

The Hanes Wine Review, October 2013 Edition

Well, all the reviews were done and ready to go at the start of September. Yet, here it is late October and no review yet. Whoops. It's good to be busy. Been pretty lucky with the wines of late, not many clunkers. But with just a little carefulness and forethought it is fairly easy to find decent wines, the general "basement" for wine is probably higher than it has ever been with a lot of "vintage variations" more or less a thing of the past due to evolving viticultural practices as well as all kinds of emergent vinicultural techniques. But fear not, Hanes is sure to find some really crappy wines soon.

This month's big winners... The 2011 Faiveley Mercurey rouge "La Framboisière" is just great stuff, finely spun Pinot Noir, lively and fresh, well worth \$30 or so. Hanes will not buy more wine for the cellar! He will not! So, unless someone else opens up a bottle, he has had just one joyous experience with the 2009 Felsina Tuscan Cabernet Sauvignon "Maestro Raro." Simply delicious, for the true Cabernet lover and worth every penny of the \$50 it costs. Had been some time since Hanes sampled the Californian wines of Kalin so it was time to cough up the bucks and make it happen. Kalin is well known for their ridiculously late releases, as in they release it when they think it is ready to drink. Sampled the 1999 Livermore Valley Sémillon and the 1995 Cuvée LV Chardonnay, both unique and intriguing in their own ways. Prices now in the \$30's but these wines are idiosyncratic enough to merit the buckage. It's not really hip to extol the virtues of Bordeaux at the moment. But there's still many very nice wines out there and the 2010 Château Croix du Casse from Pomerol delivers exactly what it should, good fruit as well as cedar, stones and a fair amount of tannin, acceptably priced around \$40. In 2011 the Produttori del Barbaresco has done a fine job with their entry level "Langhe" Nebbiolo bottling, good body, winsome red fruits, gregarious and eager to please. A good value for under \$20.

The best \$15 and under picks... There is a lot of entry level Austrian Grüner Veltliner out there these days. One which stands above the pack is the 2012 Ehmoser "Von Den Terrassen" from Donauland. Herbaceous, stony, zip in the fruit, softens through the finish. No marketing nor cutesy naming, just good wine in the area of \$10 or so. There's a lot of cheap Vinho Verde on the market these days and it sells. But if you spend just a couple bucks more you get the Broadbent Selections version which displays zesty fruit and minerality and much more character than the cheaper, more "industrial" versions out there. And hey you can afford to splurge, it's still under \$10. You'd have to be a hardcore hater to not find something to enjoy in the Pine Ridge Chenin Blanc-Viognier blend and the 2012 release is no different than usual. Fruity but not sweet, floral and citrusy and fairly priced around \$10. Production is a lot higher than it used to be so it's also easier to find. Mud House remains a "go to" cheapie Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and the 2012 is another credible plus effort, tropical and lively without the pickled nature which turns some off to Kiwi SB. For about \$11, drink up and enjoy, no marketing campaigns needed. The 2012 Pépière Muscadet is a great little wine, as if we needed further proof, it's evidence of the expertise of winemaker Marc Ollivier, this remains one of the benchmark Muscadet wines year in and out. And still under \$15. Chenin Blanc from the Loire can reach dizzying heights so it's easy to poo-poo less expensive renditions as pretenders to the throne. But there's no reason to ignore what is in the glass and with the 2012 Clos Palet Vouvray it is simply pleasurable Chenin at a fair price of about \$10. We all need an everyday Chenin after all. On that note, you could just as well be satisfied with the 2012 "Secateurs" Chenin Blanc from South African producer Badenhorst. Great dryness and texture while not impeding the flow of the fruit. Body and verve, for \$11 there's no argument here.

And the disappointments... Hanes asked for it and he got it. His sister was out west, Hanes had not had a Californian Tempranillo is lord knows how long. "Bring back the Miner." Well, the 2010 Miner Tempranillo, she is one boring wine and expensive too at \$28. We tried. The new label is nice but not doing much to make the product inside better, so the 2012 Wyatt Cabernet Sauvignon's best attribute remains its \$10 price. Little to either please or remind one what Cab is supposed to taste like. Lots of competition at this price point too. Having had the 2011 and now the 2012, the Sancerre from Hubert Brochard is an easy pass even if the pricing is reasonable in the high teens. Disjointed and lacking precision and focus, not up to the immediate competition. Very much liked the 2010 version of the Thymiopoulos "Young Vines" Xinomavro from Greece but the 2011 is not quite as good. Not bad but just not all on the same page as was the case with the previous vintage. Oh well, at least it was only \$12. The Greek disappointment continued with the 2011 Mitravelas Estate "Red on Black" made from the

Agiorgitiko grape. A bit too sour and just never quite nuzzles up to you as one might hope. But for \$8 it was worth the gamble.

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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/oldervintages2013.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 October!

CALIFORNIA RED

Fogline Vineyards

Russian River Valley, Floodgate Vineyard

Pinot Noir

2011, \$38.00, 13.7%

Fully transparent, light violet with a stronger ruby to cranberry red hue, consistent to the outer rims, quite shiny surface. The nose has cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit scents topped with a thin layer of caramel and cola, enough stone dust to dampen undue sugariness, the orange zest flits in and out, has a balanced presence without force. Medium-bodied, creamy mouth texture with caramel, butterscotch flavors and feel throughout the attack. This recedes somewhat in favor of flowers and orange zest to blossom and again cola notes. The cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit is straight-up and sticks to the traditional script, this for the better. The acidity and tannin might be low but it betrays no flab. Clean finish with an uptick in stoniness. Evidence you don't need flash to outperform. 90

Miner Family Vineyards

Amador County, Sierra Foothills

Tempranillo

2010, \$28.00, 14.5%

Although not opaque there's a fatness to the purple core, this spills over to the saturated pink to red magenta rims, has that "glow" to it all the kids today like. The nose flirts with jamminess, raspberry, strawberry and cherry with a slap of green apple, floral like a perfume aisle, mix in some clove, cinnamon spice, vanilla and cola bean and you have yourself a friendly, nondescript red wine in your nostrils. In the mouth it's just short of full-bodied, soft and sappy, here the oak creaminess and sweet spiciness is front and center, vanilla, chocolate, caramel, and even some mint. The raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit is not quite gooey but ripeness is not a concern. Fruit pie comes to mind. Absolutely no flaws, nothing wrong with it. Just a very safe, fruity wine that says nothing about which grape it was made from nor what place birthed it. 86

Wyatt

Regional Blend, California

Cabernet Sauvignon

2012, \$9.99, 13.5%

Touch of violet to the otherwise scarlet-ruby coloration, bright sunset red rims, spotless and clean. Creamy

nose of vanilla, whipped cream, butterscotch and candied cherries and raspberry compote, some baking spices, not a lot else going on, not that much length. Medium-bodied, dry enough that it's not overly sweet but not tannic either. Some plum in the cherry, blackberry base, falls short of jammy. Chocolate, butterscotch, mint and vanilla accents, more toasty oak than sugary, oak biggest single component even given the relatively small oak treatment the wine is given. Over time a grainy texture builds, lacks true flow. 83% Cabernet Sauvignon (California), 9% Merlot (Napa Valley), 8% Petit Verdot (Napa Valley). 86

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Kalin Cellars
Livermore Valley
Sémillon

1999, \$30.99, 13.8%

Can't be more amber orange than this, color-wise it's fully matured and while clear a touch flat too, hue lasts deep into the rims, rich throughout. The nose is tropical with a glazed character, pineapple, apricot, guava, peach and honeyed orange and grapefruit citrus, still penetrating enough for the florality to come through, beeswax, ginger, nutmeg, also has a ripened cheese aspect, fair amount going on but in the end it is still about the concentrated fruit. Full-bodied and spicy, even with a tacky, dusty mouth feel the acidity churns through actively. Grapefruit and tangerine zest frame the mouth entry and then that pineapple, star fruit, papaya, nectarine zest takes over. A few notes of pie dough and honey lend sweetness but this one is less forgiving and more desirous of flexing muscles. Those baking spices elevate through the finish plus some savory garden herbs. Much better and more integrated approaching room temperature. 75% Sémillon, 25% Sauvignon Blanc. 90

Kalin Cellars
Sonoma County, Cuvée LV
Chardonnay
1995, \$31.99, 13.8%

Brightly glowing amber color, many shades of orange throughout, in no way dull having good surface shine, the hue intensity does drop off at the rims. The nose is a mélange of poached apricots and peaches, orange marmalade, mint, white chocolate, freshly baked croissants and then witch hazel and caraway, has all the pungency you want but not so much the staying power. Full-bodied, you might consider it on the sluggish side but languid might be better. Not much acidity showing, has relaxed back into itself and that bean bag chair. This noted, there's vibrancy in the peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit and complexity via the breadiness, nutmeg and clove spice, orange

spice and vanilla extract. The citrus sneaks up and elevates through the finish. The sun is setting here and it's pretty so catch the last rays while you can. 90

Bedrock Wine Co.
Sonoma County, Kick Ranch Vineyard
Sauvignon Blanc

2012, \$22.00, 14.1%

Somewhat flat in appearance albeit provides a solid worn yellow gold hued core and there's some color left around the rims too, holds its own in the glass. There's a creamy texture in the nostrils, sweet and zesty lemon to lime citrus, light vanillin touch, lots of anise and black licorice, enough to stall the arrival of the smoky minerals, the peach, pear, kiwi fruit is adequate but comes across as an afterthought of sorts. Medium-bodied, soft and expansive, covers the palate from cheek to cheek. That orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit covers the full citrus spectrum, sugary and juicy. The vanilla pudding grows in stature here. The anise is joined by other sweet herbs, rosemary and cumin with a little juniper berry for good measure. You almost forget to try and gauge the acidity. Oddly, again the fruit is one of the last things to register, nectarine, peach, apricot, guava and pineapple, semi-sweet and languid. Easy to drink because it so wants to give you a hug and not challenge you to any intellectual debate. 88

Pine Ridge
Regional Blend, California
Chenin Blanc-Viognier
Blend

2012, \$9.99, 12.0%

Light white straw hue, pale yet not watery, leaves a slight fizz clinging to the glass sides, no brilliant sparkle nor still water transparency, just looks like a nondescript white wine. There's a fresh stream water and pebble aspect as well as freshly peeled lemons which imbues the nose with a happy youthfulness, everything here is light of touch, the flowers, the peach apple, pear scents, the whipped cream underpinning, the sweet baking spices, not a wine to distract you from what you are doing. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a steady, if unobtrusive, acidity which tempers the sweetness and gives it shape. Allowing for this, expect a good amount of poached apricot, peach fruit, pears and yellow apples and here a stronger floral musk. The orange to grapefruit citrus hesitates then chooses sour bite over sugariness. Nods towards a grassiness which never materializes. While not an "easy sipper" per se, it is not relegated to food wine status alone, drinkable for its density. 80% Chenin Blanc (Clarksburg), 20% Viognier (Lodi). (Screwcap) 88

FRANCE RED

Faiveley, Domaine
Burgundy, Mercurey, La Framboisière Monopole
Pinot Noir

2011, \$29.99, 13.0%

Trim, unblemished, resplendent garnet red color, hardly any darkening core versus rims, fresh and pretty looking. The nose equally fresh and snappy, tart cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit, white grapefruit, wet stone, savory herbs and meadow grasses, impressive purity and cut, goes on for some time. Medium-bodied, not lean but the acidity keeps it moving at a brisk pace, this allowing for an otherwise sappy texture. During the attack there's some caramel and toffee but no real oak presence, the stone and forest matter elements come to the fore swiftly. Given its relative regal bearing, the fruit remains the centerpiece, cherry, blackberry, rhubarb, raspberry, attractive interplay of sweet and sour. Touch of cinnamon and nutmeg extends the pleasurable finish. Very quiet mixed white citrus presence. A very happy wine which makes you feel so too. 91

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des
Beaujolais, l'Ancien Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir

2011, \$12.99, 12.0%

Crystal clear violet to cranberry red in color, sparkles and dances in the glass, pinkish magenta rims are equally bright, easy to be visually impressed. While there's a liqueur like feel to the raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit in the nose there's also a sour nip, then licorice and anise, lemon pulp, there's a good deal of stone powder to suck up excess moisture, takes awhile for it to unwind to the point where the florality starts to shine. Medium-bodied yet layered with a sneaky sort of density. A light veneer of chocolate adorns the raspberry, cherry, kumquat fruit. The acidity is superb and, as is its wont, pushes the lemon to grapefruit citrus to the fore. No greenness, more like freshly cut sweet tobacco or tea leaf. Here too you find a chalky dusting to create a nuanced texture. Satisfies completely. 91

Croix du Casse, Château La
Bordeaux, Pomerol
Blend

2010, \$39.99, 14.0%

Opaque purple core, more glowing than dense, the wide ruby rims betray an incipient hint of brick red even at this stage, looks "serious." There's a dustiness to the nose, has a linear feel in your nostrils, equal parts bell pepper and dark chocolate at first, pencil lead, stones and old dried flowers, the currant, Italian plum, cherry scents are bound up and not expressive

at this moment, there's oak toast but it is not unduly lascivious, more incense than cedar. In the mouth it is medium-bodied plus and firm, the tannin sets it squarely in the mouth and the grainy woodiness from the oak takes it a notch higher. That noted, the oak here to is not overly done, toasty and perhaps charred but not slavishly sweet and of the sort you'd expect in a young expensive Bordeaux. The cherry, black currant, blackberry fruit is perfectly fine and gets as close to the finish as the tannin will allow, leaves no worries about drying out as it ages. Cedar, leather, sandalwood, orange peel, sweet tea leaf, here the bell pepper pulls back. You admire its ruggedness and right now it needs a good decant to show best. 80% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Franc. 89

Chante Cigale, Domaine
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Blend

2011, \$32.99, 15.0%

Even with a lot of ruby in the core the purple base pushes it into opacity, the rims move into scarlet red and magenta territory, darker than might be expected. The nose is primary and fruit-driven, you get green apple and persimmon notes among the more dominant raspberry, blackberry, red cherry scents, lowkey damp earth and garrigues, same for the mixed citrus and toasted chocolate powder, just comes across as highly unevolved. Medium-bodied and languid, tends to drag gently across the palate, not sensing much acidity or tannin for structure. More herbal and with greater life in the grapefruit, orange citrus, delivers wool and dried cowhide too. Somehow the floral dimension never really kicks into gear. There's a thickness to the fruit which adds prune and raisin qualities to the base cherry, blackberry, raspberry and plum. Plumply inviting, leaves nary a clue of where the future will take it. But it ain't bad now. 65% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre, 5% Cinsault. 89

Arlot, Domaine de l'
Burgundy, Nuits-Saint-Georges, Cuvée Le Petit Arlot
Pinot Noir

2011, \$39.99, 13.0%

Clean pinkish ruby color, on the light side and quite clear, strikes you as more pretty than anything. Zippy, fruity nose of raspberry, blueberry, cherry scents, orange blossom, tea leaf, meadow flowers, straw and a light earthiness, quite pure here too and stays with you for some time. Medium-bodied, the acidity is strong and gives it a chewy feel through the mouth entry as well as brightens the orange, white grapefruit citrus. Has more kick in the fruit too, strawberry, apple, raspberry, cherry. Adorned with licorice, sweet tobacco, stones and brown earth. Very minor notes of

caramelly oak, if any. Not a lot to say, simply so easy to drink. 89

Texier, Eric
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône
Blend

2011, \$12.99, 12.5%

Clear red-ruby with a hint of deeper purple to the core, quite shiny, the rims are a full ruby red with a mild touch of pink. There's a pulsating sourness to the cherry, red berry scents in the nose, aided by twigs, bark, dried lemons, anise and witch hazel, has kick and drive more than a warm fuzziness. Light to medium-bodied, has purity and charm even as it is dry and crackles and pops on the palate. Lots of white pepper to go with the savory garden herbs, tart lemon to orange citrus and tea leaf elements. There's a hard candy to liqueur thickness to the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, however, any sweetness is short lived. If you want punch and tang, this has the transparency to go with many varied cuisines. Not sure how well it succeeds as a sipper on its own. 80% Grenache, 20% Grenache Blanc, Clairette and Bourboulenc. (Composite Cork) 87

FRANCE WHITE

Pépière, Domaine de la
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Melon de Bourgogne

2012, \$10.99, 12.0%

Straightforward yellow gold color of average intensity and luster, fades a good bit at the rims, nothing out of the ordinary here. Great smoky minerality to the nose, falls short of over-aggressive, lemon zest, pineapple, green apple, nectarine and peach with a pleasing underpinning of whipped cream, strong floral dimension, even more so as it warms, not overly linear and takes the time to fatten up in the nostrils. Medium-bodied, super tangy and zippy with white grapefruit to lemon sourness, saltiness, smoke and stone notes. The acidity is where it needs to be, firm and decisive without being a party pooper. Have to like the volume it layers onto the palate. The fruit has a dry tropicality, pineapple, guava, passion fruit, nectarine, green apple and a touch of persimmon. The above average mouth traction extends the flavors. Hitting on all cylinders right out of the gate. 91

Haut Bourg, Domaine du
Loire, Muscadet Côtes de Grandlieu Sur Lie
Melon de Bourgogne

2012, \$9.99, 12.0%

Glowing yellow gold core, attractive depth of hue, not quite squeaky clean transparent, moderate holding of color through the rims, basic white wine looking, err,

white wine. The nose has above average richness and packs in flowers and grapefruit, orange citrus around the peach, apple, pear fruit core, no aggressive posturing and offers subdued smoke, minerals, you wouldn't call it soft either. Full-bodied, has decent acidity but more so sheer weight and heft. There is a vanillin flavored creaminess followed on by a toasty dimension, this before flowers, cotton candy and orange sherbet with a touch of more sour white grapefruit. Does have an herbal side which draws out more smokiness. The peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit longlasting. Seems a touch "modern" but very pleasurable and no problem draining the bottle. (Composite Cork: Diam3) 89

Clos Palet
Loire, Vouvray
Chenin Blanc

2012, \$8.99, 12.0%

Clean and faintly glowing pale gold color, the light translucent shimmer extends the hue through the rims. The nose is minty fresh with just picked flowers, lemonade and black licorice, there's a fine chalkiness dustiness, the peach, apricot, apple fruit stays quiet on the whole. Medium-bodied, both sweet and zesty, the acidity lacks sharpness but not general punch. Pink grapefruit, lime, lemon and tangerine make for a citrus-a-thon in the mouth. While honeyed with a sprinkling of powdered sugar, really not that sweet. Here the fruit is as much pineapple, passion fruit and nectarine as peach, apricot. In the end it's not "thrilling" per se but very competent and has good shape and a well paced finish. For the price, just pound it without asking questions. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 88

Pastou, Paul et Jean-Marc
Loire, Sancerre, Les Boucaults, Vieilles Vignes
Sauvignon Blanc

2012, \$14.99, 13.0%

Clear yellow hay color with a pleasing shine, the distortion of your vision helps fill in the rims, youthful and sparkly. The nose is focused but not quite lean, hits you first with lemon and lime, then light chili pepper which is overcome by sauna stone smoke and iron rust, the apple, peach, pear scents sort of an afterthought, softens as it warms and develops deeper florality. Medium-bodied, strong acidity highlights the stoniness, minerality and generally pungent smokiness. That lemon and here grapefruit citrus brings a sweet touch, as does those rose water and licorice accents. Here the peach, apricot, red apple, persimmon fruit fares better and lasts longer with a more solid bottom. Not vicious minded but not shy about caring less about softening its rougher edges. Which really aren't that rough but it's the intention which counts. 88

Blanchet, Francis
Loire, Pouilly-Fumé, Cuvée Silice
Sauvignon Blanc
2012, \$15.99, 12.5%

Good brightness to the green-white straw hued base, the color drains out near the rims, in basic keeping with what you'd expect visually. The nose comes on first with sweet apples and then pear, apricot fruit, serene and not pushing near tropicality, most prominent though is the stony smokiness, pungent with a metallic streak, the white grapefruit citrus is there but knits in rather than seek attention, more floral than citrusy, overall it's easygoing but of type. Medium-bodied, here the acidity helps activate the sea shell, pebble and iron fleck qualities as well as minor grassiness. The mixed white citrus remains sort of background noise. Mainly peach, apple, pear, apricot fruit, little deviation from the established norm. There's some pucker and tightening through the finish which is welcome. This is about what you'd expect for Pouilly-Fumé at this price, this said in the best way. 88

Buissonnes (Roger Naudet et Fils), Domaine des
Loire, Sancerre
Sauvignon Blanc
2012, \$16.99, 12.5%

Simple yellow straw color of average luster and shine, transparent with close to hueless rims. The nose is somewhat softer than expected, ripe pear, apple, peach fruit, flowers and honey, garden herbs and wild grasses, the minerality is there but whispering, more cut by way of chili pepper, seems more broad than penetrating, unusual in that it firms up and gains focus as it warms rather than by benefitting from coldness. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, has more tang than bite and feels reluctant to yield totally to the stone, chalk and mineral dimension. As a result, there's room to play for the vanilla cream, flowers, molasses and orange sherbet. The fruit is mostly pear, apple and apricot with a dollop of pineapple. The acidity hits you with a fist, no sting from the open palm. Stylish and correct, pleasurable but not that galvanizing. (Composite Cork: Diam) 87

Brochard, Hubert
Loire, Sancerre
Sauvignon Blanc
2012, \$15.99, 13.0%

While there's decent visual shine, the white to yellow straw hue is pale and close to nonexistent around the rims, simple overall. You get a mineral smokiness and dried white citrus edge to the nose, flowers and black licorice also and more lean than racy, spiciness trumps the apple, pear to peach pit fruit scents, kind of stuck in the middle, not briskly penetrating yet not round and inviting either. Medium-bodied, quite dry

and tacky mouth feel, makes you yearn for a glass of water. Initially throws white grapefruit, lemon, saline, chalk and a touch of jalapeño. Softens very slightly into vanilla, anise, flowers and a haphazard mix of green apple, apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit. The acidity is good but something about it doesn't feel right. As a result, the edges blur and it lacks clarity of vision. But not unpleasant to drink, it's simply a matter of being able to find better value elsewhere. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc Select 500) 87

Carrel, Domaine Eugène
Savoie, Vin de Savoie, Jongieux
Jacquère
2012, \$9.99, 11.5%

Decent shine given forgives the overall lightness of hue, vague green cast to a white straw base, hard not to hold through the rims given how little depth there is at the core. The nose is cellar ripened apples, pears and peaches, wet smoke, stones, all softened by licorice, flowers and vanilla bean, lifts via lemon citrus and a light herbaceousness, have to like its lack of overripeness, lends clarity to the components. Light to medium-bodied, the acidity can kick you in the shins yet on the whole it stays firm while gives way to flow. Lime, lemon citrus, green apples, peaches, nectarines tart, sweetness comes from the honey, , beeswax, whipped cream and licorice. Tangy finish, the flavors sort of fold together as if inside a fist. Just needs a little more "joie de vivre." (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 87

ITALY RED

Felsina, Fattoria di
Tuscany, Maestro Raro
Cabernet Sauvignon
2009, \$49.99, 13.5%

The crimson to purple core is dark enough to reach opacity, the rims more blood red to orange brick in hue, there being fat with no loss of intensity, has that semi-brooding look. The nose displays a surfeit of power without quite getting pushy, a mélange of coffee rinds, bitter dark chocolate, white grapefruit, bell pepper, stony earth, pine and leather, the cherry, red currant scents are crisp but not lean. Medium-bodied, has excess tannin for sure but it is the acidity which smacks you the hardest, the latter accentuating the white grapefruit component. No greenness. Here the coffee, chocolate, burnt butter knits in well. You get some green apple in the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. As it opens turns closer to a velvety mouth texture but not quite. Youthful, needs a decanting today, has many years ahead. 91

Produttori del Barbaresco
Piedmont, Langhe
Nebbiolo

2011, \$15.99, 14.5%

It's not hazy, it's not gauzy but there's something about it like looking into the sun, otherwise it's an unblemished ruby-purple color which stays notably consistent from core to rims, no real sign of bricking or the like. The nose has a sweet cherry, raspberry core with green apple notes, light brush of rose petals and pine, however, it's overall clean and primary. Full-bodied, there's both a dustiness and toastiness to the attack, like tannin and oak working in tandem. This creates a puckering effect yet the roasted to candied character in the cherry, watermelon, raspberry, blackberry fruit takes the lead swiftly. Spice, vanilla, leather, rose petals, orange peel, it's the acidity which fuels the finish and creates a both savory and refreshing denouement. Maybe clunky now and then but three cheers for youthful enthusiasm. 89

Valpantena, Cantina
Veneto, Valpolicella, Torre del Falasco Ripasso
Blend

2010, \$9.99, 13.5%

Reddish, crimson cast to the otherwise purple core, clear yet brooding, the rims still more scarlet than any brick red or such. Ripe, soft nose of plum, cherry, prune fruit with a dollop of chocolate on top, pulped oranges, sweet tea leaves and a light bit of fresh leather, extremely easygoing in nature. Full-bodied, spreads out fully but here not quite as soft, there's a fair amount of tannin and to some degree acidity to prop it all up. That noted, it features a sweet attack bursting with plum, cherry, raspberry and then prune, golden raisin fruit. Orange and lemon citrus, tea leaf, and sweet herbs play well with those chocolate notes. Turns more savory through the finish, yet the flavors are not that distinct. Just a lot of fun to drink. Unspecified percentages of Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella. 89

Tratturi
Puglia/Apulia, Salento
Primitivo

2012, \$7.99, 13.0%

There's some burnt red in the purple core and it really comes out through the rims where there's a dried blood coloration going on, clear on the whole, no gauziness. The nose has a big floral component to it, relieves some of the weight from the plum, black cherry scents, touch of chocolate and sweet baking spices, as it opens develops a dusty, mineral powder sort of texture, not as simple as you find think at first glance (err, sniff). Medium-bodied with a full finish, has the acidity to push the white grapefruit citrus to the fore

as well as mineral earth. Still, plenty of sweetly candied raspberry, cherry to Italian plum fruit The spiciness persists, less sweet here. Tea leaf and tobacco come through the finish but nothing green. It ain't bad at all. (Synthetic Cork: Micro Cell) 87

ITALY WHITE

Cave du Vin Blanc de Morgex et de La Salle, La Valle d'Aosta, Blanc de Morgex et de La Salle, Vini Estremi

Prié Blanc

2012, \$15.99, 12.0%

Slight fizz visible inside the liquid and across the surface, there's a worn white to yellow gold hue to it, while it has a solid block like appearance it also has more shine than you'd think, interesting to look at, makes you want to figure out just what's going on. At first the nose evokes club soda and then there's mint leaf, lemon peel, whipped cream, apple, pear and cherry fruit and mountain scrub breeze, an herbaceousness not fresh but not fully dried out either, again just smelling it you know this is unusual and not run of the mill. Full-bodied, very dense and unmoving presence, there's something like a doused matchstick to dried bacon fat through the attack, mineral shards, wild herbs, lemon to orange citrus, wet smoke, tar, intriguingly all over the place. The apple, pear, peach fruit has the character of bushels left in a cold basement to slowly shrivel. The acidity is slow to uncoil, however, there's no lack of structure. A great "exercise," not sure how to use it at the dinner table and it is no innocent chugger. Worth the experience. 88

AUSTRIA WHITE

Ehmoser, Weingut Josef
Donauland, Wagram, Von Den Terrassen
Grüner Veltliner

2012, \$9.99, 12.5%

The pale yellow hay color bolstered by a warm glow, more greenish white towards the rims, transparent, not what you'd call dull but not sparkly either. The nose is interesting because it's not soft but it is gentle, the white grapefruit and orange citrus gives in a supple manner, the green pea, white pepper and minerals are lightly sprinkled in, there's a freshly picked character to the peach, apricot, apple, kumquat fruit scents, has a cleansing lift, very open feel. Medium-bodied, the acidity softly scrubs the palate until it has a raw blush about it. More herbaceous here with green pea, cut grass and pressed flowers. The stone greater than any metallic edge. Anchors itself well in snappy apricot, peach, nectarine, green apple, pineapple fruit, flavorful but not all that juicy. The white grapefruit, orange,

lemon citrus takes one big step back out of the spotlight. Finishes on the creamy side with vanilla and whipped cream accents. Fuels your desire to refill the glass. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 89

GREECE RED

Thymiopoulos Vineyards
Naoussa, Young Vines
Xinomavro
2011, \$11.99, 13.5%

Very light and super-transparent, bright ruby red to cranberry hued, slight diminishment around the rims, wonderful shine. Candied raspberry, cranberry, cherry fruit in the nose with some strawberry notes, orange peel, mild leather to loamy earth equaling a pleasing funk, cumin spice. It's light to medium-bodied, yet syrupy in texture, spreads easily across the tongue. Grassy, earthy, twigs and leaves. Gentle yet persistent tannin, has more bite than the sweetness would suggest. You get orange and grapefruit rind and a small dose of pressed flowers along with the cherry, raspberry, elderberry fruit. Seems sweet without much "wet" flow. Touch of caramel which comes off as weird then green apples. Nicely off center wine. 87

Mitavelas Estate
Nemea, Red On Black
Agiorgitiko
2011, \$7.99, 13.5%

Very clear and transparent, ruby-violet color, consistent core to rims, bright and extra shiny. The nose has a cleansing lift but its also plummy with some prune notes, lighter bits of sweet baking spices and white grapefruit, then a smidgeon of woolliness and forest matter. Medium-bodied, mostly emphasizes the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, sweet and sour at turns, more hard candy than dried fruit in nature. Decent acidity, not much tannin. Chocolate, white citrus accents, minor stoniness. It's well put together and honest, however, not very exciting per se. (Synthetic Cork) 86

PORTUGAL WHITE

Broadbent Selections
Vinho Verde
Blend
NV, \$6.99, 9.0%

Pours with plenty of that telltale fizz, big and fat bubbles cling to the glass sides and the fizz grows every time you move the glass, basic white to yellow straw in color with decent shine and clarity, sitting pretty. Floral nose, lots of fresh stream water and washed pebbles, spoonful of whipped cream to sweeten the peach, apricot, green apple fruit scents,

as it warms gets richer and fills the nostrils. Full-bodied, not quite spicy but definitely tangy with an emphasis on pineapple, nectarine, papaya fruit in addition to the apricot and peach, even some cherry. That whipped cream to vanilla fudge element persists. Here more minerally than fresh water, adds to the tang. The fizz is not distracting and the acidity level is average, not a real "slice and dice" style of Vinho Verde. Still, nothing wimpy about it. Unspecified percentages of Trajadura, Loureiro, Pedernã (Arinto). (Screwcap) (L33064, 01 13 35, bottled March 2013) 88

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Badenhorst Family Wines, A.A.
Swartland, Secateurs
Blend
2011, \$10.99, 13.5%

The ruby-violet color is deep enough for opacity, liquid is spotless, the rims take on a reddish magenta cast with a hint of pink. While the nose has a certain thickness it is also high-toned, leading with bell pepper and mineral chunk accents, ashen earth before leveling off into white grapefruit and blackberry, black cherry fruit topped with warmed caramel. Medium-bodied, strives for a satiny mouth feel and mostly achieves this as the tannin has been fined down and the earthiness held in check, minor tar and wet iron elements. Here the fruit has a sweet blueberry, raspberry, strawberry character, at times liqueur like. The grapefruit, orange citrus more sweet than sour and with a flower blossom edge. There's butterscotch, caramel and molasses flavoring yet it's not oaked for dramatic effect. Smooth and drinkable, percolates subtly without boiling over. 43% Syrah, 43% Cinsault, 8% Grenache, 3% Mourvèdre, 3% Pinotage. (Screwcap) 88

Excelsior
Robertson
Cabernet Sauvignon
2011, \$7.99, 14.5%

Has a purple core of moderate depth, brick to blood red rims, well hued throughout. Ripe, fruity nose of plum, cherry, black currant, low oak but some leather and dried spices, maybe spiced oranges, basically just fruit. Full-bodied, velvety and layered, close to heavy, no tannin nor acidity to break up the homogeneity. Thus, its again all plum to cherry fruit. More caramel, chocolate accents here which contributes to the sweet attack, albeit with a drier finish. Mixed in are moments of green apple, cinnamon and clove. You get some bell pepper retronasally but it's minor. As usual a competent drop for simple satisfaction. (Screwcap) 87

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Badenhorst Family Wines, A.A.

Swartland, Secateurs

Chenin Blanc

2012, \$10.99, 13.0%

Bright straight-up golden hue, faint warm glow, the rims empty out some, simple enough. The nose has plenty of zip with clove, ginger spice, orange peel, lilacs and a spoonful of whipped cream to soften it a tad, the pineapple, peach, apricot, apple fruit not fully tropical and more snappy than ripe. Full-bodied, displays sufficient acidity to tease out more lime and pink grapefruit alongside the orange citrus foundation. Almost minty, the spiciness melds into a generalized toastiness here. The dry, tacky mouth feel makes for a succinct, punctuated finish. As a result, the kumquat, star fruit, nectarine, pineapple, peach fruit never fully revs its engines. Its sheer energy and verve is its strongest attribute, good kick from start to finish. (Screwcap) 89

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Mud House

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2012, \$10.99, 13.0%

Mildly dull white to yellow hay in color although does have a faint glow to it, not much left at the rims, kinda does look like a Sauvignon Blanc, duh. Pungent and sassy nose of chili pepper, sauna stones, sour grapefruit, pineapple, guava, nectarine, peach fruit scents, overall it is sweet enough that you don't get annoyed by the sour or pickled notes and get to appreciate the twists and turns. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, the acidity might be a little on the soft side but, as in the nose, the pepper, spiciness and puckering grapefruit and lemon citrus makes for a lively first impression. Passion fruit, star fruit, nectarine, pineapple, guava, just about all the fruit is tropical and cutting. Acceptable dusting of minerality. Has personality and drinkability if not regal nor evocative of any terroir. Throw it in an ice bucket, works for me. (Screwcap) 89