

The Hanes Wine Review, June 2010 Edition

This edition of *The Hanes Wine Review* has been awhile in coming. In some ways attributable to laziness and general drunkenness. But mostly due to the distractions of trying to assess the times we now live in. One great line of pith I have read lately goes "History - it's not just for historians anymore."

The increased lag time to birth this edition has actually proven a boon of sorts, as the topic at hand has intensified over recent weeks. To wit, people, we are royally screwed. And anyone who can't see this, well, harsh as it may be, kind of deserves what they get. If you think I have a pretty tin foil hat on, that's your right. But the hat does look kind of sweet, trust me. Anyway, we are living in the midst of the greatest depression this country has ever seen. And perhaps the greatest global depression experienced since such things could be measured. Albeit measured inaccurately by any government or quasi-governmental extension such as the International Monetary Fund. The wheels are coming off the economy and no one amount of financial chicanery is going to stop it. You won't hear this on CNBC, the nightly news or most any mainstream media. But you'll know it when you feel it, and it won't feel good.

It's easy to go through life doing one's day-to-day shuffle and, hell, I'm doing it too. But I feel embarrassed doing it. Because it's mostly an exercise in futility given the shitstorm on the horizon. One thing I am doing is I have stopped collecting wine to age. Zero point in that. At the same time, I am drinking my stash as quickly as possible, it will be an unaffordable luxury not far down the road (wine having to be stored at 55 degrees and there not being any subterranean cool caves nearby). I'm not even that interested in buying new wines but, again, it's part of the daily "ritual" and hard to give up completely. I am glad that I don't have much responsibility. No children, just my niece in New Jersey who is well taken care of, for now. My elderly mother and aunt need help. I fear they will both outlive the existence of social security and Medicare, without which they are royally screwed. But, otherwise, I am fairly mobile. Just would have to leave a bunch of wine behind I guess.

So, let's face it. The United States government does not have the answer. The Fed does not have the answer. The Europeans do not have the answer, same for the Chinese, Japanese, whomever. The famous phrase "extend and pretend" is the best they can do, given the way the dominoes are already falling. The Tea Party? *Huge* waste of time although it does make some not-so-bright people feel they are empowered to change things. Good for them! The time to have turned the boat around with minimal pain was probably like 15-20 years ago. Sucks to be us.

Collectively, we are to blame because we do like to consume and live a lifestyle beyond our means. But we were/are being good U.S. drones since the economy is structured such that it *needs* people to live a life of debt in order to grow. Hell, I was a good American, how else do you explain a man who never made more than \$58k a year in his life possessing over \$60k in available credit? That is, available until it was all maxed out. Whoops.

How many people living in the United States understand the concept "mark to market"? Or what a CDS is? Or the relative reasons for, and pros and cons of, deflation versus inflation? Or even what a "fiat" currency is? Like 0.000001%. Self included until the past couple of years. Now I go, whew, thank goodness last year I needed to cash in all my IRA savings to live off of. At least I got some value out of them which is more than could be said for them were they still in an account should I reach 65 years old. Another sigh of relief that I never bought a house. Not that I could ever have afforded one but that would not have stopped me from being *able* to buy one. With some luck, I can probably squat free in a nice three-bedroom a little further down the road and no one will raise a peep. At least someone will be in the domicile keeping it from deteriorating further.

The point is I sincerely wish more people would PAY ATTENTION to what's going on and not act like current times are just a bump or two in the road. I say "people" rather than "citizen" since I think the underlying meaning behind the latter term is anachronistic at best. You are either being hosed by the individuals running the global financial markets (and by extension the government(s)) or you are doing the hosing yourself. Which includes a lot of people reading this rant right now. (Take off, hoser!)

It is, in my opinion, too late to do anything to "fix" things in their extant state. But it is not too late to at least educate yourself and contemplate appropriate next steps once the chickens do indeed come home to roost. Are you prepared? Do you even know what preparation looks like? Do you trust the government to look after your best interests? Who *do* you trust?

I'm not advocating violence in the streets, albeit it's not the worst retort to years of political party-neutral robbing and pillaging. I'm not advocating vote the bums out and bring on the new "saviors." I think we can all see where that got us in the White House. I'm not advocating defaulting on house loans or credit cards. Although I'm not *not* advocating this either. What I'm saying, see, is *educate* yourself and let your *conscience* be your guide. Do you do more good than bad? Do you think that all the little decisions made at work to increase profits is getting you where you want to be? Where the world needs to be? Will this be the case a year from now?

The time is nigh to circle the wagons, be close to and take care of family, and try to figure out who else you can *truly* trust. The list is not who you think it is today, even if you went to college with him or her. I'm taking care of my local family and anxiously waiting for the day my entire family will be physically close enough to each other to act as a single unit. Until then I am trying to learn as much as I can, separate the wheat from the chaff, and in the interim make whatever preparations seem rational and objective. I am also trying to stay as drunk as possible 24/7 in my own form of cowardice. The above, however, was written under the influence of freshly ground and brewed coffee.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0sS6a9RW2E>

<http://www.zerohedge.com/>

<http://boombustblog.com/>

<http://dailycapitalist.com/>

<http://www.ritholtz.com/blog/>

These are a good start. Off the soapbox. When there is a next edition, if there is, it'll be about wine and not whine.

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This month's big winners... Hanes has had mostly good luck with the wines from Joey Tensley, naturally not so much good luck with the prices, duh. That said, for like \$39, the 2008 Syrah from the Colson Canyon Vineyard is delectable and merits high praise. Dunno about aging but tastes real good young. Homeboy Morgan P. is getting serious accolades these days for his new Bedrock Wine Company wines, as if his head needs to get any bigger. Psyche. Their 2008 "The Bedrock Heirloom" is likely the best of this new winery's wines sampled yet and an excellent example of how quality Californian "field blends" should be done, fairly priced at \$35. It appears that 2008 is a contentious vintage for those who pine after cru Beaujolais. Ever one to take the bait, Hanes laid down the coin for the 2008 Foillard Morgon "Côte du Py" and it proved pretty good. Not benchmark or destined to make old bones but no problem slamming back the juice. Problem is at \$37, Kermit can sit on it and spin. Give credit where due, the 2008 Penfolds Riesling "Thomas Hyland" is exactly what it should be, energetic, dry with a nice array of flavors and maybe *just* a buck or two overpriced.

The best \$15 and under picks... Not much quality Muscadet in North Carolina but the 2008 Branger bottling "Le Fils des Gras Moutons" hits the spot and just makes the value cut at \$15. Could drink this in quantity. From the Rhône's large outfit Perrin et Fils, the 2008 white blend called "Belle Provençale" is a very good value at around \$8. It's nice to find a wine priced where it belongs. FYI, this is the same exact juice (both red and white) that goes into their "La Vieille Ferme" brand, just without a bar code so it is meant to be sold "on-premise" instead of in big box stores. In the same vein the 2008 Merlot from Pierre Henri from the Vin de Pays d'Oc is no mind bender but an honest representation of the grape for about \$9. Not a lot of value wines hitting the bullseye this time around but the 2007 Rioja by Montebuena is excellent entry level Rioja for \$13. It likely benefits from seeing less oak than a Crianza level wine, keeps it simple and accessible. The 2009 Malbec from Colores del Sol of Mendoza is a more rustic example of the grape which means Hanes will like it and it won't sell for shit. Even at a very fair \$13. Oh, well.

And the disappointments... Given the relative quality of their white blend "Farmhouse White" was psyched to try the David Hill Pinot Noir from Willamette Valley. Much as Hanes tried, even for \$16, not much to write home about here. Green and dilute is no way to go through life, son. From Sicily, the outfit COS (an acronym) gets much kudos. And Hanes has had some nice wines from them. The 2007 "Nero di Lupo" comes across a bit wanting and hopefully this is just like a bad vintage or something, want to give them the benefit of the doubt. Don't want to give them \$30. In no way a slam against the wine per se because it is tasty enough but \$29 for Copain's 2007 Mendocino County blend of Syrah called "Tous Ensemble" is whack. \$20 is what this should cost (yes, regardless of underlying costs, screw Californian vineyard prices and keeping yields down, yadda, yadda). At \$20 it sells, at \$29 keep the feather duster handy. Same basic statement for the 2005 Beringer Merlot from Bancroft Ranch just times ten. One of the greatest vineyards in California for Merlot and some of the benchmark Californian Merlots have come from here but "heywood" for \$75. Benito Ferrara has always been a Hanes "go to" when it comes to Greco di Tufo but they laid an egg with their 2008 version, poor value at \$25. Never had any wines from C.G. Di Arie in the Sierra Foothills but a lot of good Zin comes out of there so took a chance. Mediocre stuff with little depth and wimpy finish, nowhere near \$20. Just to sum them all up, had to taste a *lot* of cheap mostly Californian Chardonnay lately for work-related reasons and, ta-da, they all sucked ass. But one of them had to be picked and one was. Guess which one?

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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/oldervintages2010.html>

If you are interested in reading tasting notes by Hanes on *beer* he has recently consumed, these notes are gathered here: <http://www.haneswinereview.com/reviews/beer.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 June!

CALIFORNIA RED

Tensley

Santa Barbara County, Colson Canyon Vineyard

Syrah

2008, \$38.99, 15.0%

About as transparent as wine of this vibrancy of hue can get, reddish purple core, the wide rims betray ruby darkening into a scarlet to blood red, richly saturated. The ripened juiciness of the cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit explodes in the nose, sweet orange and grapefruit citrus as well, smattering of pine and menthol, incredibly primary, smells like a barrel sample, the alcohol can bite at times. Medium-bodied plus, silky smooth with a firm handshake which knowing when to relax, that is, keeps the tannin in a glove of blackberry, black cherry, blueberry fruit. The ruby grapefruit leads the orange here, a twist towards sour. This might bring out a welcome moment of grassiness. Otherwise, black licorice, menthol, floral musk and then a few olive pits thrown in just to keep you off balance. The acidity's presence most felt as a slight tightening of the fabric through the finish. This wine is as enjoyable as liquid crack, can't even guess if it has a future of tertiary development, just want another glass now. 93

Bedrock Wine Co.

Sonoma Valley, The Bedrock Heirloom

Blend

2008, \$35.00, 15.0%

Effulgent purple core, in spite of complete opacity catches your gaze, the rims thin but fully saturated red magenta to ruby in hue, visually fits the part of a "big" wine. In the nose the alcohol does come through, albeit softly, semi-jammy blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit scents take up lots of territory, comes with baked pie crust, molasses, lemon custard accents, ends with a strong flower and eucalyptus lift, imbues a sense of motion. Full-bodied, sweet attack slowly unwinds into a gentle shock tannin to right the boat. Plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit able to be juicy without sacrificing all shape. Molasses, honey notes render a candied nature unto the orange, lemon peel. Slight earthiness that nods just perceptibly at twiggy, leafy nuances. Here the eucalyptus or pine sappy and not so lofty. Segues to a semi-sour white grapefruit bite at the end, accompanied by stone shards and sun parched topsoil. Now you can't beat that for a wine descriptor. 40% Zinfandel, 30% Carignane, 30% unspecified field grapes. 92

Caton, Ty

Sonoma Valley, Caton Vineyard

Cabernet Sauvignon

2008, \$34.99, 14.9%

Full purple core, opaque without seeming to strive for it, the red magenta to garnet rims have moderate width,

plays the part with nary a hair out of place. The nose hits you with leather, grill smoke, eucalyptus, orange spice before allowing the vanilla fudge, caramel to spread forth, the red cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit fully ripened without stealing the show, lots of primary material to work off of as it ages. Medium-bodied, here the oak more frontloaded with vanilla, butterscotch, caramel, mint flavors before that earthiness as well as leather, animal hide, olive pit, grass and orange reduction. The tannin adopts a suave profile, semi-soft while letting the acidity take the structural lead. Concentrated cherry, boysenberry, blackberry fruit deep if bound up some. Opens appreciably with air time, loses a lot of the initial herbaceousness. Strikes you as more likely to be popular now while a better wine later. 90

Copain

Mendocino County, Tous Ensemble

Syrah

2007, \$28.99, 14.2%

Vibrant purple core of vast saturation, opaque until it reaches the dark rub-magenta rims where clarity becomes obvious. In the nose there's a touch of peanut shell, butterscotch and coffee ice cream, however, remains in proportion to the whole, fitting the firmly juicy black currant, cherry, blackberry fruit scents, bodacious florality and some zesty orange peel nuances. Medium-bodied with a nice tannic and acidic skeleton, needs some air time to unwind. This noted, there is a powdered sugar, confectionary aspect to the texture, sweetens up the raspberry, blackberry, red cherry fruit. Conversely, again, tart edge to the white grapefruit, lemon citrus. More floral than earthy, sorta stony at moments. In the final analysis, it's hallmark is the ability to deliver a good deal of fruit without sacrificing structure and balance throughout. 90

Bedrock Wine Co.

Sonoma County, Kick Ranch Vineyard

Syrah

2007, \$35.00, 15.3%

Dark purple, not black, core of complete opacity, thin and saturated ruby-magenta rims with a strong glow. Wildflowers and lemon/orange citrus provide lift in the nose to the heavier plum, black currant, cherry scents, with air time there's coconut and toffee nuances, suggestion of stoniness but not earthy nor evincing many leather or game notes, dense enough to pull up short. Full-bodied, the added sweetness to the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit helps it settle into your mouth and extend the general fruit presence. Dried flowers, mint, orange peels and cocoa powder help highlight its prettier side. Tannins firm but not entirely unyielding. Has inner mouth perfume but its sheer size doesn't leave much headspace for it to move around. Presses forward through the finish like a stubborn mule. Very good wine, needs that extra kick of complexity to really knock you back on your heels. 95% Syrah, 5% Viognier. 89

Beringer
Napa Valley, Howell Mountain, Bancroft Ranch
Merlot
2005, \$75.00, 14.8%
Moderate density to the purple core, just into opaque territory, the crimson darkness of the rims impresses, youthful vigor. The nose possesses a firm kind of plumpness, the plum, cherry fruit ripe and not without prune accents, at the same time pine, flower petals, orange blossom and black licorice try real hard to lend dimension without appearing simple, however, needs more focus to achieve this. Full-bodied, the sweet prune, date flavors much more in your face here, sugary blackberry, plum, cherry flavors try to keep up. Chocolate, mocha, butterscotch pile on next, hard to say that acidity or tannin plays any kind of real role. Pine, cedar, sandalwood incense, orange zest fashion some hues in the palette. This is a highly enjoyable wine that is vastly overpriced and has no aging potential. But pour a glass and watch it disappear. 89

Elizabeth Spencer Wines
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Proprietor Selected
Special Cuvée
Syrah
2007, \$21.99, 13.2%
Trim, dark ruby-purple core, deep magenta rims, the surface highly reflective which adds to its cool, collected appearance. Touch of peanut shell-led reductiveness to the nose, leather, dry animal fur, hard to peg it as anything but Syrah, still, presents pretty blackberry, cherry, blueberry fruit, mixed citrus and blossoms, hint of eucalyptus adds to the perfume, any oak treatment seems very neutral, one could say it doesn't linger long but really it just knows when it is polite to end. Medium-bodied, loose-limbed and moves ably left and right. The tannins are polished but in no way absent, along with acidity there's no issue about it holding its shape. Orange, lemon citrus, ginger spice, only real trace of oak is vanilla powder and butterscotch hard candy. Savory red cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit hits you with more snap than juice. Overall, smooth with a hint of danger, as if the bored date in the black cocktail dress across the table, should you return the wayward glances? Dunno, but you should finish your glass. 89

Turley
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Ueberroth Vineyard
Zinfandel
2007, \$48.00, 16.2%
Curiously transparent, the violet hued core easily yields to red ruby and magenta, its ability to draw in light and house it within the liquid adds to brightness more than depth. The nose shows a good deal of whipped cream, vanilla pudding, butterscotch as well as pine needle, eucalyptus and orange blossom, the blackberry, blueberry, raspberry fruit scents lack the expected resonance, however, stone, earth and meadow scrub fill in most of the blanks. Medium-bodied, dry and surprisingly tannic, coats the tongue in powder which staunches the flow of the blueberry, blackberry, black cherry fruit. The citrus more sour here, like white grapefruit to lemon. More herbaceous and earthy too, parched. Pine, pressed flowers moderately pretty things up, even the butterscotch, caramel oak accents fall short in this regard. Really, just too desiccated to hit your pleasure points. 87

Bedrock Wine Co.
Dry Creek Valley, Lorenzo's Heirloom
Blend
2008, \$35.00, 15.4%
Clear ruby-purple core, not a blemish in sight, has more of a pure magenta glow around the rims, nothing looks out of place here. The nose has a compact nature, sweet and sour cranberry, pomegranate, red cherry scents able to restrain the underlying herbaceousness, short burst of eucalyptus and dried flowers, even lighter might be the caramel and fried butter oak accents. Medium-bodied, quite tangy and sour from the get-go, lets the acidity pump up the cranberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit into a state of frantic motion. Orange citrus also aided by the acidity. More floral than earthy, yet, not quite "pretty." Caramel and butterscotch take more territory through the finish and retronasally. Comes across as an old school field blend, a hearty red wine, not heavy, the kind of wine you have with lunch in the working fields. Unless you prefer Steel Reserve. 50% Zinfandel, 25% Carignane, 25% Petite Sirah with trace amounts of Alicante Bouschet, Valdigue' and Cinsault. 87

TAZ
Santa Maria Valley, Goat Rock
Syrah
2007, \$24.99, 14.8%
Pretty much opaque purple core, not black, thin but seriously saturated ruby-magenta rims, looks like a "big" wine. The nose makes great effort to push the cherry, currant, blackberry fruit up first, no unusual fruit scents, orange citrus, wildflowers, but really this is a wine that has no interest in deviating from the script. Full-bodied, rich and soft in terms of pushing forward the blackberry, blueberry, cherry fruit, semi-dried fruit or fruit rollup concentration. Caramel, toffee, butterscotch, milk chocolate actually do a good job of filling in the crevices. Hint of green apple perks up the finish. From a flavor perspective not much else going on, texturally the tannin is slight and structure comes mostly from mere fullness. If you want fruit and oak in your Syrah, you'll not be displeased. 87

Tangley Oaks
Napa Valley, Lot #8
Merlot
2007, \$17.99, 14.2%
The mostly purple core washed out by scarlet hues, the brick red rims light with a noticeable orange cast, looks a bit older than it actually is. Lots of sweet milk chocolate, mocha and vanilla poured on the core of ripe red cherry, raspberry fruit in the nose, at times suggests a grassy side, at a minimum wildflowers and pine, doesn't overplay the fruit nor the oak. Medium-bodied, dry and more tannic than expected, even displays some sour bite. The gives a semi-angular character to the red cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit flavors, good pucker factor yet with a powdered sugar side. The oak here is a concentrated, narrow band of vanilla, chocolate and butterscotch, not that sweet. Smattering of flowers, orange peel and dried sweeter garden herbs. Seems like a tweener, not going to be sweet enough for the typical Merlot crowd, not earthy enough for the more "Bordeaux lover" crowd. But at least priced appropriately for what it offers. (Composite Cork) 87

C.G. Di Arie

Amador County, Sierra Foothills

Zinfandel

2007, \$19.99, 14.7%

Clear ruby-violet in color, touch of burnt orange around the rims. Vanilla fudge, butterscotch meet up with orange zest, eucalyptus to fashion an attractive nose, gives you red cherry, raspberry and a hint of pomegranate fruit, lack of weight allows herbaceousness free reign, this element aided by active lemon citrus, mountain air, excellent lift if perhaps too short-lived. Light to medium-bodied, racy acidity gives a sour quality to the cranberry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit. The latter gossamer enough to leave more room for the lemon/orange citrus, mint, menthol accents. When it unclenches past the mid-palate, the vanilla/chocolate powder comes out, helps extend the somewhat weak finish. (Screwcap) 86

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Husch

Mendocino County

Chenin Blanc

2009, \$14.99, 13.8%

Very light straw yellow color, minor streaks of green, very transparent with moderate layering, noticeable loss around the rims. Well-honeyed nose with sweet tangerine and lime citrus along with general citrus blossom and dewy flower petal accents, pear, apricot, yellow apple and melon fruit scents, allusion to stone dust, fresh but a little too cloying to be airy. Medium-bodied, the honey, cane sugar and lime, tangerine citrus make it highly personable, as does the flowing juiciness in the apricot, nectarine, pear, apple fruit. The acidity is so-so but appears to fit the overall winemaking intent. As in the nose, light stone or chalk at best. Very easy to quaff and does manage to dry up some at the end. (Composite Cork) 87

Delicato Family Vineyards

Regional Blend, California

Chardonnay

2008, \$7.99, 13.5%

Very pale straw in color, semi-translucent with diminished rims, fairly common in appearance. The nose is equally slight, fairer to say unobtrusive, pine, flowers, just ripened peach, pear, apple scents, the light vanilla and butterscotch notes betray minor oaking, adequate length. Light to medium-bodied, the acidity a touch too dominant for the meager depth of the peach, apricot, pear, pineapple fruit. More vanilla, caramel and butterscotch comes through here, almost by default. Pleasing touch of orange, lemon citrus. At once becomes more sugary as well as more puckering through the finish, like a citrusy soft drink. It is what it is for the price. 84

Butterfield Station

Regional Blend, California

Chardonnay

2008, \$8.99, 13.5%

Dilute yellow straw color, full hue loss around the rims, decent amount of surface shine though. Crisp nose, at times close to "hard," zips the apple, pear, green melon fruit scents right at you like chin music, not particularly floral nor citrusy, at the same time betrays barely a hint of oak, maybe light cinnamon or nutmeg spice. Medium-bodied, possesses decent acidity of a natural feel. Adequate peach, pear, apple, melon fruit, nothing that distinguishing. Citrus more towards lemon and white

grapefruit than orange here. Much drier texture than expected, however, does let a few floral notes through. Maybe it's looking for a more refined, elegant style but comes across as underfruited. (Synthetic Cork) 84

Rutherford Wine Co.

Regional Blend, California, Round Hill

Chardonnay

2008, \$7.99, 13.0%

Thick golden appearance comes close to amber, layered core distorts the light, the rims hold together well. The nose displays a solid middle with floral notes buttressing the denser apricot, peach, nectarine scents, some vanilla or toffee but mostly clear of oak, kinda grinds to a halt abruptly but few people probably keep sniffing that far. at least you can say it ends cleanly. Medium-bodied, from the first sip forward seems caught in the middle as if it wanted to please too many constituencies. fair amount of extracted body in the apricot, peach, nectarine, apple fruit but so little juicy fun. Vanilla, toffee front-loaded, doesn't stick around much. Some orange, lemon reduction. If you could replicate the first second or two of sipping it would be a nice value. However, turns sour and bitter with a pickle edge. Don't let it warm up on you or it gets worse. 96% Chardonnay, 4% Muscat Canelli. (Synthetic Cork) 83

Salmon Creek Cellars

Regional Blend, California

Chardonnay

2008, \$4.99, 12.5%

Somewhat dimmed, gauzy yellow hay color, expected dropoff around the rims, nothing unusual going on visually. The nose is heavy on cheap floral perfume, coconut oil, butterscotch and toffee, they went back to the store for extra bags of oak chips here, it is borderline difficult to register the peach, nectarine, pineapple fruit scents, after its big initial explosion not much staying power. Medium-bodied, the sheer amount of oak adds weight. At first tastes like a coconut custard pie. Then begins to taste like a coconut custard pie. Adroitly blends in butterscotch, toffee and caramel. Curiously has a semi-dry texture, powdery finish. Once more the apple, pear, peach somewhat cloaked. Sweet floral powder like Choward's violet candy. I think the salmon shit in the creek. (Composite Cork) 81

Estrella

Regional Blend, California

Proprietor's Reserve

Chardonnay

2008, \$5.99, 12.5%

Dull worn gold color, bends the light within decently, not enough concentration in the core to notice much loss nearer the rims. The nose lacks thrust, falls back on a center of caramel, vanilla, coconut followed on by orange, lime zest, lean green apple, pear, peach fruit scents, just not a lot going on. Light-bodied, semi-dry texture impedes smooth flow right out of the gate. Most of the territory taken up by that orange, lime, white grapefruit citrus, allows it to tease as much out of the acidity as possible as well as strike a more upright posture. There's just no skin on the bones, attenuated pear, apple, apricot pineapple fruit with little juiciness. The oak actually helps to fill it out some, vanilla, caramel and toffee fills the belly up better. But it's not there if served too cold. Very pedestrian stuff here. (Composite Cork) 81

ForestVille Vineyard
Regional Blend, California
Chardonnay
2008, \$5.99, 12.5%

Dilute yellow straw in color, clear with a standard vague translucent shimmer, moderate loss of intensity around the rims. Flat-footed nose that doesn't offer much, not even much oak going on, lemon and orange win by default, apple and pear skin, dried and crushed flower petals, only thing you can say that at least there's an herbaceous burst at the end which reminds you it's even there. Light-bodied, clean and more or less smooth, the lack of textural turbulence somewhat compensates for the boring level of peach, pear, apricot, apple fruit. Touch of mineral water, particularly with the elevating white grapefruit, lemon citrus. Acidity level seems fine considering the whole. Thin, try as one may, not much more to say here. [Composite Cork] 81

WASHINGTON RED

Revelry Vintners
Columbia Valley, The Reveler
Blend
2007, \$17.99, 13.9%

Fairly light ruby-purple in hue, very clear, the rims as much ruby-magenta as any more reddish color, very unassuming appearance. The nose likewise restrained and composed, raspberry, blackberry fruit, meadow freshness, lemon peel, moderate oak toast and caramel, vague cedar and saddle leather, more an example of directness than lack of complexity. Medium-bodied, quite dry, seemingly from both natural tannin and wood tannin as here the oak toast much more evident, along with butterscotch and caramel flavors. Blackberry, cherry, black grape fruit juicy enough but not particularly sweet. The orange, lemon citrus adds some temporary interest. Has grip but smoothes out through the finish. Just needs some kind of extra kick, not necessarily more robust fruit, simply a peg on which to hang your hat. 55% Cabernet Franc, 40% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. [Composite Cork] 87

OREGON RED

Hill Vineyards & Winery, David
Willamette Valley
Pinot Noir
2007, \$15.99, 13.2%

As dark ruby in color as purple, consistent through to the rims where a reddish magenta takes hold, very good clarity and transparency, much more pretty than impressive to gaze upon. Mushroom and merde percolate through the nose, partners with the arch herbaceousness to deepen the sourness of the red cherry, strawberry scents, squeezes a few lemons into your nostrils for good measure, the overall experience is not horrible per se but little lures you back in. Medium-bodied, not much different going on here, perhaps even more room ceded to the herbaceous, twiggy, earthy side, this said more in the sense of dilute than terroir-driven. The cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit certainly could use some fattening up, evanescent and all but gone by the end. Oddly, even the lemon and grapefruit zest lacks legs. The acidity poops all over the party. It's weird to watch people drink this and like it. 84

NORTH CAROLINA RED

Shelton Vineyards
Yadkin Valley, Malbec
2007, \$22.99, 12.5%

Somewhat muddied purple core, deepens the rims to more scarlet and blood red than magenta, deeply colored throughout. The nose is plummy with cherry and blackberry fruit scents as well, lots of roasted cocoa and coffee beans in there, seemingly to mask the bell pepper, grass elements, good fullness but a bit of a one trick pony. Medium-bodied, goes long on the acidity which creates both a puckering sensation as well as a spotlight on the white grapefruit citrus notes. The roast is elevated here as well, carob, cocoa, coffee and caramel. Much more sour profile to the fruit, instead of plum it's red cherry, cranberry and little bit of blackberry. Thins out a little at the end but nothing atrocious. Nothing here is "bad" per se, however, you wish they didn't apply so much oaky makeup to it and just let it stand more on the fruit's inherent abilities. 95% Malbec, 5% Merlot. 86

FRANCE RED

Foillard, Jean
Beaujolais, Morgon, Côte du Py
Gamay Noir
2008, \$36.99, 13.0%

Gauzy red-ruby to violet colored core, doesn't necessarily get clearer around the rims but does switch to a more ruby and pink magenta cast, average surface shine. Extremely fragrant nose of floral dew, black licorice, orange zest and semi-jammy raspberry, strawberry, rhubarb fruit scents, very little complexity but loads of primary fun. Full-bodied, dense, round and soft, very little acidity and the tannin makes only momentary stabs at firming things up. Sweet, tangy white grapefruit, lemon, orange citrus adds some tingle to the attack, afterwards some lemongrass, anise seed and oregano/basil accents take over. Fully ripened strawberry, red raspberry, rhubarb, pomegranate fruit, sugary while releasing well through the finish. Whisper of merde, leather and damp barnyard earth rise through the finish. Still, this is a fruit-driven wine that is more of an immediate crowd pleaser than an old school ager. Which is not necessarily a bad thing. Just the price is a bad thing. 89

Poujol, Domaine du
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays de l'Herault, Proteus
Blend
2008, \$14.99, 13.5%

Dense but not cloudy ruby-purple colored core, rims caught between brighter magenta hues and darker garnet, in any event more than attractive enough in the glass. The nose tries its best to spotlight the cherry, red currant, blackberry fruit but there's no denying the barnyard mud, merde and earth-caked grasses, beyond that there's lowgrade orange peel, garrigues and something piney, overall full but not heavy. Medium-bodied, sheds what weight it has as it moves forward, this exacerbated by the strong tannic and acidic punch. The dryness plays up the grass, straw, parched earth elements. Just the same it dries out the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit and shades of orange to white grapefruit citrus. Has energy but it's too tightly wound up and makes it hard to simply enjoy it effortlessly. Unspecified percentages of Merlot, Carignan, Cinsault, Cabernet Sauvignon. 87

Coupe Roses, Château
Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois, La Bastide
Blend

2007, \$14.99, 13.0%

Bright garnet red to crimson with some purple in there too, rims barely suggest ruby, sleek and shiny surface. Italian plum, cherry fruit straitlaced in the nose, slight sour edge, dried flowers met by merde inflected earth, fallen forest wood, old cedar chips, orange peels, no major deviations from the expected. Medium-bodied, dry and tannic, even the clear ripeness of the plum, cherry, currant fruit can't escape the grasp of the tannic grip. Orange zest, flowers, garrigues, cedar more or less repeat the nose. The mild grittiness on the palate helps keep it active and lengthens the finish. More of a solid bistro wine than anything else. Unspecified percentages of Carignan, Grenache, Syrah. (Composite Cork) 87

Saint-Damien, Domaine
Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône, Vieilles Vignes
Blend

2008, \$15.99, 14.0%

Clear violet color, red magenta rims, very good saturation for a wine of such relative transparency. Serious funk in the nose of peanut shells, merde, tilled earth, iodine and peppercorns, takes some time for it to open to the point of releasing blackberry, boysenberry, cherry fruit scents, smattering of orange, white grapefruit but minimal florality. Medium-bodied, quite dry with a somewhat fierce tannic and acidic spine. More floral here, good zest in the mineola orange, lemon citrus, in turn a fair amount of grassiness and leafiness. Dried out plum, currant, cherry crests mid-palate then peters out. Earthy, stony ending, a bit too pinched to be able to file as a "vin de garde" style, backwards wine. Just unyielding. Mainly Grenache, unspecified amounts of Syrah, Cinsault. (Composite Cork: Diam 3) 86

Henri, Pierre
Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc
Merlot

2008, \$8.99, 12.5%

Rich purple achieves opacity with ease, shiny surface draws your eyes outwards towards the more ruby rims, albeit still lots of violet there. Juicy nose which comes close to jammy at moments, the plum and black cherry scents shaved down some by brown dirt, straw and wet forest scrub, no signs of underripeness nor undesired herbaceousness. Medium-bodied, displays some tannic structure right off the bat, yet, in a positive way which never interferes with the steady flow of plum, blackberry, black currant fruit. On the whole, yes, dry but nothing here makes you "think" and thus it's accessible to many palates. Touch of leather among the earth, straw, hay and orange citrus bits and pieces. It's definitely drinkable and, again, not wimpy nor overly dependent on fruit. (Screwcap) 86

Perrin et Fils
Rhône, Côtes du Ventoux, Belle Provençale
Blend

2008, \$7.99, 13.5%

Crimson purple core of moderate darkness, clarity evident in the yet dark red magenta to garnet rims, full saturation retained. Simple nose of semi-candied cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit with a little wooliness to go with the meadow flowers and mixed citrus notes, some earthiness lends depth. Light-bodied, too candied to be truly tart, however, the acidity gives light pucker to the raspberry,

cranberry, red cherry fruit. Earthier here, more like brown dirt, dry and littered with small stones. The florality is there, diminishes through the finish. Better length in the white grapefruit, orange citrus. A perfectly acceptable wine of its grade, may lack the sheer fruitiness for mass appeal. Unspecified percentages of Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Mourvèdre. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 85

Caractere, Vignerons de
Rhône, Vin de Pays de Vaucluse, Petit Caprice
Blend

2008, \$8.99, 12.5%

Mostly ruby-red in color with a mild darkening purple shade at the core, almost a diluted scarlet around the rims, transparent on the whole. Edgy nose of sour raspberry and red cherry fruit, noticeable herbaceousness, merde and mudden earth as well, even with some cocoa and dried flower accents easily qualifies as a "country wine" in style, moderate staying power. Light to medium-bodied, you know it's there from the big sucker punch of tannin and acidity. Here the white grapefruit presents itself without reserve, adding pucker to the already tart raspberry, cherry, cranberry fruit. More stony and minerally earth than merde and mud, grassiness absorbed into the whole. Only a muted word or two for cocoa or chocolate powder. By the finish, mostly tactile grit left, not so much fruit. 75% Grenache, 25% Syrah. 84

FRANCE WHITE

Faillenc Sainte Marie, Domaine
Languedoc/Roussillon, Corbières, Pas des Louves
Blend

2008, \$16.99, 13.0%

Pale yellow color but with a soft glow and subtle translucency, faded rims at best. Mineral and spring Minerals and spring water frame a fresh nose of pineapple, green apple, pear, star fruit, sour lemon to orange zest, at the same time displays a powdered sugar softness as well as floral breeze. In the mouth it's medium-bodied but so muscular that it feels at times like it's frozen in place. The acidity packs some punch without bringing out the sharp blades. Tangerine and lime more biting here, adds energy, as if needed. Mineral dust powders the palate, draws out green grass notes. Puckering best describes the pear, apple, peach, nectarine fruit too dry to seem as tropical as in the nose. Good length for a wine which never seems to move. Unspecified percentages of Roussanne, Macabeu, Bourboulenc, Clairette. 88

Branger, Domaine Claude
Loire, Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie, Le Fils des
Gras Moutons

Melon de Bourgogne

2008, \$14.99, 12.0%

Flat, dilute yellow straw hue with some warm glow to it, not much to lose around the rims, clear enough given the slight gauziness it has. Nice sharp whipping action to the nose, shale, crushed seashells, lemon peel, anise and pressed flowers, pear and apple skin, not incredibly complex but leverages what it has fully and stays true to the spirit of the genre. Medium-bodied, super-firm to unyielding, you are getting no tongue action here. White grapefruit, lemon, orange citrus just sweet enough to get you trusting it before it slaps you with the wet stone, mineral, cut green grass aspects. The acidity nips here and there, more of a blanket on the palate than savage presence. The apricot, pear, green apple fruit skin and pit,

little juice although what's there lasts to the finish. Pleasingly blooming florality towards the end, adds to the lift. This is just a super-solid Muscadet, one most would be glad to drink even if not profound. Why wait for profundity, just chug! 88

Perrin et Fils

Rhône, Côtes du Luberon, Belle Provençale Blend

2008, \$7.99, 13.0%

Good depth to the golden color, deepening orange hue, transparent with only a little light bending, some dropoff along the rims. Openly knit nose of spring flowers, orange zest, pear, melon, apricot, apple fruit, has the kind of stream and mineral water to ensure it keeps cleansing rather than accrete too heavily. Medium-bodied, bright and sunshiny, nothing remotely close to offputting, perhaps by the same token avoiding anything which might truly catch your attention. Apricot, pear, red apple fruit. Basic orange citrus. Light florality. No real herbaceous notes, crafted to make sure few would get pissed off drinking it. And, really, you don't. Glass after glass could go down the gullet before you even begin to think about what you're drinking. Unspecified percentages of Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Ugni Blanc. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 87

Font-Mars, Château

Languedoc/Roussillon, Picpoul de Pinet Picpoul

2008, \$9.99, 12.5%

Deep golden hue, slightly worn, strong translucent distortion, given this not a lot of loss around the rims, knits it all together well. Bright orange, tangerine citrus in the nose along with golden honey and mint and violets, sufficient smokiness to semi-obscure the peach, pear, apple fruit scents, lowkey tenacity. Medium-bodied, a little more grip than you expected even as the acidity more blunt than keenly edged. Saline bite joins the tangerine, grapefruit citrus to keep things percolating, pleasing mineral component. Freshness lifts up the peach, apricot, yellow apple, pear fruit, just enough to get it out of harm's way and the encroaching herbaceousness. Offers more flavor when warmer, but more agreeable and cleansing colder. Gets your mind wandering towards oysters, clams and other shellfish. [Screwcap] 87

Henri, Pierre

Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc Chardonnay

2008, \$8.99, 12.5%

Brown and orange influence the yellow straw base, overall clear but in a somewhat translucent manner. The nose makes little effort to disguise that pear, apricot, yellow apple fruit, floral musk and ripe orange citrus are supposed to be its calling card, that said, pebbles, stream water and mint freshen it up to a noticeable degree, not much complexity but the absence of grassiness or other offputting scents a big bonus. Medium-bodied, using the acidity it has to charge right in there and make an appearance, definitely gives it more erect bearing than many for its price, this aided by the lack of oak as well. Conversely, appears to draw out pickle juice and green grass. Pear, apple, apricot, green melon fruit flavors settle the rocking boat, draw out nips of pink grapefruit and tangerine citrus. A few bumps in the road towards the finish but, for a cheap négociant wine, hard to fine fault with it. [Screwcap] 87

Haut Bertinerie, Château

Bordeaux, Côtes de Bordeaux Blaye, Little HB Sauvignon Blanc

2008, \$12.99, 12.5%

Pale golden straw color, benefits from a high level of surface reflectivity, transparent but not empty, holds on OK through the rims as well. Strong aromas of lime, lemon and white grapefruit citrus in the nose, fragrance extends through to pine, lilacs, licorice notes, compact pear, apple, peach fruit scents, average degree of stone and streamwater accents. Light-bodied, acidity not too sharp, prefers to grind and grip a bit instead of draw blood. Remains heavily dependent on the lemon, grapefruit citrus to impress, manages to retain that pretty floral and piney touch. The acidity is able to spotlight more minerality here without making the full presentation too dry. Patina of pineapple, papaya fruit to the green apple, pear, apricot base, conversely to the aforementioned, too dry for the fruit to blossom. Mouth weight stays steady through to the end, however, flavor intensity does drop off. [Composite Cork] 87

Dubœuf, Georges

Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc, Patch Block Chardonnay

2008, \$8.99, 13.0%

Average solidity to the yellow hay color, shiny enough surface to distract you from the loss of hue at the outer edges. There's credible firmness to the nose, outdoorsy feel with a floral center, then sort of briny with a jalapeño edge, nothing unusual regarding the peach, pear, apple fruit, while not that many arrows in its quiver makes a decent impression. Light-bodied, leverages the acidity to make a good initial thrust but loses itself thereafter. Lemon and lime citrus adds some buoyancy, florality helps here too. Peach, apricot, nectarine, green apple fruit has a little verve to it. Not sure what peg it means to hang its hat on but priced just beyond what it's worth. [Screwcap: Stelvin+] 83

ITALY RED

COS, Azienda Agricola

Sicilia, Nero di Lupo, Nero d'Avola

2007, \$29.99, 12.0%

Very clear and transparent red-ruby color, touch of purple, the rims offer little change, redder and slightly thinner, good reflectivity. Stone, pebble, ash most obvious in the nose followed on by cut brown grass, pressed flowers, semi-terse feel to the raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit scents, has good lift, more perfume than staying power. In the mouth it's light-bodied with most of its presence derived from the brawny tannin and acidity. Orange and white grapefruit citrus dry and sticky, coats the tongue. Brown earth, stone, minerals, mushroom and meadow grasses fill in most of the gaps, so-so showing by the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry fruit. Floral breeze comes on through the mid-palate. To its credit no guile nor makeup, however, no sense in denying the need for a fuller middle to impress. [Composite Cork] 86

ITALY WHITE

Sparina, Villa
Piedmont, Gavi di Gavi
Cortese
2008, \$19.99, 13.0%

While the depth of the yellow gold color is lacking, gathers in the light nicely to achieve some glow and gentle translucency, rims bleached of all hue. Lemon honey, beeswax, ground flowers, witch hazel, alternates between a creamy nostril texture and firmer feel, especially via the peach, apricot, pear fruit, ends with a rising smokiness. Full-bodied, not that round but full from cheek to cheek. Minerally sort of smokiness up in front here, akin to sauna stone fumes. Semi-bitter aspect to the pear, apple, apricot fruit, not underripe just overly bitter and hence short. Nutty, on par with the tangerine, lemon citrus zest. The honeyed aspect diminished. All in all, still finishes on a creamy touch, just might be too late. 87

Ferrara, Benito
Campania, Greco di Tufo
Greco
2008, \$24.99, 13.0%

Orangish amber color, has the look of a maderized wine, solid through the rims, on the dull side but sort of expected. The apricot, peach, pineapple fruit makes a bigger entrance than exit in the nose, has lemon peel but not a lot of honey, hence the minerality plays a large role, licorice and a waft of flowers, however, leaner and less effusive than expected. Medium-bodied, similar experience in the mouth, not so giving and, here with the acidic charge, even less likely to spread out. The orange, lemon citrus provides punch and sticks around nicely. Dilute apricot, yellow apple, peach, nectarine fruit, one could be nice and say just more room allocated to the mineral water, stones and metal flecks. The herbaceous twist at the end breathes some life into it. Doesn't have the layered goodness of the best Greco wines albeit comes across as honest per se. 86

Cielo
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Delle Venezie
Chardonnay
2008, \$7.99, 12.5%

Average yellow straw color, neither dilute nor rich, transparently clear rims, it's there in the glass, no doubting that. The nose rests on a foundation of matted dry grass, straw and lemon peels, manages to mix in pinches of anise, apricot and pear fruit, quinine and lilacs. Medium-bodied, dry and close to withering, really gets you agitating your palate to stir up some moisture. Puts most of its chips on the orange, lemon citrus, the juiciest aspect. Average sampling of green apple, pear, peach, apricot fruit, pushes through across the finish line. At times there's a malo-like creaminess if not an outright vanilla flavoring. Shows better, rounder, at close to room temperature. Nevertheless, still short on the finish and needs a few more pounds on flesh on its bones. [Synthetic Cork] 85

ITALY SPARKLING

Sant'Evasio, Cantina
Piedmont, Moscato d'Asti
Moscato
2009, \$15.99, 5.5%

Generous fizz across the surface as it pours, pale yellow color, widely dispersed and slow moving bubbles visible within, nothing really out of the ordinary here. Ripe pear, peach, apple fruit in the nose, overall has good shape and no sugar bomb approach, citrus blossom, fresh honey, goes for freshness and penetration over density. In the mouth it's light to medium-bodied, once more the freshness of the apricot, yellow apple, pear, peach fruit ore apparent than the concentration. The acidity surprises and cleanses the finish. Tangerine, lime citrus sweet but not of a soft drink confectionary nature. Actually conjures some spring water, river pebble allusions. Clean finish seals the deal as a tasteful wine but something unlikely to sell in large numbers to those who seek out Moscato d'Asti. 88

GERMANY WHITE

Valckenberg, P.J.
Rheinhessen, QbA AP #31
Riesling
2008, \$11.99, 10.5%

Very light yellow straw color, has a sort of pale moon glow to it, mostly transparent. The nose has a soft floral dimension while also hitting you with leaner, more taut lemon zest and wet stone powder, smokiness seems to inhibit the unfolding of the peach, apricot, apple scents, does offer something like a confectionary sugar note but insufficient to pretty up the whole. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, stern and hard with taciturn acidity which wants to shut up most of the flavors. As a result does come across as slightly herbaceous and bitter in the white grapefruit, lemon citrus department. Green apple, pear, nectarine fruit flavors parsimonious with the juice. Luckily the florality not diminished here. Sour puckering at the end not the friendliest of punctuation marks. Average, worse out there. [Screwcap] 85

SPAIN RED

Montebuena, Bodegas
Rioja
Blend
2007, \$12.99, 13.5%

The core mainly clean purple with a reddish influence, minor turn to ruby around the rims, youthful with little sign of even Crianza level aging. Because, duh, it's not. The cherry, plum fruit scents come with a prunish touch, vanilla, cedar, spice in keeping with expectations, comes close at times to a piney freshness, light earthiness but nothing close to herbaceous. Medium-bodied, lacks meaningful acidity and tannin yet achieves a certain freshness, again, though, the prune and raisin influence found in the cherry, blackberry fruit base. Toast, spice, cedar not overdone, less vanilla so a little less sweet. Tobacco and tea leaf accents come to the fore followed on by orange spice. All in all, nothing profound or anything to make a "secret" of, nonetheless, a pleasant little drop. 88

Masroig, Celler El
Montsant, Solà Fred
Blend
2008, \$12.99, 13.5%

As much garnet red as purple in the core, more fresh ruby around the rims with above average saturation, a little clearer than one might expect these days. Semi-plump nose that isn't pushy about the fact that it is mostly plum, blackberry, cherry fruit, not out to make a statement, has

an herbaceous side which stiffens the texture for the best, otherwise quiet orange citrus, menthol, meadow flower accents, not especially complex but you really didn't expect it to be. Medium-bodied, velvety smooth with a gentle traction across the palate, neither grinds nor lifts. The plum, black cherry, black currant fruit thick, not heavy, offers itself for you without guile or conceit. To wit, a simple quaffing wine. The tannins carve out more presence than many wines of this type, to its credit. The same herbaceous, orange citrus, woody aspects show here. Some pucker through the finish, might turn off the brainless. Otherwise, nothing here to complain about. 90% Cariñena, 10% Garnacha. 87

PORTUGAL RED

Aveleda, Quinta da
Douro Valley, Charamba
Blend
2007, \$9.99, 13.0%

Reddish purple of good intensity, not dark enough to escape transparency, the rims ruby with a lighter pink magenta hue at the outermost edges. The nose presents a crush of forest floor matter, earth, tree bark and a sort of mentholated lift, sweet and sour cranberry, red cherry, raspberry scents, gives you tough love but does have staying power. Medium-bodied, the tree bark, fallen wood, grass components evident from the first sip, as is the brawny acidity which will likely turn off more imbibers than draw such in. The cranberry, pomegranate, red cherry, raspberry fruit wiry and semi-sour, yet, as in the nose, lasts fully through the finish. The white grapefruit, lemon citrus a mixed bag, keeps the mouth presence lively, however, elevates the sourness of the fruit. Then, surprisingly, the fruit comes up with a roasted, dried fruit burst at the end. Wow. Not enough of a crowd pleaser, but isn't a ripoff if you dig the general vibe of wines like this. Unspecified percentages Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barroca. 87

PORTUGAL DESSERT

Noval, Quinta do
Douro, Noval Black
Blend
NV, \$23.99, 19.5%

Saturated purple core of full opacity, thin but thick ruby-magenta rims, youthful and the liquid seems entirely free of sediment or any free floating particles. Grapey nose with as much fig and date as prune and raisin, you get more cinnamon, ginger, orange peel than tobacco, tea leaf or smoke, some pine or garden herb notes, plays the part of a young ruby port well, leaves you thinking this is what you'll get today and tomorrow. Medium-bodied, if that, silky smooth and fluid, polished to a high gloss like the boss was coming over for dinner. Raisin and date dominate, the prune not as aggressive, plenty of orange citrus and, here, sweet tobacco, like maduro wrapper. You don't get a strong handle on any tannin or acidity presence, you do get a mild alcoholic burn. No herbaceous nor earthy accents of note. Mix of milk and dark chocolate. A very skillfully packaged entry level ruby port of average at best complexity. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão, etc. 87

SOUTH AFRICA RED

Boekenhoutskloof
Western Cape, The Wolftrap
Blend
2009, \$10.99, 14.5%

Burnt crimson purple hue, clear with average depth, purer brick red out around the rims. Generous toffee, coffee roast, butterscotch in the nose, covers up some of the tarry earthiness and creates more space for the plum, black cherry fruit scents, candied oranges and a brief whiff of floral musk, good fullness. Medium-bodied, achieves a semi-velvety mouth feel in spite of its tannic grit and the typical dry earthiness, minerality. Ripe, sugary plum, cherry, boysenberry fruit all but steals the show from the molasses, caramel, fried butter flavors. Orange, grapefruit citrus comes on nicely. The tar and smoke return retronasally, a good flourish of complexity if you want more than just fruit and oak. 65% Syrah, 32% Mourvèdre, 3% Viognier. (Screwcap) 88

SOUTH AFRICA WHITE

Cederberg
Cederberg
Chenin Blanc
2008, \$16.99, 13.0%

Light greenish-gold color, dilute yet has a soft luminescent glow which creates a touch more presence, colorless rims. The nose has an uneven texture, sharp minerals, white grapefruit pith, broken stone mixed haphazardly with cotton candy, taffy accents, the attenuated nectarine, pineapple, papaya fruit scents not helpful in deciding a final victor, perhaps the swelling herbaceousness tilts the scales in the end. Light to medium-bodied, the raw acidity increases mouth presence even if it lacks the depth of material to fill in the spaces. Tart grapefruit, orange citrus cause you to pucker, the grass and metallic notes increase this by a factor. The confectionary aspect gone here, little counterweight to the overarching sourness. Lacks the innate charm of the grape, meager finish as well. (Screwcap: Savin) 83

AUSTRALIA RED

Penfolds
South Australia, Coonawarra, Bin 128
Shiraz
2007, \$17.99, 14.5%

The opaque purple core does not venture into ultra-dense territory, yet keeps the thin scarlet red rims dark in turn, surface has some shine. Bitter dark chocolate, coffee, cocoa segues into grass, green hay, tilled earth, this as if trying to establish a foundation of terroir-based respectability, yet the black raspberry, cherry fruit not all that friendly and certainly truncated. Medium-bodied, from the start too dry to truly appeal to its target audience, this without finding a "sweet spot" to appeal to the masses. Plum, black cherry, blackberry fruit up front and center, however, acts as if not sure where to go from there. Some tannin, hard to completely discern if natural or wood based, acidity a non-factor. Touch of orange citrus and eucalyptus, starts to dilute past the mid-palate and cede ground to the grassiness. No glaring flaws, just doesn't incite you to pour another glass. 86

Coldstream Hills
Victoria, Yarra Valley
Pinot Noir
2007, \$20.99, 13.0%

Transparent garnet red to violet colored core, in no way lacking in hue, more straight-up red at the rims with a touch of orange, nary a blemish in sight. Serious oak treatment in the nose, caramel, butterscotch, buttered toast rule the roost, over time mixes in white grapefruit, lemon citrus and red cherry, raspberry fruit but these in turn held back by a pervasive herbaceousness, all makeup and bones with no flesh. Medium-bodied, seems to use its weight to flatten across the plate rather than let the acidity try to help create a scrubbing, fresh effect. Cola, lemon citrus, wildflowers but... oak, oak, and more oak by way of coffee rinds, toffee, burnt chocolate and cocoa powder. There's very little here which may be considered pliant or giving, no softness in the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit. It catches your interest during the first glass but starts to piss you off during the second. (Screwcap) 85

AUSTRALIA WHITE

Penfolds
South Australia, Adelaide, Thomas Hyland
Riesling
2008, \$18.99, 12.0%

Deep but clear golden color, transparent and just a touch dull. The nose offers a good chunk of rubber scents alongside pretty florality and taut peach, apricot, pear fruit scents, stiffened further by the sour lemon peel accents. Full-bodied and equally firm here in the mouth, the acidity deep and muscular, sets the tone early. The rubber slightly lower but, at the same time, pairs up with mineral water and stone to keep things dry and lean. The lemon citrus shows verve and tenacity and puts extra snap into the apricot, apple, pear fruit. Mild latent creaminess at the end. Deserves attention for its high energy level as well as being dry but not too so. That said, don't offer it to anyone who thinks all Riesling wines are sweet. (Screwcap) 88

Coldstream Hills
Victoria, Yarra Valley
Sauvignon Blanc
2009, \$21.99, 13.0%

Close to colorless, white hay hue at best, hence transparent, some surface shine reminds you it's there in the glass. Lemon driven nose with suggestions of both lime and white grapefruit, touch of anise or licorice, as much pineapple or nectarine for fruit scents as apricot or apple, the minerality very powdery and never quite gains traction. Medium-bodied, sweeter than the nose suggests with more carry-through in the pineapple, papaya, green apple, apricot fruit flavors. The lime shares the stage fully with the lemon. The acidity does the job, however, could still have some more zing. The textural dryness remains long after the main flavors are gone, thus extending a somewhat hollow finish. It's alright. (Screwcap) 86

St. Kilda
South Australia, South Eastern Australia
Chardonnay
2008, \$7.99, 12.5%

Good richness to the golden hue, layers well in the glass, does lose it around the rims, a little above average surface reflectivity. Firm but not lean nose of lemon, lime citrus with counterbalance in the vanilla pudding scents, mineral

dust and momentary glances of cut grass, mint, the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit scents succinct, decent length given that it barely unclenches. Medium-bodied, the acidity both dries and refreshes, however, it leaves a powdery, unnatural in feel residue behind. As a result, the apricot, peach, red apple, pineapple fruit encounters trouble gaining traction and forward movement. The lemon to lime citrus breathes life into it from the mid-palate on. It's a perfectly acceptable, average unoaked Aussie Chard and priced correctly for what you get. (Screwcap) 85

ARGENTINA RED

Colores del Sol, Bodegas
Mendoza
Malbec
2009, \$12.99, 13.5%

Deep purple core shows a ruby tinge, remains dark around the rims, ruby-magenta of good saturation. The nose immediately betrays that this is a "tougher" sort of Malbec, plenty of earth and stones mixed in with the cherry, blackberry scents, sour white citrus and some straw and hay notes, good erect bearing. Medium-bodied, as expected sets itself firmly in the mouth and not shy about exercising its tannin and acidity. That said, nothing wanting in the cherry, blackberry, red currant fruit, constant presence from start to finish. White grapefruit, brown earth, mountain scrub, again, it's not thin or underripe or overcropped or any of that shit. Even if in reality it is. Just tastes like a chewy, tannic red wine with minimal oak or other forms of makeup. No problem with that. 88

Graffigna, Bodegas y Viñedos Santiago
San Juan, Pedernal Valley, Grand Reserve
Malbec
2006, \$22.99, 14.5%

Unblemished violet core, achieves an easy warmth which extends through to the ruby-red rims, shows a touch of aging and doesn't overly depend on pure saturation to impress. Lean nose with moments of greenness, the oak shaved down to a cedary woodiness, firm cherry, blackberry scents, orange peel and pine cones, comes across as seeking old world pedigree. Medium-bodied, steely tannic super-structure makes sure you can't even ignore it in your mouth. Cedar, spice, orange peel, pressed flowers, light dusting of dry earthiness but nothing that impedes the slow, sure progress of the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit. Judicious accenting of caramel and toffee. A suave drop, still for the price one can't help but consider the alternatives. 88

Casa de Campo (Indigo Wine Group)
Cabernet Sauvignon
2008, \$8.99, 13.5%

Pure purple core with deep ruby-magenta rims, fully unblemished. The nose is lean and wiry, old cedar and earth, dusty texture, some pressed flowers adorn the taciturn Italian plum, cherry scents, ends with a pinch or two of cocoa powder. In the mouth it's even drier with a big tannic punch. That said, by no stretch charmless as you get orange peel, cocoa, hard toffee, cedar and dried herb accents. The fruit here more red cherry, raspberry, blackberry, semi-sour which leads to some pucker factor, however, displays good staying power as well. No glaring faults so it does sort of grow on you and nothing wrong with the price. (Screwcap) 86

ARGENTINA WHITE

Casa de Campo (Indigo Wine Group)

Torrontés

2009, \$8.99, 13.0%

White gold color, straw too but no green tinge, transparent with just enough bending of light to make it interesting, lack of concentration at the core makes the rims look fuller. Lemon/lime fresh nose, just picked flowers, mint sprigs, stream water and white pebbles, sunny spring day and all that, apricot, pear, peach fruit pretty as well yet almost an afterthought. Light-bodied but the keen edge of the acidity lends added presence to the, duh, presentation. Tangerine, lime and lemon citrus once more playing the leading role. The florality abundant with the apricot, pear, red apple fruit a few steps back, at times shows notes of persimmon. Not minerally per se but does have that refreshing streamwater character. Remains tightly coiled through to the end, no 40 watt bulb here. (Screwcap) 88