

The Hanes Wine Review, November 2007 Edition

Having sampled this month a couple of shockingly good wines from Sicily and subsequently realizing that Hanes has only tasted one other Sicilian wine during all of 2007, seems like a good time to outline for you a quick overview of Sicilian wines. Maybe this shall address this entirely inexcusable avoidance of Sicilian wines this year. Please, don't whack Hanes, please.

As most people know, Sicily (aka Sicilia in the native tongue) is the large island off the southern bottom of Italy, across from the region called Calabria. As with most of Italy, there is a long and storied history of wine production. Them crazy Greeks colonized it way back in the 8th Century BC and started the wine ball rolling. Lots of other folks decided to pass through Sicily over the ensuing centuries, bringing with them all kinds of grapes and viticultural techniques. As a result, it's somewhat difficult to say what grapes should be considered "indigenous" to Sicily and which considered "modern" transplants into the wine scene there. But Hanes is never afraid to make the tough calls and this shall prove no exception.

In terms of white grapes you see a lot more indigenous varieties used, for dry, off-dry and dessert quality wines. The grapes which produce on the whole the highest quality wines are Inzolia (aka Ansonica), Catarratto, Grillo and Grecanico. Often you'll see Inzolia and Catarratto blended together or blended with the non-indigenous hellspawn grapes of Europe. Grillo and Grecanico more often get bottled as single grape wines. In broad strokes, the white wines have tropical fruit flavors, big and round textures and often a noticeably floral character. The acidity can be all over the map, depending more on the blend or vintage characteristics. The best attribute here is that prices remain firmly under \$20 for even the most distinctive wines so Sicily can be a source of value for white wines.

The grapes Zibibbo, Malvasia and Moscato usually get made into sweeter wines. Zibibbo is a variety of Muscat of Alexandria but Zibibbo sounds much cooler to say. Sicily was actually first known for sweet wines, no surprise given its warm Mediterranean climate and the fact that, as a major area of port cities, sweet wines can travel for export better under less than ideal transport conditions for wine, particularly when fortified. The wines called "Passito di Pantelleria" are considered among the best. They are made by using the Passito method and are from the Pantelleria island. Hence the name, duh. "Malvasia delle Lipari" wines are also good.

The Chardonnay, Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc grapes are the usurpers making the most inroads in Sicily, especially Chardonnay since everyone knows it's the best grape in the world next to Merlot. Chances are high the U.S. market sees more Sicilian Chardonnay than any other in the world since we're so lame we are afraid to say Zibibbo in public.

While Hanes can't say it's on his radar often, Sicily is very well known for the wines called Marsala. Marsala is a fortified wine created by the Brit John Woodhouse in 1773 to compete with Port, Sherry and Madeira. Marsala is a town in western coastal Sicily. Most production is by large commercial entities and there's three basic types, Oro, Ambra and Rubino. Grillo, Catarratto and Inzolia grapes make up much of the Oro and Ambra types with Pignatello and Nero d'Avola grapes making the Rubino ("ruby") type. No one drinks Marsala so there's no need to say anything more.

When it comes to red wine one can say confidently that Nero d'Avola is deservedly king of the hill. It makes for the richest, densest wines with the most structure and complexity. There, Hanes said it. Now it's out. Nero d'Avola is produced at all price points with the least expensive wines being the most fruity while the most interesting usually being among the most expensive. Wow, that's a surprise. Sicily has very poor soils, plenty of mountainous ranges and gets lot of sun with little rain. This can produce positive stress on the grapevines and a more earthy, ashen character to the wines. This is a good thing. If you like sturdy red wine some of the higher end Nero d'Avola wines are a must try.

Frappato is probably the second best native red grape grown in Sicily. It makes for less dense wines than Nero d'Avola and wines emphasizing more "red fruit" such as raspberry, strawberry or red cherry fruit. While it is bottled on its own, Frappato is often blended with Nero d'Avola and called "Cerasuolo di Vittoria," this blend being considered one of Sicily's best reds.

The next most popular red grapes include Nerello Mascalese, Nocera, Cappuccio, Galatena and Corinto Nero. All of which you surely recognize. "Etna Rosso" from the Mount Etna area is mostly Nerello Mascalese with some Nerello Mantellato and the volcanic soils can make this wine among Sicily's most distinctive. What's more appealing than a wine that tastes of volcanic ash?

Sangiovese and some Primitivo are grown in Sicily. Now, Sangiovese is mostly grown throughout mainland Italy and Primitivo mostly in Apulia. Are these grapes interlopers or indigenous? Ouch, it hurts just thinking about it.

The main invaders, though, are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. These grapes are increasing very swiftly in popularity with Sicilian winegrowers. The wines taste just like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah from anywhere else in the world.

It should be noted that Sicily is usually first or second annually in overall production of Italian wines. They make a lot of wine. A lot. Yet, as is oft noted, they curiously *consume* less wine than any other Italian region. That's messed up.

Given the Mediterranean clime of Sicily it will be interesting to see if the higher elevations and soil types will prevent global warming from making the grapes grown here overripe, or necessitate shifting from certain grapes to other grapes better

suited for the newly emerging climatic conditions. As Hanes has said, the most distinctive Sicilian wines have excellent structure and are able to reflect the unique terroir of the local soil compositions and micro-climates. For the time being, given the large quantity of wine produced and exported, there's no reason to not drink more Sicilian wine, particularly taking into account the relatively fair prices. Please, don't whack Hanes, please.

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This month's big winners... Most wines consumed this month while helping out at a trade tasting thrown by the purveyors of fine wine, Louis/Dressner Selections. Hanes's favorite importer, so hard not to like the wines. Mea culpa. The big new find was Occhipinti from Sicily, excellent wines of strength and character. The 2005 Nero d'Avola red made the deepest impression and appears to be one of the more structured Neros on the market now. At the other end of Italy, Nusserhof of Südtirol connected solidly with their 2004 Lagrein Riserva and 2005 "Tyroldego" made from Teroldego but spelled in a more Teutonic manner. Baudry's 2005 Chinon "Le Clos Guillot" is stellar syrah which may be enjoyed today but even more so in a decade. Eric Texier's Syrah from the Côtes du Rhône village of Brézème remains pretty much one of the best Rhône Syrahs for \$20 or so you'll find. Hanes loves Muscadet and, while not imported by Louis/Dressner, Ecu's best bottling is their "Expression de Granite" and 2005 is no exception. Perhaps it is for those who believe Muscadet should be aged. All nine of you. For \$18, you can get a great Jurançon Sec from Barrère called "Clos de la Vierge" — made from Gros Manseng. Jurançon remains one of the last places in France ignored enough to keep the prices fair for the thrifty consumer, screw the vigneron.

The best \$15 and under picks... The prices for Beaujolais wines from the "cru" villages continue to go up, high teens to more usually the twenties. Wish Hanes could mention them here but them days be gone. Pépière's Loire red blend called "Cuvée Granit" is still below \$15 and a tasty drink without being the same old, same old. Palazzone's 2006 wine from the Grechetto grape for \$14 is a plush and juicy Italian white. Hanes has always been impressed by the credible quality of Portuguese producer Cabriz's "Colheita Seleccionada" — it's \$7 fer crissakes and hard to beat at that price, especially if you want structure and not just gobby, manufactured fruit.

And the disappointments... Not many clunkers this month, but Hanes will say in passing that he never gets blown away by the Domaine de la Sansonnière wines made by Marc Angéli the way he thinks he should be, based off of the swooning wine geeks around him. A white and a red this month keep the trend intact. Oddly, Hanes also was relatively unmoved by Luneau-Papin's 2005 Muscadet "Le L d'Or de Pierre Luneau." Since this is a very good producer, let's say it's shut down and should not be consumed for like 50 years or something. Altos Las Hormigas has captured a fair share of the Argentinean Malbec market at least here in the New York area. But to Hanes's taste the product becomes more standardized and banal with each vintage. Even for \$9 it's worth taking a flyer on unknown competitors, of which there are increasingly many, in lesser quantities per producer.

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

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the older (or non-imported) wines he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2007.html>

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

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

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Kalin Cellars
Sonoma County, Cuvée DD
Pinot Noir
1997, \$46.99, 13.8%

Very light orange-red color, so clear and pretty you can't call it washed out per se but noticeably aged, somewhat of a cough syrup color. Ashen nose of old wood shavings, witch hazel, orange peel, cherry cough drops, old pressed flowers, while not a lot there in general it's so openly knit that each part stands out well. Medium-bodied, right from the start the acidity sets the tone, sharpening the grass, stone, lemon to orange peel and tea leaf components. Traces of caramel soften things by the mid-palate but

there's not enough souplesse in the cherry, raspberry fruit to truly continue in this direction. That same medicinal or rubbing alcohol thing is going on, relents into more broken stone and earth flavors. As always, an idiosyncratic drink which will polarize those who imbibe it. 89

Castle Rock
Sonoma County
Pinot Noir
2006, \$11.99, 13.8%

Very consistent red-ruby to violet color throughout, noticeably clear and transparent, no difference regardless of where you look. Herbal nose, oily as well, like a knife sharpening stone, moderating cola, vanilla bean and tart raspberry, red cherry scents, even given its pleasurable sides it can't escape the herbaceousness. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and while it can't shake that certain bitter edge, overall pretty damn smooth and without tannic nor acidic interference. Cola, mocha, orange peel, grapefruit citrus and stone, together give it a decent bit of range to draw from. Satisfying for the price but it could use more elegance or, conversely, at least more richness to cloak the grassiness. 85

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Kalin Cellars
Livermore Valley
Sémillon
1997, \$31.99, 13.8%

The gold foundation buttressed by an orange amber tinge, has sufficient darkness to fill the rims, not much shine but the color doesn't make you expect much either. Even as you register the cinnamon, nutmeg spice, brown sugar glaze and pie dough in the nose you sense the more sour lemon and cutting nectarine, pineapple, apricot fruit scents coming on, wants you to break a sweat more than relax with it. Medium-bodied, equally deceptive in the mouth as it has perhaps too many things in mind at once to achieve them all fully. Lemon and orange reduction blend together with honey glaze, flaky dough and flowers but during the mid-palate the sour herbaceousness asserts itself with tenacity, making the peach, apricot, nectarine, papaya fruit stand up and justify itself. Lasts like a bucket of water kicked over in a crowded room, lots of furniture to move before it's all gone. 75% Sémillon, 25% Sauvignon Blanc. 88

FRANCE RED

Baudry, Domaine Bernard
Loire, Chinon, Le Clos Guillot
Cabernet Franc
2005, \$29.99, 14.0%

Rich glow in the violet to garnet red core, lightens into a vivid magenta around the rims, very fat and effulgent. The nose is dry enough you could sneeze, tobacco dust, chalk, fine earth, almost sandy, even the bell pepper comes across in dried bits, no lack found in the cherry, blackberry scents, however, not a main player here. Full-bodied, would soak in and stain your palate were it not for the immediately drying tannins which check the exuberance of the currant, cherry fruit. Cigarette ash, metal bits, wet stone and horsehide come through clearly, the bell pepper and mixed white citrus not as much until the back half. Builds momentum as it progresses until it could plow through a brick wall at the finish. Remains remarkably open and clear of voice while at the same time convincing

you it's not showing what it can with age. A complete wine. 92

Descombes, Georges
Beaujolais, Brouilly, Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2005, \$24.99, 13.0%

Very attractive and pure red-ruby color, squeaky clean clarity has it losing some depth around the pinkish rims. You get some sulfur or merde at first in the nose then clean sweat and sour raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, stays primary and does not show any herbaceous nor animal notes, more licorice, flowers, mocha, any latent earthiness, stoniness not shining through, just bright fruit. Medium-bodied, hard to imagine more purity and clarity, focused without trying, lemon peel, tea leaf, sweet cooking herbs, sandalwood, offers a light incense sort of muskiness. The tannins broad and blockish, needs that jolt of acidity in the mid-palate as it smoothes things out considerably. The acidity in turn gets your mouth watering for the raspberry, cranberry and cherry fruit. Pleasing grassiness keeps the back half lively. Maintains very good grip through the finish without getting pushy nor too muscular. Hard not to like. 91

Bois de Boursan, Domaine
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Blend
2005, \$44.99, 14.0%

Pure red-ruby color with the amount of purple in the core equal to the brick red in the rims, slight gauziness, fully hued throughout. Chalk, tar, tobacco dust filled nose, has a very powdery texture, meadow grasses and flowers, possesses too much lift for much earthiness to show now, while both tart and deep the red cherry, raspberry scents reticent now. Full-bodied, the richness really comes through in the mouth, layers the tongue into immobility. Very ripe plum, cherry fruit, yet, that tar, tobacco, tea leaf and crushed stone add considerable dryness. The tannins in need of some serious time to unwind. Grapefruit and lemon citrus add considerable pep to the back half but the weight has already settled in. Meaty near the finish, very masculine, almost brooding style. May be starting to close up. Lots worth waiting for, though. 65% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre, 5% Crounise, Cinsault, etc. 91

Baudry, Domaine Bernard
Loire, Chinon, La Croix Boissée
Cabernet Franc
2005, \$32.99, 14.0%

A mild murk comes through the red-purple core without being cloudy per se, more like a blur, undiluted and broad ruby-magenta rims, possesses an evenly planed surface. Very quickly paced nose, almost rushes through. perhaps due to its purity, the ash, tar, stone and grass come and go, flicker of cherry, raspberry scents with a touch of green apple, the citrus and florality have little time to catch hold, all of this and yet curiously short. Full-bodied, more controlled and enunciating concisely in the mouth, the weight of the black currant, cherry, black cherry fruit has it sinking in completely, stains the palate well. The tannins uniform, drying but never archly, well organized, frames the bell pepper, tea leaves, cummin spice, stone bits. Doesn't show a great deal of mineral bite right now. Light dusting of cocoa powder shows through on the back half as your palate acclimates in general. Good length on the finish but by then the tannin accrual might be too much for some. Gentle giant. 91

Texier, Eric
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Brézème
Syrah

2005, \$19.99, 12.5%

Squeaky clean dark purple core, meshes seamlessly with the bright scarlet red rims, complete richness of color throughout. The prettiness of the raspberry, red cherry scents belie the leather, saddle soap, hilly scrub and earth which percolate beneath, this even more so as the floral perfume explodes into your nostrils, has all the enthusiasm of youth, the complexity of life's lessons yet ahead. Medium-bodied, naturally fit and trim, the acidity is fresh and shapes things into a tight package. Very fragrantly floral here as well, mixes in green olive and tar notes, touch of subdued molasses or caramel. The lemon citrus sweet first, more sour by the finish. Given its swift tempo in the mouth, the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit has to wave as it goes by on parade. Admirable organization at the end, groomed for the paparazzi's flashes to go off. 90

Etxegaraya, Domaine
Southwest France, Irouleguy, Cuvée Lehengo
Blend

2005, \$21.99, 13.0%

Curious in that the core could not be blacker in color and yet it's clear enough to see through from up close, begrudgingly shows purple hues before the dark ruby rims, highly reflective surface. There's a sluggish billowing to the nose of a cloud of flowers, then turns more earthward with leather, tar, err, earth and skittish cherry, currant fruit which seems to have to flit about to maintain a presence. Full-bodied, the tannins set in widely like a sumo wrestler before he charges. So, now that you're back on your heels here's some clumps of grass in black mineral earth, cowhide, tar and mild merde elements. In the other direction you get some mocha crisp, orange zest, dried flowers and more than sufficient red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. Stiff throughout, needs to oil those joints. If you pop the cork now you better like them countrified, otherwise wait 8-10 years. 80% Tannat, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. 90

Clos du Fief (Michel Tête), Domaine du
Beaujolais, Juliéas
Gamay Noir

2006, \$19.99, 13.0%

A sparkling surface meshes with crystal clear ruby to violet coloration, well mixed throughout, only slight reddening around the rims. Attractive ripeness in the raspberry, blackberry fruit scents, same for the lemon juice, sweet cocoa powder notes pitch in too, all this able to sweep the stony earth into a corner and stay primary, minimal herbaceousness, if any. Full-bodied, suave acidity and good maturity in the black cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit make for a cleansing attack, at once flavorful and streamlined. As it progresses the lemon citrus and white mineral dust extend the polished feel, betrays that same sprinkle of cocoa dust. The florality really blooms during the mid-palate and adds a slight tug upwards, otherwise clings to the contours of your tongue. Coils tightly enough on the finish to resist any tugging towards the finish line. Should only improve over both the short-term and then as it ages. 90

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des
Beaujolais, Côte de Brouilly
Gamay Noir

2006, \$15.99, 12.0%

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The ruby-violet core deep enough to palpably darken the ruby rims, creates a more block-like and homogenous appearance, none the less pretty for it. Juicy sprint into the nose by the blackberry, raspberry, cherry scents, mixture of grass and tilled poor soil, wedge of lemon thrown in, densely packed enough to end on a blunt note rather than show much lift. Full-bodied in terms of super-structure, broad steel beams of tannins and acidity easily frame anything that may want to hang off them. There's stone and ash and maybe like dinosaur bones or something in there. The herbal qualities not entirely dominant nor out of whack with the whole. A keen lemon to grapefruit citrus bite keeps the energy current flowing through the back half. While aggressive, of a good temperament. [Synthetic cork] 89

Souhaut, Hervé
Rhône, Saint-Joseph, Sainte Epine
Syrah

2005, \$44.99, 12.0%

The violet shades in the core are light enough to give in easily to the red-ruby shades, close to pink magenta by the outer rims. At first the nose has a lot of funk, settles down to just leather, wet fur, lemon peel accents, the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents grow as it sits, displays just enough florality to end on a friendly note. Medium-bodied, again it is floral with generous lemon/orange citrus and sweet raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit at first before loads of dusty stones and tarry earth. The tannins hard-nosed but not unforgiving, combined with the acidity has structure to spare. Olive pits appear later, not very meaty. Plenty of thrust and length, very streamlined. Nothing demure here. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 89

Puzelat, Thierry
Loire, Touraine, La Tesnière
Pineau d'Aunis

2006, \$21.99, 14.5%

The purple hues fall easy prey to the red crimson, the latter dominating the spectrum through to the rims, barest suggestion of pink at the outermost rims. Nice twin barrel of green and black pepper in the nose, ground tobacco dust and dried lemon peels play a part too, even as the poor dirt makes its plaintive cry you can hear the cherry, raspberry, strawberry scents sing. Medium-bodied, nice and juicy, strides confidently without coming off as unapproachable. The strawberry, cherry, raspberry fruit buoyant as it matches up with the tobacco ash, wood embers and dried grass elements. Zippy lemon citrus also keeps it nimble and quick to change direction. Does a very good job of appearing old and young at once, the flavors seem aged yet the structure displays unbridled youth. Well, go figure. 89

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le
Loire, Vin de Table Français, La Gravotte
Pinot Noir

2006, \$22.99, 13.5%

Not much, if any, purple in the core, more so crimson to ochre hues, shows no sign of dissipation around the rims, clear and tenaciously hued. Ground stone and minerals drive the nose, this understood not trying to make a "terroir" statement, more just wants to stay crisp and linear as it unfolds red cherry, raspberry fruit, cut grass, lemon peel, doesn't have the richness to forestall the alcoholic fumes, the latter doesn't upset the apple cart but there's no "Plan B" here. In the mouth there's a more measured and predictable experience, not an entirely bad

thing, lets you take it on your own terms. The acidity and tannins ain't shy about stretching out during the solos, when the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit finds room it's nervous about how long it will last. Grassy without being herbaceous, provides a pleasing mélange of ash, stone dust and lemon peel. Suggests olive pit and tar at moments, kudos to that terrain, dammit. In the end, best not to analyze the parts, just remove oneself to a distance and bathe. 89

Barthod, Domaine Ghislaine
Burgundy, Chambolle-Musigny, Aux Beaux Bruns
Pinot Noir

2004, \$82.99, 13.5%

Pure and clear, the violet element willingly yields to red-ruby throughout, tactful consistency. Big, plump nose that loses some direction, beyond the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit it marshals wood ash, ember smoke, stone powder, and mushroom bits which evoke an even better, complete future. Medium-bodied, the red cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit slides in like a rambunctious three year old. The mix of lemon, orange, white grapefruit citrus is juicy enough to forestall that ash, stone, parched earth side, no greenness here nor anything to upset the cart. Thus, has a good sense of balance and the acidity keeps it clean and fluid. Tightly wound enough to be a good package now, yet with room to fill out. 89

Texier, Eric
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Vieilles Vignes
Blend

2005, \$44.99, 13.5%

There's a kind of angry red hue through the purple core, as if it wants to usurp the throne, spotless and tightly woven together, the ruby rims stray nary an inch from the rest. Steady waves of red cherry, blackberry fruit combine with licorice, flowers and butterscotch hard candy to break your nostrils open, while vulnerable only a smattering of meadow grasses and flowers fill the breach, hints at a more meaty element. Medium-bodied plus, certainly capable of coating the tongue but this layer can be shaken off by the determined. Which means you have to appreciate and search for the herbal bite, lemon to orange zest, and semi-mute stoniness. The acidity an unwilling searchlight but once you get it under control, a lot falls into place. Juicy raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit, nothing unusual but soaks in well. The type of wine which requires a certain measure of non-intellectual patience. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Mourvèdre. 88

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des
Beaujolais, Fleurie
Gamay Noir

2006, \$19.99, 12.0%

Perfectly clear violet color, the core without achieving full opacity, the magenta ruby rims spread widely and possess rich luster. Compact, yet expressive red cherry, raspberry, almost currant fruit in the nose, the violets make more of an impact than the stone dust, very pure rather than complex, lingers well. Medium-bodied, the strawberry, cherry, raspberry fruit chained up some by the raw force of the tannins and acidity. Just when the fruit starts to click in the powdery ash and stone components cloud the view. The same could said for the florality and orange zest, clear enunciation but clipped. Very dry finish as expected, only time will tell if it will unclench into a more fluid experience. 88

Pépière, Domaine de la
Loire, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France/Marches de
Bretagne, Cuvée Granit
Blend

2006, \$13.99, 12.0%

Average darkness in the ruby-violet core, very good clarity, perfectly consistent right through to the rims, attractive reflectivity as well. Dusty nose of stone and mineral powder as well as ground grasses, the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit has a sinewy and deceptively long presence, brings out lemon peel and lilacs along with it, curiously full of alcoholic fumes given its relatively low alcohol percentage. Medium-bodied, possesses nice grip right off the bat and soaks in even with the fairly muscular tannic and acidic framework. The thrust in the red cherry, raspberry fruit equal to the level of cinder ash, stone dust, tar and parched earth. The lemon and to a lesser degree white grapefruit citrus holds off until the end and crackles like fire embers. Good posture and manners without being formal. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Franc, Côt, Merlot, Gamay Noir. 88

Descombes, Georges
Beaujolais, Régnié
Gamay Noir

2006, \$21.99, 13.0%

Very light violet fades within the core to ruby and red magenta, more pure pink around the rims. Pretty nose but without punch, the strawberry, watermelon, raspberry scents spring to action very well and able to bring with it pebble, lemon peel and cocoa powder for added heft, never quite fills out but this not necessarily a flaw. Medium-bodied, good, if not remarkable, acidity. Through the attack offers elevated cocoa and mocha notes. The sweet orange, pink grapefruit and lemon citrus breathes a lot of life into it. Plays up more white minerals and stone rather than earth per se. Does have a steadily herbal side which in turn helps keep things erect. Seems like it knows itself well, decides what it can do and then does it, no overreaching. Correct finish. 88

Clos de la Roilette (Coudert Père et Fils)
Beaujolais, Fleurie
Gamay Noir

2006, \$21.99, 13.0%

Crystal clear red-ruby in color, consistent from core to rims, very nice surface shine. Deceptively airy nose, lifts but keeps its density into the sky, lots of floral perfume which contributes to the swirling, powdered mineral dust kicked up into a cloud, in no way herbaceous, more spring water and fresh air, curious brush of cinnamon, the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry scents light of touch. Light-bodied, spreads itself in a thin membrane across the tongue, lemon zest and mineral dust make for a semi-bracing entry, again clove and cinnamon appear to provide some exoticism. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit possesses a solid core and spreads out from that across the palate, credible thrust through the finish. The acidity is on the light side, you can feel it start to dissipate passing the mid-palate. Circles back on itself to close the loop, everything in its place and orderly. Just lacks the extra kick. 88

Breton, Catherine et Pierre
Loire, Bourgueil, Franc de Pied
Cabernet Franc
2006, \$22.99, 12.0%

Cloudy ruby-violet at the core which easily segues to a more red-magenta at the rims, well-integrated with nothing unusual about it. Surprisingly light nose of strawberry, raspberry fruit, flits about before the dusty earth and grass powder lay a coating down across your nostrils, is as floral as herbaceous, possesses a slow and gentle dissolve which is remarkably airy. Light to medium-bodied, steady and focused without excess richness, the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit actually comes through better as a result, less tannic structure to interfere. The bell pepper, tar, ash and tobacco coalesce into a nice core while peaceably releasing into red raspberry, cherry fruit, little of dark fruit character. Does develop a slight grainy quality through the finish, helps it gain traction and length. Compact ending, every promise met in the spirit of humility. 88

Desvignes, Louis et Claude
Beaujolais, Morgon Côte du Py
Gamay Noir
2006, \$23.99, 13.0%

The light violet core lightened still by a strong ruby element, the rims fully hued with these colors and integrated to the core. The nose semi-mute and closed in on itself, pulverized stone and chalk dust and then a big effort by the cherry, blackberry fruit to break through and sing, has a light floral and orange blossom breeze, you suspect that once it knits together it will have more oomph. Light to medium-bodied, its relative boniness heightens the presence of the acidity and even tannins as a result. Pared down strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit, good sourness extends its presence. Suggests herbal bite but thankfully doesn't deliver, leans more on the lemon, orange, grapefruit citrus and, to a lesser extent, stone bits. Moderate length on the finish, pulls up some. 87

Sansonnière (Mark Angéli), Domaine de la
Loire, Anjou, Les Jeunes Vignes des Gélinettes
Blend
2005, \$29.99, 13.5%

Pitch black core, the only way any purple comes out is through the surface froth when you immediately pour, the scarlet red rims dark and brooding as well, no sign of any filminess at all. The nose is chocolate at first with a fair amount of toastiness, way dense and with little room to move, strata of earth, you'd break a shovel trying to get an inch into it, vague floral brush helps you get at a measure of black currant, black cherry scents but not easily displaying its fruit. Full-bodied with the consistency of wet cement, slowly grinds against the palate with all its weight. Has tannins out the wazoo, might as well as suck on dry ice for all you can feel afterwards. Still, displays admirable floral perfume and that the currant, cherry, plum fruit can be identified at all to its eternal credit. There's whispers of that mocha, butter toast but not long to survive hereabouts. Same for any bell pepper or lemon zest notes. You damn well better be a tannin pig to survive this one. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon. 86

FRANCE WHITE

Texier, Eric
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Brézème, Domaine de Pergault
Roussanne
2006, \$48.99, 13.0%

Serious filminess somewhat deadens the rich golden color but it lasts well into the rims and forms a solid block in the glass, making shine less of an aesthetic issue. Maintains a seriousness in the nose despite its roundness and lack of bite, like a somber Orson Welles or something, slightly waxy dimension, only nods at honey or flowers, the peach, apricot, pear fruit fresh and ripe, there's some stuff going on but it's like watching someone dance behind a sheet. Full-bodied, pours itself slowly into your mouth like a warm Georgian summer night, almost yawns. More honey, wax and mint oil here, opens up the peach, apricot, yellow apple, persimmon fruit and lets some juiciness flow. Grazes you with citrus and grass but gone before truly registered. So much exo-skeleton you may not realize how the acidity enlivens the flesh there. Always a hard grape to cuddle up to, about as close as you can expect. 90

Petit Chambord (François Cazin), Le
Loire, Cour-Cheverny, Vendanges Manuelles
Romorantin
2006, \$16.99, 14.0%

Vibrant glow enlivens the golden hue into deeper richness, pools deeply enough to distract from any reflectivity, pushes through nicely to the rims. The nose is fresh and swirling enough to momentarily distract you from the downward pull its weight effects in your nostrils, floral and lemony at first before thicker green apple, peach, apricot takes hold as well as a smoky stoniness. In the mouth it fully delivers on its weight, full-bodied and not shy about using its heft to impress. Pleasingly honeyed, especially as the acidity is wicked strong enough to restrain any excess sweetness, the lemon reduction and fleeting notes of pie crust provide appropriate counterpoint to the more angular nectarine, papaya, peach, pineapple fruit. As in the nose the stone and mineral components cloaked until the penultimate moment, provides an ashen dryness to the finish which helps tie it all together. 90

Ecu (Guy Bossard), Domaine de l'
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Expression de
Granite
Muscadet
2005, \$17.99, 12.0%

Full golden color, pools outward from the core with layers of confidence, very clean, you can find follow every translucent ripple. The nose has a wiry fullness, no bones poke you but you ain't pinching an inch either, wet stone, mineral water, wet chalk, the lemon scents more juicy than keen, the peach, apple, apricot scents have no problem lasting long, heft its best attribute while at the same time you don't miss the cut. Full-bodied and densely arrayed across your palate, hard to move your tongue left or right. There's sufficient bitterness in the wild grass and straw elements to get your senses open, adds edge to the lemon citrus as well as elevates the stone, quinine parts. The acidity more like a lead weight than steel blade. The peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit show about as well as could be expected given the circumstances. A wine for down the road although its sheer fullness might impress newbies today. 90

Vaults (Domaine du Closel), Château des
Loire, Savennières, Clos du Papillon
Chenin Blanc
2005, \$34.99, 14.5%

Light golden straw color, fairly shiny but not crystal clear, an appreciable fade at the rims. At first the scents stick to the bottom of your nostrils then the wax and honey warm into more liquid form, very lemony, to the point of distracting you from the stone, streamwater elements, further on offers mint, motor oil, wildflowers and just more hone, as it dissolves you realize there's plenty rich peach, apricot, red apple fruit there. Medium-bodied, comes across like it has consciously given up weight per se to achieve density, winds together until it's a thick soup of honey, mint, beeswax, nectarine, peach, pear, apricot fruit and lemon/orange juice. The acidity blunt, thus its true power may be disguised, derives most of its power from the aforementioned density than edginess. Overall, the sweeter attack dissipates into a fine spun powdered sugar by the finish. Lots of follow-through at the end, stays balanced with no one element masking any other. May be losing some exuberance and shutting down already. 89

Barrère, Anne-Marie
Southwest France, Jurançon Sec, Clos de la Vierge
Gros Manseng
2005, \$17.99, 14.0%

Plenty of orange, zinc hues throughout the deep golden base, its wavy translucency helps hold the color through the rims, only minor fade to more yellow hues. The nose highly evocative of apple pie with baked piecrust and sweet spices, unwinds to produce licorice, orange blossom and some pear, cherry fruit scents too. Medium-bodied, very sweet attack of concentrated apple, peach, pear fruit and that dough and honey glaze stuff. That said, the acidity has power to spare and shrugs this sweetness off like a fly. This heightens the lemon and orange citrus in addition to a dusty layer of chalk and ground up minerals. Same can be said for a brief flourish of cut grass as it passes the midpoint. The fruit returns with a freshly bitter pit and skin kick at the end. 89

Texier, Eric
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône
Viognier
2006, \$16.99, 12.5%

Yellow lemon peel sort of color, curious combination of bright surface and dull depths, turns mostly transparent through the rims. Zooms right up into your nostrils so that it's not quite so easy to parse out, lemon and then lime spritz, bitters as well as a moment of creamy relief, the florality blooms as expected but gets run down by the wet stone accents, the peach, apple, apricot fruit as much skin fuzz and pit as flesh. Medium-bodied, much denser and tightly packed than many of its type, you sense it could lift and achieve a certain airiness but not interested. Again, lime as much as lemon citrus, orange too. The floral aspect more oil than breeze without seeming musky. Maintains that fuzz and fruit pit feel in the apricot, peach, nectarine, apple flavors, in no way lacking in ripeness, simply has that "just picked" nature. Very good acidity for the grape, helps forge a few more feet on the finish. Might divide opinions. 88

Sansonnière (Mark Angéli), Domaine de la
Loire, Anjou, La Lune
Chenin Blanc
2005, \$29.99, 14.0%

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There's a subliminal orange-brown infusion through the base golden color, not dull in a boring way, just, err, diffuse, every iota of hue in the core there at the rims. Cinnamon and clove spiced pie dough fills up the nose, juicy lemon keeps it approachable, fresh butter, then nectarine, peach, apricot cobbler fruit, lemon pie, everything about it open palmed and open. Full-bodied, the palate replicates the nose closely, maybe some interesting cocoa powder on top of the orange and lemon citrus, the cinnamon and nutmeg spice mulls the apple, pear, apricot, peach cider and all that. Can't say it's devoid of acidity but this is another one of those wines that sees narcoleptic richness as a virtue, it really is asleep on the couch. Presents a kaleidoscope of flavors but no idea of what it's all for. Good wine to drink if you're already stoned? 88

Pinon, François
Loire, Vouvray, Cuvée Tradition
Chenin Blanc
2006, \$19.99, 12.0%

The day-glo quality breathes whatever life is possible in the pale yellow straw and white stone colors, the rims are bleached but this fits with the whole. There's an initial move towards stone in the nose but then the green apple, peach, pear effortlessly steals the show, not to say the stone and pebble parts aren't there, the lemon citrus whipped into a meringue consistency, floral dissolve. Medium-bodied, holds its weight completely throughout. the lemon citrus refreshing and holds moments of lime and white grapefruit. The broad shoulders of the acidity relegates any honey or brown sugar notes to the background without unduly drying things out. Clear contours in the peach, apricot, pear fruit, ready for reveille in the morning. The finish sheds layers with deliberation, neither polite nor rude, you just have to follow its lead. 88

Bellivière, Domaine de
Loire, Coteaux du Loir, L'Effraie
Chenin Blanc
2005, \$28.99, 13.0%

Pale yellow straw in color with enough shine to compensate, moderate fading along the rims. Big, juicy nose yet old in feel with natural concentration, much more honey to be had than wax or oil, this in keeping with its sweet demeanor, has an odd hot pepper burst before very smooth and round apple, peach, apricot, pineapple fruit, not just sugariness here, there's a little underlying stoniness, however, except for the absence of overt manipulation it doesn't scream of "place." Full-bodied, juicy here unto sloppy, sloshes around playfully in the mouth, the cotton candy and powdered sugar adorning the peach, apricot, nectarine, melon fruit like a sprinkled dessert. With a paucity of acidity, not much to prod it up off the couch, more like pushing it off onto the floor. Relaxed to being laconic. The stone, stream water dimension here demands more attention, melds well into lemon pie and, uhh, honey. Really such a damn happy wine, if you don't mind homogeneity it's great. 88

Luneau-Papin, Domaine Pierre
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Le L d'Or de
Pierre Luneau
Muscadet
2005, \$17.99, 12.0%

Light yellow day-glo paint color to it, hums in the core and then steadily fades through to the rims, moderate surface shine. The flowers and lemon pie notes in the nose short-lived as the slabs of limestone and stream water fill up

your nostrils, some grassiness momentarily queers things, then the peach, apple, cherry, apricot fruit able to subtly catch your attention, mint too, it behaves like it's not used to wielding its powers. Full-bodied, nice broad shoulders provide the framework for the minerally stream water, white stone, bitter straw components to come forth without stealing the show. As a result, the creamy belly of the peach, apricot, pear fruit without giving up shape. Even as the lemon citrus softens things a bit this isn't a soft wine. Tight-lipped enough that it's anyone's guess where it's going down the road. 87

Barth, Laurent
Alsace, Pinot d'Alsace Cuvée Buster
Blend

2006, \$19.99, 12.5%

Really messed up color, yo, like a pumpkin or carrot, zinc orange fades to more yellowish transparent rims, zero shine. The nose is like the dried fruit section of a Middle Eastern food store, all dried apricot, peach, pineapple, apple fruits, caramelized lemon peels, once there's an iota of space the stony accents able to show. Full-bodied, layered onto your tongue like it wasn't meant to be dug up for years, not inert but not looking to be disturbed either. The orange and lemon reduction sweet and sour, brings out whatever tropical bite resides in the nectarine, apricot, pineapple, papaya fruit. Finds a pleasingly stony finish with spring water freshness, where the flub did that come from? A non-interventionalist special, be this better or worse. Unspecified percentages of Pinot Auxerrois, Pinot Blanc. 87

ITALY RED

Occhipinti, Azienda Agricola Arianna
Sicilia, Siccagno

Nero d'Avola

2005, \$29.99, 13.0%

Bright ruby red, positively bounces out of the glass, excellent surface shine and clarity, consistent throughout. Brown earth and dust fill the nose at first, hints of caramel, sweet smoke, juicy raspberry, red cherry, almost strawberry scents, strong orange zest as well, has spine in the nostrils while quite agreeable and very long. Medium-bodied, for its level of energy it possesses good balance and is able to deliver velvety plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, much more "dark fruit" than in the nose. Maintains a tannic base fabric to ground the stone, ash, dry earth and hay flavors. The lemon to orange citrus sweet yet only momentarily, not a continuous influence. Really crests well in the middle, then begins to dry out and firm up by the finish. Well-scrubbed and fresh ending, exceptional cleanliness. 91

Nusserhof (Heinrich Mayr-Nusser), Weingut
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Riserva
Lagrein

2004, \$29.99, 13.0%

Completely black core and, for all intents and purposes, rims, razor thin blood red hue encircles the impenetrable middle, nice shine across the surface plane. Juts into the nose with pride, freshly cut leather, lemon peel, at moments shows a prune edge to the plum, cherry scents, pine needles, sweet sage and rosemary herbs, blows away like a crisp autumnal breeze on a mountain top. Medium-bodied, could have more heft but has the sense of reserve to not hit you with all its got. Swirls of pine, licorice, lemon, violets, leather, dried beef and mountain grasses build and

build without ever accreting into a ground-bound mass. The sour and sweet red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit zips along at a brisk pace, same can be said for the lemon to white grapefruit citrus. The earthiness and leatheriness develops a scorched or sunburned aspect which resembles oak toast in texture, not flavor. Very tarry finish, like the work crew repaved the street after repairing the cables underneath. 91

Nusserhof (Heinrich Mayr-Nusser), Weingut
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Tyroldego
Teroldego

2005, \$29.99, 13.5%

Black tinged blood red core, as if from a fresh wound, as dark as it is glows impressively, lightens barely a shade in red towards the fully saturated rims. At first some oak toast shows through in the nose but no longer term match for the dense minerally black earth and stone chunks as well as green pepper notes, the blackberry, cherry scents have all the concentration of dried fruit but almost none of the sweetness. Full-bodied, charges into the mouth like a horde of Mongols, hard to imagine it any thicker, very smoky and tarry, churns into your mouth walls. Has sufficient stony bite to quash the herbal elements, highly aggressive tannins punch you even if you apologize. Angular nature to the currant, cherry, red plum fruit, it's there but not able to perform many solos. Very young, if you want a challenge drink it now, the more cautious should wait. 90

Occhipinti, Azienda Agricola Arianna
Sicilia

Frappato

2005, \$29.99, 12.5%

Light violet, easily dismissed in favor of more garnet to crimson hues, any orange at the rims swallowed back into the brick red colors, provides both cleanliness and depth. In the nose there's a slightly reductive quality to the plum, cherry, raspberry fruit, both lends concentration and sourness, any merde and bitter chocolate fades into the lemon, forest twig, wild grasses components, maybe doesn't move gingerly but you know when it moves. Full-bodied, nimble enough to get the job done but makes you want to ask just what exactly the job is. Aggressively sweet and sour raspberry, strawberry, red cherry and apple fruit leaps out in front and masks the reductive mocha and merde statements. Has acidity but almost looks for ways of hiding in the layers, as a result it's sweeter than it really could be. Do you really want to ask this much of Frappato? 88

Strologo, Vignaiolo Silvano
Marche, Rosso Conero, Julius
Montepulciano

2005, \$14.99, 13.5%

The purple core easily influenced by crimson red, unblemished throughout, the rims drop down a shade to a scarlet blush. Bracingly sour nose of cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit, this component explosive enough to dominate the not inconsiderable leather, shoe polish, grass, earth, cocoa powder scents, tries real hard to interest you without taking unnecessary risks. Medium-bodied, as in the nose fairly complex, but here in step with the acidity and wants to be as fresh and clean as interesting. Its verve highlights the red cherry, black raspberry fruit and the more earthy, stony or grassy parts wait until the structure starts to command everyone to their seats near the finish. Long, rolling ending, pushy even

if you don't like it already, appears at times consciously backward. 87

ITALY WHITE

Ulivi, Cascina degli
Piedmont, Gavi
Cortese

2006, \$18.99, 12.0%

The yellow straw color as brown as golden, nothing unusual about its clarity nor shine, what hue there is hangs around to get to the rims. With apple-driven nose with a good spritz of lemon juice, any pear and melon fruit must be accommodative, evokes stream water slowly splashing onto a stony pond beneath, not quite a waterfall, sweet herbs and licorice keep it youthfully fetching. Medium-bodied, the mature feel here of the apple, pear, melon fruit, basement dried, may create an impression of even more weight. All that licorice, mint, lemon drop and floral oil makes it hard to resist, why quest for intellectual challenge when a nice back rub will do? The acidity cruises at the right level, neither absent nor demanding. Finishes too short but like it snapped and intentionally pulled back to tease you. 89

Palazzone, Azienda Agricola
Umbria
Grechetto

2006, \$13.99, 14.0%

The yellow-brown straw color remains on the dull side, layered well enough to fill up the glass, rims devoid of hue. Cinnamon spiced nose, graham crackers and orange zest appear first then mint and flowers, finally the pear and peach fruit makes it to the stage, credible complexity while staying pretty. Medium-bodied with a big, round texture like a rubber kickball, the honey, sweet baking spices and lemon meringue the first in. Then there's an abrupt about face with bitter herbs and grass in play. The lemon to grapefruit citrus favors the latter elements and the peach, apricot, melon fruit the former. Possesses sufficient acidity for the primary material, supports rather than supplants. Luckily, the honey notes play the final card, ends on a sweet note. Nice ride. 88

AUSTRIA WHITE

Schloss Gobelsburg, Weingut
Kamptal, Gobelsburger
Riesling

2006, \$18.99, 12.5%

Mostly transparent white-green straw color, above average shine, that's it. There's a leesy creaminess in the nose before crisper minerals, quartz, lemon peel and burning grass focus things immensely, the level of peach and pear fruit commensurate to the other parts. Medium-bodied, wound around the strong acidic core comes sweet lemon/lime citrus, flowers and ripe apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit. The minerality and chalkiness hold off until the mid-palate to settle in, brings with them saltiness and a finishing brush of grassiness. Despite a progression of flavors throughout, at the finish curiously leaves you right back where you started. [Screwcap] 88

Mittelbach (Tegernseerhof), Weingut Familie Franz
Wachau, T 26
Grüner Veltliner

2006, \$13.99, 12.5%

Brilliant reflectivity, sparkles in spite of the lightness of the yellow hay hue, green flecks bolster the rims, pretty much completely transparent. Can't call the green apple, pear, apricot fruit scents soft, more so mellow, there's a fresh and open quality to it, as a result the stoniness and mineral water can't quite accrete, lemon and a touch of orange citrus flit in before it's all gone. Light to medium-bodied, its satiny smoothness may make it hard to register a lot of palate presence. Very fine acidity, nothing aggressive about it, nevertheless, your mouth dries out quickly. The stone bits, mineral chunks and steam water keep your mouth scrubbed and tingly. Good buoyancy in the lemon and lime peel notes, adds sweetness to the apricot, peach, pear, yellow apple fruit. Good natural length, doesn't try too hard just has the grip to last without a whole lot of weight to throw around. [Screwcap] 88

Bauer, Weingut Anton
Donauland, Ried Rosenberg
Grüner Veltliner

2006, \$16.99, 12.5%

Transparent unto water-like clarity, more green than anything, no white nor yellow to play off of, prismatic reflectivity. Passing moment of creaminess in the nose, softens the lemon to grapefruit citrus, very mild herbaceousness, any angularity comes from the stone and mineral components, the floral dimension further cloaks the more subtle peach, pear, apricot scents, somehow doesn't seem lacking in fruit despite this. Medium-bodied, the acidity shoots its load early, the dry and dusty attack turns into plush apricot, pear, peach fruit and lemon reduction. Still, displays a mineral sort of fizziness which heightens the stone, limestone parts and lends a subdued earthiness. Offers a full helping of each food group without overloading on any, achieves nice balance as a result. [Screwcap] 88

PORTUGAL RED

Cabriz, Quinta de
Dão, Colheita Seleccionada
Blend

2005, \$6.99, 13.0%

Pure purple core, impressively dark and deep red ruby rims, wide and add to the considerable surface luster. Tobacco, tea leaves, salted beef, wet hay and wood smoke give the nose a country wine demeanor, the red currant, cranberry, cherry scents wiry and long, not gaunt. Medium-bodied, stands its ground, has lots of tannic punch, all of it natural in feel and dry, not arch. Lemon and orange peel, leather, straw, garden herbs and dusty minerals forge a tight fist and only unclenches towards the finish when the cherry, blackberry, cranberry fruit spreads out. Ending also brings out cocoa powder and a smidgeon of lower petals. Rarely do you find a wine at this price that benefits from decanting. Unspecified percentages of Alfrocheiro, Tinto Roriz, Touriga Nacional. 88

ARGENTINA RED

Hormigas, Altos Las
Mendoza
Malbec

2006, \$8.99, 14.5%

Warm glow in the purple core, extends through the very dark ruby rims, touch of pink magenta at the outermost limits. The nose is comprised mostly of plum, cherry fruit, however, sufficient room left for sharp spice, dried flowers

and a mild grassiness. Medium to full-bodied, the attack uses up much of the richness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, starts drying out by the mid-palate. White grapefruit pith and that grassy edge provide the bite, not particularly tannic, arguably gains more structure from the acidity. No overt oaking, the fruit more or less left to its own devices. Hints of leatheriness but doesn't develop. Spicy finish substitutes for the lack of length in the primary material. (Synthetic cork) 85