

## *The Hanes Wine Review, April 2006 Edition*

Spring is here, time for another annoying Hanes third person narrative. What could be better than that? Sadly, Hanes cannot lay on the cheese when it comes to this month's topic because every groan-inducing headline or snappy title has already been taken. So, rather than "clone" previous attempts at humor Hanes will just shoot straight and discuss what grape clones are and why they are important.

For the average wine drinker, a grape is a grape. That is, if the bottle label indicates the grape the wine is made from, then that's the grape the wine is made from. 'Nuff said. Some more knowledgeable swillers know there are rules which allow for minimal percentages of a given grape to be able to label a wine "varietally" (e.g., it can say Zinfandel on the label and still have 15% Petite Sirah in it with no mention of the latter). But what most people have not been schooled on is that for almost all grapes there are many different types of said grape. This means that to say a wine is "Sangiovese" may be considered deceptive because there are many existing "clones" of the Sangiovese grape and chances are high you'll never know which grape clone(s) got squished into juice and poured into your bottle. Hell, a lot of the time maybe the winemaker doesn't even know.

So, what are "clones" in the context of wine? *Clonal differences* are mutations in the genetic code of the grape bearing vine, particularly where the grapevine shoots out of the main vine. These mutations occur naturally and spontaneously over time, starting with a single cell and subsequently spreading to take over the entirety of the vine. So, it is not like the whole vine is bathed in cosmic rays and suddenly changes. The mutation occurs in one shoot which may then grow itself into a large, hardened vine. This vine is now fairly meta-static in its clonal difference. Until perhaps it mutates again.

Now, in winegrower speak, *clones* are a different thing. This is where human intervention comes in. You have that main "new" vine which has an interesting clonal difference (if it wasn't interesting no one would notice it, right?). This "mother" vine can then be asexually propagated, via cuttings and graftings and planted just about anywhere those crazy humans want. With luck the mother vine will not mutate and can remain a source of consistent new clones. Groups of clones from a certain mother vine with the same characteristics will be given an identifying number by the powers that be. These be usually in a university or large nursery which has the pedigree to ensure quality control when registering clones and such. The clones then get sold to other nurseries, wineries, your Uncle Al in Hackensack.

It is important to note that clones cannot mutate *too much* or they will lose their familial resemblance as a specific grape. The differences among clones can be minute or more substantial. And the changes cannot be sexual in nature because when that happens (via cross-pollination or hybridization between two grape varieties) science deems the result to be a new variety, not a clone.

Now, you can't march into a nursery and say gimme the ORIGINAL Chardonnay vine. Nobody knows what that is anymore, just which clones are relatively older than others, etc. You *can* go into a nursery and say gimme Chardonnay Dijon clone number 95. Here's where it all becomes a major headache. The grapes grown from vine cuttings of a certain clone may produce differences related to flavor, aroma or color. Or the differences may be more practical in nature. Let's discuss these in turn!

In terms of having a direct effect on the quality of the wine, clones may offer distinct advantages over their peer competitors. It seems that many wine growers favor clones which produce small grape berries and smaller overall yields. If Hanes had a nickel for every time he has read about the "intensely flavored" grapes that come from a winery snootily choosing Clone X he would be a rich man. Makes you wonder how *those other* clones manage to survive and propagate. Poor suckers.

Some clones produce a darker or lighter color, desirable if one is going for a certain "look." And, for example, flavor descriptors associated with specific Chardonnay grape clones include spicy, honeyed, citrusy, minerally with emphases on tropical fruit, fig, pear or peach. There's a clone to suit any discriminating palate.

On the practical side of the ledger, there are clonal aspects which may be of great benefit. Some clones may vary in grape cluster size and density and thus help even ripening among the grapes. Others may undergo earlier budbreak or earlier ripening. Some possess more or less acidity. Simple vigor in a clone may be a desirable attribute if the goal is yield maximization. And some clones prove more resistant to some diseases. You have never truly lived until you have read a paper on how eight different clones of Albariño respectively resist powdery mildew (*Plasmopara viticola*).

The dangerous trap in discussing clones is thinking that there must be a "best" clone. What clone would Veruca Salt make her father plant? But there really isn't any "best" clone because of the vast impact "terroir" makes on viticulture. What works in the Russian River Valley may not work in Central Otago, etc., etc. Differing soil composition, temperatures, average rainfalls, vineyard drainage, exposure to warm sea breezes, all the million factors that go into choosing a vineyard site negate the concept of universally superior clones. The vast majority of Merlot planted in Washington State is clone FPMS#3. But does that mean other clones should never be experimented with throughout the state? In Australia clone SA1654 is the most widely planted type of Shiraz. Does that mean that it kicks butt in every Australian region or vineyard? No. Hell, "best" clone may not even apply to a given vineyard but maybe only a block or row of vines. Every winemaker and/or vineyard manager *has to* recreate the wheel, there's few if any shortcuts.

Clonal differences occur in varying rates among grape varieties. Pinot Noir is the most unstable grape of them all, with "inside cells" fairly frequently reaching the "outside" and creating visible differences among vines and grape bunches. Being one of the oldest grape varieties, maybe it's senile and keeps forgetting its genetic code. In Burgundy, France alone there are something in the area of 45 recognized clones (many referred to as "Dijon" clones). Worldwide, your guess is as good as anyone's, the "literature" says anywhere from 200 to 1,000 Pinot Noir clones.

Some grapes are more stable, with youth of the variety being a key factor. Sangiovese is an older varietal of some instability and has 45 recognized clones (or over 600 clones just in Montalcino, Tuscany depending on who you believe). The relatively young Cabernet Sauvignon has a simple 12 identified clones. And so on for all the various grape varieties. But the fact remains that we only notice clones that we notice. Duh. There may be tons of clonal mutations which go unnoticed and are thus more or less treated as the "same" grapes. Ahh, sweet mystery of life...

University Enology Departments are doing a lot to lead the way towards a better understanding of clonal differences and how best to isolate and propagate certain clones. And, as importantly, help prevent certain historical clones from becoming extinct. Groupings among more similar clones are made, while debating the extent to which clonal differences can be substantiated. In California, "heritage" projects involving both Zinfandel and Petite Sirah clones are ongoing. In McLaren Vale, Australia, a Shiraz clonal project has provided insights into the possibilities of more nuanced clonal selection in Australian vineyards. Give them a grant, these scientists will do anything. In a more commercial vein, the Yalumba Nursery in Barossa, Australia has had a clonal development program going since the late 1990's aimed at developing and selling superior old vine Shiraz clone cuttings.

A more recent development deserves mention here. Italian scientists have succeeded in mapping the entire genetic sequence of Pinot Noir, a major breakthrough which should influence human control over clonal differences and clones. This is the first fruit so mapped, with the only other food so sequenced being rice. The scientists showed that the pinot noir genome is spread across 12 chromosomes and is made up of around 500 million bases of DNA. We will only know the impact of this, and future similar genetic decoding, over the coming years.

OK, this is a great assemblage of facts Hanes, but what does it mean to *me*? Well, if you are drinking Two Buck Chuck probably not a lot. But once the bottles you drink creep up over \$10 and spiral past \$25 or so, it can be a lot. This is because the "mixing board" of the winemaker is full of clonal "samples." If a winemaker decides that Clone X does well in Vineyard A, it's not like s/he plants nothing but Clone X from there on. Some plantings of Clone Y may add a certain little "sumpin', sumpin'" to the mix. Or their neighbor a town over have a parcel of Clone Z and boy does that add some kick when blended with all your Clone X. Only the fanciest of the fanciest really list which clones were used in a specific wine, as well as maybe the percentages of each. And for 99.9% of the drinking public that's just slick marketing as not many people can tell you the flavor difference among clones (especially when accounting for soil and climatic differences, as mentioned previously).

Instead, the difference is transparent to the drinker, who must hope it sure as hell isn't transparent to the winemaker. If a winemaker desires more luscious fruit, s/he should plant certain clones, if more acidity is desired other clones. Greater homogeneity or complexity can be achieved via clonal selection. Either with an eye on separating out the grapes for particular bottlings or blending them together. It is rare that an 100% mono-clonal wine is the best (and given the rate of mutations highly unlikely anyway, even if this goes unknown). And the vineyard managers and winemakers should know when a certain clone isn't panning out and should be replaced in a specific vineyard with a different clone.

Experimenting with different clones in different vineyard blocks and then mixing the resultant wines in varying lots and proportions is kind of the hidden "heavy lifting" done by the winemaker. And it is an ongoing process, one where victories are temporary. New clones may become available. Recurring weather patterns may change (hello, global warming), effecting clonal performance. Disease may wipe out certain clones. The focus of the winery's winemaking style may change. The damn grapes may even mutate again!

The lesson here is that the average consumer should not assume that Chardonnay tastes differently from Burgundy to New Zealand to Napa Valley only because of different climates and such. Which clones are grown remains a considerable factor, if little advertised by the wine industry. But it's probably for the best. Imagine how much longer Hanes's tasting notes would be if he had to list the clones used too!

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**This month's big winners...** March is a kind time for broke wine writers, as it is the "Month of Festivals," or distributor portfolio tastings. Working nights, Hanes was able to attend many he otherwise would have had to skip (plus it makes the first couple of hours at work fun — until the hangover starts). Texier is "back in da house" and while his 2004 Côte-Rôtie rocks, the value play is the \$18 or so 100% Syrah Côtes du Rhône from the village of Brézème. Hanes doesn't drink a lot of Bourgogne blanc these days but he was impressed by Henri Clerc's 2004 "Les Riaux," particularly for about \$19. A big part of the highlights were some very fine California Cabernet Sauvignons, offering restraint and a decided lack of fruity goopiness. Of course, the deck was stacked as Hanes sampled personal faves such as Corison, The Terraces and Karl Lawrence. None cheap if you are buying, alas. While pushing its value at around \$18, Torbreck's 2004 Barossa "Woodcutter's White" from the Sémillon grape is one of the nicer non-Riesling Australian whites Hanes has swilled of late. If you are looking for killer German Riesling which stays on the drier side, a producer new to Hanes worth checking out is Falkenstein from the Mosel Saar Ruwer, prices fair for the quality. Another new producer worth following is Dr. Heyden

from the Rheinhessen, really liked their Spätlese Trocken "Diamant," good value at \$20. As Hanes continues to slam the 2003 vintage, he shall attempt *some* fairness by giving kudos to Barthod for their Bourgogne rouge "Les Bons Bâtons," even if getting pricey at \$28. Clos des Brusquières is a Châteauneuf-du-Pape producer unfamiliar to Hanes (he can't drink them all) but he was glad he got to sip some of their 2004 rouge, a relative value these days at \$35.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Refreshingly unadorned, for \$13 Schmitt's Riesling Kabinett from the Kranzberg Vineyard in Germany's Rheinhessen is worth scouting for. Not calling it profound but Argentina's Navarro Correas has made a slurpable Cabernet in 2004. And not only is it from a private collection, it's a limited release as well! Sadly, not much made but count Hanes as a fan of J-P Brun's 2004 Côte de Brouilly Beaujolais, a helluva wine for \$15. From Sicily, Gulfi has a seductively old school wine in their 2004 Nero d'Avola "Rossojbleo" which has less unnecessary flesh than many Nero-based wines. Since Hanes can't find many good Alsatian Gewürztraminer wines below \$15 he might as well praise another Rheinhessen producer, Machmer, for their 2004 Spätlese Gewürztraminer from the Stein Vineyard, around \$13.

**And the disappointments...** The 2003 basic wine from Bodegas Mauro was a big downer for Hanes, since he usually likes their wines. \$41 saved by free sampling! The Zinfandel from the Hayne Vineyard is Turley's premier wine (at \$75 it oughta be) but the 2003 Hanes had was a big disappointment, even allowing for the buzz-producing value found in its 16.5% alcohol. Once in awhile it's worth trying a \$20+ Argentinean Malbec just to see what's shaking at that price point. The 2003 from Mapema suggests not much. Oh, well. Hanes's fetish for Californian Syrah hit a brick wall when tasting the 2003 Neiman "Caldwell Vineyard" offering. \$75? Not! From a purely price-driven perspective the 2004 Vosne-Romanée "Les Brûlees" from Burgundian producer Yves Chevalier is another \$75 clunker. Hanes has had past luck with Mount Langi Ghiran from Victoria, Australia but their 2003 Shiraz "Billi Billi" was \$14 better spent elsewhere (props to them for using a screwcap though).

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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 #20:** "It's not a blog, dammit!"

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 April!

**CALIFORNIA RED**

Turley  
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Ueberroth Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2003, \$48.00, 16.0%  
Very blockish in appearance, solid from surface downwards and easy enough to see through, very light purple to red-ruby, scarlet closer to the rims. Briary, metallic, leathery nose, wet black earth, fried herbs, eucalyptus rub, some molasses or graham cracker notes, the red currant, cherry, elderberry fruit has a rough complexion. Medium-bodied with a natural density to it, happier to flex than speed along. The tannins bare their teeth early on, keep things dry and in the lower register. Quite citrusy, yellow with good bite, nothing sweet there. The earth, leather, tree bark, metal shavings in effect in

the mouth as well, semi-herbaceous even as this fits in with the general approach. The pared down cherry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit actually gets a little juicier near the finish, stays fresh via the above average acidity. This is a serious Zin that isn't out to just give your tongue a massage. 91

Terraces, The  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$52.99, 14.4%  
Trim red crimson in color, light and reflective throughout, touch more gleaming brick red at the rims with an orange cast. Minerally, powdery nose that coats your nostrils well, has a mountain air calm about it, very low oak, what is there remains focused, wiry black cherry, currant scents, almost a tarry aspect to the earth, appears minimally evolved. Medium to full-bodied, lots of structure, more by way of acidity than tannins but suspect that the latter will show more over time. Comes up with more cedar here, orange zest too, echoes of pine and menthol, seems as if

pains have been taken to shepherd the flavors through quietly. Ripe, juicy currant, cherry, raspberry, almost cranberry, fruit. As in the nose, the oak is there but only as a part of the fabric. Nice metallic, mineral zip on the finish. Unusual to find a Cabernet Sauvignon so refreshing. 91

Karl Lawrence  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2003, \$59.99, 14.2%

Rich glow in the purple core, just about opaque, concentrated red ruby rims, extremely vivid. Big block of impenetrable currant, cherry fruit in the nose, sweet cedar, mountain earth, smattering of florality, yet also offers a certain ashen quality, wrapped really tightly right now, that said a cloud of perfume does form in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, tight and muscular, big time acidity, enters your mouth with authority and determination. Radiant tartness in the red currant, red cherry fruit, nimble on its feet. The tannins are not broad, prefer focus and length. Touch of citrus, more so bell pepper. The oak is negligible, muted molasses or coffee grounds. More purity and finesse than usual and without sacrificing power. Complex yet not flashy. 77% Morisoli Vineyard, 14% Herb Lamb Vineyard, 6% Beckstoffer-To Kalon Vineyard, 3% Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard. 91

Corison  
Napa Valley, Kronos Vineyard  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2001, \$89.99, 13.8%

Mild flatness to the garnet to scarlet core, just a mild violet tint, more concentrated red around the rims. Some toast and caramel in the nose but in proportion to the slate, stone, dust powder as well as the leather, cedar, earth, remains primary and youthful, no lack of juicy currant, blackberry, black cherry scents. Medium-bodied, the really sweet but linearly focused raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit framed ably by the finely grained tannins. Minerals, orange citrus, earth loam, forest floor scrub, cedar and wet tobacco leaf play a consistent if not showy role from start to finish. The acidity more of a shadowy nature, brightens but not parches. Without sacrificing grip creates a wonderful inner mouth perfume. Classy, regal wine with upside. 91

Corison  
Napa Valley  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2002, \$61.99, 13.6%

Crimson red to purple in color, not opaque at all yet still robust, more red towards the fat rims. Graphite, tobacco, blood iron, bell pepper in the nose, some mineral dust as well, really sticks in there, lightly candied feel in the cherry, raspberry fruit but it's the earthiness which plays the biggest role, wonderful grip and presence. Medium-bodied, the spicy, mineral attack comes along with a healthy dose of acidity. Earthy clumps ensure the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit's sweetness stays in check and focused. Some lemon zest but there's more bite from the bell pepper and grassiness. The tannins provide some firmness but in no way impede the presentation of flavors. Light caramel/toffee tones appear through the finish, fit in well with the smokiness. Not many seams here, lots of polish. 91

Terraces, The  
Napa Valley  
Zinfandel  
2003, \$27.99, 14.8%

Bright red-ruby in color, extremely clear with above average shine, pleasingly consistent to the rims. Herbs, rocky earth, licorice, lemon drop, almost some dry honey, make up the nose, the oak cream blooms initially and then does a graceful fade, fetching purity in the raspberry, red cherry, blueberry fruit, unforced length with minimal raisin notes. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, no rough patches, fluid and briskly paced without giving up ripeness, no alcohol showing. Menthol, wildflowers, lemon peel, leather, black earth, there's clear contours in each element, none dominant. Lowkey oak, some cream but entirely in step with all else. Admirable freshness pervades the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, no doubt has a sugary side but achieves only yellow raisin sweetness at best, the finish is just as easygoing, little residue but has presence. 90

Pax Wine Cellars  
Sonoma County, Cuvée Christine  
Syrah  
2004, \$57.00, 15.6%

Not cloudy but lusterlessly opaque, black violet core, picks up some glow in the ruby-violet rims. Crisp oak toast gives the nose penetrating power, the bountiful flower petals lose some breadth due to the keen alcoholic notes, beef blood, metal shavings and tobacco leaf add a more resonant bottom, the molasses coating gives the currant, blackberry, plum fruit a semi-candied appeal. Full-bodied, active enough though that it never sits down long enough to leave an indent on your palate. The dusty acidity wrings the moisture out of your tongue, brings out a dose of white grapefruit/lemon citrus as well as light minerality. The oak softer here, more butter cream, warm molasses and caramel. Dried game, dried blood, dried earth, dry. Given that it is dry the wound-up core of red currant, plum, blackberry fruit fights to keep its border secure. Geometric decline towards the finish, a straight and steady line. Not playing all its cards yet. 90

Copain  
Sonoma Valley, Arrowhead Mountain Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2004, \$47.99, 14.5%

Kind of a garnet red to purple color, moderate depth and shine, very full rims. Semi-demure nose, more earth and forest bramble than out-and-out fruit, there's a pared down feel to the red currant, cranberry, red cherry scents. Medium-bodied while thicker and much more viscous than the nose would suggest. The lively cranberry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit is concentrated enough to fend off the softer caramel influence and favor the lemon citrus, tree bark/leaves and earth. A suggestion of eucalyptus lends a breath of fresh air. Keeps both its weight and forward motion, lots of oomph during the finish without tiring you out. More "terroir" based than many Zinfandels. 90

Pax Wine Cellars  
Knights Valley, Obsidian  
Syrah  
2004, \$45.00, 15.2%

Deep pool of black for a core, fairly wide red-garnet rims of excellent richness. In the nose there's strange combination at first of lemon/grapefruit citrus and milk chocolate, generous violet-led florality, granite-like thickness in the stone scents, clean red cherry, currant

scents, whole fruit before the skin is broken. Full-bodied, too dense to be nimble but has a certain grace about it. Spicier here, more of an orange citrus bite, more cocoa powder than chocolate, the violets just as prominent as in the nose but dewy enough to have minimal perfume lift. Toastiness remains once the more black fruit array of currant, blackberry, cherry fruit recedes. The tannins have a fluffy feel like they were whipped up. Nothing unusual about the acidity. Throws in some leather or earth punch without much gaminess. More impressive as an uncritically approached whole than part-by-part. 89

Copain

Anderson Valley, Cerise Vineyard

Pinot Noir

2004, \$55.99, 13.9%

Bright red-magenta in color, above average clarity, stays full to the rims, maybe lacks some shine. Fluffy, plushly stuffed nose, floral reduction, develops increasing smokiness which in turn draws out more earthiness and minerality, sheer weight takes a lot of the sour edge off the currant, blackberry scents, mild presence of orange zest, right now comes across as blockish and not incredibly expressive, good overall bite though. Full-bodied, there's plenty of sweetness in the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit yet the acidity and lemon citrus provide counter-weight. Quickly thereafter the molasses, caramel tones bring things back into the middle ground. Wet grill smoke, minerals come into the mix as the tannins build on the tongue. Spicy, when it gets past the mid-palate the citrus and herbal bite aid it in spreading out. Big and muscular but never clumsy, takes awhile to chug it down. 89

Turley

Central Valley, Lodi, Dogtown Vineyard

Zinfandel

2003, \$40.00, 16.5%

The purple core easily dissipates into red ruby and then a touch more magenta through the full rims. Molasses and honey filled nose, custard cream, before wet smoke, menthol, leather and wildflowers add to the depth, sweet cherry, blackberry fruit without turning sugary, alcohol well restrained. Full-bodied, the oak here immediately shows in the form of crisp toast, cocoa powder and sharp spice, takes its time giving way to mint, orange spice, earth and mesquite chips. Liqueur-like feel to the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit, liquid not powder. Something a tad rough about the tannins, kind of like when the bartender throws the lights on at 3:00 AM. Has that florality through the finish to ensure it stays pleasurable. If you are in the mood for a little steamrolling... 89

Turley

Napa Valley, Hayne Vineyard

Zinfandel

2003, \$75.00, 16.5%

There's a shadiness to the violet core, not opaque but the clarity comes and goes at all angles, thick and luminescent red magenta rims. White chocolate, mint and piecrust sneak in first in the nose, then it's all strawberry, raspberry jam, sweet and sticky, a medicinal sort of alcohol elbows in shortens the fruit by getting your nose to jerk away from the glass. Medium-bodied, at first it appears tight but the more you sip it, the more it just seems like it doesn't have much to say. The sweetness is more of a liquid form in the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, gets it sloshing but impairs grip. Dry milk chocolate,

mocha represents most of the oak tones. The most dominant aspect is the bitter tannins which create a palpable astringency after the initial sweetness of the attack. Smattering of herbs, anise, menthol and violets but nowhere near strong enough to coalesce into a real presence. Drank the whole bottle myself and notes consistent from first glass to last. 88

Dashe Cellars

Alexander Valley, Todd Brothers Ranch, Old Vines

Zinfandel

2003, \$31.99, 14.9%

Purple to burnt crimson colored core, more fresh brick red near the rims, good layering but clear overall. Bit of a peppery kick to the nose, rocks and earth, no real oakiness, gets its size from the pure raspberry, blackberry, strawberry fruit, shades of minerals and grass, pared down to the basics. Medium-bodied, tangy and zippy mouth entry, lemony with more of that mineral, crushed stone thing. Juicy, yet in no way overripe, cherry and raspberry fruit, the underlying herbaceousness gives it a good twist. Soft chocolaty aspect, burnt coffee tones too but the oak very under control. Light spiciness brings it home, nothing pushy here. Easygoing personality. 88

Pax Wine Cellars

Mendocino County, Alder Springs Vineyard

Syrah

2004, \$55.00, 15.4%

Unblemished but this doesn't matter, it's so dark at its purple core, thickly dense scarlet to red magenta rims, plenty of color to be had. The nose is so dewy and bottom heavy, full of floral oil, orange juice, mint, pine, freshly picked herbs, only a modicum of vanilla, loads of voluptuous currant, boysenberry, blackberry fruit, for some reason it all doesn't cohere. Medium-bodied, feels bound by its tannic structure than supported by it. Light bacon fat, more so floral with mint, camphor, pine cone, muted lemon citrus, these accents too unfocused. This allows the caramel to streak to the fore, albeit not overly oaky. The red currant, cherry, red plum fruit remains inexpressive except for a sharply sour bite. Leaves you with an impression that it is a collection of parts. 87

Neiman

Napa Valley, Caldwell Vineyard, Block #18

Syrah

2003, \$74.99, 14.1%

Rich purple color but not opaque, luminescent glow really comes through in the red-magenta rims. High-toned oak in the nose, fine toast, coffee bean, molasses, flowery with a touch of mint, earthiness in there but dumb, yields to the fat currant, plum, black cherry fruit scents, overall strong saturating power. Full-bodied without being ponderously heavy, the molasses acts to bring out more raw bacon, mesquite smoke, pepper spice and freshly tanned leather. Lemon to orange citrus, not enough to pair with the weak acidity. The oak cream slowly clouds over a lot of the other aspects. Sour tang surfaces in the red cherry, raspberry fruit, helps it stiffen some. Moderate tannins, with its weight the wine keeps its shape until it loses its way near the finish line. 87

## CALIFORNIA DESSERT

St. Amant

Amador County, Bootleg Port

Blend

2002, \$16.99, 18.5%

Black, black, black core, totally impenetrable, orange-tinged brick red rims. Cinnamon, brown sugar, baked piecrust, cocoa keep the nose sweet, same for the black raisin, plum, black cherry fruit, while the oakiness detracts from its richness it does give it added lift, curious notes of green apples does the same. Medium-bodied, fluid like a quality LBV Portuguese port, molasses, brown sugar, milk chocolate, toast, ginger and cinnamon spice pile on the sweetness, whole lotta mindless fun. Not overly concentrated plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit, wakes up slowly, just wants a peaceful nap. The tannins have some mild grit, adds to its legitimacy. More of an erect bearing than you might expect, finishes with power and clarity. Unspecified percentages of Touriga, Tinta Cão, Alvarelhao, Souzao, Tinta Roriz. 88

## FRANCE RED

Texier, Eric

Rhône, Côte-Rôtie, Vieilles Vignes

Syrah

2004, \$59.99, 12.5%

Noticeably light, spotless ruby color, while consistent drops a notch to red magenta at the rims. Airy nose, light on its feet with upfront cigar ash, earth dust, olive pit, demure dried grass, there's a ruggedly clipped quality to the cherry and blackberry scents, speaks only when questioned directly. Medium-bodied, broad like a wooden beam laid across your palate, muscularly dense, not unyielding like it's fighting you, more like it doesn't know how to soften up. Lemon bite, green olives, white minerals and granite stone, here in the mouth the florality has a lot more freedom to stretch out. The acidity strikes a balance between cut and focus, enlivens and pulls at the animal hide component as well as the red cherry, raspberry fruit. White grapefruit and increasing minerality fill up the back end. Pure and clean, not overly sauvage, more about palate penetration than overflowing the bucket. Grapes sourced from Montlys Vineyard. 91

Texier, Eric

Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Brézème

Syrah

2004, \$17.99, 12.5%

Vivid red-ruby color, spotless with great consistency through to the rims. Excellently vivacious nose of hothouse floral musk, green olives, white grapefruit pith, dried beef blood, the cherry and red currant scents get a bit overwhelmed. Medium-bodied, very angular and edgy, a laser light show in your mouth. Piles on the olives, grass, leather, wet mineral, grapefruit, stands naked in its lack of guile. The acidity is dominant, draws blood to the surface of your cheeks. The sour cherry, blackberry, currant fruit focused to a vanishing point. The tannins humbly cake your tongue through the finish. The gaminess would be stronger were it not so dry and biting, not enough juice left in the flesh to forge a true presence. Takes a long time to quiet down in the mouth, should take on more weight with time in bottle. 91

Brun, Jean-Paul

Beaujolais, Côte de Brouilly, Terres Dorées

Gamay Noir

2004, \$14.99, 12.0%

Perfectly immaculate and clear red-garnet in color, zero change at the rims, mirror-like surface for a red wine. Vapors of cut grass, crushed stone, lemon peel, licorice, wildflowers and leather make you think some one warmed up the wine, stuck the glass under your nose and a towel over your head, brisk angularity in the cranberry, strawberry, red raspberry scents. Medium-bodied with more grip than you'd think off of the nose, both the acidity and tannins firmly latch onto your palate. Sharper focus to the lemon citrus here, same can be said of the minerals and stone shards, appealing penetration. Touch less herbaceous, the earth, leather and even cured game show more bravura. Same "red" fruit feel in the cherry, raspberry, cranberry flavors. Does a great job of both staying juicy and dry through the finish, tenacious reluctance to end. A Beaujolais lover's wet dream. 91

Texier, Eric

Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Blend

2004, \$43.99, 13.0%

Crystal clear red-ruby color, fades a bit to a light scarlet around the rims. Good richness in the nose, no restraining the sweetness of the raspberry, red cherry fruit, produces almost a moment of honey, minimal lemon, grass or stone notes, plump and entirely unevolved. Full-bodied, has the same weight and body as found in the nose, yet here the acidity and tannins step into the breach to check the sweetness of the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. That said, the lemon citrus is sweeter and deeper while there's a complementary beeswax element too. Mildly gritty texture gives it traction and helps slow down the pace. Some dry chocolate shades, the earth and stone stay hidden in the shadows. Given this, the mineral dust accrues through the finish to add weight. Bright demeanor. 75% Grenache, 25% Mourvèdre. 90

Bois de Boursan, Domaine

Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Blend

2004, \$43.99, 13.5%

Red-scarlet in color, deep while holding its clarity, more red magenta at the rims, lots of hue left. Very floral nose, almost pregnantly full, lemon zest, fluffy/loamy kind of earth, some wooly notes too, presents ripe yet not that juicy cherry, blackberry fruit scents, too youthful and offers mainly texture and weight now. Very full and heavy in the mouth, orange to grapefruit pith, pressed flowers, wool, not very earthy at first. The acidity isn't showing much just yet, kind of buried, the tannins more in charge. Really densely packed blackberry, black cherry fruit, alert if immobile as if paralyzed. Stone and mineral chunk aspects slowly develop. Big and brooding, rumbles with power, thus will require some aging to open up. So much raw material though, worth the wait. 65% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre, 5% Counoise, Cinsault, etc. 90

Barthod, Domaine Ghislaine

Burgundy, Bourgogne, Les Bons Bâtons

Pinot Noir

2003, \$27.99, 13.0%

Very dark but clear ruby-purple core, totally full rims, touch more garnet there. Crinkly sort of minerality focuses the nose, then an explosion of blackberry, raspberry jam, odd

confluence of milk chocolate and leather, you sense it has evolution ahead of it. Medium to full-bodied, dense enough to not need the tannins for structure. That said, the tannins have kick and minimal bitter or green notes. Stocky, juicy cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit, ruler of its domain from start to finish. The floral tones are bottom heavy, serves up lemon peel, mineral smoke, herbs and some earthiness, mainly just primary fruit. Not particularly elegant nor understated but a lot of fun. 90

Texier, Eric  
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Villages Saint-Gervais, Vieilles Vignes des Cadinières  
Grenache  
2004, \$22.99, 13.0%  
Reddish violet core, imperceptibly turns to more pinkish ruby nearer the rims, clear and fully hued throughout. The ripeness in the raspberry, strawberry fruit comes through while still completely controlled, blends in matted straw and grasses, very fine mineral dust, cakes your nostrils, its purity demands it dissolve crisply and swiftly. Medium-bodied, the acidity forms a flat plane across the tongue to spread the lemon peel, red cherry, raspberry fruit as widely as possible. Minerally tang also acts to restrain the inherent juiciness and ensure total tact and manners. Just a little bit of grassiness, not at all obtrusive and in keeping with expectations. Lifts through the finish not as a cloud but as beams of light focused upwards. Wound tightly. 89

Clos des Brusquières  
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape  
Blend  
2004, \$34.99, 13.5%  
Immaculate magenta ruby to light violet in color, no change in hue through to the rims, slightest lightening. The nose is a bit mute, hard to get at the scents, slowly comes the lemon zest, white pepper, raspberry and strawberry liqueur, not very herbaceous. Full-bodied, fluid and polished, it moves at a nice clip. Features an initial burst of sweetness in the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit but it has more than enough tannin to keep this in line. Possesses a touch of lemon, stone and hay shades as well, but overall has a fresh and primary appeal that dissuades you from searching for more complexity. Does come up with a little peppery kick at the end, pleasing. Swanky wine. 80% Grenache, 10% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre. 89

Rimbert, Domaine  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Saint-Chinian, Le Mas au Schiste  
Blend  
2003, \$19.99, 13.0%  
Some film in the dusky purple to brick red core, develops an orange tinge in the red crimson rims. Super-sweet nose of cherry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit, dulcet enough to evoke caramel in a non-oaky way, moments of florality, its richness masks any terroir scents. Full-bodied, still sugary and sweet in the mouth but balanced by tang as well as acidity and tannins. No green notes nor excessive alcohol, after entry it turns successively drier. Shows light white grapefruit to brighten things, helps give shape to the florality too. Weight persists in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit without quite developing a dried fruit feel. Big, bold and juicy, hard not to like it even if it seems atypical and not quite expressive of place. 40% Carignan, 30% Syrah, 30% Grenache. 88

Gauby, Domaine  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Côtes du Roussillon Villages, Les Calcinaires  
Blend  
2004, \$24.99, 12.5%  
Fat, glowing ruby-purple core, really thick ruby rims, as luminescent as it is, semi-cloudy too. Sour cherry, raspberry fruit bubble up in the nose, leather, black earth, bare hint of merde, touch green at moments but overall clean and honest with a little peppery kick before it ends. Medium-bodied, spicy with a viscous thickness, might be overbearing if not for the fine acidity which shakes things up. Tree bark, earth, game, leather, blood iron, graphite, orange zest, no doubt there's a lot going on. This even before the richly developed red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit saturates the tongue. Unevolved enough that the secondary characteristics not fully open for business. Does leave behind a very pleasing chalky residue on the finish, keeps it trim and streamlined. 60% Grenache, 20% Carignan, 10% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre. 88

Belland, Domaine Jean-Claude  
Burgundy, Aloxe-Corton  
Pinot Noir  
2003, \$35.99, 13.5%  
Mild dark pink touch to the purer red core, clear without giving up too much depth, that pink cast brings out magenta around the rims. Candied cherry, raspberry fruit suffuses the nose, aligned with some lemon, sweet herbs and licorice, brisk movements through the nostrils, nothing unneeded kept around. Full-bodied, limber enough to not press down too heavily onto the tongue. Here some cocoa notes come out along with the lemon and straw foundation. Less minerally in the mouth, the acidity doesn't quite keep pace with the ripe cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit. There's some tannic punch through the mid-palate, the tannins not underripe but does end up putting some starch in your underwear. The floral dimension has a powdery feel to it. The more you sip the more it clamps down, however the ripeness comes through time and again. 88

Viret, Domaine  
Rhône, Vin de Table de France, Solstice IV  
Blend  
2004, \$10.99, 13.8%  
Deep ruby-purple color, good fatness, runs full to the rims with no intensity loss, adequate shine. Huge, ripe and juicy nose of plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, very sweet, smoky too with saddle leather accents, some sweet spice but no room for anything else. Medium-bodied, very dry with more than enough tannins and acidity, a good thing since the juiciness of the fruit is full-on in the mouth too, loads of jammy blackberry, cherry, black currant fruit, almost stewed in nature. Some lemon but more resonant in the leather, tar, earth department. Minerals, twigs, bark, forest brush bloom aggressively near the finish. While your tongue mostly feels tacky after awhile it starts to feel like it has a heat patch on it. Nice for how you can clearly feel it evolve in your mouth. Unspecified percentages of Mourvèdre, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Caladoc, Grenache, Carignan. 87

Deux Ânes, Domaine des  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Corbières  
Blend

2004, \$13.99, 12.5%

Luminescent glow throughout, ruby-violet at the core, fat red to pink magenta rims. Piercing quality to the nose, all white pepper, white grapefruit, flowers, leather, coal embers and tart cherry, raspberry fruit, gaminess comes out as it opens. Medium-bodied, refreshingly bright acidity gives it kick from the start, favors the lemon, grapefruit citrus and powdery white mineral dust, sour pucker in the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit, this aspect not long but with a big initial impression. The tannins are hard to notice but support well enough. Black earth, leather, dried game show through but it's less evolved in the mouth than the nose, florality more prominent. Has a light tomato-skin like residue on the finish. 80% Carignan, 20% Grenache. 87

Texier, Eric  
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône  
Blend

2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Bright red magenta to ruby in color, light but has enough glow to get it to the rims. Tart red cherry, strawberry nose, high up in the register but not because of any grassiness, more crushed stone and ground flower petals, keeps it clean and simple. Light-bodied, really sour in the mouth, almost like an electric shock. Very dependent here too on the stone and dry earth. Jolts of lemon citrus add to its clean and fluid, if not necessarily open, appeal. No lack of tartness in the cherry, strawberry fruit, green apple notes a factor too. Not a great deal of length, just snap, crackle and pop. Minimal residue left behind. Mainly Grenache, then Carignan, ~20% Clairette, Bourboulenc, Grenache Blanc and Roussanne. 86

Faiveley, Domaine J.  
Burgundy, Mercurey, Domaine de la Croix Jacquenet  
Pinot Noir

2003, \$19.99, 13.0%

Clean pink magenta-tinted ruby core, holds hue fully through the bright red rims. Big creamy oak on the nose, melted butter, some smoke, semi-sour strawberry, cherry fruit, vague minerals, no green notes. Medium-bodied, sweet cherry, raspberry fruit gets a few seconds to breathe before crushed by drying, gritty tannins, the latter being somewhat underripe if not overly bitter. More minerality here but more grassiness as well. The sharp lemon bite presses withering. Very short, hardly any fruit or other full flavors left by the finish. Tries to extract your teeth. 84

Chevalier, Domaine Yves  
Burgundy, Vosne-Romanée, Les Brûlees  
Pinot Noir

2004, \$74.99, 13.5%

Pinkish ruby in hue, very even with a consistent sparkle, even as it settles into more diffuse red rims. Hard-edged nose of stone, stone and more stone, then grass, dried lemons, a cry of tart cherry, raspberry fruit and then more stone upside your head. Medium-bodied, if you thought the nose was hard, try it in the palate. A wall of acidity and tannin makes it virtually impenetrable, witheringly dry from the first sip on. There's pep in the cherry, raspberry fruit but this is a losing battle. Sharp minerals and stone rule the roost here, very sour lemon plays along, as does the herbaceousness. If you think it might be beginning to settle

down into your mouth, it's really just the onset of numbness. Mean-spirited wine. 84

Dupont-Tisserandot, Domaine  
Burgundy, Bourgogne  
Pinot Noir

2004, \$18.99, 12.5%

Has a reddish-purple center, loses the purple big time towards the rims, much more scarlet red, above average clarity throughout. The nose is extremely stemmy and herbaceous, borderline bitter, very earthy with notes of old cracked stone, serves up tart red cherry fruit, definitely takes awhile to adjust to it. Light to medium-bodied, there's more cherry, raspberry fruit in the mouth and it's sweeter too. Smoky, swipes of gun metal, flint and black earth beat the grassiness to the punch and that's saying something. Sour oranges, merde, becomes almost oily at turns. Just gets weirder and weirder, however the bottle not flawed. Somebody must like this. Somewhere. No idea why. 83

## FRANCE WHITE

Clerc & Fils, Domaine Henri  
Burgundy, Puligny-Montrachet, Les Combettes  
Chardonnay

2004, \$87.99, 13.5%

Squeaky clean appearance, not quite colorless but close, an old yellow gold shade comes through at certain angles, adequate amount of reflectivity. Bright, enveloping toast in the nose, adds a sour edge too, lime peel, orange blossom and violets, touch of sweet spice, tactful presentation of the pear, melon, peach scents, pushes through your nostrils then slowly fades. Medium to full-bodied, excellent interplay of sweet, sour and spice, the oak toast and spice get it dancing rather than exert undue influence. The lime, lemon citrus again matches up with the stone to create more angularity and freshness. The floral dimension persists throughout, adding a graceful backdrop. The well-contoured peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit transparently present. A real picture of refinement. 92

Vaults (Domaine du Closel), Château des  
Loire, Savennières, Clos du Papillon  
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$26.99, 14.8%

The golden hay color has a slight brown cast, good surface shine while it takes on a more glassy layering below. Rich honey in the nose without an excess of sweetness, straightforward peach, apple, apricot fruit gains depth from the former, slight spritz of lemon, some stony earthiness but right now unevolved enough to remain semi-mute. Medium-bodied, tautly focused with a brisk clip as it moves forward. Quite minerally, leaves behind a wake of prickly tingle. The red apple, peach, apricot, melon fruit dry, part of the orchestra, not the soloist. More juice in the lemon citrus here, able to draw out some light honey coating. The acidity isn't flashy, no saber-rattling, again uses its muscle to play a supporting role, showing again how it's about being a total package, even given its current tightness. As it releases on the finish, it gains florality and a hint of spice. Nowhere near what it will be so decant the day before for best approximation. 91

Vaults (Domaine du Closel), Château des  
Loire, Savennières, Les Caillardières  
Chenin Blanc

2004, \$25.99, 14.5%

Faint brown straw, fades to more yellow around the rims, soft translucency bends light below the surface. Sweet lemon-honey with a fetching sour bite as well, green/yellow apple, pear, peach scents, not very spicy, more subdued and apt to play up the stone and light white smoke, ends with a nod to vague florality. Full-bodied, the first impression is of soft and juicy peach, apricot, nectarine fruit but a nanosecond later the forceful acidity flash sears your tongue. Lemon, orange citrus much more in charge here, the honey aspect minor. The stone and chalk nuances are solid in construction, not much powder or dust in them. Any florality here also lowgrade. The waxiness waits until the last second to reveal itself, too young yet for this to take the spotlight. 90

Tissot, Domaine André et Mireille  
Jura, Arbois  
Savagnin

2001, \$25.99, 14.0%

Golden brown in hue with a flatter appearance at the core, the transparency at the rims brings out more shine. Its oxidation brings out a sherry-like nuttiness as well as bigger alcohol, suggests light shoe polish and then baked apple pie, honey, molasses, soft lemon citrus, a little too active to fully settle in. Medium-bodied, bone dry with wicked acidity, a borderline enamel stripper. Here it's quite nutty yet its overall freshness elevates the presence of the lemon citrus and white mineral dust beyond the former. The green apple, pear, peachy fruit tries very hard to maintain a crisp character, fights its oxidative backdrop. At the end swells into an enormous cloud of perfume rather than fashion a long finish. As you sip grows considerably on you. 90

Clerc & Fils, Domaine Henri  
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Les Riaux  
Chardonnay

2004, \$18.99, 13.0%

Very clean white-green straw in color, perfect clarity with an agreeable luster. Presents a soft nose but still engaging, freshly floral with a touch of mint, the forward pear, melon, peach scents leavened by a touch of wet stone, what it may lack in complexity it makes up for in friendliness. Medium-bodied, fresh with a lemony cleanliness, blends together stream water, rose petals, white stones, really hugs the contours of your palate. The acidity is OK, gets it done for the level of wine in the bottle. The peach, pear, apricot fruit even hints at raspberry or cherry. Never too dry while maintaining an erect enough posture, especially as a light spiciness coalesces through the finish. Something here for everyone. 90

Tissot, Domaine André et Mireille  
Jura, Arbois, Traminer  
Savagnin

2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Light straw brown color, makes up for its lack of hue via its shininess, dilute rims. Very citrusy nose of sweet tangerine/pink grapefruit citrus, wet flower petals, clay, some powdered minerals but so wet in feel it clumps, dried apple and peach scents, light but pregnant in character like an afternoon sun shower. Light-bodied, very bright and tangy with sharp, mouthwatering acidity. The orange to lemon citrus is big but not too dominant, here there's a fresher feel in the apple, pear, peach fruit but it still has a bit of a dried fruit character. Less floral than the nose, more clay, limestone, wet earth. Spicy, this keeps it biting for some time, even as it loses weight on the finish it

stays lively. (Traminer is an Arbois synonym for Savagnin, is not Gewürztraminer.) 89

Texier, Eric  
Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Vieilles Vignes  
Blend

2004, \$40.99, 14.0%

Flat, generally transparent, especially at the rims, manages some moments of luster along the surface. The nose features mint, generous vanilla cream, wet flowers, slight tangerine zest, round and easygoing peach and apricot scents, stays even through the dissolve. Medium-bodied, while pliable in texture the acidity is quite lively for Châteauneuf blanc, brings out tangerine, lemon citrus before much else. Same for stone and pebbles, brightness before fleshiness, releases its flower petals and mint in stages. Nicely elongated feel in the peach, apricot, pear, green melon fruit, keeps a constant presence. Fresher than many peers, more versatile and food-friendly as well. 50% Clairette, 50% Bourboulenc. 88

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

2004, \$13.99, 12.0%

Quite devoid of hue, white straw at best, brilliant shine throughout, utterly water-clear by the rims. Oiled stone, licorice and lemon drop make up a large portion of the nose, mint, some clay-like notes as well, apple and pear skin at best for fruit scents. Medium-bodied, has formidable firmness and presence. Bitter herbs, lemon peel, motor oil, stones flex their authority here, less strength in the black licorice and mint dimension. Given its density it manages to stretch out some past the mid-palate and let the pear, green apple fruit breathe. The muscularity in the acidity by far outlasts any flavors. Almost dusty residue on the finish reminds you just how young it is. 88

Quarterons, Domaine des  
Loire, Sancerre, Skeveldra  
Sauvignon Blanc

2003, \$29.99, 12.5%

Green-gold color has a hazy flatness to it, some loss of hue at the rims but its gauziness fends off transparency. Nose produces lemon meringue, tangerine scents first, then smoky minerality if without cut, more like wet slate perhaps, for all of its weight it has a certain airiness about it, helps lift the peach, apricot scents. Medium to full-bodied, thick and almost viscous as it reclines across the tongue. The acidity revs up late but does arrive to heighten the bite in the lemon/lime citrus. Floral, has violets and something like cherry blossoms. Minerality tends to clump up rather than dust the palate. The peach, apricot, pear fruit peters out some at the finish line. Not overdone, especially for the vintage. 87

Montirius  
Rhône, Vacqueyras  
Blend

2004, \$24.99, 13.0%

Crystal clear and all but colorless, nice reflectivity, really not much else to say. Mint, airy florality and light lemon peel make for a winsome nose, stimulating green apple, peach, pear scents, nothing deep nor profound just refreshing. Medium-bodied, makes an initial impression of sweetness then the acidity clamps down nicely, smoothes things out into long beads of flavor. Lays out green to

yellow apple, pear, apricot fruit with a strong fruit pit aspect. Mutters of spice, mineral dust and cracked nuts but nothing here wins the pole position. There's an increase in mouth weight in the middle causing a soft cresting effect. Freshness persists through the end, monochromatic without ever losing touch with how to please. 50% Grenache Blanc, 25% Bourboulenc, 25% Roussanne. 87

Gauby, Domaine

Languedoc/Roussillon, Côtes du Roussillon Villages, Vieilles Vignes

Blend

2004, \$18.99, 12.0%

Clear yellow straw color, consistent throughout, dull without much shine at all. Whether oak used or not, heavy vanilla cream and toast penetrate the nose, mint, light floral touch, not a lot of room left for the pear, red apple, peach fruit, the sweet baking spices fare better. Light-bodied, quite dry and lean in the mouth, the acidity an able sparring partner for that creaminess. Hints of bitters and grass, orange rind, this gives it life whereas the pear, apple, peach fruit tends to sag a bit. Mint, anise seed notes help to pick things up but it still remains a "tweener," not traditional enough nor international enough, just kind of meanders the middle ground. 55% Macabeu, remainder unspecified percentages of Grenache Gris, Grenache Blanc, Chardonnay. 85

## FRANCE DESSERT

Texier, Eric

Rhône, Moût de Raisins Partiellement Fermenté Ô Pâle Viognier

2004, \$23.99, 7.0%

Very light white gold color, average clarity, most of the shine is on the surface, dulls a bit below. Explosive nose of ripe pear, melon, yellow apple fruit with a lightly poached character, yet so airy that's not heavy in any way, more cinnamon notes than stone, only suggests honeysuckle or cherry blossom. Light-bodied, while it dances and vanishes with a youthful swiftness it does hold onto its bottom and remains anchored to your palate. The sugary edge to the pear, apple, peach fruit comes through much more powerfully here, lifts up the tangerine juice as well as the cinnamon/nutmeg spice. The acidity has the ability to mold any parts into its desired form, striking presence for a dessert style wine made from Viognier. Open and engaging, just makes you smile to drink it, goes down as fast as water. Lots of floral perfume left behind. 92

Clos de Camuzeilles

Languedoc/Roussillon, Muscat de Rivesaltes Muscat

2004, \$23.99, 15.5%

All but fully transparent washed out yellow color, attractively reflective surface. Gentle nose, very light with pronounced florality, more pineapple or papaya than peach, apricot fruit scents, mineral powder and a little bit of lemon. Medium-bodied but has strong grip, coats your cheeks and tongue. Velvety texture in the apricot, peach, nectarine, pear fruit, borderline poached character. Sweet, semi-candied tangerine to lime citrus, accompanied by honey accents and a floral dew. Spicy, alternates between sweet and hot, the alcohol never burns but you do feel it. The acidity makes a credible showing given the wine's overall heft. Pear and cinnamon linger most through the

finish, its tenacious clinginess prevents it from being clean. It's a big boy, alright. 500 ml bottle. 88

## ITALY RED

Gulfi, Azienda Agricola

Sicilia, Rossojbleo

Nero d'Avola

2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Very clear red-ruby to purple core, light drop to a pinkish magenta at the rims, soft luminescence. Interesting nose, sugary raspberry, strawberry fruit finds itself in bed with ashes, tar and volcanic rock, arbitrated by ground flower petals, meadow grasses, keeps you guessing what's coming next. Medium-bodied, the powdery feel restrains the sweet juiciness in the strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit and keeps it on an even keel. Lightly floral, more offered in the lemon peel, minerals and dry earth, gives it a steady roughness that pleases. Much more focused and streamlined than many Nero d'Avola wines on the American market, has a serious disposition. Good stuff. 89

Mayr (Weingut Erbhof Unterganzer), Cantina Josephus

Alto Adige/Südtirol, Riserva

Lagrein

2003, \$41.99, 13.0%

Red to black purple core, really saturated, the red magenta rims are thin but vivid. The nose has noticeable thickness, derives some lift from a mountain air quality, slight sour edge to the cherry fruit scents, mixes in belt leather, black earth, mineral chunks, touch of smokiness, not complex and not long but very clear in its message. Medium to full-bodied, very zesty, its teeth bared as it unfolds white grapefruit, cocoa powder, dried blood, leather, black earth flavors. For all the weight in the red currant, boysenberry, cranberry fruit it's also real tart. No-nonsense acidity cracks the whip and gets it galloping forward. A cedar, clove, spice element grows and grows as well as a burnt, metallic edge. Not very subtle, not very traditional yet winds up on the right side of the fence. 87

Canneto, Azienda Agricola

Tuscany, Rosso di Montepulciano

Sangiovese

2004, \$14.99, 13.0%

Immaculate red-garnet to violet core, more of a red-magenta cast around the rims. Semi-flat nose, bit of Brett, violets, mineral dust, the red currant/cherry fruit hints at sweetness without delivering. Medium-bodied, taut frame, not dusty but very dry, plays up the sourness in the red cherry, currant, vaguely cranberry fruit, well-centered and anchored. Earth, dried rose petals, forest scrub, twigs, texturally has this low humming feel to it that prevents the flavors from sinking in. Bursts of cocoa come and go. The Brett-like notes fade away, not much animality to be had. Gets distracted through the finish. Opens some with aeration but not really enough. 86

Angelini, Tenimenti

Tuscany, Tuttobene

Blend

2004, \$9.99, 13.0%

Fairly dark ruby to light violet in color, more youthful crimson around the rims. Good amount of leather, earth to the nose, brush of mint, rosemary, dry cherry, blackberry scents, crisp military dissolve. Light to medium-bodied with viscous tannins and acidity, bruises your

cheeks right from the start. Herbaceous with dusty minerals, bitter lemon citrus, iron flecks, dry earth, nothing soft here. The super-tart cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit is focused to a vanishing point. Smoky, tarry finish continues the toughness. Not without some positive qualities but absolutely needs food with it. 50% Merlot, 30% Canaiolo, 20% Sangiovese. 85

## ITALY WHITE

Ulivi, Cascina degli  
Piedmont, Gavi, Filagnotti  
Cortese  
2004, \$18.99, 13.0%

Brown straw in color, has enough layers to remove some luster, fades slowly towards the rims. Sour herbs, lemon peel, golden honey appear in the nose alongside mild peach, apricot scents, just easygoing, wouldn't even know how to make a big impression. Full-bodied and on the soft side, has durable acidity without the edge, wipes the table clean but leaves the crumbs on the floor. Very lemony, appreciably brightens the attack. Follows up with white minerals, powdery stone but nothing out-and-out dusty. Simple, uncomplicated apple, pear, melon fruit with a thin patina of honey. Keeps to the basics, a few moments of florality, a pregnant pause of then gone. Just easy to drink, start to finish. 88

Mastroberardino, Azienda Vinicola Michele  
Campania, Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio, Coda di Volpe  
2004, \$15.99, 12.5%

Highly reflective white gold color, dances in the glass, even if mostly transparent. Smoky nose, a touch off-dry with mild cotton candy notes, cherry, red apple, pear fruit, some crumbly stone beneath, fresh enough but will sacrifice this to tickle your sweet tooth. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and has grip with enough acidity to lengthen it well. Floral, much smokier and earthier with tar, straw, hay notes, lemon peel, crisper and leaner in profile found in the peach, apricot, pear fruit. Turns appreciably dried past the mid-palate, leaves a chalky residue behind. Just off-center enough to get you coming back for another little sip. 87

## GERMANY WHITE

Falkenstein, Hofgut  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Krettnacher, Euchariusberg, Auslese  
AP #3  
Riesling  
2004, \$30.99, 10.0%

Bright white straw in hue, blinding reflectivity with close to full transparency. Big bag of crushed mineral and stone in the nose, dollop of honey, great deal of textural concentration without the weight, straightforward peach, pear, apple fruit, deep lemon zest, not insanely complex, satisfying more like a breath of morning country air. Full-bodied, very well layered in the mouth, handles the honey and brown sugar elements well by distributing them widely to prevent accumulation. Voluptuous peach, apricot, nectarine fruit, almost with a dried fruit character in terms of concentration but with such tang it keeps sliding along, especially when you factor in the tangerine, lime, pink grapefruit citrus festival. The acidity has a sinewy force to it, waits patiently for things to slow down before acting. Long, savory finish, pulsates with life. 92

Wittmann, Weingut  
Rheinhessen, Westhofener, Morstein, Erstes Gewachs  
Trocken  
Riesling

2004, \$59.99, 13.5%

Pale white hay hue, well-layered beneath the surface gleam, fully pale rims. With copious lilacs and violets, has this rich florality in the nose without being musky, while not overripe there's a clingy quality to the peach, apricot scents, they adhere tenaciously to your nostril walls, quieter tangerine to lime citrus, shades of unbroken stone, not very penetrable, overall displays a sense of reserve. Medium-bodied, appears comprised mostly of a steel skeleton waiting for the rest of the building to be erected. The rich, full peach, apricot, nectarine, mango fruit stuck on the ground floor, no elevator. Dry but not in a piercing way, more like a cloak thrown over any sweetness. The orange, lime citrus has enough sweetness to lose excess bite. The violet florality here a gentle undercurrent throughout. Wonderfully knit together even if lacking in flesh, nothing protrudes. Tactful finish. 91

Wittmann, Weingut  
Rheinhessen, Westhofener, Morstein, Auslese  
Riesling

2004, \$41.99, 8.5%

Zero color, fully transparent, like nothing, maybe a glint of hay at the rims in the right light. Bountiful limestone, smoky minerals in the nose, palpable bite from the white grapefruit element, considerable layers in the apricot, pear, melon, peach fruit scents, interesting contrast between clarity of terroir and voluptuousness of the fruit. Full-bodied, so fat and coating on the attack while it also has a steady dissolve which slowly relieves the weight and sweetness. Pushes a paste-like quality in the apricot, nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit, thankfully the acidity ably supports the weight and lifts it off its ass. The pink grapefruit to blood orange citrus also sweet without lingering unto cloying. If you focus there's some herbaceousness underneath, adds subtle complexity. The fabric still tightly woven by the finish, one continuous process from start to finish. 500 ml bottle. 91

Wittmann, Weingut  
Rheinhessen, Westhofener, QbA Trocken "S"  
Riesling

2004, \$31.99, 13.0%

Pale white straw in color, while clear there is a distorting effect, the hue empties out at the rims. Orange blossom, honeysuckle, mint give the nose an airy appeal, a thin web spun in your nostrils to catch the nicely ripe apricot, peach, nectarine fruit, no unneeded juiciness, very resistant to dissolving. Medium-bodied, immensely focused, perhaps preternaturally so, has polished each flavor so much they start to wear away. Violets and roses the orange blossom, more sweet orange and lime citrus than blossom. Peach, yellow apple, papaya, nectarine, while too dry for lush tropicality has all the verve you would need. Even as it vibrates it manages to sink in until it's strangling the tongue. So much energy now, will gain additional finesse over time. 91

Wirsching, Weingut Hans  
Franken, Iphöfer, Julius-Echter-Berg, Spätlese Trocken AP #63  
Scheurebe  
2004, \$28.99, 13.0%  
White-green straw in color, for all of its brilliant shine achieves a good layering effect as well. Sweet and generously soft nose without being stupid about it, ripe melon, peach, pear, nectarine fruit, orange blossom, lime, not very tropical, quite powdered minerals, extends effortlessly. Medium-bodied, juicy pink grapefruit to lime overwhelms all else through the attack, a citrus soup. Finely honed acidity slices the flavors apart, creates clear space for the pineapple, nectarine, green apple, peach fruit as well as mild grassiness and mineral dust. Very understated and a picture of restraint while making certain you understand there's plenty of latent power. Cruises confidently through the finish without a bump. 91

Heyden, Weingut Dr.  
Rheinessen, Oppenheimer, Herrenberg, Spätlese Trocken Diamant AP #20  
Riesling  
2004, \$19.99, 12.5%  
Light golden core infused by touches of green, moderate shine, hue drops off a good bit towards the rims. The nose is all but fully limestone, gun metal, mineral dust and dried lemon peel, rises via focused white smoke clouds, pear or peach skin the most fruit you're gonna get out of it, clarity held completely through the dissolve. Medium-bodied, witheringly dry with a great deal of extract, punches the insides of your cheeks. Dusty lemon to white grapefruit citrus, mixes in a cloud of mineral powder, pulverized stone, dried violets and vague notes of tar. The acidity doesn't bite as much as grind. Again, minimal fruit, whispers of peach, apricot, pear or green apple but they're hard to notice if you're not looking. Ripples through the mouth, never too high nor too low. Like pop rocks going off during the finish, the open spaces let a little florality through. Echoes with notes of pickles. 90

Falkenstein, Hofgut  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Niedermenniger, Herrenberg, Spätlese AP #6  
Riesling  
2004, \$24.99, 11.5%  
White to green hay in color, light bounces off the surface but it still sparkles beneath. The nose is really stripped down to basics, confidently unadorned, quite floral with a touch of brown sugar and mint, fresh and open with youthful peach, apricot, red apple fruit, lingers impressively. Medium-bodied, the acidity is incredibly bright, slices the tongue into paper thin sheets. With the lemon, lime, pink grapefruit citrus there's a sweet moment before the sour pucker takes over. The green apple, peach, pear fruit has distinct outlines and a scrubbed feel. Touch of golden honey and pie crust but without even a hint of any oxidative character. Lightly earthy, moderate stone, seems more about tone than terroir. The brightness continues through the finish, a real Energizer bunny. 90

Schmitt, Weinbau Franz Karl  
Rheinessen, Niersteiner, Kranzberg, Kabinett AP #2  
Riesling  
2004, \$12.99, 11.5%  
White to old yellow gold in color, about average shine, very clear rims. Airy nose with a great deal of lift, perhaps too

much as it's almost gone before it's there, straw, wet stone, smoke, earth, lemon peel, quite floral dust, the pear, golden apple, apricot fruit composed and light, almost delicate. Medium-bodied, opens your eyes with its dryness, above average extract too, lemon/lime residue, violets, chalk, mineral powder, coats your palate with a thin layer of dust. Very attractive transparency, has some peach, apricot, apple fruit, mainly in pit/skin character. Starts to develop stronger grip and begins to grind into the tongue past the mid-palate, shortens things but not in a way you mind. Very conscious of itself, makes its message as clear and concise as possible. 89

Schmitges, Weinbau  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Erdener, Prälät, Spätlese Alte Reben AP #12  
Riesling  
2004, \$44.99, 11.5%  
Scintillating yellow gold color with something that approaches amber at certain angles, mostly transparent with a soft bending of light below. Round and open nose, guileless and easy to grasp, just picked off the tree peach, apricot, yellow apple fruit, merest dab of honey, sweet lemon juice, relaxed stone, fresh enough to turn evanescent. Medium-bodied, pinpricks of acidity keep it percolating while sweet cherry, peach, apricot fruit fills in all the tiny holes. Deep lime, lemon citrus keeps it skipping along, not in a rush at all, but its energy keeps it on the move. Oddly, there's not a lot of discernible stoniness nor grassiness yet it still comes across as a wine grounded in the soil. Resonant finish, no slouching at the end, holds your attention. 89

Langwerth von Simmern, Weingut Freiherr  
Rheingau, Hattenheimer, Nussbrunnen, Spätlese AP #19  
Riesling  
2004, \$29.99, 10.5%  
Its green-white hay color gives it a youthful look, displays more shine on the surface but not necessarily flat below. Round, pliant nose of pear, yellow apple, peach, green melon fruit, softly floral, minimal stone, relaxed and open to the point you really don't miss the complexity. Medium to full-bodied, sweet lemon/lime citrus and brown sugar notes make for an engaging entry, takes awhile for the acidity to make itself fully known. Full yet nimble apricot, pear, yellow apple, melon fruit, strikes a nice balance between sweet and sour. Produces a touch more stoniness here, dry straw of hay as well (too dry to be herbaceous), rose petals. Carves out a lengthy finish for itself. 89

Hessen, Weingut Prinz von  
Rheingau, Johannisberger, Klaus, Kabinett AP #14  
Riesling  
2004, \$15.99, 10.5%  
Green-yellow straw color, not a great deal of shine, more a series of thin translucent layers. Muscular nose of cherry, peach, apple fruit, white smoke, crushed stone, violets and some tangerine juice, rushes to the back of your nostrils. Full-bodied, shows power too here in the mouth but also refinement and control, doesn't misuse its weight. Rides high, not lift per se yet only grazes the tongue as it hovers. Gracefully layered peach, apricot, yellow apple fruit, blends together well with the lemon, tangerine citrus. The acidity is of a dry powdery sort, leaves your tongue tacky. Mild floral swipes, the stoniness is contoured and restrained, gets smokier as it sits. Long finish, both the fruit/citrus and general weight. A big Kabinett. 89

Machmer, Weingut G&H  
Rheinhessen, Bechtheimer, Stein, Spätlese AP #27  
Gewürztraminer  
2004, \$12.99, 10.5%

Deep yellow color, no shine and a bit of visible fizz, minimal loss at the rims. Strong litchee and floral musk in the nose, lightly nutty, waft of lemon peel, round but not fat, bitter skin and pit feel in the apricot, melon, peach fruit, fades at a slow pace. Full-bodied and soaks into your palate, you sense it could move but not so inclined to do so. Very musky and heavy here too, more orange to tangerine citrus but candied, the nuttiness has a honeyed/grilled character. Brown sugar comes through in the mid-palate alongside the peach, apricot, pear fruit. Has more acidity than anticipated yet the sweetness reigns supreme. Touch of mineral tang too, relieves some weight. Serious at moments but in the end bows to agreeable richness. 88

Langwerth von Simmern, Weingut Freiherr  
Rheingau, Hattenheimer, Nussbrunnen, Kabinett AP #9  
Riesling  
2004, \$18.99, 11.0%

Mild yellow hay color, the shine confined to the surface, displays green flecks, especially around the rims. Pear and apple scents dominate the nose, gives it increased snap, any sweetness comes via the orange citrus, equal amount of broken stone and cream, has both weight and purity, a little bit of licorice and herbs add to its relaxed fluidity. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, taut and more muscular, if not outright hard during the attack. Mostly stone, slate, mineral chunks at first, lemon peel doesn't sweeten but does create some contrast. The acidity is angular but not edgy, cakes the palate slowly and thoroughly. The cherry, peach, apricot, pear fruit is consistent and without flash. Loses not an iota of weight through the finish, great deal of density leaving it dry and still hard to penetrate. Very young. 88

Hessen, Weingut Prinz von  
Rheingau, Winkeler, Hasensprung, Spätlese AP #15  
Riesling  
2004, \$21.99, 9.0%

Yellow straw in color, semi-flat, holds its hue nicely through to the rims, tends to kinda sit there though. Sweet, juicy nose, very expressive, custard, lemon pie, tempting apricot, melon, apple, pear fruit, not a lot of cut but fills 'er up quickly, sweet spice, no stone. Full-bodied, the acidity carves through the plump tangerine, lemon juice as well as the copious apricot, peach, nectarine, cherry fruit, while impressively rich not heavy nor leaden. You get more chalk and slate-like stone in the mouth, lends it solidity. Texturally stays broad and flat, plenty of downward pressure exerted. Touch of spice or honey extends things past the mid-palate, adds richness. Manages additional cleanliness at the end, not refreshing yet not sloppy nor overbearing either. 88

Eifel-Pfeiffer, Weingut  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Graacher, Himmelreich, Kabinett  
Halbtrocken AP #9  
Riesling  
2004, \$18.99, 11.0%

Pale brown straw in color with high shine, glistens all the way through to the rims. Soft lemon/lime pie in the nose, though has a crisper saline quality to it, vague dustiness show more chalk than sharper minerals, pleasing fullness in the apricot, peach scents. Full-bodied, has a lot of weight and mouth presence but its dry vinification obvious from

the first sip, heightens the orange to lemon citrus as well as the minerality not found in the nose. Lots of zest and reverb yet still comes across as slightly inexpressive, the florality shortened and the apricot, pear, peach fruit also muted and tapered. Light herbal tones. More of a textural experience than one bursting with flavor. 87

Anheuser, Weingut Paul  
Nahe  
Schlossbockelheimer  
Königsfels  
Kabinett AP #17  
Riesling  
2004, \$12.99, 8.5%

Semi-dull golden straw color, actually deeper around the rims, not much to look at. Light oil and smoke in the nose, somewhat quiet, mutter of rose and lemon peel, minimal mixed white fruit scents, just there and gone. Medium-bodied, more expressive in the mouth with richer florality, lemon citrus and peach, apricot fruit as well as stoniness and slate. More sour than sweet but there is some residual sugar at the end. Not noticeably acidic but it does accrue until there's a thickish film left on your tongue. Overall, it's clean with a fair degree of transparency, just a question of what there is to see behind it. Seems to go by the textbook, stays safe and perhaps only achieves a fraction of what it could. 87

Marienhof, Weingut  
Rheinhessen, Dienheimer, Kreuz, Spätlese AP #3  
Riesling  
2004, \$14.99, 11.0%

White to brown straw in color, nice surface reflectivity, turns translucent below. Good deal of stone, clay-earth in the nose, quieter lemon citrus, solid presentation of the peach, nectarine, yellow apple fruit, a touch bottom-heavy, natural concentration. Medium-bodied and broad, spreads itself out at the risk of thinning. Dried lemons, flower petals, the acidity is blunt and consistent. Sweet cherry core accompanied by peach, red apple, apricot fruit, good roundness to it. Not a great deal of minerality, more damp earth, clay and soil. Starts to dissolve a bit quickly, while again very natural and unforced in feel, could use a bit more concentration to increase length. 86

## AUSTRIA WHITE

Gross, Weingut  
Steiermark/Styria, Steirische Klassik  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2004, \$29.99, 12.0%

Brilliant shine in the colorless white straw, so much spectral life it has a definite presence in the glass. Sour herbs, grass, crushed stone make up most of the nose, some white grapefruit pith, little earthiness to speak of and minimal apple, peach fruit, too transparent to even think of fruit scents, just floats away. Medium-bodied, has this subtle way of boring into your mouth, almost subterranean in how it insinuates lemon peel, stone, pebbles and flower petals into your pores. The acidity chops like a machete, big blows rather than bites. Transparency achieved here too, not much comes between the soil and your taste buds. Offers an intriguing, more New Zealand-like burst of chili pepper though. Overall, has this way of being there and yet not. Slightly chalky residue extends the finish. Demurely unique, you can derive about whatever you want from it. 89

Fritsch, Weingut Karl  
Donauland, Wagram, Klassik  
Riesling  
2004, \$13.99, 12.5%

Light green gold in color, pretty shine to it but does have some shimmer below too. Soft smoke, lemon peel, violets, solid stone, pear skin and peach pit, more pure and clean than expressive, has a vaguely sour/pickled edge to it. Full-bodied, good grip, not too hard but not letting go either. Earth, schist, stone, dried grass, reflects a good deal of its place of origin. Mint, lilacs and lemon give it fresher appeal. The acidity has edge but not "edgy." The peach, pear, apple fruit remains evanescent in a good way, not fogging the window into the soil. Stone notes last longest through the finish, slight floral uptick as well. Knit together nicely until the last sip, nothing out of place. 87

## SPAIN RED

Vizcarra Ramos, Bodegas  
Ribera del Duero, Vizcarra Roble Senda del Ora  
Tempranillo  
2003, \$15.99, 13.5%

Clean, spotless ruby-violet core, turns to a warmly glowing red-magenta around the rims. Sour cherry, raspberry nose, smoothed out by a thick vanilla foundation, mildly herbaceous, dried earth, uncomplicated and not going to confuse anyone. Full-bodied, loosely knit fabric but so juicy it sinks nicely into the palate. Ripe raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit without thickness. Offers more toast and caramel/vanilla swirl, some spiciness but any sweetness here tempered by underripe tannins. Some grassiness but not a long presence. No messing around, just addresses the major needs, packs up and calls it a day. 87

Mauro, Bodegas  
Toro, Tudela del Duero  
Blend  
2003, \$41.99, 14.0%

Deep ruby violet core, full clarity, more pure red at the rims, deeply hued. Soft nose of cherry, raspberry fruit, semi-sweet, really flat with little going on, maybe some lemon peel, oak toast, amazingly void. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a semi-roasted feel to the cherry, blackberry fruit, smoky and here some earthiness comes through. The tannins have a dusty quality, tend to deaden things. More herbal here as well, additional lemon kick too which fights to nip at you in the mid-palate. Towards the finish you receive some leather, tree bark notes. Overall, never truly coalesces into a coherent message. Mainly Tempranillo, remainder Syrah, Garnacha. 86

## PORTUGAL RED

Niepoort, Vinhos  
Douro Valley, Charme  
Blend  
2004, \$86.99, 13.0%

Thick ruby-purple core, equally dense red magenta rims, very nice depth of hue throughout. Interesting nose, goes in a lot of directions at once, cantaloupe, apple, cherry skin ye not very fruity, throws in dry ash, twigs, hard frozen vanilla ice cream, mild toast, remains ineffable, based mostly in its heavy anchoring in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, more agreeable in the mouth, if still curiously light of touch, the acidity is finely polished, somewhat too fine to lead the way. Ripe, contoured cherry, raspberry fruit with a hint of green apple. With time you get sweet spice, orange

peel. Not much leather or earth, even after the tannins set in, some twiggy, leafy stuff though. Minor caramel, vanilla notes, swell mostly in the center. If it wasn't so leaden and nailed down it would gain a great in freshness. As it is, at cross purposes now. Unspecified percentages of Tinta Roriz, Touriga Franca, Touriga Nacional, Tinta Amarela, etc. 87

## AUSTRALIA RED

Torbreck  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, The Factor  
Shiraz  
2003, \$106.99, 14.5%

Dense and filmy with a warm glow in the red-purple core, the heavy-lidded crimson rims swallow up the light. For as thick as the nose is, has a purity of focus to it, arrays smoke, gun metal shades, the oak toast and cream already knit in well, this bends to the will of the currant, black cherry scents, the milder florality and mint show a dapper quietude, finishes on a dime. Full-bodied in a muscular fashion, flexes during the mouth entry, the sour currant, cherry, raspberry fruit getting a boost from the lemon citrus and mineral dust. The acidity level is good but not overwhelming, it plays up the metal content though. The florality struggles to be heard, doesn't have the oomph to provide lift. Again, oak toast adds a charred aspect while not in any way a large part of the overall fabric. Goes one and on with relentless determination, a study in power. 92

Schulz  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Marcus Old Shiraz  
Shiraz  
2002, \$97.99, 15.0%

Cloudy, opaque glow in the scarlet purple core, bruise-like, surrounded by dense brick red rims. Mint leaf and eucalyptus the biggest factor in the nose, consistent vanilla presence without dominating things, smoky with aspects of leather, dried game and a mesquite-like sweetness, closely packed yet nimble currant, black cherry scents, full with a nice release. Medium-bodied, very sweet mouth entry, thankfully met by good acidity and tannins to prevent undesired cloyingness. Violets, orange peel and cedar come through next, the mesquite/molasses glaze softens the earthiness. The currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit stands up for itself, no fat around the belly. Here there's not quite the suave release of the nose, power grip remains. Generous floral residue on the finish but still it's chewy, chewy, chewy. 89

Hazyblur  
South Australia, Baroota  
Shiraz  
2004, \$36.99, 15.0%

Good concentration in the red violet to dark ruby color, very nice clarity as well, minimal hue change towards the rims. Thick butter cream in the nose, fused with mint, licorice, old saddle leather, stays round in the nostrils even given the snap found in the cherry, blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, takes awhile to kick in during the mouth entry, an early sign of its nice tannins and acidity. The vanilla cream, coffee ice cream and mint there throughout but also more smokiness, grilled meat, mineral chunks and orange zest. Sour edge in the red currant, cherry, red plum fruit helps it remain erect through the finish. Takes clarity over unbridled power, making it easier to digest. 88

Burge, Grant  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Hillcot Vineyard  
Merlot  
2002, \$15.99, 13.9%

Average clarity to the medicinal cough syrup red, more burnt red-orange at the rims, no dropoff in hue intensity. Extremely minty nose, freshens the vanilla, white chocolate aspects, floral with a building caramel side, hard candy feel to the cherry, raspberry scents, it all coheres really well. Medium-bodied, framed with aplomb from the first sip, brightly sour and fluid as the acidity runs the show. Initial element of bell pepper swallowed into a dense vanilla, caramel swirl. Dried blood, leather, black earth, tar and herbs give it legitimate street cred. Consistent, non-flashy cherry, red currant fruit slides through the mouth, lifting slightly on the wings of that mint. 88

Teusner  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Ebenezer Road The Riebke  
Shiraz  
2004, \$22.99, 14.0%

Trim, lightly cloudy red-purple color, strong rims, touch more crimson there. First thing apparent in the nose is the vanilla and toasty oak but not overbearing, allows for a strong mint element as well as orange peel, light game and leather, straightforward currant, cherry scents. Medium-bodied, the acidity has a well-honed blade but does not last long enough to really frame the total wine. This lets the oaky butter cream rule the attack. Then some pepper, earth, minerals and orange citrus, past the mid-palate there's some herbal notes. Moderate tannins, the dryness seems to come from a lack of extraction in the currant, blackberry, raspberry fruit. Some spicy tang and elevated flavors of game through the finish extends the experience a bit. 87

McLean's Farms  
South Australia, Shiraz-Cabernet  
Blend  
2004, \$15.99, 14.5%

Rich ruby-purple but quite clean, color totally full to the rims, no dropoff at all. Creamy, buttery popcorn nose obscures some of the tarter raspberry, red cherry fruit, better faring for the smoky leather and light earth tones, keeps it simple. Medium-bodied, nice acidity right from the start to keep things in check, especially the oak, has a quick burst of toast at best (worst?). Sweet and sour raspberry, cherry, red currant fruit, tends to lose some grip past the mid-palate. A touch herbal but this helps bring out the earthiness. Mixed white citrus noticeable but perhaps mostly because of that acidity. Clean finish, not much leftover to over-complicate things. 51% Shiraz, 49% Cabernet Sauvignon. 86

Mount Langi Ghiran  
Victoria, Billi Billi  
Shiraz  
2003, \$13.99, 14.0%

Fully opaque black core, light purple, thin but heavy red ruby rims. Huge amount of vanilla cream in the nose, toast and lower caramel, the red currant, raspberry and cherry scents have more briskness than juiciness, hint of cinnamon or mint nothing else. Medium-bodied, very strong acidity which tries real hard to combat the vanilla and buttered toast, gives things an elongated feel. Sour cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit, not a lot of length. Twiggy, leafy sort of herbaceousness. Very dry, powdery

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lemon zest. Obviously from a cooler climate but not necessarily crafted to play this up, made more like the fruit had more warmer climate richness. Nice enough, eh. 85

## AUSTRALIA WHITE

Torbreck  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Woodcutter's White  
Sémillon  
2004, \$17.99, 14.5%

There's good shine in the brown straw color, beneath has a mild translucency with only slight hue loss around the rims. The nose produces bright orange, lemon citrus, also floral with a minty touch, quieter peach and apricot fruit, has more texture than range of scents. Full-bodied, turns nicer at room temperature, waxy with lanolin notes, round and thicker peach, apricot, pear fruit, good concentration with minimal extra sweetness. Here the citrus is more white in nature, grapefruit, displays more bite than length. Turns spicier near the mid-palate and pleasingly betrays little herbaceousness. The acidity comes on slowly but packs some punch by the end. Possesses a lot of florality yet not enough to really imbue it with lift. Clean, food friendly while still very young and unevolved. 89

Torzi Matthews  
South Australia, Eden Valley, Frost Dodger  
Riesling  
2005, \$22.99, 13.0%

Very pale brown straw, close to fully transparent, noticeably reflective surface but dulls a bit below. The nose reveals fine bite in the lemon, tangerine citrus, very dusty minerality, lightest touch of florality and relaxed peach, pear, apple fruit, lingers but without force. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, the acidity seems to come in one big sheet, not real arch. Sweeter appeal here to the tangerine, orange, lime citrus, softens it a tad more. That said, remains dry and lively, more oomph in the peach, apricot, pear fruit than nose suggests. The stoniness is more knit-in and not so prominent. Smooth and easy to drink, the citrus component drives its personality. 88

## AUSTRALIA ROSE

Torbreck  
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Saignée Mataro Rosé  
Mourvèdre  
2005, \$21.99, 14.5%

Presents a light rose petal color, more red than pink, crystal clear and shiny from core to rims. Funky, earthy nose, gives up wet wool, light lemon peel, sour cherry with the bite, rises upwards before it can fully settle in, lots of Mourvèdre character. Medium-bodied, much sweeter in the mouth with an ample core of raspberry, red cherry, blackberry fruit, this achieved without sacrificing attractive tartness. Proceeds further with spice, more orange citrus, the acidity has the power to bring out more minerality. Kind of grassy, this adding to its lively nature. That said, it does slow down and grind into the tongue by the finish. Says a lot in a brief period of time, needs a plate of cheese and salami in a bad way, not the light and fruity sort. 87

## NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Lawson's Dry Hills  
Marlborough  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$17.99, 13.0%

Extremely transparent green straw coloration, brilliant reflectivity through to the crystal clear rims. Piercing nose of white grapefruit, chili pepper, bell pepper, mineral dust and more muted apple, peach, nectarine fruit. Medium-bodied, bouncy and light enough to glide some as it progresses through the mouth. Has enough sweetness in the peach, apricot, pear, pineapple fruit in the mouth to tam the chili pepper edge as well as balance out the medium grade herbaceousness. The acidity lends some freshness but this isn't a particularly "slice and dice" style of wine. The white and pink grapefruit, lemon citrus too has a forgiving hint of sweetness. Chalky, never too dry yet there's some residual dust on the tongue by the end. Doesn't clamp down on the finish, remains accessible but not simple. Covers a lot of ground well. 90

## ARGENTINA RED

Navarro Correas, Bodega  
Mendoza, Colección Privada Limited Release  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2004, \$12.99, 13.5%

Brick red core, kinda blackish with increasing orange flecks near the rims, minimal hue loss though. Rich foundation of cherry, blackberry fruit in the nose, wet earth and straw, hint of licorice, lemon peel, achieves a lot of airiness before the final dissolve. Medium-bodied, fine level of acidity to counter-balance the ripe plum, cherry, currant fruit, replete with an array of leather, tar, cigar wrapper, earth flavors. The tannins are tempered while maintaining a presence. Minimal herbaceousness, strides forward with confidence, lemon bite through the finish, stays lively. 88

Huarpe, Bodegas y Viñedos  
Mendoza, Winery Selection  
Blend  
2003, \$15.99, 14.0%

Opaquely dark purple core, heavy-set crimson red rims, well-saturated throughout. Thick-necked nose but moves forward with confidence, for all of its weight it maintains composure as it unleashes soft buttered popcorn, bountiful plum, currant, cherry fruit, has a little bit of an herbal lift but remains bottom-heavy in the nostrils. Full-bodied, very sumptuous and voluptuous in the mouth, anything that ends in a -tuous. The aided a great deal by oak flavors of vanilla, coffee, caramel. The acidity restrains this somewhat, provides room for the grass, lemon peel, dried flowers, ginger/clove spice, cowhide and dried tar elements. Resonant cherry, currant, plum, fruit, not so sweet but plush and expansive. Stains your palate after but a few sips. Sassy wine. 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Malbec. 88

Mapema  
Mendoza  
Malbec  
2003, \$24.99, 13.5%

Deep and gently glowing red-purple color, semi-opaque, heavy crimson to maroon rims. The nose of a rugged, "unshaven" feel to it with smoke, burnt driftwood, leather, tilled earth, wild grasses, mineral shards, takes a good long while for the dusty currant, cherry scents to open but

never fully. Medium-bodied, broad tannic structure keeps it ultra-dry from the start, also almost acidic enough to bring out green apple notes in the basic cherry, currant, plum fruit. Earth, earth and more earth, meadow flowers, minerals, dried tar and bark. Minimal oak, its purity would be evident if it were not so dry. Not massaged nor worked over but no doubt strives for seriousness. Half achieves it. 87

Huarpe, Bodegas y Viñedos  
Mendoza, Lancatay  
Malbec  
2003, \$8.99, 14.0%

Average shine in the red-purple core, light orange in the crimson core, no hue dropoff at the rims. Fair amount of juiciness in the nose, openly knit cherry to raspberry fruit, fresh with only a touch of earth or grass, some gaminess, not complex but unforced. Full-bodied, thick and viscous in texture. Super-sweet black cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, thankfully just tannic enough to staunch it before reaches cloying proportions. Candied orange, coffee bean, vanilla, clove spice keep it user-friendly, the acidity also just strong enough to keep your pencils sharpened. Molasses, caramel come on near the end, softens and lets it soak into the tongue. Very engaging and savory, definitely breaks a sweat to make sure you like it. 87