

The Hanes Wine Review, December 2013 Edition

As Hanes moves around yet again within the wine industry, he's now back in touch with "high end" wines. At least looking at high end bottles. Which seem to be in great demand and pass hands rapidly and eagerly. There's a lack of product, not demand, for the best wines of the world, from Burgundy to Bordeaux, Napa to Sonoma, Piedmont to Tuscany, and so on.

But while grateful for the chance to sample the "best" wines now and then, that's not where Hanes usually plays. But the "sweet spot" for what Hanes wants to pay has certainly risen in recent years. Not so much because of changing interests per se, more so a result of rising prices in general. An old favorite which was \$10 is now \$16, or was \$18 and is now \$25.

Which now makes this question pertinent. In terms of categorizing wines, is it now time to raise the bar for what counts as a "value" wine from \$15 to \$20? The threshold has been at \$15 since at least 2005. But wine prices certainly aren't at 2005 levels anymore. For the purposes of *The Hanes Wine Review* it's less about what Hanes wants to pay and more about providing a useful grouping for readers (all three of you) to quickly scan at the beginning of the review what (relatively) inexpensive wines may be of interest. Hence, it's really about what ya'll are spending on wine these days. Is your everyday wine as likely to be \$18 as \$8? The way prices are going, this seems as plausible as not. In a world where a burger is \$15 (without fries) it appears folks are willing to spend, wine should not be any exception. So, if you have any sentiments on this topic, please share them with Mssr. Hanes. The review can change the section focusing on the best "value" wines accordingly.

It's all about customer satisfaction at *The Hanes Wine Review*.

* * * * *

This month's big winners... Among the tasters on this day it split opinion but let's vote with the positive crowd that the 2011 Marc Roy Gevrey-Chambertin "Clos Prieur" is a winner and worthy of laying down for the future, even at \$55 or so. Maybe even because. Okay, it needs to be clear that Fogline is produced by an old friend of Hanes. But anyone who knows Hanes will know he will not only call it like it is, he can be a d**khead. That out of the way, the 2011 Pinot Noir called "Petaluma Gap Neighbors" is some tasty juice albeit at the usual price one has to pay these days. Okay, let's be clear here when it comes to vintage generalizations. Some will disagree, haters will hate. But Hanes is way more enjoying the 2012 Cru Beaujolais more than the 2011 vintage. Many cases in point with more on the way. Want to give a particular shout out to the Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée des Ambassades" which is good now, great down the road. Finding a growing affection for the wines from the Côte de Brouilly cru. Hmm. Went to a New Jersey wine festival and tried lots of wines, trying to avoid the overtly sweet ones. Found something worth buying, "worth" being relative. It is easy to go on record that the 2011 Heritage Merlot is not a bad wine at all. Would actually drink it again. But, as is the case universally with wines from "emerging" USA wine regions, \$25 is way pushing it, bought it simply as a mitzvah.

The best \$15 and under picks... Alas, not too many cheapies swilled this time around. A good one was the 2011 Domaine de l' Enchantoir, 100% Chenin Blanc from the Saumur and called "Terres Blanches." Very nice and a good food wine version of Loire Chenin Blanc. Borell-Diehl delivers the goods for those who want inexpensive white wines. Their 2012 Müller-Thurgau from the Pfalz in Germany is gulpable, aided by the one liter bottle size. Value here at \$12. In yet another vintage the Cantina Valpantena Valpolicella "Torre del Falasco" is a good bet for \$10, delivers the ripeness without being stupidly sugary. Pedro Ximénez usually is fashioned into sweeter wines but the grape finds worthy expression as a dry wine in the 2012 Viña Mayu bottling from Chile. Intriguing, satisfying and for \$12 can't go wrong. Picpoul is a grape lots of wine geek salespeople push, the 2012 Domaine Gaujal de Saint Bon Picpoul de Pinet "Cuvée des Dames" is a good reason why, great QPR at \$9 or so and complex but not difficult at the same time. Would go nicely with orange glaze dishes. Now if you *do* want something sweeter as a white table wine you might consider the 2012 Barbi Orvieto Classico "Abboccato" which is lush and full and fruity while never to a fault. A price in the area of \$9 makes it a relative steal. Not what one would normally expect from Spanish Garnacha, the 2011 Edetària "Vinya d'Irto Garnatxa Negra" was a pleasing drop, well structured and ready to pair with a variety of foods.

And the disappointments... Gifted by my loving sister and her wife, I can't say it was a disappointment as in "I bought it with high hopes" but the 2011 "Duel" from Darioush is pretty lousy for \$55. Very emblematic of massaged or engineered wine. The good thing with "The Douche" is that the bottles are so heavy you can always use them as doorstops. Was not duly impressed by the 2011 Monthelie from Domaine Newman although really wanted to like it. Just lacked a clear message and purpose although by no means "bad," even factoring in the \$30+ price tag. Can't call it a very bad disappointment but the 2012 Hamilton Russell Chardonnay from South Africa was just an oak bomb, even if one likes oak bombs. At \$20+ can't really see a use for it, not a food wine at all. Given the prices and the rep, for \$24 or so you'd expect more from Uccelliera, even for a basic Rosso di Montalcino. But the 2011 is just good and that's it. No conversion experience here.

All contents of this electronic mail are copyright 2013 by Marc Hanes. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any format without written prior permission is prohibited.

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/oldervintages2013.html>

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on *beer* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/beer.html>

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 Type
- 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)

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Fogline Vineyards
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Petaluma Gap
Neighbors
Pinot Noir
2011, \$65.00, 13.5%
The clarity of the liquid masks some of the luminescence in the scarlet red to violet core, the rims stay a dark red before finally yielding to lighter ruby further out. The nose is muscularly high-toned, crisp oak toast, cranberry and red raspberry fruit, white grapefruit pith, cut grass, metal shavings and a dash of jalapeño, really grabs you by the nostril hairs but not uncouth. Medium-bodied in the mouth with the same somewhat stern demeanor, the acidity puts a charge into it and it will level its shoulder into you for no reason. Lively cranberry, rhubarb, bing cherry fruit,

crackles from start to finish. Orange and grapefruit citrus aid and abet in this regard. There is an element of cocoa and butterscotch yet the oak treatment is on the low side and most toast not sweetness. Cola, pressed flowers and iron flecks lend dimension. Where it succeeds is not in breadth of flavors but more so in general verve and high energy level, while remaining balanced and not pushy. Very long finish. Fruit sourced from Fogline Estate Vineyard, Sun Chase Vineyard. 91

Darioush
Napa Valley, Duel
Blend
2011, \$55.00, 15.0%
Has a deeply saturated purple core, too clear to approach blackness but not see-through either, the glow extends through to the red magenta rims, quite the vivid presence in the glass. Mint and black licorice notes give the nose immediate lift, not overly toasty

but there is some vanilla and baking spice stuff going on, the plum, cassis scents are perfunctory and not particularly expressive, gets by on guile rather than natural richness. Full-bodied, even the weight trails off by the finish though. Again, goes for the airy feel of mint, anise, flowers and cinnamon leading into lowkey chocolate, vanilla, caramel tones. There's notes of green apple and cherry brightening the otherwise moribund plum, blackberry base. Smooth enough, tannin managed, not excessively dry through the finish. Just nothing really interesting going on. 70% Shiraz, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon. 86

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Bedrock Wine Co.

Sonoma Valley, Compagni Portis Vineyard

Blend

2012, \$25.00, 14.2%

Basic straw yellow color, mild translucent layering which helps it extend into the rims, average surface shine at best, unremarkable. The nose is all honeydew and cantaloupe melon, followed on by peach, yellow apple, pear fruit, licorice, cinnamon, spiced orange peels, kind if muscular for all its more or less pretty lift, light element of whipped cream, on the whole pure although concentration brings out a heavier sweetness. Full-bodied, even as it sags into the palate the spiciness perks it up, clove, cinnamon, nutmeg but nothing too "baked pie" about it. Melon in effect, orange and grapefruit citrus, apricot, persimmon, nectarine, the semi-blunted acidity likely keeps it from getting more tropical. As in the nose vanilla and whipped cream notes flatten out the finish. Something vaguely minerally about it at times, same can be said for grilled chestnuts. The type of wine which wants to let you know it could challenge you but has demurred out of respect for your enjoyment. Unspecified percentages of Gewürztraminer, Trousseau Gris, Riesling, Roter Veltliner, Chardonnay, other. 89

OREGON RED

Hyland Estates

Willamette Valley, McMinnville

Pinot Noir

2010, \$35.00, 13.7%

Pure ruby to violet in hue, the core never darkens much so it looks consistent throughout, full rims, maybe some rust red at furthest outreaches. Quite pungent nose, a bit all over the map, but lays it on thickly, mineral dust, cut grass, clove spice, pickle brine, roasted cherries, damp earth and mud, more sweet overall but there's a lingering sour bite which snaps at you too, any oak presence integrated well. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and spreads itself

evenly, this aided by a firming tannic foundation. Dashes of cola, orange peel and baking spices to sweeten up the cherry, raspberry fruit base. There's a less overt sourness here, curious given the fact that sourness is part of taste not the olfactory sense. Cedar and vanilla notes present in moderation. Stony earth, no green nor excessively herbal elements found. There is something at times akin to smoked meat or dried blood going on. Interesting if not especially elegant. 88

NEW JERSEY RED

Heritage

Outer Coastal Plain

Merlot

2011, \$25.00, 13.1%

Super clean and shiny, very little purple, more so a lot of scarlet red, only slight diminishment at the rims, fully transparent throughout. There's a finely grained oak toastiness to the nose, some creamier butterscotch, airy and light on its feet with candied red cherry, raspberry to strawberry scents, even watermelon, quite youthful, nothing to discern except the oak and fruit. Light to medium-bodied, fluid and without any rough patches. Here there is a bit of leather, twigs or grass but in no way herbaceous. Plus the acidity is okay and there's no issue with underripe phenolics. The caramel/vanilla oak is there but in proportion to the whole. Sweet and candied cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, lasts nicely through to the finish line. Easy to drink but not simple, this noted in the absence of any obvious complexity. Jersey strong! 87

FRANCE RED

Roy, Domaine Marc

Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin, Clos Prieur

Pinot Noir

2011, \$54.99, 13.5%

Spotless violet core, fully transparent, turns to bright ruby red to fashion very wide rims, fully hued and vibrant. Displays a pure nose of minerals, stone dust, citrus peel, dried fresh earth and herbs, the berry and red cherry scents clean and fresh, no funk at all, unforced length, just great all around purity. Medium-bodied, tart but not lean, spicy with sous bois notes, ripe cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit, the latter expanding through the mid-palate. The acidity is lively but not aggressive. Oranges spiced with clove and then ginger spice. The tannin is supple but there too. Great balance without sacrificing energy. Some oak comes out at the end but in a supporting role. 92

Voillot, Domaine Joseph
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Vieilles Vignes
Pinot Noir

2011, \$25.99, 13.0%

Trim and spotless ruby to violet color, would appear darker were it not so utterly transparent, the rims fully hued and it just sparkles in the glass. There's a nice undercurrent of herbal and earthy funk to the nose, otherwise it's mainly snappy red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit scents, minerals and white citrus pith with a bit of anise and cardamom to boot. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, spreads itself widely yet not thinly, you get a touch of caramel and butterscotch on the entry and then none thereafter. Orange and grapefruit citrus, crushed stone, black licorice, pressed flowers, Touch more acidity than tannin, structure is right sized to the level of straight ahead raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit. Doesn't throw itself around but moves with decisive authority through the finish. Spot on. 90

Lapierre, Marcel
Beaujolais, Morgon
Gamay Noir

2012, \$26.99, 12.5%

Clean reddish violet color, consistent with just a bit of pink magenta at the rims, youthful but also serious in appearance. Plump raspberry, strawberry, cherry nose with caramel, candied orange peel, cigarette ash, stone, it is in your face but genial about it, doesn't seek to bowl you over although it arguably could. Full-bodied, big bottom and big top, the tannin lays a strong web which focuses and does not diminish the rich cranberry, raspberry, cherry to blackberry fruit. Minerally stone dust, mild grassiness, even with the structure it's mostly primary fruit right now. Tends to pull back some by the finish, not clenched but sort of tight. That said, what is there is knit together seamlessly and has plenty of upside. 90

Pavillon de Chavannes, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Côte de Brouilly, Cuvée des Ambassades
Gamay Noir

2012, \$22.99, 12.5%

Spotless ruby-red color, closer to a pink hue than violet, shows a light fading at the rims, transparent throughout, looks fresh and inviting. You almost sneeze when it sniffing from the dried grass element, has bright and jazzy cranberry, raspberry, strawberry fruit scents, on the brash side, minor mixed citrus accents, that dry sensation the clear focal point of its presentation. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, very tannic and just about as dry here. This said, the pleasingly juicy raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit has an easy fluidity. Elevated tangerine, orange citrus delivers added sweetness. Even with tar, tobacco ash

and stone its expression of terroir not fully at the fore. Deserves a decanting now, structured not surly. 90

Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)
Beaujolais, Fleurie
Gamay Noir

2012, \$17.99, 13.0%

Clean and shiny ruby-violet in hue, while even clearer around the rims the color is consistent and vibrant. The nose heaves strawberry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit at you with some cocoa and orange peel then ash, stone dust, grapefruit, slight briny quality, high toned presence in the nostrils, bristling power extends its stay. Medium-bodied, structured almost to a fault, the tannin and acidity give it a rigid spine. Even with that ash, stone and minerality here it is the grapefruit which is seriously dominant. Kind of peppery at the end too. The fruit is red berries with some white pit fruit too, touch of green apple at the end, this element pushed to the side at the moment. Cares not the least if you like it or not. Wait a good long time for this to come around. 89

Arlot, Domaine de l'
Burgundy, Nuits-Saint-Georges, Cuvée Les Petits
Plets

Pinot Noir

2011, \$43.99, 13.0%

Trim ruby-violet color, quite consistent core to rims, youthfully almost pinkish rims. Some sour oak to the nose, iron shavings as well, sour grapefruit, tart cherry to raspberry scents, wet mud, has a good sort of dirt to it, then flowers get muted by sour dill accents. In the mouth the acidity pushes forward, twiggy and leafy in a pleasant manner, the tannin seems average at best. Good portions of earth, salt, saline, has a certain semi-tough texture to it. Grapefruit punctuates the finish. while there's a pushiness to it the softness of the cherry, mixed berry fruit saves the finish. Tasty but tight and a touch young for optimal enjoyment. 88

Baudry, Domaine Bernard
Loire, Chinon, Les Granges
Cabernet Franc

2012, \$15.99, 12.0%

Rich glow really deepens the purple core, looks like a bucket of dye, the rims likewise a brilliant magenta red hue and of pronounced darkness. While the nose is filled with well ripened currant and cherry fruit, it remains a distant second to mineral dust, stone powder, bell pepper and white citrus zest, mix in some muddy earth and wet leather and it's angular and just about as typical as one can expect Loire Cab Franc to be. Medium-bodied, spreads itself evenly and you feel palate pressure cheek to cheek, the tannin just soft enough to let it release and flow and maintain a drying,

tacky sensation. Does lose some weight at the end but this creates space for some flowers, orange and grapefruit citrus to show and for that cherry, dark berry fruit to crackle and pop. Not all that herbaceous nor overcome by bell pepper, leans more strongly on earth, stone, metal fleck notes. Could come across as a bit tough now if you aren't into the "classic rendition" style. 88

Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Cuvée Tardive
Gamay Noir
2012, \$23.99, 13.0%

Pure red-ruby to violet color, fat reddish rims with a slightly pink cast, good shine. Full-on fruity nose of cherry, blackberry, raspberry scents, orange to grapefruit citrus, wet matted grasses, herbs, licorice, some funk rises to meet the floral dew, perhaps clunky but attractive for its generosity of spirit. Full-bodied, lush and velvety, has some acidity but just so-so tannin. At times almost too heavily layered, a wine to hold in your mouth more than sip repeatedly. Adroitly mixes in flowers, licorice, white grapefruit around a base of cranberry, red cherry fruit, has heft and leverages it comfortably. Cocoa and baking spices mildly sweeten the back half. Keeps its fatness without losing its soul. Drinking nicely now, can keep over the medium term no problem. 88

Baudry, Domaine Bernard
Loire, Chinon, Les Grézeaux
Cabernet Franc
2011, \$25.99, 12.5%

There's a touch more violet in the core but it's basically a glowing red magenta hue with vaguely pinkish rims, squeaky clean yet warm. Mineral dust and bell pepper drive the nose while it has all the charms of red cherry, blackberry fruit, to the contrary there's a lot of flatulence before the stone and pebble notes take over, overall high toned if short of aggressive, good length if not especially enjoyable for it, really needs time to open after, err, opening. Medium-bodied, young and suavely tannic, can be approached now but likely best mid-term, in a few years. Green pepper, black pepper, orange to white grapefruit citrus, and standard cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit. Charcoal, tobacco ash, minerals, in many regards quintessential young Cabernet Franc. More floral finish with a dash of cocoa as it releases. 88

Oupia, Château d'
Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois
Blend
2010, \$9.99, 13.0%

The purple core just crosses the divide into opacity, its cleanliness more apparent around the saturated ruby

rims which hint at a developing blood red tint, richly hued throughout. The nose is very plump and ripe, almost overripe, but not all that sweet, the plum, cassis fruit remains short of dried fruit character, the floral dimension holds your attention, musky, moderate honey to molasses tones, zesty orange and grapefruit citrus spritz, nothing all that complex but what's there is deep and resonant, minimal reductive qualities. Medium-bodied with a smoothness to it which anchors it to the palate as well as massages most of the dryness out of the actually pretty good tannin. Pleasing patina of caramel, toffee to draw out added sweetness from the plum, cherry, blueberry, boysenberry fruit. Thick juiciness in the orange citrus, ripe but welcomingly sour. Focus is on the fruit but there is a forest floor earthiness in the background. Wish it had a bit more flow and grace but the glass does get empty without a problem. 50% Carignan, 30% Syrah, 20% Grenache. 87

Ferrandière, Domaine de La
Languedoc/Roussillon, Pays d'Oc
Malbec
2012, \$7.99, 13.0%

Has all the fullness you'd need in the reddish purple core, the rims a bit more burnt red and then pink at the outer edges, glows with color. Full presence in your nostrils, plush and ripe yet not especially juicy perhaps due to stone dust and dried grass, has a sort of meadow breeze, steady if sour currant, red berry, cherry scents, burst of white grapefruit, dry enough to have a clear and consistent structure in the nose. Medium-bodied, tangy with a good bit of acidity whereas the tannin only clamps down at the end. The boysenberry, cherry, sour plum fruit ever present, sporadically pleasant. Here too it benefits from a shock of white grapefruit. Not hollow but kind of missing something which requires food to fill in the blank spaces. (Screwcap: Stelvin+) 87

Newman, Domaine
Burgundy, Monthelie
Pinot Noir
2011, \$29.99, 12.5%

Not much purple in the basically red-ruby to garnet red color, trim and clear on the whole, fills out the rims well, darkness diminishes the surface brightness. Fat, primary nose of blackberry, elderberry, rhubarb and cherry fruit, some mixed sweet white citrus, too thick for both the florality and damp barnyard earth to take hold. Full-bodied, not much acidity, maybe more tannin, its weight and density gives it a flat mouth feel. Clearer orange to lemon citrus, supplemented by cocoa and cinnamon stick notes. The cherry, blackberry, raspberry, rhubarb fruit has volume and lacks energy, plenty of ripeness if not that sweet. Lasts

very long, sour sourness accrues at the end. Lemongrass, stone, dirt, has a sense of being soil based more than expressive if a specific terroir. Maybe too young and unevolved. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Enchantoir, Domaine de l'
Loire, Saumur, Terres Blanches
Chenin Blanc

2011, \$10.99, 14.0%

Deep golden color, a few steps away from amber, layers well even with a dull surface and mostly hueless rims, block like appearance. Very smoky nose with pulverized stone and mineral water notes next to the mint, orange spice, green apple, peach, apricot fruits scents, there some rubber accents in there too, more dense than heavy, has agility in the nostrils. Full-bodied, sets itself widely so its weight is distributed cheek to cheek, the acidity is blunt but omnipresent. More floral here with that mint, orange citrus and tea leaf met with a light vanillin note. Sour enough to bring pineapple, papaya into the mix with the apricot, peach, nectarine. Nothing wimpy about it and never too sweet. (Composite Cork: Diam3) 89

Gaujal de Saint Bon, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc,
Picpoul de Pinet Cuvée des Dames
Picpoul

2012, \$8.99, 13.5%

There's some depth to the golden hue but it comes off as flat and the rims are close to colorless and dull, still, it does fill the glass adequately. The nose is stern, lemony and favoring stone and spring water freshness over the leaner nectarine, apricot, pear fruit scents, there's the barest hint of vanilla to soften the dissolve, latent smokiness helps it lift. In the mouth it is medium-bodied and on the squarish side so the acidity never really able to cut cleanly. That said, has pleasant nuttiness to it and a great lemon to sour orange citrus tang. More smoky and minerally here than stony, the fruit takes on added nervousity via pineapple and green apple added to the nectarine, apricot base. Retains that pleasing whipped cream to vanilla note. Biggest flaw is the lack of "give" at the right moments to keep it flowing and not allowing the underlying bitterness to accrete. (Synthetic Cork: Vinotop) 88

Thomas-Labaille, Claude et Florence
Loire, Sancerre, Les Monts Damnés
Sauvignon Blanc

2012, \$22.99, 13.0%

Faint glow to the white to yellow straw color, somewhat gauzy, the rims don't seem empty simply because the core is so light. While there's a certain

dusty chalkiness to the nose, it's striking how much honey, mint, sweet citrus, and melon, pear, peach, apricot fruit is in there, full and ripe, not that it can't penetrate but it just does so slowly and in a blunt fashion. Full-bodied, tangy but a bit lacking in acidity, there's no blood drawn. Again with the flowers, mint, licorice, honey and lime to orange citrus, hard to imagine it adopting a more friendly demeanor. Green and yellow apple, pear, peach and nectarine fruit, flirts with crunch and tropicality but in the end can't be bothered. To its credit, for all its sweetness there is a light bite at the end accompanied by a muted stoniness. Highly enjoyable to quaff but lacks the cerebral dimension. 88

Dubois, Raphaël
Burgundy, Côte de Nuits-Villages, Les Monts de
Boncourt

Chardonnay

2011, \$19.99, 13.0%

Fairly deep golden hue, lackluster, stays colored through the rims and has enough layering to appear solid throughout, actually kinda looks like Chardonnay if that makes sense. The nose is highly sour, focused on lime juice, wet oak which is still toasty, burnt butter, tart pineapple, nectarine, apple scents, certainly has liveliness but not so much fun factor, even warmer does not last very long. Medium-bodied, angular and short in the mouth too, you begin puckering with the first sip. The oak tastes fine and moderately expensive, toasty but not that crisp, no sweetness, just bite. Then there's that hyper-aggressive lime aspect. The peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit fades in and out. Light waft of honey at the end. Not horrible but needs more plushness and generosity in the middle and a desire to please at the end. 86

ITALY RED

Vallana, Antonio
Piedmont, Gattinara
Nebbiolo

2004, \$21.99, 12.5%

Some purple left in the core but it's mostly brick red with a touch more orange than brown, the hue thins out some at the rims but not really looking aged. The nose is all pressed flowers, Maraschino cherries and raspberries, lemon and orange zest then lower levels of leather, dried mud, robust and full yet has softer contours, the floral dimension grows yet more over time. Full-bodied, well layered for its age. The tannin is fierce but the liqueur like cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit fills the mid-palate, accompanied now and then by a hint of watermelon and then green apple. Normalizes into rose petals, straw/grass, earth, cinnamon powder, gets zip from the mild grapefruit notes. Drier finish,

more leathery too. In a great place, not going to get any better. (Composite Cork: Diam5) 90

Roagna, Alfredo e Luca
Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba
Dolcetto

2011, \$15.99, 12.5%

Luminescent purple core surrounded by deep and wide ruby rims, has a steady and warm glow to it. Odd coconut touch to the nose at first, out of place, then tobacco ash and cinder, dried grasses, plum and black currant fruit scents, possesses a rich muscularity and plenty of length too. Full-bodied, equally powerful in the mouth, strong acidity but it is the tannin which puts kick in it. Earthy, minerally, grassy, good depth but there's lots of sourness in the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit which helps it lift. orange peels and ash, juts its jaw out defiantly, tough but not incapable of love. Despite its structure you get some sweet prune notes at the end. 89

Valpantena, Cantina
Veneto, Valpolicella, Torre del Falasco Ripasso
Blend

2011, \$9.99, 13.5%

Moderate hue depth, on the clear side, weak purple core which yields easily to more garnet to rust red, strong rims given the average core. There's a pleasing tang to the nose, mainly driven by white grapefruit and orange citrus, chocolate and rose petals come up next, mostly plum, some cherry fruit, cedar and sandalwood more than spices, has both a firm bottom and some lift so it can extend well and tickles your nostrils. Medium-bodied, presents more reverb of flavors than lasting texture or palate weight. Prune mixes with plum, cherry and then raspberry, brown sugar or molasses laid on top, sweet attack tempered by decent acidity. Concentrated orange juice, clove and ginger, fluffy wildflowers with a slight herbal twist at the end. Holds its weight without much effort, consistency one of its strongest suits. As with wines which have a dried fruit nature there's also a mild briny nature, adds complexity. Comes close to Ripasso nature, very pleasing and not just sweet, has structure to back it up. Can be sipped on its own or accompany a fairly broad range of food. Unspecified percentages of Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella. 89

Uccelliera, Azienda Agricola
Tuscany, Rosso di Montalcino
Sangiovese

2011, \$23.99, 14.0%

Has a light purple core, mostly garnet red to brighter sunset hues at the rims including a faint orange tint, lively. Heavy nose of plum, black currant, cherry scents, pine, menthol and mint, lower grade cedar and

orange zest, has depth but not so much nuance hence it stays blunt. Full-bodied, sweet and candied, eager to please and lay on the grapefruit, orange citrus as well as cocoa, chocolate notes. The plum, blackberry, raspberry fruit close to liqueur like yet drying tannins halts this during the finish. Borderline sultry as it unveils rose petals, leather, even the earthiness seems like a come on. It just keeps asking you what you want, daddy. That said, not a lot of distinct personality but at least it has a gentle touch as it purrs against your leg. 88

Castello Sonnino (Societa Agricola Barone de Renzis Sonnino)

Tuscany, Toscana, Leone Rosso

Blend

2011, \$8.99, 13.5%

Crisp, shiny ruby red to light violet color, slight shimmer of red to orange rust around the rims, just sparkles in the glass. Mildly dusty in the nostrils but there's a core of candied strawberry red cherry fruit of which to drink deeply, dried meadow grasses, dried orange peels, mocha and sage, quite pure and direct but never seems simple per se. Medium-bodied, does the same thing in the mouth, offering a juicy array of cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, fresh and inviting. Behind it is clove, nutmeg spice, orange to lemon citrus, and a hint of anise. The tannin percolates at a simmer, not a major presence but there for sure. The Syrah component gives it the added heft to extend through the finish. Dash of herbaceousness adds snap at the end. What it does best is stay within itself and nor force anything on you, it's okay with whether you like it or not. 80% Sangiovese, 20% Syrah. (Synthetic Cork: enoPE) 88

Salaparuta, Duca di
Sicilia, Vajasindi, L'Avico
Nerello Mascalese

2009, \$18.99, 13.0%

The violet core is neither opaque nor transparent, does have a garnet to scarlet red influence, certainly the rims have a sunset red to brick hue, natural and no sign of aging, clean and pure as well. The nose first delivers a core of candied cherries, watermelon and raspberry fruit, then gets all leathery and furry, the funk pierced by white grapefruit notes, licorice and tar fight it out, feels like it should be more rustic than it is. Medium-bodied, here it is the tannin and then, following on, the acidity which is in the driver's seat and prevents unnecessary sweetness in that cherry, strawberry, watermelon, green apple fruit. The white grapefruit kicks it up a few notches, lots of pucker in the mid-palate. Tar, matted grass, brown earth and ashen soil give it character. The floral dimension never quite takes hold. Opens decently with air time and

loses many rough patches. Really needs to be consumed with food for optimal enjoyment. 87

ITALY WHITE

Barbi, Casa Vinicola
Umbria, Orvieto Classico, Abboccato
Blend

2012, \$8.99, 12.5%

While deep in hue, the golden color has a certain flatness to it, but this semi-translucency helps cover up the watery rims, that noted, looks natural as in no makeup applied. The nose has breadth and an enjoyably relaxed character, apple, pear, apricot fruit gets bolstered by honey and brown sugar accents, in turn has a dewy floral musk, not complex, not terroir driven, just smells like a fun wine to drink. Close to full-bodied with that same let's lean back in the bean bag chair demeanor, has sneaky acidity and cleans up well but not a refreshing, cutting sort. Here the grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus races to the front of the pack, tangy but sweet. Then comes that apple, pear, peach fruit, not near tropical although richness texturally suggests it. Honey, lilacs, mint, everything is pretty. Shut your brain down and just gulp it smiling. 45% Trebbiano Toscano, 30% Grechetto, 15% Verdello, 10% Drupeggio and Malvasia. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 89

ITALY DESSERT

Perrone, Azienda Agricola Elio
Piedmont, Moscato d'Asti, Sourgal
Moscato

2012, \$15.99, 5.0%

Pale white to yellow straw in color, big fat bubbles cling to the glass sides and slowly rise to create a nice froth across the surface. Minty fresh nose, open meadow flowers, tangerine citrus, resonant peach, apricot, pear and yellow apple fruit scents, chooses to stay clean and focused then develops a vanillin creaminess. In the mouth it's medium-bodied plus, the carbonation spreads it widely without losing thrust. Big emphasis on lime, tangelo, pink grapefruit citrus, very dominant force. Floral water, crushed stone too, gets close to tropical with pineapple, guava getting up close to the green apple, pear, apricot, peach fruit. Muscular dissolve. Sure it's sweet but at the same time it goes about it smartly. (Composite Cork) 90

GERMANY WHITE

Borell-Diehl, Weingut
Pfalz, QbA Trocken AP #24
Müller-Thurgau
2012, \$11.99, 12.0%

Flat, kind of sundazed white to pale yellow straw looking liquid, more block-like than watery, thus able to not change much from core to rims. The nose is more complex than one might expect, smoky, stony with a muscular infusion of lime, mixing in violets, vanilla, mint leaf, mandarin orange and a somewhat blended together tropical array of papaya, pineapple, nectarine and apple fruit, has plenty of punching power, that is for sure. Full-bodied, ample bottom, the mouth entry feels slightly fizzy than it gets anchored real quick. There's a leesy sort of vanillin aspect, gives a soft drink sweetness to the lime, orange citrus. Which itself diminishes the smokiness present in the nose. Persimmon, nectarine, pomegranate, apricot, yellow apple fruit, pleasingly all over the map. After a glass or two you realize it's best attribute is its value and so you just stop analyzing and start kicking back to enjoy. 1 liter bottle. (Screwcap) 89

Mönchhof, Weingut Robert Eymael
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Estate QbA AP #11
Riesling

2012, \$15.99, 9.5%

Pale straw gold color but not lacking in luster, there's a good bit of that German Riesling fizz clinging to the glass sides, not much change core to rims. The nose is round yet firm, anchored in vanilla, orange citrus, cherry to apricot fruit, black licorice, flowers and a dash of jalapeño, doesn't slap you with too much stoniness or the like, however, its unforced and open nature makes it agreeable to sniff. Medium-bodied, the acidity hovers up a lot of moisture in the mouth while the attack remains noticeably sweet, emphasizing honey, licorice, whipped cream, and orange sherbet. The cherry, peach, apricot fruit base gains zing from pineapple to guava notes. Has some slate to river stone aspects but here too it's not a really terroir driven wine. Stays consistent start to finish, no great highs but no dips either. Seems like a good candidate with which to wean someone off of sweeter Rieslings towards the drier, more nuanced versions. (Screwcap) 88

GREECE WHITE

Spiropoulos, Domaine
Peloponnese, Mantinia
Moschofilero

2012, \$11.99, 12.5%

Interesting light pinkish cast to the yellow base, gives it a metallic glow and semi-rosé appearance, there's also some fizz visible clinging to the glass sides, not overly shiny and the colors do fade along the rims. The nose is broad and plush, not soft but yields like a semi-firm rubber ball, pink grapefruit, lemon pulp followed on by green apple, pear, peach and milder pineapple

scents, more brisk than juicy, the florality does not really lift, does better via sweet herbs and a clumpy chalk dust, muscular overall. In the mouth it's close to full-bodied, mostly because it has a lot of natural density and tautness, this even with above average but not raging acidity. The lime, pink grapefruit, lemon citrus remains high-toned and prominent, brings out some sparkle in the minerals and stone dust. Marjoram, sage and anise give it a savory and sweet interplay. Again, not a lot of wetness in the peach, apricot, nectarine and pineapple fruit, a dulled sting. Given its density does last long and cling to the mouth roof. This comes across as a non-classic vintage of the wine. 88

SPAIN RED

Edetària

Terra Alta, Vinya d'Irto Garnatxa Negra

Garnacha

2011, \$9.99, 14.0%

The core is a deeply stained purple, however, it shifts to a scarlet red around the rims, burnt sunset to rust, no pink nor ruby, fairly transparent for the vivacity of color. While the nose does display some rubber and barnyard aspects, there's a formidable amount of blackberry, black raspberry, cherry fruit to soak in, plus violets and menthol, sweet if dusty spices and a pinch of orange peel, for all this mentioned not sickly sugary nor mindlessly simple. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a good amount of tannin to help set it strongly and create some pucker and drying sensations. This not to the detriment of the blueberry, blackberry, raspberry fruit which moves freely and hangs out well into the finish. Cinnamon, nutmeg spice, orange zest, eucalyptus and caraway seeds give it life and there is an underlying stoniness which helps to, duh, ground it. If you are looking for a sloppily wet and juicy Garnacha this is not it, not quite "serious" but not to be taken lightly either. May show best with food, which is not always the case with these sort of wines. 88

Ilurce, Bodegas y Viñedos

Rioja, Rio Madre

Graciano

2012, \$8.99, 14.5%

The core is a dark purple which falls short of opaque, heavily saturated garnet red rims, looks like it would explode in vibrancy under a black light. While there's a dusty stoniness to the nose, it's mainly cherry to blackberry fruit and floral dew, its overall heaviness makes it hard to discern the orange peel and cinnamon led sweet spices, it's about as friendly as can be given its lurching heft. Full-bodied, its good plus level of acidity enlivens the white grapefruit

element and sharpens the florality too. More plum here, thicker and more concentrated as in close to prune, some cherry and blackberry remain. Nutmeg, cinnamon spice, hint of fresh leather. Does not betray the presence of much oak, if any, a little cedar and horsehide. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 87

SPAIN WHITE

Encus, Castell d'

Costers del Segre, Taleia

Blend

2011, \$39.99, 13.0%

Very clear and transparent, a shiny white straw to green color, great shine and quite pretty. Fresh nose of lime zest with a slight whipped cream touch, flowers and pear to green apple fruit scents, light but not lean, after awhile some smoky stoniness appears. Medium-bodied, has above average acidity with brings a tanginess to the lime and sour orange citrus. The apricot, peach fruit has a fruit pit character. Wet stone, on the spicy side but the oak is a moderate factor. Great laser like presence, nice pinpoint feel to it, clean and fresh, ratchets up the apple skin and lime even more at the end. Very likable. Unspecified percentages of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon. 89

Sant Josep, Agricola

Terra Alta, Clot d'Encís Vi Blanc

Blend

2012, \$5.99, 13.0%

Mild flatness to the yellow to brown straw color but it does pool deeply into the glass, as it distorts vision extends into the rims as a result, sometimes a wine just looks about average. The nose has a tacky dryness to it like citrus pith on your fingers, on that note all loaded with tangerine and white grapefruit citrus, light nuttiness to go with oil, shale and smoke notes, the green apple, peach, pear fruit more crisp snap than juiciness, brief waft of flowers before it all blows away. Medium-bodied with surprising mouth traction and grip, the acidity like a heavy cloak than sharp knife. Only slightly less sour citrus, orange, tangerine, grapefruit. Here you get pineapple, persimmon and nectarine mixed into the apple, pear and apricot. That smoky stoniness and dried oil slick to wet wool elements give it character and burliness through the end. Maybe a touch unyielding but lots going on for the price. 80% Grenache Blanc, 5% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Chardonnay, 5% Muscat, 5% Chenin Blanc. (Composite Cork) 88

PORTUGAL RED

Esporão, Herdade do
Alentejo, Esporão Reserva
Blend

2010, \$16.99, 14.5%

Seamless, dark core of purple, achieves an easygoing opacity, the rims are a fatly glowing, effulgent magenta to garnet red, the color leaps out of the glass right at you. The nose smacks you hard with coconut, peanut, chocolate and mint, be this from oak or otherwise, its presence is undeniable, there is also a great deal of alcoholic fumes, beyond all this you get plum, black cherry fruit mixed with fig and prune, also a kind of floral paste, citrus reduction, heavysset overall. In the mouth it is also full-bodied with dense plum, cherry, blackberry fruit and a sweetly toasted patina of coffee, chocolate, vanilla, coconut and butterscotch. Menthol, pressed flowers, touch of leather and game. Fat enough that if there is any tannin or acidity, it is not strong enough to make a real impression. Modern, crafted to impress and likely succeeds on the whole. Unspecified percentages of Aragonez, Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet, Cabernet Sauvignon. 87

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Hamilton Russell Vineyards
Hemel-en-Aarde Valley
Chardonnay

2012, \$20.99, 13.5%

Strong golden hue to it, extends fully from core through the rims, lots of surface sparkle with equal amount of translucent shimmer below, fills the glass well. Has a racy, angular nose anchored in lime zest, buttered toast, butterscotch, caramel and pineapple, green apple, nectarine to star fruit scents, nothing creamy about it and when it starts to warm you can an ashen, volcanic soil sort of aspect. It is full-bodied in a way which flaunts density more than heft, just squats impassively on the tongue defying you to make it move. The acidity comes across as above average but can't really make it all that refreshing due to the heavy handed oak, caramel, toffee, butterscotch huge with each sip. The lime to tangerine citrus does help cleanse some. The fruit is tropical and sweet but not juicy so it's a drying experience of pineapple, guava, apple, peach with now and then a hint of banana. If you are going to drink an oaky Chardonnay, this is not a bad choice. That said, wish it had more flow and "fun factor." 88

CHILE WHITE

Mayu, Viña
Valle de Elqui, Dimaro Vineyard
Pedro Ximénez

2012, \$11.99, 12.5%

Semi-flat and pale yellow straw in color, fades out along the rims, still as faint as the color is does have a certain glow to it. The nose is crisp and energetic, like a morning walk on a brisk autumn day, green apple, pear fruit, tangerine zest, cinnamon sticks, stone dust, lilacs, not vastly complex but what's there is clear and detailed and further has very nice penetration into the nostrils and length. Medium-bodied but every inch of it is dense and muscular, the acidity screws it down onto the palate rather than lift. Tangy with emphasis on lime, tangerine citrus, flowers, licorice and close to tropical papaya, pineapple, green apple, pear, nectarine fruit. Spicy with vanilla to whipped cream overtones. Definitely keeps you focused on it, an intriguing wine, at times you wish it might calm down a little. (Screwcap) 88