

Amazingly, not much changes. The world of wine reinvigorates itself with new vintages. Some wineries go away, others appear. Hanes does not read much anymore. So, it is hard for him to contextualize his vinous experiences within the world writ large. What little he does come across seems to indicate a healthy industry with sales climbing cautiously and the “Millennials” appear to enjoy wine, they say. Maybe there is just too much negative energy in Hanes’s noggin and all is well in the world. God bless those who produce wine, those who dedicate their lives to its sale and, of course, those who choose to consume this blessed offering from The Earth.

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**This month’s big winners...** Tensley makes some very tasty Californian wines, mainly from Syrah. Their 2009 Syrah from Colson Canyon Vineyard is wonderful and merits the accolades it receives. The same can be said for Tensley’s unusual partnership with Montvac in Gigondas, France, a blend of juice from two countries called “Détente.” Not cheap at \$47 but worth it for what is in the bottle as well as just the quirkiness of the bottling. The 2008 Frappato from Occhipinti is up to the high standards established by this Sicilian producer, if you have \$36 burning a hole in your pocket, go for it. Consumed lots of Beaujolais from Domaine du Vissoux – 2009 is a pleasurable vintage from what Hanes has tasted, none going into the cellar (even if he was buying wines for the cellar anymore). Prices are whack but the quality is there. Don’t drink much Gewürztraminer these days, for that matter many Alsatian wines in general, but the 2009 basic bottling from André Scherer was pretty tasty and is priced around \$24, which is basically what any decent bottle of such wine costs these days. Hanes sure grumbles about prices a lot.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** Hanes tasted his first wine from the Marselan grape, this being a hybrid of Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache Noir. Fruity and easy enough to chug, for \$11 would be hard for anyone to complain. The Languedoc continues to have its act together and produces value, even accounting for the weak US dollar. Ty Caton’s Californian cheapie label Racchus Wines provided a pleasingly subdued and yet complex red blend bottling in 2008, for a fair \$14 or so. Not much of it made but if you see some consider buying a bottle. Don’t drink many such wines but a humble Sangiovese de Romagna called “Fico Grande” from Poderi dal Nespoli passed Hanes’s lips and they were happy. Good acidity, well-fruited but not dependent on such. Can’t quibble for \$15. A little 2009 red blend from Font Sarade in the Ventoux area of the Rhône is good for those who like their wine with some “vin de garde” in it, decently priced at \$14. A basic, entry level sort of Grüner Veltliner, Markowitsch’s 2009 “Ried Schanzäcker” bottling pleases without difficulty and goes easy on the wallet for around \$13 too.

**And the disappointments...** Drank lots of nasty Argentinean Malbec of late in search of a new by-the-glass product. Kind of considered this category to be awash in cheap, credible stuff but not so fast, my friend. There’s lots of junk out there too. Maybe time for the importers to become more selective. The 2008 Zinfandel from Turley and the Cedarman Vineyard was a bit underwhelming and kind of represents a general trend with the winery. Hey, Hanes is happy to buy the few allocated bottles he gets but many are just solid and not “wow” wines, which arguably is what they built their reputation on. A customer special orders Lioco’s Sonoma County Chardonnay so thought to try their red blend and see if it was any good for the shelf, alas, their 2008 “Indica” from Mendocino was a weird assemblage of flavors and textures and not really something an average customer would want, particularly for \$22. Always a sucker for the wines of Irouléguay but the 2007 red blend from Brana called “Ohitza” did not match expectations, should feel lucky it was only \$20. In a similar vein the Loire producer Le Clos du Tue-Bœuf makes mostly delicious wines but Hanes did not care for their 2009 Pinot Noir called “La Gravotte.” At \$33, this was a more ouchy experience. Just wore poor Hanes out trying to finish the bottle. While props for their Frappato, Occhipinti’s 2009 white blend “SP68 Bianco” was a crushing blow to Hanes, maybe he just is missing something elemental about the wine. Dag.

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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.

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the *older (or non-imported) wines* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2011.html>

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on *beer* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/beer.html>

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 Type

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

Tensley

Santa Barbara County, Colson Canyon Vineyard

Syrah

2009, \$39.99, 15.0%

The serious saturation to the purple core gives it glow while also bringing it to the edge of opaque blackness, however, the clarity evident around the yet super-dark and glowing purple to dark pinkish magenta rims, boldly hued with a sleek surface to boot. The nose brings out a roundhouse kick of oak toast, campfire embers and caramelized molasses to brown sugar before giving you dewy flowers and grapefruit to orange zest, a few beef jerky to sausage notes appear before dissolving into the semi-sour plum, cherry, blackberry fruit scents, shows a good amount of focus while also touching on most of the primary food groups. Medium-bodied, upon first opening slaps you with exquisitely precise white grapefruit and lemon zest, all sharp and energetic. At the same time the acidity pulses with an elevated heart rate. The more it opens, the more the citrus pulls back into the whole and the more the flesh softens the acidity's impact, not necessarily preferably so. Cocoa, vanilla powder, caramel sweeter here, less overt toastiness in the oak presentation. Savory cherry, blackberry, cranberry fruit, sweet, but never sugary, with a solid tang. Sweet barbecue sauce and pulled pork more than gamey meat. Minor shades of earth and stone, not that terroir driven more an exercise in purity of fruit and youthful energy. No sense in guessing at the future, just consume the whole bottle within the first 30 minutes of pulling the cork. 91

Racchus Wines

Regional Blend, Reserve

Blend

2008, \$13.99, 14.1%

Trim, pure purple core achieves basic opacity, clearer through the quite broad crimson to magenta rims, endowed with great vibrancy. The nose comes across as somewhat high-toned, as much pomegranate, cranberry and sour red cherry as any darker fruits, the caramel and toffee firm and taut, displaying a solid dose of white grapefruit to mandarin orange citrus, the florality is musky yet reticent, overall connotes breeding over bombast. In the mouth it's medium-bodied and similarly arrayed, the major change is the presence of drying acidity and tannin which do add to its "serious" demeanor. Higher degree of milk chocolate, caramel and butterscotch sweeten the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, the latter darker in complexion here. The grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus adds tang and takes up a fair degree of territory. Hints at cedar and leather, although not a wine to age per se could see this developing more over short term horizon. On the whole the "kitchen sink" blend comes out more along Bordeaux blend style than anything else. Good stuff if not a mindless quaff. 36% Petite Sirah, 23% Syrah, 16% Merlot, 9% Petit Verdot, 9% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, 3% Malbec. 89

Turley

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Cedarman

Zinfandel

2008, \$29.00, 15.6%

Black opaque core with a touch of purple, decent breadth to the rims, here red-magenta and purple most obvious, some filmy streaks across the surface. The nose does not offer a great deal of diversity nor fluidity, fleshy prune, golden raisin, fig and then blueberry, apricot, blackberry fruit scents, molasses and honey,

orange marmalade, wet rose petals, sort of a clumsy avalanche of randomness. In the mouth it's full-bodied and dense, not layered as much as rotund. Achieves some perfume via mint, orange spritz, flowers and licorice, after that it grinds to a halt, unable to sustain pacing and momentum. Not tannic, not acidic, but has a stemmy, twiggy aspect, slight underripeness. The plum, cherry, blueberry fruit has heft but lacks both sweetness and length. Milk chocolate and malted milk balls gain traction through the mid-palate. Finds its bearings towards the finish line, maybe too late on the whole. 87

Other Guys (Don Sebastiani & Sons), The Regional Blend, California  
Leese-Fitch

Zinfandel  
2008, \$13.99, 13.8%

Trim, unblemished and mostly transparent purple to garnet color, stronger ruby and magenta at the rims. Smoky nose, mesquite and honey glaze, vinegar and pepper rubbed pork, new rubber, the black cherry, blackberry, plum fruit scents equally sour and sugary, orange and lemon pulp, flat-footed but has enough energy to impress as it barrels into your nostrils. Full-bodied, juicy and clingy, sticks to your mouth pores. Maybe it's that plastic, Band-Aid aspect. Otherwise, the rubber tire, molasses, brown sugar and orange glaze there, pork and general barbecue flavors ensue. Zero tannin, touch of acidity, flavor compensation does not require much additional structure. The plum, cherry, blackberry fruit squeezed dry, no wetness left by the finish. At the price point, highly idiosyncratic, a likely love it or hate it situation. 84% Zinfandel, 16% Syrah. Grapes sourced 84% Amador, 16% Lodi. (Synthetic Cork: Zork) 87

Lioco  
Mendocino County, Indica  
Blend

2008, \$21.99, 13.8%

The red-ruby to brick influence in the base purple core tends to dull rather than enliven it, rims show some scarlet glow, surface shine is average and acceptable, if dull overall. Thick, close to stewed, nose of plum/prune, raisin, black currant and blackberry fruit, caramel, toffee, butterscotch, milk chocolate, all with loads of torrefaction, raw bacon, the oak treatment has a mean drunk edge to it, pine and flowers tend to duck for cover, hard to find a place to relax inside it. Full-bodied, has a good brace of acidity yet still stays on the softer side with a sugar-laden caramel, butterscotch, molasses coating. Smoky orange and white grapefruit rind and burnt cocoa, mocha to coffee elements, finding a sour dimension not an issue. With this mind, the raspberry, cranberry, pomegranate,

cherry fruit satisfies the sweet tooth as well as express that tartness. Bacon and pork rind notes add, umm, complexity. OK, some olives but maybe just 'cause it says on the label. Sure to win friends, albeit the relatively high acidity may throw a few off. 66% Carignan, 25% Mourvèdre, 9% Petite Sirah. (Screwcap) 87

Chester's Anvil (A Lagier Meredith Pott Joint Venture)  
Napa Valley, Hattori Hanzo  
Blend

2008, \$35.00, 14.9%

Opaque blackish core, almost purple by default, clarity and vivacity come through via the saturated ruby rims. Unassuming, creamy nose of vanilla fudge, whipped cream, butterscotch that happily yields to a citrus inspired floral lift, light immobility to the plum, cherry, currant fruit scents, brings on a pine to menthol element before it blows away. Medium to full-bodied, places a quiet emphasis on the fruit, the lack of sugary sweetness should not confuse, high percentage allocated to the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit. This tough-minded primary youth softened by caramel, butterscotch, popcorn, vanilla notes. Tannin needs direction and taming, at present drying things out too much and leading into a puckering finish which displays a green component. The orange to white grapefruit citrus doesn't find its clearest expression. Ginger to cumin spice present. Polished without any rough burrs or hardness, still, does not leave you with the impression of an integrated whole. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah, Malbec. 87

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Conspire Cellars  
Napa Valley, Rutherford  
Sauvignon Blanc

2009, \$22.99, 14.2%

More layered than dull appearance, solid depth to the golden hue, on the whole nothing that unusual visually yet by no stretch a watery presence. The nose achieves a high degree of tropicality without keen bite, mango, guava, apricot and peach fruit scents cast a long shadow, quite minty, the creaminess in the orange and lemon citrus leaves some tang, very airy and open, subtly anchors itself in stone shards, never gets as sweet as you suspect it might be capable of. Full-bodied, never soft while remaining agreeable and swift to saturate your mouth pores. The lemon, sour orange citrus balanced out by a vanillin cream and hint of butterscotch. Rightfully leans on the verve and length of the apricot, peach, guava, pineapple, papaya fruit, nowhere sweet enough to be a fruit bomb but fruit sets the tempo. The acidity is decent enough, even if it

seems like it's artificially bolstered. Again, mint and licorice make a noticeable showing, elevating the apparent presence of florality. Don't start shucking the oysters here, more of a sipping guilty pleasure Sauvignon Blanc than food wine. Not that there's anything inherently wrong with that. 88

## **NORTH CAROLINA RED**

Raffaldini Vineyards

Yadkin Valley, Swan Creek, Urbano

Blend

2008, \$13.00, 12.5%

Light medicinal red to brick red coloration, watery rims, not very impressive visually but not necessarily for the worse. Candied raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit in the nose, cedar, menthol, liquid smoke, cocoa, licorice, somewhat floral, unassumingly enjoyable and can compensate for lack of real scent depth. Light-bodied, tangy and sour, especially in the orange and lemon zest department. This countered by milk chocolate, cocoa notes and more pungent grill smoke and meat fat. Decent acidity, helps funnel more leather and earth notes into the light. The raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit keeps that sweet candied core, no length and dissolves faster than a lollipop. What's there seems like a scaled down version of a more substantial wine, not a faulty wine per se. Unspecified percentages of Sangiovese, Montepulciano. 86

## **INTERNATIONAL**

Tensley

International Blend, Détente

Blend

2008, \$46.99, 14.5%

Dark, trim purple core with a ruby tint, the rims fully saturated without appearing overdone, crimson base with red-magenta and brighter ruby stripes. The nose controls its muscularity very well, uses the white grapefruit pith and mineral dust to condition the overall experience, penetrating florality, both bite and contour to the red cherry, raspberry, pomegranate, boysenberry fruit scents, softens the hard spots with caramel and toffee, leverages its grassy side to good effect, bringing lift rather than greenness. Medium-bodied, the acidity charges it up from the start, however, with each new sip you appreciate more the supplementary power of the tannin. Abundantly fruited, endowed with blackberry, raspberry, blueberry and mixed cherry, all of which get extended via the verve of the white grapefruit, orange citrus. The oaky caramel, butterscotch grows as the bottle opens, yet without screwing things up. Floral side grows with air time too. Primary while refined, grabs your attention

now, can't quite send a distinct signal about its longer term future. 50% France (Gigondas: 70% Grenache, 25% Syrah, 5% Mourvèdre), 50% America (Colson Canyon Vineyard: 100% Syrah). 91

## **FRANCE RED**

Visoux, Domaine du

Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent, Les Trois Roches

Gamay Noir

2009, \$29.99, 13.0%

Satisfying in the simplicity of the ruby tinged purple core, close to fully opaque, as expected well-saturated rims of ruby to pinkish magenta, no filminess at all and with a glistening surface. The nose is taut but not tight, the raspberry, blackberry, rhubarb, cherry fruit do not allow any sourness to diminish the density it shows in your nostrils, sweet orange peel, tea leaves and something akin to eucalyptus bolster the former, there's an obligatory touch of stoniness but it's truly a primary experience, florality lifts it through the finish. Full-bodied, yet without the sheer weight that this normally brings to mind, more like an impassive, immovable presence. The tannins cast a wide net, acidity might be a tad disappointing. The orange and grapefruit citrus slip through to the front so as to introduce the sour red cherry, cranberry, rhubarb, raspberry fruit, more ripe than sweet, no extra sugar to be found. Once more, difficult to discern any earth, stone, mineral notes. Layers itself seductively on the tongue but can't really hold a nuanced conversation. Drink up, kiddies! 89

Visoux, Domaine du

Beaujolais, Cuvée Traditionnelle Vieilles Vignes

Gamay Noir

2009, \$17.99, 12.0%

Deep purple core with a sort of blackness which goes away in favor of its utter clarity and cleanliness, the rims an equally dark red-ruby to magenta in hue, spotless surface. The nose has this sort of briny funk which is quite welcome as counterpoint to the ripe raspberry, red cherry, pomegranate fruit scents and caramel swirl, has a good deal of sweeter orange to grapefruit accents too, floral while not lifting beyond ability to scrub your nostrils. Full-bodied, not heavy but does layer itself on your tongue in a consistent, if not insistent, manner. Plump cherry, blackberry fruit takes up more territory than raspberry, strawberry or rhubarb. The orange, lemon citrus feels like chunks of sour pulp dripping through your mouth. Its density favors the tannins over the acidity when it comes to structure, albeit this may not be the freshest, most classic example anyway. Instead, you get that fruit plus caramel, pine sap, floral musk and licorice. In the end it's sort of sad that it does in fact have sufficient

structure as this is sure to scare off those who would just groove on the sweeter aspects. Hard to resist its charms now, can see it improving by losing baby fat over nearer term, beyond that unlikely to find much development. 89

Vissoux, Domaine du  
Beaujolais, Brouilly, Pierreux  
Gamay Noir  
2009, \$29.99, 13.0%

The core is just simply dark, this favors the purple over the ruby which seems closer to equal when viewed closely, the battle tightly contested through the rims, where a pinkish cast finally favors the ruby, no issue with rich saturation here. Sour withdrawal found in the plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit scents, otherwise the nose offers a skillful blend of dried meadow grasses, orange juice, stone dust and a whiff of pickle juice, has an aggressiveness which is not necessarily smoky nor minerally nor earthy, animal comes closer. Full-bodied, the tannic and acidic structure open with the “beams” spaced well apart. Stays dry throughout while, by the same token, allowing the cherry, blackberry, black currant fruit a steady presence, the ripeness is there, same as a tough exterior. Orange to white grapefruit citrus throws itself into you time and again, but gives you recovery time. Sufficient florality to cushion the landing, black tea and a touch of horsehide but round in feel without cutting. Along these lines low minerality with blunt chalk and stone instead. Kind of enjoyable for how it shunts the fruit off to the side and revels in its back alley bad boyness. Not as immediately pleasurable as many of its peers but may outlast them by a few years. 88

Baudry, Domaine Bernard  
Loire, Chinon, Franc de Pied  
Cabernet Franc  
2009, \$32.99, 13.5%

Effulgent purple core, extremely saturated with vivid and dark garnet to red-magenta rims, entirely unblemished, sleek surface, impactful visual presence. Big jolt of pure blackberry, black cherry, blueberry fruit in the nose, quickly followed on by mocha, cocoa notes, spicy orange zest, floral scrub and a slight sigh of leather and cedar, youthfully primary without suggesting overripeness. In the mouth it's close to full-bodied simply because it is youthful and, again, fully but not overripened. The tannins are dry but like a thin rather than thick piece of wood, destined to a supplementary role. The acidity is turn is so-so, luckily the whole doesn't come apart or get distractingly sluggish. Given enough air time you get more bell pepper, black pepper and herbal matter than at first, pleasing counterpoint to the blackberry, cherry, currant and Italian plum fruit, all of which as tart as sweet.

Again, the mocha sticks out like a sore thumb, not sure why it's there when you want to focus on the tobacco ash, sand and quarry stone dust. Tasty, if at times diffuse, would like to see if a few years of bottle time focuses its sense of purpose. 88

Jouclary, Château  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Cabardès, Cuvée Tradition  
Blend  
2007, \$12.99, 13.0%

Pretty purple core, some ruby, most of which holds off until the rims, there you get a dusky warmth and almost griminess. The nose is fat to the point of seeming foursquare, slathers plum, black cherry, black currant fruit in your nostril hairs along with spiced orange peels, olive pit and dried grill fat, even the musky florality stemmed, the fruit immobile yet leaves so little room for anything else. In the mouth it's full-bodied, has a dry feeling on the tongue albeit not especially tannic, just mildly sandpapery. Again, the robust plum, cherry, blackberry fruit rules the roost, ably supplemented by cinnamon and ginger spice, orange citrus, honey and lilacs. Its weight and texture suggest it is a “real” wine whereas past this it's really just about having fun. Even the green olive and cut grass tamed and shaped into easy pleasure. Sweet and agreeable, flavor-wise. Touch simple, likely better for it. Mostly Merlot, remainder Syrah, Grenache. 88

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Vin de Pays de Loire-Atlantique, Cuvée Granit  
Blend  
2009, \$15.99, 12.0%

The purple in the core dark enough to stem full transparency, red-ruby covers most of the territory towards the rims, light pinkish tint at the outermost edge, youthfully vivid. The nose first offers a smoky, dried beef touch which moves more into pressed wildflowers, meadow grasses, sage, the stoniness plays up the tartness of the orange, lemon citrus as well as cranberry, red cherry, raspberry scents, has enough heaviness to warrant conclusion of full ripeness while, concurrently, no ignoring the dry, dusty texture in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, a lot of the time feels fuller as there's a thick tannic and acidic superstructure founding the whole. Not to say that it is ever harsh or bound up, more that it's clear about that chip on its shoulder. This puts a bullishness into the white grapefruit, orange, lemon citrus, all dry pith and tacky zest. In turn, the red raspberry, red cherry, pomegranate fruit throws a bunch of jabs rather than attempt to smother your tongue. Pine and forest breeze accents, stone and chalk, dried cedar, tea leaves, anise seed. Gives you a big, twisting goose at the finish, makes sure you will remember it. While not taxingly complex, a lot going on, best knit into the

substance of a meal. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Franc, Côt, Merlot, Gamay Noir. 88

Massiac, Château  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Pays d'Oc  
Viognier

2009, \$16.99, 14.3%

Semi-flat appearance solidifies the gold to white straw hues, this particularly along the rims pools well into the glass. The nose has a fetching fullness, in part due to the creamy feel, floral with marshmallow notes, peach and apricot fuzz, sweet and tangy tangerine pith, a little more minerality than expected, welcome in balancing out that creaminess. Medium-bodied, in the mouth the acidity makes all the difference, uncommonly energetic for the grape and acts as a firm conductor for the lilacs, tangerine zest, vanilla fudge and freshly picked apricot, apple, peach flavors, the latter evenly presented start to finish. Subtle mineral water aspect brings out some stoniness and even an enlivening wisp of grass. The citrus core outlasts most else, while yet on the sweet side it does add the kind of crackle and pop needed to help it avoid being a cheaper, more soupy style of the grape. (Synthetic Cork) 88

Collotte, Domaine  
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Cuvée de Noble Souche  
Pinot Noir

2009, \$20.99, 13.7%

Fairly strong purple core, on the dark side and pushes the ruby mostly off towards the rims, where a magenta tint lightens it some, as layered as transparent, solid presence in the glass. Stony, parched earth driven restraint in the nose, helpful as there's a real robust quality to the raspberry, red cherry fruit scents, mixing in lemon honey and soft floral notes, by the same token tree leaf ash and twigs, credible job of keeping the fruit in the forefront while not sacrificing more traditional, terroir-based elements. Medium to full-bodied, has a drying acidity and lesser dusty tannin element creating a tacky tongue coating. Concurrently, the fruit has a plummy quality in addition to the cherry, blackberry base. Notes of green grass and stony earth crest during the mid-palate, again with an ashen character. Keeping the oscillation going, the lemon to white grapefruit citrus adds a sweet tang which draws you back in as well as breathes more life into the underlying florality. Not a bad little wine at all, really needs food to shine best and fill in any more hollow spots. 88

Font Sarade, Domaine  
Rhône, Ventoux  
Blend

2009, \$13.99, 14.0%

Warm depth to the dark purple core, nudges into opacity, saturated ruby to pink-magenta rims, nice surface shine brings visual life. Very mild reductive notes in the nose of peanuts, merde, damp earth, balanced out and then some by garrigues-like florality, a sweet smokiness bolsters the plum, blackberry, black cherry scents, quick burst of lemon zest, keeps it simple on the whole. Full-bodied, full and generally smooth texture. Fills the cracks and crevices with ease, not soft per se but sticky enough to keep any drying tannins at bay. The orange, lemon citrus sweet here and act almost as an infusion into the palpable chocolate flavors. Quite ripe blackberry, plum, black cherry fruit fits with the aforementioned, as well as honey and licorice accents. If you can adjust to the undercurrent of funk, there's really nothing here not to like. 60% Syrah, 40% Grenache. 88

Raousset, Château de  
Beaujolais, Chiroubles  
Gamay Noir

2009, \$18.99, 13.0%

Rich purple core with a red-ruby blush, maintains its warmth while also clean enough to have some transparency, especially up close, the rims thick magenta rims with as much pink as red to them, fills the glass admirably. Well-layered nose of fluffy wildflowers, meadow grasses and a thick blanket of cranberry, red raspberry, blueberry fruit, the orange to lemon citrus presents a sweet mist, although formidable, earth and stone shards take a step back from the forefront. Full-bodied, takes a good couple of hours to really open and strut its stuff. When it does the drying tannins get subsumed into the whole while the acidity yet provides direction to the dense raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit, here the cranberry and strawberry finish in second place. Tangy lemon, white grapefruit, orange citrus puts some starch in its undies. More free expression in the stone, earth, "grounds" it as a wine of place as much as fruit, adds dryness to the finish. At times almost seems a touch salty. A pleasing little wine with the right amount of ruggedness. (Composite Cork) 88

Barrailots, Château Les  
Bordeaux, Margaux  
Blend

2007, \$29.99, 12.5%

Trim ruby-purple core, slightly on the dark side although with very good clarity, more of a burnt red to garnet hue around the rims without seeming prematurely aged. There's a muscular sourness to the nose rather than biting, heavy on the cedar, leather, loamy earth, wet fallen tree leaves, while yet bringing a full arsenal of blackberry, black currant, black cherry fruit as well as squeezed orange peels, floral brush,

big and close to clumsily brash for the appellation, still no denying its power to attract. In the mouth it's full-bodied with a generous tannin and acidity, stopping short of administering a beatdown. The sourness gives the fruit an Italian plum, cranberry edge to the base red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. For all of its aggressiveness, fruit lasts through the finish fully. Orange and grapefruit citrus sting the lips. Tea leaf, tree bark, poor dirt earth and stone anchor it, the cedar notes about the most you'd get as a suggestion of oak. What might intrigue the most is that it does not leave you with the impression of great ageability while concurrently evincing the structure one normally associates with such capability. Which suggests a high utility as a restaurant wine list Bordeaux, relatively on the cheap. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. 88

Val de Salis

Languedoc/Roussillon, Pays d'Oc

Marselan

2009, \$10.99, 13.6%

Mild duskiness to the deep purple core, just about full opacity, the rims comprised of fresh blood red with a crimson touch, perfectly reflective surface, hard to beat this kind of saturation. There's some wet wood smoke, earth and leather which hops into the nose and stabilizes the rich plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit, the herbaceousness is more like bitter wild grasses than unripe green, this component certainly cloaked by a more pleasing and broad florality. Full-bodied, close to ketchup like thickness, gluey, from the first sip you get a pull towards dryness and some underlying tannin with a counter-pull of sweet plum/prune, cassis, blackberry, blueberry fruit. Smidgeon of ginger spice, orange peel, rose water, pretty enough. Still, the more you taste it the more a more briny, pickled side comes out, with it horsehide and cedar chips. It truly tastes like a hybrid grape, you can feel it trying to acquire certain aspects of its parents and avoid others. In the end it's a rich, easy sipper that will gnaw at your subconscious without forcing you to confront it directly. (Synthetic Cork: Vinotop) 87

Saint André de Figuière (Famille Combard)

Provence, Côtes de Provence, François Cuvée

Signature

Blend

2009, \$14.99, 12.5%

Deep magenta lends vivacity to the also vivid purple core, even the pinkish cast around the rims, add in the shiny surface and it's a high gloss magazine photo shoot. There's a pleasing musky heaviness to the nose, floral, earthy and a touch meaty, the oak toast is close to a mutter, close to no expressive sweetness but no lack of plum, blackberry, cherry fruit scents,

weak orange zest, no funk nor herbaceousness present, lack of flaws only gets you so far. Full-bodied, more deep than broad, has flesh and what's there is dense, still not anything close to voluptuous. Which, arguably, is not for the best as the tannins are stronger than can be supported, leading to a drying finish. The cherry, blackberry, plum fruit checks in and out for their shift, no overtime. Florality and fusion of chocolate and orange pekoe tea attempt to fill in the holes. There is a nice lift into inner mouth perfume, On the rugged side, even has a chip on its shoulder. A good midweek wine for those who prefer an honest, unvarnished table wine. 30% Syrah, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Grenache, 15% Cinsault. (Synthetic Cork) 87

Miquel Père et Fils, Laurent

Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc, Syrah-Grenache

Blend

2009, \$11.99, 13.5%

Clean purple core, saturated but not intensely deep, the rims do though bring heavy artillery of red-magenta, violet and ruby, no questioning the richness here, sits attractively in the glass, bit of a showoff. Cocoa, mocha and vanilla powder spread generously through the nose, pushes back the black cherry, blackberry, plum scents for a good few ticks, the wildflower foundation fluffy and youthful, wisely stays primary and does not try to do too much with what is at its disposal. Medium-bodied, plush and juicy, really loads up on the plum, cassis, black cherry, blackberry fruit and kicks it up further with notes of caramel, toffee, butterscotch and vanilla fudge. So, yeah, it's sweet. Not a whole lot of tannin nor acidity, stays upright by virtue of its momentum. Floral with a sweet, wet orange to tangelo citrus component. Not much more to say here, lots of sugar and spice, you want terroir keep moving, son. 75% Syrah, 25% Grenache. (Synthetic Cork) 87

Clos Troteligotte

Southwest France, Cahors, K Price

Malbec

2006, \$17.99, 13.0%

Very deep purple unto black core, fully opaque, well saturated red-magenta rims, reflective surface knits it all together. The nose changes a lot after opening the bottle, lots of peanut shells, burnt buttered toast and cane sugar then you get more pressed flowers, lemon peel, orange pekoe tea, given its overall high degree of oakiness the purity of the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit scents discernible, firmness helps it stick around longer than might be expected. Medium-bodied, the acidity throws its shoulder into you from the start and contributes to its good posture. Orange zest, leather,

loam and forest scrub, pine and sage. Savory salty edge to the red cherry, red currant, raspberry fruit, yet, in no way light. Clay and ashen soil sturdy the finish. In the final analysis, confuses you as to whether it is crafted along more traditional dictates or trying to doll itself up for general appeal. 87

Brana, Domaine  
Southwest France, Irouléguay, Ohitza  
Blend  
2007, \$19.99, 12.5%

The liquid is a crystal clear violet-ruby, however, there are plenty of solid sediment chunks to be found, particularly stuck to the inside of the cork, more of a straight-up crimson red at the rims, could see some orange in its future. There's a rugged dryness to the nose, as in not dried out, simply no excess or fat, plenty of twigs, tree bark, black tea leaves, tar, dried orange peels, the general smokiness helps lift the red cherry, red currant fruit scents, which otherwise might get trampled over. Medium-bodied, nicely fluid with integration and balance, no unexpected dips. At the same time, it is dry and tannic to near distraction, here more rawly herbaceous, tree leaves and bark, tea leaves supplement the greenness. The orange, lemon citrus makes an argument for noticing pressed flowers. The currant, cherry, Italian plum fruit has a compressed feel to it. Hollows out some before the finish. Not a bad little wine, not sure if not the best vintage to achieve the most desirable primary material or younger vines or some shit like that. 50% Tannat, 30% Cabernet Franc, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Composite Cork) 86

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Cheverny, La Gravotte  
Pinot Noir  
2009, \$32.99, 12.8%

Thin gauziness helps to solidify the ruby-purple core, duller red further out, average surface shine, otherwise sits in there impassively. In the nose the sour cranberry, raspberry, red cherry scents at home with dried orange and lemon peels, cut lawn grass, stone strewn earth, sage and fennel, expands and expands until it just about breaks the seams of your nostrils. Full-bodied and sluggish, not that there's any lack of tannin or acidity, however, it's a cement-based structure not lean and wiry. The raspberry, cranberry, pomegranate, cherry fruit has credible depth and lasts close enough to the finish. Herbaceous and minerally, sometimes good, sometimes bad, the word "chunky" comes to mind. Kinda peppery, hot spice. Perhaps one might suggest that it leans too much on terroir to mask the lack of finesse in the fruit department. After a couple of glasses, you get tired of drinking it. 86

## FRANCE WHITE

Scherer, André  
Alsace  
Gewürztraminer  
2009, \$23.99, 13.0%

Mostly white to some yellow straw color, both shiny and possessed of good layering, the rims, however, are close to devoid of hue, looks pretty good in the glass. The nose does a good job of offering creamy whipped cream, litchee nut, cinnamon and honey alongside highly ripened but too excessively sweet apricot, pear, yellow apple, kiwi fruit scents, the floral musk also displays restraint, given its overall weight has a surprisingly delicate lift. Full-bodied attack, sheds weight into a lighter and more nimble presentation through the finish. The sweetness is akin to finer spun cane sugar mixed with honey, orange spice, ginger, cinnamon and litchee. Fleshy pear, apple, apricot that leans a little towards pineapple, nectarine without getting "tropical" per se. Vanilla and whipped cream accents permeate the whole, add cushion. The acidity is about average plus for the grape, not special but adequate. The citrus picks up the back half nicely. Add a bit more tingle and spring to its step and you really have something. 89

Roally, Domaine de  
Burgundy, Viré-Clessé, Tradition  
Chardonnay  
2008, \$25.99, 13.5%

Rich golden hue with an aged, if not oxidized, appearance, soft semi-translucency, nicely full rims and decent shine. The nose has an element of raw pie dough and sweet baking spices to it, orange infusion, honey without it all getting overdone, over time a minerally sparkle develops, floral lift helps the yellow apple, peach, pear, melon fruit chug forward, overall on the relaxed side, not that erect or full of nervous energy. Medium-bodied, uses all of its weight to maximal effect via round texture and outwards pressure against the cheeks, as well as good sink into the tongue. The acidity decent, mops up excess juice here and there, at times even suggests having an edge. Cinnamon, ginger spice, tart mandarin orange citrus, lilac powder, honey, seems more interesting in achieving contrast of flavors and textures than finding a sole voice. Yellow and green apple, peach, apricot, pear fruit, just the basics, albeit well done. For all of its sweetness, through the back half a murmur of greenness appears, again as much for contrast as required presence. Too much of a workout on its own but should perform much better with food. 87

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Cheverny, Frileuse  
Blend

2009, \$17.99, 14.0%

Filmy yellow gold liquid, on the whole transparent, flat surface, hue holds on well at the rims, very light orange tint suggests this will deepen over time. The nose is more “relaxed” than oxidized, honey, lemon drop, pie crust, cane sugar, unassuming apricot, peach, pear, yellow apple fruit chugs along, cinnamon spice, you do get a modicum of stone and white smoke but this is definitely in a supplementary role. Medium-bodied, the acidity sluggish and can’t quite assert itself although still leaves you thinking it could should such be desired. As a result, softer, pliant mouth feel with any dryness holding off towards the end. Apple, apricot, pear, melon fruit equaled by juicy lemon, orange citrus. Yeast, pie dough fit with the honey and molasses glaze, even some vanilla pudding notes. Stream water and washed white pebbles, nothing close to minerals or metal. With all this said, crafts a momentary sour burst through the mid-palate, appreciated. A wine to be enjoyed in its immediacy, maybe just off-center enough to intrigue non-geeks into trying something on the more obscure side. Unspecified percentages of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay. 87

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Clos des  
Briords, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes

Melon de Bourgogne

2009, \$17.99, 12.0%

Pale, yet glowing, yellow straw color, has a good solidity to it in spite of lack of hue, sits firmly in the glass with a super-shiny surface, if anything there’s a brown tint before green or real gold. The nose offers honey, sweet tea leaf, flowers and fairly ripe pear, apple, peach fruit scents, brush of mint, not especially dense but does pack a punch and manages to get deeper into your nostrils than you might have expected, finishes with a lifting orange, lemon citrus aspect. Medium-bodied, the acidity just never seems to gain traction and breathe the needed life into the whole, instead just adding a patina of polished grit. Honey, mint and anise actually detract from the apricot, pear, apple, melon fruit, seem to stunt the natural spreading forth rather than provide beneficial makeup. The orange, lemon, tangerine citrus likewise works towards middling effect. Has good weight in the mid-palate. Over time you start to get a smoky stoniness, however, this is not a featured element. One might aver that it’s actually too pleasant and lacks the desired killer attitude. In any event, drink short-term and don’t worry about what it will be like in ten years. 87

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Les Gras  
Moutons

Melon de Bourgogne

2009, \$18.99, 12.0%

While the white-green straw coloration is pale, the liquid itself shines brilliantly, sufficient layering under to surface to lend some solidity. Blunt, if penetrating, entry into the nose, more stony and chalky than mineral, decent juiciness to the orange, grapefruit citrus element, drags out more lilac to violet flowers, black licorice, the peach, apricot, pear fruit succinct, short of brusque, performs much better close to room temperature, keeps most of whatever cut it has. In the mouth it’s light to medium-bodied, the acidity is broad but flattened as well, for all the ground it covers, does not bring much life. Dry without the expected scrubbing action, however, this does seem to highlight more metallic notes than basic stone. Crisper contour to the lemon, orange citrus, same might be said for the green apple, pear, apricot fruit. Light twig to tree bark notes. The biggest issue here is the lack of length and ability to hold your attention. As if, well thought out but no chance of making a purse of a sow’s ear. 86

## ITALY RED

Occhipinti, Azienda Agricola Arianna  
Sicilia, SP68

Blend

2009, \$28.99, 13.0%

Clean ruby to garnet tinted core, purple core, darker than most of its competition, develops an orange tint further out at the rims, pleasingly hued. Big fruity nose of strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit with a wet florality dripped on top, bit of brown sugar, thick orange pulp, little bit of pine needle as well, bountiful perfume, very long presence. Medium-bodied, on the soft side but certainly has enough of a tannic coating to restrain unnecessary sweetness. Orange and white grapefruit citrus sweet and sour, helps keep things nimble. Oodles of strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, suave and stretches out with ease towards the finish. Light note of golden raisin. This at the same time as the acidity which also highlights olive pit and tea leaves. Very seductive, hard to see someone not liking this. Unspecified percentages of Nero d’Avola, Frappato. (Composite Cork: Diam) 92

Occhipinti, Azienda Agricola Arianna  
Sicilia

Frappato

2008, \$35.99, 13.0%

Completely transparent, the core hued a scarlet-purple with mild dropoff to redder garnet at the rims, brush of orange too, the surface glistens very well. Large floral

perfume sets the tone in the nose for a pretty experience of lilacs and roses, orange blossom, super-ripe strawberry, watermelon, cherry scents on the verge of explosive, blends in some iced tea accents, maybe a touch of mint or forest breeze, so fresh that you don't even stop to look for much beyond the flowers and fruit. In the mouth it's light to medium-bodied, the acidity flexes sufficiently to display its presence beyond a doubt, still silly sweetness is the core message through and through. First sip makes you think someone slipped you a glass of sweet southern iced tea, that much orange pekoe tea in there. The strawberry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit flavors fit in perfectly, sweet herbs and cane sugar also present. Not a harsh word uttered, all kindness and sunny grace. Happiness in a glass. 91

Nespoli, Poderi dal

Emilia-Romagna, Sangiovese de Romagna, Fico Grande

Sangiovese

2009, \$14.99, 12.5%

Clean core, mostly purple however presents a good deal of bright brick red to scarlet hues, even more crimson and scarlet around the rims, pleasing shiny luster across the surface. Sweet smoke, mesquite-like, layered on the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit scents, the nose full and sort of sluggish at times as a result, tea leaf, bark and wildflowers, orange pulp, rose petals, not especially pedigreed but it sure is friendly. Full-bodied, engagingly plush, the tannins sponge up nicely, no real drying effect though. Plum, cherry, blackberry fruit jolly but not rotund, dries up towards the finish. Juicy lemon, orange citrus in turn takes on a pith aspect over time. Pleasing floral breeze fills the mid-palate. Takes on a little bit of more rustic leaves, bark, earth over time. Acidity gets you salivating, adds the appearance of complexity where there really might need be. Should appeal to all kinds of good, honest folk. (Synthetic Cork: Integra Plus) 88

## ITALY WHITE

Vietti, Cantina

Piedmont, Roero Arneis

Arneis

2009, \$22.99, 13.5%

Sparkling clear yellow hay colored liquid, transparent with a mild shimmer below the surface, the latter highly reflective, not much hue to lose around the rims. Honey, mint and tangerine zest impel the nose at first, then raw nuts and peach, pear, apricot with a pit fruit aspect, slow developing florality helps it lift, more of a fresh perfume than musk. Medium-bodied plus, sweet attack emphasizing that honey, orange glaze, mint, nuts and pine breeze, while not overly done few could

say there's a lack of peach, pear, apple, apricot fruit, this cresting well in the center. The acidity is good and proportionate to the task, dries out the back half and plays up the nuttiness without taking the charm out of the sweetness. Sufficient flesh to maintain forward momentum through the finish, might seem heavy to some. Solid delivery for what seems to be the going rate for this category of wine these days. 89

Garofoli, Casa Vinicola Gioacchino

Marche, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico

Superiore, Podium

Verdicchio

2008, \$19.99, 14.0%

Simple golden straw color, distorting shimmer below the surface which helps extend things through the rims, ability to pool deepens glass presence. The nose is extremely creamy with vanilla to whipped cream accents, mint, orange blossom and rose petals fill 'er up further, the apricot, peach, red apple scents ripe and full, nothing close to out of place, maximizes every opportunity to engage and please. Full-bodied, somewhat soft, however, the density gives it amplitude and seriousness. The relative lack of acidity does not impair advent of lemon to orange zest and a slightly saline minerality. These, though, recede in favor of that whipped cream, vanilla edge as well as some butterscotch and mint. Well-packed apricot, peach, pineapple, nectarine fruit gains sourness as well as sugar concentration as the wine warms. Only the merest suggestion of grassiness. For its weight, smooth and fluid with nary a rough patch to be found. Long, steady finish, no great crescendo but you can feel it for some time. Leaves you with the impression that it's intentionally crafted to impress big money with smaller palate. 89

Occhipinti, Azienda Agricola Arianna

Sicilia, SP68 Bianco

Blend

2009, \$25.99, 11.0%

Mildly cloudy, orange hued liquid, peters out around the rims, doesn't necessarily seem older than its years but could use more shine to catch the light. Strongly perfumed nose of lilacs and violets, orange mist, fuzzy peach and apricot fruit scents, some spring water and stone, airy without an anchor, once you digest all that florality there's not a lot left to move to. Medium-bodied, dry and a touch dusty, however, all that floral breeze sweeps things along so it can't pinch the tongue. The tangerine to lemon citrus tighter here with a tart core and a stinging zest. The apricot, peach, apple fruit the weakest link, hard to say there's anything here of substance. The stone, mineral aspect too is light and doesn't bring the sort of complexity needed to compensate for lack of fruit.

Fairly decent acidity thus wasted by lack of material to channel. Weak finish. Unspecified percentages of Albanello, Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria). (Composite Cork: Diam) 85

## GERMANY WHITE

Christmann, Weingut A.  
Pfalz, Riesling I Trocken AP #3  
Riesling  
2009, \$23.99, 11.5%

Basic golden color of above average depth, holds nicely through the rims, has decent shine across the surface but strength visually is in its solidity. Honey and brown sugar sweeten up the nose, beats the smokiness to the punch so that the stone and mineral aspects do not take up too much territory, the orange to lemon citrus more reticent than expected, conversely, for a trocken wine the level of apricot, peach, kumquat, guava, pineapple fruit is acceptable and gets a slight boost from floral notes, on the whole offers a little bit of most, more enjoyable on the way to room temperature. Medium-bodied, evasive if not trying at times to give you the stiff upper lip. The saline and minerals come close to completely equaling the honey, licorice, mint and violet parts, not a mutual cancellation, however, no one gets the upper hand for sure. You can taste the ripeness in the apricot, peach, pear, melon fruit even as the desired dryness does not get challenged. Savory mix of white and pink grapefruit, mandarin orange and lemon citrus, never too tart nor cutting. Does begin to suggest a green streak near the finish, not that unsettling yet there. 87

## AUSTRIA RED

Heinrich, Gernot  
Burgenland, Red  
Blend  
2008, \$17.99, 12.5%

Immaculately clear, the red-ruby core has a little purple in there for darkening purposes, more of a basic "red" around the rims, not bricking nor especially scarlet nor crimson. Smoky nose, you get a bunch of burning wood as well as pungently metallic earth, at the same time there's such an abundance of raspberry, strawberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit scents that they win out in the end, this opens a path for caramel and orange juice accents as well, seems intent on maximizing the presence of any sweet element but not to the full exclusion of all else. Medium-bodied, smooth and close to silky mouthfeel with a refreshing note of acidity and most tannin polished away. The smoke more grill-like here with molasses and brown sugar burning off with meat fat. Sugary grapefruit and orange citrus splashed on top of

the raspberry, blackberry, strawberry, cherry fruit, here the latter capable of a balancing tart note. The earth more clay, sand or silt than rich black soil. Burnt butterscotch and caramel makes you think someone was on the phone instead of watching what was going down in the kitchen. Not exactly "mainstream" but does offer a flavor array that most should find familiar. Sweetness lasts fully through the finish. 60% Zweigelt, 30% Blaufränkisch, 10% Sankt Laurent. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 88

## AUSTRIA WHITE

Markowitsch, Weingut Gerhard  
Carnuntum  
Ried Schanzäcker  
Grüner Veltliner  
2009, \$12.99, 13.0%

Plainspoken golden color, neither remarkably strong nor weak, reaches fully into the rims with a modest translucent shimmer below the surface, that's about it. Soft and gregarious nose of floral dew, melon, apple, peach and apricot fruit, black licorice and mint, waft of stone and streamwater, nothing really falls out of place here, does well by itself in staying simple. Medium-bodied, here too on the soft side, sinks into your mouth pores to prolong its presence. While the acidity is low, you do get more orange to mixed grapefruit citrus here, albeit of the juicy, sweet stripe. Some snap pea and white pepper but it's more or less all about the peach, apricot, yellow apple, pear, green melon fruit. The flower petals, licorice and mint linger nicely, light nuance of tonic water. On the whole, it's more of a highly enjoyable white wine than it is a true expression of the grape's personality. (Screwcap: Stelvin+) 88

## AUSTRALIA WHITE

Frankland Estate  
Western Australia, Frankland River, Isolation Ridge  
Vineyard  
Riesling  
2009, \$34.99, 12.0%

While the yellow coloration is pale and somewhat dilute, has sufficient glow as well as translucent shimmer to carve out good glass presence, not much difference from core to rims. The nose is surprisingly open and unfolds licorice, mint, violets, rubber and orange peel with casual ease, suggestion of honey grounds the apricot, red apple, peach scents in your nostrils, expands unobtrusively to increase its length by some measure. Full-bodied, albeit not as firm nor "tough minded" as might be expected, the acidity has more dull grip than keen cut. The lemon, white grapefruit citrus teams up with the chunky minerals and shale to bring some muscle, the rubber element

helps fatten up the middle too. Leaner profile to the fruit, pear, green apple, apricot, pineapple, more pit and skin than pulp. Slow to develop, yet attractive, floral side supplemented by licorice and mint. Finishes with this mineral water to quinine scrubbing sensation. What's missing is the wattage and vigor, most else is there. (Screwcap) 88

## ARGENTINA RED

Árido

Mendoza

Malbec

2008, \$9.99, 14.5%

Standard purple core, lightened a touch by a red-ruby tint, dark but transparent through that, red-magenta to scarlet hued rims, plays the part of a red wine. Almost grapey nose, cherry, apricot, raspberry fruit scents, orange juice, at times you get a brush of tomato skin, floral with some milk chocolate, ginger spice, steamrolls into you fast enough that you have to concentrate to just try and separate and assess the various scents. Full-bodied, if not fat, piles on the blueberry, blackberry, raspberry, cherry fruit while loading the buffet plate with honey, molasses and orange reduction. Odd milky accents sort of come out of nowhere but thankfully can be dismissed. No structure outside of base weight, tannin and acidity in a witness protection program. Cinnamon, ginger spice gives it a baked dough to pie crust aspect. While there is a vague drying astringency at the end, you just about have to look for it to find it. Crowd pleaser. (Screwcap) 87

Diseño (Blends of Mendoza S.A.)

Mendoza, Old Vine

Malbec

2009, \$10.99, 14.5%

Ruby to brick red inflected purple core, dark but clarity wins out over opacity, this quite evident through the wide magenta rims, shiny surface too. Powdered flower dust, cedar, spice and a mild swirl of caramel and toffee, mix of raspberry, blackberry, cherry and slighter strawberry fruit, unassuming enough that a burst of dried grass and brown earth helps keep it center stage. Medium-bodied, displays a credible acidic spine so as to both have nice posture and bring some sour liveliness to the red cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit. Never gets that layered or deep but does not stay balanced and even throughout. Needs to open to hit you with some vanilla, butterscotch and oak toast. Streamlined, no excess, pushes nicely through the finish. (Synthetic Cork: Supremecorq) 87

Codorníu Argentina S.A.

Mendoza, Septima

Malbec

2009, \$11.99, 14.0%

Deep, semi-glowing purple core which easily achieves opacity, very broad red-ruby to garnet rims, oodles of color. The nose offers a quick floral spritz before spreading into plum, black cherry, cassis fruit scents, not overly sugary, some cedar and twigs but more vanilla powder and generalized oak toast, presents more density and weight than expressivity. Full-bodied, somewhat spicy with oak toast, ginger, vanilla and cedar to mesquite notes. Dulls through the mid-palate due to the sluggishness of the cherry, currant, plum fruit, ripe yet not juicy. Still, smoothly textured with tamed tannins and no real rough patches. Conversely, edge of tomato skin not especially welcome. Fleshy finish, doesn't lose any weight so you keep noticing it. Middle of the road without much at the extremes, pro or con. (Composite Cork: Diam) 86

Sur Andino

Mendoza, Entrada

Malbec

2009, \$7.99, 14.0%

Purple core, basic with red ruby influence, spotless clarity makes the ruby to magenta rims hum warmly. The nose sort of hurries the candied cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit to the stage, the rushed nature makes it rely on caramel, toffee, butterscotch accents for length, touches of menthol and orange spice, while not showing distinctly green notes does offer a kind of fluffy leafiness which takes more space with each sniff. In the mouth it's caught between light and medium-bodied, derives heft from the oak, caramel, butterscotch, buttered toast and vanilla powder. The cherry, raspberry, blueberry fruit seems more artificially sweetened than fully ripened. Yet, sweet nonetheless. Mesquite smoke, menthol, licorice gain vague hold. Any tannins have a slight grit to them, not particularly drying but not naturally structuring either. Adequate for what it is, however, even at the price, you expect a bit more sense of the grape and less overt makeup. (Screwcap) 84

Molto!

Mendoza, Lujan de Cuyo, Ceppi Vineyard

Malbec

2008, \$10.99, 13.9%

Clear purple core with a palpable ruby tint, more brick red, clay red to fashion the broad rims, perhaps looks a bit older than it is. The nose has a noticeable green streak, too herbaceous for the cherry, raspberry scents to show decently, woody with burning smoke notes, minerally earth, burst of orange to white grapefruit citrus, never really finds its balance and stride.

Medium-bodied, achieves a sappy, gluey mouth feel immediately but, as in the nose, the herbaceousness stamps out much of the potential fun right from the get-go. Prune embellishment to the plum, black cherry fruit, seems artificially sweetened. The orange, grapefruit citrus is sour yet this helps create some lift and separation from the tongue. Wood, cracked leather and rawhide with some anise. Underripe tannins dry out the mid-palate through finish.  
(Screwcap) 83

Naiara  
Mendoza  
Malbec

2007, \$11.99, 13.5%

The blackish purple core is fully opaque, burnt orange touch to the brick red rims, close to “brooding” in appearance. The nose comes across as soupy, lots of stewed tomato and prune to distract, otherwise you get plum, cherry, ginger to cinnamon spice and a twiggy, leafy aspect. Full-bodied, bottom-heavy and more or less on life support, tired even at this relatively early stage. Little discernible tannin or acidity to prop things up, prune, fig as prominent as cherry, plum, even the baking spices lack kick. Burnt wood, grill smoke touch only detracts further from a more fluid presentation. Metallic, tomato skin, sour orange peels, just isn’t delivering a pleasurable message. Not sure if one could suggest it was much better right out of the gate.  
(Synthetic Cork) 82