

## *The Hanes Wine Review, November 2006 Edition*

Let's make believe for a second that people actually read Hanes's reviews of individual wines. These people think a few wines sound worth trying and look for them. It's an admitted fact that Hanes drinks fairly obscure wines or, at the very least, wines that are not made in very large production numbers, that is, enough produced to saturate different locales throughout the United States. This can be frustrating for readers. Well, too bad, Hanes isn't drinking Turning Leaf just to be a swell fella. Hanes hustles to find these wines, youse gotta do the same.

That said, there's a cyclical phenomenon in the wine industry which can make it even harder to find many of the wines reviewed herein. It's nothing truly new, but right now, we're at a point in the cycle which doesn't necessarily favor the savvy wine consumer. It has to do with the size and scale of wine distribution and a current trend towards consolidation. This is one way of saying, any knowledgeable wine consumer has to be aware that not only are not all wine *stores* alike, but not all wine *distributors* are alike. The differences among them represent a tremendous factor in the sorts of wines you will be able to find locally. So, let's paint a broad picture of wine distribution to improve general public education and weal.

A lot of this issue boils down to a single factor. This being, what percentage of total sales and/or profits does wine represent for the distributor in question? The answer to this question has a lot to do with wine sales because many larger distributors derive the majority of their profits from the sale of hard alcohol and not wine. And because it is hard alcohol that captains the ship, "fine wine" often does nothing but swab the deck.

Now, before the hue and cry goes up from outraged salespeople employed by large distributors, this is *not* to say that their portfolios do not contain many fine and upstanding wines of esteemed pedigree. What it does mean is that, more often than not, money talks and bullshit walks. *Especially* in the wine business. Which is, in effect, the booze business. Naturally, this is but a single opinion and others will disagree. But this is how Hanes sees it and, hell, it's his website. Dammit.

Size plays a major role in the distribution of wine. Size in terms of the distributor as well as in terms of the quantity of product too. Wine distribution is the furthest thing from a level playing field. As alluded to at the outset, there's a lot of wine out there to be sold. Perhaps too much. Any given store or restaurant/bar can stock only so many different types. Many factors play into the decision of choosing the wines. Not all have to do with the quality of the wine. That's two short declarative sentences in a row by Hanes. This is a world record.

Back to hard liquor. Brands sell and make people millionaires. Think Absolut, Stoli, Tanqueray, Bombay Sapphire, Jim Beam, Jack Daniels, Bacardi. The distributors which control these brands possess incredible clout. Every store or restaurant carries brands like these. The demand is huge. Note in passing that the profits in hard alcohol are *much* higher than for wine. These are huge *volume* businesses. Even if in most cases the margins are thinner, the quantities sold more than make up for it. (Note further that this is why wine stores don't include hard alcohol in mixed case discounts, the profit margin is lower and differs too much from still table wine to offer the same 10/15/20% off on the hard stuff.) Major alcohol brands face stiff competition. Among themselves and from new "trendy" brands. So, there's always games being played to maintain market share. Special discounts, giving out swag, other things more nefarious. In New York State, a lawsuit was just settled wherein major distributors got their hands slapped for favoring some retailers over others, showering them with gifts, trips and other shit to keep their product on the shelves and their competitors off the shelves. These distributors were fined *millions* of dollars! Hah! What a joke. They are still laughing all the way to the bank, contrition not even in the picture. This type of behavior is not going to stop, no way José. There will be the proverbial "fifteen minutes" of notoriety and public apologies then the authorities will go back to sleeping on the job. Like the saying goes, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Here's the scenario. You own or manage a wine store or restaurant/bar. Size doesn't really matter too much, you can be small, medium or large in size. You're busy, why, harried even. You *know* you will be getting your Brand A of vodka, Brand B of whiskey, Brand C of tequila. The sales rep is there, right in front of you taking down the order. He also happens to be selling a Chardonnay from California and a Shiraz from Australia. It's decent, maybe good, maybe bad. Who knows. Who cares? It's real easy to order from them. One delivery, one invoice to pay, less overall aggravation. Chances are the product will sell just about as swiftly as its immediate competition would. Few people are going to care. And big brand hard alcohol purveyors *tend* to carry big brand wines, those with marketing clout and name recognition. Sweet.

If you read Hanes's blatherings chances are high that you are one of a select few who would care. Believe it, you *are* in a very distinct minority. The numbers show this. Most retail and "on-premise" (restaurants/bars where the booze is consumed on the premises) wine buyers don't care *because* their clientele doesn't care. There are a zillion of "them" and thousands of "us." If this were not the case, the sales numbers would be different. This isn't a normative judgment, it's just basic empiricism.

Most, if not all, of the major distributors not only have "salespeople" but they divide up responsibilities, their business is so large. A wine store can have a sales rep who sells them Distributor X's *wine* and an entirely different sales rep who sells them Distributor X's *hard alcohol*. This cracks Hanes up because it underscores how big the money is – it flies right in the face of using the booze to sell the wine by divorcing the purchasing of either from each other, the benefits of which were illustrated above. But they can afford to do it, and the booze guy's mental hard drive isn't big enough to remember the "story" behind that Washington State Merlot or New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and more effectively sell it. Better to let the booze guy focus on printing money for the company with gin and rum and get someone else to try and move the wine.

Now, of course, it's not all such doom and gloom. First, a lot of the largest distributors do end up hiring wine salespeople who like wine and care about wine. And the wines in their "book" may include some wonderful high end gems and cheapie winners. However, the wine divisions of these bigger guys are always under the gun because the people running the *whole* operation rarely care about wine as deeply as these foot soldiers do. And the wine divisions don't add as much to the bottom line either. Where's the shareholder value?! In some regards it's a fanciful luxury, or maybe even a clever beguilement, to keep fine wine around. Distracts people from the actual nature of the booze peddling biz.

Hanes doesn't drink a lot of "big brand" wine. Sometimes he'll buy a bottle for shits and grins. Or someone else will open a bottle around him and perverse curiosity gets the best of him. No Yellowtail, Ruffino, Santa Margherita, Gallo, Mondavi, Black Swan, Napa Ridge, Meridian, Sutter Home, Fetzer, Kendall-Jackson, etc. Sorry, kids. Nevertheless, the quantity of cases sold of these types of wine staggers. And remains highly bound to the sale of hard alcohol. Conversely, if a large distributor does have a highly desired, small production wine, it's "allocation" may be to the accounts who play nice with said distributor and buy big across the board (another point of contention in the aforementioned lawsuit).

Enough beating this horse further to death. On the other end of the spectrum, there's the "boutique" distributors, smaller operations hawking "artisanal" wines. The quantity of such distributors tends to wax and wane cyclically. No real rhyme nor reason. Today they are kind of on the decline. Bigger fish swallow them to bolster their book of wines until the general scene reaches a point where a "white space" appears in the market and some young buck goes out on his/her own and opens up a tiny distributorship. Until they then grow and become attractive for acquisition. Or fail. And so the cycle turns. There will never be a lack of new guys on the block, dollar and dream in hand, ready to preach the gospel of the vine to the huddled masses. Just the way it goes.

Scale is a pervasive factor here too. Small and/or new operations don't have millions to sink into product until it gets sold, the profits to be put back into the business to buy more product to sell. So they tend to align with smaller producers who themselves don't make a lot of wine. It all fits nicely. And it tends to fill Hanes's belly too, since these continue to represent the lion's share of the world's distinctive, idiosyncratic wines. Living in New York City, Hanes has easy access to the majority of these wines. As with wineries, small distributors tend to deal with "boutique" wine stores and high end restaurants and wine bars, of which NYC is decidedly not lacking. Denizens of and visitors to this fine city know of which Hanes speaketh.

These small fries have to fight and scrap for their mere existence and it's not always easy. They cannot offer multiple case discounts at the level the big guys can. For every wine that sells easily they have a half a dozen that require pleading to move. They may sell "small production" hard alcohol but this is obviously nowhere near the scale or demand to cement entry into new accounts. Life is spelled r-e-j-e-c-t-i-o-n.

Today we have the glories of the internet. And inter-state commerce, even if tricky and/or illegal in many cases. Be that as it may, chances remain high a consumer in less urban geographies can order small production wines from New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, etc. As the bare minimum of educated wine buyers grows in these other locales, regional boutique distributors slowly appear to provide certain wines locally. Maybe not the wines Hanes sees here in NYC but fairly comparable. Alas, these ventures are fraught with danger and despair. That's life: see previous paragraph times two.

None of this is brain surgery. To Hanes, the most interesting aspect of this equation are the "middle tier" distributors. These operations represent the biggest challenge for Hanes when it comes to buying wine. It's a big gray area trying to figure out these guys' books and separate the good stuff from the more generic, larger production stuff. They do sell both. And they compete with both the big guys and the little guys. Note that this is not to say that small production *mandates* high quality or that large production *mandates* poor quality. Although the latter is more likely, "poor" here meaning generic and lacking uniqueness. There are plenty, plenty, plenty of crappy wines made in less than 2,000 case lots. Or 200 case lots. Hanes has the scars to prove it.

The middle tier guys are large enough to have clout [i.e., things the customer wants and the size to offer meaningful discounts/perks] and have been around long enough to have developed deep relationships with account buyers. Middle tier distributors appeal to established smaller brands such as Californian Cabernet producers with "cult wine" designations who want to place their wines in well-known restaurants and such. They appeal to mid-tier importers who need a sales distribution organization large enough to pay attention to and sell *all* the wineries they import, a problem which occurs all too frequently with the largest distributors, where many wines (or even entire importers) kind of get "forgotten." Such importers often cannot go with small distributors otherwise their total imports would make up like half that distributor's book. Which is not good for either party.

Middle tier distributors have hard booze for sale too but it's usually smaller hip/trendy brands destined for clubs, swanky hotel bars or other places where wealth demands distinctiveness, a "secret" to be shared with select friends. Eventually the classic existential question of "who are we and what do we want to be when we grow up?" must be asked. The wine biz is like most any biz, there's lots of ego at the top. You don't often find anyone saying "I'm happy being a medium-sized fish in a big pond." Most people want their business to grow as much as possible and get rich. But it is awfully hard to make that final push into the big time. You need perseverance, talent, luck and desired product. And very few moments of ethical crisis. Hence, what role do these middle guys play?

A lot of what they do is provide decent wines at decent prices to a broader base of stores and restaurant/bars than what would happen otherwise. Highly laudable. And true. It's funny to see, though, how they often navigate between the lofty reasons behind the founding of their respective companies and their alternate desires to join the Dark Side. How do you maintain your valued personal relationship with the winery owners, the key client accounts, your sales force, etc. when there's only so much time in the day? You keep plugging away, delivering a disintegrating message of personal attention as more and more work gets delegated. It's either that or the less desirable end of getting a "life" (see five paragraphs above).

There's still a lot of sincerity left in these folks but at times it all shakes out funny. Here in NYC there's a chain of pretty damn good Chinese restaurants. The one near where Hanes lives sells wine. The wines on their list have representative bottles lined up on a shelf by the register. What cracks Hanes up is that he knows the labels and *all the wines come from a single distributor*. As if the sales rep drew up the restaurant's wine list him or herself. Which probably happened. The funny part is that *another* wine distributor regularly takes good customers to this same chain of restaurants for free dinner and drinks. Management lets this second distributor bring in wine for free although they probably never consider actually *buying* wine from this second distributor. A classic situation which probably gets repeated many more times than anyone can guess at.

At the same time, many middle tier distributors are attractive acquisition targets for the big guys. Instant market share increase, without the potentially longer timeline required to grow organically (shareholder value now!). Necessary these days for, as said at the very beginning, the big are getting bigger and covering more states than ever before in the annals of liquor wholesaling. For the biggest of the big, acquisitions are both offensive and defensive maneuvers against their fellow behemoths. And there's little gained in swallowing up the truly little guys. That said, when the mid-tier outfits get gobbled up sometimes some of their product lines get the axe. If the jettisoned wineries are attractive to little guys (and affordable), they can get picked up by them. If not, they may have trouble finding new representation because the other mid-tier guys already have filled that "slot" in their book and don't want to cannibalize their existing offerings. So, the cut winery loses. Good day, sir!

Hanes tries to sample the wines from the middle tier outfits as much as possible. Usually this means snagging an invite to one of their big tastings for the trade. This is a bonus since most of the wines Hanes most wants to sample in their books cost between \$20 and \$60 a bottle, sometimes more. Too much money to buy personally, but worth sampling for free. Especially if *any* wines with broader distribution are going to appear in *THWR!* A lot of the middle tier organizations work in multiple states and/or sell credible brands also sold throughout the United States by other distributors. This is as close to staying abreast of the general pulse of what America is drinking as Hanes gets. The elitist socialist that he is.

The gist of all this is that the fine print on the back label naming the importer or distributor may be just as important to availability as the winery name on the front label. And for varying, if not on occasion opposing, reasons. When you are looking for a specific wine, whether Hanes recommends it or not, what kind of distributors they work with plays a major role in whether or not the store in question will carry it (this effect being greatly increased in restaurants and bars with much smaller selections). If a store is cozy with only a few distributors you may *never* be able to find the unusual or distinctive wines you seek. Conversely, if you're looking for a bottle of Absolut, the stores that carry every single flavor of it will most likely *not* carry that Cabernet Franc from Chinon, German Riesling Beerenauslese nor Campanian Aglianico you've been meaning to try. Just the facts of life.

Yet another reason why it pays to frequent a few stores, not just one or two. Any given store may or may not have a working relationship with a specific distributor. The bottles look so innocent on the shelf, shiny and new. But the story of how they got there probably could have been penned by Mickey Spillane.

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**This month's big winners...** Although the weak dollar has inflated it's price, Texier's 2004 Syrah from Brézème in the Northern Rhône and called "Domaine de Pergault" is quite delicious. For those who follow this producer, this replaces the "Vieilles Vignes" bottling. If you like Italian white wines with some age on them, and who doesn't, Ronco del Gelso's 2005 "Latimus" blend should reward patience. Hits your wallet up for \$23, a fair price for what's in the bottle. Tarlant is a Champagne producer which has long escaped Hanes's steady gaze but no longer. Their current non-vintage "Brut Zero" sparkler is an intriguing wine and worthy of devotion, albeit it costs about \$43. Just over the "cheapie" level at \$16 or so, Domaine La Casenove from southern France has blessed us with a yummy wine in 2004 called "La Garrigue" (this being a wildflower found in southern France and the Mediterranean). Clos Rougeard may get a lot of the hype but Hanes has been mightily impressed by the Saumur-Champigny wines of Filliatreau. These are worth checking out, and nicely priced under \$20. Bologna makes great Barbera wines from Asti in Piedmont and their 2004 "Montebruna" is no exception. Only wish was that it was priced for less than the \$23 or so it costs, still, it's worth it. J.L. Chave is the king of Hermitage but until Hanes wins Lotto he has to stick with less expensive wines. Chave's 2004 Côtes-du-Rhône named "Mon Coeur" is 100% Syrah. Past vintages have been adequate but this vintage is a pleasant surprise and offers mucho sabor for around \$21 or so. Hanes has had the good fortune to try a few Quenard wines from the obscure-in-the-U.S. French region of Savoie and he likes. Especially their white wine from Chignin made from the Jacquère grape. At \$22, this be right up Hanes's alley.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Laplace has made a highly respectable Madiran wine in 2001 and you can't beat the \$9 price tag. This vintage is probably close to selling out so if you see any, grab a few bottles quickly. Hanes has been drinking more South American wines of late and for \$11 the 2004 Malbec from Durigutti is a sleek, well-integrated package worth exploring. The wines of Clos Roche Blanche from the Touraine in the Loire Valley are ubiquitous in Hanes's reviews as they combine tastiness with low prices. CRB's 2005 Gamay bottling is an excellent case in point, packs a lot in there for \$13. Balthasar Ress isn't a household name among German wine lovers in America but that may be why the prices are still fair. Their 2005 "QbA" Trocken is an admirable value at \$13, lots of verve and testament to the overall quality of the vintage in Germany. Fitou is a region in southern France and its wines rarely make it to the U.S. However, we do have the 2004 Champ des Sœurs called "Bel Amant" and for like \$14 it'll have you in fits of joy. J-P Brun makes a small amount of white Beaujolais, 100% Chardonnay. Most of it is probably sold in the NYC area. For \$15 it's very good if not exactly identifiable as Chardonnay. Which may be a good thing. Terredora is a steady producer from Italy's Campania region. Their Greco and Fiano wines are getting out of Hanes's current buying price range but their Falanghina can still be had for \$11 and it offers a good deal of complexity and flavor. Pays to be cheap. Hanes liked the 2004 better than the 2005 but Austrian producer Hofer's liter sized bottle of Grüner Veltliner still maintains its "QPR Champ" status at \$9. Keep the price low and we'll keep buying!

**And the disappointments...** Seeing a wine from Ribera del Duero, Spain for under \$15, Hanes rolled the dice on the 2004 Casajús. Alas, there seems to be a reason Ribera wines are pricey. Oh, well, better luck next time. It has been some time since Hanes has a Beaujolais from the cru village of Saint-Amour. They just don't come to the U.S. in big numbers it seems. So, he was psyched when his friend popped open a bottle of 2005 Cheveau named "En Rontey." Then he tasted it. It was nice and all but lacked the finesse and delicacy one may expect from this area. Sucks to be Hanes. The prices of non-mass production Australian wines seem to be creeping up a few dollars here and there, maybe it's the weak U.S. dollar, so Hanes is picky about what he buys. Being from Victoria, a region Hanes prefers, he took a flyer on the 2004 Rutherglen Estates "The Reunion" blend. It was good but not that good that it warrants the \$17 price, especially when there's more wines with a personal track record which please for \$3-4 dollars less. Whither goes the QPR of Australian wines \$15-20 USD? Dr. Frank is one of the best Riesling producers in upstate New York but the 2005 "Semi-Dry" was average at best. Since the label did not state the "Finger Lakes" designation Hanes suspects this vintage contains grape juice from other regions and/or vintages due to some cataclysmic natural event. At least it was only \$11. While Hanes likes their other bottlings, especially when well aged, he never gets wowed by Olga Raffault's entry level Chinon "La Poplinière." It must be all that new world wine he drinks, screwing up his palate. While we're on this topic, probably a big ditto for Baudry's less expensive Chinon bottling "Les Granges."

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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/oldervintages2006.html>

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

**Tagline #25:** "If empty wine bottles were redeemable Hanes would be a rich man"

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 November!

**CALIFORNIA RED**

Tensley  
Santa Barbara County, Tierra Alta Vineyard  
Syrah  
2005, \$37.99, 14.5%

The crystal clear purple core approximates opacity but really too light and pure, willingly gives way to red-pink magenta way before the true rims, warm glow throughout. Very berry nose of raspberry, blueberry, boysenberry fruit, as sweet as it is remains hard to soak in it due to the keenly cutting alcoholic fumes, trying real hard to be heard are wildflower and orange citrus swipes, not much else. Medium to full-bodied, the fruit leaves your mouth as wet

as a rainstorm, piles on the raspberry, blackberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit. Here there's a swirl of vanilla and milk chocolate to allude to the presence of oak, sweet spices as well, also something akin to pumpkin pie. Kinks have been massaged out of the tannins or acidity, remains structured but in an entirely user-friendly manner. Lemony residue evident towards the finish line. Little earthiness or gamey qualities, with a hint easy to peg it as Syrah but doesn't leave you with an impression that there's a whole lot of development to come. Yet, enjoyable enough now to happily drink up. 89

Alma Rosa  
Santa Rita Hills  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$25.99, 14.0%

Clear but there's dusky darkness in the red-purple core, as if the light finally faded after sundown, hardly any change in hue through the rims, strong red. The initial flurry of vanilla and sweet spices in the nose gets the beat down from sweet and sour raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, lemon zest, black licorice, only wet morning dew on the lawn for herbaceousness, whisper of earthiness. Medium-bodied, admirably focused acidity prevents the ripe strawberry, raspberry, apricot fruit from getting jammy, plenty there's plenty of attractively teasing sweetness to go around. More floral here, broader lemon to orange citrus swipes, not any more overly herbaceous but this element denser in the mouth. Sliced ginger, anise and mint, the oak cream and toasty spice persists throughout but only as a side dish. Rumbles too much in the low register for a clean finish per se but doesn't lack for good enunciation. [Screwcap] 89

Folie à Deux  
Regional Blend, Ménage à Trois  
Blend  
2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Trim ruby-violet color, consistent from core to the rims, zero loss of brightness throughout. Coconut custard, caramel oak presence in the nose, molasses-coated ham, some earth, not a lot of complexity, leans hard on the raspberry, cherry, plum scents for depth. Medium to full-bodied, innocuously smooth and juicy, focuses once more on the fruit like there's little else in the world. Tangerine and lemon influences perk up the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit. Dry enough, there's tannic structure throughout — to a point. Nice pacing, nothing to really piss you off, even the vanilla and caramel is down to acceptable levels here. You could do a lot worse. Unspecified percentages of Zinfandel, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon. 87

## NEW YORK WHITE

Frank, Dr. Konstantin  
Regional Blend, Semi-Dry  
Riesling  
2005, \$10.99, 11.5%

Flat yellow straw color, dull surface, bends light below, only a light green tinge left at the rims. Pure pear, apple, peach nose, some rubber and motor oil tones, floral but not very stony, really just a two trick pony, fruit and petrol. Medium-bodied, same story here in the mouth, not a lot of complexity, appears dilute at moments, however, what it does it does credibly. Soft diesel notes rein in the sweetness of the peach, apricot, red apple fruit, shortening it in the process as the primary material is really only so-so. The acidity starts strong, sort of fades

with the rest. Has more than enough flavor to make a good initial impression but unmasked thereafter. (Synthetic cork) 85

## FRANCE RED

Bois de Boursan, Domaine  
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Cuvée des Felix  
Blend  
2004, \$74.99, 14.0%

Powerful crimson red element in the purple core, keeps going to a burnt red at the rims, deeply hued, you can envision orange bricking in its future. The nose is shy, as if it is not yet sure how to handle its depth, kind of throws the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit at you, tentatively offers lemon concentrate, floral water, leather and old wood, even the earthiness, while deep, not sure how to present itself. Medium to full-bodied, much fresher in the mouth, the power of the raw material wins out over any innate shyness. Light prune, roasted quality to the raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, if it were more acidic, this might be less present. However, the tannins provide the structure from below making the dried fruit nature less noticeable. Brawny lemon citrus component, above average florality too, here an aspect of merde heightens the earthiness. Too structured by tannins for herbal notes to spread, get stomped out. Very long finish, focused and integrated with nary a misstep. It's all ahead of it. 65% Grenache, 15% Mourvèdre, 15% Syrah, 5% unspecified other. 92

Texier, Eric  
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Brézème, Domaine de Pergault  
Syrah  
2004, \$31.99, 12.5%

Clean red-purple, light burnt quality, more full red around the rims, spotlessly transparent even given its depth of hue. Wonderfully swirling floral perfume in the nose, slowed down some by a burst of caramel, then high-toned lemon and white grapefruit picks up the pace again, just starting to display some beef blood, game fat elements, very powdery minerality with a hint of olive pit, the florality is so fetching it is easy to ignore the cherry, blackberry fruit scents, overall seems barely born into the world. Medium-bodied, squeaky clean with highly delineated lines, built for racing. Again, a touch of molasses and caramel at first before the game, wet leather and green olive components gain the advantage. Attractive purity in the cherry, currant, red plum fruit, crystal clear lines. The tannins are fine, the acidity more of the primary mover. Pure class through the finish, dapper and freshly shaved. 91

Filliatreau, Domaine Paul et Frédéric  
Loire, Saumur-Champigny, La Grande Vignolle  
Cabernet Franc  
2005, \$18.99, 13.5%

Vivid red-ruby to violet core, extravagant saturation in the scarlet rims, no lack of color anywhere. Serious ripeness in the currant, red cherry, plum fruit, puts a beat down on the bell pepper and creates more space for the cigar ash, mineral, leather scents, still too youthfully fresh to display extensive complexity. Full-bodied, really layers itself on your tongue while maintaining utmost clarity. Mild peppery kick in the leather, earth, loamy forest floor foundation. The tannins coat well, as if brushed with a sponge across your palate. The voluptuous currant, plum, blackberry fruit cannot take no for an answer. Minimizes any herbal

elements, barely shows hide nor hair of bell pepper. Lots of sinew in the finish, keeps grabbing your attention while also keeping it alive and extended. While there's abundant pleasure to be had today, great future too. Seductive wine. 91

Clos Roche Blanche  
Loire, Touraine, Cuvée Gamay  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$12.99, 12.0%

Fat, luminescent violet core reaches opacity, barely shifts into day-glo pink-magenta around the rims, hard to imagine richer color saturation. The nose has the texture of thick velour, more than ample raspberry, blackberry, strawberry fruit, the minerals, tobacco ash and touch of grass have to sneak around to find anywhere to pop up. Full-bodied, has the combination of acidity and tannins to keep it dry and borderline dusty in spite of the fact that the density of the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit equals the nose. More grip in those mineral, wet stone and ash dimensions here, swipe of mixed citrus too. Not particularly herbal, too plump for that. Bulls through the finish, long but lacking in the focus for elegance. Has future upside but drinking awfully well now. (Synthetic Cork: Nomaticorc) 90

Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)  
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Cuvée Tardive  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$22.99, 13.0%

Fat ruby-purple with a strong magenta cast along the rims, very well-hued and eye-catching. Lightly tart cherry, raspberry fruit scents, cuts a nice angle into your nose, firm stoniness and earthiness underneath, if fruited well enough to miss this at first, only a glimmer of herbaceousness, ends cleanly and decisively. Medium-bodied with attractive extract, excellent clinging power in your mouth. Hint of cocoa softens the first impression of the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, then gets straightened up by a burst of lemon zest. Displays stony smokiness throughout, pairs well with the tannins to provide a solid underpinning. Again, hints at an herbaceousness which never arrives. Finds an extra kick every time you think it's gonna plateau, admirable follow-through. Chalky powder left behind on the finish, keeps your tongue on its toes. Good upside here. 90

Brun, Jean-Paul  
Beaujolais, Côte de Brouilly, Terres Dorées  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$15.99, 12.0%

Clear, if with enough richness to approach opacity, red violet core gives way to fully saturated ruby-magenta rims. Pleasing floral lift to the nose, at turns minty, has orange/lemon citrus, as the cherry to blackberry fruit hits it turns more densely-woven and starts to settle in deeply. Medium-bodied, achieves both approachability and structure, for all of its gregarious and sweet raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit there's tobacco ash, minerals, tar and black earth too. Impressive slice of lemon, florality comes in periodic bursts. Both the tannins and acidity hold off but hit by the mid-palate to push things forward more than throw up a roadblock. During the second half there's a stimulating return by the fruit, it's not taking things laying down. Stoniness and fruit pit dominate the finish, in a good way. 90

Maréchal, Catherine et Claude  
Burgundy, Savigny-Les-Beaune, Vieilles Vignes  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$36.99, 13.0%

Mostly red crimson color, too burnt for the purple to really gain traction in the core, lightens at a consistent pace towards the garnet rims. Real funky earthiness in the nose, merde, a warm bag of potting soil, then lemon oil, toffee, tar, tart cherry and black raspberry fruit, really pulls you in a lot of directions at once, maybe too many. Medium-bodied, soaks in enough to gain weight over time as you drink it. The acidity definitely has an edge to it, no complaints that it lacks a keen zip. Extremely lemony, adds to the general pucker. The tartness extends through the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, bright with many twists and turns. Gives you one big herbal yank at the beginning and then releases. It has a decided savage, country edge to it, not an easy wine to enjoy, however, rewarding if you like the kind of challenge it represents. 89

Laplace, Pierre  
Southwest France, Madiran  
Blend  
2001, \$8.99, 13.5%

Not really opaque but the glow in the ruby-violet color gives it added fatness, remains vibrant fully throughout. There's lots of ripeness in the plum, black currant scents but it's wrapped inside a leather of animal hair and leather, salty too with a slight herbal lift, claws and scratches at your nostrils for some time. Full-bodied, layers of steel-like tannins set the stage right away. As in the nose there's no faulting the heft of the plum, cherry, currant fruit. The leather, game and earth components more demure and knit into the entire fabric. The kind of wine that chews its food slowly, you may think it lacks things to say but really it just says what's necessary. Why ask for more? 60% Tannat, 20% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. 89

Clos du Fief (Michel Tête), Domaine du  
Beaujolais, Juliéas  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$19.99, 13.0%

Perfectly clear, only a tiny bit of violet in the mostly ruby-magenta core, becomes noticeably pink around the rims, great shine. Fairly tight nose, doesn't quite catch at first but when it does there's ample raspberry, cranberry, cherry fruit scents, buttressed by stony earth, dried pressed flowers, dried grasses and sour lemons. Medium-bodied, arch acidity immediately has you back on your heels. Thankfully, the cranberry, raspberry, cherry fruit is in hunt mode and chases you down from behind. Bodacious lemon bite activates your palate, graphite, slate-like notes follow then a good kick of grassiness makes sure you don't get up off the mat. Don't forget the tannins as they are dusty and coat most of your mouth pores. The floral dimension is there yet tied up at present. Has all the components but not really coming totally together now, one to really age. 89

Chave, Jean-Louis  
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Mon Coeur  
Syrah  
2004, \$20.99, 14.0%

Unblemished with a squeaky clean clarity, bright violet at the core, switches gears swiftly to more red plum to ruby, plenty of hue through the rims. Very poised and fluid nose, almost downright dapper, actually makes it tougher to

parse out the licorice, black pepper, grapefruit pith and red currant, red cherry scents, no trace of herbaceousness at all. Medium-bodied, with enough grit in the tannins to cling and add to its overall presence. The currant, cherry, cranberry fruit has both ripeness and contour on its side, good crunch and then juiciness afterwards. Not awfully complex at the moment, lemon and white grapefruit citrus, floral touches and spice but not "sauvage" per se. Here, though, the herbal notes peek through more often. Impressive follow-through on the finish, no noticeable dropoff. Easy to grasp but structured enough to challenge on a basic level. 89

Champ des Sœurs, Château  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Fitou, Bel Amant  
Blend

2004, \$13.99, 13.5%

Pure, spotless ruby-purple color, holds consistently from core to rims, cleanliness gives a lot of sparkle to the surface. Just picked juiciness in the raspberry, blackberry, blueberry scents, flower petals and orange peels, nothing but the most youthfully primary of elements to comprise the nose. Medium-bodied, packed in there well, just as youthful in the mouth but the tannins run deep enough to give it an adult, if not mature, feel. The added dryness allows white grapefruit spray and very incipient minerality and earthiness to show. The red cherry, raspberry fruit muscular without being muscle-bound. Floral with a timid component of caramel coated milk chocolate. Plush through the finish too. Curious to see what it could develop over a few years. 50% Grenache, 40% Carignan, 10% Mourvèdre. 89

Casenove, Domaine La  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes,  
La Garrigue

Blend

2004, \$15.99, 14.5%

There's a warm hum in the magenta-violet core, achieves an easy opacity, very youthful red ruby to pink-magenta rims, deeply hued. The nose is marred a tick by alcoholic fumes, then scents of beef brisket, leather and candied orange peels, juicy and ripe plum, currant, blackberry scents continue to soften its nostril presence. Full-bodied, that round and ripe black currant, plum, cherry fruit would likely prove too sugary were it not for the dusty tannins coating the palate. Sweet orange to tangerine zest, has enough of a wildflower component to warrant its name. Nothing here evokes oak toast, however, there is a cocoa powder element. Suggests a gamey side but doesn't deliver. A very credible effort that may improve in 1-3 years. 35% Grenache, 35% Carignan, 20% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre. 89

Puzelat, Thierry  
Loire, Touraine, In Côt We Trust  
Malbec

2005, \$20.99, 13.0%

Rich warmth in the purple core, achieves about full opacity, really thick and lively ruby-magenta rims, superb coloration throughout. Scattershot nose, just blows through your nostrils with white grapefruit, sour plum, cherry fruit, minerals, oddly briny at turns, gone before it can settle in. Full-bodied, what's great is that it has body and solidity while it has a more unique textural lift that somewhat defies easy categorization as Malbec. In this vein, way too sour and pickled, grassy too, a testament to how grapes change expression due to place of origin. Evinces many

layers in the currant, plum, cherry fruit without a hint of overripeness. The acidity gets its body shots in on your palate but it is the tannins which have the knockout power. Sauvage in demeanor yet too unevolved to release its animality. Minerals and earth fill the finish with a light floral lift. Not commercial Malbec. 88

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Cheverny, Rouillon  
Blend

2005, \$17.99, 12.5%

There's a vague orange cast to the red-ruby coloration, would expect to show increasing bricking with even a short additional amount of time. Beyond an initial medicinal burst in the nose, there's big beautiful fruit ("BBF" to internet daters), raspberry, cherry, blackberry, has the kind of floral scents deodorizers are made of, cleanses in a subtly controlling way, wet smoke like a sauna about to close for the day. Full-bodied, almost confuses you at first with how it's so fruity and full of strawberry, raspberry juice and then tobacco ash, leather, chalk, burnt leaves, dried lemons and merde. The acidity coils like an old hose, sometimes the way you want, sometimes not. Challenging wine, allows you to enjoy while never really letting you get totally comfortable with it. Unspecified percentages of Gamay Noir, Pinot Noir. 88

Breton, Catherine et Pierre  
Loire, Bourgueil, Trinch!  
Cabernet Franc

2005, \$18.99, 12.0%

Lively red-ruby to violet color, hums with warmth, all rich magenta to plum red around the rims. Penetrates the nose with a burst that almost comes from below moving upwards to spray bell pepper, salt, ground tobacco and black earth, real fat plum, currant, blackberry scents, once the fruit starts to register, it gets a little lazy and sinks in. Medium-bodied, active tannins poke your tongue and keep the flavors hopping about. Black pepper, bell pepper, stones, earth, the parts not parsed out a great deal and yet coalesce into a pleasing whole. Transient cocoa, followed on by an entrancing gamey nuance. Starts to clean up and fold in on itself a few yards before the finish line. Quality stuff, will improve in the short term. 88

Boislauzon, Mas de  
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape  
Blend

2004, \$33.99, 14.5%

Richly endowed blood-red to purple colored core, more garnet red around the rims, still well-hued. Nose is stuffed with raspberry, cherry fruit that's ripe enough to appear grapey at turns, however the white pepper, garden herbs, orange citrus and milk chocolate rub the fat off the fruit, displays a pleasing floral perfume which provides lift too. Full-bodied attack yet does a good job of shedding weight as it progresses. Elevated herbaceousness in the mouth, still has that white pepper kick as well as the chocolate smoothness. Has sufficient acidity to focus the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, freshness helps it last. Floral dimension somewhat muted. Slightly rough texture left behind after the finish. Should have the necessary fruit to last as it harmonizes over the next couple of years. 90% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre. 88

Raffault, Olga  
Loire, Chinon, La Poplinière  
Cabernet Franc  
2004, \$17.99, 13.0%

The crimson-purple core passes into full opacity, the brick red rims are bricking or, err, you wouldn't call them brick are, but stay youthful. First to grab you in the nose are bell pepper, graphite and leather but there's plenty of room for plum, currant fruit, the density of the herbaceousness purposely misleads because the fruit is given time to show its stuff but really the beat down is about to occur any sec. Full-bodied, extracted enough to lay more than few coats of black currant and cherry fruit as well as grainy tannins on your mouth walls. This is able to minimize the bell pepper bit, in addition to saltwater, leather, grass and merde components, is to its definite credit. Smooths out, but its nails drag enough across your back to bruise. Olga Raffault is the American Indian correlate of coyote the trickster, what you see is not what you get, what you get is not what you see. 87

Cheveau, Domaine Michel  
Beaujolais, Saint-Amour, En Rontey  
Gamay Noir  
2005, \$19.99, 13.0%

Blazing red-magenta to violet in color, entirely immaculate, surface polished to a high shine, lush magenta rims with a soft pink touch. Super-tart cranberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, doesn't allow the flower petals and chalk dust to spread out, merde and damp earth come out before it dissolves, won't sit still. Medium-bodied, very clingy, almost rubbery in texture, super-pliant yet tight fighting. Charcoal, fried lemon peels, tree leaves, tea bags, lots of minerals and chalk. Possesses above average acidity, something makes it run a touch hot in the mouth but this seems to not be the culprit. Plenty tart in the mouth too, the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit get chewed up by the tannins near the finish. Needs time to settle down, hard to say when/if it'll happen. 87

Bellivière, Domaine de  
Loire, Coteaux du Loir, Hommage à Louis Derré  
Pineau d'Aunis  
2004, \$32.99, 14.0%

Light plum red color, has a gauzy glow to it, while on the pale side, its hue definitely holds through the rims. Funky nose of old driftwood, white pepper, whole cloves, brown earth, field grasses, the red cherry, strawberry scents have to fight through the noise to get heard. Light-bodied, the acidity and tannins both have a drying effect and clip things from the very start. Tobacco, tar, earth, broken stones as well as semi-mute white pepper get things going but fatigue early. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit tries to pick up the baton but lack a center. Turns increasingly herbaceous as it passes through the mid-palate. No real horrible flaws present, more so it's an issue of a lack of positives. Hard worker, just not a lot to work with here. 86

Peillot, Domaine Franck  
Ain, Vin du Bugey  
Mondeuse  
2005, \$18.99, 12.0%

Perfectly immaculate ruby-purple color, strong pink cast to the rims, the rims couldn't have more color if they tried. There's a good deal of freshness to the nose, however, there's a certain hollowness to it as well, the tart quality of the strawberry, raspberry fruit also hampers it from

gaining traction, subdued minerality and grassiness take this a step further, raising the question of just where the beef is. Light to medium-bodied, just as fresh in the mouth, yet the tannins here provide a welcome anchor and allow a great deal more minerality and chalkiness to fill in whatever space the sour cherry, plum fruit cannot. It's overall steadiness is to its credit, handles both the grassiness, white grapefruit and cocoa aspects. Whips its coat around its shoulders and turns on its heels on the finish. The kind of wine that would smoke a horn cigarette holder. 85

Baudry, Domaine Bernard  
Loire, Chinon, Les Granges  
Cabernet Franc  
2005, \$17.99, 13.0%

The darkness in the purple core crosses the border into opacity, still spotless throughout, a reddishness permeates the basic ruby rims. The nose has a scrunchy lift to it, conjures up a mentholated feel, the black currant, cherry fruit kicks its way through your nostrils, but it has to because the tree leaves and bark, herring, dry earth and fried lemons aren't out to make friends otherwise. Medium-bodied, sour attack, reinforced by the acidity and herbaceousness, no bell pepper per se but highly grassy. The currant, cherry, blackberry fruit is in no way weak, however, not really a match for the aforementioned. Tar, earth, tobacco leaf and minerals fight what would be considered natural allies to try and salvage the whole. Not a bad wine by any stretch, but tries to do too many things and, as a result, does none well. 85

## FRANCE WHITE

Quenard, Domaine Raymond  
Savoie, Vin de Savoie Chignin  
Jacquère  
2005, \$21.99, 11.5%

Brilliant white color, highly reflective, virtually colorless by the rims. Very focused, linear nose, pierces with white mineral chunks, licorice, lemon peel, wildflowers, peach and pear skin, no messing around and gone just about before it gets there. Light to medium-bodied, same regimented profile in the mouth but rounder and more expressive. Bright lemon, lime citrus, polished minerality, mild notes of dusty earth and grasses, however, in no way herbaceous. Has that "100 watt" acidity going on, releases in a friendly manner near the finish so the palate can relax. The pear, red apple, apricot fruit has crackle, not underripe, just snaps when you bite it. Nice sort of licorice-like aftertaste. Well-integrated package. 90

Quenard, Domaine Raymond  
Savoie, Vin de Savoie Chignin-Bergeron  
Roussanne  
2005, \$27.99, 12.5%

Full golden color, takes on a light amber cast around the rims when viewed at an angle, glassy surface shine, layered enough below to create the impression of movement. Lilacs, lilies, the nose evokes flower petals floating in water, fresh mint leaf, whole and uncut lemons, the peach and apricot fruit has that "OK, it's ripe enough to pick" feel, crunches when you bite, overall more presence than kaleidoscope. Full-bodied, fluffy like cotton in the mouth, lime and lemon pie, hard cream feel. The apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit has a mature, relaxed demeanor, speaks at a slow, steady pace. Light cinnamon spice. The acidity is flat and heavy, dries more to dull than to energize.

Floral water, has musk above and beyond airy lift. In the final analysis, you're not sure what to "do" with it. Beyond drink another glass. 89

Pinon, François  
Loire, Vouvray, Cuvée Tradition  
Chenin Blanc  
2005, \$17.99, 12.5%

Light white gold color, on the whole transparent with a shine that flickers with the angle of viewing. The brown sugar to honey shades in the nose dominant at first, yet it's the abundant florality which ends up in control, followed on by juicy lemon notes, perfectly ripe peach, nectarine, pineapple, red apple fruit scents and just a hint of wet stone. Medium-bodied, the burly acidity frames it but doesn't squeeze it, leaves a lot of open spaces for relief. The lemon citrus is just as sweet as in the nose, matches the florality pace for pace. Elevated chalk and stone by extension lower the presence of the pear, peach, nectarine, apple fruit. Hedges and then picks freshness over weight and solidity. Should prove versatile at the dining table. Maybe not with a Wendy's double, though. 89

Petit Chambord (François Cazin), Le  
Loire, Cour-Cheverny, Vendanges Manuelles  
Romorantin  
2004, \$15.99, 13.0%

The shine in the yellow gold color really brings it to life in the glass, easy to ignore the lack of hue when watching it move to and fro. Juicy lemon citrus and apple fruit cascade through the nose, relaxed chalky stones, no real honey to speak of but there's a lurking sweetness around, even if not to be found in the pear, apple, peach scents, florality fights the dissolve and keeps the nose going nice and long. Medium-bodied, fresh from the vibrant acidity with an ability to still stain the palate. The lemon component is super-juicy and has a lime edge to it. Cider profile to the apple, pear, peach fruit, as much like subtly spiked fruit juice as wine. Has minerality to it yet this has to fight to break the surface with any regularity. Comes up with allusions to just picked garden herbs at the finish but not a wine that's gonna bowl you over with complexity. But will do so with streamlined enjoyability. 89

Girard et Fils, Domaine Fernand  
Loire, Sancerre, La Garenne  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$19.99, 13.0%

While clear, the yellow to white hay color somewhat dull and loses intensity, hue fully gone by the rims, layered below. Bright, crackling nose of white grapefruit, powdered stone, brine, wet grass and a tight core of apricot, peach fruit, after it almost gets you to sneeze, lifts into a broad dissolve. Medium-bodied, has racy acidity with a freshly sharpened blade, however, its inherent sweetness so rambunctious it's hard not to focus on this. Pink grapefruit, lime citrus and ripe peach, pear, kiwi, apricot fruit fill the attack and persist well through the finish. Has more than adequate stoniness and chalkiness but this isn't ready to enunciate yet given its youth. Hits an easy stride on the back half, does challenge you but lets you win. 89

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Cheverny, Frileuse  
Blend  
2005, \$18.99, 14.0%

The grainy quality to the yellow gold color helps it pool and draw your gaze in, drops into huelessness at the rims. In

the nose comes at in in parallel, the wiry grassiness and zesty white citrus scents which appear Sauvignon derived get elbowed to the side by more pickled veggie and sauna stone wafts, very capable of holding your attention, the peach, apricot fruit scents step aside anytime a bull rushes by. Medium-bodied, sweet spices, lilacs, lemon to orange citrus, seems tentative about making any bold pronouncements. While sweet upfront, dries out credibly as it progresses, suggests some acidity that never fully materializes. Dried fruit, passively oxidized, the pear, apricot, peach, nectarine fruit has a vaguely candied nature to it. The thing is that it makes believe it's a mainstream wine, while winking at you. Has all the fruitiness and forwardness to please while the canny know something else is afoot. Unspecified percentages of Sauvignon Blanc, Menu Pineau. 89

Petit Chambord (François Cazin), Le  
Loire, Cour-Cheverny, Cuvée Renaissance  
Romorantin  
2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Translucent layers deepen the greenish gold color, holds nicely through the rims. Lightly pickled aspect to the nose, smoky, burnt oil, evens out as your nostrils adjust, cider feel to the apple, pear scents, just reminds you of a cool country cellar, full as much of past years as the present. Full-bodied and concentrated, the acidity acts more as a netting than spine, again it can't help but present itself as a wine older than it is. Apple juice/cider with pear, melon tones. A generous lemon juice component pushes its flavor profile to lime/pink grapefruit and really enlivens it. Also develops pickle juice with a hint of jalapeño pepper. Light earthiness, acts mostly as the proverbial cherry on top. Swirls slowly around your mouth before the finish, like a semi-clogged drain. Even given its relatively old feel, needs time mature into greater complexity. 88

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Cuvée Eden,  
Cuvée Vieilles Vignes  
Muscadet  
2005, \$14.99, 12.0%

Basic yellow straw color, its look lies between surface reflectivity and translucent shimmer below, mild green tinge around the rims. The nose is semi-blunt, forces way in there before slowly releasing violets, mint, chalk, too dense to really sparkle, the peach, pear, yellow apple scents do not completely get out and boogie, weight is its most noticeable attribute. Medium to full-bodied, has the same degree of density and weight here, does derive an initial burst of sweetness from the lime, lemon citrus element. The acidity is cut in broad sheets. Couple of mint leaves, violets but the emphasis is squarely on the solid stone foundation. You get most of the peach, pear, apple fruit just before the finish, after the wine relaxes and unclenches. It's big and impressive, although at present leaves you not sure why. Needs time. 88

Mardon, Domaine  
Loire, Quincy, Cuvée Très Vieilles Vignes  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$12.99, 12.5%

Mostly transparent white to yellow hay color, gains strength from a green glow, brown shades fill in the rims. Very forward peach and apricot fruit in the nose, quick turnaround into floral water, mineral water, stones and chalk, there's an underlying creaminess that extends its presence. Medium-bodied, has that old vine full, if laconic,

old vine feel, unforced and not extracted. A little spicy on the attack, denudes the florality, little citrus, some lemon peel at best. Plays up the terroir tip, stone, clay, earth, limestone, mix of things. Not much fruit, apricot and peach fuzz, apple seeds, pear skin, yet does have enough to avoid appearing empty. The acidity is even-handed, just about exactly where you'd expect it to be. Like napping on a park bench in the summer shade. 88

Vaults (Domaine du Closel), Château des  
Loire, Savennières, La Jalousie  
Chenin Blanc  
2005, \$21.99, 14.0%

Vivid white to yellow gold color, layered in sheets that seem to move independently, overall presents a clean appearance without flash. There's more latent power in the nose than expression, everything parceled out just so, measured portions of peach, pear fruit, white smoke, lemon honey, tea leaf, stone, stops on a dime leaving your nostrils completely empty. Full-bodied but hard to really tell as it's extremely dry and swiftly begins to deaden your tongue. The acidity has a cloaking, leaden effect, lacks vibrancy but it does keep things dry. Dried lemons, dried honeyed nuts, dried grass. Dried. The peach and apricot fruit mostly pit and skin. The stoniness has a round, if not soft, texture, no jagged edges nor burrs. Stays the same throughout, start, middle, to end. So, at once, points for consistency, but demerits if you want a sense of progression. Curiously dry finish! 87

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Moulin de la  
Gustaie  
Muscadet  
2005, \$13.99, 12.0%

Even with only a light yellow color it appears dense, gains from a slight green tint, turns completely transparent by the rims. Loudly minty, anise filled nose, stuffed with peach, pear, much lighter on the minerality, appears more forward and open than layered. In the mouth it is medium-bodied and the acidity goes a good way towards firming up the minerality, much more pronounced here. Dustiness fits the lemon citrus zest well, also brings out a pleasing herbaceous bite. Has minor licorice, floral suggestions, continuing the reversal from the nose. The pear, green apple fruit is lean and crisp, not rich enough to lengthen the apricot notes. No creaminess so the finish is just a bit tight. Kind of caught between two styles. (Screwcap) 87

Hautes Noëles (Serge Batard), Domaine Les  
Loire, Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu Sur Lie, Les Granges  
Muscadet  
2005, \$10.49, 12.0%

Fairly dull and watery white gold color, transparent throughout with the most minute fizz possible and still visible. The nose is more about heaviness and weight than breadth of scents, mostly lemon juice, dried honey, then crushed stone and dried flowers in second place, steady if lowgrade pear, peach fruit scents. Full-bodied, still leaden of foot, all movement seems to be strained. The acidity tackles your tongue rather than pierce it, can't deny it is dry but not especially fresh. Floral and lightly honeyed, suggests the possibility of a light botrytis influence. Bitter nuts and herbs take over the center prior to the apple, pear, peach fruit, never relinquishing the upper hand. Its power lacks focus and thus it comes off semi-muddled. 87

Chidaine, Domaine François

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Loire, Vouvray, Clos Baudoin  
Chenin Blanc  
2005, \$28.99, 14.0%

Glassy shimmer in the white gold color, while light of hue, does stay consistent throughout, certainly pretty enough. Measure of reticence in the nose, bit by bit unwinds with wet limestone and fresh flower petals, very good ripeness in the concentrated apricot, peach, melon fruit, the more you sniff, the tougher it clings to your pores, never full but always leaves you conscious of it. Medium-bodied, lots of violet powder upfront, you can try it is really trying hard to be dry, however, its soul keeps pulling it towards sweetness. Driven by lemonade, pink grapefruit juice, even the mineral dust seems semi-sweet. Consistent core of peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit, nothing flashy but plenty to suck on. Hard to gauge the effectiveness of the acidity, it's there but not always in control. 87

Brun, Jean-Paul  
Beaujolais, Terres Dorées  
Chardonnay  
2005, \$14.99, 12.0%

Brown to orange tinges permeate the basic golden straw color, actually causes more confusion than it is worth, can it just be an old glasses prescription and we can leave it at that? The nose is really drawn into itself, any deep scents you get are almost against the rules, good stoniness but in a monolithic manner, not shards nor powder. takes a bit for the peach, apricot, red apple, scents to soak in, not gonna get rewarded with additional sniffs and all that. Medium-bodied, has a pleasantly surprising degree of acidity, really grabs you by your lapels and discards you when it can't figure out what to do with you. the lemony sweet and sour interplay brings out more apple, pear and melon than the peach, apricot, although the latter is indeed there. Smoky in an agreeable manner, rises so as to draw you deeper in. Blindly taste most folks and Chardonnay will not be their answer. But that's the way the cookie crumbles. 87

Barth, Laurent  
Alsace, Rebgarten  
Riesling  
2005, \$22.99, 13.5%

Basic yellow color, neither shiny nor transparent, lulls you into a sense of knowing it by no one is buying that! The nose is nonchalantly explosive, a scattershot of coconut, brine, peach pit, pear skin, oil, offers a creaminess that never quite materializes, really the more you sniff it the more fucked up it smells. Medium-bodied, if you want more of a theme in the mouth keep waiting. The apricot fruit has more of a paste-like nature here which enables added traction. The acidity has teasing nature, not really in a position to do anything but can make you think it can. The finish begins to show air pockets and then the florality has to wake up and attempt concentration. Really, really, really wants to be something that, in this instance, it can't be. 86

## FRANCE SPARKLING

Tarlant  
Champagne, Brut Zero  
Blend  
NV, \$42.99, 12.0%

Bright yellow gold color, gently fades towards the rims, light pétillance, a sprinkle of widely spaced bubbles throughout. The nose is driven by candied, roasted pralines, honey and then lemon zest, mineral dust and

pleasingly full amount of peach, pear, red apple fruit scents. Full-bodied, foamy texture on the attack, releases to reveal strong toastiness and pie crust flavors. The acidity has the brawn to minimize any honey or glaze aspects, keeps it dry even as it screams out to be sweeter. The minerality and chalkiness runs an even pace throughout, always one step ahead of the peach, apricot, green apple fruit. Curious degree of sweetness for a non-dosage wine, not sweet per se yet not witheringly dry either. An idiot savant mutant? 34% Pinot Noir, 33% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Meunier. (Disgorged December 2005, made from 2002 and reserve wine, non-dosage) 90

Larmandier-Bernier

Champagne, Grand Cru Vieille Vigne de Cramant Blanc de Blancs Extra-Brut

Chardonnay

2000, \$43.99, 12.0%

Bright yellow color, vibrant if not rich per se, big snowstorm of loosely collected bubbles. Chalky, lots of pebbles and stones, some lemon peel and a splash of honey, pear, apple and peach consistent if not splashy, attractive fullness without too much bottom. Full-bodied, dry and very round, expands more than concentrates. Minerally and dusty, loses any trace of honey and the lemon/lime citrus grows in proportion to the free space. Broad acidity, little broad but chomps down hard. Big initial thrust of peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit, quietly declines from there with grace. Hint of creaminess in the center but gone by the finish. Really nice but could use and extra gear. (Lot 09, disgorged Juillet 2004) 88

## ITALY RED

Bologna, Vitivinicola Braida di Giacomo

Piedmont, Barbera d'Asti, Montebruna

Barbera

2004, \$22.99, 14.0%

Strong red-magenta influence in the purple core, fairly seamless transition to dark ruby rims, curious surface shine with tiny sparkles throughout. Very good focus to the expressive juiciness of the raspberry, cranberry, strawberry fruit, makes room for the animal hide, leather, black earth and toasted cocoa and coffee beans, has both purity and power. Medium-bodied, here the power lies in the acidity which is formidable and determinant of the whole. While freshening, it also appears to shorten the red cherry, cranberry, red raspberry fruit favors. Not as gamey but still earthy, more herbal and with added white citrus zest. While never huge, the weight lasts completely through the finish. Not for the faint of heart, is for a big risotto. 90

Dorigo, Girolamo

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Colli Orientali del Friuli

Cabernet Franc

2004, \$17.99, 13.5%

Luminescent ruby to red magenta brightens the purple base, while a little more red at the rims, consistent in color throughout. Fistful of white and black pepper in the nose, very aggressive, more leathery and earthy than impelled by the expected bell pepper component, bracingly tart cherry and dark berry scents, comes at you relentlessly, refusing to dissolve. Medium-bodied, not an iota less taut and forceful in the mouth, the currant, black cherry fruit, however, smoother and with soothing fullness. Yet, the pepperiness just as spicy and leather, blood iron and game

aspects just as rustic. The tannins show good polish and the acidity supports things quietly. Any herbaceousness holds off until past the center and never achieves a majority position. Fine degree of stoniness extends its "mountain-like" appeal. Have to like its in-your-face quality given its only medium weight. 89

Valle dell'Acate, Cooperativa Agricola

Sicilia, Poggio Bidini

Nero d'Avola

2004, \$11.99, 12.5%

Crystal clear ruby-purple color, engagingly reflective and glistens until it slightly dulls to crimson red along the rims. Leather, salt, fallen autumn leaves and damp earth compose the lion's share of the nose, youthful prune edge to the cherry, plum, blackberry scents without being sugary, more so just to be expected, overall moves on a steady incline upwards. Vibrant cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit resists the dried fruit pull, savory juice with added lemon sparkle. Medium-bodied, framed quite well by tannins, not overly drying yet keeps all the kids seated in their assigned chairs. Herbaceousness and minerality add to its svelte profile. In terms of mouth weight, seems to push down repeatedly at intervals rather than maintain a consistent pressure. Ends on a dime, in no way short, just conscious of where it wants to end. 87

## ITALY WHITE

Gelso, Azienda Agricola Ronco del

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Isonzo del Friuli, Bianco Latimus

Blend

2005, \$23.99, 13.5%

Dilute straw to white gold color, immaculately clean with sparkling shine, as transparent as the summer sky. Strong smoky minerality in the nose, almost oily at turns, earthy with a suggestion of leather, the kind of win which if sampled blindly you might think was a red wine, the very focused apricot, pear, cherry fruit passes through at the speed of light. Medium-bodied, very tight yet at the same time it's smooth in texture and noticeably creamy. River stones, minerals, damp earth, forest floor matter contribute mightily to its erect posture. The apricot, peach, strawberry, pear fruit presents consistent juiciness, always within a structured framework, not a drop is out of control. Develops a hint of almonds on the back end. The acidity quietly does its job, unobtrusively watchful. Very complete while also obviously young and in need of settling into itself. 80% Tocai Friulano, 15% Riesling Italico, 5% Pinot Bianco. 91

Terredora di Paolo

Campania, Irpinia

Falanghina

2005, \$10.99, 13.0%

Has a pleasingly resonant golden color, translucent from afar but gains a good deal of clarity closer, rims stay solid, even take on a mild bronze cast at certain angles. Lemony nose with cinnamon and ginger swirls, pineapple, nectarine and guava fruit, for all this has a slimmed down presentation with a counter-balancing chalkiness, invigorating, not too sweet and longlasting. In the mouth it is medium to full-bodied, interesting interplay of textures as it at first throws a strong acidic punch at you alongside minerals and clean white stones before moving onto a tacky, syrupy texture (once more without the usual sweetness). More floral here, less of the baking spices. Might seem somewhat green at turns to some. The

pineapple, nectarine, pear, apricot, papaya fruit more tropical in flavor than voluptuousness. Something like coconut residue on the finish. Has a lot going on. 89

Radikon, Azienda Agricola Stanislao  
Friuli-Venezia Giulia  
Ribolla Gialla  
2001, \$59.99, 12.5%

Light cloud in the seriously amber to orange pumpkin color, does lighten to dull yellow along the rims, no shine at all. Semi-oxidative nose of orange marmalade, dried baking spices, tea leaf, the wet wood element smells like a flooded Home Depot, only after some time can you draw out light apricot, peach fruit. Medium-bodied, has steady acidity yet it is neither cleansing nor cutting. At first it hits you like an unsweetened fruit cocktail, all jumbled together. The woodiness (not oakiness) is never lost yet not as prominent as in the nose. More orange/lemon marmalade, spicy in a dulled fashion. Laconically aggressive, not excessively energetic, more stable in how it keeps after you. The more you sip, the harder it becomes to describe. Nutty, citrusy, again suggests oxidation, just lulls you to sleep. More of an intellectual experience than visceral pleasure. 88

Dorigo, Girolamo  
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Colli Orientali del Friuli  
Pinot Grigio  
2005, \$17.99, 13.0%

Light white straw in color, while light bounces off the surface, there's a gauzy translucency below to bend and twist the light that does get through, no hue left around the rims. Voluptuously ripe nose of strawberry, peach, apricot jam, quite sugary, this heightens its florality and submerges the minerality and chalkiness, its fatness has it clinging to your nostril pores. Medium-bodied, equally sweet on the attack, here there's a touch more zip. The floral aspect is strong but too musky to lift or become airy. The acidity is average at best but not non-existent. Offers a smattering of stoniness along with curious toasted coconut notes. Nothing hidden in the shadows, naked to the world for your uncritical enjoyment. 87

## ITALY SPARKLING

Loredan Gasparini, Azienda Agricola Conte  
Veneto, Prosecco Montello e Colli Asolani, Brut  
Prosecco  
NV, \$11.99, 11.0%

Spotless with zero color, blindingly reflective, minimal bubble beads, the effervescence only visible as surface foam. Lively pear, green apple, peach fruit in the nose, dances around and so nimble you may not register it fully, more airy than floral or minerally, built so that nothing settles in. Medium-bodied, fair degree of initial foam, starts sloppy but 2-3 seconds in, that's all gone and it's rather still with a deep array of peach, apricot, pear fruit and suitably matching minerality. Attractive tangerine, lemon citrus has zing but also juicy sweetness. Overall, the acidity has a piercing ability and lends continuous dryness. However, the fruit's inherent sweetness endures to the finish. Engages all your senses, very fun but you have to like that residual sugar. 89

## GERMANY WHITE

Ress, Weingut Balthasar  
Rheingau, QbA Trocken AP #6  
Riesling  
2005, \$12.99, 11.5%

Shiny white gold, too bright to seem pale, fully transparent as well as colorless at the rims. The nose is curious for its heavy weight and presence while being almost devoid of scents, at most wisps of violets, shale, mineral water, lemon peel and peach fuzz. Medium-bodied, plenty of extract to add weight. Tangy tangerine, lemon and lime citrus hits like a ton of bricks. Dry as the Sahara desert, the acidity borderline on a rampage. Dry to the point of impeding the progress of the chalk and stone flavors. Tropical edge in the pineapple, nectarine, peach, passion fruit, without any juice. The weight persists through the finish, flavors probably do as well but your mouth is too numb by then to register them. There's a forgiving floral release at the very last moment. 89

Pfeffingen, Weingut  
Pfalz, Ungsteiner, Nussriegel  
Spätlese AP #23  
Gewürztraminer  
2005, \$18.99, 11.5%

Pure gold color, mostly transparent yet without shine nor reflectivity, more block-like in appearance. The nose has a creamy texture and while it leaves your nostrils full, it's not sticky having enough minerality to provide counterpoint to the peach, apricot pie scents as well as lemon custard and floral dew. Full-bodied, while lacking in acidity it derives admirable freshness from chalkiness and mineral water elements, pointing out its fairly unusual place of origin. The citrus is soft, tangerine to orange here. Same general creaminess, almost evokes white chocolate alongside the super-sweet litchie nut flavors. Rose water and light cinnamon dashes flit in and out. More than enough apricot, pear, peach, mango fruit, without any tartness nor over-the-top sugariness. Good pacing given its size and richness. [Screwcap] 89

## AUSTRIA WHITE

Schloss Gobelsburg, Weingut  
Kamptal, Gobelsburger  
Grüner Veltliner  
2005, \$11.99, 12.5%

Rich if dull golden color, almost brassy at some angles, shows a considerable amount of fizz upon pouring, holds intensity pretty well through the rims and not devoid of surface shine either. Nose intrigues for how it flies all over the place, white pepper, snap peas and chalk try to give it good posture while there's this creaminess that makes you want to sink into it, in the middle there's a spray of white grapefruit and fairly succulent peach, yellow apple and minor pineapple fruit scents. Medium-bodied with a firm bottom and a kind of leesy feel to it. Really sticks to your gums even as it presents mineral water, chalk and crushed seashell notes. Not boldly acidic yet is dry, its lack of lift helps it appear smooth. peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit, nowhere near tropical. Gently peppery, lowgrade white citrus. Encouragingly easy to chug but lacks the distinctive bite the grape is capable of. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 87

Hofer, H. und M. Weingut  
Weinviertel  
Grüner Veltliner  
2005, \$8.99, 12.5%

The glassy yellow hay color is light from the sides yet deepens to a bronze hue at an incline, bends too much light to really be transparent, fairly strong rims. Green peas, chalk dust, crushed minerals and pressed violets make up most of the nose, not especially green nor herbaceous, oddly subdued pear, apple, green melon fruit scents, overall lots of smiles but few words. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with an angular presentation, the acidity has snap and breadth, thus it makes both an immediate and lasting impression. Huge green apple component, the pear, peach fruit a distant second. Mildly floral, here there's more white pepper and minerality and the herbaceousness raises a tick or two. The white grapefruit to lemon citrus appears to hold off its release until near the finish. No glaring flaws, offers more bang for the buck than for the memory. One liter bottle. [Bottlecap] 87

## LUXEMBOURG WHITE

Clos des Rochers, Domaine  
Moselle Luxembourgeoise, Wormeldange Nussbaum  
Riesling  
2004, \$12.99, 12.0%

The yellow color is pale but what's there possesses a semi-luminescent glow, very clear around the rims with average shine. Nice minerally nose with saline, salt notes, lemon peel, its earthen nature takes precedence over pear, red apple, apricot scents. Medium to full-bodied, the acidity has no keen edge but it does pack a wallop. Mineral water, white stone dust, sandy earth imbue it with a palpable sense of place. Very smoky, like a thick cloud it rises as much as it sticks to what it passes, manages to leave a dry residue behind. More of a center here in the peach, apricot, apple fruit but not so much sweetness. Slight nod towards effervescence helps add a few more steps to the finish. Stays with you, bitter twist at the very end. 88

## SPAIN RED

Pablo, Viñedos y Bodegas  
Cariñena, Menguante  
Tempranillo  
2005, \$9.99, 13.5%

Bright pink-magenta to violet color, sparkly and perfectly clear, pure pink to ruby rims, nice and shiny. The nose is earthy with a leathery stripe, has real sour bite, tart raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, thyme and sage herbs, lightly grassy, lifts very well. Light to medium-bodied, brisk acidity gives it spring to its step, moves nicely while keeping its grip. Good spice, grassy, piquant orange/lemon citrus, leather, tar embellishments, releases some florality towards the finish. Firm tannins too, stern however there's pockets of relief to relax in. Dry finish, lots of activity, keeps you focused on it. Intense and structured, very much in the "food wine" mold. [Synthetic cork] 87

Pablo, Viñedos y Bodegas  
Cariñena, Menguante Old Vines  
Garnacha  
2005, \$9.99, 13.5%

Light, crystal clear magenta to violet color, vivid pink rims, shiny surface throughout. Ripe raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit in the nose, simple but honest, lemon peel, incredibly easy to access, no complexity. Medium-bodied, more tannic than expected, pulls in the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit so the latter makes a good splash but can't fully follow up. Dense herbaceous bite to it, good minerality and earthiness, has little of the ripe forward quality you'd expect if you hadn't tasted it first. The acidity is more present through the finish. Needs a lot more time to open than most wines at the price point which is, on the one hand to its credit, on the other hand not going to help it wine friends immediately after opened. [Synthetic cork] 86

Casajús, Bodegas J.A. Calvo  
Ribera del Duero, Casajús  
Tempranillo  
2004, \$12.99, 14.5%

Deeply saturated and glowing red-crimson to purple color, completely spotless, the rims are seriously dark, remains more purple than turns to ruby-magenta. The nose is somewhat volatile, peanut butter and merde before earth takes over, then becomes really quiet, only a mutter of raspberry, red cherry scents, sudden emptiness. Medium-bodied, doesn't lose that bretty side that throws things off. Merde and that peanut butter thankfully shorter lived. Spicy, this adds some buoyancy under the richer cherry, blackberry, light plum fruit. The tannins possess multiple layers, a winter blanket on your tongue. Faint trace of herbaceousness in the mid-palate. Lacks both meaningful complexity as well as smooth approachability. Weird wine. 85

## SPAIN WHITE

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE)  
Rioja, Monopole  
Viura  
2005, \$11.99, 13.5%

The yellow straw color has a green cast to it, flat and lifeless, minimal shine but the hue is consistent throughout. Highly oaky nose with big toast, caramel and spice in addition to lime peel, mint, might be overpowering but, as with many white Rioja wines, seems to fit things overall, plush apricot, peach cobbler and poached pear scents. Medium to full-bodied, here the acidity carves the fat out of the vanilla and ginger spice, still benefiting from a lime and orange citrus blast. Soft chalkiness, not really a factor. Even with its weight and general roundness, not too heavy. The pear, peach, apple, apricot fruit concentrated without getting sweet. Clean finish but necessarily fresh, too thick for that. Bitter tones on the finish conjure some nuttiness. Might be a year or two away from prime time. 87

## SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Waterford  
Stellenbosch, Pecan Stream  
Chenin Blanc  
2005, \$14.99, 13.5%

Faintly glowing gold reaches well from the core to the rims, not a great deal of luster but not terribly dull either. Creamy vanilla ice cream nose with sweet tangerine juice, pineapple, nectarine, pear, red apple fruit, more floral than minerally, displays good firmness and clear, if simple, presentation skills. Full-bodied, the acidity is more like an exo-skeleton than a spine, seems most interested in

pushing things inwards than providing direction. Polished peach, pear, mango, nectarine fruit, comes off as a bit too slick rather than unconsciously fluid. Again floral, here with a patina of almonds and other mixed nuts. More clay or limestone than minerals. The orange to lemon citrus picks up speed as things progress. It's a really nice wine to drink, even if you wouldn't necessarily peg it as Chenin Blanc. 87

## AUSTRALIA RED

Rutherglen Estates  
Victoria, Rutherglen, The Reunion  
Blend  
2004, \$16.99, 14.5%

Quite vivid and trim ruby-purple color, the surface sparkles with light, little bit of pink-red magenta in the flush ruby rims. Nose of just crushed berries, raspberry, blackberry, boysenberry, cranberry juice runneth over, palpable chocolate and mocha notes too, some mixed white citrus and wet wool but really not much else. Medium-bodied, not truly thick enough to hold its alcoholic content and thus runs a bit hot. Attractively high acidity, adds freshness and snap to the red cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit. Higher level of orange citrus as well as tree bark, wool, hard and stony earth. Minor cocoa bits but not as present as in the nose. Semi-truncated finish, bitter aftertaste. All this said, doesn't wear out your palate. 40% Mourvèdre, 35% Shiraz, 25% Grenache. (Screwcap) 87

## CHILE RED

Fèvre Chile, Viña William  
Maipo Valley, La Misión del Clarillo  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$10.99, 13.3%

Light violet to red ruby in color, plenty of surface sparkle, does an admirable job of holding hue intensity through the rims. A tart edge activates the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry scents, a bit breezy which helps its purity, light smoky and earthy qualities, the lack of herbaceous bite can't help but make you happy. Medium-bodied, that the tannins outscore the acidity turns it a bit squarish, flavors tend to sit there maybe longer than a more fluid wine. That said, again, the lack of overt greenness a decided bonus and there's a credibly solid center in the cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit. Tree bark and earthiness add to its bottom, smoky too, however, not the longest lasting wine ever. Leaves you on the fence about it, the clincher in its favor being the reasonable price for a Pinot Noir. 86

## CHILE WHITE

Fèvre Chile, Viña William  
Maipo Valley, Gran Cuvee  
Chardonnay  
2005, \$14.99, 13.9%

Semi-glassy old yellow gold appearance, the surface is as solid as an undisturbed pond, holds what hue it has through the rims. Crisply smoky nose, crackles inside your nostrils, vanilla custard and pie crust but the oak is not fully dominant, floral with orange and lemon zest, well-rounded out peach, pear, yellow apple fruit and breath of clean valley air. Full-bodied, equally spicy and creamy on the mouth entry, has energy to spare here as well, prickly and more acidity and overall cleanliness than you might anticipate. Even the floral dimension has zip, in keeping with the penetrating orange to lime citrus. Good restraint and measured pacing in the apricot, pear, peach, cherry

fruit, saves itself to ensure it lasts through the finish. The creaminess and vanilla infusion mostly dissipates past the mid-palate. Attractively compact. 88

## ARGENTINA RED

Vistalba, Domaine  
Mendoza, Lujan de Cuyo, Fabre Montmayou Pretty  
Malbec  
2001, \$21.99, 14.0%

The opaque black-purple core maintains a pleasing surface shimmer, thin if full brick red rims, quite full. The nose shows mountain air, pine tree, tar, wet oak wood as well as plump plum, cherry, currant fruit, reluctant to fully open up while consistently remaining full. Full-bodied with a firm web of tannins that support while allowing for a free range of movement. Game, salt, leather, tar and dried flowers provide depth and resonance. The solidly constructed plum, black currant, blackberry fruit is tight but lasts through the finish quite nicely. Florality and white grapefruit aspects are mostly submerged at present. Has verve and keeps working punches against your body. Has room to grow too. 89

Ruca Malen, Bodega  
Mendoza, Yauquén  
Blend  
2004, \$9.99, 14.8%

Red-magenta to violet hued core, stays dark at the rims but more garnet to crimson, hints that it might turn orange with time. Dusty nose, gives it fullness but not density per se, dampens the flow of the juicy raspberry, red cherry scents, earthy but still airy, more clean than presenting complexity. Medium-bodied, here one can blame the tannins for the dry, tacky texture and, once more, a credit to the ripe buoyancy of the raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit that the first half remains as sweet as it does. Just a glancing touch of vanillin oak, more earthiness and a twist of crisp grassiness. Dries out a tick more towards the finish yet stays quite smooth, flows without a hitch. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Malbec. 88

Durigutti  
Mendoza  
Malbec  
2004, \$10.99, 14.0%

Fat glow in the purple core, its vividness really catches your eye, boasts deep red-ruby rims of equal measure. Nose stuffed to near immobility, all currant, plum, cherry with no extra sweetness, fresh sage and rosemary, semi-mentholated, hard dark chocolate, a real workout to get anything out of it. Medium to full-bodied, has all the tannic structure it needs but still, boy, is it sweet. The filminess does nothing to restrain the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit nor the mint, vanilla powder and fried butter flavors. Adds in sweet lemon juice too and a momentary evocation of flower petals. Squares it shoulders well at the finish, faces the end with dignity and grit. Not a wine geek wine but it packs a lot in there for the average consumer. (Synthetic Cork) 88

## ARGENTINA WHITE

Vistalba, Domaine  
Río Negro, Emir Classico  
Torrontés

2005, \$12.99, 13.0%

Its shininess adds luster to the light yellow hay color, reflections engage the eye to mask the transparency below. Borderline poached feel to the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit in the nose, syrupy texture, floral water, while very bottom-heavy it does not lack for life, call it a graceful fullback. Medium-bodied, shockingly drier in the mouth, has all the extract and weight but not the cloying sugariness the nose would suggest. While it possesses and ample center of peach, apricot, pear fruit, this is balanced out by mineral water, lemon peel, stream stones. Clean and open in spite of all its downwards pressure on your tongue. Hard to finger the acidity as the reason for its dryness, but something has to be responsible. Increasing florality on the finish. Intriguing contrast between the nose and palate. 87

## URUGUAY RED

Pizzorno, Bodega Carlos  
Canelones, Don Próspero Tannat Merlot  
Blend

2004, \$12.99, 13.0%

Pure ruby color, darkens some at various angles to violet, entirely unblemished and transparent, bright red rims. Round core of cherry and red currant fruit in the nose, pushes out most of the competition, very light tar, leather, earth or dried lemon accents, delivers its main message and that's that. Light-bodied, while in the mouth there's an equal degree of that cherry, currant, raspberry fruit, the tar, earth, leather, tobacco dimensions are up to the task in meeting the fruit head-on. Not tannic but its bones are strong, doesn't slouch at all. Slight bitter edge elevates the herbaceousness, but just for a tick. Peppery, smoothes out appreciably by the mid-palate. The Merlot component is very evident, defangs the Tannat. Perhaps too much so. 60% Tannat, 40% Merlot. 86