

The Hanes Wine Review, July 2013 Edition

Man, is there still so little to say about wine. How do all “these other” people do it? Gosh, it might be torture to have a weekly column (been there, done that) and have to find some new angle by deadline. Especially if one had to focus on inexpensive wine. Lot easier to write when price is no object. Guess it depends on your audience. The *New York Times* is one thing, *The Des Moines Register* is another. Hey, writing tasting notes after awhile is just like breathing, it’s structured and methodical. Easy enough for those with an analytical bent. But Hanes has been into wine seriously since like 1998 and after awhile it gets redundant and boring to read in-depth about wine (and the world of wine). *Experiencing* wine firsthand still intrigues. Yet, *studying* about wine and keeping up with the latest information (new wineries, vintage characteristics, what wine is ready to drink now or needs more time, where is this winemaker working, etc.), it’s cool in small bites but that’s it. As you get older there’s a lot of varied interesting stuff beyond wine to attract one’s fancy. A tip of the cap to all those who can maintain a deep dedication to studying wine for over a decade. Whew, Hanes needs a drink just thinking about it.

This month’s big winners... 2010 seems to be offering good value for red Bordeaux, a lot more fruit than expected and decent enough structure to support at least medium term aging. As examples, the Château Brown from Pessac-Léognan and Château Citran from the Haut-Médoc are very drinkable now and display attractive pedigree for like \$30 or a little less. Been some time since Hanes treated himself to a Riesling from Australian producer Grosset but treat he did. The 2012 “Alea” from Clare Valley is labeled as off-dry but it is certainly dry enough and structured and tropical and all that. Well worth the \$23 expended. From Piedmont, Italy Sella’s 2011 “Orbello” bottling is a delicious Nebbiolo based blend, great acidity, clean and food friendly for under \$20. While not crazy about the wines made under their Chester’s Anvil line, Lagier-Meredith’s new attempt at branching out beyond Syrah hit the mark with the 2011 “Tribidrag” Mount Veeder Zinfandel. Certainly not cheap at \$45 but some stellar juice. The Jura love fest continues with 2009 Domaine Labet “Fleurs” Chardonnay, wonderful perfume, smooth and fresh but, again, over \$30 a bottle. The Griffin’s Lair Vineyard is one of the best for growing Syrah in Northern California and Bedrock does it justice with their 2011 bottling, youthfully powerful with floral and stony notes, should develop nicely, fair enough price at \$37. If you usually spend \$37 for a bottle of wine. And who doesn’t? A unique treat made from the Tibouren grape, the 2011 Clos Cibonne rosé from Provence called the “Cuvée Spéciale des Vignettes” was familiar and different at once, full and ripe and very much along the lines of what one should seek in high end rosé, this too being around \$30.

The best \$15 and under picks... Another less expensive 2010 Bordeaux rouge, the Château des Proms “Cuvée Bellevue” from Graves is a nice find for about \$10. Fruit, mineral, stone, citrus and bell pepper, yum. Been impressed with inexpensive Graves reds of late, they appear to be improving across the board. Another one of those “off the beaten path” grapes, Monica from Sardinia can make some fun wines and the 2010 “San Bernardino” from Il Nuraghe offers very good complexity for \$15, would be interesting to see what local cuisine gets paired with it. Spain’s more prestigious regions seem to be coming up with quality entry level wines, witness the 2010 Cesca Vicent from Priorat, good flesh and flavor and not simple, all for like \$15 which is way below what most acceptable Priorat wines cost. Rodáno’s “Poggialupi” bottling usually delivers and the 2011 is no exception, an enjoyable blend of Sangiovese and some Merlot from Tuscany, still under \$15. From Terra Alta, Spain the “Clot d’Encís Vi Blanc” white blend produced by Agricola Sant Josep and based on Grenache Blanc is a crisp, citrusy and floral chugger for under \$10, energetic.

And the disappointments... Not really sure it is a “disappointment” per se but one keeps hoping to find a super value Barbaresco hence the fingers crossed for the 2009 Fratelli Serio & Battista Borgogno basic bottling which cost Hanes like \$24. Nice enough, rugged and traditional, just not forcing you to back up the truck and buy in volume. Contra to the above statement, the 2011 Ribera del Duero “Roble” from Vega Real was okay but just. Not funky and has some zing to it, could drink it again but could just as much find another wine to spend \$8 on. Had it at a big tasting and made a note to revisit later but the 2012 Shadow Chaser Grenache from McLaren Vale, Australia actually lacked sweetness and body, weird given where it’s from. At least it was under \$15. Luckily did not consume much sucky wine this month.

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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>

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

Turley

Napa Valley, Turley Estate

Zinfandel

2011, \$38.00, 15.6%

Faint murky dullness to the red magenta to purple core, pushes it into opacity, more of a standard brick red along the rims, lots of color but lacks liveliness. The nose displays obvious ripeness in the fruit but also more snap and pop than might be expected, green apple, cranberry and orange zest blended into the blueberry, raspberry, cherry base, topped off with vanilla and caramel, at times nutty as well, floral and fairly openly knit for the weight it leverages into your nostrils, any alcoholic heat kept at bay. Medium to full-bodied, moves slowly yet adroitly through the palate, it's not that the acidity is more perceptible than usual but, again, you get all kinds of pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus and green apple. Butterscotch, vanilla, toffee and even roasted coffee all present but the oakiness is proportionate to if not demure in the face of candied rhubarb, cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit, fruit pie like consistency. Acts like it wants to steamroll you but then doesn't but then again wants you to acknowledge it could have. High drinkability for the octane. 91

Lagier Meredith

Napa Valley, Mount Veeder, Tribidrag

Zinfandel

2011, \$45.00, 15.1%

The core is an immaculately bright violet hue, the rims a reddish ruby, well-colored without steroidal saturation. The nose is quite brisk and highlights white grapefruit, menthol, tea leaf and licorice as much as plum, cherry, boysenberry fruit scents, while light of foot keeps its richness until the end, there's some savory herb notes as well. Full-bodied, very balanced and even from attack through finish, almost preternaturally so, no hair out of place. That biting white grapefruit and sour orange citrus fills up the mouth entry and underscores the above average perceptible acidity. Cranberry, raspberry, red cherry, blueberry fruit displays sugar and tartness. The oak is well hidden, some chocolate, cocoa and hard butterscotch candy accents. Attractive mentholated lift has it swirling. Great personality even as it delivers on more mainstream expectations. 91

Bedrock Wine Co.

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Griffin's Lair

Vineyard

Syrah

2011, \$37.00, 14.0%

Fat glow to the purple core, looks like beet juice in a glass, the rims all luminescent red ruby, looks like it go three days without needing sleep. Very floral nose with a cornerstone of orange, lemon citrus, while the contours are long and smooth it has some snap too,

primarily from cut grass and chalky stone notes, it's as if you can feel the ripe plum, currant, cherry fruit scents biting their lip to keep from talking too loudly, displays lots of latent power. Full-bodied, while sweet it is primarily from the raw material, fully ripened cherry, plum, blackberry flavors and juicy mixed citrus. That bodacious florality certainly keeps it going in this direction. Acidity is satisfactory but not noteworthy. The caramel, toffee oak stays on the down tip and just bolsters what's there, not looking for the spotlight. Some stone, ash and forest breeze leafiness but at this point it's just a genial pup, looking to romp and play. And so it does. 89% Syrah, 11% Viognier. 90

Turley
Contra Costa County, Duarte Vineyard
Zinfandel
2011, \$32.00, 15.6%

Has a crimson-tinged violet core with good overall clarity, the rims are a scarlet to darker ruby color, has "visual restraint" and no forced saturation. Sweetly candied nose of raspberry, blackberry liqueur, caramel to butterscotch tones, orange pulp, sweet garden herbs, mentholated enough to create a pleasingly soft lift, nothing pushy going on. Medium-bodied, has surprising tang to it, nice acidic snap which highlights the white grapefruit, orange citrus. On the whole never gets that sweet and builds on a foundation of menthol, mesquite grill smoke, earth and stone to stay fresh and with good posture. The raspberry, red cherry, blueberry fruit has clear contours and finishes with unforced length. At times savory with rosemary, sage herb accents, wildflowers. Not a dumbed down steamroller. 90

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Dusi Vineyard
Zinfandel
2011, \$42.00, 16.1%

A very light haziness deepens the violet core, very broad red magenta to cranberry red rims, certainly deeply hued throughout but lacks visual sparkle. Lots of vanilla in the nose, supplemented by coconut flakes, caramel and mint, overshadows the cherry, boysenberry, pomegranate fruit scents, fair degree of white grapefruit zest in there, grill smoke too and some saddle leather, not simple nor unbalanced but just does not quite cohere, you also get more golden raisin and date as the wine opens. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, not svelte but no rubber tire around the middle, can't say it is especially acidic or tannic or such. The oak better knit in here, benefits from a steady eucalyptus fueled breeze. The plum, cherry, blueberry fruit retains a percentage of prune to raisin qualities. Chocolate, butterscotch and coconut trump the vanilla.

Hides the alcohol well, never too jammy and does not seem desperate to please. Drinks smoothly. 89

Turley
Dry Creek Valley, Grist Vineyard
Zinfandel
2011, \$40.00, 15.1%

The purple core really is not all that dark and falls short of opaque, shifts with ease into broad cranberry to magenta red rims, pleasing glow, straightforward on the whole with nothing remarkable about it. The nose has a little stone powder to dried grass tickle to it, orange peel, menthol, licorice, soft strawberry, rhubarb, raspberry fruit scents, then perhaps a glimmer of savory herbs and dried beef blood, the oak comes across as modest, some buttered popcorn at best/worst. Medium-bodied, racy acidity gives it verve and keeps the pace up. White grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus imbues it with tart tang, the raspberry, red cherry, watermelon, apricot fruit flavorful but not that juicy. Here you get a clearer appearance of caramel, chocolate and butterscotch, this too more brisk than sweet. Appreciably drier through the finish, at times close to gritty in texture. Fine level of complexity, makes you think drinking young is best as not sure what you will get if the fruit starts to fade. 89

Turley
Sonoma Valley, Fredericks Vineyard
Zinfandel
2010, \$42.00, 15.3%

The opaque purple core is a touch flat, neither much glow nor shine, the rims remain a noticeably dark scarlet to deep magenta red, deeply stained throughout. The nose first comes on with buttered popcorn, caramel and butterscotch and then mint, lilacs and cinnamon, finally releasing into plum, black cherry, blueberry scents which stop short of prune and such, at times the alcoholic fumes do disturb things. Full-bodied, heavy but not quite sluggish, no structure but oodles of molasses, fresh butter, caramel and honey, all laid out on super-ripe plum, cherry fruit which is borderline grapey. The sweetness actually helps provide a sense of motion. More perfumed than floral, every woman in a white lab coat got a good spritz in on you. Light pink grapefruit, tangerine tang at the end. Just a big, enthusiastically sloppy kiss which in its own way has its charms. 88

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge
Zinfandel
2011, \$40.00, 15.2%

Basic somewhat opaque purple core, broad red-ruby to scarlet rims, not quite as luminescently bright as many of its peer group. Simple, guileless nose of plum,

blackberry, blueberry fruit, caramel, flowers, menthol and pine cones, lemon peel, no splash or flash, just a steady unfolding, not very oaky nor sugary. Full-bodied, flat as in just awakened from a nap and not quite alert yet. More caramel, mesquite smoke, molasses here but still nowhere near what you'd peg as "oaky" per se. The cherry, plum, blackberry fruit is soft and round, more juicy and wet than sweet. Has a modicum of citrus, eucalyptus, tea leaf and ginger spice. Amazing for its ability to seem on the precipice of revving the engine an burning rubber without doing so. Nice wine yet too much of a tease, would actually be more appealing as an unrepentant fruit bomb. 88

Fogline Vineyards

Dry Creek Valley, Grist Vineyard

Zinfandel

2011, \$28.00, 14.0%

Clear and shiny, builds outwards from a ruby-purple core towards brighter magenta rims with a touch of pink, sleek and catches your glance with ease. The nose is dominated by butter, oak toast, butterscotch and dill, eventually makes room for plum, blueberry, blackberry fruit scents and a bottom heavy menthol element, dissolves bluntly, not very openly knit. Medium-bodied, also taut and firm here in the mouth, the vanilla, oak cream, popcorn and butter remain a looming presence. The dryness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit prevents it from juicing up the palate. Lemon to orange citrus, eucalyptus and tea leaf give it some needed sour character and energy. alludes to an underlying stony earthiness. The fruit does shine through at the end but more so that buttered popcorn stuff. 87

Bedrock Wine Co.

Regional Blend, California, Shebang! Sixth Cuvée Red Wine

Blend

NV, \$11.99, 14.2%

Clear ruby red to violet, more brighter cranberry red at the rims, more shine than richness, no questioning vibrancy of color anywhere, pinker outer edges. Chocolate, caramel and mint frame an overall sweet nose with candied raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, orange blossom, some underbrush, meadow scrub notes, you get some burnt toastiness before it all dissolves. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, has girth but not really weight. Not exactly structured but has a drying quality which is reminiscent of tannin. Lightly jammy raspberry, strawberry blackberry fruit, you could pour it on some pancakes at iHop. Butterscotch, caramel, vanilla and chocolate add to the confectionary character. Lemon, orange and a little white grapefruit introduce a tart tang. A very fruit driven

wine. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, Sangiovese. (Screwcap) 87

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Steen, Leo

Dry Creek Valley, Saini Farms

Chenin Blanc

2012, \$15.99, 13.6%

Semi-bright white-green in color, fully transparent, its shine is its best visual aspect. Compact with good thrust in the nose, sizable apricot, green apple, pear fruit with honey, honeysuckle, orange peel accents and a touch of salinity and minerality too, turns more relaxed over time, developing dried apple notes, yet stays dense too. Medium to full-bodied, has a languid stretch across the palate, spreads out steadily like ketchup. The apple, peach, pear, green melon, cherry again have a mild dried fruit sweetness but there's also a serious amount of minerality and stoniness. The lime, lemon, orange citrus has sourness as well as a soft drink quality too. The acidity has a strong, broad netting without negatively effecting the creaminess and florality at the end. Pinch of black licorice. Grows on you, in the sec tendre style. 89

FRANCE RED

Brown, Château

Bordeaux, Pessac-Léognan

Blend

2010, \$28.99, 14.0%

Inky color, heavily saturated purple core falls just short of black, the thin rims are a blood red to magenta hue, obviously built to visually impress. The nose has a floral, minty quality to it which helps relieve the density of the plum, black cherry fruit scents, the oak toast is on the low side, mostly burnt notes, coffee and cocoa, ends with a pleasing burst of bell pepper and iron flecked earth and stone, keeps it honest. In the mouth it's full-bodied and kind of plush, like it almost forgot to add some tannin into the mix and did so last minute. The cherry, blackberry, plum fruit has a velvety texture, mouth filler. The floral base gets accompanied by cedar, leather, graphite, and white grapefruit accents. That bell pepper or herbal edge recedes some here. But the oak toast stays about the same, mainly cocoa, coffee and burnt bread. It's very competently put together, not overwrought and may convince some it has structure but this is unlikely to age meaningfully beyond the mid-term. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot. 89

Citran, Château
Bordeaux, Haut-Médoc
Blend

2010, \$21.99, 13.5%

Very dark and fat purple core which just falls short of full opacity, the rims are mainly ruby but show strong signs of a brick red future, lots of visual youthful vigor. While nose possesses bountiful plum, cherry, red currant fruit it's true strength lies in the minerally, gravelly earth, cedar, bell pepper and meadow grasses, the oak is certainly proportionate to the whole, mild vanilla and toasted bread, no sweet candy stuff. In the mouth it's full-bodied with plenty of volume cheek-to-cheek and succulent cherry, cassis, plum fruit and supporting flowers, orange peel and sweet cedar. There's some tannin there but covered by the fruit and not doing much to dry things out or create chewiness. Still, it's not overly simple and has enough stone, gravel, earth and incipient leather or smoke to warrant watching. Good to go now and should at a minimum prove an intermediate ager, maybe longer once the baby fat is gone. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Merlot. 89

Guignier, Michel
Beaujolais, Morgon, Bio-Vitis
Gamay Noir

2011, \$18.99, 13.0%

There's a resplendent shininess across the surface, underneath a core of clear violet, the rims barely shift into a dark red ruby, vibrant and deeply hued throughout. The nose has a heavy floral musk to it, orange peels and underneath a damp earthiness, if not animal hide quality, the blackberry, black cherry, raspberry fruit scents are thick and extremely ripe, hard to wipe it out of your nostrils. Full-bodied, has sufficient tannin to fashion a dry attack, after that the flowers, white citrus and plum, cherry, blackberry fruit soften things appreciably. Adopts a fluffy mouth feel, close to cotton balls. Momentary glance of tanginess at the end with that citrus and some savory herbs and minerality. Not as funky as in the nose. Satisfying even without a true sense of flow, the weave is firm yet gives. 88

Proms, Château des
Bordeaux, Graves, Cuvée Bellevue
Blend

2010, \$9.99, 12.5%

Basic crimson red to purple color, pushes across into a clean opacity in the core, the rims have more of a burnt crimson red cast, youthful while still semi-brooding. The nose has a crunchy texture and gives you bell pepper, white grapefruit, brine and jalapeño juice, builds on a foundation of minerals and black stony earth, never too aggressive, the cranberry, red

cherry fruit scents all business, no fun. Full-bodied with good traction and a fluffy lift which lends additional volume. Has that bell pepper plus flowers, white citrus, stone, minerals and a light leatheriness. Not much oak present, vague cocoa toast. The cherry, boysenberry, blackberry fruit is solid but not close to the major focal point. Smoky residue at the end with animal fur notes. Distinct personality for the price. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 5% Malbec, 5% Cabernet Franc. 88

Grand-Jour, Château
Bordeaux, Côtes de Bourg, Cuvée Tradition
Blend

2010, \$8.99, 14.0%

Nothing unusual about the ruby-purple core, basic in all respects, nice vibrancy in the crimson red rims, clear and spotless, not a hair out of place. Ripe and close to candied cherry, raspberry fruit in the nose, tea leaf, cedar, incense, hint of bell pepper, texturally it is dry so does not overfill your nostrils. Medium-bodied, there is a slight astringency to it but otherwise it is "precocious" and fruit driven with lots of raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, all sweet and ripened. Orange peel, more tobacco and tea leaf, damp cedar, not very oaky at all, vague background toastiness. Any green leafiness massaged out, not even a real bell pepper element, the tannin is awkward and structures in a lurching fashion. Fruit lasts well into the finish, chugs right along. At the price you'd have to be mean spirited to complain. 65% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc. (Composite Cork: Diam) 87

Ameillaud, Domaine de l'
Rhône, Vin de Pays de Vaucluse
Blend

2011, \$7.99, 14.0%

You can see through the violet core with ease, more red-ruby to cranberry red at the rims, trim and shiny surface, attractive vibrancy. There's a lot of fruit in the nose, however, it comes across as pureed together and lacks distinct separation, cocoa powder, some reductive muddy earthiness, dried orange peels, more wildflowers and forest scrub. Medium-bodied, much heavier through the attack and then sheds weight at a steady pace by the finish. Has a lightly stemmy tannic side, however, the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit stays wet and juicy through the end. Sappy orange and white grapefruit citrus. That cocoa to mocha there, burnt, pushed into the background. Not green yet can't shake this odd astringency which distracts. That bracketed, it's a perfectly fine and just off-center everyday drinker. Should be able to be paired with a decent array of foods too. 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 20% Carignan. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Labet, Domaine
Jura, Côtes du Jura, Fleurs
Chardonnay
2009, \$31.99, 14.0%

Decent shine to the golden hue, pure and clear, settles gently into the glass. Fresh nose, pure flowers and then lemon/lime citrus, powdered stone, honey, possesses rich peach, apricot, pear fruit scents, cinnamon and ginger spice, primary and yet not without complexity. Light to medium-bodied, the acidity is consistent while delicate. Honeyed and vanillin, accompanied by zesty orange marmalade as well as that lemon/lime swirl. Quick burst of toasty oak. Nicely perfumed, the green apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit is round and soft. Very high level of drinkability. 91

Buronfosse, Domaine Peggy et Jean-Pascal
Jura, Côtes du Jura, Marcus Térentius Varro
Chardonnay
2010, \$19.99, 12.0%

Mild gauziness to the greenish gold color, distorts your vision, what hue is there holds through to the rims, looks flat under the surface. The nose has a toasty, acrid quality with wet oak, lime, vanilla, sauna stone smoke and taut pear, apple, apricot scents, sacrifices delicacy for thrust. Medium-bodied, again comes right after you with salinity, dill oak, sour lime and lemon citrus and brisk peach, apricot, pear and persimmon fruit. Even with about average acidity it manages to slice into the palate. Its overall main attribute seems to be saltiness, at times comes close to being earthy akin to a red wine. Certainly interesting, not sure how often one would want to take it on. 88

Ecu (Guy Bossard), Domaine de l'
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Granite
Melon de Bourgogne
2011, \$16.99, 12.0%

Pale yellow straw color yet with a faint glow which lends added presence, falls short of crystal clear even as the rims are hueless, all around it's average in appearance. The nose is very smoky, akin to wet heated stones, lots of lemon peel to grapefruit pith, close to herbaceous with a softening mintiness, then you get some chili pepper and tart nectarine, pineapple, apple fruit scents, there's a few moments you could be convinced it was Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc. Full-bodied, dense mouth feel with lots of volume, wants more to take stranglehold than refresh. The acidity throbs like a cavity, however, finishes block-like. Bell pepper, grass, stones and mineral shards, not much one could say is "pretty" about it. The pear, apple, pineapple fruit is taut and zesty without much juice. Still, you have to admire its raw energy, keeps

cranking out the wattage until you get tired of trying to peer into the light. Would be interesting to see where this goes years down the road. On someone else's dime. 87

FRANCE ROSE

Clos Cibonne
Provence, Côtes de Provence, Cuvée Spéciale des
Vignettes
Tibouren
2011, \$29.99, 13.5%

Presents an orange metallic sheen in the pinkish cherry red color, moderate fading at the rims, that aside clear and vibrant. While pure, the nose is dense with cocoa, lemon peel and strawberry and raspberry purée, its fullness tends to blur the elements together. Full-bodied, fills the mouth cheek-to-cheek, bountiful and resonant cherry, raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit but truly not all that sweet. Here the light cocoa slightly opposes the lemon peel and mint. Also has a vaguely earthy, stony element to it. Not especially acidic, has a soft firmness. It has all the qualities you want and would expect yet at the same time veers off enough from the norm to intrigue. 90

Gros' Noré, Domaine du
Provence, Bandol, Rosé
Blend
2012, \$25.99, 13.5%

Salmon orange-pink in color, kind of a metallic sheen, transparent and hue trails off near the rims, kind of looks airbrushed in a weird yet appealing way. The nose brings to bear lemon and white grapefruit citrus, cocoa powder, lean and racy watermelon, strawberry, cherry fruit, sweet garden herbs and some mineral water, more heavy than penetrating in the nostrils, sinewy but slow lift. Full-bodied and dense, you have to get the tongue working to create a sense of movement across the palate. Lemon custard, the strawberry, cherry, watermelon fruit seems close to syrupy in consistency. The cocoa, chocolate to vanilla things is strange but persistent. Even with its fatness you sense a decent foundation of minerals and stone under the flab. The acidity tries but does not have the power in reserve to make a difference. In the end you simply have to stop analyzing and enjoy it on its own terms and for immediate gratification, especially when you glance at the sticker price. 40% Mourvèdre, 40% Cinsault, 20% Grenache. 88

ITALY RED

Sella, Azienda Agricola
Piedmont, Coste della Sesia, Orbello
Blend

2011, \$15.99, 13.0%

Clean cranberry red to violet hued core, dark yet transparent up close, the rims are a pure brick red, nice and shiny, no undue saturation, accepts its natural colors. In the nose you get a core of sweetly candied cherry, red berry fruit, flowers and sweet garden herbs, some leather, saddle soap and orange peel, provides an attractive coiled muscularity in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, loaded with acidity which keeps it fresh and svelte, the cranberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit more snap and pop than sweetness, even if as ripe as you'd want it. White grapefruit, orange citrus raises the wattage and the flowers even come off as crispy. Full middle, it never gets too light nor ethereal, a bit too clean for the leather, earthy or woody accents to build strength. Not much here to dislike and it strikes one as a versatile meal accompaniment too. 50% Nebbiolo, 20% Barbera, 15% Croatina, 10% Vespolina, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. 90

Vallana, Antonio
Piedmont, Colline Novaresi Spanna
Nebbiolo

2010, \$12.99, 13.0%

At first glance it seems a basic ruby-violet in color but then you notice a lot of bright brick red hues, more consistent from the core to the rims than from glance to glance, very clean and easy to see through. The nose produces pressed flowers, anise, menthol rub and dried oranges, feels primary due to the abundance of cherry, raspberry, rhubarb fruit, actually overall has a pleasing neutrality and cleanliness. Full-bodied, layered with a velvety texture, hugs the tongue as it moves forward. All that ripeness translates into plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit flavors. Cocoa gets mixed in with the licorice, flowers, cedar and witch hazel accents. The tannin might be on the sluggish side. For whatever it may lack in subtle nuance, it compensates for in sheer enjoyability. (Composite Cork) 89

Nuraghe (Cantina di Mogoro), Il
Sardinia/Sardegna, Monica di Sardegna, San Bernardino

Monica

2010, \$14.99, 13.0%

The dusky purple core infused with a good amount of red clay to red brick, the rims a basic scarlet red, not dark enough for opacity, nothing seems forced color-wise. The nose has a heavy floral musk but curiously it chooses sides with sourness over sweetness so you

get more cranberry, blueberry, persimmon or maybe elderberry, orange peel as well as tree bark and cowhide, no really funky per se but it certainly veers off the path of your average red wine. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, tannic and sets itself with authority from a wine of its weight. You get a little cocoa and mocha at first then it's leather, dried beef jerky, mineral shards and dried wildflowers. Bitter tang to the plum, cherry, blueberry, cranberry fruit and here it's more sour white grapefruit for citrus. Has a ginger snap element to it too. More leathery and loamy even here, it fluffs up muscularly in the mouth, covers lots of territory and also has a pungent lift. It's not every day you find an enjoyably unusual wine. 89

Rodano, Fattoria di
Tuscany, Poggialupi
Blend

2011, \$10.99, 13.0%

The core is mostly purple but yields easily to a cough syrup red to red clay with a strong orange cast furthest out, clean and mostly transparent throughout. Licorice, rosemary, cedar, candied cherries and orange peels fashion a fetching nose, while full and close to heavy in the nostrils it stays fresh. Full-bodied, round and on the soft side, not a lot of acidity present and barely more tannin. Which makes for more of a "fun" wine, especially when you got rushed by all that ripe cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit. The cedar, incense, herbs met by some vanillin powder. Through mid-palate to finish a white grapefruit zest really takes hold. Stays very flavorful to the very end, nice fluidity for its size and relative lack of structure. Really easy to pound and that has to count for something. 90% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot. 89

Vallana, Antonio
Piedmont, Campi Raudii
Blend

2010, \$12.99, 12.5%

Pure, unblemished ruby-purple core, resplendent surface, the rims are mostly ruby but possess a good amount of scarlet red as well. There's a soft plummy to the nose, cherry and blueberry too, candied oranges, pressed flowers and mild licorice, some straw and hay but on the whole pure and primary and without much earthiness or such. Close to full-bodied, has a ripe and semi stewed to dried fruit character, sense some prune and raisin behind the plum, cherry, blackberry, rhubarb flavors. Here the tannin helps firm it up and at least dry up the ending some. More mentholated and less floral here, the orange citrus pairs with a wedge of white grapefruit. Stays plush and fleshy through the finish, echoes of tar and leather. Given the high volume of fruit hard to imagine anyone finding it unlikable, and its honesty

should appeal to the more jaded palate. 90%
Nebbiolo, 10% Uva Rara, Vespolina. (Composite Cork:
Diam5) 88

Nuraghe (Cantina di Mogoro), Il
Sardinia/Sardegna, Cannonau di Sardegna, Nero
Sardo
Cannonau
2011, \$9.99, 13.0%
Dark ruby-purple, while unblemished and clean you
can't quite see through it albeit "opaque" doesn't quite
fit either, the rims have a sort of burnt sienna red
complexion, looks serious in demeanor. The nose has
plenty of underbrush, leafy matter and stony earth to
offset the hard candy raspberry, cherry, watermelon
scents, quiet mutter of white citrus, sort of blockish and
inexpressive. Medium-bodied but way firm and sets
itself like cement in the mouth. Seems overly tannic for
what it is, makes it tougher to get at any juice in the
cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit. Something like
honey in there, white grapefruit pulp as well. Twigs,
bark, leaves and earth. While it is nice it really needs
more lively verve and pep, not just sit there and do a
lot of impassive yawning. Otherwise, best as a food
wine not on its own. (Composite Cork) 87

Borgogno, Fratelli Serio & Battista
Piedmont, Barbaresco
Nebbiolo
2009, \$23.99, 14.0%
Squeaky clean and utterly transparent ruby-violet hued
core, more burnt sunset to brick red rims, sparkles in
the glass. The nose is light which means it is also
slightly alcoholic, otherwise all the rose petal, leather,
licorice and bing cherry you'd want is there, anchored
by muddy earth and twigs, no doubt it's on the rustic
side but has the fruit to keep it in balance. In the mouth
it is light-bodied also, translating into a more
noticeable tannic and acidic skeleton. Muted pine,
anise, lemon peel, more herbal and earthy, the cherry,
blackberry fruit has a hard candy feel. Sticks around
for as long as its natural weight will allow. Reminds
you of "the little engine who could," you kind of doubt it
but then it keeps plugging away to prove you wrong.
Fair for the price. 87

ITALY DESSERT

Saracco, Azienda Agricola Paolo
Piedmont, Moscato d'Asti
Moscato
2012, \$13.99, 6.0%
Pale white straw in color with a brightening hint of
green, quite transparent, visible fizz is big upon the
pour and creates a solid sheen of foam across the
surface, certainly visually plays the part of a bubbly.

The nose actually shows a good deal of restraint even
as it has perfectly ripe and soft pear, peach, melon,
apricot scents, honey, orange blossom and lilacs,
chooses a direction and sticks to it. In the mouth it's
medium-bodied, moves nimbly while also providing
good palate coverage cheek to cheek. The fizz is fluffy
and consistent but nowhere near foamy. Honey and
orange glaze, lime sherbet, all support the dewy floral
lift. That said, again, not overly sweet here either,
there's a conscious delicate nature to it. The pear,
apricot, green melon, peach fruit is graciously pliable
and takes pains to fill every available crevice. This
aided by whipped cream accents. Very good with
admirable cleanliness. (Composite Cork) 88

Bera, Azienda Agricola
Piedmont, Piemonte
Brachetto
2012, \$15.99, 6.5%
Glowing cranberry red color, a light foam covers the
surface on the pour, minimal change in hue from core
to rims and the latter holds the color well. The nose
has good firmness and contour, as stony and citrusy
as sweet, the raspberry, strawberry, watermelon
scents composed and focused, there's some sourness
in there to stiffen it further, light vanilla cream helps
anchor it. Medium-bodied with an ample bottom,
decent acidity and the weave of the carbonation is
tight enough to add to the freshness and erect posture.
The strawberry, raspberry, apple, cherry to peach fruit
steady throughout and aided well by orange citrus,
flowers and vanilla and whipped cream notes.
Deserves credit for not overplaying its hand on sheer
sweetness. Can there be intellectual leaning
Brachetto? (Composite Cork) 88

SPAIN RED

Cesca Vicent
Priorat
Blend
2010, \$14.99, 15.0%
The black core is as close to transparent as black can
get, spotless liquid, then turns to a medicinal cough
syrup red with a more burnt crimson edge furthest out.
The nose is layer upon layer of fruit, plum, blueberry,
blackberry, raspberry, all doused in floral perfume,
orange juice, mint, cedar, the only thing interfering with
this is a little alcoholic burn. Full-bodied, the palate
likewise ripened to the nth degree, here some prune
and raisin notes accompany the concentrated plum,
cherry, blackberry flavors. Cedar, tea leaf, chocolate,
incense, orange peel, flowers and some wet leather.
Fat and unevolved, not lacking for noticeable perfume
and makeup. But, at the same time, not desperate for
attention and has decent pacing for its size. No

structure so likely best to consume while young and flashy. 40% Grenache, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 10% Syrah. 88

Vega Real, Bodegas y Viñedos
Ribera del Duero, Roble
Tempranillo

2011, \$7.99, 13.5%

Has a glowing purple core which is opaque from a distance and more transparent closer up, super-saturated cranberry red to magenta rims, high sheen to the surface, glossy. The nose has a tautness to it, focusing on sour blackberry, raspberry fruit, lemon peels and pressed flowers, the remainder mostly twigs, tree bark and leaves, it is clean on the whole but more firm than supple and not out to make new friends. Medium-bodied, strong framing acidity adds to the bite of the blackberry, plum, black cherry fruit, no lack of flavor but likewise minimal unvarnished juiciness. Mild milk chocolate accent. There is that lemon to white grapefruit zing and also that lively leafiness. Again, thankfully free of funk. But perhaps in the process a touch boring. You might guess Tempranillo but would be just as easy not to, unsure why someone would buy this repeatedly. 87

SPAIN WHITE

Sant Josep, Agricola
Terra Alta, Clot d'Encís Vi Blanc
Blend

2011, \$8.99, 13.0%

Kind of a brown-orange cast to the flat golden hue base, neither filmy nor shiny, distorts your vision into the glass, the rims fade off noticeably. The nose features apple juice, vanilla and cinnamon before veering into minerals, wet stone, lemon peel and flowers, the peach, pear, melon fruit is soft and subtle yet it's in no manner underfruited. Medium-bodied, somewhat lean at first but puts on considerable weight as it warms, the acidity a steadying force at any temperature. The florality masked some by minerals, stones, both eventually run down from behind by lemon to mandarin orange zest. Here there's a trace amount of honey to sweeten up the peach, apricot, pear fruit. Not a lot "unusual" going on but it has both good refreshing energy and cleanliness for the price. 80% Grenache Blanc, 5% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Chardonnay, 5% Muscat, 5% Chenin Blanc. (Synthetic Cork: ExcellentCork) 89

Sanz, Javier
Rueda, Rey Santo
Blend
2012, \$7.99, 13.0%

There's a pale glow to the white-green color, what hue is there stays consistent core to rims, moderate shine at best but does have that warmly soft luminescence. The nose has a creaminess to it as well as counter-balancing mineral water and white grapefruit pulp scents, mixes in pleasing licorice, rose petal and vanilla bean notes, curiously light in the peach, pear, apple fruit pear department. Close to full-bodied, not lacking in acidity per se but soft and generous with hugs. Has that same generally creamy texture with the flavors all over the map. The apricot, peach, apple, pineapple fruit displays more verve here and the minerality kicks it up a notch too. The white grapefruit, lemon citrus is decent but could probably do better. However, the level of stony smokiness fills in some blanks. Easy to like, easy to drink, don't allocate too many brain cells to analyzing it. 50% Verdejo, 50% Viura. (Screwcap) 87

SPAIN ROSE

Muga, Bodegas
Rioja, Rosado
Blend

2012, \$9.99, 13.0%

Pale watermelon pink color with a brilliant metallic sheen to it, completely transparent and given lightness of hue holds very well through the rims, its glow locks your gaze on it. While there's a fine amount of strawberry, cherry fruit in the nose it mainly focuses on saline notes, stone and a dried grass bite, softens some through cocoa powder, lemon to white grapefruit pulp and pressed flowers, has more edge and cut than grace. In the mouth it is medium-bodied and decently layered, the acidity leaves it with some plumpness in addition to a zesty finish. That mineral, salty touch persists, like a sea breeze or something. The strawberry, raspberry, cherry, apple fruit is straightforward and consistent, nothing remarkable. While softer at a warmer temperature, it needs the verve of a solid chill. And likely to be served with food, something salty or spicy like cod fish. Floral and citrusy perfume brings it on home. 60% Garnacha, 30% Viura, 10% Tempranillo. 88

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Joostenberg
Paarl, Family Blend
Blend

2012, \$9.99, 13.5%

It's mostly a white-green color which lacks sparkle but is trim and clean, hueless rims, plain but nothing negative. The nose comes up with a big lime, lemon, tangerine focused initial splash then adds in fresh flowers, the peach, yellow apple, apricot fruit familiar,

light smokiness gives it shape. In the mouth it's close to full-bodied, very floral in a powdered sugar way, this in turn gives the lime, pink grapefruit, tangerine citrus a soft drink nature. Has decent acidity but it's there to shave off random excesses, not command attention. Moderate amount of pineapple and nectarine in the apricot, peach, red apple base. Creamy vanilla and whipped cream notes soften and extend the finish. Could maybe be served by greater distinct personality, however, it's an easy sipper that displays a willingness to please. 51% Chenin Blanc, 39% Viognier, 10% Roussanne. (Screwcap) 88

Hall, Teddy
Stellenbosch
Chenin Blanc
2011, \$8.99, 12.0%

Curiously deepened and close to amber orange gold color, mild translucency, not weird looking per se but not exactly what you'd expect starting from zero. Orange marmalade, flowers, sauna stones, warm rubber, and whipped cream create a broad array of scents in the nose, a touch too hard for any juiciness to come through in the apricot, nectarine, apple, cherry fruit, doesn't pull up but just stops on a dime. Close to full-bodied in the mouth, has that broad Chenin Blanc coverage, like a wet woolen blanket. Has that lanolin, honeyed character without sweetness, sour grapefruit and that orange marmalade stuff. Stone and chalk. You keep hoping it will relax and just let it flow but it never quite achieves this. The rubber relents some but there. Difficult to piece the armor of the nectarine, pineapple, apricot, passion fruit flavors. Weak finish, evacuates too quickly. Decent wine, not sure the primary material was up to the level of the maestro's touch. (Screwcap) 87

AUSTRALIA RED

Goss, Thomas
South Australia, McLaren Vale
Shiraz
2011, \$12.99, 14.5%

Not that dense, yet the purple core edges itself into opacity, spotless and the rims are as much rust red and dried blood as any ruby, lustrous surface holds your gaze. Glazed dried beef, eucalyptus, pine and mesquite grill smoke frame the nose, has vanilla, milk chocolate and toffee accents even as they are prodded into a subordinate position to the boysenberry, blackberry, black cherry scents, it's quite crafty in how it wants to deliver the fruit and oak fully yet deny it ever intended to do so. Full-bodied, densely packed and slow to change directions, plenty of depth to the white grapefruit burst, supplemented by orange and lemon notes. Comes off as structured more by

acidity than tannin. Eucalyptus, grass, stone, molasses and tea leaf, has a good amount going on without being heavy handed on any one element. Sticks to dark berry fruit, Italian plum and red currant, more sourness than anticipated. Funny because it is pleasing to the palate which is least likely to purchase it in quantity, the average consumer will likely find it insufficiently sweet. (Screwcap) 88

Goss, Thomas
South Australia
Cabernet Sauvignon
2011, \$12.99, 14.5%

Opaque purple core but not so severe you'd call it impenetrable or such, just dark per se, the rims are a thick brick red to still violet, no letting up on the heaviness. The nose skirts herbaceousness while bringing to bear tobacco, tea leaf, cedar and then fills out with butterscotch, vanilla and cocoa notes. The currant, cherry, blackberry scents are unremarkable and lean more towards purity and snap than layering. In the mouth it is near to full-bodied, pours itself slowly onto the palate and offers many excuses why it can't leave. Some grass, bell pepper going on but very minor. Good acidity, the tannin flows but as a result does not accrete. Plum, cherry, currant fruit dry and savory and just the same lively. It's funny because this is really what you are going to get for the price outside of big brands but so many folk expect more for probably less money. Nasty middle road to be found on. (Screwcap) 87

Shadow Chaser
South Australia, McLaren Vale, Red Wine
Grenache
2012, \$13.99, 14.5%

Mostly scarlet to brick red in color, does not develop a really violet core, transparent, snappy cranberry red rims, interesting how it is at once saturated and so clear. The nose has a leafy, green quality to it yet it's mostly hard candy strawberry, raspberry fruit, lilacs and violets, diverges into multiple directions thereafter with caramel, green apple, wool and menthol rub accents, fresh but lacks coherence. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and has adequate acidity and tannin to restrain its sweetness, here too it's a hard candy feel, Jolly Rancher, cherry, strawberry, raspberry, cherry and watermelon. Some cocoa and coffee in there. Fills out both at the finish and overall as it opens. Leaves you actually wishing it was indeed sweeter and more focused on being fun because it falls short on the "serious" scale leaving it in no man's land. (Screwcap) 86

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Grosset

South Australia, Clare Valley, Alea, Off-Dry

Riesling

2012, \$22.99, 12.0%

White-green in color, very clear and transparent but in no way watery, has an attractively warm faint glow.

Lime and pink grapefruit driven nose, great balance of sweet and sour aspects, lively peach, melon, apple fruit scents, the whipped cream accents run down by warmed rubber and mineral mist, tingly energy in your nostrils. Full-bodied, broad while giving and not too hard, the acidity does a worthy job of structuring things, keeping it dry and focused but not dampening the fun. Pineapple, star fruit, passion fruit, guava and nectarine give it zest and piquancy. Lime, grapefruit, lemon citrus abounds here too. Conversely, the whipped cream and vanilla fudge ascend and diminish the minerality a bit. Clean, lip smacking finish that literally leaves you thirsty. Hard not to pound it.

(Screwcap) 91