

The Hanes Wine Review, January 2009 Edition

The big snooze this time around is Hanes is officially collecting his beer tasting notes on their own separate website page. Beer consumption has outstripped wine consumption over the past month or so by a considerable margin. This should normalize back in favor of wine in a few months or so. But, alas, there is a lot of beer out there and Hanes's mania for complete knowledge compels him where few others dare to tread. Read all about it here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/beer.html>

Back to the world of wine. Year end top ten lists suck ass and only the lamest of the lame produce them or consume them. Got it? Harumph. So, none of that nonsense here. Instead, a quick *prospective* look at wine sales in 2009.

Any wine retailer can tell you that sales are down over recent years and that people are "trading down" price wise with what is purchased. With the current economic climate, not a surprise. But that's the surface story. The *Wine Speculator* just published an article that wine auctions declined by \$25 million in 2008, with a very sharp decline during the fourth quarter. This appears to underscore that the flood of money into wine investments is drying up (investments versus wine purchased to consume). Maybe yes, maybe no.

Hanes suspects a slightly different scenario is playing out. Rich people didn't get rich by being dumb. Well, at least half of them didn't. Fine wine is part of a lifestyle and that lifestyle is not out of style. Hanes is fond of saying that there were plenty of millionaires during the Great Depression and that holds true for today. No lack of Richie Richs with money to burn today and tomorrow. Don't shed tears for the downtrodden of Washington Mutual or Lehman Brothers just yet. Hanes thinks what is happening now is what has happened during any severe, prolonged economic downturn in America's past. The truly rich are waiting and waiting. They know the product is out there, wine is a tangible thing, it doesn't disappear like paper investments. The High Net Worth crowd knows they can outwait the rest of the rubes and are doing so.

Producers have to sell through to raise capital to keep their wineries afloat. A lot of this depends on how much leverage the company has taken on versus how much true business equity they possess. Just recently it has come to light that the famed Château Latour of Bordeaux is for sale. Big whoop. The wine still sells for a bazillion times what it is worth (unless you believe worth is what the market will bear rather than intrinsic, you capitalist pig you). Most rich people can figure out that producers needing cash will at some point feel the pressure to sell at a deep discount to get *any* capital liquidity into their business. This, in turn, holds true for the wholesalers as well as the retailers. It's simply a matter of patience.

In the stock market you can't "predict the bottom" because the system is too dynamic and fast paced. In wine things change, but at a much more real time pace. Hence, the buyer with cash reserves can watch and wait. Which is what Hanes thinks is happening on a large scale among potential high end wine buyers. They want to be sure the "three tier system" of producer, wholesaler and retailer is feeling maximum pain before buying. And, really, why not?

Anecdotally speaking, producers on the whole are feeling a really big pinch. Too much similar quality product and competition, no cash to spend on things like marketing to differentiate product offering. And more new product (mostly cheaper) coming on line all the time. For what Hanes has seen and gathered, wholesalers are having more and more "closeout" and "inventory reduction" sales than ever. Sorry for them, a lot of this wine is crap that won't move at virtually any price and is just dead in the water. When this happens they have to start putting the higher end "cherries" on discount just to generate sales and liquidity. And this is the moment we've all been waiting for, the truly desirable wines offered for 50 cents on the dollar.

The first immediate rub here is the retailing part of the chain. Most reputable higher end wine stores are already sitting on a lot of stock which isn't moving. The question quickly becomes one of the store's ability to "protect" its profit margins. If a wholesaler is offering you some pretty nice cherries at great prices can you even afford to buy them at the discounted price? You can go in lots of directions. You can blow out the existing stock at a very thin profit margin to raise the cash to buy the new wines being offered. *If* a retailer can successfully move this existing stock (a big if), then the question becomes do you price the newly purchased wines at your regular markup or at a lower markup? Do you price off of the discounted price you actually paid or off of the normal "frontline" price the wine went for before the wholesaler discounted it? The retailer wants to maximize their profit but maybe this isn't quite up to them. The newly purchased wines have to sell and sell quickly.

For it is the end customer holding the cards right now. What will entice them to buy and inject liquidity into the whole three tier system? Again, it's the best price on the best product. Which means lots of pain for those in the wine trade. Product scarcity isn't a true motivator right now, there's lots of great wines out there on the shelves (not hidden in the back room) and for any kind of palate or wine preference. The wines are sitting right there. And sitting there. And sitting there. Without the sense of urgency that comes from buyer competition, it's more a question of who will blink first, the retailer or the buyer? And Hanes says it is going to be the retailer. If one is a buyer of high end Bordeaux, Burgundy, Cali Cabernet, Barolo, etc. they should be smiling like the cat who ate the canary. It's not today and maybe not tomorrow but 2009 may turn out to be one of the best years in recent memory for high end wine buying. From the buyer's perspective. Any buyer with cash to burn is gonna get courted harder than Angelina Jolie at a biker's bar. The buyer is calling all the shots. And when enough of them sense the bottom has been reached and start to stock up for their cellars or as pure investment plays, only then will the wine industry as a whole be able to relax. The days of normalcy are coming but not

before quite a few more wholesalers and retailers go out of business first. 20% off? 25% off? Sneers! It's going to take more than that to get the money off the sidelines.

Same thing with the auction world. Don't cry for them, Argentina. Most large prestigious auction sales are investments and who buys high when you believe the price will soon drop precipitously? The auction houses will all land on their feet because they don't take the risk, it's not like they buy the wine from the consignors. All they have to deal with are angry consignors who didn't get the price they wanted. Well, tough titties, the other auction houses couldn't get you the desired price either so you're stuck. Time will pass, new consignors will come along or the disgruntled ones get greedy again and we're back off to the races. It's really a Ponzi scheme like Madoff was running but the auction houses will only feel the pain through lowered commission fees. Big deal, fire some grunts and rehire others later.

The only ones who will get hurt at the consumer end are the *investors* who couldn't see the crash coming and paid \$20K for a case that sells for \$10K today. Well, boo-fucking-hoo. Sell it to the smart rich guy now or hold it until the world is once more flooded with dumb rich guys like you. It won't be that long.

* * * * *

This month's big winners... Hanes has been on a mini Northern Rhône tasting binge, "mini" being all that he can afford. Luckily he lives in a place where wholesalers put these wines on sale regularly. The 2005 and 2006 vintages are both apparently worth trying, this is certainly true for the 2005 Burgaud Côte-Rôtie and 2005 Gallet Côte-Rôtie. The same could be said for the 2006 Gilles Robin Crozes Hermitage "Papillon" but at \$25 it is pushing the price ceiling for value. It is what it is and taking this into account it is entirely possible to recommend spending \$16 or so on the 2006 Cousiño-Macul "Antiguas Reservas" Cabernet Sauvignon from Chile. Hanes would happily drink this were it offered at a friend's party or such. If Hanes had any friends. Dessert wines are not the province of the solitary alcoholic, so luckily Hanes was able to open a 2006 Lillypilly dessert wine blend from Australia during a cooking class at work. \$20 for a half bottle but still the fun and tasty delight he remembered this to be from days gone by.

The best \$15 and under picks... North Carolina is not ground zero for finding great Beaujolais but the 2007 Vissoux "Cuvée Traditionnelle" Vieilles Vignes is a predictable hit and thankfully the price remains right at the \$15 bargain wine threshold. The Louis Martini 2005 Sonoma Cabernet is decent for \$14 and despite the lack of luster remaining on the name of this most august Californian wine pioneer. Hanes would expect this product to be very consistent vintage-to-vintage and thinks the switch to 2006 is underway. Either year should suffice. German importer P.J. Valckenberg has sent us a cheapie Pinot Noir from the Rheinhessen, tarted up for the American market with a picture of a woman's midsection in a bodice and replete with screwcap. It's \$12 and very light in style, an unassuming quaffer for more terroir-driven than fruit-driven Pinot appreciators.

And the disappointments... Not sure what to make of the 2006 Turley Zinfandel from the Cedarman Vineyard. Only had one offering from the vineyard previously, which was decent. This one blah. More research needed, send Hanes more bottles. Would expect more from a decent Oregonian producer like Bergström, however, their 2007 Riesling "Dr. Bergström" is fairly boring and nowhere near worth the \$28 price tag. More so-so Californian wine. Hanes sells a lot of Napa Cellars Merlot so he thought he should try it. Mistake. The 2005 is \$22 misspent but ya'll keep buying them and contributing to the Hanes paycheck. MacMurray Ranch has a 2006 "Sonoma Coast" bottling of Pinot Noir. This is a fact beyond refute. Let's leave it at that. It has been ages since Hanes has tasted a wine from Australian producer Lindemans. So, when the opportunity arose he tasted the 2007 Shiraz "Bin 50." Let's hope it is twice as long before Hanes must sully his only tongue with a Lindemans wine.

* * * * *

All contents of this electronic mail are copyright 2009 by Marc Hanes. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any format without written prior permission is prohibited.

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])

* * * * *

All contents are copyright 2008 by Marc Hanes. All rights reserved.
Reproduction in any format without written prior permission is prohibited.

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Small Vines Wines
Russian River Valley
Pinot Noir

2006, \$53.99, 14.3%

Light violet to brighter garnet shades, very spotless yet with a certain measure of translucency, solid rims. Solid burst of cola in the nose, pine needles and orange zest, the oak cream kept to a minimum, an herbal component helps focus the sourness of the blackberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit scents, stretches out well before dissolving. Medium-bodied, nice tangy zip to it, again cola being the strongest flavor. The acidity above average and feels natural, accelerates the pacing. Very bright, close to hard candy nature, red cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit. Orange, almost white grapefruit citrus sweet with a sour twist to boot. Balanced with little trace of heat, no one aspect overwhelms, more a sum of the parts. Which is a good thing. 89

Seghesio Family Vineyards
Alexander Valley, Home Ranch
Zinfandel

2006, \$40.99, 15.7%

Full blend of violet and red-ruby throughout, holds steady through the rims, pleasing reflectivity across the surface. Dried grill fat, smoke and earth in the nose, molasses and soft toffee, honey glaze as well, thick plum, blackberry, black cherry scents, mixing it all together it doesn't balloon unduly and keeps a moderately trim shape in the nostrils. Medium-bodied, served well by a sturdy tannic foundation, brings up some pepper and spice elements. The vague earthiness persists while there's less smokiness. The oaky molasses, caramel stuff becomes more prevalent as it opens with air time. Blends in golden raisin and fig notes alongside the cherry, blackberry fruit, not as dense as the nose suggests. Tightens up pleasantly during the finish, no slouching. 89

Seghesio Family Vineyards
Sonoma County
Zinfandel

2007, \$22.99, 15.5%

Purple bruise with garnet red tones, good clarity as well as surface shine. Oddly not a lot going on in the nose, butterscotch and molasses, forest floor matter and pine cones, orange peel and more or less basic blackberry, raspberry fruit scents. Medium-bodied, very creamy here with upsized vanilla and butterscotch accents. This tends to blunt the otherwise tart cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit flavors. Not a great deal of tannin, however, the perceptible acidity seems decent. Doesn't push dried fruit concentration while the oak calms down by the finish. The orange, lemon citrus swells in the middle, pitching in too for freshness' sake. Ends with some smoky, grill fat notes. Doesn't go down the chute as fluidly as you might like, just about the only place the alcohol shows. 88

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Cedarman
Zinfandel

2006, \$29.00, 16.0%

Deep red-ruby as present as any purple throughout, in spite of relatively bright hue does achieve opacity, rims blend in strong magenta tint. The nose led by densely

baked vanilla cream, butterscotch, caramel and toffee, the alcohol level shines through, these in tandem for it difficult for the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit to speak clearly, not much else to draw from, leaden presentation. Full-bodied, soft except for an astringent tightening at the end, on the whole smooth and innocuous. All that butterscotch, caramel vanilla pudding marches forward as expected. There's more resonance in the cranberry, cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, not a fruit bomb by any measure though. Sweet orange juice and maybe some pine or tea leaf. Tannin or acidity, eh. There is a dry, tacky residue on the finish, though. An average Zinfandel. 87

Martini, Louis M.
Sonoma County
Cabernet Sauvignon
2005, \$13.99, 13.6%

Sufficient redness in the core to lighten the purple coloration and prevent opacity from full completion, as much brick red as ruby in the rims. Lots of juiciness and even sappiness in the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit in the nose, very light coffee or toffee oak notes, more offered by way of leather, charcoal, matted field grasses and flowers, too ripe to truly scream Cabernet. In the mouth it's medium to full-bodied, adequate tannins to at least strain against the fullness of the black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. As before, the oak very well-tempered and embellishes with smokiness, caramel and butter notes. Leather, smoked meats and more non-grassy barn matter persist. Very approachable without pandering. Finish is a little short. 87

Napa Cellars
Napa Valley
Merlot
2005, \$21.99, 14.5%

Glimmer of purple in the core, however, it's more oriented towards brick and clay red, orange and scarlet hues, quite clear without sacrificing vibrancy. Somewhat stemmy and reductive nose, fattened by vanilla ice cream aspect, wildflowers and meadow grasses apparent, the cherry, blackberry scents feel swollen as if on sale at the market a touch too long. Medium to full-bodied, would be the latter if it held onto its weight longer. Herbal with tea leaf and tobacco wrapper nuances, orange peel and tar. The oak toast isn't that bad, they must have cheaped out. Basic presentation of blackberry, black cherry, red currant fruit, doesn't try too hard. An OK wine that should really be like six bucks cheaper. 86% Merlot, 14% Syrah. 85

MacMurray Ranch
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast
Pinot Noir
2006, \$16.99, 13.5%

Ruby-violet color of above average depth, unblemished and easy to see through, the rims change just enough to suggest a more ochre-crimson cast. In the nose cola and orange citrus notes get smushed by stewed tomato and green grass notes, some clove and ginger spice start to right the ship yet the red cherry, strawberry fruit scents a touch too ephemeral to provide backup. Medium-bodied, sloughs off a good portion of the weight before the mid-palate. Neither tannic nor acidic, does remain mostly dry throughout, no overripeness in the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit. The cola bean and mixed citrus waft in and out, not sure what to finger yet there's a perduring bitterness to it, not stemmy nor green but disturbing. The tomato thing a factor too, not as bad as in the nose. Just

seems like it could be better, pushed too far to be something it's not. 84

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Hansel Winery (Hansel Family Vineyards), Walter Russian River Valley

Sauvignon Blanc
2007, \$17.99, 14.5%

White gold color, dull yellow tones vaguely deepen it, above average translucency in spite of meager coloration. The nose has a mineral smokiness to it, mixed white citrus rind, fruit pit character to the peach, nectarine, apple scents, tart sort of pull-up rather than spreads, at the same time has a sense of density while also releasing and opening well. In the mouth it's medium-bodied plus, you don't perceive the high alcohol level and, in fact, there's a blunt quality to its presentation which perhaps further dampens the heat. Pink, white grapefruit and tangerine citrus predominate, neither really herbaceous nor floral. The stone, mineral aspects noticeable but don't click completely. No problem with the length of the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit, does what it has to do. Ends with increasing creaminess when you wish it would stiffen and bite some. 87

Zaca Mesa
Santa Ynez Valley

Viognier
2006, \$18.99, 14.5%

Average golden hue of moderate reflectivity, more transparent than not, sticks around decently at the rims. Light creamy texture to the nose stops the florality from lifting much, more penetration in the tangerine, lemon citrus notes, the placid peach, apricot fruit, somewhat swift dissolve. Medium-bodied, not as fat as blowy, doesn't move in a definitive direction, meanders about. The lemon, orange citrus here melds with light cinnamon, ginger spice and flower water, gives it more tingle than density. Average acidity for the grape, nothing that will kick the apricot, peach, apple fruit in the butt. Not the prettiest girl at the ball but doesn't step on your feet if you want a dance or two. (Synthetic Cork: NPL) 86

Solex
Regional Blend

Chardonnay
2006, \$15.99, 14.0%

Light straw brown to green-white in hue, resplendent surface shine, translucent layering below, pallid rims. Nose betrays minimal oak, may even be done in stainless steel, rises at a steep angle in the nose displaying vivid orange, tangerine citrus, flower water, linear presentation of the peach, apricot, yellow apple, pear scents. Medium-bodied, zesty with only a mild creaminess at first with caramel and fresh butter, yields to tangerine, lemon citrus bite and a slight mineral dusting. Active pear, peach, apricot fruit, not very deep yet keeps flitting about. Not as floral as in the nose, it's the citrus which dominates. Easy drinking in a leaner style, acidity manages to extend finish some. 49% Sonoma County, 28% Monterey County, 23% Santa Barbara County. 86

WASHINGTON WHITE

RiverAerie
Columbia Valley
Gewürztraminer
2006, \$18.99, 14.4%

Shiny pale gold color with a green tinge, brilliance its strongest aspect, pales to whiteness along the rims. Dense floral nose with only a smattering of nuttiness, as well more vanilla cream than citrus notes, gives the apricot, peach, pear fruit scents added roundness, remains full for some time. Full-bodied, ratchets up the vanilla cream even further here in the mouth, like pudding. The tangerine, pink grapefruit citrus sweeter and resonates more too. Minimal acidity makes it approach "fruit bomb" status for the grape, pear, yellow apple, peach, apricot in abundance. The nuttiness a tick higher but still a fraction of the whole. Soft and sticky through a prolonged finish. Serves a purpose. (Screwcap) 86

OREGON WHITE

Bergström
Willamette Valley, Dr. Bergström

Riesling
2007, \$27.99, 12.5%

Transparent with a resplendent surface, full white-green hay as if harvested young, just gleams in the glass. Grapey, appley nose with a slightly dried fruit edge, as if destined for an apple pie, cinnamon, honey, luckily it has an airiness to it otherwise the fruit scents might appear sluggish. Medium-bodied, the relative lack of acidity hurts the liveliness of the apple, pear, peach fruit, here there is some sleepiness. Substitutes white grapefruit and orange citrus for most of the honey or baking spices, this helps. Overall, flavors, especially the citrus, persists well through the mid-palate and then tails off towards the finish. Needs more grip and traction on the tongue. Grapes sourced 25% Hyland Vineyard, 25% Cherry Grove Vineyard, 25% Chehalem Mountain Vineyard, 25% Territorial Vineyard. 86

FRANCE RED

Burgaud, Domaine Bernard
Rhône, Côte-Rôtie

Syrah
2005, \$56.99, 12.5%

Calm opaque purple corer, never appears too deep, very slight murkiness to it, the violet barely allows any ruby-magenta to shine through at the rims, pretty in the glass. Mild rubber, iodine touch to the nose, fallen leaves, tree bark, plenty of white grapefruit, overall not savage enough to hamper the pure ripeness of the red cherry, blackberry scents, that said, ends with a mineral smokiness. Medium-bodied, over time framed by a tannic skeleton whereas the acidity remains the primary structuring element throughout. Hugs the tongue some but prefers fluidity. Adds in floral nuances to the base of white grapefruit/orange citrus and dried underbrush. Some tar alongside the stone, mineral chunks. While there's some sourness in the cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit, again, ripeness is not an issue at all. Unforced length while at the same time possessing an almost slutty refusal to stop. 91

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Cuvée Traditionnelle Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2007, \$14.99, 11.5%
Squeaky clean ruby-violet color, consistent right up to the rims, no real sign of magenta, light plays across the surface. Suavely sour nose of cranberry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit scents, lemon peel, equal pinches of twigs and stones, notes of field flowers add to the lift, while perfectly ripened there's also a texturally dusty quality to the nose. Medium-bodied, firm and taut from the first sip while yet approachable. More lemon and grapefruit citrus as well as stone and parched earth, grasses. The red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit slithers around as if up to no good. Has a solid tannic foundation but most of the time you notice the acidity cleansing the palate. Plenty of verve and dances on the tips of its toes. not at all simplistic but allows you to just enjoy it if you prefer. 90

Gallet, Henri et Philippe
Rhône, Côte-Rôtie
Syrah
2005, \$47.99, 13.0%
Dark purple color without turning black, a glowing ruby evident along the broad rims, nothing here appears forced. The nose has a forceful purity yet doesn't become angular, solid beams of black cherry, blackberry fruit accompanied by white grapefruit pith, powdery minerals and stone, suggestion of dried flowers but more merde on hand today, moderate staying power. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with serious tannic wallop not slouchy acidity neither. This said, behind this thick veil is some sweet fruit, cherry, currant, blackberry in abundance alongside more tangy grapefruit, orange citrus. Offers leather, tobacco leaf, tree bark and a modicum of sweet vanillin oak. While dry, stays active through the finish. Needs a significant amount of time to open right now and no reason to not believe it's starting to shut down too. 95% Syrah, 5% Viognier. 89

Robin, Domaine Gilles
Rhône, Crozes Hermitage, Papillon
Syrah
2006, \$24.99, 13.0%
Pure ruby-violet hued core, segues to a firm garnet red along the well-saturated rims, devoid of any blemish or film. There's a gruff underbrush, earthy thing going on which swiftly proves no match for the candied nature of the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit scents, a touch of floral perfume but nothing very deep in the citrus or game departments. Medium-bodied, has good density, however, it could probably use more acidity and/or tannin to add freshness. That said, not not dry, and the cherry, currant, blackberry fruit darker here than in the nose. Moderate green olive notes and a twiggly sort of earthiness but, again, no real gaminess. There is a white grapefruit to tangerine citrus edge. Towards the end there's coffee and mocha accents. A nice drop but not as compelling as when the price was \$12. 88

Joguet, Domaine Charles
Loire, Chinon, Les Petites Roches
Cabernet Franc
2006, \$17.99, 13.5%
Straightforward purple core, both dark and clean, the rims fashioned from red-ruby to pinker magenta hues, doesn't look overly saturated. Merde, shoe leather, hot rubber and sulfur-like accents make the nose offputting at first, most

of this blows off with air time, however, the red currant, red cherry scents bear the scars, more earthy and twiggy than herbaceous, little if any bell pepper or cut grass. Medium-bodied, here too evinces some sulfur and/or reductive type of shit, luckily the tobacco, mineral, leather and orange peel elements largely unaffected. Doesn't seem highly acidic, the tannins have some kick. The plum, cherry, currant fruit a mix of red and black flavors, cruises consistently. Maybe slightly closed, has enough ripeness to expect the fruit to last until the rest comes together better than today. 88

FRANCE WHITE

Paradou, Le
Rhône, Vin de Pays Vignobles de France
Viognier
2007, \$12.99, 13.0%
Very light straw color, close to colorless, lots of shine and fully transparent, sparkle makes it very enchanting to view. Very creamy nose with notes of vanilla pudding, banana pie and orange sherbet, very floral as well, lilacs and violets, gently quiet apricot, peach fruit scents, bottom heavy because of the creaminess. Medium-bodied, the acidity comes on strongly through the attack, unsettles both the creaminess and the peach, apricot, nectarine, pear fruit. Conversely, this brings out more minerality, stream water and orange to lemon citrus. Floral, however, a bitter nuttiness appears as well. The creaminess based in vanilla and fresh whipped cream, assume it's lees or malo in foundation. Feels pulled in too many different directions, neither light and crisp nor thick and honeyed. 85

FRANCE SPARKLING

Coutier, R.H.
Champagne, Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut
Chardonnay
NV, \$52.99, 12.0%
Incredible amount of effervescence, the bubbles look like a snowstorm, large and persistent foam across the surface, has a golden hue of average depth. Honey and freshly baked bread frame the nose, lemon meringue, given this there's freshness in the yellow apple, pear, apricot fruit, little minerality nor stoniness but something like clay and earth. Medium-bodied, uses every bit of its weight to maximal effect, mostly round in mouth feel while the ferocious foaminess forces it outwards. At first there's a touch of vanilla fudge but what creaminess there is fades before lemon and orange zest, mineral water and dried herbs. The acidity feels blunt but doesn't lack for presence. Good center to the peach, apricot, pear fruit, a worthy part of the whole. Comes across more as a fun Champers than a serious one. 88

Bossard, Guy
Loire
Cuvée Ludwig Hahn Vin Mousseux de Qualité Brut
Méthode Traditionnelle
Blend
NV, \$18.99, 12.0%
Filled with fine, tiny bubbles throughout, an upside down spring shower, taking some time for the foam to subside after pouring, very pale white to yellow hay coloration but who notices with all them bubbles? Presents a nose of finally ground stone and seashells, the minerally element not that metallic, insufficient citrus or fruit to truly identify specific scents, while kinda earthy stays clean and lean. In

the mouth the mousse is initially aggressive, recedes by the mid-palate, allowing for more clarity in the seashell, white pebble, sand flavors. Suggests a light saline quality as well. OK, let's just call it apple, pear, apricot fruit with a pit/skin character. Dense, if blunting, acidity, pretty damn dry. Towards the end develops a twiggy, dried leafy feel. As much as a wine of this category can, it stains the palate, fully soaking in, even with the limited array of flavors. Rock suckers alert time. 45% Folle Blanche (Gros-Plant), 25% Chardonnay, 20% Melon de Bourgogne (Muscadet), 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Allouchery-Perseval
Champagne, Premier Cru Rosé Brut
Pinot Noir
NV, \$56.99, 12.0%

Aggressive foam upon the pour, huge rush of bubbles, too active to form proper beads, salmon pink color with a yellow tint at some angles, zero blemishes and long lasting froth. Tobacco ash, volcanic ash and tar make for an intriguing introduction into the nose, after that pressed lemon peels, cherry pits, red raspberries and a side dish of strawberries, neither delicate nor rough, gets up in there and then beats a retreat. Medium-bodied, the accrual of bubbly foaminess increases the presence. On the attack there's a good deal of sweetness in the cherry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit which dries out as the acidity takes hold and a little saline, mineral stuff appears. Has a little problem channeling its energy, needs a playbook. Call me when it can balance a book on its head for ten paces. 86

ITALY WHITE

Vis, Cantina La
Trentino, Vigneti delle Dolomiti, Dipinti
Pinot Grigio
2007, \$12.99, 12.5%

What gold there is equaled by brown-white straw aspects, sits like a block in the glass, translucent but not necessarily dull. While the nose has an overall blunt nature, shows lemon and orange peel, pressed flowers, licorice, the matted down feels gets through to the pear, apple, peach fruit scents, it it ever was juicy has been pressed out. Medium-bodied, unusually bottom heavy, like it's wearing cement boots and trying to march. A light spiciness accompanies the lemon, mandarin orange citrus and sinewy herbaceousness. The acidity does not shirk its duties in spite of overall heft. Average depth in the peach, apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit, no bitterness and not short. It's actually quite pleasant, but not for the person who wants a mainstream Pinot Grigio. Otherwise, solid if you dig its vibe. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 88

Terlano (Kellerai Cantina Terlan), Cantina
Alto Adige/Südtirol
Pinot Bianco
2007, \$19.99, 13.0%

Color flits between white and gold straw, remains consistent through to the rims, good translucent shimmer below holds it steady in the glass. Minor dash of honey at first in the nose, nicely pungent yet not that ripe pear, apple, peach fruit scents, mint and a trace of mineral water or quinine, lemon peel as well, while clean possesses this amazing density which anchors it in your nostrils. Full-bodied, as in the nose uncommonly thick and viscous, at times feels like a rubber wetsuit on the tongue. Liveliness in the lemon/orange citrus as well as mint, dried flower petal and cinnamon stick notes help. The

acidity is pretty good but not a contender against the density. Apple, apricot, pear, melon fruit comes with an edge of cherry. While in analytical mode it's more bitter than sweet but when just sipping sweeter. Needs a plate of food to crush under it. 88

Lagaria
Trentino, Delle Venezie
Pinot Grigio
2007, \$11.99, 12.5%

Presents a flat brownish hue with touches of gold and zinc at certain angles, neither fully translucent nor transparent. The nose first offers a scentless weight and texture, just fat and pushing outward, then comes floral dew, leesy notes, pear, yellow apple, melon fruit scents and licorice. Full-bodied, certainly follows up on the promise of the nose, not clingy more so flattens the road as it passes by. Not a lot of acidity so the lemon, orange citrus tones help. Rose hips, licorice, and anise seed add to its pretty flavor array. It's a little too fat to fit under crisp and refreshing Pinot Grigio yet not truly viscous enough to appear Alsatian in style. Hence, it seems more a tweener that would be most appreciated by the [sic] most. (Screwcap) 86

GERMANY RED

Valckenberg, P.J.
Rheinhessen, Undone QbA AP #72
Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder)
2007, \$11.99, 12.0%

Very light and crisp red core close to strawberry or watermelon in hue, fades to a watery orangish cast around the rims, sparkles across the surface. Penetrating and brisk nose of stones, stone powder, meadow grasses, and dried tar, strawberry, raspberry, apple fruit, it doesn't lift as much as breeze about as if blown by a fan. Light to medium-bodied, has both the acidity and tannin to gain traction with ease and nowhere near evanescent given its relative weight. Sour bite activates the cherry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit flavors, also heightens the grapefruit, lemon citrus element. Again, more grass and tea leaf like accents than herbaceousness. Does achieve a sweet crest in the mid-palate. There on out the stone, mineral, asphalt, tobacco juice takes over. Don't expect to be bowled over by fruit, not this wine's bag. (Screwcap: G-Cap) 88

GERMANY WHITE

Vollrads, Weingutsverwaltung Schloss
Rheingau, QbA AP #12
Riesling
2007, \$19.99, 10.5%

Pale white-green straw coloration admits minimal yellow highlights, neither truly transparent nor translucent, like looking through a thin sheet of clear plastic, hueless rims. Fresh lemon, lime, tangerine scents make for a very citrusy nose, remains precise and crisp with green apple, pear, green melon fruit scents, has more of a sparkling water feel than actual minerality, touch of florality tops it off, no need to strive for great complexity. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with enough residual sugar to get it to cling to your tongue as the river of acidity tries to sweep it away. Again, the lemon, lime, grapefruit citrus dominates although here the stoniness, mineral water elements give a get run for their money (and yours). The apple, pear fruit joined by apricot, peach flavors. Stays on course all the

way through, pulls up ever so slightly at the finish. But next sip restores its weight immediately. [Glass Stopper] 88

AUSTRALIA RED

Lindemans

South Australia, South Eastern Australia, Bin 50

Shiraz

2007, \$8.99, 13.5%

Sleek purple core, remains dark through to the ruby-magenta rims, saturated without excess concentration. Sour cherry, raspberry, cranberry scents in the nose, milk chocolate and cocoa toast, some grassiness alongside floral dust, evanescent. Medium-bodied, dry and tacky with an uneven texture. More tartness in the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, same as in the nose. Minor evidence of lemon peel, cocoa and mocha powder, butterscotch yet zero creaminess. Rough hewn tannin as well as acidity, not fun. Thankfully, it ends short so you only have to suffer the wine for so long. Insults the word "industrial." [Synthetic Cork] 82

AUSTRALIA WHITE

McWilliam's Hanwood Estate

South Australia, South Eastern Australia

Riesling

2006, \$8.99, 12.0%

Consistent deep yellow, flat surface and tends to pool downwards more than sparkle, solidly hued rims. Light nose with round scents of tire rubber, apricot, peach and mango fruit most noticeable, leans more towards being floral than citrusy, doesn't lift and dissolve as much as hover in your nostrils. Full-bodied, here it gathers up some white grapefruit to tangerine citrus tang, highlights a certain mintiness more than florality. The acidity level seems good albeit it is not the most polished, mouthwatering sort. The aforementioned helps to hide the fact that it is not the most deeply fruited of wines, basic apricot, peach, pear with suggestions of pineapple or mango. In no way difficult to sip, could even polish off a few glasses. If nothing else was around. [Screwcap] 86

AUSTRALIA DESSERT

Lillypilly

New South Wales, Riverina, Noble Blend

Blend

2006, \$19.99, 11.0%

Nicely pooled yellow-orange color, just short of amber, more distorts than translucent, above average surface reflectivity. Mild pickled edge at first in the nose before apricot paste, dried peaches and pears take over, as if thought twice about being "tropical," mixed white citrus notes, neither that floral nor herbal. Medium-bodied, the lower alcohol level helps it smooth out its presence, especially as the acidity is quite active. Oodles of pink grapefruit, tangerine, lime citrus keep it bright and alert, while still sweetly concentrated, the apricot, nectarine, peach, guava fruit flavors limber and constantly in motion. Rose water, cinnamon, ginger spice all play a role. In no way heavy nor over the top and a fine complementary dessert wine rather than attention getter. 35% Sémillon, 25% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Riesling, 10% Chardonnay. 375 ml bottle. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 89

NEW ZEALAND WHITE

Whitehaven

Marlborough

Sauvignon Blanc

2007, \$16.99, 13.0%

Pale white straw color of average transparency, curiously some deeper yellow hues along the rims when viewed at a side angle, more solid than surface and below. There's good smokiness to the nose but it never kicks it into high gear, no lack of asparagus and other vegetal notes, slight chili pepper burst, what fruit there is comes across as peach, pomegranate, apricot, strawberry, papaya, all mixed up. Medium-bodied, acidity chops at your palate like a machete, more power than precision. Bell pepper, jalapeño pepper, asparagus and the like all there in effect, if you think this represents a flaw, keep walking. Lacks mineral cut, however, there's sufficient pink grapefruit, lemon, tangerine citrus to compensate. Same vaguely tropical array of apricot, nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit sans the more red fruit notes of the nose. Digs deeper into the tongue near the finish, not a delicate dancer. [Screwcap] 87

CHILE RED

Cousiño-Macul, Viña

Maipo Valley, Antiguas Reservas

Cabernet Sauvignon

2006, \$15.99, 14.0%

Deep purple colored core, like a fresh bruise, more brick to crimson red at the rims than ruby, clarity noticeable given overall darkness. Thick nose that verges on raisin and prune in the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit, tar, tobacco resin, leather all present, the oak derived scents seem minimal, there is an odd burst of fresh rubber at times though. Full-bodied, unexpectedly tangy in the mouth with orange citrus notes and increased toastiness and caramel layering. The sweetness of the plum, black cherry fruit again pushes the dried fruit envelope, takes up a greater percentage of the whole here. Leather, tobacco, tar, black earth fill minor roles. Mixes in some bell pepper, herbaceous elements too. Lots of moving parts, pleasantly distracting. Grapes sourced 70% Buin Estate, 30% Macul Estate. 87

ARGENTINA RED

Cobos, Viña

Mendoza, Felino

Malbec

2007, \$23.99, 14.4%

Core mainly purple, some deep ruby tint, integrates well with the red-ruby to garnet rims, catches light prettily. Fresh, if somewhat dense nose, of pine, crisp toast and vanilla bean, the cherry, currant fruit scents subdued and direct, moderate earthiness, on the whole tends to drift off prematurely. Medium-bodied, clean and unvarnished mouth entry, the currant, cherry fruit is forward yet dry enough to not "leap" at you. Orange, lemon citrus notes with driftwood, pressed flowers, and pine cone as well. Tannins sturdy without getting in enjoyment's way. Does tighten up some past the mid-palate, not short but showing some structure. A very good drop, only question might be is it worth the tariff. Will depend on the drinker's wallet, s'pose. 88

Cobos, Viña

Mendoza, Lujan de Cuyo, Bramare

Malbec

2006, \$49.99, 15.1%

While the purple colored core has a deep blackness to it, not really opaque and the blood red to crimson rims spread broadly. The nose is infused with expensive oak, seductively creamy with vanilla pudding, toffee, butterscotch notes, ripe to the verge of raisin in the cherry, plum fruit, ginger and clove spice too, lifts well so that you get to inspect it at all angles. Medium-bodied, only exception to the smooth silkiness on the palate is alcoholic heat on the attack. The prune, raisin overripeness more pronounced here, sweetness pervades the jammy cherry, blackberry fruit. The oak never gets toasty, but there's a firmer feel to the vanilla bean, caramel, coffee flavors. The tannins are semi-grainy, an unusual match for the overall texture. That ginger, clove spice really blooms through the finish, lots of residue. Here a tangerine burst accompanies the spice nicely. Well-thought out wine, perhaps too much so. 87