

The Hanes Wine Review, December 2006 Edition

"Familiarity breeds contempt." Or, so the saying goes. So, what does unfamiliarity breed? A Hanes essay on alternative grape choices!

To wit, Austria makes a good amount of wine, known mostly for their white wines. These days production is probably around 75% white, 25% red. However, it's the red wines we want to focus on here. Hanes was thinking. For once. A lot of the Austrian red wine that is gaining traction in the American marketplace are those made from "international" grapes, that is, grapes like Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir. Familiarity. Meanwhile, many "indigenous" Austrian grapes have trouble being recognized or acquiring shelf space. Unfamiliarity. The thinking part. Just how long have the international grapes competed against the indigenous grapes for vineyard acreage? Even if they don't call them acres there? How can we help the local team?

The wine industry as a whole in Austria has had many ups and downs. Winemaking there goes back to the age of the Celts, Romans and into the Middle Ages. Back then considerably more land was under vine than today. But we live in a time of quality, not quantity, people. Currently, there are four major wine regions comprised of 19 smaller wine areas. Red wine is produced in all of these areas but certain areas are more known for crafting the best reds Austria has to offer. Weinland and Weinviertel produce the most red wine but not necessarily always the highest quality. Quality-wise, one could probably make a short list of Donauland, Burgenland (which really is broken down into northern, middle and southern parts), Neusiedlersee, Carnuntum, Thermenregion and Kremstal. Naturally, there will always be exceptions to such a list, both pro and con.

The more recent ups and downs in the Austrian wine industry have in some ways been a boon to red wine production. Bad things like outbreaks of phylloxera-based disease or oidium (powdery mildew) infection provided opportunity to replant vineyards with different grapes, prodding selective reassessment and experimentation. It's harder to say, but the scandal in the 1980's involving certain Austrian producers illegally adding diethylene glycol to white wines to add body and sweetness may have forced the industry to focus more on red wines as a way of gaining back international confidence and market share. In any event, one can say that the 1980's was when red wine production began to be taken seriously in a larger, more widespread manner.

No duh, but this was when grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Pinot Noir began to be planted with increasing rapidity. As the usual formula goes, increased use of oak was and is also employed. Because Austria labels their wines with the name of the grape, these best known grapes make more of a splash abroad, especially when crafted to taste like what the Ausländer expect them to taste like. Mittelburgenland is the new Napa! And, surprise, surprise, most of these sorts of reds are the most expensive coming out of Austria today, in some cases well over \$50 a bottle. Note that in the case of Pinot Noir, certain producers will label the bottling with the more Germanic names of Blauer Burgunder, Blauburgunder or Blauer Spätburgunder. Keep that straight, OK? These are obviously the wineries without savvy marketing consultants.

During this process, less marketing and general popularization has been done for the red wine grapes more historically grown in Austria. Additionally, it seems little has been done to export vines of these grapes to other wine regions of the world so as to gain secondary exposure that way. So, while we see Italian grapes like Sangiovese or Nebbiolo or a Spanish grape like Tempranillo grown in California, no Austrian grapes. But, watch out, one day it will be the "next hot thing" and on the cover of *Wine Spectator*!

So, what are these grapes, so often possessed of charm and flavor, if not recognition?

Blaufränkisch is probably Austria's classiest, most complex indigenous red wine grape. The Franks are those credited with the planting of the grape, a sign of high quality in those wacky medieval times (as opposed to those lousy *heunisch* ["Hunnic"] wines). The "blau" part, in case you have not yet surmised, pertains to the grape's "blue" color. Calling a grape blue is very popular in Austria. Poor depressed grapes. Anyway, in attestation to *Blaufränkisch*'s quality, it is one of the few grapes well-known and grown elsewhere. Germany has some, Friuli in Italy has some. Washington State here in America grows some, normally called "Lemberger." It's popular too in Hungary where it goes by the name of Lois Lane. Whoops, that is Kékfrankos. Some Hungarian reds imported into the U.S. will label these wines with this grape name. And now you know it's *Blaufränkisch*. Sweet. *Blaufränkisch* typically makes full-bodied, sturdy wines of very high acidity and more moderate tannins. Lots of dark fruit, velvety grip and can be earthy or floral with some spice. Because of its fuller body, a lot of the time winemakers think it can handle bigger doses of oak. That's too bad. Good *Blaufränkisch* wines should cost between \$15 and \$30 and are worth seeking out if you want to really see what "alternative" Austrian reds are about.

Sankt Laurent actually is supposed to originate in France and most likely came to Austria via Germany in the late 19th century. Most of the time it's name gets shortened to St. Laurent. While losing some popularity due to its difficulty to grow, it has more personality than many other Austrian reds. When done right. It's capable of a variety of body weights, normally presents red cherry and raspberry fruit flavors and in many respects is close to Pinot Noir (flavor-wise and in that difficulty to grow). The better ones have good acidic bite and even a bitter, herbaceous edge that keeps it fresh in the mouth. Tends to be more transparent to the soil and minerality too. It's distinctiveness will turn some imbibers on, some off. Its uniqueness also results in small portions being added to blends, adding nuances to the juice of the other grapes. St. Laurent can be pricey, normally over \$20 if not more per bottle.

Zweigelt remains Austria's most widely planted red wine grape. It is bottled on its own or as the backbone of many blends. Alternative names for the grape are Blauer Zweigelt and Rotburger. An Austrian dude named Fritz Zweigelt created the grape by crossing Blaufränkisch and Sankt Laurent in 1922. Zweigelt grows vigorously and creates higher yields, making it popular with many winegrowers. It's usually medium to full-bodied, smooth and often with an herbaceous or peppery kick to it. It can age decently in some circumstances but usually is consumed young. Because of the quantity produced, Zweigelt gets exported to the U.S. in larger quantities than its other indigenous peers. This despite having a name incredibly likely to scare off the average wine consumer. Prices vary but one can find highly representative bottles for under \$16, if your wine store knows what they are doing.

Blauer Portugieser is the "poor relations" of Austria's historically grown grapes. It serves a very important purpose — it grows easily and tastes decent. So, you can make a lot of it and more people get drunk than would otherwise. What's wrong with that? Lore has the grape coming to Austria from Portugal centuries ago, thus the name, but this has never been accurately demonstrated. Its wines are generally soft with good body and low tannins and acidity. Good degree of juicy mixed red fruit flavors, on the sweet side with lower alcohol levels. Basic quaffing wine, would probably come in a box here in America. The grape is also grown with regularity in Germany and Eastern Europe. Very rarely exported to the U.S. so chances are you won't be seeing any at the wine store. Maybe some maverick winemaker creates a high end bottling from low yielding, older vineyards of Blauer Portugieser and it's on a wine list at some fancy Austrian restaurant. But doubt it.

Blauburger is another wild card entry. It's an additional creation by Dr. Zweigelt, in 1923, crossing Portugieser with Blaufränkisch. From what Hanes can gather, it's more like the former than the latter. Makes for a simple, light-bodied wine that ripens early, thus well-suited for cooler climes. It's like the fourth most widely planted red grapevine in Austria. Very dark in color. Lowish tannins and average acidity. The guess is that a lot of the juice goes into blends. Never had a Blauburger wine here in America, only in Austria. It is what it is, making for serviceable wines for the huddled masses. Hey, don't blame Dr. Zweigelt, you don't hit one out of the ballpark every time.

There's a few more grapes like *Rössler* or *Blauer Wildbacher* but, hell, you'd have a hard time finding them in Austria, never mind here. The basic focus should be on Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch and St. Laurent, the wines which truly reflect what Austrian red wines can be about. Of course, Hanes does enjoy many an Austrian Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir and such wines can show the essence of their place of origin quite nicely. However, these wines should not be sought out and consumed to the exclusion of their lesser recognized brethren!

As for food pairings and the like, these kind of Austrian reds are on the whole versatile enough to go with many sorts of dishes. Standards might be boiled beef, roasted pork, lambchops or grilled vegetables. Poultry works too but nothing too light. In addition, salmon has been known to pair well here. Avoid preparations which may be too sweet, incline more towards recipes with garlic or citrus in them. Otherwise, you can just drink these wines straight from the bottle on a park bench.

For those of you light on the lingo, as with the white wines of Austria, many reds are labeled with the word "Troocken" which means "dry." It's nice to know but mostly superfluous, so no need to pay that much attention or get distracted by the designation.

Think of it, a whole world of wine choices await you when you begin to sample the group of Austrian reds which include Zweigelt, the grape destined to be dead last in every alphabetical grape listing known to humanity!

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This month's big winners... Not really the best month for Hanes's gullet with the top shelf brands but a few nice ones. Porter Creek is not a winery Hanes knows that much about but he has had their old vine Carignane before, prompting a purchase of their 2004. Which proved a smooth move as it kicked butt for under \$20. Never heard of 75 Wine Co. before and while the name is sorta dumb, their 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon is a solid, non-flashy Napa Cab for a few bucks over \$20, an astonishing fact in itself. Only made in small amounts, Hanes is an official slut for the white blend from Tensley and the Camp 4 Vineyard. At \$30 it isn't cheap but such a guilty pleasure! Yummy. Paul Pernot remains a champion of affordable Puligny-Montrachet. Although the luster is off with the leap in price on the 2005 wines. Still if someone else is buying, Hanes is drinking.

The best \$15 and under picks... Not many people even know Uva di Troia is a grape. But the good folks at Santa Lucia in Puglia do, and they make a nice cheap one for about \$11. Clean, fresh and fun. A highly respectable find this month was the 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon from a winery called Cabernet de Los Andes from Catamarca in Argentina. For \$9, this is one serious wine. Never heard of the importer before so shouldn't be easy to find. Hey, that's why god made Wine Searcher. Hanes is not sure of the actual production size, but for a product with a decent amount to go on shelves, Mud House makes a consistent New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc at a sweet price of \$12. The 2006 is a very good wine, not something worth double the price but absolutely worth what it costs. Some smaller production, or at least not hugely exported, South African wines continue to make it to the shores of the U.S. of A. The 2004 Shiraz "Vintage Selection" from Spier was a spur of the moment purchase as Hanes's family shopped for dinner at Path-Mark and it proved a nice little find for \$15. Good character and personality. For like \$5 one would be hard pressed to find a wine (at least here in NYC), with better "quality-price ratio" than the 2005 red table wine "Porca de Murça" from Douro, Portugal. Even if the producer is truly Real Companhia Velha, a fact hard to find via the label. Hanes popped a Bonarda this month! Alas, it was

from Familia Mayol in Mendoza, Argentina! Not alas, truly, as it was quite nice, familiar while off-center enough to hold interest. Not a lot made so you may have to search for it.

Both are cheap enough to fall into this section so let's note them here. Another first for Hanes, this time his first wines from West Virginia! Both a Cabernet Sauvignon and a Chardonnay, both were drinkable enough. They are designated as "American" which makes Hanes wonder if *all* the grapes are from West Virginia. Regrettably, an email to the winery went unanswered. Anyway, one more U.S. state processed for posterity.

And the disappointments... Pascal Cotat remains the "other" Cotat to Hanes, lagging behind François. In 2005 this opinion was not challenged by his Sancerre, Les Monts Damnés. For over \$40, lots of other fish in the sea. Kissing frogs is part of the Hanes game, so his \$9 was laid down for the 2006 Steenberg Sauvignon Blanc from South Africa, hoping for a bargain winner. No such luck, kinda watery. Sigh. Thanks to the kindness of the Ben-efactor, Hanes got to try two new 2004 red Burgundies from Domaine Anne Gros. While nice, neither really merits the \$60-\$80 they cost. Blame the weak dollar. Or human greed. Or your neighbor Cyrus. But don't blame Hanes. Hanes once tried a basic Barbaresco from Cantina del Pino and liked it. So he was happy to try their entry level 2004 "Langhe" Nebbiolo. It's not Barbaresco. Hanes loves Sobon's Zinfandel from their Lubenko Vineyard in Fiddletown, Amador. But every other Zin he tries for them falls short of this bar. So too the 2004 Cougar Hill Vineyard Zin. While their 2001 version of the wine rocked, the 2002 Rioja Reserva from Muga suffers from an average at best year. Disappointing mostly as the fondness for the 2001 remains active in Hanes's mind, if not belly. Hanes doesn't really "get" the wines from Kunin in California despite having tried many. Same for their 2005 Châteauneuf-du-Pape styled blend called "Pape Star." At least the taste was free.

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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/oldervintages2006.html>

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 #26: "Micro-oxygenating your liver since 1999!"

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 December!

CALIFORNIA RED

Porter Creek
 Alexander Valley, Angeli Vineyard, Old Vine
 Carignane
 2004, \$18.99, 13.7%
 There's a natural gauziness to the ruby-violet colored core, becomes much redder near the rims while holding onto its richness of hue. Ruggedly complex nose of salt, dried game, minerally earth and tar, prettied up some by wildflowers and mocha chips, the red currant and cherry fruit scents are edgy and nervous on their feet but have heft. Medium-bodied with enough grip and staying power to make a bigger impression than via sheer weight. Juicy to the point of wetness but not excessively sweet, the currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit fills your mouth like it was poured from a jug. There's a certain cocoa, toasty

oakiness to it but it stays part of the fabric. The tea leaf, tobacco, beef and leather flavors are sturdy and thick, more lean on you than kick. Concentrated in a relaxed manner. A wine that thankfully remains underpriced for what it consistently delivers. 90

75 Wine Co.
 Napa Valley, Amber Knolls Vineyard
 Cabernet Sauvignon
 2004, \$21.99, 14.2%
 Quite clean and without blemish, its bright violet core turns into rust red with a mild ruby cast to form full rims. Fresh floral musk in the nose, new cedar, more minerality and earthiness than expected without any real grassiness, very little noticeable oak, excellent focus and thrust in the currant, blackberry scents. Medium-bodied, peppery and spicy enough so as to balance out the higher degree of vanilla cream. Slaps you with cedar, tobacco, leather, dried blood first, afterwards adds a slight floral brush. The

tannins have a rough edge, add vibrancy to the red currant, red cherry, Italian plum fruit, wiry as a snake. With time you can parse out some orange peel and forest loam but it holds off from getting too complex, choosing to rest and let you rest as well. It could age but actually probably better still young and rough and tumble. 89

Palmina
Santa Barbara County, Mattia
Blend

2004, \$23.99, 13.5%

Cloudy luminescence in the red magenta to purple color, much more pure ruby at the heavily saturated rims. Generous floral dew on the cherry, raspberry fruit scents, freshly lemony, smoothly presented and unobtrusively primary, even the earthiness is clean. Medium-bodied, dusty texture with more earth, leather, tree bark and leaves than in the nose. At the same time the robust cherry, strawberry, red raspberry fruit is fully juicy. The tannins are matted down, a bit tangled too. The acidity actually smoothes it out, though. Lightly "green" but thankfully this never develops. An interesting blend, doesn't really take it to an intellectual level. 55% Refosco, 30% Cabernet Franc, 15% Merlot. 88

Costa de Oro
Santa Maria Valley, Gold Coast Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2005, \$27.99, 14.2%

While the magenta-ruby color is light, there's enough cloudiness to lend depth, drops off to light pink rims. Strong cola element in the nose, borderline root beer at moments, orange slices, grassy earth, mildly roasted concentration in the red cherry, raspberry scents add sap. Medium-bodied, in the mouth the tannins and acidity are a touch out of step with the procession of grapefruit, cut grass, cola nut, solid clove and earth flavors. The roasted feel persists here in the persimmon, cherry, raspberry fruit. Dry finish, doesn't truly get to the point of complete integration, some bumps in the road. The nose is its most enjoyable and well-rounded part. 87

Sobon Estate
Amador County, Cougar Hill Vineyard
Zinfandel

2004, \$16.99, 15.9%

Clear, unblemished and shiny on the surface yet leaves your eyes a bit blazed out, straightforward ruby-purple core, getting on more towards red-ruby along the rims. Serious fruit in the nose, grapey blackberry, blueberry, plum scents that incline towards fresh raisins, the milk chocolate and earth tend to cancel each other out, the lemon and tar accents do the same. Full-bodied, fleshy but falls flat on the palate like it fell asleep between the glass and your lips. No lack of flavor in the blackberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit. And has a nice skeleton of tannins to support. On the herbaceous side, earthy too, betrays minimal oak spice or toast. Astringent finish, mouth really puckers, this brings the heat out more than would otherwise be the case. Not a bad wine per se but needs more clarity of purpose. 84% Zinfandel, 16% Petite Sirah. (Screwcap) 85

Kunin
Regional Blend, Central Coast, Pape Star
Blend
2005, \$21.99, 14.6%

Trim ruby-violet color, fairly consistent throughout with a faint turn towards crimson along the rims. Very perfumed nose, like walking through a department store's cologne department, faint earth and lemon, leans heavily on the red cherry, raspberry, blackberry scents, not especially longlasting nor complex but pure. Medium-bodied, yet dilute and semi-harsh on the attack, doesn't have the weight density to support the alcohol. Candied/powdered feel in the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, confectionary. Herbal in the mid-palate, again mild lemon notes but nothing close to earthiness, funkiness nor gaminess. Not much acidity, marginally more tannic structure. Inoffensively boring, if you are easily distracted. 50% Grenache, 25% Mourvèdre, 25% Syrah. 85

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Tensley
Santa Barbara County, Camp 4 Vineyard
Blend

2005, \$29.99, 14.9%

Densely layered gold unto amber color, bends light in many directions, highly reflective surface masks the loss of hue along the rims. Well-thought out and linear nose, arranged so that the obvious oak toast and vanilla cream hardly bothers, bursts with orange/lemon citrus, freshly gathered lilacs, farmer's market peaches and apricots, hangs expectantly in your nostrils. Full-bodied, all tangerine, blood orange, pink grapefruit sparkle with abundant dewy flower petals. OK, the toast is pretty, err, toasty and there's no lack of caramel. But after just a couple of sips, you're having more fun than watching a Monkees marathon on The USA Network. Mint, hint of chalk dust. Hits the right amount of juiciness in the apricot, pear, peach, yellow apple fruit. Not a lot of acidity, suggesting you chug it down ASAP. Sounds like a plan to me. 65% Grenache Blanc, 35% Roussanne. 91

Gundlach Bundschu
Sonoma Valley, Rhinefarm Vineyards
Gewürztraminer

2005, \$24.99, 13.8%

Pale yellow straw color, maintains its surface shine while losing most of its hue at the rims. There's a freshly boiled quality to the nuttiness in the nose, orange marmalade, rose water, much crisper and more attentive than expected, "just ripe enough to pick" character in the apricot, pear, yellow apple scents, misty perfume with attractively slow lift. Medium-bodied, the nuttiness again the first to land, then orange blossom, lemon-honey, rosewater, the peach, apricot, nectarine, pear fruit sinewy and of pleasing length. The acidity at a nice level for the grape, may rob some length but adds buoyancy. Not too sweet nor bottom-heavy, more versatile than many of its peers. 88

Kunin
Santa Ynez Valley, Stolpman Vineyards
Viognier

2005, \$31.99, 14.6%

The bright yellow color approaches day-glo proportions, not especially shiny but hums with warmth and catches your eye. There's a certain creaminess to the nose which contrasts with the keener lemon oil, apricot and peach skin scents, even the florality seems crisp, the former slows down the pacing and makes it cling to your nostril pores, almost as if against its will. In the mouth it has a medium body and comes on real spicy, the creamy

sensations there while easily cast aside in favor of sharp clove-led spices and lemon to tangerine zest. Can't finger the so-so acidity but there's a building tacky residue left behind as the wine moves forward through the palate. The lilacs and orange blossoms are inseparable from the apricot, pear, melon fruit. As the fruit fades, the spiciness remains, thus bringing out some alcoholic heat. Hits you harder than necessary but entirely unattractive nor poorly constructed. Gets you drunk too. 87

WASHINGTON WHITE

Seven Hills
Columbia Valley
Riesling
2005, \$14.99, 12.0%

Clear white straw color, high shine to it, really sparkles, close to full transparency. The nose would be very honeyed were it not for the bodacious florality and strong peppermint, after that evacuates the mineral water and apple to peach fruit scents gain grip. Medium-bodied, very sweet attack of finely powdered sugar and more aggressive honey. Tangy sweet tangerine, lime to pink grapefruit citrus. The florality is there yet not as dominant as in the nose. Gala apple, pear, nectarine, pineapple fruit push turning tropical. Adequate acidity, not really a guiding force. Full weight held through the finish, still completely sweet too. A vibrant wine for those with a sweet tooth, not so dapper. 87

OREGON WHITE

Belle Pente Wine Cellars
Willamette Valley, Belle Pente Vineyard
Chardonnay
2004, \$23.99, 13.7%

Brilliant reflections dance both on the surface and below, has a moderate yellow gold core, thins out near the rims. The oak in the nose is crisp without being toasty, clove spice, airy floral perfume, lemon peel, traces of mineral water, the peach, apricot scents build slowly to a crescendo. Full-bodied, toasty in the mouth yet also creamier, just as much texture from the oak as flavor although has spice to spare. Extra time on the lees adds to this texture. Broad array of lime, tangerine, lemon citrus. Develops a dusty texture by the mid-palate, good thing this deadens a little as it begins to reveal alcoholic heat. Angular feel in the peach, nectarine, apricot fruit, juice runs swiftly. Leaves a strong residue on your mouth roof at the finish. 88

WEST VIRGINIA RED

Forks of Cheat Winery
Regional Blend, American
Cabernet Sauvignon
2004, \$12.50
12.0%

Soft purple in the core yields easily to more cough syrup-like red-orange hues which hold well through the rims, unblemished and very clear throughout. The nose is funky and gamey if not a touch foxy, wet smoke, burnt fire wood, brown earth, the red cherry and raspberry scents appear candied and sweet, even at only 12.0% the alcoholic fumes are a big part of the proceedings. Medium-bodied, in the mouth the sweet candied nature of the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit really comes through full force. The vanilla and butter from the oak also clearer as a

distinct part. Burnt chocolate too. The general smoky, gamey feel not lost either, just a bit more knit-in. Tannins fairly massaged into a tamed beast. The sweetness lasts to within the finish, its saving grace. 83

WEST VIRGINIA WHITE

Forks of Cheat Winery
Regional Blend, American
Chardonnay
2004, \$10.50
12.0%

Very light white to yellow straw coloration, not that shiny, does become fully transparent and clear by the rims. Tropical fruit nose of pineapple, nectarine, guava, apricot and papaya, slightly smoky but, being unwooded, not oaky, white grapefruit and lemon citrus traces, same for white mineral dust, stays uncomplicatedly engaging. Medium-bodied, spicy and on the hyperactive side, bounces around all over your mouth. The acidity lends a drying effect without bending things to a focused will. Same sweetly tropical feel here in the pineapple, peach, nectarine, apricot, mango fruit. Lower levels of mixed white citrus, replaced by a powdered chocolate thing. Stays on a more or less even keel throughout, no sudden surprises nor precipitous dropoff at the finish. 85

FRANCE RED

Gros, Domaine Anne
Burgundy, Vosne-Romanée, Les Barreaux
Pinot Noir
2004, \$81.99, 13.0%

Light ruby-violet in color, graciously shiny, stays very full through to the ruby rims, great clarity. Sweet and sour dichotomy in the cranberry, strawberry, raspberry scents, lemony too, pronounced minerality, its tarry earth nuances softened by caramel scents, an open meadow grassiness pervades throughout, lifts in a muscular fashion, not airy, just rises. Medium-bodied, very citrusy, the sour raspberry, cherry fruit falls early prey to the acidity and herbaceousness. Then the tannins plop in and add both spice and a keen tingle, really mixes up the texture. Hard-nosed but not unapproachable, just requires you break a sweat to enjoy it. Not sure that there's much upside here, though. 88

Gros, Domaine Anne
Burgundy, Chambolle-Musigny, La Combe d'Orveau
Pinot Noir
2004, \$63.99, 13.0%

Light ruby to garnet in color, clear pink-magenta rims, sits prettily in the glass. Sour cranberry, raspberry fruit in the nose, herbal with a kick of tomato too, stone ash, lemon peel, flowers pressed to bare recognizability, the funk and earth slowly and not fully assert themselves over time. Full-bodied, the tannins and acidity are sturdy yet cannot hold back the rush of vibrantly tangy raspberry, cranberry, red cherry fruit. There's an allusion to creamy vanilla and toffee then a strong lemon, orange citrus twist with an oncoming grassiness which lasts to the finish. Past the mid-palate tomato and leather accents throw it a bit more off-center, as does a growing roasted quality to the fruit. Scrubs your mouth hard for some time as it ends. 88

Huards, Domaine des
Loire, Cheverny, Le Pressoir
Blend

2005, \$17.99, 12.0%

Soft ruby-violet core, clear with good luster, turns to a pinkish magenta around the rims. Sharp herbal snap to the nose, earthy to a good extent, tar and tobacco, good density in the cherry, strawberry fruit scents but without much breadth, also digs in more than lifts. Light-bodied, aggressive acidity has your palate in retreat from the start, takes some time for it to land and start to soak in. Once this begins the minerality sets off sparks, followed on by rose petals, tarry earth, lemon peel and old cigar ash. Rights itself well past the center, the tart cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit moves things along at a steady clip. A mouth cleaner too, never lets up. 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Gamay Noir. 87

Calvet-Thunevin, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes,
Cuvée Constance

Blend

2004, \$15.99, 15.0%

Vivid purple core, bright enough to avoid opacity, heavy ruby rims with a dense cast. The nose impelled forward by sour cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit, ash, stone powder, dried grapefruit pith, offers an odd moment of milk chocolate, gives up a scorched earth edge with time, while overall full it's also clipped. Medium-bodied, has a layered and velvety texture with kind of fluffed up tannins that keep it dry yet not too bound up. Blunt peppery quality, followed on by dry cocoa powder and earth coated stones, leather and tree bark. It's not sluggish nor lazy but moves with inexact deliberation. A way of saying it has country roughness but lives in the suburbs. 60% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 10% Carignan. 87

Pernot et ses Fils, Paul
Burgundy, Bourgogne
Pinot Noir

2005, \$17.99, 12.5%

Clear garnet in color, perfectly consistent from core to rims, plenty of luster to the surface, cut from a single cloth. Resonantly grassy nose, a festival of cut grass with white grapefruit, earth and tea leaf to boot, tart cherry, cranberry, raspberry scents, really scrubs your nostrils clean. Light-bodied, has mucho tannic grip, for this little body it's super-firm. Remains herbaceous as all get out, pairs well with the stoniness and minerality, gets successively earthier over time as well. The sour bite in the cherry, cranberry, raspberry, strawberry fruit persists fully, don't expect to relax much in it. Sour lemon citrus component too, the bruises accumulate. Have to say it possesses a good deal of purity and there's no debating its message. Just the message is not for everyone. 86

FRANCE WHITE

Pernot et ses Fils, Paul
Burgundy, Puligny-Montrachet
Chardonnay

2005, \$39.99, 13.5%

Flat golden color with that solid block look, pools nicely in the glass, there's some dropoff around the rims. Regimented nose, all its ducks in a row, angular toastiness arrayed next to lime juice, mint and violets, the apricot, peach, yellow apple fruit scents polished and crisp. Medium-bodied, equally precise in the mouth, not an

easygoing type. Clove, mint, grilled nuts and lime to orange zest start grinding on the tongue right off, even beat the laser beams of oaky toast to the punch. The wiry leanness in the apple, pear, apricot fruit to its benefit, ensures the pacing stays brisk. The acidity seems to be in place, no surprises pro nor con. Manages to always stay in contact with your brain, forcing you to consider it further. Very young, should relax more to become truly seamless. 89

Champault et Fils, Roger
Loire, Sancerre, Les Pierris
Sauvignon Blanc

2005, \$16.99, 12.5%

Dull yellow-brown straw in color, consistent throughout if with fully clear rims. Fresh, airy nose of mint and flowers, sugary enough that the mineral dust is not apparent for some time, juicy lemon to orange scents too, the peach, pear, apple fruit full and lush. In the mouth there's more firmness derived from the acidity, not biting but more than adequately dry. The chalkiness, stoniness more evident, as is an herbal twist with a hint of asparagus. Lean and polished apple, pear, peach fruit, nothing overly done nor overblown. The florality blooms mostly in the center then fades slowly towards the end. Less white citrus on its own, blended into the whole. Very competent and easygoing, geeks would probably want more minerality. 88

Rijckaert, Maison Jean
Burgundy, Chassagne-Montrachet, La Comme Vieilles
Vignes

Chardonnay

2004, \$35.99, 13.0%

Zinc-orange color dominates the foundation of yellow gold, dulls below the surface and really washes out at the rims, on the whole highly unusual coloration. Very fat nose of vanilla cream, warm butter, freshly whipped cream, sweet smoke, apple cider and peach cobbler, sinks like a lead weight into your nostrils. Full-bodied, something reductive or oxidative going on, brioche, sweet honey notes too. Lemon citrus starts to provide an entry into the acidity, to a point. Minerals make a minor splash, give way without a fight to its overall sweetness, brings the peach, apricot, nectarine, melon fruit to the fore. Both the lemony quality as well as the sweetness fully persist through the finish, digs deep rather than focus on complexity. Impressive as a steamroller, not as much more. 87

Cotat, Pascal
Loire, Sancerre, Les Monts Damnés
Sauvignon Blanc

2005, \$41.99, 13.3%

The yellow straw color rises and falls with the distorted light below the surface, while still bending and twisting there's no real hue left at the rims. Curiously soft nose, herbal at first and then a swipe of jalapeño reminiscent of Kiwi Sauvignons, becomes creamier as it sits with mint, orange juice dashes supplementing the pear, red apple, peach fruit scents, hugs more than pierces your nostrils. Medium to full-bodied, repeats itself fairly closely in the mouth, lacks the acidic nervousity to become very bright and clean. The heaviness in the peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit is somewhat uncommon, a weight around its ankles. Bell pepper, cut grass and gentle minerality attempt to provide bite, the lemon to lime citrus however chooses sweetness as its calling card. Can't fault the depth of flavor but, in the final analysis, it could be from anywhere which isn't the signature of the best Sancerre wines. 87

Chasseloir, Château de
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Muscadet

2005, \$7.49, 12.0%

Has that watery yellow straw glow to it typical of many of its peers, not transparent nor capable of distortion, just kind swerves in the glass, why, like a clinamen. Touch of violets and dusty eraser chalk powder but the nose is really built on basic fullness, lemon pie and fuzzy peach, pear scents amble on by, smoke like after a candle is put out. Full-bodied, texture rules the roost in the mouth too, sits widely on the tongue if semi-briefly, more spreading horizontally than deep. Green apple, pear, peach fruit strikes you as deriving its snap from a little underripeness. More grassiness evident than chalk or seashell dust. The acidity has the nimbleness of a construction worker after polishing off a 40 ounce at lunch. Mild florality. All things considered, delivers just about exactly what it should for the price. 85

ITALY RED

Santa Lucia, Azienda Agricola
Puglia/Apulia, Castel del Monte, Vigna del Melograno
Uva di Troia

2004, \$10.49, 13.5%

Solid red-ruby to purple throughout, minimal change in hue although does lighten just enough at the rims to allow for some visibility through it. Well-stuffed nose, neither soft nor hard in feel, just dense red plum, raspberry, blackberry fruit with a floral dew, mixed citrus and dollop of melted milk chocolate, fairly fruit-driven. Medium-bodied, the tannins have the brawn to begin drying right from the start, this in the face of the forward momentum of the currant, raspberry, plum fruit. More evident earth and grass elements here, same for white grapefruit residue. Despite its dryness, stays smooth in texture and able to inch forward steadily. While it can stand on its own, likely to improve considerably with food. Have to admire its directness of purpose. 88

Samson, Savanna
Regional Blend, Sogno Uno
Blend

2004, \$39.99, 13.5%

Mostly opaque black purple core, more youthful brickish red around the rims with a vague pinkish cast. Wound around a robust core of plum, cherry fruit in the nose are more aggressive white grapefruit, rose water and freshly cut leather scents, good job of maintaining density while also freeing up more airy space. Full-bodied and smoothly extracted, moves effortlessly forward inch by inch. The thickset nature of the plum, blackberry, cherry fruit tends to cloak the white grapefruit citrus and florality, the same can be said for the herbal element too. There's a chocolaty thing that comes and goes haphazardly. Tannins subdued, acidity not a major factor. Put together with few seams, no unnecessary risks taken. Has the sweetness to appeal to many, the dry and tart finish to win over a few more converts. 70% Cesanese, 20% Sangiovese, 10% Montepulciano. Grapes sourced from Latium, Tuscany. 88

Pino, Cantina del
Piedmont, Langhe
Nebbiolo

2004, \$21.99, 14.0%

Very light red-ruby color, hints at violet at some angles, sparkly surface, becomes neutral at the semi-watery rims.

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Winsome strawberry, red cherry perfume in the nose, lifts further from the addition of rose petals then lowers with the introduction of earthy funk, then again becomes widely spaced and open as it dissolves. Light-bodied, very fragrant in the mouth too, floral with white citrus, earth and leather undertones. The tannins a bit arch given its lack of weight. Sweet hard candy core to the red raspberry, strawberry fruit, front-loaded with a steady decline. Empties out by the finish, leaves a tacky residue alone on stage. Requires the accompaniment of food, albeit nothing too heavy nor rich. 86

GERMANY WHITE

Pfeffingen, Weingut
Pfalz, Ungsteiner, Herrenberg, Spätlese AP #16
Scheurebe

2005, \$22.99, 12.0%

Glowing light yellow gives it much more life than the hue would have otherwise, lots of visible fizz, with the translucence lends solidity. Succulently fleshy nose, rubs the creamy, poached pear, peach, mango, apricot scents all over your nostrils, any minerality shadowed by sweet grapefruit accents, too fat for the florality to truly shine with clarity. Full-bodied, the mineral water and stone shades rush at you first, knowing full well they are about to get streamrolled by whipped cream, pink grapefruit to tangerine citrus and outsized pineapple, apricot, mango, nectarine, papaya fruit. Lacks the acidic spine to take on tropical zest, more sweetly concentrated. Doesn't have the herbal nip which sometimes occurs with the grape. A drinker, not a thinker. [Screwcap] 88

HUNGARY DESSERT

Royal Tokaji Wine Company, The
Tokaj-Hegyalja, Tokaji Aszú 5 Puttonyos
Blend

2000, \$31.99, 12.0%

Light amber touches mildly darken the base of the dark yellow core, the rims are very thin and nod towards transparency. The nose is fresher and lighter than expected, while buoyant, the apricot, peach, pear fruit not truly close to a dried fruit nature, shows the mildest of sweet spices, orange zest, not to say it is not sugary but doesn't present the kind of concentration to knock your socks off. Medium-bodied, its initial hallmark is its fluidity, positively glides through the mouth. The acidity is surprisingly high, adds a mouth watering quality. Big hard candy lemon drop in the center, sweet and sour. Touch more concentration in the apricot, peach, nectarine, papaya fruit here without ever approaching excess sweetness nor tropicality. Very good for pairing with light cakes or as an aperitif. Unspecified percentages of Furmint, Hárslevelu, Muscat de Lunel etc. 500 ml bottle. 88

SPAIN RED

Muga, Bodegas
Rioja, Reserva Unfiltered
Tempranillo

2002, \$20.99, 13.5%

Dark and medicinal in appearance the purple core infused by black, brown, red tints, drops just slightly to orange-red brick around the rims, no loss of intensity of hue. Picky nose with tobacco, tea leaf, wet saddle leather, potpourri scents doing most of the work, there's an angular

hardness in the cherry, red currant scents, not lacking depth, lacking in friendliness. Medium-bodied, introduces itself via menthol, orange peel and violets, succeeded by an herbaceous twist. Here you can at least blame the acidity and tannins for the unyielding qualities of the cherry, blackberry fruit, redux in that not at all short, just not very permeable. The juiciness tends to accrue close to your mouth roof while your tongue gets dusty and dry. Passing moments of merde and leather. Has a lot there but incapable of marshaling it. 70% Tempranillo, 20% Garnacha, 10% Graciano and Mazuelo. 87

Salceda, Viña
Rioja, Reserva
Tempranillo
2001, \$19.99, 13.0%

Excellent luster in the violet core, light dances across the surface, more pure red with ruby highlights around the rims. Very toasty, minty nose, introduces a bouncy airiness to it, slowly finds richer milk chocolate and black cherry, black raspberry scents, fends off premature disintegration by repeating its message into predictability. Medium-bodied, here in the mouth the acidity is elevated sufficiently to prevent the buttered toast, mint, caramel oak flavors from attaining dominance. Tannins add some dustiness as well as highlight any cedar, leather, tobacco notes to be found. While there's the initial sweetness of hard candy, the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit lacks length and juiciness. Comes close but never achieves integration. Big pucker at the end. 90% Tempranillo, 5% Graciano, 5% Mazuelo. 85

PORTUGAL RED

Real Companhia Velha
Douro Valley, Porca de Murça
Blend
2005, \$4.99, 13.0%

Glowing and saturated cranberry red to hyacinth in color, great balance between richness and clarity, full red to pink magenta rims. The nose doles things out sparsely, herbal like a spring hoeing, some pine or menthol glimpses too, used tea bags and sour cherry, raspberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, lightly peppery tannins gain support through the attack from white grapefruit citrus and puckering cranberry, raspberry, strawberry fruit to kick your palate awake. For all of its crackle it stays respectably stable and balanced, never comes close to that "aha!" moment where you think you get to unmask it as a fraud. Commensurate earthiness and scrub floor vegetation to its weight and heft. Short finish but it's cheap enough to keep pouring. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barroca. 87

Ramos-Pinto, Adriano
Douro Valley, Adriano
Blend
2003, \$10.99, 13.0%

Crystal clear ruby-violet, very shiny and reflective, bright scarlet rims. Soft, juicy nose, expands fully into a cloud of raspberry, blackberry mist and floral dew, fits in time for milk chocolate, orange peel, plays nothing but the hits, no B-sides. Medium-bodied, rushes its ripeness into your mouth, splashing raspberry and blackberry fruit. Good thing, as the tannins powder the tongue with a certain dustiness. Keeps its floral side, features added orange/lemon citrus, keeps any earth or leather notes muted. Whether it's the tannins or not, gets spicier and

spicier towards the finish. Does a decent job of quieting down for a peaceful denouement. Credible plus. 30% Touriga Francesa, 30% Tinta Roriz, 30% Tinta Barroca, 10% Touriga Nacional. 86

PORTUGAL DESSERT

Delaforce
Douro, 20 Year Tawny Port Curious and Ancient
Blend
NV, \$31.99, 20.0%

There's still an attempt by the purple to get through the brown, orange, yellow hues, clear and trim, mostly just yellow by the rims, still darker than many tawnies. Yellow raisin, date, fig fruit dominate the nose, displays obtrusive alcoholic fumes, destabilizes what floral, lemon, cigar leaf, tar and caramel scents there are. Medium-bodied, spicy and hot, its imbalance suggests this is as about as "ruby" as a tawny gets. Smoke, tobacco ash, stones, tar, lemon peel, merde and toffee, moves in a few more directions than wisely counseled. Fruit somewhat fresher in the mouth, plum and cherry to go with the fig and raisin flavors but not especially fruity. Throws too much at you at once, lacks elegance and integration. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão, etc. (Bottled in 2005) 85

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Spier
Western Cape
Vintage Selection
Shiraz
2004, \$14.99, 14.5%

Light, shiny red-purple color, easy to see through, the hue remains completely consistent from the core through the rims. Freshly juicy raspberry, blueberry, red cherry fruit scents soak in easily in the nose, softens the more rugged leather, tar, black smoke elements, has a handsome mountain air/forest thing too, goes easy on the oak, an added bonus. Medium-bodied, dry without being overtly tannic, more so peppery and smoky. Otherwise, fairly smooth, steady presentation of the red plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, more sappy grip than sweetness. Tar, black earth, tea leaf, roasted fat and wet leather speak as much of its terroir as it does the expression of grape type. Fluid, compact finish further evidence of its good balance. 89

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Steenberg
Western Cape
Sauvignon Blanc
2006, \$8.99, 13.5%

Translucent while not deeply hued, the light yellow straw more of a filmy membrane than a true coloration. The nose is soft, if not a little sleepy, some lemon and violets as well as apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit scents, only energy it expends seems to be towards quashing the grassiness. Medium-bodied, flat-footed acidity doesn't do much to keep it at attention. Here, the herbal qualities find less resistance and slowly dominate. Little minerality nor citric bite, just weight. Minor floral notes, tenuous grasp in the peach, pear, melon fruit. Just comes across as watery or dilute, be this from overcropping, climatic concerns or some other thang. Underscore that it's not flawed per se,

just makes you wonder what it was trying to say, even for the low price. Evanescent finish. 84

AUSTRALIA RED

Burge, Grant
South Australia, Barossa Valley, Hillcot Vineyard
Merlot
2003, \$15.99, 13.9%

Very clear crimson-purple, doesn't lack for depth of hue, features orange-reddish rims. Syrupy and somewhat medicinal nose, witch hazel, then candied cherry, raspberry scents with mocha crisp, too dense for any floral airiness, very much primary and without earthy elements. Medium-bodied, spicy attack, has your mouth tingling right off. This sensation creates a bigger impression of the acidity, as well as helps minimize its overall sweetness. Mesquite smoke, orange marmalade, any grassy nuances submerged. The nose actually more clingy than the mouth, the latter not attenuated but there's not a lot of richness in the red cherry, raspberry, red currant flavors. Almost counter-intuitively, you wish it had more stuffing. 87

Frankland Estate
Western Australia, Frankland River, Rocky Gully Shiraz
Viognier
Shiraz
2004, \$15.99, 14.5%

Clear, but there's a burnt edge to the cough syrup red coloration, fully hued rims where there's a suggestion of orange. Semi-sugary nose, molasses baked ham, perfumey florality, candied orange peel, sweet grill smoke, for all of its energy in your nostrils, has oddly quiet plum, blackberry, blueberry scents. Medium-bodied, strikes you as kind of lean at first then you adjust to its stripped down demeanor. Honey, molasses, lemon tea flavors derive some airy feel from the floral element. The tannins are soft yet durable, there "as is" until the end. The raspberry, boysenberry, red cherry has credible thrust but not a lot of bottom. Seems semi-forced, as if someone dressed it up elegantly but skipped the manners lessons. 95% Shiraz, 5% Viognier. (Screwcap) 86

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Australian Premium Wine Collection, The
Western Australia, The Wishing Tree Unoaked
Chardonnay
2006, \$10.99, 13.5%

Very faint luminescent glow in the white straw color, while not hue it has a transparency that still catches your eye. Pineapple, nectarine, guava fruit with lemon reduction in the nose, broad grassy streak to it, while it has a hyper nature, with time it develops some floral nuances to pretty it up. Full-bodied, not fat but certainly big-boned with equally forward elements of grassiness and peach, nectarine, pineapple, green apple fruit. White and pink grapefruit mixes with lemon and orange to create a prominent citrus presence. Has a jagged, prickly feel to it, without being able to directly attribute such to the acidity. Pickle juice, jalapeño notes really spice up the end, adds lots of heat. Not the most relaxing wine but interesting. (Screwcap) 87

Hill of Content
Western Australia, Benjamin's Blend
Blend
2004, \$13.99, 12.5%

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Pale white gold color, some shine but more of a semi-translucent shimmer to it. Herbal nose of snap peas, bell pepper, grass, lemon peel, only might minerals but something gets your nose all crinkly, not a lot of peach, apricot fruit scents but what's there lasts. Full-bodied with enough extract to cling to your cheek's pores, more zest here in the lemon/lime as well as juice. Adds in a vanilla custard too, in a kinda leesy way. Also more mineral dust in the mouth but it's elevation still lags the other elements. More robust pear, red apple, apricot fruit, not juicy though, as it possesses a dampening sort of acidity. Good flavor and without obvious flaws, however, lacking in distinction. Unspecified percentages of Chardonnay, Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc. 86

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Mud House
Marlborough
Sauvignon Blanc
2006, \$11.99, 13.0%

Moderate brightness in the white/yellow gold color, completely transparent at the rims, you better appreciate cleanliness as there's not much else. Sweet sugar powder of a nose, juicy pink grapefruit, freshly dried apricots and peaches, while it has a grassy side, it's no match for the sugar coating your nostrils receive. Medium-bodied plus, enough chili pepper on the attack to forestall the arrival of the fully ripe pear, apricot, guava, nectarine fruit. Not a great deal of perceptible acidity, makes it more difficult to register the minerality. Less sweetness here but not necessarily ore zest in the pink grapefruit, tangerine citrus. The herbaceousness is well knit-in, not a dominant presence. Gets a little blurry on the finish. It's a good cheapie, not "serious" but a toe in the shallow end of Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc. (Screwcap) 88

ARGENTINA RED

Mayol, Familia
Mendoza, Vista Flores, Pircas Vineyard, Kaleido
Bonarda
2004, \$12.99, 14.0%

Picture perfect red-purple core, dense but accepts the light and avoids opacity, maximal saturation in the beet red rims. The nose starts off quite minty, slowly mutating into roasted game fat, bell pepper, poor black earth, rubber and hot tar, enough so that the boysenberry, currant, persimmon fruit scents come at weird angles. In the mouth it's medium to full-bodied, as in the nose at first it's all minty and flowery before turning more rugged. Mineral dust and dried beef blood blend in as does dusty spice and black tea leaf. The tannins add a palpable powdery texture to things, nothing silky here. Muscular core of black currant, blackberry, blueberry fruit, stands up to the tannins and lasts until finish. At once familiar while off-center enough to intrigue. So be intrigued. 89

Cabernet de Los Andes
Catamarca, Las Retamas, Vicien Reserve
Cabernet Sauvignon
2004, \$8.99, 13.9%

Scarlet-purple in color, fat red rims, well saturated throughout with more depth than luster. Restrained ripeness in the black cherry, blackberry fruit scents, nice gritty feel in your nostrils with earth, stone bits, tobacco wrapper and eucalyptus elements. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, nice and dusty with grill smoke, leather,

wet cedar notes and a distinct, enduring earthiness. The tannins have a slightly rough texture and anchor things nicely. Kind of evokes that "Rutherford dust" if you are hep to the Cali jive. Firm and muscular currant, cherry, red plum fruit, borders on unyielding but chalk it up to relative youth. Suggestion of lemon and flowers but truly momentary. The oak is quite low, due in good part to stainless steel fermentation. Well done. 89