

The Hanes Wine Review, March 2010 Edition

Tanzer always starts off his wine reviews with a market report on the current “temperature” of the world of wine. Works for him, why not for Hanes? So, here is Hanes’s market report for Concord, North Carolina during the first quarter 2010.

Trending up is any bottle with the name “Markovic Estate” on the label. This producer from the Languedoc produces both a Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon which taste interchangeable. Both are juicy, sweet, soft red wines. They are apparently like liquid crack to the denizens of Concord, who buy these wines by the case, something heretofore never seen within city limits, where a customer buying 2-3 bottles of any wine at once seems like the commitment of a lifetime. Also hot is the new by-the-glass pour, Apothic Red from California. A blend of Syrah, Zinfandel and Merlot, it tastes like red-dyed oak and confectionary sugar and people cannot stay away, the tentatively purchased eight bottles for this new BTG special sold through in two days [note to Hanes, order full case this week]. Naturally this wine is sold by the distributor of Gallo. Holding steady and looking to explode with the warmer weather of 2Q/ 10 is the Argentinean blend of some kind of grapes that fizzes called “New Age.” Chicks really dig it, it goes extremely well with the snarky, backbiting conversations of young women who hide daily behind the façade of being “proper, polite Southern women.” Any cheap red Zinfandel under \$12 is garnering substantial market share. Traditional brand leaders such as Red Diamond Merlot, Ménage-a-Trois red blend, 14 Hands Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, and any wines labeled Layer Cake continue their unchallenged dominance. Sweet Rieslings have successfully fought off efforts by late harvest Chardonnay and local Seyval Blanc blends to capture the fancy of most of the XX chromosome clientele. However, a recent surge in sales of Moscato d’Asti could point to a new champion during the second half of 2010. In the beer segment, Miller Lite has already shown renewed vigor going into the spring. Blue Moon is on the precipice of exploding into a leading position once more.

Trending down precipitously are any wines from Spain, red or white. Additionally, Italian wines appear to be stuck in the same rut as during the whole of 2009 with only sporadic signs of sustained life. Australian wines are dead beyond resuscitation and are being replaced by cheap domestic Petite Sirah. Hanes expects to see severe retrenchment of the whole rosé sector during coming months despite the fact that this would be the time of year when sales typically skyrocket. Sparkling wines remain in the doldrums, with only moderate sales, all under \$15. Virtually all sales of bottles costing \$40 or more are nonexistent, underscoring either continued fear among consumers during the economic downturn or the utter cheapness of anyone living in Concord. The sole exceptions are the brands that have earned their reputation for unparalleled excellence, particularly for Californian Cabernet, such as Caymus, Silver Oak, Plumpjack, and Jordan. Hanes expects these blue chips to fend off any challenges for the foreseeable future. The same can be said for Rombauer, Jordan and Sonoma-Cutrer in the ultra-premium Chardonnay segment.

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This month’s big winners... Hanes is going, next vintage costs more, adios. Another “Hanes has to special order a bottle of real wine for himself before he goes crazy” moment brings us Puffeney’s 2007 Trousseau from the Jura, “Cuvée Les Bérangères.” Electric presence, lots of energy and has a personality you can’t ignore. Whew. Anytime you want to impress on a date, order a bottle of Petite Arvine. Especially if it is the 2008 “Vigne Rovettaz” bottling from the Valle d’Aosta’s Grosjean Frères. You can sit back and enjoy the fresh fruit, honey and stone notes while the acidity slices your date to pieces, making the rest of the evening much easier. Weingut A. Christmann is fairly difficult to locate in NYC so Hanes was surprised to find it here in North Carolina. Their 2008 “Riesling I Trocken” from the Pfalz is typical of the winery, a powerful, in-your-face wine which won’t let you ignore it. Such dry Riesling would languish on retail shelves were a NC retail buyer stupid enough to purchase it. If you want a moderately priced Aussie Shiraz that isn’t pure goop, may Hanes suggest the 2007 Schild Estate from the Barossa Valley? Honestly, it’s quite good. No shit, really. And only twenty bucks.

The best \$15 and under picks... Trace Wines makes an easy to enjoy Merlot for about \$13 from the Tracy Hills AVA in California. Good stuff, pretty label, still Merlot. From Napa the 2008 KitFox red blend called “Foxy” is simple juice that could please many folks for \$15, no real data available on the grapes used. Not sure who Tamás Estates is, waaay too many wineries out there, but their 2007 cheapie blend “Double Decker Red” is an easy buy for around \$10. Blah, blah, blah, more great cheap white wine from Gascony. Ballade’s 2008 blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Colombard is a steal for \$11, verve and grit, nothing wimpy about it. Domaine du Cros from the Marcellac region in Southwest France always delivers. Their 2007 basic bottling is the best Fer Servadou based wine you will have this month. OK, maybe it will be the 2008 but Hanes hasn’t tried it yet. \$14 well spent (their 2005 old vines bottling is a touch more expensive but also most excellent).

And the disappointments... Got to try my first wine from Wind Gap in California, their 2007 “Griffin’s Lair” Syrah. Decent wine, similar in many respects to the winery’s previous incarnation, so to speak. \$48 is too high pour moi, you decide yourself. Never heard of Aqua Pumpkin before recently but their basic 2007 Pinot Noir from Santa Barbara is another example of how California can’t compete broadly against the world for inexpensive Pinot. As we march through more previously unknown wineries, witness the 2007 Odisea Lodi blend called “Unusual Suspects” – sounds like a nice kitchen sink blend of Carignane, Tempranillo and Grenache, however, for \$21 it’s kind of a messy joke. Had hopes for an Oregonian Grüner Veltliner, sounds cool, huh? Alas, the 2008 Illahe version had little character and tasted more like sweet Riesling. \$18 can get you better Austrian examples, even with the USD sucking ass. Not every purchase of relatively obscure wine turns out well. The 2008 Jacquère from Eugène Carrel from the Savoie, France was a taciturn bottles of wine, luckily only \$12. Which may have been the problem. A new Spanish name to Hanes is Celler Piñol from the Terra Alta region. Supposedly, their 2008 “Ludovicus” bottling was thought highly of elsewhere. Tastes kind of thrown together, not an obvious crowd pleaser but also lacking in clear traditional roots. Not sure what the winemaking intent

here was. In the same vein, the 2007 Water Wheel blend "Memsie" from Victoria, Australia suffers from the same lack of direction and harmony. Previous vintages have been much better. Crazy.

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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 March!

CALIFORNIA RED

Turley
Contra Costa County, Salvador Vineyard
Zinfandel
2007, \$38.00, 15.5%
Straightforward, uncomplicated ruby-purple in color, high degree of clarity gives more breadth to the magenta rims. Explosion of juicy raspberry, strawberry, blackberry, watermelon fruit in the nose, cotton candy, caramel, menthol, violets, happy like a big slobbering dog, even manages to mask the alcohol fairly well. Medium-bodied, silky smooth and achieves more mouth presence from its sweetness than sheer weight. Finespun powdered sugar coats the raspberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit, some counterpoint from more sour cranberry notes. Orange citrus, pine, menthol lend depth as well as additional sweet and sour interplay. The oak inspired toffee, butterscotch, hard coffee candy flavors smooth out the finish. Eschews complexity for maximizing its ability to simply please. 90

Lagier Meredith
Napa Valley, Mount Veeder
Syrah
2007, \$48.00, 14.4%
Although opaque, vibrantly deep purple core, the clarity displayed through the dark magenta rims where purple remains a strong influence. In the nose you are first struck by wildflowers, loamy earthiness, mint and other sweet herbs, mixed citrus peels, the red currant, blackberry fruit scents taut yet possessed of length, some stoniness but more so a pine breeze led dissolve. Full-bodied, muscularly firm, the attack a battle between the sharp acidity and the grainy oak toast, the former wins in the later rounds. Compact currant, Italian plum, black cherry fruit, very solid and long, if not explosive. Orange, grapefruit citrus, cowhide, poor earth and pebbles, rosemary, all add

something to the mix. Light metallic or tomato skin edge. By the second glass you really start to feel the tannic punch. The material here is quire formidable but one senses that it is already starting to shut down some and is either best enjoyed fresh after bottling or years down the road. 90

Bedrock Wine Co.
Sonoma County, Old Lakeville Vineyard
Syrah
2007, \$35.00, 15.5%
Extremely dark purple, however, clarity is evident, fully saturated red-magenta rims, sleek surface, impressive with lots of legs. Strong floral perfume to the nose, close to garrigues in nature, blueberry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit, minty, orange to tangerine zest, with air time more vanilla and caramel accents come through, remains stiff throughout. Medium-bodied, stern and muscular yet flows at a steady pace. Cranberry and red cherry tart up the darker blueberry, blackberry, just as sour as sweet. Grapefruit, tangerine citrus lively and longlasting. The tannins are sort of chewy, however, the acidity revs the engines higher. The oak is subtle but there, lowgrade toast and vanilla extract. Touch of leather at the end. Takes time to penetrate it but rewards your persistence. 99% Syrah, 1% Viognier. 90

Trace Wines
Tracy Hills, Mount Oso Vineyard
Merlot
2007, \$12.99, 14.4%
Purple core infused with a ruby streak, becomes successively redder as it pushes outwards towards the rims, bright brick coloration. Plummy nose with ample black cherry and blackberry backup as well, cinnamon and ginger spice there, the vanilla bean and caramel not overdone, relies all but completely on the fruit. Full-bodied, supple and smooth, as in the nose majority of the emphasis on the cherry, blackberry, plum fruit, borderline sugary. As such, credible and achieves the goal admirably.

More sweet spices, orange pekoe tea, light oak toast, mint leaf. The tannins are sort of woody, though, drying but not necessarily structuring. There's really not much to say except that it's a quality, inexpensive Californian Merlot. An arrow in the quiver. (Synthetic Cork) 88

Jocelyn Lonen Winery
Napa Valley, Lonen
Cabernet Sauvignon
2007, \$23.99, 14.5%

Light brick red touch to the deep purple core, rich crimson rims with a burnt orange tinge, heavy glow draws you visually. Thick, sticky plum, blackberry fruit in the nose, close to sugary but then comes the bell pepper, straw and meadow brush notes, eucalyptus and vanilla cream then turns the boat once more, doesn't quite deliver the earthiness and cedar you might expect. Full-bodied, for its weight and thrust, stays smooth and fairly balanced from start to finish. Fully loaded with cherry, blackberry, raspberry fruit as well as vanilla fudge, milk chocolate and sweet baking spices. Orange zest, cedar, mint and eucalyptus sweeten things even more. Kinda, maybe suggests leather or damp earth. Maybe. For a fairly odd blend, gets its ducks in a row. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Charbono, 5% Malbec. 88

JanKris
San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Crossfire
Blend
2005, \$13.99, 14.5%

Reddish purple core of modest opacity, the brick red rims clear enough to see through, pleasing surface shine. Good density to the nose, plum, black cherry fruit scents, attractive floral lift, more dark chocolate and mocha than caramel oak nuances, faint eucalyptus breeze, clean given the ripeness evident. Medium-bodied, very compact and tightly wound, has the material to spread broader than it does. The tannins are strong, indeed, but not overbearing. Instead, you get the impression that it needs more bottle time, this for a wine whose cork was pulled hours before this exercise in typing. Burly currant, plum, black cherry fruit lasts throughout. Orange zest, eucalyptus, pressed flowers, cocoa powder and a surprising degree of mineral dust and earth. Grows on you, wait to render a final judgment. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 25% Syrah. 88

Wind Gap
Sonoma County, Sonoma Coast, Griffin's Lair
Syrah
2007, \$48.00, 14.6%

Effulgent scarlet purple core, even there noticeably clear, the rims full of glowing scarlet, blood red, built to impress in the glass. The nose offers one big haymaker punch of caramel, toffee oak, soft and saturating, moves into mint, eucalyptus and super dense and semi-sour currant, blackberry, cranberry scents, the floral musk too heavy to achieve any lift, nothing here suggesting a more savage profile. Full-bodied, dense in terms of structure, not necessarily richness of flavor. Dry with some tannic dust, hints at underripeness. Not much sweetness in the currant, plum, blueberry fruit. That said, butterscotch and caramel oak try their best to sweeten the pot. The white grapefruit and lemon citrus are super-sour, team up with iron-like metal flakes. Tasty after a fashion, however, its sense of direction and integration an issue. 88

KitFox Family Vineyards
Napa Valley, Foxy
Blend
2008, \$14.99, 13.5%

Red ruby to purple in color, a bit lighter and clearer than expected, more ruby than scarlet at the rims as well. Sweet, at times sugary, nose of very ripe cherry, plum, raspberry fruit, not that dark in complexion, faux sheen of leather, cedar and earth, these quickly subsumed in the fruitiness, caramel scented accomplice. Medium-bodied, satiny smooth in how it slowly covers the palate. The caramel, vanilla fudge, butterscotch oak notes more overt here, working in tandem with the cherry, blackberry, boysenberry fruit flavors. No rough edges, tannins close to non-existent. White grapefruit, orange citrus adds some diversity. Minor floral breeze. For no apparent reason does dry up a touch at the finish which breaks up the homogeneity. Really, just a friendly chugger with no desire to be taken seriously. One hopes. Cabernet Sauvignon based blend. (Composite Cork) 87

Aqua Pumpkin Winery
Santa Barbara County
Pinot Noir
2007, \$22.99, 14.6%

Deep purple color, comes with a reddish tinge, barely lightens to a brooding dark magenta around the rims, average surface shine. In the nose you get a good bit of cola and pressed flowers, sweet baking spices and orange peel, rhubarb, raspberry and strawberry fruit scents, while "pretty" in its own way, sufficient alcoholic fumes to throw it off its game. Medium-bodied with most of the weight front-loaded, the alcoholic heat evident here too, otherwise you get a pleasing core of pomegranate, strawberry, cranberry, rhubarb fruit as well as that cola edge. The orange citrus more dried out here. The acidity not especially refreshing, the tannins have a blanketing effect. Some licorice and floral notes. All in all it's not a bad example, and without truly glaring flaws sans the alcohol, however, there's little here to warrant the price tag. 87

Coffaro, David
Sonoma County, Wine Guerrilla
Zinfandel
2007, \$19.99, 14.6%

While fairly clear there's a flat blackness to the purple core, dark red-ruby rims, visually "plays the part" but little noteworthy. Molasses, honey and caramel sweeten up the nose, deepen the raspberry, blueberry fruit scents, notes of green apple as well, light menthol touch, nothing about it seems forced. Medium-bodied, while sweet, lean and at times almost angular in feel, the acidity and, to a lesser extent, tannin a constant presence. Lots of snap and crackle to the blueberry, blackberry, raspberry fruit, dash of pomegranate as well. Menthol and pressed flowers a side dish. Vanilla and cocoa come through as it relaxes at the finish. Could stand to have more "flow" to it, maybe trying too hard to be old school. 91% Zinfandel, 3% Petite Sirah, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Malbec, 1% Carignan. (Screwcap) 87

Cline
Regional Blend, California, Cashmere
Blend
2008, \$18.99, 15.0%

Nice clarity and cleanliness to the red-ruby to violet color, thins out to a redder magenta near the rims. Pleasing bubbly character to the raspberry, blackberry fruit in the

nose, more red than dark in character, wildflowers and white grapefruit, touch of caramel, soft with easy to grasp contours. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with that same smooth texture absent any rough patches. Makes no bones about leaning on the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, sweet and close to sugary. Credible orange to white grapefruit citrus too, the Mourvèdre gives it some wooly notes. Acidity and tannin know well enough to steer clear. Has that funny "seems complex" character whereas does not stand up to more critical analysis. But who the hell analyzes their wine? 44% Mourvèdre, 35% Grenache, 21% Syrah. 87

Tamás Estates

Regional Blend, Central Coast, Double Decker Red Blend

2007, \$9.99, 13.5%

Red-ruby lightens the purple core quite some, keeps it simple ruby around the rims, unblemished. Popcorn, butterscotch, caramel in the nose lets you know oak is in the house, hyper-juicy blackberry, blueberry, raspberry fruit scents, floral dew, lemon pulp, mint leaf, focused on friendliness. Full-bodied, genially sloppy mouth entry, splashes around the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry fruit as well as tangerine and lemon citrus. Some acidity present but nothing that is going to mop up the wet juiciness. Caramel, toffee but oak presence here much less than in the nose. Sunny disposition, disarms you and any attempts to think about it. Unspecified percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Barbera. (Screwcap) 87

Winesmith Cellars

Regional Blend, California Planet Pluto Meritage Blend

2005, \$17.99, 13.5%

Deep red-purple core, segues to a solid crimson red with a hint of zinc orange. Full and somewhat soft nose, like puffy bread, broadly established contours, but not everything inside is solid, you get the expected burst of bell pepper, leather and loamy earth, coffee roast, pain grille, fried butter follow on without interlude, pine forest breeze, manages well to allude to a personality it never has to deliver on. Medium-bodied, more pucker factor on the mouth entry than expected, only minor and welcome grassiness, that's not it. Semi-tart red cherry, raspberry, pomegranate fruit, smacks you then not sure how to apologize. Strong white grapefruit streak, outdistances the caramel, toffee bits. Inserts some earthen stone and cowhide, needs it. A decent blend which deserves some attention at its price point. Fuck Pluto. 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 44% Cabernet Franc, 11% Merlot. 87

Odisea

Central Valley, Lodi, Unusual Suspects Blend

2007, \$20.99, 13.9%

Brick red to purple hued core, not opaque, not transparent, just clean and relatively dark, rims show more scarlet. Fruit-driven nose of red cherry, raspberry, strawberry, some fresh cream spooned on top, spiced orange peels, licorice, avoids becoming herbaceous, not a lot of weight but can't say it "lifts" either. Light to medium-bodied, again features candied, sugary cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit albeit without much length. Here, the grassiness does raise up, particularly past the mid-palate. The orange citrus embellished by lemon and white grapefruit stripes. As said many times before, nothing wrong per se, just tastes like a bunch of grapes thrown

together which sort of fit together. 55% Carignane, 35% Tempranillo, 10% Grenache. 86

Nine North Wine Company

Regional Blend, North Coast, Rock & Vine Three Ranches Cabernet Sauvignon

2006, \$16.99, 14.1%

Reddish purple in color, switches to a vibrant brick red around the rims, good shine across the surface. Not too much going on in the nose, basic currant, cherry fruit scents, cedar, leather, driftwood, minimal oak presence, it's there in your nostrils but not capitalizing on the opportunity. Medium-bodied, too much grit and graininess in the tannins to allow the sheer juiciness of the cherry, blackberry, plum fruit to show its best. White citrus bite leads any cedar, leather, wood smoke notes, minimal oak presence to act as a balm or at least blanket. Average length, nothing special but doesn't punk out either. Serviceable if your choices aren't too deep. 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 2% Malbec, 2% Petit Verdot. 85

Rutherford Grove

Lake County, Quackenbush Mountain Vineyards Zinfandel

2006, \$14.99, 14.8%

Fairly clear throughout, the purple core lightened by a scarlet tint, stays consistent through the brick red rims, some ruby left at the outermost reaches. Sweet and sugary nose, if with little depth, banana, red cherry, apricot, red apple fruit, kind of all over the map, molasses and honey glaze your nose hairs, glimmer of mentholated lift before it all dissolves. Medium-bodied, given the sugariness through the attack you sort of expect more heft and density. Not to say there's a lack of thrust to the raspberry, red cherry, cranberry and blueberry fruit, it's there. Just not the length. Here the molasses, brown sugar, toffee tries to help out, to mixed results. Low level moments of pine and menthol. Truly, it's pretty decent until it just falls off the table at the end. (Screwcap: Stelvin) 85

JanKris

San Luis Obispo County, Paso Robles, Picaro Blend

2005, \$13.99, 14.0%

Very light and near transparent scarlet to purple in color, more burnt red to amber around the rims, spotless surface. Sweet, juicy nose of strawberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit, soft and monochrome, shades of mint and milk chocolate, maybe a quiet floral touch, nothing else going on. Medium-bodied, yet lighter than expected, the sweetness is almost all front-loaded into the attack. There you get candied strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit. Afterwards a growing astringency takes over, along the lines of underripe tannin. The accompanying herbaceous nature naturally brings out more stone and earth, any oak toast or caramel lost in the whirl. Minor notes of white grapefruit and pressed flowers. Truncated finish. 50% Zinfandel, 25% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon. 84

WASHINGTON RED

Corvidae Wine Co.

Columbia Valley, Rook Cabernet-Merlot-Syrah Blend

2007, \$15.99, 14.3%

Unblemished ruby-violet in color, more clay red to garnet at the rims, pretty damn shiny. Creamy nose bursting with

whipped cream, vanilla fudge, butterscotch, accompanied by mint, pine and mesquite grill smoke, alcoholic fumes cut away at the depth of the plum, blackberry fruit scents. Full-bodied, generous and round, coats every mouth pore equally and without favor. Total concentration by the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit to eagerly please. The tannins fully neutered. Caramel, toffee, vanilla bean notes indicate no stinting on the oak. Menthol and orange sherbet add to the general fluffiness. Ginger, coriander and clove spice read the memo fully. No roughness, however, toastiness increases at the end. Fruit lover alert. 57% Merlot, 26% Syrah, 17% Cabernet Sauvignon. 88

Dusted Valley Vintners
Columbia Valley, Boomtown
Cabernet Sauvignon
2006, \$16.99, 14.2%

It's not cloudiness nor filminess per se, but something prevents the complete clarity you think should be there in the reddish purple core through to the dusky crimson rims, has an honest look without extra forced saturation. Toffee and caramel come through clearly in the nose, coconut toast as well, ripeness but not excessive juiciness in the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents, more like hard candy, a waft of floral perfume but not much else. Medium-bodied, here the tannins form an admirable skeleton so that there's something to hang the flesh on. Still loads up on the butterscotch, caramel, toffee elements, less overt toastiness although at times you get espresso beans. White grapefruit accents are welcome, helps to tease out some tea leaf, cedar nuances. The cherry, raspberry, currant fruit stays on the "red" side of the spectrum. It benefits from some aeration and time open, not going to show its all pop and pour. In the end, a good amount of Cabernet character comes through and there's enough oak to please the crowd. [Screwcap] 87

OREGON WHITE

Bergström
Willamette Valley, Old Stones
Chardonnay
2008, \$21.99, 13.6%

Gauzy yellow straw color, its translucency allows it to stay mostly full through the rims, surface neither dull nor shiny. Lime and lemon zest pair up with finely toasted oak in the nose to give it a clean, forward direction, allows room for floral perfume and golden honey as well as broadening peach, apricot, pear fruit scents, without much fanfare digs deeply into your nostrils. Medium-bodied, the oak is evident from the first sip, yet, as in the nose, it's finely grained and toasty and avoids less interesting butterscotch or caramel flavors. Here the apricot, pear, yellow apple fruit beats the lemon citrus to the punch. Flower water and some basic stoniness, nothing near a mineral edge. Still, offers clean contours and stands up for itself rather than try to ingratiate. Slightly overpriced but you could do a helluva lot worse. [Screwcap] 88

Illahe
Willamette Valley
Grüner Veltliner
2008, \$17.99, 12.5%

Flat and somewhat dilute straw gold color, curiously holds on very well through the rims, guess there wasn't much hue intensity to lose. Sweet honey and brown sugar plays a sizeable role in the nose, candied orange slices, mint, juicy peach, red apple, pear, there's barely anything here which

suggests Grüner Veltliner, vaguest of grassy whisper before it all dissolves. Full-bodied, more of the same here with honey, molasses, caramelized brown sugar paving the road. Sufficient acidity to brighten the orange, lemon and then pink grapefruit citrus pulp, remains sweet. The apple, pear, peach, melon fruit easy and agreeable. Stone stream pebbles but no true mineral bite. Same for grassiness or pepper, nada surf. At the very end you get some pineapple, at least something with some snap to it. 85

FRANCE RED

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Moulin-à-Vent, Les Trois Roches
Gamay Noir
2008, \$29.99, 12.5%

Spotlessly clear dark ruby, the violet a deepening aspect, stays ruby at the rims rather than develop a typical pink-magenta glow. The nose fills with mineral powder, metal shavings, ground grass before a swelling of strawberry, cranberry, raspberry scents, clean earthiness, white grapefruit peels, self-assured pungency, lingers is too wimpy a word for it. Medium-bodied, wiry without an ounce of fat on its frame, immense clarity from the raspberry, strawberry, cranberry, pomegranate fruit through the grapefruit, lemon citrus on to the grass, herb elements. The earth, mineral, stone parts quietly provide, duh, the immobile foundation. The acidity vibrates throughout, ensuring active life above said foundation. Probably only sleeps four hours a night. 92

Ondines, Domaine les
Rhône, Vacqueyras
Blend
2007, \$19.99, 14.5%

Unblemished ruby-violet in color, achieves good depth without giving up clarity, the rims dark enough to stay in the realm of red-ruby and not magenta. The cherry, blackberry fruit subdued in the nose, more life in the wildflowers, mint leaf and lemon peel, while smoky hardly any trace of oakiness, green olives, sturdy enough to persist for some time. Medium-bodied, more verve and breadth in the mouth with the cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit displaying a good bit of candied juiciness. Yet, the tannins are firm and the acidity does a good job through the finish. Lemon, orange citrus, garrigues, olives, twigs and bark, fallen forest wood, all combine for a wine with authentic character. At times you get glimmers of animality. At the same time a few accents of bubblegum. Whatever you taste, it should be, err, tasty. 60% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 10% Cinsault. 91

Cros, Domaine du
Southwest France, Marcillac, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes
Fer Servadou
2005, \$17.99, 12.5%

Impressive saturation in the luminescent purple core, barely shifts down into dark crimson along the rims, full clarity, you can see a bit below the surface under strong light. Smoky kindling fire, cedar, freshly tanned leather impel the nose, however, do not underestimate the richness of the black currant, black cherry fruit scents, nothing crystal clear about the rugged mountain scrub herbaceousness, meadow flowers, wild herbs but they fill out the whole well. Full-bodied, firm mid-section, naturally stocky not a weight lifter. Generously ripened plum, cherry, currant fruit, leavened by wiry tannin and an acidic punch or two. The twigs, cedar, balsam wood and leather more

refined here, not as sauvage as in the nose. You also get elevated orange, lemon citrus which enlivens the back half as well as conjure up more floral notes. The fabric is tightly knit yet gives when necessary. Easy to consume, in no way simple or just a quaffer. 91

Vissoux, Domaine du
Beaujolais, Cuvée Traditionnelle Vieilles Vignes
Gamay Noir
2008, \$18.99, 12.0%

The red in the purple core gives it a darker, more brooding aspect rather than brighten, very clear and just about fully transparent, the rims remain relatively dark, not one of those visually sparkly Gamay wines. In the nose there's an initial crinkly burst of minerals and stone dust, afterwards fresh meadow grasses open things up and the zippy raspberry, red cherry scents keep the swift pacing up, light orange citrus, right now very unevolved and could stand to fill in some, appreciated most for its energy. In the mouth it's medium-bodied, mouth entry dusty in a manner similar to the nose, here one might finger the tannin and acidity. In any event, it's dry and bristles with the aforementioned energy, angular and not in a place where it can best position the highly credible strawberry, raspberry, red cherry fruit. The minerality supported adroitly here by orange to white grapefruit citrus. Throughout there's an undercurrent of molasses or caramel which softens a few blows. It's very good now, albeit you have to love Beaujolais, should be better over the next 18 months. Plus, if you like it like that. 90

Puffeney, Jacques
Jura, Arbois, Cuvée Les Bérangères
Trousseau
2007, \$34.99, 13.0%

Light ruby-red in color, perfectly transparent, only a mere suggestion of orange or more brick red near the rims, very good reflectivity across the surface. In the nose there's a contrast between soft strawberry, raspberry, red apple fruit scents and then wet minerals, sour orange zest and a slight barnyard funk, in turn again there's a trace of caramel, a shapeshifter with consistent presence, ends with a waft of dried potpourri. Medium-bodied, dry mouth feel, the acidity actively blankets the tongue. The ripeness in the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit admirably fights through to the surface. Less thrust to the orange, lemon citrus, more pucker. Minerals, stone dust and poor earth fit the acidity well and contribute to its lean, no wasted movement demeanor. Relentless, doesn't relax for a moment and you can't either. 90

Cros, Domaine du
Southwest France, Marcillac, Lo Sang del País
Fer Servadou
2007, \$13.99, 12.0%

Clear throughout, rust red to purple hued core, cleans up into a lively ruby-magenta around the rims. Robust core of raspberry, red cherry fruit in the nose, anchors the dried grass, iron fleck, parched brown earth components, meadow flowers, manages to remain juicy even as the more rustic parts encroach. Medium-bodied, the acidity is buoyant and keeps the whole dancing about. More animal fur, iron and bell pepper here, sets the tone. In no way detracts from the ripeness of the cherry, raspberry, strawberry fruit, just you have to be able to accept both sides of the coin. The leafy herbal qualities persist to the end, fit the whole well. The wild gaminess doesn't try to

overplay its hand, as a result the final product is balanced. A perennial winner at the price. (Synthetic Cork) 89

Faury, Domaine Philippe
Rhône, Côte-Rôtie
Syrah
2007, \$59.99, 13.0%

As dark as purple gets before turning black, of course fully opaque core, dark red-ruby rims yet fresh and youthful, without any bricking. Juicy blackberry, black cherry scents supplemented well by molasses, grill smoke and burnt meat fat, tobacco ash, saline notes, white grapefruit pith, plays itself off as old school, yet, there's a polish to it which bespeaks more calculated construction of the whole. Medium to full-bodied, has plenty of depth and weight while, at the same time, remaining fluid and moving forward without a hitch. The acidity comes on strong during the attack and then recedes to allow lemon, grapefruit citrus, molasses, brown sugar, iron flecks, sand and wet stone to come through, the currant, cherry, blackberry fruit sprints through the mouth. Decently floral and suggests the development of a deeper game dimension. The worrisome part is that, as a young wine, near the end of the bottle it gets hollow in the middle as well as loses grip in the fruit. Near-term upside but not entirely sure it'll make very old bones. 89

Lafond Roc-Epine, Domaine Jean-Pierre & Pascal
Rhône, Lirac
Blend
2007, \$22.99, 13.5%

Simple, unadorned purple core with some ruby influence, turns to a darker crimson red around the rims, not the brighter ruby-magenta sort, no sign of any murkiness. In spite of the ripe cherry, raspberry, blackberry fruit, almost powdered with sugar, the nose most notable for some gamey funk and wet earth, perhaps reductive notes of peanut shells, takes some time for the orange peel and flowers to come out. Medium-bodied, good palate breadth ensures its weight stays steady through to the finish. Round, firm character to the cherry, blackberry, black raspberry fruit, a humble cornerstone to the entire presentation. Loses its funk here, perhaps a product of just being open longer. As a result, stronger presentation of orange, lemon citrus, pressed flowers and mint. While there's nothing remarkable about the tannins and acidity, it never seems forced or unstructured. Basically, it's nice, pleasurable little wine that should be like \$6 less. 70% Grenache, 30% Syrah. 88

Bonnelière, Château de La
Loire, Chinon, Rive Gauche
Cabernet Franc
2008, \$14.99, 12.5%

The warm glow to the ruby-purple core favors transparency over opacity, fully saturated ruby-magenta rims with touches of pink, highly reflective surface, much more pretty than foreboding. The nose betrays traces of merde, peanut shells, other somewhat reductive characteristics, the blackberry, blueberry, black cherry scents have no trouble filling your nostrils afterwards, leafy but not green and no sign of bell pepper, some cedar and spice, no one element seems to be looking for attention. Medium-bodied, maybe even a little lighter, acidity helps it initially glide across the palate. Pushes that same blackberry, cherry front to the front here, contra the acidity the tannin helps it dig in some. Orange, white grapefruit sweet, pairs more with tea leaf and cedar notes

than the grass and earthen stones. Not to suggest this is made as a "modern" wine but it's clean enough that you wish for more rough edges. (Composite Cork) 88

Chermette (Vissoux), Pierre-Marie
Beaujolais
Gamay Noir

2008, \$16.99, 12.0%

Squeaky clean ruby-violet, fully transparent, remains red around the rims with a light pinkish cast. Lively minerality and dried green grass crackle through the nose, the raspberry, strawberry, red cherry scents stand at attention, mixed white citrus notes blend into meadow florality, maybe a trace of licorice, keeps it simple and direct. Light to medium-bodied, no lack of palate presence as loaded with tannin and acidity. Some merde and mud mixed in with the minerals, stone chunks. More push in the lemon and white grapefruit citrus. With the strawberry, raspberry, cherry fruit it's like a tray of fruit candy in a store showcase, the glass lets you see it but not fully experience it, its riches left to your imagination. As is, almost "vin de garde" styled Beaujolais, you quaff it at lunch with a baguette and cheese and sliced meats, wipe your mouth with your sleeves and get back to work. 88

Markovic Estates

Languedoc/Roussillon, Vin de Pays d'Oc, Reserve Semi-Dry

Cabernet Sauvignon

2008, \$13.99, 12.5%

Straightforward ruby-purple colored core, trim and clear with vibrant magenta-ruby rims, visually plays the part. Juicy nose of currant, cherry and blackberry fruit, ginger and cinnamon spice, spiced orange peels, sweet cedar, full and possessed of good staying power, betrays little sense of the grape, just friendly red wine. Medium-bodied, duplicates the nose perfectly, sweet and juicy, makes your tongue feel wet, little tannic or acidic structure. Slightly redder complexion here to the fruit but still mainly currant, cherry, blackberry. Orange citrus bigger, the ginger, cinnamon to clove spice swallowed up some. More cedar and florality. If you just want a competent red wine, and a bit on the sweet side, this could hit your bullseye. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 88

Saint Cosme, Château de

Rhône, Côtes-du-Rhône

Syrah

2008, \$17.99, 14.0%

A touch of very dark ruby to the otherwise opaque purple core, heavy saturation to the ruby-magenta rims, sleek surface and nary a sign of a blemish. The nose takes awhile to fully get going but, when it does, cocoa, white grapefruit pith, pressed flowers and hilly scrub brush become apparent, lean focus to the black currant, black cherry scents, plenty of length but no extra fat. Medium-bodied, certainly has sufficient acidity and tannin to adopt a stern demeanor if so desired. Instead, just allows itself to play up the white grapefruit, green olives, meadow flowers and twigs, bark with minimal fanfare. As in the nose, no lack of sinew to the cherry, currant, cranberry fruit, more like it needs a deep drink of water to recover from the exertion of fighting through the structure. Strong perfume at the end, here the chocolate, cocoa notes become clearer. A wine with a fair amount of character, arguably needs more time to settle down in the bottle. 88

Ogier

Rhône, Ventoux

Blend

2007, \$14.99, 14.0%

Simple, yet effective, ruby-tinged purple core, very good cleanliness and clarity, dark ruby rims, sleekly reflective surface. There's a tightness to the nose, combine this with the powerful straw, dried meadow grasses and earth and it's a puncher in your nostrils, takes a few sniffs to get at the sweet raspberry, strawberry, red cherry fruit, surprisingly light given the percentage of Syrah, decent push in the orange citrus and flower notes too. Medium-bodied, has good palate traction without getting too heavy or slow to move forward. Presents enough tannic heft to darken the fruit into plum and black cherry with raspberry accompaniment. Lots of activity in the orange to white grapefruit citrus. Here chocolate and cocoa accents outshine the flower bits. The overall dryness allows for some herbaceous or earthy moments but these are minor. The acidity freshens up the finish some. Solid and priced correctly. 60% Syrah, 40% Grenache. 87

FRANCE WHITE

Zind Humbrecht, Domaine

Alsace, Indice 1

Riesling

2007, \$25.99, 12.5%

Not filmy but dullish sort of old worn gold with an aged orange stripe, translucently bends all light within, there is a major loss of hue around the rims. Minerally, sauna stone smokiness pervades the nose, the fruit all sour and tropical, pineapple, papaya, mango and nectarine, squishy rubber notes and custard ensure it stays on the friendly side, sprig of mint and mineola orange zest, has weight and glues itself into your nostrils for some time. Full-bodied, adroitly plays the "sweet and sour" card, the attack lets the pink grapefruit, tangerine citrus and pineapple, nectarine, peach, green apple bloom, then has the acidity clamp down so it's almost at a roadblock by the mid-palate. The stony smokiness persists, here aided by an enlivening greenness, no rubber, more so an oil slick on tar in August. There's little here which is subtle, however, hard not to be won over by its raw energy. 89

Ballade, Domaine de

Southwest France, Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne,

Sauvignon Blanc Colombard

Blend

2008, \$10.99, 12.0%

Flat dullness to the otherwise transparent deep golden color, visual sturdiness holds to the rims even as the color drops off. The nose is a 3D explosion of pineapple, papaya, nectarines fruit and smoky minerality, lean with nothing soft about it, almost hits on pickled herring, saltlick, white grapefruit pith, just gets up in there with reckless abandon. Medium-bodied, here the acidity just brightens things even further, it's all energy, flash and vibrant sourness. The pickle aspect gets close to jalapeño, while the tart pineapple, papaya, nectarine, green apple, star fruit flavors knock you back on your heels. Even diminishes the white grapefruit, lemon citrus. Metallic minerality, white stone still present. Kind of green, however, in a way that isn't deeply herbaceous, too lean and wiry for that. You really want to have to be in the mood for a fight here. Maybe even be into cutting. 70% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Colombard. (Screwcap: Kapvins) 88

Carrel, Domaine Eugène
Savoie, Vin de Savoie, Jongieux
Jacquère
2008, \$11.99, 11.5%

Virtually colorless with a strong frizzante quality which kind of has you wondering, rims completely transparent. The fresh lemon peel and green apple scents belie a certain creamy custard feel to the nose, allows for more peach pit, flower petal and mint to come through, at times grassy, others not, more consistency in the stone powder and chalk aspects. Light to medium-bodied, stays close to the tongue thus adding to its mouth presence. The acidity revved up enough to keep the lemon peel sour and bring out as much minerality, stoniness as possible. Echoes of pear and apple skin, peach pit. Just very stony, albeit not in a "let me show you my terroir, bitch" way. Decent balance and clean finish. The fizz helps to get it moving some. An interesting wine in some respects, best served with food rather than alone. (Synthetic Cork: Nomacorc) 86

ITALY RED

Attimis-Maniago, Conte d'
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Colli Orientali del Friuli Refosco dal
Peduncolo Rosso
Refosco
2006, \$22.99, 13.5%

Dusky red rust to purple core, lively metallic red to crimson rims of deep hue, reflective surface adds to prettiness. Palpable leatheriness sets the tone in the nose, backroads dirt, pressed wildflowers, dried white grapefruit peels all very much in keeping with this, dry nature to the plum, black currant fruit scents, has the sheer brawn to muscle out an extended presence. Medium-bodied, nothing shy about either the tannin or the acidity, however, never gets close to "overstructured." The leather, dirt, semi-merde elements along with the sour white grapefruit definitely take up most of the stage. That said, there's abundant freshness in the plum, cherry, black currant fruit, simply more angular than juicy. Lower florality, touch more twigs and bark. A solid example, only issue here might be the price. 88

Valle dell'Acate, Cooperativa Agricola
Sicilia, Vittoria Frappato, Il Frappato
Frappato
2008, \$17.99, 13.0%

Super-clear, transparent garnet red in color, consistent through to the rims, delicately pretty. Strawberry, red cherry, raspberry fruit engages you first in the nose, fairly sweet white grapefruit scents, suggestions of stone and grass, sweet garden herbs, olive oil, nothing outrageously complex. Medium-bodied, the hard candy like strawberry, watermelon, red cherry fruit has its moment in the sun before muscular tannin and acidity slaps you like you had it coming. Lemon, white grapefruit citrus spreads widely, sweet at first but has you puckering before long. Gentle grassiness to it, pales in the face of the minerally, stony powder which accrues quickly. Retronasally, the fruit makes a strong comeback but don't mistake this for a fruity wine at all. (Synthetic Cork: Supremecorc) 87

Fontanafredda
Piedmont, Briccotondo
Barbera
2008, \$15.99, 13.5%

The purple core has an orange touch which extends to otherwise crimson rims, as if it has a touch of age to it.

Orange and grapefruit citrus tries to perk up the prune cherry, plum fruit in the nose, repelled by caramel notes, comes up with a pine, forest lift which, as pleasant as it is, leaves things undecided, tries to stay straight-up but modern enough to want more to satisfy the many. Medium-bodied, has acidity but stunted in its own way, not really unleashing the orange, lemon, grapefruit citrus. That said, the herbaceous qualities are palpable and bring out earth and pigskin accents. The prune, raisin nature permeates the cherry, plum, blackberry fruit. Too dry to be sugary, however, sacrifices clarity along the way. Weight lasts credibly through the end. 86

ITALY WHITE

Grosjean Frères
Valle d'Aosta, Vallee d'Aoste, Vigne Rovettaz
Petite Arvine
2008, \$29.99, 13.0%

Deep golden hue, layered with a high degree of translucency but not distortion per se, holds very well through the rims, sparkling surface. Subtly invasive nose of fresh mint leaves, mandarin orange zest, green apples, and a splash of honey, washed pebbles and spring water, gets deep into your nostrils with a minimum of moves. Medium-bodied, has a sticky quality which saturates your mouth pores or it would feel lighter in body. The honeyed quality more obvious here, embellishes the orange and lemon citrus, the latter fuller pulp rather than zest. Green apple, pear, peach fruit not angular but svelte. Doesn't quite get minerally, stays stony. The acidity does not have its blades out, more a couple of smacks with a blunt instrument. More floral and minty deep into the finish. Shows much better nearer room temperature, more complexity as well as clarity. (Synthetic Cork: Korked Pro) 89

Terredora di Paolo
Campania, Fiano di Avellino, Terre di Dora
Fiano
2008, \$28.99, 13.5%

Rich golden color with a brushstroke of orange to it, more translucent than clear, its somewhat aged appearance helps to fill out the rims. The nose starts off with a healthy portion of sweet baking spices before turning smokier with a more minerally edge, lemon reduction alongside peach and apricot pits, pear and apple skins, finishes with an earthiness which grounds it in your nostrils. Full-bodied, the cinnamon, clove, ginger spice finds an able sidekick in volcanic ash, metallic minerals and damp earth. There's a poached sweetness to the peach, apricot, pear fruit but not anywhere near what's necessary to overcome the former stuff. Mixture of lemon, orange and white grapefruit citrus, differs sip to sip. Chameleon-like, can be lots of different things at different times. Which can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending. 89

Mosolo Gleni, Azienda Agricola
Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Delle Venezie, Monte Maria
Pinot Grigio
2009, \$8.99, 13.0%

Flat brown straw in color, transparency marred by dullness, at least the hue does a good jump of holding on through the rims. The initial flourish of mint and flowers in the nose short-lived, then more stones and mineral chunks, not much volubility in the pear, red apple, peach fruit scents, grapefruit citrus helps stabilize things, more depth at room temperature. Medium-bodied, round in

mouth feel, however, the acidity able to churn things up some so that it doesn't come across as flat-footed. More straw and dried grass here, matched well enough by the floral aspect. Stony, not enough bite to display much minerality. White grapefruit, orange citrus has moderate activity. Less so for the apple, peach, pear fruit, lots of skin and pit shades. Finish is a little more watery than one might prefer. (Composite Cork) 85

GERMANY WHITE

Mönchhof, Weingut Robert Eymael
Mosel Saar Ruwer, Estate QbA AP #9
Riesling
2008, \$16.99, 9.0%

Flat yellow hay in appearance, more like a coat of primer than paint, distorts light fairly easily even as the hue all but disappears around the rims. Crystalline nose of cotton candy, banana, cherry, peach fruit, very broad array, heavy floral musk as well, measured doses of shale, wet stone, rubber and bright tangerine zest, for its general delicacy possesses very good staying power. Medium-bodied, the acidity has a broad-shouldered nature, more apt to run you over than skip by you. Finespun powdered sugar gives a soft drink feel to the lime, orange citrus. The lilac, violet florality pungent and further deepens the peach, nectarine, red cherry fruit, still has that banana note. The stoniness a minor player, more like fresh streamwater than sharper minerality. In no way soft, however, prefers to play up its softer side, the initial jolt of acidity notwithstanding. Which kind of leaves it in the gray area middle. (Screwcap) 89

Christmann, Weingut A.
Pfalz, Riesling I Trocken AP #26
Riesling
2008, \$23.99, 11.5%

Much richer gold color than expected, could say there's a hint of amber, transparent throughout, hue does drop off considerably around the rims. There's a musky smokiness to the nose, like wet smoke, more of a general pungency than specifically stones or minerals, pineapple and nectarine accompany the apricot, peach, apple base, bluntly powerful mixed white citrus, a hammer, not a blade, at the penultimate moment releases a floral breeze. Medium-bodied, the acidity blankets the tongue thickly and shows little interest in anything but blocking that kick. White grapefruit, lemon citrus electrically sour, heightens the raw tropical nature of the pineapple, star fruit, green apple, nectarine flavors. The floral dimension has to be strong to break through the slate, chalk, streamwater cornerstone. It's a real fighter, you have to work to enjoy it. Finish isn't as dry as you'd think, as if it wants you to have time to rest so it can whup you again. 89

SPAIN RED

Códax, Bodegas Martín
Bierzo, Cuatro Pasos
Mencia
2007, \$14.99, 14.0%

Clean but not necessarily transparent in appearance, straightforward purple at the core, saturated red magenta rims, quite colorful. Dense plum, cherry filled nose, some of that peanut shell, leather, animal fur stuff going on, through it all you can discern traces of orange peel and flower petals, good persistence but not much lift. Medium-bodied with the kind of firmness which creates a much heavier feeling, has tannin but isn't tannic in an

offputting manner. Round, well-defined plum, cherry, blackberry fruit, flavorful but not juicy nor "wet" in feel. Lemon citrus, hint of white grapefruit, florality is there but doesn't find its footing. Gets drier with each successive sip, good if you can spread them out. Still, the fruit lasts through to the finish and is by no stretch weak. Fewer peanut shell or Brett-like notes. It's a good wine which doesn't develop layers or nuances as you'd hope. 87

Piñol, Celler
Terra Alta, Ludovicus
Blend
2008, \$13.99, 13.5%

Fat, glowing purple core of immense saturation, deep magenta red rims, at least there you can discern it has full clarity. It seems to want to avoid it but there's some reductive funk in the nose, peanut shells, sweat and merde, then comes the dense plum, blackberry fruit scents, floral musk, orange peel and finally a mentholated lift, stays close to the "pleasure zone" script. Medium-bodied, spreads broadly so it holds its weight easily throughout. Surprisingly dry with a good tannic punch, after a few ticks that plum, cherry, dark berry fruit spreads the good word. Still, it's not sugary per se and someone looking for a cheapie fruit bomb is apt to be disappointed. The floral and orange citrus elements exist here, not much else added to the mix. Very light grassy or stemmy nuances at the end. Not sure if the disparate blend impairs the sense of direction and orchestrated flavor profile. Just turns kind of clunky after a couple of glasses. 35% Garnacha, 30% Tempranillo, 25% Syrah, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. (Composite Cork) 87

Borsao, Bodegas
Campo de Borja, Viña Borgia
Garnacha
2007, \$9.99, 14.0%

Clean and relatively transparent ruby-purple core, nothing unusual about it, more pure ruby around the rims, not so much magenta. The nose is plummy with an unfortunate touch of stewed tomatoes, destabilizes the cinnamon spice, orange peel, additional ripe cherry and blackberry fruit scents, there's a component of twigs and dried tree leaves as well, could do a better job of masking the alcoholic fumes. In the mouth it's medium-bodied with a densely packed mouth feel which doesn't make it as much sluggish as inert. Powdered sugar adorns the plum, cherry, blackberry fruit as well as warmed caramel and some butterscotch. Does not appear to suffer from much phenological underripeness, yet, the sweetness drops off a lot towards the end, same for general palate weight. That said, floral with orange zest accents, Again, not overly herbaceous. Just, without complete follow through from the fruit, not left with much on which to hang its hat. Tastes on the cheap side, no slight intended, which is an honest thing. (Synthetic Cork: ExcellentCork) 84

PORTUGAL DESSERT

Sandeman
Douro, Ruby Porto
Blend
NV, \$16.99, 19.5%

Surprisingly clear ruby-purple in color, for its type high degree of transparency, not deep enough to notice much change around the rims. Fresh nose, somewhat airy and more plum, cherry than prune or raisin scents, orange spice, sweet tea leaf, maduro cigar wrapper, almost

innocent in its lack of complexity, more like a very ripe table wine than a real ruby port. Light-bodied, streamlined and fluid to the point of LCD approachability, honey and brown sugar dolloped plum, blackberry, cherry fruit, the orange, lemon citrus sweet as is the ginger spice. Not especially tannic, however, there appears to be some perceptible acidity doing this and that. Lacks substantial leafy or earthy tones, just cruises along on the merit of its inherent sweetness and lack of jarring port-like depth. Unspecified percentages of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão, etc. 84

CHILE RED

Donoso, Casa
Maule Valley, Evolución Reserve
Carménère
2007, \$10.99, 13.5%

The purple core shades into brick red and burnt orange hues, transparent rims, clean, looks older than it is. Smoky, woody nose met by a candied feel to the red cherry, raspberry fruit scents, herbaceous in a foresty way, not "green" and no signs of bell pepper, orange reduction, a little sourness comes out at the end, helps with lift. Light to medium-bodied, fair amount of tannic grit, gives it a serious side and a semi-rustic feel. More of a tart nature to the red cherry, currant, cranberry fruit, no lack of liveliness. Slightly greener here, remains on the woody side of things. You get some white grapefruit alongside the orange citrus, a sign of a desire to get you to pucker up. OK juice but not for anyone looking for a casual sipper. [Synthetic Cork] 84

AUSTRALIA RED

Schild Estate
South Australia, Barossa Valley
Shiraz
2007, \$19.99, 14.5%

Deep purple core opaque but not near over-the-top blackness, still ends up in extremely dark red magenta rims. The nose presents a dense layering of plum and black currant fruit, not necessarily dried fruit as in concentrated sugars, more like syrupy fruit, piles on eucalyptus, pine sap, vanilla bean, milk chocolate, toffee as well, to its great credit pulls it off without seeming overwrought. Medium-bodied, sets itself in the mouth like a stack of four by fours, it can be moved but that thing better be named a forklift. Orange, lemon bite pairs up with eucalyptus, the acidity comes through with verve and vigor. That was verve and vigor in case you missed it the first time. Same thing here, the currant, black cherry, plum fruit pours itself on you, ripe but not cloyingly sweet. Towards the finish the oak increases its presence with coffee, caramel, mocha and vanilla tones. Overall, well done for a category full of clumsy attempts. [Screwcap] 90

Milton Park
South Australia
Shiraz
2008, \$10.99, 14.0%

Cleanly opaque purple core, switches gears into red-ruby via the wide rims, lively with a sleek surface. Wiry tautness to the plum, cherry scents, supplemented by black licorice, menthol, butter and pressed flowers, streamlined to the exclusion of any earth or game accents, slight pickled edge as it finally dissolves. Medium-bodied, juicy and wet mouth feel, however, not that much raw sweetness to be found in

the plum, currant, cherry fruit, sour pucker comes through during the finish. Licorice, orange peel, menthol bit players. Not overly tannic but the acidity seems to be on yellow alert. No real florality but has a noticeable herbaceous streak. Noteworthy most for coming across as guileless and candid, not overdoing it. But, hard to say, wish there was more depth to the fruit here. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 86

Water Wheel

Victoria, Bendigo, Memsie Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon
Malbec Petit Verdot
Blend
2007, \$17.99, 14.5%

Very dark but not quite fully opaque purple core, that said the purple saturates the otherwise ruby-magenta rims, pleasing surface shine. Eucalyptus, coffee bean, roasted cocoa and mint most present in the nose, plum, cherry, currant fruit scents, musters some floral, citrusy musk but shortlived. Medium-bodied, has a drying, grainy mouth texture which distracts quite a bit from enjoying the flavors. Not entirely tannic per se, more like an astringent underripeness. That said, there's density to the black currant, cherry, plum fruit and some zip to the white grapefruit, orange citrus accents. Less of the eucalyptus and the toasted cocoa to dark chocolate also loses its grip. Lots of pucker through the finish. Not quite what went wrong here, you sense the primary material wasn't that bad. 70% Shiraz, 16% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Malbec, 6% Petit Verdot. [Screwcap] 85

Henry's Drive
South Australia, Padthaway, Pillar Box Red
Blend
2007, \$12.99, 14.7%

Warm glow to the extremely dark purple core, gains some more visible clarity through the broad crimson stained rims. The nose is dense unto immobility, currant to plum fruit scents, tree bark, stems, white grapefruit pith, hard to get at much more. Full-bodied, again dense like it was pressed together in a vise, no movement. Slightly woody but not necessarily oaky. Mixed sour white citrus, stemmy at times. The currant, black cherry, plum fruit dry and lacks expressivity. Manages a meager mentholated lift through the finish. Not a "fun" wine yet not a "structured" wine either. It does tire you out, though. 65% Shiraz, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot. [Screwcap: Stelvin] 84

AUSTRALIA SPARKLING

Puppeteer (Ramco Wine Group), The
South Australia, Sparkling Chardonnay
Chardonnay
2008, \$10.99, 12.5%

Clear straw gold color, noticeably shiny with good bubble activity, as much swirling as straight beads. Lemon and croissant flakes initially in the nose, swiftly run down by burnt smoke and sharp minerality, clay, angular apple and pear scents, brusquely penetrating, not much to enjoy. Medium-bodied, bitter and sour here in the mouth too, albeit with a whisper of gingerbread and lemon cake on the entry. Little by way of apple, pear or peach fruit. That metallic edge doesn't go away, really messes up any of the positive elements. Fizz is at a decent level. I don't want to drink anymore of this for the sake of a tasting note. [Bottle Cap] 81