect one’s perception of balance in a wine. It really depends on how persnickety one is, how sensitive one is to a smooth, fluent sense of balance in a wine. Now, on the one hand, Hanes isn’t a total reactionary purist, if winemakers want to practice the “dark arts” of winemaking and do things to the wine in the winery so that it comes out tasting OK and close to more natural expectations, whatever, dude. *But* it’s only OK if that end result does in fact come out tasting naturally balanced. And this happens much less frequently than many with a financial interest in the wine industry are willing to admit.

Another example. Fans of single malt scotches don’t like to add ice to the liquid as it dulls the aromas. However, they will add distilled water as this helps release aromas and reduce alcoholic burn. Imagine adding water to your glass of wine to achieve the same result. Sounds funny, no? If you wouldn’t do this at home with your glass of wine then why is it OK for a winemaker to do this in the winery?

Or let’s look at the world of cosmetics. There they consider perfumes to be stronger than colognes because the former is more concentrated and contains more alcohol to release the fragrance. You only use a tiny dab here and there and that’s enough perfume. Colognes are more watered down because guys are clumsy oafs and like splashing sounds. And, if they wear cologne, probably gold chains and pinkie rings too. The concept of balance in a perfume or cologne is a sort of “category mistake” since so little is meant to be used at once. Both a perfume and a wine are intended to be rich in aromas but only the latter has to worry about balance. Too many winemakers these days think they are in the cosmetics business and seem to have forgotten that concentration is only one facet of a complete wine. But, hey, if Chanel No. 5 sells for like \$260 for five ounces imagine what my Syrah can fetch for 750 milliliters!

The issue of alcoholic heat is most dealt with in young wines because most wines are consumed young. But it needs to be noted that many high octane wines of certain expensive price ranges are supposed to be able to improve and develop subtleties with aging. With any wine, regardless of alcoholic content, after the fruit and tannins fade the alcohol remains. With high alcohol wines there is a greater chance that the heat is only going to get worse if the concentration of the fruit flavors fade and no other desirable flavor comes out as a suitable replacement — if it’s hot young chances are it’s gonna be hot old. And you’re paying extra for the honor of finding out.

Now, lest too many feathers get ruffled there *are* balanced wines out there with high alcohol content. That is, a 10.0% alcohol wine and a 16.0% alcohol wine can both be balanced but the truth is that the former is much more *likely* to be balanced because there are less variables to be dealt with and accounted for than with riper, more concentrated wines. Everyone in the biz mouths the platitude that hey, man, “it all happens in the vineyard” and not in the winery. But if this were true there wouldn’t be all these hyper-concentrated wines that make your mouth feel like it’s being jabbed with a red hot poker. If a balanced wine is really the goal of the grower and winemaker the trend should be to both tame the alcoholic content and make sure the other requisite elements of acidity, pH, tannins, etc. are where they should be. The quest for ripeness is a smokescreen if it is known that the end result is not going to be a balanced wine without it needing some serious intervention along the line. If someone wants to argue that, sure, it’s 17.5% but it’s balanced while Hanes’s tongue feels like it’s slathered in wasabi they are going to lose a great deal of credibility over time. If the vineyard location or the vintage’s vagaries do not allow for producing a naturally balanced wine without alcoholic burn then that’s your problem, not Hanes’s. The courteous thing is to not make a wine without natural balance and slap a \$50 price tag on it. Send the kids to state college, they weren’t going to get into Harvard anyway.

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This month’s big winners... Hanes sure does love him some Howell Mountain Zinfandel and this month he selfishly popped two from Turley all by his lonesome and neither the 2003 Dragon Vineyard nor 2003 Rattlesnake Ridge disappointed. Note to those who need to be noted — Turley’s wines are among the hardest to find from California and Hanes buys them directly from the winery (after years on their waiting list before getting his current small allocation) so don’t go bonkers trying to find them. Turley is reviewed herein more for the historical record than to guide consumer purchases. From Piedmont in Italy, Ferrando makes some intriguing wines including their 2004 Erbaluce di Caluso “Cariola,” Erbaluce being the grape and Cariola the single vineyard designation. For \$20, an admirable effort. Everyone likes a crisp Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand while it’s hot outside, right? Err, sure Hanes. Anyway, the 2004 Whitehaven from Marlborough is delicious and still vaguely affordable to most at \$18. Hanes loved the 2000 so when he saw the 2003 Belle Pente Riesling from Oregon he had to grab one. And, it’s so yummy, it gosh darn grabbed him back! Well worth the \$20 spent. Another Riesling, this one from Canada’s Ontario wine region, and more specifically the producer Cave Spring Cellars’ Cave Springs Vineyard, was a delight but is probably pushing it at \$27. Hanes quite enjoyed the 2003 version and the new 2004 Black Chook Shiraz-Viognier blend from Australia is a worthy successor and offers decent relative value at \$18. Lovers of Petite Sirah will find something savory and structured in the 2002 offering from Outpost [also of Howell Mountain], nothing overblown about it unlike some of the esteemed competition from Spring Mountain. Dum-dee-dum.

The best \$15 and under picks... A wonderfully understated and smooth wine worth seeking out is the 2002 Maramonte “Syrage” blend which, despite being 52% Syrah and 15% Petite Sirah, comes off as more Bordelaise in temperament due to the 33% Petite Verdot. Very food friendly and only around \$12. While their Sancerre was a mild let-down, Henri Bourgeois’s 2004 less expensive, \$15 Sauvignon Blanc from the “Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France” départemente in France’s Loire is quite the refreshing summer wine. Another winner for the hot months and no great secret anymore, Pierre Boniface’s 2004 “Apremont” blend from France’s Savoie region (near Switzerland) is a clean, transparent steal for \$11 and under. Let’s keep the “summer whites” trend going with three winners from Spain’s Rueda region: Telmo

Rodriguez's 2004 "Basa" blend; Javier Sanz's 2003 "Villa Narcisa" made from 100% Verdejo; and Nieva's 2004 "Blanco Nieva" also 100% Verdejo. All under \$12 which makes them go down even better. Castle Rock made another very nice cheapie Pinot Noir for \$10 in their 2002 "Sonoma Coast" bottling. The only difficulty with Castle Rock is that they are making so many different inexpensive bottlings it is reaching confusing status. They may want to think about streamlining the product offering to avoid pissing off customers who think they are buying X and end up with Y bottling (few people read the fine print below \$12). Just saying, that's all. Hanes does not know how many cases were made or what their distribution is but the 2001 Château de la Haute Libarde from the Côtes de Bourg in Bordeaux is a nice little find for about \$13. While not stunningly complex the 2003 Delas Frères \$9 cheapie from the Rhône's Côtes du Ventoux actually made good and easily achieves innocuous slurper status.

And the disappointments... In some quarters this is already a dead and beaten horse but the excessive summer heat experienced throughout Europe in 2003 has created some seriously misshapen and unappealing wines. This may be most apparent in the area of Châteauneuf-du-Pape where the wines' fruit is roasted while the tannins remain "green" and physiologically immature. Witness the 2003 Vieux Donjon. Or don't as the case may be. While he would like to retry it *for free* Hanes will not buy another bottle of this vintage from this highly regarded producer and may not buy another 2003 Châteauneuf-du-Pape *en tout*. So there. Hanes has in the past enjoyed a couple of wines from Oregon producer Scott Paul so he thought he'd take a flyer on their 2003 Pinot Noir "Cuvée Martha Pirrie." Whoops, coulda had a V-8. Stylistically, if it's your cup of tea there is nothing wrong with the 2003 Linne Calodo "Slacker" blend" from Paso Robles in California. But for \$32 Hanes could buy a lot of Earl Grey instead. Do not blame Hanes for seeking out wines to trash, he was poured the 2003 Novy Syrah from the Santa Lucia Highlands by others and he just wrote what his nose and tongue told him to. De Moor is a producer of Chablis entirely new to Hanes. He probably should not have started his investigations with the 2003 vintage but, that said, their "Rosette" wine was so-so and \$30 can be better spent elsewhere. Hanes suspects it is only a disappointment *today* as Maume's 2002 Gevrey-Chambertin village wine shows great potential but this is not a wine to just pull the cork and start chugging right now. On the topic of Turley, Hanes's personal opinion is that the quality of their "Old Vines" but particularly their "Juvenile" regional blend Zinfandel bottlings has fallen of late even though the prices have been held in check and remain fair. He may just stop buying the Juvenile altogether albeit Turley will lose zero sleep over this. The Domaine de la Mordorée has long been a Hanes fave yet regrettably their 2004 rosé from the Rhône's Tavel area was a crushing blow to the historical record. Crushing he says. Unlike the 2004 Ferrando Erbaluce "Cariola," their 2003 regular Erbaluce bottling was ho-hum even if half the price. Contra to the Whitehaven noted above, two producers of wide distribution and repute made so-so 2004 Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc wines. The guilty are Villa Maria's "Private Bin" and Dogwater's "New Dog."

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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 #12: "But did it get you drunk?"

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 July!

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Ueberroth Vineyard
Zinfandel
2002, \$48.00, 16.4%
While not saturated nor glowing in appearance, the purple core is more than dark enough to reach opacity, strong rust red to crimson rims. Compact, juicy nose of

blackberry, boysenberry, blueberry fruit, signs of coconut oil and popcorn, mint and offers some thick mountain air freshness but little earthier or other more solidly reverberating scents. While full-bodied, woke up refreshed and ready to drive right through your mouth with authority. The lively orange citrus and burnt bacon notes pave the way for tar, black earth, leather and menthol, shades of dried out potpourri. Has the almost obligatory prune edge to the cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit but stays limber and as openly knit as possible. The acidity adds spring to each of its steps. Real firecracker all the way through the finish, you can't refill your glass quickly enough. 92

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Dragon Vineyard
Zinfandel
2003, \$45.00, 15.5%
Mostly opaque crimson-brown to purple core, slowly yields to veiled dark magenta rims. Robust nose of mountain air fresh accents of pine, eucalyptus, orange rind, lemon wax, lilacs, tree leaves, white pepper, burnt dark chocolate, densely-packed currant, blackberry, cherry fruit, absolutely in no rush to fade away. Full-bodied without insipid weight, the big initial splash shows a touch of prune/raisin concentration. The acidity straightens it right up, bright and ready to segregate the eucalyptus, menthol, stone, leather, underbrush flavors. The lemon, orange citrus pushes forward youthfully without patience. The big-bottomed plum, black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit derives some lengthening from both the streamwater, rain tones and toast. Stays admirably true to its Howell Mountain roots. Gets better and better as you suck it down. 92

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge
Zinfandel
2003, \$40.00, 15.7%
The red-purple core has a lagoon-like murk, just about fully opaque, placid, young, wide brick red rims. Some alcohol in the nose but nicely wound core of cranberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit, spicy black pepper notes and that Howell Mountain thing of high elevation air, pine, eucalyptus, field scrub and earth, adds in some orange and lemon citrus too, while keeps scrubbing also holds its bottom. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a fine sense of fluidity, not much bite in it but the acidity is there alongside a touch of green tannins. While noticeably herbaceous this is not necessarily offputting, fits in with the earth, tree bark, tea leaf, pepper and ginger spice, orange peel and menthol aspects. Marathon runner body to the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry, cranberry fruit, all gristle with nothing extraneous. The vanilla and mocha oak-derived tones are subtle and shockingly low. Really nice. 91

Ridge
Santa Cruz Mountains, Monte Bello
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$119.99, 13.3%
Well-packed red-purple core, deep enough to mask your vision, thin yet vibrantly alive magenta rims. Blossoms like a pregnant cloud into the nose, cedar, almond, clove, spiced orange peel, floral dust, cinnamon, wet leather, clings as it unfolds the currant, plum, cherry fruit, its overripeness hurts the freshness of its dissolve. Full-bodied, fire in the blood iron, cedar, grass, orange and lemon citrus, tree leaves, loam. Add in the oak toast and burnt vanilla notes and then it is hard to fully register or appreciate the depth of the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, excellent juiciness with restraint, though. The tannins coat like dust shaken out of a rug, breaks up and then settles down back together. While young today has enough to offer now and will be killer later. 74% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot. 91

Outpost
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain
Petite Sirah
2002, \$35.00, 15.1%
Its inky black core is entirely opaque, the densely set rims glow with a strange combination of crimson and magenta.

Hard to imagine a more compact nose, stuffed in there like nobody's business, immobile currant, blackberry, black cherry scents, dried meats and salt, brown earth, old pine cones and tree leaves, traces of lilac dust, the vanilla and burnt buttered toast oak elements are a constant, if threaded-in, presence. Full-bodied, borderline brooding presence in the mouth, sulks in a way high impossible to ignore. The tannins are thick and chewy and soak up a great deal of the juice in the black currant, plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit, not to underestimate the power of the latter. Has a tick more florality as well as caramel, vanilla oak toast here in an attempt at rises an inch off of the ground. The earthiness, beef blood and orange to white grapefruit citrus flavors must be content to pull up the rear guard. Big statement maker if a tad muffled. 91

Mara
Napa Valley, Luvisi Ranch, Old Vines Marquise Reserve
Zinfandel
2003, \$34.99, 15.9%
Trim, borderline opaque ruby-purple core, heavy-lidded eyes, slowly spread into wide ruby rims. The nose is somewhat stern at first, there's a lot of tugging back and forth in the raspberry, red currant, blueberry scents, gains sweetness from its dark chocolate, hard caramel candy notes, while heavily concentrated not heavy as there's enough relief from black pepper and eucalyptus elements, sticks around like the leftovers are free for whomever wants them. Medium-bodied, here in the mouth the toffee, caramel, fried vanilla and ginger to cumin spice come first followed immediately by a big blast of mint. With time it becomes equally serious about the black pepper, orange zest and menthol flavors. The acidity makes a surprising showing in the mid-palate, really adds depth and zing. The red cherry, blueberry, blackberry, raspberry fruit comes in irregular bursts, like sucking stones through a hose. Mouthwatering finish with that acidity still going strong, bubbles pop in your mouth in defiance of its mouth weight. 91

Sine Qua Non
Regional Blend, "Just for the Love of It"
Syrah
2002, \$95.00, 15.2%
Just about completely opaque core, the purple is deep enough for some murk, thin luminescent magenta rims. Steadily insinuating nose of currant, black cherry, blackberry fruit, caramel, coffee cream, molasses, orange peel, sharp herbal kick, brioche, mint, pie glaze, rubs itself vigorously against your nostrils as it settles in. Full-bodied, tangy with a shitload of bite, plenty of acidity to frame the entry of the toffee, coffee, caramel, mesquite smoke and roasted lemon peel flavors. If — and that's a big if — your mouth can acclimate to the raw weight and taciturn oak you get some metal, blood, game, herbs and a shudder of wet tobacco leaf. The acidity yanks it violently forward. Not as ultra-concentrated as you'd think, just hard-edged. It's not really Syrah, it's SQN. 96% Syrah, 2% Grenache, 2% Viognier. Grapes sourced from Alban, Bien Nacido, Shadow Canyon, Stolpman, White Hawk Vineyards. 90

Maramonte
Regional Blend, California, Syrage Lot 7
Blend
2002, \$11.99, 13.2%
Bottomless purple core, relentlessly dark while also entirely spotless, possesses ruby-crimson rims of rich hues. Very collected nose with good brown, shows mint,

open field wildflowers, fresh underbrush, minimal oak tones, cinnamon-led spices, there's good kick in the currant, blackberry, boysenberry fruit scents, has a certain steady and grainy lift. Medium-bodied, fresh and focused, has a cleansing blast of acidity on the entry, lends order to the orange spice, wet flower petals, licorice, dried milk chocolate, mint leaf flavors, Has a small crest in the wood tannins as it reaches the center. Bright snap while holding onto its juice in the red currant, red cherry, raspberry fruit, almost turns to stone, herbal aspects. Very tangy lemon/orange citrus on the end. Keeps hitting the roof of your mouth like a trapped fly. 52% Syrah, 33% Petit Verdot, 15% Petite Sirah. Grapes sourced from Dunnigan Hills region. 90

Mara

Russian River Valley, Dolinsek Ranch, Reserve Zinfandel

2003, \$39.99, 15.9%

Just about totally impenetrable black purple core, its semi-dull surface makes it look filmy while the thin, highly luminescent rims show its clarity. Bruiser of a nose, gushes gingerbread, cinnamon, orange spice, lemon zest, gargantuanly outsized prune, raisin, plum, black cherry fruit scents, while the menthol shades cannot produce much lift you still get this slow upwards feel like when a hot air balloon just breaks from the ground. Full-bodied, cedary, there's a high level of toast which is mostly on the sweet side. Pine, menthol notes sweep by, the residual sugar camps out on the tip of your tongue so that by the finish things are curiously dry. This effect is aided by the acidity's wiry length. The fruit feels like it's squeezed through a baker's icing tube onto your tongue, thick but it goes where it wants, not all over, voluptuously ripe plum, black currant, yellow raisin, date, black cherry flavors. Big zing in the lemon, orange citrus, able sidekick in the clove to ginger spice. As it sits you get more caramel and mesquite smoke as well as newly cut leather and almonds. An acoustic pancake like listening to James Taylor's "Steamroller" or something. 90

Turley

Napa Valley, Atlas Peak, Mead Ranch Zinfandel

2003, \$35.00, 15.4%

Veiled garnet to violet core, fades to a flat if still robust ruby at the rims. Both relaxed and extensive in the nose, pleasingly floral, fresh menthol and pine notes, cinnamon spice, orange citrus, unbroken trail of juice left behind by the blackberry, black raspberry, cherry fruit scents. Medium to full-bodied, starts out more focused before expanding and taking on weight as it progresses. Lays out a full selection of orange and lemon citrus, mountain scrub herbaceousness, licorice, violets and enough earthy tones to lend bottom. Active acidity brings out more "red fruit" character in the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit and curtails any broadening of the toasted milk chocolate and coconut oak shades. Its tannins lend a strong sense of structure to the finish. 89

Linne Calodo

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Sticks and Stones Blend

2003, \$74.99, 15.8%

Strong violet core with a distinct red tinge, sure it's opaque but impenetrably so, noticeable glow in the ruby-magenta rims. The nose is hyper-sweet yet open and accessible enough to remain friendly and not overbearing

about it, the toffee and caramel oak tones are there but eminently acceptable, luscious raspberry, boysenberry, blueberry scents, lemon juice, sweet baking spices, so bubbly and gregarious you can't get a word in edgewise. Full-bodied and equally full of smiles in the mouth, for all of its back-slapping friendliness not stupid. Sure, there's big time milk chocolate and cocoa oak but also zippy lemon, orange citrus and widespread florality. Develops some cinnamon spice but this is almost a cover for the lack of acidity or tannins. Even given the minimal structure there's something which keeps bringing you back like swallows to Capistrano. Leaves itself vulnerable, a calculated bet that pays off in making you like it more. 60% Grenache, 25% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre. 89

Turley

Regional Blend, Old Vines Zinfandel

2003, \$25.00, 16.4%

Dense rust red to purple core, very wide red-ruby rims of attractive concentration. Cinnamon, ginger, milk chocolate, menthol and herbs slowly coalesce in the nose, any herbal notes prove too light to match up with the sweet raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, holds its balance. In the mouth it is more medium-bodied but with a steely enough structure from the acidity and tannins to hold its own. Trace of alcoholic heat detracts from the juice in the orange citrus as well as the creaminess of the vanilla and chocolate oak tones, spicier as a result. The blackberry, raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit maintains heft throughout. Not all that juicy though. Herbal and mineral tingle adds some nuance on finish but a tad too little, too late. In the end naught but a simple quaffer. Regional blend of Napa, Lodi, Paso Robles, Oakley, etc. 88

OnTheEdge Winery

Napa Valley, Luvisi "1908" Vineyard Zinfandel

2002, \$23.00, 15.5%

Smoked beef tones in the nose, mint, scorched earth, caramel, honey, palpable orange zest, licorice, taut yet long raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit scents, for all its sweetness maintains a semi-rugged profile. Full-bodied but without much true weight, releases texturally with alacrity. Derives thrust from the lemon to orange citrus, mountain air menthol and scrub notes. The beef jerky, game element is lesser here but still present, drawn into the earthiness. Nice whiff of black pepper spice. Once it settles down by the mid-palate the oak toast takes the spotlight for a song or two with milk chocolate and toffee flavors. Tight snap in the raspberry, cranberry, strawberry fruit, starts off at a credible altitude and then cruises in for a smooth touchdown on the tarmac. 88

Martin Estate

Napa Valley, Rutherford, Puerta Dorada Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

2001, \$74.99, 14.8%

Burnt crimson to brick red core with dull purple hue, mild fade to pure red rims. Heavy vanilla cream in the nose along with coffee, toffee notes but not enough to mask the bell pepper, strong smoky aspect in the cherry, blackberry fruit, more leathery with time, holds its ripeness nicely. Full-bodied, spicy and mineral with a dry, dusty texture, the alcoholic heat provides a dull throb. Provides more tar leather, wet tobacco elements than in the nose, lends bottom. The oak is more toasty and crisp here too but plenty of creamy vanilla and caramel to be had too. The

bell pepper, herbaceousness come more as fumes, after-image. Sappy sweet finish, BBQ sauce tones eliminate most of the tannic bite and cover up the cherry, currant fruit. Big and forceful enough to the final sip, if in need of tighter integration. 88

Kunin
Santa Barbara County
Syrah
2002, \$30.99, 14.9%

Flat black purple core, while it is opaque it does little to hold your gaze, just dims the light to the faintly glowing brick red rims. Hyper-stuffed and juicy nose, makes you want to stuff some tissue up there, after the prune to plum, cherry, blackberry scents there's little room for any cinnamon, clove spiced ham, earth or flaky brown sugar coated piecrust scents. Full-bodied, gets a bit ahead of itself in how it eagerly pours cinnamon, clove, allspice on your tongue and then juicy blackberry, black cherry fruit in addition to a firm underpinning of herbaceous and earthy elements. The tannins are just a wee bit underripe, bringing out more grassiness, but they also channel the finish in a clear direction. Ends with clear chocolate crisp and vanilla toast aspects, sneaks up on you and you don't recoil from the surprise. 88

Castle Rock
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast
Pinot Noir
2002, \$9.99, 13.9%

Strong red crimson cast to the violet core, touch more ruby at rims but admirably consistent and spotless throughout. Nose has plenty of spring in its step, lemon zest, cut grass, cola, dash of clove spice, well-defined contour to the raspberry, strawberry, blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, saturates your mouth pores well and clings easily. More floral here with elevated orange and lemon zest too. Still has solid shot of cola and a touch of earthiness to boot. The acidity is cut into thick slabs but manages to keep its forward momentum. Shows ripe, yet not overripe, red cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit, trim and in shape. Spiciness during the finish cancels out an growing herbal notes. Extremely credible. 88

Turley
Napa Valley, Tofanelli Vineyard
Charbono
2003, \$28.00, 13.9%

Dark enough to obscure any layers in the black purple core, heavily saturated ruby glow in the rims. Sticks like wet cement to your nostrils, lazily plops in there with juicy currant, plum, black cherry fruit, leather, dried tobacco leaf, old orange peel, starts to slightly turn herbaceous before its sheer density scoffs. In the mouth it's medium to full-bodied with a dry and chewy texture, sturdy tannins and a broad jolt of acidity, blockish is putting it mildly. Immobile feel in the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, little juice just a sensation of over-concentration. Ladles out some leather, tree bark, orange citrus, clumped earth, light menthol lift. No problem with the depth of the flavors, just hard to parse out enough to enjoy. Fairly smooth and regular given all of the above. 87

Santa Barbara Winery
Regional Blend, California, ZCS
Blend
2002, \$14.99, 13.8%

Trim purple core with red inflections, youthful brick red to orange rims. Metallic nose with fish skin notes in addition to leather, smoke, tar, grass, while superripe the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit scents not dominant, dissolves on earthy note, almost with bacon fat. Medium-bodied, starts with lemon to white grapefruit citrus plus grassiness, the acidity gives it a stern, steel-like feel. Continues with tree leaves, bark, hay and nuances of oily stones. The tannins slowly start to show their stuff by the center. The raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit derives lift from the smokiness. Lively finish, enjoyable but could settle down some. 53% Zinfandel, 26% Carignane, 21% Sangiovese. 87

OnTheEdge Winery
Napa Valley, Frediani "1956" Vineyard
Zinfandel
2002, \$22.00, 14.5%

Full red-violet core, trim with nary a cloud, has an orange-crimson glow in the rims. Concentrated, if not reduced, nose of mint, menthol, pine oil, plummy to pruney blackberry, black cherry scents, mix of milk chocolate and vanilla, beef blood, grass and hay, the fruit rules the roost. Full-bodied to the point of getting fluffy, then the tannins work overtime to try and organize the desk. Serves up portions of mint, menthol, orange and lemon citrus, rosemary, leather, tar, very little rises above the lowest bass register. Sweet and substantial plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, no sugar spared from use. Some acidity, the lack of ongoing strong structure brings out the sourness and a touch of heat. Still, in the end the sheer verve and weight of the fruit captivates. 87

Linne Calodo
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Slacker
Blend
2003, \$31.99, 15.0%

Dull black purple core, minimal luster but unquestionably undiluted, drops off to cough syrup red rims. Slightly green nose of camphor, menthol, eucalyptus, plenty of sourness in the blackberry, cherry, raspberry fruit, sadly suffers from obtrusive alcoholic heat, the low oak cream not enough to forgive the burning. Medium-bodied, as plush as the flavors are it remains subdued in nature and doesn't naturally seek undue notoriety. The tannins, acidity and innate herbaceousness tame the sweetness of the raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit, leaving it to fend for itself on the virtues of the stone, orange peel, wet tobacco and clove spice components. Whether or not this is enough to save it from charges of boredom is for the individual to decide. Does lose a few degrees of intensity on the finish, though, with no true finesse to replace it. 68% Syrah, 22% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre. 87

Five Vintners
Regional Blend, California
Zinfandel
2002, \$17.99, 14.5%

Spotless red-purple of average concentration, easy enough to see through, minimal change in hue to the rims and no loss of color intensity. While the fabric of the nose has a tight weave there's little too clenched about it, allows the youthful naiveté of the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit to chatter on as well as the buttered toast, mint and milk chocolate, the herbaceousness and orange citrus wait in queue as long as they need to. Medium-bodied, pleasingly non-pushy even though it is sweet enough that it could be. Tannins have a fine sandpapery grit to them, creates

enough rough spots to bring the herbal and earthy notes forward. The red cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit remains even-handed and pliable, no noticeable spikes nor valleys. Pleasing lemon, orange citrus swipes and enough cocoa and popcorn oak moments to lend a smoother appeal. You could do worse. Grapes sourced 60% Nichelini Vineyards (Napa Valley), 40% Mauritson Vineyards (Dry Creek Valley). 87

Turley
Regional Blend, Juvenile
Zinfandel
2003, \$20.00, 15.3%

Gauzy enough to create an impression of opacity, red-violet core, subtle shift to more garnet-orange at the rims. For its weight the nose is sort of diffuse, has cranberry, cherry, blackberry fruit and a consistent vanilla and mint underpinning, light grazing of earth and minerals to provide a hint of gravitas, weak dissolve. Medium-bodied, the flavors in the mouth are similar in their half-hearted attempt at a good showing — lemon citrus, tea leaf, clove, molasses, grass, all with little length. Semi-tart raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit of minimal juice or persistence. Tannins curiously elevated, perhaps a sign of underripeness. Herbal component dominate near the finish. Overall, a considerable dropoff from previous renditions. Made from young vines from the Hayne, Moore, Duarte, Pesenti Vineyards. 85

Kunin
Santa Barbara County, Alisos Vineyard
Syrah
2002, \$30.99, 14.9%

Extremely dark red-purple core, pushes opacity, just about minimal dropoff to brooding red-ruby rims, still opaque. Thick, sticky nose of mint, milk chocolate, densely packed plum, black currant, black cherry scents, smattering of earth and orange peel, medicinal notes outlast all else as it fades. Full-bodied, puckers your mouth quickly on the entry from the slightly underripe tannins. The blackberry, black cherry, black raspberry fruit has the texture of a jelly sandwich left out in the sun. Produces orange and lemon citrus, cut grass, leather, milk chocolate flavors. all in a disorganized state. Not particularly long, the glue-like texture brings it to a halt. Finish comprised mostly of coffee and ice cream vanilla residue. 85

Novy Cellars
Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands
Syrah
2003, \$26.99, 15.5%

Pleasing surface shine with murky opaque purple core below, concentrated violet-ruby rims. Off-center nose, lurches with medicine tablet, molasses coated baked ham, toffee, coffee bean, orange reduction, volatile sour oak, the alcohol saps the charm out of the cherry, blackberry scents, attention-grabber but totally ADD in nature. Full-bodied, grapey with a sweaty patina as well, way too soft, collapses into the mouth haphazardly. Incredible amount of caramel, toffee, vanilla, oaked with reckless abandon. Pudgy like it's been in a coma for years, the extracted and cloyingly sweet raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit is juicy and has no idea what to do with itself. No tannins, you'd actually have to drink three bottles of Sancerre after a glass of this to get any acidity to register. It's the chick/dude you pick up at 3:00 AM. 84

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Melville
Santa Rita Hills, Estate
Chardonnay
2003, \$24.99, 15.0%

Solid yellow gold color with a tinge of orangish amber, more fattens than distorts your vision, holds color to the rims. Leans into your nose with authority, the tangerine and lime citrus has pixie dust appeal, effortlessly blends in floral dew, minerals, pinpoint oak toast and mint, subdued confidence in the pineapple, peach, nectarine, red apple fruit scents. Medium-bodied, it's sweet but in a powdered sugar manner, swiftly dissolves away. As in the nose leads with the keen zest of the tangerine and lime citrus and florality, perhaps knowing that the oak toast and vanilla cream will soon dull this edge. Tropical tenor to the pineapple, mango, papaya, nectarine, passion fruit without becoming excessively juicy. Evinces admirably high degree of acidity, keeping it lively through the finish. Clove spice and tea leaf notes wink on and off as it ends. 90

Heitz Wine Cellars
Napa Valley
Chardonnay
2003, \$16.99, 14.2%

Mostly transparent but does bend light, bright golden splash with a distinct green cast. Very minty nose, licorice, shot of cream, clove and other herbs, tangerine to lime citrus, pretty peach, apricot, pear fruit, touch of oil as it dissolves. Medium-bodied, tangy with a full set of teeth in the orange, lemon, lime citrus and herbaceousness. The oak toast starts out OK but then grows and grows and grows until by the finish it is just about all that is left. The pear, melon, peach, apricot fruit is very consistent until it sees the finish line and then evaporates. The acidity does its job, can't complain about it. Nothing too soft about it, gets to the gym regularly. Some alcoholic heat shows at the last moment. 88

St. Francis
Sonoma County
Chardonnay
2003, \$10.99, 13.5%

Fat yellow-orange gold color, quite rich, enough so to add a flat translucency all the way to the rims. While the nose has enough spice and orange zest to sting, it's mostly about the vanilla cream and super-juicy peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit scents, turns a bit clunky as it dissolves. Full-bodied, not particularly thick but spreads what it has as widely as possible. Seems a touch hot and thus imbalanced, ginger and cumin spice abound, lemon and lime citrus spritz, summer grass, lilac air freshener. Too jingly and jangly to accurately assess the acidity, the natural material seems sweet but the finish is semi-dry. No lack of peach, pineapple, guava, apple, nectarine fruit yet it doesn't settle down much. Molasses and caramel notes try to calm the finish and put out the fire to moderate success. As always, will find its fans. 86

CALIFORNIA ROSE

Terre Rouge, Domaine de la
Sierra Foothills, Vin Gris d'Amador
Blend
2003, \$16.99, 13.5%

While still a rosé it shows a dense red-garnet color, remains just this side of transparent, distorts vision easily

at rims. Large-scaled nose, spicy with oodles of orange/lemon citrus, the mineral and chalk scents give a semi-coarse texture to the raspberry, strawberry, cherry scents, pleasingly non-grassy, keeps bursting ahead. Very broad-shouldered and sweet, starts off with honey, candied orange/lemon peels, sweet spices and a spoonful of freshly whipped cream. Softly pliable, it sinks deeply into your mouth's crevices, the milk chocolate and vanilla big lead blockers for the strawberry, raspberry, blueberry, red cherry fruit, the latter infectiously fun. Still spicy on the finish, has enough acidity to ensure it lurches gregariously forward. 54% Mourvèdre, 42% Grenache, 4% Syrah. 88

OREGON RED

Lemelson
Willamette Valley, Thea's Selection
Pinot Noir

2003, \$29.99, 13.9%

Heavy ruby-violet color at the core, the density extends all the way to the glowing dark magenta rims. While the raspberry, blueberry, red cherry scents are ripe they are also quite dry, furnished with a jumbled swirl of sweet smokiness, cocoa powder, salt, salami, vanilla, touch of straw, lacks cohesion. Medium-bodied, round enough on the attack to appear a bit bigger, the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is roasted to a dried fruit feel. The oak toast and burnt notes not meshing with the fruit, creates a breach for the cut grass, minerals to get through. The lemon/orange citrus reminds you there might be some acidity lurking about. Spicy, clove and cinnamon laden finish. Can't fault its liveliness but it didn't get that pep talk about teamwork. 87

Scott Paul
Willamette Valley, Cuvée Martha Pirrie
Pinot Noir

2003, \$27.99, 13.4%

Soft, natural cloudiness in the puce to ruby core, light enough to see through with ease though, no change in hue at the rims only a slight loss of intensity. Sweet nose of cola, freshly made strawberry and raspberry jam, lemon juice, momentary burst of oak toast before it gets subsumed in the airy herbal qualities. Medium-bodied, possesses no guile, couldn't outsmart you if it tried. Leads with an honest, straightforward shot of raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit, so plain though it could've been part of the cast of Little House on the Prairie. The tannins and acidity earn their pay and keep the ripeness in check and create a dry, filmy mouth feel which increases its grip. The low alcohol shows positively. All this makes the fact that — in spite of some cola, lemon, smoke, earth and tree bark — it remains boring all the more sadder. 86

OREGON WHITE

Belle Pente Wine Cellars
Willamette Valley
Riesling

2003, \$19.99, 13.7%

Clear enough, lacks luster though, mild orange tinge to the yellow gold, brass color. Pungent nose of orange blossom, honeysuckle, tangerine and lime spritz, mineral and metal flecks, smoky like a brown sugar glaze, plenty of youthful sparkle in the peach, apricot, pear fruit makes it even more attractive. Medium-bodied, possesses worthy focus and balance, while all the flavors are deep nothing overwrought about them. As in the nose, extremely floral

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with super-juicy lime, lemon, tangerine citrus. The acidity nudges without feeling it has to push. The stone and mineral aspects are there but it's hard to soak in them when there's such a lightly savory molasses and brown sugar coating. No dropoff at all in the apricot, pear, melon, peach fruit, consistently rich through the finish. Seamlessly seductive shit. 91

CANADA WHITE

Cave Spring Cellars
Ontario, Niagara Peninsula, Cave Spring Vineyard, CSV
Riesling

2003, \$26.99, 11.5%

Clear, if flat, yellow straw color, translucent shimmer beats out hue at the rims. While it has some white smoke, chalk powder aspects, the florality and sweet, juicy apricot, peach, pear scents win the day, aided by tangerine juice and baked brown sugar. Medium-bodied, while the acidity snakes well through your mouth there's not enough to prevent the overall sweet impression comprised of the tangerine, lime, lemon citrus, wet flower petals and peach, apricot, pear, melon, red apple fruit. Mid-palate gains weight from stone, mineral, chalk notes, also turns cleaner as a result and fights back brown sugar/molasses tones. Expands some on the finish, maintains sparkle in the flavors. Good juice. 89

CANADA DESSERT

Cave Spring Cellars
Ontario, Niagara Peninsula, Icewine
Riesling

2002, \$49.99, 9.5%

Bright amber color, moderate translucence in the yellowish rims. While fresh enough to penetrate, the nose presents concentrated apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit, sweet smoke, candied orange peel, touch more milky than grassy, for its size and depth has a graceful dissolve. Full-bodied and without undue weight, the acidity forms a nice skin to channel the molasses, fine spun powder sugar accents as well as the tangerine and lime-ade aspects. Richly arrayed papaya, mango, pear, pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit with a beautiful tropical tang for punctuation. For a dessert level wine shows surprising level of diesel/oil notes, pairs well with its quieter stone touches. Some herbal tingle keeps the finish alive. 375 ml bottle. 91

FRANCE RED

Paris, Domaine Vincent
Rhône, Cornas, Granit 30
Syrah

2003, \$35.99, 14.0%

The red-purple core gets surrounded by consistent ruby rims, nicely even and unblemished, has a "whole cloth" appearance. Surprisingly ripe and juicy nose, menthol and orange spice, touch of clove, plush raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, its concentration leads to a very extended experience. Medium-bodied, the dense ripeness of the fruit leads to some prune touches in the plum, currant, cherry fruit. Shows aspects of leather, orange peel, lemon, flowers and animal fat, The acidity has good piercing power with a focused angle into you. As it opens and turns more airy a certain toastiness comes out. Flavors of olive pit, bacon, tree bark bring it on home. Given its lighter style and weight requires aging to tame some of the acidity. 89

Moulin de Tricot, Château
Bordeaux, Haut-Médoc
Blend

2000, \$24.99, 12.5%

Dusky crimson purple color, noticeably spotless given the darkness of its core, wide and saturated brick red rims. The nose seems a bit backward, definitely in the "vin du garde" category, loaded with cedar, bell pepper, grass notes, high degree of minerals, driftwood, orange peel, dried vanilla powder, has concentrated but not particularly sweet cherry, blackberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, the tannins support rather than seek the spotlight, acidity also brings out additional lemon, orange citrus shades. Good deal of herbaceousness, strong tones of cedar, clove spice, mineral and stone shards. Stays broad through the mid-palate and on through the finish, almost so wide the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit falls through the cracks. Plenty of life left at the end. Offers vague chocolaty moments but close to zero oak. Clunky at times but nicely true to itself. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot. 89

Léoville Barton, Château
Bordeaux, Saint-Julien

Blend

2002, \$43.99, 12.5%

Super-dark purple core encircled by heavy-set ruby to magenta rims, has a saturated glow. Concentrated but not long nose of currant, cherry, cranberry fruit in addition to leather, earth, grass with any one element dominant, lifts with notes of cedar, dried flowers and lemon zest. Full-bodied, chewy and quite densely packed, almost questionably so. The acidity unfortunately brings out herbaceous, tree bark tones more than the lemon or orange citrus undercurrents. Grows into broader selection of cedar, bark, wood smoke, olive pits. The raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit is angular and needs to be accepted on its own terms as such. Good swirling feel on the finish, stays active even as the flavors are bit-by-bit shed. Shows nice medium term aging potential. 72% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc. 89

Deux Ânes, Domaine des
Languedoc/Roussillon, Corbières, Fontanilles
Blend

2002, \$14.99, 13.5%

Appealing depth in the dark purple core, maintains surface reflectivity, healthy luster in the ruby to magenta rims. Fresh ripeness in the blackberry, black raspberry fruit scents, nose built out further by garrigues and wildflowers, olive tapenade, lemon peel, tar and soft cocoa powder notes. Medium-bodied with noticeable fluidity without giving up a gently persistent tannic grip. Leather, tar, olive pit, lichens and forest growth as well as lemon to orange citrus make swift entry but it's the florality which provides the broadest flavor sensations. Not oaky at all but does have the same milk chocolate touch found in the nose. The raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit keeps coming at you without showing off. Very pleasurable. Unspecified percentages of Carignan, Grenache, Mourvèdre. 89

Maume, Domaine Bernard
Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin
Pinot Noir

2002, \$36.99, 13.0%

Mostly red-garnet at the core, some purple shading, immaculately crystal clear and entirely full to the rims. Big horse fart in the nose, incredible dose of sulfur which takes hours to even start to blow off, obviously not meant

to be drunk young, some lemons and flowers as well as cherry, raspberry fruit, very hard to register as is today. Medium-bodied, as it unwinds — albeit, very slowly — it reveals its profoundly tannic structure, more proof this is not a wine for today, no moisture accepted. Lemon, grass and lemongrass, plenty of stones, streamwater too, quite imperious in its bearing. Follows through with tea leaf, tobacco, black earth and rosemary herbs. The structure holds the cherry, strawberry, raspberry, cranberry fruit strongly in check. Has such strong muscles, can't help but last. The acidity sucker punches you in the mouth on the finish. 88

Haute Libarde, Château de la
Bordeaux, Côtes de Bourg
Blend

2001, \$12.99, 13.0%

Incredibly consistent garnet-crimson color, its darkness draws you in while its crystal clear nature holds your gaze. In the nose every ounce of juice has been wrung out of the cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit, produces heavy cream, bell pepper, menthol, traces of alcohol, as the game, earth, blood and leather scents begin to build a center they get rolled over by the fruit. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, orange/lemon citrus, tea leaf notes wake it up before the acidity and tannins churn up the center and kick up notes of iron, metal and minerals. There's a downy soft entry to the red currant, cranberry, red cherry fruit, albeit a tad calculated. Holds the other flavors in the fabric well throughout, really massages the resistance out of you. 80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec. 88

Calvet-Thunevin, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Côtes du Roussillon Villages
Blend

2001, \$54.99, 15.5%

Glowing cloudiness in the purple core, mostly opaque, incredibly thin if powerful ruby-magenta rims, they positively vibrate. Seriously jammy, juicy nose of black currant, blackberry, black raspberry, all but totally fruit, some cinnamon, orange zest, maybe eucalyptus but that's all a reach at best. Full-bodied, extracted to over-fill your mouth wall-to-wall with plush, overripe blackberry, cassis, cherry fruit, dripped with melted milk chocolate, caramel and coffee ice cream. The acidity breaks a major sweat creating any space for the orange citrus, spice and herbal aspects. Shows a bit of its alcoholic heat on the finish. Huge fruit bear hug, all but impossible to predict where it will go in the future. 45% Grenache, 45% Carignan, 10% Syrah. 88

Vatican, Cuvée du
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Blend

2003, \$30.99, 14.5%

Very consistent ruby-purple color, unsmudged with only a soft distorting quality, full rims. Smoky, leathery nose with a soft toast to it, lemon-sprayed raspberry, red cherry, blackberry scents, hint of licorice, easy and not in any way pushy. Medium-bodied, has a good punch at first, the tannic verve is there and thankfully not as "green" as many other 2003 CdPs. The raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit is not overripe and stays within control. The acidity halfway lifts the mid-palate and creates additional forward momentum. Vague moments of flowers, lemon citrus, cocoa powder, hint of game, finish is somewhat blunted.

Probably a few ticks better with time in a decanter. 70% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre. 87

Romaneaux-Destezet (Hervé Souhaut), Domaine Rhône, Vin de Pays de l'Ardèche, La Souterronne Cépage Gamay

Gamay Noir

2002, \$24.99, 11.5%

Filmy radioactive glow to it, turns from a ruby-magenta core to red-orange rims. Relatively clean nose, extremely herbaceous with a great deal of lemon citrus, shoe leather, tree bark, pulverized stone, tea leaf, super-sour cherry and raspberry scents, borderline anorexic nose. Light-bodied, the tannins and acidity make no bones about getting up in your face and dismantling the flavor fabric. Leather, tar, earth, smoked lemon peel, burnt grasses predominate and form thick, soupy fumes in your mouth. Defies you to get past this to the echoes of fruit, pale red cherry, strawberry, raspberry at best. Dilute finish, perhaps because it grabs you by the neck and drags your tongue across asphalt. 87

Gourgonnier, Mas de Provence, Les Baux de Provence Blend

2003, \$12.99, 12.5%

Bright glow in the crimson red to violet core, unblemished and clear, a shade more brick red at the rims. The nose zips and darts furtively from ripe strawberry, raspberry, red cherry scents to wet grass to animal hide/leather to dried flowers, lacks an attention span. Medium-bodied, squarish mouth entry, the tannins like a flat pancake on your tongue with the acidity flopped on top. Greets your taste buds with flowers, dried orange peel, leather, brown earth, bark and driftwood, tightens up during the mid-palate. Tart, sidelong profile to the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, doesn't do much to extend the finish. Mainly Grenache, remainder unspecified percentages of Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan, Mourvèdre. 86

Delas Frères Rhône, Côtes du Ventoux Blend

2003, \$8.99, 13.5%

Dark crimson-purple color of impressive depth, zero change or loss of hue at rims. Generously fruited nose, literally splashes plum, black currant, cherry fruit all over your nostrils, followed by abundant mint, vanilla frosted oak chips, flowers, ginger and cinnamon spice in lower doses, provides depth and the some if not distinct complexity. In the mouth it's full-bodied and furnished with thick slabs of raspberry, cranberry, black cherry, currant fruit, juicy and all-encompassing. Attractively rich lemon and orange citrus plus floral paste pretty up the slightly deeper earth and leather aspects. Some acidity to be had but not out to make a positive impression on wine geeks, just impress wine drinkers. 80% Grenache, 20% Syrah. 86

Vieux Donjon, Le Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blend

2003, \$41.99, 14.0%

While dark enough, the purple core is so crystal clear you can still see through it, nothing weak in the red-ruby rims. The nose is alcoholic and overripe, mostly prune, raisin and fig to the detriment of the still liqueur-like cherry, blackberry scents, stemmy with orange spice, cinnamon and iodine notes. Full-bodied, just about squeezes itself into

your mouth at first but density is very short-lived. Offers the same unfortunate counterpoint of overripe, prune plum, cherry, blackberry fruit and then underripe tannins which lead to green, stemmy flavors and a strong puckering sensation. Attempts to gather together some milk chocolate, orange peel, dried flower flavors but ends up with more band-aid, tree bark instead. Besides being short, also sour and possessing a rough sandpaper texture. Quite the shame. 80% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah. 84

FRANCE WHITE

Boxler, Albert Alsace, Brand, L.62

Gewürztraminer

2002, \$58.99, 12.5%

Light amber gold with a vague green hue, flat but well layered, some bit of shine at the rims. The thick, pungent nose settles in like a vapor cloud of orange marmalade, grilled nuts, lime zest, pineapple, nectarine, apricot, pear fruit, ginger and clove spice, refuses to disappear, you may have to wash the scents out of your glass. Full-bodied, at first pushes being chewy but so slinky and sexy that its weight is shed with minimal effort. Soup of orange, tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus alongside floral notes of wet roses, lilacs and honeysuckle. Reveals tones of brown sugar and candied nuts yet the acidity possesses a fine ability to balance things out. The apricot, peach, nectarine, mango, papaya fruit is self-concentrated and keeps a steady grip on its shape. That said, has some baby fat but perhaps all the more charming for it. 92

Luneau-Papin, Domaine Pierre Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine, Clos des Noëlls, Semper Excelsior

Muscadet

2002, \$20.99, 12.5%

Big golden hue, while not quite distorting vision certainly rich enough to avoid sheer transparency, reflects light well. The large scale of the nose makes it borderline diffuse, the center of lemon peel, chalk, powdered stone, licorice and wildflowers takes awhile to adjust to the space it has to fill, is helped out some by the admirable concentration in the peach, apricot, melon fruit scents. Broad and sturdy in the mouth, the acidity is on red alert for any moisture and attacks with extreme prejudice. If it wasn't so dry the lemon, lime, orange citrus could sparkle nicely. The stone powder, chalk, mineral dust elements fit in perfectly with the desiccated landscape. Despite all this, the peach, apricot, pear, mango fruit manages to make a go of it and last well. Not a wine to anger. 91

Pépière, Domaine de la Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Clos des Briords, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes Muscadet

2004, \$12.99, 12.0%

Deep white to yellow gold, appears as a solid block as if the liquid hardened in the glass, medium level shine. Stable, robust nose which requires some time to unwind, redolent of lemon peel, chalk, white stones, powdered dried flowers, mint and peach, apple skin, trace amounts of gas fumes. Full-bodied, steely and resistant enough that you have to gulp it in one go, completes appearance, smell and taste trifecta of rock-like hardness. Viciously compact, bare-knuckled assault of lemon and orange citrus, sharp minerality, dusty white stones, rainwater, the acidity has all

the bravura its drying power warrants, has a glass of water ready. The compact peach, apricot, pear, green apple flavors maintain steady flavor without any juice. Stimulating wine which resonates with energy. 90

Bourgeois, Domaine Henri
Loire, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France, Petit Bourgeois
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$14.99, 12.0%

More or less completely transparent white straw color with green flecks, no hue left at the rims. Light, brisk nose with a keen, penetrating blade of powerful lemon citrus, chalk, powdered minerals, white pepper, floral dust, mint with a skin/pit aspect to the pear, apple, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied, presents itself within a steel framework that adds clarity to the individual flavors. Metallic iron, minerals and dusty white stones abound with boisterous lemon and white grapefruit sparkle. Noticeably floral, blossoms upwards and creates additional pockets for the streamlined peach, apricot, pear, pineapple fruit. Long, zesty finish with energy to spare. 89

Rijckaert, Maison Jean
Jura, Arbois, En Chante-Merle Vieilles Vignes
Chardonnay
2003, \$18.99, 13.0%

Bright yellow gold color with good transparency, clear all the way to paler rims. The nose could be round if not spread so thin, has cream and a bit of toffee at first then juicy lemon/lime citrus, meadow flowers, mint leaf, finally yellow apple, pear, peach, nectarine scents of moderate duration. Medium-bodied, stays firm without any true blossoming, initial flourish to the florality and orange/lime citrus slowly peters out. Crisp profile in the green apple, peach, pear, cherry fruit, clean lines and profile. Has these moments of something like toastiness but not oak toastiness per se. The acidity turns semi-powdery but has lots of follow-through. More bounce and verve than suppleness on the finish, cloudy fume residue. 87

Moor, Domaine Alice et Olivier De
Burgundy, Chablis, Rosette
Chardonnay
2003, \$29.99, 12.9%

Soft, consistent glow to the green-gold color, concentrated enough to force through to the rims. Big nose of lemon, lime citrus, stone, grass, vague florality mostly orange blossom, not all that complex, attractive peach, apricot, pear, nectarine fruit, no lack of depth but little direction. Medium-bodied, shows some heat right away, takes the prettiness out of the peach, apricot, pear, nectarine, pineapple fruit. That said, the acidity is wide and almost all-enveloping even if without an edge. Floral, noticeably creamy side, has the kind of weight which grabs your attention but lacks the distinction to match. Gets taut and more alcoholic towards the finish, spicy. Close but never comes together. 87

Ferme Saint-Pierre (Paul Vendran), La
Rhône, Vin de Pays de Vaucluse
Viognier
2003, \$19.99, 13.9%

Immaculate surface shine laid on top of a brown-gold foundation, distorts nicely even as hue drops off at rims. Honeyed nose with sweet orange and lemon juice notes, floral paste, caramel, definite paste-like feel in the apricot, peach, pear, scents, recline lazily. Full-bodied, fat and plush albeit with enough round acidity to stay firm, not flabby.

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Heavy duty caramel, toffee, vanilla cream dimension, when combined with the orange spice no doubting the oak is meant to come out on top. Swiftly gets the floral and herbal aspects out of the way so as to step up the flow of the apricot, peach, pear, moving as full throttle as it can manage. Almost pushes the "heat button" but not quite. Pleasing lemony touch to the finish. A big ole lug of a drinking buddy, he's always sitting on that stool when you walk in. 87

Clos de Camuzeilles
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de la Haute Vallée de
l'Aude, Ferairolles, Les Camuzeilles
Blend
2003, \$19.99, 13.5%

Very dull brown straw color with no luster, some loss of hue at the rims while not turning transparent. Oxidized nose with strong apple pie, peach cobbler notes, honey glaze, light cinnamon powdering and vague splash of orange spice. In the mouth it is very heavy and leaden, like a suit of armor. The acidity is reduced to gumming you, no teeth. Any bite comes from the lemon and orange citrus and the cinnamon and clove spice. Still baked, but more brightness in the apple, pear, peach fruit than in the nose, lengthy mouth presence. Does grow on you the more you sip yet remains a highly distinctive, if not outright idiosyncratic, wine experience. 90% Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, 5% Maccabeo, 5% Muscat. 87

Bourgeois, Domaine Henri
Loire, Sancerre, La Porte du Caillou
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$16.99, 12.5%

Solid shine to the yellow hay color, stays consistent to the rims, green flecks, holds its luster around edges. Intensely herbaceous nose of asparagus, green pepper as well as white minerals, white pepper spice, chalk and crisp pear, green melon, green apple, fruit, keen penetrating power. Medium-bodied, an initial creamy feel swept away by unforgiving acidity, witheringly dry throughout. Peppery, shows hot white stones and mineral powder, cut grass, asparagus, lemon peel, your mouth ends up as dry as a back country road in August. The florality loses its delicacy in the process. There's bite in the cherry, red apple, peach, apricot fruit, zero juice yet its verve makes it last. Leaves your eyes wide open and tongue wagging for water. Highly stylized. 87

Borne, Domaine de la
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Muscadet
2004, \$10.99, 12.0%

Green hues blur the yellow hay coloration, roiled and distorted, semi-watery rims. That "sur lie" creaminess brings out some florality initially in the nose before succumbing to more strident lemon/lime citrus, white stone and streamwater aspects, the peach and pear fruit scents have a decided skin-like feel to them. Medium-bodied, screwed down a little tightly at first during the entry before bit-by-bit opening up into garden herbs, stream stones, grass, the acidity is like getting hit repeatedly with a wiffle ball bat. There's still never a full release in the peach, pear, melon fruit, drawn back into a shaken container of grapefruit and lemon citrus. About as chewy a finish as you'd want a Muscadet to have, maintains a considerable amount of weight even as the flavors are shed and it turns successively drier. 87

Boniface, Pierre
Savoie, Vin de Savoie, Apremont
Blend

2004, \$10.99, 11.5%

Soft green-brown straw color, very transparent, a bit lacking in shine, rims are emptied of hue. Delicate nose, decidedly unpushy, offering lemon peel, ground minerals, floral dust, stone and grass, a hint of mint, straightforward presentation of the peach, apple, pear fruit scents.

Medium-bodied, a little smoky with a strong presence of stone and minerals during the entry. Adds pinches of flowers, licorice, honey yet the acidity keeps it dry and pure and dampens most attempts at any sweetness. The minerality seems to create a vaguely petillant-like feel which gives it additional breadth. Minimal focus on the apple, pear, melon, peach fruit, smokiness and stoniness continue to dominate through the finish. Refreshing and unique enough to rise above simple quaffer status. Mostly Jacquère, remainder possibly Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Chasselas. 87

Bourdon, Domaine

Burgundy, Mâcon-Villages, Les Pierres Dorées Vieilles Vignes

Chardonnay

2003, \$11.99, 13.0%

Flat surface of white to yellow straw, hue intensity drops off noticeably towards the rims. The nose has depth, light touch at first of smoky stones and lemon peel and then keeps getting crisper before pear, peach fruit settles in, making for a more basic, perfunctory experience. Full-bodied, a little creamy at first, some minor vanilla shades, then swirls into herbaceous and sour lemon peel flavors. Lowgrade elements of chalk and pulverized white stone, floral dust up next but not enough to get past the mid-palate. Possesses basic peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit of both average juiciness and length. Bitter almonds and other mixed nuts make a curious appearance at the end. 85

FRANCE ROSE

Tempier, Domaine

Provence, Bandol, Rosé

Blend

2004, \$29.99, 11-14%

Crystal clear, lustrous pink salmon to carrot orange color, moderate drop off at rims. There's a certain briny, salty quality which heightens the herbaceousness in the nose, fruit skin snap in the cherry, raspberry, green apple fruit scents, sweet but ultimately sour lemon citrus, while the minerality is there gets lost in the shuffle. Full-bodied, while broad doesn't weaken from it, has both the acidity and tannins to stick along as much as it wants to. Dryness in the mouth heightens the stone, mineral dimension, here herbal qualities more restrained. Lemon citrus showing tooth, develops a lime sidekick. The red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit gets caught in neutral, not used to working a stick shift. Punishes your tongue most via unadulterated weight near finish rather than flavor assault. Roughly half Mourvèdre, remainder unspecified percentages of Grenache, Cinsault, Carignan. 88

Cotat, François

Loire, Sancerre, Rosé

Pinot Noir

2003, \$29.99, 12.5%

Luminescent orange-pink color, given its lightness, the brilliant shine utterly attracts, dilute rims though. Borderline intensity in the creaminess, has a custard-like nose with noticeably ripe raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit scents, herbal with touches of lemon sorbet and buttered croissant, takes an acute angle before it dissolves and holds on tenaciously. Full-bodied, lots of jiggle in its tummy, surprisingly so. Just as creamy in the mouth, furnished with abundant licorice, butterscotch, lemon candy drop, limeade, orange spice, even clove spice, just throws a mot of atypical, unexpected shit at you. The acidity is too broad for serious impact, hits you once and then recedes to the shadows. The raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit is shockingly juicy, keeps the momentum going. Satisfying in an entirely unintellectual way. 88

Baudry, Domaine Bernard

Loire, Chinon, Rosé

Cabernet Franc

2004, \$14.99, 12.5%

Deep glow in the salmon pink color, admirably consistent throughout, strong orange hues, soft reflectivity. Full nose without sacrificing an iota of cut, floral dust and stamens, dried orange peels, leanly focused cherry and raspberry fruit scents, powdered grass bits too, has plenty of bottom but not particularly giving nor open, on the standoffish side. Medium to full-bodied, dryly tannic and acidic, the ripe cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit has little juice just muscular thrust. Develops shades of anise, garden herbs and brawny lemon to orange citrus. Leaves your tongue a bit roughed up, in a good way, shows character. Gets you clenching your jaw as it pushes your teeth apart. For those who want a big dose of structure in their summer "sipper" rosé wines. 88

Mordorée, Domaine de la

Rhône, Tavel, La Dame Rousse Rosé

Blend

2004, \$17.99, 14.5%

Deep salmon pink color with a clear orange tinge, unblemished, deep enough to distort your vision some before petering out at the rims. The thickness of the nose makes it a tad clumsy, has borderline jammy raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, while starting slowly the herbaceousness eventually overcomes the lemon citrus, anise, minerals, surprisingly pulls up a bit short. Full-bodied, while it has no heat you immediately feel the alcohol in your head. Sour touch to the raspberry, red cherry fruit, has a little more pucker than you might like. Full-on lemon/lime bite, touch of white minerals but again more impelled forward by herbal notes. In the mid-palate it develops chocolaty, cocoa dimension, covers over the imbalance for a second before the grassiness takes over. A little too much power to control itself well. 60% Grenache, 10% Cinsault, 10% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah, 5% Bourboulenc, 5% Clairette. 86

FRANCE SPARKLING

Agrapart & Fils

Champagne, Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru L'Avizoise Brut

Chardonnay

1996

\$49.99, 12.0%

Has a fairly full yellow gold color, stays full to the rims, the bubble beads are about as aggressive as possible. Very, very creamy and breadly nose with maple syrup tones, orange zest, ample pear, peach, apricot, red apple scents,

while very heavy on the bass lines does help it last remarkably long. Full-bodied with an intensely foamy attack that doesn't quite have the power in the follow-through to match. Not hollow per se, just turns prematurely dry with an excess of mineral, stone, mint, lemon and orange peel notes. This 180 degree change in direction catches you off-guard and prevents the peach, pear, apple fruit from gathering a full head of steam. The acidity pushes becoming witheringly dry, leaves a spicy residue behind. The creamy toast is there but not as dominant as in the nose. Pushes outwards bullishly to remain wide through the finish. 90

ITALY RED

Spinetta, Azienda Agricola La
Piedmont, Monferrato, Pin
Blend

2003, \$39.99, 14.0%

The cloud in the red-violet core adds to the glow, full crimson-brick luminescence in the rims too, youthfully appealing. The nose is stuffed enough to blur the clarity of the scents, mixes together in a jumble of dark chocolate, beef blood, grass, orange peel, clay-like earth, mushroom, some menthol and rose petal lift but only half-hearted in the attempt, the black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit sinks it back down once more. Medium to full-bodied, quite broad with cedar, herbs, orange peel, clove spice, leather, loam, earth and then sweetening burnt cocoa, chocolate, caramel notes. While packed with flavor and currant, blackberry fruit not particularly friendly. The tannins are powdery and formidable, noticeably shortens the finish. Quite nice yet will need some time indeed to get its shit together. 65% Nebbiolo, 35% Barbera. 88

Hofstätter, J.

Alto Adige/Südtirol

Meczan Pinot Nero (Blauburgunder)

Pinot Noir

2003, \$16.99, 13.0%

Orange-maroon cast dominates the core, attractively clear and reflective, minimal loss at rims if anything. Smells real good for a Mexican Pinot Noir, freshly whipped cream, pine and rosemary, lemon peel, dried grass, starts to slow down then finds an extra gear in the cherry, raspberry scents, fresh given its weight. Medium to full-bodied, depends on whether or not you're standing or reclined, the clove and cumin lead spice catches your fancy first, then lemon zest and then a strong undercurrent of mocha chocolate and vanilla powder, the latter a quite curious element. The herbal component lifts upwards at about the same time as the juicily engaging raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit so that the former loses any excessive sway. The acidity is OK but it's the fatness of the sweet tannins which arouses your curiosity. Wine that does not suck. 88

Antinori, Marchese

Tuscany, Brunello di Montalcino, Pian delle Vigne

Brunello

1999, \$59.99, 14.0%

Simple, clean purple core, the darkness seeps into the saturated ruby to brown brick rims. The nose slowly speeds up its dance, tosses cedar, floral paste, animal skin, menthol rub fresh herbs and melted cocoa on toast, vanilla extract before displaying ample plum, blackberry, currant fruit scents. Medium-bodied with a strong dried fruit nature in the plum, currant, blackberry, black cherry

fruit. hard to ignore the fruit long enough to focus on the other elements. That said, the orange citrus, molasses, grasses and leather try earnestly to win your attention. Tannins have more punch than acidity but neither suck royally. Big cedary blast elongates the show past the mid-palate, dried meats and grill smoke make well-endowed appearances. While it has a lot going on, leaves you puzzled as to how it all fits together. 88

Rapitalà, Tenute

Sicilia, Hugonis

Blend

2002, \$41.99, 14.0%

Moderate Depth in the purple core, yields easily to wide, rich red-ruby rims. Pine, menthol, dried flowers, orange juice and alcohol infiltrate the nose first, then cocoa crisp, fried butter and well-massaged plum, black currant, black cherry fruit scents, definitely takes the steamroller approach. Full-bodied, porously juicy as it unloads the currant, blackberry, black cherry, plum fruit on you. Lots of dark chocolate and cocoa powder notes to be had, dripped over the orange and lemon citrus. Mint, violets and an insistent herbal streak break onto the scene, here the alcohol appears much more natural although the unrestrained weight of the fruit squashes most of the tannins. Seeks to scale the heights, in the end you have to admire its moxie. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Nero d'Avola. 87

Colombina, Azienda Agricola La

Tuscany, Rosso di Montalcino

Sangiovese

2003, \$17.99, 13.5%

While spotless, the purple core resists most attempts at seeing through it, very even and full to the rims where it turns more orange to red in hue. Toffee, vanilla, molasses combine with super-sugary blackberry, raspberry fruit and candied orange peel for a diabetic's nightmare, modest earth and grass, incredibly plump and mindless. Full-bodied, smoky and leathery with serious orange/tangerine zest, molasses, grass, wet wood smoke and mineral powder. The tannins and acidity fairly run amok but at least reduce some of the sugar content. The overripe cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit has blurred edges, further disfigured by the sweet spices. Something here seems unnatural. 87

ITALY WHITE

Pepe, Azienda Agricola Emidio

Abruzzi, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo

Trebbiano

2001, \$39.99, 11.6%

Cloudy to the point of opacity, looks more like yellow-amber cider than wine, strong luminescent surface glow. Takes an incredibly long time for the innate funk in the nose to even begin to think about blowing off, all rubber, sulphur, asphalt, earth, forgotten bags of grass, salt before any inkling of orange peel, peach, apricot, pear, nectarine fruit, has enough density to punch in the heavyweight class, still lingers strongly the next day. Full-bodied and swift to spread its girth as widely as possible. The cinnamon and clove spice mingle with tentative notes of orange blossom, wildflowers and lemon zest to make for a semi-tingly mouth entry. Solid thrust in the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit, here much faster to unwind. The acidity has a big center and stays on a large-scaled balance. Just feels really plump and unevolved. A tick more herbal past

the mid-palate but, conversely, also develops a creamier bottom. More intellectual at this moment but it's barely out of the womb. 91

Ferrando, Azienda Vitivinicola Luigi
Piedmont, Erbaluce di Caluso, Cariola
Erbaluce

2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Fat white-green to yellow straw in color, possesses a very nice surface shine without giving up a translucent warping below the surface, hues hold well throughout. Hyper-active nose of tar, wet cement, fried lemon peels, thick minerality and chalk, smoke from burning straw, its muscular lift yanks the peach, apricot, pineapple fruit scents into an erect posture. Full-bodied, loaded with vibrant acidic punch that grabs the whole fabric and pulls it taut and wide. Very spicy attack, even puts some distance between it and the formidable chalk and mineral elements. Sharp teeth in the lemon/orange citrus make it leap even further out of the glass. Mild licorice, rose petal, herb notes cower in the face of the grassiness. Quite uniform and wide, makes for a lively finish which leaves your mouth literally watering. 91

Garliger, Azienda Agricola
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Valle Isarco (Südtirol Eisacktaler)
Sylvaner

2003, \$15.99, 13.0%

Bright green-yellow color, verges on day-glo, fades appreciably at the rims. Some wet stone, chalk, licorice, dried flowers in the nose, admirable penetrating power, lengthens the pear, melon, apple scents which yet remain dry and angular on the whole, leaves your nostrils cleansed. Medium-bodied, attractive selection of white pepper, mineral dust, floral powder, anise, lemon seed flavors, settles into a layer on the tongue like a throw blanket, shifts completely with each tongue movement. Spicy, the acidity does a lot to help here even if turns blunt over time. Strong contours to the peach, apricot, pear fruit, makes it difficult to penetrate to the juice. Impressively long, shows a good deal of confidence as well as precision. 88

Maccia di Loredana Faraldi, Azienda Agricola A
Liguria, Riviera Ligure di Ponente
Pigato

2003, \$16.99, 12.5%

Straight-ahead yellow straw color with light stripes of green, holds it fine to the rims, above average shine. Very open and fresh pear, green melon, peach fruit in the nose, settles in nicely, aided by licorice, mint, squeezed lemon notes, its airiness actually prevents stone, chalk notes from gathering. Medium-bodied, here in the mouth it's smokier, both from burning straw and heated stones, fried lemons and white grapefruit, while conversely the mint, anise and licorice are a few ticks lower. The acidity has thick thighs, makes the whole experience denser, broader than really necessary, slows the pace down to a crawl. By the time the florality and peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit start to perk up it's a little late. Ends with a slight bitter twist. 87

Ferrando, Azienda Vitivinicola Luigi
Piedmont, Erbaluce di Caluso
Erbaluce

2003, \$9.99, 12.5%

Noticeably rich golden color, borderline amber, still has a great deal of reflectivity, if appearing more matured than it truly is. Bit smoky at first and then, licorice, broken stones,

a touch of milkiness detracts from the tropical nature of the pineapple, nectarine, peach, apricot fruit, vanilla and cinnamon notes cancel out most of any herbaceousness to be found. Medium to full-bodied, creamy and vanilla-flavored entry swiftly turns to licorice, mint, dried flowers and lemon to lime zest. The acidity has a broad sweep, little cut more so bruising. Turns successively more herbaceous in the center, takes some stuffing out of the peach, red apple, nectarine, pear fruit. Like sucking on a lead weight during the finish, the flavors turn semi-mute but its body remains relentless. 86

ITALY ROSE

Cantalupo, Antichi Vigneti di
Piedmont, Colline Novaresi, Il Mimo Rosé
Nebbiolo

2004, \$12.99, 13.0%

Bright and glowing garnet to magenta color, attractive concentration in the core, forgives the weaker rims. Straightforward brawn in the nose, lemon and lesser lime zest, smoke and even glimmers of oil and rose petal infusion, the bracingly sour element in the raspberry, strawberry scents throw you off your game, has a "dig your nails in until you draw blood" attitude. Medium-bodied, throws an acidity fit and smatters the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit across your mouth walls, smushes lemon citrus into the fruit chunks. Displays grass, leather, tar and cocoa powder and thankfully all remain aware it's all in a rosé idiom, not a red wine. This wave takes its time to crash fully on the shore, while not overly complex it will stomp on your tongue until the latter is black and blue. 87

GERMANY WHITE

Spreitzer, Weingut Josef
Rheingau, Oestricher, Lenchen, Spätlese "303" AP #5
Riesling

2004, \$42.99, 7.5%

Clear if densely layered white straw to white gold color, strong green tinge, no loss at rims more so cut from whole cloth. You can feel its weight in your nose yet the scents are all about angles, lime to lemon citrus, white minerals, crushed flower petals, linear peach and apricot fruit, doesn't over-reach for complexity, content to do what it does well. Full-bodied, maintains a languidly expansive mouth feel, road grader pace. While the attack is noticeably sweet with a powdery sugar and sweet 'n' sour tangerine, lime citrus appeal, the acidity wastes no time in asserting its power and ability to force things onto a straight and narrow path. The apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit rolls along with dignity if not much grace from the size of its undercarriage. Floral finish, basically fights with the bartender at closing time for another drink. 91

Meßmer, Weingut Herbert
Pfalz, Burrweiler, Schäwer, Spätlese Selection AP #5
Riesling

2004, \$31.99, 8.0%

White to yellow straw in color, transparent enough if without much luster, fairly consistent to the rims with what it has. Stones, chalk and flower petals offset some of the sweetness in the apricot, peach, pear, green melon scents as well as the mandarin orange, lime citrus, brown sugar and caramel reduction, good amount going on but doesn't coalesce into complexity. Medium-bodied, does enough to saturate on the attack but then wisely pulls back and gives

you space to assimilate. The acidity moves sluggishly but not non-existent, relies on the brown sugar and molasses more than it should yet also gains focus via the lime, tangerine citrus and white stream stones. The florality adds breadth but also diffuses some. Finish is energetic and long, if not showing some moments of ADD. 88

Leitz, Weingut Josef
Rheingau, Rudesheimer, Magdalenenkreuz, Spätlese AP #5

Riesling
2004, \$20.99, 8.0%

Attenuated white gold color, while clear thick enough to distort, more like a gauzy white curtain than a color. Noisy florality and orange to lime citrus in the nose, the peach, apricot, mango fruit scents too sweet to allow the underlying stoniness and chalkiness to show fully, good amount of baked brown sugar too. Medium-bodied, possessed of a much more focused profile in the mouth. Roses, violets and lilies abound, blossom feel too in the tangerine, orange, lemon, lime citrus. The acidity is no weakling yet shies in the face of all the sweetness, cotton candy and powdered sugar adorn the apricot, peach, nectarine, pear fruit. Just herbaceous enough and minerally enough to add a slight shift of direction towards the finish. Will make you smile, especially if you're on ecstasy. 88

Leitz, Weingut Josef
Rheingau, Rudesheimer, Klosterlay, Kabinett AP #5
Riesling

2004, \$16.99, 8.0%

White gold to green straw in color, visible fizz upon the initial pour, while on the whole transparent not particularly shiny. Sleek sweet 'n' sour appeal to the tangerine, lime citrus in the nose, adding in white smoke, stone and sand notes but nothing which would prove a match for the citrus, stronger opponent found in the peach, apricot, cherry fruit and baking sugar elements. Full-bodied, while immensely sweet its innate cotton candy-like dissolve provides immediate relief. Once more mainly driven by the tangerine, lemon, lime citrus although the stoniness plays a larger role here. The acidity not keen but does make a clean sweep around the perimeter. The cherry, strawberry, apricot, peach fruit is ripe and holds its form well, ends cleanly and succinctly. Some herbal, asparagus notes complicate the finish. Earns its pay. 88

Schmitt-Wagner, Weingut Carl
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Longuicher Maximiner, Herrenberg, Auslese AP #5

Riesling
2004, \$27.99, 8.5%

Plush, deep yellow hay color, reaches deep nicely if without much shine, moderately concentrated rims. The nose offers a fair degree of oiled stones, slate, fried garden herbs, lemon peel and arch floral zip, cut grass, traditional in a sense but still youthfully engaging, no paucity of peach, apricot, pear, apple scents. Medium-bodied, enters the mouth slowly and surely, its eyes are wide open enough to see if there's any holes it hasn't filled. Floral, sure, but truly leads with orange, lemon, lime citrus and a kind of wet stoniness that evokes rivers and streams. The acidity doesn't have much of an edge but has brawn to spare. Brown sugar and molasses soften the finish but by the same token detract from focus. Big finish, plenty of weight just not sure where it's going. 87

HUNGARY WHITE

Craftsman (Hilltop Neszmély Winery)
Ászár-Neszmély, Észak-Magyarország, Gardener's White
Muscat Ottonel
Muscat Ottonel

2003, \$8.99, 11.5%

Dull brown straw color, still has moderate clarity, dilute rims. Presents a nose of pink lemonade, licorice, wet flower petals, orange zest, while there's a solid presence to the peach, apricot, pear fruit something about it smells like they put vodka in that lemonade. Semi-flat and attenuated in the mouth if medium-bodied, spicy at first but more imbued with a certain milkiness and floral paste. Showy aspect of lemon and lime citrus, can't shake that alcohol mixed with soft drink feel. Blunt, granite-like feel in the peach, pear, green apple fruit, has more energy than flavor. While not particularly acidic does end dryly and perfunctory. 85

SPAIN RED

Muga, Bodegas
Rioja, Reserva Selección Especial
Blend

1998, \$32.99, 13.5%

Trim violet to brick red core, spotless, light orange infusion in the purer red rims. Oaky nose of mint, menthol, spiced vanilla, sour oak, coffee chips, the tart cherry, raspberry scents offputtingly evanescent. Medium-bodied, really sour and biting mouth entry, makes YOU adjust to IT, little give. Smoky, sour, leathery and especially tarry with vanilla oak and toast beyond what would be commensurate to the size of the tart red currant, red cherry fruit. Lemon bite, a tad on the grassy side, lack of bottom brings the acidity dominantly to the fore. Off-balance, tries admirably to right the ship but the seas too stormy on this voyage. 70% Tempranillo, 20% Garnacha, 10% Mazuelo and Graciano. 84

SPAIN WHITE

Rodríguez, Compañía de Viños Telmo
Rueda, Basa
Blend

2004, \$10.99, 13.0%

Just about colorless, very pale yellow straw hue, also lacks shine and reflectivity. Appealing penetrating power in the nose, energetic white grapefruit to lemon citrus, dried burning grass, sauna stones, mineral dust, just enough florality to sweep the peach, apple, pear fruit upwards. Medium-bodied, has good heft but also capable of decisive lateral movement, the acidity is full and mouth wateringly ripe. Piles on bags of cut grass, tree leaves, bark with generous pouring of lemon and lime juice too. The mineral component brings out cut in the sweet-inclining apricot, peach, pear fruit. Finishes with good resonance while not too heavy to keep chugging. A very nice surprise. Approximately 85% Verdejo, remainder Sauvignon Blanc, trace amount of Viura. 89

Sanz, Javier
Rueda, Villa Narcisa
Verdejo

2003, \$10.49, 13.0%

Golden-brown straw color, too transparent to be dull, instead suggests shine as it loses hue at the rims. Creamy nose without getting too vanilla-driven, more caramel and

then licorice, lilacs, violets, deeply endowed pear, peach, red apple fruit, the sweet spice brings a broadened feel as it dissolves. Full-bodied, attractively open array of licorice, golden honey, orange blossom, lilac, lemon zest, while a bit bottom heavy stays quite good natured about it, just shrugs and keeps on truckin'. The acidity is there lurking about, shy about playing with the other kids. The pear, peach, apricot, melon, red apple fruit has rolling forward momentum, ends up in gregarious cinnamon, allspice tones. Ripe and friendly, a wine to fill the glass to the rims and crank the tunes on the deck. 88

Nieva, Viñedos de
Rueda, Blanco Nieva
Verdejo
2004, \$11.99, 12.5%

Plenty of both reflectivity and distortion to be had visually, simple yellow straw color, holds its hue decently to the rims. Lots of weight in the nose, thinks about developing some creaminess yet the white grapefruit, lemon citrus and crushed white stones will have little of that, too heavy to be clean but stays focused even as it produces a modicum of peach, apricot, pineapple and pear scents. In the mouth there's an equally ponderous feel, like walking around with a five pound weight in your back pocket. Little shy about the acidity, gnaws away like a junkyard dog with its favorite bone. The papaya, guava, pineapple fruit flavors imbue a more tropical feel to the peach, apricot fruit. Bright grassy zip and pink grapefruit, lemon citrus trumps whatever more serene stoniness there may be. Likes to drive 60 MPH in a 35 MPH zone. 87

Laxas, Bodegas AS
Rías Baixas
Albariño
2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

Softly luminescent glow to the bright yellow hue, the layering greatly effects the transparency, good richness from core to rims. Densely-packed nose, you have to pull the scents back out to parse them, only then do you get anise seed, dried flowers, lemon cream pie, pineapple, pear, apricot fruit and a certain echo of oiled stones, has to actually dissolve to judge the dissolve. Full-bodied, same situation in the mouth, concentrated and massive enough that you really have to work at sucking it down. If you're game for the challenge chew on the gristle in the pineapple, papaya, mango, apricot, peach fruit and wash it down with orange, lemon citrus juice. In addition to the fruit and citrus it is spicy and has a swingblade of acidity, more or less sending the florality into hiding. Continues to jar through finish, little room for relaxation. Go to the gym or have a couple of glasses of this. 87

Allende, Finca
Rioja
Blend
2002, \$21.99, 13.5%

Solidly deep golden color, flattens at the rims. No lack of oak in the nose, heavy vanilla ice cream, mint, licorice, orange popsicle, enough florality to create forward movement and help separate out the peach, apricot, cantaloupe fruit scents. Full-bodied, outrageously toasty in the mouth, bursting with burnt wood, vanilla, chocolate, mint, butterscotch flavors, almost to the total exclusion of any herbal, lemony, floral flavors. The peach, apricot, pear, melon, nectarine fruit makes a credible stab at fending off the oak but does finally go under for the third time. The acidity seems average but who can tell with the wood

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stake through its heart? Most likely way too young to show as it was intended. 60% Viura, 40% Malvasia. 87

SPAIN ROSE

Muga, Bodegas
Rioja, Rosado
Blend
2004, \$11.99, 13.5%

Quite pale pink color, reflects light well, slight day-glo character, big time loss of hue at the rims. Not a big nose per se yet unfolds aggressively with lemon citrus, newly grown grass, ground anise seed, floral incense, sprightly cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit that positively skips forward. Medium to full-bodied, active enough to demand your attention, spice and mineral dust pop around your mouth. Angular orange to lemon citrus gives it added heft, the grassiness keeps it twisting like a paper mobile in a breeze. Some alcoholic heat in the center, this doesn't negatively effect its verve nor the length of the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit but does dry up some of the excess juice. The acidity waits and starts to chew up ground past the mid-palate. Not shy about sitting in your lap. 60% Garnacha, 30% Viura, 10% Tempranillo. 88

PORTUGAL WHITE

Arcas, Quinta das
Vinho Verde
Arca Nova
Blend
2004, \$6.99, 10.0%

Attractive surface shine in the yellow straw color, slightly more translucent below, moderate loss of hue intensity at the rims. Interesting texture in the nose, creamy at first before getting firmed up lemon citrus and mineral notes, only then to soften with cherry, strawberry, peach, pear fruit, stays there as it doesn't have any herbaceousness or somesuch to give it back cut. Medium-bodied, here you get the grassiness and herbaceousness full force, alongside a strong smoky streak as well as lemon, white grapefruit citrus and unwashed mineral chunks. The thick-necked acidity continues to bring out earthy aspects, provides less space for the peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit to play. The smoky, oily dimension really takes over the finish making it more serious-minded than it might have wanted to be. Unspecified percentages of Loureiro, Arinto, Trajadura. 85

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Thelema Mountain Vineyards
Stellenbosch
Merlot
2002, \$26.99, 14.0%

Zinc orange cast to the brick red, violet core, clear enough to brighten appreciably for ochre rims. Orange citrus, leather and grass burst into the nose, leaves things a touch discombobulated at first, mocha crisp and vanilla chips, the earthiness adds to the raw feel and creates a pace which outstrips the sweetness in the cherry, black currant scents, no time to fully concentrate. Medium-bodied, the acidity makes your eyebrows arch from the first sip, good deal of puckering sensation. Herbal, grassy notes add to the piquant feel while the orange and lemon citrus, thyme-led garden herbs finish the job. The tannins are edgy like a rusty machete. Comes up with notes of blood iron, minerals, bell pepper, as in the nose

remembers the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit a little late in the game. Has the breakneck feel an astronaut must experience during an unanticipatedly fast reentry into the atmosphere. 88

Excelsior Estate
Robertson, Paddock
Shiraz
2004, \$10.99, 14.5%

Glowing red-purple core, encircled strongly by luminescent magenta rims. Roasted coffee bean, vanilla bean, fried lemon peel, mesquite chips and brown sugar percolate in a soup in the nose, smoke the cherry and blackberry fruit, positively burrows into your nostrils. Medium-bodied with heavy-handed leather, black smoke, tar, minerals and orange/lemon citrus, together strong enough to fend off the oak toast, caramelized brown sugar components. Echoes of baked ham, grass and black earth swirl about, lift above the cloyingly thick plum, blackberry, currant, cherry fruit. Hard to gauge level of tannins or acidity. At first its aggressive nature is to its credit but the more you drink this starts to wear you down. Lots of fun, best to drink it when already drunk. 86

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Kanu
Stellenbosch, Limited Release
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$11.99, 12.5%

Extremely reflective and shiny, almost zero color, only very pale brown straw. Lemony nose with some grassy bite, more so driven by minerals, displays touches of pink grapefruit, the peach and pear fruit has skin/pit nature, overall more edge than depth. Medium-bodied, the bright acidity is fairly broad in its spread and touches every aspect of the wine. While not high in alcohol content per se still comes off a little hot. Floral, piles on the lemon and pink grapefruit citrus, chalk and white minerals, turns more powdery in the mouth as it sits. Smoky, starts to lift a little before the pear, apple, peach fruit can settle into itself. Serviceable mostly for its refreshing, mouth-watering texture. 86

AUSTRALIA RED

Laughing Jack
South Australia, Barossa Valley
Shiraz
2002, \$29.99, 14.1%

Filmy, the finely grained sediment adds to the opacity of the black purple core, durable appearance through to the medium-width crimson rims. In a rush to get the fried bacon fat, tar, tobacco leaf, toffee, metal, caramelized chocolate scents up into your nose, focused/stern feel in the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, what it may lack in depth it makes up for in length and persistence. Medium-bodied, the acidity and tannins frame the entry and give it surprising clarity. Pleasing array of mint, eucalyptus, orange zest, lemon, dried game, leather and more bacon over time. The oak tones of caramel, molasses, vanilla soften and sweeten the center ever so slightly. Smoky with elevating stone, barbeque chips, tar, earth components, takes great pains to establish a serious profile that will demand your concentration. An orange glaze covers the red currant, cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit. Clamps down on the finish, should develop a more natural length after sleeping in the bottle for a few years. 90

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Hazyblur
South Australia, Adelaide Plains
Shiraz
2003, \$34.99, 14.5%

Trim, straightforward red-purple core, broad enough to leave little room for the warm maroon rims. Unambiguous oaking in the nose, features caramel, coffee ice cream, fresh butter yet not to the detriment of the earth, eucalyptus and mild gamey qualities, persistent red currant, boysenberry, blueberry fruit scents. Full-bodied, dense to the point of impairing its fluidity. The monolithic feel is temporarily pierced by orange citrus and eucalyptus shades. Molasses, brown sugar, vanilla cake icing and mint make sure you don't forget the oak. Smoky, metallic and leathery nuances slather the red cherry, red currant, blackberry flavors, the fruit juicy yet not particularly yielding. Subterranean tannins sneakily work back stage. Tends to rumble along in no rush, lets you feel the bumps in the road. 89

Black Chook, The
South Australia, Shiraz Viognier
Shiraz
2004, \$17.99, 15.0%

Fully opaque black violet color just like most of its immediate peers, intensely backlit red-crimson rims. Sweet orange blossom, tangerine citrus and rose petals appear in the nose before a jolt of white grapefruit, menthol, almonds, cocoa crisp, roasted pig skin, quite a nice burst of power in the currant, blackberry, red cherry scents. Full-bodied, has a kind of "under construction" structure with bolts and beams sticking out, the nature bolstered with the fang-baring acidity. The texture finds further complicity in the white grapefruit, mineral, stone, hay, and smoky BBQ sauce flavors. Velvety cream cheese type texture in the currant, plum, black cherry fruit, its feet nailed to the floorboards. Expanding bitter dark chocolate, burnt French Toast and florality at the end. Not that most naturally seamless of wines but momentum pulls it all together in the end. 94% Shiraz, 6% Viognier. 89

Henry's Drive
South Australia, Padthaway
Shiraz
2003, \$39.99, 16.0%

Impenetrable black core, thinnest possible brick red rims with mild glow. Nose lunges at you with menthol, pine cone, eucalyptus, camphor only to suddenly remember violets, molasses, orange peel and earth, the red cherry, blackberry fruit scents more or less killed off by the alcoholic fumes. Outsized and desirous of making a grand statement, here too certainly thrown off balance by the alcohol, if you can adjust to it plenty of flavor. The tannins feel artificial and semi-disintegrated. As a result, some sluggishness in the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit and heightened caramel, molasses, vanilla crisp tones. Mint, eucalyptus, steamrolling medicinal streak. Doles out orange and lemon citrus, earth and soft bacon fat notes but it's the grassiness which remains through the finish. Leaves your jaw sore and your head well-scratched from trying to understand just what it is. 88

Woop Woop
South Australia, South Eastern Australia
Shiraz
2004, \$10.99, 15.0%

Completely opaque purple core, flush ruby to youthful brick red rims, well-hued. Even with its soft underbelly of plum,

blackberry, cherry scents the nose possesses a strong skeleton and uses it to show off its leather, earth and dried flower components, the mint, toast and toffee oak scents more crisp than soft. Full-bodied and broad, weighs a ton but even under that the alcoholic burn creeps up through the fissures. Orange marmalade, lemon peel, potpourri, mint and vanilla/caramel swirl the first flavors to register. After that comes a brief moment of herbaceousness before this is swallowed up by a flood of currant, blackberry, cherry, plum fruit. Has steady if unspectacular tannins. Toasty finish if a bit astringent and bitter. Holds its fullness throughout. 87

Frankland Estate

Western Australia, Frankland River, Rocky Gully Shiraz Viognier

Shiraz/Syrah

2003, \$15.99, 13.5%

Spotless crimson-specked purple core, pure red to garnet rims with a faint glow. Very thick, billowy nose that fills it all up from the nostril wall-to-wall, leather, earth, merde, wet burnt toast, fried toffee, bubbly raspberry, black cherry, blackberry scents, stays deep and resists lift. Full-bodied, doesn't lack finesse, just not interested in displaying it. Loaded with coffee, toffee, fried vanilla oak accents, little cut but in no way creamy either. The acidity level is high enough to have a negative effect on the fruit as well as increase in the level of herbaceousness, tannins dull. While there's nice thrust in the currant, raspberry, blackberry fruit, it loses direction quickly. Still too toasty on the finish for the florality to come out completely. Of two minds. 97% Shiraz, 3% Viognier. 86

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Leeuwin Estate

Western Australia, Margaret River, Art Series

Riesling

2003, \$21.99, 12.0%

Incredibly shiny yellow gold color, light but so reflective it takes on more depth, wonderful to behold. Oily, smoky, tarry nose, powerful minerality, damagingly strong lemon citrus, then flowers and licorice, crisply delineated pear, peach, red apple fruit, mostly skin and pit. Full-bodied, quite expansive from the second it touches the mouth. Sparkles with lemon/lime citrus, stone and minerals, violets, lilacs, orange blossom, dried oil slick, garden herbs, lots going on. The acidity is like strong sandpaper, rough but leaves all the surfaces scrubbed smooth in its wake. The center benefits from a swelling in the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit, in no way juicy yet effortlessly long. So wide you'll be lucky to be able to close your jaw minutes after it's gone. 92

Yarraman Estate

South Australia, Hunter Valley, Banjo Collection

Chardonnay Sémillon

Blend

2003, \$11.99, 12.5%

Attractive clarity and shine in the light golden color, soft and blurry green touches. Flat nose, oddly devoid of scents, some mint, raw nuts, lemon/lime citrus, crushed floral dust, minimal pear, apple, peach fruit. In the mouth it has slightly more breadth, if not depth. More floral, some powdered white sugar accents to the dry peach, pear, apricot fruit. Nuttiness grows as it sits in the glass, matches up OK with the lemon to orange citrus. The acidity is definitely there but on the blunt side. Its semi-oily

texture helps extend it a few more inches forward. Not bad, cursed as uninteresting. 45% Chardonnay, 40% Sémillon, 15% Gewürztraminer. 84

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Whitehaven

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 13.0%

Almost colorless, faint yellow glow adds something to its appearance, not especially shiny. There's a serene quality to the nose which slows it down as it unfolds, you get the cat pee, sour lemongrass, white mineral dust, white grapefruit pith with a nonchalant toss of its hair, while not underfruited still has a skin/pit feel to the peach, pear, pineapple, papaya fruit scents. Medium-bodied, sinewy, it all but snakes across your tongue. Bright as an 100 watt bulb, the sweet juice in both the lemon and grapefruit citrus as well as the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit never loses its edge. The acidity jingles, jangles along, just about makes you happy when it cuts you. The herbaceousness is a wonderful contrast to this sweetness and weaves the fabric tighter. Enticing for how no one element demands your attention. 90

Mud House

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$11.99, 13.5%

Light yellow straw color with enough glow to appear bigger, stays transparent with clear rims. While the nose presents a strong cut grass component there's also noticeably sweet lemon and lime citrus and forward florality for counter-weight, even the white smoke and heated stone notes can't get it to not focus on the peach, apricot, pineapple, papaya fruit scents. Medium-bodied, again presents a pleasingly engaging mix of sweet and sour on the entry, certainly holds your interest. Oily with a fried touch to the garden herbs and straw elements, the stones and chalk powder help settle it down. The acidity lacks edge but not oomph, throws the peach, apricot, pear, mango fruit forward. Citrus soup of lemon, white grapefruit, lime and tangerine. Some elevated sourness on finish but only makes you thirsty for another glass. 89

Kumeu River

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$18.99, 12.5%

Transparent, if slightly dull, white to yellow hay color, not much concentration at the core, not much concentration at the rims. Light nose, but what it has it sticks it up there sideways, frying oil, burnt herbs, stones, pine cone, earthy funk, it's like it is trying to piss you off, jams the white grapefruit and lemon citrus in there and plugs any gaps with peach and apricot pits and pear skin. Light to medium-bodied and fluid, still maintains that surly 'tude but slithers along well enough to allow you to choose how to approach it. Initially sweet, the lemon, lime, white grapefruit citrus then forges an alliance with the cut grass to sandpaper your tongue, minerality wants to muscle in on the act. There's a haughty reserve to the peach, pear, apricot, yellow apple fruit, you have to wait to turn 21 before you get a fraction of your trust fund. The acidity thunders loudly and just about brings things to a stop prematurely. As a result, the finish is so-so, like when your date's mother comes to pick her up before the dance is

done. Stays with you more as fantasy than reality. Still, not a bad fantasy. 88

Cairnbrae
Marlborough, The Stones
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$11.99, 13.0%

Evenly spread straw color, neither transparent nor shiny per se, just consistent. Shows some cream under the lemon citrus, mint and grass, light toasty notes, straightforward and uncomplicated peach, pear, green apple, pineapple fruit scents, more herbal as it sits in the glass. Medium-bodied, possesses a fresh entry which activates the palate and gets you salivating. The sweet lime and lemon citrus still ends with tangy bite. The minerals keep tingling away too, the acidity tries to leave a hickey behind. Never gets too herbaceous, softens this element with deep floral notes. Then returns to an attractive prickly feel on the finish, extends well without appearing forced. 88

Goldwater
Marlborough, New Dog
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$15.99, 13.5%

Dull green-white straw color, a bit more concentration at the core, weakens at the rims. Offers some dusty mineral and chalk texture in the nose, softens a bit quickly into creamed lemon, licorice, mint and peach to apricot juice. Medium-bodied, erect if not stern at times, leavened by sweet lime to lemon citrus, mint, flowers as well as pleasingly ripe peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit, lengthens well without depending on just being insipidly juicy, clean presentation of self. The herbaceousness spikes in the mid-palate, makes you notice the acidity more. Adds in some stone and mineral tones, loses weight, if not intensity, through the finish. 87

Maria, Villa
Marlborough, Private Bin
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$9.99, 13.5%

Quite pale and see-through yellow coloration, dilute rims. Very smoky nose, almost acrid as it unfolds the oil, fried lemon, cut grass, dried cat pee, sauna stone notes, lemon hard candy scents sweeten it some yet the pear, apple, pineapple, peach fruit scents fumble the baton on their turn. Light to medium-bodied, has enough acidity to focus the attack and hone in on the herbaceousness, lemon to white grapefruit citrus, licorice and minerals, perhaps realizing that, as in the nose, the peach, red apple, pear, apricot fruit isn't exactly the cavalry. That said, does stay more or less on balance with some sugary moments during the mid-palate. The kind of wine you'd really like if you didn't know better. 85

ARGENTINA RED

Pileta 39
Mendoza
Malbec
2004, \$8.99, 13.8%

Pushes clean opacity in the black purple core, thin and concentrated ruby-magenta rims. Close-woven plum, cherry, raspberry fruit with a sweetly smoky patina, subtler leather and earth notes, has milk chocolate and burnt toast but not truly oaky, more of a rugged, unshaven profile. Medium to full-bodied, much more herbaceous in

the mouth with drying tannins, mildly green. Offers cocoa powder, vanilla accents but the oak is more or less absorbed into harder metallic, smoky, leathery elements. This also adds a tough-minded edge to the cherry, blackberry fruit. Serious-minded but needs to read more of the classics before arguing with the professor. 85