

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

Hanes kills a lot of trees by going on and on in his wine reviews about the color of wine. So, it stands to reason that Hanes believes the color of a wine is important. But why, Hanes, why? Indeed, why. Hanes will now discuss what the color of wine tells or does not tell the imbibers.

It should be noted at the outset that this is one of the trickier topics to discuss and that everything about to be said can probably be argued ad infinitum by anyone with a desire to do so. This is primarily because scientific advances in winemaking have more or less problematized the basic visual inferences one would make about wines.

First, while obvious it should be stated that wines are normally divided into the following groups: red, white and rosé. It's true. What anyone can discern about a wine will vary depending on its grouping here. The main reason is that vinification processes differ among red, white and rosé wines to forbid treating them as the same in assessing color's meaning. These distinctions exist whether the wines are made "traditionally" or "manipulated" via more recent advancements in winemaking. Just because, Hanes will not isolate the three types of wines too much during this treatise but will instead make side statements as necessary and prudent.

Using red wines as our basis then, here's what color is good for. Color can tell you about which grapes may have been used (helpful if the wine is being tasted blindly), the level of extraction of the wine, what type of fining or filtering may have been employed, and/or the age of the wine. These aspects of the wine may or may not be of importance to you, the swallowing party. That's your call. If you do care, keep reading. If not, please go to the tasting notes and fall asleep.

First things first, if you are serious (too serious) about assessing a wine's nature via its color the conditions should be optimal. A clean white background is a usual prerequisite so no colors outside the wine will confuse your tender eyeballs. Some printed text or clear script on a white sheet of paper is good because the legibility of the text may come in handy in determining the wine's opacity, translucency, etc. A strong light source is of equal value, natural light is best but there are now many brands of incandescent bulbs which emit light in wavelengths that are much closer to natural sunlight than those from "regular" bulbs. Hanes uses these fancy light bulbs at home. They are also supposed to help combat Seasonal Affective Disorder and other depressions. See how happy Hanes is as proof of these bulbs' efficacy. Fluorescent lighting is crappy for assessing wine color.

The only other thing is that you should be able to twist and turn the glass against the background and lighting so as to view the wine from any angle with ease. Again, no great insight but the liquid will appear differently from various angles and each angle may impart some different tidbit of knowledge. This is part of why you don't overfill the glass — a full glass tilted at the correct angle to inspect the color is swiftly a much emptier glass.

Now, different grapes naturally produce different colors and depth of hue depending on the color of their skins and the size of the berries among other factors. Indeed, some grapes are used in blends primarily to add color and not flavor nor bouquet. Already we are going to get controversial and say that one can learn the "typical" color each grape type "should" produce in a "normal" finished wine. Is Hanes still "safe"? A typical Pinot Noir based wine should not look like a Syrah based wine. Pineau d'Aunis wines should not look like Petite Sirah wines. If they do, that's something to note. With experience, patience and attention one can learn the typical colors associated with each grape. One can even do so while accounting for geographical variations. Why, color might even help you *determine* the wine's place of origin! Go figure!

For red wines, typical color descriptors include: purple, violet, ruby, magenta, garnet, red, crimson, maroon, scarlet, rust, black, onyx, orange, brown, brick red, or brick orange.

For white wines, typical color descriptors include: gold, yellow, white, green, straw, hay, amber, sand, pink, brass, bronze, copper, or blonde.

For rosé wines, typical color descriptors include: pink, ruby, rose, salmon, watermelon, strawberry, or light red.

Because red wines have deeper and more varied color than white or rosé wines there are more descriptors. The intensity and concentration of the wine's color will change from the core towards the rims. The degree of change and the colors involved merit noting.

Younger red typically have darker coloration and, oddly, older white wines can be darker than their younger selves. Before getting too into this let us discuss clarity or the lack thereof. There are those who believe a wine should be brilliant and shiny. At least on the surface, as a dark red wine may be opaque beneath that glistening surface. Cloudiness or murkiness is treated as a defect. While this *can* be a sign of something like premature oxidation of the wine, it is just as likely to be a sign of a conscious winemaking decision to not fine nor filter the wine. This is especially so if the wine is younger. A winemaker may choose to avoid fining and/or filtration in the belief that this creates less interventive "noise" while the goal is to give a clear voice to the grapes and wine. Hastily put, at issue is whether fining or filtration strips out flavor, aroma and other fun stuff in order to achieve greater stability and/or avoid microbiological taint. You argue that one, Hanes is too tired. The upshot is that a lot of people view cloudiness ("view" — get it?, get it?) as *necessarily* a fault whereas this is not so. Less expensive, large production wines are more likely to be stabilized so if you are drinking a cloudy \$8 Chardonnay that might be a warning sign that the wine is damaged.

A young wine made from dark skinned grapes with a lot of ripeness and *extraction* (that is, getting as much phenolics out of the grape solids during and after fermentation, for our purposes here phenolics being color pigment, tannins and flavonoids) may even develop a warm glowing quality to it, particularly around the rims. This may be magenta in red wines and green in white wines (whites having less phenolics on the whole than reds). This can make a wine look awful pretty. So, many winemakers like to get as much extraction as they can. Even though this *may* throw the wine out of balance. And require additional maneuvers to get the wine back into balance. This balancing act is made even more complex because as the color producing chemical called anthocyanins in the skins interact with the wine's level of pH or acidity, this effects the color of the wine. So, seeking a certain level of acidity (either more or less) in the wine will condition its color. And *that* color may not be the one the winemaker wants (even if the pH or acidity is gotten right).

Older wines may develop sediment or tartrate crystals as chemical reactions occur over time. These will certainly make an initially clear wine cloudy. This may indicate a wine's age but not necessarily its quality. Hence, a certain amount of cloudiness is not a sign for worry. A bottle can be stood up to let the sediment settle at the bottom and then be decanted and/or poured through cheese cloth to catch finer sediment. That's up to you.

In terms of color, older red wines change color as the pigmented tannins change. One wine tasting term for this is "bricking" because the color looks like red or orange brick. Brown, yellow and amber are also colors associated with older red wines. These colors are much more pronounced around the rims (aka meniscus) of the wine in the glass. This is really only practically important if the age of the wine is in question or there are fears about how the wine has been stored and perhaps damaged or prematurely aged.

Because most white wines are not exactly "explosions of kaleidoscopic color" there's less to go on here. But there remains a fair amount of variety among the chemical makeup of the different white wine grapes. Some grapes result in a greener cast, others in a pinker cast. As with red wines, the level of acidity as well as the addition of sulfur dioxide to the wine (which has a bleaching effect) will change the wine's color. Older white wines oxidize into a more brown to amber color and, again depending on the wine, this may or may not effect its quality. Many wines are aged with the intention of creating new flavors and aerobic reactions are a part of this (as are anaerobic reactions). If the older white wine was *not* brown chances are you wasted time and money in aging it as it may have hardly changed since its youth.

Note in passing that with white wines there are other factors which will effect color and not quality. For example, the beneficial mold *botrytis* tends to darken color, thus botrytized dessert wines are darker, even when young. Same thing with other concentration practices such as air drying grapes, etc. One could say that a dry table white wine that is darker than usual and tastes honeyed or sweeter than expected may have been effected by a bit of *botrytis*. If such sleuthing turns you on.

Color may also tip you off as to weather conditions of the wine's vintage. If the wine should normally be darker than what you see in the glass, there may have been rainstorms prior to harvest resulting in swollen and more dilute grapes (more juice in the skin-to-juice ratio decreasing color intensity). Full ripeness means richer color.

Fermentation and/or aging in oak barrels versus neutral vessels also effects the color of the wine, be it red, white or rosé. It can also effect the color's stability. So much color can tell you!

Besides using or not using oak, winemakers do all kinds of stuff to control color. Prior to the act of fermentation you can "cold soak" the juice and skins to break the skins down and release more pigment. Once fermentation begins and the temperature of the liquid rises, you can punch the rising solids back down into the liquid or pump the liquid over the floating solids. This goes back to the question of desired extraction. Which ultimately devolves to the question of what you, the end consumer, likes and wants. On the whole, darker wines are more concentrated but not necessarily fresher nor more balanced. If everyone wants to buy inky black, super-concentrated wines this can (and is) achieved during the winemaking process. But *something* is sacrificed. There are not many "test control" samples being circulated so we'll never know what the alternatives might have tasted like in contrast to the wine which was actually commercially released. Suffice it to say that, *generally speaking*, darker wines sell better (and it's a business). Man, can't Hanes hedge?

By now it should be pretty obvious that during the winemaking process there's plenty of stuff that can be done to control and change a wine's color. If this is so, doesn't this make it problematic to infer certain traits or qualities about a wine from its color? Hmmm, Hanes would say, yes, it has become much more difficult to use color in a practical sense. This is especially so when you consider the use of commercial coloring concentrates. Most wine professionals and wine geeks know these things exist but, no surprise, no one admits to using them. However, it stands to reason to surmise that if one wanted a wine with less tannin extract but all of the color one would normally get with extended grape juice to skin contact one can remove the skins, skip the tannins which come from these solids and then simply add color via concentrate. Result: smoother, less tannic wine and still black as the ace of spades.

If you ever doubt that wine is big business, and in many quarters more science than poetry, check out these links. Not only are there inexpensive coloring powders (Eno-In Red Wine Powder, Ultra Red, Mega Purple) but there are also enough other commercial additives to change a wine's composition to convince any romantic layperson that a convention of winemakers ain't a meeting of the Dead Poets Society.

<http://shop.countrywines.com/shopsite/cwines/page5.html>

<http://www.winebusiness.com/Html/MonthlyArticle.cfm?Ald=62769&issuelid=62754>  
[Scroll down to "Widmer Wine Cellars" where it discusses their production of Ultra Red and Mega Purple coloring concentrates]

It's not so much a question of "right or wrong," Hanes isn't taking an ethical stand here. It's more an issue of pointing out how what you see may not be what you get. Color *used* to be able to tell you more about a wine than now. And since we have no idea who is using the tricks of the trade (huge commercial wineries cranking out \$5 wines or boutique wineries selling \$100 wines in bottles that weigh 20 pounds) the default just becomes, uhh, does the wine look pretty?

This is fine as far as it goes. But reducing the visual aspects of wine to simple aesthetics plays into the hands of those who take the "if you like it, it's a good wine" camp. And that may be the argument which sways you. But the layperson trying to learn about wine should at least be cognizant that other schools of belief exist and argue against this interpretation of wine appreciation. Again, Hanes doesn't have the energy anymore to take a stand on what is "natural" and what is "overly manipulated," he just wants to lay the "facts" out there and then you decide.

Before sneaking out the back door Hanes should also mention the infamous color tests where red and white wines are poured at room temperature into black glasses for experienced wine professionals to sample blindly. Naturally, these tasters could not tell red from white wines with any great degree of accuracy. Hanes would most likely flunk such a test. Hmmm, why was color important again?

\* \* \* \* \*

**This month's big winners...** Lotta, lotta French wine consumed of late. While very, very difficult to find and stupidly priced, Allemand's 2001 Cornas "Sans Soufre" (that is, unsulfured) is a fantastic wine. Hanes had to buy one just to say he tried this bottling once. Worth the tariff. Hanes is getting more familiar with Alsatian producer Dirler-Cadé and their 2002 Riesling from the Grand Cru Kessler vineyard is awfully good. Those who like Puligny-Montrachet should look for Pernot's basic 2004 village bottling because at \$29 or so it offers uncommon value. Hanes very rarely drinks Californian Merlot so it was a pleasant surprise to encounter the 2002 Lambert Bridge from Sonoma. For around \$23 a very nice drink and nothing wimpy about it. Remizieres can be an up and down producer but for cheap Crozes Hermitage their basic 2004 bottling is an excellent choice for about \$16 (especially since their Crozes competitor Gilles Robin's prices have shot up). Hanes's first wine for the Rouleugy region of Southwest France, the 2001 Brana red is serious juice and worthy of aging. Worth the \$25. From Pfalz, Germany the wines of A. Christmann are not cheap but they are quite good and worth checking out, their Estate QbA made Hanes happy this month. Much 2004 Vincent Dauvissat Chablis consumed this past month. Mmmm. Le Forest is the best Premier Cru among those sampled and their Petit Chablis is also extremely tasty (if pushing the price threshold for Petit Chablis). Naturally Hanes got to drink a lot of bubbly this past month. Check out all the reviews but the 1996 Billecart-Salmon "Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart Brut" is pure genius.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Hard not to love how rock steady the quality and price is at Château d'Oupia. Their 2004 regular red wine and their special "Hommage à Poupette" bottling both excel with the regular bottling still a mere \$10. Two \$15 Italian reds impressed for their more rustic appeal and ability to stand up for themselves. Namely the 2003 Rosso Conero "Julius" from Strologo and the 2004 Barbera from Morandina. Made by a cooperative in Rioja, the 2001 Crianza labeled as "Castillo Labastida" is simply delicious and only \$12. If a slightly sweeter style of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc tickles your fancy try the 2005 Culley wine as it is a great pickup for \$12. Not too many months ago the 2003 impressed and now Domaine du Cros's 2004 Marcillac red "Lo Sang del Pais" delivers too, around \$11. Hanes has to seek out their higher end bottlings. For those of you who like a little change of pace, Eric Bordelet's sparkling ciders from Normandy, France as fantastic values and merit the search, especially for the pear cider at \$13. Low enough alcohol to drink a few bottles at lunch!

**And the disappointments...** The 2003 Cline "California" Zinfandel was puzzlingly bad because Hanes recalls this producer always doing a credible job with their low end products. I guess this is why \$10 Australian Shiraz sells better than domestic stuff, hmmm. Hanes loved the 2003 but the 2004 "Kali Hart" Chardonnay from Talbott in California is extremely avoidable. Hanes was slightly put off by Breton's 2002 Cab Franc "Les Picasses" — weird stuff but one has to trust that with time it will come around into something more palatable. Hanes is also getting into other 2004 Chablis wines as finances allow and the Montmain vineyard offering from Louie Louie Michel was disappointing and not freaking cheap either. Hanes had another Italian wine from the Grillo grape and this one wasn't much better than his last. Thankfully this 2004 from a producer named Firriato was less than \$14. While Hanes enjoyed many Spanish wines this month one that let him down was the 2001 Crianza labeled as "Ramírez de la Piscina." Just boring juice.

\* \* \* \* \*

All contents of this electronic mail are copyright 2006 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.

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 #18:** "Hanes puts the whine in wine!"

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])

\* \* \* \* \*

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

### CALIFORNIA RED

Lambert Bridge Winery

Sonoma County

Merlot

2002, \$22.99, 14.1%

Presents a dark purple core with a fair degree of opacity, moves into more red-ruby territory to form broad, seamless rims. While sure there's spice and cocoa powder in the nose, in no way oak dominated, presents a highly attractive floral side, lemon zest and, while juicy, the currant, black cherry scents display uncommon muscularity. This general feel extends into the palate, full-bodied, taut and without much wasted motion. Uncompromising tannins keep it both erect and alert without taking an unforgiving stance towards the friendly ripeness of that cherry, currant, blackberry fruit. Mild herbal notes, more of that pleasing lemon to orange citrus bite and a fair showing of minerality. Any milk chocolate or toffee notes only appear during the finish after the rest has exhausted itself. Refreshing and energetic, has distinct personality. 81% Merlot, 13% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, 1% Malbec. 90

Cold Heaven Cellars

Santa Barbara County, Second Sin

Syrah

2003, \$39.99, 13.5%

Warm ruby-purple core of moderate depth, very little loss as it nears the rims, ruby hue more prominent. Caramel, mint, cinnamon and clove might make you think the nose is going to be an oak fest but the competition isn't taking things laying down, attractive floral dew, minerals with only trace amounts of game or black pepper, the raspberry and blackberry scents move at a rapid clip, bow pulled tightly across the package. Medium-bodied, as in the nose starts off with the caramel, coffee, chocolate oak notes but here in the mouth there's the acidity to contend with, dries things out indiscriminately. Black licorice, glazed oranges, mint and herbs present yet little by way of earth or leather notes. The currant, cherry, plum fruit juicy in terms of having been squeezed for whatever was in there yet seems stunted in terms of lacking natural fluidity. Average length on the finish. A quiet implosion. Grapes sourced from Purisima Mountain, Bien Nacido Hillside, Volgelzang Vineyards. 88

Sobon Estate

Amador County, Rocky Top Vineyard

Zinfandel

2003, \$17.99, 14.7%

Light ruby-purple in color, pretty clear all the way through to the orange-crimson rims. The nose is a study in contrasts, lots of creamy vanilla and eucalyptus, sweet grill smoke then somewhat lean — more so focused — raspberry, cherry scents, touch of spice, nothing showy about it. Medium-bodied, has raisin and date embellishments with enough freshness to bring out a red fruit character of cherry, raspberry, currant fruit. Extremely strong vanilla softness, no real caramel edge, more menthol. The tannins and acidity virtually nonexistent. Lemon zest imbues it with good tang. At times suggests cola tones. Composed finish, in keeping with the total tranquil feel. 96% Zinfandel, 4% Grenache. 87

Coyne, Thomas

Contra Costa County

Mourvèdre

2003, \$17.99,

Unblemished scarlet red to purple in color, richness deepens the core, turns redder as it nears the rims. Sappy sweet, jammy nose of raspberry, blueberry fruit with inch thick vanilla cream, toffee, sweet baking spices, the fluffy wildflower scents add to its clingy fullness. Full-bodied, super-plush and inviting, a berry pie of raspberry, blackberry, blueberry fruit, way sugary. Vanilla, honey glaze and cinnamon flavors splash across the tongue. The tannins stretch and strain under the weight of the fruit but are there. Orange juice notes thick and sweet too. The floral dimension too feels like it was cut into thick slabs. While gargantuan in size as well as dulcet as hell, not imbalanced nor clumsy. Just BIG. 87

Cline

Regional Blend, California

Zinfandel

2003, \$9.99, 14.0%

Pure violet to red-ruby in color, full rims with no hue loss. Soft, straightforward nose of cream and molasses-dipped raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, light candied feel. Sweet orange juice notes, minor menthol swipe, 'nuff said. Medium-bodied, not quite polished but certainly smooth and without any rough patches in the road. Not particularly sweet, even if it does come across somewhat like powdered sugar in texture. The raspberry, blueberry, red cherry fruit flavors lack concentration and could use more grip. That said, at least it realizes this fact and doesn't try too hard, moves at a good clip. Moderate caramel, honey shades attempt to give it more of a solid center. Clipped finish, lacks true follow-through. Flavors are there, just wish they stuck around longer. 89% Zinfandel, 6% Petite Sirah, 4% Carignane, 1% Alicante Bouschet. Grapes sourced from Contra Costa County, Oakley and Lodi. 83

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Talbott Vineyards, Robert  
Monterey County, Kali Hart Vineyard  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$14.99, 14.4%

Highly reflective and deep golden color, minimal dropoff at the rims. Tropical fruit cocktail nose of pineapple, pear, peach, cherry, banana fruit with a gusher of honey on top, orange citrus and maybe light florality, a big mindless fruit bomb. Full-bodied and not much different in the mouth, more floral perfume but real heavy too on the pineapple, nectarine, apricot, peach, pear fruit. Keeps that bubblegum, cotton candy thing too, the orange to lime citrus possesses a marmalade-like consistency. The oak adds vanilla, caramel notes but nothing even halfway strong enough to approach the power of the fruit. Wimpy acidity, plenty of alcoholic heat/burn and, even with its concentration, a somewhat short finish. Who poured the Froot Loops in my wine? 83

## FRANCE RED

Allemand, Thierry  
Rhône, Cornas, Sans Soufre  
Syrah  
2001, \$119.99, 13.5%

The immaculate ruby-violet core doesn't achieve opacity but dark indeed it is, the undiluted magenta rims are thin without losing vibrancy and glow. The nose has all the purity and cleanliness one expects, crisp white pepper, fresh green grass, violet dust, roasted game, tanned leather, grapefruit citrus, impeccably clear outlines in the currant, blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, elegantly self-assured and smooth in a semi-rakish way, grins from ear to ear. A fine blade of acidity slices the flavors into thin strips of bell pepper, flower petals, mineral shavings and leather. Has more of a whole peppercorn than ground pepper feel. Correct amount of ripeness in the black cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit, compact yet giving. The florality is here a larger part of the whole than the grapefruit/lemon citrus, remains pretty but not soft. The tannins quiet and a minor factor. Less gaminess or animality than in the nose. Savory finish, lingers for an extended time. 93

Allemand, Thierry  
Rhône, Cornas, Reynard  
Syrah  
2001, \$84.99, 13.5%

Scarlet red to purple at the core, more crimson at the rims, enough light gets through to create sparkle. Well-stuffed nose, if not at times heavy, rife with raw bacon, celery, wet violets, juicy orange citrus, hint of milk chocolate, enjoyable plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, not much earthiness, too plump for a lot of lift. Full-bodied, glides like a Mack truck going downhill. Serious floral perfume cakes the super-ripe plum, currant, black cherry fruit. Cocoa powder, orange zest and mild minerality jostle each other for your attention. The tannins seem to create a tacky mouth feel, not much acidity showing through to brighten things. While open and juicy, it appears to not yet be ready to shine. Only allusions to black pepper or game. Thickness does not relent one bit during the finish. Totally a puppy. 91

Remizières, Domaine des  
Rhône, Crozes Hermitage  
Syrah

2004, \$16.49, 12.5%

Light violet core with extremely bright to almost luminescent ruby, especially around the full rims. Dried flowers, olive pit, earth and a light gaminess combine with sourly rich currant, cherry fruit to give the nose a sense of correctness. Medium-bodied and somewhat light of touch, the acidity has power and polishes the currant, plum, black cherry fruit into a state of cleanliness. Pronounced floral component, overshadows any leather, earth of lemon citrus. Possesses a good deal of tang and fire but no alcoholic heat. More pretty than profound, but even that's hard to find these days from the Northern Rhône for under \$20. 89

Oupia, Château d'  
Languedoc/Roussillon  
Minervois, Hommage à Poupette  
Carignan  
2004, \$13.99, 13.0%

Red-ruby to violet in color, completely consistent from core to rim, maybe a hint of pink. The nose is both pliant and penetrating at once, stuffed with white grapefruit, black pepper, lavender, mineral powder and a bushel of grass, the easygoing nature of the red cherry, cranberry scents mask their depth. Light to medium-bodied, aggressively peppery on the attack, great deal of powdery minerals and crushed stone, enough of all this to push the grapefruit/lemon citrus to the background. Starts to suggest a more barnyard dimension before pulling back in favor of the vivacious cherry, red raspberry, cranberry fruit. Displays natural length to the finish, crisp and clean, freshens your mouth well. 89

Oupia, Château d'  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois  
Blend  
2004, \$9.99, 13.0%

While crystal clear, no denying the darkness in the purple color, consistent from core to the rims where it's a touch more ruby-magenta. Not an aggressive nose but moves forward at a steady clip, surrounds the currant, cherry fruit with floral notes, white grapefruit, tar and tanned animal hide, admirably full. Medium-bodied, quite smooth, enough so to pretty much glide through the mouth. Heavy duty white grapefruit component, brings out more of the underlying minerality. Not that acidic nor tannic, swift pacing has little time for structure. Much more emphasis on florality than any earthiness or leathery stuff. The cherry, currant, plum fruit in no way overdone, round and full enough to persist through the finish and that's it. Slight sour bite at the end more like a friendly pinch than anything else. 60% Carignan, 30% Syrah, 10% Grenache. 89

Chauvenet, Domaine Jean  
Burgundy, Nuits-Saint-Georges, Les Vaucrains  
Pinot Noir  
2002, \$82.99, 13.5%

Shows a pure and fairly trim ruby-violet color, nothing special but very visually pleasing, full magenta rims. Light shades of caramel, flowers and mint in the nose, maintains a strongly full bottom of black fruits while dissolving a portion of its density into a milk chocolate lift, on the whole too blockish to develop subtleties, more of a bear hug approach. Medium-bodied, the richness of the

cherry, blackberry fruit is easily noted, it is acidic enough that it makes a good faith effort to cram the fruit into some sort of structure. Lemon, white stone, minerals on hand but it never convinces you it is truly a "terroir" wine. Keeps its weight and forward momentum, distracts you from any of its flaws. Greatly satisfying as you drink it, and no doubt has room for improvement, but does not seem to have the understated eloquence for the Burgundy conversion experience. 89

Breton, Catherine et Pierre  
Loire, Bourgueil, Les Perrières  
Cabernet Franc  
2002, \$25.99, 12.5%

Slightest filminess adds to the opacity of the purple core, dense ruby to crimson red in color along the rims, very good saturation. Something reductive in the nose brings up rubber, burnt cocoa powder and belt leather before giving even an inch up to the cherry, currant fruit, stiff and unyielding, traces of minerals and lemon zest. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and damn tannic, big at the start and bigger by the end, makes the finish feel like a jumbo jet landing on your tongue without putting the wheels down first. With considerable air time the black cherry, currant, blackberry fruit catches and spreads out. Blood iron, minerals, caked earth, leather accents most prominent, all but devoid of herbaceousness. Maybe suggests licorice, fennel, rosemary or wildflowers. Arguably drinkable today, better to wait a good long while. 89

Brana, Domaine  
Southwest France, Irouleguy  
Blend  
2001, \$24.99, 13.5%

Warm richness in the red-purple core, excellent saturation in the brick red to orange rims, visually fills your glass totally. Nose screams "Cabernet Franc," all green bell pepper, mineral shards, tilled earth and freshly tanned leather, light spritz of lemon on the lively sour cherry, red currant fruit scents, quite exuberant. Full-bodied, while velvety and thick in texture the formidable bell pepper and herbaceousness gives it more spine than either the tannins or acidity, not that either of these suck. Still, the rounder mouth feel takes a lot of the aggressive force out of the earth, stone, leather, tar flavors and may broaden its appeal. Your mouth is in full pucker mode by the time it starts to register the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, truncating its length somewhat. Rough and ready, won't back down to nobody. 50% Cabernet Franc, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Tannat. 89

Bellivière, Domaine de  
Loire, Coteaux du Loir, Le Rouge-Gorge  
Pineau d'Aunis  
2004, \$20.99, 14.0%

Extreme luminescent glow in the magenta-tinged violet color, above average clarity. There's a ton of mineral dust in the nose, white pepper, dried ground bell pepper, grapefruit pith, so dusty in feel its a shock your olfactory sense registers any cherry, mixed berry fruit. Full-bodied, has a downy soft mouth entry which pushes the noticeably sweet raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit to the fore. Soon after that the acidity starts grinding away and its all about the chalk, graphite, pulverized stone. More herbaceous here, the pepper spice equally present, increased presence in the orange citrus. Finds its stride past the mid-palate and pretty much stops developing, no sense in going further. The sweet core of the fruit does

continue through the finish keeping it gracefully inviting. Not structured in an obvious manner, not sure it should be. 89

Lapierre, Marcel  
Beaujolais, Morgon  
Gamay Noir  
2004, \$18.99, 12.0%

Super-clear and light red-ruby to magenta color, extremely sparkly, light dances across the surface. Showing some sulfur stink at first in the nose, tilled earth and wet minerals, dried lemon peel, takes a good long while for the red cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit scents to open up. Medium-bodied, extremely dry with a rugged profile of cracked pepper, mildewed earth, mushroom, tree leaves, old tea bags and dried lemon, white grapefruit and orange citrus. The acidity comes on first but by the end it's the tannins that work the body over. The red cherry, red currant, raspberry fruit possesses an angular nature, especially as the herbaceousness builds. Showing its youth, a bit too much yet. 88

Cros, Domaine du  
Southwest France, Marcillac, Lo Sang del País  
Fer Servadou  
2004, \$10.99, 12.0%

The sparkle of light on the surface distracts one from the depths of the ruby-violet core, possesses generously saturated and wide red-magenta rims. Highly vegetal nose, bell pepper out the wazoo, also like sticking leather plugs up your nose, why not say while also playing in wet dirt, through all of this the thick currant, cherry, plum fruit is loud and clear. Medium-bodied, while somewhat light of touch at first once the tannic/acidic structure asserts itself and the vibrancy of the flavors begin to show, it settles in nicely. The bell pepper aspect remains a major player, same said for the leather, tobacco and stony earth. Less concentration here in the black cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, more front-loaded, which contributes to weaker grip on the finish and increasing dustiness. That said, it's a real sparkplug, like a 5'5" guy with a chip on his shoulder. 88

Pégau, Domaine du  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc, Plume Bleue  
Grenache/Syrah  
Blend  
2004, \$11.99, 13.5%

Fairly light red-ruby to violet in color, nothing out of the ordinary, stays consistent to the rims without breaking a sweat. Ripe, sugary nose, equally affable with blackberry, black currant, black raspberry fruit and a certain smokiness, stone dust too, maybe some florality and orange juice too. Medium-bodied, juicy without becoming sloppy nor meandering, gathered into itself like a bucket filled with cherry, blackberry fruit. More tannic punch than expected, more herbaceous on the attack, this folds into the fruit over time. Doesn't show much toast, but by the same token not much earth nor leather either. Basic stuff but honorable in that, nothing grotesque about it. 50% Syrah, 50% Grenache. 87

Lafond Roc-Epine, Domaine Jean-Pierre & Pascal  
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône  
Blend  
2004, \$8.99, 13.5%

Dark and spotless, runs from cranberry red to violet in color, picking up some red-magenta glow at the rims. Lively nose of citrus, stone powder, garden herbs and black

pepper, all high notes, no bottom, even though there's a strong core of cherry, raspberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, very spicy and peppery with a definite herbaceous twist too. High level of acidity has it tightening up pretty swiftly, even given the forward nature of the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit. Mild undercurrent of lemon citrus, stoniness but plays it legit and straight-up without anything hidden to confuse nor confound. Bright finish. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre. 87

Breton, Catherine et Pierre  
Loire, Chinon, Les Picasses  
Cabernet Franc  
2002, \$25.99, 12.5%

The opaque purple core has a warm feel to it, the wide red-ruby rims keep the hue richly attractive. Stinky nose of sulfurish notes, peanut shells, merde, passed gas, something here really needs to blow off or resolve, behind it all is some cherry, blackberry fruit. Medium-bodied, fresher and purer in the mouth, much less stink interfering with the red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit. Lemon citrus comes through better as well, same can be said for the minerality. Only trace amount of bell pepper or herbal matter. Tannins and acidity not soft but lower than expected. Slowly releases its grip as it gets past the center point, turns somewhat airy as it lifts off the tongue. Hard to figure out, leaves you hoping it's simply in a weird place, especially as it doesn't budge much with aeration. 87

Breton, Catherine et Pierre  
Loire, Chinon, Beaumont  
Cabernet Franc  
2004, \$19.99, 12.0%

Good density in the crimson to ruby inflected purple core, not so dark as to create a stark contrast with the more red-magenta rims. Chalk dust, tobacco and bell pepper provide able balance against the fully ripe cherry, currant fruit scents, on the whole a semi-demure nose. Medium-bodied, equally lowkey in the mouth, presents a nice lemony sparkle with lowgrade herbal notes, tobacco smoke the closest thing here to such an element. The minerality maintains an even presence without much bite, pulverized to a fine consistency. Durable concentration in the cherry, black currant, blackberry fruit, starts out big, ends big. Curious lack of complexity to it, smoothness takes precedence over chewiness or any edge. Definitely tastes like Cabernet Franc but somewhat declawed. 87

Cèdre [Le Cèdre Diffusion], Château du  
Southwest France, Cahors, Héritage  
Malbec  
2003, \$13.49, 13.5%

Holds onto its clarity in spite of having a dark violet to brick red color, hint of magenta brightens the rims. Strong oak to the nose but blood iron, flint, wet earth and a touch of leather more in the foreground, even more willing to express itself via ripe cherry, plum scents, achieves complete fullness. Medium-bodied, the tannins make a bold display from the first sip, pretty much cast the oak toast and chocolate notes aside. Even as the mouth turns dustier the core of red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit clings to its sweetness. Initially there's mild herbal qualities before becomes more chalky and earthy with iodine, iron flecks and a crushed flower petal whisper. Shows some dried white grapefruit pith too. The fruit not strong enough to fend off the tannins past the mid-palate, thus the finish is brisk. True enough to its roots even as it tries on the

some clothes that are supposed to make it look cooler. 90% Malbec, 10% Merlot. 86

Gallois, Domaine Dominique  
Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin  
Pinot Noir  
2003, \$31.99, 13.0%

Light violet, more red-ruby in color, extends fully to the rims, not particularly shiny. Sour cranberry, cherry, raspberry nose, still manages to turn somewhat sappy, powerful floral dimension, sour lemons too, the chocolate accents get rolled over by earthy funk, condenses well. Medium-bodied, no acidity nor tannins equals one dull wine. Florality tries hard to doll it up but it's devoid of get up and go, hence even the lemon citrus and what minerals there are lay horizontally on your palate. Slight roasted quality to the cherry, raspberry fruit, liqueur notes, not much length given its initial richness. Four-square is about all you can say, thankfully any "green" notes are minimal. 84

## FRANCE WHITE

Dirler-Cadé  
Alsace, Kessler  
Riesling  
2002, \$44.99, 12.5%

The color changes intensity depending on the visual angle more than most, on the whole it maintains both its cleanliness and green-gold cast, get too close and it's very transparent. Enveloping and resonant nose of rubber, baked piecrust, lemon oil, cream custard, floral musk, velvety feel to the peach, apricot, melon scents yet restrained in terms of juiciness. Medium-bodied, has a naturally solid feel to it, concentrated without too much thought. Spicy more so than sweet during the attack, brings out extra zip in the tangerine, lime citrus. Desirable degree of chalkiness keeps it evenly balanced while the florality helps it achieve at least some perfume lift. The nectarine, apricot, pear and minor pineapple fruit appears like a muffled explosion, rushes outward but never breaks apart. Mouth-watering finish, the flavors remain vivid enough to get your tongue searching for more. 92

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

Quite shiny and light yellow gold color, good deal of contrast between the rich core and watery rims. Pronounced stoniness in the nose, graphite, mineral chunks, chalk, dense enough to resist lifting into smokiness, borderline salty at turns, very nice zip and purity in the apricot, pear, apple fruit, nothing to suggest overripeness nor excess juice, sleek. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with the same emphasis on flint, stone, chalk, neither dusty nor overly solid in nature. Does derive a tickling prickle from the lemon, tangerine citrus, making this a prominent component. Fantastic grip, the acidity ably uses its muscles to focus and push the proceedings forward rather than dampen or muffle. Squeaky clean and clearly contoured peach, pear, apple, melon fruit, avoids feeling regimented even with its erect posture. Florality only a minor player. Displays excellent thrust. 92

Pernot et ses Fils, Paul  
Burgundy, Puligny-Montrachet  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$28.99, 13.5%

A translucent filminess infuses the dark golden color, while dull the hue runs fully through to the rims. The nose is initially creamy but firms up as it turns toastier, not to overlook the floral and mineral tones which show nicely, more lemon citrus to be had than apricot or peach fruit scents. Full-bodied with excellent grip right from the start, really hugs your tongue and cheeks. The acidity is durable throughout and actively fends up any inclination towards creaminess. Good sweetness in the orange and lemon citrus without losing clarity. The general richness extends to the peach, pear, apricot, nectarine fruit, juicy and at times plays with turning tropical. Spicy finish, perhaps somewhat turbulent now but easy to see it coming down over the years. 91

Dirler-Cadé  
Alsace, Kitterlé  
Gewürztraminer  
2002, \$35.99, 13.0%

Deep and even golden color, caught in between dull and shiny, mild dropoff at the rims. Juicy tangerine and lime citrus leads the nose, mixes in wet and fresh florality, combined there's little room left for any nuttiness, quite unevolved and bursting with primary scents of peach, apricot, melon, pear fruit, gently spiced, airy and so easy to sniff. Medium to full-bodied, definitely streamlined with the kind of focus that inhibits the rich voluptuousness Gewürztraminer may achieve. Very floral, a bounty of sweet tangerine, lemon, lime citrus while, again, minimal nuttiness. Does have a creamy, vanilla-flavored side which gives it heft. The acidity is non-existent but that's not much of a surprise. Good balance throughout, not great heights scaled but maintains a high cruising altitude. 90

Dauvissat, Domaine Vincent  
Burgundy, Chablis, Les Preuses  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$84.99, 13.0%

Bright golden surface, below it turns a touch translucent, does a fade at the rims but still has a respectable overall level of concentration. Floral dew in the nose along with a strong honey component, baking dough, lemon and lime juice, mint, the minerality too fine to really show at the moment, not a lot of smokiness now either, straightforward if deep peach, pear, yellow apple fruit, it more so stands on its toes than rises up into the air. Full-bodied with impressive density, like swallowing wet cement, while it keeps moving forward it is losing the race to the molasses. Liquid minerals, like sucking an uncut lemon, the toast a bit too much for the florality and more nuanced flavors. The acidity seems semi-awake, too structured to show any structure. Dense core of apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit undeniable in its power and concentration. Even after a few hours of decanting it hardly budges. Throw it in a dark, cool corner for a decade and hope for the best. 90

Ecu (Guy Bossard), Domaine de l'  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Expression de Granite  
Muscadet/Melon de Bourgogne  
2004, \$15.99, 12.0%  
Pale yellow straw in color, not particularly shiny, more so transparent to achieve freshness in appearance. The nose is so stony as to be inert, white smoke, chalk, err, granite, standard lemon citrus accents, light anise seed and the tiniest amount of peach, pear skin or pit scents possible. Medium-bodied, packed in well enough to move if and when

it wants to, displays brighter lemon to lime zest yet all but wholly dependent on its stoniness for flavor and character, a mouth full of pebbles. Minimal cut in the acidity but maintains a stable presence, dry without becoming desiccated. Vaguely herbal, here too the fruit has a ghost-like feel, floats about with shadows of peach, apple or pear. Little sense of progress through the mouth hence the finish appears semi-abrupt, as if it stops for no reason. 89

Colin et Fils, Domaine Marc  
Burgundy, Bourgogne, La Combe  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$14.99, 12.0%

Potent day-glo yellow-green color, like a liquid highlighter, brilliant shine to it, its reflectivity extends fully to the rims. Quite smoky and chalky nose, comes off as burnt in a good way, lean lemon peel more oil than zest, appears more herbal than floral as well, the pungency of the smokiness covers up much of the apricot, red apple scents. Full-bodied, reveals admirable cleanliness given its weight, doesn't bog down as it progresses through the mouth. Juicy lime and lemon citrus does help it soak in, more sweet than tangy. Increased florality here, loses the herbaceous edge and even gathers a little streamwater and pebble thing. Not particularly acidic but stronger than most peers in its category and something has to be behind that cleanliness. No half as smoky as the nose either. Easy to consume swiftly. 89

Rijckaert, Maison Jean  
Jura, Arbois  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$11.49, 12.5%

Good thing it has such lively shine as there's little by way of golden color. 99% transparent throughout. Pleasing oiliness in the nose, burnt notes accompany the stoniness well without turning acid, this powerful enough to hold any citrus or white fruit at bay, more or less an one trick pony scent-wise. In the mouth it achieves a medium body and there's much less oiliness. More punch in the lemon/lime citrus as well as an uptick in florality. The stony qualities have a rainwater freshness to them, no dirt nor dust. Fine and acceptable level of acidity, no blemishes nor stumbling in its strides. The fluid peach, apple, nectarine fruit glides along, adds smoothness while perhaps losing some depth in the trade-off. Simple, tactful finish which is neither short nor long, just right with a pretty little sparkle. Slides right on down the chute. 88

Puzelat, Thierry  
Loire, Touraine, Thésée  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2004, \$13.99, 13.5%

Great degree of filminess to it, a still pond of gold, translucency ensures about no shine, cloudiness helps the rims at least stay full. Vividly fat nose of apple juice, lemonade, glazed pie crust, nod towards an oily side, no great pronouncement made here just expressive pear and peach fruit, albeit in a dried/aged fashion. Full-bodied, weight such that it only moves in small increments. Sweet, but not in a youthful manner at all. One can be generous and call the acidity moderate, still, it's like chugging apple juice, only sneaks in peach, apricot, fruit once this has been established. Sweet spices, an OK amount of chalky minerals, basically not providing much of an intellectual workout. Good brute strength during the finish extends it a long while. Wins you over. 88



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

Extremely shiny with only an average golden hue, fades out even before nearing the rims. Good solid burst of oily smoke in the nose, stony yet not quite chalky, taut lemon citrus and grassiness keeps it even more on the closed side, not much expressivity in the pear, apple, peach fruit either, appears caught between being inert or transparent. Full-bodied and broad, not hollow but doesn't come off as dense either, seems to hover near the roof of the mouth. Presents a certain bitterness during the attack, something nutty or herbal, hard to pin down, doesn't feel like it belongs there. Soon enough it turns stonier with a measure of streamwater to freshen it up. Dry lemon and orange citrus dashes keep it on the subdued side. More chomp than bite in the acidity, likelier to bruise than cut. The dull feel runs through the peach, pear, apple, apricot fruit. More curious than intriguing. 88

Dauvissat, Domaine Vincent  
Burgundy, Petit Chablis  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$26.99, 12.5%

Thick enough golden color in the core, moderate shine at best, rims almost fully emptied out of hue. Lots of dried lemon peel in the nose, even more chalkiness, leaves your nostrils feeling serious powdery, mineral shavings, wonderful smokiness, whisper of mint, much to like about the focus in the peach, nectarine, apple scents, lifts like a comet, nothing billowy about it. Medium-bodied, good sturdiness but maybe too much so for the level of the dry peach, apricot, red apple fruit. This leaves the floor entirely ceded to the lemon, lime citrus and mineral powder, resulting in a sandpapery texture. The acidity tends to beat up on the florality, stays minty though. While in no way short, stops precisely on the finish, almost abrupt. Knows what it can do and doesn't push it. 88

Boxler, Albert  
Alsace, Sommerberg, L31E  
Riesling  
2003, \$39.99, 13.0%

Plain golden straw in color, the surface shine accompanied by translucent layering beneath, the hue dissipates towards the rims. For as big as the nose is it has composure and manages to stuff the luscious apricot, peach, nectarine fruit into a bodice, mixes in sweet cinnamon and nutmeg spice as well as orange zest, dollop of petrol, touch of honey, covers all the bases. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, soft and just a bit too pliable, the acidity isn't able to stiffen the rich pear, apricot, peach fruit. Sweet lemon/lime citrus gives it more prettiness but isn't helping with the lack of inherent structure. Honey, OK, check. Lightest of minerality, just not endowed with nuance. Easy to drink, that's it. Could be enough. 88

Blanck, Domaine Paul  
Alsace, Altenbourg  
Gewürztraminer  
2004, \$32.99, 13.5%

Anemic golden color, dull and tends to peter out at the rims, at certain angles develops a greenish cast. Good concentration in the nose, releases well too, admirable nuttiness as well as orange and lemon citrus with a marmalade feel, the flowers are more like oil essence than gaseous musk, offers more stoniness than peach, apricot,

melon fruit scents. Fuller and with more breadth in the mouth, sweeter tangerine and lemon citrus, gives it brighter presence while the nuttiness recedes, displaying a meager grilled, honeyed quality. Even balance in the peach, apricot, pear, apple, melon fruit, no swell so the beginning, middle and end feel the same. Lowish acidity, still stays clean and not too blowsy. Cinnamon and ginger perk up the finish. Too restrained in style. 88

Bellivière, Domaine de  
Loire, Coteaux du Loir, L'Effraie  
Chenin Blanc  
2004, \$20.99, 13.0%

Light amber touch to the dark gold color, not quite sparkling but its clarity combined with the vivid hues makes for a pleasing appearance. Zesty nose of mint, tangerine citrus, lemon-honey, quieter stone and mineral water drops, bends to the will of the apricot, pear, green melon fruit scents, sinks into your nostrils well. Full-bodied, fat but also solid, no jiggle here. Sweet with ginger, cinnamon spices, orange to lemon citrus, mint and golden honey, agreeably forward. Light acidity, doesn't stand much in the way of all that sweetness. Very full apricot, peach, pear, red apple fruit, not fruit-drive but close. Floral, maybe a touch of botrytis, not that much stoniness nor sense of distinct soil. Little difficulty chugging it. 88

Vieilles Pierres (Jean-Jacques Litaud), Domaine des  
Burgundy, Pouilly-Fuissé, La Roche, Vieilles Vignes  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$21.99, 13.0%

Golden hay in color, adequate hue density with more clarity than shine, sticks around to the rims. Oily, acrid nose, smoky and burnt in nature, bracing pineapple, guava, nectarine, peach fruit, grassy, all this enough to obscure any mineral scents. Medium to full-bodied, has an energetic slugger's mentality and a chip on its shoulder. Hot chili peppers, motor oil, mint, glazed piecrust, tangerine juice, lots of disparate elements swirling about here. The acidity has kick and at no point does it turn sweet, even as it is furnished with a round core of apricot, peach, pear fruit. The florality and minerality wait until the penultimate moment to come out. Thick enough finish to stay broadly flavorful. 87

Raimbault, Philippe  
Loire, Sancerre, Les Godons  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

Very clear if not that shiny, instead offers a yellow day-glo hum for color, does drop off at the rims. Good deal of stones and minerals in the nose, gasoline fumes and white smokiness as well as the typical lemon citrus kick, taut nature to the peach, apricot, pear scents, you can hear the fruit skin breaking. Medium-bodied, tough and wiry, wants to earn its terroir "cred" at any cost. As a result, you better be happy with lean flavors of pebbles, stones and minerals 'cause there ain't much more. Prickle in the lemon/lime citrus helps you notice this aspect but gets drowned in mineral water. Bitter character in the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit, gives it brightness but detracts from juiciness and length. The finish is thus clipped some, remains cleanly scrubbed though. Not interested in being accessible. 87

Moines, Domaine aux  
Loire, Savennières  
Chenin Blanc

2003, \$21.99, 15.0%

Full yellow gold with a mild greenish cast, fairly flat and devoid of shine. In the nose there's honey dripped on melon, yellow apple, peach fruit, only a touch of wax or lanolin, more medicinal menthol notes than stone or minerals. Medium-bodied, spicy attack accompanied by raw pie dough accents. Lemon to grapefruit citrus and, at best, mineral water attempt to infuse some freshness. A solid level achieved in the peach, apple, pear fruit department but not as substantial as the nose might suggest. The acidity is there but comes off as blunt more than anything. The honey aspect also a notch lower, allows for a cleaner finish. Soft notes of violets. Not as good nor bad as it might be. 87

Epiré, Château d'  
Loire, Savennières, Cuvée Spéciale  
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$20.99, 14.0%

Pleasingly dark golden color, immaculate transparency and shine. Wool, candle wax, lemon oil, borderline fresh latex paint in the nose, not a lot of stoniness nor peach, apple, apricot scents, broadened a tad by honey notes, takes time to unwind. Full-bodied, dense to the point of turning bottom-heavy, very little sense of movement. The lanolin, beeswax, honey are there yet in a dull way, add more sheer weight than texture or flavor. The acidity coats more like a wet blanket, no edgy qualities. Layers itself thickly on the tongue, eventually releases floral perfume as well as apricot, peach, pear, red apple fruit. As long as you wait it never fully opens up, nags at you that — even allowing for youth — there may not be much to be opened. 87

Cuilleron, Yves  
Rhône, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes  
Viognier

2004, \$23.99, 13.5%

Yellow-brown hay in color, sort of lusterless in appearance, fades a good amount at the rims. Block-like florality in the nose, orange blossom, comes up with some nuttiness, fresher apple, pear, melon fruit gives it lift, ground-up sweet baking spices, too stuffed for nuance. Full-bodied with viscosity to spare, layers itself generously on the tongue without giving up too much spring in its step. One big burst of vanilla cream, just reverb after that. The lemon and tangerine notes are fresh and mostly dry. The nuttiness is still there but to a lesser degree. The acidity plays peek-a-boo, breaks the surface haphazardly and at random. The rich, round core of peach, apricot, mango fruit remains thick but lacks the sweetness to be truly tropical. A lot of a little. 87

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Touraine, Le Buisson Pouilleux  
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

Super-cloudy, like a pool they forgot to put chlorine in for a month, at least this adds to the luminescent glow. Oxidized, heavy feel to the nose, sinks before you can register many scents, at turns smells like a lemon vodka tonic, or raw dough coated dried lemons, too heavy to get herbal, the apricot to peach fruit too heavy to escape muteness, it's just... heavy. As if it would be a surprise, in the mouth it is full-bodied and oxidized to near immobility. More vanilla and pie dough flavors than you'd ever expect, tastes like a bottle of Real Lemon® got poured into it too. Cinnamon, nutmeg spice thrown in, the one saving grace is that the

acidity is strong enough to keep it dry and make a plausible attempt at focus. Very distinctive, no doubt, but leaves you asking to what end? 87

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Touraine, L'Ormeau des Deux Croix  
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 11.0%

No lack of clarity in the golden hay color but so lifeless and devoid of shine it could be taken for filmy, comes up with a green tinge, loses hue density at the rims. Broad, blockish nose of apple, pear, melon fruit, lemony, some twig/leaf shades, chalky enough to be dusty, lacks staying power. In the mouth it builds to a considerable level of density, able to saturate your mouth pores without becoming heavy. Has a honeyed feel without being truly sweet, maybe more like beeswax or botrytis. Because it's not deeply sweet it pulls up some, even if not directly attributable to any real acidic punch. Derives some nervousness from how it tightens up, much to its benefit. Lemon citrus like sour candy, stings the tongue. The fruit is a touch blurry, peach, pear, apple, nectarine. Appears to be building into a bigger statement then loses confidence and stammers. 87

Carillon et Fils, Domaine Louis  
Burgundy, Puligny-Montrachet, Les Perrières  
Chardonnay

2003, \$94.99, 13.5%

Very clear, if on the dull side, pale yellow gold core, fades perceptibly as it nears the rims. Creamy mint, orange sorbet, yeasty, has a lightly poached feel in the peach, apricot, melon fruit, a little too thick and viscous to really parse out the parts to enjoy separately. Even creamier in the mouth, full-bodied and downy, mix in the orange and lemon sorbet flavors and you get sherbet. Ginger, cinnamon spice blends with the apple, pear, peach fruit below to provide a pie feel. The acidity is as dead as a doornail so the wine tends to just lay there. Little minerality, the "sense of place" not really there. Keeps rolling along due to its fatness but not consciously nor with a clear direction. 87

Baudry, Domaine Bernard  
Loire, Chinon, La Croix Boissée  
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$29.99, 13.0%

Kind of flat golden straw color, nothing to complain about yet nothing to really gaze upon either, empties out around the rims. Quiet nose, not much going on, mild spice touch to the pear, apple, peach fruit, adds in squeezed lemon, floral dust, let's just call it clean and leave it at that. Light to medium-bodied, the lemon/lime citrus and chalk/white stone aspects hit you first and after that there's more laconic florality and sweet herbs. Stable but not particularly strong peach, pear, apple fruit, ripe enough but its clarity blurred by a curious creaminess. Not consistently bitter but has a few moments. The acidity is pretty good, alas the raw material is not strong enough to take full advantage. Starts to leave a chalky film behind by the finish. Nice enough but needs that extra gear. 87

Vieilles Pierres (Jean-Jacques Litaud), Domaine des  
Burgundy, Mâcon-Vergisson  
Chardonnay

2003, \$13.49, 13.0%

Simple yellow straw color, clear with a slow semi-translucent ripple, dims at the rims. Honeyed nose, strong lemon component, oil and wet stones, enough cut to add

pineapple and nectarine fruit to the apricot, peach base, shows good crackle and pop. Medium-bodied, develops a mildly viscous texture yet has the acidity to stretch it out and add speed to its pacing. The lemon, tangerine citrus has eye-opening zest and pairs attractively with the underlying stoniness as well as its inkling of grassiness. Does push this to the edge of a slightly burning sensation but softens a bit via the apricot, peach, pear fruit. Bitter on the finish, though. Seems to switch gears often. 86

Michel & Fils, Domaine Louis  
Burgundy, Chablis, Montmain  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$46.99, 12.5%

Average yellow straw color, fair degree of translucency, nothing remarkable about it but one has to say something, no? Vanilla cream and cherry pie make for a curious initial impression in the nose, while there is a saline and mineral aspect to it remains soft and borderline squishy, this even with the simple apricot, peach scents. Full-bodied, drier than expected in the mouth with a brick wall feel to the acidity, you kind of slam into it rather than be penetrated by it. A lot more stone, clay, earth notes, at times herbaceous enough that it turns noticeably bitter. The meager apple, pear, peach fruit is not offering much relief, cedes considerable ground to the sour lemon citrus and herbs. Has lots of weight left on the finish but your mouth is puckering so strongly by then all you want to do is swallow. Starts off well and falls apart from there. 86

Bellivière, Domaine de  
Loire, Jasnières, Les Rosiers  
Chenin Blanc  
2004, \$35.99, 13.0%

Smooth golden hue, neither too dark nor too light, mildly translucent with duller rims. Honeyed, floral nose, heavy enough to sink down and not get up again, lazy peach, apricot, nectarine, melon fruit, mint, nothing leaner apparent to combat these aspects. Full-heavy and sweet too in the mouth, the sugar concentration even more noticeable here, honey and pie dough notes accompany the unrepentantly voluptuous apricot, peach, melon, pear, red apple fruit. The lack of acidity leaves it without a sail in a calm sea. The lemon and lime citrus comes across as a soft drink flavoring. Very little in terms of stone, mineral or other terroir-based flavors. Has some tang, not devoid of brightness but complexity is not even in the picture here. Surprising for its relative lack of cut. 86

Dureuil-Janthial, Domaine Vincent  
Burgundy, Bourgogne Aligoté  
Aligoté  
2003, \$14.99, 13.0%

Full yellow glow to it with a semi-greenish tinge, mid-level shine, adequate push through the rims. The nose is sweetly spicy at first before dropping down in the register to creamy vanilla and orange sorbet swirl, pineapple, peach, nectarine scents, mint, not much else to find. Medium-bodied, not fluffy but the acidity could use a kick in the rear. The creamy feel must come from somewhere, so why not finger the oak? More of that lemon to orange daiquiri thing going on, watch the ice melt in your glass. Mint, garden herbs and clove spice out in the open, ixnay on any stoniness. Less tropical here but no less sweet, the apricot, peach, pear, nectarine flavors come with the beginning of a dried fruit concentration. 85

## FRANCE ROSE

Cotat, Pascal  
Loire, Sancerre, Chavignol Rosé  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$29.99, 12.5%

Intense glow in the ruby to zinc orange color, distorts your vision while remaining clear on the whole, mild loss around the rims. In the nose the ripeness of the strawberry, raspberry, cherry fruit breaks through its muscular presentation, slightly sweetening things before the sour lemon and mineral scents yank it in the opposite direction, not much other evolution here yet. Full-bodied, the sweetness of that cherry, strawberry, apple, pear fruit makes the first impression in the mouth too, Great deal of acidity in the mix, not to point where you feel parched nor all sliced up. Lemon to grapefruit citrus still more sour than sweet but more of the latter in play. More floral as well. As it warms it suggests traces of sweet basil and cocoa. Big and brash but runs out of new things to say fairly quickly. 88

Charles & Fils, Domaine François  
Burgundy, Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune, Rosé  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$11.99, 12.5%

Yellow-orange tinge infuses the more generally pink color, mostly transparent with an attractive shine. Tart, herbaceous nose, slaps you with more grass, stone, lemon pit scents than cherry, strawberry, red apple fruit, decidedly mute presence [err, absence?]. Medium-bodied, fairly clean if with a bitter, almost metallic, ring to it. Sweet enough raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit during the attack, then dries out and does a slow fade on the way to the finish line. As it becomes more sour it's nice that chocolaty suggestions appear in counter-balance. Noticeable lemon component too, OK acidity, can't shake the grassiness. Good length, can't work up the energy to complain. 85

## FRANCE SPARKLING

Billecart-Salmon  
Champagne, Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart Brut  
Chardonnay  
1996, \$99.99, 12.0%

Full golden color throughout, extremely tiny bubbles swirl about as if in a snowstorm, very active. Lightly breadly in the nose, more piecrust than honey, more composure than brightness in the lemon notes, subdued minerality too, tightly wound core of peach, pear, apple scents too, OK, everything about it is polished and well-schooled. Medium-bodied, very dry, stops short of turning dusty. The yeast and dough held to a murmur, much more intent on expressing chalk, white mineral powder, flint and then a concentrated push forward of orange, lemon citrus, sparkly and zesty and very light on its feet. There's enough going on that it might be easy to miss the core of peach, apricot, red apple fruit which is really gagged and bound, adding more of an anchor than flavor. Prolonged finish, the finely grained pétillance keeps it going and going for an amazingly long amount of time. Seems still more an exercise in power than elegance, yet plenty of both. 94

Margaine, A.  
Champagne, Premier Cru Special Club Blanc de Blancs  
Brut  
Chardonnay

1998, \$48.99, 12.0%

Very pale golden hay, falls in between dull and shiny, displays a very thick core of bubble beads, runs as if trapped in a clear pipe down the middle. Crisp green apple, pear, peach fruit scents in the nose, great for how despite its ripeness it fights to hold its shape and contours, notes of golden honey, the lemon more juice than zest, the minerals lack edge and end up as a powder cloud, good length. Medium to full-bodied, creamy and smooth attack, evokes a guess that it has seen a good deal of malolactic fermentation, comes across more as "sec" than "brut." Again, the lemon and lime is juicy, no real bite. However, the minerality is graciously elevated and capable of lending it a wonderful chalky grit. The acidity is strong but in a confidently blowy way, not trying to impress. Dry but very deep peach, apricot, pear, yellow melon fruit a constant presence. The foaminess continues through the finish, keeps it way active. (Disgorged Juillet 2005) 91

Egly-Ouriet

Champagne, Grand Cru Viellissement Prolongé Extra-Brut Pinot Noir

NV, \$57.99, 12.5%

Yellow to orange colored, concentrated at certain angles, dilute at others, does drop off a lot near the rims. There's an initial yeastiness in the nose then very lemony, hints at lactose before veering into peach, pear, apricot fruit, smooth and pretty damn fast paced, the honey and raw dough makes a momentary stab but the speed is all it needs. Full-bodied, mostly due to its aggressive foaminess, dry as a biscuit in the sun, the lemon and lime citrus, err, dry. Also has this, uhh, dryness in the minerality, dryness in the stoniness. The acidity is stout as hell and as a result lends it a certain... dryness. The powdery peach, apple, apricot fruit ends up, despite its exuberance, dry. It's dry and it's good. (Lot 11, disgorged Mai 2005 (70 months)) 90

Billecart-Salmon

Champagne, Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Chardonnay

NV, \$61.99, 12.0%

Thinly spread core of beads with good activity, white straw in color at best, clear mostly due to the lack of hue. Fresh and fairly airy nose, delightful lift with green apple, peach, pear scents of equal depth, a touch of minerality but chooses a streamlined and much less complicated appeal. Medium to full-bodied, heavy duty mousse, foamy as all get-out, like waves crashing on the beach. Super-dry, chalky and stony to being about arid, when combined with the rugged acidity it would leave your tongue parched if not for the foam. The focus in the lemon citrus saps any latent juice, eschews broad complexity in favor of doing what it does superlatively. The peach, apricot, nectarine, red apple fruit squats like Buddha in the middle of I-95 yet somehow doesn't attract much of your attention. Leaves you with the impression that it needs more time to learn what it wants to be. 90

Egly-Ouriet

Champagne, Grand Cru Brut Rosé

Blend

NV, \$53.99, 12.5%

Yellow-pink in color, presents a single, loosely aggregated bead in the middle, the hue and bubbles thin out appreciably at the rims. Brisk nose of dried flowers, lemon peel, a cloud of minerals and then cherry, peach, pear fruit, so firm that it doesn't show any desire to move, just closes

in on itself. Medium-bodied, if the nose seems closed the palate is twice that. Exhibits some sweetness during the attack via some cherry, strawberry, pear, red apple fruit and then a couple of bursts of orange, lemon citrus. Mineral powder provides a light and pliable coating for the tongue. Smooths out by the mid-palate but never quite gets sleek, this most likely occurs simply because there's so little showing. For a non-vintage Champagne, infanticide. 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay. (Lot 49, disgorged Juillet 2005 (37 months)) 88

Bordelet, Eric

Normandy, Poiré Authentique Sparkling Pear Cider Fruit (Non-Grape)

2004, \$12.99, 4.0%

Fairly full golden hue, no beads but appreciable foam on the surface, average shine. Very ripe nose of, duh, pear with intense vanilla pudding and rice pudding scents, cinnamon spice, overstuffs your nostrils. Just as full and rich in the mouth, even more so due to the voluptuous foaminess. The vanilla and almost white chocolate flavors are lower here yet noticeable throughout. Produces hints of sweet lemon or tangerine citrus. Too dense to really be deemed clean but awfully fun and extremely long on the finish. 88

Bordelet, Eric

Normandy, Sydre Doux Sparkling Apple Cider Fruit (Non-Grape)

2003, \$10.99, 4.0%

Full gold to amber in hue, minimal foam on the surface, good shine, its core is dark enough to highlight hue loss around the rims. Very concentrated nose of apple fruit with a borderline dried fruit character in addition to a caramel coating and glazed piecrust accents. Medium-bodied, the caramel, toffee and vanilla flavors all swirled together into dessert form. Bottom-heavy, the concentration here renders it just about immobile. Its large scale never relents, while this makes for a big splash on the finish, "finesse" is not a descriptor which comes to mind. 86

## ITALY RED

Strologo, Vignaiolo Silvano

Marche, Rosso Conero, Julius

Montepulciano

2003, \$14.99, 13.5%

Fully saturated red-magenta to purple color, absolutely zero loss of hue intensity at the rims, vast darkness hides its credible clarity. Sturdy nose of chalky, stony soil, grapefruit rind, concentrated sweetness in the cherry, plum, currant fruit, touch of tar and animal hide, turns stinky in a good way that balances the fruit. Has the firmness to achieve a full body in the mouth, squares its shoulders, feet spread apart, but not in an aggressively offputting way. Has excellent tannins, adds a filmy coating throughout the mouth that doesn't dampen its ability to move forward at a measured pace. Still maintains that sweet core of red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit, enough bottom to avoid an overly candied feel. Mildly earthy, shows more grapefruit and dried flowers, the acidity sparks the finish, strong grip. Ugly label. 89

Morandina, Azienda Agricola La

Piedmont, Barbera d'Asti

Barbera

2004, \$14.99, 13.5%

Dark, saturated purple core nears opacity, big glow in the fat red-magenta rims. Dense, large in scale dose of plum, cherry, currant fruit, practically immobile, ably accompanied by lemon/orange citrus and minerals, allusions at best towards earth or leather, very focused for its size. Full-bodied, settles in swiftly with a fair amount of authority. More cocoa and milk chocolate than you'd think, pairs up well its orange citrus hints. Brawny acidity gives it a semi-rough appeal, gets it lurching some. Even with its density you still get tartness in the red cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit. Full finish but you're glad when it ends. 89

Mayr-Nusser, Heinrich  
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Riserva  
Lagrein

2001, \$17.99, 13.0%

Shady crimson to purple in color, tight core turns easily to brick red and then a light orange around the meniscus. The nose isn't tightly wound per se but no words wasted in how it delivers the abundant tar and earth as well as lower orange pekoe tea, dried flowers and a pleasingly "just there" core of red cherry and blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, the first few sips just after pulling the cork sends you scrambling for the decanter. Hard to predict but there's even more sharp-toned tar, leather and animal fur in the mouth than the nose, lick the driveway. The orange citrus turns more to white grapefruit here, sharpening the blade further. Tannins are broad in scope and strong of jaw. As in the nose, the cherry, currant fruit maintains a consistent presence without highs nor lows. Takes some time to hit its stride but no worries about it finishing the race. 89

Canneto, Azienda Agricola  
Tuscany, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Riserva  
Sangiovese

2000, \$24.99, 13.5%

The core is not quite violet, more so garnet to scarlet, razor thin orange rims, good clarity throughout, sufficiently dark. In the nose there's a light medicinal quality which highlights the herbaceousness, good dose of mineral earth too, then leather and lemon peel, firm contours in the cherry, currant, cranberry fruit scents, overall unforced and not overripe. Medium to full-bodied, its acidity firms it up enough to take on additional density. The muscularity extends through the red cherry, currant fruit, moves with determination. Vague floral touches, pinch of lemon and then elevating earthiness, successively drier. While it is the acidity that strikes you first it eventually comes across as more tannic in spirit. Spicy, the fruit gains in concentration before the finish rather than dropping off. Masculine enough that it is not fully balanced, but perhaps for the better. 89

Gabutti (Franco Boasso), Azienda Agricola  
Piedmont, Barolo, Gabutti  
Nebbiolo

2001, \$41.99, 14.0%

Trim red-violet core, blood red rims with an ochre tinge. Ripe, juicy nose of heavy vanilla cream, toffee, cranberry, red cherry and blackberry fruit, herbs and flowers, light pine sap, extremely primary and yet light of step. Medium-bodied, ultra-smooth vanilla ice cream texture, tangerine to blood orange citrus, floral powdering, pine cone, leather, the oak overpowers any more rustic qualities. The acidity presents itself much quicker but it is the tannins which dry out the finish. The oak make it smoother than it would be otherwise, supports and frames the raspberry, blackberry,

red cherry fruit. Sweet, simple and eminently approachable. 88

Foradori, Azienda Agricola  
Trentino, Teroldego Rotaliano  
Teroldego

2003, \$19.99, 12.5%

Fair degree of glow in the ruby-purple core, more red-magenta at the rims, plenty fat. The nose is leathery, this stunted by a burst of what appears to be oak toast, no lack of herbaceousness and alludes to bell pepper, the minerals and smoke lend tang to the thick currant, wild berry scents. Medium-bodied, firm tannic structure gives it punch and favors the herbal, mineral, stony side of things. Leather, animal fur and tar continue the trend and whatever oak toast which may be there is swiftly worn away. Peppery punch in the red currant, red cherry fruit brings out a sour dimension. Super-chewy finish, likable nod towards rusticity. 88

Poggionotte  
Sicilia

Nero d'Avola

2003, \$12.99, 13.0%

Scarlet red to purple around the core, fairly clear, good concentration in the orange rims. Brisk white grapefruit in the nose, tobacco ash, powdered stone, dried grasses, presents a mildly surprising stoniness, furnishes the expected rich cherry, blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, the acidity provides a nice center to guide the rest of the show. The white grapefruit here has a lemon sidekick. More grassy than floral, here displays a leathery side to boot. Smooths out and sheds weight before the cherry, mixed berry fruit clicks, this removes most of any residual sweetness it may have had. Touch of caramel as it passes through the center, short-lived. Pleasing for its composure. 87

Notaio, Cantine del  
Basilicata, Aglianico del Vulture, Il Repertorio  
Aglianico

2003, \$22.99, 14.5%

Bright red-ruby color, slight orange tinge, has great concentration around the rims. In the nose the florality does a good job of adding lift under the noticeably ripe and jammy raspberry and cherry fruit, mint, sweet orange juice, fresh mountain air scents abound, very little earthy or rustic about it. Medium-bodied, a little tougher and more muscular in the mouth, has white grapefruit zest and enough minerality to combat the doses of mocha chocolate and florality. The acidity makes a credible showing and by the end the tannins accrue to allow the same to be said of them. Still, no denying the abundant sweetness in the cranberry, red cherry, black raspberry fruit. Produces a momentary clove, baked ham edge. More weight than flavor left by the finish. 87

Ceci, Cantine  
Emilia-Romagna, La Luna  
Lambrusco

2004, \$13.99, 11.0%

Please note at the outset that this is a slightly fizzy but quite dry red table wine. Ahem. The color is pure, utterly impenetrable black, hard to gauge the rims because the surface is filled with longlasting pink magenta foam. The nose is like Noah took two of every berry on earth and loaded them into an ark called your wine glass, beneath all the fruit lurks the soul of an earthy and gamey wine.

Medium-bodied, while there is not visible bubble beads in the mouth the foaminess comes through loud and clear and lifts any downward pressure on the tongue. Dry and surprisingly tannic, this aspect adds a measure of tartness to the cranberry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit as well as sharpens whatever lemon citrus notes may be there. At moments seems to show some stoniness but not the game notes found in the nose. Fairly good length considering how parched it leaves your palate. An interesting wine that may be best suited as a "change of pace" aperitif with cheese and crackers. 87

## ITALY WHITE

Ferrara, Benito  
Campania, Greco di Tufo, Vigna Cicogna  
Greco  
2004, \$21.49, 13.5%

Real deep gold to amber color, has nice clarity given its richness, faded rims the sole regret. Very light nose of orange/lemon citrus, clove-led spice, melon, pear and apricot fruit, gains depth as it sits in the glass and warms. Full-bodied, super-smooth and fluid, glides forward fairly effortlessly. Powerful clove, ginger, nutmeg spice, almost like a cookie. The tangerine, orange citrus remains juicy and sweet, contributes to its fluid feel. The spiciness extends through the pear, red apple, peach, apricot fruit. Has enough minerality to make a good faith attempt at increased cleanliness. The acidity nothing special but not particularly missed either. Wins the day based on its vividness. 90

Firriato, Casa Vinicola  
Sicilia, Altavilla della Corte  
Grillo  
2004, \$13.49, 13.5%

Shiny glow in the yellow gold color, fine clarity without crossing over to hueless transparency. Toasty nose, lemon oil fumes, floral paste, has semi-tropical pineapple, nectarine, peach, passion fruit scents but short-lived, turns surprisingly watery as it sits. Full-bodied in how it spreads out and expands through the mouth, not necessarily in terms of weight nor density. Creamier here with vanilla tones, toast, clove spice and orange pekoe tea notes, all the more surprising since the wine is done in 100% stainless steel and sees no oak. Lime to lemon citrus, nothing shy about the florality, lots of perfume, almost gaudy. Rich apricot, peach, pear, melon flavors suggests a poached fruit dimension. Not over the top but not exactly a model of restraint either. 87

## ITALY SPARKLING

Bisol  
Veneto, Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Crede Brut  
Prosecco  
NV, \$13.99, 11.5%

Very light and pale, virtually colorless straw hue, loses much potential color due to its shininess, very thin bubble beads and widely spaced. The nose is comprised of mineral dust, lemon peel, peach, apricot and green apple fruit, only some light creaminess, very soft touch. Medium-bodied, only possesses a light fizz in the mouth, as a result it has a noticeably creamy entry before it then segues into a much chalkier mouth feel of mineral and stone dust. The lemon citrus is very dry too, the acidity moves with unchained power and fairly shackles the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit. Has good length given the paucity of

flavor, cleanliness its primary virtue. Possesses consistent weight too. Very good, if lacking in nuanced dimension. 87

## GERMANY WHITE

Christmann, Weingut A.  
Pfalz, Estate QbA AP #1  
Riesling  
2004, \$19.99, 12.0%

Steady glow in the yellow gold color, aided by a green tinge, completely immaculate and integrated appearance. Intense nose of incredible penetrating power, quite smoky and oily, the stoniness has a powdery feel, fried lemons, dried flower petals, tiny core of peach, apricot, melon scents fit like a fist inside the glove of the other elements. Full-bodied, displays a great deal of extract, intensity and energy, simply rushes into the mouth. A heightened pucker is achieved via the lemon, grapefruit citrus and liquefied minerals, spicy enough to almost suggest red hot peppers. Underneath all the crashing waves there's something like a vanilla creamy smoothness. However, this gets beaten down by the biting pineapple, nectarine, apricot, peach fruit. Smoky and chalky by the finish, the acidity still going strong and slashing left and right. Not all that harmoniously integrated but a helluva ride. 91

Spreitzer, Weingut Josef  
Rheingau, Hattenheimer, Wisselbrunnen, Spätlese  
Troocken Charta AP #25  
Riesling  
2004, \$35.99, 12.0%

Quite shiny golden color, dulled ever so slightly by a green touch, still has vibrant surface sparkle throughout, hue drops off at the rims. Roughly broken mineral chards, fried lemons, white and pink grapefruit, tangerine, a big citrus soup in the nose, touch oily too, clear outlines in the peach, melon, apricot, nectarine scents, no lack of aggression in its presentation. In the mouth it's more of the same — sour and zesty grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus keeps it bouncing around the mouth, enlivens the florality as well. This active presence casts a shadow over any underlying stoniness or minerality making these more minor factors. The acidity is powerful if not keenly edged, certainly dry from start to finish. In spite of the dryness it takes on a tropical character in the pineapple, papaya, nectarine and apricot fruit. As energetic as it is, not entirely clumsy and remains quite deliciously drinkable. The price is a question mark, though. 90

Schaefer, Weingut Willi  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Estate QbA AP #2  
Riesling  
2004, \$18.99, 9.0%

Completely transparent, the pale white hay color barely earns the title, somehow thick enough to distort light and eliminate any chance at shininess. In the nose there's evident ripeness in the apricot, cherry, peach fruit which is supported by gingerbread, lemon drop and wildflower scents, right now its paws a bit too big for its body, lurches some even if in an innocent manner. Full-bodied, pretty much the same story in the mouth as soft pudginess obscures the strong bones underneath. More space granted to the white stone, chalk and lemon/lime citrus which helps it appear drier than suspected. The acidity is as focused as it can get at this stage of its evolution. The red apple, pear, apricot, peach fruit is sweet and sugary enough to allude to dried fruit. Produces some licorice or

mint shades which add to its general appeal. More clarity and it would be top-drawer shit. 89

Schaefer, Weingut Willi

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Graacher, Himmelreich  
Kabinett AP #13

Riesling

2004, \$21.99, 8.0%

Dilute white straw color, soft green tinge, very little shine if any, translucent shimmer dominates below the surface. Full nose, blurry without distinct scents, a mush of cherries, lemon pie, vanilla ice cream, maybe some mint, not really "fresh" just youthful, generous and soft peach and apricot scents. Full-bodied, more of the same in the mouth, a touch of rubber but still bare minimal threshold of minerals or stones. This leaves it dependent on that peach, pear, apricot fruit for both body and flavor. Helped out here by tangerine and lemon/lime citrus but not getting much support from the so-so acidity. Can't say it lifts much but by the finish most of the weight is pushing up against the roof of your mouth and not your tongue. Not much length but not empty finish either. Bitter twist at the end. Would like to revisit it. On someone else's nickel. 87

## AUSTRIA WHITE

Knoll, Weingut Emmerich

Wachau, Loibner, Ried Loibenberg, Smaragd

Riesling

2004, \$47.99, 13.0%

Has some translucency in the basic yellow gold color, has a green edge at certain angles, not the strongest rims but on the whole holds it together. Has weight in the nose but not in the way which bogs it down, has white pepper and pea scents which recall more Grüner than Riesling, grapefruit citrus, stone and bleached minerals, the clarity in each scent extends through the pineapple, pear, apple fruit side, gotta like its cut. Full-bodied like a runner with weights strapped around her ankles, moves assuredly but not at the fastest speed possible. Likable angularity without unnecessarily being harsh. Has a prickly heat nature to it, like you're drinking it in a sauna, zesty grapefruit and lemon citrus, minerals, iodine, even the flowers come off as edgy. Spicy and at moments oily, the acidity likes body contact and hits you hoping you'll hit back. Nothing wrong with the peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit, just this isn't the primary focus. Watch your hand because it will be refilling your glass even as you hesitate in trying to understand it. 90

## SPAIN RED

Unión de Cosecheros de Labastida, Sociedad Cooperativa  
Rioja, Castillo Labastida Crianza

Tempranillo

2001, \$11.99, 14.0%

The spotless red-purple core gleams on the surface with plenty of depth below. becomes a rich brick red for very broad rims. Wonderful "Rioja" nose of vanilla powder, cedar, orange peel, oak toast and super-ripe cherry, raspberry fruit, big bear hug of your nostril hairs, starting to show raisin notes already, menthol, luxurious. Full-bodied, puts the acidity on display early so it can pretty much cast it aside and bask in the heavy vanilla cream, spice, cedar, orange peel and all of that cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Does actually turn drier with each sip, yet this somehow only brings out more of a dried fruit

All contents are copyright 2006 by Marc Hanes. All rights reserved.  
Reproduction in any format without written prior permission is prohibited.

character rather than staunch the fruit altogether. Soft, stretches out like warm pulled taffy, too lavish to have a precise ending. Will prove simple to many but in terms of basic pleasure it's a winner. 91

Ochoa, Viñedos y Bodegas

Navarra, Graciano & Garnacha

Blend

2004, \$8.99, 13.0%

Rich shine in the violet to dark ruby color, just a little more pure red at the rims but absolutely fully hued. Gracious sour bite relieves a good deal of weight in the nose, limbers up the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry scents, non-intrusive herbaceousness also gives it some lift, same for the lemon spritz, stone touches, honest and without a lot of makeup. Medium-bodied, fluid but with a long gait, you wait in between steps. Elevated stoniness and mildly brighter lemon to white grapefruit citrus, less herbal but it lingers. All this helps keep the candied feel in the raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit like a lollipop than seem too liquidly sugary. Comes off more acidic than tannic but neither a major player, yet never sluggish either. Big snap on the finish, crackles in the mouth, not that willing to let you relax, wants to dance the night away. 50% Graciano, 50% Garnacha. 88

Borsao, Bodegas

Campo de Borja, Tres Picos

Grenache

2004, \$10.99, 14.5%

Thick ruby-violet color, consistent from core to rims, warm glow to it, as dark as possible without being opaque. Dense and fairly sweet nose, the spiced feel to the plum, blackberry, black cherry scents add to the baked pie character, displays more florality than leather or earth notes, the lack of herbaceousness contributes to the lack of lift. Full-bodied, even though the wine has no exposure to oak there are apparent clove, caramel, butter cream flavors. At the same time it offers a huge burst of white grapefruit. The florality gets ratcheted up a few notches too, much more perfume. While large in scale, the black cherry, plum, blackberry fruit is not excessively sweet, finds enough balance to move forward. Mild grittiness, hard to attribute it to the tannins though. Not embarrassed by its size. 88

Falset-Marcà, Agrícola

Montsant, Ètim

Blend

2003, \$9.99, 13.5%

Extremely consistent from core to the rims in its red-ruby color, barely dark enough to count as violet, perhaps a touch more red at the very outer rims. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit scents feel squeezed to perform, causes it to feel leaner, more earth and stones find their way in, grilled meats too, not especially long presence. Medium-bodied, suggests a moment of raisinated sweetness initially, then the red currant, cherry, raspberry fruit peters out in favor of lemon tang and stoniness. Appears to possess more acidity than tannins, keeps it on its toes and dry. Vague momentary breeze of floral perfume. Not as overdone as the vintage might suggest, almost leaves you wishing it had more depth in the fruit. Delivers a spicy kick at the final moment. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Carignan, Tempranillo, Syrah. 87

Ramírez, Bodegas  
Rioja, Ramírez de la Piscina Crianza  
Tempranillo

2001, \$13.99, 13.0%

Attractive richness in the scarlet-purple color, some brightness surfaces as well, more red at the well-filled out rims. Great deal of creamy vanilla in the nose, spice too, light tree bark and fallen leaves, basic cherry, blackberry fruit, nothing complex here but very full. Medium-bodied, spicy with a vague peppery kick that doesn't last long in the face of the sweet cherry, blackberry, plum fruit. The tannins possess stronger dampening power than you'd think from all the sweetness, as the tongue dries out it becomes more susceptible to herbaceousness and earthiness. Oaky here too but not as extreme as in the nose, less cream and more toast and mint. Remains amply full through the mid-palate and on to the finish. No complexity, good flavors. 86

### AUSTRALIA RED

Ringbolt  
Western Australia, Margaret River  
Cabernet Sauvignon

2003, \$12.99, 14.5%

No cloudiness but pushes opacity in the crimson red to purple core, zero loss at the rims which are all heavy blood red in color. Huge amount of dill in the nose, some chocolate and caramel but beyond that not crazy oaky, instead some metallic iron and earth accents, the herbaceousness fights the currant, plum, cherry fruit scents to a standstill. Medium to full-bodied, the sappy sweet raspberry, cherry fruit here beats the dill to the punch by a hair, allowing you to enjoy the former first. The tannins are powdery and not fully natural in feel but not enough so to screw things up. Touch of bell pepper at least pairs well with the dill. Meaty in texture and flavor, has leather and brown earth flavors as well, definitely ends up tasting like Cabernet Sauvignon. Has a floral side as well, somewhat surprising. No real strong citrus, maybe an odd showing of white grapefruit. Not super-smooth, benefits from this. Has you sitting on the fence until you decide, aww screw it, and like it. 87

### AUSTRALIA WHITE

RockBare  
South Australia, McLaren Vale  
Chardonnay

2004, \$15.99, 13.0%

Simple golden straw color, lacks concentration, vaguely roiled if overall clear, average shine. Floral nose, bountiful lemon to orange citrus, a bit powdery in texture in spite of the juicy and tangy pineapple, peach, apricot, mango fruit scents, lots of vanilla cream, exactly what you expect and not too over-the-top. Full-bodied, imbued with a swift enough dissolve to avoid being cloyingly sweet or too heavy. This not really from any apparent acidity and it certainly shows a lot of alcoholic heat from the start while also feeling the hands of winemaking manipulation. That said, the apricot, peach, pear, pineapple flavors are vivid and it is very spicy. Has oak toast, vanilla powder, ginger all in spades. Not horrible but suspect it coulda, shoulda been a lot better. 84

### NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Culley  
Marlborough  
Sauvignon Blanc

2005, \$11.99, 12.5%

Light white to yellow straw in color, transparent and without the kind of shine which would make up for this. While there's a modicum of sour herbs and jalapeno pepper in the nose it's mostly sweet pink grapefruit and pear, peach fruit, more steely/metallic than stony, fills your nostrils rather than opt for maximal penetration. Medium-bodied, spicy attack from its high degree of chili pepper but overall it remains on the sweeter side, all pink grapefruit, tangerine and lime. More chalkiness here but never gonna be a major factor. Plenty of zip and zest in the pineapple, papaya, gooseberry, nectarine, red apple fruit, keeps it cranking along through an extended finish. Too ripe for any herbaceousness to become a distraction. Uncomplicated fun. 90