

The Hanes Wine Review, September 2005 Edition

Emerson said that "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Well, if that is the case then Hanes, as usual, strives to play the fool. Such is the wine reviewer's lot in life as palate consistency remains a cornerstone of the usefulness of critiquing the fruit of the vine.

Consistency in reviewing wines remains paramount because it affords the reader the opportunity to "calibrate" his or her palate to that of the reviewer. The idea is that over time oneself tastes many of the wines reviewed and then compares one's own assessment to that of the reviewer, looking for points of convergence or divergence. Sounds simple but the reality is much more complex.

The first point to consider is whether or not the assessment or judging of the wine is done by a single person or by a panel of individuals. Both approaches have their pros and cons and effect one's ability to calibrate to the wine reviews.

Many magazines use the "tasting panel" approach. The same goes for wine shows where medals are awarded and the like. At times the identities of the panel members are unknown, at others known. The idea here is that true quality is best identified by averaging out the ratings of many respected palates rather than depending solely on the idiosyncrasies of a single individual's palate. An individual may not like and/or be attuned to a specific type of wine so by balancing out this perspective with others who may like or be better attuned with that wine a more "objective" result is obtained.

There is some merit to this approach and the underlying rationale is in many regards sound. However, there exist serious drawbacks when it comes to calibrating one's palate with these results. Foremost among this is that the individuals who make up the panel often change so that, with, for example, a magazine, the palate preferences shift and evade any efforts at calibration. If you thought the panel tends to like more tannic or more fruity wines than you do, well, this month's panel may be quite different and like less tannic or less fruity wines. And if indeed the panel's constitution is unknown you can't even try to figure out which members are on the panels you agree or disagree with. So, more objective perhaps. Easy to calibrate with? A much thornier issue.

Conversely, we have the single reviewer. As this person is assumed to not suffer from multiple personalities, the reader gets what s/he hopes will be a consistent assessment of wines, month to month, year to year. If the reviewer is in fact good and makes a conscious effort at prioritizing consistency the reader shall get this. Thus, palate calibration is much simpler and as the reader tries firsthand more and more of the wines reviewed and makes a thorough comparison of the respective results the reader will know which recommendations to follow and which to avoid in the future before purchasing.

Which brings up an important aspect of consistency when reviewing wines. This single reviewer approach may be more "subjective" but, as many will say, the goal is to use wine reviews to find wines you will like. Hence, negative knowledge is as useful as positive knowledge. If you know you agree with Reviewer A a lot of the time and disagree with Reviewer B a lot of the time, both insights are equally useful. As long as the descriptions of the wine are on the whole accurate a reader can discern what s/he will like or not in the wine being discussed. It is just as easy to calibrate to someone whose palate you agree with as not. The key being consistency.

It should be noted that there exists one major drawback to this approach. Namely, human finitude. It is all but impossible for any single person to taste but a fraction of the wines on the market. And the number of wines available for purchase only grows everyday, further compounding this problem. Most wine reviewers want to taste as many wines as they can, and furthermore do so across a wide spectrum of both wine types and price points. It is as rewarding to recommend a great \$10 wine as it is a great \$100 wine, perhaps even more so. But there's just not enough hours in the day.

The most prominent single wine reviewers in the United States are arguably Robert M. Parker, Jr. (The Wine Advocate) and Stephen D. Tanzer (International Wine Cellar). Over the years they have dealt with their human finitude by hiring additional reviewers to support their efforts. These individuals are supposed to have excellent palates, powers of evaluation and writing skills, all worthy of being included under the umbrella of the titular head's writings. Sadly, though, these "super-sub" can dramatically impair a reader's ability to calibrate with the publication's output.

For example, Tanzer has in the past three years used himself and two other reviewers to cover Australian wines. Each person has their own distinct take on the wines of Australia and there may or may not be significant overlap. Calibrating over time becomes a chore and in many situations simply not possible. But what of when the "super-sub" has been ceded a particular region to call their own and has covered said region for many years? In such cases, it is surely possible to calibrate as both the reviewer and the reader have remained the same for a suitable duration of time. This is a good thing.

Sadly, though, this occurs only in rare circumstances and there remains lots of swapping in and out of secondary reviewers covering many different wine regions. If one has the time and energy one can keep track of these trails and traces and continue to make sense of it all. If one does not have the time nor energy, one may be tempted to reduce it all under the titular head's aegis and in one's mind attribute everything to him/her. Quite oddly, it seems this happens most with retailers and wholesalers who trumpet high point scores from Parker or Tanzer when, in fact, neither Parker nor Tanzer reviewed the wine in question. Only the most scrupulous retailer or wholesaler will note explicitly that the review was by Pierre Rovani or David Schildknecht or Edward Beltrami. While extremely professional, these reviewers do not quite have the cachet as the person whose name is on the office door. The wine buyer just sees "93 points, The Wine

Advocate!" and assumes it is Parker's review and then recalls how his/her palate calibrates with Parker's palate. And then potentially gets a big surprise when the cork is popped.

In the end the onus is on the reader or wine buyer to "read the small print" so this is not a harangue against The Wine Advocate nor International Wine Cellar. In order to be as comprehensive as possible this appears to be a necessary evil of sorts, with no legitimate alternative in sight. Hanes will say in passing, though, that he continues to feel it is a shame that both publications maintain a minimal score threshold for inclusion in their reviews. Indeed, there are publishing size constraints and printing costs and that pesky human finitude. But negative knowledge [what to avoid] is as useful as positive knowledge [what to buy] and the former aids immeasurably in calibrating palates. Finally, one doesn't know which wines were tasted and not recommended as they are simply never mentioned. Wines one encounters which have no available reviews on them may be simply overlooked by the main reviewers or these reviewers may have just thought they sucked. You'll never know.

Now, with Hanes it is a whole different story! He is waaaaay too greedy to ever willingly let someone else drink his booze when he should be the one passed out amidst many empty wine bottles. There shall be no subs here. But is Hanes consistent enough for his charming readers to calibrate their palates with his? Ahh, good question.

Hanes often muses to himself over this. Naturally, he may be the last person one should ask this question. He is, after all, closely involved with the process. Even intimately so. In any event, here is what Hanes thinks.

Certainly, Hanes's palate has changed over the years. Duh. Trying thousands of wines kind of does that to a fella. Wines he once loved now leave him a tad unmoved. Others which elicited a big yawn in the past get him all jazzed up today. This notwithstanding, Hanes often strives for another goal, all the while hoping consistency will come of its own accord. He makes an earnest attempt to take a given wine on its own terms, given its immediate peer group. He asks of the wine, "What is this wine trying to achieve and does it succeed or not?" Regardless of whether Hanes really, really likes or dislikes the wine. The exhaustive prose he offers in each tasting note should include enough information for the reader to decide if it will suit his/her tastes or not. The important thing is to first decide if this Californian Chardonnay is excellent against other Californian Chardonnays not against white Burgundy or Chilean Chardonnay. Only after this decision has been made is it appropriate for broader contextualization of the wine. Otherwise, the wine may be handicapped from the start and the reviewer may be doing a disservice to the reader due to the former's subjective biases.

What does this mean for the numeric scores Hanes doles out on each wine? Is 90 points for a German Riesling equal to 90 points for a Washington State Merlot? Well, err, that's the goal. But, truthfully, it is probably not the case. This is because wine types, interpreted as a group, have different levels of quality and Hanes cannot really "level them out." Taken as a whole, Uruguayan wines made from the Tannat grape are not as good as the Tannat-based wines of Madiran in France. To Hanes, them's just the facts. As a result, the scores for the Madiran wines will on average be higher. However, conversely, if a Uruguayan Tannat did get 90 points it would probably be a very impressive wine as it broke away from the pack and exceeded all historical experience to the present moment.

A reader should never get lazy and just go by the scores, be they from Hanes, Parker, Tanzer, the Wine Spectator, Wine & Spirits, etc. Both the scores and the descriptions are just snapshots in time and not definitive assessments. Sadly, numeric scores easily take on the appearance of a definitive statement. If any wine reviewer tries to convince you that all their 90 point or 85 point wines are of the exact same qualitative level they are full of it. It's just not possible, especially as the sheer quantity of wines reviewed grows over time.

Calibrating one's palate to those of many wine reviewers can be not only educational but fun. It's an interesting challenge and one learns a lot about what one likes and how one analyzes things out there in the world. It's absolutely worth the effort. And, remember, Hanes makes it even easier by offering to come over to your place and drink all your wine with you!

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This month's big winners... It's no secret that Hanes is down on the 2003 vintage throughout most of Europe but especially in France. Hence, a tip of the cap to Domaine Langoureau for making a very nice Chassagne-Montrachet from the Les Perclos parcel. Sadly, not much is available. Lovers of big Petite Sirah should make an effort to seek out the 2003 Madrone Spring Vineyard from Mauritson's "Rockpile" label, it has the brawn to satisfy. A firm traditionalist, Giacomo Conterno has made one helluva Barolo in 2001 from their Cascina Francia vineyard. Not cheap but one for any Barolo lover's cellar. Olson Ogden's 2003 Syrah from the Unti Vineyard in the Dry Creek Valley is another winner albeit not cheap either given its relative competition at \$35. Hanes is usually not that keen on domestic Pinot Noir but Hartford's 2003 "Sonoma Coast" bottling is pretty damn good and a relatively decent deal at \$20. Not everyone grooves with Tommaso Bussola's winemaking approach but, hey, Hanes liked his 2001 Amarone "BG" pretty well and he'll readily drink more if someone else pays. OK, it is \$75 but Kongsgaard's Napa Chardonnay is killer when it is on, as it is with the 2003 version. On the Chardonnay tip, Waterford has in 2004 made perhaps one of the best Chardonnays Hanes has ever tasted from South Africa and, hell, it's only \$20. Usually Oregon's best white wines are their Pinot Gris and nice example Hanes swallowed down this month was Lemelson's 2004 "Tikka's Run" bottling, a nice mouthful. Not many people are running out to buy Müller-Thurgau but if this grape tickles your fancy, Cantina Convento (aka Muri-Gries in big letters on the label) from Alto Adige in Italy has in 2004 made an eye opener. Hey, it's Sancerre that tastes like a Sancerre! It must be a 2004! Yes, it is and it's from Serge Laloue and acceptably priced at around \$20. From New Zealand, Kaimira's 2004 Sauvignon Blanc offers a distinct flavor profile and lots of energy. Pecchenino's flagship Dolcetto "Siri d'Jeremu" is a proven

winner and did a great job in the problematic 2003 vintage. Gavi from Piedmont is another wine not found on many shopping lists but the 2004 from Cascina degli Ulivi is a wonderful wine for about \$16.

The best \$15 and under picks... Not too many cheapies this month as a lot of the notes herein come from big trade tastings and Hanes uses these events to taste the "big guns"! All bona fide wine geeks bow before the wonder that is Clos Roche Blanche, the remarkably consistent Loire producer whose prices never seem to rise. Their 2004 Cabernet Franc is another winner for the anti-oak crowd and still fairly priced at \$14. Never the biggest fan of Californian Syrah producer Clos Mimi, their "Nini" blend (that's what is in big letters on the label) is probably one of the nicest wines Hanes has tasted from them, all for a reasonable \$14. Cuevas de Castilla has class with their 2004 "Con Class" white blend, a satisfying little \$10 bottle of fermented grape juice. Anton Bauer has fashioned a juicy, easy to drink Grüner Veltliner with his 2004 Gmörk bottling, still at the nice price of \$11. For \$11 or so Salviano's 2004 Orvieto is a flavorful bottle of white wine for casual chugging with friends. Hanes has long admired Rhône producer Mas de Bressades as a credible source of cheap wines and their 2004 Syrah-Grenache blend keeps the streak alive for around \$10. German Riesling producer Merkelbach "may be back" with some of their nicest wines since 2001 if their 2004 Spätlese level from the Ürziger Würzgarten vineyard is any indication. A screaming value for \$15.

And the disappointments... Some of the most profound Syrah wines Hanes has tasted from California have been made by Kongsgaard. Sadly, their 2003 is not going to make the superstar list, particularly at \$150 per bottle. Cuilleron is a Rhône producer of high repute, imported by a respected distributor too. Yet, somehow Hanes always feels slightly let down by their wines. Witness the 2004 Syrah from the Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes area — for \$13 he thought for sure he had a cheapie winner to recommend. Sigh. Same can be said for La Carraia's Sangiovese from Italy's Umbria region. Used to be a nice value for \$10 or under and for some reason recent vintages, including the 2003, are blah. Hanes likes to sing the praises of "Cru" Beaujolais but the fact is that all Beaujolais is not created equal. Château de Pizay's 2004 Morgon was damn pedestrian for a wine from the quality Morgon area and an easy pass. Hanes doesn't get the allure of the Albariño wines from Spanish producer Pazo de Señorans and after trying their 2004 maybe he never will. In the past Hanes has very much enjoyed the Piedmontese wines from producer Cantalupo. So, he is puzzled by the two underwhelming wines he tasted this month, the 1997 "Collis Breclémæ" and 1996 "Collis Carellæ." Please, just do whatever you did before. Maybe Hanes's snooty palate has become too refined or maybe it's just an issue with the 2004 version but the Malbec from Argentinean producer Altos Las Hormigas was another disappointing "could have been a contenda" inexpensive bottle. Zind Humbrecht is probably the Alsatian producer most likely to polarize wine fans into pro or con camps. Hopefully most people will agree that their 2003 Riesling from the Brand Grand Cru vineyard is a soupy mess of a wine. And \$84 too, ouch. Bernard Morey is a pretty damn good white Burgundy producer but something went horribly wrong with their 2003 Chassagne-Montrachet "Vide Bourse." Better to just forget and move on.

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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 #14: "The notes may not make sense but they sound impressive!"

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

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

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Mauritson
Sonoma County, Madrone Spring Vineyard, Rockpile
Petite Sirah
2003, \$36.99, 15.3%

Unblemished, brilliant red-violet core, minimal dropoff to the dark magenta rims. Real slugger of a nose, gets up in there like it holds the deed, all mint and black cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, furnishes undercurrents of dried flowers, orange zest, earth, leather, tightly wound indeed, minimal oak influence, the coffee grinds and burnt toast negligible at best. Full-bodied, oodles of intensity, floods your mouth like a spotlight. A big tannic beast, really dusty and drying. Boasts of orange zest, eucalyptus, stone boulders, wild grasses, old saddle leather. The blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit is dense yet tingles, vibrates through to

the finish. Mentholated but has zero lift, this is a ground crawler. Touch peppery at the end, stifles the florality but hard to exactly notice as monolithic as it is. Rolls over you so it can't hear your cries. just gets bigger and bigger as it sits in your mouth, a roaring din. 91

Husic

Napa Valley, Dos Palmas
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$104.99, 14.5%

More or less opaque crimson-purple in color, bright glow in the youthful brick red rims. Pushes into your nose but doesn't shout, the caramel and vanilla easily give way to bell pepper and earth, gains breadth for it, nice touches of tobacco, cedar, orange peel, wears the girth of the black currant, black cherry scents well, has Energizer Bunny activity. Full-bodied, large in scale, broad-shouldered, all of that but not at all misshapen nor exaggerated, just relishes its exuberance. Toffee, sweet smoke, butterscotch appear while remaining in proportion to the whole. Drips layers of blackberry, black cherry, currant, plum fruit over your tongue, you willingly drown in it. Baking spices, tobacco, leather, cedar, grass, orange zest all play a role, not shy about how it can please you, no boasting thank you. Quite reluctant to finish, more content to hang around and see how it help more. A thinking person's Californian Cabernet. 91

Tin Barn

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Coryelle Fields
Syrah
2002, \$36.99, 14.1%

Heavy glow in the purple core, just about opaque, lightens some into luminescent magenta rims. Coffee roast and dark chocolate frame the nose, follows with mint, flowers, orange spritz, nothing heavy-handed about it, stays nimble, this extends to the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, stays fresh and open. Medium-bodied, streamlined with a nice swift pacing, no dilly-dallying here. Swirling feel in the florality and orange/lemon citrus, keeps circulating and thus freshens up the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit. Little oak influence, leans more on stones and dry earth for support. Invigorating acidity opens it further. Gets a little blurry on the finish, its sole mar, attributable to the youth of the vines (fifth leaf). Touch of fresh blood and animal skin but nothing too deep. Lame to say, but seems comparable in spirit to a Saint Joseph. 90

Olson Ogden

Dry Creek Valley, Unti Vineyard
Syrah
2003, \$34.99, 14.3%

Vibrant ruby-violet color, trim and unblemished, barely shifts to ruby at the rims, very integrated appearance, cut from a whole cloth. Big, drowsy nose like a Georgia summer afternoon, fans itself in the shade with coffee, dark chocolate, floral dew, lemon drop and scents of plum, black currant, black cherry fruit, despite the 90° temperature it never breaks a sweat. Full-bodied, handles itself with aplomb, stays on balance and memorized its lines flawlessly. Toasty, yeah, no lack of vanilla cream but matches this with lime and orange citrus and really hits its stride early, not even close to getting too oaky. Lively, nimble blackberry, raspberry, black cherry has length to spare and stays juicy to the last drop. With licorice, mint and violets it knows how to play up its prettiest elements and stay on point. The acidity puts a charge in the battery, reawakens the back half. Good stuff. 90

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Mauritson

Sonoma County, Rockpile Ridge Vineyard, Rockpile
Zinfandel
2003, \$36.99, 15.1%

Deep but not opaque violet core, dense crimson-ruby rims, very well saturated. Toasty French cream in the nose, uses toffee notes as entry into voluptuous blueberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, segues into animal skin, leather, earth, even throws some florality into the mix, almost waxy in texture in how it clings without feeling forced. Full-bodied, as wide as the mouth entry is it remains smooth and fluid. Nothing noticeable about the tannins nor acidity yet something is keeping it fresh, spicy mix of ginger, cinnamon and black pepper. Vibrant orange to lemon citrus, the minerality checks the oak cream albeit no ignoring that oak spice and toffee. Plush blackberry, blueberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit stays within bounds and pairs up well with a brush of gamey notes. Concentrated, prolonged finish, even a bit tight. Powerful stuff. 90

Hartford Family Winery

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast
Pinot Noir
2003, \$19.99, 14.1%

Mild cloud to the vivid, softly glowing magenta-ruby to violet color, rich to the rims with no dropoff. Thickly constructed nose of cola, smoky raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit, wet and soaking, adds in lemon citrus notes, gets ballast from a brush of leather, earth scents, shows only moderate vanilla cream. Full-bodied, spicy without getting sharp, the cream takes the edge off. With lemon and orange citrus, minerals and a pinch of grass, along with some cola accents, presents a nice Pinot profile. Sweet and concentrated blackberry, raspberry, black cherry fruit without getting sugary. Quiet but credible acidity, knit into the overall fabric. Stays plush and fully-loaded through the finish, brisk pacing with solid weight. 90

Tin Barn

Napa Valley, Chiles Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$39.99, 14.3%

Purpureal coloring falls prey to more crimson-ruby, fairly clear and definitely more reflective than most Cabernet Sauvignon. Offers tobacco, cedar, orange peel, dried blood before yielding the floor to toffee, vanilla crunch albeit not truly overoaked, plenty of space left over for the cherry, blackberry scents, lounges with confidence. In the mouth it provides good structure, particularly with the acidity, frames and channels the inherent sweetness in the raspberry, red cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit. Coquettish peppery quality, gets more kick out of the orange zest and ginger spice, the tobacco, leather shades lack grip but the stoniness picks up some slack. Curves upward on the finish to form a nicely enclosed experience, no denying though that it's the ripeness which remains its signature statement. Minimal herbaceous notes, just a pure expression of that fruit. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, remainder unspecified percentages of Cabernet Franc, Merlot. 89

Tin Barn

Russian River Valley, Gilsson Vineyard
Zinfandel
2003, \$31.99, 15.2%

Bright, light and natural ruby color, very shiny, stays consistent throughout. Very sugary, dulcet nose, like a pie factory, all caramel, toffee, vanilla and raspberry,

blackberry, blueberry reduction, gingerbread and a whiff of eucalyptus and wet tobacco, really clings to your nostril's pores. Full-bodied, velvety and measuredly expansive, again wants to leave no stone unturned. Big ginger, nutmeg spice as well as lemon/orange citrus and menthol, the caramel, toffee, butterscotch notes rev its engine with a full tank of gas, explodes into a viscous inner mouth perfume. The raspberry, cherry, blackberry, cranberry fruit keeps it in "red fruit" mode. Not overly tannic but the acidity makes a credible showing. Texturally has lots of pock marks which relieves some of the weight. A relentless wine, would track you down to the ends of the earth. 89

Saisons des Vins
Mendocino County, l'Hiver
Syrah
2004, \$19.99, 14.5%

Ruby-violet core, trim and clean, heavy set dark magenta rims with some glow. Moderate heavy cream and eucalyptus in the nose but not particularly oaky, attractive florality with orange spritz, has a steady cleansing feel which adds more clarity to the cherry, blackberry scents, fresh overall presentation. Full-bodied, very round and supple in the mouth, rolls through with minimal turbulence. Reveals some oak toast but more so florality, grass, olive pit, orange and lemon citrus, its fine touch extends through the tannins and acidity. Finishes with a gentle drying feel, like a slightly damp sponge across a counter top. Unforced with good balance, only speaks when you're ready to listen. Still gives up a creamy sort of tang as it dissolves. 89

Léal Vineyards
San Benito County
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$29.99, 14.4%

Richly concentrated red-purple core, pretty much opaque, extremely vivid maroon rims, hard to imagine deeper saturation. Big, spicy nose of clove, cedar, mint, orange zest, mild grapey feel in the plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit scents, not overripe but pushes it. Full-bodied, really breaks a sweat packing the flavor in, orange citrus, cedar, leather, dried tobacco, tar but most of all that aggressive and juicy black currant, black cherry, blackberry fruit. As your mouth adjusts to it the clove spice and toast becomes more noticeable but never truly oaky. Tannins and supple and firm, not particularly drying. Shows admirable persistence on the finish, maintains both weight and flavor intensity. Good Cab. 89

Wolf Family Vineyards
Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$59.99, 14.8%

Fully opaque purple core, gentle fade to crimson red at the rims, highly saturated throughout. In the nose oak toast and mesquite smoke bubble through but the biggest enemy is the raw alcohol, afterwards there's agreeable cedar, fried beef blood, eucalyptus and orange rind, compact and forceful black currant, black cherry fruit scents, on the racy side overall. Full-bodied, juicy and stretches from cheek to cheek, obvious coffee, caramel, vanilla fudge oak flavors sure to please those it's meant to please. Cedar, tobacco wrapper, leather and orange rind flavors give it some street cred, makes sure the tannins were powdered in there generously too. In the end it's all

about the fruit, piles on the currant, cherry, blackberry with glee. Made for a rib eye, extra rare. 88

Patianna Organic Vineyards
Mendocino County, Fairbairn Ranch
Syrah
2003, \$31.99, 14.3%

No cloudiness yet perfectly opaque black purple core, offset in contrast by the thin, vivid ruby rims. Mint and jasmine percolate in the nose, rubs orange zest in too, the plum, currant, blackberry fruit scents somewhat mute and low to the ground. Full-bodied and almost monolithic in scale, doesn't feel forced yet obviously has placed big bets on the impressiveness of the density of the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. Relatively average degree of oak toast, nothing untoward, finds room for the florality, orange and lemon zest, rawhide dog bone flavors. Acidity there yet not in a position to combat the cream. This is very well made wine that would impress a good deal more if not framed by its immediate peer competition in California at the price point. 88

Léal Vineyards
San Benito County
Syrah
2003, \$29.99, 14.9%

Veritably opaque black purple core, heavy luminescence in the scarlet to magenta rims, quite thick and resonant. Jammy plum, cherry, blackberry fruit in the nose comes with a peanut butter edge, BBQ sauce, the alcohol keeps it rough and ready to rumble, underlying earthiness, menthol only get a few moments to speak. Medium-bodied, caramel, toffee, mesquite smoke, vanilla, orange zest, all bundled together into one big statement, creams you like you need a pie in the face. The acidity stands up more than the tannins but the later no slouch, smoky and sweet and sour red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit has a pleasingly active pace. You need to have some gas in your tank to wrestle it to the ground, not a wine to take lightly. If you can, it's a worthy victory. 88

Gargiulo Vineyards
Napa Valley, Oakville, Money Road Ranch
Cabernet Sauvignon
2002, \$59.99, 14.5%

Dense, if not opaque, purple core, very thin, dull brick red rims, lacks luster but has depth of hue. Firm nose, enough cedar, animal fur, leather and earthy funk to convince you there's something going on, there's tobacco ash and herbaceousness too, yet it can't really mask that it's really about the orange zest, vanilla cream, caramel, forces the red currant, cherry, blackberry scents through your nostrils. Full-bodied, displays bell pepper, spice, orange/lemon citrus, tobacco leaf before, as in the nose, yielding to caramel and toffee notes. Sappy, clingy currant and cherry fruit refuses to release your mouth pores. Heavy like a 300 pound football player, it can move but when it chooses a direction there's no second choice. The acidity makes a cameo appearance, tannins wait until the final curtain has fallen. Manages to stay clean even as it presses its flesh against you. Knocks you over, picks you up and dusts you off so it can do it again. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot. 88

Clos Mimi
Regional Blend, California, Nini
Syrah
NV, \$13.99, 14.5%

Semi-cloudy ruby-magenta color, powerful luminescence and complete from core to rims. Strong perfume of flowers, chocolate milk, voluptuous black cherry, blackberry scents and a hint of bacon fat. Medium-bodied, very spicy with a palpable burnt toast edge as well as tangy orange/lemon citrus. Peppery too, knocks the violets and roses into the background. High level of acidity bring out cleaner racing lines in the currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit. Fills in nicely on the back end, increasingly sweet but also showing bite and unforced length. 85% 2004 vintage, 15% 2002 vintage. Grapes mostly sourced from San Luis Obispo County. 88

Black Sears Vineyards
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain
Zinfandel

2003, \$39.99, 15.0%

Violet with a strong red-ruby cast in the core, more pure red as it nears the rims. Creamy vanilla pie nose, custard notes, touches of coconut, some menthol, mint and flowers, game and leather aspects are there too, mostly heavy on the plum, cherry, currant fruit, easygoing and not very distinctive. Full-bodied, fat and juicy and wants to make friends quickly. Reveals eucalyptus, menthol, earth components but its vanilla, caramel, toffee rules. The blueberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit is sweet and long, gains some shape from a lemony edge. Has more acidity than tannins with the structure it needs to finish convincingly. Turns earthier over time, continues to make a better impression over time. A competent wine, but at what price? 88

Léal Vineyards
San Benito County

Merlot

2002, \$29.99, 14.4%

Robust purple core, brick red accents, rims more a deep red magenta tint. Sugary sweet nose, recalls a face full of cotton candy, syrupy, if not raisinated, blackberry, black cherry, raspberry scents splash around, cinnamon and nutmeg spice, orange juice, melted caramel, no room for much else. Full-bodied, replicates the nose accurately in the mouth, major saving grace is the firm acidity which manages to soak up at least some of the juice from the prune, plum, cherry, blackberry fruit. Still, about as sugary as is sustainable, candied feel extends to the orange/tangerine citrus. Maple syrup, caramel tones in abundance, oak follows the fruit's lead in dancing on the bar. Extreme, but if this is what you want it's gonna absolutely hit the right pleasure node. 87

Kongsgaard
Napa Valley, Hudson Vineyards
Syrah

2003, \$150.00, 14.1%

Mostly opaque purple core with a red tinge, stays heavy set through to the red-ruby rims. Tightly wound core of vanilla cream in the nose but not at all soft, more expansive via the blood iron, dried beef, menthol, orange spice, powdered dried flowers, the black currant, cherry fruit scents presented on a taut laser beam. Full-bodied, aggressively toasty in the mouth with burnt butter, caramel and butterscotch flavors. If you can get past that, the acidity nicely frames the florality, bacon fat and even nuttiness. Then the tannins prematurely deaden things, leaves leather, tree leaves where the red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit ought to be. The clenching continues, making its green streak even more noticeable. Tries real

hard to be regal, and its pedigree is evident, yet somehow it never "clicks." 87

Alcina Cellars
Mendocino County, Gabrielli Vineyard
Syrah

2002, \$55.99, 14.3%

Extensive violet to red-ruby core, hardly drops to crimson-red around the rims. Dense vanilla cream in the nose, definitely steadily anchored, heavy floral wetness, beef blood, too thick to move and develop, the plum, blackberry, black cherry scents lay supine and that's it. Medium-bodied, while still four-square on the attack it has enough acidity to break up most of the homogeneity and bring out a floral and zesty orange side. Smoky aspect to the blackberry, raspberry, black cherry fruit, covered in a layer of vanilla cream and toffee sauce. Charges forward with a fair degree of abandon, not sure where it's going but gonna get there in a hurry. Frenetic, but has its place. 87

Whetstone

Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Hirsch Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2003, \$49.99, 14.0%

Faint film in the puce-violet core, loses its concentration as it fades into dull ruby rims. Thick cola and forest brush in the nose, dollops of orange/lemon zest, smoky raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, has a gentle, if insistent, touch, maintains pressure. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, possesses a jangly entry and has some fizz which lifts up some off the tongue. More of that cola and spice, equally roasted raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit as found in the nose. The acidity is fluffy but never goes away, gets kudos for trying. Develops a peppery kick by the center, vague hint of mushroom and shoe polish. Throws in lemon, orange citrus but you're not sure why. Has nice flavors, isn't overwrought, just lacks direction and loses clarity of expression as a result. Disjointed finish. 86

Melville

Santa Rita Hills, Small Lot Collection Donna's
Syrah

2003, \$48.99, 15.9%

Resonant ruby-purple core, not quite opaque, profusely colored salmon-magenta rims. As is oft the case, the alcohol pisses in the nose's corn flakes, underneath there's substantial black cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, mint, lemon oil, primary and undeveloped. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and tingles with heat. Presents an oddly high degree of herbaceousness for the full level of extraction in the currant, raspberry, red cherry fruit, sets a dissonant table from the get-go. Too candied to present much by way of "traditional" Syrah flavors, fills the gaps with vanilla and toffee cream. By the finish, the parts feel like they are almost forcibly held apart, not insurmountable but by degrees offputting. Under the house's standards. 86

Beaulieu Vineyard
Napa Valley
Cabernet Sauvignon

2002, \$15.99, 13.8%

Only its clarity prevents opacity in the red-violet core, presents thin but dense, semi-glowing ruby rims. Creamy vanilla nose with generous mint, coconut accents, orange spice, currant, cherry and blackberry scents and little else. Medium to full-bodied, chewy in a rubbery texture kind of way. Dry and tacky too, but not that tannic per se. Minor

leather, earth shades, definitely more by way of mint, menthol, butter and vanilla crisp. Mild overripeness in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, brings out some tomato skin edge. Turbulent finish, does develop an interesting smoky dimension. 86

Bishop's Peak
Edna Valley
Syrah

2002, \$17.99, 14.5%

Slightest murk in the red-purple core, hints at opacity, undiluted brick red rims, visual strength. Very toasty/burnt nose of butterscotch, butter, caramel, vanilla cream, if you can burrow beneath this there's an animal funk, leather, earth thing, has a mild sugary nature to the plum, cherry, blackberry scents, oak by far most dominant component. Medium-bodied, somewhat gritty texture, soaks in yet buoyant enough to resist getting sappy. More floral than gamey, still extremely toasty and oaky, burnt wood, cedar, mint notes abound. The smoky blackberry, black raspberry, currant, cherry fruit is no weakling at all but hard pressed to compete with the oak. The acidity can open your eyes but no tannins. Just doesn't quite find its stride. 85

Alcina Cellars
Sonoma Valley, Sonoma Coast, Sangiacomo Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2003, \$65.99, 14.3%

Real cloudy brick red to crimson in color, couldn't be duller, plods through to the rims OK enough. Outsized nose, real smoky and toasty, could spend the night in the pen for assault, quite herbaceous too, leathery, comes off as bottom-heavy, shows cola over the roasted raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit, more angular than forgiving. Full-bodied, spicy and minerally, made to impress and throws a lot of ginger, orange peel, flowers at you, alas comes with tomato skin and grass flavors too. Over-manipulated and exaggerated, the roasted quality is even higher in the mouth, compote-feel in the black cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. The acidity comes at an oblique angle, adds to the uneven feel. Too over the top, loses any pretty nuance it might have ever had. 85

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Kongsgaard
Napa Valley
Chardonnay

2003, \$74.99, 14.1%

Has this green-copper kind of cast, gauzy in a way which evokes age, flat without much sparkle even as it sits in the glass with confidence. Caramel-coated popcorn, vanilla crisp kind of nose but really still manages to remain seductive, lime juice, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit, passively floral, just gets you acting against your best judgment. Full-bodied, lush and enveloping, coats your mouth before you know it. Mint, ginger, caramel, toffee, vanilla, popcorn, orange spice, it's all there unadorned and proud. Makes you forget to figure out if it has acidity or not. Poached apricot, peach, pear, nectarine, pineapple fruit soupy but not goopy. Brawny lime citrus. Touch floral. God, just makes you feel dirty for how much you like it. 91

Kunin
Santa Ynez Valley, Stolpman Vineyards
Viognier

2004, \$31.99, 14.9%

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Depending on the angle it's either brassy gold or washed out copper, either way deep enough to draw in most of what would have been surface shine. Floral nose with orange and lemon citrus, but then gets nutty almost in a Gewürztraminer way, overall a bit too sharp to present that seductive Viognier profile, that said gets points for the clean shape in the peach, pear, apricot scents in spite of the underlying oak creaminess. Full-bodied, here the vanilla and freshly whipped cream more obtrusive, "ade" feel in the tangerine and lime citrus. Honeysuckle, orange blossom slosh forward like your drunk third cousin at a family wedding. Robust peach, apricot, pear, melon, mango fruit in search of a jockstrap to keep it all in place. Just a fun, careening ride, check your brain when you give the man your ticket. 88

Léal Vineyards
San Benito County
Chardonnay

2003, \$28.99, 14.8%

Presents a somewhat murky yellow gold color in the glass, adds to its translucency, clearer rims. Butterscotch, fried vanilla ice cream and buttered toast are evident in the nose, high level of tangerine and lime zest as well, floral, the peach, pear, red apple, green melon scents perfumed and hold their shape credibly. Medium-bodied, polished to a smooth finish, has a big enough bottom to hug the road as it corners. Keenly spicy, clove and cumin, naturally pairs up with the zesty orange to tangerine citrus. As a result, the vanilla cream more or less held in check. Consistent presence felt in the ripe, juicy apricot, peach, nectarine, red apple fruit, there straight through to the finish. Appears to have enough acidity to stay fresh and erect too. 88

Estancia
Regional Blend, California
Pinot Grigio

2004, \$17.99, 13.5%

White gold to light yellow hay in color, very clear yet not that shiny. Honeyed nose, supplemented by sweet lemon juice, brown sugar and fully ripe peach, apricot, red apple scents, the very soft touch of herbaceousness a pleasing jolt. Full-bodied and ultra-sweet in the mouth, all powdery sugar and honey, like pie or cake. The peach, apricot, green melon fruit grazed by cherry notes which concentrates it further. Not much acidity but something slightly tightens the belt after awhile. The sweet orange, lemon, lime citrus has more breadth than bite. Heavy finish, doesn't release off of your tongue, keeps pressing down with its big hands. 87% Pinot Gris, 13% Chardonnay. No regions specified. 87

Littorai
Russian River Valley, Mays Canyon
Chardonnay

2003, \$53.99, 13.8%

Unfiltered luminescent glow in the green-gold color, almost waxy in complexion, shimmers all the way to the rims. Super-buttery nose, sleek and inviting, moments of seriousness in the lime and lemon citrus but short-lived, the toast highlights the delineation in the peach, apricot, pear fruit. Full-bodied, oaked out the wazoo as might be expected, all buttered popcorn, caramel and peanut brittle, sparks it up with lime citrus and a splash of tequila. Calculates what floral swipes it needs to "gingerbread" things and does just that. Does have that over-extracted feel that verges on pickled, starts off challenging but ends

up tiring. Not making a positive impression but its flaws are exactly what many people want so go figure. 86

WASHINGTON RED

Dusted Valley
Columbia Valley, Stained Tooth
Syrah
2003, \$27.99, 14.3%

Vivid purple core, opaque but bright, saturated and dark ruby-magenta rims. Restrained nose, while it leads with plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit it manages to marshal some dried flowers, drained bacon fat and earth too, overall not dead but leaden presence. Full-bodied, sappy and dense, hits you with burnt black chocolate, coffee ice cream, vanilla, isn't the kind of wine that's apt to get up and move easily. The tannins plop over the blackberry, black cherry, black raspberry fruit, dim and shorten the bulb's lifespan. Produces a measure of floral swipes, orange juice. Has depth of flavors across the board, not short at all, yet somehow makes a wooden impression. 98% Syrah, 2% Viognier. 86

WASHINGTON WHITE

Dusted Valley
Yakima Valley
Viognier
2004, \$22.99, 13.5%

Simple, consistent yellow straw color, bare hint of green, mild translucency with minor reflectivity. Straightforward, focused nose of orange blossom, lilacs, honeysuckle, lemon/orange sorbet, mild creamy vanilla, forward if non-pushy peach, apricot, pear fruit, dusting of chalk, becomes a touch bitter as it dissolves, holds its shape admirably. Medium-bodied, lively and alert, not made in a plodding Viognier mold, built for speed. Quickly gets past that vanilla cream to orange, tangerine, lemon citrus, spicy too as well as floral, pushes becoming nutty, as if it is hinting at being a Gewürztraminer in drag. The acidity holds its own, lengthens the pear, yellow apple, apricot fruit while maintaining its contours. Vivid presentation, no mind-bender but massages your temples when you have a headache. 89

OREGON RED

Serene, Domaine
Willamette Valley, Yamhill Cuvée
Pinot Noir
2003, \$36.99, 14.1%

Shiny glow to the magenta, red ruby color, transparent despite a light cloudiness, hue complete through to the rims. Mild wafts of sweet spices, orange peel and wildflowers, mainly concentrates on presenting the candied raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, remains fresh in spite of the sweetness. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and shows a stronger caramel, vanilla cream aspect. Orange sorbet, cinnamon spice flavors also in the mix, all working to heighten the sweetness in the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit. Filmy tannins lend a semblance of structure, dry enough by the finish and possessing a good forward clip. Highly enjoyable juice if lacking that extra kick to make it more distinctive. 89

Serene, Domaine
Willamette Valley, Evenstad Reserve
Pinot Noir

2002, \$49.99, 14.1%

Strong red-ruby color, fairly clear, weakens minimally at the rims but does, becoming more garnet hued. Sweet nose with wet floral perfume, candied cherry, strawberry, blueberry scents, candied orange peel too, very primary and evokes little beyond the youthful fruity juiciness. Full-bodied and mouth-coating, fills your mouth up entirely. Quite creamy, more in texture than in flavor, some vanilla and clove spice but not oaky in terms of breadth of flavors. The sweet orange, lemon citrus is juicy with minimal tang. Simple-minded tannins and acidity, by no stretch a wimp nor a slob but not that erect and alert either. The raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit shows poise, if not power, and enunciates clearly through to the finish. Maintains some heft for sure. 88

Lemelson
Willamette Valley, Jerome Reserve
Pinot Noir
2002, \$44.99, 14.1%

Mild opacity in the red-purple core, plush ruby rims where there's no loss of intensity. Reticent nose, a little smoky and earthy, remembers to push the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit to the front, gets semi-sour at some point to keep it awake, primary with little else to clutter the message. Medium-bodied, enters narrowly but then expands like nobody's business, zesty and ready to stomp. Curious interplay between raisin notes and fresher cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, keeps you guessing. Some grass, lemon and orange peel and smoke but really, for all its hemming and hawing, keeps the focus on the fruit. Toasty oak reifies this, won't let the earthy, leathery aspects take hold. Just when you think it's clenching, it reawakens and pushes a few more feet forward. Needs the right lighting to look truly attractive. 87

OREGON WHITE

Lemelson
Willamette Valley, Tikka's Run
Pinot Gris
2004, \$19.99, 14.0%

Plain, straightforward yellow straw color, holds what hue it has to the rims, on the translucent side, not much shine. Baked brown sugar, lemon reduction prominent in the nose, very floral too, on the lazy side, yawns as it unfolds anise, pear, yellow apple, melon fruit, has breadth of scope without getting cloying or annoyingly heavy. Full-bodied with a sweet, savory attack of cotton candy, flower petals, tangerine juice, heavy cream, soaks in well without creating a fuss, smooth and agreeable are the key words. Spicy like an apple pie, blends in peach, apricot, nectarine and melon fruit for reverb action. The acidity comes out of left field and makes you listen to it. So approachable that even though you are not quite sure what you'd say to it in the morning you're taking a cab together back to your place. 90

Lange
Willamette Valley
Pinot Gris
2004, \$14.99, 13.9%

Flat, layered golden straw, more based in shimmering translucency than shine. Compact nose of few words — pear, apple, melon fruit, dried honey, lemon peel, dusty white stones and that's that. Medium-bodied, taut and stout, not very relaxed, would reflexively keep calling you "sir" or "ma'am" after you told it not to. More floral here,

takes some of the edge off of the lemon, lime citrus. Fairly stony, plenty of snap in the green apple, pear, melon, peach fruit, even has some fruit pit notes. The acidity keeps charging, eventually turns things a shade bitter. Minimal honey or other sweet embellishments, stands naked before the sun. Almost closer to Pinot Grigio in feel than what you expect when called Pinot Gris. 87

FRANCE RED

Suffrene, Domaine la
Provence, Bandol
Blend

2001, \$24.99, 15.0%

Fat ruby-violet core, full saturation, more pure red-ruby at the rims. Robust nose of borderline raisinated plum, currant, black cherry scents, cracked black pepper, white grapefruit zest, garrigues, wool and a touch of black earth. Full-bodied, compact like a midget body builder, not long but plenty packed in upfront. Serious tannins grip the tongue strongly but the sweetness in the plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit not to be denied either. Animal funk, leather, wool make an expected appearance, find able mates in the orange peel and dried flowers. A real teeth rattler, needs time to tame its tannins. 55% Mourvèdre, remainder unspecified percentages of Grenache, Cinsault, Carignan. 89

Fontedicto, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc, Les
Coulisses

Blend

1999, \$15.99, 13.0%

Filmy, dusky red-violet core, strongly hued orange-garnet rims, broadly constructed. Touch of fart in the nose, disappears quickly into florality, licorice, lemon peel, freshly cut leather, tart cherry and raspberry fruit with momentary strawberry notes. Medium-bodied, very tannic and not weak acidity-wise either, steamrolls anything that sticks up. As a result it ends up smooth in texture even as it offers rougher minerals, grass, earth and leather flavors. Oddly, in no way sweet yet still clearly defined licorice, violets, garrigues, orange/lemon citrus, clipped and semi-perfunctory. Bright, sour raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit with admirable energy, the finish crackles like an iron poking embers in the fireplace. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Grenache, Carignan. 89

Clos Roche Blanche
Loire, Touraine, Cabernet
Cabernet Franc

2004, \$13.99, 12.0%

Fully glowing magenta-ruby, mild nod towards violet, clean and colorful through to the rims. Impressive ripeness in the black cherry, currant, almost plum fruit, concentrated enough to more than check the grassiness and herbal bits, vague notes of flowers and earth waft up at moments. Medium-bodied, aggressively stern on the attack, leans on you hard. Mouth puckeringly dry lemon to white grapefruit citrus and mineral shards cut into your tongue and here in the mouth the herbaceousness comes out in spades. More leather, earth and tree bark too. Dense, not fluid, sap in the black cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit, punches its way forward. No surprise, has formidable acidity and tannins both. Takes it strong to the basket, wants to bring the backboard down. 89

Clos de Haute-Combe
Beaujolais, Juliéna
Gamay Noir

2002, \$16.99, 13.0%

Vivid red-ruby color, entirely consistent from core to rims, light warm magenta hued glow. Slightly savage nose of animal fur, leather, tar, black earth, lemon citrus rub, keen focus in the raspberry, strawberry scents, blows a hole clean through your nostrils. Medium-bodied, surprisingly strong pink and white grapefruit as it enters the mouth, layered mineral/chalk dusting too, bundles of dried hay. The acidity has good strength but its the tannins which are in charge of the show. Broad shoulders carry the red cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit, has flavor yet with little sweetness. Leather and earth peek through on the finish, helps keep the weight consistent until the final dissolve. Good brawn. 89

Bressades, Mas de
Rhône, Vin de Pays du Gard, Syrah-Grenache
Blend

2004, \$9.99, 13.5%

Very clear and nicely reflective beet purple core, turns to a touch more red to magenta at the rims. Violets, sweet 'n' sour raspberry, red cherry, borderline blueberry fruit, subterranean stone, cigarette ash, leather notes, lemon oil, a slow cooker of a nose. Medium to full-bodied, has a nicely clingy texture that helps it feel bigger. Enough acidity to perk up the tart feel in the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit. Black earth, tar and herbaceousness with a stripe of leather. Orange and lemon citrus, the florality has a cooler demeanor here. Solid enough to achieve a sense of balance, somewhat derived from semi-homogeneity. But for a one-trick pony, giddy-up. 50% Syrah, 50% Grenache. 88

Mas des Chimères
Languedoc/Roussillon, Coteaux du Languedoc
Blend

2002, \$16.99, 14.0%

Forceful effulgence in the scarlet-purple core, turns to a vaguely pinkish magenta at the rims albeit with zero loss of hue intensity. Drowsily floral nose, lays full across your nostril hairs, sweet lemon and orange citrus and then gets deep and earthy, some salty and mineral notes too, curious in that the ripeness in the cherry, currant, plum scents is evident from the start, they continue to duck into the shadows. Medium to full-bodied, attractive in how it clings to as many mouth pores as it can find, texture adds heft to the flavors. Chunky acidity with enough drying effect to knead the cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit into a dense consistency. Blends in orange citrus, hay and field grasses and some vague earth and minerality but, while not fruity per se, comes across as primary. Floral accents on the finish break up some of the previous homogeneity. Keeps you off-balance. 70% Syrah, 20% Grenache, 5% Cinsault, 5% Mourvèdre. 87

Faillenc Sainte Marie, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Corbières
Blend

2003, \$9.99, 12.0%

Immaculately pure violet core, if it wasn't so crystalline would be opaque, strong glow in the ruby rims. In the nose it presents a robust core of sweet, sugary cherry, blackberry scents and then juicy white grapefruit accents before it gets real pooppy and earth, merde, tree bark, saddle leather and sweat abound. Plush enough to achieve

a full body despite the relatively high degree of acidity to massage some of the fat out. Here the cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit hides in the background shadows, pretty much cedes the floor to the tree bark, grass, leather, cow patty, parched earth flavors as well as the bitter white grapefruit pith. Quite tannic on the finish, lots of "fire and brimstone" in its attitude. Not an easy sipper for uncritical quaffing. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault. 87

Cuilleron, Yves
Rhône, Vin de Pays des Collines Rhodaniennes
Syrah

2004, \$12.99, 12.5%

Filmy and luminescent, small violet core, mostly magenta throughout. Good deal of sulfur in the nose gives it a hot dog edge, then some honey-glazed ham, minor floral notes and lemon, cherry, blackberry and a moment of blueberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, stern and very firm, the assertive acidity cuts things into neat blocks. Floral with dried zest of lemons and oranges, sour bite in the currant, cherry, plum fruit — little juice, plenty thrust. Gets increasingly herbaceous as it progresses, still has that sulfur, Brett-like thing. Flattens out and gains a modicum more length for it but isn't registering too high on the pleasure meter. 87

Ché纳斯, Château de
Beaujolais, Fleurie
Gamay Noir
2002, \$14.99, 13.0%

Violet to crimson red in color, clear and even, full through the rims. Slightly "poopy" nose at first, scents of earth and a bag of hot cut grass on a summer's day, almost salty, white grapefruit pith, sour cherry and strawberry fruit, ends with an uplifting floral note. Medium-bodied, firm and stands up for itself, feels like it stands on its tippy toes and reaches up to let flower petals, orange peel and mostly dry strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit drift slowly downwards. The acidity provides more cut than the tannins dry things out, gives it a pleasingly angular sense. More lemony on the finish, touch more chalk too, imbues it with a more "serious" tone. Not shy. 87

Baudry, Domaine Bernard
Loire, Chinon, Les Granges
Cabernet Franc
2004, \$15.99, 12.5%

Considerable luminescence in the dark magenta to ruby color, trim enough, though, to see through. Well-stuffed nose of leather, bell pepper and heavyset blackberry, cherry fruit, produces some tobacco and earth but oddly mute given its girth. Medium-bodied, has a steely feel in the mouth too, like a slug to the jaw. Black pepper, orange zest, cut grass, cigar wrapper, leather, earth all unfold in equal share. Tar, there's muscular calves on the red cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit. The tannins start winding up early and have definitely clamped down on the party by the finish. Lots of lemon at the end too, puts a spotlight on the acidity. A bruiser that bruises, needs a little more time to settle down. 87

Haut de Domy, Château
Bordeaux, Pessac-Léognan
Blend

2001, \$17.99, 12.5%

Light violet to crimson red core, fat orange to garnet rims, plenty saturated. Strange confluence of bell pepper and

vanilla cream in the nose, sour red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit, the leather and earth run over the orange zest. Full-bodied, fat and sloppy, lurches good naturedly at you as you enter the door, the leather, tar, mushroom, loam elements mean business and fairly overpower the rest. Same can be said for the bell pepper notes, decidedly crisp bite in the herbaceousness. The tannins are filmy, its structure more dependent on the acidity. Starts to turn blunt a bit early, pulls a cloak tightly around itself. 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Franc. 86

Echards, Domaine des
Burgundy, Volnay, Clos des Chênes
Pinot Noir

2003, \$52.99, 13.5%

Scarlet to violet on color, turns a little to puce ruby around the broadly set rims, really fat and bottomless throughout. The nose literally could not be softer and plumper, strong sugary dried fruit character to the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry, banana fruit, powdered sugar, lemon pie, glazed dough, sniff as hard as you want you are not likely to find much more than that. Full-bodied, lush and succulent, plops into your mouth like a newborn pup, not sure what the space is but will gambol about until it smacks into a wall or two. Lackluster tannins and acidity, leaves it up to the fruit and lemon citrus, stones, honey to extend the show, that said not much here screaming out "I am a Premier Cru Burgundy," more like I am the second release of a brand new Russian River Valley producer. 2003 sux, man. 86

Pizay, Château de
Beaujolais, Morgon
Gamay Noir
2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Light ruby-violet color, consistent throughout, not much reflectivity to catch your eye. Offers a dumb smile for a nose, openly floral with sugary raspberry, strawberry, cherry scents, caramel, round and softly expansive. Full-bodied, somewhat sappy at first but the acidity slowly chips away at the sweetness, also heightening the grassiness. Sweet lemon and orange juice, nicely adorns the raspberry, cherry, boysenberry fruit flavors. Takes its time but does stiffen up some and show a tannic spine. Relative lack of depth hurts the length of the finish. Ends up coming off as too four-square. 85

Harmas, Domaine de l'
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Blend
2003, \$28.99, 14.0%

Spotless red-garnet core, extends fully towards the rims without much change, quite pretty to consider. Nose a bit on the green side from the start, realizes this and comes on with candied cherry, raspberry fruit, gumdrop-like in feel, lemon pie, here there's little negative, albeit same could be said for the positive. In the mouth the ripeness is immediately contrasted by the green aspect of the tannins, you get into the groove of the juicy red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit and the orange, lemon citrus and then they snatch the mutha away just like that. Rushes the minerals, cut grass, leather at you in hopes of hiding those nasty tannins but no dice, maestro. Disjointed and overly drying, you can't rewind that first two seconds when it hits your tongue. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre. 85

Echards, Domaine des
Burgundy, Bourgogne Hautes-Côtes de Beaune
Pinot Noir

2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Immaculate magenta-violet in color, just about zero loss of hue at rims, deep throughout. Enjoyably ripe nose of raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit, accompanied by straitlaced mineral and lemon peel notes and a burst of freshly cut grass, sometimes simplicity is the best path. Fat, full-bodied attack in terms of flavor array yet the body swiftly diminishes and the acidity imbues it with a bracingly vigorous jolt, nothing easygoing about it. Mildly crabbed feel, minimal sweetness to be found in the raspberry, cherry, strawberry fruit, nothing to hang your hat on, keeps you in nomadic mode. Grassy, minerally, tart lemon peel, has to get points for its unvarnished approach but by the same token needs to give you something to enjoyably suck on. Might appeal to an arch terroiriste but that's about it. 85

FRANCE WHITE

Langoureaux, Domaine Sylvain et Nathalie
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, Les Perclos
Chardonnay

2003, \$37.99, 13.0%

Dull throb in the green straw glow, holds decently to the rims. Highly perfumed nose, extremely floral with generous oak vanilla cream, orange spice, mint and noticeably ripe apricot, pear, peach fruit scents, expands in your nostrils with authority. Full-bodied, makes a big splash into the mouth, intent on slathering every surface. Offers violets, lilacs, orange blossom, tangerine zest, sweet spice, all make a big noise, to the point where you are shocked at how clean it manages to finish. The acidity is average at best so this is even more miraculous. Pleasing reserve in the peach, apricot, apple, green melon fruit, a smooth operator amidst all the other flavors. Take advantage of its exuberance now. 90

Tremblay (Domaine des Iles), Gérard
Burgundy, Chablis, Vieilles Vignes
Chardonnay

2002, \$13.99, 12.5%

All but entirely transparent yellow-brown hay color, holds what it has to the rims, moderate shine. Spicy nose, floral too with a somewhat creamy texture, lemon and orange zest, turns a good deal smokier and stonier as it unwinds, has a basic and straightforward presentation of the pear, peach, apple fruit scents. Full-bodied, sturdy mouth feel from the first sip. The orange blossom-led florality gives it a touch of makeup. Conversely, the lemon and lime citrus is blunter and the stone, mineral aspects keep that going. Little bite in the acidity but overall quite dry. Nice center in the peach, pear, apricot, green apple fruit but by no means fruity. Compact and just about complete. 89

Pinon, François
Loire, Vouvray, Cuvée Tradition
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$16.99, 12.5%

Faint gold straw color, mostly transparent, more hums like an engine than shines. All-encompassing perfume in the nose, all honeysuckle and roses, honey and luxurious peach, apricot, pear scents, orange juice, a little too plump for any stoniness or minerality to enunciate clearly. Medium-bodied, firms up in the mouth as the acidity squeezes hard on the honey and gets the extra juice out of

the peach, pear, nectarine, yellow apple fruit. Much more stone, chalk here, gets a little lactose action going too. As you acclimate the florality makes its presence well-known, brings back some of that honey too. A real mouthful, maybe switches its pacing once or twice too many times. 88

Laloue, Domaine Serge
Loire, Sancerre
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Light white straw color, trim and holds a solid surface shine all the way to the rims. Nice stony nose with a touch of mint too for extra freshness, clean lines in the peach, pear scents, holds its weight and balance. In the mouth it's lean and herbaceous, chains a lot of wiry energy in its medium body. Palpable lemon citrus dominates the stones and minerals but the latter remains evident too. The acidity is long and taut, dry from the first to the last sip. Not heavy on the peach, apricot, pear fruit but it doesn't have to be. Crisply styled, penetrates as it stays grassy with a slightly buoyant fizzy feel. Makes you want another sip. 88

Deux Montille, Maison
Burgundy, Meursault, Les Grands Charrons
Chardonnay

2003, \$49.99, 12.5%

Comes with a pale yellow-green hay color, dull and loses its hue at the rims. Lively, high-toned lemon/lime citrus, florality and spice give the nose immediate lift, the ripe and round peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple scents loaded with juice, anchored by caramel, vanilla cream, mint accents, good flooding feel in your nostrils. Full-bodied, soft and sappy, the floodgates are open from the start, extremely approachable. Cinnamon, clove, nutmeg, honey sweeten up the already ripe yellow apple, pear, peach, apricot, melon fruit. No acidity whatsoever, gets by purely on smiles and smoke and mirrors. Fat, fleshy finish, steamrolls you. Way too over the top yet joyous. 88

Damp et Fils, Domaine Daniel
Burgundy, Chablis
Chardonnay

2004, \$18.99, 12.5%

White gold in color, while light is highly attractive and clean in appearance, moderate gleam. Quite floral nose with mint and fresh garden herbs for the taking, resonant peach, green melon, apple scents, not much minerality yet its freshness not lost, likeable heft. Medium-bodied and round but not soft, the acidity fends off any excess pliability. Spicy more than stony, the floral dimension again the strongest element, tends to recline on the tongue rather than lift. Dry, snaking peach, apricot, pear fruit, not a blockbuster but sticks around in case you need it. Presents a block of granite feel on the finish, hard to chew. A big boy for a basic AOC bottling. 88

Perrin, Domaine Roger
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Prestige Blanc
Blend

2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Simple, honest white to green straw in color, moderate sparkle. Juicy, friendly nose of peach, nectarine, apricot, cantaloupe fruit, tangerine and lemon juice, almost totally comprised of big, sassy fruit and sweet smokiness. Medium-bodied, much more acidic and leaner than expected from the nose, almost an 180 degree turn. Sure,

there's ripeness in the peach, apricot, pear, melon fruit but it's delimited and speaks when spoken to. Stone and chalk make a good according of itself, the lemon and orange citrus here more rind than zest or juice. Really works its super-structure to push through to the finish line. A fine little wine for Côtes-du-Rhône blanc, which is always a dicey category. Unspecified percentages of Roussanne, Marsanne, Bourboulenc, Viognier, Grenache Blanc, Clairette, etc. 87

Fussiacus, Domaine de
Burgundy, Mâcon-Fuissé
Chardonnay

2004, \$17.99, 13.0%

Flat yellow gold color like an old wedding abnd, loses some hue at the rims. The nose comes off as pickled or sour, certainly ripe in its peach, apple, melon fruit but little by way of stone or herbs, a bit uni-dimensional. Medium-bodied, good thrust on the entry, more minerals and lemon/orange to accompany the juicy peach, pear, apricot fruit. The acidity gives it a good jolt and brings out both mint and sour herbs. Holds its weight throughout, no dropoff on the finish. Makes an impression in the end of a semi-atypical wine for its type, bound to surprise more than present a truly known quantity. 87

Brun, Jean-Paul
Beaujolais, Terres Dorées
Chardonnay

2004, \$12.99, 12.0%

Straightforward sandy gold color with a decent degree of translucency which masks most of the dimming around the rims. Semi-sour, even pickled, nose which wakes you up right off, followed up by steam off of stones, dried straw and a gregarious hug of peach, apricot, apple fruit, acts like it's reading five books at once. Medium-bodied and fairly manicured, no doubting it has an accessible honey, brown sugar aspect but it's part of the plan as it also has more acidity than the varietal usually possesses. The dried apple, pear feel plays off the honey, concentrated and brings out a reduction feel in the peach, apricot too. Herbaceous, OK still has that pickled thing going down too. But you can feel the age in the vines, reclines like it's been there before. Its fans will be happy. 87

Zind Humbrecht, Domaine
Alsace, Brand, Indice 3
Riesling

2003, \$83.99, 13.5%

Glowing greenish amber color of attractive depth, has a dull form of translucency but reaches entirely to the rims. The nose bursts with voluptuously ripe melon, peach, apricot, pineapple, nectarine fruit, coated in honey and tangerine juice, lightly floral, even suggests mint, waits until the last second and then tosses some fried herbs in there. Full-bodied, ultra-soft and downy, a big feather bed of succulent melon, cantaloupe, yellow apple, peach, apricot, nectarine fruit with a Sunday brunch dusting of cinnamon and nutmeg spice. Incredibly low level of acidity, like really nothing there. Honey, brown sugar and tangerine to lime citrus, geez everything is sugary. Flaccid but warps your mind with its sweetness until you feel just as limp. 86

Cousignac (Pommier Family), Domaine Notre Dame de
Rhône, Côtes du Vivarais
Blend

2004, \$10.99, 13.5%

Unblemished yellow-brown straw color, can't say it drops off much at the rims as there wasn't much hue to begin with. Fruity nose of peach, apricot, melon scents, slight nutty quality, fresh lemon zest, minerality, not really enough focus to gather around a center. Medium-bodied, nice soft and round texture, spicy with fleshy peach, apricot, nectarine, pear fruit. Again, offers more lemon to orange citrus than minerals or stone. The acidity picks up speed past the mid-palate, rubs some of the excess fat off. Somewhat flat finish, the few bitter notes are welcome as they wake you up a little. Unspecified percentages of Marsanne, Grenache Blanc, Clairette. 86

Droin, Domaine Jean-Paul & Benoît
Burgundy, Chablis, Tête du Cuvée
Chardonnay

2004, \$23.99, 12.5%

Virtually colorless white straw, almost too transparent for full reflectivity. You get grass, lemon peel and crushed stone most in the nose, more licorice than smokiness, light pear, peach, apple scents, on the evanescent side. Medium-bodied, herbaceousness trumps the florality, strong bones without much flesh, not anorexic, normally skinny. Possesses lemon citrus, chalk dust, stone notes but lacks length. The apricot, peach, pear, apple fruit is composed yet somehow ends up short. This does, however, help make for a clean finish. Overall, though, innocuous. 85

Morey et Fils, Domaine Bernard
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, Vide Bourse
Chardonnay

2003, \$58.99, 13.5%

Shiny yellow straw color, full throughout if light, gentle green tinge. The nose is quite unusual, evokes marzipan, violets, oak toast, lime/lemon citrus, bubblegum, licorice then banana, melon, pear, peach fruit, not fat like it is out of shape but not many muscles to flex. Full-bodied, more of the same in the mouth, very spicy and toasty, violet-led flowers, vanilla cream, orange popsicle, falls flat on the entry, tries to get up and dust itself off but slips on the puddle of cream. More green apple, peach, apricot, banana, melon fruit, the utter lack of acidity gives it a fruit cocktail character. Its flesh carries it towards the end goal but gets way sloppy along the way. Can we hit the rewind button, please? 84

ITALY RED

Conterno, Giacomo
Piedmont, Barolo, Cascina Francia - Serralunga d'Alba
Nebbiolo

2001, \$89.99, 14.0%

Faint violet to mostly brick red core, the red rims come with a touch of orange. Huge black licorice in the nose, pressed rose petals, orange pekoe tea, the red cherries and raspberries make a refined statement, nothing pushy but always there. Medium-bodied, for all the energy in the acidity it has a somewhat delicate touch. Its entry is smoothed by a thin layer of vanilla cream which fades away in favor of anise, rosewater, orange and lemon peel, leather and brown earth. Develops a pleasing perfume, anchored by the steady tannic punch. Echoes of raisin appear in the ripe cherry, blackberry, plum fruit but certainly possesses a clean finish. The licorice and slight mint shades the most enduring aspect as it folds in on itself by the end, making for a neat, tightly wrapped package. Pure class. 92

Bussola, Tommaso
Veneto, Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, BG
Blend
2001, \$59.99, 16.5%
Consistent ruby-violet color from core to rims, deep enough to sap most of the surface luster. Huge nose of licorice, coconut oil, vanilla cream, mint, piney mountain air, juicy to borderline jammy blackberry, plum, black cherry fruit scents. Medium to full-bodied, imperious and broad in scope, displaying menthol, pine, herbs, earth, stone, dried orange peel notes, throws a lot at you all at once. More game, leather, animal funk comes out during the mid-palate, takes it in an entirely different direction. The acidity is sneaky, worms into you over time. Full and ripe red cherry, raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit, nimble on its toes and hits the right pitch. Ends slowly, surely and when it wants. Unspecified percentages of Corvina, Molinara and Rondinella. 91

Pecchenino, Fratelli
Piedmont, Dolcetto di Dogliani, Sirì d'Jermu
Dolcetto
2003, \$27.99, 14.0%
Strong glow in the magenta-purple color, quite saturated in appearance, zero loss of intensity at the rims. Very floral nose, shows lifting ability while the sap in the black cherry, black raspberry, blackberry fruit anchor it well, at times reveals earth, orange peel, leather bites, crests long and slow in your nostrils. Full-bodied, tannic and bruising, the tannins maybe showing a slight green, underripe edge. Enough clamor created by the earth, orange citrus, leather and dried straw flavors to get it past this. Very dry, the black cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is sweeter on the attack and sheds flavor as it finishes. Big, thick and chewy, it takes awhile to open up and become fully accessible. May require short-term cellaring to show at its best. 89

Moris Farms
Tuscany, Morellino di Scansano, Riserva
Sangiovese
2001, \$31.99, 14.0%
Deep vermilion purple in color, unblemished and dark to verge of impeding visual penetration, its ruby tinted rims equally veiled. Alcoholic notes impair the smooth spreading of the floral oil, lemon spritz and cherry, plum fruit, shame since there's nice density there, hint of straw and grass too. In the mouth it is full-bodied, possessing enough acidity and tannins to make an impression of seriousness while at the same time not unduly sapping the energy out of the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Violets, orange peel, earth, dried animal skin and hay, a bit angular and irregular. A touch of toast peeks through at haphazard moments. Gets more and more rough hewn as it sits in the glass, never loses its sweet inner core but there's gristle to chew on. 87

Convento (Muri-Gries), Cantina
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Abtei Muri Riserva
Lagrein
2001, \$34.99, 13.0%
Rich violet core, very saturated, wide and deep pure ruby rims, dark throughout. Stuffed nose, almost immobile, mostly coconut and vanilla crunch before yielding to more earth, leather, black currant, cherry scents, takes awhile to get its act together. Full-bodied, super-spicy and loaded with ginger, spiced orange peel, herbs and violets. Puffs out its chest with oak driven vanilla and toast but why

boast so? Sappy cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit, ends with a snap. The cream persists, covers up a lot of the acidity's nerve. Some leather, tobacco leaf at the end but not in large supply. Minerality makes a final, and welcome, statement. Very nice but trying a little too hard. 87

Convento (Muri-Gries), Cantina
Alto Adige/Südtirol
Lagrein
2003, \$17.99, 13.0%
Fat ruby to mulberry color, vivid red magenta rims, quite concentrated appearance. Excellent sour twist in the nose provided by the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, ample doses of tobacco ash, pine needle, orange rub, matted grasses, stays big and blowsy for prolonged period. Medium-bodied, skinny with broad shoulders, comes off a little gangly, if affable. White grapefruit, chalky minerals and herbal matter keep it bright and lively, making it easier to choose whether or not to indulge in the earthiness. The jammy sap in the cherry, cranberry, red currant fruit starts off high and sheds weight as it flutters to earth. Light swipe of burnt dark chocolate soothes, takes some of the rumble out of the country road of a finish. Shock absorbers not shot yet. 87

Cantalupo, Antichi Vigneti di
Piedmont, Ghemme, Collis Breclémæ
Nebbiolo
1997, \$40.99, 13.5%
Violet to crimson in color, has depth but most attractive for its clarity, more lively ruby at the rims. Leather, cedar, tobacco notes most prevalent in the nose, some earthy funk and sulfur-like notes, somewhat roasted quality to the cherry, black raspberry fruit, fights forward to a point. Medium-bodied, would around a solid core of tannins, graciously allows the sweetness in the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit to make a cameo. Cedar, grass, earth, stones, blood iron, lemon peel take things in another direction, more of a "country wine" feel, especially as those tannins really start percolating. In the end remains more elements than a thematized whole, perhaps a comment on its relative youth. 87

Cantalupo, Antichi Vigneti di
Piedmont, Ghemme, Collis Carellæ
Nebbiolo
1996, \$33.99, 13.0%
Medicinal brick red to crimson in color, entirely unblemished, duller orange to garnet at the rims, pleasingly hued throughout. Cedar, earth, stone, orange peel, dried garden herbs make for a full, if laid back, nose, black licorice and candied raspberry, cherry fruit completes the set. Medium-bodied if not lighter, glides through the mouth smoothly and easily with only a little tannic grit to brush the tongue. Fried lemons, leather, merde, dried cut grass and tree leaves gather together to produce a semi-rustic experience. The red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit is low flying but at a consistent altitude. No lack of acidity here, gets your mouth watering no doubt. Licorice and honey-lemon notes soften some of the finish but not all. A wine which tells stories of years gone by. 87

Bussola, Tommaso
Veneto, Valpolicella Classico, BG
Blend
2004, \$16.99, 12.0%

Light in color, a dark red ruby at best, albeit with very pleasing shine and consistency to the rims. Smoky, almost sweaty, nose of leather, earth, burnt toast, dried blood, thick and semi-sour plum, black cherry scents. Medium-bodied, its firm acidity helps it enter with dignity, gets you lips smacking in search of moisture. Floral and gamey, creates enough inner mouth perfume to lift and swirl. Underneath it is grassy and toasty with a layer of mineral earth. Tart red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, bouncy and energetic, tad short. Finishes with elevating lemon and orange citrus to keep that lift going. Friendly but no overly so. Unspecified percentages of Corvina, Molinara and Rondinella. 87

Conterno, Giacomo
Piedmont, Barolo, Monfortino, Riserva
Nebbiolo

1998, \$275.00, 14.0%
Spotless blood to brick red core, full to the rims, not opaque but does have some translucency. Cedar, cream, anise seed, dried blood, mint, lemon cream pie, ginger and smoky cherry, red raspberry fruit all appear in the nose and yet somehow it comes off as actually nondescript. Medium-bodied, while the oak is obvious, still the wine is all angles and vectors, laser beams of white grapefruit, minerals, grass, leather, nothing soft as a counter-balance. The acidity goes unchecked, makes it tastes like grandma's cough syrup. Lurching feel in the cherry, red currant, raspberry fruit, not very balanced. Gingerbread, cedar notes keep it hyper, hard to gauge the tannins amidst all the noise. Bitter aftertaste on the finish another negative. 86

Carraia, La
Umbria
Sangiovese
2003, \$9.99, 12.5%

Markedly clear and trim violet core, a warm glow in the magenta-ruby rims keeps it dense and full. High-toned nose of sour cherry and blackberry fruit, dried flowers and orange rinds, quickly gets up in there and settles in, not much movement. Medium-bodied, the acidity swiftly gnaws away at the body and adds bite. Would have been smoother otherwise, highlights a prickly feel and lends rougher texture to the leather and floral aspects. Orange to lemon citrus has a tangy edge. The red cherry, raspberry fruit is light and shows poor length. As a result it depends on pop and crackle in the mouth for any effect. 85

ITALY WHITE

Convento [Muri-Gries], Cantina
Alto Adige/Südtirol
Müller-Thurgau
2004, \$17.99, 13.0%

While light, has a layered gold straw cast with a green tinge that adds vibrancy, a little dip around the rims. Playfully forward minerally and lemony nose, shades of anise and mint, orange blossom, almost bashfully remembers at the last second to dish out the pear, apple, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied, suave grit as it enters your mouth, casually rakes its nails across your tongue. Crisp, exhilarating feel in the lemon, orange citrus and flower petals, dances along without a care in the world. Brisk feel too in the pear, apple, peach fruit, got rid of any extra juice before it went outside to meet its public. The acidity hums along like a seasoned session bass player.

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Spectral finish, plenty of weight left and nicely scrubbed. 90

Ulivi, Cascina degli
Piedmont, Gavi
Cortese
2004, \$15.99, 12.5%

Pure, resplendent yellow gold color, solid layer unfolds across the surface until the fully transparent rims. Floral oil, especially violets, in the nose, mineral powder and white smoke, lemon oil, stream water, fresh to the occlusion of the majority of the apple, pear, peach scents. Light-bodied, tangy and blindingly bright, skips along your tongue and leaps up to the roof of your mouth. Eventually comes down to furnish peach, apricot, melon, green apple fruit as well as pebbles and mineral bits. Straw and herbs bring out a mildly sour side, heightens its freshness. Non-showy, the persistent acidity leaves enough moisture in the mouth so you can relax. Orange, lemon citrus makes a quick, definitive burst. Compact and knowingly integrated, easy to handle from first to last. 89

Ferrara, Benito
Campania, Greco di Tufo
Greco
2004, \$15.99, 13.0%

Mature looking, yellow amber to rich gold, for all its hue lacks visual luster and shine. Fistfuls of cinnamon, clove and nutmeg in the nose, ripe orange juice, wet flower petals, licorice with enough firmness in the apple, peach, pear scents to hold its shape and end cleanly. In the mouth it is full-bodied and tastes almost exactly like an apple pie from McDonald's. Has all that cinnamon-like spice and flaky dough flavors. That said, does mix in lemon and orange and that clove stuff too. Besides dried apples there's concentrated peach, apricot, pear of above average sweetness and weight, if not particular length. Not devoid of acidity, does manage to add some fluidity to the proceedings. Mucho sabor. 89

Tercic, Azienda Agricola Matijaz
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Collio, Ribolla Gialla
2004, \$21.99, 13.5%

Luminous, dancing yellow gold color, light but even with what it has. Mint, anise, violets make for a pretty nose, firmed up by some lemon zest, has a light chalk dusting too, almost some sweeter baking spices, the peach, apricot, pear fruit is round enough to persist well and maintain a good size. Medium-bodied, soft so as to be agreeable not a wimp. Noticeably floral, spicy too, with tangerine and lemon citrus to make up for any lack of minerality. Anise and mint tones keep the smiles coming. The peach, apricot, pear, apple fruit possesses full flavor and stays balanced. Long, energetic finish with plenty left at the end, lowkey vibrations echo behind. 88

Tercic, Azienda Agricola Matijaz
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Collio
Pinot Grigio
2004, \$21.99, 14.0%

Profuse golden color, easily catches your eye, average shine but maintains good concentration. Honey and lemon aspects bring out tea notes in the nose, too dense to become fully floral, low center of gravity in the pear, apple, peach scents, nothing insignificant here. Full-bodied and sticky, seems intent on becoming Pinot Gris. The orange and lemon citrus get a candied peel feel from the glazed honey, very consistent with the nose. The florality has

more room to move here, though, Minty fresh, catches your attention the way the flavors are more in the "high register" while the mouth feel is basso profundo. Extended presentation of the peach, apricot, cherry, apple fruit, rolls on attentively. Done in an Alsatian vein. 88

Salviano

Umbria, Orvieto Classico Superiore

Blend

2004, \$10.99, 13.5%

Light brown straw in color, concentrated core, paler and shinier at the rims. Generous apple, pear, peach fruit in the nose with a touch of mint and washed pebbles, slight bit of powdered flowers too, open and pleasing. Full-bodied, very juicy and soft, the ambrosial yellow apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit is the star of the show. Sugary orange and lemon citrus too, gains a pie-like feel out of the cinnamon, allspice notes. Has enough acidity to maintain a minimal threshold of freshness, ekes out a shade of florality too. Holds its body through to the finish, that sweetness keeps going too. Touch more spine needed but can't fault the vigor of the flavors. 40% Trebbiano, 15% Verdello, 15% Grechetto, 15% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Malvasia, 5% Drupeggio. 88

Terredora di Paolo

Campania, Irpinia

Falanghina

2004, \$12.99, 12.5%

Thick, gauzy sheet of yellow gold in your glass, remains semi-translucent at rims but loses most of its hue. Fills your nose with flower petals and orange spritz, heavy in texture and mildly nutty, spiced apple and peach scents, like a poached dessert. Full-bodied, sappy and clingy, high level of ginger-led spice, the orange and lime citrus is bright but somewhat sour. Florality lower here, more clover and herbs, wild grasses. Just enough acidity to help shape the peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit, good bite too. Both flattens out and becomes fizzier past the mid-palate, long in the weight department even as the flavors peter out. Spiciness remains to the last. 87

Cieck, Azienda Agricola

Piedmont, Erbaluce di Caluso, Misobolo

Erbaluce

2003, \$15.99, 13.0%

Somewhat filmy, strong glow in the yellow core, the cloudiness extends the color closer to the rims. Smoky nose, frying lemon peels, warmed stones and minerals, sour herbs, only an afterthought of apple, peach, pear fruit, all evaporates swiftly. Medium-bodied, has weight and a texturally sits fully on the tongue yet doesn't have the depth of flavors to match this. The lemon, licorice, straw, grass and basic minerals do not work strongly together. Gets more floral as it sits in the glass, this drags out some more flavor from the peach, apple, pear fruit component. Mentholated and medicinal finish throws it off again though. Weird wine. 85

GERMANY WHITE

Merkelbach, Weingut Alfred

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Ürziger Würzgarten, Spätlese AP #10

Riesling

2004, \$14.99, 8.0%

Pale gold to white straw in color, nice reflective gleam, mild degree of translucency. Gently piercing lemon and lime spritz in the nose, while possessed of a strong floral

dimension equally endowed with chalky stone, the ripeness in the peach, apricot, pineapple, pear scents holds itself in check. Medium-bodied, despite being a bit tough-minded and muscular stays fluid enough. Acidity powerful enough to create a texture of fine sandpaper. Again, somewhat dominated by the lime, lemon, tangerine citrus component, does prevent any latent softness in the florality or apricot, peach, pear, apple fruit from appearing. Increasingly dry as it passes the mid-palate, echoes of streamwater and pebbles. Refreshing appeal for the prädiikat, could potentially turn more elegant with time. 89

Christoffel Erben, Weingut Joh. Jos.

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Ürziger Würzgarten, Kabinett AP #2

Riesling

2004, \$18.99, 8.5%

Somewhat translucent, layered white-green hay color, Perfumed nose, strong but holds onto some delicacy, rose and orange blossom, lime and tangerine citrus, the patina of honey cloaks much of the stone and chalk elements, calm demeanor as it unwraps the peach, pear, apricot fruit scents. Full-bodied, sculpted shoulders lets the fabric drape and hide some of the fat in its belly, especially all that juicy apricot, peach, melon, nectarine, pear, cherry fruit. More emphasis here on the tangerine, lime, lemon citrus, less floral and honeyed. This helps you get a bit more stone flavors too. Has that light Mosel-like petillant feel, the fizz relieves weight as it dissolves on your tongue. Nothing transcendent but hits exactly the right pitch. 89

Selbach-Oster, Weingut

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Kabinett AP #24

Riesling

2004, \$16.99, 9.5%

Full yellow gold color, mild green tinge, while clear also dark enough to create slight distortion. Floral nose, sweet in an unchewed bubblegum kind of way, tangerine and lime peel, stone scents seem polished and cleansed, the peach, pear, red apple the bassist over to the side out of the spotlight. Medium-bodied, the acidity comes on quickly and without much care for what gets in its way. More minerals and stream water than one might have suspected from the nose, the tangerine and lime still there. Less floral, perhaps too dry for it to, err, blossom. Vague underripe feel in the cherry, peach, apricot, apple fruit but not out of place with the other components. Texturally, clings very well to the tongue, lots of grip. The citrus echoes through the finish. 88

AUSTRIA WHITE

Bauer, Weingut Anton

Donauland, Gmörk

Grüner Veltliner

2004, \$10.99, 12.5%

Bright yellow straw color, faint glow, while not that shiny holds its hue just about to the rims. Touch of stone, grass and brine to a nose that's mostly peach, apricot fruit and wet flowers, gentle hint of brown sugar balanced out by freshly picked herbs, keeps darting about. In the mouth it leads with youthful fleshiness for pleasure, quickly draining off the excess within a few seconds. Lemony, adds sweet tang and complements the grassiness well. No over the top but definitely fruit-driven, surfeit of peach, apricot, pear, melon to linger over. Spiciness and minerality slow to register, too much fruit going on. The acidity is solid, not quite the sharpest edge but, if so, it would detract from its

chosen overall presentation. Long, well-stuffed finish, outlasts you. 89

AUSTRIA ROSE

Mittelbach (Tegernseerhof), Weingut Familie Franz
Wachau, Dürnsteiner, Kabinett Rosé
Zweigelt

2004, \$9.99, 11.5%

Very light yellow-pink color but fully consistent from core to rims and bolstered by a luminescent glow. Fresh and juicy nose of red cherry, raspberry, melon, apricot fruit as well as lemon and orange juice, light mineral dusting but no real room for much else. Medium-bodied, its density doesn't create enough space for textural contrasts to develop fully. Keener edge in the lemon, orange, white grapefruit citrus, teams up more competently with the minerality here. Shows a mild brush of florality but this fades into more bitter grass and herb notes. The cherry, raspberry, red apple, peach fruit tightly wound and less juicy, especially given the noticeable strength in the acidity. Confident wine, not shy about running you down from behind. 88

SPAIN RED

Anguera, Joan d'
Mont Sant, Finca l'Argatà
Blend

2002, \$23.99, 14.0%

Entirely opaque black purple core, really no color at all until admits of thin vermilion-magenta rims. Soupy nose of toasted chocolate, vanilla, coconut, massive extraction in the plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit, a bit clumsy like it wants to pour you some water and gets it all over your sleeve, nothing else happening. In the mouth it is full-bodied, heavily layered and sweet, rumbles forward with extracted currant, cherry, blackberry, plum fruit, when it turns dry it doesn't feel natural, more so scripted. Powdery texture extends throughout, even to the tannins. Minor notes of lemon, grass, stone, but nowhere near the buttered toast, popcorn, caramel flavorings. Really wears you out to the point where you stop paying attention. 40% Syrah, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Grenache, 10% Carignan. 85

SPAIN WHITE

Cuevas de Castilla
Rueda, Con Class
Blend

2004, \$9.99, 13.0%

Zero color, attractive shine or you would think the glass was empty. Noticeably smoky and herbaceous nose with hefty white grapefruit component, develops an almost saline quality, ripe peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple scents. Medium-bodied, soft on the attack but firms up considerably as the acidity reveals itself. Sweet touch to the white to pink grapefruit and lemon citrus, while still herbal not as much as in the nose. Hints at a peppery quality, has a light fizzy mouth feel. The apple, pear, melon, nectarine fruit has focus and easygoing length. Ends on a bright note, quiet linger. 60% Verdejo, 40% Viura. 88

Pazo de Señorans
Rías Baixas
Albariño

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2004, \$22.99, 12.5%

Soft white straw color, more concentrated at the core, adequate shine, some fizz visible, empty rims. Semi-creamy nose of peach, apricot, stone smoke, dried flowers, full but not heavy. Full-bodied, rich and expansive until it starts pushing outwards against your mouth walls. Its sheer volume impedes the flow of the flower and lemon, orange citrus flavors, not lacking a back half but slows down appreciably after entry. The acidity is average, not able to lengthen the peach, apricot, pear fruit. Good integration but could also say it isn't taking many chances either. For those who like 'em big. 86

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Waterford
Stellenbosch
Cabernet Sauvignon
2001, \$14.99, 13.5%

Crimson to orange-garnet inflected purple core, red-ochre rims of full coloration. Really palpable bell pepper in the nose, leavened some by minerals, oak toast, pickles, lemon oil, oak toast and caramel soften the situation some, still has an edgy feel in the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry scents, looking for an open space in which to make its point. Medium-bodied, smoky and leathery in a way that brings out lemon, white grapefruit citrus, tree bark, tobacco before ceding to the fruit. The acidity relishes how it can cut through the presentation with relative abandon, no one gonna say yes or no. Bell pepper and other green vegetal matter are in the mix to stay, you have to be able to deal. Filmy, coating feel to the tannins, becomes more evident as it finishes. Not baked but the terroir rips any softness out of the fruit. 86

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Waterford
Stellenbosch
Chardonnay
2004, \$19.99, 13.5%

Pale and yet reflective yellow straw color, more repels light than shows density of hue. Outgoing, effusive nose, chock full of dewy flower petals, vanilla cream, butterscotch, pear, red apple, peach fruit, spiced orange peel, while overpowering as a whole, each element remains distinct and clear. Full-bodied, on the attack it alternates between soft vanilla cream and edgier ginger, cumin spice, eventually settling into the former as the juice in the pear, peach, yellow apple, apricot fruit tilts the scales. The acidity shaves away any unnecessary parts leaving it fresh and smooth towards the finish. The floral and orange citrus parts more embellishments than focus, support the central voice of the fruit. Extremely competent. 91

AUSTRALIA RED

Hamilton, Richard
South Australia, McLaren Vale, Centurion 1 10 Year Old
Vine
Shiraz
2002, \$59.99, 14.0%

Vibrant scarlet-purple core without pushing saturation to opacity, bright brick red to ruby rims, fully hued throughout. Vastly minty nose gives it sparkle, settles into restrained oak toast as well as fresh leather, game blood and eucalyptus, the blackberry, black raspberry fruit is not in the mood to fight for top billing, gives that mint its due.

In the mouth, has a stinky sappiness which slows down its forward momentum considerably, literally inches through your mouth. The mint and eucalyptus remains major components but not as dominant as in the nose, the sour while supple red currant, red cherry, blackberry fruit benefits from a decidedly peppery kick. Wonderfully restrained oak lends clarity to the other parts, honestly unguarded about itself. The acidity is more important than the tannins, in keeping with its general feel. Despite lack of fat still young and in need of time to grow into itself. 91

Jinks Creek
Victoria, Gippsland
Pinot Noir
2003, \$35.99, 13.9%

Very pale red-ruby in color, vague filminess and a bit washed out at the rims. Spicy, leathery nose, texturally rough like a beanbag, dried mushrooms, presents a semi-roasted, almost liqueur feel in the raspberry, red cherry scents, nothing unusual here but it lingers much longer than expected. Medium to full-bodied, baking spices and orange marmalade combine with leather, brown earth for a compelling initial flourish. Slightly pickled feel but the ripe sweetness in the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit steamrolls this easily. Picks up increasing cleanliness as the acidity gains a foothold, heightens its lemony bite too. Mint and a touch of eucalyptus bring it on home, imbuing it with a distinct profile. Very interesting. 90

Hamilton, Richard
South Australia, Adelaide, Marion Vineyard, Grenache Shiraz
Blend
2001, \$41.99, 14.5%

Dense red plum colored core, barely an iota of change near the rims, maybe, just maybe a touch more glowing magenta. Serenely stable nose of succint vanilla cream, eucalyptus, mint, leather, sour orange peel, jammy but not overly sweet raspberry, blackberry, black cherry, stiffens with some cranberry notes, then raisin too, keeps you off balance, light minerality but it's the fruit which slowly percolates and holds your attention. In the mouth presents a tight, medium-bodied frame of milk chocolate, toffee, caramelized vanilla toffee, mesquite smoke, blood iron, iron shavings, lemon peel, takes its time in gathering the steam needed to make a splash. Plum, cherry, black cherry, blackberry fruit, sappy and extracted yet nothing unnatural wreaked upon it, flows easily. Tightens on the finish but this too is part of the natural course of things. 52% Grenache, 48% Shiraz. 90

Hamilton, Richard
South Australia, McLaren Vale, Burton's Vineyard, Old Bush Vine Grenache Shiraz
Blend
2002, \$41.99, 14.5%

Purple to crimson red core, really doesn't shift much, too clean and consistent, scarlet hued rims of vast depth. Bubblegum sugar in the nose, all mindless fun and bounce, chocolate powder and dried herbs make an odd concurrent appearance, toffee, then floral, really candied and concentrated raspberry, red cherry fruit, holds its place in line but has to get a ringer or two to hold its place when it pees. Full-bodied, at once blowsy and crisp, rises easily in the guise of the red cherry, currant, raspberry, strawberry fruit and lemon/tangerine zest while the acidity keeps yanking it back down to earth. Keeps that very lean and taut feel, weight always there and caramel,

vanilla oak a solid anchor, just isn't content with a soaking effect. Will tap you on the shoulder at 3:00 AM to wake you up just to say hello. Gonna improve but makes you wonder why you'd wait. 54% Grenache, 46% Shiraz. 90

Rusden
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Driftsand
Blend
2003, \$29.99, 14.5%
Consistent violet to orange-garnet in color, minimal change near the rims, average shine but very clear. Big smoky, leathery nose with tobacco wrapper, wood ash, earth, candied orange peel, gets you scrunching enough that you might miss a good bit of the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, compact enough to stay nimble despite being fairly concentrated. The oak toast has a burnt edge which allows it more prominence here, combats eagerly with the leather, earth, smoke and dried mushroom components. The acidity has a slow, sweeping cadence which eventually helps to bring out orange and lemon citrus and a fistful of flowers. Tannins ever so slightly underripe. Syrupy texture to the raspberry, blackberry, red currant fruit but only semi-sweet. Youthfully uneven, still learning the right steps. 70% Grenache, 20% Mataro, 10% Shiraz. 88

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Leconfield
South Australia, Coonawarra, Old Vines
Riesling
2004, \$19.99, 12.0%
Neutral white straw color with green flecks, more flat and deep than reflective. The nose is made up mainly of lemon and lime citrus but absolutely presents rubber accents before developing a ginger and vanilla thing that brings up the idea of pumpkin pie, the peach, red apple, pear notes seem a bit lost in it all. Full-bodied, the acidity is a complementary undercurrent throughout, not the conductor. Sour bite in the lemon and lime makes you wince at first. Lower level of rubber here in the mouth, the tradeoff is more stoniness. Has a hay/straw aspect which never settles in, vibrates too much. Touch peppery on the back end but the casual, laconic nature of the pear, apple, apricot fruit soothes it out. Zigs and zags on you, keeps your intellect fully engaged. 89

Hamilton, Richard
South Australia, McLaren Vale, Slate Quarry
Riesling
2004, \$18.99, 12.0%
Brilliant yellow-green cast, tiny visible fizz, some loss of hue intensity at the rims. Wide sweep in the nose, chooses breadth over depth, echoes of tire rubber before lemon custard, cleanly outlined pear, peach, apple fruit and a cinnamon sweetener, wraps up nicely. Medium-bodied, quite zesty on the attack, wakes you right up like a trumpet in your ear. The acidity is an arrow right through the orange, lemon, lime citrus, brings out green spring grass and white stones as well. The pear, peach, apple, apricot fruit stands at attention even as the "at ease" call goes out. Lots left in its legs by the finish, keeps going well. Like rubbing Ben-Gay on your tongue, leaves you tingling but raw. 89

Jinks Creek
Victoria, Gippsland
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$23.99, 13.5%

While almost fully transparent, has a brown cast that brings out a hay-like look, satisfactory surface brightness. Mint, gooseberry, peach, nectarine driven nose with an alert chalky mineral component and a touch of chili powder, starts out slowly then winds tightly around your nose hairs. Full-bodied, broad sweep on the mouth entry with an initial sweet touch of powdered sugar that swiftly fades into chili pepper, lime juice, white mineral powder. As in the nose, builds steam over time until it finally explodes with apricot, peach, pear, red apple fruit in the center. The acidity is on the softer side, not likely to draw blood. This detracts a tad from the finish's length, more of an easy cascade. Integration and harmony over energy. 88

Hamilton, Richard

South Australia, McLaren Vale, Daisy's Vineyard
Viognier

2005, \$18.99, 13.5%

Mostly greenish in cast, worn gold underneath, minimal shine. Its floral perfume is shot straight out of an atomizer, settles heavily in the nose, orange blossom and honeysuckle, tangerine spritz, nutty at times, oddly the only non-heavy part are the peach, apricot fruit scents. Medium-bodied, big but not outsized, has the acidity to provide restraining walls. Generous slices of lemon, lime, tangerine citrus keeps it moving briskly. Violets and lilacs abound, a softer vanilla creaminess lingers beneath. Past the mid-palate it gets spicier and reveals an interesting grassy side. Not a gentle finish, has a fighter's mentality to the last. Don't talk politics with it. 88

Alkoomi

Western Australia, Frankland River
Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$20.99, 12.0%

Mostly transparent white-green straw color, bright and prismatic, hue just about gets to the rims. Subdued nose, the biggest noise comes from the jalapeño, cut grass and then gets quieter with the pear, peach, apple fruit and white stones, fades out with dignity. More boisterous in the mouth, medium-bodied, a lot spicier and driven by that jalapeño pepper. Sweet comeback from the flower petals and peach, apricot, pear, red apple fruit, makes a game showing. Much stronger minerality and stoniness too, elevating herbaceousness as well. Sneaky wine, not much of an impression at first and then you're taking big chugs. 88

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Kaimira Estate

Nelson

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

White straw color with a mild green tinge, transparent, especially at the rims, minimal shine. The nose is full of chili peppers and olive oil, mineral dust, pineapple, papaya, nectarine, pear fruit, strong herbal undercurrent but this cannot challenge those jalapeños. Full-bodied, super-juicy and ripe pineapple, guava, papaya, nectarine, apricot fruit, resonates deeply. Still, there's plenty of fire via that chili pepper thing, not least the white grapefruit, lemon citrus and white mineral dust. Keen-edged and the acidity makes sure your eyes stay open and alert. Almost suggests a floral side at moments, a bit out of place to coalesce. Remarkable most for how it crackles with energy and

youthful verve, not sure where it's going but will get you there in a hurry. 90

Kaimira Estate

Nelson, Brightwater

Riesling

2004, \$17.99, 12.0%

Light, if consistent, yellow gold of pleasing radiance, some loss of hue around the rims. Good stuffing in the nose with melon, red apple, nectarine, pear fruit, adds in a spoonful of golden honey, leans more on flowers and lemon/lime citrus than stones or minerals, takes what it has and gives it the focus to achieve its length. Medium-bodied, gives your tongue the gentlest of sweet 'n' sour twists on the entry, sparkles with lime, lemon, white grapefruit zest, chalky white stones and floral perfume. Moderate degree of oiliness, both in texture and flavor. The peach, apricot, green melon, nectarine fruit seems atypical but is savory. Touch peppery too, starts to come off as a Sauvignon Blanc in drag. Lush and full, you need to take it on its own terms. 88

Kahurangi Estate

Nelson, Moutere, Old Vines

Riesling

2004, \$19.99, 12.5%

Highly reflective white to yellow straw color, ultra-clear and transparent, like a freshly washed pane of glass. Friendly, openly knit nose of lilacs, brown sugar, lemon and lime spritz, peach and apricot fuzz, pear skin, its soft underbelly makes you want to poke it. Medium-bodied, has all of its ducks in a row and cleanly presents zesty chalk and powdered minerals, flower petals, honey, lemon reduction, at the last second tosses in a touch of oil fumes. The apricot, peach, pear, red apple fruit has a nonchalant carelessness, just trying to have a good time. The acidity is so-so but finds an extra gear during the back half. Keeps throwing body shots at you to wear you down until you finally submit. 88

Borthwick Vineyard

Wairarapa

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$16.99, 12.5%

While the yellow straw color is semi-flat and lacking in shine it has enough of a day-glo feel to fill up the glass. Pickled nose, sour and peppery at once, almost smells like kimchi, has sauna stone accents, minimal pineapple, nectarine, papaya and apricot fruit but has thrust to spare. Medium-bodied, manages to battle its blunter mouth feel with crackle in the minerals and grassiness. Still holds onto that pickled vegetables thing, spicy to the point where the tingle prevents the flavors from truly soaking in. Nice mouthwatering quality to the acidity, dry and makes you jones for a tall glass of water. As in the nose, delineated but not particularly forceful nor juicy peach, apricot, pineapple, nectarine fruit. Drink it when you want a challenge not to relax. 88

ARGENTINA RED

Hormigas, Altos Las

Mendoza

Malbec

2004, \$9.99, 14.5%

Reddish violet to magenta color, fully consistent from core to rims, zero loss at latter. Heavily oaked nose of caramel, molasses, coffee, burnt toast, really hard to get past this,

once you do there's some florality and then plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, predictable and thus boring. In the mouth it's more of the same, medium-bodied, slightly bitter feel in the oak, more ground coffee and burnt caramelized molasses than sweet generosity. The acidity is strong but not rock hard. Thick-legged blackberry, black cherry, black currant fruit, just as tangy as sweet. Has a brush of orange zest, mutter of florality. Clunky finish, big statement made but lacking in terms of meaning. 85

Flichman, Finca

Mendoza

Malbec

2004, \$11.99, 13.5%

Deep violet color, holds its surface reflectivity, shady and saturated red magenta rims. Big, round nose of creamy vanilla, caramel and ripe, concentrated plum, black cherry, blackberry scents, some mint and orange peel but little room for much else, snuggles with your nostrils. Medium-bodied, fluffy and expansive in a herky-jerky manner, not the most integrated of wines. The frank density of the plum, currant, black cherry fruit checks the French vanilla toast and caramel aspects. Minor acidic swipe, tannins appear most on the back-end as a semi-final statement. Fills in any spaces with mint, menthol, orange paste and gregariously forward leather flavors. Clunky. 85