

The Hanes Wine Review, May 2009 Edition

It's been noted many times over of late that people are "trading down" and foregoing the purchase of more expensive wines in favor of inexpensive alternatives. Hanes can anecdotally concur with this as any wine store he has worked in of late, or even visited as a customer, has plenty of dusty bottles sitting around with \$50+ prices tags on them. Just about the same can be said for bottles over \$30 but those are typically on shelves low enough for the staff to periodically dust.

Allowing for this, what interests is analyzing the fight for market share among sub-\$20 bottles and, more importantly, sub-\$15 bottles. Australian wines continue to languish on the whole, the bloom seems entirely off the rose here. Only on rare occasions can domestic wines "kill" under \$15, whereas alternatively there's many recommendable wines between \$15 and \$20. France and Italy offer a few things here and there but the weak dollar continues to hurt pricing and "the market" still seems to perceive these wines as representing less bang for the buck, either believing the product has to be average at best to be priced at \$15 or no one knows what the grapes are.

Which kind of brings us to the cheapie fave of recent years, Argentinean Malbec. Starting around the 1999 to 2000 vintages Malbec started to make a big splash as a credible inexpensive (like \$8.99 inexpensive) wine that consistently over-delivered, plenty of fruit, no "weird" flavors, and all this with some modicum of structure. Since then Malbec has become the signature grape of Argentina and if you ask most casual wine drinkers they might be shocked to learn that Malbec is originally a French grape. Shocked. In any event, the United States is Argentina's numero uno export market for Malbec and the amount of wine shipped here has grown just about every year.

The situation for Malbec is so rosy that the classic mistake is being made. Now, Malbec producers want to be, shudders, "taken seriously." That means phrases like the ever-lame "world class wine" get banded about and the wines see more new oak, get more fruit intensity and color extraction. and, naturally, the prices rise.

Now, don't get Hanes wrong, there's still a good amount of under \$10 Malbec wines out there and new producers come along now and then to fill the void at the bottom of the food chain. But most of the established brands are either pushing \$15 a bottle or getting close to \$20. For our purposes here, Hanes is ignoring the "high end" Malbecs which were always created to appeal to the Cali Cab drinker and not the value customer. So, what's the "new Malbec"?

All signs seem to be pointing towards Spanish Garnacha. Garnacha is the Spanish name for Grenache, a grape known primarily as the backbone of Southern Rhône wines and many from the Languedoc/Roussillon area as well. Grenache from the United States and Australia have some popularity but the prices can be steep, usually starting over \$20. Spanish Garnacha, however, is almost always rock bottom cheap and appeals to the denuded American palate with oodles of berry fruit and close to no acidic or tannic structure. Now, before anyone gets *too* testy, there are some more complex Garnacha wines out there. A few. But basically this is the new tidal wave of cheap fruit-driven wines washing across the vast land we call America. Customers are swiftly getting over the unfamiliarity of the grape name ("tell 'em it's Grenache") and the prices are undercutting many Malbec wines as well as many Australian Shiraz wines (Yellowtail and such excluded).

Similarly to the "critter" labels and brand names that helped popularize Shiraz, many of the Garnacha wines have "fun" labels or at least are easy for the casual customer to read and assess. And, opposed to many Malbec wines which lend themselves better to the dining table, once you taste a customer on some Garnacha there's a high probability they will walk out of the store with a bottle or two.

Again, pricing is key and unless the lower tier Spanish regions such as Yecla, Calatayud, Navarra, Campo de Borja, Tarragona, Montsant or Cariñena start jacking up the prices of their wines, there's no reason to believe that Spanish Garnacha won't earn more market share among sub-\$15 and sub-\$10 bottles. The market share of Australian Shiraz seems unlikely to regain past breadth while Malbec *could* win some market share back but probably won't due to the Argentinean wine industry maturing and becoming more corporate (i.e., more profit needed for shareholders and general need to increase ROI among the delivery channel players). Chile, eh. They had their chance. Portugal? Not likely, just too many foreign sounding grapes and many of the wines (even the cheap ones) are not as simple and straightforward as Spanish Garnacha. South Africa can't produce the quantities needed to flood the market and create awareness of a certain type of wine ("Spanish Garnacha") over a specific brand name. Spanish cooperatives and large farming operations can crank out production numbers usually reserved for the plonk Shiraz gushing out of Riverina, Australia.

The way retail sales are shaping up these days, Garnacha is what's groovy. Get onboard before the Spaniards want their wines to be taken seriously!

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This month's big winners... Not a lot of expensive wine down the gullet this month. Vissoux Beaujolais gets frequent mention herein and it should. Their 2007 from the cru village of Brouilly and named "Pierreux" is wonderful Gamay for about \$22. That is if you buy it from California and not North Carolina where it's more like \$27. Speaking of North Carolina, credit where it's due, the local winery Childress has produced a drinkable wine in their new white blend called "Trio." But it's probably not going to make it outside of state lines. So, please plan a visit to the winery as soon as possible.

The best \$15 and under picks... After imbibing a few vintages it is clear that there is good value to Henri Bourgeois's Loire Sauvignon Blanc called "Petit Bourgeois." The 2007 is about \$14 and drinks as if more expensive. Highly recommended. If you have to drink cheap Chardonnay, the Tunnel of Elms brand from hallowed Beringer ain't such a bad choice. Should be about \$8 or so a bottle. The catch being this is an "on-premise" (restaurant, bar) brand and should not be available in retail stores. So, the price on a wine list per bottle will likely be around \$18 per bottle with the standard 300% or so markup. A couple of Italian summery whites showed well this month. Coffele's 2008 Soave Classico was zesty and stands up for itself and doesn't stick you up as it's only \$15. Similarly, Bidoli's 2007 Sauvignon Blanc from Friuli marries good acidity with minerals and citrus to easily warrant the \$13 price tag. Credit where it's due, the Don Sebastiani & Sons outfit has put together a credible array of wines under the general umbrella name of "The Other Guys," all of which remains discreetly placed on the back labels. So, look for a Cali Viognier called "The White Knight" and you'll find a decent slurper for around \$12. As with many Spanish wines, don't look for the producer name on the bottle just look for the brand name "Monte La Sarda." What you will find is a 2007 Garnacha based wine which should easily appeal to wine geek palates for \$13. From "the other" down under, Chile offers a nice Cabernet Sauvignon in the form of the 2006 Haras Estate wine for \$13 while Argentina matches it with the Mendoza Cabernet Sauvignon called Gougenheim for about \$12. Both beat most domestic U.S. stuff at this price.

And the disappointments... Had a Saint-Joseph from a new-to-Hanes producer Laurent Betton. This 2006 was off-kilter and never found itself. This may be attributable to travel shock. But maybe not. Thankfully, twas not Hanes's \$30. Among cheapies tasted of late, the Sycamore Lane brand produces some nasty shit to be generally avoided. This is worse out there but only bad luck or malevolence should make you encounter these other wines. Bergström is an Oregonian winery which has not done it for Hanes. This month he tried a weird Sauvignon Blanc which, if he had tasted it blindly, Sauvignon Blanc would not have made a list of ten possible grapes. But, hey, what do you want for \$29 these days? Long time since Hanes tried a wine from Abruzzi producer Cataldi Madonna and their 2006 basic Montepulciano was not the right wine to reignite the relationship. Harsh and with less body and "give" than expected, never got past borderline surly. And yet still cost \$22. Normally, Hanes digs the entry level bottling Riesling from Nahe, Germany producer Hexamer called "Quarzit." But the 2007 lacks cut and liveliness and does not support the \$19 entry price. Usually impressed with any wine from well-known importer Hand Picked Selections, the 2007 "Notro" blend of Sangiovese and Bonarda from Argentina never achieved "gimme another glass" status, even at \$8. Definitely *not* a easy cocktail party or gallery opening sipper.

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

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the *older (or non-imported) wines* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2009.html>

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

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

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

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pesenti Vineyard
Zinfandel
2006, \$35.00, 15.9%
There's a crimson red tinge to the dark purple core, remains dark enough at the rims to slightly dull the more ruby to scarlet color there, about 76.82% opaque. The alcohol is a little perceptible in the nose, yet, if you are into the style it's easy to focus instead on the cinnamon and

ginger coated jammy plum, cassis, blackberry scents, orange blossom dew, curiously not that much chocolate nor toast, same for eucalyptus or mint, a fruit stealth bomber. Full-bodied, here there's a nice acidic shock to the attack which does bring out some menthol and deeper tangerine, grapefruit citrus notes, alongside a nice small touch of herbaceousness. The ginger spice persists, playing around with honey and molasses accents. Good tang on the finish and while thick not heavy. Stays true to the vineyard more than a style. 91

Lot 205 Winery
Regional Blend, California
Zinfandel

2006, \$10.99, 13.5%

Crimson red to purple in color, fair degree of transparency, fades to a duller brick red around the rims, minimal extraction of color. Fresh, somewhat hollow, nose of raspberry, red cherry, apple fruit, caramel and molasses glaze, splash of orange juice, chocolate and floral dew, easygoing and light. Light to medium-bodied, very sweet which helps it make up for lack of heft. Sugary blackberry, blueberry, raspberry flavors with cinnamon, toffee, chocolate flavors, would seem prune if it had more weight. Smattering of pine forest earthiness and lemon, orange citrus pulp. Nothing wrong with it flaw-wise, does start to deflate before the finish. And, to its credit, it's not trying to impress more than it can. Right price for what is in the bottle. 91% Zinfandel, 9% Syrah. Sourced 56% Amador County, 19% Solano County, 16% Lodi, 9% Paso Robles. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 86

Beringer
Regional Blend, California, Tunnel of Elms
Cabernet Sauvignon

2007, \$7.99, 13.0%

Light violet that seems at once draw towards black and garnet but just doesn't have the richness of hue to accumulate into a more "serious" appearance, trim and mostly transparent, the rims are a vivid ruby-magenta. The nose integrates the caramel, butterscotch accents into the full fabric of red cherry, red currant, blackberry scents and sweet tobacco leaf, orange rind, keeps it very direct and simple and thus avoids many potential missteps. Medium-bodied, holds its weight fully from start to finish and as a result can seem bigger at times. The popcorn, caramel, butterscotch oak here too incorporated as an embellishment and not as disguising makeup. Slight hard candy nature to the red cherry, raspberry, watermelon fruit, like you want to lick the liquid for fullest effect. Low tannins, nothing which might impede the flow of its chosen primary attributes. It's a very good red wine with the name of a grape of the label. [Synthetic Cork] 86

Sycamore Lane
Regional Blend, California
Cabernet Sauvignon

2007, \$5.99, 13.0%

Unblemished dark ruby-purple in color, slight diminution to magenta at the rims, spotless surface, spot-on visually. Sweet and sugary in the nose, if there was more weight could be jammy, so no surprise that the emphasis is on plum, blackberry fruit, still can't deny the presence of some forest floor greenery, orange peel and sweet cedar notes, throws one big punch rather than work the body until you tire. Full-bodied, here loads up on the vanilla cream and butterscotch in support of the sugary cherry, plum, blackberry fruit. On the flip side, produces a palpable bell pepper streak which suggests more the presence of Cabernet Franc than underripeness, despite the unlikelihood of this. Tannin and/or acidity not in the picture, should they have been is the question. The bell pepper, herbaceous qualities don't dissipate, if this element unsettles, you will find something amiss. Ends with a flourish of buttered popcorn, yummy. [Synthetic Cork] 83

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Other Guys (Don Sebastiani & Sons), The
Central Valley, Clarksburg, The White Knight
Viognier

2006, \$11.99, 13.5%

while very clear still comes across as slightly dull, rich golden hue with a vague amber tinge, steady presence in the glass. Honeysuckle, honeydew melon, orange blossom dominate the sweet nose, fresh whipped cream, banana and tangerine zest there too, thick apricot, peach, pear scents, much staying power than lift. Full-bodied, makes a similar impression in the mouth, bottom-heavy and pushes becoming cloyingly sweet. However, has surprising amount of acidity and enough sour brightness in the tangerine, orange, lime citrus to keep it awake. Has the bodacious florality Viognier is known for, the banana thing still lurks, in part covered up by the vanilla pudding and butterscotch accents. Almost suggests a nuttiness by the finish. Shows very credibly at the price point. [Screwcap] 87

Beringer
Regional Blend, California, Tunnel of Elms
Chardonnay

2007, \$7.99, 13.0%

Light brown to orange gold straw in color, more solid in the glass than shiny or layered, holds OK through the rims. Very creamy in texture in the nostrils, contributes to a soft and full array of whipped cream, orange sherbet, floral mist and completely ripened peach, apricot scents, ends with a touch of black licorice. Medium-bodied with sufficient bottom to prolong its presence. Supple for its size, doesn't have much acidity but, by the same token, doesn't try to convince you it does have it. Orange, tangerine, pink grapefruit citrus garners the most attention at first, slowly shifts over to the apricot, peach, nectarine, red apple fruit. Caramel, butterscotch and that heavy cream play a role but, on the whole, this doesn't come across as grotesquely oaky. Taken at face value, it's easily enjoyable. There's a lot of this going around these days. [Synthetic Cork] 86

Sycamore Lane
Regional Blend, California
Pinot Grigio

2008, \$5.99, 13.0%

Very pale white straw color, close to fully bleached of hue, water-like transparency. Simple pear, apple, peach filled nose, solid floral spritz accompanied by lemon citrus, minimal minerality but the parts that are there fit together nicely. Light-bodied, depends on a powdered sugar kind of sweetness to attain weight and palate presence. This gives the lemon/lime citrus an "-ade" character like a soft drink. The acidity is low, thus you get more flesh on the peach, apricot, pear fruit flavors. Hard to gauge how much of the floral accents are really citrus related or standalone. Tightens up some through the finish, but didn't have much heft to lose. Even if you want to look for flaws it's a decent competitor at the price point. Which is the price point America wants, dammit! [Synthetic Cork] 84

OREGON WHITE

Bergström
Willamette Valley
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$28.99, 12.0%

Light golden hay color with green stripes, very shiny surface while also pools in layers below. Zesty lemon-lime citrus infuses the nose, ripe apricot, peach, green melon, scents, floral dew, overall little bite or cut, rather soft and inviting, very full nostril presence. Full-bodied, has a certain salinity and minerality yet the acidity does not give it freshness. Party due to this, the juicy melon, peach, apricot, nectarine fruit comes to the verge of tropicality. The lemon, lime, tangerine citrus is juicy if without tang. Possesses good length and tasty enough, just distinctly un-Sauvignon like. 87

NORTH CAROLINA WHITE

Childress Vineyards
Regional Blend, Trio White Table Wine
Blend
2008, \$14.99, 12.5%

Highly reflective and bright, covers up the relative lack of color, mainly brown to yellow straw, pretty enough to look at. Some sweet smoke and woodiness in the nose, not oak, more of a kindling thing, fresh floral dew and light apricot, peach, pear scents, light creamy texture but doesn't betray any real oak presence, lots of lift and openly knit. Light to medium-bodied, moves nimbly on its feet and admirably clean. Conversely, there's not much depth to the apricot, melon, peach fruit, perhaps for the best. Golden honey and lemon zest continue the general tenor, more minerality and stone than might be expected. The acidity more than adequate for its needs. As in the nose has a light creaminess so as to avoid any bitterness or archness. An attractive wine with a simple personality and without overt flaws. What more do you want? 48%
Chardonnay, 37% Viognier, 15% Pinot Gris. (Synthetic Cork) 88

FRANCE RED

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Brouilly, Pierreux
Gamay Noir
2007, \$21.99, 12.5%

Very deep purple color, however, the clarity still highly noticeable, hardly shifts into ruby by the rims, just a thin magenta line around all that violet. Muscular depth to the blackberry, boysenberry, black raspberry scents, were it not for the firmness it could be simply "juicy," thick floral mist as well, not much citrus, the stoniness eventually gives the fruit some "pit" nuances as well, unevolved. Full-bodied, here has the kind of broad acidity to make you sit up and pucker through the attack, shaves off a lot of unnecessary sweetness. As well, brings out grapefruit, lemon citrus and tea leaves. The earthiness is light now, more a factor of the plump red cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit than its own innate capabilities. Tannin starts to dig in through back half. Lot of stuff layered in there but it's like a lasagna, to pick the elements apart will just create more mess than it's worth, just bite it off in chunks. 90

Bouland, Daniel
Beaujolais, Morgon, Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2007, \$16.99, 13.0%

Consistent red-violet color throughout, touch more magenta around the rims, unblemished and clear, let's the color naturally express itself. Semi-sugary nose, nudges against bubblegum notes, based mainly in strawberry, raspberry, blueberry fruit and mixed citrus scents, more floral than earthy, suggesting a youthfully unevolved wine. Medium-bodied, there's a change of character here due to rugged tannins and a healthy dose of acidity, dry and scrapes some against the tongue. There's no doubting the ripeness of the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, fights to maintain a full presence through the finish. Orange, lemon citrus pulp there, more forest floor matter than flower petals, helps create more bottom. Very honest wine, not overly fruity and easy to appreciate the tannic spine. Likely at its best over next 2-3 years. 88

Rame, Château La
Bordeaux
Blend
2007, \$15.99, 12.5%

Spotless red-purple core, barely slides into a dark garnet near the rims, given quality vibrancy of hue it's still fully transparent. Kicks its way into your nostrils with a fair degree of precision, lets some muddy earth, cedar, dirt caked stones and pressed flowers in there and waits to bring in the straightforward currant, cherry scents, no elaborate production. Medium-bodied, leisurely paces itself through the mouth, one might even say it dawdles. Chooses alternately between letting the cherry, currant, raspberry fruit bound about and ceding right of way to the tannins. Cedar, mixed citrus, tobacco and tea leaf, back road brown dirt, stones and some mineral water all come into play. It dries out a touch prematurely but this is not to say it loses its charms. Really, it's just what it wants to be, the hallowed "luncheon claret." And there's nothing wrong with that. Man. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc. 87

Fenouillet, Domaine de
Rhône, Vin de Pays de Vaucluse
Blend
2007, \$11.99, 13.0%

Basic purple core with similarly traditional red-ruby rims, slight pink magenta tinge at the very outer reaches, moderate transparency and quite clean throughout. The density of the sour cherry, cranberry, raspberry scents surprises, probably must be so to stay on par with the wet leather, merde, forest brush components, smattering of white grapefruit and garden herbs as well. Medium-bodied, lean like it's healthy but hasn't eaten for a day or two, it's a couple of pounds lighter than usual. The acidity shows verve without messing with the juiciness of the red cherry, red currant, cranberry fruit. Still, when the tannin kicks in it elevates tree bark, dried leaves and tea bags which along with poor earth and merde shunt aside the fruit past the mid-palate. Again displays a suitable dose of white grapefruit to lemon citrus. Notch higher florality at the end. An interesting glass of wine if not entirely satisfying, a wine geek special. Unspecified percentages of Marselan, Merlot, Grenache. (Composite Cork) 87

Betton, Laurent
Rhône, Saint-Joseph
Syrah
2006, \$29.99, 13.5%

Deep purple bruise color, stops short of blackness, as much violet as red ruby in the wide rims, clean and sleek surface. Highly floral nose of lavender, garrigues, sweet lemon to pink grapefruit zest, more pepper than any earth or game components, restrained red cherry to red currant fruit scents, dissolves with ease. Light to medium-bodied, buoyant acidity with pepper, minerals and white grapefruit pith, here you get more charred beef yet still not really gamey. The sweetness in the raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit mostly exhausted by the mid-palate. Thankfully, the florality stays on point throughout. At the penultimate moment caramel and toffee appear. Needs more resonance and bottom, especially given general vintage characteristics. 87

Ségriès, Château de
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône
Blend
2007, \$12.99, 14.0%

Dark ruby to purple in color, unblemished and achieves moderate opacity, the rims filled with saturated ruby to red magenta. The nose hits you with some herbal bite at first, more tilled earth than spice, matted wildflowers, the red cherry, raspberry scents direct and succinct. Medium-bodied, the tannic skeleton fairly evident from the start, however, still spotlights the candied strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit. Mocha and burnt chocolate notes fend off some of the bitter herbaceousness but not all the way through the finish. Displays some soothing, if tangy, orange to lemon citrus notes. Able to stay more or less on balance, that said, still a country cousin rather than city slicker. 50% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 10% Cinsault, 10% Carignan. (Synthetic Cork) 86

FRANCE WHITE

Bourgeois, Domaine Henri
Loire, Vin de Pays du Val de Loire, Petit Bourgeois
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$13.99, 12.0%

Pale glow to the yellow lemon peel coloration, almost like day-glo in the light rather than the dark, fully transparent rims, about average surface luster. Excellent mineral smokiness in the nose, super-tart lemon to white grapefruit citrus element, light florality, high-toned herbaceousness, in no way "complex" but has exactly what you want in such a wine in this price range. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with lean and, at times, savage acidity that pleasurablely drags its nails across your tongue. Leans heavily on the white grapefruit, lemon, lime citrus, tart and all-encompassing. Around the mid-palate some apricot, nectarine, peach, pineapple fruit starts to register, actually fully ripe but not a major part of the show. More floral notes here with a certain mintiness too. Wet limestone, chalk to white minerals more or less completes the package. Very good traditional profile, no quarter asked nor given. Try to drink a little closer to room temperature. (Composite cork) 89

Cassagnoles, Domaine des
Southwest France, Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne
Blend
2008, \$11.99, 12.5%

Close to hueless, vague yellowish tint to the liquid, surface a touch on the dull side as well, hence it's "ehh" in the glass. Laser-like cut to the nose, one way of making an impression when you've only got a few bullets in your gun, here sharp-edged mineral powder, white grapefruit to lemon citrus, smoke and tenuous pear, apple fruit scents, some forgiveness for added florality as it warms. Medium-bodied, withering acidity has you back on your heels from the first sip. As raw as your tongue gets, the wine is not overly dry and there's no lack of sour zest in the white grapefruit, lemon, lime citrus. Lots of pebbles, minerals, stones, all that terroir shit too. The lack of pear, apple, apricot fruit prevents it from filling out in the middle hence the finish truncates further. Same late-to-the-party floral side. It's likable for its naive savagery but some more "give" would be appreciated. Unspecified percentages of Colombard, Ugni Blanc, Gros Manseng. (Screwcap: Kapvins) 87

ITALY RED

Terre Nere, Tenuta delle
Sicilia, Etna Rosso
Blend
2007, \$14.99, 13.5%

There's a natural filminess to it but more like you're looking at it through a filter than it really being in the liquid, otherwise crimson red to blackish purple in the core although not dark, the red lightens a few shades at the rims, still more scarlet or brick red than ruby. Rolls easily into the nose, unfurls juicy strawberry, raspberry fruit scents and a touch of lemon peel, light tree bark or fallen wood, otherwise not a lot going on, very good lift and spreads broadly. Medium-bodied, soaks into the palate nicely without getting heavy, you feel its juiciness. Sticks to the basic raspberry, strawberry setup but there's moments of red apple and pomegranate too. Not especially floral but the orange and lemon citrus has a "blossom" character. Light dusty earthiness but not that ashy, tannins build slowly and contribute to dry finish. Credible entry level Etna juice, could snag a few newbies. Unspecified percentages of Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio. 87

Sensi Vigne e Vini
Tuscany, Chianti, Dalcampo
Sangiovese
2007, \$14.99, 12.5%

Mild reddish tinge to the purple core, the violet deepens the magenta rims as well, fairly clean, about average surface reflectivity. Some wood smoke, pressed flowers and orange spice in the nose but it mainly slaps you with plum, blackberry, cherry fruit scents, plump and generous, not much sign of oak, just lots of fruit. Medium-bodied, there's a steady undercurrent of tannic dryness, sort of like wall-to-wall carpeting on the tongue. Otherwise, you guessed it, plum and cherry fruit, albeit more thick than sweet. Orange peels, cedar and kindling wood lend some dimension and, at times, you might tease out some leather or tea leaf aspects. A Chianti for someone who wants a Chianti, not necessarily someone who WANTS a Chianti. 80% Sangiovese, 20% Canaiolo. 87

Cataldi Madonna, Azienda Agricola Luigi
Abruzzi, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo
Montepulciano
2006, \$21.99, 13.5%

Super-clean, bright violet color at the core through to the equally vivid ruby-magenta rims, transparent on the whole without losing hue intensity. Dry nose featuring leather, brown earth and tough-minded red cherry, raspberry fruit scents, a touch herbaceous, its taut nostril presence never fully uncoils, probably not getting 100% of what's there. Medium-bodied, very tannic and lean in a wiry way, not thin just has very low body fat. Bright sour cherry, cranberry flavors with much more lift than palate soaking power. The overall dryness heightens the lemon and white grapefruit citrus element. Here there's a touch more stone than loose earth. Despite a puckering sensation at the end, has decent length. 87

ITALY WHITE

Coffele, Azienda Agricola
Veneto, Soave Classico
Garganega
2008, \$14.99, 12.5%

While somewhat dilute, there's a bright glow in what yellow gold color there is, clear while sullyng the light some, holds its act together close to the rims. Broad entry into the nose, uses all of the floral and sweet white citrus it can find to get up in there, anise and ginger root at times, makes it easy to forget the fresh, crisp apricot, peach, yellow apple scents, suggests sweet tea leaves at turns as well. Medium-bodied with a stout skeleton, once it enters the mouth you know it's there without it having to flex very often. Bright zest to be found in the orange, lemon citrus. The acidity slims down its natural inclination towards roundness. More green apple and pear here, takes the lead over peach, apricot flavors. Over time there's an attractive dusty clinginess which keeps it adhered to the tongue. No pushover, put not out to pick a fight either. Unspecified percentages of Garganega, Trebbiano. 88

Bidoli
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Grave del Friuli
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$12.99, 12.5%

Mild yellow hay color, clear and transparent but not necessarily resplendent nor squeaky clean, in character for its type. Pungent nose of white and pink grapefruit, quartz and chalk, more green straw than grass accents, has excellent cut which takes precedence over the snappy, if perfunctory, pear, apple, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied, firm handshake, hugs the palate very well and uses its acidity adroitly to scrub and prod forward rather than dry for the very sake of it. Anise and pine there to supplement the orange, lemon citrus and credible mineral shard, hard chalk aspects. It does possess a semi-sour dimension which could throw some off, but it's really part of its overall balance and more subtle invasiveness. Stays bright through the finish, good value. [Screwcap] 88

Cusumano
Sicilia
Insolia
2007, \$14.99, 13.0%

Deep glassy gold color, quite deep and closer to aged in appearance, if not of dessert wine richness of hue, solid block in the glass. Resonant tangerine, orange, lemon citrus in the nose, dried honey accompanied by a floral

water side, competent apricot, peach fruit scents, attractive most for its broad presence and simplicity, just "nice" to sniff. Medium-bodied with the textural consistency of a water balloon, firms up as the acidity asserts itself through the mid-palate. Sour mandarin orange plays off that honey well, more mixed citrus crests now and then. More spring to the step here in the peach, apricot, nectarine fruit, not sweet enough to be tropical but bounces around. Wiry florality with minerality than supports rather than opposes. Pleasing retronasal action and overall length. Good juice at a fair price. [Glass Stopper] 87

Caposaldo
Veneto
Pinot Grigio
2007, \$9.99, 12.5%

Average golden color, decent depth, comes with a vague green tinge, the color disappears through broad, fully transparent rims. Somewhat heavy and thick nose of honeyed apple, pear, peach fruit as well as floral water and toffee, zero greenness, baking spices, every effort expended to be super-friendly. Full-bodied, broad and dense, while sweet there's a mildly surprising lack of length in the apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit, luckily its presence replaced by attractive lemon to lime citrus. The honey, and to lesser extent caramel, element really stunts any attempt at crispness, the acidity is below average and not showing much interest in getting the band in tune. As in the nose floral without any herbal bite. Flat-footed finish but this isn't something most people consuming it will give a shit about. Flavorful it is. [Synthetic Cork] 87

GERMANY WHITE

Hexamer, Weingut Helmut
Nahe, Meddersheimer, Rheingrafenberg, Quarzit QbA AP
#14
Riesling
2007, \$18.99, 9.5%

Pale lemon yellow color, more dull than washed out, transparent but lack of sparkle makes this sort of besides the point visually. There's a softer creaminess to the nose which makes it a nostril filler but, conversely, less nimble and delineated, white minerals and stones there, mixed indistinct but sweet citrus, ripe nectarine, pineapple, peach fruit scents, lacks the cut to get really tropical, gentle floral lift, at least starts to hover. Medium-bodied, doesn't have the acidic verve to thwart the overall sweetness of the wine, banana and bubblegum flavors play up the floral side as well as draw out more pink grapefruit, lime, tangelo citrus. As the tongue can perceive sweetness here it does shift into tropical pineapple, guava, nectarine, star fruit territory. Much less perceptible stoniness here, the sugar lasts completely through the finish. Tastes like there's too much sweeter declassified juice in this to allow for a true erect bearing. [Screwcap] 87

St. Christina, Weinkellerai
Rheinhessen, Niersteiner, Gutes Domtal, Kabinett AP #2
Riesling
2008, \$10.99, 9.0%

Light brown straw in color, mostly hueless and completely so around the rims, nice surface shine. Appley nose, some pear and peach thrown in but not that deep, more cinnamon to nutmeg spice than minerality, lemon juice, possesses a general heaviness even if not found in the fruit scents per se, honey baste smoke accents. Medium-

bodied, the acidity doesn't suck but the flesh is tubby enough that it's going to come across as a sweet Riesling to most imbibers, which is probably the general intent. No paucity of apple, pear, apricot, green melon flavors, also comes close to lemonade, limeade aspect as far as citrus goes. Here you get some stoniness, nothing major but there. Moves slowly, this likely helps it remain fleshy through the end. It's fine for what it is but little here for Riesling geeks to make a fuss over. 85

SPAIN RED

Leceranas, Bodegas
Vino de la Tierra del Bajo Aragón, Monte La Sarda
Garnacha
2007, \$12.99, 14.0%
Bright ruby-violet core, great deal of saturation throughout, the rims flushed with ruby-magenta, clarity trumps full opacity. In the nose you get a glimmer of salinity and tilled damp earth but then it's a thundering herd of raspberry, blackberry fruit and orange citrus pulp, the garden herb element continues to increase its country wine appeal. Medium-bodied, expands completely across the palate and sticks to the pores so weight is only a small part of its tactile appeal. Lots of juiciness in the blackberry, cherry, raspberry fruit while at the same time feeling more structured than comparable peers. This is not to say there's an excess of tannin or acidity, not the case. Just the primary material can stand up straight and still provide immediate pleasure. Orange, lemon citrus, more stone than earth here, the fennel to bay leaf herbs contribute to the sweet and savory interplay. As well as allow for a short floral swipe at the end. Holds your interest well, keeps reminding you it's there rather than fade into "red wine" territory. 89

Ateca, Bodegas
Calatayud, Garnacha de Fuego Old Vines
Garnacha
2007, \$9.99, 14.0%
Dark purple core without really getting opaque, very clean and shiny surface, still lots of violet left in the ruby rims. Plenty of mocha and milk chocolate powder in the nose, basic raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents of no particular note, soft cinnamon, nutmeg spice, ripe orange peels, decent amount of floral lift. Medium-bodied, has a semi-hard rubbery texture at first, not apparently due to any tannic nor acidic presence. The baking spices not as sweet here, same for the orange to lemon citrus. But the cherry, raspberry, blackberry has sufficient depth to prevent things from grinding to a halt. Conversely again, does dry out too much by the end. Light meadowy herbaceousness is a nice touch, helps to conjure some peppery bite as well. Nothing remarkable but quaffable, part of the sea of Garnacha Spain is currently exporting. Could do a lot worse. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 86

Falset-Marçà, Agrícola
Montsant, Falset
Blend
2006, \$11.99, 13.5%
Red-purple core of average depth, halfway between transparency and opacity, attractive scarlet rims. Semi-silent nose, smatterings of flowery cherry, raspberry fruit then mown lawn grass, cocoa powder, lemon pith and jalapeño juice. Medium-bodied, similarly to the nose comes across as flat, as if shaken awake forcibly. The tannins dry quietly, this not helping the blackberry, black cherry fruit

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find any footing. Hollows out in the middle, even with some chocolate, caramel filling. The tobacco or tea leaf shades can't even muster an herbal dimension. Touch more orange, lemon citrus, but no bite. It's drinkable as wine per se but there's no real character nor immediate brainless pleasure. 50% Garnacha, 30% Cariñena, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Screwcap: Stelvin+) 85

Earth 2.0 (Romero & Miller S.L.)
Navarra, Tempranillo - Cabernet S.
Blend
2006, \$13.99, 13.0%
Burnt red to black-purple in color, holds fully to the rims, doesn't really get close to opacity, looks older than it is in reality. The nose produces tea leaf, tree bark, dried earth and old orange rinds, the fruit just "dark" enough to offer more cherry and blackberry than raspberry, lacks staying power. Light to medium-bodied, finds an anchor for balance in the cherry, blackberry fruit, which has sufficient ripeness and juice to do the job. Even with the tar, leather, straw and fertilized earth aspects, fresher than the nose would suggest. The acidity is slightly higher than the norm, tannin OK enough. Doesn't piss you off at any point but, by the same token, never manages to impress you with any one thing. 90% Tempranillo, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Composite Cork) 84

Earth 2.0 (Romero & Miller S.L.)
Navarra, Tempranillo
Tempranillo
2006, \$10.99, 13.0%
Strong burnt red to crimson colors push any purple aside, consistent through to the rims, where fullness drops only moderately, mostly transparent. Funky nose of dried leather, cow patties, mud-caked straw and general barnyard stuff, there's also plum, red cherry to raisin scents, more roasted qualities than real juiciness. Light-bodied, more centered around the candied cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit flavors, can't shake that roastedness which saps most of the freshness. Highly acidic, highlights the more herbaceous side of things, bringing with it tree bark, leather, earth and tar. Shows more orange citrus zest than in the nose. While there wasn't much body to start with, begins to peter out through the mid-palate. Not much to hang its hat on. (Composite Cork) 84

PORTUGAL RED

Sogrape, Vinhos
Douro Valley, Casa Ferreirinha Esteva
Blend
2006, \$16.99, 13.0%
Very integrated ruby-purple color, minimal change from core to rims, clear without in any way seeming too transparent or lacking in hue. In the nose there's an initial onslaught of plum, cherry, dark berry fruit, more orange and sweet garden herbs than any herbaceous or earthy notes, some fried cocoa powder in there, stays close to the basic recipe but zags enough to convince you it's not. Medium-bodied plus, settles itself firmly on the palate and concurrently sets forth blackberry, raspberry, black cherry fruit and a healthy wave of tannin. Orange zest and more minute white grapefruit keep the profile at attention. Some stone and pebble comes through while at the same time keeping the herbaceousness at bay. In fact, leaves you with the impression it spent more time fending off potential

flaws than boosting its core strengths. Unspecified percentages of Tinta Roriz, Touriga Franca, Tinta Barroca. 86

CHILE RED

Haras de Pirque, Viña
Maipo Valley, Haras Estate
Cabernet Sauvignon
2006, \$12.99, 14.8%

Black core, very little purple in there, however lots of scarlet to blood red hues, thick rims, clean surface. Noticeably firm nose of currant, cherry fruit with a solid burnt cocoa, milk chocolate to coconut edge, orange zest and wet tobacco wrapper, stays within itself and muscularity helps scents linger rather than compress them too much. Medium-bodied, while on the dry side the strength of the tannins adds to its chewiness and breathes more erectness into the plum, cherry, currant fruit flavors. Mint, coconut and general toasted white bread oakiness under control and blends smoothly into the whole. The smokiness evokes leather and tobacco nuances, giving depth in addition without stealing room from the fruit. A nice tight little package that stands up credibly to the competition at the price, regardless of place of origin. 88

ARGENTINA RED

Valle Escondido, Bodegas y Viñedos
Mendoza, Valle Escondido, Gouguenheim
Cabernet Sauvignon
2007, \$11.99, 13.5%

Solid ruby-purple color, allows you to see through it without coming off as thin, very wide red ruby rims without any diminishing in hue intensity. There's a leathery streak to the nose, like it was out in the sun all day working the ranch, by the same token a raisin edge gets into the cherry, red currant scents, dried herbs give it a higher toned voice while a lactose, fresh butter touch brings into the lower register. Medium-bodied, presents an easily discerned tannic/acidic structure from the start, something which might flummox some who thought it was just a cheap Cab. Polished currant, blackberry, red cherry fruit alternates between sweet and sour, juicy enough to elongate this interplay. Cedar, leather, menthol and pressed old flowers bring quiet character to it. Let's you enjoy it at your own pace, a positive trait at any price. 88

Portillo (Bodegas Salentein), Finca El
Mendoza, Valle de Uco
Cabernet Sauvignon
2007, \$13.99, 14.0%

Unblemished, dark purple core, violet appreciably darkens the red ruby rims, strong saturation. Cedar, menthol, farmland moistness and wet horsehide take up a lot of the nose, the well-ripened cherry, currant fruit scents take some time to carve out a niche, wrapped tightly upon itself. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, hugs the palate and resists any efforts by the parts to lift into more of a perfume. Much more heavy cream and oak toast here, pushes the more undisciplined earthiness and herbal tones into the background. The tannins do not have a clear presence, however, a dryness pervades, this tying up the cherry, currant, blackberry fruit. Gains sufficient momentum to punch out decent length on the finish. Leaves cocoa, chocolate powder residue behind. Could

come together a little more fully. (Synthetic cork: Supremecorq) 87

Elvira Calle Winery
Mendoza, Alberti 154
Malbec
2008, \$10.99, 14.0%

Black purple core of full opacity, surface brilliance acts as a nice visual foil, the rims fully saturated red ruby, coloration a definite strong suit. Deep milk chocolate and cocoa notes douse the plum, black cherry, blueberry fruit scents, mint and a dollop of toffee, plump and primary and hyper-approachable. Medium-bodied, soft and noticeably sweet, as if a few spoonfuls of brown sugar made their way in. Ginger and cinnamon spice, candied orange peels, generously ripened plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit, the full monty. Not devoid of tannin but don't exert yourself looking for structure. Even as the floral dimension strives to create a perfume, it just sinks deeper and deeper into the palate. Keeps its roundness and weight completely through the finish. (Synthetic Cork) 87

Valentin Bianchi
Mendoza, San Rafael, Elsa Bianchi
Bonarda
2007, \$11.99, 14.1%

The purple core muted some by an infusion of scarlet red, the rims lighten into a solid garnet hue, on the whole transparent. Big juicy nose of plum, cherry fruit, modest swipes of leather and lemon peel, some minerally smokiness, complexity not an overt goal nor, arguably, should it in this instance. Medium-bodied, a bit bottom heavy, gets to the finish line but at its own pace. While not seemingly tannic per se, on the dry side, and this accounting for full and obvious ripeness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit flavors. Tangerine to lemon citrus, sweet and sour at once, comes close to pink grapefruit at times. Leather, fresh tree bark and stony poor earth have a role to play. Still fully fruited through the finish. The best Bonarda you may have today. (Screwcap) 86

INV, Bodega
Mendoza, Tinto de Montana, Notro
Blend
2007, \$7.99, 13.0%

Very clear garnet to reddened purple, the rims display a very youthful brick red rims, well-hued throughout, eschewing base saturation. Plump nose of black cherry, plum scents but it does take some time to come around and open up, "pop and pour" won't get you much of the baking spices, leather, bark or tar. Medium-bodied, lots of give if not outright plushness, while at the same time has adequate tannic/acidic structure. Slight raisin/prune edge to the base of cherry, plum fruit, thin coating of ginger, cinnamon spice. After a few seconds when you sip, white grapefruit citrus sprouts well. Never loses a certain sour pucker which, if you can't acclimate to it, will distract. While not comprised of distinct elements, does create a nice inner mouth perfume. Throws a lot of curveballs, no sense sitting on the heat. 50% Sangiovese, 50% Bonarda. (Synthetic Cork) 85