

## ***The Hanes Wine Review, May/June 2006 Edition***

As is well-documented, *The Hanes Wine Review* only includes what are considered to be “current release” wines sold in the United States. The idea being to not frustrate the reader by waxing poetically about wines either no longer generally for sale (although, no doubt, many current release wines reviewed are difficult to find and acquire thanks to Hanes’s ever-so-esoteric taste) or not sold in the U.S. Taking this into consideration, one should not conclude that Hanes only drinks current release wines. No, his alcoholism reaches back into the deep recesses of prior vintages. Some people read Hanes’s tasting notes on these older wines when he posts them on [www.westcoastwine.net](http://www.westcoastwine.net) but he decided to create a new page on his website to chronicle his delectation of these oldies but goodies. So, if you want to read *even more* tasting notes by Hanes, the older (or non-imported) wines he has recently consumed are described for posterity here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2006.html>

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Australia is a big country and it can take awhile to get a handle on what the regions are and what differences, if any, exist among them. To Hanes, the biggest initial obstacle to achieving this knowledge remains how the basic wine regions are outlined. First of all, they are waaaaay too large to be useful in any meaningful way. Wine is said to come from the Australian states, i.e., South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria or Western Australia. And some from Tasmania too, why not. All of these regions encompass so many varied sub-regions that it is really impossible to speak of the character of “South Australian” wines as one would wines of Burgundy or Tuscany.

The underlying problem is that across wine producing nations there exists an unevenness in basic regional category levels (something which plagues Californian wines at times too). Many are just too overly broad. Basic inexpensive wines (think Rosemount or the like) get labeled as “South Australia” Shiraz or maybe a tad more specific “Southeastern Australia” Shiraz. But this really means very little because the ultimate sources which fall under this labeling umbrella are so varied that you don’t truly get any more specific sense of what the character of the wine is than if the label just said “Australian” Shiraz. At all price points, inexpensive to expensive, you get much more useful specificity on European labels, even if they remain at general regional designations such as Nahe, Rioja, Dão, Bordeaux, etc.

To Hanes, these regional Australian labeling practices are kind of a cheese because on the inexpensive level it makes it easier to sell wine from lesser known, if large production, areas such as Riverland or Riverina which have zero wider name recognition. And ultimately, outside of Australia, it hurts the wine industry in the long run because consumers are not learning about the “true” Australian wine regions and what makes their wines distinct. Wine geeks or those imbibers with a higher degree of wine knowledge may recognize some of the more popular regional names such as Barossa Valley or McLaren Vale. But they can rarely identify the characteristics which separate them. The idea here being that in a blind tasting or something if an experienced taster can tell a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon from a Cab from Paso Robles to the south, so too should a knowledgeable taster be able to pick out the Langhorne Creek Shiraz from the Yarra Valley Shiraz.

As Australian wines gain market share in the United States, wine lovers should make an attempt to learn what makes the regions different and develop a sense of why they may prefer some regions’ wines over others. It doesn’t help that many Australian producers slather their wines in so much creamy oak that the innate differences get obliterated. But still. In the spirit of helping people figure all this stuff out, Hanes will now delve into the lesser recognized wine regions of Western Australia.

Europeans started checking out Western Australia a little before 1700. But it wasn’t until the 1830s that colonization started to ramp up, mainly around what is now the city of Perth. It is interesting to note that the initial colony was comprised of free people, a rarity in early Australian history, and not developed as a penal colony until the 1850s. By the early 1900s Perth only possessed about 30,000 citizens. And citizenship didn’t break 300,000 until the 1950s. Today the city has almost 1.5 million denizens, making it Australia’s fourth largest city.

Western Australia in terms of sheer land mass is the largest state in Australia but relatively little of it supports wine growing. These areas cluster in the southwestern part of Western Australia, where there are around 26,000 acres planted. Many of these regions possess cooler climates than their brethren in South Australia and as a result may produce more structured, less overtly fruity wines. This is due to a strong maritime influence, without which the place would be pretty damn hot. It also helps that there is a decent amount of rainfall while a fair percentage of the soils are not particularly fertile, creating the desired degree of vine stress to avoid over-production and/or over-ripeness in the grapes. The downside to all this is that the weather is less even and vintage variations in the final wines may be greater than in the other Australian regions.

As a result, tasting a Western Australian wine may surprise the average consumer who has been weaned on big jammy wines from other regions [of course, this is not to say that Australian wines outside Western Australia cannot possess finesse, balance and restraint in their own right, let’s nip that one in the bud right here]. This fact is made even more interesting as Western Australia was first known for producing sweet fortified wines such as Muscat, port or sherry, the turn to dry table wines not happening until the mid-20th century.

One of the more interesting things about Western Australian wines as a whole is that Shiraz is not as dominant a factor as in many other Australian wine regions, there being a good deal more diversity of cultivars cultivated [what else did you

think they do with cultivars?). There's plenty of Chardonnay, Riesling, Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Verdelho, Traminer, Muscadelle and Marsanne grown to make white wines as well as red wine grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Grenache and even a touch of Zinfandel, Tempranillo and Malbec in addition to other grapes one would not immediately associate with Australia.

Not a great deal of wine from Western Australia gets exported to the United States, which makes it difficult to reach more of a definitive, empirical set of conclusions regarding their wine. The United Kingdom gets about one-third of Western Australia's wine exports with the United States at about 20%, New Zealand at about 10%, followed by Singapore, Switzerland, Japan and Canada as the next biggest customers. One of the prominent barriers to larger export is that most of the wineries are small and family-owned, making economies of scale difficult to achieve for profitable export. Fly Hanes free to Western Australia for a couple of months and he'll be happy to return with more in-depth results on the wine scene there. In any event, here's what we have right now.

The **Swan District**, or Swan Valley, near Perth historically produced the largest quantity of wine, this region being where the first Western Australian wine was made in 1834. The Swan District is probably the hottest (in terms of temperature) wine region in Western Australia, if not all of Australia, and creates the type of wines American consumers would normally associate with Aussie wines (there's also still some dessert-level wines made there). That said, it seems that only very rarely do we Americans see wines designated as being from the Swan District. One suspects that the majority of the wine created goes into more homogenous, large production bottlings. If high quality is a concern, one may find solace in the fact that since the 1970s the overall percentage of Western Australian wine represented by the Swan District has fallen from around 90% to about 20% today. Ouch.

At the present time, the largest and most recognizable region is **Margaret River**. With over 10,000 acres of vines planted it's almost double the size of any other Western Australia wine region (yet, say, half the size of the Barossa in South Australia). Given its size, there's a good deal of diversity among the wineries and the types of grapes they prefer to focus on. There's definitely some Shiraz made, mostly in a lighter, more refreshingly acidic manner. However, one could persuasively argue that Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot have so far made the most distinctive and prestigious red wines from Margaret River. The white wines tend to be made from Chardonnay or Rhône cultivars, producing more uneven results than the red wines. At least from what Hanes has seen here in the U.S.

Beyond Margaret River, it seems that the most exciting region in Western Australia may be **Great Southern**. Hey, even the name is great. It's the second largest wine region too, with over 5,000 acres planted and five distinct sub-regions. There are some top notch wineries doing work here, primarily with Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. The white wines of Great Southern can be considered to be the best made in Western Australia, especially Riesling wines from the areas of Frankland River and Mount Barker. On the whole, the ones you see in the States are not cheap but are comparable in quality to Rieslings from around the world (as well as the renowned Rieslings of Clare Valley in South Australia). One of the problems with Great Southern may be that the sub-regional wines don't mention clearly on the label that they are part of Great Southern, diminishing its potential recognition among wine buyers. Like Pauillac mentions in big letters that it is part of Bordeaux, so too should these designations work together. Again, part of the general labeling problem.

Beyond these three regions Hanes is basically feeding you research. He has had some wines from the **Geographe** region, most of which were tasty, and the "e" at the end of the name lends it an aristocratic air. But the region is only about 1,800 acres, which ain't a lot. The *really* cool name in Western Australia belongs to **Manjimup**, Hanes would pay big bucks just to be able to butcher its pronunciation out loud on a regular basis. Alas, wines from there as well as **Pemberton, Blackwood Valley, Peel** and **Perth Hills** may not even make it out of Western Australia, never mind to the U.S. None are really more than 2,000 acres in size and some as small as 300 acres. Hell, some Californian wineries may have more than 300 acres themselves.

Whichever region is being discussed, one common thread persists inside the winery facilities. And this is the aforementioned more judicious utilization of oak barrels in the both the fermenting and aging of Western Australian wines. By using stainless steel for fermentation as well as often avoiding malolactic fermentation (which converts harsher malic acid into softer lactic acid) there's a generally crisper profile to the wines. As with anything there are exceptions to the rule, but what's the fun in life if you can't overgeneralize?

It's hard to figure but, as with South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, Western Australia has suffered from a wine production glut in recent years. So few acres yet so much wine! It's mostly red wine which has been overproduced and expensive wine since although Western Australia produces less than 10% of all Australian wine, it produces about 20% of the wine in the super-premium and ultra-premium categories. Statistics are not yet in for the hyper-mega-premium category.

If you run across any wines from Western Australia in your local shop, take a chance and give 'em a rip. With luck you'll find something different enough to please while your purchase will help convince the powers that be that there is a market in the U.S. for a variety of styles of Australian wine. Think globally, act locally!

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**This month's big winners...** Lots of wines these past weeks from a handful of the same producers as Hanes saves his money and drinks wines he already inadvisably spent his last few centavos on. One surprise has been from Turley, they of the (in)famous Zinfandels. Turley has kind of been a let-down of late for Hanes but a new vineyard in their stable, the Rancho Burro Vineyard, made for an admirable debut with the 2003 vintage. Yummy white Spanish wine can be found in a bottle of Godeval's 2004 offering from the Valdeorras region, 100% Godello grape. And it's just a tick above being a value winner at around \$16 or so. Napa Valley winery Outpost continues to merit the coin Hanes spends on their wines, this month offering two very nice Petite Sirah wines from the 2003 vintage. Also out of Cali, Drew Family Cellars made a savory little Grenache in 2003 from the Hearthstone Vineyard in Paso Robles and it's fairly priced under \$30. Hanes's Willi Schaefer fest from the 2004 vintage ended this month with the last of the bottles he had purchased to try, this final one a tasty Kabinett from the Graacher Domprobst vineyard in Germany's Mosel region.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Château Haut-Rian is getting to be pretty well known for bargain basement white Bordeaux Sec. At under \$9 their 2004 meets all expectations. Every year perhaps the most consistently tasty wine from Bodegas Muga in Rioja, Spain is their rosado (rosé). Sadly, it also sells out real quick like, being delicious and around \$10. Buy yours soon! Bad luck reigns as, despite tasting more inexpensive wine these past weeks than usual, most of them sucked and cannot be recommended. See below. Sigh.

**And the disappointments...** Domaine des Baumard is one Loire producer which has been harder to find here in NYC. But Hanes found their 2002 Savennières from the "Clos du Papillon" vineyard. Albeit, he may have found it too late as the wine appears to be "shutting down." Hanes has drunk lots of Pax wines from California and has many to blow through in the next month or so. For the first time he tried his hand at making white wines, one from Viognier and one from Roussanne, with mixed results. One may expect that these wines will improve over coming vintages as familiarity with the grape sources grows. A disappointment in the "cheapie" department is the 2004 Domaine de Moulines Merlot from Southern France. This may be one of those rare wines which benefited from the warmth of the 2003 growing season and resulted in a better wine then. Oh, well. Another inexpensive wine of questionable worth is Di Majo Norante's 2004 Sangiovese from the Molise region in Italia. Just entirely uninteresting and sadly minimally evocative of the grape. Continuing this trend, Hanes hovered some low budget Spanish wines and met with less than stellar results with Luzón's 2005 Monastrell from Jumilla and Can Blau's 2004 blend from Montsant. Oh, hell, as Hanes reads through the list of wines he slurped yet another under \$15 clunker is the 2004 "Pillar Box Red" from Australia (made by Henry's Drive, noted in wee little letters on the back label). Bland to the max.

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It's been said before, but it can never be said enough, that there's a good reason that the scores Hanes associates with the wines he reviews fall into a tight band. First, the scale Hanes uses really is about ten points or so with only the rarest of outliers beyond that. The hundred point scale is employed more or less for calibration purposes with the general wine reviewing public and those who love them. Just makes things easier. Second, it's a product of how Hanes encounters the wines. If he is buying the wines, chances are the wine will be good. Or, uhh, he wouldn't buy it. These wines will fall into an even tighter band of scores. If he tastes wines at a wine tasting or one of his no-good friends opens a bottle, the scores will most likely fall into a broader scope. But please do keep in mind that Hanes isn't scoring all wines 88 points just to be funny. It just kind of turns out that way. Yo.

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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.

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 #21:** "*The Hanes Wine Review* — it's not just for breakfast anymore!"

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 May/June!

## CALIFORNIA RED

Turley

Napa Valley, Moore "Earthquake" Vineyard

Zinfandel

2003, \$48.00, 15.7%

While concentrated and effulgent the red-purple core not really opaque, still a lot of violet left in the wide ruby based rims. Smoky nose of mesquite chips, dripping grill fat, iodine, leather, stony damp earth, these parts powerful enough to check the oak toast, fragrant blackberry, boysenberry, black cherry fruit scents without getting all baroque on you. Full-bodied, seeps across the palate to ensure every pore gets addressed. Much toastier here, fried butter, caramel and molasses crisp abound. While bountiful there's still a semi-clenched feel in the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit, like it promised not to spill the beans. Has some of that gamey, dried beef here as well, sharper in tone and not quite as earthy. Loses negligible density through the finish, its brawn impresses enough to cover up most of any flaws. Minimal alcoholic heat too. 91

Turley

Russian River Valley, Rancho Burro

Zinfandel

2003, \$45.00, 16.0%

Flat reddish purple in hue, nowhere near black but nothing sparkly about it either, fairly wide red ruby rims. The intensely juicy raspberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit cascades over the vanilla cream like an ice cream sundae, braised with molasses and citrus zest, rises with its sweet smokiness, does, however, have some burn in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, consistently sweet without any unnecessary spikes, maintains the freshness in the raspberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit, no real over-concentration. Some peppery spice but this gets cancelled out by the vanilla notes, tannins a bit more pronounced than expected, acidity just where it should be too. Less heat evident than in the nose. Touch herbal, adds to its bracing edge. Mouthwatering finish, fruit releases well and allows your palate to just watch it dissipate. 91

Pax Wine Cellars

Russian River Valley, Castelli-Knight Ranch

Syrah

2004, \$55.00, 15.6%

Jet black core, no cloudiness but as impenetrable as you can get, heavily saturated red-magenta rims. Big toffee, caramel popcorn blooms in the nose, white grapefruit zest, uncooked bacon, touch of earth and white pepper, unadorned and juicy blackberry, cranberry, red cherry scents. Full-bodied, has the brawny acidity to cut through the sap of the toffee, maple honey, ginger spice oak notes. That said, it's not a particularly dry wine, plenty of juice in the blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit. Blends in spice, beef jerky, coffee grounds and more of that white grapefruit. More herbal here in the mouth, this adds to its overall bite. Tannins flat-footed. Prolonged finish, the florality comes through more during these final moments. The ultimate guilty pleasure. 91

Turley

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pesenti Vineyard

Zinfandel

2003, \$35.00, 16.0%

Not really opaque in its ruby-purple core but has deep hues throughout ending in more red-ruby to scarlet rims. Fresh, yet thick raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit fills the nose first, followed by cinnamon/ginger spice, smoke, earth, feels relaxed enough to not push itself on you. Medium-bodied, really zippy entry with a lot of stimulating acidity to freshen up the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. Features a sizeable portion of grapefruit, orange citrus as well. Slows down to display the tree bark, eucalyptus, grass and light floral elements. The oak is toasty and has girth but not over-determinant in the wine's overall makeup. Past the mid-palate the minerals actually show strongly and take over. Has really nice bite, lengthens it. Unforced but keeps attacking. 90

Pax Wine Cellars

Russian River Valley, Lauterbach Hill Vineyard

Syrah

2004, \$55.00, 15.5%

Warm glow adds to the opacity of the purple core, fully integrated with the ruby to red magenta rims, sits pretty in the glass. Caramel, molasses BBQ sauce and dewy flower petals set the stage in the nose for the voluptuous blueberry, boysenberry, blackberry scents, not much developed at this point, does leave your nostrils feeling wet. Full-bodied, spreads across the tongue with the consistency and speed of motor oil. Not much out-and-out toast but vanilla, toffee and that molasses strongly in the mix. Slightly dustier here, not sure whether or not to attribute it to tannins but it leads to more hay bundles and dry brown earth notes. Still very-berry with blueberry, raspberry, blackberry, any other berry you can think of flavors. Faint allusion to beef jerky during the penultimate moments. A mouthful right now, will be interesting to see what happens once it sheds some baby fat and integrates more of the oak. 90

Outpost

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, The Other

Petite Sirah

2003, \$50.00, 15.1%

Black core but not necessarily opaque, thin yet deeply saturated red-magenta rims. Salted meat, earth, mineral chunks and herbs prove its ruggedness in the nose, buffered by coffee/vanilla accents, a smokiness permeates the currant, black cherry scents. Full-bodied, tight grip during mouth entry lends it an immediate serious feel, enough so that you skim past the vanilla, toffee oak flavors and onto the mineral earth, game and blood elements. The tannins more heavy than active, today this suppresses some length. Delicate floral nuances bring out more of the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit. A real heavyweight that needs to break up its monolithic character to achieve greatness. 90

Outpost

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain

Petite Sirah

2003, \$35.00, 14.6%

Onyx black core but its clarity shows through at the rims where it takes on a luminous ruby-magenta cast. Great deal of floral perfume in the nose, really opens it up, followed by eucalyptus, freshly crushed raspberry, black cherry juice, exceedingly primary right now, just the barest trace of any oak scents. Medium-bodied, the stern firmness of the tannins lends it a sense of gravitas if not weight. While the juiciness remains in the black cherry, blackberry fruit those tannins start mopping up the

moisture swiftly. Alludes to more earthiness and leather here, more oak too but this is bound up in the structure with the rest. Has a somewhat taciturn side, not short on the finish but about to say something then doesn't. Time is on its side. Yes it is. 90

McPrice Myers Wine Company  
Arroyo Grande Valley, Les Galets Vineyard  
Syrah  
2004, \$27.99, 15.4%

Its clarity does not detract from the glow of the ruby-purple color, hardly drops off to vibrant red-ruby at the rims. Baked ham, fresh whipped cream, molasses, a whiff of rubber, smoky ashes and broken stone, a lot going on in the nose, sweet and sour black raspberry, blackberry and cranberry fruit get in the mix, settles into itself and spreads out well. Medium-bodied, the creamy oak and molasses buffer the attack while they are not a prominent overall component. Very composed, nothing awkward about it, glides through to the point you almost wish it had more traction. Floral water moistens the black cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit, adding to its consistently relaxed presence. Light clove and mint, attractive lack of guile posing as complexity. 90

Drew Family Cellars  
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Hearthstone  
Vineyard  
Grenache  
2003, \$27.99, 14.8%

Very clear light violet color, even at the core it turns mostly red-ruby, almost pure red by the rims. The nose starts out creamy, moist buttered toast, spring of mint, very juicy but not overdone raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, sugary the way it should be. Full-bodied, thick bottom, syrupy in texture and almost as sweet. Cinnamon, mint and candied orange peel add to this feel in the concentrated raspberry, blackberry, strawberry fruit, pushes displaying a dried fruit character. Minimal acidity but the tannins do make a credible showing. You get a dose of sweet herbs without this being impeded by real herbaceousness. In the mouth the oak toast is more integrated, this allowing for some earthiness to shine through. 90

McPrice Myers Wine Company  
Santa Ynez Valley, Larner Vineyard  
Syrah  
2004, \$27.99, 15.2%

Completely opaque dark purple core, dense red magenta to ruby rims, fat and inviting, good surface reflectivity too. There's coconut and caramel in the nose yet also ample beef blood, leather and minerals for counterpoint, touch of floral perfume laid upon the no-nonsense cherry, blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, stretches itself across the palate for maximal effect, helps it add to its grip. At first comes off of a bit rough and tumble, kind of throws itself against you. Solid tannins, not especially drying yet a very good anchor. The oak toast and caramel notes there but bend to the will of those tannins. More subdued florality and orange citrus, slight bitter edge to the leather, bark, herbaceous elements. The blackberry, raspberry fruit has above average juice while also minimal sweetness. Clamps down some on the finish suggesting a light decant. 88

Castle Rock  
Sonoma County, Carneros  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$10.99, 14.5%

Red-purple core of decent density, dark but keeps its clarity and some shine, very little change at the rims, maybe a magenta tinge. Milk chocolate, mint, flower petals trumpet the arrival of the thick, sweet raspberry, blackberry scents, beyond that there's ginger and spiced orange peel, that's it, alcoholic heat minor distraction. Full-bodied to the point where it may be a touch leaden, wants to get your tongue in a headlock [sic]. There's a powdery texture to it, not sure if it's the tannins, which causes the sweetness to recede in the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit. Nice cola embellishment, rare for the price, ginger, orange/lemon citrus, sweet tea leaves, more herbaceousness here without getting out of hand. Mild roasted character comes out through the finish. Plenty of heft, pops the clutch a couple of times but that's it. 87

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Pax Wine Cellars  
Regional Blend, North Coast, Aphrodite  
Viognier  
2004, \$38.00, 14.5%

Cloudy, luminescent yellow gold, glows throughout if fades some at the rims. Fat, heavy nose of orange marmalade, floral musk, sweet spice, fresh vanilla ice cream, there's a poached aspect to the peach and apricot scents, doesn't ease up. Full-bodied, layers itself on you thick as a pile of rugs. Ginger, clove spice and toast betray a shock of oak. The tangerine and orange citrus is juicy and sweet and with a kick. No acidity to really speak of, adds to its creamy texture. Has peach, apricot, pear and even cherry fruit flavors. The florality has little get up and go, minimal lift. All this taken into consideration, it's pleasingly plump. 89

Pax Wine Cellars  
Regional Blend, North Coast, Venus  
Roussanne  
2004, \$38.00, 14.0%

Extremely cloudy yet the day-glo yellow color adds luster to its dense appearance, a bit brassy around the rims, some hue loss. Crunchy toast infuses the nose, every time you breathe in you can hear the oak snapping, caramel, grilled nuts, ground flowers, the apricot and peach fruit scents stay on the sidelines and try to not get noticed and steamrolled. Full-bodied, fat and could be viscous if it had any sense of forward movement whatsoever. The oak ain't gonna be accused of shyness here neither, very spicy, toasty, smoky with mint and toffee accents. Its sheer weight helps to fend off the alcoholic heat but it suggests this will only become more apparent over time as the pineapple, peach, apricot fruit eventually fades. Some orange citrus and the typical nuttiness is there if not yet developed fully. Keeps leaning into you in order to extend the finish. 86

## FRANCE RED

Jourdan, Gilles  
Burgundy, Côte de Nuits-Villages  
Pinot Noir  
2002, \$16.99, 13.5%

Light, pure red-garnet from the core to the rims, plenty of sparkle, adds to its brightness in the glass. Good brawn in

the nose, on the meaty side with broad sour red cherry, red plum fruit scents, solid stone, not very powdery, the grass too dried for a deep herbal feel. Medium to full-bodied, touch more sweetness here in the cherry, blackberry fruit, some residual sour bite. The tannins possess grit, keep it dry and shapes the fruit well. Not much acidity. Stronger lemon citrus adds minor cut. Pleasingly earthy, broken stone, again any herbaceousness minimal. Picks up some mushroom and leather accents past the mid-palate. Those tannins provide the added weight to stay serious without unduly pushing itself for effect. 88

Raffault, Olga  
Loire, Chinon, Les Picasses  
Cabernet Franc  
2001, \$19.99, 12.5%

Very good clarity, the ruby-purple yields easily to bright brick red, starting in the core and definitely at the rims. Minerally nose with abundant tobacco smoke, bell pepper, black earth, there's a syrupy quality in the cherry, blackberry scents, light floral breeze pleases. Medium-bodied, its light touch helps it keep a brisk pacing. The acidity shows more power than the tannins. Smoke, earth, minerals, cut grass, leather, bell pepper, cigar leaf, hits all the basics. Spritz of white citrus too. The smokiness really changes the complexion of the cherry, currant, blackberry fruit, lends focus. Not a lot of ups nor downs, finds its groove and sticks with it. 87

Raffault, Jean-Maurice  
Loire, Chinon, Les Galuches  
Cabernet Franc  
2004, \$16.99, 12.5%

The depth in the ruby-violet hues still allows for the utmost clarity, engagingly attractive reddish ruby rims. The ripeness of the raspberry, red cherry fruit in the nose provides an adequate mask for the bell pepper, the tobacco ash, leather and stone restore its sense of order. Medium-bodied, thins out a little sooner than you'd like but not the fault of the pumped-up currant, blackberry, cherry fruit, steroidally fun. Tannins and acidity about where they should be, no more. Does offer bell pepper, ash, stone, leather flavorings but this wine is hell bent on convincing the unwashed masses that it's as good as all those other wines rather than just stand up for itself. 87

Marionnet, Domaine Henry  
Loire, Touraine, Première Vendange  
Gamay Noir  
2004, \$17.99, 12.0%

Not quite filmy but there is a certain veiled feel to the purple core, plenty of density and vibrancy in the wide ruby-magenta rims. Peppery, chalky nose with hard lemon candy, grass and a curious brush of black licorice, has a slightly bracing herbal/minerally side but the ripeness, almost jamminess, of the raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit scents chase this away. Full-bodied and fruity in the mouth too, semi-velvety in texture, the tannins able to produce some dustiness and bring things back towards the middle ground. Mostly raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, sugar coated. Does produce more grassiness here than in the nose, tad more mineral powder and chalk too. Moves forward at an uneven gait, making it appear more sluggish than necessary. Thick, chewy Gamay. 87

Jourdan, Gilles  
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Vieilles Vignes  
Pinot Noir  
2003, \$17.99, 13.0%

Clear red-ruby color verges on purple but not quite, pure and consistent straight to the rims, average shine. In the nose has a shitload of merde and barnyard funk at first, leather and tar, slowly blows off to reveal candied, if sour, cherry, red raspberry scents, smoky minerality, as it ends sharp toast comes through like a knife. Medium-bodied, dry enough even if the tannins and acidity lack activity. Cocoa and vanilla powder accents are more upfront here. The cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit has an angular tartness. Displays earth and mineral/stone dust but a lot less funk, moments of tobacco ash and lemon rind too. By the end the tannins do rise up. Good but, taken as a whole, falls a bit short. 87

Moulines, Domaine de  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault  
Merlot  
2004, \$7.49, 13.0%

Light violet yet mostly red-ruby in color, clear and bright, full to the rims. Very herbaceous nose, good earthy qualities, smoky, touch of crisp toast, deep red currant and cherry scents, juicy but tightens up into increasing tartness the more you sniff. Medium-bodied, smoky and spicy, leather, tobacco, earth but this bit-by-bit occluded by herbaceousness. Burnt milk chocolate, orange zest accents, the red currant, cherry, plum fruit starts off well but peters out towards the end, especially as the tannins cover the surface of your tongue. Rugged enough to stay active yet could benefit from a little smoother of a profile. 86

## FRANCE WHITE

Orfeilles, Domaine d'  
Loire, Vouvray, Réserve d'Automne  
Chenin Blanc  
2002, \$21.99, 13.0%

White to yellow straw in color, clear without giving up body in the glass, steady fade towards the rims but holds its hue. Smoky, tarry nose, fried lemons with tangerine accents too, wet minerally earth, opulent and firm apricot, peach scents but don't think for a second that the nose is fruity. Full-bodied, lots of layers piled on top of each other until it just presses insistently down on the tongue. Minerals, stone, chalk, tar, earth, even though it is sweet with noticeable botrytis, the terroir is the first priority. The fat apricot, nectarine, peach fruit pairs well with the sweet tangerine and lime citrus. The acidity shows admirable kick. Continues to vibrate deeply through a long finish. 91

Bret Brothers (Domaine La Soufrandière)  
Burgundy, Pouilly-Vinzelles  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$29.99, 13.0%

Rich glow in the yellow gold color, some shimmer below the surface with a good amount of reflectivity. The oily nose almost evokes chili peppers, adds in wet stones, pear/peach skin, light brush of honey, dissolves with a floral lift. Medium to full-bodied, definitely bottom-heavy, decides where it's going to sit and not too interested in getting up after that. The orange, lime citrus bite lends it some erectness, not much leaning back. There's a bright beam of toastiness through it as well, while it may prove a distraction to some it does add more to its overall

alertness. The nectarine, pineapple, apricot, green apple fruit stays on point. Nice length without showing off, wears its makeup well. 89

Baumard, Domaine des  
Loire  
Savennières  
Clos du Papillon  
Chenin Blanc  
2002, \$29.99, 13.0%

Dull yellow golden color, like a solid block, minimal surface reflectivity. Beeswax, wet stone, salt and lanolin shake your nostrils awake, not very floral and the red apple, peach scents lack expressivity too, does stuff itself in there though. Full-bodied, as in the nose it's dense in the mouth, like swallowing a black star. Immobile doesn't do it justice, wouldn't move today if it was bottled in the Jurassic period. Closed, shutdown, maybe. But there's nothing here to even suggest an interest in moving. That said, it is impressive for its monumental mouthfeel. The acidity is like a plastic tarp laid on your tongue. Lots of minerals, lots of stones, smoky and almost damn leathery. Nothing here suggests sweetness, including the peach, apricot, apple fruit. Drags you through the finish like you're an used ragdoll. No guesses on its future here. 89

Girard et Fils, Domaine Fernand  
Loire, Sancerre, La Garenne  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2004, \$18.99, 13.0%

While clear there's a little translucent warp, concentrates and helps bring out more of the white-green straw color, minimal shine. Creamy texture first to the nose, then growing grassiness and mineral powder reduce this, sweet lemon citrus accents add juice to their ample peach, pear fruit. Medium-bodied, a touch sterner in the mouth as the herbaceousness pairs with earthy, stony qualities. The acidity is broad if blunt, very drying without cut. Here there is a bitter edge in the lemon, grapefruit citrus. Not a lot of sweetness in the pear, peach, apple fruit, has a skin aspect. The grassiness grows until it controls the finish. Leaves a dry, tacky residue behind. Lost in the middle ground. 88

Haut-Rian, Château  
Bordeaux, Bordeaux Sec  
Blend  
2004, \$8.49, 12.5%

Yellow hay in color, very reflective if gauzy below the surface at the core, no hue left at the rims. Ripe nose of peach, apricot, apple fruit, juicy before the lemon to white grapefruit citrus gives it focus, fair dose of stoniness while not as much grassiness, sweeter herbs soften the latter during the dissolve. Medium-bodied, sternly firm, hardly budges past the attack. The white grapefruit citrus beats all else to the punch, cut grass follows on closely. More stone dust and chalk here, agreeably dry, the acidity a blanket more than biting presence. Leaner profile in the peach, pear apple fruit, not lacking, just spent a lot of time in the sauna sweating it all out. Has all its weight through the finish, can easily pair with bigger dishes. 70% Sémillon, 30% Sauvignon Blanc. 87

## FRANCE SPARKLING

Margaine, A.  
Champagne, 1er Cru Demi-Sec  
Blend

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NV, \$29.99, 12.0%

Pale yellow hay in color, mostly transparent, displays an average degree of bubbles, diffuse if dancing. Big, rich nose of lemon custard, baking spices and a mild hint of dough, develops red apple, peach and pear fruit scents, not particularly complex but sure as hell satisfying. Full-bodied and fat with a muscular fizziness initially which fades by the mid-palate. Large scale mixture of sweet lemon, lime and orange citrus. Gives you cinnamon, brown sugar and then a hint of bitters which settles the boat. Complimentary degree of tannins. For its richness and initial sweetness there's still a well-contoured shape to the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit. A big boy that shows you how a "fun" Champagne should be made. 80% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir. (53% 2002, 17% 2001, 21% 2000 and 9% 1998 vintages; disgorged Septembre 2005) 90

Egly-Ouriet  
Champagne, Les Vignes de Vrigny Brut  
Pinot Meunier  
NV, \$35.99, 12.5%

Dark gold to light amber in color, diffuse and extremely active bubbles, a snowstorm in your flute, thick mousse on the surface lasts way after the pour. Dense and not particularly giving nose, honey glazed bread, green apple and pear skin, light sweet garden herbs, too blunt for nuance. Full-bodied and not lacking for brooding brawn in the mouth either. More lemon and powdery stone here, not much sweetness in the pear, peach, green apple fruit and it lost the honey on the way from your nostrils to tongue. Tannins evident and actually a little tough. Bitterness accrues in the lemon citrus as it expands, plays off its innate herbaceousness. Packs the kind of wallop that makes it more a Champagne connoisseur's wine than anything else. (Lot 58, disgorged Juillet 2005 [37 months]) 87

## ITALY RED

Di Majo Norante  
Molise, Terra Degli Osci  
Sangiovese  
2004, \$7.99, 12.5%

Crystalline scarlet red, evenly hued from the core to the rims, sits well in the glass. Grapefruity nose, sour cranberry, cherry fruit, parched earth, leather, tree leaf elements, throws a few good couple of bushels at your olfactory sense before getting tired. Medium-bodied, the inches of makeup it's wearing at first draws you in but beware getting too close. Touch of spice, more herbal and then earthy. Little bit of cream girds the cherry, blackberry fruit, neither sweet nor sour, the acidity an agnostic in this battle. By the end of your glass, this liquid has become an exercise in what can be, but perhaps what shouldn't be. 85

## ITALY WHITE

Monte (Occone), Agricola del  
Campania, Taburno  
Falanghina  
2004, \$14.99, 12.5%

Semi-dull yellow gold in color with average shine, the hue diffuses along the rims, tiny bit of visible fizz throughout. Rich nose of lilacs, violets, tangerine juice, sweet baking spices, apricot, melon, nectarine scents, clings eagerly to your nostrils. Medium-bodied, given the broad selection of

flavors, it remains on the dry side, if not especially acidic. Tangerine, orange, lemon citrus most prevalent at first, the spices here have more bite. Leaner profile in the peach, apricot, apple, nectarine fruit, trimmed down and without fat. More mineral dust on display than any herbal aspects. Broadens as it dissipates, adding to its palate presence. 87

Zaccagnini, Azienda Agricola Ciccio  
Abruzzi, Colline Pescaresi, Il Bianco di Ciccio  
Blend  
2004, \$12.99, 11.5%

Bright golden color, very reflective surface with more translucent layering below, strong rims. Ripe peach, pear fruit in the nose, damn juicy and moist, sweet spices, orange sherbet, mild florality, more rich than complex. In the mouth it's fat, plump and almost squishy like the Pillsbury Doughboy. More spiciness, orange citrus, lemon drop, semi-creamy texture, minimal acidity, enough to keep it dry but no real spine. The pear, green melon, peach fruit is simple and on the short side. Honey accents give it more depth. Round mouthfeel adds to its density. Innocuous and easy enough to drink. Unspecified percentages of Trebbiano, Chardonnay. 86

## GERMANY WHITE

Schaefer, Weingut Willi  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Graacher, Domprobst, Kabinett AP #6  
Riesling  
2004, \$21.99, 8.0%

White to yellow straw in hue, one solid pane of glass, hue peters out around the rims. Resonantly floral nose of lilacs, violets and orange blossom with licorice and saltwater taffy touches, submerges the mineral dust, lean peach and pear scents but they stay consistent throughout. In the mouth it's a different story as the minerality and chalkiness much more pronounced, as is the lemon to grapefruit citrus zest. Solid core of acidity ensures dryness from entry to finish, keeps that florality under a watchful gaze. The pineapple, peach, pear fruit offers more by way of a crackling presence than juiciness. As the citrus lingers through the end, helps to create a fizzy mineral water feel. Good deal of restraint shown. 90

Dönnhoff, Weingut Hermann  
Nahe, Schlossböckelheimer, Kupfergrube, Spätlese AP #12  
Riesling  
2004, \$45.99, 8.0%

Not very deep but steady white-green hay color, does a definite fade at the rims. Sweet, creamy nose of cherry, peach, apricot fruit, floral water, brown sugar, lower degree of stone, chalky minerals and lemon juice, a bit youthfully sloppy but only in the interest of fun. Full-bodied, muscularly dense without undue heaviness nor immobility. More white smoke and stone to be perceived here, the lime, tangerine, pink grapefruit citrus just about explodes. More liquid honey than sugar, the acidity helps restrain unnecessary sugariness, cuts away a lot of fat. The peach, nectarine, yellow apple, green melon fruit vividly flavorful while not overblown. Florality a touch obscured now. Has a lot more raw power than elegance, somewhat unusual for this producer. 90

Selbach-Oster, Weingut  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Zeltinger, Sonnenuhr, Spätlese AP #18

Riesling  
2004, \$28.99, 8.0%  
Plain old yellow gold color, deep enough to hold its hue at any angle and help play up some translucent contortion below the surface. Engagingly forward nose of tangerine juice, wet flower petals, unrefined sugar, dusty stones, beyond the mineral stream water there's peach, nectarine, pineapple, red apple fruit scents with good cut. Full-bodied, loses some delineation due to its size, doesn't move its girth with a lot of ease. The lemon, lime, tangerine citrus here reveals its sweetness, in turn playing up the brown sugar and honey accents. Dollop of cherry in the nectarine, peach, pear fruit, juiciness not a real concern. Give credit to the acidity for even being able to get a word in here. Never quite finds a way to get all the primary material to act in concert, best hoovered down quickly before you can start thinking about it. 89

Christoffel Erben, Weingut Joh. Jos.  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Erdener, Treppchen, Kabinett AP #1  
Riesling  
2004, \$21.99, 8.5%

The yellow straw color has almost a faded bronze cast at some angles, has both a shiny surface and layers beneath, shows the obligatory bit of tiny bubble fizz. High degree of tangerine, lime, lemon citrus in the nose, a custard-like creaminess as well, the stone elements more wet than powdery or smoky, spring water and a mild verb of cherry, peach, apricot scents. Medium-bodied, incredible sweetness in the primary material, here the cherry, apricot, pear, red apple fruit is the dominant player so it is a good thing that the acidity has some serious punching power as well, wrestles that fruit to the ground. Honey, tangerine and lime citrus add to its sugary nature while stream pebbles and solid chalk aim for more clarity. Attractive mainly for its exuberance, not one of the most refreshing Kabinetten you could find. 87

## AUSTRIA WHITE

Knoll, Weingut Emmerich  
Wachau, Loibner, Federspiel  
Grüner Veltliner  
2004, \$21.99, 11.5%

Trim with shimmers of vibrant gold, green tinge, not a loss of loss at the rims. Ornate nose of white pepper, aggressive metallic minerals, streamwater, dried herbs, grapefruit pith as well as pear, apple, nectarine pit, flies low and on a direct path through your nostrils. Medium-bodied, smooth with some grip and a measured pace. White grapefruit, lemon citrus, mineral water, violets, cut grass, pebbles, keeps things closely knit together. The acidity is flat-footed, there but only as a thinnish layer. The white pepper takes awhile but finally clicks in the mid-palate. Not a lot of pear, peach, apple fruit to be had but at least its strongest point is during the finish. Has refreshing bite. 87

## HUNGARY RED

Monarchia Cellars  
Eger, Noir  
Kekfrankos  
2003, \$9.99, 13.0%



Ruby to red-garnet in color, light orange around the rims, good clarity. Very sour nose with a grassy bite, wet brown earth, belt leather, herbaceous but releases a lot of bouncy red cherry, strawberry, raspberry scents too, stays true to its character and your expectations. Medium-bodied, the tart cherry, strawberry fruit isn't real juicy but is ripe enough to spread out nicely. The powdery tannins are a fine dust, not much supporting acidity. Quite chocolaty, smoothes out appreciably through the mid-palate, then turns toasty. Not very herbal, mild citrus, moderate earth and leather too. Tastes good, price is right, you could do a helluva lot worse. 86

## SPAIN RED

Muga, Bodegas  
Rioja, Reserva Unfiltered  
Tempranillo  
2002, \$22.99, 13.5%

Light purple at the core, more bright crimson red around the outside, deeper burnt tones enrich the full rims. Burnt toast, vanilla bubble through the nose, citrusy in an indistinct way, tar, leather, roasted cherry fruit, good amount of fullness without getting heavy. Medium-bodied, very toasty and spicy on the attack, a touch dilute in the fruit department when it comes to length but not lacking initial juice in the currant, cherry, blackberry flavors. With earth, rawhide, tobacco and cedar notes it strikes a vaguely Bordelaise feel. Flat tannins, the acidity not much better. Cocoa-vanilla residue through the finish, blood iodine traces too. A good job done with perhaps not the best material. 70% Tempranillo, 20% Garnacha, 10% Graciano and Mazuelo. 88

Mas Martinet Viticultors  
Priorat, Clos Martinet  
Blend  
2003, \$74.99, 14.5%  
Warm glow in the ruby-purple core, fat ruby rims with an increased redness. Something weird, rubbery or medicinal, in the nose, earth and ground stone too, heavily roasted feel to the cherry, plum fruit, wet leather. Medium-bodied, awkward entry, feels like it's bruised from over-massaging, doesn't flow easily. Caramel, butter appear first but not exceedingly oaky. Its lack of acidity or tannins contribute to its flat overall feel. Spiciness attempts to put some kick in the plum, currant, red cherry fruit. Earth, loam, leather come in smallish doses, plays mostly on its basic heft. 45% Garnacha, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 10% Carignan, 5% Syrah. 88

Luzón, Bodegas  
Jumilla, Luzon Verde  
Monastrell (Mourvèdre)  
2005, \$8.99, 13.5%  
Deep luminescence in the bright purple core, easily segues to glowing ruby-magenta to fashion broad rims. Rich, if sour, cherry to raspberry fruit in the nose, basic, lots of cut grass, earth, sour white citrus, kind of a chunky, sticky feel in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, has the same clingy texture here in the mouth but it does release and move forward eventually. Semi-sweet blackberry, black cherry fruit rounds out the center. Tannins not really there, acidity does a better job of it. Odd notes of bell pepper tip it towards the herbaceous side of things. Ends with a sour burst. Can say it doesn't lie to you. 86

Can Blau, Cellers  
Montsant  
Blend  
2004, \$12.99, 14.5%  
Dark clarity in the purple core, broad red-garnet rims, excellent hue throughout. Sweet strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit blooms in the nose before a curious mélange of coffee rinds, toast, seashells, sea salt and a touch of salami too, the oak eventually obscures all else. Medium-bodied although it tries real hard to be fuller. Sugary, yet this is not longlasting, the raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit succumbs to its overall powdery texture, no overt tannins nor acidity, just a certain dampening powder sprinkled on things. Not much obvious alcoholic burn but certainly becomes jagged by the finish. Enough so you could call it alcoholic liquid colored red. 35% Cariñena, 35% Syrah, 30% Garnacha. 84

## SPAIN WHITE

Godeval, Bodegas  
Valdeorras, Viña Godeval  
Godello  
2004, \$15.99, 12.5%  
Mostly transparent white straw color, good shininess, devoid of hue at the rims. Very fresh, appley nose of melon, pear, lemon peel, potpourri, prolonged presence, wiry but not taut. Medium to full-bodied, quite erect and firm, strong presence shakes your palate awake. Licorice, mineral water, limestone accents. Floral as well but the bite in the lemon/orange citrus restrains this. Displays apricot, peach, nectarine fruit with a hint of papaya. Has a slight creamy, leesy texture but the acidity is powerful enough to both keep it dry and lend it sparkle. Spicy finish. 90

López de Heredia, Bodegas R.  
Rioja, Viña Tondonia, Reserva  
Viura  
1988  
\$37.99, 12.0%  
Average clarity, the strong yellow core fades appreciably towards the rims, moderate shine. The nose bursts with caramel popcorn, butter, mint, latex, herbs and somewhat muted apple, peach, nectarine scents, more of a jumble of parts now than fully integrated whole. Medium-bodied, initially the keen acidity gives it a bitter edge, yet this is quickly subsumed into oak toast, butter, popcorn and mint flavors. The oxidation brings out a rubbery, medicinal feel to it. Texturally rises nicely, a big fluffy cloud bumping against the roof of your mouth. The pear, peach, red apple fruit in no way weak but semi-eclipsed by the other elements. Remains active through the finish, increasing minerality and meatiness. 90% Viura, 10% Malvasia. 89

Sila, Viña  
Rueda, Naia  
Verdejo  
2004, \$12.99, 13.0%  
Bright yellow gold in color, dazzling surface with a dropoff in color at the rims, very pretty. Penetrating nose, gains power from strong grassiness, powdered lilacs, mixed white/pink grapefruit, light saltiness, the crispness in the peach, pear fruit relieves most of its depth. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, has a strong attack with plenty of weight, then gradually releases into a lighter touch at the finish. The lemon, lime accents are kind of watery, not much bite. Dried floral paste character keeps it powdery.

The acidity starts out like it's gonna be fine but doesn't follow through. The peach, apricot, pear fruit demure. Some will appreciate its lack of flash, others might want some more oomph. 87

Allende, Finca

Rioja

Blend

2003, \$23.99, 13.5%

Basic yellow color, above average surface reflectivity, gets a little translucent shimmer below. Huge blast of oak in the nose, vanilla cream buttered popcorn, burnt toast, clove then orange sherbet, the peach and pear fruit scents drowned in the oak. Medium-bodied, oak, oak and more oak to the point of tasting like a spiced baked ham. More of all that vanilla cream, charred toast, cinnamon, clove, butter. The orange, lime citrus comes next in line, little here evokes an actual grape's flavors. The acidity is uneven, if not jagged at times. Mild floral swipes. Perhaps even less peach, apricot, apple fruit here than in the nose. Impossible to wipe the oak residue out of your mouth long after the liquid is gone. 60% Viura, 40% Malvasia. 84

## SPAIN ROSE

Muga, Bodegas

Rioja

Blend

2005, \$9.49, 13.5%

Electric pink color, not the shiniest but absolutely consistent from core to rim and below, glow gives it visual appeal. Cotton candy, lemonade, rose petal nose all mixed in with strawberry, watermelon, raspberry fruit scents, billows in your nostrils, softly expansive. Full-bodied and rich, its heaviness relieved some by the chilled temperature, has sufficient acidity to pick up more of whatever excess is left. Sweet and sour in alternating bursts, like good cop/bad cop. Floral, plenty of citrusy sparkle. The vanilla cream gives the citrus a meringue feel. Well endowed in the red cherry, strawberry, raspberry, watermelon department. Adds in a whisper of grassiness for extra wattage. With its initial weight and sweetness, finishes clean enough, can't complain it didn't hit the belly fast enough. 60% Garnacha, 30% Viura, 10% Tempranillo. 88

Nekeas, Bodegas

Navarra, Vega Sindoa Rosé

Blend

2004, \$7.99, 13.0%

Pale and watery salmon pink, hardly makes it out of the core, high degree of sparkle saves the visual day. Bitter nose of sour cherry to raspberry fruit, tobacco ash, lemon rind, herbal too, not very longlasting. Medium-bodied, smoother than in the nose, loses the herbal touch, not much more sweetness offered in the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit but it gets to the mid-palate. Some mineral powder but more on the creamy side otherwise. Short but not offensively so, just kind of there. Spiciness helps. 50% Garnacha, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. 84

## SPAIN DESSERT

Alvear

Montilla-Moriles, Fino en Rama

Pedro Ximénez

2002, \$9.99, 15.0%

As clear as water, close to zero hue, catches little glints of light. Really nutty nose, crisp green apple, pear fruit, spice, licorice, has fantastic lift while retaining a bottom. Light to medium-bodied, very active and airy, just creates puffs of clouds inside your mouth. The nuttiness fills up a lot of the ground territory, licorice, anise, orange peel, flower petals. Very dry, might come off as too much so for some folks. The bite in the green apple, pear fruit brings out shades of olive pit. Peaceful finish, acidity still working it, nothing pushy happening, maintains a nice balance. 500 ml bottle. 89

## SOUTH AFRICA RED

Thandi

Elgin

Pinot Noir

2004, \$16.99, 14.0%

Very clear, bright crimson red with some purple shading for depth, no loss of hue intensity at the rims, nice reflective surface. Smoky nose, mineral powder restrains the incipient candied feel in the red cherry, raspberry fruit scents, there's a smattering of lemon to orange citrus, judicious usage of oak results in very light vanilla creaminess. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with widely grained tannins to lend it a firm attack and extend the mouth presence. That said, the juiciness in the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit remains mostly front-loaded and beyond the mid-palate begins a level decline. Smoky here as well, more leather and mineral red earth, some mixed citrus tang. Not particularly grassy, allows it to spread without battling any bitter-derived erectness and draw from that light vanilla cream. Nice job. 88

## SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Thandi

Elgin

Chardonnay

2005, \$15.99, 13.0%

Washed out yellow straw color, dull with a flat surface, however there's a solidity below. Fresh nose but not without its density, floral dew and mild creaminess round off the pineapple, peach, pear fruit, spice and orange zest bring it back into snappy mode. Medium-bodied, manages to gain traction without impeding too much of its fluidity, takes great pains to ensure consistent mouth weight throughout. Softer profile to the fruit, apricot, peach, pear and melon, brings out a semi-sweetness in that florality as well as the quieter orange to lemon citrus notes. The creaminess appears as a momentary diversion, turns to a glance at butterscotch but really too crisp for that. Seamless, drinking it requires little thought or attention, much to its credit. 88

## AUSTRALIA RED

Glaxmond

South Australia, Barossa Valley, El Abuelo

Blend

2002, \$24.99, 14.9%

Clear with a burnt cast to the black-purple core, not truly opaque, the rims garnet to crimson with a slight zinc touch. Toast, toast and more toast in the nose, minty, not something you associate with Tempranillo, saddle leather, grill smoke, robust cherry, blackberry scents, comes right at you. Medium-bodied, you want to call it grip but really it's more of a heavy rubbing against your palate. Sour edge

momentarily gives a nod to the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit but here comes that oak toast, sawdust everywhere. Mild acidity, maybe the tannins manage a word in edgewise. Nicely active on the back end, dusts itself off and gets moving. Maybe it's the oak, maybe not, but just hard to discern any varietal character. 60% Tempranillo, 40% Grenache. 86

Henry's Drive

South Australia, Padthaway, Pillar Box Red

Blend

2004, \$8.99, 15.0%

Concentrated purple core without coming close to opacity, admirable saturation in the warm red-ruby rims. Odd cantaloupe fruit in the nose, then apple, pear and some cherry, nothing you'd really associate with a red wine, cocoa toast, burnt butter, attempts developing some secondary scents with no real results. Medium-bodied, strikingly incredible for how homogeneous and four-square it is, it's like a generic pill of Red Wine. No tannins nor acidity, nothing close to rough edges. Just pure Red Wine from start to finish, entirely indistinct, no more, no less. Transcends both nature and description. 57% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Shiraz, 11% Merlot. 85

## AUSTRALIA WHITE

Turner & Cole

South Australia, Eden Valley

Riesling

2005, \$12.99, 12.0%

Appears a basic yellow color, its ability to bend light in the glass adds depth, slightly below average shine. Resonant but sour lemon and lime citrus lead the nose, lilacs and some more acrid smoke and stoniness, almost starts to evoke chili peppers, fruit doesn't quite come to mind as you sniff, but there is some peach, pineapple, nectarine going on. Medium-bodied, while tightly wound one suspects this is more apparent due to the paucity of richness in the flavors. Bluntish acidity incapable of enlivening nor providing direction. Despite all this, moments of stone, rubber and dried out herbs happen. Minimal fruit, wafer-thin apple, pear, peach, pineapple with barely a drop of juice. Just feels like it's bruised up. 84

## AUSTRALIA DESSERT

Elderton

New South Wales, Riverina, Botrytis Sémillon

Sémillon

2004, \$21.99, 11.5%

Trim orange-amber in color, glows but still fairly light, evidenced by the loss of hue at the rims. The initial floral lift crushed under the heel of the poached apricot, peach, nectarine fruit, cinnamon, nutmeg, clove spice, orange zest, just teasingly suggests at that to come. In the mouth it is full-bodied and thick without any excess weight, the way freshly dried fruit texturally feels. It's really like two big guys held you down while a third big guy stuffed a 10 pound bag of dried apricots into your mouth. Ginger and cinnamon spice more sweet than sharp. Candied orange peel and caramelized brown sugar too. Stays perpendicular to the ground, good acidity and the low alcohol helps it maintain a refreshing feel. The light grassiness hovers an inch off the ground and helps it stay awake. There's peach and pear too, but the apricot is so dominant. A really fun ride. 375 ml bottle. 91

## NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Oyster Bay

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2005, \$11.99, 13.0%

Light yellow straw in color, average shine yet nice depth, solid from the surface down. Soft nose, not very grassy, sweeter mixed white citrus, mineral dust, pear, peach, nectarine fruit, blunt and stocky. Medium-bodied, sweet with only a little tang, barest hint of chili pepper, mild white grapefruit and lemon but no real citrusy bite. The nectarine, guava, pineapple, peach fruit cut into even portions, accompany each other well. The acidity has enough textural crevices to hold what spiciness and minerality it has. This tacky texture leads to a blunter finish. Serviceable, it's lack of distinct personality ensures likeability. 86