

The Hanes Wine Review, November 2008 Edition

Let it never be said that old dogs cannot learn new tricks. After having spent his entire wine industry career in the State of New York, Hanes has learned that things are not done quite the same elsewhere. And, boy, has it been fun learning! Why, what kind of fun? Glad you asked!

The big foundational difference is that North Carolina, where Hanes now resides, regulates the sale of alcohol itself, that is, *they* sell the hard stuff themselves. Per the North Carolina Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission website, "North Carolina is one of 19 control states and a member of the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association. As an agency under the Department of Commerce, it is our overall objective to provide uniform control over the sale, purchase, transportation, manufacture, consumption and possession of alcoholic beverages in the state." Practically speaking, this means that all hard alcohol ("spirituous liquor") is sold solely through ABC state stores. Wine and beer can be sold through grocery stores or privately held retail operations.

This is the direct opposite of how things are done in New York State, where wine stores can sell hard alcohol products but not beer (only grocery stores, delis, etc. can sell beer, but not wine nor hard alcohol). The upshot being for Hanes, any knowledge gained over the years about "spirituous liquor" (a true bible belt phrase) is out the window and pretty much worthless in the workplace. This vodka or that, which Orkney Island scotch is the best, try this small batch tequila, fuhgeddaboutit. You can erase that from the hard drive.

On the other hand, Hanes currently needs to be a beer expert. Now, Hanes has certainly consumed more than his fair share of beer since, say, the age of 13. But beer has always been a friendly consumable and not something to fetishize. Beer like Newcastle, Boddingtons, Stella Artois, Negra Modelo were as exotic as it gets. Because Hanes's boss is more interested in wine, Hanes has now taken over the day-to-day management of the beer section. Charlotte is supposed to be a big "beer town" so the challenge has been to address the existing brand stock, analyze pricing versus the competition and adjust product and prices to retain and grow market share. You hear that, Brawley's and Common Market? Hanes is going to slap you and take your lunch money!

There's a lot to learn about beer. Hanes is currently drinking a lot more beer than wine. Burp. Beer is, on the whole, not as inherently complex as wine. But beer lovers are equally ardent and one needs familiarity with the product and be able to "talk the talk." Hanes is getting there and the beer tasting note database already has 38 entries in it. Yeehaw. Only 11,418 more and it will be caught up with the wine database. All in all, it is fun to learn about beer and Hanes is certain this will help him immensely with the chicks. Hopefully not the chicks with beer guts.

Beyond the beer versus hard stuff angle, there's a lot in the wine world that's different too. Sure, it's the same national "three tier" system of wholesaler - retailer - end consumer. Consumers can't buy directly from wholesalers and retailers cannot directly import wines from out of state. But after that, the similarities to New York break down some.

First, North Carolina is a "bottle state" which means it is perfectly fine and legit to order wine from wholesalers by the bottle. If you do not order a full case of a particular wine there is no financial penalty levied. As a result, as long as the total order meets the wholesaler's minimum dollar amount for delivery (very low in these parts), you can order three bottles of Wine X, one bottle of Wine Y, five bottles of Wine Z, and so on. This has many effects.

First, it makes checking in deliveries a pain in the ass! It's easy to count cases when they come in, takes two seconds. When you have to check each bottle it takes much longer. Remember, the Cabernet label may look exactly like the Merlot so you have to really inspect the bottles upon receipt. Second, it makes stocking and knowing what stock you have on hand harder. Hanes's store doesn't have the vertical racks which showcases one bottle on top of a column with eleven bottle slots below for the rest of the case. Instead, it's deep cross-hatched shelves with one bottle of each type standing upwards in front. You can't see what you have back in the cubby holes unless you memorize what the capsules look like. So, when a customer comes in to make a purchase and wants four bottles it is not visibly clear if you *have* four bottles on hand. You have to hunt and peck behind the facing bottles to see if the quantity desired is there or not. 99% of the time it is not. Which means you need to special order four bottles or find another wine in the store with that quantity on hand. Which is not very likely either, unless it is a case stacked wine. Which at times frustrates the customer and loses sales. Which... Never mind that buying by the bottle loses the retailer any case quantity discounts available (raising the price to the end consumer). In many ways it is a demand issue, there just is not sufficient customer demand to stock cases of a specific wine on hand. Especially at a true wine retail store because it seems most "bulk" wines purchases (defined here as four bottles or more of the same wine) is done at large grocery store chains such as Food Lion or Harris-Teeter. Hell, even Lowes and Target have grocery stores here!

The ambiguity regarding how much of any wine is actually in stock is compounded by something commonly accepted here but foreign to Hanes's experience up north. Here, wholesaler representatives put together the orders and, further, actually stock the shelves themselves. Sure, the retail wine buyer approves the order but it's not like the buyer calls the distributor and says send me this and that. The rep comes into the store and writes up what s/he thinks is needed and asks the buyer if it's OK. This usually gets rubber stamped. Then, the next day when the wine shows up, the sales rep returns to the store and puts price stickers on the bottles and physically puts them on the shelves.

This is all done as a matter of course and Hanes believes this is pretty much the case in all wine stores/groceries, not just where Hanes works. This entirely and completely weirds out Hanes. Hell, in New York Hanes suspects it might even

be illegal for sales reps to stock shelves. Outside of a few emergency instances, he never saw wholesaler personnel working in a retail store as if employed there. Even when they pour free samples for customers they identify themselves as wholesalers and not store employees per se. Sure, Hanes is a total control freak but it seems that here it's the inmates running the asylum. They do the ordering and the stocking, where's the managerial controls? You never know exactly where the reps put the bottles, and the reps don't know if you moved some of their wine around in the back stock room. All but total disconnect and quite inefficient. But stores here seem to like it because it saves on employee costs, no stocking means no stock personnel needed. Hanes guesses that's the rationale. It's just plain messed up.

One thing that is cool here is that all deliveries of alcohol have to be paid for upon receipt. No running a tab with the wholesaler nor 30-day float. If you ain't got the money, you ain't got the hootch. This separates the mice from the men [sic] and makes sure a retailer doesn't stupidly run their business by ordering more than they can afford [they can, of course, run their business stupidly in other ways]. No punishment for not paying bills on time by being put on COD, it's always COD. This strikes Hanes as the best, fairest way to go. Especially for startup businesses which *always* insufficiently understand how much capital is needed to get a wine store off the ground.

The State of North Carolina doles out sales rights to any specific wine by county. These rights are exclusive for the county. So, for example, if you have the wholesale rights to all Gallo wines in Mecklenburg county, no one else can sell them at wholesale. Hanes doesn't think exclusivity rights are state-mandated in New York, often just agreed to contractually between a certain producer and wholesaler (and he has seen multiple wholesalers selling the same wine). From a capitalist vantage point, this is bad as it restricts competition. From a practical vantage point, though, it makes it a bit easier to find the wine. That is, unless one tries to actually *use* the North Carolina ABC website, which has a producer search function any seven year old computer programmer could beat. Plus, it appears no one like *updates* the information and many producers are listed with wholesalers which haven't sold the product in years. Sigh.

One of Hanes's pet peeves is that it is perfectly legal for a retail wine store to also have a full service wine/beer bar on the premises. This is strictly forbidden in New York, two completely different sort of licenses. There's nothing wrong with this combination per se. It's more that the way wine stores operate, watching the wine bar and its customers makes it very difficult to do any other sort of meaningful work around the shop. You can't be in the back room organizing shit, you can't be trying to make sense of the stock on the shelves, you can't work on the computer, you are basically a bartender after 5:00 PM until closing. Serving glasses, getting tabs paid, washing glasses, chatting up the clientele. Over time, from the perspective of running a highly organized wine store, that's a lot of lost productivity. And it's highly doubtful that the wine bar revenue offsets these inefficiencies. But, outside of big grocery stores, every wine store here has a wine bar, as if mandated by law.

The only other major difference is that the local clientele is not very sophisticated versus wine buyers in Manhattan. Big duh there, to be expected, but still. Domestic wines, particularly Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, rule by a very wide margin. There's some cool, funky wines available (and at all price points) but they are entirely "hand sells" and no one is just buying Gavi di Gavi nor Bandol wines just by themselves. If you get a few inquisitive souls, it is fun to get folks interested in more "esoteric" wines but Hanes has not yet seen much adventuresomeness. So, it is harder to get jazzed up to help customers when they just want to buy wines Hanes has no real interest in. Playing the role of proselytizer gets stale after awhile and really doesn't translate into more substantive remuneration pour moi. But, hey, it's a gig and the way the economy is these days, Hanes happily gives thanks. And drinks the Cru Beaujolais alone at home!

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This month's big winners... Slowly Hanes is finding locally the wines he likes. Whether he can continue to afford buying them is an entirely different question. The 2007 Sancerre from Vacheron is one of their better in recent years and serious yums, even at \$31. One might even aver that it could benefit from some aging. Yannick Amirault is a quality producer of Loire Cabernet Franc. Maybe not a true superstar but have yet to have one that sucks and the producer seems to be getting better over time. Their 2005 Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil "Les Malgagnes" is tasty and appropriately priced at around \$22. Albert Mann keeps earning their rep, from top to bottom a solid Alsatian producer. Their entry level 2006 Riesling "Cuvée Albert" can be chugged with abandon and without chagrin. Only flaw is the \$23 price tag.

The best \$15 and under picks... Winter is not when most people are thinking "I gots to be drinking me some Picpoul de Pinet." That said, the co-op wine most recognizable by the "Hugues Beaulieu" brand name on the label and funky green bottle is wonderful wine for \$10 and Hanes much enjoyed the 2007 version. In the inexpensive Spanish wine department, a wine from the Calatayud region was highly quaffable, this being the 2006 "Pontecilla Old Vines." So it was quaffed. Not necessarily while high. Dry Creek Vineyard's cheapie Chenin Blanc from California is indeed one of those wines that tasted good a decade ago and the latest versions still good today. Ten bucks well spent. Hanes's most favored South African producers of Pinotage have crossed the \$20 (or more) threshold so it's off to try new cheapies. The Nederburg 2006 Pinotage proved a pleasant find for \$14. This assuming one likes Pinotage. Hanes does. May he tempt you into liking them too? It's always a pleasant surprise to find a palatable Bordeaux for under \$20 these days. Under \$15 is supa-sweet. So kudos to Château Haut-La Péreyre and their 2005 Bordeaux Supérieur, a worthy little wine for about \$14.

And the disappointments... Hanes thinks the bloom may be permanently off the rose with the once much beloved Rhône producer the Domaine de la Mordorée. Never cheap to start with, the prices have gotten crazy. While the quality in turn seems less and less impressive over the years. The 2006 Lirac "Cuvée de la Reine des Bois" is no \$40+ wine and a major disappointment this month. It's not often that Hanes drinks Soave white wines from Italy. In the future he will drink

fewer Soave wines from producer Inama. While fairly priced at \$15 the track record has not shown the kind of sustained quality a jerk like Hanes demands. Next, not sure if it counts as a disappointing wine per se, more so a sign of a disappointing winery. Used to dig the wines of Bogle as a solid set of value wines but they have not done it for Hanes of late. Their "trophy" wine is their "Phantom" blend and at about \$21 it's oak and fruit and alcohol and it saddens. Saddens. Hanes seemed to have mis-remembered liking the basic Sangiovese from Italian producer Di Majo Norante as the 2006 was pedestrian even factoring in the favorable \$12 price tag. Database research suggests this is not an unusual showing. Sigh. Hanes drank Mollydooker wines this month. 'Nuff said.

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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/oldervintages2008.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

Tensley
Santa Barbara County, Three Creek Vineyard
Syrah
2006, \$36.99, 15.0%
The red-purple core retains both clarity and moderate transparency, still plenty of violet left through the red-ruby rims, minimal shift in overall hue. The nose initially has a little merde/fart in need of blowing off but then leather, pigskin, grill smoke and molasses glaze come out, doesn't suggest anything more than moderate oak touch, sticky density in the plum, currant, blackberry scents without sugariness, needs to stretch out more. Full-bodied yet front-loaded in a way which allows the acidity to shape a more sinewy form thereafter. Maintains that molasses, black sugar coating feel but really that's it for true sweetness, no oak cream nor toast. The blackberry, plum, cherry fruit streamlined for clarity of purpose, nothing extra that is not needed. Not what you'd call "sauvage" yet gotta like the declarative statements. Pleasurable enough now. 88

Lolonis
Redwood Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2005, \$19.99, 14.2%
Mix of red and black in the purple core pulls it in opposing directions, the rims indecisive between a pinkish ruby and darker garnet cast, spotless as is the norm. Because of the lack of extraction of, and dependence on, its cherry, black currant scents, unfortunately the alcoholic fumes come through more, leavened some by notes of fresh vanilla cream and toffee, touch of wildflowers and pine cone, lacks staying power overall. Full-bodied, through the

attack seems like it could be bigger but chooses to cinch the belt another notch instead. The caramel, coffee, vanilla oak flavors too forward for the more subdued cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit, particularly as the tannin (wood?) sponges up a lot of liquid texture. At turns floral, pleasing glimpses of cedar chips and pine forest breeze. Stays mainly true to itself even given market exigencies. 87

Hill Family Estate
Napa Valley, The Barrel Blend
Blend
2005, \$22.99, 14.8%
Brick red to violet hued core, sleek surface sheen, extends well through to the burnt red to garnet rims, sits attractively in the glass. There's a strong and steady waft of oak toast and butterscotch cream, however, this does not dominate the whole, palpable floral perfume as well, mint and then a stream of plum, currant, cherry fruit scents, again more perfumed than dense. Medium-bodied, quite smooth and level in spite of the textural pockets caused by the toasty oak. While the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit verges on pruney, at the same time it's not very rich nor layered. Orange peel, mint, sweet cedar more prevalent than any leather, tobacco, tea leaf components. In the end, while it's not oppressively extracted, it also doesn't come up with another viable reason to get jazzed about it. 56% Merlot, 39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Syrah. 87

Bliss Family Vineyards
Mendocino County
Merlot
2006, \$11.99, 13.9%
Reddish purple core of equal clarity and darkness, garnet to brick red rims of diminished intensity. Curiously quiet nose, chocolate, raspberry liqueur, candied cherries but

the sweetness doesn't persist, suggestion of flowers, just not a lot going on. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and much sweeter upfront, big blackberry, raspberry, cherry fruit. This aided by the chocolate and vanillin toast oak aspects. Sort of hiccups during the middle and gets sour more swiftly than you'd like. Tannins grainy not dusty, rough but little coating effect nor overall drying ability. Orange sherbet and floral water smooth things out during the back half. Toasty once more through the finish. Could see it appealing to more than a few folks although it doesn't choose one direction and stick with it. 86

Bogle

Regional Blend, California, Phantom Blend

2005, \$20.99, 14.5%

Deep purple color, picks up red-ruby closer to the rims, cleanliness doesn't diminish the saturation at all. Big old oak in the nose, caramel, vanilla pudding, butterscotch, this ably matched by prune, raisin, plum, blackberry fruit scents, besides that candied orange peels and cinnamon spice make an appearance. Full-bodied, looking to be massive, pounds its way into your mouth with cement galoshes. The oak treatment lacks toast, goes more for creamy caramel, butterscotch, whipped cream character. Alas, the alcoholic burn stunts the attempted creaminess. Dry enough that the prune and raisin qualities drop down into a tie with fresher black cherry, plum, blackberry fruit. That's about it. 55% Petite Sirah, 42% Zinfandel, 3% Mourvèdre. Grapes sourced from Clarksburg, Monterey, Lodi, Amador, Arroyo Grande. 85

Flora Springs

Napa Valley

Sangiovese

2006, \$19.99, 14.4%

Crimson red influence throughout the otherwise light purple core, ruby only peeks out at the rims, maintains clarity throughout. Creamy nose, plummy unto stewed prunes yet not sugary really, cinnamon, spearmint and orange blossom, all over the map, flat yet sour cherry, blackberry fruit too, clings more than lifts. Full-bodied, the acidity helps to relieve some of the oppressive sluggishness but all the plum, raisin, cherry fruit needs a kick in the rear. The oak feels like shavings left out in the rain, not naturally moist so that any pleasant toastiness is lost, however, not indulgently creamy either. Marginal orange peel, baking spice accents. The more you drink of it, the more the word "sludge" comes to mind. Sorry, yo. 84

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Dry Creek Vineyard

Carmel Valley, Clarksburg, Dry

Chenin Blanc

2007, \$9.99, 12.5%

Brightly reflective white gold color, resplendent transparency, really shines in the glass. The nose isn't tight per se, more like it has a firm weave in the tangerine, lemon citrus, pressed wildflowers, honeycomb, freshly ripened apricot, peach, pear scents, dissolves gracefully without losing its presence. Medium-bodied, the acidity shows its strength right off, brings a hint of bitter nuts along with adding a sour touch to the orange, lemon, lime citrus. Soaks in without giving up freshness, blends in notes of pineapple and papaya alongside the apricot and peach base. Mineral water edge helps extend the general

tingle past the mid-palate. Gains extra credit for high energy level and food friendliness. 88

Kunde Estate

Sonoma Valley, Magnolia Lane

Sauvignon Blanc

2007, \$15.99, 13.8%

Pale yellow straw color with a brown cast, consistent through the rims, translucency lends some depth. There's a mint and floral dew element which makes the first sniff prettied up, as it opens there's mixed citrus sorbet and a touch of heavy cream, the peach, apricot, melon scents not heavy yet don't move much, more a stew than main dish with sides. Full-bodied, not quite round in texture, more like rubberized corners. The honeysuckle, orange blossom thing comes through clearly, swipe of honey. However, not really sweet as the acidity wields a thick enough blade and favors the tart side of the pink grapefruit, lime citrus parts. Not oaky but can't shake this overall creamy sensation. Even handed presentation of the peach, apricot, red apple, melon fruit, no peaks nor valleys. Simple enough to throw back. 87% Sauvignon Blanc, 9% Sémillon, 4% Viognier. [Screwcap: Stelvin+] 87

Steele

Santa Barbara County

Pinot Blanc

2006, \$16.99, 13.5%

Fat golden color with clear green flecks, glistens on the surface while distorts light below, translucent rims. Certain measure of spice, lime/lemon citrus and floral water to the nose yet overall not very expressive, there's a quick crinkly dissolve to the pear, apricot, green/yellow apple fruit scents then just thin air. Medium-bodied, for its weight has nice grip and traction. Much more citrus-dominated here with lime, lemon tangerine and hint of pink grapefruit. The acidity adds a prickle to the tongue which fits well. Gentle spiciness, no real thrust to the peach, apricot, golden apple fruit, however, never evanescent. More residual textural vibrations than flavor intensity through the finish. 86

Kunde Estate

Sonoma Valley

Chardonnay

2006, \$15.99, 13.8%

There's a certain luminescence across the surface which forgives the otherwise dullish worn gold color below, diminishes some at the rims, average in all aspects. Dullness pervades the nose too, suggests that the peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit as well as dried lemon peel, fresh butter and bread more prevalent than sweeter oak accents, mildly floral, hell, just mild. Medium-bodied, plays up the sweet and sour juxtaposition throughout, tangy nectarine, pineapple versus more sedate apricot, pear flavors, the lemon/orange citrus not sure what to do. As in the nose, the oak also unsteady (due to sizable portion done in steel?) and adds creaminess but not softness. Decent perceptible acidity. Hollow middle, recovers a little by the finish. Pedestrian. [Screwcap: Stelvin+] 84

OREGON RED

Soirée Vineyards

Regional Blend

Oregon

Pinot Noir

2006, \$13.99, 13.5%

Light color, as garnet red as violet, consistent throughout with slight fading at rims, spotless and attractively reflective. The nose has a mix of sweet baking spices and orange zest at first, enough blackberry and cherry to darken the raspberry scents, some cola notes, ends on herbal uptick. Light to medium-bodied, has sufficient acidity and tannins, real or wood, to imbue it with solidity, if at moments diminish the impact of the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit. Fairly toasty, rife with cinnamon and ginger spice dashes. The orange to lemon citrus haphazardly active. Herbaceousness don't bother me none but might bother many. As noted many times before, you roll your dice big time with Pinot under \$15, regardless of place of origin, and this does not suck. (Composite cork) 86

FRANCE RED

Amirault, Yannick
Loire, Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil, Les Malgagnes
Cabernet Franc
2005, \$21.99, 14.0%

Fully opaque purple core with a fuzziness to it that in no way suggests sediment, if the rims were not so thin you'd get more pinkness in the ruby base. The nose starts at a weird angle, like a blow from the side, some peanut shells and milk chocolate before floral scented underbrush, kindling wood and rich blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit swell, minimal traces of bell pepper or earth, touch more tobacco ash. Full-bodied, plush attack which favorably shrugs off the unnecessary fat by the finish. Elevated tobacco, leather, bell pepper aspects definitely help keep the cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit in a proportioned place. Tannins slow to show but by the start of the second glass have carved out a credible presence. The mid-palate sees the lemon/orange citrus and flower petals crest. Nice today and viable mid-term ager. 89

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Poncié
Gamay Noir
2006, \$20.99, 13.0%

Tightly-woven red-purple hue, whole cloth from core to rims, while you can see through it, transparent is pushing it too far, vividness of the colors steadfastly holds your attention. There's some peanut shell, burnt cocoa powder funk in the nose, gets steamrolled by candied/jellied raspberry, strawberry, pomegranate scents along with a generous dose of floral dew, white grapefruit, orange citrus concentrate, not showing much evidence of earthiness nor stoniness. Full-bodied, while subtle, has the tannin to slap any element upside the head which gets out of line. Taking this at face value, the sweetness of the raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit its main attribute. The mixed citrus more of a bit player, could say the florality edges ahead. Squares up well at the finish, wants to make sure it's being taken seriously. 88

Haut-La Péreyre, Château
Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieur
Blend
2005, \$13.99, 13.5%

While nowhere near opacity there is a measure of blackness in the purple core, reddens into a crimson to dried blood hues at the rims, not a blemish in sight. The nose possesses a sinewy lift, comprised of bell pepper, cracked pepper, cigar wrapper, orange pekoe tea and just ripened plum, black cherry, currant fruit. Medium-bodied,

the tannins lead the attack which initially sets you back on your heels for a second, yet while it stays dry there is freedom granted to the elements to show. Licorice, dried orange peel and dried potpourri mix with back road dust and bell pepper for a diverse palette. The straightforward cherry, currant, blackberry fruit crests in the middle and slowly unwinds from there. Tightens some through the finish, a product of youth but at the same time contributes to its erect posture. Honest claret. 55% Merlot, 45% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Paradou, Le
Rhône, Côtes du Luberon, Grenache-Syrah
Blend
2007, \$13.99, 14.0%

Lush red-purple hued core, near opacity in spite of overall clarity, the rims show a fat crimson coloration. Sour currant, cherry, raspberry nose, lots of red fruit, borderline bracing at first while still refreshing, hints at merde before veering off into leather, burnt dark chocolate, dried potpourri and matted grasses, lively. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and has enough girth to dampen any tartness in the raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit. Credible level of tannins keeps things erect throughout. Mixed white citrus, dried flowers and forest brush shimmer more than shine. Some tacky residue on the tongue past the mid-palate, kind of makes you wish for red meat or something heavy on the plate. Sturdy, fits the definition of "country wine" pretty well. 60% Grenache, 40% Syrah. 87

Mordorée, Domaine de la
Rhône, Lirac, Cuvée de la Reine des Bois
Blend
2006, \$40.99, 14.5%

Deeply saturated purple core of full opacity, the violet begrudgingly allows some dark red-ruby through along the rims, no problem reflecting light off of its surface. The nose is mute, like swimming through cement, you can get there but not in a hurry, plum, cherry scents, twigs and tree bark, merest suggestion of orange peel, dried flowers, just not a lot happening here. Full-bodied, cascades into the mouth with a lot of weight and determination, if little sense of what it wants to accomplish. Very dry, the tannins a lead cloak over the body of the black currant, cherry, plum fruit, minimal sweetness. Same twiggy, sour bite, followed on again by orange citrus, flowers and wool. Nothing to suggest over-the-top oak usage. Doesn't really make itself approachable, kindness suggests that it has already closed down a great deal. 34% Grenache, 33% Syrah, 33% Mourvèdre. 86

Drouhin, Maison Joseph
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Laforet
Pinot Noir
2006, \$15.99, 12.5%

Crystal clear, transparent light red-garnet with a touch of violet to the core, most washed out ruby by the rims. Sugary quality to the strawberry, raspberry fruit in the nose, large portion of lemon citrus, slightly less mixture of pressed flowers and dried grass, credibly maintains its presence in your nostrils. Light-bodied, a tad sour on the attack, the herbaceousness in charge before the candied nature of the red cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit can bloom. This occurs before the mid-palate but still light and tart enough to make the switch negligible. Possesses enough acidity to keep trending in this direction. Never gets arch, here the lemon to orange citrus sweetens, yet

it's not a silky smooth drinker. Doesn't embarrass itself.
(Screwcap: Stelvin+) 85

FRANCE WHITE

Vacheron et Fils, Domaine
Loire, Sancerre
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$30.99, 13.0%

Slight gauziness to the yellow-brown hay color, somewhat flat with empty rims but you know going in appearance won't be its strong suit. Smoky wet stones and slate-like notes combine with the grapefruit, lemon citrus to give the nose a sour pungency, a real mauler, the flower petals feel like they've been ground in a thresher, paucity of pear, apple, peach fruit to its credit, more present via the absent. Medium-bodied, throttles the tongue like it's get a score to settle, drying throughout but does so slowly so you feel it. White smoke, sauna stones, chalk, herbaceous unto suggestion of bell pepper and asparagus. Non-sweet pink grapefruit and mandarin orange citrus perfectly at place. The acidity revs on all cylinders. Smattering of peach, apricot, pear, green melon fruit. Pulls tighter and tighter as it reaches the finish line. Likey, likey. 91

Mann, Domaine Albert
Alsace, Cuvée Albert L51
Riesling
2006, \$22.99, 13.0%

Fat golden color, neither translucent nor transparent, holds well through the rims, basically looks like frozen wine in the glass. Noticeable warm rubber element in the nose, not quite keen enough for petrol, edge mostly from the grapefruit to tangerine citrus zest, above average stone and cave water type notes too, enough crackle in the peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple scents to push it beyond the basic fruit array. Full-bodied, muscular with youthful density, not necessarily muscle-bound. Similar set-up here in the mouth with white grapefruit, lime, mandarin orange citrus teaming up nicely with the nectarine, pineapple, peach, green apple, papaya fruit, minimal sweetness, stings like a bee rather than float like a butterfly. The acidity casts a wide shadow and isn't shy at any time during the show. The rubber element lessened here, the wet stone, slate type parts sneak ahead. Does seize up a little on the finish. (Screwcap: Stelvin+) 89

Peu de la Moriette (J.C. et Ch. Pichot), Domaine Le
Loire, Vouvray
Chenin Blanc
2007, \$15.99, 12.0%

More layering than shine in the deep golden hue, not dull, though, fills in the rims well, slight brownish cast. Smoky nose in a sauna fog, minerally sort of way, sharp edges to the tropical pineapple, guava, nectarine, apricot scents, any honeyed or botrytis inflected notes kept mostly under wraps, hint of mint, not much citrus nor flowers, stays angular. In the mouth it is full-bodied but it releases a good bit of weight through the mid-palate and ends up with a heavy mouth perfume instead. Here the grapefruit, lemon citrus more active, teams up with the yet tart pineapple, star fruit, nectarine, guava flavors for extra kick. This dampens some of the stoniness and smokiness. The acidity has moments of freshness and keeping plugging away. Not that elegant, lots of energy and well-priced. 88

Ducasse, Château
Bordeaux
Blend
2007, \$14.99, 12.0%

Shiny and resplendent yellow hay color, forms a solid block beneath the surface, minor dip in hue intensity at the rims. The scents flow at you steadily in the nose, lemon and lime pulp, violets, light grassy quality alongside equally shy stream water and stones, perfumed nature to the apricot, peach scents, just achieved ripeness. Medium-bodied, takes pains to fill your mouth up as completely as possible. Fullness not to the detriment of the lemon, lime, orange citrus, juicy yet with tangy snap. The acidity more than adequate for general purposes, helps add tingle closer to the finish. Not delicate enough an experience for the florality to lift and dance. More herbaceousness shows as it warms, best to keep it chilly-chill-chill. Stands up for itself. 60% Sémillon, 35% Sauvignon Blanc, 5% Muscadelle. 88

Cave Les Costières de Pomerols, La
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc Picpoul de
Pinet, Hugues Beaulieu
Picpoul
2007, \$9.99, 12.5%

Nice sheen and reflectivity across the surface, below there's layers of pure gold which extends fully through to the rims. In the nose first hints at honey but then there's more of black licorice, orange peel, beeswax and lilacs, erect posture in the snappy peach, pear, apple scents, no fat here. Medium-bodied, gives of itself but also inclined to hold its ground and grip firmly. Thus, the orange to lemon citrus and the peach, apricot, pear fruit unfolds at a measured pace. The acidity able to draw out a splash of stoniness. Less floral here, not as many "sweeter" touches as in the nose. Yet, given its relative density this helps to keep it fresh. Lots of palate presence through the finish and a leesy kind of creaminess. Could drink a bottle in half an hour without even noticing. Think I did. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 88

Boillot, Domaine Jean-Marc
Burgundy, Montagny 1er Cru
Chardonnay
2006, \$27.99, 13.0%

Good depth to the golden core, pools well, relative lack of shine helps extend the hue through the rims. The nose at first commanded by floral perfume before giving way to lemon and lime zest, there's soft oak toast notes, unroasted nuts, marzipan and basic peach, apricot, pear scents. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and the lemon oil component clearly dominates the rest from start to finish. Tangy enough that the larger oak toast still held in check, the floral dimension strong but lacks the room to move gracefully. All that said, stays on balance and shows a nice acidic spine in addition to a slight white mineral, stone dustiness past the mid-palate. Strong cleansing sensation at the end inclines you to take another sip. Simple and well-crafted. 88

Roustan, Château
Rhône, Costières de Nimes
Blend
2007, \$10.99, 13.0%

Highly reflective yellow gold color with a deepening tinge of green, washes out some around the rims but so resplendent you probably won't notice. Nose features a good deal of floral dew as well as well-ripened pear, yellow apple, peach, apricot fruit, sprig of mint and spoonful of

golden honey too. Full-bodied with a round mouth feel that at moments may seem hollow as the acidity breaks the surface and messes with the texture. The floral dimension outdone by sweet lemon to lime citrus notes. In spite of the mouth feel, the apricot, pear, melon, yellow apple fruit restrained and remains at a steady low level. Without you really seeing it coming the finish is pretty gosh darn dry. Given its weight and ebbs and flows, served best by serving with food. 60% Roussanne, 30% Grenache Blanc, 10% Viognier. (Synthetic Cork) 87

ITALY RED

Ratti, Renato
Piedmont, Dolcetto d'Alba, Colombè
Dolcetto
2007, \$15.99, 13.0%

As much ruby as violet in the base hue, sufficiently dark that it doesn't glow until the more pink, magenta rims, no sign of cloudiness nor any blemish. There's a measure of dustiness to the nose, creates a dried flower petal, citrus peel character at first before the rich plum, cherry, blackberry scents ensue to plump things up, barest suggestion of milk chocolate or sweet spices. In the mouth it's full-bodied, possesses the acidity to lend a tart twist to the attack, yet after that it's back to the froth show, densely layered plum, blackberry, cherry with nary a hint of red fruit. The floral and mixed citrus components remain in play, musters a twiggy, leafy edge past the mid-palate which helps center it. Overall, a bit sluggish and sleepy. 87

Di Majo Norante
Molise, Terra Degli Osci
Sangiovese
2006, \$11.99, 12.5%
Burnt red to brown brick hues muddy the otherwise purple core, full bricking around the rims gives it an appearance of a somewhat older wine. Lots of charred oak in the nose, very smoky with popcorn and toasted bread more than cream, orange spritz can't really get the plum, cherry fruit scents off the couch, oak makes it hard to fully tell if there's tar and black earth in there too. Full-bodied, the acidity tries to chop up the plum/prune, cherry, blackberry fruit and it works to a point, the pieces just recongeal together though. Coffee, caramelized cocoa powder and straight-up toasted vanilla beans keep the oak in the forefront. As in the nose, the tar, asphalt, pine sap as much imagined as clearly discerned. Sour twist at the finish with a semi-gritty residue left behind. 85

ITALY WHITE

Inama, Azienda Agricola da
Veneto, Soave Classico
Garganega
2007, \$14.99, 12.5%
Dense golden core, deepened by a brownish hay tint, steady through the rims and solidified further by its translucency. More cleanliness and easily discernible round contours to the nose than actual scents, freshly cut flowers, vanilla fudge, orange juice, nectarine, pineapple, peach fruit, absolutely nothing offensive here, just doesn't add up to much. Medium to full-bodied, would be the latter if not experiencing the same hollowness as found in the nose. Licorice, orange/lemon spritz, flower water then takes a bitter turn with no identifiable flavor as to why. Meager peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit, lacks the semi-

tropicality of the nose. Just to underscore, no glaring flaws just a pretty damn boring wine. What's up with that? 85

AUSTRIA RED

Markowitsch, Weingut Gerhard
Carnuntum, Rubin Carnuntum
Zweigelt
2006, \$19.99, 13.5%
Small trace of ruby-red in the otherwise black-purple core, above average cleanliness, the rims fully adopt the red-ruby hue with a pretty pink tint. The nose a strange assemblage of violets, cocoa powder, plum, blackberry fruit and old worn leather, strange in that they don't gel, rather stand off each other, adequate length. Full-bodied, round and mostly supple in mouth feel, the vanilla, butterscotch, milk chocolate oak flavors not outrageous yet make it known they are in charge. Thankfully, the richness of the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit can take it, matches the oak start to finish. Maybe, just maybe mixed citrus and flower accents. Not goopy in spite of passive acidity and tannin. Conversely, too much kick to be taken for, say, a Merlot. A red wine adventure for the non-adventurous. 87

AUSTRIA WHITE

Mittelbach (Tegernseerhof), Weingut Familie Franz
Wachau, T 26
Grüner Veltliner
2007, \$15.99, 12.5%
The golden brown color favors an appearance of solidity rather than luster, holds well through the rims. The nose gets close to lifting off but then starts taxiing again, white pepper, sea salt and snap pea notes anchored to the peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit scents, well-concentrated, not heavy. Full-bodied, at first loads up on the stone dust, snap peas and freshly mown grass but doesn't quite follow through on the white pepper nor minerality, fares better with orange to pink grapefruit citrus shades. The acidity is sluggish, as if just woken from a nap, fumbles some but gets most of the job done. Just not sure where the underlying creaminess comes from, tags the peach, apricot, yellow apple, pear fruit with a semi-poached fruit nature. Flavors persist nicely through the finish. Needs a bit more bite. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 87

SPAIN RED

Gregorio, Sociedad Cooperativa San
Calatayud, Pontecilla Old Vines
Tempranillo
2006, \$10.99, 14.0%
Somber red-purple colored core, not that dark and more transparent than not, just sort of a frowning hue, the rims shift into a more light garnet with some pink tinges. There's some floral perfume and orange zest in the nose but the alcohol is extremely noticeable and zaps the former as well as the thickish raspberry, blackberry scents, really hard to register much else. Full-bodied, no burn here as the dense sappiness of the plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit cloaks all else. Stroke of milk chocolate alongside the sweet orange citrus, tea leaves and flower petals. The tannins lurch forward through the mid-palate but unsure how to get the troops lined up. Ripe and juicy, not an elegant expression of Tempranillo but if you ignore

the nose it's easily chuggable. (Synthetic Cork: Starkorck) 87

Almira

Campo de Borja, Los Dos Old Vines Grenache-Syrah Blend

2006, \$9.99, 14.0%

Bright crimson diminishes what purple there is, persists fully through the rims and squeaky clean throughout. Lots of floral perfume doused on the jammy raspberry, strawberry fruit scents, a touch of spit-roasted game and orange glaze then rests on its laurels. Medium-bodied, but soft and jiggly with what its got, the orange and lemon citrus adds just the right amount of tang to take the boredom out of the otherwise super-sweet raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit. The floral side doesn't develop until after a few sips and then mostly retronasally. You know. Mixed field grasses and twigs, not too intense. Pats off the excess juice credibly by the finish but maybe should have kept running with it, ends a tad short. Fine for what it is. 85% Grenache, 15% Syrah. 85

SPAIN WHITE

Monjardin, Bodegas Castillo de

Navarra, El Cerezo Unoaked

Chardonnay

2006, \$12.99, 13.5%

Deepening golden hue creates a big initial impression, masks dullish surface as well as drop off around the rims, not unattractive. Apple, pear and peach fruit scents have nice cut in the nose, accompanied by a light smokiness, mixes in baking spices, orange peel and wet sauna stone, slate notes. Medium-bodied, very compact and solid plus likes to throw its weight around. The cinnamon, ginger spice gives the peach, apple, apricot fruit a pie or cobbler feel, albeit without the sugary concentration. The acidity gives it an unusually strong jolt and helps extend things like the lime/orange citrus tang. For all its density, not immobile, more like dancing in clogs. Fruit falls off a little early to reach crowd pleaser proportions. 85

Licia

Rias Baixas

Albariño

2007, \$15.99, 12.5%

Attractive brightness in the yellow gold color, shiny, some distortion below the resplendent surface. Cream and crinkle in the nose, initial impression is soft texture before the smokiness and wet stone aspects grab hold, more dependent on mixed white citrus than florality for complexity, the apricot, apple, pear, pineapple scents come off as hollow. Medium to full-bodied, more based in "oomph" than finesse or lift. Tends to squat on the tongue as it unveils deep white grapefruit, lemon citrus and a fair degree of herbaceousness. As in the nose, lacks floral grace and the nectarine, pineapple, guava fruit too arch and lacking in inviting qualities. Not outrageously flawed but prematurely tires out the palate. Unsure of the intent here. 85

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Nederburg

Western Cape

Pinotage

2006, \$13.99, 14.0%

The brightness in the dark ruby-violet core allows you to note its clarity, remains dark through the rims with a thin line of pink. The wet saddle leather and animal fur scents shine through clearly in the nose, followed on by zippy red cherry, raspberry scents, a modicum of oak toast rounds things out. Medium-bodied, spicy and toasty through the attack, the heavier leather, earth, fur and black smoke take the lead through the mid-palate. Even presentation throughout of the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, borderline candied, however, this aspect doesn't dominate. This allows the tannins to show to greater effect and thus structure the finish, dry and even more leathery. Well priced example of the grape. 88

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Stellenzicht

Stellenbosch, Hill & Dale

Sauvignon Blanc

2007, \$14.99, 13.5%

Slight roiling distortion to it which favors the translucent dullness, solid yellow to white straw coloration, slight fade along the rims. Very herbaceous nose with bell pepper, white pepper notes, zesty white grapefruit and white mineral dust contribute further to its angularity, difficult to fully register the nectarine, pineapple, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied, gets in your face swiftly, oozing sour white grapefruit juice next to bell pepper, chili pepper and cut grass components. The acidity is above average but not as withering as the flavor profile. As it warms it softens some and shows a tiny latent creaminess. Then you also receive more peach, nectarine, green apple, pineapple fruit. The minerality not as present as in the nose but stays consistent. Not a wine to relax with, keeps you on your toes. 88

AUSTRALIA RED

Mollydooker

South Australia, The Maitre D'

Cabernet Sauvignon

2007, \$28.99, 16.0%

Core arguably as black crimson as purple, opaque without a sense of density, the rims segue into brick red with a certain rust or orange zinc cast. The alcoholic fumes destabilize the nose right off, easier to register the plum, date, maraschino cherry, blackberry fruit and the buttered popcorn, butterscotch and toffee scents than any menthol, citrus or flower petal nuances. In the mouth it's very full-bodied and pounds its way into your mouth like the deed is in its back pocket. Oak, oak and more oak, vanilla, butterscotch, toffee, popcorn, coffee, did I miss any typical descriptor? After that assault, hard to discern any Cabernet character, liqueur like character to the plum, cherry, currant, blackberry fruit. Maybe some cedar or eucalyptus but maybe not. Messed up shit, yo. (Screwcap) 84

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Forbes, Mac

Victoria, Strathbogrie Ranges, RS31

Riesling

2007, \$22.99, 10.5%

Just about colorless, faintest yellow hay hue, tends to pool into the glass more than reflect light but not dull, attractive in its own way. The nose leans towards thickness over lift, honeydew melon, peach, apricot and pear furnished with a

honeyed touch, the flowers a smaller component, very light oil notes, an underlying creaminess gives the orange, lemon citrus a sorbet character. Medium-bodied with a round enough bottom though you don't want it to sit on you, the acidity is there yet not strong enough to prevent that creaminess from developing in the palate too. Lime, tangerine, lemon citrus defanged thereby, therein. Full ripeness without extra sugar in the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit. No petrol but hints at the balancing presence of a grassy swipe. Overall it's tasty but just strikes you as playing it too safe. [Screwcap]
87

Mollydooker
South Australia, McLaren Vale, The Violinist
Verdelho
2008, \$25.99, 15.5%

Viscously layered, shiny golden core which does diminish along the rims, pools very attractively. Fat and sticky nose, the scents grip like glue from the thick floral perfume to the lemon peel and on through the apricot, banana, cantaloupe, mango fruit scents, no real complexity nor sense of place. Full-bodied with all the sticky, gluey qualities you'd expect by this point. Little acidity, there is some bitterness in the orange, lemon, white grapefruit citrus as well as a little grassiness, both help smack it into consciousness. The banana, apricot, melon, fig and mango fruit flavors loaded upfront and, along with most everything else steadily diminish towards the finish. Trades extensively on its sheer mouth weight and plushness. Which probably works for it more times than not. [Screwcap] 85

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Cloudy Bay
Marlborough
Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$29.99, 13.5%

Pale green, white straw hue throughout, very sparkly and reflective, rims fully transparent. Fresh, openly knit nose with minor saline edge to the white grapefruit, lemon citrus, chalk dust and metal flakes, very low on the grassy tip, the pineapple, nectarine, peach fruit scents as well not making much of a fuss, good movement in the nostrils though. Medium-bodied, very tangy and bright mouth entry emphasizing pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus next to floral dew. The acidity is sharp edged yet does not especially refresh. Papaya, pineapple, gooseberry, nectarine fruit invokes tropicality but it's not sweet enough to get all "sweet 'n' sour." Stays balanced with no real dips nor moments of excess heat. Squares its shoulders and persists through the finish for as long as possible. Doesn't have that extra kick and ends on a too sweetish note but really the only thing wrong with it is the price. [Screwcap]
88

ARGENTINA WHITE

Catena Zapata, Bodega
Mendoza, Catena Alta
Chardonnay
2006, \$36.99, 13.9%

Flat old gold color, brightened a touch by a green edge, adequate surface reflectivity, washes out around the rims. Crispy nose with smokiness and fine oak toast, feels more delicate than empty, either way offers whispers of lemon peel, stream water and peach, apricot fuzz and pear skin. Medium-bodied, openly knit in a conscious manner, moves

like thin finely woven cloth. As in the nose the oak treatment is toasty and pops and snaps more than slathering you in cream. There's a pleasing underlying minerality, paired nicely with lime and lemon citrus. Serene peach, apricot, apple, pear fruit gives it a textbook profile, neither overripe nor attenuated. No unpleasant aftertaste, lingers at the level of its price point but not out to make a huge impression. Nice array of elements, however soulless. 87