

Gonna riff once more on a topic related to global warming. It's pretty basic common sense that one cannot simply move a vineyard because its environmental conditions are changing. Or, more precisely put, the conditions are becoming *less predictable*. Less predictable because global "warming" is not a phenomenon which uniformly brings warmer temperatures. It is more accurate to say that it brings more erratic weather, more highs and lows and unexpected storms, droughts, etc. It's not simply reducible to saying that a vineyard which once averaged daytime highs of 78 degrees now averages daytime highs of 82 degrees. More complex than that. Playa.

So, just as one cannot move a vineyard in its entirety to a spot closer to what once was the vineyard's climatic norm, so too one cannot just rip up parts of the vineyard and replant them to better match evolving weather conditions. What, you *can* rip up the vineyard! Dag. However, vineyard reconfiguration is risky and, more importantly, *expensive*. Overall production numbers would drop, older and more mature vines would be replaced by younger vines, and there's no guarantee that the new set-up would be an improvement over the former. What can a vineyard manager do?

To get closer to an answer we need to understand a wee bit about vine training and trellising as well as the vineyard technique called canopy management. All three aspects of growing a grapevine have changed substantially over past decades. Why, almost as radically as weather patterns are changing now.

Grapevines don't grow all wild like, they are intentionally forced to grow in certain patterns and along certain paths. Once they have been forced into growing a certain way over a period of years the maturing vine gets pretty much "frozen" into this shape. To "unfreeze" a grapevine means pruning it back, most likely severely, to reestablish it into a new growth shape. Which means getting rid of the most productive parts of the vine and losing years of growth. No one wants to do that. Not even George Bush.

Grapevines fall down. And they can't get up. So, just as with any type of vine, a support system needs to be provided for the vines to cling to and grow along. Contemporary viticultural practices use a system of stacks and wires to support the grapevines. These are called *trellises*. As one might expect the format of the trellising system will conform to the shape the vineyard manager desires in the grapevines themselves. This is called the *training system* because the vines are being "trained" to grow in a certain fashion.

The general concern in training and trellising grapevines is to control yields and ripeness. The vineyard manager broadly put wants to either maximize yields and make more dinero or reduce yields to produce fewer grape bunches of higher ripeness and flavor intensity. Depends on the end goal, sell a lot of wine or sell less wine (at a higher price). Different systems will favor differing goals. One will want to control sunlight exposure, both in terms of direct sunlight and length of sunlight exposure. One also needs to control the amount of photosynthesis the vines accomplish, the end result being a vine neither too vigorous nor insufficiently vigorous. This with one eye on *where* the energy and fuel is being expended — on grapes, leaves, vine shoots, roots, etc.

A number of factors come into play in deciding which trellising and training systems to use. General temperatures (both day and night), wind conditions, inclines in the vineyard, how the vines will face the trajectory of the sun through the day, how poor or rich the soil is, the kind of rootstock used with the grapevine, what type of irrigation one uses (if any), what type of trees, bushes or vegetation exists in the vineyard, and then what kind of grape is being cultivated with a focus on this grape's normal ripening history (early/late, easily/with difficulty, etc.). Some trellising systems are more popular than others but none is 100% correct or incorrect.

As scintillating as the possibility is, Hanes will not exhaustively list all the different types of trellising systems. But, as illustrative examples, there are the following. Note that almost all vineyards use plastic or metal stakes and metal wires regardless of orientation because one does not want to use organic matter which may then house microbes or other nasty shit which could infect the vines.

*Spur training* is one way of doing things. It seems this is the easiest way of pruning the vine and requires the least amount of routine maintenance. The basic concept here is pare the growth back close to the base of the vine (called the cordon) as it comes out of the thick trunk which leads to the earth. There's a fruit bearing vine length (called the cane) coming out of a thick knob formed on the cordon (called the spur). There are cut off together, as is another mature fruit bearing cane just beyond the spur. The cut point on the latter comes above two cane nodes. Out of these nodes in the next spring will grow the two canes which will bear fruit that season. And the spur grows larger as older wood accrues. Over time the cordon acquires many spurs along its length yet growth is kept as "close to home" as possible by managing the number of nodes which can grow the next season. A base trunk will generally support 2-4 cordons. Apparently this form of training and pruning is popular because it clearly separates spurs and their canes from each other and allows mechanical harvesting to capture more grape bunches without damaging the grapes or the vines themselves. And, later, allows for mechanical pruning for the winter.

*Cane training* is another way of doing things. The basic concept here is to keep cutting away older canes in favor of younger canes. Too many canes coming out of the cordon diffuses the energy during the next year's growing season. Instead of cutting back all the way to the spur and retaining growth from the spur, here you pick the cane or two along the vine outside the spur that has loads of tasty buds and cut away the growth which just bore fruit that season so that the remaining canes after pruning are lean and mean and ready to focus come springtime. The canes left for the next

growing season always have a good year of age on them to help produce new fruit bearing canes. The extra maturity avoids depending on purely new growth for fruiting and basically “rotates” fruit bearing among canes of various maturities without growing the canes too far from the cordon. Cane training requires more manual labor and cannot be mechanized. It presents the advantage of treating each cordon individually and making specific decisions about which canes to cut or keep. Deep thoughts.

In general, a third method called *gobelet training* may be employed. This is an older method of doing things and not so in fashion. The trunk of the vine is kept short and squat and the pruning done so close to the trunk that really there are not so much “cordons” coming out of it but just a wealth of “spurs” accumulated around the trunk. The vines tend to grow into a “goblet” shape this way and that’s what it looks like during the winter without foliage. The new canes, leaves and grape bunches all grow within this goblet, creating the appearance of a bush more than extended vine. As many note, this is why these are also called “bush vines.” Empiricism at work.

Again, without getting too technical, vine training segues to vine trellising might quick like. Vines trained in the gobelet manner rarely need stakes or wires as they derive full support from the thick cordons/spurs which form the goblet-like structure. Vines trained along the spur or cane methods may or may not prove favorable to particular trellising systems. As a result, discussing popular trellising systems explains further how the choices made in structuring the entire vine from trunk to grape bunch may need to change over the years to come.

Training establishes the foundation of how budding will occur and foliage start to come to life. But trellising is the part which makes the final determination. This will help decide how many grape bunches will begin to grow in the early part of the growing season and how the grapes interact with the new foliage. This in turn will factor into overall vine stress (i.e., how much work the vines will have to do along with how much energy and fuel the vines will take in). Vine stress remains a key factor in determining both the quantity and quality of the grapes which live to maturity and picking.

As stated previously, changes in weather, lots of ups and downs and sideway jags, have a direct impact on the grapes. The vineyard manager will employ years of experience and history to grapple with any climatic changes as they occur (she will also grapple with how much money the vineyard owner wants out of this vintage’s crop). Trellising the new growth along stakes and wires separates the new canes and with them the new foliage and then grape bunches. How they are separated and positioned will dictate how sunlight effects the vine and its component parts: the sunlight’s angle, duration, intensity, ability to reach below the foliage of top trellis, ability to touch the grapes directly, etc.

The posts themselves are normally spaced about 18 feet apart or roughly every three plants. Wires are then run the posts from end to end. How many wires depends on what kind of trellising system one wants. The wires have to be very taut and capable of holding substantial weight. If you think your neighbor is stealing your grapes, use barbed wire.

The most basic way of trellising the vines is to have two main cordons coming off the trunk in opposite directions along the wire. With a single wire placed about five to six feet above the ground, you just let the fruit bearing vines hang downwards from the wire. Simple enough. If the rows of vines are spaced adequately apart there will be ample room for sunlight to reach from the six foot high wire level all the way down to the earth and provide the necessary light coverage. As the foliage curtain thickens the sort of trellising has the advantage of shading the earth itself which may help the soil retain moisture if there’s no natural ground covering. Pruning can be done anywhere desired along the cordon(s) and their yearly growth.

If this strikes you as too lazy, there’s a way to provide greater structure to the vines and ensure more consistent separation as well as exposure to light. As in the former example, there’s a wire along which the cordons travel. This will be the bottommost wire, about three feet off the ground. Above this wire will be three to four other wires. The young vines are trained upwards across these wires (sometimes tied to them to ensure proper alignment). This trellising system takes few chances of missing sunlight and provides better air circulation. It also makes manual thinning and positioning easier as there’s ample support and room to work with each individual vine.

Another way of doing things is a sort of hybrid of the two former methods. Here there are four cordons growing off the trunk, two in each direction. The two on each respective side are positioned far apart, the bottom one three feet from the ground and the top one six feet from the ground. Then the vines and foliage hang down from these four cordons trained along two wires. For vineyard managers who favor the first method but see drawbacks in too much foliage density or lack of circulation, this method more or less halves those problems by spreading the growth out and requiring the plant to expend its energy in more controllable quarters rather than halves.

Naturally, some clever folks decided that this last method could be improved upon. What you do is take the four cordons, and instead grow them *close together* and then train vines *up* from the top cordon pair and *down* from the bottom cordon pair, using wires for training throughout. This seems like overkill but some folks say it’s the best way to reduce foliage density without necessarily reducing the quantity of leaves producing energy via photosynthesis. Why not?

Again, there’s lots of ways to structure the fruit bearing and non-bearing portions of the vine and they all work together to achieve a desired goal. In recent decades this goal has been to increase grape ripeness as much as possible with an eye on creating more concentrated, fruit-driven wines. The last important aspect of choosing a mode of vine training and trellising remains the capacity for *canopy management*. This is the science/black art of controlling the quantity and

quality of general foliage as well as buds and grape bunches. In essence, the choices of vine training and trellising are made to enable the final degree of canopy management desired.

Vine “stress” is a good thing to many folks because a stressed vine will focus its energy into reproduction rather than general growth. This is a base effort to simply survive, not thrive per se. How does a grapevine reproduce? Duh, through grapes and the seeds inside them. Evil humans, though, fake out the grapevines by snatching the grapes to make wine and the dumb grapevines never figure this out, year after year. The more energy the plant puts into the creation and health of the grapes, the tastier the grapes will be for the purpose of making wine. No one needs a zillion healthy leaves and just a few grape bunches. We want healthier grape bunches and screw the leaves.

Canopy management, like other vineyard techniques or factors, controls the stress. This is similar to having too much water for the vines. If a vine’s roots have to work hard to dig deep for water this produces stress. The vine works on creating deeper roots rather than excess foliage. Energy not expended on finding water goes to the grapes so the plant can seed and survive. This is why the amount of water provided to the grapevine is often controlled vigorously by the vineyard manager. Same for the foliage or “canopy.” The quantity of leaves and vines will effect the quality of the grapes and must be micromanaged.

If the leaves block too much sun from directly hitting the grapes and ripen them, they gotta go. If the leaves prevent air circulation and contribute to the potential formation of mildew or fungi, they gotta go. If grape bunches are forming, any young vine material present without fruit they, you guessed it, gotta go.

By the same token, canopy management also can be said to include what is called “dropping fruit.” This is the process of selecting the healthiest, best positioned grape bunches along the vines and cutting off the remainder of the bunches. This forces the plant to refocus its energy on the remaining fruit alone, pumping them full of energy and love.

That’s basically what vine training, trellising and canopy management are meant to achieve. And it’s how we get bigger, bolder, juicier wines. Which cost a lot more money because all this manual labor gets expensive. And this is important for understanding how these vineyard techniques play out practically in the full spectrum of wine production and consumption. A lot of time and money go into these decisions. A lot of time. And money. It takes years to figure out which training and trellising system works best for which grapes in which vineyard (or section of a vineyard, etc.). And canopy management decisions can only be made based on the initial selection of the vine training and trellising. If the climate changes dramatically enough, this initial selection of vine training and trellising may have to be revisited. Which means money lost through vine restructuring and resultant lack of product grown in the interim.

Climatic changes that effect the world on the levels of continents, countries, regions or towns also effect the “microclimates” of vineyards and, further yet, the “micro-microclimates” of the vines themselves. Vineyard management is heavily tied up in controlling the environment of each specific plant and vine. If global warming changes global weather patterns it also effects the “micro-microclimates.” As said before, it’s not just warming per se. It’s the haphazardness of contemporary weather which imperils the choices made in vine training and trellising and then canopy management. Things that worked just a couple of vintages ago may not work anymore. Hell, things that worked three weeks ago may not work anymore. If this is so, these might be some results.

Training and trellising methods which today obtain desirable exposure to sunlight, air circulation and general vine stress may turn out to not be so desirable anymore. Which means more than just deciding between spur training or cane training, it means cutting it all back to the trunk to try new approaches. Shucks, perhaps *entirely* new approaches. Or ripping up vines entirely to plant new grape cultivars which will thrive better in the new climate. In terms of canopy management pulling leaves may result in more sunlight exposure for grapes but maybe less protective coverage for the grapes should there be late season “freakish” droughts, frosts or hailstorms. Changes in wind patterns may require repositioning of vine rows. If a vineyard does not cool down as much at night as in the past and thus give the vines time to rest, more leafy foliage might be required to shade the ground and prevent heat absorption, regardless of its effect on the grapes. A lot more overall cautiousness and hedging of bets may be required. Which will make “consistency of product” harder to achieve.

And all of these potential changes have a domino effect on whether or not mechanical harvesting or other automated vineyard activities may be employed, creating pressure on profitability and/or a rise in wholesale grape and then wine prices. Are vineyard owners and managers brainstorming about what they are going to do as weather becomes more unpredictable? Hanes doesn’t know, he rarely comes out of the basement. But it’s a legitimate question to ask. If the wine industry gets caught with its pants down because it cannot swiftly and easily change its vine training, trellising and canopy management practices it’s going to be the consumer who ends up paying for it. Someone call Helen Turley and Michel Rolland NOW!

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**This month’s big winners...** Catching up after a month off, off that is from publishing notes not necessarily collecting them. Somehow the last few weeks turned out to be a Italian wine drinkathon. Probably drank more Italian wine in the past eight weeks than past eight months. While priced higher than it should be, Taurino’s “Patriglione” bottling from Puglia remains a Hanes fave. The current release is the 1999 vintage and it’s pure deliciousness. And \$60. Writing about Sicilian wines in the November edition must have triggered some latent need as many such wines consumed of late. At

the top of the list are the producers Gulfi, Terre Nere and Occhipinti. All the wines are excellent in their way. Read the damn tasting notes to figure out which one you'd like best. You're not gonna find a better wine made from the Ruché grape that those made by Cascina Tavijn. Which is a way of saying you're not gonna find any other wines made from Ruché. But, seriously folks, their 2006 Ruché is super-good. Just wish the price was still under \$20. If You find Primitivo wines to be too prune-y or sugary, try Perrini's 2005 from Salento in Puglia. \$20, yes, but with more structure than almost any other Primitivo on the market. Loire producer Le Clos du Tue-Bœuf may forever remain a lesser known player but there is a remarkable level of consistency in the product. Maybe the lack of meaningful information on the labels and the weird winery name throws people off. The 2006 red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Côt (Malbec) just couldn't please more and it's a fair bargain at \$19 or so. Always wishing for a Wirsching, Hanes coughed up the \$37 for their Auslese level Silvaner (that's the grape) from Franken in Germany, grown in the quality Julius-Echter-Berg vineyard and bottled in the beloved squat "Bocksbeutel" bottle. Rich, dense and hard to wash out of your mouth. Esteemed Zinfandel producer Turley has found a new grape source in Howell Mountain's Cedarman Vineyard. The debut 2005 vintage is quite nice and at \$29 costs less than many of their more established offerings (naturally on retail shelves it'll be like \$60). White Bordeaux wines can be hit or miss but the hits just keep on coming from Clos Floridene. Their 2005 has all the unusual distinctiveness and richness you usually get. At \$23 a bottle, buy some for now and to cellar.

**The best \$15 and under picks...** It's true. Hanes is losing interest in Petite Sirah. Curse the heavens. That said, a random purchase of Guenoc's 2005 "California" bottling was not bad for \$12 and was in no way heavy handed. The Spätburgunders are coming, the Spätburgunders are coming! As predicted, German Pinot Noir is The New Style. From the Pfalz area of Germany, Weinhof Scheu hits it just right for a tidy \$15. Nice. Finca El Portillo has the recipe down for cheap, sub-\$10 Argentinean Cabernet Sauvignon. Nothing profound but very consistent and drinkable. Hanes is not a fan of how many European producers will put the name of the owner/vigneron in bigger print than the domaine or château name. It confuses shit and seems a bit egotistical. People don't know which wine to look for, e.g., Foreau or Domaine du Clos Naudin. It's like when an 150 year old college building gets a facelift and is renamed with the name of the dude who just forked over the dough for said repairs. Show humility and keep the traditional name. Grrr. Anyway, long has Hanes been confused about there being an actual historical domaine called Domaine des Terres Dorées or whether the legal name of the producer "tout court" was the vigneron's name, Jean-Paul Brun. Always thought it was Brun but now wines will be noted with the preferred name of the domaine. Whatever it's called, the 2006 Beaujolais rouge bottling called "l'Ancien Vieilles Vignes" is its usual stellar stuff and somehow the price remains under \$15. Back up the truck. Mud House continues to produce credible Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and while Hanes rarely drinks these wines anymore, it still appears to be ahead of the general pack. Just gotta keep the price closer to \$10 than to \$15. If you prefer your wines to lack flash, for \$14 try the 2006 "Ischia Bianco" from Campania's Casa d'Ambra. Better than every other blend of 50% Biancolella and 50% Forastera you will have this year.

**And the disappointments...** Following up on the earlier comment on Petite Sirah, Turley's 2005 Petite Sirah from the Hayne Vineyard just did not do it for Hanes. And at \$75 a pop, Hanes thinks that it's naught but buying Zinfandel from Turley from here on out. In the past Hanes has found the Rueda white from Spain produced by Javier Sanz and called "Villa Narcisa" to represent great value. But the 2006 version, even at under \$11, is disjointed and never gets its shit together when you need it to. Since their initial vintage Outpost has been a winery Hanes has uniformly enjoyed. But, err, less so with each passing vintage. Dunno what happened with the 2005 Zinfandel (the #1 fave in their portfolio) but it's a dud. And \$45. Perhaps another Californian mailing list dropped. Sigh. On the cheap end of the price spectrum, Bogle's 2005 "Old Vine" Zinfandel is dilute crapola, surprising from what Hanes remembers to be a solid inexpensive wine producer. Maybe we need another grape glut in California or something. Since he was just a little boy Hanes has enjoyed the wine of Languedoc producer Mas de Daumas Gassac. He owns many bottles in his cellar. That said, no bottles of the 2005 rouge are getting in there. This wine is a shadow of what it should be. Let us hope it is an aberration and things will return to groovy tastiness next vintage. As the price gets up to \$40, Hanes wants perfection in his Nigl Grüner Veltliner "Privat" from Austria. Alas, perfection seems out of reach here. Not a bad wine at all but not a \$40 wine either. Another one of those confusing name thingies, Gérard Tremblay (or is it the Domaine des Iles?) usually makes solid inexpensive Chablis. Chablis per se has more or less fallen off Hanes's radar screen as the prices have gone up too much. But he took a flyer on Tremblay's 2006 from the Fourchaume vineyard. Ho-hum wine, even at a relatively cheap \$23. Might try their basic AOC bottling but no more \$\$\$ for Tremblay's other 2006 wines.

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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/oldervintages2008.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 February!

## CALIFORNIA RED

Turley

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Cedarman

Zinfandel

2005, \$29.00, 15.0%

Fairly unremarkable mix of murky purple core and dense red-ruby to scarlet rims, sits impassively, if deeply, in the glass. The nose furnishes first a grassy edge alongside lemon zest and mountain forest or scrub filled air, little emphasis on oak or raspberry, red cherry fruit, most notable for a steady spreading lift. Medium-bodied, displays a considerable burst of acidity right off the bat which sparks the tangerine to lemon citrus accents as well as sharpens the eucalyptus and poor earth components. There's cocoa to dry milk chocolate flavorings here but can't soften the tartness in the cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit. Doesn't suggest the degree of herbaceousness found in the nose but some there. Not heavy, much more in the refreshing mode and persists longer for it. 90

Lagier Meredith

Napa Valley, Mount Veeder

Syrah

2005, \$50.00, 14.8%

The vibrancy of the violet core aided by an infusion of ruby-magenta, sufficiently clear to see through from up close, the ruby rims spread widely without losing an iota of fullness. The nose presents a semi-raw mountain air character, filled with pine, menthol, hard earth and stones, tree bark and leaves, all kind of whip around so that even the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit and mild milk chocolate can only settle it so much. Full-bodied, more velvet than satin, tugs and pulls so as to resist complete smoothness. The tannins comfortable hiding under the layers of cherry, blackberry fruit but the latter loses a bit of juice by the finish for some reason. Touches of butter crunch and chocolate but hardly oaky. Zesty finish with orange spice, menthol and sharp cooking spices. Not showing many gamey qualities as of yet. 90

Outpost

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain

Grenache

2005, \$40.00, 15.3%

A filminess lurks through the ruby-purple core, deepening what would most likely be transparent, the redness fades to a touch of orange along the dilute rims. Straightforward approach to the nose, sour cranberry, raspberry, cherry fruit, white grapefruit zest, stones and cut grass, its purity of purpose keeps it lingering in your nostrils for some time. Medium-bodied, while the roundness and pliability of the texture in the mouth defines it against the nose, the elements remain similar. Lots of white grapefruit, lemon

citrus, strong emphasis on not overripe cherry, raspberry fruit. The grassiness met by an elevated spiciness as well as some mocha notes. Provides sufficient acidity to keep it dancing through an extended finish. 89

Guenoc

Regional Blend, California

Petite Sirah

2005, \$11.99, 13.0%

Perfectly clear and transparent, light sparkles from surface down, the purple core swiftly turns over to completely hued red-ruby. Little new oak found in the nose, bountiful sour cranberry, red raspberry, cherry fruit, menthol spray, sweet lemon zest, wild brush, very clean and freshly open. Medium-bodied, behaves the same in the mouth, immaculately clean and focused with no fat nor a hair out of place. Tart cranberry, raspberry, blackberry fruit made even leaner by lemon citrus, cut grass and stones. No oak here too, less overall cream to soften it. Very slow to end, leaves a sour twist behind. Not underripe, this is what the grape tastes like when not extracted to death. 88

Turley

Napa Valley, Hayne Vineyard

Petite Sirah

2005, \$75.00, 15.2%

The usual blackness in the core lighter than usual, the purple isn't especially vibrant, in contrast to the vivid scarlet-ruby rims. Buttery popcorn and cocoa powder plop down in the nose, firm with little movement or lift, floral water, the plum, blackberry scents dense and only spread out due to their mild tartness. Full-bodied, same basic story in the mouth, whereas here you really cannot pin the blame on the tannins which do blanket things decently but truly don't add severe dryness nor shortness. Spoons out orange, grapefruit citrus, mint, flowers, these collide with molasses, butter, popcorn to effectively cancel each other out. Broadly constructed plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit steam roll along mindlessly. This is just how the wine is and years in the bottle are unlikely to change its character by much. 87

Turley

Napa Valley, Moore "Earthquake" Vineyard

Zinfandel

2005, \$48.00, 15.2%

The ruby in the rims tries to invade the core and lighten the purple, but to no avail, despite the overall darkness has a good measure of clarity to offer. Mint and eucalyptus accent the milk chocolate cornerstone in the nose, melted toffee and butterscotch show pleasing restraint, curiously the red currant, cherry, raspberry fruit sour and semi-quick to scam. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a lean, if not hard, mouth feel, comes across as a touch underripe which plays up the acidity, in a not so refreshing manner. Lemon and orange peel citrus there, gently

herbaceous, some stoniness and rock salt notes. Hate to say it but could actually benefit from a larger softening oak presence. As in the nose, on the short side. Zigs when it should zag. 87

Outpost  
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain  
Zinfandel  
2005, \$45.00, 16.2%

Basic red-purple core with nothing remarkable about its opacity nor transparency, acceptable density in the red-ruby rims, wide and bright. The alcohol pierces your nose like a box full of needles, a shame as past that there's unassumingly ripe cherry, raspberry fruit, eucalyptus, wildflowers and cocoa dust, could potentially develop a creamy character were it not so shrill. Medium-bodied with a hollow mid-palate, the alcohol not obtrusive here but something is cloaking and shortening the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit. Slightly elevated tannins play a role here, chance that they deaden the cocoa/mocha touch and eucalyptus. Towards the end a glimmer of citrus and flowers appear. Bottle not flawed, just the wine is shockingly boring. What the flub happened? 85

Bogle  
Regional Blend, California, Old Vine  
Zinfandel  
2005, \$10.99, 14.5%

Very light and transparent ruby-purple, fully consistent from core to rims, unblemished. The nose comes across as intentionally holding back, could be creamier and the raspberry, blackberry scents could be sweeter, balances it out with eucalyptus and mint chocolate, part of the general "reticence" stifles the herbal undertones. Medium-bodied, has more sweetness than sheer body, offers cinnamon and ginger notes, orange spice, cocoa powder and mint leaf. In no way "hot" but in terms of buzz factor you feel the alcohol and this takes some length out of the raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit. The texture becomes pocked and uneven through the finish, dilutes things further. Glad it's not bottom-heavy yet it still needs integration regardless of weight. Grapes sourced from Lodi, Amador County, Fiddletown. 85

## CALIFORNIA WHITE

Selene  
Napa Valley, Carneros, Hyde Vineyards  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2006, \$29.99, 14.4%

Despite the relative lightness of the white to yellow hay color, translucently layered enough to hold your gaze and stays consistent throughout. The nose remains fresh enough that oddly it's kind of empty, spring water, stones, mint, lemon peel with a skimpy honeyed perfume, the peach, nectarine, apricot fruit comes on as almost an afterthought, gets kind of stuck in the middle. Medium-bodied with a sneaky kind of weight, like it's on a seesaw tilting back and forth. Much more richness and depth in the peach, pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit here, the acidity hasn't put the gym time in to decisively get it going in one direction. As much white grapefruit citrus as lemon, clouded over by mint and clove notes. There's a mineral water quality which cleanses well but doesn't quite match up with the rest. Becomes creamy through the finish, this lengthens it some. 88

## FRANCE RED

Texier, Eric  
Rhône, Côtes du Rhône Brézème, Domaine de Pergault  
Vieilles Vignes  
Syrah  
2005, \$29.99, 13.0%

Pure red-purple core, all but imperceptibly shifts to dark magenta-red rims, glassy surface and not a blemish in sight. The nose is succinct in a satisfying way, upon a bed of flowers laid zippy red cherry, raspberry fruit, lemon slices and anise, an initial funk blows off swiftly, remains fairly primary. Medium-bodied with sturdy, borderline hard, contours, doesn't come off as tannic per se but has very strong acidity which keeps it at attention. This also freshens the "red fruit" flavors of cherry, raspberry, cranberry as well as the lemon to lower grapefruit citrus. Waves of herbaceousness come and go, light leather appears but it never turns truly earthy nor gamey. Very composed and smooth, glides effortlessly if ends a bit short. Will be interesting to see what develops in 5-8 years. 89

Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun), Domaine des  
Beaujolais, l'Ancien Vieilles Vignes  
Gamay Noir  
2006, \$13.99, 12.0%

The purple core quite on the dark side, reaches fully into the ruby-magenta rims, sort of hides the underlying clarity. The nose has a smoky, stony aspect to it, like leaves and twigs burning on naked earth, tar and asphalt found as well, there's a rugged punching power to the cranberry, raspberry fruit scents, may be too early to soften into broader expressivity. Medium-bodied, a wire net of tannin cages the cherry, raspberry, cranberry, pomegranate fruit as well as white grapefruit citrus, giving current ascendance to the more herbaceous and stony components and making for a pucker past the mid-palate. Here one finds a "cleaner" sort of earthiness, fewer smoky or tarry notes. Its sheer momentum ensures a prolonged finish. Never entirely smoothes out, like it aims for the holes in the road while smirking at you sitting in the passenger's seat. (Synthetic Cork: Nomaticor) 89

Clos du Tue-Bœuf, Le  
Loire, Vin de Table Français, La Guerrierie  
Blend  
2006, \$18.99, 12.5%

While possessed of fine clarity, it still appears deeper than transparent, the ruby to light violet core with ease segues to bright magenta at the rims. Leather and a bushel of just picked wildflowers adorn the nose, the momentary crest of merde dissolved in the ripe red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit scents, overall more perfumed in a cloud than precise. Medium-bodied, not soft but engages and invites you into it, friendly candied aspect to the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. The funk and leather steadily there in an undemanding manner, more splash in the lemon zest, flowers and sweet cooking herbs. The tannins quietly build and by the second glass are quite noticeable. Lots of retronasal activity, everyone loves that. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Côt. 89

Tunnel, Domaine du  
Rhône, Cornas  
Syrah  
2005, \$42.99, 13.5%

Strong glow in the immaculate black-purple core, utterly spotless through to the rich pink-magenta rims. The nose is slow to open, does so and then closes up just as quickly, in the intermediate stage you get fresh flowers, unpicked green olives and stone shards next to fairly ripe red currant, cherry and blackberry fruit scents, unevolved in the earth or game departments. Medium-bodied, possesses brawny acidity which shapes most of the flavors as well as provides drying sensations through to a pucker at the end. There's mixed white citrus next to the flowers here with a gain in stoniness and loss in olive notes. Some leather at first yet this gets run down from behind by a burst of oak toast. The currant, plum, cherry fruit plugs along at a steady pace, not gonna win nor lose any races. Could benefit from another 3-5 years, however, not sure if integrated balance will be achieved. 87

Baudry, Domaine Bernard  
Loire, Chinon, Les Granges  
Cabernet Franc  
2006, \$17.99, 13.0%

Bright ruby-violet in color, fades to a warm crimson around the rims, plenty of saturation and dries in stains inside the glass. Very fruit-driven nose, to the point of becoming simple, minor brushes of forest scrub and leather alongside milk chocolate and all that raspberry, cherry, blackberry juiciness. Full-bodied, bursts equally with ripeness here in the mouth, gushers of raspberry, blackberry, cherry, plum fruit with little resistance offered by the totally submerged tannins. Bit of grapefruit to lemon citrus sparks it but lacking in herbaceous bite and earthiness. Again, more or less tastes like what it should, just minus the broader complementary flavors. Maybe they will become more evident with lost baby fat. But maybe not. You find out. 87

Daumas Gassac, Mas de  
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault Haute  
Vallée du Gassac  
Blend  
2005, \$29.99, 12.5%

Light red crimson to violet colored core, more garnet red along the rims with a shadow of orange, more clean and pure than vivid. The nose too is light and heavily weighted with leather, barnyard funk and merde, fairly herbaceous as well, the red cherry, raspberry fruit taut and succinct. Light to medium-bodied, streamlined unto being innocuous, curious lack of heft. The tannins thankfully more of a solid web than blanket, keeps it dry and smooth more than gives spine. The raspberry, cherry fruit more prominent here in the mouth, lower levels of that leather, animal, general funk going on. That said, not much going on per se, a dash or two of lemon peel and cedar but not revealing much breadth at the moment. Becomes more dilute through the finish. 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot, 4% Pinot Noir, 3% Syrah. 85

## FRANCE WHITE

Clos Floridene  
Bordeaux, Graves  
Blend  
2005, \$22.99, 12.5%

Basic yellow gold in color, concentrates nicely at the core with minor loss at the rims, translucent enough to display orange hues at some angles. The nose displays its typical medicinal, mentholated edge, lively orange and tangerine citrus as well as flower petals fit in seamlessly, keeps scrubbing and scrubbing against your nostrils, makes it hard for the peach, apricot, apple scents to settle in. Medium to full-bodied, one suspects it would feel heavier were it not for the cleansing muscularity of the acidity which more or less takes no prisoners. Bright white grapefruit, orange, lime citrus here outshines the florality as well as any wax, pine or cough syrup elements. Pushes hard outwardly against your cheeks. Its length somewhat masked by the bruises it has left behind on the way there. Lobster bisque now or wait 10 years. 55% Sémillon, 44% Sauvignon Blanc, 1% Muscadelle. 90

Huet, S.A.  
Loire, Vouvray, Le Haut-Lieu, Sec  
Chenin Blanc  
2006, \$31.99, 12.0%

While on the whole transparent, there's a dullness to the yellow golden base which gives it a certain solidity, pools deeply into the glass. The nose evokes fennel, sage, mint and smoky sauna stones, the orange to lemon citrus dried yet zesty, the minerality here a yard or so behind the other elements, helps to lengthen the peach, apple, pear fruit scents. Full-bodied with a wiry frame which pretty much tells your tongue what to do and when to do it. The lemon, tangerine citrus much more vocal here, leads the way over the stones, stream water and chalk. Maintains a sweet black licorice edge but less of the garden herbs, the acidity isn't too strong nor out of whack but does favor flavors with edge and bite. The apricot, peach, pineapple, green apple fruit carves a pleasing niche for itself but it is a niche in the end. Has all the verve you'd expect of a young Huet sec without beating the crap out of you, hard to tell if this is good or bad for ageability. 89

Clos Lapeyre (Jean-Bernard Larrieu)  
Southwest France, Jurançon Sec  
Gros Manseng  
2006, \$15.99, 13.0%

Simple, unadorned golden color, perfect consistency from core to rims, runs deep into the glass. The nose more texturally expands and pushes against your nostrils than explodes in a kaleidoscope of scents, that said, there's a good waxiness which beats out the honey aspect, subdued flowers and sweet herbs, the peach, apricot, nectarine scents feel washed as if the skin remains unbroken and the juice trapped within. Full-bodied, same general impression in the mouth, it's extremely heavy on the palate and, while not sluggish, lacks the fresh skip across your tongue many Jurançon Sec possess. Green to yellow apple, pear, peach fruit get close to a drying out as in concentrating feel, reeled back to an erect posture by sweet spices and lemon zest. The acidity level seems fine in terms of steady pulse, not laser beams. Still better than a lot of wines at the price but could use a touch more breadth. [Screwcap] 88

Ecü (Guy Bossard), Domaine de l'  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine, Expression de Gneiss  
Muscadet  
2006, \$17.99, 12.0%

Nothing unusual here in the pale yellow gold color, not crystal clear nor excessively translucent, rims differ little. The nose comprised of chalk dust, lemon peel, mineral

water and rose dew, what pear, apple and apricot fruit scents there be are evanescent. Medium-bodied, in spite of the broadly spread and somewhat deep acidity it's round and a bit surprisingly soft. Not that it's an invertebrate but one might want more bite and sense of finality on the finish. The flowers, mixed white citrus and mint cover up a lot of the empty spaces left by the peach, pear, apricot, apple fruit. The stone dust, mineral aspect more diffuse here, cannot powder the palate as the best Muscadet can. That said, the complaints are technical and it's still better than most. 87

Tremblay (Domaine des Iles), Gérard  
Burgundy, Chablis, Fourchaume  
Chardonnay  
2006, \$22.99, 13.0%

Slightly worn old gold in color, holds credibly through the rims, minor fizz, coats the inside of the glass. Mineral water, damp grass and stones make a brief appearance in the nose before honey, flowers and mint, presents an overall creamy texture, this flattening the peach, apricot, pear scents, more paste-like than. Full-bodied and on the soft side, the acidity yawns, rolls over and goes back to sleep. Here the honey and flowers suggest the influence of botrytis, semi-waxy as well. Only a smidge on mixed white citrus, continues with the mineral water and wet stone element. Just as the adequately ripe peach, apple, apricot, pear fruit catches hold it develops a sour edge which truncates the finish. More like Chardonnay than Chablis. 86

## FRANCE SPARKLING

Huet, S.A.  
Loire, Vouvray, Pétillant Brut  
Chenin Blanc  
2002, \$32.99, 12.0%

Sparse array of slow moving bubbles, noticeably dark gold hue with a hint of orange around the rims, quite solid looking. The nose offers orange marmalade, unroasted bitter nuts, inert stone and a touch of sulfur, while very dry and lean the nectarine, pineapple, green apple, apricot scents skip about energetically. Full-bodied, blunt and almost heavy, it moves at its pace and nothing you do is going to change that. The initial foaminess subsides with rapidity. The acidity dries things out fully but not to the point of detracting from the vibrancy of the Clementine orange and grapefruit citrus. Fair degree of wooliness creates pockets of air for added texture. Mild herbaceous notes add to the angularity of the apple, peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit, none of the latter come in liquid form. Slight toastiness on the finish but there's really nothing here to take the edge off. That's left to the years to come. 90

Berthelot, Paul  
Champagne, Brut Réserve  
Blend  
NV, \$39.99, 12.0%

Richly darkened golden color, the bubbles start off active and then settle in a steady wide spacing, more translucent than transparent. Crisp, if not bracing, nose of stone mixed white citrus zest, spring water and a light dab of honey, the green apple, pear, apricot fruit shows clear enunciation of the few words it speaks. Medium-bodied, semi-aggressive foam on the attack with a steady dissipation as it proceeds. Minimal honey or baked bread notes, leans heavily on the tart white grapefruit to orange citrus,

verging at times on a pleasant bitterness. Stone, clay and mineral weigh down the tongue, aided by acidity more blanketing than cutting. More thrust and push in the apple, peach, pear, pineapple fruit than real juice, not to intimate any lack of fruit. By the finish has coated the mouth fully, creating a level evenness. More character than ease of drinking here. Unspecified percentages of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier. 89

## ITALY RED

Taurino, Azienda Agricola Dr. Cosimo  
Puglia/Apulia, Salento, Patriglione  
Blend  
1999, \$59.99, 14.5%

Hint of purple to darken the brick red colored core, the crimson hues all you're gonna get from there on out through the rims. It makes your nose feel slowly filled, as if you're spraying whipped cream into it, the golden raisin, fig and honey blend effortlessly into licorice, milk chocolate, cinnamon stick and orange peel scents, even the plum, black cherry fruit loses its voice in the full choral effect. Medium-bodied, given the concentration of the flavors it is no way heavy nor sluggish, possesses sufficient acidity to put some spring into its step. There is a pleasing tension between the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit and the more raisin, prune, fig flavors, the latter perhaps favored by licorice, fennel, menthol and camphor accents. After a few sips you really start to breathe it in and out, lots of retronasal shiznitz going on. Underneath these sweeter flavors there's a quiet undercurrent of salt, stone and seawater which cleans up the potentially too dulcet nature of the finish. Complex while almost trying not to appear so. 90% Negroamaro, 10% Malvasia Nera. 91

Gulfi, Azienda Agricola  
Sicilia, Nerosanlorenzi  
Nero d'Avola  
2001, \$43.99, 14.0%

The core is fully opaque without the purple deepening into blackness, heavily set scarlet red rims provide equal vividness. The nose is very spicy with cumin, clove, turmeric notes as well as being endowed with licorice, grilled meat fat, mountain flowers and fruit scents which alternate between raisins and dates to cherries and plums. Full-bodied with bottom-heavy tannins, given its weight and density achieves a measure of smoothness, this without hampering its rustic soul. The exotic spices and potpourri first flavors to the fore, then an odd pairing of white grapefruit and milk chocolate. Metallic shavings, salt and barnyard dirt hit you next. The concentration of the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit most evokes dried fruit, not any sugary sweetness. Grows on you with every sip. But watch the final sip as it's throwing a good deal of sediment. 91

Terre Nere, Tenuta delle  
Sicilia, Etna Rosso, Feudo di Mezzo Il Quattro delle Rose  
Blend  
2005, \$35.99, 14.0%

Light brick red to violet hued core, not so much of the latter, stays mostly transparent through the red rose to scarlet rims. The nose ably blends twigs, sticks, grass and ashen earth with sweet hard candy-like cherry, raspberry scents, gains smokiness as it sits in the glass alongside wet matchsticks, leather and mixed white citrus, has a ruggedness to how it dissolves in your nostrils. Medium-bodied plus, its smoothness belies the chewy tannins

hiding in the grass and ready to pounce. Same tightly wound sweetness in the cherry, raspberry, watermelon fruit, in no way sugary without giving up length either. Leather, stone bits, sand, tobacco ash and mountain grasses give it a solidity which plays well off the white grapefruit and licorice notes. Again, while you can definitely feel the sinew in its muscles it stays smooth and doesn't force itself on you, a nifty trick. Coats your palate through the finish. Unspecified percentages of Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio. 90

Occhipinti, Azienda Agricola Arianna  
Sicilia

Frappato  
2006, \$39.99, 12.5%

Very light ruby to garnet in color, betrays a suggestion of orange at the rims, clear and sits with confidence in the glass for its level of hue intensity. While sour at turns, the strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit scents are explosively friendly and get a leg up from the percolating grassiness and lemon peels, notes of molasses crisp appear too, some turbulence as it dissolves but that may just be your nose trying to sniff some more. Full-bodied, layers of that strawberry, raspberry, cranberry, watermelon, cherry fruit form a steady pressure into the tongue, along the way releasing lemon peel, rose petals and honey. At first you think it is the acidity which prevents undue sweetness but by the second glass you're convinced it is the tannin. Never quite finishes, just hovers a few feet away watching you empty the glass. Seductive juice. 90

Terre Nere, Tenuta delle  
Sicilia, Etna Rosso, Calderara Sottana  
Blend

2005, \$24.99, 14.0%

Clear and unblemished red-purple core, a red rust tinge pervades the ruby rims, prettier than most. The nose is sweet, sugary and jammy without the weight, scents of strawberry, raspberry, red cherry skip about, also furnishes abundant leather, tea leaf, tar and black ash, steady pungent lift without becoming evanescent. Medium-bodied, mostly smooth with a soft, pliable grit to help it sink in. Smoke, leather and ashen soil elements, definitely exhibits that volcanic soil. Minimal oak, little to interfere with any animal or game notes and that soil. White grapefruit enlivens the cherry, red currant, raspberry flavors, the fruit all "red" in nature. Leans more on acidity than tannins for structure and cleanliness, remains steady through the finish, naturally compact. Unspecified percentages of Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio. 89

'Tavijn, Cascina  
Piedmont, Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato  
Ruché

2006, \$26.99, 14.0%

The cleanliness in the ruby-violet core does not lessen the intensity nor depth, excellent warmth in the pink-magenta rims with full hue maintenance. Big time floral perfume in the nose, really full and persistent, orange blossom, slice of milk chocolate and non-showy while rich plum, blackberry scents. Full-bodied with the high level of acidity needed to shave off the fat and still leave it plumply jolly. The bite in the lemon to orange citrus balances out the softness found in the floral dimension. The ripeness does not have a negative impact on the definition of the cherry, blackberry fruit, given how floral it is, surprising how it stays on the "black fruit" side of things. The more you sip it develops

more tannic coating as well as a pleasingly contrasting twiggy, dried grass side. More power than grace on the finish, reluctant to call it a night. Very good structure while also approachable. 89

'Tavijn, Cascina  
Piedmont, Barbera d'Asti

Barbera  
2005, \$23.99, 14.0%

Vivid red-purple core, already throwing visible chunks of sediment, the broad rims filled with scarlet red hues. Densely packed nose of leather, hard earth and lemon peel, not especially forthcoming, the black cherry, Italian plum fruit scents slowly build steam to make one big punch inside your nostrils. Medium-bodied, the strong lemon to white grapefruit component highlights the acidity, however, the tannins no slouch. Herbaceous in a hay or wild straw manner, no astringency nor bite. Any tartness in the red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit does not impede its juiciness nor length. More impelled by stone powder and ash than leather or fecund earthiness. Holds its shape completely through the finish, stays on an even keel. 89

Montesecondo, Azienda Agricola  
Tuscany, Chianti Classico

Sangiovese  
2005, \$22.99, 14.0%

Trim and dark throughout, the violet gives way to red-ruby and then a deep magenta along the outer rims. Very floral nose, blends in sandalwood, chamomile, anise and orange citrus, nicely self-assured and unassuming, attractive consistency and richness in the cherry, raspberry scents. Medium-bodied, grips well and feels like a big rubber ball, the pressure felt on the perimeter rather than the center. The sweetness of the red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit aided by pine, licorice and candied orange peel flavors. The acidity maintains a friendliness which would rather see you smile than put more keen cut in the jib. The florality builds throughout. No Mensa member, a skilled charmer who just puts you at ease. Unspecified percentages of Sangiovese, Colorino, Canaiolo. 89

Bera e Figli, Vittorio  
Piedmont, Barbera d'Asti, Ronco Malo  
Barbera

2005, \$27.99, 13.5%

Dark ruby to light purple hued core, maybe, just maybe, turns a lighter shade of red through the rims, not so clear as to lose layering. Tobacco ash, ground stone powder and fine mineral silt make sure the nose will stay dry and restrained, no matter the underlying exuberance of the cherry, raspberry fruit, curious notes of bell pepper here and there, stays true to the soil, few other scents to be had. Full-bodied, moves with a sure steadiness across the palate, the smoky but not roasted cherry, blackberry, plum fruit presents flavor with barely a trace of sweetness. That said, the tannins or acidity both appear in proportion to the whole. Orange and lemon citrus bring zip, the mellow florality not softening things much. While indistinct in terms of analyzing it, the soil component clear from start to finish. Guilelessly pleasing. 89

Bera e Figli, Vittorio  
Piedmont, Monferrato, Bricco della Serra  
Dolcetto  
2005, \$25.99, 14.0%

Vague gauzy haze in the deep purple core, still plenty of darkening violet in the scarlet to red-ruby rims, pushes close to opacity while light bounces effortlessly off the surface plane. While there's a plummy aspect to the cherry, mixed berry fruit, the nose is slimmed down by ashen dirt and burnt leaves and twigs as well as a pinch of sweet cooking spices, dried potpourri and orange peels. Full-bodied, if it lacks contour and shape it's more because it expands so swiftly there's no empty spaces to serve as contrast. Close in character to its presentation to your olfactory sense, ripe concentration in the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit without a lot of sweetness, the swipes of chocolate, orange peel and dried flower petals best early before succumbing to a hodgepodge of earth, tree branches, hay and field grasses. Gets your attention naturally, avoids makeup and bling. 89

Bera e Figli, Vittorio  
Piedmont, Barbera del Monferrato, La Verrane  
Barbera  
2004, \$19.99, 13.0%

Deep red-violet in color with depth equal to its clarity, the rims turn to a purer red-ruby, well-hued. Brush of roasted peanuts to the nose, then musky meadow flowers and underbrush, smokiness pervades the cherry, blackberry scents, the earthiness hard as if untilled for some time and packed down, horsehide and hair waft in and out, requires patience as it opens and becomes accessible. Medium-bodied, the tannins and acidity proportionate to the breadth of the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit, the latter shaped by the former without being stifled by it. Stoniness and minerality add to its total chewiness, wispy smoky lift. Good lemon zest and a suggestion of grassiness lessens solidity. Doesn't flaunt its broad shoulders to make an impression. While it possesses very credible length, when it does end it is on a definitive note. 89

Perrini  
Puglia/Apulia, Salento  
Primitivo  
2005, \$19.99, 13.0%

Hardly any violet in the core, mostly crimson to burnt brick red, minimal difference from there through to the rims, no blemishes nor spots to be seen. Very ashen, dusty nose of powdered minerals and poor earth, sour cherry fruit, anise and other off-sweet cooking herbs, the more you sniff the more it takes on a liqueur-like character. Medium-bodied, very dry in a natural way without excessive tannin. The fruit has moments of prune or hard candy character yet the overall dryness pushes it into fresher raspberry, red cherry territory. Lemon peel and sage, rosemary, oregano accents give it more than just earthy counterpoint to the fruit. Inklings of broken stones, fallen branches and wood, presents itself with a nuanced sort of rusticity. Just the right firm clampdown at the finish. 88

Gulfi, Azienda Agricola  
Sicilia, Rossojbleo  
Nero d'Avola  
2006, \$14.99, 13.5%

Bright, shiny ruby-violet color, immaculate with red-magenta rims and a pinkish cast. Leather to outright horsehide notes embellish the nose most, crushed herbs and potpourri, light accent of dried tar, the candied

cherries and raspberries turn tart before lifting through the dissolve. Medium-bodied, not tannic per se but definitely has a dusty texture. In contrast to this, there's a raisinated quality to the otherwise fresh red cherry, strawberry flavors. Stony earth, ash and tar continue the drying out sensations. Then gets twiggy near the finish, bark notes with a brush of dried lemon peels. Sheds weight through the end while clinging well to the tongue to extend its presence. Not quite rustic, went to college far away in the big city. (Synthetic cork: Neocork) 88

Sella, Azienda Agricola  
Piedmont, Coste della Sesia, Orbello  
Blend  
2004, \$14.99, 12.5%

Very light and highly transparent red-ruby color, some shades of violet flicker through the core, same for the orange along the rims. Sedate nose of candied cherry, red raspberry fruit, mountain trail gravel and grasses, echoes of old pressed flowers and black licorice, very open dissolve. Medium-bodied, the entry softened by milk chocolate and lemon drop shades, has invigorating acidity which helps to extend the moderate raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit. Allusions to tree bark, grass, dried flowers and tar balls yet none of these dig in that deeply. Has palate persistence even as the weight releases. Slight tart pucker at the finish reminds you it's been there. Simply stated case for itself. 50% Barbera, 25% Nebbiolo, 20% Cabernet Franc, 5% Vespolina, Croatina. 87

Perrini  
Puglia/Apulia, Salento  
Blend  
2004, \$16.99, 13.0%

Due to the relatively high transparency the blackness in the purple core is hard at first to discern, solid orange to red brick colored rims. Plump nose of plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit, slightly reduced if with an eventual airy lift, sweet spices, orange hips, pine cone and witchhazel, seems simpler than it is in the final analysis. Medium-bodied, saturates the palate to gain weight as it moves forward. Requires some time to open and unwind, the stony, ashen earth and bitters stifle the ripeness of that plum, cherry fruit for some time. Never loses that powdery caking, this in spite of it arguably having more perceptible acidity than tannin. It may not be chewy per se but you have to undertake a little mastication action to get it rolling. Unspecified percentages of Negroamaro, Primitivo. 87

Ulivi, Cascina degli  
Piedmont, Mounbè  
Barbera  
2005, \$23.99, 14.0%

Fresh brick red equal to the violet in the core, brighter red at the rims, full coloration throughout. There's more alcoholic fumes in the nose than preferable, peanut butter and animal hide too, alongside hay and straw notes it's difficult to get a full whiff of the abundantly ripe blackberry and black cherry fruit scents. Full-bodied, smooth enough mouth entry, yields to a gritty texture and tannic bite with twigs, leather, dried orange peels, driftwood and piquant cooking spice powders. The cherry, plum, blackberry fruit here too able to carve out space by dint of sheer force but lacks flow. The orange citrus dimension grows through the finish. It has personality, for sure, requires more direction and clarity of expression. 86

Serafini & Vidotto, Azienda Agricola  
Veneto, Montello e Colli Asolani, Phigaja After the Red  
Blend

2003, \$15.99, 13.0%

Enough red in the purple core to lighten it and accept the wide brick red rims, good clarity throughout. The nose provides a few echoes of bell pepper and cut grass before liqueur-like cherry, raspberry fruit spreads forth, not much else of note, barest suggestion of flowers. Light to medium-bodied with a very polished mouth feel, glides through so swiftly and easily one has to concentrate to register its presence. Leans decidedly on the sweet cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, this starts off nicely but dissolves mostly through the mid-palate. As in the nose, the bell pepper or herbaceous qualities held to an utmost minimum. Vague smokiness to it, more so than florality. Difficult to discern any tannin or acidity. An innocuous sipper for those with a sweet tooth. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Franc, Merlot. 86

Maule, Azienda Agricola La Biancarea di Angiolino  
Veneto

Blend

2006, \$18.99, 12.5%

Mild filminess warms up the ruby-purple core and draws you in, the rims illuminated by red to pink-magenta hues. Cocoa powder and candied cherry, raspberry fruit give the nose a familiar gentleness, no more than a fistful of dusty brown earth, pure and unvarnished without seeming simple, average length. Light to medium-bodied, the tannins may be a notch too strong for the primary material. The coca, earth, hay, mixed citrus all get lost some and as a result cannot support each other in a choral fashion. Nothing wrong with the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, stays juicy past the mid-palate. Entirely unflawed and honestly presented, you end up respecting it more than necessarily happily sipping it. 50% Merlot, 50% Lagrein. 86

Ulivi, Cascina degli  
Piedmont, Monferrato, Nibiò Terre Rosse  
Dolcetto

2005, \$20.99, 14.0%

The ruby-purple hue spreads evenly from core to rims, moderate lightening, if any, without blemishes. Mocha powder, peanut shells, airy earth and a waft of pine present in the nose, there's a sugary, dried fruit edge to the plum, cherry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, the chocolate and peanut butter notes evoke those Reese's commercials, soft and gentle, seems like it could have done with a little less hang time and ripeness, especially as the acidity is weak. That said, can't fault the fruit flavors, plum, prune, golden raisin, cherry in spades. With cinnamon and orange blossom accents it's hard not to be mindlessly charmed, even allowing for its overall lack of balance. Just wish it was more "refreshing" with a cleaner finish. 85

Montesecondo, Azienda Agricola  
Tuscany, Rosso  
Sangiovese

2005, \$17.99, 13.5%

Red-ruby battles the violet in the core to a standstill, full ruby-magenta rims with a jaunty liveliness. Mildly reductive nose with peanut notes, you could also find olive pits, fluffy meadow brush and rubbing alcohol before getting to the straightforward raspberry, red cherry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, can't shake the peanut shells, loses some

freshness in the cherry, raspberry fruit as a result. The acidity level could be higher, might smack things into shape and get them marching on time. Muffled feel through the flowers, leather and hay shades. While it's nice, leaves you feeling like there's something more that could have been there. Unspecified percentages of Sangiovese, Canaiolo. 85

## ITALY WHITE

Ulivi, Cascina degli  
Piedmont, Monferrato, Montemarino  
Cortese

2005, \$23.99, 12.5%

Bright yellow gold color with an infusion of zinc, not crystal clear but not cloudy either, translucent enough to mask any hue loss around the rims. Sweet tea leaves, orange peel, lilacs, pine breeze, the nose is all about motion and flirtation, the apple, pear, peach scents youthful lanky and unambitious. Medium to full-bodied, does a highly respectable job of sticking to every mouth pore, this textural aspect allows the orange and lemon citrus, flowers, honey and pear, apple, apricot fruit the time to sink in at their own pace. The acidity haphazardly chooses when to clamp down or not, one sip may be dry, the next not so. Tea leaves and mountain scrub the most prevalent other influences. Hard to decisively pinpoint why you like it but damn if you don't. 90

Radikon, Azienda Agricola Stanislao  
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Oslavje

Blend

2002, \$46.99, 13.5%

Super-cloudy and zinc orange, amber in color, does shift to a more yellow-based spectrum at the rims, as always looks all messed up. In the nose there's cinnamon and ginger spice but dulled, same for the lemon to orange citrus, mildly poached fruit character to the apricot, peach, nectarine, yellow apple scents, starts to turn medicinal but instead simply dissolves. Full-bodied, at first tastes more like a good wheat beer than a wine, bottom-heavy, moves forward at a very slow pace. Along these lines, the lemon citrus feels plopped in, the sweet baking spices craftily mixed in too. The apricot, peach, apple, pear fruit confuses as it's fresh at once and oxidized at another. Damp mud, clay and brick accents crest during the back half. Nothing new here, you either "get it" or you don't. 40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Grigio, 30% Sauvignon Blanc. 500 ml bottle. 88

Nusserhof (Heinrich Mayr), Weingut  
Alto Adige/Südtirol, Blaterle Vino da Tavola  
Blatterle

NV, \$24.99, 12.0%

Pure yellow straw in color, just shimmers enough to bend light below the surface and prevent complete transparency. Licorice, violets, powdered sugar and Mandarin oranges first bubble up in the nose, a thin layer of honey covers the pear, yellow apple, peach scents, possesses a cleansing simplicity. Medium-bodied, much softer and viscerally agreeable than previous versions, suggests there's some botrytis or the like at work, the honeyed quality unusual and the acidity not swinging the usual machete. Again, licorice, eucalyptus, pink lemonade, violets hog the spotlight, minimal stoniness or minerality and even the apple, pear, apricot fruit has to stand up to be counted. Cleanses your palate like a Ricola drop but also leaves you wondering why this vintage diverges so

much from those before. 2006 vintage version although not labeled as such (L6). 88

Bucci, Cantina dell' Azienda Agricola  
Marche, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore  
Verdicchio  
2006, \$20.99, 13.5%

While clear it's easily roiled to become filmy, the golden color can adopt green hues as well, moderate strength through the rims. Licorice, violets, orange blossom and honey make for a gently enticing nose, rich while restrained pear, apricot, apple scents, doesn't change in terms of aromas nor textures but does stick in there for some time. Full-bodied, sticky and clingy, like fruit syrup brushed into your cheeks. There's a borderline tropical nature to the apricot, peach, pineapple, papaya fruit but it lacks the gusher of juice to flow through the finish. The same hint of licorice boosts the florality and lemon zest. However, the acidity lacks the thrust to keep it clean and an amount of bitterness bubbles up at the finish. More of a crowd pleaser which should be chugged over conversation than considered thoughtfully. 88

Ambra, Casa d'  
Campania, Ischia Bianco  
Blend  
2006, \$13.99, 12.0%

Presents a dark gold to copper tinged color, noticeably translucent and layered, moves like a lava lamp in the glass. Simple, unadorned nose of friendly honey, lilacs, orange peel and stream water, the peach, pear, apple scents fuzzy and freshly picked. Light to medium-bodied, more nimble and fluid than impressive, slides down your gullet like you just had the pipes snaked. Fresh lemon to orange citrus, mint and flowers here, loses most of the honeyed aspect. Same just off the vine feel to the apricot, peach, apple, pear fruit, more crisp snap than running juice. Fresh spring water, washed stones and quartz bits keep the cleanliness in full effect. Its charm found in its humility. 50% Biancolella, 50% Forastera. 88

Maule, Azienda Agricola La Biancara di Angiolino  
Veneto, Pico  
Garganega  
2006, \$28.99, 13.0%  
Hard to imagine a cloudier white wine, it's completely opaque and the yellow-orange color evokes standing water, minor diminishing along the rims. A motorcycle must have patched out in the glass because something left some rubber behind, floral water, peach, apricot and pear fruit with some pit/seed notes, smidgeon of lemon citrus too. In the mouth it's full-bodied and spreads out in a round, pliable circumference, eats up territory without having to try. Average acidity, nice spritz in the lemon to orange citrus, violet dust and licorice keep it leaning towards pretty rather than austere. The peach, apricot, pear, apple, melon fruit forward if not particularly long-lived. More or less, it's like a bearhug from a college chum you haven't seen for five years, both meaningful and tentative. 87

Maule, Azienda Agricola La Biancara di Angiolino  
Veneto, Sassaia  
Blend  
2006, \$19.99, 12.5%  
Basic golden hue, hint of orange to the core, fades along the rims, more translucent than clear. Shows some rubbery notes in the nose, behind that orange and lemon

rind, light pear, apple and peach fruit scents and a brush of licorice and dried honey, not fully expressive as of yet. Medium-bodied, very firm contours without coming off as acidic nor hard. Mild spiciness blends with lemon, orange citrus, while not floral per se, has more of this than grassiness. The core of peach, apricot, pear fruit stays tightly wound throughout. Rumbles along, not especially smooth but this helps hold your attention. Dusty minerality and ash coat the tongue through the finish. Comes off as requiring some time to completely become itself, unfair to judge fully today. 80% Garganega, 20% Trebbiano. (No sulfur added) 87

Bera e Figli, Vittorio  
Piedmont, Canelli, Arcese  
Blend  
2006, \$11.99, 12.0%

The golden hue dark enough at angles to take on amber hues, clear enough, oddly the rims almost bleached of color, displays a fizz upon pouring. The nose is made of rose water, dried golden apples and juice concentrate, dusting of clove and cinnamon, manages to sneak in some lemon and lime peel before dissolving. Light to medium-bodied, here on the attack the frizzante nature highly evident, elevates the stone, mineral water, lemon peel elements. Manages to cover the tongue while also hovering above. Bitter citrus notes firm and tauten the apple, peach, apricot, pear fruit, squeezing them off the stage before the finish. Very clean and both terroir-based as well as generally transparent, if you want a fruity wine keep on walking. Unspecified percentages of Cortese, Favorita, Arneis. 87

Ulivi, Cascina degli  
Piedmont, Monferrato, Bianco di Tassarolo A Demûa  
Blend  
2006, \$25.99, 13.0%

Dull cast to the yellow-brown straw color, even with the translucent layering it fades quite a bit along the rims. Bit of a sour bite found in the nose, throws off the peach, apricot, yellow apple scents while also restraining the honey and flower parts, offers fuller lemon extract. Medium-bodied plus, the way it coats and clings to the palate adds weight, even while later allowing for a pleasing release. More expressivity in the peach, apricot, apple fruit, a better match here for the lemon citrus and flowers. Displays an odd metallic touch which highlights some earthiness. The acidity is average, nothing of great note. Sticks together as if glued, more so than coheres, the "throw it in the soup pot" feel comes through strongly. Good palate presence through finish. Unspecified percentages of Riesling, Verdea, Bosco, Timorassa, Moscatella. 86

## GERMANY RED

Scheu, Weinhof  
Pfalz, Schweigen, Trocken AP #19  
Spätburgunder  
2006, \$14.99, 13.0%

The core has purple in it but it's much more crimson red throughout, quite clear and spotless with excellent transparency. There's a bit of earthy, forest floor funk to the nose but nowhere near enough to overshadow the red cherry, watermelon and raspberry fruit, steadily lowkey lemon peel and wet slate notes, more firm in texture than expressive in aromas. Medium to full-bodied, has admirable tannic and acidic structure, holds everything up

for inspection and prevents any blurring of the flavors. More grassiness and stony here, along with the lemon peel a more than adequate match for the red cherry, red raspberry fruit. Yet, in no way underfruited and the fruit fumes cling to your mouth roof and cheeks well through the finish. Given its weight its tartness helps to help it spread and not turn sluggish. Well worth the relatively cheap price. 88

#### GERMANY WHITE

Wirsching, Weingut Hans  
Franken, Iphöfer, Julius-Echter-Berg, Auslese AP #32  
Silvaner  
2006, \$36.99, 9.5%  
There's a translucent filminess to its appearance which helps the white straw bade deepen into yellow shades, in turn probably saps a lot of the surface shine. Highly concentrated nose of pineapple, nectarine, mango, peach fruit complete with a glaze of caramelized sugar, the floral notes a musky dew too heavy to lift. Full-bodied, a real tongue coater, floral extract, honey and molasses slather every pore so it is a good thing there's a surge of acidity past the attack to create some space for movement. This also brings out lemon tangerine zest and a vaguer white smoke touch. Stream water and stones there for the ardent analyst, if one is nimble enough to skirt the dense peach, apricot, pineapple, mango fruit. Voluptuous is putting it lightly, nears crossing into dessert wine territory. 90

Schmitt-Wagner, Weingut Carl  
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Longuicher Maximiner, Herrenberg, Spätlese AP #1  
Riesling  
2006, \$20.99, 9.0%  
On the whole transparent even as light bends below the surface, this exacerbated by the darkness of the gold to green-copper coloration, strong rims. Distinct saline and sea breeze notes in the nose, the minerality and chalkiness but up a great fight against the energy of the very ripe apricot, peach, nectarine fruit scents, hint of mint and baking spices. In the mouth it's full-bodied with the saving grace of broad-shouldered acidity, otherwise it would prove cloying in the sugary concentration of the abundant pear, cherry, apricot, peach fruit. Cinnamon, honey to molasses, lemon drops, violets all swell during the mid-palate. These, in turn, accommodate the minerals, slate and salt notes towards the end. Even with the acidity stays round so maybe not for the "trocken" lover but by no stretch an overly sweet wine either. 89

Meißner, Weingut Herbert  
Pfalz, Burrweiler, Altenforst, Spätlese Selection AP #25  
Gewürztraminer  
2005, \$24.99, 10.0%  
Attractive pure golden hue to it, sleek surface as well as fullness both below and through to the rims. The nose pliable with the initial foray of white smoke and mineral dust swallowed into the raw nuts, tangerine citrus, rose petals and honey crisp, the pear, apricot, melon scents have no interest in hogging the spotlight. Full-bodied, creamy unto velvety in texture, cuddles up to your palate and lays on the honey, tangerine to pink grapefruit citrus, flower water with happy abandon. Vanilla and sweet nuts are next, in spite of all this there is a noticeable acidic spine and a pleasing minerally foundation below it all. The pear, golden apple, apricot, peach fruit sugary and sweet

and cleans up well too. As usual, one of the more enjoyable German Gewürztraminer wines made. 89

#### AUSTRIA WHITE

Nigl, Weingut  
Kremstal, Privat  
Grüner Veltliner  
2006, \$39.99, 14.5%  
The lack of surface shine pales the yellow straw color, this aided by a slight translucent warping of light below, the only hue density is around the rims where ochre flecks appear. The nose is pure to the point of emptiness, stream water, violets, lemon pulp, white pebbles, even the peach, apricot, melon scents tiptoe about. Medium-bodied, possesses that same airy quality in the mouth as if the liquid was bread dough, fill of pockets and holes. There's a big floral lift at first until the white grapefruit to lemon citrus gets it rubbing down into the palate. Once there, the green peas, grass and shale stone flavors keep it anchored well. Too much sweetness in the apricot, pineapple, yellow apple, peach fruit for any white pepper spice to gain hold. Given its odd combination of weight and airiness, the flavors vacate a few ticks before the palate pressure does. [Screwcap] 88

#### SPAIN WHITE

Sanz, Javier  
Rueda, Villa Narcisa  
Verdejo  
2006, \$10.49, 13.0%  
Shiny green to white gold surface, turns duller below while also empties out along the rims. Cotton candy and toasted coconut keeps pace with the pear, melon, apple scents in the nose, only mildly floral, overall expands and fill softly rather than become airy. Medium-bodied, stuffed with fine powdered sugar, lemon custard and a spoonful of honey, yet this all easily fades as a vague dryness pervades the mid-palate. Bright momentary bitterness in the green apple, pear, apricot fruit. This brings out almost a hint of almond. Overall, starts off well, just can't maintain the initial cruising level. Better with a good chill on it. [Synthetic Cork: Supremecorq] 86

#### PORTUGAL RED

Lavradores de Feitoria  
Douro Valley  
Blend  
2005, \$12.99, 13.0%  
Trim and spotless ruby-violet color, a shade darker at the core, shade lighter along the rims, bright beet red infusion throughout. Moderately high-toned raspberry, cranberry, red cherry scents rise above mint, lavender flowers, lemon and vague sulfur-like notes, average lift and length, sniff and forget. Medium-bodied, has body at first but then it drops off precipitously after but a few seconds. Has a nice floral dimension, some orange essence, pinch of cocoa powder too. Cranberry, red cherry and lighter strawberry the main fruit flavors. Flirts with being overripe but then relents. Neither tannic nor acidic but has both. Jogs next to you consistently. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barroca. 86

## NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Mud House  
Marlborough  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2007, \$13.99, 13.0%

Just about fully transparent white straw color, light in hue from core to rims. Vague herbaceousness in the nose swiftly pales before super-sweet pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus blossom and zest, fruit flowers, mutter of stoniness, the citrus cloaks even the peach, apricot, pineapple fruit, curious burst of coconut too. In the mouth it's medium to full-bodied, its excess weight holds the sweetness of the lime, grapefruit, tangerine citrus, giving it a confectionary feel. Adequate level of acidity, powdery enough to appear unnatural. A tropical bite slightly extends the pineapple, papaya, nectarine, apricot, pear, apple fruit, but this does fall off by the finish. Leaves behind a tingly mouth sensation and light herbaceousness. In sum, has lots of vibrancy yet does not refresh. [Screwcap] 88

## CHILE RED

Sur Andino  
Central Valley, Terra Andina  
Carmenère  
2006, \$8.99, 14.0%

While transparent on the whole, plenty of blackness in the purple core, presents rims of saturated scarlet to magenta. The nose is full to the point of sluggishness, bushels of plum, cherry and blackberry fruit with mint, orange spice and cinnamon as well as a very light oak toast, satisfying in a basic manner. Full-bodied, creamier with more evident oak here, dry enough that the plum, cherry fruit stays second fiddle to the oak, mint and flowers. While not tannic per se, develops a tacky texture which prevents a smooth, polished progression. As a result, ends a tad prematurely. On the whole, stays firmly in the middle of the anonymous pack. 86

## ARGENTINA RED

Portillo, Finca El  
Mendoza, Valle de Uco  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2006, \$8.99, 14.0%

Sufficient blackness in the purple core, a bruise as much as anything, rims brighten appreciably to a garnet to red-magenta hue, spotless with plenty of surface sheen. In the nose, good thickness in the plum, black cherry scents, milk chocolate and orange extract, vague menthol waft, otherwise nothing jumps out at you. Medium-bodied plus, firm in spite of average tannin, more like it cures quickly on the tongue. Lemon/orange zest balances out the milk chocolate, cocoa element. The blackberry, cherry, currant fruit solid, if unspectacular, same from start to finish. Not earthy nor leathery per se yet, by the same token, not simple fruit either. No bumps in the road. [Synthetic cork: Supremecorq] 87