

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

Because of Hanes's tireless efforts to popularize wine, this elixir of the gods has now become, err, popular. He has ushered in a true golden age for wine lovers throughout the world. This is nowhere more evident than here in New York City, the city of Hanes's birth. Even as Hanes types these words, 75 new wine stores have opened within the city limits to satisfy the unquenchable thirst of the Big Apple's enophiles. There can be no limits to this boundless enjoyment of the grapevine's sweet nectar.

OK, Hanes really has to try and write these articles while sober. The fact is, wine retailing in New York City may be treading on very thin ice. There is a present danger of the over-saturation of wine stores. Where once every city block had its own dry cleaners, pizza shop and Starbucks, now too does each block have its own wine store. Some canny market researcher must have proven that the average wine buying consumer would only be willing to walk 1.25 blocks to buy a bottle of Yellowtail Shiraz. What the hell is going on here?

There is no doubt that wine consumption per capita is rising in the United States, and particularly so in a sophisticated urban environment such as New York City. The city has always been known as a culinary center, and with fine dining comes fine wining. And there is no doubting that the "wine bar" scene is about as red hot as one can imagine, every neighborhood inundated with these silly places as well (a story for another day). Allowing for all this, though, Hanes suspects that there is a great deal of that old "irrational exuberance" at play within the wine retailing world and that as a result a shake out is just about around the corner.

Why the gloom and doom, chum? Well, whereas in the past selling wine and booze used to be a simple affair, more often than not a family-run business, now many new businesses seem to be run by the worst possible type of people who could run them — wine lovers. What? You back on the pipe, Hanes? No, it's just that NYC wine retailing has seen an incredible spate of wine lovers wanting to get into the business after lengthy careers in other industries. These folks are often very passionate about wine. This very passion blinds them to basic retail business principles and clouds their vision and ability to make rational, dispassionate decisions regarding business planning and strategies. This begins before the business even opens. There is a sense that sheer enthusiasm and a willingness to educate customers will translate into paid rent and savings for retirement. Were it so easy.

Back in 1999 Hanes decided he wanted to create a database of every Manhattan liquor store below 125th Street. He would rate them and collect pertinent information about the stores in this database, whether the store was a high end boutique or basically a wall of plexiglass with a slot for the money to go in and the hootch to come out. Back then there were just over 200 liquor stores in this area. Superpages.com now lists 384 liquor stores in Manhattan. Updating that database is gonna be a bitch! How did things just about double in half a dozen years?

"Back in tha day" there were the Mom and Pop stores and a few of those from that category grew into the biggest purveyors of fine wine today. One has to assume that there were neighborhood shops that stocked the regular hard alcohol people want, in addition to simple wines that ordinary folks would drink around the dinner table. The select few stores that grew in size and scale became "destinations" of sorts for the enophiliac set, if you wanted the primo juice you jumped on a subway or bus to one of the few major players. Or you sent Jeeves out to double park the Bentley as they loaded cases of claret in the trunk. New York City has more than its fair share of "destination" caliber wine stores steeped in years of tradition. On the Upper East Side there's Sherry-Lehmann and Garnet, on the Upper West Side there's Acker Merrall. In midtown there's Morrell & Company, way uptown in Inwood there's PJ's Liquor Warehouse. Hell, there's Zachy's up in Scarsdale too. Just to name a scant few.

It used to be that these were the places you went to find rare gems, idiosyncratic items and older vintage wines. And you could trust they took good care of the wine, which was (and maybe still is) pretty rare itself. These places have been around long enough to have very long client lists of the wealthiest collectors and imbibers as well as the biggest corporate accounts. Some do upwards of \$40 million a year in sales. Not chump change. Hanes remembers quite well making intentional trips to these stores and their peers in search of wines not to be found on the local neighborhood retailers' shelves.

That's when new wine stores started to appear at a faster rate. Oftentimes it was a pain in the rear to get to the established places. And a pain in the back to carry all the wine home. But it was worth it because that's how you got the best wines. Over time Hanes developed his "circuit" of stores he would habituate regularly and those other stores he knew to stop into "were he in the neighborhood." Needless to say, with each new store that opened, Hanes's credit card bill inched a little higher. Before we get too negative, let's underscore the positives here.

We've already hinted at the benefits of not having to schlep 40 blocks out of your way for a bottle of Grüner Veltliner. Another benefit is that even the biggest stores (Garnet, Astor, PJ's, etc.) can only carry so many wines. Having newcomers on the scene dramatically increased the total aggregate number of wines among which to choose. More choice is usually a good thing. Unless you are like a certain wine reviewer who would like to try *every* wine available and cannot afford to do so. And, also as mentioned before, the newer stores tended to have more knowledgeable and caring staff than many of the existing smaller stores (in essence liquor stores that also sold wine). Bonus. Closer proximity also means the chance to visit the store more often and develop a closer rapport with certain savvy salespeople. More bonus.

These facts are very important and provide a solid foundation for the success enjoyed by many of the newer wine retailers who have opened up shop during the past ten years or so. But why waste time on the positives when we can lunge forward into the negatives? Sweet!

Rarely do the smaller stores compete well on price. You pay for (a) that higher service level and (b) the fact that the store is small and cannot buy in bulk wholesale discounts. Eight years ago Garnet and PJ's had the best overall prices in town and they still do. This is because they have bigger buying clout and higher volume of sales. Additionally, the way the game is played, smaller production or highly desired wines are "allocated" by wholesalers to retailers. The biggest (i.e., best) customers get to pick the "cherries" and rarely do the smaller shops get them. So, if you as the end customer are in the game to acquire and drink these wines it may still be best to try and work your way up the pecking order of customers at Acker or Sherry-Lehmann. And you gain this access by spending money *there*. Not at your local store. But this is just quibbling, as we have already said there's plenty of wine out there, and more wines anointed as desirable "cherries" each year. So, there's likely something for everyone at any store. At least Hanes has a hard time walking out of a wine store empty-handed.

What Hanes wants to focus on is the Big Picture. It's not a complete zero sum game by any stretch but the question is, how many new stores can come onboard before either the older stores lose meaningful market share or the newer stores find there is *not* the depth of clientele they expected? Capitalism 101, people. Says the socialist sympathizer.

When you make \$40 million a year, it takes awhile for the newbies to chip away at you. But chips break off, as they must. Hanes knows that personally he does not visit the major wine stores as much as he used to, not nearly as much. It's just easier to slip into some local store for a few bottles. Maybe these wines will not be the first thing you wanted but they will prove interesting and maybe even tasty. In aggregate, losing these nickel and dime type sales might be hurting the well-established "destination" stores. Not enough to truly threaten financial viability but enough to feel a couple of solid shots to the ribs. Anecdotally speaking, the last few times Hanes *has* visited these stores he has seen substantially less turnover in the product displayed than in previous years. This, in turn, is a disincentive: going to a store and seeing no new wines for sale will translate into fewer visits to this store.

It would be curious to see a select basket of "destination" stores' total yearly revenues as well as increase in percentage of year-to-year net profit over the past decade. Hanes would hazard the guess that while the raw number (the \$40 million) has risen a lot, the actual percentage that counts as net profit has not kept up. The costs of the wine itself, labor, rent, marketing, etc. have all risen as well, arguably at a faster pace than total revenues.

The hegemony of the "destination" store is effected not only by the proliferation of new neighborhood stores but by these stores' ambitions. Many stores really just want to be high quality local stores. There's neighborhood marketing, minimal internet presence, a smaller selection of wines for sale (but by no means necessarily worse). The business is scaled to be a small business, in keeping with the dreams of a wine loving proprietor wanting to immerse her or himself in spreading the gospel of the vine. Being profitable is always a priority but becoming the next Microsoft is not.

But there's different strokes for different folks, 'natch. Many of the new entrants *do* want to be the next \$40 million wine store gorilla. And it's these outfits that perhaps represent the biggest wild cards in the current landscape. In Lotto, it's "a dollar and a dream" but in NYC wine retailing it's "\$3 million and a dream" because you probably need at least that much to start up a new store that wants to make the playoffs. Many of the newer stores have targeted almost exclusively "high net worth" clients, those clients most likely to belong to the "destination" stores already. Unless these clients are cloning themselves at a rapid rate, something has to give. The chase for the HNW clientele persists as the closest zero sum situation, with a loser for every winner. Stores like Tribeca Wine Merchants, Italian Wine Merchants, Crush, Union Square Wines, Le Dü's Wines, Grande Harvest, Vino, Cellar 72, among others, pretty much have the Morrell's and Sherry-Lehmann type clientele in their crosshairs. Selling a \$10 bottle of Kendall-Jackson just ain't gonna cut it. Especially as these places have some *serious* rent to pay.

On the topic of serious rent to pay, let's focus on that for a bit since this will probably be Reason #1 for why some of these places eventually fail. The aforementioned Union Square Wines just moved from a totally sweet location mere yards from the very popular Union Square Park greengrocers location to a, frankly, much lower trafficked location at 13th Street and Fourth Avenue (yes, there *is* a Fourth Avenue in Manhattan). The word is that they got a nice shot of Benjamins to vacate. Nevertheless, moving to this new space is a *huge* gamble. In a similar situation is Astor Wines & Spirits, which just moved from an equally sweet location on Astor Place between two major subway lines, the #6 and R lines. They now reside in a building at the corner of Fourth Street and Lafayette Street, about 3-4 blocks south of where they were. Astor's owner owns the building they moved into so they will definitely realize some savings on rent. But, especially given that they are a very large store for Manhattan, can they continue to draw customers from around the city? Hell, can they lure their regular customers who got off the R train, stopped in for a bottle and then headed home *northwards*, above Astor Place? We shall see. But it would be interesting to see how their main local competitor, Warehouse Wines on Broadway, has been doing financially in the same monthly periods since Astor moved as benchmarked against past years. One would guess they have taken a big chunk of Astor's laziest customers. Throw in some smaller moves like the boutique store IS Wine moving from Fifth Street to Eighth Street and you see things are changing.

And Hanes has yet to mention the new entrants who are already established players outside the city borders. In New York State an entity can only hold one retail liquor license. So, these new entrants have tried to carefully position their one shot at gaining a NYC foothold. The well-known Whole Foods shot themselves in the foot by opening their wine store in their

Columbus Circle store illegally, without its own entrance separate from the food store. Ouch. The word continues to be that they will redeploy their liquor license at their new food store location on Houston Street – blocks from where Astor just moved. Californian high end food discounter Trader Joe's just opened its first branch in NYC, very close to Union Square: the park and the wine store. Their lines are long, their wines are cheap and their corporate pockets deep. Beware the new junkyard dog. And a fairly well-known outfit in New Jersey and Delaware named Moore Brothers just opened their fine wine emporium in Manhattan's Gramercy Park area. Near a whole bunch of other wine stores.

Other large wine retailers have had their eyes on muscling into the NYC territory for years. Hanes hears the rumors. The Voices always make sure he knows. Chicago's fabled Sam's Wines & Spirits has been rumored in the past to be interested. Others closer to NYC too. Have they not finally broken through the citadel walls because they can't find the right spot to open? Or because maybe the landscape has mutated so quickly of late that, even with their existing clout, there's not much fruit left to pick off the trees? These folks didn't get rich by being stupid. Umm, Hanes may have to retract that statement one day.

All this is not to mention the ever-growing wine retailing component of the internet. Are the PJs and Garnets of NYC gaining more via e-commerce than they are losing? Are New York's wine geeks spending more of their money outside the city boundaries than within? It's a black box. Until the "For Rent" sign is in the window. Profits get squeezed more efficiently out of a captive audience and the audience is no longer captive. Note also that New York State recently has allowed for wineries around the country (California, Washington, Oregon, etc.) to ship directly to customers in-state once the winery registers with New York authorities. Maybe less business for the retail stores here?

A corollary question to the inquiry regarding the survival of this horde of wine retail stores is the effect they have on NYC's wholesalers and distributors. Do they benefit from all these new retail stores or not? The answer is not an obvious "yes." At the heart of the matter are questions such as, does it make no difference if a distributor sells 100 cases of Mount Ego Napa Valley Cabernet to one store or ten cases to ten different stores or one case each to an 100 stores? Depends, depends, depends. There are issues of margins at various size case purchases, is it more profitable to move sizeable chunks at lower margins or lesser amounts for a higher margin. Any answers have to factor in things like manpower – you need more sales reps (and delivery drivers) if there are more total accounts and this is a cost factor. Fewer reps mean less salary and benefits paid. Unless they are really beating the pants off the competition, which is hard to do across the board.

Then, are the wines "allocated"? If so, everyone will want them. If you, as distributor, have 50 cases and whereas once there were 50 accounts who wanted them, now there are 150 accounts who want the same 50 cases. Trouble. As successful wine retailing is about relationships with the clients, so too is wine wholesaling. If the plethora of stores creates problems in meeting needs and satisfying customers that will hurt the relationship. If the distributor just looks at this as a chance to jack up prices (supply and demand) then maybe the end customer will just go online and buy the wine cheaper from Seattle or San Francisco than in New York and then the retailer gets stuck with a lot of overpriced wine on the shelves and no customers for it.

At 3,000 words and counting, there is no doubt this is a topic dear to Hanes's icy cold heart. And there's a lot more to say. The true "bread and butter" of any wine store is really the wines sold for \$15 and under. If a store can maintain volume there, chances are it will stay in the black. If not, dark clouds loom. To pay NYC's stoopid rents a lot of sub-\$15 wine has to be moved. The rent is only going to go up. And, once more, that's to survive, not necessarily become highly profitable. Will the average New Yorker (as opposed to the wine geek) support the volume of purchases required to keep almost 400 liquor stores in Manhattan afloat? It's a big question but if the answer is going to be "yes" you better start loudly proclaiming "I'll drink to that!" Otherwise, there's going to be a lot of dusty bottles of wine left on the shelves.

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**This month's big winners...** Was not expecting much from this at all, given Hanes's dislike for European 2003 wines, but the reputation (and price) of Coche-Dury was earned with their 2003 Bourgogne Rouge. \$58 is way too much to pay, thanks Ben, but it's a very nice sip of Pinot Noir. Turley remains one of a few Californian winery-direct mailing lists Hanes remains on, although he isn't as bowled over by them as he once was. That said, having felt so-so about the 2003 releases, the 2004 releases are out and seem a return to better days. the 2004 Dragon Vineyard Zinfandel is a treat for those who dig this producer's wines. And their basic 2004 "Old Vines" blend is pretty tasty too, the "cheap" Turley at \$25. Two 2004 German "Trocken" (dry) Rieslings swilled this month remind us that these wines are very serious, yet not for everyone. Fürst and Karthäuserhof have made substantial wines but they are neither easy sippers nor cheap, both around \$30. Softer and more approachable, Mulderbosch from South Africa continues to make easy to drink Sauvignon Blanc wines, this time with their 2005 release. \$20 may be the ceiling for what it is worth, though. After hearing it talked up some, Hanes sought out the wines from Chiarito in Mendocino. They only make wines from traditionally Italian grapevines. Their 2003 Negro Amaro is a very credible effort and, while not blown away, Hanes will continue to try these wines over coming vintages and see how they come along – growing Italian cultivars in California is usually sketchy at best and anyone who can do it decently deserves some support (Hanes also has another wine of theirs in the on-deck circle for next month).

**The best \$15 and under picks...** With 46% of the wines reviewed this month under \$15, there had to be some decent ones. While it will prove hard to find, Dalicieux's 2004 Beaujolais Blanc is a delicious Chardonnay for under \$15. Utterly charming. Dammit. See below for the bad news, but the good news is that the 2005 rosé "Il Mimo" from Cantalupo in

Italy's Piedmont region is a very fine wine for \$13 and should please most comers. Castle Rock continues to crank out very good cheap Pinot Noir and while this may not be anything new for many folks, it continues to bear mention. For \$10, their 2005 "Monterey County" bottling is very nice and since one assumes it has been recently bottled, may even improve over the coming months as it settles into bottle. It's been awhile since Hanes has had a Côtes-du-Rhône from Renjarde but there's nothing overtly wrong with their 2003 version, and it's worth the \$13 price. Proceed with caution if you demand juicy wines but, having not tried any of their wines in years now, Hanes purchased a 2001 Crianza from Rioja producer Montecillo and it's just how grandpa must have liked it. For \$10 it is a great light-bodied summer red. Never crazy about Jo Landron's wines (you can hear the catcalls in the distance), his 2005 Muscadet "Amphibolite Nature" is probably the best Hanes can remember tasting and it is \$12, the going price or so for the best Muscadet wines on the market today. Having liked their Cabernet Sauvignon wines in the past, Hanes laid down his hard-earned quid for a bottle of El Portillo's 2005 Malbec. If you want a wine with a rustic veneer, your own \$10 may reward you here.

**And the disappointments...** It being the time of year, Hanes has sampled many rosé wines this past month. On the whole, regardless of place of origin, they sucked. Maybe it is just bad Hanes karma at work again but there's too many to mention here so you have to actually scan the official tasting notes to find the clunkers. Another of the very few remaining Californian wineries Hanes purchases directly from, Outpost, disappointed majorly with their 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon. Sure, the vines are young and this is their first commercial release but for \$65 Hanes needs more. Proceed with caution with this bottling and hope those vines get geriatric real quick. The foisting of subpar wine on an unsuspecting American populace under the cover of cute names continues. From Jumilla, Spain, the 2004 "Mad Dogs & Englishmen" red blend is, even for \$11, just an exercise in taking surplus grapes and trying to make a few quick bucks off them. Boo, hiss. The relationship between Hanes and Burgundian producer Maréchal needs counseling. He used to really love their wines and now, as his palate becomes more "refined" (hah!), he finds he likes their wines less frequently. Witness their 2004 basic Bourgogne rouge bottling, "Cuvée Gravel." It's OK and all but it is supposed to be one of those wines that over-delivers for its \$23 price. Yet, it did not. Please, someone intervene here. Camelot is supposed to be a good place. However, their 2004 Pinot Noir blend from various Californian sources did not leave Hanes in a good place. Even for \$8, avoid. Same can be said for Franciscan's 2004 Chardonnay, which may actually be worse and costs \$17 to boot.

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Unlike *those other* professional reviews, Hanes only will share what he likes if it is *currently available* in stores for immediate purchase. If these wines are not to be found in some of your local stores, they suck and that's not Hanes's fault.

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the older (or non-imported) wines he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2006.html>

The challenge. Each month Hanes will try out a new "tagline" for *The Hanes Wine Review* empire. The goal is to sum up and represent The Hanes Brand. This month's entry is...

**Tagline #22:** "As much wine than you can shake a stick at without getting the shakes!"

Here's the order in which Hanes humbly provides the wine review information:

Winery/Producer Name  
Region of Origin, Appellation, Brand Name/Wine Style, Single Vineyard (if any applicable)  
Grape Varietal  
Vintage Year, Price Hanes Paid (if available), Alcohol Percentage (if available)  
Tasting Notes, Hanes's Numeric Score (on the traditional, yet inane, 100 point scale (which for Hanes truly begins at around 80 points and more or less ends around 94 points)

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

### CALIFORNIA RED

Turley  
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Dragon Vineyard  
Zinfandel  
2004, \$45.00, 16.0%  
Enough magenta red in the core to lighten the violet quite a bit, more of a dark pink to cranberry red around the rims, well-hued without looking like a bucket of paint in a glass. Attractively active elements of white pepper, pine and white grapefruit in the nose, gravelly mud, bitter dark

chocolate, juicy but not jammy raspberry, blueberry, strawberry fruit scents, no heat and possesses good lift. Medium-bodied, here the chocolate and vanilla swirl more a part of the initial fabric, tastes more like a brownie than oak. Mint, pine, orange peel, cinnamon, softer overall than the nose might suggest. You feel it has high alcohol but as in the nose not hot. The sweet raspberry, strawberry, blackberry fruit shushed by the increasing toastiness near the end. Nimble, stays on its feet but in no way shy. 92

Pax Wine Cellars  
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Griffin's Lair  
Syrah  
2004, \$50.00, 14.8%

Spotless and vivid purple core, the bright beet red rims are fully hued. The initial flourish of crips oak toast in the nose gives way to mineral dust, raw bacon and potpourri as well as, needless to say, fragrant blackberry, blueberry fruit, nothing overwrought. Full-bodied, seems indecisive about how it wants to use its heft, to hug your tongue or increase its momentum through the mouth. Alcoholic heat waits until its 99% down your throat to show any burn. Displays more of a citrus kick here, same can be said for olive pits, florality. Sharper focus to the blackberry, raspberry fruit but no leanness. The oak toast here comes furnished with a creamier vanilla bottom. Not much perceptible acidity, a bit more by way of tannins, more wide than deep. Stays very dense through the finish, even with time in a decanter. Needs some short-term sleep to smooth out. 91

Turley  
Regional Blend, Old Vines  
Zinfandel  
2004, \$25.00, 15.5%

Nowhere near opaque but has a shifting translucency that lends depth to the brick red inflected purple core, almost zero hue intensity change in the saturated red rims. The nose is kind of flat, can't stretch out enough to lift, sharp toast and creamier vanilla intertwine on top of the raspberry, red cherry fruit, displaying some youthful black pepper and eucalyptus accents as well. Medium-bodied, some alcoholic heat comes through as it enters the mouth, slowly softened by shades of violets, milk chocolate and orange juice. The oak here is a great deal toastier, sharply toned. The juiciness in the raspberry, boysenberry, blackberry fruit salves most of the wounds the alcohol currently produces. Seems like it will be better in even just a few more months. Regional blend of Napa, Lodi, Paso Robles, Oakley, etc. 90

Luddite Vineyards  
Russian River Valley, Gibson-Martinelli Vineyard  
Abouriou  
2003, \$26.99, 14.3%

Perfectly black purple in color, solid as a slab of onyx until it turns to intensely glowing ruby-magenta around the thin rims. This is what your clothes would smell like if you worked in a jam factory, all blackberry, blueberry, boysenberry sweetness with pressed flowers, rawhide, merde and wood smoke accents, very little perceptible oak just that cornucopia of fruit. Full-bodied, more extremely dense than heavy or heavy, like someone took a slab of marble and polished it into a frictionless sphere and then wired your mouth shut around it. Some sweet spice and orange blossom aspects, here you get more zippy oak toast too. The tannins put in lots of overtime trying to provide direction but can't match the mass. Black cherry, currant, blackberry, not too sweet, more of a wild fruit character, grew on an untended vine or branch. Less earthy than the nose, maybe the dirt needs to dry out from the juice soaking it receives. Too much of the same message for greatness but if you want to hurl a shotput at someone here it is. 89

McPrice Myers Wine Company  
Santa Barbara County  
Grenache  
2004, \$29.99, 15.0%

Deep luminescence in the ruby to magenta color, small violet core, rims fully-hued and warmly inviting. There's this saline and herbal side to the nose which covers up any oaky qualities without interfering with the fresh, juicy raspberry, strawberry scents, not particularly earthy nor floral, comes across as unevolved. Full-bodied and tightly-woven, not altogether supple. More coconut custard and pie crust oak flavoring here, most present after you swallow. While obviously ripe, there is not a great deal of sweetness in the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit, this allowing more space for the herbaceousness to roam. Adequate acidity and tannins, even they are perhaps too densely packed. Tastes a lot like Grenache, big bonus there. 80% Grenache, 10% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre. Grapes sourced from Alta Mesa and Lerner Vineyards. 88

Chiarito Vineyard  
Mendocino County, Fox Hill Vineyards  
Negro Amaro  
2003, \$36.00, 15.3%

It's already throwing sediment and the resultant murk makes the core darker violet but the vast majority of the color throughout is really luminescent garnet to red-magenta, full consistent to the rims. Naturally fresh strawberry, red raspberry, watermelon scents infuse the nose, wildflowers and field scrub, sweet herbs, tight spine of caramel/vanilla, you keep going back to that fruit, smells like a pie cooling on grandma's kitchen windowsill. Light-bodied, softened attack from the whipped vanilla cream flavors but it also has enough innate acidity to remain both fresh and with a swift gait. More sour kick here to the raspberry, strawberry, rhubarb fruit, the sugary qualities come as an after-effect. Yet, also provides an herbal residue for counterbalance. Indistinct white citrus nip adds a few more feet to the finish. 88

Castle Rock  
Monterey County  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$9.99, 14.5%

Crystal clear red-ruby in color, totally spotless and completely consistent to the rims, sits well in the glass. Big, well-appointed nose, borderline overripe blackberry, black cherry fruit, cinnamon and ginger spice, lemon zest, loosened up some by an airy mentholated feel, keeps moving about even at its size. Full-bodied, soft and inviting, soaks into just about every crevice in your mouth, what acidity and/or tannins there are try to turn things dusty but they are no match for the prune and date-edged plum, cherry, blackberry fruit. Solid selection of flavors, sweet white citrus, flowers, cola and tea leaf with minimal oak makeup. Has a lot going for it, an excellent gateway drug to the more refined juice in its family tree. 88

Lohr, J.  
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Estates Seven Oaks  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
2003, \$13.99, 13.5%

Unblemished black stone core, possesses a good deal of surface polish and shine, the red ruby to magenta rims are thin but radiant. The nose has all the vanilla cream, toasted and buttered white bread you'd need to walk the plank, throws a sufficient amount of minerals and basic earth at you to satisfy the majority of purchasers, breaks

up the cream enough to point you towards the currant, blackberry scents. Full-bodied, what gets the experienced taster chuckling from the start is how round and approachable it is while at the same time knowing how to maintain a minimal degree of tannins and/or acidity and insinuate it throughout as needed in order to avoid boring homogeneity. Tarter edge to the red cherry, red currant fruit than in the nose, lends it length. Consistent interplay between spiciness and sweetness, by the end the spiciness wins which plays up some alcoholic heat. You smile inwardly at its cunning... 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Petite Sirah, 6% Syrah, 5% Petit Verdot, 2% Carignan, 1% Merlot, 2% unspecified. 87

#### Outpost

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain

Cabernet Sauvignon

2003, \$65.00, 14.8%

Dark red-purple, clear and passes just into opacity, touch of burnt red at the rims, dark garnet too. Stone pillar heaviness to the nose yet mint, wildflower and pine cone components attempt to break up the blockiness, then tar and wet tobacco battle the heavy cream and vanilla ice cream to a standstill, the black currant, cherry fruit scents are slightly closed-in, nips of molasses baked ham and coffee bean, overall in no rush to vacate. Medium-bodied, pleasing mouth entry with juicy currant, blackberry, black cherry fruit which then peters out appreciably during the mid-palate, betraying the young vines the grapes came from. Mint, flowers, stone imbue it with an array of varied accents, albeit short-lived. The tannins are laid down in medium width layers, eventually they pile up into a form of erectness. While not overoaked, due to its youth and lack of substance the caramel, vanilla, butterscotch flavors comprise more of the finish than preferred. Not what it should be, you buy this vintage for the rights to buy future ones. 86

#### Kendall-Jackson

Regional Blend, California, Vintner's Reserve

Pinot Noir

2004, \$13.99, 13.5%

Plum purple to dark ruby in color, completely consistent from core to rims, given its darkness it achieves a fine measure of transparency. Thick slabs of plum, black cherry fruit in the nose, add in the vanilla cream and cola scents and it's like sniffing Cherry Coke, only mildly herbaceous, very heavy in the nostrils, sinks and sinks. Full-bodied, stemmy with a touch of tomato in addition to the clove, ginger spice, vanilla cream and bushel of cut grass. The not quite overripe plum, cherry, blackberry fruit is sleepy unto immobility. Remains consistent from the mid-palate through the finish, plenty of heft left at the end. If you didn't know better you'd start liking it. Grapes sourced from Monterey, Santa Barbara, Napa and Mendocino Counties. 85

#### Camelot

Regional Blend, California

Pinot Noir

2004, \$7.99, 13.5%

Mild violet to ruby in color, some red-magenta tinge nearer to the rims, not much fading of color depth. Fragrant nose, more perfume than richness, mainly floral with milk chocolate, lemon sponge cake notes, attractive snap in the red raspberry, strawberry scents, tends to drift off rather than settle in. Medium-bodied, here much more bottom-heavy with almost no lift. Sour and slightly under-ripe

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without quite getting stemmy. This is not to say it's devoid of vegetal qualities. Flat plum, cherry fruit more chewy in texture than flavor. Some spice, milk chocolate and cola if you focus hard enough. As the fruit fades at the finish it develops a touch of alcoholic heat. Lurches too frequently. 83

#### CALIFORNIA WHITE

##### Dry Creek Vineyard

Sonoma County, Fumé Blanc

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$14.99, 13.5%

Mostly transparent white gold to straw in color, bright surface reflects from core through rims. White grapefruit, lemon and mint give the nose an initially angular presence, both channels and obscures the herbaceous element, overall starts to fatten as the mineral/stone notes appear and as the peach, apricot scents find their voice, unforced persistence. In the mouth it's full-bodied with a big bottom yet avoids heaviness as the acidity has very good brawn. The white citrus is equally prominent as in the nose, more floral and also displaying crushed oyster or clam shell and mineral aspects. What herbal qualities there are hold off until the second half. Delicate enough peach, pear, apricot fruit cloaked by its sheer massiveness. Plenty of zest through the finish. Chewy stuff but not tough. 87

##### Mauritson

Dry Creek Valley

Sauvignon Blanc

2004, \$18.99, 13.5%

Strong yellow color, pools nicely across the surface providing both reflections and ripples to bring out the depths. The nose starts out very fresh and airy with mint, lemon zest, country forest air then comes at you with a powerful grassy streak that gives it a thicker bottom, white grapefruit citrus trumps the more self-contained peach, apricot scents, overall tickles your nostrils. Medium to full-bodied, close to no lift, like it has lead weights in its pockets. Rugged, even more herbal and grassy here, fills your mouth to overflowing. Has lemon and grapefruit flavors but no zest. No florality really either. Easily lost peach, apricot, red apple fruit. The acidity is rough like a rusted bulwark. Throws a mean punch meant to knock you over. Drinks better at full chill. Sourced from the Hardie Ranch and Coleman-Young Vineyards. 86

##### Jewel

Regional Blend, California, Collection

Viognier

2004, \$11.99, 13.6%

Bright yellow color with a mild day-glo cast, soft orange tinge, appears as a flat surface plane. Aggressively perfumed nose of tangerine juice, strong orange blossom, honeysuckle too, fruit paste edge to the apricot, pear, melon scents, concentrated but not heavy. Full-bodied and pushes being viscous, moves lazily through the mouth. The florality is less distinct and parsable here yet still pungent. Tangerine, orange, lime citrus flavors by far the dominant factor. The apricot, peach, green melon fruit has a stop-start quality which detracts from a natural forward flow. Spicy without the heat, can't fault the vibrancy of the flavors. Still, somehow doesn't excite you. 85

Franciscan Oakville Estate  
Napa Valley  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$16.99, 13.5%

Glassy golden color shows more concentration around the rims when you tilt the glass, even the less hued center shimmers and bends light. The nose is all lime juice, burnt than moistened toast, the keen oak edge not dulled by caramel and cream burst, scents of canned cling peaches and apricot halves, not much length. Medium-bodied, the wateriness in the pear, peach, apricot fruit puts the oakiness into even higher relief than expected. Thus, it is virtually all buttered toast, vanilla cream, toffee, mint and lime juice. The alcohol level is not that high but the paucity of primary material makes it taste hot. Hard to find much likable here. 82

## CALIFORNIA ROSE

Pax Wine Cellars  
Sonoma County, Rosé  
Blend  
2005, \$18.00,

heavy, heavy garnet to red-magenta in color, crazy glow, maybe hint of orange at the rims as it lightens, minimal surface shine just that glow. Before the first sniff the nose starts an, err, nose dive into a black hole of strawberry, raspberry scents, adds in some lemon juice but way too dense to expect enough space to free up for other aspects. No doubt it is full-bodied, no room to move here either. Chocolate milk, lemon drop, herb accents, orange blossom, wheat germ and lemongrass all appear yet none of them flow with ease. The raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit comes in a series of square, impenetrable bricks. So blockish the tannins and acidity can't be parsed out with ease. Too suffocating for a rosé. Unspecified percentages of Syrah, Grenache. 86

Saisons des Vins  
Mendocino County, Le Printemps  
Blend  
2005, \$15.99, 13.2%

Good concentration in the orange-pink core, has sort of a metallic shine to it, holds its hue decently to the rims. Intense buttered popcorn scents in the nose, cherry to watermelon fruit, for as full as it is, presents a strong lift, dash of earthiness at best for ballast. In the mouth it's full-bodied and immediately spicy with some herbal bite too. As soon as this has asserted itself, a creaminess comes through, buttered toast and dough. The raspberry, cherry to blackberry fruit flavors bubble throughout while remaining on the dry side. Minor shades of orange, lemon citrus, rather than sweetening, they add to its more rough-hewn feel. 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Syrah. 85

## WASHINGTON RED

Shooting Star  
Regional Blend, Blue Frank  
Lemberger  
2004, \$14.99, 13.5%

Light violet to red ruby in color, good glow throughout, fully hued red to light orange brick rims, nice clarity. Solid dose of tar, black earth, leather in the nose, gives it credibility before the coconut, burnt toast creeps in, while sour there's good resonance in the cherry, red currant, blackberry scents, takes a long time to fade. Light to medium-bodied, not as rich as the nose suggests, begins

to attenuate past the mid-palate. The vanilla/caramel element buffers the entry, sweet enough to momentarily highlight some florality. Front-loaded ripeness in the cherry, currant, plum fruit, even the sourness fades on the back half. Touch of pepperiness in the tannins lends a moment of contrast. Decent introduction to the grape. 86

## NEW YORK ROSE

Channing Daughters  
Long Island, North Fork, Croteau Farm Vineyard, Rosato  
Cabernet Franc  
2005, \$16.99, 12.5%

Washed out salmon pink in color, mostly transparent, nothing left at the rims, above average surface shine. Salty, chalky nose of sea breeze, touch of grass, crisp red cherry fruit, maybe something like mint too. Medium-bodied, gains weight as it sits in the mouth, hugs the tongue. Moderate acidity, semi-ripe attack in the cherry, raspberry fruit, curiously creamy bottom. Shows stone, sand, brine accents which help it hold its weight through the finish. Not overly herbaceous. Tart edge as it ends also helps it brighten some. Still, remains more of a chewy rosé than light summer sipper. 87

## FRANCE RED

Coche-Dury, Domaine Jean-François  
Burgundy, Bourgogne  
Pinot Noir  
2003, \$57.99, 12.0%

Loosely knit purple to red brick core, very broad, if lighter, ruby rims yet intensity of hues good throughout. There's a grassy bite in the nose, serves to wake it up and set the table for the juicy blackberry, boysenberry, raspberry fruit and lemon juice components, then returns to the merde, watered earth, wet bark thing, makes a great effort to keep the elements in harmony. Full-bodied, the luscious fruit explodes in your mouth, the juicy raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit never overly sweet. Only a touch of caramel or vanilla to elevate the overall sweetness level. The lack of tannins does not leave it unstructured, more so leaves you happy they lack the typical greenness of the vintage. Holds both its weight and flavor intensity through a prolonged finish. 90

Paris, Domaine Vincent  
Rhône, Cornas, Granit 30  
Syrah  
2004, \$36.99, 13.0%

The glow in the ruby-magenta rims moves inward into the violet core where there's some opacity to be noted, has quite a bit of surface sheen. Peanut, flowers come first in the nose, sugary enough to evoke Froot Loops, the bacon fat lurches in at odd moments, the blackberry, raspberry, red cherry scents wet enough in character to soak in and make your nostrils feel heavy. Medium-bodied, the main focus is on the cherry and raspberry fruit but there's a substantial degree of florality accompanied by white grapefruit and lemon citrus, dried beef strips and mineral dust, very little rustic about it. Tannins tame and, to a lesser extent, same for the acidity. Curiously approachable with a soft finish. 89

Renjarde, Domaine de la  
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône Villages  
Blend  
2003, \$12.99, 13.5%

Above average brightness adds to the clarity in the more ruby than violet core, becomes full red-ruby at the rims, holds hue intensity completely. Quiet smokiness at first in the nose, easily succumbs to florality and the fully ripened currant, cherry scents, darker than red berries, gives up orange zest, spice and a sprig of mint too. Full-bodied with a pliant texture that both yields and pushes outwards. Minimal astringency but the tannins are drying enough to shorten the presence of the blackberry, black cherry, black raspberry fruit. Lacks any unsettling herbaceousness, instead producing wildflowers, bark and spices. Nothing oaky nor unnecessarily additive about it, very pleasantly straightforward. The tannins do kind of stick in your craw though. 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 10% Cinsault, 5% Mourvèdre, 5% Carignan. 87

Maréchal, Catherine et Claude  
Burgundy, Bourgogne, Cuvée Gravel  
Pinot Noir  
2004, \$22.99, 13.0%

Trim, evenly hued violet to red garnet color, maybe a tick downwards at the rims, sits with confidence in the glass. Surprisingly rich and fruity nose, blooms with plum, cherry, blackberry fruit before striving to find balance through tobacco ash, brown earth, fallen leaves, hints at a light gaminess just before it dissolves. Medium-bodied, here the initial flourish of ripeness brought under bear by the strong acidity. Still, the pruney edge saps a lot of freshness out of the raspberry, strawberry, cherry fruit. More citrus and flowers than grass or earth, at present seems to be struggling mightily to find its bearings. 87

## FRANCE WHITE

Dalieux, Domaine  
Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Blanc Villages  
Chardonnay  
2004, \$13.99, 12.5%

Its spotless translucence brings out some copper tones in the basic golden foundation, manages richness of hue without truly achieving strong depth, interesting to view at multiple angles. The violets and lilacs have to sneak about in the nose to be noticed as the smokiness and wet stone components remain determined to steal the show, something like leesy creaminess acts as a seat cushion for the succinct pear, green apple, peach fruit scents. Medium-bodied, clean angles, comes into your mouth with edges abounding, almost akimbo. The smokiness and chalkiness still a big player here but the green apple, pear, peach fruit comes with its own padding and doesn't need extra support. Dash of cinnamon and clove add life to the more pretty violets. The acidity is muscular without becoming domineering, helps maintain mouth weight through the finish. Don't tell anyone it's Chardonnay. 90

Pépière, Domaine de la  
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Clos des  
Briords, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes  
Muscadet  
2005, \$12.99, 12.0%

Washed out yellow hay color, the lack of surface shine contributes to its block-like appearance, minor color loss along the rims. Saltwater and witchhazel stir up the nose first, has that wet smokiness like sauna stones, it's so sturdily built that even the chalkiness is bound up, double for any floral notes or the pear, apple fruit scents. Full-bodied, from the first few sips it is hard as nails and a few hours open doesn't help. The acidity is not especially

cutting but the wine overall is extremely dry and almost dusty. There's more florality and some lemon peel too but minimal sense of release and flow. Chalk, salt, limestone, clay, earth, bitter grasses, more of that dry and crackling smokiness. As in the nose, the pear, apple, peach fruit never had a chance. Right now has so much brute body and force it needs hearty food. Otherwise, it's more or less a joy solely for wine geeks who fetishize "Day Three" tasting notes. Should be taken off the shelves and restocked in the autumn months. 89

Landron, Domaines Joseph  
Loire, Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine, Amphibolite Nature  
Muscadet  
2005, \$11.99, 11.5%

Slightly gauzy old yellow gold to bleached straw color, no dropoff at the rims but what was there to drop off from? Lemon zest dominates the nose, behind that it's like someone took a bag of pulverized seashells and coral and blew it up your nostrils, much more stone dust than minerals, the coating of honey brings the tenuous peach and apricot fruit scents out of the shadows. Medium-bodied, as in the nose the lemon, and here tangerine, citrus a major factor, the chalk and crustacean shell aspect lower. Nothing harsh about the acidity but it is decidedly dry. The inexpressivity of the peach, red apple, pear fruit lends it a blunt feel. That said, has the momentum to keep moving forward. Does produce a pretty floral side at the penultimate moment. That's nice. Doesn't excel at any one thing but does many very credibly. 89

## FRANCE ROSE

Baudry, Domaine Bernard  
Loire, Chinon, Rosé  
Cabernet Franc  
2005, \$15.99, 13.5%

Light yellow-orange touch to the pink core, dullness under the surface gives it depth yet detracts from the surface plane, loses its color around the rims. Big, sweet nose of cherry, red raspberry fruit before earth, leather and stone slip in, not much nuance nor subtlety but does settle in with authority. Full-bodied, round and heavy, pushes outwards very nicely. Here more lemon and mineral chunks add texture to the cleaner stone base. Not a lot of grassiness, contributes some to the blunt feel of the acidity and tannins, structured but not necessarily cleaner nor more transparent as a result, lifeless. Leaves a tacky residue behind. OK, but that's about it. 86

Gourgonnier, Mas de  
Provence, Les Baux de Provence, Rosé  
Blend  
2005, \$12.99, 12.5%

Bright and shiny red-ruby to orange color gives intensity to the core, sheds its hue around the rims, still better color than most (if that matters). Chalk and stone dust give the nose momentary seriousness before the juicy raspberry, strawberry, apple scents plop into your nostrils, lemon juice, rich but a one-trick pony. Medium-bodied, on the dry side with more perceptible tannins than acidity. As opposed to the nose, not a whole lot of juice in the cherry, apple, raspberry fruit here. Very consistent from start to finish, no real highs but no real lows either. Moderate stone allusions, the herbal side not very pronounced. Good power and push, not particularly refined. Approximately

65% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 5% Cinsault, 5% Mourvèdre, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. 85

Carlot, Mas

Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc, Cuvée Tradition Rosé

Blend

2005, \$10.99, 13.0%

Deep pink-ruby, well-concentrated throughout, attractively resplendent, more pink at the rims. Enough herbaceousness and powdered stone to create a crinkly effect in the nose, tartly-edged cherry, raspberry scents, not much citrus but there's something like burning smoke going on. Medium-bodied, fruity with sweet and sour alternations, the cherry, raspberry, red currant fruit digs in, almost comes across as a full red wine. Grassiness takes over additional territory past the mid-palate, bringing it even more of a sour character. Flat-footed acidity and tannins cannot prevent its body from adopting a horizontal position. There's moments of garrigues florality and lemon citrus to pretty it up some. The uneven finish is unfortunate. 50% Syrah, 30% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre. 85

Saladin, Domaine

Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Ouh lala!

Blend

2005, \$16.99, 13.0%

Bright watermelon to magenta in color, its vivid hue makes up for the more or less average shine. Flat nose, not much going on, a little salty or stony, hint of pickle juice if accompanied by sweet cherry, raspberry after-images, does die quickly. Light to medium-bodied, on the muted side here too, the raspberry, strawberry fruit initially hints at sweetness before turning very dry. Lemon peel, floral dust and light bitters not adding any moisture. The tannins are dusty too and given its overall lack of weight, dulls the palate, gets increasingly sour as it passes the mid-palate, loses both its focus and your focus on it. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Carignan, Cinsault. 84

## FRANCE SPARKLING

Foreau, Philippe

Loire, Vouvray, Brut

Chenin Blanc

NV, \$19.99, 12.0%

Considerable amount of activity in the bubbles, strong enough that no beads form, light ochre cast to the dark yellow color, dark to the point of dulling. The nose possesses scant breadly or honeyed qualities, mainly dried orange peels and a gravel pit of stones, moderate tar and oil notes and abbreviated peach to apricot fruit. Full-bodied and firm, especially given the activity of those bubbles, quite bottom-heavy. Outside of stones, earth and some dried leaves and twigs, not much going on flavor-wise. The lemon to orange citrus is there, just as the mixed white fruit is not. Exceedingly dry, the acidity turns the skies dark. Leaves a bitter medicinal residue behind. In the end comes off as a bit strident, needing badly to prove it's of a place. 87

## ITALY RED

Antinori, Piero

Tuscany, Santa Cristina

Sangiovese

2004, \$8.99, 13.0%

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Light, clean garnet to violet in color, admirable fullness through the rims. Sour, leafy nose, like autumn leaves left too long on the ground before getting raked up, even the oak toast is sour if we sweeter coconut aspects, sour cherry and raspberry fruit scents, best things is it's all thankfully short-lived. Light to medium-bodied, not much more going on, pulverized tannins, OK degree of acidity, minimal sweetness in the raspberry to cherry fruit. Maybe some flowers, maybe leather, definitely more of the herbaceousness. The oak toast makes a gargantuan effort to mask its multiple flaws, to minimal success. It's worth mentioning that at 13% alcohol it is at least good for catching a buzz. 90% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot. 83

## ITALY ROSE

Cantalupo, Antichi Vigneti di

Piedmont, Colline Novaresi, Il Mimo Rosé

Nebbiolo

2005, \$12.99, 13.0%

Deep red-ruby to blood orange in color, almost gets past rosé hue, concentrated with layered pools from the surface down. While full, the nose has a billowy feel which prevents heaviness and punctures the ripeness in the cherry, blackberry scents, letting the excess bleed off, fresh with a smattering of flowers and lemon zest. Medium-bodied, nicely squared shoulders, comes right at you. The wiry acidity adds to this forward momentum while not preventing it from digging in its heels either. Good shape and bounce in the red cherry, strawberry fruit, holds well through the finish. Satisfying throughout, good versatility. 88

## GERMANY WHITE

Fürst, Weingut Rudolf

Franken, Bürgstadt a. Main, Centgrafenberg, Kabinett

Trocken AP #9

Riesling

2004, \$29.99, 11.5%

Basic straw/hay yellow color with a light green tinge, more of a solid piece than layered or with a distinct surface plane, decent concentration along the rims. Smoky, minerally nose with added kick from an herbaceous edge, lemon peel and poor earth, drying presence in your nostrils, the apple and pear fruit scents there but muffled. Medium to full-bodied, lives up to its Trocken designation, not searing but maybe pan-fried. Given this, the acidity is wide enough in cut to bruise rather than draw blood. Adds a more palpable floral dimension here, enough to stretch the lemon and lime citrus into more than just zest. Rocks, gravel and earth remain the dominant factor, lower herbal tones. Curiously, the peach, pear, red apple fruit most present through and past the finish. Someone tell it it's OK to relax. 89

Karthäuserhof, Weingut

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Eitelsbacher, Karthäuserhofberg,

Spätlese Trocken AP #8

Riesling

2004, \$30.99, 11.5%

Not a lot of shine in the yellow hay color but there is a glow to it, remains consistent to the rims with what it has. There's a strong smokiness to the nose, limestone and chalk, fried lemon peels, not enough richness in the pineapple, pear, yellow apple fruit scents to achieve a more tropical feel, just gets more and more minerally as it sits in the glass. In the mouth it's fairly full-bodied, you

sense its heft from the first sip. While very dry, this body inhibits meaningful fluidity from developing, much more of a grinder. The lemon citrus picks up traces of lime and the minerality and stoniness more "white" in nature without a lot of metallic bite. The acidity hits up like an axe handle to the stomach, leaves you as much out of breath as feeling for broken bones. Bit more peach and apricot to complement the pineapple, apple fruit here. This is nonsense wine here, nowhere near an easy sipper. 88

## AUSTRIA ROSE

Wieninger, Weingut  
Wien, Rosé de Pinot  
Pinot Noir  
2005, \$15.99, 12.0%

Salmon pink tint but virtually colorless, its reflectivity gives it some presence in the glass. Aggressive nose, grassy and minerally, adds crackle to the strawberry and red cherry scents, develops a wet earth touch as it dissolves. Medium-bodied, sweet and sour entry with a curious bubblegum flavor element. Lemon and mineral water gives it a light fizzy feel. Twigs, leaves and underbrush notes, not unduly herbaceous while this still remains a constant presence. Raspberry and strawberry fruit flavors most obvious, softer cherry notes. The tannins settle it down more than the acidity perks it up. Grinds and lifts haphazardly, difficult to get a full grip on it. 86

## SPAIN RED

Montecillo, Bodegas  
Rioja, Crianza  
Tempranillo  
2001, \$9.99, 13.0%

Bright scarlet red to more garnet closer to the rims, holds well while hinting at the Rioja "young but looks old" appearance. Very earthy nose, aggressive cedar, cigar leaf notes with candied Maraschino cherries, pleasingly funky. Light to medium-bodied with a powerful acidic spine, gives it erectness and a rougher texture which helps it gain grip given its lighter body. Earth and grass big here in the mouth too, merde, no discounting the cedar and spice either. The cherry, raspberry fruit displays more bite than succulence, refreshing more than decadent. White citrus and tobacco smoke linger during the ending. Not very much overt oak showing. Quite traditional, some might see this wine as too ephemeral or needing fruit but this is really the way it oughta be for a Crianza designated wine at this price. 88

Luzón, Bodegas  
Jumilla, Altos de Luzón  
Blend  
2004, \$16.99, 14.5%

Being entirely unblemished pushes it away from turning opaque, the purple core's crimson tinge moves to dark, softly glowing red ruby rims. Super-ripe blackberry, blueberry fruit explodes in the nose, bodacious oak toast, spice and chocolate powder, charcoal, stone dust, light waft of dried flowers. Medium-bodied, the dusty tannins make up a big part of the attack, not any more floral than the nose but there's a new touch of orange zest. The oak is more subdued here, still crisp and toasty but you can deal with it. The raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit is thick yet not all that juicy. At moments hints at an herbal side but thankfully doesn't follow through on it. Blunt ending gets you moving your tongue around to agitate

flavor and moisture. 50% Monastrell, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Tempranillo. 87

Murcia, Bodegas y Viñedos de  
Jumilla, Mad Dogs & Englishmen  
Blend  
2004, \$10.99, 14.0%

Immaculate brick red/violet core, quickly turns to broad orange-garnet rims, while extremely clear its color gives it an aged appearance. Fresh, if sharp-edged, nose, needs some planing down to a smoother surface, the raspberry, cranberry scents are not juicy enough to fend off the clove, menthol and crisp oak toast, albeit they possess a slight prune touch, suggests dried flowers at times. Medium-bodied, the concentration it gains from its dried fruit nature blown out by bitter tannins and green notes. Cumin and ginger spiced black cherry, blackberry, cranberry fruit lacks a center. It's nice that the earth, tar, tree bark flavors are there but they add the wrong kind of effect. Given its lack of richness as well as paucity of complementary characteristics, tastes hotter from the alcohol than otherwise might be the case. Very borderline. 60% Monastrell, 20% Shiraz, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. 83

## SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Mulderbosch  
Stellenbosch  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$19.99, 12.5%

The green-white straw color has an attractive glow to it yet it cannot avoid transparency, sparkles like a glass of water in bright sunshine. The nose slowly builds on you, elevates into sweet white grapefruit, lemon citrus, violets, cut grass and seltzer water, the apricot, pear, red apple scents casually linger, nothing forcing itself on you. Full-bodied, both spicier and sweeter in the mouth. Here there is a moment of chili pepper but not enough to effect its overall composure, thanks in part to a lightly creamy foundation. The white grapefruit base has pink grapefruit and lemonade notes. Sweet enough to evoke a floral flourish. Granting this, the acidity is powdery enough that the wine itself is not too sweet. The fullness persists in the peach, apricot, green melon fruit. Understated doesn't mean underperforming. 89

## AUSTRALIA RED

Rolling  
New South Wales, Central Ranges  
Shiraz  
2004, \$10.99, 13.5%

There's a solid cleanliness and evenness in its visual appearance, adds some brightness to the violet core, this high wattage extending through the crimson red rims. Has one of those noses that wants its cake and to eat it too, despite being dry in hopes of achieving a measure of elegance, pours on the chocolate, vanilla and cola tones and hopes this dryness will mask its dependence on the cherry, raspberry scents too. In the mouth it is medium-bodied, creamily soft with the toast making an attempt at restraining this fat. Beyond the oak it remains herbal and offers precious little else for counterpoint. The main differentiating factor is the acidity, which does partially cut through the flesh. Otherwise, same old, same old raspberry, red cherry, cranberry, apple fruit. It's a bonus that it does not weigh you down too much. 86

## CHILE WHITE

Veramonte  
Casablanca Valley  
Sauvignon Blanc  
2005, \$8.99, 13.5%

Palest hint of yellow straw color, for the most part transparent, average shine. The nose is well-endowed with apricot and peach scents, the richness diffuses the moderate herbaceousness, on the whole more floral, leaves you with the impression of sweetness rather than refreshing crispness. Medium-bodied, same story here in the mouth, the decided lack of acidity leaves it defaulting to sweet white citrus, floral water and amorphous peach, apricot, pear fruit. Snap peas and lowgrade cut grass provide a vague sense of varietal character. Even as the spiciness grows towards the finish it never develops much cut. Dry, tacky feel persists after the liquid is gone. 83

## ARGENTINA RED

Portillo, Bodega El  
Mendoza, Valle de Uco, Finca El Portillo  
Malbec  
2005, \$9.99, 14.0%

Fine clarity to the red violet core, segues quickly to bright ruby before it even reaches the rims, nice shine. Lots of smoky, charred oak at first in the nose, slowly integrates with softer caramel-vanilla as well as black cherry, blackberry scents, nods towards earthiness without really delivering. Medium-bodied, gritty and borderline dusty in the mouth, no accusing it of being a simple juice bomb. That said, there's densely packed core of black cherry, Italian plum and blackberry fruit that is capable of resisting the fierce tannic assault. The oak still got too charred but, taken in regards to the whole, the tannic structure here too tempers excesses. Tree bark, leather, earth play supporting roles well if with few spoken lines. Stays rustic enough to be more than just a simple quaffer. 87