

The Hanes Wine Review, February 2013 Edition

Hanes has been thinking more these days about the future of wine retailing. He has now worked in three very distinct environments, Manhattan, New York; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Elizabeth, New Jersey. New York City still seems to be able to move a decent amount of “esoteric” and generally high end wines, still enough wealth around to keep most of the boats afloat. He stopped waiting for the pendulum to swing in the other direction, NYC may have permanently become an enclave of the rich and the rich alone, those who can spend \$16 on a glass of Dolcetto and such. Sure, there’s a market in NYC for mainstream brands but new boutique wine stores keep opening every month with focuses on “natural wines,” they all seem to be chasing the same customer segment. Hmmmm.

Charlotte was from 2008 through 2012, and likely remains, a Big Cab town with little interest in European wines. There’s wealth but also an ability to be satisfied by very simple and easy to grasp wines, say for example Apothic Red or 14 Hands Merlot. Money does not correlate to “urbane sophistication” and Hanes sees Charlotte as fairly representative of a lot of the country – they don’t want to overthink wine, even though they like it well enough it’s just a beverage, not a lifestyle choice. A retailer is going to be successful competing on price but also on marketing appeal and making the customer feel savvy and smart as well as sort of “warm and fuzzy.” But the retailer needs to do so in a quick and easy manner, no lecturing, inundation with information, or talk of “terroir.” People are increasingly health conscious but there’s no real connection to (a) the role of wine in general health and/or (b) how grape growing and winemaking can vastly differ and either contribute to a healthier planet or not do so. Buying organic groceries resonates, but not so much organic wine.

Elizabeth is definitely down market but the way wholesaling works in New Jersey, the whole state is in what may be considered a “race to the bottom” with *everyone* competing mainly on price, charging cost for wines such as Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio or booze such as Johnnie Walker Black and hoping to eke out a profit on the back end via the odious “retail incentive program” checks attached to many large brand items. Customers literally seem willing to drive 20 minutes to save fifty cents a bottle. Crazy inability to see the big economic picture and run the numbers on gas, time spend, etc. And most retailers seem to have to play along, especially as all the major players and chain stores which sell wine are all-in on undercutting the competition. As more stores adopt the same go-to-market strategy things will likely get more desperate until the losers in the “race” get killed. You have to make money to stay in business, it really is that simple. There are not many customers looking for niche product, maybe those who do buy their stuff in NYC. But the mass of New Jersey customers appear to be brand driven and easily enough pleased, more apt to play it safe than experiment.

“Trading down” still appears prevalent among all customer segments and quantity of items purchased seems down (e.g., in the past Customer A would have bought a case of Wine X and aged 10 bottles, now Customer A buys five bottles and ages 3-4 bottles). The number of marketing based “flash brands” remains high, it would be fun to make a list of all the “cutesy” brands flooding the market today and see how many still exist in five years. It looks to Hanes as if everyone is hurting, suppliers, wholesalers and retailers. But as the party closest to the end customer, and thus arguably most vulnerable to sudden market fluctuations and changes, the retailer often takes the most risk, afraid to under stock and miss out on sales she is unsure will ever materialize. Hanes would be sweating bullets right now if he owned a retail store.

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This month’s big winners... Ideally, Hanes would try every wine Eric Texier makes. Please send cash now to make this happen. In the interim, tried the 2011 Côtes du Rhône Brézème blanc from the Roussanne grape and it was delish, nice fruit, honey, spices and excellent supporting acidity. Absolutely worth the \$24 paid. Hanes used to enjoy himself some Neyers wines back in the day (especially the Pato Zinfandel) but then the winery fell off the radar or something. Anyway, tried their 2010 “Sage Canyon” Rhône style red blend and it brought back memories of well crafted, fruit driven Californian wines which didn’t force things too much. A relatively good deal at \$24 or so. Has been since the 2007 vintage that Hanes sucked down some Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand so time to once more try this “iconic” wine and see if the \$26 spent is justified. While expecting to not enjoy the 2012 version, it really was pretty good and while not the most soulful experience it definitely displays polish and a certain classiness. Easy to see why the wine maintains broad appeal. After tasting them young and old, Hanes finds Luigi Pira’s Barolo wines best consumed young. So that it what he did with the 2008 Barolo

Serralunga and it was well fruited and energetic and approachable with no regrets on pulling the cork now. And decently priced at \$26 or so. Prices for red Burgundy remain pretty damn high, even for what were once considered “lesser” areas such as Fixin or Marsannay. So the net gets cast wider. Luckily, quality improvements continue to, umm, improve. I guess it’s like the gentrification of Brooklyn or something. Anyway, the Lrancy appellation doesn’t come up every day in casual conversation but the 2010 rouge from Franck Givaudin is quite good, particularly when you factor in its sub-\$20 price tag. The 2010 “Les Cabotines” bottling from Ludovic Chanson and the Montlouis area was a pleasurable, forward wine that delivers on all the major food groups. \$25 is kinda on the high side but screw it, you gotta live sometimes. More Loire Chenin Blanc please. After slamming Cornelissen, Hanes eats crow as the 2011 “MunJebel 8VA” bottling of the Nerello Mascalese grape was just fun and intriguing and all that jazz. Only unfortunate part is the \$55 cost to play. If you enjoy more structured Zweigelt wines, and who doesn’t, the 2010 Paul Aches from Burgenland is one for you. Grapefruit, pepper, beef and enough fruit to take the edge off, needs some time. So spend the \$27 and lay it down for a few years.

The best \$15 and under picks... It has taken this long but Hanes has officially taken a tasting note on a wine from the Lacrima grape. Velenosi’s 2011 Lacrima di Morro d’Alba red has great fruit yet stays balanced and floral, a quality find for about \$12. Borell-Diehl is impressive for their ability to deliver quality at very fair prices. The 2011 Gewürztraminer from Germany’s Pfalz region is not too sweet yet full of the grape’s natural appeal, a winning food wine. Only \$11. The wines of Southwest France often still struggle for recognition but, hey, it helps keep the prices down. The 2011 Château de Mayragues made from the Braucol grape (also known as Fer Servadou) has all the funky complexity and energetic structure you’d want in lesser bodied red and is hard to beat at under \$13 per bottle. As a basic Gamay quaffer it’s hard to argue year after year with Marcel Lapierre’s “Raisins Gaulois” bottling. It’s lightly fruity with just enough sense of terroir to appeal to the jaded palate and pique the interest of the newbie. Get it at around \$13. Cantina Valpantena’s “Torre del Falasco” lineup includes two winners this time around, their 2010 Valpolicella Ripasso and 2011 Bianco di Custoza wines. Excellent value and structure and much more intelligently put together than what one would expect for at or under \$10. Hanes doesn’t drink much Port wine these days. Meow-Meow doesn’t care for dessert wines. But at \$12 hard to resist the charms of the Niepoort “Tawny Port” as it is fresh and easy to drink and just generally poundable. From Sicily Carlo Hauner’s “Salina Bianco” white blend is not profound but a wine you’d be happy to have a glass of anytime, everything in proportion and lively and \$13. In a slightly different vein, the 2011 white “Esporão Reserva” from Portugal’s Herdade do Esporão would be fun to serve to Californian Chardonnay drinkers to get them to venture forth. Very familiar flavors and textures and just a happy wine, clocks in around \$12.

And the disappointments... Hanes wants to like wines from Brovia and keeps trying. The 2010 “La Villerina Secca” from the Freisa grape did not do it, too dry and hard and lacking prettiness and the \$24 spent is kind of ouchy. Not that one expects an unmitigated glory but Cline usually does a good job with their entry level tier wines, however, the 2011 Mourvèdre “Ancient Vines” is just formulaic and boring, a lot more out there around \$13 offering something distinct. Never had a red wine from Savennières producer Closel before so was geeked to try their 2010 Anjou rouge. Probably *too* geeked which is why it disappointed. Expected more flesh and ripeness, more general life. Oh well, it’s just one try and maybe this vintage was not that best, shall sample another vintage down the road. There’s lots of new producers out there from France as many importers “discover” wineries, especially those with a natural wine focus. Wasn’t looking for it per se but in the interest of experimentation grabbed a bottle of 2011 Maison P-U-R Morgon Côte du Py and boy was this like disappointing. Just no there there. Not sure what happened here but at \$27 there should be *some* fruit on hand. One can push the terroir transparency thing too far.

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

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the *older (or non-imported) wines* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2013.html>

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

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

Winery/Producer Name

Region of Origin, Appellation, Brand Name/Wine Style, Single Vineyard (if any applicable)

Grape Type

Vintage Year, Price Hanes Paid (if available), Alcohol Percentage (if available)

Tasting Notes, Hanes's Numeric Score (on the traditional, yet inane, 100 point scale (which for Hanes truly begins at around 80 points and more or less ends around 94 points))

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pesenti

Vineyard

Petite Sirah

2010, \$35.00, 14.9%

Impenetrably dark purple core, glows like a black light painting, the rims a heavily saturated red magenta, color-wise certainly built to impress. The nose is an avalanche of plum, cassis, black cherry fruit scents, a slight nod towards flowers, orange zest and sweet tea, no presence of oak, what's more primary than primary? Full-bodied, while big in scale feels "right" and not twisted and bent into something it's not. Very little tannin, if it's there it is buried under all that plum, cherry, blackberry fruit. Here the flowers and orange pair with a pinch of ginger powder and echo of cocoa. Nothing reductive, just redundant. Monolithic is a gregarious fashion, truly there's not much to say about it, nothing hidden, no deep subtleties to plumb. Just take it at face value and pound. 89

Turley

Napa Valley, Heminway Vineyard

Zinfandel

2010, \$30.00, 15.6%

Nothing unusual nor ambiguous about the opaque purple core, yields to fat and effulgent red ruby rims, more toward scarlet than magenta, clean overall. While well stuffed, the nose also has a certain tautness which plays up the grapefruit, orange citrus, forest breeze and back road pebbles and dirt before handing over the stage to milk chocolate, toffee and sour cherry, plum, currant fruit scents, certainly not overdone nor exaggerated, if anything pulls up a little short. Medium-bodied, fluid as it alternates between dryness and creaminess, more tang and pucker than expected, this noting that it handles its alcohol level

very well. Packs an initial punch of raspberry, cherry, cranberry, rhubarb fruit then a patina of that chocolate and caramel, however, not big time oaky. The citrus element falls back here, some licorice and menthol replace it, while sweet not sugary. As a result, it lacks flamboyance and depth but gains versatility and freshness. Likely to polarize tasters, even allowing for it staying close to the grape blueprint. 89

Neyers

Regional Blend, Sage Canyon

Blend

2010, \$23.99, 14.4%

Darkly glowing purple core, just crosses into opacity, wide and likewise very dark ruby-magenta rims, sleek surface as well, hard to imagine it having a more vivid coloration. Has a nose filled with crushed berries, blackberry, mulberry, blueberry, not much redder fruit, there's caramel and butterscotch oak in small doses, light mintiness, very primary with a generally fresh profile. In the mouth it's full-bodied with smooth contours and only a slight dustiness through the finish. Tannins are modest, yet the blackberry, cherry, blueberry fruit doesn't run amok and grow disproportionately. Here too the oak is judiciously demure and more or less only supports the fruit's natural sweetness. Lilacs and orange blossom, mutter of cinnamon spice and then tea leaf. No meaningful complexity, no new virgin territory discovered, just a solidly crafted fruit driven wine. Unspecified percentages of 45% Carignane, 25% Grenache, 15% Mourvèdre, 15% Syrah, splash of Alicante Bouschet. 89

Fogline Vineyards

Dry Creek Valley, Grist Vineyard

Syrah

2011, \$38.00, 13.3%

Immaculate and spotless purple core, fairly transparent given the degree of saturation it has, the rims turn to a glowing red ruby to magenta, hard to

imagine it being more vibrantly hued. The nose has good clarity to it, not overstuffed, and flows nicely, that said, the buttered popcorn, toast and vanilla accents cloak a lot of the pretty blackberry, raspberry scents, shortening the whole, there's decent mint, flowers and fresh forest breeze stuff going on to bring a pleasing airiness, in a very primary place with few hints of where it's going. Medium-bodied, closer to lighter than fuller bodied, here the mint, orange blossom, anise notes come first. Yet, similar to the nose, the oak treatment seems oversized for the whole and the toast and caramel, butterscotch plays too large a role. Given this, harder to gauge any terroir based elements. The blackberry, boysenberry, blueberry fruit is slightly more sour than sweet, to its benefit. Moderate acidity, tannin seems to contribute to mild dustiness through the finish. Would enjoy more transparency to the place as there's more than enough fruit to support such. 88

Lagier Meredith
Napa Valley, Mount Veeder
Mondeuse
2010, \$42.00, 14.8%

Heavy purple core, cleanly opaque, purity comes through as you can just see through the deep ruby-magenta rims, quite vibrantly hued, sleek surface too. The nose is so densely packed it is close to immobile, still as it opens you receive copious plum, cassis, blackberry fruit alongside leather, beef jerky and wet tree bark, coconut and cocoa, remains primary with a sneaky, hard to parse out complexity. Medium-bodied, the tannins build over time to create a pleasing broadness as well as drying sensation. The oak brings ginger, cumin in addition to coconut, caramel, does help in supplementing the sturdy plum, black currant fruit. Offers orange peel and flowers, any dried beef, leather or earth take a few steps back. Holds a steady pace from attack through finish, a determined fellow. Even more than most Californian Cabernet needs a fatty cut of beef to perform at its best. 88

Bedrock Wine Co.
Sonoma Valley, Bedrock Vineyard, The Bedrock Heritage Blend
2011, \$28.00, 14.3%

The core is opaque, looks like a purpled bruise, really fat ruby to still violet hued rims, how can it be clean and yet seem murky, easily achieves full saturation. Rich oak toast and powdered vanilla fuels the nose, butterscotch, thickly arrayed plum currant, blackberry fruit, mild floral perfume, clearly primary and trying not to be but there's not much else there. Full-bodied, sheds weight as it progresses forward. Soft, velvety texture with no real tannic structure, has a certain dustiness. The vanilla, caramel, chocolate powder and

butterscotch not overly sweet yet dominant. The bright cherry, raspberry, cranberry segue into blackberry, more red fruit than in the nose. has a vaguely chalky sort of earthiness with pressed flower accents. What will be revealed when the plumpness is gone? Approximately 60% Zinfandel, remaining 40% Carignane, Petite Sirah, Alicante Bouschet, Grand Noir de la Calmette, Syrah, Tempranillo, Trousseau, Mission, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Bedrock Wine Co.
Russian River Valley, Saitone Ranch Vineyard
Zinfandel
2011, \$29.00, 15.0%

Richly glowing purple core, glides past the threshold of opacity, pinkish magenta rims equally fat, there much easier to see through. The nose is very sweet, more syrupy than jammy, like it should be poured on pancakes, all blueberry, raspberry, boysenberry and honey and brown sugar, has a low oak profile, dash of orange citrus and flower blossoms but it is virtually all about the fruit. Medium-bodied, more oak spice here with ginger, cinnamon, vanilla and molasses, equal parts toast and cream, general oak level higher than in the nose but nothing overpowering. The texture has some semi-gritty dryness at times, slows down the flow of the blackberry, blueberry, cherry, which takes on a darker fruit complexion. Nice sweet and sour tang to the orange, tangerine citrus accents. Good balance, only real complaints might be it's a touch short on the finish and one-dimensional. 88

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pesenti Vineyard
Zinfandel
2010, \$35.00, 16.1%

Has good clarity while retaining vibrancy in the ruby-violet coloration, more pure red ruby around the rims, bright but not overly saturated, freshly youthful. Creamy vanilla, mint, caramel and pine sap adorn the candied raspberry, blackberry, strawberry fruit in the nose, some orange zest, does a nice job of putting the fruit first and dialing back the oak, manages the alcohol level well, perhaps pulls up too short, could spread wider and soak in. Medium-bodied, displays a stronger than expected acidic spine and general dryness which firms it up and creates a more focused than unconsciously gregarious experience. The blackberry, blueberry, cherry fruit more black than red here, candied more than juicy. The butterscotch, caramel to vanilla fudge higher, especially through the finish. Balanced out in part by orange to grapefruit citrus, menthol and pine notes. At times seems like it wants to be bigger than it is, as if its reach exceeds its

grasp. Ignore this and you can enjoy fully what is there. 88

Cline

Contra Costa County, Ancient Vines

Mourvèdre

2011, \$12.99, 14.5%

The liquid is clean and at times close to transparent, however, the color is a saturated ruby-purple which creates an illusion of depth, more pure red ruby to slightly darker garnet around the rims, plenty of surface sparkle for visual pep. The sweetly candied cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit in the nose dances with an earth to animal fur element typical of the grape and indeed welcome, blends in dried grapefruit rinds, pressed flowers, cloves, caramelized brown sugar and toffee, nothing here runs too far afield from the usual course of things. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, the fullness of the attack not matched by the finish. The clove, cinnamon spice is there, orange to grapefruit citrus, more herbaceous than earthy, has a heavy tannic texture but not the drying tactile effect. The oak here comes off kind of oversized, caramel, vanilla, popcorn, honey yet burnt at the same time. At the same time the raspberry, cherry led mixed red fruit starts off well then loses its grip. Pleasant enough in the simplest of fashions but nothing more. 86

NEW YORK WHITE

Eminence Road Farm Winery

Finger Lakes, East Seneca Lake

Riesling

2011, \$19.99, 10.7%

Fairly deep golden color, on the dull side with plenty of translucent bending of light, there is a noticeable diminution of hue around the rims, sits squarely in the glass. The nose is all apple and pear skin, pulped oranges and pebbles and river stones, overall it has both leanness and grip, as it opens you get a decent shot of hard rubber too, at moments has cider like qualities. Medium-bodied, spreads itself solidly from cheek to cheek even as you feel its dryness with utmost clarity, the acidity hammers you with a steadiness. The white grapefruit to lemon citrus sour and biting, plays along with the stones and, here, increased mineral presence. The apple, pear joins with desiccated pineapple, nectarine, guava notes. That rubber component fades in and out, helps harden the super-structure and preference for density over flow. Its personality is serious but short of somber. 88

FRANCE RED

Mayraques, Château de

Southwest France, Gaillac

Braucol

2011, \$12.49, 12.0%

While fully clear and transparent has vividly deep pomegranate red to purple hues with bright magenta rims, if you think saturation means opacity, check this out. Crisply sour fruit dominates the nose, cranberry, cherry and raspberry, crushed stone and matted wet grass, plenty of flatulence too, cowhide and then finally comes a tangerine and flower blossom lift. Medium-bodied, packs a lot of tannin and acidity for its weight which gives it more heft in the mouth as well as a dusty grittiness which helps it cling to every pore. Super tangy and penetrating, the tangerine to white grapefruit citrus is lively and adds zip to the cranberry, Bing cherry, boysenberry fruit. In keeping with this presents more metallic minerality than inert stone. That animal hide quality persists even as the merde and such takes a step back. More swirls like a tornado than lifts, eager to display how much energy it has. Fills out with air time and loses a decent amount of the funk. Delicious. 90

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le

Loire, Cheverny, Rouillon

Blend

2011, \$22.99, 11.5%

The ruby-purple core is light, redder and closer to magenta at the rims, has a pleasing sparkle across the surface. Some leather, animal fur and close to rubber notes to the nose, minerally and peppery, almost gets you to sneeze, hits you with raspberry, strawberry, rhubarb fruit scents, definitely fruity but has all the terroir you'd want too. Medium-bodied, possesses great sweetness with a softly powdery texture. Fine sugar sprinkled on the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit and flowers. There's a pleasing herbaceous snap as well as notes of white pepper and tree bark. Then creates a rose petal fueled lift. The tannin is sneakily strong, acidity able to support as needed. Ends with tobacco ash and charcoal. Never pushes you beyond basic enjoyment in order to prove a point, even as it holds your attention in the lecture hall. Unspecified percentages of Gamay Noir, Pinot Noir. 90

Givaudin, Franck

Burgundy, Irancy

Pinot Noir

2010, \$17.99, 13.0%

Clear purple with a burnt red to sienna orange cast, looks slightly older than it is while not old per se. Big, boisterous nose of clove, cherry, blackberry and close

to plum fruit scents, earthen mud, grass, all that fruit gives it a sappy texture, a sour twist extends it well before the final dissolve. Close to full-bodied, thick and viscous here too with plum, blackberry, cherry fruit, near jammy. More clove to cinnamon spice, some orange juice accents, nicely plump with moments of strawberry too. No real tannin, the acidity pushes it forward quietly. Compact and yet has give, vague element of matted grasses and earth, light floral lift. Offers good value here. 89

Lapierre, Marcel
Beaujolais, Vin de France, Raisins Gaulois XI
Gamay Noir
2011, \$12.99, 12.0%

Looks like a clear ruby-violet mist in the glass, not perfect clarity, has some visual distortion, hue holds strongly through the pink magenta rims, more bright than rich. Plainspoken nose of stone dust and chalk, raspberry, strawberry fruit and cherry pits, what florality it has countered by a barnyard funkiness, slowly unfurls white grapefruit to orange citrus spritz, very nice if you don't get turned off by a touch of that funk. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a nicely cleansing acidity which freshens up the florality, orange citrus and enlivens the raspberry, strawberry, rhubarb fruit. There is an aspect of stone here, and it does get slightly dusty at the end, but the terroir is not as present as in the nose, let's it just be a super clean fruity wine. Easily presentable as an introduction to the grape, not venturing too far into any deep complexities. Glass empties swiftly. (Screwcap) 88

Aiguilloux, Château
Languedoc/Roussillon, Corbières, Tradition
Blend
2010, \$7.99, 14.0%

Good richness in the purple core, clean and semi-dark, equally dark ruby rims, vividly saturated. Hints at animal fur and leather in the nose but it's really all about the cherry, blackberry fruit and floral perfume, has a broad and steady lift, slight chocolate accent but no real oakiness, just primary fruit. Medium-bodied, closer to light than full. Very smooth and even soft, any tannin subdued. Does have a little pepperiness, perks up the orange citrus. The chocolate is a notch stronger here, the flowers remain its strongest attribute. Basically blackberry, raspberry with a touch of blueberry. Some tar and damp earth echo through the finish. You would not be shocked to learn it is from Corbières yet not bursting with regional character either. 50% Carignan, 30% Grenache, 20% Syrah. 87

Closel (Château des Vaults), Domaine du
Loire, Anjou
Cabernet Franc
2010, \$21.99, 14.5%

Very bright ruby purple in color, close to glowing, clear and transparent, consistent through well-hued rims. The nose is plummy with both rhubarb and cranberry fruit scents, primary with minty and floral notes, nice supporting stoniness, dash of white grapefruit to sour orange citrus, more dense than lifting. Full-bodied, close to chewy at times as it clings to your mouth pores. There's a slight stemminess and astringent bite under the ripe plum, cherry, dark berry fruit flavors. The flowers more muted yet the mixed white citrus elevates. Here and there you can find some cocoa powder. The stone and schist manage to accrue by the finish. Certainly a mouth full but lacks complexity suggesting it be paired with food to account for any shortcomings. (Composite Cork: Diam) 87

P-U-R, Maison
Beaujolais, Morgon, Côte du Py
Gamay Noir
2011, \$26.99, 12.0%

Ruby-violet-hued core, good effulgence, wide magenta rims, very nice clarity throughout. Serious funk in the nose of merde, fart, salty and mineral as well, drying nostril presence hampers the cherry, raspberry fruit scents from expanding, sour oranges, lean and invasive. Medium-bodied at best, rather on the light side, gathering together minerals, stones, dried grass and a general smokiness. Cherry pits, raspberries and a touch of blueberry for fruit. Too stern for the floral dimension to shine, comes out more like tea leaves. In the end there's really nothing here but rocks, stones, ash and fallen leaves. Interesting for how it can be so soil-driven with virtually no supporting fruit at all. (Composite Cork) 87

FRANCE WHITE

Texier, Eric
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Brézème
Roussanne
2011, \$23.99, 12.0%

Lightly bronzed golden color, sits fatly in the glass and bends light at will, catches your eye with its high level of density, stays thick through the rims too. The nose lays out a platter of raw nuts, yellow apple, pineapple, apricot and white peach fruit, the florality is a dry sort, you get more thrust from the baking spices and orange zest, overall it has a muscular thickness which still does not interfere with its general ability to move with ease. Full-bodied, has uncommonly strong acidity for the type, does a great job of shaping and channeling the honey, nuts, candied oranges, vanilla pudding and

cinnamon spice. The fruit remains mostly and apple orchard with supplementary peach, apricot, pear, less of a tropical character than in the nose. Stream water and pebbles help clean up the finish. Lively while also maintaining a sense of seriousness, like it wants very much to be understood. Draws you back quicker after each sip. 92

Roally, Domaine de
Burgundy, Viré-Clessé, Tradition
Chardonnay
2010, \$21.99, 14.0%

Lightly bronzed rich golden color, pools deeply into the glass, holds steady through the rims, surface luster nice as well. The nose is driven by a sour mandarin orange to grapefruit edge, sauna stones and wet smoke, iron flecks and a very dry yet tropical nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit array, lots of power but remains coiled for the most part and doesn't spread out. Full-bodied with a wicked sledgehammer of acidity, feels disjointed in a youthful way, as if it is feeling its way and needs a lot of time to knit it all together. Bushels of apples alongside that pineapple, guava, nectarine fruit, yet again it is the orange, grapefruit, lemon citrus which zaps you the hardest. Some dough, yeast and vanilla powder accents, a stark contrast to the minerals and stones. moves like it's in a tar pit, nothing is effortless and its tenacity is evident. Mint, orange pekoe tea, licorice, honey, all over the map. Allowing for all of this, it is a wine of great potential complexity which requires patience and should not be consumed anytime soon. 89

Chanson, Ludovic
Loire, Montlouis sur Loire, Les Cabotines
Chenin Blanc
2010, \$24.99, 13.0%

Moderate richness to the golden hue, translucency helps deepen it, hint of bronze around the edges, unremarkable across the board, if not unpleasurable to gave upon. The nose splits the difference, first coming up with lemon, orange pith, mineral powder and fresh garden herbs then moving on to lactose, challah bread and vanilla powder, somewhere in-between is apricot, red apple, peach and a wedge of pineapple, ends with a minty flourish. Medium-bodied, fluid like a svelte fullback, no flab but still bulls right at you. The acidity is broad and more blunt than cutting but the end result is pretty dry. Floral, more mint and licorice, the orange is more blossom and mist than zest. While there's no clear stone, mineral or soil voice, doesn't seem unmoored from its place of origin either. The doughy, honeyed thing never quite stops lurking around the corner. There's a lot going on here, might benefit from a tighter weave and thrust forward. 89

ITALY RED

Cornelissen, Azienda Agricola Frank
Sicilia, Etna, MunJebel 8VA
Nerello Mascalese
2011, \$54.99, 15.0%

Clean and simple ruby-violet core, moves into garnet territory further out with a glimmer of orange to red brick at some angles, pleasing shine, nothing out of the ordinary here. The nose strikes first with compacted grass and muddy earth, starts to open into violets, mocha, anise and caraway seed, semi-cleansing lift, then unwinds the raspberry, strawberry, almost watermelon fruit scents to fashion a well-rounded whole, ends with a burst of witch hazel. Medium-bodied, has an unambiguous sweetness through the attack before a drying tannic blanket covers the tongue. Texturally there's a lot going on, like how it feels fullest in the mid-plate and how can feel so grainy and yet flow unimpeded. Here you are presented with white grapefruit, something akin to garrigues, licorice and then black tea leaves. All of which gets kicked to the side as the raspberry, cranberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit takes center stage, ripe and juicy while also puckeringly sour. Minerals, stone ash and a clay like component grows in stature with each sip. In the end it is not incredibly complex but there's a good amount to geek out on even as non-geek pals just like sipping it. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc Select 300) 92

Pira, Luigi
Piedmont, Barolo, Serralunga
Nebbiolo
2008, \$25.99, 14.0%

Clear and close to fully transparent, the purple core easily yields to more red magenta and burnt sienna red hues, already hinting at orange around the rims, sleek surface shine. The nose is full of candied oranges, black licorice, floral musk and very ripe plum, cherry fruit, wet cedar and toasty vanilla notes contribute to the muscularly rich feel, more like a workout for your nostrils than a cerebral experience. Medium to full-bodied, here the oak presence greater with vanilla, ginger, butterscotch and toasted coconut all present, There's a certain grittiness to the mouth feel yet the tannin seems on the low side and diminished, nothing "enamel stripping." Loads of ripe plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, lasts fully through the finish. Rose petals, anise and then fresh leather, not that earthy nor stony. Has energy to spare, no way you are ignoring this when it's in your mouth. That said, does not leave you with the impression that meaningful tertiary development is coming down the road. 89

Valpantena, Cantina
Veneto, Valpolicella, Torre del Falasco Ripasso
Blend
2010, \$9.99, 13.5%
Straight up purple core with fairly wide red ruby rims, fresh and youthful with fine clarity and does not overdo the color vibrancy. The nose has a pleasant peppery to dried grass and straw edge, sour herbs, pork rinds and muddy earth, golden raisin and fig pair with cherry and blackberry fruit scents, good lift and diversity, never do you think it's just a fruit bomb, almost the opposite at moments. Medium-bodied, sweeter attack than expected from the nose, pushes a lot of plum, prune, raisin, black cherry up front. That said, settles into a nice weave as it mixes in rosemary, sage, black pepper, orange peel and anise seed. Has more than sufficient tannin, and then acidity, to give it regal carriage. Keeps coming back to that dried fruit character, as it should. Delivers notable value. Unspecified percentages of Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella. 88

Velenosi
Marche, Lacrima di Morro d'Alba
Lacrima
2011, \$11.99, 13.0%
Deeply glowing purple core surrounded by equally saturated ruby to red magenta rims, quite shiny and sleek as well, opaque core with greater clarity further out. Floral nose with an underlying dusty earthiness, some wet leather as well and a solid abundance of blackberry, black cherry fruit, suggestion of orange citrus, while ripe and fleshy has a sort of blunt feel in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, curious in that there is a dusty, tacky texture which directly opposes the otherwise soft and pliant soaking into the palate. The blueberry, blackberry, cherry fruit comes close to jamminess at times, dials back the sugar in time to find decent balance. Same orange citrus and flower accents here, the clay to muddy earthiness stays lowkey throughout. While certainly a fruit driven wine not altogether simple. However, it is evasive when you try to pin its elements down. Dry finish is appreciated. (Composite Cork: Diam10) 88

Vallana, Antonio
Piedmont, Colline Novaresi Spanna
Nebbiolo
2009, \$13.99, 13.0%
Fairly dense violet core, not really fully opaque, turns to more brick and red hues towards the rims, dims light within the glass. The nose is plummy and ripe, cherries and currants, waft of ginger and flowers, does have a leathery side, wet and soft, could conceivably display more nuanced complexity if the fruit were not so overbearing. Medium-bodied, closer to full, on the

soft side with lowish tannin and acidity, much more plum and cherry fruit her, surprising for how it dries out through the finish but all fruit beforehand. Piles on the ginger, cinnamon, orange spice and cedar, bare hint of leather, damp earth. Enjoyable with just enough Nebbiolo character to convince you it is more than just a fruit bomb. 88

Brovia, Azienda Agricola
Piedmont, Langhe, La Villerina, Secca
Freisa
2010, \$23.99, 13.5%
Thick purple core with a light gauziness, shifts to more crimson further out and then into a light orange tint at the outermost edge, coloration is a strong point. The nose is quite minerally with a dusty texture, seems almost like volcanic ash at times, leather and manure, outdoorsy barnyard qualities, behind that is a decent amount of raspberry, strawberry fruit. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a high level of tannic and acidic structure, sets itself squarely, a real slug to the jaw. Here too there's a grainy texture and general dryness, makes it hard for that raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit to speak clearly. Mixes in white grapefruit and lilacs, retains the stone and mineral accents and loses most of the animality. Rugged, seems capable of greater grace than it displays, simply chooses the former approach. 87

ITALY WHITE

Valpantena, Cantina
Veneto, Bianco di Custoza, Torre del Falasco
Blend
2011, \$6.99, 12.5%
Simple yellow golden straw color, clean and shiny, distorts sufficiently to both layer down into the glass and fill the rims, leaves a scattering of tiny bubbles at the bottom of the glass well after the pour. The nose is at once open and dense, the weight brings a sense of complexity to what is truly easy to grasp apple, pear, apricot fruit, raw nuts, honeysuckle, orange blossom, cinnamon stick and enough minerality to help create a cleansing sensation at the end. Medium-bodied, holds its general density as it allows the pretty good acidity to create flow. Nutty with those honey to orange citrus reduction notes, here there's more stone and even twigs and dried leaves than baking spices, neither sweetness nor dryness ever gains the decisive upper hand. The apricot, pear, green apple, peach fruit has more traction across the tongue than richness. Lingering finish, hard to find anything to argue about given what's going on for the price. Unspecified percentages of Garganega, Cortese, Trebbiano Toscano. (Synthetic Cork) 88

Hauner, Azienda Agricola Carlo
Sicilia, Salina Bianco
Blend

2011, \$12.99, 12.5%

Bright golden color, quite shiny and fully strong through the rims, pure and simple. Extremely lemony nose with a splash of lime, freshly floral accompanied by a powdered stone patina, the fruit is crisp and snappy, more apple, pear than riper peach, apricot, this noted, it has admirable fatness and heft. Close to full-bodied, even its strong acidity can't shave it down and prevent it being a slug to the mouth. Mint, lilacs then orange, lemon zest and blossom. Has the vaguest hint of honey, helps the peach, nectarine nudge ahead of the apple, pear. Here the ripeness pushes back the stone, mineral dust. Has a pleasing bite at the end, adds to the liveliness. Too dry for a real tropical profile. Unspecified percentages of Inzolia, Cataratto. 88

Fantinel

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Collio, Vigneti Sant'Helena
Pinot Grigio

2011, \$15.99, 13.0%

Somewhat dark golden hue aided by a brownish straw cast, bends and distorts your vision looking into the glass, on the dull side but its general fatness helps it fill out well. The nose is filled with juicy pear, apple and peach fruit, more wet than sugary, the baking spice tones stronger than any minerals or stones, bit of orange sherbet, on the whole it is heavy and soft with sufficient sweetness and perfume to appeal to most even the least discerning palate. Full-bodied, tries to layer itself on you but the acidity clumsily gets in the way, in addition there's something like underripe phenolics which would be pretty weird in a white wine. Nutty, not quite Sherried but at times close, bitter. In the other direction, boisterous rose petals and orange blossom. There's an apple cider quality to it, fruit is majority apples with pear and then apricot, green melon in the rear. Sneaks in some cinnamon, ginger and vanilla bean. For all of its flavor, drains away before the finish. Could be from anywhere. 86

GERMANY WHITE

Buhl, Weingut Reichsrat von
Pfalz, Forster, Ungeheuer, Auslese AP #28
Riesling

2011, \$31.99, 9.5%

Possesses an extremely deep golden hue which does stop short of amber, dense enough to obscure vision through it, the rims are fat and fully colored as well. The nose is tropical and dulcet, loads of pineapple, mango, papaya, nectarine and kiwi fruit along with molasses, honey and tangelo, pink grapefruit citrus,

manages a certain liveliness in spite of how thick it is, even as it clings to your nostrils like a morning dew. In the mouth it's full-bodied, layers itself on the tongue, the acidity is a tad weak and the sugariness persists from start to finish. Here that grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus sparkles first, juicy and ripe. Then comes the kiwi, pineapple, nectarine, guava, apricot fruit, steamrolling along. Mixes in accents of coconut custard, honey, pastry flakes and flower water. A true palate coater, not a millimeter left untouched. You get a few hints of underlying minerals but at this youthful point it's really supposition. Vibrant and extremely long, close to over the top. 375 ml bottle. 90

Prum, Weingut Joh. Jos.

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Wehlener, Sonnenuhr, Auslese AP #18

Riesling

2011, \$44.99, 7.5%

Very light white-green color, reflective surface with deceptively strong layering into the glass, while unblemished distorts vision with ease, rims also surprisingly strong. The nose is rife with orange blossom, honey, lilacs, wet white stones, very gentle and openly knit, the apple, pear, peach scents fresh and crisp, good staying power given its delicateness. Medium-bodied, very light of touch with a slight fizziness. Dissolves slowly on the tongue. The peach, apricot, pear, green melon fruit supplied with enough honey to lengthen it nicely through the finish. The acidity is on the weak side but it flows so well you don't mind it. That orange creamsicle character softens the finish. Very friendly, enjoyable, still strikes you as a medium term ager. 89

Prum, Weingut Joh. Jos.

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Wehlener, Sonnenuhr, Spätlese AP #13

Riesling

2011, \$39.99, 8.5%

Layered, if clear unto transparent, white gold in color, more green than yellow, bends enough light to create presence through the rims, leaves a few trace visible bubbles behind along the insides of the glass. The nose is somewhat flat even as there's a big fresh rubber element, gains some prettiness via powdered sugar, honey, vanilla and then apricot, peach, yellow apple fruit scents help it spread and gain traction, as it begins to dissolve lifts via orange, tangerine zest. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a firm grip so as to set itself nicely, even as you begin to wonder when the acidity might decide to show up. That said, there is an attractiveness to the pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus if not kick. Moderate oomph in the nectarine, apricot, peach, pear fruit, at moments suggests a latent tropicality, has brown sugar in there as well. The

absence of palpable stone or mineral components a tad worrisome, the rubber element downplayed too. Has breeding, just not sure that is enough for the longer haul. 89

Borell-Diehl, Weingut
Pfalz, Kabinett AP #38
Gewürztraminer

2011, \$10.99, 12.0%

While it has a pale golden straw hue there's a visual fatness to it which has it amply filling the glass, good translucent pooling even around the rims. The nose has round contours yet is not particularly soft, too heavy for that, lays on the tangerine, mandarin orange citrus, vanilla custard, cinnamon spice and, of course, lychee nut, the peach, apricot, pear fruit scents straightforward and thankfully more fresh and airy than musky, helps break up the more general weight. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, more muscular than expected with good definition and above average cleansing acidity. The lychee and honey frame the mouth entry with the orange, grapefruit citrus extending the sweetness, coming with a powdered sugar character. Pear, apricot, yellow apple, peach, sure the flavors are basic but they have a friendly, lighthearted quality and you don't expect unusual complexity. Some vanillin, caramelized nuance comes on here, masks some of the bitterness which peeks through now and then. Pulls its foot off the pedal at the end, allowing for a more gentle finish. Would prove a more versatile version of the grape at the table. 89

AUSTRIA RED

Achs, Weingut Paul
Burgenland
Zweigelt

2010, \$26.99, 12.5%

Squeaky clean and mostly transparent, the core has sufficient purple to darken it into duskiness, further out it's all cranberry red, magenta and then a smidgeon of pink. The nose at first is an explosion of white grapefruit, like someone mashed a cut half against your face, moves into earth, larger mineral chunks, a touch of furry funk and brawny red cherry, mixed berry fruit scents, has a close to dusty texture, as if you feel obliged to sneeze. Medium-bodied, equally gritty and dusty here, feels like drying, powdery tannin, certainly it is a wine not lacking for structure. Chalky, bodacious minerals and ground stone, less of the muddy earth and more sour grass notes. The white grapefruit weaves into the whole, less of a standalone item. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the level of raspberry, blackberry, cherry to pomegranate fruit, simply a matter of too much else going on for it to be a fruity wine. Accents of iodine, beef and cracked black

pepper extend the "country wine" character although this is obviously a well thought out and considered wine. If the structure can soften and fruit remain where it is then 3-4 years of aging may help quite a bit. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 89

PORTUGAL WHITE

Esporão, Herdade do
Alentejo, Esporão Reserva
Blend

2011, \$11.99, 14.5%

Fairly dark golden color, pools deeply into the glass as it bends light, nice surface shine too, attractive all the way around. The nose explodes with friendly oak, butterscotch, vanilla pudding, caramel and orange spice, takes on a deeper burnt character as it warms, the peach, green apple, pear fruit juicy enough to at least stand up next to that oak, has a floral side as well, can't really say there's much else going on. Medium-bodied plus, sits squarely in the mouth, not that fat nor dense more like stubborn. Mint, flowers and tangerine to orange citrus frame the attack and then it sweetens into that caramel and butterscotch plus cinnamon and ginger. Apple, pear, apricot fruit spreads well, contributes to its "could be served for dessert" feel. No sense of place nor distinct grape character, geared more for immediately familiar enjoyment. And does succeed in this regard. 40% Arinto, 30% Antão Vaz, 30% Roupeiro. 88

PORTUGAL DESSERT

Niepoort, Vinhos
Douro, Tawny Port
Blend

NV, \$11.99, 20.0%

Still a fair amount of purple left in the core, then mostly ruby to brick red, youthful in appearance, clean and clear. The nose is slightly boozy with underlying nuttiness, cinnamon, camphor and green apple, fig, yellow raisin and peach fruit scents, pulls into a succinctly powerful punch, semi-floral lift at the end. Medium-bodied, quite soft and smooth, glides effortlessly across the palate. Cherry, berry to raisin, fig, nothing too sweet nor rich. Mild hint of chocolate with ginger and cinnamon, orange peel nuances. Lower nuttiness, fresh, kind of like a tawny striving to be a ruby. High degree of drinkability and versatility, you'd have to work to not find a use for it. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinto Cão, Tinta Francesa, Tinta Amarela, Tinta Roriz, etc. 89

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Cloudy Bay

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2012, \$25.99, 13.5%

Trim green to white straw in color, has a strong layering effect into the glass which distorts your vision, more transparent around the rims. Strong lift in the nose but not quite pungent, relies on pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus for most of the effect, the fruit mainly tart pineapple, guava to nectarine, not all that herbaceous, there is a powdered sugar aspect plus black licorice to keep it sweet, alludes to a minerally sparkle but that's it. Medium-bodied, gregariously fresh in the mouth, in almost every way crafted to please, while doing so in a "classy" way. The acidity is sculpted to create more of an impression of cleansing dryness than actually doing it, that mineral to stone element too more dressing than substance. That said, there is no denying this is a pretty wine which does indeed create happiness with each sip, starting with that grapefruit, tangerine citrus explosion. Guava, kiwi, pineapple, nectarine, peach and that crazy gooseberry all appear. More floral than grassy, minimal presence of any chili pepper. This was extremely well thought out and executed according to plan. (Screwcap) 89