

The Hanes Wine Review, May 2005 Edition

Let it never be said that Hanes doesn't have a conscience! After ripping inexpensive Australian wines a new one last month it has become more obvious that Hanes should address a truly fundamental question. It may seem almost besides the point to ask, but what IS wine?

Technically, wine is simply an beverage containing alcohol which has been made through the fermentation of the juice found in grapes or other fruit. While even this basic definition can be quibbled with (and you quibblers know who you are), it is interesting to look at how the wine industry views the question. For example, let's look at how The Wine Institute in California (via a Gomberg-Frederickson Report) segments wines for the purpose of yearly sales analysis. Here are some statistics for 2004, segmented by retail price.

"Jug Wine" is considered to be wines below \$3.00. These wines comprised 31% of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004.

"Extreme Value Wines" are considered to be wines between \$2.00 and \$3.00. These wines comprised 4% of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004.

"Popular Premium Wines" are considered to be wines between \$3.00 and \$7.00. These wines comprised 33% of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004.

"Super Premium Wines" are considered to be wines between \$7.00 and \$14.00. These wines comprised 20% of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004.

"Ultra Premium Wines" are considered to be wines over \$14.00. These wines comprised 12% of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004.

Taken together, wines \$7.00 or under comprised **68%** of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004. Taken together, wines \$7.00 or over comprised **32%** of cases of Californian wines sold in 2004.

(It should be noted that the percent of *winery sales revenues* makes the \$7.00 or under category 36% and the \$7.00 or over category 64%, in effect flip-flopping the percentages. That is, although a lot more cheap wine is sold, the real money is to be made at the higher end of the price spectrum.)

Now, for the purpose of understanding what *The Hanes Wine Review* is about we need to analyze these statistics some. While 68% of Californian wine sold costs \$7.00 or less, wines reviewed by Hanes costing \$7.00 or less is like 0.05%, if that. *It cannot be too strongly underscored that the vast majority of wines sold fall solidly outside the purview of Hanes's scribbling.* He just doesn't drink the stuff. Does this make him a snob? Well, he doesn't think so. But his loyal readers are free to disagree. Perhaps that haughty so-and-so will get a pie thrown in his face at the next wine tasting he attends as the revenge of an aggrieved proletariat. Will serve the bastard right.

So, as a rough baseline, we are looking at a minimum of \$7.00 per regular 750 ml bottle to even just get past the velvet ropes into *THWR*. As a point of comparison, Hanes has for the last three years tracked the wines he reviews by price categories. Since the inception of this data analysis, this is the current breakdown (covering 3,330 wines):

Under \$15: 30%
From \$15 – \$25: 30%
From \$25 – \$50: 30%
Over \$50: 10%

There has not been, nor is there expected to be, much deviation from these percentages. By now, Hanes basically guzzles wines regularly along the price breakdown above. It is important to compare how wine industry groups such as The Wine Institute break down price ranges for analysis versus how Hanes does it.

Hanes tried, and failed in doing so, to find industry statistics which provide more nuanced price breakdowns above the “Ultra Premium Wines” over \$14.00 category utilized by groups like The Wine Institute. This lack of additional price category breakdown is woefully inadequate and ignores the ongoing “upscaling” of many consumers of wine. It’s also a pain in the neck for Hanes because it makes him look even more like a wine snob, leaving him no useful statistics with which to defend himself. By these industry statistics Hanes drinks like 30% “Super Premium Wines” and like 70% “Ultra Premium Wines.” Sounds pretty high-falutin’ don’t it?

Getting back to our fundamental question, Hanes has presented these statistics to put into high relief what “wine is” to him. As the wines he reviews falls into that 32% bucket of the total amount of Californian wine sold in 2004, one thing wine is definitely not is cheap! Beyond the quantitative, there are really two basic qualitative wines Hanes could possibly review and herein lies the rub.

First, there are just basic wines (most of which would fall into the “Super Premium Wines” category). To Hanes, most of these cost like \$12 or less and their ultimate goal in life is to represent an easy drinking, accessible style of wine focused mostly on clean fruitiness, a round and soft mouth feel, low tannins and/or acidity and, in many cases, plenty of oak barrel-derived creaminess and flavoring. The idea is to achieve consistency of product year after year and as much as is *humanly* possible, eliminate vintage variations stemming from differing climatic conditions. Humanly, as many, many of these wines are manipulated by winemaking techniques to achieve this consistency. While most of these wines can be quite delicious they are more or less “products” not unlike beer or vodka. And consumers’ expectations are the same as for beer or vodka. While there is nothing existentially flawed with this type of basic wine this is not really where Hanes’s head and liver are at.

So, secondly, there are wines which are intended to represent the numerous nuances of the (a) distinct flavor profiles of the grapes grown, (b) particularities of place of origin as well as (c) the specific characteristics of the vintage during which the grapes grew. Wines which strive to hit the bull’s-eye in these three areas are the kinds of wines Hanes wants to drink, review and advise others to drink. If the grape grower and winemaker do strive for this, the end result should be a wine with a distinct personality and character, capable of beauty yet with the flaws organic life brings necessarily.

Of course, not every wine of the second group *achieves* its goal. Hell, lots are nasty! But whether the wine is a \$10 Muscadet or \$100 Hermitage it wants to both stand out and represent well it’s “type” of wine — grape, region, vintage. If it were easy to find these type of wines there would be no need for *THWR* and Hanes would have an awful lot of free time on his hands. Instead, Hanes uses his growing experience with wines as well as the trusted advice of his wine geek pals to cut through the crap and attempt to get to the good stuff. He is not always successful and that’s why his review is full of wines to avoid — negative knowledge is knowledge too.

And, if we return once more to the price breakdown of the wines Hanes drinks and reviews it is also clear that wines of the second group are, on the whole, expensive by most people’s standards. Recall that wines \$7.00 or under were 68% of Californian wines sold in 2004. It can be very difficult to make a wine with personality and typicity yet those who admire these wines are willing to pay a premium (“Super Dope Phat Da Bomb Premium”?) for them. Sure, lots of \$50 wines are misshapen by bogus pipeline winemaking techniques. But these wines are just for people who would be drinking “Extreme Value Wines” but are super-rich and cannot afford to spend \$50 on wines that taste like \$3 wines!

If in the end you are more or less satisfied with solid basic wines around \$10 or so (like those bodyslammed by Hanes last month) chances are *THWR* will not prove to be your cup of tea over the long-term. Sorry about that, yo. That said, if you want to explore wines of more distinction then lift your nose in condescension along with that patronizing elitist Hanes and keep on reading!

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This month’s big winners... The grape Romorantin may be new to most folks but if you see some of Loire producer Le Petit Chambord’s 2002 Cour-Cheverny “Cuvée Renaissance” get ready for an experience. A winery Hanes never heard of before, St. Harry’s Chapel from Solano in Cali, turned out a very nice wine, albeit it itself turned out to be Grenache rather than Syrah! Has been awhile since Hanes has tried Etude’s Pinot Noirs from

Carneros and they remain a solid choice for rich people who like Californian Pinots. On the Pinot tip, if your budget allows for \$40 red Burgundies Hanes can recommend at least three this month from the 2002 vintage — Digioia-Royer's Chambolle-Musigny "Vieilles Vignes," Méo-Camuzet Frère & Sœurs' (the négociant wing of M-C) Marsannay and the Dugat-Py basic Bourgogne rouge. Two French reds performed credibly in the face of the vintage summer heat of 2003, namely Amirault's Bourgueil called "La Coudraye" and Granger's Beaujolais from the Cru village of Juliéas. 2003 is also looking up for two Piedmontese grapes, Dolcetto and Barbera. Cf. Marengo's Dolcetto, Bera's Dolcetto and Oddero's Barbera. Although just going into the marketplace, Albert Mann's two 2004 basic Alsatian bottlings of Riesling and Pinot Gris labeled as "Cuvée Albert" are killer, good relative bargains and in screwcaps! Hanes slightly preferred the Pinot Gris but that could change on any given day. From Heathcote in South Australia, Tatiarra is making some wines of note. Problem is they be very expensive and they can't stick to just one name — is it "Caravan of Dreams" or "Shiraz Pressings." Occam, where's that razor?

The best "value" picks... Cheaper than the Amirault wine mentioned above is Taluau's \$10 Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil labeled "Le Vau Jaumier." Excellent value. Close on its heels would be the 2003 Côtes-du-Rhône from Domaine de la Solitude. Nothing spectacular, just solid drinking for \$11. You'll see "Verasol" on the label mostly so let's call the wine that and also call it a nice cheapie (\$11) Garnacha (aka Grenache) from Spain's Campo de Borja region. Santa Laura's "Laura Hartwig" wines have a nice change of pace easy drinker in their 2003 Carmenère from Chile's Colchagua Valley. If you like French Sauvignon Blanc with maybe a dash of New Zealand pizzazz, Pierre Jean's \$9 2004 version from Southwest France's Gascogne region is a definite keeper. Double ditto for the 2003 blend from Cassagnoles from Gascogne. They know their cheap whites in Gascogne! If you want some German Riesling instead, look for von Hövel's 2003 basic Estate QbA from the Mosel Saar Ruwer which shows good verve for the vintage at \$15. OK, OK. Here's a good Australian quaffer for \$10 — the 2003 Joseph River blend from Geographe in Western Australia. You heard it here first. Geez. Can't say if it is really a "value" or not at \$15 but Hanes *finally* had his first Texas wine made from the Mustang grape. Within its own idiom, pretty good stuff. Foxy!

And the disappointments... Müller-Catoir from Pfalz, Germany makes the Scheurebe grape one of their specialties but their 2003 Spätlese from the Mandelring vineyard is nothing special. Groffier is a well-respected Burgundian producer which Hanes has enjoyed in the past but their basic 2002 Gevrey-Chambertin bottling, for \$55, was just too much fruit and too little structure. Hanes has never been on the same wave length as producer Patz & Hall and once more was unmoved, this time by their 2002 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. Double can be said for Joel Gott's wines which have on the whole become increasingly lowest common denominator swills, here witness the 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon Blend No. 815. Hanes is often willing to take a risk of interesting bottles in the \$20's from lesser respected regions, looking for a steal. He missed, though with Aladame's 2002 Montagny 1er Cru from Burgundy. Sniff. Hanes has tried their Shiraz wines many times but Paringa's 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon from South Australia was a big negatory, even at \$11. Man, was the 2003 Neil Ellis South African Sauvignon Blanc called "Sincerely" good! Sadly, stores now carry the 2004 vintage. As Hanes has noted in the past — he dislikes young wines from Gigondas producer Cayron and loves old Cayron wines from Gigondas. So take the tasting note below with a grain of salt. France offered some clunkers from producers of well repute including Bertagna's 2002 Burgundy from the "Clos de la Perrière" vineyard in Vougeot and three from the Northern Rhône — Villard's 2002 Saint-Joseph, Graillot's (usually quite dependable) 2003 Crozes Hermitage and Clape's 2002 Cornas. Not a surprise since most 2003 whites from the Loire have made Hanes cry but the Vacheron Sancerre should have been declassified or something so as to not sully their excellent rep.

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Please note that Hanes has recently decided to begin noting for posterity and a posteriori the alcohol percentage of the wines he tastes. This decision was made too recently to record this data for most of the wines reviewed herein and, alas, will be the case for many wines in the next edition too. After that, all wine tasting notes should have this information provided. This should prove useful to those who prefer to avoid overly alcoholic wines at their dinner table and such. And useful to those who want more bang for their booze buck.

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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 #10: "More fun than a bag of tannins!"

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)

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

CALIFORNIA RED

St. Harry's Chapel

Solano County

Syrah

2001, \$27.99

Filmy, opaque red-purple core, already throwing visible sediment, more crimson to dark red brick at rims. Incredibly penetrating nose of white grapefruit zest, white pepper, minerals, salted game, leather and wet cut grass, the red currant and blackberry fruit scents sizzle while the oak toast remains just a passing fancy. Medium-bodied with a fair amount of acidity to help shape the entry, pleasing sour bite in the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit with enough juiciness to propel it through to the end. While still taut and piquant, the white grapefruit, lemon citrus reveals a sweeter depth than in the nose. The herbal component succumbs to the earth, leather, tea leaf, tar swipes. Sappy grip on the tongue lasts and lasts making for a prolonged finish. Excites you like when they first bring the hot skillet of fajitas out of the kitchen. While labeled as Syrah, genetic fingerprinting has determined that the vineyard is mostly Grenache. Hence, 80% Grenache, 20% Syrah. 92

Turley

Napa Valley, Moore "Earthquake" Vineyard

Zinfandel

2002, \$48.00

It's opaque without seeming impenetrable nor brooding, just really dark purple, fairly average in intensity red-ruby rims. While the 16.3% alcohol

definitely comes through in the nose, there's also a torrent of raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit as well as black licorice, cinnamon, orange peel and something that smells like game dragged back to the hunter through the mud by the hunting dog (where does he get this shit?). Full-bodied, has enough tannins to do a decent job of channeling the flow of the blackberry, blueberry, cherry fruit to a semi-manageable pace to aid registering it before it flows by. Mild milk chocolate and molasses but truly not that oaky, much more influenced by the herbaceous, tree bark, dried tea bag and orange to lemon citrus components. Turns somewhat four-square on the finish, loses fluidity and doesn't replace it with any other form of joie de vivre. That said, built to make a statement. 90

Hobbs, Paul

Russian River Valley

Pinot Noir

2003, \$41.99

Deep crimson touch to the ruby-red core, fiery with more garnet in the rims. Highly floral nose, sweet with easy lift, lemon to lime zest, spice and vanilla bring it back down slowly to meet the super-sweet raspberry, cherry, strawberry scents, straightforward in its purity. While lighter-bodied, has a fairly sappy texture so that what is there clings with tenacity. Candied, powdered sugar feel breathes inside the just as sweet as the nose raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit, draws out more caramel notes as well. Clove spiced ham and more mineral black earth gain a foothold during the second half but not so strong the fruit can't push it over onto its ass. Despite the juice in the fruit and relative lack of tannins/acidity, it does stay upright and march authoritatively through the finish. 90

Farrell, Gary
Russian River Valley
Pinot Noir
2002, \$34.99

Trim, almost medicinal red-purple core, more ruby at the rims. Pretty cinnamon, clove spice in the nose, orange blossom, baled hay, white minerals, has sufficient weight while maintaining the purity of the raspberry, blueberry, cherry fruit, attractively Pinot-like. Full-bodied, nice and citrusy with ample lemon, lime, tangerine shades. Gently invasive fresh leather, earth, mushroom elements, still aims at buttressing the clear contours of the cherry, currant, raspberry fruit with a hint of clove to brighten it further. The acidity rides through with confidence, no stumbles, but you feel some of the rough patches in the road. Holds onto its tang at the end, the citrus continues to dance across your tongue. 90

Etude
Napa Valley, Carneros, Heirloom
Pinot Noir
2002, \$89.99

Bright red-ruby color, the surface dimmed some by a vague film that almost comes and goes at will. The initial sharp spice in the nose gets swallowed by the softer caramel/vanilla cream swirl, betrays a hint of grilled meats before it blossoms into lemon mist, floral perfume and raspberry/strawberry scents. Medium-bodied with enough grit to hang onto the tongue while it is the vanilla that gets it soaking into the tongue. Remains light of touch in presenting the raspberry, red cherry fruit and lemon/lime burst. The back end shows elevating levels of earth, grass and light dried mushrooms. The tannins are quite fine, almost too much so, really requires the acidity to carry the structure through to the finish. Throws out some floral residue for final exclamation point. 90

Etude
Napa Valley, Carneros
Pinot Noir
2002, \$42.99

Pure, crystal-clear ruby color, even throughout with excellent surface shine. Has a smoky, mocha crisp nose with a dab of molasses yet the ripe verve of the red cherry, raspberry fruit prevents it from coming off as oaky, presents just an incipient shade of earth before a succinctly pliant dissolve. Full-bodied, quite spicy with plenty of tingle even as the tannins make a swift and decisive appearance. Sheds weight towards the mid-palate to reveal increasing herbaceousness and lemon to orange citrus. More contour and punch than juice in the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit. Gathers together a touch more earth and tea leaf than

found in the nose. Not short but doesn't linger, leaves lots of textural reverberations behind, a country road elegance. 90

Capiaux Cellars
Russian River Valley, Widdoes Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2003, \$34.99

Unsure luminescence in the ruby to magenta color, pure with good consistency of hue from core to rims. Nice, easygoing spiciness, allows room for the tangerine/lemon citrus, cola nut and tangy raspberry, black cherry scents, not primary per se but fresh enough to keep the emphasis on the fruit. Medium-bodied, solid if round feel in the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry, cranberry flavors. Fruit gains contrast from the Earl Grey tea, dried flowers and cola while once more keeping a youthful pace. Soft tannins, yield but don't break. Impactful orange, lemon, lime citrus lends zest throughout and minimizes breadth of the vanilla oak. Keeps its feet wide apart, shoulders squared. A statement-maker without raising its voice. 90

Turley
Napa Valley, Tofanelli Vineyard
Zinfandel
2002, \$30.00

Presents a standard opaque purple core, heavy-set glow in the red-magenta rims. Strong black licorice influence on the nose, mint, eucalyptus, orange peel, herbs alongside plum, blackberry, cranberry fruit, boisterous and sassy presence. Full-bodied, while juicy the boysenberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit is not particularly deep and yields bit-by-bit to the tannins and earthier flavor elements. The licorice and anise continue to dominate the orange/lemon citrus, menthol, grass, tea leaf, bay leaf accents. Not so much alcoholic heat as you'd think at 16.0%. Fluid enough, due in part to the lack of big bottom and grit. Interesting, easygoing but ultimately caught between wanting to be a big boy and show some class. 89

Morgan
Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands, Twelve Clones
Pinot Noir
2003, \$21.99

Light brilliance in the speckless ruby color, entirely unblemished with lighter red rims. Very aromatic with strong caramel, dulce de leche scents, quick burst of lemon peel, wood smoke, there's a soft, downy quality in the raspberry, cherry scents which helps them roll forward rather than stop. Medium-bodied, big initial impression that winds slowly like a corkscrew worm being twisted out of a cork. The tannins are more a

dusting than steel beam, mouth weight comes from applying multiple layers. Stronger lemon and orange citrus elements than caramel here, helps keep the raspberry, red cherry, blueberry fruit fresh. Turns slightly herbal on the finish, adding in a few complementary twists and turns. Nice in that it chooses purity over pushiness. 89

Faila

Russian River Valley, Keefer Ranch

Pinot Noir

2003, \$44.99

Mild murk in the garnet to violet core, holds its hue well to the rims. Deep but elegant touch to the vanilla cream and toast, plenty of clove and ginger spice, almost overpowers the orange peel and florality until softened by the red raspberry, red cherry scents. Full-bodied with a filmy mouth texture which plays up the olive, tree bark, meadow grass elements, forestalling the ascendance of the spice, toast and orange zest. Quite smoky in the mid-palate, like a layer to dampen the cranberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit. The tannins have been pulverized but bits get stuck in between your teeth. Holds its weight entirely through last sip, leaves a strong residue behind on your mouth walls. Shows a touch of surmaturité and heat though. 89

Crane Brothers

Napa Valley

Syrah

2001, \$31.99

Entirely opaque purple black core, thin and quite bright ruby rims. Hint of bacon and earth to the nose, the zippier lemon, orange citrus and grass pleasantly cleansing ecen as the juice of the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit pours forth into your nostrils. Medium-bodied, nice framing acidity which from the first sip keeps it fresh and as open as can be. Lively lemon to orange citrus, touch of grass, nonchalantly shrugs at the heavy vanilla cream and keeps moving. Eventually brings back the caramel but apparently just for the sense of contrast. Tannins not as present as that acidity, the latter directs and controls the movement of the currant, cherry, plum fruit. Right there. 89

Siduri

Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands, Garys' Vineyard

Pinot Noir

2003, \$44.99

Noticeable cloud in the half-glowing red-purple core, mildest of fades to dusky brick red around the rims. Deceptive nose, appears simple at first but repeated sniffs unveil cherry, red apple, cantaloupe fruit, moist potpourri musk, peat moss, cinnamon reduction and

an echo of truffle oil before shutting down. Full-bodied, expansive in its sweep, tranquil and happy with the fat reflection it sees in the mirror. The candied sweetness in the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit steamrolls the clove spice and orange citrus so don't even look for the pancake thin herbaceousness. The tannins feel like a hot sticky dim sum bun, all doughy texture with no resistance once you start to chew. Pushes outward through the finish, beyond the sweet flavors it's more about mouth feel than taste. 88

Ravenswood

Sonoma County, Sonoma Mountain, Pickberry Vineyards

Blend

2003, \$39.99

Semi-opaque purple to garnet core, more red to dark orange hues dominate as it fills out the rims. In the nose mint and menthol hits a wall of milk chocolate and coffee cream, sweet smoke, orange spice, the black currant, plum, black cherry scents are bottom heavy and benefit from the licorice-laden dissolve. Full-bodied, the tannins and acidity show suave polish. Makes a concerted initial push with just about all it has, marshals the milk chocolate, coffee, and currant, boysenberry, blueberry fruit knowing it is too youthfully plump and unevolved to have much to offer beyond that now. Grinds to a halt a little sooner than expected, that said you better wear your flood boots when you pull the cork. 51% Merlot, 49% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Hobbs, Paul

Napa Valley, Carneros, Hyde Vineyard

Pinot Noir

2003, \$61.99

Red-ruby with a bright brick red tinge, full and concentrated into deepening pools without losing much surface sparkle. Big, ballooning nose, quickly fills up your nostrils impeding much sense of movement, brimming with caramel, hard toffee, coffee, flowers, orange juice, cola nut, cinnamon and just about overripe cherry, blackberry scents. Full-bodied, sluggish as well in the mouth due to the scale, lurches into the mouth to pour white grapefruit, orange citrus, heavily creamed coffee and clove spice down your gullet. Throbs to the point of lowgrade hum but loses extension as the minimal tannins and acidity are nowhere to be found. The alcoholic heat somewhat impairs the length and purity of the cranberry, blackberry, cherry fruit. More earth, merde, grass by the finish but too little, too late. Chose slick polish over soul. 88

Failla

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast

Pinot Noir

2003, \$34.99

Gauzy film in the red-ruby color, dull surface, lighter at the rims with a touch more orange. Herbal aspect to the nose, olive pit, shows a sour lemon/orange edge and kind of cranberry, red cherry, raspberry bite, balanced some by wet earth and mulched grass, has a hothouse kind of lift to it, warm and humid. Medium-bodied, a little tightly wound and spicy at first with an herbaceous foundation and noticeably sour lemon, white grapefruit and orange citrus. The raspberry, blackberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit lingers more as the tannins are not particularly brawny, leans more on the acidity so as not to stumble. Becomes more spicy and oaky near the finish, still crisp while losing some of its focus. Sourced from Keefer Ranch and Hirsch Vineyard. 88

Edmunds St. John

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Peay Vineyard

Zinfandel

2001, \$29.99

Mild brick red cast to the mostly ruby-purple core, more pure red around the rims. Impressively concentrated nose of plum, cherry, blackberry fruit with a noticeable raisin element as well as cinnamon, allspice and powdered milk chocolate, ends with lemon citrus and alcoholic fumes. Full-bodied, slathers itself onto your tongue with more of that cassis, plum, blackberry fruit, here the oak toast flavors of cocoa, vanilla and frying butter are much more dominant than in the nose. Can't say it is because of the tannins exactly, but once it gets past the middle point turns successively deader. This muddled character extends to the lemon, orange citrus and earth, menthol shades, so much flavor to be marshaled but n one wants to get out in front and lead. The less critical you are, the better it tastes. 88

Capiaux Cellars

Regional Blend, California, Chimera

Pinot Noir

2003, \$25.99

Ruby to light violet in color, no cloudiness, minor paling at the rims. Strong floral perfume in the nose, provides almost too much lift, leaves the lemon citrus, minerals and raspberry, boysenberry fruit hanging a few inches too high off the ground, pleasingly does not come off as too oaky. Light to medium-bodied, starts with allusions of clove spice, cola and tea leaf. Not much tannic/acidic structure to provide direction, leaves the grass, smoke, olive pit and leather flavors to meander about. The caramel influence acts like a

glue to stick the raspberry, blackberry, blueberry fruit to the tongue without impairing its sour crispness. Develops more lemon/lime citrus and grassiness to extend the finish a few more yards. Delicate without being a wimp about it. 30% Garys' Vineyard, 30% Hendricks Vineyard, 25% Freestone Hill Vineyard, 8% Pisoni Vineyard, 7% Widdoes Vineyard. 88

Patz & Hall

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast

Pinot Noir

2002, \$35.99

Dark with a hint of cloudiness to the purple core, remains noticeably dark at the garnet rims, soft glow as well. Jam-packed, borderline syrupy nose, punctuated by plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit and warm molasses, the thickness impairs the spritz in the orange citrus and the snap in the grass, no lift at all. Full-bodied, equally leaden and bottom-heavy in the mouth, extracted to the point of sluggishness. It's all brown sugar and toffee coated black cherry, blackberry fruit, somehow not that sweet, just thick juice. Tannins or acidity? Hah! Mesquite smoke, dab of leather and tar but really this willingly places itself squarely in the fruit-driven idiom. Have to shake your tongue at the finish to get the juice residue off. 87

Morgan

Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands, Double L Vineyard

Pinot Noir

2002, \$47.99

Maroon to violet in color, while it has no blemishes it twists and bends light into a visual distortion. Spicy nose of clove, ginger and cumin, soothed some by a patina of milk chocolate although there's till plenty of burrs to be pulled out of the orange peel and raspberry, red cherry scents. Medium-bodied, would be richer if it didn't spread itself so widely so quickly, partially exhausting itself in the effort. Here in the mouth the relative lack of spice and greater vanilla creaminess saps some life out of the blackberry, black cherry fruit and while the weight persists through the finish the juice dries up. Supplements this some with straw, lemon and orange citrus, stony earth but it could use more acidic verve to really heighten these elements. Ends up more of an easy sipper than sensorial workout. 87

J Vineyards & Winery (J Wine Company)

Russian River Valley

Pinot Noir

2002, \$28.99

Red-garnet in color, more orange with a mild brown tinge at the rims. Sweet toffee, caramel melted into

your nose, sweet lemon and orange juice too, chocolate, ripe thrust to the blackberry, red cherry fruit scents, quite amiable in mood. Medium-bodied, has good sap, soaks in quickly to spread its sugary love. Very evident caramel, vanilla, clove spice oak flavors boost the mouth entry. Then comes the smoky, tart raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, slightly dusty but not tannic per se. While it emphasizes the fruit it has an herbal side too and tones of lemon and orange peel. Never sour enough for true bite but not a softie either. The spice outlasts the fruit on the finish. 87

Cloud View
Napa Valley
Blend

2001, \$59.99

Very pure and collected purple color with thick, heavy-set ruby to magenta rims. Enjoying laying on the caramel, orange blossom, vanilla cream and cinnamon spice in the nose, sugary/reduced feel to the raspberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, smooth and mostly fluid but also tries hard to drag against the tongue. The florality gives it some lift but returns to the ground to produce some dried earth, orange peel and leather. The tannins feel like they're tumbling in a clothes dryer. The vanilla crunch and caramel oak flavors stay at a consistent level without flaring up. But green nearer the finish, adds brightness but sour too. Adequate but lacks length and real debonair flair. 57% Merlot, 43% Cabernet Sauvignon. 87

Capiaux Cellars
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Wilson Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2003, \$44.99

Bit of film in the brick red to garnet color, slightest brown-orange tinge at the rims. Sweet, sugary nose of candied cherry, raspberry fruit, derives some relief from grass, lemon peel, dried leather notes but quickly turns mute and inexpressive, leaving only a spicy/salty residue behind. Full-bodied, sappy texture in the mouth although it releases its weight nicely to reveal brighter tangerine, lemon citrus, cut grass, tea leaf and tree bark elements. The acidity's blade is jagged and dulled at parts, making for an irregular experience. The toastiness bubbles to the surface in the mid-palate, brings some caramel too. The raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit is sweet upfront but lacks the concentration to last convincingly through the finish, clipped. Dude, where's my car? 86

Gott, Joel
Regional Blend, California, Blend No. 815
Cabernet Sauvignon

2003, \$15.99

Very dark purple bruise of a core, the fat, dark ruby rims have a red hue. Finds room for bell pepper, leather, smoke, orange citrus before sending them offstage in favor of buttered popcorn, caramel and menthol-accented ripe plum, cherry, currant fruit scents. Full-bodied, quite juicy but with a powdery texture as well, just as the cherry, black currant, blackberry fruit starts to soak in there's a dry, tacky feel cloaking things. The eucalyptus and cedar less present here, the buttery toast and toffee thing more prevalent yet not the dominant force found in the nose. Has lowgrade orange citrus and floral swipes but tends to choke somewhat in the mid-palate and skip a few beats. Just about tastes like Cabernet. Sourced from Napa Valley, Sonoma County, Mendocino, Lodi. 85

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Dry Creek Vineyard
Carmel Valley, Clarksburg, Dry
Chenin Blanc

2003, \$9.99

Reveals an almost filmy yellow gold appearance, the translucency holds to the rims even as the color bleaches out. Dry and well-shaped pear, peach, apricot fruit scents in the nose, zero juice, you can smell honey but this adds zero sweetness, touches of minerals, grass and lemon but way too tight to yield much depth. Medium-bodied, as in the nose the "dry" description on the label is very accurate, has noticeable mineral water, stone, straw, elements at first followed by orange marmalade and lemon peel. The acidity has its eyes wide open and will not go to sleep. The peach, pear, apricot fruit has clear lines and length but no juiciness. Coats your inner cheeks until it achieves a semi-puckering effect. 86

OREGON RED

Saint Innocent
Willamette Valley, Anden Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2002, \$32.99

Full-on murk in the ruby to garnet to violet color, dark glow to be found in the magenta rims. Very ripe and languidly arrayed raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, violet petal, lemon citrus and baking spice scents, decidedly primary and fruit-driven, looking for more earthier scents may be a waste of time. Full-bodied, lots of fruit and then more fruit, a cavalcade of currant, cherry, black berry juice prettied up by allspice, cinnamon and lemon spritz. Moves frenetically enough on the dance floor that you don't

quite realize it doesn't know any steps. Ripe and in your face about it, let your brain drain into the glass. 89

OREGON WHITE

Cooper Mountain
Willamette Valley, Reserve
Pinot Gris
2003, \$18.99

While lacking in brilliance, quite clean and transparent, albeit with some distortion in the pale straw core. High degree of honey and molasses in the nose, never sugary but perpetually sweet, offers fried lemons, oil, wet minerals, the peach and apricot fruit scents build to a nice crescendo as it sits. Medium-bodied, the acidity throws it off balance, tries to do too much, wants elegance on the one hand and full throttle power on the other, neither works. Very little residual sugar even as it presents an array of brown sugar and mint tones. Bluntness in that acidity prevents it from lingering. Lemony as hell, lots of bite, even the peach, apricot, nectarine fruit is all cut and minimal juice. 87

Ransom
Willamette Valley, Logsdon Ridge Vineyard
Pinot Gris
2003, \$15.99

Semi-flat surface but nice and translucent beneath, basic hay to straw coloring. Has a honey-baked nose, deeply sweet before the tangerine/lemon citrus, licorice and peach/apricot fruit yields to more sour herbs and tea leaf notes. Dull and somewhat lifeless in the mouth, has a strong baked fruit feel in the yellow apple, peach, pear flavors, semi-reduced. Reveals a sprinkle of cinnamon, the lemon and orange citrus remains too juicy to develop cut. Quiet mint, anise nuances shuffle by but, again, the sweetness lacks verve and length. The meager acidity not helping either. Nothing here tastes badly, just a big yawn in the mouth, easily there, easily gone. 84

NEW YORK RED

Jamesport
Long Island, North Fork, Sarah's Hill
Pinot Noir
2002, \$17.99

Pure violet in color, stunningly trim with a little bricking, dulling to red at the rims. Sweet, focused and simple red cherry, raspberry scents, subdued tones of milk chocolate, orange zest and leather but really no guile, just is. Light-bodied, mirror image of the nose in the mouth, straightforward raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit with accents of cocoa, orange and lemon

citrus, and earth. The acidity is soft with a slight gel-like feel. Has more than adequate length yet its biggest asset remains its overall purity. Open and easy to access. 86

Jamesport
Long Island, North Fork
Merlot
2002, \$18.99

Violet to ruby to magenta in color, appears before you in sheaves. In the nose you receive extracted currant, plum, blackberry fruit scents with the expected bell pepper, herbal notes, tobacco too, the vanillin oak peeks out during the dissolve. Plush and full-bodied, sweet attack in spite of the minerals, cigar ash and orange peel, still trying to squeeze every last drop out of the cherry, blackberry fruit until it's bruised and battered albeit with a credible result. The bell pepper, grassy element is there throughout, provides welcome counterpoint. The acidity is blah but the fruit stays juicy enough that it is hard to care. 85

TEXAS RED

Poteet Country Winery
South Texas, Mustang Wine
Mustang
NV, \$14.99

Bright glow in the violet to red-garnet core, turns willingly to more burnt orange and brown at the rims, clear throughout. Sweet medicinal character to the nose, pine needle, wet topsoil, animal fur, thyme-led herbs soaking in water, orange peel, intensely sugary cherry, strawberry, raspberry scents. Medium-bodied, sure it's sugary sweet with a powdery feel but there is more than enough acidity to give life to the strawberry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Carves out helpings of foxy animal fur, earth, lemon/lime citrus and rosemary. There's this insipidly seductive quality to it, sucks you in like a just-opened bag of Doritos. Hard to have more than a couple of glasses but damn interesting. 87

FRANCE RED

Digioia-Royer, Domaine
Burgundy, Chambolle-Musigny, Vieilles Vignes
Pinot Noir
2002, \$39.99

Refined, reflective violet to red-ruby color, likable glow in the full red rims. Dense, extremely ripe nose of blackberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, cinnamon and allspice, tangerine and lemon citrus, clumps of newly laid down sod but the plumpness of the fruit is über alles. Full-bodied, seductively over-endowed with

raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, cherry fruit, an anvil on your tongue. However, does show some incipient plummy notes. The orange, tangerine citrus booms low, the cinnamon, ginger spice stays soft and pliant. The acidity hugs the ground, rolls along broadly without a true edge. Past the mid-palate brings out is more grassy side with a glimmer of leather. Bursts at the seams with youthful energy. 91

Solitude, Domaine de la
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Cuvée Barberini
Blend
2001, \$76.99

The dark crimson-purple color gives way without a struggle to more garnet, orange at the rims. Density in the nose is evident but not at the cost of movement, sour bite at first in the grass, lemon and even earth traces, leavened some by the rumbling depth of the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, fills out with a mocha chip off-sweetness. Medium-bodied, however the edges are hard enough and the demeanor serious enough that you cannot help but feel it's bigger. The tannins quietly spread across the room like Secret Service agents. Noticeably herbal from the first sip. the alcohol too a bit untamed. Once acclimated, there's more animal fur, game, olive, earth as well as lemon, orange citrus. To its credit, it ends almost exactly as it begins, a sense of progression easily traded for persistence and consistency. It's like hanging out with a clinically depressed friend, you can have a really good time together but no one is putting a lampshade on their head. 40% Grenache, 40% Syrah, 20% Mourvèdre. 90

Méo-Camuzet Frère & Sœurs
Burgundy, Marsannay
Pinot Noir
2002, \$35.99

Violet with a strong garnet cast, very trim and spotless with a heavy coloring through to the rims. Wonderfully structured nose, quite conscious of itself from top to bottom, the spice and minerals blend together, dried mushrooms too, the grassiness keeps it reverberating as the red cherry, raspberry, kinda cranberry fruit rockets upwards. Medium-bodied, solid bottom, won't rock or sway in a stiff wind. With all but every ounce of its energy spent on putting edge into the raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit it loses some energy and momentum in proving its a serious mofo. Quite herbaceous, serves up lemon with a touch of lime, maybe cedar, tree bark, tea leaf too. Lots of vibration in the acidity without quite going anywhere. No flaws to be found, not incredibly enjoyable at the moment because it throws its structure in your face. 90

Dugat-Py, Domaine Bernard
Burgundy, Bourgogne
Pinot Noir
2002, \$39.99

Spotless enough to remove some of the depth from the violet core, brings out the ruby close to the center and rides it to the rims. There's some initial toast in the nose before becoming much more herbal with a burly punch of lemon citrus and pungent grill smoke, the red currant and blackberry fruit too compact to be exhibitionistic but does a lot of flirting. Medium-bodied, the more it aerates the more the tannins gain their footing and run the show. Plenty of freshness in the grassiness, leather, earth and mineral components without successful extension due to the aforementioned tannins. Taut enough to play up the tart side of the blackberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit as well as the lemon and lime citrus. The fruit glass is pure pleasure and everything after that is structure-driven. 90

Amirault, Yannick
Loire, Bourgueil, La Coudraye
Cabernet Franc
2003, \$21.99

Crimson red cast to the basically purple core, perceptibly wide ruby rims. The bell pepper and cigar ash notes better rush at you in the nose as they do because they are followed by a flood of raspberry, red cherry fruit, in the end presents a winning assemblage of things like leather and tar and then citrus and cocoa crisp. Medium-bodied, with a fraying satiny grip, smooth enough but pulls evident here and there. Still presents that beautiful bell pepper, cigar ash, tea leaf, tar and orange/lemon citrus strut, infectiously naive confidence. Even at this early stage the acidity and tannins are nicely knit into the total fabric, imbuing it with a well-paced linear feel that stretches out the raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit without snapping the sap as it were. Warm and fuzzy finish makes sure you like the last sip as much as the first. 90

Jouan, Domaine Henri
Burgundy, Chambolle-Musigny
Pinot Noir
2002, \$52.99

Red-ruby of middling depth, average all around in terms of clarity and hue intensity to the rims. Presents an attractive herbal, barnyard funk in the nose of damp earth, saddle leather with enough lemon citrus and raspberry/blackberry fruit to keep the vanilla/caramel oak at bay. Light to medium-bodied, quite understated and content to put the tannins/acidity at the forefront to make the initial impression. Slowly blooms into flavors of tart

lemon/lime citrus, tree leaves, olive pit, cut grass of a higher timbre, all combined cuts the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit into slices. Stays nice and edgy through the finish, if losing some concentration and focus. Holds the beat for a few measures before final release and sigh. 89

Granger, Domaine Pascal
Beaujolais, Juliéna
Gamay Noir
2003, \$16.99

Strong purple-garnet color, cut from the same cloth from the core to the rims. Expansively wide nose, quite herbal and lemony, mild leather and earth as well as cinnamon, pressed flowers but, if not entirely dominant, the most active element surely remains the raspberry, red currant fruit scents, its robust presence never tires you out needlessly. Medium to full-bodied, hits you like a warm summer shower of raspberry, cranberry, blackberry, cherry fruit. Lemon with a spritz of lime, as this settles in it becomes smokier with grass, leather and melted cocoa aspects. The acidity and tannins are not arch but maintain a constant presence, brings sour edge pleasingly to the fore. Admirable for how it just goes on and on, relentlessly moving forward. 89

Fourrier, Domaine
Burgundy, Morey-Saint-Denis, Clos Solon, Vieille Vigne
Pinot Noir
2002, \$41.99

On the light side, clear and consistent red-ruby with a brighter magenta tinge at the rims. Doles out portions of lemon/orange citrus, sparkly spice in the nose, soft spoonful of milk chocolate, delicate raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, fine powdering of minerals, keeps its light touch throughout. Light to medium-bodied, dusty without appearing overly tannic. The lemon, orange citrus and sweet herbs bloom first, there's a firm semi-round feel in the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, too mannered to boast of its juiciness. Softest of grass nips, not really herbaceous at all. The acidity adds a bright smirk in the middle. Quiet finish, not dilute but speaks sparingly. 89

Aphillanthes, Domaine Les
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône Villages, Vieilles Vignes
Blend
2001, \$32.99

Vague luminescence in the ruby to violet core, this aided by its overall clarity, becomes a bit more blood red at the rims. Presents a nice gamey, minerally, leathery profile in the nose, the grass and lemon peel

blend seamlessly into one another, there's a quiet and slow rise in the red cherry, raspberry scents, almost smirks. Heavy concentration in the mouth, very weighty without appearing forced. There's a durable, weather-proof feel in the leather, saddle soap, tar, tree leaf elements. The fruit is juicy with a pronounced liquid texture, you feel the raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit soak in. The acidity is more evident than the tannins, neither too strong without quite disappearing. Just a dollop of oaky vanilla/caramel flavoring, nothing major. Collected, integrated finish, holds its ripeness and knows its bounds. Intelligent, knows the moves. 80% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre. 89

Taluau, Joël
Loire, Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil, Le Vau Jaumier
Cabernet Franc
2003, \$9.99

While it's semi-opaque there's no cloud in the ruby-violet core, turns to magenta as it approaches the rims. You better sniff hard to get at the mineral dust, cigarette ash and leather notes because after that it's all raspberry, red cherry fruit and orange citrus spritz, ripeness covers up just about all the herbal qualities. Light to medium-bodied, takes on weight as it progresses through the mouth. The acidity and tannins simmer on the back burner as the tangerine and orange citrus cook it up on the front flame. There's a touch more bell pepper and grass here but definite second fiddle to the charcoal, stone, leather and brown earth parts. There's a heaviness in the cherry, black raspberry, blackberry fruit like it just woke up from a long nap. No guile, just a nice big mouthful. 88

Maltroye, Château de la
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, La Boudriotte
Pinot Noir
2002, \$39.99

Crimson red influence in the purple core, fat and broad brick red rims. Strong smoky toastiness in the nose, leather, lemon, wet earth scents, hugs your nostril hairs with tenacity, slathering them with blackberry, red cherry scents. Medium-bodied with good tannic punch, throws you off some before sharing the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit with you. Dry and herbaceous, typical bursts of lemon, leather and merde, a bit hyperactive and innocently aggressive. The acidity comes on strong during the back half and as a result keeps it turbulent. Satisfies you but you better be well-rested and have the energy to match up with it mano-a-mano. 88

Groffier, Domaine Robert
Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin
Pinot Noir
2002, \$54.99

Ruby to garnet in color, lively and holds its shine and hue well into the rims. Bitter grass, herbs rise first in the nose then it unchains the cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit and lemon before turning more mute and structured without any new scents to fill the place of the receding fruit and herbaceousness. Full-bodied, extracted and showing some stretch marks from the pulling and pushing. Minor olive pit, lemon grass but it's shaped to spotlight the clove, cinnamon spice and juicy cherry, raspberry fruit. The underlying creaminess trumps the acidity. Take advantage of the bountiful pleasure now as it has minimal aging upside at best. 88

Conte des Floris, Domaine Le
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc,
Villafranchien
Blend
2002, \$23.99

Immaculately displayed garnet to violet core, holds the lighter red-ruby hue through broad rims. There's a refreshingly piercing quality to the white grapefruit citrus in the nose, smells like you uts plucked one off the tree, cut a hole in it and stuck it on your nose, the supporting minerality and herbaceousness are more like sap to glue the fruit to your nose so it doesn't fall off, the rest of the scents are anyone's guess.

Medium-bodied, crafted for pleasure and smoothness but, again, the first, second and third thing you get is the grapefruit. There's enough oomph in the red cherry, raspberry fruit to get a word in edgewise but it's A word. The tannins are nice and supple and bolster without complaint or need to strut, figure why not make room for the herbaceousness, lemon and stone dust too. While not particularly long its initial statement reverberates more than enough. Do it, jah, it's good for you. 80% Grenache, 20% Syrah. 88

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Poncié
Gamay Noir
2003, \$21.99

There's a gauzy but not cloudy element to the red-purple core, more pure ruby at the rims, handsome glow. Has an outsized nose, extremely fruity and bursting at the seams with strawberry, blueberry, raspberry scents, sweet lemon juice, a fistful of mocha chips and licorice but it has this just-born plumpness which obscures anything else. Medium-bodied, there's more mainlining of dulcet strawberry, raspberry, blackberry fruit in the mouth, you better have your

throat open and greased before taking a sip. That said, once the horses are out of the barn the tannins slam the door shut and turn the mid-palate dry. Possesses moments of minerally and lemon-driven tingle as well as a dusting of earth yet can't say much lingers with you past the fruit. Which is, as they say, fruity. 87

Solitude, Domaine de la
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône
Blend
2003, \$10.99

Bright crimson to ruby color, quite nice shine, holds well to the rims with minimal loss. Maintains a refreshing tart edge in spite of the pungency in the cherry, blackberry scents, softened further by chocolaty notes, even with bursts of orange citrus and grass doesn't unnecessarily complicate itself. Medium-bodied, good flesh with just the right amount of juiciness to spotlight but not depend on the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit. Quite grassy in an enlivening fashion, stones and pebbles, lemon and orange citrus, tree bark fit in well. The acidity has to work but does cut through to extend the flavor palette through the mid-palate to finish. Spreads broadly across the tongue but the filmy gauze never breaks, keeping it of whole cloth. Plenty of fruit left on the finish, no brain teaser but one persistent mofo. Earns its keep. 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 15% Cinsault, 5% Mourvèdre. 87

Mann, Domaine Albert
Alsace, Clos de la Faille
Pinot Noir
2003, \$29.99

Clean, dense purple core with very luminescent magenta rims. At first there's a creaminess in the nose then becomes very earthy, minerally with dried grasses and merde, covering over the engagingly sour cherry, blackberry fruit, lingers as absent-mindedly as a summer afternoon. Medium-bodied, clean but not too clean, admits of semi-rugged leather, tar, stony earth and dried orange pulp. The acidity pops up from underneath, almost don't see it coming. Plenty of tart cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, keeps pushing through to the finish, releases before the effort appears tedious. Spicy, minerally ending with a broad dissolve. 87

Joguet, Domaine Charles
Loire, Chinon, Cuvée Terroir
Cabernet Franc
2003, \$16.99

Mild translucency in the red-ruby to violet core, more garnet to youthful brick red around the rims. Prickly

enough in the nose to almost make you sneeze, a dust-up of mineral powder, tobacco ash, saddle soap and orange zest, the ripeness in the cherry, blackberry fruit more than covers up whatever herbal notes may be there. Medium-bodied, more pronounced florality in the mouth as well as deeper lemon to orange citrus juice. As a result, the stone, grass, mineral and leather elements fall back a few paces. The tannins feel a bit restrained and massaged to be more amenable to the tongue's enjoyment. The red currant, red cherry, raspberry flattens even as they continue into a well-prolonged finish. Stays deep rather than brighten at the end. 87

Grands Bois, Domaine Les
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône, Cuvée Les Trois Soeurs
Blend
2003, \$13.99

There's an attractive resonance in the strawberry red to mulberry purple coloration, inclines more to the red spectrum at the saturated rims. Hyper-fruited nose of nutmeg and cinnamon laced plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit, some lemon, lavender and grass nuances but before anything can spread its wings the alcohol wipes it out. Plump and easy to squeeze in the mouth, not necessarily heavy enough to count as full-bodied but its spongy feel sure does take up a lot of space in between your cheeks. While not sugary per se, the tannins and acidity pretty much cower in the face of the plum, black cherry, raspberry fruit which acts more like a blanket than breathe life into the overall demeanor. This is a big wine without much subtlety or complexity but it really tastes good. And that's gotta count for sumptin'. 65% Grenache, 35% Syrah, 5% Mourvèdre. 87

Cayron, Domaine du
Rhône, Gigondas
Blend
2003, \$31.99

Neutral red-purple core, more deep ruby with a magenta tinge at the rims. The nose comes off as a bit dusty at first, then the underlying ripeness of the cherry, black currant fruit takes flight, sour yet pliant, there's a leathery, earthy grounding with just enough lemon peel and dried flowers to stem the downward movement. Medium-bodied, reveals its herbaceous side first, all field grasses and straw. The acidity casts its net widely and catches a few outliers but then blurs at the center. Becomes gentler with a few milk chocolate and sweet orange peel notes. The tannins not showing much spunk, thankfully there's only a touch of overripeness in the blackberry, black cherry, black raspberry fruit. Intimations of earth, leather and tar but not overly endowed with secondary flavors.

Holds well until the finish but not a very interesting wine. As is often the case with Cayron, maybe too young to judge accurately. 70% Grenache, 15% Cinsault, 14% Syrah, 1% Mourvèdre. 87

Bertagna, Domaine
Burgundy, Vougeot, Clos de la Perrière, Monopole
Pinot Noir
2002, \$89.99

Light opacity in the ruby-violet core, barest of dropoff at the rims. Heavily oaked nose of coconut oil, vanilla, mint and driftwood, exceedingly ripe cherry and raspberry fruit, even the earthiness is so heavy it feels anchored to your nostrils. Dense and almost impenetrable in the mouth, between the brawny tannins and hyperactive oak it is hard to find space to move your tongue, especially lest it get splinters in doing so. The concentrated currant red cherry, blackberry fruit is like getting a brick stuffed in your mouth. Tangy, more peel-like aspect in the orange to lemon citrus, concise herbal component as well as swipe of clove and leather. Every inch of this wine has been turned over and over for inspection and honed into conscious overdetermination. This will please some, turn off others. 87

Alary, Domaine Daniel et Denis
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Cairanne
Blend
2003, \$19.99

While dark, the violet core holds onto its clarity and shifts effortlessly into more transparent brick red rims. Hard to escape the chocolaty grip in the nose, there's some mown grass and lemon peel before the sugary jam of the raspberry, blackberry, blueberry fruit takes over. Medium-bodied, a tad fluffy in mouth feel, has that mouth full of cotton balls approach. Enough bite in the structure to lean forcefully against the wind of plum, currant, blackberry fruit yet there's a misshapen feel in the tannins and acidity, as if they are acting against their will. Enough chocolate and caramel to fill most of the cracks. Wants to bloom some lemon citrus, garrigues florality and smoke but by the time it figures this out it is too little, too late. Called shotgun but still ended up in the backseat. 85% Grenache, 15% Syrah. 87

Villard, François
Rhône, Saint-Joseph, Reflet
Syrah
2002, \$38.99

Cloudy radiance in the red-purple core followed by bright darkness in the ruby-magenta rims, full and rich. The nose is light what's there persists nicely, driven by leather, merde, dried flowers, grapefruit seed,

game, coffee bean and red currant to cherry fruit, full array without depth nor resonance. Same goes for it in the mouth, light-bodied, all treble and no bass, like you blew out the woofer in your car speakers. Refuses to settle down, swirling wind of lemon, white grapefruit, orange citrus, chalk, leather, animal skin, cocoa dust, all nervous energy. The acidity is there but it's devoid of focus and unaware of how to help the constituent flavors. More than adequate length in the mild blackberry, cherry fruit but someone has to captain this ship. 86

Grailot, Domaine Alain
Rhône, Crozes Hermitage
Syrah

2003, \$29.99

Fully opaque black-purple core, densely luminescent magenta rims which would glow 20,000 leagues under the sea. Overripe nose of prune plum, cassis, black cherry fruit, cinnamon spice, orange juice, little more than an obligatory showing of leather and meadow grasses. Full-bodied, sloshes with juice, makes you almost feel it is best drunk in a sippee cup. Overly dependent on the currant, cherry, plum fruit, the smoke and oak toast a close second place though. The tannins are filmy and a bit green, alongside the 14% alcoholic heat you just might hiccup. The orange zest, grass, violets possess minimal staying power, as a result the finish lacks grace. 86

Engel, Domaine René
Burgundy, Vosne-Romanée
Pinot Noir

2002, \$51.99

Light red-ruby in color, while consistent to the rims, not especially clear nor reflective. Plenty of sour fire in the nose highlighted by grassiness, lemon peel and leather, extends to the red raspberry, red cherry, cranberry scents, stays close-woven without getting pushy nor heavy. Medium-bodied, fairly dull during the mouth entry, no lack of red cherry, raspberry fruit but little supporting structure nor acidity to breathe more than minimal life into it. The tannins at least try to do something to minimal success. Herbal and earthy tones lost in the haze, leaves the orange and lemon citrus and dusty spice alone at the altar. Has admirable weight left by the finish but by then you're tired, having enjoyed little relief from the monotony of the flavors. Yeah, it's fruity but so what? 86

Clape, Auguste
Rhône, Cornas
Syrah

2002, \$77.99

While concentrated, the pure purple core is not fully opaque, bright red magenta rims stand out well. With volcanic ash, pulverized stone, tobacco wrapper, tea leaf and then molasses and dried lemons there's lots going on in the nose, just the volume is turned down way low, the sour red cherry, raspberry scents almost suggest cranberry scents. Medium-bodied, the lack of grip and depth makes it a touch too smooth and elusive. Sure, you get some florality, lemon zest and molasses coated bacon but the cherry, red currant fruit whispers far too often for its own good. Only the momentary glimpses of its earthiness brings out clear tannic or acidic effect. Compact but more in an abbreviated than concise manner. 86

Magnien, Maison Frédéric
Burgundy, Morey-Saint-Denis, Les Blanchards
Pinot Noir

2003, \$67.99

Thick ruby-violet color with densely luminescent magenta rims, radioactive. Burnt caramel, toffee expand aggressively in the nose, smells like a candy factory, buttery with mesquite smoke, brown earth accents, nothing there beyond the copious red cherry, blackberry fruit, utterly and unabashedly "international" in style. In the mouth it is soft and round ut even as it breaks a major sweat trying to extract every drop of flavor it can't get more than a medium body out of it. No tannins, no acidity, no motion. Be careful where you aim the blackberry, raspberry fruit because once it hits with a splat it isn't moving. Drowns you in more caramel, vanilla flavors but eventually you just get numb to it. Lightest shades of lemon citrus, grass, earth. Don't bother taking the gum out of your mouth before drinking. 84

Brusset, Domaine
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Laurent Brusset
Blend

2004, \$12.99

Nicely full purple core which pushes opacity, possesses a dark glow in the ruby to magenta rims, full saturated throughout. Lots of weight in the nose, slowly matches the texture with raspberry, cranberry, blackberry fruit, lemongrass, clay, dry brown earth, licorice and garrigues, makes a physical impression not a mental one. Medium-bodied, decently fluid, you can hear the drain gurgle as you sip. The acidity and tannins are there too swiftly, seems not quite right. The raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit has this "Stepford Wives" feel, going through the motions by rote. Same can be said for the orange, lemon citrus. So consider it said. This leaves the herbaceousness to begrudgingly pick up the flavor slack. Not in any manner unpleasant but too easy to ignore while it is in

your mouth. 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 10% Carignan, 10% Mourvèdre. 84

FRANCE WHITE

Weinbach, Domaine
Alsace, Altenbourg, Cuvée Laurence
Gewürztraminer
2003, \$60.99

A bit of dullness in the white-green straw color, holds consistently to the rims with a hazy transparency. The concentration in the violet and rose petal driven floral musk takes some getting used to, initially masks the wet litchee, tangerine, metallic minerality and tree bark scents, becomes more interesting after repeated sniffs and shows more apricot, pear, green melon fruit. Medium-bodied, more pronounced ginger, cinnamon spice during the entry activates the palate. There's a round, fleshy feel in the apricot, peach, melon, pear fruit but no excess love handles. The florality holds back to the second half and, along with the creamy mouth feel, keeps it in a generous spirit. Attractive peppermint after-images. 91

Petit Chambord (François Cazin), Le
Loire, Cour-Cheverny, Cuvée Renaissance
Romorantin
2002, \$17.99

Mild luminescent glow to the green-gold color, flat gleaming on the surface while dense enough to hold your gaze. Mint, anise, lemon, oil on stone scents resonant and crackle as the nose unfolds to release richer minerality and pineapple, nectarine, peach and apple fruit, powerful and intense. Full-bodied, the acidity gallops into your mouth with wicked intent, an ample and broadly insistent sheet over your tongue. The hyper lemon and lime citrus pounds away at your tonsils. The minerality and chalk influences show best upfront before more oil and almost rubber, licorice and floral touches take over. Chooses vibrancy over length in the pineapple, nectarine, peach, papaya, apple fruit, just enough sweetness and light honey to add back a thin layer of enamel on your teeth. 91

Mann, Domaine Albert
Alsace, Schlossberg
Riesling
2003, \$31.99

Light brown straw in color, of moderate shine but nothing noteworthy. Quite floral and almost minty in the nose, offers much more by way of orange/lemon citrus than any rubber/petrol tones, pleasing for the wiry length in the peach, apricot, pear fruit scents. Medium-bodied, plenty of limestone, licorice, peppermint, lime/lemon citrus, minerality, a whole lot

to suck on, swirls around the tongue to the point you just about forget the peach, nectarine, pear fruit. The acidity is not evident and yet it comes off as borderline bone dry. Really works you over. 91

Mann, Domaine Albert
Alsace, Cuvée Albert
Pinot Gris
2004, \$20.99

Presents just a touch of translucency in the evenly spread brown straw color. Really cleans your nose out, scrubs off a layer of skin with dense minerality, white smoke, crushed limestone, lemon/lime peel, burning oil and a laser beam of pineapple, nectarine, peach fruit, as fresh as it is it clings like a sonnavabitch to your nostrils. Full-bodied, immediately coats your mouth pores yet with a thin, semi-permeable membrane rather than ponderous weight. Youthful, open and inviting sweetness in the apricot, peach, pear fruit with minimal residual sugar. Lively tangerine, lime citrus tones pair seamlessly with the fruit. White minerals, stream pebbles and cut flowers take over the second half, acidity persists very well. Electric to the last sip. 91

Hugel et Fils
Alsace, Hugel Jubilee
Pinot Gris
2000, \$38.99

Full-on yellow gold color, appears as a solid block as if you turned the glass upside down it would fall out as a cube. Sweetly smoky nose, lifts in pregnant clouds of pear, peach fruit, mint, oil, wet stone and acacia, hangs there making you wait for the release of droplets. Full-bodied, vastly expansive, presents a pliant texture without a hint of heaviness. You get more mint, orange blossom and tangerine zest in the mid-palate, unusual tingle and brightly hued acidity. Gains a hint of shale or calciferous stone with little real mineral punch. The peach, apricot fruit remains taut but present to the finish. Ample elegant power to be had here. 91

Mann, Domaine Albert
Alsace, Cuvée Albert
Riesling
2004, \$18.99

Visually pale white-green straw, all but completely transparent with some minor surface reflectivity. Attractively pure, focused nose of white peach, nectarine, apple fruit with witheringly fierce diesel notes, just a hint of residual sugar which is mostly cloaked in florality and orange citrus. Full-bodied, impressive in how the weight remains open and mesh-like in feel. Round at first, slowly unfolds angles in the

herbal, earthy and mineral qualities, languidly surrounds and adorns the drier pear, apple, peach fruit. A very refreshing style of Riesling, exemplary energy without tiring you out. 90

Hugel et Fils
Alsace, Hugel Jubilee
Riesling
2000, \$34.99

Very light white to brown straw color, average surface shine and mostly transparent, especially at the rims. Very integrated nose, wet flower petals, tire rubber, sauna stones, almost an earthiness before a dry tropical pineapple, nectarine, peach, papaya scent array appears. Medium-bodied, streamlined muscles push it through the mouth like a shotput. Quite dry without any showiness in the acidity, sleek. Crisp form in the orange, lemon citrus, herbs and minerals, every element scrubbed clean. Lean form in the peach, pear, pineapple, red apple fruit, very little of the tropicality found in the nose. Makes you want to be wearing white gloves and a top hat as you sip. 90

Fichet, Jean-Philippe
Burgundy, Meursault, Le Meix sous le Château
Chardonnay
2002, \$49.99

Light, bright, shiny yellow straw color, enjoyable clarity with nice hue depth too. Very crisp, sleek, streamlined nose of well-honed toasty oak, clove, mineral dust, lemon to tangerine citrus, has a violet powder lift as if a fist struck a table to send a dusting into the air, strong sculpted feel in the peach, pear, apricot scents. Medium-bodied, wide and fluent with a very swift pace impelled by lemon, lime, tangerine citrus, white minerals, chalk and, yes, oak toast especially vanilla and mint notes. The acidity slices but keeps the pieces pushed together so you can't tell. The sharp peach, apricot, pear, nectarine fruit flattens out some and gives up more juice as a result. Approachable now if at the cost of a few droplets of blood, hopefully will unclench down the road. 90

Weinbach, Domaine
Alsace, Schlossberg, Cuvée Sainte Catherine l'Inédit!
Riesling
2003, \$67.99

Of a white hay color with a green tinge, softly layered effect in the center, the hue dissipation leads to transparency at the rims. Lightly honeyed nose with floral sweetness and powdered sugar, tangerine pith elements, even with its overall sweetness and ripe peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit it maintains an airy quality. Medium-bodied, wearing its winter coat of thick tangerine, orange, lime citrus, brown sugar and

orange blossom. The acidity comes in fits and starts, not easy in feel. The nectarine, pineapple, peach, melon fruit fills the center well but thankfully yields partially to the minerality on the finish. Has some flash one is not sure it carries it off fully. 88

Weinbach, Domaine
Alsace, Schlossberg
Riesling
2003, \$39.99

The yellow gold color pales considerably at the rims, where a light green tinge develops. Fine, openly knit nose with an indulgent lemony, floral lift, also white minerals and limestone, the pear and peach scents an absentminded afterthought. Medium-bodied, the acidity tries to frame the entry but it's not quite strong enough to make the oil, stone, orange citrus, dried flowers sit still and hit the high notes. Develops a pleasing sticky quality, adheres to your mouth walls. Has more lemon/lime citrus in the center, white chalk, stone dust. Lots of energy left by the finish but the focus mostly lost in the peach, pear, nectarine, papaya fruit. 88

Michel & Fils, Louis
Burgundy, Chablis, Montmain
Chardonnay
2003, \$48.00

Consistent golden color, flat but at least doesn't lose its hue at the rims. Shows attractive florality and green apple, pear, peach fruit but not the deepest nose, murmur of minerals, orange peel and licorice, either understated or of few words. Fuller in the mouth if lacking in tone, the lemon, orange, tangerine citrus reclines a bit too easily. Enough of a powdery feel accrues on the tongue as a testament to the acidity but the lack of cut is evident here too. Creamy foundation to the peach, apricot, pear fruit, elevates the florality too. Remains a mouthful through to the finish, albeit without any Fourth of July sparkle, just a solid combination punch. 88

Jean, Pierre
Southwest France, Vin de Pays de Comté Tolosan
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$8.99

Completely transparent, just a glimmer of straw hue, brilliant reflectivity. Super-active nose, brimming with white grapefruit zest, powdery minerals, bags of mulched grass, no relaxing to be had, only once your nostrils regain some feeling do they register the pineapple, nectarine, apple and peach fruit scents of above average juiciness. Medium-bodied, full 50/50 blend of creaminess and zip during the attack, eventually tilting over to the lemon, white grapefruit

and herbaceousness. Sour snap in the nectarine, peach, apricot, pineapple fruit without sacrificing weight and length. The acidity runs a bit hot and could actually benefit from cooling its jets some. Plenty of punch for the price. 88

Cassagnoles, Domaine des
Southwest France, Vin de Pays des Côtes de
Gascogne

Blend

2003, \$8.99

Very brilliantly reflective white straw color, crystal clear transparency. Extremely fresh and open nose of lemon zest, wildflowers, powdered stone, orange peel, just enough residual sugar to sweeten the pear, apricot, yellow apple scents. Medium-bodied, there's mildly surprising but pleasing cut in the acidity, moves with authority into the mouth. Keen bite in the lemon/lime citrus, plenty of tingle in the minerality, dances on the tongue. After some time a film accrues on the tongue to semi-blunt and shorten the juice of the peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit. Mild white smoke tones do, however, extend the dance. Clean finish, holds enough weight without giving up its appealing openness. Unspecified percentages of Colombard, Ugni Blanc, Gros Manseng. 88

Schoffit, Domaine
Alsace, Harth, Cuvée Caroline

Gewürztraminer

2003, \$26.99

Good richness in the golden hue, runs fully to the rims. Admirable fullness in the nose without engendering excess heaviness, strikes a really nice balance as it presents the litchee, flower water, lime peel and chalk scents, any rough spots have been rubbed off in the peach, pear fruit, as it sits the florality becomes increasingly dominant. Medium-bodied, while it drags its bottom some, does keep moving along. Not so nutty, more emphasis on the orange, lemon citrus and stones. Touch of heat removes some sweetness from the peach, apricot, pear, mango fruit. A bunch of clove-spiced ham comes out on the finish. For the varietal the acidity is right up there and pretty solid. Good choice to ease someone into the mystic secrets of Gewürztraminer. 87

Hugel et Fils
Alsace, Cuvée Les Amours

Pinot Blanc

2003, \$12.99

Utterly transparent white straw color, in spite of the lack of hue quite resplendent. Slight honey and candied orange scents in the nose, the sweetness does not detract from the cut of the minerality nor the

shape of the pear, peach scents, smells to be about the correct degree of ripeness. Medium-bodied, throws most of its weight upfront. Produces orange, tangerine, lemon citrus first and then a certain dustiness takes over, the acidity dulls rather than bites. This leads to a mild creaminess in the apricot, pear, peach fruit. Ends on a spicier note so that it doesn't come off as flat. Abundance of flavor and heft left by the end. 87

Aladame, Domaine Stéphane
Burgundy, Montagny, 1er Cru

Chardonnay

2002, \$24.99

Well-concentrated golden color, full to the rims and thick enough to lend it a semi-translucent appearance. Heavy nose, not necessarily packed with scents albeit there's good anise, violet, orange peel, polished white stone and light oil notes with a very credible foundation of peach, nectarine, apple scents. Full-bodied, tingly from the sharp spice flavors during the attack, lingers as it melds with the tangerine and lemon citrus mist. The floral patina lends depth and a bit of breadth to the somewhat squarish pear, red apple, peach fruit. Dull acidity can't take credit for overall dry feel. Creamy texture outlasts fruit flavors on finish creating appearance of greater length. Nice enough but questionable at the price. 87

Trimbach

Alsace

Riesling

2003, \$16.99

Slight glow in the yellow straw color, not particularly transparent nor filmy. Widely spaced scents in the nose, loses some grip as a result, unveils white grapefruit, lemon citrus, licorice, hint of tar and hot oil, powdered minerals, light in the peach, apple, pineapple fruit department. Medium-bodied, the active acidity makes the attack vibrant yet not especially full of flavor. Dominated by florality, white grapefruit/lemon citrus and white minerals. Smoky, you better like the tang in the nectarine, pear, pineapple, apple fruit since there's not much juice. Dry but not that long, turns a bit green before you'd prefer. Ouchy on the finish. 86

Tardieu-Laurent

Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Guy Louis

Blend

2003, \$22.99

Pale white straw color, touch more yellow at the rims, more filmy as well. Heavy, sweet oak in the nose with major league caramel and molasses scents, followed by cotton candy, flowers and mixed pear, peach, apple fruit scents. In the mouth it is aggressively

spicy, oak here, there and everywhere. Floral with a pretty dose of orange and tangerine juice, the alcoholic heat mars the length of the peach, apricot, pear fruit flavors. Vanilla cream expands through the finish, hard to really tell what the grapes were trying to express. Too much gaudy makeup and bling, too little trust in the primary material. Unspecified percentages of Marsanne, Roussanne. 86

Puligny-Montrachet, Domaine du Château de
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Clos du Château
Chardonnay
2002, \$19.99

Moderate shine, flat underneath, does hold the golden straw color straight to the rims. Mostly baked piecrust and butterscotch nose, poached pear, peach, apple fruit, violets and a burst of licorice, lacks a strong imprint. Medium-bodied, broad and high-walled, like a fortress wall was erected between your pleasure node and the flavors. With lemon/lime citrus and herbs there's lots of pucker to be had. Stony and minerally in a rough-hewn manner. The acidity has a scattershot approach, only the exit wounds can tell you where it went. The basic peach, pear, apple fruit lacks the richness of the nose and doesn't breathe easily. Harsh 'tude even as it lasts well and remains fairly clean. 86

Hugel et Fils
Alsace, Hugel
Riesling
2003, \$15.99

Color of pale brown straw, little in the way of surface shine, makes up for it in deeper, semi-veiled layers. The ripeness in the peach, pear, red apple fruit makes the nose smooth and round if not unduly juicy, submerges the rubber, petrol notes and takes the length out of the tangerine citrus and mineral scents. Medium-bodied, quite dry, feels like it overcompensated with acidification. As a result, you get more of the stone, mineral, oil but they're somewhat mute like a blanket was thrown on top. The pear, peach fruit has more of a skin/pit feel to it. Empties out around the mid-palate, no flaws nor true sense of lack just eager to dissolve. 86

Pastou, Paul et Jean-Marc
Loire, Sancerre, Les Boucaults, Vieilles Vignes
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$15.99

Virtually colorless, dilute straw color, just enough reflectivity to catch your glance. Lots of snap in the nose, light of foot, every time you try to register the grass, white mineral dust, rose petals, soft lemon, anise, peach, pear and apple fruit it shifts, not particularly fruity but neither with distinct angles. In the

mouth there's some initial hustle and bustle but this doesn't go anywhere. Scatter shot acidity can't channel the lemon/lime water, herbs, mineral dust, center does not hold. Turns increasingly lemony, the peach, pear, apple fruit evanescent at best. Sour finish, crabbed and not in the good way. 85

Vacheron et Fils, Domaine
Loire, Sancerre
Sauvignon Blanc
2003, \$24.99

Transparent white straw color, minor reflective patches at certain angles. Minty, rose water filled nose with straightforward white grapefruit and lemon citrus, a light saline quality in the pineapple, nectarine, apricot scents, overall more tropically resonant than cutting or edgy. Full-bodied and fleshy in the mouth, well-endowed with rich, sweet flavors to suck on, starting with a redux of that pineapple, papaya, nectarine, peach fruit. The florality is like a bag of petals dropped into a pool of mineral water. The lack of acidity brings out a creamy texture during the mid-palate but even that can't get it to soak deep enough into the tongue. Dried honey coating on the finish, all of a sudden loses its sweetness, the bottom drops out just leaving 14% alcohol behind. 84

Faiveley, J.
Burgundy, Mâcon-Prissé
Chardonnay
2002, \$14.99

Fat glow in the mature gold color, drops off precipitously at the rims, becoming transparent and devoid of hue. White smoke and spice get up into your nostrils, and they better because there's a big milky component to tilt the apple cart, floral but canceled out by burnt notes, there's a compote feel in the peach, apricot, lemon scents, unnaturally filled out. Medium to full-bodied, lemongrass, more imbalance from the herbaceousness, tries to right the ship with tangerine zest, violets and mint but nothing is helping this Titanic. Lacks all the simple clarity and freshness for which you go to Mâconnais wines. The acidity is like a big slug to the gut, no finesse. Boring, like watching a fight between two 40 year old heavyweights. 83

FRANCE SPARKLING

Billecart-Salmon
Champagne, Cuvée Elisabeth Salmon Brut Rosé
Blend
1996, \$119.99

The bubbles move with laconic assurance and in broadly spread beads. Has an orange-pink color, humming glow to it like an old off-the-air signal on TV,

moderately transparent. For all its creaminess, very penetrating nose of minerals, lemon peel, crunchy green apple, strawberry, red cherry fruit, leaves a chalk powder residue behind, the scents echo wit increasing growls, excess energy to spare. Medium-bodied, tight as all hell, pursed lips at first before begrudgingly resolves to give up the flavors, almost by mid-palate. Then there's honeysuckle, lilac, honey, orange zest, rosemary, mineral paste, the acidity pulsates like a message beamed to a deep space probe. Very angular strawberry, raspberry, apple, pear fruit, all snap and zing, flits across your tongue surface. Bruises, especially as the foaminess comes mostly during the finish. Incredibly young and not ready to drink. 50% Pinot Noir, 50% Chardonnay. 93

Lenoble, A.R.

Champagne, Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut
Chardonnay

1995

\$57.99

Very tiny bubbles which run in tight beads, has a light foam to interfere with the shimmering solid gold surface. Strikes a nice balance between bready toast and vanilla and then the crisper lemon, stone dust notes, big and round presence to be found in the green apple, peach, apricot fruit, scrubbed clean by the dissolve but still has so much weight. Full-bodied and dry in the mouth, too burly to be crisp. That is, not blunt just thundering. The aggressive initial foam bursts forth and equally quickly recedes. Pushes becoming imperiously dry, especially given its heft. Fair amount of toast and baked bread but in no way yeasty. Exquisitely keen acidity, very little could dull this blade. You get more lemon and almost white grapefruit citrus than peach, pear, apple fruit. If an afternoon of sucking on stones is your idea of fun, pop the cork and smack your lips. 91

Ployez-Jacquemart

Champagne, Brut

Blend

NV, \$39.99

Shows small, inactive beads which move at a moderate clip. Pale straw color with good brilliance, paler at the rims but still shiny. Mild toast in the nose, crisp but softens as it settles in, like mineral dust settling down to earth, dash of pear and apple skin, strives for a measure of regality. Light-bodied, refreshingly crisp with an active yet well-shaped foam. Wickedly dry, your tongue takes a beating from the word go, whites tones, mineral water, lemon peel, dried wild grasses, turns just a bit sour as it unfolds the green apple, pear and peach flavors. As dry as it is remains long and substantial with a thick filmy

coating left behind. Toast and a waft of smoke linger last in the mouth, very natty and proper. 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir. 90

FRANCE DESSERT

Myrat, Château de
Bordeaux, Sauternes

Blend

2001, \$35.99, 14.0%

Shows a very deep amber gold color, full to the rims and already mature in look. While a touch milky at first, the nose bursts with golden honey, tangerine and lime citrus, flowers, licorice, concentrated and dried apricot, nectarine, pear, papaya fruit, remains explosively and engagingly sweet but never too so. Medium-bodied, the flavors are so kaleidoscopic that at first you don't suspect have deep they also sink. Brown sugar and molasses have a smoky element which gains lift from the tangerine, orange and lemon citrus. The hyper-ripe apricot, peach, pear, papaya, nectarine and pineapple fruit wiggles down onto your lap. The acidity is actually quite nice and firm but today no match for the raw material. Goes on and on like a record on replay. Unspecified percentages of Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc. 90

ITALY RED

Mascarello, Azienda Agricola Giuseppe e Figlio
Piedmont, Langhe, Dai Vigneti di Proprieta
Nebbiolo

2001, \$22.99

Amplify flashy ruby to violet color, youthful appearance lasts through to the rims. Generous portions of cedar, herbs, violets, sweet smoke as well as raspberry and blackberry fruit fill the nose, very open and ready for business, stuffed to the gills without becoming weighed down. Medium-bodied, smooth end gently smoky, features first juicy orange zest, dried herbs and flowers. Impressive breadth in the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. While possessing a firm grip in no way overly tannic nor acidic, more sweet and unformed in a billowy fashion. Near the finish the orange develops a lemony highlight and you also get a hint of olive paste. More poundability than profundity but no lesser of a wine for it. 89

Marenco, Azienda Agricola Aldo
Piedmont, Dolcetto di Dogliani, Bric
Dolcetto

2003, \$16.99

Just deep enough at the core to turn violet before yielding to warm brick red to ruby nearer the rims. The nose feels like it was sprayed with some kind of

weather guard, all your senses register what's beneath the impermeable membrane, cherry and blackberry scents, loam, tobacco leaf and a touch of olives almost, remember it's impermeable dammit so it's Hanes's imagination here. Medium-bodied and compact, makes an immediate impression with the brawn in the tannins as well as in the tightly woven grass, earth, mineral, smoke elements. The sour edged cherry, raspberry fruit takes its time building up a head of steam but when it does, has good staying power. While it has a countrified demeanor not a rough housing prick you can't invite into the big house. Roguish appeal. 89

Bera e Figli, Vittorio
Piedmont, Monferrato, Bricco della Serra
Dolcetto
2003, \$14.99

Were it not so dark the purple would be positively luminescent, as it is the color is so fat to the rims that there is only the thinnest of deep magenta rims. The ripeness in the blackberry, black raspberry scents momentarily holds back the other aspects of the nose but the strong earth, tar, leather notes in addition to the orange spice cannot be denied, finally crafting a more rugged profile. In the mouth it is broad-shouldered and thin of waist, while there's no edges there is a certain hardness to it with surprisingly active tannins. Possesses excellent follow-through in the black cherry, blackberry fruit. It's overall brawn inhibits its fluidity, slow pace in the earth, mineral, grass, merde notes as well as in the prettier floral and orange/lemon citrus notes. Gets about as chewy as you'd want a Dolcetto to be. 89

Pecchenino, Fratelli
Piedmont, Langhe, La Castella
Blend
1999, \$27.99

The opaque purple core is entirely impenetrable, eventually admits of deep ruby rims. Suave and full creamy oak nose with clove spice, something like eucalyptus, herbs and ripe blackberry, cherry scents, gregarious in a "new world" manner. Full-bodied, sweet and quick to get up in your face while conversing. Plump, spicy and fruity, the red currant, cherry, raspberry steamrolls through, more resistance from the acidity than tannins. Has herbal and earthy tones, however the caramel and vanilla flavors follow quickly upon them and catch up with aplomb. Shades of orange zest and mint, just comes off as too predictable and thought-out. Has lots to enjoy but check your brain at the door. 70% Barbera, 30% Nebbiolo. 88

Oddero, Fratelli
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba
Barbera
2003, \$13.99

Pure violet core of moderate intensity, encircled by noticeably wide and trim ruby to dark magenta rims. Nose benefits from a pretty floral perfume, brings out a spritz feel in the orange to lemon citrus notes, there's both a crunchy and goeey feel in the plum, black cherry scents, like a hard coated, liquid filled candy. Full-bodied, the tannins are not shy and scrub vigorously against your tongue. However, the sheer ripeness in the black cherry, blackberry, plum fruit will have none of this and it swiftly takes on a rounder, gentler mouth feel. The florality is still a large flavor component but edged out by the zestier lemon and orange citrus which takes things in a more sour direction as it finishes. Very pleasing and drinkable, little to not like. 88

Hofstätter, J.
Alto Adige/Südtirol
Lagrein
2003, \$22.99

The concentrated purple core comes replete with heavy luminescence and saturated ruby-magenta rims. Tar, black earth, mushroom, leather and mulched grass coalesce in the nose, there's a spritz of lemon on top of the sour plum, currant, blackberry scents, the ripeness while pleasing wisely stays in the background. Full-bodied, packs a lot in until it has trouble closing the zipper. Leads with some mocha and orange peel, takes any "country wine" feel out of the tar, tobacco, earth, leather and grass components. The tannins are dusty and take on more grit as they build up. The density of the plum, currant, cherry fruit adds more chewiness and contributes to a plush, lingering finish with an attractively echoing sour bite. 88

Sette Ponti, Tenuta
Tuscany, Crognolo
Blend
2001, \$31.99

Orange-crimson cast to the purple core, thick brick red rims. Indulgent leathery, herbal grip in the nose, smoky with a touch of black licorice, highlights the ripe currant, cherry scents, reluctant to dissolve. Full-bodied, crafted for approachability, soaks easily into the mouth as it unfolds sweet garden herbs, orange juice and violet elements. Less earth and leather than found in the nose but there. The tannins have been interrogated and they spilled the beans. The red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit extends too much of itself a the beginning, putters to a halt before a natural

finish. Hits all the major food groups but still comes off as a little dilute for some reason. 90% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot. 87

ITALY WHITE

San Michele Appiano (St. Michael Eppan), Cantina Produttori

Alto Adige/Südtirol, Sanct Valentin

Gewürztraminer

2003, \$31.99

On the transparent side, you only get deeper yellow gold when the glass is upright, hints at a soft green tinge. Sappy wet litchee, concentrated orange pulp, honeysuckle, pure honey and minerals shift around inside your nose, sheds the weight in the apricot, peach fruit scents to manage more lift and sparkle before dissipating. Medium-bodied, has enough acidic verve to give more resonance to the tangerine, orange, lemon citrus and make it the dominant element. Violets and orange blossom a big part too, more stone and chalk than minerals. Semi-creamy texture to the peach, apricot, nectarine fruit, makes it more ripe than juicy. The litchee much less prominent than in the nose. Very flavorful and vivid but more or less unevolved in terms of complexity. 90

Caputo, Cantine

Campania, Sannio

Falanghina

2003, \$14.99

Burnt golden core, blurry, some depth to be had but watery at the rims. Baked apples, pears and peaches in the nose without seeming reduced, violets, orange blossoms and mint add to the spring in its step despite overall fullness. Heavier in the mouth, sticky quality like gummy bears. The orange, tangerine, lemon citrus has more sweetness than tang, the florality the main culprit here. Simple peach, pear, apricot fruit, palms open and approachable. The acidity rides high in the saddle and both lurches and absorbs bumps in the road for it. Sloppy but with the best of intentions about it. 86

GERMANY WHITE

Weil, Weingut Robert

Rheingau, Spätlese Trocken AP #27

Riesling

2004, \$52.99

Strong distorting quality in the luminescent yellow color, soft greenish hue, more or less consistent to the rims. Feels like three sheets of paper scrunched together into a ball in the nose, so oily and drenched in petrol that it might ignite, while the fire department

is coming you get lemon peel, dried flowers, pear, yellow apple and peach fruit, mostly fuzz and skin. Medium-bodied, in the mouth its trucking side is evident but this is never to the detriment of the pineapple, peach, nectarine, apple fruit nor the lemon to pink grapefruit citrus. If given enough time to gather itself it can throw a burst of streamwater, straw and flowers at you but then you might have to contend with some lingering CO2 issues. All things considered, the kind of wine which will grab you by the short hairs. Only question will be how long will the appeal last? 90

Hövel, Weingut von

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Balduin von Hövel Estate QbA AP #1

Riesling

2003, \$14.99

While the straightforward yellow gold color strongly warps light, leaves you with an indistinct visual impression, looks like wine. Has been kneaded into a tight roll in the nose, mostly lemon spritz, chalk powder, pine and rubber, slippery feel in the pear, apple, melon fruit, you better focus to catch it, overall clean and not too sweet. Medium-bodied, there's a terse trimness to it that isn't a sign of lack, more so of clarity of purpose. Very light on its feet and airy, the diesel and rubber notes are ever-present yet dissolve gracefully. The acidity is fine and fits snugly around the apricot, peach, pear fruit. More floral than in the nose, the playful lemon tones bolstered by a dash of lime. While quite easy to drink, retains noticeable structure throughout. 88

Christoffel Erben, Weingut Joh. Jos.

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Ürziger Würzgarten, Kabinett AP #4

Riesling

2003, \$21.99

Pronounced reflectivity in the white straw color, wonderful clarity with still a bunch of CO2 bubbles evident. The smokiness and chalkiness are the first thing to attract in the nose, then lemon and tangerine citrus, junkyard rubber tires, molasses and juicy but fully controlled peach, apricot, red cherry scents, overall a neatly and consciously presented package. In the mouth it is surprisingly full-bodied and firm, for all the maple syrup and sweet tangerine citrus it's very business like. As in the nose, the robustness of the red cherry, melon, pear, apricot fruit marches forward like it's in the military. As it passes the mid-palate there's a pleasing streamwater and minerally freshness to keep the palate alert. Can't say the acidity is keen but it breaks a sweat in working overtime. As a result, while the flavors dissipate some

on the finish this never strikes you as unnatural or as a flaw. 88

Wittmann, Weingut
Rheinhessen, QbA Trocken AP #20
Riesling
2003, \$17.99

Quite transparent, the center has less color than the golden straw rims, glassy layers brood underneath. Flat, broad nose of lemon oil, rubber tire, licorice, flower petals, mild stone with clipped peach, apricot, mango fruit scents. Medium-bodied, makes a big initial impression with sparkling tangerine to lime citrus and chalk dust yet doesn't have much follow-through and has to haphazardly rush the pineapple, nectarine, peach, cherry fruit out there as a result. Presents stone, streamwater, dried flowers and then there's little left but the citrus to carry the finish. The acidity isn't all that natural in feel, stumbles side-to-side some. Reach exceeding its grasp. 87

Hövel, Weingut von
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Scharzhofberger, Kabinett AP #4
Riesling
2003, \$19.99

Pure yellow hay color, while clear there's a vague translucency too, shows a slight fizz upon the initial pouring too. Crystalline nose of cotton candy, lemon-limeade, flower paste, brown sugar and nicely contoured and firm peach, pear, red apple fruit, settles into your nostrils very unobtrusively. Medium-bodied, offers a very sweet attack of brown sugar, molasses and riper, more giving apricot, peach, apple, melon fruit. That said, rights itself well and turns pleasingly dry by the mid-palate even if not really attributable to the weakish acidity. Broad sweep in the tangerine to lime citrus, again more sweet than dry. Mild grass snap but not enough to punch back against the sugar onslaught. Mostly holds its balance. 87

Buhl, Weingut Reichsrat von
Pfalz, QbA Maria Schneider Jazz Label Estate
Medium-Dry AP #62
Riesling
2004, \$15.99

Utterly colorless, how it shines with so little color is something you'd like to know. Reticent, minerally nose of chalk, streamwater and the softest hints of green matter, flower petals and peach fuzz. Medium-bodied, in the mouth it is noticeably dry and chalky, possesses a real "steel beam" feel, particularly driven by the acidity. Lays out measured servings of dry lemon/lime peel, mineral dust, chalk and stone tones. There's almost too much solidity in the pear, apple, melon fruit

making you have to suck hard to get at any meaningful juice. 87

Müller-Catoir, Weingut
Pfalz, Haardter Mandelring, Spätlese AP #21
Scheurebe
2003, \$51.99

Bright shine in the fully transparent white gold color. The intense nose of Lemon Pledge smells like a room of freshly waxed wooden furniture, offers some minerals and pear/peach fruit but there is no space after you get hit by the lemon juggernaut. Medium-bodied, so sweet and sugary it sticks to the tip of your tongue and barely enters the mouth. Displays a tropical fruit cocktail of pineapple, papaya, nectarine, apricot fruit, the lack of acidity makes it very cloying. Honey and molasses crisp intensify this effect, the tangerine and lemon citrus flavors the sole point of relief. Damn chewy on the way down, has the textural consistency of saltwater taffy. 85

AUSTRIA RED

Pöckl, Josef
Burgenland
Zweigelt
2003, \$14.99

Immaculate with a luminescent glow infusing the purple bruise core, the extremely broad magenta rims possess a wonderful warmth. In the nose there's a jumble of dark chocolate, merde, field grasses, orange peel, earth but every time it starts to get more rugged the black currant, plum, blackberry fruit floods your nostrils. Medium-bodied, the tannins and fat yet as supple as can be given their corpulence. More straw, grass, brown earth, leather than in the nose but the roost still ruled by black currant, plum, cherry fruit, accompanied by an orange spice and cocoa dusting. The acidity is so-so, manages to come together to create a nice lengthy finish with good flavor if remaining dusty. 87

AUSTRIA WHITE

Schloss Gobelsburg, Weingut
Kamptal, Gobelsburger
Grüner Veltliner
2004, \$12.99

Basic white straw color with a soft green hue, visible fizz upon pouring, clear rims. Well-stuffed nose of violets, chalk, defanged orange/lemon citrus, its creamy feel gives a semi-poached attribute to the pear, peach, red apple fruit, mindlessly pleasing. Full-bodied, softly approachable, has spice and herbs, grass but even at 12% alcohol comes off a but hot.

There's more creaminess in the mouth, stunts the bite of the lemon/lime citrus. The greenness feels freshly watered and youthful. Sweet grip initially in the peach, apricot, pear, pineapple fruit, lacks the kind of cut that would prod it further on down the road. A perfectly acceptable jump into the shallow end of the Grüner pool. 87

Krems, Weingut Stadt

Kremstal

Grüner Veltliner

2003, \$15.99

Clear white-green color with good integration from core to rims. Fairly open nose, well-honeyed with sweet tangerine, mint, anise notes, pretty and possessing a thick lift, resists dissolve, clings to the pear, peach, apricot scents without squeezing them. Medium-bodied, much more driven by simple mouth weight than richness of flavors. That said, the poor acidity plays up the molasses, licorice, floral sides. Sadly there's a quick fade after an initial flourish of green melon, pear, peach fruit. More stone, streamwater than grittier minerality or earthen qualities. Shows minor tones of orange/lemon citrus, defanged without being really juicy either. Tries to gather itself together for a fuller finish but has to hit overdrive to even make the attempt. 85

SPAIN RED

Santo Cristo S. Coop., Crianzas y Viñedos

Campo de Borja, Verasol

Garnacha

2004, \$10.99

Clear and easy to see through red-purple color, holds the hue right up to the rims. The nose is sour on the whole but still has this liquid sugar feel to it as well, raspberry, cranberry, melon, red cherry, some crinkly feel derived from the lemon zest and grass but isn't trying to do too much. Light-bodied, airy and almost air-headed in that the emphasis is on simple, unvarnished enjoyability from the first sip, no pretensions to anything more. Swipe of bitter dark chocolate but more inclined to highlight the zip in the lemon, orange citrus and keen energy in the grassiness. The raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit tap dances through your mouth with a buoyant acidity beneath. Best served with a good chill to the bottle. 87

SPAIN WHITE

Vascarlón, Predio de

Rueda, Atelier

Verdejo

2003, \$12.99

Semi-translucent shimmer to the yellow straw color, thins out appreciably at the rims. The nose is so crisp that you're afraid it may crumble into bits, cloud of white mineral dust, tree leaves and grass, sour lemons, a suggestion of burning oil, cloaked feel to the peach and pear scents. Medium-bodied, as boisterously engaging as the nose is, shockingly dilute in the mouth, little more than herbs, lemon peel and minerally streamwater with much more alcoholic heat than flavor in the pear, apple, peach flavors. Does produce some agreeable licorice, violet notes in the center. The acidity is not pronounced but at least comes off as a natural fit for the rest of the show. Dry finish keeps it clean but doesn't help keep the savor around. 84

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Thelema Mountain Vineyards

Stellenbosch

Chardonnay

2003, \$22.99

Very vivid luminescence in the glazed gold appearance. There's a big blossoming of creamy oak in the nose comprised of vanilla, mint, caramel and orange spice, then an even bigger jolt of sour herbs, oil, shale, the round apricot and peach scents reveal a bit of a powdery nature and feel. Medium-bodied, somewhat taut and dry in the mouth, the peach, apricot, pear fruit comes off as fuzzy and out of focus. Even the oak, while still creamy is disjointed and doesn't truly sink in. The orange, tangerine citrus also stays dull, more like a throb. The acidity is lopsided and blunt. Grinds down to a worn blade past the mid-palate, no replacement for the saw in the shed. 84

Ellis, Neil

Coastal Region, Sincerely

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$9.99

Has a fat shine in the white-green straw color, bends light in spite of its overall transparency. Taken as a whole the nose is soft but the sourness in the lemon, white grapefruit citrus imbues it with mild edge, more herbs and grass than minerals, the swift pace in the peach, pear, apple fruit masks a good bit of the juice. Full-bodied, the acidity comes at an angle and loses brightness, ends up in little more than a dull throb by the finish. The peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit shows the same lack of ripeness found in the nose. Alas, the minerality and herbaceousness remains pale too. If it were not for the lemon and grapefruit it would flatten severely on the finish. All the elements but minimal sparkle. 84

AUSTRALIA RED

Mitolo

South Australia, McLaren Vale, Serpico

Cabernet Sauvignon

2003, \$67.99

Fully opaque purple core, flat and impenetrable, fades ever-so-slightly to fat brick red rims with a decided brown tinge. Dried beef, salami, saltlick, leather, iron flecks more or less take care of the oak toast and flower scents, the black cherry and cassis fruits have the confidence to let the other scents lead the pack for now. Thick with incredible grip, each sip is like trying to fight off a bear hug. Vastly smoky and full of mesquite and orange spice tang, the gamey qualities are more subdued here, recede behind the earth, tar, grass elements. The concentration and weight in the fruit doesn't hamper it from evincing more red currant, boysenberry, red cherry flavors. Tannins submerged at the moment but there is no doubt a subtly consistent drying effect through the finish. 92

Tatiarra

South Australia, Heathcote, Caravan of Dreams

Shiraz Pressings

Shiraz

2003, \$74.99

Fully opaque purple color, broad and entirely undiluted ruby to magenta rims. The coconut oil, French vanilla cream and mint most boisterous after the cork is popped, then die down to let out the blackberry, black raspberry fruit out as well as orange citrus, eucalyptus and a touch of uncooked bacon. Full-bodied, the tannins realize they have to hit the ground running if they are going to make their presence known and steam the tide of the molasses, caramel, burnt toast oak notes. Strong presence of orange to lemon citrus, pleasing level of mint, grass, cured ham, earth and tar yet absolutely unevolved. The red currant, raspberry, red cherry fruit sparkles through a generally dusty mouth feel. Starts to clamp down during the finish, concentration of the fruit keeps it lurching forward but really can't say it's a long ending. 90

Liebich Wein

South Australia, Barossa Valley, The Lofty Special

Late Harvest

Cabernet Sauvignon

2002, \$35.99

Full-on opaque murk in the crimson to purple core, solid brick red rims. Bell pepper and herbal notes infuse the earthiness in the nose, plentiful tobacco wrapper, leather notes, the ripeness in the red currant, cherry scents help it to rise some, the caramel actually extends its presence. Medium-bodied, agreeably fluid

and light of foot, the cinnamon, clove and rosemary spices pair evenly with the milk chocolate, caramel oak influences. While friendly it leaves room for bite in the orange zest. The underlying tannins and acidity are firm without any showiness, contentedly behind the curtain. Menthol, mint add inner mouth perfume and there's nothing wimpy about the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. Does a good job of accelerating the tang towards the finish, definitely ends on an upbeat note. Holds your gaze. 90

Maxwell

South Australia, McLaren Vale, Ellen Street

Shiraz

2002, \$34.99

Very cloudy red-purple core, somewhat dull as a result, brightens more to red-ruby at the rims. Minty and very floral nose with a downy soft vanilla/caramel underpinning given its borderline prune touch to the plum, black cherry scents it still has a slight green edge, adds in tobacco, smoke, tar, brown earth, turns very heavy as it sits in the nostrils. Full-bodied, while capable of shedding its weight with ease in order to maintain flow the sweetness in the cinnamon and clove spice elevates further the caramel, toffee elements. Very thick and syrupy cassis, plum, currant, blackberry fruit but the juice doesn't really run freely. With tobacco, tar, lemon peel, earth and leather it ends on a flavor uptick. Nonetheless, remains hard to judge. 89

Kangarilla Road

South Australia, McLaren Vale

Shiraz

2003, \$19.99

Slight murk in the straight purple core lends it some opacity, widely spread red-magenta rims with a warm hum. More density than sweetness in the French vanilla and creamed coffee scents in the nose, moves mainly from the taut florality, orange spice, chalk dust elements, slows down again so you can enjoy the firmness of the cherry, boysenberry, blackberry scents, lots of grip. Medium-bodied, very impressed with its muscles, makes a big show out of reaching across the table for the salt and pepper shaker. Same interplay among the relatively equal orange/lemon citrus, flowers, minerals, forest floor flavors and the more oak-inspired coffee, vanilla, caramel tones. You can give your tongue a good workout wrapping it around the black currant, cherry, plum, blackberry fruit.

88

Joseph River Estate
Western Australia, Geographe, Cabernet-Shiraz-
Merlot
Blend
2003, \$9.99

Fully opaque purple core, sheds some density to let the glow out in the more pure ruby rims. Big, compact and crammed full nose of cassis, black currant, plum fruit, mint oil, milk chocolate crisp, orange spice, capable of wafting some game and leather scents in your direction. Medium-bodied yet so velvety and creamy in texture it's hard to feel any open spaces your tongue could move in for contrast. The mint, menthol, vanilla and chocolate while a little dominant than in the nose remain consistent to the very end. The earth, grass, leather and tea leaf flavors expressive but would benefit from a stronger tannic frame. Big, round, rolling feel in the currant, blackberry, plum, black cherry fruit but without sloppy juiciness. Smoky residue on the finish. And it's kosher to boot. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Shiraz, 20% Merlot. 88

Liebich Wein
South Australia, Barossa Valley, CW's Block
Shiraz
2002, \$49.99

Natural filminess in the red-purple core, soft glow to it despite its opacity, heavy-set ruby rims. Thick milk chocolate, vanilla cream, mint, coffee scents make for a slowly moving avalanche of oak pouring into your nose, reduced, if still semi-fresh, raspberry, blackberry, red cherry jam fruit scents. Fleshy and even more syrupy in the mouth, the tannins are powdery with an artificial feel. Full extraction in the blackberry, blueberry, raspberry fruit yet manages to avoid getting bogged down too much under its own weight. Large-scaled black licorice, mint components followed with lower intensity meadow scrub and flowers. The orange and lemon citrus obscured by the heat. Turns ungracefully dry on the finish, leaves the tongue a bit pinched. Possesses plenty of interesting primary material but just seems like it was put through the ringer and become misshapen. Only Yahweh Ben Yahweh knows if it will find its bearings. 87

Liebich Wein
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Leveret
Shiraz
2002, \$35.99

As totally black opaque as it is there's a radioactive glow to the purple core, the brick red rims as about as thickset as a 300 pound sumo wrestler. Volatile, alcoholic nose prevents a true blossoming of the licorice, caramel, vanilla, maple tones, what a waste of

oak, same can be said for whatever cherry, raspberry fruit scents were squeezed into your nostrils too. Hot, soupy and sticks to your cheeks like motor oil, hard to tell if it is truly full-bodied, medium-bodied or just a hologram. Full-bodied, at first like sucking down a coffee, caramel milkshake. Then the vanilla ice cream and maple syrup provided needed relief. The cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit has a sorbet-like feel to it, beyond some orange citrus and leather but there's no doubt this was built to steamroll you before you had a second's chance of registering, not even nuance, but in your face primary components. Don't even bother making her take the gum out of her mouth. 85

Hill of Content
South Australia, Clare Valley, Grenache Shiraz
Blend
2001, \$12.99

Violet but really more dark brick red at the core, strong ochre-hued garnet rims, maturing appearance. Extremely minty nose, lots of sweet menthol and floral scents, orange spice, palpable candied aspect to the raspberry, strawberry fruit, has enough leather and tilled earth scents to derive a bottom bass line. Light to medium-bodied, makes an initial impression of cough medicine, doesn't have enough flavor density to stem the alcoholic heat. Lemon drop, hard lollipop raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit flavors, violet powder all make you work hard to suck out the flavor. Mild acidic sizzle but really not much by way of tannins. The tar, leather, game, merde flavors imbue it with a pronounced matured wine sensibility. Really tries hard but doesn't quite pull it off. 83% Grenache (Clare Valley), 17% Syrah (McLaren Vale). 85

Paringa
South Australia, Individual Vineyard
Cabernet Sauvignon
2003, \$10.99

Brownish-red tinge to the deep purple color, really aggressive garnet to crimson rims, eyes easily soak in it. As worked over as the nose is, still herbal with an overlay of earth, merde and blood iron, no distinct oak scents yet still comes off as oaky, the cranberry and cherry fruit never quite gains your interest. Medium-bodied, crashes into the mouth but really after that has no clue what to do. With pencil lead, bell pepper, orange peel, grass it has flavors however remains disappointingly lifeless. The tannins are there but they cannot take credit for the deadened feel. The cranberry, red currant, cherry fruit has weight, juicy at first but no length. Wears you down by the finish to the point where you raise the white flag and just wish it would stop. 84

Kilikanoon

South Australia, Clare Valley, Watervale Mort's Block Riesling

2004, \$17.99

Solid reflections across the surface, watery brown straw coloration, catches the light nicely. There's lemony snap in the nose, rose petals and anise seed, powdered sugar, the peach and apricot fruit drives through your nostrils in low gear. Good structure in the mouth if not rock solid, softens as it passes through the mid-palate, losing cut in the lemon/lime citrus and minerals. The acidity rolls ahead like a tractor in a field, can be slowed down but very hard to stop. The focus of the peach, apricot, pear fruit reins in the juice and heightens the herbaceous notes. Nice little wine but needs more confidence to find its voice. 86

AUSTRALIA DESSERT

Lillypilly

New South Wales, Riverina, Noble Blend

Blend

2002, \$16.99

Clear but don't take the depth of the yellow-bronze color lightly 'cause it ain't light, shimmers aggressively through the rims. Your nostrils react like a lone fisherman peacefully bobbing along in the ocean before an onslaught of 500 Marines, so aggressive it almost doesn't register in your universe, the brown sugar reduction sticks to every inch of the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit scents, whatever milkiness is there gets steamrolled by the ginger spice. As thick as the slabs of flavor are, the acidity makes sure there's sheaves of paper between them all. Generous amounts of lemon, tangerine juice get dripped on the apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, melon fruit, so thick it cannot help but stand erect. This is why Australian dessert wines can be such values these days. 80% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Sémillon, 5% Muscat of Alexandria, 5% Riesling. 375 ml bottle. 91

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Sileni

Marlborough, Cellar Selection

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$14.99

Has a translucent layering in the yellow gold color, noticeable paling at the rims albeit no more transparent. Lots of snap in the nose. active and keeps moving as it scatters about the pink grapefruit, lemon citrus, gooseberry, pineapple, nectarine, peach fruit and brawny herbaceousness, pushes the cat pee thing but changes the litter box instead. Medium-bodied, features its acidity under a bright spotlight,

nothing shy about it. As a result, while there's plenty of stuffing in the flowers, minerals, tangerine and grapefruit citrus it comes off as bracingly sour which may prove a turnoff to some. The nectarine, peach, pineapple, passion fruit flavors are high octane enough to whiz by before you can register them, weakening length of the finish. 87

CHILE RED

Antiyal

Maipo Valley

Blend

2002, \$47.99

Opaquely glowing purple core, vivid and resonant ruby to magenta rims. Powerful tobacco ash, leather, scorched earth scents in the nose, mineral dust and bell pepper spritz laid on the juicy black currant, black cherry scents, attractive rawness. Medium-bodied with enough velvety sap to ensure a clinging grip and consistent mouth weight. White grapefruit, tar, asphalt, earth and bell pepper give it an unique enough profile during the entry while the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit softens the truly rough patches. The acidity does a very credible job of extending things without distortion. This does, however, play up the tar and leather more as the final flavor impression. 45% Carmenère, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Syrah. 89

Santa Laura

Colchagua Valley, Laura Hartwig

Carmenère

2003, \$11.99

Attractive glow in the crimson-purple core, equally inviting dark blood red rims, a really good visual drink. Has a nose of broadly insinuating bell pepper, cigar ash, the red cherry fruit comes inside a milk chocolate glove, ends with a swirl of vanilla ice cream/orange sorbet scents. Full-bodied, juicy and approachable, tons of red cherry, blackberry fruit and knows how to hold its weight. Chocolatey with sweet spices and vanilla but still wears the bell pepper, tobacco ash, earth and leather as a badge of honor. The tannins are fat and full, after a lot of huffing and puffing they eventually turn things drier. Has a nice sense of pacing, swells to a crest, falls and repeats. Easy to indulge in. 88

Corpora Bosset, Grands Vins

Casablanca Valley, Kingston Single Estate, Veranda

Pinot Noir

2002, \$16.99

Light violet to bright garnet in color, trim enough with a hint of the mildest filminess. Resonant earth, clove, ham, smoke, tar, animal fur scents then red currant,

cherry, blackberry fruit appears in an attempt to soften things. Medium-bodied, gentle and pliant attack of cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Heavily tarry with lesser portions of earth, loam, leather, saddle soap. The acidity may be blunt but it puts what it has forward. A gameyness really dominates the second half without sacrificing the approachability of the fruit, perhaps due to persistent caramel and molasses accents. A distinctive wine for the price with one foot moored in more familiar terrain. 87

CHILE WHITE

Fèvre Chile, Viña William
Maipo Valley, Gran Cuvée de la Viña La Misión
Chardonnay
2003, \$14.99

While very transparent, has a strong translucent quality in the white to brown straw color. Rich, full nose of peach, apricot scents, limeade, floral dew, the toast never too arch but insistent, releases some weight after awhile and gains lift as a result. Medium-bodied, stern if not a bit hard at first, its blunt feel brings out more herbaceous, earth and stone notes as well as wet smoke. The spice distracts from the juice in the yellow apple, pear, peach fruit, combined with the wiry acidity it strives for elegance at the price of enjoyment. Tangerine sorbet is the last thing you taste. 86

ARGENTINA RED

Vistalba, Domaine
Mendoza, Lujan de Cuyo, Trilogie de Fabre
Montmayou
Blend
2003, \$7.99

Pure ruby-violet color throughout, fetching resonance (fetching sticks too). Very juicy and fruit-driven nose, plummy with ripe blackberry, black cherry fruit, restrained oak cream and a touch of mint, menthol and dried potpourri. Full-bodied and equally juicy in the mouth if not more so, all about the blackberry, currant, plum, cherry explosion. The oak continues to elevate past the mid-palate but never eclipses the fruit. Tannins have been massaged out of its muscles. Orange citrus, mint and flower dew, beyond that there is that fruit to wrap your tongue around. 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Malbec, 30% Merlot. 87

ARGENTINA SPARKLING

Infinitus, Bodega
Río Negro, Methode Champenoise
Blend

NV, \$10.99

Dull brown straw color, flat with widely spaced if pleasingly active bubbles. Offers soft toast and mineral water scents but very quiet nose, murmur of melon, green apple and peach fuzz fruit. Medium-bodied, very creamy in texture given the lack of weight. Toasty, lacks grip and turns watery as the mineral water, stone aspects come through. Weak acidity, the foam is average. Very little left by the finish, just that foam and receding mouth weight. Mainly Chardonnay, remainder Sémillon, Torrontes, Pinot Noir. 84