

The Hanes Wine Review, October 2005 Edition

While Chardonnay arguably remains the most popular white wine today there's little doubt that Sauvignon Blanc has made serious inroads in popularity and this grape represents the most likely "challenger to the throne." Sadly, though, there seems to be little said about the flavor and textural differences among the many regions producing Sauvignon Blanc wines. So, Hanes thought he would produce a "quick and dirty" overview of the current scene. That Hanes. always thinking.

First, the basics. Yes, Sauvignon Blanc makes a white wine. A curious fact about the grape, known to many wine geek types, is that Sauvignon Blanc is a "parent" of Cabernet Sauvignon. The latter has been shown to be the result of a spontaneous field crossing between Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Franc (a grape which is used to make red wines) in the 18th century in some unknown vineyard in France's Bordeaux region where Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc were inter-planted. So, a grape used to make white wines is half responsible for the existence of perhaps the world's most famous grape used to make a red wine. The world is a mysterious and beautiful place.

Sauvignon Blanc is one of those grapes which can thrive under a diverse variety of growing conditions and it tolerates heat very well. Its vines are particularly vigorous and grow with abandon, something which has made it popular with growers since they get paid by the ton. However, winemakers and consumers do not always benefit from this vigor since the result may be too many branch shoots and/or grape bunches, dividing the vine's energy among too many recipients and resulting in more dilute, underripe, herbaceous wines. One (actually Hanes) may suggest that when it comes to the qualitative "basement" of wines made from specific grapes Sauvignon Blanc may be counted among the worst offenders — a bad Sauvignon Blanc can be really, really bad.

Relatively speaking, Sauvignon Blanc has high acidity, an element which contributes to its commonly crisp and zesty profile. On the whole, it is lower in alcohol than other white wines which, with the higher acidity, keeps it refreshing without the burn.

Extended aging in oak barrels tends to obscure the clean, racy qualities of Sauvignon Blanc wines. Most of these wines are instead produced by fermenting and/or aging in stainless steel vats. When oak is used it is most often in older, more neutral barrels and for shorter periods of time than many other white varieties.

Generally speaking, Sauvignon Blanc pairs best with seafood dishes. This is especially so of shellfish and lighter fish such as filet of sole or flounder. It can also prove tasty alongside Asian cuisines, particularly those with savory sauces such as curry, hoisin or red pepper flavorings. It also goes well with an empty glass and a case of delirium tremens.

Here's what Hanes believes to be the deal with Sauvignon Blanc around the world...

FRANCE French Sauvignon Blanc remains the "benchmark" against which the rest of the world is measured. While this is slowly changing, there's the facts.

Loire Valley Just about ground zero for the most prestigious and well-regarded dry Sauvignon Blancs in the world. The most recognized appellations remain Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre followed by Cheverny, Menetou-Salon, Quincy and Touraine. Chalk, marl, silex and flint are found in the soils here which help to produce wines with a decided stony, chalky profile. Lemon citrus, grass and leaner pear, apple, peach fruit are also typical flavor components. The strength of the acidity shines through (or at least should) here, highlighting the soil flavors even more. On the whole, these are Sauvignon Blancs for people who like them crisp and fresh rather than fruity or softer in texture.

Bordeaux The best dry wines are from Graves or Pessac-Léognan while boatloads of potable stuff comes from the Entre-Deux-Mers region. The rocky terrain can give the wines some character but dilution remains a problem at times making the wines lighter than desired and with weak finishes. These issues are sometimes addressed by blending Sémillon with the Sauvignon Blanc. And sometimes this addresses these issues. The better wines offer more by way of melon, pear, apricot fruit flavors with more mineral water and stoniness than explicit chalkiness. There's some white citrus and florality too and, depending on the presence and percentage of Sémillon, a rounder, fuller texture.

To make the discussion of Sauvignon Blanc in Bordeaux complete it must be noted that the famed dessert wines of the Sauternes and Barsac sub-regions are also a result of blending Sauvignon Blanc with Sémillon (and to a lesser extent Muscadelle as well). Traditionally, Sémillon has represented the majority portion of these wines however Sauvignon Blanc appears to be taking on a greater role percentage-wise.

Les Autres Sauvignon Blanc has made its way across France and can be found to greater or lesser degrees of success in wines from the Midi, Vin de Pays d'Oc, Côtes du Marmandais and other small regional pockets. If you come across wines from these places there's a good chance that (a) the grape will be part of a blend and/or (b) the wine will be very cheap or very expensive.

NEW ZEALAND Pretty much the contemporary "800 pound gorilla" of the world, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is almost a category to itself despite its popularity only truly beginning to take hold in the 1980's (having been introduced to the country's Marlborough region in 1973). The flavors associated with "Kiwi" Sauvignon Blancs are noticeably distinct and have helped set them apart from their global competition (offering many choices at lower prices hasn't hurt either). Common descriptors include the ever-popular "cat pee" (it's true), gooseberry, white grapefruit, asparagus, chili peppers,

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minerals and mint. The fruit flavors run towards the more “tropical” side of things with peach, guava, papaya, passion fruit, pineapple, nectarine aspects. While dry these wines rarely suffer from a lack of that fruit, doing an excellent job of “splitting the difference” between cleanliness and vivid flavors. While Marlborough is still the most recognized region, other regions such as Martinborough, Hawkes Bay, Nelson and Wairarapa are growing in consumer awareness and eventually qualitative distinctions among the regions may become apparent to consumers outside of New Zealand. Prices range from super cheap to around \$30, reflecting the diversity of producers and product offerings. Most medium-sized or larger retail stores will stock at least four different NZ Sauvignons at once and they all usually sell at a brisk clip.

AUSTRALIA Sauvignon Blanc has been slowly gaining traction here as experiments have taught lessons about where or where not to grow the grape, cooler climates preferred. Chardonnay still beats the pants off of Sauvignon Blanc in Australia but a few of the better ones are making it to American shores. The downside here is that because these are the best examples they come at prices that may inhibit building quick market share. The actual flavors are not all that different from New Zealand but with less cat pee, herbaceousness while the level of acidity varies greatly. Hanes’s random sampling of these wines also appears to indicate a stronger chance of encountering a creamier mouth feel.

SOUTH AFRICA Beyond France, the United States and New Zealand here is the true wild card. Potential purchasers will find a fairly broad array of choices among many different price points from around \$8 to a little over \$20. Although Chenin Blanc (aka Steen) is more widely planted, the American thirst for Sauvignon Blanc seems to bring more of the latter here. Stellenbosch and the Coastal Region seem to be doing the best job so far, or at least that’s what gets exported to America the most. What makes these wines more distinct is how they combine fuller body and weight with strong acidity for cleanliness. Taken broadly, these Sauvignons possess white grapefruit, lemon to lime citrus and noticeable floral and smoky components. The unique South African soils give these wines an earthy appeal beyond the more basic minerality and sometimes even a light gamey quality. The fruit flavors tend more towards pear, apple and melon than tropical fruit. These are mouth-watering wines which will certainly only grow in popularity over time.

UNITED STATES The Sauvignon Blanc grape came to California in the 1870’s and has steadily gained in popularity. The ripeness achieved in California often gives their Sauvignon Blancs more richness and body than elsewhere in the world. Rather than being overly grassy they push the fruit to the forefront with melon, fig, peach, apricot, guava flavors. The citrus flavors run the full gamut from orange, lemon, lime to pink grapefruit. The level of acidity varies a great deal and makes it difficult to make any sweeping generalizations — California, like all the places discussed herein, is a big place. That said, brisk and invigorating Sauvignon Blanc may not be California’s strongest suit and, if it is, chances are the prices will be towards the higher end of the spectrum. Under \$15, and especially under \$10, you are getting less body and flavor intensity, however, this may also translate into crisper wines.

As is the usual wont, Californian winemakers aren’t shy about busting out the oak barrels. Back in the 1970’s Robert Mondavi came up with the marketing angle of at once softening the flavor profile of Sauvignon Blanc via oak barrel aging while at the same time harkening back to the storied history of the grape in the Loire by labeling his wines “Fumé Blanc,” a nod towards Pouilly-Fumé. These tweaks made Bob major coin and spurred on a whole marketing trend in California which persists to today. So, yes, anytime you see a bottle labeled as “Fumé Blanc” the wine is actually Sauvignon Blanc.

The Rest of the United States Again, being one of the more popular white wines, Sauvignon Blanc is planted all over the country. In some places the wines turn out nicely, in others they are textbook exercises in wishful thinking. Duh. Washington State seems to be trying hard but, to Hanes, they can come off as underripe and somewhat dilute a lot of the time, particularly on the inexpensive side. This despite the strategy of sometimes blending in some Sémillon. More or less ditto for New York, except that the wines usually cost a little more for the honor. Nothing else from around the country has so far made Hanes want to keep typing.

ITALY If money is no object Italy can be a great place to explore Sauvignon Blanc. This is especially so in the two areas of Alto Adige/Südtirol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the northern part of the country. These wines start price-wise around \$16 and can hit \$50 or more. Ouch. However, if you like a Sauvignon with purity, a racy character, acidic verve and zest check these out. They display wonderful stony, mineral dimensions with lemon/lime citrus and apple, peach, pear fruit of flavor and not sloppy juiciness. Excessive herbaceousness is rarely an issue. If you are coming over to Hanes’s place feel free to bring a Sauvignon Blanc from Northern Italy.

CHILE/ARGENTINA Before the explosion in popularity of New Zealand’s Sauvignon Blanc wines Chile was the place to go for cheap versions of the wine. Well, the wines are still cheap (especially if you are looking in the \$8 and under category) but the Kiwis are eating the Chileans’ lunch. Mostly because the Chilean wines are too simple and lacking in personality. It’s not that they all suck, it’s more that they come across as “generic white wine” a lot of the time with nondescript flavors and little length on the finish. Also, there is a greater chance for offputting bell pepper or herbaceous notes. The book isn’t closed on these wines but, with a few exceptions such as Concha y Toro’s “Terrunyo” Sauvignon Blanc, there’s a lot of work to be done to reassert Chile as a viable threat to New Zealand on the inexpensive end of the spectrum.

Hanes has seen few Argentinean Sauvignon Blanc wines in the U.S. and tasted fewer. But it’s cool to just lump a whole country together with a whole other country. Sweet.

SPAIN Just really starting to come into its own here, pretty much a bit player for now. Sauvignon Blanc is grown mostly in the Rueda region where it is used in a supporting role when blended with the Verdejo or Viura grapes (to be labeled as “Rueda” a white wine must have at least 25% Verdejo in it). Chances are that 100% Sauvignon Blanc wines will make it to

the U.S. in greater numbers once the production steps up and the grape gains wider acceptance among the wine authorities. Note that Spain is another place unafraid of fermenting Sauvignon in barrels.

OTHER It's a big world. Austria makes some absolutely killer Sauvignon Blanc, particularly in the Steiermark, Kremstal and Kamptal regions. Most of the best cost in the \$30's but there are nice, quaffable version to be found for around \$15 which are usually labeled as "Klassik" or "Classic." There's just not a lot exported to the United States right now. Slovenia is also working hard at getting the quality of their Sauvignons up to snuff. Given the grape's acceptance and general growth in popularity it's most likely also grown in places like Switzerland, Greece, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, who the hell knows.

Say what you want about Sauvignon Blanc, at least it's not Chardonnay. Chablis excepted, of course.

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First, let it be said that this edition will not be a great read for the value conscious alcoholics among us as the majority of the notes herein were taken during the season's distributor portfolio trade tastings. Which means free wine for Hanes. Which means Hanes drinks the expensive juice first. Most of these events are over for now which translates into the usual state of normalcy wherein Hanes pays for the majority of the wines reviewed. Ergo, much less expensive wines!

This month's big winners... Tuscan producer Scalette never seems to get the full respect they are due — through this month with the 2002 version Hanes has yet to have a sip of their "Il Carbonaione" Sangiovese wine he didn't like. Merlot can't catch a break these days but one of Hanes's perennial favorites shone brightly once more, witness the 2002 Seavey Merlot from Napa. Not cheap but worth it if youse gots da coin. Hanes admires the producer but with the vintage 2003 on the label he wasn't expecting much from Gallet's Côte-Rôtie. But, being the ultra-objective source of wine criticism he is, Hanes has to give it a thumbs up. A new producer called Fetish from Australia's Barossa Valley has a good one in their 2004 Shiraz "The Watcher." While Hanes tires of all these cheesy names used with Australian wines he seems to be alone in this. Anyway, for like \$27 or so it represents a good value for that price point. A new winery to Hanes's stomach, Halleck from the Russian River Valley made two enjoyable wines, their 2004 "Three Sons Cuvée" Pinot Noir and 2004 "Piner Creek Ranch" Sauvignon Blanc. For under \$20 it can be touch-and-go for Vouvray so thank goodness the 2004 Aubuisières "Cuvée de Silex" should retail for around \$18 as it is delicious. One of those ongoing secrets are the Californian wines of Edmunds St. John and at around \$22 their 2003 "Rocks and Gravel" blend is worth a look-see, very nice stuff. St. Innocent has long been one of Hanes's favorite producers of domestic Pinot Noir and their 2003 "White Rose Vineyard" and "Temperance Hill Vineyard" are both worthy standard-bearers for the label. Thankfully this winery never seems to get trendy or hip so the prices are fairly fair (!) versus the immediate competition. In 2001 Marcarini fashioned two very nice Baroli, the "La Serra" and "Brunate" and the prices remain reasonable and under \$60. Pascal Jolivet has of late been making a favorable impression on Hanes and this streak continues with their 2004 Sancerre (around \$21). German Riesling of true pedigree under \$15 is getting rarer and rarer to find but for \$18 or so Hexamer's 2004 "Quarzit" should please all comers. In the same \$15-\$20 range you may seek out Johannishof's 2004 Kabinett "G" and Bert Simon's Herrenberg Kabinett. And, of course, the most consistent German Gewürztraminer vintage to vintage, Fitz-Ritter's 2004 Spätlese.

The best \$15 and under picks... Hey it's a wine under \$15! OK, it's \$14.99 but Vissoux's 2003 Beaujolais "Cuvée Traditionnelle Vieilles Vignes" is a wonderful wine and, to Hanes's palate on a particular day, superior to their more expensive Moulin-à-Vent and Fleurie wines. Mayr-Nusser's 2004 (the vintage is not on the bottle for technical reasons but it's the only one you'll find for sale) Blatterle wine makes a definitive statement for the \$15 price of admission. Up to you whether you agree with this statement or not. Only recently imported into the New York market Austrian producer Sepp Moser made a nice like GrüVe with their 2004 Rohrendorfer "Wolfsgraben." Grab that wolf!

And the disappointments... There are rumors here and there that Huet's 2004 wines may be mild disappointments and these rumors may have some basis since their Vouvray "Sec" from the "Clos du Bourg" vineyard was, err, a mild disappointment. It has been a long time since Hanes has had a wine from Aussie winery Black Opal. With their 2003 Shiraz he remembers why. Slight disappointments, based mostly on price and not pure quality per se, are the 2002 Cornerstone "Howell Mountain" Cabernet Sauvignon and the 2002 Cain "Cain Five" proprietary blend. Good wines but for their prices in the \$80's a buyer should get more of a "wow" experience. Double that for the Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Fay Vineyard" Cabernet. Samsara is another winery new to Hanes and this first taste was OK, no great discovery but if you are a fruit hound then you'll probably like this 2004 "Verna's Vineyard" Syrah better than Hanes. Pépière's inexpensive red blend called "Cuvée Granit" perplexes Hanes. Some vintages he loves it, others leave him flat. Crazy that. The 2004 vintage didn't quite float his boat but it's not flawed or nothing so you might like it better. Only \$10. Also from the Loire, Henri Marionnet has a rep as a good winemaker so Hanes was happy to try a white wine from this producer (only reds tasted so far). Sadly, the 2004 Sauvignon Blanc from Touraine may not have been the best place to start. Hanes has had pretty good luck with Sauvignon Blanc wines from Australia (they must have to be good to compete with their better known New Zealand brands) but his luck changed with the 2004 TK Wines from Adelaide Hills. If it is over \$125 and only rates 88 points (and we all know it's the points that matter) this counts as a disappointment to Hanes. So goeth Tua Rita's 2003 Merlot called "Redigaffi."

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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 #15: "Oh God, not THAT spam again!"

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

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

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Comes across as a bit of a behemoth currently, no lack of stuff to chew on. 90

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Seavey
Napa Valley
Merlot
2002, \$37.99, 15.2%

Crimson red infuses the purple core, more orange-scarlet at the rims, a youthful bricking. Really erect and borderline stern nose of loam, black earth, cedar, orange spice, menthol and not too ripe cherry, blackberry fruit, you almost sense it get pissed that any vanilla oak notes are showing, as it sits in your nostrils it starts to close up and circle the wagons. Full-bodied, spicy, mineral and alive with zest, sings joyfully into the open sky. As it unfolds the menthol, orange citrus, herbs, minerals and a touch of cedar it makes a statement without appearing to make a statement. A pinch of clove and ginger spice act in accord with the firm acidity to provide ample lift to the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit. Melted dark chocolate adds welcome dimension, stays in its place. Smoky, just about meaty, finish which tingles like nobody's business. Hands down, a "change your mind about Merlot" wine. 92

Seavey
Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$74.99, 14.7%

Extensive purple core, mostly opaque, sturdy orange tinge in the brick red rims. While the nose is large in scale it remains openly knit, producing cedar, mesquite smoke, dried blood, eucalyptus to give it a more rustic dimension while the taut vanilla cream helps it segue into mildly raisinated cherry, plum, blackberry scents, builds up a considerable amount of momentum in the nostrils. Full-bodied, sappy in texture but releases its grip before it gets close to raising a bruise. Chocolate, vanilla, dollop of caramel, all short-lived and give way to lighter menthol, orange peel, fresh cedar elements, the sweet ginger and cinnamon spice brings it back to the ground. The tannins are widely grained and the juice from the currant, plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit soaks into the former nicely. On the primary side now, minimal leather, earth yet shows enough pedigree to expect more to come with time.

Outpost
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, The Other
Petite Sirah
2002, \$50.00, 15.5%

Onyx black in color, completely impenetrable, only shows any color around the razor thin dark magenta rims. The nose tries to mimic the color, dense and incredibly hard to break through, floral with accents of peanut shells, dark chocolate powder, lemon citrus, olive pit and thickset plum, cherry, blackberry scents, would have to shed a ton of weight to achieve an inch of lift. Calling it full-bodied is a kind of inside joke, leaden and immobile closer to the truth. Stains your palate like a bucket of paint, all massive black currant, black cherry, blackberry fruit with a thin patina of orange/lemon citrus and flower dust. The tannins are formidable and the acidity an able right hand man. Even the chocolate and vanilla notes are hyper-concentrated. Absolutely no change from attack to finish, a true monolith. More an experience than a table wine. 90

Kosta Browne
Russian River Valley, Cohn Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2003, \$49.99, 15.5%

Unblemished but very well-hued violet core, barely turns to a shiny garnet at the rims. Large and uniform, almost downy nose, too stuffed to really turn airy, features ripe cherry, raspberry, red apple, melon fruit, lemon juice and orange peel, menthol rub, primary and only expands further if you allow it to sit in your nostrils. Full-bodied with huge extract and sap, the melted toffee and toast entirely front-loaded. The ripeness avoids jamminess in the blueberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, stays sweet and long. Acidity drives the bus, the tannins just fill the gas tank. Dashes of florality and lemon spritz give it spring and create a few open spaces for your palate to breathe. Milk chocolate powder coast the finish, ensures your tongue stays in a pleasure zone with having to give up too much structure and bite. 90

Kosta Browne
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Kanzler Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2003, \$49.99, 14.7%

Opulent red-violet core, noticeably reflective, holds its hue tenaciously both through to the pure ruby rims as well as down into the depths of your glass. Touch sugary with a powdery texture in the nose, strong cola and spice, succulent raspberry, red cherry fruit with a dusting of mocha, gains a gamey edge over time. Medium to full-bodied, comes at you in waves, moments of pressure and release. Still showing that powerful cola edge, bright lemon to orange zest and a follow-up of grass or snap peas. The tannins provide a gritty anchor, particularly as the florality starts to lift upwards during the mid-palate. The mocha and vanilla extract are consistent while remaining proportionate to the whole. A thick creamy texture builds through the finish, so broad that overall it loses a smidge of nuance and transparency. Takes a long time for the wheels to stop spinning. 90

Halleck Vineyard
Russian River Valley, Three Sons Cuvée
Pinot Noir
2004, \$44.99, 14.5%

Pleasingly reflective surface laid over a deep crimson to purple core, dense brick red hued rims. The ripe, juicy nose just explodes into smiles in your nostrils, highly concentrated blackberry, raspberry, black cherry fruit, smattering of grill smoke, cinnamon and damp earth, pretty unevolved at the moment. Full-bodied, bold mouth entry, trumpets the arrival of the king strawberry, raspberry, blackberry fruit even as these flavors remain reluctant to rise from the throne to salute the crowd. Only embellishments of caramel, doesn't appear to be that oak-driven. Orange zest, cinnamon and sweet baking spices, suggests a pumpkin pie glaze for a moment. The acidity has a mule-like tenacity to account for its inability to slice and dice. Not at all green, no blemishes on the purity of the fruit. The finish is naturally long and flavorful, focuses on your pleasure first. Grapes sourced from The Farm, Balletto, Lee Vineyards. 90

Darioush
Napa Valley, Signature
Shiraz
2002, \$69.99, 14.8%

Deeply shaded purple core, fairly trim throughout, all the way to the bright white still dark red to ruby rims. Mint, eucalyptus and sweet baking spices fill up the nose, underneath there's a hard foundation of beef jerky and wet leather, the minerality pairs well with the dry orange zest, impressive density in the black currant, black cherry scents, the oak is very focused and not distracting. Medium-bodied, very spicy as here the oak takes on a high-toned toast and clove spice dimension. Touch green at first, then minerality and dried earth take over. The red cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit gets a boost from the zingy orange to lemon citrus accents. The tannins are burred down to a smooth plane, the acidity does help to clean up the finish. Not that splashy, more admirably solid. 90

Campion
Monterey County, Santa Lucia Highlands
Pinot Noir
2001, \$25.99, 14.0%

Very light orange-inflected garnet color, highly reflective and attractively crystal clear. Smoke, cedar, clove and earth flutter through the nose, the charm comes from the ripe candied red cherry, strawberry, red raspberry scents, betrays minimal oak influence, more earth and wet

grasses to be had. Light to medium-bodied, very sturdily built just not trying to knock you over with it. Slight dried fruit nature, but not sugary, in the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, nothing to the detriment of a strong tingling sensation persisting throughout. Ample lemon and orange citrus with those meadow grasses, earth and leather. The acidity is firm as a rock without being out for blood. Suggests a peppery dimension, quite the lively one through to the stop-on-a-dime finish. A very drinkable Pinot that leaves you more refreshed than full. Grapes sourced from Sarmento Vineyard. 90

Altamura
Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$69.99, 14.2%

Glowing jet black core with a glassy surface, begrudgingly turns to magenta-violet at the rims, massive saturation. Plump and youthful nose of syrupy currant, cassis, plum, cherry fruit, you just want to wade on into it, orange peel, eucalyptus, stone and clay accents, finally a shock of buttered popcorn escapes through. Full-bodied, voluptuously primary right now, milk chocolate and caramel crisp engage seamlessly with the opulent currant, blackberry, cherry fruit. Nothing sloppy here, lemon citrus, fresh cedar, wood smoke, pine and menthol pry open the mid-palate, more than enough tannins and acidity to ensure you're not gonna call it airy. The underlying earthiness, minerality and tobacco leaf give it more bass notes and help it rumble forward just a little bit further. Has spent some time in the gym but will improve and build on those muscles. 90

Margerum
Santa Ynez Valley, Alondra De Los Prados Vineyard
Syrah
2003, \$51.99, 14.5%

Not fully opaque but the ruby-purple color extends fully and only reluctantly turns to a deep red-magenta at the rims. The nose is salty and minerally at first before expanding into flowers and caramel, the cassis, blackberry, currant fruit scents substantial and syrupy. Full-bodied, ratchets up the sappiness even more in the mouth, just about has the consistency of Elmer's glue. Toffee, caramel, sweet vanilla ice cream blend with the extracted currant, blackberry, plum fruit for a bowling ball in your belly effect. Uncooked bacon, hothouse flowers and brown sugar tones maintain the general theme. The acidity is subtly there and the tannins manage to survive until the finish. Tightens up some at the end, hard to tell if this is a conscious move or not. 89

Edmunds St. John
Regional Blend, Rocks and Gravel
Blend
2003, \$21.99, 14.1%

Plenty of clarity in the scarlet to blood red to violet core, excellent surface shine, remains mostly crimson around the rims. Fresh, juicy nose of red cherry, apple, raspberry fruit, dusty stones and dried earth, freshly tanned belt leather, lemon juice, no tricks just pure expression of youthful fruit. Medium-bodied with a firm tannic backbone, highly perfumed with floral and orange/lemon zest. Energetic bounce in the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry, blackberry fruit, keeps moving around your mouth. Leather, earth, pebbles and dried tar all make appearances, takes on a woolly texture over time. Gains some mooring from light cocoa and toffee notes. Solid

without any unnecessary flash or fireworks. 35% Grenache, 35% Syrah, 30% Mourvèdre. Sourced from Rozet Vineyard (Paso Robles), Parmalee-Hill Vineyard (Sonoma Valley), Wylie and Fenaughty Vineyards (El Dorado County). 89

Campion
Edna Valley
Pinot Noir
2001, \$36.99, 13.8%

Pretty watermelon pink to trim ruby in color, richer at the core but fairly consistent throughout. Soft coating of molasses and candied oranges on the nose, generously perfumed raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit, dusty allspice and nutmeg accents, finishes with a forcefully developing meatiness. Full-bodied, possessed of strong supporting tannins and acidity without sacrificing the suppleness in the ripe red cherry, raspberry, blackberry, watermelon fruit, pleasingly long and persistent. The earth, mineral and grass elements all feel ground together into clumps. Palpable orange and lemon peel appear mostly during the back half. Firm as a steel beam on the finish, a peppery quality builds and builds. Dense denouement, the stain doesn't rub out easily of your tongue. Grapes sourced from Firepeak Vineyard. 89

Pine Ridge
Napa Valley, Stags Leap District
Cabernet Sauvignon
2001, \$72.99, 14.3%

Pulls out all the stops to achieve richness in the red-purple core, broad scarlet to youthful brick red rims. Affably open-knit nose, polished currant, black cherry to plum fruit, suggests fluffy lavender and orange citrus, subdued caramel and oak toast, prolonged presence. Full-bodied, appears very conscious of itself at all times, takes pains not to offend. Firm creaminess, no real oak bomb, presents leather, minerals, sweet smoke, and lemon peel to gain credibility. Leans on the primary side of things, consistent appeal in the blackberry, cherry, red currant fruit. Tannins come off as a bit powdery and then green, not fully natural. Florality and pine notes please, can't deny it tastes like a Cabernet Sauvignon. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Petit Verdot, 3% Malbec, 1% Cabernet Franc. 88

DuNah
Sonoma Valley, Sonoma Coast, Sangiacomo Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2002, \$49.99, 14.3%

Spotless, consistent red-ruby to light scarlet in color, touch more garnet at the rims. Little hint of earth or leather in the nose but the caramel scents most dominant, probably because of the subdued nature of the orange spice and ginger, same thing goes for the pretty raspberry, blackberry scents, just too delicate to achieve balance with the oak. Medium-bodied, more high-toned in the mouth, the caramel and vanilla restricted to the entry into your mouth and thereabouts. Pleasing bite in the spice and orange/lemon zest, matches up nicely with the hint of raisin in the cherry, blackberry fruit. Nothing remarkable about the tannins nor acidity but it feels structured. Unforced length, lets you soak in it as long as you are willing. Splits the difference between blockbuster and restraint. 88

Cornerstone
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$84.99, 14.5%

Unblemished, deep red-purple core, brighter red-garnet at the rims with an incipient orange tinge. Real dusty nose of country road dirt, cedar, bell pepper, tobacco ash, softened by a brief caramel/vanilla swirl, while there's a round fullness in the currant, black cherry scents it is not concentrated in terms of juiciness, ends on a clipped note. Medium-bodied, the acidity runs through it well and adds skip to the steps of the flavors, especially the bell pepper, cut grass, lemon peel and white minerality. The tannins are tightly grained, hard to permeate and draw into the assemblage. Good sweetness in the cherry, blackberry fruit core, has enough menthol and sweet cedar as support. As it finishes the caramel and toffee really come out, more in terms of perfume than foundation. real young and tight, needs 4-5 years of aging easy. Grapes sourced from Heitz Ink Grade Vineyard, Neal Family Vineyard. 88

Campion
Napa Valley, Los Carneros
Pinot Noir
2001, \$36.99, 13.6%

Pale and almost pinkish ruby core, very shiny, fades some at the rims. Serene nose of raspberry, strawberry fruit, lemon peel, clay, brown earth, meadow scrub, intimation of nutmeg and clove, moves slowly and steadily through your nostrils, ends with a sprig of mint. Medium-bodied, has good grip with just enough sappiness to coat your cheeks. Orange to lemon citrus and a measure of grassiness give it snap, the acidity grabs and brightens the raspberry, red cherry fruit so that the latter never loses its tight candied core. The tannins are fine but build up quickly with each sip. Presents rawhide, stones and forest kindling smoke, scrubs against your tongue insistently until your mouth is wide awake. Rides through your palate like a jeep that will need new shock absorbers sooner rather than later. Grapes primarily sourced from Stanley Ranch Vineyards. 88

Cain
Napa Valley, Cain Five
Blend
2001, \$89.99, 14.2%

Virtually opaque purple core, maintains its density through to the pink-tinged magenta rims, healthy glow to it. The nose falls somewhat short of integration, the popcorn and buttered white toast notes are offputting so that you don't register as much of the orange citrus and eucalyptus as you might, soft black currant, cherry fruit reluctant to make a statement, some herbaceous notes add more befuddlement. Full-bodied, a bit more confident and with clarity of purpose in the mouth. Traces of bell pepper at first, swallowed by the butter cream and popcorn notes. Leather, dried beef, shoe polish, minerals and brown earth certain to please, add breadth to the flavor array. Sneaky tannins, no muscle bound brute but pulls its weight. Finishes with an orange citrus, floral sparkle. More convincing with each additional sip but still hard to fully pull the trigger on it. 52% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Petit Verdot, 14% Cabernet Franc, 9% Merlot, 5% Malbec. 88

Amethyst
Napa Valley, Vinalia
Blend
1999, \$18.99, 13.0%

Attractively maturing appearance, presents plenty of reflections through the medicinal red to garnet core, very broad orange to red brick rims, noticeable clarity. Crushed roses and leather in the nose, clingy texture to the raspberry, blackberry fruit, broken up some by pine, lemon citrus, the oak has dried out a bit but is there if you want to look for it. Medium-bodied, lets that Sangiovese shine through with a solid spine of acidity, keeps it bright even as it displays a light raisinated quality in the raspberry, red cherry, almost strawberry fruit. Never too deep but broad selection of pine, rose water, leather, tar, lemon to orange citrus, minerals. Has taken its 40th birthday with a gracefully broad smile, drinking in its sweet spot now. Nice square finish, no punisher but has an extra gear. 80% Nebbiolo, 20% Sangiovese. 88

Altamura
Napa Valley
Sangiovese

2002, \$37.99, 14.2%

Good coordination as the purple core turns to scarlet and then further out red-ruby, offers both shine and depth. Given the calm demeanor of the orange citrus, flowers and leather scents, the alcohol able to mildly destabilize the nose, regains itself with raspberry and blackberry fruit and a brief blast of toasty oak crunch. Full-bodied, friendly and likely to crack a bad joke at laugh at the fact, just wants to fit in. Little shy about it, little flashy about it, hits you with lemon/orange citrus, mocha crisp and warm toast, violets and lavender, red earth and leather and lets you choose what you like best. Tannins juts a touch underripe, not enough to take the hard candy edge off of the raspberry, red cherry fruit. Wants a bit more structure than it really should. 88

Samsara Wine Company
Santa Barbara County, Verna's Vineyard
Syrah

2004, \$39.99, 15.2%

Dark purple core, holds its density through to the ruby to dark magenta rims, above average shine. Sweet core of jammy raspberry, blackberry, blueberry fruit sets the tempo in the nose, finds able dancing partners in the cocoa crisp, beef jerky, orange peel and wet flower scents, while absolutely concentrated it doesn't unduly tax your nostrils. Medium to full-bodied, burdened down with clove and ginger spice to the point of bursting into fire, shows a baked ham to fresh game meatiness, when florality joins in a real dewy inner mouth perfume accrues. Solid patina of vanilla, chocolate and toffee oak flavors elbow in with time. Little tannins to speak of but the acidity makes some squeaking noises. The black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit has more weight than flavor, feels gravity's pull. Gets hard to sip after awhile, your tongue's muscles get stiff and worn. 92% Syrah, 8% Viognier. 87

Margerum
Santa Ynez Valley, Vogelzang Vineyard
Syrah

2003, \$51.99, 14.5%

Touch of cloud in the deep violet core, budges slightly into thick ruby-magenta rims, impressive depth. Leather, shoe polish, vanilla crisp and toast along with a candied florality show first in the nose, then a touch of mint, milk chocolate to get more agreeable, oakiness takes control just as the ripe black cherry, currant, blackberry fruit starts to blossom. Full-bodied yet without undue heaviness, no glider yet not really ponderous either. Flowers, lemon citrus, mint

shades are counterbalanced by that same leather, shoe polish, tobacco thing, when you factor in the hefty vanilla cream and bubbly caramel you're not sure what it wants you to think about it. Blueberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit has flash but not that much depth, mostly immediate effect and gratification. Much better acidity than tannins. Gets filmy and a bit artificial near the finish, takes on a plastic feel. If it doesn't get to you quick and make a positive impression chances are it won't later. 87

Inman Family
Russian River Valley, Olivet Grange Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2003, \$44.99, 14.0%

Consistent red-ruby, on the whole trim but hints at some cloud, becomes a touch more magenta at the rims. Sweet but not sappy nose, good shape in the cherry, raspberry, cranberry scents, minor notes of orange peel, grass and stone are somehow able to imbue it with a well-delineated dissolve in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, subtle tannins begin working early, dry from the very start. Earth, minerals, tree bark and loam give it a nice erect bearing, firm skeleton for the understated cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, lightly candied for a brightening effect. The acidity comes on after awhile, draws out a little more orange zest and florality. Pleasing for how it remains humble, yet by the same token, a little too short to really make a stronger statement. 87

CORE

Santa Barbara County, Blend 442

Blend

2003, \$29.99, 14.5%

Semi-filmy ruby to magenta in color, very even from core to rims. Sugary sweet, baked fruit pie of a nose, the raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit infused with an orange reduction, alludes to earth or game but it never develops, just audacious fruit to be had, albeit not overly oaky. Medium-bodied, the acidity makes an early statement and it's a good thing as the jammy quality of that raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit cannot be held off for long. Candied orange peel, sweet garden herbs, mocha and vanilla extract follow on this, takes a decided turn towards a cleaner profile past the mid-palate as a noticeable minerality kicks in. Floral and minty, so it ends on a nice flighty note. Spiciness adds grip so it doesn't totally fly off. A real crowd pleaser. 44% Mourvèdre, 36% Grenache, 20% Syrah. 87

Cloud View
Napa Valley
Blend

2002, \$65.99, 14.5%

Deeply layered red-purple color, maintains its intensity fully to the rims and then some. Very sweet nose of smoke, tobacco leaf, earth and desert brush, extremely ripe if sedate plum, black cherry, black currant scents, pinch of cinnamon, really balloons in your nostrils. Full-bodied, right off of the bat shows alcoholic heat. Hits you with more of that sappy ripeness in the blackberry, black cherry fruit with healthy helpings of caramel, molasses crisp and vanilla cream. The tannins are rugged and not entirely in harmony with the whole. Sorts through flavors of cinnamon, lemon peel, earth and grass with some lighter tobacco and tree bark too. Seems like it is about to get going and then instead grinds to a halt as it passes the mid-palate. Herbal qualities elevate too, makes your tongue feel like its stuck in an electrical socket. Lots of promise,

not quite delivering. 52% Cabernet Sauvignon, 48% Merlot. 87

Luna
Napa Valley
Sangiovese
2002, \$19.99, 14.9%

Clean garnet core that hints at violet, above average shine with ochre-tinged rims. Fresh red cherry, raspberry-driven nose with wildflowers, orange peel and smoke, not overly oaked and actually strikes you as on the demure side. Medium-bodied, even fresher and more bouncy here with a decent peppery kick in the tannins. Orange citrus, meadow scrub and leather throw in their two cents. The acidity does a lot of work during the back half. Momentary hard candy feel in the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit gives it an anchor and more clarity. Slows down near the finish, huffing and puffing. Bitter, almost nutty, conclusion. 84% Sangiovese, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Merlot, 3% Syrah. 86

Bacio Divino
Napa Valley
Blend
2002, \$84.99, 14.1%

Rich, almost velvety purple core, deep without opacity, the dark ruby rims are well saturated. Extracted raspberry, blackberry, strawberry fruit in the nose, orange spice, toasted coconut, vanilla, rose petal extract, stays thick and potent for some time. Full-bodied, feels massaged and rubbed to get maximal flavor from it. The tannins are prominent from the start, powdery and create a very tacky mouth feel. The ripe raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit has a candied feel which extends to the orange and lemon peel tones. Little acidity to be had. The florality is a nice touch, if swallowed up by coconut, popcorn, butter oak flavors. Dusty finish, on the herbal side which brings out a bitter edge. Lacks balance. 66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Petite Sirah, 12% Sangiovese. 86

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars
Napa Valley, Fay Vineyard
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$83.99, 13.8%

Brown to red brick cast in the violet core gives it a medicinal look, nice clarity while remaining full to the rims. Popcorn, butter, caramel displayed in the nose, almost tests your patience, also mint, pine-filled mountain air, wildflowers, solid and not overripe core of cherry, blackberry scents add staying power. Full-bodied, overloaded with creamy oak, fresh butter, popcorn, toffee, burnt toast — the whole oak enchilada. The plummy cherry, currant, blackberry fruit manages to come off as stewed and dried out at once. Flower petals, stone, mountain scrub and earth flavors struggle to give it a hint of typicity. Smoke notes bring out more earthiness but not much. Powdered tannins, there yet lacking in suppleness and ability to frame. Off-balance from the start and unlikely to find it later. 85

St. Amant
Amador County
Tempranillo
2003, \$18.99, 14.8%

Immaculate to the point of transparency while full in the purple colored core, dark scarlet-garnet rims with no loss of hue intensity. Toasted French vanilla in the nose, moderate ripeness in the red cherry, raspberry fruit,

allusion to lemon custard, over time it develops a dusty earthiness. Medium-bodied, much riper and sweeter on the attack with raspberry, blackberry, blueberry fruit. Turns grainy and dry awfully quickly with a bitter edge, mineral and earthy. Adds in some lemon and driftwood notes, might actually benefit weight-wise from more oak cream, especially as it turns dilute past the mid-palate. At the end it's like the stick without the lollipop. Touch too simple. 85

Smoking Loon
Regional Blend, California
Pinot Noir
2004, \$7.99, 13.5%

Very light and transparent violet to red ruby in color, consistent from core to rims. Compact nose of dry spice, leather, plum and cherry fruit, orange citrus, momentary blast of vanilla crunch, real bottom heavy to the point of getting sluggish. Full-bodied, round and juicy, would feel like a water balloon if not for the crisper oak toast and spice. Not herbaceous, more on the smoky side. Heavy extraction going on in the plum, currant, blackberry, cherry fruit. Powdery tannins clump up after awhile, not that acidic at all. Loses its grip on the finish, turns increasingly diffuse. Grapes sourced from Monterey and Mendocino Counties. 84

Laetitia
Arroyo Grande Valley, Estate
Pinot Noir
2003, \$24.99, 14.2%

Clear violet core gives way to broad scarlet-ruby rims, not a blemish in sight. Showing some sulfur in the nose, where's that match, herbal with ripe if sour raspberry, cherry, strawberry scents and ginger spice, tries to impress with weight knowing the scents lack depth. Full-bodied, smoky with a touch of toast, mostly herbaceous and earthy, features sour orange and lemon citrus and a hint of menthol, can't avoid coming off as bitter. The taut raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit dries out after a short while. Pleasing cola touches appear after time, too little, too late to right this listing ship. 84

Pagor
Regional Blend, California, Vino Tinto
Tempranillo
2002, \$15.99,

Very pale crimson to red-brown brick in color, stays more or less consistent to the rims with what it has. Very sugary, super-ripe nose with heavy cream generously spooned in, raisins and dates trump the plum, cherry scents, eventually the oak popcorn covers it all. In the mouth it's light-bodied, if not dilute, with overbearing popcorn, caramel, toffee oak flavors. Suggests tones of orange spice and mint and then plum, cherry, blackberry fruit. Some acidity, no tannins. As in the nose, the oak eventually swallows everything else entirely. An extreme disappointment and best left at that. 81

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Halleck Vineyard
Russian River Valley, Piner Creek Ranch
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$29.99, 14.3%

White to yellow straw in hue, for as light in color as it is presents a good deal of translucency. Full, stuffed grassy nose, gets up in there with little delay to deliver minerals,

lemon to orange zest, mint, pear, peach, apple, kiwi fruit, even a touch of gooseberry, extends presence very well. Full-bodied, proudly saturates your palate with a coat of primer and two coats of paint. Lively white to pink grapefruit, lemon, lime citrus activates your tongue before it smoothes out with mint and herb accents. Glides into pear, apple, peach, apricot, melon fruit and a light dusting of minerality. Almost nods at cedar or sage at moments. The acidity most like a water jet, forceful but dissolves when it hits something. Polychromatic finish of uncommon length, nice job of cleansing your palate without leaving it raw. 91

Vision Cellars
Regional Blend, California
Blend

2004, \$19.99, 14.1%

Faint yellow gold color, a bit too transparent to create a lot of shine but does gain depth from its green tinge. Strong, penetrating toast in the nose, yields to pineapple, nectarine, papaya, apricot fruit scents as well as lemon and pink grapefruit citrus, very lively and not too juicy, virtually all fruit though. Full-bodied, in the mouth the pink grapefruit is more prominent, supported by lemon and lime notes too. Plenty toasty, minimal creaminess, the admirably strong acidity ensures that. Zesty pineapple, peach, nectarine, apricot, red apple fruit, not too sweet and with lots of thrust. Maybe shows some light minerality but that's that. Mouthwash-long finish. 70% Sauvignon Blanc (Napa Valley), 30% Pinot Gris (Santa Lucia Highlands). 90

Havens
Napa Valley, Carneros
Albariño

2003, \$27.99, 12.5%

Very transparent green-gold in color, hardly any hue at all but does present a high degree of prismatic gleam. Richly honeyed nose, while sweet it's in no way heavy, strong orange blossom, mint notes as well as pear, peach, apricot fruit, a real nostril full. Full-bodied in terms of super-structure but not weight per se, while it keeps its feet on the ground, its gaze is on the sky. Much dried than the nose, the acidity rolls over your tongue and leaves it tacky and sticky. The honey aspect remains but it has plenty of angles in the orange/lemon citrus and flowers, produces a nice white mineral sparkle too. Almost hints at rubber at times. The pear, peach, red apple fruit is wiry and brisk of pace, plenty of lean muscles flexing. Just an enjoyable wine to drink now and then. 90

Folie à Deux
Regional Blend, Ménéage à Trois
Blend

2003, \$13.99, 12.5%

Presents a reflectively transparent green-gold color, loses most of its hue at the rims. Tropical nose of pineapple, nectarine, apricot, mango, melon fruit, mint and orange blossom, the perfume is bottom heavy and without much lift yet pure enough given its weight. Full-bodied, the acidity does a credible job of restraining the juice in the apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit, keeps the flavors and loses the sugar. The tangerine, orange, white grapefruit zest has good kick too, actually outdistances the abundant florality. Its fullness is maintained through the finish, stays fat and firm. Vivid throughout if not terribly complex, does

everything it does do really well. Unspecified percentages of Moscato, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc. 88

Edmunds St. John
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Tablas Creek
Vineyard

Roussanne
2004, \$35.99, 14.5%

Yellow straw in color, shows traces of fizz, dense throughout but really nothing to catch your gaze. Brawny nose, been in the gym but not sure why, very nutty, lemon-honey, minerals achieve a smoky character, durable peach, apricot, pear fruit, while no one element leaps out at you as a whole presents a formidable opponent. Full-bodied, could seem sluggish at first but really just taking its time. Attractive bitter edge brings out the nuttiness as well as the lemon, orange citrus, the honey touch a freebie bonus. The acidity might be dismissed beforehand but it works your mid-section with determination. The pear, melon, peach, apricot fruit stays within the realm of what you'd expect, competency over ability to surprise. Sticks with you real well. 87

Amethyst
Napa Valley, Los Carneros

Pinot Grigio
2004, \$18.99, 14.3%

Light glowing green straw color with a noticeable shine, lots of sparkle despite its transparency. Prolonged floral perfume with a sweet zest in the lemon/lime citrus scents, the ripe peach, apricot, pear, green apple fruit has a supporting creaminess, ends with a note of mint leaf. Medium-bodied, soft and supple enough to coat your mouth, clings nicely. Spicy but creamy as well. Not acidic per se yet does stay dry enough, if with traces of alcoholic heat. The juicy tangerine to lemon citrus keeps the palate scrubbed too. However ripe the peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit comes up just a touch short. Again, the heat impairs some of its gentleness during the finish. 87

Margerum
Santa Barbara County, Alisos Vineyard
Pinot Gris

2004, \$23.99,

Neat pale yellow straw color, pretty washed out on the whole, while reflective there's not a lot of hue, does display a touch of fizz. Super-streamlined nose of pear, peach skin, dried apples, lemon peel, stream water, dusty white minerals, smoky, if it can't be expressed concisely and quickly it won't be expressed at all. Full-bodied sheerly on the merits of its weight and texture not depth of flavors. While shows distinct notes of honey, beeswax and lemon peel, in no way sweet, More floral and driven by mineral water than fruit, frugal apple, pear, peach. Turns attenuated by the mid-palate, gets points for its focus but, damn, there has to be some flavors to hang your hat on. Unfortunate watery finish. 84

WASHINGTON WHITE

Seven Hills
Columbia Valley
Viognier

2004, \$20.99, 13.8%

The fat golden color runs straight to the rims, decent surface shine but most attractive for its depth. Creamy nose with honeysuckle, orange blossom, sweet spices, mint leaf, the ripe peach, apricot, pear fruit scents reach

fruit cocktail concentration, enveloping. Full-bodied, juicy and plush with a shock of clove spice, the tangerine and orange citrus have a creamsicle feel. The damp florality pushes things to verge of cloying sweetness, sweet herbs, minimal acidity. Climbs to the rooftop and exclaims the virtues of its syrupy apricot, peach, pear melon fruit across the city. Minerals and flint come out over time but little going to challenge that fruit. Relentless bear hug of, yes, fruit. "Over the top" doesn't do it justice, if you like them big it's for you. 87

OREGON RED

Saint Innocent
Willamette Valley, White Rose Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2003, \$39.99, 13.9%

Full, dense ruby-purple color yet clear as a bell, maintains its hue intensity right to the rims. Big, round core of sweet strawberry, red raspberry fruit in the nose, supplemented ably by wood smoke, grilled meats and leather, even with only soft touches of orange citrus and flowers it achieves lift. Medium-bodied, cleanly-structured, you can feel the beams and girders but it also has pliancy and yields willingly. Sweet lemon/orange citrus and a pinch of brown sugar bring out a friendly feel in the raspberry, blackberry fruit, unforced purity. While more primary here, offers suitable earth, forest floor herbaceousness and leather. Gets softened some by a mild foundation of vanilla cream but the acidity should not be underestimated. Excellent integration and natural length. 91

Saint Innocent
Willamette Valley, Temperance Hill Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2003, \$24.99, 13.9%

Clear and reflective, light violet to darker red-ruby in color, fully hued rims. Some fresh butter on the nose but mainly driven by smokiness and wet animal fur, wonderfully rugged profile, touch of orange blossom than a good slug of cherry, black raspberry fruit. Medium-bodied, extremely focused with aggressive acidity and tannins, first releases cut grass, minerals and orange spice to set you back on your heels. Too tightly wound for the red cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit to extend much, it's there just not budging. Begins to get peppery on the back end, this fits in well with its noble savage appeal. Pressed flowers and lemon/orange peel are the last things your tongue register before it goes numb. 90

Archery Summit
Willamette Valley, Arcus Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2002, \$74.99, 14.2%

Sparkling ruby-violet color, quite brilliant, harmonious through to the red-tinged rims. The nose lacks depth but does present a very sweet core of candied raspberry, blackberry fruit, serious cola too, very light earth and orange peel, given its relative lack of scents does have lots of textural lift. Medium-bodied, compact and somewhat folded in on itself during the entry. Remains bound up some but offers cola, heather, orange peel, brown earth, clay aspects. Clove and nutmeg spice pokes through the tannins at points, lets the raspberry, blackberry, sour cherry fruit bubble through. Tightness restricts its length, not an inherent nor permanent flaw, more indicative of its current state. Squarish after images as it ends, the spike in game and leather flavors is nice. 88

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Cristom
Willamette Valley, Mt. Jefferson Cuvée
Pinot Noir
2003, \$27.99, 14.5%

Light, highly reflective ruby to violet color, gracefully consistent through to the rims. You get buttered popcorn and fried vanilla ice cream in the nose, ripe and almost candied raspberry, strawberry scents, brushes of smoke and orange citrus but keeps the spotlight on the fruit. Medium-bodied, enters into the mouth at a flat angle, more or less parallel to the ground. Smoky and leathery, fumes start to build up and lift however it truly has the textural consistency of freshly whipped butter. Ginger-led spiciness and toast tend to cast a shadow over the red cherry, raspberry fruit albeit the oak is creamier at first and coats the mouth before it crispens up by degrees as it sits. The acidity comes in fits and coughs until the whole package throws its shoulders across the finish line. 87

Archery Summit
Willamette Valley, Premier Cuvée
Pinot Noir
2003, \$39.99, 14.4%

Robust scarlet-violet in color, the richness in the puce to magenta rims sucks out a lot of the surface shine. In spite of the pungency of the blackberry, cherry scents and sharp edge in the spice and mountain air freshness, the alcohol throws things off, muddies the intonation of the orange/lemon citrus and flower petals, stunts it overall too. Full-bodied with a sappy viscosity that is in a race with the tannins to strangle your tongue. Herbal with muter notes of earth, cola and tomato skin, there appears to be a bright orange citrus component that is masked by those tannins. The raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit stern and forceful out of necessity, it's survival of the fittest out there. Pulls up some past the center, the florality and leather waits a little too long to make an appearance. 87

OREGON WHITE

King Estate
Willamette Valley, Oregon
Pinot Gris
2003, \$13.99, 13.0%

Fully transparent green-white straw color, about average degree of reflectivity. Lemony with a touch of honey to the yellow apple, pear, peach fruit and orange citrus, fresh but super-heavy with no lift. Medium-bodied, on the sweet side during the attack, not honeyed per se. Solid dose of lemon juice with an additional spritz of lime. The red apple, pear, peach fruit possesses good contours and does have an erect posture. The acidity is not razor sharp but not too blunt either, gets it rolling forward well enough. Real dry finish, finds itself on the edge of turning chewy. 87

FRANCE RED

Grange des Pères, Domaine de La
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault
Blend
2002, \$69.99, 13.5%

Orange-tinged crimson to brick red in color, very clear, slight medicinal cast, duller crimson at rims. Real nice earthy, grassy stink in the nose, hot garbage bag full of mown grass, with dried oranges, white grapefruit pith, shoe leather, tar, tanned animal hide, mesquite smoked cherry, blackberry, cranberry scents, rugged while

remaining openly accessible. In the mouth it attacks your palate like an angry hun, medium-bodied yet intent on sacking, pillaging and burning down whatever it can't cart off. Zesty orange, lemon, white grapefruit citrus with lively leather, tar, merde, minerally earth components, floral too. The cut to the flavors is so fine that you'd be dead before you knew you were bleeding to death. Immensely smoky, slowly wafts up to push against your mouth roof. Wide-eyed and aggressive currant, cherry, blackberry fruit that has Arnold-sized muscles and a sour bite a gila monster would be proud of. Vociferous acidity kindles the fire and ensures there's no time to relax. Unstoppable. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Mourvèdre. 92

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Cuvée Traditionnelle Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2004, \$14.99, 12.0%

Slight cloud to the ruby-violet color, adds a layered effect, becomes more red-magenta in hue at it approaches the rims. Open, fruity nose of strawberry, cherry, raspberry scents, nice and smiley with good density too, notes of orange, cocoa, flowers, cinnamon, easy to access and soak in. Full-bodied, big and round so that you can really enjoy every sip yet not to the detriment of the fine acidic spine and composed integration. The savory red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit is lively and deep, stays with you like a shadow. Sunshine shows in the tangerine, lemon citrus as well as in the meadow flowers and warmed minerals, stones. Keeps up its intensity and will do whatever it takes to make sure your needs are met. Has the boldness born of youth, almost doesn't know it isn't supposed to be this good. A real joy that gets you equally thinking about and basking in it. 90

Réméjeanne, Domaine La
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Les Arbousiers
Blend
2004, \$17.99, 14.0%

Extremely consistent ruby-purple color, heavy glow throughout, brightens to a deep magenta at the rims. Youthfully violet-driven nose, sour appeal to the cherry, currant, plum scents, while super thick not syrupy, suggests earth or leather but so plum at the moment it has not settled into itself yet. Full-bodied, very forward in how it soaks into each and every mouth pore, settles in like it owns the deed to the ranch. Full of violets, garrigues, orange peel and honey, gets you very warm and fuzzy before the tannins build up steam and make their presence known. Good shape in the black cherry, blackberry fruit, has a great deal for you to suck on while also restraining its exuberance to an acceptably consistent level. Stays perfumed throughout, gives it a pleasing swirling feel. Very enjoyable, knows exactly what you want before you do. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah. 90

Brun, Jean-Paul
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Terres Dorées
Gamay Noir
2004, \$17.99, 12.0%

More intense red-ruby than violet in color, immaculate clarity and depth of hue, minor magenta tinge at rims, looks like a block of colored glass. While there's textural fullness in the nose, the zippy edge in the tart red cherry, strawberry, raspberry, green apple scents spring upwards, reluctant to return earthward, strong

herbaceous component with noticeable mineral, stone farm earth dimension, will stand at attention as long as you require. Medium-bodied with a great deal of density for the amount of weight. The tannins are formidable and alongside the acidity make this one very dry wine. This is not to underestimate the sweet core in the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, in no way underfruited. Lemon peel, chalk and white stones abound, holds tenaciously to its herbaceous side too. Doggedly long finish, like chewing on gristle. 90

Bressy-Masson, Domaine (Marie-France)
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône Villages Rasteau, Cuvée Paul Emile
Blend
2001, \$17.99, 14.0%

Red-violet to brick red in color, attractive clarity with some lightening to flat ruby-crimson rims. Billowy nose, very floral, touch of powdered white sugar, very concentrated and sweet raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, still quite primary, floods your nostrils. Full-bodied, expressively expansive, just bounds into your mouth with joy. Violets, lilacs, sweet lemon to orange citrus, more interested in developing airy aspects than any more brooding leather or earth. The tannins are finely grained and unobtrusive, do their job without fuss. Maybe a smattering of cocoa powder but entirely in step. Slowly oozes through your mouth, hugging each curve with wanton attention. Works overtime to make sure you're a satisfied customer. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah. 90

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent, Rochgrès
Gamay Noir
2004, \$23.99, 12.5%

Light, clear reddish ruby in color, fairly transparent with a magenta glow at the rims. High degree of herbaceousness in the nose, crispens and focuses it, lots of mineral dust, the earthiness wits a few ticks and then covers over the core of candied cherry, raspberry scents, has a hint of mint or licorice at the penultimate moment before the dissolve. Full-bodied with good spread in the mouth, steady fluidity while the structure remains evident throughout. The orange and lemon citrus adds a resonant tang, nice counterpoint to the abundant grassiness and earthiness. More hard candy sweetness in the cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit gives it a center but not much breadth. Bit by bit it relents and yields more, parceling out spoonfuls of pleasure. Nice subtle smokiness builds over time so that it gets more complex by the finish. Clamps down at the end with authority but forgiving grace too, stern but fair. 89

Bastide Blanche, La
Provence, Bandol
Blend
2001, \$24.99, 14.5%

Heavy and cloudy opaque garnet to orange hued violet core, aggressively colored, crimson to red-orange brick colored rims which flaunt their depth. Merde, earth, leather kick up a dust in the nose, the garrigues and wildflowers and orange citrus coax the cherry, blackberry scents out of hiding, sticks itself up in there and defies anyone to get it out. Solid mouth entry, framed like its ready for any gale force that might come its way, leans into you expecting a fight. Thickly arrayed orange to lemon citrus, wildflower, stone aspects, licorice and mint do what they can to pretty up the red currant, cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, juicy but really under the thumb of its overarching structure at the present. Smoky, leathery

denouement, digs deeper and deeper into itself. So primary now hard to fully predict where it will go but it's a wild ride right now. Unspecified percentages of Mourvèdre, Grenache, Syrah. 89

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Fleurie, Poncié
Gamay Noir
2004, \$21.99, 12.5%

Crystal clear, pure ruby color, sparkles in the glass, drops off a little to a softly luminescent magenta at the rims. Really earthy nose, bundles of straw and hay, sour raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit, light orange zest, has this rolling gait like there's a hamster on a treadmill in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, while more accessible in the mouth with a fetchingly sweet core of cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, it takes pains to ensure that the grassiness and dry earth remain in the forefront and no "vin de garde" feel is lost. The lemon peel is powdered with sugar but the mineral water component trumps this with authority. Heavy fumes, you can feel it in your mouth when you breathe out. The acidity is blockish and leans hard into you, you have to lean back to prop it up. Has a mature, confident feel about it as it finishes, like it has been through the drill before. 88

Robin, Domaine Gilles
Rhône, Crozes Hermitage, Cuvée Albéric Bouvet
Syrah
2003, \$28.99, 13.5%

Deep purple core, nice density and while trim moves to masculine dark ruby colored rims. Leather, dried beef, orange peel, wet smoke, minerals when combined with thick currant, plum scents, make the nose move on the slow side, not all that inclined to shift about. Full-bodied, borderline syrupy, only the acidity brings it back into focus and restrains the plum, currant, black cherry fruit, juicy but thankfully not overly sugary. The orange and lemon citrus is juicy too, right now too fresh to emphasize the leather, earth, tar, hay components. Primary and not chock full of verve, doesn't lay there but could use a little more spunk. That said, so attractively forward and lush you really can't help but enjoy it even if not the most traditional of presentations. Drink it now and relax. 88

Robin, Domaine Gilles
Rhône, Crozes Hermitage, Papillon
Syrah
2004, \$20.99, 12.5%

Light, if consistent, red-violet color, more ruby at the rims, moderate reflectivity. Juicy cherry, blackberry fruit appears in the nose, then damp earth, olive pit, herbal matter, dried orange peels, derives a smoky lift after some time, stays in there well. Medium-bodied, lush and fluid, spreads out easily and with minimal turbulence. With leather, tar, tree bark, tobacco, cut grass, lemon peel it hits you with all the things you expect and want. Sheds a lot of weight as it progresses through the mouth, gets streamlined and picks up speed. The acidity is fine, nudges it forward incrementally. More orange citrus tones as it nears the end, bright zest in the red cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit without losing that olive, light game edge. Easygoing and quaffable. 88

"La Garrigue," Domaine
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Cuvée Romaine
Grenache
2003, \$12.99, 13.5%

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Ruby-violet in color, high level of clarity, more pure scarlet red at the rims. Very meaty, bloody, leathery, earthy nose, super-ripe to candied raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit with both a floral dusting and milk chocolate residue, satisfactorily full. Medium-bodied, fairly streamlined, fast pacing through the mouth — wind sweeps its hair back. Floral and even more chocolaty than the nose, steady fullness while at the same time letting the acidity out to play. The orange and lemon sparkle mutates into leather, damp earth, mushroom notes. The tannins build up near the finish, keep framing the picture. Nice grip, its strong fingers hold your attention. A very pleasant surprise. 88

Gallet, Henri et Philippe
Rhône, Côte-Rôtie
Syrah
2003, \$59.99, 12.5%

The dark purple core holds its clarity while rejecting most light, the fully hued ruby to violet rims barely suggest a change. Great deal of density to the nose, maybe too much, very meaty and gamey with some floral swipes, then earth and white grapefruit citrus, minimal lift, especially as the richly endowed currant, cherry, plum scents spread out. Full-bodied, very spicy with a strong clove aspect, the orange and white grapefruit citrus, leather, tobacco, tar flavors jump all over your tongue like a gang of teenaged thugs. The acidity is able to stick in there while the more drying than supple tannins have to work a little harder to find a place, good structure throughout. Bacon fat, game, green olives, glimmer of caramel, stays honest and hard-working. The currant, cherry, blackberry fruit nimble and keeps you also on your toes. The finish is somewhat truncated but its energy crackles well. 95% Syrah, 5% Viognier. 88

Bouland, Daniel
Beaujolais, Morgon, Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Very light and clear red-garnet in color, noticeable orange tinge, washed out magenta at the rims. Fluffy strawberry, raspberry nose anchored by a certain earthiness with violets, touch of grass and lemon peel but really subtly primary at the moment. Light-bodied, fluid and polished, knows it needs to highlight the angular tannins to be taken seriously and does so. Lemon and lime citrus put life into it, the florality smoothes it out some. Good active posture, spicy with a prominent mineral kick too. Delineated but not taut raspberry, cherry fruit, swings hard at first and then settles down into a more regular breathing pattern. Subtle, collected finish which continues to highlight the florality while maintaining a solid bottom. For all its structure, has a "gentle giant" touch. 88

Potel, Nicolas
Burgundy, Savigny-Les-Beaune, Vieilles Vignes
Pinot Noir
2003, \$29.99, 13.0%

Immaculate, light red-violet core, purer ruby to magenta rims, very integrated. Earthy, mineral nose that yields to a candied core of raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit, lemon peel and tar complete the brief array of deep, not wide, scents. Medium-bodied, doesn't have the strongest grip but it shows able persistence throughout, dusty tannins and a quiet shock of acidity help. Again, there's noticeable sweetness in the cherry, red raspberry fruit if not a huge, attention grabbing presence. Nicely floral with a stable beam of lemon citrus too. The earthy, grassy

qualities really take charge during the mid-palate. Starts to blur near the finish but has lots of momentum built up which gets it past the finish line. Be ready to masticate as you drink it. 87

Pépière, Domaine de la
Loire, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France, Cuvée Granit
Blend

2004, \$9.99, 12.0%

Immaculate violet to ruby color, cut from whole cloth until a turn to glowing magenta at the rims. Richly endowed nose, super-sour raspberry, cherry, currant fruit, violets and lavender, tart lemons, earth, while it fills your nostrils it makes you want to shake it out too. Full-bodied, smoky, leathery, earthy with a swipe of bell pepper for good measure. Then it elevates the tobacco, wet grass and additional herbaceous aspects. Firm acidity and firm tannins equals firm wine. No lack of sour bite in the currant, red cherry, blackberry fruit, wakes you right up. Stays chewy through the finish, orange citrus, not all that interested in your enjoyment. Floral, some openness but really wants to bruise your esophagus. Not that bad but could be a little more understanding of your needs. 33% Cabernet Franc, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Cot, 2% Petite Verdot. 87

Prieur, Clos du
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc
Blend

2001, \$16.99, 14.5%

While clear and unblemished, still mostly opaque in its purple core, wide medicinal red to burnt crimson rims. Dense and fruity nose of plum, cassis, cherry scents, not sure how but makes room for allspice, nutmeg notes, shades of French Toast and maple syrup, that's it. Fat and full-bodied, it's so soft in texture that this unfortunately highlights the alcohol. Tosses sweet spices and toffee in your eyes, the obvious extraction in the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit not enough to get it much past the mid-palate. The big corner in the corner beat the shit out of the tannins, must have spooked the acidity off too. Orange citrus, bitter herbs and menthol make perfunctory appearances. Tries to affect an aged, wise gaze but not if you look it in the eye. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Grenache, Carignan. 86

Jaboulet Isnard
Rhône, Côtes du Ventoux
Blend

2003, \$8.99, 13.5%

Crystal clear with a tiny violet core, surrounded by a pool of glowing ruby with a magenta aura. Candied cherry, watermelon, raspberry scents bloom in the nose, smells like the syrup counter at an iHop, touch of menthol, has an open field herbal quality of thistle, grasses and weeds, nothing else going on. Medium-bodied, very juicy and accessible but just about when the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is ready to truly burst into song the tannins clumsily lurch forward like The Donger in the movie Sixteen Candles. Presents a powdering of cocoa, mostly covers up any green notes. Grinds it through the finish, shaking it like your aunt at your sister's wedding to "Dancing in the Streets." 75% Grenache, 10% Syrah, 10% Cinsault, 5% Mourvèdre. 85

Grands Bois, Domaine Les
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône, Cuvée Les Trois Soeurs
Blend

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2004, \$13.99, 13.5%

Red-ruby to violet at the core, good depth of hue with full clarity, more deep magenta near the rims. Touch of sour turbulence to the cherry, black raspberry scents in the nose, dusty florality with a wetter, mildewy earth side, zigs when maybe you think it should zag. Medium-bodied, round if somewhat hollow, attacks you with energy before retreating somewhat thereafter. The grapefruit, orange citrus provides momentary brightness before draws back down via earthy grassiness, leather and mineral notes. Builds steam but then never quite achieves the burst it got you expecting, acidity lengthens yet also dulls presentation. The red currant, cherry, black raspberry fruit is steady but more or less devoid of juicy pleasure. Simple, semi-short finish, like it unexpectedly ran out of words. Mainly Grenache, remainder Syrah, Mourvèdre. 85

FRANCE WHITE

Jolivet, Pascal
Loire, Sancerre
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$20.99, 12.5%

Light yellow gold color, quite reflective and shiny, sparkles given its relative lack of hue. Fiercely penetrating nose of white grapefruit and lemon zest, crushed slate and chalk, garden herbs and then angular peach, apricot scents, wakes you up quicker than a double espresso. Medium to full-bodied, not quite as cutting as the nose but keep a bandage handy. Touch more herbal with equally elevated levels of that grapefruit/lemon citrus and stone components. The acidity is firm but slowly yields ground to allow your palate some breathing room. Vibrant edge in the pear, peach, apricot fruit gives it length, useful as it comes off as super-dry. Leaves lots of prickle behind. 90

Aubuisières, Domaine des
Loire, Vouvray, Cuvée de Silex
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

Mild green cast to the mostly pale yellow straw color, splits the difference between translucent shimmer and surface glitter. While there's a fetching sweetness in the apricot, peach, pear scents, the nose also offers a sauna stone smokiness and minerality to accompany the juicy orange citrus and dollop of honey, pleasing fullness. In the mouth it is also full-bodied, has lots of flesh but wraps itself with a sense of demure respectability. The acidity acts as a wound-up spring that uncoils throughout, breathes life into the tangerine, orange citrus, flower petal and brown sugar notes. Even with that weight and the richness in the peach, apricot, cantaloupe, yellow apple fruit maintains its clarity and doesn't get fuzzy. Momentary baking dough and spice shades yield to stone and chalk as it progresses. Minty too. Quality offering, engages from first to last sip. 90

Zind Humbrecht, Domaine
Alsace, Hengst, Indice 4
Gewürztraminer

2003, \$86.99, 14.5%

Quite dark golden hue, has a greenish cast although certainly evinces shades of orange around the rims too, has some gleam but gets by mostly on its abundant layers. All-encompassing nose of lilacs, violets, orange blossom and litchee extract, nutty and minty both, at moments it seems to wish it could get meaty, ham leads into honey and then pear, green melon, apricot scents, just no avoiding it. Full-bodied, honeyed with a glazed tangerine to

lemon citrus feel, the lavender and violets keep that powdery sweetness rushing ahead. Not much acidity, the structure comes all but strictly from the density of the flavors. Sweet lemon, tangerine citrus joins forces with the that florality and honey to make sure your back is always being rubbed. Dulcet apricot, pear, melon, pineapple fruit takes on a fruit cocktail consistency. It would be so easy to dismiss if your gut wasn't telling you to do a belly-flop into that juicy pool before you. Going nowhere but let's live for the day, huh? 89

Zind Humbrecht, Domaine
Alsace, Clos Windsbuhl, Indice 2
Riesling
2003, \$68.99, 13.0%

Luminescent, you almost want to say it's just green in color, but there is a yellow dimension to it, has this odd dull reflectivity on the surface, very translucent underneath, fully hued to the rims. The nose is smoky and oily, not sure what it is capable of so it sticks what it can throw up in there indiscriminately, metallic and minerally pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit, shows a milky dimension, earth and grass next, may lack some direction but verve undeniable. Full-bodied, deeply set, fills up any and all spaces from bottom up to the higher registers. Smoke and then steam rising off of hot stones percolate, tangerine and white grapefruit citrus nips at your heels. Not all that acidic but stays perpendicular to the ground. Nice sharp edges in the pineapple, nectarine, apricot, apple, papaya fruit, doesn't depth to smack you around. Finish is just maybe a bit short but not because it's flabby. 89

Reverdy, Pascal and Nicolas
Loire, Sancerre, Cuvée Les Côûtes
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$25.99, 13.0%

All but completely transparent white gold to yellow hay in color, nice hue consistency if light, good shine too. Friendly, agreeable nose of lilacs, violets and orange citrus, full peach, pear fruit as well, not lacking in focus but more intent on massaging the knots out of your nostrils. Full-bodied, very broad on the attack, manages its weight well and pursues relentlessly. Grass, bell pepper and even chili pepper notes appear and give it verve and increased penetration. The acidity is on the fine side, a delicate netting laid over the mineral water, stone, chalk foundation. White grapefruit, lemon and orange citrus lend more flavor depth, more zip than succulence in the apple, pear, peach fruit. Attractive smoky after images infuse the finish, crisp. 89

Huet, S.A.
Loire, Vouvray, Clos du Bourg, Sec
Chenin Blanc
2004, \$24.99, 12.0%

While highly resplendent, the yellow gold color is a bit washed out and hardly makes it near the rims. Lemony nose with a swipe of pink grapefruit too, good deal of chalk and stone dust, touch herbaceous but in a dry way, relaxed nature about the peach, apricot, red apple fruit scents, overall comes across as somewhat laconic. Medium-bodied, more alert in the mouth even if richer and sweeter than one might expect from a Huet "sec" wine. You get more florality here, mint as well, displays a bitter edge in the hay notes. The acidity feels like its muscles clothed in a thick rubber suit, has force but pliable and more steady than cutting. Good reach in the peach, apricot, apple fruit, never fades away. As it opens and warms get smokier and

seems to concentrate its weight better. Keeps showing flashes but maybe it's just the hotel's neon sign outside the window... 88

Gagnard, Domaine Jean-Noël
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, Les Caillerets
Chardonnay
2003, \$97.99, 13.5%

Highly reflective if mostly devoid of hue, evinces some white gold at best but it does shimmer. Pinpoint accuracy in the oak, simply razor sharp toast followed on by orange blossom, lilacs, lime zest, so cutting you barely register the gossamer pear, peach, red apple scents, impressive intensity. Medium-bodied, here in the mouth while the arch toast is there it also has a creamy underbelly for relief. Nice dusty stone and chalk shades, the subdued lemon/lime citrus adds to the transparent feel despite the oak. Moderate thrust in the pear, red to yellow apple, peach fruit, seems to have made a conscious effort at self-restraint. The acidity remains shadowy, there when you look for it but never when you're not. Touch of heat on the finish is curious and shortens the fruit a little more. Cerebral in style. 88

Coume del Mas
Languedoc/Roussillon, Collioure, Folio
Blend
2003, \$24.99, 14.0%

Multiple layers in the yellow straw color, takes some of the shine out of the reflective surface, color lasts to the rims. Well-endowed nose, unfurls sweet tangerine and lime spritz, lilacs, mint rub, glazed pie crust before slipping into something a little more comfortable, namely the pear, peach, melon fruit scents. Pretty damn full-bodied without getting pushy about it, stretches itself out well to ensure the weight never accumulates too much in any one place. Semi-creamy with distinct vanilla/chocolate swirl flavoring, attractively deep florality, the tangerine and lime citrus still rock steady, there's a full-on dried fruit feel in the apple, peach, pear fruit, like they were naturally air dried in a deep, dark basement. Remains broad and flavorful through the finish, a wine best soaked in than sipped. 80% Grenache Gris, 10% Grenache Blanc, 10% Vermentino. 88

Bourillon Dorléans, Domaine
Loire, Vouvray, La Coulée d'Argent Vieilles Vignes Sec
Chenin Blanc
2004, \$16.99, 13.0%

Yellow hay in color, deepened by a brownish cast, very transparent and glassy. The nose is slow to unfold, exhibits honey and sweet lemon juice tones before round apricot, peach, green melon fruit, some mineral dust but pretty damn primary at the moment. Full-bodied, starts out with a lot of downwards weight before findings its bearings to sail forward. The acidity is laid on your tongue in broad sheets, accrues until they just about flatten it. Not much more minerally here but you do get more lemon and orange citrus. The apricot, red apple, pear fruit swells mostly in the center then drops off into a ruggedly refreshing finish, displays a lively scrubbing sensation. 88

Réméjeanne, Domaine La
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Les Arbousiers
Blend
2004, \$17.99, 14.0%

Simple, slightly filmy and dull yellow gold color, shows a good deal of depth if without much shine. Fat and slow to

twitch nose, floral with damp lime to lemon citrus, licorice, slides in at you at an angle which brings out more life in the pear, peach, melon scents. Full-bodied, heavy bottom with cinnamon spice, lemon to lime citrus, flower water, violet powder, there's a vanilla creaminess that keeps its weight pressing downwards. There's just enough focus in the green apple, melon, peach, apricot fruit to make you take it seriously even as it lacks the juice to persist juicily. The acidity is there but blunt and of flat palms, extends the weight if not the flavors. Obliquely enjoyable. Got it? Unspecified percentages of Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Clairette. 87

Hugel et Fils
Alsace, Gentil
Blend
2004, \$10.99, 12.0%

Flat yellow-brown hay in color, adequate shine, watery rims. Good composure in the nose, shades of mint and anise pave the way for pleasingly moderate ripeness in the peach, apricot, melon, pineapple scents, a light saline quality balances out any brown sugar notes. Medium-bodied, spreads itself equally throughout the mouth. The peach, apricot, red apple fruit crests early and overall comes across as surprisingly dry given the medium grade acidity. Solid overlay of mint and flowers, albeit turns out a bit bitter on the finish. You keep waiting for that moment of sugary sweet relief which never comes. Mostly Gewürztraminer, remainder Pinot Gris, Riesling, Muscat, Sylvaner. 87

Charmoise (Henri Marionnet), Domaine de la Loire, Touraine
Sauvignon Blanc
2004, \$13.99, 12.0%

Nice heft in the green-gold color, stays full to the rims and plenty of sparkle to be had. The nose presents a pleasing smoky minerality rising over a semi-creamy peach, yellow apple, pear foundation, bit of cinnamon too, ends up with a likable degree of transparency. Medium-bodied, on the soft side with a surprising lack of acidity, rolls along well on the merits of its weight. Spicy with stream water, stone notes, lemon water, while clean lacks a real Sauvignon Blanc bite. Does get a little grassier and more typical as it sits, trim lines in the peach, pear, apple fruit. Just never really revs it up and thus remains on the simple side. 86

Vissoix, Domaine du Beaujolais, Cépage Chardonnay
Chardonnay
2004, \$18.99, 13.0%

Plain yellow straw color of average depth and shine, no one wants to say it but some wine has to be average or it's all messed up. The nose offers uncommon smokiness, suggests an herbal swipe but turns instead to lemon peel, minerals and uneven florality, even as the apple, pear, nectarine, pineapple fruit scents come on it has this systemic unevenness. Full-bodied, does a good job of filling up your mouth, not structured, not soft, strikes paydirt in the middle ground. Dry and the acidity isn't quite capable of conducting things, thus a reluctant leader. The apple, pear, peach, star fruit aspects manage to get fairly far on existing reputation but not making a current deposit in the bank. It's a good Chard if you never ventured beyond the Beaujolais district. 86

Fruitière, Domaine de la Loire, Jardin de la Fruitière
Blend

2004, \$8.99, 12.0%

Lustrous with a pale yellow glow, more an aura than a true coloring. The nose has an intriguing bell pepper-led herbaceousness as well as violets, licorice, very inexpressive in the fruit department. Medium-bodied, more of the same herbaceous, bell pepper qualities, when you add in minerals and ash if your eyes were shut you'd think it was a Cabernet Franc in your glass. The acidity plods along, can't say it doesn't do its job. More offered by way of peach, pear, apple fruit than in the nose but it dissolves on the way to the finish. On the nondescript side, enjoyable if not particularly remarkable. 45% Chardonnay, 45% Melon de Bourgogne, 5% Folle Blanche, 5% Sauvignon Gris. 85

FRANCE SPARKLING

Pol Roger
Champagne, Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill Brut
Blend

1995, \$168.99, 12.0%

Presents a pale, if solid, yellow straw color, the few beads of bubbles there are thick and masculine in appearance. Semi-bready nose with a thin layer of honey to act as a weight the orange to lemon citrus, mineral powder, suggests oiled slate at turns, crisply delineated peach, apricot, pear fruit scents. Full-bodied, dry and chalky during the attack, not overly bubbly at all, proceeds forward with mineral dust, stone, lemon to white grapefruit peel notes. Has licorice and mint allusions but minimal honey at best, does deliver a solid beam of bready dough though. The acidity is crisp and vibrant and ensures it'll be dry and focused throughout. The apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit more a puncher than a boxer. Broad and engaging finish, holds your mouth open as you try to swallow. Unspecified percentages of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier. 93

ITALY RED

Einaudi, Poderi Luigi
Piedmont, Barolo, Costa Grimaldi
Nebbiolo

2001, \$89.99, 14.0%

Immaculate brick red color, noticeable orange tinge, remains concentrated fully through to the rims. Sweet licorice, anise, orange zest and rose petals breathe life into the nose, sweet mocha powder too, has a wet forest floor herbaceous quality, pregnantly moist, good sap in the raspberry, blackberry scents, swells graciously. In the mouth it is much more floral as well as possessed of a crisp and still juicy lemon and orange citrus tang. The tannins are fine, quite muscular but not showy. Olives, brown earth, stones and leather make clear, separate impressions, nice for how the parts each have distinct roles. Racy juiciness in the blackberry, black cherry fruit, helps the finish stay fat and well-stuffed. Actually approachable now with plenty of room for future improvement. 92

Petrolo
Tuscany, Galatrona
Merlot

2001, \$89.99, 13.5%

Compact and dark violet core, the concentrated scarlet-ruby rims barely a shade lighter. Pronounced smokiness and minerality in the nose, to the point where it can even

mask the abundant crunchy oak and burnt toast notes, a little herbaceousness is the final drop cloth laid over the quiet red currant, cherry scents. Medium-bodied, streamlined, if not outright sleek, glides through the mouth almost too quickly to register. Fine polish on the tannins and acidity, albeit quite dry throughout. Succinct cherry, raspberry flavors make its case and bows out in favor of orange peel, minerality, cedar, white smoke and meadow grasses. The undercurrent of vanilla and caramel is proportionate to the whole and helps to extend the finish some. Not close to ready although endowed with regal charm now. 91

Marcarini, Azienda Agricola Poderi
Piedmont, Barolo, La Serra
Nebbiolo
2001, \$57.99, 14.0%

Distinctly light and trim in the glass, a blood orange to crimson cast, hangs together with poise to the rims. The nose is not rich but very supple and round, black licorice, rose petals, leather, rosemary, basil, densely ripe blackberry, raspberry scents, slowly expansive. Full-bodied, while definitely tannic has the verve and weight to fairly burst into the mouth with authority and flavor. More of those fried garden herbs, orange and lemon peel, brown earth and gravel components, seems to prefer developing a thicker bottom than a perfume. Strong milk chocolate coating develops in the mid-palate, softens the tongue to receive more of the cherry, red currant, raspberry fruit. Not that floral, again staying more aggressive than expansive, helps length but maybe not depth. No worrying about its stuffing. 91

Sportoletti, Ernesto e Remo
Umbria, Villa Fidelia
Blend
2002, \$63.99, 14.0%

Blackish purple core that stops short of opacity, rims mainly straightforward brick red but with a touch of orange-brown too. Strong cleansing feel in the nose, not all alcohol, menthol rub, meadow grasses, pressed dried flowers, minerals and lemon peel, brush of popcorn, blackberry and black cherry scents, elements not fighting each other but doesn't strike you as harmonious either. Full-bodied, smoke, leather and grilled meats push past the plush red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit to speak first, once all this have their say, it derives some mouth perfume from lilacs, lavender, menthol and lemon/white grapefruit citrus, not oppressively heavy. Offers more by way of acidity than tannins but not by much, dry without sacrificing accessibility. Attractively erect bearing on finish, preferable to forcing extra length on itself. Presents intriguing intermediate aging potential. 70% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc. 90

Scalette, Podere Poggio
Tuscany, Alta Valle della Greve, Il Carbonaione
Sangiovese
2002, \$59.99, 13.5%

Quite dark, verging on a murky purple core with a red-brown cast, purer red at the rims where it also gains some sparkle. Direct and rugged nose of leather, black earth, crushed flowers and wood smoke, some orange spritz brings out more of the meaty blackberry, black cherry scents, stays thick. Medium-bodied, with more muscles than weight, flexes confidently as the tannins pour across your tongue. Fragrant florality and garden herbs adorn the well-packed currant, cherry, blackberry fruit,

concentrated to the point of dryness. Mushroom, leather, animal hide and orange spice give you plenty to chew on, stays grainy through to the end. These broad shoulders can put in a full day's worth of lifting without breaking a sweat. The sweet core charms but not ready for prime time drinking yet. 90

Lisini, Azienda Agricola
Tuscany, Brunello di Montalcino
Brunello
2000, \$74.99, 13.5%

The bright glow in the core favors the orange-garnet over the violet color, still humming warmly around the scarlet red rims. Saddle leather, earthen mud, basil, oregano, even a hint of game make for a sumptuous nose, good bite and contour in the smoky black cherry, blackberry fruit, like sticking a plug in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, develops a bristling energy that maybe causes it to skip a beat or two but will also ensure it gets to the point quicker than the competition. Quite dry, tannins are angular and penetrating. The leather, iron flecks, stone and meadow grasses add to its country ranch hand demeanor. As ripe as it is, it's the sour bite which impels the red cherry, raspberry fruit. Massive enough that its sense of progression gets lost some, finish tantamount to brass knuckles to the jaw. Hard to swallow now. 90

Masciarelli, Azienda Agricola
Abruzzi, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Marina Cvetic
Montepulciano
2001, \$29.99, 14.5%

The dark purple core barely moves into red-crimson at the rims, noticeably concentrated throughout. Quite gamey, meaty nose, almost raw at moments as it throws leather, tobacco, black earth, dried oranges all at you at once, too dense to release much of the currant, cherry, plum scents, ends with a burst of high-toned oak toast. Full-bodied, starts out both peppery and creamy at once, however the oak cream takes the hint from the brawny acidity and scoots off. Strikes a turbulent balance as it careens along at a good clip through your mouth. Tea leaf, tobacco, earth and mineral shards dominate, light orange zest and dried flowers reveal themselves briefly before the tannins steamroll your palate. Good showing in the center by the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit but the total structure swallows it up with alacrity. Young, young, young. 89

Marcarini, Azienda Agricola Poderi
Piedmont, Barolo, Brunate
Nebbiolo
2001, \$57.99, 14.0%

Offers more of a spotless than rich appeal in the orange to brick red color, clear but washes out some near the rims to dull garnet. Licorice, orange peel, sweet garden herbs and heather swarm about in the nose, minimal leather or earth, still showing a primary nature of ripe cherry, blackberry fruit, clings tenaciously to your nostrils. Medium-bodied, the attack is a touch sharply abrupt, doesn't spread out instead offering a series of pinpricks. The tannins cast a fine film across the tongue while still allowing for minerals, lemon to white grapefruit citrus and spice to soak in. On the floral side with rose and violet petals, the earthiness is subdued but the wine does reveal a grassy side. The cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is tight and somewhat unyielding. Moderate length on the finish, seems like it will turn out more towards the elegant

side than become a beast but either way too early to tell.
89

Zenato

Veneto, Amarone della Valpolicella Classico
Blend

2001, \$64.99, 16.0%

Both pleasing depth and clarity in the sparkling purple core, no ignoring the density in the red-ruby rims. Showing too much acrid alcohol to rub softly in your nose, ripe to sugary raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit which adds in cinnamon spice, lemon peel, more mocha powder than earth, some oak cream but not a spotlight hog. Full-bodied, throws its shoulders back and juts its jaw out before marching into your mouth, tangy orange citrus, menthol and garrigues-like florality provides a carpet for the sweeter raspberry, red cherry, blueberry fruit, intriguing swipe of green apple too. Wavers, but in the end the tannins outpoint the acidity, albeit with a few green notes. Probably most impressive in the short-term as harmony and balance don't seem really in the offing. 70% Corvina, 20% Rondinella, 10% Molinara. 88

Tua Rita, Azienda Agricola

Tuscany, Redigaffi

Merlot

2003, \$136.99, 14.5%

Has a deep violet core, while spotless the luminescent glow gives it a filmy appearance, there's a sumo wrestler level fatness in the magenta rims. Borderline immobile nose with obtrusive popcorn, buttered toast scents, tobacco ash, licorice, rose and super-ripe raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit, hard to breathe in as stuffed as it gets. Full-bodied, shows a high level of surmaturité right off the bat, stains the mouth with currant, black cherry, plum fruit. Alas, like so many European wines of this vintage the tannins are not mature and stunt the fruit's natural progression. Is spicy with iodine, beef blood notes, the florality and mint do not quite stretch out as one thinks they might. Has loamy, meadowy grass notes and comes off as herbaceous. Not much acidity for brightness, slowly starts to clench up past the mid-palate. has pedigree but even as a legacy can't get into Yale. 88

Pepe, Azienda Agricola Emidio

Abruzzi, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

Montepulciano

2000, \$64.99, 13.5%

Light murk in the ruby-purple core, thin but glowing garnet to dark magenta rims. Earth, leather, merde, fart, grass, rotted lemon peel, dust covered potpourri make for a challenging nose, semi-roasted quality to the cherry, black raspberry, red currant scents, comes up a touch short. Medium-bodied, blockish and chewy, distracted and not all that interested in whether or not you like it. Sour lemon, grapefruit citrus, leather, animal hide, more merde, defiant. The tannins and acidity are not that high but its so structured you almost cannot get at the damn structure. Toasted cocoa powder and smoke bubble up at the end, can't lose that herbal edge or the black smoke and tanned horse hide. This is the kind of wine you just roll the dice on and pray it'll be a swan in 15 years. 88

Martina, Villa

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Venezia Giulia

Cabernet Franc

2003, \$15.99, 12.5%

Fair amount of depth in the purple to ruby-magenta color, crystal clear, more or less even. Surprising whipped cream to vanilla aspect in the nose, covers most of the bell pepper notes, reveals hints of hay and leather, very ripe and densely packed plum, currant, black cherry scents, momentum does a lot to keep it going. Full-bodied, for what it is lacking in juice it makes up for in density and power. Real creamy and soft but has a spicy spike too, throws in orange zest and almost a suggestion of menthol. Neither tannic nor acidic but dry overall. Seems to have powdered its nose one time too many without checking itself in the mirror. 87

ITALY WHITE

Pepe, Azienda Agricola Emidio

Abruzzi, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo

Trebbiano

2003, \$39.99, 11.6%

Extremely cloudy, like a still pond of luminescent orange gold, no shine, just depends on its rich glow. Heavy sulfur, burning rubber notes in the nose, beyond that there's dried oranges, clove and ginger spice, tea leaf, caramel and momentary flutterings of apricot, apple and pear fruit, feels like someone tried to insert a stretching mat into your nostrils. Full-bodied with that same rubber cushion texture in the mouth. The crumb cake, toffee and a spoonful of vanilla ice cream flavors are incapable of resisting the onslaught of the tar, earth, rubber, black tea flavors. From this rugged profile springs forth a degree of orange spice and flowers. The acidity acts as a thin membrane across your palate. There's a certain type of powdered sugar sweetness in the apricot, peach, pear fruit but it all comes to an abrupt halt on the finish, someone hit the brakes real hard. As usual with this wine, check back in ten years. 91

Tramin (Cantina Produttori Termeno), Kellerei Cantina

Alto Adige/Südtirol, Nussbaumer

Gewürztraminer

2004, \$39.99, 15.0%

Glassy green-white straw color, great surface shine with a semi-translucent shimmer below. The nose presents mineral water, orange blossom, sweetly glazed nuts, litchee as well as green melon, apricot, yellow apple scents, while it has a strong presence it also possesses a billowy dissolve. Medium-bodied, dry and even a touch angular during the mouth entry, the initial creamy pillow turns to grilled bread, nuts, lemon water, honeysuckle, white minerals and chalk. The acidity drapes over the tongue like a thin cloth. Clove and cinnamon spice lightly add zip to the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit, stays round and clean with a natural in feel dissolve. Attractive for how it stays transparent even as the richness in the fruit and a wet perfume linger through the end. 89

Tiefenbrunner

Alto Adige/Südtirol, Kirchleiten

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$29.99, 13.0%

Glassy green-yellow straw in color, solid plane of reflection over the semi-translucent depths. Pink to white grapefruit and lime in the nose, smoky white minerality, fresh blossom florality, smoldering straw then pineapple, nectarine, pear, peach fruit, all crisp yet yielding, really not a mean bone in its body. In the mouth it presents a full-bodied elegance, has weight to throw around without abusing the privilege, adorns itself with mint, violets,

metallic minerals and more rugged grapefruit to lemon citrus. The acidity is lively but not dominant, a bit shy about its dancing skills. The peach, apricot, nectarine, green apple, pineapple fruit can get your attention but doesn't have the juice nor the vicious cut to demand it, just is. Not particularly long, compact and contoured, has thought some about itself. 89

Stoppa, Azienda Vitivinicola La
Emilia-Romagna, Ageno

Blend

2003, \$29.99, 13.5%

Deep, dull orange-amber in color, very rich core and more yellow near the rims. Bountiful apricot and peach paste in the nose, jasmine, lemon rub, oxidized but even more seems like smoking/steaming mineral rocks, burning straw, quite distinct. Full-bodied, real dry to the point of turning vaguely bitter, dusty in texture. Dried spiced orange and lemon peel, powdered stone and dried bread crusts. Semi-floral with mild anise seed as well. The apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit parched and about the polar opposite of the nose. Blockish finish, someone slammed real hard on the breaks. Unspecified percentages of Malvasia di Candia, Ortrugo, Trebbiano. 89

Mayr-Nusser, Heinrich
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Blatterle Tafelwein
Blatterle

NV, \$14.99, 12.5%

Composed and transparent green to yellow straw color, displays the faintest of glow. Clean and lemony nose, honeysuckle notes make it seem a bit sweet, well-constructed apricot, peach, nectarine scents take this baton effortlessly. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a wickedly powerful acidic spine. Almost starts to feel borderline fizzy before this subsides and gives way to mineral water, stone shades and a prominent lemon peel edge. Here that peach and apricot fruit has more of a pit-like character, minimal juiciness. The florality is too light to stand up to the acidity and just about runs in fear to the finish line. Amazingly invigorating, keeps rubbing your cheeks after all the liquid is already in your tummy. Makes you break a sweat trying to figure it out. 2004 vintage version although not labeled as such. 89

Pieropan, Leonildo
Veneto, Soave Classico

Blend

2004, \$17.99, 12.0%

Neutral pale yellow straw color, reflectivity constrained mostly to the surface, denser and more block-like below. Lemon-honey tones sweeten the nose, creamy texture in the green apple, peach, pear fruit, pinch of cinnamon, does remain fresh as it subtly stuffs your nostrils full. Medium-bodied, spicier and a touch leaner and more focused here in the mouth, not that acidic per se but knows where it is and where it wants to go. The lemon, orange citrus again takes on a curiously creamy texture. White minerals, stones and hay provide a more bracing feel, bring out pep in the pear, yellow apple, peach fruit. Breeze of florality as it passes the mid-palate to provide release off the tongue. Still, its weight remains an innate part of its overall texture and keep sit around through an extended finish. Not easy to wash out of your mouth. Approximately 85% Garganega, 15% Trebbiano di Soave. 88

Tramin (Cantina Produttori Termeno), Kellerei Cantina
Alto Adige/Südtirol

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Straightforward yellow straw color, on the transparent side but semi-dull too, more or less consistent. Strong creamy textural underpinning in the nose then much crisper minerality, white grapefruit/lemon citrus, licorice, flower water, while tingly the ripe peach, apricot, pear scents keep it on the fat side. Full-bodied, enters the mouth with its shoulders thrown back and flexing its muscles. Sweet lemon and white grapefruit citrus turns a little bitter after some time as the herbaceousness ticks upwards. The acidity is of average thrust yet helps to bring out minerals, stone and to a lesser extent dried flowers. Fully stuffed finish, still throwing its weight around, flavors mostly stick around too. Competently done. 87

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

Alto Adige/Südtirol, Lahn

Sauvignon Blanc

2003, \$17.99, 13.0%

Clear with a high shine on the old yellow gold color, becomes virtually transparent by the rims. Vastly ripe nose of pink grapefruit, peach, apricot, pear fruit aided and abetted by anise and lilac notes, minimal stoniness and not very Sauvignon Blanc-like, even if with a vivid overall presentation. Full-bodied, cozies up real quickly and plops on your tongue with wet flower petals, just squeezed orange and lemon juice, licorice and powdered baking sugar. Given this, there's a bit more contour in the peach, pear, apple fruit than expected and while the acidity is so-so, the fruit flavors end on a dry, clean note. Touch dilute as it dissolves, flat due to that weak acidity, no zing. Tastes good though. 85

GERMANY WHITE

Weil, Weingut Robert

Rheingau, Kiedricher, Gräfenberg, Erstes Gewächs QbA
AP #53

Riesling

2004, \$69.99, 13.5%

Pale white to yellow gold, transparent rims. Nicely perfumed nose of roses and orange blossom, cherries and apricots, country road pebbles, right now hiding its power behind its compact presentation, should unfold better with more aging. Full-bodied, dry but in a lacy way, even as it lays on the tongue there's holes to breathe through. Bright tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus in the mouth gets you salivating. Impressive florality adds very well to the lift. The acidity is round and more cascades forward than anything else. Crisp feel in the peach, pear, apricot, red apple fruit, front-loaded so as to not interfere with the cleanliness of the finish. Maintains both exuberance and tact, leaves a zesty tingle behind. 92

Weil, Weingut Robert

Rheingau, Kiedricher, Gräfenberg, Spätlese AP #6

Riesling

2004, \$69.99, 8.0%

Clear, pale white to yellow gold in color, inclines towards translucency in spite of its overall clarity. Richly endowed and dulcet nose, on the smoky side, concentrated apricot, pear, nectarine scents, the fruit now masking much of the florality and orange citrus, extreme grip. Full-bodied, lusciously upfront in how it slathers your tongue with

sweet lime to lemon citrus, honey, wet rose petals and gargantuan apricot, nectarine, peach, pear fruit. The acidity adroitly navigates through the flesh of the fruit so that the finish remains erect. With all of its weight there's sparkle to spare and it's never a chore to drink. Stains your palate with its soul. Hard to resist now — even though it should gain more crisp enunciation over time, why wait? 92

Hexamer, Weingut Helmut
Nahe, Meddersheimer, Rheingrafenberg, Quarzit QbA AP #15
Riesling
2004, \$17.99, 8.5%
The yellow straw color reflects brilliantly off of the surface as it pools in curved layers beneath, attractive to gaze upon. Nose actually has a solid amount of chalk and crushed stones as well as some jasmine-like florality but hard for these to maintain a place in the face of the outsized tangerine and lime citrus and satiny peach, apricot, red apple fruit scents. Full-bodied and exuberantly over the top in the mouth with a gusher of tangerine, pink grapefruit, lime citrus and even more concentrated and plush apricot, peach, nectarine, pineapple, pear fruit than in the nose. The succulence is so invigorating you just gulp it down before you can register the prettier floral and brown sugar notes. Thank goodness the acidity provides a strong, steady pulse to add even a moment of sobriety or your eyes would roll back in your head. 92

Weil, Weingut Robert
Rheingau, Kiedricher, Gräfenberg, Auslese AP #8
Riesling
2004, \$139.99, 8.0%
Crystal clear yellow gold color, a mild brown tinge adds hue to the core, fades appreciably at the rims. Develops an aggressive nose, smoky and minerally enough to hint at turning bitter, the fat in the apricot, nectarine, pear, yellow apple scents covered by the smoke as well as a undertone of mint, earth and flutter of dried grasses and orange peel. Medium-bodied, as sweet as it is displays good lines and contour and the acidity isn't laying down for anyone, charges forward fearlessly. The freshly juicy lime, lemon, tangerine citrus remains evident throughout, obscures most of the brown sugar tones. Rose water and pebbles come next and it is a good thing the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit is in a rush to strut their stuff as the finish gets pretty damn dry. Handles its immensity well, almost afraid to hurt you. A complete wine that seems like it will drink well at any point in its lifespan. 91

Johannishof, Weingut
Rheingau, Johannisberger, Klaus, Spätlese AP #13
Riesling
2004, \$25.99, 8.5%
Faint luminescence in the green-tinged white straw color, nice surface shine while it easily bends light below. Openly knit, yet crisp, nose of lemon peel, chalk-dusted minerals, dried potpourri and spring water, freshness remains its signature through to the pear, green apple, peach scents. Full-bodied, more accessible in the mouth, appreciably sweeter on the attack so as to let you soak in the radiance of the tangerine, lime citrus and fresh spring garden florality. A slow, tranquil dissolve then ensues and bit by bit lifts weight off of the tongue, even as the smoky apricot, peach, pear, pineapple fruit orders another drink come closing time. The acidity puts a charge in things, springs forward from the mid-palate through to the finish. Intense

ending, lots of body left, rattles your teeth with everything its got. Overpowering. 91

Domdechant Werner'sches Weingut
Rheingau, Hochheimer, Hölle, Kabinett AP #9
Riesling
2004, \$25.99, 8.5%
Attractive white straw color, very light with great brilliance, would reflect in the dark. Rose, orange blossom, tangerine zest, lilacs, chalk dust, everything in the nose is light and airy, even the well-arrayed peach, apricot scents lift into the air, a spider's web inside your nostrils. Medium-bodied, very tactful and shows breeding, touch of sweetness in the orange, tangerine citrus, gains suppleness from a semi-creamy mouth texture. The violets and lilacs give it a hothouse florality, rich and a touch sticky like humid air. Vague whisper of rubber and earth help to reveal the underlying acidity, nothing too edgy but supports and channels flavors with a certain weightlessness, presses hard once and then lifts. broad scope in the finish, wherever you look there it is. A thoughtful wine which convinces with well-chosen words. 91

Weil, Weingut Robert
Rheingau, Kabinett Halbtrocken AP #30
Riesling
2004, \$34.99, 11.0%
The glowing white-green color reduces the shine some, adds to a semi-translucent appearance. In the nose a touch of powdered sugar heightens the approachability of the sweet orange citrus, honeysuckle, rose scents as well as the solid core of peach, apricot, red apple fruit, stable presence. Full-bodied and equally gregarious in the mouth, ample supply of tangerine, lemon citrus, dewy flower petals and a spoonful of brown sugar. The acidity gains momentum past the mid-palate, strong hands to mold the apricot, peach, melon, pear fruit into shape. This also allows more room for the mineral water and stone component. Very integrated, to the point of creating a tightly knit fabric that doesn't breathe much by the finish. Despite the integration changes mood a lot in the mouth, a sign of youthful indecision. Give it time. 90

Johannishof, Weingut
Rheingau, Johannisberger, Kabinett "G" AP #10
Riesling
2004, \$18.99, 9.0%
Mostly transparent white to dull yellow straw color, average shine but it does extend to the rims. Erect bearing in the nose to the lemon peel, dried roses, sauna stones, mineral dust notes, even with a touch of honey there's an angular nature to the peach, apricot, green apple fruit scents, zips off before your nostrils can truly wrap around them. Medium to full-bodied, splashes into the mouth with authority and slowly sinks down the sides of your cheeks. The rugged acidity breathes life into the zippy tangerine, lime citrus as well as highlights the mineral water, stone components. Turns a little creamier towards the back end, allows the peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit to spread out and relax. Slightly smoky, adds deeper resonance and grip. Lingers, better loiters, on the finish, one you'll have to wash out of your mouth. Admirable palate persistence. 90

Fitz-Ritter, Weingut K.
Pfalz, Spätlese
Gewürztraminer
2004, \$18.99, 10.0%

Light but pure golden color, fine spun with a very nice shine for the varietal. Softly insistent nose of litchee, flowers, orange reduction, without you noticing the apricot, pear, melon fruit scents surround your nose hairs for a dance or two. Medium-bodied, has a good grip on the attack, you definitely know it is in your mouth but it isn't interested in showing off for you, a simple presentation much preferred. Hint of bitter notes before orange blossom and tangerine zest smooth it out, attractive transparency to the stream water and stones, shows a sense of place. Delicate touch extends through the apricot, pear, melon, nectarine fruit, has that cotton candy-like dissolve. The acidity isn't the star of the show, isn't meant to be, but its there when the credits roll at the end of the show. "Pretty" is the most accurate word for it, has the innocent smile of an adolescent. 90

Weil, Weingut Robert
Rheingau, Estate Dry AP #22
Riesling
2004, \$22.99, 11.5%

Brilliant white gold in color, equally transparent and shiny throughout. Quite dapper nose of pure mineral water, powdered stones, hint of dried lemon peels, rose petals, compact but insistent shot of cherry, peach, apricot fruit scents. Medium-bodied, very dry but not austere, offers a great deal of transparency to those same mineral water, stream stones, chalk aspects. The acidity remains broad, dries in large sweeping flourishes than tiny cuts. Borderline angular feel in the peach, pear, apple fruit, akin to a well-tailored double-breasted suit. The lemon and lime citrus are more a gentle dab of perfume than real presence. Reverberates for some time on the finish like a snare drum. 89

Simon, Weingut Bert
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Serriger, Herrenberg, Kabinett AP #4
Riesling
2004, \$17.99, 8.5%

The white straw color has a slight green tinge, the semi-translucent layers detract a touch from the surface shine. Very smoky, mineral nose, lends focus to the papaya, nectarine, pineapple, apricot scents, drops in some lemon peel and mineral water, the florality comes out reluctantly after awhile. Medium-bodied, generously sticky at first but then it gets in gear and turns real fluid, never gliding but consistent of pace. The pineapple, apricot, peach, mango fruit remains on the dry side with plenty of punch, its momentum aided by tangerine and lemon zest. Dewy florality helps to slow it down, the acidity isn't noticeable as a separate aspect but it is damn dry by the finish. Gives you a whole lot to chew on past the mid-palate, texturally like a bulky wool sweater around your tongue. Given this, the vibrant tingle never abates and it has length to spare. 89

Lieser, Weingut Schloss
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Kabinett AP #3
Riesling
2004, \$24.99, 9.0%

Mostly transparent white gold color, has enough dazzle that hue really isn't a concern, more an issue of spectral vibrancy. Good stuffing in the nose but everything has a purpose, don't think its weight is just thrown out there, the violets, mineral water, lemon peel scents not shy about hitting the dance floor, in the end though it's the pear, peach, apple fruit which holds your attention most. In the mouth it is full-bodied with enough acidity to ensure it will

stay dry and on the taut side while the robust juice in the peach, nectarine, pineapple, pear fruit vibrates confidently throughout. Floral, attractive tangerine to lime citrus too, whatever stone or chalk components are there remain bit players. Most impressive for how it maintains a strong structure while still doling out the flavors with a generous mindset. Hard to imagine anyone thinking it sucks. 89

Karthäuserhof, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Eitelsbacher, Karthäuserhofberg,
Kabinett AP #7
Riesling
2004, \$22.99, 8.5%

Strong green cast to the yellow hay color, bends light easily while showing a thick glass pane surface. The nose stays steady if on the downy side, touch sugary with a distinct honeyed appeal, wings of florality lift the peach, pear, green melon scents, not complex nor subtle but more than willing to stick around as long as you'd like. Medium-bodied, has pleasing thrust without bragging about it, at first lets you decide how long it should be. Quite floral, keen tangerine to lime citrus too, glimmer of baked brown sugar but the durable acidity has too much oomph for the sweetness to settle in and overwhelm. Nice angles in the peach, pineapple, green apple, melon fruit, kicks you hard and waits for you to get up so it can do it again. While the finish gets semi-archly dry, derives length from intensity and verve, count your teeth after you swallow. 89

Johannishof, Weingut
Rheingau, Rudesheimer, Berg Rottland, Spätlese AP #14
Riesling
2004, \$27.99, 8.5%

Strong green cast to the yellow straw color, positive shine throughout, touch glassier beneath. Raw intensity to the minerality in the nose, forces more focus into the florality and lemon citrus too, built for fast racing, no slowing it down, even for the sake of the pear, apple, peach fruit scents. Full-bodied and more forgiving in the mouth, creamier and softer in texture, mint and violets give it an opening for air. Well-ripened peach, apricot, red apple, pear fruit maintain a clear presence throughout, wants to make friends quickly. The acidity's alarm clock didn't go off 'cause it woke up real late. That said, develops a light fizzy feel which adds some spring to its step. Chewy finish, drips with juicy flavors, prolonged for more than a few ticks of the clock. 89

St. Urbans-Hof, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Piesporter, Goldtröpfchen, Spätlese
AP #11
Riesling
2004, \$27.99, 8.5%

Above average shine in the green-tinged yellow gold color, the brilliant surface turns transparent at the rims. The smoky, earthy nose has a light animal character, doles out lemon peel and a pinch of short-lived brown sugar, the angular peach, apricot scents pick the opposite angle that you do. Medium-bodied, very bright and lively attack, gets you in a good mood from the start. Racy tangerine, orange, lime citrus dances with rose and violet petals, as these swirl away the apricot, pear, nectarine fruit keeps both feet on the floor. The acidity quickly calms down to a steady throb, stays in the background past the mid-palate. The baked brown sugar notes reminiscent of a crème brûlée topping. Ends with a refreshing current of stream water. Is only going to get better and more integrated over time. 88

St. Urbans-Hof, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Ockfener, Bockstein, Kabinett AP #6
Riesling
2004, \$16.99, 8.5%
Faint white-green color, has average shine and remains on the transparent side. Extremely smoky and yeasty nose, redolent of roasted peanuts at times, crackles with slate and minerals, light lemon peel, the reticent peach, pear, apple fruit scents pay the price for its present lack of evolution. Light to medium-bodied, sleek and swift of foot, this heightened by the powerful lemon/lime component and a fizzy mineral water element. Well-honed blade of acidity, slices the honeyed cherry, peach, apricot fruit into clean slices. Not very floral, stays close to the earth and wants to keep in touch with its roots, literally and figuratively. Extremely strong grip during the finish, while it makes a big statement its definitive nature hurts its length. Tight as a drum. 88

Johannishof, Weingut
Rheingau, Johannisberger, Kabinett "V" AP #9
Riesling
2004, \$17.99, 10.0%
Quite light yellow straw in color, average shine, turns a lot more transparent near the rims. Super-creamy nose recalls those peanut shaped orange marshmallow candies, downy soft and enveloping, lemon custard, powdered violets, only a small trace of evanescent pear, peach, apple fruit scents. Full-bodied, while not as much as the nose, still spreads out like a pregnant cloud in the mouth, all vanilla cream, round florality and lemon peel before deciding to let in the stones and minerals. The acidity helps it stiffen some by the mid-palate, turns a shade smokier and the peach, pear, red apple fruit finds its balance. really hits its stride by the finish, you almost feel badly for it that it ends just when it's most energetic. Provides interesting contrast in textures in a single glass. 88

Haag, Weingut Fritz
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Kabinett AP #15
Riesling
2004, \$20.99, 8.0%
All but fully transparent, palest of green-flecked white straw, vastly reflective, dances in the glass. The florality tends to flatten out the nose some but there's more erect licorice, lemon peel, stone elements and it develops a light saline quality, more push than depth in the peach, pear, apricot scents, on the masculine side. Medium-bodied, rounder and more agreeable in the mouth, coats the palate nicely, sweet lemon, lime, tangerine citrus, honey and minerals, does a delightful job of freshly scrubbing your tongue. The acidity takes its time but when it comes through, it really comes through. Firecracker liveliness in the pear, peach, green apple fruit, brief explosion and then reverb. The stream water and stone aspects finally show up during the finishing dissolve. With as much as is going on, stays composed and within itself. Compelling for how it remains delicate with all its nervosity. 88

Domdechant Werner'sches Weingut
Rheingau, Hochheimer, Stein, Kabinett Halbtrocken AP #4
Riesling
2004, \$21.99, 11.0%
Greenish yellow straw in color, while not that deeply hued it achieves a certain translucency. Mint and violets immediately make the nose very pretty, stream water, wet stones and then a gentle dollop of peach, apricot, pear

skin, a picture of restraint. Light to medium-bodied, delicate of touch and easygoing, displays tangerine and lime peel, floral as well with a curious peppery touch. The streamlined, erect peach, pear, apple fruit pairs measuredly with the good degree of stone, pebble, earth aspects. The acidity is soft but extremely durable and it never disappears. On the back half the rose petals and lilacs make for a fetching mouth feel, likeably silky, dissolves with a steady penetration. 88

Richter, Weingut Max Ferd.
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Brauneberger, Juffer-Sonnenuhr,
Spätlese AP #15
Riesling
2004, \$24.99, 7.5%
Brown-tinged yellow straw in color, on the whole clear if of average shine. Quiet nose of flowers, lemon peel, wet minerals, borders on bashful, mere suggestion of pear, apple, green melon fruit. Medium-bodied, more open in the mouth if not giving like Santa Claus, its soft and roundish texture helps it coat your pores well and provide a steady haven for the lemon juice, white stones, baking spices and brush of dried grasses. Succulent while still dry, the well-shaped peach, nectarine, apple, pineapple fruit is supported pleasingly by slowly developing florality. The acidity eventually gets it out of neutral to try and convince the flavors to extend through to the finish. Hits you here and there but presently in need of further integration. 87

Mönchhof, Weingut Robert Eymael
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Estate QbA AP #18
Riesling
2004, \$16.99, 9.5%
Pale yellow hay in color, has that green cast, not particularly shiny, more solid and block-like, like if you turned the glass upside down, it would plop out. Very little shy about the nose, the peach, pear, apricot fruit not the sharpest tack in the box, floral with juicy lemon and orange citrus scents, some baking dough and brown sugar too, gregariously sloppy. Full-bodied and noticeably ripened to the brink of becoming super-sugary, here there's no restraint in the brown sugar and sweet tangerine, orange, lime citrus, segues without any hesitancy into cloying apricot, pear, peach, nectarine fruit, man this is one sugar bomb. To its credit, the acidity hacks away but it is outmuscled from the start. Better put out an APB on the stones and minerals if you want the cops to find any. Floral and provides a welcome glimmer of grassiness as a vague structure substitute. 87

Bollig-Lehnert, Weingut
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Piesporter, Goldtröpfchen, Spätlese
AP #9
Riesling
2004, \$15.99, 8.0%
Extremely pale yellow straw color, displays a great deal of fizz upon the pour, a touch dull with moderate shine at best. Fizzy in the nose too, flits about, squeaky clean and once it gets past this odd brief burst of caramel there's mineral water, powdered flowers, fully dried lemon peel, white smoke albeit with a paucity of fruit, bare touch of pear and apple scents. Medium-bodied and close-woven, nothing extra nor unnecessary allowed. Sour bite to the green apple, pear, melon fruit, dry and direct. The lemon, lime citrus isn't blabbering away either, reads its prepared statement and walks away from the podium. The acidity strikes you as adequate, nothing remarkable yet no denying it's a pretty dry wine. Truncated florality and brown

sugar, like they were gagged and thrown in a car trunk. Fairly grinds to a halt by the finish, either it is youthfully tight or it decided to wanted to be "classy." 87

AUSTRIA RED

Markowitsch, Weingut Gerhard
Carnuntum, Carnuntum-Cuvée
Blend

2004, \$15.99, 13.0%

Blackish dark aspect to the purple core, shows enough clarity to admit of a thickly arrayed garnet to magenta rims. Super-sour grip in the nose, sets you a bit back of your heels at first before you can "relax" in the leather, tomato skin, lemon peel, cut grass elements, the blackberry, cherry scents way too sharp to even try to fudge things. Full-bodied, the more you wait the more concentrated it gets with moderate blasts of florality, tomato skin, white pepper, cut grass, brown earth and mineral chunks, has a decided ruggedness about it. The acidity puts some fire in your belly, gives it more rumble and tumble. The cherry, blackberry, cranberry fruit stays sour which helps it extend fully through the finish. Very nicely done but not for everyone. 80% Zweigelt, 20% Pinot Noir. 87

AUSTRIA WHITE

Tement, Manfred
Steiermark/Styria, Steirische, Klassik
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$22.99, 12.0%

Green-white straw in color, shows a tiny bit of fizz, very transparent with admirable shine. Touch floral first in the nose then gets minty before a brief shade of grass and finally thickset peach, apricot, pear fruit, relaxed and not pushing itself on you. Full-bodied and expressive, sweet to sour lemon and lime citrus and floral too, stays bright as the grassiness bursts forth. The concentrated core of peach, apricot, melon fruit stands up to the brawny acidity and doesn't back down. Very minerally and chalky, does a nice job of coating your tongue in dust. One longlasting bulb, the brightness persists and extends the finish a great deal. While not profound leaves you with a big smile on your face. 89

Sepp Moser, Weingut
Kremstal, Rohrendorfer, Wolfsgraben
Grüner Veltliner

2004, \$14.99, 12.5%

Zero color, just shine, shine and more shine. Very pure and soft-spoken nose of streamwater, washed white stones, snap peas, white grapefruit pith and light peach, pear fuzz and pit, terroir-driven. Light-bodied and buoyant on the tongue, almost fizzy at times but has a sweet enough, honeyed core to stay anchored. While mildly herbaceous and possessed of a brush of white grapefruit, lemon, orange citrus, the focus remains on minerals, stone dust and chalk in addition to a dried brown topsoil aspect. Gets a little tingle out of the acidity, pushes it in a good-natured manner, if you resist it lets you win. Nice bitter twist in the peach, pear, green melon fruit, has more snap than juice, this contributes to its clearly delineated finish. Elegant dissolve leads to a refreshingly minimal residue behind. 89

Pichler, Weingut F.X.
Wachau, Loibner, Klostersatz, Federspiel
Grüner Veltliner

2004, \$27.99, 12.5%

Pure yellow straw in color, very reflective surface, translucent layers below. Creamy, very floral nose some chalk yet emphasizes the roundness in the peach, apricot scents, stays thick if not that prolonged. Full-bodied, for all of its weight and viscosity remains ethereal with a finely spun dissolve, slow and languorous. Immensely floral in the mouth too, more by way of sweet orange and lemon citrus. Approaches a mild swipe of white pepper and snap peas to remind you it is indeed a Grüner Veltliner. The acidity is average with a streaky pulse, the blade could use some sharpening but the finish is dry. The pear, peach, apricot, melon fruit also more steady than hitting peaks, wants to remain composed and knit into a whole. Very satisfactory. 88

Sepp Moser, Weingut
Kremstal, Rohrendorfer, Breiter Rain
Grüner Veltliner

2004, \$24.99, 13.5%

Highly reflective green-yellow straw color, pale until becomes fully transparent around the rims. The nose is minerally and stony if a touch mute, displays mint, ground flowers, mineral water with minimal peach, pear, apple fruit, has textural lift but not giving up many scents. Full-bodied, much richer than expected in the mouth, smooth and creamy in feel with ripe peach, apricot, pear, cherry fruit flavors. The sweetness extends to the orange, lemon citrus, the oak gives it a certain spiciness which enlivens the back half. The acidity is moderate and hides behind the spice, waits until the finish to try to dry things out. Has a floral residue, touch of mint sticks around at the end. Stays broad through the final sip but is a bit uni-dimensional and without that final snap. 87

SLOVENIA WHITE

Dveri-Pax (Erich Krutzler)
Maribor
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$16.99, 12.0%

Trim and light white straw in color, light bounces off the surface well and has enough depth to roil beneath. Mineral, white smoke, fresh green grass infuse the nose, violets, pear, apple and melon scents, on the whole stays subdued and easygoing. Light-bodied, offers a pleasing degree of transparency to the stone, chalk, mineral dust and lemon peel elements. The firm acidity has bite but doesn't push its advantage, keeps it focused without sucking out the pleasure. Rose and violet florality provide relief points, more of a skin/pit aspect to the pear, peach, apple fruit than real juiciness even as it credibly maintains a steady presence. Long and crunchy finish, lots of snap and natural in feel. Stands up for itself well. 88

Dveri-Pax (Erich Krutzler)
Radgona
Sipon

2003, \$17.99, 13.5%

Solid yellow straw in color, more blockish in appearance than split between a surface and layers, good fullness. Really worms into your nose, sour with lemon peel, mineral water, grass, bitters and broken stones, the pear, apple, melon fruit only a marginal element. Fatter than you'd expect in the mouth, sits and just about squats on the

tongue. Presents a mild dried fruit character in the apple, pear, peach fruit, very natural and more dry than sugary. The breadth this presents gains momentum from the lemon citrus and straw flavors, the acidity provides a steady back beat that is not going to call many shots. Has stone and stream water notes but this is more about doing the few things it can well rather than complexity. Nudges you until you give it your full attention. 87

SPAIN RED

Romeo, Viños de Benjamin
Rioja, La Viña de Andres Romeo
Tempranillo
2002, \$119.99, 14.0%

Incredibly cloudy, to the point of opacity, black purple core, power scarlet-red glow around the rims. Has a nose of pine, mountain air, stone, white grapefruit, garden herbs, fresh enough to create air flow but not really lifting, smoke and leather wrap tightly around the plum, blackberry, black cherry scents, has more one big punch than length. Full-bodied with a wide-eyed and animalistic energy during the attack, savages you with minerals, white grapefruit, leather, cigar leaf, keen edge to just about every aspect. Offers a shocking degree of structure, the acidity and tannins ensure there's little to soak and relax in. The red currant, cranberry, red cherry fruit behaves like pins and needles pricking your tongue. Some floral notes diminish the archness of the finish, but just a smidge. Not really sure what it is meant to express. 89

Gil, Bodegas Juan
Jumilla
Monastrell
2003, \$17.99, 14.8%

Trim red-purple core, only slightly drops to ruby-scarlet near the rims, excellent density without opacity. Sour and sweet nose, comes off as a bit hollow, shortness plagues the currant, cherry, plum scents, glimmers of chocolate and game and then, poof, it's all gone. Full-bodied, sheds its weight easily as it progresses through the mouth, leads with moments of bell pepper, beef jerky and a dried floral arrangement that was still left in the vase too long. Chocolate and toasted almonds swish by then your only choice is to soak in the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Provides some powdery tannins but they are powdery and not longlasting. Actually remarkable in that you can tell it had to work real hard to integrate its elements and it just about fully pulls it off. 88

Perinet, Mas
Priorat
Blend
2002, \$29.99, 14.0%

Pools of red-backlit purple drift outwards into a dark, rich magenta cast at the rims. In the nose the alcohol throws the florality and raspberry, cherry fruit off their bearings, gingerbread, molasses fill the gaps, not a lot of different scents but they are plenty deep. Medium-bodied, has a tacky mouth feel which gets smoothed out some by an initial layer of caramel and brown sugar. Then turns to orange zest, a fair degree of florality and ginger spice. Dry raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, cherry fruit, most of its concentration is upfront and there's not a lot left by the finish. Lack of fruit brings the vanilla cream back into the forefront. Drinkable. 47% Grenache, 25% Syrah, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Carignan, 3% Merlot. 87

SPAIN WHITE

Nora, Viña
Rías Baixas
Albariño
2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Moderately hued straw gold color, consistent throughout, offers an attractive surface radiance. Clean, brisk nose of white minerals, chalk, seashells, provides some counter-balance via black licorice and dried flowers, the peach, pear, mango fruit scents compact and succinct. Medium-bodied, real zesty and prickly, even distractably so, sizzles on the tongue. The lilacs, licorice, orange rinds, pressed flowers all come at you at different angles, testing your patience. Crisp acidic spine gives the flavors nice length. Little excess in the peach, apple, pear fruit flavors, yet holds its depth through to a clearly outlined finish. Needs a wee bit of time to settle into itself. 87

SPAIN DESSERT

Rodríguez, Compañía de Viños Telmo
Málaga, MR Mountain Wine
Moscato
2003, \$19.99, 13.0%

Faint luminescent quality to the gold color, the hue is neither weak nor especially strong, which would, err, make it average. Explosive nose of dried apricots, nectarines, peaches and pineapples, wood kindling smoke, dewy florality and a pinch of cinnamon spice, who needs anything more? Medium-bodied, refreshingly light on its feet, while concentrated and with that dried fruit character, it releases quite well and has an appealingly high level of buoyant acidity. Floral in the mouth too, but it brightens more from the sweet tangerine and lime notes. Well-collected, refuses to push itself on you. Smiles all around. 500 ml bottle. 91

PORTUGAL WHITE

Ameal, Quinto do
Vinho Verde
Loureiro
2003, \$13.99, 11.0%

Brilliantly reflective yellow gold color, really glitters in the glass, fully transparent rims. Tangerine and lemon citrus remain on the juicy side in the nose, curiously starts to smell like a bowl of Froot Loops, finishes with mint and gentle apricot, pear scents. Medium-bodied, if particularly bottom-heavy, immediately comes off as musky and flowery, like you just ran the perfume counter gauntlet at Bloomingdales. Not that sappy but the concentration in the apricot, pear, red apple, peach fruit gives it lingering power. Minimal acidity, kinds of rolls forward just 'cause. Leaves behind a powdery texture as its calling card. 85

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Boekenhoutskloof
Coastal Region
Shiraz
2002, \$45.99, 14.5%

Dark, semi-medicinal brick red to scarlet in color, pretty much full saturation to the rims. Grill smoke, leather, animal fur, minerally black earth blossom in the nose, even with all that comes off as clean with a substantial core of blackberry, cherry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, the acidity makes a very strong initial impression, beats the heavy

vanilla cream to the punch. Quite minerally and spicy with a keen blade of white grapefruit citrus. The tannins give it some grip as it progresses and brings out more leather, earth, tobacco, beef blood aspects. Has the expected smokiness in the currant, cherry, plum fruit but there's a lack of overall juiciness which shortens the finish some. 87

AUSTRALIA RED

Colonial Estate, The
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Exile
Blend

2003, \$165.99, 15.5%

Dusky red-purple core, heavy cast to the ochre-tinged brick red rims, holds onto its clarity even as it strives for a glowing richness. The nose, while dense, achieves steady motion, unveiling toasted coca and milk chocolate, earth, lemon and orange peel, roasted meats, cigar leaf, the red currant and red cherry fruit about as subdued as could be expected, bonus points for how it extends and remains fluid. If getting a steel beam shoved through your jaw equates to full-bodied, it is full-bodied. Elaborate presentation of orange and lemon zest, mint, menthol with only a smattering of vanilla and mocha oak tones. Gets more serious with black earth, grilled meats, wet tobacco, freshly sheared wool, excellent job of pushing across the palate without tiring it out entirely. The tannins no weakling, really quite able to stand up to just about anything in its path. Caramel notes give the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry, cassis fruit a dessert-like feel, if those tannins weren't there you'd be tempted to drink it with a dark chocolate cake. Smokiness lends it pleasing tang as it nears the finish, keeping popping through the palate. Serious juice that demands you pay it respect. 75% Shiraz, 20% Mourvèdre, 5% Grenache. 93

Kaesler
South Australia, Barossa Valley, The Bogan
Shiraz
2003, \$64.99, 15.5%

Just about onyx black at the core, warm glow in whatever purple hue you may discern, rims appear a shaded magenta. Curious blend of peanut butter, earth, dried eucalyptus leaves and cocoa crisp in the nose, densely immobile currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, odd in how as a whole there's depth to all the scents yet remains somewhat inexpressive. Full-bodied and saturating, a real mouth stainer, very hard to resist its the scale of its sweep into the mouth. Crammed full with currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit, sweet with a heavy layer of caramel and vanilla toast. Its center of gravity sucks your tongue in and starts to fold it in on itself so that the tannins and acidity are all but submerged — that they struggle at all is to their credit. Becomes floral with sugary orange to tangerine zest, you have to make a concerted effort to get it moving down your throat. Minty, very primary, an exceedingly youthful, but promising, wine. If you can wait. 91

Colonial Estate, The
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Émigré
Blend
2003, \$125.99, 15.5%

The glowing red-purple core pushes opacity, excellent saturation in the orange-tinted red rims. The nose is very concentrated, not immobile but no glider either, hard dark chocolate, lemon zest, red earth, minerals, driftwood, light popcorn and butter notes without getting overwrought,

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touch overripe cherry, currant, plum fruit, probably will develop more prune in the future, minor leather, on the whole the scents not as expressive as one suspects it might be. Full-bodied, oozes through the mouth like squeezed cake frosting, coats and double coats your tongue in currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit. Continuous presentation of the orange/tangerine zest, mesquite smoke, thyme, chili pepper, leather, minerals and game flavors. Minimal lift, the tannins are strong but maybe not strong enough for this. Dark chocolate, clove and a dash of caramel evoke that oak. Enacts a "momentum play" with its weight to get through the finish, the flavors start to fray at the final moment. A wine that may have benefited from paring it down to simple basics rather than trying to find even more ways to impress. 30% Shiraz, 30% Grenache, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Mourvèdre, 3% Carignan, 2% Muscadelle. 91

Warrenmang
Victoria, Grand Pyrenees
Blend
2002, \$49.99, 14.5%

Brown-red brick influence in the purple core, cashes out a more flat crimson cast at the rims. High degree of mintiness and meatiness in the nose, eucalyptus, earth, overall has a serene feel about it, light milk chocolate patina to the raspberry, red cherry, green apple fruit scents, softly candied nature as well. Medium-bodied, delivers orange and lemon citrus, mint, eucalyptus, leather, super-fresh and agreeable, really opens up across the palate with very little unnecessary weight. The acidity and tannins are never obtrusive but remain within striking distance. Minor olive, herbal, hay and stone notes. Natty florality gives it additional fluffy lift. Streamlined focus shines through the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit, built for the long haul. So stimulating and pristine you'd think it was born on a sunny spring mountain morning. 50% Shiraz, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc. 90

Wits End
South Australia, McLaren Vale, The Procrastinator
Blend
2004, \$16.99, 14.0%

Rich violet core with a splendid glow to it, turns to a dark ruby, hardly any hue change at all. Herbal, bell pepper-driven nose with distinct burst of mint for contrast, minerally earth, orange peel, thickset currant, black cherry, blackberry scents blossom, offers more by way of textural heft than a clear array of scents. Full-bodied, stays fluid and noticeably sleek for its weight, continues to graze across the palate while always moving ahead. Some sap in the smoky red currant, cherry fruit, good rive and persistence. Less herbal here, just a brush of bell pepper, more by way of leather, minerally earth and tar with an invigorating poke of orange zest. The acidity and tannins highly credible, solidify throughout. Floral, swipe of mint, offers enough pretty aspects to avoid getting leaden. Steady finisher, continues as it started, not a beat missed. 95% Cabernet Franc, 5% Shiraz. 89

Fetish
South Australia, Barossa Valley, The Watcher
Shiraz
2004, \$26.99, 14.0%

Healthy glow in the ruby-purple core, bit blackish though, takes on a dark ruby cast at the rims. White grapefruit, minerals and grassiness animate the nose, admirably

throws in some recoil with sprightly cranberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, lifts enough to achieve a clean dissolve. Medium to full-bodied, zesty attack with minerals, lemon to white grapefruit citrus, grass, earth, dried blood, iron and mild cedar elements. The acidity gives a credible performance, cracks the whip when needed. The raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit walks at a brisk pace through the mouth. Evinces more orange citrus notes at the end. Manages to keep to the gameplan the whole way through, finish has the richness you want as well as the cleanliness you want but are afraid to expect. Good collected feel, checked in the mirror before it went out. 89

Colonial Estate, The
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Explorateur
Shiraz
2004, \$34.99, 14.5%

The crimson-violet color presents more clarity than depth, extends adequately to the red rims. The oak influence in the nose is deep but done in a refined manner, buttered toast, mint, toffee alongside fried bacon bits, orange reduction, extremely dense cassis, black cherry, plum scents, intent more on making an impression than providing immediate visceral pleasure. Medium-bodied, yet so densely packed and immobile it may appear much heavier, definitely has the richness nailed down. Popcorn, toffee, whipped butter and orange zest replicate most of the nose. The black currant, cassis, blackberry fruit is so thickly slathered on your tongue that it is surprising in how it develops fumes. Nice degree of violets, herbs too, minor moment of relief. The tannins are adequate, acidity probably carrying more weight. You can feel it trying to break loose from its moorings and move about but too tightly wound. Ever get hit with a sock full of quarters? 89

Colonial Estate, The
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Envoy
Blend
2004, \$34.99, 14.5%

Light filmy quality in the red to orange brick color, runs to scarlet at the rims where it gains additional clarity. Super-ripe and juicy raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, amazing that it can produce a leathery, wooly edge, mesquite smoke too, goes for the jugular albeit in a friendly way. Full-bodied, boldly extracted so as to flood your mouth with that same boundless juicy raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit. Does not quite get as soft as the tannins have a semi-sandpapery feel about them. Nothing held back in regards to the heavy cream and caramel which ably combats the tannins. Smoke, minerals, spit-roasted game and tanned leather lend gravitas to the mid-palate. Round, juicy orange to tangerine citrus keeps the fruit love fest going. Loses some grip towards the finish but it's by that point welcome, how many bruises does your tongue need? Fruit lovers unite! 50% Grenache, 30% Shiraz, 20% Mourvèdre. 89

Colonial Estate, The
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Etranger
Cabernet Sauvignon
2004, \$34.99, 14.5%

Dense red-purple core, not opaque but certainly not losing much hue through to the burnt crimson rims. Bell pepper, grass, scorched earth, clay, minerals and chalk dust the most vivacious components of the nose, lighter notes of cedar, tobacco leaf and even less lemon peel, no lack of gusto in the currant and black cherry scents, the vanilla/caramel surprises in its restraint. In the mouth it is

full-bodied and plops in there like a ton of bricks. Presents a black hole of cassis, plum, black cherry fruit that could never be said to grind to a halt since you are not sure it ever had a beginning or will have an end. BBQ sauce, mesquite chips, caramel and black earth spark the attack but it's not long before that bell pepper is back in spades. The citrus is white in nature, lemon and grapefruit, adds zip. The tannins have as good a grip as could be expected, not drying per se but does yank it up onto its feet. Loses zero sappiness through the finish, just try to get it out of your mouth with a crowbar. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Shiraz. 89

Riggs, Mr.
South Australia, McLaren Vale
Shiraz
2003, \$49.99, 15.0%

Jet black, boldly opaque until admitting of saturated vermilion to magenta rims. The alcohol really obstructs most of the scents in the nose, if you focus hard enough you can discern massive black currant, plum, blackberry scents lurking, spray of vanilla and membrane of herbs, truly too volatile and alcoholic for further description. Medium-bodied, stable and stout, like pulling a mule up the proverbial ladder. Not sugary but concentrated to the point where the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit comes off as a powdered essence — just add water, mix and, voila!, glass of Shiraz. Given the gravitational pull of this black star, the oak toast and toffee has to struggle to not be fully sucked into the vortex. Ditto for the florality and tangerine citrus. The acidity and tannins have muscles but have chosen hibernation, hoping for a warm spring in which to stretch out. Get some rest before you pull the cork. Grapes sourced from Breakneck Creek, Penny's Hill, Quondong Farm Vineyards. 88

Lengs & Cooter
South Australia, The Victor
Shiraz
2003, \$16.99, 14.5%

The dusky purple core stays mostly opaque, densely set crimson to garnet rims. Buttered popcorn dominates the nose, even the whipped cream and caramel scents take a beating, smoky like the smell when you clean the grill with a wire brush, quick uptick of mint and then all currant, blackberry fruit scents. In the mouth its full body is sternly muscular enough to handle the oaky vanilla and buttered toast element, the acidity is ready, willing and able. Menthol, mint and orange citrus present the expected flavor sidebar, gives you a touch of grilled meats, fat dripping into the coals. Raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit punches through, no thoughtless juice, to the contrary it's a bit wound-up. For its price category probably not best for immediate consumption, needs a year or two to improve. 85% Shiraz, 15% Grenache. 88

Kaesler
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Avignon
Blend
2004, \$27.99, 15.5%

Fully opaque and glowing ruby-violet core, fatly saturated and luminescent magenta rims. Ultra-juicy nose of raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, light swipes of eucalyptus and lemon citrus, tosses flower petals at you and then fully dissolves before any other scent has the chance to appear. Full-bodied, chocolate and burnt toast make an initial flourish then sweet smoke and cedar provide a deeper bass line in the oak-derived flavors. No

real acidity nor tannins to stand in the path of the march of the jammy strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, moves forward like a road grader. Noticeable floral dimension with a pretty lemon spritz, finally able to turn the jam into more of a swirling perfume. Pushes it to the nth degree but to its credit doesn't go over the top, if you know why you're buying it that's exactly what you'll get. 50% Grenache, 30% Shiraz, 20% Mourvèdre. 88

Wits End

South Australia, McLaren Vale

Shiraz

2003, \$29.99, 15.0%

Opaque black purple core, no light getting through that, thin if vibrant ruby-crimson rims, too deep for much shine. The nose is so big and structured that barely a scent gets through, mint and heavy cream, currant, plum and cherry fruit, glue-like consistency, popcorn, heather-led floral notes, then more you sniff the more it slows down. Full-bodied, good framing ability in the acidity while no denying the thrust of the robust currant, black cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit, the underlying oak toast, caramel and vanilla not going away. The orange and tangerine citrus lends some zip, touch of minerals too but more so leather, earth and forest wood, the florality pales in the face of both the oak and acidity. Keeps nipping at you but reluctant to make a strong statement before you speak first. Juiciness lasts but never quite opens up into a full blooming of joy. May improve with some time to find itself. 87

Razor's Edge

South Australia, McLaren Vale

Shiraz

2004, \$11.99, 14.0%

Clear ruby-violet core, achieves adequate depth, more ruby to a dark magenta at the rims. Sour cherry, blackberry fruit in the nose, uneven oak toast, hint of mint, light lemon juice, gets right to the point if not semi-clipped. Light to medium-bodied, smooth with decent fluidity. Not that much oak crispness, toasty at first but not expressive enough to last. Framboise feel in the raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit, the sugary sweetness not long in lasting. Touch herbal as it progresses, quiet earthy murmur, pinch of lemon and orange peel. Seems like there's tannins or acidity in there but hard to find them when you look. Starts turning dilute as it nears the finish, makes the vanilla cream more obvious, slight chemical feel. Easy enough to drink, nothing more. 86

Black Opal

South Australia, South Eastern Australia

Shiraz

2003, \$7.99, 13.5%

Fairly light purple core, run through by a red to garnet tinge, half step closer to crimson at the rims. Straightforward nose of currant, plum, cherry fruit, dusting of cinnamon and orange peel and then a dried grass/hay thing before it loops back around to the fruit again. Medium-bodied, tangy with lots of sharp spice and lemon/orange citrus, a mean streak in the acidity gives it a slightly underripe feel. Light grit in the tannins contribute further to this feel, not a lot of length nor juiciness in the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, becomes dilute by the finish. At least the alcohol level is low enough to minimize any burning sensations. 83

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Colonial Estate, The

South Australia, Barossa Valley, Expatrié

Sémillon

2005, \$34.99, 13.0%

Pale white-green straw in color, on the dull side with hueless rims. Creamy vanilla fills the nose, baking spices, lilacs, orange blossom and strawberry, peach, red apple fruit does the rest, not easy to find much else to sniff on. Full-bodied, on the sweet side during the attack, violets, anise, hard lemon candy, candied orange peel, French vanilla ice cream and flavorful green apple, apricot, pear fruit without excess juice. The cinnamon, nutmeg and other baking spices bring out an almost breadly feel. Soft acidity puts on the onus on the sheer density of the wine to continue its presence through to the finish. This isn't quite enough to keep it full, starts to drain out after awhile which brings out increasing grassiness at the end. Needs a little more harmony to truly impress. 88% Sémillon, 12% Riesling. 87

TK Wines

South Australia, Adelaide Hills

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$21.99, 12.5%

Blunt white straw in color, color here being kind, mild greenish tinge, maintains a certain reflectivity while nothing to really gaze upon either. Nose somewhat muddled, veers from white and pink grapefruit to chili pepper, from pear and green apple fruit to violets, pebbles and stream earth, never quite figures out what it wants to settle into. In the mouth it is full-bodied with impressive weight, again suffers from indecision as to how it wants to manage all that heft. Lemon, lime, orange citrus, lilacs and magnolia, white stones, all comes off as semi-blurred. Has some acidity but still seems dilute and lacking in erect bearing. Nibbles away at you but too timid to really grab you the way it should. 85

NEW ZEALAND RED

Koura Bay

Marlborough

Pinot Noir

2003, \$34.99, 13.0%

Good depth in the crimson-violet color, very trim and unblemished, fights any hue lose relentlessly through to the scarlet rims. Nose is a bit on the closed side, not really giving much, you have to draw deeply to get at the straw, hay, mineral chunk, lemon scents, the cherry, raspberry fruit has entered a witness protection program. Medium-bodied and surprisingly much more giving in the mouth, the smoky and sappy cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit clings like a scared baby chimpanzee. There's a lightly high-toned character to the lemon citrus and floral swipes, while not overly aggressive it does gather itself into as tight of a core as it can in order to push forward. The acidity no slouch, pairs well with the earthier notes and keeps it broad through to the finish. Stays on your heels like a well-trained hunting dog. 87