

## *The Hanes Wine Review, August 2006 Edition*

Wine is a pretty complicated topic. So, it's easy to ignore one of the most fundamental questions regarding this miraculous, restorative elixir. That is, what is a grape? Just what are these things which grow on vines and eventually become something worthy of such attention (until you black out)? Let's see!

Grapes are berries that grow on vines. So, technically we can call them members of the fruit food group. And, after all, this is a technical essay. Physically speaking, grapes are round or oval with smooth skin. They grow in bunches on the vine, in a variety of quantities, both within a bunch or among bunches. Grapes are the most commonly grown fruit in the world. Grapes more or less fall into five basic buckets as to how they will be consumed by humans: (1) Eaten fresh, soon after picking, as "table grapes." These grapes are ripe, juicy and sweet. (2) Eaten dried, after the grapes have been picked for some time and become shriveled and the flavors concentrated along with perceptible sugary sweetness into "raisins" (the English word for shriveled grapes while in French the word "raisin" mean the basic "grape" itself). (3) Not eaten but instead pressed into grape juice which is then bottled and drunk. This concentrated juice is sweet but contains no alcoholic content. (4) Made into jams or jellies from the juice and pulp and eaten as a spread on other foods such as bread or crackers. (5) The only way that really matters, not eaten but instead pressed into grape juice which is then fermented into an alcoholic beverage called wine. Now we're talking! This is why roughly 90% of grapes grown are used to make wine.

As Hanes has discussed ad nauseam elsewhere, there exists a vast number of grape types, not all suitable for (5) the production of wine. These grapes may be eaten as table grapes, raisins, drunk as grape juice or smeared all over bread or your body. What we would like to analyze now are the constituent parts of the grape berry typical of grapes made into wine. This might shed light on what wine is and why it possesses the flavors and textures it does. Or it might not.

At the outset of such discussion it's interesting to consider the nutritional value of the grape before and after the fermentation process which creates wine. This is because lots of people eats table grapes to ingest their daily portion of fruits. While others (and maybe sometimes even the very same people) drink wine for health reasons. Science (surely not Hanes) is currently in the midst of plumbing what value table grapes and wine provides for human health, as well as, err, unhealth. This task remains ongoing. Fresh table grapes possess many vitamins and minerals which the human body likes. They can both add to general health and wellbeing or act to help prevent certain bodily ills, such as cancer or heart disease. Among the vitamins and minerals most commonly found in grapes are manganese, vitamin C, vitamin B1, potassium and vitamin B6 with additional phytonutrients such as resveratrol, quercetin, anthocyanin and catechin also present.

The latter phytonutrients are also known as compounds called flavonoids. Flavonoids are basically what not only contributes to the flavors of grapes and wine but also the textures and ability to change flavors and textures over time as wine ages. Now, to best understand how all these compounds and such exist and come into play, the various physical components of the grape need to be discussed.

Since this is about wine, hey, it's not called *The Hanes Grape Review*, it gets tricky. Wine, she is never simple. With any discussion of wine and stuff like flavonoids one has to expand the topic to include parts of the grapevine such as the vine stems and leaves. This is because when grapes are fermented into wine these solids are often physically present in the fermentation vessel. The term for these things together with the non-juice parts of the grape itself is the *pomace*. Before getting into wine Hanes always thought that pomace was the thing you used to scrape dead skin off the bottom of your feet. Anyway. Taken as a whole, the pomace adds a lot of chemical properties to finished wine. And, unless you're peculiar, you don't eat the stems that table grapes are attached to when grape bunches are purchased in the grocery store, etc.

So, back to the grape berry we go. There's three main parts of the grape berry, namely the flesh/pulp, the skin, and the seeds. We'll start at the outside and work our way in. Witness, the skin. Or, rather, the parts of the skin. Again, never simple. The skin's basic jobs are to protect the rest of the grape (to keep things out) and retain water (keep things in). It forms the entire surface area of the grape, save for the *pedicel*, or the part where the grape attaches to the stem. The skin is not one homogeneous thing, but rather is made up of layers. The outermost layer is called the *bloom*. It is made of waxes and the substance cutin and is really what any layperson would consider to be the "skin" of the grape. It does most of the work in retaining grape water content and resisting fungi and other bad things trying to get into the grape. Oddly, though, the composition of the bloom is beneficial to the growth of wild yeasts, something of major import to the fermentation of grape juice into wine. Below the bloom are layers of *epidermis* and *hypodermis*, the layers which contain most of the flavonoids and phenolics found in the grape's skin. Notably among these are anthocyanins, which are responsible for the color of grapes, as well as tannins, which add structure and dryness to finished wine. To make things simple, let's just say that the skin of the grape comprises about 10% of the weight of a fully ripened grape.

Unless you like sucking on seeds, the major and most important part of the grape is its flesh, or pulp. The technical term for it is the *pericarp* or *mesocarp* (the skin being the *exocarp*). Mmm, yummy pericarp! Basically, the flesh of the grape is an interconnected mass of cells called *vacuoles*. As with other living organisms, these cells are connected by tissues which share moisture, nutrients and all the other cool junk a grape needs to live and grow. The flesh of the grape is mostly juice, enmeshed by these thin tissues. A peripheral vascular "mesh" forms the outer part of the flesh, just beneath the skin. Note in passing that 99% of grapes' flesh is colorless (being mostly water) and that the color in juice or wine only comes from the anthocyanins in the surrounding skins, released during the crushing of the grapes and ongoing fermentation process.

Hanes is going to get kind of controversial here. The above description of the grape flesh doesn't really do justice to it. It's technically accurate, sure, but this is also like **the** grape for the most part. Where the flavors come from, the flavors which differentiate grape types apart and (get ready) reveal the *terroir* of the grape's place of origin. Pinot Noir is different from Grenache because of the physical composition of the grape. Some of this comes from the skins and seeds, in terms of tannins and color and such, but it's the flesh which is the grape. So, while simple in physical composition the flesh is not simple. Just ask any priest. As important (especially to wine geeks), the flesh is also the part which holds the water and nutrients of the grape. These nutrients, minerals and such *have flavor* and come into the grape via the grapevine from the soil. That is, the soil's composition effects the grape flesh's composition. Which is one of the major factors in the concept of "terroir," or, loosely put, a sense of place (factoring in soil, vineyard slope and drainage, sun exposure, wind, length of growing season, geez, so much...). The point being that what the grape is fed effects what the grape will taste like. The "food" gets located in the grape's flesh. And the food differs from locale to locale.

OK, enough passion of the flesh. The last part of the grape are the seeds. The number, size and shape of grape seeds vary among varieties. The usual number of seeds is between one and four. With the exception of seedless varieties, which have zero. Duh. However, grapes used to make wine do have seeds and these are the ones we care about. The more seeds, usually the bigger the grape. Bigger grape means more flesh, means more juice, means more wine. This said, allowing for natural variances in normal grape berry sizes among grape varieties, some grape berries are naturally smaller while others naturally larger. Grape seeds consist of an *embryo*, *endosperm*, and *coat*. The coat is the outer, umm, coating of the seed. The embryo is, you guessed it, the part that could grow into a new plant. The endosperm does something important, Hanes is sure of that.

In the making of wine seeds are important because they will come into contact with the juice once the grape skins are broken and everything starts to get all mixed up. Seeds are harder to separate out from the juice than other larger solids such as stems or leaves or even skins. Seeds possess tannins. These tannins will effect the texture of the wine. If for some reason the seeds do not reach full maturity they will likely impart a sort of bitter or astringent texture to the wine called "greenness." This is not good. They make a wine harsh and imbalanced. "Physiological ripeness" is the term for when all the grape's parts are equally mature and ready for plucking. Immature seeds occur most often when hot weather causes the sugar levels in the grape flesh to spike, the flesh maturing faster than the seeds. Because sugars convert into alcohol in the fermentation process, if one wants a wine without too much alcohol the grapes must be picked before the sugar levels get too high. Even if the seeds have not yet matured fully. So, while seemingly innocuous, seeds actually can play a big role in what a finished wine is like.

Hanes is tempted to say that this is basically the grape in a nutshell. But then all the wisecrackers out there will ask Hanes to explain how the grape got in the nutshell. On the topic of nutshells, though, while not technically a *part* of the grape, it should be noted in passing that as the grape ripens and matures, external influences beyond the basic sun, wind and rain change the chemical and physical composition of the grape. So, this is still the grape we are talking about. Foremost among this is the gray mold called *Botrytis cinerea*. This fungus has a beneficial effect on grapes (beneficial, that is, if desired by the vineyard manager or winemaker) and is also known as "noble rot." Through tiny filaments the fungus penetrates the grape berry's skin and dehydrates it, in essence beneficially concentrating the sugars remaining within the berry. The result being a grape that when pressed produces honeyed flavors and ultra-concentrated sweetness. This is a naturally occurring phenomenon in many winegrowing areas around the world and is worth the mention as an example of how the physiognomy of the grape berry may be dramatically altered in its "natural" state. The basic components of the grape remain the same but phenomena such as *Botrytis cinerea* underscore that the grape can never be truly understood in isolation from its environment.

As with so much in life, the basic lesson is that not all grapes are born equal. They all have skin, flesh and seeds (ignoring Mr. Thompson and his ilk) but that's where the similarities diverge. The types of skin, flesh and seeds will determine grapes' future as quality wine or other less laudable ends. "Nature" then plays a role as a grapevine must be paired with a suitable terrain and environment while "nurture" in the vineyard allows the grape's three components to all equally add their bit to a fully mature and healthy grape. These differences may seem important but one day, perhaps among a vineyard of Sultana or Concord grapes, will be born the Che Guevara of grapes who will lead grapes of any and all *Vitis* in raising their collective consciousness and overcoming the inequalities of birth, regardless of thickness of bloom, color of pulp, or number of seeds. All true wine lovers await this day of liberation.

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**This month's big winners...** Not any richer this month than last, so Hanes continues to dip into his existing hoard of wine rather than buy new stuff. As evidenced by the relatively meager number of wines under review herein. That said, Chiarito's 2003 Nero d'Avola was much better than their Negro Amaro of the same vintage, although as noted last month the latter isn't bad. A kind gent popped open a bottle of the new 2005 vintage Côt (the local Loire name for Malbec) from producer Clos Roche Blanche and it is an absolute stunner, beautiful now but also one to reward aging. All for \$18. Hanes is a Boxler slut for a reason, this month's reason being this Alsatian producer's 2004 Riesling "Réserve" which is not cheap at \$30 but worth every drop. White wines from the Basque region of Spain are all the rage these days (it's true) but the labels are confusing. If you see a 2005 vintage white wine that says "Ameztoi" on a greenish label for like \$18, buy it. It tastes good. The big wine event of the month for Hanes was a wine geek get-together to sample some 2004 German wines before the 2005 vintage wines come out in full force. To Hanes, the winners were two wines from

J.J. Prum, both Auslese and Spätlese level Rieslings from the Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard. The "Charta" Riesling from Hans Lang did not suck either.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Still plowing a lot through expensive wines already owned/not recent purchases. So, not much here. Hanes usually has his fill of rosé wines early in the summer but a few still find their way down his gullet. Luckily, from the Beaujolais, France, Brun's Gamay "Brun d'Folie" rosé was cannily purchased as this is a great *wine* regardless of color. And also a killer value at \$12. Hanes has been on a mini-Vermentino kick as this grape from Italy can produce some delicious wines. Bruni made a very credible one called "Plinio" in 2004 and at a fair price of around \$13. It's not the most enthusiastic thumbs-up but, hey, some credit should be given to Chile's Casa Lapostolle for consistently producing potable entry level wines that are nothing to be embarrassed about drinking, as in this month's \$13 2004 vintage Cabernet Sauvignon.

**And the disappointments...** Turley's 2004 Zinfandel from Rattlesnake Ridge vineyard on Howell Mountain in Napa was so-so, which was vexing since Hanes mostly likes Howell Mountain fruit. So he checked the database and found that he's yet to be impressed with the wines from this vineyard. Hanes knows jack about this vineyard but would be curious to know if it's all young vines or in a lesser location. Threw down the coin for a Shiraz from South Africa, the Eventide Cellar from the Wellington region. Let's just say that you get a lot of oak for your \$15. Hanes rarely drinks whole bottles of Champagne while home alone. Rarely. But not never. Gaston Chiquet's non-vintage Grand Cru Blanc de Blanc d'Aÿ Brut got popped one night but it just didn't float the boat as hoped, indecisive. In the modern style, Pecchenino's Dolcetto called "Siri d'Jermu" from Dogliani in Piedmont can be depended on for a savory experience but the 2004 Hanes tried fell flat. Given this bottling's track record Hanes would like to sample it again and see if it was just this one bottle which was hum.

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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.

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the older (or non-imported) wines he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2006.html>

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 #23:** "What will this idiot think of next?"

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 August!

### CALIFORNIA RED

Pax Wine Cellars  
Regional Blend, North Coast, Cuvée Keltie  
Syrah  
2004, \$65.00, 15.3%  
Rich dark purple core, neither particularly reflective nor opaque, tightly integrated with the lively ruby-magenta rims. There's a lot of textural weight in the nose, makes it clingy, anchors the sweet mesquite smoke element as well as the cured beef strips, saltlick, mineral chunks, too angular for the florality and even the caramel/toffee scents to catch, the currant, plum, black cherry scents more durable and deep than sweetly juicy. Full-bodied, here in the mouth the oak is much more noticeable, all spice,

clove, caramel, burnt toast and popcorn. There's more resonance in the currant, blackberry fruit but it's all vibration and still not much juice. Brown sugar, molasses blend with more zesty orange citrus, shows that smoked character like a well-basted slab of meat. Tannins and acidity do their job without fanfare, just a part of the fabric. It's a very big wine, impossible to not be impressed by it on some level. Granting this, would be interesting to meet it again when it has less to prove. 91

Pax Wine Cellars  
Sonoma County, Cuvée Moriah  
Blend  
2004, \$50.00, 15.9%  
Inviting richness in the violet to garnet-magenta hued core, mostly opaque, more red-magenta with an orange tinge at the rims. The nose is made up primarily of sweet and juicy

raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit although there is a loamy forest floor side to it, lavender, wet leather and fairly subdued and knit-in oak toast. Full-bodied in a wiry fashion, strides with authority and a rapid clip. The tannins reveal a peppery quality which elevates their presence and grainy feel. Here the raspberry, blueberry, strawberry fruit has a hard candy feel, unmoistened and with a latent sweetness. Dry enough too to produce more of a meadow grassiness than damp forest feel. Moderate smokiness and leather notes, once more the oak behaves itself. Gains in complexity for its chewy texture, not sure how much smoothing out will be necessary or desired. 73% Grenache, 14% Mourvèdre, 8% Syrah, 4% Cunoise, 1% Roussanne. 91

Chiarito Vineyard  
Mendocino County, Fox Hill Vineyards  
Nero d'Avola

2003, \$30.00, 14.6%  
Borderline opaque purple core, holds its violet hue almost fully to the rims where there's a slight change to dusky crimson-red. There's some creaminess at first in the nose, hard to tell if the mint/flower notes are oak-driven or not, clove spice and herbs, pleasingly ripe blackberry, plum, black cherry scents, the more time it has to open, the more it finds its footing. Full-bodied, its ripeness is bright and engaging, great deal of buoyancy in that blackberry, raspberry, black cherry fruit, has a mild dried fruit edge too. The cream is soft and mostly in the background, the sweet spice, mint and garden herbs provide contrast to the fruit and there's actually good minerality too. The acidity is not overpowering yet admirably consistent. Going in the right direction. 90

Turley  
Napa Valley, Atlas Peak, Mead Ranch  
Zinfandel

2004, \$35.00, 15.9%  
Basic dark purple core, absorbs most light, loses its opacity to form noticeably wide blood red to magenta rims. Molasses, ginger, mesquite grill smoke, saltick, mint oil and flowers create an active nose, give credit to the boysenberry, blueberry, blackberry scents for finding their voice. Medium-bodied, there's something unnatural about its texture, it just doesn't sit well on the tongue. Allowing for this, there's very good focus to the raspberry, boysenberry, cranberry fruit, not a drop of juice hits the floor. Fairly tannic, brings it some rugged qualities and plays up the mountain feel of scrub grasses, earth and bits of loose stone. Lower florality but some orange zest instead, not much oak in evidence until as an aftertaste. Vivid flavors but doesn't quite harmonize. 89

Ridge  
Dry Creek Valley, Lytton Springs  
Zinfandel

2004, \$33.99, 14.5%  
Entirely unblemished, helps integrate the ruby-violet core to the red-ruby rims, dark throughout but nowhere near opacity. Crushed red fruit-filled nose, raspberry, strawberry, cranberry, the sweet molasses accents push becoming honeyed, noticeable degree of vanilla too, sweet pie spices too, the oaks remains proportionate to the fruit, smattering of eucalyptus and orange peel. Medium-bodied, no roughness at all yet lacks get-up and go, not a lot of forward momentum. Slightly tacky texture to the tannins help the wine gain traction on your tongue. Has the same raspberry, red cherry base with lighter notes of cranberry

and strawberry. Soft herbal swipes, orange citrus, some flowers. The cocoa, vanilla, caramel aspect neither too flabbily soft nor sweet. Immaculately crafted wine but lacking some in soul. 79% Zinfandel, 18% Petite Sirah, 3% Carignane. 89

Turley  
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge  
Zinfandel

2004, \$40.00, 16.0%  
There a blackness in the purple core that dulls the color but can't quite get it into full opacity, highly integrated garnet to red magenta rims, very vibrant. The huge creamy butter, vanilla, coffee ice cream and caramel crisp elements in the nose tend to render the remainder of the scents indistinct, a sundae of cherry, raspberry, blueberry fruit with a wishful thinking dose of eucalyptus and pine cone. Full-bodied, not clumsy nor excessively heavy, yet you will be hard pressed to find a centimeter of your mouth not slathered in the wine. Sweet, sugary blackberry, raspberry, cherry fruit, innocent in its robust gregarious nature. The vanilla, burnt toast, butter, popcorn, mint, toffee oak flavors abound and rebound. No measurable acidity nor tannins to speak of. Surprisingly little else going on in terms of flavors. The short finish just about the final straw. 87

Peterson Winery  
Regional Blend, Zero Manipulation Red Table Wine  
Blend

2003, \$11.99, 14.5%  
Basic red-ruby to purple color, clear, much more of a magenta, even pinkish, cast around the rims, nothing "manipulated" in its appearance. The nose about evenly split between fresh and juicy raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit and toasty oak, light mint and floral scrub notes, starts to develop a more rugged earthy side but does not follow through on it. Medium-bodied, not surprisingly a reprise of the nose in the mouth, another tug of war between the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit and the charred oak toast. Given the presence of the latter, does appear clean and straightforward, has an underlying bitterness that elevates both the acidity and the alcohol. Softly herbaceous, blends with that wildflower thing, maybe a little lemon zest too. Moderate length, nothing to be embarrassed about. Needs either more weight or more fluidity. 78% Carignane (Tollini Vineyard, Mendocino County), 14% Syrah (Gravity Flow Vineyard, Sonoma County), 8% Mourvèdre (Norton Ranch, Sonoma County). (Synthetic cork) 86

## FRANCE RED

Clos Roche Blanche  
Loire, Touraine, Côt  
Malbec

2004, \$17.99, 12.0%  
Jet black yet luminescent core, the purple hue only really evident around the rims alongside the deep/dark red magenta to thick ruby colors. The nose is fat and bursting with plum, cherry, blackberry fruit as well as lavender, more herbs, tarry earth, some hiccups of cocoa/peanut butter notes, dense to the point it really doesn't fully release and spread out. In the mouth it is medium to full-bodied, very floral with more of that lavender/garrigues thing, has orange citrus in spades too. Strong sour edge, but not enough to lighten the massiveness of the blackberry, black cherry, plum fruit. Zesty acidity gets your

mouth watering and breaks up some of the weight. Mixes together herbs, tar, leather, black earth, iron flecks, olive pits and mineral chunks. Either its the density or its really integrated to the point no one element shines above the others. Very engaging now but needs time. 91

Baudry, Domaine Bernard  
Loire

Chinon, Le Clos Guillot

Cabernet Franc

2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Deep warm glow emanates from the purple core, the violet still strong in the ruby-magenta rims, light shimmers along the surface. Outstanding depth in the cherry, currant scents, momentary flare of florality before bell pepper, cigar ash, iron-flecked earth, lemon seed take hold, right now has more length than complexity. Medium-bodied, stern mouth entry, very erect and bound-up. The tannins not quite peppery but have some grittiness. Strong ripeness pervades the cherry, plum, red currant fruit without real juiciness, cedes a lot of ground to the leather, earth, tree leaves. Not really straight-out herbaceous, low amount of bell pepper versus the nose. Has some acidic kick too. Mild cocoa powder mixed with dried beef bouillon cubes. Benefits from food now or at least a few hours of decanting. 89

#### FRANCE WHITE

Boxler, Albert  
Alsace, Réserve

Riesling

2004, \$29.99, 13.0%

Dark golden color, almost to the point of luminescence, does empty out appreciably around the rims, though. Heavy nose, seriously oily with musky flower oil, orange blossom, mint, peach and apricot cobbler, the vividness of the scents prevents it from ever getting near sluggishness. Full-bodied, here the immense baby fat does slightly impair its balance, can't quite handle it all at once. As a result, haphazard presentation of the lemon oil, lime peel, rose petals, minerals and metal flakes, linseed oil as well as the peach, nectarine, pineapple, pear fruit. Again shows this minty fresh side to provide openness. The acidity has a bracing strength to it without cutting unnecessarily. Comes across as a little too young today for optimal consumption. 90

#### FRANCE ROSE

Brun, Jean-Paul  
Beaujolais, Brun d'Folie Rosé

Gamay Noir

2005, \$11.99, 12.0%

Glittering red-pink magenta color, thick glow throughout, fully hued rims, the darkness the clarity harder to notice. More firmness than wet juiciness in the cherry, raspberry scented nose, solid dose of mineral and stone particles, only a vague allusion to herbaceous snap, no unnecessary complications here. Full-bodied, no lack of palate weight, layers itself thickly on your tongue. Here the ripeness in the red cherry, raspberry strawberry fruit juts forward, as it must to escape from under the gauzy tannins. Elevated lemon juice, mocha powder and dried flowers yet still only minimal herbaceousness. Spreads wide, really coats every pore in your mouth. This said, not imbalanced for its size. And has enough of a tart edge to remain refreshing. It's the shit. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacor) 91

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#### FRANCE SPARKLING

Chiquet, Gaston

Champagne, Grand Cru Blanc de Blanc d'Aÿ Brut

Chardonnay

NV, \$34.99, 12.5%

A maelstrom of bubbles in the glass, virtually wall-to-wall, lots of foam on the surface, light yellow to brown straw color. The nose is a touch flat, honey and sweetened bread dough, washed white stones, lemon peel and minimal red and green apple, pear fruit scents. Fairly broad-shouldered but ultimately medium-bodied, the pétillance fills up your mouth the first few seconds it's in your mouth. On the bread side here too, the honey aspect more of a glaze than spoonful. The lemon citrus broadens into orange notes. Mineral water and more of those spotless stones, like they were on display in a museum of geology. Too big of a wine to count as a "finesse" sparkler, even as the relative lack of apple, peach, pear fruit prevents it from achieving more of a "hedonistic" status. Ultimately, then, a 'tweener. (Disgorged 10/12/04) 87

#### ITALY RED

Pino, Cantina del

Piedmont, Barbaresco

Nebbiolo

2001, \$29.99, 14.0%

Crystal clear ruby-violet core without losing its darkness, sits stably in the glass, turns to a strong crimson before orange at the outer rims. Hits you with a big, broad slug to the nose, full of musky flowers, soggy leather, warm tar, roses with the stems, the cherry, blackberry scents dripped with a touch of caramel. Medium-bodied, very polished, maybe even too so, in spite of the lightly filmy tannins. The plum, currant, cherry fruit remains round and super-pliant throughout. Some chocolate notes, fade in favor of pine and a fistful of rose petals. Sweet herbs, semi-candied orange peel, has a friendly profile, tries to almost intentionally create some turbulence in order to be taken as a serious wine. Drink 'em in the near term, below room temperature to add some brightness. 88

Pecchenino, Fratelli

Piedmont, Dolcetto di Dogliani, Siri d'Jermu

Dolcetto

2004, \$26.99, 14.0%

The darkness in the purple core can't hide the glow, barely shifts to violet and ruby-magenta at the rims, particularly clear and spotless. Perfumed nose, floral with a minty edge, then gets pulled in many directions by grilled meat, earth, toasty oak, cocoa powder and the juicy raspberry, blackberry scents, doesn't harmonize as much as congeal into a dense mass in your nostrils. Medium to full-bodied, has the same general assemblage but not as dense, particularly past the mid-palate. The tannins are awfully gritty, too much so for the average level of cherry, raspberry fruit. Not very oaky but not very earthy either. Little bit of florality. Comes across more as a street tough than a real bad guy. Surprisingly poor showing for a bottling which usually merits its price. 86

#### ITALY WHITE

Bruni, Azienda Agricola

Tuscany, Maremma, Plinio

Vermentino

2004, \$12.99, 12.5%

Greenish cast to the basic golden color, not a lot of reflectivity, lightens a lot at the rims. Tropical and sugary nose, rich pineapple, nectarine, papaya, pear fruit, softly floral with pleasing minerality, indistinct citrus tones. Medium to full-bodied, sappy grip, clings to the tongue and cheeks. The acidity has a blunt heaviness in the mouth, no razor cut. The lemon, white grapefruit not inherently sweet, more like it had sugar spooned on top. White minerals, stone, licorice, flower petals mix unobtrusively with peach, pear, pineapple fruit. The finish is kind of short, maybe because its sheer weight remains its strongest asset. A quick bitter burst at the end adds liveliness. 85% Vermentino, 15% Sauvignon Blanc. (Synthetic cork: Microcell) 88

## GERMANY WHITE

Prum, Weingut Joh. Jos.  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Wehlener, Sonnenuhr, Auslese AP #12  
Riesling  
2004, \$45.99, 7.5%

White to yellow straw in color, its dullness overshadows the loss of hue at the rims, has a solid block appearance. Baked piecrust and honey driven nose, creamy, with sweet herbs, orange seeds and peel, lots of focus in the apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit, gives it huge lift and helps it open admirably. Medium-bodied, very stout and forceful, just bulls right into your mouth. The cherry, red apple, apricot, peach fruit stays sinewy and deep, last fully through the finish. The acidity is more broad and coating than slicing, pas the mid-palate it really clamps down, no cuts necessary. Flowery with powdered brown sugar tones, it is round, supple and just about complete, has all the muscles to last and improve for decades. 93

Prum, Weingut Joh. Jos.  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Wehlener, Sonnenuhr, Spätlese AP #13  
Riesling  
2004, \$38.99, 8.0%

Dull golden hay color, fades just slightly as it heads towards the rims where there's nothing left, no shine anywhere. The nose maintains a heavy presence via the burnt oil slick, zesty orange and lemon citrus with a marmalade-style bitterness, it's smoky but more so like mineral dust in the air, the flower petal aspect almost suggests mint, the peach, apricot, red apple fruit scents are extremely robust while very much under control. Full-bodied, immediately shows the acidity to polish the flavors and smooth out its overall weight. Highly floral here too, generous amount of lime, lemon, orange citrus. Here the sweetness of the peach, apricot, apple, pear fruit pretty much steamrolls the underlying minerality. Suggests baked molasses and brown sugar at moments but not enough that the acidity can't suppress it. 92

Gunderloch, Weingut Carl  
Rheinhessen, Nackenheimer, Rothenberg, Auslese AP #16  
Riesling  
2004, \$37.99, 7.5%

Light green cast to the golden color, some visible fizz, its complete evenness masks its lack of shine. Crackling nose of heated minerals, pineapple, nectarine and peach fruit, all golden honey, just percolates in the nostrils, plenty of weight so there's always a bottom beneath the bubbling baby fat. Full-bodied, the acidity amazingly lifts all this

peach, apricot, pear, cherry cocktail onto its back and dead lifts it. Orange marmalade, green melon, red apple and papaya slowly work into the layers of flavor. Incredibly golden in its sweetness, highly concentrated. Maintains a sense of evenness, this despite its gargantuan proportions. Just kind of harder to parse out the individual components. So, today it's somewhat over the top, who knows when it will calm down and develop clearer shape. 375 ml bottle. (Screwcap) 91

Lang, Weingut Hans  
Rheingau, Charta AP #21  
Riesling  
2004, \$18.99, 12.0%

While not very deep, the yellow gold color is very bright and sparkly, shows some fizz beneath the surface, white and transparent rims. Highly smoky, mineral nose, burning grass, poor brown earth, very little fruit, peach pit, pear skin or apple seeds. Full-bodied, sternly taut, the acidity is a series of pinpricks back and forth across the tongue. Crushed stone, chalk dust, oily minerals play up any tartness in the green apple, pear, peach fruit. Not enough lift to really give you a sense of release, stays nervous and taut. Very dry, desiccates the lemon and lime peel aspects. Not a lot of internal contrast to be had at the moment. Pretty much rattles your teeth but worth the visit to the dentist. 90

Buhl, Weingut Reichsrat von  
Pfalz, Forster, Jesuitengarten, Spätlese AP #10  
Riesling  
2004, \$25.99, 9.0%

Bright white gold to yellow gold in hue, fine reflectivity, the shine covers over any color loss at the rims. Engaging nose, full with plenty of airy pockets to relax in, floral breeze slowly turns to banana and custard, peach cobbler, very relaxed and confident in itself, never finally sets down, keeps moving. In the mouth it features a sweetly friendly attack that soaks in without appearing heavy, the sugar and cotton candy notes has a fine spun dissolve to them. The tangerine, mandarin orange citrus tastes like it was squeezed right into your mouth. Particularly floral, with a borderline meadow air freshness. The acidity is not biting yet always in position to restrain the excess sweetness. Downy peach, apricot, nectarine fruit contribute mightily to the long, rolling finish. 90

Münzberg, Weingut  
Pfalz, Trocken AP #4  
Sylvaner  
2005, \$11.99, 12.5%

Very clear, lightest of straw colors, mostly white though, too transparent to even develop extra shine. Mint oil, flowers, sweet lemon zest, considerable mineral dust in the nose, touch of creaminess, if not vanilla, under the pear, apple, peach scents, not incredibly full but consistent. Full-bodied, the "trocken" vinification is most obvious during the finish, before that the ripeness in the peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit remains dominant. Light cut grass, asparagus notes accompany the lemon/orange citrus, minerals and chalk. There's the lightest pétillance to it which gives the acidity a fizzy feel, comes and goes. As noted, there's a dry, tacky finish. Real easy to chug, if not quite in the "mindlessly so" category. Good value. 1000 ml bottle. 88

Müller-Catoir, Weingut  
Pfalz, Mußbacher, Eselshaut, Kabinett Trocken AP #7  
Riesling  
2004, \$24.99, 12.5%

Rich golden color, not deep but vibrantly hued, lacks shine so things seep downwards into the glass. Incredibly pure nose, all focus, no pleasure, rocks and pebbles, mint and flowers, white smoke, digs in well, no fruit, pear or peach skin at the very best. Medium-bodied but so dry and hard, it can immediately feel bigger. Violets, lilacs, mint, lemon peel, chili paste capable of shining for a moment but not under this withering sun. It's dry enough to come across as excessively alcoholic and hot. Citrus helps to bring out the minerals and limestone like flavors. The acidity goes off haphazardly like a pack of firecrackers at the hands of a twelve year old. Keeps slashing until the end, all the peach, apricot, pear fruit slashed to ribbons. 88

Lieser, Weingut Schloss  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Lieser, Niederberg Helden, Auslese AP #7  
Riesling  
2004, \$35.99, 7.0%

White straw to white gold in color, bleached enough to reveal green tinge, glazed sort of surface, draws in the light and just holds it. The super-sweet nose a bit upset by burnt sulfur and milk notes, past that there's a fruit cocktail full of cherry, pear, red apple and apricot fruit, allusion to rubber tires, the way these elements bull rush you there's little chance to explore for stoniness nor minerality. In the mouth it's also sweet but here the acidity plays the role of wet blanket, giving the peach, pear, apricot, melon fruit just enough stage time to catch your eye before cloaking it over. You get a strong citrus component here, sorbet-like lime and orange. Noticeable dousing of floral water. Only during the finish does the rubber notes appear. Youthfully plump, serviceable now for its sweet naiveté while not providing too many clues what kind of swan it may or may not become. 88

Diel, Schlossgut  
Nahe, Dorsheimer, Pittermännchen, Spätlese AP #13  
Riesling  
2004, \$39.99, 7.5%

Fat golden color, has a polished look to it, mild green flecks, solid and even surface plane. Big, honeyed nose of lemonade, hothouse flowers, rich molasses, semi-voluptuous apricot, peach, pear fruit, no guile, just straight ahead, in your face ambrosia. Full-bodied, dulcetly sweet but also super-tangy, blindingly bright and juicy tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus next to the softer gorgeous brown sugar, caramel tones. Ripe, bursting unto overflowing apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit, like being in a fruit cannery. The acidity is flat and sluggish, so in the end it's all innocent fun, no brains whatsoever. It's mindless verve may not appeal to all but sometimes you don't want to think too hard. 88

Mathern, Weingut  
Nahe, Niederhäuser, Hermannshöhle, Spätlese AP #8  
Riesling  
2004, \$32.99, 9.0%

The color of old yellow gold, dull if fully transparent, no shine whatsoever. Zesty, light tangerine to orange blossom with rose petals, mineral water and stream stones, white fruit pit, pear skin, glides almost too swiftly out of the nostrils. Light to medium-bodied, very flat surface across the palate, has a gliding quality here too

albeit the pacing is much slower. The acidity is there but maybe too polished to give you all 100 watts. Displays violets and lilacs, the mandarin orange to tangerine citrus is juicy while neither sweet nor tart. No real sugary sweetness anywhere, the more you sip the more you get earth and a touch of herbaceousness. Overall, it's delicate, the residual fizz during the finish keeps it present to you. 87

Kruger-Rumpf, Weingut  
Nahe, Münsterer, Rheinberg, Kabinett AP #10  
Riesling  
2004, \$17.99, 10.0%

Brownish yellow hay color, nice surface reflectivity, keeps its hue well to the rims, excellent transparency. Light, crinkly nose, dances about nimbly with violets, orange blossom, then lime sorbet, custard, billows well as the peach, pear, cherry scents flap in the wind. Medium-bodied, lurches some during the attack, offers differing flavors and feels of lime to lemon custard pie and then flower petals floating in mineral water. The acidity is not very strong, leaves it flat-footed. As a result, not much grip in the peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit. Turns simple prematurely, if not unpleasing. Best appreciated for its light touch and bouquet. 86

## SWITZERLAND WHITE

Auvernier, Caves du Château d'  
Neuchâtel  
Chasselas  
2005, \$18.99, 11.5%

Very light green-white straw, not really enough to concern yourself with its hue lasting to the rims or not, moderate surface shine. The nose is extremely airy, if not ethereal, lemon custard, floral oil, white chocolate, some peach and apricot fuzz, touch of mint, just about floats out of your nostrils. Medium-bodied, there's a creaminess to it that provides a pillowy underpinning for the aspects of mineral water, lemon peel, floral dew, as it sits in the mouth its spiciness becomes more evident. The acidity has a sharp enough of a blade to keep it dry, especially during the finish. Pleasing for how it remains light of touch without sacrificing firmness. 87

## SPAIN WHITE

Amesguren  
Getariako Txakolina, Ameztoi Txakoli  
Hondarribi Zuri  
2005, \$17.99, 11.0%

Crystal clear whit straw "color," all but entirely transparent even with its excellent shine. Sweet honey and lemonade nose, baked apples, pears and peaches, chalk and mineral dust, overall trim and racy nostril presence. Medium-bodied, incredibly dry, almost biting so. Lemon, lime zest trumps the flowers, even the honeyed dimension takes a beating. The acidity has a keen, if brawny, presence from the start to finish. There's quality follow-through in the apricot, peach, pear, red apple fruit, especially given how dry the wine is overall. Intense amount of mineral powder, chalk and basic dustiness. Ripples through your mouth like a snake through a jungle river. 90% Hondarribi Zuri, 10% Hondarribi Beltza. 90

## **SOUTH AFRICA RED**

Eventide Cellar  
Wellington  
Shiraz  
2003  
\$14.99  
14.0%

Achieves opacity in its purple core, thin if dense red-ruby to garnet rims, darkness saps some luster. Mint, floral paste, toasted oak, frying butter infuse the nose, no lack of cherry and red currant fruit, swift pacing, even a suggestion of mineral earth, just comes across as cookie-cutter and too predictable. Medium-bodied, thicker than heavier, here the oak comes through much more perceptibly, serious buttered popcorn, charred wood, caramel and mint. Behind this there is ample plum, currant, cherry fruit, albeit not particularly exuberant. Good framing tannins. The earthiness or meatiness seems a tad forced. Maintains its weight through the finish but does become a little astringent. It's not a bad wine and probably priced about right but that's all you can say. 86

## **CHILE RED**

Lapostolle, Casa  
Rapel Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2004, \$12.99, 14.5%

Unblemished luminescent violet core, the glow continues through the heavily saturated ruby rims. The nose starts out herbaceous but this dissipates in favor of sour cherry, strawberry, cranberry fruit, there's a wet feel to the earth scents, then a tobacco ash/leather side too, the caramel/buttered toast shades don't yell and not particularly obtrusive. Medium-bodied, appears polished, pains taken to wipe away any streaks on the glass. Somehow, though, in the process some essential parts were stripped out. Lacks weight and presence in the mid-palate even as the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit remains sweet. Flowers, earth, tree bark and leaves appear, incline it more towards sourness. The tannins more or less declawed albeit the wine is dry on the whole. A perfect example of a Cabernet casual drinkers will like but will piss off wine geeks. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Carmenère. 86