

The Hanes Wine Review, March 2007 Edition

No time for a great deal of research this month so Hanes will once more just riff on a topic that suits his fancy. It's a topic that comes up fairly frequently during casual conversation among wine lovers. This being... what wines do you avoid buying because they represent bad value?

Naturally, every category has its exceptions and anytime someone just slams a category, those who disagree will leap out of the woodwork, offended and overflowing with displeased outrage and vexed aggrievement. Well, that's life, buck up sonny and get used to it. You want to vote with your wallet, you go girl, but Hanes is keeping his few pesos for other stuff. Note that just because Hanes doesn't *buy* them does not mean he does not *taste* them, so no lame arguments about the need to "revisit" these wines today, thinking they have changed for the better, either qualitatively or in terms of price. So, without further ado, let's start slamming!

Brunello di Montalcino — Since about the 1997 vintage, this has been Hanes's #1 poster boy for bad value. These Tuscan wines can be very good but more recently they all seem to be cut from the same cloth and taste the same. And the ageworthiness they purportedly possess which helps separate them from other comparable wines such as Chianti Classico may no longer obtain. These days one is better off buying a Chianti Classico Riserva for 1/2 to 2/3 the price of a Brunello. Hell, there's probably a lot of good "IGT" Sangiovese you could buy in the \$20-\$35 range which give many Brunellos a run for their money. Brunellos get the "points" but not Hanes's moolah.

German dessert wines — Be it Eiswein, Trockenbeerenauslese or Beerenauslese wines, the usual stratospheric prices rarely match what's in the bottle. And it's always a half-bottle anyway. Yes, these wines are incredibly hard to make, especially the Eiswein. Yes, the production amounts are miniscule. Yet, when compared to the quality levels of dessert wines produced elsewhere it's hard to justify the vast disparities in pricing. This criticism can be levied at more than few Austrian producers of dessert wines as well. Canadian dessert wines are *maybe* better values but, these days with global warming and such, how many vintages create truly *natural* icewines and are not grapes intentionally frozen by human beings? Especially when 95% of a winery's revenue comes from icewine? Inquiring minds want to know.

Oregon Pinot Noir — None for me, thanks. The most overpriced domestic wines as a group being made today, even allowing for Napa Cabernet. Few reach the level of finesse and elegance the grape arguably should achieve and the prices have been stupid right from the start of the wine industry there. At least in California one can find some nice sub-\$20 Pinots but you have to be awfully lucky *and* good to find an Oregonian example that succeeds vintage to vintage at such a price. Can't even remember the last time Hanes bought an Oregon Pinot Noir.

Any Spanish red wine over \$40 not from Rioja — With a few "blue chip" exceptions such as Vega Sicilia or Clos Erasmus, most of the pricey Spanish reds out there today are fruit forward, structureless grotesqueries which won't come close to developing worthwhile tertiary flavors before they implode of their own mass. Be they from Priorat, Toro, Ribera, Montsant, Jumilla, etc. they are mostly flash without true pedigree. Now, if they were uniquely flavored in their youth, that would be one thing, then take advantage and drink them young. But they are oaky, fruity and lacking in, shall we say, a "sense of place." There's many "new wave" Rioja wines out there but at least there's enough old school producers left to warrant continued attention to both aged and ageworthy Rioja wines.

The Southern Rhône — Ohh, how the times have changed. Just a decade or less ago, this region would have been near the top of the list for best *values* in the wine world. But with the weak dollar, vastly increased popularity and visibility of the top wines, and a wine buying market that can't say no to overripe fruit, the prices for Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Gigondas have gotten all loopy. Under the right climatic conditions these are wines which can mature admirably and reward a collector's patience. However, young they can be awkward if not at times sloppy. They are also susceptible to green herbal qualities and prematurely raisinated fruit, detracting from their enjoyability. Hanes buys maybe 3-4 bottles a year now when he used to buy 10-15. Sorry, Charlie. This phenomenon extends through the other named villages of the Southern Rhône, whose prices now are at levels CdP's used to be at ten years ago.

Barbaresco — This may be a tougher one to defend. But Hanes has always wondered, why pay all that money for Barbaresco, which can be awfully nice if not downright stunning, when for a few more bucks you can buy Barolo instead? Better overall policy to save up and buy one jawdroppingly good bottle of Barolo than two of Barbaresco. Of course, your mileage may vary but that's what makes the world go around. And Barbaresco wines selling! Notable exception: Produttori del Barbaresco wines, which are almost always worth the much lower prices they sell for. As any wine geek will attest.

New Zealand Pinot Noir — Hanes is tempted to just copy his complaint against Oregonian Pinot Noir and paste it here. For every superb Kiwi Pinot Hanes samples, there's half a dozen pedestrian wines that enter his gullet. However, they're all priced the same, ka-ching! The more moderately priced NZ Pinots are usually stemmy and lack length. Again, it's not that these wines suck, it's that the represent poor value. It's odd to say it, but these days Burgundy is the place for value Pinot. Hanes would take a basic Bourgogne rouge from a top producer over most \$40 New Zealand Pinot.

Argentinean Malbec over \$20 — OK, what's the point here? We know you *can do it* but why? There's a veritable sea of perfectly fine, high quality Malbec which can retail for \$8 to \$15, enough with the "But we make world class wine!" stuff. If Hanes is laying down \$30, there's already a zillion other wines he'd spend it on first. Once more, it's not a question of these wines not being extremely tasty. It's more an issue of, given limited financial resources and time to consume booze,

what makes anyone think these wines *should* compete at higher price points with all the other stuff the world produces? No shame in making a solid, everyday \$12 bottle of wine. Sorry if you are of Argentinean descent, no harm, no foul.

Classified Bordeaux — This is a new entry to this list. It primarily holds for the 2000, 2003 and 2005 vintages but it's sure to be true of any decent vintage the future brings. Too much worldwide demand for the roughly 60 producers who were listed in the 1855 Official Classification of the Médoc red wines. Even given the huge output of these wines — as well as the top wines of Pomerol and Saint-Emilion — demand among established economies and the newly surging economies of Asia are sure to keep these wines out of the hands of anyone but the landed gentry. Hanes was just born too late to really get in on these wines. Damn you, Mom, damn you.

South African wine over \$30 — While there's more winemaking history here than most casual imbibers realize, the recent revitalization of the industry doesn't warrant fetching such prices quite yet. At these price points, one may aver that the wines should offer degrees of complexity, both in youth and old age, not consistently found. A lot of the newer players have taken the lazy path, beat the crap out of the juice with toasty new oak and jack the price up by 50%. Yes, oak barrels are expensive. But, err, they are also unnecessary in many situations. For every \$30+ South African wine Hanes tastes and enjoys, there's many more which just make him mutter and shake his head.

Californian Wines from the Central Coast down through Santa Barbara over \$25 — Now that the hegemony of "Napanoma" has been broken, there's a virtual flood of expensive wines coming from other parts of California. Some have pedigree and track records, most do not. They're the new flava, something familiar [i.e., it's California and the labels are in English] yet trendy [i.e., the Silverado Trail is SO 1999!]. Hanes can't keep up with the explosion of new wineries from these areas, they're mushrooms after a rain storm. And close to none are entering the market with prices in the teens. It's getting to the level of white noise, where you just start to tune it out. Mostly Chardonnay, Syrah and Pinot Noir, the *quality* is mostly there but a consistently high bar of *value* not always reached. This point is driven home every time Hanes tastes a wine from the same regions (usually not a "single vineyard designate") that tastes every bit as good as their more expensive brethren but only costs \$16. Look for the cheapies and save some coin.

Australian Shiraz over \$20 — Does Hanes even have to say it?

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This month's big winners... Done in 100% stainless steel, Talamonti's Trebbiano d'Abruzzo "Aternum" represents good value at \$16 or so, lots of stuff going on inside the glass. Turley's 2004 Zinfandel from the Ueberroth Vineyard in Paso Robles pretty much clinches it for Hanes. This is currently his favorite vineyard offered in the Turley stable. Does anyone else produce wines from this vineyard? Hmmm. Henri Clerc's entry level Bourgogne Blanc called "Les Riaux" is developing a good track record with Hanes, very consistent vintage to vintage and fairly priced at around \$21. The cheesy piece of wood around the bottle neck should turn off any potential buyer, that said, Zaccagnini's 2002 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Riserva named "Tralcetto" is a solid wine in the mid teens, pricewise. Waterkloof in South Africa produced an interesting Sauvignon Blanc under the "Peacock Ridge" label in 2005, tastes great but not really for Sauvignon Blanc traditionalists. Savory juice, would probably move a lot more units were the price \$5 less than the \$18 it is now.

The best \$15 and under picks... Probably going to be one of those "who can find it" wines but Hanes tried a 2005 Syrah from Rhône producer Emmanuel Barou (the first wine sampled by this producer) from the Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes region and for \$14 it was quite tasty. Seems like another one those labels which have cropped up to deal with getting rid of the "wine glut" in California, but whether for this reason or not, the 2005 Pinot Noir from Twin Fin is pretty much spot on for its general price range of \$11. Not bad at all. For \$11, the 2005 Chardonnay from Languedoc, France producer Domaine Lafage called "Novellum" is worth checking out, good stuff.

And the disappointments... Hard to not be curious about a blend of Dolcetto and Lagrein from Australia! But, there's a reason some things just don't go together and Heartland's 2005 blend of these two grapes grown in Langhorne Creek was just good, that's it and not cheap at \$20. Hanes's lack of affection for the wines of the Pacific Northwest found more fuel this month. The acceptable, if average, wines consumed included the 2005 Owen Roe Syrah called "Ex Umbris," 2004 Maryhill "Winemaker's Blend" red and Cadence's 2004 "Coda" red blend, again all potable but lacking in the stuff to set it off from the pack. Not even sure why this wine was sampled since just looking at it, the guess was it wouldn't be good. But curiosity killed the cat as well as Hanes's palate. And so it went with the 2003 Cellers Sant Rafel "Solpost" red wine from Montsant, Spain. Way overpriced at \$24. Hanes has been trying to broaden his experience of producers of Loire red wine with the very good 2005 vintage, figuring if they can't make a good wine in that year, when can they? Witness taking a flyer on Domaine de la Noiraie's Bourgueil called "Cuvée St. Vincent." Even for a fairly reasonable \$15, no real reason to seek it out. Rats butt. At the risk of being chastised by fans near and far, Hanes over the years is less and less interested in the wine of German producer Dönnhoff. Maybe it's the prices, maybe it's the house style, who knows. He did, however, snag a bottle of their most basic wine, the Estate QbA, for around \$17 and it was just decent, not any better nor worse than a lot of lesser ranked German peers' wines at the same price point. Oh well, guess there's just more going to be out there for the truly devoted as Hanes ain't buying.

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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/oldervintages2007.html>

The challenge. Each month Hanes will try out a new "tagline" for *The Hanes Wine Review* empire. The goal is to sum up and represent The Hanes Brand. This month's entry is...

Tagline #29: "Screwcaps, make love, drink wine!"

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

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

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Ueberroth Vineyard
Zinfandel
2004, \$48.00, 16.3%
The semi-cloudy glow in the rich purple core brings out a red tinge, this becomes more pronounced throughout the very broad ruby rims, very full throughout. Resonant, sugary nose of cranberry, raspberry, blackberry fruit gets close to Fruit Roll-Up level, orange juice, mint and milk chocolate/coconut crisp come in moderate doses, fruit dominant and smells like it's still in the crib. Full-bodied, while the oak toast, coconut, cocoa, fried butter much greater here in the mouth, it also possesses a cleansing acidity which shapes this into a thin outer layer around the core of blackberry, boysenberry, blueberry fruit. Orange/lemon citrus, eucalyptus, large boulder stoniness, grass and red earth ripple through the finish. Again, not a particularly complex wine but succeeds completely in anything it chooses to do. 92

Turley
Napa Valley, Hayne Vineyard
Petite Sirah
2004, \$75.00, 15.0%
Even through the jet black core you can tell it's clean and unblemished, the purple shades shimmer in and out, incredibly saturated dark ruby rims, thin as a razor's edge. Floral perfume douses the plum, black currant scents and provides a modicum of lift, you get peanut shells blended together with mocha, the oak gets submerged in beef blood, minerals and leather, impressive for how it builds and builds, even if monolithically. Full-bodied, huge tannic structure yet truly not overly dry as every other aspect just as outsized. The plum, cassis, black cherry flavors are sweet without much juiciness, no room for liquid to flow. Presents very dusty mocha, cocoa shades, some grill smoke and roasted meat accents, more latent stoniness comes out with air time. Takes awhile to wash it out of your mouth, the stain might be permanent. 91

Turley
Central Valley, Lodi, Dogtown Vineyard
Zinfandel
2004, \$45.00, 15.8%
Full mix of garnet red and violet throughout the core, more pure scarlet around the rims, there's a vividly hued clarity throughout. Brown sugar, molasses, warm caramel, the nose is real oaky and downy soft in every way, pleasingly bracing grassiness, super-juicy raspberry, blackberry scents, well mentholated and accompanied by lemon drop and a touch as ash, an electric nose bursting with fruit. Medium-bodied, almost tightly wound, the acidity meshes well with the clove, cinnamon, lemon peel, mesquite smoke nuances and bring things to an unexpected level of freshness. Plenty of forward momentum in the cranberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, kicks across the finish line. Does an excellent job of knowing just how sweet it can be without being sugary. Almost nutty at moments near the end. Just nice. 91

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pesenti Vineyard
Zinfandel
2004, \$35.00, 16.0%
There's an innocently happy filminess in the purple core which pushes it into opacity, barely moves into red-magenta to red brick in the very wide rims, looks like it was painted into the glass. No lack of vanilla creaminess in the nose yet the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit is concentrated enough to turn things from cake to pie, some eucalyptus and saddle leather, shows the energy, if lack of focus, of youth, it'll be some time before it shows meaningfully developed scents. Full-bodied with firm muscles, nothing about it bespeaks over-extraction nor flabby sweetness. This is not to say there's not an abundance of richness in the raspberry, cranberry, cherry, currant fruit, it's there in spades. Yet, has the acidity to not slouch and here the oak takes on a crisper nature, less overt vanilla and more galvanizing toastiness. Moderate doses of eucalyptus, orange zest and herbs to be found but you better be looking for them. Nice tight weave to it. 91

Brogan Cellars
Russian River Valley, Lingenfelder Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2005, \$56.99, 13.9%

The brightness of the red-garnet color masks the translucency below the surface, the hue perfectly consistent from core to the rims, the effulgence of the colors and the firmness give your eyes a workout. The nose flows over with cola nuts, lemon and orange peel reduction, clumps of matted grass and wet earth, there's a moment of caramelized brown sugar before freshly tart cranberry, strawberry, persimmon fruit assume the spotlight, slowly works at winning you over, and with success. Medium-bodied, has a softly gritty texture like it was built to scrape slightly at first and then dissolve into softness. The orange, lemon and lesser white grapefruit citrus comes on first and matches well with the strong cola notes as well as the gentler herbaceousness. Same sour pucker in the raspberry, strawberry, pear fruit, here though the acidity serves to elongate it so there's minimal clenching. Clean finish, no real trace of oak nor alcoholic heat. 90

Twin Fin
Regional Blend, California
Pinot Noir
2005, \$10.99, 13.5%

Light purple in color, but more so a solid orange-garnet hue, nicely bright and shiny ruby rims. The floral perfume in the nose makes it light and airy, possesses well-shaped if succinct raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit scents, some lemon and even cola or mocha crisp, overall straightforward and guileless, thankfully minimal herbaceousness. Medium-bodied, good fullness, sugary but not insipidly sweet, the raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit turns semi-sour past the mid-palate and thus shortens some. Minor cola, lemon, stone shades, as much suggestion as reality. Doesn't fall off the map at the end yet not the last person at the party either. Approximately 91% Pinot Noir, 9% Petite Verdot. Grapes sourced from Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County, Lodi. [Screwcap] 86

CALIFORNIA WHITE

McPrice Myers Wine Company
Santa Ynez Valley, White Wine
Blend
2005, \$24.00, 15.4%

Has enough of a yellow amber cast to the gold to make it appear much older, for all of its hue it's on the dull side and visually slouches in the glass. Heavily tropical in the nose, both in terms of weight and glazed/syrupy pineapple, nectarine, apricot, pear scents, golden honey, coconut ice cream, lilac water, literally no room for any other scents. Full-bodied, a bit more spring in its step than found in the nose, soft acidic tingle helps. Orange blossom and mint leaves pair closely with the vanilla, coconut, custard elements. While plenty concentrated, the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple, pear fruit isn't dried fruit level and there's a nice fruit pit feel at moments. Hugs your mouth walls through the finish. 70% Viognier, 30% Roussanne. 89

OREGON RED

Penner-Ash
Willamette Valley
Pinot Noir
2005, \$41.99, 13.9%

Perfectly unblemished red-ruby throughout, soft tinge of violet at best, consistent through the very outermost edge with it becomes more scarlet. The nose has an angular feel, mostly wet grass, forest floor matter and damp earth, an off-and-on touch of salted cured meats then little beyond cherry, black raspberry fruit scents. Full-bodied with a velvety texture, not heavy nor too clinging but presses down and rubs your mouth pores intently. The addition of orange to white grapefruit citrus provides more zip, taking the hard candy sweetness partially out of the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit. Some grassiness but a pale shadow of that found in the nose. Appears to lean more on the tannins than acidity for structure. Fruit lasts well through the finish, overall also slims down a little and develops a shape at the end. 88

WASHINGTON RED

Owen Roe
Columbia Valley, Ex Umbris
Syrah
2005, \$29.99, 14.1%

The rich darkness of the black-purple core semi-masked by the surface shine, displays compact but well-hued dark ruby rims, obviously youthful. The density of the plum, currant, black cherry scents in the nose in turn cloaks the aggressive dark chocolate, caramel, mesquite chip oakiness, creating a small space for the raw bacon, hothouse flowers and orange zest to have a say. Full-bodied, while not massively extracted there's still a heavy coating effect and immobile weight which deadens the sweetness of all that plum, currant, cherry fruit, this not fully attributable to any tannins, which have a part to play but on the side. The oaky toastiness pervades throughout, adds spice and tang as well as sheer flavor. Some orange blossom, beef blood and herbal shades but nothing extraordinary. Seems to depend a lot on bulling its way through the mouth so you don't catch it all. Grapes sourced from Slide Mountain Vineyard, Lewis Vineyard, Elderling Vineyard. 87

Pendleton Cellars
Columbia Valley, Ex Libris
Cabernet Sauvignon
2005, \$17.99, 13.5%

Dark purple core, pure enough to equally boast of clarity and opacity, segues to fairly broad and glowing red-ruby rims, catches glints of light well. Very light dusting of vanilla and oak toast to the nose which remains mostly raspberry, red cherry fruit, gains breadth via pine, cedar, garden herb accents, on the whole compact. Medium-bodied, follows the rule book established by the nose with minimal toast and steady, if unspectacular red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Then, too, comes the pine, mountain air, cedar, orange peel stuff. Slight sandpaper grain to the tannins, a very fine coarseness. Adequate acidity too, no slumping nor stooping of shoulders. Perfectly good, no flaw, just, err, slightly boring due to its inability to pimp itself. Contains unspecified percentages of Merlot, Syrah. 87

Maryhill
Columbia Valley, Winemaker's Blend
Blend

2004, \$14.99, 15.0%

Red brick and rust infiltrate the purple core, semi-opaque, the garnet, brick red hues fully sweep through the rims. Over-oaked nose of vanilla cream, caramel, fried butter and mint, flower too but more like a spray, sweet blueberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit scents try hard to reduce the alcoholic bite. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with some grip and ability to squeeze your mouth pores. While sweet from the toffee, vanilla oak and currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, there's also bell pepper, stone, orange peel and cigar leaf to provide loyal opposition. Sits upright at the dinner table but not quite erect, lacks follow-through by the tannins or acidity. Don't care for it but certainly will make enough friends on its own. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc. 85

Cadence
Columbia Valley, Coda
Blend

2004, \$29.99, 14.4%

Red-brown influences lighten the purple core, the semi-washed out brick red to crimson rims spread wide with no resistance. Milk chocolate, sour milk, vanilla bean and mint appear first in the nose, lemon drop, wet grass, and honey next, the cherry, blackberry fruit scents, while sweet, a minority partner. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a curiously weak handshake, doesn't seem interested in making a strong initial statement. Plenty sweet in the cherry, blueberry, boysenberry fruit department but there's a soft decline before the finish. Some bell pepper but not very herbaceous at all, more interested in expressing the stone, orange and lemon peel, cedar notes. OK tannins and/or acidity, in line with its peer group. The caramel, vanilla and buttered toast most prevalent on the finish. Winemaking by the manual yet still very potable. 78% Cabernet Franc, 22% Cabernet Sauvignon. 85

FRANCE RED

Barou, Domaine Emmanuel
Rhône, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes
Syrah

2005, \$13.99, 13.0%

Deeply saturated purple core, dark enough to impair its luminescence, this not a problem around the red-magenta rims, maintains an attractive sheen across the surface too. Quite sour plum, black cherry fruit in the nose, gives it nice erectness, mixes in a suitable amount of violets, stone bits and olive bits, not especially complex yet well-balanced and never skips a beat. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, immediately impresses for its spicy, peppery bite. The tannins not overpowering but do smooth out the plum, cherry fruit and reduce the sourness. Lower orange citrus here, probably beat out by the pepper. In no way herbal, just lots of stoniness with a suggestion of caked earth. Finishes just as it started, compactly and without extra fuss. 88

Potel-Aviron
Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent, Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir

2004, \$20.99, 13.0%

Very light red-ruby in color, above average luminescence, given its milder hue the ruby rims are more than

adequately full. Crushed stone and mineral dust make up the majority of the nose, supplemented by cherry pit, cranberry, raspberry fruit scents, meadow flowers and wild grasses abound but it's not exactly herbaceous. Medium-bodied but sheds weight swiftly as it progresses. Quite ashy, both in terms of tobacco and stone. Sour lemon peels, tree bark and parched earth figure mightily into the picture. Herbaceousness elevated here, percolates throughout. The cranberry, cherry, pear fruit is sour and ultra-crisp. Austere demeanor but not rude. 87

Champs Vignons, Domaine des
Loire, Chinon, Vieilles Vignes
Cabernet Franc

2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Basic red-violet color, moderate clarity, rust tinge to the garnet rims, has the appearance which hints at interesting colors when aged. Bursts into the nose with bell pepper, pickle juice, jalapeño pepper, cigar ash and brown earth, the cherry and plum fruit scents no match, some melon rind notes, the pickled aspect just grows with time. Medium-bodied, there's enough chocolate and toast to forestall the thought of bread and butter pickles for a good 30 seconds before they and the bell pepper ensue. Good degree of stoniness too, ash, tar and tobacco flavors. The cherry, blackberry flavors do their job but clock out at 5:00 PM on the button. Not tannic per se yet there's a noticeable dustiness that permeates the finish. Nice wine but you better like pickles. 87

Noiraie, Domaine de la
Loire, Bourgueil, Cuvée St. Vincent
Cabernet Franc

2005, \$14.99, 13.0%

Unblemished dark purple core, mild red infusion, blood red to ruby rims with a healthy glow. Bracingly tart cherry, plum fruit scents which in no way provide cushioning for the ash, bell pepper, graphite, parched earth, old lemon peel aspects, overall has good punching power in your nostrils but no one haymaker punch. Medium-bodied, maintains a strong foundation of weight throughout. Herbal, pairs with black pepper, tobacco ash, broken stone, clay, orange rind, cracked leather for a nice array of flavors. The tannins and acidity start off strong and just turn parching after the mid-palate. Provides an admirable "window into the soil" but still needs more richness in the cherry, black raspberry fruit, especially factoring in the positive vintage conditions. 86

Caillou, Château Le
Bordeaux, Pomerol
Blend

2003, \$27.99, 13.0%

The violet core light enough to be equally red-ruby in hue, successively redder towards the fresh brick red rims, above average clarity. The nose is very gamey, dried venison and gristle, sharp herbal tones, kindling smoke and mineral dust, as it opens presents more mesquite brown sugar notes and lets the basic cherry, red currant scents through. Light to medium-bodied, good flavors but lacks concentration. Less bite in the herbaceousness and added orange citrus, minerals and slightly more expressive cherry, blackberry, currant fruit. Tannins kind of grainy, drying past the mid-palate, sort of typical of the vintage and all that. Dealable vanilla, toast, caramel oak accents. Florality most present at the end but by the then the party's over, there's out of dip. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Franc. 86

Maine Gazin, Château
Bordeaux, Premières Côtes de Blaye, Livenne Vieilles
Vignes
Merlot

2004, \$13.99, 13.0%

Small core of black to purple, wide swath of garnet before turns to bright red-magenta rims, clean and mostly transparent. Smoky, earthy nose, like last night's campfire in the morning, herbal with cigar wrapper and meadow brush parts, lemon zest introduces the succinct raspberry, red cherry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, not a lot of weight nor thrust but does indeed make the best of what it has. Blurry floral, citrus, tea leaf and garden herb elements take the sting out of the grassiness, smoothes out as the stone and earth take hold to provide bottom. Sufficient cherry, raspberry, Italian plum fruit but just. The tannins sandpaper, mostly flow but also catch at inopportune moments. Becomes semi-sour at the finish line, not quite what you're looking for. 85

Champs de l'Abbaye, Domaine
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Passetoutgrain
Blend

2005, \$19.99, 12.0%

Strong luminescent glow in the ruby to purple color, provides added depth given the soft murkiness in the core which on the other hand detracts from its clarity, very full rims a visual plus. Kinda funky nose, damp earth and forest floor brush, sour lemons, tart cherry, cranberry fruit scents and then more twigs, tree leaves, speaks loudly like it doesn't know you're standing right next to it. Light to medium-bodied, the sternness in the tannins and acidity grant it much more mouth presence than its general weight might warrant. While somewhat dilute, the sourness in the red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit increases its footprint. Lower herbal notes here, tea leaf, tobacco, tree bark yet even this gets beaten down by the tannins. The finish features lemony bite, an attempt made by the florality to show but never gets off the ground. Approximately 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Gamay Noir. 85

FRANCE SPARKLING

Mérieau, Jean-François
Loire, Touraine, Méthode Traditionnelle
Blend

NV, \$19.99, 11.0%

Super-tiny and fine bubbles, the beads loosely spread yet many in number, light yellow hay in color with some fade near the rims. Clean nose, the scents truly almost nonexistent, chalk, stone, mineral water and then, zip, maybe some peach pit at best. Medium-bodied, fizzy in a prickly manner, dissipates quickly after the mouth entry. Has a certain creaminess to its texture, yet at the same time maintains that mineral water freshness. Lemon peel and some twiggy or leafy notes also present. Much more evident ripeness and semi-sweetness in the peach, apricot, yellow apple fruit, albeit the whole show turns bone dry by the finish. Strikes you as being traditional in a buttoned down, "man of few words" way. 80% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Huet, S.A.
Loire, Vouvray, Le Haut-Lieu
Sec
Chenin Blanc

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2005, \$25.99, 12.0%

Barely shows any hue at all, gossamer yellow-brown straw in patches, mostly as transparent as a glass of water, if not entirely unattractive for it. The chalky, mineral nose pushes being salty, the crisp peach, pear, red apple scents possess more snap than juice, lightest of lemon-honey accents, kind of collapses in on itself over time. Medium to full-bodied, maintains the density of steel from first to last sip. Grassy snap in the attack prepares you for the plentiful stone, earth, oil slick components. The lemon to orange citrus is borderline playful, really adds a layer of friendliness. Minimal honeyed shades, the apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit left to their own devices, no makeup available for added sweetness. But, hey, no help really needed. The acidity is one tough mofo, not unforgiving yet at the same time fully in charge. Gets better and better with extended air time. 91

Ramonet, Domaine
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet
Chardonnay

2004, \$49.99, 13.5%

Brown and yellow straw hues dull the overall color, clear enough up close but flat and lifeless when viewed from any distance. Mint, violets, orange blossom appear in the nose, all within an angular framework of toasty oak, the pear, apple, apricot, pineapple fruit scents consistent, smooth presence and of above average restraint. Medium-bodied, has crisp oak accents but already showing signs of knitting this element into the whole. Sweet orange and lime citrus pair up with that mintiness and pretty floral notes. There's a smattering of stoniness to be had, if short-lived. As in the nose, the peach, pear, yellow apple, green melon fruit consistent but at the same time easy to miss. The finish cuts out a little early, fits with the general demeanor yet leaves you a tad wanting. 88

Mérieau, Jean-François
Loire, Touraine, l'Arpent des Vaudons
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$13.99, 12.0%

Plenty of surface reflectivity to mask the lighter yellow straw color, the hue all but fully gone by the rims. Highly aggressive nose featuring chili pepper, freshly cut grass and sauna fog grassiness, all high notes with no bass, the mint notes bring out additional pear, apple fruit scents. Medium-bodied, on the stocky side though, not fat but strong boned. The curious chili pepper milder here but still present, pairs well with the minerality and stone dust, the latter tempering the bite. The herbaceous component more knit into the total fabric too. Not overdone, just does its thing, steady cruising in the apple, pear, peach fruit with a solid finish and no loss of flavor. The acidity flattens out some at the end too, sacrificing brightness for added length. 88

Lafage, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes,
Novellum

Chardonnay

2005, \$10.99, 13.5%

Pretty sparkle breathes life into the yellow gold color, brilliance forgives the light hue, aesthetically speaking. Big time florality infuses the nose, hard to find room in there for the orange citrus, mint or the peach, pear fruit, even though this is more than sufficient. Medium-bodied, balanced well in order to spread its weight across the palate, welcome sense of restraint given the inherent

ripeness in the apricot, peach, pear fruit. The violet-led florality still in effect yet not as dominant as in the nose. The lemon, tangerine citrus develops more bite than expected. The minerality holds off until during the back half to really develop a presence. Spicy finish, adds a good extra kick. 88

Clerc & Fils, Domaine Henri
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Les Riaux
Chardonnay
2005, \$20.99, 13.0%

Washed out white straw color but holds onto its sparkle, across the surface, mostly transparent around the rims. The nose hops back and forth between crispness and softness, luck of the draw, lemon/lime meringue, mint leaf, glazed dough, the pear, apricot, apple scents thoroughly stand up to scrutiny, your nostrils full for some time before vacating. In the mouth it's close to full-bodied and nicely spreads itself evenly and thickly across the palate. Enough chalk and stone to evoke its hometown but the youthfully cheery peach, pear, yellow apple fruit remains the main attraction, absolutely wants to be your friend. The lemon to tangerine citrus sweet, no argument put forth by the mint and lilacs. The acidity knows what it has to do in order to check the honey and toffee notes and does so. Gregoriously loses some of its shape at the finish line but by then who cares? 88

ITALY RED

Zaccagnini, Azienda Agricola Ciccio
Abruzzi, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Tralcetto, Riserva
Montepulciano
2002, \$16.99, 13.0%

Strong red influence permeates the dark purple core, very attractive clarity with above average luster in the ruby-magenta rims. Smoky nose, initially displays a slap of oak toast but this is soaked into the red cherry, cranberry, raspberry scents, moderate earth and leather too with lower floral swipes, most impressive for its energy level. Medium to full-bodied with a strong skeleton, strides with good authority, the tannins durable throughout. Here in the mouth it delivers on the funkiness hinted at in the nose, bountiful leather, merde, earth elements. Yet, at the same time not without the more graceful charms of orange citrus and pressed flowers. The cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is semi-sour, has depth and clarity and lasts full through the finish, ripe but sufficiently dry. Good wine. 88

Kalterner (Caldaro), Kellerei
Alto Adige/Südtirol
Lagrein
2004, \$16.99, 13.0%

Black-red tint saps any brightness out of the opaque purple core, not much drop off at the rims to the dark ruby color, completely saturated. Burnt mocha and coffee beans, floral perfume, leather and something like sour milk in the nose, seems very modern in approach, the currant, cherry, plum fruit more than ripe enough to stain your nostrils. Full-bodied, very rich and succulent, while of a beefy degree of acidity and tannins, it's not enough to but suggest a direction for the abundant plum, currant, black cherry fruit. Thankfully not too sweet, the orange to lemon citrus, flowers and mineral bits provide counter-weight. The oak-like notes toned down here, vanilla and cocoa sparsely spread about. Sour vibrations through the finish give it a spring to its step. 87

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ITALY WHITE

Talamonti, Cantine
Abruzzi, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, Aternum
Trebbiano
2005, \$15.99, 13.0%

There's a layered shimmer to it which deepens the golden hue, while not especially clear there's good surface shine, holds its depth well into the rims. While deeply honeyed and possessing a thick floral musk, there's an overall crunchy texture to the nose, mint leaf, peach and apricot pit, lemon candy elements well-shaped and full without overwhelmingly sweet. Medium to full-bodied, the acidity has the broad shoulders needed to direct the flow of the honey, oxidative dough notes and bodacious florality. There's some stoniness to be had, however, not when it's stared down by the apricot, nectarine, peach, melon fruit. Never shakes the florality, tenacious presence. More lemon to Mandarin orange flavors and caramel peek through during the finish. A good mouthful. 89

San Michele Appiano (St. Michael Eppan), Cantina
Produttori
Alto Adige/Südtirol
Gewürztraminer
2005, \$17.99, 13.5%

Light, flat yellow straw color, glazed over enough in appearance to keep its hue through the rims, nothing special to look at. Lemon, pink grapefruit-driven nose, minor saline quality to the stoniness, too fresh and lively for any honey notes to accrue, hint of vanillin creaminess, light nuttiness too, with full but not too fruity apricot, peach, pear scents. Medium-bodied, round contours with plenty of center to ensure its presence felt throughout. Tangerine, grapefruit citrus, a flower petal or two and, as in the nose, more minerality than nuttiness. The acidity is broad and flat, does a good job of keeping things dry without possessing much bite. The peach, nectarine, apricot fruit stays in the middle of the sweet/dry spectrum without demanding attention. Right amount of refinement for the depth in the primary material offered. 88

Zaccagnini, Azienda Agricola Ciccio
Abruzzi, Colline Pescaresi, Il Bianco di Ciccio
Blend
2005, \$8.99, 11.5%

Shiny yellow straw in color, good reflectivity, minor brown shades, its hue fades noticeably along the rims. Light, clean nose, comprised mostly of lemon peel, wildflowers, whisper of honey and understated apple, pear, peach scents, at times does appear slightly spicy. Medium-bodied, has more tang than you'd think given its moderate size, the spiciness is more explicit and with more tartness in the lemon, lime citrus. The florality comes across as ground-up dried petals. More accessibility here in the peach, apricot, pear fruit, bright and snappy. No real herbal notes, some chalk or mineral powder instead. The acidity is right-sized for the level of depth found in the primary material. Innocuously pleasing. Unspecified percentages of Trebbiano, Chardonnay, Riesling Italico. 87

ITALY DESSERT

Giovinale, Cascina
Piedmont, Moscato Passito, Fleur
Moscato
2001, \$19.99, 12.5%

Light yellow amber to orange in color, shiny surface with moderate hue concentration, gains depth more from layered translucency than color per se. Even at 12.5%, the nose comes off as highly alcoholic, piercing, displays orange marmalade, fresh garden herbs, apricot paste and dried peaches, almonds and witch hazel scents, its brisk nature prevents it from sinking in much. Medium-bodied, noticeably fluid, most of the weight thrown at you upfront and then cast aside as it moves forward. The alcoholic nature more subdued here, while there's not lack of honey or brown sugar accents the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit fresher, this helped by a waft of flower petals. Juicy orange, tangerine, lemon citrus buoys things further. Cinnamon and clove spice present through the finish. Could work as an aperitif too. 375 ml bottle. 87

GERMANY WHITE

Schäfer-Fröhlich, Weingut
Nahe, QbA Halbtrocken AP #4
Riesling
2005, \$16.99, 11.5%

There's a some of misty gauziness to it visually, the yellow hay color concentrating or diluting with no rhyme nor reason from differing angles, this holding from the core through to the rims. The oil and warm rubber notes in the nose oppose the innocently pure apple, pear, peach fruit scents, pretty much crush them as they cannot defend themselves, has the kind of stoniness you might find in a deep, damp cave, maybe some lemon or flowers but more likely in hiding. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with lots of dry extract, powdered sugary sweetness during the attack highlights lemon drop, lilac accents and the fresh peach, apricot, pear fruit. Some fizz to it, more basic slate and stone here than wet mineral stone. The acidity some more like a blunt hammer than knife, adequate power. Suggests more pink grapefruit citrus near the end, even as this sweetness meets up with a briny sourness too. May be trying to do too much at once. 87

Dönnhoff, Weingut Hermann
Nahe, Estate QbA AP #2
Riesling
2005, \$16.99, 9.5%
Basic yellow gold color, neither super shiny nor super dull, bends the light to a good degree below the surface, just about everything exceedingly normal appearance-wise. The nose achieves attractive fullness while still remaining light of touch, violets, powdered stones and minerals, lemon to tangerine citrus, glimmer of rubber, as it sits and warms there's more pineapple, pear and nectarine scents than the previous apricot to apple. Medium-bodied, very tactful with perhaps too much reserve, doesn't really let the sweetish lemon, lime, orange citrus nor apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit gush forth. While there's an abiding stoniness to it, this too never raises its voice. The acidity is fine, as in gossamer-like. If there's anything which does speak up it's the floral tones, particularly near the back end. A well-mannered dinner guest but few memorably bawdy tales to tell. 87

SPAIN RED

Alaveses S.A., Cosecheros
Rioja, Artadi Orobio
Tempranillo
2004, \$16.99, 13.0%

Very clear in terms of murkiness yet the core is about pure black, minimal purple in it, heavy set red ruby to scarlet rims, they lighten enough to achieve a degree of transparency. The nose is curiously funky, noticeable merde, the damp earth and bell pepper components, sour oak, gun flint and lemon peel more evident than any cherry or raspberry scents. Medium to full-bodied, has nice grip and makes no bones about being in your mouth. The herbaceousness and earthiness persist here as well, the tannins dulling and broad. Little evident oak, far too rough hewn for any of that. Lemon zest, pressed flowers, tomato skin, cedar find their way in over time. Isn't unfriendly per se, but not necessarily friendly either. Has a certain appeal. 86

Sant Rafael, Cellers
Montsant, Solpost
Blend
2003, \$24.99, 34.5%

Unblemished ruby-violet in color, fairly even, a little more violet at the core, a little more ruby at the rims, plenty of surface shine. There's very succulent raspberry, blackberry, almost blueberry fruit in the nose, masked in good part by an animal, earth funk, medicinal cough drop scents, hard to fully peg as brett-derived, not much else to note. Light-bodied, herbal with lemon to white grapefruit bite, leather, tree bark, dried tea bag flavors. The red cherry, blackberry fruit less opulent here, exits with a sour pucker. This probably exacerbated by bitter tannins, becomes drier and drier as it approaches the finish. Just strikes you as incomplete, like it should have an extra gear. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Carignan, Cabernet Sauvignon. 84

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Waterkloof
Stellenbosch, Peacock Ridge
Sauvignon Blanc
2005, \$17.99, 14.5%

Brilliant white gold in color, resplendently reflects light, becomes huelessly transparent along the rims but still very attractive. Energetic nose of mint, violets and orange blossom, casually breezy, the peach, pear, apple fruit smells like the first day of harvest, fresh and just mature, no element which speaks of its terroir. Full-bodied and satiny smooth, has deceptively strong grip as it flows through the mouth. Spicy enough to take a lot of excess sugar out of the concentrated tangerine and pink grapefruit citrus as well as the equally fat apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit. The acidity strong but lacks a naturally sharp blade. Creamier in the middle, slows it down some. Here the florality gets mostly lost. Very tasty but not necessarily easy to peg as Sauvignon Blanc. 87

Capaia
Philadelphia, Blue Grove Hill
Sauvignon Blanc
2006, \$14.99, 13.0%

Very pale white hay in color, were it not for the translucency boosts the hue might very well be colorless, is more or less consistent to the rims with what its got. The nose is a little flat, like it's anchored down, mint and flower oil, lemon custard, smattering of oil-slicked stones, there's a pit-like and mildly underripe quality to the peach, apricot fruit scents. Medium-bodied, both more herbaceous and creamier in the mouth, even as there's a good machete hacking away feel to the acidity. Stones,

mineral water and lemon peel match up nicely with the grassiness, soft fizziness. The pineapple, peach, pear fruit reticent here as well, if sweeter than nose suggests. Basically a "gallery opening" type wine and, as such, a little overpriced. 86

AUSTRALIA RED

De Lisio

South Australia, McLaren Vale, Quarterback

Blend

2005, \$21.99, 15.0%

Black in color at the core but not densely opaque, black to brown tinges, brightens appreciably at the thin garnet-orange rims, impressive without it tooting its own horn. Ripe, if sour, raspberry, red cherry, cranberry scents, powdered chocolate, dried game, orange zest, surprisingly demure and lacks showiness, leaner and more linear than that. Medium-bodied, there's a sweet hard candy character to the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, the tannins dusty enough to let the fruit flavors flow, but not the sugar. Cocoa, mocha and heavy cream about it in the oak department. Some earth, tobacco, stone but oddly not boisterous in the non-fruit department either. Keeps you wanting it to fulfill your biased expectations of it but it doesn't. 30% Shiraz, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Merlot, 21% Grenache. 88

Barry, Jim

South Australia, The Cover Drive

Cabernet Sauvignon

2004, \$17.99, 14.5%

Powerful luminescence flows through the nearly opaque violet core, the glow continues through to the red-garnet rims, very vivid appearance. Crunchy oak toast, dill and grill smoke/meat fat infuse the nose, turns more minty as it opens, as all of this swirls around the red cherry, currant fruit does get somewhat lost. Medium-bodied, good dustiness in the tannins, useful as the caramel/vanilla cream and sweetness is commuted to a sentence of burnt toast and cedar. Orange zest and loose stone bits help center it. Plenty of mint to spare, lifts up the semi-inert cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, this having a slight "fruit pit" nature to it. Tasty stuff if you have some oak tolerance, keeps plugging away through the finish. Grapes sourced from Coonawarra, Clare Valley. 88

Heartland

South Australia, Langhorne Creek, Dolcetto Lagrein

Blend

2005, \$19.99, 14.5%

Just about fully opaque despite lack of true density, just the extracted blackness in the purple core makes it impenetrable, very nice surface shine, broad red-ruby rims with still lots of violet left in them. Expected sour cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit in the nose, bigger than expected rawhide, damp mineral earth yet with softening licorice, caramel, mint notes, not excessively oaky, not trying to disguise anything and willing to offend. Medium-bodied, bottom heavy enough that its lack of movement may be taken for additional body. More minty and floral here, eucalyptus, grill smoke tang too, dripping molasses and spices, Here the oak saps a good part of the sourness out of the cherry, raspberry, boysenberry fruit. Not tannic, probably wood tannins present if anything. Keeps pushing ahead through the finish, no lightweight. Interesting for a glass or two then loses its hold on you. 70% Dolcetto, 30% Lagrein. (Screwcap) 87

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