

## *The Hanes Wine Review, June 2005 Edition*

OK, time to ditch all the “meta-analysis” and get back to talking about wine! Rock and roll!

Throughout the world each country has their own rules and regulations governing how wine regions are delimited and understood. In Europe they have hundreds of years worth of viticultural history to guide them. That *this* place is called “Bordeaux” and *that* place is not has been more or less settled by arguments over the course of generations. Naturally, this is not to say that (a) no one argues about this stuff anymore (they sure do) or (b) new regions are not recognized by the authorities each year (they are). But most of the major issues have been settled and are generally accepted. Really. They are.

Here in the U.S. of A we have a system modeled on how Europe recognizes the unique characteristics of a region — its soils, weather patterns, micro-climates, all that good shit. Naturally, though, there’s a nice layer of American bureaucracy laid on top!

Starting in 1978, the specific wine regions which have been shown to represent a distinct “terroir” are called American Viticultural Areas (AVA). But even this is misleading as AVAs can actually be freaking huge. For example, the “Ohio River Valley” AVA covers 16,640,000 acres across four states: Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia. Here, you can pretty much throw the quaint notion of “terroir” out the window. While the grapes grown in such an AVA may have to meet certain federal and state regulations in order to be labeled with the AVA name there’s just no way to have a center which holds in an AVA of such size. It is important to note that these regulations have nothing to do with *quality*, the regulations just are supposed to allow the consumer to understand where the wine comes from. That is, if it says “Napa Valley” on the label the wine in the bottle can’t come from the “Ohio River Valley.” Actually, only 85% of the wine has to come from within the AVA; the other 15% can come from other places if so desired by the producer. Whereas in Europe the regulations are usually established to (try to) ensure minimal thresholds of quality, and in many cases which grapes may be grown, here it’s more an issue of “truth in advertising.” Herein lies the most interesting trend of recent years in the United States — the introduction of new, smaller AVAs intended to address the issue of quality and similarity of product.

It takes a long, long time and lots of cash to get the regulatory authorities to recognize a new AVA. All kinds of specialists and experts have to testify in its favor. And someone has to pay the lawyers and accountants! Who petitions for a new AVA? The wineries within the AVA, as they are the ones who should benefit from the stricter delimitation and “sense of place” the more select AVA brings. Note that an AVA can exist *within* another AVA. Like beautiful concentric circles, each AVA thus brings with it greater levels of specificity. So that, you, the consumer may buy with confidence. Sweet.

As of December 2004, there are over 170 separate AVAs in the United States. Over 90% of the wine made in the U.S. comes from California so it makes sense that most of the AVAs are in California (99 of them, in fact, if Hanes counted right). Belonging to an AVA is a great marketing tool for a winery, allowing them to hopefully band together with other quality-conscious wineries to raise public consciousness of what the AVA has to offer versus other winegrowing areas. Also, only if a wine has an AVA noted on the bottle may the wine additionally be labeled as “Estate Bottled” which brings with it a degree of prestige. Hanes thinks.

In a nod to The Movie Whose Name Cannot Be Mentioned, Hanes will now quickly provide an overview of an interesting and high quality AVA, Santa Rita Hills.

The Santa Rita Hills AVA was petitioned for in 1998 and approved in May of 2001. It is a curious one for, as noted could happen, it actually exists within *two* other AVAs. The Santa Barbara County AVA includes within it the Santa Ynez Valley AVA and within *that* resides the Santa Rita Hills AVA. Before 2001 wine bottle labels could only have used the two larger AVA names.

This AVA is known primarily for growing fine Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. One can also find Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Gewürztraminer and Syrah grown. It encompasses about 100 square miles, making it one of the smaller AVAs around, and is about 12 miles east of the Pacific Ocean which provides a cooling, moderating influence on the temperatures to prevent a good deal of overripeness in the grapes and provide pleasingly higher levels of natural acidity. As one might assume from the name, it is a hilly area which provides many slopes ideal for growing grapes due to better angles to the sun and soil drainage. It is bordered by additional hills, the Purisima Hills to the north and Santa Rosa Hills to the south, providing further enclosure and insulation. The soils of the Santa Rita Hills AVA contain less clay and more calcium than those in the eastern end of the encompassing Santa Ynez Valley AVA. The growing season is extended nicely by the coolness of the weather, about 35-40 days longer than in many other areas of California.

There are over 20 vineyards in the Santa Rita Hills AVA, each offering their own distinctive properties and offerings. In many cases the fruit of these vineyards are bottled by the vineyard owners under their own labels. But a lot is sold to other producers and labeled with the vineyard designate on the label. Dunno, there’s probably like 40 (if not more) wineries producing wines from the AVA. Hanes has his favorites, sure, but that’s why you read every word of the review to find out which these are, right? In any event, given its relatively small size and keen focus on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, this is one area where it is truly fascinating to compare wines and see if Winery A’s 2003 Pinot Noir from Vineyard X tastes differently from Winery B’s 2003 Pinot Noir from the same Vineyard X. You can learn a lot about how “terroir” translates into glasses of wine and also how various winemakers “interpret” the same grapes.

You know, the real geeky stuff that gets the chubby, anti-social guy the blonde hottie at the end of the movie.

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**This month's big winners...** An utterly charming wine, behold the 2004 Mas de Daumas Gassac white blend from Southern France. Worth the tariff and still a benchmark wine for its area. High end Burgundy usually costs too much for Hanes but this month it's time to celebrate, err, something. So, highly recommendable if very expensive in the 2002 vintage we find Lignier's Chambolle-Musigny "Les Baudes" and Fourrier's Vougeot "Les Petits Vougeot." Less expensive but making a good impression was Belland's Santenay "Beauregard" (though not as tasty as this house's 2002 Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot-Clos Pitois" white wine). Sometimes hard to judge when young, CVNE's wines from Rioja found a definite winner — for today and for the cellar — in their 1995 Viña Real "Gran Reserva." Their 2002 "Crianza" from the same vineyard and the 2002 vintage is excellent for an average year in Rioja, albeit it would taste a lot better at like \$3-4 less. If you are a fan of pure, unadorned Petite Sirah, Elyse's 2003 from Rutherford is simply delicious stuff. One of the undisputed top tier producers of South African Pinotage, Kanonkop has fashioned another nice wine in 2003. Just a shame it isn't like \$23 anymore! Drew Family is quietly rising up the rungs in Santa Barbara towards consistently killer level and their 2003 Syrah blended from different sources and called "Six-Sense" is worth scouting for. While summer isn't quite the right time of year for it, Ferreira's "Dona Antónia Reserve" Port offers good flavor for a reasonable price. Not quite a "value" wine at around \$16, Franciscan has still made a credible Napa Valley Chardonnay in 2002 which — within its idiom — ain't bad at all. In the same vein, and around the same price, Australian producer Vasse Felix's "Adams Road" Chardonnay is a solidly produced wine.

**The best "value" picks...** Hanes didn't drink many inexpensive wines this month (a by-product of being unemployed? hmmm...) but, luckily, many of those he did try were tasty. OK, it *will* be hard to find but Porter Creek's 2003 Old Vine Carignan is a great change-of-pace treat for \$15. Hanes apologizes for the fact that one less bottle exists to be bought. Cataldi Madonna has once more produced a very delectable cheapie white in their 2003 Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, no weakling this and fairly priced at \$14. All but impossible to find now in NYC, Hanes did get to drink a bottle of Mordorée's 2003 Côtes-du-Rhône rouge and for \$10 this house still makes great wines from top to bottom, price-wise. If straightforward, lighter styled Zinfandel is your cup of tea, check out Easton's 2003 Amador County bottling for about \$15. If you really don't want to spend much coin, Decordi's "Sfida" bottling from Puglia should do the trick for around \$8. It's true! Hanes drank a Merlot from California this month! And the 2003 Lockhart for \$11 was quite worth the price. All praise the calendar — it's finally time for the release of many 2004 Muscadets! After the underwhelming 2003 vintage, the ball gets rolling with Pépière's 2004 regular bottling which delivers much value for \$11. Also an early 2004 vintage release, Jolivet in fact hit the mark with their Loire Sauvignon Blanc called "Attitude" for about \$14. The price keeps unfortunately creeping up and up vintage to vintage but Hanes can still call German producer Leitz's 2004 "Dragonstone" Riesling a good, solid drink at \$15. But add another buck or so and...

**And the disappointments...** Two semi-pricey Côtes-du-Rhône type wines failed to rise to the occasion — Pégau's 2003 "Plan Pégau L:2003" and Pierre Usseglio's 2004 CdR. It's hard to say anything bad about the wines of Bruno Giacosa but this producer's 2003 Barbera d'Alba for the now \$30 or so it is pushing leaves you shaking your head and sighing. Coming with good advance press, Hanes looked forward to trying the 2002 Glaetzer Shiraz from Barossa Valley only to find an average wine costing \$50. Maybe the bottle in his cellar will be better down the road. Waagh! Not disappointments per se, Hanes tried a bunch of heavy-hitting, pricey Cali Cabs this month. This include the 2002 Merus at \$100 and the 2001 Bond "Matriarch" at \$75. At \$45, the 2002 Karl Lawrence is just as good if not better. In the same vein, while not bad wine by any stretch of the imagination Hanes just doesn't get the buzz about Radio-Coteau's wines. Their 2003 Pinot Noir called "La Neblina" did not provide the conversion experience needed here. Another winery Hanes is losing interest in is Carlisle, a hit in many wine geek circles. Their 2003 Dry Creek Valley Petite Sirah was everything the Elyse was not. In the bad way. Having loved the 2002, the 2003 Bucci Verdicchio from the Marche region of Italy just had nothing going for it. What the heck happened here? What to say about Hanes's beloved Ridge Vineyards? Why do they not excite him as they once did? The 2003 Zinfandel "field blend" from Lytton Springs was so goopy and uninteresting it made Hanes weep to see the name on the label. Two Hands from Australia makes wines which do all but nothing to excite Hanes. And they are not cheap at all. If you want, spend \$60 on their 2003 "Lily's Garden" Shiraz and see if Hanes's palate sucks as much as you suspect. Hanes has a well-known soft spot for the Californian white blend called "Conundrum" but the 2003 version was like a night of frat hazing involving multiple cans of Del Monte fruit cocktail. Hanes should just be nice and vow to never taste a bottle of wine from Tuscan producer Tenuta di Trinoro since he seems to break out in hives from even a small sip. And so it went with their 2003 "Le Cupole" blend.

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*This month Hanes continues to incorporate the alcohol percentage of the wines he tastes into his tasting notes. As stated last month, the purpose is to provide what is becoming an important bit of information as differing "camps" of wine aficionados look intentionally for low or high octane wines. So, please do try to pay attention to the alcoholic content of both the wines Hanes reviews and the wines **you** like as this may provide a means of focusing your wine purchasing decisions. With luck, next month and going forward all the wines reviewed herein will have this data included.*

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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.

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

**Tagline #11:** "Hey, let's get drunk and forget where we put our pants!"

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

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

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

### CALIFORNIA RED

Turley  
Napa Valley, Hayne Vineyard  
Petite Sirah  
2002, \$75.00, 14.9%  
The jet black core remains fully impenetrable while the crimson rims glow like they are on fire. The quiet insistency in the toasted coconut and vanilla cream oak in the nose makes it quite pleasant, the super-juicy blackberry, cherry fruit scents are like candy cordials dripped in chocolate, floral too with mere crush of orange zest, nothing else going on but that's the right choice here. Full-bodied, slides into the mouth like fine sandpaper, no momentum lost yet leaves rough patches in its wake. The tannins are awake, alert and will catch you if you try to sneak by. The currant, plum, cherry, blackberry fruit has a solid core but prefers to push outwards. Touch more herbal and earthy here with minor leather and tree bark notes, not enough to match up against the burnt toast, vanilla crisp, hard toffee oak elements. While utterly delicious today, met its maker before its time. 92

Pax Wine Cellars  
Sonoma County, Cuvée Moriah  
Blend  
2003, \$50.00, 16.4%  
Strong cloudiness in the glowing crimson purple core, dims to a flat ruby at the rims. Enough sparkle in the nose you almost want to sneeze, white grapefruit, minerals, burnt grass, a dusting of cocoa powder sweetens further the extracted raspberry, red cherry, blackberry scents, starts to settle in but then dusts up once more. Full-bodied, the sour bite during the attack ensures it is awhile before you feel completely just how thick and heavy it is. Has more than enough vanilla, caramel, butterscotch oak influences but balances this out with a solid shock of acidity which heightens the white grapefruit, lemon citrus and herbal aspects. Smoke, fried bacon, black earth and tree bark flavors help tether it to the ground. Not that tannic yet the finish remains compact with well-chosen words. Quietly relentless. 69% Grenache, 18% Syrah, 9% Mourvèdre, 3% Counoise, 1% Roussanne. 92

Elyse  
Napa Valley, Rutherford  
Petite Sirah  
2003, \$34.99, 15.2%  
Absolutely opaque black core, thickly luminescent red-magenta rims. Offers some sour herbs, white grapefruit pith in the nose, very minimal oaking, whatever bitter dark chocolate there is gets caught under the packed earth, grasses as well as sour cherry, blackberry, currant fruit, about as pure of a Petite Sirah nose as you can get. Full-bodied with remarkable cut, the acidity is one no-nonsense S.O.B. Gives you dark chocolate, toffee crunch upfront and then just a wave of tannins and acidity. Has the "Rutherford dust" out the wazoo, smoke, leather hide, asphalt, wild herbs, you can feel its muscles tense as it grips you. Cut from a long, closely-woven cloth that forms a shroud over your tongue. Powerful but pushes being able to stay under control. This is the shit. 91

Roth  
Alexander Valley, Estate  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$39.99  
Strong, steady glow in the violet core, turns to ruby-magenta easily at the rims, no loss in luminescence. Wonderful lift in the nose, incredibly floral with smiling orange, lemon citrus, licorice, caramel candy, really persistent with juicy red currant, blackberry, red cherry scents, refuses to vacate. Full-bodied, quite nice and smooth, for its considerable heft handles it with aplomb and moves forward decisively. With mesquite smoke, caramel, tar it adds in enough flavor to really keep you coming back to it. The sweet, well-shaped raspberry, red currant, cherry fruit stays aggressive without pushing it. Very agile wine. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 21% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc. 90

Porter Creek  
Alexander Valley, Angeli Vineyard, Old Vine  
Carignan  
2003, \$14.99  
Full-on murk in the opaque black purple core, more of a dusky aura than true rims of ruby-tinged dull brick red. Once you get past the initial shock of oak toast this is one meaty, gamey nose, very earthy with dirt under its fingernails, wood smoke, leather and finally some respite via the compact yet juicy blackberry, cherry scents. In the mouth it is full-bodied but the "old vine" character shines through as it relaxes into itself even as it makes clear, forceful points throughout. As in the nose, the toast most

evident at first before segueing to dried flowers, orange rind, powdered mint leaves. After that you have a rawhide bone and beef jerky to gnaw on. The cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit shows best when you just let it come to you rather than chase it. Lowgrade electric current keeps the tannins' light bulb flickering throughout. Stays one step ahead of you. 90

Mount Veeder Winery  
Napa Valley, Reserve  
Blend  
2001, \$69.99, 14.1%

While deep you can still see through the red-purple core, maintains strong garnet-orange rims. Resonant and freshly open nose of milk chocolate, roasted orange peel, leather and outsized currant, blackberry fruit, the underlying grassiness shakes its booty after awhile. Medium-bodied, real sticky mouth texture, clings to the pores. Above average levels of smoke, leather, citrus for its age with admirable spine, makes you look hard to find any weak points. Acidity and tannins reveal both youthful energy and focus, over time again brings out more of the cedar and grass elements. The delicious sap in the currant, plum, cherry fruit makes for a formidable finish, keeps you eyes open with each sip. 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 21% Merlot, 1% Malbec, 1% Petit Verdot. 90

Merus  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$100.00, 15.5%

Completely opaque black purple core, richly luminescent ruby-magenta rims. You get chocolate and menthol first in the nose, just picked garden herbs, densely packed vanilla, caramel and popcorn oak traces, leather, tar, alternates haphazardly between the oak and secondary scents, thus losing a lot of the punch in the currant, cherry, blackberry scents. Full-bodied, thick and ultra-syrupy. The massiveness of the caramel, toffee, coffee oak flavors reach an impenetrable level and thus it comes off as less oaky. The round and well-stuffed currant, cranberry, cherry fruit is plenty juicy and longlasting. The tannins have been shaved and polished to a slick surface. Some citric and herbal tang, just when you think it might be the same old, same old, zigs nicely and leaves a lasting imprint. 98% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot. 90

Karl Lawrence  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$45.00, 14.2%

Dark yet clear violet core, heavy-set rims of crimson to ruby hues. The nose is sort of inwards looking, offers a selection of grill smoke, cedar, leather, cigar leaf just a few moments of oak toast, these lend some focus to the plum, currant, cherry fruit scents, shows some signs of prune notes. Medium-bodied, keeps packing itself in rather than unwinding. Filmy tannins help the ship stay righted, evenly spreads the cedar, mountain grasses, dried orange peel, mineral and blood iron inflections. Subtle floral and mentholated touches heighten the prettiness of the red cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit. No dropoff through the finish, full flavor intensity, has some peppery spice as a final flourish. 78% Morisoli Vineyard, 15% Herb Lamb Vineyard, 7% Beckstoffer-To Kalon Vineyard. 90

Drew Family Cellars  
Santa Barbara County, Six-Sense  
Syrah  
2003, \$24.99, 14.5%

Just like every other damn wine it's fully opaque purple at the core, strong resonance in the luminescent magenta rims. Lavish coffee, caramel, milk chocolate initially in the nose, straightens up into more floral, earthy scents with a nod towards orange citrus, nothing over the top in the red cherry to red currant scents. Medium-bodied, equipped with the kind of strong musculature not evident from simply looking at the torso. Without truly evident tannins nor acidity, minimal deviation due to the firm feel. Reaches an attractive perfume of flowers, mint, orange to white grapefruit zest, equal to the task of fending off the oak caramel, coffee flavors. Does indeed also materialize hints of gamey notes. The currant, cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit is cut in thick slabs yet not so thick you can't chew them. Truncated finish the sole sticking point. Grapes sourced from 30% Rodney's Vineyard, 30% Windmill Vineyard, 15% Paradise Vineyard, 11% Larner Vineyard, 10% Alisos Vineyard, 4% Morehouse Vineyard. 90

Bond  
Napa Valley, Matriarch  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2001, \$75.00, 14.5%

Bit of light film to the crimson-purple core, becomes bright brick orange at the rims. Softly enveloping nose, the menthol takes some sweetness out of the caramel, reveals appreciable juiciness in the raspberry, cherry, blueberry scents, primary with enough freshness in the earth, herbs, leather to keep it nimble in your nostrils. Medium to full-bodied, while it has a steely structure you notice more of the sappy flesh between the beams and comprised of cherry, blackberry, currant fruit, eucalyptus, licorice and orange peel. The acidity is pleasingly strong, keeps it alight and light. The finish is full and savory but somehow the total experience doesn't take you on a journey with a clear beginning, middle and end. Grapes sourced from Melbury, Vecina, St. Eden Vineyards. 90

Turley  
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Pesenti Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2002, \$35.00, 16.0%

Some noticeable film in the fat garnet to purple core, barely shifts to a dark ruby as it nears the rims. The nose is smoky to the point it's almost musky — scorched earth, fried lemons, roof tar, saddlesoap, there's a keen edge to the red cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit but still hard to notice it with everything else going on. Medium-bodied and bottom-loaded, minimal lift, sticks to the tongue like rubber cement. Sharply spicy, warms your tummy from the first sip on. Once more, the tightly wound character of the cranberry, red cherry, black raspberry fruit prevents it from soaking in thus slightly truncating its presence. Dull acidity, the tannins have a thin coating effect. Has that orange and lemon citrus kick but not as savage as in the nose regarding the earthiness or other non-fruit flavors. Nothing complicated, you like the first sip, you'll like the last. 89

Surh Luchtel  
Napa Valley, Page Nord Vineyard  
Syrah  
2002, \$29.99

Just about totally opaque purple core encircled by a tight band of luminescent magenta around the rims. Roasted coffee and vanilla bean rise up first in the nose, becoming more floral over time with a light lemon misting, unforced density in the currant, cherry, the fruit rumbles along under the other scents. Full-bodied with a consistent stride forward in spite of its quite creamy texture. While there's still plenty of coffee, vanilla, toffee oak to be had, it also presents a solid beam of acidity to straighten out the fabric. Good, semi-sour red currant, black cherry, cranberry fruit, derives lift from the dewy florality. While it keeps most of its weight through the finish not "punishingly long" either. Spice, orange peel and coffee echo the longest. 89

Olson Ogden  
Sonoma County  
Syrah

2003, \$19.99, 14.3%

Immaculate black purple core, mostly crimson rims with a hint of magenta. Some cracked pepper, tree bark, rosemary spice, lemon peel and lesser grapefruit, leather, a touch of florality creates breathing room for the currant, cherry, raspberry scents, has some milk chocolate bubbling up at the end. Medium-bodied, fairly strongly structured but its supporting beams widely spaced so that it is not overbearingly heavy. The acidity burrows slowly but steadily. The oak is mild, some toast for sure, opens more into flower petals, lemon zest, earth but also maintains an admirable amount of clarity in the raspberry, red currant, blackberry fruit, if without a "bluesy" resonance. Tasty, if fairly homogeneous. 89

Neal Family  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$53.99

Vastly opaque purple core, concentrated if thin dark magenta rims. The nose unveils pencil lead, tar, bell pepper, orange peel, merde and freshly cut cedar with a nicely slow and steady lift, the deep caramel coating on the red currant, cherry scents gives it weight. Full-bodied, stays broad with a really concentrated, sappy feel to it, slows down but never close to stopping. Displays typical cedar, grass, lemon peel, leather nuances, while not incredibly complex it tastes just like you want Napa Cabernet to taste like, even if replete with burly caramel and baking spice oak flavors. Thick finish, stays with you without you even having to lift a finger. 89

Edwards, Merry  
Russian River Valley, Klopp Ranch, Méthode à l'Ancienne  
Pinot Noir  
2002, \$48.00

Pure and consistent ruby-violet color, most minimal change from core to rim. Possesses a really floral perfume in the nose, openly-knit lemon to lime zest, mint, anise, stays skeletal in structure, no unnecessary makeup, full exposure to the cherry, raspberry, cranberry scents. Full-bodied, has a nicely tailored cut to it with white grapefruit, lemon and white mineral flavors way ahead of the pack. The grassiness is next and then, after awhile, the raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit. The acidity easily furrows its brows as the tannins build and build until your tongue can barely move. Hyper-aggressive, just grabs you by the throat and won't let go. 89

Easton  
Amador County  
Zinfandel  
2003, \$14.99, 14.5%

Light and shiny red-purple core, transparent for the coloration, pure ruby rims. Attractive zip in the nose, nothing heavy-handed going on, just zesty raspberry, cranberry, strawberry fruit, lemon/orange citrus. Licorice, and then a certain measure of grilled meats and earth, middling amount of oak if any. Medium-bodied, equally easygoing and refreshing in the mouth, plain spoken and open red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit which slides through smoothly. No undue traces of alcoholic heat nor oak toast, leans more on earth, minerals, wild herbs, lemon zest and a suggestion of game. Acidity does the bulk of the work but tannins are present. Smokiness and a comforting moment of milk chocolate bring it on home. 89

Drinkward Peschon  
Napa Valley, Entre Deux Mères  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$45.99, 14.3%

Completely opaque black core, entirely impenetrable, thin if muscular rims. There's plenty of conscious direction in the black cherry, blackberry scents, the flower petals, smoke, orange citrus shades help to separate and clarify the layers, really sticks it to you without taking no for an answer. In the mouth it's full-bodied with plenty of movement, the cocoa, vanilla, mint flavors have no reluctance in joining forces with the same flowers, orange peel and cigar wrapper components. Yet, in the end, the chocolate flavors mask many nuances. The acidity and tannins both merit note but they end up taking away more than embellishing. While consistently present, the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit takes some time to fully spread out. 89

Turley  
Napa Valley, Library Vineyard  
Petite Sirah  
2002, \$38.00, 13.8%

Just about opaque black core with red flecks, the thickly set red-ruby rims glow radiantly. In the nose piercing notes of white grapefruit and burning grass are swiftly followed on by leather, tar, cow pattie funk, eucalyptus and semi-forgotten element of currant, cherry, red apple and cantaloupe fruit scents. Medium-bodied, has enough consistency of stone to sit there when it wants, move when it wants. While there is more than adequate delineation in the flavors, there is an inert feel to it all. Some oak toast here, some earth and herbaceousness there. Some cranberry, currant, red cherry fruit here, some tar and merde there. Some grapefruit and orange citrus here, some cocoa powder there. Tannic, sure, but not really. Blunt finish, like walking into a closed bathroom door in the middle of the night. 88

Thackrey, Sean  
Napa Valley, Rossi Vineyard, Orion Old Vines  
Syrah  
2002, \$99.99

Full-on opaque purple core, broadly set luminescent ruby rims, makes your eyes bleed. Reductive, volatile nose of merde, farts, rotting grass, violets, bitter chocolate, forceful currant and cherry fruit, all with a sour edge. Medium to full-bodied, rages all over haphazardly. The caramel and toffee eventually strong enough to overcome the supersized funk in the merde, tar, earth, tree bark

flavors. Not sluggish in mindset but leaden of foot and changes directions glacially. The mid-palate brings out tangerine and lemon citrus, eventually your taste buds fall into step with the flavors and it semi-normalizes in your mouth. As usual with this wine, why drink this now, so young? 88

Radio-Coteau  
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, La Neblina  
Pinot Noir  
2003, \$44.99

Light film in the garnet-violet color, becomes more dark ruby at the rims. Sweetly smoky and floral nose of rose petals, candied raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit, doesn't come off as oaky but has a very creamy presence nonetheless. Medium-bodied, while there's a big, blowsy feel in the cherry, raspberry fruit there's also this heavy caking of powdery tannins to stunt the sweetness. Unfolds lemon peel, grass and some lighter earth tones but these are swallowed up in molasses and caramelized brown sugar. Takes a mildly vicious turn on the finish, solid twist of your tongue. In the end, too scripted. 88

Lockhart  
Regional Blend, California  
Merlot  
2003, \$10.99

Concentrated brick red inflected purple core, spotless, more natural crimson makes for wide rims. Pungent nose with a noticeably sticky quality, reluctant to fade once it is in there, cherry, black raspberry fruit with enough menthol, herbs to fight the caramel popcorn to a standstill, just reclines there like it belongs. Medium to full-bodied, once more plays up its ability to cling, has a quite credible degree of acidity and there's certainly tang in the orange/lemon citrus. However, why dicker about when you bought the bottle for the red cherry, blackberry, currant fruit? Some smoke, some leather, some earth, ho-hum. Dry enough but possesses enough residual sugar to satisfy your sweet tooth. Right where it oughta be. Grapes sourced from Sonoma, Napa Counties. 88

Gemstone  
Napa Valley, Yountville, Facets  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$60.00

Impenetrably black core, fiery beet colored rims. Suavely put together nose of caramel, violets, orange reduction, chocolate crisp, while certainly extracted the blackberry, black cherry fruit scents hold their form, little to evoke the good earth. Medium to full-bodied, spicy attack with hints of clove and cinnamon as well as orange spice. The molasses and maple syrup flavors dampen any heat from the former and also coat some underlying herbaceous nuances. Without any acidity there's a tangy zest to be found in the raspberry, red cherry, red currant fruit. Manages to keep its shoulders squared through the finish yet not particularly aware of where it's going or, better, should go. More coffee cream and caramel residue on the finish. The wine will sell out, no doubt. 53% Merlot, 42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. 88

Copain  
Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands, Garys' Vineyard  
Syrah  
2003, \$58.99

Semi-opaque purple to ruby core, features thin yet incredibly dense magenta rims. Incredible peppermint freshness in the nose, wow, eucalyptus, brown sugar syrup, lemon zip and then freshly picked and scrubbed raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, curiously fluid with a break neck pace as it spreads wide the mint, menthol, lemon/lime flavors, the acidity keeps it flowing if it hits any eddies. Possesses a semi-sticky extract in the raspberry, red cherry fruit. As it sits in the glass you get more earth, pine, smoke but outside of the dominant mint component remains so primary. Leaves you curious where it will go in a few years. 88

Barnett Vineyards  
Napa Valley, Spring Mountain District  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$61.99

Completely veiled purple core, possesses very thin crimson to ruby rims of heavy saturation. The nose features thick-legged currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, equally dense eucalyptus, cedar, caramel scents with much milder orange citrus and flower notes, soft earthiness too. Full-bodied without being really that dense in the mouth, light layer of sap laid upon the tongue, mostly molasses and maple syrup. Produces pretty orange zest, flowers and menthol, seems like it could turn earthier but eschews that path. The tannins are too fat to soak up excess moisture or lend structure, forget the acidity. No lack of ripe juiciness in the cherry, blackberry, currant fruit. Minor shades of cedar, bell pepper, tobacco wrapper, yet more suggestion than presence. Milk chocolate, some alcoholic heat on the finish. Real sticky. 88

Ridge  
Dry Creek Valley, Lytton Springs  
Zinfandel  
2003, \$29.99, 14.3%

Clear and deep ruby-violet coloration, full saturation to the rims, excellent composition. Super-sugary sweet nose of cotton candy, caramel, toffee, lemon juice as well as plentiful blackberry, blueberry, boysenberry, melon fruit, search as you like nothing else there. In the mouth it spreads wide if in essence not that, that full-bodied. Begins with lemon and orange citrus then segues to melon, raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit with burgeoning aspects of cedar, leather, mesquite wood chips. The tannins and acidity are kind of dull, can help allow a brighter mouth feel but not convincingly. The odd moments of leather, smoke and tar come out of nowhere and has you scratching your head. Long but strictly by momentum. Sweet ending, the sugar hurts its delineation, slumps across the finish line. 76% Zinfandel, 28% Petite Sirah, 6% Carignane. 87

Laetitia  
Arroyo Grande Valley, Les Galets Single Vineyard  
Pinot Noir  
2002, \$59.99

Violet core with a broad dark ruby rims, trim and clear for all of its depth. Very sweet and candied nose of jammy raspberry, blackberry fruit that fades surprisingly swiftly, shows orange spritz, restrained yet ever-present vanilla cream, extremely unevolved in feel. Medium-bodied, angular entry into the mouth takes you off guard, dry and clunky with big, broad-bellied tannins. The grass, lemon and leather notes come with blurry edges. As the acidity lurches forward it finds some focus. The raspberry,

blackberry, cherry fruit maintains momentum without any real clear direction. Nice but ho-hum. 87

Karl Lawrence  
Napa Valley, Aldin Red Table Wine  
Blend  
2002, \$29.00

Rich purple core, quite opaque, becomes more crimson to fresh brick red at the rims. The nose takes some time to unwind before presenting echoes of mint, caramel, coffee beans, leather and lemon citrus, the tartness never really comes out of the red currant, cherry scents. Medium-bodied but very full, no room from cheek to cheek. Dry in texture, the tannins have a powdery aspect which seems to end up in clumps in the mouth. The cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit has more power than the caramel, coffee oak notes. Some orange citrus, herbal grassiness, cedar, leather but right now focusing on staying as plump as possible. Consistent finish, makes you taste the steak it was born to be consumed with. 59% Cabernet Sauvignon (Morisoli Vineyard, Herb Lamb Vineyard, Beckstoffer-To Kalon Vineyard), 25% Merlot (Boeschen Vineyard), 16% Cabernet Franc (Beckstoffer-To Kalon Vineyard). 87

Elyse  
Napa Valley, Korte Ranch  
Zinfandel  
2003, \$29.99, 15.9%

Clear yet there's also a big glow in the ruby-violet core, admirably fights to fully saturate the rims. Extremely bright and skittish nose, zips here and there with raspberry, strawberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit, offers a light pour of maple syrup on this fruit pancake, aims real hard to achieve a "zinberry" purity but too cloyingly sweet. Full-bodied and clingy, clings a little too tightly to your mouth pores for comfort. Orange, lemon citrus and some grass creates mild flavor separation from the gloppy caramel, molasses oak. Mild acidity and tannins at best. Towards the finish feels like it's being squeezed by a cake baker through one of those icing tubes. Has many attractive qualities yet in the end it's the same old, same old just without going for over-extraction. 87

Carlisle  
Dry Creek Valley  
Petite Sirah  
2003, \$34.99, 15.9%

Immaculate surface, has an onyx stone-like shine, totally opaque below with saturated, glowing red-ruby rims. Juicy nose, manages the alcohol decently, pronounced florality and lemon zest before submerged in a caramel fudge sundae, a mountain air herbaceousness provides some shape to the plum, black currant, cherry scents. Full-bodied, dense but not heavy, manages to spread itself broadly enough to lose any potential over-concentration. Heavy on the plum, cassis, blackberry fruit, more chewy than juicy with some lightening from the lemon/orange citrus, dried flowers and mild earthiness. Not particularly tannic. While less oaky than in the nose, here the alcohol is more obvious. Big and broad-shouldered but not the most compelling dinner table conversationalist. 87

Ravenswood  
Sonoma County, Old Vine  
Zinfandel  
2002, \$17.99, 14.5%

Undiluted red-purple core, allows your eyes to pierce it, amply filled dark ruby rims. Not a particularly giving nose

and there's some alcoholic turbulence yet you cannot deny the pretty nature of the orange zest, cherry blossom, freshly cut cedar as well as the wiry, muscular raspberry, blackberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, the flavors feel like a puppet on a string, there but could be pulled away at a moment's whim. The acidity deserves credit for quieting a lot of the noise and harmonizing the raspberry, blackberry, cranberry fruit with the lemon, orange citrus and herbal, tree bark aspects. Even as the floral and mentholated elements show doesn't lose its stern edge, feels its got too much to prove. The weight stays through the finish but the core flavors peter out, as a result you have to be a patient sipper. 86

Rock River  
Regional Blend, California  
Zinfandel  
2003, \$10.99, 13.5%

Clean red-violet core, entirely unblemished with fair concentration, more crimson to dark ruby at the rims. Simple presentation in the nose of raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit, followed up by moments of herbaceousness, menthol and orange zest, average length before slowly dissolving. Light to medium-bodied, pleasing most for its lack of pushiness, light floral and lemon to orange citrus notes prettify things and carve away some of the excess juice from the blackberry, cherry, raspberry fruit flavors. Massaged enough into a relaxed state wherein no tannins nor acidity are necessary. Less herbal in the mouth but there's still some vaguely underripe bite on the finish. An easy drinker without aspirations to more. Grapes sourced from Lodi, Paso Robles, Sonoma County. 85

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Long Vineyards  
Napa Valley, 25th Anniversary  
Chardonnay  
2001, \$30.99, 14.2%

Vague translucency in the white-green straw color, clean surface, moderate loss at the rims. Custard and piecrust nose, subtle in its concentration, slight poached or oxidative feel in the peach, apricot, pear scents, sweet baking spices, stays fresh in spite of its weight in your nostrils. Full-bodied, sticks to your mouth pores with a vanilla cream, custard grip. Very oaky but naturally so, soaks in with molasses, honey, butterscotch yet its dissolve is fast enough to please. Ripe fullness in the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit, ends on a pleasingly dry note. The acidity more envelops from the outside than form an inner spine. Has some herbal characteristics, rose thorns and spice. Possesses enough inner confidence that you can easily forget it's in your mouth, in a good way. 88

Au Bon Climat  
Santa Barbara County, Bien Nacido/Rancho Vinedo  
Vineyards  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$19.99

Trim golden color, unblemished, as light as the core is lighter still at the rims. High-toned oak toast fills the nose, takes some time to soften into caramel, lime juice, and pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit, lots of angles, has a smoky and oily quality after some time. Medium-bodied, curious in that it is round on the mouth roof and more angular along the bottom near the tongue and gums.

More oak cream and toffee accents with orange spice than out-and-out toastiness. Combine the tangerine, lime citrus with the spiced peach, apricot, nectarine, papaya fruit and while tropical, not excessively juicy nor that hot from alcohol. The acidity has thrust but more powdery in feel than keen. Stays more or less on balance. 88

Work Family Vineyard  
Napa Valley, Work Vineyard  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2004, \$26.99, 13.8%

Slight straw yellow tinge, very transparent with a high degree of brilliance, no color at the rims. The nose is on the soft side, even-tempered and consistent, creamy feel in the peach, apricot, mango scents, minimal herbaceousness. Full-bodied, arrayed with a tanginess that comes from a host of directions — orange/lemon citrus, mineral dust, cut grass, violets, mint. The pear, apple, peach fruit softens the profile somewhat but the acidity has enough splinters in it to take it back the other way. Gets muddled towards the finish, losing its sense of direction. Hey, the family liked it. 87

Morgan  
Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands, Double L  
Vineyard  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$31.99

Mostly transparent golden straw color, semi-washed out at the rims. Big, blooming nose of butter, butterscotch, lime/lemon citrus, rosemary, flower paste, pear, apple and peach fruit, empties out enough to dissolve cleanly. Creamy mouth entry, full-bodied, while the softer vanilla impresses first there is also a good degree of sharper toastiness. The oak begins to recede a little by the mid-palate, space created for lime juice, rose petals, violets. While the peach, nectarine, apple, apricot fruit lasts well, not too fruity as it is too concentrated to have the juiciness for fluidity. Stays broad and flavorful but the toast keeps it from coming down and finding a uniform focus. 87

James Henry Cellars  
Russian River Valley, Woolsey Road  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$37.99

Bright glow in the yellow color, slight greenish tinge, mild glassiness, very easy to see through, light rims too. Tight, penetrating toast in the nose, gnarly herbaceousness, sour and almost acrid in spite of the nectarine, peach, apricot fruit and lime zest, very active and swirling, the funk persists to the end. Medium-bodied, medicinal notes combine with clove and cinnamon spice, lemon peel, caramelized brown sugar, rose water, licorice and tea leaf, strives for a level of elegance just beyond its grasp. The acidity has been wrapped in insulation, making the ending sweeter than it might be otherwise. Fumey inner mouth perfume wafts up on the finish towards the roof of your mouth. Lees, oak, mint elements persist most on finish. 87

Franciscan Oakville Estate  
Napa Valley  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$15.99, 13.5%

Rich golden color, moderate luster, stretches well from core to rims. Full-bore lime juice, oak toast, dulce de leche vanilla/caramel ice cream, creamed coffee, mint alongside ripely plush apricot, peach, pear fruit, while clearly plays in the idiom into which it was born truly not

over-the-top. Medium to full-bodied, no surprises thrown at you in the mouth, stays closely to the textbook experience. More burnt buttered toast, clove spice, lime spritz, creme brûlée, here the oak influence more angular than soft. The acidity has a gnawing feel, like watching a Doberman Pinscher chewing on a big old bone. The tenor of the pear, peach, red apple, apricot, pineapple fruit follows the oak and strives more for edge than suppleness. Maybe a whiff of floral perfume but nothing else to complicate things unnecessarily. Minty finish, stops more or less on a dime. 87

Patz & Hall  
Napa Valley, Carneros, Hyde Vineyard  
Chardonnay  
2003, \$44.99

Very light yellow straw color, extremely shiny and reflective to make up for the lack of hue. The nose has orange/lemon sorbet swirled with vanilla ice cream, sweetly spicy with an allusion to mint, acacia, shows gently dissolving peach and apricot scents, quite airy overall. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, very toasty with a creamy underpinning, has the full range of oak interplay. The lemon and tangerine citrus has a pinpoint approach, the acidity zips by like on a Vespa scooter. The creaminess persists, imbues a poached feel in the peach, apricot, pear fruit. The floral notes during the finish helps its gossamer denouement but it still lacks meaningful complexity. 86

Forman  
Napa Valley  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$36.99

Light golden straw color, possessed of a mild green tinge, fairly reflective and with more than a few layers. Heavy slug of oak, mint leaf, lime juice, burnet buttered toast powers the nose, motor oil and herbs add an acrid touch, near impossible to get past the oak, at the last second throws in pineapple, nectarine, papaya, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied and surprisingly dilute, even with all the oak toast, clove and vanilla crisp. You better catch the peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit quickly because it dissolves right away. Coughs up some lemon/lime citrus peel and rose petal and there's still lots of creaminess left by the finish but not much else. Uninteresting. 85

Conundrum Wines  
Regional Blend, California  
Blend  
2003, \$25.99, 13.5%

Clear yellow straw color of above average depth, shiny surface and easy to see through. Heavy caramel-coated popcorn in the nose, floral water, tangerine/orange zest, just so crazily oaked you can barely register any peach, apricot, nectarine fruit scents. Medium-bodied, here in the mouth the tropicality of the apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit comes through, stunting at least some of the vanilla, caramel, popcorn oak. No acidity so there's some flab hanging off its arms. Touch of garden herbs and potpourri but really just rolls on past the mid-palate on the merits of its sheer weight and fruit extraction. Unspecified percentages of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Viognier, Muscat. Blended from Napa Valley, Santa Maria Valley, Santa Lucia Highlands, other Californian regions. 85

## CALIFORNIA ROSE

Pax Wine Cellars  
Sonoma County, Rosé  
Blend  
2004, \$19.99

Dull luminescent throb in the dark ruby color, mostly see-through but like gazing through a red veil. In the nose it hits you first with a big herbaceous haymaker punch then there's almost this milky quality before lemon peel, strawberry and raspberry fruit flood the basement. Big mouth presence, quite creamy and enveloping in texture, slides on its belly across your tongue. The glazed feel in the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit keeps it stuck to your cheeks. The tannins and acidity are in full lockdown so that you can soak in the fruit that much longer. Herbal qualities not as prevalent as in the nose, most apparent as the fruit eventually pales. Unabashedly exhibitionistic. 60% Syrah, 40% Grenache. 87

## CALIFORNIA DESSERT

Calera  
San Benito County, Mount Harlan  
Viognier  
2004, \$26.99, 14.5%

Simple straw color, nothing really of note to it, some translucency and solid to the rims. Sappy, almost milky, nose of peach, pear, apricot pie, splash of rose and violet water, very floral with a spray of lemon/orange zest to ensure continued freshness. In the mouth it is thick enough on the attack to earn "dessert wine" status yet dissolves steadily enough to remain light on its feet and eminently drinkable in quantity. The floral dew both sinks and lifts at once, held together by a core of tangerine, lime juice. Baked piecrust and honey continue the sweetness fest, the acidity sparkles at haphazard moments. While not profound, puts a big smile on your face and does an excellent job of stopping just where it should. Quite seductive in an innocent way. 375 ml bottle. 89

## WASHINGTON RED

Buty  
Columbia Valley, Redviva  
Blend  
2001, \$48.99, 13.8%

Filmy reddish purple core, thick glow in the crimson rims. Touch of bell pepper and freshly mowed lawn in the nose, very sappy currant, cherry fruit scents, this broken down somewhat by cigarette ash, leather and tar, yet these holes are filled by caramel and light popcorn notes. Medium-bodied, the tannins are semi-arch, possess a vague peppery nature. Delivers bell pepper, grass, smoke, leather, orange and lemon rind flavors, as it sits in the glass more floral shades emerge. Additional mesquite and barbeque sauce tones also emerge. After its initial uptick, the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit fades with alacrity. No lack of raw material just does not fully come together. 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Syrah. 88

## OREGON RED

Copain  
Walla Walla Valley, Cailloux & Coccinelle  
Syrah  
2003, \$44.99, 14.2%

Pure dark purple core, just crosses the line into opacity, wide mottled red crimson rims. Opinionated nose of burnt bacon, leather, black smoke, white grapefruit pith, flower extract, toasted baguettes, kneads the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit before oven baking it into its final shape. Medium-bodied, comes at you in regular intervals, like an old-fashioned manual lawnmower. Smoky, leathery, earthy, no doubt, but the first major impression comes from the molasses crisp and molten white chocolate. That said, highly herbaceous too with more than the usual lemon to grapefruit citrus cut, old potpourri florality and some stoniness to boot. Slight reductive feel to the black raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, sinks more than swings. It will easily outlast you in a contest of wills. 91

## OREGON ROSE

Patton Valley Vineyard  
Willamette Valley, Rosé  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$15.99, 12.5%

Extremely pale watermelon color, loses hue big time at the rims. Sour, smoky and almost leathery nose, subtle hint of caramel and touch of spice, clean and accessible cherry, raspberry, strawberry scents, its excess energy costs it balance. Medium-bodied, slightly chewy with good tannic structure, squeezes some of the sweetness out of the red cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit, dries out by the finish. Once more you get leather and earth tones, drips lemon juice into the crevices. Dry and gritty during the finish, mineral dust, really strives for some seriousness, perhaps too much so. 87

## NEW YORK WHITE

Jamesport  
Long Island, North Fork  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2003, \$11.99, 12.5%

Pale yellow straw color, modicum of concentration at the core, mostly clear and transparent at the rims. Brisk, penetrating nose of lemon seed and pith, licorice, cream, fried garden herbs as well as peach, nectarine to pineapple, papaya fruit, stripped down to the essentials. Medium-bodied, a bit bracingly sour on the attack, features mint, herbs, jagged minerals and oil. The fruit is ratcheted down a notch to pear, apple, peach and apricot — can't blame the acidity as it's fair to middling at best. Lemony kick, hint of lime too. Sour twist at the end, shortens things a little. The fabric starts to unwind during last few seconds, loose threads showing. 86

## TEXAS RED???

Poteet Country Winery  
South Texas, Sweet Reserve Strawberry Wine  
Fruit (Non-Grape)  
NV, \$19.99, 11.5%

Clean, light orange core with a delicate ruby cast, fully yellow rims, quite transparent. Duh, heavy strawberry in the nose, some raspberry and lemon too, there's moments of vague white minerals in there at times too. Full-bodied, soft and sweet, soooooo strawberry in flavor but has some acidity and miraculously ends dry and clean. Strong grip, no 98 pound weakling. Offers lemon tones on the finish. Tangy and lip-smacking, sure it's almost a light jam product but it is actually pretty damn good. Bottle got finished! The red tint on the bottle is cheesy though... 88

## FRANCE RED

Lignier, Domaine Hubert  
Burgundy, Chambolle-Musigny, Les Baudes  
Pinot Noir

2002, \$110.99, 13.0%

Immaculate, noticeably dark ruby-purple color, consistent right up to the rims where an orange aura appears. Saturates your nose with cola, orange citrus, cinnamon and clove powder, minor vanilla dust, herbs bring a mild sour edge, heavily concentrated raspberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit, the floral dimension hovers rather than lifts. Full-bodied, stuffed to the point where it has to be round. More floral here with bigger orange/lemon citrus, more resonant earthiness too. The acidity resembles a wide drill bit, the hole it makes may be big enough that you need to find a larger screw. The raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit rolls into the mouth, rolls through and rolls out, sappy but keeps moving. More chocolate than vanilla tones, the spice makes the oak most noticeable. Light tomato notes at the end. 92

Fourrier, Domaine  
Burgundy, Vougeot, Les Petits Vougeot, Vieille Vigne  
Pinot Noir

2002, \$60.99, 13.5%

Graciously pure violet-ruby color, spotless and full straight to the rims. Cinnamon, ginger bread, ripe orange peel with a burning underbrush funk, even with the purity of the red cherry, raspberry fruit it turns increasingly to animal barnyard and earth scents in the nose. Medium-bodied with excellent grip, until its fingers turn white. You can feel in the weight a slight surmaturité effecting the blackberry, cherry, raspberry fruit, slows it down like leg weights. The tannins have a rough texture too, punch you hard like you're in a fraternity hazing line. Really minerally and stony, lime and lemon pith, herbal, dusty feel. Gains in stature, shoulders broad even if in need of filling in some. Refuses to release your tongue on the finish, relishes your bruises. 92

Montus (Alain Brumont), Château  
Southwest France, Madiran, La Tyre  
Tannat

2001, \$127.99, 14.5%

Clear ruby-violet color, evenly distributed with a brighter red cast at the rims. Nose brims with stone, ash, tree bark, field scrub and comes with an ever-expanding core of cherry, plum, currant fruit alongside caramel notes. Big and full-bodied, easily saturates the mouth with peppery tannins, minerality and rawhide flavors. Smoky red currant, cherry fruit bares its fangs next to claws of orange, grapefruit citrus. Delicate floral notes and a good bit of the herbaceousness are submerged today, even as the vanilla cream and caramel effects rise slightly. The tannins remain broad throughout, not pliant but accepting. Rolls on through an extended finish, pushing outwards with insistence. Its density leads to homogeneity now. 90

Montus (Alain Brumont), Château  
Southwest France, Madiran, Cuvée Prestige  
Tannat

2002, \$58.99, 15.0%

Strong glow in the bright purple core, opaque, attractively very luminescent brick red rims. While it has a strong toast in the nose this is overcome quickly by white grapefruit, black earth, tar, black wood smoke and minerals, shows a thick consistency in the black currant,

cherry scents. Composed of powerful beams in the mouth, very tannic and broad, the term "bruiser" comes easily to mind. Vicious cut to it, chock full of minerality, jagged stones and edgy white grapefruit to lemon citrus. Tar, tobacco resin, wet earth and fallen leaves are next. The acidity comes on strong as it passes the mid-palate, aiding it to hold its wiry weight and stay on balance. The currant, blackberry, cherry fruit fits the super-structure well, will age with grace rather than brute power. Has as delicate a dissolve as possible given its size. 90

Daumas Gassac, Mas de  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault Haute  
Vallée du Gassac  
Blend

2003, \$36.99, 13.0%

Quite even red-ruby to violet color, consistent from core to rims. Produces smoke, leather, tobacco ash, grapefruit pith, lichen undergrowth, never gets too rustic as the youthful juice in the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is fairly explosive, no heat perceived. Medium-bodied, the acidity and tannins evident from the beginning, not dominant but ever-present. Collected and integrated, makes it hard to parse out the tar, tea leaf, tobacco, minerals as well as dried grapefruit/lemon peel flavors. Thankfully the angular nature of the red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit helps it to stand out more. Turns a bit more dusty over time, not clenching up but the tannins get harder and more "green." Slightly chewy, mostly herbaceous on the finish. 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, remainder unspecified percentages of Malbec, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Tannat, Pinot Noir, Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, Tempranillo. 90

Jadot, Domaine Louis  
Burgundy, Beaune, Clos des Ursules  
Pinot Noir

2002, \$39.99, 13.5%

Red-crimson tones infiltrate the whole color, only a light violet at the core, clean but the darkness obscures its trimmer qualities. Big, expansive nose with a few claws bared, minerally and borderline salty edge to the nose, you can hear the skin break in the cherry, blackberry scents, pine/menthol notes at moments, slowly swirls around your nostrils without perching. Medium-bodied, stern and tough-minded from the start, real no-nonsense in its desire to slap its sabre across your forehead. The acidity rides high while the tannins sink low. Reaches a plateau of red currant and cherry fruit with raspberry accents. Gets more herbaceous the more you sip it even as the fruit's sap remains solid. Turns more leathery and earthy near the back end, more lemon bite too. Will shed weight to ensure it can keep attacking. 89

Bouley, Domaine Jean-Marc  
Burgundy, Volnay, Les Carelles  
Pinot Noir

2002, \$42.99, 13.0%

Dense violet core, even more undiluted red ruby as it swims towards the rims. Very ripe and sticky raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, cherry scents in the nose, packs its underwear with a box of tissues to enhance its package's appearance, light mint and menthol notes, while it waits to throw in the caramel and buttered toast this is what stays with you longer. Medium-bodied, really stern and slow to move, hints at the fruit before delivering the herbs, licorice, pine, mint, actually strikingly unique initially. Then finally turns to that currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. The

herbaceousness re-upsets the apple cart even though the acidity maintains a solid supporting beam throughout. Mouthful of earth, leather, loam and sour orange as it continues to open. While it might be easy to dismiss at first, keeps coming back at you. 89

Puzelat, Thierry

Loire, Vin de Table Français, Le P'Tit Tannique Coule Bien Gamay Noir

2004, \$15.99, 12.0%

Gauzy and semi-opaque ruby-magenta coloration, warm glow breathes even more life into it, your eyebrows arch in surprise at the deep hue saturation at the rims. Casually stuffed nose of wet grass, moist floral paste, the sour cherry and raspberry fruit stays concentrated, the leather, undergrowth scrub is spread with assurance and imbues added depth. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, the tannins make a big initial show of strength and bend most of the show to its directorial will. The thick neck of the cherry, currant, strawberry fruit cranes like a sweating dock laborer. The acidity under the surface nudges forward the leather, tree bark, olive pit, enjoyably non-pushy secondary flavors. After an almost intentional turbulence at first, it evens out into a more level presentation. Keeps you licking your lips. 88

Mordorée, Domaine de la

Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, La Dame Rousse

Blend

2003, \$9.99

There's a solid murk in the dark purple core, the filmy magenta rims come with noticeable brown brick hues. The nose is dense and slow to unwind (if it does), with tar pitch, black earth, merde, herbal compost, the floral and citric components are mostly muted but the smoke-laden cherry, black currant scents fight back gamely. Full-bodied, juicy with the texture of a velour sweater. Presents a full coating of milk chocolate, orange zest and toast on the tightly constructed, ripe currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. More florality and minerality escapes the density than in the nose but not much more. The acidity capitulated fairly early in the game and the tannins are in constant struggle to stem echoes of surmaturité in the fruit. Still chewy through the finish, final notes are of coffee ice cream and buttered burnt toast. 40% Grenache, 30% Syrah, remainder unspecified percentages of Mourvèdre, Carignan, Counoise. 88

Dupont-Tisserandot, Domaine

Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin

Pinot Noir

2002, \$40.99, 13.0%

Dense violet core, in no way opaque but deep enough to fight off both reflectivity and transparency, offers more dark garnet hues for rims. Attractive spritz of lemon, orange, white grapefruit first in the nose, some leather and tar for bass resonance, the herbal character turns the cherry, blackberry scents more sour, not particularly longlasting. Full-bodied, plush and round like a water bed, moves too much in a liquid fashion to gain density. Hints at overripeness but fresh enough to also slide forward at a measured pace. The tannins and acidity tamed and attentive to the fruit's needs. Orange peel, powdered milk chocolate, sweet herbs, never even tries to get too complex lest immediate pleasure be compromised. Maybe just slightly boring on the finish but still goes down so smoothly. 88

Belland, Domaine Roger

Burgundy, Santenay, Beauregard

Pinot Noir

2002, \$33.99, 13.0%

Slightly more violet at the core but quite broad territory covered by the red-ruby hues, the light filmy quality helps keep it very dark and thick. Pronounced rustic quality to the nose, plenty of sauvage earth, mineral, tar, leather, herbal aspects, there's a deep smoked feel in the raspberry, red cherry scents. Full-bodied, chewy and even gristly tough. The tannins pounce like a bear, a big crashing forward of weight. As a result, tends to lay there for a bit before shaking off its doldrums and giving up some orange peel, leather, game and tar. Round yet tough-skinned blackberry, cherry, black raspberry fruit, pushes outward at the expense of creating a hollowed out center. The acidity adds some bite at the end but minimal tingle. Solid blow delivered. 88

Pégau, Domaine du

Rhône, Plan Pégau L:2003

Blend

NV, \$15.99, 13.0%

Slight cloud in the crimson purple core, full brick red rims with an orange tinge. Sweet and sour mix in the raspberry, blackberry fruit scents, maybe more sour, on the "green" side, olive pit, bark, leaves, leather and orange pith, offers just a little chocolate to salve some rough spots. Medium to full-bodied, stern and tannic, overly herbaceous with green olive, grass, tree leaf accents. A few wafts of florality in the mid-palate elevates the presence of the black cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit which nevertheless remains sour. Clenches before it reaches the finish line, huffing and puffing to the end. 50% Grenache, 30% Syrah, remainder Carignan, Merlot, Mourvèdre, etc. 87

Lagrange, Château

Bordeaux, Saint-Julien

Blend

2002, \$31.99, 13.0%

Mostly opaque pure purple core, thin but densely packed dark magenta rims. Highly oaky nose of burnt popcorn, fried vanilla, toffee and mint, touch of spiced orange, deals with the oak by staying openly knit, blends in light nuances of mesquite smoke, cedar, has a plummy feel to the cherry, blackberry fruit yet oddly the scents are short. Medium-bodied, stretches out enough to touch both mouth walls at once, the oak is simply out of whack and takes up too much of centerstage — cocoa, coconut, vanilla, toffee, mint. Sure, there's enough of a basic tannic/acidic punch to cover up many of its inherent flaws, the tannins especially are long and wiry it not that confident, acidity cowers at times. Indistinct cedar, lemon, leather notes and straightforward cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit, remains close to what it should be but it can't shake that blurred feel. 66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot. 87

Paraza, Château de

Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois, Cuvée Spéciale

Blend

2002, \$8.99, 12.5%

There's this medicinal or brick red cast to the clear purple core, much more straightforward ruby at the rims. Admirably collected core of blackberry, black cherry fruit to the nose, embellished with broadening elements of pine, burnt chocolate, sour lemongrass, ending elevation of powdered violets. Fairly light-bodied, makes it both easier

to drink and allows the pine, menthol, floral and orange to lemon citrus to shine without impediment. Junior High level of tannins and acidity, there, complete but not ready to flex with the big boys. The juiciness in the cherry, black raspberry fruit more noticeable as the typical Minervois nastiness of earth, tar and leather unfortunately absent. Cruises through without any true hitches, a nice little wine for the price if you don't want the full terroir experience. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Grenache, Carignan, Cinsault. 85

Usseglio & Fils, Domaine Pierre  
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône  
Blend  
2004, \$21.99, 12.5%

Crystal clear red-ruby color, completely consistent throughout. While there's a hard candy feel in the raspberry, strawberry fruit scents, overall the nose still comes off as sour and herbaceous, muted notes of lemon citrus and dried earth. Light to medium-bodied, tart snap introduces the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, don't miss it because said fruit evaporates quickly. The acidity and tannins dull the tongue thoroughly by the mid-palate. At that point the herbaceousness becomes really dominant to the exclusion of any lemon citrus, earth or floral flavors. Dilute ending, not particularly tasty. 80% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre. 84

## FRANCE WHITE

Javillier, Domaine Patrick  
Burgundy, Meursault, Les Tillets, Cuvée Spéciale  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$44.99, 13.0%

Very trim green-gold color, subtle hues with mostly transparent rims and average shine. Nose percolates with frying oil on stones, razor sharp oak toast, wet straw, orange peel, tightly wound peach, pear, melon fruit, some mint, smart like a two year old who never has said a word until she starts speaking in complete sentences. Full-bodied but more so in terms of sheer weight than textural grip. Oaky spice, orange/lemon citrus and mint brighten the entry, this turns out to be beneficial as the acidity is akin to a woolen blanket on the tongue. The peach, apricot, pear fruit is painted in broad, colorful stripes. Mineral dust yields bit-by-bit to underlying herbaceousness. Still tight during the finish, the fingers hurt you just watching them strain to squeeze you. 91

Daumas Gassac, Mas de  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault Haute  
Vallée du Gassac  
Blend  
2004, \$36.99, 13.0%

Completely transparent, zero color, depends on reflectivity to let you know there's liquid in the glass. Light, airy, fruity nose of green apple, peach, nectarine fruit, freshly cut lilacs and violets, sweet orange zest, fills your nostrils with the textural consistency of cotton candy. Medium-bodied, uniformly mellow and contoured in the mouth with creamy tones, albeit not oak-driven. The tangerine, lime citrus stays pretty and stimulating while the florality bursts forth like a spring morning. Serene feel in the peach, pear, red apple, nectarine, green melon fruit, not at all tropical but quite fruit-driven. Hint of sweet spices on the back half brings out more piecrust, dough tones. The acidity glides through to straighten the gentlemen's ties and handkerchiefs and moves on. Lots of finesse and balance.

30% Viognier, 30% Chardonnay, 30% Petit Manseng,  
10% Muscat, Marsanne, Roussanne, etc. 91

Belland, Domaine Roger  
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, Morgeot-Clos Pitois,  
Monopole  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$39.99, 13.0%

Filmy golden surface like a still pond, thinly layered, and with semi-dilute rims. The nose offers up mint, floral dust, sharp zesty lime and orange citrus, wet stones, overall focused and smoky to the point that it's hard to get at the peach, apricot fruit scents. Manages its full body very nicely, not nimble per se but turns with minimal time required. Floral with much more vanilla oak obvious in the mouth, more spice as well, the cream segues easily to a tingle, particularly as lime, tangerine citrus develops. The acidity hits some rough spots but at the same time keeps pushing forward. More ripeness than richness in the apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit, swells pleasingly in the center before slowly draining out towards the finish. Even as the weight drops off the sparkle remains. 90

Jadot, Domaine Louis  
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet  
Chardonnay  
2002, \$44.99, 13.5%

Good golden straw color, hint of bronze, soft translucency and decent consistency to the rims. Softly invasive oak in the nose, the cream pushes without any jerkiness, mint leaf, flower oil, suggestion of licorice, nicely collected and contoured apricot, peach, pear scents, lasts without effort. Medium to full-bodied, the vanilla and butterscotch oak influences add weight to the attack, derives some focus from the clove, ginger spice. The florality and orange zest blooms haphazardly, as a result somewhat stunted. The acidity runs a bit hot, disturbs the smooth polish. More or less consistent though, the peach, apricot, pear fruit starts off humbly so as to no appear to lose much either. So, is the finish nicely streamlined or just dropping off too much? Hard to say, but it does keep nibbling on your earlobe so that you lean in a bit closer. 89

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie  
Muscadet  
2004, \$10.99, 12.0%

Simple white to brown straw color, pale and hueless rims. Fragrant nose of chalky stones, white smoke, lemon wax, vital burst of lemon and white grapefruit citrus, kind of oily too, its fullness does not adversely effect the focus of the pear, melon, peach scents. Sternly full-bodied, really a touch too tight at the moment, stone flavors as well as a stone-like feel. Lemony, more lime than grapefruit, no juice just zest. The acidity has little cut but throws one big knockout punch. Florality and herbs submerged under the sheer pressure of the weight at the moment. Minimal peach, apple, apricot fruit, depends much more on minerality and chalk. Back to basics after the atypical 2003 version. 88

Jolivet, Pascal  
Loire, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France, Attitude  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2004, \$13.99, 12.0%

While very transparent, somewhat on the dull side, the golden straw color comes with a soft brown tinge. Good punching power in the nose, just the right amount of

grass, balanced out nicely by floral, sweet lemon/lime citrus, gooseberry, peach, apricot fruit, not incredibly complex yet satisfying. Medium-bodied, good heft, a dusty texture coats the tongue and mouth walls fully. Plenty of chalk, white minerals and puffs of smoke. Nothing insipid about the florality nor the length of the lemon, lime citrus. Becomes mildly sour during the mid-palate as the herbaceousness becomes more prevalent. The tartness extends to the peach, apricot, apple, pear fruit but this brings added brightness too. Solidly put together. 88

Ecu (Guy Bossard), Domaine de l'  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Expression de  
Granite

Muscadet  
2003, \$15.99, 12.0%

Somewhat filmy with a lack of shine, partially compensated for by a day-glo look in the yellow-green color. First there's a lemon custard pie thing in the nose, softly textured florality and then you get a blast of that hot oiled stone thing, plenty of stone dust too, the peach and apricot fruit has OK depth but overall the scents need more cut. Full-bodied, blunt and spread wide enough that it has trouble moving forward. While the weight is impressive, the acidity suffers for it and a good deal of the lemon/lime citrus, oil, granite, mineral chunk flavors become diffuse. Floral shades bolster the ripe if short peach, pear, apricot fruit. A certain indistinct tanginess fills the finish but as a whole it feels semi-forced, if enjoyable. 88

Dujac, Domaine  
Burgundy, Morey-Saint-Denis  
Chardonnay

2002, \$59.99, 13.0%

Semi-gauzy quality to the dull golden straw color, decidedly clearer rims. Big, sticky, opulent nose of caramel, heavy cream, fills up your nostrils all but completely, lemon/lime zest, burning grass and herbs, oil, minor stone notes, rugged juiciness in the peach, apricot, pear scents. Full-bodied, plump and forward like a big wave crashing onto the beach of your tongue, oodles of cream, spice and orange zest. The acidity helps structure the first few initial impressions but then comes apart under the weight of the oak assault. The honeyed aspect brings out more florality too. The peach, apricot, pear, nectarine fruit has a winning smile at first but can't quite last. Makes you want to freeze-frame it during the initial 10 seconds in your mouth. 88

Angerville, Domaine Marquis d'  
Burgundy, Meursault, Santenots  
Chardonnay

2002, \$39.99, 13.5%

Mild shimmer in the amberish gold color, while clear lacks brilliance and dies off at the rims. Only the smoky, burning oil and grass could manage to cover up the robust vanillin oak cream, borderline acrid at times, roasted lemon peel, spicy, everything works in concert to cut the legs out from under the pear, pineapple, nectarine scents. Medium-bodied, angular and out of joint from the start, twists its ankle entering your mouth. Finds some footing in the lemon peel, stone and streamwater nips but little freshness to be had. The acidity submerged and incapable of channeling the peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit in any direction. Deadens the tongue during the mid-palate so there's minimal verve nor a real flavor explosion on the finish. 87

Maltroye, Château de la  
Burgundy, Bourgogne  
Chardonnay

2002, \$22.99, 12.5%

Nicely golden, layered and semi-translucent, loses color yet still roiled at the rims. Nose lays it out there swiftly, dried apple, poached peach and apricot fruit, burnt molasses, finishes with a slight floral moment. Full-bodied, lots of weight but dilute with little intensity in the flavors. Dusty cinnamon and allspice, dried character in the lemon and lime citrus. The stone, mineral aspects fall prey to the dried fruit nature in the peach, apricot, pear, melon, yellow apple as well as the dewy florality. The acidity is dull at best, really, really dull at worst. Nothing horrible happened here simply remains too boring to hold your attention. 86

lbyr, Domaine Saint-Georges d'  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays des Côtes de Thongue,  
Cuvée Excellence

Blend  
2003, \$11.99, 13.5%

Faint glow in the yellow straw colored core, semi-flat with a severe loss of hue at the rims. Very light sparkling lilacs-led florality and lemon spritz in the nose, mineral dust and only a smattering of pear, peach, apple fruit. Dramatic change in the mouth, full-bodied and as hard as stone. Has that floral and herbaceous thing still but no breathing to create motion. More minerally if not earthy, portions out lemon and orange citrus. The peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit starts slowly and ends slowly. The acidity feels like a dull hacksaw. Most interesting for its texture and nose. 40% Chardonnay, 25% Viognier, 20% Sauvignon Blanc, 15% Muscat. 85

## FRANCE SPARKLING

Lanson  
Champagne, Gold Label Brut  
Blend

1995, \$45.99, 12.5%

Evenly spread, keeps its shine in addition to the brass gold color, presents slow moving thick bubbles in loose beads. Strong bread quality to the nose, high degree of toast accompanied by honey, seamlessly mixing in green apple, peach, strawberry, pear scents, some herbs and minerals give it last second lift. Medium-bodied, dry with medium grade fizz, the immensely crisp toast feels like razors baked into bread. Offers tangerine, lemon citrus with full portions of garden herbs, mint and chalk dust. The acidity has good punching power. Never quite mannered but schooled in how to be so. Baking spices and more dough lead into green apple, nectarine, pear, peach fruit, sacrifices sparkle on the finish to end as broadly as possible. Should be a very nice value play to age. 53% Pinot Noir, 47% Chardonnay. 90

## FRANCE DESSERT

Rabaud-Promis, Château  
Bordeaux, Sauternes  
Blend

2001, \$37.99, 13.5%

Resonantly layered amber-gold color, distorts light with a careless nonchalance, some yellowing at the rims. Honeyed graham crackers, orange marmalade, pine, whipped cream with peach, apricot, red apple and mango fruit, all-in-all a very collected and serene experience. Medium-bodied, streamlined and almost subtle in how it

snakes about your mouth. A tad herbaceous and spicy on the attack, broken bits of pie crust, brown sugar and cinnamon soften things progressively. A heavy toastiness then becomes evident, pierces the veil of peach, apricot, pineapple, nectarine fruit. Not tropical at all, fruit reveals a noticeably restrained level of sweetness. Acidity has on boxing gloves but you can still feel the knuckles. A real class act that doesn't try to impress and does so because of it. 80% Sémillon, 18% Sauvignon Blanc, 2% Muscadelle. 92

## ITALY RED

Vietti, Cantina  
Piedmont, Barolo, Castiglione  
Nebbiolo  
2000, \$44.99, 13.5%

Crystal clear medicinal red-orange core, turns to more washed out ochre at the rims. Sour grasses, leather, fried lemon peel, tar, pine cone comprise a large part of the nose, tart cherry and raspberry scents the rest, while penetrating the scents do not last, start to clench up and turn inwards. Medium-bodied, as smooth as it can be given its overall sandpapery grit texture. Herbaceous, smoked lemons, bark, leather, behaves as if it cares not a whit if it makes friends or not, just lets its mood dominate. The tannins are polished but the acidity needs a few more courses in finishing school. Dashes of pine, dried rose petals, dried blood slide through, casting defiant glances to and fro. The red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit stabs at you and should not be underestimated, will make the long journey. Just that journey begins to end 10 years from now. 90

Vigna Terre Rosse, Azienda Agricola  
Piedmont, Colline Saluzzesi  
Pelaverga  
2003, \$19.99, 12.5%  
Extremely cloudy ruby color with a hint of violet at the core, hue remains the same but fades some at the rims, remains hard to seem through. Sappy strawberry, raspberry fruit filled nose with formidable clinging power, mixes in lemon juice, freshly cut flowers and thyme, fatness shows no signs of dissipation as it sits in your nostrils. Full-bodied and juicy with minor roasted undertones, weighs heavily upon the tongue during the attack even as it releases nicely after a bit. Herbal with enough filmy tannins to prevent the sweet raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit from turning cloying. Shades of lemon citrus, violets and cut grass. Clean enough, no overt manipulation showing. Finish comes semi-abruptly. Deserves a good chilling to show at its very best. 87

Giacosa, Bruno  
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba  
Barbera  
2003, \$29.99, 14.0%

Filmy purple core with very wide dark magenta rims, concentrated aura. Voluptuous nose of black cherry, blackberry fruit, violets and field grasses, some orange peel reduction, the earthiness serves more for weight than for scent. In the mouth it is full-bodied and the elements are a bit better balanced together. The cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit integrates into lemon, orange citrus and herbs while earth, tar, grass add deeper resonance. After awhile chocolaty tones appear to soften the overall profile. The acidity and tannins come wrapped together into one bigger punch, slightly green. More and

more herbal as it sits on your tongue too, shortens the finish. 87

Decordi, Vinicola  
Puglia/Apulia, Sfida  
Blend  
2003, \$7.49, 13.0%

The core is more like deep red with violet accents, strong rims of dark crimson, zero loss. Lays out the plum, currant, black cherry fruit along with accents of cinnamon and orange peel, fluffy feel in the herbal notes, hedges but then returns to a fruit-driven experience. Full-bodied, there's a dried, sugary prune to raisin patina to the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, sinks more than it swims. The tannins and acidity just aren't there, their absence lets the wine's flesh wash across you unimpeded. Maybe a note or two of tomato skin, the orange citrus almost reaches a zest level, dash of smoke and sweet spice too. Skips a beat towards the finish but this actually pleases for how it makes you pay more attention. 60% Primitivo, 20% Sangiovese, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. 87

Cecchini, Azienda Agricola Marco  
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Colli Orientali del Friuli  
Refosco  
2003, \$19.99, 13.0%  
Pure red-ruby color, exquisitely full and even from the core to the rims. The raspberry, strawberry scents stopped from becoming too sweet by powdery minerals, sparkling lemon zest, the touch of herbal lift at the dissolve pleases. Medium-bodied, dense and really wound tightly, the acidity comes at you like gangbusters, quickly highlights the herbal and earthy qualities. Comes up with tree bark, tree leaves, dried whole lemons, turns increasingly sour especially as it turns to the red cherry, raspberry fruit. The tannins come in the form of a final crushing wave, elevating the leather and tar flavors while squashing most else. 87

Trinoro, Tenuta di  
Tuscany, Le Cupole  
Blend  
2003, \$35.99, 14.0%  
Palpable crimson tinge to the light purple core, turns to pure brick red to fashion ocean-wide rims, no visible blemishes. Heavily extracted nose of plummy, sugary blackberry, cherry, boysenberry fruit in addition to nostril-twisting scents of bell pepper, rosemary, grass, lemon pits, olives, earth, almost unnatural in how it swerves about. Medium-bodied, most of the action happens in the lower register even as the acidity keeps yanking it higher. Stone powder, dried grass, lemon peel, grapefruit, bark, rose petals make for a mish-mash. Almost mean-spirited raspberry, cherry, cranberry, red currant fruit. Plenty of statements made, none of them words of friendship. 43% Cabernet Franc, 36% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Uva di Troia, 3% Cesanese d'Affile. 85

## ITALY WHITE

Cataldi Madonna, Azienda Agricola Luigi  
Abruzzi, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo  
Trebbiano  
2003, \$13.99, 12.5%

Light brown touch to the yellow straw color, tad dull, definitely transparent especially at the rims. Spicy nose with good mineral bite, juicy tang in the tangerine, lemon citrus, fresh and open peach, apricot, pear fruit, has

weight but stitched widely. Medium-bodied, chalk and mineral dust pair up with a light herbal quality to give it a strong nibbling feel upfront. The tangerine, lemon, lime citrus has an attractive initial splash before succumbing to the dusty acidity which dulls the mid-palate. Solid core of peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit, adds flavor without making it too sweet nor fruity. Stays squared and intent on its follow-through until last drop gone. 89

Walch, Elena  
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Kastelaz  
Gewürztraminer  
2003, \$21.99

Glassy yellow gold color, makes thickly slow visual movements, fades at the rims. Big, wet nose of extremely ripe peach, apricot, mango fruit with equally ripe litchie, tangerine and orange citrus, the floral touches choose to remain on the gentler side. Full-bodied, were it not for the minerally dusting it would remain fairly shapeless. While plump and ripe, the juice dries out in the peach, pear, apricot fruit past the mid-palate. More floral here, subdued nuttiness. The acidity hits the bullseye but it too lacks length. Good flavor but doesn't achieve an airy inner mouth perfume as it at first promises. 87

Bucci, Cantina dell' Azienda Agricola  
Marche, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore  
Verdicchio  
2003, \$16.99, 13.5%

Full and even golden core, flat, its depth of hue makes the dropoff at the rims more noticeable. Florality in the nose crispened by lemon peel, minerals, then the garden herbs frying in olive oil is a nice unexpected curve ball, the pear, yellow apple, pineapple, peach fruit has more of a tight core than breadth. Full-bodied if without a strong bottom, lurches some from being top heavy. Good dose of honey and orange glaze before producing tauter lemon zest. The acidity really wants to pierce the thick bubble of peach, apricot, pear fruit, that said the latter not that juicy. Herbal notes just outrank the florality. Spread out too broadly to pull it back together in the end. 86

Salviano  
Umbria, Orvieto Classico Superiore  
Blend  
2003, \$10.99, 13.5%

Shiny brown-gold color at the core, quickly loses hue towards the wide, fully transparent rims. Semi-poached, overripe feel in the peach, apricot, nectarine fruit, mixes in licorice and mint, light orange paste scents, rolls on with power. In the mouth sets itself broadly and remains firm with a distinct powdery texture. Offers honey, mint oil, rose water touches yet the peach, pear, apricot fruit suffers from a premature falling off. The acidity is adequate, stays dry enough but nothing remarkable one way or the other. Just punches in, does its job, punches out and goes home. 40% Trebbiano, 15% Verdello, 15% Grechetto, 15% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Malvasia, 5% Drupeggio. 85

## ITALY SPARKLING

Bologna, Giacomo  
Piedmont, Brachetto d'Acqui, Braida  
Brachetto  
2004, \$23.99, 5.5%

Light and transparent pure ruby color, high degree of luminescence, light tiny, tiny covering of bubbles on the

surface. Bracingly sour nose of raspberry, strawberry fruit, grass and herbs, touch of sour lemons to top it all off. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, you only get a slight fizz and in a total 180 degree turn from the nose, here it is cloyingly sweet. Tangerine and lime citrus adds to the sweet fest, minimal herbaceousness, in turn has a slightly higher level of mineral dust. Acidity adds just a touch of dryness and length. Simple and direct. 87

## GERMANY WHITE

Weil, Weingut Robert  
Rheingau, Spätlese AP #4  
Riesling  
2004, \$38.99

Although not layered and more so cut from a whole cloth, the surface shine in the gold straw color is attractive and full to the rims. The fried herbs, stone and salt lend liveliness if not direction to the nose, makes the oncoming licorice, anise, tangerine citrus more difficult to place, that said it's not without a certain flow, particularly one the apple, pear, peach scents develop grip. Off of the nose, borderline shockingly juicy in the mouth with a broad and deep selection of baked brown sugar and molasses. But the acidity is one tough sucker to contend with, willing to provide space for the tangerine, white grapefruit, lemon citrus but all other decisions go to the corporate office. No lack of breadth nor thrust in the apricot, peach, nectarine, apple fruit, just hard to figure out where the juice is supposed to run off. Must admire how it looks you in the eye before slugging you real hard. Makes your sore jaw worth it. 91

Schmitt-Wagner, Weingut Carl  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Longuicher Maximiner, Herrenberg,  
Spätlese AP #7  
Riesling  
2003, \$16.99, 7.5%

Bright yellow color, quite pale at the rims, transparent with visible fizz. Fetchingly sweet nose of lemon/lime citrus, poached pear, peach, apricot fruit, strong petrol dimension, minerally sparkle, the florality builds as it warms, overall lingers robustly. Medium-bodied but so soft it cascades throughout to settle into every pore. The acidity keeps punching gamely and eventually breaks some skin. The juicy red apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit manages a fetchingly clean finish. There's a light dust up of chalk and powdered stone but not enough to cover the tangerine, lime zest. In the mouth it only hints at petrol, quite youthful and bright right now. Delicious. 90

Leitz, Weingut Josef  
Rheingau, Rudesheimer, Drachenstein, Dragonstone QbA  
AP #1  
Riesling  
2004, \$14.99, 8.5%

Crystal clear with dazzling brilliance but close to zero color, barest of yellow straw hues. The nose is thick and fruity if with some freshness for relief, almost jammy apricot, peach, melon scents, sweet tangerine, lemon citrus, much more flowers than stone, full and slow dissolve. Medium-bodied, does a good job of staying consistent with more minerality than found in the nose, lower degree of florality too but there. The acidity waits and waits but does finally show up, mop in hand. While sweet, the apricot, peach, nectarine, pear fruit holds its shape nicely. Pleasing tangerine to lime citrus tones, benefits from only minimal

presence of any brown sugar aspect. Solid finish, not final wallop but there when you need it. 88

## AUSTRIA RED

Lehrner, Weingut Paul  
Mittelburgenland, Paulus  
Blend  
2002, \$34.99

Full purple core, not quite but just about opaque, throws a super-fat glow in the magenta rims. Nicely wound sour nose with no loose threads, dryly floral currant, plum, cherry scents, gently present vanilla and chocolate notes, hint of orange peel too. Medium-bodied, stuffs itself in there willingly and achieves a very pleasing degree of density. The wiry acidity does its yeoman's job of burrowing through to create pockets of relief. The bright red cherry, raspberry, elderberry fruit is not without a bottom. Grass, lemon and orange citrus, dried potpourri, lots of lively firecracker tang. Will still need time to more completely settle into itself. 60% Blaufränkisch, 20% Zweigelt, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

## SPAIN RED

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE)  
Rioja, Viña Real, Gran Reserva  
Tempranillo  
1995, \$44.99, 13.5%

Dusky sunset glow in the medicinal crimson red to orange core, hue clears out appreciably nearer the rims. The nose is coiled like a spring, as if it hunched down before leaping out to produce rosemary and thyme spice, burning herbs, lemon zest and a slight touch of merde, opens with a sly smile into slightly dried character cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, the prune edge takes away some freshness now but will help concentration later after more aging. Medium-bodied, displays a full array of cedar, thyme, spiced orange peel, lemongrass, minerals and leather, maintains its gracious nature even as digs its nails into your tongue. Spicy, even more lemony finish, the acidity bucks like a bronco. While a bit of overripeness slows down the cherry, currant, plum fruit this only helps it linger longer rather than maintain its initial swift pacing. Mostly Tempranillo, remainder Mazuelo, Graciano. 91

Contino, Viñedos  
Rioja, Reserva  
Tempranillo  
1999, \$39.99, 13.5%

Immaculate ruby-violet color, dark enough and yet catches glints of light, full orange to brick red rims. Swirls of mint, menthol, cedar and herbs in the nose, some iron flecks and earth, the concentration in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit comes through clearly, nothing forced. Medium to full-bodied, shows its stable density upfront as it parcels out pine, menthol rub, lemon zest, grass and tar flavors. The bright acidity puts spring in the step of the raspberry, cherry fruit. Keeps spinning and moving, active without trying too consciously to be so. Feels like a geyser, there's these haphazard spurts which spray all over and then nothing. The tannins are moderate, the length is there yet it still comes off as a bit of a tease. Sending mixed signals now, will take its time over the long haul to find a final direction. Mostly Tempranillo, remainder Mazuelo, Graciano. 88

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE)  
Rioja, Viña Real, Reserva  
Tempranillo  
2000, \$29.99, 13.0%

Blood red to violet core, stays pleasingly full to the rims, without blemishes. The nose has a soft initial creaminess then firms up into crisper toast, rounding it out with raspberry, red cherry fruit, mulched grass, lemon peel, touch of fresh game, persistent overall but in no way pushy. Medium-bodied, tangy while allowing itself to settle in as well. Lemon citrus with some lime accents, the herbaceousness stands alertly at attention. Minor aspects of cigar, leather, tar. The acidity behaves like a python, slowly wraps around your taste buds, you can escape at first to a point then... Very honest, doesn't hide its flaws. Undisguised, unadorned cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Unforced finish allows it to end on a positive note. Mostly Tempranillo, remainder Mazuelo, Graciano. 88

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE)  
Rioja, Viña Real, Crianza  
Blend  
2002, \$17.99, 13.5%

Attractively resonant garnet to violet core, goes to purer red at the rims, holds hue well. Light, easy nose with enough thrust in the grass, lemon peel, minerals to breathe life into the cherry, black raspberry fruit. Medium-bodied, the acidity adds some turbulence as the weight can't quite hold to even things out. Has deeper herbs, orange/lemon peel, grass, sure, but at the same time stays springy enough to refresh. Crisp snap in the red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit, tangy enough you don't even worry about length. The acidity stays lively through the finish. Very little oak to detract from the vibrancy. Minimal difference from start to finish, feels like a youngster walking down a country road, whistling and jangling the change in his pockets. Unspecified percentages of Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo, Graciano. 88

Martinez Fuente, Bodegas y Viñedos Herederos de Bierzo, Pucho  
Mencia  
2003, \$11.99, 13.5%

Unblemished, visibly penetrable crimson to purple core, well-set brick red rims. Huge degree of black licorice in the nose, like opening a bag of Twizzlers, there's some overripeness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit scents, lemon zest and garden herbs, keeps it simple, why risk it. Full-bodied, round and quite juicy even if furnished with a bracing jolt of acidity straight down its middle. Still has that licorice thing going on, adding in some mint, herbs, lemon to lime citrus, cracked shoe leather and smoke. Big tongue-twisting sour bite in the cranberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, you almost have to turn away from the glass. Too chubby around the middle to feel any tannins at the end. At the price, distinct enough that it should merit some attention. 87

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE)  
Rioja, Imperial Gran Reserva  
Tempranillo  
1998, \$44.99, 13.0%

Features a garnet-crimson core, dims the lights with filmy orange rims. Good follow-through in the cedar, mulched grass, smoke, mineral, dried beef and powdered vanilla bean scents, laser beams of cherry, blackberry fruit, long but not heavy in your nostrils. In the mouth it's medium-

bodied yet concentrated with what it has. The smoke, asphalt, leather, stone components choose an erect bearing over spreading widely. Mineral dust falls onto your head and shoulders, not enough to reach below. With sour herbs, grass, lemon the tartness has you licking your tongue and then you realize the unchecked acidity has a lot to do with it. Touch of medicinal qualities, cedar, metal, when you think it's ending it finds the energy to keep coming. Enunciates clearly, if of few words. Mostly Tempranillo, remainder Mazuelo, Graciano. 87

Berceo, Bodegas  
Rioja, Viña Berceo Crianza  
Tempranillo  
2001, \$15.99, 13.0%

Consistent ruby-violet color, spotless and noticeably shiny for a red wine. Fresh and tart red cherry, raspberry scents set the stage in the nose, the cleanliness brings out more herbaceous, mineral, leathery elements and then charcoal, smoke, lemon too, maintains a forceful demeanor. Light-bodied, very tart and acidic, quite "Crianza" in style. There's a lean focus in the raspberry, red cherry, close to cranberry fruit, big initial splash but not enough juice to last. The tannins are a wide sheet, hide the sun. Develops smoke, tar, leather, grass, mineral flavors, none dominant. No noticeable oak, not afraid to rely on the nakedness of its primary materials. Refreshing. 87

Rioja Alta, La  
Rioja, Gran Reserva 904  
Tempranillo  
1994, \$49.99, 12.5%

Crystal clear garnet to brick red core, more pure and slightly washed out ochre near the rims. The nose is already dominated by cedar, vanilla powder and herbaceous matter, a leathery and earthy funk obscures a good bit of the cherry, blackberry fruit albeit the fruit you get has good concentration. Light-bodied and leaner than you'd expect, the acidity sweeps things along at a pace too fast to fully register the proceedings. The lemon peel, cut grass, cedar, leather, dried out oak and tar fit like pieces of different jigsaw puzzles. Medicinal edges add to the razor sharp cut, brightens but also prematurely dissolves the cranberry, red cherry, red currant fruit. Not for the faint of heart, certainly not everyone's cup of tea but if you are in the mood for it may serve you well. 86

Nekeas, Bodegas  
Navarra, Vega Sindoa Tempranillo-Merlot  
Blend  
2003, \$7.99, 13.5%

Semi-translucent purple core with a strong brick red influence, more crimson red at rims with a hint of orange. Toasted chocolate and coffee bean scents attempt to soften the brunt of the herbaceousness in the nose to minimal avail, also goes for maximal extraction in the plum, cherry, blackberry scents with same goal in mind. Light to medium-bodied, alas, the herbaceousness no less pronounced in the mouth and here paired with tar and leather aspects to heighten the former's powers. The cherry, plum, black raspberry fruit has everything possible wrung out of it, does provide a decent swelling in the center. Comes up with accents of burnt toast and dark chocolate for variety and ends with a semi-flourish of lemon citrus and gamey notes. Abbreviated finish. 70% Tempranillo, 30% Merlot. 84

## SPAIN WHITE

Arabako Txakolina  
Txakoli de Álava, Xarmant Txakolina  
Hondarribi Zuri  
2004, \$14.99, 11.5%

Pale yellow with a glow, just about fully transparent, zero color at the rims. Dense nose without extra heaviness, just incredibly hard to penetrate, serves up lemon to white grapefruit citrus, mineral dust, old crushed grasses, possesses a good core of peach and apricot fruit and then a pronounced floral lift. Medium-bodied, bracing mouth entry, deep cleansing feel with substantial white grapefruit, lemon citrus, fried garden herbs, stone, asphalt, oil slick flavors. The acidity is long and hard, has plenty of endurance. The crisp zest extends to the nectarine, peach, apple, melon fruit which remains mostly angles. Keeps chewing away at you through the finish. Drink ice cold. 88

## SPAIN DESSERT

Martinez, Bodegas Pedro Luis  
Jumilla, Alceña Dulce Monastrell  
Monastrell  
2003, \$13.99, 16.0%

Completely opaque black purple core, the magenta rims are thin and noticeably dark. Extremely grapey nose with super-concentrated plum, cherry, blackberry jam scents, equally bursting with cinnamon and ginger spice, spiced orange peel, some medicinal pine notes but nothing else. Full-bodied, like sucking down pure syrup in an IHOP. Ultra-jammy blackberry, boysenberry, raspberry fruit, like sticking your face in a cobbler pie. The cinnamon, ginger, allspice stays sweet, aided by the relative lack of acidity or tannins. The orange to tangerine citrus tries real hard unsuccessfully to brighten a corner or two. Creamy and just too monolithic to keep focusing on it. 375 ml bottle. 87

## PORTUGAL DESSERT

Ferreira  
Douro, Dona Antónia Reserve Port  
Blend  
NV, \$19.99, 20.0%

Lightish crimson to purple core, more burnt red at the rims with mild orange tinge. Engaging spiciness in the nose of clove, cumin and cinnamon, vague mentholated edge, orange glaze reduction, yellow raisin, date to cherry, plum fruit scents, maple syrup, any herbal qualities just help the lift, overall has a coquettish nature. Medium-bodied with a high degree of fluidity, has taken a few dance classes in its time. Cinnamon, ginger spice, zesty orange to tangerine citrus, the brown sugar and graham cracker flavors spread wide under the influence of the menthol, pine-like aspects. The fruit isn't overly heavy, mixes in all kind of stuff, raisin, yellow apple, raspberry, cherry, prune, fig, strawberry, you could probably make up your own list and make it stick. Compact ending, delivers everything it capily promised, only an asshole would feel disappointed. The rare Port you can pound with reckless abandon. 90

## SOUTH AFRICA RED

Mulderbosch  
Stellenbosch, Beta Centauri  
Blend  
2002, \$84.99, 13.5%

Very clean light violet to dark ruby in color, no real noticeable change from core to rims. Palpable mint in the nose at first, clear signals of oak toast before these are eviscerated by a blast of bell pepper, damp earth, sweet smoke, cigar ash, there's good fatness in the cherry, plum, currant fruit scents. Medium-bodied, very dry, almost archly so, the tannins are in a poor mood from the start. Heavy on the tar, asphalt, mineral, black earth and leather dimensions, no slouch in the sour herbaceousness department either. Quite smoky aspect to the red cherry, currant, raspberry fruit, gives it lift if not length. The acidity does, however, extend things nicely. More bell pepper and game on the finish. While the fruit peters out at the end has a wonderful "claret" style and remains a wine with genuine flavoring and a natural feel. 44% Cabernet Sauvignon, 44% Cabernet Franc, 12% Petit Verdot. 89

Kanonkop  
Stellenbosch  
Pinotage  
2003, \$32.99, 14.5%

Clean, dark violet core which turns imperceptibly to red-garnet with a slight orange cast at the rims. Ripe, juicy nose stuffed with red currant, blackberry, cherry fruit, equal portions of leather and coffee rinds, some earth but very little getting past those fruit scents. Full-bodied, while on the soft side the acidity swings a keen blade and absolutely makes itself known. Cruises forward with white grapefruit and orange tang, leather, minerals, topsoil, yet all the edgier components forced to skip along the surface of the thickset, bottom-heavy cherry, black currant, plum fruit. Not much by way of tannins yet steady on its feet, would take a big blow to knock it over. Still has plenty to say by the finish, offering more smokiness and volcanic ash, but no real final punctuation point. Smooth turbulence. 89

Foundry, The  
Paarl  
Shiraz  
2002, \$40.99, 14.0%

A bit dusty but has plenty of glow in the red crimson core, gains a touch of ochre at the rims. Furnishes you with scents of coffee ice cream, vanilla and then thick plum, currant, cherry fruit, has a pliantly bountiful feel which, as such, plays down the more rugged tar or earth elements. Medium-bodied, much less fruity in the mouth, more dominance in the smoke, leather, tar and lemon/grapefruit citrus flavors. Funky herbal tones lend brightness to the raspberry, cherry, currant fruit yet the latter has tang on its own too. Next along are intensifying cigarette ash, bell pepper, grass, smoke. Less oak in the mouth but does show some toast and fried vanilla tones. More acidic than tannic, worms itself forward with a steady pulse. Youthful, leaves your mouth feeling freshly scrubbed. 89

Boekenhoutskloof  
Regional Blend, Western Cape  
The Chocolate Block  
Blend  
2003, \$24.99,

Full-on violet purple core, rich glow in the brick red rims, vaguest of film throughout. Big battle to a standstill in the nose between the crisp oak toast, vanilla on one side and the leather, tar on the other, some floral and lemon throws things to the former while the smoky red currant, cherry fruit quietly favors the latter. Medium-bodied, energetic like it just slept 10 hours, better use that energy

fast before the day sucks it out. Supple array of lemon citrus, flowers, dried brown earth and leather, the acidity helps breathe life into it for a momentary swirl. No matter how you parse it, the coffee, vanilla, caramel oak flavors edge ahead of everything else. At least the tartness in the red currant, cherry, raspberry fruit gives it momentary bursts. Lacks the delicate touch to forgive its sins. 44% Syrah, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Grenache, 12% Cinsault, 6% Viognier. 88

## AUSTRALIA RED

Massena  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, The Eleventh Hour  
Shiraz  
2003, \$47.99, 15.0%

Placid feel in the opaque purple core, not trying too hard, smoothes out to a level of clarity in the bright crimson rims. While the nose is quite stuffed with currant, boysenberry, black cherry fruit, it furnishes ample leather, tar, flower petal, orange citrus, animal fur too and the oak toast has a lot of its brawn soaked up into the other elements. With its full body as openly knit as could be expected, grinds through without dragging unnecessarily. Barbeque smoke, hot caramel and fried vanilla expend themselves early, leaving the stage free for florality and orange peel to take the spotlight. Much more primary than in the nose, emphasis on the black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. The menthol and mint nips cannot add any lift but they taste good. More tannins than acidity but neither capable of battling the sap of the fruit just yet. No seams showing. 91

Poonawatta Estate  
South Australia, Eden Valley  
Shiraz  
2003, \$89.99, 15.5%

The flat purple core comes with a heavy red tinge, pushes opacity before becoming wide and youthful brick red rims. The nose is tightly drawn and reluctant to open, eventually releases maple syrup, baked ham, flowers, wild field grasses, while there underneath the robust blackberry, blueberry, black raspberry scents there's incipient touches of dried meats. Full-bodied, quite polished with nary a hair out of place, glides through the mouth as if on a summer breeze. The vanilla, molasses and maple syrup oak flavors are entirely in proportion to the sturdy supporting tannins as well as the thickly kneaded together black cherry, blackberry, currant fruit. Provides moments of orange zest, herbal snap and smoke for good measure. Needs a lot of time. 90

Mitolo  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Reiver  
Shiraz  
2003, \$42.99, 14.5%

Perfectly opaque black core with a saturated glow in the red to magenta rims. You get more alcoholic fumes than oak in the nose, as for the latter mostly coffee and caramel, throws in lemon citrus, dried flowers and mint, uninvolved if certainly firming up, no flab in the black currant, cherry, blackberry scents. Full-bodied without being over-the-top, enjoys its tannins and acidity to the hilt as well as the abundant currant, cherry, raspberry, blueberry fruit. Again, the oak is moderate with only embellishments of caramel, vanilla and coffee bean. More active orange to lemon citrus, herbaceousness and violet dust. Nothing really gamey going on but you wouldn't be

surprised to taste it down the road. Right now just a solid, non-nonsense Shiraz, a real manly-man. 90

Gibson

South Australia, Barossa Valley, Barossa Vale

Shiraz

2002, \$49.99, 15.2%

Hints at some cloudiness in the opaque purple core, the red-crimson rims really jump out at you. The nose stays sweet and floral with bushels of almonds, mint, menthol, maple syrup coated bacon, caramel, lemon peel, the alcohol adds to the tart quality of the raspberry, cherry, cranberry scents, contributing a violent swirl under its sails. Medium-bodied, wears its acidity like a badge of honor, almost too much so, wants to show it's not like all the other boys. Takes awhile to release the actual charm in the vanilla, caramel oak, which is abundant and sweetly integrated. The orange and lemon citrus helps the acidity fight to the finish line, good as the tannins suck. More than adequate black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, while it really wants to be your friend it's not at any cost. 90

Killibinbin

South Australia, Langhorne Creek, Blend '03

Blend

2003, \$19.99, 15.0%

Vibrant jet black core, dull aura of brick red around the perimeter. The nose is crammed to the point of immobility, maple candy, butterscotch, vanilla, violently compacted plum, black cherry, blackberry scents, then orange blossom, menthol, minor blood iron and earth too. Medium-bodied, starts out a bit serious, doesn't want to be loved just 'cause it looks good in tight jeans. Mixes in a stew of orange/lemon citrus, cut grass, menthol, new car leather, there's enough minerally sparkle to lighten the earthiness. Tannins are dry enough but they get a good slap in the kisser if they out step their bounds. The oak is on the toasty side but still with a bass rumble in its belly. You're not sure why but you really like it in the end. 60% Shiraz, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Glaetzer

South Australia, Barossa Valley

Shiraz

2002, \$49.99, 14.5%

Glimmer of haze in the opaque purple core, bursts from underneath this to form crimson to orange rims. Incredibly heavy cream, buttered popcorn nose, the oak tends to overwhelm, round but not particularly juicy plum, currant, black cherry fruit scents then mint, spiced orange before returning to the fruit soak. Medium-bodied, raw attack, runs here and there before beginning to settle into itself. Has mineral-laden earth, smoke, leather, tar, lemon peel but somehow it comes off as processed. The acidity takes whatever lackluster flavors are there and stretches them past the mid-palate. Black currant, cherry, plum flavors also present but without much splash. Restrained smoke, metal and more leather at the end. In the final analysis tries a lot of ways to impress you but they all come up short. 88

Two Hands

South Australia, McLaren Vale, Lily's Garden

Shiraz

2003, \$59.99

Fully opaque core of glowing purple, fatly radioactive ruby-magenta rims. Big league mint, French vanilla ice cream, fried dough nose, syrupy thick blackberry and cherry

impelled nose, injected with growth hormones. Full-bodied, as sappy and dense as the black cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit is, and with as much creamy toffee, vanilla as it has, ends up grotesquely misshapen. The acidity burps at the table, forget any tannins. Just gets more and more molasses-covered over time as it sits. No other flavors of note, total redux of the nose experience. Just what is this but a big mindless bear hug of your tonsils? 87

Lonsdale Ridge

Victoria

Shiraz

2002, \$10.99, 14.5%

Granting it a good degree of clarity, the red-purple core is dark enough to deflect light, broadly integrated and youthful brick red rims. Immediately reaches up into the higher register of your nose, menthol and eucalyptus, alcohol and strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, whispers of licorice, earth and minerals but they never rise above a murmur. Medium-bodied, makes a semi-deceptive splash into the mouth as it swiftly asserts its tannins and acidity making you think that because of its structure it will offer a broad selection of secondary flavors. Au contraire, mon frère, it's mostly about the black raspberry, cherry, cranberry fruit with only suggestions of mint, lemon peel, earth or herbs. As such, while pleasing, remains damn monochrome. At least it's not all that oaky. 86

## AUSTRALIA WHITE

Vasse Felix

Western Australia, Adams Road

Chardonnay

2003, \$17.99, 14.0%

Extremely pale yellow straw color, glassy layers underneath the shiny surface, holds well to the rims. Sweet cinnamon, clove spice in the nose, great deal of vanilla cream subtracts from the sparkle of the lemon/lime citrus, produces rose water, mint and a measured serving of pear, apricot, yellow apple fruit. In the mouth it has medium weight with strong bones which support the bottom of the creamed apricot, peach, nectarine fruit as well as mint and herbs. The lemon/lime citrus here too gives lift and life, stirs the drink. Turns even more floral as the weight recedes. The acidity stays the course and does a good job of giving you a few extra twists along the way. Not overly the top, very likeable. 89

Grosset

South Australia, Clare Valley, Watervale

Riesling

2004, \$22.99

Mostly transparent green-gold in color, too hueless to present much shine. Oily nose, like the spot under your car engine on the driveway, the minerality leads to something like white pepper notes, the lemon spritz and florality open it nicely albeit the pear, green apple, melon fruit seems reluctant to step up into the breach. Full-bodied with heft, blunt enough to blur the edges and slow the mouth progression to a halt. Has a shale, limestone kind of feel to it, pairs nicely with the lemon/lime citrus and chalk, white mineral components. The oil flavors are more subtle and inconsistent. The acidity is pretty decent, if never cutting, but still the peach, pear, apricot, red apple fruit bears a creamy stamp. In the "rock 'em, sock 'em robot" mold, probably best to drink sooner rather than later. 89

Paringa  
South Australia, Chardonnay/Sémillon/Sauvignon Blanc  
Blend

2004, \$10.99, 13.0%

Pure yellow color which require the curvature of the glass to accumulate otherwise it's transparency city at the core, minimal hue. Has that honey and orange blossom thing that always draws you in, sweet lemon pulp, flower oil, peach and apricot fuzz, sprinkle of chalk, nothing to scare you off. Medium-bodied, reclines willfully across your tongue, doesn't try to make believe that the tangerine/lemon citrus of florality are going to lift it up off the couch. Acidity comes at you like it is in mittens, can still be strong but will come off as wimpy nonetheless. Pleasing approachability in the peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit, nothing too juicy but still there at the end. The underlying creaminess makes certain that it continues to soak in through the finish. 47% Chardonnay, 38% Sémillon, 15% Sauvignon Blanc. 87

Mount Horrocks  
South Australia, Clare Valley

Riesling  
2004, \$16.99

Fully transparent white straw color, loses hue consistently outwards from core to rims. While you get this oil and seashells thing at first in the nose it's really the florality which dominates followed by licorice, mint and then succulent peach, apricot, pear scents. Big and bawdy in the mouth, even the severe powdery feel in the acidity can't dampen the enthusiasm of the lightly poached apricot, peach, nectarine fruit. Round and juicy, the flavors turn to flower petals, garden herbs, anise and spiced orange before admitting of any minerality or earthen qualities. Produces baking spices, glazed piecrust and vanilla creaminess in fashioning a soft, pliant finish. Never quite sweet enough, though. 87

Grosset - Hill Smith  
South Australia, Eden Valley, Mesh

Riesling  
2004, \$27.99, 13.0%

Glimmer of white straw but really it's colorless, reflective surface and duller below. Full complement of mint, eucalyptus, garden herbs, squeezed lemon/lime peel in the nose, has a floral lift which helps separate the peach, apricot, pear scents. Full-bodied, stout and borderline stern at first. The acidity is like a two-by-four to your head, the lemon, lime, white grapefruit citrus takes no prisoners. When you factor in the herbaceous qualities, the tautness in the pear, peach, apple, cherry fruit really comes out. Only the slightest petrol element, a little more generous with the floral dew notes. No natural reason for the flow to stop short of the finish, just does. Gives to a point, will it ever give more? 87

## NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Scott, Allan  
Marlborough, Vineyard Select  
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 13.0%

Good surface shine but dull underneath, just a basic yellow gold color, zero hue at the rims. Intensely herbaceous nose, the grassiness grabs your nose hairs, closely followed by sour lemon, washed wet stones and a brief shot of skin to peel-like pear, peach, apple scents. Medium-bodied, much more forgiving in the mouth, plenty of zig and

zag in the grassiness but the lemon, lime, white grapefruit citrus is a few degrees sweeter and there's also a wee bit more of a floral accent. That said, "cat pee" does come to mind and there's no lack of herbal cut. The acidity has its moments, more of a pulse than steady current. Medium weight in the peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit. Grows on you the more you sip it. 88

## ARGENTINA RED

Foster, Bodega Enrique  
Mendoza, Lujan de Cuyo, Ique  
Malbec

2003, \$10.99, 14.0%

Bright, consistent glowing quality from core to rim, equal blend of violet, ruby, magenta hues. Clean expression of raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit in the nose, lemon, white minerals, the sourness does nothing to detract from the ripeness, semi-ash laden ending. Full-bodied, natural fatness in the texture kind of bogs it down so that it really has to chug past the mid-palate. Has a good balance of wood smoke, mineral, grass, charcoal and tobacco ash flavors and then red cherry, blackberry fruit. Being unoaked heightens the acidity but not enough to stop the fruit from over-concentrating by the finish. While not creamy nor cloying, really tires you out. 87