

The Hanes Wine Review, November 2010 Edition

The fall is a wonderful time of year for many reasons. Foremost among these is the release of the new vintage of higher end German and Austrian wines. So, while many folks turn from white to red wines, from October through December Hanes increases white wine consumption with lots and lots of Riesling. Oh, rapture. Not that much available here in North Carolina but buying what there is, as well as what can be afforded. Which usually means no Grosses Gewächs and much fewer Austrians than in the past. QbA and Kabinett, Hanes loves you. Please do spend some time this autumn searching out new Rieslings to try. They might all be gone soon and you would miss out. This is Hanes's final warning.

On a side note, it recently occurred to Hanes that that he now seldom uses the word "seldom." This word seems very traditional and it should be a part of an educated person's daily vocabulary. Yet, the word is seldom utilized. Why? It sure is classy. "Herbert and I seldom frequent the swinger's club these days." "Rarely" or "infrequently" does not do justice to the class-inflected nuance of "seldom," both an adverb and adjective. Witness this quote from W.H. Auden, "Fame often makes a writer vain, but seldom makes him proud." What word but seldom would fit such a sentence? Please do not let pedigreed words such as seldom die a slow death. Use the word oftentimes. Thank you.

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This month's big winners... Sastre's 2008 basic "Viña Sastre" Ribera del Duero is 100% Tempranillo and 100% delicious, this can move at \$21. Ancient Peaks from Paso Robles is an outfit new to Hanes but their 2008 Zinfandel is highly credible, especially at \$20, customers like it too. Vajra from Piedmont, Italy has done well by the world with their 2008 Langhe Rosso bottling, fruity and structured and even has some Pinot Noir in it. \$16 is a very good price for this. From the Russian River Valley, White Oak poured a bunch of their wines at the store lately and their 2008 Sauvignon Blanc was quite nice and more or less correctly priced at about \$19. Puzelat's 2009 Loire Gamay Noir "Le Telquel" is a juicy, tasty wine that may be more "modern" than expected but none the less slurpable, \$20 is about pushing it, though. Just past the "value" category, Corvidae's Syrah "Lenore" from the Columbia Valley is a simple, every day quaffer with substance for \$16. No one buys it. Similarly destined to collect dust on Concord retail shelves are any wine from Irouléguay, so Hanes just quaffed his own bottle of 2008 wine from Domaine Brana, a feisty blend of Gros Manseng, Petit Courbu and Petit Manseng.

The best \$15 and under picks... Not many value wines this time around so just have to mention that Château d'Oupia's Minervois is a perpetual bargain, their 2008 red wine \$14 or so, still very affordable for white trash like Hanes. From Gascony the producer Cassagnoles makes a killer bottling of 100% Gros Manseng that has yet to disappoint, their 2009 the usual vicious little bastard you want and need. Still just \$15. The "Belle Provençale" line from La Vieille Ferme is basically the same juice as the latter, just for on-premise sale only. Their 2009 red would retail for about \$9 and qualifies as an excellent buy at that price. Probably a ripoff at wine list pricing. The 2009 white "Colombelle" bottling from a Gascony cooperative provides a steady cheapie, a blend of Colombard and Ugni Blanc, \$12 is worth paying. Weiser-Künstler has made a fine herb with their 2009 QbA Riesling, think the \$22 price tag is justified, particularly if one is a Riesling slut. Gonna give a value thumbs up for the guts to make a 100% Petit Verdot from Spain. Langa Hermanos did it right in 2006, at \$15 could sell a lot of this if anyone knew what Petit Verdot is.

And the disappointments... Always searching for cheap wines for the wine bar's by-the-glass list, thought the non-vintage red blend from Contempo called "Inferno" might be a hit. Lots of oak and fruit but too dry and rough. Can't win them all. Joguet is a Chinon producer loved by some, not so much by others. Their 2009 rosé was an average effort, unlikely to decide the case. \$23 for it sucks, though. Hanes is going to just have to stop buying the Sauvignon No. 2 from Touraine's Clos Roche Blanche as this bottling never excites him. There is sufficient historical record to support this unfortunate conclusion. A 2009 Spätlese Dry Pinot Blanc from Rebholz failed to inspire and made Hanes weep for the \$29 spent on it. Another unusual disappointment came from the house of Knebel and their 2009 Riesling "Von Den Terrasen" – needs more life and verve to warrant spending \$23. Big letdown by Setzer and their one liter bottle of 2009 Grüner Veltliner from the Weinviertel region. Even for only \$14, this lacks anything approaching real character. Damn, son. Was not expecting much but even very low expectations can be missed, witness the 2009 Mendoza Cabernet Sauvignon from Alamos. At \$14 this is a giant ripoff.

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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/oldervintages2010.html>

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

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

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

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
 San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Dusi Vineyard
 Zinfandel
 2008, \$42.00, 16.1%

The purple core has enough red-ruby in it to stay just this side of opacity, in turn the rims focus more on ruby to pink magenta hues, unblemished and noticeably clear. While there's no heaviness in the nose, full-on jamminess to the blueberry, boysenberry, blackberry, black cherry scents, strong orange reduction, mint, lilacs, has a low oak presence, some vanilla/chocolate swirl, enticing alternation between clinging and lift, more overall coverage as a result. Full-bodied, however, sheds weight like a snake skin, does not allow its richness to slow it down. Caramel, butterscotch, milk chocolate and malt, adroit usage of oak, does not distract but instead decorates the blackberry, boysenberry, black cherry fruit, more fully ripened than sugary. Light marmalade/preserve character to the orange, lemon citrus. Finish starts to get tingly or prickly, the moderate acidity making a show of it. Not a huge blockbuster, much more an expression of old vine fruit that wasn't pushed too hard. 90

Ancient Peaks
 San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles
 Zinfandel
 2008, \$19.99, 15.0%

The purple core a little too dark or black to let much ruby into the clubhouse, very clean though and easy to see through, more red-ruby to a flat scarlet closer to the rims, great surface shine, vivid coloration without looking "massive." The nose is sweet and sugary while also "fresh," avoids dried fruit notes in the plum, apricot, blueberry, blackberry, red apple fruit, good mix going on, the chocolate and toffee nuances are just that, nuances, then molasses, butterscotch and candied orange peels, possesses a welcome floral lift, supporting menthol, nothing deviates from the script, better for it. Full-bodied while still fluid and sheds weight as it moves forward. Brambly feel at first, mixes together the eucalyptus, garden herbs, pine, ginger, and more wildflower aspect. The orange citrus comes with embellishments of more puckering lemon and white grapefruit. Not to say that it has unusually high acidity but it perceptibly seems more elevated than many immediate peers. Completely ripened plum, blueberry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit, sweet but knows to end on a more sour note to extend presence. For a straightforward wine, makes you want to keep typing about it. 96% Zinfandel, 4% Syrah. 90

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Dragon Vineyard
Zinfandel
2008, \$45.00, 16.0%
Red-ruby to violet colored core, comes close at times to a magenta red, deep but not fully opaque, the rims take on a decidedly stronger reddish cast, youthful but not as extravagantly saturated as one expects from The House of Turley. There's a buoyant underpinning of vanilla, molasses and orange reduction beneath the blackberry, blueberry, cherry fruit scents in the nose, the eucalyptus to pine add weight more than anything, some forest scrub, there's a very solid presence here but nothing close to explosive. More medium-bodied, than full-bodied, leverages its weight nicely but no lead plate on your tongue. Lively raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit with some golden raisin, blueberry and boysenberry flavors, any sugariness tempered by the component of white grapefruit, mandarin orange citrus. Little by way of tannin but you perceive more acidity than might usually be the case with such a wine. Eucalyptus, caramelized brown sugar, toffee, the oak is more sweet than toasty. No peppery nor very mountain-like herbaceous qualities, still dries out some by the end in a positive fashion. Tightens up and finds pacing through the end. All said and done, a great Zin that does not deserve the price tag. 89

Middle Sister
Regional Blend, California, Rebel Red
Blend
NV, \$11.99, 12.5%
Mostly transparent ruby-violet color, consistent with an infusion of red magenta at the rims, spotless surface. The nose offers up an insane amount of ginger spice, then orange pekoe tea leaves, milk chocolate nibs, menthol rub and, of course, jammy, concentrated blackberry, raspberry, boysenberry, blueberry, berry berry fruit, hard to imagine more intensity in the sugariness. Medium-bodied, smooth, soft and fluid, moves through the mouth like a hot knife in butter. As far as butter goes, there's that plus vanilla pudding and caramel. Plus that bodacious ginger spice. Candied orange peels fit right in, two scoops of close to dried fruit sweetness in the cherry, raspberry, cranberry, blackberry fruit, nothing as heavy as plum. Eucalyptus notes provide a modicum of lift. Zippo tannin or acidity. Froot loops in a bottle. 38% Zinfandel, 34% Merlot, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Syrah, 2% other.
(Synthetic Cork) 85

Contempo
Regional Blend, California, Inferno
Blend
NV, \$11.99, 14.2%

Dark blackish purple core, still retains a fair degree of clarity, the rims remain dark, crimson to brick red in hue. Heavy duty oak in the nose, roasted coconut flakes, toffee, fried butter and mocha powder, thick and pungent plum to prune, black cherry, blueberry fruit scents, perhaps some menthol or eucalyptus but, truth be told, it's just oak and fruit. In the mouth it's more of the same, coffee bean, coconut, butterscotch, peanut brittle and cocoa with a shovel of plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit. Here, however, the wood tannin adds a measure of astringency, particularly towards the finish, drying and powdery. Touches of orange peel, basic florality and mint. Were it not for the nasty tannic roughness would be a perfectly fine "red wine." Proprietary blend, grapes unspecified.
(Synthetic Cork) 83

CALIFORNIA WHITE

White Oak Vineyards & Winery
Russian River Valley
Sauvignon Blanc
2008, \$18.99, 14.3%
Faint gauziness to the brown straw color, more worn gold present than bright yellow, decent surface shine. The nose bursts with mint, lime and lemon citrus, kiwi, pineapple and mango fruit, derives additional lift from the abundant florality, comes up with a pinch of stone dust before finally dissolving for good. Medium-bodied, the acidity has more dustiness than sharp edges, no crazy bite here. Oodles of sugary sweet lime, tangelo, pink grapefruit citrus though. And no lack of green melon, kiwi, apple, mango, nectarine, pineapple fruit, ripe and juicy. The mint, rose water and lilacs continue to keep things pretty and light-hearted. Touch of ginger spice perks up the finish. Very straightforward and textbook, for the grape in the American idiom. 89

Hahn Estates
Monterey County
Chardonnay
2008, \$10.99, 14.6%
The depth in the old worn gold core extends through the rims, neither especially shiny nor dull, sits like a block in the glass, nothing visually unusual. Rich, layered nose of butterscotch, toffee, caramel and marshmallows, the oak ably met by pineapple, nectarine, peach, red apple fruit scents and then tangerine, lime citrus, not much else to comment on, but doesn't really need more. Medium-bodied, covers the full breadth of the palate with what weight is there, the sour tang to the lime, lemon, tangerine citrus sets the tone, focuses the vanilla, butterscotch, toffee like a snug corset. Acidity is slightly above average and helps in this regard as well, feels "natural" and unforced too. No holes in the pear, peach, pineapple,

green apple fruit. The florality comes on like an air freshener. Keeps its feet wide and secure through the finish, delivers to anyone with basic, moderate expectations. (Composite Cork) 87

Souverain
Alexander Valley
Chardonnay
2008, \$14.99, 13.9%

Good brightness in the rich gold color, suggests an amber tint at some angles, steady throughout, works hard at filling the glass. The nose focuses on the oak, duh, but really uses creaminess as well as toastiness to keep a nice alternation between butterscotch, caramel, vanilla fudge and wood smoke as well as lime, tangerine citrus, pushes the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit off to the side, good speed and lift, both never feels heavy or slight. Full-bodied, the acidity initially shows energy than trails off. Ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon spice leads into lime, orange citrus. Once these sharper elements sink in, vanilla and caramel ensue. More flesh to the apricot, peach, nectarine, apple fruit. Consistent weight from start to finish, soft but not wimpy, engages you with intent to please. No room to complain, if this is your bag you will be pleased with the purchase. 87

White Oak Vineyards & Winery
Russian River Valley
Chardonnay
2008, \$24.99, 13.9%

Dull yellow to brown hay color, sits deeply in the glass, possesses enough translucency to fill out the rims even with diminished hue. Strong toast in the nose, yet not without its own creamy vanilla softness too, lime custard, plumply contoured peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit scents, some wood spice and clove notes, holds a full nostril presence for some time. Full-bodied in the mouth as well, pushes against your cheek walls looking for more space to fill. Oak of all sorts, butterscotch, caramel, fresh whipped cream, buttered toast, then the standard burst of lime, lemon citrus zest. Red apple, pear, apricot, peach fruit full from start to finish, with sappy grip as well. The acidity actually livelier than expected, just hard to notice under the oak. Could as easily establish the script as follow it. 87

Hess Collection, The
Monterey County, Shirtail Creek Vineyard
Chardonnay
2009, \$14.99, 14.2%

Solid golden color, minimal hue around the rims, more of a solid block than layered, actually shows a touch of bubbly fizz inside. Lots of oak in the nose, not as much creamy as toasty, fried butter on bread, butterscotch,

the lime to orange citrus has a sour twist to it, floral but doesn't spread widely, the apricot, peach, pear has average thrust and depth, overall hits the basics across the board, needs staying power. Full-bodied, here it's because of the oaky creaminess which pulls a little ahead of the toastiness, vanilla, whipped cream, butterscotch with some graham cracker notes. The pear, red apple, apricot fruit comes off as a tad simple. More sweet than sour lime, orange, lemon citrus, a major factor. The acidity leaves you with little opinion of it, no edge but there is some dryness there. Florality masked by the oak. As with the nose, the end needs extension. Still, nothing wrong as a sipping wine. (Screwcap) 86

Pozzan Winery, Michael
Napa Valley, Annabella Special Selection
Chardonnay
2008, \$14.99, 13.5%

Basic golden color, benefits from above average surface shine, sits solidly beneath the surface too. The oak is crisp rather than creamy, maybe for the best as there's a plump, poached feel to the pear, peach, apricot scents, orange juice as well, more burnt butter and butterscotch than caramel, lacks lift or, conversely, really impressive weight. Medium-bodied, sort of diffuse in how its marshals itself from the start, however, more troubling would be the tailing off through the finish. Same array of pear, apple, peach fruit, nothing special and the lemon to orange citrus needs zest. Minimal florality, the oak weaker than expected, some toast but really outside of dry, gritty texture, not adding much. Lacks sweetness as well as length, tastes well below the pedigree suggested by the label as well as the price. (Composite Cork) 83

WASHINGTON RED

Corvidae Wine Co.
Columbia Valley, Lenore
Syrah
2007, \$15.99, 14.1%

Pure, unblemished and completely opaque purple core, violet dominates the rims as well, thin a mix of red magenta and crimson, richly saturated. The nose is unusually dense, as a result the plum, black currant, cherry scents don't release much, in turn while there's roasted coffee and mocha, only a smattering of florality and close to no citrus or pepper. Full-bodied, overall smooth in texture with good fluidity, there is a fair amount of tannin, seemingly a mix of natural and wood tannin. Sweet cherry, plum, cassis, blackberry fruit the clear focal point, more white grapefruit than flowers here, the cocoa, coffee, chocolate roasty and toasty, crispens things. Not much acidity but it would just lessen the appeal of the fruit. In no way prune-y nor

overripe, just loaded with juice. Simple pleasure here in spades. 87

WASHINGTON WHITE

Smith Wines, Charles

Columbia Valley, Evergreen Vineyard, Kung Fu Girl Riesling

2009, \$15.99, 12.5%

Pale yellow straw color, distorts the light and your vision with ease, decent shine, a little fizz visible within. Airy nose but not necessarily light, like a flag slowly flapping in the wind, with each turn you get more pear, green apple fruit, taut florality, high-toned orange, lemon zest and a surprisingly amount of chalkiness, this said, doesn't dry out your nostrils nor lack adequate staying power. Light to medium-bodied, the acidity firms it up well and creates additional palate presence. Semi-sour lemon, lime citrus frames the mouth entry, gets the taste buds revved for the wiry green apple, pear, peach, passion fruit flavors. Mixes in some mineral water, stone notes without missing a beat. Dry without losing pacing or getting you to lick your lips, the flavor level remains through the end. Very nice, maybe all it needs for what it is might be a bit more weight in the middle. (Screwcap) 88

VIRGINIA RED

White Hall Vineyards

Monticello

Cabernet Franc

2008, \$15.99, 13.0%

Palpable red-magenta to crimson influence on both the violet core and more basic ruby rims, entirely unblemished and transparent although in no way lacking in hue. The nose betrays some oak toast but nothing which appears to be masking flaws, similarly the buttered muffin and vanilla remains lowkey and make room for the tart red cherry, raspberry scents as well as bell pepper, snap pea elements, smattering of orange zest, not really earthy but there's a pinch of mineral and stone dust in there, decent length.

Medium-bodied, has some tannic underpinning but it is the acidity which is much livelier. The structure may make it appear watery to some but it really is not, the red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit lasts fully through the finish, both sweet and savory. The orange, white grapefruit citrus fits the overall demeanor nicely. Brush of caramel, vanilla, more sweet oak than toasty. Takes pains to reduce the herbaceousness, just a hint of bell pepper. Not fruity nor oaky enough to deviate too far from what an honest Cabernet Franc should taste like. Should be even better with food. (Synthetic Cork: Diam) 87

FRANCE RED

Puzelat, Thierry

Loire, Vin de Table Français, Le Telquel

Gamay Noir

2009, \$19.99, 11.5%

There's a warm glow to the rich magenta-purple colored core, full with a moderate opacity, the rims more ruby to pink, a bunch of bubbles cling to the bowl bottom as it was scored. Thick red currant, cranberry, raspberry fruit alongside more snappy green apple and orange zest, generous white pepper spice, followed up by a deep floral dew, not to mention pleasing counter-balance from mineral dust and a good herbaceous twist. Full-bodied with more lift than cling, as if it wants to stick to the roof of your mouth more than your tongue. Caramel accents introduce the sugar coated orange slices, rosemary led herbs but it's a nanosecond before the cranberry, cherry, raspberry, blueberry fruit juice up the dance floor. Even with that pepper to sage spice, hard to pep up the tannin, alas, the acidity kinda napping on the couch too. Lucks out that the primary material has that lifting nature, leaves the overall experience close to "guilty pleasure" territory. Which is not such a bad thing, if you like wine. (Synthetic Cork) (No vintage on label, you just have to know who to ask to find out.) 90

Oupia, Château d'

Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois

Blend

2008, \$13.99, 13.0%

Vibrantly glowing purple core, segues to a youthful blush of deep red magenta, too dark to display much ruby. Pretty floral spritz pairs up with orange and white grapefruit scents to establish a presence in the nose, well-set core of plum, blackberry, black cherry scents, muscularly expressive, notes of licorice keep it clean, stays primary and immediately pleasurable. Medium-bodied with a smooth mouth texture to help leverage every ounce to keep full weight through the finish. Plump cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, any unnecessary sugariness shaved away by able acidity. The orange citrus sweet and juicy too. After some time you can tease out beef jerky, iodine and mineral chunk aspects, nothing really close to animality nor herbaceousness. The floral element drier here and more front-loaded. Closes up slightly with extended air time but the bottle should be consumed swiftly enough to not pose a problem. 60% Carignan, 30% Syrah, 10% Grenache. 89

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Poncié
Gamay Noir
2008, \$28.99, 12.5%

Clear, but not especially vibrant, ruby-purple color, remarkable consistency from core to rims, about average surface shine. The nose brings you a stony, close to minerally roughness, add in lemon zest and it will take a few sniffs for the actually sugary strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit scents, pretty floral lift, you really have to like how it mixes muscle with a gentler touch, there's a little bit of cocoa, sweetens before it dissolves. Medium-bodied, nothing hard about it while at the same time the acidity and tannin's direction is the direction it all goes in. White grapefruit, tangerine, lemon citrus more sour than juicy, for the best. Florality pushes any grassiness into the background. During the second half the stone dust and chalk starts to reverberate and add to its steady cadence. Cranberry, pomegranate blends with the raspberry, strawberry, great oscillation. Nibbles on you at the finish. There's nothing here "profound" but it is absolutely enchanting and tickles your palate until you just say ok, I'll refill the glass. 89

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des
Beaujolais, l'Ancien Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2009, \$18.99, 12.0%

Light violet to ruby color, consistently hued, displays some pink accents at the rims, surface is clean and of above average shine. Leanly muscular nose, full of orange, lemon peel, stone to limestone notes, wet, then cranberry, raspberry, red cherry, pomegranate scents of admirable edge, a slight cut grass component which stiffens it in the absence of meaningful minerality, you get a floral lift a murmur of caramel before drifting off into the ether. Medium-bodied, pleasingly imbued with the acidic, and to lesser extent tannic, structure to walk erect and then some. Orange, lemon citrus lively, here you get a mix of stone and minerals, almost earthy. More cocoa dust than caramel. The raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit has juice and length, approaches your tongue with a fine sandpapery grit. Floral to a point, yet, wants to make sure it isn't a pretty boy. Slakes your thirst without sacrificing country wine roughness. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 89

Verdier-Logel
Loire, Côtes du Forez, Le Volcanique
Gamay Noir
2008, \$14.99, 12.0%

Trim, spotless visually, very consistent violet to ruby from the core to the rims, you see some pinkish magenta to fashion the thin outermost edge. There's a

nice earth, mushroom, wet forest floor matter element to the nose, any sourness to the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit scents leavened by inherent ripeness as well as caramel, butterscotch notes which kind of come out of nowhere, inconsistent orange to lemon citrus breeze, in no way lacking in fruit but you really appreciate the herbaceous qualities for the life they bring. Medium-bodied, more weight during the attack and thereafter slowly trails off. There's a sort of sneaky manner to the tannin and acidity, you feel like the sweetness is about to explode but then things just subtly get dry. Cranberry, pomegranate, red cherry, raspberry fruit stays taut, yet stretches out admirably. The lemon, orange citrus has a sour quality but really just helps to keep things awake. Wildflowers, thyme, basil provide more edge, the earthiness has a kind of clay, red earth density. Provides an attractively pungent retronasal blast, nothing new but deepens what is there. Fruitiness can't save it from being rejected by people who just really want fruit. 88

Coquelet, Damien
Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages
Gamay Noir
2009, \$17.99, 13.0%

Rich purple core with a mild ruby cast, dark enough to mask its clean transparency, the rims remain dark with a red magenta to garnet hue, vivid color not an issue here. The nose comes across as sort of tight, not lacking in substance, just clenched some. There's plenty of cranberry, raspberry, bing cherry fruit scents to go around, tart lemon to orange citrus accents, moss and lichens, tarry earth, merest glimmer of merde, has an approachable old school feel in spite of the relative lack of expressivity. Medium-bodied, has real nice tannic and acidic structure which helps it strengthen its position on the palate immensely. As savory as sweet, the orange to white grapefruit citrus has bite while the flower petals and licorice lessen the brunt. Pomegranate, cranberry, cherry, mulberry fruit slugs its way through your mouth. Not "clean" in any crystalline manner, yet, not dirty in the pejorative sense, just brings a certain measure of funk. The finish is sort of short, more a product of strong grip than lack of primary material. Texture appears to be the primary goal rather than flavor, could stand to loosen up and just have some fun. That said, no problem finishing the first glass, second too and so on. 88

Rame, Château La
Bordeaux
Blend
2009, \$16.99, 13.0%

Trim, unblemished ruby-purple color, vividly transparent, little noticeable change at the rims. Thickset nose of red currant, red cherry, raspberry

scents, at times close to jammy, still has a lively grassy streak and enough stone, merde notes to earn respect, orange slices, interesting for how strongly it leans on the fruit without losing its "soul." Full-bodied, has enough layers to coat the tongue without rendering it immobile. The tannins add a prickle and drying effect at the end, otherwise cede the floor to the ripe raspberry, red cherry, currant, cranberry fruit and semi-sweet orange, white grapefruit citrus. The cedar, balsam wood, sandy earth components manage to eke out some grit to the undercarriage. There is an oaky toastiness going on, however, it doesn't evince itself in any specific flavors and more or less fits into the whole. Can easily please multiple palates at once. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc. (Composite Cork) 88

Gardiès, Domaine

Languedoc/Roussillon, Côtes du Roussillon, Mas Las Cabes

Blend

2008, \$14.99, 13.5%

Full purple core, pushes the red-ruby and magenta out towards the nicely broad rims, its depth may make you miss how clean and reflective it is. A little bit of earthy funk at first in the nose prior to releasing the roses, milk chocolate to cocoa, powerful orange zest, has a tightly bound character which impedes the spreading of the plum, black cherry scents, is helped by a mentholated, herbal streak. Close to full-bodied, loses weight towards the end but certainly fills the mouth at first. Dry and tannic, again outsprinted at first by the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, just can't sink much in. Orange and lemon citrus, pressed flowers and some of that cocoa powder help to middling success. Here not so earthy nor grassy but has mineral side which is nice. Presents itself as a pleasant country style wine, really all that's glaringly missing is more fluidity and length. 60% Syrah, 30% Grenache, 10% Carignan. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 87

Belle Provençale

Rhône, Côtes du Ventoux

Blend

2009, \$8.99, 13.5%

Warm ruby-purple core, unblemished through to the red magenta rim, nice vibrancy throughout. Strong florality in the nose, enough so that the plum character restrained, you get more sweet raspberry, blackberry scents, brush of milk chocolate entirely in keeping, orange juice and light pine. Medium-bodied, soft with lots of give which may create the impression of more sheer weight. Very slight tannic grit and not much more acidity ensures that the raspberry, strawberry, blueberry, red cherry fruit stays sugary and long. Squeezes orange to tangerine juice all over the

tongue. The flowers are downright musky and infiltrate most every pore. Over time the mouth feel seems creamier, almost like whipped cream on top. Likely to attract many fans without coming off as "simple" per se. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Mourvèdre. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 87

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des

Beaujolais, l'Ancien Vieilles Vignes

Gamay Noir

2008, \$18.99, 12.0%

Highly reflective and crystal clear ruby-violet color, perfectly transparent with just a touch of pinkish magenta at the rims, highly attractive. There's more stone, mineral dust and dried poor earth in the nose than strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, the orange to lemon citrus similarly attenuated, not quite herbaceous but there is a grassy streak, overall tightly bound and not giving much, lacks a resonant perfume. Medium-bodied, equally tight and unyielding here, the tannins are hard as nails and put too much starch in your underwear. The dryness permeates your tongue until it can hardly register much of the red cherry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit. The tartness of the grapefruit, lemon fruit help it fare better, however, all the earthiness, pulverized stone and grassiness remain fully in charge. Maybe one could argue that it is already in "shutdown" phase but, even with extended aeration, this is not a wine giving up much pleasure. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 85

Descombes, Georges

Beaujolais, Régnié

Gamay Noir

2008, \$22.99, 12.5%

While clear, there's a certain flatness to the ruby-violet coloration, doesn't quite get pink but the rims have more of the standard magenta hue, overall nothing unusual here. The nose reveals lots of pit and fruit skin to the cherry, raspberry, blackberry scents, dovetails with the chunks of stone, poor brown earth and matted meadow grasses, little here is soft or trying to cuddle up to you, comes across as tight and either shut down or didn't have much to offer when open. Medium-bodied, gives you the same impression in the mouth, unleashes the tannin and acidity until your mouth pores feel roughed up, dry from start to finish. Stream water, stone notes deaden, can't say there's enough minerality to get it dancing. The raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit seems to have more retronasal presence than direct. Dried grapefruit pith, on the herbaceous side. The pieces seem to be in place, they are either thinnish or just not meshing together. Too bad. 85

Chermette (Vissoux), Pierre-Marie
Beaujolais, Les Griottes Rosé
Gamay Noir
2009, \$17.99, 13.0%

Orange cast to the otherwise pinkish color, metallic like fish skin, maybe salmon flesh, has a good translucent shimmer to it, sort of yellows out around the rims but nothing dilute. Firm nose, all business as it marches out the mineral dust, strawberry, watermelon, sour red cherry fruit scents, lemon zest, curiously not that floral, however, it does soften a touch for a little honey or mocha to sneak out. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with, again, firmness as its main calling card, the acidity does know when to relent and let the raspberry, watermelon, strawberry, white grape fruit flow. Pleasing mix of zing and juice to the orange to white grapefruit citrus notes. The mineral and stone components commensurate to the whole. Never too dry nor dusty, still strikes you as a wine that might be better off in like six months or so. Right now, likely better with food or slightly closer to room temperature. (Synthetic Cork) 88

Joguet, Domaine Charles
Loire, Chinon, Rosé
Cabernet Franc
2009, \$22.99, 13.5%

Vibrantly glowing watermelon pink, even with the relative lightness of color and perfect transparency carves out a full presence in the glass. In the nose nothing really underripe about the strawberry, cranberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit, however, this component marginalized by the lemon zest, metallic mineral powder and dusty grassiness, fruit gains a stronger foothold nearer room temperature, until then the whole show on the quiet side. Medium-bodied, the acidity throws a charge into the lemon to grapefruit citrus and makes this by far the first thing you notice. The stone, stream water and general "firm calmness" is next, not adding much flavor more so an implacable façade. The red cherry, raspberry, watermelon fruit more or less holds its own, particularly past the mid-palate. After awhile the dryness gives the citrus a powdery feel, like a tub of "-ade." In the end, hard to assess in terms of grape or rosé category, makes you want to turn the brain off and soak in whatever visceral pleasure is to be had. 86

FRANCE WHITE

Huet, Domaine
Loire, Vouvray, Pétillant Brut
Chenin Blanc
2005, \$32.99, 12.0%

Crisp golden color, neither deep nor light, a plethora of active fat bubbles cascade within, above average

clarity, the gold sparkles through to the rims. The nose features lemon zest to oil, angular pear, peach, red apple fruit scents, curiously sharp flower petals, this met by softer honey notes, more lime to orange as it warms, light bread but not yeasty, for all of its desire to push deep into your nostrils, not that hard-headed as it were. Medium-bodied, the carbonation has a real tight punch to it which ensures the flavors will have free room to move. Dry, early emphasis on lemon to white grapefruit citrus as well as green apple, pear, peach, kumquat fruit. White stone, chalk and minerals appear, more powdery than chunky in nature. Underneath this you sense some hesitant creaminess, not like "soft" but at least "understanding." Minor component of grass and wildflowers, some mint. Stays taut and linear, no slowdown, you better enjoy it as it briskly passes by. 88

Cassagnoles, Domaine des
Southwest France, Côtes de Gascogne, Cuvée Gros
Manseng Reserve Selection
Gros Manseng
2009, \$14.99, 13.5%

Glassy yellow straw color, has some depth in spite of the overall transparency, hue holds on decently through the rims, surface blends into the liquid below. The nose comes right after you with pineapple, star fruit, papaya, nectarine and green apple fruit followed on by tangerine, pink grapefruit zest, white mineral powder and a pinch of spice, some green grass as well, nothing here lacks energy. Full-bodied, same electric personality here, clove cigarette smoke, sand and mineral dust, viciously aggressive tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus. That pineapple, papaya, kumquat, green apple, pear, nectarine fruit has just slightly underripe firmness. The acidity can't wait to get out of the starting gate and rip along the inside track. In no way herbaceous, however, has an outdoorsy streak. Does finish with a forgiving handful of honey and cane sugar at the end. Yowza, if this can't get your attention, little will. (Screwcap: Kapvins) 91

Pinon, François
Loire, Vouvray, Cuvée Tradition
Chenin Blanc
2008, \$22.99, 13.0%

Flat yellow straw color, light enough to appear even throughout, adequate surface sheen, visually most impressive viewed as a solid block in the glass. Tight feel in the nose, as in more dense than heavy, lemon honey, minerals and wet chalk, sufficient florality to overcome smokiness, pushes tropical before falling back into more basic peach, nectarine, apple scents, all of which last very well, steady lift, more of a 747 than wispy cloud, prettier when approaching room temperature. Medium-bodied, the energy and brawn of

the acidity is what makes this wine from the start, willing to draw blood to get its way and keeps every element focused while also your tongue salivating. More honey as well as sweet 'n' sour tangerine, lime citrus to enjoy while here the fruit does blend in pineapple, papaya with the nectarine, peach, green apple foundation. At times, however, nuances of vanilla creaminess do come through which provide oases of sweetness. Floral with traces of black licorice and fennel. Very engaging, gooses your tongue without you wanting it to stop. The acidity should make it more versatile at the dinner table too. 90

Brana, Domaine

Southwest France, Irouléguay, Ilori Les Jonquilles Blend

2008, \$19.99, 13.5%

Deep golden color which pushes close to amber, moderate hue loss at the rims, decent surface shine but dull, blockish below. Crisp, if not sharp nose, of pineapple, guava, green apple, passion fruit with no lack of white grapefruit, sour orange citrus zest, serious wet smokiness, fetchingly acrid, still comes with a honeyed touch which helps to anchor it, the grassiness is nothing to worry about. Medium-bodied, muscular but doesn't have the sort of weight which would slow it down. The acidity revs high without unnecessarily drawing blood. Here the fruit more green apple, pear, pineapple, apricot, less juice but less sharpness too. The white grapefruit, lemon, orange citrus a calming influence. Lemongrass, dusty white stones. Dry, sharp finish has you licking your lips for more tough love. 50% Gros Manseng, 25% Petit Courbu, 25% Petit Manseng. (Composite Cork) 90

Droin, Domaine Jean-Paul & Benoît

Burgundy, Chablis

Chardonnay

2008, \$28.99, 12.5%

Both shiny and layered golden straw appearance, draws you deeper into it while at once leaping out at you, distortion of light helps fill the rims, nothing ephemeral about it, fetching while the glass is full and close to empty. Consistently full nose, offers lemon, tangerine, lime citrus notes with more than a few pinches of minerality, hints at cut grass and snap peas but relents, never clamps down hard, instead you get some floral notes in helping the softening flow of the earthiness and somewhat just ripe apricot, peach apple, pear fruit. Medium-bodied with a wiry body that The acidity could be brighter were it not for a desire to get dirty and mud wrestle your mouth pores until someone goes uncle. The flower petals stronger here and the pink/white grapefruit, lemon to lime citrus more or less the deciding factor throughout. Lacks the persistent follow-through to impress most buyers but

there who "get it" while appreciate everything but the semi-weak peach, pear, apricot fruit. It's a pretty fine drinker over next 2-3 year horizon. 89

Thomas-Labaille, Claude et Florence

Loire, Sancerre, l'Authentique

Sauvignon Blanc

2009, \$23.99, 13.0%

Simple white to yellow hay color, remarkably unremarkable, somewhat glassy but not dull, rims are leached of most color, it's a glass of white wine for sure. The nose has some crinkle to it, white smoke and mineral dust, however the more lasting elements are the pink grapefruit citrus and floral water, underneath is slowly percolating fruit of apricot, pear and peach, there's more life and breadth nearer room temperature. Medium-bodied, the acidity is able to express its street cred without administering a critical beatdown. Super tang in the tangerine, mandarin orange, grapefruit citrus along with a more metallic ring to the stone, mineral component. Too dry and not savage enough to achieve tropicality, pineapple and nectarine join the semi-softer peach, apple and pear flavors. Lilacs and other fragrant flowers appear, no real musk. Maybe even a few moments of licorice. This is high quality basic Sancerre, offered at a price that is about as low as it gets this days. More yearning for one's youth. 89

Huet, Domaine

Loire, Vouvray, Le Mont, Demi-Sec

Chenin Blanc

2008, \$42.99, 13.5%

Pure, straightforward golden color, solid block presence in the glass, only slight fading in the glass, surface possesses plenty of luster. There's a creaminess to the nose which evokes thoughts of vanilla pudding, some bubblegum notes alongside the honey, brown sugar and orange glaze, more penetrating scents of lemon peel, stone dust and pickle juice appear, however, a thick stream of apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, red apple fruit clears all that up, attractive floral side, while has youthful plumpness for sure, unsure if it has the bone structure to firm up over time. In the mouth it benefits immensely from the sinewy acidity which keeps the wattage high from start to finish. Sparkly life drives the tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus to the head of the line, along with this, can't seem to shake that pickled or jalapeño character you'd expect more from Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc. Resonant, long presence to the peach, nectarine, guava, apricot fruit, achieves a certain stickiness in spite of the acidity. Honeyed, still it's a creamier fresh cream to vanilla pudding aspect which dominates the back half, not really leesy nor milky. The acidity may yet save the day down the road but it's fun enough to

chug now that one might be happy enough with that.
89

Bellegarde, Domaine

Southwest France, Jurançon Sec, La Pierre Blanche Blend

2008, \$29.99, 13.5%

Dark gold to lighter amber in color, hazily transparent, thins out around the rims, nothing special about the surface luster. Toasted coconut, fried butter, nougat bursts into the nose, zesty lime and tangerine citrus, fresh mint leaves, sharp metallic flecks, the apricot, peach, pineapple, nectarine, kumquat fruit almost comes across as an afterthought, bramble wood and thistles, a very interesting attempt to blend disparate elements together but ends up more like a black and white cookie. Which is not a bad thing. Full-bodied, more in the way of gluing itself to your mouth pores than density. The caramel, butterscotch, coconut evident, but here the acidity wields a mean carving knife and slices most of it away by the mid-palate. Green apple, papaya, pineapple, passion fruit flavors keep things fairly angular. Lime, lemon, white grapefruit citrus bring serious wattage. Again, more metal and rust than stone, whether it is minerally depends on your definition. Mint, anise, basil, sweet and sour. Serving temperature is highly important to get the desired result. 70% Petit Manseng, 30% Gros Manseng. 89

Texier, Eric

Rhône, Moût de Raisins Partiellement Fermenté Ô Pâle

Viognier

2009, \$25.99, 7.0%

Filmy, unclarified appearance, flat yellow gold, its solidity holds the light nicely. Sturdy nose, has thickness without the fat, the green melon, green apple, apricot, peach scents are simply stated, on the sweet side, concentrates the floral dew further, more orange blossom than zest, even manages a almond like nuttiness. Full-bodied and here on the heavy side, the relative lack of acidity hurts more in terms of verve than dryness per se. Has the mouth feel of apple cider, tastes like it too, mixing in peach, pear too. The lemon, orange citrus dried to a peel. However, more breadth in the flowers, if not actually lift. It tastes "pretty" yet the dryness clenches the finish. Hard to tell if it show better colder or warmer. Fullness suggests serve with food rather than pound on its own. (Composite Cork)
88

Grands Bois, Domaine Les

Rhône, Côtes du Rhône

Viognier

2009, \$16.99, 14.0%

Sort of washed out yellow to orangish color, firm in the middle with some translucent layering, more thinned out around the rims. Surprisingly muscular nose of orange reduction, honey, molasses and floral musk, scrubbed apricot, peach, yellow apple fruit scents, mint notes pretty some, oddly maybe even some chocolate powder, the extract is obvious and helps it fill 'er up without a hitch. Full-bodied in the mouth too, coverage from cheek to cheek, yet without anchoring itself unduly. The honey, brown sugar sweetness informs the orange blossom to zest, same for the apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, apple flavors. If anything gets bogged down, it is likely the rose, lilac flowers, could shed some weight in favor of sprightliness. Vanilla and mint, even with the weight everything is fairly "pretty." If you want full-on Viognier without the drier, more nuanced side of the grape, pretty damn hard to beat for the price. 88

Clos Roche Blanche

Loire, Touraine, Sauvignon No. 2

Sauvignon Blanc

2009, \$19.99, 13.8%

Semi-flat, or at least low gloss, yellow hay color, the surface shine separates from the solid block below, little loss at the rims, certainly fills the glass. The nose has a languid fullness to it, the pear, apple, peach scents have a creaminess to them, dewy floral breeze, freshly squeezed ripe lemons, light stoniness, more so a sauna smoke aspect. Full-bodied, here the acidity attempts to provide the missing piece and stiffen the whole. Still the fruit comes across as green apple cider mixed with pieces of pear, peach. The lemon to orange citrus the most active force, sour yet juicy, covers the full palate cheek to cheek. Slate and wet stream stones, not much minerality. Taken as a whole not sweet, however, not particularly dry either, even with a honeyed note later on. Weight on the palate complete at the end. Very easy to drink, not the one for you if you want "steely" Sauvignon Blanc, more about old vine richness. 87

Plaimont, Union des Producteurs de

Southwest France, Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne, Colombelle

Blend

2009, \$11.99, 11.5%

Straightforward yellow-white straw color, neither dilute nor full, while easy to see through shows a bit of layering, can't say it looks like anything but a "white wine" in the glass. Crisp, active nose that verges on aggressive, sour white grapefruit and lemon citrus, brawny herbaceousness, sauna stone mist, the nectarine, pineapple, passion fruit, star fruit scents have edge to spare, everything here sharpened to a keen, cutting edge. Medium-bodied, sheds some

weight towards the end. As in the nose, clearly focused on hitting you with white grapefruit, lemon, sour orange citrus and fresh green grass, what minerals or stone is there supports this position fully. Still nothing attenuated about it, without much depth the vivid nature of the citrus and nectarine, pineapple, green apple, star fruit flavors kick hard through the finish and, at the same time, it's not as hardnosed as it might otherwise be. Scrubs your mouth pores fully, nothing here is breaking new territory but if you want some sparkle in your mouth, the price is right. 70% Colombard, 30% Ugni Blanc. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 86

FRANCE DESSERT

Huet, Domaine
Loire, Vouvray, Le Haut-Lieu, Moelleux 1ère Trie
Chenin Blanc
2008, \$48.99, 12.5%
Moderate depth to the heavy golden color, fades some around the rims but credible hue in the middle, about average surface shine. Sauna stone smoke, tangy pineapple, papaya, nectarine, peach, green apple scents, lively white grapefruit to tangerine citrus, some honey, in no way lean but pared down to pure basics, slides in there like a jail shiv, you've been cut for a minute before you notice the blood, keeps sparkling texturally even after the scents have gone. Medium-bodied, broad shouldered and aggressive, the acidity acts like its on audition for Girls Gone Wild, wants to be as over the top as possible. Electric pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus with a solid layer of honey, brown sugar following on. Heightened sour bite to the papaya, guava, pineapple, green apple, star fruit flavors, oddly though, it all has this whipped cream textural quality as well. Brief floral breeze. Just amazingly acidic without the withering dryness. The classification as "moelleux" is questionable, drinks like a sec. 92

ITALY RED

Grosjean Frères
Valle d'Aosta, Vallee d'Aoste, Gamay
Gamay Noir
2008, \$25.99, 13.0%
Pretty sparkle to the ruby-violet color, vivid and fresh, perfectly clear, the rims show a more ruby with a pinkish cast. Very fruity nose, crushed raspberry, blackberry, red cherry scents, were it not for the lemon zest and then mineral dust infusion could verge on jammy, blends in some floral dew as well, rosemary and thyme, too ripe for any earthy or grassy elements to develop. Full-bodied, really coats the palate evenly as well as from start to finish, consistent presence. Has the acidity to tame the sweetness and bring zip to

the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit without shortening it at all. The lemon to white grapefruit citrus moderately sweeter here, a nice side dish to the fruit. No sign of greenness at all, tannins also appear under control. The florality at times gets cloaked by the bountiful citrus. Suggests some mineral and stone bits under the baby fat. Has some dryness which might confound a few folks lured in by the fruit, otherwise giving loads of immediate pleasure. (Synthetic Cork: Korked Pro) 90

Vajra, G.D.
Piedmont, Langhe Rosso
Blend
2008, \$15.99, 13.0%
Utterly clean and transparent, the purple core yields quickly to burnt crimson, reddish brick shades, weakens slightly at the rims. Light, high-toned nose with crisp lift focusing on pomegranate, cranberry, red cherry fruit, leather, rose petals, while earthy it's pure overall, aided by sparkly orange zest. Light ot medium-bodied, super-bright acidity squeezes your tongue with authority. White grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus abounds, white mineral dust and some peppery notes. Crazy sour cranberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit. Lightly grassy with dried earth, leather and cedar, its overall lack of body keeps it zipping around like lasers, never slows down as it moves across the tongue. Tannin keeps things dry and percolating as well. Yummy and strikes you as versatile at the dinner table. Unspecified percentages of Dolcetto, Barbera, Nebbiolo, Pinot Noir, Freisa. 89

Vallevò
Abruzzi, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo
Montepulciano
2008, \$10.99, 13.0%
Very good saturation to the purple core, healthy glow, the primarily red-magenta rims deepened by a crimson tint, sits impressively in the glass. Sweet nose, spoons on cinnamon and nutmeg on the base of plum, black cherry, blueberry scents, mixes in orange peel and floral dew, mild ashen stone and earth element, good staying power with some lift. Medium-bodied, nice firmness, the majority of the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit in the first half, not overly ripe, more so that it has a fine amount of tannic spine as well as that ashen earthiness, does avoid developing any annoying herbaceousness. Orange and then a brush of white grapefruit citrus. Adds molasses to the sweet baking spice component. That said, in the end leans more towards a basic everyday "country wine," if not exactly rustic. (Composite Cork) 88

Vigna Rionda S.S. di Massolino Fratelli, Azienda Agricola
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba
Barbera

2008, \$23.99, 13.5%

Reddish purple core, well-hued while at the same time clean and clear, more crimson red around the rims, lots of color anywhere you look. Pure, fruit driven nose of plum, black cherry, blackberry, close to blueberry, sweet herbs and menthol like notes, candied orange peels, hint of vanilla toffee crunch, minimal earthiness or anything too rugged, built to please right out of the gate. Full-bodied, more plump than fat, presents the minimal amount of acidity and tannin to retain a sense of grape typicity, as well as moderate the influence of the toasty oak, vanilla, cocoa, butterscotch. More zest to the orange, white grapefruit citrus, gives it some needed sparkle. Densely packed cherry, blackberry, plum fruit, stays this side of getting too concentrated, sugary or dried fruit in nature. Has that mentholated edge here too. The alcohol level is fairly low given the level of ripeness. Can't say it is textbook Barbera but it is very tasty. 88

Masi & Co., Renzo
Tuscany, Chianti
Sangiovese

2008, \$11.99, 13.0%

As much black as red in the otherwise purple core, wide bright blood red rims, super-clear and clean with decent surface sparkle. Some funk at first in the nose, takes a few minutes to blow off, eventually normalizing into cedar, dried rose petals and lightly candied raspberry to red cherry fruit scents, some damp earthiness, approachable in its basic stance. Full-bodied and close to sappy, lacks any sort of acidity which might pose a threat to the sugary plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit. Lays on a solid dose of orange peel, the flowers mostly dried petals but no less present. Maybe, just maybe, drier at the end yet no loss of fruit. Sweet cedar and vanilla powder, ripe enough to avoid any green qualities. No unnecessary complications here. 92% Sangiovese, 5% Canaiolo, 3% Colorino. (Composite Cork) 87

ITALY WHITE

Borgo M
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Grave del Friuli
Friulano

2007, \$16.99, 13.0%

Rich golden color with some layering in the glass, pretty surface reflectivity, not much noticeable dropoff at the rims, good concentration throughout. There's this mature heaviness to the nose, autumnal if you will, like drying apples, pears and peaches in the

basement, lemon sponge cake, mint, fresh honey, achieves balance via a spring water freshness, at times nudges up to hot wet stone mistiness, fullness ensures it ain't going nowhere soon. Full-bodied, its level of extraction keeps it layered on the tongue, there's a good amount of zip to the otherwise sweet lemon, lime, orange citrus. Alternates between ripened or verging on dried, shriveled pear, red apple, apricot, peach, melon fruit. Pinch of cinnamon, sweet breadiness. Snuggles your mouth pores more than clings, lets go before it starts to bore. No virgin territory conquered here yet it makes you happy from the first glass to the last. 89

Colterenzio, Cantina Produttori
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Thurner
Pinot Bianco

2009, \$16.99, 13.5%

Basic white to yellow straw color with maybe a hint of green, sufficient translucency to give it good solidity in the glass, above average surface luster too, pretty for a wine with such little color. Dewy florality in the nose gives it a heavy texture, orange citrus pulp, even the red to yellow apple, pear, peach scents luxuriate in their fat, conjures up mint and garden herb notes before getting all stony and earthy, certainly has the heft to last well. Full-bodied, same feel here, plush and ample with a lot of extract, spreads itself fully across the palate. Here you get a strong nuttiness riding shotgun with the orange to lemon citrus, turns the latter a more bitter. Comes close to a poached or dried fruit character in the pear, apricot, peach, apple fruit. The floral angle less distinct, at times makes the citrus prettier. Stony with some mineral water, less earthy or minerally per se. Throws one helluva haymaker, if you are in the mood to take one on the jaw, this is the one for you. (Composite Cork) 87

GERMANY WHITE

Christmann, Weingut A.
Pfalz
Spätburgunder I Trocken AP #00
Spätburgunder
2008, \$26.99, 13.0%

Very light violet in hue, more like candy apple red, not dilute but fully transparent, shows a more brick red to cranberry skin red around the rims. Smoky nose with a good dose of barnyard funk and merde, at the same time offers notes of cola and chocolate which surprise, perfectly ripe raspberry, red cherry, strawberry, watermelon fruit scents, white grapefruit to orange citrus zest, the herbaceous side present throughout while in no way obtrusive as such. Medium-bodied with a firm grip on the tongue, spreads cheek to cheek with minimal effort. The tannin has been tamed while

the acidity fresh enough to hold the conductor's baton. Some smoky, kind of woody touch to the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, somewhat oaky but not in a sweet manner. But you do get a molasses edge. The earth and grass convinced to stay in the kitchen while the guests mingle in the parlor. What's weird is that there's enough pure Pinot character here and yet still enough makeup to flummox you if you tasted it blindly. In the end, it is tasty with sufficient pucker to earn its street cred. 88

Weiser-Künstler, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA Feinherb AP #6
Riesling
2009, \$21.99, 10.5%

Soft yellow to white straw in color, minor league semi-translucent bending of light, surface full of reflective glints. Lots of focused verve and raciness to the nose, mint, licorice and rosewater add pungency while classier pear, apple, apricot, star fruit scents zip along below, slowly unpacks lime to orange citrus zest along with wet chalk accents, very relaxed in itself and what it has to offer. Medium-bodied, softer mouth entry segues to a tighter weave as the above average acidity takes hold. Spotlight here on the lemon, lime, tangerine citrus, both sweet and tangy. Flower petals, mint adorn things well, help it develop a light creaminess in the middle. Solid core of wiry peach, apricot, pear, red apple, green melon fruit, level of ripeness appropriate to the whole. Mineral and stone dust accrue on the tongue towards a drying finish. Comes together with clear purpose and able execution. (Screwcap) 90

St. Urbans-Hof, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA AP #4
Riesling
2009, \$14.99, 9.5%

Mix of yellow to white straw color, not dilute, has some glow, what's there fills out the rims decently, surface shine is about average. Simple but forceful nose of flower petals, mint, orange blossom, succinct apricot, pear, apple fruit scents, for its brawn maintains an admirable degree of freshness, light smoky, molasses touch at the end. Medium-bodied, does a good job of coating your mouth pores, even as the acidity tries to peel it off the tongue. Lime, tangerine, lemon citrus zesty and sweet, holds your attention. Mint, lilacs add to the lift, the nectarine, pineapple, guava, apricot, green apple fruit displays a lot of internal diversity. Again, more sweet smokiness than minerality or stoniness. Really gains momentum towards the finish, extremely easy to drink but if you are looking for a "regal" Riesling you should pass. 89

Eifel, Heinz
Pfalz, Shine QbA AP #9
Riesling
2009, \$11.99, 10.0%

Paler yellow to gold straw color, average transparency, turns somewhat watery around the rims, nothing here distinguishes it from the pack. The nose presents a surprising smokiness at first, shale, oil, stone, no real mineral bite, good shape and heft to the orange, grapefruit citrus scents and the nectarine, peach, papaya, green apple penetrates nicely, honeyed enough to ensure the focus stays on that rather than the smokiness, for the better as far as sales go. Medium-bodied, the acidity slaps you upside your face a few times but knows it is not meant to be the chief and recedes to let more juicy tangerine, lime, lemon citrus through. Not to diminish the heft of the peach, nectarine, green apple, apricot fruit, a touch more sour than sweet. Good floral side, maybe even some mint, lends fresh, youthful appeal. In no way simple but eminently accessible. Which is, after all, what moves product. (Screwcap) 88

Immich-Batterieberg, Weingut Carl August
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Kabinett C.A.I. AP #1
Riesling
2009, \$24.99, 11.5%

Evanescent yellow hay color, transparent with a gentle shimmer, average surface luster, not much to loss nor lost along the rims. The nose takes two approaches at once, white minerals and stream water on one side, vanilla pudding creaminess on the other, has a "just ripe" feel to the peach, green apple, apricot, cherry fruit scents, lots of wattage to the tangerine, lime citrus, carefree floral breeze, mint, overall very little wasted movement. Medium-bodied, general demeanor matches the nose, with the addition of the acidity to sharpen things more than a few notches. White grapefruit, lemon, tangerine citrus finds the spotlight easily. In spite of its dryness, the stone, mineral shard, club soda elements never elevate too much. That said, the honey seems crisp, cane sugar and mint leaf appear in support. Pear, apricot, apple, pineapple fruit steady from start to finish, yet, lacks grip and meaningful presence. Ends with quinine, grassy accents, an extra twist to a wine already twisting. (Screwcap) 88

Rebholz, Weingut Ökonomierat
Pfalz, Spätlese Dry AP #15
Pinot Blanc
2009, \$28.99, 13.5%

Strong translucency without getting hazy, flat yellow hay color, decent strength through the rims, the surface shine is fairly average. Muscular citrus component to the nose, rough and ready lime, lemon,

mandarin orange, supported by stream stones, white smoke, whisper of licorice and mint, the peach, pear, apple fruit is in no way lean but absolutely wastes no movement, overall gets in and out of your nostrils as if on a black ops mission. Full-bodied, lots of extract and grip, bores into your mouth pores as if it never wants to leave. In spite of this you get a decent floral element as an introduction to the tangerine, orange, lemon citrus and honey. Difficult to fully gauge the acidity through all the density but it ain't bad. The peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit dry, no surprise there, but lasts to the end with ease. Has a sort of green streak to it, not great per se but adds some life. Here hits you with more metallic minerals than stone. Shows much better close to room temperature. More of a good intellectual workout than source of immediate pleasure. 87

Knebel, Weingut Reinhard und Beate
Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA Trocken Von Den Terrasen
AP #3

Riesling

2009, \$22.99, 12.5%

Deep golden color, at times pushes amber, looks like a wine much older than it is, still, mostly transparent with only a slight weakening towards the rims. The nose comes across as simple, if not dumbed down, softly textured with yellow apple, pear, peach scents of no special depth, flowers and lemon/lime citrus friendly if without substance, spring water and wet stone, just not much going down. Medium-bodied, adopts a dry texture without much effort expended by the so-so acidity. Almost by default the orange, lemon, white grapefruit citrus steps up first. Slate, stone but inert, no earthiness. The peach, apricot, apple fruit weaken through the mid-palate. Suggestion of sweet herbs and mint. Not a bad wine at all but you do expect less of a monochrome presentation. (Screwcap: Stelvin+) 86

Steinmetz, Weingut Günther
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Brauneberger, Juffer, Kabinett
Feinherb AP #17

Riesling

2009, \$20.99, 11.0%

Deep golden color, richer than expected, makes the dilute rims more pronounced, a few fizzy bubbles here and there, surface shine average, maybe less. The nose is clean yet lacks expressivity, green to yellow apple, pear, apricot fruit with a lemon honey touch, mint leaf, streamwater and white pebbles, moderate floral lift, has a calm steadiness about it but nothing really sticks out to grab your attention. Medium-bodied, firm mouth entry that would otherwise have a creaminess were it not for the acidity throwing its shoulder into you. Apple, cherry, apricot, pear fruit hints at pineapple but too round. The orange, lemon

citrus ripe yet finishes on a dry note. The honey to maple syrup element adorns the first couple of seconds of each sip before disappearing. Not sure it really has the overall sweetness level to be a legit "feinherb" wine. Any stone, mineral parts are bit players at best. Not a bad wine, however, wants for either more electric verve or succulent richness. Overpriced for what it is. 86

AUSTRIA WHITE

Strauss, Weingut K&G
Steiermark/Styria, Sämpling 88

Scheurebe

2009, \$12.99, 11.5%

Very pale white straw color with more green than gold to it, in spite of the lack of hue has a translucent shimmer to it to moderately deepen its presence. Great pacing to the nose, brisk but not hurried, nectarine, pineapple, papaya, green apple, star fruit scents pair with the white grapefruit citrus, floral at moments, this is an expression of the lean, wiry side of Scheurebe rather than the voluptuous side, aromas are broad but not deep. Medium-bodied, has plenty of downward pressure on the tongue, in turn the acidity can whip it and makes sure the full experience is dry. The pucker factor is strong but does release, when it does you get lime, white grapefruit, tangerine citrus with heavy wattage. This actually obscures and underscores the florality at once, citrus blossom with other elements now and then. The pineapple, green apple, apricot, nectarine, kiwi fruit zesty but in no way evanescent, lasts and contributes to the steady lift at the end. White pepper spice enlivens the back half. It's almost as if you have to approach this wine with no preconceptions, preferably blindly, and just judge it as such. Half will like it, half not. (Screwcap) 88

Setzer, Weingut

Weinviertel

Grüner Veltliner

2009, \$14.99, 12.0%

Basic gold color, acceptable depth with little diminishing through the rims, benefits from a more block like appearance in the glass. Floral water, mineral water and a fistful of white grapefruit, lemon citrus in the nose, glance of pear, green apple, green melon fruit, overall not much going on, enough so that can't peg it for heaviness nor lack of lift, just there. Full-bodied, kind of sheer weight without much else behind it, does have that mineral water fizz to lend activity while the acidity about where it should be. If there's one major complaint, no secret by now, it's "watery." No meat on the bones, the apricot, pear, peach flavors fruit wrap thin but without the sugar. mild florality, even more evanescent white grapefruit, lemon

citrus. To its credit, the mid-palate swells with some sweetness. For a moment. No pepper and even minimal herbaceousness. On the most primal level it does taste like Grüner Veltliner. However, only in an attenuated form. As white wine, it's innocuous enough. One liter bottle. (Bottlecap) 84

SPAIN RED

Sastre, Bodegas Hermanos
Ribera del Duero, Viña Sastre
Tempranillo
2008, \$20.99, 13.5%

Deep saturation in the purple core, opaque there but the clarity more evident towards the cranberry red to magenta hued rims, hint of pink. There's a wiry tautness to the nose, white grapefruit pith and stone shards and powder, then dusty potpourri, maybe a moment of menthol, the blackberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit scents focused and devoid of fat, dry, almost sandy, brown earth, meadow scrub, holds onto its weight while, at the same time, achieving decent lift, sticks to what it does best. Medium-bodied, from the first sip you feel the acidity and tannin percolating just below the surface, subtly structures the whole. Bountiful florality, buttressed by orange, grapefruit zest, helps it really open up in your mouth. The raspberry, cranberry, pomegranate, red cherry fruit sweet and savory, more sheer impact than sugariness. The tea leaf, meadow grass, dry earth helps to firm it up and contrast the fruit. Gets you licking your lips at the end, fresh and vibrant. (Composite Cork: Diam) 90

Moro, Bodegas Emilio
Ribera del Duero, Finca Resalso
Tempranillo
2007, \$14.99, 14.5%

While deeply saturated, there's a reddish cast from the violet core to the magenta rims, gives it more of a Tempranillo look, sparkingly clear liquid and transparent even at the center. While the nose leans heavily on very ripe blackberry, raspberry, plum scents in addition to mint, orange blossom and a toasty caramel, coconut, vanilla edge, can't deny the presence of leather, earthen mud and grass, not anywhere near "rustic" but no simple fruit bomb and mains a long, sinewy presence in the nostrils. Medium-bodied, round and steadily expansive mouth feel but not soft, has the tannin and then acidity to make it take it seriously. At least until the plum/prune, black cherry, blackberry juice starts flowing, then it's party time and the orange/lemon pulp, flower water and caramel/chocolate are on the invite list. As in the nose, stalls the earth, grass, leather or any more funky element until both the retronasal aspect of things kicks in and when the bottle opens more. So, in the end, it's

more than a gregarious juicy wine but, cannily, it can be if that's all you want. 88

Langa Hermanos, Bodegas
Calatayud
Petit Verdot
2006, \$14.99, 13.5%

Dark purple, opaque but not that incredibly deep, turns clearer through the youthful scarlet to brick red rims, nothing unusual for the grape. The nose shows some reductive notes at first, rubber, merde and peanut shells, segues more into raw oak toast, molasses glaze and pork rinds, white grapefruit zest gives it lift, the cherry, blackberry scents full if semi-lead. Medium-bodied with a clear tannic skeleton and then a decent amount of acidity, not a lot of room to yawn and stretch. In spite of this, the plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit has the density to make a good initial splash and roll some past the mid-palate. Lays some floral mist on you, buttressed by white grapefruit zest. Air time rids it of the reductive element, however, the oak toast, butterscotch, molasses hangs around, in some ways a good thing as it extends the overall sweetness and lowers the tannic dryness. Does shine best a good hour or more after opening, get the decanter ready. (Synthetic Cork: ExcellentCork) 88

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Whitehaven
Marlborough
Sauvignon Blanc
2009, \$17.99, 13.0%

Pale white to yellow hay, transparent without being immaculately clear, wisp of haze to it, hueless rims but this more or less expected from the first glance. There's a white mineral, sand, stone aspect to the nose which helps to smooth out the white and pink grapefruit, tangerine citrus zest, and in turn temper the jalapeño notes, meaningful thrust to the pineapple, papaya, nectarine, star fruit scents, taught to lower the shoulder and drive through you, as it warms a glimmer of floral breeze appears. Medium-bodied, works hard to achieve palate traction from the first sip and succeeds. Erect bearing, keeps you awake as it serves up chili to jalapeño pepper, tangerine, pink grapefruit citrus and iron flecks. The herbaceousness a plus, checks the military corners on the bedspread. The pineapple, nectarine, papaya, guava, apricot fruit hits your tongue like it's a snare drum. Enough residual sugar mixed in there to bandage the cuts at the end. Crackles across the palate, if you enjoy Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc hard to find faults here. (Screwcap) 90

Chasing Venus
Marlborough
Sauvignon Blanc
2009, \$14.99, 13.0%

Yellow straw color with strong white-green flecks, for its lighter hue creates a solid presence in the glass, avoids watery transparency. Smoky nose, sauna smoke, wood smoke, smattering of jalapeño, formidable white grapefruit zest, fine snap to the pear, nectarine, apple, pineapple fruit scents, tight herbaceous burst, good typicity if a little weak length-wise. Medium-bodied, lots of sparkle and fireworks but maybe lacking in the depth department. White grapefruit, lemon zest dries out the tongue, the acidity here too more like a moisture sucking sponge than refreshing element. Chili pepper, mineral dust and stone powder, bell pepper, active to the point of distraction. That said, sufficient pear, pineapple, nectarine, green apple fruit to carry the whole through to the end. A good representative of its type at this price point but no great steal. (Screwcap) 87

ARGENTINA RED

Escorihuela Gascón, Bodegas
Mendoza, Don Miguel Gascón
Malbec
2009, \$14.99, 13.9%

Deep purple core has no problem reaching opacity, melds tightly with the more red-ruby rims, the latter thin and effulgent. A touch of floral dew and orange to lemon citrus breaks out in the nose before lackluster blackberry, black cherry, blueberry fruit scents get shoveled in, even with a leavening component of pine and menthol nothing notable about its lift or length, just a steady, simple presence. Full-bodied, fashions a plush, pliable mouth feel, does not “give” as much as squish around. Wet, juiciness, not sweetness, in the blackberry, red to black cherry, currant fruit, always well fruited without seeming very ripe. Some mixed white to pink grapefruit, bolstered by a dollop of caramel and toffee. An undercurrent of acidity keeps the soil tilled, also helps the citrus reverb. No greenness nor unpleasant hiccups along the way, a solid mid-tier effort by someone who has been cranking them out long enough to have the recipe down by now. (Composite Cork: Diam) 85

Alamos (The Wines of Catena)
Mendoza
Cabernet Sauvignon
2009, \$13.99, 13.7%

Clean, if richly layered purple core, segues to an immaculate scarlet red at the rims, lushly hued throughout with a glossy surface sheen. The nose betrays a touch of bell pepper and grass but much

more so strong kindling wood smoke, vanilla dust, hot tar and ashen earth, white grapefruit douses the red currant, Italian plum scents, the fruit remains pushed into the background. Medium-bodied, dry in a highly massaged manner, simply feels artificial in the mouth with grainy wood tannin rather than ripe phenolics. The cherry, currant, plum fruit in turn seems like every bit of juice was wrung out into your mouth and it still wasn't much. While it is kind of green, this is not a deal breaker per se, just needs to be offset by natural juiciness. The white grapefruit, orange citrus element sour and biting throughout. Weak finish, not much left but that gritty residue. In many regards, not horrible. Let's just damn by faint praise and leave it at that. (Composite Cork) 83