

People say, “Hanes, why don’t you write any more articles in your reviews?” Usually, that’s the last thing they say for awhile as they end up in a full body cast and eating through a straw for the next few months. The temerity. But it is a question with a modicum of validity.

The first edition of *The Hanes Wine Review* came out in September 1999. That may not seem like that long ago but it really is. It’s a damn long time and along the way has sucked up a lot of time. All for the greater good, of course, all for the greater good. But now that Hanes is 44 years old and not 32 years old, there’s a lot less free time to go around. Thankfully, Hanes has avoided having sniveling little brats who suck up all of one’s precious bodily fluids and prematurely age the skin. But three cats *do* demand a fair amount of attention. And there’s “work work” plus familial responsibilities, endless updates with the parole officer... Well, you see the picture.

But the real truth is this. There’s really nothing new to say about wine that hasn’t been said before. But, but, Hanes. Every month magazines come out like *Wine Spectator* with plenty of new articles! Hogwash, says Hanes. The vast majority of it is simple regurgitation or fluff pieces on individuals that no one *should* care about. In reality, new and noteworthy facts about wine come very rarely. Sure, there’s the chance to gloss over the newly released vintage or the newest winemaker on the block. But that shit gets redundant over the years too. And what the hell is the sense in Hanes being redundant in his wine writing when he is already such a creature of habit in real life? C’mon, is there really anything new to say about Carneros Chardonnay, Chianti or New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc wines? Naw. Hanes still makes mucho reading effort to keep up with the “world of wine” and no topic leaps out at him as worth covering. Just not worth the bandwidth.

Another major factor to consider is the veritable explosion of wine related media and/or general discussion outlets in the world. Back in 1999 the internet was not as painfully over-saturated with content as it is today. The hideous blogger spawn had not yet hatched. There was an arguable minor need for more diverse wine related articles. Today, you could spend 18 hours a day just trying to keep up with the writing output out there. Fuck that noise. It’s not that Hanes does not want to “compete” or begrudges those who blog or tweet. It’s more that it’s useless, no matter how fervent a believer one is in “spreading the gospel” of the vine. It’s great that authority has been decentralized and that anyone can be a self-appointed expert on wine. Let a thousand flowers bloom. Just don’t fucking water them. Hanes has always done his review for fun and not for money (despite many friends over the years browbeating him to commercialize the review). There’s no editors nor deadlines, no criteria to meet nor quotas. Hanes really feels for his friends who do blog, the structural demand there to “produce” is immense – where’s the new content, where’s the new content, this regardless of what is going on in the personal life of said blogger. A swell pal of Hanes has a very well regarded blog but as of this writing he has not posted a new entry in twelve days. That’s decades in blog time. Who needs that pressure for something that is supposed to be fun? For what, a few free tastes at a winery or trade tasting, or maybe a free sample bottle or two of undrinkable swill? As if. But, hey, everyone has a dollar and a dream these days and new bloggers hit the set weekly while new online wine discussion boards pop up like mushrooms after a rainstorm. Good luck synthesizing all that and making sense of it – what’s legit or not, factually correct or just all messed up. Never mind paid for or not.

So! After 12 years or so, *The Hanes Wine Review* has a distribution list of 398 individuals. That’s fairly puny but not unexpected given that it remains an old school “website” that only gets updated every 1-2 months. Hanes would be a plain old fool to attempt to “gain market share” in a world where, as mentioned, there really ain’t that much to say no more. If all wine writing stopped today, there would be more than enough information available in hard print and on the internets to satisfy even the most hardcore wine geek. Enough, already, geez. Just stop. Some will counter that the “social media” phenomenon is the new revolution to expand the scope of readership and information flow. At the age of 44, Hanes knows a bubble when he sees one, thank you very much. Good luck with all that, sonny.

Nope, from here on out it’s just wine reviews and *maybe* a wine article if by chance and unholy alliance some worthy topic appears on the scene. Hanes is tempted to get back into general ruminative writing. Not brief bursts such as on blogs, Hanes has always preferred longer, thorough pieces which remain entirely out of vogue. You know, the old cliché of authorial intent and sustained argumentation, not the rat-a-tat-tat of sound bites. So, it may very well be the case that Hanes offers up such tidbits as accompaniments to the review. But these shall likely (a) have nothing to do with wine; (b) cover social or political topics; and/or (c) simply discuss the matter at hand baldly enough to offend most. As such, they will be linked and not part of the main review page. So, if you are one of the 398 here to just see which new wines are worth trying you might want to skip any such missives.

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This month's big winners... Nebbiolo from California is not a generally impressive category. But in 2008 Harrington Wines pulled off a neat trick with their Paso Robles version, true to type, if pricey at \$40+ per bottle. What can you do. Will plug a pal's new winery, Fogline. Hanes paid for the bottle so no under the table deals for a good review from Hanes to create huge market demand for the wine. Bottle is the 2009 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, understated, intelligently fruited and with nice supporting acidity, all for \$35. While on the topic of RRV wines, Tin Barn is a winery whose Zinfandels from this area deliver consistently yet the winery has never achieved "sexy" status. Shame, very fairly priced at \$24 and a wine any Zinfandel lover should try. Domaine Les Aphillanthes has a hard name to produce and it always makes Hanes think of ants but their Côtes-du-Rhône wines are consistently good, here their 2009 "Cuvée des Galets" red blend. Lots of density, good structure and relatively a deal at around \$20. Hanes must be getting too old and suffering from loss of palate. The wines of Chablis which once thrilled now barely excite. And we are not talking about aged Chablis destroyed by premature oxidation, but of young and just released wines. Maybe it's because it's mostly basic AOC bottlings but where once Chablis was a screaming value (say 1998 to 2002 vintages) now it's as overpriced as the rest. To the best of Hanes's knowledge there are only two producers in the Lessona area of Piedmont, Italy. One is Società Agricola Vigneti De Marchi (Proprietà Sperino) and their 2005 bottling is top notch Nebbiolo and arguably worth the \$70+ it costs. Hanes tried the 2006 at a tasting and will indeed pay to purchase a bottle when available locally. Yummy. It's rare to find Rhine Riesling in Piedmont, Italy but Vajra in Piedmont has some and the 2009 is a fantastic drop. \$43 is way pushing it, but Hanes will drink this any day.

The best \$15 and under picks... Hanes drank nothing under \$15 worth recommending. Note that he is now buying much less wine than ever and the infrequent purchases made will likely be above the \$15 price point. The immediate Hanes goal is to drink as much as his wine collection as possible over the coming year and remove this albatross from his life. Keep it lean, mean and easy to hit the road, mofo. 100 cases of wine just doesn't fit in the trunk like it used to.

And the disappointments... In Hanes's neck of the woods the Santa Barbara winery Au Bon Climat just left a medium sized distributor for one of the big guys. Rarely a good sign but not surprising once you taste their 2009 entry level Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir which is quite pedestrian given the historical reputation of this winery. Even the relatively fair price of \$20 does not forgive. Chester's Anvil is a side project for the owners of Lagier Meredith, a great Syrah producer. So far, Hanes has been underwhelmed by the Chester's Anvil wines, this despite being a cat lover. Their 2009 Rhône white blend called "Gretna Green" was pretty boring, \$30 should get you more. From Washington state comes the 2008 Six Prong Cabernet Sauvignon, an okay wine but one overly dependent on oak. You better like dill to drink this one. Never had a white dessert wine from Banyuls before. So, tried the 2008 Domaine La Tour Vieille, from Grenache Blanc and Grenache Gris. Have not been missing much, shan't try one again until some other squid ponies up the dinero for it.

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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/oldervintages2011.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)

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

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Ueberroth Vineyard

Zinfandel

2008, \$48.00, 15.9%

Red-magenta to brick infiltrated core, the purple is lighter than might be expected, the magenta to dark ruby rims almost have a stern look, doesn't take on that usual mindless luminescence you can find in many Zins. In turn, the nose has an unusual focus on dirt, stones and wildflowers before finally ceding to butterscotch, caramel and eucalyptus notes, a controlled ripeness in the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry, rhubarb scents, achieves a semi-sour character without strong citrus influence. In the mouth it's full-bodied with both density and fluidity, moves at a measured pace. Here you do get more orange and some grapefruit citrus, brings sparkle to the already lively raspberry, blackberry, boysenberry, cherry flavors, full blend of red and black fruits. Not that tannic but has more acidity than you'd find in its immediate peer group. The chocolate, caramel, butterscotch oak supplementary, nicely integrated. Again offers a blanket of eucalyptus and flowers. Long finish, both sweet and savory, makes you eager to take the next sip. 92

Lagier Meredith

Napa Valley, Mount Veeder

Syrah

2008, \$48.00, 14.4%

The core is dark enough that the full-on saturation of the super dark purple color, the ruby rims are already deepening into more brick red to crimson hues, vivid with an immaculate surface. One might argue that the nose penetrates to the detriment of full breadth, wildflowers, pine, freshly tanned leather, menthol rub, orange blossom, green olives, hint of merde, no meaningful sign of oak here, at the same time the leanness of the black currant, black cherry scents evident and a contributing factor to its swift

denouement. Medium-bodied, more balanced and capable of presenting a consistent weave start to finish. The close to candied sweetness of the blackberry, black cherry, raspberry fruit adroitly plays off of the sourness of the orange, white grapefruit, afterwards allowing pine, pressed roses, cedar to mesquite chips, sandalwood incense to show. The oak here has a sour, biting quality in spite of some softer vanilla to caramel accents, at times conjures up dill or sage. The tannins have been managed into a clearly demarcated supporting role, the acidity can snap you like a wet towel now and then. This particular bottle is a chameleon glass-to-glass and sip-to-sip, you have to aggregate many impressions into a unsteady whole. In the end, very good with solid medium-term potential. 90

Harrington Wines

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles

Nebbiolo

2008, \$40.99, 14.3%

Light, glowing cough syrup red color, completely clear and transparent throughout, just beginning to suggest that orange might play a greater role going forward. The nose has an attractive delicacy, alas this allows the alcoholic fumes to come into play more than desired, otherwise it's all pretty cherry, cranberry fruit, tangerine zest, rose water and menthol, lighter cinnamon to graham cracker accents, smells true to type. Medium-bodied, not quite lithe yet moves with both grace and determination, nothing indecisive here. Added leather, merde and earth ground the floral perfume, this especially so as the tannins assert themselves, no slouch in this department although does not unnecessarily force its structure on you. Zesty orange, grapefruit citrus keeps the tempo up. Whereas there is a candied concentration to the cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit this trails off at the end into a dry, sort of chewy finish. Pulls off being both Nebbiolo and Californian well and without undue sacrifice on either score. 90

Turley
Regional Blend, Old Vines
Zinfandel
2009, \$25.00, 15.5%

The violet core enriched by glowing magenta to ruby hues, not quite opaque, no pink as the rims stay in the garnet to blood red spectrum. There's a puppy-like enthusiasm to the nose, caramel and toffee start it off with bountiful raspberry, blueberry, blackberry, peach fruit scents, slides in mint, orange juice and grill smoke, it's all softly invasive and sticky except for the alcoholic fumes so don't stick your schnozz too deeply into the glass. Medium-bodied, seems like it could be "bigger" but decides to stay seamlessly fluid and mobile instead. Decent acidity, not much tannin, nothing to gum up the works, if anything slows it down it's oaky, woody toast and smoke. The orange, white grapefruit citrus adds some zing so you don't zone out, eucalyptus and mint stretch it out a few ticks. Wide array of raspberry, strawberry, cherry, blueberry, peach, apricot fruit, a lot more "white fruit" than you'd expect. Chocolate, caramel and butterscotch consistent while proportionate. Very well done, impressive without seemingly desirous of being so. 90

Fogline Vineyards
Russian River Valley, Windsor Oaks Vineyard
Pinot Noir
2009, \$35.00, 14.5%

Bright and shiny cranberry red color, barely any difference core to rims, maybe a vague more metallic zinc tinge, exquisitely clear, good shine, has the sparkle to hold your gaze. Fluffy, not dewy, flowers infuse the nose, reminiscent of garrigues, lemon oil, sweet spices, mint, witch hazel, erect bearing in the raspberry, red cherry, rhubarb fruit scents, channeled lift, not especially deep but attains and keeps the level it clearly desires. Medium-bodied, the acidity gives it a slow percolating effect, steps lively on the palate. At first you get caramel, cocoa and toffee but this drifts off in favor of sweet mandarin orange, grapefruit citrus and close to hard candy character cherry, raspberry, cranberry fruit, sweet but not that juicy. As it opens gains more herbaceous qualities. Dries out slightly after each sip, keeping it food friendly and versatile. In turn, the caramel softens and fills the finish too. Could make a bigger splash if it wanted, nicely chooses not to. 90

Tin Barn
Russian River Valley, Gilsson Vineyard
Zinfandel
2008, \$23.99, 15.6%

There's as much crimson red in the core as purple, possibly more, even deeper crimson around the rims, burnt with an orange cast, good overall clarity as well

as surface cleanliness. The nose drips with wet blackberry, blueberry, black cherry fruit in tandem with brown sugar, chocolate and caramel, this outrun by a big eucalyptus lift, ends with a flourish of orange citrus and backroad earth. Medium-bodied, for all of its sweetness also possesses a highly credible backbone of tannin and acidity, no slouching here. As a result, there's tempering of the candied raspberry, blackberry, boysenberry, cranberry flavors and a good balance between red and black fruits. The chocolate, caramel, toffee, coffee oak flavors embellish rather than seek the limelight. Orange with a touch of grapefruit citrus, eucalyptus, rawhide and beef jerky add sour and savory touches. A few brief times you get a light merde like quality in the earthiness, kind of gives it some "country" credibility. Still, especially when the floral lift comes along, hard not to just grin and enjoy it as a big, fun Zinfandel that should be enjoyed more than parsed. 90

Chester's Anvil (A Lagier Meredith Pott Joint Venture)
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast
Pinot Noir
2009, \$38.00, 14.7%

Mostly red-ruby core darkened by purple, just enough pinkish magenta in the rims to create visual separation, fuzzy sort of clarity, like looking into the sun on a clear day. Alcohol sort of destabilizes the nose, however, there's charm left in the cola, cocoa, ginger accents and plenty of life in the raspberry, red cherry, strawberry, watermelon fruit scents, the semi-muscular floral lift can mask a flaw or two, glancing brush of earth and tomato skin accompanies the relaxed grassy element. In the mouth it's close to full-bodied, much more suave and integrated. Adroitly uses caramel, butterscotch to supplement the ripe and concentrated cherry, raspberry, cranberry, watermelon fruit, the sugar focused like cane sugar, not sweet for sweet's sake. Tangerine pulp, cola, vanilla bean work at holding your focus, draws you away from any metallic or vegetal notes. Could shed some plumpness through the finish. Acidity level is so-so, tannin might actually fare better after its sheds its baby fat, still might always have to rely on its sheer weight for structure. Highly approachable and difficult to imagine how the average imbiber would not be impressed. 89

Caton, Ty
Sonoma Valley, Caton Vineyard
Petite Sirah
2008, \$35.99, 15.1%

Even as black as the core is the luminescent glow in the purple comes through clearly, hardcore cranberry red to ruby stains the rims, surface glistens nicely. Some earth, peanut shell, driftwood notes before the plum, currant, blackberry fruit slowly spoons itself into

the nose, smattering of flower petals, then milk chocolate, toasted mocha, and a drip of orange juice, given some air time manages to gain a solid footing and create a deeper, more lasting effect. Full-bodied in terms of density and brute force, has a shocking amount of acidity for the type, makes it hard at first to even tell what kind of tannin is there, but they do come on after some time. Vanilla, caramel, toffee accents remain restrained in nature, the peanut stuff stays in play, not quite how to finger where it's coming from. The raw juiciness of the blackberry, blueberry, cherry, plum comes through and helps to loosen its muscles some. This is an exercise in focused winemaking, it feels like every inch of it was planned and thought out, no movement wasted. Leaves you with the impression that it's a "day two" kind of wine. 89

Harrington Wines

Regional Blend, California, Cold Light

Pinot Noir

2008, \$29.99, 14.1%

The purple base to the core more or less overtaken by cranberry red, ruby tints, more basic red ruby towards the rims, clear yet well layered for the relatively light hue, sits squarely in the glass. The nose has this sour edge redolent of jalapeños and green grasses, however, readily enjoyable as such, tart grapefruit notes chime in before more candied raspberry, red cherry, strawberry nuances gain hold, at which point sweet baking spices and light cocoa shades help it settle into an extended friendly presentation. Medium-bodied, suave with just the right amount of turbulence to keep your focus. The mouth entry features caramel, chocolate to pave the path for sweet and tart cherry, raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit, very much red in complexion yet with good heft and length, the grapefruit and lower lemon citrus also find fecund territory playing sweet off sour. Hints at cola or menthol but then coyly relents. That peppery, briny edge lurks in the background, a nice touch if you want added complexity. In the end, you might say it's more beautiful for its warts. (Composite Cork) Grapes sourced from Lund Vineyard (Carneros), Wiley Vineyard (Anderson Valley). 89

Turley

Napa Valley, Moore "Earthquake" Vineyard

Zinfandel

2008, \$48.00, 15.8%

Dark purple core yet holds onto decent cleanliness, not fully opaque, the rims have a warm glow, skew to ruby and cranberry red rather than brighter magenta, nothing weak color-wise. The floral dew and orange spritz in the nose insufficient to fend off heaviness, sappy feel to the plum, currant, black cherry, blackberry scents, drawn down further by milk

chocolate, cinnamon, pine cone accents, the oak seems minor, only adding in trace amounts of caramel and butterscotch, regrettably just sort of slouches in your nostrils. Full-bodied, tannic but a lot of it just feels like wood tannin, dry in a toasty manner. More concentration than sweetness in the caramel, toffee, chocolate, spice flavors, just about the same could be said for the plum, cherry, boysenberry, blueberry fruit, lacks the natural flow to fashion a prolonged finish. Strong orange to grapefruit citrus component. Does start to unwind after at least an hour of air time, still not a wine of immediately visceral pleasure and never quite shakes the semi-astringent finish. 88

Fogline Vineyards

Dry Creek Valley

Zinfandel

2009, \$24.00, 14.5%

Dark purple to red-ruby hued core, the rims show a vivid scarlet red with some ruby left in there, unblemished and bristles with energy. Somewhat high-toned nose of menthol, eucalyptus clay earth and minerals, cedar and garden herbs, the vanilla to caramel oak never quite takes hold to soften and buttress the raspberry, pomegranate, red cherry, cranberry scents, maintains a grassy if not green herbaceous side, no alcoholic heat, maybe a light brine edge, good length given the relative lack of depth of primary scents. Medium-bodied, soft and pliable until the tannin and acidity clamp down during the mid-palate. This allows the earth and grass to surface more, this a good counterbalance to the otherwise candied to syrupy cherry, raspberry, blueberry, boysenberry fruit. Good deal of orange, white grapefruit citrus and ginger spice to kick it up a notch. The cocoa, vanilla, caramel oak flits across the surface. Maintains clean lines and kicks aggressively across the finish line. Not for those who seek sugary, densely fruited Zins. 88

Dutton-Goldfield

Russian River Valley, Dutton Ranch I Morelli Lane

Vineyard

Zinfandel

2009, \$22.99, 14.5%

Sparkly red ruby to purple core, magenta to cranberry red, unblemished and sleek surface, lots of vigor without seeking unnecessary saturation. There's a sour to pickled quality in the nose at first, then layers of candied raspberry, cherry, strawberry, cinnamon, ginger, lemon drops, menthol, mild grassiness, stone, not complex but has a crazy fast pacing and just bursts through your nostrils. Medium-bodied, sticky and gluey and just short of jammy. Plum, cherry, blueberry, blackberry fruit sugary and needs to be washed out of your mouth. Orange, lemon, white

grapefruit citrus in turn sugar coated and more sweet than sour. Milk chocolate coated. Not much tannin but the acidity semi-rises to the occasion. Carefully put together and shows class, still it needs to rely on the fruity sweetness to stick inside your mind. 88

Chasing Lions

Napa Valley

Blend

2006, \$16.99, 14.1%

Close to a blackened purple core, clarity comes through via the broad crimson to scarlet red rims, ruby tones lighten it somewhat. The nose is a hodgepodge of cinnamon, mint, toffee, caramel, grill smoke and other sundry oak influenced notes, the alcohol momentarily unleashes some grassiness, however, the depth of the cherry, blackberry, cranberry, red currant fruit sweeps all that away, nothing complex to be found here, probably to its advantage. Medium-bodied, not that dense but gluey and sticks to the palate on the whole. As one would expect from this comment, the tannins or acidity have been beaten into submission, if they ever existed. Buttered toast, coconut, vanilla, caramel don't need to be too dulcet to take up most of the stage. The plum, cherry, black currant fruit more concentrated and darker here, intent on sweetening the pot. Mint or pine, flowers or orange zest, who knows, something like this wafts through. Approachable and "LCD" from start to finish. Wines like this make money for those who sell them. 55% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, 7% Syrah, 3% Petit Verdot. 87

Nine North Wine Company

Central Valley, Lodi, Hullabaloo Old Vines

Zinfandel

2008, \$21.99, 14.9%

Deep purple colored core which nudges up against black, the scarlet to brick red influence starts in the middle and takes full hold by the rims, fully hued but lacks the bright zip of magenta or ruby, no blemishes of note. Sugary, hard candy sweet nature to the cherry, raspberry, blackberry, apple fruit, while no prune notes, conversely there's a vague metallic, fish skin element lurking in the background, no green notes but ample amounts of cinnamon, clove spice, menthol and orange juice, tends to collapse back into itself rather than seek to cover more ground. Full-bodied, dense, if not soggy, just covers your tongue to the point of immobility. Sweet and candied here too and with the same fundamental problem, seemingly underripe phenolics and a tomato skin, metallic edge that gnaws quietly at your otherwise mindless enjoyment. The orange, grapefruit citrus is juicy, straight out of a Tropicana container. Eucalyptus, menthol, flowers and mint play minor roles. The

raspberry, cherry, strawberry, blackberry fruit can't escape the clutches of the clumsy tannin. As a result, shortens through the mid-palate, ending in a gristle-like, chewy finish. Not a bad wine, smooth outside of the stated flaws, not underfruited, best guess would be overly massaged to justify the extra \$8 per bottle it's getting over what's in said bottle. 86

Au Bon Climat

Santa Barbara County

Pinot Noir

2009, \$19.99, 13.5%

Deep ruby to magenta equal to purple in the core, only a slight difference around the rims, favoring a more basic scarlet red, clear and transparent throughout without appearing attenuated. Initially you note a lot of smokiness in the nose, this yields to caramel, butterscotch accents, cooked lemons, cola soda and a semi-pickled cherry, raspberry fruit element, overall there's an overarching sourness which turns you off some. Medium-bodied, while not that "weighty" it does cling in a gluey fashion and you certainly feel its presence with each sip. The acidity level might be a touch high for the lighter primary material, the red cherry, strawberry, raspberry fruit peters out before reaching the finish line. Buttressed some by that butterscotch and caramel but in the end this isn't quite sufficient. Cola, witch hazel and menthol drift through, same can be said for the lemon to mandarin orange citrus. It's not a bad wine per se but it too often seems to be at cross-purposes, pandering on one hand and seeking regality on the other. 86

CALIFORNIA WHITE

Zocker

Edna Valley, Paragon Vineyard

Grüner Veltliner

2009, \$19.99, 13.3%

Clean white-green straw in color, shiny surface, while the hue may not be that deep it simply sparkles in the glass to reignite your gaze. Telltale snap peas and pepper in the nose along with white grapefruit pith and then a mild floral swipe, never soft but becomes creamier as the apricot, peach, nectarine fruit takes hold, may not have that extra gear but more than covers all the basics. Medium-bodied, good grip and sap as it hugs the tongue, the acidity chugs along easily enough, not calling attention to itself. More upfront presence to the white grapefruit, lemon, orange citrus, more crackle than juice. Spicy pepper and cumin notes, mix in a little grassiness and hard to claim its wimpy or lacking in spine. Touch of pineapple and papaya to stiffen the apricot, apple, nectarine fruit. Any stone or mineral accents capable of cresting but not sustaining. In the end it is a very respectable

domestic version of the grape and “ringer” worthy, oddly might need more extract to get to the next level. (Screwcap) 88

Chester’s Anvil (A Lagier Meredith Pott Joint Venture)
Napa Valley, Stagecoach Vineyard, Gretna Green
Blend

2009, \$30.00, 14.2%

The base gold color on the dull side, does take a deeper orange tint at some visual angles, that said, tends to fade towards the rims, affectless surface. The nose betrays a strong oaky character focusing on coconut custard, buttered popcorn and caramel, offers green apple, pear, melon, slightly underripe peach fruit scents, has a floral side, however, the Marsanne apparently dominating the Viognier, much more nutty in character. Full-bodied, more simply dense than layered with a sluggish demeanor, the proverbial bottle of ketchup you have to smack to get anything coming out. Nutty with a honey streak, pleasing semi-sour quality to the lemon and orange citrus. The cleanliness of the apricot, peach, apple, pear fruit enunciated before the advent of the popcorn, butter, caramel, butterscotch, caramel. If allowed to warm some the floral dimension becomes more pronounced. The acidity is kind of decent given relative expectations but still no freshening element. Not poorly crafted, however, still clumsy in the end. 50% Marsanne, 50% Viognier. 85

WASHINGTON RED

Six Prong

Columbia Valley, Horse Heaven Hills

Cabernet Sauvignon

2008, \$20.99, 14.2%

Enough black in the purple core to bring it over to opacity, this despite a natural inclination towards clarity, fresh blood red rims with a healthy burnt orange edge. The nose features oodles of vanilla, chocolate, fresh cream, butter and coconut, once you start to digest this oakiness you realize that the rest is not particularly expressive, dumb cherry, currant fruit as well as flowers and a medicated menthol rub lift, not that diverse an array. Medium-bodied with the sort of big splash into the mouth that makes you suspect it was supposed to be richer and last more through the finish. On the whole dry, the same cherry, currant, plum fruit has a dark complexion yet no resounding sweetness to soak into the tongue. Not toasty, more buttery, the oak offers vanilla, chocolate, caramel and cream but does also bring some dill notes to the table. When evokes an herbaceous streak and a semi-sour grapefruit bite. Not a horrible wine but if you take away the makeup there’s likely not much left on which to

hang your hat. 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Malbec, 4% Petit Verdot, 2% Merlot. 86

FRANCE RED

Aphillanthes, Domaine Les

Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône Villages Plan de Dieu, Cuvée des Galets

Blend

2009, \$19.99, 14.5%

Brightly saturated ruby-purple core yet fully unblemished and close to transparent, the rims a serious red magenta and equally resplendent, very good surface reflectivity. The nose shows a slight reductive funk upon opening then blooms into fresh and juicy raspberry, strawberry, blueberry fruit, wildflowers and orange zest, a few notes of wet wool, on the whole it’s primary and can’t help but emphasize the fruit, its tight weave might allow more alcohol to appear than otherwise. Full-bodied, spreads broadly along the skeleton of tannin and then acidity, still the sheer weight of the material has it soaking into the palate too. Again, hard to ignore the bushels of blackberry, blueberry, raspberry, cherry fruit unloaded onto your tongue. The orange citrus sweet and benefits from a streak of more sour white grapefruit. Chocolate powder and a touch of caramel in proportion and help extend the enjoyment. Moderate stone and wool notes, you can call it “purity of fruit” or a paucity of more complex flavors. In any event, hard not to find pleasure in sipping it, if the tannin softens over next 3-5 years could even improve. 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 20% Mourvèdre. 89

Aufranc, Domaine Pascal

Beaujolais, Chénas, Vieilles Vignes de 1939

Gamay Noir

2009, \$17.99, 12.5%

Basic ruby-violet of good depth as well as clarity and shine, the rims not heavily saturated but you get plenty of magenta with the ruby, just not pinkish. Slight jammy quality lends weight to the strawberry, raspberry, rhubarb, red cherry scents, finds its footing via white grapefruit, dried wildflowers, honey and cinnamon sticks, stony earthiness is there but not overpowering, finds a rhythm and sticks to it. Medium to full-bodied, has riper tannins that cling to your mouth pores and avoid greenness. Still, not overly dry and the floral perfume helps the lift in that same strawberry, raspberry, cherry fruit. Juicy, if zesty, grapefruit to orange citrus pairs up with the fruit to keep the profile approachable. No funk, clean presentation of the stone, earth, in keeping with the whole. Squeezes a touch tighter through the finish, wants to make an impression and does. A little more souplesse and you’ve really got something here. 89

Berthier, Domaine Pascal
Beaujolais, Saint-Amour, Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2009, \$19.99, 13.0%

Somewhat dark ruby-purple core, the glossy surface does not detract from the likewise rich red magenta rims, spotless throughout. Clouds up in your nose, thick if not especially pungent, lots of stone to mineral dust, leather, wood smoke, and dried beef like notes, more presence in the white grapefruit to orange zest than straightforward raspberry, blackberry, red cherry scents, overall acts a little like a street tough. Full-bodied, not dense per se but covers ground from cheek to cheek. Wiry tannins hold it all together, a tight weave at that. Any loose threads extinguished by acidity on the hunt. Savory with salt and iron next to mineral earth, slight forest herbal quality. While sour, the raspberry, pomegranate, cherry, cranberry fruit fares well. The white grapefruit, lemon, mandarin orange citrus stays just this side of sour itself, helps balance things as well as add a "wet" feel. Unwinds a touch with air time. Yet, still ends with a twiggy, grassy note. Comes across as fairly old school. 88

Mourgues du Grès, Château
Rhône, Costières de Nîmes, Les Galets Rouges
Blend
2009, \$14.99, 14.0%

Blood red and black infused purple core, stunning clarity, extremely dark violet to magenta rims, high sparkle to the surface shine. Some reductive funk to be found in the nose, resolves in favor of white to pink grapefruit citrus, iron flecked earth, pressed flowers and then blackberry, black cherry, boysenberry fruit scents, its sinewy lift keeps it simple in terms of breadth but compensates well in terms of freshness. Medium-bodied, energetic yet overall well-balanced without too many a misstep. The acidic charge adds to its grip while also keeping the pacing swift. Floral with the same grapefruit to orange citrus burst, moment of caramel and butterscotch before ceding the floor to brisk, biting red and black cherry, blackberry, blueberry and cranberry fruit, interesting mix in the fruit basket. Leather, clay, brown earth, fallen wood come into play thereafter. Stays tangy and on the aggressive side, digs into you from first sip to last. If you like them with attitude it will grow on you, if you want a casual sipper this is not the one for you at all. 65% Syrah, 20% Grenache, 15% Mourvèdre and Carignan. 87

Coupe Roses, Château
Languedoc/Roussillon, Minervois, Granaxa
Blend
2008, \$23.99, 13.5%

Ruby-tinged purple core, more of a dried red blood around the rims, no brighter ruby nor magenta, no filminess and has decent surface reflectivity. The nose is a touch flat but does not lack for cinnamon spiced plum, raisin, cherry, scents, a generous floral perfume, and some milk chocolate and orange juice as well, has weight and fullness, this can play the part of length. Full-bodied and dense, just enough acidity and lower tannin to keep it moving and avoiding claims of sluggishness. Floral, has substantial sweet and sour white grapefruit to orange citrus. Obvious prune edge to the otherwise cherry, blackberry, plum fruit base. Bit by bit mixes in leather, damp earth and a clump of merde, lacks real mineral bite. Keeps leaning its shoulder into you through the finish, not pushy per se, just uses momentum to best effect. 90% Grenache, 10% Syrah. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Viking, Domaine du
Loire, Vouvray, Tendre
Chenin Blanc
2009, \$21.99, 12.0%

The white to yellow straw coloration isn't attenuated while not fully transparent either, keeps what it has fully through the rims, nothing extra-normal about the surface shine. The nose is juicy and user-friendly, pineapple, maraschino cherry, peach, yellow apple, pear fruit, good diversity, tangelo to tangerine citrus on the sweeter side, golden honey, wet wool and smoke, the floral aspect strong but in no way soft. Medium to full-bodied, not heavy but has such good staying power that it just naturally feels weightier. Clean streamwater, white pebble, sand flavors segue into chili pepper and sparkling tangerine to grapefruit citrus, the acidity is not vengeful but can sling a blade. Conversely, complete ripeness found in the green apple, peach, cherry, nectarine, pineapple, green melon fruit, as in the nose covers many bases. More smoky than grassy, a likely product of said ripeness. The honeyed quality is a coating and not a limelight seeker. Finds erect bearing through the finish, can't complain that it panders to the crowd. 90

Gassier, Michel
Rhône, Costières de Nîmes, Nostre País
Blend
2009, \$19.99, 14.0%

Crisp golden color, light green tint, brightly shiny with clear and transparent rims. Snappy and invasive nose of lilacs, violets, mixed white citrus, streamwater and metallic mineral dust, the green melon, pear, apple, apricot fruit deepened some by a dash of honey to brown sugar, always stays firm and muscular but not unyielding, keeps shifting enough to hold your

attention. Medium-bodied, the acidity puts a charge into things but no real cutting bite. The spicy oak able to leverage buttered toast, vanilla, butterscotch to bring things back towards the middle. Sweet and tangy lemon, orange, tangerine citrus adds sparkle. Could use just a bit more juiciness to the apple, green melon, peach fruit. As it warms the minerality elevates while curiously it manages a creamier finish. Were it a bit sweeter you could move some serious product here. 90% Grenache Blanc, 5% Roussanne, 5% Viognier. 89

Tribut, Laurent
Burgundy, Chablis, Côte de Léchet
Chardonnay
2009, \$40.99, 13.0%

Lighter white to yellow straw in complexion, average clarity and shine, not washed out by any stretch, however, neither much to remark upon. The nose plays off of a fetching burst of lemon and lime citrus accompanied by flowers and mint, very credible amount of minerals, stone and smoke, more snap than juice to the apple, pear, peach scents, never too acrid and puts on more weight nearer room temperature, true to type and accessible. Medium to full-bodied, in spite of the broad and dampening acidity offers an initial creamy mouthfeel emphasizing vanilla and butterscotch in addition to that sweetly zesty lime, lemon citrus. The florality gets partially submerged into the bolder minerality and stoniness, here a touch of grassiness also heightens the former. More skin and pit in the apricot, apple, pear, cherry fruit than softer wetness. Carries its weight well and crafts a full finish which avoids undue dryness. Technically speaking this is a nice wine, still, it never quite excites you enough to reach the next level. 89

Bouchard, Domaine Pascal
Burgundy, Chablis, Les Vieilles Vignes
Chardonnay
2008, \$24.99, 12.5%

Golden straw coloration, neither that shiny nor dull, as much brown as brighter yellow, subtle hue loss along the rims, more of a solid mass than layered appearance. Flowers, slate and minerals give the nose verve, a vanillin undertone smooths out the bottom, slight pickled aspect brings out more pear, apple fruit than peach, apricot, some orange blossom, sinewy without becoming tiring. Medium-bodied, tighter and leaner here as the acidity gives it a tacky mouth feel and the stony aspects keep it dry and thick skinned. The vanilla, caramel becomes more pronounced as it warms yet never sufficient to fully activate the latent sweetness in the apricot, nectarine, cherry fruit. More saline and herbal matter comes through at the finish. It's a perfectly fine example of entry level Chablis but

also one that reminds you of when such bottles cost half as much. (Composite Cork: Diam) 88

Michel & Fils, Louis
Burgundy, Chablis
Chardonnay
2009, \$25.99, 12.5%

Unremarkable white to yellow straw coloration, would be transparent were it not for a layering aspect, decent surface shine, visually stays close to the Chablis script. Bountiful florality in the nose alongside mint, dried orange peel and pit and skin inflected apricot, peach and apple fruit, somewhat demure stone, streamwater element without any smokiness, remains freshly sweet, has more pungency nearer to room temperature. Medium-bodied, the acidity feels like a damp blanket, tends to cover and restrict movement more than brighten. So, it's dry yet not crisply so, more the absence of juiciness. The floral dimension remains its strongest selling point, here able to elevate the peach, apple, melon fruit. Same mint, cinnamon spice touch, the stone, slate parts are durable if inexpressive. Softer than you'd generally prefer but not wimpy, covers enough of the basic food groups to evade serious critique. (Screwcap: Stelvin Lux+) 87

FRANCE DESSERT

Tour Vieille, Domaine La
Languedoc/Roussillon, Banyuls, Blanc Doux
Blend
2008, \$28.99, 16.0%

Light golden straw color, hard for the rims to seem weak given this, transparent and clean. Mint, vanilla custard, candied orange peel, anise, cinnamon make for a full, well-stuffed nose, smooth and round pear, red apple, peach fruit scents of moderate depth, in no way complex, more so satisfying in its simplicity, if there's any flaw it's a bit boozy. Medium-bodied, good taut mouth feel, this without possessing a strong acidic spine. The orange, tangerine glaze comes through clearly, really lays on the vanilla pudding, caramel, butterscotch to the point of breaking. Licorice, mint, witch hazel add to its erect posture, mouth fumes as well. The peach, apricot, pear, cherry, green apple fruit dappled in syrup. It's very interesting but ultimately not altogether pleasing. 50% Grenache Blanc, 50% Grenache Gris. 500 ml bottle 86

ITALY RED

Marchi, Società Agricola Vigneti De

Piedmont, Lessona

Proprietà Sperino

Nebbiolo

2005, \$71.99, 12.5%

Slight gauziness to the brick red, adobe clay red core, any purple is already diminished and a secondary influence, takes on a mild ruby brightening further out, average surface luster. In the nose the cherry, raspberry fruit shows decent concentration but a definite runner-up to the oak, bigger vanilla powder, buttered toast, cedar, mesquite smoke, shows a quality mineral side as well, maybe a touch too stern for the floral dimension to shine, earthy but not overtly rustic. Medium-bodied, here the tannin and acidity easily outlast the rest and, while managed as well as possible, will always be in charge. Dry pith quality in the white grapefruit, lemon citrus, pressed flowers, gains some layered weight via leather, cedar, anise and rosemary-led garden herbs. Sour tang infuses the red cherry, cranberry, raspberry fruit, crests nicely in the mid-palate. Chewy, enjoyable in its own right, however, no doubt a fatty, hearty food accompaniment would help a lot. 95% Nebbiolo, 5% Vespolina. 89

Isole e Olena

Tuscany, Chianti Classico

Sangiovese

2008, \$24.99, 14.5%

Unblemished and shiny, fully transparent, presents a blood red based core with accents of black violet and orange rust, further out it's more of a solid crimson hue, still very bright and nothing to suggest anything but a young wine. The nose brings out licorice, pressed flower petals, raspberry to maraschino cherry fruit, pine needles and orange to white grapefruit pith, maybe a touch on the soft side, adequate lift as well as general staying power. Medium-bodied, sweet and softish here as well, the acidity and tannin have been massaged into the whole so as to lose the ability to put any serious charge into things. That said, not sloppy nor prone, brings enough herbal notes as well as tomato skin, brown earth and leather to force some attention away from the sweet and candied cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit. Subtle shades of caramel, vanilla appear, restrained by a progressively drier mid-palate to finish. As it opens that orange, grapefruit dimension becomes a larger factor. As far as Chianti goes it is a very good "split the difference" choice at its price point, not all that traditional nor modern and discernibly of its place. 88

Casabianca, Fattoria

Tuscany, Coppaja

Blend

2009, \$12.99, 14.0%

Clear shimmer to the otherwise black-purple core, nowhere near opacity, ruby to brighter brick red takes it from the core through to the rims, given its overall clarity the rims, more pretty than impressive in the glass. The nose comes across as closed at first, mute and then a mix of earth and grass, then a menthol rub, sour lemon, basil element comes through, luckily followed on by hard candy, if not sugary, red cherry, raspberry, blackberry scents, tough love but not unapproachable. Medium-bodied, the tannin and acidity is not off the charts but, at the same time, this is no easy, cheap quaff. The herbaceous grassiness can be a turnoff for those who don't dig such things, compensates with a spoonful of caramel and milk chocolate. The cherry, raspberry, watermelon, strawberry fruit can't get out of the "red" spectrum. The lemon to orange citrus is dry and pithy, hehe, coats the mouth in tacky grit. Floral dust, mint, anise and more garden herbs eventually soften things up until it reaches "country wine" status. Honestly flawed. 50% Sangiovese, 25% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Composite cork) 86

ITALY WHITE

Vajra, G.D.

Piedmont, Langhe Bianco

Riesling

2009, \$42.99, 13.5%

Faint yellow gold coloration with a distinct green tint, fades to hueless clarity around the rims, moderate surface shine. Attractively floral nose with a dollop of honey to caramel next to a tangerine, lemon, white grapefruit spritz, needs to warm for the depth of the peach, apricot, apple, Bosc pear to really gain hold, offers a finely powdery stone to chalk dusting, not especially mineral, leans heavily on those flowers to impress. Medium-bodied, overall has a dry to tacky mouth feel, not enough to hamper the ripe juiciness of the pear, peach, apricot, kiwi, cherry fruit. Also displays a good deal of ripeness in the tangelo, pink grapefruit citrus, sugary and this even before the honey starts to coat things. The acidity puts a muscular charge into the proceedings and can keep things edging closer to a more balanced dryness. An excellent effort for relatively young vines. 91

Venica & Venica, Societa Agricola
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Collio, Ronco delle Mele
Sauvignon Blanc
2009, \$38.99, 13.5%
Fine depth to the golden core, solid block appearance, slight amber edge at certain angles, surface is not quite flat yet not particularly glistening either. Gentle floral lift to the nose bolstered by grapefruit, lemon zest, the grassiness ever-present with impinging on the rest, touch of chili pepper infuses the gooseberry, nectarine, pineapple, peach scents, moderate stoniness, has both breadth as well as muscular persistence, at times reminds you more of Sauvignon from New Zealand. Full-bodied, more stuffing than fat, the pepper and pickle noticeable from the start, never quite gets to minerally. Pungent herbaceousness avoids bitterness, this aided by the inherent sweetness of the pineapple, papaya, nectarine, peach fruit. Here the florality given less room to play, pretty nonetheless. The acidity kind of a blunt weapon, no slasher flick. Impressively scaled, needs more finesse to make a deeper imprint. 89

Bidoli
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Grave del Friuli
Gewürztraminer
2009, \$13.99, 13.0%
Mix of white to yellow gold in color, shows a light fizz in the glass, rims fairly empty, acceptable surface shine for a grape not known for such things. The nose shows its place of origin via mineral water, stone and washed pebble notes, on the lean side without aggression, tangerine and grapefruit citrus with only a whiff of florality, minute nuttiness, good tang to the nectarine, pineapple, green apple, peach scents, pretty like a lithe, athletic field hockey player. Medium-bodied, displays more “give” here, particularly as it warms, the acidity lays down a fast paced back beat and can lash a tongue or two. Again, the grapefruit, tangerine to lime citrus leads the pack, not metallic enough to really be minerally but stony for sure. Not enough softness in the floral side to really help it soak in more deeply. Kiwi, pineapple, nectarine, guava fruit, however, without the kind of sugariness which conjures up the descriptor “tropical.” What it is, is pleasing in a challenging manner, you know you can like it and you know you can match it to certain foods, but the dance is not going to be a simple affair. (Synthetic Cork: Integra) 88

SPAIN RED

Resalte de Peñafiel, Bodegas
Ribera del Duero, Crianza
Tempranillo
2005, \$43.99, 15.0%
Ruby to blood red infusion into the otherwise purple colored core, no filminess but perhaps a slight dusky quality, the rims a pure scarlet red, lively while appearing as a wine with a touch of age to it. Big floral perfume to the nose, sweetens the red cherry, raspberry, boysenberry fruit, the oak presents more of a finely grained toast than any creaminess, equal parts damp earth to orange citrus pulp, keeps a firm, lean shape with good penetration even as the floral dew keeps sinking in deeper. Medium-bodied with a gentle touch, spreads softly across the palate, this again without the benefit of much creaminess and just touches of vanilla, chocolate from the oak. Slightly roasted nuance to the hard candy sweet cherry, raspberry, strawberry, watermelon fruit flavors. Full mix of sweet and sour in the orange to lemon citrus. Not as overtly floral here but there’s anise seed, basil and cedar accents. To its credit, the individual components are woven into a whole more than stand out on their own so, in the end, you just have to take a sip, close your eyes, and decide if it’s for you. 89

PORTUGAL DESSERT

Infantado, Quinta do
Douro, Medium-Dry Ruby Port
Blend
NV, \$18.99, 19.5%
The base purple color infiltrated fully by orange to crimson hues, immaculately clear, the rims have a slight burnt quality yet not that distinct from the core. Fresh nose of as much green apple and apricot fruit as prune, raisin, fig, the molasses and brown sugar proportionate, spiced orange peel, potpourri, vague smokiness, its purity and lightness main calling cards, doesn’t wear out your olfactory sense. Medium-bodied, quite fluid and without undue presence of tannin nor acidity, same for alcoholic burn. Naval orange, white grapefruit citrus enlivens the golden raisin, fig, date to apricot, peach, apple fruit. Gains more suave qualities from the light caramel, butterscotch touches to the cocoa foundation. Mild tobacco resin to tarry earth, charred smoker wood. Just about everything here is lowkey and genial, too versatile and flowing to be the quintessential “roaring fire and pipe” style port. At once its strength and weakness. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão, etc. 88