

The Hanes Wine Review, July 2009 Edition

Nothing new under the sun. So, as usual, Hanes sticks his nose where he knows it doesn't belong. And it's a big nose. He must have been drunk to get trapped in a wine-related discussion online where he knows he is an outlier (at best). Anyway, the best part of having an old fashioned "website" versus a "blog" or "discussion board" is that the owner of the website always gets the final word! Totally sweet!

The topic was, and is, the general merit and utility of asserting vintage generalizations. Here's the Hanes Take™. Utilizing vintage generalizations has limits but in many instances also presents necessary help due to a variety of factors. Just to define terms, a vintage generalization is like saying "2002 sucked in the Rhône Valley" or "2000 is a fantastic year for Bordeaux." It is *shorthand* to convey a general sentiment and (Hanes thinks) you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who would defend a vintage generalization in its entirety. To do so would mean believing that 100%, without exception, of 2000 Bordeaux rouge wines were of superior quality. No one believes this. Many are great but there's some that suck too. So, let's dispense with any counter-argument that might paint Hanes as taking such an extreme position. Thank you.

It may be fruitful to approach the topic through the needs of both the beginner and the seasoned veteran imbibor. Vintage generalizations tend to serve different purposes depending on where one is on the spectrum of learning about wine.

For the beginner it is a way of framing all the different grapes and regions and such into some kind of coherent form. Pinot Noir is Pinot Noir (albeit there are many varied clones, let's not go there). Pinot Noir is very cranky and typically only thrives under ideal conditions. Ahh, but what is ideal? Well, there is ideal for the grape *per se* insofar as this can be asserted for novice learning needs. Then there are the ideal conditions for each region, e.g., Burgundy, Santa Barbara County, Willamette Valley, Alto Adige, etc. Then further there are ideal conditions for smaller regions, micro-climates or vineyards. What makes for a great wine in Pommard may not 100% make for a great wine in Chambolle-Musigny.

But this comes later. Attempt trying to explain the different needs of Pinot Noir in Pommard versus Chambolle-Musigny to someone who only knows they like Pinot Noir better than Zinfandel is using an elephant gun to shoot a fly. It is inappropriate to the circumstances. As a result, you have to back off and ratchet down the explanations to more general, digestible form. You *might* be able to get away with breaking it down on a Willamette Valley versus Burgundy level, but even that is for someone with at least a passing knowledge of the topic. More often, you will have to explain a little about the general characteristics of the Pinot Noir grape and then assert that, based on these characteristics, 2005 is a stellar year for Burgundy rouge. This will make the sale. Not talking over the head of the customer or your idiot friend who just doesn't get it.

Part of wine education is explaining that not all vintages are the same, wine is not a product like a can of Pepsi. Now, that statement can, and did, trail off to a whole other topic in the original discussion. That is, naturally winemakers try to produce the best wines they can in every vintage, regardless of good or bad weather, age of the vines, insect infestations, powdery mildew, etc. That is, after all, their job. The only dissension revolves around whether a winemaker should or does let "the grapes speak" about their differing experiences during 2001 and 2002 or rather should continually aim at a certain ideal profile of what the final wine should taste like given optimal growing conditions and winery practices. This is a big debate, related in some ways to vintage generalizations, but beyond the purview of today's rant.

We will assume here that vintages within a region, sub-region, vineyard, etc. do indeed vary from year to year, in such a manner as to be recognizable to palates of various levels of training. If this assumption holds, one could then sample many wines from, for example, Pomerol in Bordeaux, from 1990 and 1991 and after assessing the various positive and negative qualities and general tastiness of the wines, come to the conclusion that, generally speaking, the 1990 wines taste better than the 1991 wines. Again, this is not to say that all 1990 wines rock or that all 1991 wines suck donkey dick. It merely represents a comprehensive opinion of two different vintages expressed in conversational shorthand. Being able to do so has utility. This utility may change as the interlocutors' knowledge of wine expands. This happens. But it strikes Hanes as silly to deny that the generalizations made are devoid of utility *tout court*.

This leads to what Hanes considers to be the core strength of vintage generalizations. Beginners or novices only have limited need for vintage generalizations but as their enthusiasm and knowledge grows into an intermediate stage it helps not only educate but guide purchasing decisions, these purchases likely to become more expensive as one gets into wine, increasing the risk associated with the purchase.

"Bad" vintages instruct as contrast to "good" vintages, allowing the wine appreciator to grasp why the good wines are held in esteem by others and why the bad wines fall short of the theoretical heights. If you started drinking Pomerol with the 1989 and 1990 vintages you'd think Pomerol is almost always a great wine. But once you tasted the subpar 1991 offerings you just *might* gain greater appreciation for the wines of 1989 and 1990. Without years and years of contrasting experiences with the same wines Hanes thinks it would become awful difficult to learn what makes a great wine a great wine. You also learn that certain producers can make good wines in bad years by contrasting the producer's wines against those of lesser peers through vintages both good and bad. To Hanes, bad vintages serve the valuable purpose of providing contrast so that you can experientially comprehend the highs and lows wine may achieve. And, further, appreciate the unique rarity of truly great wines.

The intermediate wine lover is really the person who gains the most from vintage generalizations. This person is trying wines from all over the globe: different grapes, different styles of winemaking, different terroirs, all that nonsense. If the

person has really caught the wine bug the most perfect world would be one in which she gets to try every single wine made in every vintage. That would be heaven on earth. But this simply cannot be done. We must look elsewhere for answers.

The crux of the matter is FINITUDE. As humans, we need to sleep, eat, drink, defecate, copulate, watch *Lost*. We cannot always drink wine during these activities. So, choices must be made. Again, the intermediate wine lover typically has an interest in exploring many, if not most or all, of the wines around the world. This person does not have the time to sample all of the wines made in the world. This person cannot even sample all the wines of a specific region. A reason must exist or be created to choose some wines and avoid others. This is required for survival in the jungle of wine. While still keeping in mind that tasting below average wine has merit and benefit, most people will seek out the best wines currently available on the market. If you have never tasted top notch Australian Shiraz before and all the wine writers in the world agree that the 1998 vintage kicks ass, you are going to allocate more money there to see what the fuss is about. There is nothing wrong with this, it is part of the learning process. It also means you may spend less money on other concurrently available wines, say 1998 Californian Cabernet Sauvignon. Likely because the general wine writing world, the main source of information you have given your newly emergent palate, thinks the 1998 vintage of Napa Cab is ho-hum. Remember that the concept of "best" changes as one's palate matures and becomes more singular. But, conversely, this does not mean any one is an island and that aggregate opinion has no effect nor meaning for an individual's appreciation of wine (or anything for that matter). Good, bad, best, worst – take these terms out of the language and see how far you get making sense to other people.

Finitude in wine appreciation is most acute in terms of sheer time to sample and consume wine but also in terms of finances. For 99.9% of the people out there, even if you had the time to sit at a tasting table every day for hours and sample wines, you still likely wouldn't have the money to purchase all these wines (i.e., you're unemployed). Again, it's about survival. You're trying to learn as much as you can about *all* wines at once and do so on a limited budget. Unless you're like Hanes, then you just rack up tens of thousands of dollars in debt buying wine. Oh, well.

Financial finitude remains the most paramount of the two finitudes once one has become a wine "expert." After years and years of sampling all types of wines, good, bad or indifferent, you can typically settle on a few favored grapes and/or regions. This makes things easier because in your quest to absorb as much experience and data on newly released wines instead of spanning the entire globe you may instead focus on your favored regions, say Chablis and Oregon Pinot Noir. Now, of course, there is still a *lot* of Chablis and Oregon Pinot Noir produced each year. More than most people could reasonably expect to sample firsthand. As a result, you will likely first gravitate towards previously favored producers and then experiment with other wines once these favorites have been covered. But if the current release vintage of Oregon Pinot Noir is 1995 you may taste a few, talk to fellow wine geeks, read a few magazines, and then, gulp, make the generalization that the vintage is bad and not worth further exploration. Instead, you may dedicate your limited funds to trying more German Riesling instead of keep plugging away at bottle after bottle of sucky 1995 Oregon Pinot Noir in hopes of finding a few exceptions. This makes sense. It is rational behavior. Even for the wine expert, vintage generalizations can help save money and time. If you taste 20 of the 1995 Oregon Pinot Noirs and your trusted friend Larry tastes another 20 and your trusted magazine *The Wine Advertiser* tastes another 50 and everyone thinks the wines suck, what kind of idealism would get someone to keep buying these wines? Hanes don't know.

Once more, it would be fantastic to be able to give every producer the benefit of the doubt in every vintage. Give Hanes a few million dollars and he'll give it a shot. Promise. Honest injun. He means it!

But since that is not happening, if Hanes tastes a few 2002 Northern Rhône wines and they suck and they are still expensive, watch the money flow across borders into Austria or South Africa or Italy. There may be a kickass 2002 Northern Rhône wine out there untasted which would bowl Hanes over. But untasted it shall likely remain. And this is the smart move to make. Yet, somehow maintaining such an opinion gets Hanes in dutch. Sigh.

Now, a cogent point was raised in the earlier discussion and merits addressing here. Instead of depending on vintage generalizations, you may instead ask of any given wine "What is it good for?" or "Does this wine suit a purpose the same wine would not in a different vintage?" Or further "When is this wine good for X (but maybe not Y)?" This is very egalitarian and even-handed. However, to Hanes's ear, it is a position which tends to gloss over the issue of finitude. It's a little too idealist in the guise of being pragmatic.

If a winery makes 12 different wines each year and you love the winery you'd want to try all 12, right? And in a stellar vintage, finances allowing, you just might. But even if you love the winery, if you try 3-4 of the wines in a certain vintage and none of them taste as good as previous vintages have to you, will you really purchase and taste the remaining 8 wines? Or will you say oh well and chalk it up to the vagaries of weather and fate and buy other wine instead? Maybe a lifetime of crack addiction has made Hanes squirrely but he'd pass on the remaining 8 rather than taste them to see "what they might be good for." Yes, they might pair better with a certain dish or cuisine than the same wine from a "better" vintage but why not spend the money seeking out the best of the best rather than find a slightly different use for (usually) old reliable? There is soooooo much wine out there to try that this approach actually seems *limiting* to Hanes rather than egalitarianly freeing. If someone *gave* Hanes a bottle of the not-the-best-vintage wine, hey, he'd find a way to drink it! But, otherwise, if it's not up to usual snuff or better, next!

The question of *when* the wines are consumed is more nuanced but still barely pays heed to finitude. Some vintages drink better earlier than others and vice versa. If Hanes was in a restaurant, sure, he'd want to drink the vintage most

approachable at that particular juncture in the time/space continuum regardless of general vintage characteristics or the aging superiority of other similar wines on the list. You want to maximize the pleasure of the immediate experience. That *is* practical. Of course, better still would be an aged wine from a great vintage on the wine list. But let's not push it. On the flip side of the coin, there's the times when you are in a restaurant and don't recognize any of the wines or have experience with them. In such instances, it is perfectly rational to utilize vintage generalizations to guide the wine choosing experience rather than draw straws. Unfortunately, you cannot always count on the restaurant staff for advice and this is doubly so when most of the wines on the list are totally unknown. Utilizing a vintage generalization is merely a way of increasing the odds of success in the face of a lack of other information.

Another example raised with Hanes was that of a Bordeaux from both 1928 and 1929. In the wine's youth the 1929 was considered the superior wine, the 1928 being too hard and tannic. However, *today* the 1928 is the superior wine because the 1929 is over the hill while it took a good 60-80 years for the tannins to soften in the 1928. Hanes cannot really argue against this. He hasn't tried to wines in question but the example is plausible and certainly must have proven empirically true at some juncture for someone.

But, but, but. Doesn't such a long term horizon skew the discussion? A wine "flawed" by something such as excessive tannin can resolve into something "better" down the road. Duh. But if you bought a case of the 1928 and the 1929 Bordeaux on release and drank bottles from these cases over the next 30 years, who wouldn't practically and rationally feel the 1929 was better and the 1928 a gyp? Is this person supposed to care that his great-grandchildren got to enjoy some nicely aged claret from 1928? In the purchaser's life, his finitude should have him concluding that the 1928 just wasn't a good wine. Arguing that the 1928 is the better wine in 2009 only gets you so far. It's a slippery slope argumentative tactic, and who is to deny that any subpar wine may "come around" given sufficient time. Say, 300 years or so. To Hanes, the discussion of vintage generalizations needs to be constrained to a fair temporal horizon, say, within the lifespan of a normal human being. If not, the wine has no real utility to the person. Except as an inheritance to someone else. Maybe they did that back in 1929, dunno.

Most wine (and more and more wine that previously required substantial aging) is meant to be consumed on release or shortly thereafter. Vintage generalizations are oriented to this fact. They have more practical value in the short to medium term. After that, things get fuzzy and this is to be expected. If someone has the money to gamble long term and see who comes out the winner in 60 years more power to them. Hanes, he'll be dead.

It is a conservative and rational decision to attempt to derive maximal return on your investment in bottles or cases of wine. Many people literally cannot *afford* to take too many chances. People usually want to avoid *unnecessary risk* and sometimes vintage generalizations help you do this. Can this mislead at times? Absolutely. Can they cause someone to miss out on that dazzling exception? No doubt at all. And hard to argue that with wines of ageable characteristics vintage generalizations become less useful the *further* the wines get from their time of release. But if someone called up Hanes and asked, "Hanes, I'm gonna pop open a bottle tonight of Australian Shiraz with my friends what should I get?," and not knowing what specific wines were in the store the friend would be going to, Hanes would say look for a 2006 or 2005 vintage wine over a 2007. They're better vintages. But, Hanes, he's nuts.

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This month's big winners... From Monterey County comes a fairly priced 2007 Pinot Noir called Tarrica. No flash or anything unusual, just a solid wine for like \$17 which is what it should cost. It had been awhile since trying a wine from them but the 2005 Napa Valley Cabernet from Joseph Carr was a nice treat for \$24, simply because it has structure and does not rely on fruit to impress. Given that it needs a decanting and lots of air time to show well Hanes can see why it doesn't sell better. Have to say that Matanzas Creek makes a delicious Sauvignon Blanc out of Sonoma County. It is a shame that the 2007 version costs \$23 per bottle (and that is on distributor promotion) but if you've got the money, Hanes gets the time. Hanes never had a wine from these guys before but from Washington State the 2008 Alexandria Nicole "Shepherds Mark" white Rhône style blend offers good complexity and variation from the norm. Alas, tis \$28 which ain't in the current budget. Rosé, why do you cost so much money? Sigh. Anyway, no great surprise but the 2008 Commanderie de Peyrassol Côtes de Provence rosé is delightful, entrancing, intriguing, all that shit. But at \$19 it shall prove an infrequent treat.

The best \$15 and under picks... The Languedoc cooperative La Cave Les Costières de Pomerols always makes a nice Picpoul and their 2008 is no different and still like \$10. Note that the previous "Hugues Beaulieu" brand name has been shortened to "HB." This could confuse the hordes of people searching for Picpoul de Pinet. An offering in the "battle of the Mondavi boys," this one from Michael, he who purports to want to make more "traditional" wine. It's a 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon called "Canvas" and while there is zero information available on the grape sources for the wine (beyond being from California) it is a very nice value at \$12. A less expensive while still yummy rosé comes from Austria's Tegernseerhof and crafted from the Zweigelt grape. Screw Bandol and Tavel, this is \$14 so Hanes is buying! And if not that, the perennial fave, Muga's Rioja rosé (they stopped putting "Rosado" on the label for some reason) is as competent as ever in 2008 and about \$13. Still trying to sample some of what North Carolina has to offer and the 2006 Chambourcin from Westbend is an interesting wine that's off center enough to hold your attention. Worth the \$15, probably not much more. Not sure how available it is but the 2006 Raw Power Shiraz from Australia's Adelaide Plains is like \$14 and shows that even a cheap Shiraz can deviate from the recipe now and then. Maybe they weren't lying about regional differences in Australia? Nahhhh. Finally, the Casa Marguery 2007 Malbec from Argentina is around \$15 and offers more spine and muscle than many of the crowd pleaser styled competition. This is a good thing.

And the disappointments... The 2007 Turley "Rattlesnake Ridge" Zinfandel is not a bad wine but this offering tends to always end up vintage to vintage with like 88 points from Hanes. Which doesn't exactly validate the \$40 price sticker. Got to taste a few wines from an outfit in California under the moniker Acre. Wrote up the 2008 Merlot and Chardonnay which were blah but, just for the record, the other wines from Acre were blah too. Two Spanish cheapies slightly underperformed, the 2006 Altos de la Hoya Monastrell from Jumilla and the Barahonda "Carro" Monastrell-based blend from Yecla. Neither horrible but in the sea of inexpensive Spanish wine, nothing to get all excited about either.

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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/oldervintages2009.html>

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

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

Winery/Producer Name
Region of Origin, Appellation, Brand Name/Wine Style, Single Vineyard (if any applicable)
Grape Type
Vintage Year, Price Hanes Paid (if available), Alcohol Percentage (if available)
Tasting Notes, Hanes's Numeric Score (on the traditional, yet inane, 100 point scale [which for Hanes truly begins at around 80 points and more or less ends around 94 points])

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

CALIFORNIA RED

MadoroM
Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2005, \$80.00, 14.3%
Spotless black purple core, thin dark crimson rims, looks a little older than it is, clean surface. Toffee and butterscotch adorn the currant, plum, cherry scents, the sweetness focuses into toasted vanilla powder, wet tobacco leaf, orange peel and eucalyptus, not short per se but does tighten up, seems a product of where it is in its evolution. Medium-bodied, the tannins give it a, not fluffy, but well stirred up quality. The plum, currant, boysenberry, blackberry fruit has a jaunty thrust to it but trails off at the end. The cedar, tobacco, orange peel, mint shades contribute to its wiry feel. Actually has the acidity to freshen the finish. The oak has some toast but isn't overbearing. Kinda comes across as a touch shutdown already. 90

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge
Zinfandel
2007, \$40.00, 15.9%
Black core with equal red and purple influences, allows for only razor thin red-magenta rims, sleek surface draws your gaze to it. Ginger and clove spice contribute to the semi-brusque push into the nose, the breadth of the blackberry, boysenberry, raspberry scents make it all appear suddenly, almost startles, there's also eucalyptus and orange peel, the pine fades into alcoholic fumes, some sour oak and vanilla tones. Medium-bodied, gets lean

quickly via the acidity, really tightens things up. Drops in elements of grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus, ginger to nutmeg spice. Seems to want to express more tea leaf and cedar or teak wood but can't push it out fully. Ginger ale accents near the end. Actually isn't monolithic enough to fill the finish, hence, given the perceptible alcohol, not enough thickness to forgive that sin. 88

Tarrica Wine Cellars
Monterey County, Limited Release
Pinot Noir
2007, \$16.99, 13.5%
Light red-ruby color, barely touches on violet, that said, holds well through the rims with no sign of pink nor magenta, very clean throughout. Light roast to the cherry, raspberry fruit scents, cola nut and lemon peel grounded by wet leafy matter, the mild funk contributes to its lift and swirling through the nostrils, does not over-depend on the fruit. Medium-bodied, framed by acidity which highlights the lean musculature over the innate sweetness of the latter. Cola, cocoa, lemon citrus and ginger spice provide a steady supplement without flash. Does get a touch dry near the finish, Yet, keeps its edge and zestiness. Admirably free of fault and overreaching. Unlike Hanes. (Synthetic Cork: Supremecork) 88

Folio Winemakers' Studio (The Michael Mondavi Family)
Regional Blend, California, Canvas
Cabernet Sauvignon
2007, \$11.99, 13.5%
Plain enough ruby-purple of moderate+ opacity, lots of magenta in the yet dark rims, clean and unblemished throughout. Clove spice, cedar and general oak toast first sets you back on your heels in the nose yet the cavalry of

plum, black cherry, blackberry scents rides in alongside sweet orange zest to calm the masses, sweet tea and a smattering of eucalyptus there too, very subtle caramel notes. Medium-bodied, much more acidic and, to a lesser extent, tannic spine than expected, serves to mop up a good deal of the juicy plum, black cherry fruit. Some cedar, orange spice, tobacco leaf and sweet pine, all stays in balance nicely. The oak driven caramel, vanilla and butterscotch proportionate to the whole. Very intelligently put together at the price point. Grape sources unspecified. [Synthetic Cork] 88

Carr, Joseph
Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2005, \$23.99, 13.5%

Red garnet streaked purple core, very clear, maroon and brick red hues come through the very wide rims, given its clarity has the look of a wine in middle age. Takes some time to open up but when it does, there's a healthy amount of cedar, tobacco and orange peel in the nose, excellent counterweight to the chocolate and general toastiness, the red currant, red cherry scents have snappy verve and contribute to the unusually strong lift for a Cab. Medium-bodied, as in the nose it's unusual for its strong perceptible acidity and slightly dry, puckering mouth feel. Does not come across as underripe, nor overly tannic or green, just throws you back a little with its muscular tautness. There's a spiciness to the cherry, currant, raspberry fruit that keeps it skittering around the mouth. The abundant white grapefruit, orange citrus contributes here too, there's not much to anchor it in one spot. The tobacco to tea leaf, cedar notes meet black licorice and anise. This is a wine that demands a good decanting if not Day 2 tasting note and should be considered as such. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 2.5% Cabernet Franc, 2.5% Petit Verdot. 88

Clayhouse Vineyard
Regional Blend, Central Coast, Adobe Red
Blend
2006, \$13.99, 14.1%

Very clean unto transparent in spite of the solid red purple coloration, more of a dark ruby hued rims which leaves an impression that it would start bricking soon. Honey coat, molasses saturated nose, plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit nice and juicy, eucalyptus too, caramel grows over time, some grill smoke, hard to argue that it's much more than a big heaping of fruit. Medium-bodied, has a mildly surprising amount of acidity, this spotlighting white grapefruit citrus and a more airy pine element. The juiciness in the plum, currant, mulberry, cherry fruit front-loaded and much drier towards the finish. Caramel, molasses, butterscotch come through without any boringly predictable dependence on oak. It's alright and the price is fair. 58% Zinfandel, 17% Syrah, 13% Petite Sirah, 12% Malbec. [Synthetic Cork] 86

Acre
Regional Blend, Central Coast
Merlot
2008, \$15.99, 13.5%

Very spotless liquid, so beyond the black purple core you can see through the brick red to dried blood hued rims, looks sleek in the glass. Plummy, if dry, nose with a good dose of chocolate, caramel and gingerbread, contributes a burst of orange peel before getting a little grassy, the oak definitely adds sweetness and body to its presence. In the

mouth it's medium-bodied and tries real hard to squeeze whatever juice it can out of the plum, cherry fruit, to mixed results. Dry in an underripe phenolics way, never bitter but comes across as herbaceous with a nod towards bell pepper. The orange citrus brings out a little tea leaf. The caramel, butterscotch oak unable to salve wounds as well as in the nose. What's most unfortunate is that it's not an approachable, gregarious Merlot nor is it a balanced, structured wine. Gets lost in the middle and probably loses its audience in the process. You could forgive this at \$7.99. 80% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petite Sirah. Grapes sourced 72% Monterey County, 20% San Benito County, 8% San Luis Obispo County. [Composite Cork] 84

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Matanzas Creek
Sonoma County
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$22.99, 13.5%

Green to bleached white straw in hue, much more sheer shine and luster than color, fully transparent with glassine rims. The nose displays a certain salinity which carves away at the floral mist as well as lime and orange zest, has a lot of lift while retaining a firm feel, there's a trim, freshly picked character to the apricot, pear, green apple scents, not at all fruity. Medium-bodied, shows many of the same characteristics here as well, in no way archly acidic but has a certain tautness which keeps the apricot, peach, pear fruit slimmed down. This leaves more room for the expressive white grapefruit, lime, tangerine citrus to swirl aggressively through the palate. Sea salt, stone powder and chalk dust give it more personality than most, the floral dimension a touch stifled here. Kicks through the finish line without losing stride. Has more elegance when fully chilled than when closer to room temperature. 87% Sauvignon Blanc, 13% Sauvignon Musque. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 89

Clayhouse Vineyard
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$12.99, 14.0%

Faint yellow hay color, whitens around the rims, visually redeemed by a resplendent surface and general spotless gleaming. The nose lacks punch and penetrating power, however, initial flurry of white grapefruit, lemon citrus and pineapple, apricot, nectarine fruit has enough street toughness for effect, afterwards there's demure floral and white stone to chalk stick notes. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and comes across as a "tweener," that is, it's not really crisp and brisk like, say, a Sancerre, but the malo or leesy creaminess isn't defining the personality either, all stainless here. You get the white grapefruit, lemon pith loud and clear, no real issue with the stoniness either. The pineapple, nectarine, peach, green to yellow apple fruit lacks the juice or zest to be tropical, just gets halfway through and then grinds to a halt. Just seems like it's trying to do too much rather than pick a direction and run with it. [Synthetic Cork] 85

Acre
Regional Blend, Central Coast
Chardonnay
2008, \$15.99, 13.5%

Green-gold color of moderate depth, definitely trails off toward the rims, clear enough and with average shine.

Nose can't shake a jalapeño sourness as if pickled, then slides you the vanilla oak cream and toasted white bread, some mint and orange blossom, curious quiet quality to the peach, pear fruit scents, a honeyed accent ensures it will stay anchored in the nostrils rather than lift. Full-bodied and sluggish in the mouth, sour is as sour does, pucker on the attack and the finish. More depth to the peach, apricot, apple fruit yet without a great deal of juiciness. The citrus bite lasts better, here a curious amount of white grapefruit alongside orange and lemon. You could probably say it has more acidity than its immediate peers but difficult to gauge through the tartness. With 50% French oak and 100% malolactic fermentation you'd think it would be oakier but it even comes up short on that score. The etched bottle is pretty and will ensure increasing market share for sure. [Composite Cork] 83

WASHINGTON WHITE

Alexandria Nicole Cellars
Columbia Valley, Horse Heaven Hills, Destiny Ridge
Vineyards, Shepherds Mark

Blend
2008, \$27.99, 13.4%

Nice layering to the golden hue, albeit somewhat flat and without shine, holds well through the rims, has that solid block in a glass look. Lightly honeyed nose, serves as an entry point to the dewy florality, bright orange zest and fresh apricot, pear, yellow apple scents, possesses the expected nuttiness and brush of clove spice, given its considerable weight it gets up and lifts some too. Medium-bodied, sure it's bottom heavy in terms of overall density and textural cling, however, it strides forward without breaking a sweat. No dried fruit notes in the apricot, peach, pear, apple fruit, thick but not overly sweet. The nuttiness here lends a bitter edge, welcome in adding alertness and supplementing the tangerine, lime citrus. Has more edge than most of its ilk. 65% Roussanne, 24% Marsanne, 11% Viognier. 89

OREGON RED

Van Duzer
Willamette Valley, Vintner's Cuvée
Pinot Noir

2007, \$18.99, 13.0%

Clear violet-ruby color with the emphasis on the later, easily transparent, the rims shift to a more pink to red magenta hue. The nose offers up cola, pine needle, lemon peel and a dusting of mocha powder, sufficient svelteness in the cherry, raspberry scents to allow alcoholic fumes to break through, even at its relatively low alcohol percentage. Medium-bodied, and just, there's a taut balance to it like it's been stripped down to a fighting weight below its healthiest level. Same level of cherry, raspberry fruit as in the nose, no richness nor paucity. The cola is somewhat lower but you get more floral notes here. Not short at the end but the succinctness of the message may make the finish appear abrupt. 87

NORTH CAROLINA RED

Westbend Vineyards
Yadkin Valley
Chambourcin

2006, \$14.99, 12.5%

Presents a purple core with plenty of brick red, scarlet influences, the rims more brickish with a certain aged

quality, clean throughout, clear visibility. Sweet, jammy nose of plum, cherry, blackberry juice, orange and grapefruit juice too, leather and tar, not especially complex but very sticky and longlasting. Medium-bodied with a rich fullness to it, you feel like there's not much space left empty in the mouth. Grapey character to the plum, cherry, boysenberry fruit, sort of smoky at the same time too. Or you could say it's the "foxy" North American vibe, leather, fur and tar. The white grapefruit element has lots of zest and provides a kick to the overall pacing. Whether you find it good, bad or indifferent there's plenty of flavor and punch here and by no stretch is it a boring wine. [Synthetic Cork] 88

NORTH CAROLINA WHITE

Raffaldini Vineyards

Yadkin Valley

Vermentino

2007, \$16.00, 13.7%

Plain yellow color with a mild orange cast, just deep enough to bend light some otherwise transparent, noticeable fade at the rims. The nose is very spicy and penetrating with something like a chili pepper edge alongside the orange to lime blossom, ginger spice, tropical pineapple, nectarine, guava, passion fruit scents, all flash and lightening, overall could be said to sacrifice staying power for cut. Light to medium-bodied, the acidity has some oomph but isn't the driving force, once more it is the chili pepper, white pepper, tangerine to lime zest, mineral smoke and hint of toastiness. The pear, apricot, peach fruit does get a jolt from the pineapple, papaya touches. The floral dimension too gentle to play a significant role. The bracing sourness actually may be its strongest attribute. Screw typicality, it's just curious to put a glass or so down. 87

FRANCE RED

Amirault, Yannick

Loire, Bourgueil, La Coudraye

Cabernet Franc

2007, \$13.99, 12.5%

Unblemished and mostly transparent, even at the ruby-purple core, the broad rims a tug of war between ruby-magenta and more red brick hues, plenty of surface reflectivity. While there's a little barnyard stink to the nose, the cow patties and animal hide eventually subside in favor of Bing cherry, black raspberry fruit scents, shaded by field stones and white grapefruit pith, neither especially floral nor herbaceous although there is a dill pickle aspect to it, good overall lift. Medium-bodied, firm tannic grip, needs a fair bit of air to unwind. Beneath all that is a solid core of red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit and white grapefruit. More pressed flower presence here, in turn it delivers more straight-up earth and ashen stones than funk and animality. The acidity smoothes the finish out somewhat and allows it to extend some. Bright, puckering wine. 88

Arveyres, Chateau d'

Bordeaux, Grave de Vayres

Blend

2005, \$22.99, 13.0%

Close to black core, the dark purple barely perceptible, the rims an equally dense brick red to crimson in cast. While the nose presents a burly core of black currant, cherry scents, dry tobacco ash, mineral dust, bell pepper and

grass run the show, shades of cedar and orange peel lend a touch of sweetness, moderate length overall. Medium-bodied, there's a sinewy spine of tannin to it but arguably it's the acidity that gives it the most zippy charge and posture. Tartness permeates the cherry, currant, raspberry fruit, not to say it's juiceless but you only get a precious few seconds to enjoy before your mouth starts to pucker. Slightly green, but in keeping with what should be its general profile, less bell pepper, more straightforward earth, minerals, leather and dried field flowers. Displays a slight burst of oak toast and cedar, vanilla and a suggestion of dill. Vin de garde style which won't float much here in the US of A. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Cave Les Costières de Pomerols, La
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc Picpoul de
Pinet, HB
Picpoul
2008, \$9.99, 12.5%

Simple yellow straw color with a pleasing layered translucency, adequate surface shine to distract from the diminished rims. Honeyed golden apple and pear infused nose, lemon tarts, floral powder and mineral dust keep it zigging and zagging between dry and sweet, develops a stony smokiness which keeps it lifting, more tactile diversity than array of scents. Medium-bodied, has a certain saline, chili pepper edge to it which lends pucker to the attack. Stone and minerals pair with lemon, lime twists to continuously tickle and prickle the tongue. The peach, apricot, apple, pear fruit concisely presented with no trouble maintaining through the finish. Tends to hover close to the tongue without much lift and inner mouth perfume, yet, conversely, this probably helps it keep its weight. The citrus crests during the finish, the wine's final calling card. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 88

Helfrich
Alsace
Gewürztraminer
2007, \$14.99, 12.5%

Solid golden color, nicely layered and closer to green than white in tint, light translucency helps it sit thicker in the glass. Sweet nose drips litchee nut, honeysuckle and orange blossom, close to syrupy apricot, peach, pear, cherry fruit scents, possesses sufficient streamwater, pebble notes to avoid undue thickness or sluggishness, a suggestion of grapefruit also adds to late forming erect posture. Medium-bodied with that mouth filling "water balloon" type of texture, pliant and malleable but never not there. Light baking spices and general nuttiness, less outright litchee here. The orange, lime citrus focuses things a few notches while the rose, honeysuckle floral side stays more dewy than breezy. Pear, yellow apple, apricot fruit flavors present more roundness and accessibility than sweetness per se. Does dry out credibly through the finish but by then people who don't like sweet wines are likely to have been turned off. All in all an acceptable entry level example. [Screwcap] 87

FRANCE ROSE

Peyrassol, Commanderie de
Provence, Côtes de Provence, Rosé
Blend
2008, \$18.99, 12.5%

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It's pink at base yet shows a metallic quality which pulls it both towards orange and red, there's just an unnatural glow to it, close to full transparency, color drops off substantially at the rims. Subtle saline edge stiffens the violets and roses in the nose, fresh lemony breeze, just ripened strawberry, raspberry fruit, offers more minerality but there is a touch of meadow grasses as well. Medium-bodied, so taut you could play its ligaments like a banjo. The acidity commands respect but is a just and merciful ruler, no one put to death. The grapefruit, lemon citrus comes close to knocking down the strawberry, red cherry, raspberry, watermelon fruit. Chalky stoniness helps keep the contours well-delineated. Head fake that it might get kind of grassy and then instead sweetens through the finish. There's a reason the glass is already empty. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault. 90

AUSTRIA ROSE

Mittelbach (Tegernseerhof), Weingut Familie Franz
Südburgenland, Rosé
Zweigelt
2008, \$13.99, 12.0%

Has an almost metallic shine in the pink coloration, very bright and shiny with consistent hue depth through the rims. The nose is succinct and concisely stated, strawberry and raspberry fruit, lemon peel, crushed white pebbles and mineral dust, as well as a pinch of dried grass. Medium-bodied, very dry and acidic which contributes to its overall feeling of firmness and muscularity. That said, the strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit comes through clearly and juicily. Add in some lemon zest and there's a pleasing interplay of sweet and sour. The zing in the minerality likely disguises any earthiness underneath. Displays minimal herbaceousness yet, again, the wattage here is bright enough to blind you to some elements. As one might expect, becomes a little powdery/dusty at the end. More flavorful when close to room temperature, more enjoyable when nicely chilled. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 88

SPAIN RED

Olivares, Bodegas
Jumilla, Finca Hoya de Santa Aña Altos de la Hoya
Monastrell
2006, \$11.99, 14.0%

Dusky purple core achieves opacity while at different moments suggesting tints of black, brown or ruby, out towards the rims much more of a solid red-ruby cast. Big plummy nose with undercurrents of blackberry and blueberry, fills in the blanks with milk chocolate powder, pressed flowers, orange peel and sweet tobacco accents, stays full for some time, and with only a light alcoholic booziness. Full-bodied, remains overly dependent on primary fruit here in the mouth, loading up on plum, black cherry, blackberry flavors, even if they trail off near the finish. You still get cocoa, mocha tones and solid mixed citrus bite. And some of that tobacco, leather, tea leaf stuff. Dries up prematurely but not in an offputting way, if you're not paying attention you'd probably not notice. Throw it back stuff. Primarily Monastrell, small unspecified percentage of Garnacha. [Synthetic Cork: Supremecorq] 86

Barahonda, Bodegas Señorío de
Yecla, Carro
Blend

2006, \$11.99, 14.5%

Clear, if dark, red-purple core, segues into a red-magenta to ruby hued rims, plenty of saturation to be had. The nose marred by a strong peanut shell element, on the reductive side of things, muddy earth and merde before the plum/prune, black cherry, peach fruit ensues, there is some alcoholic heat as well, orange juice, menthol and warm chocolate touches come next, kind of a slugger with poor footwork. Full-bodied and sluggish, like it doesn't want to wake up from a nap. No lack of layers of plum, currant, cherry fruit, even if it dries out some past the mid-palate. Orange peel, menthol, eucalyptus and an undercurrent of buttered popcorn and toast flesh things out some.

Displays some acidity, not much tannin. Does give you a late arriving sour twist. Competent enough, however, nothing here to truly separate it decisively from the horde of competitor peers. 50% Monastrell, 20% Syrah, 20% Tempranillo, 10% Merlot. (Synthetic Cork: ExcellentCork) 86

SPAIN ROSE

Muga, Bodegas
Rioja
Blend

2008, \$12.99, 13.5%

Metallic pink coloration, dazzling glow, closer to orange than to yellow or ruby, unique brightness strengthens the rims. Maybe it's the power of visual suggestion but has a metallic minerality in the nose too, focuses the white grapefruit, orange citrus notes as well as the light herbaceousness, good mix of apricot, apple, pear and persimmon fruit scents. Medium-bodied, sets itself firmly in the mouth, while fluid no easy sipper. The acidity has a few rough edges which, overall, works well and keeps its legs churning across the palate. Intertwined presentation of the orange, lemon, grapefruit citrus, more of a bigger force, pushing the mineral and stone a touch back. Fruit pit notes throughout the apricot, peach, apple flavors, more streamlined than tropical here. Sweetens some towards the finish while damn dry yet. Quite different well-chilled to room temperature. 60% Garnacha, 30% Viura, 10% Tempranillo. 88

AUSTRALIA RED

Raw Power
South Australia, Adelaide Plains
Shiraz

2006, \$13.99, 14.9%

Reddish purple, like plum pulp, opaque without being monolithically impenetrable, vivid crimson hued rims, looks the part naturally. Taut plum, blackberry, black cherry scents, ripe without excess juiciness, noticeable orange citrus burst, mixes in coconut, caramel and fresh butter without appearing thoughtlessly oaky, touch of eucalyptus and wildflowers, no alcoholic burn. Medium-bodied, has the muscularity you expect but not muscle-bound. Sweeter profile to the plum, currant, cherry fruit, strays from prune territory. Molasses, mesquite smoke and butterscotch again in measured portions. The zing in the orange, white grapefruit citrus keeps it nimble too and underscores that it's not devoid of acidity. Delivers at the price point and can be served to many geeks who would normally barf at the smell of Shiraz. (Screwcap) 88

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ARGENTINA RED

Marguery, Casa Vinicola Familia
Mendoza, Casa Marguery
Malbec

2007, \$14.99, 14.0%

Deep purple core draws it over into opacity, its clarity visible through the equally rich red-magenta rims, attractively reflective surface. Linear presentation to the nose, earth, forest breeze and stone shards as present as black cherry, blackberry fruit scents, dollop of orange citrus, gingerbread and pine, packs it all together into a well-orchestrated punch. Medium-bodied and once more tightly woven, here the tannins really play a channeling and drying role without overstepping their bounds. As a result, the plum, cherry, currant fruit has full expression as well as a defined place in the whole. The earth, stone, tobacco component more evident here due to the dryness. And the orange fades into a sour white grapefruit bite too. Minimal oak presence. Comes close to earning a "rustic" label and ideally should be served at the dinner table. (Synthetic Cork) 88