

The Hanes Wine Review, July/August 2008 Edition

The suck-ass condition of the U.S. dollar against most foreign currencies means prices for imported wines are higher than they might be if the dollar were stronger. Luckily, later this year the American populace will elect a new President who will then prove equally incapable of managing the economy. Whew. Until then high falutin' drunks will just have to pay more for their wine. Accepting this premise, an interesting question is to then ask whom in the wine biz is getting hurt by the weak dollar.

As anyone who works in, or pays attention to, the wine industry knows, it's arguably more competitive than ever. Even allowing for a certain amount of wholesaler consolidation, if not because of it, the most competitive arena is between individual wines for shelf or wine list space and overall market share. Some wines have a sustainable track record of popularity such that they will sell through almost regardless of price increase. Maybe at a slower pace or spread among more customers buying fewer bottles, but they will sell through. Or the production quantity is small enough that once initially gained, maintaining the sliver of market share required is not that large of an ongoing concern. However, there's no lack of wine saturating the market and fighting for its life just about every day. How are these wines surviving?

Wholesalers, retailers, restaurants all have witnessed increases in underlying costs beyond the expense of the fermented grape juice product itself. Rent, electricity, salaries, insurance and similar items go up, up, up. As in any business, one normal course of action is to simply pass along increasing expenses down the chain. Producer to importer to distributor to retailer to end customer (or auction house!). If the wine industry was monopolistic each link in the chain would just have to take the price increases with a smile. Wait, it *is* monopolistic! Or almost so in many places. Which gets us closer to the heart of the question posed. Who in the chain is feeling the most pain because of the weak dollar and poor American economy?

First, let's be certain to note that this screed is mainly about imported wines. As per usual, Hanes is focusing on what is called in the business the "super-premium" (retailing roughly for \$8 to \$14 USD) and above categories of wines (a small segment of the overall market). If you are reading this, you are one of a very few interested in these wines. *Anyway*, if you're thinking that the weak dollar abroad was an opportunity for domestic producers to steal market share away from the foreigners, you're more or less alone. Smaller domestic producers (arbitrarily, let's say under 2,500 cases made per year) have fixed and/or rising expenses themselves and play in even more rarefied air than "super-premium" and their customers are less interested in price than points. The larger domestic producers (a) have a fairly stable market share and would rather maintain or increase profit margin than hold or lower prices as import prices rise or (b) are closer to being international conglomerates with sufficient profit streams coming from foreign held properties such that the overall corporate bottom line does not mandate the domestic entities in the portfolio fighting too hard for increased market share.

Add in the fact that domestic wines are branded and labeled in ways more familiar to the majority of the American public and thus have a natural advantage. There's still plenty of "tweener" producers which Hanes would think might make a more concerted effort to grab market share via price drops while the foreign competition has been hobbled – if for no other reason than to become a prettier acquisition target – but few seem to be making these moves. If the prices of bulk grapes are too high to reduce end prices to the consumer, the domestic producers must have other good reasons to not spend their money to chase wider market share. Maybe it's because the price of a Lexus keeps going up.

Let's go back to the beginning of the sales chain. As has always been the case, regardless of the state of the American dollar and economy, the price of imported wines vary greatly among countries or origin. Duh. Same goes for the regions within countries, sub-regions, vineyards, etcetera. Those regions and producers deemed as the best fetch the highest prices at the starting gate. Unless greed, ego or a new oak barrel habit obtains, the weak dollar shouldn't cause producers to raise prices much. The local costs of production are in a steady state. There should be rather a slow rise in prices over time to account for general inflation, replanting, vineyard acquisition, kids going to college, stuff like that. Contrary to the belief of many, it's not the producers who are making the majority of the profit in the industry, particularly so for imported wines. They are just selling at whatever level international exchange rate the relevant currencies are at.

Importers and distributors (not always the same party) make many decisions in economic climates such as that of today. If you just spent the last 3-5 years sweating to carve out a sustainable market share for a French Côtes-du-Rhône or Argentinean Malbec or Australian Riesling you may decide to take a hit on your own profit margin to keep the retail price steady and not drive off fickle, price conscious end buyers. This tends to happen a lot with smaller importers and distributors who traffic in niche producers and more esoteric wines. If a line of wine has a great deal of brand awareness built with the buying public, a one to three dollar increase based off of a start point between \$8 to \$12 will probably be absorbed by the buyer, whose interest in a "known quantity" trumps saving a buck.

Large scale production brands can cap price increases in great part by squeezing the grape growers and wineries. "Central Coast" or "Southeastern Australia" bottlings get their grapes from anywhere they want within these loosely defined areas. And if X wants A for the grapes while new guy Y only wants B for the grapes, adios to X. Loyalty isn't just a river in Egypt. Or something like that.

Smaller importers and distributors may not always have this luxury. Larger guys can be somewhat cavalier in maintaining producer relationships, the distributor knows that they have the clout to either move the product or if the producer gets pissed or feels slighted they can be replaced. Littler outfits have to continuously be appeasing two groups, the producers

and the end buyers. This is a tricky maneuver to say the least. The need to hold prices steady during an economic downturn will usually mean that the importer or distributor fares the worst out of the entire production to consumption chain. You need to keep the small, artisanal producers solvent while at the same time if you raise the wholesale prices too much the stores or restaurants won't buy and market share erodes. It can take a long time, years, to place a product in the market but only one release cycle to be forgotten. Them's the facts.

Which leads to the point which hits home the closest with you, the buying public. If you prefer to purchase wines from smaller, more esoteric producers, should you cheer for competitive battles to retain shelf space? Does the battle for underpricing the competition help you more or less, especially in the longer term?

Hanes is of two minds here. It happens when you suffer from multiple personality disorder. As usual, he tries to remain dispassionately objective and assess facts and not emotional attachments. Natch. First, smaller importers and distributors who offer diversity of product not found with their larger brethren will be hurt financially if they try to hold the line on prices. If they bought the 2006 vintage at Price X and the 2007 vintage is now X+1 or X+2 they can either pass that along or swallow it. If they do too much of the latter they do indeed risk financial insolvency themselves. Bills must be paid, even by boutique wine importers. Conversely, raising prices doesn't endear oneself to retail store wine buyers nor restaurant beverage directors. (Plus, it is worth passing consideration that even if the distributors hold the line it does not guarantee the avaricious retailer won't mark up their shelf prices as if the retailer paid more to the wholesaler than they in fact did.)

So, if the wines you love are still as cheap as ever someone is paying a steep price for your \$10.99 bottle of Muscadet. How long can this go on before the importer goes belly up? Depends on the importer. But there is substantial risk. So, the rationally self-interested wine buyer may decide that paying a slightly higher price is worth it because in the longer term it keeps the pipeline unbroken and open. Better to pay \$14.99 for the Muscadet than have no Muscadet at all.

As in almost any industry, there's little doubt that an economic downturn hurts the little guy more than the big guy (cf. Bear Stearns or Fannie Mae). It's no different in wine. That said, there's something Hanes has seen in many years of wine-fueled drunken frenzies. And it's that there's never a lack of new players trying to get into the game. It's a sad and unfortunate fact, for a whole host of reasons. A dollar and a dream, baby, a dollar and a dream. As a result, while it may be the case that the importer you know and trust may go under, the producers in their portfolio will likely be represented in your market soon enough by some eager new guy. It's bad if you are personal friends with the first guy but it still remains the case that, even as Hanes types, there are people on the sidelines with a fervent desire and a financial backer waiting to snatch away any loose high quality product from the extant players. If the wine is good and has a following, it won't be unrepresented for long. This is a *very* cyclical business.

In the age of the internet and e-commerce and all that jazz, we're more or less in a post-romantic epoch. Loyalty remains a laudable concept and one that even the scoundrel Hanes adheres to — once in awhile. But when the world is running down, you make the best of what's still around and Hanes ain't paying no \$40 for a Nero d'Avola, no matter how good. Hey, how many of you would buy a bottle via the internet to save \$5 rather than buy it down at the local wine store? We're all "winehunters" galore. There are legitimate fears that smaller distributors get hurt more than large distributors when the economy sucks. But if the wine buying public's paychecks are shrinking too, then it's just time to sit back and watch ole wonderful capitalism at work. Closeouts and liquidation sales stink for the selling party but for the buyers it's a rare moment of relief. Close your eyes, minimize the emotional component of wine buying, and it's just like gas is \$2.00 a gallon again...

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Here's a big mega blast of tasting notes, accrued during all the planning and execution of The Big Move from New York City to North Carolina. Not sure when Hanes will have built up enough new notes to warrant the next wine review, so savor every morsel herein! Hanes will try to find a local outlet for wine besides the nearby Food Lion supermarket...

This month's big winners... For about \$16 it's not rock bottom in price yet still a screaming value — it's the 2004 Feudo Montoni Nero d'Avola from Sicily. Great heft and presence without ever turning saccharine as some Sicilian reds can. Although somewhat tight right now there's a lot to luv about Breton's 2006 Bourgueil "Les Galichets." Fairly priced at \$22, Loire Cabernet Franc consistently delivers value, no secret but it bears repeating. "Some people" turn their noses up at the French wine region Costières de Nîmes but Hanes has always had good experiences with cheapie wines from there. While not cheap at \$23, he was able to sample a producer new to him, the 2006 "Marginal" bottling from Terre des Chardons. Very good wine and nertz to those who don't like these sort of wines. Valpolicella has mostly been off the Hanes radar but the 2005 Latium "Campo Prognai" bottling is a forward, gregarious wine for all of \$21. While on vacation Hanes stumbled upon a gem of a Portuguese red, the 2004 "Vinho Regional Ribatejano Reserva" from Quinta da Alorna. An easy buy at \$16 or so, only problem may be not sure how widely distributed it is.

The best \$15 and under picks... News flash. Pépière has made a regular bottling of their Muscadet in 2007. It's great as always, probably better than the 2006. And it's \$13. Don't be a wuss, buy a case. Went on a minor Greek wine buying binge and the best was the Domaine Spiropoulos white wine made from the Moschofilero grape. The 2007 vintage was \$14 and there's lots of winsome flowers, citrus and white fruit without any heaviness. Hanes hasn't been enthralled with drinking newly released Bordeaux for some time. But he laid down the \$14 for the 2005 Château Haut Nadeau Bordeaux Supérieur and found it a sturdy little claret without pretense. God bless the petit châteaux. If you want cheap, drinkable

Nebbiolo wine Italy's Lombardy region has been delivering of late. For around \$14 you can get the 2006 Rainoldi "Terrazze di Retiche di Sondrio" bottling and experience Nebbiolo. That's saying something. The exile brings with it a return to simplicity. Why, like the 2005 Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon from Five Rivers for a mere \$8.49. Profound, no, very potable, yes. For inexpensive Jurançon Sec from Southwest France (as opposed to inexpensive Jurançon Sec from Chile) Domaine Castera is proving to be the go-to choice for Hanes. The 2006 remains \$13 and offers a great summertime blend of citrus, flowers and restrained fruit. Hot stuff. Another good summer white is the 2007 Bodegas Bleda "Castillo de Jumilla" white wine crafted for your delectation from the Macabeo grape (aka Viura). For a mere \$11 you can impress both friends and family with a bottle!

And the disappointments... Austrian wines tend to flit above what Hanes can pay these days. But when someone else opens a 2006 Grüner Veltliner from beloved producer Jamek and the esteemed Ried Achleiten vineyard, let's rock. Or not, as the case may be here, nice wine but more or less average compared to its tastier forebears. It's Turley time once again as Hanes quaffs wines from the latest winery direct shipment. Mostly OK though below expectations were the 2006 Dusi Ranch Zinfandel and 2006 Rattlesnake Ridge Zinfandel. That's why Hanes only buys one bottle of each wine made. Buddy loves the wines from A Donkey and a Goat Winery so got to try their 2007 rosé "Isabel's Cuvée." Once more, Hanes don't get the appeal. And it's like \$22. Oh, well. In contrast to the Castera, the 2006 Charles Hours Jurançon Sec was below the, admittedly high, expectations. This is Hanes's favorite Jurançon Sec producer, hence he lays down his \$25 without reservation. Such is life, we will have to wait for a potential bounce back with the 2007. While not bad at all, Hanes wanted just a little more clarity of purpose from the 2006 Pfeffingen Riesling "Grosses Gewächs" bottling from the Weilberg vineyard. Can't a man have clarity of purpose anymore?

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

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on the older (or non-imported) wines he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/oldervintages2008.html>

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

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

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Dragon Vineyard
Zinfandel
2006, \$45.00, 16.0%
Unblemished and with a trace of filminess, the natural darkness to the purple core lightened by a reddish tint, in turn the rims while based in ruby also have a pinkish cast. The nose is noticeably fruity, a blend of watermelon, green apple as well as more expected raspberry, blackberry, blueberry scents, the pine and pressed flower scents are lighter but mesh well, has that "mountain air" feel too, earthy yet open, not a wide range of elements. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, not sappy per se but hugs the curves of your tongue. Lemon and tangerine citrus has the sweet tang to get ahead of the blackberry, cherry, raspberry fruit, here there's a slight prunish touch. Given its relative lack of weight you can't finger the mostly absent tannin nor acidity for that. To the back of the bus for the flowers and pine. Curious absence of oaky cream or toast. More pleasing for its simplicity. 89

Turley
Napa Valley, Atlas Peak, Mead Ranch
Zinfandel
2006, \$35.00, 16.5%
Deep red-purple core of spotlessness, dark well through to the saturated ruby to red-magenta rims. The nose on the whole subdued, leads with caramel and milk chocolate, flowers and tangerine, tries to marshal some earthiness but all this does is really freeze the blackberry, raspberry, cherry scents in place, you feel it could be more expressive than it is. Full-bodied, mix of sweet and savory appeal in the mint, pine, eucalyptus, orange rind, the milk chocolate, vanilla extract and butterscotch notes soften on the whole. No real tannin nor acidity, any archness comes from the alcohol (albeit doesn't show much heat). Sugary boysenberry, blueberry, blackberry fruit with a big floral perfume. Stiffens up with increasing menthol accents before you swallow. Last glass the best. 88

Turley

Regional Blend, Old Vines
Zinfandel

2006, \$25.00, 15.4%

Basic purple colored core, surrounded by deep red-ruby rims, looks friendly and juicy in the glass. There's some alcoholic heat in the nose but the menthol, eucalyptus cloak it some, offers molasses crisp, orange glaze accents, the ripeness of the cherry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit scents at times evoke cola, for the low quantity of elements does not mesh as well as expected. Medium to full-bodied, most of the weight leveraged through the attack then sloughs it off going forward. Here there's a lot more chocolate, cocoa, toffee coming through, surprising for the lack of this in the nose. Develops a slight grassy, earthy side too, welcome counterpoint. The cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit has a liqueur-like texture and heat. Acidity and tannin... speak English, man! A chugger for summer barbecue, not much more. 88

Porter Creek

Alexander Valley, Angeli Vineyard, Old Vine
Carignan

2006, \$27.99, 13.4%

There's a dullness which approaches filminess in the dark violet core, brightens into ruby-magenta rims of near full saturation. Juicy raspberry, blackberry filled nose, as if just squeezed, nuances of dried herbs, stone and brown soil evoke a garden without real "earthiness," not a great deal of leather but there's some orange peel and little evidence of oak. Medium-bodied with good purity through the attack, the tannic grit adds welcome counterpoint to the ripeness of the raspberry, red cherry fruit. A little more grassy here which lifts it through the mid-palate and also pairs up with the orange to lemon citrus. Again, barest hint of cocoa powder but no creaminess nor overt oaking. Drops weight as it progresses yet this is in keeping with its freshness. 88

Dashe Cellars

Dry Creek Valley
Zinfandel

2006, \$21.99, 14.5%

Trim and clear enough to see through the otherwise dark violet core, still enough purple around the rims to shade the ruby base, good surface reflectivity. There a steely firmness to the nose, even the whipped cream and vanilla bean scents feel regimented, serves up measured portions of eucalyptus, flower oil, orange spice and slightly muddy earth, the cherry, blackberry scents plainly spoken but not short on words. Medium-bodied, yet the tannins have the consistency of metal netting, the more you struggle against them, the tighter they become. Rounder milk chocolate and coconut custard flavors here without it seeming oaky, insufficient to soften the general texture or supplement the ripe, if terse, cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit. Lower levels of eucalyptus and citrus as well as flowers. Enjoyable enough but actually appears to need food for complement. 88

Anthill Farms

Russian River Valley, Windsor Oaks Vineyard
Syrah

2006, \$29.99, 14.5%

Full purple color of excellent richness, surrounded by wide and deep ruby rims, soft glow throughout. Coconut custard, vanilla pudding, caramel make a grand

impression in the nose, touch of mint before a flush of cherry, blackberry juice completely fills your nostrils. Medium-bodied, has a somewhat stern to tight feel, as if it is wearing a girdle. The sweet ripeness shines through the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, by the mid-palate it's back to the cavalcade of coconut, caramel, vanilla fudge, cinnamon notes. There's a bite which suggests a metallic or mineral component but this doesn't persist. Grill smoke and seared beef rise through the finish. Plays it sort of by the book, if vividly flavorful. 88

Turley

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Dusi Ranch
Zinfandel

2006, \$42.00, 16.4%

The ruby-violet core is remarkably light and transparent, not to say lacking in color, just not the usual boring saturated appearance, thus even though they're not it makes the diminished ruby rims appear watery. There's a pervasive sourness to the nose, oak adds a dill twist to the cranberry, raspberry, red cherry scents, lemongrass and pine more lifting than expansive, a caramel cream trumps what earthiness may exist and then, poof, it's all gone. Medium-bodied, more light than full, creates an odd contrast between the golden raisin, date, fig and then plum to cherry fruit flavors as there's an all but total lack of bottom to support either camp. Displays lemon to orange citrus, eucalyptus and coconut/vanilla cream to fill in the blank spaces as much as possible. Some acidity, no real tannin to speak of. The overall creamy texture fights the leaner punch of the fruit and citrus. Taken as a whole, the flavor is always sparkling and vibrant but it lacks harmony. 87

Five Rivers Winery

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles
Cabernet Sauvignon

2005, \$8.49, 13.9%

Completely unblemished and clear red-purple color throughout, only real difference is darker at the core, vivid scarlet rims. Cinnamon and clove spice, cedar and orange blossom help the nose lift so that you don't really notice the light footprint of the cherry, currant scents, the oak toast is moderate with slivers of toffee and mint, nothing major. Medium-bodied, the acidity and to lesser extent tannins keep it slim and fresh. That said, the oak here is more buttery and sweet. The general spiciness never knits in, leaving the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit more bouncy than rich. Muted mixed citrus, mint, flower nuances. It's dryness may put off those looking for a cheap fruit bomb but it stays level-headed and within itself. 91% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Merlot, 2% Malbec, 2% Petit Verdot. (Synthetic cork) 87

Cambria

Santa Maria Valley, Julia's Vineyard
Pinot Noir

2006, \$23.49, 13.9%

Sparkling and speckless red-ruby color, darkened by a smidge of purple, while the tint stays the same, turns watery around the rims. High-toned nose that almost triggers a sneeze, grass, clove, orange zest, cola, cedar, lifts with rapidity and to the detriment of the raspberry, red cherry scents which never really find their footing. Light-bodied yet does have sufficient tactile grip to stretch out admirably. Sour jalapeño notes meld with cola bean, cedar, clove and twig/bark type notes to keep it zigging and zagging, the acidity ably greases these wheels. The white

grapefruit and orange citrus can't show best until the former starts to fade. The cherry, strawberry, watermelon fruit fares better, catches hold right after the attack. Drops a notch at the end but, overall, it's credible product. 87

Turley

Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge
Zinfandel

2006, \$40.00, 15.9%

Simple, straightforward red-ruby to violet core of moderate opacity, there's a fat glow in the ruby-magenta rims, nothing here stands out from the usual. The nose is oddly dilute, all the scents are there but weak, raspberry, blackberry fruit, popcorn and butter, eucalyptus, orange zest, touch of flowers, little length. Full-bodied, soft and sloth-like, yawns inside your mouth. No tannin nor acidity to activate the orange/lemon citrus, eucalyptus, menthol, cut grass elements. Why, even the oak cream and butterscotch barely keeps its eyes open. The raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit just jammy enough to congeal without sugariness. No noticeable flaws nor signs of being compromised, just a dumb wine. As in simpleton. 86

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Trou de Bonde

Santa Maria Valley, Bien Nacido Vineyard
Pinot Blanc

2006, \$19.49, 14.1%

Brilliant, sparkly yellow gold color, pitch perfect clarity with just enough depth in the core to make the hueless rims more noticeable as such. Lemony fresh type nose, scrubs away many of the other scents, there's pressed flowers, white mineral powder in addition to pear, green melon, yellow apple, peach scents, even a waft of licorice. In the mouth it has a great sinewy nature, sweet yet also bright, all the creaminess upfront. Towards mid-palate the friendly lemon, orange, lime citrus and slight fizz has it dancing. Produces stone and mineral element, however, this not a match for the greater honeyed dimension. Is it somewhat silly to speak of complete Pinot Blancness? Hmmm. 89

Cold Heaven Cellars

Santa Barbara County, Le Bon Climat Vineyard
Viognier

2006, \$34.99, 14.0%

Rich golden color with touches of orange, strong translucency helps extend the color through the rims, a solid block from the surface down. Deep, resonant nose without lift, apple juice mixed with pear, apricot fruit, lowgrade creaminess, pushed aside by tangerine to orange citrus, takes some time for the florality to develop, as indistinct as the scents are, as a whole fills up your nostrils. Full-bodied with a big bottom and flat top. Offers flavorful doses of tangerine, orange, lime citrus, cinnamon and clove spice, lilacs and then swerves into bitter raw nuts. Vanilla fudge, butterscotch comes and goes, never oppressive. Above average perceptible acidity, actually somehow deepens the texture rather than freshen. That said, does possess enough transparency taste like a pretty Viognier. 87

Ca' del Solo

Monterey County, Ca' del Solo Estate Vineyard
Muscat

2007, \$19.99, 12.5%

Fully transparent, more silver than even white straw in color, light fizz upon pouring, nothing left at the rims. Freshly floral nose of honeysuckle, lilacs, orange blossom, softer lemon notes with pinch of mint as well as basil/thyme notes, eventually gains weight which helps the semi-lighter peach, pear, green melon scents accrete. Medium-bodied, however the texture is that of velour to velvet which hugs the palate and slows down its progression forward. Not deeply sweet but the honeyed side adds depth to the orange, tangerine, grapefruit citrus, no real zesty bite. The acidity adds spark just when absolutely needs, not more. Turns pleasingly floral nearer the finish. Not too sweet nor dry, just right down the middle. [Screwcap] 87

Souverain

Alexander Valley
Sauvignon Blanc

2006, \$12.99, 13.9%

Very pale green to white straw in color, transparent is one way of putting it. The nose has lots of trebly notes in the grassiness and white grapefruit pith, an unwelcome caramel element cancels out any florality, difficult to separate and discern the crisper apple, peach, pear scents, sheer angularity prolongs its presence in your nostrils. Medium-bodied, sweetish mouth entry of peach, apricot fruit which momentarily forestalls the herbaceousness nearer to the mid-palate. Turns watery thereafter with muddled florality as well as grapefruit to lemon citrus. The acidity is tightly wound and doesn't lessen the choppy waves. Meets expectations. 85

CALIFORNIA ROSE

County Line

Anderson Valley, Rosé
Pinot Noir

2007, \$23.99, 12.0%

Incredibly light pink hue, almost yellowish, can't call it washed out because there's almost no color to start with, good reflectivity. The nose has a sort of lemon custard creaminess to it yet also possesses a minerally dustiness, rose petals, streamwater, bright hard candy cherry crunch, stiffens positively as it opens. Medium-bodied, the acidity bites deeply and quickly has you back on your heels in order to force it back into the whole. The lemon citrus is pleasingly tart and at moments suggests lime or grapefruit too. Clings to the tongue well, as if drying into it. Dried herb accents naturally spice up the cherry, raspberry fruit. Surprisingly long finish, borderline aggressive. 88

Donkey and Goat Winery, A

McDowell Valley, Isabel's Cuvée Rosé
Grenache Gris

2007, \$21.99, 14.1%

Bright glow to the watermelon red color, attractive depth to the coloration with clean transparency as well, minor fade at the rims. There's a jellied sweetness to the raspberry, red cherry scents, with some time a floral mist develops, overall possesses a swift denouement. In the mouth it is medium-bodied and the sweetness persists in the strawberry, persimmon, raspberry fruit, aided in part by cedar or incense notes too. Despite being crafted in stainless steel it shows very creamy vanilla and toasted coconut accents. The lemon citrus has moments of lime or orange buttressing. Not herbal, perhaps more so stony. There's depth in the acidity, even if lacking some in focus.

Good weight through the finish, flavors trail off at the end.
[Synthetic Cork] 86

FRANCE RED

Breton, Catherine et Pierre
Loire, Bourgueil, Les Galichets
Cabernet Franc
2006, \$21.99, 12.0%

The purple core is dark enough that you don't see the bountiful sediment until the glass is empty, the wide rims made from glowing magenta to ruby hues. The nose smells like the pressing room come jamming season, blackberry, blueberry, raspberry, flowers as well, milk chocolate powder, orange spice, big stone boulder, lighter leather or dried grass notes. Full-bodied, plenty of sap, sticks right to your mouth pores from the first sip. The tannins damn suave given their muscular nature, never truly dampens the underlying enthusiasm. More damp new leather, floral musk and grapefruit citrus here, still none of the bell pepper or grassiness you might expect. More like cigar ash. Not especially earthy nor that stony, just leans on all that ripe cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit. Some olive retronasally, but the savory bite, no. Needs time or chugging. [Synthetic cork: Neocork] 90

Terre des Chardons
Rhône, Costières de Nîmes, Marginal
Blend
2006, \$22.99, 12.5%

Deep purple bruise colored core, perfectly clean but fully opaque nonetheless, the rims still influenced by violet through the foundation of red-ruby. Pungent florality in the nose of garrigues and lilacs, very fresh but too dewy to really turn airy, the beef blood and leather accents strong as well, mild toastiness helps to sharpen its focus, smoothes out the ripeness of the cherry, blackberry fruit scents. Full-bodied, lots of polish and fluidity, the tannins not weak but release quickly. Its swift pacing a good thing as it's slightly hollow in the middle. That said, still possesses more than enough of the fetching florality as well as some orange to white grapefruit citrus and sweet garden herb nuances. The meatiness a touch lower in the mouth, perhaps yet to fully develop. The blackberry, raspberry, cherry fruit sweet and persists completely through the finish. Convinces you to stop looking for flaws and just drink. 90% Syrah, 10% Grenache. 89

Raffault, Olga
Loire, Chinon, Les Picasses
Cabernet Franc
2002, \$17.99, 12.0%

Pleasingly clear and light violet to red-ruby colored core, more pure red towards the rims with flecks of orange. The nose is slow to open up, earthy, leather, merde before candied cherry and raspberry scents, once this normalizes there's sufficient airiness to bring out tobacco ash and dried flowers in addition to general grassiness. Medium-bodied, very harmonious and integrated, however, there's this tightness in the tannins which doesn't resolve and pinches the finish, fully matured on the vine but still youthful in the bottle. Increased levels of tobacco ash, cedar, orange peel, bell pepper and dried blood, even as maintains sufficient floral notes to swirl some. While ripe and consistent throughout the cherry, raspberry fruit doesn't have the sweetness found in the nose. If you can decant and drink slowly it gives more but there's good argument for holding off for a few years too. 89

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Paris, Domaine Vincent
Rhône, Saint-Joseph
Syrah
2006, \$26.99, 12.5%

Pure violet core, sufficiently dark to hold off the considerably wide ruby to pink-magenta hued rims, possesses saturation along with clarity. Abundantly floral nose with piercing white grapefruit citrus and stone shards, this softened by the ripe juiciness in the raspberry, cranberry, red cherry scents, develops a woody sort of smokiness before it dissolves. Medium-bodied, the aggressiveness of the acidity here even gives extra punch to the white grapefruit citrus as well as punctuates the grassy and stony parts. The tannins are fairly suave and knit into the fabric. Suggest more than delivers olive pits and flowers. A resonant sourness infuses the cranberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit, dances across the tongue without ever settling in. For all the scrubbing sensations and bite, never deadens the palate and stays in command through the finish. Belies the village's reputation for femininity. 89

Gonon, Pierre
Rhône, Saint-Joseph
Syrah
2006, \$29.99, 13.0%

If a dark purple core can be bright, this one is, the violet deepens the moderately wide ruby-magenta rims. Reductive notes of sulfur and peanut shells in the nose first then turns nicely floral with embellishes of white grapefruit and black olives, the red currant, red cherry fruit more crisply tart and invigorating than juicy, while it unwinds and spreads out well never fully loses da funk. Medium-bodied, the acidity does an excellent job of smoothing things out and weaves the parts together into a seamless presentation. Never too dry, the mouth does water for the white grapefruit to orange citrus and iron metallic notes, almost rusty at times. Here the herbaceousness matches the florality making it closer to a vin de garde style wine than vin du plaisir. The tannin even shrinks in the face of the acidity albeit the former should have its day. Angular feel in the red cherry, raspberry, red currant feel, hits you then pulls back. Given the dips and turns, stays balanced. Think even a few more months in bottle will help here. 89

Coulaine, Château de
Loire, Chinon, Le Clos de Turpenay
Cabernet Franc
2005, \$27.99, 13.5%

Black purple core, if not for the faint glow would verge on onyx, the rims crafted of fully saturated ruby-violet hues. While there is indeed bell pepper, tobacco ash, metallic minerals and dried herbs in the nose, it's the abundant plum, blackberry, cherry fruit which grabs your attention, literally sticks to your nostrils. In the mouth it is full-bodied with a certain velvety texture in spite of the more than adequate tannins, once more the currant, cherry, plum fruit leads the charge. Once this has settled onto your palate and coated the mouth fully, slowly there's upwards wafting of cut grass, bell pepper, stone and dried flowers. That said, today it remains so dense that it is difficult for anything but the fruit to gain the space for clarity's sake. Long, punishing finish which still clamps down on the tannin, not the other way around. Will be interesting to see it once escapes from its chrysalis. Yeah. 89

Clos Roche Blanche
Loire, Touraine, Cuvée Côt
Malbec
2006, \$21.99, 12.5%

The rich violet core flirts with blackness but settles for opacity, there's a bawdy vivacity to the pink-magenta rims, ruby be damned. There's a flatness to the nose which bespeaks of a young colt yet seeking its legs, the flowers smell like they were dropped in mud, there's the roundness of plum and cherry fruit suggesting yet unpierced skin, more herbs than earth, so primary you feel badly for its inability to enunciate clearly. Full-bodied, alas, more of the same in the mouth, the good earth gives up the plum, cherry, currant fruit but yet hugs the herbs, grasses, lemon/orange peel and licorice to its bosom. The tannins have the fearlessness of inexperience and charge against the fruit, only to retreat to a puzzled standstill. Aye, the day shall come when a chorus replaces the furtive murmur of the dark forest. 89

Chave Selection, Jean-Louis
Rhône, Crozes-Hermitage, Silène
Syrah
2006, \$23.99, 13.0%

Possesses a pure purple core that inches over the line into opacity, trim and shiny through to the red-violet rims. Whiff of merde in the nose blows off with a little time to leave room for fresh wildflowers, orange zest and mineral chunks and stones, taut without being closed, after the red currant, cherry, blackberry scents it's said its piece. Medium-bodied, steady and slow of pace, eschews highs and lows. The acidity more prominent yet the tannin no slouch, especially at the end. Here the same cherry, blackberry fruit supported by green olives, flowers, mixed white citrus and dried grass/hay. The stone or mineral elements quieter, diminishing any earthiness too. Little if no gaminess as well. Complete weight and flavor breadth at the finish, offers great purity right now, maybe more nuance a few years down the line. 89

Travers, Domaine des Coteaux des
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages Cairanne
Blend
2006, \$19.99, 15.0%

Unblemished, however, opaque purple core, this remains the dominant hue along the rims, aided and abetted by an incandescent magenta stripe. Garrigues-like wildflowers and orange zest provide some counter to the heaviness of the plum, blackberry, cassis scents in the nose, milk chocolate dust and a stain of barnyard floor pull it further into the lower registers. In the mouth it's full-bodied and sets itself widely across the palate, manages a modicum of sense of movement due to the drying quality of the tannins which pinches it here and there. Full steam ahead with the raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit, coats completely, the lack of overt sweetness prevents true pluminess. The orange to tangerine citrus still there but the floral side too delicate to survive in this environment. Dash of baking spices and cocoa, but no more. No trace of alcoholic heat given its level. The finish is rich and broad, not so much a rich broad. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah. 88

Haut Nadeau, Château
Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieur, Réserve du Propriétaire
Blend
2005, \$13.99, 13.5%

The purple core is neither especially reflective nor flat, perfectly acceptable clarity alongside achieving opacity, the rims remain mostly purple with stripe of ruby, fully hued yet still lacking luster. Bell pepper, cedar, sandalwood and tea leaf adorn the nose, the first the strongest of the group, the red currant, cherry fruit scents more long than deep, tenacious in their own fashion. Medium-bodied, possessed of acceptable fluidity as well as grip, neither comes across as dilute nor hallow while not squeezed for of inch of possible flavor. The tannin dries things unobtrusively and consistently, leaving the tongue scrubbed into receptivity for the dried straw, earth, cedar, orange to white grapefruit peel nuances. The bell pepper element front and center yet less so than in the nose. Bright tartness in the raspberry, red cherry, red currant fruit. In fact, most everything aims at keeping things skipping across the tongue. Nice unassuming and straightforward. 75% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Gramière, Domaine de La
Rhône, Castillon du Gard
Blend
2006, \$19.99, 14.5%

Clean glow to the dark ruby to violet hued core, the rims a noticeably bright and lively red magenta color with plenty of intensity. Ripe and super-juicy nose of raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit, has an open field freshness which swirls away the flowers, mixed citrus and straw grasses before they touch down, you suspect there's earthiness there but little overt proof. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with good breadth, settles across the entire palate. The tannins pull it further downwards into the tongue, a palpable drying force in the face of that sweet raspberry, blackberry, cherry fruit. The dryness also spotlights more of the grassiness and stoniness, perhaps in turn hampers the white grapefruit to lemon citrus and dried flowers. Given the borderline candied nature during the attack, about a full volte face by the finish. Doesn't seem to lack for phenological maturity, just needs a couple of years to soften. 80% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 5% Mourvèdre. 88

Diochon, Domaine Bernard
Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2006, \$21.99, 13%

A vague filminess adds depth to the basic purple core, the ruby starts sneaking out there and fully in control throughout the broad rims, dark throughout. Nostrils bloom fully with spices, orange peel, tea leaves, potpourri and heavy fruit scents, from plum to cherry and blackberry, pinch of cocoa powder too. Medium-bodied, moves more nimbly here in the mouth, both the tannin and acidity tug at it so no straight line forward, yet no dead weight. Tobacco, tea, incense, orange peel, lighter mineral dust and dried grass, in aggregate enough to counter the ripe and almost sugary blackberry, black cherry, raspberry fruit, again flirts with pluminess. Dries up considerably through the mid-palate, makes room for florality. Very good but sends mixed messages, hard to gauge longer term prospects. 88

Cros, Domaine du
Southwest France, Marcillac, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes
Fer Servadou
2004, \$16.99, 12.5%

Clear, unblemished violet core, the rims a mixture of garnet red to red ruby, nice and wide. White pepper,

grass, leather, dry brown earth almost push the nose into rusticity, very focused and streamlined currant, blackberry fruit scents, at once anchors itself in your nostrils and also lifts. Light-bodied, the tannins start doing the grind right off and blow into the tongue. As in the nose very peppery and leathery, any herbal qualities smoothed over by savory cherry, currant, blackberry fruit. Has presence more than weight, nicely leverages dried potpourri, orange peel, pine notes to positive effect. Possesses a whipped up, fluffy texture as it finishes, keeps your attention. 88

Guion, Domaine
Loire, Bourgueil, Cuvée Domaine
Cabernet Franc
2006, \$10.99, 12.0%

Dusky red-purple core, segues to a glowing pink-magenta through broad rims, no visible cloudiness. Oodles of stone powder and mineral dust in the nose, with grassiness and tobacco smoke very drying presence, the cherry to raspberry scents taut and have more punch than length. Light-bodied with buoyant acidity which turns a bright spotlight on virtually every element, from the grass, bell pepper, white grapefruit citrus to the stone, parched earth and tanned horsehide to the cherry, raspberry fruit. Even the tannins have to wait until the finish to get into the act. Not dilute per se through the finish, more so a byproduct of sore muscles from the acidity. In any event, metallic flakes, bell pepper and sour grapefruit more prominent at the end, leaving the rest behind. Honest wine. 87

Villeneuve, Château du
Loire, Saumur-Champigny
Cabernet Franc
2004, \$23.99, 13.0%

Dark enough ruby-violet core to suggest some filminess, however, clarity shines through at the red-magenta rims, sleek surface. There's a touch of unfocused overripeness in the plum, cherry scents, tomato skin and metal flecks, moderate floral lift, matted muddy grasses, cedar, only a glimmer of bell pepper, falls asleep in your nostrils. Light to medium-bodied, grassy and stony with a thick velvety texture and notes of bell pepper and lemon peel. The tannins drier at first, turn diffuse and lose grip. Sticky, almost goopy quality to the plum, cherry fruit but without the density. More of an herbal twist through the finish, helps achieve a modicum of inner mouth perfume. 86

Varoilles, Domaine des
Burgundy, Gevrey-Chambertin, Clos des Varoilles,
Monopole
Pinot Noir
2005, \$54.99, 13.5%

Pleasingly clean ruby-violet color, turns to glowing ruby-magenta rims. Quiet raspberry, red cherry fruit in the nose, demure flowers, lemon peel as well, pure to the point of disappearing. Light to medium-bodied, perfectly pleasing with enough leather and merde to add breadth to the attack. This fades into plain spoken raspberry, red cherry fruit, no sweetness but credibly smooth. The tannin and acidity average at best, nothing to really complain about. Broadens some through the finish but never really takes on the weight and persistence to be more than an average wine. At a price. 86

FRANCE WHITE

Pépière, Domaine de la
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie
Melon de Bourgogne
2007, \$12.99, 12.0%

Bright golden haw color with a mild greenish tint, achieves a fair degree of translucency even at the rims where the color is mostly lost. Invigorating nose of lemon peels, seashells, chalk, white pebbles and a suggestion of mint, more herbal than flowery, the apple to pear fruit scents murmur quietly. Full-bodied and broadly acidic, doesn't slash the tongue so much as coat in a layer of sealant. More obvious flavors of apricot, peach, apple fruit here, enters richly before yielding to the lemon to lime citrus and all those pieces of chalk, seashell, stone and metallic minerals. As you sip more and the palate becomes adjusted the floral dimension raises up a notch. Pleasingly bitter twist on the finish, makes sure you're still with it. More classically styled than previous vintage. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 90

Castera, Domaine
Southwest France, Jurançon Sec
Gros Manseng
2006, \$12.99, 14.0%

Clear, if not sparkling bright, surface, made of yellow-brown hues, bends light in the center, more colorless along the rims. Honeysuckle, orange blossom, pink grapefruit to lime citrus, apricot, melon, peach fruit scents all work together well in the nose, the stone to stream water elements are there in a quieter fashion. Medium to full-bodied, begins with fleshier floral musk, lime, lemon and orange citrus, and honey flavors but has more than sufficient acidity to dry things out as it progresses and relieve any homogeneity, lengthening in the process. Turns mineraly, if not even a touch salty. The cantaloupe, apricot, pear fruit keeps both contour and juiciness. Has a little bit of everything and, for the better, doesn't mix the ingredients too fully. A bottle would disappear real quick like on a hot afternoon. [Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc] 90

Pithon, Domaine Jo
Loire, Anjou, Les Bergères
Chenin Blanc
2005, \$28.99, 13.0%

Fat, translucent appearance in the glass, sticks noticeably to the sides, deep golden color with a touch of green flecks, too layered to see much hue loss at the rims. Explosively dewy nose of fresh flowers, honey, orange zest, cinnamon, rubber and fully ripe apple and then peach, apricot, pear fruit. Full-bodied, not fat but has all the flesh of youth, as strong as the acidity is should certainly turn into a trim teenager in a few years. Even more appley here with sweet pear, melon, apricot supplementation, this element pushes the flowers into the background some, however, the acidity has a natural inclination to spotlight the orange, lime, tangerine citrus. Honeyed but this too loses the oomph it had in the nose. Sticks to your tongue like a glove and hard to wash out through long finish. Even allowing for its "humble" appellation it deserves some time to develop in bottle. 89

Branger, Domaine Claude
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Le Fils des
Gras Moutons
Melon de Bourgogne
2006, \$14.99, 12.0%
Soft translucency adds a touch of depth to the brown-
yellow straw color, fades by the rims, faint trace of visible
fizziness. Spring water, minerals, stream pebbles make the
nose very evocative of wetness, so crisp and well-scrubbed
that the flower petals and lemon peel recede to the
background, even more so for the apricot, apple scents.
Medium-bodied, the acidity has give in it, more like netting
than a cloak, gives breathing room to the lemon/lime
citrus. The flowers and mint still reticent, swells most in
the center. Hint of bitter nuts before the stones, pebbles,
chalk rise to the occasion and take over towards the finish.
Broad-shouldered with an overaggressive demeanor. 88

Vaux, Château de
Moselle, Les Gryphées
Blend
2006, \$16.99, 12.5%
Green-white straw in color, semi-gauzy translucence which
distorts things somewhat. Good punch in the nose of
mixed orange, grapefruit, lemon citrus, mint, roses,
brightly toned peach, nectarine, apricot scents, the stone
and pebble notes last but not a large factor. Full-bodied,
layers itself deeply across the palate, has a rubbery
texture in spite of keen-edged acidity. Plush lemon, orange,
lime citrus mixed with field flowers, herbs and grass as
well as a certain oasis of creaminess in the mid-palate.
Grassiness builds along with stoniness, has a tart edge
which makes sure it ain't gonna stop dancing soon. The
pineapple, nectarine, apricot fruit piquant and front-loaded.
Has good energy. 30% Pinot Auxerrois, 30% Müller-
Thurgau, 30% Tokay Pinot Gris, 10% Gewürztraminer. 88

Moret-Nominé
Burgundy, Rully
Chardonnay
2006, \$29.99, 13.0%
Straightforward golden straw color, mild hue lessening
towards the rims, stands between dull and sparkly. Floral
and minty nose, touch of spice but nothing here suggests
overt oak, more lime than lemon citrus, subdued
apricot, pear, apple scents. Light to medium-bodied, treads
softly upon the palate with nary a footprint left behind.
More tangerine, orange citrus here with garden herbs,
white stones and a flurry of cut grass. The acidity no
slouch, tires at times but there for you at the end.
Possesses a streamwater freshness which relieves some
weight through the finish. Becomes a touch toastier,
though, nearer to room temperature but not too badly. A
solid little package. 88

Hours, Charles
Southwest France, Jurançon Sec, Cuvée Marie
Gros Manseng
2006, \$24.99, 14.5%
The thick golden translucency verges on orange amber,
just as deep at the rims as the core, while shiny on the
surface any light below fully diffused. There's a lot of
evident ripeness in the nose, however, it's no necessarily
all in the peach, apple, apricot fruit, this texture also
pervades the vanilla cream, butterscotch elements as well
as the vague mint and flower petal shades, too portly to
really let the stoniness and citrus zest shine. Full-bodied
and, while the acidity gives great effort, it can't get the flab

off the mid-section. The white grapefruit to Mandarin
orange citrus brighter but still gets turned into a custard
like consistency along with the vanilla and butterscotch
flavors. More apple and pear here to supplement the
peach and apricot, lends snap. The minerality sort of lost
in the noise. But the finish does dry out and get dustier.
Leaves you with the impression of a non-classic vintage
that slightly spiraled out of control. 90% Gros Manseng,
10% Corbu. 88

Boxler, Albert
Alsace
Chasselas
2005, \$19.99, 13.0%
Great depth to the green-gold color, like an old wedding
ring, more solid than shiny in appearance, the rims hold
the richness credibly, not the last girl you'd pick to dance.
The honeyed sweetness in the nose succumbs swiftly to
sour keenness in the pineapple, apricot, nectarine, papaya
fruit, swirls in mint and tangerine citrus alongside a bed of
fallen flower petals, increasingly smoky before it dissolves.
Medium-bodied, grips your palate like it has suction cups
and thus can appear heavier. The mandarin orange to
tangerine citrus puckers and the tart tropicality persists in
the nectarine, papaya, pineapple, apricot, passion fruit
flavors. Here, though, they get support from above
average acidity which ratchets up the intensity some.
Chalk, seashells, an allusion to saltiness too, if you can
normalize to the vibrancy of the fruit and citrus, there's a
credible presentation of terroir. Hard to tell, but it's as if
it's short because the fuse gets burnt out rather than a
reflection on any inadequacies in the primary material. 88

Bellier, Pascal
Loire, Cheverny
Blend
2007, \$15.99, 12.0%
White straw with brown tint in core's color, good sparkle
across the surface with a soft translucency below. The
nose crackles with herbaceousness, all cut grass, hay,
mint, meadow flowers, possesses a full smoky lift which
pairs well with the apricot, peach, pear scents. Full-bodied,
zesty tangerine to pink grapefruit citrus frames the attack,
turns sour as the grassiness blooms. Some mint and basil,
thyme type of herbs too. More fullness here in the apricot,
peach, nectarine, apple fruit. The acidity is adequate to the
task plus some, however, no laser beam in nature. Holds
steady and remains in full control through the finish. 80%
Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Chardonnay. 88

Jeanguillon, Château
Bordeaux, Entre-Deux-Mers
Blend
2006, \$11.99, 13.0%
Very clear and transparent yellow straw color, good thing
it reflects light as you might not see much in the glass
otherwise. Lemon Pledge and pine needles provide the
nose with a cleansing appeal, turns to a light floral breeze
with time, quiet green apple, pear and apricot fruit scents
only manage an off and on presence. Medium-bodied, does
trail off precipitously towards the end. More of a sorbet to
light custard feel in the lemon to lime citrus here, sweet in
spite of a more general tacky dryness on the tongue. Light
and "pretty" florality without a pinch of that pine accent.
Fruit more towards peach and apricot here than apple,
pear. There's a vague element of mineral water and stone
but nothing longlasting. The acidity lacks bite but there is
that dryness. Innocuously simple, hard to dislike or

remember. Unspecified percentages of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Muscadelle. [Composite cork] 85

FRANCE ROSE

Cézin, Domaine de
Loire, Coteaux du Loir, Rosé
Pineau d'Aunis
2007, \$16.49, 12.0%

Yellowish tint to the washed out pink color, nicely sparkly, diminishes a lot around the rims. Super-sour cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit in the nose, fried lemons, mineral smoke, grass and white pepper, stiffens well in your nostrils and sustains for some time. Medium-bodied, good breadth and here in the mouth the white pepper and white grapefruit components big and bad. More sweetness in the cherry, strawberry fruit yet without giving up its sour side. Grassy with more coating mineral powder and stone dust parts. The acidity starts off with zing and widens by the finish to add to the dry coating of the tongue. Nips more than it bites, like a playful pup. 86

FRANCE SPARKLING

Selosse, Jacques
Champagne, Initiale Grand Cru Brut Blanc de Blancs
Chardonnay
NV, \$269.99, 12.0%

Flat golden hue, unfiltered-like in appearance, thick bubbles gather on the glass sides with thin beads of moderate speed. The nose is honeyed in a dry manner, lemon custard, caramel, dry mineral powder, presents full if only moderately expressive apricot, peach, pear fruit scents, a floral perfume lengthens its presence. Full-bodied, loads of extract which creates a good deal of palate weight, even as a cloud of orange, lemon citrus lifts above. Bready, yet in a spicy fashion, not so much doughy, this especially so as the honey element lighter here. The acidity doesn't have a keen bite but blankets the tongue completely. Cinnamon and ginger spice, herbs more noticeable due to the bubbly froth. Not inclined towards finesse, more a muscular thoroughbred that wants to run and run. [Disgorged 24 Octobre 2006] 91

ITALY RED

Montoni, Feudo
Sicilia
Nero d'Avola
2004, \$15.99, 13.5%

Both black and crimson red darken the purple base of the core, the crimson rims, while dense, display the underlying clarity of the wine. Really layers itself into your nose, gummy raspberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit with a perfumed, not sugary, sweetness, the hints of milk chocolate and orange spice balanced evenly by mineral dust, ash and a general stoniness, keeps steadily moving forward into an extended presence. In the mouth it is full-bodied with excellent release which leads to more freshness in the completely ripe cherry, blackberry fruit. Here too it's sweet without overt sugariness, focused on the joys of fruit without needing to do so. The orange to lemon citrus elevated and tingles the tongue and perhaps heightens appreciation of minerality which would suffer otherwise. The tannins cling well enough to dry any unwanted spillover from the fruit. Fully concentrated through the finish with a little puckering to boot. 90

Latium S.S.
Veneto, Valpolicella Superiore, Campo Prognà
Blend
2005, \$20.99, 14.5%

The purple core is dark without this being to the detriment of pure clarity, darkens the red crimson hued rims, zero loss of color along the rims. The nose explodes with lilacs and banana, follows up swiftly with cinnamon, raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, hint of golden raisin, touch of lemon, primary and more apt to hug you than describe itself at length. Medium-bodied, gains weight as it progresses through the palate, repeats the lilacs and violets out the wazoo tip, adds in lemon custard, cotton candy, strawberry, raspberry, watermelon flavored powdered candy. The acidity as well as the tannins docile and aim to shave off excess quietly. Semi-sour tangerine and lemon citrus find a place, cocoa notes too. About as friendly as friendly gets without dumbing down. Innocent fun right here. Unspecified percentages of Corvina, Molinara, Rondinella. 89

Rainoldi, Casa Vinicola Aldo
Lombardy, Terrazze di Retiche di Sondrio
Nebbiolo
2006, \$13.99, 12.5%

Sits brightly in the glass, a complete mixture of violet and red ruby, full to the rims where maybe it's a bit more pinkish, transparent throughout. The nose has a nice herbaceous snap to it, brings out more white citrus and stone dust, ripe and tart cherry, strawberry, cranberry fruit spreads through the nostrils without weighing anything down. Medium-bodied, has a fine powdery tannic coating which in no way interferes with the hard candied appeal of the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit, both sweet and sour at turns. Less grassy here but present, the citrus a mixture of orange to white grapefruit. Holds onto the stone dust to parched earth thing, however, this element met in equal strength by more airy dried flowers. Fruit lasts longest, this excepting that layer of tannin. Not the most complex Nebbiolo you'll taste but for the price it's hard to say no. [Synthetic cork: enoPE] 88

Fay, Casa Vinicola Sandro
Lombardy, Rosso di Valtellina
Nebbiolo
2004, \$11.99, 12.0%

Red-ruby to violet throughout, very consistent, light and clear, maybe slightly redder rims. Rose and other fragrant flowers, orange peel biggest in the nose, very light leather and stone as well as a hint of anise seed, tart red cherry fruit, subdued and quietly penetrating. Medium-bodied, has a wide spread netting of tannin which sets the limits and general contour of the candied strawberry, raspberry, watermelon fruit in addition to the lemon and white grapefruit citrus. Palpable elements of cut grass, flowers, leather, stone without any sign of oak or general toastiness. Fluid and sheds weight as it progresses so that you never feel it is impinging on you or trying to get your attention. The sweetness in the fruit just as bright at the end as during the attack. Complex, no, tasty, yes. 90% Nebbiolo, 10% unspecified other. 88

Spinetta, Azienda Agricola La
Piedmont, Barbera d'Alba, Gallina
Barbera
2006, \$44.99, 14.5%

Deep black core with razor thin red magenta rims, the latter armed with a very heavy glow. Displays a floral nose

with licorice and mild dark chocolate notes, densely packed currant and blackberry scents, spreads widely into a thick mist, smells best as an undifferentiated whole. Medium-bodied, surprisingly monochrome, if in the friendliest of ways. Quite floral and, at times, minty, the oak toast recedes nicely into the fabric of the raspberry, cherry, blackberry fruit. Develops mild pie crust and honey accents. Conversely, the tannins clamp down some near the end. Decent wine, more basic than expected, especially for the price, but perhaps also better for it. 87

Roccaperciata

Sicilia

Syrah

2005, \$13.49, 14.0%

Glowing ruby-purple core, dark yet unblemished and clean, more deep red-ruby around the rims. Big, juicy nose of plum, cherry fruit and ginger, cinnamon spice, supplemented by orange blossom, dark chocolate notes, while obviously ripe it does make room for a glimmer of beef jerky and damp metal/minerals. Full-bodied, there's a sawdust-like texture to the tannins which slows down the progress of the plump plum, cherry, blackberry fruit while also underlining the oak toast, cocoa and mint accents. Orange and lemon zest, flowers and sharp spices slowly work their way into the mix. Keeps all of its weight and just about barrels through the finish. Flavorful red wine, apt to please. 87

ITALY WHITE

San Francesco, Azienda Agricola

Campania, Costa d'Amalfi, Tramonti

Blend

2006, \$16.99, 12.8%

The highly reflective surface in part disguises the strong translucency below, this with a light green-white straw coloration throughout, quite visually appealing. The nose possesses a lilacs and violets prettiness and soft lemon peel accent before more smokier notes firm it up, then heads back in the other direction with a custard like creaminess, as a result the pear, apple, peach scents hover rather than risk touching ground. Medium-bodied, round and tends to lay about the tongue rather than lift, here the cinnamon and other sweet baking spices come out more alongside white grapefruit and lemon juice, pie dough. The mineral water and chalk, ash come through well, supported by above average acidity. As it opens becomes a touch more herbaceous, brings snap to the peach, pear, green apple fruit flavors. The lilac led florality the thread that binds throughout. Though dry on the whole, ends on a sweeter note. Unspecified percentages of Falanghina, Biancolella, Pepella. 86

GERMANY WHITE

Meisheimer, Weingut

Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA Dry AP #4

Riesling

2006, \$19.49, 11.5%

Pale yellow color with enough glow to escape a flat straw/hay like look, the rims fully transparent. The nose is a citrus bowl of pink grapefruit, white grapefruit, lime, lemon with very solid supplementary mint oil, flowers too, almost makes you miss the pear, peach, apple fruit, super-fresh presence. Medium-bodied, the acidity feels thick yet without giving up all sharp edge, here the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit is richer and juicier. Not that the lime,

tangerine, pink grapefruit slacks off any. Given the strong presence of acidity in the mouth, the stone and mineral chunks show better too and grassiness adds to its length. Quite lively and fun. 89

Pfeffingen, Weingut

Pfalz, Ungsteiner, Weilberg, Grosses Gewächs QbA

Trocken AP #20

Riesling

2006, \$35.99, 13.5%

Sturdy day-glo yellow-green coloration to it, light dances across the surface while gets bent underneath. The nose more broad than penetrating, doesn't bore too deeply into the nostrils, pineapple, nectarine, papaya, apricot fruit scents, mint and orange blossom, whisper of wet sun warmed stones, overall seems to fold in on itself like some modern dance routine or something. Medium to full-bodied, certainly has plenty of extract and grip, big bear hug on the tongue. The lemon, white grapefruit citrus has a semi-creamy texture which diminishes its zing but spreads it more broadly. Conversely, the angularity in the pineapple, nectarine, papaya, peach fruit has it slashing through the palate. The fruit's character plays up a vague herbaceous side as well. The acidity dries steadily, more a puncher than a boxer. The stoniness is demure and waits until you just about swallow into all that retronasal shit. The floral side never develops beyond a hint. Leaves you wondering where it's been, at and going. 88

Kuntz, Weingut Sybille

Mosel Saar Ruwer, QbA Trocken AP #11

Riesling

2006, \$17.99, 13.0%

Semi-flat green-yellow in color, draws in and stifles light more than reflects it, its glow keeps things consistent from core to rims. Soft poached or candied character to the peach, apricot, pear fruit scents in the nose accompanied by fresh tire rubber, orange marmalade, violets and ground seashells to chalk accents, the floral dimension opens as it warms. Full-bodied, moves periodically so as to not congeal on the tongue, the acidity more scattershot than focused, this allows the honey, lemon drop candy and orange juice elements to claim a bigger slice of the pie. Same ripeness, if without the undue concentration, in the apricot, pear, peach, melon fruit, few tropical notes. The rubbery component seems to fit itself into whatever space the other bits left alone. As in the nose, the shale, seashell, chalk stuff almost sneaks in so that you almost happen to notice it more than sense it from the start. Weight outlasts the flavors through the long finish. 88

Reuscher-Haart, Weingut

Mosel Saar Ruwer, Piesporter, Treppchen, QbA AP #13

Riesling

2007, \$16.99, 8.5%

Were it not for the day-glo quality to the faint yellow color the glass might appear empty, as transparent as transparent gets. The nose leans heavily on lime, lemon, tangerine citrus, flowers and a clean stoniness without grit, neither deep nor complex but refreshing. Medium-bodied, abundantly floral here in the mouth, almost pushes the lime, tangerine citrus off the table. Good center in the peach, apricot, pear fruit, close to fruit cocktail in texture but releases very well. Again, the stone and chalk nuances don't gather steam but not invisible. The acidity is moderate, in keeping with the whole fabric. While not

compelling, nothing difficult about throwing it down the chute. 1 liter bottle. 86

AUSTRIA WHITE

Jamek, Weingut Josef
Wachau, Ried Achleiten
Grüner Veltliner
2006, \$34.99, 13.0%

The golden hue shows distinct brownish tint, flat surface but the hue does extend through to the rims. More minerals and streamwater than pepper in the nose, rich pear, apricot, peach fruit, doesn't seem particularly complex but fills the nostrils completely with what's there. Medium-bodied, once more has that round texture which pushes outwards. More pepperiness here and a tad more mixed white citrus, however, overall it is very creamy in a leesy manner. More spine in the fruit, nectarine, pineapple, peach and pear flavors. The acidity lasts throughout, without real bite. As it warms more of the white grapefruit gains separation and presence. On the whole balanced, but for the lack of constituent parts? 87

GREECE RED

Tsantalís, Evangelos
Rapsani, Epilegmenos (Réserve)
Blend
2003, \$26.99, 13.5%

Very clear, but not transparent, ruby-violet color with a strong warmth to it, completely saturated red-garnet rims. The nose is rife with tobacco ash, tar, bell pepper, orange peel, very drying and penetrating, airy field grasses and wildflowers, light and sweetly candied red cherry, strawberry scents. Light to medium-bodied, the tannins heavy enough to create pauses in its progress, displays more richness here in the cherry, blackberry fruit. The dried straw, ash and bell pepper stick around, if quieter. Floral musk and lemon infused mineral water grow through the finish. Ends on a chocolaty note which helps it adhere to your tongue and lengthen. 34% Xinomavro, 33% Krassato, 33% Stavroto. 87

Skouras, Domaine
Peloponnese
Blend
2006, \$9.99, 12.5%

Transparent and shiny, vivid violet core with red-ruby to garnet rims, not "saturated" per se but fully colored. In the nose there's sour lifting notes of cranberry to red cherry fruit, herbaceousness, minerally sort of stones, sour lemon peels, light enough that there's little time for anything else to develop before it's all gone. Light to medium-bodied, furnishes cinnamon, orange peel to grapefruit pith, wet stones, and then cocoa powder. Less tannin than acidity, the latter does everything it needs to do to get things flowing. Again, tartness reigns in the red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit, not underripe but small-bottomed. Grassiness takes up a bigger portion of the whole as it moves forward. Offers itself as an integrated, face value quaffer. 95% Saint George, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Synthetic Cork: Nomaticorc) 86

GREECE WHITE

Spiropoulos, Domaine
Peloponnese, Mantinia
Moschofilero
2007, \$13.99, 12.0%

Brown straw in color with a hint of gold, mild pétillance upon pouring, transparency without brilliance. Good penetrating power in the nose, lemon-honey, dried flowers, chalky stones, just ripened apricot, pear, apple scents, a waft of licorice pretties it up further, openly knit dissolve. Medium-bodied, the acidity tightens the fabric a good deal, as the tongue dries this forces the flavors into an inner mouth perfume of lemon and orange zest, chalk, spice and mineral water. The honeyed dimension is there but it takes until the mid-palate to become noticeable. Admirably consistent peach, apricot, nectarine, pineapple fruit. Even as the acidity bruises the palate the florality softens overall heading to the finish line. Very refreshing and needs a good chill when serving. 89

SPAIN RED

Ramírez, Bodegas
Rioja, Ramírez de la Piscina Reserva
Tempranillo
2001, \$19.99, 13.0%

Purple hued core with more pure red than ruby tinge, the rims display the clarity of the wine in their brilliant garnet hue. There's abundant cedar, dill weed, caramel, coconut custard and orange peel in the nose, straightens up some with added meadow grasses and flowers, nothing too over the top about the black cherry, blackberry scents, consistency over splash. Medium-bodied, here the oak really goes for the gusto, ratchets up the coconut, vanilla, toffee element to the point where it fully dominates the attack. The fruit here has a greater prune dimension to sweeten the base of cherry, blackberry and currant fruit. The tea leaf, white grapefruit and cedar shades help to firm it up some and bring out the latent acidity. Coheres better with air time and divides the stage up more equitably. Probably best consumed over next 2-3 years. 88

Fernández Rivera, Bodegas y Viñedos
Tierra de Castilla y León, Vino de La , Dehesa La Granja
Tempranillo
2002, \$16.99, 14.0%

Moderately dark violet hued core, the darker ruby rims extremely broad and with no loss of color intensity at outer edges. The nose offers up a substantial amount of cocoa and milk chocolate, wood smoke and then merde and wet grass, never rids itself of that semi-acrid smokiness to truly let the sweetness of the raspberry, red cherry scents spread and soak in. Medium-bodied, pretty much straight up redux in the mouth, coconut, dill weed, butterscotch and burnt toast make up most of what's there during the attack. The robustness of the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit fades some as the grainy tannins take hold. More orange spice and flowers here, less overt grassiness. Satisfactory yet lacks the cohesion to really become a smooth and easy crowd pleaser. 86

SPAIN WHITE

Valdesil, Bodegas
Valdeorras, Monte Novo
Godello
2007, \$14.49, 13.5%

Faint day-glo aspect to the green-yellow hue, pools well in the center while easily transparent further out. The nose is very creamy in texture which swallows up some of the mineral and chalk powder as well as lemon zest, still manages a vague smokiness and achieves balanced ripeness in the pear, apple, apricot scents, clouds up in your nostrils before dissolving. Medium to full-bodied, almost puts on weight as it moves forward until it squats through the finish. Before that the pebbles and chalk cloak the tongue decently, some mint and dried flowers blow in and out. Tangerine, white grapefruit and lemon citrus swirl about nicely too. Straightforward pear to peach type fruit. Easy to throw back but not boringly simple. 88

Rodríguez, Compañía de Viños Telmo
Rueda, Basa
Blend
2007, \$14.99, 12.5%

Green-white straw in color, while light and transparent, it dances in the glass and stays lively. A flicker of textural creaminess in the nose before lemon custard, lemongrass, white mineral dust and ground seashells, a small measure of saltiness too, the peach, apricot, pear scents not meager but don't stick around to see if the cops show up. Medium-bodied, crackles enough with excess energy to splash into the palate. After that, it's picking up the scattered pieces of chalk, seashells, grass, rose hips, lemon peel as the peaches, apricots, apples, pineapples roll away. The acidity cuts a broad swath through the mouth, more prickling than truly drying. As it progresses to the finish builds a pleasing tartness, suggesting well chilled the best route to take. Very good, could stand a little more give. Approximately 85% Verdejo, remainder Sauvignon Blanc, trace amount of Viura. 88

Bleda, Bodegas
Jumilla, Castillo de Jumilla
Macabeo
2007, \$10.99, 12.5%

Very light yellow straw in color, fully transparent throughout, no hue at all along the rims. Spicy, chalky nose with a large lemon component, some orange too, palpable grassiness, attractively open peach, apricot, pineapple fruit without a lot of sweetness, easily rolls around the nostrils. Medium-bodied, the acidity is quite freshening and brightens the floral element as well as the tangerine, lime citrus. Streamwater and wet chalk provide counterpoint to the peach, apricot, melon fruit. Able to maintain grip and traction through the finish, retains sweetness to give it center while, taken as a whole, dry. Great simple summer quaffer. 88

PORTUGAL RED

Alorna, Quinta da
Ribatejo, Vinho Regional Ribatejano Reserva
Blend
2004, \$15.99, 13.5%

Dull purple core with a reddish cast, the rims set densely and made up of brick red to orange colors, no hint of sediment just flat. Floral nose with bountiful milk chocolate and cocoa notes in addition to orange and lemon citrus,

menthol, clove and ripely succulent plum, black currant, black cherry fruit scents, pushes outward with a sure fast steadiness. Medium-bodied, the tannin dances in a swirl along with the garden herbs, lemon/orange citrus, pine, cedar and ginger spice to keep things dry without giving up liveliness. Along these lines, there's weight and heft in the plum, blackberry, black cherry fruit without any saccharine notes. Might be too dense to really let the florality spread widely but it's there fighting. Retains full weight and flavor intensity through the finish, refuses to be washed out of your mouth. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Cabernet Sauvignon. 89

Encostas do Douro, Sociedade Vitivinicola
Douro Valley, Palestra
Blend
2006, \$7.49, 13.0%

Dark plum skin colored purple core, attractive clarity throughout, helps to add brightness to the red-ruby rims which otherwise might get sucked into the deepness of the core. There's a little bit of leather, saddlesoap and beef gristle to the nose, accompanied by milk chocolate accents and a swipe of flower petals and orange zest, the juiciness of the raspberry, blackberry scents does not come off as too sweet and remains even-keeled until it all dissolves as a whole. Full-bodied and, while certainly driven forward by the cherry, blackberry, blueberry fruit, not soft nor simple. The tannin coat the palate respectably and even the roof of your mouth feels dry after a few sips. Stronger enunciation in the orange/lemon citrus in addition to the floral dew, same for the chocolate tones without appearing overtly oaky. Minerals, leather and dried blood to iodine shades sprinkle some complexity into the mix. No palpable loss of weight nor flavor at the end. Stays within itself nicely. 40% Touriga Franca, 40% Tinta Roriz, 20% Tinta Barroca. 88

Crasto, Quinta do
Douro Valley, Crasto
Blend
2006, \$14.99, 14.0%

Unblemished and clear violet core, glowing red-magenta rims, warm and rich. Nice sour bite in the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit scents, the floral side outweighed by wet leather, dark chocolate but nothing here suggests it being too oaky, stays full in the nostrils. Medium-bodied, consistent weight and palate pressure throughout, uncomplicated presentation of floral dew, orange peel, cherry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit. Not tannic, however, the acidity does rise up periodically and smooth out any rough edges. Chocolate dominant but there's vanilla too. Stays within itself and never attempts too much, thus there's enough to please any crowd and won't perturb the more persnickety. 50% Tinta Roriz, 20% Tinta Barroca, 15% Touriga Franca, 15% Touriga Nacional. 88

Roboredo Madeira (CARM), Casa Agrícola
Douro Valley, Quinta do Côa
Blend
2006, \$17.49, 14.0%

Light violet color yet in no way dilute, simply not striving for saturation, mild ruby infusion, the rims brighten into youthfully full red-magenta. The plum, cherry scents nudge up against prune and golden raisin notes, the rest of the nose mainly filled with cinnamon, white grapefruit, dark chocolate, espresso bean and field flowers, neither oaky nor extracted, lingers in a wiry fashion. Light-bodied, grassy

and stony like a dusty brown country back road, the acidity as well as tannin kicking up a storm from the first sip. Chocolate and coffee accents do little to soften the initial brunt, white grapefruit to orange citrus, tea leaves, bark and touch of tar keep things rumbling along. Fresher raspberry, blackberry, red cherry flavors without the sugary dried fruit aspect. Tight in the manner of a shrunken t-shirt, it moves but not without some pulling. Has a good purity about it, energy trumps any desire for smooth going. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz, Touriga Franca. 87

ARGENTINA RED

Weinert, Bodega y Cavas de
Mendoza, Gran Vino
Blend
2000, \$25.99, 14.0%

Enough black in the purple core to sneak into opacity, reflective surface extends through to cover the garnet to brick red rims, not showing age but not showing no youth neither. There's not enough general depth in the scents to dispatch the alcoholic heat, what's there mostly cedar, horsehide, orange peel, cut wet grass and merde, no lack of solidity in the cherry, currant fruit scents but they can't express themselves. Full-bodied, very suave and insinuates itself into your mouth like a guilty pleasure. The fatness of the plum, cherry, black currant fruit covers up any weakness in the tannins and makes you forget to look for structure. Cedar, mint and clove, the oak truly knit into the whole, that said, it's not a "terroir" wine as much as a well-crafted wine. Leather, game, dried flowers, lemon peel. Cannily, never tries to achieve too much, knows when to demure. All the flavors present through the finish. 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Malbec, 20% Merlot. 88

Foster, Bodega Enrique
Mendoza, Ique
Malbec
2007, \$9.99, 14.0%

Squeaky clean ruby-violet color, darker core whereas the rims are garnet to magenta in hue. Strives for a roughhewn character in the nose, mocha powder, tree bark and leaves, leather, on the whole the cherry, red currant fruit scents inert in feel. Full-bodied, same "frozen gears" nature here too, the tannins flatten the palate, this aided by a kind of woodiness, has earth and stone aspects yet very dry and short-lived. With time orange juice and a smattering of flowers angle in. The red currant, cherry, blackberry fruit poker faced and just satisfy minimal requirements. Middle of the pack wine, and it's a big pack. 85

Filus, Bodega y Viñedos
Mendoza, Barrio La Boca
Merlot
2007, \$6.99, 13.0%

While the red-purple core is dark enough, you can't help but notice the transparency, very easy to see through, the rims display a more scarlet red hue, not dilute. There's a little spice and general dustiness to the nose, makes sure the grassiness is dried and not fresh, slight element of dried mud and cow patties too, the fruit scents are mainly red currant and red cherry. In the mouth it's light-bodied and very dry, the tannins are a bit much for the non-muscular cherry, currant, mixed berry fruit. As in the nose, though, the arid quality helps keep the herbaceousness to a minimum. Too cheap to really have a lot of oak in it,

maybe some cocoa powder. Moments of orange and white grapefruit appearance but not sour. Black out, pop the cork, and enjoy. 85